

Easy Enough

Von Ligeia_Maloy

"I want the strongest thing you have."

"Easy enough." Ah, yes, sure. He had made the mistake to take a human customer by his word once. That was eight years ago, when he had started serving drinks at the Dark Star Lounge. A mistake he never repeated, after an interview with C-Sec – no, he didn't want to poison a human general, yes, it was a misunderstanding. Followed by a lecture from his boss and cleaning the counter, not only from that mess, but also for the rest of the week. *Easy enough*, a reply that stood for 'thanks Spirits there are enough hard drinks in the galaxy that guarantee to knock most humans out without causing internal bleeding'.

"This is... It's green....?" the guy remarked once his drink was served. Say what, a sharp one.

"And guaranteed to knock you on your ass. Unlike you're dextro-DNA like me. If you are, it'll kill you." *If you happen to be dextro and intolerant against Thessian plant life, otherwise, it'll just taste like a vorcha smells.* Who cared about the small print, humans liked their exotic drinks served with a bit of drama. He wasn't sure why, it probably added to the adventure.

This human didn't flinch, not from his words, and not from drink's taste. He lifted the glass, and poured it into his mouth. He put the glass down, and met the turian's eyes with a challenging stare.

"Anything else?" Not bad. This was the first human who didn't stagger away from his counter and had to be guided outside by his friends or security.

"Let's have another one." Even the man's voice didn't slur. If anything, he sounded unimpressed, with a hint of – disappointment? Oh wonderful, another one of those who wouldn't stop until alcohol drowned their woes. Well, not his problem, as long as the grand finale happened in the restroom or outside.

"There you are." He gave the man's face a closer look while pouring the second drink. N7 uniform and fancy guns. Well, in his experience, higher ranks of Alliance military took not only drinking seriously, but also paying for drinks and service; there were worse customers out there. This dude seemed to have seen some shit – dark circles under his eyes, face covered with yellowish stubbles, the blond hair an unkempt mess in need of a cut. The face wasn't bad for a human. Strong features, square jaw, a

handful of scars. Most humans were too... roundish for his taste, he had to admit, however, that a strong nose like this guy's had a certain charm.

"Can I ask you something?" The human had emptied the second drink in the same fashion as his first.

"I serve drinks." *Here we go again.* What was it with humans and their desire to confide into strangers as soon as a few drops of alcohol touched their tongues? And why always bartenders? Was there a human law that they couldn't bother the lady from the souvenir shop, or any of the guys selling weapons? If clearing that mystery up didn't meant having to engage a conversation with a customer he'd ask.

"And you're doing a great job, big guy. How about another?" His unmoved expression was destroyed by a wide grin, revealing two rows of sharp, white teeth when the turian filled his glass the third time. "Name's Shepard, by the way. Commander Dylan Shepard. Yours?"

"I'm your friendly neighborhood bartender."

"Too complicated for a dude trying his best to get drunk." He waved impatiently with his hand, dismissing the answer. "Can I call you Bob?"

"Er... Alright," he sighed, put his hands on the counter and leaned forward. "Because I kinda like your smile, Commander Shepard, it's Traian for you."

"I can't believe it..." Groaning, Shepard picked up his glass, having another taste of his drink.

"What's wrong now?" Oh please! *I'll give you the next on the house if it's not one of those 'I once knew a guy with the same name' stories.*

"I didn't even try yet, and you get kinda flirty." Burying his face in his hands, he groaned against his palms.

"Apologies, Commander, but I think you're reading too much into-"

"No, no, it's okay," Shepard cut him off, emerging from his hands and putting on a smile. "Customer talk, for a good mood and tips, I know. Traian, it's not like it sounds, but – are you into guys?"

"A fine ass is a fine ass, all other parts enhance the experience in their own way," he answered without hesitation. It was a too common question. After hearing it from all kinds of races every other night over years he didn't mind it anymore. Sure, he had been raised to see private matters as, well, private matters, but he also had learned that the truth didn't hurt anyone. Simple question, simple answer.

"Do I want to know where this is going if it's not like it sounds?"

"Let's pretend you're a turian acquaintance of mine who knows I'm into men." He downed the last drops of his drink and wiped his lips with the back of his hand. Then,

he leaned over the counter, a wide grin on his face, gazing at the bartender with his dark blue eyes.

"What would you do, if I said, just like this-" he tilted his head as he spoke on, "Hey, Traian. Good job today." He stretched, and gave the turian a friendly slap on the shoulder, but let his hand rest instead of pulling it away. "Smooth moves. Why don't we go over them later, after a shower, while having a glass of dextro-friendly wine?"

"Well." Traian reached for the small human hand and removed it from his shoulders, but kept holding it, stroking it with one of his two long fingers. His light amber eyes returned the dreamy gaze, and his rough voice deepened. "If you said that to me, like that, I'd say – my shift ends in two hours, wait for me outside." He let go of the human's hand and laughed. The conversation with this human customer had taken a turn he hadn't expected.

"Now, what did *he* say?"

"That he's sorry if he did something wrong during the mission, and that he'd of course go over it with the rest of the squad once he's finished with his calibrations. Fuck his calibrations! I *should* fuck his calibrations! Maybe THAT would get him jealous or something." His voice was dry after his rant, and he wetted his throat with the rest of the liquid in his glass.

"Oh dear!" Whoever this guy had set his eyes on was either too polite or professional to shoot his commander's advances down. Or delightfully oblivious. This was indeed one of the more entertaining encounters he had had with a customer lately.

"He's a friend?"

"Best friend you can have in this crazy galaxy." The sudden seriousness in the human's face and voice was touching. The grin was gone, and he looked tired when he spoke again, "Let's try this: Don't worry too much about the scars. I assure you, they don't just drive *krogan females* crazy. What would you say?"

"I don't need scars to drive anyone crazy. I'll gladly elaborate. At my place. At the end of my shift in two hours." He refilled the commander's glass – taking the liberty to choose a lighter drink – and gave him an encouraging nod. "His answer?"

"Last thing he needs is having horny krogan males chasing after him." The two men looked at each other in silence for a moment, the human's expression sombre, the turian's unmoved. Almost unmoved – struggling against it as he might, he couldn't stop his mandibles from twitching. Slightly first, then stronger. Finally, he lost the struggle.

"I'm sorry," he roared, hoping none of his co-workers, or worse, his boss, would come over to see what was up. It took him a moment to regain his composure. "Sorry, but this is too good." He bit down another chuckle. Fortunately his customer wasn't offended; despite his frown, the commander smiled.

"Glad you're having fun." He chucked down the vodka, stared at the empty glass in confusion. Then he shot a disapproving glare at the bartender.

"How about a real drink?"

"Sure." Traian shrugged. After all, it wasn't his liver. "How about batarian ale, uncut? Don't ask how I got it and it's on the house."

"Deal." Shepard took the full glass and sniffed its content. Then he took a long gulp. The muscles in his face twitched, blood shot into his cheeks, and for a second Traian feared his eyes would roll up and he'd faint.

"God, this hurts the good way."

"There are other things that do that, too."

"Traian, my friend, you know how to play this game!" Shepard chuckled, shaking his head and grimacing against the taste in his mouth. "You'd be fun to have around. I could get you a job on my ship if you want."

"I appreciate the offer, but my tender heart couldn't take watching your vain attempts at seducing your friend. Speaking of friend, that guy belongs to you? He's been watching us for the last two or three minutes, looking a little lost." He nodded at a turian standing by the door behind the commander. Of course he didn't need an answer. A turian, most of the right half of his face covered by a bandage, what skin was exposed showing fresh, healing scars, and observing his superior and friend with a hesitant, worried expression.

"Yo, Garrus! Come over here, have a drink!" Shepard turned around, and when he waved at the turian, he was setting himself in motion, as though he had only waited for the sign.

"What can I get you? Turian brandy? Horosk? Or," he added with a sly voice, winking at the human, "How about our special cocktail of the night, a Weeping Heart?" He kept a straight face when the commander groaned.

"Uh, nothing, thank you." Declining politely without even looking at the bartender, the new arrival didn't waste another second on him. His focus was on his commander.

"Shepard, I got worried. Is everything okay?"

"Sure, Garrus, sure. And if I drink too much, you'll always carry me back to my cabin, yes?" As before during his pretended flirting, Shepard tilted his head as he spoke, looking at his friend with a gentle smile. Traian caught the change in the turian's face, and had to turn away and concentrate violently on sorting the bottles on the shelf behind the counter.

"Is something wrong? Aren't you feeling well? If you're sick, I'll get help! Give me a second, I'll call Mordin! Uh, or maybe better Dr. Chakwas..."

"No, no, I'm fine, I'm fine." With a faint laugh of resignation, Shepard put his hand on the turian's arm, stopping him from activating his omni-tool. "Thanks for your concern, Garrus, but all's good. Just having a drink here with my new pal. I'll be back with you guys soon. Wait, one more thing before you go!"

"What is it?" The alarm was back to his voice, as Traian noticed, hoping that the two were too engrossed in their exchange to hear him chuckle, and finally openly laugh when he listened to the commander's reply.

"I think I'll call it a day earlier tomorrow. We could meet after my shift, you know."

"Oh... yeah, I mean..." The turian paused and took a deep breath, his words as worried as before, but now also dripping with disappointment. "Does that mean you won't have me in the squad tomorrow? Is it... is it still because of what you said after we left Korlus? We never spoke about that, if I..."

"Fuck, no!" That cry of dismay even drowned out the music around them. A couple of an asari and a krogan interrupted their chatter and curiously turned around. Shepard sighed, and lowered his voice.

"Forget what I said, and of course you're coming. Like I'd go on a mission without you having my back!"

"Good, I mean, good to hear. Thanks, Shepard." For the first time since his arrival, the turian seemed to relax. "Well, I'll go back Tali and Anderson, I guess. And wait for you to join us. The ambassador wants to talk to you in person."

"Sure. Give me another twenty minutes or so." He waited until Garrus had left, and turned around, back to the bartender. Traian hurried to finish a cocktail for a volus and returned to his human customer, looking at him with pity.

"That... was painful to watch."

"See what I have to deal with? Did you see that?" Shepard shook his hand at the door behind him, his face flushed and his eyes nearly disappearing under his frown. Suddenly he sighed, and buried his head between his arms on the counter.

"God, he's gonna kill me one of these days. Here lies Commander Shepard, he lived fast, and died horny, because his best friend dodged his advances like bullets. And here I thought I'd end as food for the reapers while saving the galaxy. Should change my name to Idiot Shepard. Why did this happen to me?!"

"Well, he's kinda cute," Traian stated once he was sure that the commander was done with his rant of self-pity.

"Also has a nice voice, a nice ass. Scars are a bonus. So seen from this angle I'm not surprised he caught your attention. And heads up, Commander. He cares about you, that's obvious."

"Yeah, because we're best friends." Shepard had sat up again, and was turning the

empty glass between his hands. "Not that this is a bad thing, but, you know."

"How about trying a more direct approach?"

"How much more direct?" He stroke over his stubble, thinking for a moment. Suddenly, he broke into a grin and waved at the bartender as though he greeted an old friend.

"Yo, Garrus, you're my best buddy in the whole galaxy, so why not step up the game to the next level and have sex already?"

"Why not? First off, there's no way anyone could misunderstand that. Secondly, I'll let you have another drink on the house if you come back one day and tell me how he reacted." Witnessing the other turian for only a short moment had been enough for him to seize him up. It didn't matter so much if that guy would say yes or no to his commander, but Traian would bet money on the reaction being comedic gold.

"My suffering amuses you a lot, eh?" Shepard grinned back at him, a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"A bit." Not to say, immensely. This guy was alright, not bad looking for a human, and Traian was beginning to like his open, honest face.

"Would it comfort you if I said it's now less than two hours until the end of my shift, and that I really live close by?"

"Don't tempt me." Shepard smiled, giving a sad sigh. "I'd jump at your offer if it... if it was just about *that*, you know..."

"You don't want turian dick, you want *his*, got it." The disappointment over the rejection was mild, he had expected this nature of the answer.

"I swear, I do wish he'd be half as fast as you to catch on. Thanks, Traian." He activated his omni-tool, and swiftly entered a row of commands. "Does that cover the tab?"

"More than enough, thanks, Commander." The turian nodded in appreciation when he saw the generous sum on his screen, then he picked another bottle from under the table. "A last one before you're on your way?"

"I think I have enough. If I get him to carry me to my bed I'd rather be conscious enough to enjoy it. See you around, buddy." He pushed himself away from the counter. His feet were staggering, his body swaying, but he kept his balance. Rubbing his temples, he lifted his head and grinned.

"If I give your advice a try I'll let you know about the outcome."

"Good luck, Shepard." *Even though I doubt you'll need much.*

