

IC HAPTER XII: UNPLEASANT TRUTHS

"Tifa, can I talk to you for a minute?"

They stood at the entrance to the Cetra Sage's cave. Before walking up to the cave they had decided it would be prudent to conceal the helicopter. They had covered it as best they could with branches from nearby trees. It was crude, but he hoped it would conceal the chopper from casual detection. Fortunately Reeve had landed close to the forest, so they didn't have to lug anything very far, otherwise it would have taken them all night.

The Cetra Sage and Reeve were ahead of them. Cloud had spoken softly, so only Tifa could hear. Still, when they stopped Reeve noticed and turned to look at them. Cloud motioned for him to go ahead.

Tifa watched Reeve disappear into the cave before speaking.

"What is it?" she questioned.

Cloud didn't reply right away. Instead he walked along the hill, away from the cave, out onto a small promontory that overlooked the ocean below. This was something that Reeve needed to know too, but he wanted to talk to Tifa first. He had a feeling she wasn't going to take his news very well, and he thought it would be better if they were alone.

He felt her come up beside him. He reached back, seeking her hand, and squeezed it tightly when she offered it. He wasn't sure how to begin. There wasn't any easy way to tell your wife you might never be able to see your son again.

"Cloud, what is it?"

He could hear that her voice was laced with worry. It was obvious from the way he was acting that something was wrong, that he wanted to tell her something but was having a hard time getting it out.

"When Aeris and I first came here I fell ill," he said, his voice hardly above a whisper.

He wanted to turn to face her, to look into her eyes, but he didn't. He didn't think he could stand it.

"Are... are you all right?" she questioned.

"Yes," he said quickly. "Well, no. Yes and no, actually. Well, its not like I'm going to die or anything."

He hesitated once more. He felt her squeeze his hand more tightly.

"Cloud, please tell me what's wrong."

Already the sound of her voice tore at his heart and he hadn't even told her anything yet. Still, he realized he was just making things worse. He had to just come out and say it.

"I have the Cetra plague," he said, his voice sounding hollow. "The virus that Jenova unleashed on the Cetra thousands of years ago. It still exists, and I've got it. It's not fatal to humans, but there's no cure. I've become a carrier. Any Cetra I come into contact with I could give it to. It would kill them. The Cetra Sage told me I'd be a carrier for the rest of my life."

Cloud found himself holding his breath as he waited for a response. He didn't know if she would grasp the consequences of what he was saying immediately. He knew from his own experience that this was something that took some time to sink in.

She didn't say anything at all, just stood there beside him. Finally he couldn't take it any longer, and turned to look at her. She was just standing there, looking at him, and he could see tears forming in her eyes. It was true, she wasn't sure exactly what he meant, but she could tell it was bad. Very bad.

"Cloud, what are you saying?" she finally found her voice. "Are you saying that Zangan... that you can't..."

Her lips continued to move but no words came out. She couldn't get herself to say it.

But it had to be said. She had to understand.

"I'm saying that I'm the carrier of a disease that will kill any Cetra I come in contact with. I'm saying there's no cure. I'm saying that if I ever meet my son again it could..."

He found himself faltering. He could see Tifa's cheeks wet with tears now and his own eyes were misting up.

"That it could kill him," he forced himself to finish.

She understood now, he could tell by the way the color drained from her face, by the way her whole body seemed to go limp. He didn't want to hurt her. God how he didn't want to hurt her, but she had to know. Looking at her now, it broke his heart. He hated himself. He hated himself for having to tell her this, for having gotten in this position in the first place. He knew it was foolish to blame himself but he just couldn't help it. If only he hadn't come here. If only he hadn't been clumsy and fell and scraped his hand on that rock. One step, one step in either direction and it might not have happened. How could he have been so stupid!

She shook her head. She was sobbing now. The sound of it made him feel as if something was dying inside himself.

"No one can cure it?" she managed to ask.

He let go of her hand and grabbed hold of her, pulling her close. She knew there wasn't. She was grasping at straws. It was only natural. He had done the same thing himself at first. The plague had been around for thousands of years and no one had come up with a cure.

"I'm sorry," he said softly. "I guess there's always a possibility a cure might be discovered, but it's been around so long. The Cetra have been working on a cure unsuccessfully all these years. I don't think... I don't think there's much hope."

He didn't want to say that. He wanted to be more optimistic, but he didn't want to give her false hope either.

"I need to sit down," she whispered.

He let go of her. She walked away, toward the very edge of the promontory. The land fell steeply from there, almost straight down to a narrow band of beach. She sank to the ground. Cloud followed her, sitting down beside her. He could see she was still crying. He put his arms around her, wishing there was more he could do, wishing he could somehow make this hurt go away, but there was nothing. There was nothing he could do expect hold her, not matter how inadequate that might be.

"It's not fair," she said.

He didn't reply. There wasn't anything he could say.

She had been leaning against him, but now she sat up. He pulled her hands up in front of her chin, and he could see that her fists were clenched, that her knuckles were white.

"It's not *fair*!" she said bitterly.

"Tifa," he said, putting his hand on her shoulder, but she shrugged it away.

"After all we've done!" she continued. "All these years, all these years we've strived to do what was right. We helped save the Planet. We really did. I always thought that somewhere along the line it would all end, that we'd be able to live happily ever after. But no, the powers that be, in their infinite wisdom, seem to think that would be too easy for us. This is the thanks we get? This is our reward for doing what was right? They take your son away from you? That our family is destroyed?"

Her voice cracked on the last sentence, and the tears flowed again.

"Tifa," Cloud said softly. "You know life doesn't work that way."

"Well then life *sucks*!" she shouted.

She turned toward him, twisting her hands in front of her.

"I want to hurt something Cloud. I want to... hurt something!"

His head slowly sank.

"Me?" he said softly.

Hearing him say that, her anger suddenly subsided. She fell to her knees in front of him, pulling him into her arms again.

"Of course not," she said. "I love you Cloud. I would never want to hurt you. Its not your fault. Its not anyone's fault. I'm just being foolish, but I can't help it. I want to hurt something, I want to fight back, but I can't punch a disease. You can't slice a virus up with your sword."

Again he didn't know how to respond. Before he could say anything she looked at him again.

"I'm not going to let you go," she said. Tears still streaked her cheeks, but she wasn't crying anymore. Her anger was gone, and now her face held a look of resolve. "I'm not going to let this beat us. We'll find a way. Somehow."

He took hold of her hand, giving her a reassuring smile. He didn't feel very reassured himself, but he smiled anyway, for her sake. This virus had been around for thousands of years and in all that time no one had found a cure. What were the odds that one would appear during their lifetime? It would be like winning the lottery. The chances were astronomically slim.

Tifa was no fool. She was a bright girl. She must realize how small the odds were as much as he, but what could they do, what other hope did they have to cling to? It was human nature to seek comfort where you could, no matter what the odds. If the only hope you had was vanishingly small then what's what you hung on to, because the only other option was despair.

After all, in spite of the odds, people did win the lottery, now didn't they?

"No, we're not going to give up," he agreed. "We've both been through a lot. Life isn't going to beat us down, not if I can help it."

He looked at Tifa. She seemed to have calmed down, at least for now. It was a bitter pill to swallow but she was tough. That was one of the things he had always admired about her. The hurt wasn't going to go away anytime soon, if ever, but she wasn't one to agonize over things that she couldn't do anything about. They had another problem in front of them, perhaps not as earthshaking, but this was something they *could* do something about.

"We have to rescue Aeris," he spoke up.

"What happened to her?" Tifa questioned.

Cloud dropped his hands into his lap.

"That's probably something Reeve should know as well," he said to her. "Do you feel up to going inside?"

She wiped her eyes, removing the last traces of her tears. Then she nodded.

The both stood up and Tifa followed Cloud as he led her into the Cetra Sage's cave. Reeve looked at them curiously when they walked in, but his expression changed to one of concern when he saw the look on Tifa's face, and though she had wiped away her tears the redness of her eyes still gave away the fact that she had been crying.

"What's wrong?" he questioned.

Cloud told Reeve and Tifa everything the Cetra Sage had told him. Reeve's eyes widened when Cloud said he had the Cetra plague, and Tifa looked upset again when he told them about the virus the Cetra has released that turned humans into Cetra.

"It's their fault?" she blurted out.

Cloud nodded. Tifa said nothing more, just stood there looking off into space, a smoldering look in her eye. It wasn't hard for him to see what she was thinking. Here was someone at least that they could strike back at. If that made her feel a little bit better about the situation, he wasn't going to argue.

"Yes," he replied. "I don't know if all of them are in on it or what, and I don't know if there's anything they can do about it, but we're certainly going to find out, and stop them."

"Cloud, if we..." Tifa said slowly. "...if we eliminated the virus, would that mean that Zangan might become human?"

Cloud's brow knitted. He hadn't thought of that. He had no idea. Was it possible there was some hope after all?

"I'm afraid it's not as simple as that," the Cetra Sage spoke up. "The virus alters the genetic makeup of the cell that the child forms from. Once that change has taken place it's permanent. It's like a mutation, you can't take it back."

Cloud looked at Tifa. She said nothing but the little hope he had seen in her eyes faded. She lowered her head, feeling defeated. She tried very hard to not show what she was feeling inside. It was all right to fall apart in front of Cloud, but she wasn't going to do that here in front of the others. She was determined to put up a brave front.

"What do we have to do Cloud?" she asked.

"The Cetra Sage told me I wouldn't stand a chance with a frontal assault," Cloud replied, looking at the Sage. "But there is an old Cetra city underground here. Most of it is abandoned, and he thinks we can come upon them unawares if we take that route. There are dangers however. He thinks the area might be filled with monsters."

"Figures," Reeve spoke up.

"However, that looks to be our only chance. Unless we wait while someone goes back for reinforcements."

"I'm afraid that's not going to be possible," Reeve said.

"Why not?" Cloud asked.

Reeve looked at Tifa

"Because the helicopter doesn't have enough fuel to get back," Tifa admitted.

Cloud scratched his head.

"You came here without enough fuel to get back?" he questioned.

"Yes," Tifa said. "It was my idea. I didn't want to wait. I thought... you might be in trouble."

"I see," Cloud said, letting his head drop. "Well, I guess it'll just be the four of us then."

"We told Cid where we were going," Reeve said. "When Shera gets back with the Tiny Bronco they're bound to come looking for us."

"And when will that be?" Cloud asked.

"I'm not sure," Reeve replied. "A few days at most, I would think. We figured... well, Tifa figured that would give us some time to do some hunting. Even if you were here, we didn't expect to run into you immediately. "

Yeah, they were lucky there at least, Cloud supposed. The island wasn't that big but it was a stroke of luck that he had found them so quickly. They could just as easily have run into the Cetra first and that could have been disastrous.

"So we've got a little luck, at least," he said. "I don't think it's a good idea to wait. I don't know what the Cetra are going to do with Aeris. The Sage here doesn't think they'll kill her but I'm not so sure myself, especially when they find out they can't convince her to join them. I think the sooner we get her out of there, the better."

Reeve resisted the urge to tell Cloud that their odds of rescue would be much improved with the other members of the team here with them. He knew that was just the logical part of his brain talking. Nothing wrong with that but in this case he agreed with Cloud. If Aeris was in any danger at all he wanted to get her out of there as soon as possible.

Even so, Cloud looked ready to run off this very minute and he didn't think they were prepared for that.

"It's late," Reeve said. "I think it would be best if we all got some rest. We can start off early tomorrow."

He looked at the others for their opinion. It was true, Cloud did want to start off immediately, but he could see the wisdom of Reeve's words. He and Tifa had had a long trip, and a lot to digest since they got here. He glanced over at Tifa. She looked pretty tired. Not that he wasn't himself. He was still weak from his illness, but he still felt better than he had in a long time.

"I think that would be very wise," the Cetra Sage spoke up.

Cloud looked at the others and it seemed they were all in agreement.

"All right then, let's get some rest."

"I'm afraid I don't have any accommodations for guests," the Cetra Sage said. "Its been a long time since I had any visitors."

"That's okay, the ground will do," Cloud replied. "Its what I've been sleeping on since I got here, save for last night."

He looked at Tifa

"This is fine with me," she said. It wouldn't exactly be the first time she had roughed it either.

They made themselves comfortable, or as comfortable as they could get, in a corner not far from the entrance. Reeve lay down closer to the fire, which by now had faded to just red embers. Tifa curled herself up next to Cloud, her head resting on his shoulder. She entwined her hand with his and looked up at him.

"Everything's going to be all right, isn't it?" she whispered.

Cloud looked up at the cavern above his head. He had promised himself he was going to tell her the truth, that he wasn't going to sugarcoat anything. In the end it would be better for them that way, and she was strong enough to handle it. This

time, however, he didn't think she wanted honesty. From the sound of her voice it seemed all she was looking for was some reassurance, she was looking to him to give her a little bit of hope. Right now, that might be more important than honesty.

"Of course it will," he said. "We've been through tough times before. We've almost managed to get by. It'll work out somehow. We'll make it work out."

For a long time she didn't say anything, didn't move, just lay there looking at him. Finally she nodded and lowered her head.

He didn't think his simple reassurance would really convince her of anything, but she seemed satisfied with it. If his words supplied some temporary comfort to her then that was fine. He would gladly say them. He just wished he could believe them himself.

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"This can't be good."

Yuffie and the others stood looking at the front door to the Shinra Mansion. The door lay on the lawn in front of the house itself, a good ten meters away from actual entrance way. Splinters of wood and the twisted remains of the hinges littered the lawn around it.

"Oh shut up Yuffie," Reno said. He didn't exactly consider himself Mr. Sensitivity, but Elena stood right beside them, and it was easy to see she was practically hysterical already from worry. Her face was white as a sheet and she looked ready to collapse at any moment. She certainly didn't need any of Yuffie's flippant comments.

Yuffie gave Reno a dirty look but kept her mouth shut.

They walked up to the door. From there they could see that the door wasn't the only part of the Mansion that had suffered from someone's wrath. Furniture was strewn about inside, tossed about or smashed outright. It looked as if someone had taken a wrecking ball to the place.

"Damn," Reno muttered. It was hard to believe such destruction could have been accomplished by one person. But it really wasn't a person who had done this. Vincent couldn't have done damage like this by himself. It was obvious it had to have been the Chaos beast. Vincent must have transformed, that was obvious to all of them. Which did not bode well, which did not bode well at all, considering the reason behind what Lucrecia had been doing was to prevent that very thing.

"Put that away!" Elena said shrilly.

Reno turned and saw her staring at Rude, he stood nearby, his pistol in his hand.

Rude just stood there looking at Elena.

"What are you going to do, shoot him?" Elena said, her voice thick with emotion. "It's Vincent!"

No, that wasn't true, Reno thought. It was the Chaos beast, and they had no idea how he would react to their presence. Rude was right, he was only being cautious, but Reno knew Elena would never understand that. Now he was beginning to regret bringing her along. For her sake, he didn't want to hurt Vincent anymore than she did, but what would they do if the Chaos beast suddenly attacked them? They had to defend themselves, even if it meant hurting Vincent.

He was hoping they were blowing things out of proportion here somehow. It was obvious that Vincent had transformed, but that didn't mean he was still Chaos now. He was hoping that somewhere in the Mansion, or more likely somewhere nearby, they would find Vincent back to his old self. He knew that Vincent usually didn't remain Chaos for long. And even if he was still Chaos, that didn't mean he would attack them. Even as the beast Vincent still seemed to have some kind of control. He didn't attack his friends.

Still, they had to be prepared for the worst. Elena had said that she heard Lucrecia scream. That might not mean that Chaos attacked her, but it the most likely explanation, and if he had attacked Lucrecia, the woman he had loved all those years, who knows how he would react to anyone else?

In spite of all that, with a nod of his head he told Rude to acquiesce to Elena's request. If Elena was going to be with them at all, and he was certain she wouldn't let them leave her behind, then it would only make matters worse if they didn't appease her in this. Somehow they had to remain ready to fight without seeming to.

Rude slipped his gun back inside his jacket and they continued on their way.

The trail wasn't difficult to follow. The destruction led in a straight line directly to the stairway leading down to the basement, or rather, what was left of the stairway. There wasn't much. Looking down into the dark Reno could see about four intact steps and after that nothing but a dark gaping hole.

"Shit" he muttered.

The others came up behind them and stared down as well.

"Anyone bring a rope?" La Lai said after a moment.

No one answered.

"I'll go into town and get some," Rude finally spoke up. Without waiting for a reply, he turned and strode off.

Reno nodded. Lucrecia could down there somewhere, she could be hurt, but there wasn't anything else they could do.

"Hurry," Elena said.

"Maybe we should look outside," La Lai suggested. "I think it's pretty obvious that Vincent left."

From the trail of destruction, yeah, Reno thought. That was probably true. Vincent could be anywhere by now, but it wouldn't take long for Rude to get some rope, only a few minutes, and they wouldn't get anywhere in a search outside in that time. They needed to know what happened downstairs, and they needed to find Lucrecia.

"Rude should be back in a minute," he said. "We'll search outside afterward. We have to know what happened."

"I think its pretty obvious what happened," Yuffie spoke up. "Vincent flipped out and tore the place apart."

Reno saw Elena flinch.

"Shut up Yuffie," he snapped.

"You can't tell me what to do!" Yuffie exclaimed.

"Do not speak to Miss. Yuffie in such an insolent manner," Ichiero spoke up.

Reno turned to the samurai.

"You shut up too," he growled, in no mood to be tolerant.

Ichiero put his hand on the hilt of his sword.

"You dare..."

"Oh snap out of it," Yuffie said, pushing Ichiero roughly aside. "I don't need you to fight my battles. And stop calling me Miss. Yuffie." She looked at Reno. "I'd say why don't we just settle this man to man, but it seems that neither of us qualify."

"Oh shut up you little twerp," Reno retorted. "You don't even qualify as a member of the human race."

"Uhh, people?" La Lai interrupted. "I don't think we really have time for this now."

Yuffie stood there for a moment, then she brushed past Reno and walked over to what was left of the stairway.

"You're right, we don't," she agreed. "You wussies can wait around here for a rope if you want, but I'm going down."

"Yuffie, there's no staircase," Elena pointed out.

"Pfff," Yuffie replied. "A ninja doesn't need a stupid staircase."

And with that, she leaped into the darkness below. The others ran up to the edge and looked down to see her scrambling down the chute, using both the wall and the remains of the stairs as hand and foot holds.

"Miss. Yuffie, wait for me!" Ichiero called out. A moment later he too leaped into the pit and followed her down.

Reno inched up until he stood on the very edge of the precipice, staring down into the dark, his fists clenched.

"Call me a wuss, will you?" he muttered.

Elena looked at him.

"Reno, don't."

For a moment he didn't move, and Elena almost thought he was going to listen to reason. She should have known better.

"Screw it," he proclaimed, and jumped.

He managed to reach out and grab hold of a post that was left over from the destruction of the stairs, bringing himself to a jarring halt and just missing being impaled by the remains of another post right beside the one he had a hold of. He looked down, but it was too dark to see more than a few feet. He couldn't see the bottom, but he could see more pieces of debris protruding from the walls at various places below him. Slowly he began to inch his way down.

It didn't take him long to realize this might not have been one of his best ideas. There were a number of places where he had to jump gaps between the wall protrusions and more than once he almost lost his grip and fell. Worse were the areas where there were no protrusion at all. At first he didn't know how to negotiate these gaps. He hadn't watched the other two go down, he didn't know which route they had taken. He didn't know if there was an easier way, but he didn't think he could make his way back up. The only way to go was down, whether by climbing or... other means.

A few cracks in the walls provided the only handholds he was going to get. Using these he somehow managed to get across one gap. Feeling quite proud of himself when he reached a second gap he approached it with more confidence. Perhaps as a result, he wasn't quite prepared when the stone of the wall under one handhold crumbled as soon as he put his weight on it.

His wild clawing at the wall availed him naught, and a moment later he found himself falling through the darkness, with no idea how far a drop he had before he hit bottom.

Fortunately for him it wasn't all that far. He landed on his rear end and back, and though it knocked the wind out of him and made his head spin for a moment, the fall didn't do him any serious damage.

His vision cleared to see the visage of Yuffie standing over him. She was bending over, her hands resting on her knees, looking down at him curiously.

"Where did you learn that? At the ninja school of plummeting?"

Suppressing a groan he hauled himself to his feet. Pretending he was dusting himself off, he tried to rub the soreness out of his back.

"I *meant* to do that," he muttered.

"Yeah, okay," Yuffie replied. "C'mon, the lab is over here, that is, if you can still walk."

Growling an unintelligible reply Reno followed her down the corridor. About half way down they turned into a room on one side.

"Didn't have much of a chance to look around yet, but it's pretty much a mess," she said.

She was right. It was a mess, at least, what he could see of it. Being underground there were no windows, of course, and the lights were not on. The only light that filtered into the room was from the bulbs that hung from the ceiling in the hallway.

Reno nearly jumped out of his skin as Ichiero suddenly loomed up in front of him.

"Why don't you turn on the damn lights in here?" Reno snapped. "Or is wandering around in the dark some kind of ninja thing too?"

"As a matter of fact it is," Yuffie replied. "But not in this case. We tried the light switch. It doesn't work."

"Great," Reno muttered.

He walked over to the switch by the door and flicked it a few times. Yuffie gave him a sour look, then wandered off. Reno stood there for a moment then turned and walked out of the room. They might want to go searching the room in the dark but that wasn't his style. He needed some light.

He walked a little farther down the hall, into the library. This room seemed to have escaped Chao's wrath. He could see no damage. Again no lights were on, but there was a lamp on a small end table beside a reading chair. He walked over and clicked it on. Seeing that it was in working order, he unplugged it and walked with it back to the lab. He looked around as

he walked in the door and vaguely made out Yuffie and Ichiero near the back of the room. As he was plugging the lamp in he heard a sudden intake of breathe from the samurai.

He clicked on the lamp, its light filling the room, and looked up to see Ichiero staring at something on the floor, but a long counter filled with lab equipment prevented him from seeing anything.

"What is it?" Reno questioned. "Find a rat?"

Yuffie was closer. She took a step toward Ichiero and stopped suddenly.

"Oh my Gawd."

The sound of her voice told Reno there wasn't anything as simple as a rat over there.

He walked rapidly over. As he came around the counter he saw something on the floor. It was a body.

"Lucrecia," he exhaled.

Ichiero was already beside her, stooped down. In a moment both Yuffie and Reno were beside him. Lucrecia was lying on her side, and from where he was Reno could only see the back of her head. She lay splayed on the floor. She wasn't moving. Pieces of glass from the lab equipment lay strewn around her and on top of her. There was blood on the floor underneath her.

Yuffie was on her knees beside the scientist. She reached out and shook Lucrecia's shoulder.

"Lucrecia, are you all right?" she said.

There was no response. Reno bent beside her. Yuffie looked up at him, then backed up, her hand coming up to her face.

Reno reached out and grabbed hold of Lucrecia's hand. It was ice cold. He could see no sign of her breathing. His fingers ran along her wrist searching for a pulse, an action that he knew inside himself would be futile. He had seen enough dead bodies in his lifetime to recognize one when he saw it.

"Is she..."

Yuffie's words hung in the air.

Reno could feel no pulse, just as he knew he wouldn't. No pulse. No breath. No warmth. He looked up at Yuffie and shook his head.

"Oh gawd," Yuffie said. She turned away, walking a few steps from them. Ichiero went over to her and put a hand on her shoulder.

Reno slowly stood up. He looked around. Lucrecia was dead. He would never have believed it. This was worse than he had thought. Much worse.

They heard movement outside. A moment later Rude walked into the room, followed closely by Elena and La Lai.

"Vincent's not here," Rude said as soon as he entered. "He went through the town, leaving a trail of destruction behind him and headed off south. Three people were hurt pretty badly by him, but fortunately no one was killed..."

He stopped when he saw the look on their faces.

"That's... that's not exactly true," Reno said after a moment.

Seeing something was very wrong, the others walked forward, around the counter and into view of the body. Elena stopped and her face went white.

"Oh no," she said.

The other two just stood there. Rude looked at Reno, who gave a short shake of his head.

"Oh no, please no," Reno heard Elena say. Once more she sounded on the verge of hysteria. Reno really couldn't blame her this time. Lucrecia was dead, and Vincent had killed her. Lucrecia, the woman Vincent had been obsessed with. The woman he once would have done anything for. It was true, he may have lost some of that passion since, but it couldn't all have disappeared. He had to still have felt something for her. He certainly would never want to see her dead, yet she was, and by his own hand. Vincent had never attacked his friends. Even as the Chaos beast he had always had some sort of control, limited though it might be.

He could hear Elena crying now.

Now however, now he wasn't so sure. If Vincent had killed Lucrecia, then the beast must have more of a hold on him than he ever had before. It might even be possible that he was so much the Chaos beast now that Vincent could never regain control. If he went on the rampage, and from what had happened in town that seemed more than likely, they were going to have to stop him. Reno wasn't an expert on the Chaos beast, but he had seen the transformation a few times, been on the wrong end of it once or twice when he was working for Shinra, in fact, and he didn't relish the idea of a rematch. He had been hoping there was still some vestige of Vincent left, he was hoping that there would be some way they could still reason with the Chaos beast, but if he had killed Lucrecia then all bets were off. If he had killed his first love, then Reno didn't think there would be much chance of reasoning with him. If that were true, then just how were they going to stop him?

He shook his head slowly.

"Some hell of a mess this has turned out to be."