

Two Out of Three

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Two Out of Three

by [guesswhattimeitis](#)

Summary

Aria T'Loak and Commander Shepard cross paths, prompting confused feelings.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

A light breeze rolled across Aria's face. She had stirred only a moment before, and wondered if the draft was something she imagined. After a moment of lying still, the breeze came again. It wasn't something she imagined. There was a moment where Aria questioned if she would have left her balcony door open last night, and in a moment she remembered what had happened last night. What she had done. *Who* she had done.

Slowly she turned over in her bed, Thessian linens smooth against her bare skin. Her *very* bare skin. The bed was otherwise empty, and her eyes made their way around the room to see if the balcony was indeed open. Finding it was, Aria was surprised to find that someone was sitting on it, laid back in one of the chairs there and holding a rocks glass with something dark in it. The shock of blonde hair told her her memory of the previous night wasn't an illusion. But the fact that she was still here was...a mystery. Slipping silently out of the bed, Aria pulled a black silken robe from the hook it hung on near the headboard, and lazily pulled it over herself. She didn't bother to close it, just walking lazily to the balcony. No sense in letting her *guest* sit alone.

Shepard was humming something softly as Aria made her way to the balcony. It sounded sad, melancholy, maybe nostalgic. Aria couldn't place it, but the tune was clear enough to get a feeling for it. She was wearing her shirt from the night before, a simple black tee with her trademark red and white stripes on one shoulder. Otherwise she had only bothered to put her panties back on, jet black boyshorts that more resembled compression shorts than undergarments. Aria dropped into the chair next to Shepard, but made no attempt to start a conversation. They sat there for a minute, Shepard humming and Aria listening.

Aria was not a nostalgic woman. She wasn't a particularly warm or caring person. There was a part of her that wanted to kick Shepard out the moment she woke up, or at the very least ask why she hadn't left yet. But she wasn't heartless. Not really, no matter how hard she tried. She was mean, and ruthless, and cold when she needed to be. But there was something to Shepard that brought out something unfamiliar in her. Eventually Shepard stopped humming, and took a sip of the dark brown liquid in her glass. Aria checked the time, noting it was early in the morning and no longer late at night.

"I wasn't expecting you to be here this morning." It was a statement, not a question. Aria did not mean to imply that Shepard should leave, but she wanted to make it clear what she had expected.

"Would you like me to leave?" Shepard didn't look at Aria, her eyes still fixed far off into the smoky distance. Her tone was neutral, her jaw set. Shaking her head, Aria told her the truth.

"I didn't say that." The air was quiet for a moment before Shepard started to speak.

"I wanted to apologize. For last night. What I did was selfish. You don't deserve that," she said, taking another sip of her drink. Aria couldn't believe what she was hearing. An apology was the last thing she was expecting. After taking a moment to think, Aria reached out and took Shepard's drink, smelling it apprehensively. The thick scent of alcohol hit her nose, and she placed it outside of Shepard's reach on a small table on her opposite side. Shepard gave her a bland look before looking back out over the balcony.

“You have nothing to apologize for. Even if your motives were to drown your troubles, I knew that’s what you were doing. A woman like you wants to drown her sorrows with my alcohol, laying in my arms? I don’t do anything I don’t want to, Shepard.” Aria took a moment to think before proceeding. “I quite enjoyed our night together, actually. You made me feel young again.” Another moment to process the sentimental garbage coming out of her mouth. “Tell anyone I said that and I’ll mount your head on my wall.” It was a mostly empty threat. Mostly.

Shepard smiled at that, just a small, faint smile.

“I’m glad it wasn’t just for me then.” There was something about the look in her eyes that was far away, like she wasn’t really looking at what was in front of her. The scars on her face and arms glowed a dull, almost unnoticeable red, her eyes more visibly so. Aria had melded with Shepard the previous night, as they lay in one another’s arms, basking in the glow of a shared night together, and while there was pain, physical and emotional, that threatened to drive Aria out, there was something much duller, much *worse* underneath it all. A feeling of loss. A feeling of emptiness. A feeling of *failure*.

In that moment Aria knew she shouldn’t have looked. She was a ruthless person at heart, willing to take from others no matter the cost if it benefitted her. There should have been no hesitation to use that knowledge to leverage Shepard even further. Having the savior of the galaxy on a leash was certainly tempting. But it was too far. The loss in Shepard’s heart matched a feeling she had thought she had buried. Her daughter’s death was still fresh, all these years later. Shepard’s loss was not deeper, but more broad; her life, her friends, her love, her very identity, her bodily autonomy. She was the ruined shell of a person who by rights had nothing to ground her and nothing to motivate her. It was no wonder she had tried to drink away her sorrow and drown it in Aria’s bed.

The minutes of silence between them stretched out to feel like a lifetime. Some part of Aria dreaded that maybe she had started to feel something more than simple lust for the handsome, powerful woman, but if it had happened it was already too late to stop it. Still, Aria wasn’t a blushing maiden; she knew whatever this was, whatever feelings she had and whatever she might call her moments with Shepard were fleeting. That was, in the end, for the best, though Aria was going to allow herself a bit of selfishness, if she was able. Finally she broke the silence.

“It’s still early. Would you like to come back to bed with me?” It wasn’t something she would offer to anyone else. Aria had not known Shepard long but she suspected the commander had that effect on many people.

“I don’t know if I’ve got the energy to go again,” Shepard said wryly, a lazy half smile on her face. Aria wanted to preserve her reputation as a cold, all-powerful bitch. She really did. But... there was something about her...

“I wasn’t planning on that. Just, lay with me.” Now that was an offer she hadn’t made in a long time. Maybe centuries. It wasn’t like her, wasn’t something she did lightly, wasn’t demanding or controlling. It was an offer of comfort and, to some degree, devotion. Shepard had somehow managed to wrap her around her finger and Aria wasn’t sure how she felt about

that. But the look of questioning and perhaps longing on Shepard's face made her feel like she actually wanted to.

Aria had been informed when Shepard came aboard her station. Instead of business, as it had been two days back, it was for 'shore leave', though Aria wasn't too concerned about the why. Shepard was a ticking time bomb, an anomaly, and an annoyance. So when Shepard was on Omega, Aria wanted to know about it. She hadn't brought a shore party with her, so that was something to celebrate, only one unpredictable madwoman to worry about for the moment.

Aria had been informed when Shepard made an immediate beeline for Afterlife. Not only was this woman trouble, but she was trouble that had already ended up on her doorstep twice in the span of a week. And now, three times. Although as soon as Shepard was in Afterlife, she made her way to the bar and apparently had no business with the queen or anyone else, so that was something. Aria didn't think that Shepard had any interest in Afterlife as anything but a vehicle to speak to her and try to get information, a place for business and not for play, despite the scantily clad dancers and the plethora of alcohol.

Aria had been informed when Shepard had had her fifth drink and showed no signs of stopping. Everything about this woman was a possible problem, and having a powerful and driven biotic drunk in her club wasn't something Aria wanted to have to clean up. But while that much ryncol was enough to put a krogan on the floor, Shepard was apparently made of sterner stuff. That concerned Aria for a different reason. She wasn't some ordinary human after all, the lights in her eyes and under her skin weren't just for show. A human that could hold her liquor was one thing; a woman that could out-drink krogans and live was another.

Aria had been informed when Shepard started asking questions about her at the bar. The bartender was smart enough to immediately send word about Shepard's meandering questions, and Aria was interested to see where this went. Worried about what Shepard could be planning, since she was such an unknown, but interested. She lived for power plays and balancing acts, and this was just one more to add to her ever growing pile. It was frightening. She decided she liked it.

Aria had *not* been informed that Shepard had ordered another ryncol and a second drink, left the bar, and sauntered remarkably gracefully up the steps to her throne. As the inebriated woman made her way towards the couch, Aria started to prepare a sly remark. Bray and Grizz gave Shepard a look but otherwise let her pass without issue. With a solemn nod of her head that Aria chose to believe wasn't mocking, Shepard handed Aria a glass. It *looked* like her favorite drink, but it was hard to tell. If the bartender was giving away what her favorite drink was to anyone that asked she was going to have to have a word with him.

And then, Shepard sat down on the couch. Very nearly on top of Aria herself.

Her right arm held her drink steady, a rocks glass with something rather blue in it, and her left arm snaked around the back of the couch and rested just behind Aria's shoulder, just far enough away not to touch. Shepard was sitting *very* close to Aria, and out of the corner of her eye she saw Bray and Grizz tense up. With a subtle shake of her head, they stopped moving but didn't relax. This show of companionship was unexpected. What a strange woman she was.

"Can I help you?" Aria put a good bit of edge in her voice. She was too intrigued to just kick Shepard out straight away, but not intrigued enough to not let her know who was still in charge. She didn't appreciate people acting like they could do whatever they wanted, but she respected that Shepard had the quad to try it.

"I thought you might be lonely up here, thought you could use some company." That was not what she was expecting. But this was an opportunity she couldn't pass up. A drunk woman was a woman that might give away her plans, or her disposition, or something useful for later. It was with this thought, and this thought alone, that Aria decided to humor the woman.

"Bray, Grizz: I'm not taking any more guests tonight. No one else comes up the stairs, and get some bottle service up here." She said it with her best commanding tone, and her lackeys looked at each other before turning their backs and heading out of sight. Aria didn't much care what they might think of what she was doing. It was her club, her station, and she was going to get Shepard trashed and find out what made her tick. After they were gone, Shepard took another sip of her drink before facing Aria, her face close and breath hot.

"You want me all to yourself? I thought you didn't like me, Your Highness." Aria rolled her eyes. She wasn't going to put up with that. She took a sip of the drink she had been handed, noted it was, in fact, her favorite, and responded curtly.

"Aria or nothing, Shepard. Don't patronize me." Her voice was thin, but Shepard didn't recoil. Of course she wouldn't. She didn't seem to be following Omega's one rule very well, but she hadn't outright broken it yet. Yet.

"I'm sorry, Aria. It won't," she blinked once and shuddered, "happen again. This stuff is going through my system all wrong." Turning her head away, Shepard appraised her drink. No doubt it was ryncol, heavy and powerful alcohol that should have already knocked her out.

"Then maybe you should slow down." Aria laced the words with a bit of ice but Shepard missed it.

"Can't. This damn new body doesn't like to stay drunk." A new body? What did she mean by that? It was strange enough that Shepard was alive after apparently having been spaced, but the idea that she might be in a new body was disconcerting at best.

"You can't *stay* drunk? Sounds like a nice problem to have." Aria wasn't sure if it was or wasn't, but wanted more details regardless.

"Fancy implants. Keeps me running, keeps my head clear. Plus this hungry new amp in my head, a bleeding edge L5 burns like a house on fire. Gotta put a lot in me to get me drunk,

gotta keep putting it in to stay that way.” She paused, looking off into the distance before continuing. “Can’t really run away from anything, anymore.” The last bit knocked Aria’s thoughts off course. She wasn’t expecting Shepard to get sappy on her couch. There might be something of use in that, but so far it just sounded like a sad woman trying to drown her problems.

“So you’re drinking all my booze, then?” A server had arrived, bringing a bottle of ryncol and a tray to place on the couch, depositing both without a word. Shepard spoke up once she had left.

“Precisely. Plus, it got me brave enough to bring a beautiful woman a drink, and she even took it.” Aria wasn’t a stranger to compliments and people making passes at her but this was shameless, sloppy, and yet again unexpected. Shepard didn’t seem to be the type of woman to go about things like this. She seemed unbalanced, at odds with the Shepard that Aria had spoken to about a doctor in the slums and a vigilante in a dead end alley.

“And now that she’s taken your drink, and let you sit as close as you want, what are you going to do next?” Aria looked Shepard directly in the eyes as she said it. She wanted to challenge the drunk woman, and really draw out what brought her up here in the first place. It would not be so easy.

“Next? I never thought I’d make it this far. Frankly I’m just happy you haven’t thrown me out.” There was an impulse to do just that, bubbling up in defiance at Shepard. Aria wanted to do it just to hurt her, just to show she could. As threatened as Aria felt by Shepard, she was slowly starting to feel a sort of affection for her. Misplaced, surely, but the feeling was there all the same. But she wouldn’t learn much more by throwing her out. Instead, Aria polished off the glass Shepard had brought her. Time for something harder.

“Pass me the bottle.” Aria didn’t like ryncol. It was harsh and strong and pungent and unsubtle. But it got the job done, and right now the job that needed doing was to blunt the deep impulse in her brain to try to make an example out of Shepard. She wanted to pick the woman up by her throat and throw her at a wall. And then run her tongue across Shepard’s collarbone. It was a complicated feeling she had been struggling with since meeting her.

After she poured herself a full glass, she refilled Shepard’s and they sat in silence for a while, drinking without looking at one another. Aria noticed at last that as close as Shepard had got, they still weren’t actually *touching*, the barest distance between them. Even drunk she had the good sense and manners to not be overbearing to that degree. It was sickening how sanctimonious Shepard seemed. It probably wasn’t on purpose but it didn’t much matter; Shepard was a virtuous and respectful woman to the very end, and no amount of alcohol seemed able to shake her of that. It was annoying. If she was going to be flirty she should at least get a little handsy. Aria wasn’t shy about what she wanted.

So, as subtle as her suddenly airy head would let her be, Aria scooted just a bit closer to Shepard. Not a lot. Only a hair’s width, all told. But enough for their legs to be pressed firmly together at the thigh. She stretched herself back on the couch so Shepard’s arm rested more across her shoulders than the couch, and she slipped one arm not so subtly behind Shepard’s back, letting her hand rest on her waist. That night Aria had opted to wear something less *tactical* than usual. She didn’t always wear her commando leathers, and tonight she had

chosen a less confining dress, just long enough to keep her covered, with a halter top and a plunging neckline. She had even decided to forgo her trademark jacket, the heat of the club getting on her nerves and setting her on edge. So when she snuggled up to Shepard, there was very little indeed between them, and Shepard's bare hand draped across her bare shoulder felt electric. Maybe she had been a little quick with the ryncol. Maybe her heart had begun to race because she had had too much. Maybe.

Shepard's whole demeanor immediately changed at the contact. She was perhaps less comfortable with the arrangement than her bravado had claimed. Still, after a moment she relaxed, took a sip of her drink, and leaned into the contact. Letting her hand down off the back of the couch, she clutched loosely at Aria's shoulder, rough hands on smooth skin. Finally, she knocked back the last of her glass and set it on the tray at her side, the first time she relinquished it since coming up to the throne.

Their faces were close, eyes locked. Aria hadn't intended to take things this far, but she wasn't exactly disturbed or upset at the change. Tonight was full of surprises. And one of them was how long they just sat there. Neither of them moved. Frozen in each other's gaze, it was like they were staring down one another, waiting for the first one to break, a silent battle raging inside. Aria wasn't one to lose. Apparently, neither was Shepard. Finally, Aria voiced the challenge openly.

"You've come this far. I thought you didn't feel fear." She wanted to hear Shepard admit defeat, admit anything. Or maybe just take her then and there on the couch, messy and languid and imperfect. The casual physical contact with Shepard had reminded her how long it had been, and as much as she loved to be in control she wanted Shepard to press her into the cushions and have her way with her. She could be simple sometimes too. But Shepard flinched, her face twitching for a moment before she looked away. It was a victory maybe, but Aria didn't feel like she had won. Not when Shepard spoke.

"It's part of the mystique, isn't it? The *fearless* Commander Shepard. The *invincible* Commander Shepard. The *noble* Commander Shepard." She grimaced, and let out a sigh. Aria didn't want to interrupt, but she didn't ask for philosophy. Shepard continued, "The unfortunate reality is it's all a load of *shit*, a great big facade and there's very little underneath it. If there was ever a Commander Shepard like that, she wasn't me." There was venom in the words. Aria didn't have any answer to it, but she wouldn't let Shepard slip into some sort of depressive state. Not on her couch, not tonight.

"Shepard. Why are you really here tonight?" She cut right to the heart of it. No more games.

"Won't you humor a heartbroken woman and just drink with me?" That wasn't an answer. It was a deflection. Aria brought a hand up to Shepard's cheek, and turned her head so their eyes met again.

"I'm not a cure for heartbreak. But we both have needs. I think we could keep each other company tonight," she said, leaning close enough that she could feel Shepard's breath on her lips, "if that's what you want." Aria wasn't sure if it was the ryncol or her latent attraction to Shepard that was bringing this on, but she didn't care. Her feelings surrounding Shepard had started to shift once she saw the cracks in her armor. And frankly, she could figure out what

she actually wanted and how she actually felt later, when her head was clear and Shepard was naked in her bed.

“I don’t need your pity.” It was barely a whisper. Aria smiled, her eyes not leaving Shepard’s.

“I don’t pity fuck *anyone* . Not even you. But my bed is big enough for two and I could use a little company. Someone to keep me warm for the night. Do you think you could manage that?” At the start of all this Aria didn’t think she’d be propositioning Shepard. She didn’t see it happening. And yet.

Shepard closed the distance between them, her lips soft and hesitant. Her free hand rested on Aria’s thigh, skin on skin, as she pulled the smaller woman close. It was tender, only the bitter taste of ryncol and the pounding music a reminder of their surroundings. Aria pulled back after a moment, giving Shepard a dark and lustful look.

“Let’s go somewhere a little more private.”

End Notes

Ok shorter notes on this one, I felt that this one was suitably close to being done to be posted, and I'd like to start getting pieces of this series out into the world.

I considered writing the actual rendezvous between these two but it didn't feel right whenever I tried, so I might come back and add a second chapter if I can find a way to make it feel good but for now, consider this one complete.

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