

Convergences 4 BOOM!

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Convergences 4 BOOM!

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Summary

he assault on "Firebase Anaya", Miranda's mission comes to a conclusion, the Normandy 2 comes back home, and the Shepard clone saga takes a major twist. Lots happening here. In other words, BOOM--lots of explosions.

Miranda: Family Reunions

Family Reunion—Miranda

Crouched behind a pallet of cargo containers, Miranda whispered to her comrades, pointing towards a full Eclipse commando company that was stationed near the elevator with an asari, obviously the leader, giving orders.

“That’s gotta be Enyala.” Vega whispered. “She knows we’re coming. See how she’s positioning her people?”

“Sniper on the catwalk at two o’clock.” Jodrum pointed out, “And there is a heavy weapons team located at that cargo sled. She’s definitely ready for trouble.”

“You got any ideas, Gears?” Vega whispered, turning his head towards the Reman engineer hunkered down on the other side of him.

“Hmmm...” Veril pondered the situation for several moments before responding. “I can set up some holographic projectors here...” she pointed to a side entrance, “and here.” she proposed, pointing to another entranceway. “They should provide a temporary diversion. Quantum mortar wouldn’t be a good idea unless we’re wanting to risk collateral damage.”

“We can’t take the chance on Oriana or her family being hurt.” Miranda declared, “And we can’t strike before Niket arrives with them. If he gets wind that Enyala’s under attack...”

“He’ll divert and we’ll lose him and your sister.” Vega finished with a grimace, “So we’re gonna have to be sure to check our fire.”

“Correct.” Miranda nodded, “No area effect weapons.”

“Plasma turrets set for pinpoint fire over here...” Veril pointed to a corner location, “and here.” she pointed to another choke point, “should catch them in a crossfire.”

“Good idea.” Miranda nodded before pointing out, “There is still the issue of the sniper though.”

“Don’t worry.” Vega replied, “I’ve got him.” Turning his head back to Miranda, the Alliance marine inquired, “So...how do you want to play this, Miri?”

“We hit them the moment Niket arrives with my sister and her family.” The Australian biotic responded, outlining her plan. “Stun and smoke grenades to cover me while I go for Oriana. The rest of you keep Enyala and her people off me long enough to get her and her family away.”

“Won’t work.” Jodrum shook his head, “The brief on Enyala is that she’s a good tactician. You’re making the mistake of underestimating her.”

“What do you suggest?” The Australian biotic retorted challengingly.

“I think I might have an idea.” Veril timidly interjected.

“Don’t be bashful, Gears!” Vega encouraged, giving the Romulan engineer a broad grin. “Tell us what you’ve got.”

“We could use the holographic projector to render images of us.” Veril proposed. “The holograms will appear as if they’re wanting to parley...hopefully getting Enyala to drop her guard just enough for us to take her by surprise.”

“Won’t she pick up on them being holograms?” Vega inquired.

“If they get too close...” Veril admitted, “Yes. She will.”

“So how do we keep her from getting too close too soon?” The Alliance marine asked.

“She’ll be wary...at least initially.” Jodrum pointed out, “That will buy us some time...not a lot...but it should be enough.”

“I’ll need you two to record your voice prints.” Veril instructed, speaking to Miranda and James. “The holograms are programmed to adapt to conversations—they’re not quite fully sentient, but close enough for our purposes.”

Complying with the engineer’s request, Miranda let out a breath. “All right. I’ll work my way towards the elevator. Niket will be bringing Oriana through there. When we strike, I’ll cover her and her family with a biotic shield.”

“Putting yourself on the line here, Miri.” Vega pointed out.

“No choice.” Miranda grimly replied. “Enyala will target them first. Hopefully, the combination of my personal shield, armor, and barrier will hold long enough to get Oriana and her family to cover.”

“Veril and I will draw the fire of Enyala’s guard.” Jodrum declared, outlining his plan. “While Lieutenant Vega takes out the sniper and then provides support for you. Hopefully, if all goes well, we can bring the operation to a successful conclusion.”

“You know what they say about the best laid plans when they come into contact with the enemy.” Vega cautioned, the salarian Spectre nodding in understanding.

“Then we will have to be ready to adapt.”

Satisfied by the salarian's answer, Vega turned to the dark-haired woman next to him, "Miri?"

Miranda commanded, "Veril? Prepare your holographic projectors. Vega?"

"I've spotted a good location where I can take out that sniper and then offer you fire support." The marine replied, pointing to a stack of containers.

"Then let's do it."

"I want everyone on alert." Captain Enyala barked into her comm. "Those bastards have already taken out two entire companies."

"We're ready for them Captain." A salarian engineer wearing Eclipse colors responded.

"Is everyone in position?" Miranda whispered into her comm from her hiding spot near the elevator door.

"Got the sniper in my sights." Vega replied in a low voice, "What about you, Gears? Jod?"

"Ready." The Spectre replied.

"Ready to go." The Reman engineer replied.

Taking a deep breath and exhaling, Miranda commanded, "Activate the holographic projections."

"Look alive people!" Captain Enyala called out to her forces as the two holographic images approached. Before they could draw too close to their position, the asari Eclipse captain barked out, "That's far enough." With a derisive snort, she taunted, "You're the two who took out my teams?" Spying the skintight cat suit the Miranda hologram was wearing, the mercenary leader mocked, "You look like one of Aria's dancers." As she spoke, the elevator door opened, "That'll be Niket and your family, Ms. Lawson. Pity they won't be able to say goodbye to you, but the bounty on you is too good to pass up." Pointing at the Vega hologram, the Eclipse mercenary issued a warning. "Lucky for you, there's no bounty on you. You get a chance to walk away if you do it now."

With an evil smirk on her face, Enyala, on seeing neither of her targets moving, sneered as she pumped her shotgun. "Thanks for making my life easier." Firing her weapon, the captain's eyes widened as the rounds passed harmlessly through the images. "What the fuck! Take the brat and her family out Niket! Now!"

On hearing the mercenary captain's angry command, Miranda sprang into action. Ignoring the rain of fire coming from the Eclipse commandoes, the Australian biotic threw up a biotic shield around her sister and her family while simultaneously slamming Niket against the wall. She had just enough time to utter "Oriana..." as a lucky shot from one of the Eclipse mercenaries' assault rifles pierced through shielding and armor, striking the raven-haired biotic in the small of the back, sending her bleeding to the floor.

"Miri!"

Gritting his teeth as he saw his friend go down, Vega growled into his comm, "Taking the shot" as he fired his plasma rifle at the Eclipse sniper who had fired the round that had brought down his friend, the green energy bolt impacting and piercing through the man's shielding and armor, killing him immediately.

Simultaneously, Veril replicated a pair of plasma turrets before rushing to Miranda and her family, dodging ferocious fire from the Eclipse troopers. "Cover me, Jodrum! James!" the Reman engineer hollered as she went to work on her injured companion, administering a mix of pain killers and medigel.

"We've got your back, Gears! Take care of Miri and her sister!" James shouted back as he lobbed a plasma grenade at a salarian engineer trying to deploy a weapons turret while Jodrum calmly brought down a pair of Eclipse troopers with an incendiary blast from his omnitool.

"There's only three of 'em left standing!" Enyala hollered as she attempted to rally her troopers. "Put them down!"

"Bring it on, *Put*." Vega taunted back as he cut loose with a barrage of plasma fire, bringing down another mercenary. "Step on up, kids! I've got a lot more where that came from!"

"Tough talk, human. Let's see how much you like this." Enyala taunted back just before launching herself in a biotic charge at the Alliance marine, impacting head on with him, staggering him to the floor. "Time to die." The Eclipse captain smirked as she pumped a fresh thermal clip into her shotgun and aimed it at the still stunned marine.

Enyala, however, neglected to take into account a certain quick-witted young Reman engineer, not to mention a cunning and creative salarian Spectre. Acting swiftly, Veril deployed an electrostatic field around Vega as Jodrum simultaneously encased the mercenary captain with a cryo-blast.

"Now, Veril!" Jondum shouted, "Concentrate fire!" The powerful fire from the pair's plasma bolts converged, impacting on the frozen mercenary, the force of their intense blows shattering the captain as if she were a glass statue.

“They’re falling back.” Veril sighed, pointing to the retreating mercenaries.

“Their casualties have taken the fight out of them.” Jodrum noted, further suggesting, “Time to see to our wounded as well.”

“I’ll be fine.” James declared, shrugging off his companion’s efforts to tend to him. “I just got knocked around a bit. I can walk. Miri and her sister are more important. We should go to them.”

“Very well.” The salarian Spectre agreed as they made their way to their teammate, currently being tended to by her sister.

On seeing their rescuers, a middle-aged man heaved a sigh of relief, “Thank you.” He said, “I’m Kenneth...Kenneth Baker. This is my wife, Josie.” He introduced a middle-aged woman with brown hair.

“We’ve been taking care of Oriana since Miri dropped her off with us.” Josie declared as her eyes fell on the unconscious man sprawled out on the deck, “I can’t believe Niket was about to...” she choked back a sob, “Why?”

“We’ll find out when we get him back to our ship.” Vega promised as Veril knelt down next to the teenage girl.

“She’ll be all right.” The Reman engineer said with a smile as she ran a medical diagnostic. “Although she’s probably going to require a day or two in Medbay. If nothing else, Dr. Chakwas will insist on it.”

“Agreed.” James chuckled as the Australian biotic’s eyelids fluttered, signaling her return to consciousness. “Hey there, Princess.” The Alliance marine said with a smile as he looked down on the raven-haired beauty. “Have a nice nap?”

“Not really.” Miranda joked back with a crooked grin, “I was constantly kept awake by a certain marine’s continual bellowing.”

“Hey, Miri.” Oriana smiled down at her sister. “How are you feeling?”

“Better.” The former Cerberus operative replied, “Now that you’re safe. Speaking of which...” she queried as a frown appeared on her face, “Is Niket still alive?”

“He’s alive and on ice.” Vega responded, “I figure we’ll take him back with us when we return to the ship. Let him and Neilana chat.”

Scowling, Miranda answered back, “I want what’s left of him after she gets through with him.”

“Consider it done, Princess.” Vega smiled as his Reman teammate cleared her throat

“We’re going to have to find a secure place to stay until the *Gallena* returns.” Veril declared. “Centurion Kev has warped out of orbit. He got orders to take out the *Normandy*.”

“I’m open to suggestions.” Vega quipped.

A female voice responded to the Alliance marine’s remark. “I think I can find a place for you to hole up until your friends get back.”

“Matriarch Aethyta.” Jodrum stated flatly as the matriarch, flanked by two asari commandoes, entered the terminal

“The bartender at *Eternity*?” James replied in an astonished and disbelieving tone.

“Unofficial agent representing the interests of the asari Matriarch Council.” The Spectre explained before politely inquiring, “Why, may I ask, are you willing to help us?”

“Two reasons.” The bartending matriarch replied as another asari came in to assist with Miranda and her family. “First, the Council asked me to assist in any way I can so long as I kept it low key.”

“And the second reason?” James interjected.

“That’s personal.” Aethyta replied, “Now...do you want to get somewhere safe? Or do you want to stay out here with your asses hanging out?”

After receiving answering nods from his teammates, Vega replied, “What are we waiting for? Time to vamoose.”

The Taking of Normandy One...Two...Three

Chapter Summary

The Gallena launches its assault on the Normandy in an effort to bring it back home.

The Taking of Normandy One...Two...Three

One:

Cerberus Frigate Normandy:

Looking out at the empty galley, Mess Sergeant Rupert Gardner heaved a sigh as he poured himself a cup of the coffee he had just brewed. Preferring his coffee black, Gardner sat down at one of the tables, soon losing himself in his thoughts. His family killed or abducted by batarian pirates...Dixie's treason...the possible fate of his good friends Hawthorne, Jackson, and Markham—all three now languishing in an Alliance prison somewhere.. Lastly, and what worried the former eezo miner the most, the nagging feeling he kept on getting that something was off on the *Normandy*...something serious. He couldn't quite put his finger on it, but it was there just the same.

"Hey, Rupert! Coffee fresh?"

"Sure is!" Plastering a grin on his face, the mess sergeant pointed at the coffee pot, "Help yourselves, gentlemen. Just brewed a fresh pot for you guys coming off second shift."

"You're the greatest, Rupert." Crewman Hadley grinned as he and the ship's weapons specialist, Crewman Matthews, walked over to the coffee pot and, after pouring themselves fresh cups, sat at down at the table with the grizzled cook. "So...how are you holding up, Rupert."

"Okay, I guess." Gardner replied, trying, but not quite succeeding, to strike an upbeat tone.

"You don't sound okay." Matthews commented with a note of concern in his voice as he took a sip of coffee. "What's wrong?"

His gaze drifting up to the surveillance device that was recording their every word and action, the mess sergeant ambiguously replied, "It's just been a long week...that's all."

At once spotting the reason for his friend's circumspection, Hadley remarked in an equally guarded tone, "Yeah. A lot of stuff's happened. We could all go for some downtime I think."

"So has anyone heard anything about..." Hadley began to ask before trailing off, as if unable to utter the words he wanted to.

"Dixie?" Matthews interrupted, anticipating his comrade's question with a shake of his head, "No. No one's found a trace of her or the shuttle she stole."

"Heard they're planning on putting Markham and Jackson on trial for treason." Hadley growled as he poured creamer into his coffee.

"Yeah." Matthews confirmed, "Caught it on Westerlund News last night. According to the vid, there was a survivor on Feh1 Prime who could identify them and Hawthorne's testifying against them in exchange for immunity."

"Hawthorne and Dixie were good friends." Hadley stated, his voice tone reflecting an odd mixture of sympathy and disappointment, "Maybe Dixie's desertion caused him to snap?"

"Maybe." Matthews acknowledged, "I remember that he was really upset when Dix took off and when he returned from Feh1 Prime. Something must have happened down there to really shake him up."

"What do you think, Rupert?" Hadley asked, drawing the old mess sergeant/handyman into the discussion.

"What do I think?" Gardner replied guardedly, making a point of quickly glancing at the surveillance bug watching and listening to their conversation, "I'm just the cook and janitor. All that stuff's way above my paygrade."

Taking the old man's hint, Matthews replied, "Yeah...you're right. Best to leave that stuff to the ones in charge."

RRW Gallena

Still under cloak, the Romulan warbird drew closer to its unsuspecting quarry. "We'll be within weapons range in two minutes." Solana declared from the tactical station.

"Launch the second Scorpion." Centurion Kev ordered from the center chair.

"Scorpion Two launched and is moving into position." Specialist Traynor announced in her clipped posh Oxford accented voice. "We'll have

to move quickly and smartly before they have time to activate their defenses. Otherwise, we're going to have a real fight on our hands."

"Affirmative." Solana grimly acknowledged as she recited the results of her tactical scan. "They've upgraded their GARDIAN system and have torpedoes capable of bringing down our fighters and even giving us a problem. If we don't take them out quickly, we'll have no choice but to carry out an attack with full power to our torpedoes and weapons."

Tovan nodded his head in agreement with his tactical officer. "That will, of course mean the destruction of the *Normandy* and probably the loss of all onboard. So let's try to avoid that, shall we."

"Aye, Centurion." Solana acknowledged as Tovan further outlined his attack plan.

"The fighters will knock out the *Normandy*'s defenses and engines. Once they have been neutralized, transport the anethazine gas canisters and the assault teams, Solana. Remember our orders—we want to minimize casualties, but if necessary—do what needs to be done."

"Understood, Centurion."

Toggling the comm, the executive officer spoke, "Chief Adams? Are you and your prize crew ready to beam over?"

"Aye, Sir." The Alliance engineering chief responded, "Just say the word."

"We're in weapons range, Sir." Joker announced as the Cerberus frigate grew larger in the viewscreen.

With a single nod of his head, Tovan commanded, "Begin the attack."

Two:

"Roger that." Steve Cortez replied on hearing the go order. Speaking to the Romulan engineer seated next to him, the Alliance pilot grinned, "Time to retake the *Normandy* name, Rodek. Scorpion One to Scorpion Two. Begin attack run. Remember...quick and clean. We're not going to get a second chance if we want to take the ship and everyone on board it alive."

"Understood, Scorpion One. Beginning attack run. Targeting weapons hardpoints."

"Plasma cannons charged and adjusted for pinpoint targeting...torpedo ready to launch." Rodek replied in a grim tone.

"All right." Steve took a deep breath. "Beginning attack run. Decloak and fire."

Green bolts of plasma shot out from both fighters, striking the frigate's mass effect drive and its javelin launchers and GARDIAN defenses, a plasma torpedo adjusted for low yield from the second fighter simultaneously impacting on the Thanix cannon, knocking weapons systems and engines out.

"Their engines and weapons are down." Satra announced from her station.

Heaving a sigh of relief at the good news, Tovan barked out his commands. "Transport anethazine canisters and assault teams. Take the *Normandy*."

"Retake the *Normandy* you mean." Joker muttered under his breath as a slow smile appeared on his face as he gazed at the Cerberus frigate on his viewscreen. "You might not be the original article, but welcome home anyway old girl."

Normandy:

Coffee spilling all over the table and himself as the ship shook violently, knocking pans and cooking utensils off their shelves and hooks, Mess Sergeant Gardner exclaimed, "What the..."

"We're under attack!" Hadley, jumping up from his seat, announced in a loud voice.

"How?" Matthews, his lap also damp from spilled coffee, cried out as a green column of light appeared and just as suddenly vanished, leaving behind a strange cylinder. "What the hell?"

His eyelids growing heavy as he coughed, Hadley, activating his comm, groaned "Gas" as Rupert and his friend collapsed on the table and two more green pillars of light appeared, this time leaving behind two human appearing aliens in their wake. With one last gasp before slipping into unconsciousness, the Cerberus crewman spoke into his comm, "Boarding parties in the..."

Surprisingly, the capture of the *Normandy* took only a few minutes. Nodding her head in satisfaction, Solana answered her chirping comm.

"Boarding party...status."

"Frigate secured." Solana reported, "No casualties with the boarding party and only a few injured Cerberus commandoes who were wearing hardsuits at the time we attacked. There were also minor casualties as a result of our attack that knocked out their engines and weapons. We are purging the ship of gas now. Give us a couple of minutes, then you can send the prize crew over."

"Understood and job well done. Once the gas has been purged, transport the prisoners to the brig until they can be transferred to Alliance custody." Tovan commanded as he spoke to the prize crew waiting in the transporter room. "Chief Adams? Are you and your people ready?"

“Aye, Centurion.” The Alliance chief engineer replied, turning to his two proteges, “Gabby...Ken...we’re up to bat. The time to bring the *Normandy* name back where it belongs.”

“Ready to go, Chief.” Donnelly responded in his usual thick Irish brogue, his partner in crime nodding her head in agreement.

“Come on then...” Adams grinned, “We’re wasting time.”

Three:

“Is there anyone that you recognize?” Tovan asked the ship’s counselor, Kelly Chambers, a former employee of Cerberus, as the pair gazed on the *Normandy* prisoners languishing in the *Gallena’s* brig.

Pointing to a cell containing three men, she nodded her head. “I’ve seen those two. Their names are Hadley and Matthews. I remember Hadley telling me once that he had a brother who was a colonist on a world in the Traverse.” Her voice now taking on a more somber quality, she explained, “I think his brother was one of those taken by the Collectors when they attacked. He felt that the Alliance wasn’t doing anything so...”

“A Cerberus recruiter got to him.” Tovan finished, Kelly nodding her head in confirmation.

“Correct. He has a chip on his shoulder where the Alliance is concerned.”

“Is he going to be a problem?” The executive officer asked with a frown.

“No.” Kelly shook her head, “I don’t think so. You’re not planning on any extensive interrogations—are you?”

Tovan replied with an reassuring shake of his head. “There’s no need. We’ll just turn him and his mates over to the Alliance authorities when we rendezvous.” After a momentary pause, he further inquired, “What about the others?”

Her mood lightening somewhat as the Romulan XO changed the subject, the redheaded counselor quipped, “Matthews won’t be any problem. He was always talking about setting up an appointment with Sha’ira...the Asari consort...the next time he was on the Citadel.”

“What about the third one?” Tovan inquired

Squinting, Kelly looked closely at the monitor, her eyes widening as she recognized the grizzled bald man sitting alone in the cell. “I don’t believe it! That’s Rupert Gardner! He was a cook and handyman while I was working for Cerberus. Like me, he was slated to join the *Normandy* with Shepard. After she was killed, the Illusive Man changed his mind and I was given the choice to either resign or transfer to a receptionist’s spot. So...I chose to resign and Councilor Anderson recruited me soon after that. I guess the Illusive Man decided to send Gardner to the *Normandy* anyway.”

“I get the impression you would like to see him.”

“If it wouldn’t be too much trouble.” Kelly responded with a warm smile. “We used to grab a cup of coffee together when I was on my break. He’s a good man—but he’s had it rough.”

“How so?”

“He used to work on an eezo mining rig out on the Attican Traverse while his family lived on a small colony world close by. Then one day the colony was hit by batarian pirates and...”

“His family were either killed or kidnapped.” Tovan finished, Kelly grimly nodding her head in acknowledgement.

“He’s never really recovered from it.”

“It’s not something you can easily recover from.” The Romulan XO replied, hearkening back to the destruction of his home by the Tal’Shiar and Elachi. “Do you think he might benefit from counseling?”

“It couldn’t hurt, Sir.” Kelly pleaded, “If nothing else, seeing a friendly face might make it at least a little easier on him.”

“Very well.” Tovan agreed, “I’ll have him brought to your office.”

“Thank you.” The human counselor grinned, “Oh...hmmm...I don’t want to push it, but...”

“Go ahead.” The Romulan officer encouraged with an incline of his head.

“Well...Centurion...I was thinking that it also might not be a bad idea to send Hadley, Matthews and a few of the others to see me...under guard of course. I don’t think they’re lost causes. Not most of them. With a few exceptions, the majority of them are more like Hawthorne than the combat specialists Aria had given over to us. I think they can be reached if it’s handled properly.”

“A good idea.” The executive officer concurred, “It will also prevent your friend from being branded a traitor by his shipmates if they see that he is not being singled out for special treatment. When would you like to begin the counseling sessions?”

“Give me a couple of hours or so and then bring Gardner by my office, please.” Kelly responded, further requesting, “It might not be a bad idea if his escort was human given his experiences.”

“Understood.” Tovan nodded, “I’ll have a couple of Starfleet officers bring him to you when you’re ready.”

“Thanks.” Kelly smiled back, I appreciate it.”

The Siege of Firebase Anaya

Chapter Summary

Shepard and her forces launch their attack on Anaya's police station in the concluding chapter of this story.

The Siege of Firebase Anaya

11:30

Leng:

"As expected, the Normandy has been taken." The Illusive Man declared speaking on a private scrambled channel to his subordinate.

"Do you want us to continue the planned assault on the police precinct, Sir?" Kai Leng, Cerberus assassin and now unofficial commander of what was once Shepard's team, inquired of his superior, speaking in a deferential tone of voice.

"Yes." The Illusive Man replied. "The main purpose of the exercise from our perspective is to test the performance of Subjects Zero and Grunt in the field. Whether you succeed in eliminating the police detective and her officers or not is irrelevant."

"Understood, Sir." Leng inclined his head in acknowledgement. "And Shepard?"

"She has served her purpose." The Illusive Man declared, pronouncing sentence. "Your transportation and the transport of the test subjects off Illium has been confirmed. Execute Shepard at your discretion before...during...or after the attack, and then proceed with Subjects Grunt and Zero to the rendezvous point."

A cruel smile appearing on his face, Leng affirmed, "Your orders will be carried out, Sir."

"Good." The Illusive Man responded, "I anticipate reading your after-action report."

11:45

"Does everyone understand the plan of attack?" Shepard commanded, speaking to her unusual team. "Eclipse mercenaries will deal with the satellite kiosk in the Transport Hub. Eclipse and their mechs will launch the initial assault on the firebase accompanied by Grunt, Zero, and I. Shadow Broker mercenaries will provide flanking support. Mr. Leng comes in after the station's outer defenses have been taken out. His mission will be to seek out and eliminate both the police detective and the alien with her. Anything to add, Mr. Leng?" The redhead queried, barely hiding her feelings of disgust towards the black-clad assassin.

"No." The Cerberus killer responded with a shake of his head his last statement more command than suggestion. "You've covered everything. Final preparations have been made and our Eclipse and Broker allies are in position. It is time for us to join them. Let us do so, immediately."

11:48—Shepard's subconscious

"Are you ready?" The prisoner asked, this time standing at the door to her cell waiting for her other self. "It's almost time."

"No." Shepard whispered back from the other side of the cell door, "But it's not like I have much in the range of choices—is there? No matter what happens, we're going to die."

"That's not going to change." The prisoner consoled, "We can't save ourselves. But we can save those innocent people."

"I know." Shepard heaved a dejected sigh, "It's just that I..."

"Never had a chance to live." The prisoner finished, giving her twin a warm, sad smile. "I understand. There were things I wanted to do too. I can't remember most of them...not anymore...but I do know that there was someone I loved and who loved me."

"So when do we do this?" The clone asked as her hand went to the cell door and opened it, releasing the prisoner.

"We'll know when." The prisoner responded, giving their warden, whose back was turned to them, a glare. "I have a feeling it will be soon."

11:50—Firebase Anaya

Gritting her teeth as she saw her officers and those who had allied with them at their positions, weapons at the ready, awaiting the coming attack, Anaya whispered to her Romulan friend, "I get the feeling you and your people have been in a lot of these."

"Too many." V'lana replied. "They all start to meld in with each other after a while."

"This is my first time." Anaya confessed. "Same thing for most of my officers. I mean...it's one thing to go after an Eclipse merc or a perp—

quite another to have to beat back an all-out attack on your own police station. Any advice?"

"Don't feel bad if you piss your pants." V'lana chuckled lightly, "I did my first time." Getting serious, she consoled, "You and your people are going to do just fine. We know they're coming, and we've had plenty of time to get ready. If anything, you should feel sorry for those mercs on the other side. They're going to walk into a meat grinder."

"Thanks." Anaya smiled, "So what was the worst thing you had to fight?"

"Has to be the Borg." V'lana answered back, "They're relentless. They never give up...never stop...and..." her voice trailed, taking on a haunted quality, "and it sucks when you have to kill the person you had a drink with six months earlier because he'd been assimilated and turned into a drone."

"Sounds like you speak from personal experience."

"Yeah." V'lana's lips turned up in a sad smile, "I'll tell you about it over drinks when we get done here."

"It's a date." Anaya answered in a soft voice as a loud crash came from the direction of the spaceport. "They're here, everyone!" The police detective shouted, "Hold your positions and don't fire until you get the order."

"Ready?" V'lana whispered as she sighted in her plasma rifle.

"As ready as I'll ever be." Anaya responded, checking her phaser, "And...thank you." Seeing two Ymir mechs and several Lokis moving towards their position, the asari detective cried out, "They're coming!"

"They're using the mechs to clear a path through the mines and force us to reveal our defenses." V'lana noted in a steady voice as mechs exploded. "Smart. The real attack's coming with the next wave. That's when we'll see Shepard and her pets." Turning her attention to the youthful quarian, the Romulan subcommander commanded, "Hold off on the turrets until the mechs get close, and then turn them into scrap."

"Understood." Tali responded as rocket fire from one of the Ymirs exploded close by, the force of its blast stopped by the enhanced shielding the quarian engineer had earlier set up.

As the mechs drew closer, their concentrated fire began to take its toll on the shields as they lit up and began to waver. "Compensating!" Tali shouted as she adjusted the shield harmonics, temporarily stabilizing them, but it wasn't enough as the concentrated fire of the heavy mechs finally brought down the barrier.

"Sorry, Subcommander!" Tali shouted, "Give me a little time and I'll get the backup going."

"You heard the lady!" V'lana called out as the mechs continued their relentless assault. "Let's buy her that time."

"We can't stop them!" One of the officers yelled, her eyes widening in fear as the officer next to her collapsed on the floor, blue blood flowing from where shrapnel had hit her. "We gotta run while we can!"

"You've got this, Felecia." Anaya said, projecting an aura of calm as she fired her phaser, bringing down a pair of Lokis in a shower of sparks. "Just think of them as a future pile of scrap metal."

Rallying, the young police officer responded with a "Thanks" before firing her rifle at the oncoming mechs, bringing down another pair.

Watching quietly until the mechs had drawn within range, a smile appeared on the Romulan subcommander's face as he uttered her command, "All right, Tali...let 'em have it!"

Green bolts of energy lanced from the two plasma turrets as the entrenched officers opened fire, releasing a withering barrage of fire. Then, after several moments of intense fire, a calm descended, the area around the police headquarters littered with the smoking and sparking scrap metal that used to be functioning mechs. Heaving a sigh as the medic administered first aid to a few injured officers, Anaya called out, "Casualties?"

"Thaya and Bellessa are wounded, but they'll be all right after some medigel." An officer who had medical training responded. Then, in a much more somber voice, she announced, "We lost Kala."

"Shit." Anaya swore, explaining to her friend, "Kala was supposed to get bonded this week. Now, I've got to break the news to her betrothed. I hate this part of the job."

Placing a hand on the asari detective's shoulder, V'lana consoled, "I know what you mean. I've done it all too often. If there's anything I can do...anything you need."

"Thanks." Anaya smiled back, "I think I can manage. But I appreciate you're asking." Raising her voice, she commanded her officers, "Take a few minutes to catch your breaths and recharge your weapons but stay on your guard. This was just the beginning." Activating her comm, Anaya called out, "Dana? What's your status?"

"We beat back a company of mercs." Sergeant Dana winced as one of her officers administered medigel to her and patched her bleeding arm.

"How are you..."

"Oh? That?" Dana interrupted, a smile appearing on her face. "It's just a graze from a round that got through my shields and armor. Nothing that can't be fixed with a little medigel and a shot of booze after." Her gaze falling on one of the Romulans that had joined her, the asari sergeant quipped, "I don't think those mercs planned on our new allies. Those shields they put up saved our asses."

“Keep on your toes.” Anaya advised, “They’ll be back—probably more of ‘em next time. This was just a probing attack.” Her lips turning up in a grin, she joked, “First round at Eternity is on me.”

“I’ll take you up on that.” Dana replied, gritting her teeth as she spotted the movement of oncoming troops, “Gotta go...we’ve got company.”

Feeling a tug on her arm as the comm cut off, Anaya heard her Romulan friend’s warning. “They’re rolling out the big guns. Take a look.”

“Shit.” Anaya frowned at the sight of the redhead and her team, flanked by soldiers in plain armor, displaying no colors. “That’s gotta be Shepard and her freak show.”

Studying the human woman and the others with her oculars, V’lana nodded as she handed the ocular to her friend, “Yep. Take a look at the bald female and the krogan. I think the female’s what’s left of the one they call Jack, but I don’t recognize the krogan.”

“Ugly bastards.” Anaya swore. “That human female looks as much machine as human.”

“She is.” V’lana confirmed, “They’ve grafted Borg technology on her. And see the greenish tint on her skin?”

Nodding her head, the asari detective queried, “Do humans have green skin color?”

“No.” V’lana shook her head, “Not naturally. I’m betting that comes from Thorian spores. They’ve probably also given her implants—maybe Reaper—and/or did some genetic tinkering to improve her biotics.”

“What about that krogan?” Anaya inquired, handing the ocular back to the Romulan woman crouched beside her, “He looks bigger than the normal krogan—and they’re big enough. Also...greener. And...he’s got those Borg implants too.”

“Probably the Gorn grafts and genes.” V’lana replied. “It also wouldn’t surprise me if they exposed him to Thorian spores too. It’s a tossup on who’s the most dangerous. Him or Jack. And I wouldn’t underestimate Shepard or the man in black.”

“That’s Kai Leng.” Anaya said, spitting out the assassin’s name. “His job’s probably to finish me off.”

“He’s not going to do that.” V’lana declared as she placed her hand on the asari detective’s forearm. “I won’t let him.”

“I know.” Anaya smiled back and then shouted as she saw Shepard pointing at the police station. “Heads up, girls! They’re coming!”

Shepard :

“Are you ready?” The prisoner asked her other self as the pair eyed their jailor.

“As ready as I’ll ever be.” Shepard replied, clenching her jaw as she and...she prepared to make their move. “When do you want to do it?”

“Soon.” The prisoner replied, “We’ve got to wait for the right time. Too early and our warden will kill us, and the attack will go on. Too late and...” She shook her head as she somberly pronounced, “It won’t matter because everyone will be dead.”

Looking up Shepard declared, “It’s gotta be soon. I just gave the order to go.”

“Trust me...trust yourself.” The prisoner pleaded, “It’ll work.”

“I hope so.”

“Look alive girls!” Anaya shouted to her officers as the giant krogan and his cohorts charged the precinct house, braving the withering fire from the plasma and phaser turrets.

Spotting mercenary engineers setting up missile and gun turrets, V’lana called out orders as she fired at the engineers with her plasma rifle. “Take those bastards out! They’ll overload our shields if they get those turrets up!”

“Duck!” Bellessa warned as the bald cyborg biotically lifted a cargo sled and threw it at one of the precinct house’s walls, penetrating the shield and impacting against the wall.

Reeling from the shock of the impact of the cargo sled on the wall, Anaya gasped in alarm as a chunk of wall fell down, collapsing on one of her officers, instantly crushing her. “Shit! Bellessa...concentrate on the north wall! That’s where they’re going to...”

Before she could finish, the Romulan woman crouched next to her grasped her firmly by her forearm, warning. “No! That’s a diversion. Watch the krogan.”

“Fuck! You’re right!” Anaya cursed as the giant krogan charged at the west wall at the same time that the mercenary heavy weapons specialists poured on missile and heavy mass effect projectile fire. “Damn!” She shouted in alarm, “They took out one of the turrets!”

“Tali!” V’lana shouted.

“On it!” The lively quarian replied as she quickly fabricated a second turret just in time to counter the fire from the mercenary heavies and turrets.

Winning at the heavy fire coming from the mercenaries and the constant pummeling from the cyborg krogan and biotic human drones, Tali

exclaimed in an apologetic voice, "The turrets and shields aren't going to last much longer."

"It's okay, Tali." V'lana responded, "We know you're doing the best you can."

"Where are these mercs coming from?" Anaya cried out as yet another wave of mercenaries charged, the west wall beginning to buckle under the sustained assault.

"Good question." V'lana quipped as a temporary lull fell on the field. "Maybe they grow 'em from dragon seeds."

"Maybe." The asari detective responded, laughing nervously, a sad, rueful grin on her face as she moaned, "Looks like I'm not going to have those grandchildren after all. What about you? Anyone or anything other than your boyfriend you're gonna miss?"

"Besides you." V'lana chuckled in an effort to cheer up her friend.

"Yeah." Anaya smiled back, "So?"

"My Big Brother." V'lana responded her lips turning up in a fond grin. "Nude sunbathing on the Riviera and Risa...Zsa-Zsa's parties..."

"Sounds like fun." Anaya remarked with a wry grin.

"Yeah." V'lana answered back before quipping in a half-joking tone, "We get out of this...after getting good and drunk...I'm taking you to the holodeck and we're going to the Riviera, take off all our clothes, and lie out in the sun doing nothing but sipping pina colodas."

"It's a date." Anaya laughed, their conversation suddenly interrupted by a hail of weapons fire combined with the thundering of missiles impacting and exploding against the wall and ceiling.

"This is it." V'lana declared as the giant krogan literally picked up a cargo truck and heaved it at the west wall while the bald biotic drone picked up a pair of innocent bystanders caught in the crossfire and flung them against the wall, their bodies impacting against it with a sickly thud.

Trembling as cracks appeared in the wall and ceiling and rubble began to fall, Anaya, heaving a sigh as she gazed into the eyes of the lovely Romulan beside her, leaned towards her and kissed her. At first, a tentative kiss, then V'lana, much to the surprise of both, returned the gentle kiss, igniting the passion that had been building between the pair as they kissed heedless of the rubble beginning to fall around them until interrupted by a throat clearing.

"I'm sorry..." Tali interrupted, "But it's time to fall back. The wall and ceiling are about to collapse. If we don't withdraw to the cell block now..."

"Right, Tali." V'lana replied, her face flushing dark green, the face of the asari she had just been kissing also taking on a darker blue hue. "We have to go."

"Fall back!" Anaya called out to her surviving officers as the ceiling began to collapse, "Now!"

A cold smile appearing on his face as the wall and roof of the precinct house collapsed, leaving the heavily reinforced cell block as the only standing structure, Kai Leng sneered as he addressed the redhead standing beside him. "Now we finish the job. Order the final assault Shepard. And remember the asari detective must die along with everyone else except her off world allies. The Illusive Man wants those taken alive."

Glaring at the black-clad Cerberus assassin next to her, Shepard responded with a sneer of her own. "Don't tell me my job, Mr. Leng. I know exactly what I have to do. I will go in with Zero and Grunt. You and the mercenaries follow immediately afterwards." Not saying another word, she motioned at the two drones, signaling them to join her.

"Go." Leng ordered, "And do not fail."

"Ready?"

"I'm ready. Let's do this before I change my mind."

"Here we go!" With a final exertion of will and aided by the voice in her head, Shepard overcame her implanted jailor. "Now!" the voice urged, "Before the implant recovers! Do it!"

"Goodbye!" Shepard, her synapses firing in pain and agony from her implants joining with the voice inside herself, struck with her omniblades at the two cyborgs, causing them both to cry out in pain.

"I'm seeing it, but I'm not believing it!" Anaya shouted exuberantly as she and V'lana witnessed Shepard turning on her own people.

"She must have managed to temporarily override her implants." V'lana surmised as her comm badge chirped, "I hope that's you Big Brother." The subcommander responded, answering the hail as Anaya shouted at her officers to concentrate their fire on Shepard, the cyborgs, and the Cerberus assassin dashing into the melee towards the redhead, his katana drawn.

"Cerberus frigate secured, Little Sister." Tovan responded, "Do you need assistance?"

"Hell yes!" Both V'lana and Anaya shouted simultaneously as they continued to shoot, paying no heed to their own personal safety.

"Security troops on the way."

Even as she felt her synapses shutting down one at a time, Shepard continued to fight, the force of her constant assault breaching the two augmented drones' defenses, causing them to stagger as she landed repeated blows and strikes with the her omniblades, switching from one to the other, staggering as she parried the giant krogan's wild blows. Then, Kai Leng who had been waiting for this very moment made his move.

The Cerberus assassin struck silently, running Shepard through with his katana from behind. Piercing shielding and armor, the blade penetrated through to the other side dripping blood on to the ground. Extracting his blade, the assassin spat as weapons fire cascaded from all sides at him and the mercenaries, a green bolt of energy grazing his armor. Ignoring the body lying at his feet, Leng called out to the two drones, "Zero...Grunt...Withdraw. Gamma Protocol."

"They're running!" Anaya shouted out in glee, embracing the Romulan woman next to her, "We've won! We're alive!"

"Yes, we are." V'lana smiled back, returning the asari detective's enthusiastic hug. Then, seeing the Shepard lying bleeding on the ground, the subcommander called out to one of the medics that had just beamed down, "See to her at once!"

"Aye, Subcommander." A Starfleet nurse clad in a light blue minidress responded, dashing to the clone's side along with another medtech while other medics, Romulan Starfleet, and asari, quickly went to work on the wounded.

"Dana? This is Anaya..." The detective spoke into her comm, trying to reach her other officers

"Anaya!" The asari sergeant exclaimed, *"Thank the Goddess! For a while I wasn't sure..."*

"It was touch and go for a while." Anaya confessed with a sigh, "But...what is it the humans' say? The cavalry arrived in the nick of time. What about you and your people? How bad?"

"We lost Talassa." Dana answered back in a melancholic tone, *"And all of us are banged up to one degree or another. But...we'll get better. And we're alive."*

"That's what counts." Anaya replied as the nurse ministering to Shepard called out.

"Subcommander! I think you should come over here. There's something you need to see!"

"Go ahead." Anaya prompted, "I need to finish up some business with Dana and then talk to Bellessa. Come get me when you're done."

"What is it?" V'lana asked as she approached the nurse who had just called her over, kneeling down over her patient.

"I've never seen anything like it." The human nurse exclaimed in a hushed tone. "Even though I managed to stabilize the wound to her abdomen, she should still be dead. The implants they put in her should have fried her brain completely. But I'm picking up faint...very faint...neural activity in her cerebral cortex."

"So she's still alive?" V'lana queried, "How?"

"Good question." The nurse responded, "Between the loss of blood from that stab wound and the damage those implants caused, she should be dead. However," the nurse warned, "She won't be alive for long if we don't get her into a stasis chamber stat."

"Do so." V'lana commanded. "Transport her immediately to sick bay and tell Doctors Chakwas and Aven to give her top priority. I want to find out what the hell's going on with her."

"Aye, Subcommander." The Starfleet nurse acknowledged as she tapped her comm badge and called out. "Medical emergency immediate transport to Sickbay. Inform Doctors Chakwas and Aven they are needed stat."

As the nurse and her patient dematerialized, V'lana felt a hand on her shoulder and heard Anaya's voice. "Everything all right?"

Her lips turned up in a slight grin, the subcommander turned to face the asari police officer, "Yeah. I think. Somehow or other Shepard's still alive. I ordered her beamed back to the ship so that the doctors can have a look at her." Tapping her comm, V'lana called out, "Big Brother? Status report."

"Normandy is under our control in the outer system, Subcommander. Lieutenant Adams is leading a prize crew and will take the frigate to the Farinata System to rendezvous with Admiral Anderson. I've assigned the Scorpion fighters to accompany him should Cerberus get any ideas."

"Good." V'lana replied, "What about the other teams? Miranda and Lieutenant Commander Oudekirk and Liara?"

"Miranda reports mission success. We are preparing to beam her, her team, and her family up on your command. Cilla and Liara have tracked the Shadow Broker to a ship located near the planet Hagalaz in the Sowilo System and have taken the Telara in pursuit."

"Understood. Beam up Miranda and her people and be ready to depart for the Sowilo system on my orders. Oh...one other thing, Big Brother...Tali's all right."

His relief at the news obvious in his voice tone, Tovan replied, *"Thank you, Little Sister."*

Turning to Anaya, the subcommander asked, “Are we done here?”

Looking about, the asari detective pointed to the flashing lights rapidly approaching saying with a snort of derision, “Looks like they finally decided to show up. I’ve said my goodbyes, and I know that between Bellessa and Dana, the precinct’s going to be in good hands.” A sly grin appearing on her face, Anaya quipped, “If my bosses weren’t pleased at how I did things, wait until they get a load of how those two are going to run the show. They’re already planning on how to drive Eclipse off Illium.”

“Good.” V’lana replied, giving the asari detective a tentative smile, “Ready to go?”

Anaya answered, giving the spaceport one final look, “Let’s go.”

Tapping her comm again, V’lana commanded, “Avesti to *Gallena*. Two to beam up. Energize.”

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