

An Affair of the Heart and Soul
By Meriko

Chapter 40: Reeve Butts In

After the morning gossips had scattered from their chickadee-clusters, Rocket Town settled down once more into the usual peaceful bustle of every day life. Shops were opened, front steps were swept, and neighbors chatted easily over fence lines. A gentle breeze swept through the town, cooling the golden sunlight that sparkled down from the noon sky. Over at the house closest to the launch pad, the broken glass and pottery had been carefully swept away, and the broken window replaced with a new piece of glass pilfered from Cid's scrap room. Reeve had taken the initiative as well as the opportunity after spotting Shera storm out of the house not long after Cid. An earlier riser than the rest of his friends, he had been the only one of them outside at the time a certain teapot had made a desperate suicide run for the outside world. Leaving everyone still snoozing or having breakfast at the inn, he carefully made his way to Cid and Shera's, and shamelessly eavesdropped for a moment. Leading a double-life through Cait Sith had developed a tendency for spying and voyeuristic living, it seemed, not to mention butting in. He stepped back out of the house and looked up at the sun now high in the sky. He could see some of his companions in a store across the way, and some more chatting easily by the front gates. Pursing his lips in consideration, Reeve went over his options and then carefully skirted around the house and began to look for a friend.

He sat in the shadow of a great oak tree, hiding his form from Rocket Town's eyes behind the gnarled trunk. Cigarette after cigarette was lit and then held loosely between the second and third fingers of his hand, forgotten, until it burned down and was replaced. He didn't even feel like smoking anymore...what was wrong with him? It seemed like Shera wasn't the only one who had undergone a change since her death and resurrection. And all of the changes, whether for the best or the worst in the long run, were all definitely confusing right here and now.

Would Shera be mad at him forever? The quiet engineer who had always been so complaisant and uncomplaining - would she now hold this hurt to her heart as stubbornly as she had always been about forgiving him before? And had she always felt this way, or did coming close to being buried change a person? Cid shrugged his shoulders irritably. He'd almost died countless times while testing his machines, not to mention in the previous year's escapades with Cloud and Co, but did that compare with being dragged back from the brink of the abyss as Shera had been?

A polite cough disturbed the silence and he looked up to find Reeve standing over him, a polite expression of inquiry pasted carefully onto his face.

"The hell you want?" Cid growled, but his voice lacked its usual bite.

"Nothing, really," Reeve replied nonchalantly, settling himself in the shade next to the pilot. "Just thought I'd sit with you. Enjoy the breeze, that sort of thing." He closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the scaly bark to enforce the lie. After a few seconds of seeming ennui, Reeve peeked open one eye to find Cid staring at him dubiously.

With a gentle smile, Reeve began talking once more, but with his words and gaze carefully targeting a spot of air just a few feet in front of him. "You know, I usually hate it when I want to be alone with my thoughts, and all my friends just keep bugging me; trying to cheer me up or get me to pour out all my feelings - that kind of touchy-feely mushy stuff." Cid grunted noncommittally, and Reeve continued on, "But then again, there are some times when it would be nice just to have someone to talk to. It helps me sort out my brain when life gets too confusing. That's the original reason I built Cait Sith." He nodded to himself as if in conclusion and then turned to fix Cid with a calm, clear gaze.

Cid sighed and tossed the cigarette into the dust, grinding it out with one worn boot-heel.

"I must really be depressed to yak it out with you, of all people," the pilot sighed. Reeve ignored the comment and absorbed the friendship that Cid's opening up reflected. "Back in Mideel, we were both so worked up but it felt like we...connected, somehow. Like she knew without me having to say anything, you know?" Blue eyes turned down to stare at his empty hands. "I held her in my arms...and she held me back. The few hours at the inn when we tried to talk and just ended up crying again. I felt so...sure, somehow...then, that she loved me. That things would turn out alright somehow." He

turned to his friend with a pitifully confused look. "But now...she's so mad at me. She looked like she wanted to kill me when I told her...something...this morning. And it drives me crazy that something might happen to her again. I've already come close to losing her twice, and it's been my fault both times. But she won't let me protect her or even get close to her anymore. Like she's getting back at me for the past ten years or something. I don't know. Maybe this is what I deserve..."

Reeve weighed his words carefully for a moment, wanting to offer solace without disturbing the already uneasy situation between his two friends. "Shera's upset, yes," he began, "and you're certainly one of the reasons, but you're not the only thing that she's upset about right now. And she's not mad at you for finally realizing you love her, either."

Shaggy blonde eyebrows knit together in a confused frown. "What're you talking about, Reeve?"

A rueful chuckle escaped Reeve's lips as he explained. "She's been through a lot recently, don't you think?" The laugh died on his lips and his expression turned somber.

"I've seen a lot of soldiers die in the hospital, and you know what I see in their faces as they go? Surprise. They all knew that they would die someday, and in their line of work, someday was probably going to be sooner than later, but not a single one of them really truly believed they would die until it happened. There's always the hope in the back of their minds that a last minute miracle will allow them to continue to live. People walk around in their daily lives believing in their secret hearts that they're invincible. Many wouldn't be able to deal with life without that hope, false as it is. It's human nature. Shera's the first person to have to see the true face of death and then live to deal with it. That false hope that people use to help them stay sane has been taken from her." Reeve's lips tightened into a thin, taut line and his expression grew quite grim. Cid wondered what experiences this quiet, unassuming former executive might have had to make him ponder the mysteries of life and death so intricately. Certainly Cid had no insights such as Reeve was now sharing with him. His attention was brought back to the current conversation as the dark-haired man continued.

"Another trait of human nature is the longing for stability. Most people need a place they can always go home to, or someone they can always count on...something that will never change to be an anchor in their lives. All the other women in Rocket Town have husbands and children, and they dedicate their lives to their families. Shera's life revolves around you, and by extension, your work. The only family she has is the crew, and the only things she's dedicated herself to are the airship and the rocket. Now, not only has the lie of immortality been taken from her, but so has her daily life. You've stopped construction on the rocket, you won't let her work on anything remotely dangerous, and most of all, you don't treat her the same way she's used to. Everything that she knows, that she could rely on - whether good or bad - has been taken from her. I don't blame her for lashing out, but it's not in anger - it's fear."

Cid ruminated for a moment, and then asked, "So...you're saying I should try to make everything like it used to be? Start up repairs on the rocket, let her work on whatever she wants, and cuss her out every hour?"

"Ah...no." Reeve decided. "Definitely don't schedule cussing sessions. I think you should go ahead with the rocket, though. You're not her mother, and she's not a five year old. Shera's an adult, and can take responsibility for her own life, and even though you might want to protect her, you can't just put her in a box. And as for yourself, don't try to be the same old 'Captain Highwind,' because you're not the same man you were a month ago. Don't try to be some reformed 'new man,' either, because frankly, I don't think a drastic reform is in your nature. Just...be yourself, whoever that might be at the moment."

Cid seemed to lose himself in thought, so Reeve hoisted himself up off the ground and brushed a bit of dust off his slacks. As he walked away, a gruff, "Hey," stopped him. Turning, he raised an eyebrow at the blonde pilot still slumped up against the tree, a newly lit cigarette clenched between his teeth.

"Thanks."

Long years as an executive forced to work for those he despised kept the surprise from his expression. Reeve simply nodded in acknowledgment, turned on one heel and strode away, smiling to himself.