

# Tears of a Princess

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## AC 198

Relena sat staring at her reflection in the mirror and she did not recognize the woman looking back at her. “What has become of me?” she asked the reflection as her tears cascaded down her soft cheeks. Just three years ago her life had been simple. A spoiled daughter of a rich politician. She’d been pampered and polished, and not prepared for the life she now lived. They had sheltered her from her birthright so much, that the dreams of being a princess masked the bitter reality of it.

The work was never ending, everyone wanted a little piece of her. She was wearing thin. Both figuratively and in actuality. A Gentle knock came to her chamber door. She quickly wiped her tears and put on a sober face. “Come in.” She said and a familiar figure entered carrying a tray. “You skipped breakfast, and three bites out of a salad is not lunch Relena.” Zechs said placing the tray on her vanity. He’d brought her a bowl of what looked like a rich stew and a large glass of milk. “I am going to sit here until you eat every bite young lady.” He added with a smile, but deep concern in his azure eyes. “Thank you, but I’m not hungry Milliardo.” She said and he frowned. “I don’t care Relena. I’ll cram it down your throat if I have too. You are making yourself ill. I’ll not let you starve yourself to death.” He said reaching up and laying his palm to her moist cheek. “You are my baby sister. I have always looked out for you, and I always will. I know you are under a lot of stress Relena. I know the vultures circle you relentlessly. Don’t give them a target. You can only give so much. You push yourself too hard.” He said and Relena turned away from his piercing blue gaze.

“I only do what’s necessary.” She said and Zechs sighed. “You go beyond what is deemed necessary Relena. You are burning the candle at both ends. You will burn out if you keep to this pace. You need to slow down.” Zechs said shoving the bowl closer to her. “Eat.” He ordered this time. Relena obeyed, she had learned to read the signs from her brother. When he broke down to giving orders, he was serious, and it was foolish to argue further. Not to mention, technically he outranked her. He was not only her elder brother, which made him the crown Prince of the former Sank kingdom, but he was also her commander and chief of the royal guard. Her protection, was his business, period. He preferred to leave the political running of the World Nation to Relena and the other minister’s of peace. He was born a soldier and would die a soldier. All he cared about was his family, and he was not happy with how this member of said family was taking care of herself.

A second gentle rapping came to the door and Noin poked her head around the door. “Oh, I see you beat me to it.” Noin said as she too came bearing a tray laden with food. Zechs stood and walked over to relieve his wife of her burden. He kissed her cheek as he did so. “This time.” He said smiling at her. “When it comes to food though, I seldom beat you to it.” He teased patting the large mound in Noin’s middle. “Cheeky sod.” Lucrezia said tugging one of Zechs’ long platinum locks. He just chuckled and steered his very pregnant wife to a chair. Relena smiled at her sister in law and friend. “I’m sorry for worrying you both. I didn’t realize my eating habits were of such concern.” Relena said finishing the glass of milk Zechs has

brought. Noin frowned “Have you looked in the mirror lately Relena. All your dresses just kinda hang on you, you’ve lost so much weight. It’s not healthy.” Noin said and Zechs nodded. Relena frowned. “Like my weight matters.” Relena said with a sigh. Noin raised an eyebrow. “What’s that supposed to mean?” She asked and Relena stood. “Nobody cares what I look like Lucrezia. I don’t even care what I look like. It’s not like I have anyone to impress with such nonsense. If you’ll excuse me. I have work to finish.” Relena said and Zechs frowned. “Sit right back down Relena. Don’t you dare hit and run with a comment like that.” He said standing and pointing to a chair. Relena stood facing her brother arms folded across her chest, defiant.

Lucrezia took Zechs’ hand, the look in her eyes told him to drop the subject. “We’ll leave you alone Relena. Don’t forget about the party tonight. Happy Birthday dear.” Lucrezia said with a wink as she let a befuddles Zechs out of Relena’s chambers. “What happened? What was that comment all about Lu?” He asked and Lucrezia hooked her arm through her husband’s. “She’s eighteen Zechs, no boyfriend. She’s not feeling particularly desirable.” Lucrezia said and Zechs choked. “Desirable!? I would have chose another term Lu!” He said and Noin laughed. “No, I chose the right one, I love to watch you squirm.” She teased as they walked down the palace corridor’s to their own apartments.

After Noin and Zechs left Relena turned and looked at the ballgown the servants had picked out for her. “I don’t know why I bother. No one sees ME anyway. They see a name, a title, but never me.” She said dragging her fingers down the soft royal blue silk. Turning away from the dress as if it were poison, Relena walked over to her desk, buried in documents and went back to work. It was her birthday and she’d not had a happy one in four years. Her fifteenth she spent chasing after Heero, only to see him get shot. Her sixteenth was spent on a long shuttle flight , holding a teddy bear Heero had given her. Working as usual, her seventeenth had been spent in summit meetings and conferences. This would be the first party she’d had in three years, and she was not in the mood to attend. She had nothing to celebrate. So she was a year older, big deal. Most eighteen year olds were flitting about going to university, or working, going out with friends, and having a good time. Relena had no friends. male or female. Those she did class as friends had their own lives now, apart from hers. Quatre was busy running his empire, Trowa still by his side. Duo and Hilde were still an item and living in the L2 cluster happy as can be. They were simple people, Relena adored them both. Dorothy had just drifted away and she’d lost contact with her. She saw Wufei and Sally regularly, but it was usually on a professional level. And she had no idea what had happened to Heero. He had simply up and vanished. It had been two years and not a word, nothing. She’d given up on him, even if her heart still clenched in pain at the mere thought of him. She longed for the normal life all of the rest of her friends, even her brother had somehow managed to find. It was her trade for peace she supposed. In order to give them their normalcy, she’d had to forfeit hers. The inner, selfish voice inside her screaming that it did not seem fair. “Life isn’t fair Relena. You were spoiled, not it’s time to pay the piper.” She said to herself to try and make sense out of her misery. It never worked, she felt horrible, and very, very lonely.

Heero adjusted his cravat and scrutinized his appearance in the mirror. His glare now focused critically upon himself. He hated the formal attire he now wore, but in order to blend into his surroundings and keep watch, it was necessary to the mission. Checking under his elaborately embroidered long coat to ensure his holster and firearm was secure and hidden. He deemed himself ready for the evening. His appearance greatly altered to the boy he had been. At nearly nineteen, Heero has achieved a good measure of his final manhood. He had grown taller and broader since his Gundam days. The frame and bearing of a man now greeted his foes, rather than a wiry adolescent. He had made warriors tremble in fear in those early days, now, no one dared question one Heero Yuy. Everyone that was except on annoying American. “Lookin’ Good Buddy.” Duo said slapping the Japanese pilot heartily upon the back. Heero never flinched just grunted in annoyance. The American only seemed to get more jovial the older he grew. Not to mention obscenely

tall. Duo had seemed to shoot up like a weed, practically overnight. His braid nearly hanging to his knees now. Heero reached out and gave it a tug. "When are you going to cut this?" Heero asked and Duo looked at him in near horror. "I have never cut it. I don't plan to start now. At least mine looks neat. Ever heard of a comb Pally?" Duo asked as he nudged Heero out of the way to look in the mirror himself. Just then before Heero could retort, Hilde waltzed into the room. The other happy idiot Heero thought rolling his eyes. He loved them both, but he would never admit it. "You're both handsome. I swear you spend more time in the bathroom preening than I do. Come on, we're going to be late. I for one, do not want Miss hormone imbalance Lucrezia blubbering if we're not there to surprise Relena." Hilde said giving Heero a push and grabbing Duo's braid. "Ow..ow.. ow... I'm coming already! Sheesh!" Duo said holding his braid at the base of his skull as Hilde pushed and pulled them out of the Hotel. She was wearing a Magenta formfitting gown with a partial slit both sides to her knees. "I don't know why in the hell I let you talk me into this dress Duo. I feel naked." She said as they walked through the lobby. Duo grinned. "Why do you think I begged for that one?" He said growling playfully at her. Heero rolled his eyes and Hilde giggled at Duo bent to kiss the back of her neck.

Outside Quatre and Trowa dressed in their formal best awaited the trio outside. "Ten to one Duo makes us late." Trowa muttered looking down at his watch. Quatre frowned. "Trowa! How awful. Don't forget Hilde and Heero are with him. I don't think we'll be late." Quatre said just as the trio emerged from the main foyer entrance. Both Trowa and Quatre could barely believe their eyes. Three people you never saw in formal wear, were dressed in the best the former sank Kingdom tailors could offer. Quatre embraced Hilde warmly "You look wonderful. I see you're letting your hair grow out." Quatre said tugging on one of the loose tendrils framing Hilde's pixieish face. "He hides the scissors." Hilde said tilting her head in Duo's direction. "I can believe it." Quatre chuckled as they all crawled into the limousine and headed toward the palace to celebrate Relena's eighteenth Birthday. "I'm so glad you decided to come Heero. I know Miss Relena will be pleased to see you." Quatre said and Heero turned to look out the window. "I'm here for business, not pleasure Quatre. Unlike the rest of you, I was not invited as a guest." Heero muttered and everyone's jaw dropped. "What?" Duo asked incredulously. Heero just continued to look out the window. "I'm tonight's security." was all Heero said. His voice steady and calm, his gaze blank and void of all emotion as always. He would never let slip how he secretly longed to be able to attend as just Heero. To enjoy Relena's company for once rather than always having to be in the background. To feel her in his arms on the ballroom floor just one more time. Their last and only dance had ended far too soon. That had been the day he had fallen in love with her. Truly and utterly in love. The day Oz had tried to assassinate her and he had protected her. The first time of many, as he would continue to do so long as he drew breath.

Relena looked at her reflection in the mirror, as always, the servants had preened her like a prize peacock. Her hair was piled loosely atop her head, pearls pins holding it in place. Her royal blue simple gown, accentuated her blue eyes as well as all the right curves. She may have looked like Cinderella out of a fairy tale, yet there was no Prince charming in her life. It was unlikely if there would ever be one. She had begun to group men into categories, and the only category she wanted, was empty of names. There was the 'Get close to Relena for the Power she can give us' category. Stuffed shirts only after her title. There was plenty of men in that category. All of them she despised. Then there was the 'too afraid to approach the powerful Princess-Vice Foreign Minister' category. Those hurt her deeply. She hated when people feared her, she wanted people to see the real Relena. Almost no one looked to the woman behind the title. That was the third category, the "I know and love Relena for who she is" category. That one was not entirely empty, but all the men within it were already spoken for. Duo had his Hilde. Trowa and Quatre had well, each other. Wufei, barely made that category to begin with and he had Sally. Then there had been Heero. Her heart ached at just the memory his name brought to mind. She'd not seen hide nor hair of him in three years, he'd

vanished from her life as suddenly as he had appeared. A phantom left only to haunt her dreams. She knew he had kept in contact with Duo and Hilde, but other than knowing he was alive and well, she knew nothing else. Well, she knew her feelings for him had run deeper than his for her. That knowledge hurt worst of all, and to this day, she could not help but love him. She knew he cared not for her, but it didn't matter, not to her heart. Absence had only made it fonder for him. Where was he? Was he happy? Did he have a love? The questions plagued her night and day, she was miserable. She was starving for affection and could not find surcease.

Duo looked over at his best friend and noticed the sadness lurking behind his eyes. "Heero, why do you do this to yourself man? If you'd just bite the bullet and quit hiding from her you'd be a lot happier dude." Duo said and Heero's expression never changed. "Butt out Maxwell. This has nothing to do with you." Heero said and Duo frowned. "Bull-shit. I'm not putting up with your melancholy me crap anymore. You are hung up Heero. You gotta pull it together man. The War is OVER. O-V-E-R. Done, kaput, finito! You can start acting human, You love her, admit it! I am sick and tired of these games you play." Duo said and Heero leveled him a death glare from hell. Then a voice one rarely heard actually spoke and agreed with Duo. "He's right Heero. You are holding back your emotions. I seem to remember you telling me once to act on them. Why do you hide from her? Is there something we don't know?" Trowa asked and Heero shook his head and turned his gaze away from questioning eyes. "I'm not good enough for her. Please don't tell her I'm there tonight. I'm not a guest, I have a job to do." He said and Quatre frowned. Trowa met his worried gaze and shook his head. This was a demon Heero had to face on his own, not even Quatre could comfort it away. Trowa just held his hand while they silently worried for Heero's soul. Duo just looked frustrated. Hilde laid her hand to his knee, the rest of the trip to the Palace was made in strained silence.

Zechs adjusted his waistcoat and cravat in the mirror while glancing at Lucrezia's reflection over his shoulder. "I hope your plan works Lu." He said and Noin smiled. "I'm positive it will. I had Hilde and Sally to help." She said as she sat at her vanity applying her make-up. Zechs chuckled "You are devious my love." Zechs said walking over and planting a kiss on her bared shoulder. "It runs in the family." she said and Zechs laughed. "You know, finding out Hilde is your cousin didn't surprise me in the slightest. Strong willed, loyal women seem to run in your bloodline." He said smoothing her dark silken waves of hair behind her ears. "We get it from our mother's." Noin said winking at her husband. "I just hope this angel gets that spirit." Zechs said rubbing Noin's swollen abdomen. "Be careful what you wish for." Noin teased as she finished getting ready for the party. "How did you find out where Heero was?" Zechs asked as he sat on the edge of their bed. "Well, Sally got a list of Security firms, and Hilde did the searching." Noin said and Zechs frowned. "She did the hacking you mean." Zechs said and Noin laughed. "Still a sore spot lover?" She asked and Zechs grimaced. "I just can't believe the little pixie pulled it off right under my nose." He said grinning. "Never underestimate a determined Gruber woman. We may have lost the surname when our mother's married, but the genes remain." Noin said giggling. "Obviously." Zechs said throwing a cotton ball at his wife. "Well Mrs. Peacecraft, are you about ready for this party?" He asked and Noin laughed. "Oh definitely. We just gotta make sure they actually talk to one another. the rest hopefully will fall into place." Noin said as Zechs helped her to her feet. "Then let's be off." He said hooking his wife's arm into his own and leading her to the ballroom where the guests were beginning to converge.

Once at the Palace, Heero vanished into thin air almost immediately. Hilde frowned as she greeted her cousin. "He was there one minute, gone the next. Sorry Lu." Hilde said and Noin smiled. "He'll show his face sooner or later I'm sure. Don't fret Hilde, just have a good time." Noin said and Hilde laughed, "With Duo to keep in line? I'll be busy tonight." Hilde said giggling. "How are things with Him?" Noin asked and Hilde smiled. "Wonderful as always. Life is never boring with Duo." She said almost beaming. "You look

happy.” Noin said and Hilde looked over to where Duo was talking with Wufei and Zechs. “Very. He may be a bit Wild and carefree, but I wouldn’t change him for the world.” Hilde said with a sigh. Noin couldn’t miss the love in her eyes. “That’s another Gruber trait you know.” Noin said hooking her arm around Hilde’s shoulder in a semi hug. Hilde gave her a questioning look. “What is?” Hilde asked. “Knowing the right man for you when you meet him.” Noin said glancing over at Zechs. “I knew within ten minutes I’d love Zechs forever.” Noin said and Hilde sighed. “Me too. He may drive me to distraction, but he’s all mine. I never worry about him being faithful, that’s for sure. And I could, I mean the looks I see women give him while were out somewhere makes me want to scream sometimes. But he never notices. Or, if he does, he never lets on. He treats me like I’m the most beautiful woman in the world.” Hilde said and Noin smiled. “I’m glad to hear it, I knew I liked Maxwell for a reason.” Noin said just as Zechs and Duo walked over, punch in hand. “My ears are ringing. You been talkin’ about me behind my back babe?” Duo asked handing Hilde her punch. “Yes.” Hilde said succinctly. “Should I be afraid?” He asked playfully. Noin grinned. “Yes.” Duo grabbed his heart in mock effrontery. “I’m wounded! I didn’t do it I swear.” He said grinning. Everyone just laughed. Noin looked approvingly at her cousin, yes, she approved of her choice in men very much indeed. He was a perfect complement to Hilde, in every way.

All eyes turned when Relena made her solemn entrance into the ballroom. She looked every inch the Princess, and her smile appeared sincere to all, save for those who knew her well. Zechs’ heart ached in sympathy, he said silent prayer his wife’s plan would work. His eyes scanning the room for Heero. Relena greeted everyone politely and when all pleasantries were out of the way, tried her best to blend into the background. She really was not in the mood for a party. She had come to hate her birthday. The hours seemed to drag by, when she wandered out onto the verandah. Heero from his position by the door, watched her glided gracefully by him, he could reach out and touch her if her wished. She was so beautiful. Every year just seemed to add an elegance to her that was unequaled. He followed her into the garden, where she sank down on the edge of the fountain and buried her face in her gloved hands. Her weeping brought out a courage in him he hadn’t realized he possessed.

He plucked a rose from a nearby bush and walked over to her on silent feet. He reached around from behind her and presented her the rose “Please don’t cry Relena. Tears don’t become you.” He said softly and Relena’s heart raced, she was afraid to turn around. Could it be? “Heero?” She asked and he ran the soft petals down her cheek. “Relena.” He said softly his free hand resting softly on her bare shoulder. She closed her eyes and leaned back against him almost unconsciously. This was a dream, it had to be. She dreaded waking. “Is it really you?” She asked reaching up to accept his rose, but still too afraid to turn around and have the dream fade from reality. “Yes. Tell me what’s wrong.” He asked softly placing both hands upon her shoulders kneading softly, relishing her close proximity. The soft scent of her perfume caressing his olfactory senses. She even smelled beautiful. “Nothing’s wrong. Not now.” She said softly and Heero’s pulse quickened. Fear, longing, hope and despair, all the emotions he had ever felt began to tumble about inside him. He wrapped his arms around her, her back against his chest. Could she feel his heart pounding? He rested his cheek against her soft honey colored hair. “I’ve Missed you.” he said softly, and Relena’s tears began again silently, but for new reasons.

“Why did you go?” She asked and Heero turned her around to face him, her tears glistening on her cheeks. He wiped them away with his fingers. “I never left you. I’ve always been here.” He said looking deeply into her beautiful eyes. Her tears still betrayed her heart. “Then why? I don’t understand Heero. What have I done to push you away?” She asked and with those words, the last bit of mortar in the wall around his heart crumbled and fell away. Leaving him raw and exposed before her. He clutched her to him in a desperate embrace. “Oh Relena! It’s not you, it was me. Please don’t cry. Please.” He said speaking into her

hair. "I was afraid of what I felt for you. I'm not good enough for you. It's not you Relena, it's me. I was a coward." he said as she clung to him in return. "I love you Relena. I always have, and I always will. I never meant to hurt you." He said lifting her chin to gaze into her eyes. "Oh, Heero I love you too." She sighed. With that he bent his head toward her and claimed her lips in love's first kiss.

From the Verandah Noin smiled up at her husband. "I told you it would work. No more tears for our little Princess." She said and Zechs sighed. "At least not from a lonely heart." He added as they watched Heero and Relena disappear into the garden arm in arm, and heart to heart.