

THEY're following me around again. Ever since the stupid leader thing. Damn Headmaster Cid – did he really believe I could lead this place? Dr Kadowaki doesn't think so. Treppe and Xu and Nida don't think so, not really – hell knows what they talk about up on the bridge when I'm not there. Probably how to salvage the place from the damage I've caused it.

I need to be alone. I need to not have these two following me around everywhere. They even follow me to my fucking bedroom.

I just want to sleep.

"Sorry," I hear myself say to them. "Will you leave me alone?"

They're happy to comply. At last I have a chance to rest. I never used to sleep during the day, but I just have to let go of everything for a while. It's too much.

I have to go and see her. Kadowaki tells me I'm in there too often, but she doesn't understand. The Garden is so bright. The students seem so unbothered now, even after the attack. As if we're still in Balamb and they're just learning how to fight, picking little techniques out of a textbook. But this is real now. They knew that before, but it's almost like they've forgotten.

I'm on my way to see her. A girl challenges me to cards. I win a Red Bat from her easily; she doesn't seem to mind. In fact, she leans closer as I take the cards, and breathes, "Do you want to come with me to the training grounds?"

I've seen it from a lot of them. Now that I'm the leader, they're all interested in me. I have no time for any of them. They're all stupid, and they're all much too innocent. I wouldn't be good for them even if I wanted it.

Kadowaki looks up at me as I come in. I hoped she wouldn't be here. I'm not ready for another lecture about how nothing's changed and how I come in here too much. But she gives it to me anyway. "You need to lead the students, Squall," she says. "They look up to you."

But I can't lead them when this is happening. There's nothing I can do, nothing I can think about apart from this. There's an ugly feeling coiled up in my stomach that stops me thinking straight.

I go in to see her. I hate looking at her. But I want to be here as much as I can: in case something happens, in case she wakes up. I want her to see me. I want her to realise.

The sight of her makes me crumple. I kneel by the bed and rest my head in my hands. What can I do? When did this become the only thing I care about? I feel so useless.

I'm crying. Fuck, I'm actually crying like a little kid. There are slippery wet streaks on my gloves. It's been years since I cried. At least nobody will see.

Please, Rinoa. Please wake up. I'll do whatever it takes. I need you to wake up. I need you to be here with me. You were right: I can't do everything alone.