

Chapter 6

Eila paced back and forth in front of the Inn. According to Vincent, her ride to Midgar should arrive within the hour. But it already has been twenty minutes past that hour and there was no sign of the airship that he ordered from Rocket Town. Glancing at a small map displayed on the wall, Rocket Town was just across the Nibel Mountains. If it was taking this long for the ship to arrive from there, how much longer would it take for her to get to Midgar?

Traveling on Nia wouldn't be advisable either. The magical bird had it's limits. Being able to fly a maximum of three hours at top speed. It was fast enough, but, they'd crash down into the ocean. Eila let out a long sigh and sat down on a bench, propping her chin on her retractable staff.

Finally, she heard her name being called. Jumping up from her seat with a start and grabbing the little travel bag Vincent had provided for her, she made her way to the town's exit. There, Vincent was waiting for her, and right behind him on an open field was a miniature version of the Highwind. The airship had the same blimp and a cabin that could hold up to five passengers.

A friendly looking man in his late thirties stepped out of the ship and approached her and Vincent. "Sorry 'bout the delay. As soon as we heard the situation, Ma'am SHERA ordered us to launch 'Tornado Junior' here." He indicated the airship and grinned. "It's the latest air vessel model that we've built so far. It's the first one, by the way. Guess that means the Captain will see his new baby sooner than he planned."

Vincent looked at the man indifferently. "Is it as fast?" He said in a monotonous I-really-don't-care tone. The pilot immediately stopped laughing at his own joke and nodded.

"Fastest one, yet." He said. "Three times the speed of Highwind II."

Vincent turned to Eila, his serious and unchanging expression making the girl tremble a little. "He will bring you to Midgar." He told her and walked past her. Without as much as saying goodbye, he entered the weapon shop and closed the door.

Both Eila and the pilot raised an eyebrow at the man's behaviour. But they could talk about that on the way to Midgar. They had no time to lose.

"Thanks for everything, Vincent!" Eila yelled at the weapon shop before she closed the metal door of the Tornado Jr. She knew that Vincent would hear that. Him and his super keen senses. If not, then, hopefully one of the townspeople would relay the message to him. She took a deep breath and signaled the pilot to start their journey.

The Television hissed with static. Blurred images of people passed the distorted screen, adding only to the annoyance of the five viewers. It was an old television set and a damaged one at that. But, here in the darker part of Midgar slums, such a thing was a rarity.

"Give it a little kick to the side." One of the viewers said and demonstrated it on the withered T.V. set. The screen flickered with the blow, then the image cleared as well as audible. "See?"

It was the news again. Boring news. The Gainsborough versus Strife case and all the celebrity stuff happening. Frivolous weather and news reports that lead to nowhere important. Finally, came the report on the 'Wild Beasts' that roamed and killed all throughout Midgar City. That caught the viewer's attention.

"That's us." One of them hissed proudly as images of dead bodies and worried people were flashed on screen. Mayor Reeve was being interviewed, but offered very little reassuring speeches. They knew that they would never be caught by the ShinRa Army. They were too busy appeasing the people...and the people were too busy following the Strife case.

A perfect cover up for their mission of liberation.

"Get ready, we leave before sunset. The bombs are in place...we only need to wait." A new comer said. Appearing behind from where the viewers sat and gazed at the Television set. They responded immediately to their leader, Silver. The blind man was not one of them on the outside. He was blessed to have been left with smooth, pale skin and complete human features. Unlike the rest of the pack that had neither of these.

Rippled dead skin and tissue. Reeking with the stench of decay and the over abundance of mako in their blood. They hated themselves almost as much as they hated those who have done this to them.

This was their revenge. By this time tomorrow, the Television would spark to life once again to show their victory over the oppressive creatures who call themselves "humans."

Scarlet crossed her legs and flipped away a strand of golden hair from her face. She sat on a large and soft couch opposite to Mayor Reeve. According to Reeve, they would meet the person Tifa chose to represent Cloud in this, so called, legal matter.

"I can't wait." Scarlet muttered, while playing with the strand of hair around her fingers. She smiled slyly and gave a little wink at the Mayor who was busy with paper work.

Reeve let out a deep sigh and glanced at the foxy woman sitting across the low wooden desk. "This is senseless, Scarlet. You're not doing us any good. The last thing that the people need is to be told that their hero is a murderer." He returned his weary gaze to the case report on his hands. There were more important matters he had to attend to. One of them were the beast attacks. Now, that was the real murder.

"But that's the truth!" Scarlet said, giving him a very unsavoury laugh. "The people need to know that they will not be fooled by a pretty-looking boy claiming to be a saint."

"Scarlet, the only evidence that we have is Mrs. Gainsborough's testimony and the fact that the girl is still missing. But that does not make Cloud Strife a criminal." Reeve retorted, his voice slightly rising in tone to reveal his annoyance.

However, the woman only shrugged and rolled her eyes. "It's the people who will persecute him, not me. That's what they need, right? Encouragement to fight."

"You're just trying to ruin their lives." Reeve muttered. "I know how you twist and take the law as if it were a piece of clay, Scarlet. I know how you love playing with people's lives and their agonies." Like she was doing now. If only his hands were not bound by honor. The people did deserve to know what was really going on. Cloud was brave to face this challenge head on, not running away from the truth.

Reeve pursed his lips and shook his head sadly. Everything was going along so well, why did this have to happen? Why at such a critical time as this? The people are still trying to recover from meteor, and now they are faced with beasts that threaten to extinguish them at a flash. He wouldn't forgive Scarlet if they found out that all of this was for nothing.

A soft beep introduced the arrival of their guests. Tifa Lockheart and Cloud's representative.

Scarlet fixed her hair and grinned at Reeve. "Finally."

The doors opened and Tifa entered the meeting room. She walked briskly in front of Reeve and Scarlet to introduce her companion.

"This is our representative." she said in a formal tone which barely concealed the flame underneath. "Mr. Eiji Mishima."

The youth walked in slowly, confidently to where Tifa stood. He was taller than both Reeve and Scarlet in her high-heels. Wild and determined hazel eyes set against his rich Wutai-an skin color. His lips were twisted in a proud smile. Short, black hair swept back with occasional spikes falling below his eyes. He looked impressive, underneath his dark trench coat and suit and tie, they could see traces of a muscular body.

"Good afternoon." He said. "I am Eiji Mishima from Wutai."

"Ah, the Resort Province, am I correct?" Scarlet said in a mocking tone. Trying not to act impressed at the young man who dared to challenge her in this matter. But then again, he was a new one. Something she could easily corrupt.

"Yes, the Provincial town that cut the ShinRa forces in half." Eiji grinned referring to the utter loss of the ShinRa army to Wutai a few years back. Their only asset being Sephiroth. He is dead now, and Wutai, has slowly regained their name.

Scarlet didn't take that remark too kindly. Her eyes suddenly flared with anger at the young man's tongue. "It's amazing how a common biker can be dressed up so prettily and be called a lawyer. You hardly resemble that, my dear." She sneered at both Tifa and Eiji, crossing her arms across her chest to intimidate them.

But Eiji reacted by running his hand through his hair in an almost familiar manner. "It's even more amazing how a pretty face who barely wore decent clothing be called a ShinRa Developer in a matter of late 'presidential' nights." He grinned as Scarlet's face flushed red..

"Who are you? Where did you learn that?" She demanded, trying to remain as calm and composed as she could.

"Please, Miss Scarlet, I do not wish to re-live past memories. Our concern is Gainsborough and Strife." Eiji stated in a formal tone. "And I challenge you to a real trial this time. With a real jury and a real court."

Tifa smiled. She remember what Scarlet meant by "court room." It was really a public execution chamber and anybody in there is always considered as guilty. They had a fighting chance this time and by the way that Eiji was making Scarlet's ears smoke, she knew they could trust him. Cloud would be saved.

"I guess that is all I can say. I would like to speak with Mr. Strife." Eiji turned to Tifa who nodded and lead him to the door. He gave a polite farewell to Mayor Reeve and followed Tifa outside the room, leaving the two stunned individuals in silence.

Reeve was the first to break the silence by clearing his throat. "It appears that one of the corporate shadows have come into the open." He said while returning to his seat. Scarlet eyed him wildly.

"Are you saying that he used to work for ShinRa?" She asked in a voice filled with merciless ice.

"Yes. You'd better watch yourself, Scarlet. The boy has a sting that is more shocking than lighting. He knows what he's doing."

Scarlet dismissed Reeve's words with a wave of her hand. "Do I have to be afraid of a common biker, Reeve? I've spent years in this corporation, I'm even surprised that someone has dared face me."

"He's not just a biker, Scarlet. He is, in a manner of speaking, a ShinRa."

Scarlet's eyes widened at Reeve's words. Surely, all her years working very close to both the late president ShinRa and his son, she has never known of anything so absurd such as this. "You lie, Reeve. You're just trying to catch me off-guard."

Reeve raised his palms in the air and grinned. "No, I'm not. A little younger than Rufus. He resembles more of his Wutai mother. Another company secret. He's not the only one, Scarlet. Who knows how many more unfortunate children were abandoned by their busy and important father. It makes sense, however." Reeve rubbed his chin, taking note of the rough stubble that has grown during these taxing days. The he looked directly at Scarlet.

"How do you suppose Don Corneo was given such a high responsibility over the slums?"

Scarlet stared at the floor in disbelief. She was so close, yet, she knew nothing.

"It doesn't matter." She suddenly snapped. "Strife will get what he deserves."

Reeve grinned and returned to his paperwork once again. Ignoring Scarlet as she stormed out of the room.

Tifa was overly excited to break the news to Cloud. Their representative has proven himself to be a very potent weapon against Scarlet. She found herself walking briskly through the prison halls with Eiji following close behind.

When they reached Cloud's cell, she immediately wrapped her arms around his waist and pressed her cheeks against his chest. "Cloud, you're gonna be alright. " She said, glancing at Eiji from over her shoulder. "This is Eiji Mishima. You should have seen how he manhandled Scarlet. He'll get you out of here."

Cloud stiffly shook the other man's hand, though their expressions remained serious. "And...how do you plan to do that, Mr. Mishima?"

Eiji took a deep breath and apologized. "I'm afraid that it is going to take a miracle and huge amount of investigation before I can do that. Unless we find Miss Eila and prove that she left Midgar willingly, then we could win this case. Unfortunately, Scarlet has a criminal mind."

"Tell me something we don't know." Tifa said with a casual roll of her eyes.

"There are two things that she will do. She'll either try to stop Eila from coming back to Midgar, or she has Eila hidden somewhere." Eiji then dropped his gaze to the floor and offered a more serious tone. "Unless, she plans on killing Eila herself to get her revenge on you."

Cloud muttered out a curse and broke free from Tifa's embrace. "Damn...this doesn't have to go that far...You have to find her." he told Eiji desperately. "I don't care if I rot here in jail...but just find her and make sure that she's all right. Please." .

Tifa sat down beside Cloud who unconsciously retreated to a dark corner, gently stroking his back and praying in silence that things would turn out alright. Yet, at the back of her mind, she could not help but feel envious of Eila, who seemed to be the focus of all the attention. Especially Cloud's.

Eiji on the other hand, understood how Cloud felt and the urgency of his plea. "I will do my best, Mr. Strife." He said and meant every word. Eiji promised to himself that he would not let injustice reign over this new Midgar. He intended to keep that promise.

The sun has nearly sank into the horizon as the Tornado Junior made its way through the clouds. It sped over the wide ocean that separated the two continents. The winds aiding it in its desperate struggle to reach Midgar City in the least amount of time. The lives of many depending on its precious passenger who lay fast asleep on her seat.

Eila's head was tilted to the side, leaning against a fluffy pillow for support. They've been traveling for over six hours and she found it necessary to sleep the rest of the way. Fortunately, her dreams were pleasant this time. Though it was like any incoherent dream, it left her with a cheerful feeling when she opened her eyes.

"How much longer till we get to Midgar?" She asked the pilot while lazily lifting her head from the pillow.

"About three hours more. Lotsa time to catch up on your beauty sleep." The pilot grinned and returned his attention to maneuvering the ship so that it would sail upon the winds.

Eila lay her head back down on the pillow, but did not close her eyes this time. Worrying thought filled her head. Most of them were of Cloud and the trouble that she has caused him. He kept on telling her not to get involved in this fight against the beasts. She should have listened and just allowed him to take her and Miss Elmyra as far away as possible. At least, he wouldn't be accused of kidnapping her. Maybe if she listened, they'd see each other again in much better terms than this.

Another wave of nervousness crossed her chest as the pilot announced that they were already flying over Junon Military Base. The ShinRa base that has been left operational for ShinRa army training and weapon development. She feared that these weapons would be used to destroy the Jenova beasts with the people not knowing that they are also their brothers.

But how would she convince the people not to raise arms against the beasts? Who would listen to her and believe what she says? These people are driven by fear. Fear for survival. Nothing can stop them.

Cloud and the others. They would not help her. They most probably despise her right now and wish that she were indeed dead. She just had to step into their peaceful lives. All because of her accursed likeness to their dead friend. Now, she is afraid that this painful memory would re-live itself whenever she would look in the mirror.

She would see Aeris, not the Eila she knows herself to be. To the eyes of everybody she's met, she is Aeris. She could still hear Cloud explain to her that he didn't want the same thing to happen to her. He didn't want to lose another Aeris. While Tifa, even though she never spoke of it, didn't like her very much either. Tifa couldn't help it. In a way, she considers Eila as another rival. Just like Aeris was in their adventurous days.

Eila has no intentions of ruining their perfectly good relationship. Nor does she want to spoil any memories of Aeris because of her face. She is a spitting image of the dead girl. Something that she would have to live for the rest of her life.

Midgar Sector 3 was in a panic. Armed forces made their way hastily through the busy streets. ShinRa soldiers, patrol units, tanks and even helicopters all proceeded with great caution towards the center of the sector.

Civilians and bystanders were shooed away by the soldiers. They were warned to evacuate the area for the beasts that have been ravaging Midgar were there. They were armed and dangerous and they bore bombs. Powerful bombs that is capable of destroying everything within a five mile radius.

The sky had become dark. Clouds and stars became more visible against the blackness. It only added to the suspense that was in the atmosphere. A barricade was formed in between the two opposing forces of Shinra Army and the small group of beasts which hid behind the rubble and stone. Neither side attacked, nor did they move. Afraid that the least amount of action would cause something that they would regret for the rest of their lives.

However, the following event happened without warning. It was an unprovoked action coming from the beasts side of the war. There was only a single cackle from the frightening creatures which puzzled the ShinRa soldiers long enough for the bomb to explode.

Fire, smoke and a thunderous crash ripped against their flesh and bones. The cloud of flames ran through them, they did not even feel their skin being burned away and the buildings being tossed at them by the vibrations. The last thing the Soldiers saw was a bright light and then darkness.

The coffee mug crashed on the floor, leaving a thick brown stain on the maroon carpet of the mayor's office. Reeve muttered and cursed as he struggled to get up on his feet and look outside the window. He saw, with much horror, the mushroom shaped explosion at the center of Sector 3. Five miles...it was a lie. The size of the blast covered at least ten.

There was nothing he could do. Even at the top floor of the new ShinRa building, he could hear the screams of his people. Dying and lamenting over the new loss that they have gained.

"What do they want?" He whispered, pounding on the thick glass which was enough to protect him from the flying ash and debris. Tears rolled down his eyes. Too many have died again.

Cloud looked up to the ceiling as dust and small rocks were shaken off by the explosion. They clattered on the concrete floor and some even fell on him. He ignored it. He knew why the world was shaking. The JENOVA beasts have struck. Whatever they had planned for the people of Midgar, he didn't care. All he wanted right now was to run at them and destroy them.

If only he weren't locked up in this blasted cage.

How could people see only the small mistakes and ignore the big ones? They shouldn't have kept their sights focused on the tabloids for scandals of their superstars. Sensationalized news that aim nothing more than to make money. Greedy politicians who wish to make a name for themselves by making events that intrigue the undying lust of people to gossip.

They shouldn't have kept their eyes focused on that. They should have devoted more time into stopping the JENOVA beasts.

Then all these deaths would have been prevented.

The Tornado Jr. tossed and turned at the rough winds. The poor airship shuddered against the immense force of the JENOVA bomb, sending bits and pieces of the machine flying away in the opposite direction. Inside the cabin, it was smoldering hot. The airship had caught fire as it was flying on a direct course to the explosion.

Eila hugged Nia close to her body. She herself has already suffered burns and bumps, but she refused to let that stop her. She had to get out of the Tornado. The pilot was dead. Killed by debris and shrapnel that hit their ship.

Instinct and the will to survive took over her body as the ship plunged down into the burning sector. She grabbed a parachute pack that was hidden under her seat and struggled towards the exit falling down twice as the airship rolled and turned from side to side.

"Come on..." she cried as she slammed her palms against the Emergency Exit button to open the doors. They did not move for a few seconds, which caused her to panic. Then with a rigid jolt, the door slid a few inches to create an opening. Smoke and embers flew into the ship making her suffocate. The heat from the fire outside seared her skin and her tears stung her eyes.

Eila did not think of what would be a more pleasurable death. She would die if she remained in the ship any longer. But she would also die if she leapt out and faced the heat with her frail body. She closed her eyes, and hugged her pet tightly, then, jumped out.

Flames rose up from the ground to meet her. Pulling her body towards the earth a tremendous speed. The winds burned her skin even more than it was softening her landing. The parachute, much to her dismay, was not doing its job. There was a huge hole, and its cloth had already caught fire.

"Oh, God..." She cried out as tears, warmer than the flames, danced against her burned face. If she should survive this fall...