

Chapter Four: New Life

The following chapter contains scenes of extreme violence. Reader discretion is advised.

"That's the will and the spirit of the Turks, believe it!" - *Elena the Turk*

"Fire3!"

"Bolt3!!"

"Quake3!!!"

"Ice3!!!"

Billows of smoke rose through the night sky above Wutai. Groups of angry townspeople brawled and looted in the streets. The largest group surrounded the smoldering remains of what was once the tiny item shop on the edge of town. Now it was all but timbers and ashes, the cluttered remains of civility.

"We must search the remains," Godo stood triumphantly in front of the crowd, his blood rage cooled by time and vengeance. "I must be sure of their fate!"

Several members of the gathered mass began searching the wreckage of their little shop, sifting through smoking boards and crumbled plaster. But they found just that. The remains of their shop and nothing more.

"Where are they?!" Godo became frantic as his blood began to boil once more.

"Here!" A villager sorting through the rubble called to the others. "I've found something!"

The others rushed to his side as a few of the crowd began moving and brushing aside some debris. They finally uncovered it. A metal hatch. Quickly, they opened it to reveal a darkened underground passage.

"No!!! I will not be robbed of my vengeance!" Godo became enraged once again. Tunnels just like this one ran under many parts of Wutai. Most of them led to the temple on the on the edge of town. Some ran between other buildings. "Quickly," he said as he descended the stairs, "They must not escape!"

"We must hurry!"

In a dark cave, three men in blue suits made their way through the puddles and mud beneath their feet. One man carried another, while the third watched behind them for pursuit. Their panicked voices echoed through the cave. The small amount of light came from a flashlight they had found in the item shop.

Malcom leaned on Vincent, dragging his feet, half-conscious from the amount of pain he was feeling. Reece nervously looked behind them at regular intervals. Vincent held the flashlight with his free hand, carefully examining the cavern ahead. The three came to a large oak door barring the rest of the passage.

"We must get this door open," Vincent spoke in a dire tone while he lowered Malcom to the ground and leaned him against the cave wall. "Reece, do you have any fire spells left?"

"One more shot. I shoulda used it to weld that trap door shut back there."

"It is good that you did not. We need it now." Vincent examined the door and crouched next to one of the hedges. "Here," he pointed near the bottom of the door. "One shot here."

"Fire!"

A green gem in the handle of Reece's firearm flashed with light, and the bottom of the wooden door was assaulted with a bright but small flame. The weakened door groaned and fell from its damaged frame. Vincent picked up Malcom and the Turks hurried through.

"Hojo, what is the meaning of this?" Professor Gast fumed at his assistant. He had returned from a progress report meeting in Midgar to find his lab completely rearranged. Large tubes replaced scientific measuring devices and strange liquid glowed and bubbled inside them. "I am in charge of the Jenova project. This is NOT a part of my project." Gast walked over to the largest glass tube, the one which contained Jenova itself. Several tubes carried liquid from this tube to the others and back. Its form floated inanimately, yet almost mocking Gast with its silence and stillness. He turned in anger. "And where is Lucrecia? Why did she allow this?"

Hojo looked up nonchalantly from his notebook at Gast. "She went into labor an hour ago. Right now she's at the hospital." Gast looked at Hojo in shock and stormed out of the lab.

Dust settled in a dark cellar, the only motion in a dead room. The air was stale and musty, moisture seeped down the walls. The only sound was a constant dripping. A small rodent scurried across the floor.

Suddenly a loud crackle thundered outside the door, followed by the lurching creek of an oak door falling off of its hinges. A beam of light pierced the darkness and moved across the room between walls.

"The room is clear," Vincent's voice was flushed and raspy under the strain of the night's events. He still carried his wounded friend Malcom, barely conscious, one arm over Vincent's shoulder. "This cellar must lead to one of the homes in Wutai. We must find the trap door and make our way out of the village."

"Did you just hear that?" Reece's head darted back towards the cavern.

"Hear what?" Vincent looked gravely at the other Turk.

"I coulda sworn I heard voices," Reece wiped some sweat from his head.

"Never mind that now, I have found the exit." Vincent aimed the light at a rotted wooden hatch above some cracked concrete steps. "Quickly!" He hurried towards the steps carrying his larger friend. Reece followed hesitantly watching the passage behind them. Vincent ascended the narrow steps and kicked at the door. "It is locked from the outside. Reece, do you have any bullets left?"

"Yeah, I've been usin' up my fire materia all night."

Vincent moved up against the wall with Malcom, and Reece walked up to the trap door. He stuck his gun up against the opening where the moonlight outside was blocked by the latch. A thunderous gunshot echoed through the passage. Malcom jolted conscious and faded out.

The Turks made their way out of the cellar into a small backyard. The night air was full of smoke and the distant angry cries of rioting townspeople.

"There they are!"

A small group of people on a nearby street began running towards them. Reece turned back to the dark cellar and heard the cries from Godo's group. Both groups closed in on them.

"Push, Lucrecia, push!" The doctor in Nibelheim held Lucrecia's hand tightly as she talked her through labor. "We're almost there, you can do it!"

"Lucrecia!" Professor Gast rushed to the side of Lucrecia's bed and took her other hand. He was wearing a mask and cap in addition to a hospital clean gown, fully prepared to assist his colleague and friend when she needed him most.

"Arrghh!!! Professor! I'm so glad you came GRARGHH!!!" Lucrecia clenched her teeth in pain, tears rolled down her eyes.

The doctor moved to the foot of the bed to assist the nurse there, and smiled up at Lucrecia, "It's time." Lucrecia screamed in pain and turned to look at Gast.

"Breathe, Lucrecia, breathe!" The Professor held her hand tightly and smiled.

The doctor looked down and then back up at Lucrecia, "Okay, push, Lucrecia! Push!" Lucrecia screamed and hollered. "Push!" Again she screamed. "One more time! You can do it, push!" Lucrecia screamed at the top of her lungs until she nearly passed out.

"People of Wutai, return to your homes," A booming voice was broadcasted on a speaker phone over the whipping sound of helicopter blades. "For your own safety," The voice continued, "Please go home!"

The normally calm night skies over Wutai were ablaze with activity. Several Shinra helicopters circled over the village with searchlights focusing on the people in the streets below. Smoke filled the air from fires set throughout Wutai. A few of the helicopters landed and soldiers piled out to attempt to disperse the various groups of gathered people.

"Vincent!"

The Turks turned to see a large man stepping out of one of the landed helicopters. He ran from the vehicle hunched down to avoid the still spinning blades. Colonel Heidegger. Vincent was never so glad to see his commander.

"Sir, we have matters to discuss," Vincent shouted to the approaching officer as he helped paramedics put Malcom on a stretcher. "It is about what happened here -"

Heidegger raised his hand to silence Vincent, "I know about everything. I was in communication wit>

Transfer interrupted!

arted."

"You knew what they were doing?!" Vincent shot Reece a look of disgust and glared back at the Colonel.

"Never mind that now," Heidegger turned away from Vincent. "The President wants you back in Midgar for debriefing and then back to your post in Nibelheim.

Nibelheim. Vincent had forgotten all about Lucrecia. He looked back at Malcom on the stretcher, medics securing him for his flight back to the city. And turned to follow Reece and Heidegger to the waiting helicopter.

"You did it, Lucrecia," Gast spoke softly as he held his friend's hand in the Nibelheim hospital. He looked down at the doctor at the foot of the bed.

The doctor just stared downward. The nurse happily approached her with a bowl of hot water, but choked in horror and dropped the bowl. Silence filled the room, shattered only for an instant by the bowl's impact with the floor.

Lucrecia turned her gaze from Gast and down to the doctor. "Is - is my baby okay? Is he alive? Doctor?"

"H-he's fine," The doctor slowly whispered. The baby: was perfect. Healthy, alive, and very still. It did not cry. It just stared up at the doctor with a piercing gaze. Its eyes glowed an unholy green. Its matted hair, white.

And Sephiroth was born.

Deep under Nibelheim in a dark lab, a glass tank filled with liquid was still. But the liquid began to bubble. Jenova had awakened. Her conqueror had come.

It had been a week since Vincent left Wutai. He sat in a helicopter and watched the mountainous scenery pass beneath him. Reece sat in the seat next to him, looking out of the other side. An uneasiness hung in Vincent ever since he left the village. The Turks may have killed an old man - under Shinra orders. Godo may have lost his father - under Shinra orders. Who knows what countless crimes his company may have committed without his knowledge? He glanced over at Reece, who sat nonchalantly looking outside. He turned back to the window and saw the town of Nibelheim on the horizon. The sun began to set over Mount Nibel. It took most of day to get to Nibelheim by helicopter. He had contacted Yuriko the Turk this morning and told her to gather her belongings for her trip back to Midgar. She and Malcom were assigned to retrieve a woman wanted by the Shinra - Ifalna, something. She had disappeared from a research facility in Midgar under mysterious circumstances. Some believed she may have had inside help. But that was not Vincent's concern. His mind wandered back to Lions. With no trace of his friend anywhere in Wutai or elsewhere, the Shinra simply gave up. He wondered how hard his company would look if he himself disappeared.

"We're setting down, gentlemen," The pilot said as he turned his head back to the Turks. Vincent noticed that no one seemed to be around. He had expected, at least, to see Yuriko waiting to board the helicopter. Something was wrong.

Vincent and Reece stepped out of the helicopter and walked towards the well in the center of town. Vincent had his shotgun out and at his side. There was no one. No citizens wandering about. No children played in the streets. No men wandered into or out of the tavern. The wind was the only sound that accompanied their footsteps.

"GRAARRGGHHH!!!!!!"

Vincent turned in shock to see a large, scaly beast leap from the top of the well and land on Reece! Its enormous jaws sunk deeply into the fallen Turk's shoulder! It was roughly the size of a horse, with a head similar to an alligator, covered in thick,

dark scales; and it had the agility of a puma! Reece screamed in pain and terror as the creature lunged for another bite! A thunderous boom launched the beast from Reece, and Vincent prepared for another shot! The creature leaped towards Vincent and he raised his weapon and fired! The body of the demon fell hard to the earth and splattered green blood on Reece, still laying on the ground.

“Holy %\$*&#@!!!! what the hell is that?!!” Reece trembled frantically, covered in blood from his wound and that of the dead creature. Vincent quickly knelt beside his fallen comrade.

“Cure3!” A green gem in the handle of the Death Penalty glowed to life and Reece’s wound began to heal. “That should suffice until we get you to a doctor. We must find out what is going on here!” It became crystal clear to Vincent why the streets of Nibelheim were deserted. He helped Reece up and reloaded his gun.

The Turks ventured toward the Shinra Mansion. Vincent carefully pushed open the iron gate and slowly walked towards the house. Reece limped after him, holding his shoulder and grimacing in pain. And there they saw it. Yuriko’s lifeless body, torn almost in half. Her dead eyes were covered in blood and stared upwards. A look of horror frozen on her face. Her sword discarded on the steps beside her. The concrete steps were painted crimson with her blood. Vincent and Reece gagged.

And in the surrounding shadows they heard a low growling.

Madre Dios! I hope the Turks get a whopping hazard bonus on their paychecks every week! It seems like a really stressful job. Even moreso than a professional wrestler. The riot in Wutai will definitely be a sore spot between the village and the Shinra. And also a sore spot for our favorite Turk, Vincent.

The birth of Sephiroth was creepy in a ‘Children of the Corn’ kinda way. Raise your hand if you know where those beasts in Nibelheim are coming from! Vincent will be finding out, and the one responsible’s not going to go quietly into custody. And the Jenova project comes to a deadly halt (at least for Vincent) next chapter, don’t miss it!