

Rufus's Twin
By Jen

Chapter 1: ONE YEAR LATER

Cid Highwind took a long drag of the cigarette hanging from his lips like a parched man in bad need of water. Then, he resumed pacing the small room already stuffed full of bodies. Four bodies to be exact: Vincent Valentine, Cloud Strife, Red XIII, and Barret Wallace.

"Dammit Cid," Barret complained, "quit yer pacin' or I'm gonna hafta shoot ya. Yer startin' to make me nervous."

Cid gave Barret a look that could have leveled a rhino and said simply, "Go piss up a rope."

Said Vincent from his post in the corner, "You are so eloquent Cid. I believe that is why we are such good friends."

Cid glanced in Vincent's direction and tugged at the damned so-called tie(which he felt was really a noose).

"Shera had a hard time getting you in that Cid. I think you should quit messing it up," Cloud informed him.

"Did I @#&\$n' ask for opinions from the peanut gallery?!"

"I have not said a word," Red said, lifting his head from his massive paws long enough to deliver this statement.

Vincent, having decided he had had enough with watching Cid demolish his tie, walked up to his friend and got him to hold still long enough to fix it.

"How'd you learn to fix these damned suicide ropes?" Cid queried, getting a few more puffs out of his cigarette before lighting another.

"You forget friend, I was once a Turk."

"Yeah, before you came to your senses."

"Sleeping in a coffin is coming to my senses?"

Vincent's little remark accomplished what he had hoped it would, it got Cid to laugh and relieved some of the tension in the room.

"Shit! What the hell is takin' that woman so damn long!"

"You only get married once," Red reminded Cid.

"Yeah, well, I'm beginnin' to have second thoughts. Why the hell didn't I just leave it alone?"

"Ya needed ta make an honest woman outta her," Barret said.

"She is seven months pregnant," Cloud pointed out.

"So! What the hell difference does that make?"

"Maybe it makes a lot of difference to her. It did to Tifa," Cloud replied.

Cid's only reply was a very distinctive four letter word. He continued to pace and smoke, having gone through one pack already. He realized he was probably being a real ass, but he couldn't control the damn quivering in the pit of his stomach, or the slight tremble to his hand. He'd been living as lovers with Shera for a year now, but somehow marriage posed a very

different view on their relationship. But, dammit, if this was what Shera wanted, then this is was he would give her.

Vincent watched Cid pace, and for the first and only time, he was grateful for his lack of feeling. He would not want to be experiencing what Cid was right now. If anyone had told him a year before that Cid Highwind would be marrying a very pregnant Shera, he would have told them they were better off trying to hold Shinra Inc. together, rather than hoping for a miracle of this proportion. But, here he stood, witness to the fact that Cid was actually wearing a suit(monkey-suit, as Cid called it)and marrying Shera.

Cloud braced his lean frame against the wall and thought about Tifa in the other room, holding their baby girl--Cera, three months old. Although he had never treated Tifa the way Cid had Shera, he had been just as blind to his feelings for her as Cid had for Shera. But, it didn't take long after defeating Sephiroth for Tifa to tell him to make up his mind. He knew that losing her was not something he cared to face, so he married her. They now took up residence in Rocket Town just a few houses down from Shera and Cid.

Red was trying very hard to take a nap. But, the vibrations of Cid's work boots(the one thing he refused to change, besides the goggles with his cigarettes tucked in the side)on the floor was making it very difficult. Red, being of a very calm nature, did not let Cid's anxiety affect him. Still, he felt a twinge of unease, and was uncertain of its origin. Did this mean that danger was coming, and that they were not as safe as they hoped? Or, was he actually, for once, affected by another's agitation?

Barret was strongly considering beatin' Cid over the head to get him to sit down. All that damned pacin' was startin' to make him edgy. Especially, since he could relate. Hell, it was only five months ago that he had married Elmyra and the three of them--Elmyra, Marlene, and him--had made a permanent home in Kalm. Things were pretty peaceful right now, and he prayed that nothin' changed.

The door suddenly burst open, and Cid, cursing wildly, burnt his hand on the tip of his cigarette. The newcomer was a half an hour late, and breathing very heavily.

"You @*#&\$%#@#\$!&n;' cat! If I didn't wanna ruin my suit and make Shera cry--an' she's been doin' that a lot lately, Doc Thomas said it's those damn hormones--I'd beat the shit outta you!"

Reeve scratched his head and managed to look suitably sheepish. Although he really had no use for Cait Sith anymore--considering he was the President of The Reeve Electric Co.--the nickname "cat" had stuck. Just about everyone called him Reeve now, except for Cid and Barret.

"Sorry Cid. I didn't mean to come bursting in here like this. I got caught up at work. With my Vice President attending the wedding, I got a little behind."

"The least you could've done was warn me. I burnt my damn hand!"

"How many of those have you smoked already?," was Reeve's reply.

"Hell if I know!"

"He is on his second pack," Vincent replied for him.

"You must be pretty nervous."

Cid glared at Reeve, and Reeve wisely backed away.

"How are the remodeling of the sectors coming?" Red asked Reeve, trying to interject a note of peace.

"Sector 7 should be finished in about six months. The people of Midgar do good, fast work when they are treated and paid decently. It really amazed me how fast they converted the mako reactors to electric generators. Midgar should be up and running without bugs fairly quickly."

Reeve turned from Red and looked toward Vincent, "My offer still stands Vincent, should you want to join the former Turks in working for me. With your deadly aim, you would make a perfect bodyguard."

With a small twitch of his lips, something that passed for a smile where Vincent was concerned, he replied, "As before, I thank you Reeve. But, I have no wish to work for anyone. I have managed to clean out the Nibelheim mansion, and now I wish to remain there. I am still sorting through all of Hojo and Gast's workings. I want to make sure that they have left no loose ends to threaten our new found peace."

Reeve nodded, and turned to Cloud, "I sent Reno out to look over the progress of Sector 7. He was extremely bored at the thought of spending a day watching men work, but he did it. Vincent, I sent Rude to the Icicle Village to collect all of Gast's files for you to look over. Elena, is overseeing the repairs on the electric generator in Nibelheim as we speak."

Cloud nodded and said, "Sorry to leave you with so much work Reeve. But Tifa wanted me to be here early to make sure I got here at all. I get so busy sometimes that I'm late for dinner."

Cid glanced at the clock on the wall and said, "How damn long can it possibly take to get dressed!"

Tifa put another flower in Shera's hair, and then stood back to admire her effort. Shera looked beautiful in a simple white dress, her hair piled on top of her head and decorated with flowers.

"Cid will forget all about how long he had to wait when he sees you," Tifa told Shera.

"Are you sure I don't look like an egg?" Shera asked with a smile.

"Nope." Yuffie told her, holding up little Cera in order to make baby noises in her face.

Tifa glanced at Yuffie and shook her head. Although Yuffie was still quite annoying at times, and still very greedy for materia, it always amazed Tifa how much she had changed. Sometimes, she thought, looking at Shera, she was amazed how much they all had changed.

"So Shera," Yuffie asked, "how did you manage to make the old man marry you?"

"I didn't. He just got it in his mind that this is what I wanted. You know Cid; once he has made up his mind, there is no stopping him."

"Is this what you want?" asked Elmyra, who held a sleeping Marlene in her lap.

"Yes, I wanted marriage. But, I was perfectly happy the way things were."

A look of understanding passed between Shera and Tifa as she added, "I'm just happy to have him."

Yuffie shook her head, her face scrunching up into a look of disgust, "Why you'd want him anyway is beyond me. The man is an obnoxious, old goat."

Tifa took Cera from Yuffie and gave her a dirty look. Maybe she had been a little bit wrong about Yuffie changing.

"Well..." Yuffie trailed off as Tifa pinned her with another look.

But, Shera merely laughed and replied, "You'll understand one day when you love someone."

Shera glanced at herself in the mirror and decided that she didn't look too bad. She had been feeling a little restless lately, but that was because Cid refused to let her work until after the baby was born. She figured she could make some small sacrifices. But, Cid had learned quickly that Shera wasn't really the pushover that she seemed. She couldn't be, to have put up with his treatment of her all those years.

A knock sounded, and one blonde spike peaked its way in, "Is it safe to come in?"

"Yes Cloud." Tifa replied.

He walked in and softly closed the door behind him. Walking up to Tifa, he slid an arm around her waist and pressed her to his side. Sometimes, Tifa still found it hard to believe that all of Cloud finally belonged to her. After their experience trapped in the lifestream, they had found the closeness they never had as children. Cloud still had nightmares about Sephiroth and all the experiments Hojo performed on him, but with her right there to comfort him when he woke up, the nightmares were less frequent. And now with little Cera, and a job as Vice President to Reeve--that wonderful man, she could just kiss him if Cloud wouldn't take offense and try to slice him to ribbons--Cloud had too much to concentrate on to be concerned about Sephiroth.

"Cid is driving us crazy Shera. I hope you're almost finished."

"Yes," she laughed, "I'm finally finished."

He looked her over and said, "You're going to knock Cid dead."

"I hope so."

Cloud kissed Tifa and said, "I'll let the others know."

When he had left, Elmyra said, "I just want you to know Shera, that I think it is really wonderful that you are getting married in Aeris' church."

Shera walked up to Elmyra and squeezed her hand, hoping to lend some comfort to the pain that would never heal in all of them. She knew that being married to Barret was the best thing to happen to Elmyra since she was given Aeris all those years ago. It was obvious to anyone who knew them, that the two were happy. And, most importantly, so was Marlene.

"I really wish she was here to see this."

"She is Elmyra. She is."

Cid waited for Shera at the altar--Vincent, Cloud, Red, Barret, and Reeve all next to him. First down the aisle came Marlene, then Elmyra, Yuffie, Tifa, and finally, Shera. If he would've had a cigarette in his mouth at this moment, it would've fallen to the floor. He'd seen Shera in various states of dress, but never lookin' like this. Dammit, if she didn't look like his own personal angel. He swallowed hard and tugged at his tie.

"Cid," Vincent whispered, "leave that tie alone."

"Would you look at her Vincent?" he replied.

"Cid, is that a tear?" Reeve asked.

"No dammit! I got somethin' in my eye."

He watched her glide closer, and he wished to hell he had a cigarette right now. Damn, but he really did love her.

"Jesus." he said, after a moment.

When she reached his side at last, he took her hand and they said their vows. When it was over, he kissed her hard, swept her up into his arms, and headed for the general direction of the remodeled Highwind--it had taken quite a beating after the Northern Crater. As soon as he dropped everyone off, he was taking her to Costa Del Sol for a much needed

vacation/honeymoon.

Okay, so you're saying Cid marrying Shera? That's been done too many times to count! Well, sue me. I happen to like the idea of those two together. And since he's my favorite character, I'll do whatever the hell I please with his life. I have yet to decide what the baby Shera is carrying will be. My only goal there, is to make sure this baby makes Cid's life hell. He deserves a few gray hairs.

I decided to stick Barret with Elmyra so he wouldn't feel so left out of all this marrying stuff. Besides, Elmyra did take care of Marlene and she and Barret actually get along.

Well, I thought that Midgar deserved to have someone nice running it since the evil person in question isn't having anything to do with the running of it. Yet. We'll see what he gets up too soon. As Cait Sith, Reeve never interested me much. But as Reeve, I see a whole new set of possibilities. I never used to care about him one way or the other, but I'll give him some story time here. Who knows, he may play a vital role in saving everyone.

And, I was really tired of Cloud being a mindless freak. I wanted him to shake free of Seph's hold with the help of Tifa and his motley assortment of friends. So, I've decided that Cloud will be as normal as normal is for Cloud. I also feel that Cloud and Tifa belong together. As far as Cloud and Aeris go, that one is hopeless considering she is gone. I didn't want Cloud running around being hopelessly in love with someone he could never have.

As for Vincent, I decided he can take up residence in the Nibelheim mansion--He seems to like to torture himself anyway. I'll let him sort through Hojo's mess and maybe he can discover the truth about all of Hojo's little experiments. As much as he loved Lucrecia, the thought of him living forever in her waterfall just didn't hold much water--No pun intended. I wanted him to be an active part of my story. I happen to enjoy his indifferent ways.

Yuffie you say? Why, she's just her old self. Nothing too exciting here. Maybe. Maybe I'll change my mind and let her get a little more exposure.

As for Red, he will of course stay in Cosmo Canyon. Perhaps he will take over where his Grandfather left off--protecting the planet and dispensing wisdom.

Okay, the Turks. Well, like a great deal of us, bad guys or not, I happen to like the Turks. So, I couldn't very well leave them out of the story. Since Reno made sure the Turks were splitting from Shinra when it fell apart, I decided to aline them with the good guys. The most obvious placement for them seemed to be working for Reeve. He pays good, even if they do get boring jobs.

Am I forgetting anyone? Nope, it appears not. Well, I hope the current shenanigans of our favorite FF7 characters entertains you immensely.

The best is yet to come, so read on to Chapter two. I'd appreciate any comments:)