

Sense of Life

Final Fantasy VII

Von abgemeldet

Kapitel 3: The Promise

Chapter 3: The promise

The snow was gently floating down on the small town of Kalm, covering it with a peaceful white coat. It had been snowing for weeks now, and no end to it was in sight. Yet as it was now two weeks before Christmas, everybody appreciated the solemn feeling it added to the short, dark days and long black nights.

Tifa sighed as she took off her thick coat and scarf and put them into the wardrobe. Just a few minutes ago, she'd had her second ultrasound appointment at the doctor's to check if everything was alright with the twins. And, to everybody's delight, everything seemed to be perfectly fine.

Well, almost, Tifa thought as she gave another sigh and placed her hands on her largely swollen belly. Now 6 months along, she looked as if she would be giving birth any minute. With each new day, Tifa found it harder to get comfortable, either lying in bed, sitting on the couch or even standing around, which was especially painful, as her back seemed to be starting to complain heavily.

Yet everything had its bad sides and she was trying hard to ignore them in order to cherish the good ones.

Even though Tifa still grieved over the death of her former Master Zangan just two months ago, and had shed lots of tears for him already, she still tried to appear strong in front of the others. If it bothered her, there was no reason why the others would have to suffer as well.

Cyra, Zangan's latest student, who was now to learn from Tifa herself, had decided to go home to her grandmother for the rest of the year to bring some distance between her and Zangan's death, so that she would be able to cope with his death and find her own inner peace. After that, at the beginning of the new year, she would return to Tifa to start her studies. Yet it was not decided how the training would go about, because Tifa was most obviously not able to show her any moves right now. She would have to stick to explaining at first, until she would be able to do the practical part again.

Tifa was still pondering about her new role as a teacher, a mistress - she actually did not like the sound of it -, while she was walking right into the living room, to meet Shera who was sitting by the fireplace, writing Christmas cards.

She had returned about a month ago, along with Cid, on the Highwind. The two of

them had sorted out their feelings, and, as Cid had always been a man of action but not of words, he had proposed to her at once, without holding a speech. The way Shera had told it, he had just pulled out the ring, held it in her face and bluntly stated that she'd have to marry him, otherwise he'd have to persuade the man who had sold him the ring to take it and give him his money back.

Tifa had chuckled at those words. They were just so totally him that she could see it like a movie in front of her eyes. Yet Shera loved the grumpy pilot just the way he was and she'd said yes immediately.

But somehow, Tifa was a little jealous at their engagement. Even though they had talked about it before, even before Tifa had known that she was pregnant, Cloud had not proposed to her yet. Nevertheless, she knew him better than he himself, she knew how excited and nervous he was if things became serious. So he was surely just waiting for what seemed like the right moment. And she knew that he would find it, he always did.

"So, what did the doctor say? Everything alright, I assume?" Shera asked, looking up from the cards, waking Tifa from her thoughts.

She nodded, smiling, as she sat down in the armchair by the fireplace, which was Cloud's favorite spot.

"Yeah", she returned, placing her hand on her belly. "Everything's fine, they're growing day by day."

Tifa's sigh was ensued by a small chuckle from Shera, who was well aware of her friend's little misery.

"Oh, by the way, did you make any plans for Christmas dinner yet?"

Tifa shook her head in reply.

"Nope, not yet", after a short pause she added, "but I would die for a little chocolate ice cream with cheese sauce on it!"

Shera shot her an unbelieving glance, not sure whether she had understood right.

Even Tifa seemed to realize what she had just said and smiled sheepishly, shrugging her shoulders.

Immediately, both women burst into laughter once again.

Cid, who was just coming past the room, shot them an odd look and continued his way, shaking his head.

"Women..."

Just one day before Christmas Eve, the whole house was busy with making the last preparations, which included setting up the Christmas tree and decorating it.

Yet the progress was slow, and more humorous than anything else.

Barret was holding the tree, receiving instructions from Shera to make sure it stood completely straight and in a perfect 90 degrees angle. Cid and Cloud were carrying in dozens of boxes full of decoration, while Nanaki was checking a list made by Shera to make sure they lacked nothing. Some hours before, Yuffie had left to do some late Christmas shopping, dragging a helpless-looking Vincent right behind her. Little Marlene was just jumping around hyperactively all the time, not wanting to wait another day to receive all her presents.

When Tifa had done the finishing touch at the Christmas dinner, she joined the others in the living room, taking in the scene with a slight chuckle.

It was a most humorous sight to see the heroes that had saved the world getting

desperate at decorating a Christmas tree.

"Darn tree! How come a bunch of green needles and old brown branches that rot after just a few days can make such a f***** pile of problems?" Barret cursed, and finally let go off the tree, eyeing it viciously.

Shera placed her hands at her hips and looked at him, displeased.

"Barret, please would you keep your cursing down? Just because you don't like Christmas Trees doesn't mean that ours has to be totally crooked!"

Tifa gave a chuckle as she walked up to Cloud and softly kissed him on the lips.

"Everything alright?" she asked, smiling at him.

Cloud returned the smile, yet grinned at the scenery.

"Well, more or less, I'd say. At least the tree's standing now." He looked back at her.

"How's dinner?"

Tifa sighed, resting her head on his shoulder.

"It's all done now, at least as far as possible."

In the other corner of the room, Barret had now begun to curse about the circumstances, well, the tree in particular, and it seemed like he was really annoyed that time.

But suddenly, out of nowhere, totally unexpected, something completely new happened;

Tifa rose her voice until it was merely a scream and shouted at Barret.

"Can't you just the f*** stop complaining once and do what she's sayin'? It's not like she wants anything impossible!! And, would you PLEASE the heck stop cursing?!?!"

Within split seconds, the room fell totally silent, not a single sound to be heard, unbelieving showing in everybody's faces.

As soon as it had happened, Tifa's mood changed again, and, becoming fully aware of what she had just done, she clasped her hands over her mouth and looked at Barret apologetically.

"I... I'm so so sorry, Barret", she stammered. "I really don't know what's come over me..."

She seemed to be definitely miserable and sorry about her reaction, as it was actually very unlike her to apply such a rough tone if not really necessary.

But Barret did not take things that serious and started to chuckle.

"Hey, Tif, it's ok. It's not your fault, really."

Tifa just grinned sheepishly, still somewhat embarrassed that she had lost control over herself that easily.

"Alright", Shera said after clearing her throat to get attention, "now that you two got that set, we should get the tree done."

Turning over to Barret, she added. "You know, the angle's just a mere 85° yet."

Barret did nothing but groan as she got ready to face his greatest horror.

It was merely dawn when a sudden noise from the corridor could be made out; Marlene was up already, bouncing around the upper floor as if she had been sitting in a huge nest of ants. After all, it was Christmas Day, morning actually, and most likely there was no child on the whole world that would be able to sleep through on that very special day.

And as energized as she was, she now - after a fruitless attempt to wake up a grunting and snoring Barret - darted towards Cloud and Tifa's room, hopeful to wake the two

of them. Not that she wouldn't be able to open the present herself, but it would be a lot more funny with some company.

Without even knocking, the little girl, still in her pajamas, burst in, bouncing up and down in front of the bed.

"Uncle Cloud, Aunt Teef! Get up! It's Christmas! There's lot of presents waiting for us!" But all the little girl's efforts resulted in were a grunt from Cloud and Tifa making her head more comfortable on his chest, a smile on her lips.

Marlene pursed her lips, not wanting to give up and headed for the curtains, pulling them open the let in the slight winter morning sunlight.

Yet it was enough to wake the couple.

Cloud was still trying to get back to sleep and buried his face deep in his pillow, making disapproving sounds while Tifa sighed and pushed herself up into a somewhat sitting position, blinking at Barret's daughter.

"Aunt Teef, it's already like lunch time and we still haven't opened our presents yet!"

Tifa glanced over at the alarm clock which confirmed her feeling that it was just after 8 in the morning.

With another sigh, she carefully pushed herself of the bed and stretched her tired muscles.

"Okay, Marlene", she said, turning towards the girl, "you go and wake Yuffie and Nanaki, I'll wake the others and we'll meet downstairs then, ok?"

It was definitely "okay" for Marlene, because she nodded happily and jumped out of the room, humming a sweet melody.

Tifa smiled as she watched after Marlene, remembering well when she had been a little girl, and how excited she had been every year when it was around Christmas.

With a giggle she turned around to Cloud, wanting to wake the stirring form that desperately was trying to get back to sleep.

An impossible attempt with the bright, snow-reflected sunlight streaming in.

About half an hour later, everybody in the house was finally up, heading for the living room, still in their nightclothes.

As all of them had expected, there was no sign of Vincent. He seemed to have left during the night, most likely to find some time for himself during the holidays, which even enlarged his suffering from Lucrecia's death.

Still, the atmosphere, apart from the fact that it was too early actually to be up already, was a happy one.

Marlene still had not stopped running around excitedly, not being able to wait for opening her presents any longer.

So there seemed to be no other way out for everybody to get a little rest than to finally enter the living room and let the girl rip open her presents.

Yet the living room looked far better than anybody had expected: a nice, warm fire was sparkling in the fireplace, mountains of presents were packed onto wonderfully decorated tables and, right in the middle of everything, there it stood: the Christmas tree.

Most obviously, Shera had been able to persuade Barret, as it was standing in a perfect 90° angle. It was hung with thousands of tiny pieces of decoration, from sparkling glass balls to small sugar canes and real red candles.

That wonderful sight brought smiles to all faces, even Barret and Cid could not deny

that it looked incredibly "christmasy".

And while everybody was saying their "Merry Christmas", they started searching for their presents and piling them up.

Little Marlene's eyes were growing wide at the amount of presents she had received, and, more happy than ever, she started ripping them open one by one.

Most of the presents had little name-tags that told who had given it to whom, and everybody seemed to be quite content with what they had gotten: Yuffie's eyes were shining as she unpacked her elemental and summon materia, Cid was concentrated on his book about the history of spaceships, Marlene started playing happily with her toys and "girlie stuff" like Barret called it, he himself was focused on accessories for his gun arm and Tifa received lots of stuff for herself and the twins.

Only Cloud was sitting in front of his pile of presents, motionless, absent minded. Considering the look on his face, he was fighting an inner struggle.

Obviously not even noticing the pile of presents right next to him, he simply stared at his hands which lay closed in his lap.

Whatever it was that he was thinking of, it definitely had to be quite important if it could consume all of his thinking at once.

After having watched him for a few minutes, Tifa started to worry and decided to ask him what was wrong.

Carefully, she got up from her place on the floor next to Marlene and went over to Cloud, sitting down right beside him.

Strangely though, as he noticed her approach, he seemed to tense up even more, a quite uncommon sight with the strong warrior.

Gently, she placed her hand on his cheek and turned his head around so that he now faced her.

"Cloud, you alright?" she asked, concern showing on her face. "Anything wrong?"

Cloud swallowed visibly hard and, suddenly, dropped down onto one knee in front of her.

An awkward silence fell over the room as everybody stopped unwrapping their presents and chatting loudly to stare at the young couple.

Summoning up all his courage, Cloud took Tifa's hand in his and, quietly, started to speak, his voice slightly quivering, yet determined.

"Well, Tifa, we've known each other for like our whole lives now, and even though there have been incredibly hard times, the past year has been the best ever. Since we finally confessed our feelings for each other, and now even will be having our twins soon", he smiled at Tifa and gently touched her stomach, "I could not be happier and more content with life. And I don't even dare imagine what it would be like if you weren't by my side, cheering me up, holding me back when I'm about to do something stupid; loving me for who I am no matter what. I never want to lose you, Tifa", he looked her deep into the eyes and tightened the grip on her hand unconsciously. "I can't stand the thought of being without you. And now, with the twins to be born soon, I want us to be a real, whole family that no one can break apart."

He made a short pause to give Tifa some time to take in the news. Silent tears were glistening in her eyes as she watched the love of her life smile at her.

"Well, I guess you already know what I'm about to ask, but still, I'm gonna say it straight out..."

He let go of Tifa's hand and opened a small velvet box he had kept tight in his other hand. Tifa gasped as she looked at the incredibly beautiful ring right before her eyes. It was made of pure platinum, with two lines running through the ring at full length:

one of deep crimson, the other of clear, shining blue. The young woman found it hard to get her eyes off it and look at the man kneeling in front of her.

With the ring held out right before him, Cloud cleared his throat and rose his voice again, to finally end the waiting.

"Tifa Lockheart... would you do me the honor of becoming my wife?"

A sobbed 'yes' could be heard before Tifa rushed into his arms, kissing him passionately, tears still running down her face.

Suddenly, the room grew loud again with cheers and clapping of their rejoicing friends who were happy that everything had finally worked out the way they had always known it would.

When Cloud and Tifa had finally broken the hug, he took the ring and slowly slid it over her finger. Unbelievably, she looked at it, turning her hand in all directions, still not sure if it might not just all be a wonderful dream.

Cloud smiled at her, slightly bemused by the incredulous look on her face. Carefully, he took her face in his hands and turned it toward him.

"Believe me, Teef, this is true. It's not just a dream. It's better."

With a smile on both faces, they kissed again, knowing that things could hardly get better than they already were.

Nothing, they assured themselves, absolutely nothing would ever be able to tear them apart, no matter what.

Almost a month had passed now since Christmas, the end of January was nearing.

Finally being engaged to Cloud, Tifa was incredibly happy and content lately, even though her pregnancy was still troubling her at times. It was now more than impossible to get comfortable, no matter how. Even lying in bed was beginning to be a real torture. Just two more months, just a few more weeks, that's what she told herself again and again, yet never really being persuasive.

But luckily, there was something that kept her mind off all that unpleasant thoughts most of the time now: just a few days ago, Cyra Mindstorm, Zangan's last student, had returned and Tifa had started tutoring her. The young girl showed great potential, not only physically, but mentally as well. With a few years of training, she would surely be able to become one of the top martial arts fighters on the planet, if she had the wish to do so.

All Tifa could do for now was train her as well as possible.

Which was not really a lot yet.

The first few days, they had spent getting to know each other, talking not only about their training, but about everything that came to their minds, from their hobbies, to family background, to the crushes they'd had when they were younger.

About a week ago, the actual training had started. The two women were mostly out in the open, fields or forests, wherever there was a chance for an easy fight. They had decided not to rush things as Cyra was not that skilled yet and Tifa would most likely not be able to help her if the situation demanded it.

It had taken Tifa quite some time to convince Cloud that it was not necessary for him to accompany them wherever they went. They had been arguing about that topic for hours. And even though it was surely nice how much he cared about her - and she really appreciated that - , she wanted to keep some independence.

That day, they were at the edge of a forest a few miles from Kalm.

Cyra was busy fighting a small number of Imps while Tifa was shouting her advice on how to beat them best and fastest.

The young, blond haired girl swirled around in the air, doing a single somersault, followed by an upper kick. Her speed was incredibly for a student, and after a few seconds, the fight was done, and Cyra landed back on the ground with a swift, elegant move.

Tifa smiled at her student, walking closer to her.

"That was really good", she admitted, kind of proud, "What do you think? Do you wanna try a harder one now?"

The girl nodded, her green eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Hmmm... okay then..." Tifa started, her gaze wandering around the terrain, watching out for the next opponent. After a while, she had spotted something that seemed almost perfect: a large, poison snake. Even though they were looking vicious, they were relatively easy to battle, she knew that out of experience. As long as the fighter was fast enough, able to dodge the poisonous tail that moved at a rather fast speed, the battle would be over soon without much effort.

Tifa gestured for her student to follow her deeper into the forest, until they were just a few feet away from the beast. Resting herself down a little away from the place of action, she gave Cyra some last pieces of advice, explaining the weak points and best tactics.

Right then, the girl broke some smaller branches in a nearby tree to arouse the snake's attention. The tactic had the wished effect: the snake was coming closer rapidly, ready to attack the intruder.

At first, everything worked fine. Cyra, with her great speed, had no problems dodging the snake's tail, and with each round, she was adding a little more damage with her somersaults and kicks.

Tifa watched the battle with great interest, yet keeping quite so that she would not arouse the snake's attention, for she did not want to endanger herself more than necessary.

Then, all of a sudden, she felt a sharp pain in her stomach and let out a low cry, clutching her belly.

Yet she was not only the center of her pupil's attention now: the beast stopped in its tracks, its head turning abruptly in Tifa's direction.

Sensing that the pregnant young woman would certainly be an easier target, it let go off Cyra and sped off toward Tifa.

Stumbling backwards, she fell to the ground, unable to escape the approaching beast. Cyra rushed to her help, yet she did not make it in time.

A high pitched cry rang through the trees, scaring away the birds, as the poisonous sting penetrate the woman's body, flooding it with its deadly liquid.

The girl was in deep rage.

Without any second thoughts, she dashed at the beast and attacked it, fury unleashing powers that before had been buried deep inside of her.

After two unbelievably powerful attacks, the beast had lost, its body falling limply to the ground.

In the same instance, Cyra remembered what had happened and rushed to Tifa's aid. She was lying on the floor, sobbing, weeping, while she clutched her stomach. Agony was painted all across her unnaturally pale face, joined by horror.

She was deadly terrified that she might lose her child.

And it was not unlikely to happen at all.

Sensing the urgency of the situation, Cyra grabbed Tifa's PHS and dialed a number, yet changed it after thinking about it.

There would be no use calling the ambulance, they would never be able to get into the unruly terrain.

"Cloud?... Cloud, it's me, Cyra.... Come here, quick! I need your help! We're in the East Forest!... Make the others call the ambulance.... Tifa, she got poisoned by a Tyrel-Snake! Please, hurry up!"

She hung up immediately, dropping the PHS, softly touching Tifa's forehead; she was panting, covered in cold sweat, the color completely drained from her skin.

"Tifa! Tifa, please, try to stay awake! I just called Cloud, he'll be here really soon! Tifa, please, be strong, you'll make it", she cried, holding down her sobbing, trying to reassure her friend, trying with all means to keep her conscious, "Don't give up, you'll be alright!"

Never before in her life had Cyra Mindstorm felt more helpless than in that very moment out there in the forest with her pregnant Master poisoned with a deadly toxin.

There was absolutely nothing she could do.

Her eyelids heavier than ever before, she slowly opened her eyes, yet regretted it in the same instance.

Coming with all the sudden light and blurred shapes was an overwhelming pain that penetrated her whole body. Yet somehow, for some reason beyond her conscious knowledge, she knew that she should not give in to the longing of falling asleep. She knew she had to stay conscious.

Still, no matter how hard she tried, everything still seemed surreal, the blurred shapes and crackling sounds making absolutely no sense in her mind.

But there was something. A feeling, a touch probably. And suddenly, she felt calm, somewhat comfortable, and she knew, everything would be alright soon, the pain would cease.

Weakly, shaking uncontrollably, she raised her hand in the direction of the touch, until she felt resistance.

A tiny smile formed on her lips as the comfortable feeling increased and she sunk back, relying on those that would help her.

Not really knowing where he went, his legs carried him faster than they ever had, brushing past small bushes and finally reaching the thick forest.

He immediately found his way and, soon, reached the spot where the tragedy had happened: his love Tifa was lying on the ground, drifting off into unconsciousness, with her student Cyra right next to her, looking totally helpless.

A thousand different emotions rushed in on him, overwhelming him, but above all, it was worry and fear, the fear that he might lose his fiancée, and his unborn children as well.

Unconscious of any of his actions, he rushed to her side, touching her forehead slightly.

To his surprise, Tifa seemed to feel his touch and reacted. Her eyes slowly fluttered

open, and a smile crept to her face.

"Tifa... Teef... Stay still, don't move. I'll help ya, you'll be alright soon!"

Slowly, she raised her hand up to his cheek and gently touched it, still smiling, before she sunk back onto the ground.

Determined, he took her into his arms, carrying her out of the forest, right toward the small town, Cyra right behind him.

There was not a second to lose.

He had to hurry.

The doctors had been in the operating room treating Tifa for two and a half hours already. And for exactly the same time now, Cloud was pacing up and down the corridor, waiting for news on Tifa's state. None of the doctors had told him or his friends anything so far, they just had brought her in quickly and left them be.

And that fact definitely irritated Cloud. Yet he was not just mad at the medical staff, but even more at himself, for not having been there when she had needed him most. He now deeply regretted having let her go off training on her own, just with her student by her side, that he had not been able to have it his way and accompany her whenever she left town.

Damn it, how could you, he accused himself and punched the wall, resting its forehead against it, eyes closed.

He knew that, if any permanent damage had been done to Tifa, or their children, he would not be able to bear the guilt he would lay upon himself.

He would not be able to go on living.

Even just imagining the pain made his mind reel and spin, and him hope even more that everything would be alright.

Yet no matter how hard he tried to convince and cheer himself up, it just would not work. The guilt that built up inside of him was too strong, threatening to overwhelm him any second.

And something similar was obviously happening to Cyra at the same time.

She was sitting on a bench, not far away from Cloud, still sobbing quietly with her face hidden in her hands. Even though Nanaki and Yuffie, who had just arrived a few minutes after Tifa had been brought in, had told her that it was definitely not her fault, the teenager did not believe in anything they said and just continued sobbing all the time.

Yuffie, who was about the same age as Cyra, was sitting next to her, holding her in her arms, rocking her carefully.

Nanaki, Cid and Shera had taken place some feet away from the mourning man and the sobbing girl, simply staring at the floor in front of them in stony silence, as no one of them actually knew what to say to lessen the tension which was hanging in the corridor.

Barret though seemed somewhat enraged. He had known Tifa for many years now, and she was like a little sister to him, as she had always cared for Marlene and helped him with the things he did not really understand about girls. And although he did not know who to blame, he had been cursing wildly when he had arrived and had been told about the situation. However, he had calmed down, at least acoustically, staring at the floor as if he was trying to rip it open with nothing but his looks.

As the minutes went by and turned into hours, the tension rose, visible on the faces of

all those who were waiting for answers.

Not a single word was being spoken, only the low hum of the bright lights and the faint sobbing could be heard, at times accompanied by noises of Cloud's fist hitting the solid stone wall.

Even after a whole three hours, the situation had not changed the slightest bit; no doctor had yet come to give them any new information. And, slowly but surely, that fact was driving Cloud crazy.

He had already punched the wall for what seemed like a thousand times now, his knuckles already showing signs of the beating.

When he rose his fist once again, Barret lost his temper.

The dark man walked up to Cloud, catching his friend's fist before it could hit the stone, holding it in a tight grip.

Locking his gaze with his eyes, he shot him a fierce look. The tension was almost overwhelming by now, like a suffocating blanket that slowly sunk lower and lower to rob them of all oxygen.

Suddenly, the silence was broken as Barret rose his deep, harsh voice.

"Would you the **** stop it now?" his eyes narrowed as he stared straight into Cloud's face, "I know, we all know, that you're mad and irritated an' stuff, but, d'you think we don't feel just as helpless as you do? You're not the only who cares for Tifa, be sure about that. There's no use in making all of us even more nervous and annoyed!"

With a fast motion, Cloud withdrew his hand from Barret's tight grip and stared back at him with an icy glare, yet it was very obviously just a façade for those feelings that were seriously troubling him.

"As if you knew how I'm feelin'...", the icy expression slowly faded from his eyes as he sunk back against the wall, sliding down, running his hands through his spiky hair.

"I should have been there! It is my duty to protect her from anything that might harm her! And now, just because I've failed I might lose her... and our children..." he pressed those sentences out, trying to force back the tears welling up in his eyes. However, it was a useless attempt, for, just a few seconds later, they streamed down his cheek, uncontrolled, yet silently.

Although there were thousands of thoughts in his mind, thousands of encouraging words Barret could tell his young friend, nothing seemed really adequate for that situation, so he just placed a hand on his shoulder, reassuringly, and left him be.

The corridor would have sunken back into deep silence if a door had not opened in just that second, a doctor emerging.

Cloud and the others jumped up immediately, nervous about what news the man might bring.

The older doctor walked down the corridor, stopping in the middle of the group.

Studying the man's facial expression, Cloud walked up to him, every muscle in him more tense than ever before, his mind reeling.

Not being able to voice a single of his thoughts, he just stood before him, eyes pleading for answers.

"Well", the doctor started, clearing his throat, "First, if Miss Lockheart would have been brought here even just a few minutes later, it would have definitely been too late for her, we can say that. The poison penetrated the area of her abdomen, rapidly expanding to the upper part of her body, infecting the neurons."

"So... so she's... okay?" Yuffie asked, choking on the words, voicing the thoughts Cloud could not get out.

The doctor's expression grew even more serious as he continued to speak.

"It would be too early to say something like that. Her situation is still extremely serious. Only the next few days will show if she and/or the twins will make it."

Cloud closed his eyes, inhaling sharply. His insides were turning. His mind was reeling. His worst fears possibly coming true soon.

Oh, how much did he wish it was all just a dark, bad nightmare from which he would soon awake right next to his fiancée, gazing into her beautiful, healthy face, without any worries to threaten their lives.

Yet he had to face reality, he had to face his worst fears.

He would prevent them from coming true, no matter what.

"Can I see her?" Cloud asked, his voice still quivering from the tension, nevertheless determined.

After a moment of considering, the doctor nodded and rose his voice again, pointing for the intensive care unit.

"Yes, you can, but only one person at a time. She is still in a coma, but I think she would recognize the presence of close friends."

Cloud nodded, then turned around to his friends, receiving approving half-smiles and nods.

More nervous than ever before in his whole life, his legs shaking vigorously, he made his way to the intensive care unit Tifa was being nursed in.

Yet what he saw upon entering was far worse than he had imagined: the small room was packed to the ceiling with instruments, beeping screens and two obviously stressed nurses observing every small regularity.

And there she was, in the middle of the scene: his Tifa, his first love, now fiancée, bearing their children.

Half covered by a blanket, the exposed part of her body - the arms, neck and head - was plastered with tubes running to various instruments, as well as some infusions that were steadily dripping into her body.

The nurses turned their heads at Cloud, trying to smile reassuringly at the miserably looking man, gesturing him to sit down on a chair next to Tifa's bed.

Cloud did as he was told, feeling his spirits sink, seeing her like that, his Tifa, the young woman that had always been so happy and cheerful, never giving up, never showing any signs of weakness.

Carefully, he brought his hand up to her face and caressed it gently, tears forming in his eyes.

With a profound, agonized sigh, he took her left hand into his and slowly brought it up to his face, kissing it, feeling her soft skin against his.

However, feeling the coolness of her otherwise so warm and soft skin made him realize the full scale of what was happening right now.

Without any warning, the tears now finally broke out, running down his cheeks in streams, yet silently, as he rested his head next to hers, inhaling her sweet scent, no longer being able to deny the dreading facts.

Almost a week had already gone by, however, Tifa's state had not changed the slightest bit. She was still in deep coma, not responding to anything that happened around her.

No matter what the doctors, nurses or her friends tried, she just lay in bed, still, not showing the slightest reaction.

And although the doctors were slowly losing hope that Tifa might recover, Cloud still sat by her side, hoping, praying. Since the first day she had been brought in, he had been sitting right next to her, not leaving her side for more than a few minutes when his friends made him.

Cyra came in to visit Tifa every day, still not being able to throw off the feeling of guilt.

The rest of the bunch stayed in the background, not really knowing how to react to the situation, simply hoping that their friend would recover soon.

Like every day for the past days, Cloud was sitting right beside Tifa's bed, holding her hand in his, staring at her as if alone his looks might be able to awaken her from her deep sleep.

He could barely cope with the thought that there seemed to be actually nothing he could do to change her situation. If there were, he wouldn't let anything undone, untried.

Yet all he could do was sit by her side and spend her company and consolation.

Countless times had he already spoken to the doctors and nurses, still they seemed to be just as helpless as he was.

"We'll just have to wait", was all they said, each and every time he asked, but he never stopped.

He just did not want to accept the fact that he couldn't do anything. Now he could understand even better how Tifa had felt when he had been poisoned by Mako and had almost lost his mind.

Yet she had never given up on him, so there was no chance he would.

Closing his eyes, he rested his head next to hers, a position he liked a lot, feeling her soft skin close to his.

It was a little relaxing, as he always started dreaming, dreaming of life what it would be like if everything were to be right again, of what their twins would look like.

Would they have her eyes? Or probably his?

Would they have her melodic voice? Or probably his deeper one?

Would they have her cheery optimism? Or probably his determination?

Trying to picture his kids evoked deeply sad emotions, and the thought that he might lose his fiancée, the person he loved even more than himself or anything on earth, as well, was unbearable.

Once again, tears welled up in his eyes, and he did not bother suppressing them.

Life could be more than unfair sometimes...

"Hmmm....."

Cloud's thoughts were erased within split-seconds as he felt the slender, long fingers move in his grip.

With a jerk, he sat up straight, looking over at Tifa.

Was he hallucinating? Dreaming?

Incredulously, he watched as Tifa stirred in bed, her eyes slowly fluttering open after the long sleep.

Cloud bent over her, watching her every muscle move as if it were a miracle given by God no man had ever been allowed to see before. And to him, it actually was.

As soon as her eyes focused, they jumped around nervously, trying to find out where she was and what had happened to her.

"It's alright, Tifa. You're in hospital. Calm down, everything's alright!" he blurted out instinctively, trying to quiet her.

Suddenly, a look of horror appeared on her face and she carefully touched her swollen

belly with her hands, obviously remembering what had happened before she had fallen into coma.

Anxiously, she shot Cloud a questioning look, trying to voice her questions, yet not being able to utter an audible word.

"Don't worry, Tifa, the twins are okay, nothing's happened to them." He said as he gently kissed her on the forehead.

Relieve was painted across both their faces as she brought her hand up to his cheek and slowly pulled him down for a soft kiss on the lips.

The nightmare had been prevented from happening once more.

Outside the room, the nurses stood in front of the glass door, giggling.

The tests could wait...