
THE ADVENTURES OF
HACHI & ARAINE
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Tenno Hachi is an unstoppable juggernaut on the battlefield with her Warframe Araine and heavy blade. Different from others, Hachi is insecure and unsure of herself in social interactions. When she accepts a job from Sara, an ex-Corpus salvager now living on Cetus who insists on coming along for the job, Hachi is forced to deal with her and more than she could have expected.

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Part 1

Where an unstoppable juggernaut struggles to interact with others but awakens to her emotions.

So I met a girl with sandy blond hair.



I'm looking at myself in the large body mirror before me.

Putting my arms through a Ceno cuirass and pulling on the straps I clumsily twist the armor side to side trying to get an appropriate fit until I feel a pinch. Another twist, another pinch; repeat until it's settled in place.

I give myself a good once over, then again, critiquing myself.

The hair on the side of my head is starting to grow out, the golden circlet around my forehead contrasts well against my dark chocolate skin, but my eyes seem uneven; my right eye doesn't open as much as my left and causes me to look as if I'm winking, maybe wincing. My mouth is covered behind a cloth hiding small scars along the bottom of my jaw. No one can see them but I feel their ugliness is there.

My body is skinny; too skinny. I lack the definition I see commonly in the physique of active people. The ones working the docks, standing guard at the city entrances, or even those who work in their skin-tight jumpsuits on the relays.

I feel a mess. I hate my face. I feel uncomfortable in my body. I take a breath and sigh. I imagine the woman I am and try to reconcile this with who I want to be.

I look down at the blue metallic cuirass now covering my torso, helping to hide me. I feel comfortable with that in a way, but the discomfort of the armor begins to wear on me. Besides, I think to myself, this blue clashes with my vermillion and dark chocolate Koppra attire.

While the Cetus shop clerk looks at me with a smile, agreeable with my choice of attire, all I can feel is the front plate pulling my chest down and causing my bra to dig in. I begin to loosen the cuirass's straps and remove it. A sigh of relief as I adjust myself; no more pinching.

The clerk seemingly recognizes my frustration and begins to grab another option from his rack of wares; I stop him.

"Thanks, I don't think these are what I'm looking for right now." And place the cuirass back on the counter beside him.

"We have other fits that may be more to your liking?" he asks, but I'm already walking away.

I glance around the shop one last time and see a girl with sandy blond hair and bronzed complexion, her hands fingering the fabrics against the wall. She has a pretty face, her muscular body covered in tailored clothes that seemed to be stitched together from various tan-colored fabrics.

I briefly admire her and wish how I could look at least somewhat as attractive as she, and begin to make my way towards the door.

A voice calls out, "You should try the Vhad. I think it'd suit you." It's the girl with sandy blond hair.

Did she notice me staring at her? Was I being rude? Maybe she's talking to someone else – but we're the only ones in the shop beside the store clerk. I'm still going through the thoughts in my head when I realized she's walking towards me. A few steps away now; she smiles and leans towards me.

"I think you're just who I needed to meet today."

I'm realizing I'm staring back at her. I don't have a clue what the most appropriate response is. I stumble out a single word. "Ok." And turning, walk out the door of the shop.

Outside the streets are busy with people and other Tenno within their Warframes, all manner of life, food, and necessities seem to be available and for a brief moment, the chaos of people moving about their daily activities is welcoming.

The girl with the sandy blond hair steps in front of me. She smiles again, "You're someone who feels more comfortable in one of your tin suits I bet? Have a minute to talk before you change?"

I'm confused by her abruptness and I find myself mentally staggered between my goal of shopping versus having to converse with someone I don't know. *How does she know what I am?* My first feeling is to go transfer back to my frame, away from her and the others in the city, away from people and life, and just welcome the silence and safety of my ship.

"Ok," I mutter and immediately wonder why I had agreed.

"Great, come with me please!" she exclaims and motions me to follow her.

We walk along a path leading away from the noise of the market, not too far ahead I can see the path leads to an inclined trail, and beyond that, back towards the water where the fishermen bring in their hauls. We stop a short distance away from a vista point of the market, the noise of the crowds a dull roar in the background fading as the sounds of birds and wind through tall grass become more prominent.

"I came here to put in a bounty with Konzu or the Quills hoping for a Tenno to respond, but since I've run into you I figured I'd ask your help directly. You don't mind do you?"

"That's fine," I respond, then wonder if I responded too fast. I realize then I should be asking what the job is, but I figure she'll tell me so I stay quiet, waiting for her to speak again. I begin to imagine it'll be something related to Grineer in the plains when she begins to speak.

"I've been scavenging in abandoned caves nearby. I often find useful parts and gems I can sell here in town and occasionally some Grineer equipment or weapons left mostly intact."

She pauses as if waiting for me to say something. I wait.

"During my recent trip I was exploring caves when some ground gave way and I fell down a narrow slope. Got myself covered in mud, scraped up, and nearly broke myself if my helper here hadn't found some ground to plant in and hold fast." She motions to the Cyath Zaw at her waste. "It took me almost a day to get myself out of that hole I'd fallen into. But it was worth it…maybe."

I continue looking at her as she tells me her story. My thoughts drift from her hazel eyes to the light pink of her lips and white teeth as she talks. I find I'm staring at her mouth.

She must have people here who would help her scavenge, why not take them along? My thoughts refocus and I'm glad she's still talking; not waiting for me to respond.

"That's when I came across a…door…at least I think it's a door. It reminds me of a door at least. A large white moon with gold inlays and this aqua light coming from its center."

My thoughts lose her words again as I find myself staring at her boots, animal furs wrapped tightly with some type of cords. Poufy on the top where her muscular legs began, at least more than mine, but still feminine. *Why am I so fixated on her?*

“So you gonna help me get in or what?” Her hands go to her hips, elbows arched out and I realize her top accentuates her well. I wonder how I’d look in her clothing, but it would need to be brighter colors; I’m not a fan of khaki.

“What?” I say out loud as I realize she’s waiting for my response.

“The golden door? That’s one of your Orokin vaults or something right? Can you get us in there and we split the loot - fair?”

I start to wonder if there could be an Orokin Vault here and realize she’s waiting for my response, she seems frustrated – *is it because I haven’t replied?*

“Yeah, sorry, was thinking, you could probably have anyone help you get into a vault why a Tenno?”

“Hello! Have you not been paying attention, I couldn’t pry this thing open and explosives would bring the entire cave down around me. Were you not listening to what I’ve been saying?”

Crap I had gotten lost in thought again. Now I was beginning to feel bad that I hadn’t paid more attention to her story.

“Yes, I can see if I can get inside.” I had no idea if I could do that, though at this point I should at least offer to help.

“Great! I need to gather some supplies, meet me at my place first thing in the morning?”

“No, I’ll just go now. Just send me the coordinates.”

She seemed to get annoyed. “You really aren’t a good listener, are you? I’m going with you.”

“That’s not necessary. I can go check it out and retrieve whatever is in there for you. Besides, it could be dangerous –“.

She cuts me off, “No. I’ll be going, there isn’t any way for you to find it on your own, those tunnels are like a maze and I don’t want someone else stumbling across it before us.”

I’m about to disagree, but the look on her face tells me it’s useless.

“So like I said earlier when you weren’t listening *clearly*…I need supplies, food, and rest before we head back out. I’m not like you glowy eyes.”

Were my eyes glowing?

“Ok,” I said. She seemed pleased with this and smiled again. Putting her hands together she gave a slight bow.

“Thank you, Tenno. I’ll meet you here.” Her fingers pointing to coordinates on a datapad in her hands. “At first light tomorrow. If you need to get a hold of me use this.” She holds out her hand, a small com device in it. I take it as she gives me a nod. “My name is Sara.” She pauses looking at me.

“I’ll be there,” I reply, but she continues to wait. A brief pause, then a slight frown followed by a brief shrug. She smiles and heads back the way we came.

I’m back on my landing craft.

“Was your excursion a successful one Operator?” A calm synthetic voice echoes from my comms.

“We have a job Kumo. I need you to make me some dragon keys.” I reply.

“Of course Operator. Shall I lay in a course for the nearest derelict gravesite?”

“No, it’s here.”

There is a pause.

“That’s unexpected.”

“Yeah.”

“Interesting. I wish the Lotus was reachable to provide her insight to you. I have nothing of this in my codex. Perhaps you’ll share the details of this finding with me for further analysis?”

“So I met a girl with sandy blonde hair.”

So I hand Sara my sidearm.

I'm staring at a metal door bolted on one side into the stone rocks and the other loosely held shut by what looks like a metal wire and stick. I'm near the southeastern rocky walls of Mer-Sah Bay, the sun rising, the dull roar of waves crashing as the tide shifts and birds moving towards the first signs of life appearing in the city market not far in the distance.

I move my hand to knock and stop short as I hear movement and a hand freeing the stick causing it to swing open.

"Good morning!" Sara exclaims as she opens the door, a pack slung over her shoulder.

"Hello," I reply, the voice audible but the mouth of my frame unmoving.

"Hey, stranger! I'm glad your color choices are consistent, I never would have guessed that was you in there." She replies. "What do you call this attire of yours?"

I hesitate. I've never been asked, nor so directly. *How does she know so much about us, the Tenno?* What would the Lotus say about her? Most likely that I should stay away…

She smiles at me as I realize she's waiting for a reply. "You sort of remind me of a spider. I guess that'll come in handy when we need to climb." She steps forward, closing the door behind her. "Well, I'm ready. Let's go."

"We don't know what's inside the vault." It's more a question than a statement.

"Oh no, you don't. I've already told you I'm coming with." Her response is bratty.

"And what of Grineer or worse?" I protest.

"Don't be silly, I've been scavenging these areas by myself for years." She lets out a long sigh. "Besides, if we run into trouble you can just lend me that fancy sidearm of yours while you take out the bad guys hero." Her response is overly flippant as she points to the kit gun strapped to my Warframe's thigh.

I sigh to myself.

It's an uneventful but arduous journey as we leave Cetus and head to the location north of Oston Range on foot.

While I reflect on how the trip would have been much faster having I just flown my Archwing I find it's at least enjoyable to observe Sara and her effortless interactions with the things around her.

Stopping every so often to admire the native flora or pry a brilliant gem from nearby stones, and it seems to always provide her with an opportunity to tell me something I didn't know about the Ostrons, Cetus and the plains, a short story from her past or a childhood memory.

Like the time she was first given a Maprico fruit by her brother, who showed her how to remove the thick skin and scoop out the sweet pulp. She'd later use that fruit with tea leaves to make a sweet drink or ferment it into an alcoholic beverage.

It begins to cause me to appreciate our surroundings more.

When I ask her about her family she falls silent and provides a non sequitur response. I assume like most from Cetus the Grineer are to blame for much of their struggle, but seeing her talking about the fond memories…it's nice to be reminded of what we fight for, what the Lotus had woken us to preserve.

We approach a cliff wall, in front of some natural rock formations; Sara slows down.

"We're almost there." She says as she reaches into her bag, grabs a thin disc, and places it on the ground.

"Explosives?" I ask.

"Just making sure when we come out of the cave we have a way of avoiding any issues with whoever may be out here."

I nod.

She places the explosives several feet apart as we continue. The area around us is full of grass, plant life and rocks, no signs of any technology, let alone Orokin, nearby.

The rock formations themselves seem random as if fallen from the nearby mountain slopes and washed over by centuries of rains and weather. Nothing unusual.

She leads me to a small opening in the rocks, barely large enough for me to fit through.

"This is the easy part." Says Sara as she places a headlamp on and flicks a switch, the light illuminating the cave in front of us.

We walk for a bit, the light from the entryway becoming all but a faint glimmer in the distance.

"Now the fun part," Sara exclaims and with the loud pop of a metal bolt she impales into the stone walls surrounding us, she attaches a rope and immediately slides down into the darkness below, the light of her lamp vanishing quickly out of my sight.

Damnit. I think to myself. If she's hurt herself...my thoughts were broken by her voice echoing up from seemingly nowhere. "You coming?"

I slide down.

20' down a narrow slope I rise to my feet. The ground hard. Polished stone. Debris and layers of dust cover what is very clearly man-made floor. Walls that look like finely polished bones, broken and split with age as the roots of some unknown tree has decided to reclaim the room as its home.

Rocks and earth have invaded what was a hallway or perhaps a large room, but the wall across our entrance shows the faintest of light, a glow, tracing back to the unforgettable white half-moon covered in gold with four distinct patterns connected by blue illuminated intersecting lines.

What the hell was this even doing here? I wondered to myself.

Sara is standing just ahead of me, securing the rope to the ground and fastening some sort of makeshift clamp to it. A tool for every situation apparently in her satchel.

"I'm securing the line. Whatever is in that vault it'll be easier to carry back up if we use the rope as a pulley."

I move closer to the door. Sara finishes her pulley and stands beside me.

"Hellooooo? Anyone home?" Sara says as she's banging her fist against the door.

I wait, listening, nothing. Sara shrugs.

I pull the keys from my gear and begin to see which one will fit. The first slides into place, a clinking sound, but nothing happens. Odd I think, and try a different one in the next slot. Another key fitted, but nothing. I place the third and begin to hear a faint hum, something seems to be coming online. The last key slides in and the faint blue glow turns bright. The golden decorations and patterns twist, retracting away into the stone walls, but jam almost two-thirds of the way open.

Sara squeals with delight. “EEEEEE!” You did it, Tenno!” She’s holding up her hand, palm open towards me.

I stare back at her and she motions to my hand and then to her hand. I hold mine up and she slaps it against hers. “Hi-Five!” She exclaims.

I turn back to the now mostly open doorway of the vault. The interior lights turning on, but dim and flickering. A small room maybe twenty feet wide and a dozen or so long is before us, completely empty except for what appears to be a table in the center.

Sara is inside scanning the room from wall to wall, her headlamp darting side to side almost frantically.

“Is there really nothing in here?” Disappointment in her voice...

I move closer to the table. Another polished bone looking device, a circlet of gold and blue light, ever so faintly drawn on the top.

Sara moves closer to me and the table and the faint blue becomes brighter. The circlet begins to rotate.

“Step back,” I say and put my arm out blocking her from moving closer to the table. Within a blink she’s a few feet back; incredibly agile.

The circlet opens and a white pedestal with a blue sphere rises, a click is heard as the device seems to lock into position. The sphere begins to move clockwise at first, then counterclockwise as it lights up, small white lights appear within its center and suddenly the room is filled with stars and floating planets hovering above us.

The Sun, Earth, Pluto, our solar system; a blinking gold light beyond Sedna.

“Is this some sort of map?”

I take a moment to take it all in.

“Yeah,” I say.

“EEEEEE! You know what this means Tenno?!” She’s looking at me a huge grin on her face. “We’re going on a treasure hunt in space!”

I spend the next hour arguing with her in what can only be described as a futile effort. I explain she could sell the map, how Maroo is always looking for information like this, how I’m not a taxi, and offer to bring back whatever is in the derelict to her but her insistence on being a traveling companion is relentless.

I give in.

We make our way back up the slope, Sara moves surprisingly well using the fastened rope and pully system she rigged. I find myself fixated on her again.

We're eventually back on flat ground and walking towards the cave entrance when I hear them. I stop and put my arm out in front of Sara. I motion with my other hand a finger to what would be the lips of my frame had it had them. She nods and crouches down, pulling the detonator from her bag she readies it.

I shake my head side to side. *We don't need that yet.*

I move closer to the entrance, with luck they'd pass by and we could go about our way.

I look outside, a dozen armed Grineer heading north. I sigh, we'll wait here for them to be gone and in a few moments leave with them being none the wiser. I immediately realize that I should have said that thought out loud.

BOOM! Then a series of more BOOMS! I can see the explosives going off one after the other, shrapnel and dirt flying everywhere. The first brings the squad to alert but as they attempt to regroup, the sequential explosions leave none standing.

There is bound to be another group, but if we slip out now we could get far enough away that it wouldn't matter. I pause and listen, a dropship, the sound of heavy metal boots hitting the ground. Crap, more are here already.

I glance back at Sara who shrugs.

I sigh. *They'll start searching the area for sure now.*

So I hand Sara my sidearm.

So I head out the airlock

When the dust clears the remains of a crashed drop ship and the bodies of a few dozen Grineer litter the ground. I sheath my blades and begin to reload shells into my shotgun.

“You Tenno are amazing! I knew I’d be fine with you around.” Sara says, she seems very happy with the situation as she hands me back the kit gun.

“We should go,” I say looking towards the setting sun nearing the horizon and I realize it won’t be long before night falls.

“Just a few minutes, please. I need to make sure I didn’t miss anything of value.” Pop! A bolt comes off a casing of a Grineer shoulder piece and Sara is removing some parts.

“Seriously?”

We make it back to the entrance of Cetus just as the sun is setting, Sara’s bag quite a bit heavier than when we set out, but my relief as we enter back into the market turns to frustration as Sara reminds me she wants to go to space.

I’m standing on the upper level of my Railjack staring into space, Kumo navigating us to our mystery destination, beyond Sedna, to something unknown.

Why am I doing this?

It’d be simple enough if it were just me, but why did I ever agree to Sara that she could come. It’s reckless, Kumo had stated, and while he wasn’t prone to be a constant nag I felt he would remind me at any moment of how bad an idea this was…or maybe I just wanted him too.

He wouldn’t be wrong. If the Lotus had been around, if she had been aware, she would have cautioned against this. She may have even reached out to Sara directly to stop her.

But why? Why is everything such a secret with her, with us, our missions, our goals?

Liability. I hear myself echo back.

A liability for whom I wonder? She had seen me at Onko’s and known what I was. During our initial journey to the cave she had shared constant anecdotes about her life, and in the last few days, she seemed forthcoming with all kinds of information.

Her family was not natives of Cetus I learned, which explained her lack of *surah*, *dah-dap,* and other common speech I often hear from the plains folk. Instead, her parents had come from a Corpus colony on Europa where they had discovered a cache of salvaged war parts that paid for their way to Cetus. A place they had hoped to begin a trade shop between the inhabitants of the plains, the Corpus and Grineer, it seemed like a good plan.

Unfortunately, as the Grineer enacted their attempt of control over the people of Cetus, Sara’s family had been caught in the crossfire. Losing all of them at once had not just left her an orphan, but left her having to take care of herself.

She made her way by doing whatever she could, foraging and fishing for her food, selling salvage to anyone who would buy it, and had several run-ins with the Quill who she occasionally delivered especially odd items she lifted from Grineer camps. When the first Tenno started taking Konzu's bounties it was from the Quill and hanging around Onko's shop that she had discovered some of the secrets of the Tenno.

When I asked her about why she approached me for this job she said it was because I was the only one in the shop at the time and she really had thought the Vhad outfit would look good on me.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Sara's voice turns me away from the emptiness. I turn to face her. She's standing before me smiling, a cup of tea in her hands. I hadn't heard her approaching. "Did you want one?" she asks as I realize I'm staring at her cup.

"No, thank you." Why didn't I say yes? Should I ask what kind of tea it is? Maybe I should ask what she's doing here…no that'd be rude, it sounds rude at least. Why don't I ask her about her experience with other Tenno? *Is that an appropriate response now or later*, I wonder to myself.

"Soooo?" she drags her voice out slowly, "What are you looking for out there?" She motions with her head to the window in front of us.

I pause still considering a response. "It's calming."

She turns her body to face the glass and leans towards it then turns away abruptly facing back through the opening behind me into the lower floors.

"It looks so empty to me, so lonely." And then with a playful smirk turns to face me and exclaims, "Aren't you glad I'm here to keep you company!" It wasn't a question.

Why did I say yes to this?

"Operator, five minutes until the location is in visual range." Kumo's voice rings out in the comms.

Sara has a puzzled look on her face, "Do Tenno have names? I've never heard Kumo use it."

I pause, *what could it hurt I wonder*. I'm staring at her again, she smiles at me. "Heading to navigation now," I respond.

"I think you mean, we're heading to navigation." Sara chimes in and chuckles.

"Anything of interest in the area?" I ask of Kumo.

"No current flight paths follow this trajectory and no ships have been detected in range. The map's location seems to be an old pre-war Orokin sentry tower."

"Are there life signs?" Sara briefly pauses as if about to ask more, but then realizes Kumo hasn't responded.

Sara looks at me, an annoyed look on her face.

"Kumo," I say.

"Yes, Operator?"

"What can you tell me about the sentry tower?"

"These pre-war towers usually had limited crews as they were designed to be used as early warning detection for sentients or restocking stations. I am getting some very low power readings, so some facilities should still work...however, there are…life signs…it appears infested."

“Kumo. Attend to Sara while I investigate.”

“Yes, Operator.”

“Hey wait a minute?! I’m going with you!” Sara exclaims.

“You can’t.” As the words come out I can tell Sara is about to protest.

“Operator, may I interject?”

“Yes, Kumo.”

“Sara, we are unable to dock with this derelict vessel. We have no space suits available for use and attempting to travel with the Operator would result in your immediate death due to loss of atmosphere outside this ship.” Kumo’s voice is a very matter of fact.

Sara sulks, “Ah man, so what do I do here? I wanted to get in on the action down there?”

“Sara, you’ll be able to speak and view the Operator's progress from here. I’m sure she will find your insights informative.”

Sara seems to perk up at this. “Alright. But I’m going to need you to listen to me if there is something I want you to investigate more. Ok?”

“Sure,” I reply and turn toward the arsenal.

I approach the controls and can tell Kumo is already selecting my loadout. I’m looking at Araine, my frame; my only Warframe. I see her all the time, yet each feels like the first. I admire her noble features, vermillion, and dark chocolate colors intertwine her legs, arms, and around her neck. A dark contrast to the fleshy pink along her torso, chest, shoulders, and face. Part metal, part infested, appendages like long jacket collars grow from her neck rising outwards to her shoulders and up. Another set protrudes downward from her lower back like a tailcoat. For something to be so beautiful, she must have been truly impressive before…before this...A flash at the moment and then I’m looking at Sara gawking at me, at us.

“Eeeee! It’s so amazing seeing you do that first hand!” Sara looks truly amazed. She’s seen me transfer out of Araine once when first coming on board and now she’s seen me transfer in.

It’s nice to be seen, I think, but it makes me uncomfortable all the same.

“It’s like POOF you’re here, then POOF you’re gone!” Her excitement suddenly pauses, “Wait! How are you going to carry all the treasure back?”

“I’ll manage.” *We don’t even know if there is anything of value there.* I move across the room to a small airlock pad. “Kumo?”

“Yes, Operator. Scanning derelict now…will mark possible locations of interest to your nav.”

“Good luck Tenno!” Sara’s voice cracks with excitement and she waves at me.

So I head out the airlock.

So I guess we're rich

I'm surrounded by a vast emptiness, distant stars, the light of my Railjack, and my destination ahead of me the only navigation sources I have of what direction my Archwing should carry me. As I move closer to the derelict tower I can begin to make out its details; what should be familiar bone and gold towers shining like a pillar in the darkness are now little more than grey shells strangled by dark infested veins. The infestation runs along the sides of the tower and reaches out into space like branches, their synapses, leaves, gathering the light around them. Debris, perhaps pieces of the tower itself, litter the area as I begin to move closer, a small reflection catches my gaze and I head towards it; an airlock.

I come to a stop just before the door, no signs of recent usage, it shutters when opening, but once inside closes behind me without a sound. The entry room hums, atmosphere, the second airlock door before me opens.

"Can you hear me? Is this working?" Sara's voice over my comms.

"Yes." I turn on my camera display.

"Excellent! This is so exciting!"

I'm standing in a circular room, at one time perhaps it was a waiting room, but now the walls show numerous signs of age, strange plant overgrowth have reclaimed the ground, walls and parts of the glass ceiling above me, illuminating the room, and I can't help but feel it's strangely beautiful; tranquil.

I deploy my Helios, the inverted omega-shaped sentinel floats around me and begins scanning the room. As I move forward artificial lighting begins to come on, purely automated functions, and I head towards a now visible hallway across from me.

The narrow hallway is long but opens to a huge expanse. What was once a glorious half dome hall filled with travelers going and coming, now is a ruin of broken staircases, shattered glass, fallen statues, and…a buzzing.

I roll backward as a flash of light darts in front of me and solidifies into an intense beam.

"Operator, the derelict defenses seem to have activated due to your presence." Kumo's info is a bit late, but if life support, lighting, and defenses are active, there is a good chance whatever the map was leading us to is still here.

I make my way into the main hub of the tower. Paths leading in all directions now blocked with wreckage and impassible overgrowth make it difficult to identify which will lead me to another room and which will be a dead end.

I check the headings Kumo gave me as potential points of interest, places with the highest power consumption within the tower, places I hope to find something worth coming all this way for.

"Oh my god what is that thing?" exclaims Sara, her voice panicked. I look around, a faint shimmer of movement, something camouflaged moving along the side of the walls, it darts into an opening in the wall.

"A Kavat," I respond and move towards the opening. The original ways in and out of this hall appear blocked, but the opening the Kavat went into. This is new, a hole ripped open when the destruction first happened, pried further apart by plant roots pulling at its sides.

I step into the hole and find myself inside the walls. Electrical cabling and power cells, long decayed, surround me; further ahead something that looks like an old air duct, now my new passageway, a metal fan twisted stuck attempts to block me, but is moved aside easily.

Another room, this one below me, has what was once a beautiful pond, perhaps with some bushes and flowers, now a swampy sludge pit with infested tendrils rising out of it and staining the ground around them. Doors stand within archways at either end of the rectangular-shaped room.

I drop down, my sentinel hovers away above me and slowly descends near me, then heads off towards the sludge. A faint blue corner of something sticks out of the mud, the helios acts excited and seems pleased with its finding; some ancient object it hadn't yet cataloged in its database.

I move to the door closest to me, a small storage room appears, a bench in the center is serving as a bed to some type of root or tree, it passes from the bench through the ceiling; impossible to identify from the sight of it. Lockers stand along the sides, all aglow with green and red lights, except a couple that has fallen over, their contents long since spilled and spoiled.

"Oooh, would you look at this Tenno! What do you think is inside these?"

"Nothing much." *At least not anything someone would make a map for.* I think to myself.

"Let's find out!" Sara's voice is excited.

I move to the first locker and open it, it's empty. Sara lets out a long sigh over the comms. I continue opening the lockers throughout the room and can feel Sara beginning to pout. Besides some ammo and mutagen samples, there is little of use or value in the storage. I make my way back to the previous room and head along the sides of the sludge pool towards the other door.

It opens to an intact hallway, the lights flicker and come online as the corridor appears untouched by the chaos that the rest of the tower has experienced. A few steps more and I'm facing stairs, dead trees lining the walls, a great golden artwork of rotating circlets spiral around, suspended in the air above a device that reminds me of ancient clockwork.

"That's amazing! What is that?" Sara's voice excited again. "Can we take it back with us?" She giggles.

"No."

"I'm just kidding silly!"

Of course, she is, but for a moment I do consider how good it'd look on my Railjack's observation deck.

Up the stairs and an archway presents me unto a balcony facing a great expanse, a glass ceiling more than a hundred meters above me and below, darkness and stars, cracks revealing a glass bottom. At one time this must have been a glorious observation room with walkways connecting to various levels of the tower, but like the rest of this forgotten and crumbled derelict it's simply a maze of large roots, infestation tendrils, sludge and debris working as more of an obstacle than anything.

A balcony similar to the one I stand on is direct across the chasm from me. I look for a few remains that seem like they could support my weight and I'm running, a jump, I come down with a hard slam against the stone and vines below me. Again. I'm across.

Storage bins block the inner hallway from the arch before me. I look around, an air vent above seems like the only way to go. I'm up, my fist slamming into the fan of the vent and it comes crashing down, the sound echoes around me. I step inside, then I hear it; a rustling sound growing louder as I move through the air duct.

"Um, that doesn't sound good." Sara's voice trails off then perks up with, "Maybe it's another kavat?"

I'm almost at the opening of the duct and I can already see my problem below barely twenty meters down. A room littered with infested, their misshapen bodies pulling themselves along on limbs made of what looks like sinew and bones.

"It's like they wear their insides on their outside, how disgusting!" I can sense her squeamishness and imagine Sara making a face, perhaps sticking her tongue out; it makes me smile.

The room below is large, a lift in the center, no longer connected to the floors above, a pool of running water, little waterfalls made from the central floor where a pipe has burst open sit in the middle and around it, infested swarm and move about aimlessly. Perhaps they sense a new presence, *us*, but are uncertain of its whereabouts.

No matter I can see what we most likely came for. The familiar half dome bone-colored door with four distinct golden circlets etched into its face, and connected, vibrant blue, lines reach down to the floor. A vault door.

"Hey, you see that door over there? It looks like what we found in the cave, right?" Sara's voice. "You think you can sneak around these things and get to it?"

"No."

I draw my heavy blade and jump down bringing it hard onto the head of a creature that may at one time been a human but now was little more than a disfigured bipedal shape with an enlarged torso for ahead. Its body explodes and showers the area near me with puss and bile and a loud clang echoes as my blade strikes all the way through to the floor.

For a second I hear Sara's voice, it's full of concern; I appreciate it. The room begins to move, the dozens and dozens of infested race towards me, to the sound, whatever they sense of me they know isn't completely one of them. I ready myself.

I'm standing in front of the vault door, my frame drenched in fluids and flesh; *not hers*. While the various dismembered parts of infested litter the room around me I find the area seems to have been kept running. Ceiling and floor lights, intricate golden suspended mechanical artwork swirling about the walls and though the broken pipes spew water into a pool it looks clear, not muddied like the sludge pits from earlier. The room's power supply seems to be completely unaffected by the devastation that happened to the other parts of the tower.

I pull out the first key, a click, same as on earth, the door demands more. All four key types placed and I'm anticipating Sara's voice as the door slides open.

The room is larger than your normal vault, all white, storage containers line the walls, but amongst the central walkway a path is outlined with several types of Ayatan sculptures, fully socketed their movements and humming add calmness to the room.

"Would you look at that Tenno! That's some serious Endo! Wooo!"

I step in and follow their makeshift walkway to the back of the vault, a statue of an unknown person holding their hands out, within it a glowing orb of light containing a golden collar.

"What is that thing?" Sara's voice again.

I approach and reach out my hand, the light dims as I move closer to it and I grasp the golden collar.

Void Static.

“Hey what’s happening, everything ok?!” Sara’s voice is concerned.

“I’m fine,” I say, but I’m not sure, the frame seemed to react when I first touched the collar, but it’s subsided now.

I motion to the Helios, who begins gathering the sculptures as I open each locker, the contents full of cyan and amber Ayatan stars.

“Jackpot!”

“So I guess we’re rich.”

So I guess I'll go take a bath

I'm heading back out the airlock of the derelict when I hear Kumo, "Operator, scanners have detected a Grineer Crewship entering proximity."

I'm about to activate my omni, but I can already see the Crewship and its missiles exploding against the shields of my Railjack; the damage is minimal but it's not what I'm worried about.

"Kumo, you need to help Sara hide." My words come out in a panic as I see a ram sled eject from the Grineer ship and slam into the side of my hull.

Damnit. This is why we shouldn't have brought Sara with us, now I need to decide if I ensure Sara is safe on my ship while being bombarded or take out their ship and risk something happening to her?

Lights appear from the front of my Railjack, four focused beams begin converging on the Crewship and then suddenly a high pitched chirp followed by a dull rumble. More rumbles and the Crewship explodes. Good on her. I activate my omni.

I'm back on my ship, in the engine room, Kumo's defense measures must have stunned the boarding party, allowing Sara time to run and enter the forward artillery holding area. She'll be safe for a time.

The engine room door opens as a Grineer raider enters, his rifle's barrel lifts to face my chest as my heavy blade pierces through him. I push him back against the wall of the hallway to the main cabin, another raider appears and catches my blade in the side of the head, brain matter and helmet parts fly off, ricochet against the wall and come crashing down just inside the cabin area. I step in and four raiders rush me, but their attempts are futile; within seconds their blood and body parts litter the floor.

"Boarding party has been neutralized." Kumo proclaims as I make my way to the navigation; Sara is coming up the lift from the forward cannon.

"Welcome back Tenno, like my shooting?"

I nod. "Kumo, any ships in range?"

"No Operator, skies are clear."

We're in the cargo area of the engine room, Sara is inventorying the haul gleefully. "Look at all this! Maroo will pay a fortune for this!"

Sara continues talking but I'm not really listening as I focus on the golden collar I hold in my hand, such an odd thing to be in the vault. It reminded me of the Ascaris I've seen the Grineer carry when they attempt to capture a Warframe, but this was purely Orokin, not Grineer or Corpus technology.

Why would there have been a map on Cetus to this place? Sure a plethora of endo producing sculptures would be a thing to keep in a vault, but why have a map on Earth? It didn't make any sense, and why did Araine and I react when we first touched it? Perhaps one of the Cephalon's on the relays could tell me more.

"I'm going to hold onto this device if that's alright with you." I place it in my pocket.

"Sure, you've earned it. Besides I wouldn't want to put that thing around my neck, it'd probably fry my brains."

I walk to the side of the cargo area where I left Araine; covered in the remains of our encounters from earlier. I bow my head to hers and grab a sanitation hose. I don't like the thought of leaving her this way, all filthy from the adventures. Sure, it's unnecessary, but as she takes care of me I'd at least like to show her respect and take care of her as best I can. I shut off the hose and begin to wipe her down, her hardened metallic flesh dries easily and I look her over and smile touching her shoulder. *Thank you.* I mouth the words to her.

Sara moves over to us and I turn to face her.

"You take good care of her."

"She takes care of me."

"She?"

"Araine." I immediately wonder if I should have told her this.

"She has a name?"

"She was a Dax." I could see the confusion on Sara's face, her expression tells me she may start in with a barrage of questions. I turn away from her back to Araine. "An Orokin soldier."

I remove the device from my pocket to look at it again. Static. Then a vision of myself standing before Araine. I step back. It stops. I look at her, *was I transferring in briefly or was I seeing her seeing me?*

Sara's arms reach out to me, "You ok, you looked dizzy like you may fall."

I nod, "I'm fine. Maroo's?"

"You weren't listening again were you?" She smiles and shakes her head placing her hands on her hips. "Orcus Relay, we can offload this there and it'll give me a chance to check out what deals Darvo may have going on."

I nod.

"So what will you do with your new-found wealth Tenno?"

"I think I'll enjoy a bath."

"Oh, the New Loka springs? That's a great idea! We should totally have a spa day, some work on our paws and claws too, you think?"

"Paws and claws?"

Sara motions with her hands, curling them down and letting out a meow sound.

I laugh.

"Oh my god, did I finally get you to loosen up? And to think I didn't even have to get you drunk on fermented Maprico tea!"

I'm at the observation area again looking out at the stars. I'd begun to open up to Sara more as she asked about Kumo and me.

While not all of the past was something I wanted to talk about, and much like what happened with her family, we didn't press one another, but for the first time in a long time, I had someone other than Kumo to share with.

I told her about the Lotus awakening me from a long stasis and how it had taken a while for me to adjust to this new world. To some degree, I felt that it was us, the Tenno, who was responsible for the way things were. While we had toppled one empire of cruelty we had never taken the time or effort to establish a better way, instead of leaving it up to the citizens to choose their own path. While sounding ideal it had led to the rise of Corpus greed and Grineer's desire to rule all the sectors. It was because of this that Tenno felt it necessary to help wherever we could while attempting to stay somewhat neutral and out of the daily politics that engaged many of the factions and their skirmishes.

Unlike other Tenno, my Orbiter had been lost during my slumber, a meteor, or some other natural disaster has destroyed it. Fortunately, my landing craft and this Railjack had somehow survived almost untouched, though Kumo had suffered damage to his personality making him lack the normal emotional displays. While some Tenno would fabricate new arsenals I only had what I salvaged or traded for with others. However, I felt bonded with Araine, for me she had sacrificed her life as a Dax soldier to help the Orokin's war with the Sentients and now she helped me with my own causes. Thinking of her as simply one of many tools to be used wasn't something I would ever want to consider her.

Sara seemed genuinely fascinated with my story and we talked for hours at a time over tea while sitting by the observation area. While no stranger to combat on the plains with Grineer Sara's plan was now to look for work on the Orcus Relay with the Perrin Sequence, their hope of bringing prosperity to the system without the need for war what attracted her. Of course, the familiarity of having fellow Corpus raised comrades would help with her transition she felt.

It was incredible to me, how someone with such a seemingly casual attitude had survived so much and was willing to join a cause she believed in.

"What of your home on Cetus?"

"Well, I suppose if things don't work out I'll have a place to go back too, but if they do work out then I guess I'll have a place to visit. What do you think?"

I nod in agreement. *How would I know?* I thought. I've never lived in a home that wasn't a spaceship.

"Maybe someday I'll even have my own ship and then that will be my home like you."

I nod again.

Sara smiles, sips her tea, and leans against me, her head resting on my shoulder. My pulse jumps as my heart begins beating fast.

"I like this Tenno." She pauses, smiles, and leans over to me, her shirt loose and hanging down; *that's a lot of cleavage*. My eyes quickly glance back up to lock with hers. She's smiling wider now. *Did she catch me looking?* "I've always had a thing for shy people."

My heart begins racing and I begin to feel uncomfortable, my hands becoming sweaty, I try to focus on my breathing and keep it steady. Should I go or would that be rude? I don't know what to do.

"Operator, we'll be arriving at Orcus Relay soon." Kumo's voice providing the reprieve I needed.

"Thanks, Kumo," I say as I stand, Sara looking up at me, her face a brief expression of confusion then a smile and chuckle.

"When we dock can I have Kumo help me with offload Tenno?"

“Of course.” I force a quick response. *I wonder if she can tell I’m nervous?*

Sara moves a step closer to me, my personal space diminished, her face looking up at me with a smile. “And then I’ll come meet you at the New Loka baths for our spa day right?”

I nod.

Her arms grab me in a hug and she presses the side of her head against my chest, I can smell her lavender like scent, my heart skips a beat. “Yay, this will be so much fun you’ll see.” She rocks me slightly side to side then giggles and heads off towards the cargo area.

As I watch her head off my breathing begins to calm and I suddenly realize I miss the feeling of her holding me. I’m going to miss her. *Or maybe just someone to talk too?*

“Kumo. When we arrive I’ll need you to see what you can find out about the Orokin device we recovered from the derelict.”

“Of course, Operator. I’ll see if Simaris has any insight.”

“Thanks,” I say and turn to face the stars, Pluto quickly becoming visible. “So I guess I’ll go take a bath.”

So I kissed her

I'm sitting in the warm waters of the New Loka pools on the Orcus Relay. Steam fills my private room to the point that the entryway and nearby walls where my towel and robe are hanging are now barely visibile. A shadow of Araine's figure stands at the entrance to the room, adjacent to the hallway leading to my tatami rest area.

The fragrance within the New Loka's artificial sacred forests floods my senses, I can smell grass, moss, a feeling of serenity in their replica of an ancient earth forest. I think of earth, it's lush vegetation it's hidden Silver Grove, quiet, still, a peace; for a moment I could allow myself to forget where I am. The cares of the outside world begin to fade away and I can feel the tension leaving my naked body in waves.

This is perfect. I'm incredibly grateful I had made an ally of Amaryn and been granted access to these private areas. And of course their tatami room was much more comfortable than the chair Kumo had me salvage from the remains of my orbiter and install in my Railjack. For a moment everything is bliss, but my mind begins to wonder about what comes next.

Would Kumo have found a bounty he'd want me to follow up with? Should I go and check in with my contacts here on the relay? Or simply patrol the nearby Proximas for sings of sentient activity? No. I can think about that later, for now, let's just focus on this, nothing, a void of inactivity and relaxation.

I hear the door slide, open, I can't see her, but I can tell it's Sara, her voice confirming it a second later, "Oh my, this is so nice!"

"mhm." I'm nodding. My eyes closed. I'm focusing on the sound of the streams flowing into the pool. Jets along the sitting areas push out softly against my back. I kick my legs outstretching them away from me.

"The offloading went as planned. Maroo's contact was efficient, maybe I should have asked for more." She giggles and I can hear her step into the water, wading towards me. "May I sit with you?"

I begin to hesitate, to over think, but the steam and water jets cover me enough that my fear is gone.

"Sure," I respond as I open my eyes. Sara is standing before me, truly beautiful, her bronzed muscular physique now fully exposed confirms beyond any doubt how she's such an impressive fighter. While her clothing had previously hidden some contours, I could now see without hindrance, each chiseled ab, healthy veins running along her defined forearms and several scars most likely from previous adventures along her legs and sides. Her breasts, sporty and perky; she still had the perfect femininity I could only wish for.

"You like what you see?" She smiles and I realize I'm staring. *I'm so stupid why was I staring at her?* Why didn't I just keep my eyes closed? She giggles, "It's ok." and sits down beside me. Her leg brushes against mine and I can feel my body begin to become uncomfortable. I'm unsure of myself, what I should do. *Should I be saying something?* I look down towards the water, the jets behind me pushing out bubbles that hide everything below the surface.

We sit in silence for a time. I keep wondering if I should say something, ask her something, but can't find the words.

"Hey Tenno, you ever going to tell me your name?"

It catches me off guard, but I feel relieved as I immediately stop worrying about the silence. I turn to face her, her hair pulled to the side as she uses one hand to cup the water and pour it over the sandy blonde

locks then shakes her hair loose, fingers running from her scalp out. She's smiling, her hazel eyes looking directly at me, her pink lips slightly open as if to say something, but close and she turns away.

"Hachi," I say. *Why did I tell her? What should it matter?*

My thoughts stop as she abruptly turns, her arms embracing me, "Thank you Hachi!"

The hug takes me by surprise, her lavender scent is pleasant, her hair damp, her body warm against mine. I move my arms around her, but then my mind begins to wander again. Am I holding on too long? Should I let go first or should I wait for her to let go? My heart begins to race, it's too much, but then again; I don't think I want it to end.

"You leave tomorrow and I join the Perrin Sequence." Her voice seems flat and lacks its usual emotion.

I'm about to answer *Yeah* when she continues, "I'll miss you."

"I'll miss you too." The words come out of me and I wonder if it's the correct response even though I mean them. While I hadn't wanted Sara originally to travel with me in the beginning, I found her capable and enjoyable to have around.

I briefly wonder if I should tell her this when I feel her shift, her head pulls back, I match her movement, and our cheeks touch, then the sides of our lips brush against each other. She pauses, we're looking at each other and then she closes her eyes, our lips touch. *What am I doing?*

Her hands come up on either side of my face and she kisses me hard and deep; her tongue darting in and out. I don't want this to end, but I pull back and turn away. "I should go." The words just come out of my mouth.

"What's wrong?" She asks as I begin to stand up to leave as she moves towards me reaching her hand out to touch my arm, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean…" her voice stops and I realize she sees me; she sees *it*, the difference between us. I turn slightly away from her, not wanting to fully face her, my arms wrapped around myself as if to hide, but before I can think to enter the void her voice stops me, "Hey Hachi."

I freeze in place unsure of what to do.

She stands up next to me, her arms slowly embracing me. *Please don't hate me*. But my words don't come out. I look at her hazel eyes, I wonder if mine are full of fear?

"I like you."

What? No words come out. I know what she said but all I can think is that I'm not like other women. I 'm not like others at all. I feel different and I'm afraid she'll think I'm gross.

"Do you like me?"

I nod without hesitation and respond my voice barely a whisper, "Yes." I didn't have time to breathe.

"Good."

She places a hand over one of mine, I release my arms to take her hand with mine. Our contrasting bronze and chocolate fingers touch and clasp together, she looks up at me and smiles, her other arm moving behind me, her fingers running slowly and softly against my back.

I look at her and immediately think of the scars on my face. I instinctively move my hand to my jaw to cover them.

"I have scars too, it's our imperfections that make us beautiful like your glowy eyes."

Is that a line? It sounds like something she's used before, but I don't know if I mind it.

My heart is pounding as if it'll leap out of my chest. She presses the side of her head against my breasts, embracing me with both arms, then turns her head to face mine. I can feel myself becoming aroused, I begin to feel uncomfortable, but she pulls me closer to her and turns her face to mine.

"It doesn't matter what parts we have, ok?"

The uncomfortableness feeling stops as I finally look at her looking at me. I don't know what this is, but I like it.

So I kissed her.

Hello Hachi

I'm heading down a long corridor of Orcus Relay that will eventually lead to the docking area, my landing craft, and ultimately take me back to my Railjack with Kumo. Each step with Araine feels heavy as if I'm wading through water while fighting the current. *Why am I feeling like this?* What is wrong with me. Sara has done well for herself and I trust the Perrin Sequence to take care of her, I should be happy, but I'm not. I can still smell Sara's lavender scent on me and I want to be selfish, I don't want Sara to go and work with the Perrin Sequence, I want her traveling with me. But that wasn't going to happen. I wasn't going to ask her to come with me; how could I? How would I feel about myself if I continued to put her in danger?

"Operator." Kumo's voice in my comms, I slow my pace, hoping he tells me something that will need me to stay on the relay longer.

"I've concluded my analysis of the golden collar."

I stop and move to the side of the corridor.

"What'd you find?"

"While it appears to be a similar design to the Ascaris that Grineer attempt to use on Warframes, the design and hence functionality is completely different. After reviewing your Helios's recent codex scans from the derelict and speaking with Simaris, we conclude that this device has no known application or use."

I pause and feel for the device in my pocket. I take it out and look it over again, the intricate gold and bone design could pass as jewelry. *Is that all you really are?* I put it back in my pocket.

"Thanks, Kumo."

I continue and make it to the docking platforms. The relay service personnel at the controls guiding ships and landing craft in and out of the bay.

"Hey there Tenno, not leaving yet are you?" It was Sara's voice.

I move closer to her and she throws her arm around Araine and hugs her, me, us.

"I got you something." Sara's embrace ends and I want to ask her to come back to the ship, I want to feel her in my arms again. Sara reaches into her pocket and pulls out a Ki'Teer Atmos Diadem. "It's so you remember me and it'll match your glowy eyes."

I nod. *Do my eyes really glow?*

She smirks, "You still have my comm I gave you before so you can always reach me." She pauses. "You know If I'm ever in trouble I expect you to come to my rescue, right?"

"Yes." My response is immediate. I probably should have taken a breath first.

She smiles. "What will you do now?"

I really don't know. If this had been just a normal bounty I would have just been done with it and had Kumo look for another or scan for distress calls within the Proximas. But this experience was completely different. She was completely different. Maybe I should tell her I'm going to stick around. Maybe I should ask Kumo to see what the Perrin Sequence needed help with. Maybe I should ask her?

Sara smiles, I'm staring at her again. I want to ask her to stay with me, but no words come out.

She hugs us again and whispers, “Don’t be a stranger, Ok?” She pulls back and we begin to walk apart she waves; I wave back.

I’m back on my Railjack, back staring out into space from the windows of the cargo hold. Araine standing near me.

“I should have said something?” I turn to face her. Emotionless and lifeless, she doesn’t move or respond to me.

“What was I supposed to do? If I tried to stay she probably would have thought I was clingy and would have gotten annoyed with me.”

“Operator, who are you talking to?” Kumo’s voice over the comms.

“Araine.” I pause. “Myself, I suppose.”

“Shall I continue looking for distress calls and bounties?”

I don’t answer. I look back out to the stars, a glowing swirl of engine light dissipates from my ship as we travel through space. It’s pretty I think, my hands slipping into my pockets, touching the golden collar.

I take it out and hold it in my hands. Perhaps it’s simply meant as a decoration? “Do you think it’s pretty Araine?” I say holding it out towards her. Her body still and unresponsive.

“Operator?”

“I’m fine Kumo.” I miss having someone to talk to. “Just scan for distress calls, and listen for any Perrin Sequence requests.”

I walk over to face Araine. “I think it’s pretty.” I hold a golden collar in front of us and look up at her. I place the golden collar around her neck, its shape begins to bend, fitting her perfectly as if designed specifically for her.

A flash of light then suddenly my thoughts are no longer my own as memories of someone else, something else fill every part of me.

I remember a face in the morning. Still sleeping. Breathing shallow. At peace, your body relaxed. I brush the hair from your face. Your eyes open and your lips purse before you smile.

“Good morning”, you speak softly as you push your face more into the pillow before committing to waking.

I want to hold onto this memory forever.

I need to remember this.

You were all that ever mattered to me at that moment.

I need to remember.

What color was your hair that day?

I wake to find a man's face staring down at me. He adjusts the bag and inspects the IV running into my…*is that my arm? Has my arm always looked like that? Was I burned?*

I try to speak but no words come out as my mouth moves.

The man looks at me puzzled and smiles as if delighted in my suffering.

I make a fist and feel pressure in my hands.

I look down at where my hands should be and I don't recognize what I'm seeing.

Long nails have pierced through the palms and protrude out the back. I relax my hands and see the fingers retract from within the flesh. Blood drips down but I don't feel any pain.

What am I looking at?

The man says something, his words clear, but the meaning muffled in my head.

He's wrapping my hands.

I close my eyes and wait for time to pass.

Why are my hands bandaged?

I remember the training. The two-mile runs, the hundreds of calisthenics, the thousand meter swims.

Was it the first time I saw you, or the first time I noticed you?

You were training with the other Dax, you were so focused, so fast with your blade.

I think it was your eyes.

I recall they caught my gaze that first time and I was powerless to resist.

What color were your eyes that day?

I wake unsure of where I am.

A man, a doctor, is inspecting me. He's speaking in a language I don't understand, *or do I?*

A door opens, another man, very tall, very slender. I know him. *How do I know him?*

His long right arm reaches to me and touches my head.

"I see your recovery is going well." I hear his voice in my head. "It won't be long now. Our enemies have no idea what you'll do to them."

Do I know you? I can't even mouth the words.

I have a vision of you in the fields, covered in blood; not yours. You're breathing heavy, I'm running towards you. A figure behind you. *What is that?* It's not a Kubrow.

I'm almost to you. Acknowledgment on your face changes suddenly as you realize what I see; as you turn I know it won't be fast enough.

I throw my body fists first into the mass of flesh and tendrils hurtling towards you. It stings and tears my flesh but my claws find their mark.

The last one. No more left.

You crouch over me.

You're safe; I'm not.

You touch your forehead to mine as your hand cradles my head.

You smelled of magnolia.

Voices yelling.

I know that voice. I hear you in my memories. Another voice. His.

How long has it been?

I can see you through the glass window. You move towards the door but he stops you. His long arm grasping your shoulder. It lingers too long and I can tell it makes you uncomfortable. He reaches to touch you; you pull away.

"Oh, you're awake?" I hear his voice in my head.

He grabs your arm, the others in the room put their heads down.

"Get away from her!" I want to scream but the words aren't coming.

Rage fills me. I'm shaking.

You look concerned. They close the curtains.

What, who, when was all that? Dozens of questions flood my mind and I begin to have trouble focusing on which one to focus on first. I look at my feet, then up at the wall in front of me. I quickly scan the room. Araine is near the window kneeling before the stars. *When did I move her there?*

"Operator, are you alright? I'm unsure what I am detecting."

"It's fine Kumo."

I move towards Araine and she stands on her own, turning to face me. No words are spoken, but I can feel…something…as if the feelings of sadness and loss were flowing out of her. I should be asking how she's moving, but my first words are, "Araine, are you ok?"

Her head cocks to the side as if she was about to ask me a question.

"Was that your memory?" I ask, still confused by the experience.

Then suddenly emotions begin filling me; frustration. Her demeanor changes and her arms fold, one lifts to rest her chin against her fist, then back down and she seems to focus on me yet again. Then calmness.

Another wave of emotion hits me, a feeling, a connection reaches into me and I *feel* as if she's speaking the words, "*Hello Hachi*."

End Part 1.

Part 2

If life goes to shit, just make it fucking work.

So let's start

I'm waving to Araine, my hand slowly moving side to side trying to see a response.

Again a feeling forms a sound in my head, *Hello Hachi?*

Did Araine really just speak to me? Maybe I was imagining it, maybe something was wrong with me, whatever those images in my head had been of or even from…maybe…My thoughts stop as Araine slowly moves her hand to mine and grasps it gently. *I didn't make her move.*

Another wave of subtle emotion, humor, a chuckle, then, *"It's me."* The voice more in my head than auditable.

I hear Kumo's voice, something about Araine moving on her own, but I'm ignoring it, focusing on her in front of me. She looks the same. Her hand holding mine feels the same, but there is something else now, something I can sense; a presence. The dark chocolate colored appendages protruding from her begin to move, to sway, almost like someone shifting their weight from one foot to the next.

Araine's head tilts to the side and I can see the slightest movements across her face, a smooth surface, humanoid, but completely removed from any human recognition. From where her eyes would be onyx colored sunken ovals reflect light and give off the faintest glow.

"Hello, Hachi." The *feeling voice* again. *It is her.*

It took Kumo and I the better part of a day with Araine to fully understand what had happened, and three more before I felt like I was truly understanding her.

With no facial expressions, voice, or sign language other than pointing and motioning towards and away from things, it took some guesswork at first and I was beginning to feel as if I was inferring more than was there at times. However, there was a type of understanding between us with the emotions she could send me, or maybe I was pulling from her, it *felt* like she was speaking to me.

While it wasn't the vocal communication I would have with Kumo or Sara, or anyone else for that matter, it began to feel natural, organic as if some part of us, perhaps due to the transference, gave us a kind of mental link. While I would have to relay to Kumo what she was telling me, I could feel her frustration, her approval, disapproval, and more than anything I knew she needed our help.

The Orokin device had disabled any mental inhibiter and allowed Araine to regain her sentience and some of her memories. Unfortunately, most of her memories involving her life before the transformation seemed to be fragmented and I wanted to find a way to help her with this recovery. While I hadn't had any more shared visions of people I never met, I did have the feeling that it would help Araine if we could find, or at least identify, the woman from her visions. Unfortunately, without a clear image of her or any information to go on Kumo and I were at a loss to know where to begin.

It had been several days before my first message from Sara while sitting in the observation area with Araine, and my first thought was that I should have reached out to her sooner to see how she was doing.

“Operator, incoming message from Perrin Sequence; it’s from Sara.”

“Thanks, Kumo.”

“Hey Tenno, how are you?” Sara’s voice was upbeat and playful. “Not forgetting all about me on your adventures are you?”

“No, of course not.”

“I’m kidding silly. But really, how are you, anything exciting happening?”

“I…” I pause for a moment trying to decide if I should tell her about the Golden Collar and Araine. *How do I even explain that?* “We’ve been searching for someone.” My words come out flat.

“Ooo, exciting, an escaped criminal, infested cultists, or maybe someone turning people into glass?”

“No. It’s hard to explain. We don’t have much to go on.”

“Oh, well then maybe I can help?”

“You don’t have too.” I begin to think I should be asking how she is doing, but I’m not sure when in the conversation it’s appropriate for me to ask without it sounding awkward.

“Don’t be silly, if it’s just a simple missing person I’m sure I could put some feelers out.”

“Thanks, I’ll...I miss you.” It just comes out. There is a pause. Should I not have said that I wonder? I immediately follow up with, “How have you been?”

“I miss you too Tenno.” I feel relieved hearing those words from her. “I’ve been good, the Perrin Sequence has been good to me. I’ve already helped them retrieve a few members from some Grineer confinements.”

I think again to tell her about the collar, but immediately stop myself as I begin to wonder if the Perrin Sequence is listening in, and if that is why she isn’t using my name; perhaps they would randomly screen their transmissions of new members like Sara.

She tells me more of her adventures and I try to focus on every word she says, but my mind wonders, and I can’t help but think of her lavender scent and the pink lips of her face smiling as she talks. I want to tell her to be careful, but she knows what she’s doing. I want to tell her I’m proud of her, but the words don’t come out. Instead, I just listen and acknowledge her deeds with the occasional exclamations of “Nice!” And “That’s great!” I’m being genuine but I begin to wonder if she thinks I’m patronizing her; if she does her voice doesn’t convey it. I want her to ask me when we’ll see each other again, I want to ask her, but I don’t.

“Hey I have to run, but have Kumo send me what you got on that missing person and I’ll see what I can find out on my end, ok?”

“Sure,” I say, not sure what Kumo and I can provide to her.

“And Tenno.”

“Yeah?”

“I’ll be visiting Kronia Relay after my next mission. Maybe we can meet up and discuss your missing person. If you’re not too busy that is?”

“I’ll be there,” I answer too fast.

Sara chuckles. “See you then.”

The comms go dark and I sit in silence for a minute unsure of what my next step should be.

“Operator, you didn’t tell Sara about Araine?”

“I…I didn’t know how to bring it up.” I look over to Araine, she’s staring out at the stars. No feelings of approval or disapproval coming from her. *She must not have minded herself I think*.

“It’s probably for the better. We should keep this to ourselves, at least until we know more.”

“Can you scan the images from my memories?” I need a way to view what Araine remembered, what I saw and the pictures I conjure in my head are fading.

“Hmm. We could use a memory extractor. But…” He doesn’t finish his thought.

“But?”

“It will take some time to prepare…and…”

I wait for him to finish.

“It may be painful.”

I look to Araine, she’s still staring out towards the stars.

“So let’s start.”

So that was weird

It's a throbbing headache, the kind I imagine when people talk about having a hangover. The pain begins in the back of my skull and radiates outwards, my eyes wince at the light when I open them and I'm beginning to feel nauseated.

Three small gold and white marble-like devices orbit my head, the mental fragments from before return, but this time slower, almost as if in stop motion, but everything is blurry and impossible to focus. I try to recall any detail I can but it's like a wet painting someone has rubbed up against.

"Operator..." Kumo's words sound garbled to me. *Why isn't the scanner working?* It should be displaying a projection of my thoughts the way I would imagine and see things within the Simulacrum.

I remain silent. I feel as if it'd hurt more to speak. I can't see her, but I can sense Araine watching me. *Is she concerned for me?* I begin to feel a tingly sensation in my limbs.

"…we need to stop." Kumo's voice followed by the pain immediately dissipating, my eyes focus on the room, the walls of the Railjack, Araine then the image on the screen before us.

A blurry image of what could be a woman or any person for that matter.

"Operator, the scanner is unable to reconstruct these images from you."

I look to Araine. "Can we scan Araine?"

"I apologize, Operator, this device isn't designed for Warframes. It would not be able to recognize her brain patterns."

"I'm sorry Araine," I say looking down. I suddenly feel Araine's hand on my shoulder. I look up to face her standing over me; she shakes her head side to side.

I smile and stand, moving past her I head towards the observation deck and kneel before the stars. *I need to think*. Araine follows a few steps behind me.

I'm wondering about the images I saw, trying to piece any detail I could together in my head. Araine stands nearby her legs one in front of the other, her left arm at her hip, and her right in front of her. I glance over and she sees me looking to her, she moves slightly and raises one arm above her head, her talons flexing like spider legs climbing up a web, and tilts her head back as if finishing a performance. A warm feeling passes to me.

I stand and turn to her, my voice breaks as I speak as I immediately realize how dumb my words sound, "Can we talk?"

With Araine's newfound sentience I decided to see if she was open to continuing to work together, as I feared that she may not want to fight anymore; that she may not want to be used as a weapon. It was a

confusing thought, not wanting to do the very thing you were created for, and I was relieved when she provided her approval or at least the feeling of one.

“You sure it’s ok?” I asked meekly wondering if she felt I was annoying for asking again.

A feeling, *maybe a yes*, I’m unsure and it makes me nervous.

“And you’re ok with transference?” It seemed like such an odd thing to ask, but I felt it was the right thing to do now that she could decide for herself.

She motions to me with her hand, then to herself.

“Shall we try now?” The thought in my head, *better now than before we’re neck-deep in infested*.

She nods.

“Thank you Araine.”

I transfer in, and see the stars from the observation deck.

“They’re beautiful.” The sound in my thoughts isn’t verbal, or speech per se; it’s more emotion, raw feeling, but somehow my brain translates it as it would when hearing different languages spoken out loud.

Is that you Araine? Does the transference make it easier to…I don’t even complete my thought before the feeling voice comes again.

“Yes.”

A barrage of questions fills my mind *who was the woman and the people in those memories, did you want this for yourself or was it done to you and how can I help?*

A wave of emotions comes, confusion, panic, frustration. I can feel as if words are being spoken to me but they overlap and become no more than gibberish. I begin to feel an emotional tension becoming stronger and stronger within me. I transfer out and see Araine before me, she paces side to side, her hands on either side of her head.

Do I tell her I’m here for her? Should I promise we’ll figure it out?

I reach out with both arms and grasp her, pulling myself close to her. I can feel her stress and sense it begin to diminish; her arms drop to her sides.

While this new emotional communication was becoming easier for us while on the Railjack, I needed to know what it would be like for us to head into the field together and how we would find the best ways of working together. There wasn’t any shortage of bounties, and I told Araine how I normally looked for jobs that directly help the citizens tending to stay away from the mercenary requests between Grineer and Corpus power struggles. I began to find myself talking to her as I would anyone else, even if she couldn’t verbally respond. I hoped it would make her feel more included, more like a person; like the soldier she once was.

Since we had some time before our rendezvous with Sara I asked Kumo for a list of bounties that would bring us closer to Kronia Relay. Kumo provided us with a recent request from a fellow Tenno's Cephalon that would bring us to the Cassini Galleon currently orbiting near Saturn where we needed to retrieve a Grineer captain. The Captain was responsible for the destruction of a Fortuna bound trading vessel passing through Saturn Proxima.

According to this Tenno's Cephalon, the Grineer captain gave the order to try out one of their Ship Killer Platforms on the unsuspecting vessel all for simply venturing too close to Grineer operations. Fortunately, a few survivors were ejected in escape pods, but the vast majority of the trading vessel crew died in the attack.

When Kumo briefed us I began to have the feeling of Araine's words in my thoughts, *"The Grineer prey on the weak, but we prey on the Grineer."* and I felt her agreement with the request to capture and hold accountable the Grineer captain.

We set in the course and had Kumo contact the bounty requestor's who agreed to have a transport ship on standby for this criminal to be teleported too.

"Operator, we're approaching the Cassini's sensor range."

"Hold here Kumo."

I turn to Araine. "Here we go."

Just outside of the Cassini's sensor range we cloak the Railjack and use the Archwing to maneuver closer. The space between us is vast and empty, but with luck, the galleon will think we're just space debris; small and insignificant.

As we move closer to the ship we can make out the slug-like shape with antenna reaching outward like legs or feelers into the emptiness around it. With nothing in view as far as we can see the ship appears almost stationary, adrift in a sea of darkness sprinkled with distant stars. Unsuspecting that Araine and I, we, are closing in, latching onto the sides of the lower decks, hacking the outer entry of a service airlock, and slowly making our way inside.

Once inside we navigate the dark hallways, illuminated mostly by the reflected light of stars through the hull windows, towards the upper decks. The walls and floors are clean, but the dark militant green and lack of light give the appearance of grime and decay; not unlike the Grineer clones themselves. Steam seeps from vents, a faint smell of chemicals and the occasional sound of machinery clanking into place surround us.

We're moving together as one when the sound of footsteps, *lots*, are heard. *Should I fight or should I let her* is my first thought followed by a vocal feeling from Araine; *together*. The doorway ahead of us opens with a dozen Grineer, maybe more, entering and immediately take notice of us. We leap forward passing through the crown and spring from the floor upwards towards a ramp on the platform above. We keep moving, faster now, it won't be long before…sirens blare.

“Operator, alarms have been triggered.” Kumo’s voice in the comm.

A few floors up and Kumo’s voice again, “Operator, your target should be near your location.”

We see him, surrounded by guards the heavily armored Captain towers above his entourage. Araine’s feeling voice in my head, “try –“, an image in my thoughts, faster than I could say it, I decide to go with it. I transfer out dashing towards the Grineer, a blast of my void energy releases from me that knocks the guards onto their backs. Araine leaps towards the Captain taking him down in one hit and throws her arms out to her sides, chain-like energy radiates out from her and the guards become suspended in the air as if caught in a web.

I transfer back, we’re together again, the teleportation collar attached around the captain's neck activated and we wait as he slowly vanishes from our sight, no sound can be heard, but his facial features tell us he’s screaming expletives at us. The sound of bullets ricochet around us, more Grineer enter and we continue to move as one through the chaos.

We’re circling back the way we came, but the sheer number of Grineer, an entire Galleon’s worth, is proving to be more than we can handle on our own and when we spot a loose air vent beyond their reach we rush into it. The vent is narrow and dark, but it provides us a reprieve from the onslaught searching for us.

“Kumo, we need a way out.”

“Operator, transport hangars are your best option. Sending coordinates now.”

A few minutes later we’re blasting our way out of the vent, the sound echoes around us as we exit into a large cargo area with transport ships and fighters. It won’t be long before the Grineer are on top of us, but it doesn’t matter, the ship airlocks are in sight and we’re steps away. As we make our way to extraction we hear a high pitched voice.

“For my queens, glory awaits!” A female Grineer soldier, or perhaps a maintenance worker given their lack of heavy armor, rushes straight at us with a large spiked hammer, the force of their attack knocking us back. *We just need to get past her.*

We recover almost instantly, back on our feet, leaping past the maintenance worker toward the airlock doors, but we’re suddenly stopped midair, slamming down against the ground face first, a grappling hook dragging us back towards the Grineer. The sound of footsteps, maybe hundreds, echoes through the hangar as we’re about to be overcome by a wave of soldiers. Another shared thought enters my mind and I dash forward towards the airlocks as Araine turns swinging the heavy blade sideways the force of the flat surface against the Grineer pushes her back into a row of cargo containers, canisters falling all around her. She gets up staggered and swings her hammer as if winding up to throw it at us, *I want to tell her to stop*, but it’s too late, the movement breaks the containers, her final words, a scream, “I am…queens chosen!” and an explosion of gas and flames consumes her.

The soldiers are closing in around as I pull Araine to me, transferring in, we hit the panel, the door opens and we're propelled through the vacuum of space; Kumo and the Railjack heading to us. We look back at the galleon, the airlock doors begin to close, the soldiers stand firm as they gaze at us, fury at being unable to stop our invasion of their ship. The female maintenance worker's body lying on the ground; a Kuva Guardian stands over her.

Kumo didn't mention the Kuva Fortress nearby or the galleon transporting Kuva.

I shrug off the thought as words form in my mind, "So that was weird."

So I was useless

It'd been a few days since our mission on the Cassini when Sara messaged us when she'd be back and able to meet. I was beginning to feel excited about sharing Araine's new found sentience with Sara, and to some degree, I was beginning to realize how compatible Araine and I still were even when not joined in Transference.

While being beside her without relying on controlling her meant I needed her to wield our Heavy Blade, I could still focus my Void energies through my Amp Vox Solaris had helped me assemble on Fortuna and contribute to the fight. This allowed for us to complement each other's abilities, for Araine her agility, strength, and energy chains she could use to trap our enemies, whereas for me I could rely on my abilities to remain unseen, moving freely amongst any chaos, appearing when needed to blind and set ablaze those who came close. It was a bit of a tag team, and seemed to work well, with both of us instinctively knowing which parts to play.

And even when not in battle I found Araine to be a lively and welcome companion. Of course, she had always been with me for most my life, which made things familiar, but at the same time this experience was both new and exciting. I was learning more about her every day and beginning to pick up on her unique mannerisms and humor; like when I would be meditating and my gaze would pass over to her. She'd be standing with her arms out to her side and notice me, only to twirl around and strike a statuesque pose, one fist raised to the sky, the other at her side and then switch, as if readying herself for some gladiator arena.

I had always appreciated Araine for being a Warframe for whose abilities complimented my training and needs, as well as I often wondered what she had been like before, as a Dax, and now I was finally finding out. It was like having an imaginary friend as a child that had become real.

We're staring at an incredibly tall and narrow waterfall that doesn't seem to splash as its waters fall into the shallow base surrounding a statue of Rhino. People walk along the circular walkway encompassing the view, some entering into the station heading to the rooms beyond, others talking with their companions as they head out to catch the next transport yet pause to take in the scenery one last time. The Kronia relay is busy with life, from Cetus to Fortuna and everything in between.

I begin to wonder what I'll do when I see Sara. I want to hug her *but would it be weird for Araine if we do?* A sudden feeling of warmth.

"*It's ok*."

I'm immediately reminded that during transference Araine and I seem to share our thoughts more readily, and maybe some portion of our feelings, but even knowing this I still begin to fantasize about seeing Sara again and what it'll be like.

“Hey Hachi.” A synthesized voice, somewhat familiar, is coming from a female body in a blue and gray form fitting jump suit. White arm bands and a U-shaped stripe run over the chest of the suit. Completely covered from head to toe, her face hidden behind an almost cone shaped helmet with built in visor.

I turn to face her, as I do she bends one knee slightly and moves her arms out at either side rocking back and forth. “You like my work outfit; stylish huh?”

I know it’s Sara, but her name comes out of my mouth like a question, “Sara?”

“Oh please, don’t tell me you can’t tell it’s me.” She giggles and reaches out her hand, “Come on, let me show you my place.”

She leads me to her living quarters, a lavish apartment overlooking the very waterfall we were at, filled with relics and trinkets from her adventures. She removes her helmet and I smell her lavender scent, see her hazel eyes and run my fingers through her sandy blonde hair as we embrace.

A couple walking past me, almost brushing against us as they move along talking more with their hands and body language than their mouths, breaks my thoughts.

Sorry Araine, I just really want to see her again. If I could blush during transference I would be.

“*Caring about another is good.”*

I imagine myself smiling back to Araine. A reciprocating image appears, a glimpse of a woman with bronze skin, thick black curly hair rising above her head adorned with gold and emerald piercings along her ears, nose and lip smiles back at me. It’s familiar, but not the Araine, the Warframe, I know.

I hold my thoughts, I don’t want to overwhelm her like before while in public, but in the back of my mind, to myself an idea emerges, *was that you before this?*

We wait patiently for what feels like an eternity, first an hour, then another. We walk back to the landing craft, *perhaps we got the time wrong?*

After confirming Sara’s last message with Kumo about the day and time to meet, I begin to feel uneasy. *Did her job take longer than she thought? Was she in danger? Was she blowing us off?* I’m not sure what to think and if I should be concerned or not.

“Kumo.”

“Yes Operator?”

“Any recently placed bounties from the Perrin Sequence?”

“Checking. Latest bounty from Perrin Sequence was submitted three days ago. It’s a request to help hijack a medical container from the Corpus. Would you like me to pull up the details?”

No rescue requests are a good sign, right? And if the hijack request is still open then no one has been captured?

“Sure.”

I turn to Araine, “Feel like stealing something?”

Araine stands, her arms out to either side of her, then moves her left arm to her hip and her right hand up towards me, rubbing her thumb and pointer fingers together.

I laugh. “Kumo, we’ll take the bounty,” I turn to Araine, “I’m sure they’ll pay well.” I pause. And Kumo, let’s leave a message for Sara that we missed her, but will be back in a couple days.”

We’re standing on the frozen surface of Europa staring at the remains of a crashed Orokin ship surrounded with Corpus machinery and robotics. A makeshift camp has been setup nearby with heat generators and barracks.

“Take out the generators first?” A fellow Tenno, with a tall and bulky charcoal Warframe with four azure lights running up and down his sides and arms with a matching colored Oloro MOA, asks me. I don’t know his name, or anything else about him other than the Perrin Sequence had requested four Tenno for their bounty, but we were the only ones to accept.

Taking out the heat generators will cause a panic and divert the Corpus’s attention to the barracks area while we can make our way to the transport Rovers undetected. *Not a bad idea.*

“Yeah.”

Three shots with his sniper rifle, three explosions, sends alarms up and we can see the commotion outside the barracks as Corpus machines scan the surroundings before beginning their repairs.

We head across the ice plain and to the side of the ship wreckage entering in through one of the many ripped apart walls that expose its internals. A series of thick cables, busted control panels and ice are all that remain, anything of value stripped clean. It makes it easy to move around in as we make our way to where the transport containers will be.

Not a word to each other along the way, just silence as we leap through the pathways and steel shafts. I see a few odd devices scattered about the ground occasionally and wonder if Sara had been here would she have wanted to put whatever it was in her bags? My thoughts become lost briefly before I hear the Tenno’s voice again.

“We’re here.” He points to the console next to the closed doors in front of us. His MOA beeps and moves closer, a cipher tool extends from its body, a few seconds later the doors slowly open. Four transport rovers sit idle inside the large hangar before us as tracks lead towards huge blast doors.

His MOA heads towards the rovers, starting up the engines of one then another as we position ourselves in front of the blast doors. We only have to get a few kilometers away from the wreckage for our landing craft to pick us and the rovers up, so as long as the Corpus still don't know we're here this should be over and done with soon.

Suddenly a door opens, two Corpus enter the hangar from a walkway above. The first upon seeing us makes a run towards a wall console. Before I can react Araine does for us, her arm reaches out and a type of entangling energy flows out wrapping around the Corpus, stopping them in their tracks. The ensnared Corpus struggles to break free, but is held fast the energy expanding, grasping and entangling the other onlooker. Two shots ring out from the rifle in our fellow Tenno's hands and the Corpus are no longer an issue.

The massive doors make a loud popping sound that echoes through the ship as they slowly begin to open with a flashing light and dull beeping sound. Outside the frozen ground is littered with rover and footprint tracks in all directions, but it seems to be a clear path to the rendezvous area as we head out.

The rovers move along, slower than I would like, but they're making progress. I'm watching behind us and scanning the skies; my fellow Tenno focusing on our destination.

We're almost to the landing area when we notice several Corpus near the launchpads. The charcoal Tenno motions for me to move back as we slide backwards along the roof of our rovers and drop down to the packed snow behind them.

The Corpus can see the rovers by now, but not us, as they attempt to call and validate whatever shipment they think this caravan is for. We wait for them to get close, the Tenno holds his hand up to me, I pause, his other hand holds a round device. He rolls it towards the Corpus crew and before they even notice they're pulled one by one into a vortex of energy, their bodies an entangled spinning mass.

We look around, no one else nearby and clear skies. We signal our Cephalons and the landing crafts soon appear, hoisting the rovers into their storage.

We reach up with a hand, palm out facing the other Tenno who stares back at us blankly. "High five?"

"You're welcome for the carry." A voice echoes out as our fellow Tenno turns away and heads into their landing craft.

So I was useless…

So we need an alchemist

“Operator.” Kumo pauses. “A message from the Brugia is coming in. It’s from Sara.”

“Put it through.”

“Hey Hachi…how are you?” Sara’s voice is soft, weak, and trails off to a whisper.

“Hi.” I respond excited to finally hear from her.

“I miss you.” She says, barely audible.

“Kumo is Is there a connection issue?”

“No Operator.”

The sound of her breathing into the comms. It’s uneaven. Something seems wrong.

“I…I’m sorry I didn’t make it back.” Her voice is soft and I hear the sound of her gasping as if she’s having trouble breathing.

“Are you ok?” My voice is flat. I’m not sure if I should be concerned or not yet. *Maybe she’s just tired?*

“I fucked up.” More heavy breathing. “I fucked up bad Hachi.”

“What’s wrong?” My voice cracks a bit as I begin to worry. My mind begins to race with thoughts, is she hurt, does she need us to get her?

She chuckles slightly, “We were heading back when something hit the ship…infested…it spread so fast. I locked myself in this room…but the fucker got me…got me right in the gut…” she starts to cough, it sounds slippery, and I can imagine blood splattering from her lips. “I miss you Hachi…I wish we had had more time.”

“Sara,” I say firmly as I glance at Araine. “Hold on. We’re coming for you.”

“Kumo, Is the ship’s flight information available?”

“Yes Operator, it’s last known location takes it past Eris.”

I look to Araine, she nods and heads towards the arsenal.

“Hurry Kumo.”

I’m pacing by the airlock fidgeting with my amp as Kumo pilots us to the last known location of the Brugia. Araine stands off to the side inspecting her equipment. The four bolts of the shotgun compress inwards towards the barrel as she tilts it to the side, making a popping sound as they protrude again, indicating the weapon has been reloaded. Setting down the shotgun she twirls the kitgun in her hand, holstering it against her upper thigh opposite the heavy blade.

I'm worried about Sara. I'm worried about what will happen if we don't get to her in time. I can't recall ever being so nervous about a mission. *Sara…*

"Operator." Kumo pauses. "You should see this."

I move to the front cabin of the Railjack and look at the ship in front of us as we grow closer to it. I can see the infested mass attached has already strangled the ship with its root-like tentacles. Another day and it would be unrecognizable as a once Corpus transport vessel. *Please hold on…we're coming for you.*

"Let's go."

We prepare to breach the ship, but there is no need, as our Archwing is able to bring us directly inside a corridor due to the hull being torn away. Puss filled sacks secreting spores and strange colored flora grow along the walls, with small insect-like fauna crawling out from them and onto the ground.

Kumo pings me a location, a sign of life that may not be infested. Without hesitation, I transfer out of Araine and dash forward through the hallway. The emptiness of space dulls all sounds around me and for a minute I realize if it wasn't for my void form I would quickly succumb to the lack of atmosphere.

Footsteps, hundreds, are coming towards my direction. Following my movements as if they know I'm here and where I'm heading. The lockers, storage containers, and even infested crawlers are knocked out of my way and little more than a blur as I quickly phase in and out of the material plane. Any of the Chargers running towards me are torn apart or held in place twitching from the energies spreading out of me. I'm not holding anything back and as I begin to near the area Kumo indicated on my map I suddenly feel Araine in my thoughts, *Hachi…Careful!*

I stop. A faint yellow beam of energy runs a few inches in front of me. I follow it with my eyes from the ceiling to the ground. Originally a defense mechanism of some type, while misaligned, still effective in tripping whatever other security may still be active. I look down, I'm standing near a ledge with several, now infested or broken, walkways leading to a lower area with three small cargo containers. *Was this some type of atrium or observation area?* The containers are built into the glass wall as if used as storage or perhaps also some type of loading corridors designed for another ship or station to connect directly too. I find it a strange design and for some reason, my thoughts linger on it more than the hundreds of footsteps approaching behind me.

I make my way around the beam, and quickly notice several others along my route to the storage areas below me. Sara must be inside one of these. The first door is ajar, claw marks indicating something had gotten out from within. I peek inside, infested remains, but nothing human, and nothing that would have appeared to perhaps once been human; a good sign.

I move to the next, the door is locked, accessed denied, I use a cipher key, I don't have time to fuss with manually decoding the locks. It slides open. Empty. The footsteps behind me are getting louder and I know dozens of infested will be on me soon.

Last door, please be here.

I open the last of the cargo rooms. The door slides open revealing a near-empty mini mobile lab. The cargo rooms suddenly made sense to me, these storage rooms were mobile labs that could be deployed and retrieved while being self-quarantined.

I fall to my knees. *Was I too late?* The footsteps are getting louder, but I also hear the sounds of combat, slaughter, Araine has caught up. She'll hold them off for now.

"Hachi?" A faint voice, I look up to see a hand protruding from the floor, pushing up a metal slab. I quickly help move it and am taken back by the sight.

It's Sara, her grey bodysuit covered in blood, some random cloth held fast by her other hand to the lower left abdomen covering her wound, which now has several purple three centimeter long tendrils rising out of it. Her eyes are closed and blood spatters out of her mouth as she tries to speak. "It's too late."

Like hell it is.

I put a hand to Sara's face, try to smile, and engage the helmet on Sara's suit, as I transfer back into Araine. We pick Sara up and hold her against us.

"Kumo, I need you to pick us up."

We leap up towards the ceiling and I glimpse a massive herd of infested flooding out of the hallway, air ducts, and any opening into the ship as they pour into the room. There's no way through, but it doesn't matter, we just need to get Sara out of here. We face downwards and propel ourselves to the glass floor below, the heavy blade in our hands coming down hard as it strikes its mark.

A small crack, then another, quickly spreading and suddenly we're pulled out into the vacuum of space along with many infested as well. The force causes us to spin out of control with no idea what direction we're heading in and I can barely tell if we're still holding onto Sara or not.

Then the spinning stops and it's empty darkness around us. We grasp Sara in our arms, her body limp and lifeless as we're pulled into the Landing Craft.

Hachi…I feel Araine's feelings, sympathy, sorrow for me as I lay Sara on the ground. The tendrils from her wound having frozen and fallen off in space, but the infection is still clearly spreading outwards from the wound.

"Kumo."

"Operator, we'll need to place her on life support. She's unresponsive, and her vitals are incredibly low. We don't have any means of treating her here."

"So we need an alchemist."

So we'll help you.



I sit upon my throne, a *Somatic Link* container, surrounded by darkness, dull glowing organic wires that flow throughout the Orbiter's internal systems, the only source of light. The subtle sound of my ship's workings humming flees from my thoughts when a ball of light illuminates the central area within the dome-shaped room before me.

Standing in the center of this spotlight a slender mechanical harlequin appears before me, moving ever so theatrical as I feel the recitation of ancient musings from a time long forgotten. The words, something called The Epilogue from As You Like It, softly echo in my head, yet their delivery mesmerizes me.

> *It is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue; but it is no more unhandsome than to see the lord the prologue. If it be true that good wine needs no bush, 'tis true that a good play needs no epilogue; yet to good wine they do use good bushes, and good plays prove the better by the help of good epilogues. What a case am I in then, that am neither a good epilogue nor cannot insinuate with you in the behalf of a good play! I am not furnished like a beggar, therefore to beg will not become me: my way is to conjure you; and I'll begin with the women. I charge you, O women, for the love you bear to men, to like as much of this play as please you: and I charge you, O men, for the love you bear to women--as I perceive by your simpering, none of you hates them--that between you and the women the play may please. If I were a woman I*

would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased

me, complexions that liked me and breaths that I

defied not: and, I am sure, as many as have good

beards or good faces or sweet breaths will, for my

kind offer, when I make curtsy, bid me farewell.

The mechanical harlequin curtsies and bows, her arms out to her sides as she bends over deeply. My hands come together as she rises, the ball of light vanishing as does the darkness when the room's lights come on.

"Bravo!" I respond aloud sincerely as I applaud.

"Thank you, my Tenno." The voice echoes in my head.

The harlequin stands before me as I admire her white and purple coloring, unblinking glowing lights come from where her eyes would be as gold diamond-shaped tassels dangle from the horns of her head. My gaze flowing downwards, large golden guards protrude upwards from her shins, just above the knees as golden ball-like tassels hang from her hips.

She moves towards me, gracefully and captivating, I don't even notice when she's mere inches from me. The words in my head, *"Shall I recite Helena's Declaration next my Tenno?"* the golem's hands reaching out and taking hold of mine gently.

I look at her hands, taking them in mine, and smile as I turn my gaze up to her face as it nears. My eyes close as my lips press against the metal flesh; my breathing pauses before continuing. I put my arms around her, my palms sweaty as they grip her sides. I feel her hands on me pushing past the folds of my *Manduka* suit.

A feeling voice in my head, not so much words but raw emotion fill me, the thoughts and visions appearing quickly, the images becoming clearer with every lustful desire reciprocated with another thought of passion.

It's sometime later and my head is resting in the lap of the harlequin, looking up at her, the lights of the fish tank behind her in our quarters causing her skin to appear to shimmer and sparkle at times. Her head looks down toward me, watching me as I wake, her left hand placed over my sternum while her right-hand cradles my head.

"Operator." The sound of my ship's Cephalon rings out over the comms.

My eyes roll as I frown and instinctively take hold of the metal hand on my chest with mine as I turn my gaze away from her. "Yes?"

"There is a distress call from another Tenno."

I stand and dress, moving towards the entrance to my *Mantis*, the harlequin at my side.

“Continue.”

“The Tenno seems to be requesting the aid of an Alchemist.”

I pause to consider if they mean to refer to a healer or the Tenno in the snake-wielding frame I’d once met on Deimos.

“How close are they?”

“We could arrive at their last location within the hour.”

“Is anyone else already en route?”

“No. It seems no one else has responded yet.”

“When did the call start?”

“I notified you as soon as I picked it up.”

“Let’s go.”

The voice in my head, *“I guess this means I’ll be waiting here?”*

I look to the harlequin at my side and let go of her hand, “Only for now.”

She takes two of her fingers, touching her face where her mouth would have been, then presses them to my lips. *Hurry back.* I feel the cold metallic skin press against me and smile as the world around me vanishes, a blink as the *Somatic Link* transfers me away.

I’m staring out the eyes of the black and gold ant-like frame, making my way towards the navigation of my *Mantis* craft. The ramp closes behind me as the ship’s Cephalon, having set in our course, launches us towards our destination and away from my Orbiter.

Within far less than an hour I’m staring at an Orokin-era interceptor, clearly well taken care of, but nothing fancy like the *Caballero* or *Sungem* I’ve seen other Tenno flying. A *Liset* landing craft is towed along the Railjack.

“Ships in range?” I ask, looking for signs of a recent ship battle, my initial thought that a recent run-in with Grineer boarding parties or Corpus capital ship had overwhelmed this lone Tenno; perhaps others coming back to finish the job.

“None, Operator. I’ll continue scanning.”

Some chatter between Cephalons and once confirmed the proper codes of the Railjack appear on my Omni. I engage them, a brief moment of shimmering light, and next, I’m in the bowels of a Railjack like none other I have been on before.

Storage crates, decorations, and trinkets of various kinds litter my surroundings. While one would typically expect to find a minimalist, almost sterilized interior within any Tenno's Railjack, this vessel looked well lived in, as if someone had tried to install the contents of their entire Orbiter into this ship.

I take a few steps and a spider-like vermillion and dark chocolate-colored frame appears before me, motioning to come down towards the back of the engine room to what looks more like a makeshift living space than an actual cargo hold.

The frame stops and I see a very pale human woman with sandy blonde hair laid on the ground, some bedding placed underneath her to keep her comfortable. Immediately I notice the wounds and move closer, bringing my frame's fist down towards the ground as I focus the *Blessing* energies towards the human. I see subtle improvement, but the purple-tinged blood coming from her abdomen causes me to pause.

"That's going to be a problem," I say calmly, pointing to the wound as I look towards the spider-like frame.

"Options?" The Tenno's female voice coming from the frame.

I think for a bit and bring out a restoration device, a mechanical cylinder I lay next to the human. It opens upwards like a flower blossoming and glows green, mechanical dome devices hovering around it.

"This will help…for now…" My voice trails off as I wonder who this person is. From the looks of her attire she must be affiliated with the Perrin Sequence, *but where were they? Why wouldn't they have been nearby to have picked up one of their own or provide medical assistance?*

A dark-skinned female Tenno with scars along her jawline appears before me, her voice forceful, demanding, her sudden appearance and demeanor taking me by surprise. "I need to save her!"

This person must be very important.

"You need someone with infestation experience, Mycona or Entrati if they can help, or find someone to start replacing her body parts soon."

I can see the worry and frustration on the female Tenno's face. The spider-like golem moves and places her hand on the female Tenno's shoulder.

Two Tenno are here? No…Is she like us...

I transfer out, my frame going motionless and lifeless behind me as I do. I look at her and then to her frame, and back to her.

"So we'll help you."

So tell me about your other companion?

I find myself meditating on recent events, replaying them in my mind as we head to the Necralisk on Deimos. Home to the Entrati and the birthplace of infested Orokin research where we'll hold a brief audience with Gomaitru whose promised treatment for Sara if we can help her family recover an artifact from one of their vaults.

With Sara in bad shape and not responsive I had sent out a distress call to fellow Tenno, hoping an alchemist, a healer, would be nearby. If only I'd had access to a foundry system or purchased some recovery items the last time I was at a relay maybe we wouldn't have been so badly in need of assistance. Fortunately for us, a fellow Tenno did show up. Lamant, a dark-haired Tenno with Orokin implants on his face and hands. He helped to stabilize Sara, though she remains unconscious, using a combination of his ant-like frame's abilities and some type of device he had brought with him. He suggested that we try to reach out to Mycona and the Entrati for help as Sara's infestation proves to be our primary concern, and most likely the cause for her continued unconsciousness.

We first tried contacting the Mycona, considered friends of the Perrin Sequence, but with the last of their Triuna line now gone and no knowledge of a way of passing that genetic defect to an adult, or even a child without it eventually killing them, there was little help they could offer. The one suggestion they did have…salvage what we could of Sara's humanity and look to transferring her into a new body, either cloned from Grineer tech with possible genetic defects or a mechanical body courtesy of the Corpus with an exorbitant price tag. While I'd gladly pay any price to help Sara recover, I couldn't imagine her forgiving me for forcing a decision like that on her while she's unconscious.

So, this was it, our last best option was to reach out to the Entrati, partially-infested Orokin, but unlike the cruel authority of the past, this family was scholars. Though disgruntled and troubled, they weren't entirely terrible people, except maybe to each other. While they were certainly expecting something in return for their help it seemed to be a more than fair trade if they could save Sara's life.

According to our Cephalons, Tenno were constantly being hired by the Entrati to reactivate and retrieve their old research materials from Isolation Vaults overrun by the infested Grey Strain. While we'd receive further information on the specifics once we arrived we were told it'd be a task to retrieve some Scintillant and any of the Ayatan Sculptures still intact, most likely rare Kitha, Hemakara, or Zambuka treasures.

As I contemplate these events in my mind before the emptiness of space on my observation deck thoughts burn and linger within me. *Why is Lamant still on my ship? Why did I let him come back? Why is Lamant so eager to continue to help us?* He could have left after stabilizing Sara, but he insisted on staying to help, even had us ping him our location so he could bring back another frame along with some equipment from his Orbiter; an outlandish-looking purple and gold harlequin armed with dual *Zundi* pistols and dark blades, even an *Orloro* Moa.

I found it odd. Odd because most Tenno, while open to helping one another don't often bond the way most people do. Even those who join clans, attempting to rebuild some remnants of the past hierarchy

are rarely connected for more than the mutual gain of a safe dry dock and access to hard-to-find blueprints.

Or maybe that's just me, projecting myself onto all other Tenno. I've never felt the need to bond. I never felt the need to connect with others…at least not until I met Sara. It took some time, but I liked adventuring with her. I want to adventure with her more. *Why didn't I ever ask her to stay?* I'm suddenly overwhelmed with emotion and need to think of something else; anything else.

The Tenno on my ship. *What does he have to gain by helping me with Sara now that we're heading to Deimos?* If it hadn't been for Kumo encouraging Araine and me to let Lamant and his Cephalon Adie help I don't know if I would have accepted it beyond stabilizing Sara. *So, what does Lamant want or expect from us?*

I feel a presence and open my eyes to find Lamant in meditation nearby, his harlequin standing lifeless beside him; he seems so fond of her. Perhaps she's like Araine is to me, a favorite frame, his first maybe? I stand and move toward him. He must have sensed me. As I approach him, he stands, turns to face me, then bows formally.

"Thank you for letting us accompany you." He says, smiling and somewhat charismatic.

"I want to know what you want." I blurt out. I hear the sounds of my words and wince. I feel they're rude but couldn't find a better way to ask.

He smiles, "I want to see this through." He pauses. "If I leave and your companion dies, I'd feel responsible for not doing more."

That's unusual, but maybe not wrong and not malicious. I think to myself.

He's staring at me, still smiling. I say nothing.

"She's very important to you."

"Very."

He nods, then pauses, his gaze turning away and then back to me.

"You live on your Railjack?"

"Yes," I respond, wondering if his next response will be to pity me.

He looks around, "It's quite impressive what you've done. Convenient too."

"What do you mean?" *Is he insulting me?*

He looks at me, a somewhat charming demeanor. "Convenient because the Railjack is more defensible than an Orbiter and because of less upkeep what with maintaining two vessels instead of three."

I nod. *He sounds sincere.*

"What happened to your Orbiter?"

"It didn't survive; we recovered what we could once we salvaged this interceptor."

He nods looking solemn, then smiles, "If you need access to a foundry you can use ours."

I wonder what he'd want in return. Not saying anything.

"Could I ask you something personal?"

My thoughts go to Sara, he'll want to know who she is, who she is to me perhaps?

"You don't need to answer if you don't want. But your…*spider*. It moved on its own before."

I pause. Araine had tried to comfort me before. *Perhaps this is what he wanted to know? About the collar…would he try to take it for himself…for his harlequin?*

He continues talking. "I understand if you don't want to tell me. It's unusual for frames to be sentient. Most who were originally went mad if what I've read is to be believed."

He's staring at me. *I should say something, but what?* "I don't know." *Come on Hachi*, I think to myself, *that's not a response*.

Araine walks over moving to my side, sensing my concern.

He waves at her as she approaches. "Perhaps we can offer assistance here too."

We? Who are we and us he keeps referring to? My frustration rises and I'm sure he can see it on my face when suddenly his harlequin takes a step back and curtsies. *She's like Araine*.

"A collar," I say, suddenly no longer concerned about his intentions.

He looks to Araine's collar and nods, then pointing to his hands and face, "My implants."

Did he get those done on purpose or were they done to him? To the two of them? I'm staring at him saying nothing.

"These were..." motioning to his implants, "a *gift* from an Orokin vault I discovered long ago when it was only Mira and me against the world." His phrasing and hand gesture towards her a bit theatrical.

"Does she have trouble remembering things from her past?" I blurt out, wondering if they could help Araine regain her memories.

He looks to the harlequin who returns his gaze. "We both struggled with that at first, but we've made new memories together." He takes her left hand in his as she touches her right pointer and middle finger to her face and then to his lips."

"What?" the words just come out of me and I instantly regret them. I can feel Araine's disapproval of my question and tone.

He looks at me and smiles. "I suppose your relationship is strictly platonic?"

"Yes, very." As soon as the words come out, I immediately wonder if that hurts Araine's feelings.

He kisses the harlequin's hand before releasing it. "Well, we'll behave ourselves on your ship of course." He smirks, perhaps realizing he's making me uncomfortable.

Am I uncomfortable? I am. Why am I? Should I be? My mind is a deluge of thoughts and feelings I'm unable to process.

He talks again, breaking my silence. “So, tell me more about your other companion?”

So that's an Esophage

"I didn't mean to upset you," I say to Araine, my voice soft. We're standing in my Railjack's cargo area, Sara sleeping on the makeshift cot nearby as I watch over her.

I'm not sure how to apologize to Araine for the conversation with Lamant earlier.

She stares at me, *it's alright*, the feeling voice comes to me.

I'm suddenly uncomfortable as I look at her. *Did she ever think of me the way Lamant and Mira do each other?* I didn't even want to ask, afraid either answer would make me even more uncomfortable than I already was.

Love has many forms. Her arm reaches out and touches my shoulder. I move closer to her and put my arms around her hugging her. I'm so stupid. Of course, I loved Araine, and she loved me. It wasn't like Lamant and Mira. It was just us, Hachi and Araine.

"I'm so dumb."

I know. A feeling of laughter coming from Araine.

I'm staring at a pulsating wall of misshapen flesh as it tears itself apart opening to reveal another tunnel path in front of me. Visible secretions dripping from its torn appendages sizzle as they hit the ground below, acid and vile I avoid the puddles as I step through, further exploring this underground cavern I can't wait to forget.

"Not far now." Lamant's voice coming from Mira as she performs a series of intricate movements forming a ball of light that illuminates our path.

We continue ahead, Lamant commenting on the infestation with peculiar fun facts about the formations, many seemingly made up, his attempt at humor as we enter what looked like the intestinal tract of a larger being that had swallowed us whole.

I had thought once I told him the story of how Sara and I met that he'd quiet down, but Lamant was unlike any Tenno I had met before. I wasn't sure if he was just inquisitive, or if he just felt the need to constantly talk. It wasn't so much annoying, as just so unnecessary.

He had little comments for everything, "mhm, yes, I'm sure this would go lovely with some refined Maprico juice, maybe even toss in some Ganglion soup." Lamant would say staring at the growing tendrils lining the walls. I'd try to tune him out, but I could still hear the mumble of sound from him when he'd make other random remarks when cutting into the faint glowing parts of the walls with his plasma drill, his Oloro collecting minerals along the way, almost as happily sounding as him with its *beep, bop, boop* noises.

I suppose in some ways it was helping to keep my mind off of Sara. The Entrati had immediately transferred her to one of their medical facilities where'd they begin applying some of their serums and

oleum to her injuries. According to Gomaitru, Sara would be awake and much better by the time we retrieved their bounty. Relieved somewhat, but at the same time eager to finish the task given us and get back to her. This time…*this time I'll ask her to stay with me*.

While the task of breaking into an Orokin vault overran with infested wouldn't be any more difficult than the constant raiding of derelicts I'd done in the past, the fact that two previous Tenno had been here and not returned did cause me some concern. *Is Lamant concerned?* I had no idea. His demeanor was a constant genial one I found to be sincere, though at times most of what he said and how he said it would at first sound far less than genuine.

The Oloro pauses its cutting, the sound of scraping continuing but coming from the tunnels ahead, getting closer.

"Here they come." Lamant's voice coming from Mira, who bows, creating several shimmering doppelgangers surrounding her as she moves against the walls into the shadows.

The scraping gets louder as the first of the infested lunge forward towards us, the Hecaton shotgun in Araine's hands unloading into the narrow pathway, shredding the creatures before they near us. The shells ricochet off the walls and continue as the roar of the Zundi's from Mira empty into the darkness ahead. We continue in silence, anticipating the next pack of infested to appear at any moment.

It's quiet for some time, then a glimmer of light glowing in the distance, brighter; illuminating the tunnels before opening to the ruins of what was once a majestic Orokin research facility. Once a treasure trove of information and relics from the void, these Isolation Vaults were now little more than corrupted structures full of death and decay.

We're standing in the entryway to a large forgotten room, white and gold steps leading to intricate spherical perpetual motion machinery still spinning, unhindered by the time spent lost in this glorified burial chamber. Infested veins spread out across the floor and along the walls, reaching out as if attempting to claim prize to the structure, nothing to stop it from continual hunger.

The sound of infested screams can be heard, a dark circular opening coming from the next room. We move cautiously, expecting to be overrun by an infested pack at any moment, as the next room opens to a fleshy biomechanical chamber. A large pit-like opening in the center of the floor can be seen, most likely from a collapse or cave-in of the structure above it, the sound of infested screams coming from below.

We peer over the edge carefully, the ground unstable beneath us, and see two Tenno below fending off a horde of infested. One a golden statuesque frame unwavering as the infested claws scrape against the body, seemingly inflicting no visible harm. The second a smaller frame, surrounded by fire, a flaming ring tearing through the infested as quickly as they spawn from the vile mass of organic sacs along the cavernous walls.

"Well, we found the missing Tenno." Lamant pointing out the obvious.

I look around to see what we could use to get them out of there. Four pillars along the perimeter of the walls, we could knock one down so they could climb out, but that may cause another cave in on top of us.

Lamant moves away from the pit towards a nearby pedestal. He transfers out and unleashes a blast of his amp's energy against the small reactive crystal sitting atop it. It hums softly.

I'm about to ask him what he's doing but he suddenly leaps down into the pit. I immediately unleash all the shells in my Hecaton into the mass of infested below in an attempt to provide cover, Mira doing the same. Lamant lands and dashes forward, his void energies suspending nearby creatures in the air, their skin crackling and becoming brittle as he passes through them.

The other Tenno notice him, continuing their onslaught of infested but move quickly towards him. I see another pedestal with a similar reactive crystal in the pit, his void energy causing it to glow and hum brightly as he approaches it opening a portal.

Lamant vanishes into the portal, appearing behind us near the pedestal he activated earlier. The other Tenno take note and follow, appearing near us. Lamant forces another blast to the pedestal, the portal closing, trapping the infested in the pit below.

I look at them. *Should I ask if they're alright?*

"Thanks." A voice from the shorter of the two frames speaks.

"Us or the vault?" A voice from the golden statuesque frame towering over us speaks.

"Both. Any luck before this setback?" Lamant replies casually.

"We stomped the old Necramech down here but didn't know how to open it. You know the rest." The voice coming from the shorter frame with the flaming ring on his back.

Lamant nods, "Show me. I may have an idea."

I'm at first a bit in disbelief, but then consider that if he knew how to activate the portal below, perhaps he may *actually* have an idea how to open the locked vault.

My thoughts are interrupted as I realized both Tenno staring at Mira as she holsters her Zundis, standing next to Lamant. A brief pause and silence as Lamant looks to me and then to them. "We good?"

The smaller frame nods.

We head deeper into the vault, passing the Orokin rooms still trying to cling to their old life and into more semi-organic tunnels. A vault door larger than any I had ever seen before is before us, five pillars in front of it humming softly.

Lamant approaches each of the pedestals, eyeing them closely, touching the markings along the base.

"It's a Requiem Cipher."

He motions with his arm for us to move back as he lets out a small burst of energy from his amp at each pedestal. Each blast produces a glowing image of a word above it and the sound of a gear clicking into place; Vome (Order), Fass (Chaos), Jahu (Form), Lohk (Void).

The vault door opens to a small room filled with bright light, some unknown machinery causing it to illuminate the walls, floor, and ceiling revealing our prize. Ten different, yet equally beautiful Ayatan sculptures line both sides of the vault, a couple of Scintillant hovering above a cache of Argon Crystals, Ayatan Stars, Ambolos, and Xenohast.

Lamant looks at me and smiles; I'm suddenly grateful he's here.

We spend the next several minutes loading up our Sentinel's storage with what they can carry. Lamant's Oloro still scanning the areas around us for any sign of missed rarities or intact blueprints as we backtrack out of the Vault towards the room with the sunken floor. Lamant joined with Mira, I see them studying a nearby infested plant, a tendril with a flower-like bud protruding from its top.

"Lamant!" I shout as Mira and he are engulfed in the mouth of the sinuous tentacle, swallowed whole.

The two other Tenno look then move closer to it. They motion to me to follow and I watch in horror as one by one they offer themselves to the infested plant. *What the fuck is going on?*

I think it's the way out, the feeling voice from Araine.

I approach apprehensively, the bud opening up as it takes hold of Araine and me. I shut my eyes, and when I next open them I'm staring up at the mountains of the Cambrian Drift. Mira and the other two Tenno frame's standing over me.

"Esophage." Lamant's voice coming from Mira as he extends her hand out to me. "Loid mentioned those infested flowers aren't malicious and would regurgitate us out near the pools of water south of the Necralisk."

I take Mira's hand and pull Araine and myself up, "So that's an Esophage."

Thank You Hachi

I'm running down the hallway of the Corpus ship, the power is failing on every deck as the lights flicker in and out no matter which path I take. No intention or thought as to where, just instinct. The instinct to stay alive, to move as quickly away from the scratching and clawing coming from behind me.

I'm almost out of breath when I see the Atrium, the mobile labs, and then it hits me. They have their own power supplies. I could seal myself in, get a message out, and maybe survive long enough for someone to show up.

I move quickly down the stairs towards the nearest mobile lab, a sharp pain hits me in the gut and I double over falling down the stairs. Blood and puss leak out of the side of my stomach as I scream out, an intestinal-like appendage sticking out. I grab it and yank, more blood, but it's off; the infested *thing* wriggling on the ground. I pant and gasp, moving across the floor into the mobile lab.

The door shuts and I lay down flat on the ground, blood pouring out of me. *I need to hold it in.* I tear off some of my right sleeve and push it hard against my wound. I can hear the clawing and the shrieking coming from outside. They might make their way in if they're hungry enough. *The infested are always hungry*.

I feel the floor panels and pull them up, pulling out the cargo boxes and miscellaneous equipment from below as I crawl in. The one thing left to do is call for help. I could call the Perrin Sequence, they'd send someone. I look down, the blood flow has slowed, but then I see them; purple little tendrils sprouting from my wound. It wouldn't be long now. It wouldn't matter if the Perrin Sequence sent someone. I was already dead.

"Hey Hachi…how are you?" my voice soft and weak, trailing off to a whisper. "…I wish we had had more time."

Everything is fading in and out. The lights are out, or maybe I just can't see them anymore when I hear more screams from outside. I wonder how long it'll be, what it will be like when I take the last breath. Will I feel it when I don't breadth anymore? Maybe my brain will stop functioning before then?

I think about the first time I met the skinny girl with dark skin and glowy eyes in the shop on Cetus. I'd been looking for a Tenno, looking for a tin suit, but when I saw her it took me by surprise. Surprised they'd be so similar to us, yet so different given their origins. I was so curious about her and wanted her to be the one to help me.

How wonderful things were on our adventure. Her magical spaceship, watching her effortlessly take out Grineer, Infested, unfazed by any combat challenge, yet visibly struggled to hold even the simplest of conversations. I was curious and more curious about her with every day we spent together.

When our adventures were over I wondered what she'd do. I'd been so happy the night we finally spent together. I briefly wondered if she'd ask me to stay. I wanted to spend more time with her, but I also

wanted to be someone who was worthy of spending time with. I wanted to find my place in this universe. Maybe make a name for myself like Maroo or Darvo, with a spot on a relay where patrons would come to see and trade my wares, my salvage, and my rarities from the Orokin Derelicts.

But none of that mattered now. It'd all be over soon.

Then I see Hachi's face, a friendly visage on my way out. "Hachi…it's too late."

There's darkness. Cold. Bitter cold like nothing I'd ever felt.

Sounds. Words. *Are they human?* I can't make them out. It's like someone keeps saying or asking me something but I don't know the language. It sounds familiar, but I can't make it out.

Something warm is near me. I think I can feel my heartbeat. *Am I alive?*

Pain. It radiates through my body starting in my abdomen, I want to grab myself, move, flee, anything, but I'm stuck. I'm held fast in darkness. The sound of my heartbeat, words, machines. I feel something hot in my arm, it stings and trickles into my body, spreading out instantly like wildfire.

I gasp. I'm breathing. My eyes open as I see a skull with a golden hat floating above me. The room is dark, with very faint lights, blue and black walls with gold trim. I'm lying on a slab of metal, suspended in the air several feet from the stone floor. A needle in my arm empties of liquids and is pulled out by the machines nearby. My stomach bandaged.

"You're awake. Wonderful." The floating robotic skull says, its face lighting up with every syllable spoken.

"What are you?"

"I'm a Cephalon, this body you see is a machine called a Necraloid."

"Where am I?"

"The Necralisk."

"And where is that?" I interrupt before he can respond. "I have no idea where I am or how I got here, can you fill me in on any details I missed while I was out?"

"You're on Deimos, the Tenno brought you here due to your injuries. I'm an Alchemist, a physician."

I look around. *Hachi must have gotten me here, but how and why?*

"It's no good doc…I'm infested."

"Yes, but only partially, you should make a full eighty percent recovery."

"Eighty percent?"

"Yes. Some infestation will remain with you always."

I sit up and look down at the bandages, slowly peek under them. The right side of my pelvis, abdomen, and chest below my breasts are now a purple hue or infested flesh, hard and cold like steel. Purplish veins spread outwards from the wound's center, fading into normal flesh and veins as they move through the rest of my body.

"Is Hachi here?" I look around.

"The two Tenno who brought you here should be back soon. She's retrieving some supplies for us."

"Two Tenno?"

"Yes. There were two Tenno who brought your comatose body here."

I guess she must have had help?

"Am I able to leave?"

"I'd like you to stay here for just a moment longer. To make sure your infestation is holding at bay."

"Will I need to come back for treatment once we're finished here?"

"I imagine so."

"Will I ever be able to leave this moon?"

"Of course, we'll prepare some serums, but I'd like you to come back every several months. Unless you'd prefer to be more infested."

"Is that a joke?"

"Yes, it was. Did you like it?"

"So what adventures await you and your companion once she's better?" Lamant stands beside Mira, their arms around each other's waists.

"What do you mean?"

He looks at Mira and smiles then back to me, "Will you have her go back to the Perrin Sequence or stay with you? Your Railjack has the room available."

I want to ask her to stay. I think, but I say nothing as we look at each other, "I don't know."

He smiles. "Ask her."

Maybe he's right. It's what I want to do.

His face changes and becomes solemn. "Hachi." He pauses. "Somethings coming. I've heard many rumors and whispers, not just here, but from all over. The Sentients may be returning and there is talk of another war. A coming great war between all the factions; Corpus, Grineer, Syndicates, and Sentients."

He pauses again. *Is he waiting for me to say something?*

He smiles. “It’d be good to have friends if the rumors are true.”

He and Mira hold out their hands to us. I look at them. Araine accepts Mira’s and I take Lamant’s in mine.

“Reach out when you and yours are whole again and you can use my Orbiter’s Foundry. Plus it’d be great to catch up and plan our next adventure.”

“Our next adventure?” The words just come out.

He chuckles and waves as he and Mira head towards the hangar bay.

It is good to have friends. The feeling voice from Araine.

Is Lamant a friend? The first thought in my head. I look to Araine. “Yeah. I guess he is.”

I’m standing for the first time since I passed out and I realize I feel good. No pain or dizziness. I touch the infested parts of my body and feel the cold steel on my fingertips, yet the warmth from my fingers. I look around and see my clothes are in a pile on a chair near the room’s doorway.

Move to them when the door opens. I see the dark-skinned girl with the glowy eyes and the vermillion and dark chocolate-colored clothing. She smiles at me.

“Sara!” She exclaims and moves quickly to me, embracing me.

I smile and pull her tight against me, speaking into her ear.

“Thank you, Hachi.”

End Part 2.

Part 3

That one time when life was really good.

I think we're going to get along splendidly…

"Hachi…" I ease back on my embrace as Sara's voice trails off. She looks at me, but I can't tell what her expression is; excited, upset, or concerned. Her eyes dart back and forth syncing with my eye movement until I look down, then back up.

I move my face towards hers, she tilts to the side, but then pauses and looks down at her bandages and back to me. A faint glimpse of infestation from the sides of the bandages.

"I'm the one who's different now."

"Araine and I are immune to the infestation, though it tries to kill us."

She looks up at me with a questioning gaze that vanishes to a smile; then nods.

"So what now?"

I kiss her softly.

It'd been a few weeks before the medical Necraloid provided Sara with a clean bill of health or at least a clean enough case for us to continue our off-world travels and not risk her infestation endangering anyone else. Though they encouraged her and me to return at least once a Martian year for checkups.

While Sara recovered I'd spend my days lurking about the surface of Deimos, reluctantly rescuing downed Grineer searching for relics, helping Corpus researchers investigate native fauna, and raiding storage caches for old war technology and rarities the Entrati could use in their new-found quest to reclaim some of this moon from the infested outbreak.

It starts with an ask from the family, mostly the matron Gomaitru, but often from Vilcor, Kermerros, or Kaeli. We join or are joined by other Tenno who have accepted the task and heads out the Necropolis and into the Cambrion Dift collecting resources, fighting off infested monsters, recovery allies, artifacts, and resources. We head back in, each collecting our payment and leaving on our way. We set up drilling machinery, excavate entrances to Isolation Vaults, destroy rampaging Necramechs and recover schematics and blueprints that would be otherwise lost forever. Again we head back, disband, collect our trinkets and go our way. We activate Requiem Obelisks, collect fish for dissection and try to save any wildlife that successfully bonded with the infestation and then once again we head back. It's different work, different risks each time, but a cycle remains. Join with others, do the thing, come back alive, collect our reward and go out again.

In exchange for this work the Entrati took care of Sara, and with some convincing from Lamant, provided some much-needed upgrades to my Railjack. No more cots to sleep on but instead sectioned crew quarters within the second level of the ship, and more importantly, a Foundry and Mod segments installed within the aft decks by engineering and storage. All recovered or improvised from parts found within the derelicts of Orokin vaults we'd uncovered.

My Railjack now had all of the comforts needed for us to travel the galaxy in style, to the void and back, without so much as returning with a stiff back. Much of the work had been organized with the help of Lamant many of the bounties and enhancements to the Railjack had been his idea. I thought it strange how much he would insist on helping. Of all the other Tenno at Deimos, even those who had briefly joined us in our hunts for old war technology, none had so much as hinted at grouping with us again, let alone actively trying to help us.

Perhaps the thought that Araine and I were like Mira and him was *really* all he needed, but I couldn't shake the feeling it was something more. Something he must want; something hidden from us.

I'm staring up at the ceiling above me. Sara is asleep, her head on my chest as I cradle her in my arms, my left-hand runs along her right arm that holds me.

The room feels like it should be slightly cold, the intricately designed walls are empty and the room is spacious, but nothing more than the bed and nightstand. Sara's breathing changes as I feel her push against the heavy bedsheets covering us and she looks up at me.

"Does she sleep?" Sara's head motions to Araine standing along the window looking out.

"Not like we do," I say, considering for a moment what it would look like if Araine slept in a bed like us, the thought so foreign to me I smile as I find the vision almost humorous.

I had explained to Sara about Araine; the collar we'd found and how it changed her and ultimately myself as well. I explained to her that when Lamant found us he was astonished at how we were like Mira and him. Two Prime Warframes that had their servitude bonds broken, a blessing but also a curse due to their lost memories. It was easy for Lamant and I to sympathize with them, as most Tenno who had slept for more than a few centuries had fragmented memories as well. While our memory loss was due to our length in stasis, theirs was more deliberate and purposeful we expected, a cruelty of the Orokin we wanted to undo.

"Is it strange…the transference now?"

"It was at first."

"She lets you completely take control of her…that's next level intimacy…" Sara's voice trails off as her head lies against my chest, then she sits up quickly, "Should I be jealous you're going inside another woman?" She smiles her tone slightly off.

Is she joking? She's making fun. My mouth opens, a look of shock, "We're not like Lamant and Mira." I say, immediately wondering if I should have shared that. I can see Araine put a hand to her face and shake her head back and forth. *Was she also laughing at me?*

Sara chuckles, looking to Araine and then back to me, innocently shaking her head slightly.

"So when do I get to meet this *friend* Lamant? I suppose I need to thank him for helping keep me alive." She emphasizes the word friend in a way I find peculiar.

I hadn't thought about it. The last few weeks I spent my days adventuring with Lamant for the Entrati, then staying nights focusing on Sara and her recovery. *I suddenly realize how little thanks I had given Lamant and feel guilty.*

"Hachi?"

I realize she's waiting for me to respond. "He did ask us to help him with retrieving something from an Ice Mine."

Sara smiles and hugs me tight. "Ok, so when and where do we go?"

I look at Sara as her sandy blond hair falls over me. *Was I really going to bring her with me? Could I really keep her safe?* Doubts crept into my mind as I lay there, my heart beginning to race.

"He wants to steal some Orokin device from a Corpus Ice Mine."

"One of those Fortuna *'indentured servants for life'* camp ones?" She air quotes the phrase instead of saying slave camp.

I nod.

"Wonderful." Sara thrusts herself up out of the bed, her bandages are gone and I can see the infestation along her torso, like a large burn scar that tried to be covered with a colorful tattoo. "So let's get going then."

I look at her, "Did I explain what the Orokin device was?"

She shrugs, "Nope, but whatever it is we'll find it together."

I nod, thinking to myself, *Ok then.*

I'm staring out the window of a small room. It's dark and cold with the most minimalist of furniture. A small bedroll, desk, and chair. The wall opposite the entry door is a slender floor-to-ceiling window looking out over the landing pads of the Necropolis. All manner of ships coming and going; Tenno, Corpus, and Grineer.

Penny for your thoughts. The feeling voice in my head, a cold metallic hand on my shoulder.

"I never saw true beauty until this night," I say as I look out towards the landing craft and point towards the figure of Araine walking next to the human girl Hachi had needed to save.

They're cute.

I nod.

You seemed to take a liking to Hachi.

I wonder to myself. *How many Tenno have we met and never another like us?* The words leave my mouth, "I do."

Does she remind you of someone?

I shrug.

Will we travel with them again? Another cold hand moves around me. I embrace it with mine and turn slowly and lift my head to press my lips against the metallic flesh of the harlequin.

“I’d like to. Would you?”

I suppose I could share, so long as you don’t stop thinking of me.

I press my lips against her, my tongue tasting something similar to metal as I embrace her body with both arms and pull myself tight against her.

“Je pense toujours à toi,” I say as I exhale.

A few moments later and Adie’s voice informs me of an incoming call, it’s a female’s voice, excited and friendly. “Hi Lamant, this is Sara.”

“Hachi’s friend? I’m so glad you’ve recovered.”

“Yes, thank you, I owe you one!”

“Don’t mention it, happy to help you and a fellow Tenno, especially one like Mira and me.”

“Awe, you’re sweet, aren’t you.”

I chuckle.

“Well then, I just talked with Hachi. How about I turn on some Nora Night, serve up some Daku Liquor while Mira and you come to join us so we can plan out how to liberate that device you want from the Ice Mine?”

“Sara.” I pause, smiling. “I think we’re going to get along splendidly.”

You got me silly; I'm yours

I'm looking at the remains of the spread of Cetus food Sara had prepared for us. A small plate of Golden Caviar from the Geonate Shelf, now empty, the only indication of its contents the smudges along its rims where the crackers had scraped the sides. Bones from the Kuakas and Virmink litter the plates in front of us and the remains of a gourd with soaked Bomba leaves and a burnished Juta reed; a practice signifying friendship between parties. There are also Fungal Polyps, Kaelli had overly encouraged us to partake that we all shied away from.

I'd told Sara before how Tenno didn't need to eat like those on Cetus, or even the Corpus and Grineer that survived off Nutrient Bars and celebrated with Cryotic Cocktails. However, she had pushed her idea of sharing a meal between all of us, and I hadn't wanted to decline or discourage her desires. After all, this is something most people and cultures shared in common across our galaxy and I was finding myself wanting to be a part of that; a part of her universe.

While it was an unusual sensation, it wasn't a bad one, and I did feel the experience of eating cooked meat and drinking was overall an enjoyable one. The way the food hit the palate, sometimes soft, crunchy, salty, sweet, and various combinations thereof; a bit surprising sometimes. The swallowing was the tricky part at first and a couple of times I had to catch myself from choking. *How many centuries had it been since I ate food and drank regularly?*

We sit around our small console designed for combat strategy and ship readouts, now temporarily converted to a dining table for our amusement. Araine stands to my right and Sara sits to my left, engaged in constant conversation with Lamant, but often embracing me, holding my hand, and giving me the physical signs she's checking in on me. I let her lead the conversations with Lamant directly across from us, the banter seems like it'd be draining. Sara's only pauses are while Lamant shares Mira's responses with us or mine for Araine. Several hours later and into the evening yet everyone is still going at it, *how do they keep up? How do people not get exhausted from so much talking?*

"Right! I'm like, is she going to respond or just keep staring at me?" Sara and Lamant laugh. I force a chuckle.

"Oh, we're just teasing you Hachi," Sara says reassuringly as she pecks my hand she's holding in her lap.

"You didn't tell me Lamant was so handsome," Sara whispers to me and chuckles. "Don't you think?"

I think to myself that Lamant was pleasant to look at, the implants in his face adding more character than a fault to his appearance. I immediately wonder how much pain he's endured and if he still does.

"What's that now?" Lamant's voice.

"Oh, just girl talk; never you mind now."

I smile and take a sip of the Daku Liquor, it mostly burns with a hint taste of Peca nut as it travels down my throat. I try to forget about what it's made from. I watch, smiling as Sara and Lamant trade more stories. Interactions they've had with me, with Corpus, and Grineer; eventually getting to Lamant's

request and covering the details of this, our next heist. I suddenly start to feel even more pleasant and realize I like hearing them converse.

It's easier to watch and listen sometimes. The feeling voice from Araine to me. Is she concerned I wonder, but feel the sense of a smile as I look at her.

"Don't you agree Hachi?" Sara's voice is perky and her face smiley as she looks in my direction along with Lamant.

I take another sip of the Daku. I'd been listening, but not paying attention to what they said. I realize I'm rubbing her hand a lot more than I recalled doing so a few moments ago. "Yeah," I mutter nodding my head and focusing on slowing down the movements of my hand.

Sara smiles and says, "So to recap…the plan is we drop Mira and Lamant out the airlock near the asteroids surrounding the Ice Mine in Veil Proxima so they can recover their artifact. Next, I take Hachi and Araine to where the nearby Freightlinker waits for the mineral cargo and cause some commotion."

"Decoupling the cargo containers with a few explosions should cause enough of an issue for them to focus on us and not the mines," Lamant says, nodding to Mira.

"Once you have what you need, I pick you all up and we get out of the sector." She pauses, "But Hachi, is it a good idea to keep us all separated like that, shouldn't we just all go together to the Ice Mine?"

It's more efficient to split the party, I think to myself. While Araine and I hold their attention the Corpus most likely won't even notice a break-in at their mines until after we're gone. And even if they did, if we're destroying the only ship nearby that can hold and transport their cargo they'd make that their priority. After all, the mine wasn't going to go anywhere.

Lamant smiles and winks at me, "We'll be fine."

I look at Lamant and then at Sara and nod. I'm suddenly more concerned about Sara alone on the ship. "Kumo."

"Yes, Operator."

"Let's take Sara to the arsenal."

Sara looks at me and I smile at her, my hand caressing hers.

We're looking at the Arsenal wall, a column of light dropping down a cylinder with touch screens to make selections from the ship's available storage. Rifles, shotguns, hand cannons, and unusually oversized melee weapons only a Tenno's Warframe could ever think of lifting, let alone wielding in a fight.

Hachi motions for me to enter and I'm immediately in awe of how many weapons she has stockpiled; it'd make a Kavor militia jealous. While many of the weapons seem familiar, things I'd seen Grineer soldiers carry or Corpus crewmen have in their possession, many of the weapons seem far too intricate or unwieldy to be of any actual use to me.

And then I see something extraordinary. “Hachi…” I pause, biting my lip.

“Anything you want is yours.” She says.

I click the selection, the Sepulcrum, an old war-era Orokin sidearm that fires in bursts with lock-on explosive rounds.

“This makes my Secura Dual Cestra look so tiny,” I say as I hold the massive sidearm in my hand, its weight heavy but somehow wieldable in my hand.

Hachi nods.

I nod and take another sip of the Daku.

“Hachi, are you getting drunk?” Sara fake gasps as she looks at me, her hands pulling me to her as she pecks my lips and forehead briefly.

Lamant chuckles, “Well I suppose we should get going, I’m sure you have some *preparations* to do on your end.” He says the words as if implying something else. He stands and takes Mira by the hand. He looks at her so intently and I wonder if I look at Sara that way. I find myself staring at them and smiling.

“Oh, we have rooms here now if you’d like to stay in one.” Sara volunteers and looks at me as she moves closer positioning herself in my lap. “Then we could all leave together in the morning; right Hachi?”

“Of course. Kumo can show…” Sara presses a finger to my lips interrupting me.

“We’ll show you to your guest room.” She smiles and stands adding. “That’s what hosts do.”

“Yes,” I say and stand, my legs a bit wobbly and I feel as if the room is slightly ajar. Sara looks at me and chuckles.

I lean towards her and smell her lavender scent deeply.

“I think we’ll let Kumo take this one, you’ve been very gracious as it is and we know it’s late already,” Lamant says.

“Nonsense, we’re fine.” Sara looks at me and then at Lamant. “We’ll give you the tour.”

I grab the small container of Daku from the table as we walk down the hall and towards the ramp leading towards the stern of the ship and abruptly downwards. What was once simply an engineering and cargo area now was sectioned off with accommodations of four sleeping quarters. Not particularly spacious, but private and comfortable. Sara’s words and Lamant’s start to sound funny to me, the words drift to my ears but their meanings are lost to me. I lean against the wall.

Sara looks at me and then to Lamant, “Holler if you two need anything.”

Lamant bows and turns to take Mira by the waist as Kumo lights a path at their feet for them and they head into the room.

“You feeling ok?” Sara says, she’s looking at me. *Is she concerned?*

I lick my lips and move closer to her. She takes my head in her hands.

I suddenly feel a strange sensation and turning abruptly away from her I feel the reverse of eating earlier. The strange pressure inside me builds and pushes everything out of my mouth as I vomit on the floor. It makes me light-headed.

“Let me take that.” Sara’s voice is soft as the bottle of Daku is removed from my hand.

I can hear Kumo and Sara talking as I stumble back to our room, the hum of the Domestik drones awakening and heading towards the mess I made. Sara puts her arm around my shoulder and helps me along. On one hand, I feel incredibly vulnerable; on the other, I can’t stop thinking about her scent.

Once in the bed, I sit up to look at Araine and Sara before me. I want to say something. I want to tell them how I feel about them. How much they mean to me. How much Araine has helped me and how I’m so happy Sara is a part of my life.

No words come out. Instead, I hug Araine, my face against her lower torso as I kiss what I think is her upper thigh and mouth the words that I love her.

It’s ok Hachi, I love you too, get some rest. The feeling voice from Araine as she pets my head gently.

I fall backward to lay on the bed and reach out for Sara.

I see Sara crawl beside me, “Drink this.” a glass of clear liquid with something cold and soothing traveling down my throat as I gulp it down; water. She lifts me and sits behind me, my head and shoulders resting in her lap and she looks down towards me and caresses my face with her hands.

“I want you to stay.”

Sara pauses and looks at me, “You got me silly; I’m yours.”

So let's get out of here.

The flight controls are pressed all the way forward as I lean into them with Araine's body. Our Railjack is accelerating towards a Corpus Crewship on a collision course with its shield satellite when I push hard to port. We barely pass by the shield, a small gap between it and the crew ship, a few seconds and it'll be back in alignment between us and our target, but it's not fast enough. The Apocs are already firing, closing in and then shrapnel from the wreckage showers in every direction, bouncing off our Railjack and the Crewship alike.

I let the Railjack drift as we slow directly behind the Crewship. The lights from the cannon below are already finding their weak points. I don't even need to say a word to Sara as she pulls the trigger and in a flash of light and the absence of all sound, the ship in front of us is no more.

Kumo's voice, "Operator, Archwing slingshot loaded. Tenno in the barrel."

"Now's your chance," I say and see the indicators that Lamant and Mira are on their way to the nearby mines.

Kumo again, "Operator, fighters on scope."

"Let's head directly to the Freightlinker." I say as I push the controls forward and engage the boost. The shrapnel from the Apocs tearing through the Corpus fighters is all we can see, intensifying the closer we get to our target. More and more Orm Weavers, Basilisk, and Harpi swarm around us like infested to fresh new flesh.

"You got this?" I ask Sara as she readies to take the helm.

"I got this!" She says smiling. Then throws her arms around us, Araine and I, before pressing her lips against Araine's face briefly, "And you two keep each other safe!"

I feel a strange new sensation from Araine, and maybe myself, the feel of flesh against Araine's skin, our skin at this moment. I quickly force it to the back of my mind.

Sara takes the helm, thrusting the ship down and fast and accelerating hard as the Apocs continue to fire. Several of our missiles punch a hole through the cargo bay doors as Araine and I drop out of the airlock. Immediately my Amesha's drones surround us as we blink, propel ourselves towards the newly formed opening.

We fly through and hit the ground hard as the artificial gravity takes effect the further away from the opening we are. Shields designed to keep the oxygen inside have been triggered by the ship's life support forming a protective wall sectioning off our entryway.

Araine's feeling voice clear in my head due to the transference, *Time to keep the enemy busy while our fellow Tenno raids their Ice Mines.*

I can see a console a short distance away from us that emits a faint glow. Araine's voice in my head, *The alarms will sound as soon as we begin decoupling the cargo containers.*

"Let's trigger the alarms," I respond.

The sound of Corpus crewmen can be heard coming towards us, the large cargo bay in front of us is currently empty as it waits for a cargo that will never arrive; lights illuminate the darkness before us like a sea as Walkers, Rangers, and Scrambus head towards us.

Ready?

We fire several rounds from the Hecaton into the crowd, peppering the robotics and shielding of the Corpus fighters in front of us before Araine releases a dome of living chain that begins to ensnare large groups of the enemy. Twisting and dangling them before our heavy blade splits and sunders them apart.

“These Corpus slavers remind me of the Orokin, selfish, greedy.”

We’ll put an end to them.

We’re in a large open room, metal walkways and railings precariously attached to the walls of ice surrounding us. The passageway we came from was lowly lit and the room before us silent except for the gentle hum of machinery. The steel floor a level below us sparks as conduits occasionally short and overload; the results of the cursory craftsmanship of Fortuna’s workers eagerly trying to meet their Corpus master’s efficiency requirements.

Metallic tiles and pillars rise from the steel floor, their lights emitting a faint, but noticeable, shield around the center of the room. A raised circular platform with steps leading to the center houses a large crystal of ice ever so slowly being thawed a dark shape within.

Mira watches over me from above as I drop to the platform below us. My void form keeps me hidden, though no workers or Corpus taskmasters are around to see me, I need to make sure I’m able to penetrate the shield before us.

Now the moment of truth. Mira’s feeling voice in my head.

I slowly reach out with my hand and touch the shield with the tip of my finger. Nothing happens. If there is an alarm going off here there is no visual or audible indication. I move through it and reach the frozen crystal.

I can see the shape within, an aqua-colored steel circle with three rectangular protrusions stemming out from its center on either side at equal distances increasing in length.

“Here we go,” I speak softly as I begin to focus my void energy through my amp and into the ice crystal. The thawing quickens until enough is melted around the old Orokin Key that I’m able to reach my hand in and break it free with a sigh of relief.

Lamant! Mira’s feeling voice screams in my head as I barely have time to react before the throwing knife rips through my right forearm causing me to drop the Key. I quickly duck and grab it with my left hand as I look for Mira. Static floods our comms as our Omni device is unable to find a signal.

Mira leaps towards me, the shimmering doppelgangers of herself dissipating as the red and black Valkyr frame lunges at her with its claws. Mira tries to parry, but the Valkyr is too fast and the claws tear

through Mira's side. I scream out and let loose the rage within focused through my amp at the Valkyr, she's temporarily stunned before she turns her eyes to me. I dash to the floor above and down the hallway we came from, then pull Mira to me, our thoughts and bodies one again.

We need to let Hachi and the others know an acolyte is here.

"We need to get out of here."

The juggernaut of a Warframe gains on us as we twist back into the air firing a barrage of bullets into her chest, little more than a minor nuisance to her, as we leap forward again. Mira's clones dissipate as soon as she can summon them as the Valkyr continues to gain on us.

You go on ahead…

"No, we're almost to the airlocks."

We leap from shadow to shadow evading the talons until another catches Mira's leg, we stumble onto our back as the black and red Warframe pounces onto us, the full magazine of each pistol releases into the chest of the Valkyr pushing it back, briefly delaying her attack as Mira and I stop her talons with our duel blades.

I transfer out and dash behind the Valkyr unleashing the void energies from my amp hitting her square in the face staggering her but her claws reach me and shred my chest, my body reacting subconsciously and flowing back into Mira, void static begins to hinder our vision. Mira leaps, moving us out of the way of another flurry of attacks.

"There, we just need to get there," I say to Mira as I look upwards at the small walkway leading to the airlock chamber.

The Valkyr's talons sink into Mira's right forearm forcing us to drop one of our blades as she turns her gaze directly to ours, her voice bellows out echoing within our heads.

There is no place to hide. Raspy echoes from the Valkyr.

"Mira…"

I know love…

We drive our other blade into Mira's forearm separating it from us and leap upwards. The Valkyr seems confused, if only for a split second, before the forearm in her talons glistens like an irresistible jewel then bursts into a blinding explosion. It propels the black and red Warframe backward, impaling her into the walls of ice and machinery as we grab the railing above us and lunge towards the airlock.

A second later we're in the cold emptiness of space, no more static as I hit my Omni.

"Sara," I say over the comms.

"Hey you two, we ready to get out of here?"

"Yeah…we're good to go."

Hachi's voice over the comms, "So let's get out of here."

So let's explore.

What happened? Is the thought in my head as I look at Lamant standing beside the Foundry system as it stitches together a new forearm for Mira. Lamant's shirt is torn across his chest and right arm, bloodstains soaking the fabric, though his exposed flesh shows no sign of trauma.

"I may owe you for some Polymer and Nitain." Lamant says his gaze doesn't leave Mira as his hand touches her head. She gives him a slight nod. "There was an Acolyte."

Sara looks at Lamant, then at me.

Tell her what an Acolyte is, Araine's voice in my head.

Lamant speaks before I can, "They're fellow Tenno who believe…we've lost our way."

"Lost your way?" Sara asks. "I didn't know Tenno fought each other."

Lamant shrugs as Sara looks back at me.

I shrug as well.

"mmmK…I'm gonna need more than that at some point, especially if something like this happens again." Sara exclaims as she exhales loudly glancing at each of us, her gaze lingering on me.

"Agreed," Lamant says.

I Nod.

Sara takes a breath before speaking, "Well, let's see what was so important you almost died?"

"This thing must be worth a fortune…but…what is it?" Sara asks as she holds the Orokin device in her hand, holding it up to the light above her then down again as if it were a jewel to appraise.

"The worth isn't measured by its value, but rather to what it can find." Lamant pauses then says, "And hopefully open for us."

It's a Clan Dojo key, the thought in my head, not verbalizing to Sara as she continues to look at the Orokin device with a puzzled face. *All this work for that? Why would Lamant be after this key? There are plenty of active Tenno Clans willing to accept new members and even if he wanted to start his own there are plenty of Tenno who work towards collecting the resources or credits needed to construct or buy their own. With Lamant's knowledge he probably already has everything required, so why…?*

My thoughts are interrupted by Sara's exclamation into my ear as she throws her arms around me, "Yay a treasure hunt! It'll be like when we first met!" She pecks my cheek and smiles at me.

Lamant turns and smiles at us. "Exactly that. A treasure hunt. Now we have the key to the chest, but we need to find where the sunken treasure was dropped."

"How do we do that?"

“That’s where Hachi comes in. Or at least your ship’s Cephalon Kumo.”

I look to Lamant confused, my thoughts begin with *Wouldn’t Adie be able to…*

Lamant continues, “Adie, Mira, and myself don’t have access to our own Railjack, so we lack their old war maps. The maps in my Orbiter were erased after my entry to cryo to prevent anyone from finding our locations.”

“So you want Kumo to help Adie locate the Dojo this key opens?” I ask.

“Exactly.”

I look at him then at Sara, they both seem so eager for the next step of the hunt.

“Kumo.”

“Yes, Operator.”

“Please assist Adie in finding the Dojo this key opens.” I want to add *if it even exists* but I keep that to myself.

“Of course Operator. We’ll begin now.”

“Thank you, Hachi.” Lamant says, “And for this too.” He says the last part looking at Mira.

I nod, then look at his torn and bloody visage, “Do you need clothes?”

“hmm, does he?” Sara whispers into my ear.

I open my mouth to reply but I sense a feeling from Araine and I realize I don’t need to respond.

Lamant looks at himself then to Mira who raises a fist and an upward thumb with her good hand.

“I’ll go change now and come back to check on Mira and your progress on the location.”

He’s barely down the hallway when I feel Sara’s arms around me pulling me tight against her.

Several hours have passed and I find myself looking out the window to the distant stars as they fade dimmer and dimmer along our course. Between Kumo and Adie the location of the Dojo the key belonged to didn’t take long to uncover and so we were heading directly there. Someplace between the Veil Proxima and the Void I began to wonder if it would be intact enough to salvage some goods. Perhaps some lost Orokin parts or blueprints; though if nothing else perhaps something of value to trade once we were back to civilization.

My head rested on Sara’s chest, the sound of her heartbeat steady, her breathing slow and calm, and body warm to the touch. I slowly lifted myself from her, pushing the hair from her face as gently as I could as I began to stare at her as she slept. *How did we get here?* Our past events play out in my mind. *What was I doing with this crew; a friend and a lover?* My thoughts are interrupted as Kumo’s voice in my comms breaks the silence.

“Operator, we’ve reached our destination.”

I look at Sara, she stirs then wakes from her sleep, looking up at me.

“Scanners?” I respond.

“No ships in this sector, Operator.”

“That was quick,” Sara says as she sits up.

“It’s been a few hours,” I say as I stand up and begin to dress.

Sara grabs my hand and smiles, shaking her head as she pulls me back to the bed, “No you don’t. Not yet.”

I pause and look to Araine by the doorway.

Sara places her hands on my head and turns me to face her. She smiles but has a serious look on her face. “She can watch or join, but I need you here first.”

My mouth opens, but no words come out. I don’t even know what to think. I slowly turn to Araine, who has her arms and hands move out to her sides and looks to us then to the door and walks through it.

“What is that thing?” Sara’s eyes are wide as she takes in the structure before us, her jaw-dropping open as she exclaims.

“A temple,” I say, the words blurting out of me.

Lamant smiles and shakes his head, “Much more than that Hachi.”

I look to him and pause, waiting for him to say more.

“It’s a home.” He says calmly and looks back out at the shimmering construct.

The dormant and long-forgotten base shimmers slightly in the emptiness of space. Such little reflected light from the stars and the stealth-like metal structure makes it difficult to see with eyes and almost impossible to pick up on scanners. If we hadn’t known the exact location it would have been near impossible to find on our own. No active flight paths and enough orbiting asteroids to make it blend in, that ship sensors would interpret it as just another piece of space debris.

“So how do we get inside?” Sara asks.

“There.” Lamant points towards the lower end of the structure. “I’m willing to bet there is an old Dry Dock entrance at the base of the structure.”

“Kumo,” I say. I leave out instructions, but he’s aware of what we need.

“Yes Operator, heading there now. Adie and I can confirm there does seem to be a dock below.”

Kumo navigates the Railjack through the smaller debris and to the base of the Dojo, its triangular shape almost like a pyramid if one had talons reaching down from each corner. Between the talons and upwards we came to rest in front of a large rectangular structure attached to the Dojo with a wide oval opening.

“Operator. Scans indicate no signs of life, though the structure seems to be intact. Unfortunately, we’ll be unable to activate the clamps to hold the Railjack in place until you’ve reactivated the structure with the key.”

“Can you hold the ship stable here?”

“Yes Operator, there is no significant movement from the debris surrounding the structure and it appears the anchors are still functional for this Dojo.”

“Is life support on?”

“Yes Operator, though it appears the Dojo is in a hibernation state. Minimal systems are still active. Life support, most doors and consoles should have power and be available for use.”

I look to Lamant then to Sara. “So let’s explore.”

So…docking clamps…right.

We leave out the lower airlocks and drop to the lower ramps of the Dry Dock where the magnetic clamps lack the power to hold the Railjack in place. It's dark with only a faint glow of orange lights appearing around the frame of doorways and in front of hallways. *Some types of indicators are powered by an emergency backup unit.* Behind us looking below the Railjack is the darkness of space, a false emptiness, but a glance upwards and out the primary flight path shows a shimmer of aquamarine essence like a sea of water, a veil between worlds not too far in the distance where the void beckons.

Sara shines a lamp light into the darkness; it illuminates so little of our surroundings we can barely make out the walkway before us. Lamant and I light up ours as well as we make our way to the main doors in the center of the Dry Dock's observation deck. The doors are large, dome-shaped, about 20 feet high in the center, and width as long as 20 feet at the base.

"Moment of truth," Lamant says as he pulls out the Orokin key and places it into a console along the side of the giant doorway.

A slow grown and the sound of the doors sliding open causes a light gust of air from inside. It smells somewhat stale but not foul or toxic.

Adie's voice on the comms, "Operator, marking the power source on your navigation. If you can locate and activate it the Dojo may awaken from hibernation."

"Thanks, Adie." Lamant says then turns to us, "Shall we split up?"

"No, you all did that once and you nearly died so we're sticking together, right Hachi?" Sara remarks quickly as she looks at me.

"Sure."

"Ok then, looks like the fastest way is…this way," Lamant says as he points before Mira and he leads the way into the darkness.

The temple's structure is in good condition. No signs of damage from war, infestation, or even overgrown foliage are common within abandoned derelicts. The hallway leads us to a large open room with stone tiles and four metallic pillars, numerous consoles in each, perhaps a former trading area where Tenno and their guests would come to exchange goods; all dark and offline.

In the center is a fast travel tube; also offline. Lamant tries a few switches along with Adie's and Kumo's help but it's unable to be powered on and enabled.

"Well, we were planning to walk anyway, right?" Lamant says.

Though it's not a question I nod in response.

We continue following the lights of the main hallway which opens to a smaller room with two spiral staircases in the center, both leading up as well as down. We follow Mira and Lamant as they descend the right staircase, another small room with three hallways in each direction but a closed-door ahead of us.

Lamant touches the door, it beeps a series of faint sounds. The console along the side has a series of buttons, but no means to insert the Orokin key.

“Hmm, any ideas?”

“Would the device thing you have open it?” Sara asks.

“Doesn’t seem to be a place to put it.”

I watch the two of them converse.

“Is that thing like a keypad?” Sara points to the console next to the door.

“I believe so. I would have thought biometrics of some kind, but it doesn’t seem to recognize us.”

I look around the small room and then along the hallways.

Perhaps a vent leads into it? I think to myself.

Then Araine’s voice in my head, *Ask them that*

“Maybe…there?” I point to the vent above us.

Lamant snaps his fingers and points at me smiling. He looks around and then above us.

“On it.” He says as Mira leaps and grabs the grating pulling it down easily.

She and Lamant dash into the darkness, a muffled sound crawling above us and then silence.

A minute passes, then another. Sara looks at me. *Is she concerned? Should I say they’re probably fine? I start to wonder if they got stuck.*

There’s a buzzing sound, then a flash of light flickering and the subtlest of hums in the background as the hallways, doors, and room become illuminated. The door barring us entry previously slides open and Mira stands just inside flailing her hand as she bows then performs a quick curtsy.

“Ta-Da.” Lamant’s voice as he walks out. “Looks like we got the power back on.”

“Alright, let’s see what this place has for us!” Sara exclaims excitedly.

Sara’s mouth is wide open as she looks at the panel readouts in the control room.

“Is this…Are these numbers real?”

Lamant and Mira punch away at the controls, providing access to Adie and Kumo and resetting the station's subsystems to recognize each of us as new owners.

Lamant pauses and looks over. “Probably, we should verify what’s in the storage though while we run diagnostics and reset these controls. We’re good here if you want to check it out.”

Sara smiles, “I don’t think I’d know what 300,000 Nano spores would even look like.”

Lamant laughs, “That’s fine, when you get to the storage area you can verify the numbers from our end match up with what is on your display. Sound good?”

“Yeah, I can do that easy enough.”

“Great, I’ll send the navigation to you so you don’t get lost.”

Sara looks to Araine and me, “You coming?”

I’m about to nod, but Araine’s feeling voice in my head, *Let’s take care of docking the Railjack first.*

“We’re going to get the clamps on the dock working,” I say as I transfer into Araine.

“Ok then, see you soon.” Sara then runs off excitedly.

Lamant looks at us, “I’ll let you know if anything comes up, but from the look of it this place is completely empty of any living thing.”

We nod and begin our walk back towards the Railjack.

Hachi…, Araine’s voice in my head.

“What is it?”

I can sense her wanting to ask me a question, I stop moving and wait.

Earlier…when you and Sara were together…

A feeling of embarrassment comes over me, I’m at a loss for words. What do I say? How do I say that I just can’t say no to Sara? That maybe she just really needed me…that...

Araine’s feeling voice breaks my thoughts, *Had you wanted me to join?*

I transfer out, my thoughts racing so fast I didn’t want to risk confusing her any more than I was already confusing myself. What did she just ask me? Did she *really* ask that? Why hadn’t I said something earlier…I should have said something…asked her to give us a bit of time…

Hachi…

I look to Araine blurting out, “Why do you think that?”

Araine’s demeanor changes and I sense embarrassment from her now. A hand rises to where her mouth would be and touches it then she drops it down again.

I’m sorry I upset you.

“No, no I’m not upset. I just am not sure why you asked me this.” Was I coming off upset? Was the tone of my voice incorrect? This isn’t coming out right…

It’s just…do you remember the night with the Daku?

“Yes. I drank too much and was sick.” I rack my brain trying to remember every little detail of the evening.

And you kissed me.

“Yeah, I remember. I kissed your thigh as I couldn’t stand or sit upright before I passed out.”

Mmm Hachi, Araine pauses.

“Yes?”

You didn’t kiss my thigh…

“What do you mean?” This isn’t right, I was drunk, I was falling, I held her and kissed her leg.

She looks down and points to her groin. *Of fuck* I think to myself. I’m such as ass.

“I…I’m sorry Araine, I thought…I…don’t know what happened. I’m sorry if I hurt you.” I reach for her hands and take them in mine, looking up at her.

No Hachi… She shakes her head. *You were surprised at Lamant and Mira…but then I wasn’t sure if…*

“If I wanted that for us?” The words come out and all I can think about is how uncomfortably warm and anxious I feel. I don’t know what to tell her. Araine’s my best friend, not my lover, the thoughts spin in my head as I look for words that don’t form.

She looks down at our hands then back to me and I can’t tell if I am feeling my own anxiety, hers, or if we’re amplifying it in each other before I feel her arms around me and her face pressing against my lips. The metallic flesh touches me and for an instant, it’s cold, then warm, a taste like steel in my mouth. *I need to breathe. Remember to breathe.*

I look up at Araine. I have no words. My mind has stopped thinking. Overloaded from attempting to process what just happened. I’m frozen in place.

Araine seems to notice, her head looks down at our hands still embracing. She nods her head at me then walks off, heading back towards the Railjack.

You coming? Her feeling voice is a calmness that stirs me from the chaos in my mind.

“So…docking clamps…right.”

So this is home.

A few keystrokes on the dry dock control panels and the Railjack magnetic clamps are in place and working again.

“Kumo, you should be able to auto dock and undock as needed now”.

“Confirming. Yes, Operator, docking clamps are calibrated.”

I look to Araine who was busy opening some of the nearby storage crates that hadn’t been connected to the transfer conduits and loads them one by one. Sara was still on her way back, confirming with Lamant and Mira that whoever last operated this Dojo had managed to stockpile a massive amount of resources. Even if we filled all the storage bays of my Railjack and Lamant’s Orbiter, we’d barely make a dent in the volume of materials collected.

I watch Araine work and think about our conversation. I’d never experienced something like that with her before. Part of me was nervous. We needed to talk more about this…No…I wanted to talk more about this. *I wonder if I should tell Sara about it?* I was so confused but glad she felt she could talk to me about it. My insides felt like a pile of infested tendrils.

She notices me staring and waves then points to the boxes and motions to me as if I could lift them. I laugh and wave my arms in the air.

Lamant’s voice over the comms exclaims. “Enough work, it's picnic time!”

“What?” I ask. The word just coming out.

“Seriously, you ladies are going to love this. Come check this place out.”

“A picnic? Do we need to bring anything from the Railjack? I’m almost back.” Sara’s voice over the comms.

“We got that covered. Sending the location now.”

“Oooo it smells so nice in here!” Sara exclaims as she rushes into the room excitedly, Araine and I follow her into what appears to be an atrium of some type. A gentle aroma of eucalyptus fills our senses as plant life springs up from the metallic flooring and pools of water connected by gravity-defying streams of water surround us, making a maze-like path around stone walkways.

“Oh hello.” Lamant’s voice, sitting next to him Mira, the two on a sheet of thick fabric laid out across a grassy mound near the center of the room. “Come join us.”

We move towards him, in a roundabout way as we follow the path of cobblestones.

“This is pretty but taking too long. I’m hungry.” Sara says as she splashes into the shallow waters, making her way directly to Lamant and Mira.

I smile, wanting to follow the path, Araine behind me, as we follow the stone path as it leads us to the center.

Sara and Lamant are laughing and as we approach she stands and moves quickly to me, grabbing my hand and Araine's. "Come on you two slowpokes!"

She pulls us back to the large fabric. "Here try these, they're so yummy!"

Sara pushes a small cube of gelatin, it tastes both sweet and savory, a tray of them sits on the fabric, Lamant chewing on one as he lays back with Mira.

I chew and swallow, nodding my head.

"Now lay down and look up." She says.

I follow her instructions and see the ceiling above us, at first just dark glass, then the sparkles of light, and realize we're staring into space. It reminds me of the Railjack's observation deck; of home.

"So what now?" The words come out, not directed towards anyone in particular though I could ask Lamant what his plans were for the place or Sara where she wanted to see next.

"Hachi!" Sara says her voice concerned. "You *really* need to learn how to relax. Do I need to get you drunk again? I'm sure Lamant has some more Daku Liquor I could feed you."

The thought of the Daku at first sounds appealing, but the memory of my reaction after its ingestion makes me feel ill. I glance at Araine and immediately look away.

I can feel Araine's amusement at Sara's comment.

"We stargaze," Lamant says, smiling.

"And we celebrate!" Sara exclaims.

"Fantastic! What are we celebrating?" Lamant responds.

"Oh seriously, you Tenno are thick sometimes! Your new home of course. This is the place you were after. That you *literally* got ripped apart for."

Lamant pauses and looks to the stars above, taking Mira's hand in his. He chuckles, "It is the place we were hoping to find. And it is home, but it's not just for us. It's for all those Tenno who needs one. It could also be yours as well."

"Whaaa?" Sara's voice continues but my thoughts fill my head with too much noise to listen to their conversation.

It would make sense to share the facility. Given its size, capabilities; additional Tenno could help bring in a steady flow of supplies that would ensure its continued operation. Though unlikely to be needed given how long it's sat unfound, more Tenno would make it easier to defend. More Tenno. Maybe Lamant meant more Tenno like us, like him and Mira, like Araine and me.

"Hachi." Sara's voice breaks my thoughts and I look at her. "Where'd you go?"

“I think it makes sense.” Sara looks at me, a devilish grin on her face as if testing to see if my answer fits with their conversation. “It makes sense to help other Tenno like us have a place to call home.”

“Hachi,” Lamant says, a little quieter than his normal voice. “I’d like to show you something.”

“Ooo, do I get to see it too,” Sara says playfully, eyeing Lamant. She looks mischievous.

Lamant chuckles, “Of course.” He stands and puts out his hands to take ours, helping us up.

Mira looks at him and waves, she moves closer to Araine and takes her hand. She steps back and moves her feet side to side as her arms go up and down one after the other, her torso and head swaying as if dancing to the beat of music only she could hear. To my surprise, Araine joins her, at first mimicking her motions then adding her own. I have a brief sensation of jealousy that I’ve never danced with her before. I smile at the two of them and wave.

We follow Lamant out of the room and to the travel tube leading us to his now docked Orbiter.

Up into the landing craft and then walking past a row of machinery, a foundry, mod segment, relic refinery, miscellaneous systems, equipment, and decorations litter the walls before we head down a ramp and to the Personal Quarters segment.

As the doors open to his personal quarters Sara exclaims, “Wow!” The walls are lined with tanks of water with a larger display in the center of the room where both organic and biomechanical fish swim. The lights are dim, but the blue and silvery glow from the aquatic animals illuminate some of the room’s walls with dancing lights.

Against the far wall, opposite the couch pictures surround the window to the stars. The photos and drawings appear to be of various people of different ages. Some Orokin, some Corpus, some…*Tenno…*

Lamant pauses, “Here it is.” He says and reaches for one of the photos. I can see it in his hands as he brings it to us. I can see the image of a young pale child smiling happily, his arm around a small dark-skinned child grinning; his head leaned into the other’s chest. There’s no mistaking who those children are.

“You asked me once why I was helping you and it was because you were like me...At least at first.” He pauses as if waiting for me to respond. “But then I realized, or rather Mira did when we were here…this photo.”

He passes it to me. I don’t reach for it but instead, stare at him and it. Sara takes it from his hands and examines it closely.

“You see, I couldn’t remember when…or why…this was taken.” His voice begins to break and trail off. His voice then changed, “All these photos are like that, they were here for me when I arrived, so I guess I must have kept them for some reason.”

I’m suddenly angry. Not at Lamant, though this explains so much of his persistence with me. I’m mad at the Lotus, so much of my life is forgotten, erased, still now completely gone due to the long cryonic sleep. She put us to sleep, then woke us up only to leave us alone in a world we helped bring chaos to.

Tears drop from my eyes. I’m just looking for something…anything to blame.

He notices. “I’m sorry Hachi, I know you were a different person than from who you are now. I didn’t want to remind you of that, just that I think we knew each other. I think we may have been friends.”

Sara smiles and puts her arm around to hug me close, another touches Lamant’s shoulder; his demeanor has changed to someone unsure of what to do. I don’t know what to think. My head goes quiet as Sara pushes the photo into my hands. I hold her as I look at it. Did I forget because of what the Lotus did, or did I forget because I wanted to forget I was born in the wrong body? The Kuva would have let me change, but I never got the chance because of the Void.

Images suddenly appear in my head, a small girl at school. Voices in my head call out, they call her a boy, they call her harsh names, they throw their leftover food at her. No one wants to sit near her in class.

The bell rings, everyone leaves, she waits for them to go so she can walk back to her room alone. Two boys call out from behind her. They want to see what she has under her skirt. They want to hurt her. She runs, but they chase her. She’s cornered.

One boy pushes her books to the ground as another makes a fist to swing. STOP! A voice yells out. My would-be assailants are surprised at the sudden appearance of someone nearby and run away. The cowards.

The girl is crying and shaking. The boy picks up her books. He asks if she’s ok. He calls for help. A teacher arrives and he tells them that this girl has been attacked.

I see him for the first time. Tall and slender, pale and wearing the silliest looking animal hat I’d ever seen. The same hat is on the child in the photo.

“Llama.” The word comes out of my mouth softly as I look up into Lamant’s face.

He smiles, his eyes are watery.

I pull Sara tight to me with my left arm as my right grabs for Lamant and pulls him hard against us, my head resting on his chest.

“So this is home.”

So I'm good with boring.

I feel just right. Not cold or warm. My body feels as if it's completely weightless as I sit submerged at the bottom of the wading pool.

How long had we been here? Days seemed to have turned into weeks then months. We had explored the entire dojo, a temple from before the Old War, somehow in pristine condition. Somehow this place was fully stocked with whoever was supposed to be here never arriving as the access logs had all seemed to indicate no previous visitors or members. It became the perfect place to live; a fully intact Orokin Era dojo temple.

While most of the dojo had been what we expected, your typical storage rooms, engineering facilities, crew quarters, navigational and communication arrays, along with recreational facilities such as the atrium with its small streams and shallow ponds, a sauna, and a swimming lake. We had also found some oddities, like a plain room with a large floating mirror-like cube about six feet by six feet. It was confusing at first, and something about it had been somewhat alarming. It happened by accident after several different attempts at analyzing the device, that we discovered various sounds, instrumental or vocal would cause the device to spin. The longer and faster the musical sound we played the faster and faster the device spun until it would begin to glow and illuminate various shapes and colors along the walls, floors, and ceiling. Sara thought it would make a great dance hall, and we didn't disagree.

We had more supplies than we could ever use ourselves and had begun making weekly runs to Fortuna and Cetus, offering what we could to help the causes of Solaris United and the Ostrans. We'd occasionally take on a bounty as well, though we found the need to take on more Isolation Vault investigations for the Entrati on Deimos to stock up on medications for Sara.

Sara even began to come along with us on our bounties, she had become accustomed to the teleportation and we would often have her along to support us on missions. Even without Void abilities or a Warframe her combat skills proved quite remarkable. She'd quickly become somewhat of a weapons expert with the various Tenno weapons we had been able to stockpile. A good addition to our little party. Lamant with Mira and their Moa, Araine and I with our Helios and now Sara.

All of us had grown quite closer, to the point that I couldn't imagine not having them in my life. Lamant and his silly stories, Sara and her constant playfulness and affection. Even Mira I found to be so animated and amusing. Mira seemed like she and Araine had taken quite a liking to each other as well.

Often during meditation, I'd find myself thinking how boring life had become, and at which point Araine would remind me that when it comes to relationships *boring is often good*.

I hear only a dull silence, I sense subtle motion around me as my body and the pressure equalize. My mind is as still as the waters I'm submerged in before the surroundings are disturbed and I feel a vibration and muffled sounds slowly growing louder. A splash, then Sara and Lamant's voices. I open my

eyes and see their legs as they enter the waters before I stand. I'm in the deeper waters as my shoulders barely rise above the waterline.

Araine and Mira stand near the entryway, not entering the deeper waters.

"Hachi!" Sara says as she moves towards me, "isn't this place amazing!"

I nod as she steals a quick kiss from me.

Lamant waves at me before diving into the deeper waters, he swims out to a small floating square where he climbs out of the water, his shorts sticking tightly to him as he stands before laying down on the platform. The artificial light is brighter and warmer above the platform than anywhere else in this room.

Sara looks at me, "Did we interrupt you?"

I shake my head as I look at her and smile.

"Did you want to light bathe on the platform? The fake sun will feel nice and warm."

I look to Araine, the feeling voice in my head from her as she waves to me, *go on*.

"Sure."

She splashes me then laughs as she swims towards the floating square, "Chase me."

I swim after her.

Sara reaches the platform first and climbs up, I stop swimming to watch her climb out. She's in a revealing form-fitting bikini that I find pleasant to look at. She notices me staring and smiles back as I resume swimming then place my hands on the step ladder leading up.

Lamant and Sara are laying on their backs looking up as I step onto the platform. Sara's eyes widen as she chuckles, "Ok then. I guess Lamant gets a show."

Lamant's eyes open, "Hmm?" He pauses, his eyes opening wide, then his mouth slightly opening before he composes himself, laying back and closing his eyes.

Sara swats at him, "It's fine." She says then looks at me and starts to remove her suit.

It occurs to me that I was the only one who hadn't worn any clothing.

I lay down, looking up. There may have been a time when I would have felt dumb or embarrassed, but today most of me didn't care and the other part wanted them to see me as I wanted to see them.

"You too." Sara's voice directed at Lamant.

He obliges and removes his shorts. I can't help but look, the scars and implants cover his entire body including every portion of him.

"There. Now we've all seen each other." Sara's voice is very matter of fact as she takes my hand in hers. The three of us lay back and look up at the artificial lights made to look like sky, clouds, and sun.

I suddenly wonder if Mira would be jealous and look across the water towards Araine and Mira, they seem to be conversing with their hands. It seems as though Araine senses me and waves. Mira as well.

I suddenly have a feeling of what feels like frustration within me. It's hard for me to tell what exactly is happening inside of me. I sit up, my heart starts to race as I try to calm myself. I look over to Sara and Lamant.

"You alright?" Sara's voice.

I step over her and sit down between her and Lamant and take their hands in mine. Lamant and Sara look up at me and I feel like I should say something. I want to say something. I don't know how to ask for what I want.

Instead, I lay back, taking their hands in mine I pull theirs against my stomach and interlock our fingers together. I pause, then slowly start to slide their hands upwards.

Sara turns to look at me, she raises an eyebrow first, then shrugs and cracks a crooked smile. She raises herself a bit to look over at Lamant. He looks at her and then at me. He opens his mouth to speak then closes it as I smile and nod.

"Ok then." Says Sara.

I press their hands tight against me as I pull them to me.

Sometime later we found ourselves swimming back, our clothes still on the dock.

Araine and Mira greet us before we head back to the quarters to dress, back to our daily mundane dojo maintenance and restocking the Railjack for our supply missions. Back to stealing kisses and smiles from each other as we go about our day.

I smile and think to myself.

So I'm good with boring.

End Part 3.

Part 4

Sometimes things just happen.

So maybe we take it easy now

“Did you know they had done that to him?” Sara asks me before sipping from a glass of Daku Liquor.

We’re laying on a cushioned relaxation area of the dormizone. A small fire pit sits near us with dancing flames, the only source of light in this chamber. I’m sinking into a large half moon-shaped chair, Sara in one next to me, turned to slightly face me while Araine stands to the side of me.

Sara’s inquiring about Lamant, the scars and implants that cover his body tell yet another story of Orokin cruelty. They’d mutilated him before our trip; removing some parts and replacing with synthetic implants or sensors.

My mouth opens slightly, I want to respond with “no” but I realize I may had forgotten if I new before.

She takes another sip of the Daku and continues, “He’s a very generous lover.” She smiles mischieveously as she says it and I wonder if she’s trying to get a reaction from me.

I begin to wonder if it bothered her, with us being more intiment now than ever, how it had made her feel. I had so many fragments of memories coming back to me from my childhood with Lamant that in the moment by the swimming pools I had wanted him, I still wanted her, I needed them both together.

She places her hand over mine.

“Hey, you ok? I didn’t mean to offend you.”

“No, it’s fine. I just…” My voice trails off, not really knowing how to respond, I give up trying to finish a sentence.

“He’s more a man than any of those scum.” She says leaning towards me, taking my hands in hers.

I smile and nod, then speak softly, “Did it bother you?”

“That we’re all a bit different? Of course not. Look at me, I’m almost halfway infested!” She makes a fake gasping expression.

“I meant with us together.”

She moves one hand and touches the side of my face shaking her head. “Not at all Hachi. I’m yours.”

She finishes the last of the Daku in her cup in a single gulp before looking back at me, “But maybe next time you’re feeling like adding another it could be a female.”

I look up at her, not so much surprised at her response, but for her to so easily say things outloud. I suddenly wish I could be more like her in that regards.

I smile at her.

She looks at Araine, “What do you say Araine?” She looks back at me and smiles, her eyeborws briefly rising and lowering back.

Is she fucking with us? Araine’s feeling voice in my head.

“Damnit!” Sara exclaims as her hand cannon clicks empty in her hand, shells and empty cartridge containers litter the sandy Martian desert around us. She quickly rolls and moves to shield herself behind some nearby metal crates of random Grineer equipment as the wolf-like Archon, rushing towards her, slams into one of the crates head first, its jaw partially lodged in the steal. Flame and smoke spew from its mouth as it shakes itself free. I can hear Sara grunt as the metal crate is torn open and pushed back into her, a brief spike of adrenaline courses through me as I see her nearly smashed between the stone wall and it.

Lamant and Mira are immediately behind the creature, a constant stream of explosive bullets point blank from the Trumna, Mira unloads into the back of the beast ripping apart its heavy armored flesh. A sudden hope that the creature would go down, but only for a moment before it begins to regenerate. Turning its attention to them it lunges, clawing for Mira. It misses her, Lamant blinding it temporarily with his Void Prism. The two dash backward and away from the snarling fanged monstrosity, but not before the tips of its claws spark along the back of Mira’s leg.

“This *really* sucks…” Lamant’s voice is exasperated.

“These things are fucking bullet sponges,” Sara’s voice from behind the crates.

“Hachi, we need you to do the thing again…”

I’m one with Araine as we watch the Archon’s movements, it’s speed, and agility a fearsome creation, with skin as strong as Warframe armor, but with incredible regenerative abilities. This was now the third one we faced.

It’d been a few months since we, along with many other Tenno, helped rid Fortuna and Cetus settlements of Narmer and his veiled minions. With no longer, any place to rebuild and enslave more people to become their veiled followers the only real threats left had been these rogue Archons. A cross between Warframe Specter and Sentient technology, these Archons had gone into hiding on various worlds, seeking to build a nest, their base of power, but constantly being hunted by Tenno, Corpus, and Grineer alike.

The bounties paid well, not that we needed the credits, but the Archons also possessed special Shards that could be used to enhance our Warframe’s and our Void abilities. Each had its specialty, the Owl with its flight and electrical storm abilities had stunned all of us briefly during our fight. The Serpent with its poison spit had infected Sara and caused her to remain on bed rest for the better part of a week to fully

recover. Now the Wolf with its incredible speed and fiery roars was all that remained from us completing our set.

We'd been lucky the first time, but now we knew, the only way we'd managed to kill them was to front load enough damage in one hit to the head before it could begin to regenerate. The shimmer of its skin could be used as a timer, just as it fades away, a solid blast point-blank would do the trick. Of course, the problem was getting them to stand still and not tear you apart long enough for the gimmick to work.

One last time? Araine's feeling voice in my head.

"We got this."

I motion to Mira and she begins to move toward Araine and me. I transfer out, staying in void form a few feet in front of Araine who readies the Hecaton in her hands. Mira passes through me, the Archon right behind her, a brief shimmer of void energy flows across its skin as it approaches me then fades. I pull Araine to me, the wolf head in front of us, my eyes instinctively close as we pull the secondary trigger to release all the rounds at once.

We fall onto our back hard against the ground from the blast, rolling away, and then leaping up to position ourselves, but there is no need. The Archon's headless body slumps to the ground. Lamant approaches it and reaches into the neck cavity with his hand. A ripping and tearing sound, brutal, yet strangely satisfying for all the work put in.

"There we go." Lamant pulls a bloody hand out, the amber-colored Archon Shards sparkling in the sunlight.

"That's the third and final one right?" Sara asks as she walks towards us, holstering her hand cannon to her hip.

"Yeah, with this we each have a set of Crimson, Azure, and Amber Shards…" Lamant pauses before shaking his head and smiling, "Of course, we could always keep going for more you know."

"Fuck you," Sara points at Lamant with her finger.

"Hachi, you good?" Sara asks me as I realize I'm staring at her, her clothes are covered in blood.

"Are you ok?" I respond moving towards her quickly, Lamant seeming to take notice as well.

She looks down, her suit is covered in blood along her arms, torso, and legs. Burn marks and charred holes expose infested flesh along her sides.

"Yeah, he got me a few times I guess, but you know…" She pauses then smiles before giving us a thumbs up, "I grow back."

Araine and I nod at her, though we catch a glance from Lamant, her infested flesh was spreading much faster than originally expected by the Entrati. Most likely due to the injuries she was constantly taking during combat, but also the stress of our missions was most likely impacting her mental ability to fight

the infestation as well. With Sara insisting on always coming with us it was probably time to take on some lighter work and set aside these types of adventures for a while.

My voice comes out of Araine, “So maybe we take it easy now?”

So let's hear this story

I wake on the small bed of the Dormizone. Sara stirs and smiles, her eyes still closed as she stretches out her arms and legs. They cross over me in a purposely obnoxious way, then wrap around as if she were some type of vine trying to bring me closer to her. I smile, finding her attempt at annoying me appealing.

I look across the room, Araine is standing by the entryway to the Dojo's corridors.

I feel something like a smile from her.

"What's the plan for today?" Sara mumbles with her eyes still closed as she moves her head onto my shoulder sighing heavily.

Our last few months had been nothing short of living life as a Tenno transport and delivery service. We'd been taking supplies from our Dojo to Fortuna and Cetus to help the Solaris and Ostron recover from the recent Narmer invasions. We played space taxi for a few interested scholars going to see the Entrati on Deimos from Kronia and Orcus relays, keeping us in favor with Gomaitru. Now with a permanent place of our own, we had a way to store more than enough of Sara's medication so it was always close on hand as her infestation began spreading increasingly faster than anyone had anticipated.

If nothing changed today then Araine and I would be on our way to Cetus soon to drop off supplies, and perhaps buy some items from the market per Sara's requests. We'd meet back home where Sara would have food and drinks prepared for us, as well as for Lamant and Mira. The five of us would talk about our day, be merry, and depending on the mood may end up sharing more of ourselves within the Dormizone. Afterward, we might meditate and relax in our atrium's tranquil garden or one of the many rooms with pools and waterfalls. Eventually, Araine, Sara, and I would end up back here.

I remember Varzia once telling me that she wore the uniform because she believed in the principles the Dax died for, but the day would come when she would take it off, lay it to rest, and hopefully some pretty thing would be there to do it for her. I looked at Sara and wondered if I had found myself the pretty thing to keep me here and be at peace. I didn't know how long we had with the infestation spreading within her, but I knew I wanted this to never end.

I look at Araine and wonder how long it had been since she'd regained some portion of herself. We hadn't become any closer to finding a way to restore her memories or Mira's. It was something that had recently started to eat away at me inside. I could feel myself growing frustrated that if nothing else perhaps we could find records of her life that Ballas or the Orokin might have kept filed away. Unfortunately after months of searching, I'd started to give up hope.

Deimos's Isolation Vaults had seemed like the most promising start after talking more with Vilcor, but the infestation had made it so all data was lost or worthless. Our Dojo's database, filled with pre-War Orokin technology, had not been linked with any other systems in the area or beyond. Kumo had spent more than a few days searching our Dojo's archives for any information on the Warframe project or Tenno but to no avail. We'd even made several attempts to investigate Lua, but between its near destruction and

the constant plundering by Grineer and Corpus, we'd come up empty on every expedition. An entire generation of our civilization's history was completely lost.

"You have a look on your face?" Sara's words break my thoughts; her eyes are open as she looks at me with concern.

I look at Sara, then at Araine. I want to do something more. I want to keep my promise to help Araine. I look at Sara, my mouth begins to open, I'm thinking about saying *I want to help Araine* but nothing comes out. That phrase feels like it'd be an odd thing to say right now.

Sara smiles as her hand moves to my lips and wiggles my lips up and down gently with her finger, "You need to use your words."

I look at Sara. "I'm thinking about my promise to Araine."

"To help her find her memories?"

I nod.

"I'm sorry Hachi, I know how hard you've been looking."

Hachi…it's ok. Araine's feeling voice in my head.

I stand up from the bed and begin to walk toward the sanitation room.

"Hey," Sara grabs my hand, "We're not giving up ok." She smiles at me and looks at Araine.

I smile at her and nod. "I know."

I'm sitting at a dining table in a cafeteria-style room. Sara pushes an injection of Void Infused Resin and Stringent Drops into her arm then begins eating a mixture of red, orange, and gray Nutrition Cubes from the processor. She'd been taking the injections every day, sometimes multiple times, often telling me how she could sometimes feel it *"growing"* within her. Araine and I are sitting across from her as I stare into a glass of water lost in thoughts when Lamant and Mira come in.

"Good morning ladies," Lamant says as he sits next to me and Mira sits next to Sara.

I realize I'm still staring down when I hear Sara comment.

"She's upset today," Sara says to Lamant.

I look up, my mouth slightly open to object. "I'm not…" my voice trails off as Lamant looks at me concerned.

“She wants to try looking for more Orokin information on the Warframe project.”

“I see.” He pauses briefly. “We hadn’t much luck ourselves over the years.” He looks at Mira and takes her hand in his. It’s clear that the two are sharing some private words between each other when after a brief moment he speaks again, “It has been quite some time; perhaps we’re due to check in with our…*Sister*…friend?”

“Hmm?” Sara’s curious expression fills her face as she finishes the cubes.

“Well you see,” Lamant looks at Mira and then to us, “We’re sort of, or at least were, friendly with a Sister.”

“A Sister of Parvos!?” Sara exclaims.

“It’s a long story, but we haven’t spoken to her in years. Seems as good a time as any that we check in on her. We could also see if she has any information. After all, if someone was going to have something perhaps Parvos’s databases would have some information that could be useful.”

“Ok, I’m sure Hachi is going to be all for this, but I *really* need to hear the full story on how a Tenno is *friendly* with a Sister of Parvos.”

I smile at Lamant and Sara as she presses him for information, his “Wells” “Hmms” and “Uhhs” causing her to grow more and more curious and excited during their conversation.

It’s obvious to me that he knows this isn’t realistic. Varzia would have told us if she recognized Mira or Araine and of all the Corpus to have known anything, it would have made more sense that any clues would have been found with Alad V. Not to mention, the countless times both Mira and He, or even Araine and I, had raided the storage and research facilities of Alad V, we’d never come across anything related to the actual people used in the project. While Alad V had used Warframe technology for his Zanuka project, he had never cared about, or even needed to be aware of, who the Wareframes had been made from.

To think that Parvos Granum, someone who while being granted a Warframe as a guardian, was solely focused on profit and growing the influence of the new Corpus would have that information seemed unlikely. But in this instance, I really appreciated him for trying, for Araine, for me…

Thank you Lamant is what I want to say, as I smile and look at Araine and then at him, but the only words that come out are, “So let’s hear this story.”

So let's go see your friend

"Ok, seriously, we need to hear this story!" Sara exclaims as she presses Lamant and Mira for more information. "All the details, hold nothing back, please!"

I smile and hold in a laugh as Lamant begins his story.

"Yeah, ok, we're on a Corpus ship called the Ishtar that's orbiting, near Venus, helping a couple other Tenno clear an Infestation outbreak that started up at one of the Corpus facilities."

"Were they doing some experimentation there?" Sara asks.

"No, I believe it was from a meteorite carrying infested boils that hit one of their manufacturing plants on Montes, but debris from the impact had managed to hit one of the ships, the Ishtar, and was spreading."

"Was the meteorite that hit Venus like the Plague Star that approaches Cetus?" Sara is asking Lamant but looks at me.

Lamant shrugs, "I suppose it would have been similar."

"I hadn't realized other planets had to deal with that." Sara made a concerned look.

"In any case, there had been a request for help, and while normally we'd leave the Corpus to fend for their own, at the time Mira and I thought it might be a good opportunity to help ourselves to their data while making sure to curtail the infestation spread."

Mira nudges him.

Lamant mumbles, "Well ok, maybe we would have helped anyway…" before continuing as normal, "But yeah, we're on the Ishtar and the place is a total shit show. The infested are everywhere, crawlers and chargers are running down every corridor. Infested tendrils are taking root in all the walls. You name it, it's happening. We push them back…hard. Things are going fine when we come across the remains of a Corpus Treasurer and he has on him this coin that looked like some type of money."

"Oh, a Granum Crown! The Perrin Sequence had mentioned there tokens of high esteem for upper ranked Corpus."

Lamant nods, "That makes sense. So we're…"

His story continues with constant interruption from Sara as my thoughts start to drift and picture the skirmishes taking place. I'm only half paying attention, but I try to shift my gaze from Lamant to Sara to Mira as each one speaks and motions to the other.

Mira and Lamant while clearing infested onboard the Ishtar, and occasionally gathering intel from any consoles they could hack into along the way, had taken the Granum Crown from the Treasurer and placed it within one of the Golden Hand Tributes. Apparently these devices are able to do long range teleportation, opening a brief connection to an area of the Void, and more specifically, to where Parvos and his crew reside.

Once inside they approached his ship, only to find themselves surrounded by Errant Specters, some kind of continuously self-replicating defense team of flying androids. At this point it occurred to me that if it were anyone else telling this story I would have found it hard to believe them. In either case Lamant and Mira are so overwhelmed and unable to reach Parvo's ship they decide it best to run back through the brief opening and return to the Ishtar.

Back on the Ishtar they continue the work to clean up the Infestation on the ship, collect their payment from the Corpus, and head off. While they assumed the Corpus would find out about their incursion into Granum's Void from their ship it wasn't of any immediate concern. Until of course, a Corpus capital ship kept appearing on their radar, not close enough to be able to cause trouble, but never out of range for more than a handful of hours.

To test if Adie was being paranoid with his readings or if there was something amiss; Mira and Lamant decide to take on a nearby rescue request from the Lotus. They drop into the Linea holding facility on Venus and are almost to the cells when they encounter a very tall Corpus woman in a full body combat suit and some kind of robotic hound heading straight for them. From the recount of his story it seemed to be a rather intense fight, one where both Mira and Lamant were really pushed to their limits, but in the end they were able to come out with a draw and evade her.

Back on their landing craft they head out, only to have this Corpus woman hail their comms and introduce herself as Saniana Tir, a Sister of Parvos. As Lamant told the story he'd try to imitate her actions or voice as he'd quote her, "All forces, claim this Sector in the name of Parvos Granum, and the rest of the Corpus, of course." They attempted to leave the sector, but the ship was following everywhere they'd go, with the Sister taunting them along the way.

They'd head to Ultor on Mars, she'd be there with them. They head to Amalthea on Jupiter, again she'd appear, Morax on Europa, even Salacia on Neptune. Always coming after them, they had Adie run a full check for illicit tracking materials on their landing craft, but nothing came up. Apparently this Saniana Tir was just amazingly good at her bounty hunting job.

But then her taunts started to take a turn. It began with her saying, "I know, I'm a bitch. But I'm the kind of bitch that makes people want to write poems." This had peaked both Mira and Lamant's interest but not enough to respond, but then eventually she mentioned, "Look, I don't have any beef with you, not really. This was all Parvos's idea. You and me, we're just caught in the middle. Let's talk this out."

While he had doubted her ability to *talk this out*, as she said since any time they had come face to face resulted in her trying to kill them, or so he thought, the two were so unsure of what to do that they decided it best to simply take her down. They headed into the Nu-Gua Mines near Neptune Proxima and waited for her ship to arrive.

Once in the vicinity they boarded her ship, disabled much of its security and were getting ready to blow the core when she arrived telling them, “I think we need to talk about your attitude.” It was all just so strange, that they asked her why she kept following and trying to kill them. To which she replied, “If I’m honest, I’ve been following you since we first met, does that sound strange?” So many of her comments had been so non sequitur that it lead them to simply reply back with, “What the hell lady?!” This apparently was all that was needed to start a further dialogue with her.

As it turned out when they entered the Granum Void, she had been dispatched by Parvos to hunt them down and eliminate them for any secrets they may have uncovered while aboard the Ishtar or in the Void. However, while her recent enhancements had reprogrammed her to always obey her superiors, she had been trying to fight it as for her, she remembers a time when she was little and a Tenno saved her from a Grineer Invasion of the Corpus at Valac on Europa.

She had to obey, but was struggling with the thought of killing someone she didn’t want too. She needed them to subdue her and it took quite the effort on their part, but after some struggles they were able to use Mira’s Parazon to make a connection and permanently break the Sister’s security encryption.

Since then they had become *friendly*, often Saniana Tir sharing Corpus information with Lamant and Mira. She’d even offered to help them on their bounties. Of course she also always seemed to want the occasional social experience as well often ending their conversations with the phrase, “Alright, so I got a thing. Call me, and we'll do lunch. If that don't, then we won't.”

“That’s one hell of a story Lamant!” Sara exclaims. “I kinda don’t believe you, but I’m pretty sure you’re not lying.”

Lamant laughs while Mira tosses her arms slightly upwards and tilts her head.

I want to ask where she is now, or if he’d ever think of inviting her to our home. The thought suddenly worries me that we could allow someone so dangerous in our home. Sara and Araine place their hands on mine as I look up at Lamant and Mira.

“So let’s go see your friend.”

So I think the surprise was for herself

“Adie,” Lamant says, our comms all open and shared.

“Yes, Operator.”

“We need to reach out to Saniana Tir.”

“Of course Operator, I’ll begin leaving the breadcrumbs now.”

“Breadcrumbs?” Sara asks.

“We can’t just directly contact her. Since she still *technically* works for Parvos and Corpus we had to have…*a system*…for making contact.”

“Oh I see, makes sense. How long until you reach her?”

“Uh. Hmm.” Lamant seems to think, then looks to Mira and back to Sara before shrugging. “I don’t know. It may be a while.”

“Well, in that case, I suppose we have time for our supply runs,” Sara looks to Lamant and me, “So where to today?”

Lamant responds right away, “Fortuna for us and then to wherever Saniana Tir wants to meet I suppose.”

“Cetus,” I say.

“Mmm,” She pauses thinking to herself, “Hachi, you’re taking me with you. I need to restock on some things.”

“If you give me a list…”

Sara places a finger over my lips as she smiles.

“You’re taking me with you.” Sara turns quickly to Araine smiling, “Isn’t that right Araine?”

I look to Araine.

She nods, her feeling voice telling me, *Best not to disappoint.*

Araine and I are waving to a group of men and women carrying the cargo off our Railjack and back to Cetus’s marketplace as I take a moment to look up toward the Anum tower. The tall white and gold pillar rises into the sky in defiance of all that presses against this city just outside its walls. It’s amazing to me how fast the people here had rebuilt after the Narmer invasions. Of course, with their constant struggle against the Grineer they’ve been more than tempered to handle anything.

I look around, “Sara’s not back?”

Something about a Surprise. Araine’s feeling voice in my thoughts.

“Some special food or drink maybe?”

I’m sure you’ll love it.

I feel my slight embarrassment and Araine’s feeling of humor within, the transference making our communication and thoughts a constant flow of instant feelings and words expressed or otherwise.

We walk back up the ramp leading into the Railjack and make our way inside. A small wooden crate with intricate designs carved into it depicting the various schools of focus that Tenno and Dax had learned in their training.

“This ones for us Araine.” I say as we open the crate slowly. It’s smells old and stale as the air inside escapes, my hands pulling out a wooden clothing stand before I pause and look further inside; a set of clothing, gold and black Orokin designed armor.

Bishamo, Araine’s feeling voice in my head.

I remove the armor and place it on the stand.

“You remember it?”

Yes, it’s Dax armor. Araine’s feeling voice is soft a series of different emotions run from her to me.

“Should we try it on?”

Ok

I transfer out and strip off my Naramon suit before setting it aside. Araine watches me as I pull up the greaves and slide the curiass over my torso. A feeling of frustration comes over me as I get an arm stuck preventing the armor from sliding down. I can feel humor from Araine and feel her approach me and pull the armor down around my waist. It’s snug, but not constricting.

“Thank you.” I say looking up at Araine, her hands linger on my sides before she grabs the pauldrons and hands them to me. I slide them on and take the Dax syandana in my hand, “May I?”

She tilts her head and shoulders down as I move the syandana behind her and clasp the straps around her shoulders affixing the harness to her shoulders.

“How do I look?”

A sudden feeling I can’t quite place comes from Araine.

Hachi…

“Yes?”

Thank you.

I look at her as I think, *“for what”* but she’s already responding.

For trying to help me remember.

I reach out with my arms and embrace her tightly. I can feel her metallic arms move around me. Some time passes and I realize we're still holding one another as I look up at her and smile. I can feel an emotional warmth from her unlike any other. We take a few steps down the hallway and Sara is running at us. She smiles and throws herself into my arms, her lips pressing against mine hard before she pecks Araine.

"Look at you two!" Sara exclaims turning to Araine, "Araine, so regal! Hachi that armor!" Her gaze turns to look me up and down, stopping at my chest. "And the lift they give…" She mumbles and smirks suggestively at me.

It does make them look larger… Araine's feeling voice is filled with laughter in my head.

I smile and can feel myself a bit embarrassed.

"I got us something." Sara says, smiling mischievously as her arms reach into her bag and pull out a large glass cylinder with ten strips of stretched tissue pieces inside held tightly with metal fastenings along the top and bottom of each.

Genetic samples? I wonder.

Araine's response, *Maybe she wishes to grow a child with you.*

My heart skips a beat at Araine's remark, but we say nothing audible.

"You have no idea what this is do you?" Sara says as she holds the glass cylinder up.

We shake our heads.

"It's a Kavat kit. I've always wanted to have one and now with our place and this…" she says shaking the cylinder, "We can grow our own."

I say it only to Araine in our thoughts, "So I think the surprise was for herself."

So let's kill them all

"mmm, I needed that." Sara purrs as we lay on the floor of the observation deck, her body shimmers as the interior lights reflect off her infested flesh, now covering more of her torso, left leg, and arm and creeping up her neck. The infestation that should have drastically slowed had instead continued to spread quicker and more aggressively.

"Aren't you glad you brought me along?"

I smile and nod.

"I like it when it's just the two of us," she says smiling, then adds, "…well most times. You do like to keep things interesting for us and I don't mind Lamant…*occasionally*."

I look at her, wondering if I should respond and if so how, what to say, any option I run through my head seems like it may be the wrong thing. I stay quiet, smiling at her when Kumo's voice over the comms breaks the silence. "Operator, Grineer Flaks incoming."

We jump up and begin to dress as the first impacts of heavy gunfire can be felt on the Railjack. The ship shakes and rocks as we quickly head towards navigation. I can feel Araine on her way to the pilot stand.

"Operator, a Galleon has fired Ramsleds." Kumo's voice over the comms is muffled as I hear the sound of metal and cabling burst somewhere within the hull of the Railjack, the smell of smoke wafting in the air.

I call out, "Kumo, fire suppressants!"

Kumo's voice over the comms continues, "Intruder alert! Full squad, small arms."

"On it. I'll get those amateurs off your ship." Sara says as she looks at me and checks the hand cannon strapped to her thigh.

I smile at her as we reach navigation and I transfer into Araine. The ship's shields have been disabled and the hull is taking a beating. I engage the ship's countermeasures and bring online our ship's Nautilus, a repair and service sentinel we'd recently installed. We punch the engines and pivot hard, swinging around to blast away at the nearby Flaks. The Galleon in our sites is approaching quickly but no longer firing at us. I swing us around and start a full burn of the engines away from it.

A series of gunshots and explosions can be heard from within the belly of the Railjack. Araine and I as one head down the hallway and back toward the center of the ship, the ramps leading up to the observatory are littered with pieces of Grineer Marines and shrapnel. The ramps to the cargo hold below lead to the sound of gunfire and a vision of an oversized Grineer soldier covered in heavy mechanical armor and carrying a large spiked hammer. We see Sara opposite her firing her hand cannon at this empowered soldier. I'd heard of them, but never seen one, *could this be what they call a Kuva Lich*? The soldier looks up at us as we descend below.

“So we meet again my little adversary.” The lich says with disgust.

I stare back at the armored being before me, more monstrous meshes of equipment and steal than that of a cloned Grineer soldier.

Sara turns her face towards me and points, “You know her?”

I have no idea I think to myself, confusion causing me to pause instead of reacting.

The lich throws her arms up in disgust, “Your dismemberment of me on the Cassini has not resulted in a conventional outcome! I am of the old blood. We do not die so easily, foolish Tenno.”

I try to recall having met this creature before as my voice echoes from within Araine outward, “I don’t know.”

Sara fires off a shot at the Lich that ricochets off the armor and into the ship’s cargo hold. “Seriously, Hachi, what the hell is her deal? What did you do?” Sara looks at me, faux shock followed by a smirk.

“I really have no idea,” I say as I transfer out of Araine, looking at the Lich more closely to see if anything recognizable calls out to me.

“Prepare!” The Kuva Lich becomes infuriated and charges toward me as Araine lunges with her heavy blade to intercept but the slam of the hammer shatters the heavy blade in two and hits against Araine’s torso sending her flying past me and down into the lower cargo level of the cargo bay.

“Araine!” I scream out, instinctively my body dashing backward, a trail of electrical shocks sparking out and slowing the Lich’s movement as her hammer swings again coming within inches of me.

I can see her face more distinctly now. Scarred from surgery and marred by clone degeneration, the face does seem somewhat familiar. I think back to the Cassini. One of the first missions Araine and I had completed after her newfound sentience.

I wonder if this was the female Grineer who blew herself up?

I dash forward my void form passing through the Lich in front of me as Sara’s hand cannon lets off round after round into the creature's back. The blasts bounce off with hardly a dent on the hardened metal shell protecting her.

The lich turns, Araine leaps from the lower cargo area and throws her hands out, I can see her chains forming from her hands as they fly towards the Lich attempting to snare her. The Lich brushes them off and rushes at me again swinging her spiked hammer wildly. I brace expecting to move back to my Void form.

Sara moves in front of me.

No! Why would you…

The back spiked point of the hammer hits Sara hard in the chest, puncturing her torso as the Lich impales her and raises her upwards.

Sara’s blood splatters me.

I feel a great weight press against my abdomen and expand outwards, up toward my chest and throat, and down through my groin and legs as I scream out *"Sara!"* the energy in my body releases a blast that drops the Lich to her knees.

Sara's head tilts back towards me, she makes a face as if she's trying to wink regardless of the pain.

"I got this Hachi."

Sara's hand cannon presses tightly against the flesh of the Lich's face, the Lich notices but is too slow to react before the entire clip unloads in one frightfully long series of small explosions. The explosive rounds destroy her head and can be heard ricocheting within the body of the Lich, followed by the sound of them escaping from gaps in the armored plate and hitting the interior hull of the Railjack. The Lich slumps to the ground, the hammer slamming hard into the ground and driving deeper through Sara. Blood drips out of Sara's mouth and the gaping wound around the spiked hammer.

I rush to Sara's side as Araine meets us. I can see her infested flesh beginning to fill the wound as Araine looks at me.

She'll be ok, right? The infestation should repair this. I tell myself.

There's a sudden *whoosh* sound before the world goes silent. The lights flicker as the air is sucked out through the hull breach that opens up wider. The previous pummeling of rockets to our outer hull and gunfire inside had finally caused a fracture in our walls.

Araine grabs me as I see the Lich and Sara begin to get sucked out towards the blackness surrounding us. I try to dash forward and grab at Sara missing her hand. The Lich's body hits the hull breach, temporarily slowing the suction. Sara's body is limp, the hammer's spiked end entirely through her torso protruding out her back. Araine and I rush to her and try to pull her off, the infested portion of Sara's body begins to regenerate around the wound and spread.

I lift her head to face me, I want to say something comforting, something like, "*We're going to get this off you, or you'll be ok."* But when I look at her, her open eyes are a glossy gray, with no spark, only an emptiness looking back at me. Her blood covers her lips and the lower half of her face and body.

I feel the air current gaining strength as the hull breach begins to worsen, then a brief chill as my body transfers into Araine as the three of us are sucked outside the Railjack, floating in space. I grab onto Sara, trying to pull her free from the spiked hammer, as I activate our Omni.

Hachi…

Araine's voice in my head, our sorrow amplifying each other's.

I'm standing over Sara's body in our cargo hold. The rupture in her chest was sealed closed by her infestation and was now slowly spreading outwards through the rest of her lifeless body. My right-hand grips hers as I kiss her forehead, tears streaming down my face, my lips tasting their salt as my nose begins to leak.

Hachi… I can feel Araine's voice in my head. I can feel her trying to hold back her sorrow to keep from amplifying my own. Araine's arm touches my shoulder as she points to the infestation spreading outward.

"I know…I just…this can't be it…" Words stumble out of my mouth as I gasp and try to breathe, it's harder and harder to even think let alone speak. "Kumo, have her body placed in a cryo-pod."

"But, Operator, she is decease---"

I won't let him finish the word, "I don't care."

"Yes Operator, of course…and," Kumo pauses before breaking his constant overly formal persona, "I'm very sorry for your loss Hachi."

In the years I'd been awake from cryo sleep I could count on one hand how many times Kumo had used my name. It caused another stir of emotions in my gut as I swallowed hard and breathed before responding.

"Thank you, Kumo."

As the Nautilus sentinel arrives to move her I take one last look at her, I touch the side of her head running my fingers through her hair. *She still smells like Lavender.*

Araine reaches out to Sara, in a quick motion and a small lock of Sara's hair is cut and handed to me.

So she's always with you.

I want to say, *"Thank you,"* but instead I simply turn to her and clutch her tightly as I cry and sob onto her chest. Her arms wrapped around me feel like the only thing holding me together. We stay like this in silence for what feels like an eternity before my sobbing slows and I'm able to catch my breath and turn to face Sara again, her body now frozen in a glass tube within our cargo hold.

What do I do now? I think to myself, my gut clenching like a fist as my body begins to ache and shake.

"Operator, the Galleon is still in the sector and moving towards us again."

I continue to stare at Sara and then look at the shattered heavy blade, the spiked hammer, and the body of the dead Kuva Lich on the floor.

I look to Araine and feel her approval, "So we kill them all."

So let's go to the Zariman

"Stealth, Kumo."

"Yes, Operator."

"How long until we can board."

"At our current speed an hour if they don't move."

Araine takes my hand.

There will be a lot of them…

"Let's prepare then," I say as I look over the Lich's body, the mechanical armor is thicker than most, almost like that of the old war machines, the *Sentients* or *Necramechs*.

Something to pierce it?

I look at the missing face from where Sara had emptied her clip, "Something to explode."

And this? Araine's feeling voice in my head as she holds up the two pieces of the broken heavy blade, once a reliable blade, forged many years ago on Cetus by Hok's Anvil, now no more useful than scrap.

My gaze turned to the oversized spiked hammer, again Araine's feeling voice in my head.

Perhaps we repay in kind?

Araine looks at the hammer and lifts it, gripping and moving it slowly in her arms. She nods.

We go in loud, the sounds from the *Hecaton's* explosive rounds echo through the corridors of the Galleon as Araine and I proceed indiscriminately from room to room of the capital ship. The alarms kick off mere minutes after our arrival through the airlock. Between her void chains grabbing, binding groups of Grineer and the constant ringing of shells bursting through their targets it's not a mission but extermination of everything in our path.

Our wake is a bloody storm of fury as we move through the ship, our only reprieve to reload and check briefly on one another before proceeding. The only goal is in being in the moment, to keep moving forward, to the main reactor, nothing else matters. In the past I would have tried to limit the loss of life, to limit the impact my missions the Lotus or others had me on to meet a needed goal; but not now.

My feelings were muted, and suppressed; I felt nothing as we moved and laid waste to the Galleon and her crew. My thoughts were empty, a blank slate. No longer any anger, no pain, no sorrow. Occasionally a

growing frustration that it was taking longer than I wanted to get to where and what I wanted to do. *Break all the things*. I began to have the feeling of losing myself, losing what control I had, becoming something of an animal, feeding on instinct to the end.

We make our way to the belly of their ship. The reactor's core is shielded within its casing. We detour down nearby corridors into the coolant rooms, destroying the cells and their housing systems. Back to the reactor room, we head directly below and replace the fuel cell to overload. A few moments later and Araine's *Parazon* is giving Kumo access to the Galleon's systems, the reactor restarts and triggers a meltdown.

I pause and think to myself. *How easy would it be to just stay and watch it all end*? My eyes begin to tear again and I sink to my knees.

Don't you dare! Araine's feeling thoughts are loud in my head as she grabs my arm. She pulls me to her tightly, almost hurting me.

"I'm ok," I say as I look up at her, transfer into her and we hit the *Omni* device to head back to our Railjack.

No Hachi…you're not.

Back on the ship, I sit cross-legged on the observation deck watching the Galleon explode. Whatever catharsis I had hoped to have isn't happening.

Hachi…

She's reaching out to me, wanting me to talk to her, but I can't form a complete thought let alone say anything. My lips try to move, just gasps, when I feel her arms lift me and cradle me. She carries me back to my room and lays me in the bed. A strong scent of lavender on the sheets causes me to recoil and close my eyes shut as I breathe it in. I grab out with my hand for Araine and hold it tightly pulling it to me. I feel her move and lay down next to me, her arms holding me tight as I wish she could wrap me into a cocoon and I could dissipate into the void.

I sob hard.

Sometime later I wake, still in Araine's arms as Kumo's voice over the comms, "Sorry to wake you, Operator. Lamant is trying to contact us."

"Not now." I respond, the words just coming out of me. It sounds overly curt, my annoyance slipping out.

"Very well Operator, should I relay…recent updates?"

I pause, opening my eyes. I don't even know what to say. It'd be easier to have Kumo tell Lamant everything that had happened to us…to Sara…*could I even hold myself together long enough to tell him?*

Araine nods her head and brushes my hair from my face.

My voice shakes as I speak, "Go ahead Kumo…and get us home."

There is a brief pause before he responds, "Operator, we arrived approximately 30 minutes ago."

"Why didn't you…" The words just come out of me as I sit up.

"I didn't want to disturb you." Kumo's voice is apologetic and soft, he's trying to be sympathetic, but having us dock at the Dojo and no word to anyone, of course, Lamant and Mira are curious as to what is going on. Why we haven't left the ship or messaged them? At least they called first I suppose.

"You could have let them board…"

"No operator, they are not here at the Dojo."

I pause, realizing that we arrived while I was asleep. With no one else here Kumo had decided to simply let me rest and not bother me. He was being thoughtful, though I wish he had at least attempted to wake me when we docked.

I take a deep breath, "it's fine Kumo."

Araine sits up next to me and takes my hand as the comms open.

"Hachi!" Lamant's voice is excited as the words flow out of his mouth in rapid succession. I'm trying to listen to him, but it's difficult for me to process anything. He tells me of his reconnection with Saniana Tir aboard her Corpus Stanchion, the details of them reuniting a fuzzy mess of words as I feel myself disengaged from the call. I snap back to the conversation when he mentions the return of the Zariman.

Our once-upon-a-time home on which we flew to help the Orokin colonize Tau, forever lost, had somehow reappeared. While still deep within the Void, its endless drifting had finally seemed to stop as it sat stationary like a prize to be won by whoever could strip it clean first. Fortunately, Tenno were flocking to it, defending it, but that hadn't stopped the Corpus or Grineer from trying to claim it as their own.

Apparently Saniana Tir had been ordered to take an incursion force to it, but once Lamant had reached out she sabatoged her entire fleet and was traveling with him to help defend it.

"Hachi?" Lamant asks, concern in his voice.

"Yes."

"You're very quiet, is everything alright?"

I pause, thinking to myself. *How do I tell him Sara is gone?*

“Hachi?” He asks again, more concerned.

I open my mouth to start talking but all that comes out is a story of incomplete sobs, gasps, and occasional words coming out of my mouth as water runs from my eyes and nose. Araine pulls me tight against her.

“We’re on our way back.”

I inhale through my nose, “No…No, I’m on my way.”

“Hachi…” Lamant’s voice is soft.

I click off the comms and look at Araine.

“So let’s go to the Zariman.”

So this is Saniana Tir

I'm in a small room connecting to the Chrysalith laying back on a heavily cushioned chaise lounge. My eyes are closed as the woman's voice asks me, "Tell me why you feel like you need to become stronger?"

I open my eyes and look at the woman sitting across from me in a tall chair. She has a datapad in her hands as she uses her fingers to write out some notes. Yonta, the Archimedean with red hair and a welcoming voice once disintegrated by the Orokin's Jade Light, now sat here listening and talking to me, trying to bring comfort from my loss of Sara.

I'd been on the Zarimon for a week now, doing everything I could to keep myself busy, keep my mind occupied on anything that wasn't Sara. The very first day aboard I spent it helping numerous other Tenno defend Exodampers from Corpus and Grineer raiders, before moving on to freeing Exolizers from Thrax Centurians and recently with less immediate threats, I'd been collecting Vitoplast to seal up Void Ruptures. If it wasn't for so many Tenno returning to the Zarimon and rebuilding the Dormizone within the Chrystalith the nightmares that plague this ship would have seen it overran long ago.

Yonta, was a kind woman. She'd recognized Lamant and me from the time we were still children under her studious care. She'd been a helpful guide and protector then and was trying to be one again now. At the behest of Lamant, I started talking with her to help me to talk through my feelings, though I had begun to feel that this task was a bit of a struggle for her.

Isn't it obvious? I think to myself before the words come out, "If I had been stronger, faster, better. I could have kept her safe."

"But her infection happened when she wasn't with you. There wasn't anything you could have done to prevent it?"

I say nothing.

"You may have embodied Eternalism, but you aren't omnipresent or omnipotent. You can't continue to blame yourself for those things that are beyond your control."

She pauses waiting for me to speak, but I say nothing.

"And how are things with your friend Lamant…*and his guest*?"

When I arrived at the Zarimon Lamant and Mira greeted me, and told me how sorry they were and that they wanted me to stay with them. It was sincere, it had helped to know they were there for me, but I hadn't felt up to being with them; at least not the way we had been before. I had wanted to be by Araine and myself, at least until I could get over all the things I was feeling.

After speaking with Hombask I had been granted access to my old childhood room within the Dormizone. It was where we stayed day and night, the only exception when we'd meet Lamant and Mira to take on a request from Quinn. I hadn't even bothered to go to Lamant's room, to meet his friend

Saniana Tir, the former Sister of Parvos he'd brought back with him. I suddenly wondered how Lamant was able to get the Holdfasts to agree to her staying aboard with him.

"Is it strange?"

"Is what strange?"

"Having a Sister on the ship?"

"I don't think anyone finds it strange that you children are so fluid…accepting of *any* partners in your lives…given your natures."

A wave of anger briefly washes over me. I'd seen other Tenno squads on the ship, often with members from any of the various syndicates from the system. While I'd always had contacts and dealings with the Perrin Sequence, Red Veil, or New Loka it was the sight of Tenno traveling with Steel Meridian, Arbiters of Hexis, Cephalon Suda or Grineer Liches, that would make me avoid them.

Yonta looks at me, tapping her datapad.

"Ok.' She says, crossing her legs, then continues, "You still feel taking on the Angels in the bowels of our ship alone is going to help you get stronger? Or are you looking for a way to die?"

The question causes me to glance toward her, *did she think I couldn't do it? Would Quinn not allow me to accept the bounty if she didn't provide some type of approval?*

There's a ding on a timer of her datapad and her face looks a bit sad as she looks down at it.

"Hachi…I'll tell you something that has helped me and I truly hope you take it to heart." She briefly pauses before continuing, "Objects that have affected one another will continue to affect one another even when they're separated. Do you understand?"

I think about it before answering, "My time with Sara will always be a part of me and something I can look back on?"

She smiles, "Something like that. Will you come by again tomorrow?"

I sit up and nod before I head towards the door, it slides open before me as I hear her words.

"Maybe visit your friend, find out for me if this friend of his should really be allowed to stay here."

I say nothing, but think to myself, *maybe*, as Araine greets me at the door and I transfer into her. A series of thoughts and feelings run quickly between our synapses conveying the last hour of my therapy session.

Perhaps it is time we visit them.

Without thinking, we begin walking down the nearby stairs toward the elevators that lead to the ship's Dormizone. The Chrysalith was once a majestic site to behold, a large hub for colonists to meet and

relax, and now a sanctuary for Holdfasts and Tenno. The once gold and white Orokin standard designs with windows opening to the stars in every direction were now tarnished and gray, corrupted like everything else that lingered in the Void for too long.

We make our way into the elevators and down the various corridors, passing my room we continue ahead navigating the sections until we arrive at Lamant's door. It suddenly occurs to me I should have contacted him first, *what if he wasn't even here right now?* I go to knock on the door and stop myself. *Would it be weird to knock?* I transfer out of Araine and press my hand to the door panel. It opens; Lamant having made sure I could access it.

I step into the dimly lit room with Araine beside me as we see a table, two chairs, then moving around a slanted corner we find the bunk beds built into the wall across from a kitchen area. I hear the sound of running water coming from the glass door leading to the washroom. It's fogged up with a light shining from inside; Lamant's Koppra suit is hung by the entrance on a stand.

"Why hello darlings, you must be Hachi and Araine!"

A woman's voice catches me by surprise as I see her rise from the lower bunk, a blanket wrapped around her.

"Be a doll and help me with that won't you?" She motions to a gray colored suit on the floor.

I pick it up and hold it out to her, it's surprisingly heavy and feels more like bits of metallic wiring weaved together than it does a fabric. She stands up fully and drops the blanket before accepting the suit.

Was she wanting me to see all of her?

A tower of unblemished porcelain flesh, middle-aged and completely hairless, she steps into the suit, each leg more like an armored thigh-high boot, and slides each arm slowly through its heavy sleeves and gloves that looked more like gauntlets.

The water stops and the washroom door opens, Mira and Lamant step out.

"Hi." There's more words I want to say and things I want to ask, but it's all that comes out as I put my arm up, palm open to them.

Lamant and Mira see me, he smiles as Mira waves, "Hachi, was wondering when you'd finally come by."

He moves towards me with his arms open, he's still undressed and I can see the woman looking at me, one eyebrow raised and a smirk on her face. I eye her back and put my arms around Lamant's shoulders and pull him to me, my lips locking with his. He seems a bit surprised but accepts it. Mira moves closer to me, I glance towards the woman discretely before I embrace and kiss Mira as well.

Mira uses her hands to communicate something to Araine and I remind myself to ask her about it later.

“I’m sorry, I’m being rude.” Lamant motions toward the woman, “Hachi, allow me to introduce you to Saniana Tir, former Technical Senior Adjust Visionary in charge of Analytics Correction for the Uranos Sector, once member of the Sisters of Parvos.”

That’s quite a ridiculous mouthful. I think to myself.

She smiles at me, “Let me grab us some Cryotic cocktails from the synth,” then looking at Lamant and motioning at him while wiggling her fingers, “And hun, love the look, but how ‘bout you cover up or you inviting us all to have a go?”

So this is Saniana Tir.

So what happens now?

“And so I told him, muck you ya muckin’ muck mucker!” Saniana Tir says then tosses the rest of the drink down into her mouth, slamming the cup hard onto the table.

Lamant and Saniana, or Sani, as she had mentioned we could call her, were laughing hard at the table as I enter the room.

Lamant and I are laughing hard as I find myself wiping my eyes and rubbing my cheeks. Saniana, or Sani, as she said we could call her, was proving to be very funny.

There’s a lull in the conversation and I take a sip of the drink Sani had made me before I speak.

“I’ve decided to take an Angel bounty,” I say, the room going quiet and still. I begin to eye the cocktail in front of me, entranced by the cold vapors leaving the glass like smoke from a recently fired gun.

I’m heading down a dark corridor filled with the debris of overturned desks, cabinets, and storage containers littered about, their once-held possessions strewn about the floor by Void Manifestation tantrums, or previous raiders quickly grabbing anything of perceived value.

The walls shimmer, occasionally showing a glimpse of bright Orokin white and gold before changing back to the corrupted time-covered decay before us. Once offices and recreation facilities, these now abandoned parts of the ship had been sealed off, the only sounds are a faint hum of the ship’s engine and Void Manifestations skittering about in the shadows, replaying past conversations and events to whatever audience would be naive enough to watch.

Access to these areas, like anywhere else on the Zariman, was open to all Tenno, but many would prefer to come with a full squad or at least some support. Lamant had of course offered to come with us, though Sani had been hesitant to *let him* come due to his recent recurring run-ins with Acolytes, however, this bounty, this task, was something I needed for myself. I needed to prove to myself, to Araine, that we could face anything; just the two of us. I needed this to help me get over my feeling of failure, my feeling of loss, of Sara.

Araine and I pass through a narrow doorway when we hear a shuffled tap somewhere in the distance.

That one sounded closer, Araine’s voice in my head.

I nod, “Let’s keep going.”

We enter a former observation area, a large triangular-shaped room with telescopic equipment connected to the windowed wall positioned out toward the celestial entities, the narrower side of the room housing two cubicle-like stations of various instruments before leading out to another pathway along their center. A dull blue light with no particular source illuminates the center of the room, a

twisted mass of abstract art; a humanoid body of circular shapes that give the appearance of liquid sits in the center and spreads out like chains throughout the room.

A shuffled tap comes from somewhere within the room, as we proceed further toward the blue light a distinct humming begins, the shuffled tapping growing more rapidly as it encircles us. Nothing visible, but the audible sounds and feel of things unseen lingering, watching, and crawling around us cause me a moment of hesitation.

Don't doubt.

I nod.

I reach out with my hand and touch the abstract creation, the blue light causing its flesh to sparkle and ripple like the breeze of a lake on a cool windy night. The humming intensifies as Araine and I look around, the skittering sounds around us vanishing into the corners of the room before falling silent. The hum grows louder, the sound competing with my breath and heartbeat, it makes it hard to concentrate, to think.

My hands relax as does the rest of my body before sudden and violent scream proceeds from the abstract artwork, a cloud of red particles manifesting from within its blue shimmers causing the structure to spring to life as the Angel is made before us.

Back! Araine's voice in my head as I feel her arm slam across me knocking me backward and pushing me out of the way as a series of shimmering void chains rise to surround and imprison her within their cage.

I dash backward, unleashing my Amps energy into the chains, quickly dissolved by the same energies that created them.

Araine leaps at the Angel, the spiked hammer landing firmly on the head of the entity before sliding down its torso like flesh through a grater.

The Angel screams as small orbs of concentrated light begin to circle its body.

Araine steps back, readying herself, I dash forward and force my body through the orbs, through the angel's body, it's a feeling like cold fingers gripping at my heart and lungs as I materialize on the other side. It makes me take a moment to catch my breath.

The Angel screams and roars with rage, its arms and limbs thrash about the room breaking equipment, scarring the walls, and flailing about wildly.

Araine moves a step closer toward it and points the Hecaton point blank, as my Amp illuminates the back of the Angel, a series of four rapid shots repeat in succession before the abstract humanoid hardens and cracks, a deafening silence surrounding us.

A feeling of excitement washes over me, my body tingling with energy. I press my lips together and blow, the cracked statue dissipating into dust before us revealing several Voidplumes before the Helios quietly gathers them up.

I guess we have reason to see Cavalero now.

The excitement grows inside me, unable to tell if it's a side effect from the fight with the Angel, perhaps adrenaline and endorphins kicking in, or perhaps some released Void energy. In either case, I knew there was only one thing I wanted at this very moment.

"I want something else."

I can hear Lamant and Sani talking and laughing as I enter his room.

"Hachi!" Lamant exclaims happily as I transfer out of Araine, "You're back!"

Sani reaches for another glass and begins to pour some liquid into it, "How'd the hunting go darling?"

"Lots of plumes," I say and take the glass, sniffing it. The feeling I'd had immediately after the Angel fight is still with me, the energy in my gut flowing outwards through my entire body tingling as it rebounds at my fingertips and toes. I felt as if I would begin to shake if I tried to stand still any longer.

"Well come tell us all about it." Sani slaps the base of a chair.

I swallow the drink and set my glass down on the table as I undo the clasps around my waist and wrists. Reaching my hand out to Lamant I take his hand in mine, the words coming out of my mouth without thinking, "I'm taking this." I pull on his hand as he stands and lead him away towards the lower bunk pushing him gently back onto the bed.

I hold Lamant's head against my stomach as I look back at Sani, she looks at us, smirks, and then turns back to her drink, the words from my mouth not sounding like much of a question, "You coming Sani."

It's late, or maybe early, when Araine and I crawl out from between our interlocking pile of limbs to leave Lamant's room and make our way back to ours. The energies within me from earlier had dissipated, along with the intense feeling of satisfaction and happiness that had washed over me after our time together was now fading. I briefly thought of Sara and pushed her from my thoughts, easier to do so now than days ago.

We enter our room and I immediately strip as I head toward my bed and crawl into it. I forget to grab the covers, but feel Araine beside me, her arms wrapping around me as she pulls them over the two of us.

I wake hours later. I can hear the sound of Tenno and their companions walking and running through the hallways outside. I stand and move towards the window, staring out into the lower levels of the concourse watching the people move about their day below me.

I begin to feel a tinge of loneliness as I think about sleeping by myself before I close my eyes and breathe, clearing my thoughts.

Araine's presence near me is suddenly warm and comforting. I stand and lean back into her, my arms involuntarily moving above my head and interlocking behind the back of her neck. I close my eyes.

Just breathe.

I smile and follow her lead; my emotion and composure regained. Araine's arms wrap around my sides, her fingers interlocking just below my navel. My head rests against her shoulder.

I wanted to tell her *thank you*, that she had helped me through so much, and that I was so grateful to her. I relaxed my thoughts and let my mind share with her as I voiced the words out loud, "Thank you."

There's a flood of emotions back, then a nervousness. As soon as it hits I can feel her fingers unlock, they linger on me, gently caressing me as the side of her face rubs against mine. She doesn't feel cold or metallic, but at this moment it feels as if another version of me was touching myself.

I breathe, pushing the side of my face against hers again, my feet involuntarily pushing onto my toes to press my back and torso harder into her. I feel her gaze move down as my fingers run along the back of her head. Her caress around my waist moves outward to my sides and then inwards, with each gentle movement I can feel her fingers moving in opposite directions.

I look up at her, a projection of the dark-skinned Dax woman with big hair shimmers where I should see a Warframe. I hold the shared mental image in my thoughts as I move my hands to hers, my gaze not leaving the brown eyes locked with mine.

"So what happens now?"



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