

Chapter 16: Merrily We Go Insane

"Just couldn't stay away from me, huh?"-Reno Lynley

Reaching the top of the stairs, Reno looked around, cold Turk training swiftly taking over. The door to the weapon room that he had discovered earlier was wide open, and he saw Kiyara there. He froze.

She was crouched on the floor, batting at invisible ghosts around her golden head. But it was what she was batting with that really scared him.

A very sharp, wicked-looking knife that she had obviously gotten from one of the cabinets of weapons.

"Reno! Reno!" Reeve was yelling into the phone that Reno still held in one hand, but the redhead ignored it.

Reeve could wait. Kiyara obviously couldn't.

Reno bolted down the hall and into the room. Apparently not even noticing his approach, the blonde woman raised the knife up to her neck, obviously meaning to slice her jugular vein. He dropped to his knees a few feet in front of her with a bone-jarring thud that rattled the floorboards, and as he slid the last few feet up to her on his knees, Reno dropped the phone on the floor.

The ex-Turk wrenched the knife out of her right hand and flung it across the room. It skittered noisily across the floorboards and out of reach as he took her slim wrists and held her arms by her sides.

Kiyara stared at him, shaking badly, her blue-gray eyes wide and devoid of all emotion but total, mind-numbing fear. "Alone, so alone," she murmured in a low, husky voice. She said nothing more, but began to weakly try to pull her arms out of Reno's grip.

The redheaded man knew how strong she could be, and he acted accordingly. He pulled the woman to him and held her tightly with her back pressed up against him, pinning her arms to her sides.

Kiyara didn't seem to notice even this intimate contact. Her eyes and mouth hung open, the horrified, haunted twist of her countenance aging her face far beyond its years.

The blonde whimpered so quietly that it was almost silent.

Despite himself, Reno felt a chill run up and down his spine for no apparent reason.

"Kiyara?" Reno asked cautiously, unsure of what to say or do.

She said nothing, unmoving face looking as though it had been turned to stone.

"Kiyara!" he shouted in her ear, desperately trying to reach her.

For the first time, she seemed to notice him, and turned around to look up at him pleadingly, her face rapidly paling.

"What the fuck is goin' on?" he asked with no real anger behind the words, keeping his bright green eyes trained on her face.

She ignored him once again and spoke, voice an almost imperceptible whisper. "Help me."

"Help you what?" he questioned, patience rapidly eroding.

"Please. Please."

"Godsdammit, answer me!"

She barely even flinched at the violent shout, going back to her first habit of simply sitting and staring.

And suddenly, Reno knew what it was that she was going through. He had seen it before, and he mentally kicked himself for not realizing it earlier. Dumbass. Dumbass dumbass dumbass. It was shock. It just had to be a coincidence that it looked like what Damaya had done. It just had to be. His brain firmly refused to accept the other possibility, that it was something more. And the best way to get rid of shock would be to give her another, smaller shock, like cold water. He didn't see any way to half drag, half carry her to the nearest source of water, which would be the bathroom, so he did the next best thing.

Then, reaching one hand back as far as it would go while keeping a tighter grip on her with his other hand, Reno braced himself.

She's gonna rip you into tiny fucking pieces for this, Lynley.

He whipped his hand forward and caught the side of her cheek in an open handed slap. The sound cracked around the room, and the force of it snapped her head around.

The slap seemed to have the opposite affect than what he was going for on the blonde. As his flaming red handprint grew on her cheek, Kiyara exploded in a flurry of sound.

"Nooo!" she screamed. "I'm not a backup for Sephiroth! I'm not!"

Reno froze, all movement immediately coming to a screeching halt. Ohh, mother of holy hells, what?!

Kiyara suddenly began to fight wildly to break free of his grasp, but despite his shock, Reno was holding onto her too well. She pulled one arm out from beneath his protective grasp and clawed at his face, leaving five red, bleeding slashes running down one cheek.

"Shit!" came the expletive as he reached for her hand again, struggling against her crazed strength to press it back to her side again.

She continued her tirade. "No! Hojo, get your goddamn hands off me! Get away! No!"

"Would you...would you quit it?! I ain't Hojo, dammit!" he roared, battling to hold her still.

In an effort to get rid of him, Kiyara twisted at the waist and threw herself to one side, dragging Reno down with her. There was a second of struggle until his superior weight came in handy, and he emerged on top of her, pinning her to the ground with his body. He found himself looking down on her raving, contorted face.

She bucked underneath him, trying to push him off as she bellowed at the top of her lungs. "Get the fuck away from me!"

Something inside of him whispered, "Kiss her..." Are you fuckin' nuts?!

It was the same voice that had made him think, the steak knives! when Damaya had gone running into the kitchen. It had caused him, when he was in the hospital after the Pillar incident, to ask, "Where's Aimee?" It was the voice that had prompted him to go to Costa del Sol a week ago, starting this whole mess.

So, despite his response to this thought, before Reno really realized what he was doing, he lowered his head to hers and their lips met. For a half a second, she froze. The insane fire in her eyes was extinguished as her eyelids closed over the blue-gray orbs. Everything stopped.

There was a sudden pressure on his mouth, and it took him a long moment to realize that it was her ... kissing him back?! At almost the same instant, her arms extricated themselves from beneath his body, wrapped around his back, and pulled him closer, if that was even possible.

Everything in his head, mouth, and body exploded in a flash of sensation. He had been kissed before...hell, that was an understatement--lots of times before, but never before had it felt like this. It was fierce, needy, passionate, and violent to the point of being bruising.

Holy...fuck.

The few seconds for which the moment lasted seemed to last for an eternity, and everything around them slowed to a standstill.

That same voice decided then to speak up again. "Stop."

First you tell me to kiss her, then you tell me to stop. Make up your godsdamn mind already!

"Stop."

In his head, Reno sighed, but did as he was bidden. He--reluctantly, albeit--drew his head back, severing the link between their lips.

There was a long moment of nothing before she cautiously opened her eyes.

"D'you remember what happened?" Reno asked, managing to act as if he pinned her and wildly made out with her like that every day.

There was a slow, uncomprehending nod in reply, then realization dawned in the blue eyes. Her hands immediately were yanked away from his back, placed on his chest, and her arms gave a hard shove.

Reno was pushed off of her and rolled to one side, coming up in a crouch as Kiyara leaped to her feet, eyes blazing. "How could you?" Every word was short, freakishly calm, clipped, and oh-so-dangerous.

Reno straightened his lanky legs and stood, holding his hands open, palms facing her in self-defense. "H--"

Kiyara crossed the room in a flash. "How could you take advantage of me that way?!" Every word was accompanied by a poke to his chest as her self-control rapidly eroded.

Reno decided to fight fire with fire. "Hey, you were goin' nuts!" he bellowed back.

Kiyara glared at Reno, eyes glittering angrily. "Yeah, well that sure as hell didn't give you the right to climb all over me!"

Reno found himself becoming inexplicably angry. "I wasn't climbing all over you, dammit! You actually think I'm interested in you that way?!" He barked out a nasty laugh as he looked her up and down. "You may have a nice body, sister, but you're nothing compared to some of Midgar's finest."

Kiyara's hand moved so fast Reno barely even saw the blur. His head snapped around with the force of the slap, then he turned his head back to her, fingering the rapidly growing red mark on his cheek. "Heh heh. Now we match."

"My gods, are you a vile, malicious bastard! I'll bet even your mother hated you!"

"Hey, at least my mother didn't abandon me, you dumb bitch!" the redhead roared back.

In the shocked silence that followed, he knew that he had gone too far. Once again, her hand moved almost faster than he could see. This time, however, it was gathered into a fist. The punch seemed to start a mile behind her, and unfortunately for Reno, ended directly in front of her. The hard fist buried itself in his solar plexus. His air escaped him in a rush, and the Turk folded over like a cheap card table. Her other fist connected with his jaw, spinning his head and sending flecks of blood and spittle out of his mouth. Kiyara's hands shot out, giving the tottering man an angry shove. He fell to the ground with one hand wrapped around his injured stomach, gasping for air.

Kiyara stomped on the fingers of Reno's outstretched hand and spun viciously. He gave an involuntary yell and yanked his hand back when she stepped off of it.

Kiyara stormed out of the room in long, angry strides, her face dark with rage.

Reno's only answer was ragged, heaving gasps and a low moan. Finally, after he had recovered enough, the Turk managed to crawl over and pick up the phone. "I'm here," he mumbled through a jaw that felt broken.

Reeve sounded relieved, but still pissed. "What the hell happened?!"

"Me and my traveling partner had a, uh...domestic dispute." Reno massaged the lower half of his face. "Aww shit. I think she broke my jaw too..."

"What?" Reeve asked.

Reno shook his head, then remembered Reeve couldn't see the gesture. "Never mind."

"What was with the Sephiroth comment?!" Reeve sounded somewhat panicked.

"I dunno, Reeve. I'm going to ask her once she calms down a bit."

"Who the hell is she?"

"I don't wanna say over the phone; a lot of people are lookin' for her, and I'm trying to keep us from getting our brains blown out."

Reeve sighed. "Fine. Now I want you to explain to me just what the hell is going on and where you've been!"

Reno grinned. "Later, boss. Just get down to Tifa's bar, in Sector 5. We need you."

"You're with Tifa?" Reeve sounded incredulous.

"Yeah."

"And, Reno, as much as I would like to, I can't get down there today. Why don't you tell me what's going on now, or I can send-"

"No," Reno cut him off. "Don't send someone else. I want someone that I can trust who's good with computers, and that's you. I don't care who you know who is trustworthy; I want you. Why the hell can't you come? Can't you cancel whatever the fuck it is?"

Reeve sounded frustrated. "No, Reno, I can't just cancel. It's a very important meeting with some of the elders of Cosmo Canyon about the safety of the Planet."

"Okay, okay, fine. Can you come tomorrow?"

Reno heard the clacking of keys being tapped. "Hang on... Let me check..." Reeve muttered indecipherable phrases to himself as he went through his list of appointments for the next day. "You say this is very important?"

Reno nodded. "Yeah. Pretty godsdamn."

"All right. I'll be there tomorrow, at about eight in the morning. Does that work?"

"Yeah. Reeve, whatever you do: make sure you're not followed."

"Can do. I take it from the computer expert comment that you want me to bring my laptop?"

"And whatever security passes and other crap that you might need. Hey, by the way, did we ever computer index all of Hojo's shit?"

Reeve jumped on the other end. "Hojo?! Why do you need to be picking through Hojo's trash?!"

"Not over the phone," Reno said with complete sobriety for once. "Just get down here tomorrow, Reeve, and I'll explain everything. And was it computer indexed?"

"Yes, it was."

"And do you have access to it?"

"I'm one of the few that do."

"Good. We'll need to access it tomorrow. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got business to take care of."

"Reno, what have you got yourself into?! Hojo and Sephiroth?! Reno! Don't hang up on me, dammit! Don't hang--" He hung up.

With a sigh, Reno replaced the little beat up phone in his pocket. He knew what he had to do next, and he wasn't particularly relishing it. It was something he hated to do, and was very bad at sincere ones.

Apologies.

Reno moved out into the hallway, and swiftly ducked down the steps to find Kiyara walking away from him, wearing her black jacket and carrying her bag thrown across one shoulder.

"Hey, wait!" he called.

She turned, face set and angry. This ain't gonna be good. She looked quite ready to kick his ass. "Hey, what was that up there?" he asked, arms folded over his chest.

She shook her head at him, spun back around, and continued her walk towards the door, middle finger on her fight hand flashing out at him.

"Where're you going?"

Kiyara stopped again before whirling to glare at him defiantly. "Why the hell do you care? I'm just a 'dumb bitch,' remember?"

Reno glanced down at his feet sheepishly. "Aww, shit, Kiyara. I didn't mean it."

She raised an inquisitive blonde eyebrow. "Oh? Well, that's nice. Have a nice life." She moved toward the door, but Reno took several quick steps to close the distance between them and grabbed her by the sleeve.

"Wait," he said.

She spun, looking ready to kick him.

"Hear me out first," Reno said quietly. "Then if you still want to leave, be my fuckin' guest."

She folded her arms over her chest. "I'll still want to leave. The only reason I stuck with you in the first place was because I thought you could help me. I thought you would help me. Obviously, I was wrong."

Reno ignored her comments for the most part. "I came down here to apologize, but you're just not going to make it easy for me, are you?"

Kiyara looked at him grimly. "Did you expect me to?"

Reno sighed. "No. But Kiyara, you--"

Her eyes blazed venomously, and she snapped, "Don't you 'But Kiyara' me!"

Reno held up his hands in an attempt to pacify her. "All right. I just won't address you then."

She ignored his sarcasm. "Good."

"So, where you goin'?" Reno asked again casually, trying to buy himself extra time to gather his thoughts.

In response, Kiyara sighed and looked at her watch. "You have three minutes." She pretended to yawn. "The clock is ticking."

"Kiyar-S'cuse me. One-who-is-not-to-be-named, I'm..." His face lost the usual malicious, sarcastic expression, and assumed one of earnestly and honesty.

He hated doing this. He hated it, he hated it, he hated it. "...sorry," he muttered. Knowing that she'd be none-too-impressed by that, he glanced back up to her again. "I really am. I don't fuckin' know why, but I am. I guess...I shouldn't've kissed you for as long as I did. I can see how you'd think I took advantage of you, and it was wrong. I regret it, and no shit like it will happen again."

He was rather enjoying the look of shock on Kiyara's face at his eloquence and (only slightly false)contrition. "An' then I shouldn't have yelled back at you when you started flippin' on me."

He paused for a moment, collecting his thoughts, then plunged onward, forcing himself to hold her gaze frankly.

Gods, when'd I turn into such a fucking total pansy? Why don't I let her just go? It'd be good to get rid of the bitch, he tried to tell himself. But he couldn't just let her leave; especially not now. She was a helluva kisser; she should stick around.

Kiyara found herself enjoying this new, honest Reno, who looked at her steadily with no discernible deceit or mischief in his eyes.

"I talked to Reeve; he's comin' tomorrow. With his help, you c'n find out more about you, your past, and how to get rid of those goons that're following you." He looked at her steadily. "But the grovelin' stops here; I'm nobody's bitch." He straightened up proudly, and looked down on her, waiting for her answer.

In reply, Kiyara turned and moved toward the door.

"Dammit," he muttered to himself, surprised--and a little disgusted--to find that he really was none-too-pleased by the idea of her leaving. "You're sure?" he asked, arms crossed over his chest and green eyes serious and hard.

"What do you think?" she questioned sarcastically over one shoulder as she turned the knob and began to lever the door open.

But the answer didn't come from Reno.

A strange voice spoke in her head. Do not go, little one.

Kiyara did not move for a full second before wildly looking around. When her eyes fell across Reno...it looked as though he had been frozen in time. He didn't even appear to blink or breathe. The dust mites fluttering down through the shafts of sunlight had halted and sat in mid-flight, unmoving. The sounds of city traffic and voices outside had silenced.

Who...who said that?

There was a deep bass rumble that sounded like a chuckle of some sort. No, no. You cannot see me.

Who the hell are you?

I am the mouse in the sewers; I am the president of Junon in his mansion; I am animals, monsters, humans, the earth, and plants. I am everything.

Are you...are you the Planet?

There was another rumble. Very good. The prophets made a wise choice after all, I see.

Prophets?

There is not time for much, but I can tell you this. You, Kiyara Maiden, are to be the savior of the Planet, along with Reno Lynley.

Kiyara snorted. Reno isn't exactly hero material.

Nevertheless, the two of you are to save the Planet. Together, not apart. Stay, little one. Do not go.

And what if I don't stay?

It sounded vaguely regretful. If that was even possible. Then we shall be forced to take action. Action that you probably will not like.

What kind of action?

There is no time. Just remember this: remain with the other human, Lynley. Together, you are the key to the Planet's salvation.

No, wait! I've got all kinds of questions! Come back here you damn pranker; I want to know how you did this!

But it was gone.

Immediately, horns sounded just outside the door and wheels scraped along the pavement. Dust mites soared about the room, driven by the breeze wafting in through the half-open door. The handsome man in front of her shifted his position faintly, intelligent green eyes peering curiously at her as she stood there, unmoving.

She felt an overwhelming surge of emotion for him for a minute, and her eyes widened in horror as she beat it back. What the hell was that?! Those were positive emotions, for Reno of all people. More than positive, it almost seems... Shaking her head violently, her face came up and blue-gray eyes met with emerald.

Hell, not even that, but what the fuck had that whole 'Planet' thing been?! The blonde woman found herself surreptitiously glancing around the room, looking for hidden speakers that had broadcasted that crazy voice.

Okay, so maybe she didn't quite believe it, but she wasn't about to risk leaving and facing the Planet's wrath, even if it was all just a practical joke. But then again, she was not about to let Reno off the hook this easy, and she looked at him, eyes silently inviting him to speak.

Reno shook his head slowly. "You shouldn't have to rely on me to tell you why you should stay. If you feel the need to do that, then just fucking go. I've already said everything that needs to be said. I'm not gonna beg, Kiyara. It's your decision, not mine."

Kiyara shut her eyes for a moment, against the sight of him being actually nice, noble, and making sense; she didn't like it at all. Then, slowly, she pushed the door shut, and the sunlight faded. She opened her eyes again and met his hopeful green gaze for a moment. "I'll...stay."

Reno grinned at her, but shrugged. "Whatever."

"And thank you," Kiyara said, cutting through the growing silence.

He frowned, looking as though he thought she'd finally stepped right over the deep end. "For what?"

"You saved me up there. If it weren't for you, I would have carved a big slice out of my jugular."

He smirked. "I guess I did save the day and all."

She snorted. "Nobody ever taught you how to take compliments gracefully, did they?"

"Look...What really did happen, up there?" he asked, face pulled in a frown.

She sighed quietly. "I'm not exactly sure. I started remembering some things about what Hojo did to me, and then I completely lost control. Everything's really vague and shaky until--" You kissed me. "--I started remembering again," she finished lamely.

Thinking of that kiss...Damn. Damn. It had been gr--no, no nononononono. Don't even go there.

He caught the distress on her face, and assumed it was from talking about her little...episode. "Hey, forget it; tell me later, whatever you want."

Kiyara gave a small smile. "Okay." Somehow she knew, though, that she should keep her odd conversation with the enigmatic "Planet" to herself. Once a day was more than enough to sound completely insane.

The two started back up the stairs together, acting as if nothing had happened. But Kiyara knew that things could never be the same.

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That night, Kiyara tossed and turned on the unyielding hardwood floor for hours. Tifa had done her best, supplying blankets galore, but the floor just came right through the bedding.

Like the princess and the pea, Kiyara grumped to herself.

Finally, when she rolled over and something dug into the sensitive part of her back, making all of her limbs convulse, Kiyara had had enough. That's it! I'm tired of this!

Scooping up the layers of blankets, she padded down the hall, being careful to keep quiet. The sounds of drunken carousing could be heard from the bar downstairs. It wouldn't do to have some dumb drunk hear some noises and decide to investigate. She tapped on the door to the guestroom. A small strip of light was visible beneath the door.

Reno's voice came back immediately. "Who is it?"

"Kiyara."

"Go away. I'm not decent."

"When are you ever?" Kiyara retorted. After the events of that morning, the two of them had returned to their habit of malicious teasing--with a vengeance.

She pushed the door open and went in. The illumination was coming from the small lamp on the end table next to the couch and the sliver of moonlight apparent through the un-shuttered window. Reno was in the bed, lying on his back with his hands behind his head, staring at the ceiling. He sat up, glanced over at Kiyara, and face worked into a broad grin.

Her golden hair had once been in a ponytail, but now it had been destroyed by her constant tossings and turnings, the elastic having worked its way down through her hair, and stray strands stuck out all over her head. She was wearing pajamas that had been loaned to her by Shera. The blue fabric of the pants was now rumpled and wrinkled, and the faces of the little brown monkey designs grinned impudently. The strap of her white tank top was falling down one shoulder, and she was trailing blankets behind her like the train of some fancy gown. A pillow was tucked under each arm, and she was grinning rather ruefully.

Kiyara looked down at herself, and her smile became even wider. "I do look kinda funny."

He asked, "What did you want again?"

Kiyara dumped all of her blankets onto the couch across from Reno's bed and jumped onto it. "The floor's uncomfortable. I'm staying in here."

Reno gave her a crooked smirk. "Just couldn't stay away from me, huh?"

His answer came in the form of a pillow that hit him in the face. "I'll take that as a yes." He flung it back at her.

Kiyara had cocooned herself in the blankets, curling up in them happily. She caught the pillow that Reno threw and placed it under her golden head. She reached up and flicked the light off.

Reno muttered rebelliously to himself. "What makes her think that she can just march in here, take the couch, and turn the light off as she pleases..."

"Bad night, Reno," said Kiyara's voice from the darkness.

"Why thank you, Kiyara. And horribly sour dreams to you."

After a few moments, Kiyara's deep, even breathing signified that she was asleep. Reno envied her, and glared at her still form. "How come you get to sleep and I don't?"

Of course, there was no answer.

Reno sighed. Maybe countin' sheep? But by the time he got to 30, Reno was bored, wide-awake, and had shot all of the sheep.

After tossing and turning for another half-hour, Reno finally faced what was keeping him awake. "Damn her," he whispered.

What I felt for her today, when I kissed her, was more than just lust. There, ya happy? Can I get some shuteye now?! But sleep was still elusive. Reno stared at the ceiling, his emerald eyes glowing slightly in the gloom as a cause of the Mako injections he had received in his short time as a first-class SOLDIER. ...And maybe I'm becoming attracted to her? His eyelids still wouldn't close. ...Because of who she is, not because of her looks and body. There, that oughta please whatever's keepin' me awake. But it didn't. Aww hell...

Reno glanced over at Kiyara, lying on her side, facing him, and that one glimpse quickly became more of a prolonged stare. Gods, she's hot...

Moonlight streamed in through the window, bathing the contours of her face in silvery light, making her seem far less harsh and hostile than during the day. Long eyelashes fluttered over her ethereal countenance, and her pale pink lips were half-open as she breathed softly. Trim, muscled body was hidden beneath the covers as she pulled at the blanket in her sleep. Her waist-length blonde hair was spread out along her pillow and behind her; it looked even more golden than usual, with silver flecks dancing through.

In short, she looked like a goddess.

Reno found that his mouth had gone dry, and he worked it furiously to get moisture back into it. The motion snapped him out of whatever reverie he had fallen into, and he turned over so violently that he almost fell out of the bed. What in the hell am I thinking?! This is Kiyara for the gods' sake! The bitch!

But somewhere, Reno knew that he just couldn't think of her as a bitch any more. Swearing to himself, he angrily pulled his pillow over his head. "There, I hope you're happy now, you evilly perverse unknown being," he growled aloud.

"Reno, I'm willing to bet that this 'evilly perverse unknown being' of yours is your brain," came Kiyara's amused mumble. Her sleepy giggle rang in his ears.

"Aww, shut up," he grumbled with no real conviction.

It's all thanks to you, you evil thing, that I won't be able to get some shuteye tonight. I've disgusted myself too much. I'll never... Reno yawned. fall... The thought trailed off as he drifted off to sleep.