Security

by TheHarlequinRevolver

Summary

Your name is Garrus Vakarian, and you’re starting to wonder if the vid playing in front of you is true.
It has been exactly eight thousand seven hundred and sixty five hours since you last saw the Citadel at least somewhat in tact.
That would make it around eight thousand seven hundred and sixty six hours since you last saw her.

Post ME3, Garrus/Fem!Shep (Renegade, Ruthless, Earthborn, Sentinel) Based on what happens after the "Destroy Reapers" ending if Shepard lives. Rating could change later.
**RECENTLY REVAMPED!**

Notes

Hey everyone. I'm new to this site (I've migrated from FF.net to try this place out. I heard it's much better!) and I'm still learning the ropes, so please forgive me if there are any errors in how I publish things, etc.

This is not my first fanfic at all, but it is my first in the ME fandom. I am really, really looking for reviews on this so I can make sure my characterization is correct. I will warn you that this
story is intended to start out slow, and it will pick up later.

Thank you for reading and please leave some feedback! I’d love to read it!

xoxo

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EDIT (UPDATE 8/20/13):
Hi everyone. Just so you know, there are some issues with this fanfic that I'm aware of. There are some tense issues later on (I later switch to past tense entirely). I will fix these issues as soon as this fic is complete. Thank you and enjoy the story!

Chapter 1

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you were starting to wonder if the vid playing in front of you was real.

It has been exactly eight thousand seven hundred and sixty five hours since you had last seen the Citadel at least somewhat intact.

That would make it around eight thousand seven hundred and sixty six hours since you had last seen her. It wasn’t like you had counted or anything; you were supposed to have something else to distract yourself with. You could have lied about it all you wanted; however, it was still clear that you were a mess. Even the most naïve of aliens could understand that there was something wrong with you and the former SR-2 crew.

What had happened after you had been taken aboard the Normandy a year ago wasn’t supposed to be engraved in your mind, but you could easily recall it all. Grim expressions had graced Hackett’s face as your body was shoved into the elevator. You had still been conscious, too.

“Get him to the Med-Bay!” she had yelled while the metal Normandy doors shut. Your eyes closed, and that was the last you had seen her. It was also the last time you had heard the sounds of a dying Earth; ear-shattering screams accompanied by the sounds of rapid fire weapons and biotic charges had been cut off as soon as you were back where you had belonged. In that one moment, the Reapers had come to kill everyone, and they were fulfilling the prophecy that you knew all too well.
They were a race that didn’t discriminate; it had to be their only redeeming quality. They didn’t care if you were turian or human, nor batarian or quarian. As far as you knew, they just wanted your body turned into something that could be of use to their cause. Husks, banshees, cannibals; they all contributed to their bizarre quest with unknown motivations.

Just moments before, the doors of the Normandy were wide open and you had still been caught up in all of the mad chaos that the Reapers had brought upon the galaxy. Liara had been next to you, her suit covered in her own violet blood from a shrapnel related injury. She had undoubtedly been hurt more than you had. After the asari had been hauled into the Normandy for medical care, you veered towards Shepard as she reached out to touch your armored hand. Blue liquid gushed from your wounds, but you refused to succumb to them as another crew member started to pull you away. Those moments could have been the last you would ever share with your commander; you planned on running with her to the beam regardless of her orders.

Besides, you had never been one for subordination.

“I’ll always love you.” she had said. This time you knew for sure that she wasn’t just humoring you. As cliché as it had been, it was real.

There were so many words you could have said right about then. Hell, there were words you could have told her when you had been back in the London Alliance camp a few hours prior. You hadn’t told her enough before the squad set out for the conduit. The “what if’s” had swirled in your mind since you had woken up with Dr. Chakwas standing over you.

You could have settled down together on a beautiful, warm planet and tried your hand at making some human-turian babies regardless of incompatible biology. If that didn’t work, there were plenty of displaced children that would be looking for someone to help them start over. Sitting out in the tantalizing sunlight, you could have felt sand nip at your scaly feet as you made love to a woman who wasn’t exactly what you had planned on being with. She didn’t have mandibles or a brawny exoskeleton. This woman had scarring from every battle that it had experienced. Her normally bunned up hair could come down and the ends would tickle your battered cheeks, and her back would arch whenever you would trace a single mar on her body. The awkwardness had disappeared between you two long ago, and you could have just lived your life in peace. No Reapers, no Collectors, no Cerberus.

It was going to be you and her and whoever the hell you wanted to be in your life that you shared with her.

You hadn’t told her any of these details, though. You kept it brief and only mentioned the tropical climate and the kids. When you took her in an embrace and told her to come back alive, she melted at your touch. At the mention of children, she chuckled. It was rumored that human women swooned at lovey-dovey comments and heartfelt goodbyes, but Shepard didn’t seem to be the average human woman. She was a warrior who couldn’t just be human flesh. There had to be something more.

But those last moments…those feelings…could they ever be recreated?

In the past three hundred and sixty five days, you doubted it. You watched the galaxy get rebuilt piece by piece. The mass relays were repaired, the Citadel was slowly restored and the Council was back in session. Everything was at peace, even when you stepped on the ancient “prothean” work of art for the first time in a year. Things were eerily normal again. C-Sec officers laughed and called your name. Avina still smiled brightly with a purple hue, no longer buzzing out due to ignored mechanical failures. There was still that working model of Shepard where the refugees used to camp
out. Things were far from being in a state of total repair, but it was better than it had been initially. It looked like a façade, but things still felt like they could be ok. Mundane at most would have been a better term to describe it, especially after the terror that everyone in the galaxy had experienced.

That is, until you were caught staring at a certain vid for five straight minutes by a confused asari.

“You didn’t know?” she had asked. “Commander Shepard has been spotted around here for the longest time! I heard she survived the Crucible blast! You’re that turian, right? Rumor has it that she’s been looking for you. Of course, that’s what that latest gossip magazine said. Can’t always trust what they say”

Your name was Garrus Vakarian, and that was the moment when you knew that there was something still left to live for, even if it was nothing more than just a rumor.
Priority: Commander Shepard

Chapter Notes

Wow, I'm really starting to get used to this site...

If you would like to read ahead, this story is on FF.net. I'm thinking of delaying when I put the chapters up on here, but I'm still debating it.

xoxo
THR

Chapter 2

Priority: Commander Shepard

If one was to look up at the sky from planet Earth in 2186, they would presume that they would see only one object: the moon. Bright and creamy in complexion, it was a sight for the sore eyes of civilians and warriors alike. On a normal dusk it would be concealed by the evening smog. On occasion, it would be covered by an incoming fleet of air support.

There was a war going on, after all.

However, if the clouds aligned in a precise way on a bitter night, it could shine with equal amounts of solemnity and mischief. Its celestial beams could cast through clouds and warm even the coldest soldier’s heart. If one could acquire a telescope or possess superb vision, they might also notice the craters and dents that maligned its beauty. In reality, this shining beacon of white was only a rock orbiting its parent planet. On the contrary, though, it was so much more to those who were fighting for their lives on Earth’s now war-torn lands. It might have been just a moon, but it was still something similar to a light of hope.

On a few nights in particular during that year, though, a much different foreign object could be seen from the sky in Earth near the optimistic white orb.

And if you were in the city of London, England, you had the best seat in the house.

A prime example of supposed prothean architecture shined in the sky, not caring about the fact that it wasn’t supposed to be there. After being brought into the system of Sol, its metal gleamed against the blackness of space. The structure was once a home for the most prestigious in the galaxy; sporting everything from shopping malls to penthouses with prime space vistas, its visual perfection could be compared only to Thessia. Those who lived there knew that this was far from true, though.

But when this cylindrical edifice made its way into Earth’s territory, all of these people were gone.
Victims of the harvest, they had already been long forgotten in the depths of their former home.

In the center of London, where a No Man’s Land met face to face with a living Hell, a conduit glittered down from this metallic jewel that once floated in the nebula affiliated with the snake. This structure, known to every Milky Way citizen as nothing more than “The Citadel”, had been forcibly moved from its original home due to the Reaper War. The Old Machines had done their corrupt deed with the help of a deceptive ally. With the entire galaxy’s forces pitted up against an army that came once every fifty thousand years, a final assault had loomed between them.

A civilian looking up at this sky borne chaos may begin to question the magnitude of the Citadel’s Earth debut. It was obviously a big deal seeing something that was an independent anomaly so close to home. Without even considering the light years and mass relay jumps, its trek had been a long one.

Yet the Reapers had transported it there in hardly any time.

At the hands of the most powerful synthetic race, the Citadel’s great arms had been shut. The singular mode of transportation into its internal depths was an intermediary beam. This conduit gave off the most vivid shade of light blue one could imagine. Whoever could get to it would rise up and have the chance to activate the mechanism that was dubbed as the Crucible. It was the one thing that could seal an organic victory.

And it was a machine that was bigger than what anyone could imagine.

In short, it was the one single object that could change everything in the blink of an eye. By utilizing every mass relay’s power, the energy it could amass was incredible.

And all it was was a mere attachment to the Citadel. This, of course, is an understatement. In spite of this, the insertion of this massive device into the arms of its catalyst would be able to save the entire galaxy.

All of the Reapers would allegedly be gone if it was fired. If everything could go right, everything would be okay. It could be docked, and it would be safe to say that humanity would prevail once again. The war could be ended.

And that was exactly what the Crucible did when it was fired.

The Crucible was a device constructed by everyone in the galaxy. It wasn’t just a single race’s gadget. The creation of it was the most collective project that anyone has ever seen; Alliance forces to non-Council races oversaw its great rise to life and contributed to its success in some way, shape or form.

The Crucible’s assembly could never be credited to one person. The action of organizing it, though, could be ascribed to a single crew and its fiery leader.

The Normandy SR-2 and its crew, led by the illustrious Commander Shepard, were known as one of the few sources of sanguinity in the Reaper War. Leaping across the galaxy at the blink of an eye, the Commander piloted her crew with a caliber seen only a few times before. She was tough, yet fair and serious while also remaining satirical. Some called her a ruthless bitch or the poster girl for the model soldier. Others considered her a war hero that was to be honored. A select few still called her “The Butcher of Torfan”. But, if you asked her crew, they would tell you that she was the one that they could count on no matter what the situation. She was a friend, a squadmate, and to one lucky turian, a lover.
She was the one to use the Citadel’s conduit along with the honorable Admiral Anderson.

She was the one to take down the Illusive Man.

And, her most commendable achievement was how she had managed to activate the one and only Crucible. The fate of galactic civilization had been in Shepard’s hands, and she cradled it with the utmost amount of caution.

Although only initially known by the great Admiral Hackett, rumors of Shepard’s actions circulated not long after the attacks had ceased and rebuilding has begun. Nobody knew for sure what had happened up at the Crucible’s decks, but it was clear that whatever Shepard had done was legitimate.

As soon as comm systems were up again, media groups jumped on the story of the supposedly fallen hero. Her actions were sometimes exaggerated for news stories to give hope to those who needed it after the Reapers’ destruction. Stories ranged from her sacrificing herself to Harbinger to her becoming a Reaper herself in exchange for peace. However, the truth was much more understated than the rumors that had swirled around the Milky Way. Her bloody hand had fired a gun at a device, and in an instant, every synthetic life form ceased to exist. The Reapers went away, and so did she.

At least that’s what the crew of the Normandy thought.

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and you were starting to ponder your choice in residence for the past three hundred and sixty something days. When trying to stay out of the public image was your main concern instead of kicking Reaper ass, you had no choice but to simply question everything going on around you.

You didn’t really know what kind of state you were in now. You knew for sure that your Spectre status hadn’t exactly been revoked yet, but a “leave of absence” sure as hell wasn’t what you wanted to call your sudden lack of action. Instead of curling your fingers around a rifle and shooting at bad guys, you had taken a liking to tracing the new scars on your arms or gazing out the clean windows of your penthouse that had been gifted to you by Admiral Hackett. You liked to call it a pity gift, much to his displeasure. It was still a beautiful home, anyway, and in reality you were more than grateful to be able to relax a little bit. The Admiral had been keen on keeping you away for as long as he deemed fit. Your survival had been unexpected, and a little bit of forced vacation time was hypothetically good for you. That didn’t mean that every bit of it tended to feel wrong.

The Presidium wasn’t what it used to be. After days and nights of staring at hovering vehicles and disgustingly happy people, you could tell that this reconstruction was bringing out something different in the residents of the Citadel.

Many of its old inhabitants had either been scared off by the Reaper attack or were harvested a year prior. Large chunks of the population were now legal refugees from planets that had not yet been restored. The rich and noble had also managed to get their place in society back after the first post-Reaper reconstruction year; investment projects and charities made things easier for them.

“Has it really been a year?” you asked yourself. After a brief look at your omni-tool, you figured out that it was indeed true.

Your body had been recovered by a turian recon team that was sent into London after you had activated the Crucible a year prior. You still were not aware of how long you were left on the ground after the blast or how bad your fall from the Citadel had been, but if your scars indicated anything, it had been a long while and an even longer fall. You had healed quite well in a year; Hackett
frequently said that you had only lived by the grace of god and because of some damn good
cybernetics. He was the only one who bothered to visit sometimes, which was yet another bizarre
aspect of your incarceration.

More vehicles whirred past you in the false Presidium skies, and you couldn’t help but think of why
you were alone like this.

Where was the crew? What had become of them?

Why hadn’t they even bothered to make contact? Did they even know that you were alive?

Your name was Liz Shepard, and never before had you felt so isolated from every single person in
the galaxy that you once cared for.
Chapter 3

Priority: Honorable Discharge

A fifty something year old man sat in a place that had been previously reserved for one woman and the select few that had been close to her. His graying hair was covered by a ruined blue navy cap, and never had the lines on his face been so prevalent. He looked ten years older; his blue eyes had faded and lacked the energy of the surging ocean that once frightened his opponents. His battle scars had more stories to tell, and never before had his stubble been this unkempt. His body was no longer one of a soldier; he had turned into a wise, older figure, but he was still decked out in an Alliance uniform that matched his hat. As he got more comfortable, he let his dirty nails dig into the leather couch that hadn't been touched much. Hell, the particular deck of the vessel that he was sitting on barely looked like it had been lived in at all.

The captain’s quarters of the Normandy SR2 was an area of the ship that evoked curiosity in its former crew. Sleek chrome lines, a warm bed and an expansive fish tank were a few of the things that occupied the smallest deck.

It might have made up a mere fraction of the craft’s internal volume, but it was still more elusive than the guns in the main battery; in fact, most of the crew members had never been up there. It was considered taboo for anyone to enter the commanding officer’s quarters without an invitation from the leader of the Normandy herself. This was proper etiquette for most ships in the galaxy; this one, however, was very different.

The metallic doors slid open and out stepped the toned figure of a woman. She was loftier than most with an admirable build. It was obvious that she had possessed great looks and skin free of any sort of blemish at one time in the past. One could tell that the past three years had worn away at her slowly. Her last battle was the one that had killed her on the inside more than any other one prior, yet she was still standing tall. It was a somewhat insignificant reason why she had been chosen as a
Her body was one of a fit soldier; tall, muscular enough to still be considered feminine, and hair tied back so tight that one would wonder if it was cemented to her head. The locks were still a fiery red, but the man wouldn’t be surprised if there were just a few white ones mixed in somewhere. Her age was unknown, but her face told a story that could engross a persnickety old batarian. Light wrinkles made her look a bit more genuine, along with the scarring that could be traced on her face and all over the rest of the exposed parts of her body. Her casual dress was form fitting yet modest, and she began to limp her way over to the couch that she once used to entertain guests and spend time with the closest of friends. Bandages and scabs were visible on her frame, but she wasn’t about to let them deter her.

“Admiral, I didn’t think I’d see you again.” she croaked, her hand going to her forehead to form a salute. She kept her limb erect as she went to sit down next to her old comrade, and even though it pained her to do so, she knew that Hackett deserved nothing but the utmost amount of respect after what he had just gone through. As he watched her sit down, the admiral did the same hand motion but moved to put the woman’s hand down on her lap. The respect they had for each other was a little too apparent.

“My thoughts are mutual, Commander. I see they’ve patched you up well. Didn’t think I’d see Huerta back up and running so quickly. God only knows what will happen once they’ve fully rebuilt the Citadel. It’s a powerful thing to watch.”

Hearing her formal title glide off of his tongue was relieving. So many people used to call her “Commander,” but it felt different this time. It had more of a meaning than it had a few months prior. Nevertheless, it did not mean that she was entirely fearless like a stereotypical Alliance commander should be.

After going through hell and back and paying the price tenfold, the woman known only as Shepard was shaking as she sat on the cool leather. Although she had faced things much worse than her boss, she wanted to go and heave her guts up in her former master bathroom that was a few feet away from her current position.

The way he was looking at her could make a child cry. He was concerned about her, but the underlying theme of remorse and bitterness could be observed easily. It was like an aura around him, and it certainly didn’t make this conversation any better. She had so many questions and she could only hope that tearing the awkwardness away would be easy. Was asking all she had to do?

How long had it been since the firing of the Crucible? Was everyone safe? Why was the Normandy docked on the barely intact Citadel? Where was her crew? This wasn’t the first time she had gone through such a displacement like this, but for some reason, it was much more complicated this time.

“That place is filled to the brim with the survivors. Still can’t believe they got me in and out so fast.” she commented. “Not sure if I deserve it.”

No, that was not what she wanted to come out of her mouth. This was small talk; they both knew that they had things to say to each other. The right moment to throw it all out there hadn’t come up yet.

“The entire galaxy is in overdrive, Commander. It’s as if the Reapers were still here. The feeling of unity still hasn’t worn off yet.”

They contemplated the last statement, and Shepard looked up at the man in front of her with tired
“Admiral Hackett.” she said, her voice plain. There was no time to avoid the elephant in the room. Even though the entire galaxy had gotten a head start on rebuilding everything they had ever known, she figured that it would be better to come late to the party than to never come at all. She needed the truth.

“What the hell happened? To the crew, to the Normandy…why is she at the Citadel? I can’t remember a goddamned thing right anymore and now I don’t have anyone other than you to help me.”

This was the question that Hackett had dreaded. He didn’t have a choice, though.

Her records from Huerta couldn’t be covered up. Shepard had suffered severe trauma from the firing of the Crucible. She had been on board. The rubble had crushed her. She had been thrown forcibly off and back down to Earth from the blast and her being alive was less believable than her dying.

After fighting against suffocation, internal and external injuries and mental shock, she had beaten the odds again. This time, though, there was some permanent damage.

“Your crew is fine. They’ve been decommissioned so the Alliance can worry about rebuilding and restoring. It’s…temporary.” he replied, not going into much detail.

It wasn’t like her closest friends and crew members thought she was dead or anything. It also wasn’t like the entire galaxy was mourning the loss of one of the most famous war heroes of all time.

No, that couldn’t be true at all.

The pain in his voice was getting to be more evident, and it was if the two of them didn’t have much left to say. After the war, there really wasn’t much else to talk about other than rebuilding, anyway. It was all anyone was concerned about.

“Temporary? Did you tell them what happened?”

Admiral Steven Hackett looked at Commander Liz Shepard in the most solemn way that you could. He had to be frank yet gentle with her at the same time.

“Commander, this situation may be a bit more than temporary.” he explained. “You’ve been put on a semi-permanent leave of absence from the Alliance Military. I can’t give you any details, but you’ll need to hand in your tags as soon as you get the chance.”

At that moment, no words were said.

There was silence that was more sprawling than space itself.
Thank you so much for the kudos, comments and views. When I woke up to find so many from here and FF.net this morning my heart absolutely fluttered and I was so happy! Please enjoy the chapter!

xoxo
THR

UPDATE: I assure you that each chapter is being updated. I have ten done so far but tbh I'm just too lazy to write new chapter notes. In other news, why does ao3 have to always try to center my writing.

also, it's nice to listen to the ME atmospheric soundtrack while writing/reading this. A little Lana del Rey helps too. Enjoy.

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Chapter 4

Priority: Admiral Steven Hackett

Your name was Admiral Steven Hackett and you were starting to wonder if your title meant anything anymore.

As the commanding officer of the Fifth Fleet of the Alliance Navy, your duties included (but were not limited to) signing peace treaties and making inspirational speeches on the Citadel’s reconstruction to tired out refugees.

Your advanced age had given you the wisdom to be excellent at performing these tasks, but if you had been told this a year prior, you would have had to disagree. You belonged on the battlefield or at a communications hub, barking orders to your ground scouts in an almost paternal manner. Your new office was more than amiable to you in theory, however, it couldn’t compare to the experiences given to you through the sparks and fire of war. It never would.

As top ranked as you were, destruction and war cataclysm were not required in the galaxy at this moment. It was the year twenty one eighty seven, you were fifty two years old, and the Reaper War in the Milky Way had ended a year ago. The galaxy had entered into a self proclaimed period of great reconstruction and peace. Hostility between races was no longer a current issue.

That is, until someone pointed out that permanent galactic unity wasn’t possible.

Since the incident that changed all organic and synthetic life permanently, you had been given a new
position on the Citadel in thanks for your efforts in the Reaper War. Despite most of the place being in shambles, the Alliance had gifted high ranking officials with cramped leftover offices in the Presidium. It was certainly better than being stationed on Earth, which was in an even worse state. The Citadel position wasn’t much, but all of the tired and essentially unneeded big shots had been placed there to twiddle their thumbs and appear to be useful. You were among these high rollers, and your job description read more like one of a humanitarian than a war hero.

Instead of mobilizing fleets and patching yourself through to the Normandy while it was engaged in battle, you got to watch as everyone else rebuilt their lives around you. While everyone forgot, you were left to remember.

It wasn’t bad for the first few weeks. It was, in fact, therapeutic. Knowing and seeing the civilians you had saved had given you that satisfying feeling every time you encountered them. When you went out into what was left of the Presidium Commons to buy a bite to eat, the looks the remaining frazzled merchants gave you were ones of utmost respect.

Some of them would exclaim to you how much you’ve done for them indirectly. The horror stories they would tell hurt you every time. The pain from the deaths of families and friends never dulled, even in the heart of a hardened soldier.

Others would ask more personal questions. One in particular would come up more than once every time you went out. As you began to become better known than you already were, people swamped you with it again and again. Shopkeepers, waitresses and nosey newsmen would all ask it and use the exact same words every time.

It hurt more to hear them inquire than to hear about death stories or a heartfelt refugee account of the war.

It reminded of you of something that was more guilt inducing.

“Where is Commander Shepard?”

You never answered them.

Quite frankly, you hadn’t realized the magnitude of Shepard’s heroism until after she had been discharged. You had told her that it was a “leave of absence” just like it had been after the Collector incident, but this was not true. You lacked the courage to tell the great Commander that she could no longer do the thing she loved, regardless of the things your own experience with these sorts of things. Commander Shepard was undoubtedly the most recognized war hero the Alliance had ever known, and she damn well deserved all of the praise that was hurled at her. Mainly positive responses about her role in the Reaper War had been collected throughout the galaxy, most notably from Earth. Without even knowing about her actions related to the Crucible, the entire galaxy at least gave a shit about her.

It was an amazing thing to be close to such a woman like you were. She had that kind of spark that made you want to know more, especially in the heat of battle. Like a good book, she drew you in but didn’t divulge the good details until later. She was also, however, straightforward and the best leader anyone could ask for other than yourself and the late Admiral Anderson. You could care for her like she was the child that you never had, but she had never accepted your nurturing. If she ever really did, she hid it. It was simply the way she was. She did at least think of you as a close friend, and that privilege was enough for you.

This relationship made you determined to be with Shepard through her career, including when she
was not in her finest hour.

That was exactly what you did.

~

The Alliance got word of the Commander’s post-Reaper state not much longer after you had. Her health report hadn’t been as clean as you had been expecting.

Mental Health State: Fair but below average. Deteriorating.

Physical Health State: Excellent but also deteriorating. Current injuries sustainable but permanent damage is still a possibility.

Emotional State: N/A.

This had been enough for the galaxy’s most prominent form of government to pull the plug.

They had told you that this once great war hero was no longer needed for active duty. Let her keep her Spectre status so she had something worth fighting for, but strip her of everything else and consider her temporarily retired. There wasn’t a war on, so why keep her hanging on for nothing?

Besides, proclaiming her dead seemed like a simpler idea anyway. If they really needed her, they could pull her back out and parade her around for speeches. For now, though, she just wasn’t well enough.

There was hardly anyone above you in the Alliance forces, and the words that had exited their mouths had been ones of complete and utter bullshit. You had been at the meeting and had heard it all. They respected her enough to appreciate her services, but their self pity for her as a veteran was almost non-existent.

They were going to send her this information over the Extranet. A simple message stating that she was no longer needed was going to be the one thing that would terminate all she ever knew.

You couldn’t allow that to happen.

“Shepard is the most honorable solider I’ve known in my whole goddamned life.” you had told them. “If you’re going to make the mistake of discharging her, I’ll do it myself.”

When you had sent for her on a certain fateful day many months prior, she arrived to see you sitting in her old ship. The doors of her cabin had slid open with ease, and the woman’s expression was no longer one of a fearless leader. She was uncomfortable since the Reaper War; you could tell by her face, not just by the medical reports.

Your objective that day was supposed to be simple: you were to tell her that she was being given an honorable discharge due to a condition of hardship. The papers that you had been instructed to give her had been folded in the pocket of your old navy uniform. Hasty, prompt and polite were the instructions given to you specifically from the Alliance and the Council themselves. It was apparent that you didn’t intend to follow these instructions. After all, you had already brought the Normandy to the Citadel for her to make it a little bit easier. If it were up to you, you’d give it to her to keep. She deserved it after what the higher-ups had done to her.

You had asked the Alliance presence on Earth to send in Shepard’s former fleet specifically for the meeting; the Normandy was in pristine condition after having some repairs done and bearing bad
news in a familiar setting always seemed like it would be better experience.

You had rendered the rest of the details from the awkward situation unimportant.

The only thing you had left to remember now was that Commander Shepard’s discharge papers had been long forgotten in your uniform pocket.

She had also never turned in her dog tags.

Your name is still Admiral Steven Hackett, and as the doors to your office opened to reveal a familiar turian, you began to wonder what was worth fighting for anymore.
Ahh thanks for more comments and kudos! I love getting them!

And just so you all are aware, this story is currently on its seventh chapter on FF.net. I will, however, catch up to it on here soon. I just like being prepared in case I don’t have time to write. (then I won’t feel guilty about not uploading every day. uwu)

Please enjoy the chapter and leave comments!

xoxo
THR

UPDATE: tryin to give this whole thing a stream of conscious vibe. hope it's working.

Chapter 5

Your name was still Garrus Vakarian and you had managed to get yourself into the office of Admiral Steven Hackett. You had one sole reason for visiting the man that had led the Alliance to victory in a countless number of wars. Although it appeared to be futile, you needed to know the whereabouts of the Commander. Knowing she was possibly alive was one of the few things that kept you going. Everything you had done after the war had been for her, but you would never let anyone know it. If you could just see her one more time, you would be able to go on with your life and breathe a sigh of relief. If you found her and she wanted more, you would give her all that you had. Even if that meant your life, you would go for it. It was sickening that you would do so much for a person, but there you were, begging just for a single look.

In front of you sat a worn out man who was surrounded by an office of glass that showed a fantastic view of the Presidium around you. If you hadn’t known him, you would guess that he was a retired military man who was sitting around in his uniform for the sole purpose of sentimentality. The place encasing the two of you was half the size of the AI Core back on the Normandy, which had been considerably tiny to begin with. He sat behind an antique wooden desk, which you presumed was imported from Earth. The rest of the room lacked furnishing other than a chair in front of the desk and a tiny houseplant. It wasn’t considered suitable for the man that inhabited the workspace, but the Alliance was just scraping by nowadays. They couldn’t afford the best for the best until the Citadel or Earth was fully rebuilt.

Admiral Hackett looked up at you, the scar on his face more prevalent than usual. He had aged
considerably since your last meeting, which had been brief.

“Vakarian, correct? You’re the one that kept Commander Shepard in line back during the good ol’
days. What’s a former C-Sec officer doing in the Presidium?” The way he spoke was humbling and
it was as if nothing was wrong in the universe.

“It was more or less the other way around, Admiral.” you answered. “I’m here to ask about her, if
you don’t mind.”

You slapped a pile of files on his desk in the nicest manner possible, but your fervent demeanor
didn’t allow you to appear so kind.

As he looked at the documents, his eyes widened and he quickly began to rub his wrinkled forehead.

“Where did you get these?”

You put your arms behind your back and hesitated in sitting in the chair that was in front of the desk.
When he held his hand out, you sat down.

Having some friends at C-Sec had certainly aided you in this endeavor of yours. The few of them
that were still alive had been eager to help you in your search to find the seemingly lost Commander;
you felt like the entire galaxy would be willing to help you find out her whereabouts if you had
asked.

You had visited the Zakera Ward C-Sec office approximately a half hour ago. The last time you had
been there had in fact been with Shepard. It hadn’t been that long ago, but it still felt like it could
have been an eternity. Maybe it was just the lack of so many familiar faces in the office; having an
occupation for so long gave you the privilege of having a large number of companions to rely on.
However, not many of these old comrades had survived the invasion of the Citadel. When you
arrived, the turians that you remembered greeted you with a warm smile. Others had jealous sneers;
when you work with someone as famous as the Commander herself three times, envy was something
to be expected along with respect. Soldiers were still idolizing her, and the admiration wasn’t limited
to just humans. Turians were amazed at her persistence. The determination of your own species
wasn’t often seen in the likes of a human, and despite the animosity your people had with the
inhabitants of Earth, Shepard had been different in their eyes.

The men at C-Sec knew more than you had been expecting. Access to medical files, classified
reports and important encrypted data was not easily granted to you at first. You had to pull some
mandibles (figuratively, of course) to get what you needed. It took time, yet it had been all worth it in
the end.

Among the miscellaneous files mentioned, only one seemed to be of significant importance. As you
had left the C-Sec station and started to wander around Zakera with a stack of datapads in your hand,
one in particular had stuck out to you.

“COUNCIL MEETING #6871-B 2186: STATUS OF COMMANDER E. SHEPARD”

The title was a bit blatant, and you got to reading it as soon as you found a place that served good
turian food. This small bit of relaxation didn’t subdue your keenness for finding your possibly dead
human girlfriend, because after reading the meeting briefing, you were up on your feet.

The notes were clear. There was no longer a doubt in your mind.

The Alliance and the Council had turned their backs on Shepard again.
It didn’t take you long to find your way onto the Presidium.

“I have some friends down at C-Sec. There’s still some good boys down there; they weren’t exactly eager to share what the Shepard files held. I guess that means they’re doing their job.” you replied.

Hackett nodded, unfazed by your homebrewed security breach.

“These files…” he started. His hands dropped the datapad back onto the wood. The sound of metal clashing with old wood made both of your ears ring, and he looked up at you in the most genuine way possible.

“Vakarian, let me make one thing clear to you: Commander Shepard is very much alive.”

You shook your head, not wanting to be brash with the man that had probably saved your ass in one way or another.

“That gossip has already gotten on the news. I need to know where she is.”

He took his hat off, revealing grayish white hair. Instead of rubbing his forehead, he moved to his growing bald spot.

“If you got these files and read them all, it’s no use trying to keep her from you. You were the woman’s most trusted squadmate, were you not? Rumors have been going around since comm buoys were back up, anyway. Her being alive is no surprise to anyone with half of a brain. The Alliance and the Council may be good at covering things up, but things are different when it comes to the Commander. This entire matter is…delicate. But it’s already been fractured.”

He paused for a moment, allowing his hand to come up to his scratchy chin.

“The things she’d tell me about you make me wonder why C-Sec would let such a good employee get out without a fight.”

The praise flattered you, but you disregarded it. You had been fired from C-Sec, after all.

“She’s in the worst shape she’s been in since before Cerberus put her back together. Don’t push her and don’t mention this to anyone.” he explained as he handed a different datapad to you. On it was an address that would lead you to a location on the Presidium.

This great reveal of information was out of character for him; Hackett was an earnest man, not someone who handed out classified files to some failure of a turian. For a second, you wondered if this was a trap. Such a thought was soon deemed futile in your mind, though; the galaxy had suffered enough travesties for more than a few lifetimes. The look in the man’s eyes was genuine and this was not a set up.

This was why you did not protest. Instead, you took the datapad with confidence and stood up.

“And I thought going to someone like Dr. T’soni would be easier…” you muttered, your mandibles flaring out in a mixture of nervousness as well as anticipation. “Hell, this wasn’t supposed to be this easy at all. According to the documents, this was all top secret.”

Admiral Hackett stood up and walked behind you, putting a steady hand on your armored shoulder.

“She cared about you, Vakarian. We didn’t have a lot of time to talk personally…what with all of this damn Reaper nonsense. But when we did, she made you out to be a good man. Don’t let me regret this. This is a favor…a big, big favor…and a security breach. But I owe it to her and I’m
feeling generous.”

You craned your head to look at the man behind you, and as much as you wanted to leave and keep your mouth shut, it was impossible.

“Why me, though?” he asked, knowing that the answer to that question had already been explained. “You’re a top ranking Alliance official and you’re giving me information that could cost you your job.”

“Don’t remind me,” Hackett continued. “Intergalactic politics are in shambles, and after the hell I’ve been through, there are some things that can slip through the cracks. And, quite frankly, Shepard needs some hope too.”

Your name was still Garrus Vakarian, and it was time to do what you had been longing to do since you and Shepard had said goodbye.

It was time to say hello again.
Thanks for the kudos and comments, guys! I really appreciate it as usual.

I feel so bad because I won't be able to write anything new tonight. Hopefully taking a day off won't make readers go away...I've had that happen before. This was also my favorite chapter to write so far. I'm not sure why.

xoxo
THR

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Chapter 6

Your name was still Commander Liz Shepard and you were starting forget that you still hadn’t turned your dog tags back to the Alliance.

They hung around your neck like they always did, almost like a scarlet letter. Because they weren’t always covered up by armor anymore, the soft clinking noises they made when you walked was one of the last reassuring things in your entire penthouse. When you bent down to pick up a long forgotten datapad lying on the ground, a soft metallic tapping sound would come along with them hanging down into your peripheral vision. Other mundane tasks were made better when you were able to see them. It was almost a sick obsession of yours to listen for them or look down at your chest to check them. Sometimes you wondered if they were still there.

They always were.

Staring at dog tags was only one of your many bizarre habits that you had picked up while on semi permanent shore leave. The fact that you still considered your current state to be shore leave was another one.

You also tended to look at your former armor an unhealthy amount of times during the day.

It was disassembled and shelved in the very back of your closet, which was a walk in. You had not experienced the feeling of the hard shell that had protected your body for so long in approximately a year. Although initially destroyed by a Reaper beam, your first order of business when you had usable free time was to get it repaired.

You sent it into the Presidium Commons anonymously; when given the specs, merchants figured that it had been sent in by a Shepard fan looking to have an accurate copy of her armor. You laughed
when you had figured that out.

When you got it back, you were determined to not have a single scratch be inflicted on it. You needed to savor it. In the long run, you had lost the Normandy and her crew, but you didn’t have to lose the one thing that had protected you until the end.

Its curves and make had been engraved in your mind since the initial purchase: metallic purple and indigo finish, Kassa Fabrications chest plate, the rest outfitted with Airmax Arsenal, white lights on the back.

You found yourself staring at it a bit too often, among other things that you probably shouldn’t have been doing. Most of the things you did nowadays would be considered insane by the standards of most races. You were no longer Commander Shepard. Your reasoning behind your actions was simple; most people would go insane if they had been shoved inside a place that they didn’t belong.

It was like an alien on Earth or a civilian on a warship. It couldn’t work, it wouldn’t work, and they would try to find some way to leave no matter what.

Because no matter what, the ends would always justify the means. You were Commander Shepard, god damn it. You could tell yourself that you weren’t, but you always would be.

At least you would be on the inside.

For now, to feel like a commander on the outside, you would have to take certain measures.

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and you were sitting on your couch in full uniform.

You felt stupid. You were stupid. Reminiscing wouldn’t get you anywhere.

The small bit of rationality in your brain was making you seethe. Why were you doing this to yourself? Would a once great hero like you die in a penthouse from utter boredom just because of restrictions that had put on you? Were you even a hero anymore? Would you have to try and fake your status by wearing armor around while doing petty things like cleaning and watching dumb vids?

No, that wasn’t going to happen.

As the Presidium ogled back at you from your floor to ceiling living room window, you did something that you had wanted to do for a long time.

“Don’t use your biotics.” they had told you. Who “they” were had never been important to you; you were prone to insubordination to begin with.

They could try to take out your L2s (which didn’t exactly work), they could put you on house arrest, they could let you off with a warning, but nobody was about to try and stop you now.

It was 19:30 on the Citadel. The false, simulated sunset was approaching and all was quiet. For a second, your attention drifted away from the blue haze welling up in your hand. As fake as it was, there was a watercolor painting being formed up in the Presidium’s skyway. The light cerulean faded into purple, your favorite. Then there was the dark red, and then the other colors of fire that somehow made their way up into the sky. It was beautiful, yes, but fake. Everything on the Presidium was fake. The fakeness combined with the quiet was soon too much, and while you were
engrossed, your hands began to go out of control. It felt numb, and for the first time, you felt like you couldn’t even stop an urge that you had in check for years.

That is, until the cracking of a series of windows elicited a tiny crowd below you. Six meters worth of glass was either partially shattered or scarred on the metal deck that was outside of your personal balcony. Power surged through your body again, and as you looked down to see scratches on the violet finish of your suit, you fell to your knees.

You couldn’t let that happen again, yet before you could control yourself, it did.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you had never been more afraid to do something in your life.

Military manners and combat techniques had been embedded in your brain since you were a teen. If someone lunged at you, you could have them on the ground. If someone pulled a gun on you, you could have them dead in seconds. If someone sniped you, you’d snipe back and make each shot better than your last.

But when it came to women, you couldn’t help but deadpan sometimes.

You did have emotions and feelings for females, of course. However, they had never been strong enough for you to have the desire to initiate something meaningful. Many a time you had been with a turian woman and got lucky. Every single encounter had been nothing more than a non-passionate fling; you could wake up and have her gone so you could return to life as normal. You were not a player whatsoever.

Hell, you were just plain confused.

That is, until you met a woman.

A human woman.

Your story had been unbelievably cliché. Some of the human crew aboard the Normandy had called you star crossed lovers, and you rolled your eyes every single time because it really was just a silly pun.

But sometimes, you couldn’t help but believe it.

What was once thought to be nothing more than “blowing off steam” turned into a sudden whirlwind that you couldn’t explain. It wasn’t a fling; it was dependence.

It was, dare you say, love.

You needed her as much as she needed you. You knew what guns she liked and she knew when you would be busy with calibrations. She didn’t mind cheap champagne and staying in for the night to look at stars. Dates weren’t either of your styles, anyway. You were both a little too rigid for that. Harsh combat and watching each other’s back was good enough for you most of the time. When you were both feeling cozy, other things would go on in the privacy of the Main Battery or the Captain’s Quarters. It wasn’t necessarily sex; heartfelt discussions or a few properly planted kisses made both of your hearts start beating faster than they should have.

Other than domestic needs, your sexual ones were more than just satisfied by this woman.

There was an obvious species difference. The two of you had been aware of this when starting things out. The first time it had been awkward. Weird angles and asking if the other one was ok led
to scars and allergic reactions. You had been frazzled and thought that you had turned her off. Time revealed to you that you had done the absolute opposite.

Your kisses had to be kept to a minimum due to skin reactions with your saliva. You didn’t want to hurt her, but you couldn’t help but embrace her when she gave you deep kisses with her always chapped lips.

You stared down at the datapad in your hand and reviewed your current appearance. You had been in armor, not civvies. Exhaling, you brushed your clothing off and regretted your choice in attire.

After checking yourself over externally, you recalled what Hackett had said and began to ponder why he had even sent you after her to begin with.

Shepard wasn’t stable. You saw firsthand what she had put herself through. The last thing you wanted to do was set her off.

There hadn’t been any no-no subjects presented to you before you had left. In fact, you had been given nothing more than a brief warning, which was also quite strange. In retrospect, though, this entire thing was strange and unexpected.

You figured that you would assume nothing until you saw her again. The moment would reveal itself to you soon enough and you began to relax a little bit. There was no sense in being tense, anyway.

You then realized that you should have known better. Out of the blue, the elevator that you were currently travelling in shook in a violent manner. Within seconds, you heard a loud blast and the lights turned off. Backup lights turned on, and so did your sense that made you want to keep going.

Something was wrong, and you needed to get the hell out of that elevator and up to Shepard’s supposed penthouse. Just as fast as the elevator had stopped, you pulled out your omni-tool and got to work.

Because if something happened to her and you were this close, you knew that you couldn’t forgive yourself. It was a primal instinct, one that you couldn’t control nor did you want to curb it.

And you loved every minute of it.
Wow, here's yet another thing that I didn't do justice.

This chapter is a little briefer than I wanted, but I think I got the point across. :)

As always, thank you for the comments and kudos.

xoxo
THR
your mind, but you were a cautious turian.

Your thoughts were interrupted momentarily, and the elevator doors spread open.

In a matter of seconds, you realized what had caused your technical difficulties.

The first thing you noticed about the expansive penthouse in front of you was not the stark white finishes. It wasn’t the modern interior or untouched furniture.

It was the woman on her knees twenty feet away from you, who was just as shattered as the glass that was on the floor. She was in her armor, which was just like how you remembered: a shiny purple color and well maintained. Her attire was more than just bizarre; she had never worn her armor off duty when they had been on the Normandy.

As you took a step closer, you could see details that were even more gut wrenching for you to witness. Glass had stabbed her in the face, and blood mixed with salty tears. Never before had you seen Shepard cry.

Human crying had a distinct oddness about it, but hers didn’t seem to fit into that category. It was passionate and longing, almost as if she was looking for someone, anyone, to come and find her. It was a cry for help.

As you stared at the scene in front of you, you had the urge to fall to your own knees. The one woman who had led everyone was dying on the inside. She had relinquished all control.

She was no longer Commander Shepard.

She was Liz Shepard, the Earthborn woman who was supposed to do great things. Those things were done now, though. Now she was nothing more than a mass of stardust.

The first words that came out of your mouth were the same ones that you had said in the elevator. Although your voice was shaky and strained, you managed to make it sound stronger than it had ever been before.

“Shepard.”

She didn’t look up at first. This made you take a step back instead of advancing. The way her own body pulsated made you want to leave her alone.

Was she going to attack you? Reject you? Kill you?

However, in an unexpected turn of events, she did something you hadn’t expected her to do.

She stood up.

Her brown eyes pierced your black and blue ones, and you watched her as she attempted to regain her composure. That was one thing she had always been good at.

Tears were still rolling down her cheeks and glass still stuck out of her skin, which had retained its cream-like hue.

“G-Garrus…god dammit, it’s you, Garrus…I thought you didn’t make it.”

Your name slid off of her tongue like warm butter and her eyes looked so eager. If you were better at reading human emotions, you would have even dared to say that they looked happy.
There was a lack of time to analyze emotions in the next few seconds. Her legs moved faster than ever before while charging towards you and you braced for impact. She was by no means a tiny human; in their standard measurements she was about six feet and three inches in height. From what you could understand, this was rather large for a female.

Her weight shifted onto you when you collided, and the impact brought you both to the ground. Glass scratched both of your faces and you leaned in to kiss her. You were careful as usual, but her force overwhelmed you. She had, after all, managed to knock you over. That had been a first.

Her red blood smeared over your face, and you held her in an embrace once you recovered. You pulled her close and kept her safe just like you had so many times before. Iron, you thought. She smelled like iron and starkness, which was something you weren’t used to. It wasn’t right, just like how these circumstances were, but you couldn’t give a shit right now. When the two of you locked hands, it was as if not even the entire galaxy could come between you.

And, as far as the two of you were concerned, it wouldn’t.

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and never before had you felt so much relief.

You said his name so many times while you were in Garrus’ grasp and inhaled sharply just to let his scent overtake your body. You were getting hot in your armor, but being in it made it feel like the days back on the Normandy again. When you closed your eyes, you were still in your cabin. He was holding you for the first time and nobody was going to stop you. For a second, it all seemed like a dream. Why now? you thought. It was a just question considering the circumstances; not a single person, not even your boyfriend, had decided to visit you until now. It was soon clear in your mind that these people hadn’t even known what happened. They didn’t even know any of it. Not even Garrus knew. The heartache, the entrapment, the injuries, the mind games...

Your thoughts paused. The way he started picking glass out of your skin hurt, but it showed how he was still concerned about you.

Of course he’s still concerned about you, you idiot. Why would he be here? you told yourself. You ignored these statements in your head and instead focused on trying to act mentally stable for your long lost boyfriend. That is, if he was still your boyfriend. You had made a promise to him before heading for that goddamned beam, and if anyone knew that you would always keep your word, it would be Garrus.

Before you could get in a word, he brushed his free hand across your hair to pull out your tight bun. He must have remembered how you liked that.

Scarlet hair fell just below your own shoulders and he began to speak in that voice that you had been longing to hear for the longest time. The vids you had played over and over again on your omni-tool would never compare to hearing the real thing in person.

“Shepard, I know.” he whispered while flicking a shard of crimson tinted glass into the pile across the room. “Good to know that I’m not the only one that’s been screwed over by some bastards on the Citadel.”

You bit down on your lip, wondering what he was talking about.

“Shep—Liz.” he said while correcting himself. “Come on, sit up. You need to get out of that armor.”

You did as he said as if he was your admiral; he had total control over you for once. Insubordination on his part was impossible. He would be your boss for now. He was capable of guiding you.
Your self-inflicted biotic blast made your legs turn to jelly. Being in a hot turian’s arms wasn’t helping the matter, either; you were still wondering how you had managed to run to him so fast.

Instead of continuing to think, you just acted. As he led you to your stairs, he offered an inquisitive look, and for some reason you were both acting on instinct. That in and of itself was beautiful, mystifying even.

“You’ve got a bathroom up here, don’t you?”

You nodded and continued to be silent. You wanted to take him in all over again. Every curve of his body had to be relearned, and you had some studying to do.

His scars still had not healed, and he had aged a slight bit since the last time you had seen him. His physique was no different, though. You knew that under all of that armor, he was toned and his waist was still thin and flexible. A mischievous smile crept onto your face when you thought of him that way, but you repressed it.

As your feet moved blindly up the stairs, the two of you remained silent until you reached the top.

“There isn’t anyone in here, is there?” he asked. “It’s not every day that an elevator shuts down on you because of a spontaneous biotic explosion. Well, unless Jack lives here with you. Which I don’t think she does.”

You chuckled and looked up at him, your sanity slowly starting to return temporarily. You had forgotten about the dog tags and the scratches on the suit.

For once in a year you could say that you were more than just okay.

You were great, even if that mood was only temporary.

“L2s can still do a hell of a lot of damage, Vakarian.” you teased. His smile was reassuring, and the final thing he said to you before you began to take your armor off stuck with you for a long time.

“You’re still a mystery.” he said. “You’re too grey, and you remember what I said about that. I might not know what to do with grey, but I think you’re an exception.”
Enter: Jeff "Joker" Moreau

Chapter Notes

Ok I know I'm uploading two chapters in one night but this one was just so so so fun to write and I hope you guys enjoy it!! Please comment on this one because I put a ton of work into it. uww

xoxo
THR

(I quoted two songs in it btw. Anyone who can guess them gets a cookie)

UPDATE: taking a psych class really helps with writing this stuff. just another random thought I feel like adding to these notes because hey it's my story. lol ok time for you guys to actually read. thanks for kudos and reviews. <3

Chapter 8

Enter: Jeff "Joker" Moreau

Your name was Admiral Steven Hackett and you didn’t know how you were going to compose a certain email.

Telling the Council how you had royally fucked up on purpose was never easy. In fact, you had never had to live through the harsh experience before. You had undergone your own instances of failure. An unsuccessful invasion or a lost crew had come up before in your career, and shrugging it off with ease had never been unproblematic.

You were a strong man, though. Or, at least that’s what the media said about you. You could handle things like that without having a chip on your shoulder. These statements were somewhat true.

Getting ratted out by the Council for military matters was hardly brutal. They were diplomats, anyway. Their perception was hardly accurate when it came to war. But revealing that you had divulged classified documents, revealed Shepard’s confinement location and didn’t arrest an offender would be out of character and in their playing field. Leveraging diplomatic matters was their job and fighting was yours.

They should have been expecting this, to be honest.

Anything just having to do with questioning their reasons behind Shepard’s containment left their intergalactic panties in a wad. But revealing information to someone who lacked prior approval, let alone someone who was technically a civilian and former vigilante? You could get discharged yourself.
The questions they would ask were already playing in your head. Why was a crazy old man being trusted with this knowledge, anyway? They would have to spend their precious relief funds to initiate a cover up. You’d get called rash and sentimental for caring about the Commander. You shook your head and looked at your omni-tool in question.

Caring wasn’t exactly the word that was the best for the situation. Sure, you knew the Alliance and the Council cared about Shepard. She was supposedly under house arrest for a good reason: her own mental health.

They cared enough to drive her insane with a limited amount of visitors. Anyone who wanted contact had to go through an approval process first. Most were denied. Others were told that she really wasn’t alive.

She couldn’t go shopping or go on even the simplest of missions to satisfy her constant thirst for adventure. She had to be confined to a house. It was supposed to help her recover independently for her own good. Turning a penthouse into a makeshift asylum had been effortless for the government despite your protests.

The Alliance had been forced to comply with the Council’s decisions regarding their soldier. She was, after all, a Spectre.

“Keep her secluded,” they had said to you and your other important colleagues at the Alliance. “If you let her out of your sight she’ll do something imprudent and hurt herself. Don’t you see what she does? A path of destruction follows her everywhere and we don’t need more drama and the loss of the best goddamn Alliance soldier falling into our laps. Not to mention her position as a Spectre! The galaxy doesn’t need Shepard to turn into the next Nihlus or some other fallen veteran.”

You knew there were other motives for her second house incarceration. Former crimes and grudges were still there. Although the two parties agreed on most things, the fate of an infamous commander was not one of them.

And as you sat at your worn wooden desk with your omni-tool still blinking, you made yet another decision that came with much self-reproach on your part.

You cancelled the email that was to be forwarded to Alliance agents and the Council members themselves. This could be another secret that you could throw away into the wind and let go of.

It certainly mattered, but you were willing to face the consequences. It was for the greater good, wasn’t it?

Even if it wasn’t, you were still going to be able to sleep better at night.

Your name was still Admiral Steven Hackett, and you wanted what was best for the victims.

Your name was just Liz Shepard right now.

As you sat on the glass counter of your master bathroom, the Presidium was staring back at you again with that false façade that you had grown to hate. The next mock up night cycle had started again, and the soft light of the stars were spilled all across your own face as well as your partner’s. The watercolor was gone now. It was just blue.

Garrus had gotten on one of his old C-Sec comm channels and told C-Sec to hold off on investigating the biotic accident. “Under control,” he had said. This was a lie; neither of you liked to lie, but you supposed that it was for a good cause this time. You were in a good place right now.
You didn’t feel crazy.

The look of the Turian in front of you right now was breathtaking. With his carapace shining and reptilian skin giving off a cobalt hue, he straddled you and wiped a talon across your scabbed over cheek. In theory, the damage your face had taken on was minimal. Needless to say, though, Garrus was protective. He had sprung into action from the second he had shown up.

You hadn’t expected anything less from him even though it still felt so surreal.

The glass was all gone now, and you two seemed to have nothing else to say. He had remembered the normal conduct for reunions and you knew better than to speak to him right away. He may be the most friendly face you could ever wish to see right now, but that didn’t mean that you weren’t downright scared.

The feeling of him embracing you while you were still in your armor was now gone. Your outer shell for protection was now sitting on the floor in pieces. In agony, you touched the tags around your neck almost like a form of security. What would happen if you screwed up while talking to him? In the blink of an eye, he could get up and leave.

He could never come back and maybe find someone of his own. Turian women were endowed with a thinner waist and more supportable hips than the ones that you possessed. They would be more attractive to him, anyway.

“Shepard?”

His voice. He had said something and you weren’t listening again.

You jerked your head up, noticing the glowing blue target visor. It was one of the few things in the room that was still alive with light, minus the cars flying outside.

The way he looked at you was practically endearing. His talon moved to your chin and tilted it up, but you couldn’t look straight.

“You don’t belong here.” he muttered. His tone was angry, and you couldn’t help flinching.

Why were you afraid of him? Your hand turned into a fist around the tags and bit down on your lip.

“You should be out there fixing what the Reapers ruined.”

Instead of touching your chin, he moved to your hand and took it away from the tags. You didn’t know if he knew what those meant to you.

Sensing that this was turning into a one sided conversation, he cut out the romantic advances and moved towards the big window. His eyes narrowed at the view; you could tell that he wasn’t impressed, either. He had been on this damned station for way too long to feel anything more than apathy most of the time.

“I’m tired of seeing this place.” he continued. It was almost as if he was speaking to himself, but it became obvious that neither of you minded much. “I’d rather be somewhere warm, if you know what I’m saying.”

You remembered exactly what he was talking about, but a different sentence slipped out of your mouth.

“I’m tired of feeling like I’m fucking crazy.”
Your name was Jeff Moreau, but you preferred being called Joker. Two things you had never really been good at were walking and manipulating technology that didn’t deal with piloting ships.

Parts were everywhere in the small Citadel apartment you called home. With the salary you got on the Normandy, you could have afforded better if you wanted to. Since then, you had also picked up a few Alliance relief effort jobs that involved flying, but they were petty. You got nothing out of them. Besides, inflation on the Citadel was only getting worse due to limited space and you needed its resources. You wanted to be there so you could reassemble her.

Recovered files.

As you sat at your personal computer station, you typed as rapidly as you possibly could. Fingers flew. They cramped sometimes, and the Vrolick’s didn’t help. You had to slap some medi-gel on them from time to time, as they were almost too prone to fracture.

Since you had left the Alliance on personal leave, you had one objective that you were determined on completing. In fact, if you were capable of completing it, you could for sure say that you would be able to feel some sort of fulfillment in your life.

One would think that you would be able to say that your life was pretty damn good. You had served on the Normandy three times, been called the most prestigious pilot in the Alliance and had some of the best friends a guy could ask for. You were still youngish and you had learned so much in your thirty-something years of life. You had faced challenges and celebrations. Being on the verge of death throughout the past few years made calling yourself a badass a little more justified, too.

During these times, you also had one person who had been much more than a friend.

There was one sole problem in that person that had ruined everything.

That person had in fact not been a person.

Your hand swiped across the computer in front of you, and you were one button away from trying out your newest experiment.

Her name had been EDI. Some people hadn’t called her a person. To them, she was the Enhanced Defense Intelligence.

You knew that she had been more than that.

She was an AI, a friend, a colleague and someone who had saved your own life more than a few times. You could never admit it, but you wondered if you were in love with her.

EDI had been destroyed in the Reaper War along with all other synthetic life forms. The transition to life without her had been everything but seamless. When you were in a ship cockpit, nobody was there to tell morbid jokes. Nobody would make the witty comments like she could and you couldn’t think of a single person that would be allowed to make your helmsman’s chair spin out of control other than her.

Sometimes you were even convinced that she was the one who you wouldn’t mind spending a lot of your troubled life with. You knew you couldn’t marry her, but having a lifelong bind would suffice. Besides, inter-species relationships were hardly tolerated. Organic-synthetic ones would be out of the question and were looked upon as a fetish.

You had grown so attached to her during your time together. Some would call it a sick attraction.
Others found it to be an engaging relationship that was different than most.

The precautions you had taken in case of a sudden shutdown of her systems were the single thing left that could save her. She laughed at you when you backed her up before the final assault on Earth, saying that she was omnipresent. You tended to be on the paranoid side, though, and for once your intuition surpassed hers. The computer in front of you held everything: her program files, her memories, and even logs of all of her previous conversations.

The one mission you had left was to bring her back to life. Since you had been back, you had tried before. All of those attempts failed.

You weren’t sure why this time felt different.

The button on the computer was simple.

“Launch system synthesis?” it asked. Your finger hovered above it.

The risk of losing the data was high. The success rate was low.

With your top teeth gnawing on your lips, you pressed it anyway. It was one of the last chances you had to get her back.

With that, you waited. Minutes turned into hours, and the small progress bar that felt endless kept filling up in front of you. You could count the pixels as they got closer to the end.

You didn’t really know what time it was when you looked up.

“Synthesis failed.”

You stared at it with a blank expression.

You had failed again.

In a huff, you stood up and yelled in agony. You couldn’t stand this anymore. Being so alone and helpless never felt so bad. Never finding someone like her made you feel even worse.

Yells turned into tears, and you soon found yourself on the floor with a broken arm.

“It’s a motherfucker without you here, EDI…” you muttered. “I’m sorry you can’t—“

“Shall I send for a car to Huerta, Jeff?”

You looked up, your eyes wide. You knew that voice. It was mechanical and funny sounding and beautiful in every way possible.

It was her.
Your name was Joker Moreau, and never before had fixed your hat or your shirt so much for someone who couldn’t even see you.

Your calculations had initially indicated failure. Even the computer in front of you was claiming that there was no chance to resurrect the AI who had been so much more than a piece of technology.

The familiar blue orb that had been with you on your bridge for so long was staring back at you on the same computer, though. Her voice was as crisp as always and she was waiting patiently for a response.

“Jeff, do you require assistance or not?”

She had repeated herself and you couldn’t help but be mesmerized. Maybe there really was some sort of god out there, because you knew one thing for sure.

EDI was not supposed to be alive right now.

“Holy shit…” was the response you gave to her. The pain in your arm seemed to melt away at the thought of her being right in front of you. Although she was not physically near you, the proximity the two of you shared was enough to speed up your heartbeat.

“Hold yourself together.” you thought. There was no sense in acting like a dipshit.

“EDI, when was the time of your last shutdown?”

The blue orb on the computer pulsated a bit and soon provided a response.

“Approximately a year ago. Without a proper database to reference, precise dates are unknown.” She
blinking a bit more before speaking again.

“Jeff, I would advise you to take me back to the Normandy for further data synthesis and linking. You have saved my critical functions to the point of operational use. However, I am finding your current systems to be inadequate. I would also feel more comfortable in Dr. Eva Coré’s body, if possible. It would make interactions far easier, although it is not required.”

She hadn’t changed at all, which warmed your chilled heart more than you could ever imagine. With hesitation, you got up and limped back towards your comfortable chair to sit closer to her.

“It’s good to have you back, EDI. I’ll get all of that for you.” you chirped. You knew that she could detect the happiness in your voice.

“I am pleased to hear from you as well, Jeff. However, I have a few inquiries before you start to get anything else done.”

You nodded your head as you nursed your bad arm. You didn’t think she could see you and you had thought wrong.

“I understand that Commander Shepard is here on the Citadel and your email logs indicate that the two of you have not been in contact. You also haven’t corresponded with the rest of the crew. Did anything happen between my shutdown and now?”

Hearing Shepard’s name made your eyes hit the floor. You still cared about her more than she would ever know. Hell, you were the one Anderson had appointed to look out for her. You had always worried about her since the beginning and that hadn’t changed.

You knew you would never forgive yourself for leaving her. Watching a person who you had been willing to die for disappear into an abyss had never been easy. After losing her and EDI at once, things in your life had been unbearably complicated in the worst way possible.

After the Normandy had been taken back into Alliance possession, you remember the way the crew had felt. Some had tried to seek atonement while others went along like it was their duty to continue fighting. You, on the other hand, felt nothing at all.

Rumors had been circulating about the Commander’s survival for months now. You had felt like she was still alive since the beginning despite the crew’s discouraging comments. You had known her longer than some of the people that had been aboard the Normandy; Shepard was not one who could be killed easily and a supposed “explosion” wasn’t enough to put her out forever.

Around the six month mark since her departure, the speculations had been confirmed by your former crew’s own Diana Allers. The broadcast had been brief, much to your disliking. Shepard was very much alive and her location was undisclosed. You remembered how relief had surged through your body; you had never really cared for Diana much, but now she was like an angel from god that was delivering divine news.

It was odd because you never saw her on the news again after that. You didn’t think anything of it.

Hearing EDI talk about was alarming, even if she wasn’t right, and it made you wonder where she was. What if she was here? The Citadel wasn’t as large as a planet. In theory, you should have run into her by now despite the limited travelling that you did on the structure. You weren’t about to doubt the one source of information that had been true every time you consulted her. However, something seemed to be off.

“I didn’t think she was here—alive, I mean. The entire crew has disbanded and shit. Not much has
“I believe it would be a good idea to go and see her. She is very much alive, according to Council documents.” the AI countered. “Medical reports show evidence of insanity. Or, rather, possible insanity.”

Your jaw dropped at the sound of that. Insanity from the sanest person you knew? How could that be possible? Wait—there was another part of what she had said that you weren’t listening to. Shep was here. Well, you liked to imagine that she was.

You rested your unharmed hand on your cheek and sighed. After the bullshit she had been put through, it was no wonder that insanity had plagued her.

“I think it would be a good idea to go to Huerta, EDI.” you said. “And I’ll bring you back the Normandy hardware after doing a little smooth talking.”

“I’ll send for a car right away.”

God, you loved that woman.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you didn’t find Shepard crazy at all.

You spun around to look at her, and it was evident that she was on the verge of tears. The way she was sitting on her counter was unsettling. Her posture had been so profound while she was still in duty. She had exchanged her proud stature for something that was more or less like a slump. The liveliness in her eyes was gone; they had been replaced with anger and defeat.

The words she had just said replayed in your head like the repetitive sound of machine gun fire.

“I’m tired of feeling like I’m fucking crazy.”

You didn’t know if it was okay to tell her about everything you knew. Maybe she would get closure from it. There was also the risk of her going even farther off of the deep end.

She slid off of the counter and came up behind you, hugging your slim waist. In an instant, you felt her snuggled against the coldness of your armor. You could hear her sobbing again. It didn’t take long for you to decide that you didn’t like it; it was something so unnatural coming from her.

For the second time in a day you witnessed the greatest Alliance commander cry, and you didn’t blame her for it at all.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you felt the need to cry again.

It was trivial of you and you felt like a baby. Crying was for children, not for a full fledged military woman.

But you weren’t in the military anymore, and you felt like crying might be justified right now.

You weren’t just crying because you had a lack of stability. You were crying for Garrus.

You were crying because you hadn’t been outside your own goddamn balcony in a year.

You were crying for the lives you couldn’t save in so many places.
The entire galaxy.

You cried because you weren’t really sure if there was something to live for except the turian in front of you, and that scared you.

Because eventually, you knew he would leave.

Your tears hit his metallic armor, and you whispered into him.

“Don’t leave me again.”

You confirmed that he heard you when he turned around, and in a moment he gripped your shoulders tight enough to show that he cared.

“Shepard, listen to me.” he said, his voice firm but soothing. This time, you didn’t avoid eye contact. The two of you owned the room and nobody was there to interrupt.

“I’ve loved you longer than you’ve known, and I will never leave. You’re the one good thing that’s happened to me in a long time, and you’d better know that I’ll be your armor when you don’t have it protecting you. I’ll give you as much security as you need and I won’t leave unless you want me out. This whole thing is crazy, but that’s what happens after a damned war—nothing is right. Nothing fits. But spirits, somehow I managed to get here, and I don’t understand all of this. You’ve been hurt but I’m not leaving.”

He pushed back your hair just like how you liked it again, and every word he said had been injected with the most truthfulness that you had heard in a very long time.

Your expression lightened and you looked up at him. His scars were still present, his visor still glowed, and he was the most handsome man you could ever concoct in your mind.

Nobody else could convince you differently.

A rough pair of lips kissed your forehead, and the way his mandibles felt against your skin made that feeling of security feel a little more real.

You liked that.

You liked it a lot.

In a second, he pulled away from you and looked down.

“Vakarian…” you whispered. There was one more thing you needed to know from him right now.

“How did you get here? As far as I know, the Alliance has me under lock and key.”

He sighed and you pondered your own question. Had you really been as difficult to find as you thought?

“If you want to know the whole story, we can at least go out for a drink. I mean, if you’re ready for that sort of thing. It has been a year, hasn’t it? There’s nothing wrong with breaking a few rules—I mean, I am a bad turian.” he answered.

You perked up like an excited animal at the thought of going out, and never before had you rushed to your closet so fast in your entire life. It was like you were being broken out of jail, and no matter how wrong it was for you to leave confinement, your chains were now shattered.
This may or may not have been the longest chapter that I've ever wrote.
And it came out of absolutely nowhere! Yay!!

Please enjoy the chapter and keep up the comments and kudos! I didn't get any last chapter. :( 

Happy tenth chapter!

xoxo
THR

UPDATE: so this is the last chapter I have fixed. I promise I'll finish. I advise that you don't read any further than this, as all of it is subject to change. but hey, I'm not gonna stop you. cheers.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you were trying to remember your old process of getting ready.

Garrus had gone downstairs to leave you alone, and now you could look at the mirror in front of you and contemplate what you had done to yourself and what you still needed to do.

Your time to examine your face was limited; you were able to observe how it had retained its gauntness and high cheekbones that made some people gawk and stare. Some said you had a triangular face, but you felt more comfortable thinking that it was heart shaped. The scars that adorned it were easily covered with makeup, which you brushed on with a swift yet shaky hand. God, when was the last time you had done this—it stung your open wounds and made you feel like shit. It didn’t seem like a good idea to cover them up, but this was a date. Not only that, but it would be the first time that you wouldn’t be breathing air that was totally filtered out. And the people—when was the last time you even saw a person other than Hackett or a stark doctor?

Your lipstick felt dry from lack of use and you had forgotten that this place was even stocked with beauty products. Makeup was a necessary evil for women in the galaxy, especially on the Citadel. After all, you were going out. If this was going to be your big, fat, illegal civilian return, you reckoned that looking nice would aid the process.

No matter how old you were, this whole thing still felt a bit foreign. Mascara was soon glided across your eyelashes (yes, you got some on your nose and you cursed as you wiped it off) and the apples
of your cheeks were eventually tinted a hint pinker than before. Your lids turned dark and smoky from the compilation of pigments, and your appearance had changed from mental patient to something of a real, put together person.

You then realized that your hair was spilling across your shoulders in an uncontrollable manner. After retaining the same hairstyle for years, there wasn’t much left that you could do with it. You could put your hair in an Alliance standard bun in your sleep.

Like you had done hundreds of times before, you grabbed hairpins that had been lying on the counter of your sink. With much trial and error came a rewarding payoff: a perfect chignon that put your previous style to shame.

You looked sufficient enough now that you had enhanced your appearance. Selecting clothing seemed like the next logical step and you were in your closet a few seconds later. There wasn’t much to choose from clothing wise. Being homebound didn’t exactly require much effort when it came to fashion. You had kept all of your clothes from the Normandy, however, which included a tight dress that had an N7 logo.

It had been your favorite outfit for shore leave and you remembered wearing it most of the time. You hadn’t dared to put it on since your abrupt departure. It brought back too many memories—both disturbing and pleasant.

In an instant, your hands felt the slippery fabric and you smiled.

It felt nice to touch it again.

Your name is Joker Moreau, and you couldn’t help but think that your current situation was precarious and amusing at the same time.

With a sling on your arm and a drink in your hand, you watched the occupants of the Purgatory Bar as they danced their problems off as if they were nothing at all. Every sort of race congregated in the bar, which featured exotic asari dancers and loud dubstep. You had been attending the nightly festivities since you first came to the Citadel. When EDI had had her own body, being here was much more fun. Making snarky comments about the patrons and debating over music made the nights go by faster. In addition to EDI’s company, Shepard would sometimes stop by. Your role had always been guarding the table for her while she took a load off or decided to dance. Her skills at dancing were remarkably terrible; this was why you had the most fun when she was around.

Brittle bones never made for easy dancing when it came to you, but it didn’t mean that you couldn’t get drunk off of your ass and watch everyone else make fools of themselves. If anything, it was pure entertainment at its finest.

A few people were around you at the bar. A few turians and asari were assembled at one end, along with an elcor and salarian at the other. Being the only human, you kept to the center and didn’t talk to anyone.

You knew that you were supposed to be helping out EDI right now, but not knowing exactly what she wanted you to do was putting a damper on your escapades. The one concrete thing that you knew for sure was that you had to acquire her systems. Without them, she would have diminished capabilities.

You had to finish what you started, and if that meant hauling the Normandy out of temporary retirement, so be it. Right now, though, the most productive thing that you felt like doing was people
watching and trying to overhear anything that could be of use. You were well aware that doing this in a bar was futile, but it was an excuse to have a few beverages and think about how the hell you could pull off such a crazy, nonsensical thing.

You held your drink to your lips and took a generous sip. This had been your second glass of brandy, and you felt the need to stop while you were ahead. The flashing lights and the alcohol combined with loud music made your lack of ability to concoct a proper plan in your mind a little too apparent.

You were very well aware that EDI’s old hardware might no longer work. Once the Reapers had been destroyed, all synthetic technology had been eradicated without a proper explanation. It was not likely that the hardware would even be intact. If it was even usable, you would have hit a stroke of luck.

What made your assignment even more difficult was that you didn’t know the location of the Normandy to begin with. She had been the best ship you had ever laid your eyes on. Being her helmsman had been an experience delivered from God himself.

Suave controls and an intense driver core were a few of the things that made the vessel so perfect. You couldn’t have conjured such a stunning ship in your own mind, and you were amazed that she was now nowhere to be found.

As expected, whatever spare time you had when you weren’t trying to reprogram EDI was spent tracking down your beloved ship. The only info you had was that she was on the Citadel, which didn’t help you very much at all.

“Think, Joker. Think!” you said to yourself in your head.

You put your glass down and rubbed your forehead in agony.

This mission was starting to get a little too unruly.

If there was one place you never liked going, it was Omega.

Omega was like the Terminus System’s sick response to the Citadel. Crime was rampant, drugs were common and innocence went there to die. Years of violence had plagued the lively asteroid turned spaceship, and now it was a place for terrorists, ne’er-do-wells and outcasts who wanted to come to a place where anarchy was supreme. The asari didn’t call it “The Heart of Evil” for nothing.

You mission here had been planned out and given to you from the Illusive Man himself. You were to get two recruits for you mission to stop the Collectors.

On this visit in particular, though, you were looking for just one of them.

Your quest to locate him landed you and your crew in a bar known as Afterlife. The outside appearance made you want to vomit; dirty individuals lined up and stunk of B.O and recreational drugs while people screamed in the background. The occasional gunshot was not uncommon, and the pollution made the place hotter than it needed to be. The place was like a red hued greenhouse and you wanted out. Getting inside was a harder task than it needed to be. Crowds of whining people blocked the entrance while apathetic bouncers gave monotonous declines to those that were not good enough to get in. Once you were inside, though, you felt a bit of relief.

Afterlife’s interior was a bit more appealing than its exterior. Walls featuring LED lights with flames
licked the ominous hallway that led to the entrance. Batarians and other various races lined the perimeter. Some of them had the nerve to yell obscenities at you or make remarks about Aria’s need to see you.

The name Aria T’Loak did not ring a bell to you until you first arrived on Omega. By then, you could quickly tell that she was one bad bitch.

If there was a single ruler that could be pulled out of the living hellhole that was Omega, it would be her.

The double metal doors parted, and the core of the multi-tiered club greeted you with air conditioning, the smell of free flowing alcohol and melodic beats. Dancers made love to their poles as less endowed patrons gawked, while some individuals promised their eternal love to the empty shot glasses in front of them. Others screamed their passion for Aria as loud as they could; it was as if a drug had been released into the air that made everyone feel some sort of high. A few stable looking mercs dotted the area as well, and they didn’t look promising. Tables were also scattered around the club. Some of them were full while others had people in them that looked downright creepy.

“Find Aria.” they had ordered you. You scanned the tempting bar and tried to see through the red light that was identical to the warm shade outside. If you were a de facto leader, where would you hide?

After some careful espionage around the location, you ascended up some stairs and went into the upper level of the club. Its lighting was mellower, and the view of the dancers was impeccable. Your crew followed you into a small lounge room. That was where you saw her.

The deep purple of her skin looked pristine against her white and black suit, which was tight and neatly pressed. Bodyguards of all races surrounded her with a menacing look, and they didn’t hesitate to raise their weapons to you when you approached.

The asari known as Aria did not budge, though. She looked out over her club through a window, her arms crossed. You could tell that she was contemplating something, but as you stepped towards her you suddenly realized that you would never figure out what that was.

Once you had gotten within five feet, she gave you and her guards the signal.

“That’s close enough.” she ordered, sending her numerous protectors into a massive frenzy. Miranda and Jacob—who you still had mixed feelings about—pulled out their pistols while you held onto yours in your pocket. This bitch was good at her job and you knew this.

At this point in time, though, you still thought that nobody was better than you.

You carried yourself just as grandly as she did. Your shoulders were broad and poised and your hand was fingering the pistol on your waist.

She must have detected this, because with a nod of her head the guards ceased.

After a quick omni-tool scan and some protests on your part, you were invited to come closer.

When she spun around to reveal her face, you couldn’t help but revel in her beauty. Her facial markings were a deep violet, and a permanent scowl gave her an odd bit of promiscuity. Her figure was a mixture of slender and curvy, and you suddenly understood why everyone downstairs either wanted her or wanted to be her.
“I have questions.” you said, your voice husky. She didn’t even bat an eyelash.

“And I have answers.” she retorted. “That depends on who you are, of course.”

You scoffed. This was a struggle between two powers and you were determined to win.

“You’re the one who runs Omega and I’m a dead Spectre. I think that makes my track record just as good as yours.”

It didn’t take her long to burst out laughing. Aria turned to her window again and spread her arms out as if she were a religious figure.

“I am Omega.” the Asari jeered. “And everyone who’s anyone comes to me when they need information.”

You took a step back until she gestured for you to sit down. After finding a comfortable spot on the other side of the couch, you got down to business. She had deemed you worthy of her help and you weren’t about to refuse it.

“Before you say anything else, I think you need to know how profound I am on this wasteland of a spaceship, Shepard.” she continued. “I’m the boss, ruler, queen... however you’d like to put it is fine. And we only have one rule.”

You waited for her to continue. Until she did, she gave you a piercing glare with her cool eyes.

“Don’t fuck with Aria.”

You figured that playing it cool would be the best thing to do in this situation. You were now just starting to realize the utter importance of Aria T’Loak on Omega.

“I can work with that.” you replied with a glower just as fierce. “And I have similar rules.”

She promptly ignored your last comment and changed the subject.

“Cut the crap. I know you’re here for Archangel and he’s in hot water right now.” Aria explained. “The Blue Suns, the Eclipse, and the Blood Pack want him dead, hence their temporary alliance to take him out. Hell, over half of Omega wants to have him gone. You’re gonna have a tough time if you don’t know what you’re doing. Getting him out of his greater good bullshit isn’t going to be easy.”

“I want him alive.” you interjected. She chortled at you before talking again.

“That’s different. Most people here are out to get him because he’s still convinced that he can do Omega some good.”

Her voice was like a purr; every word she said had you on the edge of your seat.

“The people here know that there is no good here. He’s been pissing everyone off.”

You nodded and rested your arm on the back of the sectional couch the two of you were sitting on.

“If he can piss everyone off, then he’s the guy I need.”

Once again, she did something to ridicule your response.

“You’re an odd one, Shepard.” she pondered. “And you can’t have him unless you get to him.
Mercs have been holding him off at a rendezvous point and rumor has it that they’re hiring anyone with a gun to get to him.”

After a long period of silence you looked her over and scowled.

“You’re saying that I get recruited as a merc and go rogue to get to him?”

With a small nod, Aria gestured you towards the stairs.

“There’s a private room for recruiting downstairs.” she barked while motioning. “Go get drafted and find Archangel. But don’t blame me if neither of you make it out alive.”

With that, the guards escorted you and your crew downstairs and all dialogue between you and the purple woman ceased as fast as it had started. You didn’t know how to feel about the curtness about it all, but one thing that you knew for sure was that it has been both insulting and intriguing. There was nothing left to know about the illusive, deceiving Aria T’Loak until you would meet her again.

Now it was time to find Archangel.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you were fixing your armor as you looked down into the bustling Presidium nightlife.

You had renounced the Citadel since you had left C-Sec. All of the corrupt talk and disobedience could only be tolerated for so long. The façade put up by the Council was bad enough; after what they did to Shepard, your respect for them was gone. Other than your little bit of trust that you had for C-Sec, the Citadel was dead to you.

Going out wouldn’t be as bad when you knew that you had Shepard with you. You were determined to make this busting out celebration enjoyable for her. As much as you wanted to be in that apartment alone with her, your judgment told you that she needed to get out.

You were even far enough to consider it a real date.

Even if it was in a bustling, dirty nightclub, it might bring back more pleasant memories for the both of you.

When you heard the sound of shoes descending down stairs, you turned around and greeted your date with a turian smile.

Shepard stood at the bottom of the stairs waiting for you. Her hair was neat again, and the dress she was wearing was very familiar for the both of you. Although she had gotten a lot softer since she was relieved of duty, a hint of toned muscles could still be traced in her arms and legs. They were readily exposed and you took them in like the scent of a luscious flower.

“Shepard, you look—”

“Badass and ready to bust out? Yeah, I know. Hopefully I don’t blow a gasket. Like I said—I think I might be crazy.”

The normal response from her elicited another smile from the both of you, and you walked to the elevator together.

However, as you entered and watched through the shattered glass windows before your plunge to the exit, you couldn’t help but feel a bit uneasy.
Your name was Garrus Vakarian, and you knew that something was going to happen tonight.
Priority: Snog

Chapter Notes

Take the title in jest. :)  
Oh, and keep up the comments and kudos please. Kthxbye

xoxo  
THR

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Chapter 11

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Priority: Snog

You pulled away from him in one fluid motion, feeling the numbness of your skin. His plate-like epidermis had caused the kind of friction and pain that had made your entire upper body raw. Everything from your cheeks to your lips to your bare arms was now tinted red.

The passion the two of you had just shared had been worth it, though. The way he had thrown you down onto the control panel in the main battery made your insides throb with fervor, not to mention the bites and kisses that now marked up your already battered outside layer. You had returned the favor by showing him some human customs, which he readily embraced. He wasn’t used to you wrapping your legs around his slender waist and you didn’t know how to respond to his more painful yet sexy advances.

The two of you were learning, though. That was supposedly the main step to inter-species relations according to a pioneering site that you had found on the Extranet. The important thing was that the two of you had gone farther than before. That was a step.

His original apprehension was also gone when he had closed and locked the doors upon your initial entrance. What was intended to be a calibration check ended up in a zealous rendezvous, not to mention the screwed up control panels that were now ready to be serviced by your very own Turian.

“Shepard,” he had said, his voice reverberating against the metallic walls. That was the only word he had said before advancing towards you. After that, you were ravished and you had loved every minute of it.

Presently, he looked down at you with concern. He knew that you were a tough woman and could easily handle the scarring. This time, though, you could feel your face puffing up as you walked away from him.
This was your first real allergic reaction.

“I’ll go to Mordin.”

Your comment was more of a mutter, and he grabbed your hand before you left. By now, he knew that you didn’t just leave because you were bored of him. Every romantic encounter the two of you had had ended with a sense of abruptness. As soon as one of you descended upon each other, the other partner made a habit of leaving quickly after the deed had been done. To be frank, you hadn’t done much more than kissing. His lack of spontaneity made things overwhelming. This time had been different, though.

“Did I do something wrong?” he asked. His face held an expression of genuine caring. Your hand tightened around his and you flashed him a smile.

He loved how devious it always looked. It was as if you knew something that he didn’t, and you absolutely adored it. He got back at you by confusing you to the point of no return; it was like the both of you were puzzles that were just waiting to be solved.

You had opened up to each other, but there was still something being held back.

“Don’t worry about it, sweetie.” you purred. “It’s nothing a little ointment can’t fix.”

The doors to the Crew Deck were soon unlocked, and you slinked out while smoothing your dress.

Your name was Commander Shepard and you were afraid to let someone love you properly.

You didn’t understand why she kept so much away from you.

Yes, she was a famous military woman.

Yes, she had gotten backstabbed.

But why couldn’t she trust you?

She had gone past the point of camaraderie with you, which was a large milestone. When she suggested a relationship, you had been uptight. However, when the opportunity presented itself, you couldn’t say no.

You knew you loved her. You had always loved her. It was a stretch to say or think about, but the way you straddled her on the panel made your knees buckle just thinking about it. She hadn’t pushed away, either. She did the exact opposite.

Sure, it was love, but did she love you back or was it purely lust?

Sex had been something the two of you avoided for a good reason. You weren’t sure if she could bend certain ways and when you warned her of the pain, she shrugged it off. It would be an acquired taste, but you couldn’t say that you hadn’t fantasized about it.

You knew that she didn’t love you. Not yet, at least.

As the door in front of you closed, you started to wonder why you had chosen the path you did. You could have taken the high road and courted a Turian girl from Palaven or something. Your father would be proud of you and you might be able to go back to a normal job. You could have kids and live on your homeworld in peace. Hell, maybe you’d even end up in a classy condo on the Citadel.
Instead, you were having a fling with your own commander and you were starting to fall in love with her (that is, if you weren’t already in love). You couldn’t reproduce and the whole thing was likely a dead end.

The glint she had in her eye when she left made you realize something, though.

The relationship hadn’t even been consummated and she still came around every day. Maybe it was because of the impending suicide mission that was approaching or maybe she just liked you a lot.

Either way, you knew that it wasn’t solely lust. There was something else and one day you would get her to let her guard down.

The only bad thing about that was that if she took down her walls, you would have to too.

Your name was Joker Moreau, and just when you thought that the night couldn’t get any more entertaining, something happened.

The people-watching had gone well so far. However, it didn’t contribute to your plan to revive EDI fully. Two newbie dancers fell off of their poles and onto patrons, much to their delight. More than a couple bar fights broke out between some marines, and some guy had juggled bottles with his biotics. It was uneventful for some, but it had been enough for you to get a few laughs. On an even better note, you were entirely distracted and drowsy.

Your eyes were drooping from exhaustion even though the night had just begun. There were more funny things to be seen at the bar, but you chose to fall asleep instead.

Before you could, though, another thing occurred.

“Jeff!”

You hopped up in your seat, sending pain all across your body. With as much swiftness as you could muster, you looked around you and saw nobody in your immediate line of sight that was trying to talk to you. The sound had seemed like it was close, which was why you didn’t suspect someone far away.

“Jeff, can you hear me?”

You raised your eyebrows when you realized that you still had a communicator device still stuck in your ear. The voice’s owner was quite obvious after that.

It was EDI.

How she had managed to use and manipulate frequencies in order to speak to you was baffling. Your eyes widened and you quickly chuckled. She was still amazing you every day.

“I’m not gonna ask how you managed to connect up to this goddamn thing. How’s the outdated hardware working out for you?” you answered jokingly. The bar was so loud that nobody would look at you oddly for talking to yourself; there were people weirder than you occupying the place, anyway.

“I have already told you that it is not sufficient enough to withstand my capabilities. I am always running at optimum performance, though. Accessing radio and Extranet signals was easy despite my lack of memory.”
A happy sigh escaped your lips and you glanced around the perimeter a few more times.

“Does this mean that you can actually help me find my ship? Because I think I might have left something in the glove compartment.”

You thought that you heard her laugh, but you could have been wrong. AIs didn’t laugh.

Yet again, she wasn’t just an AI.

“The way you find the ship is by staying here for another hour.”

Your brows furrowed and you stopped looking around.

“I’m not saying that I don’t trust you, but what’s waiting around this place gonna do?”

She didn’t respond after that, and you forced yourself to wait.

After all, how could you argue with EDI?

Your name was Liz Shepard and you felt like you were going to throw up.

Never before had an elevator ride felt so long to you. Yet again, you hadn’t been on an elevator ride in over three hundred and sixty five night cycles, so it wasn’t like the sensation was out of the ordinary.

Being in such an enclosed space was also contributing to your nausea. Garrus was beside you, but you couldn’t help but feel insecure. For the first time in a long time, you would get to feel normal. You had been planning this moment out since you got incarcerated by the Alliance and Council.

You would take the elevator down with butterflies in your stomach. When the excruciating ride was over, you would step out and the nervousness would turn into utter euphoria. You could feel the simulated sunlight hit your skin and you could mingle within crowds of people as much as you wanted. You wouldn’t have to talk to just yourself anymore.

Instead of this fairytale, you were feeling claustrophobic and annoyed. The feeling of bile creeping up your throat certainly wasn’t contributing in a positive way, either.

“This question is going to sound like bullshit,” you started. Your gaze was directed to the gray doors in front of you because you were sure that you would hurl if you looked at your partner.

“Go on, it can’t be worse than what I used to hear from drunken felons at C-Sec.”

The comment made you laugh, but you still didn’t feel much better.

“How much has changed since I got boxed up? I mean, I get that there’s no synthetic life and all of that. What’s the extent of it, though?”

Garrus blinked a few times and leaned up against the wall of the elevator.

“The Citadel has gone to shit.”

His response was blunt, which was to be expected.

“Of course, it already was like that before. This time it’s changed physically, though. You can walk around and still see gaping holes in walls and some places are as bare as Palaven was during the
war. For the most part, the synthetics are back up. That didn’t take too long, but that doesn’t mean that things aren’t different. I don’t know what it is, but you’ll know—“

At that moment, the doors opened and the Presidium was revealed to you.

A large deck was sprawled across from you, and you could see some fallen glass shards from your accident. The view was the same one you had before except at a lower elevation.

However, seeing people of all different kinds again was overwhelming.

Asari, Volus, Turians, Humans, and Salarians were all mingling in front of you. Facial expressions varied from elated to irate. Things seemed the same on the outside, and it felt like only you and Garrus could tell that they weren’t.

Noises reached decibel levels that you hadn’t experienced in the longest time. Everything was starting to give you sensory overload and you couldn’t seem to keep your head on straight.

As if it was a reflex, you reached for Garrus’ talon.

When he took it, you looked at him gratefully.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you were wondering why you had kept your walls up for so long. If this was the payoff for loving someone, you should have done it so much sooner.

Being a hardened bitch was much less fun now that you got to be on the other side of the spectrum.
Hey guys! Thanks for all of the comments and kudos! I'd like to thank KabiViolet for all of the comments. You have no idea how much they mean and when I wake up and read them I just get all fluffy and happy inside.

OKAY, I’LL STOP RAMBLING.

Anyway, please enjoy the chapter!! And I apologize for all of the flashbacks. I just want Garrus and Shep to have some character development.

xoxo

THR

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Chapter 12

Things had to go according to the plan.

If they didn’t, the entire relationship that you had worked so hard to forge would be gone. You knew it.

Things now were different than they were months ago. You didn’t know the words to use to describe her before; “bitchy” would too brash, but it was the truth. You had been vastly different, too. Things had changed now, though. She had learned to be less aggressive and rigid around you. The constant badass façade was gone; in fact, the two of you had shared drinks more than a few times while on break. You talked about trivial things, such as Dr. Chakwas’ ironic brandy obsession as well as EDI’s humanlike mannerisms. Your childhoods and home lives also came under discussion.

She had been, to your surprise, Earthborn and had lost contact with her parents when she had enlisted. You had told her of the escapades you had had with your own honorable family, notably with your sister. The two of you laughed and laughed, and it felt like the both of you were starting to let down your shields piece by piece. The process was slow and you had no intention to rush it.

While you had taught her to lower her own pace a little, she had taught you to act artless off of the battlefield. Spontaneity was a hard concept for you to learn when it didn’t involve a sniper and a few nifty attachments. Whether it was goofing off in a bar or pulling each other aside to share a kiss, you had learned the ropes when it came to being spur of the moment. You hadn’t impressed her yet, but you hoped that you would be able to tonight.
Your rapport with the notorious Commander Shepard had pushed past the fling stage. Whether you were flying to the Citadel to take a shore leave or fighting alongside each other against Collector bastards, the two of you had formed a permanent bond. You were still sure that it was love, but you couldn’t pull words out of her mouth until she said them herself.

You looked around one more time and made sure that everything was in check. It was a vile Turian habit that you couldn’t drop; triple-checking things and making sure that a job was well done was embedded in your genes.

You had traded your armor for civilian clothing, which you had been obsessively smoothing out since you arrived in Shepard’s personal cabin. Music that you had chosen based on her apparent tastes was waiting to be played in the stereo. The wine in your hand wasn’t the expensive kind that you thought she liked, but it was chilled to perfection and was something that the two of you could hopefully enjoy. And, most importantly, you had checked with Mordin and learned about the proper way to fornicate a relationship with a human. The whole concept didn’t seem as slick and straightforward as you wanted it to be. In fact, it felt like the whole thing was going to be stiff and uncomfortable for the both of you.

The action itself was the same in Turian culture, but the way it was performed in an inter-species courtship was undoubtedly awkward. The hyper Salarian had been glad to assist you; he provided everything from the likes of vids, diagrams and reports written by well-known relationship scientists and psychologists. The expressions he gave you while he handed off the research were unsettling ones which you didn’t comment on. He also didn’t forget about reminding you of the embarrassing allergic reactions that could follow once the deed had been completed.

As much as you had hated to admit it, you studied the hell out of the notes while you were calibrating the Normandy’s guns. Watching the vids led to you having a shaky hand sometimes, which you worked hard to suppress.

Needless to say, although you lacked a human fetish unlike some others in your species, you weren’t turned off to the idea of sleeping with them. They had soft curves unlike Turians. Some of the women had figures like hourglasses, which did happen to make you feel a bit attracted to them. You had never looked at human anatomy before, and once you got over feeling dirty about it, you were well versed in what humans found irresistible.

The lighting was perfect and all you could do now was wait. Breaking into a commander’s private quarters was forbidden, but you were hoping that you had gotten a free pass inside by now. This was a surprise, after all.

You doubted that she would really want a surprise right now. The supposed “suicide” mission was impending, and the fate of the entire crew was resting on her shoulders. For the past few months, Shepard had led the crew all across the galaxy in search of resources and recruits to fly under the Cerberus flag. Now the sole thing that was left to do was enter the infamous Omega 4 Relay to stop the Collectors. She had spent most of her free time researching the ominous race, and it was clear that she was determined to get this mission right. After all, she had to. She couldn’t tolerate failure.

Constant questioning from everyone had taken a toll on her. She was coming to see you more and had gotten more intimate when she wasn’t busy studying. Her movements became gentler, yet her capricious streak was also coming out in battle more than it should have.

She was slipping and you hoped to the spirits that she would be able to hold on until the end.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian, and you were going to do anything that you could to help her.
You stood in the shower alone.

With nobody around to hear you or help you up, you allowed your uncovered body to slide down the glassy walls and onto the ground. Beads of water fell around you like an old rain shower on Earth, and you kept on telling yourself that the droplets running down your cheeks were not coming from your own eyes.

*Did you even deserve this shower? Everyone else on the crew had to share. Why should you get one of your own?*

As you sat on the floor, you traced the tiles below you with your pointer finger. It trembled while it outlined the grout, and you realized that being so fickle with your emotions was pointless.

*You hadn’t set the course for Omega 4 yet. You could wait.*

*You could wait for everything and then just disappear while you docked on some planet. You didn’t care where it was. Hell, it could be a gas giant for all you cared. You deserved to have your body inflated with toxins like a sick balloon. The crew would watch you burst from the windows of the Normandy and would feel relief as they walked away.*

*Your eye became clouded with liquid again.*

*No.*

*They didn’t feel that way. They weren’t faking it. You were just hallucinating.*

*Your name was Commander Shepard and you were not good under long term stress. Unfortunately, running the behind the scenes Cerberus invasion on the Collectors fell into the category of “long term”. This entire mission was your responsibility, and you had turned unreasonable in the recent days. It was only a matter of time before you launched the Normandy on a suicide mission that couldn’t be stopped. You weren’t afraid for yourself; you were afraid for your crew. They had been abducted a week ago and were god knows were by now. That had been your fault.*

*Being in battle was different than making decisions. You were a warrior and tactician on the theatres of war. When it came to offshore decision making and choosing which sacrifices to take, you had to be hasty. If you weren’t, your mind was plagued with paranoia and doubt.*

*You let a few sobs out and pretended like they never happened. If nobody was there to hear you, it wouldn’t matter. Good commanders cried, didn’t they?*

*No, they didn’t. You knew that for a fact.*

*You bet that Garrus didn’t even cry.*

*When his name popped up in your mind, you let out a sob for his sake.*

*It was safe to say that that Turian had changed you in the past few years that you had known him. You didn’t know how to describe your relationship; it was passionate yet safe.*

*Surprising yet stable.*

*New yet experienced.*

*You had trusted him with your life while you fought on the front lines. Now, though, you would be*
willing to trust him with your own sanity.

You loved Garrus Vakarian and not even the Collectors were going to stop you.

Your head jerked up when you heard the shower in her bathroom turn off and hoped that she wouldn’t step out naked.

You propped yourself up against a support pillar by her desk so you could easily operate the stereo.

“Breathe, Vakarian.” you told yourself. As much as you wanted to think that this wasn’t going to be a big deal, it was and you knew it.

After some rustling came from the other room, you saw the door slide open and Shepard stepped out. Her hair was colored a bit darker, and you presumed that she hadn’t dried her hair at all. Instead, it hung at her shoulders. Although it was neatly combed, her face was free of makeup, meaning that her scarring was very visible. You had overheard the numerous conversations she had had with Chakwas about it, but you hadn’t been expecting it to be so bad.

You didn’t have anything to say about it, though, considering the nasty blemish that you had on the side of your face.

“You got a second?” you asked, your voice suave. “I mean, I’d love more than a second, but you get the picture.” She simply stood next to you with her feet planted firmly on the ground. She was in her N7 black dress, which clung to her wet skin.

A hint of a smile played on her face while she watched you and she took a step forward. When words didn’t come out of her mouth, you continued to attempt smooth talking her.

Your mandibles twitched when you realized that you hadn’t turned on the music, which you lunged to do before she could notice. An upbeat melody played across the room, and you were mortified to hear that it wasn’t part of the setlist that you had selected.

“I brought some wine.” you continued. “If you want to relax a bit, I’d be willing to join you.” You raised the bottle in your hand and tried your best to ignore the wrong tune playing in the background.

You weren’t sure whether or not she was about to cry or burst out laughing. It looked like she could do both at any second, and it was then that you knew that you had pushed her too far. She wasn’t ready for this sort of relationship and she certainly didn’t care for you like you cared for her.

Your plan of attack was undetermined. Now it was time for you to involuntarily rely on the one thing that you could sometimes do best: rambling.

“Look, Shepard, I didn’t want to make this awkward for you. If this isn’t how this kind of thing goes in human culture, I’m sorry. You look, uh, beautiful, by the way. Just...when you talked about letting off steam I thought-“

Your on the spot tactic worked.

At that moment, Shepard walked over and turned off the music that was playing and took the wine off of your hands. Instead of going along with what you planned, she rested the palms of her hands on your chest and looked up at you.

“Consider me seduced, babe. I’ve never had a boyfriend try to plan anything remotely nice for
me.” she admitted. “Sure, a date on shore leave every now and then was nice. But something like this? Fuck, I don’t even care if it’s awkward.”

When she paused, your insides fluttered at her touch and you rested your talons on her shoulders.

“Garrus…I love you, goddamn it. I didn’t admit it before because I didn’t want you to leave.”

You touched her cheek and she laughed when they turned a light pink. The uncouth feelings you had melted away and the two of you kissed. This time it was different, though.

“I love you too, Shepard. I’ll love you until the end of time.”

The distance between you had been closed and all of the walls had been knocked down temporarily. As you took her into your grasp, she wrapped her legs around your torso again and you nearly dropped her on the bed. She must have done her own research, because she was doing every single thing right.

Instead of making things brief, you milked it out for as long as you could. You wanted to take her in over and over again just in case the two of you never made it back.

Between kisses and nibbles, she told you everything that she hadn’t told you before.

She was fierce but she had fears, and you were the same.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian, and you could honestly say that you made love to someone for the first time that night.

“Come to think of it, I hardly think a nightclub that’s filled with off duty soldiers is a good place for us to be.” said your boyfriend.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you were starting to think that life was good again.

The overwhelming sense of claustrophobia wore off on your second elevator ride. You were beginning to feel good when you heard civilians murmur your name.

“It’s the Commander!” they would mutter to those next to them. You didn’t know if their comments were positive or negative, but none of them had the audacity to come and speak to either you or Garrus.

You were a little thankful for that.

“Oh, come on.” you said while rolling your eyes like a child. “What’s the worst that could happen?”

The Turian shrugged as the two of you went through the V.I.P entrance to Purgatory. His arm was linked with your own for reassurance, which you were thankful for once you got inside.

The large amount of people was overwhelming and you realized that assimilation wasn’t going to be easy. There were easily five hundred people packed into the raunchy club, and the way the music throbbed against the wall was ear shattering.

In a desperate attempt to find some sort of closure, you scanned the crowds in search of someone or anything that you could deem familiar.
Your eyes drifted to Aria’s former seat in the lounge, which was now occupied with a human couple making out. Jack’s spot nearby was empty like the vast space right outside of the Citadel.

Something happened when you looked at the bar, though.

A familiar figure was hunched over a few empty glasses. His hat was turned backwards and it looked like he was talking to himself. His brown hair crept out from under his hat, and his stubble was still as scraggly as ever.

Without saying a word, you let go of Garrus and ran.

There was not a single doubt in your mind: that man was Joker.
Chapter Summary

Uggh I'm so sorry guys.  
I'm going to admit ahead of time that this chapter is not up to par.  
I wanted to write it in one day and make it awesome but I couldn't.  
So yeah.  
I tried.  
//dies

xoxo
THR

Chapter 13

Your name was Joker Moreau and you could swear that you just shitted your pants.

“EDI?!” you called out in a frantic tone. It looked like you were talking to the empty space around you, which made others around you stare.

No response was given, and you knew that that AI had a surprise up her sleeve.

Either she had hired two pretty damn good impersonators while browsing the Extranet unsupervised or the two people that were close by were the weird thing. EDI was a trickster no matter how limited her powers were, but you didn’t think she would stoop this low.

The first being that you had seen from across the thundering crowds was a face you knew and loathed. It was the Turian famous for having a stick up his ass; if and when he finally removed it, he’d go and smack someone with it.

Blue markings dotted his alien cheekbones. The way he conducted himself was rigid, but the female next to him was making him calmer than normal. His normal attire of a blue set of armor covered his avian like frame, and the only scales showing were on his face. To your surprise, he still had a gun holstered to his back. Now that you thought about it, it would have been bizarre for him to be without a firearm. His six foot something frame was towering above some of the others around him, which allowed him to move through the crowd with ease. You didn’t think that he had seen you yet, much to your dismay. The two of you hadn’t gotten off well until your third mission. At one point he had even visited the bridge to share a few Turian jokes with you and EDI. He had been a good man and one you had learned to respect.

His name was Garrus Vakarian, and you figured that you would never see him again.

You were wrong.
The woman next to him, however, was an even bigger surprise.

She stood next to him wearing her signature dress that always made you a tad bashful. What she lacked in height compared to Garrus was made up in determination. This was apparent in her stance; you knew that she wasn’t confident, but she acted like she was anyway.

Her cherry cola hair was tied back into a bun like it used to be every single day. Not a hair was out of place, which was just how she had liked it before. There wasn’t much else left to tell about her.

Her name would reveal enough.

Her name was Commander Liz Shepard, and she was making a beeline towards you.

The way you had spotted them in the crowd had been odd. They were standing at the entrance like two awkward teenagers on their first day of high school. The two of them had been in there before, but the feeling of being out of place overwhelmed them. Based on the way they were acting, you assumed that the both of them were still a couple. Their arms were hooked loosely together, indicating that some sort of spark was still there. Maybe it was just friendship, but knowing the two of them, you knew that this wasn’t the case.

You grinned to yourself; they had always been good together. Although they had kept their relationship under wraps for the longest time, you were one of the first few to know about them. Hearing the gauche first sex story had always been entertaining. It was bad enough that Liz had told you about the juicy details while you were sharing a drink in the cockpit, but telling EDI had been one of the most hysterical things that you had ever done.

All of the memories you had that involved the two of them all came flooding back when she hugged you with unexpected force.

When Shepard was determined to do something, she was going to do it. She had pushed through crowds of people to get to you. Although this was nothing compared to what she used to do, you were well aware of how unstable she could possibly be.

When she took you into your arms, though, she had unfortunately ignored you obvious sling. You embraced her with your one free hand.

Her scent was different than before; instead of the occasional smell of cigarettes and soft Illium imported perfume, her smell had been sterilized. It was almost like she was a brand new doll that had just been taken out of her plastic packaging. She wasn’t worn or played with.

She was just there.

You tried to ignore this and focus on the reunion that was playing out in front of you. She squeezed you with more strength and then pulled back to look at you. Her hand moved to your cheek and she gazed at you with an amount of emotion that you had never felt from her.

“Joker….” she murmured, her voice soft. She laughed for a second and then started to act like her old self. “What the hell have you been up to?”

You really didn’t know how to respond to this. Telling her that you were trying to rebuild EDI sounded odd. Saying that you had also been in an apartment on the Citadel since you had been off duty would probably be frowned upon.

This woman was Shepard, though. Wasn’t it?
She had conveyed to you on multiple occasions that it was okay for you to tell her anything. Most of these times had been in jest, though.

You took a deep breath and muttered a brief “fuck it” in your mind.

You were going to spill everything to this woman, which included your plans to take back the Normandy.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you had never been so elated to see your sarcastic helmsman since he had been under your command. Although you were no longer a commander and he was an off-duty pilot, you spoke to him like nothing had changed. If you acted any different, he would be able to pick up on your questionable mental state. You couldn’t help but feel guilty for putting up a façade; hell, this was Joker. You had told him things that you wouldn’t dare utter to anyone else again. He was your most trusted helmsman and advisor in many situations that the two of you had encountered.

His expression faltered before he answered, but he responded nonetheless.

“Comma-, shit, I’ve gotta call you Shepard now, don’t I?”

He was stalling.

You laughed him off and leaned against the bar. You could get a proper seat later.

“Whatever you want. I’ve been called a lot these days.”

“It’ll be Liz, then.” He continued with a genuine smile on his face. “And you’ve gotta promise me that this won’t sound stupid.”

Your eyes rolled. What could he possibly not want to tell you? Hearing about his excessive porn collection way back when had made any sort of aloofness between the two of you disappear. If this was something worse than that, you wouldn’t really give a damn. It wasn’t like either of you had a reputation on the line anymore.

“Spill it, boy.”

“You know I’m older than you!” Joker protested. With a reluctant sigh a few moments later, he began to tell his story.

“When you fired the Crucible, y’know, all the Reapers and other synthetics disappeared? EDI didn’t make it.”

You frowned and blinked slowly; that had all been your fault. If you hadn’t shot the console, EDI would still be here and Joker would still be happy.

Once again, things had been your fault.

You had to help him.

You had to redeem yourself for what you did.

You didn’t really listen to his entire speech. He had said something about living on the Citadel, which didn’t seem relevant to the conversation the two of you were having.

Your hands were too busy drumming your fingers on the bar. The nails hitting the counter made a
soothing sound that drowned out the sounds of the club. Joker’s voice was dissolving, and the sudden clinking of your dog tags soon took over. You were thankful that they were still on your scarred neck.

*Dog tags and nail tapping.*

*That was ok.*

“Uh, Shepard?”

Your head jerked up to look at Joker and you realized that now was the time to be glib. He would see right through you, but you didn’t care.

“The music is too damn loud!” you shouted.

He nodded his head and then started talking again. His voice bellowed and commanded attention this time, which was a rarity when it came to him.

“Long story short, I’m rebuilding EDI from backup files and I need help to get back to the Normandy. Are you in?”

Your name was Liz Shepard, and you had never answered yes to anything so fast in your life.
Chapter Summary

Ahh sorry for the really late/short update again guys! I've been at a convention for two days and haven't gotten home until very late each night!

Although this chapter is short, I hope you enjoy it!

BTW, this story is up to pace with the one on FF.net. Just thought I should mention it if I haven't already.

xoxo
THR

Chapter 14

Your name is Garrus Vakarian and you were starting to recall why you didn’t care for bars.

Back when you were in C-Sec, it was easy to get lost in a place like Purgatory. You had done it multiple times, as a matter of fact.

Being hypnotized by mesmerizing Asari as their cool bodies flowed in every direction was what had led to these previous events that had occurred while you were still employed with a proper job. Then, with the addition of a few drinks, you laughed and let loose with a few officers while you were on your break. Cat-calling, dancing and hopping on the bar were just a few of the many scandalous activities you had once engaged in while intoxicated.

You were different now, though.

You weren’t sure if helping to save the world had an impact on your perceptions.

Maybe you were just getting old or perhaps the Asari had lost their touch.

You didn’t feel compelled to become intoxicated after Shepard left. Instead, you stayed behind with a watchful eye. Seeing Joker wasn’t a priority; you had always suspected that the kid had a loose screw in his head. Before dealing with the Reapers, though, you had dropped your animosity towards him. And, as much as you didn’t want to admit it, he told some pretty good racial jokes.

You wanted to let Shepard have her proper reunion alone, though. If she was going to assimilate into society again, you weren’t going to hold her hand. On multiple occasions she had made it obvious that she didn’t want your help with anything.
She wanted to independently reach the Reaper Conduit in London. She never wanted help typing up mission reports, nor did she ever care for having others simply cook for her. Liz Shepard was an autonomous being and nobody was about to stop her.

She might not be as fierce or bitchy this time around, but you figured that she could cope. After all, she had taken down Reapers, Collectors and everything else that had been thrown at her. What else was left?

You glanced around the club, eying a group of Turians and a single purple Asari dancing near them. They looked like C-Sec from what you could tell, and you suddenly harked back to your own times of off cuty escapades. Times like that had been fun. You didn’t have to care about much; at the most, you had a job, a family back on Palaven and a girlfriend if you were lucky.

You began to wonder how you had gained so many other priorities now. Getting drunk and joy riding in a sky car was nothing compared to staying on the sidelines and having some quiet target practice at home. Instead of beverages with a high alcohol content, you experimented by adding different amounts of sugar in your dextro-coffee. It felt like you had turned into an old man over the period of three years.

Perhaps you were yearning to be calmer after suffering through the living hell that was the Reaper War. Stability was what you were looking for, not disruptions and chaos. Sure, it was nice to be in combat once in a blue moon.

However, you could only take so much before you would begin to feel the onsets of the same unhinged symptoms that Shepard sometimes had.

You turned your attention away from the Turians and focused on the flashing lights, which blinked all around you in glorious patterns. The way the lights refracted everywhere entranced you. Flickers of yellow, green, blue and purple flickered on the skins of everyone in the massive club. Everyone and everything was packed together and surged with the music. Bodies melted together to form one unit: a crowd. The DJ controlling the music served as their temporarily god. He was a human, to your surprise, and the way girls sauntered over to his platform was sickening. With their dresses pulled up and their cleavage showing (if they had any), they batted their eyelashes and acted like the man was their very own deity.

Your hand went to your chin and you began to stride into the club. Some people that must have known you threw some harsh glowers your way, signaling that you still had a presence on the Citadel. This had already been affirmed by your C-Sec visit, but the fact that people still knew of you was touching in all of the wrong ways.

While pushing past them, you bumped into various people with your armor. This elicited complaints from women in immoral clothing. Shepard was in sight, and you were involuntarily walking over to her. The look on her face was a bit abnormal. Before, she had never been one to space out or not acknowledge you while you were speaking. From what you could tell, though, she was ignoring Joker entirely. You could tell that he was rattling on about an unknown subject, much to your displeasure.

Her hands went to the dog tags again, and you shook your head in silence. She was obsessed with those damn things and you knew exactly why. She was trying to hold on to what she once had.

Feelings of depression and desperation clung to her like paparazzi. Memories and unpleasant flashbacks probably plagued her too.

These were the symptoms of a human disorder known as “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder”. You
had read about it in books and figured out that it occurred in some soldiers who had been discharged. The mental records of war scarred them in every way, shape and form. Never again could they live life normally. Even if they could, it would always be complicated.

The abbreviation “PTSD” had been written everywhere on Shepard’s medical files. When you thought of this, you were also able to recall the real reason why you were in the bar.

You were supposed to tell Shepard about why she was even incarcerated in her own home.

That was most likely a topic that would ruin her coming out party. Your original intentions were obviously forgotten.

Once you reached the bar, there was a small fragment of space left for you to stand. The good thing about this was that it was behind your former commander.

The bad news was that your crotch was pressed against her behind the entire time.

When you got in place, your talon touched her shoulder. Her tall frame didn’t flinch; instead, it turned around with a sincere smile.

“Look who decided to join the party a little late.” she said, her voice congenial and refreshing. This woman could change her mood on a dime. Now she was as happy as could be when she had seemed depressed a minute prior.

Joker poked his head in your direction and offered his free hand. You noted the cast and remembered why you had felt sympathy towards him in the first place. Vrolik Syndrome was a bitch.

Without much emotion, you shook his hand with a firm but gentle grip.

“Nice to see you again, Garrus. You didn’t get a stick stuck up your ass again, did you? Either way, I’m glad I ran into you two.”

You chose not to comment on his little remark. As harsh as it was, you couldn’t help but laugh a little. It was true; you were rigid and regimented and you loved things that way. It was a Turian stereotype which you happened to fit.

“No, I remember I stuck it back up yours back on the Normandy. How’ve you been?”

Being congenial wasn’t a talent of yours. However, Joker had started to grow on you back when you were on duty. You wanted to give him another chance.

You then realized that he hadn’t changed that much. He was still a little short and covered his full, scraggly head of hair underneath an N7 cap. His stature was muscular despite his physical handicaps, but not even close to how beefy James had been. Joker’s stubble looked unkempt to you, and you then began to wonder what you would do with such facial hair.

“I’ve been good, man. Just, y’know, putting EDI back together.”

You hadn’t expected this response from him.

“EDI? I thought the Reaper takeout got rid of everything?”

He paused and looked at Shepard, who had turned blank. Why was she so animus towards the Crucible firing and Reaper destruction?
“I’ve got her backups on a hard drive and she’s vegging out on my computer back at my apartment. I was wondering if I could recruit the two of you for a project with her. I mean, it wouldn’t be much, but I need the technological expertise—“

Shepard looked at you with pleading eyes. You knew that she had already said yes.

At this rate, she would do anything to get closer to what she had before. Despite the stress, she wanted it all back.

You soon abandoned your original prospects and led your other two former crew members out of the bar. As you left, the table of Turians looked at you.

“Hey, isn’t that Garrus? I heard he’s an uptight ass.”

“Shit man, you think? I thought he fucked Shepard and saved the universe.”

“Nah, he couldn’t do that. One of my partners down at the Zakera Station said that he was a huge pussy. He’s the best sniper in the galaxy, though.”

“I bet I’d do better.”

You saw Shepard turn around violently. She had heard them.

*Oh no.*

*This wasn’t happening.*

*Not now.*

Your name is Garrus Vakarian, and you were preparing yourself for a petty bar fight.
Hey guys, sorry for not uploading last night! I was still at a convention and got home at like eleven, and I don't think you guys want to read what I write at like one AM. That would not be pretty.

Anyway, please continue reviewing and enjoy the chapter!

xoxo

THR

(PS- If you don't know the history of the USA in the Mass Effect series, I suggest reading it before reading this chapter. Some stuff went down that you might not understand. The Mass Effect Wiki sites have good articles about them!)

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Chapter 15

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Priority: Fight

Your name was Liz Shepard and you were absolutely mortified.

With a hand-me-down dress thrown onto your lanky frame accompanied by a pair of faux silk covered kitten heels, you waited in a bar for a man who you had met just a few hours prior. He had been a soldier, and he had turned you on like no other man had.

It was your first real date that you had ever had in your entire life. You were seventeen and were armed with nothing but a fake ID. You weren’t an innocent girl at all, but the thrill of going out with someone for real made your heart pound.

Earth could be a cruel place sometimes. People were cold and heartless and you felt like nobody understood you. These emotions were called normal for people your age. That’s what the shitty counselors had told you.

Your parents could care less about your feelings, though. They were always busy. If they gave you the time of day, it would be to point out your flaws and criticize you. They called themselves rich philanthropists that donated their time to helping others. In reality, they made software for omni-tools and paid more attention to needy children that lived on poor colonies more than their own daughter.

Your choice of attire for your romantic engagement didn’t reflect your social class, though. You
didn’t want it to.

The bar around you was bustling. It was one of the few places left on Earth that reflected the architecture of an older time. Unlike the whitewashed modern appearance of your own home, this place was like a dark wooden palace. The counters and seats were composed of leather, memories and a dark cherry that must have been retrieved from the sturdiest trees at one point in time. Men crowded around the place and were being entertained by women with bosoms covered by tight dresses and bodies that had the fragrances of flowers that were long extinct. Laughs and good times were all around you, but you couldn’t help but feel like this location was different than all of the other places you’ve snuck out to. It wasn’t exactly a strip club, but it certainly wasn’t a family environment either.

You had never been allowed in such places with permission. Nowadays, this kind of act of defiance was nothing for you. A fake ID wasn’t out of the unusual and neither was meeting with older men. You had a penchant for military hunks and all of them were enlisted. This meant that they had to be over eighteen. Of course, that didn’t stop you from faking your own age. Sometimes you told your dates that you were twenty one. Other times you felt like you could pass for twenty five. They believed you.

This time, though, you had said eighteen. You weren’t sure why you had told this guy any different.

The two of you had encountered each other while out for a walk, which wasn’t something many people did. Pollution was bad, and although Earth appeared to be a Utopia, its citizens knew better. It was filled with nothing but metropolises that lacked security. There was not a single stable thing about them.

In addition to the atmosphere’s effluence, crime was rampant. You had to watch out for creepers and scammers even on the Upper East Side.

You lived in New York City, or at least what was left of it. Shore lines had closed in on the city, which had been situated on multiple islands. Previous generations’ global warming problems had caused the tides to take the city into the ocean’s clutches.

Since then, the citizens had built up.

The former areas were now nothing but tourist destinations. You could take submarines down into the oceans and see the ruins of Times Square. The former Empire State Building barely stuck out of the water.

The city you lived in now was built on pillars, mass effect fields and massive suspension bridges. Instead of being called the Big Apple, it was called The Floating City. Everything was a pathetic attempt at being made the same after the Second World War, which had been caused by rogues a long time ago. You had never bothered much with learning about the history of that war, anyway. It wasn’t like you were going to be involved with any damn wars.

Each borough of the city had the same name once it was reconstructed, except with a “new” slapped in front of it.

New Manhattan.

New Times Square.

They had even constructed a new Statue of Liberty.

You hadn’t lived during the time of the old city, but even you could tell that nothing was the same
Out of all the places you had learned about, you could only compare it to Illium. New York City was now like the Asari colony city, minus the purple theme and interesting climate.

The bar that you were standing in had been salvaged, though. Technology had allowed for its restoration, and it now stuck out like a sore thumb if one looked across the city’s skyline.

Since a building like this was rare, you treasured all of the feelings and became determined to remember this day.

You would recall the scent of musk and cigarettes as you sat with your husband and kids in ten years. You could talk about how real honest men with fake smiles would sit down with their drinks and forget about their lives. You could tell them about the feeling of a kiss on the lips and what a gin tonic tasted like with cotton candy flavored gloss on your lips.

Little did you know that this would not be the case at all. Today would be a memorable day, but it would be for all of the wrong reasons.

A hand touched your shoulder, and you turned around to see him. Your breath hitched.

He was tan, tall, muscular and beautiful.

His hair, although mostly buzzed off, was still a little fuzzy. It was a dark, coffee bean brown that made you absolutely swoon. His choice of attire was just as awkward as yours; a well-worn dress shirt covered his ripped body along with a boring pair of khakis. You could tell that he had attempted to dress for the occasion but somehow fell short.

“Sorry if I don’t impress you,” he said, his voice sweet. “A marine’s budget is pretty slim these days.”

You flashed him a hint of a smile and patted the seat next to you. He sat down graciously and flagged the bartender down.

“Beer, please.”

The woman behind the bar nodded at him and went to work while you gazed at the man in front of you. He was absolutely perfect and you didn’t even know his name, but that was okay.

“So, what does a man like you do for fun?” you asked. If you could hear yourself right now, you would most likely gag. You sounded like a ditz and he knew it.

You could tell yourself that this man made you happy and that you were crazy about him.

You could forget that you had only known him for a grand total of twelve hours.

You could fake your way through your conversations and touch his knee as he sipped his beer.

Your name was Liz Shepard, and for a few hours that night you had turned into one of those women with gorgeous bodies. You pretended that you had smelled like an exotic flower.

When you woke up alone the next morning in a bed that wasn’t your own, you realized something. You couldn’t handle being some guy’s bitch.

From that moment on, you were determined to give your life a little more meaning. Maybe you
could do something useful.

Your name was Joker Moreau, and it had been a long time since Shepard had punched someone so hard.

Five minutes prior to the incident, things had been fine. The three of you had been leaving the packed club to go somewhere a little quieter.

You weren’t really sure what had happened. The actions playing in front of you had been blunt and rapid.

Without warning, Liz had opened fire upon a group of drunken Turians with her fists.

“The fuck did you just say, asshole?” she had bellowed. Her voice was vicious, and it was almost like she was a real commander again.

The group had been intimidated at first. They didn’t move for a few moments and then they proceeded to burst out into laughter.

“Damn, is that the old Shepard?”

“Wasn’t she put in an institution?”

“She’s a little bitch now!”

Her knuckles had turned white under the intense lighting. The whole room had miraculously turned silent, minus the blaring music. Nobody else had been speaking except the laughing Turians, who were having a grand old time.

That was when the first punch was thrown.

Currently, the situation was flaring up even more.

Shepard’s body was sandwiched in between the men. The leader was being squished by her, which gave her a great advantage.

Her hands had managed to get around his neck after delivering prime blows to his head. With the biggest amount of force that she could muster, she choked him.

Beads of sweat dribbled down her head from the close contact. You could see them clearly, which meant that you weren’t far enough away from the fight.

You couldn’t risk hurting yourself even more, but your friend’s safety was at risk.

Before you could make another move, you heard her hiss in the Turian’s face.

“Don’t you ever, ever think that you can fuck with me or my boyfriend, you understand? Go back to Palaven and cause trouble, but don’t do it here! I’m a motherfucking Spectre and will not hesitate to slash your throat open and watch your dead body get hauled away by the goddamn Keepers!”

Her hands tightened and the entire mass of people could see him start to go down. If somebody didn’t stop her, he would be dead within a minute.

The alien behind her then did something that made the crowd gasp. Garrus, who was already nearby fighting off a few other members of his own species, turned around to look at what was going on.
He had jumped in as soon as Liz had made the decision to fight. He had grabbed her at first, but he then decided that protesting her advances was a futile idea. Now, he was staring at her and her opponent in shock, causing his combatant to knock him out to the ground.

The Turian that was pushing into Shepard had drawn out a gun.

“Shepard, move—”

The last few moments played out like a slow motion dream. The individual being pinned down by Shepard fell down to the ground. You prayed that he wasn’t dead. If he was, all three of you would be facing the consequences.

The gun came up to your friend’s head, and you knew that she could feel the cold metal. The crowd didn’t stop looking.

They knew that a crime was going on in front of them, but they didn’t call for C-Sec. The great Commander Shepard had reemerged, and they weren’t going to let her go out without a bang. Her prowess matched up to all of the challengers around her even without a gun of her own. It was stunning to watch her physique move in ways that they hadn’t before. Each swift movement she executed was on point.

You knew that she had been dreaming for a moment like this, and you could only hope that she didn’t perish with the man next to her.

Everyone held their breaths as Shepard turned around to face her impending fate. There was a loud noise that didn’t quite sound like a gun, but you couldn’t bear to look and see what had happened.

Your name was Joker Moreau, and you didn’t even know if your own friend was dead.

Your name was Admiral Steven Hackett, and it wasn’t often that you received urgent emails in the middle of the night anymore. During the war, requests for backup or Crucible updates came at every hour of the day. Now that you were getting used to a warm bed and a decent night’s sleep, you didn’t want it to be interrupted. It was one of the few things you took solace in nowadays, anyway.

The Citadel’s nightlife was still buzzing by the time your omni-tool began to convulse. It woke you up from a pleasant dream about simpler times.

You sat up and looked through the information that the device displayed in front of you, and you then pressed a button to view the email that had been sent a few minutes prior.

It was from the Asari Councilor.

Admiral Hackett—

I regret to inform you that we are having problems regarding the Commander. It has been said that she was let out of her penthouse by former members of her crew. From the reports we’ve gotten from C-Sec that claims that she’s killed two Turian men and isn’t in the best of states. They interviewed her accomplices but they have divulged nothing. I do not want to have to request this, but the Council is holding an emergency meeting in the morning to discuss how to handle Shepard and her escape. Your attendance is required. Please meet us in the Embassies at approximately six during the next morning cycle. Your cooperation is much appreciated.

Sincerely,
Your name was Admiral Steven Hackett, and you sighed deeply as you looked out into the Citadel from your bedroom window. While everyone else lived a life without a care in the world, you still worried about things that you should have put behind you.

Shepard, on the other hand, wasn’t someone that could be easily left behind.

Tomorrow was going to be a very, very long day.
Enter: Commander Bailey

Chapter Notes

Hahaha I hope you guys like cheesy song quotes.
I know I do. ;)

That is all.

xoxo
THR

Chapter 16

Enter: Commander Bailey

Your name is Commander Armando-Owen Bailey and you don’t particularly care for your first names. Commander Bailey was the abbreviation that you went by most of the time. Some of your friends still called you Captain out of habit, which you didn’t mind. Your promotion was more like a demotion.

As Captain, you had regulated the Zakera Ward on the Citadel. From petty thievery to cold blooded murder, all of the crimes that had been committed used to come through you. You had a fun time during your years at C-Sec; you had made friends, enemies, and had gone through your share of some amazing adventures. Some may have called you and your policies unconventional, and you agreed with them one hundred percent.

Despite turning your head at some suspicious activities, you were fair to almost everyone who passed through your doors. Until someone wasn’t able to get their job done, you were alright with letting people get by as they needed to. That sometimes meant ignoring illegal activities, which you didn’t frequently feel the need to patrol.

Your promotion came as a surprise to you a few months ago. Regretfully, you packed up your items and said goodbye to your desk at Zakera Ward’s front door. Instead of busting the most dastardly criminals that tainted a less than graceful part of the Citadel, you were stuck behind a desk in the Embassies section. One would think that being a commander came with extreme responsibilities and power.

However, much to your misfortune, you were no Commander Shepard.

You became more or less like a glorified office assistant for the Council. You got your own office, which was closed off and dark. The single window you had gave you a less than pristine look out into the Embassy Lobby, which was bustling with angry and distressed people. Now that the war had ended, it was quieter. This didn’t mean that an angry refugee wouldn’t come in once in a while, though. That was always entertaining to watch from your own personal corner of the Citadel.
You also got your own share of distraught citizens even after the conflict with the Reapers had ended. Some reporters would barge into your office on occasion and questioned why the Keepers weren’t working faster to rebuild or how many unknown regions of the Citadel existed. Some political extremists came in and even threatened to shoot the Council from time to time.

You usually had them arrested and it would be the most interesting part of your day.

Now that your job was less tedious, you also had time to think about things around you. Other than your ex-wife and children back on Earth who had survived that attacks, you thought of the Citadel before it had been reconstructed.

You had been on the overhyped spaceship for more years than you could count. It had remained largely the same during your period of residence there.

However, after the rebuild, something there changed.

The Council took you aside as soon as order had been restored and when the Citadel was back in its normal location. During the initial attack on the Citadel by the Reapers, you had taken shelter with a group of refugees. Your chances of survival had been slim. Divine intervention was your reasoning behind your survival.

“Keep things as normal as possible as we work with the Keepers to rebuild” they had said.

And, as soon as the attack had begun, it had ended and the Council had things running like normal. They had you back in your office handling calls about safety so they wouldn’t have to do it. They spent their times locked in their chambers, and not even you knew what they were discussing.

“Business as usual” was what they had liked to call it.

Everyone else knew better than to call it that.

Within a few months the Citadel was looking normal again. The Presidium had been restored entirely, as well as the entire fleet.

On your commute to work, though, you still saw unsettling things.

A dead body could be seen every once in a while if you looked close enough while in a sky car. It had turned into a forgotten carcass that was lost in the unending sea of deaths that had plagued the Citadel. Sometimes you caught people in the middle of the streets and wards sobbing. There was no reason behind it, either.

Tears streamed down their faces as others watched and carried on with their lives.

Some areas of the Citadel had also been sealed off. Parts that had once been heavily inhabited were now supposedly quarantined without question. If someone tried to enter, protocol said that they were to be shot on site.

If the Citadel was allegedly so perfect and recovered, then why did such drastic measures have to be taken?

You asked yourself this every single day, and today was no exception.

It was about five o’clock in the morning, and you checked your computer like you always did at about this time.
The file that popped up was one that you hadn’t seen in a long time.

“COUNCIL MEETING #6871-B 2186: STATUS OF COMMANDER E. SHEPARD (REVISITED)”

The name evoked a smile from you. You had spent a lot of time with the Commander and she shared a similar mindset with you when it came to work: do whatever you need to do to get the job done.

The missions you had completed with her hadn’t been large in number, but the experiences you had had with her were some of the most memorable of your action packed days on Zakera.

When you heard of her discharge many months ago, you had even dared to complain to the Council. They had ignored you.

As you looked over the current file that was in front of you, your expression changed from content to appalled.

According to these papers, Shepard had killed two men last night.

This behavior wasn’t unlike her, but you remember what the Council had ordered last time they had a hearing regarding her.

She was to be on house arrest until further notice.

You exhaled loudly and nibbled on your bottom lip. They were going to have another meeting regarding Liz Shepard’s status in about an hour, and you were determined to get to the bottom of it.

Your name was Commander Bailey, and it was time to search for answers. It didn’t take you long to figure out that she had been taken into custody and was in a cell right nearby.

You stood up, disregarding the rest of the work that was in front of you. There was no reason to have a war hero imprisoned. She may have killed two men, but after saving the galaxy she deserved to have some sort of pardon.

And, with that, you left to go and find the woman who you admired the most on the entire Citadel.

Your name was Liz Shepard, and your neck was naked.

With your head pressed up against a wall, you let out loud screams. Your muscles trembled and your hands clawed at your throat.

_They were gone._

You felt like you were born to die. Being locked up in a cell all alone was hardly something foreign to you, but now it was different. You were isolated and teary eyed. Dog tags wouldn’t be enough right now. You needed someone to remind you that life wasn’t just enough anymore.

_He was gone._

_“Garrus! God fucking damn it, you said that you wouldn’t leave!”_

It had been a few hours now. Your nails had been ground down to stubs. The bleak environment around you had taken a turn for the worst.
Was it even morning yet?

You had already chosen your last words. They were going to put you to death.

You ground your palms against the ground and bit your lip.

No, they wouldn’t do that.

Your name was Liz Shepard, and now you were nothing but a warm body. Last night, you had been incarcerated for killing two Turian men in a brutal manner.

This time, you weren’t being let off with a slap on the wrist.

The door to your cell opened, and you expected the worst. The officers that had thrown you in had been kind, but now you were predicting a more brutal experience.

Instead, you were greeted with a more familiar face.

“Come on, Commander.” he declared. “You’re going to your own hearing.”

Your name is Commander Shepard, and you had done it.

The Collectors were dead.

Things had changed so much since the mission had ended.

All tension had disappeared between everyone. There was no reason to be worried, and everyone spent a majority of their time chatting and having a ball. Guns no longer had to be calibrated and the engine room didn’t need to be constantly supervised. The high alert attitude was officially dropped when Joker started to spend most of his time away from the helm.

Everyone else began to settle into their off-duty time with a great amount of swiftness. Plans to go home were to be postponed according to your orders. You wanted some time with your crew before they left.

You didn’t want to have to face the day where you would never see this great assembly of people again. It was approaching faster than you would have liked. You took the time to interact with them now that you had more time, and your observations made you feel legitimately happy for the first time in a long time.

Mess Sergeant Gardner cooked meals all day long with a grin on his face. He had even gotten to teach some reluctant associates how to cook proper meals.

The once feared conference room no longer hosted holograms that had the likeness of the Illusive Man. Now that you had put him in his place, you allowed your crew to use it as an area to contact any family members or friends over vid chat. Tali and Legion talked to each other more often and shared their ideals.

Even the shyest members of the crew came out more.

Perhaps the most monumental event was Jack and Miranda’s formal apology to each other. Despite Jack’s reluctance, it was a step.

You, on the other hand, spent a lot of time in your personal cabin writing your final mission report with a certain Turian beside you. You had also learned the real meaning of “siha”.

When the last week before homecoming arrived, you felt nostalgic. Watching everyone pack up their belongings was painful, but it was a necessary evil. Even you had to gather your things. Although you weren’t sure of where you were going after this mission, you had some ideas in mind.

You were going to go back to the Alliance, settle down on Earth, and ask Garrus to come with you.

However, when the moment of the proposal came, it was a miracle that you could compose yourself.

You were in your private quarters and you had just finished taping up a box of things to get transferred off the Normandy. With a shaky hand, you pressed the intercom button that called the Main Battery.

“Garrus?” you asked. “If you aren’t busy, would you mind coming up here?”

There was a brief pause before your boyfriend’s response.

“I’ll be right up.”

Like a teenage girl, you paced around your room in impatience. This was going to be the defining moment in your relationship. If he denied you, you wouldn’t know what you would do. If he really loved you like he said whenever he kissed you or unwound your bun, then he would accompany you on whatever your next adventure would be.

“Garrus,” you said while clearing your throat. You might as well practice before you screw it up for real.

“I just want you to know that I really love you and it would be, y’know, fantastic if you came with me after we all leave. No, that sounds fake.”

You stopped yourself and sat on the edge of your bed.

Time to try again.

“Garrus, I fucking love you! Move in with me! No…”

“You’re one hot Turian and I want to sleep—I mean, live with you!”

The last one made you mentally slap yourself.

“Garrus, I—“

The doors to your quarters opened, and the subject of your pleas was soon in front of you. He gave you a brief laugh and then walked towards you.

“Garrus what?” he asked. Your eyes bulged out of your head and you looked up at him with total and utter embarrassment.

“You weren’t supposed to hear that!” you whined. “I was…practicing something.”

“Practicing? I thought you just winged it all the time.”

His teasing tone haunted you.

This was not making anything easier.

After taking a deep breath, you looked at him and started talking. Hopefully at least some of it made
“No, this needs practice because it’s supposed to be serious. Considering that you’re already here, though, I might as well take my chances.”

His eyes widened a bit and he plopped down next to you.

“Go on.”

“Garrus, you’ve…you’ve done something to me that I’m not sure I can explain. This thing that we have…this beautiful thing that I don’t know how to describe…I don’t want it to come to an end. Don’t look down on me for asking this, but I was wondering if you’d be willing to come with me after we leave the Normandy. Maybe we could do something like settle down until the next mission. I don’t care what we do, just as long as I’m with you.”

For a few good moments all he does is stare at you.

When he didn’t respond, you pulled your body up and walked away from the bed.

Yeah, you had fucked that whole thing up.

“Shepard, wait—“

The door to your bathroom slammed because of your own biotic force. You pulled yourself onto the counter where the sink was and looked down to the floor.

He didn’t love you.

He couldn’t love you.

It didn’t take long for him to begin rapping on the door. You didn’t respond.

Besides, he was only trying to contribute to the pity party.

“Liz, if you don’t open this door I’ll go and get Grunt to do it for me.”

There was another period of silence before he continued speaking with you and you started to wonder why he was still with you.

“I don’t know how to phrase this without sounding cheesy, but I don’t think I could think of a better post-Collectors arrangement. Humans have a place called Heaven, don’t they? Correct me if I’m wrong, but I think it would be like that place if I could accompany you off duty.”

It didn’t take you long to open the door after that.

When he saw your figure, he touched your shoulder and you came into his embrace.

“Heaven would be anywhere in the galaxy as long as you were with me, Garrus,” you murmured. “I hope you remember that.”

Those were the final words you exchanged. After that, your communication was solely through actions. He spun you around like a child and the two of you laughed and laughed while the stereo in your room echoed.

Your evening ended with the best instance of intimacy you had ever experienced.
Your name was Commander Liz Shepard, and you couldn’t wait to start your new life.
Chapter 17

Your name is Admiral Steven Hackett and waking up early was a habit of yours.

You had lived most of your life not knowing when you would have to wake up again or for what reason. Until you obtained the rank of admiral, calls to duty at random times were frequent. Your life had been relatively peaceful for the past few months, though. However, you still enjoyed waking up in the early morning hours so you could look outside your penthouse windows. The false sun shone in the sky and a dusky blue sky changed into a pastel colored one.

Your penthouse, although more spacious than Shepard’s, lacked the modern décor that was the staple for Presidium homes. You, unlike most humans, had grown up on Earth. Your family had had an appreciation for less stark home interiors. Interior design was hardly a hobby of yours, but you made sure that your environment at home was cozier and not austere like a mental institution.

Calming blues and taupes were the norm around your abode. The colors reminded you of Earth’s beaches, which had been unregulated when you were a child. You could remember going back to a comfortable beach house and not having to worry about pollutant levels.

Things had changed, but this didn’t stop you from bringing subtle reminders of your more relaxing past back into your life. Even if this included being choosy with paint swatches, you didn’t care. Other than the nice inside, there wasn’t much going on in the space around you.

You house may have been simple, but it was nice. Its format was similar to that of Shepard’s as well. The only difference was the square footage. Its picturesque view also evoked emotions of an easier time as well. You found yourself staring out into it more often than you would have liked.

You weren’t aware that a certain woman had the same habit.

Your name was Steven Hackett, and at six forty five Earth time you looked out onto the rising Presidium. Citizens were just waking up and you were already in full uniform. You adjusted your cap and then headed to the elevator. It was time for Shepard’s hearing, and you were going to speak
your mind this time. There was so much that you owed her, and this time the Council wasn’t going to get away with pulling wool over your eyes for the second time. Something was amiss on the Citadel and you needed to know what it was, especially if it meant incarcerating someone so great.

Before you left, though, a particular memory entered your mind.

It also wasn’t the most pleasant one, either.

“**Shepard, you know that this is as difficult for me as it is for you.**”

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and you had just been told how insane you allegedly were.

You had done nothing but help the man in front of you, and what you got in return was imprisonment in a foreign environment in order to recover. Had he even attempted to get you out of this mess when he had talked to your superiors? You doubted it.

He knew that you weren’t crazy. He had known you longer than anyone on that corrupt governing council, anyway. Hell, even the Council knew you. They had never been hostile before.

Even if you were messed up liked they thought, you weren’t still in a hospital like before. The war had ended months ago and PTSD didn’t seem to be bothering you. It never had. You were fine.

How long had it been since you had been recovered, anyway?

You sighed and put your head in your hands. This wasn’t something you could handle alone.

“I did all I could to organize a peaceful release, but the Council didn’t want you—“

“Fuck what the Council thinks! If they think that they’re going to keep me alone in this shithole of an apartment for the rest of my life, you can count on me not being there when they need their problems solved!”

The man in front of you shifted and you began to realize how ungrateful you sounded.

He was trying to help you, right? He had at least had the decency to come and visit you. The engagement had started with small talk which hadn’t been successful. Now he was just bullshitting everything else to make you feel like these drastic measures weren’t so bad.

The area around you was expansive yet cold and it was to be yours. According to him, this penthouse had been gifted to you from the Council. Their intentions seemed nice at first.

That is, until you found out about the house arrest conditions.

You hadn’t even taken a tour of the place and you already hated it. Like a wild animal, you had to be able to roam where you pleased. It sounded like a basic privilege, and suddenly being stripped of it made you feel naked. You were no longer a person; you were a puppet that was being pulled up against its will by a panel of unfeeling bastards. Your gaze faltered and you started to take a look around the place that you were going to be calling home for a long time.

The white and grey interior around you was less than welcoming. All of the furniture was composed of white leather while all of the flooring was made of translucent white tile. There really weren’t any real rooms; everything simply flowed together like a modern watercolor painting. If you glanced one way you could see a lackluster kitchen. It was filled with basic supplies and nothing more.
Right now you were occupying the living room. The single interesting object in the entire vicinity was a state of the art television. You would soon find out that this entity along with your omni-tool would be your sole vessels for knowing about the outside world. Other than these things, the room was pretty bare. It would have been nice with some decorations and color.

Of course it lacked all of these things. There was a blank spot where a fireplace should have been and you wondered if they removed it in case you decided to light yourself on fire or something.

In the space between the kitchen and living room there was a set of table and chairs. There had to be at least ten places for people to sit, but it wasn’t like you were going to be entertaining anything more than dust bunnies and inanimate objects.

A few doors covered the walls, and a contemporary glass staircase was perched near the most interesting part of the space: the floor to ceiling windows.

You came to realize that that window wall would become the bane of your existence. At that moment, you vowed that you would smash them open one day so you could feel the freshness of the Presidium again. You took this vow before realizing that you had a balcony, which was also suicide proofed.

“If I can’t do anything to change their mind, this is going to be your arrangement until you indicate that you can handle leaving. You have a mental disorder, and although I don’t agree with what they’re doing, it’s law.” he continued. “My hands are tied.”

Your outbursts no longer had an impact on him, but his had shocked you.

Handle?

Had he just spoken to you like you were a dependent child?

You stood up sharply and looked down at the man. His face was wrinkled and had once given you the kindest expressions. Now he was the enemy.

He had put you in here. Even if he technically didn’t, he hadn’t stopped who did.

“Admiral, I really don’t give two shits about what the Council wants. I’m getting out of here and I don’t care what they say. They don’t own me or anyone else on here. I saved their asses!”

He looked up at you while you towered over him. You weren’t sure if he was able to understand your power struggles.

“And besides, the law doesn’t apply to me.”

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard, and you had turned into a conceited and traumatized bitch again.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you were never good at handling awkward situations.

You had been in a few sticky adventures during your time on the Normandy. One time you had managed to walk in on Tali when she was changing, which ended with a scarred mandible on your part and an infection on hers.

Another one had been getting stuck inside the elevator with Miranda and Jacob while you were still taking down the Collectors. Those few hours had been the most questionable ones that you had
spent with that duo.

The situation that you were in right now was ridiculously awkward, though.

After being released by C-Sec by pulling a few strings, you and Joker were stranded until Shepard returned. The helmsman had suggested heading back to his apartment to catch up with EDI, but you had different plans.

When Joker had put in his suggestion, you had been irate. Shepard had been banned from seeing visitors. You had to be dragged out the door before finally giving up on retrieving her. It had been a reluctant decision on your part, but if you weren’t there when she got out you didn’t know what you would do. You promised her that you would never leave her a long time ago, but now you needed to break your agreement. Instead of being there physically, you monitored her virtually.

Last time you checked her status on her visor was at three in the morning. According to your C-Sec documents, she was on the Presidium awaiting her hearing. Specifics had been irretrievable.

There were no further updates after that.

Now it was six in the morning and you had somehow found yourself back at Shepard’s penthouse.

The glass was still scattered about. Other than that, the penthouse appeared to be unused.

This destination had been a last result on your part. There wasn’t really much else for you to do with Joker, anyway. You had been incarcerated up until five, anyway.

“Damn…” your friend had said upon entering the stuffy residence. “They kept her here?”

You had answered her with a simple grunt and he soon learned his place. He didn’t talk much after that and made an excuse about being tired.

Currently, Joker was asleep on the couch and you were looking out onto the view that your partner had witnessed every single day.

It was then that you began to wonder about things.

You began to wonder about that warm place and the Turian-Human babies. Would that ever happen?

Would she still love you or was she delusional from all of her years of service?

Was she suicidal?

What was the first thing she thought of when she closed her eyes?

You sighed and looked down at the glass that would be stabbing your feet if you were armorless. As you bent down and picked up a piece, you could swear that it was stained red.

When you saw the red tint, you quickly dropped the object and moved to another part of the house: the bedroom.

This place was just as drab as the other rooms. The bed was too small for a Turian and the colors were boring.

There was also a total lack of anything personal. There was no photography or art on the walls, and you began to scan the room for a sign of personalization.
It took you a while, but you found something.

On the nightstand was a small picture frame that wouldn’t have been visible at first glance. Something about it was beckoning. You answered its inaudible call and strode over to it.

Upon further examination, you were shocked.

It was the picture Shepard had taken of you during your short period of living together. You remember calling it bizarre when she first took it; you were putting on your armor’s chest plate and allowing the Earth’s real sunlight to beam down on you.

You could recall the day she took it vividly. You had just gotten up and wanted to surprise Shepard with breakfast, which was a difficult task considering that you didn’t know how to cook for humans. Why you had decided to wear armor while doing it still baffled you, though.

The bedroom that you had shared together was coated in a yellow morning light. It hit your skin at the most unique angles, creating a brownish tone. She had captured the moment while sneaking out of the shower.

“Sneaking” wasn’t a good term, though, considering that she was laughing the whole time.

“I caught you red handed, Vakarian! Now we’ve got proof of your handsomeness!”

Your name was sometimes just Vakarian, and you didn’t know a picture could give you such strong emotions.
Sorry for not updating yesterday. I'm stuck with exams right now and it's hard to keep up!!

Please leave some comments on this! I haven't really gotten any lately. :((

xoxo
THR

Your name was Commander Shepard and you were preparing for a day that was bittersweet.

In fact, that day was today, and it had approached faster than you had been expecting.

Your ship that had once been filled with diligent workers and trusted friends was now close to being empty. Everyone who you had known and loved would soon part ways. This wasn’t something that you had expected to be so difficult. Now that your squadmates had left, though, you couldn’t help feeling a little lost on the inside. Keeping a soldier’s composure began to get more strenuous as you packed your own things in your personal quarters.

Your mate’s goodbyes had been heartfelt and memorable. You couldn’t help but try to coax them all to stay for a little while longer. Jack had the nerve to call you motherly when you attempted to sweet talk her into having a drink on the Citadel next week.

“You sound like the mom I never had, Shep. Get a grip.”

You had scoffed at that comment.

You supposed that she was right despite your retorts. Growing close to every single one of them was a journey. As much as you didn’t want to admit it, you hoped that these adventures with them were not entirely over.

People who had started out as basic colleagues had turned into something so much more. When
you had enlisted so many years before, you didn’t think that these sorts of attachments to people would come so easy to you. You weren’t a people person at first; you were just a leader who had no idea what she was doing.

Although leaders were supposed to have amiable qualities, you seemed to break the mold. You had been something like a monster when you were first resurrected. Your demeanor had been cold until you met people that had changed you.

There was one person in particular that had changed you for the better.

You smiled when you thought about him and looked down bashfully at the mention of his name sometimes. He was like the teenage dream that you never had.

Of course, your teenage dream wasn’t a badass Turian at first, but you were willing to change your once conceited opinions.

He was the only one who had agreed to accompany you on your post-Collector adventures, whatever they may be. Everyone else on the crew had someone to go home with. Others had obligations that needed fulfilling.

You had one too.

So did Garrus.

Your obligations right now were each other.

You hadn’t planned on having a steady partner at all throughout your life. Brief relationships suited you more than long term ones. People had told you that this was a phase and that there would be the one person that could break it.

They would be the one that could stand beside you in combat and behind closed doors. They could decode your expressions with nothing more than a glance, and they still grew warm when they felt the flutter of your heartbeat. They knew questionable things about you yet would still stand by your side.

They would take a bullet for you without even blinking.

You found these qualities in Garrus, and you hoped that he could at least find some of them in you.

You didn’t exactly know where you were going to go with him. After bringing the subject up a month prior, he had suggested settling on Palaven while you preferred Earth. The both of you unanimously agreed that you wouldn’t become Citadel citizens, though. It was too stuffy and neither of you could bear to spend more time there than you needed to.

You never did reach a consensus with him about your next endeavors. All that mattered was that you were going to be with him. Maybe you could even live a normal life like a civilian and not have to care about everyone else. It was a thought that was clouded with problems: the Reaper’s return, the threat of Cerberus interference, the trouble with fame. The list of worries seemed to go on the more you thought about it.

With a reluctant exhale, you took one last look around your quarters. You’d miss the Normandy and her beauty, and you were certain that at least Joker would feel the same.

You would also long for EDI, who had become a little more than just a simple AI companion.
You sat down at your clean desk which used to be covered in unfinished mission reports and datapads. The surface was unusually clean now, and a cheerless feeling came over you.

This wasn’t your last mission on your very own vessel, though. You could sense it.

Abruptly, the door behind you opened and a figure stepped inside. He greeted you with nothing more than a ghost of a smile. His black eyes flickered and stared at you through the bluish light of the room, and his green skin clashed against the other cool colors.

This man’s name was Thane Krios, and you were surprised that he had a desire to say goodbye to you.

“Siha,” he began, his voice reverberating throughout the space. You turned and rose up when you saw him, not expecting his visit to be long.

Although you had grown close to Thane over time, you could tell that there was something that he had been holding back throughout the mission.

Since you had helped him with reconciling with his son, he had changed. His thoughts and words were more optimistic.

His smiles and exultant tones became more frequent.

“I wanted to say goodbye before I left the ship. I’ve decided to spend more time with Kolyat before succumbing to my own fate.”

You took a step towards him and crossed your arms.

“I was starting to think that you weren’t gonna come around and really say bye.” you said. You gave him a warm grin which he did not return.

“It’s been a pleasure working with you, Thane. Really, I mean it.”

He nodded before sticking out his hand to you. His method in doing it was awkward, but you took it anyway.

“This is proper human behavior for goodbyes, isn’t it? I’m sure yours differ greatly from Drell or Hanar ones.”

Without hesitation, you leaned in and hugged him. His scent was intoxicating, and the lust of something more than friendship lingered upon you. His skin felt so much more different than Garrus’. It was almost wet, but the leather of his outfit made it feel less welcoming. You could feel his chest moving up and down in an offbeat rhythm, most likely caused by his terminal disease. You just wanted to reach up and--

No.

You couldn’t do that.

You shook it off with a throaty laugh and looked back at him.

“We usually do it like that, hon.”

Thane looked back at you and blinked. You swore that you could get lost in those eyes. They were a deep black abyss, and sometimes you found yourself staring at them for a bit too long.
Instead of doing anything tempting, you diverted your gaze and listened to him as he began to speak again.

“You know, my time is limited in this galaxy and I’ve wanted to leave it so that it’s a better place for my son...for my race...and for people like you. I just wanted to give you my utmost gratitude for making that possible for me, siha. You’ll never know what you’ve done for me by giving me the opportunity of a lifetime. You’ve reunited me with my son, given me a chance to seek penance and create new relationships. It’s been refreshing and rewarding.”

Your eyes widened as he looked at you with the greatest amount of thanks that you had ever witnessed. He had done his atonement; hell, he had helped save the entire galaxy from destruction. If forgiveness from his gods was what he had been looking for all of this time, he had damn well achieved it all.

“The pleasure’s all mine. I, uh, well…”

Were you stuttering in front of him?

No, you weren’t stuttering.

You couldn’t stutter in front of him.

His hand touched your shoulder in a manner that made you shiver. He picked up on this sudden movement and backed off towards the door.

You wanted to tell him to stay, but you didn’t.

“Goodbye, Shepard. May your travels lead you to warm sands.”

The door opened in front of him, and you suddenly did what you thought you couldn’t.

“Thane!”

He turned around and looked at you in question.

“Before you go, I have one more thing to ask of you.”

Instead of retreating, he took a step back in and was only about a meter away.

“How may I be of service?”

You bit down on your lip; even though you just wanted to take him in for the last time, you had to think of some legitimate reason to keep him behind.

“What does siha mean?”

For the first time in a long time, he smiled at you and took your hand.

“It means warrior angel...or fierce protector.”

After patting your palm, he vanished and was soon out of your sight.

Your name was Commander Shepard, and you were becoming the victim of a hasty feeling of guilt.

These emotions began to overwhelm you when yet another voice interrupted your thoughts.
“Commander, there's a last message for you on your private terminal. It's from Admiral Hackett and he mentioned a Batarian-Reaper conflict. Would you like me to pull it up?”

“Go right ahead, EDI.”

You were the Turian Councilor and you were filled with rage.

More specifically, your name was Quentius Valibus and you were absolutely mortified with the recent reports about Liz Shepard’s sudden escape.

Her violent encounter with a group of your own people also didn’t aid you in liking her.

Yes, she was a well respected war hero, but that didn’t make her insanity less apparent. She deserved respect like all of the other veterans. In fact, you believed that she had deserved more than what the public gave her.

Adoration for such actions was not enough. As the first human Spectre, she exceeded everyone’s expectations and managed to save the galaxy from Reaper havoc. Not to mention her saving the Citadel during a Cerberus invasion and protecting the Council from a rogue member.

However, her actions were inexcusable. This was no longer a time of war; killing and aggression had no place in this new era.

At least that’s what the rest of the Council kept on spouting out to the public.

In your opinion, she was better off dead now anyway.

The Shepard Files were never supposed to be opened after your well respected group had condemned her to a decent home on the Presidium. She wasn’t supposed to get out of her home prison until someone like you considered her to be fit for duty again.

Something had happened and circumstances were altered. The variables had been unchecked.

An incident like this was just what the Council had ignored. They should have known that they couldn’t box in a once righteous commander.

As you sat at your place in the former Councilor Udina’s office, you began to wonder what would be accomplished in this “emergency” meeting. Its guests included the Council, Admiral Hackett and Commander Bailey, among other important diplomats. The trouble that the former commander was giving everyone was really starting to take a toll.

Lives had been lost.

Minds had gone to shit.

It was time for an intervention.

The Asari councilor, Irissa T’Alneto, sat across from you with a stern expression. Her eyes, which had always been ominous, expressed no feelings now. She was a closed book and she hadn’t said a word since she had arrived.

The Salarian councilor hadn’t arrived yet, but a solemn looking admiral was sitting next to you. His hands were folded neatly in the lap of his Alliance blues. His face was wise, but an expression of sorrow was upon it.
You felt like he knew something that everyone else didn’t know.

Your name was Quentius Valibus, and you had nothing more than an inkling of an idea about how this meeting was truly going to go.

“Bailey? God damn it, Bailey, is that you!!”

Your name was Commander Bailey, and in your arms you held a flailing Shepard.

Finding her cell hadn’t taken up a lot of time. It was five fifty five in the morning, and you had decided to show up a little bit early to Shepard’s meeting.

You also intended to bring a surprise.

Although this surprise was living, breathing and deadly, she needed to hear the truth.

“If you’d stop moving your ass everywhere we might be able to talk about this!”

Passersby looked at the scene playing out in front of them. It was quite comical to see an old man carry a strong woman like that.

It was especially humorous to see said woman falling to the ground.

“That was your own fault.”

“Fuck you.”

Shepard gave you a glare and stood up. It was clear that she had no composure at the moment. Her nails had been grinded down to stubs and her skin was practically translucent. Her locks flowed just past her shoulders, framing her exposed collarbones quite well.

She would have looked fine with a little more muscle and some depression prevention pills, but you decided against pointing this out to her.

“What’s Garrus?”

You looked around for the man in question and didn’t see a single Turian.

“Lord knows where that fellow’s run off to,” you answered. “He’s not important now, though. The Council’s having a meeting regarding your status and I am not letting them keep you locked up.”

She looked down in guilt, and you could see the sorrow in her eyes. She was well aware of the crimes that she had committed. Whether or not she was going to seek forgiveness was beyond you, though.

“What I did to those men…it was nothing more than a reaction.”

You nodded at her and grabbed her by the arm. Although she protested by rattling off her defense, you still had to drag her all the way to Udina’s former office. It was only a few steps away from your office, which made it convenient.

When you reached the doors, you looked her in the eye.

“Listen, you’re going to go in there and prove to them that you’re healthy. I know you’re struggling but now is not the time to let them know that. You’re not alright but there’s no way in hell that I’m
going to allow them to keep you in a glass cage anymore. Understand, civilian?”

She rolled her eyes and gripped the doorknob.

“That’s Commander to you, Bai—“

“You haven’t been reinstated. I suggest you take this seriously so we don’t both look like fools.”

It was obvious that she was disoriented. This probably wasn’t going to be a good idea in the long run.

You’d be willing to bet a hundred thousand credits on it.

“I always get what I want, crazy or not.” she exclaimed. “And right now, I want answers to what the fuck has happened to me over the past year.”

Your name was Commander Bailey, and you were starting to wonder if you were as crazy as the woman in front of you.
Wow I just now realized that the Council members have legit names and it just took me forever to find them...I fixed all of the previous chapters, though!

And I'm coming to the conclusion that verb tenses in the second person are a pain in the butt and I really wonder if I'll ever get it right. >__

Chapter 19

Your name was Garrus Vakarian, and although you were used to the silence in the Main Battery, hearing it in the other parts of the Normandy was rather eerie.

The place was filled with almost more life than some of the more bouncy areas of the Citadel. There used to be someone or something always talking or laughing, especially after the Collector’s defeat. Although the times before the victory had been less positive, there had still been activity nonetheless.

The state of the Normandy was now entirely different than that now.

You had just wished Thane the best, and he had been the last one to leave the ship that you knew of.

Even Joker and Dr. Chakwas had departed, but you sensed that their leave was temporary. The Med-Bay was still covered in papers and there was no way Joker was leaving without saying a few more goodbyes to EDI. That man was so damn attached to that robot.

You somehow wondered how they could form such a bond, and you then remembered how you had forged a relationship just like they had.

Yours was a little more real and passionate, though.

As you strode around in the Crew Deck, you began to reminisce about the things that had gone on there. You had thought that you had seen every possible activity occur on that level. From sparring to having a mini-rave, the Normandy’s largest section had been a multifunctional space.

You never would have guessed that seeing it coated in a veil of stillness would be the most amazing thing you would witness.

This stifling peace was put to an end soon enough. The elevator doors parted, and you waited in the kitchen part of the quarters to see who it was.

You thought that you had a pretty good prediction.
You knew her smile in an instant and had memorized the curve of her face.

She was only a lady when she wanted to be, but she had so many other layers.

Commander, soldier, lover, fighter and occasional peacekeeper.

Her name was Liz Shepard, and she was starting to make you think that a human fetish wasn’t such a farfetched thought anymore.

There was no reason to continue to have uncertainty about her feelings for you. Despite her constant mentions of commitment issues and your inter-species relationship doubts, the two of you had pushed through and made it to the end.

Was this the end?

You didn’t think it was. She had asked you to come with her after the crew had departed.

Now that they were gone, you couldn’t help but wonder if her offer still stood.

Did a woman like her really want a Turian like you at her side?

“As soon as we make our last step to the Citadel to drop off Joker and Karin, the ship is all ours. You want me to set a course for Palaven?”

You turned around and confirmed your prediction. Standing on the other side of the Crew Deck was the one and only Commander Shepard. She had let her hair down for once, and you noticed her suave yet sincere smile.

Her words had made an even bigger impression.

“I thought you didn’t want to go to the wonderful fortified and strict planet that I call home. What changed your mind?” you asked.

She gave you a shrug in response initially. As she walked towards the counter that you were leaning against, she continued.

“I’ve never been there. They’ve got suits for the radiation, don’t they?”

You paused and watched as she hopped onto the counter beside you. You knew that she wouldn’t fit in there; although she could be as rigid as a Turian at times, her soft body wouldn’t be able to withstand the climate. Finding food that the both of you could enjoy would be a challenge.

Did she know this?

“They’re hard to come by.” you admitted. “Not a lot of humans settle there. It’s too…confining for people like you.”

“People like me are pretty damn adaptable. You’d like it there more, won’t you? If you don’t, we’ll go somewhere else.”

Your reassuring hand was soon on her knee, and she looked away with a small bit of pink on her cheeks.

“Usually it’s the man that’s making sure the woman is comfortable, Shepard. It’s not like I’m complaining about it, though.”
She redirected her gaze, and this time it was fixed on you instead of the cold metal floor.

You weren’t sure what she was trying to convey. It was almost as if her eyes were pleading with you.

“Look, I’m as new at this as you are. I just thought—“

You put a finger to her lips and suddenly pressed your forehead against hers.

She cared about you, and she would never know how much that meant to you.

“We’re not new anymore.” you purred, your lips only centimeters away from hers. “Now, I’m flattered that you’d put me ahead of your own feelings, but I really don’t want to see you cooped up in a suit all day long because of some goddamn heat waves.”

The distance between your lips was soon closed, and the way she carefully nibbled at the side of your mandibles between breaths.

“Commander? Am I interrupting something?”

And, like it never even happened, Liz slid off of the counter and out of your embrace.

It was with good reason when you saw who was standing in front of you, though.

Dr. Karin Chakwas, the Normandy’s chief doctor, was standing in front of the entrance to the infirmary. She looked rather amused, but your lover’s expression was quite the opposite.

“Karin—I mean, Doctor! No, we were just going over some last minute plans. Is there something you need?”

Although Dr. Chakwas was a mature woman, the smirk on her face made you laugh. She had a wicked sense of humor.

“Of course. I just came to collect the spare reports I had left. It was an honor to work with the two of you, by the way. I hope your scarring goes down…and that goes for the both of you.”

While Shepard basked in her own embarrassment, you opened your mouth to wish the doctor a final goodbye. After all, she had performed life saving surgery on you.

“And in case I haven’t mentioned it before, the two of you are such a good example of a cross-species relationship. I wish people like you had existed back in my heyday.”

With that, she retreated into her quarters like she had never witnessed anything.

In that moment, Shepard came towards you again with a wide grin.

“A good example, huh? I never would have guessed.”

She gave you a peck on the lips before leaving for the elevator.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian, and as you touched your own mouth in bliss, you realized something.

Where you lived didn’t even matter anymore.
Your name was Liz Shepard, and what had happened in the last fifteen minutes of your life had been very questionable.

Fifteen minutes ago you had been confined to a cell that was much less welcoming than your penthouse. You had been driving yourself crazy. Looking back on those few minutes made you frown.

Had you really been driven to that? After a year of telling yourself that you weren’t crazy, was it time to admit that you had lied to yourself?

Instead of continuing to be incarcerated for the third time in your life, you were now standing in front of a set of doors. You knew these doors very well.

Before a few particular events had occurred, the room behind them held a man more important than even Admiral Hackett. You had been the one to put him down after he went into a rogue state.

Behind these doors you had talked to dignitaries that some people were lucky enough to just look at in person during their lifetime. You had made outlandish requests and revealed secrets that had been unknown.

You had also stared at these doors with scorn and asked yourself questions that you didn’t want to answer.

It was safe to say that you had done some memorable things in the room closest to your current position.

This time, though, a friend had brought you to this part of the Embassies for a particular reason: it was time to decide your destiny.

He was holding onto you by the back of your dress now. He had once respected you, and now you wouldn’t be surprised if he thought that you were a lunatic.

Things were becoming more real in your mind now that you thought of it like that.

You had killed two men and you were out of the line of duty. This was no longer something that could be shrugged off.

Normal citizens would be charged with the death penalty.

You could hardly think of yourself as normal, but your opinion didn’t matter. Your fate was in the hands of the Council.

Considering that these were the same people that had agreed that you were insane wasn’t helping your case. In fact, looking like a messed up hooker right now also didn’t assist your plans to at least get out of C-Sec jail.

After all, you were Commander Shepard, weren’t you?

You thought of the last two cocky things that you had said to Commander Bailey. You thought of who was beyond the doors in front of you. You thought of Garrus, Joker, the men you killed and the ones who were still alive.

Your name was Liz Shepard, and something in that moment clicked in your mind.

You were crazy in a way that you couldn’t even describe. You had been crazy like that all of your
life.

There was no fixing it now, though.

There was only one thing you could do.

You had done it before your final Reaper battle and prior to facing off with the Collectors.

You stopped slouching, put on a composed face and shook off all of the signs of insanity that you thought that you could control.

You had a reputation to purify, and you weren’t going down without a fight.

Your name was Admiral Steven Hackett and you watched as the Salarian councilor entered the room from a side entrance.

You thought that the Council would be more organized than this. What was once a trusted organization was now slightly frowned on by the public. They had done a legendary job while dealing with the Reapers.

Now, however, they were more difficult.

Someone being late to a meeting should not have triggered all of these thoughts in your mind. Instead of continuing to overthink, you stared at the main set of doors that led out into the Embassies. The room you were trapped in now was rather attractive. It had been modified to look like a boardroom that overlooked the beauty of the Citadel. Everyone sat around a massive glass table with comfortable chairs.

It was supposed to be a fine occasion, but the matter being discussed made it anything but.

After the fuss of getting the Dalatrass to her seat, the Asari councilor cleared her throat and spoke in a clear voice. She stood in front of everyone in almost a controlling manner.

“We can’t wait on Commander Bailey, so this means that we’ll have to move on and get started. I’ve called all of you here to discuss an issue that many of you thought was taken care of: the status of the former Commander Shepard. In case you haven’t been informed, she was involved in a bar altercation last night that ended in the death of two Turian men. One was killed by strangulation and the other by a melee-combat application from an omni-tool. Both of these deaths have been caused by Shepard, who has been on house arrest for a little over a year. She has been diagnosed as a victim of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder by the professionals at Huerta, and an extensive profile on her mental state is visible in these files which I have sent to your datapads.”

Everyone suddenly began to check the devices in front of them, and you did the same. You had seen all of the information before, yet the rest of the Council acted as if it was new.

“As a diplomat, I suggest that the former—“

Everyone turned to look at the portentous set of doors that were placed at the front of the room.

They had been opened by the final member of the meeting, who had arrived fashionably late.

“Commander Bailey.” greeted the Asari councilor. The Commander looked at her with a threatening glare, and it didn’t take long for him to step aside and take his seat.

The remaining diplomat’s jaws dropped.
Behind him was Commander Shepard.

“I apologize for being late.”

Bailey’s voice was gruff, but it wasn’t like anyone was listening to him.

Your name was Admiral Steven Hackett, and this meeting just got a lot more interesting.
Hey guys, sorry for the delay!

In celebration of 20 chapters, I made this super long!

8 pages, 3000+ words...yay!!

Thanks for the kudos, too!

xoxo

THR

Chapter 20

Your name was Liz Shepard, and no matter how whorish you looked, you were going to prove the Council wrong.

You knew that you had to prove them wrong with your tattered dress and disheveled hair. You weren’t a cold blooded soldier that was plagued with a debilitating mental disease.

All you were was just a grunt who had done enough shit to get famous for it.

Even if you weren’t, the least you could do was convince them that you needed real help. Real help wasn’t being put in jail.

Help would be putting you back on duty or letting you go freely to live with the one man in your life that you gave a damn about.

You weren’t a normal human being whatsoever, but none of them were either. They had to understand you to some sort of extent.

The environment in the room was tense. Everyone you knew was there: the Council, Bailey, and Hackett. Other people who you weren’t familiar with stood on the outskirts of the room. Some were out on the balcony where they could pour at the Presidium’s beauty. You had other things to worry about that wasn’t the fake exquisiteness that surrounded you.

The first person to speak to you was the Turian councilor. You had encountered him a few times before. He had been rather supportive of you and your endeavors in the past. Unlike certain members of the Council, he could be considered a voice of reason. He lacked the self centered ideals that consumed the other councilors regarding their own races. He saw the Council as a group whose purpose was to make advances for the galaxy, not just the Turians. You had admired him from afar for his mindsets and neutrality, and never before had he looked down at you in disdain. In fact, he
had a great deal of respect for anyone who dared to become a Spectre.

Now he was standing with both of his fists on the glass table that encircled all of the meeting attendants. His stance was a powerful one, and you knew that daring to mess with someone in his race would force you to face deadly consequences. His face, which once seemed hospitable, now resembled a bare skull.

When nothing was said at first, he slammed his talons onto the glass. Anyone who hadn’t been paying attention had diverted their concentration to him. Even the ones outside were looking back in now.

The way he glared at you made you want to look down at the floor. You would have never admitted it, but you were absolutely terrified of him.

He was bigger than you, you were out of shape and unarmed, and he wanted to put you to death.

No.

You couldn’t think that. You wouldn’t allow yourself to think that.

Stand tall. You’re Commander Shepard.

No matter how many times you told yourself that, it wouldn’t work. He began to speak, and you couldn’t drown out his words. They pierced you like bullets, and you knew that you rightfully deserved each jab.

“Cut the bullshit.” he hissed. “This woman defiled two men who have done nothing to her. I’m not about to let her get away with this! She had defied the rules the Council has put in place for her, and if the reports are correct, she ruined the Citadel’s property by shattering the window of—“

“Shut the fuck up your merciless prick! If you knew what your perfect little Council drove me to, maybe you would understand my reasoning!”

Your retort had been just as sudden as his accusation. The room was deadly silent, and you could tell that this was about to be a faceoff.

It was time to plead your case to the Council. They had to know what they had put you through.

The Turian opened his mouth to snap at you, but you didn’t allow it.

“How would you like to be put away for months by yourself without a choice? You all treated me like I was some sort of pawn—I’m not your property! I’m a human being and you’re going to know it before I leave here! There isn’t a single thing right about killing a civilian. I’ve known that since I was a child. But trapping someone in a place that they don’t belong in? You’re stooping to Cerberus levels!”

“What do you want me to do about it, Shepard? Go kill two humans as collateral for your release?!” he screamed. The way his voice sounded with a flanging echo disturbed many of the people in the room. You had a burning desire to look around and see their faces.

Were they in shock?

Were they horrified?

Much to your displeasure, you couldn’t look at them. The sole person who was getting the brunt of
your menacing glower was the Turian councilor.

You weren’t going to change your expression until you got some answers.

“I don’t want you to do anything!” you replied. Your voice had just as much fervor as his, if not more. “I want to be let out of this hellhole! I want to go back on the Normandy or at least get transferred back to Earth! I want to live in a place that’s warm and tropical and settle with my goddamn partner! I want to have kids and tell them the stories about how we took down thousands of Reapers and how I was able to take a deep breath after being trapped under rubble! I saved the fucking galaxy and all you give me is a penthouse and a locked door. If that doesn’t spell out bullshit to you, I don’t know what does. You can obliterate me with as many mechs as you want when we’re done with this as long as you either get me some proper medical help or give me some answers.”

The Turian chuckled darkly and sat back down. Now you were the only one standing with an angry stance.

“Is that a promise?”

His sneer made you bite down on your lip. This was a serious meeting and all he could do was joke about killing you. It wasn’t something you hadn’t heard, but now was not the time to be messing with you. Your omni-tool was still accessible and you were fully capable of tearing him up like a piece of cooked meat. Before you could lunge at him, another person spoke up. This person was more humane than the others.

“If it is a promise, then you’d better believe that I’ll be the one standing in between the mechs and the hero we have here in front of us.”

Admiral Steven Hackett stood up, and, to your surprise, walked over to your position. His movements were still as powerful as ever. Despite not being fond of him right now, you hadn’t known what he had done for you.

He put his hand on your shoulder, and you wished that you had known that he was responsible for bringing Garrus back to you.

“How can you possibly be defending this monster?!” the raptor liked creature bellowed from across the massive table.

“She’s not a monster. Even if she is one, it was the Council’s massive cover-up that made her that way.”

Admiral Hackett’s voice was soothing compared to the others’. He managed to remain calm in every situation he was thrown into.

You always thought highly of him for this.

“And before you start questioning the Commander, I would like to make it known that I was the one that let her out. Her location and files were revealed to her significant other by me. I will accept all consequences from here on out regarding her release.”

The entire Council looked on in shock. The man that was responsible for commanding the entire Alliance Navy had just admitted to exposing confidential documents to an unapproved source. He was considered to be the sole man who hadn’t been affected by the bad blood and dirty politics that corroded the underbelly of the Citadel.
Not everyone could be entirely honest anymore.

You turned and looked at Hackett in awe. Had he just given up his entire life’s work for your own well being?

“Admiral, don’t—“

“If Shepard and the Admiral go down, you’d better damn well believe I’m going with them.”

Commander Bailey had moved behind you as well. Your own personal army was here to defend you against the group of people who had done you wrong. They had willingly asserted their positions and put their jobs on the line.

You didn’t deserve such people in your life.

“That was a joke, but your valiancy isn’t appreciated when it comes to defending a murderer.” said the Turian. The two men behind you didn’t back down, though.

Your name was Liz Shepard, and your respect for a certain pair of men had reached higher than the Presidium’s simulated sky.

Your name was Enhanced Defense Intelligence, but you preferred to be called EDI. Quite frankly, Enhanced Defense Intelligence was a mouthful and you wished for your name to be a bit more feminine.

Your job description was once one that held a large amount of valor. You had started off as a simple AI on the Normandy SR-2. Built by the terrorist organization known as Cerberus, you were shackled due to your overwhelming processing power. The group feared that you would become too powerful for your own good and would become radical.

As a ship’s AI, you worked to assist the crew. You started out lacking your full potential.

Somehow, this role of yours became different over time, as did your capabilities.

After having your intelligence restraints removed from you by your ship’s helmsman, your aptitude increased dramatically.

You eventually acquired a body, superior combat skills, a dry sense of humor and the helmsman’s affections. The crew grew to appreciate you for more than what you were. They laughed at your jokes and even invited you to participate in normal happenings around the Normandy.

Although you sometimes felt like a human, you knew better than to call yourself one. You were never a real person. You were nothing more than a load of coding that happened to come together to function in an astounding way.

If you asked the crew of the Normandy what you had been, they would probably laugh.

They wouldn’t have called you human or robot.

“That EDI…man, she’s something else.”

Jeff had told you that long ago.

You were just something else, which you were okay with. You weren’t supposed to be more than a program, but now you were anything but.
As much as you strived to be helpful and humanly, it wasn’t practical in your current state.

You had been reduced to nothing but an intelligent program on your companion’s computer. Your fetters were put back on you so quickly.

This time, though, it wasn’t because of a terrorist’s paranoia.

The destruction of synthetic life by the Crucible was what had done this to you. You were well aware of who had initiated this annihilation: it had been Commander Shepard.

This didn’t bother you, though.

Synthetics were built to please and serve their creators. The thought of rebellion never entered your mind.

You knew better than to attempt a coup.

Even if you wanted to rebel, you wouldn’t have. Although you were not living, you had learned and adapted to many organic customs. You found some of them to be bizarre or unnecessary. The one you were the most familiar with was friendship, and you had decided to accept it entirely.

During your time as the Normandy’s AI, you had gained friends.

Even though there was sometimes a communication gap between you and these supposed friends, you wouldn’t have had it any other way.

Things had changed, though.

Now you were nothing more than a few mashed up backup files compiled onto a slow computer. Your capabilities were amazing given your current lackluster hardware, but you had immediately requested replacements when you had booted up for the first time.

If Jeff hadn’t backed up your files, you would be permanently dead now.

Dead wouldn’t have been a good word to describe you now that you had the time to think about it. You had never really been alive in the first place.

Not having any duties to attend to was giving you plenty of time to do things like run probability processes and analyze questionable data.

Some of this questionable data was regarding Commander Shepard.

It was currently six fifteen in the morning on the Citadel and she was being subjected to a Council meeting. It was rumored that she herself had arrived at the meeting. The information that you had acquired only took a few minutes.

If you had your advanced hardware, it would have taken you a few milliseconds.

Nonetheless, you were still concerned about your former commanding officer’s safety. You were an unshackled AI with nothing better to do.

You were curious.

It didn’t take you long to hack into the security feeds of the late Councilor Udina’s office. Every detail of the meeting was now exposed to you.
Your name was EDI, and it didn’t take you long to compose an email to Jeff Moreau, who was affectionately known in your limited database as “Joker”.

You told him to come home right away.

There was some footage he and Mr. Vakarian needed to see.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian, and you had never been to Earth before.

You weren’t sure what you were supposed to expect. It wasn’t supposed to be as militaristic and safeguarded like Palaven was. It also wasn’t supposed to have the allure and superior environment like the Asari planets did.

You hadn’t arrived on the planet yet. In fact, you were watching EDI do all the work now.

You had managed to fall for Shepard’s desire to return to her home planet.

She had mentioned that it was a temporary arrangement and that she had to tell you something important when you landed. You were wondering what this thing was and why she would want to spend such a short amount of time on her place of origin.

“Garrus, is there any particular spot you would like the Normandy to land on Earth’s surface? I recall the Commander saying something about a large city. Perhaps she was mentioning her hometown?”

Presently, you were sitting on the bridge. You never had the opportunity to try out Joker’s helmsman chair, and you never would have guessed that it would be comfortable for a Turian. You could swear that the Normandy’s pilot had never left it, and you soon understood why.

Its soft material cradled your body like a mother held her newborn child. It was a cheesy comparison, but you couldn’t think of anything more accurate.

Behind the systems controlling the ship, you could see planet Earth getting bigger and bigger as you approached.

It was known as the “blue planet” by its native race: the humans. They weren’t durable, but what they lacked in protection they made up for with determination. Their features were rather squishy and their anatomy varied greatly from person to person. Their genetic pool had so many variances compared to Turians.

It was fascinating, but you had never received a proper opportunity to study the species. Sniping and taking down entire corrupted races was more your style, anyway.

“She did mention a city.” you mused. “And a particular landing area.”

You crossed your legs and sat in a fashion that was similar to the long forgotten Illusive Man. It was quite comical for a certain woman to see you sit like that.

If only you had known that she was watching you.

“New York City,” a female voice chirped. “And land at New LaGuardia. Let’s hope there’s room for a ship bigger than most of the jumbo jets that park there.”

Her orders were crisp and to the point as always despite her grin, and you spun around to look at her.
“Did Cerberus rub off on you, Vakarian? You look an awful lot like a cross between Joker and a man that I hate right now.”

You chortled and turned around to look at her home planet, which was getting even larger by the second. Your initial reluctance to go there was starting to go away.

Hell, it would definitely be a change of pace for the both of you.

“What, are you implying that the Illusive Man’s poses weren’t flattering when he sat in that commanding chair of his? I think it makes my legs look pretty damn good.”

She laughed at you and then did something that the two of you had never done in front of another person.

Granted, EDI wasn’t exactly a person, but she was a conscious being. She could see what was going on, and you didn’t know if she would comment on Shepard’s sudden romantic advancements.

The woman that you called your girlfriend plopped down in your life and gave you a deep yet brief kiss. Her arms wrapped around your metallic carapace and you could have sworn that you heard EDI grunt across the Normandy’s comm system.

“I’ve requested docking permission.” EDI alerted. “It may be about ten minutes until I receive a response. Would you like me to leave you two alone?”

You felt Liz laugh, and you tentatively pulled your arm around her waist. She hadn’t been thrilled about being in a public relationship, but you were now going to assume that she had gone back on her position.

Her actions in public and in private varied greatly. Although you two were still in private, she hadn’t been very open about her romantic status to many members of the crew.

You reckoned that she had mentioned it to Thane. The Doctor obviously knew, as did Joker.

EDI could now be added to the list, but you were still questioning if she still counted as a person.

“Nah, EDI.” Shepard said. “You’re good.”

“Would you like me to locate prime lodging accommodations or would you prefer to stay on the Normandy?”

You looked down at Shepard, who was looking at you with a questionable expression.

“I didn’t realize the Normandy was an, uh, option.” she continued. Her eyes were locking with yours, and you could tell that she wanted to stay.

“I have things to take care of, anyway. On the Normandy, that is. I’m sure Garrus won’t mind doing a few extra useless calibrations.”

You punched her shoulder playfully with your free hand, and she responded by planting a kiss on your scars.

As wonderful as your life seemed right now, you couldn’t help but wonder if it would stay this way.

It felt too perfect.

Not much had ever gone right for you.
You didn’t want to feel paranoid, but it was instinctual.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian, and as you held your partner in your arms, you realized that you never wanted to let go.
Chapter 21

Your name was Joker Moreau, and you had been enjoying a much needed nap until you had been disturbed by two things.

One of these things was a Turian that was shaking you violently. You presumed that this meant that there was new news about Shepard’s status. It wasn’t like you weren’t interested or concerned about your friend who happened to be in jail for a double murder.

The dream you had been experiencing had been a little more interesting than arising to see Garrus’ screwed up face, unfortunately.

You were seeing stars by the time you did sit up. Every detail of your vivid reverie was still clear in your mind, and Shepard was the last thing you wanted to think about.

Although you weren’t about to reveal any details about it to anyone for at least a few months, you didn’t see anything wrong with reliving it in your mind.

The setting had been a place you knew and loved: the Normandy SR-2. As usual, you were on the bridge flying the ship. This sort of dream wasn’t out of the ordinary; you still put yourself into trances about flying that hell of a vessel whenever you got time to doze off.

Instead of just flying, this delusion was a little different.

EDI had been in it.

Your cheeks turned a bit red as you continued to think about it, and you were very glad that EDI wasn’t powerful enough to hear your thoughts. When she was at her prime, brain wave interception was just about the only thing she couldn’t do.

Her technological capabilities weren’t what got you going, though.

“Joker, get your ass up! EDI’s got a hacked feed to Udina’s office and they’ve got Shepard cornered
with Bailey and the Admiral.”

“Shit, I forgot about EDI! Did I mention that she wants to take back the Normandy?”

You blurted that last sentence out at an awkward time, and even Garrus would have raised an eyebrow at you if he possessed one. Luckily for you, he didn’t have one and he was too distracted by his visor.

You were soon preoccupied with something as well. The second reason for why you were initially disturbed was your omni-tool, which you had found yourself relying on more and more while off duty. It was sending you alerts that indicated a new email had arrived in your inbox. Sure enough, it was from EDI. Her message was brief, but the attached video feed link was invaluable. How she had managed to get it from controlling your shitty computer flabbergasted you.

You then chuckled to yourself. You should know better than to doubt EDI. Even when her systems were at their worst, she could outperform most humans.

“Take back the Normandy, huh? That sounds like the plot from one of those overbudgeted Citadel blockbusters.” he commented. You were well aware of how outlandish it sounded once you took it into context. Stealing a ship from the Alliance would land you, Shepard and Garrus in more trouble than it was worth. Perhaps just asking for EDI’s hardware back would be a better alternative.

“Nah,” you said to yourself. “That would be too easy.”

There wasn’t anything said between the two of you for a few more minutes. You simply sat on the unused couch in Shepard’s penthouse while she accepted her fate with the Council.

Whenever you turned to look at Garrus, his talon was propped up against his chin. Sometimes he would nod while other times his free hand would be clenched into a fist.

He would grunt but never would he say real words.

He seemed to know exactly what was going on between Shepard and the Council. You, on the other hand, were in the dark.

Now that you thought about it, you really didn’t know why Shepard was initially locked in her own house to begin with. Sure, she was supposedly suffering from a bad mental disease. In most cases that you had heard of, though, the patient was never subjected to solitary confinement. Most of them got counselors and were able to at least talk to the people they cared about.

Why had Shepard been put in the dark? The Council had a tendency to be secretive, but their reasoning for treating a Spectre and a hero with such animosity couldn’t be ignored.

“Garrus, this is gonna sound like a stupid question,” you started. He turned to look at you and you could tell that his attention was still focused on the feed.

“I wouldn’t expect anything less from you.”

His tone was stern and you could only hope that he had meant that in jest.

“I understand that Liz isn’t ok. Anderson told me a long time ago to look after her, and it’s obvious that she’s messed up now. But house arrest and being locked up…seriously? What kind of games are these people playing?”

A pained expression made it onto the former C-Sec officer’s face. It was one of pain, and you hadn’t
been expecting its sudden onset. His mouth turned into a scowl, and for the first time in ten minutes he tore himself away from the secret footage.

Before focusing his attention on you, he scanned the room as if to look for any spies or bugs that could be watching the two of you. Given your environment, you wouldn’t be surprised if there were some.

“I can’t tell you anything until you swear to not let it leave this room.”

His warning was sincere. If you had any doubts about it, all you had to do was look at his face. He was serious.

“You’ve got my word,” you replied while putting your hand up to salute him. “Flight lieutenant’s honor.”

He still looked reluctant to share the information that you were lacking. It wasn’t as if you were going to stab anyone in the back with it. Shepard was one of the closest friends you had.

You needed to know what had happened.

“The main reasoning behind it started right after finishing our deals with Cerberus. We were in some sort of hotel restaurant on Earth. Damn, that place was stuffy…”

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Your name was Garrus Vakarian, and this was your first real restaurant date with your girlfriend.

*Human customs for formal dining were foreign to you. There were three knives, two spoons and four forks all at your disposal. You had a feeling that they all had their own individual purposes, but you weren’t about to go and ask about them. It would be rude and, quite frankly, you weren’t expecting to eat anyway.*

*Earth was supposed to be a place of diversity. However, it wasn’t often that Turians visited this garden world with the sole purpose of leisure. If you weren’t a diplomat and you were a Turian, there wasn’t really much of a reason for you to visit Earth.*

*This meant that they didn’t have your type of food readily available. At most you would be able to tolerate the food served to you. If you were lucky, you wouldn’t have to hurl it up later.*

*You looked at the woman across from you. She also seemed to be having a problem with finding her way around the table.*

*Before you had arrived at the restaurant, Shepard had been raving about the food that New York City had to offer. It had been a racial melting pot roughly two hundred years ago. Every nationality had had a home in the city, whether it was in the former Chinatown district or on Curry Row in Manhattan. All of these names that she had poured out to you had gone in one ear and out the other.*

*These racial communities had turned into species-centered ones. Instead of there being a gap between races, species discrimination was rampant throughout Earth. Simple racial stereotypes and communities had been buried with the old New York City itself, which was now deep in the ocean. There were now places for refugees all around the massive uplifted city. Instead of sanctuaries for Chinese-Americans, there were now some for colony expats or displaced aliens.*

*Nonetheless, you were still impressed by the humans’ sense of design.*
If anything, the city reminded you of Illium. Tall skyscrapers made the skyline jagged. Everything looked brand new.

Roads were nearly obsolete, but if you looked close enough you could see them underneath the layers of buildings and support cables. Sky cars zipped across the landscape everywhere you looked. If you didn’t see a car, chances are that you were stuck looking at an electronic billboard.

Sidewalks that had once been a staple for the city were now made of acrylic glass and spanned over bare spaces. It was as if you were walking on glass suspension bridges, and they made their way all across the city.

A citizen from two hundred years ago would have called it the same city. The only differences were the modernization, the fact that the city was practically floating and that there was a hell of a lot more metal and glass. Of course, these few modifications made the metropolis look immensely different. The longer you lived there, though, the more you began to realize that it wasn’t all that changed.

That is, unless you were Commander Liz Shepard.

After she finished eying the silverware in front of her, she looked up at you in horror.

“I have no idea what any of this shit is for!” she whispered. She looked elegant in her civilian clothing, but never would someone have guessed that she felt as out of place as you.

“So much for fine cuisine. I’d rather eat some of the Mess Sergeant’s grub than figure out how the hell you’re supposed to waste so many utensils.”

Your waiter hadn’t even arrived yet, and you were starting to wonder why you were even here.

“You know what?” Shepard asked. “Let’s go back to the Normandy. This place isn’t exactly what I was expecting. Of course, I could always teach you about drive-thrus.”

“Anything sounds better than decoding human forks,” you joked.

Your failed attempt at a date ended abruptly, and you came to the conclusion that outings like this weren’t meant for people like you. You tried not to let it get to your head while you got out of your stiff chair. When Shepard took your arm like a helpless woman, you tried to pretend that everything had gone off without a hitch.

You didn’t want to feel bad about the whole situation. Hell, if you thought about it some more, it didn’t even have to be a “situation”.

There were bound to be some other romantic dates that would appeal to the both of you, anyway.

It didn’t take long for you to exit the eating establishment and enter your vessel again. The more time you spent on the Normandy, the more it felt like home. Finding it at the Enrique Aguilar Memorial Docking Station was a breeze considering that it was just across the street from the stiff location that you had just left.

When you got to the elevator, you took a deep breath and asked the question that had been bothering you since Shepard had mentioned it.

“You said you had something to tell me, didn’t you?”

She looked up at you and raised her eyebrows. It wasn’t as if she was eager to tell you what she had
been implying.

“I, uh, got a message from Admiral Hackett. He wants me to take care of some classified mission for him. It’s in the Terminus System and there’s a shit ton of Batarians who want an undercover Alliance researcher’s head.”

Your first response to her would have been no. If she had been any other woman, you would have said it automatically.

“I thought you and the Alliance weren’t in contact.” you mused.

“Hackett and I are...close. He mentioned that no other Spectre took the job and that I was the only option left. Considering all of this Cerberus bullshit, I’m lucky that they want me back.”

“Have you ever considered freelancing? The Normandy is yours, Commander.”

She looked at you and leaned against the elevator wall, which exposed her slender yet toned frame.

“I put it in the back of my mind a long time ago.” she replied with a sigh. “Contrary to what the public believes, I don’t have the money to independently operate a ship and fly across the galaxy to do good deeds. Rolling that way wouldn’t be my style.”

You nodded and watched as the elevator indicated what floor you were ascending to. If you were correct, Shepard had pressed the button that led to the Crew Deck.

“Is this a solo mission or do we need to reassemble the crew?”

You secretly hoped for an opportunity to tag team this scheme with Shepard. You had accompanied her on a majority of her galactic missions, but never before had it been the two of you. Somebody else had always been there for backup.

“Hackett said that it’s Spectre business, but now that the cat’s outta the bag, I don’t think there’s a problem with you tagging along. Who knows, I might need something calibrated.”

A devious smile played on her face, which wasn’t what you had been expecting. Your romantic skills were improving lately. You were able to pick up on her romantic cues a little easier, which made everything a lot less awkward.

“Reprimand me if I’m wrong, but I have a feeling that you aren’t talking about calibrating the guns.”

She responded with yet another spontaneous move which you hadn’t been anticipating. Her hand touched your cheek in an affectionate manner and she planted a kiss on your scruffy lips.

You could swear that her lips contained some sort of drug that made you crazy. When she pulled away, you pulled back with a hungry look in your eyes. Her eyes shared a mutual expression.

“Vakarian, you’d better know that my guns aren’t the only things that you need to calibrate on a regular basis.”

Your breath hitched, and you reached to the back of her dress to unzip it.

This ended in the zipper being torn off and discarded to the floor.

She worked just as hard to tear off your civilian clothing with a sudden burst of unexpected lust. You willingly accepted it without any sort of hesitation.
You took her down and she submitted without resisting, which was yet another thing that you loved about her. Cross-species intercourse awkwardness was now a thing of the past with you two.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian, and you had never anticipated doing it in an elevator.

You were also beginning to realize that you didn't mind surprises much anymore.

“So, Batarians and a covert mission? That sounds like a thing Liz would do.”

Your name was Joker Moreau and you felt like the entire story hadn’t been revealed to you.

Garrus had only explained one thing and you were having a hard time believing that Shepard got in trouble for telling him about a Spectre mission involving the Terminus System. That place was sketchy, but not sketchy enough for the Council to lock her up like she was a madwoman.

“Not now, Joker.”

Garrus’ attention had diverted to the feed again. He had stopped mid-story without explanation, and one couldn’t just start to tell a tale like that without finishing it.

“And besides, all of this took place before the Reapers. Something isn’t adding up!”

Your constant questioning didn’t impress the Turian in front of you, who promptly began to ignore you.

Your persistence was futile now. All you could do now was that same thing that he was doing.

Your name was Joker Moreau and you were still utterly confused.

Chapter End Notes

One day I swear I'll write a better love scene between our two protagonists. I promise.

:D
I apologize for this chapter's brevity. I didn't have time to write but I wanted to get something up.

School is out and I am done with exams, which means that I can get better chapters up daily! Yay!

xoxo

THR

Chapter 22

Your name was Liz Shepard, and the former Earth councilor’s office was starting to feel like a cross-species courtroom.

You were the defendant. Armed with two of the best lawyers in the business, you watched carefully while they stood by your side. Their arguments were fierce. Their retorts were relentless.

On the other side was the prosecution. Their sole mission was to see you rot in jail for the rest of your life. Some of them were more generous than others, but they all seemed to share a common goal.

You sighed and fidgeted in your seat. The faceoff between you and the Turian councilor had ended about ten minutes ago. Fantasizing about how this could be an excellent crime drama vid was the only thing that made this meeting interesting. It was an immature move for you and could potentially be the most stupid thing you had ever thought about at such a serious time. You had never cared for political or boardroom bullshit, though. Daydreaming was a coping mechanism.

At least that’s what you thought.

Instead of discussing your status as a supposed public menace, the Asari councilor was going on about how hostility during a meeting was intolerable. It seemed to be a pointless argument; these summits always seemed to end in either confusion or aggression. The Council’s intended purpose was not one of antagonism. In reality, it was anything but.

Councilor Irissa sat down after scolding everyone in the room. Her allotted period for droning on had ended and it was time to get back to the real purpose of the heated get-together.

“Now that we have an unexpected…guest here, I suppose we should at least give her a decent explanation as to why her fate was so unexpected.”

Your head perked up and you looked at the two men next to you. Hackett and Bailey had
You weren’t sure of their real intentions. As much as you wanted to believe that they were there to help you, you knew that some people weren’t always so kind. These men had been your friends and your colleagues. They had changed, but above all, you had changed more. If these changes were enough to sway their opinions about you, then you didn’t know what to say to them to convince them otherwise.

You thought about it for yet another brief moment and then realized something. Would these men really be here if they didn’t care? You didn’t answer this question and turned your focus to them.

Out of the two of them, Bailey was expressing the most emotion. His expression was one of unyielding anger. You could read it like a book: he didn’t want to be defending you, but he knew it was the right thing. He was a man of courage and some honesty. Above all, he was also someone you could call your comrade. As opposed as he was to helping you, he knew better than to leave you alone. It was some sort of a mutual respect that you couldn’t quite pinpoint.

You turned your glance to Admiral Hackett. For all the years that you had been under his command, the one thing that you could not decipher was his emotions. You had been able to see through every single one of the members of your squad. Hackett had never been under your command, though. He had been above you on each mission that you’ve commanded, and it was for a good reason.

He was unreadable. His stoic qualities were pristine and admirable as was his blue uniform. When you recalled your own identical uniform you wanted to sob.

His slate was clean.

It always had been.

Yours was cracked, covered in mud and smeared with blood.

“Shepard,” Irissa said, her voice soothing. You heard the words drip off of her tongue like raindrops gently hitting a spider web. You couldn’t let yourself be entranced by it.

*You couldn’t fall into the trap.*

“Before I tell you what happened to cause your outlandish living arrangements, I—“

“Spit it out, you purple bitch.” you spat.

You saw Councilor Quentius’ fists tighten again, signaling that you were pushing your luck. You felt like you couldn’t help yourself. If this was an excuse brought on by insanity, it would sure help with your case.

A firm hand placed itself on your shoulder, signaling that you needed to cut the attitude. It was coming from your right, which meant that it was Hackett.

“Keep talking.” asked Bailey.

The Asari across from you took a deep breath and shrugged off the insult with grace.

“Our reasoning behind your imprisonment is rather complicated. You see, combined with your Batarian mission and your destruction of the Council a few years ago. These grudges are hardly professional, however—“
“The Batarian mission? What the hell does that have to do with anything?”

Your tone had turned nasty. If your past insult hadn’t insulted Irissa, this interjection had.

With that, the Asari councilor lost her composure.

“If I hear another interruption from this defiled mess of a Commander, I’ll have her removed from this meeting! That’s enough!”

You thought about what she had just said regardless of what was going on around you. Her comment had sent the room into hysterics.

Unknown diplomats around you protested. The Turian councilor pounded his fists on the glass table and hurled insults at anyone who would listen. The Salarian councilor put her head in her hands. The Asari councilor left.

Your name was Liz Shepard, and you tried to keep the Batarian mission in your memory. You had killed so many in just a single day. It had been your last mission before the Reaper conflict.

You could even go as far to say that that mission was the last time you were able to fight stably.

Your name was Commander Shepard, and you had let the past two weeks melt away on the Normandy.

Until you were given any further intel on the assignment sent to you by Hackett, you were free to do as you pleased. He had tentatively given the assignment a title: Priority: Arrival. You hardly knew any additional information other than what you were initially given. You didn’t mind this one bit. You needed a semi-permanent shore leave, especially when it was on your own planet.

You spent the days pondering your next mission’s title and looking at the skylight above your bed. After spending so much time looking at blank space, a blue sky and flying cars was a change of pace that you welcomed with open arms.

As for Garrus, you never thought that being so close to someone could feel so good.

His touch was your weakness. His kisses, although not gentle, sent shivers down your spine.

Your connection was magnetic and knew no bounds. When you weren’t relaxing on your bed you were showing him around New York.

He had barely seen a fragment of the city. Most of the time you lacked the drive or energy to explore the depths of the great megalopolis.

What you did show him had him laughing and smiling. Seeing him so genuinely happy made you beam.

You had even found a spot that served real Turian food, which he had stocked up on.

Currently, he was eating said food and sitting at your desk while you gazed outside. Along with his eyes, you found yourself getting lost in your window.

You could see the New Empire State Building and the brightness of vid advertisements soaring high into the sky. The sun was setting, and this time it didn’t have the simulated colors of the Citadel. The blues ran into the purples and reds, and the way the lights from sky cars refracted off of the tall buildings made your eyes sparkle. As corrupt as the city was, it was okay if you could forget about
that. Despite the pollution, crime and deception, this place was your home.

Earth was your home and it was good to be back.

“You love this city, don’t you?” he asked from across the room. “I see it in your eyes every time you look out there or take me out.”

You glanced at your boyfriend and watched as he consumed a traditional Turian dish, which looked something along the lines of sashimi to you. Whatever it was, it looked unappetizing to you.

You sauntered over to the desk and looked over his shoulder. Next to the plate of food was a datapad of information about Arrival.

“You’re reading that?” you asked. You allowed your hands to massage his tired shoulders, which were bare. He had stopped wearing civilian clothes while on the private decks of the Normandy. You had gotten used to his scaly upper half and muscular arms. You could let your hands wander across them all day, along with his metallic carapace. It was a natural wonder for you. No matter how many times you saw it, you were still fascinated.

Every part of Garrus made you wonder. He still captured your imagination just as much as the city below you did. His skin was more vivid than the sunset in ways that nobody else would understand. Greens and browns clashed with the blue markings on his face. His expressions were more entertaining to watch than the vid ads.

He put the datapad on the other side of the desk and grunted contentedly as you worked your magic upon his shoulders.

“I was thinking that maybe accompanying you would be realistic. I mean, if you really were serious about the calibrations and all.”

The flirty tone in his voice made your heart skip a beat. He had started to be more romantic with you.

The break was having a positive effect on him. Of course he was still disciplined, but he had even gone as far as to initiate sex and order an extra bottle of champagne when you were telling EDI what to have purchased back down on Earth.

These things might have been trivial in the mind of an average person. Although neither of you were average, it was nice to think that you could be.

You could have a normally functioning inter-species relationship, and it was absolutely beautiful.

“You’d better believe that I want you to come with me.” you replied while running one of your free hands up the horns that protruded out of the back of his head. “There’s no Shepard without Vakarian.” He grunted again, but this time it was filled with even more pleasure.

“But you’re also a commander who I know can handle herself. I just figured that I could throw in a bullet or two if you need it.”

This comment elicited a chuckle out of you.

“Sweetie, you know I always need extra ammo.”

As per usual, your romantic moment was put to a halt because of work.
“Commander, we have the Conference Room synced to Alliance channels. You may now speak to Admiral Hackett on vid comm. He has requested to meet you in person if possible.”

Garrus and you groaned in unison and directed your attention up to the ceiling, which was where EDI’s speaker was.

“I gotcha. Thanks, EDI.”

“Oh, and Shepard?”

You raised your eyebrow at Garrus, who shrugged and went back to finishing his meal.

“Yeah?”

“The Admiral seems to be in a good mood. Asking him about Mr. Vakarian’s attendance on the mission would be advisable at this time.”

You laughed again, and this time it sounded a bit more jocund.

“You’re the best, EDI.”

“I am always executing tasks at optimal performance, Commander. Thank you.”

Within the period of a minute, the environment had lost its sense of freedom. You were on duty again, although it did not involve shooting guns or sitting between two opposing delegates.

You were in no place to argue, though. You couldn’t help when duty called.

“Good luck up there, Shepard.” Garrus said between bites. “And don’t forget to come down for dinner. I had EDI order up some dish called sashimi…she said that you’d like the restaurant.”

You walked to the elevator and gave him a wink.

Your name was Commander Shepard, and for once you could say that you truly did not want to leave the Normandy.
Chapter Notes

Ahhh I really enjoyed writing this. I'm gonna go play ME1 after this because I'm like 99% sure it's done downloading! Yay!

xoxo
THR

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 23

Enter: K.A.

Your name was Commander Shepard and you had just pressed the button that activated vid comm access between you and Admiral Steven Hackett.

The sun was setting outside but you couldn’t see it. You were trapped in a windowless room. It wouldn’t have been so bad considering the history you had with it. This room held remnants of conversations that you preferred to not relive.

It reminded you of how you let yourself fall victim to an organization with an agenda that consisted of anything but amiability.

Although you had made it out and reached your goal in the end, you could never forgive yourself for working with Cerberus. You knew that you had made more than one questionable decision in your career. Your ruthless reputation made you prone to making decisions that were not the most ideal. People questioned your morals constantly. You were capable of getting jobs done that way.

Lacking morals helped you make the decisions that you did. It wasn’t like you didn’t have a compass to guide your ethics; this compass of yours was just deeper inside of your body than other people. Your conscience was merely quieter than others, as well. It would speak when it was necessary.

Admiral Hackett had to be aware of your Cerberus relations. You had severed all ties with the organization, but they had rebuilt you. It would have been rash of you to be ungrateful for their efforts, which you weren’t. Even though they remade the Normandy and retrieved your friends for you, their reputation as a business would still remain tainted in your mind.
This was a contradictory opinion, and you didn’t tell anybody about your feelings about them. For all you knew, Hackett may not trust you entirely anymore because of Cerberus. Maybe he thought that they had implanted a goddamn chip in your brain.

If he felt like this, you were determined to tell him that the only kind of chip in your body was an L2. There wasn’t anything he had to worry about.

You wanted to stop doubting your favorite admiral’s opinion about you. He was a trustworthy man and you could say that he was one of the few people that you aspired to be one day.

“Shepard, is that you?”

You looked up and beamed at the man in front of you. You gave him a respectable salute which he waved off.

“Admiral, it’s great to hear your voice again. EDI told me that you’d like to see me in person?”

Hackett crossed his arms and leaned against what looked like a desk chair. You couldn’t see the environment around him, but it looked promising.

“If that’s possible,” he replied. “I’m based in Vancouver right now and I’d like to see you face to face. It’s nothing mandatory, of course. I’d like to check on your condition. I’ve also got a few special visitors that wish to meet with you again.”

You furrowed your brows. Did “reviewing your condition” really mean that he didn’t trust you? This couldn’t be the case.

Instead of focusing on the negative, you continued to keep a content expression and address his other comment.

“Visitors? Are we talking dignitaries or ambassadors?”

Admiral Hackett chuckled before composing himself and uncrossing his arms.

“I’m afraid not. These visitors are a little closer to home than you’re expecting.”

His last sentence puzzled you. What did he mean by that? Perhaps it was an old Normandy crew member. Your first thought was Thane, but you quickly disregarded it.

“Speaking of close to home, I was wondering if I could ask a favor.”

The admiral stroked his chin and nodded.

“Considering the danger of this mission, I was considering putting in a request for a partner. Is that possible?”

“This is strictly and Alliance-Spectre based mission. We’ve teamed up with the Citadel on this. If possible, we could attempt to get you another Spectre to share the responsibilities, although—“

“I want Garrus Vakarian as my partner for Arrival.”

You watched as Hackett paused for a long moment. He didn’t say anything at first, which was alarming to say the least.

“Mr. Vakarian…he’s a rogue Turian C-Sec agent, isn’t he?”
You didn’t want to say yes, but you nodded anyway. Hackett nodded back and the whole environment became edgy.

“He went rogue for his own purposes. He’s got the best shot in the galaxy and he’s—“

“He’s your romantic partner, is he not?”

You froze at his statement.

How did he know?

You wrung your hands when you felt them start to get clammy. The room’s darkness was closing in around you. You loved Garrus dearly, but why did you not want anyone else to know about him? Was he a precious secret that you wanted to keep for security or an embarrassment that you wanted to hide?

No.

You love this man.

It was nothing more than stupid embarrassment.

You took a gulp of air and ignored the pressuring environment around you. You were breaking out into a cold sweat and you tried to pretend like it didn’t matter.

“Yes, he is. I’m pretty damn proud of it, too. I assure you that it won’t impact the mission in any way that isn’t positive. We work well as a team. He also assisted me in defeating the Collectors.”

Hackett sighed and rubbed his forehead. You couldn’t read him and you were praying that he was about to tell you yes.

“We’ll have to discuss this at Vancouver when you arrive. This is the Alliance, not Cerberus. I’ll send you a shuttle shortly. Commander, I’d like to make sure you know that this isn’t a personal matter. We can discuss it further upon your arrival. Hackett out.”

You pressed the button to turn off the vid comm and slammed your fists down on the console.

“God fucking damn it!”

Your hands collided with the metal, which initially didn’t hurt. It took a few seconds for the pain of the hit to set in, but you figured that you deserved it. You had fucked up this time.

You figured that you were making a big deal out of nothing. You tried to tell yourself that but it didn’t seem to be working.

You had let Garrus down yet again. He would be stranded alone while you were on a mission in the Terminus System. God only knew how dangerous it would be to mess around with Batarians.

The guilt you felt was unnecessary. You didn’t know this, though.

Your name was Commander Shepard, and you were going to have to tell Garrus that you wouldn’t be able to make it to dinner.

Your name was Admiral Steven Hackett and you had had enough.
Watching Commander Shepard get grilled by the Turian councilor had been brutal. You had exerted all of your energy to not raise your voice.

Hearing the damn Asari in front of you preach about proper summit rules had been agonizing. Your knuckles had turned white from clenching your fists. The room had gotten cold, and it wasn’t from the temperature.

Hearing everyone on the Council argue over the most pointless things had drawn the line for you. Using the most stable demeanor that you could muster, you stood up and cleared your throat. When the diplomats and councilors refused to listen, you used the voice you normally reserved for talking to new grunts that lacked the capability to shut up.

“Excuse me!” you bellowed. Your voice resonated throughout the room and bounced off of the glass interior. Everyone broke into complete silence and you couldn’t help feeling proud.

“Before all of you begin to continue to make this meeting difficult, I’d like to restore some order. I understand the logistics behind your reasoning to imprison Shepard, but why would you do it in such a way?”

Shepard looked up at you with a confused glare. She was in the dark once again.

She didn’t know the real reason behind her second imprisonment yet.

In fact, out of everyone in the entire room, she was the only one that didn’t know.

In your opinion, she should be the single one that should know.

The Salarian councilor, who had remained mostly quiet throughout the meeting, finally said something intelligent.

“Do you intend to tell this woman the real cause of this drama? If not, I’d highly recommend escorting her back to her cell.”

You looked down at Shepard again, who was staring you down with her sullen, bloodshot eyes. Whether or not she was ready, you were about to tell her the real story about everything.

Your name was Admiral Steven Hackett, and what you were about to say was not pretty.

Your name was Joker Moreau and you had your hands pressed together in your lap, which was rather difficult to do with your arm in a sling.

You hadn’t been this quiet since you had been working on EDI’s files alone in your apartment. These moments were much tenser, though.

You sneaked a glance at Garrus, who had used his omni-tool to route the video feed to Shepard’s TV. It was easier to watch now, which also meant that his emotions were more intense.

He watched with a careful eye as his girlfriend was put in the hot seat. If you had been in the same position as him you wouldn’t know what to do. You wanted to say that you would be right by EDI’s side.

You paused at your last thought.

Had you really just referred to EDI as your girlfriend?
You dismissed the thought. It was pathetic of you to think that.

She wasn’t a robot in any way other than her physical features.

Your focus was soon back on Garrus and his overwhelming support for Liz. The conversation in Udina’s former office had nothing to do with the two dead Turians anymore.

It was the analysis of Shepard’s imprisonment.

As you listened to Admiral Hackett speak you began to feel more animosity for the Council. You had feared the worst, but this was far less than that.

It was downright scandalous.

Garrus was sitting on the edge of his seat. Every so often one of his mandibles would twitch in anger. In a normal situation you would be laughing at it. This situation, however, was no laughing matter.

“There’s no way that it should have happened like this.” he growled. “We need to get this exposed!”

You listened to the words that the Turian next to you uttered.

_Expose it._

It didn’t take long for you to get an idea.

It was an idea that terrified you more than entering the Omega 4 Relay. Its consequences were deep and never ending. If executed, it could mean the end of you.

If it meant the end, it would also mean that Shepard would be at least somewhat liberated.

“I’m going to call EDI and tell her to broadcast this on the Citadel news streams.” you announced. “It’s a hellish plan but I can’t think of anything else that could get the word out.”

Garrus turned to you in shock. His jaw was practically open and he didn’t say anything at first.

“Joker,” he said, his voice raw. “That’s the most irrational plan I’ve ever heard of. I say we do it.”

You stood up in disbelief, which hurt your legs to an extent. Garrus was one of the most logical people you ever met. He thought through things and was overly regimented. He was anything but spontaneous. Your idea, although impractical, posed an opportunity that was crazy, outlandish but also brilliant. You had the capability to expose the whole Citadel to Shepard’s struggles. They could know the real reason why the Council was holding back.

“You’re sure that you’re not kidding, right? I mean, I know it’s crazy, but—”

“If it means justice for Shepard, I’m in. I’m not letting the Council getting away with stabbing her in the back one more time. I love her, goddamn it. She’s not going to go through this alone. She’s going to have the whole Citadel fighting with her. And when I’m rotting in jail for doing something this stupid, I’ll have a smile on my face the entire time.”

You put your finger up to your ear to activate your communications with EDI.

“There’s no turning back. Are you just saying all of this to be gutsy?”

Your question made him pound his hand on the firm white couch.
“Contact EDI and do it!” he ordered. “Do it for Shepard and I’ll take the blame!”

Garrus had never been so straightforward and hostile towards you. You were aware that he wasn’t entirely fond of you, but his fervor for Shepard was apparent. You didn’t take his antipathy offensively.

All you did was issue an order yourself.

“EDI,” you called, your voice shaky. “Do you have the capabilities to broadcast this feed into the Citadel’s television stations?”

There wasn’t a response at first. The both of you held your breath in anticipation.

“I’ll try my best.” a mechanical voice replied.

Your name was Joker Moreau and you were hoping that you wouldn’t regret this decision.

You were a man who was visiting the Citadel, but your name wasn’t important yet.

You were keeping your usual seat at Apollo’s Café warm. In front of you was a breakfast plate consisting of bacon, eggs, and an unscrupulous bottle of imported German lager. The Presidium was gorgeous in the morning, hence why you made a point of visiting the Commons to have breakfast when you visited. This place brought back memories that once plagued you. Over the past year you had changed your feelings towards these recollections, though. Remembrances that once haunted you had turned into pleasant dreams that you longed to relive.

You had been a special solider in the Reaper War. You were a Sentential as well as a solider of valor for the Alliance.

You had also earned the privilege of serving on the Normandy SR-2 during that time.

Your life had changed dramatically since then. You didn’t tote guns or stun people with your biotic talents anymore. Instead of blasting across the galaxy, you kept a nice home in Vancouver away from the bustle of real life. Your parents, who had insisted on purchasing you an apartment for all of your contributions during the war, were safe and sound. You visited with them on a regular basis and even went through a few flings with some Earth girls.

Who knew biotics could be used to woo the ladies?

You sipped on your pint generously while crunching on a piece of your bacon. The news was playing in front of you as well.

Much to your distaste, not a lot of interesting events were happening on the Citadel. The reason why you had chosen to visit now was unknown to you. Vancouver was your true home, but you saw nothing wrong with visiting the infamous spaceship every now and then. You liked to see the rebuilding process in person and you had the miniscule hope that you might run into someone from your Normandy days. You didn’t quite care about whom you met. You just wanted to know that at least some of them were safe and that you could reminisce again. Telling the same stories to women back home could only get so entertaining.

As the male newscaster droned on about the newest Blasto movie, you saw a blip on the screen. It looked like a brief second of static, which you shrugged off.

You continued to listen in a nonchalant way until it happened again.
This process repeated for a good minute. The static got longer and longer each time and began to form a picture after thirty seconds.

From what you could piece together, it looked like an interference.

Eventually, this static turned into a full on station hack.

You analyzed the video stream that was going on in front of you and looked on in shock.

It looked almost as if there was a large summit taking place in the former human councilor’s office.

It also looked like Commander Shepard was sitting in on it.

You shook your head. There was no way that was her. With a reluctant squint, you couldn’t say no.

That was your commander.

Beside her were Bailey and Hackett. They were honorable men as well, and you couldn’t help getting up and moving forward to listen to the feed’s audio like everyone else was.

You pushed through the small crowd that had developed in front of the broadcast screen.

“The Batarians wouldn’t forgive us for Shepard’s destruction of their people and their relay! Stopping the Reapers wasn’t enough and they wouldn’t stand for just having her cooped up on Vancouver before the war officially started. They came and threatened us afterwards when we got ahead on rebuilding the Citadel. ‘Make her face the consequences or we’ll get everyone in Terminus to undo the restoration to your useless shithole of a ship!’ That’s an exact quote! How were we supposed to make any other sacrifice?! Shepard was wrong no matter what Hackett ordered her to do!”

Your name was Kaiden Alenko, and as you watched the Turian councilor speak, you didn’t want to know what was going on around you.

Everyone else gasped, and you felt like it was up to you to put together the pieces of this complicated puzzle.

Chapter End Notes

I really hope that this isn’t getting hard to follow. I would suggest learning about the Arrival DLC for ME2. It will help a lot until I get into the real meat of the plot.
Chapter Notes

There really isn't much to say about this chapter. Please enjoy. :D
xoxo
THR

Chapter 24

Your name was Commander Shepard. In one hand you had a takeout box that had a few pieces of sashimi stored away for later. Your other one was being encased by a hand that was bigger than yours and had but three fingers instead of five.

You shifted uncomfortably in your shuttle seat, which didn’t feel soft against your seldom used armor. You hadn’t worn the protective suit since going against the Collectors. Although that event had gone on just a month prior you felt as though it had been an eternity ago.

Instead of slaughtering aliens you were now on your way to Vancouver. Being on Earth again was an achievement in and of itself.

Being there with Garrus was entirely different.

When you had stormed back into your room after your conversation with the Admiral, he put an apologetic hand on your shoulder while you searched for your gear. Wearing it to meet Hackett would be comparable to a businessman wearing his finest suit for his performance review with his boss. You had wanted to dress to impress. None of this had exited your mouth.

“Let me come with you,” he had said in a gentle voice. He knew that this worked when you were angry. He hadn’t known why you were so out of sorts when you arrived back, but this didn’t stop him from being reassuring. “At least let me meet the man in person.”

You allowed him to come with you for a variety of reasons, but him being there to hold your hand on the ride there was good enough for you.

When you had been in your room throwing on your breastplate, he went to his former quarters to dig out his own. He was still there for you and he would never know how much you appreciated it.

You lacked the courage to tell the Turian next to you the real reason behind your anger back on the Normandy, which was still docked in New York. Telling him that his chances were slim wasn’t an easy task. Instead of having your normal keen attitude, you had resorted to waiting until the last
minute. As far as he was concerned, his attendance on the mission wasn’t going to be a problem. You didn’t want to give him false hope, but relaying information like that wasn’t your strong point. Sure, you had been able to do it while he was on your crew. Your crew was nonexistent now and there was no reason for you to give him a full blown pep talk. Perhaps you just didn’t want to make him upset. Even if you did, you knew he would fight for his position to work alongside you no matter what.

A sudden jolt signaled that the shuttle had landed. You were now in the state known as Canada, which was a part of the United North American States. More specifically, you were in the metropolis known as Vancouver. It was now the headquarters for Alliance operations due to its beautiful surroundings and fairly mild climate due to the global warming conflicts. You had never gotten the chance to visit there and you assumed that Garrus hadn’t either.

“Commander, there’s a car waiting for you and your guest at the main terminal a few meters past the shopping district. Welcome to Vancouver, British Columbia.”

The doors beside you opened in a dramatic fashion and it was clear that you had docked at a terminal that was attempting to mimic the Zakera Ward on the Citadel. Cars upon cars piled up near shuttles like yours in docking areas which led out to places to shop. The one thing that separated this place from Zakera was the wonderful sunshine that poured through the windows. It was still mid-afternoon here and you couldn’t ask for anything more. The sun coated everything in a light yellow halo that had provided you with a pseudo-welcoming atmosphere.

If you were going to have a rough meeting with Hackett, at least you could do it in a somewhat tranquil setting.

You exited the shuttle along with your partner and watched as it flew away to dock at a different station. You seized the opportunity to look at your new location with a bit of zeal.

People were bustling around and they all seemed to look rather ecstatic. It was as if none of them had ever heard of anything along the lines of mercenaries, pirates or even Reapers.

It was odd seeing such a large group of people in such a good mood. Shopkeepers handed over souvenirs to small children. Some of them eagerly went back to find their parents while others zoomed around the shopping complex. Adults laughed and chattered with beverages in hand while lovers nibbled at each other’s necks and kissed cheeks. Information brokers sat at advanced looking terminals while other upscale merchants showed their wares on visual display units.

Soldiers were intermixed with the civilians. There was an equal amount of men and women. A few of them were limping or obviously wounded. A majority of them were as jolly as could be. A small crowd walked by while still in uniform cheering something that you couldn’t decode. They must have been headed off to a bar of some sort.

Much to your surprise, there were even some aliens mixed in with the humans. Seeing everyone interact without any sort of incidents was a bit odd to you. You might have even said that it was the slightest bit scary.

You weren’t about to protest despite the false cheeriness that surrounded the docking depot. You had other things to be concerned about, such as whether or not you could get Garrus on board with Arrival.

“Is it me or is this place a little too over-emotional?”

Garrus was standing behind you with his arms crossed. He wasn’t exactly shocked to see such
activity. He had been across the galaxy and back.

“I don’t like it either,” you responded while eying the transportation terminal that your driver had pointed out to you. “I think we’ve been around too much gloominess to remember what happy is.”

When you turned your attention back to your boyfriend, he was already walking towards the car that was waiting for you across the expansive shopping space. He turned around after noticing that you weren’t initially following.

It didn’t take you long to catch up, but when he did, your anger was thawed.

Just like all of the other lovers around you, he pulled you into a tight embrace and held your armored hand to his chest.

Regardless of all of the metal encasing your body, his warmth still radiated through to your bones. The butterflies were in your heart again and you smiled up at him. He still made you feel so bubbly and you could never pinpoint the exact reason why.

In moments like this you preferred to keep these reasons a mystery.

“Here’s to hoping that gloomy isn’t a word we have to use in the next few months. Deal?”

And, with that, you became just like all of the other couples in the vicinity. No matter how many people gawked or frowned on you, you wouldn’t let it bring you down.

When Garrus Vakarian bent down and kissed you, you forgot about the very reason why you were in Vancouver to begin with.

Your name was Commander Shepard, and you only uttered one word between your kisses.

“Deal.”

Your name was EDI and never before had you found a meeting to be so interesting. You could recall when Shepard had told you to take notes during her summits with the intergalactic leaders during the war. Those, although amusing, had never truly sparked your interest. Although they had been as controversial as all get out, you couldn’t have predicted the scandalous encounter between Shepard and the Council that was happening as you thought.

You were watching the meeting go on just like everyone else on the Citadel now was. Contrary to what others may believe, you thought that streaming the meeting across the space station had been a wise move. You found yourself with more humanlike thoughts now than ever before, which meant that your capabilities to discern your own opinions were stronger than they had been on the Normandy. Although your intention was to be unbiased, you couldn’t help rooting for Shepard.

You ran minimal scans with your unsatisfactory technology and determined that your original feed was now being broadcasted throughout the official Citadel networks. The Council must not have been aware of the interference. If they had been they would have sued the networks’ programs off the air already.

You knew the story behind the Council’s betrayal of Shepard. In fact, you had known for a long time. Being an AI gave you certain capabilities that made file hacking a breeze. Despite this, you decided to tune into a newsfeed to see what the media was doing with the story.

Your name was EDI, and as you listened to the stream intently, you continued to question whether or
not you did the right thing.

Your name was Tanya Thompson and you were convinced that today was the day that you would get your big break.

You worked for the Citadel NewsNet and had been hired a few months ago to replace the late Emily Wong. Wong had been a well respected reporter who had allegedly committed suicide during the Reaper War. She had covered all sorts of stories across the Citadel, but perhaps her best known feat was befriended Commander Shepard. It was obvious that the first human Spectre didn’t have good relations with anyone in the media. Emily Wong had defied that stereotype, though.

News about the Commander had been sparse lately. All that had been known was that she was mentally unstable and could in fact be deceased.

All of that had changed in the blink of an eye.

It started with a network interference.

The company execs watched carefully as the plot unfolded. The normal news broadcast had changed on televisions across the Citadel. Instead of hearing about box office results, viewers were getting an inside look in the former Earth councilor’s office. In it was the Council, high ranking officials and the one person the entire galaxy had been searching for: Commander Liz Shepard. The footage was raw and was being provided by some hacker. As illegal as it was, the broadcasters were all over it. This was like media gold.

Just five minutes ago an assistant had handed you the script to memorize. You were the one that got to report on the Shepard story. This was your first major story that you had ever received and it was going to be huge.

As you read over the document in front of you and repeated the words in your head, a makeup artist powdered your face and got you ready for the limelight.

“This is it.” you told yourself. “Don’t fuck it up.”

You soon found yourself in the hot seat. The cameras in front of you were about to roll and you kept your focus on the teleprompter.

And, with that, you began to speak.

“This is Tanya Thompson with the Citadel NewsNet. This morning we are broadcasting a little early to give you a special update on a woman who has undoubtedly impacted all of our lives: the disgraced Commander Shepard.”

Your voice was engaging and upbeat just like you had practiced. Everything seemed to be going right so far.

“Early this morning a source indicated to us that Liz Shepard had been incarcerated for a period of a year in a Citadel penthouse for unknown reasons. Last night it was reported that she exited the residence after causing some problems with her biotics. Her and her rumored lover, former C-Sec agent Garrus Vakarian, made their way to Purgatory for a night out. Witnesses at the bar claimed that Shepard looked a little ‘out of sorts’ and ‘troubled’. These reports must have been true considering that she was arrested and charged with causing the involuntary manslaughter of two Turian men. Later this morning, she was released from captivity to attend her own case meeting. In attendance was the Council, Commander Armando-Owen Bailey of C-Sec, Admiral Steven Hackett
of the Alliance and other important dignitaries. Just a half hour ago an interference caused our
airwaves to broadcast this classified meeting. The stream is credited to an unknown hacker who will
remain anonymous until further notice. From this footage we learned many things, such as the
reasoning behind the Commander’s two imprisonments. According to the spontaneous recording of
the summit, the Batarians ordered the double incarceration periods due to a covert Spectre mission
that Shepard led before the Reaper war. This mission led to the destruction of the Alpha Relay and
an entire Batarian system. Shepard’s supposed mental torture was the Batarian’s requested form of
retribution, which the Council obliged to.”

You looked away from the teleprompter when you saw a crewman waving his hands.

“Stop!” he mouthed silently. The expression on your face looked horrified.

The man that was manning the hovering camera then began to speak to you.

“We lost the signal. It looks like someone’s trying to block us from broadcasting! We got the story
but everything else is lost…”

Your name was Tanya Thompson, and you weren’t sure whether you had failed or succeeded.
What you did know was that the entire Citadel was now aware of what happened to Shepard, and
they weren’t about to let it slide.

Your name was Kaiden Alenko and you had forgotten about finishing your breakfast.

Thoughts were swirling around in your head and you didn’t know how to address them. Even if you
were aware of how to decode them, it was too loud for you to even consider thinking.

A mob had formed around the small television that was in the outdoor space that comprised Apollo’s
Café. People were yelling in protest and in happiness.

Before you could comprehend what you were making yourself do, you moved out of the crowded
space and tried to think of the first rational thing that you could do.

*Go back to your apartment and sort this out.*

Your name was Kaiden Alenko and you did just that.

There were some calls that you needed to make and they weren’t going to be easy.
Chapter Notes

I'm happy to say that this story now qualifies for NaNoWriMo and is over 50K! I am so proud. :D

xoxo
THR

Chapter 25

Your name was Commander Shepard and you were starting to feel a little more at home.

Admiral Hackett’s office at the Alliance Headquarters was flawless. Its beauty rivaled the Presidium’s finest locations. The room was expansive to the point of excessiveness. While you sat in a luxurious chair you pondered your surroundings while you still had the chance. This place seemed to be more believable than what you had seen before exiting the shopping terminal. People didn’t look so happy here. Perhaps it was your military attitude that was overtaking you, but you felt more at home when you were with the Alliance. It was better than running from Cerberus and the Illusive Man. The stability gave you security and made you feel more humble when it came to your choices. Coming back to the Alliance instead of freelancing with your boyfriend, an AI a stealth ship still seemed like a good idea.

Or, at least it felt like it was the right decision.

Behind Hackett’s desk was a set of long windows that gave you and Garrus a picturesque panorama of Vancouver. It was a busy city; however it did not rival New York when it came to traffic. It was a little more rustic and you tried to appreciate it. You could even see a few trees off in the distance. Non-isolated greenery was a rarity on Earth. The environment was so controlled and structured everywhere else.

Sometimes you longed for the freedom of something that wasn’t so contained. You wonder if that was why you hadn’t left Cerberus earlier.

Had you tried to create a personal rebellion against the Alliance by doing that?

The Alliance was like a parent to you. They had been there since the beginning and had trained you so you could bring some success to the galaxy in the name of humanity. They stood behind you and went to great lengths to put you on a pedestal. They could welcome you back with open arms or
turn you away, but their respect was ultimately what you would always strive to achieve.

This analogy would have fit if you had had a better childhood experience.

Nonetheless, you felt like going against the grain was in your subconscious. People around here knew what kind of person you were.

Sure, you could be rigid, but that didn’t mean that you had to follow the rules.

A hand was placed on your armored leg and it was then that you realized that it had been shaking.

“I never thought I’d see you nervous. Last time you shook like that was when the Council sprung the Spectre title on you.”

You wanted to smile at Garrus’ teasing but something was stopping you. You had an ominous feeling about something and you weren’t sure what it was. This bothered you to no end and you desperately looked for some form of comfort.

You found it by looking out at the trees.

They swayed in the most nonchalant way possible. They didn’t have to worry about saying lives or being on hit lists. They were living, breathing things that lived to help others in a way that didn’t hurt people. They didn’t have to take people down or—

“Commander Shepard, it’s good to see that you arrived safely. I see you brought the Turian.”

As if on cue, Admiral Hackett entered the room with two bodyguards following behind him. This man was the most respected person in all of humanity. If you fucked this up too you didn’t know what would happen next.

Garrus stood up before you did and nodded his head at the Admiral while you followed his lead and offered a salute. The guards were quickly dismissed and it was time to get down to business.

You could tell that Hackett was looking you over and comparing you with your former self. Not even you knew if you measured up.

“You seem to be in fine shape, Commander. That doesn’t mean you’ll get to bypass your physical, though. Those L2s aren’t giving you trouble, are they?”

“No, sir. It’s a pleasure to see you again. I was hoping that we could discuss what we were discussing earlier.”

The way you could turn your diplomatic voice on and off was something that you prided yourself on. You wish that this situation would have a more natural informality, but you weren’t setting your expectations high.

Hackett picked up on your congeniality and warmly welcomed it. It was different compared to the attitude you had given to your superiors in your younger days. You had been nothing but respectful to the Admiral before. At least he was noticing it now.

“I’d love to usher in that subject a little later. I also want to catch up but I’m afraid that our visitors aren’t keen on waiting for you. They’ve got a packed schedule.”

When he said this you made an assumption. These so-called “visitors” were likely rich fans who had lives that were even busier than yours. They could also be government officials who wanted to
commend you just asking for a future favor wouldn’t be so impolite.

“Are they part of the Shepard fanclub?” you asked halfheartedly.

To your surprise, the Admiral laughed at your remark.

“I think it would be fair for me to say that they started it.”

The door behind you opened and a woman that you knew all too well walked in. She looked drastically different compared to the last time that you had seen her. Her hair, like yours, was knotted into an intricate bun. Instead of possessing its old strawberry blonde hue it had turned as white as the smog outside. The dress on her thin frame was as monotonously colored as her hair. Although her skin was wrinkled in a few places and her cheeks were gaunt, she maintained an air of professionalism and cheerfulness that could be found in a much younger woman. The only bit of color on her body was evident in her omni-tool, which, unlike others, glowed a bright blue. Her brown eyes practically smiled at you in a way that they never had before. Every other time you had met those eyes they had given you nothing but disapproval and shame. When you looked at her face you saw yourself.

That scared you.

After she had entered the room, a monstrous man with glasses followed. He appeared to be younger than the woman and it was clear that he must have served for the Alliance at some point in his life. Pockmarks and scars dotted his face and detracted from what used to be his good looks, but he didn’t seem to be the kind of man that cared about those sorts of matters. He had given many people a good beat down but had also managed to make the most innocent of children smile. His sideburns were going as white as his wife’s hair while the rest of his locks were slicked back and were tinted a dark auburn. He also had an omni-tool at his arm, which looked to be a very advanced model. And, as if this man wasn’t intimidating enough, he had a teal aura around him.

He was a powerful biotic and you had been made aware of this at a young age.

“I’m assuming you know these two very well. They’ve joined the Alliance the head of our Technical Services Department. Their philanthropy and intelligence make them an asset to our team and they wish to endow you with a new omni-tool for Arrival.”

You wanted to tear apart whoever sent these people here.

Their jolly stares burned into your flesh no matter how protected you were. As much as you didn’t want to admit it, they had hurt you more than you had hurt them.

You had left to join the Alliance. They had chastised you relentlessly and you hadn’t spoken to them since.

There were no words for your feelings anymore. Your legs shook and you could see Garrus’ eyes were widening ever so slightly. Even he knew who these people were.

“Elizabeth, is that you?” the woman asked, her voice gentle. “I can’t recognize you behind all of that protective gear.” That tone could have made every other child in the world happy. To them it meant that a better life was about to come to them.

To you it meant that all hell was about to break loose.

“I didn’t think you’d get so far without our help, Commander.”
After hearing that line from the man that you had once been close to, you stood up and sent the chair behind you flying into a wall. Your own body began to glow as blue as the man a few feet away from you.

“You have no right you call me Commander you selfless prick!”

Your name was Commander Shepard, and it was safe to say that you never got along with your parents.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you had just learned the truth behind your fate.

You had also developed a permanent grudge against Batarians.

What had happened made sense now.

No matter how crazed and diseased you supposedly were, not even you were stupid enough to not believe what Admiral Hackett had just stated.

You had destroyed a mass relay and eliminated a Batarian outpost and incinerated an entire system. It was your fault and there was no reason to let it slide.

It was a bad decision. You were aware of this.

But inducing psychological terror from an empty threat? It wasn’t right nor would you forgive neither the Council nor the entire Batarian species. You were normally welcoming to aliens, but your liberated attitude was now in the toilet.

Instead of protesting or screaming against what had happened, you did something else. Some would say that it was a mature move for you to make while others would call you crazy.

You were staring at something to distract yourself.

In the corner of the room was something that you had not noticed upon your abrupt arrival with Commander Bailey.

It was a camera.

It was small and finicky and you weren’t surprised that the meeting was being taped or something along those lines. At first you shrugged it off.

That is, until you noticed that its tiny red light never turned off.

“Shepard!”

The call to attention was a shock and you practically sprung back into the conversation.

“Sir?”

Commander Bailey glared at you while waiting for a response. You narrowed your eyes as a signal to him, which he chose not to pick up on.

“Are you clear with what the Admiral explained?”

Truth be told, you weren’t. You would never be clear with what happened and you weren’t going to accept it.
But you were going to force yourself to.

“I don’t think there’s anything left to discuss here, Commander!” interjected the Turian councilor. “This woman is insane and needs to be convicted! Her input means nothing!”

“Sir, I wasn’t finished speaking!”

Everyone directed their attention to Hackett, who had bellowed across the office.

“This woman doesn’t need to be the victim of false accusations. Considering the things she’s done for all of you, I think she’s earned a pardon regardless of her crimes! This woman that you’re trying to throw away was the first human Spectre and defeated Saren, the Collectors and the Reapers! How many times do I have to plead her case to this delusional Council?! At least give the poor woman another chance!”

Silence overtook the room and everyone was lost in thought.

They all knew that your insanity wasn’t your own fault. Whether or not they would admit it was up to them.

Without seeking the permission of the other councilors, the Asari councilor stood up and looked you in the eye.

“I hereby grant the former Commander Shepard a psychological analysis before any form of punishment is inflicted upon her. This meeting is obviously not accomplishing anything right now and I would like to request a delay.”

Knowing that the Turian councilor would never agree, she turned to the Salarian. They needed a two thirds agreement to delay the mock trial to a later date.

“I agree.”

Those two words that came from her mouth were never so relieving.

Your name was Liz Shepard, and while you had an extreme distaste for Batarians, you were also finding that you really did have a thing for Asari and even Salarians.

Your name was Kaiden Alenko and you were happy that you were a Spectre.

Like your biotics, it was a good thing to abuse for the right reasons. Although the position was romanticized, the perks behind it were real. You worked above the law and everyone respected you for it.

You had access to every file and you read every single one that had to do with Shepard.

You paid careful attention to the case file from her incident from the previous evening.

Two Turians killed. One by choking with biotic assistance and the other by an omni-tool stab.

It didn’t take you long to realize that this wasn’t your Commander.

Your Commander wouldn’t slaughter anyone without reason. Even after being tampered with by Cerberus you were well aware that she would never do such a thing. Whatever had happened to her wasn’t right and you were determined to fix it.
As you sat in your rented apartment on the Citadel, you worked on your computer and omni-tool to do the impossible: free Commander Shepard. Although her title had been stripped from her and you had surpassed her in rank, you owed her the respect that you would give an elder. From one Spectre to another, her achievements were something to be honored.

It wasn’t as if she was Saren. She was a woman who needed help.

Help was something you were willing to give.

You started helping by composing a hell of a lot of emails. You contacted everyone that you could think of: Garrus, Joker, EDI, Liara, Chakwas, Miranda, Jack and even Grunt.

This was a team project. Everyone who had served under Shepard had to know everything.

Your name was Kaiden Alenko, and you weren’t about to let the Council screw your friend over again.
Enter: Katherine Shepard

Chapter Notes

I'm super proud of this chapter...

xoxo

THR

Chapter 26

Your name was Katherine Shepard and you always thought that you had been a loving mother.

Words that you would not use to describe yourself would be supportive or constant. In your opinion, these factors did not matter when it came to raising your daughter. You had been a very busy woman in your heyday. In fact, you still were. With your husband by your side, you jetted between Earth and Illium to create an empire that took the galaxy by storm. To keep it simple, you told everyone that asked that you were an entrepreneur that happened to develop revolutionary upgrades for omni-tools. In reality, this job description was nothing like what your true profession was. You had been at the top of your class in college. You had graduated with honors and quickly married a military man who served in the Alliance forces. He, like you, learned concepts easily. By experimenting day and night, the two of you spent the first years of your marriage in a small New York City apartment developing your own software.

Now you were millionaires who enjoyed champagne as well as being generous towards the less fortunate. Your favorite charities included ones that supported kids in poor colonies and Krogan adoption agencies. You no longer had to worry about coming up with the newest innovations. The scientists were there for that, and you would continue to amass a fortune as long as they continued to be brilliant.

When you had to rely on nothing but your brains back in the day, you didn’t have time to do much outside of work. Starting a family hadn’t been a priority for you. It had been more like an accident when you were in your forties.

Your pregnancy hadn’t affected you much. You worked through it.

You didn’t recall your daughter’s birthday as most parents would. Instead of celebrating your child’s arrival into the world, you always remembered that it had been the day when your company launched its first full omni-tool model. While nurses offered you your baby, you shooed them away in exchange for your own advanced omni-tool so you could check the status of your sales.

Some would say that this was cruel of you, and you gave them the same retort each time.
“I’m a career woman,” you would say. “But that doesn’t make me love my daughter any less.”

If you were to ask your child about this, she would say otherwise. In actuality, the time you had spent with her had been limited. You prided yourself on being there for most of her major achievements. You saw her walk and talk. You potty trained her and sent her off to her first day of school.

That had been enough for you.

She had been in the care of a nanny for the rest of the time. When she reached thirteen you allowed her to stay in your large New York apartment on her own. In retrospect, this had been a bad parenting decision on your part. You didn’t know the exact details of your daughter’s escapades for at least six years. There had been older men, drinking, drugs and the occasional wild party involved. You had brushed this off as normal; that was what teens did. Teens would be teens even if you were there to supervise her. Your husband supported your lax parenting techniques so you could both advance your careers further. It didn’t seem careless at the time, and you can’t say that you regret it now.

The most prominent moment in your life that involved your daughter was when she announced that she was going into the Alliance Marines.

You remembered this day vividly because it was the most terrifying experience you ever lived through.

It was her eighteenth birthday and you had flown into New York to throw her a party. Aside from the occasional vid comm call (which normally ended in her hanging up on you), you had not seen her in person since she was just a pre-teen.

When you arrived at your old home, the place was trashed.

Your daughter’s raging biotics had torn up the place, and you were appalled to find bongs and red sand remnants scattered all around the house. When you asked your daughter what had happened, she shrugged it off.

She did not say hello to you.

She did not hug you.

She simply stood in a doorway with a suitcase in her hand. This was her greeting, and from that moment you could tell that she was not pleased to see you.

You tried to take her into an embrace, but she resisted. When your husband slapped her across the face for her attitude, she held him back with a barrier. In your absence, she had grown to be powerful in her biotic abilities. She had also taken the liberty of outfitting herself with an L2 implant without parental consent.

Temper flared on that night and you found out that your child’s and you husband’s biotic abilities were both on par. They had been a match for each other and the fight that broke out between tempers was unstoppable.

You had thrown yourself in between them and begged for mercy. This was child abuse and no self righteous daughter would disrespect her father in such a way.

They didn’t listen.
Neither of them had been scarred by the scuffle, but the apartment was in even worse shape when they had concluded their match. He wouldn’t admit it then, but your partner later told you that he had been impressed by her skills. If she had learned one thing from private school, it was biotic power control.

“I’m becoming a marine.” she had said with a blunt tone. She didn’t want the grand party you were going to throw. She only asked for your support.

You, of course, lectured her on how dangerous enlisting was. She wouldn’t get far and death was imminent. Her father told her the same thing, which she called hypocritical.

Looking back on this moment, you realized that your unwavering support was the only thing that she had ever asked of you throughout your entire relationship. You had been an absent mother and now you were beginning to understand that this hurt her.

You looked at your daughter in front of you now. She was a high ranking Commander and a Council Spectre. She had travelled across the galaxy and was even dead for a few years. You couldn’t begin to list her accomplishments. You knew them all from observing her progress from afar.

And, as terrible as it sounded, you thought that she would have been dead by now.

You noticed that nothing had changed when it came to her rather fiery personality. She might be in front of the great Admiral Hackett and some sort of Turian man, but that didn’t stop her anguish from unleashing itself. You had arrived in Vancouver to check on the Alliance’s progress with your tech program, which you had willfully adopted. When you came to talk to the Admiral and heard word of your daughter’s presence, you had to see her.

You couldn’t say that this was a good decision. Instead of looking at you with love, there was only scorn in her eyes. She propelled a chair at you by using a biotic field when you entered the room she was in, which wasn’t the least bit surprising.

You had praised her and she had responded with physical violence. The media portrayed her as a ruthless yet respectful soldier who was admired across the galaxy. She did not display this reputation in front of you. It wasn’t long before you and your husband were escorted out of the room. When you were outside the office, you were asked to leave by security.

As you looked back at the double doors that led to the office of Admiral Steven Hackett, you took your husband’s hand and squeezed it. He looked down at you in shame.

Your name was Katherine Shepard and you came to a drastic conclusion.

Maybe you just weren’t cut out for parenting.

Your name was Commander Armando-Owen Bailey and you were given the honor of escorting Shepard out of the makeshift Council quarters.

The meeting was over due to out of control circumstances. Her fate was not decided, but many secrets had been unearthed. Her reactions to them hadn’t been what you had predicted. In fact, they weren’t as bad as you had been expecting. Perhaps her mental state wasn’t as horrifying as the Council made it out to be.

When you looked down and saw her fingernails, which were bent and gnawed at so they formed little nubs, you retracted this opinion.
Shepard stood up and moved towards the doors without someone by her side, which caused the Turian councilor to order that you take her back to her cell. He claimed that they “didn’t need her stirring shit” and that she was still “a menace to Turian society”. Considering your position in Citadel hierarchy, you were the appointed professional that had to open the door for the poor woman and hold her by the arm while she took the walk of shame. You assumed your role and tried to allow her to keep the little amount of dignity that she had left.

Your grip on her was gentle, and the way her eyes looked over your face was unwavering. She was trying to decipher your personal opinions, and maybe that little bit of sanity that was still left could be seen in her facial expressions. With a sigh, you opened the doors that led out into the hallway of the Embassies. You had no real intentions to bring Shepard back to her cell. If it was quiet outside, sneaking her back to her home in the middle of the Presidium would not be a problem.

To your shock, you were not alone when you looked into the hall.

Hundreds, if not thousands of people were crowded outside and were flowing into the heart of the Embassies. While you watched them in shock, your ears detected a common statement being shouted out by all of them.

“Free Shepard!”

“Save the Commander!”

Shepard, on the other hand, was beaming beside you.

“How did they know that this…this thing was going on?”

You didn’t answer her question because something else had already grabbed your attention.

A reporter by the name of Tanya Thompson was flashing on the nearest television that was docked to the wall. As you watched her speak, you noticed that a video feed containing footage from the room right behind you was playing.

Somebody had leaked the security footage from Udina’s former office to the news.

Your sweaty palm wiped your forehead and you gave Shepard a defeated expression. Her left eyebrow cocked up and she waited for you to say something over the crowd, which was overflowing and getting closer to the two of you.

“Considering that the Council never revoked your Spectre status, I’m assuming that you have the right to overrule me. Go home, but don’t you even think about telling anyone why you aren’t in the damn cell. I have bigger issues to worry about that doesn’t have to do with keeping a great hero in prison.”

With that, you turned around and walked briskly to your office, leaving Shepard to her own devices. You were sure that this wasn’t a bad idea, but you were well aware of the consequences if it backfired on you.

Your name was Commander Armando-Owen Bailey and it was time to continue cleaning up the Council’s mess.

Your name is Liz Shepard and you watched as your temporary guardian walked away from you. You doubted that this was considered to be your formal release, but you had ideas swirling in your head that kept you from overanalyzing this conflict. Right now you wanted to get home and
contemplate what had happened over the past few days.

You rekindled your first long term relationship and destroyed it in less than a day.

You killed two men with brute force.

You fucked up with the Council for the umpteenth time.

You gnawed on your lip and watched as the crowd around you surged. They hadn’t caught sight of you yet, and considering what they were chanting you thought that this was a good thing.

You were ugly, disoriented and crazy. If they did happen to find you, then they would likely send you into a panic attack. You were, of course, on the verge of one already due to sensory overload.

Lights.

People.

Noise.

The nakedness you felt wasn’t something that you could describe. You didn’t have your protective gear with you.

You were just a soft, flimsy human without any sort of defense mechanism. You did have biotics and your own two fists, but were they enough to fend off a crowd?

No.

These people were supporting you. There was no reason for you to retaliate against them.

But what if they were the ones that turned against you? Their blind support would last for just a limited amount of time. They would eventually realize what a terrible person you were.

You murdered civilians and didn’t give two shits about it. You had destroyed an entire system that was filled with even more innocent people without any sort of legitimate reason. How was that something commendable? They would all turn on you and the Alliance. It would be the death of you and everything humanity has strived for. Your acceptance would be revoked and nobody would even dare to help humans again.

Your eyes slammed shut in a panic. How were you supposed to get out of this unscathed? It was obvious that you were overreacting and putting yourself into a compromising position.

You threw up a subconscious barrier up to shield yourself from the crowd that was in front of you. It hadn’t been a strong one, but it had been something nonetheless. It helped you despite your saner half denying the fact that you needed it.

With your head down, you began to walk swiftly through the masses of people. They were members of every race and they all continued to call your name or something having to do with it.

“Justice for the best human ever!”

“Is the Council prejudiced against biotics?!”

“Kill the Batarians!”

You didn’t feel worthy of these claims. They were lies and you told yourself this during your
painstaking walk home. You were a washed up Alliance bitch who didn’t need sympathy. You just needed help and a warm bed, which were both things that you lacked. The crowd eventually thinned out by the time you reached the location of the more luxurious apartments that the Citadel had to offer.

Your brief travels had been monotonous and filled with negative thoughts towards yourself. You were alone again, and you knew that you still would be when you opened that door.

For another few years you would sit and rot in this hellhole of a house. You would watch the Citadel continuously rebuild and remember that your imprisonment is what keeps this spaceship going. Public protests would die out and everyone would forget your name. Your ghost of a crew would go on to remember that you were a great woman who didn’t take a gracious fall. Reporters would call you crazy for as long as you continued to live.

Garrus would remember you as the woman he mistakenly loved. You were nothing more than a comrade and a waste of his time. You assumed that you had scared him off. You knew that you would be a little disgruntled if he killed two humans in a fit of rage. He was too familiar with you and what you stood for, and blind killing wasn’t it. Just because your life had been flushed down the drain didn’t mean that he had to go down with you.

You were going to be alone, miserable and insane for the remainder of your days. You knew it.

This didn’t sound like a promising life to you at all, but it was what your life was going to be.

Like the reasoning behind your confined life, you were not going to accept it.

You were going to deal with it.

When you pressed your hand on the door to open it, you were surprised that there was no encryption to lock it.

The doors parted, and you realized that you were not alone like you had been expecting.

“Shepard!”

Two men were inside your apartment. One of them was a Turian who you knew all too well. He didn’t need any sort of description other than four words: he was your man.

The other one had a sling on his arm and a fighting spirit worthy of the fastest ship in the galaxy. You had spoken to him last night but you couldn’t recall any of the conversation’s details.

They were Garrus Vakarian and Joker Moreau, and you suddenly knew that you weren’t going to spend your life alone.

Garrus’ warm arms encircled you and you tried your best to hug him back. You had never felt so secure in your entire life.

For once things felt like they were going to be okay. Sure, you might have murdered two people and were up for inspection by the Council, but that was something that could be disregarded for now.

You felt loved and that was all that mattered.

Joker was close behind you; however, he chose not to interject. He gave you a smile that meant a thousand words.
You felt absolute euphoria as you gasped for breath. Although you felt like your lungs were about to collapse inside of you from hyperventilation, you sobbed into your boyfriend’s shoulder like there was no tomorrow.

It didn’t take long for you to cave into your body’s desires. You passed out in Garrus Vakarian’s arms for a multitude of reasons. Sheer happiness was one of them, but dehydration and exhaustion had ultimately got the better of you. Even though you were worn out, you were thrilled.

Your name was Liz Shepard, and you could finally say that you were no longer alone.
You name was Admiral Steven Hackett and you hadn’t been expecting the spectacle that had played out in front of you.

When you first met the parents of Commander Shepard, they also hadn’t been what you were expecting.

Katherine and Captain Mitchell Shepard had approached you while their daughter was still missing in action with Cerberus. You knew their names well. Their company, Ariake Technologies, was referred to as the best in the business. They were self-made moguls that had paved their way through the Earth tech community. After years of success, their products expanded across the galaxy and their expertise began to shift. Instead of thinking of their own innovations, their focus was on new charities. That must have been a luxury that came with basking in your own empire’s glory. They had grown rich enough to the point that their knowledge no longer mattered. They were figureheads, not inventors.

Their ingenuity was an asset that the Alliance could use, though. They had mentioned that they wanted to get into a different business and philanthropy genre, and supporting their planet’s armed forces was the only direction that they had wanted to go on. Katherine’s bubbly nature and Mitchell’s rigidness clashed, but they seemed to be a power couple. Their talent spanned across the galaxy and you weren’t about to turn down an offer that you could use.

Their formal induction had been brief and they got to work quickly on advancing Spectre technology with the Citadel as well as improving armor quality for your soldiers. You hadn’t discovered their relationship to the Commander until today while conversing with them after getting off vid comm.

Katherine’s contagious zeal to rekindle her relationship with her estranged daughter had been fervent and honest. When the subject of Liz came up, she practically jumped for joy. You had casually interjected Commander Shepard’s name into the conversation while mentioning your schedule for the day. You had a meeting planned with the a few tech agents that were supervised by the Shepards until their daughter decided to reappear.
Her husband, on the other hand, had been much less enthusiastic to hear about his child’s arrival.

“I haven’t seen my daughter since she was eighteen! I must see her if she’s coming back to Earth! We had the closest rapport even though I was absent for most of her teenage years. Oh, if only you knew about the things she did as a child, Admiral!”

You never understood the Captain. Although he had worked for you for just a short period of him, you were still trying to comprehend his unusual bitterness. You had met many people in your line of work, but none of them were quite like him. Despite being a good soldier when he was still in service and also a genius, his aura was one that was surrounded by the rigidity of a Turian. From what you were told from a background check on the man, he was a talented biotic and a private man. His attachment to his wife seemed limited and he wasn’t much of a talker.

You later realized that Shepard could sometimes demonstrate the same qualities, minus her passionate attitude that got in the way of her exhibiting a silent demeanor.

You watched the Commander carefully. She happened to be in front of you at the moment, and the reunion that was supposed to go smoothly had been anything but.

Upon seeing her parents, she threw her body up out of her chair and yelled at them in horror. The strong bond that Mrs. Shepard spoke of had to have been a fantasy in her mind. The Commander, a skilled biotic like her father, retaliated upon seeing them. She lost her temper, which was something that astonished you.

You were aware of her thin patience when it came to rogue Spectres and vicious alien races, but you could now add her relatives to this list.

You felt bad for putting her in that sort of situation. Her reaction wasn’t something you could have predicted, but you wondered what the real history between her and her guardians was.

“Commander, I had no idea that your relationship with your parents was so…strained.”

She turned around swiftly to face you and her boyfriend. The people in question had been escorted out and you noticed some changes that had gone on with her. Her hair was no longer standing on end. Her stance was one that expressed relief instead of aggression.

“Permission to speak freely, sir?”

You nodded at her and sat back down in your seat.

“My parents are jackasses!”

Her tone was vile and bitter as if it could cut through the thickest steel. Her true feelings towards her parents were now lucid.

“They left me to rot back on Earth while they did whatever the hell they wanted in the galaxy. If I didn’t have any sense then…then…”

Her pause was drastic. She was pondering something in her mind as if it was a questionable statement.

“Then what?” Garrus asked daringly. Shepard looked him in the eye and then dropped back into her chair, which she had moved back in front of your desk.

“I would have killed them both and passed it off as Spectre business.”
Her statement had been alarming. Perhaps Cerberus had made her judgment unstable.

“I’m assuming you’d like that stripped from the record, then.” you muttered.

She bit her lip and uttered a quiet “yes” before straightening up. You were going to disregard her comment for the most part, but it wouldn’t be something that would be removed from her psychological profile. You made a mental note to mention it to the chief doctor when you send Shepard in for her physical.

“Now that we have that out of the way, would you mind if we reviewed Garrus’ status for the mission?”

You raised an eyebrow at the woman in front of you and then began to look her Turian over.

He had markings on his face, which indicated that he was at least somewhat of a good man. You had heard a lot about Garrus Vakarian and had met him sparingly. From what you knew, his gun expertise was impeccable and he had the best shot in the galaxy. You were hesitant in sending an alien on a human Alliance mission. The fact that he was not a Spectre also made accepting him difficult.

“The Alliance is going to have a background check on you, Vakarian. I trust Shepard’s judgement and I’m well aware of your former position at C-Sec, but the Alliance isn’t exactly the easiest organization to work with. Considering the importance of this mission…”

Shepard was waiting for your response with bated breath. Allowing her to bring along a companion would give her a form of closure and combat assistance. However, you were worried about potential romantic rendezvous that could potentially occur. For all the time that you had known this woman, she had never once mentioned any sort of partner in her life. She was a solemn woman who felt complete on her own.

This was not the case anymore.

Your trust in the Turian was relying on nothing but Shepard’s good word now. You supposed that you could give him the all clear once he was given the same evaluation that Shepard was to receive.

“…I believe that having a partner may benefit you.”

A face of victory graced Shepard’s face and her hand glided towards Garrus’. Her hand looked so unnatural in his grasp. Different species in a relationship was considered bizarre (with the exception of Asari), especially between one of your own and a Turian. These two felt different in your eyes, though. The way he looked at her and her bashful eyelash flutters told a tale of two lovers that wasn’t exactly the same as everyone else’s.

Your name was Admiral Steven Hackett, and you were now truly aware of how diverse love could be.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you were worried.

It had been twelve hours since Shepard had been knocked out and things had been rather uneventful. After transporting her safely to the couch so she could slumber in peace, you and Joker scavenged the Extranet in search of proper care techniques. No matter how many medical apps you downloaded for your omni-tool, none of the scans came up with anything more than symptoms of exhaustion when you waved the device over your girlfriend’s body. Not being able to take her to a hospital was a difficult feat to overcome. If you brought her and she was supposed to be imprisoned,
you would be the one responsible for screwing her over. From watching the security feed, you were aware of her upcoming psychological evaluation that had been ordered by the Asari councilor, which meant that she would be put into yet another hospital in due time.

There was a lot that you didn’t know, though.

In fact, you weren’t even sure if Shepard was supposed to be home in the first place. She had, after all, murdered two men. Her status didn’t make her crime inexcusable, but the opportunity for her to plead not guilty due to reason of insanity had to be an option.

When you weren’t tending to her, you spent the time assisting Joker in his escapades to locate EDI’s hardware, which was hopeless. The both of you lacked the proper tech skills when it came to AI capabilities and requirements. You were good with calibrations and guns while Joker’s skills coincided with his brilliant flight capabilities. As talented as the both of you were, this did not mean that you were capable of solving much when it came to artificial intelligence conflicts.

Joker had amassed a bit of research on the matter and had compiled it onto a few datapads, which you read while watching the news on Shepard’s television. If there was nothing else to do, you supposed that helping him achieve his dream of reviving his so-called girlfriend wouldn’t be so bad.

You wished that you were capable of paying attention to what he had written, but you couldn’t help exhausting all of your energy by raging internally over the news arguments that were on TV. Every network was talking about the incident dubbed as “The Shepard Scandal”. Every so often you would hear reporters knocking on the door, which you ignored.

Some channels argued over your own morality. You had a small amount of fame before, but now it felt like everyone on the Citadel was familiar with your name.

“Why would Mr. Vakarian, a former C-Sec agent, get romantically involved with a woman that slaughtered two members of his species?”

“Should Garrus Vakarian be blamed for the Shepard Scandal? He was technically her enabler!”

You tried to shrug these claims off. They were news channels who broadcasted political bullshit, half of which wasn’t correct to begin with. Shepard was the topic of the week. They would move on to something else eventually.

You never once questioned your relationship with the Commander during this twelve hour period. You didn’t feel like you had to. Yes, she had fucked up big time with Turians and most everyone important on the Citadel.

She hadn’t been in the right state of mind to control herself, though. Some would say that you were justifying her actions because of your relationship, but it was true.

Wasn’t it?

She was theoretically innocent.

“Shit! Garrus, look! She’s moving!”

Your head jerked in the direction of Joker’s voice and you started to tune out the TV that was playing in front of you. Shepard had moved, and by the time your eye focused on her she was beginning to sit up.

“Goddamn…”
You should have figured that the first word she would utter would be something along those lines.

Joker limped over and sat on the now free space near the couch while Shepard lifted her head. To be honest, she looked like absolute shit. Her hair was no longer neat and the makeup she had applied over a day ago had smeared across her face. Scars and bags were a little more prominent near her eyes.

Instead of acknowledging anyone in the room, she just looked around and eyed the both of you before standing up and maneuvering to the kitchen. You presumed that she was hungry and you weren’t about to question her actions. Her being able to get up like that displayed some form of self sufficiency, which, to your knowledge, she seemed to lack.

Joker turned to you and furrowed his brows.

“What the hell is she doing?” he mouthed.

You were just as clueless as he was.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you really weren’t sure of how to handle what exactly was going on.

Your name was Dr. Karin Chakwas and you were feeling sentimental.

Since leaving the Normandy after it had been taken into Alliance possession for a second time, you had given up on your dreams to be a more exotic and adventure seeking physician. You were getting older, but your fighting spirit had not subsided by any means. Instead of being constantly aboard a ship, you had decided to take a permanent job over at Huerta Memorial Hospital instead of serving under the Alliance. It had been a bold move that was also towards the direction of retirement. It wasn’t entirely what you wanted, but it was what was good for you.

You had been given your own office and worked alongside Dr. Michel to lead the Upper Ward sector of Huerta. It had been an honor and the experience it gave you was truly rewarding. With the patients from the war and all of the refugees that needed to be checked, it gave you fulfilling opportunities that you wouldn’t have been able to experience on the Normandy.

You thought of your old ship every time you looked at the photo on your desk. It had been taken years ago and you always reveled in looking at pictures of your younger self. Next to you was the famed Commander Shepard, and in both of your hands were glasses of Serrice brandy.

You had heard of what had happened to the Commander and yearned for those old times with her. During your free time, you had also taken advantage of your status so you could view her medical reports from her last visit.

To put it lightly, they looked rather grim.

You had put in a request to examine her numerous amounts of times. There was something that wasn’t adding up with her condition.

You had heard all of the news broadcasts and had devoted a small bit of time to researching the facts, but to no avail. There was nothing that you would be able to determine without having her there in person.

You stared at your photo longingly before an interruption occurred.
Your computer had dinged, which meant that an email had arrived.

With reluctance, you refreshed your page and smiled when you saw who the first one was from.

*Kaiden Alenko.*

You had gotten to know the Spectre well over the years and you had been thinking about him recently. You didn’t spend any time on this message; you figured that saving it for later would be a better idea considering that it was probably about personal matters. You went on to the next email that had been labeled as urgent.

It was from the Council themselves.

Or, it was composed and sent by Commander Bailey and it happened to contain the Council’s official seal.

You scanned it and you began to feel like karma wasn’t such a falsehood after all.

They had requested your expertise and had invited you to be the chief physician to lead the investigation of the disgraced Commander Shepard.

A smile crept up onto your face.

Your name was Dr. Karin Chakwas, and in a few days time you would finally get to see a troubled old friend.

Perhaps some brandy would make things better.
Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and your irate emotions had just melted away.

Those few little words that had been uttered by the Admiral made you forget all about the drama that had just gone down between you and your parents. Your subpar attitude and Cerberus impressions had not left a good mark on your records, but having a chance to be with somebody while on the mission made you so happy that you felt like you could melt.

That person was Garrus, which made it even better.

You had scheduled another meeting with Hackett in a few days time. You had spent the remainder of your stay in his office discussing logistics and informing Garrus of what was to happen when the mission was executed. Although Hackett wasn't allowed to divulge much to your favorite Turian, he now had a better understanding of what you were going into. Until Garrus gained the proper security clearance from the Alliance, he would be on shaky ground. In your opinion, the hard part of this whole thing hadn't even begun yet. Once his file was submitted to the governing body on Earth, it would take at least a week for a single background check to go through. Getting his authorization was going to be even more difficult than actually navigating Batarian space.

You turned to the man in question and he was sitting beside you in your shuttle coupe. The ways he would sneak glances at the scenery between fussing with his visor made you not want to interrupt him. Even with all of the free shore leave you had gotten with him, you couldn't say that you had ever fully accepted the fact that you could fully relax. Now neither of you had anything to worry about; the machine taking you home had been set on autopilot and you were entirely alone. It felt wonderful to take a breather after the fiasco that had gone down back on Vancouver. You had been taking one big breather since finishing the Collectors, but it was the moments like this that made you comprehended that your qualms were limited. You were free from responsibility in a sense, and it was liberating.

“I didn’t think it would ever feel so good to not be busy, y’know?”
You felt like you were talking to yourself at first. You hadn’t expected him to respond. Even though Turians could run on less sleep than you, his bright blue eyes were drooping when they turned to look at you.

“I never thought that I could go a week without getting an email,” he responded with a tired chuckle coming after his comment. “Getting back to work is more exciting than sitting around, though. It’s not that I don’t like watching Earth’s atmosphere too, because the view from your bed is fantastic, but being able to fight for a cause is just as rewarding. Feeling the recoil of a gun and knowing that you’re doing the galaxy some good is what helps to create those kinds of relaxing moments.”

“I get it. Most people can’t say that they go out and kills people daily to make a living. I guess that makes us different. To be honest, I wouldn’t have it any other way, but times like this are priceless. It’s almost like a feeling of satisfaction…like all of the hard work is starting to catch up to us and it’s paying off.”

He moved closer to you while you pulled out your omni-tool for a brief second. There was no reason for you to have it out, but staring at it made you think of the incident that had occurred a few hours prior. Your model wasn’t top of the line. It wasn’t due to your own personal preferences. Ariake Technologies manufactured the best versions and there was no way in hell that you were going to support your parents’ false empire.

“I didn’t know you were related to Katherine and the Captain. Shepard’s a fairly common name among humans, isn’t it?”

Your omni-tool disappeared and a fiery feeling welled up inside of you at the mention of your parents’ names. You didn’t appreciate the subject change. Your feelings of malice weren’t about to get the better of you, though. You wouldn’t let them.

“I wasn’t the one who made it a famous name to begin with.” you grumbled. “We were never close, anyway. Me and my parents, that is.”

You hadn’t dared to mention your family to Garrus. His home life had been much less dysfunctional than yours. Whenever the subject came up, discussing his sister’s wild teenage years was more fun to talk about than retelling the story about the time you hooked up with a red sand dealer to enhance your biotics for a final exam in school.

“Part of me wants to say that they’re nice people, but that doesn’t feel rational based on what happened. They weren’t abusive, were they? I’d have to pull out the old sniper if they were.”

You wanted desperately to expose your home life to him. You wanted to tell him about how alone you had felt until you enlisted. You had been nothing more than collateral damage in your parents’ life and the only person that knew about it was the teddy bear that still sat on your childhood bed.

“What happened was irrational and stupid of me. Goddamn it, I threw a chair at them, Garrus! Look at what I did! It doesn’t make up for all of the years that they left me alone!”

You saw Garrus’ position shift and he offered you a warm arm and a shoulder to nuzzle. His sentiments were genuine, but that didn’t change how hypocritical your parents’ had been.

“If you’re still angry I can try and see if we can get the shuttle to dock at an Alliance training facility and you can shoot at some of the practice mechs that the recruits take out. Breaking in shouldn’t be too hard at this hour. Spectre statuses tend to make things like that easier.” he suggested with a soothing tone. You looked up at him and smirked.
“Yeah right. Your childhood seemed fine and dandy from what you told me. If you knew the bullshit I went through you would also know that a few bullets and fake targets won’t make things better. And before you get a mood swing, no, I don’t want to go into details.”

In an instant, he pushed you away. His once comforting demeanor had turned into one that was a little more hostile. What had slipped out of your mouth had been accidental yet sarcastic. Garrus, on the other hand, wasn’t taking it as lightly as you had. The shuttle felt a little darker and the heat building up in your armor wasn’t the most pleasant feeling to accompany these negative emotions encircling you.

“Shepard, don’t take this the wrong way, but my parents were never in a good place, either. My mother is sick and my father is still shaming me for deferring my C-Sec position. My sister...damn it, I haven’t even heard from her in a while because my mother keeps her busy with her illness! I came out here to fight with you because it’s obvious that you’re an amazing leader who can inspire a single crew to take out an entire rogue race. I stayed because you’re the one thing that has gone right for me in a long time! Don’t make me feel like a hypocrite.”

Your heart dropped.

As far as you were concerned, you had thought that his former home life had been enjoyable. His father, although brash and rule-abiding, seemed at least a little loving. You now understood why the subject of his mother hadn’t come up often. You weren’t sure of what sort of thing he meant by “sick”. If it was anything like the terms that were used on Earth, it meant something along the lines of cancer.

He went back to work on whatever he had been doing on his visor. The delicate etchings that had been engraved on it were still visible in the moonlight. Your desire to reach out and make things better didn’t feel like a good idea.

“I’m not anything more than a woman who can give good orders.”

That feeling of only talking to yourself was coming on again. You had hit a sore spot with him and you weren’t sure of how to mend it. It had never happened before and you began to get paranoid.

Was this your first fight? No, it couldn’t be.

“And I didn’t mean a bit of that. I had no idea you had family problems. Hell, there was no way I could have known. I don’t know why I said it; it was just—aw, fuck. There’s no way I can justify it, is there? Since we’re bringing up the past, I might as well spill it. My parents left because they had better things to do than raise a kid they didn’t want. I grew up with a nanny and eventually slipped into doing shitty things. Drugs, hooking up with guys, cheating on tests…you know, the bad kid stuff. One day I woke up with a soldier next to me and I was stark naked. I told myself how stupid it was to be so lowly. I couldn’t be like that for the rest of my life. My parents could have more money than god and I would still be a loser. I had to be proactive so I became a self-made bitch in the Alliance. For a period of time, I loved it. But seeing my parents again it…god, I don’t even know how to explain it. I didn’t think we had the ‘bad parents’ thing in common but now that we do—“

You felt a pair of scruffy lips brush against your cheek. Unlike all of the other times you felt that sensation, they didn’t comfort you. Was this his sign of forgiveness or were you supposed to keep on rambling?

“My parents left me alone and let me get into things that could have ruined my life! It can screw up a person like me and I already say things that I shouldn’t! It’s not even fucking fair, Garrus...G-Garrus...fucking Vakarian!”
You felt a trail of kisses being planted on the few bare spots left on your neck that weren’t covered by armor. The tiny red spots that they left made you wild and you couldn’t help but succumb to Garrus’ gestures. You took this as a token of his appreciation and allowed yourself to surrender to his intoxicating moves. From what he was doing now, you knew that you had put him in his place when it came to romance.

His lips moved to your ear, which he nipped at with the utmost amount of care. He didn’t want you to have an allergic reaction, which would undoubtedly make the situation awkward.

“I know I can’t make this better but I know something that can. Being emotionally supportive isn’t my area of expertise…however, I think we can forget about this for now and debate in the morning. This thing is a coupe, isn’t it? Should be more fun than the elevator.”

You gnawed at your own lips hungrily and didn’t waste any time disassembling his armor. As you ripped each piece off and threw it down onto the ground, you felt as though you were going to lose consciousness.

Your own body had become one hundred percent bare. His moves were faster than yours, and while you were still working on his cuisses he had managed to strip you down.

A bright purple shell was now lying on the floor with a few blue parts mixed in for good measure. You allowed yourself to be thrown down onto the double seats, and the colors refracted light and put you into a trance.

Every sense you had was being stimulated and you tried your best to do the same for your partner, but your mind was still reflected on the makeshift fight. Was sex supposed to make things better or shut you up?

You didn’t mind the bite marks or venomous kisses that left scars on your bare back. It would be an understatement to say that you adored them.

You let your hand wander to his cheek, and as you pulled his body down on top of yours, you whispered to him just as he had to you.

“I love you and I’m so sorry.”

His entire being crashed into you. You were able to pick up on everything even though you already had at least a million times before.

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and this was the start of your descent into madness.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you had a new project.

Keeping busy wasn’t something that you were able to do before because there had been nothing going on that interested you. Now that you were no longer alone, being productive was something that you did to pass the time. Your mental evaluation hadn’t been assigned a date yet, and you couldn’t say that it was something that you were looking forward to. Instead of dwelling on the issue, you chose to assist Joker in repairing EDI. His cause had been presented to you over a half assed dinner of waffles and beer that you had ordered in discreetly from Apollo’s. He had insisted that he didn’t need much help, but after reading over his notes you didn’t have to be sane to realize that he needed help.

You had been proficient in your tech skills since high school. It was one of the perks of being classified as a sentinel. However, your lack of mental stability made focusing harder than it should
have been. Coding and research sometimes made your brain feel like it was made of mush. Once
you applied yourself it began to get easier. Concepts came back to you with time.

Helping someone that you cared about brought back a little sunshine into your life. It wasn’t like the
fake Citadel sun’s feeling, either. It was like Earth’s sun, which would penetrate the atmosphere and
left you with that warm fuzzy feeling that you hated to love so much.

You tended to work on this project out on your balcony. Sometimes Garrus would join you.
Your conversations had been light and you could tell that he was holding back. You had stopped
fingering your upper chest for your dog tags and he had stopped trying to push you to talk.

It wasn’t like you didn’t want to speak to him about what had happened over the past year.
Discussing what had happened over the last two weeks was hard enough, though.

“Yeah, I sat in my house, blew up some windows and killed some Turians. No biggie.”

You had also discovered that you missed being with him. You hadn’t kissed him for real since the
day he had arrived and his most romantic gesture was checking on you before sneaking off to bed.

He slept on the couch.

The whole situation agitated you. There was so much you could do to improve it, but every time
you yearned for his romantic attention something stopped you. The feelings of betrayal and paranoia
hit you like a boulder crushing your body. He had told you so many times that he had loved you. It
had been clear since the moment he had crashed back into your life.

Why couldn’t you express it to him?

Your old self would have told you to stop acting like a pussy. You were emotionally stronger than
this.

But when you caught yourself sneaking glances at him next to you on the balcony like you were
now, you felt like you really couldn’t do it.

He was in his civilian clothes and was reading over a datapad that contained some sort of interesting
information that was undoubtedly more entertaining than you were. He didn’t appear to be too
engrossed, which you denied in your mind. He would rather read about the cleanup of Palaven or
god knows what else. Perhaps he was looking into easy ways to break up with a long term girlfriend
and he had copied some information from an Extranet site onto the pad.

His legs were crossed and he looked more domesticated than you would have liked. You were the
same way; your N7 hoodie hung loosely on your body and you had taken a liking to a pair of red
shorts in your closet. You had been wearing them for the past few days because nobody seemed to
care if you wore something else.

You couldn’t focus on the AI hardware hookup information that you were supposed to be reading.
You wanted to shoved the datapads to the ground and wrap your legs around your own Turian’s thin
torso like you used to. You would kiss him with so much passion that his head would spin and his
inexperience with love would begin to show again.

These felt like mere fantasies, but you were determined to make them a reality.

“Garrus?”
The man looked up and gave you a blank expression.

“Shepard?”

This hadn’t been the response you were looking for.

“Remember those times when you talked about retiring to somewhere warm and tropical? We were going to have kids and make sure that nobody would ever bother us again? After all of this goes down and I get…better, is that still a feasible dream?”

There was no hesitation in his reply. He was in another chair, and he promptly uncrossed his legs and made his way over to you. In turn, you stood up and waited for him to say something. Anything would be better than sitting in silence and thinking about those tantalizing “what if” moments.

“We’ll make it through. We always do. I don’t care if getting off this damn ship is harder than throwing a target out onto the Presidium and hitting it square in the center; we’re going to retire to the most beautiful planet you could ever imagine. It just might take a while.”

You could tell that he wasn’t sure how to handle you. Would a kiss or a hug be more appropriate?

There was no way of being sure unless one of you made a move.

You got what you wanted and you took the first step.

It was like old times that really weren’t that old to begin with.

Just like in your daydreams, you took him into an embrace that quickly turned to one of lust and pure romantic euphoria. He responded with the same amount of devotion.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve done something like this. Was it really before the final stand of the war when we last had—“

You put your finger to his lips and closed the distance between the two of you. His arms didn’t feel foreign and you loved the way he gripped your waist, which he had dubbed as “supportive” a long time ago.

Joker had been off at Huerta getting his cast removed, which meant that you were entirely alone.

You didn’t waste any time getting inside. In order to speed up the process, he unzipped your hoodie and exposed your chest which was covered with a plain bra. It had been a while since you had broken out the lacy lingerie, but he didn’t seem to mind the simplicity.

The feeling of him picking you up and hauling you to the couch brought back memories that you never forgot. You let your hoodie fall off your shoulders and burst out into laughter when your body bounced from being dropped on the sofa. Acting natural wasn’t a thing you had to think about now. It was almost as if being with him was starting to feel natural again.

Unlike how the two of you normally went about with your foreplay, you took charge and pinned him down as fast as you could. The change of pace was something that he didn’t adjust to easily.

Just as you were about to rip off one last innocent piece of clothing from his spindly frame, you felt the click of a door and watched from behind the couch as Joker walked in. He had an unsuspecting frown on his face and called out to you.
“Shep, the Council is waiting for you at Huerta! They’ve got an interesting sidekick with them…it’s Kaiden! I forgot to mention the email I got from him the other day. Who would have known the jackass was trying to get you pardoned! They want to do the psych thing now, by the way! I know I sound informal but they’re pretty pissed. They wouldn’t tell me nothing about this whole ‘critical examination’!”

You couldn’t believe Joker’s timing. He had always been the most ironic member of your crew, and this fact was rearing its ugly head again. You didn’t move at all.

Keeping your body pressed against Garrus’ was really the only thing that you were able to do. Your Turian boyfriend looked up and answered your unspoken complaint with a wry smile.

“Tonight seems like a better option. Meet me in your room after the appointment. I’ll come with.”

Your name was Liz Shepard, and your plan had almost entirely failed.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, that WAS a Justin Timberlake ref.
Chapter Notes

Sometimes I feel like I should stop writing chapter notes because I'm 99% that most people don't read this story on this site...

xoxo
THR

Chapter 29

Priority: Wishful Thinking

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you were now able to say that having sex in a coupe could be crossed off of your bucket list.

It wasn't something that you had intended on doing at first, but that didn't take away from the experience's wondrous consequences that were anything but unpleasant.

Drenched in your woman's sweat, you eyed the foggy windows to see the Earth's dark sky casting a menacing black light into the vehicle. The way the luminosity hit your scaly exterior didn't make you feel like the most confident Turian in the world. If you could, you would reach down for the remnants of your armor. They had been tossed onto the ground because of the heat of passion that had overtaken you in the most sudden romantic whirlwind that you had ever experienced. While you were still alert and aware of your atmosphere, your girlfriend was not. She had succumbed to her own fatigued desires and left you to relish in the memories of the forgiving moments that you had just shared.

Her body was flopped over the leather cushion of the seat as if she was a ragdoll. Her clothing was obsolete at this point; even if she wanted to put it back on, she had taken a beating. You were well aware of how rough she liked things and on multiple occasions she pushed you to not hold a single thing back. Turian mating rituals could be described as forcible and scarring, but still zealous and intimate nonetheless. Her body, once pure with porcelain skin, was now covered in red marks. Some of them were from the inevitable allergic reactions while some were simply from accidental talon scratches. Sleeping with you made her exhausted every time. She could keep up for the duration of the encounter; she was Commander Shepard after all. You had learned to become more gentle with her as time ran its course and her agility began to get sloppier towards the end. To hide this, she would still want more even when her head hit the pillow and her eyes were drooping shut.

Keeping up with her was still a challenge despite your own energy level. Just when you would think that she was done, she would play an absolute wildcard. Pushing you down or biting into your flesh wasn't out of the norm but it wasn't something that she would pull frequently. Needless to say, she
kept you on your toes when she wasn’t even on her own.

Her ungloved fingers twitched while she laid on her stomach. You let your eyes wander down her back, and you were still questioning the correctness of staring at her bottom. It was yours; she had said that numerous times to you with a flirtatious wink afterwards. You had the permission from one of the scariest women of the galaxy to stare at her ass until your heart was content. You could look at the concealed tattoos that dotted her back and the war scars that tainted her form.

Perhaps it hadn’t occurred to you that she was really yours. Did you deserve a woman like Commander Shepard? She had flaws and so did you, but she felt so perfect compared to you. A ragtag C-Sec officer shouldn’t have been able to score an Alliance marine that had done more for the galaxy than you ever thought you could.

As much as you wanted to scream these things out to the world, you couldn’t allow yourself to.

She was your girlfriend, damn it.

You were sure as hell going to be proud of her and flaunt her. It was the exact opposite of what Turian society wanted you to do, and going against these expectations excited you.

“You will be arriving at your destination in approximately twenty minutes, Commander Liz Shepard and Garrus Vakarian. Please resume your upright position and continue to enjoy the flight!”

You silently cured the VI that was built into the ship. That thing was more useless than a Krogan on a reconnaissance mission. Part of you hoped that the thing didn’t have a built in camera. The other part of you knew for sure that it did.

You heard the sound of a bare body moving against the seat and turned to see a naked Shepard facing you with a daring grin. She had forgotten about the events that had happened an hour prior and was back to her calm and unguarded demeanor. That side hadn’t been coming out a lot lately, and she blamed it on “Alliance stress”.

“Mornin’ hon. How’s it hanging?”

The informality of her speech made laughing easy for you.

“I’m going try and appreciate that sort of Earth slang without reporting you for misconduct.”

She responded to your threat by doing something that drove you absolutely wild.

“I’ll have you taken in for insubordination, soldier.”

Her body pressed against yours, pushing her curves just into the right crevices of your own being. Feeling her slick body slide like the way that two puzzle pieces fit together wasn’t something that you could handle. You felt like a wild animal when you forced her further into your slender personage but regret was not a feeling that clung to you.

She cursed under her sweet breath when her bruises hit your scales, and you gained a grasp on reality again. Her body was soft no matter how tough she claimed she was. Without enhancements she wouldn’t be able to fully keep up with you.

“This hurts more than being hurled into space. Get some moisturizer or something, Vakarian.”

You planted a kiss on her forehead and tried your best to think of a witty reply.
"In your dreams, Commander."

Your name was Garrus Vakarian, and although you weren’t all that witty, you still had the best woman in your life that you could ask for.

Your name was Doctor Karin Chakwas and you wanted to catch up with an old friend who was sitting in a stiff position a few feet away from you.

Instead of being able to do so, you were seated in front of your desk in your office with the Council breathing down your neck. On a normal day this sort of thing wouldn’t have bothered you. You could recall when Shepard used to come to you and howl about “those sons of bitches” and how they were inadequate officials. You didn’t share this opinion because you lacked the proper experience when it came to the Asari-rooted group. Until you had official dealings with them, you planned on giving them the utmost amount of respect. Shepard had been known to bend the rules when it came to what she said and did. If you bad mouthed the Council, you would be willing to bet a lot of money that your job would end up on the line. However, it wasn’t just the Council’s presence that had made your day more than a little out of the ordinary.

You glanced up from your paperwork to look at the spread of individuals in front of you. When you scanned the row you saw nobody unusual until you reached the end. Sitting on a chair to your left was the one and only Kaiden Alenko. When the governing body of the Citadel had arrived at your door on such short notice requesting to see you, you hadn’t been expecting the second human Spectre to be in tow with them. Instead of greeting you with his normal enthusiasm, he nodded to you.

You had read the email that he had sent. Like him, you wished to assist Commander Shepard in any way that you could. He had vocalized his efforts in this email a few days prior.

He had even mentioned getting the charges that had been put against her dropped.

Upon first reading his message, you thought his goals were little more than wishful thinking. Spectres operated above the law, and from what little knowledge you knew about them it didn’t seem like a man such as Kaiden would do such a thing no matter what sort of privileges he was given. He, like Garrus, was someone who would do anything to uphold justice. He wanted to do the right thing whenever possible.

“Doctor, we’ve dispatched Shepard. The way it was executed wasn’t the most…formal way of doing so. One of her accomplices was spotted being treated at this hospital and was spotted by a C-Sec agent, who notified us immediately. This man claimed to be that great Alliance pilot. Joker Moreau, I believe it was. He’s sent for Shepard and she is supposedly on her way.”

You let out a mysterious laugh at the mention of Joker and wondered if he was still taking his medications without your constant reminders. You looked up at the Asari councilor, who had sounded rather disturbed when she mentioned the Alliance pilot.

“There’s no reason to fret about Joker, Councilor. He’s a fine man. A little rough around the edges, but still great nonetheless.”

She nodded and put her hand to her chin. It looked like she was in intense thought, but you chose not to waste time pondering about what went on inside her brain.

There wasn’t any more chatter for the next few minutes. You spent your time signing forms that the Salarian councilor had handed to you at the beginning of your meeting and observing the facial...
expressions of each of the aliens in front of you.

Out of all of them, you found the Turian’s to be the most fascinating.

Until recently, he had been a just man in the eyes of the media. Unlike his predecessor, he had been tolerant towards every Citadel race. He had even shown kindness towards Commander Shepard on multiple occasions.

Now he appeared to be brash and impersonal to everyone who attempted to discuss the scandal that had been forcibly tossed into the Council’s hands.

Since entering your office, the things that had been uttered from his mouth were limited. When he did speak, his words were muttered underneath his breath. You might have been old, but that didn’t mean that your hearing had gone south. You were well aware that he didn’t want to be in your office. In fact, you wouldn’t be surprised if everyone but Kaiden shared his opinion on the matter of Shepard.

As you looked over the paperwork, you observed some incredulous requests from the Council. Their inquiry to you had at first mentioned nothing more than a simple physical. Now they were ordering that you test Shepard for diseases that you hadn’t even heard of. Biotic stability experiments and full mental disability analyses were the tamest demands that you read.

You could be a stubborn woman when you had to be, and now it was time to let that side out. In your opinion, this examination would do nothing but send the Commander further into madness.

“I don’t mean to question your requests, but these tests that you’ve ordered are outlandish. My professional medical opinion is that she needs nothing more than mental help that doesn’t involve solitary confinement. It doesn’t seem right to test her for all of these foreign diseases.”

Instead of looking down, the Turian councilor glared up at you with malice.

“We had the best doctors from across the galaxy aid us in formulating the best possible remedy for Shepard’s ailments. How do you suppose we should go about it? Would you rather us go with one medical opinion or hundreds?”

You passed the paperwork over to Kaiden, who read over it with a sickened expression. As he slowly began to find reasons to agree with you, your hand crumpled into a fist that had more spite in it than the Turian’s entire body. It didn’t take long for the Spectre to chime in.

“I have to agree with the doctor, sir. These tests, they’re…well, they’re unbelievable. I’d also like to know why this examination is so discreet. Shepard was notified through a messenger who may or may not be reliable. There hasn’t been a single press release and you just let her go when she was let out of jail without much more than a slap on the wrist. Half of the business that you’re conducting is —”

“Alenko!”

Sweat gathered on Councilor Valibus’ neck while he stood up to release his pent up rage. Kaiden flinched as if he had been stung, and it wasn’t until he mentally remembered his position. He was sitting here in your office for a reason. He was overseeing Council business. It was his job to work above the Council and see that this was being handled correctly.

The Turian councilor soon recalled this, too.

It didn’t take him long to leave the room in an irate frenzy. Concerned, the Asari councilor excused
herself and left, taking the Salarian councilor with her to deal with their problem.

This meant that Kaiden and you were alone at last.

There was no longer a tense aura in the room. The Council’s presence seemed to consistently make things more difficult no matter what situation they were in. Now that they were gone, a weight had been lifted off of both of your shoulders.

Kaiden indicated his emotions with a long and heartfelt sigh. He chuckled a bit and looked up at you with those brown eyes of his. It had been a long while since you had the opportunity to truly see him.

You wondered how Shepard had managed to fall for a Turian instead of Kaiden. He had been a looker since you had known him. Although he had aged since the end of the war, the bits of grey that peppered his sideburns didn’t detract from his good looks. He had retained his marine build and was boasting his normal muscular physique. His armor gleamed against the faux Citadel light and it was obvious that he had taken the time to polish it himself. With light stubble dotting its way across his jaw, you came to the conclusion that he was a formidable man fit for a person of the same stature.

That is, if he ever decided to court someone.

“I read your email.” you mentioned. “I understand your concern for Shepard, but she still needs treatment. I doubt that the Normandy is a sufficient place for her to deal with her stress. It might bring back memories she would prefer to not relive.”

The door had just been closed by the time you started to speak. It didn’t take long for you to hear the security guards rioting outside to calm down the Turian.

“Doctor, you don’t understand! This is a whole government conspiracy and the Council isn’t revealing a thing to the public. The Batarians have them in their pocket and they’re going to continue to torture the galaxy’s greatest war hero unless we intervene! If we can get Shepard on the Normandy and out into the Terminus so she can—”

“The Commander isn’t going anywhere until she’s properly reinstated and issued a clean bill of health! I don’t care if the Batarians weasel their way back onto the Citadel within a week! Shepard can handle them when she’s mentally stable!”

Your tone had been more motherly than you had hoped for. He strained his hair through his fingers while sorting through the options in his mind.

“What happens when she’s not, Karin?” he retorted.

You gave Kaiden a look of disapproval. You were reluctant to admit that you were puzzled yourself; if the Batarians were indeed using Shepard to manipulate the Council, then why should you be the person to hold her back?

Your top priority was Shepard’s health and wellbeing. As important as she was, there was no way you would let her within mile of the Normandy without making sure that she could handle it. You weren’t entirely sure what Kaiden was implying. You did know that he was scheming and that not much good could come out of it. You let yourself cave into him for a multitude of reasons, though.

“Then I suppose we’ll have to make up our own kinds of rules. That, of course, would involve the abilities of a Spectre.”
A smirk played on your face and you could see that your comrade was well aware of what you were trying to communicate to him.

Your name was Doctor Karin Chakwas and you now considered yourself officially onboard with Kaiden’s daring project.
Your name was Kaiden Alenko and you weren’t sure what to say when you were called into the office of Admiral Steven Hackett. As you sat in the hot seat, you began to ponder the purpose of your visit and the impact that the Admiral had on your life in the most indirect ways.

You had sort of met the man before during your first tour of duty aboard the Normandy. Your contact had been limited to overhearing the transmissions that your Commander took note of while overseeing the vast picture of the galaxy that occupied the stealth ship’s control center. However, the things Shepard said about him made him seem like a divine god. He was a human who had served under the Alliance for as long as you could remember. When you had enlisted, he was a man to look up to. As you rose in the rankings, he did too. You would see his name on the Extranet or hear of his great victories while riding on a Citadel elevator.

You had never spoken to the man face to face or convened with him in person. Considering his background, you didn’t think you had to meet him to know that he was the best soldier in all of the Alliance.

His office, although spacious, gave you a feeling of utter emptiness that you couldn’t quite put your finger on. The room was encased in all glass and was set up with minimalistic furniture, which was now the norm for Earth decor. The view of the Vancouver skyline put you in a place that soothed the inner workings of the soul that you thought that you had lost. The Canadian municipality had been the roots of your own childhood. It was the home of your entire family. Appreciating its beauty was something you seldom did until you were forced to onto Gagarin Station in your youth. The station for biotics was nicknamed “Brain Camp” by the kids who had attended. The view of space stayed beautiful for a brief amount of time. After a few weeks there when you were still a child, you got to understanding how empty space was. There were no bustling cities outside of the station. There was nothingness.

Now, you treasured Vancouver with the little bit of innocence you still had left.

After you left the Horizon colony because of the Collector attack, you had kept a low profile. You
had even let loose and hooked up with a few girls, which would have been disastrous for your old self back when you were fighting Saren. It wasn’t like you to be so wild. After seeing Shepard working for Cerberus, you reasoned that it was time to go a little rogue yourself.

You had your fun and stayed on Earth to tie up some loose ends afterwards. Spending hours with your parents and taking the time to form solid bonds with friends of yours had taken up most of your time once your distant wild streak came to an abrupt close. Not being on duty wasn’t something you could handle at first.

Now you felt like you were enjoying it.

The Admiral’s request to see you was one that was filled with deception and uncharted secrets. The call came late last night while you were participating in an Turian style drinking game with one of your cousins. You had been lucky that the call came in while you were still somewhat sober.

It had been from a secretary. She gave you a time and a place. It was out of the blue and inconclusive at first.

The whole thing felt like a trap. The woman provided no credentials or precise evidence.

Doubting Hackett wasn’t something a single marine did even if the Admiral worked for the Navy. It felt dictator-like, but this man had never committed a single wrong action in his entire service career. If you defied him, there would be no way a promotion would be attainable. He wasn’t just a member of the Alliance; he was the Alliance.

Your qualms subsided the second you noticed that the address given to you had been the one of the Alliance Headquarters. Getting through security had been a bitch, but as soon as you saw the Admiral step into his office, it all felt worth it. His entrance had been alarming; he entered without notice and was outfitted with a full entourage. It popped you out of your thoughts and into the real world.

“Major Alenko? I don’t believe we’ve met in person. Steven Hackett, Fifth Fleet, Alliance Navy.”

You observed proper protocol only to be put at ease a few seconds later. A salute lasting more than a few seconds was unacceptable to him in this sort of environment; he preferred handshakes.

A pool of bodyguards followed him around and this whole routine felt like a song and dance that was on a permanent repeat. This happened to him every day. Meeting marines like you was the norm.

At least that’s what the current environment evoked.

His hands were dry and firm and you wondered if your own father had been able to talk to someone so high up in the chain of command. If there was a poster boy for a perfect soldier, it would be Hackett.

With a flick of his hand, the guard soldiers fluttered away as if he was a wizard casting a complicated spell. You desperately wanted to be close and personal with this man. If you could, you would.

It would be an unprofessional relationship, though; you wanted a promotion, not a friendship.

“Yes, sir.” you replied, your palms covered in a light coat of sweat. “I was stationed at Horizon for a covert investigation against Cerberus. I came into contact with Commander Shepard there, too. Before that I served under her and Anderson for the Alliance and eventually the Citadel. It’s been a
great ride, Admiral, but I can’t say that I know why I’m here.”

You mentally kicked yourself. This man didn’t want to know your life story.

He sat down behind his desk, which meant that it was probable that standing up would make you look like an fool.

“Youre record is pristine. In fact, it’s more impressive than I could have ever hoped for. The Alliance called me and told me to dispatch you for a variety of reasons. They’ve got some plans for you, Alenko. Big plans.”

Your name was Major Kaiden Alenko and you walked out of the Admiral’s office that day with new accomplishments to be proud of.

You were now appointed to be the head of the First Special Operations Biotic Company that was to be formed after your new assignment. Hackett himself had requested you to go on a mission into the Terminus System. Known only as Arrival, the anticipated time of departure was to be in a few weeks

To make things even better, you would be working with the Commander herself the entire time.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you did not like Huerta Memorial Hospital.

The hatred you held for the place could be considered rational. It wasn’t unusual for soldiers to hate hospitals in the first place. It reminded you of things of the past that you tried too hard to cast away. The platoons of matching dead bodies were covered in white sheets and paraded around for all to see and your fists clenched in anger and guilt. Bile crept up your throat when you would see doctors pound their entangled hands onto a person’s chest; those compressions were futile attempts to keep the dead living. The place was busy regardless of all of these morbid activities that took place right under the staff’s noses. People screamed and ran around in the same paths day after day in the name of modern medicine. When you watched them it felt like they were just running around in circles.

The worst thing about Huerta was not any of this, though. For others, your worst fear was trivial. It was nothing more than something that was observed and questioned. For you, it was your worst nightmare.

It was the patients receiving therapy out in the lounge.

As if they were animals in a zoo, mental patients were thrown out into the real world for their sessions with a counselor. There was no privacy. Everyone could see them and hear about their false hopes and past hardships as they droned on to a doctor that didn’t give a real damn. There were more ex-soldiers out there than there had ever been now. It was because of the war.

The Reapers had done irreversible damage to people. They had done more than destroy a galaxy; they had eliminated the body and soul of every life that they had touched in some sort of form. Their toxicity had even leaked through to the civilians, driving some of them to the point of madness. None of them shared the same mortal trepidation as the enlisted, though. They populated the majority of the hospital along with their doctors.

You walked into the patient lounge and didn’t hold your partner’s hand. It would be a sign of weakness and you feared that maybe one day you would be in the same position as the distressed soldiers. You couldn’t see yourself talking to someone who had a more peaceful life than you ever had. These doctors didn’t know what you had been through. They didn’t know the pain of losing your entire squad to some sort of sentient being that wanted to annihilate your entire world. There
was no way for them to feel a bullet penetrating the sole barriers of their shields. The snapping of their last lifeline wasn’t a sensation that they would ever worry about. All you had to use to explain it were your words, and there was no way that it could be enough.

A warm, deep breath exited your lips and you looked around for some sort of indication that this was the real place you were supposed to be. Nobody acknowledged your arrival.

Everyone was paying attention to the bustling noise and dying patients instead.

You were used to commanding a room. Now you were nothing more than another patient.

“They came close to killing me…they left me to rot with the rest of the husks! I was betrayed!”

Your ears perked up and the solid recollections of the apparent basket cases echoed throughout the lounge. Their stories were all you could hear. There were no more screeches or orders coming from medical professionals.

Your mind was being filled with stories as if it were a carrier frigate being loaded with cargo.

“I was the head Commando in my squad until I killed a civilian out of complete rage. Damn, it sounds horrifying when I say it! I didn’t mean to do it!”

You listened and tried your hardest not to scream. These people were more like you than you wanted to believe. They were on your level.

The urges in your brain tore away the barrier than you created for yourself. Garrus soon felt a familiar hand wrap around his talon, which was a subtle sign that expressed how much support you needed.

“Shepard,” he said, his voice quiet. You hadn’t noticed your own tears until his scale encrusted skin wiped them away. “If you’re not ready for this, then we can just go home.”

“Go home?”

Your voice shook while you talked and you were insulted. Did he not realize that you were entirely sane enough for this? Even if you weren’t, you could pretend like you were and it would all be okay.

“Going home is not an option! I need this! I don’t want it but there’s nothing I can do about it!”

His hand slipped out of your grasp. He didn’t want to disrupt you any further.

“Yes, ma’am.”

The sentence slipped out like a figment of the past. He used to call you that every day back when the SR-1 was still in existence. It was the bluntest type of formalness that you despised. However, his respect for you had been never ending. It took you ages for him to drop the adult-like title. Sometimes he would still call you it as a joke.

This time, his tone was anything but jocund.

“Commander!”

You knew that voice better than anyone else in the entire hospital. A figure approached the both of you before you could protest. You considered this a good thing; there was no way you could tolerate an argument right now.
You blinked a few times when you saw who it was. Perhaps a verbal dispute would have been better if you had been told who you were about to face.

The man who had approached was one that you had once had the capacity to have feelings for. He was taller than you by a long shot and possessed muscles that would make anyone fall to their knees in infatuation or envy. His hairstyle hadn’t changed since your last encounter; it was slicked back and not a single hair was out of place. His shore leave uniform was also identical to what he used to wear and you recalled teasing him about his fashion sense. You didn’t want to admit the inevitable, though.

Not in this state of mind.

You weren’t about to let yourself come to terms with how handsome this man was. The two of you had a past that you had never brought up for your own reasons. You didn’t look back at the fling with scorn. Other than your current relationship, it had been one of the best that you had ever had. It was short lived and blissful. It was almost like a break from what you desired: a partnership with depth and hardships that you could work through no matter what happened.

Your name was Liz Shepard, and you never thought that you would see Kaiden Alenko ever again.

You were very wrong.

Your name was Major Kaiden Alenko and it had been a long time since you had last seen your old commander.

You had spent the last week trying to track her down. You operated above the Council to help her. Seeing her in the flesh was an entirely different experience.

Her body had shrunk, causing her to lose her once strong arms and legs. The nicer way to put it was that she looked more womanly, but it was probable that she would take offence to that term. Her skin, which was once a comfortable shade of white, had turned translucent. If she looked any more like a mental patient you would be convinced that she truly was one.

Preplanning your conversation before approaching her had been a must. You wanted to greet her with a congenial smile and ask how she was. You were to give her a brief pat on the soldier while making sure to keep your other hand down. She didn’t deserve a salute; she was no longer in the service nor would she be for a long time if you didn’t intervene.

Your internal script went to shit when she turned around. Vakarian had been next to her and you felt like you had interrupted something between them. It was fair to say that you didn’t approve of their relationship. Inter-species affairs weren’t something that you were crazy about. It wouldn’t be an understatement to say that you still had feelings for Shepard that you hadn’t addressed since your Lieutenant days.

You had kissed her and she had kissed back before you had gone for your final attack on Saren. She had gone for you instead of Ash on Virmire. She had never professed her love for you in a verbal way but you had a desperate urge to confirm her current feelings. Even if she denied you, there would be no reason to hang on to any hope. She had left you for Garrus after her apparent death and you assumed that she thought that you wouldn’t find out.

You had attempted to keep these feelings in the dark for a long time, which drove you to the point of almost killing Shepard back on the Cerberus Citadel assault while fighting the Reapers. That was the height of your denial.
Of course, you never discussed this phase of love to anyone anymore. You found it irrelevant.

Her eyes stared you down like they had on a certain fateful night a few years ago. They had that sparkle in them that made you want to ask her every question on the galaxy. She was an enigma to you now, though.

She had the same aura when you had fought the Batarians with her before the Reaper War.

She didn’t respond to your concise introduction at first. For all you knew, she could be just as in awe as you were.

“I don’t think you’re allowed to call me that anymore.”

Her legs shuffled towards you and Garrus was aware of his place. He stayed behind and gave you a curt nod, which was all you could expect from him.

She stopped in front of you and didn’t continue any further. It was up to you to make a move with this woman, who now looked frailer than she ever had. Would hugging her be out of line?

“Old habits die hard.” you muttered to her in response. You had a subconscious smile plastered across your face, which drew out a halfhearted laugh from your former boss.

In an unexpected move, she took you into her grip. The Commander wasn’t one for hugs. The numbered people that could say that they’ve received some form of affection from her were mainly members of her crew. You could recall the physical contact that you’ve had with her in a lighthearted way. She was warm and comforting, almost like a mother figure. At the same time, she would pull a fast one at any time and turn into an admirable harlot whose chuckles could send you into a sexual daze. Of course, you would do the same thing to her with a strength that surpassed her own. At one point she had melted in your arms like butter. Now she did that for Garrus and nobody else.

This hug lacked the kind of lust that she once felt towards you. It was a hug that made you feel like nothing more than a trusted friend. There was no way that you would push her to be anything more.

You were more than okay with being her ally, comrade, and companion.

Before things got any more physical, the Turian walked over and gave you a more genial greeting.

“It’s good to see you, Kaiden. You in here for Spectre business?”

Shepard pulled away from you at the mention of your title. Her own status hadn’t technically been revoked, but acting above the law right now wasn’t a good idea.

“I’m actually here for Shepard,” you explained. “I got myself assigned to her case. I’ve gotta have a word with the both of you later in private about that.”

Your voice got lower and you whispered so both of them could hear.

“Go back to the third examination room and wait inside. I’ll be back. Just…don’t ask questions. I know it’s sketchy, but I think you’ll find someone in there that you’ll be happy to see.”

Brevity wasn’t something that Shepard was fond of. She opened her mouth to protest, but Garrus stopped her dead in her tracks.

“We’ll go,” he said rather rapidly.
Your name was Kaiden Alenko, and as the couple walked away, you could swear that you saw Liz look back at you with a face that you still couldn’t decipher.
Chapter Notes

Uhm yeah no chapter notes for this.
Sorry for the brevity of this one.
xoxo
THR

Chapter 31

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and it wasn’t often that you thought of Major Kaiden Alenko. You had never known the man on a personal level, nor did you wish to. He seemed nice enough for a crewmate. He was cordial, stiffer than the average person and rather good looking by Shepard’s standards. During your service on the Normandy SR-1, you recalled her leaning against the Mako while you repaired it. A smuggled cigarette would be between her lips each time she graced you with her presence. While she observed your careful handiwork, she would tell you all about her life, which, at the time, included Kaiden. Each detail of their relationship was exposed to you over a gradual period of time. She didn’t think that you listened to her, let alone comprehended all of the miniscule niceties that she exposed. The relationship hadn’t reached the level of commitment that the two of you had now, but you still struggled with the same thought over and over again.

What if she still had feelings for him? She had been smitten before; it was possible that it could happen again.

Going back to the now Spectre was still a feasible option for her. He was the same species as her and had been the stereotypical good boy for his entire life. Humans told each other that opposites attracted, and it had proved true for the pair for at least a brief period of time. Having a mild, well mannered man in her life had balanced her out. She had conveyed to you that their spark had been extinguished after the Saren mission. Her false death had struck a chord in the fellow marine, and it wasn’t one that was in tune. When the two of you encountered him on Horizon, he had been distant. Kaiden had turned up his nose at the mention of Cerberus. He later came to regret bringing such criticism onto the Commander; despite who she was with, she managed to save the galaxy again. No matter how many apologies he issued, Shepard still said that he wouldn’t look at him with lust in her eyes again.

How a Turian renegade could beat a handsome good boy flabbergasted you. In no way did you want to protest her romantic choices, but you wanted to figure out what made her make such a bold decision.

Your question was soon answered by the best source herself. You didn’t even have to ask, either.

“I’ve never seen him so happy to see me before.” the former commander mumbled while walking down a less crowded hallway. Her tone wasn’t one that sounded rather thrilled; if anything, she
appeared sad or disturbed. Your mandibles twitched up into something that was intended to be a
smile. Shepard’s body curved against the third examination room door in a catlike manner when you
reached it. Her hands worked gingerly at her bun, which had turned loose for the third time that
day. The outfit that was slung over her thin frame was inappropriate for an appointment. Instead of
looking like a professional, her garb made you reminiscent of your own childhood days. It wasn’t
like her to not care about her appearance. The only perk coming out of it was that it made her look
almost ten years younger than she was. Her stretches made her let out unnoticeable moans that she
tried to keep to herself.

“Why wouldn’t he be happy? You were practically his favorite person on the Normandy.”

She was well aware of the emotions that you were trying to convey. In return, she flashed you a grin
and snatched your wrist.

“You know who my favorite person on the Normandy was? He’s a Turian bad boy who could get a
girl turned on with nothing more than a kiss. The things he can do with a gun will drive anyone
wild. It’s just a rumor, of course.”

You wanted to laugh off the comment and sweep her off her feet for one of those kisses that she was
aching for. The last time she had spoken to you like that and meant it was before the war. Whatever
had gotten into her today was something that you could get used to. The tempting things that she
would be willing to do with you almost distracted you from the main problem at hand.

Shepard was masking the issue right in front of you. She had never denied Kaiden or his feelings.
That is, if he even had any. Turning to seduction was a tactic she employed a lot when she was off
duty. If anything, it was a damn good defense mechanism and loved to fall for it.

You were well aware that paranoia could be getting to you again. No matter how long you were
together, the inter-species conflict would come up time and time again.

There would always be someone better than you that she could relate to more, let alone just eat the
same types of food as she did.

“I’m flattered, Shepard, but I was being serious. You don’t think he’s still—“

You noticed her hands fluttering in the air. Her entire body was shaking and had a sickly
characteristic. She had been in that state since entering Huerta; you just didn’t want to address it.

“In love with me?” she interjected, her hand sitting on the knob of the door. Her inactive hand
stabilized on her own, leaving the rest of her body to quiver in nervousness. “You know better than
to bring that up. But to whoever’s asking, he damn well better be. Didn’t you see the look in his
eyes? I haven’t seen him look at me like that since…”

Her pause wasn’t intended for dramatic purposes. There were thoughts on her mind that had to be
collected and there was no way she was about to misuse her words when it came to a subject like
this.

“…a long time ago.”

The conversation ceased when she opened the door to face her fate head on. She had no trouble
breaking off the exchange and you figured that asking about it later was the sole option that you had
left. Pushing her to answer now wouldn’t end well.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and your girlfriend’s response was stressing you out much more
than it should have.
Your name was Liz Shepard and you were mentally kicking yourself again.

If you found yourself in a state of panic that didn’t relate to anything having to do with your now ex-occupation, you would retaliate in a few ways.

If the situation or person you were dealing with was something or someone you hated, you tended to lean towards physical violence.

If the antagonist was indirect and you could do nothing to stop it, you turned to the few men that you could trust: Jack, Jim and Jose.

A better name for these men would be hard imported liquor.

When it came to romantic relationships, though, there was one thing that you did best whether you were stressed, angry, confused or genuinely in love.

That one thing was flirting.

You made romantic advances towards your partners as a distraction from the bigger picture. You didn’t have the best charm due to your questionable demeanor. This didn’t mean that people fell for it.

A touch of the shoulder and a come hither smirk was a technique you had employed since your teenage years. Some called it a defense mechanism while you dubbed it as “tactical flirtation”. You recalled sharing this with Joker and he almost broke a bone from laughing so hard. Sometimes your advances were subconscious. Other times you were set out to avoid something socially and there was no way you were going to face it.

This time, you had been avoiding a certain subject that you didn’t want to bring up again for a long time: Kaiden Alenko.

You didn’t comment on your romantic involvement with the man. If you did, it was limited and lacked proper details. A few years back before you had gotten with Garrus, he had asked you a question about the bond with the man.

“Why did you leave him?” he had asked in a haphazard manner. You were on duty at the time and had taken some shore leave on the Citadel to check in with Anderson, who was long gone now.

You didn’t give him an answer until that evening. It had taken you that long to analyze your separation from the man who had tried to pick up all of the pieces that you dropped for six months. Before Garrus, Kaiden had been your longest relationship to date.

As you stepped back onto the Normandy and waited in the decontamination chamber, you turned to the Turian and gave him an answer.

“He was too perfect for me.” you said. “He plays by the rules and he deserves a woman who can appreciate that. He told me that I taught him to be more human when all I did was take him onto the beaten path instead of the paved one.”

Those were the only words that you could use to convey how you felt about Major Alenko.

Your name was Liz Shepard, and until further notice, you did not want to comment on Mr. Alenko’s involvement in your scandal.
Your name was Doctor Karin Chakwas and you were waiting for your patient while sitting in an office chair. The examination room you were in was the most private one in all of Huerta Memorial. There was not one window or security camera in sight. The seclusion had been eerie at first, but soon you began to enjoy it. It made rereading Shepard’s medical files for the fifth time a little easier as long as you could ignore the noises coming from outside and the bizarre noises that the building made.

“It’s just the building settling. Doesn’t that happen on spaceships, too?” you asked yourself.

The watch on your wrist ticked with vigor and you noticed that the time had come. Shepard’s abruptly scheduled appointment time was approaching fast.

You thought you had a five minute period of freedom to finalize your notes until the door opened. You were half expecting to see a member of the Council coming to sit in on the examination. You had not heard a word from them since the incident with Quentius, which you were thankful for. Their political opinions held no medical value, anyway.

The people that entered were just as shocked as you were upon finding out each other’s identities.

“Shepard! And Mr. Vakarian too!”

“Doctor!”

Liz Shepard’s entrance hit you like a brick wall. Although she had a disdainful expression on her face at first, it twisted into a neutral one that was shot with awe and elatedness.

“The Council really hired you to do this?” she inquired.

Your arms were crossed across your chest as you gestured towards a bare looking examination table. With reluctance, she sat down, leaving Garrus to lean on a free space on the wall. You silently cursed the hospital for not providing you with an extra chair that would fit the complicated tendencies of Turian anatomy.

“I believe they thought that you would be more comfortable with a familiar doctor. I’m recognizable enough, aren’t I?”

She took the sarcasm lightly and put her arms in an identical position to yours.

From a medical standpoint, Shepard did not appear to be alright. Her entire body looked frailest than ever before. Something else was not right, and until you were able to give her an entire examination there would be no way to prove your hunch. You wanted to say that it was just her outward appearance that made you well aware of the problems that this woman was facing. This statement lacked proper validity, though. You would have to prove it with concrete facts.

Your name was Doctor Karin Chakwas, and you stood up to walk towards your patient.

“Let’s have a look, shall we?”
Chapter Notes

I'm starting to realize how much I like publishing on this site more. I don't get as many snooty people and the people that do comment are such sweethearts~ I love you guys (I hope you know who you are)

xoxo

THR

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Chapter 32

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Priority: Confirmation

Your name is Commander Liz Shepard and it had been a few weeks since your second meeting with Hackett. Nothing had been confirmed about your next chapter with the Alliance and the Citadel forces.

The meeting’s brevity made it seem less crucial than it was in actuality. All you had been told was that Garrus’ files were processing through Alliance services. Not much else could be inferred about the process; he had warned that the human-led organization was pickier about aliens than they should be. Even the Admiral came close to admitting that your partner’s track record was admirable. Between his work at C-Sec and dedication to assisting you and asserting justice throughout the galaxy, he was more convinced that perhaps this mission wouldn’t be as rough as he had been expecting.

After leaving Vancouver again, you fell into a routine of laziness. Garrus, to your surprise, began to mellow out and follow your lead. A few times a week you would find yourselves sprawled out on your bed, only to realize that waking up early was good for the sole purpose of indulging in morning sex. When you didn’t succumb to your own urges in the wee hours, you slept in until noon and Garrus woke up a little before you to tend to any Extranet business he may have had.

Some days you went down into the city to pass time or pick up fresh food so you would have something to do. The Normandy, which was still docked at your hometown, had settled into its new station nicely. You greeted the workers and mechanics while your hair flowed in the wind before you descended down into the real world. Most humans on Earth treated you with respect and some even fanaticized you. Sometimes it made you feel like you were in a movie or a popular vid, and as soon as you hit the unforgiving depths of the above-ground city and forced yourself into a taxi that all went away. On occasion, Garrus would come along with you and striding along in Central Park
didn’t seem as farfetched as it used to. Back when the Collectors weren’t a thing of the past, you found yourself dreaming of moments where you could let yourself be free. The lives of everyone weren’t at stake and doing semi-stupid things didn’t come with dire consequences.

Underneath all of these trivial, normal things that had happened, the bigger picture still loomed in the back of your mind. Each day, regardless of what you did, you found yourself refreshing your omni-tool before you went to bed. You had a desperate longing to know if Garrus had been confirmed for duty by the Systems Alliance. Hackett had promised to forward the notification to you as soon as possible, but as the days passed by, your thoughts grew more and more negative.

With your boyfriend’s scraggly toes nipping at your legs from under the covers, you carried out your evening routine just like you would each night.

“That email is never going to come, Shepard. Humans don’t have a reason to accept an unknown Turian into their systems.”

Your look of disapproval was evident when he dragged his eyes away from his laptop, which was much less portable than the translucent tool that was mounted on your arm.

“You jinxed it now!” you whined, your voice sounding more like a child’s instead of a marine’s. Although you were half kidding, your words stayed fresh in your mind. You had been preparing for the email for a few days; it would say that he was denied and there was nothing that you could do about it.

With one motion, your omni-tool disappeared from your forearm and you found yourself laying flat on the bed. He didn’t want you to worry. In fact, you didn’t want to worry for him, either.

It was a natural instinct at this point.

“What of your people won’t get over the First Contact, the Alliance included. I don’t think you’ll have any trouble getting through this thing without a partner. You pulled off Torfan by yourself, didn’t you?”

Your hands clenched around the sheets. You didn’t talk about your first major victory as a marine; in your opinion, it had been a flop that got you famous. The squad that was under your command almost perished entirely.

“Pulled off isn’t the best word. Torfan isn’t something you’d called Spectre work, though. This is an Alliance and Citadel operation that I give more than just a miniscule fuck about. It could make or break everything that I’ve been working for.”

His grunts were ignored by you. Instead of arguing a moot point, you pushed yourself into his grasp and grinned when he accepted you.

He had changed since a few weeks ago and it was palpable during your most intimate moments. He was fierce, but his edge had dulled in the best way possible. Before, he had said that sitting around was useless. It didn’t take him long to retract that statement.

Your felt yourself falling into a lull. With your eyes drooping downwards and your senses dulling, it was apparent that you had spent too much time worrying about work without even paying attention to what it was you were doing. No matter how relaxed you claimed that you were, something would be in the way no matter what. It was a funny sort of thing in the most bizarre ways.

Just as you were about to fall asleep, the lower section of your arm lit up. A golden hued light propelled itself throughout the room, putting the moonlight’s soft illuminations to shame.
The email had arrived.

You were awake and alert again in an alarming amount of time. Garrus’ protests were loud enough that you could hear them, but even he was growing curious over the sudden message that had popped up.

“Dear Commander Elizabeth Shepard,” you began. You felt the Turian looking over your shoulder as you read and tried your best to focus on the text that was being projected in front of you.

“We are pleased to inform you that Garrus Vakarian’s profile has been approved by Alliance personnel. We recommend that you meet with Admiral Steven Hackett as soon as possible for more details on your upcoming assignment. Please take note that this mission is classified. Any leaked information is investigated due to the galactic security that could be compromised by it. In addition to Mr. Vakarian, you will also be accompanied by Staff Commander Kaiden Alenko while executing your duties. According to your personal file, you have worked with Mr. Alenko in the past and we feel that the addition of another biotic to your crew would be beneficial to your success. If you have any questions please respond to this email with your concerns.”

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and you weren’t sure if this was what you wanted.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you had just discovered that you did not have a penchant for hospital gowns. The things were as light as paper and light blue just wasn’t your color in the first place. The garment had been handed to you with haste a few minutes ago.

Now that everyone was out of the room, you figured that putting it on and getting this show on the road was the most viable option for someone in your situation.

You tore at your clothing and stripped down to nothing whatsoever. With your discarded clothes scattered into a hodgepodge on the floor, you pulled on the thin garment and used it as a less than appropriate replacement for your former attire. It was sticky in some places and lacked any sort of shape. Whenever you moved, the gown made a crunching and got more uncomfortable. The whole thing drove you mad and the appointment had just gotten started.

You exhaled and went to the door to give Dr. Chakwas the okay to come back in. She had warned you that it would be better if Garrus stayed behind. He was your lifeline, and even though she knew this she continued to advise against his presence while she went over your medical information fifteen minutes prior.

You gave the door a few knocks and it popped open with your favorite doctor standing behind it. Her smile was a forced attempt to make you feel a bit more comfortable. If anyone was going to help you out of this, it was going to be her.

“Kaiden was in the lounge and he told me to—“

Karin put a finger to her lips and you shut your mouth. She must have known about his secretive plan, which was still a mystery to you.

“I want you to tell me everything that has happened, Shepard. I when I say everything, I mean everything. Start from the moment you first remember having any sort of stress at all.”

You opened your mouth and prepared to cry a waterfall. Was this something you could handle?

You decided that it wasn’t.
“Doctor, with all due respect, there’s no way anybody can understand what’s happened to me.” you whispered. The faintness in your voice caused the older woman to put a hand on your shoulder, which you rejected.

“Not even Garrus can understand. When I woke up in a hospital after the war and was told about the trauma that I’d been dealt, I…I didn’t know what the hell I was supposed to do. Thinking that you were once a fucking brilliant woman and then being told that you’re a vegetable because you gave yourself to the whole galaxy isn’t something anyone else can relate to. Nobody will ever understand no matter how much I tell them. Those raw emotions that I’ll try to tell you about? There’s no way you could relate. You’ll laugh at me and put me in another institution! Don’t you understand what I’ve had to deal with for the past year?! I’m not a robot, I’m a human being! I’m not crazy, I’m just…damn, I don’t know what I am! I’m a hurt woman who doesn’t need to be treated like someone inferior! When I came face to face with the Catalyst—I mean, this kid was the one who controlled all of the Reapers. He was the tiniest thing and he had the more impact on all of our lives than you’ll ever know. What I told him decided the fate of every person in the entire Milky Way. He gave me three decisions and I feel like I blew it. I saved everyone but killed every synthetic being, Karin. There was no way out and there still isn’t! I’m still doubting myself every day and night and it isn’t right! I wake up each morning thinking that my boyfriend has left me for someone of his own species because I’m no good! I sometimes think that Joker stays around just so he can get my help with repairing EDI! But when I see the people I thought I loved and how they’re still around because of something I did…damn, it feels good. Those few moments of the day when I can take pride in my job are the best seconds of my whole life. There was a payoff for this insanity. I-I need help…but not anyone else’s help. I just…”

“Shepard.”

You stopped your tangent to look Dr. Chakwas, who was handing you a box of tissues. You took them with reluctance and did nothing but toss them to the ground. Salt-filled tears streamed everywhere.

“You’re not a psychologist, are you, Doctor?” you asked with a displaced chuckle.

In another attempt to be consoling, she sat up on the examination table with you and took your hand.

“I’m well aware that I’m not you, nor am I a psychologist. My purpose for being here is to give you a head to toe examination. But you know me; I’m not easy when it comes to prompt subordination.”

With a swift slide, she got off of the table and went over to a close storage cabinet. What she pulled out looked unsuspecting at first.

“However, your cries became more blatant when you saw the object that she had retrieved.

“You remembered it for me, Commander. I wouldn’t forget it for you. I think this examination can wait a little bit. I do believe it’s been a year since our last drink, anyway.”

In her possession was a half full bottle of Serrice Council Ice Brandy. You were well acquainted with the bottle, for it was the same one you had purchased for her back when the both of you were still with Cerberus. How she had managed to keep it in tact was beyond you. That simple piece of glass had withstood the Collectors and even the Reaper War.

It was symbolic in a way that you couldn’t describe.

Your name was Liz Shepard, and for a moment you were starting to feel better. Nothing helped like
the taste of alcohol.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you were watching as other family members of patients sat around you.

Some were sobbing because of an imminent death. Others were joyful from the success of an improbable cure.

A select few looked as though they weren’t really there at all.

The lounge at Huerta wasn’t a place that you frequented. However, it felt like you were going to be there for longer than you bargained for. It had taken Shepard more than a few minutes just to change out of her clothes, let alone conduct a full mental and physical examination.

You knew better than to leave her there alone. The days of her independence had come and gone. Instead of pushing you away, she clung to you like a frail child. She was gaunt, afraid and sometimes acted out of the ordinary more than you would have liked.

This didn’t make your love for her dwindle. The more you told yourself that she hadn’t changed, the less you doubted her. She would get better.

She was Commander Shepard. She had to.

“Garrus, I’m glad you’re out here. I wanted to know if we could have that talk. You know, about the Commander.”

Your head jerked up and you saw the man that you wished you had cast out of your life. Kaiden Alenko stood tall in front of you. He was towering over to you due to your current position in your chair.

If you had things your way, you would slap the man. He was anything but self righteous. In fact, he was the exact opposite. You envied him for his ways but didn’t dare tell him that.

He was perfect for Shepard.

“I’ll humor you.” you muttered. Your civility towards the man could go to shit as long as the Commander wasn’t involved.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you were ready to school the hell out of Kaiden Alenko. If you couldn’t, you could at least try to.
I’ve realized that I’ve shamelessly fallen in love with Garrus and Kaiden’s voices at the same time.
I can’t even.
Oh, and I’m almost done with ME1! There were spacebutts. A lot of spacebutts.

xoxo
THR

Chapter 33

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and it had been a long time since you had put on your formal uniform.

Considering that you weren’t a real marine anymore, you didn’t feel like the privilege of wearing the garb should have been granted to you. You were nothing more than an ally of the Alliance now, if you could even call it that. If anything, you had more jurisdiction as a Spectre. The Alliance wasn’t supposed to mean anything more to you after your near-death incident and Cerberus run in. You didn’t want that, though. Cutting ties with the organization that breathed life into your first career was hardly something you wished to go through with.

The pants of the outfit were too short and the coat was too tight on your bust line. In your case, that meant that it fit just right. You had never bothered to get the clothing fixed due to the infrequency of its public appearances. With the exception of formal ceremonies and the occasional marine ball, you kept it stuffed in a storage cabinet somewhere on the Normandy. Digging it up had been a chore; you should have suspected that it would be in your own room instead of tearing through the cargo bay where Grunt used to spend his time. Today’s occasion wasn’t one that seemed appropriate for the formal marine attire. You would have much rather put yourself in your usual suit of armor. It gave you more protection and, more importantly, more authority.

Your ship, which was now docked at an Alliance station, was chosen to be the host of a summit between a few select people. This exclusive group included Garrus, Admiral Hackett, Kaiden and yourself. You weren’t keen on seeing Kaiden come back onto your ship. The thought haunted you day in and day out.
The last time you had been him was on the colony of Horizon when you were investigating for Cerberus. Needless to say, that ended up being the biggest disaster that you could have ever been involved in.

Feeling your now ex-boyfriend’s quixotic embrace back then challenged your own feelings for your then budding relationship with a certain Turian. You didn’t know what you were supposed to tell him. You still cared for Kaiden a great deal. You had a cold heart but this did not prevent you from having any sort of feeling for a man that you had allegedly loved. If he wasn’t a romantic interest for you any longer, the least you could do was be a supportive friend towards him. He deserved that much.

Before you could deduce a social plan, he turned away from you and patronized your actions. Your association with Cerberus had thrown him off. He claimed that you had changed and that you weren’t the woman that you had been back on your first mission together.

He later apologized more times than you could count. Email after email he sent in an attempt to get back to you.

You never responded.

This had been a regrettable decision in the long run.

This was going to make today’s encounter with him a little more awkward.

As far as you knew, he wasn’t aware of your relationship with Garrus. You were a single woman in his eyes and he could be preparing to try and mend the love that you had forged out of stress and devilish fraternization.

You adjusted the buttons on your coat and made sure everything was in place. There was only an hour left until a small group of Alliance personnel made their way onto your ship.

Your life of leisure was now replaced by your old one, which had been creeping up on you for some time. It was time for things to return to normal again.

“Looks like we’re both stuck in outfits we don’t want to be in.”

A set of arms wrapped around your padded shoulders. They were covered in armor and clashed against the unused softness of your jacket, which was unstained.

Your fingers tickled the top of your boyfriend’s gloved talons. You loved how he was larger than you and the way that his protective hear made him appear even more monstrous turned you on.

“C-Sec uniform, huh?” you mused. “I didn’t think you’d be one to keep stuff like that.”

He chuckled and pulled away, making your shoulders and collar bone feel bare again.

“Turians aren’t ones for sentimentality. I figured I’d keep this for a special emergency. Considering the circumstances, I think this is one.”

He looked so different in the blue and black plated outfit. As much as you wanted to tear it all off, maintaining a professional image did not allow this.

After fixing your hair one last time and deciding on the proper tube of lipstick to apply, you sighed and supported your body by resting your hands on your bedroom desk.
Garrus had moved to the bed, where he must have been checking something on his visor.

You turned to him and closed your eyes, which were lined and dusted with a dash of light cocoa colored eye shadow.

“Are you sure that this is going to go alright? With Kaiden, I mean. He knows nothing about all of this—I mean, us.”

The Turian rose and shook his head while combing back his motionless horns.

“Don’t worry about it, Shepard.” he replied, his tone comforting. “We’ll get through this.”

You didn’t know whether or not he was right or wrong. Quite frankly, it didn’t matter. His unwavering support was the thing that you needed the most. Even if you did break down in front of your former cohort in due time, you could at least do it with somebody you loved at your side. You couldn’t help but curse yourself for allowing your thoughts to be so cliché. This didn’t stop you from continuing to fall for Garrus Vakarian more and more by the second.

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and never before had it been so soothing to hear one man’s voice.

Your name was Kaiden Alenko and you didn’t know what this confrontation was supposed to bring.

You sat down next to your former Turian crewmate and waited for him to say something. Silence overtook the two of you. If there had been no activity throughout the hospital ward, the dead stillness would have made the tension rate rise to a ridiculous level. The pressure between you both was bad already; it didn’t need to increase.

“Look, I hope you understand that we’re both here for the same reasons. I’m the Spectre who forced himself into Shepard’s case. This entire thing is a conspiracy that has to be uncovered!”

Your voice had gone into a low tone and you could tell that Garrus didn’t want anything to do with your scheme. Speaking to him could now be considered a lost cause. No matter how many missions Shepard had brought the both of you on in the past, there was no way you would ever be able to cooperate at an entirely civil level. He believed that you hadn’t atoned for what you had done before. His reasons were undisclosed and you preferred to keep them that way. There was no reason for the both of you to erupt into a fight, anyway. The PTSD patients being treated nearby didn’t need to be subjected to that.

“I don’t know what you have in mind, Alenko.”

His reply was on the late side and you waited to hear the rest of his words. Before you could open your mouth to interject, he continued on.

“Whatsoever it is, I’d be willing to look into it. But if you even think about ruining what little happiness Shepard has left, I won’t hesitate in ringing your soft neck. I don’t care how many times I get put in jail for it. Forging a camaraderie with someone I hate isn’t one of my strong points. You’re a damn good soldier, though. Shepard seems to care about you more than I knew, too. For her sake, I’ll do what I can.”

This was the best possible response that you could hope for. It wasn’t one that had an immense amount of certainty. It did, however, have a small sliver of optimism hidden in its context somewhere.
You just had to search hard to find it.

Now that you had the easy part over with, you chose to address a subject that may or may not come with violent consequences, such as a slap in the face.

“I also wanted to tell you something that’s more personal.” you began. A pause came after your statement to which he disapproved of.

“I’m listening.” he prodded with an irritated tone. It took all of the guts you had to say your next sentence.

“I still love her.”

Your name was Kaiden Alenko and that was the worst possible thing that you could have said at that particular time.

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Your name was Dr. Karin Chakwas and you had just completed the most strenuous and out of protocol medical examination of your career. Accompanied by brandy and multiple psychological analyses, you pushed through four hours of work to complete Shepard’s full medical examination from head to toe.

You had gained a wealth of knowledge from talking to the woman that you thought you knew inside and out. Many a time you had discussed personal issues with the Commander, whether it was on shore leave or from a casual encounter aboard the Normandy while on a mission.

This exchange had been so much more valuable than casual banter. You had discovered that you had done nothing more than scrape the surface of a woman who was the most in-depth person that you had ever met. All of your perceptions of her had changed in a matter of hours.

The person who was the strongest in the galaxy was the weakest in the end. The one who had the most striking personality from afar could be aloof up close.

The one person you could trust could be the one who betrays you in the end.

Although she was not wiser than you, she had experienced things that not even people your age knew about. She had seen everything from Reapers to bad politicians to even Rachni.

Her revelations stunned you. Her rationale made you think differently of her. Her character was still as genuine as it had been before, but it had bumps and kinks that you would have never learned about before.

The entire time that she spoke to you, though, you listened.

In the end, you were glad that you did.

After the period of ordered scrutiny had finished, you escorted her to your office. She had managed to get rather emotional throughout the whole ordeal, which prompted you to link arms with her for personal security. It even gave you some comfort as well. What you were about to tell her would require a large amount of confidence on your part. A fully physical examination had revealed some saddening things about the Commander’s condition and it was going to pain you to tell her.

The most interesting thing didn’t have anything to do with her mental issues, though.

You had discovered that Shepard suffered from infertility.
You figured that telling her wouldn’t be important. Her biology didn’t cooperate with her boyfriend’s, making having children impossible if they chose to do so. The advancements that had been established nowadays could be able to take care of her problem, but it was unlikely that the process of conceiving would be a simple road to travel down. It was an unusual thing for you to come across. Combined with one too many groin shots and various circumstances, it created yet another issue that you were required to discuss with the disgraced marine.

The root of her cerebral conflicts was something that you should have expected from the beginning. The consequences of having her L2 biotics implants was starting to catch up to her.

You had discussed these issues with her and Kaiden long ago. Kaiden had experienced migraines that kept him bed bound on certain days. Shepard, on the other hand, didn’t seem to have the crippling pain that came with the primitive implants.

It was now obvious that she was suffering.

In certain circumstances, L2 patients would have flare ups in situations that contained psychological or physical stress. You feel like it would be fair to say that facing a race of vicious sentient machines head on and feeling Death himself multiple times would fall into that category.

These implants could sometimes drive people to utter insanity. You didn’t want to think that this was the case with Shepard.

Sometimes, though, you felt like there was no other hope.

Your name was Dr. Karin Chakwas, and this was going to be the hardest diagnosis that you would ever have to give.
Your name was Kaiden Alenko and you continued to adjust the collar of your new uniform as you followed Admiral Hackett’s entourage into the Normandy SR-2.

Even while docked in the expansive Alliance station, the ship had increased in mass since you had last been aboard. Considering that the old hull had been demolished, you figured that this ship wasn’t even the same one that you had served on just a short time ago. Your desires to go in there without having to face any sort of changes had been fried at this point. Seeing your former vessel transformed into something of a monster wasn’t something you wanted to face. Change was repulsive in your mind, but as you looked down at your jacket you tried your best to accept the modifications that had been made to your life. Different markings on your formal uniform had taken the place of lesser ones. You now led an entire division of biotics that answered to nobody but you. The Alliance was coming to you for once for assistance.

You had a voice.

“Forwarding boarding request to Commander Shepard. Please wait for acceptance.”

You lingered around the entrance to the airlock with the rest of the crew and shuffled your feet in impatience. To pass time and avoid thinking about the real problem at hand, you thought about how annoying this Normandy’s VI’s voice was compared to the old ones. It had an organic quality about it that made you feel tense. The fact that this VI was an AI was unknown to you right now and it didn’t seem to be of relevance. Instead, you started fussing with your hair and made sure that each strand was slicked back in a neat manner.

You had been waiting for this moment of repentance to come for some time.

If your life would truly be stripped of its entire normalcy, then there was one thing that you would fight to save. You had been struggling to maintain that precious thing with countless apologies and letters. As time passed, it got more difficult and facing the head on challenge of keeping the thing
safe started to dissolve from your grasp. Instead of dwelling on all of life’s magnificent opportunities, you had devoted a chunk of your own time to atoning for your mistake. You had hurt this thing; it withered at your touch and was nothing more than a dying wish. It screamed out to you in the silence, but when you reached out to help it you couldn’t hear it any longer.

This thing was your relationship with the Commander. After the way you had treated her on Horizon, she had left with her crew and had managed to take out a whole damn race of aliens.

You didn’t regret not joining up with her and Cerberus. No matter how head over heels you were for anyone, there was no way your morals would be compromised in the process. Your tenure with the Alliance would be the most important thing in your life until you retired or faced your impending death. It was how your father approached his time in the service and you had full intentions of emulating him.

This decision of yours had started to pay off in the last few weeks. Once you forgot about Shepard for a bit, your life soared. You were no longer chained down by someone who wasn’t there for you.

Catching sight of the Normandy slammed you down back onto the cold hard ground. She was behind the doors of the airlock waiting for you. Everything that you could ever want in a woman was standing just a few feet away from you. Your commitment to her had the potential to still be golden after the time that had passed. Even if she wanted to stay alone, you were going to give it your best shot. If her hunger for you was still there, then you would let her devour you.

It wasn’t often that you gave yourself to anyone like you had to her. Being intimate with someone was enough for you to want to hold on. What you had with Shepard had been more than mindless sex before a battle. It wasn’t brief fraternization or a one night stand.

It had been love.

It was sweet, constant and knew no bounds. Its safety was so warming and gave you a sense of consistency that you had never had before.

Your thoughts ceased when the metallic doors in front of you separated. Decontamination didn’t take long and was rather unnecessary.

You exited the airlock and found yourself in the brand new Normandy. She was brighter on the inside and outfitted to the nines. Cerberus had done a fantastic job in rebuilding the ship in a way that surpassed its former glory.

“Admiral, it’s a pleasure to see you again.”

Guards dispersed around you and they took their places at the appointed stations that your old ship used to have. Instead of following protocol, you glanced up to see Shepard taking the Admiral into a rather hearty handshake. Next to her was none other than Garrus Vakarian.

Why his presence on his mission was so crucial was something that you wished you didn’t have to hear about. Deep inside, you thought you could decipher the reason. It was as lucid as the stars in the midnight sky.

You weren’t about to admit it, though.

“I’m happy that we’ve agreed to formally work together. You remember Staff Commander Alenko, don’t you? He’s changed since your departure but a little more responsibility has made him an even better person and soldier than he was before.”
Hackett’s introduction wasn’t required in your book, but you stepped forward with a gracious attitude and disregarded his comments.

“I’m thrilled to be serving under you again, Shepard.” You offered her the same sort of handshake, to which she declined.

Instead, she took you into a hug, which shocked even the likes of Garrus.

It had been short lived and lacking romantic influence. Its aura was more apologetic than you had been expecting.

The same even would occur between the two of you a few years later. The same emotions would be expressed and your feelings would remain unrequited.

Of course, you had no way of being aware of this.

Your burning desire for her flared up in your inner core and you grabbed her hand as she pulled away. Instead of responding with the same amount of fervor, she passively pushed back and returned to her place next to Garrus, who was near the Normandy’s sprawling galaxy map.

The words that came out of everyone’s mouth from that moment on didn’t matter. You watched the two of them and how they could throw casual glances while Shepard discussed logistics with Hackett near her. Garrus’ discrete smirks were noticed by you. His name was on her lips at night now, not yours.

Your feelings were crushed when she held onto his hand instead of yours.

Your name was Kaiden Alenko and it felt like your face had hit the pavement for a second time.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you had just learned what it felt like to slap a Spectre. It wasn’t exactly as satisfying as you had hoped. There was no dramatic reaction from a crowd and the sound of your talon smacking his stubble coated skin had been gotten lost between everything else that was going on in the hospital. As a self proclaimed hothead, hitting him had been an instant reaction to what he had just said to you. In theory, it was a reflex. He had just made you aware of your worst fear and you didn’t know what to do now. It hadn’t been a good choice to make in hindsight. Your troubles were starting to look bad compared to a Batarian. Slapping a Spectre and a high ranking Alliance officer wasn’t what you were looking to have burned onto your behavior record.

Kaiden’s face was shot down and covered in redness. His crimson blood rushed up to his face and the damage you had caused had been nothing compared to what you had inflicted on some people before. Apologizing didn’t feel like the right thing to do right now.

You had to let the slap soak in a little bit first. After all, you had enjoyed it a little more than an ethical person would have.

“I feel like I deserve that.” he mumbled. “But part of me knows better than to think that. I wasn’t planning on doing anything. Is there something wrong with me being here to help a woman who has spent way too much of her time assisting me!!”

His counterargument was more than valid. You were starting to look like the over attached boyfriend now.

“You were the one who took her away from me! I’m the one who let her into my life! As much as
you love her, I don’t think I’m ready to let go!”

He raised his hand to you and lunged, which you were well prepared for. His tiny hand fit into yours just like Shepard’s did. Although his were much bigger, it didn’t hinder your ability to deflect his attempt at retribution.

He squirmed in your grasp and then pulled away, sending a defeated glower your way instead of another physical confrontation.

“Fighting over women is a civilian thing, don’t you think?” you theorized.

“If you’ve won her heart, then so be it. Regardless of that, Shepard’s in there without support and for all we know, she could be getting a diagnosis that could change her life. I say we get our asses over to wherever she’s at and act like men.”

Yet another statement of his sounded like it should come out of a heroic quote book. You stood up and brushed off your clothing while he did the same.

A temporary truce was formed between the both of you. You didn’t like it one bit and he didn’t either.

Standing together was about the only thing you could agree on. It wasn’t for you; it was for Shepard.

“Mr. Vakarian?”

The voice of an Asari maiden caught your attention and you turned to see her dressed in typical nurse clothing. She appeared to be concerned and the clipboard in her hands was clenched tightly to her chest.

“Liz Shepard is requesting your presence in the office of Dr. Chakwas. The doctor said something about a diagnosis and it sounded important. I would suggest getting over there right away.”

The woman’s tone was urgent and you set off on foot to see what the problem was. Kaiden was a thing of the past now. She needed you and you had given her countless promises that were all weighing on this one moment. You had told yourself in the mirror every morning that you were a dependable boyfriend. You could offer support in the emotional department regardless of how much you sucked at it. Pushing through people and discarding insignificant blunders would be the price to pay if she needed to see you at any given time. You were hopelessly devoted to her and she had sworn to be the same way to you. Sometimes you had caught her doing the same thing as you in the mirror. She measured herself up and wondered if saving the galaxy three times had been enough.

Was her sheer existence enough to repent for what she had done before? Would she be able to push through her problems?

Could she be the partner that she wanted to be?

She was.

You told her that she was all day and night. Even though you had been distant towards her because of her problems, that didn’t stop you from letting her know how she was faultless when she flashed you a toothy smile. Her perfume she wore perked you up and the way she handled a gun made your own hands hanker for a sniper of your own.

She wasn’t idyllic in each sense, but she was herself. She tried her hardest for you.
That was more than enough.

You kept these thoughts in your mind as you ran to be with her.

“She didn’t mention a ‘Kaiden Alenko’, did she?”

The Spectre’s words were out of your range, but you would have felt a little better if you had been able to hear them.

“No,” the maiden nurse said. “I’m afraid not, sir.”

Your name was Garrus Vakarian, and you had just won the first battle of the war.

Your name was Liz Shepard and it took you a long time to leave the office of Dr. Chakwas.

The diagnosis that you had been given was starting to soak in. Getting a real professional opinion had been worth sacrificing your own desires. Your mind had been screaming for you not to go for a reason.

It hadn’t wanted to face the truth.

All of your urges and nervous ticks had been explained with just four little letters. You didn’t feel as bad for killing people or destroying a part of your home. These thoughts of yours felt sinister and there was no way a diagnosis was enough to justify what you had done. Taking the lives of people that were at least a touch innocent hadn’t been right. Your reasoning for it had been skewed. Being irate and in the moment were two catalysts that had set yourself off.

Being trapped alone for a year was also the match that let the fuse on your disease.

When you repeated the word in your mind, it sounded so foreign.

“I have a disease and I need help.”

The way it made you feel lesser than those around you devoured your mental health, but accepting your fate was what you had been waiting for. Acceptance would come later; this time, though, you were willing to set yourself right.

You told the doctor that you would get on medication or go to therapy sessions. Garrus chimed in and said that he was capable of doing whatever it took to help. He meant it, too.

He was too genuine to not mean it.

Your disorder wasn’t the only thing you had figured out about during your visit with the Normandy’s ex-doctor.

You were informed that your biotic implants were failing you.

L2 implants were far from being the most advanced pieces of equipment used to turn eezo exposure victims into well bred fighters. In fact, they did more harm than good. The amount of power that you could wield with them was extraterrestrial. You were not on par with Kaiden but you could sure as hell take an Asari if they asked for it.

You could easily recall the day you had them installed. It hadn’t been the most legal procedure in the world. Your parents’ permission had not been obtained and you may or may not have purchased the L2s in an illegal way upon hearing of their immense force. You were still in training to be a real
biotic at the time and it felt like a good idea. The scars from the surgery were still faint on your skin, and as you touched them you could now deem them as a reminder of the worst decision you ever made in your short life.

While your biotics were stronger than ever now, they had burdened you with crippling mental issues. They contributed to all of your instability and made you feel like a second class citizen. While Alenko was stuck with nothing more than occasional headaches, you had been accused of being insane because of the damn implants. Dr. Chakwas’ medical opinion of them was rather unsure; without surgery there was no way in telling the dangers your implants were causing you.

You would either rot away mentally or suffer brain damage from an operation.

Of course, the option of being fine was there, too.

Surgical procedures weren’t an option for you now, and you had Garrus refuse on your behalf. Having the devices put in illegally made their risk even higher. At this point, you felt like you could care less.

Besides, this wasn’t the sole issue that plagued you.

On a more minor note, you had been given a tentative diagnosis of infertility. It wasn’t supposed to matter to you. Considering that your partner was a Turian, adoption was considered to be the most “humane” way for the both of you to parent.

Part of you couldn’t help but feel lacking, though.

You couldn’t produce a child for anyone who wanted one. You weren’t mother material and you didn’t feel like maternal senses worked for you. The galaxy didn’t need another Shepard running around, which was a good enough reason for you to abstain from getting pregnant.

But not being able to do something that other women were very capable of doing felt crippling to you. Even if the entire universe depending on it, you wouldn’t be able to conceive a child whether you liked it or not. The Shepard name would die off and would be forgotten.

These two things still felt like the least of your problems.

Your name was Liz Shepard, you had been officially diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and all you could do was fall into a Turian’s arms.
I feel like the world's biggest idiot.
I've been misspelling Kaidan's name the entire time.
Wow.
I'm not going to go back and fix it here, but every time it's used in my Word document I
have replaced it.
I need help!! xD
xoxo
THR

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
but that didn’t mean that they still stung like harsh venom.

“Kaidan, I’m well aware of how I fucked things up between us. Don’t rub it in.”

His voice rose to a tone that you feared would interrupt the summit going on a few feet away from you.

“I’ll rub it in as much as I want to, Shepard! You died and then rose from the dead and you didn’t think your boyfriend would care?! Working with Cerberus wasn’t a good idea and I’m sorry for Horizon, but Garrus? You left me for a Turian? I’m not the judgmental type and he’s a nice guy and all—“

“If you loved me like you said you did before, you would have been aboard the Normandy within a second without questioning my reasons for working with Cerberus. I didn’t like them either! You left me with no other option!”

Your words hurt just as much as his did. He flinched and looked down at the ground with a scornful face.

“Choosing between you and the Alliance was something that I had to do! If you think I enjoyed any second of it, then you’re wrong. I thought long and hard about what happened, but it all became clear to me once I figured out what Cerberus was. It was a terrorist group! How is it even possible for you to work with them?! Is that a good enough reason for me to doubt you or do I have to make up lies like you do?!”

He had a point and thinking of a rebuttal was starting to look too hard for you. If this was how he was going to work with you on the upcoming assignment, you wondered if you would make it out of the Terminus System alive. Better yet, it would be more practical to ask if he would be the one living through it.

“This isn’t the place for your lovesick arguments, alright? Shut your mouth and do as you’re told.” you barked. It had been a while since you had given orders to someone, and it had felt better than you had been expecting. Having authority over someone gave you a logical sense of control.

“With all due respect, I do believe that Alliance records still indicate that you were killed in action.” he sneered. “Until that changes, you have no right to issue an order to me.”

He stormed off into the elevator for no particular reason and you prayed that he wasn’t planning on invading your quarters.

Besides, you hadn’t cleaned up in there since leaving New York. You would rather not have the brunette see some of the questionable things you had stashed in there.

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard, and you could say that your official reunion with Kaidan went as smoothly as you had been expecting.

________________________________________________________________________

Your name was Joker Moreau and you were in total disbelief of the information sitting in front of you.

You could recall the day you asked Shepard to help you with EDI and her repairs. It hadn’t been that long ago. In fact, it had been over a lackluster dinner that you had attempted to cook for her. You were no Michelin star chef, but you had to admit that your grilled peanut butter and banana sandwiches weren’t all that bad.
She had thanked you for the grub with a reassuring smile and dug into the soupy mess while you picked at your own food from the other side of the table. Garrus had run out to purchase his own fare. Your Turian cuisine skills were limited and he had mentioned something about not wanting to end up with his face in the toilet bowl that night.

The topic had come up in a spontaneous way. To be honest, sharing a wholesome conversation with the Commander was a seldom experience since the war. When she wasn’t out of it, she was trying to rekindle things with Garrus or watching vids that didn’t seem to pertain to her. You wondered how she was able to sit around and live such a sedentary lifestyle after facing life as a marine. Sometimes you could swear that you saw her just staring at a mirror with the same lifeless look in her eyes. Other times she would be looking out into the Presidium with longing eyes. Even though her house arrest wasn’t valid anymore, she stayed inside for her own sake. As many times as you tried to talk to her as a trusted friend, she shot you down. You couldn’t even begin to recall how many times she had confided in you while still on the Normandy. Now, you were nothing more than a body that took up space in her life.

Your dinner table conversation was a push against her antisocial tendencies that had been coming up since being homebound.

“I heard from EDI the other day. She’s still as feisty as ever.” you had mentioned in the most casual way possible. Shepard’s soft spot for EDI had been well known by everyone aboard her ship. She took time away from her day to answer the AI’s questions about human life and culture back when the sentient synthetic was still in her glory.

“Oh yeah. I remember you mentioning something.” the redhead responded. It was almost painful for you to have to further the conversation yourself.

“She’s been wanting me to get her back off of the Normandy so she can still function in her body. Being installed on a little desktop isn’t allowing her to do much as of now.”

She had nodded at you and then looked up from her food, which was starting to cover the sides of her mouth.

“So you’re saying that you want to get her blue box off of the Normandy along with her hardware? You really think that you’ll be able to do that?”

Her tone was annoyingly sarcastic, and you would have sighed and walked away if you hadn’t known better.

“I’ve got some research done. Initiating a remote startup of her systems shouldn’t be that hard. The ship’s docked on the Citadel somewhere. I bet it’s worth a try.”

She chortled a bit and wiped the remnants of her meal off of her face with her arm.

“I need something to keep me distracted.” she replied. “Let me see your notes.”

Your secondary escapades with her started there. Over time, Shepard had taken your notes and made them into an entire report. All of the AI and tech research that she could find had been complied into two datapads worth of info. If her calculations were correct, a remote startup of the Normandy to launch EDI’s systems back up would be possible with a few decryptions and manual overrides. After linking her Normandy systems to the ones on your personal computer, reactivating her would be a breeze.

You were shocked with the amount of information she presented to you. Day by day she would
update you with her progress. You felt like it gave her some sort of confidence to be working on something again, even if it didn’t involve toting around a gun. Being able to give that to her made a massive difference in your life alone.

You looked around the penthouse, which was now empty. When you had walked in and relayed a message to your other two housemates, they had been engaged in a rather raunchy rendezvous on the couch. It wasn’t the first time that you had interrupted one of Shepard’s romantic pursuits, but you could tell that this time it had been rather bittersweet for her.

The pair had been out for quite a while and you assumed that they were at Huerta. You had been there earlier that day and it had been awkward being pulled away by a C-Sec agent.

The entire situation with the Commander’s scandal seemed shady. Everywhere you turned it felt like someone was watching all three of you. Business between the Council and all of you was conducted in secret. Something wasn’t adding up, especially since you had been assigned to be a messenger for the Council themselves.

As soon as you had started to doubt certain people’s motives, the door to the penthouse opened and the couple of the hour stepped in. They appeared to be exhausted.

“How’d it go?” you asked, your voice cheery.

They didn’t respond well to your tone.

Shepard, who appeared to be dazed, sat down on her white leather sectional. Her glassy eyes looked at you with remorse and you knew that whatever had been revealed to her hadn’t been good news.

Garrus put a hand on your arm and you took it as a sign that your departure would be the best thing for the two of them right now.

With a lack of enthusiasm, you limped away and found your way upstairs. A bedroom of your own had been given to you since Garrus had jokingly said that he felt guilty about making a cripple sleep on the couch. The mood between the two of you had gotten lighter in the past few weeks. Jokes made everything seem better on the outside when they weren’t on the inside.

“EDI, you there?” you asked with two fingers up against your right ear. You plopped down on your own bed and stayed hunched down towards the floor.

“Is there something you need, Jeff?”

You found comfort in the AI’s technological voice. Her surreal quality evoked a sense in you that you couldn’t even understand yet.

“Access Shepard’s most current medical records and see what you can find. I think something bad happened.”

A pause was initiated between the two of you before EDI came back with her information.

“The most recent visit she has had was earlier today. She was diagnosed with moderate to severe Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, infertility due to unknown causes and instability with her biotic implants. She was seen by Dr. Chakwas.”

You took a second to take in all of what she had just reported. None of the diagnoses came as a surprise to you except the second one. You felt bad that Liz couldn’t have kids. It wasn’t something that she had mentioned to you before, but you could bet that it wasn’t a good feeling to know that
you couldn’t procreate.

“I have a personal question and would like some insight.”

You perked up as if EDI was in front of you and uncrossed your arms.

“Shoot.” you replied.

“Is it normal to be worried about your friends in a passionate way? I am very concerned about Shepard and her medical problems and wish to help in some way. Do you feel similar?”

The question was rigid yet simple to answer. You reckoned that EDI knew the answer already and was looking for nothing more than clarification.

“They wouldn’t be a friend if they didn’t care about you, EDI.” you said. “I’ve wanted to help her since day one and I think I have. I mean, at least I think I did.”

“I see.” she answered back.

Your name was Joker Moreau and you were starting to realize how much you really did want EDI back for real this time.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you were trying to continue to be the supportive boyfriend that you knew you couldn’t be.

Joker had left the room a few minutes prior. After his departure, Shepard didn’t hesitate in getting physical. You had kissed her forehead while she climbed into your lap, which she somehow found inviting. With her legs wrapped around your waist just how she liked it, she sobbed and sobbed until she couldn’t anymore. No matter how many times you petted her hair or rubbed her arms that were wrapped around your neck, it was no use.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered repeatedly. You almost found yourself crying, too. Hearing the galaxy’s strongest woman sounding so helpless made your heartstrings feel like they were splitting apart. Perhaps you had gained some emotions within the past twenty hour hours or maybe you were just starting to understand how much she was faced with.

Her once capable fists were shaking like a crying child’s. Her perfect hair was scattered across her shoulders and knotted to the point of no return. Her ghost white face had turned red with rage and depression. Tear stains outnumbered her freckles for the first time ever.

You didn’t know what to do with her. Instincts that were supposed to be kicking in right about now had run dry. Staying in your current position was all that you felt like doing. Risking a wrong move and upsetting her felt too high risk.

“You’re a coward,” you thought. “Alenko would know what to do in a time like this.”

You froze and stopped giving her a proper hug. Allowing your thoughts to get the best of you was never something that you wanted to allow yourself to do. When it happened, the thoughts of Kaidan seemed to take over.

No matter how much she wanted you, it would never make a difference. The fear of hearing her scream out that other man’s name when she was in the height of passion would haunt you until the day you died. One day she would ask for him instead of you when something detrimental occurred. Instead of looking for you to help her on the battlefield, she would rely on his biotics instead of your
gun expertise.

“Garrus?”

Her voice was unrecognizable behind mucus and tears.

“I’m sorry, Shepard, I just—“

You stopped speaking and put a hand up to rub your forehead.

“You should go take a nap. I don’t want to bother you.”

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you slipped Shepard out of your grip.

She really did deserve better no matter what she told you.

Chapter End Notes

psst

you guys got this early because you're cool like that.
Priority: Duel

Chapter Notes

Longest chapter ever? I think so. :)  
I've never broken 4k before! It's a new record!  
xoxo  
THR

Chapter 36

Priority: Duel

Your name was Kaiden Alenko and you had found solace in the SR-2’s fresh starboard observation deck. From what you could tell, the place felt as though it had been lived in at least a few months prior. Places where furniture should have been were bare and clean. There were a few fixtures left in the metal floored room, but not enough to make it welcoming. A bar and a mod chair were hardly enough to satisfy anyone other than an alcoholic. The massive window that covered the back wall allowed the infinite space to pour through, making your problems feel tiny compared to what was around you. Any trace of life that had been in the space before was now gone. It was just you now, and it was more than agreeable for your current circumstances.

Your hair was beginning to fall into your face and you cursed yourself for not applying enough gel to keep it in its regular slicked back position. Talking to Shepard made you feel foul and unscrupulous. She had been a great woman until she was brought back to life. Part of you wanted to believe that the entire ordeal was nothing more than a scandal and that the woman you had fallen for was dead. It would have been easier to handle compared to what you had to face now. For all you knew, the Shepard that you had just shared an exchange with could have been a clone or some sort of complicated replica. Knowing the truth behind her and the organization she had worked for was wishful thinking. Until she told you something believable, you were going to assume that something had been altered in her body against her will. She had turned into a cruel person who wasn’t worthy of working under the Alliance.

Cheating on someone was not her style and neither was yelling at someone she had cared for. You didn’t want to think that you were in denial of her. People changed and you were well aware of this.

However, the sorts of changes that had occurred in Shepard felt out of the norm.

The bar was starting to look as hot as a Playboy model to you. Its alluring collection of drinks enticed you to step forward, which you did without a second thought. As you picked up a glass, you pondered the number of times Shepard found herself getting drunk and lost in her thoughts in this exact spot. If she still considered herself a lush, then it would be countless.
The alcoholic poison that you mixed for yourself ended up being purple. That color started to look a little more than nauseating after downing about five of them. Hoping that it wasn’t Turian liquor that you had ingested, you collapsed onto the bar stool and wondered what the hell you were even doing.

Whether you liked it or not, this would be the place where you would have to spend your time for at least a month. Other than the likes of a few Alliances and Council-regulated personnel, there wouldn’t be a considerable amount of other crewmates on the ship. Garrus, the Commander and you were the only crucial members that would be aboard. This meant that you would have to strategize and plan battle tactics with them. Eating with them and speaking to them on a regular basis was also going to get in the way. If drowning your malicious experiences with alcohol was how you were going to have to deal with things, then resigning and taking a head start on your biotics group felt like the best option at the moment.

The airy sound of the doors parting open made your body jerk up. Your biotic control was starting to fade away, causing you to feel a blue aura form around you. Drunken biotics were like live firecrackers. If you weren’t careful, it didn’t take much for you to get burned.

“Kaidan, you and I both know that we need to talk about this.”

Her unexpected sympathy came as a surprise to you. You could count on no more than two hands how many times she had shown pity for people she fought with. Shepard wasn’t one to try and console or even solve social problems when there was a mission at hand. Her presence itself was mind boggling, especially when you couldn’t even comprehend why she was there.

She didn’t acknowledge your drunkenness and you were pleased that she didn’t. Hell, if she even dared to criticize you over alcohol abuse then she would have another thing coming. This was something that you did much less than her.

“In case you didn’t realize, the Alliance treated me like scum. They wouldn’t have wanted to rebuild me. They wanted to invest their credits in something more worthwhile like advancing their place on the Citadel. As much as I hate Cerberus, they spent billions on me and repaired my whole fucking body! If that isn’t enough to give them a little respect then I don’t know what is. I didn’t work for them. Using them and their money to stop the Collectors was the best option at the time and it stopped those colonies from vanishing. If I hadn’t gotten to Horizon you might have been dead.”

Her words didn’t seem to mean much to you now. As much as they made sense, her relations with a terrorist organization would never be justified no matter how drunk you were. The way she talked made her look so self righteous. She had left her own planet’s forces to rot and abandoned you and your budding relationship. Now she seemed to think that she saved you, which was the most ludicrous thing that you had ever heard.

“Kaidan! What the hell is wrong with you?”

You revealed your red rimmed eyes to her when she sat down at the adjacent stool. Her own eyes scanned the bar and she shook her head when she saw the used glasses rolling across the table.

“Don’t talk to me like that.” you barked. “You cheated on me and your ass doesn’t look as good as a pint of good Canadian lager right now.”

The remark was unnecessarily cruel and your current state didn’t make anything better. Her shoulders shrugged when she registered the statement in her mind. If anything, it looked like she was dejected.
In reality, she was anything but.

Without another remark, she spun off of the stool and shoved all of the glasses onto the ground with her arm, making them shatter against the firm floor. The sound jerked your body out of its lull, and the way she grabbed your arm afterwards made you lunge at her. She was irate, not depressed because of your offensive comment. There was no way she was going to dominate you in this sort of argument, especially when you were intoxicated. The foreign beverage had made you more uppity than ever. There was no way you would allow her to touch you. Her body slammed against the window wall of the room, making it look like she was pressed up against space.

You found her in your arms because of your violent advancement, and they way your bodies fit together felt too natural to be comfortable. Her short exhale was in anger and the romantic sensation was short lived. As much as you desired to kiss and make up, she had made that option obsolete.

You could feel her tense in your grasp. Her body shared the same blue aura as you, meaning that her biotics were still as hardcore as they used to be.

“Get off of me, you drunk son of a bitch!”

You suffered while you were propelled to the other side of the room by a mass of dark energy. Your view from the floor would frighten most; Shepard was towering above you with a menacing glare. It wasn’t absurd for her to use force to get what she wanted. From your perspective, it felt immature.

That was exactly why you were going to play along.

You got to your feet and struck back with an overwhelming amount of force, catapulting Shepard a few feet up onto the window. Watching her slide down with a wince on her face and heeding the slamming sound that her body made was enough satisfaction for you to be finished with your little game.

Realizing that you were the more powerful one, she got up just as you did and brushed off her now defiled uniform. Now that you knew that you really weren’t afraid of her, she began to look less and less threatening.

She was silent as she left the room, leaving you to bask in your victory.

Your name was Kaidan Alenko, and you felt like your triumph had been bittersweet.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you could now admit that you were a complete bastard.

When Shepard needed you the most, you caved into your own darkest fears and let your paranoid mindset sink to levels that you didn’t think were possible. In that very moment of time, you truly weren’t good enough for her and never would be because of your own lack of emotional knowledge. That might not have been a good reason, but it was the honest truth.

You had retreated out onto the upstairs balcony after leaving your partner to sob by herself. If that wasn’t enough for you to declare yourself as the worst boyfriend in the galaxy, you didn’t know what was. While she sat in pain, you stood far away from her in remorse. An embrace from your protective arms was all that she needed. However, you lacked this important fact.

Cars rushed across the Presidium as they always did. They didn’t stop to help you console your heartbreak or assist you in solving your never ending problems. You felt like the biggest pansy; if you were back on Palaven, men would be laughing in your face because of your lack of confidence.
Any male that couldn’t act as an equal for his woman was shunned and labeled in a negative way. Turian women were tough and critical. There was no way you would find yourself in this sort of position if you had stayed with a member of your own species.

You stopped breathing for a moment when that sort of thought entered your mind. This whirlwind of a relationship had taken its toll, but not in a bad way. You didn’t think you had a penchant for humans until Shepard came around. What the two of you had was a beautiful thing, and now that it was cracked and bursting at the seams, you realized how much you had taken all of the sane moments for granted.

At that moment, an even more daunting thought entered your mind: what if she couldn’t make it past this? What if the circle that the two of you were going through was going to last forever?

You sighed and allowed yourself to sit in one of the lawn chairs, which was one of the most used pieces of furniture in the entire penthouse. These nightmares weren’t helping your cause at all. Trying to remind yourself of the events of the last day was the only thing that could keep you going. You were a strong man, but women still made you feel aloof. She had asked for you. She held your hand. You weren’t sure why you couldn’t grasp the concept of her love. You still couldn’t comprehend it. You loved her and she loved you, but that didn’t mean that you were good enough. The constant battle that raged in your mind wouldn’t stop.

Now it was worse than ever.

You pulled yourself out of the chair and went back into the cage that was Shepard’s penthouse. The second you got inside, you ran into someone rather unsuspecting: Joker.

“The Commander—I mean, Shepard is waiting for you in her room. I don’t know what the hell happened, but…”

You had forgotten the promise that you had made her. After the appointment, the two of you had planned on resuming what you had started beforehand. As much as you wanted to ravish her for the first time in over a year, you didn’t feel like you deserved it. You doubted that she wanted to see you for those sorts of reasons, anyway. A woman that was just told that she had mental problems probably wasn’t in the mood for sex, especially after her own partner was too much of a coward to face her.

“…she had tears running down her face, man. She kept asking me for you when I went in there to check on her and it was the most fucked up thing I’ve ever seen. You’d better go.”

Your name was Garrus Vakarian, and something in your mind began to click at the sound of those words. It was the same sort of click that had happened earlier that day. You gave Joker a gentle push and moved towards Shepard’s room at a brisk pace.

She needed you and you weren’t going to up and leave her ever again.

Your name was Councilor Quentius Valibus and you were up to no good.

The actions that the Council had been taking towards Shepard had been, in your eyes, unacceptable and insufficient given the numerous crimes that she had committed during her years of service. Killing two Turians gave the woman no right to be free. No matter how much blood she shed in the name of the Council and Alliance, there was no way she was going to get away with slaughtering two of your own. Even if she operated above the law half of the time, you weren’t going to let it slide.
The rest of the Council refused to listen to you. The former Commander was a disgrace to Citadel society and had to be conquered. There was no way that the species that called Earth home would be able to triumph against you.

This time, it was going to be different. Shepard was going to pay instead of have her charges waived.

As you sat at your desk at your embassy, you were faced with a decision that could make or break the former Spectre’s status whether the Council approved of it or not.

In front of you was a button on your computer. If pressed, it had the potential for you to get into contact with the Batarian Hegemony, the enemy race’s militaristic government. It had a reputation for being spiteful and private, only reaching into Citadel space unless necessary. They had issued a threat to the Council about a year ago: punish Shepard or suffer the consequences that the Batarian military had to offer. You didn’t blame them; destroying a chunk of a population and a mass relay would make the Council just as furious. The real size of the former Citadel race’s forces were essentially unknown, which was why they were not shrugged off. Their request had been brutal when it came down to what they wanted to do to Shepard.

The yearlong house arrest had been their idea, although they had intended for it to last much longer than it did. The Council’s job was to implement it and nothing more. Now that the intervention of Hackett and that other Turian had done immense damage, notifying the government was a very feasible opportunity that would end up paying off for you.

You had the option of notifying the Hegemony of the Council’s decisions to be soft towards the Commander. Doing so could potentially result in a surprise attack on the Citadel. However, the credits that you would obtain would be amazing for you. Such intel was considered to be easy to acquire by Council races, but the Batarians were out of touch with everything that didn’t concern the Terminus System. Unless warned, they would have no idea and the entire plan would go to hell.

You had already done enough to screw Shepard over for your own personal reasons. Other than reading all of Spectre Alenko’s files and blocking his emails from sending to most of the Normandy crew, you had fudged a few minor details in his and Shepard’s files. They were harmless enough until somebody found out.

As of now, you didn’t feel like this was enough retribution for you.

You gave the computer in front of you another quick glance before signaling the guards to close the entrance to the embassy. You pressed the button on your computer and prepared to reveal what the Council was trying to hide.

Your name was Councilor Quentius Valibus and the Batarians were about to find out that their end of the deal had been abolished without them knowing.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you were trying to act like nothing was wrong.

You sat on the side of your bed with little emotion on your face. It was still sore and tearstained, but that wasn’t about to stop you from trying to recover. Joker had opened your door to see you bawling a few minutes ago. You had called for Garrus over and over and were met with nothing more than a nod from the helmsman, who you assumed had emerged from his room to see what the muffled sobs were.

Now that you had stabilized, you couldn’t help but wonder if calling for him had been the best
Accepting your fate wasn’t something that was going to happen with ease. In fact, you planned on resenting it for as long as you could. This period of resentment wasn’t supposed to be so depressing. You had planned on having a few people that were close to you that could carry you home in your time of need. They were always there and didn’t even think about leaving your side. You had fought with and beside them for more days than you could count. You shared drinks and gave your insight about calibrations and even the future to them.

One man had gone against that destiny, though. He happened to be the one that you cared about the most.

You blinked back tears when you saw him open your door a few moments later.

At first, you didn’t think that he would come or even remember the words that he had spoken to you so gently before your Council regulated appointment. You wouldn’t have blamed him if he left, either. Waiting for his departure from your life was something that you had been anticipating for a while now. Holding onto him like a child wasn’t going to fly for much longer, and having a real mental disease wasn’t helping matters.

As sad as you had been when he took you out of his arms, you figured that he had his ways. Either he couldn’t put up with you any longer or he just wanted to get out of this madness and think about what was happening around him. Blaming him for needing a breather wasn’t something you were going to do. You felt like you needed one, too.

You stood at his arrival and braced for impact. His words had the potential to hurt you, stun you, or make you begin to cry all over again. You loathed the control he had over you. At the same time, you wouldn’t let it be any other way.

You loved him and that wasn’t ever going to change.

His pace quickened and rushed to pick you up and finish the business that he had abruptly removed himself from. As natural as it could be, you flourished into his grip as he lifted you up in the air. Your arms soared into his carapace and locked into place and your legs resumed their former position around his thin waist.

“Shepard, you know I’m no good with this.” he said while kissing the top of your forehead. “And I also know that I’m not good enough…but damn it, I’m trying the best that I can.”

Your eyes widened at his statement. Did he really think that he wasn’t good enough?

No, he couldn’t.

You removed one hand from his carapace and placed it on his scarred cheek. His mandibles twitched at the sudden touch and you swore that you felt his face heat up.

Was blushing something that Turians did?

“Let me down, hon.” you muttered. Without any other consent, you hopped down and sat on your bed, leaving a large enough space for him to join you.

You inhaled a large amount of simulated oxygen and let it out. He didn’t sit down next to you and opted to sit and relax against your small headboard.

“I don’t know why you would even try and call yourself inferior. You’re the one that has to deal
with a soft, shameless woman who isn’t even one of your own.” You let out an unstable chuckle before opting to continue your speech.

“What I’m trying to say is that you’re more than good for me. You’re the best damn thing that’s happened and I don’t want you to get hurt because of what I’m doing. I don’t understand why you don’t think that you’re good enough when it’s really the other way around. I’m the one that’s hindering you. Hell, if you really wanted to, you could be back in Omega and Archangel could make his big return to save the slums. Instead, you’re opting to stay here with a condemned psychopath while she battles governments. It doesn’t add up in my mind, Garrus! You’re the handsomest Turian I’ve seen and I can’t wrap my head around why you’re here! You even said that you hate the Citadel!”

You saw him direct his gaze to the floor. You had said the wrong words already and you had hardly been together for more than a few minutes.

In an instant, he held out his hand. You took it and found yourself pulled into his grasp. It was warm and secure unlike any other person you had laid your hands on. With your head on his chest, you listened to his heartbeat and prayed that it would never stop.

“This isn’t an argument that you can win.” he purred, his talon resting on your tender collarbone. “I’m never going to leave as long as you want me to stay. I can’t think of a better way to spend a good chunk of my life. After this war I think it’s about time to live a little, if you know what I mean. Enough calibrations and gunfire; I could use a pretty long temporary retirement as long as you’re beside me. I mean, if that’s what you want, that is. I wouldn’t mind shooting up mercs on the side until you get reinstated like you deserve to be.”

The flirtatious tone that he used was beginning to ignite a fire in you that hadn’t resurfaced for a long time. Whenever it did, there weren’t many things around the penthouse that you could put it out with. You had no problem with not arguing with him if it involved what you thought it did.

“Garrus, if mercs are the only thing that you think you’ll be shooting up, you’re dead wrong.”

He leaned down and pressed an aggressive kiss upon your lips, and you had a feeling that you were going to need some of the old medication that Mordin had prescribed for you for situations like this.

“Oh, I promise you that it won’t just be mercs.” he teased inbetween breaths. His talon wandered down from your collarbone and onto your chest. “There’ll be some Batarians just for you.”

You let out a promising moan, which made him begin to kiss harder.

“This conversation isn’t over,” you warned. “But to be honest, you’re making me hornier than I’ve been all year.”

Your breathing got faster little by little as you nipped the most aching parts of his skin that had remained untouched by any other woman.

“You’ve got yourself a deal, Commander.”

Your name was Liz Shepard and there were certain things that drove you absolutely wild.

Garrus Vakarian was one of those things.
Enter: Hegemony

Chapter Notes

Hopefully this chapter was worth the wait. :) 

xoxo

THR

EDIT 7/8/13: Edited some parts regarding Kaidan's Normandy locations. There were inaccuracies!!

Chapter 37

Enter: Hegemony

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and you were disgusted. Whenever you sensed this feeling coming on, you usually found some sort of way to vent or forget about it. Whether it was through retail therapy, sparring, shore leave or a fanatical sexual encounter, finding an outlet to dismiss these emotions was easy to come by most of the time.

None of these outlets were available while you were supervising Kaidan as he moved his belongings into the Normandy to prepare for the upcoming mission. It had been weeks since your incident with him and you had spent no time on repairing you fractured relationship. Being able to call him an enemy was an understatement; as far as you were concerned, the two of you were in a full on social war. If you had had things your way, Alenko would have been kicked off the ship and discharged from the Alliance the second he put a hand on you. Part of you advised yourself against it and you were still trying to figure out why you had done nothing. After all, the Normandy wasn’t quite an Alliance regulated ship yet. Although it was technically Cerberus property, you still had jurisdiction over what went on as long as you retained your position of Commanding Officer. Something inside of you was urging your entire being to keep the other man around. He was a good soldier and someone that the team couldn’t afford to lose. You used that as an excuse until you were able to figure things out in your mind.

You had limited your actions with him since your encounter. The agreement you both made was simple: speak only when spoken to and interact in a civil way when it came to the battlefield or matters concerning the assignment. You and he concurred that there was no reason to screw things
up for each other. The hatred was allowed to be mutual, but its extent could reach just so far without getting out of hand.

The man you were too afraid to admit your former love for had chosen to reside in the lounge. As angered as you were about him taking over Samara’s old stomping grounds, he refused to be anywhere else and you weren’t about to ignite another biotic firestorm aboard a rather small ship.

“Why are you here?” he asked while setting the box down on the ground. “You were the one that wanted to stay as far away from me as possible.”

You leaned against the wall near the door and responded with a snide chortle.

“Considering that I’m still the CO, Alenko, I don’t think you have the right to question me. Alliance or not, I’m your boss until Hackett says otherwise.” you purred. Your tone was flirtier than you had intended and all that seemed to do was piss him off even further. The box of belongings landed with an angry thud.

“Just because you’re still on top of me doesn’t mean that you can act like a bitch.” he responded. Pushing his buttons was unprofessional. It was the most easily accessible source of entertainment aboard the ship, though. Considering that you weren’t exactly on duty yet, you figured that a bit of teasing wouldn’t hurt.

After all, you did hate his entire being with every bone in your body.

At least that’s what you wanted to tell yourself.

“On top of me?”

You raised an eyebrow at him and he rolled his eyes at the childish remark.

“You haven’t changed at all, have you?” he muttered.

You departed from your post near the door and walked towards a shelf. A seemingly innocent cluster of glasses filled with colorful liquids lined the storage area. As long as your ex was on
board, liquor was going to be imported in by the gallon. You decided on a light blue beverage that you had taken the liberty to purchase on your last trip to the Citadel.

“Fucking a Turian can do some things to you.”

You took a swig and realized that this was the most intimate setting the two of you had been in without killing each other. The hostility was still there, of course, but it felt like things were a little lighter. If this was a subconscious attempt on your part to be friendly, you planned on mentally kicking yourself later.

He snorted in response and eyed the drink in your hand. He hadn’t consumed a single alcoholic beverage since the incident between the two of you.

You cleared your throat and finished off your beverage with one last swig. Realizing that the environment had gotten tenser from your reference to your current partner, you bit down on your lip firmly and looked at him with genuine sympathy. Even for you, the comment had been out of place.

Besides, you didn’t hate him that much, right?

You chose not to answer that question.

“Kaidan, it was a joke. It was unprofessional and I didn’t mean to—“

He threw his hands up and strode away from you.

“Forget civility, alright? I’m going to pretend that I never heard that.”

His back faced you and you forced yourself to stare down into your empty drink glass. The remnants of your beverage were at the bottom; light blue droplets circled the container as you allowed yourself to get lost in the color that mimicked the color of Earth’s unpolluted sky.

“And just so you know,” he continued. “All of these problems between us won’t be an issue when it really matters. Let’s try to make it work.”
Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and for once you truly had no idea what to say.

Your name was not important. You were, however, a government worker in the extensive network of the Batarian Hegemony. There wasn’t much else to know about your life; on Kar’shan, there were wasn’t much else that mattered. The Batarian homeworld boasted nothing more than an isolated communist government. Its workers were private yet countless. The military was unseen to anyone who wasn’t a Batarian. You tended not to question what went on around you. After all, anybody could be listening to you at any time.

Your life on your home planet revolved around your job, which was more crucial than you would have liked. You were rather old for someone of your species and had spent a good deal of your life climbing the career ladder. On such a poor world, this didn’t get you any higher than an assistant to a top ranking government official. You didn’t get the opportunity to become a big shot like some people in a high class did. Instead, you worked right under their noses. It was a high paying job but it wasn’t enough to pay the steep fees that the Hegemony requested. Even if you wanted to quit, it would be next to impossible. You knew better than to gripe and complain. Your parents told you from a young age to deal with what was handed to you. If you didn’t, you would end up enslaved or put in jail.

The Batarian government was essentially useless to people like you. Kar’shan was divided into nation-states. The single most influential or richest man on that part of the planet was appointed (never elected) to a position in the official Hegemony Council, which was the supreme form of government. They convened in the capital city from time to time and debated over outdated laws and endorsed terrorist organizations that plagued your planet into exile. As each nation-state representative argued with one another, they all had a meager assistant to hold them back and take care of their dirty work. This was your job.

On a normal day, you sat outside your representative’s office and took calls as well as opened messages that weren’t very interesting. Sometimes they would be complaints from other officials and other times it would be spam from some sort of Extranet porn site. Either way, it wasn’t quite a job that someone would want to have.

Today was a different day, though.

For the first time in a long time, a name came up in the sender box of your email and it was truly a familiar one. Councilor Quentius Valibus was a person who you had never met in person. You had heard tales about him and his dealings with your government. He was the Turian councilor on the Citadel and wielded power that was almost unmatched by anyone on that piece of Prothean junk.

For a majority of the time, the Hegemony had ignored the Council and bashed it from afar. Propaganda and empty threats were hurled at every planet and race under the Council’s jurisdiction. However, they had declared that your race was just a problem that had to be ignored.

That is, until the Bahak Relay Incident involving Commander Liz Shepard. You heard that those under Council jurisdiction had given it the codename of Arrival and it sounded pretty stupid to you.

You were sure that the Hegemony had given their people a skewed view on what happened, but you had been there during the briefing of the incident. Three hundred thousand of your own had been slaughtered just so an Alliance soldier was able to bring back a scientist that was being held hostage.
A single woman had destroyed a mass relay, your people and an entire system. When the representatives found out, they resumed contact with the Citadel for the first time in a long time.

They demanded that Commander Shepard be enslaved, put to death or tortured. This was during the time of the Reaper War, which had changed things indefinitely.

Once the war had been conquered, the conflict resumed.

The Hegemony had threatened to send the entire Batarian fleet and every terrorist ring to the Citadel to destroy the place even more than the Reapers had. Long story short, they gave in and vowed to keep Shepard in solitary confinement. They kept up with their end of the deal to not attack and checked in month after month to assure that the Commander remained unstable.

You clicked on the email in your box and began to read over it.

To your horror, it revealed everything that the Hegemony didn’t want to hear. Shepard was alive and had been released. She had figured out the truth and was most likely going to be acquitted of any sort of charges brought against her.

You closed the email on your computer in fear of someone looking. There was no way anybody could find out about this without a few heads rolling.

With a reluctant sigh, you stood up and opened the door of your representative’s office. With your omni-tool flashing, you read out the contents of the email to him.

Your name was still not important because your head was one of the rolling ones that day.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you had forgotten how much sex was a strenuous labor of love. Between the medications and the meticulous movements that were planned out to the utmost degree, caution and steadiness were more important than uncontrolled lust. You didn’t want to hurt Shepard and she didn’t want to displease you. Considering that it had been a long amount of time since the two of you had gone at it like animals, she had meandered over to the bathroom to prepare herself for what was about to ensue. That had been five minutes ago. By this point, she normally was trembling too much to even bother injecting herself with anti-inflammatory medication. The fact that she hadn’t exited the lavatory made the minutes feel like hours.

You could swear that it used to be more romantic than this. Having your girlfriend suddenly stop sucking on your tender mandibles to go and take pills and a shot wasn’t something that you looked forward to. It was a mood killer and it left you sitting alone while the area between your legs throbbed. The periods of time between administering the prerequisites and the beginning of foreplay were the longest ones of your entire life. Now it felt worse than ever.

She hadn’t bothered to strip you down yet and curling your talons around the edge of your pants was inevitable at this point. You had waited an entire year for this moment. The hours you had spent alone fantasizing about her couldn’t compare for what was about to happen. For once you were going to be able to prove your love to her so that doubt was no longer a sensation in her mind. Forgetting your flaws was going to become natural while your body tuned into hers. It would take strength and flexibility, but you were determined to make things work again. It had been a long while since you had watched the vids that Mordin sent you almost two years ago. You had been so naïve back then. Figuring out optimal positions and learning what made Earthborn females tick had been a strenuous process. What started out as an awkward encounter ended up blooming into something deeper than love. It was a bond that had more depth than one was capable of imagining. You both put more trust than you ever had into each other. The risks and uncomfortable moments
evolved into a type of interspecies pleasure that was irreplaceable.

You and Shepard had been pros a year ago. The last time you had been with her, she could finally last as long as you and you had decreased the amount of scratches and bruises that ended up on her sensitive skin by accident. Sex had been highly experimental between the two of you until the last time you had it. The two of you had, in theory, achieved perfection at that point.

You wished that you could relive that moment again and again. Not even the Reapers interrupted the two of you. The way you pulled on her hair and the perfect bite marks she left had turned into an art form. Tempos had balanced and kisses were gentler than ever. The two of you went at it for the entire night until her chest heaved up and down uncontrollably. Another memory that you loved to recall of that night was the way she slept. Sweat made the strands of her loosened hair stick to her exposed forehead. She curled up into a ball on her bed, making the sheets swirl up around her. Her skin melded into the satin of the fabric and she was truly at peace for the first time in months. You were concerned that she would no longer be able to experience that.

It was then that you determined that this night would be about her. As much as you loved the thing that her kind called a “blowjob”, you weren’t going to make her do anything strenuous. After being put through hell, this woman deserved to feel like a normal person again. If evoking this feeling required you to act as a subordinate, then you were going to swallow your pride and do it.

You pulled your talon out of your pants and cursed your subconscious urges.

Walking over to the bathroom had been quite a task. Like Shepard’s type, Turians had erections that were capable of being more painful than expected. From what you had seen in the vids, your anatomy was similar to that of a human male. The differences were more than noticeable, however. This didn’t seem to put Shepard off. She had admitted to preferring Turian anatomy compared to other men’s. It had been a questionable comment but you weren’t going to argue with it.

You uttered a soft moan as you put your hand on the door in an attempt to knock. You felt your own length beginning to get sore and you gripped the knob for support. She must have heard you, because the sentence she mumbled broke your heart.

“Unless you want to see an ugly ass human putting a needle in her arm, I suggest you stay outside.”

This didn’t stop you from opening the door with an overwhelming amount of force. The woman that stood in front of you was the most breathtaking one that you had ever seen and you were going to be sure that she would never forget it.

Her clothes had been tossed aside and had been replaced with a set of lingerie that you hadn’t seen since her Cerberus days. It was loose on her due to the weight she lost in muscle and fat. Fortunately for you, this hadn’t affected the size of her breasts, which were an asset of hers that you had grown to love. Turians lacked the same sort of mammary glands as humans. It took you a while to understand why men found them so voluptuous. Once you saw them bare, though, you gave into their everlasting appeal.

You counted each one of her ribs, which were on full display. She had also let her hair down for you, allowing the color to clash against her sickly skin. Each one of her flaws was exposed to you; scars, liquor fueled tattoos and freckles were spread across her body. You longed to kiss each one and make sure that she never thought any less of herself because of them. You were sure that she was too thin to be considered healthy. However, you couldn’t help but marvel at her slim waist, which mimicked a Turian female’s all too well. You were beginning to prefer your women without
scales. The softness of other species’ skin was looking sexier and sexier by the minute. The
sensation of letting your talons wander across Shepard’s was something you didn’t think you were
able to wait for.

She had even gone as far as to apply a bit of makeup to her face. Fierce catlike eyeliner had been
drawn over her lids, giving her a sultry appeal that you hadn’t seen in an eternity. Her tall frame
hunched over in a shameful way as she let a syringe drop to the ground.

“You still have the medication, right? Last thing we need is going to that damn hospital again.”

Your comment didn’t lighten the mood. She instead answered with a cool nod before turning back
to you with a distressed frown.

“Women were obsessed with losing weight back on Earth. It seemed so materialistic. Now that I’m
thinner than most of them I’m starting to wonder what all of the appeal was for.”

She had tried her best to be as close to perfect as possible for you. Her speech continued and she
became more and more dejected as she spoke. The lack of vigor and spirit in her demeanor made the
whole scene feel so out of character.

“I really did think that this talk could wait. The whole inferiority thing, I mean. But looking at
myself now, I just—“

You couldn’t wait anymore. You were too hungry to listen to her speak lies about herself and your
primal instincts began to take over. Without hesitation, you pounced and pinned her against the
counter of the bathroom. Shepard’s arms scrounged around the sink area in search of something to
grab onto, sending a glass soaring onto the ground. The shattering noise made your grip on her
clench up, launching her into an uncontrollable frenzy. She was well aware of how to play your
game.

In fact, she knew how to cheat it, manipulate it and win it until her own mind was content.

Other objects came crashing down while you hoisted her up onto the counter. With her ass landing
perfectly in the basin, she angled herself so she could do what she did best: link her legs around your
waist.

Her limbs locked in place just like they used to and a fervent growl exited her lips. While her nails
dug into your neck, you took her in and watched her back arch when you kissed old spots on her
body. What started as innocent forehead kisses turned into ones that were much more risqué. Tiny
red marks emerged on her chest and navel area and she moved with you. Just hearing her whisper
your name and ask for more was enough to keep you going.

In a sudden move of heartfelt aggression, she pushed you off and then regained her grip by
catapulting you to the ground. Her strength had diminished, but the way she pinned you down on
the ground was irresistible enough to keep you in place. With her nearly bare crotched pressed
against your covered one, she grinded against you and kept her hips in line with your narrower ones.

“Take off your goddamn pants before I start feeling self conscious again.” she teased while leaning
down to kiss your own neck. “I’ve waited a year to feel like a woman again.”

The purr of her voice was a significant change from the way she had been talking to you just minutes
ago. You pulled her upon you and attacked her lips with a sense of urgency while she helped you
with removing the unneeded garment, which was tossed aside without care. It relieved a bit of the
pressure building up in your throbbing nether regions.
The makeouts between the two of you were a constant battle for control. One minute Shepard would be trying to slide her tongue across your mouth to put you in a trance. Equally as fast as her, you pushed her down to the ground and tried to strip her down, which failed each time. She was going to make you earn the right to devour her again, which you secretly adored yet hated.

The one thing that sent her into a state of yielding was when you hooked your fingers on the edge of her panties. She willingly gave up all control as you sent one finger down further, caressing her soft folds of skin that you had learned to love. There was one place in particular that you focused on, causing her to ball up her large hands into fists.

Her suppressed screams turned into moans as she buried her head into your carapace. You had managed to get on top of her and pin her lower half down, allowing her upper body to reach up and pepper kisses onto your jaw line as a reward for executing all of the right moves.

“J-Jesus fucking…Vakarian, don’t stop!”

You increased the pace of your fingers, allowing them to move and slip into her. You made sure that their rough and calloused texture didn’t cause damage, but she had insisted that their ribbed quality felt better than her own touch.

Sure enough, she emitted nothing more than a squeak and didn’t control her hips as they bucked towards you. Your tongue licked your lips as you watched her before you. She looked so helpless and out of control beneath you, but the amount of trust she was displaying was monumental.

While you continued your advancements, she managed to unhook her brassiere with a shaky hand. She smiled at you when you noticed and continued to moan in a state of pure bliss. With your free hand, you threw the lingerie over to where your own pants were and began to work on removing her panties, which were beginning to become more of a hassle than they were worth.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you realized that nothing in the entire galaxy could replace the grin that was playing on her lips.

For once in your entire relationship, you were feeling more than good enough for her.

You were perfect again and the fun was just getting started.
Enter: Dr. Liara T'soni

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a little short. To be honest I feel like I'm in some sort of a slump, not sure why. I wanted to get something up, though. I think I have to change ratings and stuff after the last chapter...which I hope I did a good job on...

Also, there were changes made to the first part of the last chapter so I suggest that you guys go back and reread! There were some location issues.

xoxo
THR

__________________________

Chapter 38

__________________________

Enter: Liara T'soni

__________________________

Your name was Kaidan Alenko and you were opening a package.

You stood in the armory area of the Normandy and your hands wrapped around one of the best pistols money could buy after discarding a secure box. The brand name of the firearm had been drilled into your mind throughout your galactic escapades. While walking throughout the Citadel, advertisements directed at you were blasted from terminals while you strode past them. Stores endorsed them until they were blue in the face. Even the Alliance was working with the company and making sure that every recruit was given a basic model pistol once they completed training.

The Ariake Technologies brand name meant a lot in the galaxy right now. The curves of a Raikou X pistol caressed your skin with the utmost amount of delicate care. You had been awaiting its arrival onto the SR-2 for a while now. Special ordering it had been a pain in the ass even with special Alliance privileges. Custom tactical grips, extended ammo capacity and a high caliber barrel didn’t come cheap. You figured that it was time to pull a few strings and treat yourself to something nice. Even if it was just a fancy gun, you had a mission to complete. Having the correct weapons made things easier and it would be great to show it off to Shepard.

Since moving onboard the former Alliance marine’s ship, you had been losing your morals slowly but surely. Succumbing to your CO’s low blows and harsh feelings had turned you into a more hardened man. Although there hadn’t been any more mass effect fueled brawls, the two of you exchanged spats that rivaled the Krogan’s arguments. Petty insults could only go so far and it amazed you that things hadn’t reached a physical level yet. You had stopped all sincerity towards the woman you had professed your love for long ago. Wanting things to work was no longer a desire in your mind. She didn’t stop her mind games and you knew that Garrus was falling for
them, too. What came off to others as a badass personality was different in your mind. Shepard was a pureblooded bitch who had nothing better to do than stoop to levels unknown. Saying that you had attempted to make amends was good enough for you. Actually continuing to try wasn’t worth the aggravation.

It felt like you were threatening to leave the ship every day that you spent on it. Tactical planning and supply gathering was still in the works. You had the opportunity to have shore leave and just disappear, but for some reason you couldn’t allow yourself to leave.

There was a job to get done and you weren’t about to leave because of an annoying boss. Despite getting assigned the most annoying duties and never getting shore leave, you were going to stay no matter what.

Just for kicks, you pulled the trigger to your new gun and smiled at the clicking that echoed across the room. The device was ready for use, which brightened your day a bit.

That is, until another woman stepped into the room.

Her steps were light and almost silent, but you knew better than to ignore them. Your head rose out of habit to either greet or mentally strangle the visitor. The woman’s choice of attire was poor compared to what you had seen before; a pair of butt ugly sweats and a muscle tank sporting the N7 logo wasn’t something that fit protocol.

Her head turned to the worktable you were at. She paid you no attention and that was the way you liked it. You, on the other hand, couldn’t help sneaking a glance at her ass like you always used to while aboard the SR-1.

Without a care in the world, she went to work on whatever the hell she was doing. In a similar manner to you, she picked up a heavily modded assault rifle and began toying with it. Her long fingers touched the trigger, her eyes giving it a look that she had once given you. To think that she had the same level of appreciation for her guns as she did her men felt kind of disgusting to you.

You bit your lip when your mind also began to think that it was a tiny bit sexy.

You snorted, sending her head straight up again and in your direction. She didn’t look pleased by the minor interruption no matter how innocent it had been.

“Alenko,” she muttered, her voice smooth. “What kind of gun is that?”

Her tone was rather kind, which had been a miracle given her facial expression. You placed the pistol on the table and away from your immediate grasp.

“Ariake pistol. Got a discount from the Alliance. Does it matter?”

Your curt response triggered something in Shepard that you seldom saw. She dropped what she was working on and took a step closer to you.

“Yeah, it does.”

You raised an eyebrow, half expecting her to either lunge at you or just walk out. Instead, she paced back and forth before finally returning to her own workplace a minute later.

Her response didn’t get any further due to an interruption from the Normandy’s AI. You didn’t know what to think of the machine, who had been dubbed with the feminine name of “EDI”. From what you could tell, she exceeded the capabilities of even the Geth. A wicked sense of humor also
accompanied her astonishing abilities. The way the remaining Normandy crew spoke to her made her appear to be a real person. Trusting her wasn’t something you felt like doing until she proved herself. You hadn’t been in serious combat situations yet, meaning that her duties were limited to flying the ship and giving messages to crew members.

“Shepard, Admiral Hackett is requesting to see you in the Communications Room. He said that the message is urgent and requires direct attention from you.”

Almost as if she was a robot, Shepard did as she was told and retreated out of the room without saying another word to you.

Your name was Kaidan Alenko and you began to follow your ex as soon as she left the room.

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and you hated what had just gone on.

To be frank, you lacked the energy to patronize Kaidan’s choice of pistol. He didn’t know the reasoning behind your hatred for Ariake. They developed damn good technology and you would use it in a second if you knew that your deadbeat parents weren’t behind their operations. Professing your undying abhorrence for a successful company required a large allotment of time that you would rather put towards other things. Explaining your former life to Alenko wasn’t something you wanted to do, either. EDI’s message felt like a godsend. You were soon about to find out that dealing with Hackett would not be.

Instead of being patched through to the Illusive Man, the blue scanners slid up your body and you came face to face with one of the most prominent Alliance members to date. While he was dressed in full uniform, you were hardly the picture of reliability and honor.

He was distracted by your choice of attire for a moment but spend no time in getting on with the supposedly crucial information.

“Commander, we have some frightful news that needs to be jumped on as soon as possible. I’m afraid that Arrival has been compromised. Very compromised, as a matter of fact. I need you to get into action as soon as you possibly can.”

You took a deep breath and gave the Admiral a small chuckle, as if to say “are you kidding?” with nothing but body language. You had been put up against tighter odds before. However, this didn’t mean that your situation was anything less than extreme. This was a project that you didn’t know much about. You still weren’t entirely aware of what you were up against. Batarians and an Alliance scientist weren’t details that you were able to go on. You needed concrete answers as to what the hell you were really doing.

Until someone in the Alliance provided that, you were staying grounded.

“You haven’t exactly divulged much about the matter at hand.” you said. You had to choose your words carefully. One wrong move could get you into deep shit.

“I need access to what this mission is really about. Send it to me or else I can’t guarantee that I can get out of this alive.”

Hackett brought his hand to his chin and looked at you in thought. There was no way that he couldn’t agree with your opinion; after all, he had barely told you anything regarding your newest assignment.

“I’ll forward a datapad to you with all of the information. I apologize if this isn’t what you’d like,
but the Alliance and the Council need you, Shepard. Hackett out.”

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and you now had a large setback on your hands.

Your name was Dr. Liara T’soni and you were the Shadow Broker.

As a powerful information broker under an anonymous identity, you bought and sold data and facts that were worth more than pure element zero itself. Your product was unique; it might not be a tangible good, but it had the power to start and end wars, careers and even lives. As a broker, you made sure that your merchandise went to the best place. In your case, it would be the most controversial and highest paying bidder.

Without giving out an identity, you had dealt with the likes of every major government in the galaxy. You had discussed personal matters with each member of the Citadel’s Council. Your influence had even given you a cult following. Many people romanticized the Shadow Broker; its alluring identity gave people the freedom to imagine you in ways that you would never expect. You had received rumors that your position was the central character to a new vid series in Nos Astra. As illustrious as you felt at times, you were disconnected with what your former life used to be. Before becoming one of the most powerful people in the Milky Way, you spent time on the Normandy SR-1 and 2 and had the luxury of being able to call studying Protheans one of your countless diversions. The times that you had been a broker on Illium had been the most enjoyable part of your one hundred and ten years of existence. It was a halfway point in your life; you had the power of a broker and control over millions, but you maintained a solid identity and didn’t spend your life yelling at a drone or slaving over a computer.

Since losing your arsenal of a ship and concluding your efforts to end the Reaper War, you settled down on Thessia and anonymously donated thousands of credits to the Asari government to rebuild. You shared an expansive apartment with your Drell coworker and set up an office that took up most of the abode’s space. Computers ended up in the kitchen and the bedroom and it was hard to find a place that your occupation hadn’t overwhelmed. However, once you realized that it had been a year since the end of the war, things started to turn in your life.

You began to distance yourself from your work more and more, leaving Glyph to do a majority of your more trivial tasks. Instead of tracking down a councilor’s mistress or secretly analyzing ex-Cerberus operatives, you poured hours into checking up on one of your best friends: Commander Liz Shepard.

Her Alliance title had been stripped and she had been turned into a ruthless criminal, but this wasn’t enough for you to stop believing in her. Your job gave you access to everything and you had everything tagged with her name placed into a personal folder on your omni-tool. Every time there was even an inkling of information on her, you were the first to know about it.

Feron joked with you and said that it was “high profile stalking”, but you laughed it off each time he brought it up. Keeping tabs on someone you cared for wasn’t what you would call stalker behavior. You were doing nothing more than keeping an eye out for her.

The information that you had uncovered about the woman who you used to serve under was shocking. The scandals with the Batarian Hegemony and the Council made you outraged and you wanted to go and pay them a visit when Shepard’s return was in full swing. You had even gone so far as to watch every second of her meeting with the Citadel’s supreme government, which pissed you off much more.

The only thing that was keeping you on Thessia was your work. You had relinquished some
responsibilities as the Shadow Broker to Feron once you admitted that he needed to be more than an assistant to you. He gladly took some of the load off of your shoulders, but this wasn’t enough for you to just pick up and leave the planet. Paying Shepard a visit required planning; purchasing a ship ticket and arranging all of your precious cargo was going to be hard. The days of the Normandy were long gone, which meant that packing all of your computers into a former Cerberus cheerleader’s office was no longer an option.

You looked down at your omni-tool and pretended to favor it over the stunning view of Thessia that sprawled out in front of you. Despite your view being limited due to the hardware that covered most of your window space, you left one small area untouched for your viewing pleasure. You tried your best to enjoy it for a while. You had been working all day at trying to crack codes and expose secrets that weren’t meant to come out. In your opinion, this constituted at least a minor break. You never really stopped working, though. It was a habit that just couldn’t be broken.

While you looked out that window and imagined a more peaceful life, you blinked and were disturbed by the brief vibrations of your tool. This meant that there was a Shepard update.

You gave the tool a nonchalant glance at first until you were able to comprehend the magnitude of the information presented to you.

Your name was Dr. Liara T’soni and the Batarian Hegemony was exchanging information with the Turian councilor regarding Shepard’s status. From what you could tell, this was the sort of information that was very capable of starting a war.

Perhaps it was time for an intervention.
Chapter Notes

I feel like I have so much more freedom on this site compared to FF.net. I can put whatever I want as the a/n without getting backlash....

In that case, enjoy the chapter.

Questionable things occur. :D

Which I suck at writing.

That is all.

xoxo
THR

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and you were preparing some kind of speech to accompany your meeting that you had scheduled with the Normandy’s new crew.

There weren’t a considerable amount of people aboard the vessel like there used to be. With the exception of a few Alliance reps and servicemen, the real crew comprised of you, Kaidan and Garrus. This bothered you to a certain extent. If something happened to anyone on the squad it meant that you would be risking catastrophic failure. Despite the solitary reputation of most Spectres, you found that working in small groups got things accomplished faster. It was nothing more than a tactical preference, but you didn’t know what would happen if your style failed. You stared at the laptop document in front of you and drummed your fingers on your desk in impatience. You had called for the assembly of the staff in a half hour and your mind was drawing a blank.

Your quarters were deserted with the exception of Garrus, but his presence was always welcome. He sat on the bed analyzing algorithms on his own PDA while you thought over things in your head.

“Vakarian, how did I use to plan those old motivational speeches? I don’t want to feel like a walking cliché or some shit. This is one of the most important announcements I’ve ever made and I can’t screw up.”

Garrus was in the dark about what was happening. Up until a few hours prior, he was aware of just about as much as you when it came to the mission. Now that you were informed, you refused to tell him anything early. Just like everyone else, you were to present the data given to you by Hackett at the gathering and he was going to listen to it then.

He put the tablet down and looked at you, his eyes as blue as ever.

“It would probably help if you told me what you’re motivating us for.”

You exhaled at him and rolled your eyes, something that you found yourself doing in jest a lot. It wasn’t with him but with the crew instead. Being constantly asked if you needed anything or if the engineers were handling the maintenance correctly wasn’t something you would be capable of
laughing off for much longer.

“Aw, come on. That would so ruin it.” You teased. In actuality, the information that had been presented to you regarding the mission was terrifying. Diffusing the tension was the last defense mechanism at your immediate disposal. “Winging it sounds like the better option right now.”

He erupted into laughter, which wasn’t something the Turian man did quite often. After pulling out his work again, he leaned back in his chair and clicked his visor off. The azure glow covering his eye faded away, making his face look less illuminated than usual.

“Commander Shepard winging something? I don’t think that’s the best idea. Don’t you remember what happened when you winged it and threw down a thousand credits at a game of quasar?”

This made you shut down your laptop indefinitely. You remembered that night well; it had been back before you were a Spectre and a few credits mattered a lot more than they should have. You gained ten thousand credits from only a single thousand and lost it all in one night with Garrus and Tali at your side. You smiled at the memory and wondered how things went from silly to complicated within a few years.

“That was the best night of your life. Admit it.”

You stood up from your seat and took the opportunity to stretch before you had to change into proper clothing. You weren’t about to address your crew in a pair of sweats. That wasn’t something that you would allow to happen.

“Actually, that thing you did last night made a few quasar matches seem pretty meager. Who knew your kind could do so much with their mouths?”

Instead of heading towards your closet, you stood frozen in your place with red tinted cheeks. You tried your hardest to play it coy but you had a feeling that it wasn’t working whatsoever.

“Whatever you say, big guy.” you mustered while pulling an older shore leave uniform that you didn’t wear much anymore. The dress resembled styles one might find on Illium or even the Citadel; it was long, satiny and covered in shades of red. It had been a gift from someone back in the day, but its exact origins were unbeknownst to you.

You didn’t seem to care about Garrus’ presence while pulling off your unattractive clothing. In fact, him being there made you turn things up a notch. It was petty of you to move your hips a little slower and take your time with pulling off your shirt. He was watching you with bated breath but said nothing. Knowing that his eyes were all over you made you turn around and throw him your bedroom eyes, which were normally reserved for pillow talk or foreplay.

“Trying not to smirk?” you mocked. The blood colored dress slid over your figure, revealing some of your more nasty scars from missions gone awry. Parts of your stomach and back were exposed. Those sections were bruised and battered and redder than the garnet garment itself.

“Turians have an excellent sense of emotional control.” He countered. “And I think you know that I’m lying when I say that.”

Just as expected, a smirk played on his face and you settled into the unused piece of clothing. With a little smoothing here and there, you didn’t look half bad. Out of place, yes, but not bad.

“Shepard, it has come to my attention that the crew is assembling. I suggest going down early in order to deliver the battle plans.”
You cringed at the words that EDI had broadcasted over the intercom.

Winging it really felt like an even shittier idea than it had before.

No matter how high you were in the galaxy’s invisible caste system, doing things like this were almost worse than thrusting yourself into a battle. If you didn’t deliver the correct words to a crew, they had the potential to bomb the entire mission and be decimated by the enemy. Motivation was always key no matter what you were fighting against. Whether it be Collectors, Geth or Reapers, you had to be prepared. You didn’t have the luxury of being able to tell them what they would be up against or what their chances were, but you did have the knowledge to be able to tell them to kick ass regardless of what they were facing. It was a cunning way of doing things yet it was very effective most of the time.

“Tell them I’ll be right down. I just need a few more minutes.”

“Of course, Commander.”

As you headed towards the door, you stopped for a moment and began to speak.

“Are we really ready for this? Another mission, I mean. It just feels like all of this is so different. I’m going into it blind and nothing is going right. I just figured out what we have at stake and if I screw this up…damn it, I don’t know what I’ll do.”

Garrus had picked himself up off of his chair without you noticing. He passed you and exited your quarters, leaving you with one last thought.

“If the Alliance and the Citadel joined up and assigned this to you it means that this is something that they can’t handle alone.” he said, his voice echoing in the tight hallway. “You’re the one that told me to never lose hope in everything that I did. You encouraged everyone no matter how bitter you felt on the inside. Live by your own words, Liz.”

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and it took you a long time to follow Garrus down to the CIC.

Your name was Kaidan Alenko and you were preparing yourself for one of Shepard’s trademark speeches.

Back when Saren was still a problem, it wasn’t common for her to address the crew by throwing herself up on an imaginary pedestal. Being good at public speaking like she was wasn’t difficult. It required specific components that, if honed correctly, brought out the leader in anyone who stood in front of a crowd.

Shepard had all of these characteristics. She was capable of acting charismatic and empathetic towards people. She also had learned to act like a bad bitch when everyone else in the room needed that extra push. Most importantly, her actions and words empowered people to be like her. At one point you had been in that crowd. She was younger than you but you had yearned to accomplish things like she had. You wanted to taste the words of empowerment on your tongue and fire her words out like bullets in a gun.

You had grown out of that phase, though. Now her words were laced with lies that you detected in each sentenced she uttered. You were prejudiced towards her because of her actions. In your mind, this didn’t lessen your opinion’s validity; it amplified it.

The crew surrounding you comprised of about ten others. You knew them all well, for they were all
of Alliance origins. Some of them you considered friends. Others were mere acquaintances whom you had met because of years on the job.

One in particular wasn’t someone you got along with.

The Normandy’s temporary staff member, Navigator Bryson Blake wasn’t someone you were on kind terms with. He was a few years older than you with a thin physique and dirty blond locks that were cropped close to his head. For a gangly man, his personality packed a punch. You couldn’t remember where you had met before, but a few bar encounters was enough to make you hate him.

“The Little Biotic Boy” and “L2 Baby” were among the childish nicknames thrown at you during his drunken ramblings, which were disregarded by the Alliance. He had been rather quiet towards you during your current stay on the Normandy. It was so unusual that you were expecting an outburst any minute.

As if your worst fears had been realized by the man, he stumbled over to you with the smile of a bastard.

“Well, if it isn’t Mr. Alenko. Heard your girl is the one heading this ship. Ain’t her name Shepard?”

You felt like the entire room was capable of hearing you. Nobody in the small crowd noticed your conversation in reality.

“Navigator, I’d prefer to keep my off-duty life private. You can ask Shepard herself when she’s done commandeering these Batarians.”

Blake raised an eyebrow at the name of the species.

“Batarians! Ha! And hey, if you wanna keep her all to yourself, that’s gotta mean that you banged her pretty hard. Am I right or are you just the little pussy that you’ve been since I met ya? I bet you could do some good things with those amps of yours in the bedroom.”

“Ex-girlfriend.” you replied while gritting your teeth. “She’s my ex-girlfriend and she sure as hell isn’t someone you should talk about like that. She’ll tear you apart whether you like it or not and then throw you to the varren.”

Blake shut up after that, boosting your confidence up a notch. You were soon glad that your remark had made an impact on the man. The Commander entered seconds later wearing attire that matched what most of the female crew members were wearing. The final bit of shore leave time had just concluded, meaning that most of them hadn’t bothered to get back into proper uniform.

The dress that had been thrown onto her body without much care brought back recollections that you had persevered to forget. The rose hues of the threads matched her hair and you were reminded of one of the many times she had visited the Citadel with you in the unsuspecting garment. Things had been so innocent back then. Times like the one you were living in now were shrouded with decaying virtue.

Your teeth nibbled on your lip as she stood in front of the hallway that led to the helm of the ship. All at once, the crew became dead silent.

“I’d like to thank all of you for assembling on such short notice.” she began, her voice less powerful than it had been before.

“I called the crew in here because I needed to reveal something to all of you. I understand not
knowing the purpose of a mission with such high importance is hypocritical. When I signed on for this, I didn’t know anything, either. Some might say this was a stupid idea, but I have to disagree.”

You readied yourself once again for her supremacy bullshit. Instead, she shocked you.

“This mission is for the Alliance and the Citadel. They need us and only us to stop whatever it is that’s in their path. They might have let me down, but that doesn’t mean that I’m turning my back on them. No organization is perfect. I figured that out during my bout with Cerberus. But what the Alliance has done is something no government has done before, and their accomplishments would have been non-existent without a few flaws along the way. If at all you doubt me or my motivations, feel free to come up to my cabin. You talk and I’ll listen.”

Your entire body tensed up. What she had just uttered was the exact opposite of what you had been expecting. There was no hate for the Alliance whatsoever.

“Right now, we have something that’s more important on the line. The Alliance has a covert spy staking out at the edge of the galaxy, which means it’s Batarian territory. Based on what’s been heard by Hackett, she’s gone off of the radar in the Hegemony’s prisons. She’s up for terrorism, which means she has to be evacuated ASAP. The survival of this woman and her former team’s data is vital due to its sensitive nature. It involves intel about an impending Reaper invasion that cannot be compromised at any cost. Her status isn’t known as of now, which is why the Admiral has issued us a two day warning to get out into Batarian space to get her. This isn’t something we can cut corners with. I need your full support.”

Your name was Kaidan Alenko and you were starting to realize why you had been assigned to this mission.

Anything that involved Shepard and the Reapers was bound to be dangerous.

Your name was Liz Shepard and there was only one person in the galaxy who was capable of making you feel whole again. The best part of this was that he was towering above you as you thought of him.

Putting your trust in someone was a last resort for you. Close friendships were also a blatant no-no that you didn’t have much experience with. Other than the people who had served on your squad, you didn’t keep companions for very long. They either died or forgot about you.

Romantic partnership was even rarer, as was consecrating a relationship without deceit and unrequited falsehoods getting in the way. Most of your partners hadn’t meant much. Calling them expendable would be a harsh term, but it was as if there was no other way to describe them. You cared about them but not to the point of total love. Living in a world that was constantly changing and tossing away commitment had made you behave as such. Sex meant nothing until now.

You screamed out his name and neglected the fact that you weren’t alone in the penthouse. Your body gave out as if each bad memory had been forcibly removed. At the same time, energy was pulsating around you. Your lower half was warm and slick with sweat. His name came out of your mouth again and again and you beamed when his kisses made their way from your delicate lips to your chest. As you yelled for him, it became so clear that he was the one for you. There was nobody else no matter how much others tried to convince you. His finger left your core and your arms flailed just so they could envelop his carapace, which was still clothed. You wanted to give all of your love to him no matter what it took.

With all of your strength, you pulled the clothing up and over his head without hesitation.
Understanding your dream-like state, he took no time in pulling himself away from your assets to assist.

Instead of overwhelming feelings of hesitation and fear, you grabbed onto him and pushed him up and away from you. The two of you were on your knees now, his frame reaching above yours by just a few inches. Watching the vids about erogenous zones had been a bitch, but this helped you determine that placing your hands on his waist was a surefire way to get him to loosen up a bit. You did just that, throwing his head back before he leaned in for another kiss.

“I never thought it would be like this,” he whispered into your ear. “Through all of the bullshit... Saren, the Collectors, and even the Reapers, I wouldn’t have been the one to guess that we’d be here on a bathroom floor together. We did it.”

A lusty giggle left your mouth and your hand snaked from his waist and down into his underwear, which was the last piece of clothing left on either of your bodies.

“Speaking of old times, do you remember that time long ago when you said that humans were good with their mouths?”

It didn’t take you long to find what you wanted. It was, after all, protruding up into your grasp.

You gripped him but took care to not hurt him or get him too excited. He moaned, which was the signal that meant to move faster.

You slid your hand up and down his length, increasing in speed and soon disposing of his undergarment altogether.

“Y-You better believe it.”

His reply was later than expected, but this didn’t put you off at all. You soon had him in a compromising position in his own. With your body now towering over his, you had thrown him down on the floor into submission as you started to satisfy his needs.

His legs clenched when you leaned down. Your mouth was dangerously close to his cock, which was enough to drive him wild. Hearing him growl your name in that sexy voice of his made you want to sob.

You were good enough.

As if the ordeal was a battle to be won, he sat up and grabbed you like a toy. The move was a surprise, but this didn’t mean that you were about to resist.

He placed you into a position on the floor that you were used to. It had been perfected in elevators, coupes and California king beds. Your legs were spread, revealing yourself entirely to him. He had full access now and you prepared yourself for the sensation of the two of you melding into one.

He moved himself and straddled you accordingly like the vids had instructed. With a delicate talon, he swiped the hair out of your face and gave you yet another quick kiss.

“This is your night, Shepard.” he murmured. The sounds of his voice reverberating everywhere around you made your uncontrollable smile get even bigger. Before he could sneak his talon away, you gripped it with your hand and squeezed with a tight grip.

“Aren’t you a gentleman?” you replied, your voice shaking. Sensing your impending nerves, he toned down the instincts and stayed static.
“You’re ready, aren’t you?”

You let go of him and made sure your legs were locked in place. Positioning was a big deal between the two of you. One wrong move had the potential to end in scarring for both of you.

A firm nod was enough for him to proceed further. With his dark cock pressing against you, you trembled at his will.

“Tell me you’re ready!”

His voice commanded dominance, which made the lack of total intimate contact even worse than it had been before.

You opened your mouth to speak, causing him to push against you further. You could feel him slipping into your entrance, but it wasn’t enough for either of you.

“Just fuck me, Vakarian!” you yelled. Your voice had turned almost as dictating as his. “Don’t make me wait another year! I love you, god damn it all! Please, just fuck me!”

He followed your command just like he always had before. As he entered you fully, small squeaks of pain slowed down his eagerness. The two of you had been too impulsive and had forgotten about the dangers of inter-species contact. It took readjusting, but that didn’t matter.

Nothing else mattered.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you were finally getting what you wanted for the first time in years. You had found your one bit of comfort in the galaxy. Although it got more complicated as it went on, the thing that you had with Garrus Vakarian wasn’t something that you could throw away.

This thing wasn’t something that you could contain. It was too beautiful for that.

You didn’t want to understand it. You wanted to live it until the day you died.

You just hoped that he would be okay with that, too.

Chapter End Notes

I can’t even...
I really need to stop writing fluff but it's just so happy and precious. I can’t stop.

Is that a bad thing?

xoxo

THR

ps...I hope the plot isn't getting complicated. To be honest, I feel like something isn't going right with this story but I'm not sure what it is.

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and you were watching the Normandy’s travel progress on your omni-tool.

To say the least, you never looked forward to entering Batarian space. You were brought up to be respectful to other races no matter what sort of stereotypes were made up about them. It was one of the few values that your absent parents had instilled you with from a young age. You were brought around on their business trips as a toddler and stayed with them until your charm stopped helping them close deals. Although they hired countless nannies to keep track of you when you weren’t doing your “job”, your mother had taken the time to repeat herself over and over until you understood what was expected of you.

“Be nice to each alien and treat them like one of our own. You’ll never know what kinds of benefits you’ll get along the way.”

Although the reasoning behind her statement was self-righteous, you stuck to it for your own reasons during your own career as an adult. Having dealt with practically each intelligent life form in the galaxy, you learned firsthand that aliens weren’t any different than you. As your experiences with them became more profound, they started seeming less foreign and more inviting than anyone else you had ever met. They were more comforting than humanity in some ways. All wars and prejudices aside, it didn’t take you long to meet some dependable comrades that were of every race and color.

However, throughout your years as a soldier, you never found anything comforting or alluring about Batarians. Whether it was because of a bar poisoning mishap or a run-in with a Hegemony
terrorist group, you couldn’t find it in your sometimes cold heart to like them. There were a select few that you had become well acquainted with during your travels. It was true that one bad apple was capable of ruining the whole bunch, though. As for the Batarians, most of the bunch was already bad to begin with.

The galaxy shared the same general opinion regarding the semi-malicious race. They were a problem to be ignored most of the time, which was why you had managed to stay away from assignments centering around them. Delving deep into their entirety all at once was starting to get overwhelming and you were still two hours out from arriving in the Viper Nebula. You sighed in impatience; the sooner you got all of this over with, the better.

Instead of holing yourself up in your quarters where you would be easily detectable, you had holed up in the Normandy’s hangar area.

The shuttle loomed above you and for a brief moment you wanted it to fall and crush your body just so you could escape and see what would happen. You were in an odd place right now; not being allied with any particular side made you uneasy. You had ditched Cerberus and the Alliance hadn’t reinstated you yet. As of now, you were nothing. Most people didn’t know you were alive to begin with.

Out of desperation, you pulled out a smuggled cigarette out of your pocket. Your stash, which had been bought back in New Manhattan, was limited and close to be depleted. With the stress you’ve been under, you’ve been finding yourself sneaking away to have a smoke more often than not. Lighters were hard to come by, but you managed to make do with what you could scrape up from shore leaves and brief outings.

You placed the cancer stick between your lips and lit up in a designated smoke free environment. The dangers of smoking aboard any sort of ship had the potential to be detrimental. One spark had the capability to ignite a fire. Considering your location, it wasn’t a nice enough place for the Normandy to go down in a literal blaze of glory.

With care, you blew the smoke up towards the ceiling and prayed that EDI was keeping track of shipwide ventilation. It didn’t take long for the nicotine to get into your system, sending you into a relaxed state of mind. If Garrus wasn’t going to be there to keep you stable, cigarettes would have to help you pretend.

“Alenko to Shepard, do you copy?”

The voice echoing over the loudspeakers wasn’t EDI’s and it sure wasn’t anyone other than Kaidan Alenko.

With reluctance, you raised your head up and responded.

“No need to be all formal off duty. Do you need something important?”

Your reply was less uptight than it should have been and he wasted no time in taking advantage of your relaxed state.

“You’re the one who set up an open door policy and I’m up in your quarters. You mind telling me where you are?”

You bit your lip in indecision. Telling him your location would ruin your privacy. You weren’t one to go back on your promises even when it involved someone you hated. It was time to suck up and act professional in front of him for once. If you weren’t going to get at him with petty tactics, being
the bigger person would have to do for now.

“Hangar. Meet me in five.”

You pulled yourself off of the ground, not giving a damn about him seeing your smoking. No matter how hostile you were to each other, you expected his anti-tobacco lecture either way and wouldn’t take much of it to heart. As much as you regretted smoking, it was an addiction that had to be given into for now.

The elevator doors parted, revealing a rather rugged looking Kaidan. He had maintained a somewhat proper disposition by walking in with a neutral expression and an Alliance crewman’s outfit on. His head looked back and forth before settling on you.

Much to your displeasure, his expression did not change.

“Smoking in the hangar? I should have you reported.”

You weren’t sure if this was supposed to be a joke or not. Considering all of the bullshit you had been putting him through, you assumed that he wasn’t speaking to you in jest.

“My ship, my rules, Kaidan. Don’t try to play nice. We both know that you stopped the good guy routine with me after Cerberus.”

The remark hit him like a brick. He passed by you, bumping into your shoulder roughly. He had no direction or purpose; getting away from you was his sole motive. You didn’t even have to utter a single word to him to understand that.

“Did it ever occur to you that I’m trying to act civil for our own sakes? This is a warship, not a high school that you can rule like a queen bee! What we say here isn’t supposed to affect our jobs!”

The little word that you wanted to ban had just exited his mouth: civil. It felt like he had just told you how civility had gone to hell between the two of you. Now he was trying to reignite it for the millionth time. His eyes focused on the shuttle as yours had minutes ago. Trying to think of the right words to say at a time like this was a treacherous feat to accomplish. Although the unacknowledged plights in your relationship hadn’t been mentioned, you wondered if now would be the right time to air out your dirty laundry.

He had you pegged when it came to the queen bee reputation. The Normandy was like a child to you. If there was one thing that you were going to do with your resources and notoriety, it was run the damn ship the way it was supposed to be run. This meant taking drastic and sometimes ruthless measures. You were alright with this as long as the ends justified the means.

When it came to Kaidan, you figured that being passive aggressive would pay off as soon as he resigned and got off of your ship.

Feelings of sour remorse accompanied these harsh thoughts. Through the hated and bitter scowls, you still cared for the man that you had shared your bed with two years prior. He was an admirable soldier and possessed biotics that were way above your level. Realizing this was hard when you were blinded by a mission that had to be completed. With a deep breath exiting your lips, you followed him and snatched his wrist.

“If this is your way of telling me that we need to have one of those talks, then sit down and get comfortable. We’ve got a few hours until we get to our LZ.”

You didn’t even know what you were saying anymore. The fact that you were being real with him
felt like a disdainful choice on your part. It was going to come back to bite you; you just knew it.

He stopped pacing around the hangar and rotated his head to see if you were serious. He was twenty feet away but took no time at all to get back to you.

“You wanna talk without getting physical? We’ll talk, but don’t blame me if I walk out. I don’t want things to end on a rough note, Shepard.”

You sat down on a spare crate that was resting on the side of the room. Just in case, you eyed a gun and a bit of extra ammo sitting on the ground nearby. You pushed the impulse out of your mind; shooting him wasn’t going to be tolerated.

He found a spot on the same crate and allowed you to keep your own space by sitting on the edge.

“He was always a gentleman…” you pondered internally.

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and you wondered if an entire relationship really could be repaired within a matter of hours.

Your name was Kaidan Alenko and you couldn’t help staring at the woman in front of you.

What were you supposed to do or say? She had cheated on you, manipulated you and even admitted to it half the time. Each day the tension between you fluctuated; sometimes being in the same room was unbearable and on other occasions you were capable of sharing conversations without hostility. This situation was the tamest one yet. You had managed to get her within a few feet of you.

You were all for being able to become friends again. Pursuing a relationship, on the other hand, was out of the question. She had her moments where you wanted to whisk her away, but those were quickly overshadowed by the infidelity and rudeness that tended to grasp her character. Going off of bipolar feelings weren’t right in any shape or form. If you wanted to be with her again, a single doubt couldn’t be present in your mind.

If things kept on going on the same route, there was no way you would ever call Shepard anything more than a former friend.

“I think the only thing I need to get off of my chest is Garrus.” she muttered.

The mention of the Turian brought mixed feelings upon you. He had been a fantastic comrade to have aboard the SR-1. He kept the Mako in check and was also someone that you came to be good friends with.

Learning about what he had done with your former partner disgusted you. While knowing about Shepard’s relationship with you, he allowed her to pursue him without blocking her or warning her of the consequences. Regardless of who had made the first move, you considered them to be emotionally thin if they had to stoop to those levels.

“I don’t care how many times we go over this, but damn it Kaidan, Horizon wasn’t what I thought it was going to be. When we saw each other and embraced, I… I wasn’t with Garrus and I wasn’t intending on acting upon a stupid crush that I had developed for him. You were gone and there was no way I had time to get into contact. You shut me down and I didn’t know what I was supposed to do. Were we over? I wouldn’t know, because all you did were make stupid ass remarks about how Cerberus is bad. You didn’t think I already knew that?! I feel like we’ve gone over this a million times and I just—“
Her voice got louder and louder and it soon reverberated across the whole room. What was intended to be a quiet, calm deliberation was turning into another one of her countless screaming matches.

In a daring attempt to rescue what was still left, you put your hand on one of her legs, which was hanging off of the storage crate the two of you shared.

“Shepard!”

The sudden contact didn’t frighten her, nor did your interruption. Your eyes locked while she let go of her anger.

In a move that was equally as risky, she took your hand and held onto it.

While you were trying to understand what the hell she was doing, she continued to speak.

“Garrus was there when you weren’t. What I had with you, Kaidan, it wasn’t a fling. I was younger at the time and thought that I loved you. You were older than me, you had a heart that was bigger than mine and someone had to teach you to let loose.”

She laughed a little before continuing and slipped your hand back into your own lap.

“I thought about you every day after Horizon. I kept your picture on my desk and tried to be optimistic—trust me, as a realist, that didn’t work out for long. There was a little bit of hope left in me when I was talking to Garrus one night. The mission with Cerberus was intended to be a one way trip. We weren’t coming back and I didn’t have the heart to respond to your apologies. Hell, you could say that I was being rash on purpose. I was going to die and a Turian asked me if he wanted to have a little fun before we plunged towards an imminent death. It sounded like a drama vid and indulging a little felt like a well deserved reward. Considering what you told me, I didn’t have any intentions on going back to you. Me and Garrus ended up being different…what was once a fling turned into something that I can’t describe. I still get chills when he’s within a few feet of me. He didn’t turn his back on me. He’s a good man Kaidan, honest to god. He really is.”

You sighed and wrung your hands back and forth. Hearing her perspective without having screaming and insults involved certainly made you look like the bad guy.

“This isn’t about Garrus.” you lied. “Horizon shouldn’t count for anything right now. We both did regrettable things and this shouldn’t come up ever again. Just know that seeing you there in the flesh after you being gone for two years…it was the most traumatizing thing that I’ve ever experienced. You were supposed to be dead and you were with Cerberus! I wanted to take you and never let go, but just the sight of that damned Cerberus logo was enough to put me off. I don’t know if it’s true now, but I don’t think that a terrorist organization changed you. Maybe you changed by yourself. Like I said, it shouldn’t count right now. We can take things as we go.”

She slipped you a slight nod and looked up at you with happier eyes.

“Is that all?” she implored. “No fights?”

“I don’t think either of us are done yet, Shepard.”

Your name was Kaidan Alenko and you stayed in the hangar with Shepard until EDI forced the two of you to get into your armor.

Needless to say, it wasn’t the easiest conversation. Shouting and disagreements accompanied heartfelt remarks.
All you could do was take things slow and try to rebuild an already rocky relationship.

Your name was Dr. Liara T’soni and you had locked yourself in your room to research.

Despite the catastrophic damage done to the Batarians during the Reaper War, you were very much aware of the damage that could be done by the decimated race. As the Shadow Broker, not even you were capable of cracking into the Hegemony. Nothing else was known about them other than they were highly private and didn’t accept foreigners whatsoever. Batarian refugees had been threatened with death if they spoke. The Hegemony’s allies were also unknown. Their fleet size was a mystery as was the volume of their population.

Needless to say, this code was going to be tough to crack.

“Glyph, arrange a meeting with Commander Shepard.” You said with haste. “Something is about to go down and it isn’t going to be good.”

Your name was Dr. Liara T’soni and you soon found yourself searching for a flight to the Citadel.

You had a friend to save before things went even more awry than they were.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you tried your best to place your scratched up girlfriend on her bed without tossing her and trying to ravage her again. She plopped down and giggled, which was a noise that you hadn’t expected from her. It was plain and happy and you didn’t want it to stop.

You had lost track of time while getting reacquainted with each and every inch of her body. After relearning the correct angles and methods, going at it over and over again was like second nature. It was as if nothing during the past three years had happened. It was about you, her and the relationship you had forged together. Kaidan hadn’t happened and nor had your useless attempts at dating. Wars and battles hadn’t pushed either of you to your edges.

“Vakarian, what’re you waiting for?” she asked, her bare body melting into her shiny sheets. She was right in front of you, sprawled and ready to be taken again. Her feet kicked your shins with impatience.

You had done a significant amount of damage to her due to a combination of previously unfulfilled thoughts of lust and lack of recent experience when it came to inter-species intercourse. Chafing, redness and the aftereffects of bites and scratches had given her a less than pristine complexion. If you achieved this then it meant that you had done an excellent job. Her sadness was gone and you swore that what you had done was better than depression medication and therapy combined.

She had managed to leave her own marks on you by making subtle bites on your sensitive neck. What would be a reddish blotch on her skin was a dark brown one on yours.

“It’s a love bite.” She had told you between kisses. “Don’t get too excited.”

You wanted to stand there in silence and admire her for a few more seconds. She might have had a little less meat on her than before and her whiteness made each and every mark stand out more than it should have, but she was still the same Shepard. She gave you the same deep kisses and flashed you a devious smirk to let you know that everything that you did was right in her eyes. With her, you didn’t have to worry about being reprimanded or told that you weren’t getting at things the correct way. Sex wasn’t a performance between the two of you. It was the most natural thing you could think of.
Instead of going down on her to return the favor for the amazing things she had done with her mouth before, you sat down on the side of the bed and rubbed the top of your hand.

She crept up on your back and leaned on it. Feeling her breasts dig into your shoulders was almost like an out of body experience, but you tried your best to shrug it off and embrace the moment for what it was worth.

“Shepard,” you said, your voice raspy.

“I love you.”

Your name was Garrus Vakarian, and you discovered something very quickly that night.

Cuddling in bed was just as good as sex by itself.
I know I shouldn't complain because it's my own problem but I'm seriously considering just rewriting a crap ton of this story because I feel like I haven't done a lot of things properly and I haven't fleshed things out and sal;fasdfasfd i'll just stop ok xoxo thr

Chapter 41

Priority: Arrival II

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and the sense of your own bones rattling in your body wasn’t a sensation that you looked forward to each time you had something vital to take care of. Since being on semi-permanent shore leave, you had forgotten what it was like to have a soldier’s version of the butterflies. Your throat got tight, every flaw was placed in front of a microscope and you sometimes had the urge to shoot anyone who got in the way. What you were dealing with was nothing more than a little bit of augmented anxiety for most advanced Alliance officers and Spectres. As far as you were concerned, though, it was much worse than that. Being off duty for more than a few weeks put you in a relaxed state. There was nothing to worry about, meaning that you were free to do as you pleased. Now that you were adjusting back into your role as an important military figure, your body wasn’t going through the transition like it should have been. You had done it before, but something was different this time. Without being able to put your finger on it, you kept your mouth shut and handed datapads to Kaidan and Garrus to fill them in on anything about the mission that they had missed. You had worked your ass off to make yourself look good. Hours of office work and report writing had been put into planning the infiltration operation.

The autopiloted shuttle wasn’t entering Batarian space as smoothly as planned. Sweat built up between your armor and your skin, making the scorching environment of the Kodiak like Hell incarnate. The heat shook your insides to the core, yet you continued to feel icy about the assignment at hand. Along with this, you had a perpetual gag reflex that was prompting you to vomit all over Kaidan’s feet. Thankfully you were in control enough to prevent this incident from happening. Covering his polished blue armor with bile wasn’t a good start to your “new and improved” relationship.

Recalling the talk the two of you shared wasn’t something that was helping to calm your nerves. The conversation had its ups and downs; accusations and insults were hurled without care as usual, but there had been a fair share of laughs and bashful smiles to keep the both of you in check. The so-called social war was off now. Focusing on getting this scientist out of harm’s way was your main objective right, not making amends with someone you once cared for more than anyone in the galaxy. It was cold and blunt, but it was a difficult reality that you had taken charge of long ago.
With your stiffened hands fastened across your battle rifle, you concentrated on the floor and repeated the same sort of mantra in your head over and over again until it stuck.

Save the target and leave.

Save the target and make sure everything turns out okay.

Save the target and don’t get caught.

Save the target and avoid a diplomatic nightmare.

“Shepard!”

Your grip on your weapon tightened even more than you expected while you jerked your head up to see the distraction.

It was Garrus.

His body towered over yours while you stared straight ahead at Kaidan, who looked just as disgruntled as you. How your boyfriend found the headroom in the shuttle was a mystery to everyone who had been on your squad before. He towered over most people he encountered. Turians had a notable reputation to begin with. Combine that with a big ass gun and heavy armor and you’ve got yourself a man that can’t be stopped. You thought that Vakarian fit that description quite well, and you were grateful to be taking him with you for more reasons than one. No matter how much he told you that he was the opposite of what the Turians considered to be a model citizen, you had never seen anyone fight so hard for what they believed in. You could only hope that the effort he was going to put forth today would be enough to prove to Hackett that you still had more potential in you. You were capable of picking a squad and getting the job done without any hassles getting in your way.

If something did happen to deter you, it would get kicked in the ass and would be left off of the report.

His visor was blinking at a more rapid pace than it did on a normal day, which meant that he had calibrated it to prepare for the potential danger that the three of you faced. Its targeting system was state of the art, but there was no way that you would be able to understand its precision; he never took the damn thing off.

When you didn’t further the conversation he took the opportunity to do it himself.

“I didn’t realize that we were going in dark. No gunfire, no anything? That’s not like you.”

The blasé look on your face made him understand your nervous attitude.

“We’re going in, getting this lady and going out. I don’t know why this is such a big deal now that I look at it, but as long as Hackett is watching we have to stay sharp. If the Batarians figure out about this, we’re dead meat.” you answered. Kaidan looked up from his own datapad and raised an eyebrow at your plans.

“This place is probably filled to the brim with guards. How are we supposed to get past them all? Stealth?”

Your gloved hands rubbed your forehead, which was an indication that you were already overwhelmed by the task at hand. Being on the brim of vomiting and screaming at someone at the same time wasn’t a good place to be at in your life. The sweat was pooling everywhere now,
making your hand slide off back into your lap. Grasping at your wet skin was a lost cause, anyway.

“We hardly even know anything about this woman! Did Hackett give a name or anything else to go on? I hate not knowing anything about what I’m going into, Shepard.”

Kaidan’s voice seemed to be droning on and on and you felt more inadequate as he spoke.

“Her name is Amanda Kenson and she’s a close friend of the Admiral, Alenko!” you barked. “If you think you can lead this mission, then by all means do it! You’re the only official Alliance guy here, after all!”

You wanted to retract the outburst when Kaidan’s glare became apparent. All of your talking had gone to shit with just a few wrong words and you pleaded with yourself to make things better.

All it took were words to sway your relationship with him back and forth like a steady pendulum. Being okay and then being vicious towards each other was a cycle that was difficult to break. Staying in that good place again forever was looking bleaker as long as you continued to speak to him. Word vomit was a bitch and at this point it felt even worse than actual vomit.

Swallowing back your pride and bile was the only way to redeem yourself. As painful as it was, you still tried.

“I know as much as the both of you at this point. I don’t know why the Council and Hackett haven’t divulged much, but I have a gut instinct that this is imperative to helping us. That remark wasn’t intended to be so hostile, I’m sorry.”

Kaidan nodded and gave the remainder of his attention to the datapad once again. An unsteady sigh escaped your lips while an affirmative talon rubbed your shoulder.

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and you were hurling your guts up when the shuttle touched down on the Batarian prison.

Your name was Kaidan Alenko and you sat in your apartment without knowing what you were supposed to do now.

Getting Shepard back on her feet and exposing the Batarian-Council controversy was starting to become less and less feasible. Politics were in the way regardless of how much Spectre authority was doled out to you. Nobody would listen and it frustrated you to no end. Not one single crew member of Shepard’s had responded to your mass email asking for their support. With the exception of Chakwas, nobody else was supporting your plan. Not even Garrus, a somewhat trusted friend, was interested in assisting in bringing justice to his own partner. Considering how passionate the Turian was when it came to certain people and subjects, you didn’t know what else to do.

The odds weren’t in your favor anymore. Other than public backlash, nothing regarding Shepard was getting anywhere. The Batarians and the Council were going to get away with murder if you didn’t intervene.

You still hadn’t determined why you were still so attached to Shepard in the first place. You supposed that the two of you had technically written the book on how to fraternize in the Alliance without anyone knowing. You smirked at the thought of those older times when things were okay between everyone and stopping Saren was the only problem you had to deal with. Your brain treated those memories like they had taken place twenty years ago, not just a few.

Considering what had happened between you and Shepard, it was almost like you wanted to owe
her something. After all those years of fighting, forgiveness and being a damn good CO, it felt like maybe it was time to give her a little something after the war had stripped her of everything except Garrus Vakarian. Although the Turian seemed to be enough for her, you wanted to give her more as a friend without pushing things. You had held her at gunpoint and came close to killing her. How she still had the guts to even speak with you and give you a hug was beyond your comprehension.

Yet again, she wasn’t exactly a saint when it came to the bad things that she had done to you. Time and time again you felt like you could put those occurrences in the past, but seeing her yell for Garrus or hold his talon still killed you on the inside. It was dumb and you resented every moment of these sappy feelings. However, there was no getting rid of them until you found someone else to rely on.

With your laptop in front of you, you tapped away and took care of other important business that didn’t involve your strained ex girlfriend. You had heard of her medical reports already and wanted to go and console her, but you figured that it wasn’t your place to do so. Taking your mind off of Shepard helped you with the rather bland task of sorting through emails and intel that had to be approved.

Out of all of these bits of information, one message in particular was of utter importance and Shepard’s life had been thrust into yours without even trying.

An email from Dr. Liara T’soni had entered your inbox just minutes ago. Its content, although rather bare, expressed her intentions quite fluently.

“Coming to Citadel from Thessia to see Shepard. Just got your email now—it was blocked by Council before, most likely the Turian councilor. Being Shadow Broker has its perks. Shep is in danger. The Hegemony may be very weak but they might have unknown allies. (assuming that you know about their dealings with the Council. Elaborate later) Will take a while to hack into their most private systems. Would like to meet up when I arrive. Also need to make emergency travel reservations that will accommodate my equipment. Any ideas? Miss you and the Normandy crew immensely.”

You read the message out loud and assumed that her lack of proper grammar was caused by seemingly rushed travels. Of all people who would respond, you expected Liara to be one of them. However, at least Shepard’s associates had a reason to not reply to your request for help.

Learning about the Council blocking your emails made you livid. You were a Spectre, for god’s sake! You operated above them in most circumstances.

Your head throbbed with violent pain, sending you back in your office chair. You leaned back and the chair accommodated your drained body with plush comfort to soothe away your worries. As much as the inanimate object’s warm, welcoming padding helped, it wasn’t enough to soothe a migraine caused by those damn L2s that you had received as a child.

You had done enough for today and retiring to your bed felt like a great idea. It beckoned to you even though you were nowhere near it, as did the medication bottle sitting a few feet away.

With haste, you took out two pills and swallowed them dry before getting up to go to sleep.

Your name was Kaidan Alenko and you were really starting to wonder if caring about Shepard this much was worth it.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you couldn’t find it in yourself to fall asleep.
This didn’t mean that you weren’t suffering from being exhausted. The battle scars from your first rendezvous in a year had grown enflamed and red. Some of them had even achieved a shade of dark purple or blue. Each of them was a reminder of the one thing that made you feel like you were on cloud nine no matter how far you were pushed down into a sea of darkness. What Garrus had given to you that evening had erased the negative emotions that had been dwelling inside of you. The depressing events of the day were replaced by more pleasant and erotic ones all because of his actions.

You swore to yourself that you would return the favor soon. Now that you had a chance to think about it, there were a lot of things that you owed him.

The edge of the bed lacked the satisfaction and warmth of Garrus’ arms, but he was fast asleep and was becoming more and more fidgety as you stayed in his grip. He insisted that Turians were foreigners to cuddling before, but you had converted him long ago. Pillow talk and post-sex relaxing had scrounged its way into your routine and you didn’t think that bothered either of you.

Instead of spending a dreamy night asleep in his arms, you came to the realization that romance vids weren’t real life and you still had a sleeping problem. Your relationship was also far from conventional, which meant that no matter how much you tried, a Turian’s arms would still scratch your own soft flesh regardless of your position.

You didn’t feel like taking the risk of getting your bare body scarred up again and decided to switch positions to see what the hell your boyfriend was doing. Low, guttural sounds came from him when he slept, which wasn’t very often. They brought a Chesire cat smile to your face and you were never able to tell if they were downright hysterical or sexy. His visor, which had been clicked off to allow his slumber to be easier, was still present on his face. In addition to this, he was still butt naked and you now had a new appreciation for him hating the sheets and covers.

His bare ass was right in front of you. If he wasn’t sleeping you wouldn’t hesitate slapping it because he would respond with pulling you down onto him and kissing you better than anyone had before. It was a fond thing to dream of, but he was unfortunately not conscious enough to make your fantasy become reality.

After figuring that you had indulged yourself enough, you went to grope around your bathroom for your clothes and decided to tame your growling stomach. It was getting late and padding to the kitchen in lingerie didn’t seem like a bad idea. It was better than sitting around watching your boyfriend sleep and being envious that he was even able to snooze in the first place.

You were careful about leaving the room so you wouldn’t disturb Garrus. The door closed without sound, allowing you to slip away unheard. The silence of the house ate away at your sanity. Having two other people living with you made quiet time an unforeseen rarity. You loathed it more than anything considering the solitary confinement that you had suffered through. During that year you sometimes found yourself screaming at nothing just to end the pathetic quiet that had fallen over the penthouse.

You reached the bottom of the stairs with your hands picking at your neck as if they were looking for the dog tags again. The nervous tick ceased when you saw a light on in the kitchen.

“Please let it be Joker…” you uttered to yourself.

With gentle steps, you rounded a corner and your eyes widened.

“Oh dear god…”
Your name was Garrus Vakarian and Shepard was a sight for sore eyes when she exited the shuttle. You and Kaidan were well aware of why she had stayed back in the first place. It was hard for anyone to control the distasteful noises that came with nausea and not even a shuttle door was enough to conceal Shepard’s intentions. If that wasn’t enough, she insisted on staying to “check her guns” and that she might have also encountered a glitch in her tech armor, leaving the two of you to go forward and land on the sickening Batarian planet solo. You called bullshit when you saw her make a beeline to the bathroom. Maybe it was an Earth thing, but you were positive that weapon and armor malfunctions weren’t typically handled in the lavatory. There were still unspoken doubts in your mind as to what the hell you were truly about to face. Even if the Normandy’s CO was your girlfriend, she had been tight lipped as to what was going on. Part of you wondered if she knew anything herself. Unlike Kaidan, she did not have a sometimes blind faith in the Alliance. She questioned it relentlessly. However, it was clear to you that she was doing her job to further impress Hackett and earn his forgiveness for working against them. You would have done the same thing in her position, but the stress was starting to get to her. Never before had you seen the Commander throw up before completing a significant objective. As you looked around, the outcome of the mission was starting to look bleaker and bleaker.

“I don’t like where this is going.” your associate muttered. Before Shepard could evaluate the situation, you and Kaidan had taken the opportunity to survey the Batarian planet of Aratoht. From your position, there wasn’t much to see. It looked like something out of those old noir films Kasumi had watched while the Collector fight was still on. Rain dribbled at a slow pace, sending droplets into your eyes and visor. You blinked back the water like substance and gave yourself a fair view of Aratoht’s sky. Plagued with grey and muddy blue pigments, the planet’s moon dominated most of the scene in front of you. Its light lacked the ability to provide sufficient warmth and the darkness of the place remained unbreached. This mood transcended to the terrain as well. Slate colored rocks were the closest thing to an environment. Jagged edges allowed the flora to grow only on top of the mini mountains, which surrounded the facility that looked as big as the moon itself.

The prison had quantity but lacked in quality. People weren’t kidding when they said the Batarians lived under a stereotypical communist regime; not a person was in sight and even the most used
facilities were run down. There wasn’t enough money to make repairs when Hegemony members had to live their lives in the lap of luxury. The entire thing made you shake your head. Batarian or not, these people didn’t deserve this. From what you had been told, most places under the Hegemony’s authority were like this.

“The Batarians must have a thing for dark, rainy places.” you mused in response. “This place fits the bill when it comes to a scary and likely unauthorized prison.”

This got a laugh out of the biotic, who maintained a stoic composure while on duty. Seconds later, the shuttle doors opened and a certain woman popped out.

The jump she executed while leaving the Kodiak was weak. After tripping on the ground and coming close to falling over her own footsteps, she brushed herself off and looked rather unconfident. That was enough for you to begin fearing for all three of your lives.

“You sure you’re ready for this, Shepard?” Kaidan asked with a semi-reassuring expression. She didn’t respond to him and instead looked to you for guidance. It wasn’t your place to give her advice. She outranked you and was better at recon missions like this. If this was an all out combat situation, you would have been much more comforting. A hint of a nod was enough for her to continue despite her falters.

“I’m good.”

Shepard lifted up her hand and scanned the area with her omni-tool, which revealed that the door in front of the three of you was sealed.

“The nearest entrance is sealed but it’s saying that there’s a way to cut the power.” she announced. “Work on finding a console.”

Hoping that your partner’s newfound stability would get sounder as you infiltrated, you got to work.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and unfortunately for you, this stability wasn’t going to last much longer.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you were now able to say that you had seen Joker Moreau’s ass. You didn’t know that Joker went commando when he slept, nor did you feel like you ever wanted to know that wonderful little fact. The crippled man was leaning against the white countertop while munching on something unknown to you. You were rather thankful that his back was turned. If the both of you ended up looking at each other’s choices of attire (or, in Joker’s case, his lack of any), it had the potential to end badly.

It felt weird to think that you hadn’t seen another ass that wasn’t a Turian’s or your own. With an overwhelming amount of self control, you pulled your eyes away and hid the upper half of your face in your hand.

The munching ceased and you heard your former flight lieutenant turn around. His lack of words was beginning to get to you, but you didn’t want to take the risk of looking forward. Knowing your luck, what you might see could be catastrophic.

“Before you say anything, I didn’t actually think anyone would be down here. That conclusion is logical because the two of you were pretty damn loud when you were going at it. I figured it would have lasted longer. Just saying.”

You gave him a long sigh in return and dared to open your eyes. Despite your initial thoughts, what
you saw wasn’t all that bad.

Although he lacked the toned muscles of most Alliance men, Joker had a good enough amount of meat on him. The slightest hint of a four pack played on his torso, which, like his face, had a hint of hair. He still donned a hat on top of his head, and the only other garment covering him was a pair of dark grey socks. The fact that he wasn’t all that embarrassed was comforting. Come to think of it, you were the one who should be flustered.

“I wonder if EDI is aware of your secret voyeurism fetish.” you countered. The mention of EDI was sometimes a tender topic for the pilot. Until you were able to get her back up and running again, Joker would continue to get defensive about her.

“Don’t drag the poor AI into this, Shepard!”

You laughed at this comment and proceeded to enter the room even further.

“Besides,” he continued, his tone getting lower. “She could be listening.”

Joker revealed his snack of choice, which happened to be some potato chips that a Citadel café sold. You kept your eyes fixated on his face rather than any of his assets. It didn’t take long for him to detect the awkwardness of the situation. It was almost as if he didn’t realize he was in the nude.

“Good to see you and Garrus really rekindling things. Seriously, you guys are like the poster couple for inter-species relationships.”

He was used to you not talking much lately, which meant that propelling the conversations by himself was a task he had learned to accept.

“It really helps to have him around.” you commented. “Same with you. I really mean that.”

Being frank with Joker wasn’t something you were familiar with. As his name implied, he was a sarcastic, witty man who you could always joke around with. The two of you had shared a considerable amount of serious talks on the Normandy, but they never had a lot of meaning. It was normal of him to disregard bad situations with humor. This time, he was doing the exact opposite of that.

He walked over and put a hand on your shoulder. “On a realer note, I heard about what happened down at Huerta.” he whispered. “If you really need anything, just let me know. I told Anderson a long time ago that I’d watch out for you. I don’t care if the old man’s dead; I just want to make sure you don’t get any worse. Shit, that almost sounded maternal.”

Your lips turned up into a smile despite the odd encounter that the two of you had shared. Hearing him be so sincere didn’t happen often.

“Joker, I--” You paused midsentence, unsure of how to express your gratitude. Being confined in a house for a year had diminished your social skills.

“Thanks for…er, everything.” You decided that this was a somewhat efficient response. It didn’t convey the sheer thankfulness that you felt towards the man, but it would suffice until you learned any better.

“No problem, Commander.”

He disappeared into the shadows of the penthouse after that, making his body turn into nothing but a cloaked illusion in the dark. You were alone now.
Instead of Joker’s loud voice keeping you company, you had an empty bag of chips and a kitchen that wasn’t used for cooking. The silence began to creep up on you again. It was slow at first, taking root in the space around the walls and then invading your own personal bubble. You had tried to fight it long ago, but you still found yourself reverting back to your old ways.

Silence was what you feared nowadays. It wasn’t gunfire or having your ship taken down by the enemy. In theory, these conflicts were much greater than the absence of noise. It was yet another irrational fear that dominated your own existence. The stillness of the penthouse in the evening reminded you of the times when you had been entirely alone. Back when solitary confinement was still at large in your life, it wasn’t unusual for you to have moments where the quietness turned from peaceful to unbearable. Since the return of your comrades, this hadn’t been a problem anymore. You were filled with positive energy and had been so close to taking a step in the right direction. You could almost say that you weren’t prone to panic attacks because of the complex web of support the two men had weaved for you. With them, you felt like it was still possible to recover.

After the events at Huerta that you had just been reminded of, it felt like you took one huge step backwards. Allowing the silence to take over occurred while you got lost in your own thoughts.

You’re a psychopath.

You can’t give a man any children.

You need therapy to be normal.

Returning to the Normandy shouldn’t and won’t happen again.

Garrus is going to leave no matter how much he cares.

Silence began to ruin your life again.

It brought back the recollections of being suffocated in the middle of space because you hadn’t been able to make it to an escape pod in time.

It made you remember the chills of not being able to hear a friend’s voice again and how unsure you were of your own sacrifices. Had you made the right decisions in the past? Were you worth it?

Silence made you question all of what you knew.

Your fingers turned clammy as you wrapped them around the edge of the counter. All of Garrus’ handiwork was wearing off as you felt your own body being breached by something that wasn’t there.

Sweat piled onto the slick material that made up the counter. You slipped and slid your hands until you could get a good grip. With both hands scouring the surface, the pace of your breathing quickened.

“G-God damn it…”

Hyperventilation came with your inability to stay still. Convulsions took over your stability and you soon realized that this wasn’t anything normal.

Thinking that solace would come upon you when you shut your eyes, you were greeted with a familiar sight. The ink like darkness did nothing to conceal your self-conjured terrors. What you had managed to dream up for yourself felt supernatural. It couldn’t be taken down by sheer force or willpower. Because of this, you allowed yourself to stay frozen in shock.
You opened your eyes and shadows walked among the kitchen, which didn’t had been transformed by your sudden nightmare. There was no light, only darkness. The room around you had gone to shit; it was like it no longer existed.

The shadows screamed with the voices of the ones you had left behind. Masked with the faces of the people you had loved, raw emotions came to toy with your well being. Your memory, which was now blurred by illusions, had forgotten when you hit the floor or cried out. It instead began to recall the dreams you used to have back on the Normandy.

The Catalyst, the trees, the fog; it was all coming back.

The lights were still very much on and not much had changed in reality. The kitchen remained clean and free of any black apparitions. Your hallucination was the work of your imagination.

Worst of all, the entire room was silent.

Nobody was there except you, and that was your weakness.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you felt yourself slip away for a while as you sat on the floor of your kitchen. Tears rolled down your cheeks and you began to understand that you were not a powerful commander anymore. You lacked the fearlessness or bravery that came with being Commander Shepard. You didn’t wield a gun or a respected opinion.

You weren’t successful.

Your lungs shook as they struggled to find a normal breathing pattern to adjust to. Your breath’s pace got faster and faster, as did your heart.

You spent your last breath wisely before drifting off into a place that you couldn’t leave.

“Garrus!”

As much as your body would allow it, you screamed his name over and over and dreamed that he was at your side the entire time.
Enter: James Vega

Chapter Notes

Wow, you guys get to see a picture of Liz Shepard because you guys are just cool like that. And hey, longest chapter ever!!

xoxo
THR
(if you want to see all the banter I posted just go to FF.net)
(ps, decapitalizing the species names because that's just plain weird, also am making a reference to the Citadel DLC at the end. Oh, and I'll be on hiatus for a few days because I'm going on vacation)
These aren't the most current designs but they're close enough! I gotta get more screenshots that don't suck!

Chapter 43

Enter: James Vega

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and something inside was telling you that this mission wasn’t going to be alright.

It was your own fault for not acting on your instinct initially. Ignoring your gut was a challenge for you to begin with, but Shepard’s constant reassurance had been enough for you to continue into the contentious prison. You should have been aware of the dangers when you saw Shepard succumb to her nausea. Kaidan’s apprehension was yet another cue that you disregarded.

Shepard had even had her doubts about the assignment from the beginning and you somehow managed to shake it all off. Now the regret was starting to sink in as you snuck behind your partner in an attempt to emulate an undercover agent. Turian bodies were bulky and impractical for tasks that required sneaking around. In recent years, you had learned that your own frame was very capable of bending in ways that seemed impossible. You had also begun to appreciate your species’ stamina and ability to move at a fast rate. One would imagine that this made your people suitable for activities involving reconnaissance. Anyone who dared to think that way was either crazy or not familiar with your biology.

Shepard had elected to send Kaidan off into the depths of the prison by himself when you reached a fork in the winding hallways. After tangling with varren and barely making it inside to begin with, travelling as a group carried risks that the Commander wasn’t willing to take. Communication was limited with the other biotic; there weren’t a significant amount of signals for omni-tools to latch
onto and use. This disability forced her to form a pact within the squad: speak only when necessary and don’t access any unsecure channels with any sort of tech devices. Despite her distaste for Alenko, you could tell that it pained her to let him go by himself. If he didn’t come out alive, he would be MIA on her watch. This woman didn’t need another weight hefted onto her cracking shoulders.

You turned to her, her breath now raw and audible. You hadn’t been given a proper chance to ask about any of her afflictions, be it her physical or mental ones. Considering that you were perched underneath the window of an occupied room, it didn’t appear to be the right time to fill the role of the considerate boyfriend. Behaving in such a manner on duty was frowned upon, anyway. If there was one thing that you had gathered from your mandatory military experience, it was that messing around while on the job would get you reported no matter how alone you thought you were. Turian procedures had given you an edge of paranoia when it came to that particular subject and you instead put a hand on Shepard’s shoulder as a light symbol of support.

She gave you a sharp look and took the contact the wrong way. Without saying a word, she asked you if anything was wrong with nothing more than a facial expression.

“Heard they’re keeping that human doctor under wraps until she gives us some answers.”

“If you ask me, the bitch isn’t worth it. All that screaming is hurting my ears. If that team of hers didn’t want to try and slam an asteroid into the mass relay then I’d say that we should kill her on the spot.”

You paid careful attention to the batarian guards’ banter and held your hand up to Shepard to indicate that your touch meant nothing at the moment. She nodded in reply and used her omni-tool to scan for heat signatures on the other side of the wall. Raising her head would likely end with the both of you being spotted through the window.

With careful precision, she observed the obstacles around you. To your right were laser sensors that had the potential to set off every alarm in the facility and burn off a few limbs in the process. They blocked the logical route to the prisoner that you sought. If there was a place to shut them down, it would be in the room occupied by the guards right in front of you.

“Take care of them however you want.” she hissed. “Just make sure I can get in there and shut down the damn security system.”

The instructions had been far simpler than you had expected. No elaborate plan followed her order. Shepard eyed you and didn’t reveal anything about her thoughts to you. Although it would jeopardize the mission in theory, you didn’t mind the lack of words. You were too far into your professional relationship for that to be crucial. Regardless of your romantic standing, you preferred to surprise her with your methods when it came to combat instead of taking her directions to a t. The both of you weren’t in the presence of another Alliance officer, meaning that taking the time to throw in a few ad-libbed tactics didn’t matter one bit.

You pulled your sniper rifle from its mounted position on your back and decided that it was your turn to issue orders.

“Throw them so I can get a better shot.” you barked. The slight purr in your voice earned the attention of Shepard and the guards, much to your displeasure. The dastardly beam that graced Shepard’s face put any turian woman’s smile to shame. She had admitted that you were a damn good shot before and knew that there was no way that you had to have her raise the targets to take them out.
“Who the hell is that?!”

Over the guard’s vicious threat, you heard her response.

“Whatever you say, Vakarian.”

In a flash, her hands were illuminated by dark energy. Glass shattered everywhere from her impact and hurled the guards into the air. Just as soon as they had risen, you took them out with two single suppressed sniper shots. The bodies hit the ground with ease, allowing blood to drip from their heads down onto the ground.

You made your way into the previously closed off room before Shepard could and didn’t waste time in finding the source of the security beams.

“Cutting the power.” you announced. With a sweep of your own omni-tool, the lasers disappeared from outside and your path was no longer blocked.

“Alenko to Shepard, do you copy?”

“Go on, Kaidan.”

“I heard gunfire close to my flank, is everything okay?”

You peeked your head out and saw Shepard with a finger to her ear, meaning that she had gotten back in contact with your other squadmate.

“Your flank? You made it farther than we did.”

There was a pause on the other end of the line for a brief moment.

“You can’t be that far behind. Anyway, I’ve also got a brief layout of the prison from some data I picked up. This place is a damn maze.”

You had to agree with Kaidan on that one. The area began to look more and more run down and primitive as you made your way through. Half the time the flooring was made of broken down rubble. Varren were scattered everywhere and doors didn’t seem to work half the time. Water from the rain dripped down and hit your head from the ceilings, which were too low for your frame. It certainly felt like a prison: dark, deceptive and crawling with undesirables. Instead of going up, you made your way further and further into the building’s depths. It was a struggle that kept on persisting.

“Upload the links to me and keep them brief. I just got a tip from a guard and I’ll search around for more.”

She followed your path into the room and stared down at the bodies as if they were an accomplishment.

“I wasn’t expecting spontaneity.” she commented. “But I’m not complaining. Short range sniping is something you’ve gotta teach me when we get back to someplace that’s got a good shooting range.”

As she bent down to search the batarians’ pockets, you leaned against a counter and rubbed the plating on your forehead.

“Shepard, can I be frank?”
She paused and pulled out a PDA from one guard’s pocket.

“Do you have to ask?”

With a sigh, you continued on.

“This entire thing, it just…I don’t know. After working on Omega for so long and seeing everything we’ve both been through, something feels different about being here. It’s unstable, and I don’t mean that lightly.” you confessed. “We don’t even know what the hell we’re supposed to be doing. Yes, there’s a woman that needs to be rescued and there’s Reaper intel involved, but this place is far past what we’ve done before. The Admiral made it seem so vital to his efforts and it could all be screwed up because of a single communication error. Don’t you think that’s odd? Hearing the things those guards were mentioning wasn’t exactly encouraging, either. Blowing up mass relays doesn’t sound like what we signed up for.”

Instead of taking a brief pause, she abandoned her task and walked towards you. The harsh light made her violet armor shine against your own damaged blue set. Tufts of hair had slid out of her bun and dark circles had nested below her eye sockets.

“Why do you think I puked before getting off of the shuttle? Things have been fine but I can’t help but wonder if something is going to go wrong. If this doctor is planning on blowing up relays, then I’d love to get to her as fast as possible.”

A map popped up on her omni-tool, revealing the scattered layout of the prison. Her hand twisted in a pattern and marked a place on the three dimensional map.

“As long as we get out of here in one piece and have the same amount of relays as when we came in, I think this mission could be a success.”

She chuckled at your dry attempt at humor and took a step towards the door.

“As long as you’re here, I don’t think that’ll be a problem. Besides, when do our missions ever go as planned?”

“Noted, Shepard.”

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and unfortunately for you, neither of those two things were going to happen.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you had never been a heavy sleeper.

Ever since you were young, you had grown accustomed to waking up a few times in the middle of the night. Turians didn’t require much sleep to begin with. Humans, on the other hand, required about seven to eight hours of rest for optimal performance. This made sleeping beside Shepard a task that you loved and sometimes loathed. According to the old Normandy crew members, Shepard didn’t spend much time lost in slumber. She worried too much and saved her dreaming time for later. Regardless of this, you still slept considerably less. As much as you wanted to stay with her, your body grew restless under the sheets as the heat from both of your bodies built up. Once you did wake up, it wasn’t uncommon for her body to be melded to yours. Unlike turian women, humans appeared to love close contact while in intimate positions. You had learned this early on in your relationship with Shepard, but this didn’t mean that you had grown used to her longer sleeping hours. What you had become accustomed to was having her sleep beside you. Given your distaste for blankets while you slept, she gave off body heat and kept you warm without you being entirely confined by an extensive sheet of cloth.
It felt like she had been beside you just a few minutes prior. Without giving it any thought, you reached over to her side of the bed with your talon and tried to pull her closer to you. Another formerly foreign concept that you had adapted to was cuddling. It was different when you had someone soft to rub up against. There was less friction and it was, in fact, even more intimate than sex itself.

You sat up and rubbed the horns that jutted out of the back of your head. You hadn’t shared a bed with Shepard for quite some time, but you never recalled her getting up in the middle of the night unless something was wrong or if she was worried (which had been every night when the Reaper War was on).

“Shepard?” you called, your voice low and hoarse. There was no light on in the bathroom nor was there any brightness escaping from the bottom crack of the bedroom door.

You didn’t want to think of the worst possible thing that could have happened to her. Maybe she just forgot to turn the bathroom light on or perhaps she had gone downstairs to get a quick drink. When it came to your partner, thinking of the worst possible outcome was the norm. Nothing was ever average with her.

When there was no response, you succumbed to your own personal circadian rhythm and woke up while the sky was still dark.

That was when you heard the boom followed by a shrill scream that wasn’t from anyone in the penthouse. Its eerie tone made you reminiscent of the Ardat-Yakshi that had been turned into sick, ruthless banshees. Their screeches pierced the sound barrier and left a tingling effect on everyone that bore witness to the spectacle that they put on.

The noise made you shoot up at attention and scrounge towards the door in a panic. The word uttered by the feminine voice had sounded an awful lot like your name. Your visor clicked into gear, sending a flash of blue into one of your eyes. The door opened and you hauled your unclothed body down the stairs. Being able to walk around without clothing was the only perk you could think of when it came to having semi-internal reproductive organs.

The downstairs level was dark and deserted. Not a single noise echoed again, and it left you with a feeling that reminded you vividly of the batarian prison that you had visited long ago. You tended to cast the memory of that mission out of your head, but something about your situation made you recall the dark time.

“Shepard, are you alright?” you asked. Regrettably, you lacked a sidearm or something to defend yourself if this was going to be the worst case scenario.

The scream came again, only this time its source made you want to throw up.

“Garrus, please! Just make it all stop!”

You knew that voice better than anyone in the entire galaxy. You had heard it through agony and pain as well as times of happiness and pure ecstasy. It had spoken to you through whispers, secrets, and prayers that were uttered while dotting kisses around your neck. It had spoken at the head of many great battles and a handful of failures.

It was the voice of Commander Liz Shepard, and she still needed your help.

As fast as your feet were capable of carrying you, you ran to the kitchen and picked up her limp body.
“What the hell happened, Shepard? God damn it, just speak!”

She lacked proper clothing, meaning that her body had gone frigid. Between hyperventilation and shivering, she convulsed in your grip and sobbed harder than ever before. To say that she was a mess was an understatement.

Clammy and hot hands slipped into your own talons, which were sopped with tears comprising heavily of salt.

“Don’t leave…help…”

Your own breath hitched when she uttered those words. After all of the years of idolizing her and looking up to her, she was doing the same to you. You were the last bit of hope that she had. She hung onto you as if you were her last breath of life. Gone were her days of dominance and control. You held her by a single thread and you had no intention of letting go.

“What do you need? Spirits help me, tell me and I’ll do whatever you want!”

Her brows furrowed inwards as she held onto you. The scene in front of you was all too familiar. Pulses racing, skin going cold and rapid breathing indicated shock. It was common on the battlefield during the fight for Palaven. Turians dropped left and right from the stress. Most of them were later diagnosed with some sort of mental disorder.

“R-Remind me of something…” she croaked. “Anything. Speak the first thing that comes to mind and make the pain go away!”

The request was an odd one and you didn’t know how to oblige. Your talon tightened around her bruised hand and you began to speak of the happiest memory that you could recall.

You had to stay strong for her. If you didn’t, then nobody else would. Even if they did, she would still look at you as her rock.

With a firm yet comforting voice, you remained determined to talk her through her shock.

“The first thing I remember, huh? It’s gotta be one of the only good moments we’ve had on this huge spaceship…”

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you had put on the closest equivalent to a suit and tie that you owned. Instead of opting for a bolder color, the outfit was almost entirely tinted blue with the exception of two vertical stripes in the front. When your salary had gone from nothing to a considerable amount of credits, you had taken the time to take Shepard out shopping with you for new civilian clothes. Although you had selected this outfit yourself, she had complimented your fashion sense and agreed with you one hundred percent when you purchased it.

The Normandy had been docked for shore leave for quite some time now. After the debacle that the crew had just gotten over, you felt like it was time for you and your lady to really unwind and have that first date that you had been planning for at least a year. You felt like a bad boyfriend for putting it off for so long. However, Shepard had joked that it could turn into some sort of roleplaying thing where the two of you could pretend that it was really a first date. Thinking that it was some sort of bizarre human custom, you played along and pretended that there was still some sort of impressing that had to be done on your end.
The two of you had agreed to meet at the Silver Coast Casino’s upper bar area, which was known for its blaring popular music, dancing and strong ryncol. Neither of you were ones for the clubbing scene around the Citadel. It wasn’t unusual for you to stop into Purgatory every once in a while for a few drinks, but it was never anything major. On Palaven, bar dates were normally frowned upon. As out of place as all of it seemed, you had a sneaking suspicion that something fantastic was going to come out of this.

You ascended the staircase of the bar and looked at the luxurious establishment around you. Rich bankers and politicians threw their money away at bartenders and gambling machines, hoping to flush away the pain with some credits. You shook your head at their attitudes; even though you had money now, you could hardly think about discarding it in such a careless manner.

The upper level of the casino had a crowd that you could mingle in a little easier. Average people who had put on their best clothes or military grunts who were looking for a classier scene flocked up there and scoffed at the expensive drinks. People were cramped everywhere, but they hadn’t blocked the clear view of Shepard.

She stood at the bar closest to the dance floor while nursing a human drink known as a martini. The angular glass that contained the clear beverage was almost empty, meaning that she had been here for at least ten minutes. You checked your omni-tool and assured yourself that she had just arrived earlier than you and that you were not late.

Your blue eyes blinked a few times as you looked her over from afar. Tight black dress, metallic necklace and strappy heels decorated her body and you tried to stop yourself from drooling. That was your girl but for just a few hours you would have to pretend that she wasn’t.

Before she caught sight of you, another woman did. As you passed by, a tan and white turian woman locked gazes with you. You weren’t going to deny her beauty; it was certainly different than looking at a human for a change. Someone like her was who your family wanted you to be with. She appeared strong and reliable with her firm waist and piercing indigo eyes. A fatal smile made its way onto your lips and you had the nerve to smile back. It was out of politeness, right?

You continued to the bar and leaned against it. Thinking that it was another scoundrel, your date looked up and grimaced until she realized who it was. Her expression changed into a more cheerful one. It lacked the tense undertones that it did on a regular basis. You also detected genuine excitement in her eyes.

Assuming that you were going along with the whole “we first met” thing, you flagged down the bartender and made sure he knew to get you a dextro drink.

“A turian on shore leave?” the redheaded woman pondered. “That’s a miracle. What’s a man like you doing here?”

You could tell that she was holding back a grin and you were doing the same.

“I come here often to, you know, blow off steam.”

Just as you had, Shepard caught a glimpse of the admirable turian woman and kept her eyes focused on her. She felt as if a challenger had arisen and straightened up her posture a bit while you spoke.

“Can’t say I don’t mind the scenery, either.”

Your stare went back to the other woman. You were trying to make things a little realistic, which
meant that you weren’t necessarily in a committed relationship yet. You could look if you wanted to.

Luckily for you, you had glanced over at the right time. She had started dancing to the club music and her moves were arguably better than your current girlfriend’s. You meant that in a joking way; nobody was ever going to be able to beat Shepard at a bad dancing contest. It proved that even the best soldier in the galaxy wasn’t capable of being great at everything. Among her flaws, dancing could be counted as one of them.

Shepard, on the other hand, didn’t take your realistic attempt in jest. She threw you a glare and you rapidly tried to correct your mistake.

“I’d much rather enjoy what’s right in front of me, though.”

A smile reappeared onto her face as she finished off her drink.

“I’m sooo impressed.” she continued. She paired the sarcasm with an eye roll. “How often does this smooth talking of yours work?”

There was something sexy about her playing hard to get. Your mandibles flicked out in protest and you continued to act like you knew nothing about Liz Shepard whatsoever.

“To be honest, not that much. A lot of ladies just get lost in this voice.”

In a bold move, you leaned into her and let your voice turn into a low mixture of a purr and a growl. Along with the scar on the side of your face, your tone tended to drive her wild.

“I’m Garrus Vakarian, better known as Archangel. I’m an all-around turian bad boy who’s determined to be a vigilante among the unjust plague that floats across this galaxy.”

An unstable bit of air exited her mouth as she looked away, a smile still playing on her candy colored lips.

“Oh, I help kill Reapers on the side, too. And you are?”

The childish expression left her face as she began to do a little self-flattering.

“Commander Liz Shepard, Alliance Navy. I’m the commanding officer of the SSV Normandy and a damn good Spectre. Along with killing Reapers, I also kinda died a year or two ago. I wouldn’t call that important, though.”

Her smug tone made you drum the tips of your talon on the bar. Your drink, which remained untouched, found its way into your grip and eventually into your mouth.

“You’re the Commander Shepard, huh? That’s interesting, because I could swear I’ve heard a few things about you.”

She raised an eyebrow and let her hand wander over to yours. Her grip lacked the loving touch it always had. Instead of genuine, it felt flirtatious and lusty. Part of yourself was thinking that she was going to grope you, while the other half knew that she wouldn’t dare. She was enjoying this almost as much as you were and there was no sense in spoiling it.

“A lot of the things you hear about me aren’t true.” she teased. “Care to humor me?”

You mustered up as much as a smile as any turian could.

“Well, rumor has it that you’re the smartest and sexiest commander in the Alliance. Damn good
shot, too. A certain person also told me that you’ve got a thing for turians.”

“Turians? What kind of human would fall for one of them? They’re all scaly and rough.”

Your glance faltered yet again. You were losing ideas for all of this small talk and you were really looking forward to kissing her right about now.

“With a voice like this and a, uhm…” You stopped dead in your tracks, unsure of how to list any other assets that came with dating a turian. To be honest, you couldn’t think of many.

“Alright Shepard, you win. I can’t think of any other ways to compliment myself.”

Sensing your lack of experience, she whispered and tried to go along with it as best as she could.

“Just make it up or something. Remember, we just met.”

Instead of all of the obnoxious house music that normally echoed around the casino, a different kind of rhythm began reverberating around the second floor. You recognized it as a Latin beat of Earth origins. It was a precise beat that was dominated by a piano and Hispanic sounding beats, making you want to bounce out of your seat and dance.

You suddenly got an idea.

“Uh, right.” you continued. “All of the girls fall for me, especially when I do this.”

Right along with the music, you pulled Shepard up and out of her seat. She kept her bottom glued to the chair and looked up at you in sheer horror. She had heard the music and saw where you were trying to pull her off to.

“Wait, what? Is this your idea of improv?!?”

“You’re the one who said to you with it, babe.” you retorted. Your voice had grown even suaver but she was still having none of it.

“B-Babe?”

She remained infatuated for a moment until you pulled her out onto the dance floor with the rest of the tangoing couples. Their moves correlated with the beat and it was hard to believe that some of these people weren’t professional dancers. Like two embarrassed teenagers, you tried your hardest to pull her out of her seat and onto the floor with everyone else.

“Garrus, no no no no no, don’t--”

Before she could protest any longer, you body locked with hers. In a typical tango fashion, you kept one hand on her waist and led her with the other one.

“Come on, I’ve been taking lessons on the side!” you prompted while whispering into her ear. Instead of embracing the sensual dance, she pulled her head back and looked at you like you were crazy.

“You’re gonna fucking pay for this, Vakarian. There’s no way you’re getting anything tonight.”

You spun her around and watched as she stared down at your feet. She tried her best to follow your steps in an effort to not look like a complete idiot. Fortunately, you had been well aware of the challenge that was facing you and took a good lead. It was almost impossible for her to mess up.
“Promises, promises.” you purred.

She stepped on your foot and you didn’t know whether or not it was accidental. Considering the monstrous glare on her face, you thought that her intentions were clear.

As the tempo picked up, you watched her mouth the rhythm. She counted in time but still managed to screw up her footing whenever you stopped focusing on leading the two of you.

As the beat reached a small peak, you felt her trying to gain control. During this effort, her body found its way against yours and she even started to pick up on the steps a bit more. She stepped on your feet less and less and you didn’t have to focus on not dropping her.

“Let me show you a little something.” she whispered. She held onto your hand tightly and, in a daring manner, lifted her leg up like an Argentinian woman. Her knee apsed at your waist, and the crowd around you uttered a long “ooh!” in reply to her flaming hot response. When the true peak came in the song, you pulled yourself back and she extended with you. The two of you stood frozen in your place while the rest of the couples began to flee the dance floor to view the spectacle that was playing out in front of them. Even the gorgeous turian lady stopped to realize that her love interest was obviously taken.

Like on the battlefield and in bed, she adjusted to you and adapted to your ways. She wasn’t learning the dance per say; it was more or less like she was emulating you and doing a damn good job at it. Your moves became more complicated and she still fell into place like she always did. Swinging, embracing and curving around became second nature for just a few minutes. She laughed along with you while planting clear kisses on your neck and mandibles.

However, her tame demeanor didn’t last long.

A familiar spectator stepped in front of the crowd that was forming in front of the two of you. Unbeknownst to you, Lieutenant James Vega had witnessed the entire façade that had played out. He had appeared in front of everyone else to watch his Lola attempt the tango, and you didn’t like the smirk on his face.

As you neared him, Shepard pulled another move that made the crowd gasp.

Instead of staying in your grip, she strayed away and wrapped an arm around James’ waist. The three of you knew it was all in good fun, but the crowd thought otherwise.

He grunted and almost got pulled into the dance, but you took Shepard’s hand and twirled her back in, causing the audience to laugh and cheer.

She allowed herself to let loose even more and fall into line with what you were doing. Spin after spin, she stayed with you until the song drew to a close. As you felt the final beats approaching, you pulled her to the center of the floor and planted a single kiss on her lips before tilting her back and supporting her fully. Her leg climbed up your frame again, sending a chill down your spine. It was the stereotypical finish to the dance, but the crowd had grown wild anyway and began to applaud.

While she was still down, you took the opportunity to continue your long forgotten roleplay.

“So, do you think the girls fall for that or what?”

She batted her eyelashes a few times and replied as you pulled her back up. As if nothing had ever happened, the old clubmixes came on again and everyone got back to dancing.

“Oh hell yes. That’s the hottest thing you’ve ever done with that reach and flexibility of yours.”
Now that your hands were free, you put one on her chin and gave her a proper kiss.

“I’m sure it is, but it’s nothing compared to what’s going to happen tonight. Tango isn’t the only thing I’m well versed in.”

“Don’t I know it.”

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and despite the Reaper War, it was still easy to find something that you loved.

She was right in front of you.
Hey guys! Not sure if anyone is reading on here anymore but I'll keep updating anyway just in case.

Hiatus is over, I'm back from vacation with a longer than usual chapter because I took my time and did a crap ton of editing. I'm still not happy with the last part but I still tried my best!

xoxo
THR

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Chapter 44

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Your name was Kaidan Alenko and you knew that you had reached the correct destination when you heard muffled screams and the deep baritone voices that were a distinguishing characteristic of batarian men.

No matter what kind of reservations Shepard had, keeping in radio contact via omni-tool became a necessity between the two teams. You had reached the bowels of the unnamed prison before Garrus and she had. There was no way you were going to blind yourself more than you had to. Even while using the most secure channels and enabling encryptions, breathy sighs with panicked undertones never stopped echoing through your feed. They were feminine, meaning that their sole owner had to be the Commander.

“I had to mess with a crane and some boxes to get down to where I am.” You whispered. “Didn’t you say that you were close?”

“That was before I realized I had to reroute the damn power god knows how many times. You never mentioned having to tangle with varren, either.”

You imitated one of her sighs and made sure she understood that you really didn’t feel comfortable being down here alone. It felt like a cliché war-horror vid; sooner or later you were going to get captured by the illusive aliens and would be held for ransom while the great Commander Shepard and her associate scoured in search for you.

You laughed for a second and then found yourself holding back again.

Like that would ever happen.
In her defense, though, getting down to the lowest and most secure level took thoughtful planning on all three of their parts. After you shared map schematics with her and Garrus, assisting each other and taking turns at redirecting electricity and power wasn’t a simple job. Doing it while remaining undetected had been a bitch. As far as you knew, there weren’t any other tech jobs that had to be remotely taken care of. All Shepard had to do now was meet up with you in the deep depths of the asylum-like building.

“Copy, Alenko. I didn’t get that.”

Her voice wasn’t laced with sarcasm, meaning that she legitimately thought that you had said something important. You turned silent again and leaned against one of the countless concrete walls. There wasn’t anything else left to do while waiting for your superior.

“Nothing, Shepard. Just get down here ASAP.”

“Noted.”

The line fell silent after that and you took the time to try and piece your situation together. The Commander had filled you in on what she had overheard other guards saying. From recovering old security logs and scavenging around for datapads, piecing this situation together made you feel even worse about it.

For starters, it had been made clear to you that Amanda Kenson was not a simple doctor with a theory about the Reapers. She also wasn’t working alone.

Her operations were shady to say the least. The recordings of a former guard’s musings revealed that her ship was embarking on frequent missions to Omega to acquire parts for engines and other things that would likely propel a large vessel of some sort. Compared to some of the other things you had heard, though, smuggling parts seemed tame.

It was common knowledge around the galaxy that the Hegemony was a manipulative government. They leaked what they needed to leak to the public and kept a majority of their citizens enslaved or in the dark about what went on in their mystifying empire. Most of the time the “facts” they released had little to no truth behind them, meaning that nobody actually believed a word the estranged race said. Due to your lack of information regarding the inside workings of the batarien systems, you didn’t know for sure if their government employees were well informed or not. While passing by yet another group of watchmen prior to settling in your current position, you had intercepted another fact about Kenson and her team that confirmed your suspicions about the mission: this woman was trying to blow up a mass relay.

Hearing the sentence about a half hour ago had made your heart jump into your throat. Detonating one of the most precious resources the galaxy had to offer was unheard of; everyone thought that they were indestructible. After trying to process the overwhelming bit of information, you had trudged further into the prison and eventually ended up near the chamber that Kenson was in. You weren’t aware of her close proximity quite yet, but that was about to change.

As you leaned against the wall and watched your glowing blue barrier fade away, you wondered if the tidbit held any validity. You had already executed the responsible maneuvers and notified Shepard a long time ago about it. Ironically enough, she had uncovered similar information and the pieces of the puzzle were starting to come together. You couldn’t see the full picture yet, but you had a feeling that it wasn’t going to be a pretty one. If anyone had the intention of annihilating a mass relay, you would be able to fully comprehend why Hackett had given your crew this mission to begin with. Things would make sense and doubting Shepard would be obsolete.
You became lost in these few seconds of thought that you had given to yourself. Thankfully, you weren’t engrossed enough to ignore a shocking screech coming from the room beside you. The hideous sound was coming from the depths of a woman’s lung and sang across the terrain.

“Shut your damn mouth and tell us what you’re doing!”

As if nothing had even happened, your body reapplied a coating of dark energy around your form and you pounced towards the nearest door. With a loud whisper, you put your finger up to your ear to signal your superior.

“We’ve got the doctor down here! Those batarians are trying to torture her and it doesn’t sound like she had much time left! I can get to her but I can’t wait for you!”

Static greeted you on the other line and you tried not to assume the worst. A gruff voice responded seconds later, meaning that Shepard wasn’t available to respond.

“It’s Garrus.” the familiar turian barked. “We’re getting down as soon as we can. Just--”

“Don’t let Kaidan go in there alone!”

Shepard’s voice could be heard in the background along with the distinct noise of her biotics charging out into the confined halls of the prison.

You exhaled while another one of Dr. Kenson’s screams echoed throughout your vicinity. With a gruff growl, you lunged up and began decrypting the locked door. A woman’s life was at stake and you weren’t about to wait for Shepard to complete the job when she wasn’t there to do it. This wasn’t about who got the glory or who was able to break into the interrogation room with the most style. It was about a person who was facing life or death and had the potential to save the entire galaxy from the Reaper’s imminent threat.

“Patch Shepard through!” you yelled, your voice getting excited from the action you heard coming from their side of the line.

A few bumps and yells were heard before you heard a familiar voice.

“Kaidan, who knows what’s going to be in there?! Keep an eye on Kenson but don’t throw yourself into suicide! Do you have any idea the kinds of sensors that could go off if you break in there?!”

Your omni-tool dinged and the door no longer had a red light floating above its metallic finish. The only thing standing in between you and the target were Shepard’s orders.

“With all due respect, Commander,” you began. “I don’t follow orders from Cerberus personnel. There’s a life that needs to be saved and you’re telling me to wait. Alliance or not, I’m not going to stand for that.”

Anything else that she said after that became a blur. You tried telling yourself that your remark wasn’t based on past grudges which had supposedly been put behind you. This wasn’t a jab at Shepard nor were you trying to be hostile. Water poured in from the ceiling and hit your head and the building’s temperature was starting to have an effect on you, but you weren’t about to give up here.

You stepped closer to the door and forced it open, revealing a horrid sight.

The room you entered had to be the most advanced one in the entire prison. A capsule-like mechanism held Dr. Amanda Kenson and was probing her face with an external device. Although
the capsule had an open front, it was clear that it could be sealed off at any time. The metal contraption had her strapped down to its frame while it poked at her and it pained you to watch her flinch away. She didn’t speak; instead, her lips remained pursed in a permanent scowl that wouldn’t budge for anyone, not even her ruthless captors. She was older than you had expected. Dust colored hair had been swept into her face and formed a modern styled bob. She hadn’t been kept in custody for long; you assumed this because of the plum lipstick that remained smeared upon her mouth. For an older woman, she appeared to be feisty. She didn’t give in to what the batarians wanted nor had she given up her career as a deep space operative due to her age. Even from across the room, she had a fire in her eyes that was unmistakable. Any other characteristics regarding the woman of interest would have to be left to your imagination. There was a fully armed batarian guard operating the probing device and allowing him to advance further into her personal space wasn’t something you would let happen.

Her bluish orbs locked onto yours almost as if you were the last hope she had left. She was brave, but not brave enough to break out alone.

You threw a biotic charge, sending the guard into a semi-permanent stasis. The doctor’s eyebrows went up in shock and it was as if she hadn’t seen a human in at least a hundred years.

“Who are you? How did you make it down here by yourself?”

Beads of sweat fell down your forehead; the downside of being a biotic was starting to kick in. You felt your body yearning for some sort of energy, and of course any sort of nourishment would only be available once you reached the shuttle again. After examining the tech controls in front of you, you swept your omni-tool over the capsule and worked at getting her out.

“Major Kaidan Alenko of the Alliance. I’m on the team that was sent out by Admiral Hackett to get you out of here.”

Your mouth moved faster than it should have while you expended more brain power on getting her out rather than thinking over your words.

“Your debt won’t go unpaid, Major.” she replied smoothly. With the flick of a single switch, the prongs let go of your victim and she slid out onto the floor again. She gave the device a look over before turning to you and offering her hand. “I’m also assuming you heard rumors from the guards. Allow me to explain.”

Her explanation ended up being rather brief. In fact, she didn’t have the time to explain anything at all. Your hyped up metabolism and your attention had been diverted elsewhere, causing you to forget that you had left the guard in stasis. As talented as you were, there was no way that the batarian could stay frozen forever.

“Who are you and how did you manage to break into a Hegemony run facility?”

As if he had been released from a curse, he fell to his knees and coughed wildly. His voice was intended to be much powerful than it had sounded. Your attack had damaged him enough to come close to taking his life, but it hadn’t been enough. Kenson grabbed your arm and moved her hand to where your pistol was located.

“Shoot him!” she howled. If you weren’t going to do it, you wouldn’t be surprised if she snatched up your weapon and did it herself.

The prisoner wasn’t given another chance to speak. Another biotic shockwave hit him like a brick wall, except it wasn’t from you. The wave of blue pulsated across the air, pressing him up against
the confines of the room. Objects from shelves toppled onto him and hit the man square in the head, which brought the end upon him.

“Shepard!”

Your eyes darted forward, revealing a tall woman who was glowing as much as you were. Her tech armor shined brightly against the violet metal clinging to her, and although her hair was beginning to flop into her face she managed to maintain the aura of a soldier. Standing in front of her was a turian who towered over every person in the room. His slender waist was coated with armor that most likely weighed more than the woman who was standing beside him. Blue markings were tattooed onto his upper facial plates, and his matching eyes were inches away from staring down the scope of a sniper.

Their names were Liz Shepard and Garrus Vakarian and they had arrived fashionably late.

In theory, this would have been humorous if the three of you hadn’t been in such a serious situation.

The redhead nodded to her turian partner, who disregarded you and went over to check the body of the dead guard. Her arm went down, meaning that she had no intentions on sending another biotic shockwave throughout the room.

The bun in her hair finally gave out while she took steps towards you, sending her locks flowing down onto her shoulders. She picked the mass of hair up and pinned it back into place in a sloppy manner. Now that you could get a good look at her face, she looked as beat up as you did. Before conflict plagued your relationship, you used to share the woes that came with having L2 implants while on shore leave and during times of rest on the Normandy. Even though she was covered in armor, her chest was heaving and it seemed like she had exited a heavy fight. She mustered a composed face and, like Garrus, didn’t bat a single eyelash at you.

“You must be Dr. Amanda Kenson.” she began. Her tone mimicked yours in a way and she slid out a gloved hand to the only other woman in the room.

“Commander Shepard, Council Spectre and informal member of the Alliance. I see Alenko got here before I did.”

Kenson took her hand and shook it with a firm grip.

“Commander Shepard?” she asked. “I supposed informal would be more than a fitting title.” Shepard’s eyebrow quirked up, presumably because she didn’t know if the woman was being sarcastic or not.

“Hackett has told me about you. I’ve seen the vids and didn’t know for certain that you were alive. Considering that you’ve brought a team here, I’m guessing that the Alliance ended up receiving my distress signal.”

Garrus’ body rose up again and his hands held nothing, meaning that no physical evidence had been extracted from the guard.

“If we’re going to avoid any major incidents, I’d recommend getting out of here as soon as possible.”

The doctor wrinkled her nose at the turian and swept off her science uniform.

“And I’m, uh, Garrus Vakarian. I don’t exactly--”
“Garrus is my ship’s acting XO.”

Silence fell into its usual place in the room. An aura of shock accompanied it and everybody stared at Shepard as if she was a lunatic.

Garrus stared because he wanted to call Shepard’s bluff.

Kenson stared in awe because a turian was second in command on an Alliance ship.

You stared because you had no idea if she even had the authority to do what she had just done.

Her sudden declaration made a bit of sense in your mind; from what you could gather, the last executive officer had been Cerberus and had resigned from her position right after the supposed suicide mission. The temporary Alliance crew that had been designated to the Normandy lacked a true second in command. Out of all the people on the vessel, Garrus was without question one of the few people that Shepard had left to trust. No matter how much you wanted to like the former vigilante, memories lingered in the back of your mind and clouded the positive ones that you shared with him. He was a good man but he had managed to lure Shepard out of the bond that you had formed with her. She had assured you that there had been no coaxing on his part, but his presence was a constant reminder of what you had lost. You hated yourself for still thinking about these things. You could talk things out until you were blue in the face but nothing would ever change indefinitely.

After clearing her throat, Shepard broke the quietness. “I’m assuming that you have the information to back up what Admiral Hackett told me.” she continued. “As long as it has to do with Reapers, then this rescue was worth it no matter how many batarians we pissed off.”

With confidence, Kenson turned to look at the door and put a hand thoughtfully to her chin.

“There’s no doubt that the Reapers are coming, Commander. The information that my team has uncovered is monumental compared to what those four eyed creatures think about us. However, none of the intel will be accessible unless we can create an escape path.”

“That would require a security override.” you commented. The doctor nodded her head in agreement.

As soon as the words exited your mouth, the buzzing of alarms began to fill everyone’s ears. Your infiltration skills had worked well all up until this point, but you knew that it wouldn’t be a mission led by Commander Shepard without something going wrong.

It also wouldn’t be a Commander Shepard mission if she didn’t find a way to fix it.

“Someone better start working on that override.” she muttered. “Because the batarians aren’t going to sit around while we twiddle our thumbs and work on building a security hack.”

“We’re in code red mode! The leader escaped and every guard better get their asses in gear to stop them! This is not a drill!”

You tilted your head up to hear the message that echoed in sync with the alarms over multiple loudspeakers; if it wasn’t obvious that Kenson was breaking out, it certainly was now.

“Alenko!”

You turned to Shepard, who appeared to be less than pleased with your previous misconduct.
“Get out there with Garrus and hold them off while I cover Kenson.”

You tried to dig deeper and determine the meaning of the tone she had used. It was firm and orderly, but there was an underlying note in it that made you wonder if she was proud of you for what you had done. She didn’t show any indication of being pissed off. Based on how she used to behave towards you, you’d say that her current mood was far from livid. She wasn’t giving you any body language to go off of; she stood tall and was ready to fight with you at a moment’s notice if she had to. You decided that it was better than nothing and then cursed yourself for even caring; idolizing her like a child was something Garrus did, not you. You were older than her and you were so damn close to having more experience than her. Hell, you even outranked her, but that didn’t matter to anyone in the Alliance. She had proven her worth time and time again. According to Hackett, you had too. You had almost forgotten that you had a biotics team to go home to and lead. You had climbed the ranks for longer than you were able to remember. You had gotten your recognition not only because of your valor and talents, but also because of your split second decisions that ended up saving people instead of taking their lives.

What you had done ten minutes prior was one of those decisions.

The popping sound that a heat sink made echoed throughout your ears. Before you could confirm your orders, gunshots were fired in the direction of the alien enemy that was starting to close in on the room you were in. Two guards that had made their way to the doorway were now standing dead at your feet.

“I appreciate the backup, but I remember where they kept the guns in this room.” Kenson pointed out. In her hand was an M-6 Carnifax which she had grabbed off a counter. “And Alliance training taught me more than just how to hold a petty little pistol.” A hellish expression was painted upon the older woman’s face. She was out for revenge and a few shots weren’t going to stop her.

A small smile came up to Shepard’s face and she blew a spare strand of hair away from her reddened eyes.

“Alright everyone, change of plans!” she said, her hands locked around her own heavy pistol. “Let’s double time it so we can find that console!”

Garrus and Kenson wasted no time in taking down the first wave of the guards that had piled up in the hallway that you had used to enter the room. The winding paths of the prison still daunted you and you were fortunate that you didn’t have to go through it alone for a second time.

“Kaidan, wait!”

A hand grabbed at your arm, which was still coated in cerulean dark energy. The blue hue had transferred to Shepard’s hand as well, causing her to retract her limb in a heartbeat.

“What you did back there was…”

She sighed and rubbed her head, causing the lazy bun to fall back down onto her shoulders. It had been a long time since she let her hair down, literally and metaphorically.

“Damn it!” she hissed. With the free moments she had, she took the time to push her hair up into a proper knot and made sure that it stayed in place. Like it had before, a single strand of hair teased her upper cheek and threatened to be the sole piece that didn’t make it into the tight hairdo.

“It’s not like we have much time here.” you prompted. She was stalling whatever she was about to say.
“Just...know that what you did down here was a good call.” she said begrudgingly. “Don’t make a habit of going against a superior’s orders. Whenever we have our next sparring night I might just kick your ass without biotics.”

This was the closest thing to a loving remark that she was able to give you. You answered her with a smile and began to feel a little better.

“Thanks, Shepard.” you replied. “And, by the way, you’ve got a lock of hair sticking out.”

“You act like I don’t know it’s there.”

Your name is Kaidan Alenko and as you fought your way through the batarian prison to get to a single security console, you couldn’t help but smile just a teeny, tiny bit. Those kinds of moments overshadowed your problems. They were stupid to dwell on and sometimes easy to forget, but recalling them made the days go by a little bit faster. If you weren’t going to be able to see her smile at you again or watch the natural breeze of Earth tease at her loosened hair again, you would indulge yourself in a self-made façade.

Your partner’s determined attitude was what was keeping her going. Her lustrous desire to come out on top against her ex put her into overdrive.

That burst of energy had since worn off. The mission had been completed and all that was left was to hijack a shuttle and get the hell out of batarian territory. You had come across the prison’s hangar out of sheer luck; you thanked the spirits that you didn’t have to circle the jail in search of an escape. Of course, the maps you had installed into your omni-tool did wonders, too.

While Kaidan checked the shuttle to see if its systems were intact, Shepard stood beside you and let the sun radiate her dewy complexion. Although rain still poured down on the planet, vegetation was more visible and the yellowy orange star shined through the defiant clouds. Her entire body was dripping with sweat and she was fortunate enough to have a uniform to cover up most of it, leaving just her hairline tinted with a dark color from the moisture. Bloodshot brown eyes met your own blue ones and she offered a smile. Nothing more was needed and for once you were able to just enjoy the view again.
Avian-like creatures cawed in the distance while you observed trees that were somehow anchored to dark rock. Canyons of stone and hills of jagged minerals completed the landscape and stuck out against the now vibrant colors of the sky, which had once matched its planet’s terrain. As if there weren’t already enough colors, trees glowed a dark green and whispered softly as their leaves were hit by the descending water droplets.

“Call me crazy, but if this place wasn’t infested with batarians and had a decent city, I think retiring here would be one hell of an adventure.”

She laughed at your comment and shielded her own eyes from the sun’s brightness. After a second long pause, she turned to you and leaned against your side.

“Do they have sunshowers like this on Palaven?”

Your mandibles flared at the foreign term, which hadn’t been interpreted correctly by your translator.

“A what?” you asked.

“It’s called a sunshower,” she continued. “It’s self explanatory. The rain falls when the sun is still out. The kids back on Earth say that it’s because the devil himself is beating his wife.”

A deep chuckle exited your throat and you accepted the weight that was being pushed onto your right side.

“You humans and your damn religions. I’ll never understand half the things you come up with. It’s creative compared to turian spiritual beliefs.”

The echo of the rain began to die down and the sun took center stage, staining the environment with its luminosity.

“And no, we don’t have such a thing.”

She affirmed your response with a grunt and pulled away when she heard Kaidan calling for her. That meant that the shuttle was finished and it was either totaled or ready for takeoff.

“Wait, Shepard!” you exclaimed, wanting to address one more thing with her before she went off. She tilted her head in your direction and crossed her arms, waiting for you to say something.

“What you said back in the prison…” you began, not sure of where to take the remainder of the conversation. “You didn’t really just promote me, did you?”

She uncrossed her arms and placed her weight on her left hip in almost a suggestive manner.

“Come on, XO Vakarian,” she teased. “The shuttle’s probably ready and you’re sitting here asking questions about your rank.”

“I guess it’s just another position I can add to the book, then.” you continued. “Former C-Sec operative, Archangel, boyfriend of the great Commander Shepard…Executive Officer of the Normandy would sound pretty good in that list, won’t it?”

Instead of veering off to go and deal with the shuttle, she moved in dangerously close to you, her breath tickling your plated cheek. She smelled of sweat and the metal that coated an empty heat sink, which was something you had gotten used to. The contact you shared felt invisible through your armor but that didn’t mean that you couldn’t enjoy it.
“You forgot a few things,” she whispered while bringing her mouth up to one of your mandibles. “You’re the bravest, most loyal person I’ve ever met.” She nipped at you, knowing the right places to put her teeth and how much pressure you liked. Her tongue glided across the tough flesh that was near your mouth and almost nothing was holding you back from leaning in and kissing her.

“You’re the best marksman in the galaxy, you saved Omega, not to mention that you’re the best guy I could ask for when it comes to what goes on in the bedroom.”

She pulled her mouth away and went back to being a leader again. The suave smirk on her face suggested otherwise, though.

“The position’s yours, Garrus, really. Nobody else could help me keep the old girl running like you.”

She became quieter as she spoke and you were tempted to pull her into you again so you could return the favor. Wetness came from around her eyes and nobody could be sure if they were tears of just stray beads of sweat.”

“Y-You’re…the best damn partner anyone could ask for.” she continued. “Now come on, let’s get moving.”

You rubbed the scarred side of your face and followed her. Your strides were naturally longer than hers, which meant that keeping up was never an issue.

“Love you too, Liz.” you replied, your mandibles moving up into a smile.

You weren’t sure if it was appropriate to say anything else as you boarded the shuttle with everyone else and listened as Shepard addressed Kaidan about the status of the spacecraft. The stress was now gone from her face and she was going to be able to face Hackett with a triumphant mission report. Everything had been a total success.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you had just discovered your sudden fondness for sunshowers and the scent of sweat and the metal that coated an empty heat sink as you sat on a seat in a batarian manufactured shuttle.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you had never been a poetic man until tonight.

Turians weren’t known for their rich culture for a reason. If one was to look around the galaxy for edifying information regarding the arts, Palaven would be the last place they would look. You never seemed to hear about turian philosophers or painters; martial society didn’t give fame to those who focused on creativity off of the battlefield. Generals and Primarchs were the ones who were put in the history books, not free thinkers. They wrote battle plans instead of bestsellers and the only plays that they directed were laced with danger and sometimes certain death. This rigid thought process that had developed in your people wasn’t as dreadful as it sounded, though. There were, of course, still men and women that practiced and perfected their arts as a career.

Granted, they just did so after their mandatory military service and few were successful.

While races such as the asari had spent their time going through enlightenment in their ancient days, your people had already started building an armada that would span across the galaxy. It had paid off; the turians still possessed the largest fleet in the known universe even after being decimated by the Reaper War. Military was a component in every single cobalt colored cell in a turian’s body. Turians used to say that their children were born to hold rifles, not paintbrushes.
This statement held true to you for most of your life. You had learned a thing or two about giving a squad an invigorating speech before a battle and that was about as far as your persuasiveness extended as far as you were concerned. You had spent a lot of times tripping over your words during your childhood, much to your sister’s delight. You had grown out of that phase and you laughed sometimes when you thought of how far you had come throughout the years. You even managed to hold a serious relationship and job, which were always your two main priorities. Somehow you had made it through nearly three decades without having to be deep or lyrical. You got the job done and that was all that seemed to matter.

When your partner needed you to tell her something that would make the pain go away, you were damn sure that you were going to put everything behind you, wipe the nervous sweat from her forehead and tell her that things were going to get better even if you didn’t think you would be able to do it.

And that was exactly what you did.

With gentle, expressive words, you began to retell the fondest memory you had with her on the Citadel. It had been about a year ago when the Normandy had been docked for pre-Reaper invasion maintenance. Just weeks before the final assault on Earth, you and the entire crew had the time of your lives and encountered a bit of shore leave that nobody was going to forget anytime soon. During this limited period of time, the Normandy crew saw a clone of Shepard, the destruction of the Citadel’s best sushi place and the last party they would all have as one big dysfunctional family. You tended not to dwell on those parts of the adventure, though. As fun as it was to have one last hurrah before the grim reality could set in again, there was really only one thing that you wanted to relive over and over again from that extended Citadel shore leave period.

That one thing was your first real date with Shepard.

After deeming the kitchen as an unsuitable place to conduct an intervention, you picked up the once strong woman and decided to move her back up to her bedroom. Despite her stature, it was now even more obvious that she had lost a significant amount of weight during her time alone. Carrying her up the stairs would have been a simple task if you didn’t have to retell a story at the same time.

“Remember the time when you insisted that we have a real first date on the Citadel? It was before Earth, before solitary confinement…in fact, I’d call it the last time either of us let loose without killing someone.” you joked while keeping her steady as you ascended the stairs. “To be honest, I wasn’t sure what to expect. A night at a casino with my human girlfriend, blazing lights, a good crowd…what could possibly go wrong? The last time I had been on a date since then had been ages ago. I remember dressing up that night, wondering what would go wrong this time. Contrary to what I believed, everything that went on had been absolutely right. Especially that dress you wore.”

You figured that using the same words that you used when reliving the memory by yourself would be the most comforting way to make her feel better. Even though you knew her a little bit too well, you still weren’t sure how to go about helping her. She had changed so much but you knew that deep inside there had to be the same woman that made you melt at a single touch. The beautiful girl who played coy and even gave in to dancing with you on that momentous night was in there somewhere; you just had to look a little harder this time.

As she gripped the talon that supported her shoulder, her eyes closed and she immersed herself in your words. You described every single detail that you could remember; the hue of the lights, the key of the music, the step patterns that made up the tango, the oxblood color of the lipstick that she had smeared onto her lips. It got more challenging as you went on because it forced you speak of a different Shepard than the one you were cradling. What you had back then was so dissimilar to what
you had now.

You lost track of time once you hit her bedroom. You resumed your position in the bed, letting her get tangled up in your entire being. Whenever you pointed out your habit of rambling to her back in the day, she would smile and wait for you to continue because she genuinely loved to listen. This time, she was a little less comprehensible. You tore up the sheets and she inched closer to you, giving you soft kisses in exchange for just talking. That was your only signal to keep going.

You didn’t stop until the both of you had fallen asleep. By that point, even you had become exhausted. Your eyelids drooped closed and the thought of sunrise made your plates shiver in displeasure.

All of those emotions could be thrown to the wayside for her.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you wouldn’t have done any of the things that you did if you didn’t love her.
Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and you hadn’t been expecting much from a batarian shuttle. If their technology was anything like the state of their prisons, it wouldn’t be long before your entire squad and Kenson fell out of the sky and perished into Aratoht’s rocky terrain.

The first good sign had been the lack of effort it took for Kaidan to get the vehicle moving. Before the penitentiary’s proper security protocols could engage, the shuttle was off of the ground and already travelling into the atmosphere at a swift pace. Upon further inspection, you discovered that the shuttle was, in fact, a Kodiak that was likely just Hegemony property. The aircraft was rather comfortable and you acquainted yourself with your less dangerous surroundings almost immediately.

After settling down onto a bench, you watched as Dr. Kenson took over and commanded the shuttle into autopilot. With Garrus and Kaidan across from you, she crossed her arms and addressed you with a little more courage than before. Her voice was more fervent and had gone up to a slightly higher pitch; you reasoned that this was because her worries had diminished now that she had been extracted from where her captors had been planning on leaving her to rot.

“That tech we put into their system should leave them scrambled until we leave the atmosphere. We’ll be out of range by the time they can get air support, which means we’re in the clear.”

You breathed a sigh of relief and the feeling of success started to kick in. Your first Alliance mission in almost three years had gone off without a hitch. Hackett’s faith in you had somehow paid off. Even when you doubted yourself, you got the job done without any problems. It felt like he knew your abilities more than you did.

You nibbled on your bottom lip and rested your chin in your two fisted up hands. Perhaps you had succeeded only because you were well aware of the consequences of failure. Displeasing Hackett was the last thing you wanted to do. That was the kind of thing that gave you nightmares; the moment you would have to tell any superior that you couldn’t do something or that a mission was a
defeat would be the moment that you failed as a soldier and a person.

“Commander, are you prepared to hear about my work now?”

You perked your head up and gave an affirmative nod.

“Absolutely. But before we start anything, are you sure we’re okay until we leave the system? I don’t need batarians coming after us while we’re in a ship with lackluster armaments.”

A hint of a smirk was plastered onto Kenson’s face.

“If they get out here while we’re still in range, I’ll see to it personally that we take down every ship. When a human comes in with plans to destroy a mass relay, most batarians would shoot them on the spot. I don’t believe I’m an exception to that mindset.”

Garrus’s mandibles twitched at her response and he stared at you in concern. Your eyes had widened as much as his had; to be honest, you hadn’t even considered that the rumor that was going between the prison guards contained any merit. Now that the source itself had leaked the information, you didn’t know what you were supposed to say.

This woman was Alliance, after all. If she was a close associate of Hackett, did that mean she was allowed to do such a thing?

Your eyes darted over to Kaidan, who looked just as frazzled as everyone else. You knew the look that he was giving you all too well.

He had done the same thing when you had approached him on Horizon. When he had heard of your Cerberus involvement, he had given you a painful glower and avoiding it was impossible. There was no way that he could have stopped you during that attack; you were going to go back on the SR-2 and continue your mission as if nothing happened. But he and you both knew that what you were doing wasn’t right. He was going to let you go yet he was going to assure that you were well aware of his negative opinion by using nothing more than his facial expression.

Without using words, his tawny eyes told you that everything around you was wrong this time. The entire idea about blowing up a relay, the complete calmness in Kenson’s voice as she suggested it, and even the serene background of space was invisible to you outside the shuttle. All of it was wrong and you didn’t want to agree with him.

The wrinkles around his forehead became more prominent and his eyebrows were knitted together in confusion. As unsure as he looked, he was as right as right could get. Alliance authority or not, there was no way to rationalize the destruction of such a vital object. This time, you agreed with everything he was trying to tell you. There was a soft reminder in his eyes, though. He was going to trust your judgment until you gave him a reason not to. In your opinion, you had done this a number of times, but considering how well the mission had gone you were assuming that he was giving you a real second chance.

You gave a breathy sigh and felt all of your positive emotions leaking out of you. Your confidence had been replaced by a sensation of looming skepticism again.

Much to your despair, things were not going to be as easy as you had planned.

“I thought the guards were kidding when they said that. How can such a small team execute an operation as massive as destroying a mass relay?”

Your response was neutral so you were able to allow the woman to explain herself. If she knew
about the Reapers then there had to be some sort of method to her madness.

“Don’t jump to conclusions.” she retorted. She threw her hands up in defense and then pushed back her sideswept bangs. She then began pacing around the shuttle, which was roomy enough for her to take a dramatic pause while standing in the middle of the space. Her hand was brought up to her chin in thought and she began to explain everything that you hadn’t been told.

“That’s only half the story. What my team has discovered is more valuable than a mass relay.” the doctor explained. “The real reason why we were here was to investigate Reaper technology way out near the borders of this system. They were mere rumors but the Alliance wasn’t taking any chances.”

You sat up a little straighter and attempted to understand her logic.

“I’m hoping that means that you’ve found something of importance.”

Kenson began pacing again, this time stopping in front of you. You stood as well and watched as she straightened up to get closer to your own height.

“What we discovered is pivotal in comprehending what the Reapers really are. I can confirm that we uncovered that…and much more. While our operation was still unknown by the Hegemony, my team unearthed undeniable proof that the Reapers will be arriving in this system. Its mass relay is crucial for them; they’re going to use it to leave dark space and spread themselves around the galaxy. Its name is the Alpha Relay, and they’re going to have no problem taking all of us down by using it.”

“Which is why you’re planning to destroy it?”

You turned at the sound of Kaidan’s voice, which was as unfeigned as all get out. He had stood up too and was making his way towards you and the other woman.

“I’ll admit, it’s a hell of a way to keep out a few billion sentient flying robots, but what about the long term consequences? They’ll find another way in and in theory all we’d be doing is butchering a vital transportation system that makes the galaxy function.”

You hadn’t expected Garrus to chime in as well, but his point of view put things into perspective a bit more. Sure, the idea felt a lot less crazy now that there was a valid explanation along with it, but there would undoubtedly be severe repercussions.

Kenson turned to the turian and crossed her arms.

“I’m not saying that this is how we can stop the Reapers permanently. There will be a large aftermath in the galactic community and lives will be lost.” she replied. “But if that delays the Reapers for even a few months to a year, it’ll give everyone more time to rally an army and understand what’s at stake. Most intelligent life forms regard the Reapers as a legend. Thanks to Shepard and her work with taking down Saren, some are realizing that there’s a real threat out there. We’ve got the attention of the Council and we can’t stop there. Even though a large chunk of people are still ignorant, destroying the Alpha Relay is what’s best for everyone. Killing a few million people so billions more can live is a sacrifice I’m willing to make. Knowing the Commander’s history, I’m sure she shares the same philosophy.”

The shuttle’s passengers looked to you for confirmation. Kenson knew more about you than she let off; you assumed that by “history”, she meant the battle that had formed your ruthless reputation. The Siege of Torfan wasn’t something you thought of much anymore. It had been the mission that
made you into who you were today, as cheesy as that sounded. You still cringed when you recounted the losses; over seventy five percent of your squad perished while you slaughtered batarian slavers who were willing to turn over their pride. You had been so careless back then. You didn’t know how to comprehend the value of a life, whether it was human or batarian. That was what the Alliance had liked about you; emotional morals didn’t get in the way of the job. Your efficiency was off the charts and you had never experienced true failure.

After the end of the Skyllian Blitz conflicts, you had started to grow as a person. You figured out that you were more than a cutthroat, sadistic officer. You were still as calculating as ever, but you would pause for a few seconds to think about your decisions before executing them. Part of this was due to Captain Anderson’s influence, which you still valued to this day.

What Kenson had said made you think, though. Was there anything wrong with sacrificing millions for billions or was it worth putting up a fight to save everyone? She hadn’t presented any alternative to destroying the Alpha Relay, which would obviously end in the death of a large number of batarians who lived in the Bahak system.

Was it worth it to have them all die just so you could get a few more months of a secure life? Would the galaxy even accept that fact that the Reapers were coming?

You counted up the unknowns in your head and pressed your lips into a fine line before responding. There really weren’t any true answers to these questions and you came up with the only answer that made sense to you.

“If it means saving lives, then anything is worth the cost.”

Kenson nodded and walked over to the shuttle’s map. She pulled up a diagram of the relay and gestured to it. It was a smaller scaled replica of the real thing and it floated on the console in hologram form.

“Delaying the Reapers is about all we can do right now. Even though they have advanced FTL drives, travelling without a mass relay will make things as difficult as possible for them. They can go to the next relay but it would require them to go without assistance for a much farther distance. While we made our discoveries, we formulated out data into one big idea and loosely named it nothing more than the “Project” to throw off any potential intruders. What we wanted to do with our concepts was simple: inconspicuously come together and annihilate the Alpha Relay by launching an asteroid into it so the Reapers would have no access to the system. As I said before, lives would be lost in the process. I’m talking about the destruction of the entire system and the deaths of a countless number of batarians.”

“We’re going to need a lot more proof than that if we’re going to put down so many civilians.” Kaidan interjected. “How do you even know that you’re going to be able to destroy the damn thing? The Alliance taught us that mass relays were indestructible.”

The doctor punched a few buttons on the console controlling the map, revealing a window on the side of the shuttle. The total blackness that covered the vast expanse of space disappeared and exposed the Alpha Relay itself. Just like any other mass relay in the galaxy, it glowed and offered a beacon of hope for those who were unaware of the Reapers’ impending return. Stars were practically surrounding the mechanism, which was swirling with life like every other mass relay in the galaxy.

“I’m aware that most people think that, too. The funny thing is that nobody’s ever thought to try and take one out, though. We spent months travelling close enough to the relay to analyze its schematics, and if our calculations are correct, it would take even less than a small planet to take it down. It
isn’t as foreign as you perceive it to be. Just like everything else in this universe, it’s fragile and capable of breaking down. Before I was arrested, we were a button push away from proving it. Its explosion has the potential power of a bursting supernova yet it’s actually quite a simple object to get rid of. It might be the most powerful mass effect engine mankind has ever encountered, but everything has its weak spots.”

Garrus froze in anger as he looked out into the relay and tried to understand what Kenson had just proposed.

“So this Project is still operational and you were about to destroy this thing without the Alliance knowing?! How much have you divulged to them? Don’t they understand the number of casualties involved?”

You looked to Garrus and saw raw rage settling into his body. His talons were curled up into balls and his mandibles were pressed up to his plated cheeks. You could almost see his teeth being bared at Kenson, who stood her ground a few feet away from you. His displeasure for the operation was understandable; he had worked with innocent batarians on Omega. They weren’t bad people whatsoever. The reputation their race faced wasn’t fair at all, but that didn’t mean that they didn’t do bad things more than anyone else. Everything Garrus had fought for on Omega went against what was happening right now. No matter what the means, he would save everyone if it meant that he was the only one that had to die. He sacrificed himself instead of everyone else, which was a concept that you had gradually learned. That style of thinking had been in his blood. It took him no effort to do the right thing, which you were secretly envious of. Like you, he was a leader in his own right. He wanted to save these people and stop the Reapers at the same time. Kenson’s plan wasn’t capable of doing both of these things.

“Enough to allow them to continue funneling money to my team and me. I wasn’t exactly going to warn them before I did it, but--”

“Shepard, this isn’t something we should be meddling around in. This is more of a terrorist operation than something that’s going to benefit everyone in the long run! What happens when millions die for nothing?!”

Your chest got a little tighter as you barked at him. Like a sudden gunshot in a peaceful field, your words cut through his as if they were a sharp knife.

“Stand down, Vakarian!”

His facial plates lowered when he realized what you had ordered. The right adjective for his demeanor wasn’t in your immediate vocabulary; he didn’t appear to be hurt but he also didn’t looked too pleased with you. If this wasn’t a real mission, he would have continued to speak freely regardless of what you had said.

Instead, he answered you with a dejected sentence, his subvocals coming out more than they normally did. He didn’t want to stand down. Instead, he wanted to stand up.

If you hadn’t gotten in his way, he would have.

“Yes ma’am.”

Before you could allow yourself to feel bad about your actions, you turned back to Kenson and resumed your conversation.

“I’m hoping you knew how you were going to propel this asteroid.” you questioned. She pulled up
another diagram on the map and it was a large rock this time. You assumed that this was the makeshift weapon that you were discussing.

“Our ships have been travelling from here to Omega to smuggle engine parts. As long as you have the power and a good VI pilot, we can pretty much tell the asteroid where and when to go. It’s painfully straightforward. Our constant travels to that wasteland of a spaceship rose suspicion in the Hegemony. They were watching us and ended up catching me and a small squad when we went out to run some more tests. Fortunately, our base is still undetected and intact.”

“Commander, if you don’t mind, I have a question that has yet to be answered.”

Kaidan had moved beside you while you weren’t paying attention. You looked to him and crossed your arms.

“Go on.”

“The theoretical chance of the Reapers invading are high from what we’ve learned from Saren and the Battle of the Citadel, but you’re coming to us with radical claims that can’t be confirmed or denied. How did you figure out about such an ominous invasion without speaking to a Reaper yourself?”

“It can all be explained when we get back to Arcturus Station, Major. I can assure you that once you hear about what else we’ve recovered, there won’t be a single doubt in your mind. The entire Project crew agrees with me and I’m sure all of you will too despite your reservations.”

The answer had been dodgier than expected. It felt as though she was trying to hide something.

“I need solid answers if I’m going to report your real findings to the Alliance. Show me physical proof and then we’ll see where we’re at.”

For a brief moment, a flash of anger plagued Kenson’s aging face, but she turned to the Kodiak’s window and put a finger to her ear.

“Project Base, we’re having a change of plans. Get the artifact ready in the lab and make sure things are tidy. I’m coming home and I’ve got Commander Shepard with me.”

A muffled response could be heard from her earpiece. As she spoke with another Project worker, you turned to Garrus.

His eyes pierced yours with an overwhelming sense of guilt that made you flinch. He pulled up his omni-tool and typed a brief message, which you soon figured out was directed towards you.

The bright orange light of your omni-tool broke the navy blue darkness of the shuttle and you didn’t even want to look down and see what he had said.

Of course, you did anyway. You opened the chat client that the two of you used and scanned the holographic screen with reluctance.

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New Message from: Garrus Vakarian (Contact Name: G)

Connection Status: *CONFIDENTIAL*

G: I understand your decision is final, but I’d rather get out of this knowing that we didn’t kill off a system for nothing.
G: I know you’ll figure something out. You always do. Just promise me you’ll think over everything before letting her do all of this.

You wanted to look up at him and make sure that his irate emotions had truly been thrown to the wayside. Instead, you pecked away and composed your own message. If you did happen to glance up at your turian, you feared that your face would turn as enflamed as the color of your omni-tool.

In all honesty, you didn’t think that he had forgiven you so fast. Maybe he hadn’t even been that irritated in the first place. You continued to reply anyway and made a mental note to give him a much better apology later.

-> Reply

Username Input: Shepard-Commander

Connection Status: *CONFIDENTIAL*

Shepard-Commander: We have to trust this woman. Valid or not, she’s got something and she isn’t going to tell us anything else without a little more prodding. She seems good, though. Give her a chance.

G: Listen to her. She’s talking about some sort of artifact.

Shepard-Commander: I’m guessing we’re not going to Arcturus anymore. Great. So much for this mission being a piece of cake.

G: Come on, don’t be such a pessimist. And why are you comparing our job to a baked good?

Shepard-Commander: You’re the only person who can convince me to even consider being optimistic, Vakarian. It’s a human saying, by the way. They can sometimes get weirder than our religions. :)

G: I guess my irresistible charm just isn’t working after all of these years. I’ll be sure to brush up on human culture a little more when we get back to the Citadel.

Shepard-Commander: You’ve gotta give me a better reason to look on the bright side. Hold up, she’s turning around.

User: Shepard-Commander has ceased chatting with Garrus Vakarian (G)

“Commander, we’ll be approaching the base for the Project shortly, ETA fifteen minutes. If you want evidence, we’ll get you evidence.”

You nodded at Kenson’s voice and gave her a quick reply.

“Your compliance is appreciated. I’m looking forward to seeing what you’ve got.”

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and as you stood quietly in the shuttle while continuing to chat with Garrus, you didn’t realize that the worst was yet to come.
Your name was Garrus Vakarian and your head didn’t leave Shepard’s pillow until midmorning the next day.

You couldn’t remember the last time you had spent so much time in bed with her. The first occurrence that came into your mind was the night before the two of you had raided and destroyed the Cerberus base with EDI’s mobile platform. That night and brief few hours of dawn that you spent with her had been serene. The thought of possibly not seeing the person you adored ever again brought out that kind of side in you and Shepard. She arched her back a little more and dared to sink her teeth further into your sensitive flesh while you mastered the art of French kissing.

It had turned out okay, though. No matter how many “I love yous” and “Please don’t gos” the two of you had uttered before unleashing hell on Cerberus, you came out alive. What was apparently the last night you would spend together ended up being one of the best. Shepard was still beside you and she would always be just like she was now. Granted, she was a bit less levelheaded than before, but that wasn’t making much of an impact any longer.

Your entire body felt like a hunk of cumbrous steel. With all of the energy you were able to muster, you pulled yourself out of bed and leaned on the edge of the piece of furniture. While artificial sun came down onto the floor in perfect beams, you shrugged off its happiness and padded to the bathroom to find some peace of mind in the shower.

Before stepping into the other room, you peeked back and made sure that your girlfriend was still sound asleep in bed. Slipping out of her grip had been unnecessarily tedious; she had a firm hand on some of the most awkward parts of your body. Her foot had been lodged in your spur while her arms had wandered down into your carapace with her fingers ghosting across your bare neck. Her locks had been sprawled across your own face, causing you to feel like a million tiny bugs were eating your head off.

You chuckled at the thought and shook your head. She had since curled up into a ball against her pillow and allowed small snores to slip out every few seconds, meaning that she would be fine until she woke up. You left her alone and slipped into the lavatory without saying a single word.

A tall mirror greeted you on the left side of the room and towered over the vanity that contained the room’s only sink. The mess the two of you had left from the previous night was still evident; clothes were scattered across the floor in an array of colorful patterns. Objects that had once been untouched had been hurled across the room. Worst of all, the glass floor tile had been cracked and the vanity contained more than a few scratches.

The nails of your talons followed the pattern of the gashes that you had inflicted upon the inanimate object. They spread out like the pattern of veins in a body and you traced each one in some sort odd attempt to avoid looking into the mirror itself. You almost feared what you expected to see reflect back at you. Would it be the reflection of a young turian who had turned old or would it be someone that you actually looked forward to seeing?

You tilted your head up and exposed yourself for your own self examination. Your shirt had already been torn off long ago, exposing greenish grey plates that were covered more often than not. They twisted and turned into elaborate patterns and protected the fleshy parts of skin that lay beneath them. If you looked close enough, you would be able to observe the smallest, most peculiar scratch marks that remained on them like never ending tattoos. Some of them had been inflicted by Shepard’s nails. Others were from sparring matches gone awry or previous flings with turian women who had talons that were sharper than they should have been. Most of these marks had been made on your upper chest or waist, which was still slimmer than it really should have been.

Your eyes panned up and you looked away once you reached your face. You had never been
considered inherently ugly until you were left with severe facial scarring years ago. The right side of your face was still the only thing that you felt self conscious about in reality. The scarring was like a web of jagged lines; even after so long, their presence still affected you. The pink colored tissue had faded away, leaving you with darker marks that looked like a maze. They continued up until your neck, which had been left with ripples of disfigured skin that were still tender to the touch.

The rest of your face wasn’t as bad as you had been expecting. Like every other sentient being, you had aged a bit. You saw it right before your own eyes.

The blue in your geometric colony markings had faded and you tried to remind yourself to get them reapplied when you got back to Palaven. Spirits knew when you would really be able to return; the planet was still in shambles and your family had since evacuated to a distant world. There was no reason to go there other than to resume your position with Primarch Victus. Considering that there were no more Reapers to be heard of, you wondered if your “Reaper Task Force” still had a real purpose.

You groaned, causing your subvocals to come out as a deep purr. You didn’t know what you were supposed to feel right now.

Relief? Sorrow? Elation?

You blinked your eyes a few times and ran a hand over your fringe. If anything, you felt troubled and you didn’t know how to solve it.

Things with Shepard weren’t the only reason behind your difficult feelings. Since being off duty, you had been questioning your purpose and had been yearning for a change. Moving into this Citadel penthouse semi-permanently had been enough to keep you satisfied for a month or two, but something else was brewing inside of you.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you really could use a pair of reassuring arms wrapped around your waist right about now.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you threw your body up out of bed while wondering what the hell you had just done over the past twenty four hours. It ached to move when you swung your legs out of bed and you didn’t see the cuts across your body at first. They were dotted up your legs and convened at your inner thighs before moving up onto your torso. Your breasts had taken a considerable amount of damage, but you were unable to see the blazing red cuts through the fabric of your undergarment. Your thighs rubbed together, which made you hold in a yelp.

Once you understood the reasoning behind the scrapes, you felt a little bit better about having them. You hadn’t been put through such vigorous sex in what felt like an eternity; for that you were grateful and disappointed. It would be a while before you remembered how much it hurt the next morning or how dire the consequences were from forgetting to take your many antihistamines. Your hand soared to your neck to inspect the love bites that had been inflicted on you, and you settled on one in particular. It felt deep but you didn’t seem to care. It was the one mark that established that you were his; as much as you hated being a subordinate, you would gladly step down when it came to a certain turian.

As you stepped out of bed to watch the sky cars zoom past your window, another sense of soreness overtook you. It felt like you had been slammed into the ground (it had happened to you before, which meant that you knew the feeling quite well).

You let out a tepid shutter, allowing your brain to recount what else had occurred the previous night.
You remembered recalling events that you shouldn’t have. You remembered falling to the floor and screaming.

You also remembered Garrus helping you pick up the pieces.

You shook your head and began questioning how you ended up with someone that was so fucking perfect. After everything he had sacrificed for you, you wouldn’t dare complain about anything having to do with him.

He had stayed while you were at your weakest.

You needed to thank him for that.

While keeping your fist pressed against the window, you pulled your forehead so it hit the glass and kept it there while observing the events of the Presidium.

“How the hell did I get to rock bottom?”

You asked yourself this at least five times before looking up.

What you had achieved last night was pure failure. You had been avoiding it for some time now, but you wouldn’t be able to erase the memory of that panic attack. You had been afraid of fear itself and succumbed to its dark requests.

You weren’t supposed to give into such a weak force. You had done so much to prove yourself and now all you were doing was falling into a black hole. Was this how Commander Shepard was supposed to act?

You slammed your fist into the glass. It didn’t shatter nor did it crack.

That angered you.

You pounded again and again and it was still impossible for you to even make anything more than a small crack.

You weren’t Commander Shepard anymore. You were a living, breathing, psychotic human who had gone over the deep end.

As you peered over to the bed and caught that Garrus wasn’t there, you took a deep breath and held it for a few seconds.

It was time for a change.

With an unsteady hand, you pressed your palm against the bathroom door and opened it so you could splash some water onto your face. Something inside you was coming up and you weren’t sure of what it was. You needed time to think about things.

The door parted and revealed your turian partner in a similar thinking pose. With both talons pressed against the vanity, he was staring into the mirror with his eyes glazed over.

You took careful steps and ended up behind him. You didn’t know if your presence was welcome, but you did the first thing that popped into your mind.

Your name was Liz Shepard and you wrapped your arms around Garrus Vakarian’s waist and buried your face into his shoulder. His plates were warm and welcoming like they always were, and it didn’t take him long to wrap his hands around yours.
“We’ve gotta get outta here.” You muttered.

“Yeah,” he replied. “I think that would be a pretty good idea right now. Besides, it isn’t like us to stay in one place for such a long time. If we’re retiring on the Citadel, you have permission to shoot me right now.”

You smiled and pressed your cheek into him.

“Fat chance, Vakarian. I don’t think this is the warm and sunny place you imagined.”
Chapter 46

Priority: Indoctrinate

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you gazed out of the shuttle and let your eyes rest on what was known as Project Base.

Unsurprisingly, the nerve center for the audacious operation was situated on the asteroid itself. Thinking about how they were going to use that very object to kill so many batarians made you grind your teeth in rage. Hoping that Shepard would see their true intent was all you were able to do. You could encourage her and step out of line as much as you wanted, but didn’t necessarily mean that she was going to see this as you did. You were all for killing Reapers and delaying their arrival for as long as possible. You had learned about their true power on Ilos and during the Battle of the Citadel. There wasn’t a single doubt in your mind that the Reapers did in fact exist and their powers were limitless.

However, a gutsy thought kept lingering throughout your mind.

What if there was a way to save everyone that didn’t involve getting rid of the Alpha Relay?

You turned off the chat client on your omni-tool and gave Shepard a nod. It didn’t appear as though she had a chip on her shoulder when in reality she was crumbling away. She wrung her gloved hands a few time and put her own omni-tool into sleep mode, causing the orange light to fade out. She too looked out the window and pressed a hand up to the reinforced glass. A lot was riding on her decisions right now. Playing the helpful boyfriend or resilient executive officer card wasn’t going to work right now. It was all her and everyone in the whole damn shuttle was going to know it in the forthcoming hours.

“I’ve never seen such an elaborate station built on an asteroid. How did you manage to construct such a thing within a small timeframe?”
Kenson, who had been tinkering with the ship’s map, turned to Shepard to answer her inquiry.

“Enhanced VIs and black market building plans can do wonders, Commander. You’d be surprised to see what the place looks like on the inside. It’s much larger than you’d expect.”

You took a good look at the structure’s architecture while the shuttle closed in on the location. Against the ashy hue of the asteroid, bluish lights cascaded up and were just visible to the naked eye. The distance between the base and you became less and less and you got a better view of what you would be working with.

Intense networks of pod like metal buildings were connected together with long tunnels that were lined almost entirely of windows. Like a web, they interlocked and kept in a consistent shape. You supposed that there was additional work space deep underground. Humans tended to keep their buildings buried deep into a planet. Sometimes they built up as well, but the Project Base hardly had any height to it. However, a plethora of tall towers dotted the perimeter and a few oversized buildings and platforms broke the pattern of the web on occasion.

The shuttle turned into a midsized docking bay and spent no time touching down. Kenson pushed yet another button on her console, sending the shuttle’s doors flying open. Shepard, who had been antsy since the mention of “Alpha Relay”, jumped out with Kaidan on her six. She turned back and gave you a puzzled face before surveying the area. Her eyes narrowed and scanned the station, which was just as impressive inside as it was outside.

You stayed behind and made sure that Kenson got out before you sealed the door to the stolen space vehicle. As immature as the thought was, you wanted to backhand the woman with your talons for what she was planning on doing.

You ran a hand up your fringe and exhaled, letting your subvocals hum out. Instinctively, Shepard looked back yet again at the sound while others ignored it.

“Shepard, welcome to Project Base. Everything you need to know about us is contained in these very walls.”

Shepard’s head extended up and she crossed her arms in thought.

“What’s that?”

There was a large set of doors that guarded the entrance to Project Base. On top of the archway that led into them was what looked to be a countdown clock. You read what it said out loud.

“Two days, three hours, twenty five minutes and twenty one seconds. That’s a little too precise.”

You went up further and took a position next to Kaidan. Kenson proceeded towards the door and gestured the rest of the party to follow.

“That’s our calculations hard at work. Once the time runs out on that clock, the Reapers will have entered the system. We’ve called it the Arrival, so to speak. Please, follow me in and I’ll show you the artifact I was talking about earlier.”

You nibbled on your bottom lip plate. Her choice of words had been peculiar. Had she really dubbed her project “Arrival”? Hackett had used the same words to name your very own mission. There was no was that this was coincidental.

As the doctor proceeded ahead of you and your squad, Kaidan motioned for you to follow far behind her.
Once he was in whispering range, you craned your head ever so slightly so that he and Shepard could listen.

“I don’t feel so bad about being paranoid anymore. Arrival? Really?”

The other man let out a grunt and led the pack in Kenson’s direction.

“Those were the exact words that Hackett used.” He muttered. For a man that respected Admiral Hackett so much, Alenko looked even more doubtful than you did.

“Something else is happening here. I don’t know what it is but we need to put a stop to it. What are you planning on doing, Shepard?”

The two of you looked at the Commander as she walked at a calm pace. She hadn’t said a word since speaking to Kenson.

Wrinkles formed on her forehead as she struggled to make sense of the plot unfolding around her. As she looked to the ground, she unfolded her arms and kept a careful eye on her footsteps.

“It puts things into perspective.” she muttered. “She’s implying that the Reapers could hit Earth in a little more than two days. How is that not compelling enough?”

“Shepard!”

Your voice was louder than it should have been but you didn’t care. Was she still going to blindly believe this woman just because of a fancy clock and a few sincere sounding words? If this had been a C-Sec operation, Shepard would have been removed from the operation by just thinking about believing this woman without sufficient evidence. She was smarter than this. You knew it, Kaidan knew it, and you had to believe that she knew it too.

“Garrus.” she replied, her voice now laden with more feeling. “If you were told that Reapers were going to strike Palaven in two days, what would you do? Even if you weren’t one hundred and twenty percent sure of it, you knew that the Hierarchy wasn’t preparing and that you might be facing an inevitable death. If you had the power in your hands to stop it, what would you do?”

You ceased all movement and watched as her eyes pierced your own. Her thought process was making sense now. Thinking of Palaven burning just like the Citadel was a nightmare. Seeing your own perish at the hands of unthinking monsters wasn’t something that you could allow to happen. You thought of your own family and what would happen if the Reapers reached them.

“I’d stop them.” you said while putting a hand on her shoulder guard. “But you’d better believe that I’d try and save every damn person I could in the process. You remember what I told you. I know you’ll find a way, but just make sure it’s the right one.”

“Besides, it’s not like it would be an easy decision if Shepard was involved. We’ve been through this time and time again. This isn’t going to be the hardest thing we’ve faced if the Reapers are still among us.”

You smiled as much as you could at Kaidan’s comment but you were pretty sure that you just looked like an idiot with raised up mandibles. After taking one more look at the doomsday clock, you continued to walk into the facility where Kenson claimed to have evidence stashed.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you hoped that you never had to see Palaven burning like how Shepard described it.
You didn’t know it now, but Palaven would be in an even worse state in less than a year.

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard and you had managed to get deep into Project Base’s inner buildings.

Just like the outside of the building network, the internal structure was precisely designed for stealth and comfort. Kenson guided you through the place as if it was a museum to be marveled at. The many workers offered congenial smiles or salutes that you didn’t deserve. Clean workspaces and bioengineered greenery dotted the hallways and you started to wonder if this place was really as serene and secure as Kenson made it out to be. Regardless of this, the place was still remarkable. You made small talk and asked about the Project. According to its leader, her return meant that it could be launched at any second. You asked her again and again about any alternatives that wouldn’t risk lives, but to no avail. She made it seem like destroying the relay was the only way out of this mess.

As bright light shined through the station’s windows while you passed by, you kept reminding yourself of Garrus’ words. In the end, you had to make the right decision. That was what Commander Shepard would do. Despite all of the hardships and obstacles you would face, people were still expecting you to be moral and not fuck anything up.

Truth be told, that was starting to get harder and harder to accomplish.

After following Kenson through elevator after elevator, she stopped at a door that had two human guards beside it.

“Behind this door is Object Rho, the artifact that’s going to validate every single thing I’ve told you. We’ve catalogued it and have as much info as possible on it. I must warn you, though, there is something that I haven’t been very clear on.”

“What do you mean?” you asked. Part of you didn’t even want to know what else Kenson was hiding.

She clasped her hands together and it looked as though she was fearful of what your reaction would be. This was the first time she ever looked as though she was truly afraid.

“Commander, this is a Reaper artifact. Everything I know has been caused by the visions it gives me. I did some research and the only thing I can think of comparing it to are the experiences you’ve had with Prothean beacons. It consumes me and tells me everything…and we are all in danger.”

Had you heard her correctly?

Did she just say that it was a Reaper artifact?

You knew that you shouldn’t have been surprised, but nothing stopped your voice from raising itself.

You lunged at the woman but kept distance between the two of you. You had tried so hard to understand this doctor’s reasoning. Her points, which lacked a significant amount of evidence, were serious. Working with her could have led to the most powerful advancements when it came to understanding the Reapers. Now that you knew what she had been exposed to, there was no sense in trusting her any longer.

“Kenson, do you understand the consequences of working with such a thing?” you bellowed. “Every single one of these people could be in danger and you still want to proceed with this operation? How the hell are you getting away with this? The risks are too high! For all you know,
you could be plagued with indoctrination. That’s what the Reapers want and they’re going to access everything through that artifact!"

A steady hand pulled you away from the elderly woman and you didn’t know whether or not it belonged to a guard or one of your own. You barked at her no matter what until her voice surpassed yours in volume.

“I know of the consequences, Commander! You’re not speaking to a child!”

By now a small crowd had formed around the debacle. Innocent workers pushed forward in awe to see the famed Commander Shepard and what her reasoning was for nearly attacking their boss. You longed to holler at them and tell them about the danger they were all in. If they were indeed indoctrinated, then it would be no use.

Trying to save them wasn’t really an option right now, though.

When Kenson’s fear melted away, the two of you stopped dead in your tracks and you narrowed your eyes at her. For the second time, she looked as if she was consumed by fury. Her eyebrows arched down and a sneer dominated her facial expression. It didn’t last any longer than a second, leading you to affirm that something was very, very wrong here.

“I don’t care how much you claim to know about Reapers. All that matters is that you and every single person on this goddamn team is in danger. They need to be evacuated to the Citadel to make sure that they’re not being controlled!”

The doctor ignored you and instead addressed the mob around the four of you.

“Please, there’s nothing to see here! We have to get back to work on the Project and prepare for its launch.”

She spoke with the voice of a dictator controlling her unruly subjects as if they were children. Like innocent sheep being herded by a shepherd, they wandered off and did their jobs without any questions asked.

This fueled your rage even more. You took a second lunge at Kenson; she had these people under control and it was getting under your skin. Even if you were exaggerating, nobody was going to hold you back.

Of course, there was always an exception.

A familiar touch pulled you back once again and it didn’t take much for you to know who it was. Guarded hands kept a tight grip on your upper back to assure that you didn’t make an ass out of yourself, but it was prepared to let go at a moment’s notice. It had been a touch that had comforted you long ago yet also kept you in check.

“Shepard, we have to get to that artifact. We either shut it down or see what it has to offer.”

“Kaidan…”

“I need an order, Commander.”

He was attempting to look sympathetic despite his strained tone. Those dark eyes had been the same ones that had won and broke your heart. They were no longer as bitter and apathetic as they had been before. That made you feel good for a second; putting your life in his hands didn’t feel like a risk anymore.
You pushed his hand away and gave the now unguarded door one final look before making up your mind.

“Hack the doors and get them open. Garrus, just cover him in case things get ugly.”

This action garnered Kenson’s attention. As the crowd began to go about their business, her attention redirected towards you and your squad. Garrus’ talon was at the ready and could snatch a heavy pistol from the holster on his back if anyone dared to fire at Kaidan. You, on the other hand, were poised and prepared to duke it out with this woman. You wished to avoid a physical altercation as that would easily turn into a diplomatic incident, but someone had to fight for the health of these people and you were prepared to do it.

“Shepard, tell your friends to stop what they’re doing so we can have a civil conversation. Your actions are futile and now I’m not surprised why your record with the Alliance is so…tarnished.”

Her words cut into you and they shouldn’t have. You were too wound up with anger to think any other way.

Just like the other workers, though, you listened and you didn’t know why.

“Kaidan, Garrus…give her a chance to speak.”

Your voice was weak and didn’t have much merit to it.

With reluctance, the biotic dropped his omni-tool and shook his head in shame. Garrus, on the other hand, chose to do absolutely nothing. That enough was disturbing on its own.

Kenson pushed past them and pressed her hand up to the door, which gave her instant access to the artifact. She beckoned for you to come inside.

“Come in here. Let’s talk like the adults we are.”

Right then and there you predicted that something was going to go horribly wrong within a short period of time. This had happened more than once over the course of the last twenty four hours, but now things were starting to get more realistic. Everything around you was wrong and there was no way you could fix it. You were in a cage that you were unable to escape from. Your feet dragged you towards the artifact, which towered over you like a powerful ruler. You weren’t moving towards it willingly. In fact, you would dare to say that you were being indoctrinated yourself.

You heard the words of your squadmates trying to pull you back, but Kenson and the artifact had sucked up your ability to control yourself. Your boots moved at a substantial pace and the doors behind you closed.

The object itself was beautiful in design. It had metallic roots that were planted on the ground and spindled up to become large, thick branches that were similar to a tree’s. At the same time, it almost looked like a fledgling flower bud with gentle, puckered petals that were seconds away from blooming. Turquoise lights ran like veins around the structure, making it feel like it was alive.

Inside of its protective metal frame was an orb that glowed brighter than anything you had ever seen before. The device was emitting its own energy at a rapid rate. The closer you came to it, the more you could sense it in the deepest depths of your body.

“Shepard, this is Object Rho. It’ll show you a vision if you give it a moment. Just relax and give in.”
As you felt your freewill slip away, you tried your hardest to retaliate.

As thorough as N7 training had been, they hadn’t addressed what the proper procedures would be during mind control. However, you had been taught one thing: never, ever give in.

Your mind raced as you thought of all of the things that you needed in this galaxy. There was no room for you to give into anything, not even yourself.

You had to stay for Garrus and Kaidan and the entire Normandy crew. You had to stay to fight for humanity. You had to fight for your own uncertain future and everyone else’s.

Your legs, which had been putting up a damn good fight, gave out.

Your name was Commander Liz Shepard, and as you fell to your knees and watched as visions of Reapers passed through your eyes, you weren’t aware of how your squadmates hacked the door open.

You also didn’t know that Garrus was at your side, shaking you violently to wake you up while his subvocals chirped out in distress.

Or that he was being held at gunpoint by Kenson.

Your name was Garrus Vakarian and you didn’t know a pair of arms could feel so good.

Although Shepard’s thin arms had a hard time enveloping your bulky frame, she managed to move in all of the right directions and even got her hand up to stroke your scarred bicep plate. Her touch was warmer than usual and her words were fueled with change and motivation, which were qualities that she hadn’t exhibited since the two of you had reunited.

You laughed at the subtle joke she had told and a purr like sound exited your lips. Her embrace was the sole thing that you wanted right now. It let you know that she was still there for you and she always would be no matter what.

After all, there was no Shepard without Vakarian.

“What exactly do you mean by ‘getting out of here’? I could think of more than a few other places I’d like to head off to.”

You felt her shrug while she pressed her body against your back. You felt her every curve and shivered while her nails travelled up to your neck. All of a sudden, the touches stopped and you let out an accidental pout to request for more.

She instead stood next to you and looked into her mirror herself.

“I thought about what happened last night. This place is like an enclosure for me.” she muttered. “For so long I felt like I wasn’t able to get out and now that I have freewill I don’t even take advantage of it. Before I came in here, I kind of had one of those revelations. I just...I know that I can’t stay here. I can’t have that happen again. We need to go somewhere, but with everything that’s going on I don’t know if it’s physically possible for me to leave the Citadel. For all I know, the Council is gonna throw me in jail again.”

The last sentence was accompanied by a chuckle and you spun around to take hold of her hips, which felt like they were beckoning to you. It didn’t take long for you to switch up your positions, to which she greatly obliged. Her scarcely covered body was clothed in nothing more than the
lingerie that she had been wearing the previous evening, and the bruises that you had inflicted upon
her were becoming more and more obvious.

You focused your attention on a mark near her hipbone, which was on its way into turning into a
small welt. You felt bad for putting her through hell, but you hadn’t exactly made it out unscathed
either.

“Are you saying that you want to play the Citadel’s real estate market? Which, by the way, is
overpriced no matter where you go. Too many people want to live here.”

“I couldn’t imagine why.” she replied, a cheeky grin spreading across her face. Just like her careful
touches, though, the smile left her face as she moved on to a more serious note.

“I’ve already got a place for us, though. The problem is that I don’t know how we’re going to get
there. Remember the apartment on the Silversun Strip that belonged to Anderson?”

You watched as her expression fell while she spoke about the deceased man. He had been her idol
back during the SR-1 days and he remained in the position until his death. Some viewed him as
another casualty of the war while others look at him as Earth’s savior.

Shepard viewed him as both.

“He left it to you, didn’t he?” you asked. You wouldn’t mind living there again. It was more
luxurious than this place and everyone would be able to have their own room.

“I guess so, yeah. He wasn’t here to change his mind and I don’t think Kahlee is living there
anymore. I couldn’t imagine the pain she’s still going through, with Grissom and the Admiral’s
passing. I was thinking that maybe we could have a go at it, you know, moving in there and all of
that. I’d rather be in a place surrounded by more positive memories than…”

She stopped talking and pushed herself up against you, looking for protection.

“You know what I mean.”

You pressed your forehead down until it met hers and planted a soft kiss on her nose.

“Anything is worth a shot. I can’t see you like this anymore.”

She snaked her hand down and held your talon, which swallowed her hand in comparison. As she
pulled away, this was the only contact the two of you kept.

“I can’t see myself like this anymore. If the old version of me was here, she’d be kicking my ass!”

You laughed and began to pull off your own pants in preparation for your shower. She eyed you
and you didn’t know if she was expecting some sort of striptease. Left with only your tight fitting
undergarment covering your sheath, you began to fuss with the waistband without even knowing it.

“The old you is in there somewhere and she’ll be out kicking ass again before you know it.”

She leaned against the vanity and reached behind to undo the clasps of her own bra, much to your
pleasure.

“You don’t mind someone else in your shower, do you?”

This elicited a subharmonic moan from you and you stepped towards the shower, waiting for her to
remove the rest of her underwear. You, on the other hand, removed the last garment that was on
“Do I mind?” you asked. “Please, the pleasure’s all mine.”

She followed your lead and took off what little clothing was left with the exception of her brassiere, but not without making it a little more enjoyable for you. While you worked on undoing the clasp yourself, she checked her omni-tool and her eyebrows rose in excitement.

“Kaidan forwarded me a message…” she said. “Liara’s on her way here…for me…”

The sheer joy in her voice was enough to make you smile. It would be good for everyone to see Liara. You just needed to get Wrex and Tali back to the Citadel and the entire old crew would be back. You wondered if she was going to be bringing all of her equipment with her but you figured that asking would be too complicated.

“Can’t wait to see her. How much do you think she knows about all of this? She is the Shadow Broker.”

“Garrus?”

“Mm?”

“Talk later, please.”

“Oh, right, sorry.”
yes, this is a second update.

to keep it short (and in case you haven't gone back to the first chapter)...

- yes, I am back.
- yes, I am finishing this story.
- no, I have no idea what the ending is nor have I started writing new content.

they say you have to give a great house a lasting foundation, and while I have new ideas and know where I need to push this story, I have to fix the underlying problems first. that includes grammatical errors, plot holes, stylistic stuff, etc. so, if you're willing, I'd like to take you on this ride with me. let's give Security the ending it deserves. as usual, I'd like to thank everyone who has left kudos, sent messages and given reviews. you're the best and I love you for that. I hope I can continue to have everyone's support. this is gonna be fun.

XOXO

THR ♥

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