

THE LONG WEIGHT

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Garrus Vakarian trundled through the narrow corridors of Nova Citadel Station, the nearly spherical turian feeling his blubbery sides brush against others or squeezing against particularly narrow doorways. He hefted his tank-like belly for the last obstacle, tilting sideways to get through one of the weapon detectors before reaching the residential wing. The alarm buzzed when he was halfway through.

"Oop, looks like we've got some *heavy* artillery there; you know that's against Council regulations, Captain," a krogan with a dark green crest running over his scaly face said, leaning out of his booth to smirk at Garrus.

"Hah, you're hilarious, Tukar. You get a lot out of that routine back on Tuchanka?"

Tukar, the krogan officer, offered his hand to help pull Garrus out of the detector, as his belly and huge butt pressed against either side, but Garrus waved him off, managing to pop free like a cork out of a wine bottle. "Quiet day?" Garrus grunted, brushing himself off.

"Yeah, only one noise complaint- I commed Tullus and Posca to check it out a while ago. A few grocery deliveries passed by towards your place, Captain- there was enough for a family of krogan. What, feeling like a light snack?"

"Oh, *two* fat jokes in the span of five minutes- really jostling those two brain cells today, aren't you, Tukar? Meanwhile, have you forgotten how to salute a superior officer?"

With a tight smirk, Tukar saluted Garrus, before throwing in a gesture from Earth that had become increasingly popular in Council space. "How's... y'know, how's *she* doing?"

"She's fine, Tukar," Garrus said bluntly. "Now get back to work, or I'll sit on you."

The turian pushed past the checkpoint and down the station's corridors to reach his apartment, but as he turned the final corner, he grimaced. Two turian guards were patrolling the hallway, and they flipped up their visors as Garrus approached, revealing intricate red patterns tattooed on their faces, marking them both as coming from a first generation Turian colony world- Aephus, Garrus thought. They saluted him smartly, in sync- Tullus and Posca weren't related, but they might as well have been joined at the hip. "Sir!"

Garrus chuckled bashfully- most of C-Sec treated him with the sort of fondness one would a fun uncle, as someone as blubbery and planet-shaped as him rarely commanded militant respect- but Tullus and Posca idolized him for his actions during the Reaper War. "Boys, at ease, I'm not your commanding officer. I'm *no one's* commanding officer, we've been through this."

"Respectfully, sir, we'd follow your command at a moment's notice." Tullus said. There was an awkward pause, which ended when Tullus elbowed Posca in the side.

"Ow!" Posca grunted. "Actually, sir, we were wondering..."

"...We know you said 'no' the last few times..."

"...But, what would you think about joining us for drinks or something?"

Garrus huffed, shaking his head. It was sweet that he still had fans. Tullus and Posca had been persistent, but he hadn't really been in the mood for company- not in a long time. Now, though? "Ah, what the hell." He smacked his belly, making it wobble. "If you boys think you can pick up a tab to fill this tank."

Tullus and Posca's mandibles twitched, and they visibly beamed. "Oh! Wow! Thank you, sir! We'll, uh, we'll meet you on the twelfth level of the New Zakera Ward, tomorrow at twenty one hundred hours?"

"Sounds good, boys," Garrus grinned. "What was that noise complaint Tukar mentioned, by the way, the one you two were sent down to investigate? Nothing serious, I hope?"

The two turians exchanged looks. "Uh..."

"It's taken care of, sir," Posca said quickly. "You'll see."

Garrus arched his brow quizzically. "Alright." There was another awkward pause as Tullus and Posca glanced at the larger turian's space-filling belly. "What?"

"Uhm... we- we can just, uh, knock on a door here to step out of your way, sir," Tullus said.

Garrus rolled his eyes, and pressed himself flush against the wall, his belly leaving a precariously narrow crevice between him and the wall. "Go around, boys." They hesitated, causing him to click his tongue. "That's an *order*."

"Sir!" Tullus and Posca leapt to attention. Both of them squeezed by, jostling Garrus' belly. Strangely, they both gave that orb of turian fat a hearty rub, with curt nods and muttering "Captain!" as they passed by.

Sighing heavily, Garrus lumbered towards the end of the hall, punching in his code, and at last reaching his home. The apartment was large and roomy, a relative luxury on the crowded station, and given to Garrus by the Council as part of his "Galactic Hero" reward package. It had felt empty, even with how much turian inhabited it- but thankfully, that issue had been addressed very recently.

"I'm home!"

"Oh! Hey!" a shock of red hair and bright eyes popped from around the corner. "Come on in, I, uh- I made some snacks!"

Garrus arched his brow wearily. "Now... when you say 'made' snacks, do you mean you arranged crackers on a party platter, or did you actually cook?"

His human lover stepped out from the kitchen, her arms folded. "I cooked, smartass."

"Yeah, but Shepard... isn't your cooking about as good as your dancing?"

That earned him a punch in his flabby side- not that he felt anything past the jiggling. "If you're going to mouth off, Vakarian, I'll just throw out these xenma burgers and make you drop and give me twenty."

Garrus' eyes widened. "You got *xenma* steak? From Palaven? How? That stuff was like wagyu beef for humans *before* the Reaper War."

"I called the priciest turian-friendly restaurant, said I'm Commander Shepard and they're my favorite restaurant on the Citadel, and boom, free xenma steaks. But if you don't trust my

cooking..." Shepard produced a plate of two large, delectable looking burgers, and she started hovering over the trash can.

"No! No, no." Garrus snatched the plate out of Shepard's hand. "I, uh. Love your cooking. You're as good as that classical earth chef, Gordon Rumbley."

"Rambley."

"Yeah, whatever," Garrus said, clutching the burgers close. His snout wrinkled; he could smell burnt meat, but it wasn't coming from the admittedly tasty smelling burgers. As Shepard moved to the bar to fix them some drinks, Garrus followed the smell to two large garbage bags shoved into a dark corner of the kitchen. His keen eye followed to a bed sheet thrown over the instant grill, and, given that Shepard had her custom M-3 Predator pistol holstered and it was still cooling down, he had a feeling he knew what the noise complaint was.

"So I saw Tullus and Posca in the hallway..." Garrus paused, smirking to himself as Shepard sputtered, nearly spitting out her drink.

"Uh... yeah?" Shepard asked, regaining her cool composure.

"They came across the grocery deliveries... I was starting to wonder what you were doing." Garrus settled on to a couch that had been doubly reinforced, and yet still groaned under his weight. He set the plate on the sheer shelf of belly that filled his lap, and took a tentative bite- he had no idea just how many failed attempts Shepard had gone through, but the burger was actually really good. "They asked me out for drinks tomorrow."

"Oh! Hey, that's good." Shepard flopped on the couch next to Garrus, curling up next to him. She had recently developed a habit of resting her head against the turian's belly- Spirits knew, there was plenty of room. "You're going, right? They worship the ground you walk on, you know."

Garrus chuckled. "Yeah, they're good guys. So... where *did* this sudden culinary bug come from?"

Shepard shrugged. "What else *can* I do? The Alliance doesn't know what to do with me, the Council doesn't *want* to know what to do with me, and I'm done with the Spectre program. Going merc or rogue's no good, look how well that went for me with Cerberus. So... I thought I'd try my hand at playing June Cleaver for a day." She glanced up at Garrus' confused face. "It's from an old show from Earth. Y'know, a housewife."

Again, Garrus' face was blank, like a really overfed puppy trying to understand a new command.

"What, you don't have housewives on Palaven? Stay at home, take care of the kids, clean the house while the menfolk bring home the bacon?"

Garrus chuckled, making his belly bounce. "Shepard, turians are *all* duty-bound. When my dad went to work at C-Sec, mom was running security at a bar back on Palaven. Besides, if one of us is going to be staying home, it's probably *not* going to be you."

"Yeah... you'll just be staying home and making yourself pretty for me," Shepard quipped.

"Yeah, pretty, that's the word to describe me..." Garrus muttered, polishing off his first burger. He sighed, setting the plate aside.

"Hey." Shepard sat up, reaching over to cup Garrus' bloated face in her hands. "I've said it like, a dozen times. I still think you're handsome. I killed myself making these burgers because I wanna *remind* you how much I appreciate you."

Garrus grinned crookedly, leaning in to exchange a quick kiss. "Sorry, sorry. I'm killing the mood." He draped an arm over Shepard's shoulders, tugging her close to his thick side. Shepard was quiet for a bit, letting a pregnant and awkward silence hang over them until the turian leaned forward to look down at Shepard past his belly. "Something on your mind?"

"Well..." Shepard sat up a bit. "Ever since I woke up, you've been really patient with me. Asked a lot of questions. Made sure we got word out to everyone- by the way, the whole crew wants to get together in a few weeks- but, we didn't talk a lot about you."

The turian scoffed. "Jane, you already know everything about me."

"Well... not this." She patted his belly. "Look- I love you. And if you say you feel good and the doctor signs off, you're healthy, I'm not worried. But *how* did this happen?"

Garrus puffed up his already round cheek, blowing air out. "Well, Shepard," he picked up the extra burger. "I took a burger like this, and ate about, I don't know, a million of them after you went into a coma. The end."

"Garrus."

He sighed, dipping his head down so his mandibles pressed into his multiple chins. "You don't really want to hear about this stuff, it- it's a little... pathetic."

"Hey." Shepard cupped her hands around his face again. "It's just me. And it's about *you*. I love everything about you."

"Oh, barf," Garrus cracked, chuckling. "Where'd you get *that* from, a hanar greeting card?" He laughed harder, blocking another punch from Shepard. "Okay, okay. You sure you want to hear about this?"

"Yes, Vakarian. Give me the whole story."

Garrus leaned back, groaning as he reached for the second burger. "Okay, alright, you asked for it..."

I need to start back when we got you out of the Citadel. After you got through the portal, the firefight back in London was *brutal*. Me, Javik, and Wrex were drawing the fire to our trench, Tali and Liara were doing what they could to keep the portal secure and online. Joker and Edi were keeping locked on your coordinates in the Normandy, and the rest of the team were working to flank the reaper forces.

Whatever you did up there with the reapers, it worked, and those that weren't blown up, starting dropping like flies all over. Joker was the first one to find you, and Edi carried you back to the ship. When we were able to all regroup, it was hard to tell what was in worse shape- you,

the Normandy, or the Reapers. Dr. Chakwas got you in a stable condition, and that's when the coma started. You looked like Hell- I won't lie. Burns everywhere. Your hair was mostly burnt, too- you looked like Jack with less tattoos. Thank the Spirits that grew back. Dr. Chakwas is the best, though, so we knew you'd be alright. We stayed together for a few days, but the whole galaxy was still on fire and we were the only ones with water. Wrex went back to rebuild Tuchanka, Liara had to wrangle together what was left of the Asari government, and Tali went back to Rannoch to formally declare an end to the Migrant Fleet and start resettling the planet. I did get a call from the Hierarchy, but, ah... I'm not cut out for being a Primarch. Still, I had to go back to Palaven. I made sure, doubly sure, that Joker and Dr. Chakwas would be there with you every day until I got back.

I got home, only to find out mom had died during the war. We knew she was sick, but it still stung. Dad and Solana made it out okay- I know dad was mad about me turning down the Hierarchy, but he was too tired and too relieved to fight about it. After mom's funeral, though, we had my big "Hero of Palaven" feast and... if I'm being honest, I think that's where it started- where you lost me to the second love of my life, food, and I ate like a pig. I can close my eyes and I swear I can still taste it- these huge, tender xenma steaks bigger than my head, dipped in this amazing gold sauce, the gimgin kanasus was flowing like water- Spirits, it was amazing, and I just couldn't get enough. I think after everything, I just needed a release- and boy, did I find it. Dad thought I made a disgrace of myself, eating so much when rations were still planetwide, but it was a feast held *for* me, he should've been chewing out Victus or- never mind, it doesn't matter. I left Palaven thinking my armor was a little snug, but after arguing with dad, I didn't think about it much.

After I had some time to cool down, and with how form fitting Turian armor is, I finally started to feel the effects of me pigging out at the feast. Dad got in my head, and I started looking for good paying jobs- I could've had anything I wanted, the galaxy was still chaotic and everyone knew who I was by this point. I ran a few jobs for Aria on Omega, thinking she had gone straight, but that went nowhere fast- the world nearly ended, but Omega's still Omega. I had grown accustomed to rich food, so I just kept eating- if nothing else, to pass the time. I was at this one dive joint, run by some grumpy little shit of a volus- it was a dump, but it had this *amazing* saragras cake. It was almost too sweet. Actually, remind me, I'll look the place up, maybe he'll deliver. Oh, you know what, if we could get the recipe and some dextro-friendly ice cream, that would be *fantastic*. In fact, it would go great with-

"Garrus." Shepard held up her hand to the turian's mouth. "Eat the second burger, hon, you're getting sidetracked."

"Oh," Garrus chuckled nervously, his round cheeks blushing as he tore into his snack. "Right, sorry."

Anyways, so I'm having some of this cake, and then I ran into Zaeed, of all people. The bar was on this way station near the Terminus Systems, so it got a lot of rough types. Zaeed takes one look at me, and shouts clear across the bar, "Goddamn, Garrus! I was hired to take out some little shit, but you've only gone and ate him!"

That was the first time anyone commented on my weight- I may have eaten enough cake to loosen my breastplate, and it was pushing against the table. I quickly lost my appetite after that comment- at least for the time being. Zaeed sat across from me, and we got to talking about the state of things. At first, you couldn't spit without hitting a mercenary or a contract. But the Council was coming down hard, and with most of the biggest gangs and powerbrokers either dead or worn out from the Reaper War, employers were scarce. Worst of all, Zaeed told me that I had no chance. I was too much of a celebrity, and no less-than-legal organizations would want me- and legitimate organizations couldn't afford me.

That was a big blow to my plans. I was deflated- and so, well, I inflated myself with more of that volus' cake. There was nothing else to do but to come here, Nova Citadel Station- I don't know if you noticed, but it's just the reclaimed remains of the old Citadel being rebuilt. I had to up my entire wardrobe, and had to hope everyone in Council space would be too polite to point out this butterball belly.

Garrus sighed, sinking slightly into the couch and resting his hands on his swollen middle, his plate empty. Shepard frowned softly, watching Garrus look down at the curve of his belly- the turian could barely see anything past his own fat from that perspective.

"I'm sorry, Garrus," she said, squeezing his shoulder. "I know how hard that must have been for you, to just end up where you started."

"Ah, it wasn't so bad," he looked up, grinning softly. "It's around that time you were moved to the hospital here, so I could stay close by."

She grinned, moving to grab a drink. "Oh!" Garrus shifted, turning towards the kitchen. "Could you grab me one of those smoothies, the ones with saragras, the bright red ones?"

Shepard stopped and quirked an eyebrow. "Garrus, aren't those meal replacement shakes?" She grabbed a bottle, checking the nutritional info. "Yeah, this is almost six hundred calories."

"Oh yeah," the turian said drily, smacking his round middle and making it ripple, spilling over his lap. "I don't want to lose my dainty figure, after all. C'mon, Jane, what's a couple extra calories going to do to me now? Besides, saragras is one of the sweetest dextro-friendly flavors I can find anywhere, it tastes *amazing*."

Shepard shrugged, shaking her head as she tossed Garrus the bottle. "I don't get it. I can count the fat turians I've seen on one hand, and I've never seen *your* appetite this big. This isn't just the result of stress eating."

"Oh, I'm on a bulking cycle- gonna go after Mr. Galaxy next year. Check out these massive guns." Garrus flexed his arms, thick bunches of fat squished together- but with a fair bit of muscle, buried deep under; Shepard's brows bounced when she felt how firm they were.

"Seriously, Vakarian."

Garrus rolled his eyes, sighing. "It's not stress eating, no. There was a word, Miranda used it once, what was it... Gourmet- no, Gourmand! That was it. I'm a Gourmand. I *like* good tasting food. It puts me in a good mood, and while you were under, well..." he spread his arms. "I needed an upper."

Jane grimaced, settling back down next to Garrus. "So... how'd you end up back at C-Sec?"

"Oh, that," Garrus grumbled. His shoulders visibly sagged, his face weary as he took a deep drink of his shake. "Well..."

Once I was settled in the apartment and you were transferred over to the hospital, I made a daily trip to check up on you. You were doing much better, to my relief- your hair finally started growing back. This was about six, seven months after the Reaper War; I remember our neighbors, the human couple, were putting up a Christmas tree. I did get you a Christmas present, but they were dextro-friendly chocolates, and well, I didn't want them to go bad- so, I owe you some chocolate.

At any rate, sitting in the apartment would drive me crazy. The Hierarchy was out, and despite being *very* polite, the Council gently told me they didn't have any Spectre armor for a turian my size. I spent a lot of time just wandering aimlessly. I was waiting for you, but I had no idea how long that wait would be- so, back to C-Sec I waddled, still eating my way to be beach body ready for you, of course. Executor Pallin died in the Battle Over London, and so Chellick, you remember him, was made Executor in his place- a safe choice, but I guess that's all anyone wanted after the Reaper War. He had no idea what to do with me. Making me a beat cop would be a waste, and extremely insulting, but he couldn't keep his eyes off this butterball I was lugging around, and I could tell he didn't want me to be one of the conventional top brass. Never mind I could still outshoot any of those rookies with my eyes closed, I didn't *look* fit for duty. So, "Chief Consultant Officer" was dreamt up to soothe my ego without giving me any *actual* say in how C-Sec was run. I was great for recruiting- C-Sec's numbers swelled almost as fast as I did when they heard the great Garrus Vakarian was back.

Of course, once they got a look at me, I think most of them stuck around to gawk- I made a party trick of swallowing a meter-long sub sandwich whole, like a Palaven Python. A few of them, like Tullus and Posca, came to me for advice or for help on their cases, and I did what I

could- most of it was just telling them common sense, but to hear them tell it, I revealed the secrets of the universe. For the first few months, it wasn't so bad- a lot of them figured out I'd give them tips and tricks for small bribes of food. Tukar said I was like the grandpa he never had, sharing stories and sage advice- so after I caved his skull in with my cane, I settled in for a little bit, until I realized how depressing the whole situation was- Wrex was all but crowned king of all krogan, Liara and Tali were pulling their entire civilizations back from the brink, and here I was, right back in C-Sec, the only difference being a bigger office and a custom desk so my gut wouldn't stop setting off the sensors. I had become the same type of armchair officer, apathetic and lazy, that made me mad enough to go and search you out all those years ago.

When it all hit, I almost wished I was back in Omega as Archangel. I stopped caring. Stopped showing up for work, when I realized that I could sleep with Chellick's mother and then call him a son of a bitch and still not get fired- not that I ever *tried* that. A part of me is glad, really, that you weren't around for that part. Just so you wouldn't see me turn into a fat pig. It's a state of mind, you know? I'm not talking about the weight, but the lifestyle- or lack of one I had. The only thing that made me feel *slightly* good, aside from any signs of progress for you, was food. I started bingeing.

Oh, the food I put away... I cracked my exoskeleton, I ate so much, so fast. That was a fun lecture from Dr. Chakwast. I spiraled, eating by the bucketloads, stuffing my face until I fell asleep, woke up with bits of wrapper and sauce clinging to my mandibles and crumbs all over me... and just went right back to eating. What was the point, you know? This is when I started getting mail- I think Liara knew something was wrong first, and then decided to let everyone know. I even got one from Javek- just two sentences. "I heard you were eating too much for your own good. Stop this, it is a waste of resources." Very moving stuff. I replied to everyone at least once, I think- "I'm fine, just busy, don't worry, making calibrations," all the usual guff.

"Wait, Garrus, stop," Shepard held up her hands. "You *broke* your exoskeleton? Are you going to be alright?"

"I'm fine, Jane, turian exoskeletons can repair themselves like broken bones. They can adapt, too, to uh... fluctuations in weight," Garrus said. "It... wasn't pleasant when it first happened, but, y'know. It adapted. I adapted. It's fine... it's fine."

Shepard and Garrus sat in awkward silence for a moment too long. Shepard frowned as Garrus stared vacantly, lost in his own thoughts at first, but then he looked ruefully at the empty plate and half-drunk smoothie, a "snack" that would have been an opulent meal for anyone else. "Garrus...? What aren't you telling me?"

The turian sighed, leaning back and tilting his head up, eyes closed; Shepard almost thought he was praying. "Look, Jane, I'm *really* not proud of this next part. Just... give me a moment, alright?" Garrus hefted his weight, sitting up again as his belly again advanced past his knees. He grabbed his shake and chugged the rest of it in one gulp. "Okay. I'm good."

I think everyone knows when they hit rock bottom- it's always like a splash of cold water. I woke up after one binge, and by this time, I was even bigger than I am now. I woke up, and I couldn't *get* up. There was just... too much of me, and I hadn't been exercising for nearly a year. My gut was bigger than some krogan, and it was now literally weighing me down. I was starting to panic because lying on my back, I simply could not get up, gravity wouldn't allow it. I had to roll on my belly like a varren, and from there, work myself up to a standing position, leaning against the walls and the couch, which I had broken by this point. It was humiliating, I was almost too weak to stand and all the time I was trying not to panic. I was huffing and puffing like some overheated engine just by *standing*. Then the doorbell rang. I dragged myself over and found Joker and EDI. I was so hungover, I only thought to ask if they had my breakfast order.

Both of them took one look at me, and well, it was all downhill from there. EDI took a quick body scan, and hooray for me, my body was eighty percent body fat. Joker had to pick his jaw up from the floor and the two of them nearly rolled me back through the hallway to get inside. I cursed Liara in my head; she kept threatening to send people to check up on me, and well, here they were. And here I was expecting some Shadow Broker goons, not worried friends. This whole place was a wreck- not a pig sty, maybe, but if it wasn't the couch, the bed, or the fridge, I didn't care about it, so there was this thick layer of dust *everywhere* that my huge ass didn't leave a huge indent on or my even huger gut hadn't left a smudged impression.

Joker couldn't help himself. "I heard there were some gravitational anomalies on the Station- who knew you were getting your own gravitational pull, huh?" Smart ass.

It was awkward. EDI kept *fixing* things and fiddling with everything in the apartment while I was trying to make polite conversation. Then, I caught something, a band of platinum and gold around Joker's finger- he and EDI got married. I thought about you, and that was no good, and then back to a pang of guilt- I knew that if I went back through my mail, I would probably find an invitation I had overlooked and ignored.

Joker played it off, saying it was a small affair. Miranda was EDI's maid of honor, and Joker picked Jack as his best man as part of another elaborate joke between them. Apparently, she looks good in a tux. He also said the only one on EDI's side that showed up was her grandmother, a toaster. Hilarious.

Still, things started to feel a little more normal. We all settled down and started swapping stories from the old days. Joker, however, couldn't keep his eyes off my gut. Both of them had helped me sit down, which was bad enough, but he was just staring, so I finally snapped and asked what the problem was. Joker's making more cracks- "it's time to face the elephant-sized turian in the room," and I'm getting ready to sit on him if he doesn't stop. EDI starts up with all these statistics about weight gain and obesity, and I don't want to hear about it. Joker tells me everyone's concerned, I tell him there's no need. We went back and forth, and finally I told Joker something I knew I was going to regret.

"You know, life's a lot easier as the getaway driver for every mission, so how about you stop acting like you know what I'm going through?"

Joker let me have it- literally. He hit me hard enough I actually fell over. He broke his hand on my mandibles, but I had gone to seed and not even looked at a gym in a year, and he was still fit for military duty- it was no contest, brittle bones or no. EDI straightens me up, patches up Joker, but all this time he goes on this rant, and I was still stunned so I just let him. He started with reminding me of who it was, exactly, that got everyone out of the Collector base in time, and that I would only weigh things down in my present state.

He told me a lot of hard truths. That he didn't run away, and he did what he knew he was best at to help the people he cared about- like EDI, like you, like me. Said he never thought I'd get the stick out of my ass just to eat it, that ignoring my friends is the biggest dick move after everything we've been through, and that you wouldn't want me to live like that. EDI decided the visit was over, and picked Joker up to carry him out- he got one last parting shot at me, though.

"What's going to happen if- no, when Shepard wakes up? Is she going to be happy to see what you've become?"

Shepard stared at Garrus in stunned silence. The turian had stopped talking, leaning his head back against the couch, eyes screwed close- and growing watery. He let out a shuddering sigh and sniffled before Shepard said anything. "Garrus... look, Joker was way out of line."

"No!" Garrus sat up suddenly, rubbing his eyes. "No, Jane, c'mon. No he wasn't. He didn't say anything that wasn't true. *I* was out of line for taking potshots at him when he and EDI came by because they were worried about me."

"Okay, well, you were both out of line, then." Shepard sat up, resting her hands on Garrus' chest so they were practically cheek to cheek. "Look at me, Vakarian. No one who knows what they're talking about says that being one of the survivors is easy. People like us, we don't just... drop all our weapons and armor and go and, I don't know, open up a flower shop. It doesn't work like that. You were stuck in limbo because you didn't know what to do with yourself, and didn't want to leave me behind. I don't want to leave *anyone* behind- Virmire, Krios, Mordin- I'm still not over any of them. But I've got *you*. And you, Vakarian, you've got me. I'm grateful you told me all of this- because I don't see someone pathetic or weak. I see someone strong enough to start digging themselves out of that hole. I see the man I love- and one that can, and will, kick as much ass as he wants before it's all over."

Garrus was silent, staring at Shepard with wide eyes. Slowly, he wrapped his arms around her, pressing her against his bulging belly, thick love handles, and pillowy chest. Tugging her close, he kissed her, holding her tight for a few lingering moments before they separated. "I love you, Jane."

"I love you too, you big oaf." They settled into their seats again, Shepard resting her head against the curve of his belly. "So... what happened after Joker left?"

Garrus grinned. "Well... Thankfully, this story doesn't have quite such a depressing ending. I couldn't get Joker's comments out of my head- he was right, a hundred percent. He gave me the kick in the flabby rear I needed to start turning things around. I needed a few days to collect myself and build up the courage to get a trainer to start exercising again- called everyone, apologized for being such an ass. Exercising has gone really well, actually- Vega gave me some tips for lifting weights, and after lugging this much weight around, I could probably bench press the Mako. I lost enough weight that I could actually move around again, but... I loved good food too much, so if you're waiting for me to fit into a size medium shirt ever again, I've got bad news for you. I cleaned up the apartment as best I could- told myself I was getting it ready for you."

The turian stopped, sharing a warm smile between him and Shepard. He then shifted his weight, leaning forward to press his gut against her. "I *also* took up more than a few cooking lessons. We haven't had the opportunity, but I can and will make a meal fit for a queen for you... speaking of, if you ever do shoot anything in *my* kitchen again, missy, we're going to have to have a long talk."

Shepard chuckled, giving him a mocking salute as she sank into the couch, pressed down by his weight. "Sir, yes sir."

"You remember that, Shepard- you might be the Commander and savior of all life as we know it in every corner of the galaxy, but in that kitchen, I'm god."

Shepard snorted into laughter. "You're *god*?"

"Well... you said something to that effect last night in bed," Garrus said, wagging his eyebrows. Finally, he cradled his massive belly, leaning back to let Shepard up. "So, there we have it," He hefted up his gut one last time, letting it drop with an audible slap against his keg-like thighs, wobbling like gelatin. "That's how you ended up waking up to this turian studmuffin. Aren't you lucky?"

Shepard leaned in, stealing another kiss. "I am." Holding each other close and cuddling for a moment, she did stop to think of something. "You *did* make up with Joker and EDI though, right?"

"Yes, yes," Garrus waved it off. "Joker's hand is fine now, too. He said it wasn't the first time he broke his hand working something rock-hard."

Shepard burst into another fit of laughter, leading to Garrus arching his brow quizzically. "What? What's so funny?"

Once her laughter died down, she looked back up to Garrus, still confused. "It's... don't worry, it's earth humor, you wouldn't get it."

Garrus slowly nodded, letting it drop. Shepard met his eyes, draping her arms over his thick neck. "So, that's it, right? We've both come clean- no more hidden trauma, no more secret aches and sorrows?"

The turian grinned crookedly. "Not that I can think of."

"Good." She paused, running her hand over his head crest. "Because I'm back now. We're both back. We made it, and now we've got our whole life together ahead of us. There's no Shepard without Vakarian..."

"And no Vakarian without Shepard." Garrus grinned wider, and holding Shepard tight, hefted her up. She clinged to his belly, legs wrapped as far around his wide hips as they could reach.

"What the hell are you doing *now*, Vakarian?" she demanded, as Garrus lumbered his way to the kitchen, still carrying her.

"What do you think? Getting started on dinner. I'm *starving*."

"You just ate!"

Garrus set her down, thumping his belly proudly. "You yourself said that was a *snack*. If we're going to take the galaxy by storm again, I want to be plenty well-fed. Besides- I dunno." His smile proved infectious, growing wide enough to dimple his bloated cheeks. "I feel lighter than I have in a long time."