

Chapter 2: That's An Ouch

"Are you looking for a fight? If you are, I'll sure as hell give it to you!"-young man

"Damn, I must be losin' my touch. How could I have let such a goddamn puny little kid fool me like that!" Reno muttered angrily to himself through gritted teeth as he raced after the said puny little kid in question.

The redheaded ex-Turk came to a dead halt when he stepped foot onto the bridge that led to the rest of the town. "Where the hell did he go?" Reno scanned the streets. The moon was still behind the clouds, making it tough to spot the boy. Suddenly, he spotted a running figure. It looked like he was headed for the beach.

Reno gave a grin of triumph and dropped off the edge of the bridge onto the cobblestones below, absorbing the shock by landing in a crouch. He stood, then sprinted to and down the stairs that led to the beach. Then he stopped on the sands of the beach. "Where the fuck is that little ankle-biter this time?!"

"Right here!" Reno half-turned at the last second to see the blond boy swinging a piece of driftwood like a bat at the ex-Turk's unprotected head.

Reno lashed out with his foot, throwing off the other man's aim just enough. Rather than cracking his head, the chunk of wood slammed into his shoulder with a suspiciously nasty cracking sound.

"Goddammit!" Reno yelped in pain. He retreated for a moment, clutching his shoulder.

The other man dropped the driftwood and backed off as well, massaging the hand that Reno had kicked.

They stared at each other for several, long seconds. Reno broke the silence. "Who the hell are you?" he asked.

"That's for me to know and you to never find out," the boy replied impudently, watching Reno warily.

"Great. A smart ass," Reno announced to the clouded heavens.

"And you're not?" The boy began to stretch, pulling his limbs into seemingly impossible positions and cracking his knuckles.

Reno shrugged. "Good point. How d'you know so much about me?"

The boy stopped stretching and faced Reno. "Oh, come on, now. Everyone's heard of the big, bad Turks, and the redheaded devil that was the worst of them all, before he joined the new Shinra. I know who you are, Reno Lynley."

Reno laughed aloud, an annoyed, unamused tone buried beneath the merriment. "I'm shakin' in my boots here, kid; you're damn near terrifying. I think I might piss myself."

"Enough talk. Are you looking for a fight? If you are, I'll sure as hell give it to you."

That reminded Reno why he was here having this conversation in the first place. "You're damn right I want a fight!"

"Bring it on, then." The young man settled into yet another unarmed combat pose, this time, his hands closed into tight fists before him as he swayed back and forth faintly. This combat pose, unlike the former, was extremely authoritative and businesslike, and it made it look as though the boy had had some boxing experience.

The redhead grinned wickedly at the sight, unclipping his nightstick from where it hung at his belt. The weapon was a long, slim, metal rod about the length of a man's forearm. In theory, it didn't look like it could do too much damage.

That is, until Reno thumbed the 'on' switch on its worn, leather-bound handle.

The electromag rod immediately hummed with deadly electricity, and Reno's toothy smile grew as he gestured toward himself with the weapon, issuing a definite challenge to his opponent.

The young man just stood for a moment, then he was a blur of motion, bolting forward to duck under Reno's swing with the weapon and whack the redhead's arm with the same chunk of driftwood. As was his aim, the other man's forearm immediately went numb and the weapon fell from his nerveless fingers. The mysterious fighter kicked it to land several feet away, buzzing in the sand. He catapulted himself backward into an agile back flip that returned him to his old position of several feet away just as fast as he had left it, leaving Reno to scowl in a new-found grudging respect for his enemy's skills.

"Unless you can find me another one of those somewhere, we're fighting hand to hand. I have no desire to become a barbecue, and it wouldn't be fair if you had one of those and I didn't, now would it?" the boy said, voice a medium-tone with an odd husky quality to it.

Reno shrugged nonchalantly. "Electrocution, beating, it's all the same to me. How you want your lesson to be taught to you is up to you."

In response, the boy suddenly stepped up close enough to hit Reno, and aimed a hard punch at the redheaded man's face. Or, he aimed a hard punch where Reno's face had been an instant before.

Reno came back up, from his crouch, swinging. His right fist made good, solid contact with the other man's eye.

The boy hissed in pain, trying to back away, with his hand instinctively over his eye.

But Reno was too quick for him.

He punched the blond in the stomach, causing the boy fold over as the breath went out of him. The young man gasped out something softly.

Reno leaned in cockily. "What was that?"

"I said, 'what lesson?!' the boy answered, standing and swinging his leg up at a height that looked deceptively impossible. The booted foot slammed into the taller man's ribcage. The redhead staggered backward under the impact, but used those several steps to hold onto his balance, and he did not go down.

The boy, sure that his opponent was occupied, took two quick steps closer, and delivered an impossibly strong uppercut to Reno's jaw. Ducking back at the very last minute, the other man managed to avoid the brunt of the blow, but still felt his teeth clack together painfully. While Reno was still reeling, the young man's fist shot out, slamming into Reno's right eye.

Reno roared in pain, feeling sure that he would have one hell of a shiner in the morning. He kicked out viciously, catching the boy in the kneecap. The young man cried out and fell, rolling backward almost before he'd even hit the ground. Reno's follow-up kick hit nothing but wet sand.

The blond rolled to his feet in an avalanche of gritty sand and immediately threw a punch at Reno's other eye, trying to blind him. The ex-Turk reacted quickly, dodging to one side, catching the slim forearm, and twisting.

For the first time, the boy cried out; his voice ragged. He involuntarily dropped to his knees, clutching his arm and staring at the ground, mouth and eyes wide. He finally glanced up at Reno resignedly, waiting for the kick to the head that would put him out like a light.

With a grin, Reno drew one long leg back, then drove it forward.

That was when the moon finally came out of the clouds. And with the new illumination, Reno discovered something that he hadn't realized.

He froze, foot literally inches from his opponent's face. "Holy shit," he breathed. "You're a girl!"

She looked up at him defiantly. "And what if I am?!" There was no mistaking it. Her face, with its high cheekbones and full, pale lips was distinctly feminine, as was her voice, come to think of it.

Reno, for once, was lost for words. "I...you...how...holy shit!"

She slowly, painfully rose to her feet, then took a few steps back to get out of his reach. "Yeah, I'm a girl," she called to him. "And what of it? Surprised that a mere girl could beat the shit out of you like I did?"

Reno regained his voice. "You did not beat the shit out of me! I'm not the one with the sprained arm!"

"Yeah, just the way that I'm not the one with the black eye and bruised ribs!" she retorted.

The top of her head was about up to his eye level, making her about 5'10". She was probably, like him, in her mid-twenties. Her waist-length, thick golden hair had come out of the ponytail during the fight and was arranged around her face in disarray. Wispy thin bangs curled slightly and ended just above her warm, blue-gray eyes. One of her eyes was swollen almost shut, the skin surrounding a lovely shade of blue-purple.

She was still beautiful, though. It was obvious that, uninjured, she must be a fucking knockout. She wore baggy jeans, red sneakers, and an over-sized gray T-shirt.

Reno couldn't fucking believe that he hadn't realized that she was a woman.

However, he decided to give up on the "who's injured the most" contest and tried a different tack. He shook his head in amazement. "Where did you learn to fight like that?"

"What's it to you?" she asked, still warily watching him.

"Look, I'm not gonna hit you," he said simply. "An', to be honest, I've never see anyone as good as you are. Exceptin' myself, of course."

"Yeah, right. Like when you didn't hit me and gave me a black eye," she replied sarcastically. "Look, there goes that famous Turk modesty."

"I don't hit girls, no matter how much of a pain in the ass they may be," Reno retorted, growing sick of her sarcasm.

"Ooh, how gallant," she replied acidly, glaring daggers.

They stared each other down for several seconds. Then the woman turned away and started walking to the stairs that led to the town, testing out her arm and its muscles as she walked.

"Where are you going?" Reno asked loudly, reaching over to scoop up his nightstick from where it had gotten kicked at the beginning of the fight.

She stopped. "To sleep, where all people who are in their right mind are right now!" She continued her walk up the stairs.

"Look, I'm sorry, okay? It's not my fault that I thought you were a guy! I mean, you were the one pretending to be one!" Reno called to her, following her.

The young woman turned at the top of the steps. "Y'know, I think you've done enough damage for the night. Why don't you just go away!"

She marched away indignantly.

Reno dogged her steps, still curious about this mysterious woman. Besides being mysterious, she was hot. Good combination. "Where're you from?" he asked.

"Fuck you!" she called back over her shoulder.

"What's your name?"

"Just go away, dammit!"

"Are you staying at the hotel?" Reno referred to the villa that had once belonged to President Shinra, then Cloud Strife, then the town of Costa del Sol. Cloud had sold it to the town several years ago, and the town had remade it into a beautiful hotel.

"Yes! There, I answered a question! Now will you leave me the hells alone?!" she shot at him angrily.

"Answer two more and I will," Reno lied.

"Fine. What?"

"Why would you want people to think you're a man?"

"That's a kinda obvious one, don't you think?" she said over her shoulder, still walking to the hotel. "It's a well known fact that men will usually get harassed and bothered less than women. Of course, the opposite goes for this situation..." Reno got the weird feeling that she was holding another reason back.

"Okay... One more. What's your room number?"

He grinned mischievously.

"Hell, no! I ain't giving you my room number!"

"I'll leave you alone," Reno tempted. Again, he was lying, but she didn't have to know that.

She sighed loudly. "I'll tell you, but I swear to Shiva that if you show up at my room I'll kick your ass all the way to the northern continent. I'm in room five, okay? Now just fuck off!"

"Hey, that's right next to mine! I'm in room six!" Reno called up to her.

Giving a raw scream of frustration, she stormed off, boots clicking rapidly on the cobblestone street.

"Was it something I said?" Reno questioned of the humid night air.

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His hotel room was bland, boring, and quite ass-ugly.

There was a bed, dresser, and small bathroom, along with a small black and white TV. The carpets were a dirty brown-yellow that looked as though they had once been white, and the walls were a hideous shade of coal-gray.

Some people might be disgusted by the molding walls and cheap, ramshackle furniture.

Of course, Reno Lynley was not 'some people.'

Rooting in his black sports bag filled with crumpled clothes, the tall man produced a bracelet studded by a tiny green orb, which he slid onto his wrist as he muttered, "Cure." A soothing green mist surrounded him for a moment, then vanished.

He was going to feel this in the morning, and he would still have an amazing black eye for the workers at Neo Shinra to rib him about, but at least his ribs weren't as fucked-up anymore. He removed the bangle from his arm and tossed it onto his suitcase.

Since he had been thrown out of the only drinking establishment in town, and there was nobody out and about in the late hours of the night, the ex-Turk stood in the center of his cheap room for a moment, pondering his options. He could sleep, sleep, or try and get a reception on the tiny black and white television.

He opted for the latter and dropped into a ratty red armchair--which groaned under his weight, but held--and hit the 'on' button of the television. The only thing that came in was a local news show--produced entirely in Solian. Great.

The Lifestream-green eyes absently stared at the fuzzy screen as he wondered about the girl in the room next door. Who was she, and what in the black hells was a woman with her considerable skills doing in Costa del Sol?

Before he could do much pondering, the redheaded man's head lolled onto the back of his chair and his breathing deepened as he fell asleep.