

On the Way to a Smile: The Story of ShinRa

At the Ancient Ruins — The mission assigned to Tseng, leader of the Shinra Company's Department of Administrative Research which was also known as the "Turks", was to obtain the ancient stone known as the "Black Materia". However just moments before that, Sephiroth appeared and severely wounded him, leaving him leaning against the wall close to the verge of death. The bleeding never stopped and he was passing out. Just when he was already prepared to die, Aerith and her friends appeared. They too had arrived at the ruins in pursuit of Sephiroth.

Keeping surveillance over a descendant of the Ancients and looking for opportunities to assist his company at his own discretion has been his duties for a long period of time. Sometimes he would be under pressure by the violent ways of his subordinates but within Shinra Company, they were considered very gentle operations. Once he had tried to control Aerith's mother by force and lost her as a consequence. This affected Tseng's principles and made him reflect on his actions.

Aerith was the last descendant of the Ancients in this world. Tseng thought that someone who represented the darker side of his company like him, shouldn't be getting close to such a majestic existence like her and because of that, the days when he would just watch over her continued.

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The first time Aerith spoke to him was when she was still just a child.

"Thank you for your hardwork as always."

Tseng was suspicious of the words he just heard from the young girl. Seeing how silent he stayed, Aerith continued.

"You're protecting me, aren't you?"

When Tseng thought about his mission, it was probably best to take advantage of this moment. But Tseng went ahead and told her the truth. That very instance in his life was the time he's been the most honest.

"I'm Tseng from Shinra Company. I have something to speak to you about."

"I *hate* Shinra!"

As he watched the back of the young figure run off, Tseng thought it was best this way and was relieved. He thought to himself that even when the day he has to take her away by force, he still won't be able to lie to her.

Before long after many years and certain events passed, Aerith came into contact with the anti-Shinra group Avalanche and the situation took a sudden change. Tseng became agitated as he couldn't get a grasp of the situation at hand and because of that he treated Aerith with an attitude of such pretense evil that even his subordinates turned cold towards him. He would always think of what to say to them.

This isn't pretense evil. To Aerith, Shinra itself is evil. That's why evil should act like evil—

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As a result, even though he was aware his death was approaching, he chose to approach Aerith as a Turk.

"Damn it. Letting Aerith go was the start of my mistakes."

Even so, Aerith shed tears for such a Tseng. She didn't see him as one of the enemies but a friend who she had known since her childhood. Tseng thought to himself that dying through such an unexpected event wasn't such a bad end but, he could barely make a joke about it.

"I'm not dead yet."

After Aerith left, Tseng quietly awaited for his death. But it never came. As he started to feel faint, he still couldn't feel his mind merge with the Lifestream.

It was Reeve who saved Tseng. He controlled an odd little robot cat - riding on a Giant Mog - and appeared before Tseng. Reeve was assigned the mission to spy on Aerith and her party using this robot cat.

"That was close, Mr. Tseng."

"Where's the Black Materia?"

"..."

There was no answer. The robot stood still as if it had stopped working. However, before long it began speaking again, "Excuse me. I'm controlling both No.1 and No. 2 at the same time - it can be a little difficult."

"I see."

Tseng couldn't understand just how difficult it was but, he waited for Reeve to speak again so that he wasn't causing any interruptions.

"I've handed the Black Materia over to Cloud for the time being. That is a wiser choice than letting Sephiroth have it, yes?"

Cloud. He was linked to everything that has happened so far and was one of the great mysteries that remains to be solved but at the same time, he was a necessity. *He's just a kid*, Tseng felt but no matter how much he thought about it, he didn't know what the outcome will be. In any case, it was best Cloud had the Black Materia to prevent the Ultimate Black Magic, Meteor from being used.

"Cloud has the Black Materia — I see."

"As for yourself, Mr Tseng — I'll contact Shinra for you."

"—Right."

"One more thing— My identity as a spy has been found out but I will be staying with them. They're quite an interesting bunch. I'm very interested in what they will do. Right, lets get you moved somewhere."

There was a number of things Tseng wanted to ask but as he was lifted up by the Giant Mog, the pain that struck him knocked him unconscious. He couldn't remember what happened afterwards.

Three men carried Tseng onto a boat. They were his subordinates once. *Why did Reeve contact these people and not the company directly?* He never managed to get into contact with these three men. Question after question came to mind but Tseng didn't have the strength to say anything. A lot of time passed as he blanked out. Eventually he woke up in a small room. Inhaling the distinct air that was mixed with the smell of the tides and rusted metal, he knew he had been taken to Junon. A doctor appeared almost immediately and began his treatment.

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After Tseng left, Aerith died and the Black Materia was handed over to Sephiroth from Cloud. Using the Black Materia, the Ultimate Black Magic Meteor was cast.

It was said that upon impact, everything on the Planet would be gone in three to seven days. The actual results may not have been different but, no one had ever expected it to really happen.

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Midgar, Sector Zero, somewhere close to the Shinra Building—

Constructed rapidly on iron pillars in Sector Eight, was a dangerous canon that was barely transported by air from Junon and was a last resort against Sephiroth. The "Sister Ray", connected to the dedicated pipelines in Midgar in which Mako energy surged through, was expected to wipe out all enemies including Sephiroth by boosting the power output with a Huge Materia. They aimed it towards him in the distant Northern Crater where he slept. They thought if Sephiroth died, the nightmare that he had summoned in the skies with the Black Materia, would also disappear. If the Planet was no longer threatened, the Weapons would surely return to where they came.

"Theoretically, it's perfect," Rude said looking up at the Sister Ray.

"Theoretically? What about non-theoretically?" Reno asked with a serious tone he didn't usually have.

"It leaves me concerned."

"Then I'm relieved."

"What do you mean?" Rude questioned.

"I thought I was the only one worried. Are we seriously going to fire this thing? Don't we have to test it out first? Will Midgar be alright?"

"Would you be reassured if I said it'll be alright?" Rude replied to the torrent of questions with a stern tone in his voice.

"Hey, don't get mad."

In the end, the Sister Ray never fulfilled their expectations and was turned into a giant piece of scrap. At the same time, the executive floor of the Shinra Building was destroyed under the

Weapon's attack. As a member of the Turks, Rude and Reno were used to seeing the ruins of buildings during their work. However, they felt differently for the Shinra Building. They had little office work and their missions mainly involved travelling around outside so, the Shinra Building was very much like a home they could return to after work. All the tough times they've been through together with their comrades, the times when they got scolded by their superior, the times when they would tease the girls while they had nothing to do and get teased back. When they're out, their "switch" is on and when they're in the office their switch is "off". It was the complete opposite of the other office workers but even so, they had some strong feelings for the Shinra Building.

The unrest that lay with Rude and Reno grew stronger after they learned their President had gone missing.

There were many witnesses that saw how the Weapon's fire struck the executive's office so they didn't know if he had really simply gone missing. On top of that, they couldn't confirm the safety of the rest of the staff because the Shinra Company's management system was a mess. There were many who had already given up their positions a number of days before the expected day of the Meteor's impact.

Rude and Reno felt they should confirm the well being of their President and waited for the elevator. The elevators to the executive floors weren't working so they had to try the regular staff's elevators.

"This thing isn't moving."

"It looks like the emergency lock system was activated."

"They managed to get that working pretty well."

"Reno, Rude. Take the stairs."

The two looked at each other at the sound of the new voice before trying to find out who it was. Before long, they spotted a familiar man with long hair who they hadn't expected to be here.

"Chief!"

They had received reports that Tseng had died several days ago. Elena had acted on her own, pursuing Cloud and his party to the Northern Crater to take revenge. However, she failed and returned to Midgar in a bad state and they remembered how she repeated the word "revenge" like she was under a spell afterwards. In short, every member of the Turks thought Tseng had died.

"What's wrong?" Tseng asked, looking at the dumbfounded Rude and Reno.

"You're alive, Chief."

"As you can see for yourselves. But now isn't the time to explain."

"Yeah," Reno nodded a number of times to show they didn't need to hear any explanations.

"Chief!"

Suddenly, they heard the voice of a young woman. The three turned round and found Elena standing there. The youngest member of the Turks didn't try to hide how happy she was to find the Chief who she had thought was dead still alive. She suddenly jumped up and gave Tseng a hug.

"Oh come on, Elena. You know I want to do that too," said Reno.

"No need to hold back, Senpai."

"I'll pass."

Tseng placed a firm hand on Elena's shoulder and had a good look at his three subordinates.

"—Come on. Time to get to work."

Darkness—

After being hit directly by the Weapon's attack, Rufus Shinra laughed as he began to slip away in the darkness.

The Weapon was a monster that lay dormant within the Planet. After its attack hit close towards the President's office, the blast had knocked Rufus to the floor. An explosion followed within the Shinra Building afterwards and the metal materials that formed the ceiling fell crashing through the floor next to him. He rolled his body underneath a desk to avoid all the falling debris. He was prepared for death the moment he saw the Weapon's fire heading directly towards him. However, the moment the impact knocked him to the floor, anger welled inside him. He was angry at himself for accepting death. What does it mean? Why didn't he want to die? His anger calmed him down. The Weapon might attack again. He had to escape quickly.

As Rufus looked for some means of escape, his eye caught sight of a small switch engraved with the letter, 'L'.

It was located underneath the desk so that it was hidden away from view. *It must be for some emergency use if it's placed here. Perhaps it will be of use in this situation.* Rufus pressed it without hesitation. The part of the floor he was lying back on disappeared with a "Gatan" and he found himself falling about one metre downwards. He lands on a hard sloping floor and began sliding down it. *In the end, I still think I'm going to die. And not only that, it looks like I'm going to die inside an air duct that runs around the building's walls and floors. It's ridiculous. What would everyone think once they found my corpse? Right in the middle of a battle in which the Planet's life was at stake, the President of the very Shinra Company that had the power to fight with the enemy dies. Inside an air duct. Ha. Such a jest. It's a pity I can't see myself now. But what is it with this air duct? There's no reason why it should be built at such an abrupt angle. And that L switch—* Rufus suddenly remembered a conversation he had with his father twenty years ago. He finally raised his voice and laughed.

It was when he was only five years old. Young Rufus had woken up in the middle of the night and noticed his father was back home - which was rare. Knowing he might get scolded and be made to go back to bed he went out but to his surprise, his father seemed to be in a very good mood and showed him a blueprint. It was a blueprint of the President's Office at the top floor and how it was to be modified.

"What do you think? This is the room where I give out orders to the world."

"Amazing."

Rufus pretended to show his interest while he did his best to read something from the plans. He had to make his father praise how clever he was. But he couldn't read anything and only said what was on his mind.

"Father, where's the escape route?"

His father couldn't understand what Rufus was thinking.

"Escape route? What?"

"If the enemy attacked, you need some way to escape."

"Ah—"

Realizing what his son meant, the father continued, "Shinra Company has no enemies. Even if there were, the President's Office is on the seventeenth floor. No one would be able to attack there."

"Mr. Palmer said the enemy can attack from space."

"Palmer said that?"

The father's eyebrows frowned deeply. It was a sign he was angry. Palmer, who led the Space Development Division, could be in for some trouble later. But Palmer told him that being scolded was part of his job so all will be fine. *As long as I haven't made him angry at me, I don't care. But it looks like I have.*

"Father, I'm sorry. I'm kind of sleepy."

"Listen, Rufus. It's as you say—" continued President Shinra, ignoring his son. "I will have an escape route built in case the enemy attacks. But let me make this clear, Rufus. I won't use it. It will be for you once you become president. Of course, there's no guarantee you will take my place."

"Father—"

"Ha. Escape? Me?"

"Father, I'm sorry."

"Why do you apologize? Are you admitting your idea was wrong?"

"Yeah."

"You're such a simple-minded one!"

There was nothing else that Rufus could think of when he looked at the plan apart from an escape route.

"We will mark out the escape route with something that really stands out. "L". Don't forget it now. 'L' for "Loser."

And Rufus was thankful. Thankful for what he did when he was five years old.

The seemingly never ending long chute that lead all the way down to the ground floor from the President's Office gave enough time to think back through one's life. All the trivial memories that had been forgotten were revived one after the other. When Rufus realized that they were all linked to his father, he realized that he too was just another male— Another boy. A boy that just wanted to surpass his father and be praised but didn't know how to express his feelings and in the end, all he got from his father was being scolded and ignored. However, the fact that such an experience lead him to the now seemed to be more hilarious than any other joke he's heard in his life. In the darkness he laughed wholeheartedly.

The escape chute ended abruptly and Rufus found himself sliding into a bright room surrounded by white walls. It wasn't a very big room but Rufus didn't stop until he hit the wall opposite the chute.

"Yikes!"

Rufus laughed again at the pitiful sound he made. He noticed some of his rib bones had broken but he couldn't stop laughing. He continued to laugh, remaining in a pose that he would have found too disgraceful to show anyone when he hit the wall. However, his fractures eventually pulled him back to reality.

With his body still aching slightly from the escape route, Rufus turned to survey the room. It was approximately five square metres in size with white walls. Next to the chute's exit was a plain bed that reminded one of the hospital. The linen was high quality but clearly it hasn't been used for a very long time. The whole wall on the right was used as a closet. To the left was what looked like a door made from steel. While bearing the pain, Rufus tried to get crawl closer to it and looked over its structure. There wasn't a handle or signs of any traps. It had a small panel which seemed to be where the door was controlled from. But Rufus had no idea what the passkey could be and neither did he have the strength for trial and error. He gave up opening the door and turned to face the closet, getting up and dragging his feet towards it.

I'm in such a state I just can't bear to be seen by anyone. The closet doors opened easily. Inside were sterilized boxes made by Shinra. He reached for the bottom shelf—that was as far as he could reach—and pulled a box out. Engraved on the lid were the words, "For L".

"Ha."

Seeing the engraving made Rufus laugh with his nose up. Again, he couldn't suppress the laughter that welled up from within him but laughing made his ribs hurt. He managed to open the lid by keeping his laughter down. As he expected, inside were potions and other medicines from the pharmacy. Avoiding the deteriorated magical items that may have turned into poison, he took some of the painkillers and waited for it to take effect to relief his body. His eyes were focused on the giant 'L' on the ceiling.

"Don't make me laugh any more, dad."

After absorbing the painkillers, he waited for the haziness to go away. He was right in choosing to use a Shelter while using the medicines from the pharmacy. But at the same time, he felt extremely irritated. Soon, Rufus went to the control panel on the door and supporting himself

against the wall, he tried entering a number of passkeys. It all ended up in nothing. It was the medicine's fault that he couldn't concentrate on cracking the passkey but, it was also he himself who decided to take the medicine in the first place.

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Rude and Reno were in the wrecked President's Office.

"No one's here."

"Yeah."

"You've checked carefully three times?"

"Everywhere."

"So he's alive."

"But where could he be?"

There were a few girders that seemed to have fallen from the ceiling onto the floor. They focused on searching under them carefully, making sure Rufus wasn't under them.

"So— where else?"

With the Meteor closing in, a powerful storm was blowing. The Turks ignored the Meteor and continued their search for Rufus. The rescue party had made their rounds but they never received any reports of Rufus being found.

Rude and Reno went through an inconspicuous door located further in from the entrance on the first floor of the Shinra building and checked the Executives Only Emergency Room that lead half way into the ground. The previous President Shinra's habits meant it was built very simple. It was sturdy but had no decorations at all - not even a single painting. Exposed steel girders can be seen on the ceiling, walls, floor - everywhere.

"Nothing here. Lets go, Rude."

"Wait."

Rude stopped Reno and pointed to part of a wall.

"The colour's different."

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Rufus stood next to the control panel and stared at the keys numbered zero to nine. He knew all he had to do was try every combination possible but it was an impractical thought. He will probably lose track half way through his trial and error. He had to think of a more efficient way of cracking it. The passkey may have a certain meaning linked to it. But then he thought that his father would never do something like that because to him, it was meaningless. He had already tried the meaningful numbers that both he and his father knew—his mother's birthday and the day she died—none of them unlocked the door.

He didn't know how long he's been in the room. All that mattered to him was that he was still alive and Meteor was still in the skies. In other words, their operation to use the Sister Ray had failed and Sephiroth was still in the Northern Crater. In that case, sooner or later Meteor will impact with the Planet and he will die.

Rufus thought about death. *So my spirit will become one with the Lifestream that courses through this Planet. I wonder if father will be there too. Does consciousness have a shape? No, such a powerful flow of energy would shatter the consciousness of any single human being easily.*

"Ah, I see now."

He smiled as he came to realize what it would mean if the Planet was going to disappear. A moment later he took the small bottle of painkillers from his white suit's pocket. He put three pills in his mouth, grinded them with his teeth and stared at the control panel.

"Ha."

Even if he was going to die, he didn't want to die in such a room. He entered the combinations that never came to mind when he had first entered the room and gazed the control panel. He knew by entering such numbers in anticipation, he was admitting defeat to his father. But this was no time for pride.

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Rude and Reno examined the area of the wall that had a different colour.

"It's just a wall, Rude."

Before Reno could finish the wall shook a little. A panel approximately one metre squared sank into the floor and disappeared. Rude and Reno looked at each other before they rushed over to it. They could see a white wall deep inside through the hole. It looked like a small room.

"Anyone there?" Reno asked but just as he was about to peep in, Rufus' face appeared.

"Good work," the young Shinra Company President said before collapsing to the floor.

"Boss!"

Rude walked into the white room and passing Reno who was looking over Rufus. He knew immediately that the room was a shelter.

Taking a quick glance around, Rude saw four of the buttons on the keypad were still lit up but were quickly dimming again. Never did he know that it was a habit of the late President to set the same passkey on any equipment that he might be using. It was made up of numbers that the late President would never forget and that was the birthday of his son.

"Rude, go find a doctor. And check outside while you're at it."

"How's the Boss?"

"He's sound asleep."

Just as Reno said, the soft breathing of the sleeping President could be heard.

"Looks like he's relieved to find us again," Reno tried to joke but failed.

"I'm glad," Rude said with a serious tone before going outside.

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Rude stood in the darkness with the rain and harsh winds blasting against him. They were at the Shinra Building's back door. Rubble that looked as if it was broken off from the upper plates or the building itself were scattered everywhere. A spotlight was set up on the ground to aid the rescue groups and the powerful search light from the helicopter hovering above glistened over the shattered glass. Rude took a good look around but remained calm. Finding out Rufus was still alive gave him courage. Rufus himself was Shinra Company. Whether for the good or bad, Shinra was going to live on. If Shinra was going to live on, so will the Turks. Just thinking about life outside of being a Turk was painful.

The helicopter descended and the powerful wind from it sent a palm-sized splinter of wood bouncing off Rude's forehead. Rude smirked. Rude loved thrills. And Rufus always guaranteed some for him.

Taking care where he was stepping, Rude made his way towards the main entrance of the building. A group of people were squatted over there. Rubble was flying all over the place as they used their hands and feet to move it away. He tried calling out to them to see how many were alive. Most of them looked scared the moment they saw Rude. For someone with a skinhead and dark sunglasses on, he just reeked of violence. Rude was satisfied with the reaction he was used to getting.

Busily rushing about at work was the rescue team that was made up of hospital staff funded by the Shinra Company. He grabbed one of them and told them where he needed help. He didn't know how they would react if they heard Rufus' name so he made no mention of it.

"Is he a member of Shinra?"

"Yeah."

"Then he has priority."

"I'm counting on you."

The man nodded and called over to his colleagues who were carrying a stretcher then headed towards the back door. Rude followed afterwards thinking he should lead them there. At that moment, a young woman speaking over a radio caught his eye.

She was one of Cloud's friends named "Tifa". She was also one of Shinra's enemies but for the time being, there was no reason to fight with her. The Turks only had to fight when they were given the order or if someone or something was in their way.

Rude quickly hid out of sight and watched the frantic Tifa rushing about.

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As the rescue team moved Rufus onto a stretcher Reno asked, "Where are you going to take him?"

"We'll take him to the hospital first but we can't say what happens afterwards."

"Can't say? What the hell does that mean?"

"I mean Meteor is on its way. What can we do when the planet's about to be destroyed?"

"Well, that's true. Come on, this way."

Reno lead the rescue team through the lobby and then a small door.

"This place is really messed up. That skinhead could have told us about this shortcut."

"It's a passageway for executives only. Don't tell anyone."

"—Yes, sir."

Reno nodded, satisfied with the answer and lead them towards the main entrance. He continued walking through towards the outside until he saw the back of a familiar figure, Yuffie. He stopped.

"Could I leave the rest to you guys? Something's just come up," he said turning round to the rescue team.

"Of course. He'll be in good hands. By the way, what is the patient's name?"

"He'll tell you himself once he wakes up. Put him inside a good hospital room like you should."

"Could he be— Rufus Shinra?" one of the people carrying the stretcher from the back muttered.

"Shh!"

Not long after the rescue Rufus experienced a miraculous moment in Kalm, a town near Midgar, which he refers to as "The Fated Day" or simply as "that day". The Turks couldn't guarantee Rufus' safety at Midgar's hospital because it was filled with all sorts of people therefore after Rufus woke up, Reno reported their situation to him and they moved to a small house in Kalm that Shinra owned. They could have travelled further away because they had access to a helicopter but, Rufus chose Kalm. Rufus had moved respecting his subordinate's advice but he didn't believe in the aesthetics of running away when the planet was going to be destroyed.

Meteor was so close that you would think you could touch it just by reaching out your hand. With such a surreal situation before them the four Turks patrolled Midgar. The Meteor's impact was imminent and the Turks may not be able to ease Rufus' mind but, they chose to ensure the President's safety and carry out their job to the very end.

"There is no point in thinking about what happens after the Meteor impacts. We will keep working and assume the planet will overcome this disaster," said Tseng before he ordered his subordinates to help with rescue efforts while taking everyone else to shelters. The town was already feeling the effects of the Meteor in close proximity. Soon the powerful storms and earthquakes rocked Midgar, bringing down the buildings. The city of steel screamed as if it was caught in surprise.

"It's just like the chief to use his last orders for good deeds," muttered Rude.

"What about it?"

"Atonement."

"I see."

Not long later, the original head of the Turks, Veld and their other colleagues gathered together in Midgar. Reno thought it was a dream - just another effect of Meteor.

Once long ago, the Turks had done something that wasn't in the interests of their company. Now that Reno thought about it, they probably never made such great efforts to keep a promise than that time. As he helped the citizens of Midgar back at that moment, Reno pushed himself beyond his limits and never stopped to take a break.

After the incident, President Shinra and the executives ordered the Turks to be disbanded and killed but rescuing them from such a grave situation was Rufus who was the Vice President at the time. Rufus was their patron and now that Reno has helped secure his safety and reunited with the colleagues who he never thought he would see again, Reno was glad that he will have no regrets to leave behind any more.

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Meteor was destroyed directly above Midgar and the Planet escaped destruction. It was the power of the Lifestream bursting out of the Planet that saved it. That very moment when the powerful Ultimate White Magic "Holy" won against the equally powerful Ultimate Black Magic "Meteor", people could only think of it as the Planet protecting itself and didn't know how much effort Cloud and his party had put in to help.

At that very moment when the two magics were battling against each other, Reno and Rude had split up with the rest of their colleagues and were heading towards the Shinra Building located directly underneath Meteor.

"Why does it have to happen now?"

The building shook violently as the Lifestream burst out of the ground. It burst through the window, its light almost like a monster destroying everything in its path as it rushed inside. The two of them ran to safety— talking to each other over the cubicle walls in a toilet.

"This is my fault."

"What is?"

"If I didn't suggest we come back to collect the tool box then— " Rude began with a sorry face.

"Forget it, man. Now's not the time to feel sorry."

Noticing Reno's voice was different from usual, Rude quieted down.

"Rude?"

As if he couldn't stand the silence any longer Reno called out to him, "What is it?"

"We've been together for a long time."

"Yeah."

"Partners right?"

"Yeah."

"The best partners."

Rude noticed that Reno was back to his usual self and could hear him leaving his cubicle. Almost immediately afterwards, the door on Rude's cubicle gets kicked down. Rude catches it and kicks it back.

"What the hell!"

"My last present to my best partner."

"A door?"

"A thrill. The sort of thing you like."

"—Not enough," Rude replied as he got out of his cubicle."

"Then why don't we take a look outside? I bet it's exciting."

"It's a festival."

The two of them sprinted towards the front entrance of the building as the wind picked up and grew stronger around the Lifestream. Beams of light bundled together, whipped their way pass before their eyes.

"Whoa!! That was the Lifestream wasn't it?"

"Reno."

"What?"

"This is the best."

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"Tseng, Reno, Rude, Elena," Rufus began talking to the four Turks that remained the next morning after the Lifestream had burst out of the Planet. "What do you all plan to do from here?"

"I don't remember being fired."

Tseng and the others agreed with Reno.

Rufus went on to give the Turks two orders. One was to return to Midgar and find out the situation there and the second was to gather friends.

"Just because people maybe our staff doesn't mean they're friends. Understood?"

"I know that. But what use will it be gathering friends now? What are you going to do?"

"I want information for now no matter how little or how much."

Rufus already knew he had fractured ribs and a broken right heel and the pain they were causing him meant he needed the assistance of a wheelchair but, he still hadn't lost his dignity.

"Tseng."

"Yes, sir."

"I'm sure you've been reprimanded—"

"There are still many things that only Shinra can accomplish."

Rufus nodded satisfied at his response.

"I'm sure this will be fun."

The Turks split up into two groups as they made their way to Midgar practically without resting. Tseng and Elena were responsible for gathering intelligence while Reno and Rude were responsible in finding friends. All the friends they had managed to gather yesterday night were already spread out gathering information and sending it all back to Kalm.

"Avalanche once said Shinra was the Planet's enemy," Reno suddenly said as if it suddenly came to mind.

"Yeah."

"Looks like they were right."

"Why's that?"

"Look."

The Lifestream had saved the Planet but it had also punished Midgar. The town wasn't completely destroyed but rebuilding it was going to be very difficult. It was as if it they were sentenced to suffer between life and death - and it wasn't going to end. On top of that, those who found out it wasn't Shinra who saved the Planet from Meteor were already hostile towards them. Many people mentioned Shinra's name as if they had to lay the blame for these difficult times on someone.

The two of them arrived near the Shinra Building in Sector Zero. A large crowd of people were gathering there even though there weren't many wounded around. It seems they were all wanting to know something or were here to seek help.

"How ironic," Reno grunted as he listened to the conversations amongst the evacuees. They had all considered the Shinra Company to be the root of all evil yet, they all hoped Shinra will also be the ones that will change the dire situation they're currently in.

"I want to gag their mouths with my socks."

"Do it. I won't stop you."

"I don't have any spares."

* * *

Meanwhile, Tseng and Elena were in the lower sectors of Midgar, the Wall Markets in the Sector Six Slums. It wasn't a very sophisticated place but long ago, the Turks would occasionally go there because it was easy to gather information. It was now a mess, covered with the fallen rubble from the Plates and pillars. If someone was told that's what the place was already like, they might believe it. That was the impression people had of the Slums. There were few remaining that could say how it's changed - a result of people spreading rumours that Midgar will soon be destroyed and evacuated themselves from the umbrella Plate.

On their way here, Tseng and Elena too had heard people criticizing the Shinra Company. There were even people who threw stones at them the moment they saw their Turks uniform.

"It's kind of hard to go about our job. Why don't we change our clothes?"

They found a store and chose some more appropriate clothing— Tseng wore a flashy t-shirt resembling those from Costa Del Sol and Elena wore a petite one piece dress. The two of them entered a bar where they presumed most people would gather at. Most of the tables were already taken. Finding empty seats, the two of them sat down and immediately began observing the crowd. Tseng's eyes were trained on a man wearing a black shirt who took up an entire table that should have had room for four.

"He's sleeping, isn't he?"

"He could be—"

"Mr. Tseng?"

"What is it?"

"I decided to stay with the team partly because of my pride as a Turk but, the most important reason was because of—"

Elena had never tried to hide her own attraction towards her superior but when faced with the man right before her, even she couldn't put her feelings into words.

"Continue."

"Hmm?"

"It's unnatural for you to be silent. I don't care if you're just going to talk nonsense. Just talk."

"Nonsense...?" Elena said sighing slightly, looking up at Tseng's face. Tseng seemed to be concerned about the sleeping man ever since he entered the bar.

"Strange."

Tseng got up and went over to the man, calling out to him.

"Are you alright?"

But there was no answer. Tseng put a hand on his shoulder and shook him a bit but, almost immediately withdrew his hand when he felt some stickiness in his palm. Turning his hand round he found a black sticky substance. Tseng started inspecting the man again. He wore a black shirt which made it difficult for them to realize the entire top half of his body was covered in the substance.

"What's the matter?" Elena asked walking over next to Tseng.

"He's dead."

* * *

Rude and Reno were in the lobby of the Shinra Building. Reno was writing a message on a large advertising space that was roughly the size of a man.

"Anyone who wishes to escape, follow the railway at the station upwards and get down from there. No trains are in operation. Date of resuming services undetermined. There are no provisions here. Shinra Company is temporarily closed down."

* * *

The house in Kalm had two floors - On the first floor there was a living room, a dining room, a small kitchen, bathroom and a toilet. The second floor had three bedrooms and Rufus was in one of them. His heel was in a cast and his neck, chest and waist were bandaged heavily so it was still difficult for him to move around without his wheel chair.

Rufus gazed over the town from the window. The closed curtains had a small gap he could peep through and people can be seen hurrying about in the streets. Kalm was also damaged by the Lifestream but there weren't any houses damaged to the point where they uninhabitable. For that very reason, there were so many refugees from Midgar who were all here seeking for such a home that it surprised Rufus. However, he had to be discrete and with no bodyguards present he couldn't risk getting into contact with any of these people. He felt very uneasy when he realized that only a single wall partitioned him from the anxious and irritated crowds outside. And it was just the average wall too, not the thick reinforced walls that the Shinra Building had. Tseng had insisted someone stayed to guard him but Rufus declined. He smiled bitterly at the sense of uselessness he felt and thought over things again. The Shinra Building was a fortress his father built. It could be said that it was a symbol of his father. A son must leave his father's house one day and work his own way up starting from scratch. It was normal. Now that time has come for him. It was no time to fear the public. He had to dive in and accomplish whatever that he must— And that could only be the reconstruction of the world.

The door bell suddenly rang. It rang once then paused. Another ring. Just as Rufus was going to ignore it, it rang again. It was rang the wrong way. It wasn't someone he knew. Soon afterwards, he could hear someone trying to break their way in through the door. Rufus wheeled himself

towards the bed, taking out a pistol from underneath the pillow and hoped nothing dangerous was about to happen. He hid it away inside the sleeve of his opposite arm and struggled to drag a chair over to the door from the window.

Rude did a good job in reinforcing the door and it seemed to force the visitors to give up. But almost immediately afterwards, glass could be heard being broken and a number of intruders had broken their way inside.

"My, my," Rufus said to himself as he removed the safety lock on his pistol.

* * *

It was evening. Elena and Tseng were walking back to Kalm. They were talking about the disease they came across in the Slums. It seems there were many people who had the same symptoms as the man that died in the bar.

"Did you learn anything about it while I was resting?"

"No. It's the first time I've seen anything like it Mr. Tseng."

In other words, those symptoms have only started to become widespread today and we don't know much about the disease, Tseng thought to himself. Is there anything different about today and yesterday? I see — The Lifestream. So the Lifestream didn't just destroy the city. It must be punishing the people of this Planet too.

"I hope everyone can remain calm."

"Who knows."

Elena remembered how all the customers panicked at the bar when they found out the man was dead. Everyone had looked at the man out of curiosity at first but after someone said, "It's contagious!" panic broke out and everyone was pushing and shoving, trying to get out first.

* * *

Rude and Reno were already walking back to Kalm ahead of Elena and Tseng. They had wanted to use the helicopter or a car but they didn't know what the current situation with fuel was so it probably wouldn't be easy getting them to run.

"We going to Sector Five tomorrow?"

"And what are we going to do at the company residential area? Ah wait, you think there might be some of our staff there."

"There is a warehouse there. I'd like to secure some vehicles— and weapons."

"Weapons huh. Yeah, we'll need some."

Reno sighed as he thought about the exhausted people of Midgar and the people who couldn't conceal their discontent from them.

* * *

Rufus was surrounded by a number of men.

"Looks like you've gotten yourself in quite a mess, Mr. President, " said the unshaven man as he pointed his hunting rifle at Rufus.

"Indeed. But now's the time that I fear most. There is nothing more frightening than a foolish mob," Rufus said as he looked into the red-stricken eyes of the man before him. He could see the hatred in them and was sure he was going to be killed. He could take out one or two of them with his hidden pistol but— There were three of them in his bedroom and he could hear a few more downstairs— It was impossible to kill them all.

"We might be foolish but at least we know who should be taking the responsibility for everything that's happened."

"Oh? Then let me ask you this. What will you do after you leave this house? Have you thought about your futures?"

"What do you mean."

"There are two kinds of people in this world. People who give orders and people who take orders. It is a question of one's abilities, not a trick question. Often when an incident occurs, it is the ones who give orders that are made to take responsibility. As a result, those who remain lose their direction and panic arises. Then everything comes to a grinding halt."

"You don't plead for your life very well," the assailant sneered at Rufus.

"You might be leading a number of people here but how long will it last? What kind of future can you give them?"

"We're a foolish mob. As long as we can live for today, that's all that counts."

"No, not "we". It's just you," Rufus said and was aware the others were looking over at their leader now.

"You have some sort of plan?" asked one of the other men.

Rufus turned to look at that man. He was in his thirties. He seemed to be a relatively wealthier man wearing an expensive looking but worn navy blue jacket and had a sturdy build.

"Why of course. First I would secure my home. Kalm can't shelter all the Midgar refugees. It looks like you're one of the locals here—"

"Yeah."

"Do you want this town to become like Midgar?"

"—" The man was clearly imagining to himself what would happen.

"It's only natural we help the people who need refuge!" the man with the gun cut in as he was being ignored.

Rufus answered, "Take this for an example. What do you do when it rains? Where would the overwhelming number of people go? Perhaps anyone would provide them shelter out of good will but think about how big Midgar's population is. It may not be very big but you can't shelter them all. Can you lay their discontent and anxiety to rest? What can you tell them when all you care about is living for another day?"

"Shut up!" the man raised his voice. Rufus stayed calm and thought to himself he was right about the man. A military captain of a small team would try to carry out flashy jobs but on the other hand when it was one of a middle-sized team like this, it wasn't so easy to do.

"Well, you maybe right. What would your plan be?" The man in the blue jacket said with an understanding tone. Rufus changed his mind and thought perhaps this man was the real leader.

"It would cost my life to tell you."

* * *

When Rude and Reno arrived back in Kalm, they noticed there was a big change since they left in the morning.

"That is a hell lot of people."

The sudden increase in people was no different even when they arrived back "home". There were some strangers coming and leaving from it.

"Boss!"

They broke into a run but couldn't get inside. Peeking through the open door they saw men and women lying limp on the floor.

"They're ill."

Rude was right. The two had the same symptoms as the people they saw in Midgar — their clothes and bandages were soaked in a black liquid — Many of them were gathered together.

"Rude, you check the first floor."

Reno made his way up to the second floor careful not to step on the ill. However, it was the same on the second floor. Perplexed that there were no signs of Rufus, Reno gave up and returned downstairs where Rude was.

"He's not down here."

"Seriously. Lets go outside, partner. If we stay here we're going to get—"

Reno noticed one of the ill glaring at him and smiling back insincerely, he urged Rude out.

Elena and Tseng had just returned.

"Chief, our house has been overtaken," Reno tried to summarize the situation.

"We must find the President. He may have been taken away. We have to confirm if anyone knows what happened."

"I'll ask the people inside the house. They're less likely to threaten me," Elena said just as she was about to go inside.

"Elena, be careful. They've got the disease in there."

"If it was contagious then I would have been infected already," she replied and Reno didn't disagree.

"Well then."

"Go find any witnesses," ordered Tseng. Rude and Reno nodded silently and split up into town.

* * *

The two of them returned together and reported back to Tseng how the people they met were only filled with discontent and hatred towards Shinra. There were no witnesses.

"It can't be helped in this situation," Tseng said looking over at the ill and wounded who couldn't even walk on their own.

Even if there were witnesses none of them would tell us anything, thought Tseng.

* * *

Rufus estimated that it's been two weeks since he was taken away from the house. After he was disarmed, they knocked him out with a drug before taking him away so he didn't know where he was. However, the man wearing the blue jacket had given his name as "Muten"— it might not be his real name but Rufus guessed he might be at his villa. He was probably locked inside the basement. A large number of people can be heard walking around on the floor above. If those people were refugees then this might not be a villa after all. But it could also just be Mutten's friends gathering together. Without a plan, it was best he patiently waited for the Turks to rescue him. *Well,* thought Rufus as he looked around the strange room. *An interior completely in red. It looks high class but he has some bad tastes* — There was some furniture that were in the form of men and woman that were half monster. There was a heavy chain around Rufus' foot which was attached firmly onto a hook on the wall. Thinking about what kind of man Mutten maybe possessing such a room to confine people gave Rufus the shivers and the chain that kept him from moving freely around unsettled him.

Rufus was robbed of his freedom but it seemed Mutten also considered him a guest. A well mannered middle-aged woman who seemed to live in the house would come feed and take care of him. However, it seemed she was ordered not to answer anything.

An old doctor came to have a look at him once. After giving him a simple inspection, the doctor prescribed some medicine and left. Rufus couldn't ask if he knew he was the Shinra President. He had thought about raising his voice when someone entered the room but he couldn't imagine what would happen afterwards.

Every few days Mutten would appear. He was trying to learn the development plans Rufus for Midgar. Rufus had thought about saying his plans were entirely dependant on the information the Turks gathered but even if he did, he probably wouldn't be permitted to contact them. Claiming

that he didn't have enough information at hand, Rufus only let Mutten hear a small portion of his plan. First he will build a town on the east side of Midgar. The land was level there and work would be easier. They could use the scrap from Midgar as resources. All the machinery or tools they needed to cut and join everything together can be retrieved from the warehouse in Sector Five.

Rufus thought he could only drag out time this way. If Mutten learned everything from him, he would be killed. He smiled bitterly as he thought of himself as a bard that had to weave a new story to entertain the king every night or be sentenced to death.

"Tell me everything. I won't kill you."

"Then remove the chain from me. I won't run away."

The day we trust each other will never come, thought Rufus to himself.

* * *

The Turks had managed to gather information but it wasn't enough for them to investigate and learn the whereabouts of their President. Tseng didn't give up the search. They abandoned the house in Kalm that was now occupied by refugees and turned one of the company residential houses in Sector Five into their office. Following Elena's suggestion, they spread rumours that Midgar was going to collapse. Many people left believing the rumours. Even without rumours it wouldn't be long before Midgar, now a nest for disease filled with debris, is deserted. However, Tseng wanted the place deserted as quickly as possible. There were many of Shinra's secrets in Midgar and he wanted to avoid the refugees getting their hands on the weapons.

"We've got trouble," reported Reno. "Some of the remaining army from Junon have taken over the head office. I think there are about a hundred of them. Some guy named, "Gate" something from military school is leading them."

"What's he after?"

"I don't know. Looks like they're making preparations for some kind of assembly."

And so Tseng and Elena went to understand the situation themselves while Reno and Rude left to secure the weapons they wanted.

* * *

Sector Five was the Shinra Residential Area filled with a number of houses built next to one another but, only those with a pass could enter the warehouse built next to the Mako reactor. It was surrounded by a high wall and there was only one entrance. There was a large solid gate that won't open without the right passkey. However, there was also an emergency passkey that only staff of certain high status knew that allowed them to bypass and change the main keys too. Rude and Reno stood outside the gate and quickly entered the passkey that Tseng told them and arrived at the main warehouse door but it was already open.

"The army did this?"

"Possibly."

Cautiously the two of them made their way to Sector Eight's warehouse that also stored some weapons. On their way through Sector Four they noticed the door for warehouse dispatchments there was also open. They hid themselves in the shadows to investigate.

"Hey, they're just average civilians."

There were people that were young and old, women and men going in and out of the warehouse. Even children.

"Sector Four's warehouse holds construction tools and machinery."

Just as Rude said, the people were carrying away medium-sized machinery while the children were carrying smaller tools such as drills.

"What are they going to do with it all?"

Just as Reno began to wonder, they heard cheers from Sector Five. It seems they managed to open the door there too.

"This is bad, Reno. The emergency fuel supplies are in the Sector Five warehouse."

"Mako?"

"No. It's gasoline that we made for emergencies. We'll need it."

"Well, this is great."

Wanting to settle the situation in a peaceful way, Rude and Reno went to stand before the crowd and spoke in a non-threatening voice, "We're personnel from Shinra Company — Who's in charge here?"

"I am," said a well-dressed young woman. You could say she was still in her teens.

"Oh?" Reno looked at her. "And what are you doing?" he continued with a low voice. The woman suddenly looked anxious.

"We were told to collect the machinery we needed to build a town from—"

"By who?"

"A Mr. Kylegate from the army."

"So it's this Kylegate that told you the passkey to open the gate and warehouse door?"

"Yes, that's right. Sorry, did we do something wrong? We heard that the Shinra Army are now independent and were starting to rebuild the town so we came here as volunteers."

Rude and Reno looked at each other as the girl continued to look at them anxiously. They were curious what the army was up to but the girl and the rest of the people really did seem to be simply volunteers.

"Well, if you're just taking what those tools then there won't be any problems," said Reno nodding at Rude slightly.

Quickly Rude added, "But only take the fuel you need for the time being. It must be rationed."

"Yes, sir."

The girl went back to work. Rude and Reno stood watching over them until they finished. They watched the last person carrying a small electric generator leave the gates. The volunteers were very happy and gave their thanks to the two.

"Midgar has a bright future."

"We can't say that yet. Come on."

"What?"

"We must secure transport, weapons and fuel. Then we have to change all the passkeys. The doors and gates - everything."

By late night, Tseng and Elena who came to check on them helped with the work but it wasn't until morning before they finished. Returning home, the four of them decided they should take a nap but they were woken up before it was even daylight by Veld.

"You gave me quite a surprise for an old man who's supposed to be dead."

"I should be the one surprised that Turks are sleeping for this long."

"We're just happy we could see you again."

"—" Veld replied to Reno's smile with silence and began his report on Junon's Lieutenant Kylegate. "The lieutenant was supposed to be on vacation but he summoned his troops here to Midgar. This morning he organized an assembly at the east side of Midgar to perform a speech. He proposed to build a new city on these grounds and had people gather tools that belongs to Shinra—"

"Veld... Sir," Tseng began unsure how to address his former superior. "Your information conforms to what we have gathered but please tell me. On what grounds do you come to us with this information?"

Rude and Reno looked at each other, unsure of what Tseng's intentions were. Veld was like a father who raised the Turks.

"A reason—" Veld's eyes narrowed. "Retribution or perhaps paying back a favour?"

"—I thank you for your information but there is no need for retribution and you don't owe any favours."

"What the hell, " cut in Reno with an irritated voice, "What's all this about needing a reason for information and retribution? Who cares about that? I'm just simply—"

"Simply what?" Tseng invited him to continue but Reno quieted down.

Seeing Reno's reaction, Veld began speaking again, "Reno. You Turks are like my—"But he too couldn't speak out the last few words and swallowing them, the room fell into silence. A moment later, Reno opened his mouth again as if he had repented on how he had acted earlier like a young boy.

"The tools were taken away by volunteers from the warehouse yesterday," he said in his formal tone as if to hide the embarrassment of letting his emotions take over earlier.

"But a lieutenant shouldn't know the passkey," mused Rude.

"That's the key point to all of this. While on vacation the lieutenant stayed in Kalm. He found out the passkey that he shouldn't know. Who could he have learned it from? Where did the President disappear from?"

Hearing Veld's words, they all suddenly stood up together but Tseng calmed them down and asked, "What kind of man is Kylegate?"

Veld shared all the information he had regarding Kylegate. He was born in a wealthy family but after losing both his parents, he became head of the family. With his status there was never a need for him to join the army but it appears his will was to defeat Shinra's enemies and bring peace to the world. He has talent as a soldier but was criticized about his character.

"Torture. Cruelty. Whether it was training or on the battlefield he always overdid things and stood out. There are rumours that he joined the army to legally satisfy those desires."

"I see—Then do you have any idea where the President may be?"

"—In Kalm. At Kylegate's mansion."

Before Veld could finish, Rude, Reno and Elena rushed out of the room but Reno paused to look back—

"Where are the other Turks? It would be much more reassuring if they were all here."

"They are spread out around the world gathering information— But they're also leading their own lives now. We all gathered together under Meteor because we all felt the same way that day. We can't force any of them to come along with us now."

Hearing Veld's words, Reno looked discontent but he turned and left in silence.

"What do you plan to do now, Sir?" asked Tseng as he made his way to the door to follow his subordinates.

"I will go to Junon again. Reeve is headed there."

"That is curious."

"Yes. It's not just Reeve. Just this once it doesn't look like I can read the minds of everyone involved this time."

"The Turks are different. Perhaps the same could be said of everyone that gathered that night. They are all loyal to your teachings."

"In other words— They're a bunch of people whose minds I can't read," said Veld as he walked pass Tseng through the door first. "Look after the President."

As Tseng watched Veld leaving he muttered, "I wish you could have watched me leave like you did in the past, Sir—"

* * *

Mutten Kylegate hit Rufus three times.

"I can't tell you something I don't know."

"Tell me the new passkey!"

"Someone must have changed it. I only know the emergency—"

Mutten hit him again without waiting for him to finish. He was well-trained in his punches.

"I see. So you're from the army—"

"You've passed by me many times before. But to you, I'm just another one of your troops."

"—I'm sorry," Rufus sincerely apologized. However at the same time he thought to himself, *If everything in this house belongs to him then he must be the son of a rich or famous family. In that case, he must have been born quite early and should be older than he looks. There was a rule within the company that prohibited certain kinds of people from being recruited for the army but it was often ignored. In this case— Mutten must have some problems that prevented him from being promoted. This room filled with its horrific decorations maybe proof of that.*

"You have lapdogs don't you?"

Mutten suddenly changed the subject. *He must have a very unrefined mind if he can refer to people as lapdogs*, thought Rufus.

"Where are they?"

"I was taken away when my subordinates weren't present. They don't know my whereabouts."

"I see," Mutten said convinced but he hit out at Rufus again. Someone came in.

"What is it?"

"We have a guest," replied one of the maids.

"A guest? Who could— Never mind. I'll be right there."

Just as Mutten was about to leave the room he turned back round to look at Rufus.

"The construction of the new city has started this morning. I've gathered plenty of volunteers and lapdogs together. You should have seen the crowd that gathered on the east side of Midgar. I'm really looking forward to it, Mr. President. They're building *my* city. I'd love to show you it but you leave me no choice but to leave you here."

He left after letting Rufus know the new city will be called, "Edge". Not long afterwards, Rufus could hear the angry voice of a man. It was familiar voice. Gunshots could be heard and the maid screamed. He could then smell something burning and heard a lot of people screaming trying to escape.

Rufus tried to get up from the chair he was forced to sit on but his body wouldn't obey and the slightest movement caused him to fall over. He could feel a scream surging inside his ribs but he tried to stay calm and surveyed his surroundings. *I had the feeling this would be where the fight would be.* He heard a vulgar voice outside.

"Mr. President, where are you!"

Rufus believed it was the voice of the man that pointed a gun at him. He didn't know what the situation was but most likely they had some dispute amongst themselves. In any case, it didn't seem like help had come. *Now then, what should I do? I'll crawl my way underneath the bed and hide myself there.*

"—"

His fractured bones were aching and he wanted to cry out in pain but he bit his lower lip and persevered. *What do I do now? If he sees the chain on my foot he'll know where I'm hiding.* Rufus rolled onto his back and looked at the bottom of the bed. There were metal hooks and a number of whips were hanging from there— Just thinking about what they were used for disgusted Rufus. He took one of them and gripped onto the handle tightly.

"Mr. President!"

The door was kicked down brutally and a man entered. Rufus could only see his boots from where he was hiding. As he walked over to the bed, his foot hit the chain that was locked to Rufus' foot.

"Heh, hiding under the bed huh."

Come on. Closer. Just as Rufus expected, the man was cautiously getting closer to the bed. *Come on, peek down. Lets see your face.*

But it was the end of a silver gun that he saw extending underneath the bed. Immediately he grabbed the gun with his left hand and pushed against the bed hard.

"What are you doing!"

A gunshot is heard. Pain ran through Rufus' left hand. Letting go of the gun, Rufus slid out from under the bed. He couldn't feel the pain on his flank. He rolled over and kicked the man with the cast on his foot. "Urgh!" cried the man staggering back a few steps. Getting up quickly, Rufus swung the whip hard. Fortunately for him, the gun dropped close by. He quickly rushed over to pick it up and pointed it at the man.

"I win."

But smoke suddenly filled the room.

"You stupid President! Come on! Fire! You'll be burned to death in the fire too anyway! How's that gun going to help you?"

Rufus had no choice but to let the man live for now. He quickly tried to find a good reason to make the man listen to him.

"You killed Muten?"

"Yeah, I did. He's been treating me like s***! We grew up together damn it!"

"I see. And that's what caused his fall."

"Don't try to make me one of your men. I haven't forgotten how you made a fool out of me back in that house."

This must be karma, thought Rufus. He never thought things would end this way. That moment, he heard another gunshot and the man fell. He thought he had unconsciously fired the gun but he found someone else had entered the room.

* * *

"Boss!"

The refugees from Midgar who had made their way to Kalm were now rushing out of the Kylegate Mansion. Four of the Turks arrived just in time to see the mansion burst out in flames and collapse before their eyes.

"Boss!"

The Turks frantically looked for Rufus amongst the refugees and finally found out what they wanted to hear.

"Someone saw a middle aged man carrying out a man in a white suit that had his head and feet in bandages," said Elena with a worried face.

"That must be the President," Tseng said.

"Who could the middle aged man be?" asked Reno.

"I'm sure we know him," said Rude.

"Could be the Chief," Reno said, eyes narrowing. "Should we do this the Turks' way? They all hate Shinra anyway."

"You have my permission. But do not harm the volunteers."

"Why?"

"The plan to rebuild the city is most likely the President's idea."

* * *

Just moments ago underneath the burning Muten's mansion, a middle aged man was pointing a gun at Rufus.

"How are you Mr. Rufus Shinra?"

The man was the doctor that had inspected Rufus.

"Not very well."

"Then you should throw away your gun. It'll just make things worse for you."

Rufus felt uneasy at the doctor's words.

"Doctor. If you throw yours away then I will do the same."

The doctor smirked and pointed the gun at Rufus' face firmly. Rufus knew he was ready to pull the trigger. Quickly he aimed his own at the doctor's heart and fired. The gun clicked with an empty sound.

"Mr. Shinra. You don't know the man who possessed that gun. He hated Muttien. All Muttien did was make him do all the dirty work and take all the good stuff for himself. That's why he used all the bullets to relieve his own hatred on Muttien. I believe the last shot was used in this room—"

Rufus let out a sigh as he watched the corpse being kicked over before him. *He never did think about the consequences did he?*

"I am Kilmister. I worked for the Shinra Company since I was young. I was a little lower down than Dr. Hojo's assistant in terms of status.

He's one of Hojo's staff — I have a bad feeling about this.

"Now throw away that gun."

Rufus had no choice but to obey and threw the gun at Kilmister's feet. Kilmister took out a glass bottle from his pocket and held it out before Rufus.

"Take a sniff of this. I need you to pass out for a moment. If you don't do it, I'll shoot. I'm going to need some of your help so I won't kill you but — I will make you suffer," said Kilmister handing the bottle over. Rufus took it and opening it, he recognized the smell right away. It was the same smell he noticed that Muttien had when they were still in the house in Kalm.

* * *

Waking up, Rufus found himself on the back of a truck. There were nine others besides himself. There were five young men and four women who were around the same age. They were all bandaged. But there was one other similar thing they all had. He had thought they were all just covered in dirt but looking closely, he noticed a black liquid was flowing out of their body. Even their hair were covered by the sticky substance. He knew they were suffering judging from the occasional moans he could hear from them. One of the young woman next to Rufus lost her balance and fell on him.

"I'm sorry."

"Don't worry about it."

"You— You don't have the disease," she said in a sorrowful voice. "I'm really sorry if you get infected."

Rufus broke his bones sliding down from the top floor of the Shinra Building. Then he was locked up and tortured before being faced with a gun. Now he was facing a fatal disease. He smiled bitterly thinking about everything he's been through. He didn't want to get dragged into anything else but right now at the back of the truck, there was nothing he could do.

It was a rough ride. The road was bumpy and Kilmister was driving at an insane speed. Rufus had thought about pretending he fell off the truck but remembered how Kilmister said his help was needed. *I doubt my life's in danger. Wherever it is he's taking me it will probably be better passing out in the wild here.*

* * *

Kilmister stopped the truck in front of a cave by the coast in a rocky area. Just like the time Rufus was taken to Muttin's basement, he had lost consciousness for most of the trip so he had no idea how far away he was from Kalm. Looking at the coast, Rufus tried to map out where he was and judged he was around a three to four hours car journey away. As injured as he maybe, it was possible for him to walk back on foot.

Kilmister pointed his gun at the patients and gave out orders. Even if he didn't, it didn't look like they had the strength to fight back. Rufus got off with the help of the woman who he had talked to earlier. He didn't have a walking stick for support so he held onto the woman's shoulder until they reached the cave.

"I hope we both get better soon," said the woman. *Indeed I hope so too*, thought Rufus.

There was a steep drop the moment they entered the cave. Rufus had a harsh time climbing down the ninety degrees ladder for five metres. He forced himself to look up, his neck cracking with pain. *If they removed this ladder, it would be impossible to climb back up.* As if expected, Kilmister removed the ladder.

"There's a number of passageways further in. Each of them leads to a dead end. Go find one you like. It'll be your room."

"What about our treatment?" asked a young man.

"Come to me when I call you. No harm will come to you," answered Kilmister in a calming tone and disappeared.

Surprisingly enough, some simple bedding and pajamas were prepared for them in the cave. Each of the patients took their share and went away to the "one they liked" and claimed their beds.

Rufus chose the one furthest in as part of his habit. Not long afterwards, a boy whose symptoms had calmed down came round with his meal which was some bread and cheese.

"Was everyone threatened with a gun to come here?" asked Rufus.

"No. We've been Mr. Kilmister's patients since we were children. He's the local doctor in Kalm. That's why when he said he could heal our disease we believed him and a number of others helped carry things to this hospital here."

"Hospital?"

"Yeah. We have to be quarantined. He told us even if we stayed in the village we would eventually be chased out-" The boy said, suddenly looking troubled. He continued, "He says that he only decided to use a gun now to make sure you won't try to escape."

"I'm a patient too but... It looks like he doesn't trust me. By the way, where are we?"

"He told us not to tell you."

Looks like it won't be a fun stay here either, thought Rufus.

* * *

One day, Rufus received some treatment from Kilmister. Near the entrance there was an isolated examination room, roughly built into the cave. While Kilmister was changing Rufus' cast, the boy who had brought Rufus' meal was standing in the back with a gun in his hand.

"Doctor. Is there any progress being made towards the cure for this disease?"

"Of course."

Rufus caught Kilmister's gaze as he looked over at the boy.

"What are you after."

"Why, I'm a doctor. I simply want to rid the world of all diseases."

"That is commendable. But why did you bring me here?"

"Jenova."

"What?" asked Rufus in a loud voice, hearing the unexpected name.

"After examining the patients I found that a number of their cells resemble those found in Soldiers."

"Please explain," urged Rufus who saw Kilmister glancing over at the boy again.

"I will in due time," he replied and became quiet.

"At least tell me this - Is it contagious?"

"I will tell you that due time too."

It can't be contagious, thought Rufus.

* * *

Three months have passed. The bandages around Rufus' ribs had been removed and the day that he could remove the cast around his heel had arrived. Kilmister handed him a walking stick.

"It's a pipe found somewhere from the Shinra Building."

"What's the situation in Midgar now?"

"The disease remains widespread. The number of people infected maybe rising but there's still a lot of people working hard in the new city to the east."

"Who is leading them?"

"Who knows. It seems there's a number of different groups. By the way, Mr. President - Do you know anything about the Shinra Company's assassins?"

Rufus shook his head firmly.

"It seems letters have reached the people who managed to sneak into the Shinra Building and warehouses, threatening them not to try it again if they wish to stay alive. They're all so scared that they've been found now that they've decided not to do it again."

Those foolish Turks, Rufus smiled to himself without thinking.

"Mr President. I'm not talking about right away but I want some of the machinery that Shinra possesses. Could you let your assassins know?"

"What do you want?" asked Rufus no longer trying to hide his caution.

"Dr. Hojo's equipment."

"And you'll be using it for our treatment I presume."

"Of course. I will also be needing-"

"Jenova."

"Yes. Where is it now?"

"I don't know. I was going to look for it after I leave this place-"

Kilmister suddenly looked at Rufus as if evaluating his worth.

"Then we must find a new place. This place isn't suitable for any research."

Research...

"Dr. Kilmister. Are you a doctor or are you a scientist?"

Silence.

"Your treatment's over," said Kilmister as he pulled out a gun hidden underneath his lab coat and pointed it at Rufus.

Afterwards, Rufus spent some time slowly practicing walking. Having just recovered, he could still feel the pain now and then but eventually he was able to walk around the cave freely on his own. Enough to let him peek into the "rooms". A number of them were empty. He found out the boy that had brought him his meal was dead. There were now three men and two women left. Four people had died in total.

He saw a woman groaning with pain in one of the rooms. She was the one that had spoken to him on their way to the cave. A man was watching over her, worried. Spotting Rufus, he said, "The doctor said there isn't much medicine left so he's cutting down our doses. I gave her mine too but it looks like it's wearing off."

It didn't look like Rufus could do anything for them. *No wait-* Rufus went out and called to Kilmister. Not long afterwards, a man in a white lab coat with a face full of melancholy appeared.

"They tell me there's not much medicine left."

"Yes. All that I have left will soon be gone."

"You had medicine?"

Does that mean he's had a cure for this disease all along?

"Wait there," said Kilmister who disappeared and came back with a ladder. "Can you climb up?"

Rufus grabbed hold of the ladder thinking it was his chance to escape. He climbed up carefully and finally reached the top but he found the end of Kilmister's gun pointing in his face.

"Hold it right there. We'll talk here."

Looking closely at Kilmister, Rufus could see his face was pale white and sweating. "You don't look too well, Doctor."

"I want medicine."

"What medicine?"

"I want my share of the medicine at the very least."

It seems Kilmister have been giving the patients a slightly diluted version of the stimulant that Shinra's troops used.

"It can't cure the disease but it can suppress the pain."

"So that's what their treatment is."

"I haven't been tricking them. I had to find out the source of the disease first and until then, I had to control it somehow."

"And you've been infected too?"

"No," replied Kilmister and explained that by taking a diluted version of the stimulant, he could work overnight too.

"But it's possible that you can become addicted too," thought Rufus smiling, thinking that he maybe able to gain control over Kilmister. "Do you have a phone? Or a pen and some paper."

"Who are you going to contact?"

"Shinra's assassins. They know where the stimulants are stored."

Kilmister's eyes glowed but he still tried to handle the situation with the utmost caution. He ordered Rufus to go back down the ladder and before long, threw down a pen and some paper to him.

Rufus didn't write anything else on the note apart from asking for a supply of the stimulants. It was more important he earned Kilmister's trust right now. The He can rely on the Turks to take care of the rest.

However, after leaving for Midgar with the note for some time, Kilmister did not return. The Turks did not come either. There wasn't much food supplies left. He had told Kilmister to go the Shinra Building and call out to the assassins - The Turks, and pass them the note. He was expected to be back with the medicine within three days - With the Turks tailing the good doctor of course. It's now been over a week.

Rufus had now grown accustomed to the cave and was going around inspecting it to pass time. The condition of the woman was getting very serious and was losing her senses. The man who was watching over her was also groaning with pain now but he held her hand, hoping a miracle would happen.

"I'm sure Kilmister will be back soon," said Rufus to them even though he had no proof to show it. *Why did I say that to them?*

It had been raining outside for days and suddenly Rufus realized the water was getting into the cave too. It wasn't just at the entrance either. The water was starting to leak through the roof where Rufus has been staying. It appears there were many holes and water was now streaming its way in like the taps were turned on. *After so many days of rain why does this suddenly happen now? The water must have accumulated somewhere*, thought Rufus. *We have to evacuate somehow*. Rufus warned the others as he made his way towards the cave entrance.

His neck hadn't fully recovered but he looked up and found no signs of anyone around. He could only hear the loud pattering of the rain. He looked around. If the rainwater was to fill up the hole they were in - and he could somehow swim then he might be able to make it up.

"This is the least I can do..."

Rufus returned inside and went to the others to tell them to prepare to evacuate. He received no answer. The patients who had been taking the stimulants instead of the painkillers were too focused on persevering the pain.

"Five people huh..." Rufus muttered to himself and made up his mind. Determined, he went to where the furthest patient was and carried him as close to the entrance as he could. They had lost so much weight they were looking very fragile so even though Rufus hadn't recovered his full strength, he was able to carry them.

The water was now up their ankles. Rufus went around looking for something that he could use as a buoy. A few wooden beds floated by. He removed the metal parts that held the beds

together and pushed the wooden frames towards the entrance. They moved surprisingly fast while afloat on the water. Rufus returned to where the patients were.

"Those of you who can swim, swim. If you can't then hold onto these frames. One person per frame."

A few hours later, the water level had risen to Rufus' jaw. All the patients were holding onto the wood. *I've done all I can now* - Rufus gazed upwards, his mind a complete blank. He grabbed onto the wood himself as the water continued to rise. Not long later, he was only one metre away from pulling himself out of the hole but the situation changed. The water had stopped leaking into the cave. *Did the rain stop or did it have something to do with the geography of the cave?* Rufus bit his lip. *We'll just have to wait for help.* He looked back and found there were fewer patients remaining. Two men and one woman. The woman was the one who had talked to him. She was grasping onto one of the frames that had floated together with another that a man was holding onto. Just when Rufus thought she was dead, she moved groaning in pain. For some reason, Rufus found himself breathing a sign of relief.

Hours later, nothing changed. The water level didn't rise or fall. Rufus could feel his body temperature dropping having been submerged in the water for so long. *We don't have long left*, he thought.

"What?"

He felt as if someone had called out to him but there was no one around that could have had the strength left to do so. He looked around the water, his attention heightened and thought he saw something moving. A black shape slowly made its way towards Rufus. He couldn't make out whether it was the black ooze coming from the patients.

The shape moved as if it was alive. Frightened, Rufus started to splash the water in an effort to force it away. The waves Rufus created had no effect on it and it closed in. Soon, he found his white suit dyed in black. It was so dirty it could no longer be described as white but he had kept it on knowing that he will need it when he managed to escape. He looked at his sleeve which was now dyed in black and thought, *This is the end.*

The black ooze crept its way up Rufus' neck towards his face. He knew it was trying to get into his mouth but he held it shut firmly. It tried his nose next. He covered his nose with his hand. He wasn't going to be able to breathe now but he would rather suffocate than let the ooze win. However, the ooze soon made its way into his ears and with a cry, Rufus lost consciousness.

* * *

"Mr. President! Mr. President!"

Rufus woke up to the sound of someone calling to him.

"The flood was most unfortunate. I'm sorry I'm late," said Kilmister as he lowered a ladder. Rufus was surprised he was still alive as he slowly grabbed onto the ladder. Turning round to look behind him, he found only the man and the woman were left.

"Hey, are you two alright?"

The man looked up.

"Help has arrived!"

The man looked at him blankly but soon understood. Anxiously, he called out to the woman next to him and she weakly moved her head in reply. Rufus offered a hand but just as the woman was about to reach out towards it, a gunshot rang out above their heads. She fell off the wooden frame as if she was repelled off it and sunk into the water.

"Pamela!"

The man cried out in horror and dived into the water after her but he didn't have the strength to swim. Rufus reached out to grab his arm while holding onto the wooden frame for support.

"Pamela..."

The man wailed but couldn't find the strength to cry out any louder. Rufus dragged him along by the arm towards the ladder.

"Get up."

"But-"

"You must think of nothing but survival."

The man paused for a moment, looking back sadly at the spot where Pamela had sank into the water before he looked up at Kilmister with hatred - Rufus never knew the man had known her name.

"Nothing could have been done. I was simply easing her pain. Pamela won't hold a grudge against me for it."

Indeed, nothing can be done for her now. But what about this man? thought Rufus. The man started to climb up the ladder full of determination.

"What's your name?" asked Rufus.

"Judd."

"Judd, now isn't the time. Leave Kilmister to me."

Judd climbed all the way up without answering. Rufus followed up but just as he was going to see the surface he had long missed again, he felt a sudden surge of pain tear through his entire body. Something was flowing out of his mouth.

He used his hand to wipe it away and found it was the same black substance that had been oozing out of Pamela and Judd.

"My, my. You will have to take some of the stimulant too, Mr. President," said Kilmister as if enjoying the sight.

"Ugh-"

Suddenly, Kilmister's angry voice could be heard and a gun fell pass Rufus into the water. Rufus looked up, persevering the pain. He could see Kilmister suffocating and someone grasping his neck from behind. *You fool, Judd! I told you this isn't the time!*

"Argh!"

Judd's own angry voice followed but it was a short one. Rufus cried out furiously, his body trembling as he gripped onto the ladder.

"You're late!"

"Oh, I'm sorry," smiled Reno.

* * *

Cliff Resort was a place created as a sanatorium at the dawn of Shinra Company for its staff. However, people enjoyed spending their time by the sea more than the mountains so it was eventually abandoned. A number of lodges remained as they were from that time. Splitting themselves into two cars, Rufus, Tseng, Elena, Reno, Rude together with Kilmister and Judd made their way there. A large crowd of infected people had already gathered. Most of them were patients of Kilmister that the Turks had transported from Kalm. Rufus was uneasy at what he saw and so, Tseng explained.

* * *

About a week ago, Kilmister arrived at the Shinra Building and had shouted out to them. Only Reno and Rude were the ones on the lookout at the time. Kilmister had said that he had a note from Rufus Shinra and having been a while since they heard any news of the President, both of them came out from their hiding place to meet him. The letter said, "Give all the stimulant you can to this doctor" but because they didn't know what it meant, they were suspicious if it really was from Rufus himself. They told him to come back the next day. After that, Rude returned to their "office" in the Fifth Sector to discuss the matter with Tseng while Rude tailed Kilmister.

Tseng somehow felt it was the President's handwriting but he wasn't completely certain. He decided to give the doctor some stimulants so that they could follow him.

Reno followed Kilmister all the way to Kalm. There, a small hospital had become home to refugees because there had been no doctors around for over half a year. Kilmister was the doctor of that hospital. The patients in Kalm were happy to see the doctor's return and immediately they sought help from him. As Kilmister examined the patients unhappily, Reno thought to himself that he himself must have been ill too.

The next day, Kilmister returned to the Shinra Building's entrance and found a box stacked full of stimulants. After confirming they were what he was seeking he opened one of them and diluting it with some water from his flask that he prepared, he drank it. Ignoring the Turks who looked at him dumbfounded, he sat down on the ground then laid on his side, telling them to wait until the medicine took effect. The Turks had no choice but to wait as told because he was the only man that had information about their President.

Soon after recovering and looking better, Kilmister asked the Turks to carry the box of stimulants out of Midgar. Clearly he was taking advantage of the situation - after that, he even went ahead to ask Tseng if there was a suitable facility he could make use of. He wanted an isolated place that was away from the human habitats but also wasn't too far away to get to and was big enough to

accommodate a large number of patients. He told them that he wanted to make a contribution to history by spending his time studying the disease there. As if he suddenly realized the Turks didn't trust him, he began telling them about Rufus and his current condition. When he managed to tell them the exact details of his injuries, the Turks believed what he said. He continued about how he had protected Rufus by leading him out of Mutton's mansion and that they should be grateful to him. When asked why he kept quiet about all this, Kilmister answered that he had wanted to get on the President's good side.

Tseng soon remembered about Cliff Resort and decided to lead Kilmister there. Kilmister appeared to be satisfied with the location and ordered the Turks to bring the patients. It angered the Turks that they were being ordered around as if they were one of his stimulant addicted patients but he wasn't going to tell them where the President was until all preparations were complete so they had no choice but to obey. They made many trips to and fro between Kalm and Cliff Resort, fulfilling the doctor's wishes. As if he was satisfied using the Turks as his own subordinates, he finally agreed to lead them to where the President was.

They arrived a little later than the doctor because Reno had lost sight of the doctor's truck in the heavy rain and floods. Reno later insisted it was his great senses that lead them to the cave afterwards without any guidance as if to cover up his failure.

* * *

Rufus spent his time at Cliff Resort as one of the patients. He was given some stimulants, although it was referred to as medicine and it certainly cured the pain the disease caused. When he didn't have a fever and was in good condition, he would be updated by one of the Turks finishing their shifts and re-think his plans for the future.

"What's at the centre of the new city?" Rufus asked Reno as the thought suddenly came to mind.

"Hmmm, a plaza. A big round plaza with nothing there. There's a road extending straight to Midgar from it and surrounding it are other streets. That's why we call it the centre of the city."

"In that case, build something there. Yes, build a monument there."

"What kind of monument?"

"An ostensible kind- A monument to commemorate how the planet repelled the Meteor."

"An ostensible kind? Then what's its true purpose?"

"To claim our place."

"Ah! Having it in the centre of the city means Shinra owns the place! You come up with the best ideas, Boss!" replied Reno.

* * *

As usual, Shinra Company was asked to take responsibility for the aftermath of the Meteor but by providing resources such as machinery, fuel and medicine they managed to gain some trust amongst the people. One of Shinra's former employees Reeve brought many machinery and human resources from Junon, making a great contribution towards the construction of the city. It was clear that Reeve was now anti-Shinra but as long as the activities of the Turks and the

former Shinra employees they gathered together made contributions towards society, he did not interfere with them.

Reno, with the help of some volunteers, began to construct the monument. People were happy to help thinking it was some kind of symbol being built at the centre of the plaza. Amongst them, there were also those who protested, knowing Shinra's true intentions but such problems were resolved using as Reno liked to call it, "the Turks' way of doing things".

The number of patients at Cliff Resort fluctuated but the quiet days at the sanatorium continued. However, one day there was some commotion. Kilmister was making a fuss about how their supply of stimulants were running low. Elena who had become very close with the local residents of the city suggested that they should share the stimulants with them and Rufus permitted her to do so. For that very reason very little of the stimulants remained in the warehouses. Rufus ordered the Turks to gather together the people who knew the stimulant's formula to make the preparations necessary in making more - but they were going to have to think of a new name. He had thought of using Shinra's facilities and if necessary, contact Reeve too but Kilmister didn't agree. He insisted that they should secure the amount necessary for Cliff Resort first. Tseng and the others weren't happy about the addict's request but for some reason, Rufus tolerated him. The raw materials required to produce the stimulant were the tails of Nibel bears and after learning that they maybe able to produce more than a single stimulant from each tail if the chemicals they extracted were highly concentrated, Elena immediately set off to gather supplies.

"Hey Rude," Reno called to him, looking unusually troubled. "Why is the Boss being so kind to that Kilmister?"

"He's waiting for the results of his research. That's what I think."

"What research? If he's just going to waste money to kill a little pain then even I can do it," Reno grunted.

"I've provided some of my cells as one of the healthy people. He should find out something soon enough."

"I want to do some investigating of my own. We're surrounded by so many of these patients yet nothing's happened to us. Weird, isn't it?"

"The Boss said it isn't contagious," said Rude punching Reno in the stomach lightly because he still looked half doubtful. "How about little training, partner? Been a while."

"Why?"

"To train our body and mind. If we are strong in both then we won't fall ill."

"Stop talking like an old geezer," said Reno but moving into a fighting stance, the two of them began their training.

* * *

The little devils - That is what the elderly patients referred to Rufus and his followers staying at Cliff Resort. Someone once said they didn't understand how they could stay so well united.

Even the President and his subordinates themselves didn't understand how their relationship never deteriorated or how they could still continue working together as an organization under

such dire circumstances. Strangers saw their behaviour as little children playing make-believe, pretending they had a company. Little children that had nothing good waiting for them if they returned home and in a way, it was as if they were homeless little children out playing to their heart's content.

* * *

One day, two years after that fated day, Rufus dropped by Kilmister's room.

"Well, doctor? Shouldn't it be about time you revealed the results of your research to me? I am very intrigued to learn what the relation between the disease I have and Jenova is."

"Very well. First of all, there has been no progress towards a cure even over these two years," Kilmister said as if he was joking even though he had managed to improve the effectiveness of the stimulant. Rufus listened without any change in expression. "But I very much know the source of the disease now."

Kilmister began by telling Rufus how the very first patient had directly been washed over by the Lifestream. He knew this the moment he examined the first patient infected and seemed to be pleased he did.

"There is another common symptom I found in the patients. Whenever the disease's symptoms grew worse, I found they were all troubled and were ready to accept their deaths - You know that yourself don't you, Mr. President?"

Indeed, thought Rufus.

"After that day I'm sure many have thought to themselves there is no future for them and that death was near. It was then that there was a sudden increase in the number of infected people. Also..."

Kilmister began talking about the black water. Rufus remembered the water that seemed to have its own mind during the flood in the cave.

"...Amongst the ones with post-symptoms of the disease, we have seen many who appear to be stained with black water. I believe they have either submerged or drank the water themselves without knowing it. It is water after all. When you think of it like that then they could have absorbed it from anywhere."

"What do you mean when you say if you think of it like that?" Rufus asked, curious in the doctor's choice of words.

"The pain and fever the patients experience is proof that their bodies are fighting a foreign substance. Compared to other illnesses, it is perhaps too much for them to endure. However, the one who brought about this substance is powerful. Nothing can be done to ease their suffering."

"Have you found out the true source of this disease?"

"...They are Sephiroth's genes, you could say they are Jenova's genes in a way - No, you should say they are remnants of his genes. It is as I have once told you. They resemble the distinct characteristics that Soldiers had."

Rufus' memory of being surrounded by black water suddenly came to mind again and his body froze at the sound of Sephiroth's name.

"Mr President. I would like to have a look at Jenova. Where is it?" asked Kilmister showing no concern towards how Rufus was feeling.

"Unfortunately, I do not know of its whereabouts either."

"Order your subordinates to find it."

"Let me think about it."

"I hope you make a decision soon."

Rufus nodded and turned his back towards Kilmister. Just as he was about to leave the room, Kilmister said in his usual tone, "Long ago Professor Hojo rejected a project I proposed. Even now I am itching to give it a try. I think we might be able to create something beyond Sephiroth."

"What about the cure?" asked Rufus without turning round.

"We must give up on those who already show symptoms of the disease. However, as long as those who are still healthy don't cloud their hearts with darkness they will remain fine. You can tell the public about that but do not let them know about the water. It will cause a panic."

Rufus who was also one those patients already showing the symptoms left the room in silence.

* * *

The next morning, Kilmister was found dead. He was shot. When Tseng examined his corpse, Judd appeared to confess he had killed him.

"Where did you get the gun?"

"I can't tell you - I wasn't told to keep quiet about it but the person who gave me it had saved my life once."

Tseng went to report to Rufus about what happened between Judd and Kilmister but Rufus didn't seem surprised.

"Tseng, listen to me."

"Yes, Sir."

"Shinra Company will find Jenova and secure it."

"...Yes, Sir."

"Our goal is to keep it safe and not let anyone get their hands on it be it mad scientists or-"Rufus remembered Kilmister's words, "Or remnants loitering about the Lifestream."

"Yes, sir. I will make the necessary preparations at once."

* * *

Rude and Reno were repainting the sign to Cliff Resort.

"What does 'Healing' mean?"

"It means to heal the world." The two of them turned round to find Rufus who had suddenly appeared behind them.

"Our methods maybe a bit reckless but- We are Shinra Company. It won't surprise anyone."

Rufus's voice tingled with excitement.

* * *

Case of Shinra

Fin