

Tales of Symphonia®: Corrine's Killa

A fanfiction based on the NAMCO RPG Tales of Symphonia

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Corrine's Killa

"Lloyd, how could you?"

Sheena held the body of her dearest friend close to her heart and wept openly in front of her enemies. The little summon spirit's body was already stiffening. He held onto his physical form for her benefit, willing his body to stay whole long enough for her to embrace him one last time, before it dissolved into pure energy and floated upward to the starry heavens. His nose, ordinarily wet, felt clammy against her skin.

"It's okay, Sheena. I'm happy to die for you." He spoke in the secret language of Mizuho, and she replied in kind.

"Corrine, you're the first friend I ever had."

"You'll make new ones, and I'll keep an eye on you, I promise."

"Ai shiteru."

"I love you too, Sheena. Goodbye."

With that, he was gone.

"Corrine!"

Lloyd kneeled beside her, hesitantly placing a hand on her shoulder. "Sheena, I'm so sorry. I didn't have a choice. Can you forgive me?"

Sheena regarded the hand for a moment, the hand that killed her friend, the hand covered in its blood-red glove. "I will..." she said.

Lloyd nodded, "Thank—"

"I will NEVER forgive you!"

He saw her slap coming, but did not try to avoid it. She must have turned her fingers inward before her hand connected, because, in addition to the stinging impact, he felt three very sharp pinpricks. Blood rolled down his face, commingling with a few salty tears.



Five minutes ago

To a muddy hilltop just out of sight of the camp, Kratos led Sheena, having declared with a gravity that brooked no refusal that they had to talk. She should have been more wary.

"The Chosen is too soft-hearted to do what is necessary," Kratos said, drawing his sword. "But I am not. For the good of Sylvarant, you, Assassin, must die."

Before she could reach her cards, he was on her, slashing and thrusting. His blade sliced cleanly through the tightly wrapped layers of her clothing and opened her stomach. The spells woven into the lavender and white fabrics numbed the pain, but did little to lessen the severity of the injury. Instinctively, her hand went to her stomach. It came back slick with blood, but only blood—red, not black or yellow from bile. And she'd felt no graver injury. That was meaningless, however. Between the layers of her undergarment were swaths of a tightly-woven, stretchy bandage-like material, that in a pinch would work as the real thing, keeping any—oh, God—organs that might be poking out in place until she could find a healer. Mizuhoan garments were designed not to protect, but to keep you mobile. Complete the mission. Complete it or die.

She withdrew a handful of cards from her robe, but Kratos didn't let up. Sheena wasted a tenth of her TP defending against another attack that never came. Once he saw the defensive barrier go up, he calmly waited until it fizzled away to resume his offensive.

His next attack, she wasn't expecting. Leaving his sword stuck in the mud, he rushed forward and grasped the back of her forearm. With his other hand, he chopped at the base of her wrist, loosening by reflex the tight grip she had on her cards and scattering them to the ground. To finish off, he shoved her backwards while simultaneously ripping at her undershirt. Ostensibly, this was because he had noticed its bandaging function, but it might also serve to distract her. Her need for modesty would demand she cover up.

Not likely.

Kratos was too cunning a warrior to waste battle-time leering, Sheena knew and, for her, modesty was meaningless if you were dead.

When she went down, her hand came to rest on one of the fallen cards. She could tell its type by the raised dots on the corners. Perfect.

"Cyclone seal," she screamed, standing and bringing the card to bear. But nothing happened. She hazarded a glance down and discovered the kanji on the card was covered in mud. Damn it! If obscured, the spells were useless. God couldn't see them, the tradition went, and didn't know what you were asking.

While she rubbed the card furiously against her robe to clean off the mud, her other hand snaked around to the hidden pocket in the back of her obi, the first of her back-up card stashes.

But Kratos wouldn't stand for this. The flat of his blade he slammed into her skull, and she went down again, dazed and disoriented.

So this was how it ended. The hope of Tethe'alla, the reviled killer of her own people, the failure, died like a pitiful dog.

"No, leave her alone, you big meanie!"

"Huh? Whazzat?" Sheena slurred, "Corrine?"

"Stay where you are, Sheena. I'll take care of him."

"No, you're not strong enough."

Ignoring her, the kitsune attacked the swordsman, slashing with claws, using tails like weighed-down clubs, and sinking teeth into Kratos's cheek. Corrine was truly a terrifying

sight, blood trailing down his little face, as he spat a chunk of Kratos's flesh to the ground. His fur stood on end, pricked up like a porcupine's, and (unless it were a defect in Sheena's disoriented vision) he shook with rage.

"You leave Sheena alone. She's done nothing to you."

Kratos seethed. He wasn't used to losing. "She tried to kill the Chosen."

"She repented."

Kratos growled and charged. Corrine charged, and drove his attack into the swordsm^{an}'s most vulnerable spot. Kratos dropped his sword and doubled over, clutching at his privates. The armored plating hadn't helped a bit.

Just as Corrine readied for another attack, Lloyd came rushing over the crest of the hill. "Sheena! Kratos! I heard shouting. Are you guys all right?" This was the scene Lloyd came upon: two allies down, one dazed with a bloodied abdomen, the other missing a sizeable portion of his cheek and nursing what Lloyd knew from experience to be a most painful injury. He reached the only logical conclusion—Corrine was an enemy to be dealt with.

"Double demon fang!" Lloyd shouted and sent twin blasts of energy toward the fox spirit.

Corrine dodged; he tried to explain, but Kratos's blood, still pooled in his mouth, garbled his speech. He didn't want to attack Lloyd (one needn't be a keen observer of human nature to notice the affection Sheena held for the boy), but Sheena was still in danger. Kratos could regain his bearings at any time, and then Sheena would be done for. To save her, Corrine had to knock Lloyd out of commission. He leapt into the air and weighed down a tail. A simple bash to the side of his head, if it were hard enough, would do the trick.

"Corrine, no! Don't hurt him!" Sheena cried.

Without hesitation, he obeyed his summoner's wish.

Lloyd, however, was still in battle mode, his pulse thundering in his ears so loud he could hear nothing else. As Corrine neared, Lloyd didn't notice the fox spirit drop his offensive posture. All he saw was a threat—to himself, to Kratos, and, most importantly, to Sheena.

With one sword, he impaled the tiny creature, with the other he slashed at his throat. Elegant cuts; Kratos would be impressed.

Sheena rose unsteadily and stumbled toward her dying friend. Lloyd still had him impaled on the end of his sword, held up like some kind of trophy. Gently, she pulled him off. Her heart ached as she heard his mews of pain.

"Sheena, are you—?" Lloyd started.

"Lloyd, how could you?"

"What?"

"He's my friend! He was protecting me."

Sheena sank to her knees and held her friend close. Down her robe his blood trickled, uniting with hers.

She barely noticed when the other members of the Chosen's group crested the hill or when Kratos traipsed off. Raine's healing magic soon closed up Sheena's wounds but not the hole in her heart.



Sheena stalked into the tent she shared with Raine and the Chosen and threw herself into the comforting arms of her sleeping bag. God, what was wrong with her? It wasn't Lloyd's fault, she knew that. He'd come into the fight with only half the story.

Sheena had been a prisoner/ally of the Chosen's group for nearly a week now. In that time, she'd come to see the Chosen and her protectors as the good people they were (most of them, anyway). But really, that was no surprise. She'd never expected them to be ogres. They were risking their lives to save their world, after all. And here she was, planning to kill one of them to save hers.

But did she really plan to kill her any longer? She had grown close to the Chosen during this week and closer still to the Chosen's friend Lloyd. Something about his earnestness disarmed Sheena, and she found herself telling him things she shouldn't. Unless Kratos happened to be around. Then she clammed up. He didn't trust her, didn't like her, and the feeling was mutual. But so disarming was Lloyd that often Sheena did not detect Kratos's presence until he had been in earshot for quite a while, long enough, perhaps, to learn something damning. Did he suspect she was a Tethe'allan? No, that was crazy. No one on this side knew of the other world. Did they? Had an idle conversation with a *boy* sealed her and Corrine's fates?

Possibly so. Kratos's eyes were always watching, his ears always open, and his mouth always silent. Sheena recognized these as traits of an intelligence gatherer. Kratos, if he were not a spy, certainly did a fine job imitating one. Of course, that might be overstating things. Any skilled warrior gave away as little as possible about himself and his techniques, while learning as much as he could about his opponent's. It was, she realized with a burst of clarity, as if Kratos were sizing them all up as potential opponents.

He was so unlike Lloyd—Lloyd whom she trusted, whom she felt comfortable with, whom she was falling in love with. She'd deny it to the death if called on it, but here, in the safety of her own mind, she suffered herself no illusions. She was falling in love with the murderer of her best friend.

Love! How improper! A Mizuhoan ninja had no time for affairs of the heart; she was cunning and quick; she focused all her energy on fulfilling her task for the honor of her village and the glory of her chief.

Sheena sighed. Maybe the villagers were right, and all she was good for was hurting people she supposedly cared about. Lloyd was the person she cared for most among her enemies turned companions, and he was the one she'd hurt the most.



Early the next morning, Sheena awoke to the stench of blood. She'd neglected to clean herself last night and now practically reeked of it. Colette and Raine must be furious—oh, but they weren't here. Indeed, their sleeping bags had been removed some time in the night. She wouldn't be surprised if the Chosen's group had abandoned her while she slept and set up camp elsewhere. A peek past the tent flap told her otherwise. A spare tent had been set up. So they didn't abandon her; they just didn't want to be near her. Stop thinking so negatively, she chided herself. Maybe they just wanted to give her privacy to grieve.

That's what friends do, a voice that sounded like Corrine's whispered into her ear.

Stuffing body wash and a change of clothes into a bag, she stepped out of the tent and started toward the river to wash away the filth. She tripped after only a few steps. Dropping her bag, she wheeled around and fumbled for a card from a pouch hidden in her boot, but her hand shook too badly for her to get a firm grip on it. Tears assaulted her eyes; her heart beat erratically, throwing off her defenses—she was panicking.

"Sheena, what's wrong?"

It was Lloyd. She had tripped over Lloyd, who slept outside her tent.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I know I'm the last person you want to see right now. But Kratos told us what he did, and there's no way I'd share a tent with that bastard. Plus, I wanted to be nearby in case he...tried it again." He stood up, offered a hand to help her to her feet.

She ignored it.

He averted his gaze. "We're having a vote later today on whether to expel him from the group."

"I'm going to the river to wash up."

"Take Raine or Colette."

"No," she said. "I need to be by myself."

"I can't let you, not with Kratos still around."

"I want to be alone."

"Hate me all you want, I won't let you die."

I don't hate you, Lloyd, she wanted to say, but instead, "Fine, *you* can come, but if I catch you peeking at me—"

"I would never—"

"Yeah, I know."

As she bathed in the river, Sheena examined the cut running diagonally from above her right thigh to below her left breast. Touching the inflamed skin, no matter how gingerly, made her wince. Infection would have set into the wound without Raine's prompt attention. However, if Sheena kept it washed and changed the dressing regularly, it would fade to a fine white line within a week. A few days after that, it would disappear completely.

"Sheena," Lloyd called, "I have something for you."

Unless it's my friend back from the dead, I don't want it.

"I left it at the rock near your clothes. I didn't peek."

She found a short-sleeved robe of pale blue (the same color as the accents on her damaged clothing) over-lain with a pattern of pink and white cherry blossoms. She examined the spells sewn into it and gasped. This was true armor—not that pain-deadening stuff she'd been equipped with by her people—and top of the line. It must be worth a fortune. Besides that,

"It's beautiful."

She slipped it over her arms and shivered in ecstasy. It felt finer than silk against her skin. It was also more conservatively cut than her damaged clothing. She smirked. Was Lloyd trying to tell her something?

"I found it in a chest in the ruins of the Fire Seal," he explained. "The fortune teller in Triet told me I should give it to someone really special."

"Why didn't you give it to Colette?"

"I'm making her a birthday present, and anyway the robe isn't her size. Besides, I wanted you to have it."

"Thanks."



"You've got to be kidding me!"

Raine shook her head. "I'm sorry, Lloyd, but we need Kratos's strength."

"He tried to murder Sheena!"

"I understand your feelings, and ordinarily I would agree, but the World Regeneration Journey is too important to jeopardize over a petty disagreement."

"Petty!" Lloyd shouted.

Raine sucked air through her teeth. "That was a poor choice of words."

Sheena sat with eyes downcast, chewing on a stem of grass. The voting went as expected. Each member of the group, Lloyd excepted, found reason to justify keeping the mercenary on. For pragmatic Raine, it was his strength. Genis, torn between loyalty to Lloyd and trust in his sister's judgment, gave in to the latter. And Martel's dedicated servant Colette was as passionate as the goddess herself was purported to be. To her, no sin was unforgivable.

Sheena could fault none of their reasons, though she objected to the way they were explained. Each seemed a direct insult against Lloyd: He's too weak, too stupid, too unforgiving. How wrong the group was and yet how right.

She spat out the grass stem and said, "Raine's right, Lloyd. You do need him, more than you need me anyway. If anyone should be sacrificed for the good of your journey, it's me."

Lloyd shook his head. "No sacrifices."

"Say you won't go," Colette said, grabbing Sheena's hand.

Sheena lied, "All right, I'll stay."



Three weeks later, she made her move. It took that long for the group to trust Kratos with the night watch again, and she needed Kratos on night watch. Only he would allow her to leave camp uncontested. In addition, the passage of time meant emotions had settled down enough to make her departure unexpected. She only hoped she could get away without alerting Lloyd, who still slept at the door of her tent every night.

She glided past the tent flap and pulled her robe tight against the chill, nervously tracing its cherry blossom pattern and wishing its weaver had incorporated spells to regulate body temperature. She detected no sign of Lloyd, not even his sleeping bag. Good. If he were sleeping in a tent again, it meant he would survive her departure. Well, of course he would. It wasn't as if he loved her. They had been companions for only a month, and she'd treated him like dirt for most of that time. He would be glad to see her go; protecting her from Kratos would be one less responsibility on his shoulders.

She recalled with a sigh the conversation Lloyd and Kratos had the night following the vote. They spoke in voices too low to be heard, but she was very good at lip-reading:

"If you hurt her, I'll kill you."

"Who is she to you?"

"She is my friend and my ally. Who are *you* to me?"

Yes, with her gone, Lloyd could focus on what mattered, or, rather, who mattered. *Take care of him, Colette. He is dear to me.*

In the center of the camp, Kratos warmed his hands by the fire. Sheena watched him carefully as she lifted her pack to her shoulder. When she caught his eye, she sent him a gaze of pure hatred. He grinned.

Closing the distance between them, she said in a low voice, "I'm leaving. You don't have to follow me. I'm no longer a threat to the Chosen."

He touched the pommel of his sword. "See that you are not."

As he spoke, she watched the rise and fall of the faint discoloration on his cheek, the last reminder of Corrine's attack. The cheek had healed well, but he would always carry a scar.

He still applied gel to the wound every day, though it did no good. That small hint of vanity made her happy; it signaled a weakness that meant Kratos was not a nigh-omnipotent demigod, but a mortal just like everyone else.

Nodding, she disappeared into the night.

She made it less than fifty yards before being ambushed.



A hand clamped onto her arm and spun her around. "Just where do you think you're going," an angry voice demanded.

"Let me go!"

"Not happening."

"Lloyd, I'm leaving," Sheena said, slapping his hand away.

"Why?"

"It's best for everyone."

"Not everyone." He dropped his intense gaze after a moment. "I'm going with you." Indeed, he had a satchel slung over his shoulder and his sleeping bag tucked under his arm.

Her mouth felt dry, but she managed to choke out, "Colette needs you."

"She has Kratos. He was hired to protect her," Lloyd said. "I'm not even supposed to be on this journey. Genis and I are just tagging along."

"So, you're going to protect *me* now?"

"Yes. What's to stop Kratos from going after you?"

"He won't," Sheena said. "We've reached an understanding."

Lloyd shook his head. "I don't trust him."

"Me neither, which is why I'm putting as many miles between me and him as I can by morning."

"Then let's go."

"You'd only slow me down."

"I can't let you go it alone."

"Why are you making this so difficult?" she mumbled. Firmly, she grasped his chin and directed his gaze into her eyes, praying he didn't notice her tears. "I'm a trained assassin, Lloyd, a ninja—not some...some kid playing warrior. I don't need you. Go back."

Five seconds of silence felt like fifty.

Then he spoke. "You're right. I am a kid, stupid and easily distracted, but I'm good with my swords. I'm not the best, but I can protect you. If not, I'll die trying. And if you run away, I will follow."

Her tears flowed freely now. She had to hide her face and so threw herself into the closest available hiding spot. Leaning against Lloyd's chest sure felt right. So did being enveloped in his arms. Her eyes snapped open. No, she couldn't show weakness. She clenched her fists and beat on his chest, albeit halfheartedly. Lloyd refused to let go, and she soon fell into a sobbing heap, while he stroked the back of her head.

"Why do you have to be so stubborn?" she said.

"Because I care."

"I'm not helpless," she said.

"I never said you were." He grinned. "I've fought you—I know."

She chuckled, then took his hand and intertwined her fingers with his. Her first instinct had been to break the embrace, but she sensed the sacredness of the moment, knew that, in this

time and in this place, she could drop her ever-present façade of strength; she could be vulnerable, and Lloyd would not fault her for it. Of course, once it was over, that façade would have to be guarded all the more closely.

But it wasn't yet over; she would enjoy it while she could.

"I'm sorry," she said, "for the way I've treated you. After you killed Corrine, I tried to hate you. But I couldn't, because you are my friend. You're my best friend." She bit her lip. "Can you forgive me?"

"I will always forgive you."

"Thank you." She laid her head against his chest once again. "You don't happen to know Mizuhogo do you?"

"Your language? No, why would I?"

"Good." She couldn't have him understanding her. "Lloyd, *ai shiteru*."

"You said that to Corrine before he died."

"Mm-hmm."

"What's it mean?"

"I can't tell you."

"Aww! No fair."

"Sorry," she giggled. "Ask me again when our journey is over. If you and I are still together, I'll speak those words to you in your language." Slowly, deliberately, she raised her head and gazed into his eyes. "And I'll mean them with all my heart."

"So you're staying?"

"Yes," she said. "I'll stay with you."

Sheena slipped out of the embrace, intending to end the moment on that note. Lloyd, though, continued to hold her hand. To Sheena's surprise, she let him, and they walked back to camp hand-in-hand. When Kratos noticed, his features tightened, and he crossed his arms. His agitation grew when they disappeared together into the same tent. It was just for warmth. Sheena couldn't have Lloyd freezing outside while she was toasty warm inside; she'd feel horrible.



Sheena would always miss Corrine. He had been her friend and confidante, and no one could replace him. Lloyd, though, stood by her side, becoming her confidence booster, her shoulder to cry on, and her sounding board. She told him everything, and he never judged her or spoke ill of her. And when, months later, she discovered Corrine reincarnated as Verius in the Martel Temple, she felt content leaving him behind as she resumed her journey.

Kratos grew increasingly distant as the weeks passed, and it was no great shock when he revealed his true colors at the Tower of Salvation. When he attacked the group, he singled Sheena out to bear the brunt of his offensive. But dozens of hours of observation had prepared her. She knew how he moved, and, with a little luck, a lot of skill, and the right amount of teamwork, she at last avenged Corrine. Lloyd may have struck the blow that ended the kitsune's life, but Kratos had been the one truly responsible.

On that day, as Lloyd stood with her above the body of their tragically fallen foe, she broke her word. And told him exactly what was meant by *ai shiteru*.

He held her close and said, "I love you, too."

THE END