

Chapter 15: Memories of a Melody

"Yeah, we'll be fine as long as we don't kill each other."-Kiyara Maiden Shinra

Reno sat down on the bed, bouncing up and down happily.

"Lead me to the floor," Kiyara said to Tifa, ignoring his antics.

"This way," Tifa replied. The brunette led her back down the hall to the living room.

The walls were a plain white, and there were several deep red, high-backed chairs spread around the room. There was a large empty space, that Kiyara was willing to bet the couch usually occupied, directly across from a large cabinet that looked like it housed a television and electronics equipment. Two speakers were set up directly beneath the two windows, and there were tables and other miscellaneous items galore. A large bookshelf was filled with volumes of every shape, size, and sort. The late morning sun shone in through one of the windows, lighting everything and giving it a softer look.

Kiyara looked at the hardwood floor in dismay, but said nothing.

Tifa caught the glance and laughed. "Don't worry. I'll get you lots of blankets and pillows. I've got plenty of extras since I have guests quite often."

Kiyara smiled as she set her bag down on the floor and pushed it out of sight behind a chair with her foot.

"So, how long are you and Reno planning on staying?" asked Tifa, ducking out of the room and returning with a pile of blankets.

Kiyara frowned in thought. "I'm not sure, really. I think that Reno plans to get into touch with the president of Shinra, though, to get some information that'll help us get those guys off our tail. I think we're here until Reno can contact him."

Tifa nodded. "Okay. Well, you're welcome for as long as you need." Her face darkened faintly. "But I swear, if Reno so much as looks at me wrong, I'm giving him the boot."

Kiyara gave a grin. "No problem there."

Tifa walked out into the hall, and Kiyara heard a closet door creak open and shut. Then the brunette appeared again in the door, now with an armful of pillows. She set them down on a chair.

The blonde woman glanced at the stack of pillows. "You look like you've got enough stuff there for an army."

Tifa gave a small laugh. "Well, Barret, Cid, Yuffie, and the rest are practically an army. They all come to visit quite a bit, and it seems like each time there are more of us to account for."

Suddenly, there was a pounding noise that sounded like it was coming from downstairs. Tifa's hand flew to her mouth. "Oh no! That must be Jaya! I totally forgot about her!"

Kiyara blinked. "Jaya?"

Tifa nodded, on her way out the door. "She helps me out with the bar. She always comes a couple of hours before we open. I've gotta go get ready to open the bar up now. Will you guys be okay up here?"

"Yeah, we'll be fine as long as we don't kill each other."

Tifa smiled faintly, pausing in the doorway. "That would be a sight to see... Oh, and Reno is welcome to use my phone to get through to Reeve. It's in the kitchen." She paused awkwardly for a moment. "Um, make yourselves at home, okay?" She ran out the door, then poked her head in one more time. "And you guys'll hafta be pretty quiet so that Jaya and my customers don't hear you up here." Then she was gone, dashing down the stairs.

A moment later, Reno was poking his head around the door. "She gone?"

Kiyara smirked. "Why, you scared of her?"

Reno sauntered in and plopped down in a chair. "Hell no. It's just easier not having to confront her."

Kiyara heard voices downstairs and the stamping of feet as Tifa let her helper in.

Reno looked like he was listening. "Who's that?"

"Tifa's little helper. So we've gotta be really quiet now that she's here."

Reno nodded, lowering his voice. "Fair enough."

Kiyara perched herself on the arm of a chair and sighed. "What the hell are we going to do all day?"

Reno turned to look at her, raising an eyebrow.

Kiyara's eyes flashed. "Don't even say it."

Reno frowned, doing his best to look innocent. "Whatever did you think I was going to say?"

"Y'know what, I'm not even gonna bother to answer that."

Reno draped himself over his chair, sticking his legs over one arm, and his head resting on the other. "Kiyaaaaaarrrrraaaaaa?" He said her name in a whiny, singsong type of way.

Kiyara sighed. "What, Reno?"

"I'm bored."

"It hasn't even been five minutes yet! How are you going to last until tonight?"

Reno shrugged. "Kiyara?"

"What, Reno?"

"I'm bored." Kiyara groaned. "Don't tell me that I'm goin' to have to freakin' baby-sit you."

There was silence. Kiyara looked over at him. "You mean I won't have to?"

Reno grinned. "You said not to tell you, so I didn't."

Kiyara hissed something nasty under her breath, then stood up. Reno ducked as she passed him, but she didn't hit him.

Instead, she walked to the large cabinet that she had noticed earlier and opened it. She had been correct in her assumption that it housed electronics. There was a large television inside, along with a VCR, movies, a stereo system, and many CDs and cassette tapes. Kiyara nabbed the remote control from on top of the TV, then walked back over to Reno. She threw it with some force on his stomach, and the redhead was temporarily knocked short of breath.

"Do something constructive," she said, sneering. "Watch TV while we just wait for your friend Reeve to become telepathic, figure out that we're here, and call."

Reno looked slightly abashed. "Oh yeah. I forgot." He stood up, looking longingly at the remote control before setting it down.

Kiyara spread herself over her chair in much the same way that he had a moment before. She snatched up the remote from his now vacated seat, and gestured with it vaguely. "The phone's in the kitchen." And with that, she turned on the television, making sure that the volume was low.

Reno glared for a moment, muttering dire threats under his breath. Then he went out into the hallway. He crept past the stairs noiselessly, then walked into the bright, cheery, black and white tiled kitchen. He found the phone, and muffled the dialing noises as best as he could with his shirt.

After he had finished in the kitchen, Reno ducked back out into the hallway. He happened to be looking at the opposite direction from the stairs, and he saw a door that he hadn't noticed before. Frowning slightly, he crept down the hall, went into the room, and flicked on the lights. He stared in amazement. "Whoa..."

The entire room was full of weapons. Several cabinets with glass doors were all around the walls, and they were stuffed with swords, guns, spears, shurikens, knives, fighting gloves, and the like. It looked like Tifa had been given custody of everyone's cast off weapons. And there was more. Another bunch of cabinets were full of materia in every shape, size, and color. It was a collection to make Yuffie proud. The sunlight streamed into the room, highlighting the white walls and hardwood floors, but Reno didn't notice.

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Kiyara had a half an hour of blessed peace and quiet before Reno came stealing back into the room, holding a large bowl of popcorn that he was munching from happily, a battered looking cell phone, and a screwdriver.

Kiyara glanced back at him. "What'd he say?"

Reno dropped back into his old chair. Kiyara stole a handful of popcorn from him. "Nothing."

Kiyara snorted. "How can he have said nothing?"

Reno tucked his feet under himself with ease. "Easily. I couldn't get through."

"What?"

Reno gave a chuckle. "What, you thought the average Joe could just ask to be put through to the president and have it be done? Man, you are naïve."

"But I thought you were some sort of bigwig!"

Reno spoke around a mouthful of popcorn. "Yeah, I'm part of the board of directors, but how are all of the little people working for him supposed to know that? I know I can't trust everyone who works at Shinra, so I didn't want to give out my real name. And without my real name, we're gettin' nowhere."

"Well, how are we gonna get his help, then?" Kiyara asked.

Reno waved the sleek, battered little phone around. "This little baby. It's mine, and gives me instant access to Reeve without having to go through all of his lackeys."

Kiyara looked ready to rip his throat out. "So why didn't you use it in the first place?!"

"Take it easy there, babe. I've had it with me since the very beginning, when you tossed me into the water at Costa del Sol."

Kiyara groaned. "Oh no..."

Reno nodded. "Oh yes. Its circuits got fried by the water. Instant barbecue."

Kiyara put her head in her hands. "Can you fix it?"

Reno shrugged. "Possibly. But then again, maybe not." He set the popcorn down on the table beside him, and used the screwdriver to pry the back of the cell phone off. There was a shower of sparks, and it made a wheezing noise.

Kiyara winced. "That can't be good."

Reno's only answer was a curse as he tried to cross two wires and he got a shock. He glanced up at her again. "This is gonna take a while..."

Kiyara sighed unhappily. "Things are never easy..."

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An hour later, Tifa came back up the stairs. She appeared in the doorway, where Kiyara was watching a boring documentary on the mystery of the Temple of the Ancients, and Reno wrestled with the cell phone. "Jaya's gone, for now. She'll be back in a couple of hours, when we open. Feel free to roam; I've just got to run to the store quickly. I'm pulling down the blinds downstairs, so you can hang out down there too if you want." The brunette disappeared again.

Kiyara stretched, yawned, and flicked the TV off with the remote control. Standing up, she yawned again, then ambled out of the room. She felt the urge to dance around after having to stay quiet and cramped up for so long, but she suppressed it and made her way downstairs.

Looking around for something to do, her gaze rested on the small stage full of instruments. Smiling, she walked over and found a violin in the mix.

While wondering why there was a violin player in a band that played gigs in a bar, Kiyara's long, slim fingers closed around the violin and picked it up. Digging around, she found the bow, and she held it in her left hand. Unsure of why this felt so familiar and so right--and why she had picked it up in the first place--Kiyara placed the instrument beneath her chin, took a deep breath, and just let her mind go and fingers wander.

Out of the violin came a beautiful, complicated, melancholy tune. Kiyara's mind wandered as she played.

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Didn't know she could play the violin, Reno mused to himself as he wandered in and sat down at a table, still digging around in the innards of the little phone.

Looking at all of the different colored wires, he muttered to himself, "Hmm. Which do I combine? The red wire, or the blue wire, or the yellow wire, or the green wire, or the fucking magenta wire... Aww hell." With a shrug, he closed his eyes, picked two wires, and stuck them together. There was a large shock, and he cursed as his emerald eyes snapped open. Putting his now blackened finger up to his face, he winced. Son of a bitch, burned it again.

Oh well; might as well try it. An uninjured finger of his hovered over the 'on' button. "It ain't gonna work," he said aloud to himself. He pushed it. To his amazement, the lights of the little phone came on. He pressed the speed dial button that was attuned to Reeve's private PHS, and to his shock, heard it begin to ring. "Yesss!"

The sound from Kiyara's violin almost drowned out the sound, and he could barely hear it being picked up at the other end. He cursed. "Dammit, Kiyara...keep it down, willya?! I'm on the phone!"

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Where was I when I learned this song? When did I last play it? The answers came in a rush of sounds and images, rising from the back of Kiyara's mind and overwhelming her.

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She was small, and frightened. A young woman with short, shockingly pink hair was holding the little girl still as the bad man leaned in close to her face. Greasy black strands of hair fell from his ponytail and into his sickly pale face, nearly obscuring his glittering green eyes.

" 'Fessor Mojo!" the little girl cried out, struggling against the iron grip.

Hoyo smiled sadistically. "Now, now, Miss Shinra. Don't try to run. You're going to have fun with us." Then, to the woman: "I'm thinking that if she is to work out, we must gauge her intelligence and quick-wittedness. Music would be a good test. Take her away, and teach her the..." He trailed off as he tapped a long, chemical stained finger against the lenses of his glasses in thought. "...Violin."

The woman's grip stayed strong as she carried the little blonde girl away over one shoulder.

The cries for her mommy echoed off of the cold, dark walls. But nobody came to help her.

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Kiyara gasped with the pain of the memory, the bow scraping across the violin in such a way as to produce a horribly mangled discordant note. Reno yelped in surprise, but Kiyara didn't notice. The blonde, blocking out confused thoughts as best as she could, became determined to find out more, and resolutely began to play again.

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Reno cursed under his breath as the built-in answering machine on Reeve's cell phone picked up. As the message finished, Reno took a deep breath and smirked slightly. Then he barked into the mouthpiece, "Reeve, where are you, dammit?! I know you're there! You always carry this with you! It's Reno! Pick up the godsdamn phone!"

Suddenly, there was a click as the answering machine shut off, and Reeve's voice came on. "Reno?!"

Reno grinned in relief. "El presidente, you have no idea how good it is to hear your voice..."

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The little girl had been handed a violin and taught to play. Her teacher was the scary pink-haired lady, and she wasn't very patient. She taught the child the notes, and over time, a very complicated song that, once Kiyara mastered it, convinced Hojo that she was the test subject that he wanted. It was the same song that she was playing right now, in the present time.

Kiyara saw the time that she played it for Hojo running through her head. She had been brought to the laboratory, carrying her little violin, and set down on a stool. If she had known all that would befall her after this, she probably would have fucked up on purpose, but she had no vision of the future. The small child played, and she played well. Her eyes were closed as she concentrated deeply on each individual note, and although the little girl couldn't see it, Hojo and the woman exchanged delighted glances as the song went on.

And the small girl played on blithely, not knowing how much anguish and heartache she was causing herself with each passing note.

The song she was playing abruptly halted, while the small room disappeared. A light from above blinded her eyes. She couldn't move her arms or her legs; bands of some kind strapped her to a cold, metal table. She whimpered, and heard a sinister chuckle that sounded like it came from the man with greasy black hair. Some smelly liquid on a cloth was held up to her nose, and blood red dots and skulls flashed across her vision as she began to black out. Then she heard something that she wasn't supposed to hear, and that she hadn't understood then.

"We must do this right if she is to be a backup for Sephiroth," Hojo's bodyless voice said.

The image was gone again, and was replaced by blackness as dark and enveloping as a thick blanket. The little girl's cries could be heard, echoing around the empty spaces.

"Mommy, where are you?"

An anguished shriek. "MOMMY! HELP ME!" Quiet sobbing.

Suddenly, the light came back. " 'Fessor Mojo does bad stuff to me, Mommy." The little girl was sitting on her feet in a see-through specimen tube, her face pale and solemn for such a little one. "Worser stuff than even Daddy did. You're gonna come an' get me soon, right, Mommy?" Her high-pitched voice became plaintive at the end. A shrill scream came as the door to her tube opened, and Hojo reached in for her. "NO! Get away from me! Azzie! Mommyyyyyy!" she wailed as she fought to break free of Hojo.

The scenes began flashing faster and faster. The blonde girl, now older, was vomiting into a stainless steel basin, looking thoroughly wretched.

Miserable, anguished cries and terrified whispers accompanied the flood of images. "Mommy, I don't think I can live like this for much longer."

"When are you gonna come and take me away, Mommy?"

"Aaarrgghh!"

The voice dropped to a whisper as the now thirteen or fourteen-year-old pressed her face to the inside of the test tube. Her hands squeaked down the glass on either side of her face, which was contorted horribly into a grimace of agony. A swath of needles and tubes embedded deep in her back swayed and shook as blood dripped down her face.

"Help me, help me, help me, help me..."

And above it all, the cold, mocking voice of Hojo rose. "A backup for Sephiroth...a backup for Sephiroth...a backup for Sephiroth..."

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Not even realizing it, Kiyara turned around and set the violin down behind her. Then she sat bolt upright, looking down at her hands, as if she had never seen them before, turning them over and over again in sudden interest. Reno frowned and paused from where he was listening to Reeve rant about 'Where the hell had he been?!' Something about that gesture was very familiar...

A backup for Sephiroth... the cruel voice whispered, and something deep inside of Kiyara snapped.

"No..." she whispered brokenly. An angry whining buzz began to fill her ears. Stepping off of the small stage, Kiyara calmly walked to the staircase and ascended the steps, posture and expression inhumanly rigid and calm.

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Reno looked on as Kiyara whispered to herself quietly. He slowly took the phone away from his ear, not paying any attention to Reeve yelling, and frowned. What the fuck was she doing now?

Kiyara shook her head at an invisible specter and strode directly past Reno and up the stairs like an emotionless robot.

Reno sat there for a moment, open-mouthed, as he listened to her fleeing footsteps as she began to run along the hall upstairs.

Then his eyes widened dramatically. The blankness of her eyes, the emptiness of her features, what she did and said; it all reminded him of... it reminded him of...

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The same redheaded young man--only even younger, now; eighteen, to be precise--sauntered in through the door of his expensive Midgar home and slammed it on the incessant sounds of vehicles and voices from the street behind him.

A young woman's voice was heard calling out. "Reno? Is that you?"

"What, Damaya?" he bellowed back.

The redhead followed the sound of her voice through the green-painted breezeway, wood paneled hall, and into the living room. On his way, he threw his jacket down across a chair in the hall in his typical haphazard manner.

He paused at the doorway to the living room, dress shoe-clad feet clicking on the hardwood floor. The fading sun's rays flashed through the windows, throwing dancing patterns across the pale yellow walls and Wutaian-style wall scrolls.

A young woman glanced up from the newspaper that she was reading in her favorite leather beige chair. She was absolutely gorgeous, with shoulder-length, thick chestnut curls and hazel eyes shaded by long eyelashes. She was tall when standing and possessed a curvy figure that was thin at the waist and stomach, and wide at her chest. Her high cheekbones jutted out of a pale face, giving her a very distinctive look. Her lips were full and pale pink, and they curved into a smile at the sight of him. She wore a short, strappy, brightly-colored sundress with a Costa del Sol print and floppy sandals.

"Hey there, stranger." Her voice was smooth and composed, just as she looked. She set down the newspaper and rose to greet him. The woman--who looked to be in her early twenties--reached him quickly on her long legs, and her arms snaked around his neck. She smiled up at him. "What took you so long?"

Reno wrapped his arms around her waist and drew her closer to him. He breathed in her scent of jasmine perfume, bent over, and kissed her a long, lingering kiss. When he felt the need for oxygen, he disengaged his mouth from hers, and lied between his teeth. "I was negotiating to get a day off tomorrow."

Damaya squealed and clapped her hands behind his neck. "And did you get it?"

Reno grinned. "Yup." That was just one of the many perks of having a model as a girlfriend: she was none-too-bright. He'd actually been with one of his favorite girls at Shug's.

Monogomy was one thing that was just not for Reno Lynley.

Damaya hugged him even more tightly, happily. "How did you manage that one?"

Reno smirked. "I pestered Tseng until he gave in."

That part was true. He'd just done the pestering during the actual work day.

Damaya burst out laughing.

"And now I've got an entire day to spend with my two favorite ladies," Reno finished, and this time, he wasn't lying. Sure, he lied to the girl and slept with someone else occasionally, but he did feel real affection for her, which was more than he could say about most other people in his life. "Hey, speaking of that, what'd you guys do today?"

Damaya took one of her hands down from his neck and held some of the fabric of her dress between her slender fingers. She swished it around. "What does it look like, idiot? We hopped the ferry to Costa del Sol and spent the day at the beach."

"Fuck me, but I'd rather of been there than at work. Feel like goin' again tomorrow?"

Damaya kissed him again. Another thing she was good for. "Definitely. And Aimee would love it too. Right, Aimee?" She was addressing a space behind her.

Reno thought that she had gone crazy for a moment, or just inhaled too much hairspray, then he stared over Damaya's shoulder. His one-year-old daughter came tottering out from behind Damaya's chair on unsteady legs. On her legs. Reno gave an unconsciously proud grin as the little girl toddled over and said clearly, "Da." He had known that she could talk a little, but walk?

"When'd she walk?" Reno asked.

Damaya bent over and picked up their red headed daughter. Aimee cooed happily and sat high in her mother's arms. "Today, when we came back from the beach."

"Too bad I missed it," Reno said, not sounding too perturbed by the prospect.

Damaya was oblivious to this. Eyes twinkling, she shook her head. "No, you didn't."

Okay, definitely inhaled too much hairspray. "I think I definitely did, Damaya."

Damaya nodded to the video camera that sat on the end table beside her chair. "I had a feeling that she was going to do it today, so I had the video camera out." She grinned at him. "I caught every minute of it on tape."

Though he wouldn't have admitted it for all the gil in the world, he was oddly relieved to learn this, and something in the light green eyes reflected this. Aimee held out her pudgy arms to him, and he took her from her mother and balanced her slightly uncomfortably on one hip.

"Da!" she said again.

Reno carried her into the living room with him. "That was a good trick you played on Da, there. Did you and Ma plan it together?"

In response, Aimee blew a large spit bubble.

Reno snickered slightly, and tossed her up and down in the air several times as the tiny girl shrieked with laughter. Then, still carrying Aimee, he went over to where Damaya had sat back down in her chair with the paper.

Damaya eyed him over the top of the newspaper. "Y'know, if you keep carrying her like that, she's going to forget how to walk."

"Hey, my little girl isn't that stupid, right, Aimee?" Once again, Aimee blew a bubble. As Damaya laughed, Reno said with a proud grin, "That's my girl."

Leaning over with the child still in his arms, Reno read the front-page headline of Damaya's newspaper aloud. " 'Local girl Damaya McKormac signs lucrative modeling contract that will make her one of the highest paid in the business.' Man, that's old news."

Damaya laughed. "What do you expect? This is the paper from my little town. It's Lircos Village, for Leviathan's sake. They probably think this is new news."

Reno read the title of the paper. " 'Lircos Village Herald.' How the hell do you get this? And it's this month's date, too."

"Reno, there is a definite advantage to being a supermodel."

Reno grinned, and left her to her paper as he wandered off to play with his daughter.

Forty-five minutes later, Aimee had been put to bed and Damaya was still happily perusing the news from her hometown. Reno was in the stark black-and-white-themed kitchen, struggling to figure out how to use the high-tech microwave to reheat a slice of cold pizza. Suddenly, the lanky man heard a gasp from the other room.

"What's up?" Reno called out. There was no answer. "Dee?" Nothing. "Damaya?" Silence reigned.

Leaving his half-cooked dinner behind, Reno made his way through the hall to the living room. "Yo, Damaya, wh--" He stopped. Damaya was staring at her hands in fascination. Then she looked up at him, and it was as if he wasn't even there. She was staring straight through him. Reno took a cautious step forward. "Dee?"

She appeared to be mumbling to herself, then suddenly, she jumped up, dropped the newspaper onto the floor and blew past Reno into the hall before he could make a move to grab her.

Reno stared after her for a moment, then heard her rifling through the kitchen drawers. The redhead suddenly had a

horrible vision of the large, vicious steak knives housed in one of the drawers. He bolted out through the hall. She wouldn't, she wouldn't, she wouldn't...

Reno stopped short when he reached the door to the kitchen.

Apparently, she would.

The woman's body was sprawled across the floor, blood gushing from her slashed and mutilated throat to form rivers in the cracks between the floor tiles. Her dress and hair were already soaked in the crimson liquid.

The young Turk had seen enough corpses in his lifetime to recognize the stiff posture and open, staring eyes. Dee was dead.

He looked at her numbly for a moment, then flicked off the light switch and walked away to find a telephone.

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Back in the present time, Reno hissed to himself, "Oh fuck." He sprinted up the stairs behind Kiyara, taking two and three steps at a time.

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Author's notes-First of all, I AM going somewhere with the whole thing about how Damaya and Kiyara acted so similar. Now, I just have a few quick notes about this chapter.

A HUGE thank you goes out to my beta reader Bonnie E. She was what made this chapter so powerful. Her help with the memory sequences was invaluable.

Another big thanks goes out to my 'bait reader,' Diego Chavez. Thank you, Diego, for pointing out that I use the phrase 'the martial arts expert' too much, and for also pointing out that there is no such thing as a Hawaiian print dress in the FF7 world. ^_^ Also, the place known as Lircos Village kinda belongs to Diego. If you're a little confused about it, what happens to it, why I'm using it, etc., read Diego's In the Absence of the Sun. Our stories are going to end up kind've intertwining a bit, so that might help you out.