

Final Fantasy VII: Children of Jenova

Chapter 2: A Little Fight

The sound of the front door being slammed nearly off its hinges startled Cid such that he reflexively attempted to sit up, thereby bonking his head on the underside of the Baby Bronco. Apparently, Junior had come down a little harder than he thought the other day; upon closer inspection of the ultralight he had found the landing gear slightly bent. Not a serious problem, but it needed to be fixed before he'd let his girl fly it again.

Rubbing what was sure to become a lump on his forehead, Cid slithered out from under the little airplane and came back inside to see his disheveled and bruised daughter stomping off to her room, muttering a string of kiddy-swears under her breath.

"Stupid fartface barfbrain chocobopoop stupid lousy stinkybutt stupid big kid..."

"What the hell!?" Cid wiped his hands on a rag and followed, reaching Junior's room just in time to have its door shut in his face. He tapped on it softly. "Junior?"

"Sir?"

"Can I come in?"

The door opened a crack, and Junior cast one black eye upon her daddy. Her shirt and hair were muddy and she also had a nasty-looking cut on her lip. It was obvious that she'd been in a scuffle.

"Shit, Junior!" Cid knelt down next to the kid and inspected said black eye and said busted lip. "What happened to you?"

"Stupid big kid from my class was picking on me at recess," she said simply, then she sat down on the floor and pulled off her shoes. "Stupid dumb-butt kid, it's not my fault he flunked third grade." She threw her shoes in the general direction of her closet and missed. She didn't seem to care. This was not like her at all. She kept her room meticulously clean (something else she got from Shera). Everything had a place, and if one damn thing wasn't where it was supposed to go the kid went positively nuclear. Stuffed animals, for example, went in the corner except for the brand new Cait Sith, which went on her bed. Books went, of course, in the bookcase. Model airplanes went on top of the dresser. And shoes went in the closet.

/Goddamn, am I glad Shera's workin' late today.../ "Did you tell Mrs. Cole?" Cid sat down on the poor kid's bed and sighed. Maybe it hadn't been such a hot idea to move her up after all.

"Yeah. That's why he beat me up. He was waiting for me after school." Junior stood up and kicked a stuffed animal. "Stupid poop-face stinky-butt LOSER!" She kicked the stuffed animal again, and it sailed across the room and landed in the corner. And then she grinned. "But I got him."

"Oh yeah?" Cid perked up a bit. "What'd you do?"

"I did just like Tifa told me." She stood up and gave a demonstration. "See, he tried to punch me and I stepped over and blocked like this--" and she made a quick sidestep-block move-- "and then I kicked him real hard like THIS while he was trying to think of what to do then--" and she kicked with her back foot. Cid noticed with some alarm that her foot stopped right where he guessed the big kid's crotch would have begun, and he almost unconsciously crossed his legs in sympathy for the kid. Junior shrugged. "And he just fell down and started crying and I gave him a wedgie and I ran away before he got back up!" As Cid winced, Junior looked at him in puzzlement. "Daddy, how come he just fell down like that off one kick?"

"Well..." /Ouch...thanks, Tifa, but damn.../ Cid fidgeted a bit. "Heh...ah...ask me again in about ten years, okay?"

The kid seemed satisfied with that. "Maybe I shouldn'ta given him that wedgie," Junior mused, and shrugged. "He's prob'ly real mad at me now."

"He's probably SCARED of you now. Hell, I know I would be!" Junior giggled, and Cid smiled. "Lemme see that eye. Does it hurt?" Cid took a good look at the poor kid. The shiner didn't seem too bad and it'd probably be gone in a day or so even without magic, but it pissed him off royally that some little shithead had had the nerve to give it to his daughter.

"Not really."

"That's good." He looked at Junior out of the corner of his eye. "Did Tifa teach you the wedgie part too?"

"No sir. I thought of that myself." She grinned. "Pretty good, huh?"

Cid patted her on the shoulder and laughed. Then he went over to the closet and tossed Junior the little flight suit Shera had made for her. "Let's go for a ride."

"Didja fix my plane?" Junior hopped up and threw the suit on over her clothes and crammed her new slingshot in the pocket. Cid shook his head sadly.

"Naw, I gotta do some more stuff to it. We're takin' the Tiny Bronco. You want front or back seat? Like I need to ask."

Junior giggled again. "Duh! Front! Where we goin'?"

"Goin' to see Tifa. First cause she's got all our Restore Materia and we gotta get rid of that shiner and that busted lip before your mom sees 'em and gives me some o' my own, and second 'cause maybe you could use a little help." Cid started out the door, and Junior followed.

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Cosmo Canyon was the only town on the planet that had been completely unaffected when the last Mako reactors shut down for good. Electricity had come via windmill for as long as Nanaki could remember...and that was a pretty long time. They got along fine without Mako energy before; they would continue to do so now.

Nanaki growled softly as he ascended into his grandpa's observatory. Ladders were not meant for four-leggers like himself. /I must have Cid build me an elevator,/ he mused as he struggled up the ladder. He'd spent most of his time up here the last few days, ever since Reeve had called him up on the PHS, but he did need to eat once in a while and to do that, he had to negotiate that ladder both ways. The Lifestream was now known to have surfaced at Junon, Branford (a new town that had sprung up just east of the Gold saucer), Rocket City, old Midgar, and Mt. Nibel. This on its own was disturbing enough. The Nibel reactor's reactivation filled him with dread. How could Shinra, after all that had happened before, be so ignorant? Had they learned nothing from the Meteor disaster? Yes, it was only one reactor, but it was still sucking the life out of the Planet. Any doctor will tell you that even a small cut, if in the wrong place, can cause a person to bleed to death. And Nanaki could think of few places more wrong than Nibelheim. Jenova had been kept there for years, slowly sending her poisons into the helpless bodies of the test subjects Hojo had imprisoned there...maybe even into the Lifestream itself.

No. That could not have happened. The Planet would not have allowed it.

Still, he had to be sure. Nanaki crawled into a chair that sat before one of Bugenhagen's machines and turned a dial with his teeth. This machine was truly a wonder; it was powered by an exceedingly rare type of Materia and allowed its operator to keep tabs on the health of the Planet. It was this machine that had allowed he and Cloud to hear the scream of the Planet when they were pursuing Sephiroth, and it was this machine that enabled him to look into the Lifestream itself. Nanaki did not like what he saw.

Something was wrong. There were three spirits, three wills there, that simply refused to let go and join the Lifestream. The first he saw gave him a temporary burst of hope; it seemed to radiate Holy energy as it drifted aimlessly. Its form was vague at best, but it appeared to be that of either a woman or a slender man with extremely long hair, and it floated along cradling its head in its hands as if in deep sorrow. Aeris? No. Aeris--rather, the spirit energy that had been Aeris--had dissolved into the Lifestream as she should have after Sephiroth's defeat. She had finally found her Promised Land. What was this Nanaki saw? Another Cetra, perhaps?

The joy Nanaki felt at seeing this creature soon gave way to unease and then pure revulsion as he saw the other two spirit-bodies.

The second resembled the first, but its aura was a sickly greenish-yellow. It was the color of pure evil, and Nanaki shuddered. There could be no question of this phantom's identity.

The third was definitely female and just as definitely not human. She sat there, swaying gently in the current but otherwise unmoving. As Nanaki watched, the second phantom floated up to this one, nodded, and began to swim upwards. At that exact moment, the PHS phone rang and Nanaki pawed the "talk" button, fearing the worst. "Hello."

"Red, it's Cloud. Another Lifestream geyser just popped up around the old mythril mine."

This was not good.

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"Daddy!" Junior pointed down at the ground to her left. "Look!"

"Shit!" Cid watched as another green geyser shot up right in the middle of the Midgar marsh. Fortunately, the Tiny Bronco II was flying much higher than the Baby Bronco had that day, and he and Junior were in no danger. "Okay, no problem...let's land this baby."

Junior kicked on the landing jets and killed the regular engines, and the Tiny Bronco II slowed to a hovering position about a hundred yards south of and a hundred or so feet above Kalm. Little by little the kid eased off the throttle and gently set the old Shinra Stingray down on the grass. "How was that, Daddy?"

"Damn fine landing as always, kiddo." Cid hit the canopy open switch, and the transparent bubble hinged open slowly to allow the jet's pilots to get out. A ladder popped out of another hatch just below the cockpit and Junior scooted down it first. Cid followed as Junior began to take off at a full run towards Cloud and Tifa's. "Hey! Wait for me!" Cid broke into a run as well but as any smoker will tell you, eighteen years of chain-smoking and running a hundred-yard-dash do not mix very well. By the time Cid dragged himself through the front door of Cloud's place, he was about to fall down.

"Why's she...gotta...run so damn...FAST!?" Cid wheezed, sinking into a chair. Junior was already getting her hugs from Cloud and Tifa and giving Zack his usual hug and noogie.

Zack didn't mind. He liked Junior. Sure, she was scary. She stood about a half a head taller than he did and she was strong enough to beat the fire out of him, but that was okay. She was smart and pretty and funny (especially when she and Ryan got into one of their name-calling bouts). And now she had an airplane. He wished he could go to the same school as Junior, but he got to see her pretty often anyway.

"What brings you here, Cid?" Cloud sat down next to Cid and offered him a glass of water. "Junior ready for another lesson already?"

Cid downed the water gratefully. "She's having trouble with a bully," he frowned. "Some stupid kid beat her up...well, he tried to but she got him, thanks to a very painful-looking move Tifa taught her." He sighed. "She still got a black eye and a busted lip outta the deal."

"Aww." Tifa knelt down and took a look. "That's not so bad. Now where did I put that--ah, here we go." Tifa snapped a small green orb into the back of her glove and laid her hand on Junior's cheek. "Cure!" she said, and the air around Tifa and Junior seemed to become filled with little green sparkles. When they faded a few seconds later, there was no trace of Junior's battle scars left. "There you are! Good as new."

"Thanks!" Junior yelled and gave Tifa a peck on the cheek, then she took off after Zack again.

"Yeah, thanks. Shera woulda kicked my ass if she'd seen that." Cid snickered. "Maybe Junior oughta go easier on your boy..." He pointed out the window, where all could see Junior tackling Zack and attempting to pull off one of his shoes so that she could tickle his foot mercilessly. Both children were laughing. Cloud laughed and shook his head.

"I think Zack lets her do that stuff," he said. "He's kinda taken with her, I guess."

"Well, she IS a pretty girl," Tifa added. "I better go out there before they fall in the mud again." She stood up and left.

"Did you see anything weird on the way over?" Cloud asked. Cid nodded.

"Yeah. Another gusher out at the marsh. What the hell's going on lately?" He looked out the window, past Tifa corralling the kids, towards the mountains. "You talked to Red about this?"

"Yeah, right when it came up. He's got a bad feeling." Cloud stared off into the distance as well. "Do you ever wonder...if Sephiroth's still alive in there?"

"No," Cid lied. How many nights had he jerked awake in a cold sweat, feeling those green eyes on him, scared to death to look next to him, thinking he was going to see Shera's lifeless body next to him with the Masamune sticking out of it? That damn dream had come much less frequently since Junior was born, but it still came and it still scared him shitless; in fact it was worse when it did come because when it did, the son of a bitch got Junior too. Still, there wasn't any need to fan Cloud's little fire about it. "Cloud, you were THERE. We dusted him. There's no damn way he coulda survived."

"Maybe I'm just being stupid." Cloud mused. "But sometimes Zack gets this look in his eyes...maybe he just got it from me and that's all there is to it, but it gives me the creeps."

"Cloud." Cid set his glass down on the table. "Sephiroth is DEAD. He ain't coming back. You keep wondering about it, you're gonna go crazy. Let it drop, man."

"I guess you're right." Cloud stood up and laughed suddenly. "Hey, look at this."

"What?" Cid took a look out the window and burst out laughing. Tifa had Zack and Junior lined up and was leading them through a kata or two, and the serious look on Junior's face was priceless. "I wish I coulda had five minutes with that little son of a bitch this afternoon...no, scratch that--the little son of a bitch's DAD," he grumbled as the kids finished their forms and took up sparring stances. "Damn, this gets me...but what am I supposed to do!?"

"You might try talking to his parents," Cloud suggested...then he remembered who he was talking to and quickly appended, "CALMLY."

"I thought about it, Cloud." Cid took another sip of water. "But you know what'd probably happen? The kid's folks'd ground him or cut off his allowance or some such shit, and he'd just come to school and take it out on Junior." Cid growled. "Goddamn, this gets my hackles up!"

"She'll be okay." Cloud laughed. "A few more lessons with Tifa and she'd probably be able to take ME out."

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Whap! Zack staggered back as Junior's foot connected with his stomach. She almost knocked him down, and she was holding back! He didn't let that bother him. Well, he wouldn't have, but just as he came back to his fighting stance, Junior hit him with a right to the side of his head. She'd even given him plenty of time to recover from that kick!

They kept this up for some ninety seconds. For every good hit Zack landed, Junior landed three. It wasn't fair. Junior was bigger than he was! She was trying to let him win and he still couldn't! Zack threw three more punches; Junior blocked them easily and then tagged him upside the head (softly) with her foot once more.

Zack saw red.

In his anger, he wound up and threw a hard punch right at Junior's face. Sensing that something was wrong, Junior tried to block but Zack's fist sailed cleanly past her arm and smashed into her nose. For the second time that day, Junior's head was snapped around by the impact of someone's fist making contact with her face and she landed hard on her bottom, hand clamped over her nose. Tears welled up in her eyes, but she swallowed them back. /I better not cry,/ she thought. /If I cry Zack'll get in trouble./

"Zack!" Tifa gasped. "What did you--"

"C.J.!? " Zack shook his head as if to clear it, then he burst into tears. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to!"

"It's okay," Junior said. "It didn't hurt too bad." Then she whispered to Tifa, "Don't be mad at him. It was just an accident an' besides, I shoulda blocked."

"What the--Junior, you okay?" Cid scooted to the kid's side. Junior nodded.

"Yes sir. Go inside, Zack."

"But--"

"You want me to beat you up some more?" Junior laughed. "Go on. I'm okay." As soon as Zack was inside, she took her hand away from her nose. Both her hand and her nose were covered in blood. "Wow," she muttered.

"Shit!" Cid untied his scarf and held it to Junior's nose. "It's not broken, is it?"

"I don't think so," Tifa sighed. "Cid, I'm really sorry. I didn't think he'd do that, ever. Well, it's a good thing I still have that Restore Materia handy." Tifa did her thing, and Junior wiped her nose and hand on the scarf she held.

"He looked weird," Junior said and sniffled. "There was somethin' wrong with his eyes."

Cloud and Cid exchanged worried glances. "Like how?" Cloud asked her.

"I dunno. I thought they kinda glowed, but maybe I was just seein' things." She blew her nose on the scarf and attempted to hand it to Cid. "Thanks, Daddy."

"Um..." Cid turned an interesting shade of green. "You can keep it." He made a quick recovery and looked towards the house. "Maybe we're all overreacting. You think maybe he's startin' to get his Limit Breaks down?"

Tifa shook her head. "No. If Junior had really been beating on him, I'd consider it. She was holding back, Cid! She was hardly touching him!"

Cid nodded slowly. There was something weird about Zack, all right. He helped Junior to her feet. "We better get going," he said. "Thanks for all the help."

"It's nothing." Tifa gave Cid a hug. "And I'm very sorry about your nose, Junior."

"It's okay." Junior looked up at Tifa worriedly. "He's not gonna get in trouble, is he?"

"Well--" Tifa looked over at Cloud, who shrugged. "We'll talk to him. I don't think he meant to hurt you, though. Sometimes when people are mad they do things they don't mean to."

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Somewhere a bit north of Junon, a restored Shinra Stingray cruised above the mountains. Inside its cockpit, Cid was letting Junior do all the flying, while he gazed down at the mountains beneath him. As he watched, something came into view...a strip of concrete? The corner of a metal building?

"Holy shit!" he muttered.

"Daddy?" Junior looked back at him. "What is it?"

"It's still there. I'll be damned." He grinned. "Hey, Junior! You wanna see a piece of aviation history?"

"Sure! Where?"

Cid leaned forward and pointed. "You see that little airstrip in the mountains there? I want you to put us down on it."

"Okay." Junior did her thing, smoothly as ever, and she and Cid climbed out of the airplane.

The airstrip they'd put down on was mostly overgrown with weeds and grass, and the metal hangar at the end of it was rusty and looked like it'd fall down any second. /Wonder if it's still in there,/ Cid thought as he took Junior's hand and started towards the hangar. /Or did those bastards steal it too?/

"HALT!"

Cid and Junior spun around to see a scraggly-looking bearded man in a Shinra flight crew uniform holding a gun on them.

Author's notes: Now would be a good time to babble about some of the miscellaneous aircraft I drop in here. Yes, the time I spent in the Air Force is FINALLY paying off! There are four main models of Shinra combat aircraft in this fic. The first we see is the Stingray, which is loosely based on a Harrier (i.e. hovering, vertical take-off and landing, etc.).

Next chapter we'll see a Viper, which is modeled after the good old F-16's I used to fix. The Shinra company also has some new air power flying around: the Banshee (equivalent to an F-117 Stealth fighter) and the Hurricane (more of a heavy attack plane). When my drawing talents get a bit more up to speed I will illustrate. Yes, I am learning how to draw again. I have thrown myself into several superhero/comic book drawing books for the past week and I can actually draw things that resemble people now. And yes, the town of Branford is named in honor of Terra from FF3 US.