

Cid Gets His Tea

Princess Artemis

It all started so innocently, as these things tend to do. All he wanted was a nice, warm cup of tea. Where is the challenge in this? Is this a quest fraught with danger? Is it too much to ask?

Cid Highwind didn't think so, but, as it turns out, The Fates had other ideas...

"Where's the %^&\$# tea?" Cid shouted as he slammed the last cabinet shut. He had successfully ransacked the kitchen, leaving a trail of destruction of such enormous proportions that it could only be compared to the desperate acts of a couch potato in search of the elusive remote.

Shera rolled her eyes. "You used the last of it this morning," she pointed out. "I remember vividly the curses you made and the oaths you swore because you were going to have to go to the store and get some."

Cid turned away and gave Shera a sideways glance, muttering and sulking in that way he had whenever he knew Shera was right about something stupid and he didn't want to admit it. "But I want some tea...", he whined.

Shera giggled and said, "Then go get some!"

"Why won't you go?" Cid asked.

"I'm not the one addicted to caffeine! It's ten at night, and I'm all ready in my jammies. You want it, you go."

"I have a headache," Cid countered.

Shera put her hands on her hips and tilted her head just so. "Are you threatening me?"

Cid jerked his head in surprise. "Huh?" he asked.

"Threatening to complain all night. All that'll get you is grounded and kicked outta bed. I ain't getting' the tea," Shera responded darkly.

Well, now Cid didn't want that, especially considering the fact that the only place to sleep other than the tattered fold-out couch they shared was the puke-green bathtub. So he grumbled and pouted and muttered and groaned as he went and got his jacket, scarf, and gloves. He was making a huge production out of it. There were acts, scenes, even a soliloquy of grumbling. He shuffled to the door theatrically and cast one last hopeful glance at his wife.

“Regular Shakespearean tragedy. You make more work trying to weasel out of things than it would take to just do them!” Shera reacted. Oh, how wrong she would be. If they had only known, tragedy could have been averted. But life cannot be wasted pondering the ‘if only’s’.

Cid stomped his foot and said, “Dammit! Yer onta me,” in a self-mocking tone. Shera burst out giggling and waved him out the door.

It was a dark and stormy night. Well, maybe not so stormy, but it was bloody cold and Cid was certain he was going to freeze his buns off. He instantly wrapped up as tight as possible, teeth chattering hard enough that he thought he might lose a filling. “D-d-dd-dd-ddd-,” he tried to curse, but it just didn’t come out right. Sighing, Cid began the long and arduous trek to the twenty-four hour Vons across the street.

When he arrived, he was sorely distressed to find the doors shut tight. ‘Closed in remembrance of Cait Sith’s selfless sacrifice at the Temple of the Ancients. Without his singular courage and valor, we would all be Meteor-fodder,’ the neon orange poster declared. “Sh-shh-shhhhhssh-,” Cid chattered. He huffed and mentally cursed the day Reeve had bought Shin-Ra and every other major chain with his share of the fifty bazillion gil the group had acquired while trying to master Knights of the Round. (It had taken two months, but dammit, it was worth it just to see Yuffie piddle in her shorts when she saw the resulting Master Summon materia.)

Cid turned from the grocery store in disgust, wondering what he could do. The only options he had were convenience stores or a really long hike through Mount Nibel to Vincent’s house. Going to bed without tea was unthinkable. What he really needed was an intravenous caffeine/nicotine infusion, but he was quite certain that was about as likely as convincing Cloud to lay off his daily mousse and super glue hair regimen. About as likely as getting himself to stop cold turkey. So he decided on the convenience store idea and headed toward Am/Pm. On the way, he tried to light up an illusory cigarette.

No smokes...?

“DDD-DD-ddd-DDD!!!” Cid hollered, realizing that not only was he to be denied his caffeine fix, but his nicotine one as well! He growled low as his withdrawal headache doubled in intensity just because it knew he was out of smokes. Stomping toward the Am/Pm, he realized that Reeve owned that, too. The shock and horror was so intense that he fell on his butt and silently wept. Reeve owned them all...Cid would have to go to Nibelheim to get his tea and ciggies. After crying like a baby for a few minutes, he gathered himself together and steeled himself for the long and desperate journey whose end would only come when he had a steaming vessel of liquid beauty in one hand and a burning wrap of leaves and chemicals so numerous just thinking about them caused cancer in the other.

Finally, Cid gathered the courage and returned to his home (but only to the garage; no way was he gonna give Shera the satisfaction of knowing to what lengths he would go when unable to indulge his vices). He took his favorite spear in hand, the Venus Gospel, and strode purposefully out the garage door and into the bitter cold. He cared not one whit that the Venus Gospel was

really a halberd and that the Viper Halberd was really a lance and that his homemade Spear, the one he had spent days forging, sharpening, and welding, was really a pike and was mass-produced by a small Junon firm intent on being the one-stop-pole-arm shop for Dragoons everywhere. (The fact that Cid was the only being alive on the Planet that even closely resembled a Dragoon had, of course, necessitated the bankruptcy of that small Junon firm.) Cid yelped in pain when in his effort to wrap up tight to get warm resulted in him raking the wing-blade of the Venus Gospel across his cheek, shaving his stubble and drawing a copious amount of blood. "Dd-dd-dd-!" he cursed.

"Sh-shhh-shsh-!" he yelled when he couldn't say his first curse.

"....!!!!" Cid exclaimed at the top of his lungs when his curse for not being able to curse wouldn't come out. After a few moments of fuming, he took his scarf, his brand new, nice, white scarf, and held it to the rather large scrape. Then he walked away from his garage and toward the Chocobo stables attached to the Shanghai-Tei.

When he arrived at the inn, he faintly heard someone banging on a door and shouting at that man who had taken up residence in the restroom. He snickered slightly over this; it wasn't as if the rooms of the inn didn't have toilets. All that dude had to do was walk up stairs. Then again, everyone in Rocket Town was downright neurotic, so maybe it was some twisted codependent thing. As he approached his Chocobo's stable, he heard Setzer's faint cooing. He'd never thought about it before, but he supposed she must have been snoring. It was pretty late at night. When Cid carefully opened the stable door, he saw Setzer all curled up in a painful looking ball, but he wasn't at all alarmed; Chocobos always slept with their heads tucked under one wing. Cid walked up to Setzer and gently shook her.

"WARRRRK!!!" Setzer screamed as she Chocobuckled Cid. Cid fell back when the spell hit him and glared at Setzer. She never got mad like this. The black Chocobo was glaring fiercely at her owner, as if to say that it really wasn't very nice of him to surprise her like that.

Fortunately for Cid, he almost never ran away from monsters; otherwise, Chocobuckle would have done more than give him a headache. He grumbled again as his withdrawal headache, as if with a mind of his own, gladly took the Chocobuckle headache and accepted it as its own. He *really* wanted a cigarette right now. No, he needed one.

Setzer eventually calmed down enough to let Cid tack her and climb on. As he began riding her out of the stable, he noticed she seemed to be waddling rather than walking. He examined her crest and found one white feather, a sure sign that she was expecting. *Dammit, now I hafta deal with a pregnant Chocobo, too.*

Setzer slowly waddled by a greens container and began foraging. As hard as Cid tried, he couldn't get her to move until she had found *just* the right green. Of course, it had to be on the bottom. Eventually though, she found it and waddled merrily on her way.

Now, there are a few things one must know about Chocobos. For starters, garden variety yellow Chocobos are pretty fast, faster than monsters, but that's about all they're good for. But

breeding them can end up giving one a new variety of Chocobo. Blue ones, the River Chocobos, can cross shallow rivers by running really, really fast. The green ones, Mountain Chocobos, can climb mountains because they are very agile and sure of their footing. But they don't run all that fast. There is a special variety, the gold Ocean Chocobo, which can cross oceans by running really, really, *really* fast and being sure on their feet. Black Chocobos, the river and mountain breed, don't have these special adaptations and indeed, are slower, on average, than the garden variety. But they do have one thing the others lack: functional wings. Black Chocobos are quick and excellent fliers.

But not when they are pregnant.

Thus, all the advantage Cid got from riding his egg-laden Chocobo was that it would be a little longer before he needed to make a trip to the shoe store. He sighed heavily, thinking to himself that he probably should just go home instead of having to battle monsters all the way to Nibelheim. But he decided to go on anyway. He was just too prideful to go back to his wife, defeated, without tea in hand. So he went on.

Just as soon as Cid stepped out of the confines of Rocket Town, the ambient temperature dropped a few degrees. Now it was cold enough that all he needed to do to get a good brain freeze was to take a nice, deep breath. He knew this because he had just taken a nice, deep breath and got a pretty good brain freeze. After the sharp pain went away, allowing him to think, he decided not to curse, because he knew he couldn't and it would just get him more pissed. He tapped Setzer and rode her toward the Nibel Mountains.

Shortly thereafter, a couple of monsters decided that he would make a great midnight snack. They were two Jokers that had wandered over the mountains. Cid saw them and reacted quickly. He pushed Setzer as fast as she could go (which wasn't all that fast, but fast enough) and lowered the Venus Gospel toward the approaching monsters. His plan was to kill them while still mounted. Perhaps his plan would have worked if the tip of the spear hadn't caught on an unseen rock and caused Cid to pole-vault right off Setzer. He landed on his feet, fortunately; his gift for jumping included aerial acrobatics and the ability to fall with cat-like grace. After all, it wouldn't do to be able to jump thirty feet in the air if it meant one would break bones on landing.

Apparently, the monsters weren't called Jokers without reason, because they both took cards and wrote '10' on them. Holding them up, one announced into an imaginary mike, "He really stuck the dismount, ladies and gentlemen." The other one started laughing and pointing.

Cid turned an interesting shade as both embarrassment and anger fought for the mastery. He stood staring at the Jokers, thinking horrible curses. But it wasn't quite right just thinking curses, so he gave up on that and continued staring. The one that was pointing and laughing started motioning to its cheek, as if to say there was something on Cid's cheek. Wondering why anyone would find a scrape funny, he touched the scrape. Then he rolled his eyes and groaned. So that was what they were laughing at.

His scarf was stuck to his face.

Feeling rather foolish, he carefully removed the scarf, trying his best not to disturb the scrape. He was reasonably successful, although his ego was fatally wounded. But the act had just made the Jokers laugh harder. One finally sputtered out, "Cut yourself shaving? You know you're supposed to stop when it hurts, right?"

Cid spread his hands and looked to the heavens in a 'why me?' sort of way then remounted Setzer. He rode her away, leaving the Jokers to laugh and mock. *Well*, he thought, licking his wounds, *at least I didn't have to kill them*.

Soon Cid arrived at the edge of the Nibel Mountains. They were tall and majestic in a twisted sort of way. They were also covered with snow. It would be a hard trek through, but what lay on the other side was worth the risk. He nudged Setzer and began the ascent.

When they came to the entrance, Cid was alarmed to find a Materia Keeper blocking the way. When it didn't move, he guessed it was asleep. Carefully, he dismounted Setzer and tiptoed closer, trying to see if there was a way to pass. He found none; the Keeper had the cave entrance thoroughly blocked. Tapping the back of his head and chewing his lip, Cid came to the decision that he should kill it, using the element of surprise and his powerful Venus Gospel.

As luck would have it, Setzer chose that time to loudly protest the freezing temperatures, her swollen ankles, and the fact that there was no Tantal and Uribo flavored ice cream available. Of course, this woke the Materia Keeper. Cid shook his head heavily then brought up the Venus Gospel. The Keeper turned around and blinked all eight of its liquid eyes, trying to drive the sleep away. Cid took that opportunity to leap forward and strike it in the face with his spear. It got stuck right in the Keeper's nose. Cid blinked in surprise then yanked the blade out and examined it. The golden point was extremely dull. Cid slapped his face and groaned when he realized he was out of magic. He'd used all of it up earlier that day trying to get some prefabricated logs lit in a neighbor's fireplace. It had taken three castings of Flare, one Fire 3, and ten Phoenix summons to get the damn things to burn. It was worse than trying to light those charcoal briquette thingys. The net result was a powerful, ultimate weapon that wouldn't cut a slice of bread, much less a Materia Keeper. All Cid had succeeded in doing was, in essence, pissing it the hell off.

"Oh, %^\$#," Cid muttered. He was momentarily pleased that he could swear again.

The Materia Keeper advanced slowly, rubbing its nose and glaring murder. Setzer waddled away as Cid backed up a step, then another, then another. That last step was just a few inches to the left of the edge of the mountain path; this resulted in Cid falling a good distance down the mountain. Finally, his unexpected descent came to a halt, just above another trail. He gingerly picked himself up and stepped down to the trail. Surveying the damage, he discovered two scraped elbows, a missing glove, a few cuts on the gloveless hand, and a tear in his black shirt with a long cut beneath. Not too bad, all told. But his hand was already getting too cold for comfort, so he shoved it in his pocket. He really hadn't come prepared for this trip, but with dogged courage, he continued on.

Shortly Cid came to another cave, this time unblocked. There was a glowing Save spot nearby. As he approached, he wondered why they were called Save spaces. Probably should have been called Safe spots, since one could set camp there without worrying about monsters attacking. Reaching into his jacket, Cid pulled a large tent out of his Inventory. Inventory was a strange space-time distortion that all would-be heroes and Defenders of the Planet seemed to have on their person. It allowed Cid to carry an ungodly amount of junk around without weight and bulk concerns. Other would-be heroes could access it as well; sometimes Cid searched his Inventory from one end to the other, only to find that Barret had taken what he was looking for.

After setting camp, Cid glanced nervously around the dark cave. He had never actually hiked through this particular part of the Nibel Mountains and he was unsure of his way. He was an outside person in the extreme; he possessed a veritable gift for travel in the open air, where he could feel the wind. This whole spelunking thing just didn't float his boat. Actually, it more properly sunk his boat; he was claustrophobic, and certainly did not enjoy being cooped up in caves that came complete with stagnant air and bats. After an uneasy hour or so, Cid finally succumbed to exhaustion and snuggled up in his sleeping bag.

He awoke with a start when he heard rustling outside his tent. Warily taking up his Venus Gospel, (he had all his magic now), he tiptoed over to the entrance of the tent. When he peeked out from a small slit where he had left the door partly unzipped, he growled deeply. Those two Jokers had followed him and, judging by the absolute glee on their sallow faces, had committed some heinous act of stupidity in another attempt to humiliate him. Suddenly, both Jokers turned to face the tent door then hightailed it out of the cave.

After straightening out his clothes, which had become all tangled up as he slept, Cid unzipped the door and stepped out to survey the damage. Nothing much, just several rolls of toilet paper and large amounts of pink Silly String. No biggie, he thought. It wasn't as if he would keep the tent; for some reason he couldn't fathom, all the sporting good stores would sell were Disposable Tents™. They were only good for one night, and then they would disintegrate. Indeed, his Disposable Tent™ was doing just that. Only moments later, the Save spot was covered in paper and string. Cid shrugged; certainly, the Jokers could have done worse. He leaned down and picked up his shoes (he was willing to sleep in his jacket, but not his shoes), then slipped one on while hopping on the other foot.

There was something suspiciously slimy squishing between his toes.

Lifting his other shoe to examine it, he cursed loud and long when he found it full of whipped cream. He hissed and began scraping the whipped cream from his shoe as he promised to himself that he would slash those Jokers to ribbons the next time he saw them. After cleaning that shoe as best he could he removed the other and flapped his foot around, trying to dislodge the cream. Unsatisfied, but sure he could do no better, he replaced that shoe and began walking through the cave in the direction he thought Nibelheim lay in. *Why couldn't I just go to a damn Starbucks? A double espresso would do me good...*

After several hours of hard hiking up and down the strangely glowing caverns of the Nibel Mountains, a large group of those whatchamacallit grasshopper things (Cid could never remember what they were called, just that they were extremely annoying) appeared from nowhere and attacked him. He quickly dispatched one with an easy slash of his spear (or halberd, or whatever.) Two other grasshopper monsters attacked in quick succession, trying, as Cid always thought, to suck his brains out with their long mosquito mouths. The last one paused without biting Cid's head and scurried down his shirt and legs then sniffed his shoes. Cid brushed it away just as it made a strange little chirping noise. He was surprised when it didn't get up and attack him when it landed. Instead, it and the other two surviving grasshopper things discussed something amongst themselves, then called for others to join them.

Two hours later, Cid was stomping out of the last cavern, fuming everlasting annoyance, as grasshopper monsters swarmed about his feet and battled one another for a chance to taste his whipped cream-soaked shoes. There were twenty, easy, all scurrying in and out and around and under his feet; it was the worst of cats, but even cats never tried to eat his socks. He had given up trying to kill them or kick them away; every time he did, another one would jump on him and bite him in retribution, and there were just too many to kill before they sucked him dry, so he endured them in thunderous silence. He supposed there was a silver lining to this cloud of large, green insects, but at the moment he was way too irritated to see it. Vincent had better have some tea and a whole stack of smokes, oh yes. He rubbed his head, wincing as his withdrawal headache came back with a vengeance.

After a while, as Cid descended the last incline of the Nibel Mountains, the green bugs began trailing off by ones and twos. Soon, he was off the mountains and in the grasslands surrounding Nibelheim, entirely grasshopper free. He glanced down at his feet and snickered. The entire episode with the grasshoppers had been so surreal and absurd he had to laugh when he saw that the bugs had eaten both his shoes and his socks.

By now, however, his feet were too cold to be bothered by the frost that clung to the ground in patches. He supposed that was a bad thing, having hiked down the snow-covered mountainside with fast disappearing footwear, but it was water under the bridge now. After a close examination of his toes, he was pleased to discover each one was still attached and contained at least a hint of color. Not much, though; Cid had a propensity to wear a lot of clothing no matter the temperature outside, so the only parts of him that regularly saw the light of day were his elbows and head. This resulted in his possessing of a very fair and rather, er, soft skin...which was one of the reasons he always wore so much clothes. He had long been tired of others rudely pointing out how 'pretty' his hands were. Not his fault he didn't want all his welding and fabricating to cut him to ribbons. After wiggling his toes a bit to make sure they still worked, he started off toward Nibelheim.

It didn't take long to reach the small town. He was surprised to see Setzer wandering aimlessly about; apparently, she had followed him over the mountains by paths that humans couldn't use but were fine for pregnant Chocobos. Cid approached her and stroked her head, relieved to find his favorite bird alive and well.

“Coo,” Setzer said in response. Cid guessed she was relieved, too.

Now that he was within sight of his goal, Cid's addictions made a powerful offense and fairly dragged him with them to the Nibelheim Mansion where Vincent lived. After gathering his wits and trying to stomp some warmth into his feet, Cid walked up to the gate of the mansion. It was fenced in by wrought iron pickets tipped with wicked looking spikes. He tried the latch; it was locked. It was nearly midday, so perhaps Vincent was asleep. Despite many opinions, Vincent was not a vampire, but he certainly was nocturnal, and a plain weird dude besides. Cid stood in thought for a moment, stroking his blonde hair with his very cold hand. He decided to jump the fence; this was hardly something he felt would be difficult at all. First, he threw the Venus Gospel over the fence, then stood still to concentrate. Just as he was going to leap, a sudden thought struck him. This whole trip had been a series of difficulties from the start...could something go wrong now? By the time the thought came, he was already committed to his course of action and his concern only served to distract him from his jump, which resulted in him jumping only five feet nine inches over a six foot fence. His pant leg caught on one of the spiked pickets, causing a drastic alteration in his flight path; that is to say, he tripped and swung down, barely avoiding a nose-to-picket impact by grabbing one with his bare hand. Hollering in frustration and hanging upside down, Cid set his other hand on the cold ground and tried to jerk his leg free. This only made the situation worse by stabbing the spike into his foot. “OW!!” he cried out in pain, then after a moment to collect himself, he assessed his situation.

Cid tilted his head toward the ground, which wasn't very far away, then decided he would try to do sort of a handstand and lift himself off that spike. Perhaps this would have worked if his bare hand weren't stuck to the frozen iron. He yanked on it a time or two, but it was right well stuck.

“*^\$#!@%!!!!” he yelled, “%^\$#, %^&\$, &%@%, *&%!!!!!!”

A few minutes went by as Cid tried to calm himself. What was that reason again for which he put himself through so much agony? *Oh, yeah...* he sighed as he rubbed his head with his free hand, then put it back on the ground. All for the love of tea.

Those two Jokers that plagued Cid's every step picked this time to float up to the fence and see what all the hollering was about. They were in no danger in Nibelheim; no one lived there except Vincent. One Joker floated over and leaned down to look Cid in the face. It began to laugh silently, squinting its eyes shut and covering its thin lips with one long hand. The other one turned in his direction and gawked. Cid turned red with anger and humiliation, jaw clenched and glaring murder at the two monsters. Setzer waddled over and cooed questioningly at the Jokers. One turned toward her and tried to shoo her away. She didn't move, just stood there and stared. The Joker shrugged and floated over to its companion near the embattled pilot. It looked down at Cid and said, “Can anyone say ‘stuck’?”

Cid rolled his eyes then decided that he really couldn't lose any more of his already tattered dignity and began screaming for Vincent. Setzer found this terribly disturbing and began warking shrilly. The Jokers burst out in hysterics at the scene. They only stopped when a bullet whizzed by their heads. The Joker's shocked expression was priceless and Cid felt it was only just to see

them look stupid for a change. He then looked toward where the shot had come and saw Vincent standing in the doorway of his mansion. The Jokers quickly fled.

Vincent strode over to where Cid was hanging from his fence. He squatted down and looked over the situation, the faintest of smiles playing on his lips. "Having a little trouble, Cid?"

"Yes, dammit! What does it look like?!" Cid answered hotly.

"Need help?" Vincent asked coolly.

"Yes, Vincent, I do need help," Cid replied slowly.

Without another word, Vincent stood and grasped Cid by the ankles and lifted his foot off the spike. His pant leg was too tangled to be freed, so Vincent cut it with his sharp claws, then set the pilot down. Seeing that Cid's hand was still stuck to the wrought iron fence, Vincent walked into his house and returned a moment later with some warm water. He dumped the water on Cid's hand, freeing it. With his hand free, Cid stood and gingerly set some weight on his injured foot. It wasn't too bad.

Wordlessly Vincent motioned for Cid to follow him into the mansion. After they went in, Cid sat in a chair near a fire while Vincent sat in the other. The weary pilot enjoyed a moment of warmth, letting his feet thaw in front of the fire. The two sat in silence for a long stretch, interrupted only by the crackling of the fire. After a long gaze at Cid, Vincent said, "You've looked better."

"Huh?" Cid muttered from the half-dozed he had fallen in. He sat up a bit and looked himself over. Yeah, he had looked better. All told, his little quest had netted him scrapes, cuts, ruined clothes, a touch of frostbite, an astounding lack of ego, and no tea. "Well," he began, "I guess I got a bit carried away..."

Vincent blinked his red eyes and watched his friend from under his crimson cowl. "Shera called me," he intoned, then produced a carefully wrapped foil packet. "Here," he said as he handed Cid the packet of tea.

Cid smiled and took the proffered packet gently and reverently. After a long, loving gaze at the tea, Cid glanced toward Vincent and ventured, "Smokes?"

Vincent shook his head. "No."

Cid nodded. It was too much to hope for. "Thanks," he said to Vincent, "A lot. I guess I had Shera worried, huh."

Vincent didn't respond, just got up and retrieved a pair of old shoes for Cid. He handed them to Cid and said, "You should get back to your wife."

“Yeah,” he answered as he took the shoes. Apparently, Vincent wasn’t feeling particularly social, so Cid slipped on the shoes and took his leave. Vincent walked him out to the fence and unlocked the gate for him.

Before Cid exited the premises, Vincent deadpanned, “You have beautiful hands.”

Cid shoved his bare hand in his pants pocket while Vincent’s expression shifted just enough so that someone who knew him could see the ghost of a smile.

Setzer was waiting patiently by the gate, ready to head back home. Cid hopped on her back and rode her away toward the mountains.

He decided to let Setzer lead the way, since apparently she had traveled a path over Mount Nibel that didn’t go through the caverns. The trip home was generally uneventful, but that withdrawal headache never went away, it just got worse. And there was something tickling at the back of his mind, something ominous. He couldn’t shake that feeling that something was amiss even as he re-entered Rocket Town. That sense of foreboding only grew as Cid approached his home.

Night had fallen again, and Cid was really looking forward to his first cup of steaming hot tea. He opened his door and set his spear aside as Shera walked up and hugged him in greeting. Then she looked him over and said, “What have you done to yourself? Tell me next time you decide to take off for parts unknown!”

“All right...It’s a long story, but look,” Cid answered as he held up the foil packet in triumph, “I got my tea!”

Shera smiled, wondering at her husband’s singular persistence in his undertakings. All that trouble just for a bit of tea, when all he had to do was take some aspirin and get some in the morning. And he ruined his new scarf. She took the tea and put on the teakettle as Cid went and cleaned himself up a bit, as much as possible given his intense desire to guzzle his tea. Two days, humiliation beyond compare, a good deal of bloodshed...well, it was all worth it if only to relieve his caffeine headache. He sniffed the air with delight...wait...something smelled funny...it smelled good, but something wasn’t quite right.

Shera set two teacups out and poured Cid and then herself a cup. He came back in warily, unsure as to why he felt so uneasy. He sat down and picked up his cup, inhaling the scent. It smelled really good...but something was missing. He rubbed his head again, trying to calm that headache. Well, the tea should help with that. He lifted the cup to his lips and took a tentative sip.

No, oh no, it couldn’t be...all that trouble...all that pain and humiliation...no smokes...

“AAHHH!!!! IT’S DECAF!!!!!!!!!!!!”

~fin~

"I thought he liked herbal tea," Vincent shrugged.

"At least he shaved..." Shera added.

Moral of the Story: If it's late at night and you run out of tea, sleep in the bathtub.