

Rufus's Twin

By Jen

Chapter 1: Two Months later

The Highwind was flying smoothly, gliding around the sharp, jutting pieces of the Nibel mountains and expertly skimming the top of the crystal blue ocean. Still, he couldn't shake the feeling of unease snaking its way through his gut. It didn't take long for him to realize the source of this discomfiture--the ship was as deserted as a ghost town, and no one was at the controls.

Suddenly, the Highwind's internal alarms went off and he was thrown hard onto the floor as something large crashed into the side. Just as he got his footing, it smashed into the ship harder, causing him to hit his head solidly against the metal plating of the control deck.

Before he lost consciousness, he saw the image of an enormous eye staring into the airship and heard the maniacal laughter of Sephiroth.

"Cid? Cid!"

Cid shot up, his chest heaving with the effort to breathe. He ran a hand down his drenched face and through his sweat soaked blonde hair, before turning to Shera.

"Did I wake you?"

She shook her brown head, "No, I woke you. You were having another nightmare."

"Jesus Shera, they're all the same. Always the Highwind, Ultima Weapon, and Sephiroth. Either I'm crazy, or they're tryin' to tell me somethin'."

Shera scooted as close to him as her swollen belly would allow, and said, "You're not crazy. It's just your mind trying to sort through everything, that's all."

"How long 'till it's done sortin'? It's been over a year. Dammit, am I gonna be haunted by that bastard forever?"

Shera knew by now, when to talk to Cid and when to simply offer comfort. She did the latter now, pulling him down to rest on her belly. He felt her stomach clench and then relax--Shera sighing when it returned to normal.

"Did I just feel the baby kick?"

"No." she calmly replied, "that was a contraction."

Cid rushed to a sitting position and said, "Dammit Shera! You mean to tell me while I was blubberin' over my nightmares, you were sittin' here gettin' ready to have our baby?!"

"It's all right Cid. Dr. Thomas said that it would probably take awhile for the baby to be born. I've only been having contractions for about an hour."

"Shit! An hour!"

"It's not time to go yet."

"Not time to go yet?! Your in labor for christ sakes!"

Cid jumped off of the bed and grabbed the suitcase full of Shera's things that he had packed a whole two months ago. He then threw on a pair of faded, brown pants and grabbed a shirt from the back of Shera's vanity chair. Snatching a pack of

cigarettes from their dresser, he tried in vain to light one. When he realized that his hands were shaking too damn bad, he gave up and grabbed the PHS.

Shera calmly watched the whole escapade from their bed, knowing that it would do no good to interrupt Cid when he was on a mission. She would let him make all of the preparations he wanted and when he was finished, she would tell him it wasn't time to go yet.

"Vincent! Dammit Vincent, I ain't got time to talk! Shera's in labor."

Vincent's steady, lucid voice floated from the phone and to Shera's ears, "Are you sure this time Cid? Last week, Dr. Thomas said that it was a false alarm."

"@#\$% Vincent, I'm damn sure!"

"Are you listening to Shera. If you had listened to her last time, you would not have needed to get everyone out of bed."

"Are you deaf?! I said it ain't a false alarm!"

"All right, friend. I will have everyone ready to be picked up within the next 20 minutes."

"Twenty minutes! That's too damn late!"

"I am no expert, but these things take time."

"Givin' birth, or gettin' morons organized?!"

Vincent chuckled, a rarity for him, over the undisguised agitation in Cid's voice, "Giving birth, of course."

"All right, all right! I'll get Cloud and Tifa up an' movin' since they live next door. You take care of everyone else."

"Yes Captain."

"Be sure an' tell'em to be ready or I'm leavin' without'em!"

Cid hung the PHS up without saying goodbye, and turned to Shera.

"Why they hell aren't you read to go?!"

Shera laughed, as much as was possible over the increasing pains in her stomach, "You heard Vincent, we have 20 minutes."

Cid swore and headed for the door, "I'm goin' to get that spikey-head kid up and movin'. Be ready when I get back."

"Or what, you'll leave me too?"

"Dammit Shera! This ain't no time to joke!"

Sensing his fears were getting the best of him, she sought to reassure him, "I'll be fine Cid, I promise. And, I'll be ready when you get back."

Vincent stretched the stiffness from his legs, caused by having sat for hours going through the numerous files of Hojo and Gast. He rarely slept anymore; years of slumbering in the world of nightmares does that to a man.

He had another rusty chuckle over the raw panic in Cid's call over the PHS moments ago. Cid was the toughest person he

knew, yet his wife's labor had neatly plucked the foundation out from under his feet in seconds. He pushed a lock of long, black hair from his face and adjusted the scarlet scarf surrounding his neck.

The Nibelheim mansion, thanks to the efforts of him and his friends, was now a slightly less gloomy place to live. The windows had been cleared free of grime, so that light leaked through, and all of Hojo's unwelcome inhabitants were disposed of. A little over a year had passed since Sephiroth's defeat, but he still had not managed to read and organize all of the files littering the basement. His hope was, that he would find nothing that would threaten the tenuous threads of peace surrounding the groups members.

Well, it was time to make the calls. Of all of them, he disliked the job of awakening Barret the most. He was not interested in hearing the litany of curse words that the big, black man could spew forth. The ninja girl Yuffie was often times hard to reach, because she would sometimes turn her PHS off when sleeping. Red, the sleek panther-like creature, took naps when it was to his liking, so he was occasionally awake at this time of the night. Reeve, formerly known as Cait Sith, being awake or not depended on whether he had accomplished his daily mountains of work.

Vincent picked up the PHS and began to dial.

Cloud awoke to a loud booming noise coming from the general vicinity of his living room. He ran a hand through his blonde spikes and shook his sleeping wife awake.

"Wha-" the soft voice of a woman with long, silky brown hair asked.

"Tifa, I think Cid is beating down our door again."

"Do you think Shera is really in labor this time?"

"She'd better be, or I'm going to stuff the Yoshiyuki up his-"

"Cloud! Have a little sympathy. Remember what you did to Cid?," she added with a giggle.

"Yeah. I woke him up twice before it was the real thing."

"The second time, he came to the door with his Venus Gospel in his hands."

"I was afraid he was going to use it too," he replied, jumping into a pair of crisp, blue pants.

Tifa heard bits and pieces of a muffled conversation and then Cloud returned, cradling the form of their five month old baby Cera in his arms.

"Cid said that Shera is sure it's for real this time. He wants us ready in fifteen minutes or he's leaving us behind."

"How did he look like he was holding up?"

"Terribly."

"Well, let's get going then. I wouldn't miss this for the world."

Barret fumbled around the nightstand next to his bed for about three rings before his big hand closed around the PHS.

"lo?,"he asked, fuzzily.

"Barret? Sorry to wake you."

"Vincent? What the hell is it?"

"Shera is in labor."

"Is that damn fool Cid sure this time?"

"Yes. He said to be ready in 20 minutes or he is leaving you. That would make it 15 minutes now."

"Okay, okay, I'm gettin' up. But he better be right, or else I'm gonna shoot'im."

"Goodbye then."

"Yeah. See ya soon."

He turned to Elmyra, his fierce expression softening. He had never expected to find someone to care for after his wife had died at the hands of the damn Shinra. Takin' care of his old friend Dyne's kid Marlene had seemed like enough for him. But, seein' Elmyra with Marlene made him realize she needed a woman in her life, and it helped that he liked Elymra enough to want to marry her.

"Was that Vincent?"

"Yeah. Shera's in labor for real this time."

"I'll get Marlene ready if you want to grab the blanket I made for the baby."

"Sure, sure," he replied, reaching out to brush a strand of graying, brown hair from her eyes.

She smiled at him and crawled out of their bed. Barret did the same, reaching for the clothes folded neatly on top of the dresser.

"No Vincent, you did not wake me. I have been sleeping restlessly lately. Grandfather taught me to be in tune with the planet and I have not been liking some of its cries as of late."

"I have been feeling uneasy as well," Vincent told Red XIII.

"Have you been able to discover anything in Hojo or Gast's files?"

"Not yet. But I am afraid it is only a matter of time until I do."

Considering that Red had paws and walked on all fours, it was awkward for him to hold the PHS and stand at the same time. So, Cid had fashioned him intercoms for the rooms of Cosmo Canyon that he liked to frequent the most. When he was away from his home, he wore a set of headphones with a large button for answering on its side.

He was resting now, on the small, green sofa in what had once been his Grandfather's room. His one good, red eye blinked every so often with the rhythm of the conversation.

"And Cid is certain this time?"

"Yes."

"You know that I require very little time to ready myself. I will be at the entrance to Cosmo Canyon in ten minutes."

Yuffie Kisaragi yawned and considered throwing her Shuriken at the PHS that rattled noisily across the room. It was too damn late for someone to be calling her now. It could only mean one of two things: All hell had broke loose, or Shera was in labor. Of the two, she really hoped for the latter. At least births took hours; and since she wasn't the one having the baby, she could sleep through it.

She pushed herself to a sitting position on her mat, and then rose on long, skinny legs. Her short, pixie-like brown hair was still in a neat cap surrounding her head.

"This had better be good," she told the caller.

"It depends on your view of 'good'."

Vincent? Does this mean Shera's in labor again?"

"Yes."

She sighed. Leave it to Vincent to keep everything short and simple. The man was damn hard to pry details out of.

"Well," she demanded, "is he sure it's for real this time?"

"Yes."

"Gawd Vince, enough with the one word answers already!"

"Be ready in ten minutes or you'll be left behind."

"Ten minutes! What does he think I am, his gold chocobo?!"

Goodbye Yuffie."

"Yeah, c'ya soon."

She stumbled into a pair of shorts and a tank top. Then, she headed across the town of Wutai to tell her father where she was going.

Reeve clutched his aching head and told his PHS to, "Shut the hell up!"

First, he had maneuvered his way through a morass of paperwork, and been given a migraine for his efforts. Simple aspirin was not working anymore, and he considered asking Dr. Thomas for some medication. Then, the welcome wagon Reno and Rude--formerly of the Turks--had shown up with a half a case of beer. Never one to pass up an opportunity to get drunk with friends--he couldn't count the times he and Cid had got plastered while playing poker--he had merrily drowned his headache in alcohol.

Now, the damned PHS was like an anvil pounding away at his throbbing head.

"Who the hell is this, and you had better make it well worth my while!"

"A hangover again, Reeve?"

"Dammit Vince, why don't you ever suffer the woes of the mortal man?"

"I have no feelings with which to drown in the pits of alcohol."

"Jesus! My brain is moving so slow to keep up with you. Can't you speak in plain English?"

"I am not stupid enough to get drunk."

"Thanks. I feel much better now."

"Shera is in labor," was his reply.

"Now?! When I feel like death warmed over?"

"I am afraid so. Cid is planning to leave in five minutes."

"Five! Well, I'll get one of my pilots to fly me there. I may be late, but I'll make it."

"Goodbye then."

"Bye."

Reeve stood up, grabbing the headboard of his bed as support for his wobbly knees. What he needed was a cold shower, plenty of caffeine, and a whole damn bottle of aspirin. And oh yeah, he needed to wake up the two guys responsible for this and take them with him.

By the time Cid and the gang arrived in the newly remodeled Mideel--thanks in large part to Reeve--Doc Thomas had everything ready to go. His nurse wheeled Shera into an examining room, shut the door, and told everyone to stay in the waiting room, including the foul-mouthed, expectant father.

Cid had gotten Vincent to light a cigarette for him, and was now puffing nervously away. Of the large group, he and Vincent were the only ones that remained standing. Well, Vincent stood still, and Cid stalked the length of the room and back again.

"Damn Cid," Barret complained, "this is worse than you're wedding."

Cid didn't even spare him a glance, all of his focus was centered on the hallway that led to the room where Shera was giving birth. It had been four hours already, and Yuffie, Marlene, and Cera were all sleeping. Tifa rested against Cloud's side, whispering something to him every so often, Red was stretched out on the floor, and Elmyra was enclosed within Barret's enormous arms, Marlene in her lap.

The doorway to the waiting room suddenly flung open, and a very pale Reeve stepped through.

"Dammit Cat, are you ever on time?!" Cid demanded.

"Jeez Cid, not so loud."

Behind him, Reno and Rude drug their groggy forms through the door as well. Of the two, the red-headed Reno couldn't hold liquor worth shit. Seven of them, and he was out like a light. The bald, extremely tall Rude, on the other hand, could have about twelve and not blink an eye.

"What the hell're you two doin' here?!?" Cid wanted to know.

"Ask super-prez here," Reno winced, grabbing his head.

"They had a part in my suffering, so I forced them to come with. How's it going?"

"Too damn slow."

"Be patient Cid, these things take time. I should know."

Cid turned to Tifa and tried his best to manage a smile.

Three hours later, with a wail loud enough to make her papa proud, Amanda Cid Highwind was born.

Oh boy, did I ever have fun with this chapter. I love to make Cid as human as the rest of us. It's about time to start with the gray hairs anyhow.

I went ahead and let Vince and Red hint at the trouble yet to come. It'll be entertaining, I guarantee it.

As for Reeve getting drunk with the infamous drinking duo Reno and Rude, who better? With all the responsibilities he's got, Reeve is entitled to get plastered every now and then. Besides, I'm still a little peeved at him for being a spy. He needs to suffer some. Anyway, drunk scenes are soooo fun to write!

Okay, just in case anyone wants to know, or anyone is screaming, "Hey, that's my idea!," I did not take any of the characters current actions from other FF7 fanfics. I simply wrote what I wanted to see. If you really don't believe me, you're welcome to e-mail me a bomb.=:)

So, where do I go from here? To making Cid's life a little more exciting I have a feeling Mandie is going to have something to do with that:)