

Rufus's Twin

By Jen

Chapter 13: Dark Corners and Secrets

Cloud closed the door to Cera's room and walked silently down the hallway. He had, had a hard time getting her to go to sleep. She was excited about school tomorrow and still running on the energy left over from her and Marlene's games.

Shaking his head ruefully, he wondered when the last time was that he had that much energy. His childhood and even everything involving Shinra and Sephiroth seemed like a lifetime away. He hadn't thought it possible for him to attain this much happiness, but he had, and he planned to never take it for granted. Tifa was most certainly the best thing that had ever happened to him, and in more ways than one.

"Is she finally asleep?" Tifa asked, as he came into their bedroom.

He smiled. "Yes, but I thought she'd never get there."

Tifa ran a brush through her long, chocolate colored hair. "I'm surprised with all of the running around that her and Marlene did, that she could even stay up long enough to take a bath."

"Ah, the exuberance of youth."

She grinned at him. "Feeling our age, are we?"

Cloud plopped himself down on the bed and spread his arms out. "Now I know how Cid felt when we teased him about being old. I'm just a few years behind what he was."

Tifa laughed. "Cid wasn't old then, and he isn't old now. He's simply too stubborn."

Cloud sat up and ran a hand through his hair. "Well, I may be stubborn, but I'm smart enough to know my limit."

Tifa glanced into the mirror at herself and admitted she liked what she saw there. Age had brought a few lines to her face, but it had also brought with it the joys and trials of the last nine years. She could see them all stamped on her face, and Cloud's. And she regretted none of it. Cloud swore that she hadn't changed a bit since they first met, but she could see small signs here and there.

"You aren't picking at yourself again are you?" he asked, rising to stand behind her.

"No."

"Liar."

She whirled around in the chair and pinned him with a look. "Are you accusing me of telling a falsehood?"

He offered her his most serious expression before saying, "Yep."

"I wonder, how comfortable is the couch? Does it have lumps, like the last one, or did we get much better furniture this time?"

Cloud laughed and reached down to scoop her up in his arms. "All right, all right! You aren't a liar."

Tifa stared up at him. "You're just saying that so you don't have to test the couch."

"You're too mean to me, you know. I should have married someone else."

She smacked him upside the head. "Oh, and who would that have been?"

"Ow," he replied, rubbing the spot where her hand had connected. "You still pack one hell of a punch, for an old woman."

"Cloud Strife, you are just asking for it aren't you?"

Holding her tightly against his chest, he tumbled onto the bed with her and tried to keep her from scooting away, as she slapped at him with the hairbrush.

"Aw, c'mon Tif! Stop it!"

When he knocked the hairbrush out of her hand, she reached over and grabbed her pillow, swinging it in a wide arch that he barely dodged. He rolled, snatched his, and sat back up, a gleam in his eyes. If she wanted a pillow fight, then a pillow fight she was going to get.

"Are you challenging me?" she asked, pressing her hand to her chest. "The undisputed queen of pillow fighting?"

He flashed her a wicked grin. "That my dear, is because you cheat. You use your feminine wiles to charm me, and I cannot help but surrender."

"Ha! You just don't want to admit that I am physically superior."

"That'll be the day!"

Tifa scooted down to the end of the bed kicked out with her foot, catching him softly on the shoulder.

"Ah, ah, ah. None of that. This is simply a pillow fight, and there is no other physical contact allowed."

"Oh really...does that extend to beyond the pillow fight?"

Cloud offered her a solemn, sad expression. "You are a wicked, wicked lady."

"And that, is why you married me."

"I married you because I love you."

"You can't soften me up before we fight, it won't work."

Cloud let out a whoop and charged her. Tifa rolled neatly under him and came up behind him to hit him on the back of the head. Cloud whirled and tossed his pillow out, connecting with hers. Tifa immediately scooted in, and they began to hit each other furiously with their pillows. For every hit she landed directly in his face, she would giggle and manage to dodge his.

"You're such a cheater!" he hollered.

"I had a good teacher!" she yelled back.

"Are you referring to me?"

She sat up. Her hair was a tangle around her face, and the edge of her robe had come unfastened and slid down to expose one smooth, creamy shoulder.

Cloud set his pillow down and crawled across the bed to her. "Tifa," he said softly, "this pillow fight is officially over."

"Is it?" she asked, even as she was sliding her arms around his neck.

Reaching over to flip the light off next to the bed, he replied, "Oh yes."

Shera patted the space next to her and said, "Come to bed."

Cid lit up a cigarette and inhaled deeply. "In a minute."

"You're feeling all right, aren't you? There aren't any side effects for the shot that you aren't telling me about are there?"

Cid turned from the dresser and smiled at her. Of all the women he knew, his could worry the best out of the lot. It seemed that she was a born worrier, and he admitted it was one of the reasons he loved her so much. After all, someone had to do the worrying in this family.

"I'm fine. It's just like the doc said, no side effects. So quit fussin'."

"Yes, Captain," she replied softly.

He came to sit down next to her, and took her hand in his. "Been a long time since ya called me that."

His deep blue eyes searched her for signs of whatever had been troubling her earlier. It had bothered her enough that she had talked to Dr. Thomas in private. He figured that was because she wanted to spare him any worry. It was just like her to take everything on herself and try to spare him. It made him furious and it made him love her all the more.

Shera brushed a strand of hair away from her face and avoided Cid's gaze. She knew what he wanted to know, and she also knew that he was very good at getting what he wanted. She had hoped he didn't notice when she pulled Dr. Thomas aside, but she should have known better than that. Cid rarely missed anything.

"What's goin' on Shera?"

Squaring her shoulders, she faced him and said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"You're a horrible liar. Always were."

She sniffed. "Don't insult me Cid Highwind."

He laughed. "And ya sure know how to act dignified if ya think it'll get ya somewhere."

Her expression softened, but when he pulled her into his arms, she remained stiff and unyielding.

"C'mon now honey, how did I get made out to be the bad guy here? I'm not the one keepin' secrets."

She melted against him. He chuckled into her hair and stroked it softly.

Then, growing serious, he asked, "What's wrong? If there's somethin' wrong with you, I want to know."

"Not me. The baby--"

He pulled away from her so that he could look her in the face. "What about the baby?"

She smoothed her hand on his cheek. "It's nothing to worry about. Just a few minor things that made me want to get an earlier check up than usual."

"What minor things?" he asked, not appeased.

"Well I'm bigger at this stage than I was with Mandie, and I have a lot more aches and pains."

A small smile played on his lips. "You're gettin' old, woman."

She hit him playfully. "I'm not the old one here."

He grimaced. "Don't remind me. I turned 41 this last February."

"Are you worried about your age?"

He grinned. "Nope. Not me. I don't feel a day over 20."

Shera laughed and leaned in to rest her head against his chest. Despite his penchant for cigarettes, and the numerous battles he had found himself in over the years, Cid was remarkably fit for his age. In others, she would have called it vanity. But in Cid, it was merely a desire to see his children grown and married as happily as he was. And, he had informed her, it wasn't going to take 'no damn five years.'

"Is that all? You're sure there isn't somethin' you aren't tellin' me?"

Hearing the note of anxiety that he tried to hide, she said, "That's all. Now quit worrying. I'm sure it's nothing."

He laughed softly. "Yeah, worryin's your department."

She hit him again, and then pulled him down to lay beside her.

"Did you check on Mandie before coming in?" she asked.

"Yeah. She's sleepin' soundly. And it don't look like she's gonna have any side effects either."

"Well, watch her closely tomorrow morning. I'm not letting her go anywhere if she shows any signs of being ill."

"I thought ya weren't worried?"

"Oh hush."

Laughing again, Cid reached up to turn the light off and pulled Shera tightly into his arms, so that his chin rested atop her head. He had, had nine years of happiness with her, and he intended to have at least 50 more.

"I don't remember Shinra, or anything to do with the city called Midgar. But you say that's all gone? That they're dead?"

Vincent nodded.

"My parents...they would have died in the explosion."

Morgan bit her lip and felt sadness, despite the fact that all she had of them was the small flashback a few moments before. If they had still been alive, she might have been able to meet them again and they could have helped her to regain her memory faster. The realization that she had no one who could remember her for who she once was hit her hard, and she pushed her bowl of soup away.

"I'm not hungry anymore."

Vincent eyed her bowed head. "I am sorry."

She looked up at him. "It wasn't your fault. You didn't blow Sector 7 up, Shinra did," she added, spitting 'Shinra' out as though it was acid on her tongue.

His face remained impassive. "I know what it is like to wake up and have everyone you once cared for gone."

Morgan didn't have time to digest that cryptic answer or form a question, because he rose, taking her soup and walking to the sink. She wanted to ask him why he understood her pain, but she was afraid to. If he felt anything like she did inside right now, then she didn't want to bring back those memories for him.

"I must have been asleep for all those years that you said I was then. And so much has changed since then...I wouldn't even know where to begin looking."

Vincent turned suddenly, and the intense expression in his eyes caused her to shrink back. It was made all the more frightening by the fact that his face was so pale, and so still. It led her to wonder if perhaps, he didn't feel anything at all. But if that were true, then why didn't he want to talk about his past? What if something that had happened to him could aid her? Would he really hold that back from her?

Glancing back up to meet his eyes, she realized that he would.

"Do you know Hojo?"

"Hojo?" Morgan tested the name, and a face flashed briefly in her mind. She tried to recall it, and then gave up, frustrated when it wouldn't come again.

Vincent noted the struggle taking place on her face. She was obviously trying desperately to remember something, and he wondered if bringing up Hojo had triggered dormant memories. He was afraid of pushing her to far, too fast though, because he had no idea of the state of her mind. He didn't want to shatter her.

"I don't know. Who was he?"

"The Head of the Scientific Department for Shinra."

"Was he evil?"

"He was driven. And he hurt many people. I suppose that makes him evil in his own way. Hojo got what he wanted in any way that was possible."

Did he hurt you? she wanted to ask. Instead, she said, "Do you think he did this to me?"

"I don't know."

Morgan glared at him. She couldn't understand why he was attempting to help her when all it seemed he was doing was making her angry. Every time she thought she was getting closer to finding out who she was, who he was, he would neatly turn her away. She supposed she had a right to know who she was staying with, but it was his home. And he could force her to leave at anytime.

She couldn't let him make her leave, because she knew that he may be her one chance at finding the key that would unlock all of her memories, whether he was willing, or not.

She couldn't really say why it was so important for her to find out who he really was. Maybe it was the way he shrouded himself in an air of mystery and calm. It seemed that he had been keeping himself away from others for a long time, and was very good at it. She, who wanted to embrace life so much, couldn't understand why he would reject it.

Vincent felt amusement tugging at him. She was staring at him, and trying not to be obvious about it. He knew she was attempting to figure out what made him work. She wasn't content with just finding out who she was, she wanted to find out who he was as well. He was beginning to think it was a mistake to bring her here. He enjoyed his solitude, and he had already gathered that she was a child of the sunlight. She wanted laughter, and noise. She wanted heated arguments and the kind of companionship that he didn't have to offer. In a way, she reminded him of Cid.

Cid was the closest thing to a best friend that Vincent would allow. And even after nine years, he hadn't given up on probing deeper into him and understanding his moods. Vincent's only regret was, that for a foul mouthed mechanic, Cid was extremely perceptive. Perhaps the old pilot could understand him.

"You and your friends saved the Planet, while I was sleeping?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

His gaze sharpened. "Why what?"

"Why did you save the Planet?"

"I had my reasons."

"So tell me what they were."

"Why do you want to know?"

She rolled her eyes. "Is it that big of a deal for you to share something with me?"

"You are a stranger," he said icily. "I am not required to share anything of myself with you."

She reared back as if slapped, and then composed her face in a look of indifference. But she had not had as much practice as he, and he could see that he had hurt her. Although a part of him was disgusted with himself, another part told him it was better this way. He didn't want her getting attached or close to him. When the time came, when she regained her memory, she would leave. He wanted it to be that much easier for her to let go. If she viewed him as some kind of monster, then she wouldn't want to stay.

Even as he told himself this, he wondered who it was he was really protecting.

"I see," she said, after she trusted her voice.

"No," he replied, "I don't think you do. You know nothing of me. You only know that I am the man that saved you from being harmed, and brought you here. Because of that, you may have some misguided views of me. I am not kind, nor am I friendly."

"Only because you won't let me!" she shot back. "And if you aren't kind, why did you even bring me here? You could have simply left me in the streets after chasing those men off. I would have found my own way."

They were back to this question again.

"Why does it matter so much to you? Would you have rather I left you? Where would you have gone? You yourself said you have no family."

"I know I have no family! You don't need to remind me," she added, rubbing the inside of her arm in a way that he had come to know as a habit.

Striding forward, he took her arm and forced it out. Startled, she tried to jerk it back, but his grip was strong. Running the tip of one gloved finger along it, he found what he was looking for in the creases where her arm bent at the elbow.

"What is it?" Morgan asked, her eyes wide.

"A mark. Does it bother you?"

She frowned. "No. Why?"

Vincent's eyes met hers. "Then, you don't realize you are rubbing it constantly?"

"No...what does the mark mean?"

"I suspect that you were injected with Mako. It is the reason your eyes glow."

She nodded. She had noticed her eyes glowing in the mirror. Suddenly, her dream came back to her with vivid clarity.

"Vincent, in my dream, I was being injected with some kind of fluid. Could that be this Mako?"

"It might."

Then another thought occurred to her. "What-what does Hojo look like?"

"Why?" he asked.

She jerked her arm away. It was strange, but even through his glove, his touch was beginning to warm her skin. Rubbing absently at the spot where he had been holding her, she said, "Just tell me. Please."

"He had unkempt black hair that he kept out of his face and he wore glasses. I had never seen him without his white lab coat."

An image flashed in her mind again. The tall, thin man of her dreams with the long, greasy black hair and a high, nasal whine. She had hated his voice. And his hands.

"I-I think that he was the one that did this to me."

Vincent's gaze focused on her so sharply, that she felt it and looked up.

"How do you know this?"

"In my dream, there were two distinct men. This one that you just described, and a man with long, silver hair."

"Sephiroth." she heard him mutter.

"Who is Sephiroth?" she asked quickly.

"Hojo's son, Lucrecia's son. He was the one who sought to destroy the Planet."

He said no more after that, and appeared to be lost in his thoughts. Thought he might not have noticed it, his tone had fluctuated slightly as he said 'Hojo' and then 'Lucrecia.' It made her curious, and it made her forget she wasn't supposed to ask him personal questions.

"Who is Lucrecia?"

He rose immediately, staring down at her with what she thought was disapproval. "She is no one that you would know."

"No, just another of your secrets," she replied crossly.

"And am I not entitled to secrets?"

She shook her head. "Never mind. Forget that I asked."

He turned his back to her and she had no doubt that her request would not be a problem for him.

"You should head for bed now, and get some more rest."

Her first inclination was to argue, but thinking better of it, she rose and sighed. Despite this long sleep she had been in, she was actually quite drained. She supposed it was because her body wasn't used to the activity, although she certainly felt fit.

"I am a bit tired," she acknowledged.

"Can you find your way back to your room?"

"I'll manage," was her reply.

He took that to mean any help from him was rejected. When she had left the room, he smiled, staring down at the dishes in the sink. She certainly had a temper. Whatever had happened to her, he was beginning to think she was strong enough to overcome it and find her past, even without his help, though it was apparent she thought she needed it.

Morgan moved swiftly down the hallway, trying to deny her body its wish to simply collapse and rest a bit. She knew she was pushing herself to the limit, but she felt that, that was a trait she had always possessed. She was beginning to realize a lot of things, the more time she spent awake. She wondered how long it would be then, until she fully gained her memory. And why did that frighten her somewhat?

The mansion was dark now that there was no daylight to flood through the windows. Of course, she didn't know what it looked like in the light. When Vincent had brought her here, she had been asleep. But looking around, she thought this place seemed to suit him just fine.

Oh yes, she thought with a touch of acerbity, Vincent seems right at home here with all his dark corners and secrets.

She had to admit that part of her was afraid of going back to sleep. She didn't know what memories would grab a hold of her in her dreams, and she wondered if all of them were so frightening. Wasn't there a simple, happy moment anywhere in her past? Or were the horrible ones the only ones her mind would let her remember?

Morgan found her room not by her sense of direction, but rather, because she had left the lights on. Sighing with amusement at herself, she reached over to turn it off and then crawled into bed. She couldn't help but wonder what Vincent was doing at this moment. It hadn't seemed like he was ready to go to sleep anytime soon. As a matter of fact, it was hard to detect anything in those remote, crimson eyes of his.

Deciding she was better off forgetting about him for this moment, she turned on her side and attempted to fall asleep. She was rewarded, a few moments later, with just that.

Well, I said it didn't I? ^_^ This chapter definitely belonged to Vince and Morgan, as did the last one. Well next, it's time to visit the others. Gotta get a new day started after all.

As always, thanks! And comments appreciated.