

## **A Mother's Regret...A Lover's Loss**

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## **A Mother's Regret...A Lover's Loss**

by [DavidFalkayn](#)

### Summary

Samara asks for help in dealing with her daughter, Morinth, on Omega, with tragedy the result.

### Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

## Prelude to tragedy

### *RRW Gallena—Bridge*

“Tovan?”

Tovan Kev, currently seated in the *Gallena's* center seat, quickly responded as he heard Tali's sobs through the comm.

“Yes, Tali? What's wrong?”

“*Can you meet me in the Raptor's Nest when you get off duty?*”

Seeing that his relief, Lieutenant Commander Cilla Oudekirk, had just exited the turbolift on to the bridge, Tovan replied, “Or course. Cilla has just come on to the bridge. I will meet you there in...fifteen minutes?”

“*That'll be fine.*” Tali responded, “*Thank you.*”

“I relieve you.” The willowy blonde Dutch-Trill Starfleet officer announced as she handed a padd to the *Gallena's* XO.

“I stand relieved.” Tovan replied as he authorized the shift change and handed the padd back to his relief. “You can find the Subcommander in her ready room if you need her, Cilla.” Tovan said as he relinquished the command chair. “Have a pleasant shift.”

“Enjoy your time off.” Cilla answered back with her usual placid expression as she entered the shift change into her log and then, settling in the center chair, took out her padd and began reading a paper on Prothean archaeology that Liara had sent to her.

### *RRW Gallena—The Raptor's Nest*

At once spotting his quarian friend seated at the bar sucking a quarian liqueur through her ‘emergency induction port’, Tovan noticed by her body language that something had upset her—seriously. Walking up to the bar, the Romulan centurion signaled the bartender to bring him a drink as he took the stool next to her. “What's wrong, Tali? What happened?”

“It's horrible.” Tali replied, choking back a sob.

“Tell me.” Tovan encouraged as he took a sip of his khali fe.

“I've been charged with treason.” The young quarian moaned. “The admirals have ordered me to report to the Fleet to stand trial. If I don't show—I'll be automatically exiled.”

“Did they explain why you're being charged?” Tovan inquired.

“No.” Tali shook her head. “I was just told that I'm being put on trial.”

“When do you have to report back to the Fleet?”

“Soon.” Tali replied, “They'll wait for a while, but not for too long. I'm going to charter a shuttle to take me to the Fleet...”

“You don't have to do that.” Tovan interrupted, raising his hand, “I can speak to the Subcommander about requisitioning a runabout and...if you'll have me...accompany you to the Fleet.”

“I can't ask you to do that.” Tali protested, only to be again interrupted by the handsome Romulan centurion.

“I insist. You're a member of the *Gallena's* crew and it is my duty as executive officer, and my desire as your friend, to come with you. Please.”

Touched by her companion's gesture, Tali placed her hand on his, “I'd like that, Tovan. To be honest, I was afraid of going alone.”

“Then, it's settled.” Tovan replied with a warm smile. “I'll speak to my Little Sister about getting that runabout while you make preparations.”

Leaning over, Tali gave the Romulan officer an affectionate embrace. Resting her chin on his shoulder, she said in a low voice, “Thank you.”

### *RRW Gallena—Captain's quarters*

“Captain's Log...” V'lana, lying face up on her bed, paused for a moment before continuing her log entry, “Computer? Enter in the current stardate—I don't feel like looking it up.”

“*Affirmative. Stardate entered into log.*”

“Thank you.” The subcommander reflexively acknowledged before continuing, “Item one: I've granted Centurion Kev permission to take my gig so that he could accompany Tali to the Migrant Fleet. Hopefully, they'll be able to clear up that matter regarding her treason charge. Pause recording.” Shaking her head, V'lana got up from her bed and walked to the replicator, “Tarkalian tea.” Taking her beverage, she returned to her bed and sat down on the edge. “As if Tali could commit treason. I haven't heard anything so ridiculous in my life. This whole thing smells

like a giant pile of mugatu shit. My Romulan blood is telling me that Tali's a pawn in someone's political powerplay."

"Item two: After I finish tying up loose ends on Omega, we're bound for our next destination—what in our universe is the Celes sector. There we will be mapping and scanning—looking for any possible wormholes or gateways or anything else that might serve as a bridge between our universes. Tubac, our resident Ferengi trader, is currently on Omega helping to set up the dabo tables I promised Aria in exchange for us taking a ten percent cut on their take, and training some of her strippers to serve as dabo girls. I'm heading down to the surface to speak with Aria and finish up our business here. Hopefully...Tubac hasn't pissed someone off enough to space him." Hearing the door chime, she called out in acknowledgement, "Come in."

"Subcommander?" Samara, the asari justicar, remarked as she entered the ready room, "Remember when I told you that I was hunting a very dangerous individual."

"Yes." V'lana nodded her head as she gestured for the elegant asari to take a seat, "I remember you said that she was incredibly vicious...what did you call her again? A...Ardent...Akshi?"

"Ardat-Yakshi." Samara corrected, "Yes. You are correct. This does concern her. Thanks to the resources of your ship, I have finally been able to track her down."

"Where is she?"

"Here." The justicar declared, "On Omega."

"The perfect hideout." V'lana replied, Samara nodding her head in agreement. "It's an open port where you can do pretty much anything you want...sell anything you want...kill anyone you want—so long as it doesn't affect Aria."

"Also correct." Samara acknowledged. "The problem is that Morinth knows me by sight. Should she see me before I am able to act..."

"She'll run and kill more people." V'lana interjected, finishing her guest's thoughts.

"Yes." Samara replied, "That is why I am here. I must ask a favor of you."

"Sure." The subcommander answered back, "What do you need?"

"I need your help in finding and killing her." The justicar pleaded.

"Is it absolutely necessary to kill her?" V'lana inquired, "Wouldn't just confining her to a prison or penal colony be sufficient?"

"I'm afraid not." The justicar shook her head. "Assuming she would allow herself to be captured, she would only escape to kill again." Taking a deep breath, Samara confessed in a haunted voice, "I have no choice but to kill my daughter."

"Your daughter?" V'lana exclaimed as she got up from her chair and began pacing. "I think you need to tell me what's going on here, Samara. Everything."

"It will take some time, Subcommander and it is not a story I enjoy telling." Samara replied.

"I understand that." V'lana replied as she returned to her seat, "But I need context here. After Garrus and Zaeed, I am not in the mood for any more honor crusades or wars for personal justice. The only reason I'm giving you a hearing on this is because the law on Omega is pretty much what you make of it and your daughter is so dangerous. So...again I repeat...is Morinth's death absolutely necessary and if so...why?"

"Please understand..." Samara began haltingly, "what I am about to tell you is very personal and must remain in complete confidence."

"I swear no one will hear what we say in this room." The subcommander solemnly vowed, "You have my word."

"Very well." Samara replied, lowering her head as she began her tale. "During my maiden years I was a mercenary. Reasons caused me to leave that life and I found someone...an asari...and settled into my matron phase and we had three pureblood children together. Unfortunately, all three of my girls were Ardat-Yakshi. The doctors believed that as I was a pureblood and mated with an asari, the genetic defect that caused one to become Ardat-Yakshi was passed on to my daughters."

"So what happens in cases where an ardat-yakshi is born?" V'lana inquired, "Are they killed or..."

"No." Samara shook her head, "They are offered a choice once old enough. There is a monastery on Lessus that houses those with conditions similar to my daughters. They are well treated and comfortable..." the justicar assured, "but once admitted, they are not permitted to leave until they can show with absolute certainty that they can be reintegrated into asari society once again."

"So, it's not necessarily life imprisonment." V'lana surmised, the asari justicar nodding her head in confirmation.

"Correct. Those who can prove that they can control their condition are eventually permitted to leave, but those who cannot or will not, are confined in the monastery for the remainder of their lives."

"I see." V'lana responded thoughtfully. "So two of your daughters accepted imprisonment while the third didn't."

"Also correct." Samara affirmed. "Rila...the eldest...and Falere...my youngest...currently reside at the monastery. Morinth...my middle daughter...rebelled. She is the one I seek."

"And there's no way to correct her condition?" V'lana inquired.

“No.” Samara shook her head, her tone tinged with regret. “Once she made her escape, she began a spree of murder and destruction. She cannot be saved. The sickness is like an addiction—one that cannot be cured and will only get worse with every life she takes.”

Taking a deep breath as she weighed her options, the subcommander made her decision. “All right. I will help you track down your daughter and will aid you as far as stopping her is concerned. Neither I nor anyone on my crew will help you kill her though. If she dies in combat or resisting arrest—then that is the way it goes. But...if she chooses to surrender...we take her alive.” Her eyes boring into those of the justicar, V’lana declared firmly, “Those terms are non-negotiable. If you cannot accept them, then I am afraid I cannot help you.”

“Very well, as I have no other choice, I agree to your terms.” Samara reluctantly acknowledged.

“Good.” V’lana nodded, “Is there anyone in particular you want to assist you in this?”

“Yes.” The justicar replied, “I would like to ask Commander Alenko if he would aid me. He will not alert Morinth as a Romulan or one of the other races on this ship would. He has also served with Shepard in taking down Saren and would appeal to my daughter’s penchant for violence.”

“The decision has to be his.” V’lana replied, “But if he is agreeable, then I have no problems with him accompanying you.” Tapping her comm, the subcommander spoke, “Kaidan?”

*“Yes, ‘lana?”*

“Can you come to my ready room please? Something important has come up—something that has to remain confidential.”

*“Sure. I’m on my way.”*

Minutes later, her lover entered the ready room with a questioning look on his face as he saw Samara sitting in one of the chairs opposite the subcommander’s desk. “Madame Justicar.” The human biotic politely greeted before turning his gaze to his paramour, “What is it, ‘lana? I’m assuming it has something to do with Samara?”

“It does.” V’lana replied with a single nod of her head as she gestured to the other chair, “Have a seat, Kaidan and I’ll let Samara fill you in on everything.”

“Sure.” The handsome Canadian answered back as he took his seat, “What’s going on?”

Nodding her head at V’lana’s unspoken permission to proceed, Samara replied, “I need your assistance on a very delicate matter.”

Quietly listening as the justicar explained the situation, Alenko waited until she had concluded before speaking. “So...you’re saying that she’s beyond hope?”

“I’m afraid so.” Samara asserted, “But...I promised the subcommander that if Morinth surrendered voluntarily, she would be taken into custody.”

“This could be very dangerous, love.” The beautiful Romulan warned, “If this Morinth gets her claws into you...”

“I will be with him.” Samara solemnly vowed. “I will see that he comes to no harm.”

“Can you guarantee that?” V’lana pointedly asked.

“No.” The asari justicar shook her head. “All I can promise is that I will do everything I can to ensure his safety. But, yes, a lot of things could go wrong.”

“That’s assuming you’re able to find her.” V’lana pointed out, sounding another cautionary note. “She might well have moved on in the time between your receiving your intelligence and now.”

“Aria might have an idea as to whether she’s still on Omega or not.” Kaidan suggested.

“She is wired into everything that goes on in that station.” The subcommander mused, “All right. I’m on my way to see her anyway about some other business, so you two can tag along and we’ll see what she knows.”

Nodding her head in agreement, Samara affirmed, “That is acceptable.”

“Works for me.” Kaidan assented.

“Okay.” V’lana nodded her head, “I don’t like this and I have a bad feeling about it, but I’ll go ahead and authorize it. Meet me in the hangar bay in one hour.”

## Act 2: A Mother's Grief

### Chapter Summary

V'iana, Kaidan, and Samara begin their investigation into Morinth's activities.

#### *Omega—Afterlife*

“Just like the Paradise Bar on Nimbus III where I used to pick pockets and turn tricks.” V'iana remarked as she rolled her eyes. “Gotta watch your step and be careful about who you take a drink from or you might end up on your way to an Orion whorehouse.”

“Speaking from personal experience?” Samara inquired in curiosity.

“My own?” The subcommander answered back with a shake of her head, “No. But I had a few friends...really more business acquaintances who were in the same line of work. When I was a teenager scraping and getting by on that shit planet, it didn't pay to let people get too close to you. Anyway, someone I knew would disappear one night after going off with a client or after being carried off drunk. Much later, a little before coming here, I and my team ran into a human woman who had been taken by slavers. She was in a cage in a nightclub owned by Hassan the Undying. I always call him Hassan the Fat or Hassan the Shithead though as Undying no longer works for him.”

“Why is that?” The asari justicar queried.

With a grim expression on her face, V'iana responded, “He became Hassan the Dead after I shoved a plasma torpedo up his ship's exhaust manifold. Anyway, as I was saying, Hassan kept her in a cage to sell to whoever would buy her. That's bad enough, but it gets worse. The guards in that shithole liked to use their prisoners for...well...you get the idea.”

“I do. Deplorable.” Samara responded with a grim look on her face, “Why is a place like that permitted to exist?”

“Just like Omega, it's neutral territory—not controlled by any of the major powers for a couple of reasons.” V'iana replied, answering the justicar's query. “First, it's more trouble than it's worth to send a fleet to take out the pirates and mercenaries, and then maintain occupation troops to keep order. And second, it's a useful place for unofficial meetings that you don't want anyone to know about. So before I grant any shore leave here, I'm going to have to get Aria's permission to station security troops as a shore patrol.”

“That's going to be a tall order.” Kaidan remarked with a sardonic grin.

“Yeah.” V'iana agreed, “I don't see that happening anytime in the near future. So...no shore leave for now—I'm not going to risk any of my people being snatched. Too big an intelligence risk.”

“True.” Kaidan agreed as the party approached the stairs leading up to the unofficial queen of Omega's perch. “I wouldn't want someone like the batarians getting hold of warp drive technology. That would be bad—very...very...bad.”

“Exactly.” The subcommander responded as Anto motioned for them to proceed.

“Aria's expecting you. Go on up.”

As they entered Aria's sanctum, the asari crime boss waved off the guard holding a scanning device, “I don't think that will be necessary now.”

“Thanks, Aria.” V'iana responded with a smile as she took a seat on the couch with Kaidan by her side. “So...how are things going with Tubac? Did you get the dabo tables set up and operating?”

“We did.” Aria responded with a smirk and a nod of her head, “You were as good as your word, profits from the casino have increased markedly. I'd say you've earned your ten percent cut.” Chuckling, she added, “The strippers who volunteered to be dabo girls nearly killed your trader when he tried to charge them tuition for training them. His people...what do you call them?”

“Ferengi.”

“Yes. Ferengi. They put the volus to shame as far as both greed and the desire for profit are concerned.” Aria exclaimed with a hearty laugh.

“That's because their whole culture is based around profit, unlike the volus.” The subcommander explained, “They call their holy book the Rules of Acquisition and when they die, they have to bribe their way into their version of the afterlife—The Great Exchequer.”

“One of these days you must tell me more about the species in your universe.” The crime lord remarked conversationally. Then, her attention focused on Samara, Aria questioned, “Is there any reason why you've brought a justicar here? You understand...justicars and places like Omega tend to not mix very well.”

“Do not worry.” Samara declared, “I am not in pursuit of you.”

“Good.” Aria responded, “I'd hate to have to clean up a mess. So...” She inquired, turning her attention back the Romulan seated near her, “Why is she here?”

"We're looking for an Ardat-Yakshi." V'lana replied.

"I knew it." Aria answered back in a grim tone, "Nothing leaves a body quite so...empty...as an Ardat-Yakshi."

"You haven't done anything to try to kill her?" Samara inquired.

"Why should I?" The crime boss answered back, "She hasn't done anything to fuck with me." Pausing for a moment, Aria passed on her information, "You've done some good turns for me. It's only fair that I do one for you. Check with a woman staying in one of the tenements near the old quarantine zone. Her daughter was the latest victim. A pity..." Aria remarked with just a note of regret in her voice, "from what I was told, she was a pretty human. Also a very talented artist. I was thinking about commissioning her for a work."

"Thanks, Aria." V'lana replied as she rose to her feet.

"Good luck finding your Ardat-Yakshi." Aria responded, adding with a faint note of sincerity, "Better luck catching her."

As they passed by a batarian street preacher ranting against humans, V'lana shook her head, "He's still here? He was here the last time I passed through. Thought I was human until he saw my ears."

"Even though the humans in this universe paid a steep price to save the Citadel..." Samara lamented, "A lot of ill will towards them still exists...and..." she remarked somberly, "sometimes with good reason. The humans in your universe have by and large embraced the diversity of life, but here...there is still a great deal of mistrust and xenophobia."

"A lot of good people died to defeat Sovereign." Kaidan reminisced. "I was with Shepard when she made the decision to save the Council. She could have easily saved a lot of human lives and let the Council die. I also lost a lot of friends and former shipmates on the *Cape Town*."

"There's mistrust and suspicion on all sides...human...batarian...turian." V'lana noted as the loudspeaker reporting the latest from the batarian state news agency boasted about a recent attack on a human colony followed by an editorial calling out the Council for its restrictions on the slave trade. "Hear what I mean."

"Yes." Samara acknowledged, "Even we asari are often withdrawn and narrow where the other races are concerned. We hide behind a mask of superiority because of our extended lifetimes. Living a long life..." the justicar reluctantly admitted, "does not necessarily mean that the person living that life is a wise person. It just means that they've lived a long life."

"This is the apartment Aria was telling us about." V'lana stated as she pressed the door's enunciator and spoke, "May we come in? We'd like to talk to you about your daughter."

"One moment." The door opened to reveal a haggard looking human woman, her eyes red from tears. "You'll excuse me if I'm not at my best..."

"It's all right." Samara replied soothingly. "We regret your loss."

"We have some questions if that's all right with you?" Kaidan asked in a consoling voice.

"Of course." The grieving mother replied as she ushered her guests into her cramped abode.

"May we ask your daughter's name?" V'lana questioned as she began the interview.

"Nef." The mother responded as she sat down at the edge of her bed. "Her name was Nef. Short for Nefertiti. She died a week ago and no one here seems to care. The medics said the cause of death was a brain hemorrhage, but that's not true. I know she was murdered. Some sick person took my baby away from me."

"We think she was murdered too." V'lana affirmed, "We're looking for the killer. Will you help us?"

"Thank you." The distraught mother sobbed, "I didn't think anyone would ever believe me. It's so hard...I'm all alone now."

"You're not alone." Samara replied in a soft voice. "We will get justice for your daughter. This I swear to you."

"Were you sent by Aria?" The mother asked as she dried the tears from her eyes.

"We're here to help you." Kaidan interjected, "Does it matter who might or might not have sent us?"

"I'm sorry." The mother apologized, "It's just that no one else here on this hellhole gives a damn. You're the first people I've talked to who do. I'll do everything I can to help you. For Nef."

"Thank you." The Romulan subcommander replied, "Did your daughter have a lot of friends?"

"Not really. No. She was very shy and spent most of her time in her room making sculptures. Something changed in the few weeks though..."

"What?" Samara gently inquired.

"She started talking non-stop about this asari she'd met. I think her name was Morinth. I didn't like her." The mother gritted her teeth, "She dragged my daughter off to clubs and I think she was giving her drugs."

"Samara?" Kaidan queried, "Does Morinth use drugs to control her victims?"

"No." The justicar responded, shaking her head, "She doesn't have to. She controls them through sheer will. The drugs and clubs are just a

lifestyle choice for her. You could say that she's a hedonist."

"I am too." V'lana remarked, "But I don't go around killing people for my kicks."

"Did this Morinth kill my daughter?" The mother asked, tears once again running down her cheeks.

"We think so." Kaidan replied.

"As we promised..." V'lana answered back in a compassionate voice, "we'll make sure that Nef rests easier with the Elements."

"Thank you." The mother tearfully replied, "I hope so."

"Can you tell us anything more about Morinth?" Kaidan asked.

"Not much." The mother shook her head, "Nef wouldn't bring her here, but she always talked like she was some sort of queen or goddess."

"That is how Morinth controls her victims." Samara declared in a somber voice. "Her force of personality is so strong that only the strongest of wills can resist her."

"Did Nef have any places where she liked to go?" V'lana inquired, "Like clubs...museums...libraries...bars?"

A chuckle both sad and ironic escaping from the mother's lips, the distraught woman replied, "Libraries? Museums? On Omega? No. She always kept to herself and worked from home. Then...a few weeks ago..."

"Right after she met Morinth." Kaidan concluded.

"Right." Nef's mother nodded her head, "She began going out all the time to the VIP section of Aria's club. I think you need a password to get in. That was when everything about her began to change." The mother moaned, "She looked tired and distracted whenever she was here. She couldn't wait to get back to Morinth."

"Could be the drugs causing that." V'lana conjectured, "And other possibilities, Samara?"

"It's part of the subversion process." The asari justicar declared, "Her will overpowering that of her victim's."

"What sort of person was Nef?" Kaidan queried.

"She had a fire smoldering inside her." The grieving mother replied, "She was shy, but also very creative and driven. And she was the best girl a mother could hope for."

"How did she express her creativity?" Samara asked.

"She was a sculptor." The mother responded, "A very good one. Several galleries were interested in her work. They said it was fresh and different."

"Can we examine her room?" V'lana asked, "We'll try not to disturb anything, but there could be some valuable clues in there that would help us."

"I didn't want to disturb anything. It's all as she left it." The mother sobbed, "That's the way it always will be. My baby's gone and nothing's going to fix that."

Acting instinctively, V'lana embraced the crying mother, hugging her briefly.

"Thank you." The mother responded through her tears. "I'm sorry. I just miss her so very much."

"We understand. We've all suffered pain and loss." Kaidan commiserated as memories of Jane flitted through his mind.

Samara gravely declared in a somber, sympathetic voice, "I too know what it is like to lose a daughter."

"Thank you...thank you all." The mother said with a snuffle. "If it helps you to catch the killer, feel free to look around."

"We will be respectful." Samara promised as the grieving woman opened the door to her daughter's room.

"A note." Kaidan exclaimed, pointing to something lying on the bed. Picking it up, he read aloud, "Nef...I'm sending you this hologram by the elcor artist Forta. His work is sublime, but don't stare at it too long or you might go mad."

"It's like looking into the abyss." V'lana commented as she examined the hologram. "You know you shouldn't look too long at it, but you're drawn to it."

"There's more." Kaidan said as he continued reading, "I don't want anything bad to happen to you, love. Can't wait to hear what you think of Forta."

"Her diary?" V'lana announced, pointing to a still open computer. "Might be something useful in here. "Read the newest entry." The Romulan subcommander requested as a ghostly holographic image of Nef appeared on the screen.

*"Cycle 42, Orbit 67. She's going to take me to her apartment tonight. Whatever happens, I want to be with her forever. She can sell my pieces and we can live somewhere glamorous, like the women in Vaenia, that vid Morinth likes."*

“*Vaenia* is an erotic work in our literature.” Samara explained, “It has been adapted for several vids. The work reaches Morinth on a sensual level.”

“*How did this happen to me? I’m just dumb trash from Omega.*”

Shaking her head as she gazed at the collection of sculptures and sketches in the room, V’lana declared, “She wasn’t trash. She was a talented artist cut down before she even had a chance to spread her wings.” Taking a breath and exhaling, she commanded, “Play the middle entry.”

“*Cycle 36, Orbit 67. Am I a freak? Morinth is a girl like me, and she’s definitely not human.*”

“I know that many humans in this universe still have taboos regarding interspecies relationships.” V’lana declared, “Does that also apply to relations between those of the same sex?”

“Not really.” Kaidan shook his head. “But there are exceptions. While the Systems Alliance and most of the nations on Earth respect and legally protect same-sex relationships and marriages, there are some nations and religious faiths that still frown on it. Maybe she belonged to one of those?”

“Could be.” V’lana nodded her head as the ghost on the diary screen continued to speak.

“*Just...when we dance and the Hallex is flowing through me...*”

Pausing the recording, Kaidan explained to his Romulan lover, “Hallex is a very powerful drug popular among the club set. It’s taken in pills and heightens the senses and also gives the user a feeling of extreme euphoria. It’s also highly addictive.”

“It weakens the resolve of the user.” Samara interjected, “Making them less aware and more willing to mate.”

“Drugging her victims.” V’lana scowled, “How quaint.” She then unpaused the recording.

“*The way she looks at me—with a hunger...a longing...no one’s ever looked at me like that. We kissed tonight and it felt so right.*”

“Play the oldest entry.” The subcommander requested as Nef’s image again appeared.

“*Cycle 34, Orbit 671. For once, I’ve got a lot to talk about! I dropped Jarut’s name and they let me into the VIP room at Afterlife. I was sure everyone was staring at me! Then, the most beautiful asari began dancing near me. She moves like water—form and volume, but shifting, changing. I’m in a trance. Then I’m dancing with her! Later, we went for skewers and I’m supposed to see her again tomorrow.*”

“End playback and close journal.” V’lana commanded, “I think we’ve gotten everything we’re going to get from the diary.” The Romulan subcommander explained, “No need to pry any deeper into her life.”

“Agreed.” Both Kaidan and Samara echoed, the human biotic declaring, “Let the dead rest in peace.”

“Morinth is attracted to artists and creators. Someone with a spark who is slightly isolated from their peers.” Samara explained, offering her own insights into her daughter’s behavior. “She impresses and overpowers her victim through sex appeal and sophistication. Then, when her prey is off guard, she strikes. For her, it’s not so much the conquest that matters as the hunt.”

“Be careful, Kaidan.” V’lana advised as she placed her hand on her lover’s forearm. “Morinth’s been at this for a long time. We’re dealing with a dangerous t’liss here. Don’t underestimate her.”

“The subcommander is correct.” Samara confirmed, “Morinth will speak to you on many levels. Body...scent...her eyes and voice...she will engage all of your senses...and then...when you are at your most vulnerable--strike.”

“Are you sure you want to go through with this, Kaidan?” V’lana, her face etched with worry, cautioned her lover.

“I don’t see as to whether we have any choice.” The handsome Canadian replied, “Morinth has to be stopped or she’s just going to kill more girls like Nef. I know what you’re thinking...that it’s another ‘honor crusade’ like with Garrus and Zaeed, but this time it really isn’t.” Kaidan explained, “Morinth is dangerous.”

“I know.” V’lana interrupted, “She’s been at it for over four hundred years—all the more reason why you shouldn’t...”

“Someone has to.” Kaidan declared, cutting off his lover before she could finish her sentence. “It can’t be you because your people aren’t well known here yet. While yes, a part of her would probably be drawn to you, she would also be more on her guard. Also, you don’t really understand the culture here. You could very easily say or do the wrong thing and spook her. It has to be me...do you see that?”

“Yeah. I do.” The lovely Romulan reluctantly conceded, “But that doesn’t mean I have to like it.”

“I know.” Kaidan replied as he gave his paramour a quick loving embrace before turning his attention to the justicar who had been silently observing. “What’s our next step, Samara?”

“Storming her den is out of the question.” The justicar answered back, “She’s got escape routes planned and will be long gone before we can catch her and we won’t see or hear from her again for fifty years or longer. We can’t afford to make any mistakes.”

“So we have to set a trap for her.” Kaidan prompted, Samara nodding her head in response.

“Precisely. She seems to like using Afterlife’s VIP section as her hunting ground. You’ll need to go there alone and unarmed.” Speaking quickly before the subcommander could interrupt, the asari justicar declared, “If she sees that you’re carrying weapons or sees me, she’ll know it’s a trap right away. And, if you go with the subcommander, she won’t even approach you. You have to lure her out and into her quarters



where I'll be ready to strike.”

“How do you know she'll be attracted to me in the first place?” Kaidan questioned.

“You helped take down Saren and have lived a life of violence.” Samara replied encouragingly. “That will attract her. You also have a sensitive and creative side, she will be drawn to that as well. I promise you that I will be constantly watching over you. You will never be alone.”

Shaking her head, V'lana reluctantly agreed to the plan. “If you're going to do this, you need to get started. Good luck and Jolan tru, Kaidan.” Turning to Samara, the subcommander gazed directly into the asari's eyes, “And Samara—you better keep your promise and take care of him or I'm going to go on a 'honor crusade' of my own. Understand?”

“Clearly, Subcommander. I swear I will look after Commander Alenko.”

“Let's go.” Kaidan prompted, pointing to the exit, “The sooner we get started, the sooner we can get it over with.”

As she watched her lover and the justicar walk out the door, V'lana took a deep breath and exhaled as she muttered to herself, “Why do I think I just made a huge mistake?”

## Act 3: Bait

### Chapter Summary

Kaidan and Samara bait their trap--but are they the hunters--or the hunted?

#### *Afterlife bar*

"Another asari mead." V'lana requested as she handed the turian bartender her glass, receiving in return a full goblet. Downing it in one gulp, she handed it back to the bartender, "Hit me with another and keep them coming until I say when or I pass out—whichever comes first."

"Careful Lola...asari mead sneaks up on you and the last thing you want is to get sloshed here."

"Carrying detox." V'lana smirked, slurring her words slightly as she held up a hypo.

"Yeah." James chuckled as he took the hypo and injected the subcommander with it, "But carrying it and knowing when to use it are two different things."

The antidote clearing the alcohol out of her system, V'lana sighed, "Yeah. I know. It's just..."

"You're worried about Alenko." Vega interrupted in a kind voice, "Yeah. I am too. Waiting's a bitch, isn't it?"

"It sure as hell is." V'lana growled.

"Well...tell you what..." James suggested with a cockeyed grin on his face. "I managed to scare up a card game with some of Aria's guards. Why don't you join us? Better than drinking alone here."

"You're right." V'lana replied with a sigh, "Lead on."

"Here you go, Trexiks." James exclaimed as handed the bartender his credit chit, paying the subcommander's tab for her. "Keep the change."

"Thanks, James." The bartender replied, "Oh...tell your human friends not to go to the downstairs bar, Forvan's tending bar tonight."

"Thanks. I will." Vega responded with a nod of his head, "Have a good shift Trex."

"Take it light, Vega!"

#### *Entrance to the VIP section of Afterlife*

"Wait a moment, Commander." Samara requested as she drew the biotic into an alleyway close to the entrance. "There are some things you need to be aware of. As you know, Morinth is a predator. She will be very cautious. You need to get her interested in you enough to contact you, while at the same time being careful not to repel her or scare her off."

"How do I do that?" Kaidan inquired.

"When she finally decides to meet you, try to subtly steer her towards inviting you to her apartment. I will follow behind at a safe distance and when the time is right, spring the trap. Be careful, until I get there, you will be in great danger. She is planning to inflict great horrors on you and if you're not on your guard, you'll want her to."

"How can I get her interested in me when I'm not even talking to her?"

"She's attracted to courage or suicidal bravery." Samara explained, "If you hurt someone defending yourself or someone else, she'll be impressed. But, if you are the one picking the fight, she'll lose interest. She likes it when someone shows skill in smoothly working through a nightclub crowd. You'll attract her the moment she sees you. What you have to do is lure her into dropping her guard."

"So say we're talking and she's interested..." Kaidan queried, "How do I get her to take me home with her. I get the feeling the direct approach won't work."

"It won't." Samara affirmed immediately. "She's drawn towards those showing strength, directness, and vigor, but is turned off by displays of modesty, chivalry, or humility. She's especially excited by violence. You've killed, Commander. She'll like that."

"Okay." Kaidan took a deep breath and exhaled, "I think we've covered everything. I guess it's time to go in."

"Do not worry, Commander." Samara assured, "I will be with you and will not let you come to harm. Also, if you're unsure about anything, come back here and talk to me. Remember, we only get one chance at this."

"I won't fuck it up." Kaidan swore.

"I know." Samara confidently replied, "Good luck."

Coming up to the turian bouncer guarding the entrance, Kaidan declared after the guard asked him what he wanted, “I was told by someone that this place puts the rest of Afterlife to shame.”

“Your friend’s smart. Who was it?”

“Jaruu.”

“Go on in.” The bouncer replied as he opened the door, “A piece of friendly advice: You start a fight, we hurt you. If someone starts shit with you though, then you can kick their ass. Have a good time.”

Entering the bar, Kaidan noticed a man near the entranceway leaning against the wall. “Hey? You got a sec?”

“Sure.” Kaidan replied, “What do you want?”

“Do you know where I can get any tickets for Expel-10? They’re a sensory band. I heard this gorgeous asari say that this is her favorite band, so I’m hoping to get tickets…”

“So that she’ll go out with you?” Kaidan interrupted as he filed the information he’d just been given in his memory.

“Yeah.” The man enthusiastically replied, “But I gotta act quick. The band’s playing tomorrow and I don’t have any tickets.”

“Sorry, man.” Kaidan replied, shaking his head, “You’re out of luck, I don’t have any.”

“Well if you score some, let me know. There’s creds in it for you if you do.”

As he sauntered at a leisurely pace near the dance floor, Kaidan overheard a turian coming on strong to an asari dancer.

“Come on, baby…” the turian propositioned, “I can pay. I’m a good tipper too.”

“Stay away from me!” The dancer exclaimed in an irate tone.

“You playing hard to get?” The turian pressed, “Come on…give it up, baby. I’m sold. I got creds. We’ll go on back to my place. Don’t worry…I’m not into anything kinky if that’s what you’re worried about.”

Pushing the turian back, the asari snapped angrily, “Back the hell off asshole! I’m a dancer not a hooker. You looking to get laid—go up to the main level and leave me alone.”

“You got a mouth.” The turian lewdly remarked, “I can’t wait to see you use it.”

“That’s it.” Kaidan warned, interposing himself between the turian and the dancer. “She told you to back off. So, back the hell off—now!”

“What business is it of yours?” The turian retorted. “I’m just looking for a good time. Now get the hell out before I throw you out.”

As the turian approached him, Kaidan struck, punching him first in the gut and then a quick uppercut that knocked the brute on to the floor. Watching as his foe slowly got to his feet, the human allowed his biotics to momentarily flare as he pointed to the exit. “You can leave on your own two feet or I can throw you out. You’re choice.”

“I’m leaving…I’m leaving.” The turian said as he sulkily headed for the exit muttering under his breath, “Damn humans. Think they own everything.”

“Thanks for your help.” The asari said with a slight smile, “Security must be on break or something—again.”

Leaving with just a simple nod of his head, Kaidan continued his leisurely stroll until his attention was drawn by a man standing near some tables motioning for him to come over. “What is it?” The biotic asked in a flat tone of voice.

The man glanced nervously at the room, “I need help and don’t know who to ask. You’re human and you’re not high, so you’re it. Can you help me out here?”

“Depends on what you need.” Kaidan replied cautiously. “Slow down and tell me what the issue is and we’ll take it from there.”

“All right.” The man heaved a sigh, “Give me a moment. I just don’t know what to do here.”

“Take your time.”

“My friend, Moira, is a reporter. She’s doing a piece on Omega’s gangs and she’s been hanging out with Florit…”

“Who’s Florit?”

“Florit’s the leader of the Red Talons.” The man explained, “He’s one of the worst of them—although they’re all pretty bad.”

“Risky business. This could end up very bad for her if she’s not careful.” Kaidan cautioned.

“You’re right.” The man confirmed as he glanced in the direction of a table where a man and woman were talking with each other. “That’s her. Florit’s made her. His gang’s on its way here and they’re going to mess her up—as a warning to anyone else. I have to get a message to her—fast.”

“You’ve got a lot of info on this.” Kaidan skeptically responded, “Wanna tell me how?”

"I'm her tech." The man explained, "I've been monitoring the gang's communication. The last transmission said that Florit's gonna ice her." His face reflecting his fear, the man pleaded, "I'm just a techie. I'm way outta my league here."

"What do you want me to do?" Kaidan asked.

"We have a code." The man explained, "All you have to do is go over and say two words. My friend will get the message and take off. Just say 'terminal' and 'eternity' in that order—it has to be in that order. Please tell me you can do that. If you don't—she's dead."

"I can do that." Kaidan responded with a nod of his head.

"Thank you!" The man answered back, relieved, "Thank you."

Walking calmly and leisurely over to where Florit sat talking with his victim, Kaidan paused at their table.

"Something you need, man?" Florit challenged.

"Is there a public extranet terminal around here?" Kaidan asked, dropping the first code word.

"In a club?" Florit laughed, "Don't you have an omnitool?"

"That is a pretty strange question." Moira interjected, picking up immediately on the first code word.

"I get by on public terminals." Kaidan replied as he dropped the second word, "My omnitool's been broken for an eternity."

At once picking up on the code sequence warning her of danger, Moira stood up, "I gotta go pee, Florit."

"Hurry back, Moira." The gang leader responded, "I'm ready to head out."

Continuing his sweep of the bar, Kaidan overheard a turian tough talking to his pal, "Good cred hunting tonight. We hit 'em in an alley and as long as they're not one of Aria's people, we're good."

The other turian responded, "We got to get enough creds to get Hink off our backs."

As Kaidan approached them, the first turian glowered at him, "What are you doing here?"

"I'm here to tell you to get the hell out." Kaidan answered back in a gruff tone.

"We gotta pay the man." The turian answered back, "We work for Hink. Get it? So...what do you think of us now..."

"How about I give you enough creds so that you can pay your boss. Then you leave and stay gone. No one gets hurt."

"I can live with that." The turian replied.

Unknown to the human biotic, and just as Samara had said, he was being observed as he worked his way through the club. Walking past an asari woman, she called out for him. "My name is Morinth. I've been watching you. You're the most interesting person in this place. I've got a booth tucked away over here in the shadows. Come...sit with me."

### *Afterlife—the guards' breakroom*

"Read 'em and weep!" James cried out in victory as he laid down his full house and raked in the pot.

"Fuck you, Vega!" V'lana joked as she laid down her cards, "Two fucking pair."

"Three of a kind." Aria's turian bodyguard, Grizz, growled as he set down his cards.

"Beats my pair of jacks." Bray grumbled as he lit up a cigarette. Speaking to the sole female at the table, the batarian tough nodded his head, "You're alright, Lola. Not like the Alliance humans who come here."

"Hey!" James protested.

"You don't count, Vega." The batarian laughed. "You're practically one of us." Turning his gaze back on the lovely Romulan, Bray remarked, "Hell...so are you. You play poker...cuss...drink like a fish...helped out Aria a couple of times when she needed it—and don't think she hasn't noticed."

"And I owe you big for the way you handled the Patriarch." Grizz added as he guzzled down some turian ale from his bottle. "Nice and smooth. Got him to leave before those Blood Pack mercs arrived. Aria especially liked that. And we liked that there was no mess to clean up and no bodies to drag out."

"Yeah." Bray said as he shuffled the cards, "You and your people are welcome here anytime—even your humans. Just be sure they wear those uniforms."

"Especially the women with their miniskirts." Grizz chuckled. "But yeah, Bray's right. Just tell any humans on your crew to wear their uniforms or something to mark them different from the local or Alliance humans and we'll make sure that no one messes with them."

"Aria also wanted me to tell you that she's allowing you to post a small number of guards as a...what do you call it? Shore patrol?" Bray

informed the subcommander and her human companion, "So long as one of our people are with them."

"I've got no problem with that." V'lana nodded her head, accepting the crime queen's terms.

"Someone better clue Forvan in to leave Lola's humans alone." Grizz pointed out.

"I'll make sure he gets the message." Bray assured.

"Who's Forvan?" V'lana inquired, "That's the second time I heard that name mentioned. He got a problem with humans or something?"

"Yeah." Bray answered back, nodding his head. "His brothers were stationed at a mining colony on Bekke when some humans led by a big dark-skinned human who used biotics."

"Sounds like Jacob, Lola." Vega muttered, "Might not be a bad idea to keep him away from here."

"If he's the one who led that attack." Bray nodded his head in agreement, "Yeah. Best to keep him out. I don't have a grudge against him, but Forvan and a bunch of other batarians do."

"Okay." V'lana nodded, scowling down at her cards as she drank her beer, "You said he led an attack on Bekke. What happened? Were his brothers killed in the attack?"

"Yeah." Bray replied. "So Forvan now blames all humans and gets back at them by poisoning their drinks."

"Don't worry." Grizz interjected assuring, "We'll make sure he doesn't do it to any of your people. They'll be safe in Afterlife, the markets, and the docks." The turian bodyguard further clarified, "Outside those areas though...we can't guarantee anything."

"Fair enough." V'lana nodded her head as she grabbed a full bottle of beer and, opening it, took a good, hearty swig, "I'll make sure my people understand and begin authorizing shore leave parties."

"All right, Lola!" Vega exclaimed as he pushed his chips into the pot, "I've been wanting to bring Solana here for a drink and maybe a game with these lugs."

"Great!" Bray responded with a big grin on his face, "Aria will be pleased. The bet is fifty credits. In or out?"

## Act 4: Loss

### Chapter Summary

Kaidan and Samara spring their trap only it doesn't go as planned leaving V'lana to pick up the pieces.

#### *Afterlife—VIP lounge*

“On some nights...” Morinth said as she flirted with the human seated next to her in the booth, “There’s no one interesting to talk to here. Other nights...there’s just one person. Tonight it’s you? Why is that?”

Remembering his earlier conversation with Samara, Kaidan replied, “You and I want the same things.”

“Do we?”

Seeing that she was pulling back, Kaidan quickly responded, “What sort of music do you like?”

“I’m into dark rhythms and violent pulses.” Morinth replied, “Something that stirs the primitive in me. What about you?”

Realizing that his next answer might well determine the success or failure of the mission, Alenko, remembering his earlier conversation with the man seeking tickets, answered back, “I’m curious about this band—Expel 10. Have you heard of it?”

Her smile indicating satisfaction at his response, Morinth replied, “They get in my head and tear it to pieces. Did you know that they’re in concert here soon? Maybe we should go together.” She then further tested, “You can lose yourself in the music here, you know. Did you know that there are ways to enhance that?”

“What about Hallex?” Kaidan responded with a slight smile.

“It slithers through my soul.” Morinth declared, her smile growing wider, “Looks like we do have some things in common after all.”

“What sort of art do you like?” Kaidan inquired, “I’ve just recently gotten into this elcor sculptor, Forta.”

“Same here.” Morinth exclaimed with a predatory grin. “He speaks to the dark places inside me. But sculpture isn’t the only thing that reaches out and grabs me. Some vids also speak to me. What about you?”

“Have you seen *Vaenia*?” Alenko asked.

“That’s my favorite.” Morinth responded, “The two actresses on it are so glamorous. Maybe we could watch it together?” Changing the subject, Morinth probed, “I enjoy seeing new things and new places. What about you? Where have you been?”

“Where have I not been?” Kaidan chuckled, “I’ve traveled all over the galaxy.”

“It changes you, doesn’t it?” Morinth answered back, eagerly waiting for her prospective victim’s answer.

“Real travel...” Kaidan declared, “means going to dangerous places.”

The smile still on her face, Morinth exclaimed, “Places where you can see and do things most people can’t imagine. When I travel, I like to go to those places that are dark...dangerous. What about you?”

“I like violent places. Places where you have to be smart and tough to win.” Alenko boldly asserted.

“Violence is the surest expression of power.” Morinth declared forcefully, echoing her prey’s words.

“Violence is a means to an end.” The human biotic answered back, smiling inwardly as he realized that his quarry had taken the bait. “Power is that end.”

“Do you want to leave this place?” Morinth propositioned, “My place is nearby and I want you alone.”

“Let’s go.” Kaidan agreed thinking to himself, *hope you’re watching, Samara.*

#### *Afterlife—guard’s break room.*

“Guess I win this one.” V'lana grinned as she raked in the pot. Taking the cards she began to shuffle as the door opened.

“So that’s where you all have been hiding.”

“Aria!” Bray exclaimed as he and Grizz quickly rose to their feet. “We were just...”

“Enjoying an extended break drinking booze and playing cards.” The asari crime boss laughed as she took a chair and sat down at the table. “Well...what are you waiting for? Shuffle those cards and deal.”

## *Morinth's Apartment*

Entering the Ardat-Yakshi's apartment, Kaidan was at once struck by the combination of elegance and decadence as Morinth sat down on the sofa, stretching out her legs languorously. A hand-carved jade chess set attracting his attention, the human biotic remarked, "Nice set. You play?"

"Of course." Morinth responded, "I like any game where your opponent believes he's about to win—just before you deliver the killing blow."

"I agree." Kaidan declared honestly. "There's nothing like maneuvering your opponent where he is forced to make the move that puts him into a mating position and then you make the kill."

Seeing a large, beautifully carved, statue of a krogan warrior, Alenko nodded his head appreciatively, "Impressive."

"Thank you." Morinth grinned seductively, "This was a gift from a suitor." Chuckling, she quipped, "It's got more personality than he did. Still..." She smirked, "It impressed me enough so that I gave him what he wanted. It just didn't end the way he hoped it would."

Noticing her prey's eyes falling on a katana, Morinth remarked, "I was into dueling for a while. There's nothing quite like the moment you see in your opponent's eyes that he knows that you're better than him and that he's about to die." As Kaidan picked up a pill bottle sitting on the end table, the asari said, "Hallex. Take one if you want, but wouldn't you want to have all your senses clear and sharp right now? I know I do."

Setting the bottle down, Kaidan turned and smiled, "You're right. I want to be as clear headed as possible. I don't want to miss one moment."

"Have a seat." Morinth urged as she patted the sofa next to her, well within her personal space. "I love the clubs—don't you? The people, the movement, the heat and the bass. It all comes together like the drums of a great hunt, out for your blood. But here, it's silent...safe. Is that what you want, Kaidan? To be safe?"

"People feel safest right before they die." Kaidan replied as he caught a whiff of the asari seductress's perfume. His resistance weakening; her scent, along with the touch of her hand on his drew him ever closer to her. Gazing into her eyes, he saw a brief glimpse of V'lana that faded quickly—to be replaced by that of another. A woman with red hair and a good heart. A woman of strength and conviction. The woman he fell in love with and whom he had thought he had lost. Now she was back in the eyes of the enchantress sitting next to him; beckoning him to come ever closer—to embrace her—to let her into his most intimate thoughts—to let her into his soul.

"It's true. We're never safe." Morinth agreed, her smile part inviting...part predatory as her prey drew ever closer. "I've never understood the attraction of playing it safe. It's boring." Sliding on to Kaidan's lap, the temptress placed her arms around his neck as she whispered, her words tickling his ear. "Freedom and independence over submission and surrender. I think we have that in common—you and I."

As Morinth spoke and gazed into his eyes, Kaidan fell hopelessly into them. Seeing and hearing only Shepard's face and voice...feeling her touch as the asari enchantress drew him closer until their lips brushed and then met in a kiss. Feeling her entering his mind, he didn't resist, opening himself...body and soul completely to her—the last image in his mind being that of Jane, lying in bed next to him just before the jump to Ilos, kissing his neck and whispering in his ear. "So warm...so delicious..."

"No!" Samara cried out as she forced the door to her daughter's apartment open.

"You're too late mother." Morinth taunted as she moved closer to the window. "He's already mine. And he was so delicious!"

"Then I will avenge him!" Samara shouted as she threw everything she had into a biotic throw that was quickly absorbed by her daughter's barrier.

"My only crime was being born with the gifts you gave me." The Ardat-Yakshi taunted as she edged closer to her escape window. "I am the genetic destiny of the asari, but they are not ready to reveal that. According to you..." an evil grin crossed Morinth's face as she reached her destination, "I have to die." Gathering her strength, she flared her biotics in a forceful display, forcing her mother to the floor while simultaneously shattering the window. Before diving out the window, she mocked one last time. "I'm sorry to disappoint you, Mother. But I'm not going to die. Better luck in another hundred years!"

Her eyes darting first to her daughter making her escape, and then to the human lying helpless on the couch. Samara realized that she had to make a hard choice—to leave the man she had sworn to safeguard to die alone so that she could finally catch her daughter. Or save her ally's life—even if it meant allowing Morinth to flee. Tears flowing down her cheeks, she made her decision. "Samara to *Gallena*. I must report a medical emergency."

## *Afterlife—Breakroom*

"Helluva a bluff, Aria." V'lana remarked as the asari crime lord raked in the pot. "A fucking pair of deuces."

"You were running a nice bluff yourself." Aria replied with a self-satisfied grin. "Nothing but a 10 high card."

"Shit." Vega swore as he threw down his cards. "You two have cleaned us out." As the Alliance marine finished his sentence, V'lana's comm chirped.

"*Subcommander?*" Samantha's voice, sounding strained, came through the comm.

“What is it Samantha?” V’lana replied.

“We’ve had a medical emergency, Ma’am.” The communications specialist answered back, “It’s Staff Commander Alenko. He’s in a coma.”

“It seems your justicar didn’t arrive in time.” Aria commented, her voice tone tinged with sympathy and regret. “For what it’s worth, I’m sorry.”

“You gonna be okay Lola?” Vega asked as he at once spotted the worry and fear on the Romulan woman’s face.

Quickly gathering herself, V’lana gritted her teeth and replied, “Thanks, James. I’ll be fine.” Rising to her feet, she said in a surprisingly calm, measured voice to the asari woman still seated at the table. “Thanks, Aria. I’m sure you’ll understand why I have to leave.”

“Of course.” The asari replied in an equally placid tone. Then, addressing her chief bodyguard, she ordered, “Bray. I want a full search for this Ardat-Yakshi. Break down doors...shake people down...rough them up if necessary. Find out if she’s still here and if she is—kill her. Also, if she’s already made her escape, I want a bounty put on her head. Make it high enough that it gets the attention of every single bounty hunter in the Terminus Systems and Citadel space.”

“At once, Aria.” Inclining his head at his fellow bodyguard, the batarian commanded, “You heard the Boss, Grizz. Time to go to work.”

As V’lana and James began heading to the exit, Aria called out to them before they left, “I can’t promise we’ll be able to catch her before she leaves Omega—hell—she’s probably already gone. But I do promise to make life miserable for her. She’s going to be looking over her shoulder wherever she goes.”

“For her sake...” James remarked, placing his hand on his distraught Romulan companion’s shoulder, “that bitch better pray that one of your bounty hunters gets to her before Lola does.” Looking down at the petite subcommander, Vega urged in a low voice, “Come on, Lola. Kaidan needs you.”

### ***Sickbay—RRW Gallena***

“How is he, Doctor?” V’lana asked, worriedly chewing her lower lip as she looked down on the helpless man lying on the biobed.

“Physically, Kaidan’s fine.” Dr. Chakwas replied, “However he has suffered tremendous mental and psychic trauma due to his encounter with that...” a look of disgust appeared on the normally placid and serene face of the old *Normandy* doctor “thing. Samara tried to undo the damage her daughter had done, but only partly succeeded. She restored him enough to keep him alive and prevent further damage to his brain, but the damage was severe.”

“I get the feeling there’s more?” V’lana prompted.

The doctor continued to deliver her bad news with a mournful sigh, “Samara said that she felt something in his mind. Something that she couldn’t describe. I’m afraid that he’s going to need the type of therapy that must be carried out by a skilled telepath. Asari mind joining, while similar in many ways to the type of telepathy you’re familiar with, has some minor—but important—differences.”

“What about Neilana?” V’lana inquired, “She’s a very strong telepath.”

“For a Romulan...” Dr. Aven interjected, “Yes. But she does not possess the skill or training to carry out the fine work that must be done to restore his mind. She’s trained to use her telepathy as a sword, axe, or club to overwhelm the subject of her interrogation. What we need is someone who, besides being a strong telepath, is also subtle and careful. A trained Betazoid or Lethian therapist would be best...although an equally skilled Vulcan could accomplish the task as well.”

“And we have none of those on the *Gallena*.” The subcommander sighed as she wiped the tears away from her eyes. “So what can we do?”

“My recommendation would be to keep him in stasis until we make contact with your universe.” Dr. Chakwas suggested, adding, “If he receives the therapy he needs, there is every reason to hope that—even if he’s unable to recover all of his memories—he’ll still be able to live a normal, healthy life—maybe not as he was—that would depend on how successful his therapy would be in restoring his memories. But he would still be alive and would be able to build a new life for himself. But...” the old doctor cautioned as she gazed down with tearful eyes at her patient, “as I said, there is no guarantee of success. I’m sorry.”

“Thank you. I know you’re doing all you can.” V’lana responded with a wan smile before turning to the other doctor, “Dr. Aven? Your thoughts?”

“I agree with Dr. Chakwas.” The Romulan CMO replied, supporting his colleague. “Stasis would be best. We know connections between our universes exist. It’s only a matter of time before we or one of the other ships searching find one—or one of our ships finds it from their end.”

“Very well.” V’lana agreed, caressing her fallen lover’s cheek. “Do it.” Withdrawing her hand as the doctors prepared to begin their work, the subcommander declared in an abnormally placid tone, “There’s someone I need to talk to.”

“Please. Be easy on Samara.” Dr. Chakwas pleaded, “She’s distraught about what happened as well.”

“Thank you, Doctors.” The subcommander acknowledged, inclining her head, “Take care of him. Please.”

### ***V’lana’s ready room***



"I take full responsibility for what happened to Commander Alenko and will accept any punishment you deem appropriate. I promised to keep him safe and I failed." Samara declared in a solemn voice as she stood before the subcommander who was seated behind her desk.

Her lips turned down in a frown; eyes red with tears, V'lana replied in a low tone, "I'm not going to punish you, Samara. You saved Kaidan's life and stabilized the damage to his mind when you could have just as easily chased after your daughter and probably caught her. You decided instead to see to my...to see to Kaidan. So no...I don't blame you. If anyone here is to blame, it's me. I gave permission for him to go when I knew I shouldn't have." Tapping her fingers on her desk, the subcommander inquired, "What do you intend to do now?"

"I would ask that you to please release me from my oath so that I may try to pick up my daughter's trail. I must find some way to bring Morinth down without placing another innocent in jeopardy and I cannot do that on your ship."

Taking a deep breath and exhaling, V'lana lowered her head. "Very well. I release you from your oath. Will you be disembarking here or would you like to get off at our next port stop?"

"It would be preferable if I disembark here." The justicar replied, also bowing her head. "I shall gather my belongings and depart. I appreciate your generosity and hospitality during my stay with you. Subcommander, you are a person of honor and integrity."

"As are you." V'lana replied, returning the compliment. "If you are successful in tracking down Morinth and need help taking her down, let me know and I and my ship will be there for you."

"Thank you." Samara acknowledged, "If I may take my leave?"

Nodding her head, V'lana assented to the justicar's request, "You may go now, and good luck." Watching as the door closed behind the asari justicar, V'lana heaved a sigh. Getting up, she made her way to the replicator. "Tarkalian tea." Returning to her seat, she activated a small holodisk, revealing a hologram of her injured lover, "Get better Alenko—that's an order."

## End Notes

There's an old saying that you only hurt the ones you love. As you saw, things are now a bit rocky for our couple. Even after he's recovered--should he recover--both Kaidan and V'lana will have to deal with his lingering feelings towards Shepard. Time is also a very powerful force as at some point, V'lana could well find comfort in the arms of another. Speaking of Shepard, what I wanted to do in this part was to again stress just how important she was and how keenly her absence is felt. Only Shepard had the strength of will to hold off Morinth long enough for Samara to come in and deal with her daughter. Kaidan could not withstand the strength of Morinth's psychic assault—really mental rape of him. Even though he was a strong and courageous man, he just does not have the strength of reserves that Shepard possessed. In short, he failed because he was not Shepard.

So...why did I "let" Morinth slip away? As Samara had pointed out earlier, her daughter had a million and one escape routes planned in the event of an emergency. Samara being just a fraction late, combined with her mostly successful feeding off of her victim, gave Morinth just enough of a window to...if you'll pardon the expression...jump off the window and scarper. Samara then had a hard choice to make—keep her oath to V'lana and Kaidan or go after her daughter. I felt that in this circumstance, our justicar would conclude that her oath to her shipmates took precedence. I also felt that she would not choose to remain on the Gallena while her daughter was running lose. Partly out of pride...partly duty...partly guilt at having let Kaidan and V'lana down. So does this mean that we're not going to see Morinth and Samara again? Not necessarily. You're just going to have to stay tuned for future episodes.

I hope everyone enjoyed this part. Next part will be focused on Tali and Tovan. Take care!

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