

Chapter 7

The sudden shifting of the scene baffled her. Like in any in-coherent dream, scenes shift so rapidly before anyone can make any sense from it. It only allows you to remember the emotions the experience has left in your head.

Crystalline notes from an invisible music box filled the still room. Shafts of sunlight pierced through the broken roof and blessed the little flowers that covered the damp ground. There a young girl knelt down, adoring each precious blossom around her.

Eila was back in the church. The church she knew as her home. She was tending the flowers once again, the legacy of a certain Aeris Gainsborough to the slums.

Then, all of a sudden, she heard someone move behind her. She saw a man lying on the ground, dust and flower petals drifted in the air as he crashed through the roof of the church. It was Cloud. He was alive, but completely delirious. It was strange. What was he doing here?

He continued to ramble about Sephiroth and Jenova. Eila found his actions frightening, she tried to stand up, but he held firmly on to her arm and her waist. Then he opened his eyes and drew her closer calling out Aeris' name. He continued to speak about the past. How he missed her and how sorry he was for not being there to protect her.

He acted as if he couldn't hear her plea to let go. The embrace, which he held her in, was tight and it hurt her. She couldn't escape and she couldn't talk any sense into him. The more she struggled, the more her body acted clumsily, growing heavier by the second.

Finally, her left arm was free and she drove it as hard as she could into his cheek. He stumbled back and away from her. He didn't move. He sat on the flowerbed with one hand touching his swollen cheek. Then Eila tried to run.

She ran as fast as she could, even when her legs felt as heavy as bricks she continued to run.

Then she woke up feeling less than pleasant. Quickly as she did, pain swept through her body. Burns, cuts and bruises she had no idea where she got.

No, .she remembered. It was the fall, She dove off the Tornado Jr., into the flames. That's all she could remember. She could not recall being brought into this dark room, lying down on a soft bed and wrapped in clean clothing.

She wasn't in a hospital, as she first thought. The room, which held her, was big and luxuriously furnished. A single lampshade emitted a dim orange glow that was enough to make her see the flower arrangements by the vanity mirror and the dresser. It was very silent, and she was alone.

"Ni-Nia?" She called out weakly, then waited a moment for her bird's response. Then she called out again, a little more desperately. Tears formed in her eyes for she knew that the bird would not answer back.

"You're awake!" Someone said. A man. "You've been asleep for two days. That was some explosion." He moved from the shadows and approached her bed. As he passed through the light, she caught a glimpse of his face and black hair. Soon, he was standing by her side, examining her temperature of her forehead with the back of his hand. "The fever's gone down. You're lucky to be alive."

"Don't worry. "He continued. "I'm a friend."

She responded with a nod but remained silent and motionless.

"You're Eila Gainsborough, right?"

"How did you know my name?" She whispered.

"Your friend Tifa Lockheart identified you in the hospital and had you brought here." He answered calmly, sitting down on a couch near the bed and near the lampshade. She could see him now, at least part of his thick black sweater and short black hair.

"You're a doctor, then?"

"No." He said with a soft chuckle. "But don't be alarmed!" He said when he noticed her suspicious stare at him. "I'm working for Cloud Strife. I'm working to get him out of the mess that Scarlet started."

Eila relaxed and forced herself to sit up despite the pain from various injuries. "I'm ready to help." She said, wincing as she adjusted herself on the bed. That way, her back was leaning against the wall. All the while, her desperate green eyes were glued to the man before her. She could not see his face but she felt that he could be trusted.

"Cloud did not kidnap me." She said sternly.

"I know, Eila." He answered calmly. "I know that you tried to escape from the beasts. I know that you and Cloud fled to Cosmo Canyon. In fact, you did all this to save his life as well as yours."

"Maybe, I should be charged with kidnap." She snapped, bowing her head down and then looking up at him again.

He shook his head with obvious amusement. "No, that wouldn't be right. Anyway, what happened after Cloud's friends found you in Cosmo Canyon?"

"They were going to bring me back here." She started, slowly. "Cloud wanted me and my foster mother, Elmyra to go to Wutai where the beasts would not harm us. Then, he and his friends would deal with the beasts. They were after him anyway."

"Yes, Cloud told me about the possibility of the beasts connection with JENOVA." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully and asked her to continue.

Eila nodded and leaned forward as she relayed the rest of the story to him. She told him that she felt that she had to do something. She told him that she decided to face the dangers on her own, to find out where the beasts came from. Cloud told her about the JENOVA and SOLDIER Projects that were done in Nibelheim that was why she decided to go there. She didn't want them to stop her, so she left without any of them knowing.

"And did you find anything in Nibelheim?" He interrupted. She nodded and continued.

"Books, journals, a hidden laboratory. They were all there. A complete account of a thirty year project that should have ended when meteor struck." Eila paused as she remembered reading the files. At first, it was all unbelievable how a person could violate the sanctity of life. Then she saw Vincent, and read his story. He was lucky to have gotten away with only a claw. He retained his human features and could mingle with the crowd. But the JENOVA beasts and other specimens that were failures were not so fortunate. She suddenly understood why they would want to take revenge on the 'normal' humans. She felt now, that she had to stop the inevitable war between the beasts and the humans.

"I didn't mean for anyone to get into trouble. Especially Cloud and his friends. They've been very kind to me." Eila bowed her head down again and hugged her knees. "I'll do anything to get them out."

"Don't worry, Eila. I know that everything will be alright." He gave her a reassuring smile, which she reciprocated with a smile of her own. Then he leaned back on the couch, letting the light touch his face. She saw him clearly now. Strong features, short black hair that spiked up without the gel that held it in place. Dark brown eyes, watching her as he picked up a telephone and dialed a number.

"By the way...I don't know your name." She said.

His lips curled up in a sheepish smile. They've been talking for a while now and he forgot to tell her his name. "Eiji Mishima." He said just as the party on the other line answered. He covered the mouthpiece with one hand and looked at her. "I'm ordering for dinner...what would you like?"

"So, she is here?" Silver said in a monotonous tone. The other beast nodded stiffly as the others waited for their leader's response. "I see. Then it is unfortunate that she will have to suffer as the others will."

Whispers rose from the others. Most of them were relieved that their leader would push through with the attack on Midgar without letting the girl interrupt. However, two of the members disagreed.

"Sir, let Adrian and I get her out of Midgar." Rosh said, raising his hand. He knew that he was taking a big risk in voicing out his opinion, especially since the majority of the pack believed otherwise.

Silver looked at the beast for a long while then turned his back. "As much as I would want to spare her... I cannot delay the attacks any further. Besides, if I remember correctly...it was your job to keep her away from Midgar."

Rosh stepped back into the line of beasts and folded his arms. "I understand." He said quietly.

"Good for you. All them bitchin' humans deserve to die." A nameless voice spoke, causing about whispers and cheers of agreement from the rest of the pack.

Adrian started to growl, as did Rosh. But Silver held out one arm to calm them before the scene turned into a brawl. "Enough! The girl is no longer our concern. Once the humans have learned to fear us, we can have any woman we desire."

With that he turned around and left the meeting area to get ready for the dawn attack. The first bomb has killed at least ten of their number and injured a dozen more. They could not afford to lose more because of a petty human. Yet, he had to admit it would be a waste to lose Eila.

Silver, in his past, he knew what it was to be loved by a woman. Though he could barely recall her beautiful features, he never could forgive himself for leaving her. It felt right during that time. But now, he's lost her forever. He could never return. That was years ago. She probably has found someone more deserving of her love...unless, Meteor killed her too.

A thin grin passed over Silver's lips then disappeared quickly. He was different now. A JENOVA Hunter. Determined to destroy not only the creature that contaminated their cells, but the humans who turned them into monsters. ShinRa.

He had hoped that the Meteor completely destroyed ShinRa and all it's sickly evil. But, he was quite relieved to learn that remnants of the once great Industrial Empire still survived. Then he and his pack could stomp them out of the face of the earth with their own vengeance. That was a pleasing thought that all of them held dearly. For years, even decades, the JENOVA people have trained hard and formed a community. There are more than seven hundred of them now. Some of them hidden around the world in small groups.

But soon, he promised to himself, they would not need to hide.

"I want to see Cloud." Eila said all of a sudden, putting down her fork. "I want to explain everything to him myself."

Eiji slowly chewed the rest of his pasta and looked at her. "It's not that simple, Eila. We can't let Scarlet know that you're here."

"Why not?"

The young man set his fork down beside his plate and wiped his mouth with a napkin. "Well, for one thing, I'm afraid she might try to hurt you. Knowing that your presence threatens her prosecution."

Eila's shoulders dropped. Disappointed, but she understood. "I'm not afraid of Scarlet. Maybe I could even convince my mother to drop the charges."

"Yes, we could. But if I know Scarlet, she'll do anything to get you out of her way. She may even have you killed."

The girl stifled a small gasp. Scarlet would go that far?

"I'm sorry. But no kind of witness protection program will keep Scarlet from getting her hands on you." Eiji continued.

Eila gave out a defeated sigh. Tapping her fingers absently on the table. "Don't you think that the people who brought me here would tell Scarlet who they saw. I'm sure that there are some people who would recognize me. I'm not exactly a nameless face here in Midgar. I'm the flower girl from the slums, the Aeris-look-a-like."

"True," Eiji said, suppressing a wild grin. Honestly, he was impressed with the girl's quick response and found himself troubled for an answer. "but, it wouldn't help Cloud if you get hurt or disappear again."

Eila opened her mouth to talk, but gave up and folded her arms across her chest. "I can protect myself. I've survived three sure-death situations. I can handle Scarlet."

Eiji found himself chuckling softly at the girls story. True, she survived the beast attack that evening when she and Cloud disappeared from Midgar, then another wild monster attack on her way to Nibelheim, finally, she survived the bomb explosion as well as a hundred foot fall from an airship. Perhaps the Ancients are watching over this girl. Or maybe she's just that lucky.

"Very well." He said, once again picking up his fork. " Tomorrow, if you're feeling better, we'll go out shopping with Tifa."

"Really?!" She said, almost jumping out of her seat.

"We'll have to be very careful, though." He said, looking at her casually, "If things go well, I believe we'd be able to visit Cloud at the ShinRa building."

Eila nodded. "Of course. Thank you, Eiji."