

Chapter Two: The Children of Jenova

"That's when it appeared! It looked like.... our... our dead mothers... and our dead brothers. Showing us specters of their past." - *Ifalna Gast*

Vincent Valentine sat in the helicopter and watched the ocean pass beneath him. He was assigned to oversee some important scientific work in the town of Nibelheim. It was his job to "babysit the eggheads". He did not like basic guard duty, but there was a different reason for his uneasiness today. The words of an angry young man rang in his head since they had been spoken only days ago.

Was Godo Kisaragi right to blame the Shinra for the death of his father? Why was Vincent unable to put those words in the past as nothing more than the conjecture of a bitter, paranoid man. His nights were sleepless to say the least. There had been rumors about the conduct of some of the higher executives on the Shinra corporate ladder. He had dismissed them as just that. Until that day in Wutai.

When he returned to Midgar for debriefing and reassignment, he had found time to check some activity reports in the Shinra records archives. The discovery of a new experimental source of fuel had led to the dispatch of many exploration teams throughout the globe in search of more evidence. But when the team assigned to the Wutai continent attempted to drill within close range of the sacred Da-Chao mountains, the Wutai clans resisted.

One main source of resistance came from Yen Kisaragi, the elder leader of Wutai. He was the driving force that resisted their efforts. Then about eight months ago, the elder Kisaragi was found murdered in his bed. He had left behind a son as his sole legacy. With no real resistance from the clans, the Shinra were free to resume their exploration.

Then about two weeks ago, an incident with Yen's son Godo resulted in millions of Gil in damages to drilling equipment. But the reaction from the Heidegger was unexpected to say the least. The Colonel saw the potential in Godo as a candidate in Professor Gast's new SOLDIER program.

And this was where Vincent came in.

"Mr. Valentine," The helicopter pilot looked back towards the Turk, "We're approaching the freighter. I'm getting ready to land."

Vincent checked his suitcase and pack one last time. He took out his Death Penalty shotgun and loaded it. This was a habit he had picked up from his brief experience as a Turk. Maybe it was nerves. Maybe paranoia. He preferred to be ready.

Vincent disembarked from the helicopter and headed towards the landed ship. Men were loading large crates from the deck to trucks waiting near the shore. The town of Nibelheim was not far from the port, and Vincent wondered why so many Shinra employees and soldiers mulled about the site. A large crane was in operation at the other end of the ship, loading an enormous steel crate onto a special flatbed truck. Most of the soldiers had their attentions focused on this particular item.

"Mr. Valentine?"

Vincent turned to see two men and a woman in lab coats, with several armed soldiers as their escort. "Yes."

"I'm Professor Gast. This is my lab assistant Hojo, and my colleague Lucrecia."

Lucrecia.....

Professor Gast continued to talk but Vincent did not hear any more words. This vision that stood before him. Was it an angel? Was he dreaming? It was by far the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He found himself staring and snapped to attention.

"...for the duration of the project." Professor Gast looked at the Turk with anticipation.

"We should really get going, Professor," Vincent was sure they had caught him daydreaming, "I understand your time is precious."

The town of Nibelheim was usually quiet. Not much happened here. The population itself was small, and it matched the values of its people perfectly. Pies cooled on window sills. Men worked on trucks and fields. Women hung out laundry with children clinging to their legs. The most extraordinary thing in town was the large mansion. It was constructed by the Shinra corporation only years ago to house their employees working on a nearby drilling site. The mountains surrounding the town had been a source of scrutiny. For now the mansion was unoccupied. The employees had vacated it just as suddenly as they came.

Then its new occupants arrived. The town became flooded with trucks and soldiers loading equipment into the mansion's basement. The work lasted about two weeks, even through each night. The most interesting item was a large metal container. It itself had its own day and night for loading. All other objects were halted to focus solely on this mysterious package. There were no markings on it, save one word inscribed in small, black letters across its side. Jenova.

"Remarkable. Simply remarkable." Professor Gast gazed upon his specimen in complete awe. A darkened figure floated in a large, glass tube suspended by wires and poles attached to several places on its form. "What we are looking at could very well revolutionize mankind. This could be one of the most important findings of all time."

Behind him Lucrecia looked up at the shape and scribbled intently on her notepad. Hojo was equally, if not more, mesmerized by its presence. He stood like a statue, staring up as if taking dictation. The Turk stood towards the back of the room and watched with his arms folded across his chest.

"Well," Gast spoke finally, "We've had a busy day, I believe we should turn in and start fresh in the morning." And with that he made his way out of the room, with Lucrecia and Vincent behind him.

"I.... I'll be along in a moment," Hojo said in a hushed tone. Then he was alone.

As Vincent followed the other two scientists up the hall, he paused for a moment. *Did I just hear Hojo talking to someone?* Satisfied that he had not, the Turk continued on.

Lucrecia was about to ascend the staircase to her room when she saw her guard approaching. "Was there something else, Mr. Valentine?"

Vincent became flushed at the tone of her voice, "I was going to get a cup of tea at the local tavern to help me relax. That... that.. thing we just saw was something else. I was wondering if you would care to join me?"

Lucrecia could not believe her ears. "I'd be happy to, Mr. Valentine."

"Please, call me Vincent."

The two walked out of the mansion and towards the local tavern. As they walked side by side, they shared an awkward silence. Then finally Lucrecia spoke.

"So how long have you been a Turk," She paused, "Vincent?"

"Only a year," The Turk was flustered at the mention of his name. "I was a soldier for a brief period until my skills caught the attention of Colonel Heidegger, the man in charge of Shinra Peace Preservation."

"Peace Preservation," Lucrecia repeated, "I've always found that term amusing. It's such a misleading way to describe our company's military branch." And with that they shared a chuckle.

"Yes," Vincent opened the tavern door for Lucrecia, "Our company is nothing if not misleading." But as Lucrecia passed him his mind reached back to Godo Kisaragi's words. He quickly shook off the memory and followed Lucrecia into the tavern.

Come to me, Hojo...

"Yes."

Soon we can be together....

"Yes."

Soon we will rule this world....

"Yes." Hojo was kneeling on the floor in front of the glass case, staring up at the shape inside. It did not move. It simply floated in the chemicals that sustained it. The darkened laboratory was deserted of all employees save Hojo. No sound accompanied his hushed voice.

But he was not alone.

The next morning, Gast and Lucrecia started early on their work, with Hojo lurking around them. The three worked for an entire day taking readings and samples from the specimen. Hojo worked alongside them but on separate tests. He stared intently at the test tubes of chemical samples that littered the counter tops. Pages of notes were strewn about the lab and books were stacked on the floor. All the while, Vincent watched the scientists, being careful not to get in their way.

That evening, Gast and Lucrecia accompanied Vincent to the tavern for a meal and some relaxation. But once again, Hojo declined to join them.

"So how did you discover this thing," Vincent looked across the table at Professor Gast.

"I'm sorry to say the exact details of its discovery are classified, Mr. Valentine." Gast looked up from his meal with sincerity. "But I can tell you about the ancient writings that had led to our findings. Even now archaeologists are working in labs in Midgar trying to learn more. All we know now is that this creature was known as Jenova and could be millions of years old."

"Professor Gast was chosen to experiment on this new discovery," Lucrecia added, "With his background in genetic research, he is the leading expert in the biological sciences."

Vincent nodded sagely at some of the scientific theories he heard that night, even though he didn't understand them at full.

I want to be with you, Hojo....

"Yes, my goddess of the stars," Hojo's beady eyes rested on the glass tank before him, bloodshot and weary. Sweat rolled down his forehead. "Soon we will be together, and we will rule this planet."

You have learned well, my love....

"I have, sweet Jenova."

But for us to be together, I must have a vessel to traverse your world....

"I understand, my precious." Hojo rose from his kneeling position and turned towards the test tubes on one of the counter tops. His hand slowly reached over and opened a drawer. His eyes fell upon the contents of the drawer. A lone syringe.

For the next few weeks, research in the mansion continued as planned. The Turk watched from a distance while polishing his firearm. The three scientists ran their tests and computed their findings. Lucrecia was examining the readout on a device mounted at the front of the glass tank. She began recording the results in her notebook, when a sudden chill washed over her. She looked up at the inert shape within.

"Whew, I think I've been working too hard," She said with a nervous smile, "I'm starting to imagine things." Hojo gravely looked up from his work at Lucrecia, then up at Jenova.

"There's no reason why you couldn't take a break," Gast said with a friendly smile, "We've all been cooped up in this stuffy lab for weeks. Vincent, take Lucrecia outside for some air. Perhaps you could bring us back some coffees from the tavern. If you wouldn't mind, of course."

Vincent was on his feet, "Not at all, Professor." And the Turk led Lucrecia out of the lab and up the stairs. Hojo just watched them leave with fire in his eyes and spite in his heart.

"I'm sorry to be such a bother," Lucrecia spoke softly as they walked through the town, "I don't know what's come over me today."

"Nonsense," Vincent smiled at her, "You have been working so hard on this project, it is only normal that you feel this way." Lucrecia looked down at her hand. On the palm, there was a small pinhole. She couldn't remember where she could have gotten it. She was sure it hadn't been there when she went to bed last night. She dismissed it and smiled back at Vincent as the two went into the tavern.

That night, Lucrecia tossed and turned in her bed. Fever overtook her sleep, and her dreams were disturbed by a voice that was alien to her.

Do not resist me, child....

"Who's there?!" Lucrecia sat up in her bed instantly. "Show yourself," She called to the shadows, "I'm not amused!" Nothing. Darkness. An empty room strewn with shadows from the moonlight that passed through trees outside her windows. "Am I going crazy?" She smiled to herself, "Now I'm talking to myself." Lucrecia laid back in her bed, and returned to her nightmares.

Several weeks later, Vincent knocked on Lucrecia's door. "Lucrecia? I was wondering if you would join me for coffee? Professor Gast flew to Midgar this morning with the latest test results." Silence. Her door was unlocked. Carefully, he pushed open the door. Nothing. The room was tidy. The bed was empty. It was clear that no one had slept there. This was alarmingly similar to the night he found Lions missing. A million thoughts raced through his head. He frantically returned to his room. The Turk knelt before his bed and took his shotgun from underneath. If something had happened to Lucrecia, someone would pay. The Death Penalty was loaded and ready. He took his one true friend and left the mansion. He hurried down the street towards the edge of town. No sign of departing vehicles, pedestrians, or chocobos. Nothing but silence. The occasional villagers passed by, going about their business.

"Oh my darling!"

Vincent turned to see two people coming arm in arm out of the tavern. Lucrecia and Hojo. They paused at the town square and embraced.

Vincent was crushed.

Author's Notes: Well I know you're all out there yelling, "Damn, Captain! You spoony bard! 'Children of Jenova' is one of the greatest FFXVII fanfics out there! What the hell's with you?!" I decided to pay homage to my favorite fic by the talented author, Sailor Solathei (holychao@swbell.net). The title fit for this chapter and I couldn't resist! You've probably guessed who were Jenova's 'Children' in this chapter by now, but we'll come back to this situation in chapter 4. Next part: The tension in Wutai builds as the Shinra searches for their lost Turk. Can WAR be far behind??