Ebb And Flow

by KivaEmber

Summary

It's been five years since Eorzea made peace with Garlemald and all the major characters of that conflict have begun to settle into their new lives. The Warrior of Light, for one, quite enjoys his time spent in Mor Dhona raising Chocobos and surfing, done and dusted with war and clandestine wetwork operations on behalf of Eorzea - and then he meets a very handsome Elezen who seems a little familiar and its that mix of curiosity and attraction that lets him pursue their casual something that they build up. And then things get messy.

Or,

Aza just wants to forget his past and enjoy his retirement - unfortunately his past doesn't want to forget him.

Notes
See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter 1

‘THWACK!’

‘Oof!’

“Oh, shit! You okay, dude?!”

It happened on a busy Friday morning when Aymeric was literally rammed into by the love of his life – and his surfboard.

It’s a fairly ridiculous love story.

“Wow,” The Miqo’te was laughing, helping him up one-handed, the other gripping his surfboard tight underarm, “I really nailed you with my wood.”

Aymeric, who was feeling a little dizzy from the hard knock, made a vaguely amused noise as he got back on his feet. The Miqo’te’s hand was warm and calloused in his own, and his accidental attacker held the grip for a moment, as if making sure he was steady, before letting go.

“You sure you’re okay?” The Miqo’te asked, peering up at him with wide, concerned eyes, “That was a nasty spill.”

“I’m fine,” Aymeric groaned, rubbing his forehead. He’d probably have a nasty bruise there later, but he endured worse things than a surfboard to the head. He lowered his hand after a moment, focusing on the Miqo’te and… oh.

He was basically half-naked. Clad in nothing but gladiator sandals and black, red-striped board shorts, the Miqo’te before him was of a rather short, compact stature. What drew Aymeric’s gaze though were the stark scars that ran all over that well-toned body, some faded against darkly tanned skin, and some stark white and pink- he even recognised a few of them, bullet wounds, claw marks, something that looked like an old burn mark…

Aymeric forced his gaze upwards when he realised he’d been staring blankly at his well-defined chest for several long seconds, up to the Miqo’te face. Very handsome, the dazed part of his brain noted, with light brown hair tied back into a tight braid, and almond-shaped, golden eyes that gave him away as a Seeker. He was smiling at him, eyes crinkled in warm amusement.

“Mnhmm, y’sure? You look kinda dazed there,” The Miqo’te hummed playfully, leaning back on his heels. He shifted his grip on his surfboard, letting its butt sit on the pavement as he rested it against his shoulder. His weight shifted, hip jutting out to one side as he planted his hand on it, everything about him oozing laidback confidence, “Didn’t give you a concussion or nothin’, did I?”

“I’m still a little stunned,” Aymeric admitted, unwittingly drawn into the Miqo’te’s easy casualness. Despite their rough introduction, something about him just encouraged interaction, and Aymeric briefly forgot that he had been in a hurry before. “I didn’t expect to be attacked by a surfboard this early in the morning.”
The Miqo’te’s smile took on a sheepish edge, “Ohh, yeah, my bad there. I was rushin’ to hit the waves before the wind died down too much. Should’ve been lookin’ at where I was chargin’ to. Though…” he paused, biting his bottom lip briefly. Aymeric found himself focusing on his mouth before he realised it, “Maybe it was a good thing.”

“Oh?” Aymeric instantly knew the game that was being played now and was sort of amused – and flattered. Honestly, he wasn’t going to lie, the Miqo’te was his type, Aymeric wasn’t the sort to allow race to interfere in his preferences, and he marvelled over how Halone practically dropped him, literally, into his lap. Perhaps this morning wasn’t going to be as bad as he initially worried it’d be.

“Well, yeah, I got to meet a handsome guy like you,” The Miqo’te said shamelessly, his smile shifting into something more inviting, his ears flicking forwards and tail curling in a smooth, elegant curve, “Always a nice thing to brighten my morning.”

Oh, very much his type, Aymeric thought with growing amusement, unable to hold back a chuckle. He liked them a little bold, “Hmm, knock to the head aside, I must say the same. I was having a fairly bad morning until you tumbled into my lap.”

“Really?” The Miqo’te looked adorably surprised for a moment, as if startled that his flirting had been reciprocated so easily, before he swiftly recovered his earlier laidback confidence, “Oh, well, glad to be of service then. So, uh…”

“I’m Aymeric,” he said smoothly, holding out his hand. The Miqo’te seemed disarmed by his introduction but took his hand without hesitation. His grip was just as strong as before, and Aymeric could appreciate it a bit better now. Ah, it was such an extreme temptation.

“I’m Aza,” The Miqo’te returned, giving his hand three firm shakes before letting go with open reluctance. He was eyeing Aymeric thoughtfully now, as if trying to gauge how far he could push. If this was a different setting, Aymeric would’ve been eager to let him push as far as he wanted but – oof, he really did need to get to work, attractive Miqo’te or not, but neither did he want to let such an encounter go to waste.

As Lucia would say, he was far too impulsive and attracted to stupidity when it came to his tastes in men, but, well. Aymeric had learned that life was too short to waste it on being too conservative – they both wanted a bit of fun, it seemed, and Aymeric was in Mor Dhona for the long haul, so why not enjoy a bit of company while it lasted?

“I hope this isn’t too forward of me,” Aymeric said slyly, delving a hand into his suit pocket to draw out one of the business cards he kept on his person at all time. He took out his pen too and quickly scribbled his personal number on the back, “But would you be interested in us getting to know each other better?”

“Oh, fuck yes,” Aza blurted, before turning a little pink at his over eagerness. His façade of laidback confidence was broken, but Aymeric found himself charmed by the sheepish grin curving his mouth, those golden eyes peeking up at him beneath his thick eyelashes. That expression had to be illegal, with how covetous it was.

“I mean, sure thing,” Aza amended, neatly taking the card and tucking it into his shorts’ pocket, “I’ll call you when I finish up at Silvertears, handsome.”

Very bold. Aymeric really did like him already. “Mm, I’ll be looking forward to it.”

“Me too,” Aza winked at him, and hefted up his surfboard. “See ya later, handsome. It was nice bumping into you.”
And with that the handsome Miqo’te trotted off into the morning crowd, heading towards Silvertear Falls. Aymeric watched him go, until he vanished from view, before heaving a reluctant sigh. Well, at least work will be more tolerable now that he had something to look forward to in the evening. Though, he could easily imagine Lucia’s exasperated eye-rolling when she hears why he was late this morning.

Not that he minded. With a spring to his step, Aymeric continued onwards to work. Mor Dhona was shaping up to be a good business trip already.

Aza waited until he was on the outskirts of the lake’s shoreline before he pulled the card out of his pocket.

He examined it thoughtfully, memorising the number quickly before flipping it over to stare at the name on the front. Aymeric de Borel, MP, Ishgard. Aza could feel something itch at the back of his mind, like he was forgetting something vital, but ultimately discarded it. He got a lot of those about the most random things, it didn’t have to mean anything.

“Aymeric…” he hummed to himself, trying out the name. He really liked it. The Elezen had been so easy on the eyes and surprisingly playful – Aza could admit he got a little hot behind the ears when he flirted so easily with him. So forward! Unexpected of an Ishgardian, but Aza wasn’t questioning his good luck. He’d been getting a little bored out here in Mor Dhona, even if it was the nice, easy life he’d craved since. Well. Since Then.

He stowed the card back into his pocket, humming cheerfully to himself as he continued to Silvertear Falls. Whoever or whatever Aymeric de Borel was, he had a feeling he was going to be very interesting to play around with.
“You’re in a cheerful mood today.”

Aza cracked an eye open, not moving from his lazy lounging on his surfboard. The waters had calmed considerably on Silvertear Falls since that blustery morning, so now Aza had been planning on catching some pleasant z’s bobbing on the surface of the lake… ruined, now that Bluebird decided to drift over to him. She was straddling her surfboard, close enough to lean over him and block out the sun blazing high above.

“I-I’m al-always…” he broke off into a loud yawn, feeling his jaw crack, “Urgh. Mm, always cheerful.”

“Yeah, but it’s always that creepy fake kind,” Bluebird drawled, reaching over to poke him squarely in the ribs. He grunted, flicking his tail at her. She ignored the warning, “C’mon, spill the beans. Did you get more Chocobo children to coo over? Your Azeyma roses come in?” she paused, then added slyly, “Got a hot date?”

“No, no, and yes,” Aza said, closing his eyes as he tried to resume his nap.

“You can’t just say ‘yes’ and then block me out!” Bluebird squawked, “C’mon, tell me, tell meeee!”

Aza sighed, realising sleep really was beyond him at this point, and reluctantly sat up. He rolled his shoulders, feeling the tight pull of taut muscles and old scars, and made a mental note to book another appointment with the physio up at Bronze Lake sometime soon. “Well,” he began, slanting a tired look at his friend who was leaning in, obviously on tenterhooks to hear the story, “I ran into a really handsome Elezen this morning.”

“Elezen!” Bluebird scoffed, “What is it with you and tall guys?”

“I like them tall,” Aza said mischievously, “And strong, and bold, and oh, this guy was bold.”

“Mm?” Bluebird smirked at him, reaching up to tug her hair loose from its high ponytail. Aza watched her dark hair tumble around her shoulders – only to be quickly gathered up as she braided it instead, “Was he thirsty?”

“In a nice way,” Aza admitted, “He seemed to be in a bit of a rush to get to work, so he probably didn’t want to lose me he gave me his number.”

“Lucky, lucky,” Bluebird sighed, finishing up her braid and tossing it carelessly over her shoulder. “You calling him later, then?”

“Hell yes,” Aza smiled at the thought. Even if their meeting had been kind of bumpy, Aymeric had been so charmingly lovely and nice to look at. Very nice to look at. Aza could admit most of his interest was in the physical attraction side of things, but he tended to make friends post-sex with his casual encounters. It made further encounters even more fun and relaxed, truth be told.

“His name’s Aymeric,” Aza offered after a companionable silence, “Ishgardian MP, if you can believe it. He’s probably here for that peace treaty shit.”
Bluebird frowned, pressing a finger to one of her cheek scales, “Hmm, Aymeric… Ishgardian MP… why does that sound familiar…?”

“Does it?” Aza flicked an ear in interest, “You thought so too?”

“It rings a bell or two,” Bluebird said dismissively, “But I haven’t paid much attention to politics since the Scions.”

Yeah, neither had Aza. He quite liked the ignorant bubble he had built himself in a cosmopolitan place like Mor Dhona. It had transformed into a central hub of trade and tourism after the war ended, and Aza could pretend that life was as laidback and carefree as much as he wanted here. Whatever happened regarding the peace treaty and Garlemald and all that crap could happen somewhere out of his personal life, thank you very much.

“Probably heard it on the news,” Aza murmured, but he was intrigued now, despite himself. He had initially passed off the familiar feeling as unimportant, but what if… oh, it’d be awkward if he’d been involved in one of his more clandestine missions in Ishgard. Aza had done not so legal things there. “Oh well, I’ll find out later.”

Bluebird snorted, “I’ll laugh if you, like, assassinated one of his predecessors. Could be a lovely conversation topic, ‘oh, hey, I helped you get your job’!”

“Shut it,” Aza tutted, not in the mood to revisit those memories on such a lovely day, “Shouldn’t you be at work by now?”

“Nah, I called in sick when I saw the weather this morning,” Bluebird said without a shred of shame, “I mean, what, s’not like they’ll fire me. Hah.”

“You can’t ride on past achievements for your entire career,” Aza said flatly, “The police are gonna get annoyed at you constantly shirkin’ work and just straight up fire you, ex-Scion or not.”

“Pshaw, don’t you worry about me,” Bluebird flapped her hand dismissively at him, “I’ve got it covered. You should focus more on getting your own life sorted.”

“What?” Aza barked out a laugh, “I’m fine!”

“Mnhmm, sure,” Bluebird gave him a look that was far too knowing. He grimaced at her. She always knew how to dig right under his skin, and he sincerely hoped she wasn’t in a particularly picky mood today. He didn’t want to deal with her stirring shit for no reason other than to irritate him, “Still haven’t taken Alphie up on his job offer.”

“Ugh, he told you about that?” Aza groaned, tipping his upper body back in dramatic annoyance, “I’m not interested in goin’ back to that kind of work, and he knows that.”

“You’ve been pretty bored,” Bluebird pointed out, “And, what, this new man of yours will probably entertain you for… a few months? Maybe half a year?”

“I’m done with wetwork ops,” Aza said, his tone sharper than he liked, “And I know what he’s askin’ for. I refuse to go within ten mals of Zenos.”

Bluebird made a face like he uttered a foul curse – which he pretty much did. Zenos was a blight that Aza was sorely upset he failed to snuff out. To this day his name was muttered with hushed disgust within Eorzea, uneasy with the knowledge that such an unpredictable creature like him remained within Garlemald’s borders – suspiciously quiet. Aza would’ve thought he’d take the peace treaty with ill-grace, but he hadn’t given up so much as a peep. Maybe the Emperor did the smart thing and
had him disposed when he was convalescing. One could dream.

“Fair enough,” Bluebird said reluctantly, “But you’re gonna have to hammer that into Alphie’s head. He’s determined to get the old gang back together, for some reason.”

“I’ll talk to him tomorrow,” Aza muttered. Alphinaud should be in Mor Dhona – hm, he probably knew Aymeric, actually, from his political circles. He could probably ask him a bit more indepth about his mystery man…

“That aside,” Bluebird hummed, “I think I’m done. You staying or you wanna grab a bite to eat with me?”

“I’m stayin’,” Aza said, lying back down on his board, “You interrupted my nap earlier and I wanna catch up on it.”

“Hm, fine. I’ll talk to you later.”

Aza listened to his friend paddle away, making himself comfortable and letting the soft swaying lull of the lake ease him into a light doze. The reminder of Alphie’s job offer troubled him, to be honest, but he firmly put it out of mind and instead drew up his memory of that morning. Aymeric de Borel… handsome man, somewhat familiar, dangerously bold. He must’ve been involved in an old op for Bluebird to recognise his name too…

He held that concern for a moment, before burying it deep. It’s probably wasn’t all that important. The mess in Ishgard was so long ago that whatever skeletons tried climbing out of their graves to hound him really couldn’t touch him at this point. The Warrior of Light had been dead for five years now, and Aza was the sort to never get involved in those kinds of things.

He’s just an innocent surfer and Chocobo stable owner now. Absolutely nothing to worry about.

“You’re in a cheerful mood today, sir.”

“Am I?” Aymeric said mildly, trying to keep a straight face as Lucia studied him with a quiet frown, “Hmm, I suppose it’s just a good day.”

“We’re dealing with Garleans this week,” Lucia pointed out blandly.

“I deal with a Garlean every day. I like to think I’ve built up an immunity,” Aymeric returned in an equal tone – but he couldn’t keep the neutral expression any longer, especially at seeing Lucia’s reluctant amusement, “But if you really want to know… I had a nice encounter this morning.”

“Oh?” Lucia’s tone was as dry as the Sagolii Desert, her expression clearly saying she already knew where this was headed, “Seeker or Keeper?”

“I have wider tastes than that,” Aymeric mock-grumbled, but admitted after a pause; “Seeker.”

Lucia rolled her eyes.

Aymeric let out a softly amused huff, returning to the folder in his hands. Today had been heavy on the reading, as he was jumping into another’s role feet first and he was… wholly underprepared for what was expected of him. Thankfully he had Lucia with him, who could help him parse the more
obscure Garlean customs, but it was still a dry, painful read. Just because was an ex-commander and an MP didn’t mean he innately understood what was required of him as Ishgard’s new diplomat.

“Should I arrange for your schedule to be clear this evening?” Lucia asked.

“Hmm, potentially,” Aymeric said distractedly. It felt a little arrogant to expect their rendezvous so soon, but the Seeker – Aza – did seem genuinely interested. He should keep a clear schedule, just in case, “Is there anything important I need to do today?”

“Not particularly. You’ve been given three days of acclimatisation,” Lucia replied, idly flicking through her PDA. Already he could see her mentally reshuffling his schedule, “You were expected to have a meeting with Alphinaud Leveilleur, the Scion representative, but that can be pushed to tomorrow morning instead.”

Aymeric tried to recall who that was exactly… oh, right, he remembered. That startlingly young diplomat – the grandson of the late Louisoix – who was briefly involved in the integration of Ishgard’s burgeoning Republic into the Eorzean Alliance, back during the war. He must’ve been seventeen then, and now… twenty-four? Impressive career for someone so young, but the Scions had always been rather… outside the norm, when it came to the recruitment of their members.

“I’ll speak to him tomorrow morning,” Aymeric decided, “It’s most likely to be an attempt to secure my support for something.”

Lucia made a wordless noise of agreement and adjusted the timing on her PDA. “I’ll send a call to his office, sir.”

Aymeric hummed, flicking over a page in his folder as Lucia excused herself and left their office. He waited for a moment, to make sure she was gone, before dropping the folder on his desk with a sigh. He couldn’t wait for tonight, whether Aza called or not, just to give his mind a break. This was a last-minute appointment and it showed, what with most of his office except the desk and chair still in boxes. Still, Aymeric wasn’t the type to shirk responsibility, no matter how difficult, and he was certain he’d find his feet after a week or two.

He leaned back in his chair, letting his mind wander back to this morning. Now that he had time to look back, he found himself intensely curious about the Miqo’te who practically bowled him over. Those scars on his body… he was most likely one of the many veterans that settled into Mor Dhona at the conclusion of the war. He looked a little young, but Miqo’te ages were notoriously difficult to place at times. Potentially in his late twenties? Early thirties?

Ahh, it was such good luck that Estinien hadn’t accompanied him to Mor Dhona after all. No doubt his closest friend would be giving him that flat, dead-eyed stare of extreme disappointment if he knew Aymeric was picking up young, handsome Miqo’tes on his first day of work. He chuckled quietly to himself at the thought, picking up the folder again and finding his place, forcing himself to focus. He can satisfy his curiosity about Aza tonight, for now he better focus before Lucia scolded him for daydreaming. His subordinate or not, she was not afraid to thwack him upside the head if she thought he was being foolish.

It was just edging past five o’clock in the afternoon when Aza dragged himself back home.

Well, he dragged himself back long enough to dump his surfboard and get changed into his stabling
clothes before marching back out. As part of his retirement agreement, he’d been allocated a lovely house on the outskirts of Mor Dhona complete with enough land to support the several Chocobos that he had. Not enough to make a business of it, but enough for him to find comfort in a steady routine filled with hard work.

“Rations~” he called as he stepped out into the field behind his house, stuffing his hands deep into the pockets of his jacket. The wind had picked up again, picking up a biting chill, and he wished he picked up a scarf before he came out but, oh well, he’d been colder before, “Rations! Get over here!”

Rations trotted over to him with a happy warble, and he grinned at her rapid advance, holding his arms out wide. The moment his Chocobo was close enough to threw his arms around her thick, powerful neck in a tight embrace, laughing as she nibbled at his ear and hair affectionately.

“Ahaha~ yeah, yeah, I missed you too, beautiful,” he purred into her feathers, finding comfort in her musky scent, before pulling away to carefully pat at her. A few of her dark feathers were streaked with silver, and her eyes were a little clouded as she bent her head low enough so she could see him, trilling softly. Still going strong, though, thank the Twelve.

“Hmm, still looking good despite being a granny,” Aza teased, covering up his slight unease at the thought of Rations’ future. She was very old for a Chocobo, especially a War Chocobo that had lived through history’s most recent and gruelling war, but just like her owner she stubbornly kept on trucking. Good girl. Loyal to the end. “Not too cold out here, are you?”

Rations ruffled up her feathers, huffing at him.

“Hey, hey, I just thought I’d ask,” Aza laughed, patting her chest feathers soothingly, “C’mon, let’s get you in back into the warm. It’s meant to rain tonight and you and the kids will get all sulky if I leave you out here.”

Rations grumbled, but docilely let him lead her back to the stables. From the corner of his eye he saw a few of the other Chocobos, Rations’ children who were just as stubborn and salty as her, curiously follow at a distance. It was why he always put Rations back in the stables first, they were little terrors if they had to go back in before Granny Rations.

“So, I met a cute guy today,” Aza confided to Rations, grinning when the Chocobo just ‘kweh’d in an unimpressed tone, “No, seriously, this one is very cute. Devilishly handsome too. He was so forward, and I’m gonna call him after I set you and the kids back into bed.”

If Rations could roll her eyes, he had a feeling she would’ve been.

“Yes, yes, this means I might not be around tonight. Don’t worry, I’ll leave extra greens and a few carrots,” Aza tried to soothe, “Look after the house for me, okay?”

“Kweh.”

“Yeah, I know. But still, you’re getting senile in your old age, you might’ve forgo- ow! Hey~ no need to peck me!”

“Kweh!”

“You’ve gotten so cranky as a granny- ow! Rations!”

“Wark!”

“Okay, okay, I take it back! I take it back!”
The field was filled with laughter and playful calls as Aza let Rations ‘chase’ him back to the stables, her kids getting in on the game with enthusiastic fluttering wings and loud warking. By the time he managed to wrangle his over excitable Chocobos back into the stables, he was sweaty, muddy and grinning like an idiot, with Rations exuding smugness from her stall.

“Fuu…” Aza puffed at his fringe, “You’re a terror.”

“Kweh,” Rations chirped, tilting her beak up imperiously. Wherever did she pick up such an attitude? Certainly not from him.

“Hmph,” Aza glanced over the stalls, double checking everything was done. Mucked out, feed and water refilled, blankets in case the temperature plummeted a bit more… yeah, his Chocobos should be fine a night alone. “G’night, Rations. Look after the kids for me.”

Rations trilled at him as he blew her a kiss, and turning off the stable lights, he marched back to his house, grimacing as his right shoulder pulled uncomfortably whenever he moved his arm a little too enthusiastically. He strained it during his playful tussling – geeze, this body was falling apart and he wasn’t even forty yet.

“Getting old…” he sighed to himself, shouldering his front door open and closing it carelessly behind him. He ambled through his house, veering towards the living room to collapse gracelessly on the sofa. He laid there for a long moment, forcing himself to slowly untense and relax before slipping his linkpearl out of his pocket and swiftly inputting the number he memorised that morning.

Shifting to get more comfortable, he stifled a yawn as he cradled the linkpearl in the crook of his shoulder, letting his eyes slip slowly shut. The phone rang, and rang, and rang until he was worried he either inputted it wrong or Aymeric was busy, until-

“Aymeric speaking.”

“Aymeric~” Aza greeted cheerfully, “It’s me, Aza.”

“Aza,” Aymeric’s tone instantly warmed, dropped a slight octave, hmm, even over the phone his voice was so lovely and alluring, “I was beginning to worry.”

“Mm, I got a bit distracted,” Aza admitted, rolling onto his side and snuggling into the sofa cushions. Mmm, so sleepy… “S’that invitation still open?”

“Tonight, if you’re able,” Aymeric said, “Though, you sound a little drowsy. Long day?”

“Mm, long day being lazy,” Aza chuckled huskily, “And surfing. It was a pretty good day. How about you?”

“Exhausting,” Aymeric sighed, and Aza remembered, oh yeah, politician. He must’ve had an incredibly dull day… doing whatever it was politicians do. He remembered Alphie just bullshitting at people a lot, and having to deal with everyone else’s bullshit, something Aza would have had little to no patience for. “But tolerable, when I thought about speaking to you again.”

Aza was kind of glad this was over the phone – he felt his face warm a little as something hot and pleased wriggled in his stomach. How blessed he was to literally bump into someone so eager and flirty. His good karma must be finally kicking in, “Flirt,” he purred, “When do you want to meet?”

“Hmm, I’m still in the office but… in an hour?”

“Sure, at the Rising Stones?” Aza muffled a yawn, “Mmn… that’s where all the civil servants work,
“Right. Where do you want to go after that?”

Hm, good question. Aza was a little too drowsy to get up to anything too strenuous that night, but maybe he’d think differently once he had a chance to admire Aymeric up close. They could go out for drinks in the pub near the Rising Stones, but, hmm, this close to peak hours? Aza didn’t want people sticking their noses into their private time since too many people knew his face there. He supposed…

“My place’ll be good,” Aza finally answered, “Then we’ll work it out from there.”

“Sounds good,” Aymeric said easily. Distantly, Aza heard something in the background, a female voice murmuring something, “Oh, yes, I’m almost done, Lucia. Aza, I’ll see you in an hour.”

“Mmhm,” Aza hummed sleepily, “See you then, handsome.”

Aymeric made a low, pleased noise, murmuring a goodbye, and then hung up. Aza remained in place for a moment, fighting off the urge to doze off for a few minutes, before forcing himself up. Shower first, then… a nice outfit, something seductive. And then… well, he’ll see where the night led them both.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I lied about the next update being slow. Here’s something because I didn't sleep at all last night, but expect future chapters to be a little slower lol

Please comment/kudos if you liked!
As Aza predicted, it did start to rain that night.

More specifically, the moment he was getting ready to leave for the Rising Stones. He grimaced as he stared up at the inky dark sky like it had betrayed him, standing on his front porch and contemplating his options. He didn’t mind getting wet, but he supposed making his date for the evening walk back with him in the rain didn’t evoke much romantic feeling… or it might. It gave an excuse for stripping off once they got home, and his gut feeling told him that Aymeric would probably find amusement in it. It would be funny and nice and playful…

He tapped his bottom lip in thought. Or maybe… he could finally use that Magi-Car Cid foisted on him a while back. It was a model that was positively ancient by Garlean standards, but still rather novel in Eorzea, so Aymeric may be properly wowed by it. Only thing was it had seen better days, already being older than himself, and it made that weird rattling noise whenever Aza forced it to go anywhere above 20mph.

Yeeeeeah, no, no, Aza wasn’t going to bring the car.

Resigning himself to a long, wet walk, he picked up his umbrella next to his door and stepped out.

Just a little after six in the evening the entrance hall to the Rising Stones was empty.

Well, aside from the Miqo’te receptionist half-dozing on her desk, Aymeric amended with some amusement. Through the wide, glass doors he could see the rain pattering on the pavement outside, puddles catching the orangey glow of the streetlights, and stifled a sigh. He forgot to check the weather before he left for work this morning and was paying the price it seemed. Well, unless Aza came by in a Magi-Car.

Feeling restless, he found himself slowly drifting towards the centre of the hall, where a large monument sat. It was an impressive piece of metalwork, most likely darksteel, with a certain liveliness to it that made him suspect it was of Ananta craft. The monument loomed, there was no other word for it, sculpted in the form of a Spoken in some strange armour, its helmet fashioned after a snarling Behemoth and its gauntleted, clawed hands clasped over the hilt of a large greatsword embedded into the base of the monument. Its entire posture screamed of fierce, unyielding defiance, an unusually aggressive posture for a building dedicated to the Garlean peace treaty.

Curious as to what this was memorialising, he skim-read the plaque;

‘Warrior of Light, He of the Stalwart Sword and Scion of the Seventh Dawn. May He Ever Walk in the Light of the Crystal.’

Oh. Now that was a very controversial person to honour.

Aymeric looked back up at the statue with renewed interest, carefully taking in its aggressive
posturing, the way the artist had meticulously attempted to capture the barely restrained violence held within the armoured form. They certainly didn’t shy away from portraying the Warrior of Light in all of their dominating glory – though they went with the curious interpretation of them being a Miqo’te. After all, no one really knew who the Warrior of Light was – or, rather, any who did know were either long dead or legally gagged. All that was known were the horror stories that came from the frontlines and whispered half-rumours that sounded too fantastical to be true.

They were widely feared – respected, but feared, and with a small frown, Aymeric realised that no one really knew what happened to them after the war. The Garleans had kicked up a fuss, baying for their head for ‘war crimes’, but they had been denied and the Warrior of Light had quietly slipped into the background, out of public eye and mind. It was so odd, to think that such a powerful, influential entity would just… docilely fade into obscurity without so much as a peep.

And so odd for there to be such a blatant, proud monument to them here too. This was where the peace treaty with Garlemald was managed, and they place a statue of the Warrior of Light here? Were they making a statement? A warning?

“Aymeric?”

He flinched in surprise, so engrossed in his thoughts he didn’t hear anyone approach. He turned quickly, his sheepish expression instantly giving way to mild wonder when his eyes landed the Miqo’te he had so impatiently been waiting for. Oh. Dark, form-fitting trousers that hugged every subtle curve, with an equally snug shirt overlaid with a dark leather jacket… somehow, Aza became more tempting with the more clothes he had on. Impressive.

Aza was looking up at him with a smile, his golden eyes alight with amusement as he took in his somewhat stupefied expression, “Hm, I guess I made the right call with my wardrobe then?”

“I… yes,” Aymeric cleared his throat, not bothering to hide his grin as he let his gaze trail down then back up along Aza’s body. The shirt collar plunged low enough that he could see his collarbone, and the beginning of a pale, thin scar that slipped downwards at an angle. His gaze lingered on it, “You took me off guard,” he admitted.

Aza winked cheekily at him, unhooking the bright yellow umbrella that had been dangling from the crook of his elbow, “I was aimin’ for seductive,” he hummed playfully, “So, you ready to go, handsome?”

“Ready and eager,” Aymeric said, quickly regaining his footing in the face of Aza’s laidback confidence, all thoughts and curiosity about the statue at his back forgotten, “Did you walk?”

“Mmhm… I thought it’d be romantic to take a stroll out in the rain together,” Aza said, starting to walk towards the large glass doors of the building. Aymeric quickly followed, walking abreast of him, “Y’know, snugglin’ close together underneath an umbrella, gettin’ to know each other… though, you’ll need to hold it for it to work.”

Oh, right, the height difference… Aymeric had to very forcibly push the mental image away before he let out an inappropriate laugh. Though, judging by the cheeky grin Aza was sending his way, he had a feeling laughter was what his date was angling for, “Because you’re, ah…” Aymeric let the silence hold for a moment, “Short?”

“Excuse you,” Aza huffed with mock-offence, thrusting the yellow umbrella at him. Aymeric quickly took it before he was speared with it, “I’m a perfectly normal height for a Miqo’te.”

Aymeric made a vague, sceptical noise, fiddling with the latch on the umbrella as they stepped
through the automatic glass doors and underneath the building’s awning. “If you say so.”

“I do say so,” Aza sniffed, his gaze fixed on his umbrella as Aymeric began to open it.

It became clear why a moment later. Aymeric paused, peering up at it and the cutey Chocobo face design on its bright, yellow fabric. He glanced down at his date, one eyebrow slightly raised.

“Chocobos are…” Aza was straight-faced, though his cheeks started to turn an adorable shade of pink, his ears flicking back a fraction, “They’re cute, okay? So, I thought it’d add atmosphere to the…walk.”

“Hmm…” Aymeric gave one last glance at the umbrella before dismissing it. He wasn’t overly bothered – in fact, he had to admit it was rather cute. While he wasn’t as obsessive over Chocobos like most Ishgardians, he liked them well enough. “I think so too.”

Aza instantly brightened.

“Really? Great!” he chirped, crowding in close to Aymeric’s side and linking their elbows together as they stepped off from beneath the awning. The rain pattered loudly against the umbrella, which was quite nicely sized to share, Aymeric found.

“I love Chocobos,” Aza continued, after gently nudging Aymeric the right direction with his hip, “They’re very loyal, and smart, and friendly creatures. I actually have four of them back home. If you want, I can show you them.”

It was amazing, how animated and excited Aza sounded. It was different to his almost lazy attitude from before, but it was a pleasant one. His ears were flicked forwards, his tail curved upwards, tip flicking side to side merrily… it was adorable. Aymeric couldn’t help but be swept away by his enthusiasm.

“I’d be fine with that,” he said easily, making sure to keep his strides short as they ambled down the street. He noticed Aza’s gait was a little uneven and shorter than his own – an old injury, perhaps? “What are their names?”

“Well, first you have Rations,” Aza said proudly, “She’s my old War Chocobo. Tough as nails and has a serious attitude problem, but fusses like the old granny that she is.”

“…Rations?” Aymeric asked, trying very hard not to laugh. That was a name many Ishgardians would balk at giving their Chocobos.

“Her full name’s Emergency Rations,” Aza admitted, voice light with humour, “But that’s a mouthful, so she’s Rations most of the time. I gave it as a joke, but, uh, she wouldn’t respond to anythin’ else after that so, it stuck.”

Aymeric couldn’t help but chuckle, “And the others?”

“They’re her kids. Bluebird’s Chocobo got frisky with mine a few times,” Aza huffed, though he didn’t sound overly annoyed, “You’ve got Instant Noodles, or just Noodles, who’s the oldest, then Ready Meal, and Drumsticks is the youngest.”

Aymeric had to process this for several seconds.

“Rations, Noodles, Ready Meal and Drumsticks,” he repeated, and made a note to tell Estinien this at the earliest opportunity. He could almost imagine the sheer agony on his friend’s face at hearing these names – it was too funny, “I sense a theme.”
“I like food,” Aza said innocently, not sounding embarrassed at all, “And at least they’re better names than what Bluebird called hers.”

Aza waited pointedly, and indulgently Aymeric asked; “What did she call hers?”

“Horsebird,” Aza sniggered, “She gives me shit for my namin’ style and calls her Chocobo ‘Horsebird’. She can’t say shit.”

Aymeric listened to Aza laugh, liking the low, husky edge to it, before he decided to sate some of his curiosity, “Is Bluebird a friend of yours?”

“Yes,” Aza’s tail brushed against the back of his thigh, “She’s an old war buddy of mine and, well, my sister in all but blood. We grew up together,” his tone lilted teasingly, “So don’t worry, she isn’t someone to compete with.”

Aymeric hummed innocently, slowing his steps when they reached a crossroads, “I wasn’t thinking that.”

“Mnhmm, sure,” Aza gently bumped his hip against him, his body a firm line against his side as he subtle urged him to turn left, down a narrow street that led away from the city centre, “Though, I guess this is a good time to ask what you want out of this.”

Aymeric paused, surprised at the bluntness – but relieved at the same time. As fun as it was lightly exploring the possibilities, having a clear-cut idea of what they both expected would reduce chances of awkwardness, “I’m fairly flexible,” he finally said, “Your company is pleasant enough, if you’re wanting to keep it slow.”

Aza let out that low, husky laugh again, “Babe, I’m always about going fast. If you had plans of fuckin’ me into the mattress tonight, I’m more than happy to accommodate you.”

Aymeric felt his pulse pick up slightly at that because he had been, ah, entertaining that lovely possibility, “And if I said I was interested in more than just tonight?”

“Then I’m happy with that too,” Aza purred, a low rumble that made Aymeric shiver, “We can keep it casual, if you want. See where it goes, how much fun we have… it doesn’t have to be about sex, either. You’re new here, right? I can show you around the city too and introduce you to some people, show you a few places. Mor Dhona’s all about makin’ friends.”

“I’d like that,” Aymeric murmured, feeling something relax in him now that clear expectations were drawn, “Starting casual, I mean.”

Aza’s gait gained a bit of a swagger to it, his tail flicking side to side in open satisfaction, “Great. I’ll make sure you’ll have lotsa fun, handsome.”

Aymeric didn’t doubt it – he was having fun already. Aza was so easy to talk to, his laidback, casual attitude helped him to feel relaxed after a busy day of bashing his head against dense paperwork on the treatises of the Eorzean Alliance and the Garlemald Peace Treaty. If this ended up becoming a long-term, casual relationship, then Aymeric was certain this posting wasn’t going to be as harrowing as he initially feared.

“Hmm, you’ve given me high expectations now,” he teased lightly, glancing down to see Aza peering up at him with a cheeky smile and brightly amused, golden eyes, “You sure that was wise?”

“Babe, I’ll exceed them, just you watch,” Aza said cockily, though Aymeric found it difficult to doubt him, “It’s my thing, to exceed high expectations.”
“Cocky…” Aymeric murmured, his hot gaze lingering on him. He really wanted to kiss him right now but, location and height difference… hmm…

Aza must’ve noticed something in his expression because he suddenly looked a little sly, his tail curving upwards, “You like it though, mm?”

“Hmm,” Aymeric made himself look away, though he was incredibly aware of the press of his body against his side, the way his tail kept teasingly brushing against the back of his thigh and his backside, “Maybe a little.”

“A little, he says,” Aza laughed at him, “You looked like you were undressin’ me with your eyes there.”

“Probably because I was,” Aymeric said shamelessly, smiling to himself when Aza made a small noise in the back of his throat, “I was remembering this morning, where you stunned me with your perfect form.”

“Perf.” Aza spluttered, sounding both pleased and embarrassed in equal measure. Ah, how adorable, that he was bold-faced when speaking crudely, but flustered over straight-forward flirting, “I think I might’ve addled your wits a bit, when bonkin’ you with my surfboard.”

“Mm, no, my wits are all here,” Aymeric said cheerfully, “Though, I admit, some of my friends will say I have strange tastes in men.”

“Strange tastes! Well, I guess that’s true,” Aza chuckled, “Not many would instantly start flirtin’ with some ol’ scarred Miqo’te that practically ran ‘em over.”

“I don’t mind the scars,” Aymeric said honestly. Truly, if anything, they attracted his attention more – curiosity, mostly, but also admiration. Ishgard had been entrenched in war long enough for there to be a cultural admiration for a soldier who lived long enough to carry such scars, though he wondered what Aza must’ve endured to gain them. He knew the war had been brutal on the frontline soldiers and mercenaries, but several of those scars looked to be in near fatal places. He must’ve been lucky enough to have a White Mage on hand during those times…

“Ah, right, you Ishgardians always have a fetish for them,” Aza said, his tone idle, “Well, feel free to explore away, when we’re in bed. I ain’t shy about them.”

“If you’re comfortable with that,” Aymeric said, cautious of overstepping any boundaries. Aza sounded a little too detached about it and he didn’t feel as relaxed as before, “We don’t need to discuss them if you don’t want to.”

“Mm, it’s fine,” Aza insisted, his free hand trailing down his forearm in a gentle gesture, “We’ll see how it goes.”

Well, if Aza was so certain about that… Aymeric let the topic drop, the rain filling in the silence that followed. But it wasn’t uncomfortable. There was something warm and companionable that had relaxed between them, Aymeric slowly able to build a profile of this lovely, handsome Miqo’te at his side. It made him want to know more, really, his interest eclipsing pure physical attraction.

Really, thank **Halone** he had been late this morning, otherwise he may’ve missed such a treasure entirely, and wouldn’t that have been a shame?
Saturio sas Forius was not having a good night.

He was very tempted to crack open the bottle of wine sitting in the bottom drawer of his desk as he read, and reread, the email on his Magi-Terminal, wondering if he had somehow dozed off and entered into a horrible nightmare without realising. There was no way this was true, was it? They couldn’t be sending him to replace Flavia sas Livius as the lead ambassador of the peace treaty?

Saturio leaned back in his seat, dismay eating a pit in his stomach as he stared at the name glaring out at him in bold capitals; Asahi sas Brutus.

A fierce supporter of Zenos wir Galvus, who had been stripped of his title yae after failing to stop the Eorzean tide breaking over Garlemald’s gates. Asahi was irrationally rabid in his defence of the Emperor’s son and had consistently headed several petitions for Garlemald to demand the Warrior of Light’s extradition for ‘war crimes’ in return for the continuation of the peace treaty. It was stupid. While Eorzea never openly supported or praised the Warrior of Light, the fact was he was their leashed attack dog, ready and waiting to be loosed the moment Garlemald put up too much a fuss. There was no way Eorzea would willingly hand over such a trump card.

Especially when that trump card so thoroughly crushed Zenos wir Galvus under heel. It’d be the height of madness to cast aside such a terrible advantage, all to soothe a City State that they could’ve easily burned to the ground instead. Savages that they are, Eorzea did have some standards at least.

Saturio drummed his fingers on his desk in a nervous gesture, contemplating calling some contacts in the capital. This must be some sort of mistake, right? Asahi was the worst choice to send – he was unpredictable and passionate, and Mor Dhona was not a place friendly towards the Emperor’s son. Zenos wir Galvus did tremendous damage in this area near the end of the war, and the old mercenaries and soldiers settled here remembered it with deep, seething grudges. If anything, it was lucky Eorzea hadn’t demanded Zenos’s head for his crimes against their citizens.

“I need to- to mitigate this, somehow,” he muttered to himself. As lead ambassador, Asahi would be granted the power to speak on behalf of the Emperor, and last thing they needed was Asahi getting incredibly impassioned and deciding something that all of Garlemald would regret. Then again, Asahi was terribly eloquent and persuasive when calm and collected, but…

Oh fuck. Saturio stiffened when a sudden thought came to him. The foyer. The fucking statue.

The monument to the Warrior of Light, standing proud and defiant in the foyer of the Rising Stones had always been a sore point with any Garlean civil servant working here. Saturio, who had been picked for his even temper and open-mindedness felt anger and resentment every time his eyes landed on the damned thing. It was why he always took the rear entrance into work, just so he could avoid the stupid thing. But Asahi… fuck. He’ll flip his shit if he had to see that every day.

Mind made up, Saturio decisively yanked open his drawer and pulled out the wine bottle. This was definitely a night to get blind stinking drunk. The peace treaty was doomed if Asahi sas Brutus was taking the reins of it. Or, maybe if they’re lucky, he might be sent back in disgrace and someone saner might be sent in his stead!

But, Saturio couldn’t shake off a heavy, lingering feeling of dread as he popped open the wine bottle. His sixth sense said disaster was brewing on the horizon, and if it was, he wasn’t going to face it sober.
Yup, Asahi is gonna be one of the main players in this fic - also extra drama because Asahi had actually encountered WoL during the war, even if WoL had a helmet on at the time. Aza is most definitely going to have a heart attack when he bumps into him at the Rising Stones ; )

(also yes, Aza hates the WoL statue in the foyer so he always tries to pretend the stupid thing doesn't exist)

Please comment/kudos if you liked!
For all their defiance, Garlemald burned eventually.

Aza sat at the base of the Emperor’s broken statue that loomed in the palace courtyard, too weary to stand. Bluebird leaned over him, clasping his cheeks between her bloodied, calloused hands, her thumbs rubbing underneath his eyes as he struggled to focus on her. Her lips moved, over and over and over. The world fuzzed grey.

“Focus on me, Aza,” she was saying, “C’mon, you dumb fuck. You’ve got a whole retirement plan waiting for you. Focus on me. There, see, like that. C’mon. Look at me.”

Aza obeyed. He focused on her.

“I have to die now,” he told her blankly, “I’ve finished my mission.”

“Shut up,” Bluebird snapped at him, “They can say that all they want, but you won this damned war for them. You deserve to be a person now. I’ll stab any fucker who says otherwise.”

He didn’t doubt her. He listed to the side, drained.

There was a crunch of stone, and Bluebird cursed softly. The yelling of voices, the blare of alarms, crackle of gunfire and the sharp taste of magic – aether. Aether. Aether.

“The only thing that’s dying is this Warrior of Light shit,” Bluebird told him brusquely. She started unbuckling his breastplate, tearing off the vambraces that were so iconic of the Warrior of Light. He offered no resistance, almost tumbling off the cracked pedestal from Bluebird’s brisk movements. Soon, he was down to the dark fatigues underneath, the Scion’s emblem a dirty grey on his left arm. Bluebird tossed his armour aside like it was worthless trash.

She pulled him to his feet, supporting him with an arm over her shoulder.

There were so many bodies around them, he noted distantly. Scions, Garleans – they all looked the same when dead. Sprawled ragdolls, burned and blackened or blown apart, pathetically lying in slagged craters or crushed beneath stone. Except for him. The Prince. Aza’s head spun, gasping in pain when Bluebird made him walk, dragging him onwards, towards the noise of shouting – the rest of the Eorzean Alliance, coming up along the path the Crystal Braves – the Scions infantry – had carved through Garlemald – and all died for it. Just them now.

“Remember,” Bluebird whispered to him, “You’re Aza. You’re a person. You deserve to live, so you will. Understand? You’re going to live now, and damn them all.”

“Live…” Aza mumbled, everything dropping into a dull, incomprehensible roar. All he could smell was smoke, all he could feel was a deep, agonising pain that went soul deep, all he could see was a greyed-out world that didn’t matter anymore.

Garlemald burned.
Aza could still smell the ash when he stirred awake.

Morning sunlight was spilling through his bedroom window, and Aza stared at it blearily, letting the lingering memory fade with his sleep. Once, that would’ve made him jerk awake in a cold, trembling sweat, remembering the stink of fire and ash and that awful pain – but time dulled the fangs of that dream. It still made his stomach twist uncomfortably, his heart flutter, but like Dr. Crisp told him, he focused on the Now, he breathed, he focused on the bright, Chocobo patterned curtains dappled with sunlight, and… relaxed.

He gently pushed the memory down.

A soft noise behind him drew his attention, sleepy and husky. Aza brushed aside the prickly feeling that always trotted on the heels of his dream-memories and carefully rolled over, so not to disturb the arm draped over his waist overly much. He came nose to nose with his fuck-buddy of the night: the lovely Aymeric.

His handsome face was relaxed with sleep, his dark, thick eyelashes fluttering minutely. His hair was mussed, inky black locks half-curled against the pillow, and a lovely, bared neck where he could see the lingering marks from their earlier fucking. Aza remembered the noises he made when he dug his fangs right in, remembered how he’d climaxed and panted and begged and squirmed-

Aza let out a sigh, reaching out to gently press his finger against that bruise. Aymeric’s pulse fluttered, strong and slow.

This was a better thing to wake up to.

Last night had been good. As well as being charming and lovely to look at, Aymeric had been a hungry fiend in bed. Adaptable too. Rare was it for Aza to find a man to his tastes who was just as eager to spread his legs and get fucked into the mattress just as hard as they wanted to fuck him. Aymeric was perfect, really. It made Aza almost wary as to how it was going to go all wrong. Such nice things never tumbled into his lap without some kind of painful fishbook waiting to catch him.

He dismissed that gloomy thought with a flick of his ear, half-sitting up to prop himself on his elbow, letting his thumb brush over the sharp line of Aymeric’s jaw, then, over his bottom lip. Soft and plump, and Aymeric made an adorable sleepy noise, lips moving against the pad of his thumb. Gods, he really wanted to kiss him, but…

Aymeric had a job, he realised irritably. It was about… oh, past six in the morning, and if he remembered rightly, those government jobs tended to start around nineish? Eight, if you were Alphie. He supposed the right thing would be to wake his lovely fuck-buddy up and pat him on the ass to let him be on his way before he was late.

Aza rarely, if ever, did the right thing without being prompted.

With a wicked smile, he let his hand cup against the curve of Aymeric’s neck, shifting close and letting his tail flick over his hip. “Aymeric~” he purred, giving him the gentlest of jostles, “Time to wake up, handsome.”

“Mmn…” Aymeric grumbled, resisting at first, before slowly opening his eyes, blinking in fuzzy drowsiness. It was unbearably cute, “Mm? What…?”

“Mornin’,” Aza chirped with obnoxious cheer, hooking a leg over Aymeric’s and practically sprawling on top of him. His fuckbuddy let out a small ‘oof’ of surprise, but quickly adjusted, half-rolling onto his back and his hands gripping his hips as Aza settled, nice and comfortably, atop of
him. His body was all firm, perfect muscle, warm, and pressing up so nice. Aza rocked against his toned stomach, feeling himself stiffen.

“…morning,” Aymeric was looking a bit more alert now, his mouth curving into an amused smile, “Frisky already?”

“Mm,” Aza smiled, utterly shameless, letting his tail curl up as Aymeric’s hands moved to clutch at his ass instead. He let out a low, pleased noise when his fuckbuddy squeezed his buttocks, coaxing him to rock a bit harder. Even when groggy with sleep, Aymeric was quick on the uptake. Perfect. Aza’s terrible dream was now easily forgotten.

“What’s the ti-mmn…” Aymeric politely paused when Aza kissed him, then yielded when he pressed, and when they parted they were both panting and flushed. Aymeric looked a lovely mix of dazed and sleepy and aroused, and it was such a fuckable expression that Aza very nearly cursed from the unfairness of it all. Aymeric was so effortlessly provocative and lovely, it should be a crime.

“S’past six,” Aza murmured breathlessly, all but grinding against his fuckbuddy’s perfect stomach, peppering short, insistent kisses against that equally perfect mouth. “Do you, mmn, have time…?”

“Always for you,” Aymeric returned seemingly on automatic – then rolled them over.

Aza laughed a bit from surprise, breathless from anticipation, and he caught a flash of a too pleased grin on Aymeric’s face before he bent low over his chest and – oh, this was why he liked him so much, Aza thought delightedly, tangling his fingers into his thick, dark hair and stroking it affectionately. Trailing a line Aymeric was becoming masterfully familiar with, he kissed and nipped along his chest, briefly teasing a pert nipple, following a long scar that trailed down to his hip, nuzzling his happy trail and… It didn’t take long. Still sensitive from last night, too riled and too eager to feel pleasure, Aymeric had him gasping and begging within a minute. His warm mouth, very clever tongue (fucking thing was dangerous for his sexual stamina), the way he managed to get that near-Miqo’te purr, right in the back of his throat, vibrating through his cock and making him dig his heels in, hips thrusting hard into that mouth, Aymeric eagerly taking it, swallowing-

-and stopped.

Aza whined as he humped thin air, blinking open his eyes to see Aymeric smiling up at him from between his spread thighs – oh, that was a memory Aza was keeping for a lonely night. Aymeric’s kiss-bruised lips, slightly dampened, curved into that wicked smile, framed between his spread, trembling thighs and… Aymeric cocked his head, affecting an innocent expression Aza didn’t believe for one second. Fucker knew Aza had been close.

“Can I take you?” Aymeric asked, ever so politely, “Or are you too sore?”

Aza wasn’t sure whether to be annoyed or pleased. He settled on a mix of both, swatting him lightly with his tail before bending a leg to push the heel of his foot against his shoulder. Aymeric obediently backed off.

“You’re gonna to kill me at this rate,” Aza huffed, but he rolled over once Aymeric gave him the space to do so. This would be more comfortable on his hip, which was aching a little from all the weird and wonderful positions he had to do last night. He groaned when his sensitive cock pressed against the mattress beneath him, and he couldn’t help but rut slightly, his thighs spreading and his tail lifting up, curling towards him, a silent invitation.
Aymeric made a low, cut-off noise behind him. Aza hid his smirk into his pillow, the cloth cool against his hot cheeks. The mattress dipped slightly, a clatter as Aymeric grabbed the heavily abused lube off the bedside table, and... mn, Aza purred when he felt wet, impatient fingers press against his loose entrance, pushing against them eagerly. They slipped in, and he moaned quietly when Aymeric thrust quickly and deep, fingers curling, scissoring, making sure he was still loose and ready and-

Aza’s back arched and he gasped when the very tips of Aymeric’s fingers prodded his sweet spot. He nearly came on the spot, biting his bottom lip hard as he felt his muscles clench tight, fighting against that amazing, hot surge of pleasure. Oh fucking- too sensitive for that. The mattress squeaked loudly as he frantically humped the bed, finding himself just – just teetering, Aymeric’s fingerfucking him hard but just avoiding that sweet spot now, the teasing asshole, and- and- and-

Like before, just as he felt the first cramps of orgasm, Aymeric stopped.

“Oh, you fuck,” Aza gasped, all but throttling his pillow with a white-knuckled grip as Aymeric grasped his hips, pulling them up high enough so he couldn’t grind himself to completion, “You tease.”

“Now, now, Aza,” Aymeric laughed huskily, the rough, low noise making Aza’s belly clench pleasantly, “If you keep saying such mean things, I might not finish.”

“Oh, you will,” Aza huffed, his tail flicking, then – he held his breath when he felt Aymeric suddenly press close and- push in. He was a wonderful size, big enough and thick enough that it filled him so much but not too much, and he let out a shamelessly low, long moan of delight as his fuckbuddy pushed all the way in in one smooth, albeit torturously slow, thrust.

Aymeric’s breathing was short and strained, his hands tight around his hips as he waited – for a moment, just long enough for Aza to shakily exhale and – then he was moving, hard, fast, mattress squeaking, headboard striking the wall and Aza- and Aza- Gods, he could barely think, good, thank fuck, his hips frantically pushing back to meet the hard, unrelenting thrusts, trembling when Aymeric clumsily reached around him, curling his calloused fingers around his cock, jerking him off, hard, fast, until- until- until-

He didn’t stop this time. Aymeric fucked him until his orgasm hit him hard enough to murder all his wits. Aza writhed, his moans muffled when he mindlessly bit his pillow, every nerve singing with pleasure, Aymeric milking him dry with sharp, insistent jerks of his hand, grinding hard into him, Aza clenched tight and- ah. Aza shuddered when he felt warm wetness spill into him, Aymeric breathing out his name in absolute adoration. The sound of his name in that voice... fuck, fuck, that was definitely being remembered for lonely nights.

Aza groaned breathlessly when Aymeric pulled out of him, feeling a wet, ticklish feeling trail down the inside of his thighs. The mattress felt wet underneath him when his fuckbuddy let his hips drop, but he didn’t care, too dazed and sated. His tail flopped weakly onto the bed, and Aymeric shifted behind him – Aza wondered if he would still be up for snuggling before he had to leave, he was happy enough to do that last night...

“Gods...” Aymeric mumbled behind him, sounding a little dazed. Aza twitched in surprise when he felt him lean over and kiss the space just above his tail, making him shiver down to his toes, “I don’t think I could ever tire of fucking you.”

“Fuck, I hope you don’t get tired of fuckin’ me,” Aza mumbled into his pillow, and Aymeric breathed out a chuckle against his skin, kissing him from the base of his tail, over the curve of his ass, his hands settling on the back of his thighs. Aza made a low, inquisitive sound, curious – that quickly turned into a gasp when Aymeric pushed his thighs apart, hands sliding up, thumbs pressing into his
buttocks and spreading them and-

That filthy man.

“Aymeric!” Aza gasped, half-scandalised, when he felt the warm drag of his tongue, unthinkingly arching his back into it with a strained moan. Oh fuck, he’d never had anyone eat him out before but – oh damn, wow, okay, Aza didn’t know a tongue licking right there could feel that good. He panted when Aymeric dug his thumbs in a bit more, spreading him wider, lapping up the cum that leaked out, tongue teasingly pressing in and-

Well, fuck him. He honestly barely remembered what happened next.

He remembered cumming all over again though, definitely remembered that. Begging mindlessly (“please, please, oh Aymeric, fuck, please, please”) until he couldn’t barely think past his orgasm, rutting against the bed and squirming until the pleasure became needle-sharp sensitive and Aymeric, mercifully, stopped. Oh Gods, he didn’t know if he was being punished or rewarded by inviting this sex fiend into his bed. One night he had him, and Aza already felt fucked out for the week.

Aymeric kissed the back of his shoulder as Aza tried to catch his breath, and he could feel him smiling in smug satisfaction, “Hmm, was that too much?”

“Mmmgrphfh,” Aza mumbled incoherently into his pillow. He was having Aymeric lick him clean every time he cummed in him now, holy shit, “You’re th’devil, sent t’test me…”

Aymeric laughed at that, and it was such a lovely noise. Make him laugh more often, his dazed brain commanded.

Aza lifted his head, glancing at the clock sitting on his bedside table. Almost seven now. Aymeric was nuzzling the back of his neck, snuggling against him – a hugger, nice, Aza loved a bit of affection after doing the nasty – and Aza basked in it for a long, selfish moment. This guy really was perfect. He hoped he stuck around for a while. Most of his fuckbuddies bored him after a while, but he had a good feeling about this one. He really liked him.

Aza flicked his tail at him, “Babe, what time’s work for you?”

“Nine,” Aymeric kissed his shoulder again, “I’m resigned to being late.”

Aza tisked, smacking him properly with his tail, “No, you’re not gonna be late. C’mon, get off me.”

Aymeric grumbled, but another smack of his tail coaxed him to roll off him. He flopped like some sated big cat on the bed, and Aza eyed him with an amused smile as Aymeric stretched out before pillowing his head on his arm, his eyes heavy-lidded and sleepy. Very nice.

“I’ll drive you,” Aza offered, in a good enough mood to endure the awful morning traffic with this handsome man at his side, “But only if you go shower.”

“Will you join me?” Aymeric asked a bit cheekily.

Aza flicked his forehead. Aymeric let out an amusing, high-pitched noise of surprise, “Go shower.”

Aymeric sighed but did as he was told. He rolled off the bed, paused to stretch – Aza keenly watched him – and lazily ambled to the bathroom.

“And wash your mouth out if you want me to keep kissin’ you!” Aza called after him, “I know where it’s been!”
Aymeric was in heaven.

Or, that’s how it felt that morning. From the moment he picked up his new companion last night, all the way through the morning of Aza prodding him to shower, to have breakfast with him (Aza was sinfully good at scrambled eggs) and even driving him to his home, so he could pick up a fresh suit for work. Aymeric was certain he hadn’t stopped smiling once since they left Aza’s home, and he didn’t care. The morning just felt too great, even as tired as he felt.

Aza seemed to be pleased too. He was reclined lazily in the driver’s seat, one hand on the steering wheel, his other elbow resting on the door, window open so his hair fluttered about his face. Somehow, he managed to look attractively cool, even when dressed in an open summer shirt printed with colourful flowers, and dark blue boardshorts and flipflops. A pair of sunglasses perched on his nose, and all in all he looked like he should be reclining on Costa de Sol with a coconut drink in hand.

The car growled when Aza eased it into a narrow parking space a street away from the Rising Stones, Aymeric feeling the entire vehicle vibrate under him. It was a repurposed Garlean Reaper Vehicle, an old model too, so it was blocky and huge and plated, a beast compared to the tiny civilian Magi-Cars everyone else possessed. Aymeric had no idea how Aza got his hands on one, considering they were all meant to be decommissioned after the war, but since most of its weapon systems had been ripped out, Aymeric turned a blind eye to (the admittedly illegal) vehicle.

He must have a permit for it, he told himself. If Aza so openly drove around in it, he must be allowed it, right?

(Though, that did remind him that he didn’t really know what Aza actually did for a job…)

“There we go,” Aza hummed, turning the vehicle off. The whole thing shuddered at it was powered down, its powerful engine rumbling into silence, “Right on time.”

Aza was right, Aymeric had ten minutes before Lucia would start crucifying him for his tardy ways. What luck.

“Thank you,” he began, but paused when Aza unbuckled and opened his door, surprised. Was he walking him to work too?

“No problem,” Aza said cheerily, hopping out of the vehicle. Aymeric hurried to do the same. The door locked the moment he shut it, and Aza swaggered around the front of his vehicle to meet him on the pavement.

“I'll walk you,” Aza said, cramming his hands into his short’s pockets, “I’m gonna visit someone in there anyway.”

“Oh?” Aymeric asked. He had a fleeting urge to hold his hand, or have Aza snuggled up against his side like their walk back last night… but it was in the morning now, and Aza seemed to be keeping some distance. It confused him, but… maybe he wasn’t a fan of PDA in crowded areas? Aymeric stifled his disappointment and contented himself with openly admiring his new companion, “Do you work with them or…?”

“Nah. I'm just friends with some people,” Aza said, “From the War and stuff. Y’know.”

Aymeric didn’t press. Aza suddenly seemed a little tense – as he always did whenever the War was
brought up. He skirted to a different topic instead, “Are you free again tonight?”

“Again?” Aza laughed loudly, “Seriously?”

“I really enjoyed tonight.”

“Hmm… well, sure,” Aza shrugged his shoulders, “If you’re free. Though, maybe we can go for a bit of socialisin’? I did promise you to show you around the city.”

“Anything you want to do.”

“Charmer,” Aza purred, but he looked pleased. Aymeric couldn’t help but smile like the besotted idiot he was.

They stepped into the Rising Stones. The statue of the Warrior of Light loomed, as intimidating in the light of day as it was at night, and a few people were mingling around it, chatting. A new receptionist sat at the desk, a mousey haired Lalafell who was peering over at them with an expression of exasperation. Or, rather, at Aza. Compared to all the smartly dressed civil servants, Aza’s casual-wear stuck out like a sore thumb.

“Well, this is where we part ways, handsome,” Aza told him, looking blissfully oblivious – or uncaring – of the stares he was bringing, “Feel free to call me whenever.”

“How about lunchtime?” Aymeric asked cheekily, and was delighted when Aza laughed.

“Oh, you’re lovely,” his companion sighed. He shifted his weight to one leg, and crooked a finger Aymeric’s way, “C’mere, bend over, handsome.”

Giddy, Aymeric did so.

Aza kissed him, right there, in the middle of the Rising Stones. Chaste and quick, but still a public display of affection, and pulled away with a smile. He adjusted his sunglasses and wagged his fingers at him, “See you later, handsome.”

And with that, Aza swaggered away, his tail swishing confidently. People watched him go. Stared at him.

It took every scrap of willpower not to blush, and Aymeric hurriedly went the opposite way towards his office. No doubt that gossip was going to spread to everywhere before the day was done. Not even in his job for more than two days, and already he’s making himself memorable by openly kissing a colourful character like Aza. Not that he cared. Aymeric just felt happy. Relaxed. He had a good feeling about this.

Except, the good feeling lasted until he stepped foot in his office and regaled Lucia with how perfect of a date Aza was, how he fit almost every standard he had, how lovely and accommodating and handsome, Lucia, have you seen him? Look, he had a photo on his linkpearl and-

And of course, Lucia, who had long since appointed herself the role of keeping his idealistic, passionate self in line, burst his bubble with, “If you ask me, sir, he sounds a bit too perfect. He could be a honeypot.”

Aymeric paused at that, halfway through opening his photos on his linkpearl.

“…a honeypot?” he frowned at the suggestion, “From who?”
Lucia gave him a look like he was a dim-witted child, “Sir, you’re the new Ishgardian representative for the peace treaty with Garlemald. What state actor would have a vested interest in compromising you to gather information on Ishgard’s intentions for it?”

Oh.

That wonderful happy feeling Aymeric had woken up with instantly deflated, because… that did make an awful amount of sense. His first day here and he runs into a handsome Miqo’te that hit all of his preferences, who was eager and willing to hop into bed with him, very accommodating to his desires and encouraging his interest… and Garlemald were notorious for running spies throughout all levels of society. Lucia was a perfect example, after all, having managed to infiltrate the isolated Ishgardian society before they joined the Eorzean Alliance.

“He never asked me about anything sensitive,” Aymeric defended weakly.

“You know how honeypots go, sir. He’ll try to win your trust first before broaching those subjects.”

Aymeric sat back in his office seat, fiddling with his linkpearl. He didn’t want to believe Aza was a potential honeypot – but enough about him was suspicious, and he said he needed to meet someone here… no, he wasn’t going to leap to conclusions. He’ll just be mindful of what he said around Aza, and… maybe Aymeric was just very lucky and Aza was what he appeared to be: a retired mercenary looking for a few weeks of naughty fun. He’d feel awful if he upset him by thinking he was a Garlean agent. Still, the suspicion niggled now that Lucia put it in his head…

“I can investigate him, sir,” Lucia offered, “Just a low-level one, to ensure his identity checks out.”

That felt invasive, but it was within Lucia’s purview as his bodyguard and aide. He had a feeling she’d do it anyway even if he said no, “Just a low-level one,” he sighed, morosely putting his phone way, “Nothing sensitive.”

“Of course, sir,” Lucia murmured, looking genuinely apologetic for ruining his good mood.

Aymeric sighed, turning on his terminal and readying himself for a long day of work. Aza, a Garlean honeypot… the idea was damnably plausible, but Aymeric was hoping otherwise. Lucia will look into him, and hopefully Aza will prove to be who he says he is, and then Aymeric could go back to shamelessly enjoying his amazing company for as long as he was able to. Please, Halone, grant him this at least.

Lucia, unsurprisingly, ended up opening a can of worms.

Chapter End Notes

oh wow i finally updated one of my older WIPs!

yeah so. yeah. this fic is gonna have a lot of shameless smut in it. sorry not sorry. also not sorry for having aza dress up like a hawaiian tourist.

please comment/kudos if you enjoyed!
Aza strolled into Alphie’s office that wonderful, bright morning to his friend’s deeply disapproving glare.

“The Ishgardian diplomat,” Alphie said flatly.

“Well, good mornin’ to you too,” Aza replied promptly, kicking the office door shut behind him and moving to the squishy armchair before Alphie’s desk. His friend had gone up in the world – and in height, since the end of the War. His office was spacious, though it didn’t seem like it with the amount of steel filing cabinets lining the walls, overstuffed with documents and treatises. Aza was certain Alphie had over a thousand different versions of the Garlean peace treaty, all rejected and quibbled over still. The only thing that made the office less of a storage room was the large window that allowed a beautiful view over Revenant’s Toll, sunlight spilling in and making Alphie’s heavy oaken desk gleam.

He had a high-tech Magi-Terminal perched on one side, and a staggering pile of paperwork on the other… and a photograph of the Scions after the Siege of Garlemald. Alphie, Alisaie, Y’shtola, Lyse, Thancred, Arenvald, Krile, Urianger… and himself, his identity hidden behind that snarling beast helm the Warrior of Light was known for.

They were all filthy and exhausted in that photo – but so happy, relieved… looking at it always made Aza feel strangely sad.

So, he glanced away from it, slouching back in the squishy armchair like a delinquent teenager, smiling at Alphie’s peevish face, “How’re you?”

“Annoyed… and amazed,” Alphie grumbled, pushing his fingers through his hair and threatening to upset his tight ponytail, “One day, Aza. Aymeric de Borel had been in his post for one day, and you bed him.”

Aza cocked his head, “Alphie, it’s kinda creepy how you keep track of my sex life.”

As expected, Alphie turned a bright shade of pink, “I wasn’t keeping- his aide told me when I found our meeting abruptly rescheduled. She said, and I quote, ‘he’s been seduced away by a Miqo’te’ and I instantlly knew it was you.”

Oh wow, Aymeric snubbed Alphie for him? Aza made a mental note to give him a high-five for that later, “Rude. There’re loads of Miqo’te around here thirsty for Elezens.”

“I’m not having this conversation with you,” Alphie sniffed, “Go and cause mischief somewhere else.”

“Nah, I came here for a reason,” Aza pushed himself out of his lazy slouch, leaning forwards slightly, “Bluebird says you’re gettin’ the old gang back together.”

Alphie paused, glancing about his office as if expecting to find Garleans hiding behind his filing cabinets. Once satisfied they were alone, and the door was firmly shut, he fiddled with his terminal until traditional Gridanian music began playing from it. Loud enough to muffle their voices from any would be passerbys of the office, but quiet enough for them to talk comfortably.
“I am,” Alphie said, no longer his easily flustered young friend, but the serious diplomat of the Scions. He was studying him closely, “Is this a sign of your interest?”

“No,” Aza said bluntly, “I’m not interested.”

“But you are asking about it.”

Aza leaned back in his seat, pushing his sunglasses back up so they hid his eyes entirely. He looked at the photograph, where all the Scions stood there with tired, relieved smiles… except for him, with his face shrouded. This was the only ‘legal’ photograph with the Warrior of Light in it. Aza knew Alphie got inundated with requests from collectors and the like to buy it off him. He never sold it, even though he had copies.

“I thought the peace treaty is going well?” Aza asked, “The Garleans are ready to sign and formally cease all hostilities.”

“Allegedly,” Alphie muttered, “That’s the line we feed the media, but…”

He went quiet. Aza waited.

“Asahi sas Brutus is replacing the Garlean ambassador,” Alphie finally said, “And there have been some reports that Zenos wir Galvus has returned to the public eye for the first time since the conclusion of the war. The Emperor’s health wanes, and with no clear heir from Zenos’s fall from grace… there are rumblings of a potential civil war, or a coup.”

Aza absorbed this, carefully compartmentalising the ugly surge of rage that simmered in him. Asahi. Zenos. His two most loathed creatures that dared to exist on the same planet as him. The Warrior of Light was mortal enemies with them… but Aza didn’t know them, so he swallowed that anger down, exhaled, remembered Dr. Crisp’s advice, and just said, “Sounds bad.”

Alphie was watching him carefully, expression neutral.

“I think…” he said after a pause, “Asahi is being sent here to intentionally sabotage the treaty.”

“Why?” Aza asked, “That would just fuck over the Garleans more than us. Even without- without the Warrior of Light, Garlemald is so weak that the Eorzean Alliance will just steamroll it. Also, like you said, a coup is on the horizon. They can all rip each other apart and solve our problem for us.”

“I would just sit more comfortably knowing we are in a position to react quickly,” Alphie sighed, “Please, Aza, you’re-”

“No,” Aza said, slouching back in his seat. He adjusted his sunglasses again. His fingers were shaking, and he could feel himself break out into a cold sweat, pulse fluttering rabbit-quick, “I can’t. I… I don’t do that stuff anymore. I don’t want…”

Alphie lowered his gaze, his mouth twisting – but he didn’t push.

“Very well,” he murmured, “I won’t force you, Aza. If you don’t want to, you don’t have to. You have that choice now.”

Alphie turned the music off and gave Aza a moment to compose himself by politely looking out of the window.

“So… Aymeric de Borel,” Alphie said, turning back to him when Aza could breathe semi-normally again, “How did you two meet?”
Aza latched onto the topic change, smiling a bit weakly as he began, “Well, um, I almost knocked him out with my surfboard, and…”

Lucia had thought checking a retired mercenary’s identity would be a straightforward and simple task.

Not so.

After leaving Aymeric to claw his way through his predecessor’s insane filing system – that was a fight she wasn’t willing to sacrifice her sanity for – she decided to do a quick detour to the administrative part of the Rising Stones. The small office there was manned by a very tired looking Keeper woman who didn’t question Lucia asking to see the old mercenary listings from five years ago. It came at the cost of waiting for twenty minutes as the clerk – Nahdi, her nametag said – disappeared into the file storage room and noisily bumbled about in there. Lucia heard many filing cabinets wrenched open, a lot of sneezing, and a few muttered curses before, finally, Nahdi trotted out carrying a large, beige folder full to bursting, sheaves of paper threatening to spill out.

“Here ya go, miss,” Nahdi said, slamming the folder down and sending a thick wave of dust up, “No idea why ya so interested in out of date listin’s, but this ’ere is all the mercenaries group that participated in the War. You doin’ a history paper or somethin’?”

“Yes,” Lucia said without hesitation, lifting the folder up. With a murmured thanks, she went to the long armchair before a low coffee table squashed into the corner of the administrative office. Nahdi eyed her curiously for a few seconds before turning back to the game she’d been playing on her linkpearl earlier.

During the War there had been up to ninety-four mercenary groups that had been assimilated into the Eorzean Alliance army. The unpleasant truth was was that the City States never had large standing armies. Their Grand Companies were a defence force, numerous enough to enforce the local law and fight off Beast Tribe incursions into their territory, but they weren’t stood up to act as a functioning army. In fact, Ishgard was the only City State that had a powerful army, and their joining of the Eorzean Alliance was the true turning point of the War.

But before Ishgard had joined the fray, the mercenaries had propped up the Eorzean Alliance. They were a dime a dozen – mostly local defenders in frontier villages where the Grand Companies couldn’t effectively respond to attacks from Beast Tribes or bandits. Out there everyone and their grandmother had the outdated Garlean gunblade that were as common as copper gil coins – Thanalan especially was particularly lousy with them the further into the desert you went, with roving bands of mercenaries driving about in white, bullet hole ridden Aircutters occasionally taking pot shots at each other or joining forces to harass the Amal’ja tribes.

In short, there were many mercenary groups… but only a few were good. The Company of Heroes was the most famous Eorzean mercenary outfit. They were utilised alongside Special Forces, and Lucia recalled having one of their battalions support her Ishgardian Company during the Battle of Silvertear Falls. They were good, strong men, and this was the first listing she looked through.

A Limsa Lominsa outfit, the Company of Heroes were mostly known for defeating the Primal Titan just before the War really picked up speed. After that their recruitment levels spiked, and they became the biggest military force beside the Maelstrom within Vylbrand. It meant there were a lot of names to read through. Luckily, Lucia was a fast skim-reader.
Unluckily, whoever wrote this list didn’t believe in alphabetising the damn thing, so it was when
Lucia flipped through thirty pages worth of names, printed in the tiniest lettering known to
Spokenkind, that she finally found the name she was looking for.

Aza. Miqo’te. N/A. N/A. N/A. ID No: 93467192

Lucia frowned, puzzled. Every other name had their date of birth, place of birth, and nationality –
except ‘Aza’. There wasn’t even a last name. It was just luck that Aza had such a unique name for a
Miqo’te that made her semi-certain this was the same man that her Lord Commander- ah, Mister de
Borel, had taken such a fancy to. At least his ID number was written down here.

So, after carefully closing the file and tucking the loose papers in a bit firmly, she went to the desk.
Nahdi glanced up at her.

“Finished?” she asked.

“Are you able to find a file on a registered mercenary for me, please?” Lucia asked politely, “I found
someone who seems good to follow up on for the Battle of Silvertear Falls.”

Nahdi looked briefly uncertain, “Oh, I dunno. We usually need permission from the Scions or the
Security Officer to go into those…”

“Only for a quick look,” Lucia pressed gently, “He’s one of the Company of Heroes.”

Nahdi dithered, but Lucia patiently waited, making sure to appear keen, but not too keen. Body
language, tone, expression… she tailored it perfectly for lazy, bored Nahdi to consider her options in
her favour. After about thirty seconds, Nahdi slowly nodded.

“Well, okay, miss. It’s such a pain dealing with the permissions thing anyways. Yer not goin’ to take
‘is address down and do anythin' creepy, are ya?”

“You can watch me read his file, if you want,” Lucia offered. She can memorise things very quickly.

That seemed to win Nahdi over, “Okay, what’s ‘is ID number?”

The process was quicker this time. Nahdi took the folder with the mercenary listings back, and
returned five minutes later with a folder that was equally as thick. Nahdi looked bemused as she set it
down, puffing a limp lock of dark hair from her eyes. This folder was dark red, with SENSITIVE
stamped across it in black, unfriendly writing. Judging by Nahdi’s expression, this wasn’t normal.

“Most’ve ’em are, like, an ilm thick,” Nahdi muttered, “This lad must’ve gotten around.”

Lucia didn’t reply. She brushed the folder open. There was a photograph clipped onto the first page –
she barely recognised him as the man Aymeric showed her on his linkpearl. Unlike the brightly
smiling, long-haired and laidback Miqo’te who had lounged so handsomely on a sofa in Aymeric’s
photograph, this one was a quickly taken mugshot. His hair was cut short, his expression blank and
his eyes dull. He was not smiling.

She carefully tugged the photo free, ignoring Nahdi leaning in curiously, and skimmed the page
underneath.

FULL NAME: AZEYAMA’A IRIQ LYNEL
ALIASES: AZA, COEURUL, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], SCION
ID NUMBER: 93467192
GENDER: MALE
Lucia stopped reading after that, bewildered. She had half-expected to see some redactions, the Company of Heroes did some clandestine operations, but this was… aside from his name, everything was purged. She flicked the page over – there was just thick, black lines scraped through it all. A few words she could see – “…joined in… participated at… seen in… destroyed… held… fought…” – and as she flicked further and further into the thick file, it was all the same. Redacted to the point of uselessness. It made her wonder why they even bothered collating this file.

It was right near the back that her stubbornness bore fruit – at this point Nahdi returned to her linkpearl, having lost interest in the boring file. She flicked a page, expecting to see the same rows of black lines – only to pause when black and white, poorly scanned photographs exploded onto the page. At first, she wasn’t sure what she was looking at, the lines were so fuzzy and the quality so bad, but slowly, she realised…

X-rays. MRI scans. Photographs of blood results. Aetherical levels. All kind of things that went beyond Lucia’s knowledge. She narrowed her eyes, puzzled, and squinted at the cramped, photocopied writing at the bottom of an X-ray of what appeared to be a shattered arm.

“…increased levels of [REDACTED] … attempted… [REDACTED]… aether sickness by [REDACTED]… [REDACTED] … high levels of assimilation… [REDACTED]… increased dosage of [REDACTED]… success of [REDACTED] … estimated by 1570 -6AE. [REDACTED]… Echo is… [REDACTED]. Possible Aetherical starvation of [REDACTED]… dangerous… [REDACTED]… high recommendation for [REDACTED]. DANGER. [REDACTED] RISK. [REDACTED] RECOMMEND [REDACTED]. DOCTOR [REDACTED].”

Well. That was…

Lucia looked at the photographs again, but the quality was too poor to make anything out. She reread the ‘doctor’s notes’, feeling that creeping, ill feeling from when the Eorzean Alliance learned of the Garlean Hypertune Project. Not enough was said to scream of that level of vile experimentation but, what was this? Medical files of some strange illness? Injury? Mercenary files had them if they sustained life-changing injuries/illness that made them ineligible to join other mercenary outfits of the Grand Company but this was… too queer. This page gave her the chills.

Disturbed, Lucia forged on. More poorly taken photographs of X-rays and other scans. This one was of a ribcage caved in, then another X-ray of presumably the same ribcage halfway broken, then another fully whole. A photograph of an MRI scan showing ruptured organs, made whole in the next scan. There were numbers scribbled under them, but Lucia couldn’t figure out the DTG format of them. Were they recording someone’s regeneration rate? Someone’s sensitivity to healing magics? Potions?
The next page was a weirdly unredacted page detailing his work with the Company of Heroes. Served with distinction in multiple battles against Garlean forces. Joined the Crystal Braves midway through the War when scouted by the Scions. Participated in the Siege of Garlemald as the vanguard. Breached the gates. Crystal Braves suffered a casualty rate of 98%. Aza was one of the very few to survive with life-changing injuries. He was lucky to keep his limbs. Honourably discharged from service with a medical pension, a state pension, and a lump sum for his sacrifice in the War. Currently unemployed and retired.

The last, final page was another photograph. This one wasn’t poorly scanned, but the photograph itself was amateur. It was of Aza, sitting on a surfboard and looking vaguely in the direction of the camera. It was a nice shot. The sunlight caught the lake, and Aza himself sat handsomely on the surfboard, straddling it with scarred thighs and baring his ruined torso to the world. No doubt souvenirs from the Siege of Garlemald.

The only thing was… in the two other photographs of Aza, the one Aymeric held, and the one in the beginning of the folder, his eyes were bright yellow. In this one… it may be how the light was, Miqo’te eyes tended to reflect a camera flash weirdly from time to time, but it was simply… just like with the page with all the X-ray and MRI scans, this one made her feel deeply uneasy.

For Aza gazed towards the camera with eyes that were a bright, pupilless crimson, like burning pits of fire. His face almost seemed to be shrouded in a shadow that was out of place in the otherwise sunny picture. He reminded him of the many statues of the Fury that loomed in courtrooms, staring with hungry vindication at trembling criminals. This was not a mortal’s expression.

Underneath the photograph, scribbled in a stranger’s handwriting was: “1570 -6AE. FRAY.”

Disquieted, Lucia closed the folder on that eerie photograph, staring for a very long moment at the dull red cover. She came in here expecting to find a paid prostitute, or trained Garlean agent trying to slither into her Aymeric’s bed. Instead she found… this dangerous mystery. Because this was dangerous, she realised. No one was meant to open this folder. She had no doubt that if she went the legal route of asking permission to view this, she would’ve been bluntly denied – and probably picked up in the middle of the night and vanished somewhere. This was a state secret she stumbled over.

…

Fuck.

Aymeric leaned back in his seat with a low groan, rubbing the back of his neck to try and get the crick out. He felt cross-eyed he read so much, a dull headache pushing against his temples as he fumbled for his linkpearl. Lucia still hadn’t returned from her low-level investigation – or, he hoped was low-levelled, she tended to keep digging and digging whenever spotting anything off – and he was leery of contacting Aza until he knew… but it was lunchtime now and he promised he’d call or message him. He didn’t want to upset Aza in case he was innocent, but…

Making up his mind, he took out his linkpearl and unlocked it.

Aza had sent him messages already. Attached photographs;

“i forgot to introduce you to my bestest buddies in the world last night! i was too distracted by your amazing body lolol so here look at my babies!”
Pictures of him taking **adorable** selfies with his Chocobos followed. Then;

“**btw are you a classy drinker or pub drinker? v important for date tonight.**”

Aymeric sighed. Seriously, how could Lucia think of him as a honeypot?

He was in the middle of replying to Aza when Lucia returned. He paused with his thumb hovering over ‘send’, taking in her expression. She was annoyingly difficult to read, staring at him for a long moment as she clearly thought on what to say.

“He’s not a honeypot,” she finally said.

Aymeric almost deflated from relief, “Thank Halone. So, am I able to…?”

Lucia frowned, looking reluctant. He felt like there was a ‘but’ lingering on the tip of her tongue, but after a moment she swallowed it down.

“You’re a grown man, sir,” she said simply, “I only ask you be cautious. He… was a Crystal Brave, and was one of the few survivors of the Siege. That may have left some… mental scars.”

Oh, well, that explained why Aza was so reluctant to discuss the War or his scars. Aymeric filed that information away, knowing now to steer **well clear** of any discussion of the War and Garleans when they met up. He felt a bit bad, though, learning about this behind his back but…

“Thank you for warning me. I’ll tread carefully,” he said, turning back to his phone and missing Lucia’s look of dismay, “I’ll leave early again tonight to-”

“Sir…” Lucia interrupted, “Did you remember your appointment with Alphinaud Leveilleur?”

“…”

“Sir.”

Damn, he knew he forgot something, “I, ah, forgot?”

Lucia stared at him for a very long moment.

“On your feet, sir,” she said in a soft, dangerous tone, “Your man of the night can wait.”

Aymeric almost tripped over himself he stood up so fast. He knew better than to argue with Lucia in a mood. Sheepishly, he let her frogmarch him towards Alphinaud Leveilleur’s office, but he was too distracted by the **relief** that yes, Aza wasn’t a honeypot. Guilt-free casual relationship was still on the table.

Thank Halone. He’d been worried he may’ve gotten involved in something **complicated**.

_____________________________________________________

Stepping out of Alphie’s office, Aza abruptly sneezed.

Chapter End Notes
So this is just an introduction chapter, hence why it's so short and stuff BUT i'm planning on it being a proper fic and I've sketched out a plan for it already. Not going to lie, it originally started as a dumb AU because of Sal, who always gives me amazing ideas and stuff, but then my brain just... gave me more and more plans and ideas until we... got this...

It's gonna tackle BIG STUFF emotionally and mentally, and Aymeric/WoL's relationship will initially be super casual and, while the focus, there'll be a lot of interaction from the rest of FFXIV's cast and plenty of worldbuilding to see how this modern version works. The updates will be a little slower than my quick oneshots, bc it'll require more planning and quality control, but I hope you all enjoy what I'll be writing!

Please kudos/comment if you enjoyed!

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