

Title: Dream of the Phoenix

Rating: PG-13 (just to be safe, but may change depending on violence)

Series: Final Fantasy VII

Pairing: Cloud/Aerith

Summary: Follows the romance between Aeris (Aerith in America) and Cloud as it progresses to the end of the adventure. As I've not beaten the game yet (had my memory card with a save on disk 3 stolen along with the game), this will be my version of the ending, how I feel it should end.

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== Chapter 1: Costa Del Sol ==

He awoke with a start, sweat on his forehead, unshed tears in his glowing green eyes. The remains of the nightmare still clinging to him like last breath. He looked around the room, the moonlight flooding in the window told him it must be midnight.

Looking towards the bed next to his, he saw her, a pool of moonlight on her face giving her an ethereal beauty, her long honey-brown hair glowing silver in the gentle rays of light. She had a smile on her face, whatever she was dreaming must have been pleasant, unlike his own tortured dreams.

He looked at the other occupants of the room, Barrett, Tifa, Red XIII, all still asleep in their own beds. He noticed that Tifa was snoring, he gave a small smile, she always woke herself up and tried to blame it on someone else. *How can you snore so loud that you wake yourself up?* He asked himself as he moved through the room.

Moving silently so as not to wake anyone, he moved to her bedside and knelt there, just watching her sleep. He slowly moved his hand to her face, gently stroking it as he brushed some hair behind her ear. He leaned forward and whispered in her ear, "Aerith, I love you." He then placed a light kiss on her forehead; leaving the room he was unaware of a pair of eyes following his progress.

He left the Villa and moved towards the beach. The beach in front of Costa Del Sol was a protected beach, so there were no monsters to be found, yet he still wore his sword, just in case.

He sighed as he walked the beach in front of his Villa, recently acquired for some hundreds of thousands of gil, but it was worth it for the view of the sea. He moved along the shore towards a rocky outcropping. Some would call this protrusion a jetty, but he called it a sanctuary, a place to meditate and focus his thoughts. He sat on the edge, near the water, the gentle waves lapping at the rocks beneath his feet.

He sat in silence, his thoughts moving a mile a minute; every one of them was of her. Every night since their journey had begun he'd have the same dream. Every night, when every one else

was asleep, he got out of bed and knelt beside Aerith, kiss her forehead, brush stray hair from her perfect face, whisper 'I love you' in her ear, then he'd leave the room and walk for an hour. Normally he just wandered around the inn or the village, but in Costa Del Sol, he went to the beach and let his mind drift on the waves, soothed by their hypnotic sounds. As far as his companions knew, he slept the entire night, not one had any idea about his midnight walks and confessions, until tonight. Tonight everything would change.

He had been sitting, watching the dark ocean, listening to the waves that still crashed along portions of the shore, when he became aware of a presence behind him. He wasn't surprised by who it was.

"You should be asleep, you need your rest, the fight with Jenova took a lot out of you," he said as the person silently sat beside him.

"So do you, you fought pretty hard yourself," they replied with a smile, Cloud smiled back.

"One of the things about having been in SOLDIER is that I can go for days on small amounts of sleep, you have to when you're in battle," Cloud said while watching the moon reflect on the water.

"So, why'd you wake up?" the person asked, pulling their knees to their chin.

"Just couldn't sleep, no big deal," he lied.

"Cloud, I can always tell when you're lying, your voice gets slightly deeper and you won't look at me when you talk. Really, what's wrong?" they persisted; Cloud could never lie to his friends, especially this one. He sighed as he formed an answer.

"I had a bad dream, that's all, it's really nothing to worry about."

"Oh, really? Then why are you awake in the middle of the night sitting alone on the beach?"

He sighed once again, his resolve entirely gone, at this moment he would tell them anything they wanted to know, if they would just make the dreams go away, he wanted to sleep in peace for one night.

"Why?" he asked after a pause, "why do you want to know? It's my problem and I don't need to burden you with it."

"Cloud, I want to know because you're my friend, and I want to help you." They said as they placed their hand on his arm.

Cloud slowly looked at the hand, and then looked the person straight in their emerald green eyes.

"You really want to help me, you really want to know what's wrong?"

"You know I do," she replied silently, her voice a mere whisper.

"Ok, I'll tell you, and only you," he replied, his voice slightly higher than hers.

He looked at the reflection on the water once again before rising. He offered his hand to her and helped her stand when she accepted it.

Taking her hand in his he began to walk down the beach away from the Villa.

They walked for several minutes in silence, only the ocean was heard. Finally they came to a small rise, well above the high tide markings, covered in a soft grass. Cloud led them to this rise.

Sitting her down he say so that their shoulders were touching, he then began speaking.

"You asked why I wake up in the middle of the night and wander alone, it's because of the nightmares. I've been having the same horrid vision every night since I met you. Every night I dream that you are taken away from me... erm, us, forever."

"Please, tell me what you dream," Aerith begged, placing her hand on his arm.

"I see you kneeling, praying in a temple, you look up at me and smile, and just at that moment a dark shadow descends and strikes you down. You fall towards me as I rush to catch you," his voice becomes choked off, as he struggles to not cry, this is a war he can't win. "I manage to catch you before you hit the ground, but I can see that you're dying, blood is flowing from the wound where that daemon pierced all the way through your body. I stroke your hair as I struggle to wake you, you wake with effort and look lovingly into my eyes, I pull your head close to mine so only you will here, I tell you I love you."

He stops as the tears are now flowing freely; he wipes his eyes on the back of his sleeve.

"What happens then," Aerith asks in a small, sad voice.

"You look at me once again and say 'I'll return when this is over', then before you can say you love me, you close your eyes and die. That's when I wake up in a sweat, with that beast's laughter following me," he replied with his head down, the tears falling unchecked.

"Oh, Cloud," she says as she wraps her arms around him, lending him her strength. "Cloud, I do love and I will never leave you as long as I live and longer."

At her words Cloud pulls away shocked, *she loves me?* He thought as he stared at her, stunned.

She watched him for any reaction, and smiled when she found one. She watched as a small smile crept it's way onto his face, banishing the tears from his eyes.

"You, you love me?" he asked, in shock as the smile continued to creep it's way over his features, causing his eyes to glow brighter.

"Yes, I do, with all my heart. Cloud ever since I first saw you, I knew we were destined to be together. But do you really love me, Cloud?"

"Of course I do, I couldn't think of loving another person as much as I do you," he replied empathically.

"What about Tifa?" she asked.

"What about her? She and I are best friends, we have known each other since we were kids, but that's all. I used to have a crush on her, but that ended when I joined SOLDIER." He explained.

"Now the only one I love is you," he continued, "and I want to be with you forever."

"Oh Cloud, I want that too," she exclaimed as she threw her arms around him and hugged him, a gesture that he embraced.

Reluctantly he broke the embrace, but kept holding her.

"Aerith, we should probably head back to the Villa now, the others may wake up, it's almost morning."

She looked around them, and sure enough there was the just barely noticeable tip of the sun lightening the sky.

"I guess you're right," she sighed, saddened by their peaceful moment being broken by the sun. "We wouldn't want them to worry."

So, Cloud led the way back along the beach, Aerith's hand in his the entire way.

When they reached the Villa, they were still the only one's awake. Looking at the clock they realized that the other's would be waking up any minute. So, as one they moved to the kitchen, hands still entwined.

In the kitchen they started the coffee maker, a fresh cup in the morning would make everyone feel better.

Cloud stood leaning against the doorway as Aerith started the coffee maker. He took this opportunity to study her closely, something he wasn't able to do before.

He watched as she glided rather than walked across the floor, the motion adding a seductive, yet innocent appeal. He watched as the rising sun threw orange rays into her hair, making it appear to be made of pure, golden honey. He watched her smile softly and hum to herself as she

worked. All this endeared her to him further, in that moment he vowed to never leave her side no matter what may happen. He vowed that he would protect her even if it mean giving up his own life.

Silently he moved to stand behind her, the coffee maker churning happily. He gently wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her to him. She leaned her head back against his strong chest as he gently kissed her forehead.

She turned around in his arms, she looked into his eyes, getting lost in their depths. She watched as a questioning look appeared at her scrutiny.

"I just want to remember how you looked when we confessed our love," she said with a smile, he just nodded forcing another smile to her lips.

He watched her lips form a smile, he tried to resist, but was weak against her power. He leaned towards those lips and gently brushed his against them, he felt her smile grow against his lips.

She wrapped her arms around his waist and pulled him closer, capturing his lips with her own in a gentle, yet passionate kiss. They stood there, savoring their first kiss, the aroma of freshly brewed coffee adding a dimension of tranquility to it.

They quickly broke apart when they heard to door to the bedroom close, they separated further, Aerith to the coffee maker and cloud to the wall, as Barrett came down the hall stretching.

"Mornin'," he said as he gratefully took the coffee Aerith handed him. She then moved to stand next to cloud, her left hand hidden behind his back as she leaned against him. Cloud put his arm over her shoulders and pulled her closer to himself, forgetting about Barrett. Cloud then placed his chin on the top of her head as he once again held her close to his body.

Barrett cleared his throat, a grin on his face.

"Now, I won't tell a soul about you two until you're ready, but only if I can get another cup of coffee before Tifa drinks it all, you know how she is with her coffee," Barrett said as they heard the brunette complaining about being kept up all night by Red snoring, to which Red defended himself.

Aerith laughed and gently pulled away from Cloud and moved to the coffee maker. She returned with another cup for Barrett and one for Cloud and one for herself.

Tifa and Red took this opportunity to join the others, still arguing about whether Red was snoring all night, or if Tifa woke herself with her snores.

"... how can you snore so loud that you wake yourself up? It's impossible Red, **you** were the one snoring."

"Tifa, I do not snore, I'm telling you, you woke yourself up."

Cloud just rolled his eyes while Barrett lost himself in his coffee, trying not to laugh, Aerith just giggled.

A few hours later, after eating, they set out for their next destination, North Corel and the Gold Saucer.

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To Be Continued ... Chapter 2 – North Corel/Gold Saucer