Chapter 11 – Hell

It took a tenth of a second for Jessica’s brain to switch from the raw emotional shock of seeing her close friend’s head get blow off by a sniper round, to the grim, sharp determination of a soldier under fire. “Take cover!” she shouted to her team, running and sliding in behind cover herself. Civilians were running around wildly, picking up their crying children and trying to find places to hide.

“Fire coming from the far end of the docking bay!” Wolfe had judged where the enemy was located by the direction Sam’s headless body had fallen from the bullet impact. “Jack, shields up! Grunt! Kolyat! Get clear of the shuttle and get in to some god damn cover!”

As if Wolfe had read the enemy’s mind, a rocket suddenly streaked past them, colliding with the rear of the shuttle and causing a massive explosion that rocked the entire platform. Jack had reacted quickly, running towards Grunt and Kolyat who were still trying to get clear of the shuttle. She’d just managed to protect them from the blast with a large biotic shield projecting from an unseen power source inside her own body. That girl was incredibly powerful.

Enemy fire started zipping through the air wildly around Wolfe’s position. She could tell from the amount of ammunition they were wasting, firing even when they didn’t have a clear shot, that it must have been mechs. She took a quick sideways glance out from cover and confirmed her suspicions. There was close to fifty skinny, humanoid looking mechs marching out from their hidden positions at the end of the dock, all firing in her general direction. Grunt and Zaeed had already started laying down sporadic shots back at them to keep them from advancing. Grunt may have been young but he already had a soldier’s instincts.

Jessica rolled sideways out of cover in to the protection of Jack’s biotic shield so she could get an unimpeded look at the attackers. Jessica took down two mechs with her customised Harrier rifle while taking stock of their numbers through the targeting scope. “Thane! Kolyat! Show me some of those famous Drell sniper skills!”

Within three seconds, Thane had already dropped a mech with one round to the chest. Kolyat was only a heartbeat behind his father, taking out another with an almost identical shot to the chest. The boy was a fast learner. Wolfe saw him glance at his father, possibly for approval. Thane however had already slipped in to a state of cold focus, fluidly reloading before firing another round.
As if the large number of mechs wasn’t bad enough, Wolfe could see a squad of Cerberus Guardians lurking far at the rear, one holding the sniper rifle that must have taken out Sam and another reloading a rocket launcher. They were staying far back to avoid being targeted, letting the mechs march forward to absorb the limited ammunition Wolfe and her team had on hand. Thankfully Wolfe always insisted on being armed, even on what should have been harmless shopping missions like this one.

Then the real problem turned up. A squad of Phantoms came running out of cover from behind the mechs. One was dressed differently to the rest, all in black with two knives strapped to her boots, presumably the squad leader. Phantoms were an all female unit of Cerberus. Skilled with a sword and every one of them an exceptional hand to hand combatant. Suddenly they all disappeared, activating their cloaking tech. “Two can play at that game,” said Kasumi, activating her own cloaking system and running forward.

“Kasumi! Stay with the team!” yelled Wolfe, but it was too late. She saw a slight shimmer in the air about fifty meters away, indicating that Kasumi was already half way to intercepting the enemy on her own.

“Jessie!” yelled Zaeed from where he was ducked down behind a large shipping container reloading his rifle. “This reminds me of that little adventure we had on Tuchanka where we were pinned down by that idiot Krogan, Byle Yanik and his little army of secondhand mechs he’d bought to kill me with. Remember that?” he asked with a sly grin.

“He said you’d slept with his wife!” Wolfe replied, loosing a few more rounds at the oncoming mechs. “I’ve been meaning to ask you actually Zee. You didn’t actually sleep with a Krogan did you?”

Zaeed laughed. “A gentleman never tells,” he replied with a wink, leaning out from cover to fire another burst.

Grunt rumbled out a laugh of his own from behind cover on the opposite side on the bay. “You wouldn’t have enough sack to satisfy a Krogan female, human.”

Suddenly Wolfe noticed another shimmer in the air about sixty meters away. The problem with Kasumi wandering forward was that Wolfe wouldn’t be able to tell if that shimmer was her or the enemy. She took a calculated risk and loosed one shot at the object, enough to cause the cloak to momentarily drop but not enough to kill. It was a Phantom! The cloaking went back up as the Phantom darted back in to cover before Wolfe could take it out.

Wolfe cursed silently under her breath. She would have harsh words with Kasumi if they survived this. They needed to take out the mechs now so they could focus on the Phantoms that were closing in silently. Then they’d still need to worry about those Guardians that were for some reason still waiting patiently in the distance. *Why weren’t they closing in on their position while they were pinned down?*

“Shit, are we going to just stand here boss lady or we going to kick some ass?” asked Jack, still standing out in the open with her biotic shield taking a lot of punishment from enemy fire. Unlike
any other biotic Jessica had encountered previously, Jack’s shield didn’t seem to be losing strength. “I thought you said you were going to let me get my hands dirty!”

She seemed to be genuinely angry that she wasn’t able to get physically involved in the fight. Wolfe wagered that Jack would love to let loose with the shotgun strapped to her back but they couldn’t afford to have that shield drop. The enemy mechs were all grouped together, moving forward as one, concentrating their fire on Jack’s shields. If only Wolfe had a rocket launcher of her own or if Jack’s shotgun was about fifty times bigger they could take them all out with one hit. *Now there’s an idea*...

“Jack! Have you ever wondered what a cannon ball feels like?” Wolfe asked.

“Are you kidding me?! That’s how I feel all the time!” Jack replied with a devious smile.

“Grunt, how’s your throwing arm?” Wolfe yelled as Grunt looked over at her confused.

“Oh I like how you think Wolfe! This is gonna be fun” Jack replied with a massive grin on her face.

“Grunt, shoulder your shotgun and get over here behind Jack! Get a good grip on her shoulder straps and belt!” Jessica yelled. Grunt now had a smile of his own as he seemed to have figured out her plan. “Jack, bring your shield in close to your body and charge it up to bursting point. Get ready to unleash it the second you make contact with those mechs!”

Jessica rolled back behind cover as Jack’s shield shrank in size while glowing brighter, “Grunt, show me just how strong a genetically perfect Krogan really is! Throw her!!”

Grunt bent down at his knees and got a good strong grip on Jack’s straps, “You ready for this little sister?” he rumbled.

“I was born ready!” she laughed in reply. “Just make damn sure you throw straight!”

Grunt lifted her effortlessly off the ground, swung back with his hips and shoulders then practically shot her through the air straight at the oncoming droves of robots. Jessica could have sworn she heard Jack laughing for the two seconds she was airborne before crashing with a monumental explosion of blue energy that literally tore the robots apart. The ripples of energy caused the small hairs on the back of Jessica’s neck to stand up.

The blue haze started to clear and there was Jack in the middle, struggling to stand up. Her nose was bleeding but she was seemingly otherwise unharmed. Through the fog, Jessica saw four Phantoms approaching Jack’s position. By the time she’d levelled her rifle and taken aim, Thane temporarily took out the shield of one with a sniper round to the head. Kolyat then followed up the shot a split second later through the exposed shield in almost the exact same spot his Father’s shot had landed. The Phantom fell to her knees and slumped over dead, a clean hole burned straight through the side of her helmet.

Kasumi suddenly materialised behind the second Phantom, firing her shotgun right up against the enemy’s armor to instantly bypass the shield. Grunt roared and leapt forward with a biotic charge to drive the third straight off the balcony.
Jack looked up at Grunt’s face which was all full of concern for his small human friend. “Thanks, meatball” she said with a smile as Grunt helped pull her to her feet.

From behind Wolfe’s position, a group of C-Sec officers came running to try and assist against the Cerberus attack. There were three human males, a female Salarian and two male Turians.

Two of the humans and one of the Turians started running down the side of the platform towards the remaining mechs. They successfully took out four of the seven before the Turian was gunned down. The larger Turian who had stayed back to fire from cover shouted out to the remaining officers to find cover of their own. They didn’t listen.

The Cerberus Guardians in the distance mowed them down the second they got too close for comfort. The remaining human and Salarian left cover as well to try and avenge their fallen friends. The fourth Phantom Jessica had spotted ran through the human with her sword, leaving him in shock, holding his open stomach in his hands. The Salarian was next as the Phantom drove her sword straight through the officer’s chest.

Wolfe and her team fired at the Phantom but the shots that found their mark were absorbed by the enemy’s in built armor shield. The Phantom was on a path straight towards the remaining C-Sec officer. The Turian stood and lowered his weapon as if he’d given up and had accepted his death. At the last second as the Phantom thrust her sword forward, the Turian side stepped to the right and trapped the blade between his arm and chest, leaving him face to face his attacker. He raised his rifle and unloaded the entire clip point blank in to the Phantom. There was no surviving that.

The Turian dropped back in to cover and slipped back closer to Jessica’s position. “Thanks for the assistance. I’m Commander Wolfe. What’s your name, officer?” she asked, trying to keep him calm and focused after losing his colleagues.

“Decimus Kyrik, ma’am. My friends call me Decker” the tall, dark red faced Turian replied. The white markings on his face looking vaguely familiar to Wolfe, “What’s the sitrep Commander? Do you have confirmed enemy numbers? I count over thirty reinforcements at their rear. They may have more mechs stored for another wave.”

Jessica was mildly surprised at how calm the young Turian was and also at his very military like evaluation of what was going on. She also noticed that his words weren’t being relayed to her headset through her omnitool’s universal translator. He spoke fluent English which was almost unheard of for a Turian. He was well educated. “We’ve taken out the majority of the mechs and half a squad of Phantoms are still on the field. We could use any help we can get right now. Have you got a military history Decker?” she asked.

“Yes ma’am. Former Captain of the 26th Armiger Legion” he replied. “Proud member of Citadel Security now but more than happy to help as much as I can Commander”.

Jessica heard that tone in his voice and was sure that this young Turian missed his days in the military. A shot ricocheted off the top of the crate Jessica was crouched behind and she ducked her head down further. Why he left was a question for another day. “I’d love to hear more, soldier,” Jessica waited to see if he reacted to the title and saw that his chin tilted up a little upon being called
soldier again. Yes, he did miss it, “but for the moment I’m just glad to have an extra rifle in the hands of someone that knows how to use it. Lay down some suppressing fire while I try to radio my ship”.

Decker didn’t need further instruction. He leaned out from cover and loosed three rounds, dropping the remaining mech. Her crew had already taken out the others.

“I’d also love to know if you’re related to someone else with that same last name”, Jessica said as she started to input her ship’s emergency radio frequency in to her omnitool.

“Yes I am, ma’am”, Decker replied calmly.”Nihlus Kyrik was my Father”.

_The Turian Spectre murdered by Saren. There were indeed a lot of questions Jessica would love to ask this young Turian. That is, if they survived today._ Sudden silence stopped Wolfe mid transmission to the Occitania.

The Cerberus Guardians in the distance had stopped firing at Jessica’s position. _As if they wanted to let something have a clear path at them!_

Jessica yelled, “There were eight Phantoms!”

As the words had just left her mouth, the Phantom in black armor appeared right beside Kolyat. Kolyat was fast, instinctively throwing a punch at his enemy’s head. The Phantom in black was faster. As Kolyat swung, the lithe woman ducked under his arm and struck him in the armpit with her left hand. As Kolyat started to rotate towards her with his other arm, she moved forward and in to him, driving the butt of her sword in to his solar plexus. Kolyat fell to his knees.

Zaeed haled the black Phantom’s shields with rounds from his rifle as she rolled behind Kolyat, using him as a human shield. Zaeed cursed and lowered this weapon. Kasumi materialised again, right behind the Phantom, a smile on her face as she levelled her shotgun towards her enemy.

Suddenly Kasumi’s arm dropped and she screamed in pain. A large cut had formed across her shoulder as if she had been struck by an unseen blade. Another strike to the back of Kasumi’s leg caused her to fall to the ground. Her invisible attacker’s cloak shimmered and Jessica could see it was another enemy in generic white Phantom armor, much smaller in stature than the others. At a guess, Jessica assumed the girl was 16 at the oldest.

Wolfe and Zaeed fired at the girl but she had disappeared again and moved out of the line of fire too quickly. These Phantoms were clearly on a whole different level of skill to those Wolfe had faced before. Their cut and run tactics were devastatingly effective. This fight needed to end quickly.

Jess suddenly felt the same electrical sensation as when Kasumi was near her earlier and by reflex alone, slammed the butt of her gun in to the face of the third remaining Phantom. The enemy’s cloak dropped as she reeled back from the hit. Jess ignited her Omnistield and launched forward, slamming the Phantom off the edge of the balcony in a shower of orange fire.

A powerful shot struck Jessica’s chestplate from another unseen enemy. Decker fired in the general direction of the shot but hit nothing but air. There were three Phantoms left now, the one in black, the small one and one with a high powered rifle. Jessica felt a stab of pain even through her armor from that shot.
Jessica’s headset crackled as the enemy had broken in on her frequency. A loud male voice with a Russian accent bellowed in to her ears, “Commander Wolfe, I’ll see you in hell and you can take those Phantom bitches with you!”

Jessica saw the Phantom in black materialise again near Kolyat, waving frantically back at the Guardians watching from the distance. The woman screamed back through the radio “Piotr, don’t you do it you god damned bastard!”

Wolfe saw the targeting lazer hone in on Kolyat’s chest, still staggered on his knees, as the men in the distance zoned in on their area with another rocket launcher. She turned and took aim at the Guardian with the launcher but at this distance, rifle fire would do little against their shields. It looked as if one of the Guardians tried to stop the man with the launcher and was shot in the abdomen for it. The rocket launched...

Jessica boosted her tech armor and omnishield to the point of draining her energy reserves completely and ran in between Kolyat and the rocket. She didn’t even hear the rocket collide with her as it sent her flying through the air. There was only as split second of pain and then the darkness enveloped her.

Zaeed, Thane, Decker and Grunt continued firing at Piotr’s departing troops in the distance but it wasn’t to any effect. With one last burst of energy, Jack grabbed the one who fired the rocket in her biotic grasp and launched him a hundred meters in the air. The man’s colleagues didn’t seem to care as they all ran off without a backwards glance.

Silence had started to return to the port as the smoke from the explosion started to dissipate. All the civilians had evacuated the area, leaving those still standing to check on their fallen colleagues.

The Phantom in black and the small one were down and unconscious. The third one with the rifle had voluntarily surrendered. The blonde woman had taken off her helmet to reveal a beautiful yet angry face. Being backstabbed by your own people would do that to a person. Decker was already putting handcuffs on her before the dust had completely settled.

Grunt had Kasumi in his big arms and was carrying her away from the still flaming wreckage of their shuttle. Jack was walking very slowly back towards the rest of them, holding her side and kicking any mechs she passed by to make sure they were down for good. Those things would fight on even after their legs had been blown off.

Thane was at his son’s side who was unconscious but breathing fine. Then he heard Zaeed yelling, “Breathe Jessie! Breathe dammit!”

Zaeed was holding Jessica up and shaking her. Her chest armor had collapsed inwards and was crushing her heart and lungs. Thane got to his feet in a heartbeat and sprinted over to where she was laying. He quickly seated himself behind her on the floor and pulled her closer in to himself so he could wrap his arms around her chest. Zaeed was on the edge of tears. “Massani, pull those side clips up and remove her chest armor” Thane said calmly.

Zaeed hesitated. Obviously Jessica was one of the few people he’d grown close to and the thought of losing her had shattered his usual confidence.
“Massani!” Thane repeated.

Something seemed to snap inside Zaeed and that confident purpose in his eyes returned. He quickly snapped open the clips on either side of Jessica’s armor and pulled the chest piece free. The hesitation returned for a split second as he saw all the blood staining her shirt. The armor had cracked and sections had penetrated her skin deeply.

“What do I do now?” Zaeed asked, looking at Thane desperately for a miracle.

“Nothing”, he replied. “Just stand back and give her room. Room to breathe.”

Thane looped his arms underneath Jessica’s and pulled her shoulders back, arching her chest forward, then back. Her head was leaning back limp on his shoulder. Thane whispered in to her ear with that calm, deep voice, “Breathe with me Jessica. Breathe with me. Breathe with me...”

To be continued.