

## Mass Effect: The Final Error

By Novus Peregrine

### Prologue

The building shivered as the Reaper's main beam swept through it, incinerating two more lab techs even as they tried desperately to activate their prototype. Oriana Lawson threw herself out of the way of falling debris, tripping over the body of an Asari with two foot of rebar where her heart should have been. She scrambled away from the corpse in horror, purple blood on her hands. Then, the face of the Asari registered and jarred her out of her adrenaline haze.

Shit.

Shit, shit, shit, shit!

The body she had scrambled away from was Matriarch Geduli's, the very Asari that was supposed to be the target of their prototype. If she was dead, then...a whine of powering machinery wrenched at Oriana's attention as the desperate efforts of the project staff paid off. Against all odds, the Parallax Machine was powering up! They hadn't even known if it *could* power up, let alone under these conditions! But...with Geduli dead, who would they send back? She glanced up at the terrified project staff, just in time to see an I-beam come down, shattering the main console and trapping everyone else, if it hadn't killed them outright. The machine was powering...and Oriana realized she was literally the only one that could reach the pad. With a deep breath, she powered up her biotics and *charged*. Then...everything went black as she struck the beam just as it powered up...

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Oriana groaned in pain, feeling like she had the night Miranda and she had gotten properly drunk, in some misguided effort to talk about their shared pasts. No, this was actually worse than that. Instead of nausea mixed with a pounding head, her whole body was throbbing with pain akin to a hangover. She desperately curled up and tried not to think. Words came from somewhere, the tone alarmed even if she couldn't make them out. A hand touched her, causing her to flinch and the world to lurch sideways as a result. Then, the pain became too much and she blacked out again...

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The next time she woke up, the pain had lessened, but not entirely vanished. She groaned again and pried her eyes open, finding the stark-white of a hospital ceiling above her. It took several minutes for her eyes to properly adjust, her vision only slowly giving up its meandering ways to settle down and let her analyze her situation. Has the Parallax beam failed? Had the first time she awoke been survivors pulling her from the rubble? But no, there were no hospitals on the remote moon the project had been settled on. And this wasn't the base infirmary, the walls there had been gunmetal grey, not hospital white. As that processed, she abruptly sat up, yelping in pain as the action caused the throb of agony to return for just a moment. She heard a medical alert pinging on the machinery in the room, but ignored it in favor of looking at herself...

Son of a bitch. It had *worked*. The mad, insane, stupidly idiotic and impossible plan had worked! It must have, since her hands were smaller than they should have been...as were her boobs. Huh, she'd had her double-ds by 16, so she must have come back farther than that. Which was a relief, honestly. The Parallax Machine had been intended to target an Asari for a reason, as even the wild pseudo-science they were working with seemed to indicate that someone could only be sent back a percentage of their own lifespan. When she'd charged into the beam, she'd been afraid it either wouldn't send her back far enough to make any difference at all...or that it would, you know, atomize her. It had been calibrated for an Asari, after all, not a human. But it had worked, or at least it looked that way, despite all the bullshit pseudo-science they were working with.

Project Parallax had been an insane long-shot, sponsored by the Shadow Broker of all people, though Miranda seemed to have thought something was humorous about that. The idea, in crudest form, had been to skip someone's mind back through the weave of time and into their previous self, in order to try and prepare the galaxy for what was coming. Oriana had wanted to do something, *anything*, to help out, and Miranda had directed her to the long-shot project. Probably to keep her somewhere remote and safe, Oriana knew that...but the project had actually *worked*.

Oriana's whirling thoughts were cut off as the medical room's door banged open and doctors rushed in. She looked at them in confusion, then remembered the pinging of the medical alert. She opened her mouth to speak...only for a Salarian to dose her with a hypospray to the neck. She tried to protest, only to find her eyes growing heavy. The blackness took her again moments later...

## Chapter 1: Illum

2178.

That was how far she'd been sent back. Just five years before the disastrous events of Eden's Prime. Into the body of her fourteen-year-old self. Not nearly what the project had been supposed to accomplish. Worse, she hadn't been the one prepped and briefed to go back. She had only partial knowledge of events, only her own experience, the bits she'd pulled out of Miranda since they'd met again, and the package of details she'd helped to arrange for the Asari that was *supposed* to go back. That last was the one saving grace, though much of it was useless, having been intended to be used farther into the past and mostly worthless information now as a result. But...there was enough information stuffed into her nearly-flawless memory that she could make a difference. It would be an uphill struggle...but she could at least give the galaxy an edge. Assuming she got it right.

Oriana took a deep breath and ran through the motions of a biotic singularity again. This, this was something she could do *right now*. She'd begged and badgered first Miranda, then the Asari she worked with on the project, for lessons on how to use her biotics better. Her sister had been astonished to discover that Oriana's raw power was actually higher than her own, the result of Henry Lawson's intense efforts to make Oriana even more perfect than 'the prototype' had been. Indeed, her raw power had been surprisingly close to Subject Zero's, though she hadn't had anywhere near Jack's skill at using it. And then there was what had happened to her due to Project Parallax.

The panicked behavior of the doctors had made a lot more sense when she finally recovered and learned the full details of how she ended up in the hospital. There *had* been some side effects to the Project Parallax beam, after all, though only she herself realized the cause. The doctors on Illum had been baffled when her shivering, jerking body had come in by air-ambulance. Or, rather, they'd been baffled when they discovered the cause. The ezeo nodules in her body had undergone a spontaneous, refining mutation, and her very DNA had twisted half a step to the proverbial left, toward something more Asari-like. It probably would have killed her...if not for the VIP flag on her citizenship documents, which Oriana had every suspicion was the result of either Miranda or Cerberus' meddling. As it was, the best doctors on Illum had managed to stabilize the changes.

So far, the only real results had been a boost to Oriana's already potent biotics, a slight smoothing of her skin, sudden lack of hair growth anywhere but her head, and darker eyes that could see a bit into the ultraviolet spectrum. If that was the extent of it, with the only negative being a need to eat even more than she already had been as a human biotic, she could live with it. Well, there were also some medical issues about not really being compatible with any blood but her own now, but that was for the future. For now, it made her current task both harder and easier. Harder, as even with her younger body she now had almost as much power as adult-her had possessed, and easier because the biotics themselves seemed to be *smoother* somehow, more natural feeling.

Either way, she was determined to succeed at her current task, that of reinstalling the combat reflexes her sister and those Asari had tried to instill in her older self. Some of it, the mental component, had carried back in time with her, but it wasn't properly integrated into her younger body. Hence her current task, hundreds of mindless repetitions of single biotic moves. She took a deep breath, wiped the sweat from her face with a towel, and reset to go again...

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Oriana cursed under her breath as she navigated the electronic lock's systems with her omni-tool. It had been two months since her return. Her adoptive parents had been concerned about her sudden changes, but she'd been able to pass them off as the result of her near-death experience and the shifting of her biology. A 'mysterious benefactor,' probably Cerberus, had paid for her medical bills. Which was alarming in and of itself. If she proved to be more interesting to them than useful as a tool to keep Miranda happy...Oriana pushed the thought down, again, and focused on her current task, getting around the alarm on the lock. She'd already done what she could to deal with the protentional issue that was Cerberus, training herself to exhaustion so she wouldn't be helpless if they came for her. Now, however, she'd made as much quick progress there as her merely fourteen-year-old body would allow, and she needed to begin acting on other information.

Money. That's what this was about.

Money was going to be the next big step. Her near-perfect recall had the specs for several important pieces of hardware tucked away, including the Thanix canon, improved kinetic barrier systems, and other improvements that might be useful against the Reapers. Those had come from Miranda, when she'd asked for things that might be useful to the project, and as a result they had been assigned to Oriana to teach to their original test subject. But bringing something like that to market, in a way that didn't just get her killed, was going to take money and time. Time to pull together the

blueprints and fill in any blanks, money to build a prototype, file patents, and grease the right palms to get it into production. She had some ideas who, here on Illium, might be able to help her...but she needed to have something solidly in hand before she went to her.

She blinked and grinned viciously as the alarm died a quiet death before ever going off, moving on to the lock itself. Her mind wandering off a bit and she worked through the various pieces of hacking software by instinct. This was something she'd always had the talent for, even before Miranda showed up in her life, even if her current limited equipment was slowing the process down. She could afford to mentally check out a bit, reviewing her plans.

She'd mapped it out, it was going to take longer than she'd hoped to get the initial capital and contacts she needed. At least two years, during which all she could do was train, draw up as many blueprints as she could, and start spreading some information and rumors via the extranet. A few hints where certain things might be found may get a couple of things rolling early...though she'd discarded anything related to Eden Prime for the moment. She didn't know how long Saren had been seeking a beacon for, and the last thing she needed was to kick off the whole Reaper invasion early, before Shepard was available to kick their tentacled asses back to dark space. But...a few judicious hints to Doctor Liara T'soni about other places to look might bare fruit, as would a few other bits of information dropped in the right ears.

But for now...for now, she had seed money to acquire. She knew where several new ezeo mines had gone up during these years, but to finance those finds...she steadied her nerve as she slipped through the door she'd just finished hacking. The scum who lived here wouldn't be missed, he was too low-ranking in the Blood Pack for that and Illium was Eclipse territory besides. But his money would help...and she needed actual combat experience. She stepped into his living room, hands glowing and biotic barrier up...

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A year. A long year of training and vigilante work, dodging the local 'police' of Illium as much as the gangs. And now she stood over the cooling corpse of a freighter captain who had taken her out to stake her claims. He'd tried to backstab her when the sheer scale of the first find became obvious. The ezeo in the small, out of the way, moon was worth literally billions. She'd known he'd try, had been grateful for the excuse to kill the creep that had been entirely too happy to let a fifteen-year-old human seduce and bed him. She wasn't really fifteen, of course, even if her body was, and she'd sworn the day she came back that she'd do whatever was needed. But, this was the first time she'd been *happy* to kill someone. She wondered what her sister would think of her, if she ever found out...

Oriana shook the thoughts off. They were ridiculous, given the things she knew her sister had done herself. She panned her gaze over the remaining crew. Indentured Quarrians, every single one. Unarmed and clearly terrified. She wouldn't need to kill them. Probably. In fact, one or more of them might be useful to hide her involvement a little more. She gave them a smile, making it as charming as she could under the circumstances.

"How would all of you like your contracts paid off?"

There was a moment of hesitation, then the chief engineer spoke up. “You’re not going to kill us?”

Oriana’s smile turned sardonic as she waved the idea off. “No, not unless you make me, like he did. Instead, I’m going to offer to pay off every single one of your indenture contracts, with the money from this find. As well as hire you afterward, to help organize things. Best this not spread any farther until we’re all rich, right? All you have to do is help me finish this...and testify if needed that I was defending myself.”

It didn’t take long for them to agree.

## Chapter 2: New Allies

Oriana smiled at her boss of six months. It was time. “Hey, Aethyta, can I talk to you? Privately?”

The Asari matriarch arched a sardonic eyebrow, then gestured her through the door behind the bar. She called out to Fallion, a young Asari maiden and Oriana’s sometime-lover who had gotten Oriana her job as a runner for the matriarch. Oriana was still too young to be in the bar, something that had drawn frowns from Aethyta once or twice when Fallion’s relationship with her came up, but the matriarch had never caused a problem about it. Which Oriana was grateful for. Fallion was actually a decent sort and the fun they had together was more exploratory than serious. It might actually have been a bit inappropriate if Oriana really was seventeen. But she wasn’t, not in mind at least, and Oriana was happy with the pressure-relief valve a little time with her Asari friend-with-benefits created.

The moment Aethyta sat down behind her desk, she pressed a button and Oriana heard a muffled ‘chunk’ from the door behind her. The matriarch’s face hardened, glaring at Oriana. “Is this where you finally tell me why the youngest self-made billionaire on Illium is working as a gopher in my bar? Not to mention fucking one of my employees. You better not just be using her to get close to me, or I’m going to have issues with you, kid. Even if I can’t help but like you, otherwise.”

Oriana flinched, then sighed and sat down across from the matriarch, trying to act casual despite the raw terror trying to overwhelm her. She’d known there was a chance Aethyta had made her, despite her efforts to keep her name concealed when the ezeo mines went up. Even so, she’s hoped she might not have, Asari matriarchs were *not* someone to screw around with.

“I admit, when I first befriended her, I was looking for an introduction. But that’s got nothing to do with us ‘fucking,’ as you say. I’d have never gone that far if I wasn’t legitimately attracted to her, though both of us know it’s not a long-term thing.”

Aethyta leaned back, glare lessening. “Good, at least you have the quad to admit it. What do you want, kid?”

Oriana gestured with one hand. “The room is secure?”

“Yes.”

She ignored the terse reply, choosing to take it at face-value. She pulled out an old-fashioned data slate and slid it across to the Matriarch. She wasn't putting this on an omni-tool. "Take a look at that, it contains blueprints for something I've been working on for years." She felt a little guilty taking credit for the Turian designs...but the galaxy needed them and it wasn't time to muddy the waters. Besides, she actually *had* been working on them for years. They no longer resembled the original, crude Thanix designs very much. The basic technology was the same...but Oriana's first-class brain had refined the original rush-job to be nearly 40% better. "I even have a working prototype...what I don't have is the connections to not end up dead in a dark alley if I try to take the design to market somewhere like Illium."

The matriarch's eyebrows both arched and she reached for the data slate, powering it on and skimming the contents. Her first, half-dismissive glance was quickly replaced by a furrowed brow and more intense scrutiny. Minutes ticked by then, after a quarter hour, Aethyta put it back down and snorted explosively. "And your prototype actually holds up to the claimed specs?"

Oriana nodded firmly. "Within less than half a percent of designed specs, all at three quarters scale. And it's not the only design, either."

Aethyta looked interested for a moment, then sighed and reached up to rub her forehead with one hand, sliding the data slate back with the other. "Look, kid, the design is good, but..."

"Your one of the only Asari matriarchs to push for actual technological advancement and a stronger military. I'm not looking to get rich, boss. I want the galaxy to get off its ass and actually fix some of the problems it has." Aethyta's gaze had sharpened and Oriana pushed on, laying out her gamble. "That said, I'm smart, and I've grown up on fucking Illium. Despite being young, I know that quixotic crusades, moronic petitions and stupider marches, they won't do anything. The only way to change the galaxy is to be in a position to push with a lot of horsepower. Like, say, utterly revolutionizing kinetic barriers, ship-to-ship weapons, biotic amps, and a bunch of other shit. Someone with influence like *that* behind them, they could actually seriously push for change."

Oriana paused, letting her cold and clinical statements settle on the far older woman. Aethyta looked...surprised and a little impressed? It was hard to say, exactly, despite how good of a read she'd gotten on the matriarch in the last several months. She tried to return the gaze focused on her with one of equal strength.

"And you want me to, what? Partner with you so people take you seriously? Kid, I was laughed off Thesisa. No one will listen to you just because I told them to."

Oriana shook her head. "No, you misunderstand. I don't want to *partner* with you, I want to *give* you the prototypes and designs, as well as a few billion in funding. I'm only seventeen, I don't have the political chops and centuries of contacts needed to change things. But you? If you have all this to work with? You can *make* the matriarch's council listen by shoving their face in the fact that you were right. That a little effort could propel the Asari and the rest of the galaxy out of their rut."

For the first time, Aethyta looked surprised. "What, you don't want anything out of this? Bullshit."

Oriana shrugged. "I'll be an investor in all of this, so I'm expecting to make money, sure. But..." Oriana hesitated, then played her last chip, something that had come from funding Doctor T'soni's work on the sly and pointing her in the right direction. "There's something nasty coming. Have you heard of Doctor Liara T'soni?"

Aethyta's eyes hardened. Oriana expected that. She knew perfectly well who this Asari was to the good doctor. She ignored the dangerous stare, plowing on. "She's quietly published a few new papers, which seem to indicate that something sinister was behind the Rachni Wars, something that linked to her own theory about the Protheans being eradicated. It's a little..."

Oriana froze as a brutally quick and powerful biotic stasis hit her. She'd barely even seen the woman twitch! She tried to gulp at the angry expression on the Krogan-blooded Asari Matriach's face, but even the muscles to do that were frozen.

"Don't you think I *know* who funded that research. You came to me, after leading my daughter around by the nose, then dare try to play on my own history for your own gain? Give me one good reason I shouldn't just killed you now!"

Oriana pushed with her own biotics, just enough to free her vocal cords. "Meld." Aethyta looked taken aback at the word, or perhaps at her biotic power and control? Didn't matter. "Meld with me. I will show you what I know."

It was reckless, a wild gamble that Oriana hadn't wanted to take, but the alternative was to be ripped apart by a half-krogan Asari matriarch that thought she'd been screwing her daughter over. Even if she thought Oriana was crazy, it might still keep the matriarch from killing her.

Aethyta seemed to think about it for long moments, then roughly let the stasis go, stepping forward with one hand out to grab Oriana by the neck. Oriana didn't resist, simply stared defiantly into the matriarch's eyes, and Aethyta nodded. "EMBRACE ETERNITY."

The meld was rough but not violent. Aethyta wasn't quite ready to simply rip her secrets from her head. That was good...but also largely irrelevant. Oriana had melded enough with Fallion to know how to push memories forward, so she did, focusing on everything she knew about the Reapers, showing all the holofeeds of their attacks of Thessia, followed up by everything she'd known about Project Parallax...and even throwing in her own efforts after coming back, including the multiple people she'd killed. She *needed* Aethyta to believe her at this point, so she held nothing back.

The meld lasted for a long time, far longer than Oriana had even known meld's *could* last. Then, with a grunt, the matriarch dropped her hand, sagging back against her desk. For just a moment, the powerful Asari looked tired, but she shook it off quickly, staring intently at Oriana, mind visibility whirring at lightspeed behind unfocused eyes and a blank expression. Oriana herself felt exhausted, mentally more than physically, falling back boundlessly in the guest chair and trying to focus, hoping the Asari would believe her.

"I saw Thessia burning. And...Reapers, you called them? I'm tempted to call you fucking crazy...but I knew some of the Asari involved in this Project Parallax of yours. Not to mention that there's simply too much detail, as crazy as it is..." Aethyta cut herself off for a moment, then nodded slowly,

eyes properly focusing on Oriana again. “As it is, I have to believe you. What have you done since coming back? Aside from murdering a bunch of scum and getting rich.”

Oriana flinched at the word ‘murder,’ but gathered herself. “Well, you know about my funding of a few archeology digs. In addition to that, I’ve...”

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Oriana ran her hand suggestively over the thigh of the stuttering Asari maiden, ignoring the slight jerk of the other woman’s body as a blush turned the poor girl’s face nearly purple. She’d had some qualms about this plan, at first...but the adorable reactions of the painfully-inexperienced hundred and fifty year old maiden had washed most of them away. She wasn’t intending the girl any harm...and it was clear the brainy physicist was in desperate need of a social skills intervention, not to mention a little confidence.

Ani’lia T’kosh was a genius. Specifically, a genius physicist who specialized in energy theory, and they *needed* her. One of Oriana’s own projects, something completely original she’d developed since coming back in time, was a series of energy-based hand and ship weapons. Since mass effect weaponry was effective at nearly any scale and generally had lower power requirements and cost for equivalent damage, no species had really developed energy weapons more powerful than GARDIAN laser point-defense arrays. Oriana, having heard from a drunk Miranda about how the Reapers had guided the entire galaxy’s tech development with the mass relays and carefully selected ruins left behind, had reached into old pre-mass effect science fiction and real R&D programs, looking for something to change the equation.

Energy weapons had been one of her major decisions and she’d managed to crack some of the problems with scaling them both up and down. Unfortunately, brilliant as she was, she was stretched thin these days and had admitted to Aethya that she needed help to hit all their goals. The matriarch’s answer had been to point her at one Ani’lia T’kosh, a brilliant but painfully awkward Asari physicist who the matriarch had heard about through old contacts.

The problem? Ani’lia T’kosh made Liara T’soni look like a gifted people person. She’d turned down dozens of offers from various companies that wanted her talents, purely because those companies were ‘scary and full of people.’ Essentially, she was a shy, mildly agoraphobic shut-in who couldn’t handle the idea of working in a high-pressure lab with lots of people. Which is why Oriana and Fallion, who’d been brought into the whole conspiracy months ago, were here, busy pouring on the charm for the pale-but-attractive Asari stuck between them. They just needed to convince the poor girl that working with them would be a...positive experience.

Which was promising to be far easier than they’d imagined, if the low moan coming from the physicist as Oriana ghosted her fingertips every-so-lightly over her cloth-covered sex meant anything. The dazed expression on the other woman’s face said she couldn’t believe this was happening, at what was supposed to be just a short business meeting. Then Fallion leaned in to nibble at her fellow Asari’s neck from the other side and Ani’lia actually shuddered through a climax!

Oriana grinned. Oh, Asari were easier to make cum than virtually any human woman, the result of having dual clitorises and an overall more sensitive body...but for this one to cum with barely any direct stimulation? She must both be even more sensitive than usual *and* desperately in need of



attention. It was really a wonder no one had managed this with her before...but that might have been due to no one considering that an Asari of all beings might be this inexperienced. That and the disarming setting of meeting in a small, quiet bar instead of an office might be the difference.

Letting the maiden come down just enough to focus a little, Oriana leaned in and whispered in her proverbial ear. "Why don't we take this somewhere more *private*. No pressure, nothing to do with the job. Fallion and I simply find you cute..."

She could see the shy Asari was about to refuse...but Oriana struck before she could, cupping her palm over the Asari's sex and sending a biotic pulse of subtle purpose through the other woman's clothes. It was a trick she'd learned from Fallion and it worked even better on Asari than on humans, lighting up every pleasure node in the maiden's core for just the briefest of instants at a time...and yet utterly unable to make someone cum on its own. Oriana began pulsing the technique in a slow rhythm, watching the maiden's eyes nearly go black before backing off and whispering the invitation again in time with one last pulse. The maiden nodded dazedly...and didn't protest at all when they pulled her to her feet and guided her to one of the citadel's rapid transit pods.

Not wanting to be completely manipulative, Oriana allowed the maiden to recover in transit...somewhat. Instead of doing anything overtly sexual, she and Fallion alternated kissing each other and making out with Ani'lia. It seemed to be enough to keep the woman's nerves from overtaking her, though they were clearly showing a little as they pulled her into their own hotel room. Oriana smiled gently and whispered to her again. "Relax, sweetie, we won't do anything you don't want..."

The reassurance in her voice seemed to reach the maiden, who took a deep breath and nodded, eyes remarkably sharp despite her clear arousal. Good, hopefully that meant she wouldn't regret this later. A subtle signal had Fallion pulling her fellow Asari onto one of the leather couches in the room, nibbling and petting, but making sure not to fully distract her as Oriana began to strip. It wasn't a full strip-show, even an inexperienced Asari had likely seen enough of those for them not to feel exotic. Instead, Oriana simply made sure to show off the full flexibility and strength of her body, the toned muscle and training scars as well as her ample proportions, as she slowly shed her clothing. Ani'lia attention was glued to the sensual act, likely seeing her first nude human woman in the flesh...and with Oriana's body it was almost certainly the finest she'd ever see. Her eyes followed the bounce of breasts, far more mobile than those of Asari, and lingered on Oriana's apex as her sex became visible.

And there was another difference, one that might have been a stumbling block for just Fallion. Normally, by this time, Asari would have melded with their lover...but as shy as Ani'lia was, a subtler approach was called for. Miranda joined the other two on the couch, cool black leather sending a pleasant shiver through her as it embraced her body. She leaned in and began making out with the enraptured maiden, hands simultaneously helping Fallion strip their guest. It was only when the other woman was down to just her black thong that she seemed to even realize, pulling back with a blush...only to throw her head back with a moan as Fallion latched onto a nipple with her mouth. Miranda quickly joined her on the other breast, marveling at how sensitive the Asari was. That was *not* typical. It was one of the few areas human women typically had an Asari beat, human breasts and nipples being somewhat more sensitive overall. But that wasn't the case with Ani'lia, clearly, and the analytical part of Oriana's mind that never really shut off wondered if it had something to do with the fact Ani'lia, like Doctor T'soni, was a pureblood. She smirked wickedly at the idea of finding out by

testing with Liara at some point, then blinked in momentary shock as that thought penetrated her own rising lust. Was...she developing a thing for Asari?

Shaking that thought off for now, she refocused on Ani'lia even as Fallion moved away to strip her own clothes of. Unlike Oriana, she didn't make a show of it, simply stripping quickly while Oriana distracted their mutual lover by running a fingertip along the sodden front of the physicist's thong, drawing a loud moan and a mindless attempt to hump her hand for more friction. Oriana smiled, drawing back, then going in for a new kiss when a pout sprang up unconsciously on the blue beauty's lips. Ani'lia moaned into her mouth, then whimpered as she felt Fallion return, pressing naked breasts into her fellow Asari's back and nibbling at her neck.

Miranda smirked and left the maiden's lips, trailing kissed down her body, bypassing her breasts and heading lower. Ani'lia tensed as she realized Oriana's destination, only to relax again as Fallion kissed her way along the sensitive ridges and folds of the maiden's crest. The distracted Asari maiden's thong, fairly modest by Asari standards, came loose at a tug, with an obscene sound that almost made Oriana giggle. The girl had positively *drenched* the garment, to the point it might never be useful again. Hmmm, in fact...it would be fun to convince the girl of that, making her leave commando style. Fighting a naughtier giggle this time, Oriana moved in before the maiden could tense again, spreading the other woman's legs and rubbing fingers along her dripping 'azure.' Much like a particularly smooth human woman in texture and shape, the Asari's lips were less sensitive but still enough to make Ani'lia try to buck for more, only to find Fallion had gotten ahold of her in such a way that she couldn't.

Oriana smiled at the whimper that came from her victim and move in farther, replacing fingers with tongue on the Asari's lips...before going for her real target, the twin magic buttons to either side of the maiden's upper folds. Though placed differently, these were the Asari equivalent of the human clitoris, and the maiden under her bucked with far more power as Oriana lavished attention on first one, then the other. She worked the girl up, not *quite* letting her peak for several minutes...then she plunged her fingers into the Asari's core, sending the shy beauty literally screaming over the edge...

They let her recover for all of two minutes before Fallion initiated the first meld, transferring her own feelings of unsatisfied lust back into the other Asari. They weren't anywhere near done with the shy physicist. By the time they were, Oriana was determined to have the young woman's blue tits pressed up against the glass of the outer wall. She wasn't sure why...just that it would be fun...

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It most certainly *had* been fun. As had the dozen other positions that the three of them had worked through over the next two days of prolonged lovemaking. Some of them visited more than once. And at the end of it, after having manage to convince the physicist that both of them were legitimately attracted to her, the shy beauty had signed on with their project. In part it was the desire to stay near her exciting new lovers...but the energy-specialist was also intrigued by what Oriana had already come up with. She would be taking over those projects almost entirely. Which was a huge relief to Oriana, who simply had too many balls in the air to juggle and stay sane at the same time, at this point.

With the energy-weapon research delegated to Ani'lia and much of the other R&D shifted to the think-tank a certain group of ex-indentured Quarrians had set up with her help, Oriana was free to pour more work into helping Aethyta piece together as much of the big picture as the two of them could.

With the far, *far* more experienced woman's connections and skills, they made huge inroads into the various military sectors on the business side and started several additional plans in motion that would farther rock the boat a bit. Quietly seeking out and collecting data on the genophage, using Oriana's own mutations to work up a new genetic enhancement package for the Alliance that would actually allow them to *make* biotic soldiers, something never done by any race before. Several facilities quietly but forcefully shut down as bits and piece of Oriana's knowledge of Cerberus, gleaned from conversations with Miranda, helped them point certain individuals at the more radical aspects of that group. Justicars and Spectres were *surprisingly* easy to manipulate, when you had certain types of information to pass on. Though, there was some backlash against the former group operating outside of Asari space...

They knew they were missing things. Oriana's information was simply too incomplete. But whatever happened...the galaxy *would* be at least somewhat stronger and more prepared, assuming they didn't fuck up and trigger a Reaper Invasion early...

### Chapter 3: Eden's Dawn

Oriana stepped off the shuttle, eyes already taking in the new installation that was finishing, just barely on schedule. Aethyta followed her, eyes sweeping the private landing pad before looking the same way. It was the rough-tongued matriarch that spoke first.

"Fucking hell of a thing. You think it will actually work?"

Oriana nodded firmly. "It should. Still not 100% sure it was the right move to install them here first, but the new grav-lensesd grasers are purely energy-based. Kinetic barriers don't even slow them down. They'll only get off a few shots before the energy banks are drained dry, they're efficiency still sucks. But even a Reaper should feel it and Geth ships won't have a chance. They probably won't stand off the whole attack, if it even comes, but..."

"They'll fucking bleed. Good. Even better if this Sovereign dick gets his quad smashed in and we don't have to worry for a while." Aethyta started moving toward the exit and Oriana followed along in her wake.

"Somehow, I doubt we're going to be that lucky."

The matriarch snorted. "It happens, kid, but I doubt it to. No, this is likely to be a long slog, like you saw the first go around. Just don't get Liara killed or I'll make your insides into outsides, no matter how much I like you."

Oriana winced. "I know you're not happy that I got her involved with the dig here, but..."

Aethyta held up a hand. "Don't. I agreed with the need to both get her involved earlier and keep her off Therum, since we can't know Shepard would make the same choices in the exact same order that saw her rescued in the nick of time. I don't like that she's here of all places, but that's why *I'm* here to make sure those little flashlight fucks don't lay a hand on her."

Oriana grimaced. "I still think we should have tried to contact the True Geth, they could have really helped."

Aethyta gave her a dismissive look. “No you don’t, kid. You admitted you don’t know enough about them to say which way they’d jump before the heretics even attacked anyway. You could have touched off a war or pushed their genocidal little hearts into siding with the heretics. Hell, kid, you don’t even know what the fuck Shepard did to convince them to side with her in the first place.”

Oriana shrugged uncomfortably, not liking the reminder of how much she simply didn’t know about the Reapers, their methods, and the events that led to their invasion of the galaxy. So far as she knew, only Shepard herself had known everything, and Project Paralax had been completely black. She very much doubted Shepard had even known it existed. No one had worried about it, since their hail Mary long-shot was aimed at strengthening the galaxy as a whole over the course of decades or centuries. If things had gone to plan, the degree of butterfly effect involved would have invalidated anything more than the basics. It was only now that it had worked, yet only sent a single human back a handful of years, that the problem of not knowing all the little niggling details really hurt.

Changing the subject, Oriana brought the topic back to the new installations. “The new defensive batteries should be online in less than two weeks and the projected time for even finding the beacon isn’t for another two months. It’s possible Liara’s presence could change that, as she’s got more experience excavating protean ruins that anyone on the original team did, but us getting involved as the main financiers mean we can slow things down if they get too close.” Oriana shot the matriarch a smirk. “If all else fails, we can introduce her to you properly. I’m sure discovering who her father is will throw her off enough.”

Aethya gave her a dry look, suggesting without words that there would be much pain in Oriana’s future if she even suggested that again. Given how hard the matriarch already worked her in training, with multiple broken bones being a regular event, Oriana simply grinned, shrugging off the glare with an equanimity that few even amount Aethya’s fellow matriarchs could have managed.

“Ha fuckin ha, you little shit. You just get those fucking guns working and corral the mad scientist you screwed into creating them for you. Let me worry about the fucking beacon.”

Oriana’s grin merely widened as she playfully saluted her partner in galaxy-saving, splitting off from her with a sway to her hips that Aethya herself had taught her. She heard a chuckle follow her and knew that her point had been made... Aethya had suggested how to bring Ani’lia on board herself, after all...

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“So...Chief Williams, right?” Oriana couldn’t believe her good fortune as she observed Gunnery Chief Ashely Williams standing at attention, along with her six-man squad. She was completely aware that merely sending the Gunnery Chief instead of coming himself was supposed to be an insult on the local CO’s part. The man had made it abundantly clear that he was a short-sighted fool that didn’t think much of the new hardware. But if that gave Oriana nearly two months of early access to another of Shepard’s potential crew, she was happy to take the insult.

“Yes, ma’am! Dog Squad was sent to learn the basics of the system from your techs, so we can properly train the crews that take over when testing is finished.”

The Chief looked apologetic, as aware of the insult as Oriana was, but Oriana just waved the unspoken apology off with a grin. "I'm glad to see you, Chief. I was half-afraid that insufferable asshole was going to insist on being here personally. He can't kill this project, the new hardware is simply too big an improvement over literally anything else out there, but he might have driven me to get locked up for murder if he stuck around and ranted about 'new-fangled over-priced gizmos.'"

Williams' face twitched, clearly trying not to smile back at the combination of Oriana's grin and comment about her current CO. After a moment, she cleared her throat and managed to get her next sentence out with a straight face...somehow. "The CO did send his compliments, ma'am, but said he'd be too busy overseeing the upgrades to the traditional defenses." She looked around at the busy lab-techs all around them. "Uh...what do you want us to do here, ma'am? None of us are really techs..."

"That's quite alright Chief, we won't be teaching the maintenance techs for these things until testing is done. What we need now is explicitly *non-techs*, regular soldiers to give us feedback on using the system for combat air and orbital defense. Mostly, you'll be working with me personally, over at Emplacement One, which is already online. For now, though..." Oriana eyed the bored looking squad. That wouldn't do. "Why don't I buy all of you a round of beers while I talk the basics of the system? After that, we can head over and give you lot your first-hand look at the targeting system hardware."

Williams blinked in surprise, clearly not used to the idea of getting briefings over beers. She hesitated only a moment, then nodded her head. "I think we'd like that ma'am," she turned to point firmly at her squad, "Just one beer, though. We need to actually remember this shit!"

Oriana chuckled in response and waved the Chief out, mind already whirling with how to make this new windfall work for her. Seduction was out, from what little she knew of the Chief's preferences and the lack of any signs of attraction from her, despite Oriana having adopted a working-day suit similar to her sister's catsuit. But friendship could hopefully work just as well, and complaining about the woman's ass of a CO was clearly one way to get on Williams' good side. Not surprising, if some of the stories about how someone who ended up being Spectre material ended up stuck as a mere Gunnery Chief on groundside safe-worlds for years were true...

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"Ash! Over here!" Oriana waved the Chief, who was alone and dressed in civvies for once, over to her table. The woman smiled when she saw Oriana, making her way over after a quick stop at the bar for a drink of her own.

"Alone, Ori? What happened to your Asari...friends?"

Oriana winced just a bit in response, taking a pull from her own drink. Ash's last word had been said with a bit of discomfort. Exposure to Fallion, Aethyta, and occasionally Ani'lia had sanded down the edge of Ashley's mild case of bigotry, but it wasn't entirely gone. The other woman didn't really have anything against aliens and never had, they just...weren't human. And Oriana being in some sort of three-way relationship with two Asari had always made the woman uncomfortable. Unfortunately, it wasn't the most appealing subject at the moment.

“Ah...Fallion and Ani’lia have decided to bond.” Seeing the lack of recognition on Ashley’s face, Oriana grimaced and clarified. “The Asari version of marriage, Chief. They had fun with me...but all three of us knew it wasn’t a permanent thing. But they unexpectedly clicked perfectly together, so...”

“Ah, so they broke off and got together with each other.” Ashely’s tone was genuinely sympathetic. She might have been uncomfortable with the arrangement, but she still wanted her friend to be happy.

Oriana shrugged and grinned. “Yeah. To be honest, I’m happy for them... But it still stings just a bit,” her smile turned a bit lop-sided, “hence coming to the bar for a stiff drink or two.”

That got a smile from Ashely, who quickly changed the subject, asking Oriana for more stories about Illum or The Citadel. Despite being human-focused, the Gunnery Chief was intensely curious about what else was out there. Oriana was grateful for the change of subject, so she told a few of her better stories this time, a couple of which hadn’t actually happened this time around. She soon had her friend in stitches, trying not to spill her beer as she snorted in laughter...when the raid sirens went off.

Oriana jerked to her feet alongside Ashley, who was frantically pulling up the alerts on her omni-tool. What the fuck? The beacon had only been found a two days ago! And the Normandy wasn’t due for another three! This wasn’t supposed to *happen* yet. But...even as she and the Chief pushed their way through the crowd, out into the street...the massive new graser emplacement’s she and Ani’lia had designed fired in anger for the first time, lighting up the night sky even as smaller flashes could be seen in orbit...the destruction of the small frigate picket force on overwatch assignment for the colony. As the first drop ships were shot down by the more traditional anti-air defenses, also upgraded by Oriana and Aethyta’s *New Dawn Enterprises*, Oriana grabbed Ashely by the shoulder before she could run off.

“Chief! You’ll never make it back to base to kit up, *New Dawn’s* facilities are closer. We can pull something from the armory for both of us! Besides, at least a couple of your Squad are at the Emplacements!”

Ashely hesitated for only an instant, then nodded and they set off at a jog even as the the night sky lit up again, this time with the deep blue light from the heavy kinetic barriers of Graser Emplacement 1 was fitted with, shrugging off an orange beam of fire which could only have been from a Reaper main beam. Oriana paled, then sighed in relief as the barrier held. They’d designed the things to be *far* more powerful than any dreadnaught barrier, tapped directly into the buried fusion generators installed to charge the graser capacitors. But even so it had never been certain that they could repel fire of that magnitude. And even if they could...it was doubtful they’d hold through more than a couple of shots. Still, as the Emplacements returned fire, Oriana grinned viciously. The Emplacements weren’t going to fall without bleeding the Reaper first...

The Invasion of Eden Prime had begun...

**End of Part 1**

### Chapter 3: Invasion

Oriana panted, diving behind a bit of concrete rubble as her barrier faltered. It had been almost thirty-six hours since the assault began and the final air defenses had collapsed just an hour ago. It might have been the proudest moment of her life when the graser batteries had torn into Sovereign, wounding the Reaper Dreadnaught badly enough to force it to peel off from its lightning-assault on the colony. Unfortunately, wounded though it had been, it had gotten the measure of the defenses in that initial attack, slagging Emplacement 3 into a half-molten wreck. After that initial failure, Sovereign had called in Geth cruisers for the next assault waves, throwing them into the teeth of Eden Prime's enhanced defenses to grind them down. The last of the three graser emplacements had melted itself to slag trying to fight off the third assault, nearly 6 hours ago now, and with its loss the regular anti-air defenses hadn't taken long to be stripped away.

And none of that mentioned the unending waves of Geth Dropships. Dozens of them had been chewed up right along by the improved traditional defenses, and a few more had been taken out by what little heavy-ordnance the garrison had in its own right. But for every three destroyed, at least one had slipped through. Even with the warning that repelling the first wave had given the colony, even with every man and woman willing to lift a rifle added to the garrison and police forces, the colony center had been chewed to rubble. And even then...the second and third assault waves had only been pushed back by the presence of Matriarch Aethyta. For the first time since...ever...Oriana actually understood just how terrifyingly powerful a Matriarch could be. She knew that Aethyta was likely among the most dangerous of that elite caste, her temperament working against the slow degradation of her combat skills even before she'd begun actively training again. But now, after *years* of getting her edge back...

Well, she'd seen Saren Arterius personally driven back by the Matriarch during the second wave. And the Spectre hadn't turned up at all in the third. Oddly, it was in that moment that it finally clicked for Oriana how important Shepard really was. Others could have killed Saren. Skilled as he was, powerful as his cybernetic alterations made him, there were other *individuals*, who could have killed him. Hell, Shepard had needed a small strike team to manage what Aethyta had done alone. For that matter, there were undoubtedly any number of others who could have done any individual thing Shepard had managed. But Shepard was more than just an insanely badass soldier... she was a leader. A renaissance woman that hadn't done *one* spectacular feat, or even a won a dozen battles in her capacity as a fighter. She'd done that...plus successfully played intergalactic politics, waged an information war, and recruited and led a team of other crazy-skilled individuals. All *without* the support of the galaxy's leading powers.

But now, Oriana was afraid that she might have doomed the galaxy instead of saving it. The beacon had been pulled in by rail and hidden in an outbuilding during the first hours, most of the locals not even aware that it was likely the target. But the garrison had been whittled away to almost nothing. Ashely and a private named Nirali were the only two members of the Chief's six-man squad still alive, the later kept that way only by the potent addition of Oriana's biotics on several occasions. The last they'd heard through the constant jamming, there were less than three hundred members of the nearly eight thousand strong marine division left alive and fighting. In addition, there were maybe a dozen of the special security detail brought in by New Dawn still alive, centered around Matriarch Aethyta. And there were maybe two or three hundred police, hired guns, and civilian volunteers still remaining.

And that had been an hour ago, before the final collapse of the air-defense net. Before a new wave of drops ships had brought in more Geth troopers. Literally the only good news was that even the

Geth seemed to be running out of bodies, or platforms she supposed, as there were far fewer dropships in this wave than there had been in the previous three. But...there were still too many for the exhausted and battered defenders. As evidenced by Oriana hunkering desperately behind cover, Ashely and Nirali the only others anywhere in sight and two dozen Geth closing in on them. As she heard the crunch of rapidly approaching Geth feet, Oriana was just about to summon her faltering biotics for one, last, desperate stand...when the most beautiful sight in the entire fucking galaxy flashed overhead.

The SSV Normandy had arrived.

Grinning fit for a lunatic, Oriana dug deep and called out to her two companions. "The Cavalry is here! We just have to buy them time! Williams, take the left! Nirali, right! I'm going right down the fucking center!"

Before the other two could acknowledge or, more likely at this point, call her fucking crazy, Oriana lept *over* her cover and powered up a biotic charge right into the center of the Geth formation. She staggered on landing but turned her faltering footing into a forward roll that ended in a biotic shockwave when she came back up. Fire hammered her barriers even as assault rifle fire from her compatriots ripped into the newly exposed holes in the Geth line. Oriana's biotics finally failed her...but that was fine. She was in close now and using the Geth themselves to shield herself from their own fire. She unloaded her shotgun into the lone Prime in the group, firing as fast as she could, not worrying about overheating. The gun wasn't even part of her normal loadout, but something she'd scavenged when her biotics started weakening, and she let it melt to scrap just to slag the prime in turn. Then she was dodging and weaving, her usual Raikou pistol in hand as she broke to one side.

For the next few minutes, it was only her insanely expensive Predator light armor, gifted to her by Aethyta and modified heavily by Ani'lia, that kept her alive. Even then, by the time they killed the last Geth, her shields were gone and a mass effect round had punched a hole through the armor itself on her right side, causing a deep graze that she'd had to treat with the very last of her medigel. Ashely and Nirali broke cover, racing to make sure she was alright and covering her while she tried to regain some strength after crashing from the short adrenaline spike seeing the Normandy had given her.

That was how Alliana Shepard found them when she came over the rise a minute and a half later. She was armored up, with full helmet of course, but Oriana somehow doubted there was another woman in N7 armor that just happened to be on Eden Prime with the Normandy. As she and the others raised palms and sent out an IFF ping just in case, the woman and her two escorts nodded acknowledgement, jogging up to meet them. Shepard triggered the folding mechanism on her helmet, pursing her lips to whistle appreciatively at the carnage around the three of them. Oriana took the moment that the commander used to sweep the field for threats and information to get a good look at her. Younger than then one time they'd met before, in her past life. Of course she was. But...also far less tired and with far fewer scars. She'd always been a striking woman, but here, with brighter eyes and fewer battles behind her, she was outright gorgeous. Maybe there'd be a chance to get a piece of that along the...Oriana shook off the exhaustion-induced daydream as the redhead finally spoke.

"Where is the rest of your unit?" She looked between Ashely, with her rank patches, and Oriana. Seeming unsure who was leading their group.



It was Ashely that answered. "Gone, ma'am. Dead in the first and second assaults. Narali and I are all that's left and we'd be dead too without Ori." The gunnery chief waved at the Geth. "Most of this was her work. Damn scary biotic, ma'am."

Commander Shepard locked her eyes with Oriana at that, seeming to finally decide the way the chief had waved a differential hand to her meant she was in charge. "Thank you, miss. Do any of you have a sit-rep?"

Oriana answered promptly. "Utterly buggered. They finally broke the air defense net an hour ago, and there was less than 300 of the garrison left by that time. The only good news is that I don't think they've gotten what they came for, yet."

Shepard's voice took on a neutral tone. "What they came for?"

Oriana gave the commander a wintery smile. "My full name is Oriana Lawson, Commander. I'm one of the primary shareholders of *New Dawn Enterprises*. I was on-planet to oversee the installation of the new defense grid. But, as *New Dawn* is also the major sponsor of the excavation that turned up a certain beacon, I knew all about it." Her smile turned grim as she continued. "Knew about it and made the choice to move it right after the graser emplacements turned back the first assault. It's hidden in a storage shed. Unless you have enough troops to take this place back, you need to get it and leave, fast. I can take you to it."

Shepard looked her over and hesitated. "You're dead on your feet. If you just mark its location, you can head to pickup and leave with the Normandy."

Oriana shook her head firmly. "My biotics are shot for now, but I can still move and shoot. And I didn't put the location in my omni-tool anyway. Didn't want to chance the Geth being able to hack it. Good as my security might be, keeping an AI out isn't a joke."

The hesitation was smaller this time, the redhead turning to the lieutenant next to her first. "Kadien, give her one of your biot-bars." As the other soldier nodded and reached for a utility pouch, Shepard turned back to her. "Fine. You three are with us. But let us take the brunt of any fighting until you've recovered a bit. Which way?"

As Oriana gratefully took the high-calorie recovery bar from the lieutenant, she pointed. "Down the street, hang a right at the burned out Grisly." Even as the commander started moving, Oriana took a gamble with the future. Well, another one. She was getting used to it. "And commander, there's something else you should know, in case I don't make it. This attack is being led by a rogue Spectre. At least, I hope he's rogue, or this just started a war with practically fucking everyone."

The redhead's forward pace slowed even as she activated her helmet again with a frown. A moment later, Oriana got a ping on her omni-tool for an encrypted com channel and Shepard's voice came over the line, demanding she repeat what she just said. Realizing she'd probably tapped her coms into the Normandy's net, Oriana gave more detail this time.

"The second assault was led by the Spectre Saren Arterius. He was only driven off by an Asari Matriarch who was here with *New Dawn*. She was actually the one overseeing the dig-site for the company. She managed to wound him in the chaos and he hasn't been seen since, but she was absolutely sure it was him." A new voice, a *Turian* voice, came across the com. And suddenly a spark of

memory hit Oriana. That's right, there had been another Spectre on Eden Prime but she'd never known who. Only that he'd been killed early on. His name hadn't been in the data she'd seen as part of the project.

"I find that hard to believe. Saren is the best of us, my own mentor in fact. Do you have any proof?"

Oriana's heartbeat skipped. Saren was his *mentor*? Shit. "I have recordings of the fight between him and Matriarch Aethyta. Is that enough?"

There was a hesitation, certainly, but the voice was firm when it came back. "Send them to my omni-tool."

Oriana obeyed, then had to focus on moving and giving directions as Shepard picked the pace up again. There were two short firefights, mostly handled by Shepard, Kaiden and the kid with them, before the Turian Spectre came back on the line, his voice hard and angry.

"It's Saren. No question. Not just the appearance either, his fighting style matches perfectly. And if he's here he's *definitely* rogue. I was the only Spectre assigned to this and the whole mission was kept quiet. He shouldn't even know the beacon is here, let alone be working with the Geth of all things to steal it."

Shepard had just finished off the last Geth trooper and responded smoothly, even as she got them all moving on Oriana's last set of direction with hand motions. "So, obviously that's bad. What do we do if we run into him? Call him out or just shoot?"

"You shoot, Shepard. And keep shooting, while praying you saw him before he saw you. Better yet, hope that Matriarch is there, too. That's the first time I've actually see someone beat him more or less one-on-one. Matriarch's don't usually keep their combat skills that sharp. Not outside the Justiciars, at least."

Oriana interjected. "Matriarch Aethyta is considered something of a rogue, a military development proponent. She's been training me for years and trust me, you can tell her father was Krogan. Usually within thirty seconds of meeting her." She heard Ash snort, causing a grin to tug at the corners of Oriana's mouth for a moment. Aethyta and Chief Williams had been an occasionally amusing combination in the last few months. Suppressing the temptation to smile, she continued. "More to the point, she's one of the only others on this rock that knows what he has to be after. With the defenses falling, she'll likely be either already there or in route."

A gruff acknowledgement came over the com, then silence for a few moments, followed by a terse warning that he was about to meet up with them. Less than a minute after that, the Turian Spectre, who Shepard greeted by the name Nihlus, came out of an alley and joined up with them, just a few blocks short of their objective. Oriana looked at him just a little wearily, given his admission that Saren was his mentor. But from what little she knew of the original events of Eden Prime, the Spectre assigned to Shepherd had died. Hopefully that meant he wasn't on Saren's side. And given what they'd begun hearing ahead of them...they might just need the extra gun. Sounds of heavy combat had been getting louder as they approached the hidden location of the beacon. Oriana flexed her biotics just a bit,

relieved when they responded. She wouldn't be able to do much, probably, but anything was better than nothing.

They slowed down just before the last corner...and even the Spectre flinched as a wrecked Geth Prime flew right by them on a wave of biotic power. Oriana grinned and tapped her omni-tool, seamlessly bridging the encrypted Normandy Com net with her own private encrypted channel. "Matriarch, please don't do that again, I'm coming around the corner with Alliance reinforcements and a Turian Spectre that, thankfully, isn't with Saren. That Prime almost took our heads off."

There was a bark of rough laughter over the coms. "Wasn't me, kid. Liara's got her mother's biotic strength, apparently. At least when she's pissed about someone threatening her new toy. I'll tell her to lay off throwing any of them your way. Now, get your lazy ass in here, Ori, that bastard's been making hit-and-runs with some sort of fucking powered glider. Winged it with a warp on his last run, though, so I'm expecting him to push in on foot next."

Oriana growled and threw up her Biotic Barrier. She turned to the others, seeing them staring at her. "Well, what are you waiting for? A fucking engraved invitation?" With that, she powered a short charge around the corner and dove into the back of a dozen Geth troopers...mentally considering, just for a moment as she crashed into them, that Aethyta may have been a bad influence on her...

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The fighting had been brutal...but short. Saren had made another push for the beacon but, with Nihilus and Shepard backing the exhausted Matriarch, he'd never had a real chance. If he'd had more time, he might have outlasted them with his remaining Geth forces. But it turned out that there were more differences between this assault on Eden Prime and the original than just the timing. For Shepard actually *had* brought along both more ground troops...and a small fleet. If Sovereign hadn't been damaged by the graser emplacements, the lone dreadnaught in that relief fleet wouldn't have made the difference. But Sovereign was hurt, having had to take part in every assault in order to overwhelm each graser emplacement's shields in turn. Wounded, it hadn't been willing to fight the Alliance Dreadnaught and its accompanying cruisers. Sovereign had thrown the remnants of the Geth fleet at them to give Saren time for his final assault...but when that assault failed it had pulled out, hanging back to exchange long-range fire with the other dreadnaught just long enough to pick up Saren's fleeing assault craft.

Less than fifteen minutes later, marine and infantry assault teams from the various Alliance ships now entering orbit had begun to drop onto the burning colony world. Their own small force, which included the remaining five members of *Eden's Dawn* security forces, had stuck to the storage shed that held the beacon. Letting the new, fresh units worry about sweeping up the remaining Geth platforms. Liara, face exhausted and streaked with soot and sweat, led Oriana, Aethyta, and the Spectre into the storage unit itself, most of them coming face-to-face with the beacon for the first time.

Face-to-face with the *active* beacon for the first time.

What? Why was it suddenly active?

Liara was the one with the explanation. When Oriana voiced her confusion, she spoke up. "We think that's how they found it. Some sort of short-range activation protocol, then picking up the activation on active sensors. Once they broke the defenses, Geth Prime units started sweeping the

colony with teams of a couple dozen regular troopers as guards. When they passed a block from here, the beacon suddenly sprang to life and..." The young Asari trailed off, actually looking frightened. It was her 'father' that picked up the story.

"And fucking grabbed her. Liara was the closest to the beacon and it grabbed her in some sort of field, then fucking mind-whammied her or some shit. She was out cold for almost half an hour." The Matriarch's voice grew a little thinner, softer. "...I thought for a bit that I had lost her."

Liara took a deep breath, steadying herself and trying to stand tall under all the eyes now fixed to her. "I think it was some sort of message. But it was one built for Prothean minds. I don't know what would have happened if anyone but an Asari touched it, since it nearly overloaded even my nervous system. That's what knocked me out. But...well...I saw..." She paused, shook herself, then continued. "I think I witnessed the fall of the Prothean Empire. Worse, scrambled as it was, I'm almost certain that I saw ships just like the one that led this attack, bombarding hundreds of prothean worlds."

Nihlus interjected tersely. "Thought you saw?"

Liara looked uncomfortable. "Like I said, the message seems to have been made for a different biology. What I can make out of it are only fragments. Confused flashes. Like brief, warped snapshots of clear video from a corrupted file. I'm only as sure as I am about the ships because they showed up in so many of those snapshots."

"And it wasn't a hallucination? Brought on by seeing the one that attacked here and the nervous system overload?"

The Turian didn't seem disbelieving. Only like he wanted to be sure. Which is probably the only thing that saved him from Aethyta snapping his mandibles off and shoving them somewhere unpleasant. Instead, she simply glared at him. "We'll be able to determine that with a meld, once we're sure it's safe for her to do so. I could probably confirm it wasn't a dream, at least, but I've never been all that deft a touched with melds. If you want to be dead certain, someone like Sha'ira could easily tell you beyond any shadow of a doubt."

Nihlus looked a little doubtful. Probably at the idea of casually getting into see the Consort even for something like this. Still, he nodded. "Someone on the Citadel will be able to help, at least. If you're certain we'll be able to know for sure, then we can add it to the report I'll make to the Council. Anything that could give us a hint why Saren would go rogue like this...let alone why the Geth would attack a human colony on his behalf..."

The Spectre trailed off but they all nodded. Oriana and Aethyta knew, of course, but they couldn't just vomit up all the answers and expect to be believed. And the others were genuinely in the dark. After a few moments, Shepard clapped her hands together and spoke.

"Either way, we should get the beacon prepped for transport. Can we do that safely, Doctor T'soni?"

Liara shook herself and confirmed they could. With a sure voice that didn't match her earlier uncertainties, but certainly *did* match her combat-stained appearance, she got them all moving to help shut down the beacon and prep it for transport....

## Chapter 4: Afterparty

Oriana had a problem. She'd eaten a ton, conked out for a solid twelve hours in a spare pod aboard the Normandy, and on the whole felt largely better. The problem? Frankly put, she was horny as hell. It wasn't even unexpected, really. Humans often had a combat survival reaction of their own, which might have produced something like it, but it was a bit worse than that in Oriana's case. She was, for all intents and purposes, part Asari now, and something she'd discovered early on was that heavy, sustained usage of biotics did...interesting...things to Asari nervous systems. It was, in fact, one of the lesser known details that had contributed to the entire race's reputation for being promiscuous. Oriana didn't quite have it as bad as a true Asari would...and at the same time, she had it worse. An Asari would have gotten the arousing effects of heavy biotic use more strongly, but they *didn't* have the same chemical responses to combat that humans did. Meaning that the combat itself rarely contributed to their arousal, not in comparison to the heavy biotic use from said combat, at least. So, Oriana got less of it from the one source but doubled down on the issue from another.

Which left her in a relatively tiny ship, without either of her now-former lovers who were now in a committed relationship with each other and probably fucking off their own post-battle hormone trip somewhere back on Eden Prime. She was grateful they'd both survived...but it would have been nice if they were *here* and willing to go in for one last threesome! She's just about given up on anything more exciting and decided to take care of the problem herself, when she stumbled onto a possible solution.

That kid from Eden Prime, Jenkins she thought his name was, was sitting alone in the middle of the ship's night cycle and was looking seriously jittery. Eden Prime was probably his first serious fight and he'd almost died like, a dozen times. At least once he'd run out where he shouldn't have and only Oriana managing to snap a weak biotic barrier up in front of him had saved the kid's life. So, maybe she could do a good deed and get the kid to think about something else, and if it went the way she hoped, maybe knock down her own problem while they were at it. He was cute enough, if painfully young seeming in some ways...and it had been a while since Oriana had a real cock, instead of just a strap on. Even if he wasn't very good with his, it would probably do.

Yes. This could do nicely, she decided. She grabbed a couple of beers from the stocks, casually bypassing the lock that was supposed to keep them out of reach when the ship was technically at alert status. She joined the marine private and slid the second beer across to him. He jerked in surprise but managed to snatch it, looking up from his study of the tabletop to see who it had come from. His jaw dropped a little as he realized who it was.

"Uh, ma'am?"

Oriana chuckled. "Oriana please, or even Ori. I'm not military so no need for formalities, yes? Besides, you look like you could use that beer...and someone to talk to. First time seeing real action?"

He flinched, then slowly nodded.

"Not much like the vids, huh? Or even what they tried to prepare you for wherever you were trained."

“Um, no ma--, um...no. I’m Jenkins, by the way, Private Richard Jenkins.”

He didn’t seem quite ready to use her name, but he’d at least caught the ma’am and stopped himself, trying to cover for it with his own introduction. She smiled gently and laid a hand on his arm, leaning forward a bit so the t-shirt she was wearing would fall open a bit, giving him something to look at. As his eyes track down reflexively, she told him something important. Self-serving at the moment? Absolutely. But still important.

“It’s never like you think it will be. Faster, hotter, slower, bloodier, muddier, just plain...more. More intense. More horrible. More exciting. Just, more. But you know the trick to getting through it afterward, without it haunting you?” When he shook his head, she smiled. “To remember not the death but the life. What you accomplished, who you saved, who was there alongside you. A girl back home, a friend with a nice smile, a fuck buddy you’ll get to see again.”

Those last bits were over the top, but she’d seen the reaction in his eyes, which is why she’d added them. No girl, not even a friend with benefits. Excellent. She steered the conversation away from that, taking the time to give him some actual sound advice from her own experiences in the last few years. Plus some things others had told her, after rough missions or lost fights. Eventually, she segued into jokes and flirty comments as he finished the beer she’d brought him. At that point, she leaned in and made a whispered offer in his ear.

He looked at her with wide eyes and managed to choke out a question. She smirked and nodded, then grabbed him by one arm and tugged him to his feet. He trailed after her like a puppy on a leash as she made her way to the closest thing to privacy they were likely to get...it wasn’t even close to ideal, but on a ship as small as the Normandy, it was the best they could do. At least it was ‘night’ aboard ship and the only people awake were likely to be on-watch. There was risk...but she was horny and didn’t care. Who knows, maybe if someone spotted them they’d join in instead of ratting them out. Though that might scare the kid off...

Once in the limited privacy of the communal bathrooms, Oriana didn’t hesitate to push Richard up against the back wall of the small shower stall. It was the only place that really had enough room for her to kneel, and would act as a slight additional shield of privacy if anyone came in. Probably not enough, but she also didn’t really care at this point. Giving the private her best smoky eyes, good enough for the kid to audibly gulp in response, she stripped off the loose t-shirt she’d managed to acquire from ship’s stores to sleep in. She hadn’t been as lucky with a bra...and honestly didn’t need one outside combat. Despite being a D-cup, the changes to her genetics both before and after her trip through time had given her unnatural support for her size. That support had also made them equally unnaturally firm and perky for D-cups, something Jenkins clearly approved of if the way his eyes were glued to her tits as she uncovered them was anything to go by. Then again, he was young enough that he’d probably be glued to just about any pair tits he got a chance to see.

Amused by the thought, she allowed herself to smirk as she turned away from him to peel off the much-tighter pants she’d acquired. She heard a slightly pained sounding groan from behind her as she wiggled her ass out of them and her smirk turned mischievous, wandering just how tight she was making that nice bulge of his feel. Well, he could suffer just a bit longer...she was certainly going to soothe any pain. And possibly replace it with a dull ache in his balls when he couldn’t get it up any longer...

When she was reduced to just the lacy thong she always preferred for panties, having run those through a quick wash cycle earlier, she slowly turned back to face him, letting him have a few moments to rake her body with his eyes before sinking to her knees in front of him. "Hmmm, let's see just what we're working with here, sweetie."

He let out an audible moan of relief as she deftly unzipped his pants, pulling them and his boxers both down in a single, smooth motion. Her eyes widened as she was almost slapped in the face with the erection that popped out. She leaned back a moment to get a good look at it and gave a low, impressed whistle when she got a proper eyeful. The kid was at least 8 inches at full mast and fairly thick to boot. No wonder he'd been groaning in pain as his pants tightened! She grinned up at him, getting a hesitant smile in return. Clearly the kid wasn't exactly a Casanova...but that's why she was on her knees. He was young enough to pop back easily for a second round once she took his edge off...

The kid jumped as she wrapped her hand around the base of his shaft, then blushed scarlet when she grinned up at him. She didn't say a word, though, instead lowering her gaze to focus on what she was doing. She leaned forward, kissing his tip gently for just a moment, then parted her lips slightly and flicked her tongue across the slit. He flinched and moaned at the same time, actually causing her to giggle a bit, but then she got serious and doubled down. Knowing she intended this to just be a warmup, and that they could be interrupted at any time, she didn't bother going slow. She slipped his cockhead into her mouth...and then smoothly pressed down his shaft until her lips met her fingers just shy of his base. He thrust convulsively, but she'd expected that from the inexperienced private, using her free hand to keep him from thrusting far with a pressure against his right hip and moving in time with his thrust. Despite it having been a while since she did this, she managed it fairly smoothly, and was quickly able to start bobbing up and down on the thick specimen, enhancing her ruthless deep throat by humming low in her throat as she went.

There was no way the kid could last long under that assault...but that's why she'd kept two fingers loosely around his shaft as she went. She felt the twitch and knew his load was coming, drawing back to just the head and flicking her tongue out again. The reaction was instant as his hips, now held by both of her hands and her considerable gene-therapy-augmented strength, tried to thrust. He was only able to push out a little as his cock spasmed, firing a load straight into her mouth. She accepted that one but quickly popped his cock out from the seal of her lips, grabbing it and pointing it down at her tits. She didn't mind swallowing and he didn't taste all that bad...but having her tits covered in cum would help her with the next step of her plan. He didn't seem to mind, mind lost to anything else as he pumped a full five additional shots onto her face and body. Then he went semi-limp and his erection started to flag. Well, that certainly wouldn't do.

She reached up to cup his dangling balls and massage them gently, knowing his shaft would be too sensitive for the next minute or so. That got his attention and a twitch from his softening cock and she pulled away with a smirk, bringing her hands to press her tits together, gazing up at him with burning eyes as he tracked the motion. She let low, throaty moans flow from her lips as she massaged her cum-splattered tits, watching his cock twitch with a hidden smile. No, she certainly wasn't done with him.

She reached up and found some of his cum where it had hit her upper chest and spread it out, deliberately rubbing it in over as wide an area as possible. Her eyes flicked up to his for a just a moment. Oh yes, he was definitely paying close attention. One hand went up, the other down, she gathered more

cum from what had landed on her face onto her fingers, then sucked them clean with a sensual moan. The other hand she slipped quite obviously into her soaking thong, making it obvious as she plunged two fingers inside herself, moaning some more around the others in her mouth even as she locked eyes with the young marine. Jenkins gulped, already half-erect cock springing valiantly back to full mast.

Oriana smiled and reluctantly removed the fingers from her core, slowly standing...and grabbing him by his erection. She tugged and he stumbled after her as she made her way to the counter, letting go just as she bent over, her other hand moving to pull her thong aside. She looked over her shoulder with a wicked grin. "Well, kid, what are you waiting for?"

That was all the invitation he needed. He was on her in a flash, cock hiltling in her in one smooth motion that ripped a gasp of mixed surprise and pleasure from her throat. Her back arched as he pulled almost out and slammed home a second time, her hips pushing back to meet his but sheer instinct. She had no idea how the fumbling kid from earlier had managed to be that smooth, and with another woman it might have been too much...but for Oriana it was  *fucking amazing*. Sensual was fine, sensual and slow was great. But Asari were good at that and she'd been getting it for years from Fallion and Ani'lia. And it *so* wasn't what she wanted right now. Between her original, artificial creation and her new Asari additions, her body was virtually built for sin and more than strong enough to take any abuse this kid could throw at her. Right now she wanted to be hammered rough, by a cock that could do the job properly, and inexperienced as Jenkins clearly was he had the right tool and attitude for the moment. All that remained was to see if he had the stamina to keep it up.

As he sped up, roughly pounding her from behind, he actually seemed to be getting deeper with every thrust, dragging wanton moans out of lips that no longer cared if they got caught. She was getting what she wanted, what she needed, and that cock was hitting her soooo deep. She bucked back into him and he surprised her again, grabbing one of her wrists and pinning it behind her back, pushing her down into the counter even as she instinctively raised her hips in response. The sudden aggressiveness and her lack of control just stoked the fire higher and she spasmed through her first climax unexpectedly quickly. But Jenkins didn't stop pounding...and she didn't want him to. She was thoroughly multi-orgasmic, capable of cumming for hours if she had even brief breaks and was allowed to...or forced to. That had been one of her more interesting adventures with Fallion...

The memory of that brief foray into bondage, one of the few she had from the bound perspective in her previous relationship, as Fallion hadn't been that into it and Ani'lia was pure subbie, simply made the situation hotter. She was almost disappointed as she felt the kid's efforts start to stutter a few minutes later, a telltale sign he was on the ragged edge. He held out for another minute, pushing her to the very edge of her next release, then unloaded deep inside her with one last, brutally deep thrust. She cried out in turn as the gushing sensation of a blissfully large second load emptying into her set her off again, hard. She bit her lip, trying not to scream and only half managing it....then she sagged, feeling the softening cock leaving her as she did...

A few minutes of furtive cleanup later, with her having mischievously tucked her soaked thong into Jenkin's pocket as a 'thank you' memento, the two of them slipped out of the bathroom...to see an amused looking Asari Matriarch calmly holding a filmy-thin biotic bubble over the bathroom entrance. Aethyta smirked at the blushing duo, then dropped the sound-blocking biotic film and walked away without another word.



Oriana was *really* going to have to find her fellow conspirator a nice thank you gift...

## End of Part 2

### Chapter 5: The Council

Their arrival on the Citadel had been surprisingly quiet. Frankly, it was an aspect of the changes she had made that Oriana hadn't even thought of, though for now it seemed a positive change. In the original timeline, in *her* original timeline, however that worked, the utter mess that had been Saren's raid on Eden's Prime had sent shockwaves through the halls of power. Which, to be fair, was still the case this time. The difference was in the low profile with which the Normandy, along with its passengers and crew, had been able to slip onto the Citadel. Nihlus's Spectre status had let him reach out to the Council directly, before they even left Eden Prime's Orbit. Furthermore, his clearance had allowed the Normandy to dock at a private Spectre-only docking slip, keeping the paparazzi from connecting it's arrival with the shocking news coming out of Eden's Prime.

Nihlus's report, combined with a forwarded copy of footage showing Saren in combat with Matriach Aethyta, had the Council taking things dead-serious from the moment the ship stopped moving. An Asari Meld Specialist, not the Consort but one of her top adherents, met them not two steps outside the Normandy's hatch. She was accompanied by others, including a second Spectre. That Spectre was one of the branch's only dedicated investigators, a Salarian named Jondum Bau, who specialized in the sort of high-level, high-stakes, galaxy-spanning investigations that called for a Spectre to be involved. Along with him was a C-Sec detective that Oriana immediately recognized. Garrus Vakarian had, after all, played a rather major role in events of her original timeline. She was a little surprised to see him now...but Jondum quickly explained that his fellow investigator had already reported suspicions about Saren's behavior. Which meant that he had a place to start when no one else did. Since time might well be of the essence, that head-start was enough to involve the detective in at least the initial efforts.

The hours following their arrival had been grueling as a result of the prep work that had been done by the council and the Spectre office but, as those hours were also incredibly productive because of that same pre work, no one was about to complain. During that time the Meld Specialist had confirmed the authenticity of Liara's vision, all those of that had been on the ground on Eden's Prime were efficiently questioned, the prothean beacon secured, and information about the sheer size and toughness of the 'dreadnaught' that attacked Eden's Prime verified completely from Alliance sensor data. And...after all that, they had been let go for a few hours while the information was delivered to the Council. Once the councilors had had a chance to be briefed fully on the data, they would be taken directly to them for a face-to-face meeting and questioning. Until then, they'd been told to cool their heels...and immediately ignored that idea in favor of chasing down any additional information they could.

Which, as it happened, was how Oriana had ended up in her current situation...

Oriana cursed as she dove out of the way of a stream of heavy fire coming from a Krogan wielding a squad-weapon like it was a toy, using her biotic power to throw the corpse of another mercenary straight at the enemy Krogan. The heavy weapon's fire chewed the corpse to offal...but it bought enough time for the Krogan battlemaster nominally on *their* side to bull rush the younger

member of his race. Absurdly, his Qurian friend had been latched onto his back and let go only a bare moment before her ride impacted his fellow Krogan. As the two behemoths bellowed, the Qurian rolled around the pair and brought up her shotgun, unloading an overcharged carnage round straight into the enemy Krogan's side. That wasn't enough to kill him...but his howl of agony and flinch away gave her partner space, and the battlemaster followed up by punching his fist straight through the new hole in armor-and-flesh before releasing a biotic warp, tearing the other Krogan apart from the inside.

Oriana grinned fiercely at the sight. She, Shepard and Alenko having finished off the remaining human and Salarian mercs during the distraction the charge had caused. Then she saw the Krogan swing back around, his own shotgun coming up toward Shepard, and she hurriedly spoke up. "Hold, Battlemaster Wrex! We have no quarrel with you!" The sound of his name and title caused his shotgun to slow...then stop short of actually pointing at Shepard, merely aiming at the floor at her feet. After a tense moment where everyone tried to pretend they weren't on the cusp of more violence, his gravelly voice spoke.

"Who're you? And how do you know my name. If you've come for Fist, I've already got dibs on him."

It was Shepard that spoke up for their side, before Oriana could. "We don't care about Fist, only any information he might have about a rouge Spectre named Saren."

That statement actually seemed to surprise the Krogan. He blinked slowly, seeming to consider something...but it was the Qurian that spoke first. "What do you want to know about that slimy, sleazy Bosh'tet! If you're one of his agents, I'll feed you to Wrex!"

That seemed to amuse the battlmaster, a bass chuckle rumbling from his chest. "Don't think humans probably taste very good, little Tali, but I'm willing to try..." He paused, grinning a bit darkly as his shotgun lowered farther. "But if they called him rogue, I doubt they're some of his."

"We aren't. He personally led an attack by the Geth on the human colony Eden's Prime. We're trying to dig up anything on him that might help us track the bastard down." Shepard's voice was cool, calm even as she deactivated her own weapon and motioned her team to do the same. "If you're not some of his, we have no issue with you. But we had a lead that Fist might know something."

Wrex snorted. "He doesn't. He sold the Shadow Broker out for Saren's credits, but Saren played him. Cut the stupid fuck off to die. Makes sense now, if the birdie can't make it to the Citadel anymore."

Shepard grimaced but went on doggedly. "We might still get something from his systems, if he's been in contact with Saren."

It was Tali that spoke up in response, not Wrex. "I doubt it. Saren's a Spectre, or was at least? He'll have covered his tracks from anything someone like Fist can do. But...I might be able to help you. Fist tried to have me killed because I found something out about Saren and tried to sell the information to the Broker. If Wrex hadn't been following a few of Fist's thugs, thinning out their numbers before he hit Chora's Den, I'd have been dead."

The Krogan snorted again, rolling his eyes over to his partner, then back to Shepard. "Don't let her fool you, she killed 3 of his thugs before I got the last one that was trying to shoot her in the back.

Figured, after seeing that, it was worth letting her tag along, since she had an axe to grind with Fist after he pulled that.”

Everyone, even Oriana who’d never known much about Tali’zarah vas Rayya/Normandy, was suddenly blinking in shock as they looked at the girl... Who stared back, half defiant and half sheepish looking. After a long few moments of silence, Oriana found her voice first.

“You have something on Saren? What do you want for it?”

The Quarian’s stance firmed, even as she glanced at Wrex. He nodded and she spoke. “Help us take out Fist and I’ll give you what I have. Wrex had to take me to get patched up, so the bosh’tet had a chance to pull in a couple of merc groups to cover his ass. We’ve been trying to kill him for days, but between the mercs and C-Sec, we couldn’t get to him until now. And there’s still a lot of them between us and him.”

Shepard nodded, sharply and decisively. “Done. If he was a human helping Saren he deserves whatever you’ve got planned for him, anyway.”

Wrex grunted. “Practical. Good in a fight. I might just like you, human.”

With that, he turned to the inner door that the Krogan merc had been defending. Without farther pause, he charged up his biotics....and smashed right through the reinforced door, immediately taking fire on the other side. As the human team scrambled to get their weapons out again, Oriana grinned in triumph. Urdot Wrex was *important*. And she’d not been able to track him down before this. She had no idea how Shepard had originally recruited the ancient battlemaster...but hopefully, she could work with this.

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As Tali’zarah played an audio file from her omni-tool, it was all Oriana could do not to gape. *Tali* had been the source of the original information about Matriarch Benezia? Oriana hadn’t known how that connection had come to light in the original timeline...and hadn’t known how long Benezia had been working with Saren. They hadn’t dared try to reach out to the Matriarch, even as much as that fact had been a bitter pill for Aethyta to swallow regarding her old flame. Now, she was frantically trying to recall everything she knew about the Quarian, trying to slot the new information into her calculations. Should she try to make sure Tali was aboard the Normandy again? She hadn’t even secured her own spot yet...and she *absolutely* needed Wrex to be. Could she...no. Don’t borrow trouble. She might end up following anyway, just like she originally did. Worry about it if that didn’t happen. For now, focus on the council...who was listening to Aethyta grimly confirm that it was her old lover’s voice. The councilors looked at each other for a long moment, then Tevos spoke.

“So, this plot goes far deeper than merely Saren and the Geth. Matriarch Benezia will need to be brought in as well...or otherwise dealt with. And then there’s the information the Meld Specialist was able to confirm from Doctor T’soni’s encounter with the beacon. These...Reapers.”

Valern spoke up even as the Asari councilor trialed off. “Concerning. Insufficient data to make full conclusion. But possible link to destruction of both Protean Empire and Rachini War are both obvious. Must act to get more information.”

Sparatus grunted, adding his two cents when the Salarian stopped. "More than information. We need to deal with Saren and this Reaper ship, as well as Benezia and the Geth. If not for the new weapons the Alliance was testing on Eden's Prime, that ship would have wiped out the colony. As it is, the data we have suggests it could take any two dreadnaughts in the galaxy, even if one of them was the Ascension. And even that estimate is only if both dreadnaughts were fitted with the new Thanix main guns. It's almost enough to make me think you could have been working with him for your own profit, Lawson. Particularly given how closely its main gun resembles your Thanix designs."

Oriana blinked...she actually hadn't considered how suspicious that could look. But she didn't have to answer, since Aethyta growled at the councilor and he hurriedly waved his hand.

"Only almost. The efforts she and you made on the ground make it clear that wasn't the case, Matriarch. But someone else will point it out, eventually, if I don't."

Oriana shrugged. "I sort of doubt Saren's going to be quiet, now that he's failed in so spectacular a fashion, and I imagine my continued help against him will shut down anything but wild rumors." Several gazes looked at her, uncertain what she meant, but she waved them off for now. After a moment, the Turian councilor broke the short silence again.

"And how went your original mission, Nihlus? What is your evaluation of Spectre candidate Shepard? Is she ready to be a Spectre?"

Several of the those in the room blinked, off balance at the seeming change of subject. But Nihlus responded swiftly. "From a combat standpoint, I'd say the answer is a definitive 'yes.' She chewed through the Geth, despite their numbers, in a way that stacks up well against any Spectre, including myself. She also made excellent use of local resources, made all of the correct calls, and ultimately was the one to secure the objective. This all speaks well of her potential. However, it falls short of telling me several other things I need to know. When we arrived at the Citadel, I had intended to recommend she take several additional missions alongside me or another Spectre before final evaluation."

Nihlus paused for a moment, then the serious expression on his face twitched into the Turian equivalent of a smirk. "However, her actions since arrival have changed that. When told to 'wait,' she instead immediately set out into the station, tapping her own resources and connections for information and following up on that information when she got it. In the process, she managed to track down and obtain critical information about who is working with Saren, that may prove key to locating him. She did this entirely on her own initiative, with her own contacts and resources...and admittedly, a certain utter disregard for proper protocol."

After a long pause to let that sink in, Nihlus's smirk changed to grin. "Which is, frankly, *exactly* the skill and mindset required of a Spectre. I'd argue that she has, almost accidentally, shown the best promise of any Spectre candidate in decades at least, possibly even centuries. Any farther testing would be superfluous in light of that. My formal recommendation is that she be promoted immediately to Spectre status and assigned the usual mentor to induct her into Spectre operations."

The councilors...actually looked relieved. It was Sparatus that spoke for the three of them a moment later. "This is excellent news, as it means our best option for handling this...delicate

situation...is viable." He exchanged a quick glance with the other two, then gestured for Tevos to take up the explanation. She nodded as he seemed to 'step back,' turning her gaze on Shepard.

"Later today, as soon as it can be arranged, you will be very publicly promoted to full Spectre status. Immediately after that, you will be both publicly and privately assigned to investigate Saren, Benezia, the Geth, that Dreadnaught, and these 'Reapers' that young Liara saw in her vision. You will *not* be the only Spectre assigned this task, of course, both Nihlus and Jondum Bau will also be assigned. However, where they will be assigned specific tasks, we want you to simply look into everything and feed any and all information to the others. By all means, if you find a target to strike at, do so. However, on the whole, you are intended to be the Wild Card. You already have as much information as any Spectre to start with, since you are already involved, and you are an unknown to Saren." Tevos paused, grimaced, then went on. "Even that is, however, a justification. Your inclusion in the hunt is partially a political reality. A rouge Spectre has attacked a human colony. Providing the first human Spectre as part of the major investigations will prove that we take that seriously. Having said that, this position is *not* a sinecure. You, like any other Spectre placed in such an important task, will be expected to produce results. I pray to the goddess that Nihlus is right to recommend you, as you will be thrown straight into the deep waters in a way even more Spectres rarely are."

Shepard's spine had straightened, even as satisfied smiles appeared on Ambassador Udina and Captain Anderson's faces. Oriana herself gave a relieved sigh, glad that her meddling with the timeline hadn't *completely* derailed Shepard's future. The galaxy was going to *need* Alliana Shepard in the coming days, and becoming the first human Spectre had been what truly propelled the woman into galactic prominence. With that much achieved, she was certain she could count on Shepard's own insane combination of skill, charisma, and simple luck to do the rest...not that she had any intention of leaving it all to chance. With a last mention from the council that Jondum Bau would meet Shepard at the Spectre officers to get her set up, as well as join her on a first mission, the meeting broke up and they all filed out of the private meeting room. Even as they did so, Oriana's mind worked on her argument. Barely outside the secured room, Udina and Anderson had begun immediately talking to Shepard about taking the Normandy and its crew...but before they could get any farther, Oriana interrupted.

"Excuse me, Gentleman, Commander, but I believe other assets need to be discussed first, before they fly away." She flagged down Tali and Wrex, who had been loitering near the trio as well. "We're going to need a couple of things for this endeavor, one of which is individuals that can help take someone like Saren or Matriach Benezia on in a fight." Ignoring the sharp glance from Udina at the mention of 'we,' she gestured to Wrex. "Let the three of you be properly known to Urdnot Wrex, a rather infamous Krogan Battlemaster....who is in excess of a millennia old. Though I'm afraid I don't know his exact age, despite pulling all the files on him from several different organizations."

Wrex grunted, eying her a bit curiously. "Don't know either. Don't keep track. Twelve hundred or so, I think."

Oriana nodded to him, then smoothly went on. "He's one of the handful of fighters in the galaxy I'd expect to stack up well against a Spectre of Saren's caliber...and interested in this little jaunt, I think?" She directed that at Wrex and he nodded.

"Broker wants Saren dead. I took the contract."

Before anyone could say anything about that, Oriana quickly went on. "Exactly. And we're probably your best shot at finding him. As for any security concerns," she glanced at the Alliance members, "I'll personally match the Broker's fee if you agree not to pass on anything about the Alliance, the Normandy, or anything else classified, to the Broker."

Wrex gave her a toothy grin. "You speak my language, human. Done. But you'll take the kid, too." He pointed a finger back to a surprised looking Tali.

Oriana nodded, then smirked at the slightly poleaxed looking trio of her fellow humans before turning toward Tali to confirm. "Done. Her knowledge of the Geth might prove utterly crucial. Moreover, I'll personally assure you are paid via a brand-new freighter as a pilgrimage gift, in addition to whatever you learn about the Geth during this that might be useful to the fleet. And yes, I *can* do that, as I own several shipyards."

Even as Tali stuttered her acceptance of the deal, Shepard finally found her voice. Her eyes narrowed, her eyes sharpening as she caught Oriana's with her own. "And why does all of this sound like you are planning to join us?"

"Because I intend to. I lost people on Eden's Prime Shepard. Between the crews of the grasers, which hadn't yet been taken over by the Alliance's people, plus the techs, dig team, and security..." Her voice hardened. She might have expected it. Been ruthless enough about it to put her people in anyway. But she was not *sanguine* about their deaths. "*New Dawn Enterprises* lost over 300 people. And that's a low estimate." She glanced at Udina and Anderson with a cold smile. "The Systems Alliance will be hearing about a new deal from our people before the day is up. We had intended to offer it to the Asari, first...but I convinced my business partner to sell some of our new weapon systems straight to the Alliance. And to do so at considerably lower a markup than we were originally planning." Almost no markup at all, actually. But they didn't need to know that.

Ignoring the avaricious expression on Udina's face, she refocused on Shepard. "As for me specifically. It's *not* commonly known...but I'm the single most powerful human biotic that's ever been recorded. The original, quite accidental, prototype of a certain very black project the Alliance is currently working on with *New Dawn*. I've been combat trained by one of the most deadly Asari Matriarchs currently living, have my own information network, and can bring both prototype bleeding edge gear to your team...and the personal ability to tear apart any technical information we find on the Geth or that Dreadnaught. I am, after all, the original designer of the Thanix system and several other major improvements in Kinetic Barriers, Torpedo Systems, Engine Systems, and more."

Every single one of them was wide-eyed at this point. Even Wrex, who was blatantly reevaluating her. Oriana simply locked her gaze with Shepard's, the other woman the least effected by her little resume statement. After a long moment, Shepard nodded grimly. "Welcome aboard, then. When I get back from the Spectre offices, we'll go over anything you can add beyond your personal skill in combat. Though, to be clear...that would have been enough, along with your desire to get some back for your people."

Oriana smiled back at the other woman, just as grimly. Even if, inside...she was mentally turning cartwheels at getting this chance. Even she didn't know if it was better to be on the Normandy or simply working in the background...but the part of her that had been shaped by Aethyta in the past few years

was unwilling not to get personally involved. So, this is how it would be. Besides, she suspected Aethyta would never have forgiven her if she wasn't aboard the Normandy to look after Liara, after getting her daughter mixed up in this in the first place...

## Chapter 6: A Cure for Grief

Shepard had met up with her for just an hour after the Commander had gotten back from the Spectre office. After a brief overview of what Oriana could help with and setting a few plans in motion...both on behalf of Shepard and a few of Oriana's own, they had separated. There was a lot to do in order to transfer Command of the Normandy to Shepard, as well as some minor repair work to see to. Not to mention proper provisioning and crew allocation, as the ship had originally been on a Shakedown Cruise. It would take at least a day for them to be ready to go, no matter how much they hurried, and Oriana had something else she needed to take care of before they left. Something...a bit more personal.

She found Ashely in the armory, field stripping and cleaning weapons that were...frankly...already pristine. She'd suspected she'd find her friend there, it being a habit of the Chief's she'd already seen once or twice when the other woman was morose. Considering that she was only one of two surviving members of her squad, with the only other survivor left back with the shattered remnants of her division, 'morose' was probably putting too light a word to the chief's thoughts. And...Oriana wasn't going to let her friend wallow. Ashely jumped when Oriana laid a gentle hand on her shoulder, then tried to smile at her once she realized who it was.

"Yeah. That smile isn't fooling anyone, Chief. Least of all me. Come on, put those away and get cleaned up, we're going out."

"I don't—"

Ashely didn't get any more than that out as Oriana laid a finger on her lips. "Nope. You're going to come out with me. We're going to have drinks to toast the fallen. We're going to get utterly hammered to forget for the night, possibly find a guy or two, and *then* get back to the hunt tomorrow, Chief. There's a place for being stoic...but right after virtually your entire division gets shot up, along with virtually all of *New Dawn's* security people and civilian tech, isn't it. Now come on."

Ashely's shoulders actually relaxed from their hyper-tense position and she nodded. This was something she understood. A soldier's sendoff for the fallen and a cure for their own grief. She followed Oriana to the crew quarters, where she'd already had a few basic civilian clothes and necessities delivered for both of them, to replace everything they'd lost on Eden's Prime.

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Oriana grinned as she pressed her naked breasts into the gunny's back, her hands cupping the other woman's tits and expertly exploring, even as the chief bounced up and down on the cock of the overly-handsome man whose name Oriana had never bothered learning. She'd never gone in for the movie-star-plastic sort of handsome...but Ashely clearly did, and Oriana had let the tipsy chief pick their

target. After all, getting the clearly-a-bit-repressed chief to fall into a one-night-stand had been hard enough...and making sure she wasn't *quite* drunk enough to regret her actions in the morning made it even harder. As such, Oriana wasn't about the quibble about her target selection...particularly as she was personally more interested in the chief than some random guy. Now...she just had to make this experience so spectacular that any remaining fear of her being upset by it was a non-issue.

With that in mind, she set to it with a will. She sent a tiny pulse of biotic power through the hands still playing with Ashely's tits, drawing a lewd moan from the chief as the action stimulated every nerve ending in the woman's nipples at once. Even as the chief's back arched back into Oriana, she latched onto one of Ashely's earlobes, gently sucking and nibbling. The chief came with an explosive cry, her pace faltering as she lost control of her leg muscles. But Oriana had been ready for that, one hand already moving down the other woman's body and her biotics flaring. With the seamlessness that could only come from years of experience with an Asari lover that enjoyed threesomes, she pulled the chief free of the cock she'd been riding and flipped her down onto the high-class hotel mattress below them. The man made a noise of protest...right up until her biotics pulled him up to his knees even as Oriana dove between Ashely's thighs, her own ass rising off the bed toward him in clear invitation.

Startled but willing, the man took the hint and grabbed her raised hips, hilted fully in Oriana's pussy with a single unguided thrust that spoke, at least, of a decent amount of skill. She moaned, eyes closing for a moment at the surge of pleasure his more-than-decent cock elicited as it bottomed out, then opened them to focus on attacking the chief before she could recover. She grabbed Ashley's thighs, lifting them over her own shoulders even as she homed in on the Chief's soaked pussy, tongue diving it before the other woman could recover enough to realize what was going on.

Under normal circumstances, the chief probably would have rejected Oriana's attentions, not really being into women. But under *these* circumstances, with the high from cumming her brains out joined to the fading blur of alcohol in her mind, Ashely's response was pure instinct. She wrapped her legs around Oriana's head, pulling her in closer, one hand coming down to grasp the other woman's hair. Oriana managed a brief smile even as she moaned from the handsome man's efforts, a part of her cheering at getting into a straight-girl's pants. Then she had no more focus left for anything but her and Ashley's pleasure. Her tongue darted to and fro, thrusting one moment, flicking over the chief's clit another, and teasingly tracing her lips between, when Ashely got too close to cumming again. Despite the increasingly incoherent pleas coming from her 'victim,' Oriana drew it out, driving the chief to the edge repeatedly before backing off, even as she continued to moan from the efforts of the man fucking her. Finally, just as Oriana was about to peak herself, she sent a tiny jolt of biotic juice through her tongue and into the other woman's clit, sending Ashely *howling* over the edge in what was most likely the most powerful climax of the other woman's life. Mere moments later, Oriana lost control of the biotic trick as she was thrown over the edge into her own climax...

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The man, for all that he hadn't been Oriana's type, had proven himself skilled. He'd managed to make her cum twice before losing it himself...and he'd had the stamina to get it up again to fuck the sex-delirious gunnery-chief a second time. Oriana had no idea how many times the other woman had cum...but it was enough that the woman had passed out twice before the night was over. Now, the man long-gone, she accepted the heavily-loaded room service cart from the bell-boy. Well, bell-Asari, actually, whose wide eyes were roving Oriana's body, barely covered by a half-heartedly closed robe.



Oriana grinned at the girl, gave her a nicely sized tip to go with the free show, then pulled the cart in and closed the door.

The smell of the food finally caused the chief to stir, a moan coming from the other woman as her hangover fought with the hunger cravings the smell of a full-English breakfast was creating. Oriana grinned at the sound of half-misery. "Sober-up hypo is on the nightstand next to you."

The words, once they processed for the other woman, resulted in a slow hand creeping out from under the covers to feel around on the nightstand. It soon found the hypospray, filled with a cocktail colloquially known as 'sober-up,' that could both flush alcohol out of the body...and cure handovers with a concentrated dose of the right nutrients and fast-acting painkillers. There was a soft sound as the chief used the hypospray, then thirty seconds of quiet...followed by the still-nude chief sitting up in bed, cover's falling away from her naked chest. Oriana ogled appreciatively, then grinned and deflected a thrown pillow with a tiny bit of biotic power.

"Now, now...that's no way to thank someone that set up that hypo for you...and ordered us both room service."

Ashley huffed, rolling her eyes. "I think you got your fair returns last night. I don't normally do threesomes...or women, either."

Oriana grinned and waggled her eyebrows. "Oh so worth it though, wasn't it?"

Ashley huffed again, the crawled properly out from under the covers, grabbing the robe tossed to her. "Thanks. And...I suppose I have to admit it was. If that hadn't been literally the best sex of my life, I'd be kinda pissed that you suckered me into a threesome just to get in my pants."

Oriana grinned hugely, but refrained from rubbing it in. Who knows, if she was gracious about it, she might even get in those pants again. Under the right conditions, of course. Like, if she got the chief smashed and horny again. Choosing to politely ignore the chief's blush at the admission, she whipped the cover off the food cart...neatly wiping away any lingering annoyance from the gunny as she descended on the food...

## **Chapter 7: Sisters**

It had turned out that they couldn't get out of dock in just twenty-four hours, as Shepard had hoped. Not only would the repairs to the Normandy take a few hours longer than that...but Jondum Bau needed a bit more time to crack the financial records of Saren's holdings. He'd found a link to Binary Helix but needed another day to sort through that company's various holdings for a suitable target. Meanwhile, Garrus Vakarian had disappeared, much to Oriana's quiet chagrin. On quietly looking into it, it appeared that he'd been grabbed up by Nihlus to help with his own line of investigation into Saren. Despite the fact that Vakarian had been another major name associated with Shepard in the original timeline, Oriana tried to be serene about that change. The Turian was still going to be involved in some fashion...and she honestly didn't have much idea how important he'd been, anyway. There was no use crying over spilt milk...and she'd known from the start that her changes to the timeline would have consequences she'd never be able to predict.

Unfortunately, all of that was secondary to that fact that remaining so long on the Citadel had let someone catch up to her at last. Someone who she very much wanted to meet...but was terrified of

meeting at the same time. Her sister had finally caught up to her...and had simply seemed to appear out of nowhere and plot down across from Oriana at the small café she'd been enjoying lunch at. For long minutes Miranda just stared, seeming not to know what to say...and finally, Oriana's nerves couldn't take it. As calmly as she could, she spoke first.

"Hello, Miranda. I do hope you haven't led Cerberus to me. I think I may have angered them somewhat in the last few years."

Her sister started in her seat, eyes going wide, then she slumped and shook her head. "No. I made sure no one followed me. And I'm not sure I'm going back. After all, you *have* angered them. Too much so for me to shield you any longer...but...how did you know?"

"About you? Or about Cerberus?"

"Both."

Oriana sighed, used the table-console to order drinks for both of them, then settled back in her seat to lie outright to her sister. Or, well, hopefully simply redirect rather than lie, for now. "I found out about Cerberus first, actually. They were much too heavy handed with that whole medical issue I had a few years back. I trust you know what I'm talking about?"

Miranda's mouth twisted and she nodded, but didn't interrupt."

"Well, once I found out my file had been flagged so highly...I'm not stupid, Miranda. You of all people should know that. And I grew up on Illum. I knew to be careful, lest I end up disappeared at some point...but I started digging. It took several years, not to mention befriending an Asari Matriarch, to eventually discover just who'd rigged my file. But that rabbit hole led to a lot more...including a number of horrifying black projects...and one of Cerberus' old financial backers." Oriana's expression turned hard, her voice wintry. "Did you know, dear sister, that Henry Lawson was a major investor in Cerberus? He cut ties with them only when the Illusive Man decided your *skills* were more valuable than Henry's credits. Cerberus didn't need money at that point, but a *perfect* human biotic? Oh yes, they valued that far more than the money and connections dear old dad had."

Miranda had gone bone white as Oriana watched her. Good, she actually hadn't known. Oriana had thought not, all things considered, but she'd never been able to be sure. She tapped a few keys on her omnitool, sending the relevant files to Miranda. Her sister's bloodless face turned down as she opened the files with shaky hands, following the old money trails. Then an expression of rage twisted her face, only to disappear under a mask of calm as she took several deep breaths.

"And how did you find out about me? From following our *father's* tracks?"

Oriana nodded. "Yes. I never tried to make contact with you, though. Because I couldn't be sure what your loyalties were. Cerberus is a *terrorist* organization, Miranda. A nasty one, with a bunch of horrifying experimental projects."

"They agreed to protect you. And they did it too, you'd never have survived *whatever* happened to you 5 years ago, if they hadn't. But...my loyalty was always to you and they aren't willing to ignore your actions any longer." The rage flashed back on her face again for a mere moment before it was

suppressed. “And this new information means I’ll never go back to them. Though, I’m not sure where I will go.”

“I know exactly where you’ll go.”

Miranda looked at her, cocking an eyebrow, and Oriana smiled.

“I’d like to get to know my sister, Miranda. While I’m going to be a bit...busy, helping a few Spectres follow up on Eden Prime, I know Matriarch Aethyta will gladly accept some more help running *New Dawn’s* intelligence apparatus....which is quite a bit larger and more involved than I suspect even Cerberus is aware of.”

Miranda looked shocked. “But—”

Oriana interrupted. “But me no buts. We could use you, the *galaxy* could use you with what we expect is coming...and I trust Aethyta to keep an eye on you. I might want to get to know you, sis...but I’m not stupid.”

Miranda winced at that. Then sighed. “Part of be says I should go after Cerberus before they go after us, but...I do want to get to know you to...sis?”

Oriana smiled. “Don’t worry, we’ve got *plans* for Cerberus. So you’ll get your chance once the Matriarch is sure of you. And once *I’m* sure of you...” Oriana faltered, “sis, there’s something BAD coming at the galaxy. Worse than the Rachni Wars or Krogan Rebellions bad, I think. I don’t know enough yet...but we’re going to need every hand we can get if *any* of us are going to get through this.”

Miranda stared at her, searching her face and eyes for truth, then sucked in her breath at whatever she found there. “Fine. I’ll meet with this Matriarch of your’s, at least. But for now...can we talk about something else? Were your adopted parents good ones?”

Smiling at the plea in her sister’s voice, Oriana eagerly set about telling Miranda what she could of her life...both her lives, even if she wasn’t sure she’d ever be able to tell her sister more than this about the first one. For now, though...this was enough...

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Later in the day, Oriana was sitting in the storage area behind the med-bay that she’d managed to, along with Dr. Tsoni, take over for a mix of a lab and living space. It hadn’t been that hard a sell, given that both of them needed to bring some gear aboard to be of the most use...and Oriana may or may not have factored in the benefits of the close quarters with the cute little Asari doctor when she roped Liara into helping convince Shepard of the necessity. Even as she mentally smacked herself again for that thought, knowing full well that Shepard and Liara had gotten involved in the original timeline, her omnitool chimed with a vid-call. Seeing that it was Aethyta, she quickly closed the work she’d been doing to arrange new gear for the crew and answered the call.

“Your sister is just as smart as you are, kid...but seriously kinda a bitch. I think I like her.”

Oriana snorted. “Well, hello to you too, boss.”

Aethyta smirked at her. “Oh please, we both know I’m not really your boss. Now, please tell me you have a plan for what to do with your sister? I know we spoke about it in loose terms before, but you never really made a decision.”

Oriana nodded. “Yeah, that was because I really wasn’t sure how loyal Miranda was to Cerberus...and how loyal to a sister she’d gone out of her way to protect, but never really met.”

Aethyta shrugged as Oriana paused, making a ‘get on with it gesture.’

“I’m pretty sure, after how she reacted to some of what I told her, that she’d no longer loyal to Cerberus. Which, as I see it, is perfect. We’ve needed someone to handle dealing with them, since they’ve got some assets we want...and a distinct lack of caution with Repair tech that I seriously don’t want to deal with this time around. I want them shut down, hard, and anything useful they have converted for use by *New Dawn*. Put Miranda in charge of it...and assign Jack to work with her. She can keep an eye on my sister and make sure my desires aren’t betraying my instincts here.”

Aethyta thought for a moment, then nodded. “Jack hates Cerberus, so she’ll keep a close eye on her without us even needing to ask. The two of them might kill each other, though. You know how Jack is.”

Oriana grinned. “Oh, I don’t know, I think it will be good for both of them. Unless, of course, they really do kill each other...”

Aethyta shook her head, even as she smirked, then changed the subject. “So, you’re shacking up with my daughter, huh? Liara told me about it.”

“She’s keeping in touch with you? That’s good! And, yeah...I wasn’t about to put up with those goddess-awful sleeping pods, you know.”

Her business partner snorted. “Sure, and the fact that you might get to see Liara naked has nothing to do with it? I doubt it will happen, though. My daughter is such a prude, you know.”

“I admit I wouldn’t mind looking...though I’ll leave her be, she and Shepard made such a cute pair last time.”

Aethyta rolled her eyes. “Right, bullshit. Even if you could be sure they’d click again, despite all the changes...you totally have a thing for threesomes. Don’t think I didn’t hear about you managing to bang Ashley last night. Congrats on that one, by the way, I never would have believed even you could get in that one’s pants.”

Oriana grinned but didn’t take the bait, instead changing the subject to the first of several pieces of business they really did need to get sorted out. There was no telling when the next chance to communicate securely was going to be, after all...

**End of Part 3**