

Rufus's Twin
By Jen

Chapter 11: Needle Phobia

Yuffie trailed behind Reno, Rude, and Elena, careful to remain out of sight. She couldn't believe Reno had refused to let her go with them, as if she was some sort of child that needed his permission. She wasn't 16 anymore, she was 24 and she made her own decisions. Besides, she couldn't see how this would be any more dangerous than facing Sephiroth had been. And that was nine years ago!

"Damn you, Reno!" she muttered, torn between hating him and liking him.

One minute, he was kissing her and making her think that he wasn't half bad. The next, he was ordering her around and treating her like a child. Yuffie wasn't quite sure just who Reno thought he was, but it was most certainly not her father or her keeper. She had almost single-handedly turned Wutai into a flourishing, economic power again, and she didn't think that Reno could boast to having done anything even close to that. So who was he to tell her what to do?

Under normal circumstances, she might not have wanted to visit the underground beneath Midgar. She was pretty certain there were all kinds of atrocities breeding there, from mutated creatures to dark, damp hallways. She would have preferred to stay here in Wutai, where it was warm and comfortable. But there was no way she was going to allow Reno to get away with ordering her around. Besides, they might need her help at some point. She was a ninja, after all.

Stealing as close as she could get without being discovered, she eavesdropped on their conversation.

"Reno, are you sure Yuffie won't be any trouble?" she heard Elena ask.

Reno ran a hand through his dark, red hair. "Why? You saw how she agreed to stay here."

"I know. It was too easy, and that's what bothers me. Yuffie has never listened to anyone, why would she listen to you, of all people?"

"Thanks El. Your confidence simply overwhelms me."

"Come on Reno, admit it. You and Yuffie fight like cats and dogs."

"I'm telling you, Elena. I have that kid wrapped around my finger."

Yuffie stopped for a moment, shocked by his words. He was just using her. She should have known. Reno was notorious for using women and then tossing them aside. To think that she almost believed him when he told her he had feelings for her.

"That bastard! Wrapped around his finger?! I'll show him!" Yuffie growled to herself, trying to push away the hurt caused by his careless words.

She was so consumed by her anger, that she didn't hear Rude say, "Reno, she's just an innocent kid. Don't hurt her or I'll break your neck."

Reno laughed. "Have you appointed yourself Yuffie's champion then? Well, she doesn't need one. She's a selfish little sneak who knows how to get her way."

"Reno! Rude's right. Yuffie doesn't know the first thing about relationships. If you don't have genuine feelings for her, leave her alone."

"What is this? I don't need you two—" he stopped when he caught the expressions on their faces.

"You forget, Reno, we know you really, really well," Elena added.

"Some friends you are," Reno muttered, as they boarded the ferry.

Yuffie stole onto the ferry, sitting as far away from the others as she could manage. She didn't want Reno to spot her. Instead, she wanted to relish the looks on their faces when they found she had followed them underground.

Yuffie tried to get as comfortable as was possible in the vents above Reeve's office. Although she was quite slim, it was still a tight fit. But at least from here, she could see the maps clearly and could memorize them while the others droned on.

Reno stood against the wall, not wanting to get very close to Reeve or exchange anymore words than he had to. He was still steaming over the fight they had earlier. Obviously, Reeve was too, for he only glanced at Reno when it was necessary and directed most of his words at Elena and Rude.

"This looks like a city," Elena murmured, looking closely at the maps.

"It is," Reeve said. "At one time, there was a great earthquake and the ground broke open just under Midgar. It seemed that the city was built on a dormant fault line. But not dormant enough, because there was an earthquake and Midgar collapsed into the crack. Rather than relocate, they salvaged what they could and built a new city over the old one."

Elena frowned. "Wouldn't that still be dangerous? I mean, what if the fault line acted up again?"

Reeve shrugged. "Extensive studies were done, and the scientists were sure that it wouldn't become a problem again. Even if it did, I believe the city would be safe since it's sitting on top of another one."

Yuffie stared at the maps in disbelief. A whole city was underneath Midgar? Who knew what sort of things they would find when they went under there. There could even be materia that hadn't been used in ages. She could only imagine how pure it would be and how strong.

Automatically, she began adding up the figures in her head and determining how much more profit that would make Wutai. Maybe this wouldn't be a wasted trip after all. She could teach Reno a lesson, and make a little money off of it.

"Let me get this straight," Reno spoke up, "there's a city underneath of the one we are in now, and you want us to go down there? There's probably some colony of mutants who only want to live in peace. We'll go down there and they'll consider us a better meal than the rats."

Elena made a face. "Oh Reno, cut the theatrics."

Reeve grit his teeth and refrained from making comment. He knew Reno was just trying to goad him into an argument. He had gotten the impression when the Turks arrived, that Reno wasn't ready to forgive him for earlier. As far as Reeve was concerned, although he felt bad, part of the fault lied with Reno. And he felt it was better for them just to keep their distance for awhile.

Reeve ignored Reno and said, "It'll probably be chilly under there, so you'll want to dress warmly. I hate to say this, but I'm not sure how long you'll be under there. The underground city is enormous, and there's no telling where the energy Red spotted has moved to now. So you'll want to pack plenty of food."

"I've been studying these maps," he continued, "and I think it might be better for you to get a good night's rest and head out early tomorrow morning. From these areas here," he said, pointing to the map, "I think that they would have collapsed and created the equivalent of the Da-Chao mountains."

Rude leaned closely to the maps and studied for a few minutes before straightening. "Hmm. Then we'll need climbing equipment."

Reeve nodded. "That would probably be a good idea."

"How many soldiers are you sending with us?" Elena asked.

Reeve scratched his goatee, "I've been thinking about this. A large group of soldiers just might get in your way. If you were to travel down alone, you might-"

"Alone?! Are you kidding me?! God only knows what's under there!" Reno interrupted.

Elena rounded on him. "Shut up, Reno! You didn't even give Reeve a chance to explain. Now quit it. You aren't acting like a professional Turk here."

Reno was about to reply, when one look from Rude silenced him.

From above, Yuffie covered her mouth to stifle a giggle. Elena was really putting Reno in his place, and at the moment, she became one of Yuffie's favorite people.

The trip underground was starting to sound a lot more difficult than she had thought. But she was a ninja, and she had climbed Da-Chao many times. Besides, if she followed Reeve's advice and packed all of the things he said to, she would be fine. And she had no intention of staying down there until they found whatever it was they were looking for. She just wanted to make Reno look like an idiot, and find that materia. Then she was out of there. The Turks were on their own after that.

Reeve sighed and rubbed his temple, where a headache was forming. "As I was saying, if you go down there alone, you can get around much more quickly. Since it would only be you three, all you need to do is find out what this energy is and then get back here. From there, I'll take care of it."

Elena swallowed uneasily. "What if...what if we find something...well, something like what Reno mentioned?"

Reeve rolled his shoulders to relieve some of the tension that had been gathering there and answered, "Honestly, I don't know what you'll find. I wish I did, but all Red could tell me was that it was a large mass of energy. He couldn't tell if it was human, or other. I'm afraid you'll just have to go down there and find it. Because, if it is a danger to all of us, we need to get rid of it as soon as possible."

Elena nodded. "We gave our word that we would do whatever job you set before us, so we'll do it."

Rude agreed, and Reno remained sulking in the corner.

"Okay then. Inside the cave, just before you reach Junon, there is an exit to the underground that was dug during the war with Wutai. Shinra used it to ship soldiers out in the night without Wutai's sentries getting word. But when the Mako reactors were built, strange creatures began migrating up to the light and Shinra was forced to seal it off. I'm telling you this, because if you get in trouble and find yourself far away from the entrance in Midgar, you can always bust out through there."

Yuffie silently fumed. "Stupid Shinra. If I was alive when Wutai was at war with them, I would have found out about their secret passage and stopped them."

"So where's the entrance here in Midgar?" Reno asked.

"The Sector 5 slums."

Elena's face expressed her surprise. "Where?"

"According to the architectural plans, there is a manhole in the north eastern section of the town. It may have got covered by dirt over the years, so you might have to search a bit."

"And no one seemed to notice large groups of soldiers sneaking through the town and using it?" Reno asked, clearly

skeptical.

Reeve shrugged. "It was the middle of the night. Besides which, what does it matter? It's ancient history."

"Sounds like we got all the information we need, then," Reno said, turning around and leaving.

Elena and Rude gathered up the maps so that they could study them further, and Yuffie silently crept back through the vents.

Before they got out of earshot, she heard Rude say, "We'll meet you in Sector 5 at 6:30 sharp, Reno."

"Why so goddamned early Rude?" Reno complained.

"Oh stop, Reno," Elena replied. "Go to bed early for once, and you might be able to get up that early without being such a grouch."

Cid, Shera, and Mandie sat at the kitchen table, finishing up the last of their dinner. Evening had set in, and the time for them to fly to Mideel was drawing close. Now that Cid wasn't so worried about the mako in the shot, he began to think about the fact that he was getting a shot. There were very few things that could make Cid Highwind's skin crawl, and unfortunately, a needle was one of them.

Mandie didn't seem overly concerned. She was simply happy to be getting rid of the itchy spots.

"Mom, can I go to school tomorrow?" Mandie asked, between bites of her soup.

Shera set her spoon down and replied, "We'll see. It depends on whether your spots are gone by the morning or not."

Mandie frowned. "I thought you said that they would be gone in a couple of hours."

"That's what the doctor said, but we want to make sure you aren't contagious first."

Mandie shrugged. "I think they'll all be gone. Won't they dad?"

"Huh?"

"The spots. They'll all be gone just like the doctor said."

Cid nodded absently. His mind was still on the shot he was going to be getting. It seemed that every time his mind pictured it, the needle seemed to get longer. By the time he reached Mideel, the damn thing was going to be as long as the Highwind.

"Cid? Are you all right?" Shera asked.

"Yeah. You ready to go yet?" he added reluctantly.

"Yeah!" Mandie yelled, jumping up and racing from the room.

"Amanda Cid!" Shera called after her.

Mandie immediately trotted back into the room and smiled sheepishly. In her excitement, she had forgot to clear the table of her dishes and push her chair in.

Quicker than Shera would have liked, given the clanking sounds coming from behind her, Mandie put her dishes up and pushed her chair in. She then ran out of the room again and came back wearing her coat before either Shera or Cid had

even risen.

“Come on Dad! We gotta get rid of these spots!”

Cid gathered up his dishes and rose, grinning at the sight of his daughter. Every spot that cropped up Shera had covered with lotion to reduce the itching. They had dried to small, pink splotches that looked worse than the original red bumps.

Shera rose last, stretching to relieve the ache that had settled into her lower back. She wasn't sure why she had aches and pains already, because it wasn't like this with Mandie. That, and her stomach seemed so much larger at this stage than it had with Mandie. She was thinking of setting up another appointment with Doctor Thomas and having him check her over to make sure everything was fine.

Cid pulled his worn, blue flight jacket on and helped Shera into her coat. The weather was taking on a slight chill here in Rocket Town, and he knew that winter was fast approaching.

Mandie ran ahead of them and started climbing the rope ladder with such a speed, that it was reminiscent of a monkey. She loved machinery the same way her old man did, and it was something that Cid was so proud of, he fairly burst every time it was mentioned. He knew he couldn't have gotten any luckier than the day when he came to his senses and told Shera his true feelings. He had Mandie, and another baby on the way to show for it.

After helping Shera onto the deck, and then heading inside, he started up the controls and watched in amusement as Mandie got as close to the front window as she could. The Highwind lifted off the ground much more silently than it ever had before, thanks to Cid's tinkering over the years, and headed for Mideel.

She was running again. Her bare feet slapping against the icy pavement, her white robe flapping behind her and exposing the pale smoothness of her legs. She knew they weren't far behind. Their boots made too much sound and their voices carried far. This was the third time she had escaped since being captured. She couldn't remember how long she had been here, she had lost all track of time. If they caught her this time, he would be very angry. And he would perform more of the tests she hated so much.

She had no idea why he had taken her. She only knew that one minute she had been selling fruits in the city for her mother, and then she had been taken. Taken to this place with its pristine white walls and its antiseptic smell. There were others. She had heard their screams and pleading when she wasn't sedated. She had tried covering her ears, and when that didn't work, covering her head with her pillow, but she still heard them.

She rubbed absently at her arm where she had ripped out the IV. He wasn't satisfied with the amount of the greenish-blue liquid he had injected into her veins, so he was adding more. He hadn't allowed her to look in any mirrors, but she knew there was something different about her. She felt it. She felt the new strength coursing through her body as she ran.

All she knew was, that she wanted to go home. Back to her parents and the small house that they shared in the Sector 7 slums. It was dirty there, and they were poor, but she loved her parents and all the people that lived around her. She didn't want to be here anymore, being experimented on by him. She couldn't see why he would want a weak girl from the slums, who couldn't even fight. Surely, they couldn't expect her to become...like him. The man with the long silver hair and the even longer sword.

Each breath she took sounded harsh and overly loud to her sensitive ears. Everything in her environment was enhanced now. He had ran many tests on her to make sure that she was progressing at the rate he wanted her to. And the others. She wondered if the same things were happening to them, and what their fate was.

Up ahead, she suddenly saw her escape, and her heart leapt for joy and she nearly cried aloud in relief. And then she saw him. His long sword was still at his side, but he blocked the whole doorway with his large frame. They had sent him to stop her from leaving this time.

She stopped immediately and turned quickly, only to find herself facing the soldiers and the man whose face she hated the

most. They were going to take her back to her prison.

"No!" the scream was torn from her throat as she sat up in the bed, her chest heaving and sweat running down her face and between her breasts in rivulets.

Frantically, she looked around. The room was very dark, and had an almost old, musty smell that the new sheets and the scent of lemon could not quite wipe out. Wherever she was now, she had the feeling that she was safe.

The curtains were drawn over the window, but she could tell that night had descended, and she wondered how long she had slept. And then she remembered. The man who called himself Vincent Valentine had brought her to his home. She only remembered waking long enough to find him putting her in this bed and then she fell back to sleep. It had been a blissful, dreamless sleep until now.

"Are you all right?"

She nearly screamed again, when a shape became apparent near the window. How was it that she had looked there moments before and seen nothing?

"I-you frightened me."

Vincent shifted slightly. "I am sorry. You were having a nightmare. Are you all right now?"

"Yes." Had he been sitting there the whole time she was asleep?

She looked down at the white sheets and fidgeted with the strands of hair that fell over her shoulder. Her dream had been so vivid, that she was certain it was another memory. Two faces haunted her, the man with the long silver hair, and the man with white lab coat. Who were they? The man with the white lab coat had been in her other memory, and she knew he had caused her a great deal of pain.

"It-it wasn't just a nightmare, it was a memory," she said, surprised to be telling him this.

At a time when everything was so confusing, it was hard for her to want to trust anyone. And yet, she felt as though she could trust him. He had saved her from those men in...why had that place looked so familiar, yet she could not put a name to it?

Vincent rose from his chair, and walked over to the bed. He was surprised when she did not cower away from him, but looked up at him with a mild curiosity and...trust. Most people, save for his friends, shied away from him. He knew he looked dangerous, with his blood red clothing and his golden claw. Truthfully, he had no intentions of changing that image.

"Do you want to tell me about it? It might help if you talk about it aloud."

She stared at him, finding she couldn't look away from his crimson eyes, so red in a face so pale.

"Maybe it would. Here, sit down. It's hard to talk to you when you're standing over me like that."

A small smile formed on Vincent's lips, and he sat in the space she made when she moved over. Swallowed up by the white sheets, she looked even smaller and even younger. She couldn't be more than 17, unless looks were deceiving. Which Vincent knew was not impossible.

She glanced at him again and pursed her lips, narrowing her green eyes. "First, where are we?"

"In Nibelheim. In my home."

"Nibelheim." she tested the word on her tongue. "It sounds familiar...but I can't picture it."

Vincent waited in silence, knowing she had more to say.

"I-I don't know my name, my age, or where I come from. All I know is, I awoke in some strange, dark place and the light...the light blinded my eyes and it was like I hadn't seen light in years. So I ran. I ran as fast and as far as I could, but my legs were really weak. I don't know how...but I found this opening...it was like a vent, you know, the kind with bars. So I pushed on it, but I couldn't move it. Then, it was strange, but I got really mad and pushed as hard as I could and it moved. I climbed out, and found myself in some kind of city. The people looked at me oddly, but I guess I can't blame them since I had just crawled out of a vent."

"Anyway," she continued, "I wandered around, but it was like I knew where to go, even if I couldn't remember why. When I got to the place I was sure I had to go...no wait, in my dreams, I remember a place...the Sector 7 slums? What does that mean? Does it sound familiar to you?" she asked, her voice taking on a desperate tinge, as she gripped his sleeve.

Vincent stared down at the tiny, white hand. "Yes. It was the place where I found you."

She smiled, the effect making her look even younger. "I remember, I used to sell fruits there for my mother. But I can't remember what she looked like." the smile faded, and she retreated into her thoughts for awhile.

Vincent watched her, still unsure why he had brought her here. He could have simply taken her to the Midgar Hospital, where she would be cared for until they found out her identity. But he had brought her here, an impulsive action that was so unlike the man he had become.

"Vincent...do you suppose that my parents are still alive?" she suddenly asked, her voice startling him out of his own thoughts.

Her clear green eyes locked with his, and he found himself wishing he could give her the answer she sought. "I don't know."

She turned her face away from him, and he knew she was done talking for now. Her dream and the answers it might hold would have to wait.

"Are you hungry?" he asked.

There was moment of silence and then, "Yes, please."

"What would you like to eat?"

She looked back at him, and the expression on her face caused him to regret his words.

"I don't know," she said softly. "I can't remember."

Vincent rose from the bed. "The bathroom is just through there, if you want to freshen up while I fix you something. I will just make you some soup. I don't know the last time you ate, and that may be all your stomach can handle."

She nodded, but didn't get up from the bed until he had left the room. When her bare feet touched the carpet, she marveled at its softness. The last time she remembered her feet touching anything, it had been the cold tile in her dreams.

She pushed through the door that Vincent had said led to the bathroom, halting when she realized she was afraid to see her own image. What would it reveal?

"Quit being ridiculous," she told herself. "You'll never find out who you are if you don't get a little bravery."

Flipping on the light switch, she walked into the room and gripped the sides of the sink, looking into the mirror. The face that stared back at her was pale, with a bruise discoloring one cheek. She noticed her eyes seemed to glow, and she wondered if that had anything to do with the experiments that were performed on her. She touched her long black hair, and then suddenly a memory hit her.

"You've got such beautiful hair, why don't you take better care of it?" a soft, sweet voice asked, and she felt a brush being pulled through her hair.

"Oh mom! I take care of my hair. I was just racing Jimmy again and it came undone, that's all."

"Hmph. If I didn't know any better, I'd say that Jimmy was more than just a friend."

"Mom!" she cried, feeling a blush heating her cheeks.

"Better hurry up. You'll miss the parade," a deep voice said from behind her.

"What's so important?" she asked, wincing when her mother tugged too tightly on her hair.

"Did you forget? It's the President's son's 14th birthday."

She made a face. "What's so special about that? Why don't they spend the money they waste on that stupid parade and fix up the slums?"

"Morgan." her mother said softly, her hand on her shoulder.

"I'm sorry. But I refuse to watch the parade. There'll be so many people there, Mom, let me sell our fruits? I'm sure they'll get hungry by the time the festivities get rolling."

Her mother laughed. "Sure. Always practical, my girl..."

Morgan. Her name was Morgan. And she remembered an important event. Maybe if she told it to Vincent, he could tell her what year this was. In her excitement, she ran out of the room, leaving the bathroom lights on, and forgetting that she didn't know her way around.

Cid walked into the clinic in Mideel, Mandie holding his right hand, and Shera on his left. He was not looking forward to this, even if it would only take a few minutes. God, he hated needles.

He remembered the last time he had needed a shot. It was when he was just entering the flying academy for Shinra Inc., and they were all given routine physicals. One look at the size of the needle in the doctor's hands, and he had punched the nearest orderly and was heading for the door before the doctor could so much as sneeze. It had taken five orderlies and two other recruits to hold him down while the doctor administered the shot.

"Hello there," Dr. Thomas greeted, coming out from around his desk.

"Hey Doc," Mandie replied, letting go of Cid's hand and walking eagerly forward. "So, when are we gonna get our shots?"

Dr. Thomas laughed. "What a brave girl you are."

"I don't like these itchy spots, and I want to go to school tomorrow."

"Ah, important business then," Dr. Thomas said, and winked at Shera.

The nurse came into the room and helped Mandie remove her jacket and get seated on an examining table. Shera came forward and sat next to her, having no idea that Mandie wasn't the one who was going to need her hand held.

Dr. Thomas left the room and returned with a tray carrying two, large needles. Needles that looked far too big for Cid's liking.

"Now, this will only take a moment. You'll feel a slight pinch and then it will be all over. As I said to your Mom, these won't

have any harmful side effects and in fact might keep you from getting so many colds.”

Mandie held up her arm and asked, “And these’ll be gone in a few hours?”

Dr. Thomas laughed, “Sure will. Two or three at the longest.”

Cid, whose face had grown considerably pale, moved away from the tray of needles and crept closer to the window. He was getting the feeling that he might need a little air.

A few moments passed, and then he heard the sound of Mandie’s feet hitting the floor.

“All done. Here you go, a lollipop,” he heard Dr. Thomas say.

“What do you say?” Shera prompted.

“Thanks,” Mandie said, in between licks.

“No problem. Now, for Dad. Cid, are you ready?” Dr. Thomas asked, looking toward the pilot.

Cid turned around reluctantly, his face ashen. Shera rushed over to him, concerned.

“Cid, are you all right?”

Cid glanced to the needle, then to her face, and back again. “Shera...I hate needles.”

Her face creased into a smile, and she took his hand. Her fearless Cid was afraid of something after all.

“Don’t worry. It’ll be all over in a few minutes, and I’ll sit right next to you if you want me to.”

He allowed her to walk him over to the table and remove his flight jacket, but when Dr. Thomas raised the needle, he swung his hand up and snapped, “You ain’t jabbin’ me with that damn thing.”

Mandie frowned. “It only takes a few minutes Daddy, and then you get a lollipop. Here, I’ll sit on the other side of you. See, me and Mommy will protect you.”

Cid managed to give his daughter a shaky smile, his heart constricting with the love he felt for her. Her innocence was the only thing that kept him from growing bitter sometimes.

“Okay Cid Highwind, quite bein’ a pansy and get it over with,” he muttered, low enough so neither Mandie nor Shera heard.

He slowly lifted his arm and let the nurse prepare it for the shot by cleaning it. When Dr. Thomas lowered the needle, he closed his eyes and waited for the feel of it piercing his skin. After a few moments, he opened his eyes to find the doctor looking the other way. It was over.

“See Daddy? That didn’t take long, did it?”

The nurse bandaged the small spot, and Cid shrugged back into his flight jacket. Shera rose from the table and took Dr. Thomas aside for a moment. Cid wasn’t sure what she was talking to him about, but he would ask her later. Just as soon as they were out of this damn place. He had always hated hospitals and doctor’s offices.

Shera came back to collect him and Mandie, and on their way out Dr. Thomas stopped them.

“Cid, can I interest you in that lollipop you’ve earned?”

Cid gave him a sour look, tempted to tell him to go to hell if it weren’t for the fact that Mandie was here.

He was about to say no, when Mandie took the lollipop and said, "Here you go, Daddy. See, I told you you get a lollipop."

Cid sighed and tucked the thing away in his pocket.

"What do you say?" Mandie prompted, sounding so much like her mother, that Cid burst out laughing and thanked the doctor.

Wrapping his arms around Shera and Mandie, he said, "Come on girls, let's get home."

Well, as promised, Cid and Mandie got their shots. Poor Cid, even I was starting to feel bad about it!

So now, we've learned the name of the mysterious girl and had a few questions raised. Wonder what else she'll be able to uncover once she talks to Vince? Guess we'll just have to wait and see. ^_^

As always, comments welcome and appreciated, and my thanks to all of you who read my first shot at a fanfic.