A Promise Fulfilled
by DaughterOfDanu

Summary

Etro had made Claire Farron a promise long ago, one that Lightning nearly jeopardized. But what happens in the new world where Etro is dead and Bhunivelze defeated? Can that promise be fulfilled, will Claire remember? How will she even know how to find Fang, will Fang still want her, will they be together as promised?

Notes

Final Fantasy XIII: Lightning Returns ends on the note that the souls that Lightning saved are to be reborn into a new world. I had the feeling that Lightning kept her memories and was heading to see Serah, from the movie monologue. I also read somewhere that she was supposed to be calling her friends, thus meaning everyone was born as the age they were with all their memories. This is just a speculation from the cut scene at the end of the game and what I’ve read. So correct me if I’m wrong.

There are also several schools of thought about reincarnation, no different from the games version. I won’t go into it, but if it interests anyone, the various Asian religions and their beliefs of reincarnation are very fascinating.

The story will not begin with the train scene from the ending of the game but a different view following a mixed combination of several of the schools of belief in reincarnation. And they will not start out at the age they were when the game ended, but I will keep their names and physical descriptions for the sake of the story.

Thanks again to anyone reading and as usual, please leave comments. Improving my writing to entertain others is a goal, and I can’t do that without feedback.

Also, on a side note I am taking part in the nanowrimo this year, so updates for chapters may be slow in coming as my brain will be wrapped around getting out those lovely 50,000
words in one month.

And before I forget, I gave this a mature rating for later chapters.

Thanks again and enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

Life could be confusing sometimes with so many people telling you what to believe, what to think and then screaming about treading on their beliefs all the while pushing theirs in your face. Claire Farron wasn’t exactly a person who fancied following man-made religion; she was more a person of faith in something bigger than herself. It wasn’t something she could tangible grasp; it was a deep-down feeling that it wasn’t all about her.

Claire wasn’t closed off to the world; she just filtered it through the gut feelings she always had as a child. So, if you were to tell her that souls were born in groups and that in those groups were your soul mates, she probably would have just listened to you talk, processed the information and made her own decisions. She wouldn’t have spoken about what she believed and did not encourage those types of conversations. Besides, who had time to spend wondering about these sorts of things, anyway? She had a life to live. Seriously, what teenager had time to worry about religion and theoretical theories and thoughts when she was so close to graduating?

And don’t get her started on twin flames, it was fascinating and all, but she just didn’t have the time to waste on giving it more thought than a cursory glance and move on. She supposed that it was partially her own fault for taking electives for world religions and philosophy. She’d found many manmade religions fascinating, and she didn’t begrudge someone their beliefs; they were theirs. But Claire didn’t shove her beliefs down anyone’s throat and she hardly ever talked about what she believed at all. Sure, she discussed things in class, but never her own personal thoughts or beliefs.

Besides, whatever god, goddess or supreme being was out there, they had given her this gift of life. It wasn’t always rosy, but it was hers, her journey. Life could be testing, for instance her parents had nearly divorced, Serah had nearly died when she was younger and had been in a medically induced coma, so yeah, things weren’t always so wonderful. But it was the potential that fascinated her, being someone better every moment you drew breath. She would live each day to the fullest, learn, laugh, love and live. Although, the love part she hadn’t encountered yet, but that was okay, she wasn’t in any hurry. Her gut told her that when the time was right, she’d meet the right person at the right time.

Besides, she was too busy doodling in her diary and amusing herself with stick figures of her choking Serah. Not that she’d ever do that, not for any reason in the world at all, but she knew her sister had been snooping in her diary. Claire just wanted to leave her a message. She was just finishing up the drawing when Serah’s loud mouth and pounding sounded on her door.

“CLAIRRRRRE! Come on! I swear if I miss volleyball camp today, I will shave off all your hair in your sleep!”

Claire rolled her eyes.

“I’m coming! Sheesh, you act like it’s the end of the world. Addict! It’s not like you haven’t been to two other camps already this summer!”

Claire opened the door and peered at her glaring younger sister.

“Why won’t you play sports, are you afraid of breaking a fake nail; or is the modeling jobs finally going to your head?”

“Tch.” “I like it Serah, so what’s it to you? I get paid and when I turn 18, I’ll get to see other places. Who wouldn’t like that? Besides, it’s easy.”
Serah laughed.

“Says you, I asked mom about it, it’s anything but easy. You're just lazy, that’s your problem. Modeling isn’t a challenge for you, or you wouldn’t do it.”

Claire just shrugged and made her way past Serah. Maybe she was lazy, or it really was just no challenge at all for her. Besides, Claire was not a competitive person, that was for blockheaded boys and her sister. At this point in her life, a whole sixteen years, she was sure she’d escaped falling into the trap of acting like boys.

Not that Serah was a boy, but she had a tinge of competitiveness in her. And to Serah’s defense, she was very much a team player and full of grace. Her sister didn’t make the game about her or rubbing it in the other persons face in a dominating act of humiliation for the loser. The idea alone of women running around with clubs, grunting, scratching themselves and acting like men just repulsed her.

Despite having a driver’s license, Claire climbed into the back of the car with her sister. There were errands to run and as soon as Serah’s camp was over for the day, it was time for family night. It was an activity Claire loved. With the end of summer, modeling and Serah’s camps, it was nice to sit down as a family and spend time together. Much to her dismay, however, Serah wanted to continue their conversation.

“Claire, there are other sports you could play.” “Oh! I know, you could become a professional race car driver, then you wouldn’t have to worry about breaking a nail.” “Hmmm… but then again, knowing you, you’d let everyone pass you or crash in the wall and catch on fire. Yeah, I think you need to do something else.”

“Really, Serah?!”

At the sound of her daughter’s exasperated groan, Mrs. Farron turned around to face her daughters.

“Serah, if Claire doesn’t want to play sports, that’s her right. Quit tormenting her over it.”

Claire gave her mother an appreciative look.

“It’s not like I’m telling her to go out for football mom. She could ride horses or do something less violent if that’s what she wants. Giving up dessert and good food to model is just killing. Who wants to have to make sure they’re always an anorexic twig the rest of their life?”

“Serah.” Her mother replied in warning.

Katherine Farron regarded her eldest for a moment. Claire was no weakling, in spirit or in strength as far as a female goes, neither of her girls were.

“Claire, Serah has a point. If you’re worried about your modeling, there are other activities you can be a part of. You know your father and I would support you if you were interested in equestrian riding, ballet, or dance of any form.”

Claire just shook her head.

“No mom, I’d rather focus on school and the modeling in the summer.”

Serah rolled her eyes and scoffed. She’d wanted to play volleyball since she’d first watched it on TV. She’d pursued it with a ferocious passion and admittedly, she was good. What wasn’t to like, it made you think on your feet; it kept you active, and you made good friends and great teammates and you worked together for a common goal. Sure, it was still competitive because there was a
winner and a loser, but Serah saw it as an opportunity to be the better winner or loser. Yep, that was competitive too, but wasn’t that better than the alternative? In the end though, she just knew that Claire was just lazy.

After arriving at the school for yet another of Serah’s obsessive volleyball camps, Claire wondered the hall while her parents got Serah registered. Claire hadn’t paid attention to which school was holding the camp, but she noticed the variety of sports they offered. Perusing the pamphlets on the table, there was one that piqued her interest.

“I had no idea there was a fencing team.”

Pocketing the information, Claire rejoined her parents and after bidding Serah goodbye for a few hours they left for errands.

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It was late in the afternoon by the time they picked Serah up from camp, with pizza and drinks picked up en route to the house there was only one thing left for family night to begin.

“Serah, it’s your turn to decide, have you decided?” Mr. Farron inquired.

Serah looked at Claire while trying to hide the smirk on her face.

“There’s an overseas volleyball club competing in the finals tonight. Coach told us today, and one team playing has these sisters from Australia that are on the cover of my Volleyball Monthly magazine. So, the sports channel tonight?”

Serah could swear she heard her sister’s eyes creek as they looked her way. All she could do was smile at Claire and ignore her. It wasn’t long anyway before her older sister zoned out of the conversation all together.

Had Claire listened and not tuned out until the start of the game, she would have been prepared for one Oerba Yun Fang to show her face on the tv screen. As it was, the moment Claire laid eyes on this green-eyed beauty from Australia, she was entranced. The world literally slipped away from her and she couldn’t remember anything other than being clued to the television.

Claire wouldn’t question it until later, that’s how spellbound she was. But seeing Fang for the first time, she felt this warmth and comfort as if she were coming home from a long journey. No, it was more than that; she felt connected to this girl, pulled to her, attracted. But why, she wasn’t a man hater, and she didn’t dislike women; she just never really thought of either sex in any kind of romantic way before.

But with Fang, she had felt a sudden longing, and it played with her mind. Claire examined these feelings, first analytically. She’d taken biology, taken psychology and knew from those classes that women did not have a sex drive.

“Good thing too, I wouldn’t want to be like a poor cat with my butt stuck up in the air and needy once a month until…”

She couldn’t even bring herself to finish the thought; it was too disturbing. Well, she knew that a woman’s sexuality was in their mind, that’s why women could be fluid. But that wasn’t it either, was it, she didn’t really think of men or women at all in that manner? Lectures from her Philosophy and World Religions classes started filtering through her mind; there had to be an explanation for this sudden attraction. And each time Claire tried to analyze the facts, her mind would slip to the thought of those green-eyes, that tan skin and dark hair with hints of red highlights.
Then her mind would argue that it was even more than aesthetics. There was something about how Fang carried herself, and the way she acted. Claire just KNEW she knew this girl, but how? “Argh!”

Claire was getting on her own nerves, she’d asked the “expert,” volleyballer in the family about it tomorrow. Until then, Claire hoped that she could find sleep and not consumed by this Oerba Yun Fang. One could always hope.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Not your typical female athletes, Fang and Vanille spend their time quietly in their room waiting to leave for their big championship volleyball game. Not much can shake Fang, but that was before she let Vanille talk her into doing something very teenage like while they waited.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 2 introduces Fang and Vanille. There's just enough information about the two to give some background and still leave a bit of mystery to their lives.

I also wanted to give some kudos to some of the writer's on here and the fanfiction site. It will take me a minute as I realized there are quite a few authors that I have enjoyed reading their works. I'll have a list in the notes for Chapter 3.

Hope you enjoy, and thanks as always for reading and leaving reviews.

Fang reclined on the bed in the hotel room. You couldn’t tell by her posture that there was a championship game taking place hours from now. She was studiously at work on her final exam. You also wouldn’t take her for the honor roll type by looking at her. She had a wild exotic beauty about her, even for being only sixteen. Fang would blame it on her hair if you asked her, it was stubborn, wild, and free spirited much like her. But for a free spirit, she was grounded and took matters seriously. Fang had a very different perception of the world, but people of mixed nationality often did. They had a view of life others could not understand.

Her father was Native American, and her mother was of Irish and Indian descent from Europe. It was on a trip to the Americas where her mother had met her father. It was love at first sight. Along with that came a lot of disapproval from certain family members, but her parents had worked through it. Despite their struggles they always kept it from their young daughter. Fang had been a happy child and well loved.

Unlike most in American culture, her father had grounded her in Native tradition, and her mother had exposed her to their Irish and Indian roots. She had been surrounded by a rich culture and was very thankful for what she had been given. Fang’s parents had gifted her with a strong start in life, rooted in love and respect for all people and cultures. It was a tragedy that life had taken them so soon, but what time they had with their daughter, had given her the strength to endure the loss.

A disgruntled sigh from the other bed drew Fang’s attention, she’d almost forgotten her cousin Vanille was there. A smirk touched her lips as her cousin continued her melodramatic sounds, followed by a burst of angry comments now that she had Fang’s attention.

“Why do I have to be the back-up? You know I’m the better player Fang?”
Vanille’s lip poked out, but her eye’s told Fang she better back her up or else. Her cousin just chuckled.

“Damn, humble much Van?”

A pillow flew across the room and would have hit Fang square in the face had she not had such excellent reflexes.

“You’re the prodigy child, you tell me why.”

A glare from the other bed was the only response. Fang sighed, shut the lid to her laptop and gave Vanille her undivided attention.

“Okay Mensa member, I’ll spell it out for you. This is Irina Federova’s last year with the club, you have several more years ahead of you. Besides, no matter how much you pout, she’s still a damn good player.”

Fang’s look took on a more serious tone.

“And just how many 14-year-old girls get to come to the clubs at your age? You should be thankful they let you come at all. Skipping ahead in school doesn’t always entitle you to have life just fall into your lap the way you want it…”

Fang was about to lecture Vanille on why she was discussing this with someone of her cousin’s intellectual caliber when said cousin broke out in laughter.

“Ha! Gotcha ya!”

“What the hell Van!”

“I’d say I’m sorry, but I’m not.” The red head smirked.

“I finished my homework awhile ago, I was a little bored.”

A pillow flew at Vanille’s head and a battle began between the cousins that ended in laughter.

“I swear Van, I don’t know how we’re related sometimes.”

“You love me like your sister, and you know it.”

“I do.”

The two cousins were different in many ways, even in appearance, but genetics were funny that way. One would never know they were related just looking at them. Fang had tan skin to Vanille’s pasty pale, she was taller, with dark hair and natural red highlights, where Vanille was shorter with red hair. The two cousins were close, and it was clear in the way they interacted.

After Fang’s parents had died, her aunt and uncle took her in, and she was raised beside Vanille. She’d lived with them since she was 10, giving her six years of new experiences. It was an acquirement of new perspectives on how different beliefs were and family dynamics even within a family group. Like she and Vanille, her mother and Vanille’s mother were different. Vanille’s mother was stricter and not as carefree. It was not to say that her aunt was monstrous in anyway, she just had a different approach to life than her sister had. It could just be that Vanille’s mother was the older sister. Either way, it wasn’t important, because they were all family and love and support was the backbone of their relationships.
“Phft!”

“Mensa, why do you always have to bring that up?”

Laughter from the brunette drew another pout from Vanille.

“Because your IQ makes you a prime candidate for their organization.”

“And yours doesn’t?” The red head argued.

“Come on, you really think I could get behind some of the snobby thinking that goes along with an organization like that. And before you pop a few brain cells, I know that not everyone is like that. I just have more important things in life than to tout my IQ to the world.”

She shot her cousin a sly grin.

“Besides, that’s what I have you for.”

A weak attempt at smacking Fang in the face with the pillow failed as soon as Vanille realized she didn’t really feel like putting the effort into it.

The two cousins laid on Vanille’s bed and stared at the ceiling in silence. Whatever was going on in either’s brain now was anyone’s guess.

“You’ve got mail from the States you haven’t opened yet.”

“I know. I’m trying to get the nerve up to open it. But cousin Mina has been sending teen and fashion magazines to me. Father would turn over in his grave if he knew what she was spending her time on.”

“Maybe.” Vanille replied.

“He’d say something, true, but he’d tell you it was her path to walk.”

Fang scrutinized her cousin.

“HA! You were listening to him all those years ago.”

Her only response was a smile a mile wide.

Blowing out a puff of air, Fang got up and grabbed the puffy envelope and tore it open. A few magazines fell on the bed next to Vanille as Fang plopped next to her and gave the magazine’s a cursory glance.

“Ooo… fall shoes!” Vanille squealed.

“Let’s look at this one first!”

Slowly the two cousins began perusing the magazine, looking at the current fall fashion’s for the girl’s their age. They had just reached the pages dedicated to boots, when the redhead stopped Fang from flipping the page.

“Before we go further, promise me if I find a pair I like that you’ll get them for me for Christmas.”

Fang didn’t know whether to laugh or hold Vanille in a head lock when she gave her those looks. Did she honestly think she’d fall for those hush puppy eyes?
“No promises.” Was the replying smile.

Vanille huffed but then giddily turned the next page. Fang’s eyes caught on a pair of boots with open toes and heels. They were unlike anything she’d seen and; she found she’d wear something like that without a thought. Maybe she could work a deal with Vanille, considering….

Fang was busy looking at said boots and wondering what she could wear them with and what she could do with them when her head was grabbed by an excited Vanille.

“Oh my god, look Fang!”

Just exactly what she was to be looking at the brunette had no idea, but her eyes fell on the title at the top of the page.

“Soldier Girl, what the hell kind of title is that?”

But when Fang’s eyes fell upon the model her throat tightened and she found it suddenly difficult to swallow. Her mind was suddenly at war with her body. The title on the page had urged her to take in the entire view, why she couldn’t say, Fang abhorred war or any thought of it. As her eyes traveled down, she found the most intriguing rose-colored hair, sitting on top of a beautiful face with gorgeous blue eyes. A young slender girl about her age peered at them with an intense glare that sent goosebumps along Fang’s flesh.

What in creation was wrong with her, she’d never been so drawn to another being in her life and Fang found it increasingly difficult to tear her eyes off of the photo while Vanille babbled on in the background about boots?

Several loud knocks at the door nearly made Fang leap from the bed. Vanille gave her a strange look as she noticed her cousin's heavy breathing.

“Girls, time to go grab your gear and head for the bus!” A voice yelled from the other side.

“On our way coach!” The red head yelled back.

Vanille turned to Fang.

“You all right, you’re a little flushed?”

“Yeah, I’m good.”

Before her cousin could get in another word, Fang leapt off the bed this time and grabbed her bag and tossing Vanille’s at her.

“Come on, let’s go. We’ve got a game to win.”

Vanille gave her a suspicious look and filed this moment away. Fang would not hear the last of this strange behavior.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Claire has a dream, and it is both exhilarating and perplexing. Will this motivate her to investigate where this new feeling and strange occurrence are coming from? And what about Serah, will she play a role in these new events, or future one's to come?

Chapter Notes

I had this chapter done yesterday; time just didn't permit me to post it. Also, I don't have that wonderful list of the author's yet but will at least say...read!!! There are many wonderful authors with different styles on here and fanfiction. And those of you that have Deviant Art accounts or just browse, there are wonderful pieces of artwork from popular fan pairing. Check it out! Support your artists and keep them motivated to write, draw, paint, etc.

And as always, thank you for reading and commenting.

With a slash of her gunblade and a swing of Fang’s lance, they cut through the pack of gorgonopsid’s with little effort. On Grand Pulse, you were the hunter or the hunted. Should it have surprised Lightning that aside from their looming focus, she could lose herself in this place with Fang? After Fang had confronted her about her feelings, the soldier was letting herself go more and more when she was alone with her wild Pulsian.

Was it simply fear, or was Lightning in love with this exotic beauty from Grand Pulse? Her heart beat in her chest in a tempo she’d never felt before. Lately, when she was with Fang, she would swear if she tried her feet would leave the ground and take flight. With barely a moment to take a breath, Fang was up and gone, with Lightning giddily chasing after her.

Etro! She felt like a little girl!

And each moment that passed, the urge to tackle this Grand Pulse native to the ground and kiss her grew. The soldier’s body burned with heat, but not of lust. It was a desire to get to know Fang on an intimate level, a longing she’d just discovered for the first time. But Fang was just so damn elusive when she wanted to be. Was she being a tease?

As a being built for speed, she was finding it difficult to keep pace as Fang weaved in and out of dense copses of trees and bushes only to lead her toward towering rocks of sediment and grand metamorphic layers set in ravines; she was sure would resemble fingers from the air. There was nothing like this on Cocoon, it was awe inspiring.

Rounding a corner in hot pursuit of the woman who made her heart soar, a hand reached out from a hidden cavern, snatching Lightning inside. On instinct, the soldier’s hands grabbed hold of her attacker, prepared to grapple for her freedom. As a pair of lips descended upon her own, the rest of her senses followed, recognizing the sari she had her fists tightly tangled in as they rested upon the
ample swell of Fang’s chest.

Lightning moaned.

Goddess, how this woman affected her and all the selfish desires that she’d long ago locked away. Be damned everyone and the world because all she wanted was this woman who was kissing her for all her worth.

Lightning found her back against the wall, the cool damp surface overshadowed by the growing heat of her body. Said body was on autopilot, acting on her mind’s desires. She pulled Fang tightly against her as she leaned more into the Pulsian. The more contact, the better. Fang’s hand came up to cup the side of Lightning’s face as the kiss deepened.

A throat cleared, and then a giggle followed.

“Enjoying yourself?”

Claire sat bolt upright as her heart raced. Beads of perspiration flecked her forehead, and she found herself needing to take deep breaths for air. The fog of the dream had left her breathless and as clarity began to overtake her, the interloper who had shattered her dream stood in stark reality against the door frame of her bedroom.

Serah.

A look of pure delight graced her features, as well as an all-knowing look.

“For fuck’s sake Serah!” Lightning exclaimed.

From the look on Serah’s face, Claire could tell that she’d startled her. The elder sister was not one for cursing. But at the moment, Claire didn’t care, they’d scared each other and Serah had it coming for the way she’d intruded upon her dream.

After a moment of regarding her older sister and the startling language that had come out of her mouth, Serah raised a defiant eyebrow.

“It’s nearly noon Claire. Mom sent me up here to check on you.”

As Claire remained sitting upright on her bed, Serah left the frame of the door and waltzed over to her sister’s bed. It was a cocky walk if the elder sister had any say in the way the younger was acting. With her eyebrow still raised, Serah tossed a magazine on the bed.

“Hmm…now I know I was right.”

Claire’s eyes remained locked on Serah. The younger sister had an all too pleased with herself look on her face. It wasn’t until the door closed and she was all alone again that Claire dared to look at what her sister had tossed onto the bed.

Laying right in front of her face, but in the younger version of herself, was the object of Claire’s dream. In large glossy color on the front of the magazine was a very detailed picture of Fang and her sister, Vanille. Without thought, her eyes went immediately to Fang’s lips and the tell-tale sign of an ample chest beginning to develop.

Claire’s cheeks burned and her inside’s warmed. With a moan, not of pleasure, Claire collapsed back onto her bed, pulling the covers up over her head. She just knew she’d have to eat crow later with Serah.
Claire allowed herself a moment to try and get her thoughts together before making herself go through her morning ritual. Showering and having to look at herself in the mirror was a challenge. It was like her mind was on a continual loop with every detail of the dream. First the shower was on hot, then cold and then back to hot. She finally rushed through, giving up on taking a nice long shower, not when thoughts of this older version of the woman kept popping up in her head.

Growling, Claire shut off the water and wrapped a towel around herself. Maybe she could brush her teeth in peace, but as soon as she saw herself in the mirror, Claire was transfixed. Glaring back at her, was the older version of herself. But stranger yet, Claire was wearing that stupid uniform she had on at the summer photo shoot. The exact same on older her was wearing in the dream.

“What the hell…”

She touched her lips and a part of her wanted to be back in that dream, kissing the older Fang. Surely, she was losing her mind? Looking in the mirror however, Claire didn’t know what was scarier, wanting to go back to dreaming about the older Fang, or the intense glare from the older version of herself.

Yep, she’d cracked. It was time to get to the bottom of all of this, starting with speaking to the professor at school that had the class about dreams. School was a week away, and Claire could not wait. Maybe she’d go talk to the psychology professor while she was at it too, there was a logical explanation for this.

Funny how your brain and your heart could be at odds, and that it felt frighteningly familiar to her. Logically, she knew what she’d do, but when she passed by her bed on the way out of her room, her heart had her automatically pick up Serah’s volleyball magazine.

Lunch with the family had been a breeze, it was evident that Serah hadn’t breathed a word to her parents about the earlier outburst. But was this something Claire could allow herself to feel relief about, or be on alert for some type of blackmail? Saturday was a leisurely day in the Farron household and there were not a lot of expectations unless there had been pre-made plans for the day. The only stipulation on Saturday’s were to make sure they communicated with their parent’s about leaving with friends and making sure they all ate together as a family when at home.

At sixteen, one would typically bemoan the fact of feeling so contained on a weekend by parents, but after their near divorce, Claire was all too happy to be a family. So, with no special plans of her own for the day, she took the volleyball magazine and went to her favorite place to read. Climbing up the old ladder, Claire crawled into the tree house and propped herself up against a cushion.

In the luxury of privacy, or at least in a place where she would have ample warning of a visitor, Claire stared at the cover. Why did this girl seem so familiar? Tracing the outline of Fang’s lips, Claire pondered her own question. Were they connected in another life, were they soulmates or part of a family group of souls? Did she believe such things herself? Claire didn’t know, but what was the harm in staying open to such possibilities, especially when logic made no sense of how she felt.

With that thought in mind, she opened the magazine and began to read about the young girl who had entrapped her heart and caged her mind.

The creaking of the ladder alerted Claire that she had a visitor. How long she’d been up in the tree house wasn’t evident, but she was sure it had been awhile. Serah peeked her head over the base of the tree house and into the sheltered room, more out of curiosity than fear. And from the look on her sister’s face, she wasn’t about to be punted off the top.
The girls were both very mature for their age, but they’d been brought up to be young adults from the beginning. And with Serah’s sickness and the divorce that almost happened with their parents, you had to grow up quickly. So, when her little sister sat down next to her with a congenial attitude, Claire smiled.

“I’m sorry about earlier, you startled me. Forgive me?”

Serah leaned into her sister, bumping shoulders.

“Of course, silly. You want to talk about it?”

Leaning her head against the wall, the elder sighed.

“I would, if I only knew where to begin.”

“This whole thing is just...strange.”

Serah laughed.

“Well, you’re the metaphysical guru, explain the ‘strange,’ to me.”

“Okay, smartee…”

“I feel this strange connection to this girl I saw for the first time in my life, on a televised TV show!”

Claire sighed.

“Not only that, but I dreamt of us both last night, only we were older.”

Turning her head, she looked at her baby sister.

“And I wore that goofy outfit that I wore at the summer photo shoot. You know, the one for the up-and-coming fall fashions. It was that soldier one that looks like a manga outfit that would be on some pubescent boys wall?!”

Serah laughed.

“Well, sounds like you don’t need to worry about what the boys will be thinking, you’re more wrapped up on what Fang would think.”

Groaning at the mention of Fang’s name, Lightning stared at the ceiling.

“It’s just so confusing.”

“No, it’s not.” Replied the younger.

“You already know the answer with what’s going on in here…” she said poking her sister in the head.

“… and in here.” Serah finished with a poke just above her sister’s heart.

Claire just stared at her sister.

“Well, it’s not like we’ll ever meet.”

“Never say never Claire.”
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Surprises abound during the Championship game.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay. I actually had this ready to go several days ago, but I wanted to try and proofread it before putting it out and life was making it difficult to get it done. This is a long chapter, and I hope I don't bore anyone to tears. It has been a long while since I played volleyball and there have been changes to the game. Please excuse any inaccuracies to the game it's self.

Quick note on for those that may never have played:

3-meter line is a ten foot line from the net back. It is also referred to as the attack zone. You have 6 players and there are several different formations you can use on the court. But imagine 3 front row and 3 back row players. You have a setter who "Sets" the ball up for your hitters/wing hitters etc. These people also block the ball when playing defense. They used to have what they call "Side out," that was when the team serving the ball, lost the serve. There was no point added the ball just changed hands. Now, the ball still changes, but that won the serve also gets the point. I could go on, but anyone interested can look it up on line.

Enjoy and thank you for your patience and willingness to read!

Fang didn’t mind playing the back row, but the front was where she always did the most damage when it came to scoring. Her specialty was blocking and hitting as the brunette proved to be a menace at the net. It had earned her the affectionate nickname Ragnarok, the world ender. With Fang working the front line, it would likely be the end of your team.

Vanille’s abilities was setting the ball; and her older sister had never seen such a gentle touch when her younger sister received the play. It was like some invisible barrier between Van’s fingertips and the ball. The redhead had never been called on a double hit, and Fang was certain never would.

But when it came to Irina Federova, this young woman was a combination of both siblings, with a sonic punch. If Fang was the world ender, she would be its ultimate destruction. Vanille lovingly referred to her as “The Decimator.” College scouts had been sniffing around this young woman for a while, waiting for the chance to entice her into attending their university. It was no wonder that Van had received a rebuff from her sister.

The bus trip to the stadium was full of laughter, singing, chanting and all-around excitement. Some of these girls had been playing for the same junior international club since they were fifteen. Tight bonds had formed outside of their volleyball season. It was no surprise though, as of them were from Brazil. Even in the international clubs, most of the players were from that country. There
were always exceptions, like in the case of the two sisters from Australia and the Irina who was from Russia. They had all formed close bonds as players, but Irina and Fang were best friends. It didn’t hurt that the two powerhouses had come to love the Brazilian people and culture.

Although Irina was older and had more experience on the court the two had developed a fast relationship. Both young women had been limited to texting and phone calls throughout their school season, but it hadn’t stopped the strong bond. Perhaps it was because they had things in common and that they were both from other countries and playing for a team from Brazil? In the end, it didn’t really matter because they had found a lasting friend out of each other.

Irina was a dark blonde beauty with steel grey eyes, a sharp accent and an even sharper wit. Being from Russia, their country possessed an extensive history of competitiveness. The Russian had once told Fang her country was proud and that was how they showed their prowess as soldiers and leaders. The two girls had laughed even though they both knew “The Decimator,” was very competitive herself.

Fang on the other hand was not competitive and that was why she and Irina got along or it could simply be that they accepted each other for whom they were. Either way, the two of them were sitting up near the front of the bus, while their coach went over formations with them. Vanille sat behind, observing the opening formation and substitute rotations. If she was lucky enough, their youngest player would get a little game time during the championship.

The team had watched enough video of the competition to know they were perfectly capable of bringing in the last-minute surprise. Whether it was a power server, hitter, or back line specialist capable of handling any return hits. Both teams had deserved their place in the championship game, and that meant anything could happen and would.

Filing out of the bus, it became apparent that the two Australians were the smaller of the team. Fang stood at only 5’9” and Vanille at 5’3.” It may seem like a disadvantage when you were going up against players that were 6’ and taller, but the two sisters were not to be underestimated because of their height.

In volleyball the Setter and the Opposite were the most valued positions. Vanille, as a setter placed the ball for the wing spikers or middle hitter beautifully every time. It didn’t matter if the Australian lacked the height for blocking. What she lacked in stature, she made up in serve and defense of that 3-meter attack zone. The redhead was like a mother bear protecting her cubs when it came thwarting the ball from touching their zone. In practice, and in game, few balls ever hit that floor. It was like the girl possessed eight arms, they were everywhere.

Then of course, there was Fang, she had been rotating with Irina for Opposite while playing Outside Hitter. The young Russian played as an Opposite, a Setter or Outside Hitter depending on where the coach needed her most. For the championship, he had placed Irina as their Setter. With Fang at the net, the 5’9” brunette could catch air the likes none had seen. Often times at heights that put some of the taller girls to shame. It was like Fang was carried on the wind as she worked her spiking magic on the opposing team.

Once inside, the girls changed and prepped for their pregame rally with the coach. It was a whirlwind of activity that easily swept you up in the growing excitement of pre-game jitters. But for Fang, she here to enjoy the company of friends and teammates. If they won, all the better, and if they didn’t, they will have ended on one hell of a season and good times.

While some girls dressed and went to be tapped by their physiotherapist, the rest were in various stages of pinning up their hair or braiding it. It was like a ritual every game, and not hard to miss if you were paying attention. Fang was currently participating in her own way as she let Irina braid
her hair. Ever since the young Russian woman found out her friend was part Native American, she had insisted on braiding her hair.

Throughout the two years they’d known each other, Irina had attempted many different types of braids, but the current one had grown on Fang. Her friend’s nimble fingers braided three small braids on the side of her head before combing them into one giant lattice behind her right ear. She wore the braids all the time now but indulged her friend’s whim when they were together.

“Why won’t you let me do more?” Irina asked in her distinct accent.

“I like it this way.” Fang replied.

“How are you supposed to catch the eye of some adorable boy or girl?”
Fang laughed.

“I’m uninterested in the mating rituals of homo sapiens at the moment.”

Her friend gave her an odd look bringing Fang to laughter once again. If the brunette were honest, she hadn’t been interested in either sex until earlier that day.

“Andressa has been watching all summer, haven’t you noticed?”

“She would have you singing her praises if you allowed her half the chance.”
The look on the befuddled Australian’s face caused her friend to burst out laughing.

“Wow, with someone so smart, you sure can be naive.” Irina teased.

Heat flared in Fang’s face, and a brief glance over at Andressa confirmed the Russian’s words. The team’s Middle Hitter was looking right at her, and the look was salacious.

Reaching around, Fang scratched the back of her neck and gave Andressa a raised eyebrow.
Intelligence didn’t always equate with being aware of everything around you, and she had been oblivious.

“Shall I re-introduce?” Her friend teased.

“No!” Fang countered.

The pre-game meeting with the coach had been filled with smiles and lingering looks from Andressa. The young woman was a 6’2” amazon with caramel skin, jet-black hair and the deepest brown eyes Fang had seen. Brazilian women were recognized for their beauty, and most of the girls on their team were attractive. It wasn’t that the Australian raised brunette didn’t fit right in, heaven knows she’d heard about her exotic looks. But Fang was extremely busy having fun with her friends rather than checking out the scenery so to speak.

Irina kept elbowing her and teasing her quietly while the coach spoke. She could just feel the heat of embarrassment roll of her friend, and it was too tempting to be quiet. The teasing might have been an issue but wasn’t for the fact that the girls understood how to leave things off the court. As soon as they stepped out into the crowded arena, it was all business.

Once out on the floor, the girls stretched and did their warm-up for the game. It would be the best three out of five games to 21 points, requiring a 2-point win and a 25-point cap. This championship could be a quick three sets or a grueling 5 set match.
Coach would start the line-up with his normal starters. His A-listers included Fang playing Opposite Hitter, Irina as Setter, Andressa as Middle Hitter. Gabriela as an Outside Hitter, Lecia as Libero and Fernanda as Outside Hitter/Defense Specialist. After each team had their warm-up, the Captain’s met for the coin toss on who would serve and who would receive.

Brazil won the toss and took the serve. As their coach huddled with the girls, Fang saw Vanille smile and give her a thumbs up. Ragnarok and The Decimator were about to take the court and the other team better beware! The world ender was predatory and good at sniffing out weaknesses in the other team. She was the hunter, or huntress that cleverly waited for her prey to show their weak spot. Add Irina’s sharp wit at finding things even the huntress did not, and you had opposing teams constantly on their toes. Pressure like that was bound to put cracks in your offensive and defensive strategies.

As Fang and the other girls took the court, she took a moment to absorb the electricity in the air. There was always that feeling, no matter where they played. The crackling spark only intensified when it was a Championship game in the home country of that team. In this case they were in São Paulo, Brazil, so the feeling was so strong that the fine hairs on her body stand at attention. Ragnarok’s body buzzed with the contagious energy that filled the stadium, and a quick glance at Vanille said her sister was experiencing the same thing.

But as Fang turned back to the court and took her position, the sounds and the excitement were drowned out by an intense focus. It was Game Time! Her attention went to Fernanda, who would be serving the opening serve. From here, the chaotic tempo of the game began.

Fernanda slammed an ace down the sideline, and Brazil scored the first point in the game. The crowd went wild and the girls came together for a quick congratulations. For the girls on the court, they never heard the roar, the cheers or the sound of the announcer; they were focused on one point at a time. Fernanda’s second serve was returned, and the marathon began. The objective was to serve, pass, set, spike, and block. This continued until someone scored or the ball came into possession of the other team.

Fang’s limbs were buzzing with motion. Irina set the ball and she and Gabriela moved to the net. The young Brazilian faked a hit as Fang spiked the ball with deadly accuracy to an exposed position on the opposite side for a kill. The other side’s Libero dived to try to connect with the volleyball and keep it in play. The ball however, hit her forearms with such force it flew back toward team Brazil, catching the net and hitting the floor.

That was team USA’s experience with the first two plays of set one with Brazil.

“Welcome to Brazil, ladies.” Vanille thought as she inwardly giggled.

The first set ended 17-25 team Brazil. Now that team USA had an idea on what to expect from Brazil, they found their feet and began going on the offense. By the end of the second set, Fang had a light sheen of perspiration on her forehead. When the young brunette put her mind into the game, it was everything she had. The young starter often worked herself up into a nice glistening sheen. Her wild mane looked almost feral by the end of the set, intensifying her Ragnarok persona.

The second set ended 25-27 team Brazil. Team USA proving to the rest of the world that they had earned their right to be in the championship game. By the start of the third set, the first few plays battled out between both clubs. For several minutes, the blocks, spikes and returns increasing in intensity and accuracy. The girls were getting a workout. The score was 21-21, but you wouldn’t see any fear in the girls’ eyes. Gabriella, Fang and Andressa were working the net like a pack of velociraptors, with Idina as the pack lead.
The team knew how to read each other from years of playing together and they quickly incorporated new members. In this instance, the girls had had a successful block at the net, and the ball had returned to play on team USA’s side. Together in a fluid motion as if they were one, Gabriela and Fang jumped at the center line to block another attack.

It all happened so fast, a mere blink of an eye and chaos erupted. The first official or referee blew their whistle. Gabriela fell to the floor in pain clutching her ankle. From the bench, Vanille and the team gasped along with the crowd. The coach and team physician were off the bench and out on the floor as Fang tried to comfort a distressed Gabriela.

The poor girl was in tears as the physician looked at her injury. They had barely taken off her shoe when her ankle had swollen to twice its size. Injuries happened in sports all the time, but none of the girls from the Brazilian team had expected it to happen today of all days.

As the volleyball manager and physician led Gabriela off the court, the crowd cheered her on. As the injured team member left the court to have the ankle properly examined, the remaining members huddled with their coach. Ana would replace Gabriela, but the team had been struck with an unexpected loss and it showed when the US took the set 21-25. Had they not lost Gabriela the team would likely be celebrating as Champions, but they lost their bearings long enough for the US to capitalize on their distraction.

It wasn’t easy losing a top player, but the team needed to recover and gain their momentum back. If they were going to win, the coach would have to make the best decision for the overall good of their club. He needed their power players and either way he did this, there was always a risk involved.

“Fang, I need you at Outside Hitter so that we can move Irina to Opposite. Vanille, you’re up Leia can’t play with her broken fingers.”

The redhead caught herself before she gave her sister a look of terrified excitement. Vanille had wanted to play, but she wouldn’t have been disappointed if it hadn’t happened. The young Australian gave a side glance to Leia, who suspiciously gave her a smile full of hidden knowledge. The other setter had played before, but she’d been training other position during practice and had done remarkably well as a Wing Spiker. Vanille had just assumed she would remain playing as a Setter.

As the coach turned in the change in line-up, the two team moved over to the opposite side of the court. Each player took their positions out on the floor and Vanille felt her stomach twist with butterflies. Fang gave her a quick reassuring hug.

“You got this Van. No one’s got as soft a touch with the ball as you do. ” Her sister whispered.

In the background, the announcer could be heard while the two sisters shared a moment.

“It appears as if this shake up with the loss of Gabriela Santos has rearranged Brazil’s front-line defense and offensive hitters. Coming in for the first time is the youngest and the shortest player of the team. Number 23 Vanille Dia. We’ve heard remarkable things about Ms. Dia, but she had yet to play in any match so far this year. Could this be a secret offensive weapon for the Jr. Brazilian Club? We’ll see how this young lady handles her first time.”

Fang rolled her eyes, hoping that Vanille hadn’t just heard the dribble coming out of the announcer’s mouth. A quick glance told her that she hadn’t, the redhead was focused on whatever it was that Irina was saying to her. With a sharp look from both girls, Fang was alerted to their little “secret code.” Oh, this last set would be a ride by the seat of your bun hugging shorts and Fang
shot her conspirator’s a lopsided smirk.

The edition of Vanille had put a momentary hush to the roar and replaced it with murmurs. She’d show them and when she did the butterflies would take flight and find a new place to nest.

It was the US’s serve, and out from the gate they aimed for Vanille, expecting her to be the weak link in the chain. The first serve was aimed right at the back line, just behind the redhead. Fernanda passed the volleyball toward her and Van set the ball up for Irina to spike. The crowd waited with bated breath as Irina slammed home a kill. The crowd went wild and their Russian teammate gave the redhead a high five followed by a wink.

“Just amazing!”

“The ball never looked like it touched Dia’s fingers at all! If this is what to expect throughout this set, then we’re in for a wild ride. Welcome to the Jr. league Vanille Dia” The announcer crowed.

It soon became apparent that the young Dia had the Midas touch with the ball. Whenever Vanille had contact, she either saved the ball from touching the ground, or set the most beautiful passes for the spikers at the net. Despite her 5’3” stature, Vanille came across as 10’ tall. On top of it all, she was having the time of her life aside from being slightly embarrassed by her older sister’s proud grin.

Ten minutes into the game and the teams were sitting at 15-14 in Brazil’s favor. There had been several long volleys during this set that seemed to go from one side to the other without any points being scored. But it didn’t matter to the crowd, they were eating up the intense play. Irina was leading the charge on the floor, followed closely by Fang, Vanille and the rest of the team.

Confidence was soaring on the Brazilian side when the coach called a time out. After a quick huddle they returned to the floor. While they waited for the US team Irina pulled them all together and briefly explained her plan. With a determined look of exchanges between each one of them, the girls returned to their positions.

Fernanda delivered aces on the first two serves, bringing the score to 17-14. A save from Lecia sent the ball spiraling high into the air, but Vanille was there and set the volleyball. Capitalizing off of the set, Fang scored a kill with an overhead spike. Brazil was now leading 18-14. The crowd stood on their feet and roared, the energy in the stadium jumped to new levels.

Vanille back set to Andressa who scored on a kill. Irina blocked a spike from the US that they were unable to return bumping the Brazilian team to 20-14. The US team called for a time-out and the girls raced to the side to rally with the coach. At this point in the day, the girls were so in tuned to each other, everything seemed like white noise. After the break, the game resumed and it had done nothing to stop the momentum of Team Brazil.

After Fernanda served the ball, several long volleys occurred before the US got a lucky spike in that touched the back corner of the boundary lines. Losing the serve had not diminished the girl’s confidence. They were now driven harder to get the ball back and did after an amazing play from Ana.

Now that the home team had the ball, the girls agreed, no mercy. Fang known for her power hitting stunned the US with a scoring point as she sent a dink over the net. The crowd was on its feet chanting for their home team. The roar was so loud that it was near impossible for them to hear the calls. Despite the noise, somewhere in the back of these focused player’s minds, they were spurred on by the chanting. In rapid succession, the last four points were scored by the front row hitters, ending with Irina sending a devastating kill on the left inside corner of the attack line.
Rushing off the benches, the rest of the team joined the starters on the court. Vanille and the others were suddenly scooped up by an over exuberant crowd that grew from the Junior Brazilian team to an onslaught of spectators. The entire starting team was riding a wave of people and all they could do is laugh. Everyone that is except for the brunette’s sister, the redhead had an almost hysterical look of fear on her face even though she was laughing.

After several attempts, Fang was able to get her sibling away from the crowd and their feet back on the ground. But the redhead wasn't the only one about to get the shock of her life, as her older sibling turned to face her teammates, Andressa grasped the unsuspecting player by her shirt and pulled her in for a kiss. And it wasn't some short peck on the lips, the Brazilian was going for that full-on contact.

Ending the kiss, Andressa gave Fang a sultry look with a wink before melding into the rest of the group. At this point, Vanille was laughing so hard at her older sibling that she failed to realize that the poor thing was in shock. Coming to the rescue, Irina slipped an arm around her friend and helped her younger sister steer her to the locker room and far from the Temptress.

"Oh, how the mighty Ragnarok has fallen." Irina laughed

"Just be careful Fang, I don't think she's done with you yet."

As friend's words registered in her mind, Fang shook her head. "Least she could do is give a girl a warning."

They had just won the Championship, and Fang was more concerned about avoiding the siren that was on the prowl. Smacking her out of a daze, Van nudged the elder girl to join in on the frivolity. The brunette made a mental note in the back of her mind to keep an eye out for the Brazilian minx and spent the rest of the night celebrating with her team.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Claire has another dream about this mystery version of an older Fang. Is she losing her mind, or simply acting like a normal 16 year old girl? Can the young girl uncover the truth behind the dreams, and where will this road lead her?

Chapter Notes

There will be a few more posts with Claire and Fang at 16, and then I will start moving them forward in time. We will get to see Fang and Lightning meet for the first time when they're a little older, but how long into the future and how they meet will be a mystery. To what degree Etro is involved will hopefully become a little more clear in future chapters, as well as her conversation with "Claire/Lumina" that started this whole thing.

On a side note, November is NaNoWriMo so updates during the month maybe slow. I will likely still be writing as it will be my "break" from the monthly writing challenge. Anyone out there that also likes to write, there are a lot of people who have become published from writing during this time. It's a great way to meet other writers in your area and a great challenge to get 50,000 words out in a month. You can google the NaNoWriMo and it will take you to their official site if you want to check it out.

Thanks as always for reading and feedback.

Saturday came and went, and Claire found the ability to recapture her previous night’s dream impossible. Try as she might, it eluded her. Frustration finally gave out to weariness and then sleep. But as the oldest Farron daughter slept, different images came to her.

“And you call me stubborn?” Fang interjected.

The brunette angrily poked Lightning/Claire in the shoulder. The Grand Pulse native was not one to trifle with when she was angry, and the soldier could see why Anima had chosen her to be Ragnarok. It was not only intimidating to most, but rather quite scary. And in any other time and place, the most beautiful and attractive display that Lightning had seen.

It really irritated her to be at war with her emotions, on the outside she was glaring at Fang with her infamous “Farron Stare,” but on the inside she wanted to kiss this woman so damn bad it hurt. Why couldn’t she just listen to her heart for once, because the brunette made so much sense.

“Why can’t you just let that damn stoicism of yours take a day off? What the hell is wrong with you, can’t you show even a little emotion?”

“The Argument,” it might as well have its own title. It was the same thing they quarreled about repeatedly. Come to think about it, it was the only thing Lightning noticed that they argued about.
They had different opinions and both women expressed them rather openly with one another, but it never led to an outright argument. The more that the soldier thought about it, the more she realized that despite the situation they were in, she and Fang had a lot in common and a growing respect for the other.

It just so happened that, this particular topic always caused a dispute between the two. And the stoicism was so ingrained within her, Lightning wasn’t sure if Claire would ever fully show herself again. Not that that part of her wasn’t trying as her eyes dropped to Fang’s lips. Unconsciously, she bit her own before her outward “stare” traveled back up to the brunette.

From the shocked look on Fang’s features, she knew she’d been caught.

“Shit.” The soldier muttered to herself.

What the hell, she might as well go for it. Grabbing hold of the Huntresses sari, she kissed her. And if the fire wasn’t blazing now, it was surly an inferno by the time the kiss ended. The soldier closed her eye’s and leaned her forehead against the brunettes.

“I’m sorry. I told you Fang, I’m not good with the emotional stuff. I may never be.”

The Huntresses anger had dissipated and aside from being turned on, she felt empathy for Lightning.

“Look Light, I get it. I was so focused on my people and Van that I didn’t let anyone else in. We lost our parents to the war, grew up in the orphanage and all we had was each other. I wasn’t going to let Anima take it all away from me. So, I shut myself off from everyone in my pain and rage. I missed that I’d scared Vanille with my actions. I was so damned determined that I could fix it all and I nearly lost everything doing it.”

Fang cupped Lightning’s face with her hands.

“I know that the future is uncertain, and we have to concentrate on our focus, but there’s nothing that says we can’t find a little happiness along the way.”

Lightning felt the tears touch her face. She never cried, at least not for a long time. What was so magnetic about this woman that she stirred such raw emotion with in. She wanted to wipe her eyes, glare at Fang, hit her, something to stop this feeling that was growing inside.

“Etro Lightning. I love you.” Fang replied as she softly kissed her.

Claire woke with a jerk, and it wasn’t Serah that had woken her this time. It was the wetness on her face and the tingle on her lips. It was so real that the girl’s heart ached. Was she losing her mind? Throwing her covers to the side, Claire ran to her desk and pulled out a pen and paper. She needed to record these dreams to make sense of them. The images from the night were quick-notations of feelings and anything she could remember, including the names unfamiliar to her.

“Etro, is that a curse word?”

If Claire was to dissect this dream with an impartial view, it would be fascinating on all kinds of levels. But the young woman didn’t have time to ponder, she needed to focus on getting some answers. Truth be known, she had this growing need to meet the other girl, but how do you have that happen without sounding like some lunatic?

For now, Claire needed to get her mind off the dream and focus on reality. After breakfast, the oldest Farron daughter returned to her room. Something sticking out of the corner of the desk caught her eye and Claire opened the drawer to find the Fencing pamphlet she’d picked up the
other day.  
“I need something to help me focus, maybe…”

Rushing down the stairs, Claire presented the booklet to her parents. They were sitting in the living room conducting their normal Sunday ritual, canasta. The urge to turn around and run back up the stairs was great, it wasn’t one of girl’s favorite games to play.

“Mom, do you remember on Friday that you said you and dad would support me taking up an extra hobby?”

“Can I do this?”

Her mom and dad stopped their game as Mrs. Farron took the offered brochure from her daughter. After looking it over, she handed it to her husband.

“Fencing Claire?”

“What on earth made you chose this?”

Claire bit her bottom lip.

“It caught my eye, and it seems like something I might enjoy. I can’t say exactly why, just a feeling.”

Her parents exchanged a knowing glance before Mr. Farron spoke up.

“I don’t see why not but let your mother and I discuss it and we’ll let you know over dinner. Fair enough?”

“Thank you, that’s all I really wanted is for you do give it some thought.”

She kissed them both on the cheek and headed back to her room. It wasn’t until Claire had made it half way up the stairs that she paused and wondered why she’d just asked them to support her learning to fence. A part of the girl’s brain wondered if she should be concerned for her erratic behavior as of late.

Claire didn’t feel like she was going mad, but can someone tell if they are? Oh, she had so many questions for the professors at school. Somehow, she wasn’t quite convinced that saying that it was a theoretical friend who had asked or that she was just curious would fly with the professionals. Shrugging, the mystified young lady bounded the rest of the way up the stairs and into her room.

It was only shortly afternoon when Serah came knocking. The two sisters usually gravitated toward each other when at home together. They usually would play a game together or sit and enjoy the silence while they each did their own thing. While Claire read, her younger sister was busy cutting something out of a magazine. Before long, the older sister could feel her younger staring holes in her head. Rolling her eyes, the eldest kept reading.

“What is it Serah? I can feel your eyes on me, and it’s kind of creepy.”

Giggling, Serah popped the object she’d been cutting out of the book in front of her sister’s face. The younger sibling got the exact response she was hoping for. Claire nearly dropped the book she was reading and fumbled to keep it from dropping.

“Serah!”

“I knew you’d like it.”
“I’m sure there will be more of this when the new magazine comes out.” Serah sang.

The object in question was set on the bed, and it was a picture of a certain young Fang in her volleyball outfit that seemed to stare right at Claire. She was transfixed. It was just like in the dream, she couldn’t take her eyes off the brunette. There was a yearning to know this girl like her doppelganger knew the older version of her.

“Serah, do you believe in love at first sight?”

The younger sibling stopped for a moment. She knew Claire had been instantly smitten by Fang and her older sister wasn’t the type to be taken by fanciful flights of fantasy. In fact, the elder Farron was very level headed. So, this question her sister posed, Serah she took it seriously.

“I don’t see why not. There must be something there that’s got you interested Claire.”

“You don’t think I’m being an idiot, do you?”

Serah gazed at the photo.

“No, honestly, she’s gorgeous. And everything I’ve read about her, if it’s even partly true, it makes her even more beautiful. She’d be a great friend Claire, and probably an even better girlfriend.”

To say the older Farron sister was touched was an immense understatement. Serah could have easily teased her about this. But that was the great thing about her younger sister, she was pretty cool when she wasn’t being a pain in the rear.

“You know Serah, if you weren’t my sister, I’d marry you.” Claire remarked without looking at her sister.

The smirk on her face grew as the silence hung in the air. The elder sister couldn’t stand the silence anymore and looked over at her baby sister.

“Ugh, You’re twisted Claire.” Serah responded with a glare.

“But I’d marry you too.” The younger responded with laughter.

“Except, there would be no bossing me around and telling me what to do. I would be your equal.” She replied.

Claire scoffed.

“Whatever, you’d still be younger and less knowledgeable.”

Serah smacked her older sister hard in the arm.

“Claire Farron, you know that’s not true! Age has nothing to do with wisdom or intelligence.”

To say that life didn’t have interesting twists in the Farron household was an understatement. They weren’t perfect by a long shot, but the two sisters were damn near each other’s best friend and that went a long way in their relationship. They teased each other as siblings, they could put aside their own feelings to hear each other out, but most of all, they were always there for each other. You couldn’t ask for more in Claire’s opinion.

By the time supper rolled around, the eldest had completely forgotten about her conversation with her parents. It wasn’t until her mother spoke, that Claire remembered and suddenly sat in nervous anticipation on what their answer would be.
“Your father and I have discussed the idea of you taking fencing classes, Claire. And if that’s what you really want to do, we’ll support you.”

Their elder daughter was beaming with joy for some unknown reason, but the idea of being able to learn how to handle a weapon like that just made her feel giddy. Of the three types of weapons in fencing, Claire was hopping to learn to use a saber as compared to the epee or foil. She couldn’t wait!

The day had ended great, despite wondering if she’d lost her mind over this girl named Fang. And if Claire were to be honest, she’d been hoping that the dreams would continue. The eldest Farron wanted to know more about this older version of the girl she seemed connected to.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Oerba Yun Fang is about to get a visit from someone unexpected and 16 year old Fang is being drawn down a rabbit hole. Will younger Fang pursue this dream or will she dismiss it logically? How big a part will faith play in the success of an older Fang's desire?

Fang hit the bed exhausted. Life had been a whirlwind of activity after winning the championship. But it wasn’t as if the excitement died down, there had been interviews, pictures, press and a whole slew of activity that both the gals from Australia were experiencing for the first time. Vanille looked beyond frazzled by the time she slipped her championship t-shirt over her head. Her elder sister had to practically carry her out to the bus. Anyway, just how many times did a person have to explain that YES, they were technically cousins, but their relationship was far beyond that?

Last year, the team had done well, but they were not strong contenders for a championship game. There had been too many solid teams that they had competed against. It just worked out that most of the teams had veteran players and the Brazilian team just wasn’t strong enough that year to compete with the such talent. So, what experience Fang had with this whole comical show of cameras, mics, and interviews had been severely lacking. In much the same way that Vanille was physically dragging, she was mentally.

Honestly, most of the girls looked like they were ready to drop. Appearance wise, they were all still hyped on adrenaline, but the crash was coming. Fang could feel it in her bones. Even Irina looked over the whole ordeal and ready to get some rest. Despite how they felt though, the players had all been chatting among themselves in small groups on the bus. The redhead was practically passed out against her older sister’s shoulder while the brunette softly talking with her best friend.

“This has been a crazy day, I think I could sleep in the entire day tomorrow.” Irina replied.

“Yeah, I won’t argue if coach let’s us all have a later wake-up call.”

Fang lowered her voice.

“Thanks for having my back with Andressa. Don’t get me wrong, she’s attractive...”

“But your just not into her?” Her friend finished.

“Yeah, thanks.”

The two friends chuckled among themselves and spent the rest of the ride in quiet conversation. Except for their head coach giving them some preliminary instructions before departing the bus, a cheer went up for the announcement of a later wake-up call. Fang and Irina smiled and gave each other a high five before waking her sibling up.

Not even bothering to change for bed, the redhead face planted into her pillow and was softly snoring before Fang even taken her shoes off. Wanting to follow her sister’s lead, the brunette fell backwards on the bed, flinging her arms out to the side. If it hadn’t been for the sound and odd
texture her hand fell against, she likely would have been fast asleep.

With effort, Fang turned her head to see what her hand had hit. Sitting on the edge of the bed was the magazine that the two had been looking through before the game. The first instinct was to shove it off the bed and roll over to go to sleep, but the odd glaring red on the book drew her attention. Wearily, the elder sister picked it up to investigate the odd color. Circled in red were a pair of whose, likely the ones her little sister was going on about earlier.

“Christmas is coming up! Hint! Hint!” Was scribbled on the page.

It was looking at that magazine that made Fang realize that she hadn’t thought about the girl with the rose-colored hair since the game. Flipping the page, she stared at “Soldier Girl,” for a second time, and just as before, the brunette was captivated. In that moment, Fang couldn’t deny that if it had been that girl that had kissed her, she would have never pulled back. Odd. With a yawn, the Mighty Ragnarok closed the pages, threw her clothes on the floor and joined her sister in slumber.

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Fang paced back and forth, practically frothing at the mouth. How could everything they had done ended up costing so much? Was this punishment, some torture for past crimes? Heaven knew she had done enough in the early days to deserve no less, but Lightning? Growling in frustration, she slashed her lance at nothing.

“ETRO! You’re not dead yet. I want answers!”

“Not everything is for you to know Oerba Yun Fang.”

The Huntress turned with lance at the ready to the unexpected voice. To her great surprise it wasn’t some mechanical looking being like they had faced with the Fal’Cie. In fact, it appeared to be a being of flesh and blood she could easily run through with her lance. But looks were deceiving and Fang felt in her bones that this being was anything but flesh and blood, and she would not be easily conquered by the likes of the brunette.

“Etro?”

The Huntress felt this overwhelming desire to fall to her knees and bow her head. The anger in her fought that urge and she wasn’t sure if she should be ashamed for wanting to fight it. Etro was beautiful, flowing dark hair, pitch black eyes and bare as if waiting to feed and nourish her children. She was a being that demanded respect, not to be leered upon with lust. Every fiber in Fang realized, she was the embodiment of a mother and she knew she would fight anyone who disrespected her.

Begin uncovered was not something new to Fang, many of the tribes including the Yun were bare chested. It was more of a Cocoonian thing to cover up, as if to be ashamed of the body or let lustful thoughts go through your mind. It was only in Fang’s lifetime that the women began to cover themselves, and it had mostly been toward what had taken place during the War of Transgression.

The men of Cocoon had done horrible, unspeakable things to their women and rumors had abound that even the Cocoon women acted as men. Begin a mother was a sacred thing and before her stood the embodiment of a mother. It had been said that men were born of the spilled blood of Etro. Fang fell to her knees, her rage boiling and her heart bursting.

“Children want their free will and when they choose things that bring them trouble, they want to blame god.” The goddess sighed.
“Arrogance allows man to feel as if they know better than god, their perceived intelligence falsely gives them the impression that they know god. But in the end, you will always be children and we will always have superior vision.”

“How can you say that?” Fang spat vehemently.

“The world is a mess, your Fal’Cie have branded and killed us, all for the sake of bringing god back!”

“What makes you think that you are more special than the blade of grass you trample upon, because you can talk, reason, or walk on two feet from here to there?

The grass lives and dies just as you? It is arrogance that make you feel more important than the rest of creation.”

The Huntress had no rebuttal, because what Etro had said, was the exact ideal that her people held. As a Huntress, the animals that gave food for their families to live were more important, because without them, they would starve. How had allowed such wisdom to be skewed?

Fang felt a soft loving hand lift her chin.

“A mother knows her children Fang, search your heart and tell me what it is that really bothers you.”

It was a strange request, didn’t Etro already know? Thinking on the goddess’s words, the brunette realized the truth. It was her, she needed to see it. Fang needed to see past her own bull, all the excuses and past the anger. It was fear. The Huntress was afraid of losing her Soldier. As realization dawned, Etro gave her a tender look. Tears came unbidden.

“I don’t want to lose her. I feel so helpless in here. There’s no one there to have her back.”

“She made a choice, just as you did.”

“I know that.” Fang ground out.

“I’ve never asked for anything for myself and…”

The Huntresses gazed dropped and she whispered.

“I want to have a chance to be with her.”

A thumb caressed the side of Fang’s face, encouraging the brunette to look up and into the eyes of Etro.

“You’ve built your foundation on yourself, and your trust and faith have often faltered. It is time for you to put your faith into someone else for a change Oerba Yun Fang. Trust me and have patience with her for those desires to come true.”

It was difficult to reconcile so many years of anger and distrust toward any of the divine. Looking into Etro’s eyes however, Fang could feel that it would be so easy to have faith. The goddess kissed the Huntresses forehead before letting go of her face.

“You know, Lady Luck has always been fond of you.” Etro replied with a knowing smile.

She was gone the next instant, and the brunette had barely time to even form a thought, let alone comment on the incident. Fang suddenly felt sheepish. All this time, cursing and bad mouthing the
As the Huntress began to stand, she was struck by several images of herself and Lightning. Images flipped past her inward vision so quickly, that Fang was barely able to decipher the meaning behind any of them. Regardless, the brunette oddly felt at ease. The only thing she needed to do now, was wait.

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Sixteen-year-old Fang woke in her bed. Visions were not uncommon among the medicine people of the Native Americans. But young woman could never recall having them and she wondered if this was just a fanciful dream from looking at the photo of the model with rose-colored hair. She had enough intelligence to know that dreams were merely fabrications of events that happened in your life and that they could happen at any time. Something you did today may come out in a dream 10 years from now, or immediately that night.

As much as she tried to logically dismiss it, a nagging feeling in the back of her mind said to have “faith.” The elder girl nearly chuckled at herself. Fang would wait and see how things played out, if more dreams came and the feeling didn’t go away, then she would know something was up. In the meantime, more sleep sounded ideal as the cover’s pillowed over the younger Fang’s head.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Claire and Fang are in for a few surprises.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for bearing with me through Nanowrimo. I finished on the 22nd, but my brain needed a few days to recoup and work back toward Fang and Lightning. As a thank you, here is a Thanksgiving Day treat.

A few notes:

This post jumps between both Fang and Lightning. Plus, I have no experience with Fencing, so please excuse the vagueness of posts with Claire at the moment. There are some great videos on youtube about the sport, however, if anyone is interested. I did take a few things from the video, especially about how Sabre's are the quicker of the two disciplines. Ironic, as Lightning is known for her speed and I just picked the Sabre because it looked more like something her character would use.

Anyway, Claire's conversation with Etro is coming up and we'll wrap up the younger versions of the gals. The road won't easy for Lightning or Fang, because as everyone knows life gets in the way. So, don't expect that they'll be together forever right of the bat.

Have a Happy and Safe Holiday everyone!

Claire was already weeks into school, before her first fencing class was scheduled to begin. The young lady had spent the time focusing on school and trying to talk that lug head Snow into helping her steer her sister away from morons. Serah had this obsession with the brain-dead jocks and her older sister was trying to encourage her toward someone who would amount to something, someone like Snow.

“Come on Snow, at least come over to the house a little more so that Serah can see there is a variety of males out there.”

“I am not going to help you dissuade your sister from poor choices. Shouldn’t you be talking to your mother about this, or better yet, Serah?”

Claire sighed, what was the point? Her sister would do exactly as she wanted, whether it was good for her or not.

“Besides Claire, it is her choice. You can’t make them for her, that’s…well manipulative and controlling.”
“You’re right, I need to let nature take its course.”

Snow patted his friend on the shoulder for comfort. Sometimes Claire could show a scary side of herself that made the bigger man question her sanity. Serah’s sister can be so open to perceptions of life, but occasionally when it had something to do with her sister, the older sibling had a darker scarier side. The blonde headed giant was almost afraid of this impulsive side of his friend.

“So, today’s the first day for your fencing class, how are you feeling?”

“I’ll let you know when its over. Have you heard anything about the instructor?”

Snow shook his head.

“I haven’t heard a thing, other than the fact he’s new and he’s supposed to be a very good teacher.” Claire bid Snow goodbye as they departed for different class rooms. She didn’t say as much, but the older Farron sister was excited about going to Fencing class. There wasn’t a reason that the young teen could put a finger on, but she was more excited about learning to wield a sabre more than she had been about anything else.

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Claire ran to the girl’s locker room to change. Her first day of Fencing class and she was already running late. Switching over to the required clothing, she quickly tied her hair back and grabbed her gear and headed for the training room. She could have screamed, hearing the voice of the instructor already talking. This was not a good way to start of her first day. The embarrassed teen slowly opened the door as all eyes looked at her.

“Well, if it isn’t Soldier Girl.”

“Excuse me?”

“That’s you on the page of this magazine, right?”

How many times was Claire going to hear this? And why, this one instance did it not seem so bad? Claire looked at her teacher and felt goose bumps rise on her arms. Okay, this was new and creepy. He seemed so familiar to her.

“Have a seat Ms. Farron. I’ll reintroduce myself, since you missed that part.”

“Names Sazh Katzroy, I’ll be teaching you how to Fence.”

Looking at the man, he just didn’t seem to be the type to teach a class like this, but what did she know? Doing as instructed, Claire took an empty spot next to the others in the room. Time seemed to speed by as the young teen listened in rapt attention. Today was the first day and although they did not actually get out and begin learning with the sabre, Mr. Katzroy laid down the fundamentals of each discipline, the rules and history of the sport.

By the time the lecture was over, Claire’s head was buzzing with information and excitement to start training. Now the oldest Farron daughter had a focus that would make her practice hard outside of normal course work. The young teen couldn’t wait to talk to Serah. It was something new outside her sister’s volleyball obsession and a certain brunette the older Farron had discovered
“Fang, hurry up or you’ll miss your plane!”

“Don’t get your brain in a twist Van! I’m coming!”

Fang ran down the stairs with her duffel bag stuffed full of clothes and other essentials. The last bit of her summer was going to be spent in the states with her dad’s family on the reservation. It may not seem like an exciting place to be, especially with the stigma of her father’s people concerning what had happened to them on the reservation. Drugs, alcohol, prostitution, there were a lot of issues that still rubbed her wrong.

She maybe a half-breed, but Fang still considered her Native heritage as part of who she is and she embraced it as much as she did her mother’s culture. Living in Australia had given the young woman a view of the United States looking from the outside and she had to admit, she didn’t like what she saw. It would be nice if things were simple as they were hundreds of years before the European’s came over and destroyed everything.

But Fang was also a realist, and the cycle of life was death and rebirth. Everything died, and in that, so did cultures and tribes of people. It would be nice to think that such things didn’t happen, but they did and they do, so the young teen moved on and did the best she could as a human being.

Depositing her bag in the car, she and Vanille talked all the way to the airport. Her younger sister wouldn’t be going, so they spent as much time as possible before Fang’s flight left. It was only for two weeks, a measurement of time that would surely go by too fast. But the girls talked as if they wouldn’t see each other for a much larger span of time.

“Did you write it?” Vanille asked in hushed tones.

“Yes, but I don’t have an address to mail it too, and besides, it’s too creepy Vanille. What am I supposed to say to someone that I’ve never met, and it not sound like I’m some stalker? Hello, my names Fang, I saw your photo in a magazine and it just caught my attention. Would you ever consider getting to know me? By the way, I’m female, you don’t have issues with that do you?”

Fang gave her sister a dubious look.

“Stalker!” “I’d have the AFP at the door and would have to try and explain to your parents why. I think not.”

Vanille gave an exasperated sigh.

“Really Fang, people have pen pals, what the harm?”

“Because she feels to me like more than just a pen pal, get it? As if that doesn’t increase the creepy factor.”

The truth was, Vanille was the one that suggested writing the model and at the time Fang decided to indulge her sister. But the more she wrote, the more the topic of familiarity snuck into the writing. Even after several drafts, and wasted paper, it still seemed too weird. The urge to meet this
girl though, had only increased and the dreams hadn’t helped the matter.

The entire clan stood at the check point, giving Fang hugs and kisses and bidding her farewell. The flight to the States would take a bit of time, so when the older teen bid her family farewell, she boarded the plane and made herself comfortable. Maybe her uncles or grandfather could help her out in this matter? It’s not that the brunette didn’t believe that such things could happen, quite the contrary. The question on her mind was, could love be that powerful that you would find each other in the next incarnation?

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The first week of practice had Claire learning the basics of En Garde, Advancing and Retreating and the Lunge. Sabre fighting as the young teen learned, was the fastest of the three disciplines, giving the combatants the ability to score while slashing or cutting. It quickly became apparent that Claire was well suited for this style with her incredible reflexes.

“I’ve never seen anyone with natural instincts, like yours, Ms. Farron.”

“Thank you, Mr. Katzroy.”

Sazh scratched the back of his head. He’d been playing and teaching this sport for a while now, and the older man was impressed.

“I don’t say that to give you a big head. Fencing is a fast contact sport as it is, but you’re like faster than lightning. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anyone that quick.”

It had been a casual statement at the end of practice between mentor and student, but it was something that soon came to stick with Claire during the year. Claire “Lightning” Farron, the fastest sabre fencer in her high school collegiate team. The young teen wasn’t a very prideful individual, but she had to admit it did make her feel just a little bit taller. Fencing was the first physical activity the young Farron had really come to enjoy.

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“Come on now, at least take the blindfold off!” Fang pleaded.

The buzzing of the machine hummed in the brunette’s ear, while her cousin sat beside her. The feeling was more annoying than hurtful. But Fang was feeling a bit anxious about letting her cousin talk her into the tattoo to begin with.

“Relax cousin, you’re going to like it.”

“I swear, if you’ve tattooed breasts or a penis on my arm…”

“Have some faith Fang, the mighty Ragnarok needs to commemorate her win!”

“Kimi…” The brunette whined.
“It’s almost done.”

Fang groaned, what on earth possessed her to allow her cousin to talk her into getting a tattoo? Her cousins could be a wild bunch and Kimi was the pack leader for the girls. They’d grown up together, spending a lot of time together when her parents were still alive. People often changed as they grew, and the elder of her cousins was no different. Although, the brunette would argue that her crazy cousin had only become more rebellious and wilder.

“Ready, Fang?”

“No!”

Despite the pleading, she was afraid to see what Kimi had told the tattoo artist. The brunette’s chair swiveled, and she could only guess it was to face the mirror. Slowly, deliberately so, Kimi removed the blind fold. After blinking to adjust to the light, the Aussie turned toward the mirror and nearly fell out of her seat.

“Where did you get this design?”

“Pretty tribal, isn’t it?”

“Seriously, Kimi, where did you get this idea.”

Her cousin just shrugged and pointed at the tattoo artist.

“I just told him about your championship game and what they called you, and he came up with this.”

Fang’s dream flashed before her eyes. It was the exact same black gapping maw in her dreams, this couldn’t be a coincidence. Kimi, who had been so proud of the whole thing saw the pale complexion on her cousin.

“I didn’t think it was that bad. Come on Fang, you have to admit, it’s cool.”

Fang’s eyes found her cousins in the mirror as she stared at the ink.

“No, I…I just saw this tattoo in a dream, on my arm.”

Her cousin raised an eyebrow, she wasn’t into all the mystical stuff. She considered herself more of a modern type of Native and was proud of it. The complexities of that way of thinking as opposed to the elders was another topic all together. But Fang couldn’t believe her eyes, this was no coincidence and the fine hairs all over her body stood up at once.

“Really, that…is weird. So, you like it then, right?”

Fang turned to look at her cousin and then down at the freshly inked arm. Was she supposed to have this in two lives? Slowly she nodded before she found her voice.

“Yeah, I do actually. It’s just odd.”

“Consider it a right of passage! Ragnarok! The beast the…hunter has devoured its prey. Of course, I guess Huntress, that would be more gender appropriate?”

Fang tried to keep from turning any paler, or any more obvious that this was just some plain out right weird shit. Suddenly, the brunette was ready to be home and starting school. It was time to have that talk with her grandfather.
Vanille snuck into Fang’s room and rummaged through her draws. Her sister was such a neat freak but thank god not to the extent of OCD. Not that she was a slob, but come on, her creases had creases and her folds had folds. Good grief! She was searching for something and knowing her sister she likely had the finalized version of it sitting somewhere.

“Ah ha!” The red head cried out.

“Vanille, did you say something.” Her mother called from the kitchen.

“No! Sorry.”

Fang’s binder, she kept everything of value in that, from her birth certificate, pictures of her parents and now this. She knew her sister was trying to down play the whole infatuation with the model. Sitting down at her older sister’s desk, Vanille wrote in the address she’d obtained from her search, placed it in the envelope and placed the postage. All she needed to do now was go down and place the letter for delivery within the mailbox.

“Fang will thank me later or strangle me. Either way, if we don’t go to prison, then she’ll get over being angry.”

Strangely enough, Vanille felt giddy and skipped out of her sister’s room to the mail box. Hopefully, the other girl wasn’t a bitch, or mean, or…oh, the redhead hadn’t actually thought about how the girl was in real life. This could backfire, and badly. It only took a minute for Fang’s sister to think about it and she dropped the envelop into the box. The younger sister had some ideas on how to get out of this, if it actually went bad.

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Serah sat on the couch like a deflated balloon. Practice had been excruciating, but it was for a good cause. The youngest Farron really wanted to play internationally during the school break. There were several reasons of course for this, but the most meaningful was that she had always wanted to play overseas. Getting to meet Fang and Vanille had been a goal of hers since she’d first seen them play and it was just a bonus if she got to use this chance to torture her sister more.

Try as Claire might to act like she didn’t think about Fang, Serah knew better. There was a giant-sized poster of the brunette hanging on the wall in her older sister’s room to begin with, and every single article and photo she found of Ragnarok, her sister had kept in her room in a folder. Obsessed much? Still, the youngest Farron really did want to play internationally, so the pain now would pay off later and she had greatly improved.

Serah looked out the window to see her sister practicing with her sabre. This was the current distraction of her heart’s desire. But, to Claire’s credit, she was good, and she’d been kicking butt at the few tournaments that she’d gone to so far.

With a tired sigh, Serah made herself get up out of the chair and walk over to the kitchen to grab
something to eat. The afternoon mail was sitting on the counter and the younger Farron snatched her monthly subscription from the stack, spilling some of the mail to the floor. Besides the normal adult bills, mail generally consisted of modeling offers for her older sister. Being nosy, Serah perused the offers for her sister as she walked toward Claire’s room.

“Looks like you’re going to have another busy summer.”

“What do you mean?” Claire inquired.

“Well, just look at this stack of offers for jobs.”

“Serah, you know that half of that is solicitation for jobs that bypassed mom and dad and the agency, most of it is trashed.”

“Still, there’s a lot of it.”

Serah tossed the small bundle on the bed and made herself comfortable.

“So, how’s practice going, “Lightning?” Her younger sister remarked with air quotes.

Rolling over on her stomach, Claire’s sister decided to continue to nosy through the mail, silently murmuring to herself while her sister worked on her homework. It was the sudden silence of Serah that caused the older sister to turn. Her younger sister sat up right on the bed with a shocked look on her face.

“NO WAY! This is a trick; how did you even get this?!”

Serah was staring at her sister with an accusatory look and the older sister was dumbfounded.

“Serah, what are you even talking about? Are you feeling okay?”

“THIS!” Her younger sister waved the envelope in her hand.

“What?”

“It’s from her…”

“Her who?”

“OH MY GOD CLAIRE! You are so dense sometimes!”

“HER! Your dream girl!” Serah said as she waved the envelope at the poster of Fang on her sister’s wall.

“Are you taking drugs?”

At this point Serah was off the bed and sticking the letter in her sister’s face. Claire couldn’t for the life of her figure out what was going on in her sister’s brain. Why would she have a letter from Fang, they didn’t even know each other? Carefully, she plucked the envelope from her sister’s hand. Silently she looked at the addressee’s information.

“Serah, you’re not playing a joke are you, because I don’t find this very funny.”

“How would I have her address?”

“How could she have mine, or my name for that matter? And you could have looked it up on the internet somehow. Maybe some insider volleyballer information? How should I know?”
Serah shrugged and went to snatch the letter back.

“Excuse me, but it is addressed to me.”

“Well, read it!”

“It’s private Serah! I’m not reading this out loud to you.”

“So, you have had communication with her?”

At this point, Claire sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. She loved Serah, she really did, but sometimes… And if this was real, how would Fang even know about her? This whole moment just seemed too surreal. The older sister ignored the fact that her heart was suddenly racing, and she wanted to tear that letter open to see if it was really the brunette.

“Serah, some privacy for a moment please. And this better not be a joke or mom and dad will have one less daughter to worry about.”

“Fine!” Serah ground out in frustration.

“But if it’s the real thing, I want to know!”

Her little sister made a show of her disapproval for being dismissed as she closed the door. For long moment, all Claire could do was stare at Fang’s name and the Australian mailing address. Her dreams came screaming back to reality and Claire’s hands began to quake. Slowly, she opened the envelope and unfolded the letter.

Hello

My names Fang, I’m almost 17 and I live in Australia. I’m female, just in case the name confused you. You’re probably wondering why you’re receiving mail from someone in Australia that you’ve never met? I’ve had to scratch my head on this myself, especially considering the reason I’m writing in the first place. I’ll be honest, it sounds psychotic and crazy to my own ears. Hopefully, you will hear me out with an open-mind, and you don’t easily offend.

My sister, Vanille, she gave me a magazine that my cousin sent from the States. I’m not usually one for fashion magazines, but I decided to indulge my sister and we looked through it. I saw your photo under a caption that read “Soldier Girl.” I can’t explain what happened, but I couldn’t take my eyes of you.

I felt instantly connected to you. You looked familiar but I’d never met you. I’ve gone over this a million times in my mind and the only explanation I can come up with is that we knew each other in another life. I know that may sound crazy and it make me look like some sick stalker who saw your picture in a magazine, but it truly isn’t.

But how do I tell you this and then tell you I want to get to know you. I swear, I’m just an average girl, going to school, wanting to go to the university to get a degree. I even play volleyball, I promise no screws loose here. But it’s easy to say and to write when you don’t even know me.

You can though, just write me back even if it’s to tell me to piss off. I hope I didn’t just cause you to lock all your doors and windows and call the authorities. Take a chance, the worst that could happen is we really do like each other.
Fang

P.S. – This is Vanille, Fang’s sister. I mailed this without her knowledge. She didn’t have your address, but I found it and sent it. Don’t ask, less incriminating that way.
P.S.X2 – Fang is a really great person. I promise! Please give her a chance. I put a picture of her in the envelope so you could see her!

“Oh my god! Fang knows about me!”

Claire was thankful she was already sitting down because her brain was too busy trying to process this and didn’t have time to control any other motor function. After a moment of hesitation, she checked inside the envelope and found the photo, she’d missed. It was Fang, from their championship game and Farron felt her heart triple in rhythm.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Claire is persuaded to make a daring commitment, while Fang is pleasantly surprised.

Chapter Notes

Apologizes, I had this ready to go, but I got the flu.

Mentally, Claire was divided. What was she supposed to do? Part of her brain, as well as her heart was thrilled and nervous at the same time, while the other half was convinced her younger sister had played some cruel sick joke. But Serah showed no signs of deception, quite the opposite really. The younger Farron had been hounding her all day about the details of the note. How did one sleep and concentrate on anything else but this?

Finally, just before bed, Claire had confided in her little sister. If the older sister had any doubt as to her sister’s guilt, it was put at ease after Serah punched her in the arm.

“OW! What was that for?”

“How is it that I’ve been idolizing Fang from the moment I saw her, and YOU get a letter from her?!”

“Like I did this on purpose! I can’t explain it Serah, I don’t even want to believe it.”

Claire rubbed her arm, boy her sister could throw a mean punch. It was a true confession, part of her didn’t want to believe this craziness. Why couldn’t she just be like a normal teen and angsty over some boy? The elder Farron shivered for even thinking such thoughts. This was were the other half of her brain kicked in and was thrilled beyond explanation.

“Well, are you at least going to write back? Maybe put in a good word for me, ask Vanille at least if she’d like a pen pal?

“I don’t know yet Serah, this whole thing is just…weird.”

“Are you insane?!” Serah raved.

“You have been pinning away for Fang since you saw her! You have a chance to get to know her, what’s the worst that could happen?!”

“Don’t even go there,” Claire warned.

“I have to think about it. I need time Serah, to process all of this. The dreams are one thing, this is whole new level of strange I’m not prepared for.”

Claire’s little sister gave her a dubious look, before going to the door.
“Don’t be stupid Claire, take the risk. No harm could come of it other than you have a new pen pal.”

Claire watched her sister go out the door and head to her room. There wasn’t much she could do right now, it was time for bed. Serah would just have to deal with the fact that her older sister needed time to process all of this. In the meantime, bed sounded wonderful.

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Fang had gotten an ear full when she’d gone home. Vanille, of course, thought the tattoo was awesome and wanted to get one of her own, her parent’s not so happy. The brunette loved her aunt and uncle, but sometimes they were a little too strict. They were lucky that their daughter had some sense or the red-head would be running amuck. But that was tame compared to the volcanic eruption that was lying under the surface from the discovery that a certain letter had been mailed out.

“Dammit Vanille! This whole thing was crazy to begin with, but now that girls going to think I’m certifiable!”

Fang paced the floor, before running her hands through her thick hair. Her sister on the other hand seemed to be calmly watching the brunette pace the floor.

“There’s no cops yet, so that’s a good start.”

“But you sent her a picture of me! From the championship game! What if it gets back to the league? They could keep me from playing again!”

Her younger sister scoffed.

“No, it won’t happen…”

Vanille held up a hand when Fang when to protest.

“Trust me, she doesn’t look the type to reports such things. She’s a professional, most she’ll do is throw it away and ignore it.”

Fang plopped on her bed, defeated.

“Van, this was important.”

The red-head sat next to her sister.”

“That’s why I sent it. Would you just trust me, I have a feeling about this Fang.”

Green eyes gazed into a paler pair of her own.

“Alright, but I swear…I could throttle you for this Vanille.”

The red-head just smiled and patted her older sister on the back.

“It’ll be okay, I promise.”
Just how Vanille thought things would be okay without knowing the future was beyond her older sister. It was not something that Fang could easily guarantee to anyone. What’s done is done, so the brunette let it go. Their school year was about to begin, and the two siblings had volleyball to concentrate on. Besides, the girl with the rose-colored hair had better things to do than write back to a lunatic.

****

Claire had convinced herself by bed time that it was just best to drop this whole thing. Writing Fang was absurd and giving into fantasies was asking for trouble in the real world. Fencing and school needed to take priority in the elder Farron’s life anyway. Fantasy can’t help her with her school work, nor would it get her into a good university. With a yawn, Claire laid her head down and fell fast asleep.

“Get up! I need to have a talk with you.”

Claire was shaken awake, only to be staring bleary eyed at her future self. Suddenly, she found herself wide awake.

“Tch. Have I really become that soft? You’re making us look weak, Claire. This was the whole reason I blocked you out of my life to begin with. You have an opportunity to get what you want and you’re sitting here cowering like a little baby. Quit being a candy-ass Claire, and write the damn letter!”

Claire blinked and repeatedly chanted to herself, “This is only a dream.”

Lightning glared at the future version of herself. Etro only knew that in this moment in time, she wanted to go back to where she didn’t have to see this version of herself. Without permission, she grabbed Claire by the hand.

“Come on, there’s something you need to see.”

Claire was speechless, but what was she going to say to herself, let us go? The thought was laughable, and it was very apparent that the older version of herself would likely stab her before taking no for an answer. Dreams were funny things, you could skip from one scene to another and miss it if you blinked. That’s kind of how it felt when Lightning drug her away from her bed. And before long, she was looking upon an even younger female, who suspiciously looked a lot like Serah. But how did her sister have anything to do with this dream, and who was that luminous woman?

Lightning gave her another glare and Claire shut up and watched the two other beings. She wasn’t arguing with this self.

“But it’s not fair.” Lumina replied.

“Lightning always destroys everything I’ve ever wanted to do or be.”

Etro picked up the young girl and set her on her lap.

“We all make choices in this world, and Lightning felt it wiser to push you away in order to survive. I’m not saying it was right, or wrong, it was just a choice.”
“But I really like her.” Lumina continued.

“I wanted to have a life with Fang, but she’s so stubborn.”

Lumina’s lip was poked out, but the tears could not hide the hurt and pain that the young girl was feeling. A tender hand lifted the child’s face to gaze upon the radiant being.

“What Lightning does, she does for everyone, including you. Without the sacrifice now, there would be no chance for the future. Do you understand?”

“Yes.” Lumina mumbled.

“But Etro! You’re leaving me! How can I have a chance with Fang if you leave? I don’t want you to leave! I’m scared!”

“Everything dies, it’s the natural cycle of life, of the universe. You die and then you are reborn. I will always be with you Claire, in here.” Etro said as she touched the young girl’s heart.

“Promise?”

“I promise. All you need to do is think of me, and I’ll be there.”

“What about Fang, can you promise me that she’ll be there too. Can you promise that I will get a chance to be with her?”

“All you need to do is have faith and I promise it will come true.”

Lumina felt doubtful, how could Etro promise this if she died. And she was dying, she could feel it. She suddenly wanted Lightning to promise she’d protect her and save her. Instead, the young girl hugged Etro tightly.

“I love you Etro, I don’t want to lose you.”

Claire could not see the smile on Etro’s face, but she felt the warm embrace.

“You won’t, if you believe.”

Lumina sniffled.

“I love her too Etro, Fang I mean.”

“I know you do. But Fang also understands the sacrifices it takes to protect those you love. Do not be angry with her or pass judgement because she has not been here for you. You know the Huntress would if she could. And Claire, do not judge yourself harshly. The sacrifices Lightning makes, it is for you too, even if you do not know it.”

Lumina smiled. She believed and she couldn’t wait until she got to see Fang again. With a kiss to the cheek and another hug, she hopped off Etro’s lap and vanished, she had work to do! When the version of herself that looked like Serah left, Claire was a little confused, but not about the message. She waited for Lightning to take her somewhere else or that she would fall back to sleep. The young Farron was puzzled when they didn’t move.

“Claire, come here.”

Claire looked around, waiting for the other girl to reappear, but when Etro looked directly at her, she froze. Only the firm grip of Lightning’s hand steadied her.
“Go on, don’t keep her waiting.”

Claire looked back at Lightning and then to Etro. Whatever this was, she had a feeling that she wouldn’t wake up until she did as she had been asked. Slowly, she approached the radiant woman called Etro. Could her life possibly be any stranger?

“Rebirth is not meant to be easy Claire. The soul needs to learn, and learning comes from experience. I’m glad to see that a part of you held onto that belief.”

“I…don’t understand.”

“Understanding is not needed, only belief. That is why so many on the world suffer, they have to question everything. Sometimes, learning to trust and believe in something higher in yourself is all you need, but so many have a difficult time doing that. Why are you doubting Claire?

“I…it’s just…that.” Claire was having a difficult time justifying anything in front of this being.

Etro smiled.

“That something can not be real, just because it sounds crazy?”

Claire blushed, missing the action of her former self as Lighting rolled her eyes.

“I wouldn’t be here now, if some part of you still didn’t believe.” Etro replied caressing the side of the young girl’s cheek.

“I will not tell you what to do Claire, the choice is yours. It always has been.”

Etro faded before her eyes, but the warmth that radiated from Claire’s cheek lingered. Dream reality came crashing down as a firm hand squeezed her shoulder. The young woman turned to see the almost pleading look in those harsh blue eyes.

“Right the damn letter, Claire.”

Claire awoke with a start to her alarm clock and the picture of Fang mysteriously in her hand. This was perhaps the strangest dream yet, but the older Farron daughter did not make light of the newest vision.

“I’ll write the damn letter.” She replied to know one in the room and smiled inwardly as she said it.

The correspondence of course would have to wait, it was time for school and then Fencing practice. Claire would set time aside this evening after homework to work out her thoughts onto paper. This was going to be one strange day.

***

Fang made another lap around the track as she passed a winded Vanille.

“Ha! Told you, you should have laid off all that junk food during the summer!”

Van looked up and glared at her older sister, the urge to flip her the infamous bird battling it out with manners. Why Fang insisted on running after practice was beyond her, didn’t they do enough
while on the court? Maybe her sister was right, but the idea of coconut cream pie made all this worth it. She wasn’t giving it up, and she wouldn’t even it told it would kill her in her old age. What a way to die!

Three weeks into school and the volleyball team was kicking butt and taking names. Fang and Vanille were on a streak, a streak of fire and awesomeness as far as the red-head was concerned. As Captain and Co-Captain of the team, they made sure they were giving one hundred and ten percent of their effort on and off the court.

The brunette made another easy lap around the track, coming to a stop by her collapsed sister. Vanille lay on the ground breathing deeply with her hand over her eyes. A frown graced the red-heads face when she heard her older sister chuckling above her.

“You know, the Tarahumara out of Mexico are known for their long-distance running abilities and their good health.” Fang said as she poked her sister in the side.

“You’re not Tarahumara, Fang.”

Vanille uncovered her eyes as she heard her sister laughing again.

“I like learning about other indigenous tribes, so sue me. Come on, lets head home.”

The red-head cast a glace at her sister’s tattoo, she had to admit, it fit her. Since her parents had calmed down about it, the biggest uproar was the students at school. Of course, it was more the lines of oohing and ahthing over the ink. It had attracted quite the following from male and female alike, but of course Fang was totally oblivious to the whole thing. She was stupid, for a smart person.

“Come on marshmallow.”

Fang took a hold of Vanille’s hand and hoisted her up on her feet, then bent at the waist and slung her over her shoulder. The red-head squealed in protest.

“But me down, you’re going to ruin my reputation of being a bad ass, Fang!

Her older sister chuckled more as she carried the pouting sibling to the car, depositing her in the passenger seat. The two continued to tease each other all the way to the house. After dinner and chores, the two siblings settled down to work on their homework, a common routine for the two straight A students. Fang stopped working when she felt Vanille’s eyes on her.

“You’re done, I can always tell. It’s like you’re silently mocking me from across the room.” Fang said as she looked up at her sister.

“How about a drink then? Since you have time on your hands. I’ll take a lemonade please.”

The red-head gave her sister the raspberries, despite the fact it didn’t bother her at all. Fang was always meticulous with her work and never liked rushing things. Vanille on the other hand, she flew through her work, but with the knowledge that it was correct. The brunette always cautioned her about not letting her intelligence turn her into a snob, but her motivation was always based on confidence in her work.

Vanille felt the sudden urge to skip to the kitchen, it gave her a moment of deja vu for some reason. Despite the weird feeling she skipped to the refrigerator humming along as she did so. One pitcher of lemonade filled in two glasses coming up, she thought as she poured the liquid.
“Vanille, there’s mail on the table for you.”

“Thanks mom!” Vanille chimed as she finished pouring the glasses.

Setting the drinks down, the red-head looked through the mail. Her magazine, ‘Genetics’, was sticking out from the normal mail toward the bottom of the stack. Fang’s younger sister could not wait to get her hands on it and read the latest in genetic news. Tucking the mail under her arm, Vanille grabbed the drinks and headed back to her sister’s room. With deft skill, she handed her older sister her lemonade and set the mail on the desk, taking up her spot next to the window.

“You know, you have a room with a desk.”

“I know, but I like hanging out in your room. It’s more stimulating than talking to myself. Besides, your cousin sent you another magazine. Are you sure you didn’t tell her about your secret crush?”

“Positive, it’s bad enough she had me scared to death that she might have had some profane object tattooed to my arm.”

“Well, aren’t you going to look at it?”

Fang rolled her eyes.

“Will it get you to be quiet for two seconds?”

“It might.” Vanille sang.

Leaving her desk, the brunette grabbed the mail on the way to her bed. Fang had barely sat on the bed before her little sister was right beside her. It reminded the older sibling of the Christmas time when they’d look through the magazines with toys. The two siblings flipped through the magazine together.

Although, it wasn’t spoken aloud, Fang had secretly hoped that there would be more of the girl with the rose-colored hair. Unfortunately, it would not be the case and even Vanille seemed less than excited about looking through the pages now. Climbing off her sister’s bed the red-head took up her usual post on the floor.

So much for teasing her eldest sister relentlessly about a certain model. Fang wasn’t particularly motivated to return to her school work, so she flipped through the other mail, finding a letter from her best friend and team mate, Irina. The brunette tore open the letter, smiling the entire time while she read.

“Irina sends her love Van.”

“Oh, and what is she up to?”

“I told you she got into Lomonosov Moscow State University…”

At Vanille’s nod, Fang continued.

“Said she’s studying hard in their computer science field and said to tell you thanks for the computer hacks…”

Fang put the letter on the bed and looked hard at her sister.

“Seriously Van? I think you’ve corrupted her. I won’t be shocked when both of you are arrested for reported treason for hacking into military data bases.”
The red-head ignored her, although Fang could see the hint of a smile curled at the end of her sister’s lips.

“Irina said she’s already been approached by her country to participate in the next summer Olympics. That’s about it, just school and the Olympics, and that she’s doing fine and wants us to come visit her in Russia during the summer if we can.”

“Did she already forgetting that the summer will be packed with volleyball?” Vanille asked.

“P.S.” The brunette continued.

“Tell Vanille that, no I did not forget and that we still have what is left of the summer after volleyball.”

“You just made that up.” The red-head said as she stared at her sister.

“No, I didn’t. It’s right here, come see for yourself.” Fang laughed.

The brunette was still shaking her head when she came across another letter.

“Who is Claire Farron?”

Vanille nearly choked as she jumped up off the floor.

“OMG! She wrote you back!”

It only took a second to register before Fang was staring at the envelope in her hand as if would reach out and slap her back into reality. Vanille had never told her the girl’s name, only that she found her address and sent it. Was the brunette in such a state that she didn’t even think to ask her in all this time?

“Claire Farron.” Fang repeated more to herself. It felt, right.

In seconds, the brunette had the letter open and began to read.

Hello Fang

I’m sure by now you realize that your sister sent off your letter. Please don’t be angry with her, I’m glad she did, or we might have never had the opportunity to get to know each other. Please thank her for me.

I guess the first thing I want to say is that you allowed yourself to be honest and vulnerable in your message, so the most I can do is repay that in kind.

My name is Claire Farron, I’m 16 and I’ve been modeling for a few years now. I was pleasantly surprised about receiving your letter. Surprisingly enough, I do know of you. My sister Serah plays volleyball and she’s been watching you and your sister since you started playing for the team in Brazil.

I saw your championship game. I can’t judge you about feeling connected, because I felt it too, that night when I watched you play. I would have never in a million years expected you to send me a letter, or to even be aware of me at all. I guess I need to thank your cousin too, for sending you that magazine.

I am or consider myself to be open-minded and not easily offended. Could we have shared a previous life together, I don’t see how that could be impossible at this point. I guess what I’m
saying is that I would like for us to keep writing each other and see where this goes. Honestly, I
don’t like the idea of not knowing you, now that I know about you. If that makes any sense.

So, please write back. And, before I forget, my sister Serah would like to know if Vanille wants a
pen pal. I also enclosed a photo. It was only fair, since Vanille sent one of yours.

Hope to hear from you soon
Claire

Fang quickly grabbed the envelope, and sitting there inside, just as Claire had said sat a photo.

“Hello Sunshine.” The brunette said with a smile.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Life begins moving forward, but not just for Claire and Fang.

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the wait and the shortness of this chapter. Our stories at a point where we can begin moving Lightning and Fang to older versions of themselves. Their road will not get any easier, but it will be worth it all in the end.

As a side note, I'm sure those of you that have written fan fiction before know that the characters tend to lead us in directions we don't expect sometimes, or they push their agenda through in our writing. Yes, sounds crazy, but it's true! Anyway, the girls have been pushing a Christmas story, set in the near future for them. It will not give away too many details of Fang and Lightning's story, especially since everyone knows where their relationship is heading. But it will be a filler to the established relationship, but not how it came to be cemented.

Since the story has already been floating in my head for about a week, it will hopefully write itself. I plan on having it up before Christmas so that everyone can have a Christmas story for the holidays.

Anyway, thank you always for reading and commenting.

“Claire, that was the lamest letter you could have sent! Did you at least ask Vanille if she wanted a pen pal?”

The elder Farron found herself rolling her eyes at her younger sister. What was she expecting, for her to delve into the dreams she’d had about an older Fang, in another life? Looking at Serah, she realized that her sibling would have been all for it.

“I did ask, just for your information and no, I did not want to jump right in and start telling a perfect stranger that I’ve had dreams about them from another life.”

Serah eyed her sister suspiciously.

“It’s not like she would care, it might even speed things up a bit.” Her sister added helpfully.

“Geeze give a girl a chance. What’s the worst that could happen.”

“Fang freaks out and stops writing me.”

“As if! You said it yourself, Fang was the initiator in most of your dreams. I highly doubt she’d be offended.”
Claire’s cheeks flared red.

“No Serah, for the last time. Someday, when we’re a little older maybe.”

“How else are you supposed to get laid if your acting so lame.”

“SERAH!” Claire was speechless for a moment.

“You know that would require a male or…”

“A toy?!”

“I swear I don’t know you!” Claire replied.

Serah laughed and poked her sister in the arm.

“I’m kidding. I just like seeing you go all red thinking about fun times with your girlfriend!”

“She’s not my girlfriend…”

“Yet!” Serah replied.

There was no arguing with her sister, Claire imagined that it was because she knew deep down that Fang was it for her. But the young woman wanted to savor the idea of getting to know the brunette, she had a feeling that they hadn’t had a lot of time for that before. And she couldn’t deny that she also felt a bit of urgency, but she was unsure as to why? Perhaps it was something tied to their past, it’s not like she’d seen everything or knew everything that had happened before.

Either way, Claire had written Fang and she wanted to take this slowly and savor getting to know the other girl. But the elder Farron couldn’t deny the fact that she was anxious to lay her eyes upon the brunette, to touch her and make sure this wasn’t all a dream.

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To Fang, the picture that Claire sent was like a radiant beam of light. The young women smiled, and it felt like she carried a bit of the sun with her. The name sunshine had just come out of her mouth, the brunette wasn’t sure just where it came from, but it seemed appropriate. As far as Fang was concerned, Claire Farron was a ray of sunshine in an otherwise dreary day.

If Fang had made anything of the almost formal letter, she never said. Vanille would say it was because her sister was shocked that Claire had responded at all. It didn’t matter in the long run, the girl with the rose-colored hair could have cursed her nine ways to Sunday and Van was sure her older sister would have been on the moon anyway.

It was the first among many letters that would be exchanged, and it wasn’t just her sister and her new crush. Vanille had begun writing Serah and the two had hit if off like they’d known each other for years. The two younger sisters had no lack of material when it came to conversation, especially since both played the same position in volleyball. But that wasn’t the only thing, their older sisters had been a huge topic of conversation, much to their personal enjoyment.

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Serah,

We need to do something about these two, I’ve never seen such cowards when it comes to conversing with someone. We must find a way to get them together. Any chance you know your
sister’s modeling schedule? I don’t suppose she could end up in Brazil this summer?

You should see Fang every time she gets a letter from Claire! I honestly haven’t seen her so excited! Don’t tell Claire, but I think she’s taken her allowance and buying your sister a phone card! I predict a disaster, they have such a hard time writing, what are they going to do when they hear each other’s voice?

I digress, you must tell me more about this Snow Villiers! I can’t believe your sister has been trying to hook you up with someone, she needs help herself! Is he ugly? What’s so unappealing about him? Is it your age? Send a picture if you have one, I can give you a critique about him by his picture!

Your friend

Van

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Vanille

I know right! These two need our intervention! I cannot believe the lame letter Claire sent. She won’t let me read her letters and she stopped talking about them to me. She’s getting tricksey in her old age, and cranky!

Mom won’t let her model out of the country yet, not until she’s 18. So, that’s one alternative we can’t explore right now. And when Claire is 18, mom is going with her, so I have no idea how we’d get them alone. If I can make one of the international volleyball teams this year, we can see where that takes us.

Claire’s the same way, you should see her room, it’s covered in posters of Fang and any pictures your sister sends her! OMG! Really, I won’t breathe a word, but I am so recording this conversation. I’ll try and get photos and send them to you when they talk to each other, you do the same. It’s always good to have blackmail readily handy with older sisters.

Snow, he doesn’t seem to be a bad guy, it’s just he’s a huge nerd. He’s big Vanille, I mean like line-backer size and yet he wears these cardigan’s and dresses, well, don’t take offense, but like a nerd. I keep telling Claire I think he’s gay, but she insists he’s not. My sister has a picture of him in her yearbook, I’ll send you one and you can tell me what you think.

Your bestie

Serah

****

Letters were a constant all during the school year, it didn’t matter if it was Fang and Claire or Serah and Vanille. Sometimes the girls would get mail the same day, or a few days apart, but the correspondence was constant. Despite how the younger sister’s felt, both the brunette and the eldest Farron wanted to take things slow.

Hey Sunshine!

Congratulations on the win! And don’t fret about the nickname, Lightning fits you. I know we promised not to share any intimate details over letters, but I can’t help feeling that that name fits you as much as Sunshine does. And thanks for the new photo of you in your fencing outfit.
Please don’t take this the wrong way, but I sent you a phone card. It’s been driving me crazy trying to figure out what you sound like. It’s obvious to me that you’ve had more dreams about us, I don’t know if that will change, and I somehow doubt it. But the connection to me feels stronger, doesn’t it to you?

Is it weird for me to say I can feel you across the sea? I swear, I have felt you nervous, excited and anxious. I even think I can tell when you’re thinking of me. I know there is a 10-hour time difference from the States to where we live in Australia, but I would love to hear from you, provided your parents don’t have an issue with it.

I can’t wait to hear from you Sunshine!

Fang

*****

Claire read through the letter again, holding on to the phone card with a mixture of anxiety and excitement. Fang had sent her a phone card to call her the long distance to talk! For a moment, the elder Farron froze, her entire begin stuck in the whirlwind of emotions.

With a steady blink, she cleared her mind and headed for her parents. They would need to know about the card, so that they were not assuming that their daughter was running up the phone bill. Half way down the hall, she paused when she heard Serah giggling and talking to another girl. It wasn’t that this was out of the ordinary, but the girl she was talking too had a distinct accent. An Australian accent.

“Vanille, you should have seen her when she got Fang’s letter today. She ran straight up into her room and closed the door. She’s probably had a stroke and died right on the floor when she sees what Fang sent her.”

“I know, right.” Vanille replied with laughter.

There was a slight twitch under Claire’s eye as a spontaneous desire to choke her sister filled her with murderous intentions. With a firm shove, Serah’s sister pushed the door open.

“SERAH!” Claire ground out through clenched teeth.

The younger sister in question swiveled around in her chair at her sister’s explosive entrance, but whatever Claire was about to say died on her lips as she looked at her sister’s laptop and saw Vanille. Fang’s younger sister was staring between the two sisters, obviously undisturbed by the situation.

“What are you doing?”

Claire finally responded when she could find her voice. Her eyes never left the screen.

“It’s called technology Claire. Vanille and I are chatting with the web cameras. Unlike you and Fang, Vanille and I have moved on to more convenient methods of communication.”

On the other side of the screen, Vanille was trying her best to hide the laughter bubbling up inside. This day was turning out to be the best day ever, and it was about to get even better.

“Hey Van, have you seen my computer cord, it’s not in….my…bag.”

Fang had looked up from digging in her bag to staring at the scene she had just entered. She never
saw Vanille’s face, just Claire, who was now staring shell shocked back at her.

“Claire?”

“Fang.”

Serah and Vanille could be heard stifling giggles on both sides. The more they looked at their love-struck sister’s the harder it was to keep from bursting out in fits of laughter. Especially the more they stared at each other without talking.

“I got your card and your letter today.”

“That’s great.”

“Would now be a bad time to call?”

“No! I was just going to change my playlist out. Yeah, now would be great!”

“Okay, talk to you in a minute.”

“Sounds good.”

Claire and Fang both exited their sister’s room in a hurry and Vanille and Serah could no longer hold their laughter at bay.

“Oh my god! Their hopeless!” Vanille said between laughter.

“It’s worse than I thought!” Serah replied.

“Vanille, this is serious! Left to their own devices, they’re never going to get together.”

Both girls started to sober at the thought. Despite being little sisters, and being full of evil mischief, they had been thrilled at their older sister’s finding someone. The “L” word hadn’t been used yet, maybe it was too soon, but they could both tell that there was an undeniable connection.

“Okay, time to come up with a plan.” Vanille said in all seriousness.

****

Outside of their sister’s rooms, Fang and Lightning quickly went to their own. If they were in the same house, there would be the undeniable flushed skin, fast beating heart and light-headedness going on between the two young women.

Fang sank down beside her bed, holding her phone nervously and silently berating herself for the awkwardness of her encounter with her Sunshine. A half a world away, Claire was clutching the phone card and her phone with shaking hands. She had glimpsed enough in her dreams to know that her former self would be scoffing and rolling her eyes right now. Where had their courage gone, the brave strong women she had seen them be?

It was decided, she’d tell her parents about the card later, right now, the eldest Farron daughter needed to brave the phone call to Fang. She thought it would be easier, considering that they’d just seen each other over the webcam, but it had not stilled the shaking in her hands.
“Make the damn phone call.” She mumbled to herself.

With pain-staking concentration, Claire dialed the number, holding her breath as the phone rang. A continent away, Fang stared at the phone. At the first ring, she swallowed her nerves down and answered.

“Claire?”

“Hi.”

“I’m glad you called.”

There was a pause as Fang gathered up her thoughts.

“You’re not disappointed about the card, are you? Would you rather have moved to chatting over the web?”

“Yes, I mean NO! No, I’m not disappointed. We said we wanted to take things slow. You’re not disappointed, are you?”

Fang chuckled then, something that made Claire smile.

“After that collision a few moments ago, I’m glad I sent the phone card. Van will just have to get over the fact, I’m being old-fashioned.”

Claire’s cheeks flushed.

“Are you courting me, Fang?”

The brunette tried to swallow the sudden lump in her throat. Holy shit! She was, wasn’t she. How did she not see it? Of course, she wouldn’t, she was going by instinct and this was the natural progression, wasn’t it?

“I hadn’t thought of it, but yeah I guess I am. You’re not upset?”

There was another pause on the phone and Fang felt her body flush again, but out of concern that she’d screwed up. Why did she feel such a need to be with this girl? She can’t deny the dream she’d had, but it was between Etro and her old life. She had yet to dream of Claire, or Lightning as she had known her in the dream. But the connection was undeniable, and Fang just wasn’t one to make a constant habit of questioning her instincts.

It didn’t mean she didn’t wonder, or that questions didn’t bubble up and the need for an explanation happen. She just chose to listen to her gut and Fang had yet to see where it had failed her. And with Claire, it was what Vanille would call a no-brainer, only there was a need to take things slow.

“Sunshine?”

Claire’s breath caught in her throat.

“Sunshine?”

Fang had written that to her in several letters, but it was the first time she’d heard it from the brunette. It made Claire smile.

“Why Sunshine, Fang?”
Another soft laugh from Fang.

“You’re first picture you sent, that smile just lit up your whole entire being. It was the first thing that popped into my head. You’re like a ray of Sunshine.”

Fang could feel the smile through the phone.

“If you’d rather me call you Lightning?”

It was the first shiver that Claire felt travel through her body. She’d heard the Huntress call her both names in her dreams but hearing this Fang say Lightning in that way transported her to those delicious moments in her sleep. This was the reason she was grateful that they were taking things slowly as she felt the heat from her cheeks.

“Honestly, I like either nickname, and I didn’t answer your question. I like the idea of you courting me, but how would our family take it?”

“Biologically, we were both adults when we could have children, but I understand. Societies tend to change their perspectives over time. Frankly, I know my parents wouldn’t care, Sunshine. How my aunt and uncle would respond is a different matter. But we don’t live in the same country, and it’s not like we’re saying that we are getting married…”

Courting was the idea of finding out if you were compatible for the other. Each society had a different take on courting and how it was handled, but it eventually led to marriage. Taking things slow had caused Fang, and likely Claire to not look at the big picture, or at least not discussed it with one another.

“Sunshine…I think we need to talk about this. It’s not that I want to scare you in either direction, but if this is leading to where I feel it is, I need to know you’re okay with it.”

“Fang, I know everyone else might think we’re crazy. We’ve both never dated anyone, we’re not even finished with school yet, but I can tell you with an undeniable certainty, that this just feels right. I can’t explain it, but I can’t deny this attraction, the pull you have with me. Maybe we’re both insane, but there isn’t anyone else that I want to be that way with.”

There was a staggering well of emotion that overtook Fang. It was as if she’d been waiting for Claire her whole life just to hear these words of conviction. Maybe they were both nuts, it was scientifically proven that love alters the brain and a sort of insanity sets in. But the brunette didn’t care, because this felt right and as if it had been a long time coming.

“Sunshine, your beautiful.”
Chapter 10 Part 1

Chapter Summary

Time begins to move forward for Fang and Lightning, will they ever make the time to finally be together, or is there a stronger force trying to keep them apart?

Chapter Notes

This Chapter is in two parts and will finally wrap up the teenage and young adult years for Fang and Lightning. I am almost done with the second part and hope to have it up in the next day or two. This will finally get us to the angst part of their story, if it hasn't already felt like that to you already.

I apologize for any misspelling, and atrocious grammatical errors. Also, I try to be as accurate with real life equivalencies in the story as possible, such anything that happens in the real world of sports, careers, etc.

Hope everyone has a safe and Happy New Year!

The school year was going by quickly and Claire and Fang had finally felt comfortable enough to video chat. They still called each other when chatting on line was unavailable or just not possible at all. Calls and online chat sessions were not for hours on end like Vanille and Serah would do, as the older sisters had too many activities that did not always allow them to talk.

Both girls agreed though, that this was much better. The moments in between kept the flames lit to a scorching degree until they could talk again. They had not lost that initial anticipation for conversation since first corresponding through letters. So, each moment they had together, was a treasure that neither would give up for the world.

They had quick phone calls when time permitted to wish happy birthday or congratulations. It was often difficult to coordinate schedules as both Fencing and Volleyball season ran concurrently. But it didn’t stop the two from calling when they could or squeezing in that emergency call just before a match. Fang wasn’t one for nerves, but she could often feel Claire’s and would contact her if she was available. If nothing else, it was a text to say, “Hey, I’m thinking of you. You’ll be fine.”

Truth was, despite Claire’s nerves, the brunette knew that as soon as her Sunshine stepped up on the strip, or piste as it was called, Lightning would be in charge and things would be more than fine. The high that the two young women seemed to run off of during the school year was more than just championship wins and grades in school, it was the synergy that passed between them. And that synergy reflected in whatever they were doing.

Fang wasn’t a fan of Thanksgiving for obvious reasons. The brunette was not thrilled about the perpetuation of lies that the government portrayed between the pilgrims and Indians. It was insulting and offensive to her and her father’s people. Claire had picked up on that through their conversations as she had gotten to know her. Christmas on the other hand, regardless of the
original pagan holiday being “adopted,” by the church was family time.

With school out for Christmas time, Fencing and Volleyball done for the season and no school work to worry about, the two young love birds spent most of their time chatting. Claire had quit having dreams, and aside from the weird connection they had Fang had never had more than that one initial dream. The two had chalked the whole ordeal up to the fact that they had met and there wasn’t a need for anymore.

But Claire didn’t need the dreams anymore to wonder what it would feel like to hold Fang’s hand, to sit near her, to feel her skin against her own, or what it would be like to kiss her. The visions of their older and former selves had just ignited a flame of curiosity for the day when they could do such a thing. And though her ability to actually feel the brunet’s emotions were not as strong, she knew that the thoughts were mutual. So, it went unspoken that neither young woman would torture the other with thoughts of if’s and when.

Spring had rolled around and before Claire and Fang knew it summer break was around the corner. That meant that they would each be pulled away from each other with busy schedules. There was modeling for Sunshine and Fang and Vanille would both be busy with volleyball until the start of school. It was quickly becoming apparent that it was almost a wash and rinse cycle.

As for Vanille and Serah, the two girls had spent plenty of time chatting up a storm. Serah had a study buddy as well as a co-conspirator for the “Let’s get our sisters together,” project. So far, their efforts to make that happen had been a flop. Not even the mighty Mensa brain was able to arrange the schedules so that the magic could happen. But the red head wasn’t worried, life ran its own course regardless of what individuals tried to manage. As much as people wanted to control life, it was usually the opposite and the sooner individuals realized that the only thing you could control was your own behavior, the better off the world would be.

And if Serah had thought that having a genius for a friend would mean school would be a breeze, she never voiced out loud. In fact, if she was honest, and she was, Vanille was worse than her instructors. It wasn’t that the girl truly desired her work to be easy, she just didn’t expect her best friend to be such a slave driver. In the end, her grades did improve in areas she was a little weaker and her work ethic had changed in how she studied.

Of course, Vanille had plenty to say about the crappy education system in the US, and she was determined not to let her bestie fall to the way side. As much as her older sister might think that they did nothing but laugh and plot and plan, there was an absorbent amount of time spend on school work. Serah did grumble, but the rewards far outweighed the work in the end. Just how much it had paid off; Claire’s younger sister would soon find out.

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“I hate that I’m whining Fang, but summer break is in a week and that means less time to talk.”

Fang looked at Claire through the screen and it broke her heart. Unconsciously, she reached up to touch the side of her Sunshine’s face through the monitor. The brunette was dreading it too.

“I know Claire, but it wouldn’t be prudent for us to get caught up in each other so much that we lose focus on school and our futures. We were both headed in a direction in life long before we found each other. I don’t relish the idea of not being able to provide for us because spending time
together was more important.”

Claire snorted as a smile finally crept onto her face.

“Always so logical. Here I am crying like a baby and acting like a silly teenage girl when you’re thinking about a solid future together. I guess I’m not immune to fits of fantasy and illogical thinking.”

“Don’t get me wrong Sunshine, it would be easy to fall into that trap and lose our way. I don’t mean to sound preachy, but relationships are work. I’ve seen too many people walk away because they’re not willing to put forth the effort. I guess I’m just saying that, to me, you are worth the effort.”

“You’re right, because I feel the same way Fang. I’d go through hell and back for you.”

The brunette smiled when both were startled by the screams coming from each other’s speakers. Apparently Vanille and Serah were having a rather monumental conversation in their rooms.

“Well…” Fang began when she saw Serah burst through her older sister’s door.

“OH MY GOD! CLAIRE! CLAIRE…”

Fang could almost hear the sound of a whip crack with how quickly Sunshine turned around. To the older sister’s merit, she did not yell at her younger sister, but let her finish.

“I got on the team! I get to play volleyball this summer! I might even get to play against Vanille and Fang!”

Claire watched Serah bounce up and down in her room with papers in her hand. The older sister swore the girl would burst from joy just watching her.

“Mom and dad said I could play. They signed the permission slip. They said it was a reward for all the hard work in school this year!”

“Can you believe it?!?”

Claire went from startled, surprised to feeling a well of pride in her sister.

“Serah, that’s wonderful! Congratulations!”

The elder sister was up and out of her seat, hugging the still bouncing Serah. The earlier screaming made sense now that her younger sister had revealed her news. Claire wasn’t jealous that she’d told Vanille first, the two had become good friends.

“Congrats Serah!” Fang’s voice said out of the computer speakers.

The younger sister’s attention was suddenly drawn over to the other side of the room. Grabbing her sister’s hand, she drug her back over to the computer.

“Hi Fang! Thanks! Can you believe it! The US Women’s Junior National Team!”

The brunette smiled back at Serah, but her eyes drifted up toward Claire. It was great to see her Sunshine smiling and proud of her sister.

“Oh my God! I left Vanille in the other room!”
Serah rushed back out of her older sister’s room just as quickly as she’d entered, and you could hear the two girls squealing in joy all over again. Claire laughed and turned to close her door before returning to the monitor.

“Well, I could say that I’m jealous, but I’m not. Serah’s talked about this for so long, I’m happy that it’s come true.”

Fang could see the truth in Claire’s smile.

“That’s quite the feat, it’s difficult to make the cut for any team that plays abroad. If I remember right, there is a camp and then tryouts and I think a final tryout she had to go through. Tell Serah that I’m proud of her too.” The brunette replied.

“Does that mean that there’s a possibility that we might finally get to see each other in person?” Claire asked with hope.

“Depends on your parents, it’s a general rule that once you’ve made the team, you’re under the care of that country’s appointed guardian’s. They’re generally staff members of the volleyball league, but parents and other family members can buy tickets and attend games. That’s where it gets expensive, especially traveling abroad.”

Disappointment reflected in Claire’s face and Fang was quick to try to remedy the negative emotion.

“Hey, things will be alright. We will get our time together Claire and all this waiting will just make it that much sweeter.”

Claire looked up at Fang and studied her face, the concern and genuine compassion in her eyes. It was difficult not to be moved, she’d have to be a cold-hearted person to not see it.

“How did I get such an amazing girlfriend?”

Fang flushed, and Claire smiled as she made out the darker tint to the brunette’s cheeks. In her dreams, the past version of Fang didn’t strike her as the type to embarrass. Dare she said it, how could it be possible to find her even more attractive in that moment?

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Summer came into full swing and Claire was in demand for several photo shoots. With Serah out of the house their parents split time between both girls and work. The girl’s mother had a more flexible schedule and she was with her eldest daughter when photo shoots took her to New York or California. Mr. Farron was able to attend a few of the home games played in the US. Both Mr. & Mrs. Farron made sure they were with their girls as often as they could be.

Unfortunately for Fang and Claire, none of the brunette’s games were in the States and their schedules had caused them to be creative with communication. When neither had the time to talk on the phone or over the webcam, they had both resorted to recording messages and sending them to each other. It helped ease the longing to see each other and it gave both young women something to look forward to.

Claire’s birthday came during the summer and of course it was in the middle of her modeling jobs,
but Fang found a way to make sure it would be special. With the help of Vanille and Serah, she had managed to send a birthday gift to Claire’s hotel. While Mrs. Farron was out of the room, a concierge knocked on the door.

“This was just delivered for you at the desk, mademoiselle Farron.”

“Thank you.” Claire responded.

It only took a moment for Claire to realize who the package was from. Her mother had gone to pick up dinner for them, and the eldest Farron daughter suspected a birthday cake. The young woman quickly opened the package as she made her way toward her bed. Opening the box, she saw a jersey, Fang’s game jersey with her number. Sitting on top of the shirt, was a card.

Setting the card on the bed, Claire quickly pulled the shirt from the box. In the process another smaller box and a memory stick landed on the bed. The smaller box immediately caught her eye, even as she unconsciously picked up the jersey and put it to her nose. Fang had worn this shirt, how on earth did she manage to take her team jersey and send it without getting into trouble? But even as that thought filtered to her mind, she set the shirt aside and picked up the smaller box.

What had the young models heart pounding was that it was a jewelry box. Logically, she knew it wasn’t an engagement ring, Fang was very traditional in the sense that she wouldn’t do that without first proposing in person. Carefully, Claire picked up the box and opened it. Inside was a small piece of paper and a beautiful looking necklace.

It was a horse, galloping with its tail and mane flying in the invisible wind. The horse itself, she was sure was made of white gold. Surrounding the horse in an intricate braid was emerald and yellow gold. In short, it was breath-taking, and Fang had given it to her for her birthday. Quickly, Claire fastened the necklace around her neck and opened the piece of paper.

“Couldn’t wait to read the card first, could you Sunshine?!”

Fang signed it with a smiley face and a heart. She couldn’t help the embarrassed tinge of pink that touched her cheeks, regardless of the fact she was in the room alone. Moving to the birthday card, she opened the envelope to find a rose themed card with the words ‘Happy Birthday to Someone Special,’ embossed on the outside. On the inside, was Fang’s distinct writing.

“Happy Birthday Sunshine!

Wish I could be there with you to celebrate 17 years, but I’m there in heart and spirit. I hope you are okay with the jewelry, I saw it and it just seemed like the right gift to give you. I hope you like it! And, I know it seems kind of tacky, like a guy giving his girl his jersey or his letter jacket but trust me that wasn’t the thinking that went into the gift. I wanted to give you a piece of me to have since we can’t be together right now.

I’m with you in spirit Claire, always. I honestly struggled with sending it, I didn’t want you to think that I was trying to stake my claim or obnoxiously say this is my girl. The truth is, I belong to you and I wanted you to have this. In case you’re wondering, it is the game jersey from last year’s championship. Don’t worry, it was given to me after we won, so it’s been in my possession for a long while. I want you to have it.

The thumb drive, it’s part of your birthday gift too! I know you told me you take your lap top, so don’t forget! Talk to you soon gorgeous!

Yours Always
Claire immediately grabbed her laptop and turned it on. To say the least, the young woman wasted no time putting the memory stick in once the computer was powered up. There was only one file and it was a video titled ‘Sunshine.’

As the video loaded, Claire slipped Fang’s shirt on. The brunette in question popped up as the file began to play. It was the best birthday gift Claire could ever recall getting, perhaps because she realized her heart was so entangled with the young woman responsible for the recording. It was twenty minutes of Fang, and Fang and Vanille, wishing her a happy birthday and promising to watch out for Serah if they ended up playing in the Championship together.

Claire laid back on her bed after the video finished, it left her content and feeling joy like she’d never felt before. But it also left her with a longing for the day that they would finally meet. This brunette had captured her heart, this was the one she knew she wanted to be with from the moment she saw her. Such fantasies were ludicrous in her mind, but it had happened. What were the odds? This had to be some divine intervention.

“Etro, you’d promised and if I hadn’t had the luxury of the memories, Fang and I would never have met. Thank you.” Claire said softly.

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That was how the summer went. Claire of course had sent a video back through the Cloud to Fang. It was the quickest way for her to see how the brunette had made her day and to thank her for the beautiful gifts. The two love struck women had only actually had a handful of moments to talk one on one with the other during the whole summer and when they did, they made it count.

Summer ended with the championship game held in Mexico. Claire had finished her last job on the morning of the game. Mrs. Farron and her eldest had decided to stay in the hotel and fly out the following morning to go home, while Mr. Farron had made his way to Mexico to be there in support of their youngest daughter.

Claire of course was divided in one respect; her girlfriend and her sister were playing on opposing teams. Fang only had one more year before she was too old to play in the junior league and Serah had three more and with Vanille’s age, despite what grade she was in, those two would have more time for championship games. It sounded horrible, especially when Brazil won last year, but Claire was rooting for Brazil.

It ended as she figured, Brazil had beat the American team yet again in the championship and there was that moment where her heart ached for Serah. But her sister was nothing, if not a great example of sportsmanship and if her hugging Fang and Vanille wasn’t the epitome of that example then she didn’t know what was.

That night had been a special treat as well, Mr. Farron had taken Serah over to the hotel that Fang and Vanille were at and they’d all conferenced in with Claire. The conversation was full of rambunctious teenagers celebrating in the background, that would be Serah and Vanille of course while she and Fang talked.
Fang noticed that Claire was not only wearing the necklace, but she had her old jersey on. It had the brunette grinning from ear to ear. Summer was now officially over, and it was time for their Senior year of school. It was time to wash, rinse and repeat and hopefully this year would be different, and they would finally get to meet in person, somehow.

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Claire was beginning to wonder if some force was trying to keep her from ever seeing Fang. They had both jumped right into school, then their college entrance exams, picking out schools to attend and then there was Claire’s Fencing and Fang’s volleyball. It was a never-ending cascade of activity. If Etro had gifted them this chance at a life together, why on earth was it so difficult for them to find time together?

Through it all of course, Fang had been a rock, her support when she felt the need to scream over just about anything and surprisingly enough, she was that for Fang when she needed her. It wasn’t that she was incapable of such, it was just that there seemed to be rare occasions when the brunette seemed to need that extra help and support. So, when her girlfriend had called to talk to her about things troubling her, she had been over the moon to jump in and help solve the problem, or just simply listen to her unload.

There was something to be said when you could count on someone, there was a freedom from judgement or ridicule, but there was that confidence that they would be honest and forthright as well. It was these moments of clarity that helped push past the year and into graduation. And yet again, their schedules did not allow them to attend either event. But the two young women stayed in touch, exchanged gifts during the holidays, talking when they could, and despite the inability to even be in the same room together, their bond grew even stronger.

“Claire, this is beautiful! Where did you find this?”

The women in question smiled as she watched Fang stare at the pendant, a dragon filled with onyx and amethyst. What do you buy your girlfriend and future wife for her 18th birthday? As it turned out, amethyst was Fang’s birthstone and the dragon reminded her of the brunette. She had a quiet fierceness and mystery to her, and just as Fang had picked out Claire’s gift by instinct, she had done the same.

There was a moment that she wondered if it had been tainted by the Fang from her previous life, but those dreams seemed like distant memories. She hadn’t dreamt of either of them for over two years now.

“A local jeweler, believe it or not.”

Fang fastened the necklace around her neck and gave her Sunshine this biggest smile she’d ever seen.

“Thank you.”

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In life, we do what we want to do, even when we lie to ourselves about it. If one really wants something, they go and get it, so what was the deal with Claire and Fang? Serah and Vanille had pondered that mystery over the years. But inevitably, the moments of sadness in either of their sisters had been chased away by their significant other. So, what do two younger sisters’ do when they need answers to this mysterious question? Well, they ask, they get nosy and hope for a response that doesn’t involve threatening. When the two younger girls got their answers, they compared notes.

“Fang hadn’t really thought about it. She said she just knows that it will happen when it’s time, almost like something has to happen first.” Vanille replied.

“Claire said they want to get established in school and careers first, that there’s no big hurry too. But I think it’s a copout Van. I see the tension in her at times when she hasn’t been able to talk to Fang for long periods of time.”

“Fang has her anxious moments, but she’s never been one to panic. Maybe Claire just isn’t used to something like this?”

“She’s always been level headed, sometimes it’s like this stoicism creeps over here like a second skin. It is kind of disturbing at times. Do you think they’re scared?”

Vanille pondered the question, it wasn’t the first time she had. What the young women found was that the whole situation was perplexing. The atmosphere was just charged with some kind of heaviness waiting to be expelled. Aside from the normal craziness of being in love, both Claire and Fang seemed perfectly fine waiting.

“From our previous conversation, I don’t think so. But something is in their air Serah, even I can feel it. I just haven’t figured out if it’s something that has to happen, some event, or what it might be.”
Part 2 of Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Claire and Fang are on the verge of making that final step after so long, but what forces are working against them and will they find that happiness that seems within their grasp?

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year! I do hope everyone had a safe and happy beginning to yet another year.

Here is the wrap-up of Fang and Claire's journey to finally meet and see where this strong attraction is taking them. It has been a long almost 5 years and a feeling that if they don't make that last step that something bad will happen. This takes us into where that feeling is coming from and what is at the end of it for them. Obviously, if you've read First Christmas, the women are going to get their happy ending, but that journey is not always comfortable. Next will be the challenge that awaits them and how Etro has been with them the entire way.

Thank you all for reading and commenting.

The next couple of years had come and gone quickly. For Claire, it had involved the middle of the high school year change in the direction of a degree at university. Originally, the young woman had been debating psychology. The truth was she had a very strategical mind, and the military was just not an option for her. She tossed around the idea of pursuing a degree in law but hesitated with the bad reputations and crooked dealings that had been made public. There were other careers she could pursue, but business was less appealing.

Funny how all it took was one beautiful young woman by the name of Fang to open her to another possibility. Environmental Law, why she hadn't thought of it before perplexed her. It wasn't that she didn't understand what the world and people, including herself, did to the environment. The truth was, Claire hadn't considered specializing in a particular field of law.

As it turned out, New York had one of the top-rated universities in that specific field, and it would work well with the modeling agency she was signed with. Her home for the next few years would be in New York, still quite a distance from her love. Apart from scholarships, and her modeling job, Claire still found a way to incorporate Fencing into her schedule. It wasn't like work, it was like a vacation for her and she enjoyed the challenge immensely. At the age of 19, she had received a request to try out for the Olympic Team, but school and obligations came first.

As for Fang, the brunette followed her love of volleyball to the very city she had won her first championship in, São Paulo, where she would play for Sesi Vôlei Bauru. It was a testament to how much the country of Brazil had grown on the young woman over the years. It was nothing personal against Australia, or even the United States, Fang always followed her instincts and then her heart.
São Paulo University also gave her the opportunity to pursue her degree in Conservation Biology. It may not have been the best-ranked school in the world, but that wasn’t what Fang was looking for. Going to school so far away could have seemed intimidating, but both Fang and Vanille had an aptitude for learning and understanding other languages. So, living in Brazil wasn’t that big a deal to the brunette, she spoke Spanish and Portuguese well enough that she had been able to do interviews during the last two volleyball seasons here.

But just like Claire, she was far from her heart’s desire, her Sunshine. What had possessed them both to go in such opposite directions when they did not have the limitations they once did in high school? Sometimes it took the brunette a moment to ponder this. The answer was simple and one that she and Claire had discussed several times. The did not want to make the mistakes they had seen so many do, they wanted their education, a career so that they could provide for each other. Life was not fair, and it most certainly was packed with unknown variables. The idea that either one of them could end up infirm, or unable to work meant that there would be an extra load on their partner. It was something that neither woman wanted if they could avoid it. And it wasn’t like they wanted children and the world was populated enough that they were not shirking any duty of keeping humankind going. So, why did this feeling keep creeping up, as if they were running out of time, or they needed to meet soon? Instead of spending too much time in thought, Fang would recruit her staunchest supporter, Vanille.

And speaking of Vanille, the younger sister had graduated the same year as Fang. Valedictorian of course, and even though her older sister never talked about it, she had been Co-Valedictorian. For the first time, the two would be separated and by thousands of miles, as the red-head chose to go to England and attend the University of Cambridge. She could have gone anywhere she wanted, but the quality of research the University did was what sealed the deal for her.

“Come on, come on Van, pick up the damn phone!”

It was difficult not to be impatient. Fang was now 20 and fast approaching her 21st birthday. She felt ancient for someone about to turn the legal drinking age in the United States. But it wasn’t really her age that was bugging the young woman, it was that ever-pressing feeling that it was time for her and Sunshine to meet.

“Fang! Give a girl a chance to get out of the bathroom before blowing up her phone!”

“Thank goodness, I was afraid you and Serah were in one of your top-secret meetings and you were going to ignore me, again.”

Vanille fell quiet, it was so unlike Fang to behave in such a manner. The red-head softened her voice.

“What’s wrong?”

All the way in Brazil, Fang sat down on her couch and unloaded everything going on in her mind.

“I can’t explain it Vanille, it’s like there this heavyweight pushing on me about Sunshine. I’m not one to worry, but it feels like if something doesn’t happen soon, it will be all for nothing.”

“Why haven’t you two just picked out a day and place and met yet? I know you’re taking things slow Fang, but come on 4 years!”

“We had our reasons, but it seems more pressing that it happens soon. I can’t explain it.”
Fang could hear Vanille typing on her keyboard as she sounds of the fast-furious clicks could be heard through the phone.

“It’s just a few hours difference in time, there’s a flight leaving out of São Paulo International Airport in a few hours. I can pay for the flight and have you ready to arrive in New York by this evening.”

Fang sighed. Serah and Vanille really had gone to more private conversations, during their high school years both sister’s knew their schedules front and back.

“Claire’s on a photoshoot for Sports Illustrated, they’re in Hawaii and then she heads to Colorado Springs Olympic Center to take photos with the qualifying fencing team.”

Undeterred by the news, Vanille’s fingers continued to fly across the keyboard.

“Have you decided yet on whether you’re going to play for a team this year?”

“No, it’s the same old news, India wants me to play for them because of our heritage, the United States wants to parade their Native American around, Australia wants me to play for them, and Brazil has finally cut through the red tape with the Olympic Charter to be able to call me up to play for Brazil.”

The typing paused.

“Have you told Claire how you feel yet? If she knew how you felt, and I wouldn’t be surprised at all if she’s feeling it too, then the two of you can come up with a solution. Now that Brazil is on the table, you can play for them in the Olympics. That will surely put you two in the same place.”

Fang ran a hand through her hair. There are always exceptions to the rule and generally, you can’t get to know someone until you’ve spent time with them. And spending time was not on the phone, not over a webcam and not e-mailing or sending letters. Spending time in person was how you truly got to know the real person. Fang knew this, so did Claire, but it felt like they’d known each other for a very long time.

“I’m glad you understand Van, your parents think I’m a lunatic and I see how this looks. It’s just that this feels like a timing situation and I haven’t cracked the reason why.”

“Fang, talk to Claire tonight, your birthdays are not too terribly far apart so discuss your schedule, make exceptions and meet somewhere. I’ll help you in any way I can. Call me back with the information, if you two don’t do something soon, then Serah and I will. I love you, make the time.”

And Vanille hung up the phone, leaving Fang sitting on the couch feeling less than intelligent for having to get a speech from her little sister. There was a 7-hour difference in time between Brazil and Hawaii, and she had a small window to contact Claire before a busy day took her away. Dialing her phone, the brunette took a deep breath and waited.

“Hello, Fang, this is a pleasant surprise. Your hours early though, is everything okay.”

“Hey, Sunshine! Nothing serious, just something that I need to share with you. Do you have a minute?”

“Of course, what’s wrong?”

“Claire, I can’t get over this feeling that the time for us to finally move things forward is upon us. I know this will sound strange, but I feel an urgency like we need to do it soon. I can’t explain it,
I’ve tried to analyze it, but I come up with a blank.”

There was the sound of relief from the other end of the phone.

“You’re not alone Fang, I’ve felt it too. It went from a gentle tug at my conscience to urgency as you said. And to tell you the truth, I’m glad. I’m tired of waiting.”

“What’s your schedule like Sunshine? Let’s set a date and soon.”

Claire pulled out her laptop and went through her schedule, you could almost hear the groan from Fang as it would be well past her 21st birthday before Sunshine even had a day to herself. And the few days that she had were not back to back and conflicted with Fang. This was insane, having to schedule the first time to meet each other. Vanille was right in that sense, it made all this waiting seem like a gigantic joke! But to be honest, it was the same problem even then. The two had lives they were living well before they met each other.

“Fang, I don’t want this to sound pretentious, but the day of my birthday, I’m free that entire week.”

The sounds of Claire’s fingers going over the keypad rang in Fang’s ears, while her own brain processed the information. She almost laughed and cried at the same time at the irony of this repeated typing and the situation.

“Sunshine, I don’t have anything either.”

“Good, I just bought a ticket to São Paulo. You can pick me up at the International Airport at… 2:30 gate 22A.”

Finally, Fang laughed. If Claire was here right now, she’d hug her so tight out of pure bliss.

“Thank Etro! I’ve blacked out my calendar gorgeous, we have the whole week together and we can do whatever you want!”

The two love birds talked excitedly for several more minutes before life called them apart yet again. But the day was complete for them both and they were experiencing a high that hadn’t in quite some time. Moments after getting off the phone with Claire, Fang dialed Vanille.

“I take it you two figured it out?”

“Yes, Ms. Smarty britches!” The brunette replied with no venom.

“Than why do I still feel there’s something wrong?”

“Van, my laptop is in the other room, if I give you Sunshine’s departure time, can you check to see if there’s an international flight from Brazil that arrives earlier?”

“I just have this feeling that I should get there first, give her a surprise for her birthday.”

“One ticket from Brazil to New York with a flight right back to Brazil coming up.”

Fang had barely gotten the request out of her mouth before Vanille had a ticket bought for her sister and sent to her inbox.

“I’m so glad Serah’s not insane like this.” The red-head mumbled.

“I heard that.”
“All in a day’s work for a younger sister.” Vanille chirped back as she giggled.

“Thanks, Van, I owe you.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll have my Christmas list sent to you before tonight. Your confirmation for your ticket and flight should be in your mail. Make sure you let me know if it isn’t there tonight and Fang tell Claire not to be angry, but I hacked her account and bumped you both up to 1st Class. Love you, Bye!”

She couldn’t be angry at Vanille, she was floating on cloud nine and she didn’t even think she’d be able to touch the ground to chase after her. Won’t Sunshine be surprised! And then it occurred to Fang that Lightning would likely be getting a confirmation for the seat upgrade and change. There was a moment of concern that the surprise would be spoiled when she was jolted by the sound of a text message.

“P.S. – No, she won’t know about the changes, just in case you are wondering. You can thank Serah for that, as we have access to the e-mail account as well. There will be no trace, she won’t know about it until she sees you!”

The text ended with a large smiley face and in that instance, Fang wondered if Vanille would survive her first meeting with Claire when she found out about those two sneaky younger sisters. It didn’t matter, she’d cross that bridge when she got there, until then, the brunette went to the kitchen whistling a happy tune while she checked her refrigerator for dinner.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

The moment has finally come for Claire and Fang, but what kind of surprises will they encounter now that they are together? Just how strong is their love for one another, and to what lengths will they go for the other?

Chapter Notes

The next two chapters will have some wonderful moments for our two ladies. It's a time for them to shine and do what they do best, but I won't go into how that will play out. Expect some twists and turns for Claire and Fang as they move forward in their relationship.

A few months, that’s all they had to wait, but Claire and Fang knew that it would seem like the longest delay yet. There was that agonizing air of anticipation, excitement, and longing that made the last few years seem like nothing. So, when Fang’s birthday rolled around, Claire spent every moment she could chatting with the woman that had held her heart captive since the moment she saw her. And during their conversation, neither woman could stop smiling.

“No, plans then?” Claire asked.

“Sure, I’m talking with you,” Fang responded.

“I mean besides talking to me.” Sunshine laughed.

“No, it’s just another day.”

Claire couldn’t tell if she should be touched or exasperated, maybe a little of both.

“What about you gorgeous, what would you like to do on your birthday? Brazil has so many places I can show you. It’s a beautiful place.”

The thought of finally being with Fang just seemed so unfathomable after so long, as if it was just a dream. So, when the brunette had asked her, all she could think about was being with her. It was Claire’s silence that brought about the laughter from the other woman.

“Or, there’s that too. Not that you’d hear me complain.”

Claire’s cheeks flared the brightest red. And when she roused herself from the daydream, she noticed that green eyes were staring at her and that Fang was tracing what she knew to be the outline of her face.

“Sorry, it’s just, over 4 years Fang, my brain is trying to comprehend the reality of finally being in the same space as you.”
“It’s alright Sunshine. I know the feeling.”

The dreamy look on the brunette’s face made Claire unconsciously clear her throat.

“You said you had news?”

“Oh, yeah,” Fang replied as she refocused.

“I decided to play for Brazil. Now that the red tape has been cleared. We’ll have another excuse to see each other.”

“That’s wonderful! It seemed like the obvious choice, with you playing in Brazil’s junior league.”

“It was, and I briefly thought about the other countries, having dual citizenship, but Australia’s strength is in beach volleyball and the United States has too many good players as it is. I briefly thought about my mother’s lineage and considered India or Ireland too, but they’re both so new to the game. Outside of some of the customs my mother past down I haven’t had been around that part of my family. Needless to say, it was just too awkward to think about playing for either country.”

Claire knew the story well, Fang had spoken to her about the situation years ago. Although from different backgrounds and cultures, both of her parents had taught her the value of honoring your ancestors despite the initial rejection from both sides. Fang’s father’s side had eventually accepted his wife, but things had been a little more difficult for her mother. The lingering stigma from her grandmother having married outside her cast to a foreigner had not sat well and now her daughter was doing the same. Growing up, Fang had had very little to no contact with her full-blooded Indian or Irish relatives.

Claire was not shocked that Fang did not hold them in contempt. It was their way, their culture. It wasn’t right or wrong, it was just different. Fang, for the most part, was half Native and a quarter each of Irish and Indian and whatever mixture down the line those ancestors led too. Fang had once told her that they were all connected in one way or another through blood, and humans just couldn’t get through their heads that they were literally fighting their brothers and sisters. But try telling that to someone who was different from someone else through skin color, culture, and heritage. Human thinking was so stunted, but people only knew what they knew and if you were raised racist, and a person did not have their own mind, they followed what they’d been taught.

Claire thankfully was a lot more open-minded and had a large enough perception she could see where Fang was coming from. The brunette’s thought process followed a lot of what she had already been thinking, but isn’t that the problem? It was often like-minded individuals that could be racist and prejudiced against others. Beliefs were a dangerous thing because they had nothing to do with anyone but the person who held them. Humanity as a whole would do a lot better if people kept their beliefs to themselves and strived to be a better being on the outside, regardless of what was inside.

With the subject focused on Claire’s trip to Brazil, the model noted a slight change in the brunette. Fang’s smile had changed to a smirk and Sunshine had a sudden moment of Deja vu.

“Why do I get the distinct feeling that you’re up to something?”

Fang barked out a laugh.

“Wow, suspicious much? Can’t a gal be excited to finally get to see her Sunshine?”

Claire raised an eyebrow.
“Yes, but something in that smirk tells me that your brain is cooking up something.”

The suspect in question let her smirk go to a softer smile.

“I just can’t wait to finally see you, Claire. These last few weeks have seemed much longer than the years before.”

Truer words had never been spoken and with that remark, she understood completely, but Claire still couldn’t help that feeling that the brunette was up to something. She pushed it aside though as the two continued to chat until life pulled them apart.

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The closer to the day that Fang was to fly out, the more it reflected in the brunette’s behavior. That excitement and anticipation had boiled to a point Vanille’s older sister thought she’d burst for sure. Everything she did reflected the increased joy and enthusiasm and even her dearest friend commented on it when they talked over the phone. Irina had become an honorary member of the “Our sisters are idiots,” fan club. The Russian and best friend of Fang could not fathom the reason behind the two women not meeting in person for over 4 years.

She’d often teased Fang that her high intelligence had caused a mental disorder. For heaven’s sake, Irina herself had seen Fang throughout the years, why hadn’t she met Claire in all this time? The ex-teammate was thrilled for her best friend though and she had said as much the night before Fang’s flight. Of course, the conversation had eventually turned to the two lovebirds coming out to see her. It was a promise that Irina made her make before hanging up the phone.

“Damn Russian woman!” Fang had laughed as the call ended.

The brunette then turned her focus to her checklist to make sure everything was ready. Her apartment was in order, bags were packed, reservations for two at D.O.M. and Claire’s birthday card and gift were packed and safe. Fang had been planning on taking care of flowers when she arrived, but apparently Serah and Vanille had made the arrangements and all she had to do was tell them what she wanted.

Everything was in order, all she had to do now was talk to Claire before bed and get up in the morning and take the taxi to the airport in Brazil. Fang would have a few hours before her Sunshine was even scheduled to arrive at the airport in New York. It was plenty of time to pick up the flowers and watch for her arrival. Between Serah and Vanille, they would make sure that the two did not miss each other.

Fang shook her head, she could envision the whole scenario, Serah on the phone with her Claire, while Vanille and Serah were on the webcam together, and Vanille on the phone with her giving all the details to ensure that she did not miss her Sunshine getting on the plane. And if that wasn’t bad enough, Vanille made sure she had some inside help at the airport to make sure the two didn’t miss each other. Had the two older sisters really been that bad, that their younger sisters had gone to these extremes?

The entire situation was absurd to such a degree it seemed more like a poor movie plot, but Fang was grateful none the less. The truth was, she still had this nagging feeling in the back of her mind and she wouldn’t be able to get rid of it until she had Sunshine in her arms. Like clockwork, her
phone rang. If Vanille and Claire had one thing in common, it was their punctuality.

The conversation wasn’t very lengthy, Claire had just come back from a photoshoot in Milan and Fang could hear in her voice how tired she was. It caused her heart to hitch at the thought that her Sunshine had just returned from one flight, tired and suffering from jet lag, to turn around the next day to do it all over again. It was a statement to Fang, that Sunshine loved her very much, even though they had never spoken it to each other.

Despite the weariness, Claire’s own excitement was still obvious in her voice. When they returned to Fang’s apartment, the brunette would let her Sunshine sleep for as long as she needed. If they had to reschedule the reservations at D.O.M., then so be it. When the yawns could no longer be stifled, Fang ended the conversation with the promise that they would have an entire week together. It was that thought alone that allowed the brunette to fall asleep that night herself.

With a two-hour difference in time, Fang took the earliest nonstop flight possible, but it was still a 10-hour trip. Claire’s flight was not scheduled to leave until later that afternoon and would put her in Brazil in the very early hours of the morning. It was the best she could do with flight limitations, but it would give her the chance to surprise her Sunshine and enjoy the flight back together. The brunette’s last official act before boarding the plane was to call Vanille and let her know she was on her way.

Fang napped a good portion of the way, telling her overly enthusiastic mind to settle down so that she was at her most relaxed state when meeting Claire. It had helped, until arriving at New York’s JFK and finding out that Vanille had sent her a dozen texts. Panic nearly stopped her heart, Sunshine left early, she was already at the airport! Fang dialed her sister’s number.

“What the hell Van? What’s going on?!”

“Serah called me early, told me she’d just gotten off the phone with her sister. Claire’s so excited she hardly slept a wink and wanted to get to the airport so she wouldn’t miss her flight. She told her sister that JFK’s usually so busy, that checking in could take awhile. She didn’t want anything to hinder the trip or slow her down, so she called Serah and told her she was on her way to the airport.”

“Does Serah have eyes on her now?”

“Yes, she just finished at the check-in counter and was headed to one of the stores for some coffee. Serah used the excuse of helping her stay awake until her flight left as a way to keep her on the line.”

This was not how Fang saw her surprise going when she’d made the flight arrangements to come out here before Claire left. She hadn’t even made it through customs and she still had the flowers to pick up.

“Don’t panic, Serah ordered the flowers from Paradise Flower Shop when she called me, I made sure to have them sent to Hudson’s Bookstore in the same concourse you two would depart from. My inside person will take them there and have them hold the arrangement until they’re picked up.

“Van, I love you but sometimes you’re just plain creepy. Please try not to be in my head so much.”

Her sister giggled.

“Not like you haven’t done it to me.”
“Where’s she at now?”

Fang could hear Serah through the phone talking.

“She’s headed to Starbucks for coffee. Fang, you took only you’re carry-on, right?”

“Yeah.”

“You should see someone waving you over soon, you’ll be sent through the express line.”

Sure enough, as if on cue a woman called her by name and waved her over and out of line. Vanille could practically feel her sister’s gratitude through the phone. She was going to have one heck of a Christmas this year, not that the younger sister did this for gifts. All the comments in the past were always in teasing and jest, but she knew her older sister took it quite seriously.

Fang was in an out quickly and following Vanille’s instructions was on the hunt for Sunshine. She was so close; the brunette could feel the link stronger than she ever had ever before. In the meantime, Claire had gone through customs with the knowledge that the only thing keeping her upright was the fact that she was the closest to seeing Fang than she’d ever been. It was enough fuel to keep her going and she knew if she had to crawl to get there, she would.

Coming two hours early had paid off, she had checked her bag, discovered that she’d been upgraded to 1st Class and had decided to walk around the airport. With a lot of time on her hands before the flight, she needed something to keep her mind and body occupied with activity. Serah had made her stay on the phone the entire way from her apartment. She was grateful for the support, but Claire wanted to call and talk with Fang.

As much as she loved her little sister, the last hour would be solely for Fang. Claire made her way from toward the Starbucks in the main terminal, from there she walked over to one of the many Hudson New’s stores in the airport. A good book or magazine would be a good way to pass time, and when she saw a familiar face on the cover of a magazine, her brain froze.

“Hey Serah, I’ll call you back.”

Without waiting for a response and ignoring the protest on the other end, Claire placed the phone in her shoulder bag and picked up the magazine.

“Ragnarok to represent Brazil in the Summer Olympics.” She read to herself.

Claire smiled, but she couldn’t get past that beautiful woman on the cover. Fang was without a doubt the most intoxicatingly beautiful woman she’d ever seen.

“You know, I’m kind of partial to the Sports Illustrated myself. I think the cover is a much better view to look at. But then again, I’m kind of bias.”

The hairs on the back of Claire’s neck stood on end. That voice, the beautiful Australian accent, it sent a thrill as well as a chill down the model’s back. Her body was on autopilot, turning her around to stare into the very woman’s face that she had just been looking at on the magazine cover. That smile and those green eyes held her captive.

But it was when she looked into those green eyes that Claire’s world narrowed, and a shiver ran through her body as if a ghost had passed through her spirit. It was a piece of her that had been missing, coming home to make her whole, and it wasn’t entirely what one would think.

“Claire, are you alright?”
Lightning looked at Fang only it wasn’t fully her Fang, there wasn’t that recognition in her eyes. And yet, while part of her grieved, part of her was so relieved it trumped the other feeling.

“No, I don’t like surprises.” Lightning responded.

It took a moment and before the Huntress cast her a disappointed or sad look, Claire spoke up.

“I’m sorry, I’m just tired and…”

Lightning took hold of Fang and pulled her into a kiss. They’d spent enough time talking, and by Etro, she wasn’t wasting another second, whether Fang remembered everything or not. She would not let this gift be squandered. It was Fang who pulled back first, likely because she’d been startled, but she wouldn’t get an apology from Lightning. But instead of the Huntress saying anything, she did something very reminiscent of her Fang, she leaned her forehead against Claire’s.

“Remind me to surprise you more often if this is your response.”

Fang’s voice was hoarse, but after that searing kiss, Claire had taken not only her breath away, but apparently her voice. And when the brunette pulled away, Claire’s hand was still fisted in her shirt while hers was exploring that face with gentle touches and caresses.

“Hi,” Fang replied with a smile.

“Happy Birthday Sunshine.”

“Best Birthday Ever.” Came the reply.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Fang and Claire are getting ready to embark on a new journey after almost 5 years of waiting to be together. What will become of our two young women, especially now that Lightning remembers everything? Will anything come from Fang's need to fly out and meet Claire before she came to Brazil?

Chapter Notes

Drama begins.

Hope you all enjoy the continued journey of our two lovely ladies.

Lightning was a bit self-conscious as she found herself just staring at Fang the entire time, they were in the airport terminal. Her mind kept going back and forth on the fact this was Fang, but not entirely her Fang. She found herself wondering what kind of conversation Lumina had had with Etro. Yes, it was her, that part of Claire disguised as her younger sister, even so.

Whatever tiredness she had felt had left her in that first instance of seeing the Huntress. There were so many hints at her old love that it was almost excruciating. Fang had taken her hand and led her to the bookstore, where she’d been presented with a beautiful arrangement of long stem roses. Even though they were in a box, they were wrapped and prepared for flight on the plane.

“How did you pull this off?” Lightning asked as she and Fang walked toward Cascata for a light meal.

The ex-soldier had a suspicion and was curiously amused by the prospects of Fang’s answers. The Huntress herself looked a little guilty, likely from her conversation the night before. The pause from her love only brought about an eyebrow raise.

“Promise me you won’t be angry.”

“I promise.”

Lightning squeezed their joined hands in reassurance, but the temptation to let Fang sweat a bit was strong.

“I made arrangements with Vanille to get a flight out here to surprise you. Vanille and Serah both helped to make sure we met before your flight. And…”

There was another pause as Fang was struck with the odd sensation that something was very different. As Claire continued to look at her, waiting for a reply the savvy brunette continued.

“Vanille bumped you up to 1st class, her birthday gifts to the both of us.”
“Claire, are you sure you’re alright, you seem a little different?”

She was different. The ex-soldier was no longer just Claire with these odd feelings, unknown carry-overs from her previous life, and random dreams from her early teenage years. Remembering it all brought everything she was and had been all together. She was more than just Claire and more than just Lightning. But she realized with a clarity she couldn’t tell Fang about things she didn’t remember. Sure, her Huntress had carried over her sharp perceptions, but what would be the results of selfishly saying something to her? That was one question she didn’t want to know what kind of results she would receive, so she answered it in the safest and truest way she could.

“I am. I’m finally with you and that has changed me, for the better.”

It was the truth, without revealing all the details and for now, that was the best Lightning could do. Her answer, however, had a powerful reaction to Fang. She stopped and studied her for several moments. Lightning couldn’t deny the thrill it gave her, almost reminiscent of the very look her Huntress would give her when she was deciding something.

In one tug of their joined hands, Fang drew her close, cupping Lightning’s face with her free hand as she gave the ex-l’cie a dizzying kiss. It was the boldest move the former Huntress had made in the almost 5 years they’d known each other. Truth be told, her Fang would have found her way over to the States and taken that kiss long ago. Lightning found that she enjoyed this side of the brunette as well, but it didn’t mean she herself was completely immune to the idea of dragging her back to her home and skipping their flight.

The flashing of the camera’s brought the two back to reality. They weren’t the only celebrities that passed through the airport, but they were the ones currently giving the public something to gossip about. Fang received Claire’s brilliant smile and was quick to note the absence of embarrassment. Unbeknownst to the brunette, a smirk appeared.

“Sorry, Sunshine, guess we aren’t going to keep this secret now.”

“I don’t care, Fang, let them stare and gossip.”

The two professionals had spoken about their eventual meeting, and what it might mean once they were out in public together. Sometimes having privacy was a rarity when you became pop culture’s latest fad. And though they had spoken about keeping some private time for themselves as much as possible, meeting in person was vastly different than what either had expected.

But for Lightning, knee jerk reactions were not always easy for her to contain and a menacing glare gave both the fan and Fang pause. It was not the reaction she had been expecting, but it made her laugh none the less.

“Sunshine’s got some solar flare to her character. Remind me never to get on your bad side.”

The comment brought Lightning back to self-awareness and the glare disappeared and was replaced with a smile solely for Fang. Tugging at Fang’s hand, she kept them moving toward the restaurant.

“I suppose a little more sleep would help with the attitude.”

“Where have you been hiding this spitfire personality?” Fang teased.

The brunette had a sudden flashback of her first championship game when Andressa had shocked her by pulling her in for a kiss. She suddenly got the feeling that the Brazilian had dodged a bullet with Claire. And as beautiful as Sunshine was, Fang, did not see her as a pushover, or an easy win
for that matter. Yes, Andressa would likely have been sporting a shiner if she’d been dating Claire back then. There was just a tinge of guilt at finding it funny as she looked at the woman next to her.

“Apparently meeting you was all it took to come out.” Lightning smiled back knowingly.

The two were seated at their table and wasted no time ordering something light from the menu. Lightning decided that a cup of coffee would be in order to keep her awake. Those long days and short nights in another life, were long ago and she did not feel Etro’s powers surging through her as she once did. The conversation had been lively between the two, but the looks and touches lingered during the whole conversation. There was relief in them both, but Lightning was sure that she’d received the better gift and prayed to the goddess that Fang wouldn’t be left in the dark.

It was close to time to head toward the terminal they would be boarding the plane at, but Fang stopped Claire from getting up from the table. The brunette set a large rectangular box on the table. The smirk had reappeared.

“It’s for your birthday.”

Lightning gave Fang a suspicious look, before opening the box.

“A…lightsaber.”

“Not just anyone.”

“I know, Leia’s, the one she used in the books when she was training with Luke. You remembered? We haven’t talked about that since we first spoke to each other.”

Fang’s smirk grew wider.

“I have the blade going to your apartment. It was too large to carry around and I didn’t want to take a chance that something would happen to it. But, that’s not all…”

Fang indicated the white envelope stashed inside the lightsaber box and Lightning swore she saw a tinge of trepidation pass through the brunette’s eyes. Setting the saber aside, the ex-soldier picked up the envelope. Not wanting to keep her love in suspense of her reaction, she opened it. Inside was a birthday card and what looked like photos.

The card was full of it’s usual loving and romantic overtures from her Huntress, but she knew that what really had Fang’s attention was the content of the photos. Picking them up, she nearly choked from surprise. It was a set of photos that were damn near to her Blazefire, without the optional gun portion of the gunblade. Etched along one side of the blade the design of Odin’s summing gate and on the other side of the blade the summoning stone. It was the most intricate and amazing sabre she’d ever seen.

Speechless wasn’t an adequate word for how she felt. Fang watched the play of emotions over Claire’s face. She’d given her gifts before over the years, but this one by far was the best.

“How…”

“I know that roses aren’t your favorite flower…”

“No, it’s exquisite, Fang!”

The brunette smiled.
“Where did you find this...”

“I searched for a master weaponsmith and sent him some sketches and ideas.”

“You drew out the design?”

“Yes, it was surprisingly easy once I figured out what to get you for your birthday.”

If only Fang realized just how much of her past life was in this one, but in the end, it didn’t really matter. What Etro had given them was gift enough and Lighting loved this Fang just as much as she did her old Huntress. If she had to carry this burden alone, then she would gladly do it, just to be with the women that had had her heart for thousands of years.

“Where is it now?”

“At my apartment, waiting for you.”

An alert sounded on Lightning’s phone, reminding her that it was time to move toward the boarding gate. Fang wouldn’t allow her to pay for her lunch, insisting that today was her day and nothing but the best for her Sunshine. The royal treatment was something Lightning never expected or experienced in this life or the last. Her old response would have been to scoff at such treatment, but she wasn’t entirely the same Lightning anymore. Instead, the ex-soldier drew close to Fang and whispered something in her ear, causing the brunette to grow warm and a tinge of red to show in her tanned cheeks.

Lightning simply smiled and continued to lead the momentarily stunned Fang along with her. After those that had disabilities or special needs boarded the plane, Fang and Lightning were next, following the others that had booked seats in 1st Class. The two settled down and once the plane was off the tarmac, they reclined in their seats, still hand and hand and drifted off to sleep.

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Fang wouldn’t have thought it possible after a good night’s sleep, but with being so close to Claire and in constant skin contact, she fell asleep like a baby. The brunette was fast asleep with her Sunshine’s head laying on her shoulder when she jerked awake. Lightning was instantly awake, too much training from the Guardian Corp. for her to suddenly dismiss it because of this life. Now that her memories were back, there wasn’t anyone she trusted more with instincts than Fang.

“What’s wrong.”

“To state the obvious, something feels off. We’ve changed course.”

Lightning’s gaze casually went around the cabin, looking for signs that there might be trouble on board. There was nothing, even the passengers seemed oblivious to Fang’s apprehension. Not a moment later, the phone rang by the stewardess’ chair.

“What are you feeling.”

“Danger, like we need to grab a parachute and get the hell off of this plane.”

That was not a very reassuring feeling, and without their l’Cie powers, death was a more likely
conclusion. But Lightning didn’t panic yet, despite the air of doom hanging over their heads. Just as the ex-soldier was about to say something, the overhead intercom came on.

“Attention passenger’s this is your Captain speaking. We’ll be making a slight course alteration due to some mechanical issues. For your safety, we will be landing in Brasilia within the next 45 minutes. There will be a connecting flight on to Sao Paulo leaving shortly after our arrival, you will be directed to the gate after landing. I would ask that you please fasten your seatbelts, remain seated and place all trays in their upright position for the remainder of the flight. We apologize for the inconvenience and thank you for flying AA airlines.”

The message was done in the typical calm professional manner, giving no indication as to the severity of the plane’s issue. But Fang and Lightning both saw the fear in the eyes of the stewardess that had answered the call from the cockpit. She could smile all she wanted, but the two women could tell there was more to the conversation than what everyone on the plane was told. Passengers began to comply with the request immediately and conversation and hysteria began to rise, despite the calm announcement.

Even though Fang did not remember their past, she was remarkably calm with that steely look of determination. Etro have mercy on them, they’d just gotten together and to survive a plane crash at this altitude toward the front of the plane was just as astronomically rare as plane crashes.

Fang fastened her seatbelt, turning to help Claire when their world exploded in a flash of steel, flame, and chaos. The brunette’s instinctual reaction kept her Sunshine from being sucked out of the plane. Lightning was very grateful for the strong grip the Huntress had on her, had she retained that ability from their old life? If so, she was thanking Etro for such a mercy.

“Don’t you let go!” Fang called upon the chaos.

Lightning was hanging on for dear life as the brunette tugged with all her might to pull her back in toward their seat. In that instance, Fang’s own world narrowed, and she had flashes of falling, of Lightning reaching out as she and Vanille drifted away. Like being hit by a Thundaga spell, the brunette’s skull felt like it was being split in two from the inside out. As quickly as the chaos was enveloping them, Fang’s memories came flooding back.

“Light!”

She’d seen it happen in an instant, that flicker of recognition, the moment that Fang had come full circle and remembered everything. There was relief in her face, if only that they would get to die together if this was how it was to end. But Lightning was no more a quitter than the Huntress, but how do you survive this? There was no Eidolon’s, no Bahumat, no Odin to rescue them?

Lightning couldn’t immediately tell you who’d been sucked out in the giant gaping hole of the plane, and beyond the hysteria, she could hear the wind whipping past the hole, and the groan of the plane as it felt the stress of fire, and pressure from altitude. Fang had managed to pull her back toward the seat and between the two of them buckle in. It wouldn’t make a difference at the end of the plane crashed nose first, but from what the Huntress could tell, the pilot was doing his best to level the craft out and lower the altitude.

This was Brazil though, still a vast continent of rainforest despite man’s best effort to destroy it. And when Fang couldn’t see the stars outside, she knew that they had likely hit a fog patch, adding a new element to their issues. The brunette held on to Lightning’s hand and gave her a loving look.

“Light, I’m not going down easy, if I can help it, but I have to say this. I won’t let it go unsaid this time around...”
“I love you.”
“I love you too, Fang.”

And the world exploded in a shower of color and light before the darkness enveloped everything…

****

It was 5 am, and Vanille groaned as her phone rang for the third time. It wasn't that she had been ignoring it, the girl was just a deep sleeper. Rolling over in her bed, she reached for her phone just as the phone quit ringing. The red-head would have thrown it across the room if she hadn't noticed the missed calls from Serah. If she wasn't fully awake before, she was now. Claire’s sister wouldn’t just be calling her for nothing. Before she could even dial the number, Serah’s name popped up again, Vanille answered it immediately.

“Serah?”

She was greeted to a sobbing voice barely coherent on the other end. This can’t be good.

“Their plane… it went down. Vanille,…Claire and Fang’s plane crashed…”

Vanille suddenly felt ill and she knew she’d have fallen over if she wasn’t already sitting in her bed. Was this why her older sister had had a bad feeling she needed to see Claire before she came to see her? Had she and Serah just lost their sisters?

“Serah, I’m here, tell me what you know.” The red-head replied as calmly as she could. She felt the tears threaten to overwhelm her, but Serah needed her.

It took the younger woman several minutes to compose herself, Vanille was right, she needed to take a deep breath and calm herself. Thank heaven for the red-head, and she could honestly say if this was the way Claire felt about Fang, she understood her a lot more concerning their relationship.

“It came on the 10 o’clock news, that their airplane had called in with a mechanical issue and was headed toward Brasilia to change planes, sometime after that call they lost radio contact. A fog has settled in over the area they last received a transmission from and search and rescues efforts are delayed.”

While Serah was telling Vanille over the phone, the red-head had pulled up her laptop and was scouring the internet for news. If she had to hack into information to find out more about their sister’s she would.

“Serah, can you pack a bag and head to the airport?”

There was silence on the phone.

“Yes, what do you want me to do.”

“Do you remember my friend Hope Estheim? His father owns a private airline for people who don’t want to travel by public plane.”

“Hope’s father is that Estheim?”
“One and the same, I’ll make a few calls. How are your parents, do they know?”

“Mom’s the one who called me, she’s not doing well.”

Vanille rattled off a list of things for Serah to do before and after she arrived at the airport. It wouldn’t be convenient for them to wait on parents at this stage, but if they wanted to go to Brazil, the red-head would see what she could do about Hope helping if he could. The tears were ever threatening, she just hoped that she was off the phone before the feeling of crying overtook her too.

“Serah, whatever happens, you won’t be alone.”

“I know Vanille, and I hope you know that the same goes for you.”

“I do.”

When the younger sisters finished their call, there was a lot of work to be done before they could get to Brazil. The first was a phone call to her parents to let them know about Fang. If the tears came then, Vanille wouldn’t stop them. The next call was to Hope. There was no way she’d leave her sister and Claire out there even if the worst had happened.

After the calls were finished, arrangements were made and Vanille had the chance to shower, pack and change before she ran out the door. Serah was the final call, to confirm that the younger woman was also headed to the airport. As flight plans were made and the taxi sped off to the airport, Fang’s younger sister was busy putting that intellect to work. Come hell or high water, she and Serah were on their way to find them.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Lightning and Fang are facing the scariest moment of their lives. What will become of the two women, will they both survive? Meanwhile, Serah and Vanille are racing against time with the optimism that their sisters are alive. With Hope's help, if they are alive, can they get there in time to make sure they stay that way?

Chapter Notes

Things are heating up and the drama continues. Please do not shoot the writer!

On a side note, airplane crashes and natural disasters that result in death are no laughing matter. I just wanted to take a moment to recognize the Chapecoense football team from Brazil that died in the plane crash on November 28, 2016. Also, a moment for Australia and the terrible conditions their country has been facing with the raging fires and destruction. There is so much going on right now, and the world is a mess. It would be nice if we could all get our BS together and be united.

As always, thank you for reading and commenting. Please excuse typos, grammatical errors, etc.

The first conscious sensation was pain and as awareness expanded, a chill filled her being, followed by wetness. But when she moved, the first feeling overwhelmed her and drug her back deep into the depths of darkness. She did not fight it; the pain was too great to want to continue to experience it. The dark, it was a good place to be, because there was no feeling at all.

The second time she became aware, the original sensations were still there, only more expanded. She thought she could hear the crackling of a fire, but it was overpowered by an awful smell. Her mind kept telling her, she needed to wake up, to get up, it was important for her to do so. Her painful response was, why, oblivion seemed so much better than the pain and cold. The darkness returned only this time, she wasn’t so sure she should let it take her. It did anyway.

The next time she was roused from the darkness, she was coughing, and her lungs burned, and her side felt as if a blade had been rammed through it. The iron taste of blood in her mouth was the first thing to startle her with a drive to wake up. There was something important going on, there was something she was forgetting, or someone but her pain hazed brain was having a difficult time focusing on anything past the pain.

She couldn’t remember fighting so hard, ever. But the pressing sensation that it was vital that she awoke started to become as pressing as the constant pain. This time, with more clarity, it was that someone needed her, someone important to her. But for the life of her, she couldn’t remember who. If she could just focus past the pain, she could do this. Someone needed her.

She moved, and it was a mistake, but she found no air in her lungs to scream. This time, the
darkness came, and it swam at the edge of her vision, but she used the thought that someone needed her, to focus on the urgency of staying awake. It hurt to try to open her eyes, and she found it difficult to even get a glimpse from underneath her eyelids. It felt as if they were glued together.

She was not about to be defeated by this, not when someone that meant the world to her, needed her. She began by testing smaller parts of her body, moving a few fingers, then a wrist, testing the level of mobility despite not being able to see what she was doing. The pain was so great within her entire being it was difficult to tell, what truly hurt and from where. If she could just get one of her hands up to her face, she could pry her eyes open if she had too.

Her mind had deduced that it had to be an accident of some kind, that would explain the pain and constant loss of consciousness. It also explained the reason she couldn’t open her eyes, they must be encrusted with dried blood or swollen to a point she couldn’t open them. There was a strange moment of feeling like she should be panicked, but nothing came, just the urgency that someone needed her badly. Right now, it didn’t matter who it was, just the feeling that it was someone of importance.

Laughably, she couldn’t even remember her own name. No time to worry about that, she needed to see, to get her bearings on the situation. Why did everything take so damn long when there was a feeling of urgency? But that was a facet of life, control what you could, because everything else was out of your control. And that answer usually was, you could control yourself with emotions and behavior, the rest you had no jurisdiction over.

As frustrating as it was, time seemed to tick by when she finally reached a hand up to her face. It was slick with something, but she was becoming aware she seemed to be wet everywhere. Gently she probed about her face, making sure she wasn’t adding to an existing injury, when she felt sure enough of her examination, she began to cautiously pry one eye open at a time. Even though she had physically felt no serious damage around her eyes, having them opened one at time was challenging. The moment one eye opened, it wanted to slam shut and burned to an irritating degree. But she kept at it, until she could blink away the irritation and get a full look around.

Unfortunately, what she could make out in the light of a burning fire was a sight for a waking nightmare. Her senses heightened immediately, and the gnarled remains of wreckage surrounded her, as well as a pitch darkness unlike anything she’d ever experienced before. There was a wetness to the air and fog hung so low to the ground it was almost impossible to make anything out. If parts of the debris hadn’t been on fire, she doubted that she would have been able to see anything at all.

And what was that god-awful smell? It hung thick in the air and with a sudden jolt, she realized it was airplane fuel. Fang would have noticed that smell without even having to open her eyes. Her senses were just that sharp. And then it hit her, just like when she’d seen Fang at the airport, everything that had happened up until the crash.

Fang! Immediately, Lightning’s eyes looked to her right and the Huntress was not beside her. In fact, her entire seat was missing. Now, the ex-soldier felt a surge of panic. Without thinking, she went to move, to scour the area for her beloved and was reminded, that she herself was seriously injured. The seat belt alone was still intact and the sudden jerk in movement to rise, brought on a sudden inhalation of breath and then a coughing fit as blood splattered on her hand.

Lightning’s side burned, her lungs burned, and the pain was something she would not soon forget. The ex-solder bit down on the feeling and pushed it as far from her as she could humanly do. She was not about to be defeated by her own injuries when she had no idea where Fang was or what kind of condition, she was in. Panic served no one, and if the Huntress was dead, she couldn’t do
anything for her anyway. They no longer had their l’Cie gifts, she was no long Etro’s Champion, and the power of the divine, she could no longer feel it.

Focus, it was her mantra, her Guardian Corp. training, it was all there, she simply had to use it. Once her breathing was under control, Lightning did a quick assessment on her own condition. All the damage sustained seemed to be on her left side, the side closest to the cabin. Her left-hand laid limp against her, the swollen fingers an indication that it was likely broken. She was no doctor, but she’d seen injuries in the field and in training.

The severity however, Lightning was unsure of. There was no bone protruding from the skin that she could see, but the pain and tenderness, the swelling of her fingers and the way her arm caused her pain when she attempted to move it, was enough evidence that she’d broken it. As for her side, there was wet sticky blood caked along her torn shirt as well as against the wall of the plane. She’d at least cut up her side, and there was no evidence that she’d penetrated the skin near her chest. Perhaps the blood she’d been coughing up was from the blunt force trauma?

After a quick assessment, Lightning unbuckled the seat belt and attempted to rise. A wave of dizziness hit her, and she took hold of the arm of her seat to keep from falling. There was a wave of dread that enveloped her, when she’d stifled that part of her that had been Claire so long ago, she’d been an efficient soldier. She’d turned off that natural nurturing part of herself and her emotions. She loved Serah, but it had become a job and a responsibility. And in that, she had been disconnected from her sister, she’d become a cold-hearted bitch.

But now, in this life, Claire had been given the opportunity to grow up, she hadn’t been stifled and with it came the emotions she had so masterfully suppressed. She when dread and panic danced at the edge of her mind, she knew it was because she cared. And one of the most important people in her life was somewhere out of her sight and reach and it terrified her to no end. Lightning would have to double down on these emotions to push through for her love. And with that thought in mind, the soldier put her military mind set into action and slowly pushed off from the seat.

She would crawl if she had to, Fang was far more important to her than her own injuries. The Huntress would have been at her side already if she could, it didn’t even matter that she didn’t remember. It was just a core part of who Fang was. With slow calculated movements, Claire began looking for her Heart.

“Fang! Can you hear me?”

A few bodies scattered the area. The plane had come apart either from impact or from instability or both. The scene was truly a horror with the burning debris, mangled metal, scattered pieces of plane and contorted corpses. Claire didn’t have time to grieve for the dead, she needed to work with clinical precision as Lightning. Grieving for the lost would come later, no sense dishonoring them now by giving up or breaking down. Besides, others may have survived, but priority was Fang.

The area was deathly quiet, absent from the sounds of people. Lightning carefully made her way along the wreckage looking for any sign of Fang. There was more than once that if she hadn’t had a strong stomach, she would have vomited at some of the sites she saw. She prayed that these poor souls met their end quickly and hadn’t suffered and that they had gone on to a better place.

The longer she looked, the more difficult it was to keep the despair at bay. If Fang’s seat came undone before the impact, she could be anywhere. Each moment that passed, Lightning felt her resolve falter. Tears pricked the corner of her eyes as she searched through the debris.

“Fang, answer me damn it!”
There was a tinge of desperation in her voice, but Lightning pressed on. Parts of the plane were everywhere, one moment she was walking on parts of the plane and the next she was touching the wet earth. It was outside of the plane, yards away that the soldier spotted what appeared to be a 1st class seat. As fast as her body would allow Lightning drew nearer.

The closer she was, the clearer the image cast by the random fires. Claire was frantic, Lightning driven. The seat was clearly damaged and in that twist of metal she made out a shape. Dark hair with red highlights, she knew that body better than most and the soldier had to take control of the emotional surge that threatened to take her over.

“No…no…no…no...”

Lightning reached the seat, and her worst fears stared her in the face. For all the better quality of seats in the first class, the Huntress looked a mess. Blood pooled around the seat and as the soldier made her way to the ground, she could see that Fang did not appear to be breathing. The brunette was covered in blood, cuts, gashes, deep seeping wounds covered her body. The gash to her forehead did not appear to be as bad as those on her left arm, but it was still seeping blood far more than the others.

The first thing Lightning did was feel for a pulse, there was nothing there and the first sob caught in her throat.

“You idiot, if you saved my life just to turn around and…."

Lightning choked on another sob as tears began fall from her eyes.

“…die. I swear to Etro I will kick your ass.”

The words sounded so empty, even though she meant every word. Lightning placed her good hand in front of Fang’s mouth, no breath.

“Damn you Fang…don’t you do this to me again. Don’t you leave me.”

Her grief was too powerful to hold back. Her ribs protested, her entire body screamed, but it wasn’t as agonizing as what she was feeling now.

“Please Fang…” Light sobbed.

“I can’t do this again without you.”

Lightning searched for the buckle holding Fang into her seat. With what little strength she had left, she was able to unbuckle the Huntress and pull her from the seat and practically into her own lap. Claire couldn’t handle this, she was resting on the strength of Lighting and that was faltering. Holding her with one good arm, Lighting rocked Fang in an embrace as the tears came.

“Please Etro, you can’t let this happen. You promised. I believe you. Please…”

In the darkness, a brilliant golden light erupted.

****
Serah and Vanille were meeting at an airport half way to their destination in Brazil. For Serah, they had to arrange for an emergency passport to get into the Country. The red-head quietly talked with Hope, while they waited for one of his father’s private jets to land. A quiet took them both over, as Claire’s younger sister landed and disembarked from the plane.

It was like the two young women were on autopilot as they ran toward each other to wrap supportive arms around the other. For several minutes the tear exchanged fears and tears, with Vanille quietly holding Serah and reassuring her she would not be alone. After minutes seemed to pass, Van turned back toward the other plane.

“Serah, this is Hope Estheim. He and his father are helping out with the rescue efforts.” Vanille replied as she wiped at her tears.

“Thank you Hope. You can’t even imagine how thankful my family is for this.”

“The pleasure’s all ours Serah. I’m just sorry that we’re meeting for the first time under such circumstances.”

Hope was thin, attractive and a tall young man, a little larger than Fang herself, Vanille would say. The young man in question had a keen intelligence that belied his easy-going nature. It was one of the attractions that the red-head had had to him as a friend. But Hope wasn’t here for small talk with the ladies, he knew the urgency of the situation. On the flight to Brazil, he would talk with the women if only to ease the emotional situation.

“We have to make a stop inside the airport, Serah, for your passport. Hope and the pilot will take care of things here and then we can leave.”

Serah looked exhausted, but if you asked her, so did Vanille. No one wants to lose a loved one, but their anxiety was more for their sisters. With nothing left to do, Van took Serah’s hand and the two rode in the awaiting car to the terminal. There was a long way to go yet, and still lots of red tape and obstacles ahead.

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One minute, Fang was holding on to Lightning’s hand and confessing her love to the solder. In the next instance, she seemed to be floating above what appeared to be her body.

“What a bloody mess, this is almost funny except for the fact I’d hate Sunshine to find me like this.”

Speaking of Lightning, the Huntress had the need to find her, sans body if need be. If her Sunshine had survived, well, she would both be happy for her and sad. The two warriors knew each other well enough that it wouldn’t go over well with either one of them to be a sole survivor. Making sacrifices was old hat for Fang, but she’d promised Lightning too, that she wouldn’t leave her again. Such a foolish promise when one knew that you could tell the universe how to operate.

Even in death, it seemed that Fang was drawn to Lightning. The Huntress was aware of exactly where the soldier was. Passing through the debris, she gave little notice to the other spectral spirits roaming the crash site. Her concern for the moment was her Sunshine. She was there at the soldier’s unconscious side in an instant.
Fang knelt in front of Lightning, a ghostly hand caressing the side of her beloved’s face. There was such love and adoration there and she willed as much as she could toward the body of the soldier. The Huntress had such disdain for the divine in her old life, blaming god for their creation of the Fal’Cie. But for some reason in this life, her soul was a peace. Perhaps because she held on to that faith that Etro would deliver on her promise.

Yet even now, standing before Lighting in her bodiless form, she wasn’t angry, and she felt that Etro would still deliver on that promise. Just how that would happen, Fang was uncertain, but she was a peace. Maybe this was what it was like to be dead, a sense of peace, but hearing the sudden wails and cursing of the other specters put that thought to rest.

“I’m sorry Light. Don’t give up on Etro, I believe something will happen that still allows us to have a life together. I love you, I always have, ever since I met you. Let my love for you be your strength.”

Fangs attention was drawn by a sudden flash of light, like a tear in the existence between worlds appeared and two very familiar forms stepped through.

“Bahumat, Odin?”

They were not in their mechanized forms as she had known them, they were ethereal forms of the creatures themselves. This gigantic form of a dragon as dark as the abyss with hints of that amethyst coloring through out his wings and horns. And there beside him, the most beautiful white stallion the Huntress had ever laid eyes on.

They called her forward, not with words but by feeling and the Huntress obeyed, giving Claire a final spectral kiss before departing.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

In the midst of a storm, faith can bring a calming peace, or it can bring joy and happiness. The divine's perception of life greatly differs from our own, but if we remain faithful when all seems lost, blessings beyond our imagination can occur. Fang and Lightning experience these blessings amidst loss and Serah and Vanille discover an important lesson.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for not responding to comments yet, but I knew that there were a few of you out there waiting for a new post. As a fan myself, I know how frustrating it can be when you have to wait. Unfortunately, life happens and people disappear, lose interest, etc. and we sometimes never get our ending. So, unless an act of god happens, this will be completed by a few more chapters.

Please excuse grammatical errors, sentence structure or spelling. I have no other eyes to read and proof and I wanted to get this out to you all as soon as I could.

Thank you for your patience, comments and for reading this story tellers stories.

Although the hour was late, or early depending on your perception, Serah was able to get in and out of the airport with a new passport in hand. Emotionally, Claire’s baby sister was a wreck, physically she was fatigued but continued onward for the sake of her sister. Her pain and suffering was for the unknown state of Claire’s well being. When you loved someone, truly loved them for them, you felt pain for them, not for yourself and right now Serah was hurting.

But Serah wasn’t alone, and when she looked over to the red-head beside her, that still held her hand in support, she felt loved. She and Vanille’s relationship had began to change over the years and as far as Claire’s younger sister felt, it was better than before. This was what Fang and Claire had been feeling, all those years and the youngest Farron daughter had a deeper understanding now.

The two younger women had gone from not knowing one another, to knowing the most intimate thoughts and feelings of the other. Vanille and Serah had started out as strangers, become friends, best friends and now they had been ending their conversations with, “love you.” And the words might have seemed casually and say as close friends, but they both knew better. Why had they never acted on their feelings towards the other?

Inwardly, Serah laughed, she could imagine the hypothesis that Vanille would give. She would examine it, dissect it, and look at every possible theory and present them all. The red-head was simply amazing and beautiful all at the same time. What saddened Claire’s sister, is that it had taken this reflection of the tragedy of life for her to really look at this terrific young woman beside her.
When Serah’s passport was complete and in hand, she led Vanille to a secluded place. It was funny in a way to hear her protesting and question what she was doing, but Serah needed to do this. No one had the luxury of time and she was hit with this clarity like a tidal wave.

“Serah, what’s wrong. We need to get going.”

“Vanille, I need to say something. It’s important.”

“We can do it on the plane, I know you’re upset…”

Where the boldness came from, Serah didn’t know. But looking into Vanille’s eyes, she just reacted and pulled the red-head in for a passionate kiss, soundly cutting off her speech. Surprise was not the appropriate word for Fang’s little sister. A pleasant shock only began to scratch the surface, but when Serah released Vanille, the red-head had a funny little smile on her face and was beet red.

Serah wanted to giggle, she was absolutely adorable, but what she had to say was more important and Claire’s sister didn’t want to be distracted.

“I can’t say that I’m sorry, Vanille.” Serah began.

“We’ve been saying, ‘love you,’ for some time but we’ve never acted on it or expanded on the feeling.”

It was the first time that Vanille had ever been speechless, but the kiss alone had struck her dumb and all she could do and wanted to do was hear Serah out.

“We’ve talked about and I know that the, ‘I love you,’ means more than just as friends. Knowing that we might be going to Brazil to find our sisters dead has shaken me to the core. I can’t sit by anymore than we lectured our sisters and act just like them.”

Serah took hold of Vanille’s hands.

“Vanille, I really do love you and more than just my friend. I want to go out on a date with you after this. I want to spend time with you, hold your hand and…”

This time it was Serah’s turn to blush.

“I want to kiss you again. You mean the world to me and this accident has opened my eyes that I’m no better than Claire when it comes to acting on things.”

Looking into Vanille’s eyes, Serah made the leap.

“I love you, will you go out with me.”

Vanille was still dumb struck. For such an intelligent person and prolific speaker, her words and intellect failed her. Serah was completely right, they had been skating around this love for some time. They had dressed it up and disguised it as helping their stunted older sisters make the leap, and yet over the last year they spent more time just talking with each other.

“Yes, I would love too, Serah.”

This time the red-head made the move and gentle kissed Serah.

“I love you too.”
There was a long embrace and loving words exchanged before the two raced hand in hand back to the plane. Life would go on, whether their sisters were alive or not and the two knew that Fang and Claire would both be unhappy if they ignored the attraction due to death. Knowing that, they would honor their sisters no matter what, but until then, they were on a rescue mission.

***

Fang walked through the tear in reality and stepped into the unknown. Standing before her were the eidolons that had been a part of their lives as l’Cie. Looking up at the massive dragon that was Bahamut, the Huntress felt very tiny. She reached out and ran her hand along the scales of his large head with a gentle stroke.

“Hey big guy, good to see you with out all that technology on you. Such a handsome dragon.”

Odin snorted and Fang laughed.

“You too, Odin. I’m glad to see you too and I’ve never seen such a handsome stallion.”

Fang replied as she reached with her other hand to run it along his head and muzzle. If only Lightning could be here now, in other circumstances of course. The Huntress spent a few moments and enjoyed just loving on the two children of Etro, her brothers and kinsman.

The brunette imagined riding the massive dragon around as he truly was and the though made her laugh for a moment. She could see the faces of all these billions of people in the world and how they would react to something of “legend and myth.” But that was a far as it went, because the reality was that some idiot would be hunting him down and killing him out of fear or for want of a prized trophy. And unfortunately, she could now start adding some women to that stupid category.

No, such a glorious being deserved better than what human kind would give, and the Huntress knew she would not stand any harm coming to him. Fang was humbled at the fact that Bahamut had been such a large part of her life, it had really been a true blessing. Although, back in her l’Cie days, the brunette would have argued such a point.

But while the Huntress reminisced on days past and the present, she could feel Odin and Bahamut sending her messages through their feelings.

“You’ve been watching us all this time?”

The thought brought a smile to Fang’s face, and a longing in her heart that they could have had a more active role in the flesh. But she understood, this was supposed to be a new world and as such, things had to change.

“So, you’ll be our unseen and silent companions until the end of our days?”

Again, the brunette found herself humbled.

“Well what’s the plan? I know Etro wouldn’t go back on her word, so how are we getting me back into my body? If Lightning finds me like my body currently is, she won’t find it as amusing as I did.”

Odin pawed at the ground with his hoof and snorted.
“Of course, I don’t like the idea of her finding me like that! It does bother me, because Lighting isn’t just Light anymore, she’s Claire too.”

Fang was aware of the situation, they were both different in this world, even with their memories back. Her younger and uninformed self willingly took things slow, her former self, in a life long gone, would have been on the first flight out to get Sunshine. Even though her physical form was currently dead, and Lightning was seriously injured, the brunette found the wisdom in how things had gone.

She could have stood there and argued what good did it do to wait, when she was now dead. But there was a marked difference in what the old her would have done and this new version of herself, Fang had faith. And it wasn’t just any kind of faith, it was faith in the divine, in a higher power. Had she and Lightning been born exactly the same, their lives would have been drastically different.

And it was that change within them that her crack about her dead body caused sadness for Claire. Lightning, she would soldier up and find a way to move on, because that was her. It didn’t mean she didn’t love Fang, it just meant she was accustomed to life being unfair and cruel at times. Claire however, even though she had an awareness was a woman of deep emotions and feelings.

Just before they crashed, when Fang’s former life came roaring down upon her, she knew that Lightning had been there first, but for how much longer? Claire had finally been able to live, to grow up, to experience emotions that Lightning had buried a long time ago. The Huntress knew that Claire would be devastated, and she wasn’t sure the soldier was prepared for that part of her.

Odin nudged her with his muzzle and Bahamut pushed his large head against her shoulder. She could feel the love pouring in from them, trying to dispel the sadness that had overwhelmed her. That kind of love made it that much harder to say goodbye when the time came. And the Huntress knew with all her being that they would be parting ways.

“Thank you.” Fang said as she sent them all the love she could back.

There was no response in feelings as to her question about Etro’s plan, just that she was here for a reason and then would be leaving again. Presumably, Fang would be returning to Lightning, but who was she to make assumptions about the thoughts and actions of the divine? The Huntress would just trust and believe, let her faith and instincts carry her as they always had.

“Ow! What was that for you menace!” Fang said as Odin nipped her.

“Of course, I love her, you should know that!”

The Huntress relaxed from the initial shock of the bite. Who would have thought that your spirit could feel pain? She almost laughed out loud, but Odin’s feelings of concern sobered that reaction.

“You know I’ll take care of her. She’d be rolling her eyes at you right now if she knew you thought she had to have someone to watch over her.”

Fang did laugh when Odin snorted.

“It will be our secret.”

Bahamut pressed his head into Fang’s shoulder. She reached back up to rub her hand along his cheek. The moment nearly choked the poor Huntress into tears. There time was coming to a close and a part of her did not want to say goodbye to her companion. Odin nudged her hand with his muzzle, drawing her sorrowful thoughts to the present. She pulled her hand up and opened it with
the palm up.

“Sorry, I don’t have anything if that’s what you’re looking for, Odin.”

But even as the words came out of the brunette’s mouth, a flare of pink and amethyst burst from her hand and mixed together. As soon as the colors faded, the Huntress saw what had brought on the colors. Sitting in the palm of her hand was her and Lightning’s old eidoliths. As much as she would have wanted it to be the case, she knew that the eidoliths were not for what she desired. The feeling’s translated to her current companions and they both nudged her.

“It’s okay, this world wouldn’t understand you anyway. We’re a little too concerned with self.”

The Huntress clasped the crystals in her hand as her emotions poured into the stones. It took her a moment to speak.

“This is a monumental gift and it would be selfish to ask for more. I’ll make sure Lighting gets this, Odin. And Bahamut, I’ll keep it close to me, always. I know you’ll always be around, but now we will both have a physical reminder.”

She felt, more than heard the tear between realities reopen. The brunette still did not have an answer as to what Etro had in store for her and Lightning, but she would have faith that the goddess had a plan. With a final farewell, the Huntress loved on both Eidolons, bidding them goodbye and stepped back through the rip between the worlds.

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Lightning gasped as she was filled from the inside out with light. It was followed by a warmth that penetrated her from the very soul and outward to her skin as the blinding light coalesced into one location, her heart. The ex-soldier felt it immediately, that flow of magic, the touch of the goddess in her veins and in her being and it radiated as a brilliant aura all around her.

Her faith in Etro had called it forth, their mother had not left them she had dwelt within them as she had said. Lightning knew, without a doubt that if she were to look under her shirt, she would be wearing the brand of Etro herself. And she was touched and humbled to have the honor to be a conduit for the goddess once again.

Although Claire did not have the experience with magic that Lightning did, but the actions of the two were the same none the less and without thought or hesitation, healing magic poured from her and into Fang’s lifeless body.

“Divine Etro, please mother, please let me be your conduit. I can’t bring Fang back, I need you. Use me, so that she can come back, as you promised.”

The radiant light of Etro that enveloped Lightning, extended and enveloped Fang, penetrating her physical body to her very soul. The brightest light erupted from the arm of the Huntress where her scorched brand had once lay.

The ex-soldier laughed with joy and relief, a sound that sounded almost hysterical to her own ears. Tears began to slide back down her face and drop onto the Huntress’ cheek, mingling with the blood and grime. Claire’s hand lay gently upon Fang’s chest as she confidently watched Etro’s magic channel from her being into her Heart.
Fang stepped through the tear and without warning was sucked back into her body with a supernatural gasp of air. Pain hit her all at once and inwardly the Huntress cursed herself for not being prepared. It was a pain unlike anything she had ever felt, even under the torture of Orphan. But mingled in the pain, was the exponentially greater feeling of love and security. It felt warm and comforting. The brunette felt like a baby in the arms of her mother and she imaged that was exactly what this was. She was in Etro’s embrace.

Sensations bombarded her all at once, it was like having your entire brain turned on at once and overwhelming did not even touch the surface. Fang sputtered and coughed and heaved air into her lungs as her physical body over compensated for the shock. The Huntress suddenly felt the soothing touches and calming voice of Lightning.

“Shhh…I’ve got you Fang. You’re going to be okay. Everything’s fine now, your back. Etro brought you back.”

Wash Sunshine crying, she hadn’t even had the strength to open her eyes yet, the Huntress swore she could feel Lightning’s tears slide down her face and impact upon her own. She could feel the sobs held back by the relief of the brunette’s return. Fang tried to talk and started choking again as Lightning held her tight.

“Be still.”

Without even opening her eyes, the Huntress curled further into Lightning’s embrace, giving her body a chance to adapt to being reborn so violently. A feeling of comfort and relief filled permeated the atmosphere, and soon Fang’s body calmed at the love from her Sunshine.

“You didn’t happen to get the license of that Oretoise and his King Behemoth friend did you, Sunshine?”

“Tch, idiot.”

A half laugh half sob accompanied Lightning’s response, and the Huntress blinked open her eyes to look at the still emotional woman.

“Light…Claire. I’m okay, I’m here. Etro fulfilled her promise. I’m sorry love, I would have never put you through that on purpose. Not again, ever.”

Tear stained blue eyes gazed into emerald.

“I know. Faith, that’s what made this happen. Faith in Etro and not ourselves. I’m just…I’m relieved.”

Though neither woman was fully healed from their injuries, Etro had given them enough to sustain them longer until help arrived, or they found a way out of their predicament. Even so, it did not stop the tired warrior from reaching up to caress the side of her beloved’s face.

“I have a gift for you.”

“I have everything I need right here.”
“No love, not from me. I’m just the messenger.” Fang said with a smile.

Clutched in her other hand, Fang brought up her other hand and opened the palm. From the surprised gasp from Light, she imagined they wouldn’t need a full translation of the gift.

“How?”

“When my body died, I’d gone to you. While I was there with you, a hole opened between space and time and they both appeared within. I knew they were calling to me, so I went to them.”

Fang went on to explain how they’d been watching over them, what they looked like without their mechanized alterations and the promise that they were with them always. There in her hand, laid the proof of that promise.

“So, a new brand.” Lightning stated.

“Apparently.” Fang laughed.

“Only, not for us, for Etro’s use.” Fang added.

They could both feel the power of Etro running through their souls and Lightning would admit it was much stronger than the mark of the l’Cie. She had no desire or intention of stepping in for the goddess ever again at the level she had as her Champion. It had been a special time and special circumstance and the ex-soldier now knew she was sorely unqualified. It was a responsibility she could not handle, not at a divine level. This, being Etro’s servant in this way was easier.

“How you move?” Lightning asked as she ran her fingers through Fang’s hair.

“Yeah, I think so.”

“We’ve got work ahead of us.”

The Huntress knew just how true that was. They had had their selfish moment, but Etro was calling them to help other survivors until rescue arrived. Claire reached to remove the rose crystal from Fang’s hand, and she paused looking deep into those green eyes.

“There’s something I need to do first, something important.”

The hand that was just about to take hold of the rose crystal diverted its path to tenderly cup Fang’s face. Not disturbed or sidetracked by the blood and grime, she gave the Huntress a slow and passionate kiss. When she pulled back, the love in her eyes pierced the Huntress to her core. Lightning gave her the most disarming smile.

“Oerba Yun Fang, will you marry me?”

How does one contain the energy that bursts forth from such joy? For the Huntress, it was not something to contain, you shared it. She pulled Lightning into a kiss.

“Yes, a thousand times yes.” She replied with joy.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Serah and Vanille run into some obstacles on their rescue mission and Fang and Lightning take on their natural roles to lead and help the survivors thrive until rescue.

Chapter Notes

I truly do not know how many more chapters there maybe. The gals still need rescued and I wouldn't even dream about ending the story before the wedding. So, with that in mind there are at least three more chapters that I can see happening.

On a positive note, there have been several stories running through my mind for these two. If everyone is interested, I will begin work on another story once this one is complete. Here is a look at one of the ideas already running through my crazy head. Just a note, this particular idea doesn't have anything to do with the FF series. The characters and descriptions that you are all familiar with will remain the same.

The Arms of A Stranger -

Yun Fang was always a survivor. Emancipated from her biological parents at a young age, the girl changed her name and became one of the top rising stars in track and field. As a long distance runner, she was the one to beat, and when Fang set her sights on setting a record, you could bet she'd make it happen.

Considered an over achiever, Fang branched out into martial arts and any other subject that piqued her interest. She was determined not to be held back or confined, even in her personal life. When she set her mind on something, she went after it. That was until the car accident that took everything away.

If it had't been for the kindness of a stranger, Fang swore she wouldn't have made it. But will the bitterness of defeat keep her from finding this stranger? Will self pity prevent her from seeing a guiding light before her eyes? Or will she succumb to self pity and truly loose everything?

There's a taste of one of the stories, let me know if anyone is interested and it will be the next story. Thanks for reading and commenting!

There was nothing more Fang wanted to do than rest here in Lightnings…her fiancée’s embrace her thoughts reminded her. Having your essence rebirthed back into your body was a painful and exhausting experience. And though the two women still carried the marks of the plane crash, how could one be so selfish to ask for more when life was given to them so freely? Whatever pains and wounds remained, the two ex-l’Cie would carry bear them with honor.

“Can you move?”
Claire whispered softly while she smoothed back the hair in loving strokes from Fang’s face.

“The question isn’t really can I, it’s more do I want to.” Fang admitted.

The was a quiet laughter from the ex-soldier. She leaned down and placed a kiss on the brunette’s temple. Aside from the words, she could see that Fang was ready to get onto business, so she together, they stood, supporting each other as they would be throughout the rest of their days. What more could a person ask for, than the gift that Etro had bestowed upon them?

“I know that look, what’s going through your mind?”

Lightning asked as she brushed a hand along the new brand on Fang’s arm, careful to avoid the deep cuts.

“Daylight’s several hours away yet, and this fog will make trying to rescue anyone dangerous. We need to get a fire set up to detract any beasts and provide warmth for any survivors.”

The Huntress looked at Light’s dress and smiled. She had sensibly worn tennis shoes, jeans and a light long sleeve shirt, as the brunette had. Although they had suffered injury and clothes had been torn and bloodied, they were still better protected than they would have been, had they worn revealing clothing.

“Then let’s get too it, the sooner we get this fire going, the quicker we can look for survivors.” Lightning added.

The two were like a well-oiled machine, but why wouldn’t they be? In battle, they danced as if they had been fighting together for years. In this life, it translated to working together to reach a common goal. The most frustrating part of their ordeal was not being able to move more quickly, but what good would they be if they re injured themselves and spent the last of their energy healing new wounds on each other?

As rapidly as they could, a stack of burning material was placed into a large area, while Fang used her uncanny strength to gather the kindling. Lightning’s quickness dug a safe trench around their pit, to avoid spreading the flames and bringing about a new type of disaster. As soon as they were ready, the lit the fire, not having to expend energy on a spell. There was enough burning debris to borrow for a flame.

Silently, the made torches for light and began the tedious task of searching for survivors. It would not be until after dawn that they would realize the scope of the wreckage and how far it was spread. With clinical precision, the obvious dead were passed by with a quick prayer that their suffering had been quick, as they moved on to search more wreckage.

Lightning came upon a man, still alive, but the signs that they were much too late were in the deathly paleness of skin, shallow breathing and most obvious the exposed abdomen. There was a pause, like an inner struggle or debate and when Fang noticed, she came up beside her. By then, the ex-solder was kneeling over the man, the intentions clear on wanting to heal him.

“Lightning…” Fang began, pausing as if she had had a change of heart.

“Claire…you can’t save him, you know this. Listen to your gut, listen to Etro, you will know when you’re needed.”

It seemed harsh, but such gifts were not given for the two of them to play god and both women knew that everything died. How they died was not theirs to decide, fate would choose. When your time on earth was over, your body would expire, it was just the way things were. Fang knew, that
Etro’s gift would not work, unless it was called for.

“I…I know.” Claire said more resolutely.

Fang squeezed her shoulder.

“We can stay with him until he passes, give him as much comfort as we can.”

Or, for Claire, comfort for her that they hadn’t at least stayed with him. This was where, as callous as it seemed, Lightning was best suited for handling the situation. There was nothing she could do for a mortally wounded man, or for the dead. The living needed them. And neither had the audacity in this life to think they could play god or have the wisdom to see beyond their own thoughts and feelings.

It didn’t take long, and it would be nice to think that they didn’t encounter anymore, but that was not to be the case. The most difficult, were children. The Huntress knew from experience, how easy it was to blame god for our sorrows and woes, to demand an answer as to why this happened, or didn’t happen. Where was god when tragedy struck? The brunette was intimately acquainted with such thoughts.

Predation, freedom of will, there were many things that played into life. The first, as a member of the Yun Clan and a Huntress, you knew that for creatures of any kind to survive, one would prey on another. Take a man’s tools from him and he was the most venerable prey. Without tools, man would be eating insects and vegetation. You can’t bite through the hide of a cow, cook something without fire, etc.

As far as freedom of will, it was granted to everyone, but what did we do with it? Rebelliously, we walked our own feet into trouble and then blamed god for not protecting us or fixing the problems we made for ourselves. It was almost laughable now, the arrogance she had back then. She was still Fang, only far wiser and a little wider in her thinking.

The mask that Lightning wore so well, set upon Claire’s face. Only this time, Fang knew that when there was time to let it all out, she would grieve, and the Huntress would be there for her. Morning was approaching, Fang could feel it in her bones, along with it the fog would finally disappear as the temperature rose with the morning sun. The brunette ached all over and she knew that Lightning did too.

All in all, they had found at least twenty survivors in a plane that held a capacity of 105, and that did not include the crew for the plane. The airbus that were in, luckily was not filled all the way to capacity, but still, it was close enough. Along the way, as they searched for survivors, the grabbed anything they could find to cover shoulders, sit people comfortably on the ground. Those that were able, the two women directed with small tasks around the fire to aide the others.

It had come in quite handy to have a fiancée who was adapt at speaking Spanish and Portuguese. When they would finally have time to reflect on this crash and the circumstances, they found themselves in, they could not help but see Etro’s hand. It wasn’t irony, that placed them on that plane and gave the brunette the ability to speak to people from a country she had adopted as her own, or memories of a life past that helped them to deal with the situation and have the knowledge needed in order to survive.

“Fang, sit down before you fall down.” Lightning ordered, without any venom.

“The cuts along your arm are bleeding again, I need you here with me and not passed out on the ground.”
The Huntress saw the small curl of Lightning’s lip to know she was teasing, but with sincerity to
the situation. Fang closed her eyes as Sunshine ran a tender hand along her arm to examine the
wound. What few supplies medically they had found, had long been used up on the more severely
injured.

“How, these cuts, they’re…."

The Huntress laughed.

“In the exact same spot as they were in our past life.”

The brunette looked up into Lightning’s eyes.

“Just what kind of conversation did Lumina have with Etro anyway? And speaking of the sly little
devil, why haven’t I seen her in you?”

Lightning groaned.

“Please, let’s not encourage even the thought of her please. Let’s just hope she was the part of
Claire that was rebelling against being stunted. I don’t need help in this life to get on my own
nerves.”

Fang chuckled as she leaned into Lightning’s abdomen and wrapped the unattended arm around
her. It was then that she felt something hard against Sunshine’s belly. For a brief moment, she was
concerned that Light had yet once again played off her injuries with a streak of her old stubborn
self.

“Light…”

The Huntress began to pull at the ex-soldier’s shirt, causing Claire to blush. Slapping the brunette’s
hand away, she reluctantly tugged the shirt up to her belly button. There, just as in the life before,
sat a shining belly button piercing. To muffle her laughter and save her companion from further
embarrassment, Fang buried her face fully into Light’s abdomen. Apparently, Lumina was there,
getting a good laugh at them both.

The Huntress watched Light with an intensity that would have bothered most. It was introspection
of life, circumstances and finding love in a world that truly did not understand the self-sacrifice in
the truest sense of the word. Part of the intensity though, was due to her brain trying to reconcile
that they were here together and that they remembered. Yes, she’d had faith in a promise fulfilled,
but it was different to be living that truth.

With precision and a knowledge that came from a life before, the two women took turns looking
after the other the best they could under current circumstances. With hare arm cleaned and
wrapped, and Lightning’s head and side patched, and her arm placed, reluctantly Fang would add,
into a sling they both found themselves drifting toward exhaustive sleep. Leaning against each
other, propped up right off the ground, both women would sleep for the next few hours.

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“What do you mean the situations complicated?!” Vanille’s voice raised an octave higher.
“I’m sorry Miss, but until the weather clears, it is too dangerous for us to send rescue teams. We would have more fatalities going in blind. I’m sorry.”

The red-head bristled as Serah comfortably took her hand and led her away. Vanille and Serah weren’t the only ones that were demanding results from the downed plane. A response team was in place before the news revealed the information. The flight was an international flight, there were more than just Brazilians on the flight and when other countries became involved it could be a political nightmare.

Serah took Vanille to a more private area where they could talk, and Claire’s younger sister could comfort her new girlfriend.

“Vanille, they’re somewhere in the rainforest, if a rescue team tries to go in now, they’re be risking more unnecessary casualties. I’m worried about them too, but there is nothing we can do for them right now.”

Serah massaged the tension in Vanille’s neck. It seemed to be doing the trick when the red-head let out a sigh and finally looked up at her.

“I know Serah. It’s just that Fang and your sister would not be happy sitting around letting other people dictate when a rescue would happen if we were the ones out there. They’d risk their fool necks to try and get to us if they could.”

“And it’s not like I’ve been one to follow the law to the letter.” Vanille mumbled.

The two young women sat down next to each other, holding hands and quietly pondering the situation. Surely, there was something they could do to help, some way to at least offer a better solution than just sitting and waiting. Serah tossed out some ideas, knowing that Vanille would work past this emotional haze and get that genius brain of hers back into production. Until then, she’d do her best to help the red-head.

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Lightning was the first to stir, past life habits were hard to break, even in new situations. She could hear the quiet talking amongst the living and the soft cries of distress from pain or loss. It was surprising that they had been able to sleep at all. Especially, Fang, she was still a Huntress through and through and such commotion would not have gone unnoticed. But coming back from the dead, surely it had taken a lot from the ex-l’Cie even with returned gifts from the goddess.

Surprisingly, two of the survivors were flight attendants, and they had been very helpful in locating supplies from the wreckage. While Claire and Fang had slept, the two women tended to and looked after the others. Yes, people would expect that from them, since that was there job. But when crashes happened, what was really inside a person came out and these two were exemplary employees in her mind.

The first hint of daylight was the warmth that was beginning to penetrate through the fog. Slowly, but surely, the thick blanket of white would disappear and a new set of challenges would come about. With the lifting of the fog, there should be a rescue mission planned and waiting for the weather to lift, so that was at least something to have hope for. Lightning however, would not be satisfied with just sitting and waiting. Those that were able needed to gather what necessary
supplies they could find, especially water and prepare for a long day and possibly longer.

The ex-soldier ticked through a list of things they would need to survive out here past a few days, just in case rescue efforts were further hindered, or they were for some reason difficult to find. As the fog began to lift, the situation became clearer, for some reason they were in the jungle. Brazil, for the most part was jungle, but Lightning wondered if that was part of the mechanical issues the pilots were having. Perhaps they were farther off course than they originally thought and sought to fix the issue before something major happened?

She couldn’t imagine flying over the sea and having navigation systems fail and leave you in the middle of the ocean, low on fuel and no idea how close to land you were. Even now, she could see why Fang had always been opposed to too much technology, it made everyone stupid and dependent on something other than instincts.

“I can hear you thinking, Sunshine.” Fang said as she opened her eyes and turned her head to look up.

Somehow, she had ended up on Lightning’s lap, not that she was complaining. The brunette studied those tired blue eyes for a moment, seeing the solder’s determination and that strategic mind at work. Fang closed her eyes at the soft touch that ran through her hair, if Light wasn’t careful, she’d put her back to sleep.

“What’s going on in that beautiful brain of yours?”

Lightning laughed softly.

“I’m going over what we need for supplies for the next few days.”

Fang slowly sat up next to Lightning. Now that she was awake and Sunshine was busy planning survival for the next day or two, the Huntresses keen eye swept over the wreckage.

“Water needs to be the priority, I’ll scout out the area. We can have the flight attendants look for something we can use to store and boil it in.”

There was a tightness in Fang’s features. Their new paradise was wrought with signs of global destruction. She’d been afraid of what the Vipers would do to Grand Pulse, and all around her the entirety of those reborn were worse on the new world. And of the souls reborn, was it just her and Vanille that were still the only survivors of the Clans? They’d had respect for the land and the people, and then things changed. Were they doomed to repeat these mistakes?

A hand on the side of the Huntresses face brought her back to the present, and when she looked into those concerned blue eyes, she knew Light was aware of her thoughts. Fang reached up and grasped the hand that touched her face. The brunette gave Sunshine a smile.

“Bad time for thoughts of Grand Pulse and Cocoon issues.”

“I won’t ask you not to go, or to make sure I’m with you, we need to keep some semblance of leadership among the survivors. But it doesn’t stop me from wishing you had your lance, or at least the blade you had made for my birthday.”

“I’ll be careful, you know me.”

Lightning gave Fang a glare.

“Yes, I do and that fool hardy stubbornness too.”
Fang cupped Claire’s face in her hands.

“I’ll be careful. I have something wonderful to come back too. I’m not losing you when Etro just brought us back together. Trust me, as you have.”

Lightning rocked forward on the tips of her toes and planted a soft kiss on the brunette’s lips.

“I trust you. Let’s get you ready for a hunt.”

Fang’s hands came down from Lightning’s face as she took hold and squeezed her hands. The two made short work of finding some bottled water, a makeshift weapon and some other minor supplies for the Huntresses journey. The brunette reassured Lightning that she would find her way back and would not take any undo risks.

A human could live days without food, water was a different matter. And just because they were in the rainforest, did not mean they wouldn’t get dehydrated. The humidity could sweat out the water in you, just like the desert and if you didn’t remain hydrated, well Fang didn’t need to tell herself what would happen, nor did she need to tell Lightning.

“I don’t want to sound like a nag, but, be careful. Bring your butt back to me in one piece.”

Fang smirked.

“I will.”

Lightning kissed her goodbye, trying to keep control of the rush of emotions that swept through her.

“Promise. We have a wedding to plan for and a life together to live.”

The smirk grew into a smile.

“I promise.”

Focused on her task, the Huntress took up her gear and disappeared through the trees. Silent and stealthy like the agile hunter she was, Fang disappeared without a sound. Claire closed her eyes for a moment, listening to the hard edge of Lightning talking to her from the past. They were one in the same, she could not afford to be divided and fighting Lightning now, Claire needed to let the soldier lead, or she would be worthless. With the morning’s checklist fresh in her mind, Light strode with purpose toward the other passengers. Those who were able bodied would be put to work and given tasks to complete for the survival of the group.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Lightning and Fang take charge of looking out for the survivors and planning for the worst-case scenario concerning a rescue. And Serah decides it's time to pull Vanille back and take a break before the red-head explodes.

Chapter Notes

Lightning and Fang will get the opportunity to finally talk about their past lives in the next chapter. It will also give them the chance to discuss how Fang received her original scars and why Lightning got her belly button piercing. It's small little discussions they never were able to have and it's been over 1000 years in waiting.

Depending on how the next chapter flows it will likely be the last or second to last chapter. Work and ideas for The Arms of A Stranger are already underway and we will wrap up the last chapter for First Christmas. I know it is pretty popular on AO3 to take ideas or requests, so I would be willing to hear any ideas that someone might have for a story. Moments In Time was based on quotes, so we can be creative if it's a song or a quote you would like to see a story built from.

I'd also like to thank LongMaxSilver for volunteering to Beta and be an extra set of eyes as well as a sounding board for ideas! Thank you, your help and suggestions are greatly appreciated! :)

On a hunt, there was no time to focus on subjects that took away from your senses. You needed your wits in order to survive. The beasts of this world were not the same challenges as on Gran Pulse, but that did not mean they were not as dangerous. In Brazil, there were snakes, jaguars, centipedes, spiders and mosquitoes. Yes, the deadliest was also sometimes the smallest of creatures. You had to watch where you stepped, where you placed a hand or what was under your feet and in the trees.

There were no King Behemoths and the large predators of her past life, but the creatures were still just as dangerous. There was a wash of nostalgia that stuck Fang as she made her way through the jungle and there were parts of her that missed Gran Pulse and its land. She was in her element here, out in the jungle, outliving within the land as part of it. The Huntress never felt so alive, as when she was out roaming the land and surviving on instinct alone.

Fang gripped the makeshift lance she and Lightning had put together. It wasn’t her lance, it wasn’t the tried and true weapon from her previous life, but it felt good to have the substitute in her hand. It would serve to protect her from any of the larger beasts should she come upon them. As for the smaller and more dangerous, her keen eyes scanned the terrain as her hearing sharpened to the sounds of the jungle and her sense of smell kicked into full alert.

As her mind quickly scanned over the truth of how “convenient” it was to have her Huntress
abilities and skills in this life, she now knew the truth. It took a divine being such as Etro, to foresee the future events that would occur and have provisions in place to deal with them. The other truth was the fact that if she and Lightning had chosen a different path, these events would not have happened. It wasn’t as if the divine could not deal with situations without choosing to implement them through people at times. It just meant that because of man’s free will, these particular events would not have come to pass.

It almost made one feel like a puppet, or a chess piece placed on the board and moved accordingly to the divine. The divine really didn’t need mankind to carry out such deeds or miracles for them, they chose too, just as mankind chooses to listen to the divine. Funny how that worked and yet Fang didn’t really care if this was really the truth. She’d been gifted with the promise and the delivery of that promise because of their faith. She had Claire, and was that such an awful thing even if the truth was that we were all just puppets?

If Fang had never met Claire, this crash would have still taken place. And it wasn’t the divine that was responsible, it was the mechanics of the plane or pilot error. Still, if Fang or Lightning hadn’t remembered their past lives, if they hadn’t been gifted with their old aptitudes and the knowledge they had now, would they have fared as well in the crash? Fang just happened to have chosen to play volleyball in Brazil, and just happened to have chosen the major she did and was studying the local fauna and flora as a result? It was almost laughable now looking back, the provisions from Etro were scattered throughout her life and she was sure it was the same for Claire.

These thoughts, however, were quick blips on her radar, as her mind focused on the Hunt. In this case the hunt for a water source. Fang slipped right back into that old knowledge, like a warm glove, as she made her way through the forest. The Huntress had new knowledge of the land guiding her toward several possible sources for water. Never once, did she worry about not finding her way back to Lightning or the plane. She felt familiar with this land as she had Gran Pulse, yet she had never traversed the Amazon.

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Lightning was in full soldier mode once her Heart stepped into the jungle to find a decent water source. The momentary concern for her safety, replaced by the knowledge that if anyone was safe in the Amazon besides its natural natives, she would be. In the meantime, she had people to help and an ugly job to conduct. The remains of the dead, they couldn’t just leave them out to rot in the humidity and attract the beasts of the land. And they didn’t have the luxury of burying them, so the most logical choice was a funeral by fire.

The ex-soldier did not put too much thought into the fact that such an act could cause political issues. Her concerns were the welfare of the survivors and not any political nonsense. There was always the off chance that a loved one left behind might sue, but she would deal with that later. And as it turned out, the survivors were not excited about the idea of the dead laying out in the open themselves, so there was no issue from any of them.

Despite her arm being in a sling, she had enough help from some of the others as they built a funeral pyre away from their small encampment. It took a few of the men and women brave enough to deal with the remains to haul the bodies over to set upon the fire. Scarves, handkerchiefs and any form of clothing they could use covered their mouths and noses as they set the remains aflame. Some had taken to crossing themselves or saying little prayers for each of the bodies as they were tossed on the fire.

It was a morbid job, but what remained of the person alive was long gone and only their husks remained. That wasn’t always the way that people saw the dead, but Claire thought it was
comforting to know that the true self was only using the body as a vessel until it was time to move on. She had never been one to force her thoughts or beliefs on others, but this one moment seemed like it would be more comforting if everyone adopted such beliefs. What a horrible thought to think that you were nothing but your body.

The sun had risen and had reached its highest point in the sky and Fang had not yet returned. The chore of burning the corpses had taken most of the morning. Those that were not part of the disposal of bodies, Lightning directed to continue to safely scavenge through the wreckage for useful items. She had appointed one of the flight attendants to oversee this project. Even in this life, the commanding presence of Lightning seemed to carry an air of respectable authority. But it wasn’t surprising, no one outside of herself and Fang had taken the initiative to act after the crash.

And Lightning did not take the lead to be presumptuous or exert any top of supreme authority. She and Fang had seen a need and had acted, and the others had gladly let them do so. But as the tired ex-soldier took a moment for a much-needed break, she was approached by one of the survivors.

“Excuse me, your name is Claire, correct?”

Lightning regarded the man as she finished taking a drink of water.

“Yes.”

“I’m Adam, I just wanted to thank you for what you’re doing. Honestly, not trying to sound chauvinistic, but as a man, I should have been the one to step forward. I was too busy worrying about being alive and staying that way so that I could get home to my wife. She’s pregnant with our first child and well, she was all I could think about. Watching you made me think about what my wife would think about her husband looking out only for himself…”

Lightning listened to the man speak, she was aware of how selfish relationships can be. Had she not been selfish when she held Fang’s dead body in her arms? The ex-soldier certainly was not thinking of anyone else at that moment and she told him as much.

“Adam, I don’t think you’re being chauvinistic. Believe me, I would have liked nothing better than to have sat back and let someone else take charge. It was very tempting to do nothing but think about myself and my fiancée.”

Adam looked at her quizzically, to Lightning amusement, trying to figure out where he’d seen a man with her.

“Your fiancée wasn’t on the plane with you?”

While Lightning might have been annoyed or offended, Claire found the situation quite hilarious and when she didn’t immediately respond, the truth struck him like a lightning bolt. How ironic.

“The attractive brunette that was with you, the one some of the passengers are calling…”

“Ragnarök.” Lightning finished for him.

There was a slight chill that ran through Claire, knowing the truth behind the name now. But as far as she knew, Etro had relieved Fang of that burden long ago.

“Yes, she’s my fiancée.”

Adam gave a low whistle.
“Well, on behalf of all men, the world is now short two beautiful and outstanding women.”

As the blush touched Claire’s cheeks, she could inwardly feel herself roll her eyes. Lightning was not one for compliments based on looks, but Claire reacted to the kindness of his words. She could feel the edge of a lecture with herself coming on, and she diverted it with a conversation.

“That’s…very kind of you to say.”

Adam talked with Lightning for a few more minutes and left her in peace. As she watched the camp, she observed with a smile, Adam take more of a lead with the others. Sometimes, all it took was a moment, a situation or a person to give us the boost we needed to come out of our shells of self. Lightning had no doubt he was a good man, one who had allowed a moment and a situation to hold him back.

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At almost the same time, Fang was taking a moment to rest as well. The two would laugh if they knew that they were almost simultaneously taking a water break at the same time. The Huntress was not far from a liquid source now, she could hear the running water. The brunette had spent most of the morning traversing the Amazon for this life-giving source.

After her short break, Fang readjusted her pack and headed silently toward the water. Lightning had once told her that she moved with the quiet and deadly grace of a large cat. It had earned the soldier a smile and a look of gratitude from the brunette. For the soldier to compliment her, it was high praise indeed, and this was before they had both started to gravitate toward the other. Lightning never minced words, nor did she flippantly give compliments unwarranted. It was a testament to Fang’s skills.

But, in hindsight, Fang wouldn’t have earned the role of Huntress if she had been clumsy and loud. And no matter how good you were, there was always someone better. Fang’s pride came from the fact she was confident in her skills, not because she thought herself the best. So, when the Huntress approached the water and startled the jaguar, instinct brought out the makeshift lance when the large cat appeared ready to pounce.

“Easy now big fella. I’m not here to hurt you unless you start something first.” Fang replied in a soothing tone.

The cat hissed and took a defensive stance, looking ready to leap. Slowly, Fang tightened her grip on the weapon and when the big cat lunged, she sliced the lance downward in front of her. Taking him by surprise, the sharp and jagged edge of the weapon came down slicing the beast across the shoulder. Luckily for the jaguar, the surprise of Fang coming up on it undetected and the cut to the shoulder was enough that the cat decided it wanted no more.

Fang watched the big feline disappear into the thick jungle surroundings. It wasn’t until the animal was gone that she realized that there was blood dripping from the deep cuts on her arm. Grumbling to herself about stubborn cats, she quickly looked for the nearest Dragon’s Blood Tree. Wiping the cat’s blood off the blade of her weapon, she quickly sliced through the tree to gather up its resin. This would stop the bleeding and in order not to waste the damage to the tree, she collected a large sample of the resin to return to camp with.

The Huntress wasn’t sure why she hadn’t thought of it before now, but it wasn’t like they’d really sat idle for long once daylight had shown its colors. Fang made hast gathering what water she could take back and boil, constantly keeping an eye and an ear out for danger. Once she’d collected all she could hold, she packed it away tightly in her bag and headed back toward
It was late in the afternoon when Fang returned to the makeshift camp. The Huntress was immediately embraced by Lightning upon her return, an action that the brunette had no problem in returning. To have waited over a thousand years for this time together, neither woman wanted to waste any moment. But an embrace was not the only thing Fang desired, as she captured Lightning’s lips in a soft kiss.

“I see you didn’t waste any time getting this place whipped into shape, Light.”

The soldier scoffed while leaning her forehead against Fang’s.

“Just as I see you didn’t waste any time getting yourself into trouble without me.”

Fang gave a soft bark of laughter before finding herself maneuvered over into a make-shift seat. Lightning took a moment to look at the bloody looking residue on the brunette’s wounds.

“I see you found something to stop the bleeding.”

“Yeah, I brought some back with me. I don’t know why I didn’t think about it before. It would have saved us some headaches.”

It was well into the evening when the two ex-l’Cie had finally settled down. A lot of work had been accomplished in merely a day and the results showed around the camp. Shelters had been set up, supplies for food and water gathered, injuries treated and cared for to the best of everyone’s abilities and there was a sense of change settling over the group. Morale had shifted from hopeless to hopeful and a sense of comradery was beginning to develop amongst the survivors. It was a feeling that Fang and Lightning knew very well.

As they talked quietly, the two were approached by one of the Flight Attendants.

“Excuse me, Ms. Fang. I don’t mean to intrude, but I found this while we were going through looking for supplies. I believe this is yours, I recall seeing you with it when you boarded the plane.”

Fang took the offered bag and thanked the attendant. The item she held, was her carry on and it was unbelievably in perfect condition despite the crash. Immediately, the Huntress unzipped the bag to inspect the contents. The brunette’s eyes growing large at what she found.

“My cell, I completely forgot that I’d put in the bag.”

Lightning sat up straighter.

“Do you think there’s satellite reception to pick up a signal?”

“Only one way to find out.”

Fang often turned her phone off when she traveled by plane, a fact she knew irritated her little sister for this very reason. But this very habit might just be their saving grace if there was satellite reception to be picked up.

The Huntress hit the side button on the phone and nearly whooped out loud when the screen came on. She had a full battery, charged and ready to go. If they couldn’t get a signal here, there was
always a chance to try it somewhere else.

Fang hit speed dial, for the first person outside of Lightning that she would ever call, Vanille. Light knew that something was happening, just by watching the Huntresses face.

“FANG!” Vanille screeched from the other end.

***

Red tape my backside, Vanille had told Serah when they’d hit one challenge after another. The redhead was conducting her own search while the ‘powers that be’ danced around political disaster. Between her, Serah and Hope, they had transportation and their own help waiting on the sidelines for her word that it was a go.

As night had set in, Serah and Vanille had traveled to a local restaurant. Both young women were eating just to pass the time rather than enjoying the food. But taking a break for a meal had mainly been Serah’s idea. She wanted to get her girlfriend away from the politicians and those in charge before the young woman got arrested for doing something crazy.

Vanille picked at her food, only eating when Serah gave her a concerned look. Truth be told, Serah, when she was in the mood, could give the red-head a run for her money in the intimidating department. One would think that these petite sweet looking ladies were anything but intimidating, but as the saying often goes, ‘dynamite comes in small packages’. Neither had spoken a word while they ate, but in an instant, it was all they would be doing.

Vanille’s phone rang, and like most people with a phone, she had specific rings for the people in her life. But these were no ordinary ringtones, the red-head made it a purpose to find ways to be ingeniously irritating. For her sister Fang, it was was the brunette’s own voice recorded to sound like a chipmunk. It had brought several moments of laughter between her and Serah when the phone went off.

But there was no laughing or giggling at her older sister’s expense when the tone went off. As a matter of fact, Serah and Vanille shared a moment where they both stared at each other, looking to see that they had both heard what they thought they heard. The red-head grabbed for her phone, nearly dropping it on the floor.

“FANG!” Vanille practically yelled.

“Oh, thank Etro! Vanille!”

Simultaneously, the two sisters sighed in relief as Serah anxiously looked a Van with the unspoken answer about her sister.

“Fang, is Claire with you, please tell me she’s safe.”

Unseen by the two younger sisters, Fang looked at her fiancee and smiled. They were going home.

“Yes, she’s here.”

Vanille looked at Serah, taking a hold of her girlfriend with her free hand as she smiled and nodded the unspoken answer.

“Are you two okay?”

“A little banged up, but alive Vanille, we’re alive.”
All at once, Serah pulled out her phone to call her parents as she handed Vanille her laptop. Their sisters were alive, and they were coming home, even if the two younger sisters had to do it themselves.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Lightning and Fang are finally rescued and Vanille and Serah's relationship grows.

Chapter Notes

One more chapter everyone and we can finally reach the conclusion of A Promise Fulfilled! Thank you for taking the journey with me, I know it hasn't really been full of action, but this story was more based on a spiritual journey for Fang and Lightning to have faith that Etro would grant their wishes. There are more story ideas in mind as an addition to this one that has potential for action.

The last chapter will lead up to the wedding! After that, I will work on the last chapter for First Christmas and get the first chapter out for Arms of A Stranger. If there are any thoughts or ideas that someone has, feel free to comment. I would be willing to base a story off of an idea or thought for someone, within reason.

Thank you again for reading and commenting!

The mood around the wreckage had considerably improved once Fang was off the phone. There was an abundance of hope that permeated from the survivors, as those that were still up or conscious excitedly talked about going home and seeing their loved ones. And they were going home, Fang and Lightning both knew now that Vanille and Serah had their satellite coordinates, neither sister would rest until they were in front of them and somewhere safe.

Fang leaned against the soldier’s shoulder, she was utterly exhausted and ready for a long rest with Sunshine. Even if they were confined to a hospital bed for a day or two, they would at least be together and that was worth more than all the fame and fortune that the world had to offer.

The Huntress felt her eyes flutter as Lightning ran a soothing hand through her hair. A plane wreck, compared to what the two had been through thousands of years ago, seemed like nothing. But Fang was tired, thousands of years exhausted it felt like, and she could sense it from her Sunshine as well.

“You should rest.” Lightning suggested.

“Keep that up Light and I won’t have a choice.”

“We’ll be home soon, rest up, I’ll keep watch.”

Fang chuckled, so reminiscent of the old days with the soldier.

“Sure you don’t want company?” The brunette asked.

“I’m sure, get some rest.”
The brunette lifted her head, a sobering moment touching her features as she looked at Lightning and touched the side of her face.

“And for the record, I am home.”

There was a smile that crept upon Lightning’s face before she kissed Fang.

“Ditto.”

It didn’t take the Huntress long to comfortably fall asleep next to Lightning. Once Fang’s head lay across Light’s lap, she was practically out. How could she not, the brunette knew she was in safe hands, that Sunshine always had her back. And now, the ex-soldier had her heart and would keep it safe for the rest of their days. You couldn’t ask for more.

As Fang slept, Lightning watched the rest of the refugees slowly settle into sleep. The jungle was alive with all kinds of sounds and sights from the flickering of the fire. Cocoon and Gran Pulse combined did not have these sounds in the dark. And despite the fact that the dangers were very different, they made her feel alive. The urge to pinch herself was strong, life was really unfolding before her and here slept Fang, safe in her presence.

“Thank you, Etro. This is more than the little girl in me could have ever imagined.”

There was no doubt that the ex-soldier was tired, but a calmness had come over her and a peace she didn’t fully understand. So, this was what faith was like? She had placed her trust in someone outside of herself and Etro had shown her the results of such faith. Lightning’s life was so much more than she could hope for and one of the biggest gifts was fast asleep with her head on her lap.

Sometime during the middle of the night, Adam approached Lightning. He suggested she get some rest, with a promise that he would watch the fire and be alert for predators. There was no argument from the ex-soldier, as she promptly situated herself next to the sleeping Huntress. Even though this was not exactly how one envisioned laying next to your loved one, any excuse to be with Fang was good enough for her.

By the time dawn had begun to peak its colorful head over the horizon, Fang had woken to a warm body snuggled to her front. Not surprising to the Huntress, her arms were wrapped securely around the sleeping beauty. With a desire not to wake her, Fang pulled her in more tightly. A smirk touched her lips, as she thought about the cave she had drug Sunshine into so long ago.

“Keep your mind on sleeping, Fang, and out of the gutter.”

The Huntress chuckled.

“Well, if dragging you into a cave and slamming you against the wall for a passionate kiss is the gutter, I don’t want to be saved.”

Lightning pulled back from her nestled place along Fang’s neck. There was a matching smirk, along with pink-tinted cheeks.

“Careful, Light, you’re Claire’s showing. And she’s quite beautiful.” Fang whispered as she snuck in a morning kiss.

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Serah and Vanille had been busy, after getting off the phone with Fang. The red-head had wasted no time in contacting the government agencies involved with the search and rescue to give them the coordinates. With a green light for weather conditions, SAR would be headed out first thing in the morning, to bring home the survivors and sort through the wreckage for clues and other evidence for the crash.

After a call to the parents and arrangements were made for transportation, the two younger women checked into a hotel, showered and laid in bed. It was in that quiet moment, knowing that their sisters were alive and coming home that they were able to let go of the hidden fears. They lay in bed, not saying a word as they held each other close and allowed tears of relief to flow freely.

They would talk later, revealing their fears and relief, but most importantly how valuable it was that they had each other to lean on at this moment. It would be a truthful confession, one that leads to the discovery that they had this bond long ago and that it had only flourished as time had gone on. Vanille and Serah had teased their sisters about having a slow-burning love, but in all honesty, it was theirs that had taken the longest to kindle.

And as they had discovered together, the greatest show of love was in what you did and not what you said. Vanille had found that the word love was thrown around so freely that it oftentimes meant nothing. So when she told Serah, that she loved her, it was more in the way she showed the younger woman than in her words. It was a vow the red-head intended to keep, action over words.

It was a soft kiss to her temple that stirred Vanille in the early hours of the morning. Apparently, Serah had been up and already found a local bakery for coffee and breakfast. The smell was the second thing the red-head noticed, long before her eyes opened and a cheerful smile spread across her lips.

“Sorry, I couldn’t sleep anymore, so I figured I’d get us some breakfast.”

Vanille’s face lit up and she practically bounced out of bed to join her girlfriend at the little table in their suite. Serah laughed when the red-head took a deep whiff of the food. Having barely eaten the night before, good news had restored her appetite and from the variety of food that Serah had brought, Vanille couldn’t wait to get a bite.

“I must have been out, I didn’t even notice you leave.”

“You haven’t slept much.”

“And you have?!”

“You know what I mean Vanille. I wanted you to rest and I couldn’t sleep anymore so I went and got us breakfast.”

The red-head blushed.

“You know, we sound like our sappy sisters.”

Both younger women burst out laughing.

It wasn’t long before the two women were seated at the table, coordinating the day’s events over coffee and a meal. Since the traditional Brazilian breakfast was considered the least important of the day, outside of their coffee, Serah made sure to bring a variety of typical treats, especially the little cakes. She could still remember how Vanille had ranted about how wonderful they were
years ago.

Before the sun was even cresting the horizon, Vanille and Serah were knee-deep into the specifics of the rescue. They met Hope, back at the command center for the SAR efforts, volunteering personnel, planes, and equipment. In all honesty, they were going to be there whether the officials in charge wanted them too or not. By the time the first helicopter was in the air, the two young women and Hope were following along.

The Huntress, of course, was the first to hear it, the telltale sound of whirling blades rising above the sounds of the jungle. Lightning’s first response was to look in the direction of Fang’s attention, knowing that the brunette had picked up on something.

“Planes?”

“More like a helicopter, two or more from the sounds of it.”

Fang could see the relief in Lightning’s face as she closed her eyes and just breathed. Moments later, the ex-soldier began to make out the very first faint signs of the noise. By the time they’d both moved toward the group, the others had started hearing the noises as well. A cheer and several cries of joy lifted from the survivors and they all, in whatever condition they were in, stood and helped to stoke the fire. If the planes did not see the smoke, then they had to be blind.

Within 15 minutes, there were two helicopters within range, hovering above the scattered wreckage of the plane. Within minutes of the first medic touching ground, survivors were assessed and the most critical lifted into the air and quickly moved to the closest hospital. It was obvious that there was no safe place to set down that was close and additional rescue teams would have to be dropped in or hike to their location.

Perhaps the most touching, if not comical moment for the two older sisters were watching their younger siblings repel down a rope to be on the ground. Hugs, lectures, more hugs, and more conversation filled the air in the next hour than Fang and Lightning had experienced during the whole crash. Within hours, all of the survivors had been airlifted to safety, thanks in a large part by Hope’s father and his company, and the entire wreckage had become a circus of investigators, law enforcement and federal agents. The two ex-l’Cie were never so happy to be out of there as the political side of things took over.

Reluctant to go, Fang and Lightning were hauled to the hospital with the rest of the survivors. It was not uncommon for a crash like this to happen that a few people escaped such a catastrophe unscathed. It was with that hope and knowledge that the two expected there would be no serious inquires as to the lack of severe injuries.

With Fang, it was general fatigue and bruising on her side from the seat, the cuts along her arm and other minor cuts and scrapes. Lightning’s minor injuries were a fractured arm, although she knew it had been much worse, the cut along her hairline and the bruises and cuts along her side from the impact along the plane’s cabin. In any case, much to their chagrin, they were admitted for 24-hour observation before they could get a release.

Luckily, there had been no need to try and pull strings to be put in the same room. After all of this, and when the two meant all, it was the last few thousand years, there was no way they would allow themselves to be separated now. Was it any wonder then, that by the time parents had arrived, both Lightning and Fang were fast asleep in each other’s arms in Fang’s bed?

True to what they were told, Fang and Lightning were released 24 hours later. There had been no need to detain them, no questions pursued about the bodies of those that had perished in the crash
and aside from giving an initial interview about the crash, they were free to go. The only obstacle came from the celebrity status they both had. As Lady Luck would have it, they were able to blend in with their family and escape out the door to an awaiting car.

As far as the days were, Lightning was already two days into the time she originally was supposed to be having with Fang. And at this particular moment, if Claire and Lightning were not one, they would both be agreeing that they needed to escape and get away from everyone. Yes, relationships were selfish, because they only involve you and the other person and the Huntress’ Sunshine was struggling with it in a big way. She wanted the brunette to herself and no one else.

But diplomacy and manners won out, it was family after all and they had come all this way to see them when the news came of their survival. So, as the combined families sat around a table to eat lunch, Lightning and Fang would steal looks. The Huntress was going through the same struggle it appeared but had opted for the better part of valour. Why valour, because to the ex-soldier, this was a battlefield of selfishness they both had to fight through in order to put everyone else first.

“Mom, Dad, there’s something we should probably tell you.” Lightning replied, interrupting the current conversation.

“I asked Fang to marry me, and she accepted.”

There was a pleasant surprise on Fang’s face and while congratulations and questions were thrown around the table, the Huntress only had eyes for Lightning. It was as if this whole experience from this life, and regaining their memories from their past life were coalescing to form a salve to heal old wounds. And looks could say a thousand words the tongue could not pronounce, as a brilliant smile touched each woman’s lips.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

The time has finally come, Fang and Lightning get their time together from the rest of the world. A promise is finally fulfilled, and the two dedicate their love to Etro and to each other as it should be. Contentment and joy they once though unobtainable becomes a reality.

Chapter Notes

Finally Chapter everyone! Thank you again for reading and commenting! I hope you've enjoyed the reading as much as I've enjoyed telling the story.

There are two stories now in the works, as previously mentioned, "Arms of a Stranger," and one that LongMaxSilver and I are collaborating on called, "Etro's Daughters."

There was a snippet of, "Arms of a Stranger," mentioned in a previous chapter notes and this one will contain lots of drama and is completely AU to the Final Fantasy universe. There will be characters present from the FF XIII universe and some similarities, but that is where it will end.

As far as, "Etro's Daughters," goes, this will be a story minus XIII-2 or Lightning Returns. There have been several takes on stories like this, but we're going to give it a new twist and Lightning will be going through some trials (think Greek heroes in mythology) to free Fang and Vanille from stasis. The story will end up with a Fang and Lightning pairing, but it will not necessarily be an established pairing. (We are still working out those details.)

Thanks again, everyone! And thank you LongMaxSilver for Beta reading and begin an excellent collaborator!

“Fang.”

There was barely a response from the Huntress as she steadfastly began to fall towards her takeout. Lightning’s quick reflexes prevented the brunette from planting face first into her dinner. Not that she could blame Fang’s inability to stay awake. The last couple of days had been hard on them both, especially for her Heart.

A gentle hand cupped the brunette’s face and the only response from her was a contented sigh. Lightning couldn’t help but smile, sure Fang teased her about “Claire”, but the truth was that the Huntress had softened too. And it wasn’t in a bad way, she knew that if push came to shove, the very heritage of the Yun and her Native blood would shock the world.

Fang was no pushover, she never had been, even in this life. Perhaps it was love that took the edge off, and in the same instance made you more fierce. Whatever the case, Lightning marveled at the
sleeping Huntress, her heart so full of love for this woman that it threatened to burst.

“Fang, come on, let’s go to bed.”

By this time, Lightning had gotten up from the table and moved around closer to Fang. She gently caressed the side of the Huntress’ face as the woman mumbled incoherent words. With a shake of her head, there was one sure-fire way to get her sleeping beauty up long enough to get her into bed.

“You really don’t want me to wound that Yun pride and have to carry your sorry butt to bed, do you?”

That did the trick, when those eyes opened and a pair of darkened green eyes looked upon the soldier, Lightning didn’t hide her smile. There was a slight narrowing of the Huntress’ eyes, as they gazed upon her Sunshine.

“You wouldn’t?”

“Oh, wouldn’t I!?” Lightning smirked.

“You’re an Evil woman Farron, bring out Claire, I want to talk with her.”

Lightning laughed, as she waited for the sleepy Huntress to motivate herself out of her seat.

“You’re lucky I love you, that remark would have earned you a sore jaw.”

Fang continued to grumble as she rose to her feet.

“Besides, Claire and I are in agreement, the sooner you get your butt to bed, the sooner we can fall asleep together.”

Bingo! The Huntress was on her feet, sweeping up a protesting Lightning and moving toward the bedroom. But not before earning a hard smack to her backside from the soldier.

“Ow!”

Despite smacking the Huntress, Lightning was laughing at her. They had begun teasing each other about the changes to who they once were and who they had become. It was more of a flirting mechanism, not that they needed an excuse, but the teasing did have some wonderful results.

Bravado aside, Lightning helped Fang undress and get under the covers as it seemed whatever steam the Huntress had left had been spent on carrying her Sunshine to the bed. The brunette was already fading back to sleep by the time Light joined her. The ex-soldier no sooner slid under the covers than a pair of arms pulled her up snug against her Heart.

Fang was out before Lightning even realized what had happened. She had a few moments to reflect on the last few days before she joined the Huntress in sleep. They had both thought that most of the work was over when they’d been rescued, but it wasn’t. There had been media to attend to, parents, family members and friends to call and reassure and schedules to rearrange.

By the time they had eaten a meal with their family, it was already three or four days into Lightning’s vacation. Truth was, her own brain was too tired to reflect on the actual time, so it wasn’t important to be exact. The time gone, was time she or Fang couldn’t retrieve, but at least they’d been together. As Fang would say, Lady Luck, who it turned out was Etro, had given them the time back and then some.
Schedules had been rearranged, photoshoots, practice, etc. so that there was time to recuperate. And it didn’t take a genius to figure out just how the two were planning on spending that time. Even if it was just resting and healing, they would be doing it together. Besides, there was a wedding to plan!

Lightning had drifted off to that thought. She was getting married! The idea might have frightened her in the past, but now it seemed like it was long overdue. If her old self had just realized how much Claire needed protecting, she would have given into the Huntress long ago. As it turned out, she had needed someone, and apparently, so had Fang. Yes, Lightning Farron was needy and as it turned out, so was her Heart.

As wonderful as it would have been to be in her own place when she woke up holding Lightning, it was not the case. It went unspoken, that the two were not exactly anxious to get back onto a plane anytime soon, so they had opted to drive back to Sao Paulo. After a meal with parents and family, Lightning and Fang had seen them all off as they traveled home. The next task was to take the day to make phone calls, reserve a rental and rest before heading out. Thank Etro, they were not going to have to cut their time short, so the Huntress was in no hurry to get up or disturb Light as she slept.

Instead, the quiet moment allowed Fang to really study Etro’s brand upon Lightning’s chest. She’d not had this close skin contact with her since their l’Cie days and to the Huntress’ amazement, the brand reacted to her. The closer her fingers came to tracing the outline of the brand, the more pronounced the brand became. Did it do the same when Lightning touched the brand on her arm?

When Fang drew back, the brand receded and she silently chuckled. Etro thought of everything, including a way for her Sunshine to conceal her matching brand. Curiosity got the best of her as she examined the brand. What all could and would it do? The Huntress knew with everything she had, that whatever it was, the two of them would know when the appropriate time came. But it did not stop the childlike curiosity.

“You know I can feel that don’t you?” Lightning replied as she opened her eyes.

“Sorry Light, didn’t mean to wake you.”

“Fascinating, isn’t it?” The soldier laughed in understanding.

“Yeah, did mine do that? I never noticed.”

“It does, only it seems your brand doesn’t disappear, it just changes, becomes bolder.”

“Etro linked us in more ways than we originally considered,” Fang remarked thoughtfully.

The two spent the next hour in bed just talking, talking about everything. Eventually, they had moved to the shower, sharing the warm water, closeness, and conversation. They had the familiarity of their old lives that made intimate tasks seem like they’d been together for years. And if one thought of it in a past life perspective, they had.

It wasn’t as if the two had no desire to make love, that would come in time. In truth, they were waiting, waiting to make their vows before Etro. There was no desire to sully what had been given to them, by acting like fools. The world could make speculations and assumptions, and would, but as far as purity, it would remain so between the two.

Lightning could not deny she was looking forward to the road trip. It would give the two of them privacy and allow them to spend time closing up old wounds and building off of what was started.
Once showered and changed, the two checked out of their room and headed to pick up their rental. Fang had offered to drive and it gave Lightning the opportunity to rest if she wanted. But that was the furthest thing from the ex-soldier’s mind.

“Fang, we never did get a chance for you to tell me about the Yun. I would love to know about your old Clan and about your Native heritage.”

The Huntress turned and regarded Light with a well of emotion, and her Sunshine could feel it, including the pride at Lightning for wanting to know. They were barely on the road and already they were closing the gaps of thousands of years of desires wanting to be fulfilled. And as the brunette drove them closer to her home, she began to tell the stories of her heritage, both past, and present.

“So, each Clan gave engagement gifts, similar to most of the indigenous tribes of today?”

“Yeah, each one was a little different, for instance, the Dia gave bracelets and the Yun necklaces, but it’s still jewelry. And if you were to marry a Yun, there had to be approval from the family before anything was final. If you couldn’t win approval verbally, you could win them over by dowry or trial through combat. You had to prove your worth to take a Yun as a mate or companion.”

“These traditions are very similar to cultures today, given the circumstances, it’s not so surprising.” Lightning commented.

Had other Yun survived, considering reincarnation, and if they had would they approve of Lightning given she was from Cocoon? Light was grateful that she didn’t have to put Fang into a situation like that, but it did not stop the ex-soldier from wanting to honor her fiancee’s traditions.

“So, given the fact that I was from Cocoon and there aren’t any Yun that we know of outside of you, what is the proper way for me to proceed since I was the one that proposed?”

“Well, considering the fact that you proposed, you can make me a necklace. I’ll show you how, proper beads and colors, while I make yours.”

Lightning scooted closer to Fang as she drove. The soldier wouldn’t call her out on it, but she could hear the change in the Huntress’ voice as she talked. Etro was allowing for healing in all ways of their life, and Lightning couldn’t deny the ever-growing feeling of humility and gratitude.

“I never had the opportunity back then Fang, but, would you teach me your language?”

“Pulsian?”

“Both.”

Fang chuckled, her voice still strained from emotion.

“Sunshine, there’s more than my Native tongue as a Yun and a Native of this time. My mother did teach me to speak Bengali and Gaelic.”

“Well, looks like I have my work cut out for me, so how about we start with the Pulsian language first. I would like to get married before we both die of old age.”

“Don’t worry Sunshine, I’m not going anywhere. You’re stuck with me now.”

“Tch.”
The two women took their time traveling, it gave Fang the chance to go over the importance of the colors of each bead, what they represented and compared them to today. All the while, she began teaching Lightning the Pulsian language. They stopped in little towns, shopping for leather cord, bone, precious gems, and beads, as well as take in the culture.

Hand in hand they walked, talking about their dreams and wishes in both lives, getting to know each other in a way they had never experienced before. Each time they made physical contact, Lightning could feel the brand beneath her shirt grow warm and pulse as if her heart was beating through the mark.

It had taken them four whole days to reach Sao Paulo by car, but it was an experience they would never take back. By the time they’d reached Fang’s apartment, they had everything they needed to make the necklaces. Before they had even begun, Lightning took a moment to look at the replica of her Blazefire. The sight of the weapon took her back to her Guardian Corps days and Amodar. It was almost comical now, seeing what they had remembered their old lives before Etro gave them all of their memories.

It often made her wonder if outside the small l’Cie group if anyone else had come to the new world looking the same? It wasn’t something she wanted to dwell on, so the former soldier put her mind to task in making a necklace for her wife to be.

“Now, you know what all the colors represent, how you arrange them, the order you put them in is entirely up to you. The idea is that it is special amongst each of the clan members and their betrothed. You choose the meaning of each item that represents the one you love. Mine will be the pattern I made for you, and a repeating pattern from the one you made me.”

“If yours represents both ours, shouldn’t mine be the same.”

Fang smiled.

“No, it signifies that you were the one that proposed.”

“Oh, I still don’t understand, I guess. I would have thought that they would both be the same.”

“The first necklace is a betrothal necklace, the one I gift to you shows my acceptance. We will make another necklace after the wedding, those will be identical and it will be something new entirely.”

“Okay, what was the one you wore during our l’Cie days?”

“Hunter’s necklace.”

Fang watched Lightning closely, there was a moment there when she thought that Sunshine looked relieved. There was still so much they didn’t know about each other, but they were working on that. The Huntress reached over and touched Light’s hand, a nonverbal reassurance that it wasn’t what she thought.

As she cooked their meal, she continued talking to the ex-soldier about handfasting. Lightning had wanted to go through the traditional Yun ceremony, or at least as much as they were able in a world where Grand Pulse was not even of note in the history of this world.
“Did I hear you right? Naked?!” Lightning replied as she suddenly stopped working.

“The handfasting ceremony is done in the nude, before Etro?!”

Fang stopped and turned to look at Lightning, the soldier’s cheeks were cherry red. The urge to tease her made the Huntress’s lip twitch.

“Light, you don’t think that a god or a goddess wears clothes, do you? Think about the original sin of this world. The two humans hid and covered themselves up. The world would be a better place if we were more transparent with each other. People only leer and ogle because we naturally hide. There’s no guess what’s underneath and after awhile everyone looks the same, you seen one part, you’ve seen them all. It wouldn’t be a big deal, most humans are just prudes and they let their minds go directly to the gutter.”

“No, it’s not that, it just...”

Lightning got up from the table and moved over to Fang, wrapping her arms around the Huntress’ waist and leaned in to touch their foreheads.

“Simply put, you’re beautiful and the idea of being able to string two words together when you’re standing right next to me naked as the day you were born makes me speechless. How am I supposed to concentrate?”

Fang closed the small distance and kissed her Sunshine.

“Easy, you go with confidence in the fact I’m right there with you and that we’re making this promise before Etro and to each other.”

Lightning smiled.

“Smooth Yun, real smooth. I suppose this makes me a lucky lady.”

“I don’t know, I think I’m the lucky one.”

It didn’t take Lightning long to finish the necklace and then Fang began to work on hers. Even thousands of years didn’t seem to slow the Huntress down as she naturally breezed through the making of her engagement necklace.

“You’ve already put thought into this.” Lightning stated as they each fastened the other’s necklace.

“Ever since our l’Cie days. Only, I thought I would be the one asking the question.”

“Ever the over achiever, Farron.” Fang teased.

“You’re one to talk.”

By the end of the first week, Lightning had the words down for the ceremony. Fang was impressed with how quickly the ex-soldier had learned. What words she knew, Sunshine was speaking them as if she’d known Pulsian all her life. Whether a gift from Etro or the dedication and determination of the ex l’Cie, the Huntress didn’t question.

Through the week, while working on the necklaces and just outright spending time really getting to know each other, discussions on where to have their private ceremony were tossed about. The conclusion, although many might find it morbid, was the crash site. There, Etro had used Claire to bring Fang back to her. There really was no other place that the two could think more appropriate.
So, when Friday came around, the two took a rental back to the area of the jungle they had crashed in and hiked back to the location. It was late Saturday night when they arrived. The only visible sign left was the telltale markings on the ground as the plane wreckage had been removed for further investigation.

Lightning and Fang quietly worked setting up a tent, building a fire, and arranging for the ceremony. There would be no witnesses, just the two of them, Etro and the creatures of the jungle. It was enough. They needed no others to witness the commitment that they made before Etro.

Just before midnight, Lightning emerged from their tent. The nerves that had caused her to blush on the state of her being naked had been replaced by excitement and joy at finally being able to be with Fang. But the truth was, they’d been together all along, for several years and before that. In their hearts, they’d always been together, even if they were no physically in proximity.

With that knowledge rooted firmly, she stepped out of the tent and joined the Huntress, who was already there. Was she smiling like an idiot? Part of her felt as she was, her cheeks hurt from not being able to smile bigger, it was mirrored in Fang. Yes, she supposed they were both smiling like idiots, but the joy was so overwhelming, how could you not?

The moment they faced each other and took the other’s hand, Lightning could see nothing but the joyous green eyes of her companion. The words flowed freely, and she barely felt the binding cord in her hand as she wrapped it around Fang’s wrist, before the Huntress used her free hand to continue the wrap around hers, adeptly tucking the loose strand under the wrapped cord.

They had to improvise with no witnesses for the ceremony, but things had gone so smoothly, they’d barely noticed that they had gone through the entire ritual. For a long time, they just stood and stared at one another. Lightning hadn’t even noticed that Fang had unraveled the cord and was holding her hand, she could scarcely take her eyes off of the Huntress.

“There’s one more thing, I want to share with you,” Fang whispered.

“I want you to see Etro, as I see her.”

Her brand reacted immediately, as Fang’s hand drew near. Lightning gasped as her hand touched her skin and a brilliant white light encompassed them both. It was an experience that she would never forget, a being not mechanized, a mother who desired success for her children but did not interfere in the hard lessons in life that allowed you to grow.

She was breathtaking to look at, and she could feel the power once more that would undo you to the very molecules of your soul, and yet a mother’s love that encompassed her unlike any she’d ever felt. The love was there, but the power and knowledge for her state of being that demanded respect and reverence. It did not shock the ex-soldier that her eyes were warm with tears.

Lightning woke the following morning in the arms of her companion. It didn’t bother her in the least that she didn’t recall how she’d gotten here, or when they’d re-entered the tent. She was warm, happy, content and overwhelmed with gratitude and humility. She would not let Etro down, she would be there for Fang as the Huntress would be for her. And wherever the goddess called them, they would answer. The duty that had filled her before was compounded by a greater understanding.

When her mind cleared of the haze of joy, it was then that she realized that Odin and Bahamut had been present. She chuckled softly to herself, knowing that the symbol of his eidolith was not far from her. She and Fang could talk about it later, for the moment, she tucked herself in tighter to the Huntress’ embrace and fell back to sleep.
One might think there would be a sadness to the two women, as their time drew to a close and life demanded their attention. The rest of their time had been spent making their wedding necklaces, planning for the wedding for the sake of family and talking about the steps of moving forward.

As crazy as it may seem, they had expected time to fly by, so when the wedding for the sake of family had arrived, neither woman had batted an eye. Of course, they’d attended the Olympics together, both receiving gold medals with their respective teams and Lightning an additional one for her individual win.

By the time they’d returned to the mess of the world, rumors and to their slight amusement, the pictures taken at the airport of them had circulated the news. But the two had shut out the world, while they’d spent their time together. It had been officially announced by the two of them during the Olympic ceremonies, not that they cared what the world felt or that they even needed to know.

Fang and Lightning had both finished school, bought a home in Brazil to stay when Fang was playing and began searching for a home in the States. In the meantime, they divided their time between New York and Sao Paulo just living. When the day arrived, they’d already been in the States, spending time with Claire’s parents, dealing with frazzled sisters who were insistent upon making more of a fuss than the two actually going through the ceremony.

At breakfast, the day of the wedding, Lightning sat across from Fang, idly stabbing at the meal on her plate. All the while, the ex-soldier stared into the green eyes that were staring back at her. With one elbow on the table and a hand under her chin, she smiled a knowing smile back at the Huntress. The brunette, for her part, had long ago forgotten about her own breakfast, as both elbows sat on the table supporting her head.

It was a rather comical picture, more so with the frazzled people running about the house for the wedding. Fang and Lightning had long ago found their calm within the storm and simply just took in the other while chaos stormed around them. It wasn’t until the clearing of a throat that brought the two back to the present.

“Claire, it’s time to leave honey.” Her mother replied.

“Guess that’s that then.” Fang chuckled.

Claire’s parents were from the East Coast, and Lightning had grown up there. They had chosen a quaint little cottage near the woods to rent out for the ceremony. Light’s parents had been gracious enough to let their daughter chose, Fang’s aunt, however, had insisted on certain traditions being honored and if it hadn’t been for a calmer Huntress, things might have been a little ugly.

As it turned out, she had given into letting her Aunt dress her in a formal sari and let her wear her braids and jewelry. Unbeknownst at the time, both women were wearing their wedding necklaces, but no one at that time questioned them. Was it any wonder then, that Lightning had done a double-take of Fang when she’d walked out in the sari. It covered more than in their l’Cie days, but that was about the only difference, besides the open-toed and heeled boots.

The two soon to be wed again women, had chosen to make the affair small and between family. Unfortunately, at the time, most of the former l’Cie were absent and likely would be for the entirety of their lives. It was a burden of the heart that they would carry, knowing that they had their own lives in this world.

Perhaps the biggest surprise was the shock to the family and Fang when Lightning spoke all of her vows in Pulsian. Fang’s initial surprise turned to a loving smile and a hidden smirk at the rest of the gathered people. The Huntress almost barked laughter out loud at the looks of those in their
party and the audacity of her wife. Who said her Sunshine didn’t have a sense of humor, just try and tell Lightning that to her face!

At the reception, Fang watched as Claire made the traditional slow dance with her father. Several times she felt herself floating between two existences and she felt no immediate need to tether herself for safety. But when the Righteous Brother’s, “Unchained Melody,” began to play, her mind seemed to synch with the wisdom of the words in accordance with their situation. The past and the present could merge, become something better now that they were finally together.

She moved of her own accord, taking Claire’s father’s place to dance with his daughter. It had been strange for the family, trying to decide who to give away or how to handle such a wedding. Instead, they decided to stand at the altar together and that Lightning’s father should have his dance with his daughter.

But as the music played, Fang quietly serenaded Lighting, the meaning of the words not lost on the soldier. Her eyes closed and her head dipped forward to touch Fang’s. One song flowed into another as they slowly moved around the room, there couldn’t have been a better ending to the day.

End Notes

The first chapter involves Claire and a look into her family in this life. In the next chapter, I will bring Fang and Vanille into the story. I apologize if my thoughts are disjointed, work has been kicking my butt regarding free time.

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