Time to Change
by Constance Truggle

Summary

Time Travel. Cloud goes back in time to change things for the better. He'll have help, but will it be enough? Will be slash later on. There will be other slash and het pairings that will be noted as they come up.

Notes

Moving from FFN. There will be slash, but the pairings aren't quite set yet.

See the end of the work for more notes.
The Unfamiliar Past

Chapter Notes

I've finally done it. I've started a Final Fantasy VII Time Travel fic. It will be slash (yaoi). I'm still working out the pairing. Quite a bit of this is written, it just needs filled out and fleshed and cleaned up. Nearly all the major plot points are done, actually. It's the in-between bits that are not yet done. So let's see. Time travel. Seph/Cloud friendship to start. (Might be more, might stay this way.) Cloud in Nibelheim. I'm a trope whore. Sorry. ^.^

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Time to Change

Chapter One: The Unfamiliar Past

The Cetra had spoken. He was to go back, try to prevent the Calamity from claiming the General of SOLDIER. Cloud Strife, classification: Hero, was being sent back. In time. For the sole purpose of saving Sephiroth, classification: Villain. He didn't know what to think.

Cloud had gone to relax in the peace of Aerith's church, laying on his side near the pool that once was a flower garden. He was drifting in his mind when suddenly he was in a white place, yellow and white flowers at his feet and a warmth at his back. Her voice reached his ears, sweet and serene.

"We have a proposition for you, Cloud." She paused, as if waiting for acknowledgment from the blond, but all she got was an expectant silence. "We can send you back in time. Well, your consciousness, at least. You should go back to your teenage body. No enhancements or mako... no, that's not entirely true. Mako exposure is something you will enter ShinRa with. It has been decided that for you to be slightly enhanced would be preferable. You fell in a mako spring as a young boy. You will enter ShinRa with the purpose of getting into SOLDIER. You will work to get closer to Sephiroth. How you prevent Meteorfall and Jenova and Nibelheim burning and the Silver Demon going crazy is up to you, but to have any chance, you'll have to be SOLDIER. You will have help, but I don't know who or how many will be going back with you."

"When?" Cloud asked. He had accepted that anything the Planet and the Cetra determined was going to happen, whether he wished it or not, so why fight it. He was glad to know he wouldn't be alone, though.

"Now. Be careful, Cloud. Come see me when you get to Midgar, okay?"

Finally, he smiled. It was small, but it was real. "I will."

When he opened his eyes again, he was in Nibelheim.

"Damn," Cloud muttered to himself. He had thought he'd be arriving just before leaving for ShinRa, but it wasn't. Apparently, it was now just after he fell in the mako spring. He was five. What in Gaia's name did the Cetra think they were doing? He knew he had no choice but to deal with it. So he made plans to visit the mansion and rescue Vincent.
He heard voices coming from the upper floor of the ShinRa Mansion as soon as he was through the front door. Footsteps were coming towards him, too. So he slipped into the first room he could find. The last time he was there, it had Dorky Faces and dust inhabiting it. This time, there was furniture and obvious use and Oh Shiva! He was so dead. So he hid. He found a corner and thanked the Planet he was as small as he was. A love seat was situated in a corner near a bookshelf, an armchair across from it. He dove behind it as he heard the footsteps making their way down the stairs, and sighed in relief. Scooting himself deeper into the shadowed corner, he froze when he encountered not a wall, but a body. A warm, breathing body. Attached to the hand that was now covering his mouth. Wary blue eyes, shining with the glow of mako, looked over his shoulder and collided with green. The pupils were oblong, but still rounded. There was no taint of Jenova-induced insanity in them. Silver eyebrows arched over them, but there was no cruel smirk twisting the lips below. Silver hair drifted over shoulders, down the chest. Silver bangs just brushing sharp cheekbones. Cloud was not ready for this younger version of his idol-turned-enemy. He couldn't make a sound, though, for fear of being found and turned over to Hojo. His fear of that madman made his breathing labored even as he flinched away from the teen behind him. The teen who was gesturing him to calm down and be silent. He stilled as footsteps and voices entered the room, obviously searching for something.

Sephiroth pulled the small child to him as the scientists came in. He hadn't used this hiding spot since he was roughly the age of the child in his arms, so was fairly certain he was safe from discovery. He wondered what such a young boy was doing in this den of monsters and how he was going to get him out. There were windows, of course, that he could sneak the child out of, but that required this floor of the building to be clear. Otherwise, the windows were too loud to open unnoticed. He studied the little person he held, from the blond spikes all the way to the too big pants and scuffed boots. But what struck him were the child's eyes. Blue as the sky in the summer over the mountains, glowing with the hint of mako; but this wasn't one of his father's experiments. No, this child came from outside, and Sephiroth wanted answers. So he waited until the scientists left. It wasn't like the didn't know he'd return eventually. He just escaped to get some time alone, and the Professor allowed it as an experiment. When all was quiet, he turned the child to face him.

“Who are you?”

Blue eyes blinked up at him, face as expressionless as his own. “Cloud. You?”

“Sephiroth. What are you doing here?”

“I didn't think...” the boy trailed off, eyes unfocussed for a brief moment. “I thought it was empty. I was here to find something.”

The silver haired teen thought pause between some and thing was odd, but the child didn't let him ask.

“How old are you?” the young voice asked.

“Fifteen.”

“Oh. I'm five. Do you live here?”

“Yes. Where do you live?”

“In the village, Nibelheim. It's just down the road from here.”
“How did you get mako?”

“Fell in a spring.”

The two lapsed into silence, blue eyes studying him as green eyes warily returned the perusal. He didn't know how to read this child. His father was easy after fifteen years, as were the assistants. The only other person he knew that he couldn't read was the Turk assigned to guard his father. Cloud reminded him an awful lot of that man, actually.

Gaia damn Hojo! Cloud thought to himself. Why were they not in Midgar already? Was Sephiroth really raised here this long, or was this another change the Cetra made to give him an opportunity to meet the man he was to save? He couldn't give away knowing too much, like the teen's name for instance, but Sephiroth's stunted social upbringing would come in Cloud's favor this time. As he studied the older boy briefly, he considered what he could and could not give away now. Perhaps, if he were friends with Sephiroth before joining SOLDIER, before the man became The Famous General Sephiroth, he could maneuver better later.

“Sephiroth?”

“Hmm?” the teen replied.

Cloud considered this before asking, vaguely remembering how he had no friends as a child, and how lonely it was; how damaging it could be to a young psyche. “Will you be my friend?” he asked, looking up and into those eyes that haunted him in his past. He watched with faint amusement as they blinked, years of reading Vincent allowing him to see the astonishment in the young man before him.

“I... yes. I would like that.”

Cloud smiled slightly up at the taller boy, settling against the wall to Sephiroth's right. “Can you come out and visit me sometimes? Or do you have to stay hidden in here?”

Sephiroth took his time replying, and Cloud could only imagine what was going on in that head of his. “I can try, but I've never made it to the village before. Only up towards the reactor and into the mountains.”

“Oh.” Cloud didn't know what else to say to that. Knowing Hojo, the boy was watched at all times anyway.

“Let's get you out of here before they come back and find you, alright Cloud?” Sephiroth asked, quietly gesturing to the windows. Cloud nodded and followed the teen, a surprised squawk issuing from him when the teen picked him up and jumped out the window with him. Cloud was even more surprised when the older boy walked him back to the village and watched from the outskirts until Cloud entered his home, waving to Sephiroth as he closed the door behind him.

Over the course of the next four and a half months, Sephiroth came out at least once a week, and Cloud snuck in just as often. When Cloud was inside, they would lowly converse about their lives and, when Sephiroth learned that Cloud wanted to learn how to fight, he began teaching his friend about materia and swords. When Sephiroth snuck out, he showed him the exercises and kata he had been talking about. A steady friendship developed between the two, something both were in desperate need of.

When he was alone, Cloud thought over this new development. As a child the first time, he didn't
know Sephiroth was even in the town. The mansion was, after all, ShinRa property and scary to boot. Sephiroth told him, the second time he snuck out, that the Turk bodyguard caught him and only allowed it because he was of the opinion that Sephiroth needed to learn social skills. Cloud inwardly snorted at that. He was about as social as the future general. But it worked for them. They confided to each other, although Cloud never told him of their shared past. He wasn't crazy, and didn't want to appear to be. It shocked him that he was saddened when, nearly five months after their friendship began, Sephiroth told him that his father was moving them to Midgar. Cloud had heard all about Hojo, although the details of the experiments were withheld. He didn't know how to tell the older boy not to believe the man, so he just occasionally offered platitudes along the lines of 'Don't believe everything you're told'.

But when Sephiroth told him they were leaving the mansion by the end of the week, so that would be their last training session, Cloud was very nearly heartbroken. His new childhood was made so much better because this one man –this person who had the capability of destroying the world– was his friend. He couldn't fathom it, but those were the facts. The only thing that helped was that he knew, once the mansion was empty, he could rescue Vincent. That, and he could tell that the future general was just as upset by the news.

15 Dec 2011
Chapter Word Count: 1929
Chapter Notes

Bit of time jumping here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Time to Change

Chapter Two: Letters From Home

Sephiroth was surprised by Midgar. The city was large and full to bursting with people. Having only Nibelheim to compare it to, it was awful. It was also an assault on his senses. The people and vehicles and trains were loud, everything he touched was gritty, it was dreary and greenish-grey and it stank. The stench was so bad and thick that it coated his tongue as well as making him cringe from the smell. He was quite happy to be bustled into the ShinRa building, where it was quiet, climate controlled, clean and fresher than outside. It didn't come close to the freshness of the air in the Nibel mountains, but it was better than what he was subject to stepping out of the chopper. He was less happy to find out he was here to make friends. He had a perfectly good friendship with Cloud, and didn't see why he couldn't have just stayed there. The age difference didn't bother him; Cloud was far more mature than he expected a child to be.

Cloud,

I'm in Midgar now. My father has expressed an interest in my making friends my own age. It appears that my association with you has helped me in this regard. At the very least, it allowed me to understand that blowing up my new acquaintance would not be a good idea. Let me explain.

There were two boys that I was introduced to today. The first was expected, in a way. His name is Angeal, and he is serious, goal oriented and polite. He is also friendly, which was a nice surprise. He reminds me of you a bit, actually. He carries a large sword around but he refuses to use it. Father had us spar and Angeal chose a broadsword over the hulking thing on his back. More about that later. Angeal is dark haired and slightly taller than I am. He has blue eyes, but they're lighter than yours. Not as colorful.

The other boy is named Genesis. He's a redhead, and his eyes are like Angeal's. Blue, but a faded kind. He's shorter than I am, too. He's also the one I wanted to flambé. Genesis is an oversized child. He is flamboyant, selfish, overly dramatic, self-centered, and uncaring. I didn't like him.

Angeal is protective of Genesis, like the redhead is fragile or something. It's a very strange thing to me. They grew up together, however, so I expect it's understandable. Not that I understand. I'm beginning to think, now that I have the time to consider it, that it is very much how I would act were you to ever meet them. Perhaps I understand, after all.

I told you I'd tell you about our spar. It was myself against Angeal and Genesis. We started out testing each other, of course. The two make a formidable team, it seems. Genesis focuses more on materia usage while Angeal is more of a physical attacker. Genesis is by no means useless with a blade, but he is not up to my level at all. My materia ability is not quite a match for his, so it was a
bit more of a fight than I expected from him. Angeal was a good opponent, but again, his swordwork
was not up to mine. In the end, I prevailed. But it was a good fight, and I look forward to more in the
future. I am being called away now, so I will write again soon.

Sephiroth

Cloud,

I find myself displeased with your absence, and exceedingly homicidal towards the good professor.
Wore it not for him, I would never have left Nibelheim. Angeal and Genesis are, generally, decent
enough. After a week with them, I have learned to deal with Genesis' quirks and idiocy. Angeal has
silently declared himself the peace keeper between us. If not for his calm presence, I believe Genesis
and myself would have destroyed half of ShinRa's tower. As it is, we have destroyed two training
rooms and a hallway. In time, I am hopeful that things will settle down.

Angeal has told me that their doctor, Professor Hollander, moved them here just the day before I
arrived. They came here from a smaller farming town called Banora. Apparently, Genesis' family
grew what they call Dumbapples. I understand that they don't grow in cycles, but more whenever
they wish; no set harvest season. They are officially called Banora Whites.

How is your mother? How is Nibelheim now that I'm not there? Are you bored yet? Are you keeping
up with your training? Did you ever find the something you were searching for when we first met?

I'm being sent to Wutai at the end of the week. Apparently a show of force is necessary. It looks like
we're heading for war. Perhaps negotiations can be worked out, and bloodshed avoided. I have to
go now, briefings to report to. I will try to write before I leave, but I cannot guarantee anything.

Sephiroth

Sephiroth tucked the letter into an envelope, setting it aside to send when he had a moment. He only
sent the first one out the day before, over a week after it had been written. He hoped Cloud was
doing alright, but there was little time for him to worry over his young friend. If he wasn't training or
sparring, he was being paraded around with the other two, hailed as ShinRa's strongest weapons.
Gaia, how he hated the attention! Genesis seemed to shine under the spotlight, but he and Angeal
both shied away from it. The red-clad teen drove him crazy, but Sephiroth was grateful that he
focused all the attention on himself, drawing it away from the awkward man-child.

Cloud knew there was no better time to get into the mansion and get Vincent. Monsters wouldn't
have moved in yet, and Lost Number shouldn't be there when he got the key for Vincent's room. It
wasn't. As he snuck down to the basement lab through the secret passage, he felt wracked by cold
shivers. This place was a nightmare for him, one he'd lived through but only barely.

By the time the blond made his way into the room occupied by coffins, Vincent was climbing out of
his. It was still nerve-wracking to see a live person get out of a coffin, but the boy just smiled at the
red-eyed man.

“That's still creepy,” he said, to which he was certain he received a twitch of pale lips for.

“I had assumed you would have woken me by now,” Vincent replied.

“I intended to, but the mansion was still occupied until two days ago. I did meet Sephiroth, however.
What a change from the insane murderer I knew to teenager.”
“...”

“Because I met him, or because I didn’t kill him?” Cloud replied to the silent question.

“Explain.”

“He is not yet the man that I had to kill, and there is a chance, a possibility, that he never will be. Already, so much has been changed. Just by our being here things have changed. I can’t kill an innocent child, and I can’t shun an unwanted person.”

Vincent turned away, but Cloud knew the older man understood. Years passed before they spoke of Sephiroth again, even though the ex-Turk knew about the letters going back and forth between the two.

Cloud,

Hey there! It's Yuffie!! Bet you didn't see that coming, huh! And guess what? The Planet made me older, so that I can be more help to you. At least, that's what I figured. I mean, I'm only supposed to be a couple of years old, right? But here I am, eight years old now. How old are you? I'm guessing fourteen.

Anyway, the war is heating up real bad here. I mean, the first couple of years were... well, not great, but not hopeless, either. But now we're finishing up the third year, and I heard that ShinRa is sending their Firsts over, meaning Sephiroth will be here soon. I can tell you that I'm not sure how I feel about that. I've had years to think on the Demon of Wutai, and eventually I realized that he was a military man. He was doing as he was told by the people in charge. It's not his fault the fat ass president wants to own the whole planet. But he'll be the figurehead that everybody hates because of it. I read about him sometimes, when I can get my hands on a ShinRa paper. He's really nothing like he was when we fought him, is he? I can kind of see why people look up to him. He's cool as silk, and never lets anything get to him. At least, that's what he seems like.

Well, I have to hurry and get this out before Godo finds out I'm friends with someone outside of Wutai. He's a little unreasonable about those who live in ShinRa controlled lands. I guess I understand, but it's totally frustrating. Write me back, okay?

Yuffie

Yuffie,

You're right. I didn't see you being part of the help the Planet was sending back with me. But it's nice that you're old enough to help before things get bad. And I'm not fourteen yet. I'm only ten. Speaking of help, Vincent came back, too. He's out racing chocobos right now, trying to get better class ones so we can eventually breed gold chocobos. It amuses me to think of Vincent hanging out at the Gold Saucer. It just doesn't fit.

Wow, you have grown up, haven't you. Yeah, Sephiroth isn't too happy about being sent out there either. He told me he hates the idea that he's slaughtering innocent people for the president's greed, but there isn't much he can do about it. Like you said, he has to follow his orders. Oh, you're probably curious now, aren't you. I met Sephiroth when I first got back here, five years ago now. We've been friends ever since. Vincent didn't seem to get it at first, but I think he might now.

It came to my attention that a lot of the Jenova War started because of misinformation. Hojo led Sephiroth on and fed him lies, right? So I thought, how do we get Sephiroth the truth? I was hoping
to fly through the SOLDIER ranks when I got to Midgar and become one of his friends then, and point him in the right direction. I didn't know he'd be in Nibelheim still when I got here. I went to rescue Vincent and ran into Sephiroth, instead, and I found out that he's just an innocent in all this. He's cold and distant, yeah, but I think it's a defense thing. I mean, fifteen years of Hojo has got to make you build walls, right? So we became friends. And I know that I can give him the truth of things now, and he'll believe me, but that's not why. I'm not using him, you know, even if I kinda am to save Gaia, too. But he was so sad and lonely, and now he's not. And I did that. I gave him something nobody else offered him. And I know I'm justifying myself to you, but Vincent won't let me even talk about him and you're the only other person I can say these things to.

So, Vincent. I live with him. Moved into his place nearly as soon as he bought it, a few months after he got here. It seem the Planet is sending us back at random times, so I don't know if anyone else at is coming back, and who they are if they do. Or when. But Vincent says not to worry, that we'll find each other when it's time. So I'm glad you wrote, Yuffie. Otherwise, I might never have known you were here. Of course, you wouldn't let that happen, would you? Write soon.

Cloud.

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Sephiroth,

Hello. It's been a while since I've written, and I'm sorry for that. I've made a new friend, and I was trying to find the best way to tell you. Not that she's replacing you. You were my first friend, and you'll always be one of my closest friends, no matter what. No, it's more who she is that I was having a hard time telling you. With the Wutai War going on, it's dangerous for us to talk, and even more so with me being your friend. You see, my new friend is none other than Yuffie Kisaragi, Lord Godo's daughter. I'm sure you see the inherent danger here now. As neither of us is actively involved in the war, however, we don't really care enough to stop being friends. I don't want to get you into trouble of any kind, and I know you already censor what you tell me for confidentiality reasons, but you need to know.

Vincent is well, thank you for asking. He's busy working to get us golden chocobos for when I'm old enough to join SOLDIER. Yeah, I'm still going to join. Vincent always tells me to be mindful of what I'm told, and to check my facts before following through on a plan, but I don't see my facts changing in this instance. You are my friend. You are SOLDIER. Therefore, if I want to be near you, I need to be SOLDIER too. To be a SOLDIER cadet, I need to be fifteen, so I have to wait a few years. See? Nothing has changed; my facts are still the same.

On a side note, I'd like to thank you for the PHS. It's nice to have instant access to talk to you, but with the war I know you're busy. So call me anytime, but for now I'll stick with sending you letters. Once everything cools down, and you have a normal, non-confidential schedule, I'll be able to call. I hope it's soon. I'm sending you some of those cookies you used to like so much. I finally learned how to make them. Write back soon!

Cloud.

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Sephiroth sighed as he put down Cloud's latest letter. He was glad his friend was making more friends, but did it really have to be Godo's daughter? That could cause problems for him and his blond friend. Cloud likely didn't know that his mail was opened for him as soon as he got to the front to keep danger to his person to a minimum. He was also certain the Turks read every letter the little Nibelheim boy sent him as well. He was lucky that he was able to post his own letters without having them checked first. He did wonder about this Vincent that Cloud started telling him about not long after he left the small mountain village. Cloud never described him, never said what he did for a
living, and never gave a last name.

The general also wished the boy would use the blasted PHS sometimes. He understood that the blond didn't want to interrupt him during wartime, but Sephiroth purchased that for his friend for that very reason. He appreciated the concern, but he wanted to talk to child. As soon as his paperwork for the latest recon mission was done, he'd give the boy a call, he decided.

Finally, after hours of work and a brief tussle with the Wutaian guerillas, Sephiroth had a free moment. Stepping away from Angeal and Genesis, but of whom were bunking with him, he speed-dialed Cloud.

“Hello?”

“Hello, Cloud.”

“Sephiroth! I thought you'd be busy fighting...”

“Indeed. I've got some free time, however, so I wanted to call.”

“Great! How are you? You're not overworking yourself, are you? How are your friends? How are you feeling? Have you been eating right?” Sephiroth could hear the genuine happiness this one boy held just because he was able to talk with him and it made him smile. They talked, Sephiroth telling Cloud about insignificant things, like Genesis' obsession with LOVELESS and Angeal's sword that he never uses and how Cloud's cookies were great, thank you, and he had a hell of a time keeping them away from the other Firsts once they'd had a taste. Cloud in turn told him about the ongoing chocobo breeding they were working on to have gold chocobos to travel to Midgar on and how he was learning other dishes as well that he couldn't wait to make for the older man once he got to the city. Sephiroth found himself looking forward to that day with more anticipation that it likely warranted, but he didn't care. Only five more years. They survived the first five, the second should be a breeze. Right?

Chapter End Notes

Well, that's it for this chapter. A bit of how things are developing is shown here. I hope you liked it. Let me know!

19 December 2011
Word Count: 2847
More time jumping, as per the chapter title. ^.^

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Time to Change

Chapter Three: Highlights of Time

It hadn't occurred to Cloud that may not have thought of all the repercussions when he agreed to this path. At least, not until Sephiroth asked him –once, when the teen had come to the village to work with the young boy– why he wasn't playing with the other kids. Then it dawned on the blond that he wasn't going to know Tifa, not like he used to. Not if the Planet didn't bring her back, and he saw no reason why she wouldn't be there with him if she were coming back. He wouldn't know Cid or Barrett or Nanaki or Yuffie, either. Not if he didn't make an effort, and face it. Barrett was already thirty five when Cloud had first met him, and Cid might have been older. Nanaki, if all went well, would never need rescuing, so he'd have to travel to Cosmo Canyon to meet him, and Yuffie, well. He already had mako eyes, and she shunned anything ShinRa related. Even Reno, Rude and Tseng were making him a bit down. Not so much Rufus, though. The spoiled child of President Shinra just wasn't worth his time; never had been. So he simply told Sephiroth that he was all the friend Cloud needed just then. If you knew where to look, you could see the future general light up at that.

When Cloud was nearly six, Vincent finally bought his own place. Cloud moved in almost immediately, and with great relief. Not too long after rescuing the dark man, Cloud realized that his mother was also a casualty of this plan of the Cetra. Before, what he recalled of her had been warm and loving, doting and affectionate. Now she was indifferent to him. Apathetic at the best of times when it came to her only child, and at the worst of times, she didn't seem to remember that she even was a mother. The bullying he vaguely remembered was still in abundance, and as he trained more, the hostility from the village kids raised even as the physical showing of it lowered. That was also when he began taking over the cooking. Simple things at first, as he couldn't do too much in such a small body. With Vincent out of the house nearly as often as he was there, somebody had to feed the boy, right?

When Cloud turned seven, he received a package from Midgar. He knew Vincent wasn't quite happy about his friendship with the Silver General, but he didn't let the man's opinion bother him. It was nice, knowing there was always another friend there for him. But even Vincent had to admit to the friendship being good for Cloud, especially when they saw that it contained a broadsword. Live steel. The accompanying note informed Cloud that the general figured he had been training long enough to have the real thing now. He'd have to build up the strength to wield it, of course, but with the mako in his veins it should be easier. That set the tone for the only packages Cloud ever received from him. Once a year, on his birthday, he would get something from his silver haired friend.

On his eighth birthday, he got a gold armlet and a Cure materia. It was unused, so he'd have to level it up on his own, which he was grateful for. Vincent started taking him into the mountains and
surrounding towns with him, taking him to The Gold Saucer once. He got his Cure up a level, and his fighting up two. That's also the trip that gave them the idea for the chocobos, and when Vincent started spending more time there than at home in a year. Cloud continued to train in the Nibel mountains, and his Cure materia got mastered quickly.

Cloud's ninth birthday contained two materia and Ribbon. The materia were an unleveled Fire and a nearly mastered Ice. The letter explained why the Ice was already worked. Since Cloud lived where dragons made their homes, Sephiroth didn't want his young friend to be without their counter. Just in case. He didn't want Cloud to have to take the time to level it up, either, since there had been reports of heightened dragon activity in the area directly around Nibelheim. So he equipped his sword with Cure and Ice and his amulet with Fire, tying ribbon where it once was most comfortable: his upper left arm. Vincent was finally thawing on the subject of Lucrecia's child, but not enough that Cloud would initiate conversation about Sephiroth.

Cloud's tenth birthday heralded the vaunted PHS, and a few weeks later, the phone call from Sephiroth. That established a bi-weekly phone call routine, and Cloud got to know a little more about Angeal and Genesis, too.

Especially one time when Genesis snatched the phone from his silver compatriot and started gushing. There was no other word for it, the man was certifiable. Except, he kind of wasn't. He was pleasant, once he started talking to Cloud and stopped trying to embarrass the General. Except, he kept trying to convince Cloud that LOVELESS was the be all and end all of all literary works. Cloud disagreed. They debated various literature for nearly three quarters of an hour, after which Cloud asked to kindly speak to Sephiroth again. He later learned that Sephiroth didn't speak to the Crimson General other than professionally for a week after that stunt. But he was oblivious to the other man's feelings about speaking to Genesis, and he blithely chatted about what was new in Nibelheim (nothing), his life (slightly less than nothing, but still boring), Vincent (whom he wouldn't name for fear of the PHSs being tapped), chocobo breeding (almost there!) and Yuffie (whom he also wouldn't name, and it was all in generalities since they were in the middle of a war). Sephiroth didn't have much to say, which was usual since the man's life currently revolved around being in the field and none of it was information he could share with Cloud. All in all, they had spent over two hours on the phone that time.

On the eleventh anniversary of his birth, Cloud received no package. He wasn't disappointed, he told Vincent, but the dark man knew he was lying. Two days later, Cloud found out why. Vincent had left on Cloud's birthday, which was a good thing in Cloud's opinion once he realized. He had just gotten done with some morning training and was on his way home for lunch. He gradually noticed that he was being stared at... was that awe? He didn't understand, and didn't care to. He just wanted to go home, take a shower, and eat. So, ignoring those boys who would have been yelling taunts or throwing something at him –they never physically touched him anymore, after all, and taunts were nothing-- just yesterday, he pushed his was into his home. Which was unlocked. His head snapped up, wariness steeling over him until he saw just why his door was open when he locked it when he left. Sephiroth! He had come to visit! The blond was a blur as he launched himself at his friend, not caring about the other two men except to catalog that they were a redhead and a brunet, the brunet bearing a striking resemblance to Zack, but not quite.

"You're here! Why are you here? Nevermind, I don't care. You're here!" Cloud grinned.

"Happy birthday, Cloud," Sephiroth said, amusement lurking in his tone. The blond just smiled wider, finally letting go of the older man. He heard his door shut, but paid it no mind, instead
recalling exactly what it was he had planned on doing when he got home.

“Oh Gaia!” he breathed, mortified. “Sorry! I just got done training, and I'm a mess and I need to take a shower and... Hello, Sephiroth. Genesis and Angeal, I presume?” he murmured, waving at the others. At their laughing agreements, he just nodded then muttered something about showering and he'd be right back.

As he descended the stairs, he finally got a good look at Sephiroth's contemporaries. Angeal was rugged and masculine; good looking and tall, for sure, and Sephiroth described him as suited more to the bouncy, energetic type. It didn't take much to understand why Angeal chose Zack to mentor. They were well suited, even for a purely platonic relationship as mentor and student. Genesis, on the other hand, was delicate. Gorgeous and fine boned, he was shorter than both of the other men. He seemed almost fragile, except there was something about him that screamed arrogant cruelty. It would take a strong will to run herd on that man. All three men were striking individually; together they were just too much. Too much beauty and magnetism and power. So much power between them, flowing and ebbing like the sea. They were breathtaking. Good thing for him that he learned control years ago.

Genesis looked up at him and smirked as he caught the blond staring. He arched an auburn brow and, oddly enough, got a blond one lifted right back at him. That was a new reaction. Most people, when they were caught staring, would blush and flounder and turn away. This one, though... this friend of Sephiroth's acted like he was perhaps cataloging them? Strange child. Even stranger when he continued past them all into the kitchen, offering food for them, to which the redhead accepted.

As they ate a meal of Wutaian noodles (where did the boy learn to cook these things? They were proper Wutaian, not that stuff you get in Midgar, Midgarized Wutaian), they chatted about inconsequential things. Both Genesis and Angeal asked the blond about his life, his interests, and he repaid them in kind, interrogating them in an almost Turkish fashion. They were lounging on the sofa and chairs after eating when the door opened again.

“T’im here!!!!” came a chipper, female voice as a young girl bounced in. Cloud's head popped up and he stared at her, even as she continued talking while removing her shoes, which went up to her knees. She kept her eyes on what she was doing, which was the only reason Genesis could think of for what she said next.

“Vincent came and got me, said you were bummed about not getting your usual package from Sephiroth and you were worried that he was hurt and of course ShinRa wouldn't call you and let you know. We both know that son of a bitch Hojo would never tell you, if it even occurred to him and I haven't heard anything, but then Godo does try to keep me far away from the war efforts, so I doubt I'd hear anything anyway. So, what do you want to – oh, sweet Leviathan! Why didn't you shut me up, Cloud?” All four of them were now watching Cloud's face. The men had been watching it turn steadily redder as the girl spoke and he was now as bright as a summon materia.

“Yuffie?” Cloud squeaked. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath before continuing. “Is Vincent with you then? Odin's balls, this is not going to be fun,” he trailed off into a mutter, the girl still standing in the doorway, gape mouthed. It didn't matter as a dark man filled the portal behind her, and Cloud stiffened, eyes still shut. “Hello, Vincent.”
I prefer Yuffie's shoes from Advent Children. Sue me. Actually, I prefer that whole outfit, so that's what she's wearing. She prefers it as well. Well, let me know what you think.

25 December 2011
Word Count: 1920
Dinner Guest?

Chapter Notes

This was a pretty difficult chapter to write, for some reason. Not sure I'm fully satisfied with it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Time To Change

Chapter Four: Dinner Guest?

Vincent took in the scene before him with determined stoicism. Sephiroth, the Nightmare himself, was sitting on his sofa with Cloud. Two other men were ensconced in the armchairs, and all four were staring at him now. Cloud looked on in dawning horror, blue eyes finally open and clashing with red. Vincent understood his concern, truly; but now was not the time.

“We'll discuss this later, Cloud,” he intoned as he entered, moving to the kitchen to make tea, which Yuffie handed over to him without complaint.

“I brought your favorite tea, Cloud! Didn't you say Sephiroth liked it, too?” Yuffie said excitedly, while Cloud just nodded dumbly at her.

“What have you been doing while I was gone?” Vincent inquired.

“Oh, umm.. you know, just clearing the mansion a bit,” Cloud replied.

Vincent turned so fast his red cape flared out behind him, causing Genesis and Yuffie to both snicker. Cloud, knowing the warning signs of an impending ‘Vincent Blowup', cringed a bit towards the Silver General.

“I told you. I told you! How could you be so stupid, Cloud? You're not strong enough for the Sahagins! What if you died while nobody was here to keep track of you? Or worse!” the ex-Turk hissed.

Genesis goggled and turned to Angeal. “What's worse than death?” he asked lowly.

Both Vincent and Cloud, still staring at each other, answered him. “Hojo.” To which Sephiroth twitched and the other Firsts frowned.

“What does Hojo have to do with anything?” Angeal asked.

“Nothing yet,” the ninja answered, shooting Looks at her two friends, which went ignored.

“Think about what he did to Lucrecia after Sephiroth was born, Cloud. Think! You know what that man is capable of. You are aware of the lengths he'll go to to get what he wants and to keep what he has; what he'll do to stop any interference,” Vincent continued.

Sephiroth couldn't help himself. So he asked, “Who's Lucrecia?”
“Your mother,” Cloud said absently, watching Vincent. “He's not here, Vincent. If he was in town, I would know and I wouldn't go anywhere near the mansion.”

“You did before,” the dark haired man gave a pointed look in Sephiroth's direction.

“I did, but I didn't know he was here, then. And once he left, I only went back for you. Now I can train there, and gain experience. I know to stay away from the lower levels, and only go where the Dorky Faces and Jerseys are. I'm not helpless, you know. And I had my PHS on me, my cure, potions and ethers. You know I can handle this, Vincent.” Cloud shook his head and made his way to the tea, which Yuffie had prepared while her friends were having their stand off.

“Excuse me,” Sephiroth growled, “but could one of you explain how this Lucrecia is my mother? My mother's name was Jenova.”

Cloud gestured to Vincent to take this one, as he knew more about all of it, and being that the ex-Turk was the Turk protection for Project Jenova, his words would carry more weight. With an inscrutable look towards the blond, Vincent nodded. Genesis, having enough of the whole tension thing, got up and made his way to Cloud's side. Leaning against the counter, watching his friends talk to this Vincent about Sephiroth's parentage, he sighed.

“Is it always like this around here?” he asked, to which the blond shook his head.

“Pretty quiet, normally.”

“All this upheaval, just for us? I'm flattered, really, but you didn't need to,” Genesis smirked. He was mildly surprised when a soft, pleasant laugh reached his ears, covered by a higher, tinkling giggle.

“My pleasure,” Cloud demurred, amused. He was holding his teacup, leaning casually next to the crimson First when Yuffie jabbed him with her elbow. Glancing at her, he followed her gaze. It took a moment of staring, but then he caught it. A gesture or a look; the shape of an eye or mouth. His teacup shattered on the tiles, hot liquid flying up along with shards of porcelain. Cloud gaped and slowly shook his head, denying what he saw. He pulled up a picture of Hojo in his mind's eye and compared that to his friend, and was convinced.

“Cloud?” Sephiroth asked, worried for his young friend. “Is something wrong?”

The blond ignored the question except for a wave as he blinked, focusing his gaze on ruby orbs. “Vincent, I think—” he cut off as first Sephiroth's PHS rang, followed by Angeal's, then Genesis'. He scrunched his nose in confusion when all three ignored theirs only for his to ring. As far as he knew, the only people who had his number were there in the room with him. He snatched it up and answered with a bemused voice.

“Hello?”

“Cloud.”

“What do you want?” he asked, ignoring the sharp looks from the four other men, all of whom could hear the entire conversation.

“Is he there?”

“Which one?”

“Sephiroth, of course.” A sigh could be heard as it drifted across the line. “It wouldn't do for the Company to lose him.”
“Is this an official inquiry?”

“It is.”

“Where are you?”

“Gongaga.”

“Officially, he's trekking his way across the continent, showing ShinRa's power.”

“I see.” There was a thoughtful pause, and then, “Unofficially?”

“Unofficially, dinner's in two hours.”

It didn't take that long for the Turk to show, although Cloud was being peppered with questions that made the time seemingly go infinitely slower. So it was with relief that the blond answered the knock on the door, finding the future Turk Leader, hair shorter and up. With a nod, he held the door open and watched his comrade's face as the man took in who all was in the house. When Tseng had said he was in Gongaga of all places, Cloud's hopes soared; they shattered when the man showed up alone. The Turk seemed to understand as he shook his head slightly. Vincent was the first to speak up.

“Tseng.”

“Vincent. I should have expected you,” Tseng replied, then turned to the small female. “And Yuffie. You are someone that one never expects.”

Yuffie giggled and grinned widely at the man. “Haven't lost your touch, eh?”

“Tseng,” Sephiroth said sharply, “what brings you here?”

Tseng let only a brief hint of a smile cross his face as he answered. “Dinner.”

Chapter End Notes

27 December 2011

Chapter Word Count: 1107
Conversations

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Time To Change

Chapter Five: Conversations

Dinner went much as Cloud suspected it would. Yuffie and Genesis carried the conversation between them, with the other five silent. In fact, it wasn't until materia was brought up that Cloud even really tuned in to what was being said. As the two escalated their conversation from discussion to debate, the blond shook his head. He cut in with a sigh.

“Genesis, I'd advise you to be careful around her,” he suggested blandly. He received a glare in return.

“I am a master of materia! You don't need to worry about me around one little girl.”

Cloud just exchanged smirks with Vincent and Tseng and held out his hand to Yuffie.

“Give it here, Yuf.”

One shining orb dropped into his hand and a blond brow lifted. With incoherent muttering and a plink! Plinkplink!, three more followed. The teen glanced at them, impressed that she managed to snag a summons and a nearly mastered Fira. He carefully - deliberately - placed each of the four orbs directly in front of the arrogant redhead.

“If you needn't be careful of her, perhaps you'd like to keep better track of your materia?” he inquired matter of factly, which is the only reason Genesis didn't take offense to the question.

Cloud shook his head slightly and turned to the Turk. “What are you going to do?” he asked as he cleared his and Sephiroth's plates to the kitchen. Yuffie brought hers and, surprisingly, Genesis' and started on the dishes while Cloud went back to grab the rest. He was thwarted by Angeal grabbing them up and taking them to Yuffie and helping her clean up. Cloud had cooked, after all.

“I plan to follow the trail back to Midgar. Perhaps find some recruits on the way,” Tseng replied.

Cloud and Vincent were both curious still. “Why did you call Cloud? Why are you searching for Sephiroth in the first place?” Vincent asked.

Tseng gave an enviably elegant shrug as he replied, “Professor Hojo was... concerned, when the general didn't report to Midgar as expected. When he and his friends fell off the grid, I was sent to find out why. But as the general is merely crossing the continent on foot to prove the might of ShinRa, I have no further need to search for him. So long as he gets back in a timely fashion.”

Yuffie laughed, dispelling the last of the tension that followed Tseng in. “So are you gonna hang around here for a while, then? Or do you have people to recruit?” she asked.

The Turk cocked his head at her, then considered the SOLDIERs in the room before answering. “I shall remain for the night, but after that I have a job of my own to do.” The tone was soft, decisive, and final. Even if they wanted to try, he would not be swayed. They didn't. The old friends could all see how uncomfortable Tseng's presence was making the SOLDIER leaders.
Cloud made an offer to Tseng of his room, which the Turk Leader declined. He had already claimed a room at the inn, so he was set. So Cloud shrugged and gave Yuffie his room. He’d take the couch, he said. Yuffie, never one to say no to something she was going to accept anyway just nodded and tossed her bag on his bed. As it was getting late, the four ShinRa men bid goodnight, Sephiroth promising to be over bright and early to take Cloud out training. Cloud walked back to the inn with them, making small talk and avoiding the stares and curious whispers that followed them. The return trip across the square to home was worse; he didn’t have the Firsts or their reputations to shock the townsfolk into awe, nor the Turk’s reputation to quiet them out of fear. So as he made his solitary trek home, a couple of the bigger bullies tried to confront him. He pushed past them, but didn’t miss the sneering taunts. Couldn’t really. It’s not like they were trying to be quiet about it now that there weren’t impressive personages around him. But he just ignored them and made his way into the house, realizing how tense he had been only after the door shut.

Cloud, Yuffie and Vincent sat with their cups of tea, discussing this turn of events. Vincent, needless to say, was not happy. But Yuffie and Cloud were intrigued; by the two commanders, yes, but especially by the similarities between Vincent and Sephiroth. But Cloud apparently thought it would be easier to ease the older man into that revelation, and spoke up before Yuffie could.

“Vincent. What do you know about Genesis and Angeal?”

The dark head shook in a negative. “Nothing. Until you became friends with The Nightmare, I was unaware of them ever existing,” was the unhelpful reply. Both males looked at Yuffie.

The Princess of Wutai shook her head, as well. “I vaguely recall Genesis disappearing during the war, but I was more interested in fighting the infidels then, so I don't remember much. I'm pretty sure they died, though, if we never ran into them!”

“Right,” Cloud said. “One of us will have to corner Tseng before he leaves, then. I can't. I'll be training with Sephiroth. You'd be the best bet to get all the information we need, Vincent.”

“Right!” Yuffie chimed in. “So, why didn't you ever tell us that Sephiroth was your son?”

Sephiroth turned from the window after he watched his very tense young friend return to his home. With the windows being the kind that didn’t open – which made sense in the mountainous climate – he couldn’t make out everything that was said, but it was enough to know that what Genesis had once speculated was true; Sephiroth was one of Cloud's only friends. Green eyes narrowed in anger that a soul so sweet as Cloud’s was would be estranged from the rest of his peers, but he consoled himself that although it bothered the blond a bit, he didn't seem to be bitter over it. And he did have Sephiroth, after all. He’d never leave Cloud.

His gaze landed on the Turk, watching him thoughtfully.

“How do you know Cloud, Tseng?” he asked.

“We have a mutually beneficial acquaintance,” the Wutaiian man replied.

A silver eyebrow arched above disbelieving eyes, but the general didn't call the other man on it. “And the others?”

Tseng smirked slightly. He had, after all, been waiting to be questioned since he arrived earlier that day. “Yuffie is... well. You met her. She leaves an impression that will last for the rest of your life. As for Vincent, that's Vincent Valentine.” When Sephiroth just continued to stare at him, Tseng
sighed. "He was Veld's partner. A Turk of the highest caliber. His last assignment also happened to be as protection for Professor Hojo and the Jenova Project."

Sephiroth nodded then. "So that's how he knew what he did about my mother," he mused. His eyes cut to the window, and the house he could see was still lit up, before returning to Tseng. "Do you have access to the files on Lucrecia Crescent?" he asked.

Tseng considered the man for a moment before making his decision. This was the man that could destroy the world. He could also save it. And possibly save his friends, as well. "I do."

Chapter End Notes

Word Count: 1260
6 June 2012
**Chapter Six: Information**

Yuffie’s uncharacteristic lack of hyperactivity was gone the next morning. Cloud stepped out of the bathroom to find her bouncing on her toes, a grin on her face. Anyone else, that kind of thing would make him wary. But with Yuffie it was just... normal. She reminded him a lot of Zack, come to think of it. It didn’t even faze him when she tried to pick his pocket as he passed her. Last night had thrown him for a loop, though, and he was thankful she was back to normal today.

Cloud went downstairs to find Vincent had made tea, and the SOLDIERs were all there already. What time did they get up to be ready and over so early, Cloud wondered. But he just shrugged and grabbed his own tea, gulping the hot liquid down before refilling and finally greeting the others.

Genesis was clearly amused. “Not a morning person, then?” he queried.

Cloud grunted at him, glaring slightly.

“It appears not,” Sephiroth stated, very amused as well, if you knew him well enough.

Cloud was grateful the other two restrained their hilarity... and that sounded sarcastic even in his own mind.

“So, where’s Yuffie?” Genesis went on.

“Right here!!!” came a sing-song reply as Yuffie stepped off the bottom stair.

After breakfast, everyone bar Vincent left the house for training. Not even five minutes later and Tseng was let in. Offering tea to the Turk, Vincent sat him down and looked at him. Before the Turk could state his business, the ex-Turk was speaking.

“What do you know about Genesis and Angeal?”

“Ah. I had wondered if any of you remembered them. They were Hollander's subjects, experimented on at the same time Hojo was working on Sephiroth. Something went wrong, however, and they degraded. Genesis was, eventually, cured. But Angeal was not. Zack Fair called it Suicide by Puppy. I believe that was the beginning of the end for Sephiroth. He never recovered from losing his friends, and then Jenova had free access to his mind.”

“What happened when they degraded?”

“Degradation is very much like the Geostigma was. If we could combat it now, perhaps we can cleanse all of them. But Aerith is still young and untried; she may be unable to provide another cure.”

Tseng drifted off into his thoughts – as much as any Turk drifts, at least.

Vincent observed his – friend? colleague? – intently while processing this new information. He had a couple ideas of his own, if Aerith proved incapable.
“Have you and Cloud taken care of Jenova?” Tseng asked.

“No,” Vincent said, a note of something in his voice. “We have been unable to locate her. The library in the mansion, however, has been cleared out. It was... disturbing, how much information Hojo planted there.”

The Turk second remained silent, but he was aware of how twisted the good professor was. This additional information did not surprise him in the least.

Vincent was just as silent, ruminating for nearly five minutes before he spoke again. At first, when his young friends had mentioned it the night before, he thought they’d been joking. After all, Yuffie was nearly always joking, and Cloud was nearly always stoic, so even when he did joke you often couldn't tell. But his mind kept circling back to their question over and over throughout the night, and he found it still preying on his mind that morning. Decision made, he turned to the younger Turk.

“Does the Company still require DNA material be kept on file?” he asked.

Tseng, knowing this man never asked something without a very specific reason, nodded slowly.

“Do you still have access to mine? And Lucrecia's?”

“I would assume so, but I will make certain. Why?”

“And Sephiroth? Do you have his?”

“Of course. As a current member of ShinRa, his material will be accessible. Why?”

“Cloud and Yuffie suggested that Sephiroth may not be Hojo's progeny.”

Tseng raised a single dark eyebrow, carefully perusing his companion's face. “There are similarities...” he mused. “Is there a chance?”

“I have been going over our every interaction since last night. I am confident that there is a decent probability that he is mine. If this is true, then Hojo will suffer long for what he took from me,” Vincent said, ending in a growl that held a good sized hint of Chaos.

“I will run a comparison, then,” Tseng confirmed quietly.

Outside, standing still where he had been when he heard his name mentioned, a SOLDIER's eyes were wide. He couldn't believe all he'd learned. He hadn't meant to eavesdrop, but was rather glad that he did.

The two men were still in each others company when the door opened to let two sweaty time travelers tumble in.

“Hah! I told you he'd be here!” Yuffie exclaimed. “That means I get the shower first!”

The front door opened again, admitting the missing SOLDIERS just in time to see Cloud run for the stairs, only to be tripped by the ninja.

“Yuffie!!” Cloud cried out in embarrassed pain. He'd face planted hard on the floor, to the amused snickers of Genesis and Sephiroth, while Yuffie was laughing loudly.

“Shouldn't try to take what's mine!” she said.
Vincent raised an eyebrow at that. “Isn't that a bit hypocritical, Yuffie?” he asked, and Cloud could hear the amusement in even his stoic friend's voice. A glance at Tseng and Angeal showed an impassive face and twitching lips respectively.

“Honor among thieves, Vincent. You don't steal from a fellow thief!” the Wutaian princess explained.

Cloud growled at her. “I'm not a thief, Yuf. You just take forever in the shower! I'd like to get clean some time today.”

“You can shower in our room, Cloud,” Sephiroth offered. Genesis looked at the man disbelievingly.

“Yes, if you can get in before he does. He takes longer than a girl,” the Crimson Commander said. Angeal snorted in amused agreement and gestured towards his head.

“It's the hair,” he murmured. Cloud grinned at Sephiroth's disgruntled expression and shook his head.

“I'll just wait on the Treasure Princess here,” he said. “You guys can go do your showering if you want. Or you can stay here.” After all, the three men didn't really get much of a workout with the two preteens.

While Angeal was convincing Cloud it'd be quicker to run to the inn and use theirs, Genesis was staring at the two Turk men with an inscrutable look on his face.

Chapter End Notes

I can't rightly recall if the Suicide by Puppy is fanon or canon, but I like the line and found it amusing to make Tseng say it. So whatever. ^_^

Word Count: 1116
13 June 2012
Chapter Notes

Canon timeline at least has been tossed out the window. Canon might have been, too, come to think of it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.


time to Change

Chapter Seven: Traveling

Genesis was pensive all the rest of that day and well into the next. He kept his own confidence about what he'd heard, but he was mulling it over just the same. He didn't want to tell his childhood friend about them supposedly being sick, but he did want to tell his friendly rival about his possible father. He hoped Vincent would tell Sephiroth himself, if the comparison came back favorably, but couldn't be sure. He couldn't read that man at all, and Tseng was just as blank. Perhaps he should approach them about what he'd heard. It was something to ponder, at least. Something in the way the Turk had phrased things was bothering the redhead, though. He'd spoken as if Genesis had been aware of being ill and then was cured, and as if Angeal was already dead. And who was Zack? The more he thought about it, the more questions he had. And he only had until the next day to find out before they had to head back to Wutai. Tseng had left already, but was only a PHS away, and he'd sent messages to the three men that they were needed back at the front. He couldn't even imagine what would happen if the fat president got wind of their spending their 'break' with the Wutaian princess, but perhaps he'd die of apoplexy. It was a comforting thought.

He entered Vincent and Cloud's home to find them in a state disarray, and it looked like they were... packing? But not much, it seemed. He settled down next to Angeal and leaned in close.

“What's going on?” he asked.

“Youffie has to return to Wutai, apparently. She didn't exactly have permission to leave, but I gather that she often disappears for long stretches. They've decided she's been gone long enough, however, and with our orders to return, Lord Godo will be tightening the security around her. Cloud and Vincent have decided to travel with her,” was the soft reply. Amused blue eyes watched the flurry of activity as Youffie made sure she had everything she brought with her, Cloud demanded his materia back from her as he checked his armlet and sword slots, and Vincent glared her into returning his.

The Crimson Commander shook his head at the irreverent girl, liking her immensely and wishing they weren't on opposite sides of this war. It was only a matter of time before ShinRa won, and he honestly hoped she were still amenable to being friends even with the risk of dishonor. The Wutaians were a proud people, after all, and he refused to trample on that intangible bit of their heritage like the troops trampled their homeland.

He never got a chance to speak to the ex-Turk that evening. But he did find that they would be traveling to Rocket Town together, and from there, turn west to eventually cross over to the Wutai Area via Mire. Once they got onto the island, they'd split up and go their separate ways to avoid unnecessary conflict for either side. He was confident that the youths could handle themselves, and what they couldn't take, Vincent could. So Youffie'd get back home safe and sound, and then Cloud
would return home and let Sephiroth know he was safe, and Genesis would breathe easier. At least, that's how it should have gone. But when Cloud is around, apparently nothing goes to plan as it should.

The trip to Rocket Town went pretty much without a hitch. Yuffie, it turned out, tired easily so they'd brought along chocobos. Cloud, apparently, bred them. Vincent helped, the blond had said, but the older man denied doing anything but racing them as Cloud was too young. Cloud took care of the birds, raised them and trained them and bred them. Cloud gave Vincent the credit for getting him the nuts to breed the best, though. So there they were, the six of them riding gold – gold! – birds into Rocket Town, just as nonchalantly as if they'd been using ShinRa trucks. And that was where things got odd. Folks had come out to see the spectacle – and Sephiroth, the redhead mused silently – and the group was startled by a shout that caused Cloud to smile, Yuffie to laugh and Vincent to growl.


“Cid! Cloud, look! The Old Man's here!” Yuffie squealed. There was no other word for it.

It was this Cid's turn to growl now. “I'll show you old man, brat!”

Cloud reigned his chocobo in next to Sephiroth and merely waited for the older man to make his way there. When he did get a look at the blond's travel companions, his eyes widened briefly before narrowing in on Cloud.

“Shit, Kid. You play for keeps, doncha!”

Cloud gave him an oddly restrained half-smile that Genesis hadn't seen on the kid before and it made him a bit sad to see the carefree smiles disappear.

“Yeah. Cid Highwind, this is Genesis Rhapsodos, Angeal Hewley and Sephiroth. I've known Sephiroth since I was five.”

The dirty blond man nodded and pulled a cigarette out and lit it. Talking around his smoking, he suggested they all head back to the inn with him, maybe have some tea. Get refreshed. Vincent countered by suggesting Cloud and Yuffie go with the pilot while the rest of them collected any supplies they would need for their trip across to Wutai. So they split, the two kids leading the older man, oddly enough. It seemed to the redhead that Vincent, Yuffie and now Cid all deferred to Cloud. Very odd indeed.

Soon as they got to the inn, Cid ushered them to his room and locked the door behind them.

“Talk, Kid.”

So Cloud did. He told Cid about going to free Vincent and running into Sephiroth instead. About becoming friends with the silver-haired teen and being rather sad when he finally left the mountain village. Then he glossed over the years between then and now, just saying they kept in touch and that the general never forgot his birthday, which was why they were traveling together, actually. Cloud told Cid that they were heading to Wutai, Cloud and Vincent to get Yuffie home safely, the other three to get back to the matter of waging a war.

Yuffie was, understandably, upset about that bit but she knew it was inevitable. Their pasts guaranteed that ShinRa would win; Godo put up one hell of a fight, but ultimately will lose. It was just a matter of time.
“So, when did you get back, Old Man?” Yuffie asked.

“Three days back. Was in Midgar workin’. Had to get leave approved. I was plannin’ on headin’ your way this evenin’. I’ve got the Highwind, which is why it took me so long to get here.”

“You’ve got the Highwind?” Cloud asked. “How do you feel about a trip to Wutai? I can stable the birds here until we get back, or bring a couple with us for getting back.”

Cid thought about it for only a moment. “All a ya or just you three?”

“All of us.”

“You’ll love Genesis!” Yuffie said excitedly.

Cloud rolled his eyes but didn’t deny the veracity of her statement. Cid would love Genesis, after all. They were both mouthy and irreverent, after all. But then, so was Yuffie and she annoyed Cid more than anything. So maybe not. With a sigh and a quick shake of his head, Cloud stood up and, smirking at Cid, strapped his sword back on and said, “Let's mosey!” He walked out the door to the sound of Yuffie's giggles.

Yuffie could be just as annoying to Cloud as she was to everyone else if he let her. This wasn't one of those times. He and Yuffie were walking down the street, searching for the rest of their party while Cid was checking out of the inn and heading to the airship to get her ready. The two were apparently just around the corner from the older men when a couple of older teens – bullies by the looks of them – must have thought they were easy marks. After all, they were younger, small for their ages, and outsiders. So they planted themselves in the youths’ path and attempted to appear menacing. Cloud and Yuffie exchanged glances; they'd seen far scarier things in their lives. When it was clear the bullies weren't moving without encouragement, Yuffie huffed.

“Excuse me! We're moseying here!” she called out insolently. They realized their party was near when they heard Genesis laugh just prior the the four men turning the corner just behind the bullies.

“Cloud,” Sephiroth inquired blandly. “Are these children in your way?”

At his voice, the boys turned and gaped, stammering about how honored they were to meet the Great General Sephiroth and the Extraordinary Commaders Rhapsodos and Hewley! Yuffie snickered when Sephiroth, Genesis and Vincent pushed past them without even acknowledging their existence. Angeal, however, stopped and told them that harassing kids smaller or different than them held no honor and they would never make it to SOLDIER if they kept acting like that. They needed to clean up their act if they ever wished to rank among the greats. Genesis wore a soft smile that he quickly schooled into indifference watching his friend.

Once Angeal joined them again, Cloud told them that Cid had the Highwind and would be taking them across to the island nation shortly. The blond just wanted to make sure his birds were settled first.

Cid got a kick out of this trip. Yeah, Genesis was a hilarious bastard that he got along with instantly. Cloud bemoaned introducing the redhead to both Yuffie and Cid and declared he was going to find a room. It didn't surprise him at all when both Sephiroth and Vincent followed him, but only the general went with him to his room. Vincent must have found his own.

“Do you know what happened with Genesis?” Sephiroth asked.
“No,” Cloud replied. “I was going to ask you the same. He seemed withdrawn the last couple of days. Far different from the man I met that first day. He puts up a mask, but you can see through it pretty easily.”

“I agree.”

“You'll just have to ask him, you know. He's your friend. If he thinks you should know, he'll tell you. If it's not something to worry about, then he won't. But you're going back into war now. He needs to get his head back in the game.”

“Hmm.”

Chapter End Notes

I've noticed that I'm writing a lot from Genesis' perspective. It's odd, since I figured I'd write more from Cloud's, like I did in the beginning. Ah well. What do you think about that? I hope you enjoyed it and if so, please leave a review and tell me! I welcome constructive criticism and can't improve if I don't know what I'm dong wrong. I've spotted a few typos in the last chapters just by going over it a few times as I prepare to write the next chapter, but some help on what I'm doing well and what could be done better would be wonderful. So let me know, okay? Thanks! And thanks for reading!

Word Count: 1802

17 June 2012
Chapter Notes

I try to keep all songs and song references out of my writing unless it's absolutely inescapable. That said, this song, this verse specifically, fit this chapter so well that I had to toss it in there. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“I did my best, it wasn't much
I couldn't feel, so I tried to touch
I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you
And even though it all went wrong
I'll stand before the Lord of Song
With nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah”

~Leonard Cohen “Hallelujah”

Time to Change

Chapter Eight: Truth and Consequences

Yuffie was talking to Angeal when Cloud and Sephiroth reentered the bridge. As the two drifted closer, they could make out more of what was being said.

“How come you never use your sword? I noticed when you were sparring with Genesis and working with Cloud that you also had a broadsword that you used instead. But you have that massive piece of metal on your back all the time. Why?” Yuffie asked.

“This sword represents my family's honor,” Angeal replied. Cloud was very interested in this origin story as he had used that same sword once upon a future himself. “To use it would bring about wear, tear and rust. That would tarnish it and be a real waste.”

Yuffie blinked at the answer. It made no sense to her. “If you don't ever use it, then how do you know it will stand up to the pressure when you finally need it?”

The metaphorical side implicit in the question was not lost on Angeal. He was sure his honor would stand up to anything, though. But perhaps, like a muscle, it would get stronger with use? It was something to think on, whatever the case.

Sephiroth turned to his redhead friend and softly asked if he wished to talk about whatever was bothering him. Cloud tuned out Yuffie and Angeal to find out the answer to his earlier concerns. What was hindering Genesis’ natural flamboyance so much that he was forced to put forth a mockery? The redhead shook his head to Sephiroth's query, but blue eyes locked on blue eyes and Cloud knew his melancholy had something to do with them. Something he learned or saw or heard or found during his visit was the root of the problem. So with a look to his silver haired friend, Cloud led Genesis off to a corner where they could talk quietly. The enhanced hearing of the others was a problem, but they were far enough away that they would have to actually focus to hear what was being said. Hopefully, normal decency would prevent that. Cloud didn't forget, though, that
Sephiroth was brought up in a lab, so things like that that would normally be learned from both parents and practical application were absent. He nudged Genesis just a bit farther and dropped his voice as low as he could.

“What is it?” he asked, his usual bluntness possibly working in his favor.

Genesis made a decision to speak, but he would withhold the part about Sephiroth and Vincent. He was sure that if Tseng returned favorable results, Cloud would be the first to be informed. Maybe the blond could prevail on the dark man to speak to Sephiroth, then. “I overheard some disturbing things the other day. Vincent and Tseng were speaking, and they spoke almost as if Angeal and I were already sick, and Angeal was already dead. I am unaware of any sickness, and this thing, this... degradation they spoke of, I've never heard of it. Nor have I ever heard of this geostigma. But both were talked of as if they had passed, and a cure was even spoken of. I want to know what's going on. It's like a puzzle, but one piece is just out of reach and I need that piece to see the whole picture.”

Cloud sighed and his head drooped momentarily. Then he seemed to come to some form of conclusion as his head came up and he looked over to Cid. Just a quirk of the eyebrow had the man using the intercom to reach Vincent's room. While the pilot was doing that, Cloud turned back to Genesis.

“I think I may be able to answer that, but it's not entirely my story to tell. You will have to be patient a bit longer.”

Genesis nodded and moved over to join Angeal and Sephiroth, sending Yuffie off by telling her Cloud wanted her. He knew she was somehow involved in everything, after all.

Cloud looked at Vincent, Cid and Yuffie and heaved another sigh. This wasn't going to go over well with at least one of their party.

“I think we need to tell them everything,” he began only to immediately be cut off.

“Shit, Kid! What the fuck for?” Cid blustered, drawing the direct attention of all three Firsts. Cloud rolled his eyes.

“Because Genesis heard Vincent and Tseng talking the other day? Because it's about time we did anyway? Because I was always going to eventually? Because Genesis is totally out of sorts and he needs to get straightened out before he gets back to Wutai and I refuse to tell him anything without telling Sephiroth either at the same time or first? Take your pick.”

“Cloud. Do you know what you're doing? What you could cause?” Vincent asked, already knowing that their blond leader was going to do it anyway, and that he did know the risks.

“Of course. I was there, after all. Yuffie?” Cloud turned to the uncharacteristically silent girl.

“I think you're right,” she said slowly; thoughtfully. “They have a right to know, after all.”

With a final, decisive nod, Cloud walked back over to the three SOLDIERs, his friends trailing behind him like always. The blond leaned against the hull of the airship, his arms crossed defensively over his chest, blue gaze locked on green.

“There are some things that you need to know. First, Sephiroth, know that I was always going to tell you. I had just hoped to do it privately. And have more time. But time has run out, so here we are.”

Sephiroth narrowed his eyes slightly at his young friend. Obviously the boy was nervous. He didn't
normally fidget like he was, after all.

“What is it, Cloud?”

“Okay. First off, we're not crazy. We're gonna sound crazy, but we're not. After we're done, you can call Tseng and ask him, if you like. He's not here, and we haven't had a chance to fill him in on what we're about to tell you without your knowledge, so...” A deep breath, eyes closed on the exhale. His eyes came open again, still locked with Sephiroth's. “The thing that's been bothering Genesis is that he overheard some stuff. Our Turk and our ex-Turk were talking while we were all out the day after you got to Nibelheim. Genesis left during the training, if you recall, and when he came back he was... different. Well, he heard Tseng telling Vincent that both he and Angeal will, at a future date, suffer from what is known as degradation. All three of you were included in experiments from before your birth. Genesis and Angeal are almost brothers. Tseng told us something about Gillian's cells being used in both of their conceptions and during their gestation. I'm not sure who Gillian is—”

“My mother,” Angeal said quietly, voice slightly strained. Yuffie moved up beside him and rested a hand on his shoulder while Vincent watched Genesis for any negative reaction.

“Thank you. So they both carry the genes of Angeal's mother. They also carry Jenova cells.” Here, Cloud watched Sephiroth very carefully. The man was still; too still. Like he was having trouble processing. “Do you need a moment to wrap your head around that?” Cloud asked softly. The silver general nodded once and began to pace. When he finally settled again, it was once more across from Cloud, and another nod prompted the boy to speak again.

“Hojo injected Lucrecia with live Jenova cells, while Hollander gave Genesis and Angeal dormant or dead cells. Not entirely sure which. That one difference will be the difference between life, death, and sanity. Genesis', Angeal's and yours, respectively. In them, the Jenova cells didn't assimilate. They were rejected. In you, they assimilated all too well. They eventually overtake all of your natural cells to turn you into a puppet for an insane alien. There is a cure, but we're not sure how long it will take to get it. We will start on that right away. Would have done so five years ago if I had known anything about you two.” The last was directed at the two Commanders.

“How do you know all this, Cloud?” Genesis asked. He had an idea, but it was too farfetched and crazy to be true. Right?

“There is a possible future in which you die. Well, in which Angeal dies, Genesis is cured but I have no idea what happened to him, and Sephiroth... Well. You don't really want to know how bad it could get, do you?”

A softly spoken “I do,” answered that.

“You...” Cloud finally dropped the older man's gaze, his head bowing down and his voice quiet with regret. “You tried to destroy the world. Jenova burrowed into your mind and set about trying to kill everyone on the planet. It's not something I want to see again,” he finished, voice so soft they had to strain to hear him.

“What do you mean, again?”

“The four of us, and Tseng, are from that future. Jenova, through you, polluted the lifestream enough that the Cetra and Gaia herself had to use what remained of their power to send our consciousnesses back to our past bodies to try and change things.”

“Is that why you became my friend?” Sephiroth asked, his voice cold. He had apparently jumped to the worst possible conclusion first.
“No. That's why I had planned on killing you,” Cloud said bluntly. Green eyes widened slightly at the casual remark. “And then I met you and I found I couldn't. You hadn't done any of those things yet, and I just couldn't. You were lonely and alone and turning cold and too much like me for my liking, but you were also innocent. And nice. And I wanted so badly to give you just a small bit of happiness that I didn't think past that moment. Then I found out that I liked the person I was coming to know. You weren't at all what I knew of you from Before. Granted, I didn't know you well, then, but I knew enough to know that the coldness I saw developing in you in Nibelheim turned into a wall of ice so thick nothing could get through. I knew you more after you succumbed to Jenova's tactics, and thus still didn't know you at all. But you, now, are a person I've been proud to call friend for five years, even when some were against it.” He glared at Vincent a moment, who lifted an eyebrow in return.

“I did not want you getting hurt should you have to kill him again,” was his explanation.

“Again?!???” Genesis asked.


Cloud closed his eyes for a moment, breathing deeply to calm his nerves. “Yes. I got lucky the first time and killed you after you tried to kill me. It was nothing more than willpower, I think, that managed it. Then I had to kill you again, in different forms, as Jenova ran around with your body. Then, about a year before I met you in this timeline, I had to kill you once more. I don't ever want to do it again.”

“How? How were you able to take down Sephiroth?” Angeal asked, joining the conversation at last.

“Hojo. After the first time, I was badly wounded. Sephiroth had impaled me on Masamune, and I was unenhanced. Hojo got hold of me and another person, a SOLDIER that was on that mission with us. I was a Trooper then. That SOLDIER had first tried to stop Sephiroth, and got badly wounded for it as well. Hojo took us to his labs under the Mansion in Nibelheim and kept us as experiments for the next four years or so. That other SOLDIER, he made it through them pretty well. A lot more jaded and angry, but he broke us out one day. I was suffering from Mako poisoning, though. He dragged me all the way to the cliffs above Midgar, where ShinRa caught up with us. He stashed me behind some rocks and faced them. They killed him. Troopers, SOLDIERS and Turks. They took him out because he got away from Hojo.” Cloud spat the name like a curse. “They left me to die, because the poisoning was so bad. But I had already started to get better, and before that SOLDIER died, he gave me his sword and called me his Living Legacy.”

Cloud was lost in his memories, his and Zack's. Even his friends from the old timeline were learning new things about the blond. “My memories got messed up with his somehow, probably the Mako combined with the experiments. He told me a lot of things during our four years in captivity; about his life and his hopes and dreams. I took on his personality when I finally came to, and didn't even remember him for nearly a year after that.” He shook his head and refocused on Sephiroth. “Hojo has ruined more lives than you can imagine. Vincent was in the basement of the Mansion. Hojo had him locked away. That's what I had gone there for in the first place. I didn't know you'd be there, but I'm not sorry that you were. You're my friend.”

The SOLDIERS didn't know what to think, and moved away to gain the time needed. Sephiroth’s thoughts, surprisingly, weren't on Jenova or Hojo at all. Well, indirectly, perhaps. He was thinking about how he'd like to kill the man for what he did to Cloud. And how it seemed that, distantly at least, he was somewhat related to Genesis and Angeal.

And the two Commanders were worried for their friend and for themselves. Could Cloud find the
cure needed before it was too late? When did it become too late? How did they know if they were being affected? One thing was for certain, though. They wouldn't be going to Hollander or Hojo for help.

Sephiroth didn't know what to think. He paced and prowled the whole of the ship, pondering on what he just learned. He had been angry when he found out that Cloud had known all of this, but the little blond was so certain, so emphatic in his assertions that Sephiroth was his friend and none of this has any bearing on that that he was confused. So he decided to take that advice given at the beginning and call Tseng.

"Tseng."

"It's Sephiroth. Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"Good. Cloud suggested I call you right before he told me a tale of a future that could be where he killed me and I'm loosely related to Genesis and Angeal and Hojo experimented on him. What do you know?"

"I see. And you want me to confirm the truth of it?"

"Yes."

"It's true. He had to kill you many times, often while fighting my Turks as well. Ask him about the time he had to wear a dress." You could almost hear the smirk.

"Very well. Thank you, Tseng. I will call when we have reached our base."

"Good."

Well. He would definitely have to get to the bottom of the dress wearing, but at a later date, perhaps. Right now, he needed to absorb the information he learned and figure out where he stood now.

Cloud was staring out the window when everyone was finally ready to leave the ship. Yuffie had asked him not to accompany her and Vincent back to the capital. His eyes would worry any Wutaian, and if she was with him, they might shoot first, ask questions after his death was confirmed. He understood. Hated it, but understood. And he couldn't go with the SOLDIERs to their camp, even if Sephiroth started talking to him again. He wasn't sure how the older man felt about all this, since this was the first he'd seen of him since the general departed the bridge. So he was just going to stay on the ship with Cid until the pilot had to leave, then make a camp until Vincent returned. Genesis was having none of that, though. The cynical part of Cloud's mind said that Genesis only wanted him close since he knew how to possibly get the cure for him. The other part said Genesis liked him, and that was that. Either way, he got drug along with the SOLDIERs anyway, and Vincent was told he could find the base and retrieve him when he was done with his escort duty. Sephiroth still hadn't even looked at him by the time they left the ship. And all Cloud felt was despair.
Time to Change

Chapter Nine: Developments

Tseng slowly stepped into the church in the Sector Seven slums. He wasn't sure what to expect, but the sight of the young girl kneeling, tending to flowers that no longer existed for him, wasn't it. Oddly enough, it was a sight he'd walked into many times over many years both now and Before. But he was used to not coming here anymore, and when he did come, he only ever found a blond man with a sleeping roll near a pool of water, flowers only very occasionally dotting the edges.

“Tseng!” the girl said as she turned, a bright smile on her face. She had greeted him the same way for years now, and it made a small smile twitch his lips.

“Hello, Aerith,” he replied, gazing intently at her. Then he asked her a question that was – quite possibly – the most bizarre thing she'd ever heard him say. “Is it always cloudy in the mountains?”

Aerith Gainsborough gaped at the dark haired man a moment, long enough for him to begin to believe he was wrong. Finally, she answered him. “Only in Nibelheim,” came the soft reply.

This time the smile came swift and sure, only to fade away – along with most of the blood in his face – as she continued talking.

Cloud walked dejectedly alongside Genesis. Sephiroth still wasn't talking to him, and it made him feel like even more of a heel for hiding everything this long. During their walk, he realized that he hadn't wanted to say anything because he liked just having this uncomplicated friendship with the man. This cold distance, though... had it been worth it? Had having five years of Sephiroth's affections been worth the separation he now felt? The widening chasm between them felt like he would need a rocket to cross, and he didn't like it. Not one bit.

Sephiroth was angry. Cloud hadn't trusted him in all these years, it seemed. He hadn't told him this one important truth about himself and that hurt. Sephiroth considered that. He was angry because he was hurt. Cloud hurt him. Therefore, Hojo was wrong. Sephiroth could feel affection. Cloud was his friend, and his silence on this subject hurt. But it also hurt that he was hurting Cloud. He could see it in the droop of the boy's shoulders. Even his hair seemed to droop. It would be amusing if it weren't his friend. His first and best friend. They would have to talk this out, he knew. But neither were good at expressing themselves so something would have to spark that talk. Maybe he could goad Genesis into something.

Cloud's PHS trilled as a call came through and his snatched it up, answering quietly. Only Sephiroth was still awake, having watch currently, and the blond didn't want to wake the other two.

“Cloud.”

“Tseng? Why are you calling so late?”

“My apologies. I didn't take the time difference into account. It doesn't matter, however. I still would
“have called.”

“What is it, Tseng?” Cloud was very wary now. Tseng almost never prevaricated.

“There has been a... development.”

“What kind of development?”

“Cloud?” a new voice said. The blond blinked rapidly, thinking he’d never hear that voice again.

“Aerith?” he whispered, voice choked as he saw her impaled again on Masamune in his mind’s eye.

“Cloud, we’re not the only ones to come back.”


“No, Cloud. You don’t understand. Jenova found a way to push someone through the portal Gaia made.”

Cloud sat up ramrod straight at that.

“Aerith, who else came back?” he growled into the mouthpiece.

“We don’t know. We don’t even know when they’ll show up. The only thing we’re certain of is that it’s not Sephiroth.”

Cloud’s eyes flickered up, only to meet angry green. His own closed on a sigh. He knew what he had to ask, and it sucked.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“How?”

“Aside from the fact that he hasn’t tried to kill you yet?”

“Yes.” Cloud’s eyes were once more locked on the Silver General’s, hoping there was proof positive that the insane Sephiroth wasn’t anywhere near him.

“His... in the Lifestream, every essence has a distinct... flavor, I guess you could call it. I’ve tasted his many times before. This one is unfamiliar to me.”

“Good.” But was it? Was it really good that, although it wasn’t his mortal enemy once more, they now had no lead on who, exactly, it actually was?

“Damn. Listen, Aerith. See if you can get Tseng to get you out of Midgar. Get Cid to put you up, or, better yet, see if you can get into Wutai and stay with Yuffie. It could be anybody; I don't want you in that kind of risk.”

“I'll see what I can do. I can't promise anything, though.”

“Good. And, Aerith? Try to level up your Limit Breaks, okay?”

“Of course! Tseng told me about Genesis and Angeal. I'll do my best, Cloud.”

“I never thought you wouldn’t.”
“Tseng has something he needs to tell you now,” she said, and Cloud thought he detected something gleeful in her voice.

“Cloud, Vincent shared your concerns with me before I left Nibelheim. Once I returned to Midgar, I was able to run a comparison. I wanted you to know that it is a match for Vincent, not Hojo.”

Cloud was once again looking at green eyes, but this time they seemed bewildered. Cloud's own face, however, reflected his fierce joy at this news.

“Thanks, Tseng. I'll let them know.”

Cloud watched Sephiroth as he put his PHS down. The man was watching him, and Cloud was about done with the silent treatment.

“Whoever Jenova sent back, you can believe that it's not going to be a good person.”

“Is that why you thought it could be me?”

“I confirmed it wasn't because I had to, not because I thought you were her puppet again. I knew you weren't, but I had to make sure. I had to because if I was wrong, if you were hers again, then it wouldn't just be me in danger. I could handle just me. I could even deal with you killing me. But not if it put everything else at risk. So yeah, I had to ask. I just wish we knew who it was. I don't like unknown dangers.” Cloud sighed. “Do you hate me?”

Now it was Sephiroth's turn to sigh. “I was – am – very angry that you withheld this information from me. I understand some of why you did it. In the beginning, you couldn't be sure how I would react to it. I just wish you had shown more faith in me sometime during the last five years.”

“It's not that! I just... I didn't want things to change. I knew that once you knew what I knew, things would be different. I didn't want that. I was happy and I was selfish and I didn't want to lose your friendship. You were my first friend in this timeline who didn't know what I'd been through or what I'd done and you still liked me.”

“Now that you're friends again, can you both shut up so the rest of us can get some sleep?” came Genesis' voice. Cloud and Sephiroth moved away a bit and lowered their voices more, but that was the best they could give the cranky redhead.

“What was Tseng saying about Hojo and Vincent?”

Cloud wondered if Vincent would kill him or not, but he wasn't going to withhold any more information from the silver haired man.

“Vincent had Tseng run a DNA comparison to confirm your parentage,” Cloud started, watching as his friend stared at him with unfathomable eyes.

“And when Tseng said the match was Vincent and not Hojo, I assume that means that Hojo is not my father?” The general was definitely not slow on the uptake.

“Right. When we saw you and Vincent together for the first time, it struck me and Yuffie that you two looked a lot more similar than you and Hojo ever did. In the Before time, Vincent only knew you as the enemy, so we never saw you both like that. But now... and for Hojo to have done that to both of you...” Cloud was angry. Very angry that his friends had their lives torn away by that one madman. “It's unconscionable. He's a plague on Gaia and her people and needs to be put down like any monster.”
Cloud was pacing now, hoping for a monster to attack them so he could let his frustration and anger out on it. He calmed at Sephiroth's hand on his arm.

“I will not say anything to Vincent until you tell him,” he offered and Cloud nodded. He would tell the dark ex-Turk as soon as he showed up.

“I didn't want to tell you that Vincent might be your father because if Hojo really was, then I would hate myself for giving you that false hope. But I'm really glad that Hojo has no claim on you now. And Vincent won't let this go unpunished, either.”

“Good.”

It was time to rouse the other two now and continue on to the base. Less than a day's walk was left, and Cloud was just happy to have his friend back.

Chapter End Notes

12 September 2012
Word Count: 1612

End Notes

Thanks for reading! Let me know how you like it and stay tuned for more!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!