

# Bloom on Invictus

a *Mass Effect: Andromeda* fanfic

by Rodo

for *truebluemoon*

“SO THIS IS how it’s going to be, huh, Taron?” Vetra drawled, leaning back in her chair and staring at the comm screen showing Taron Wix’s intricately painted face. She never met another Turian as in love with his fringe as him.

“You know how it is, Nyx. A deal’s a deal.”

For a second, Vetra got distracted by the door to the armory swishing open, revealing a curious Peebee who was about to ask a question, then froze when she noticed that Vetra was busy with a call.

“Sure, but that’s no reason why you can’t just let me make a copy. I’ll pay half price for it – and bring my own blank OSD.”

“That would devalue my merchandise. My client pays extra to get their hands on something this exclusive. If there were more copies floating around, it would ruin my reputation.”

Vetra let her mandibles flare with frustration. Taron’s face, on the other hand, stayed unnaturally still. The self-important fuck never let anything slip; it was infuriating. “I just want the one copy,” she explained. “I’m not in the business of producing bootleg vids, and if I was, I’d definitely not choose this one.”

“And I can’t live on promises and maybes. If you really need this vid, look elsewhere.”

And with that, he cut the comm link, not even a goodbye or good luck. For a moment, she ignored Peebee still standing in the door and eyeing her curiously and instead leaned her head back and growled lowly. Why was it so damn hard to get a vid that wasn’t even ten years old, give or take six hundred years?

“That guy sounded pleasant.”

Vetra scoffed. “Yeah. I wouldn’t deal with him if I didn’t have to. But he’s the only one in the whole cluster who has a copy of *Bloom on Invictus*, at least right now. Who knows what some of the colonists still in cryo have stashed away in their personals.”

“*Bloom on Invictus*’? That’s a terrible title for an action vid. It’s only slightly less bad for a porn vid. Why the hell would you want to buy something so bad even the title sucks?”

“It’s not an action vid, and it isn’t porn either. It’s a Turian coming of age vid series featuring four female friends who just started their military service on Invictus and their trials, tribulations and romantic entanglements.”

Peebee blinked at her, at a loss for words, but not for long. “Wow. That explains the title, I suppose. I didn’t know you had such a terrible taste in vid series, though. Well, I guess nobody’s perfect.”

Vetra rolled her eyes. “It’s not for me, you ass. It’s Sid’s favorite series and her birthday is coming up. We couldn’t really do anything last year, with the Uprising and the outposts on Eos failing, so it’s got to be something good. First proper birthday in a new galaxy and all.”

“And your sister wants a vid that sounds trashy and embarrassing. I get it,” Peebee sighed. “Sucks, but I guess I get it. I suppose you’ll have to think of a plan B.”

“This is plan B,” Vetra groaned. She’d sunk so much time into this project, chasing down leads, burying herself in ledgers until finally, she’d ended up running into Taron Wix, of all people. Her luck was truly rotten sometimes. “What Sid really wants is a cat. A *cat*, of all things. But there aren’t any cats yet, and there won’t be for another couple of months. So I can’t get her a cat, and I had to think of something else.”

Peebee paused again, apparently running through some mental database that brought up nothing. “Do I want to know what a cat is?”

Vetra barked a laugh. “It’s a pet from Earth. Ask Ryder, Cora or Liam sometime if you have an hour to kill. Suvi if you want to make it three. They’re cute, small and furry and apparently completely useless unless you like to have a roommate that throws everything to the floor and loses hair at an alarming rate. So, not a priority for obvious reasons.”

“And your sister wants *that*?” Peebee looked properly horrified at the prospect. Finally, someone who didn’t think Sid’s cat fixation was the most natural thing in the world. “I can see why you went with a vid instead. Can’t you think of anything else she might want? Maybe something Angaran? This is a new galaxy, after all.”

If only it was that easy. Vetra sighed. There were plenty of things that would make Sid happy. Making Sid happy was easy. It was just that Vetra wanted it to be special, something that meant something to her. She’d been racking her brain for an alternative ever since she’d found out just how difficult it was to get her hands on a copy of *Bloom on Invictus* –

and that was after she'd had to wait for weeks until Sid bemoaning the loss of her favorite series sparked something in her brain. At this rate, Sid would have to wait for a present until there were cats around to cover their tiny flat in fur.

"I really wish I could," she admitted.

Peebee, undeterred, just smiled at her. "You will. Now, what was I here for again... Ah! Have you seen my second Sidewinder?"

"Yeah, you put in on the crates and I had to put it the weapons' locker."

"Thanks!" And with that, she grabbed her gun and ran out to do who knew what to it – probably augment it with some bit of rem tech – leaving Vetra to stew over her dilemma.

\*

"What's this one called again?" Vetra asked, sipping on her drink. It tasted acidic, with a hint of engine oil, and it packed a punch. Dutch had been making forays into cocktails for dextro-amino-based lifeforms recently, and she was undecided if it was a good thing or not.

"Whispering Weasel?" Cora Harper suggested. "No, that isn't right. It was two Ws, though, and I'm reasonably sure about the weasel. Wandering Weasel?"

"Are you sure this is safe to drink?" Lexi T'Perro asked, staring at the glass in front of herself with a frown. "I mean, alcohol in general isn't healthy and potentially carcinogenic, but this seems a bit like playing Russian Roulette, just with drinks."

Vetra couldn't help it: she snorted in her drink. "You really need to find your off switch."

"She isn't wrong," Cora added – she'd opted for the well-tested Dirty Squirrel. "Can't beat the classics," she'd said when she ordered. "Oh, I've got it – Waxy Weasel."

That explains the oily aftertaste, Vetra thought. It felt good – sitting in a booth in the Vortex, having a good time, for once not busy hunting kett, investigating some Remnant site or tracking down supplies. There were music and drinks and she was determined to spent her evening off on shore leave doing everything except brood about what to get her sister for her birthday. She needed to have fun, and this was the place for it. Another drink or two, and she might even get up and dance.

"There you are!"

It was a miracle they heard her over the music at all, but all three of them turned their heads to see Peebee jogging towards them, looking about as excited as she would in a new vault, but far too excited for the Vortex. Her steps slowed a little when she spotted Lexi

next to Vetra, but she evidently decided to ignore her presence in favor of whatever had her so giddy in the first place.

“What’s up?” Cora asked. “I thought you had something to do today.”

Peebee waved her hand at that. “I had. Which is why I’m here. So, Vetra, please don’t be angry, I know it’s none of my business, but it just kept nagging at me. Plus, I was kind of curious about what a Turian coming-of-age series looked like, and I thought, if you can’t convince the seller, maybe you can convince the buyer. So I hacked into Wix’s emails and files on his backup server, and guess what I found?”

For a moment, nobody said anything. They all just stared at Peebee, breathing heavily, while digesting what she’d said at twice the speed of a normal conversation.

“I don’t know, what?” Vetra asked, while she heard Cora say “Turian coming-of-age series?” in what would have been a normal speaking voice everywhere else, but a whisper in the Vortex.

“There is no buyer! He made it all up.”

“What are you talking about?” Lexi asked, her drink now completely forgotten.

“That barefaced, slippery fucker,” Vetra cursed, then she left the explanation to Peebee; she was too busy fuming. Taron fucking Wix. There was petty, and then there was whatever he was being right now, which was so much worse. If he’d had a buyer, Vetra would have understood. Backing out of deals you’d agreed to was bad for business. But this just meant he was sitting on an OSD that Vetra was willing to pay good credits for, for no reason other than whatever bug had crawled up his ass.

“Why would he do something like this?” Cora asked.

“It’s kind of a long story,” Vetra said.

“We’ve got time,” Lexi argued. She offered her drink to Peebee when she sat down next to Cora, and after a little squabble, she even accepted. A free drink was a free drink, after all.

And so Vetra told them the story. She talked about how back in the Milky Way, there had been several acquisitions specialists working for the Initiative. Some since the very beginning, when most people had thought Jien Garson’s vision little more than a pipe dream. Taron Wix hadn’t been one of the first, but he’d entered the picture far earlier than Vetra. He was Turian through and through, stuck on hierarchy, loved the military, and so he had hated it when Vetra had shown up: no military service, no respect for authority, young and not even particularly in love with being a Turian.

“And then, I upstaged him, of course. I got the parts where he failed.”

Cora and Peebee groaned in sympathy and even Lexi sighed and nodded when she heard that. They had all been there at one point.

“Not a graceful loser, I take it?” Cora surmised.

“Yeah. But I didn’t think he’d be willing to cut his own flesh in the process. Talking behind my back, badmouthing me to the other Turians, I get. But we’re both professionals, and credits are credits. Grudges are no good in this business.”

With a thump, Peebee sat down her tankard. “There’s only one thing for it,” she proclaimed. “You’re going to get that vid. That’ll show him.”

“I’m not a thief,” Vetra argued. “Plus, he’d definitely know it was me once he notices it’s gone. And it’s not as if there are any other copies around. Believe me, I checked.”

“So you just make a copy. He doesn’t have to know where you got it.” Peebee leaned back, as smug as if she’d personally solved the Nexus’s food supply problems on her own.

“That’s not actually the worst idea,” Cora said.

“Gee, thanks,” Peebee drawled.

“Now, hold on a minute,” Lexi said. “Are you really considering breaking into what I can only assume is a secure warehouse or other storage facility, just to get your hands on a birthday present for your sister? Do you have any idea what can go wrong? There will be cameras, security alerts... and what are you going to do if Wix is working, or if he needs to get something for a buyer while you’re busy copying an OSD. Do you have any idea how much trouble you’ll be in if you get caught? How much trouble *Ryder* will be in? I think you’ve all had more than enough to drink.”

For a moment, Vetra exchanged glances with Peebee and Cora. None of them were surprised by Lexi’s rather straight-laced attitude to a little breaking and entering and intellectual piracy. Never mind that technically speaking, *Bloom on Invictus* was out of copyright even by Asari law. But still, she *did* have a point.

“You’re right,” Vetra admitted. “We’re going to need a plan. And a distraction.”

“Not what I meant,” Lexi muttered, but somehow, without saying a word, it was decided. Even Cora was game. They ordered another round of drinks, and then got down to business.

\*

“This is the worst idea you’ve ever had,” Lexi whined. “I don’t know why I let you talk me into this.”

“Oh, come on, Lexi. Haven’t you ever done some crazy stuff back when you were a med student? Even you must have done something a little mad when you were younger. Everyone needs a little excitement in their life once in a while – why else did you sign up

with the Initiative if not to live a little?”

Lexi sighed and pursed her lips, but she didn't deny Peebee's insinuations. Vetra had to smile. There was a little adventure in all of them, even in someone as outwardly solid as their medical officer. For a moment, she wondered just what exactly Lexi had gotten up to in her younger days. She had grown up on Omega after all, not that it showed.

“I just, I don't know if I can do it,” Lexi admitted, deflated.

“It's not that hard,” Vetra assured her, and Cora backed her up: “You only have to play yourself. Just ask about those rare old treatises on Turian physiology, bring up your dad if you can, and he'll eat it up.”

“You'll do fine. Wix is going to eat it up with a spoon, and you don't need to keep him busy that long. We'll handle the rest,” Vetra added.

“Trust us, we're professionals,” Peebee chirped.

Somehow, Lexi didn't seem that assured. Maybe because they all were still a bit under the influence. But Peebee wasn't wrong – they were professionals. They'd broken into Kett facilities and helped Ryder solve all sorts of problems. This was one measly storage unit. There weren't even any guards.

\*

“No guards, you said,” Lexi whispered via comms. Hopefully not in a way that was noticeable. They didn't need their distraction to give them away.

Taron Wix's storage unit for his less bulky merchandise was close to his apartment, right next to his office on the other side of the block, but still technically within the commercial zone that ringed the docks. Everything looked new and shiny, and Vetra wouldn't have known where it was if it hadn't been for that one time she tried to get a bunch of circuits for Kim Connor on Prodrimos, back in the early days of the outpost.

“Well, it's just one guy,” Vetra replied, staring at the napping Turian – ex-military, from the looks – who had set up shop in front of the entrance. He should probably be standing, but he'd sat down on the rim around one of the hydroponics cubes that were both functional and decorative. And now, he was snoring away, his assault rifle resting in his lap. Vetra couldn't really fault him for it. It was probably one of the most boring jobs you could have in a new galaxy.

“He's sleeping,” Cora said. At some point, she'd taken over mission command, probably because she was both the most trained and the most naturally bossy – barring Peebee's general anarchist tendencies. “Proceed as planned. Peebee, the door.”

“On it,” Peebee hissed before activating her omni-tool and typing furiously. Vetra and Cora kept their eyes on the guard while in their ears, Lexi was starting an incredibly awkward conversation with Wix’s secretary at the office. The moment stretched and stretched, just like Vetra’s patience.

“Got it!” Peebee finally cried. A little too loud. The guard started, and for one tense moment, it seemed as if he was about to wake up. Nobody dared to breathe, and Vetra couldn’t help but think that they must look ridiculous, crouched next to a building, jumping at shadows. Her fingers itched for her gun, and she could see Cora do the same. There was a strict-ish no guns policy on the Nexus, and usually there wasn’t any need to bring them, so Vetra had obediently left her Cyclone in the armory. She’d only expected to go out for drinks, after all. Not that she wanted to hurt this poor guy; she’d just feel better with a bit of insurance right about now. Then he started relaxing again and the snoring picked back up, and they all sighed a collective sigh of (quiet) relief.

“Now,” Cora ordered, and like a well oiled machine, they went into the storage unit. Vetra kept her eyes on the guard until the door swished shut behind them. When she turned, she found the long corridor much as the last time she’d been here.

“There should be a terminal right behind the door,” she said, pointing at the end of the long corridor. “I don’t think it was locked the last time.”

“You’ve got the cameras?” Cora asked Peebee, earning a nod in response.

“I’ve got the loop set and ready to go.”

“Then do it. Vetra, go!”

And Vetra did. Peebee followed, in case she was needed, while Cora secured the corridor. All in all, this bit of the operation went as smooth as it could go – somewhat unusual, since missions with Ryder tended to go south sooner or later. “No plan survives first contact with the enemy” she had told her crew once. “An old human saying.” And at least in Ryder’s case, a very apt one. But the terminal was unlocked, and Vetra found the inventory number in no time. Peebee scrubbed the resulting log, and she kept an eye on the loop while Vetra took the OSD out of its drawer and created a copy on her own, blank one. The waiting was almost boring, with no one shooting at them while they created a copy of the data. Even Cora looked slightly unnerved by how uneventful everything was when they arrived back in the corridor.

“Maybe we should leave Ryder on the Tempest more often,” Vetra joked. “This was as smooth as a Salarian’s butt.”

“Don’t jinx it,” Cora said.

“Oh, loosen up, Harper!”

“Not the time, Peebee,” Cora ground out while Peebee opened the door. “Has nobody told you never to— Shit!”

That about summed it up, Vetra thought. Everything had been going so well, but when the door began to open, she saw the guard on the other side finally startle into wakefulness, hastily grabbing his Avenger and there was nothing she could do, nothing. Except freeze and hope he was the type who asked before shooting. Ryder was going to be *so* pissed. And Addison...

Thankfully, Cora wasn't frozen solid, and her instincts kicked in before the guard had a chance to properly take aim. With a powerful blast of her biotics, she grabbed the poor guy and flung him into the air, securing him with a ball of blue energy. Vetra watched as his rifle tumbled to the ground and wondered if she should go for it, just in case.

“Listen,” Cora began, eyes focused on the guard as if she was a varren about to pounce. “We didn't steal anything, and there's no evidence we were ever here. So this can go one of two ways – either you let us go and you pretend this never happened, or you can try to fight, but I don't fancy your chances – it's three against one. So I suggest we come to an agreement. You let us go and Wix doesn't have to know that you sleep on the job.”

Vetra could see the wheels turning behind the guy's carapace. His eyes roamed over the three of them; Vetra was holding the unmarked OSD, Peebee's hand had frozen over her omni-tool and Cora was starting to tense with the strain of keeping a grown Turian suspended in mid-air. How long could she keep this up?

“You didn't steal anything?”

Vetra shook her head and showed him the OSD. “Just made a copy. The original's still there.”

The Turian thought for a moment longer, then sighed. “Alright. You've got a deal. Just make sure this doesn't get back to Wix.”

And just like that, he fell to the floor in a graceless heap. Vetra kept her eyes on him, just in case he went for the Avenger. Luckily for him, he didn't. Cora might not be up for another volley of biotics quite yet, but there was always Peebee. Vetra guessed the guard figured as much as well when he waved them off tiredly. They didn't need to be told twice.

\*

“I can't believe we pulled that off.” Lexi still looked shell-shocked, as if she'd woken up from a strange dream only to find out it had all been real after all. “I can't believe I

managed to talk about *Sub-High-Frontal-Carapace Hemorrhaging in Victims of Blunt-Force Trauma Caused by Krogan Hammers* for almost twenty minutes.”

“I can’t believe he let you talk about it that long. I guess Wix has got a crush,” Vetra said, only half-joking. They had rendezvoused back at the armory on the *Tempest*, as promised, and the post-mission jitters were just starting to hit, even if it hadn’t been much of a mission. It was just that enough had gone not quite according to plan to make it feel like one.

“Lexi’s got a boyfriend,” Peebee sang, off-key. She’d gone straight for a bottle of Asari brandy to celebrate their success.

“Oh, shut it,” Lexi shot back. “I’m not the one who screwed up.”

“Stop it, both of you,” Cora said in her voice of authority. “Everything ended up alright. Vetra has got her vid series, and Wix is none the wiser. Now I’m just curious what a Turian coming of age series looks like.” She was staring at the OSD, lying innocently on Vetra’s desk. When Vetra looked around, she could see the same pensive look on Lexi’s and even Peebee’s faces.

“I’ve still got a bottle of wine stashed away,” Lexi pointed out.

“And I know where Liam hides his snacks,” Cora added.

Vetra and Peebee shared a shrug. Even if she’d never admit it out loud, she kind of wanted to know what all the fuss was about as well.

*Fin*