

An Affair of the Heart and Soul
By Meriko

Chapter 43: Just Because

"So the launch is finally happening, huh?" asked Yuffie around a mouthful of cookie. Shera simply nodded, her eyes dreamily staring off into nowhere as she recalled how the morning sunlight had glittered on the waiting rocket.

"I can't believe Cid's taking you with him!" said Yuffie, rather tactlessly, and then blundered on, "In fact, I can't believe anything I've seen about you guys in the past couple of months...first you're dead, then you're not, and..." Tifa cut in smoothly with, "You know Shera, your hair's longer than Yuffie's now. Are you going to grow it out again?" This question brought the young Ninja's attention around to a new topic, as hoped, and as she chatted away about the possibility of a new hairstyle for herself, the two older women turned once more to their teacups with indulgent smiles.

Tifa glanced out the inn's window and exclaimed softly, tugging at her companions' sleeve and arm. "Shera, Yuffie, look outside," she urged. After carefully placing her teacup on the table - Tifa's tugs had almost upset the cup from her hand - Shera peered past Yuffie's shoulder to find a surreal picture framed in the window.

Standing together in the middle of the main road through Rocket Town were Vincent and Marion. They faced each other, wrapped comfortably in the other's arms, with Vincent smiling gently down into Marion's laughing face. Nothing out of the ordinary, perhaps, but for the flower petals that swirled in a lazy whirlwind around the couple.

No breeze bent the treetops or flowers lining the road, and no dust rose from the road where they stood. Nevertheless, delicate pastel petals from all over Rocket Town were being swept along the cobbles to spiral around the couple in an airy dance. As Tifa and Shera stared in bemused delight, Marion - for it had to be she - sent the petals upward to gather in a pink and peach cloud above her shining head. Vincent tilted his face up to watch the fluttering cloud, which suddenly burst as if it were a firecracker, sending down a gentle, fragrant rain over him and his bride. He joined her in laughter, and then kissed her affectionately on the forehead.

With a quick flick of one slender hand, Marion scattered the petals to the sides of the road and slipped her arm into Vincent's once more to resume their interrupted stroll. And on the other side of the inn's window, three friends picked up their conversation once more, albeit on a different topic.

"There's gotta be a Wind materia out there somewhere," Yuffie mused. "Maybe growing in some cave, like the Mime?"

Shera smiled wryly and turned her attention to Tifa, who had remarked, "That was beautiful, wasn't it?"

"Yes," replied Shera, "it always is." Tifa tipped her head to the side, looking across the table questioningly. "Have you seen Marion do that before?" she asked Shera. The engineer laughed softly and shook her head, soft curls tumbling around her face charmingly.

"I'm sorry, Tifa, I was talking in the abstract. Yuffie looked outside and saw that the knowledge of the Ancients contained in the Lifestream could also be used to harness the wind. You looked outside and saw a young couple in love."

"So what did you see?" chirped Yuffie.

"I saw what you two saw, of course. Lifestream condenses in different forms all over the world, so it's not impossible that you'll find a Wind materia somewhere out there." Shera gave a quick laugh as Yuffie's eyes gleamed. "And as little as I knew Vincent from before, the change wrought in him by Marion is painfully obvious even to me. And they're most definitely in love. But what I thought the most beautiful was what Marion was doing with those flower petals...or actually, what it symbolizes."

"Every time I've seen or heard of Marion using her gifts, it was for a purpose...usually a dire need of some sort, in fact. She's healed Vincent's wounds, battled monsters, and brought me back from the dead. Even her simple demonstration at

Cosmo Canyon must have been a little like a test run on a research specimen. Nothing I'd call pleasant."

Gesturing out the window to the scattered petals, Shera continued, "What Marion did just now was use her gift for the sheer pleasure of it. She touched her magic with the love and joy she found in her heart, and she did it to bring just a little bit more happiness into the world she shares with Vincent. And that's what's beautiful, no matter how often you see it. To find joy and happiness in using talents that are usually turned to work or even war. To make use of an ability just because you can, and not because you have to. Of all the ways those two have changed each other, Vincent showing Marion the joy in her magic is the most beautiful to me."

A thoughtful silence descended upon the trio then, and they spent a few moments in companionable quiet, sipping at their drinks and gazing out the window while they pondered. Shera drained the last of her tea and then, setting it down on the table, pushed her chair back and stood, announcing quietly, "I think I'll go tell Cid I love him," just as she might have said, "I feel like a nice nap."

"What? Why?!" blurted Yuffie, and then winced as Tifa backhanded her arm. With an aggrieved air, the young Ninja turned to Tifa and whispered, "What'd you do that for?"

"What'd you say that for?" Tifa countered in a quick whisper.

"Why'd you hit me?" Yuffie persisted.

"Why'd you say that?" Tifa replied flatly.

Giggling, Shera stood and waved at the two brunettes. "Because, Yuffie. Just because," she said, and walked out of the door.