Summary

It's an alternate universe where Sephiroth is a king, while Zack, Cloud, Vincent, and Rufus are his harem slaves, who he has renamed as gems. Read from the top of the list down to be in order.

Notes

Katrina Asked for spam. Okay. I started typing. I got... a world.
"Dun nuh nuh, nuh na. Dun nuh nuh, nuh na. Dun dun da, dun dala, nuh na~ya." The soft lilting tune was nearly quiet, haunting, timed perfectly with the twist of blades through the air. The last note was voiced as he came down out of a high arc, a turn that brought blade around from shoulder down to knees in a flash of silver. His blade-tip rested on the ground far out to the side, with his slender, emerald bangled arm facing palm down with blade in hand.

The ending pose was a kneel, head bowed, long hair hiding his face as a gesture of respect. The dark blue and blood red of the silk paneling of his top was fanned out, the open long vest just a dark splash of color against pale, barely tanned skin. The silk hid none of the muscles of his body, and by that same coin hid none of the softness. A solitary claw caged amethyst rested against his chest, low on the golden rope of chain. It had been bestowed on him when he’d accepted this life.

That was the extent of the adornments, but it was enough for the barefooted dancer with his live steel, something none of the others were allowed in the master's presence. He knew it, and the lord master knew it. Lifting his head just enough the shorter dark strands were out of the way, he met the feline green, waiting and patient for some signal that he was permitted to rise, to speak, to do anything other than he’d already done.

"I've been told by my advisors that I shouldn't let you dance for me." He watched the man push to his feet, dark velvets and silks hiding the true figure and making their leader look so much softer than he was. He knew the silver haired man wasn't weak, and the muscles that lay under the cloth, but their allies didn't. He'd sat at his feet for enough conferences to know that few were perceptive enough to catch the trick. "That I shouldn't keep such an obviously favored pet that some other lord might try and kidnap for a ransom they say would be above your worth."

He watched the man come down the steps of the dais to the open area, lifting his head into the palm that was rested against his hair. He didn't speak, having learned early that the man sometimes paused, but that wasn't meaning that it was his turn to speak. He just liked to pace his words, that was all. He didn't lift his blades, aware of how fortunate he was to even be allowed to touch live steel in the same room, let alone while the man was in striking range of him and unarmed.

"But then I've be depriving myself of one of my most beautiful possessions. The very idea of giving up one of my gems is... foolish at best, isn't it?" He let his eyes flutter half shut as the elegant fingers, callused though few ever knew that, tipped his chin up, revealing his violet eyes fully to the searching gaze. "I don't keep unloyal man slaves. And I know that any of you would tell me if one of your number did not hold me highest in their heart." Petting now, which felt wonderful, leaving him lidded eyed. "Wouldn't you my sweet one?"

Now was his turn. Now he could speak. "I would. I know they would be sent away, but you're good to us. Fair. There isn't better." He shivered and turned his head, just a little to nuzzle the palm. "I wouldn't take freedom over serving you. Ever."

He smiled, one of those rare rare smiles that let him know that had been the right answer, the good answer. "I know. That is why you're one of my lovely gems. They don't understand how I could have any slaves willing to die for me, live for me, let alone four of you. They scoff the notion of a prince under my hand, the idea of a prized warrior setting down his weapons. They think my beauties aren't here by their own choice, but here you are, given more than adequate time to kill me and be on your way."

He closed his eyes then, turning his face into the touch. "I would never kill you my liege. I would
never even try."

"I know. In all things, that I do know." Another stroke of the fingers, and then his lord walked away, the whisper of clothes brushing him by before he opened his eyes. The closing of a door far behind him signaled that he could rise to his feet.

From there, he went to return to the others on silent feet. It was their place to keep the advisors from causing their lord unrest, and they weren't to slack in those unknown duties.
Chapter Notes

Part two? I should be worried.

He never went to the council meetings. He wasn't permitted to sit in on the grand tactical conferences. The war room wasn't a place he was allowed to go. He was kept strictly away from anything that spoke of politics and persuasion. The art of war had been pulled beyond even the touch of his fingertips with the choices that he had made to bring his life to what it was and he knew that it was a legacy he was going to spend the rest of his life with.

That didn't honestly matter however.

Hand pressed against the smooth stone to the side of the winter frosted window, he let his gray blue eyes go unfocused as he listened, ignoring the chill seeping into his bones as he stood in place. His white sleeves were wide, fallen back to his wrist on the hand near his face even as the other hid his fingers, emerald graced ring resting on his middle finger amid white gold just to the side of his vision. He'd stared at that once, when he'd first gotten it, but it was much easier to visualize what he was being told if he didn't have something quite so concrete to look on. It was so much easier to use the fields and valleys beyond the high stronghold window to piece things together once he realized how it needed to be done.

"Jaenkester was adamant that there would be an attack needed on the southern border, a three lined assault with middle cavalry and fleet troops in flank at east and west of the city, archers on the last line back in a final barrage. They seemed to have been using the west map and-"

The description cut off as he raised his other hand. He felt the thumbnail sized black diamond shift in place against his forehead as he looked to the one speaking to him. The white gold chain circlet did so little to keep it in its proper place. Dismissing the familiar irritant, he let a dry smile cross his face. The violet-eyed man was the one who could go all the places where he could not. He wasn't raised to have ever understood them, though his intelligence lent him to noticing the details, remembering things that might be important later. Zack memorized, and then he shared what he had seen, what had been said with he, the tactician. It was his role to make sense of it and leave the plans where their lord could access them. Careful notations on scrolls without marks could easily be brushed away as little other than restive script. There was no misunderstanding as to the true source of the guidance, but their lord didn't wish to lose them, and as such, he would not reveal that it was not himself who came to such conclusions. Or perhaps he did and he was fooling himself to think he was as brilliant as the man… in either case, that was of little relevance to the matter at hand, and it was bad of him to let his thoughts wander. "Expressions. You've laid the map for me, now give me the atmosphere. Just how impatient have they become?"

When he turned back to the window, he mostly closed his eyes and focused on his companion's smooth voice. Given another life, the man might very well have had option to be a bard. There was irony in that, given their priest had had such a life. Tuning fully into what was being said, he ignored the chill breeze pressing through his silk attire. "Taegar had a pinched look around his eyes, redness, and looked like he hadn't shaved in a few days. He was tense, sitting up allot straighter than normal, and he kept fidgeting, curling and uncurling his hand against the table. Marcus had a smile
throughout the entire talk, leaning back in his chair with his eyes slightly narrowed, one heel caught in the rung of his chair and his arms crossed. You'll remember that I told you he didn't say anything. Hojo frowned. Constantly. I know he's normally not mister sunshine or anything, but that was kinda creepy." When he cleared his throat, Zack seemed to start, skipping back into his explanation. "He glared at me a few times too, kept moving so I couldn't get a clear line of sight on him, and he didn't let me get any really good looks at his face. Jaenkester was twitchy. Every time someone talked to him he seemed to jump a little, and he was the one pushing for the attack. The others didn't exactly seem what I'd call enthusiastic or anything and-"

"Zack. Why must you ramble?" He moved away from the window, quiet dignity fully intact as he arched an eyebrow at the other slave. One with rank on him no less. He'd fallen so far in the world, though it wouldn't be a fall when his country was taken over for him to rule from this rather coveted place under their lord's regard. He forcibly pressed back chilled shivers, almost missed in his reverie, and moved quietly towards where there was a fire lit. He silently hoped that his lips weren't blue. He didn't abide fussing, and Zack was prone to it if he thought one of them was discomfited in some manner.

He saw Zack glance up and around from the corner of his eye, noting that he immediately understood when the door to their little world cracked open, a royal guard checking in on them during his rounds. "So, you sure you won't let me pierce your ear? I mean, I think that'd be a really good look for you…"

When the door closed, he simply shook his head and closed his eyes to block out the annoyance, fingers resting against a temple. If only that hadn't been a perfectly serious question. "You forgot to keep track of the time again." Sighing softly, he shook his head. "No matter, we'll work on tone of voice and go back over the other details later." He heard the other man groan, ignored the fact he very likely had just had someone roll his eyes at him, and waited patiently for him to speak.

"Right then you uptight bastard. No cosmetic tips for you." The tone of voice went from amused to serious before he slipped into his descriptions again, never missing a vital detail to be shared. With his eyes closed and his attention focused, he need never set foot in a conference. This was just as clear as if he'd been present.
Watchful King

Chapter Notes

Yes, apparently this world has eaten my brain. But! I am not alone! I'm sharing! 😊

pegunicent wrote fic for the outlands here, here, and here!

He was observant. Any who held his rank and status needed to be, if only for the simple reason of keeping assassins from stabbing you in the back. In some ways, that fear had faded, while in others he'd found himself near paranoid over the very idea of relaxing and simply enjoying the comforts that he'd inherited when his father had died. He hadn't been a young man, but he hadn't been quite so old as to turn over the title of king.

There were still stories told in the city about the little girl who had been the last person he'd seen while alive. She'd opened her hands to show him what she held inside... and that was that. The fire hadn't reached the second story witnesses of the interaction, and from there, rumors and tall tales abounded. Less than three years later, a carriage 'accident' had killed his mother. She hadn't even quite reached forty at that point, and she'd been far too brilliant to die that kind of death.

He had no intentions of ending in the same fashion.

Of course, that meant that he took risks with his life, and the lives of others to ensure that those around him, that he could relax near... weren't going to be the end of him. The first had been Zack. He'd had him long before his father had passed on, had, in fact, been a birthday present from that very man. When he'd turned sixteen, he was told he could have whatever one thing he wanted, and he'd chosen an untrained, rude, scruffy little slave boy with unusual eyes. His mother had been horribly appalled. Now though, now he was his Amethyst, his oldest gem, and he knew the man would never do him wrong.

Years after his mother had died he had acquired the pair, his Diamond and his Ruby, his prince and his warrior. They'd caused him a great deal of trouble at first, as the two had hated each other on sight. One was given as a treaty gift and the other was taken as a ransom. That event undercut the efforts that were being made to remove his Diamond as competitor for the Acadian throne. In all, he should have never had trust in them. He remembered, however, the way Rufus refused to return to his homelands as anything but monarch. He remembered him being fully aware of the fact that it was almost a certain death to return as he was, being born the third son had earned him no protection, and being free stood him no better, not in these lands. The people were still far too bitter at the bordering countries to forgive a noble among them, let alone royalty. So he remained, even when his time as a tool had officially passed. The other had never had a place to return to. He'd been a gesture of peace from a vicious people, and had been too proud but to devote his being to his task. If he returned to that country under any guise but the one he now wore, they would return him and beg forgiveness as to avoid a misunderstanding. It seemed that he, at least, had never misunderstood that. At times it took patience to ensure his personal importance was known, but Vincent wasn't unreasonable. He understood, and in that he was quite set in his ways. He'd always been a warrior for his people, and now, he would obey his king. At least he knew that there was honest affection there as well, and that softened any misgivings that at times seemed to spark.

Most recently had been his Sapphire. Younger than the others, magically talented, he'd been a gift
from a slave he'd freed many years before. The man had been too intelligent to kill, too wild to sell, and too rough to be a gift, so he'd simply let him leave. It likely was one of the wiser choices he'd made for him. Cloud was a priest. He wasn't sure how he'd come to be with Cid when the tinkerer had presented him, but there was no doubting his talent if he simply touched the wards. Sometimes, if he concentrated, he could see the flicker of symbols over the walls in barely perceptible pulses of white light. It was exhausting, but there were times when one needed unhindered sleep, and that was far better than counting chocobo in the dark. His youngest could have killed him by now, had more than had opportunity, yet he hadn't.

His gems. He didn't give their real names to his enemies, and he wished that his advisors had never need know. He'd inherited most of them from his father, and they were visionless. Most, at least, for when they had vision, the plans they laid before him chilled him to the bone. They were no men he could trust, and was utterly certain that he would never dare risk letting his guard down among them. His father had told him, once when he was still a fairly small child, that the most unnoticeable detail was often what would tip the scale, and that a feather could break a nation.

He watched for those details, and he wasn't alone in his attention. Two sets of eyes at every meeting, and bitterness from the advisors due to the rarity of his attending tactical, even political, meetings without a pet at his side. It was always his longest standing, and most had long since learned to ignore his presence. Others, such as Hojo, were far too keen, far too aware of the secondary reason underlying the slave's presence. He was the one rallying the cry to be rid of them.

He would not be rid of them though. They were his. He knew what they did for him, how many times they'd kept his fate from following that of his parents. He knew, and he would not say for they were breaking more than a few laws. They were not to be involved in politics. They were not to be involved in war. They were involved in both, and he still trusted them with his very breath. His advisors were trying to shake that trust, to convince him of how it should not exist. But he, as well as his advisors, were aware of something terribly important.

He did not truly wish to be alone. He needed to have something to keep him from being a broken king, to keep him from missing something important and being killed, or worse, caught in a spell that would blind him to reality and leave him as a shell. His advisors, however, would be more than happy to have just that. And just as with his gems, his advisors knew he knew.
Tactical Relations

Chapter Notes

Yes, I will not dodge the results that would come of an unwed king... So, I hope you all aren't unhappy with my tendency for odd pairings. 😄pegunicent did another chapter on the Outlands as well.

It had been an uphill battle, and it was reasonable enough to say that she wasn't happy to be here. In fact, if they hadn't been the only un-allied bordering nation, she wouldn't have to deal with this. It wasn't her fault she was the oldest. In fact, she would have been more than happy to keep up her martial training and let her little sister do the dubious honor of being presented for marriage.

If it hadn't been for her little sister's childish streak, dissuading her father might have worked far better than it had. Instead, she had the facts known about the Galethan King laid out for her in precise terms. The man was strange. The man was nearly thirty years old and already had silver hair. The man kept a male harem that she was clearly supposed to ignore. She had her pride, and apparently she was expected to squash it and do her duty as a princess.

Itching for clothes that weren't so elaborate, she instead smoothed down the gold and blue velvet skirt, silently thankful the covering attire hid her nervous twitches. She didn't want to be here, but her father had only needed one far-too-innocent smile out of Yuffie before shooting down any last arguments she might have had, and now, she sat in the waiting room to meet her husband to be.

Turning over what she knew in her head, she wasn't sure what to think. The man was known for his ruthless tactics against his enemies, and even tighter strung control over his allies. He'd seen battle face to face and was revered by his troops. She hadn't ever heard any stories of kindness about the man, and there was some rumor that he was actually a weakling, and ruled with an iron fist so people wouldn't doubt him. On that same tact, it was said that his political success was largely luck and puppeteering. Between the contrary descriptions of her trainer and her brothers, she had come to expect a former military man with scars, a gut, and premature gray hair.

Instead, she could do nothing but stare as the man stepped into the room. He wore the greens and silvers of his court, of course, but the fact that his hair was honestly silver was the first thing to really catch her attention. She'd honestly thought the word silver had been an exaggeration, but no, apparently that had been wrong. Her gaze dropped from his hair to take in the rest of him, skipping around his face. She'd heard rumors that he wouldn't even see foreign ladies for prospective bride status, and that he'd declined royal balls, so that meant there had to be some obvious flaw. No gut, possibly even muscles, though the constantly shifting material made it nearly impossible to tell.

Finally, she dragged her eyes upwards, bracing herself for some disfiguring scar, or for him to just plain be ugly. Who else needed harem slaves but the ugly after all? Green eyes, cat-like and strange, that she'd been told about... but there were no scars, and he certainly wasn't ugly. She was out of her league.

"Princess Lockhart." When he took her hand and laid a kiss on the back of the glove, she was frozen. She was expected to marry this man? Was he abusive and that was what was wrong with him? His voice wasn't grating, then again, he didn't look like the type to have a grating voice, and
was that really such a bad thing…?

"Sire." Her voice was a squeak, and she quickly cleared her throat when he arched an eyebrow, straightening and taking a step back from her. She was going to hurt Reeve for not warning her about this. At least she wouldn't look as stupid in front of her father when she got herself sent home. Getting to her feet, she took a deep breath and squared her shoulders before trying again. "Sire, I have no wish to marry you."

"I know. I don't really want to marry you either."

She'd been all set to lay out her arguments, but that threw her, and her mouth, already open to argue further, to snap shut as she gave him a stare. Sure, she wasn't interested, but he was supposed to be! She might not have been the prettiest woman out there, but she knew she wasn't anything to scoff at. He was the man here, he wasn't supposed to just not want to marry her! He was supposed to make her work for it! Offended, she drew herself up. "What? Why not?"

He actually had the gall to smile at her. After an insult like that? The temptation to slap him was strong, but she squashed it with all her considerable dignity. "Because I have no interest in the political liability you represent princess."

She felt herself bristling, the true aim of her argument lost in the fact that he just insulted her again. She wasn't her sister! "I am not a political liability."

"No?"

"No."

"Are you willing to prove that?"

Was he challenging her abilities? He was! Straightening up further, she glared at him. "Of course, Sire."

He studied her for a long moment, then nodded, stepping back with a slight bow. "Very well princess." Turning away, he gestured to a blond woman near the door. "Lady Elena, please escort the princess to her rooms until the ceremony."

It wasn't until they were halfway down the hall that Tifa realized what she had just done, and she could have slapped herself. Hard.

She'd wait to do that until she was alone.
Chapter Notes

Be prepared for philosophical rambling.

There is duty, honor, love, hate, vengeance, justice, trust, deceit, abuse, discipline, subservience, and dominance. There are more, so many more that the list would be never ending if one tried to spell out every emotion and its compliment. Not the antithesis, because no emotion is honestly opposite of another. No, it's always a compliment, a tableau that it is placed against that the other can be better understood. This does not mean that they are the same, or in the same manner. It does not mean that you cannot know one without the other.

You can. You can know hate without love, abuse without discipline, deceit without trust. You can also know nothing but obedience, never praised, never valued as a person, but for your potential and abilities. You can be not a man but a thing, a thing for war, a thing for peace, but still just a thing. When he'd first gotten here he'd been faced with the son of his enemy. He'd been told he was not to do as he'd been prior trained to.

He had to change his objectives, and he hadn't cared for that. He'd still done as told. The other, however, had never been a thing. He'd been a person, refused to be a pawn, and being a slave seemed to not have phased that self-awareness. They'd only come to blows over these difficulties once, and once alone was more than enough for them to learn never to do it again. Zack had stepped in the way and been struck.

Their lord had taken this news very elegantly considering the circumstances. By all rights he could have called break in treaty, had him executed alongside the enemy he'd never met before here but who loathed him on sight. Instead he'd healed his most prized slave and gestured them to stay in place as he escorted the youth from the room.

He wasn't a cruel man, but the punishment laid out with his return made it clear he was creative. They were locked in a room, bound to opposing walls, though they had enough room to move, lay down crouch or sit. There wasn't the length to stand, because that might have given them room to reach each other, and it was clear they weren't wanted dead, nor to fight further. They were left there for three weeks. In that time, the only ones that they got to speak to were each other and their Lord, as the servants would go about their business in each pass of the day, checking the bindings, grooming, feeding, and taking away things that shouldn't be there. For all purposes, they were no more than objects to the staff, there to be taken care of, but otherwise going unseen.

It was during that time when it came clear why Rufus hated him as he did. He'd killed the only one of his brothers who wasn't mad, the one who was honest. That brother was also the one that king had sent to the battle after battle. It had only been a matter of time.

He had felt no need to apologize for doing his duty, and Rufus hadn't been pleased to hear it at the time. War was war, duty was duty, and loyalty would not be swayed out of compassion. It was something that Rufus had come to appreciate about him since then. That foundation had saved their king more than once. It had also saved them. He could have let their king be killed in his rest, he could have let the other, then two, slaves be murdered in cold blood. He'd turned away those chances for freedom.
He didn't want it. He'd done nothing to deserve having his life under his own hands. He'd killed, destroyed, ruined homes, and he knew there were things he'd done that he shouldn't stop regretting. And yet even that wasn't it.

His musings were broken into, fingers running over the golden dragon armlet that was twined from wrist to elbow over his skin, a ruby centered on the dragon's back. The fingers were those of his king, who was watching him with quiet, unusual green eyes, he replayed the last few moments in his head. He'd been asked a question.

"Vincent?"

Looking over the letter from the Outlands, he murmured a soft reply and returned it to his Lord's hands. That earned him a barely perceptible smile and a nod before he rested his fingers at the emerald clipped belt that rested over the black silk and leather of his clothing and turned to write a returned missive with his other hand.

He wasn't going to betray his liege. Even if he hadn't been coin of a treaty, he simply refused betray family now that it was within his touch. There was no need to inform the king of a bastard sibling when he might already know. Such news would change nothing.

He'd asked.
Cloud finally spoke to me! I had to beat Hojo off with a stick to get Cloud to talk, but he did! Allot... this is the lognest part yet. Well, in pages, not by words.

"Sire, I've resettled the protections. May I have a reward?" He kept his head bowed as he asked, emerald drop earrings resting against his jaw. There was a point when he would not dare ask such a question. The temple had been strict. You were not rewarded for doing your duty. You did not seek to change your duties before you were told you were capable. You did not pick favorites, and you most certainly never touched politics.

You also didn't run away to do everything they told you not to, and he'd done just that. It was a choice he'd only regretted once or twice, but never in the time he'd lived here. "What sort of reward do you want?" The voice, always without inflection when formal, did not cause him to lift his head, though he did spread his hands against the dark blue silk of his pants.

"Time." It was a murmur, and he adjusted his position just the slightest bit more, studying the pair of sapphire and silver anklets he was wearing. Ever aware of lurking eyes and ears of servants, he was not going to overstep his place where it could be seen. "Your majesty has been spending a good deal of time on plans of recent, and I was hopeful that perhaps…?"

He tilted his head just enough to see through his blond spikes where they fell forward, watching as the king sent people away with conservative, almost absent seeming motions. The servants clearly knew them for what they were, and departed, closing the door near silently behind them. "Are you the only one that's been feeling displaced recently?"

He didn't move until he caught the beckoning gesture, lifting his head and moving over with an easy stride. "You've been very busy recently. We know that."

He didn't protest when the man nudged him to kneel to his left, and he didn't feel the sting of irony that at one point such a position was only for prayer. That had faded a few years ago, mere months after he'd gotten accustomed to this court. "She can't steal my affections from the four of you, you realize that don't you?"

Closing his eyes when the pale fingers brushed along his cheek, he sighed softly. "We all knew you would need to marry eventually."

"Cloud. I want an answer."

"Yes, I do, but that doesn't mean that you're going to spend as much time with us. Unlike Zack, the rest of us…"

He opened his eyes when the king tipped up his chin. "Unlike Zack, the rest of you have complete lives you left behind for this one. Shouldn't it be my place to worry that my slaves will long to return to their original lives given any neglect from me?"

Drawing a sharp breath he shook his head, a hand raising and curving around the man's wrist before
he even registered that he was moving. "I wouldn't go back there. I don't want to go back there. I hated that life." His fingers were caught before he could jerk away from his trespass, so he held still, watching.

"Nobody would believe me if they thought you were here willingly. They think you were stolen from your goddess. I don't dissuade them, because who wants to battle someone who can take the very faces of the gods for themselves?" The words were warmer, but not by much.

"I was never that high. I was always told I didn't have the ability to be an avatar, let alone lead rights. I've told you that before." Deferential tone for argumentative words, and he was sure it wouldn't be the last time he did it. It certainly wasn't the first.

"And they were wrong. Even still, you are a priest. Both you and I know this. The court knows this. They simply don't know the details, and are fooled into the illusion that they wish to see." Sighing softly, he had to concede the point. Illusions were a rather large portion of temple life, and he'd simply been the one who couldn't tell the difference between them and reality.

"Will I get my reward?" Sometimes it was a bad idea to remind and push, and those times got him a no. Other times, it would never come to be if he didn't pursue the answer. The kind was simply too hard to keep track of to stick with one or the other, so he felt it better to try than not.

"Yes, you will get your reward."

"When?"

There was a moment of silence, then the king ran his fingers up his cheek and just under his lower lashes. The action should have been threatening, yet it wasn't. He knew the king would give him nothing he didn't deserve. "Tonight. I'll be sure to come see you before I retire."

"May I sleep with you after?"

"Isn't that more than one reward Cloud? You're getting very bold of late." There was a moment of pause, one in which he dared say nothing, then a tiny smile flit over the king's face. "You may stay the night with me, so long as you deal with the others before."

He knew there'd be a catch, but as they went, that really wasn't a bad one at all. "I can do that."

"Then I'll see you tonight, won't I?"

"Yes." He rested his cheek on the man's thigh as servants started to filter back in, and it wasn't long before Zack made his way over to sit on the right side of the king's feet, the older slave just flashing him a small grin before settling into his place. It was going to be a long day. "Yes you will."
The girl was supposed to help the situation, not make it worse. Frowning, he snapped his book shut and dropped it on his desk, giving up on his reading for the time being as he considered the situation. He had already known that Grimiore's boy wasn't one to be swayed by feminine wiles. They'd tried that before he'd started adding political alliances to that harem of his, and he'd either brushed them off or ignored them entirely.

It wouldn't have been so bad if he'd even had a girl or two in that little clutch of his, but no, the man couldn't even come up with something sufficient to breed with. After all, it wasn't unknown for a king to take a bastard child and make it an official heir if he never married. But could the boy be relied upon to manage his own affairs? No. Instead he'd actually developed a system for gauging his slaves and didn't even try to keep some of the more promising ones around.

The man just didn't understand that slaves were things, and the mindset was more than slightly annoying. True, those things were rather intelligent, like a hunting beast or a riding bird could be, but that did not make them something that the king of a country should listen to. You did not take advice on war from a chocobo. Likewise, while one should value the object that a slave was, by no means should it be the slave's choice to come and go as they please, request favors, or anything else of the kind.

At this point he was sorely regretting not having taken the chance in the wake of the prior king's death to deal with the head slave while he was still a small child. If nothing else, there had been the chance to break the child's spirit, and that might have led to him being discarded by now. That chance had been foiled while Lucretia had attempted to get rid of his contract.

They really had underestimated his magical studies at that point, and now the family simply couldn't be rid of him, though they could try. They couldn't kill him themselves, and he was attentive to assassination attempts on his person. He honestly couldn't say they bothered him. It just proved that the boy wasn't a complete fool and was aware of a way to use some of his resources. Unfortunately, it seemed he only knew how to appropriately use a few.

The advisors, at least, agreed with him on this matter. They did not like the freedoms that the king was giving his prized pets. It might not have come to their attention at all had he not overturned the ban on slaves wielding weaponry, and if nothing else good came of that event, at least now they were aware. It had been chaos at first, and it was no good trying to reinstate it, because many had taken the change and run with it, turning slaves to guards, sword showmen, and a few other things they had previously been banned from due to the law. It would have caused more trouble than it was worth to put it back in place when it had been so quickly adopted by the upper ranks. At least he'd kept firearms out of the bargain, meaning that the king's prized little warrior wasn't nearly as worthwhile as he might have been without the prohibition.

That was one refreshing instance in a slew of far too many failures. The little spy was still attending meetings, though at least the boy hadn't been able to dispute them to bring any other. After all, the...
oldest of the slew had always been there, he would tell no enemies, but what of the slaves that had formerly been enemies? They weren’t to be trusted, and he made sure that the other advisors backed and realized the extreme error in the current arrangements.

It didn’t seem to be working quite as he anticipated though, but that wasn’t a real worry. He was here to ensure that plans stayed on the track they should be on, whether the king cared for the idea or not. He was just the king, and a king should not overturn the plans carefully laid by his predecessors simply because he did not agree with them. That was not the way things worked.

Thus he arrived back at the topic that had initially made him set aside the book. How would he manage to get the princess to do her job? She was supposed to use that overzealous excess of pride that she had and demand the king be rid of his pets to be solely devoted to her when it came time for their nuptials. Instead it appeared that she was taking pains to form a friendship with the man’s pets. This, of course, only made him more displeased, so he took the time and careful effort to make sure that all of the available tutors and trainers of her preferred, not to mention far too physical, activities were well distracted to other locations.

It wasn’t so difficult considering that war was on the horizon if but one of those alliances of the king’s were to be broken. Kill the warrior, and Cemere would cry broken treaty. Kill the little prince and Acadia would be in an uproar. It didn’t matter if either was doomed for death before coming into the tender care of their nation, it would merely be the fact that that token had been smashed liberally all over the wall. War would bring about innovation, and the king was trying very hard to stay in his way.

If he managed to push through his ideal however… perhaps he’d yet be able to test just what exactly it was that fueled a priest. He always had wondered how they worked, and he hadn’t been able to learn. War would give him plenty of opportunities, he was certain, because what kind of king wouldn’t fight with his men?

Certainly not one worth following.
Reasoning

Chapter Notes

Let's take things from a slightly different angle, shall we? Meanwhile, in the Outlands we've had an update.

"Come on, please? You know mine, can't you tell me yours?" She paused outside the door as she heard the princess's exuberant and for once almost happy sounding question. She could wait a few minutes before breaking into the conversation if the girl was letting go of her discontent for a while.

"No. It's really not something I can give." They were deeper tones, and it only took her a few minutes to realize the amused voice belonged to Sapphire. He could laugh? She'd never seen it. Cracking open the door, just a bit, she peeked in so she could watch the pair.

She was just in time to see the princess prop her hands on her hips, and repressed a sigh at how underdressed she was. That half skirt really didn't count for anything, though she couldn't argue the practicality. "You're not giving it to me. You're just... letting me know. It's not like I'd have a chance to use it. C'mon, just a little hint?"

The dark clad slave took a step back when the princess leaned in towards him in her earnestness, and when he shook his head, she couldn't tell his expression. "I'm sorry m'lady, but I only answer to the king."

And those quiet words added to whatever his expression must have been stole the smile right off the princess's face. She'd need to step in soon. "I'm going to marry that man you know. This is the least you can do to make this whole mess easier. Besides, I'll know then won't I? I won't tell. It's just a little detail."

Her hand was on the door to push it in, the silence starting to draw out a bit too long for her tastes, when the man spoke again. "Princess... Have you ever had a slave?"

The reply was nearly a squawk, and she wondered how the girl could reach that shade of red so quickly. "Of course not!"

He shook his head again, and she was almost certain that halfway tilt was him looking at where she stood behind the door. He didn't hold it long enough for her to be sure. His answer was almost too low for her to catch though. "Then please, stop. Just because we're his slaves because we want to be doesn't make us any less of a slave. It just means we're content slaves. Go out there, look at the way some people treat their slaves, then come back here. If you can say that doing this one thing to please the king is still just a little detail, then I might tell you. If you can't, then stop asking about things that the king doesn't want you to know."

She had to move quickly away from the door when he turned and swept through it, head tilted down, but she caught a glimmer of some emotion as he moved past her. He gave her a nod to show that he'd noticed her before slipping around the corner towards the rooms that were set aside for the royal slaves. Sighing, she shook her head and moved in the direction he'd come from, realizing that there was silence within.
"M'lady? Princess?"

Dark eyes flicked to her as she drew near and she reached out, making sure the woman didn't lose her footing as she just seemed to just sag in place. "It wasn't really that big of a deal, was it?"

She hesitated, glancing towards the still open door and back again. "Princess, may I speak freely?"

Well, an annoyed look was better than the confusion at least, but the woman nodded anyway. "Of course Elena, that's why I asked."

"Very well. Yes, it was. The king gave them the names you have now, for his safety and theirs." She shook her head when the black haired female opened her mouth to speak. "But it's not just that. He could have chosen not to name them at all. The king could have been one of those men who treats his slaves as faceless toys. Slaves only have as many rights as their masters give them. The king has fought very hard to give his slaves the freedoms they have, and I've seen some of the looks the advisors give him for it. Those men know what he deals with on their behalf and you asked Sapphire to disrespect that. Do you see why he got upset when you pushed like you did?"

The dark eyed woman looked prepared to throw a fit by the time she was finished speaking. It took her a few tries before she managed to get past a highly frustrated sound in reply. "It's just a name! The servants never made such a big deal out of their names!"

She shook her head, short blond hair falling across her eyes. "But he's not a servant. He's a slave."

The princess looked like she was going to argue further before she snapped her mouth shut with an audible click, eyes flashing with frustration that she had nothing to say. "Elena, sometimes I hate you."

Stepping back and giving a curtsey, she carefully refrained from smiling. The princess really was one of the most interesting people she'd ever gotten to guard. "I'm aware of that princess."

"I mean it too."

"You're being asked after, if you would come with me, we'll get you presentable for proper company." She turned slightly as she came back to her feet, waiting for the princess to start moving her direction so that she could follow.

"I really, really mean it."

"Yes, princess, I know."
She was a priestess, the step below being an avatar, and she had been one of those most unhappy when Cloud hadn't come down to his training one morning. He'd always been impatient, trying to move further ahead before he was ready, but she'd kept her peace and hadn't been among those that had chastised him for his misbehavior. She was only a bit older than he was, but women always had been favored with their brand of power, and while there were, indeed, powerful priests, they were never a favored chosen.

At least, that had been the theory.

The temple had been in an uproar for days. Minor fluctuations of power that had been noted and used were gone, but so was a bulk of the presence that had filled the buildings as well. It had been more than a bit of a shock when a few unnoticed wards started flaring to life before dying out entirely. Study of the rune combinations used had been done, and it hadn't taken long to realize that the errant priest had laid his own protections.

It was only made more evident that he needed to be returned in that he'd been able to do such a process undetected. While loath to admit it, many of the priests and priestesses no longer able to touch the deities of their temples in anything more than the barest of superficial contacts. It was no human fault, simply the way the gods moved, leaving power for few, and the natural talents of many to cover the gap until the gods and goddesses returned to their followers. While the man had never been good at the illusions or healing with plants, he hadn't been without talent.

This meant that someone needed to find him, and she was sent to look, to confirm the suspicions of the others that he had been hiding his real potential from them. That had been a few years before, and while she kept in touch and sent prospective talents back to her native temple, it seemed for a time that Cloud had completely vanished.

Then, there had been a murmur in the wind, the plants turning more alive, and she followed the path to the castle at the heart of the capital city. Hooded and garbed in her temple attire, she could not be turned away at the gates and was permitted to pass. Even mages feared the gods, and while she might have seemed a delicate woman, none would honestly dare try to anger them. It was never a clear thing who represented the face of the god or goddess of any given church. The avatar was never announced, and it was safer that way for all concerned.

This, then, was how she found herself in the room for petition, the king entering from a side door in his green finery with a dark haired harem slave at his heels. When he settled, he took her measure before he spoke, and while she did not bow, she had not been expected to. "What brings a priestess to my home?"

"I've been on a journey, looking for someone, and I believe he is to be found here, if I was merely..."
given leave to look." She peeked from under the deep colored cowl, green meeting green boldly. "I would not need your hospitality long."

"And what temple do I risk angering in refusal? By whose hand would wrath be dealt?" He didn't break the gaze, and it was a credit to him, though she hadn't expected signs of magic on him. Few kings had any true power.

She wasn't unaware of the violet eyes watching her either, no matter how the man might seem distracted by his master. "Aeris Gainsborough, left path priestess of the temple of Freya in Nibelheim."

"Left path?" He seemed to get the slightest bit more alert, and she felt she was being better scrutinized, though he didn't break eye contact to do so. There had been many times that her introduction had gotten such a reaction, so she wasn't stunned that the king was giving her a due. "They sent a healer on a quest?"

She nodded, unable to help the small smile that flit over her lips at the faint tone of startlement she'd earned. No, healers rarely did travel. "We lost one of our right path priests, and they felt it wisest that I be the one to search for him as I knew him better than most."

"Is there a name you can give me for the warrior at the end of your quest?" He knew something. She could see the way he was shutting away his reactions after that first, but she couldn't quite pin down what they meant. He seemed to have warding against her empathic touch.

"Cloud Strife. He's been gone for a few years now, and I believe him to have come to a rest somewhere in your city." The man moved, he had been for a while now, petting the slave at his feet's hair while they'd been talking, but the action was distinct in that it got the man a nod before the dark form left the room.

"What shall you do if you find him and he doesn't wish to return with you, or he has given up his right to do so?"

She stared into shuttered eyes for a long moment, then drew a deep breath and decided that there was no way the man could harm her if she spoke in honesty. "I would stay with him. I am unwelcome by my temple if I return alone." She tipped her head so that the edge of her cloak hid her face.

There was silence for a few long moments, only the closing of a heavy door and light footsteps breaking through. "Then, lady priestess, I must ask how you intend to stay."

She lifted her eyes back to the man with the statement, gaze flitting quickly across those near the throne as she felt her heart sink. To one side of the silver king was the first slave, one who she had no name for. To the other was Cloud, dressed much the same.
Pacing

Chapter Notes

And Zack finally steals back the point of view after um... 8 chapters of it wandering? In any case! Zack is dealing with a concept that, to him, is rather novel. I think he did good. Oh! Outlands has updates. Yay for fan more prolific than myself?

He leaned over her bed, his hair a bright splash of light in the darkness and his blue eyes watching her with quiet intensity as a faint frown lingered at the corners of his mouth. It was clear he didn't think she should be there. It was also clear he had no intention of telling her so.

It was one room over, not quite attached to the harem suite and reserved for guests that the King had deemed important. Technically, they were allowed to be there. Officially, one of them had been asked for. Privately, the woman very likely knew that she wasn't going to be alone even though she hadn't invited, nor even spoken to, the blond that was hovering over her bed with a quietly bothered air.

Sighing out a soft breath, he ran a last look over the scene and slipped back from the doorway he was leaning on. He didn't need to worry about Sapphire any since the woman wasn't going to touch him. They seemed almost like siblings and that was enough to ease his qualms and allow him to sneak back across the hall to the rooms he shared with the other gems. Almost, but really not quite, and he curtailed his thoughts before anxiety could send him to check again.

He had to be up early in the morning to attend to the king, and he couldn't be exhausted because he'd stayed up the whole night fretting over something that wasn't his worry in the first place. He didn't have any say in the possible outcomes that would happen because the priestess was in his King's home. He would have no say in if his fellow gem would be released into her care.

It wasn't anything he'd ever had to be worried about before and he really, really, didn't like it.

He hesitated near his bed before turning around to head back for the room he'd just left. A pillow smacked him in the face as soon as he completed the action and a grumpy voice came from the general direction the throw had originated in. "Stay or go already, your pacing is starting to get on my nerves."

"I am not pacing! I'm just… checking on the king's interests." He pelted the pillow back at the remaining blond, following it over to lean on the man's nest of bedding.

"No, you are fussing and pacing. He wouldn't let her steal him in the dead of the night, not to mention that you've checked six times already, just where do you expect them to go?" There was a brief pause. "Get off my bed."

In direct contradiction to what he'd been told, he straddled the gray-eyed man, using him a perch as he lowered his voice so as not to bother the one person still asleep in the room. "Look, I'm allowed to worry a little, this isn't exactly a familiar situation for me. So just be quiet about it, alright Di?"

"No. You're still keeping me up." He frowned, prodding rudely at the chest of the darker slave and seemed less than shocked when it did absolutely nothing. "I believe I told you to get off my bed."
A little glint of mischievous intent flickered in the older slave's eyes, and he draped himself quite comfortably on the younger one. "But I don't want to."

"Amethyst, I'm trying to sleep." This time the prodding transformed into a full-fledged shove, which only served to give the taller gem a chance to roll to the side and under the blankets before he could be stopped.

"So am I."

"You're annoying."

"Put up with me and I'll stay put until the king comes to get me."

"...Really now?"

"Yeah. Deal?" Smirking as he saw the hint of interest that broke through the other man's glare, he snuggled his cheek rather comfortably on a pale shoulder.

One aborted action of his pillow to roll onto his side was the initial answer, one he thought had been wholly unnecessary, and then the man sighed sharply a moment later, closing his eyes rather imperiously instead. "Go to sleep before I kick you."

Dark hair fell into his eyes as he lifted his head to look at the pale face properly, tone turning serious. "Thanks Di, not a night I think I wanted to sleep alone for."

"That's all very nice, but I really don't care. Sleep." Even though the words had been sharp, the blond had wrapped his arms around him, pressing his cheek back down against his chest in a gesture that was half impatient, half gentle.

"Yeah, yeah. Going." This time he allowed himself to close his eyes and try to relax.

Sapphire would still be there in the morning.
Reprieve

Chapter Notes

I um, completely skipped the porn in this chapter. If enough people poke me I might actually write it. But, fluffy! And Outlands has some updates. And is about over to boot. Nations isn't anywhere near that pint yet. If it even has one...

It was times like these that the problems in the court came to a hold for a little while. Amethyst had finally stopped fretting, well distracted by the king, and the king wasn't concerned over his frustrations with the board of advisors. They, his Gems, were the only ones that could do that for the man, and he really saw no shame in the fact he was one of them.

When he'd still been royalty officially, he certainly hadn't had anyone that he could trust that far. He'd have been more concerned that the person or slave he was taking to bed was going to knife him on someone else's orders. Often, that someone else would have been a sibling of his, which made the prospect even more urgently in need to be avoided.

This king though, knew that they would not do that to him. How he weeded out those who would from those who would not he wasn't quite sure of. It might have had something to do with the glow of the man's eyes, but it was impossible to be certain since he'd never honestly seen him do magic.

He felt a faint tug on his hair, and turning his head to find the cause brought him eye to eye with Sapphire, who gave him a small smile. "You're thinking too hard right now Diamond."

The murmur was loud enough to catch, and he opened his mouth to reply before getting distracted by a sudden bout of laughter from off in the pillows. "That tickles!"

The king's quiet, not often heard laugh followed, and he leaned over the dark-haired slave that he tended to spend most of his time with. They'd quickly learned not to be jealous about it. "Yes, I know it does. Vincent?"

Leaning over, Ruby caught and pinned the flailing and giggling mess that Amethyst had sunk into. "Has he ever kicked you doing that?"

"Once or twice." Both blonds moved over to where the other three were, drawn by the obvious shared amusement, and it quickly became clear that the king was tormenting the man with his hair. It wasn't exactly something a man would expect to see a king doing.

"Ack! Tag teaming. So, so not fair." Amethyst was laughing still, his gaze bouncing between Ruby and the king as the crimson eyed man showed a bit of rarely observed humor and shook his head, making his hair tickle on bare skin as well.

That only seemed to increase the flailing, so he took it upon himself to join in the fray, hands catching and pinning an ankle so that he could tickle the bottom of a foot. "Why didn't I ever realize he was so ticklish?"

The king apparently didn't mind, merely shooting the blond an amused look before turning back to his doings. His visits never were the same from one time to the next. "Because you have to be
creative for it to show itself Rufus. Cloud, get the other limb?"

The priest did as asked, not taking any liberties with the opportunity. Then again, he still was the shyest of them about certain things. If he'd believed they'd be in trouble, he was certain the king's attention would have shifted well before now, but the signs of temple training still showed themselves glaringly. He never had liked the stupid things. They took all the interesting quirks right out of people.

Amethyst, meanwhile, was finally starting to calm down, even under the continuing assault, little giggly laughs that escaped with his breaths subsiding into amused hums. The king switched tactics when he noticed, crouching over his naked slave, then leaned over to kiss Ruby.

He should have been expecting something like that from their king. He wouldn't neglect them. Just as they made sure that his mind was off of the stresses of day to day, he made sure to try and keep the four of them from feeling ignored. It didn't take long for the play to slide into foreplay, then into sex from there, one well pinned Amethyst staying caught on the bottom of the pile until the king returned his attention to him.

Best for last maybe? He doubted it. If he had his guess, he'd say that the king just liked to feel the man squirm. He'd done things like that himself when he still had rank, and even if the king didn't mean it that way… well, it certainly amused him for Amethyst to squirm.

When the king wasn't distracting him that is.
And Vincent is thinking. Allot. And his mother... is someone I think you guys should take a guess at. She may say 'the end', but, Outlands is more persistant then she really believed that it was going to be.

She was his mother. Really, if not for that he would never have come home, never spoken to her, and never ever gave her his love. But she was his mother, and that meant that he loved her. No matter what kind of person she really was.

He had turned a blind eye to how she dealt with political matters. He was a bastard child, and as such, he technically shouldn't exist. Society didn't really have to acknowledge that he did, and while that made some things harder, it made other things easier. She'd had him to try and further her personal ambitions. A bastard son of a foreign nation may have a glaring sign painted on his spine, but the lack of any other children from that nation's king could have made her Queen.

Of course, then that king had gotten married and had a son, thus ruining her chances unless by some perchance the entire family was killed off. It was almost disturbing to hear the fact that that king, his father, was dead when it had happened. It had been more disconcerting to see that his mother was actually rather pleased to get the news.

He was Cemerean. Cemere was the country he was born to, and was the land where he had been formed and taught his art of killing in. It was where he became the demon of the battlefield. Junon was where he grew up, and the matter of Galetha should not have impacted him. His mother was a low ranking noble, even if her contacts were at times terrifying and vast. He would not reveal her because he was more loyal than that, and was a good son, but that never meant that he agreed with her methods. They both knew that, and she often used it against him.

Still, when there had been a shift in power from king to queen, he had been one of the first nobles in his country to hear about it. His mother's friend, a man named Hojo, had sent her a message to indicate what had happened, and he had been the courier from door to sitting room so that he could give her the missive. She usually didn't pass any letters along to him after she read them, for which he was grateful, but apparently she'd wanted him to be aware of the news.

He couldn't ever remember seeing her smile quite like that before that time, and he could honestly say that it unnerved him. It was like a reptile's grin, nothing warm about it at all, and it came more often after that day, usually on the heels of bad news, such as when the queen of Galetha had fallen years later.

He didn't like the idea that she'd come unhinged as he'd grown older. That in mind, he'd discounted it as a possibility entirely, picking apart his memories of her with studious care. He quickly found that her cold-blooded tendencies had always been there. The vicious ruthless streak, the chill calculating looks, neither of them was new. Shrouded in a gentle touch and motherly love, at least so much as a woman like her was capable, they seemed to go down to her core. He had no idea how he'd grown to be such an honorable man with her as a role model, but he knew he was, in comparison to many.

When the Cemere military had shown an interest in his talents during a practice, his mother had
encouraged him to follow the prompting. His quiet caution in picking at her motives had quickly become more, deeper, cynical. He'd been such a fool as a child, but he was more a fool later, because even though he could now see her for what she was, she was still his mother, and so she would remain. It wasn't exactly something that one could avoid.

In turn, when he'd been chosen as a gift for the king of Galetha, he hadn't been sure how to take the news. Some secrets were truly secret, and while most didn't know his parentage for a certainty, others suspected and were not wrong. He still had moments when he wondered if he was more a joke than a gift, but he knew some, who had been at the bargaining table that day, were still angry that he'd been taken in so graciously.

He could only guess they'd been careful in trying to pick someone they thought might be refused, thus giving excuse for the fighting that they dearly wished to continue. That was years ago now, and there was a sharply enforced peace across the four nations. At least, they would be the four nations as soon as the wedding was finally official. For years now it had been the three nations and Wutai, not enemies, but with a shakable alliance.

Thus was the role of the elder Princess, Tifa Lockhart Kirasagi, of Wutai. He met her once before, while he was officially seen as a warrior, and now he was going to watch her marry his king from the shadows as a harem slave. He couldn’t begrudge her, the king needed a queen. He knew he never wanted to step up from the concealing shadow he’d lived his life in, and the best way to ensure that was to make sure that the current king had a child. He was no king in the making, whatever goal his mother may have had in birthing him, and he felt no guilt in thwarting her.

He simply had to keep an eye on those in attendance, because he knew she was invited. He didn't want her to put his king at risk. Much as he loved his mother, he trusted his king more.
Jitters

Chapter Notes

Tifa was thinking on the upcoming ceremony. Look! It lives!

She wasn't terribly eager to carry out the events that the day was already putting pressure on her for. Ritual, purification, preparations, contracts, so many contracts that she nearly wanted to scream had led clear up until it was time to rest the night before. Politics was an annoying, unwelcome thing that dictated entirely too much in her life. It was dictating who she was going to marry, it had crippled her ability to make real friends, it had estranged her from her parents. And that was only a few things really.

Politics, in essence, were a major bane in her life.

Turning over the papers she'd had to sign the morning before in her mind, she sighed. While her and the King got along well, she wasn't sure how she felt about him. Sephiroth was an intelligent man, and they'd had a few intriguing discussions since she'd come to live here. He seemed to be much better at verbal sparring than she'd really believed he would be though, and she often lost anything that approached a debate between them, usually with her thinking herself the victor until she'd left his presence. That fact would have upset her more if she hadn't been aware it was her own fault for letting her temper get away with her. He was good at pricking it, steering her where he wanted her to go by using her own strong feelings against her.

She didn't want to get married. Even as she sat and felt the emerald beads being threaded into her hair with pale flowers for the wedding, she knew she didn't really want to be here, or do this, and she still made no move to leave. All that was left was the ceremony and they would be wed. Every other formal part of the marriage had already been dealt with, and she'd do nothing more than embarrass herself were she to leave now.

"Why do I need to do this?" It was a murmur, one that she hadn't intended to speak out loud, so she was startled to get a reply.

"Because you got that honor thing goin on Princess." The amused drawl was from the doorway, her redhead guard leaning easily in the frame with an amused look on his face. "Not planning on gettin cold feet on my King are ya?"

Both annoyed to have been heard, yet also relieved to get an answer from someone less biased than her handmaiden, she studied the black and gold adorned man, the orange sash that completed his livery for this day having been exchanged for green. "Why shouldn't I? He wouldn't blame me for it."

"Nah, he wouldn't blame you, King's a good man, but he'd definitely react to it anyway. Broken contract and all that y'know." He shook his head, wandering into her room and glancing around. He'd come with her from Wutai, but he'd originally been from Galetha. He didn't look like he fit in here any better than he ever had in her home court though.

"If he didn't blame me, why would he do it?" She already knew the answer, and she could see he knew that, but if there was one thing she could count on him for, it was that he'd play along. He was
a friend, one of the few she had, and even if he was a bit of a prankster that wasn't all he was.

"Because he's the King Princess. I mean, c'mon, insult and all that. Being ditched by a gorgeous gal like you? Like his little troupe of warmongers'd let a chance like that pass." He stopped out of her immediate reach, blue eyes studying the fine embroidery on the silvery gown she was wearing. It was his version of respect to his betters, so she pretended it was as good as a bow, since they were in private.

"So even a good man has to keep up appearances?" She felt Elena move away to get the simple chain necklace she'd been given the evening before for the ceremony, and turned her head to meet the blue eyed gaze directly.

"Yeah, even a good man. Don't worry princess, he'll keep to himself if you want him to outside, well, y'know."

"I know." She let out a deep breath, her thoughts flitting over her soon to be husband's slaves. She didn't believe in having any of her own, but she could understand the practicality of the tradition for people with rank, even if she didn't always want to. "You should go."

"Course Princess." He backed off as the blond woman came back towards them. "I'll let your dad know you're almost ready to go."

She followed his jaunty steps with her eyes, then stared intently at herself in the mirror with a soft sigh. "Yeah. Almost."
Wedding

Chapter Notes

This one comes to a stunning 1,297. Longest part of this thing yet. The ceremony.

This was one of the few occasions in which he could honestly say that he wished he had never been trained. The mage rights weren't public, and they had been taken care of that morning after the preparations had been started. He'd watched the guests filter into the great courtyard, a sea of bright colors and overdone finery easily seen from his current perch near the building up on the platform.

He hadn't exactly volunteered for this duty, but he was here, as was Aeris, much as he wished she had not found her way to him. There was no shame in being one of the King's gems. There was no shame in being a slave. He just knew that while she understood, she didn't seem to grasp why he wanted this life. At least she'd stopped trying to convince him to return with her. It had made the time spent in this small area while they set up the ceremony a very quiet affair though.

He eased back as the last symbol was scribed on the tiles with his brush, gaze flicking to the assembled guests, and he wished dearly that someone else might have been eligible for this task. There was no second best for the King though. He was here and he was powerful, and a priestess had come to them of her own will. There was nothing else needed, social status ignored during this in favor of knowledge.

That was simply how these things worked.

Pulling up to his feet, he noted that Aeris was doing the same. Unspoken cues had them circling to check the work of the other. They were done with the preparations, and now all that was needed was the wedding party itself. A look upwards was enough to tell him it was time, and he gestured Aeris to her place. She was to embody the female and be his assistant in these rites.

It didn't feel nearly as unnatural as it should have to be in this position. He'd been told so often that he'd never lead rites before he'd left the Temple that to be in charge of one so important… he would have been rather happy about it if he wasn't marrying someone, who his life was devoted to, to someone he didn't love. As it was, he focused on his task.

Moving forwards, he opened his arms, the deep blue of his vest rippling as a breeze swept through the yard, slowly hushing the crowd. He was wearing his earrings and anklets, as he always did, and the chime of the sapphire and silver on his ankles reminded the people whom it was that he belonged to. It was an artful way to understate the man's power; he would definitely give him that. He had no doubt that some people were noting and filing it away for later consideration.

It was not, however, something he could afford to focus on just now. Projecting his voice as he'd been taught when he'd still been an initiate, he started to speak. "I ask now that all those who would desecrate this union leave now lest the Lady protest your interference."

There wasn't any movement, and he hadn't expected there to be. These people did not believe in the gods. They did not fear them, and they did not know the sincerity of his request. There were those who were not in attendance who did, and he didn't see the faces of some who would very likely be at the reception. They, at least, understood not to interfere in magic.
"As it shall be." He eased back, one pace, then two, and watched people move to the edges as he pushed open the doors that led inside, signaling to those within that they were ready for them.

The princess was first, and the moonlight glow of her dress was broken up with a veritable rainbow of designs in the fine threads. The king's attire was opposite as he followed four steps behind, dark velvets a pattern of many colors as silver threaded them together at the seams. For each, the wedding attire suited, and he watched them get arranged in their places. The king stood before the priestess, the princess before himself to the king's right.

He was aware of the others slipping out to their positions, Amethyst was on the steps at the corner of the platform to the king's left, Diamond was to the princess's right in a mirroring position. He didn't need to turn his head to see Ruby slipping down three steps behind the pair. They were going to be used in this ceremony as the sentries. He could feel Reno stationed behind himself and Aeris opposite Ruby. The three behind the pair were turned out towards the crowd, while Reno was with his back to the doors and as such was looking through the group down to the people below. All sentries had to be the same gender, and close to the pair who were being united. It was just convenient that in this instance there was already a set.

Sweeping his gaze to be sure everyone was in their respective positions, the people milling below already having quieted as the ceremony started, he nodded to Reno. The man pulled the doors shut.

"Freya, this servant asks your attendance to this ceremony. He calls on the right of your hands that this union be always defended."

When he paused, Aeris started to speak. "Freya, this servant asks your compassion for this ceremony. She calls on the left of your hands that this union be always strong."

He shivered as he felt their calling heeded, and he moved forward one step to stand before the pair as they turned to each other to join hands. Aeris was getting the cords, and he knew she didn't realize that their goddess would pay them this attention, but he noticed when she noticed that the careful marks they'd laid out were starting to glow, rippling out from his position over the stone. The light crawled along the wards of protection already laid in the walls.

"I would ask this union be blessed by your hands. Lady of many faces, see them and give that which you would give." The cord found its way into his hands, and he was oblivious to the murmurs breaking out in the crowd, the fact that attention was turning to him because of the glow suffusing his skin as he wrapped the hands of the royal pair. "I would ask they be blessed in their future and love."

The glow jumped, not leaving him but spreading to the couple, and it brightened certain coils of the design as it encompassed their sentries. He was more focused on getting the threads, so many colors to show that single-mindedness would not be part of the union, into place. The light flared when they were settled and he lifted his hands away.

He felt Aeris move forward more than he saw her as the light faded away, and he heard her voice ringing clear. "We thank you lady for your grace and the blessings bestowed on this day. Know the invitation stands always to your grace." The light drained out of stone, the power settling back where it had come from. "It is done! Go and tell all of your queen that there might be celebration!"

The blindness of using power was the cue he'd been waiting for to tell him there wasn't anymore to do, and he let out a breath of relief as his vision went dark. The ceremony was finished now. Stepping back and to the side out of sight of all those below that had come to watch, he summarily collapsed.
She watched the unconscious form carefully, turning over the inconsistencies of the ceremony with those she'd been a part of in the past. Usually, there was some kind of magic, some kind of presence, yes. With their goddess it was practically unheard of for a wedding to go entirely without blessing and the notice of the divine. Power, in this instance, was life, and it was almost guaranteed that a child would come of the union in which the couple had been so touched.

And that, of course was the crux of it. It hadn't just been the couple that the gods had touched. The light had spread over all of those who had been involved in the ceremony… and she had no idea what that meant. Perhaps that wasn't so true, she had a rather good idea what it could have meant, but she didn't believe that to have been what happened. It was unheard of, honestly, but it had happened, and the only one that was aware of the reason, possibly, was unconscious at the moment.

Amethyst had wanted to come here with her and Cloud, not that she could blame him after watching his king be wed to someone else, but that was not the way the duties worked. He had to attend his king with his new queen, as the senior, and highest ranking, harem slave. Diamond had been sent to coordinate the gifts being given, and Ruby was given task to mingle and give thanks for each blessing bestowed. Among the four, they each had a task set to them well before the ceremony had gone so oddly, so there was no real argument to be given.

The only thing she'd allowed Amethyst before sending him off to the royal pair was tying the black sash across Cloud's eyes. She wasn't sure why he'd done it, but there had to have been some reason and she wasn't going to ask it of him. Especially when he seemed to believe that she already knew. There were quite a few things that she didn't already know about this particular day. She made sure not to tell anyone that fact.

At least not yet.

It did seem, however, that that time was coming very quickly. "Cl-…Sapphire." She only just caught herself from calling him his given name. It made her pause every time. Perhaps, after a few more months, calling him otherwise might come somewhat naturally. "Sapphire, you shouldn't be sitting."

He was rubbing his eyes, though not moving the material, and after a moment of peering upwards, he looked at her, the action seeming as much like a direct gaze as anything else he might have done, blindfolded or no. "I just need a few minutes to get my bearings."

"What happened out there? It wasn't normal, certainly not like any other ceremony I've ever seen or been a part of. I didn't let anyone know that, but that… That was not how it was supposed to go."

He leaned into her touch, letting her steady him easily, and she could take a fairly good guess as to why. When one of the other Gems returned, she'd be sure to hand him over quickly so that nobody could accuse her of picking through the king's treasures. Again. "Aeris? What are you talking about?"
She bit back the urge to sigh and just met the blindfolded eyes with her own, trying not to notice the way he seemed to be listening intently even when she wasn't speaking. That was a new thing, and she wasn't sure she trusted it. "The light should not have touched the sentries. It should have moved away from us, more specifically you, and into the marriage pair. It… didn't work like that out there."

"It didn't?" He paused, straightening up slightly. "I didn't realize that the ceremony was any different than a normal one."

She sighed out a soft breath and moved forward to hug him. "You wouldn't. You were at the eye of the power, and that's enough to blind anyone to the outpouring beyond that. It was as though… they were all being blessed Cl-Sapphire. All of them. All of us. You know what that could mean don't you?"

He was quiet for a long few moments, then ducked his head on a soft breath. "I know. You can't tell anyone though Aeris. It just wouldn't be safe for them to be aware of the significance."

Her voice got hushed, and she eased back to look at his partially obscured face. "Silly Cloud. I won't go telling your secrets, they're safe with me. If someone finds out… well, I'll be able to make sure that they can't use it against you. People may fight each other, but they can't fight the gods."

He shook his head on a soft sigh, looking to the left of her as he leaned his chin on his knee. "That's what I'm worried about."

"Then I think, my dear friend, that you need to have a little more faith in the gods."
What, you didn't think that I forgot Hojo, did you?

Fascinating. Interesting. Advantageous. They were all appropriate words for the information he had been told by one of those who had attended the ceremony in his stead. His paranoia had proven itself to be wise, since if he'd attended his protections could easily have been shredded by the goddess that had decided to bless the… group. Such beings were often known to be vengeful to those who were against something that they were in the process of approving.

His companion, likewise, had not been amid the audience, and he greeted her warmly. She had no love for his king, considering the way he'd thwarted her long held plans, but she, too, was aware of the fact that the day's events did not necessarily have to be a negative development. Especially not in light of the unexpected divergence from what had likely been in the original plans for the ceremony. It left her contingency plans in a better stead by far at the very least.

He dared not mention to her that he had been years in trying to completely ruin her scheming, of course. Not when it might, at last, work to his benefit. Then again, this only changed his plans in method, not so much as in essence. He could, however, leave one while dispensing with the others if it would make his lady happy.

He so very rarely had the urge to please, and he was glad it did not interfere with his personal goals.

"Hojo, what are the schemes being formed in that mind of yours?" The low murmur reached him easily as the blue eyed woman leaned into him, one silvery blond eyebrow arching. She was such a pale thing, but part of that, at least, was well-seasoned age. One would never know she was well into her fifties just by looking at her, no more than they would think that of himself. If he had just met her he would have placed her at no more than half her real age.

"What makes you believe I'm scheming anything at all? When in your presence I have no need to speculate on anything other than gaining a smile from you." They were both aware of the emptiness of the flattery, as genuine as it might be normally.

"No need perhaps, but that doesn't mean you don't do it." She shook her head, and her eyebrows raised slightly. "Tell me what thoughts your errand boy put into your head. I know you have a theory on this magic."

He led her away from the dance floor as the music changed tempo, easily meeting her eyes. "Surely someone as adept at yourself would have far more experience than I ever could. After all, I can't do magic, so how could I possibly have thought of something you haven't?"

At that point she laughed at him, her look turning to viciously sweet as her voice dropped to a croon. "Oh, don't lie to me. You know I'm not afraid to make my way past those barriers of yours to rip the information right out of your mind." She leaned even closer, snugly tucked against his side. "But I have more respect for you than that, can't you give me the same?"

He shivered, and his smile turned softer as he studied her expression, the way her eyes just dared him
to defy her in this matter. She was never more glorious than when she was terrifying. One just had to recognize the signs. "If I tell you, you will not be pleased with me."

"You think I'm pleased with you now?" She tossed her head slightly, and her annoyance was yet clearer as the sharpness of a red glow started to show at the edges of her left eye.

"Not in the least. But if I told you my plans then that would take all the surprise out of them. You know I truly hate to spoil my gifts to you." He put as much sincerity into his voice as possible, and he soon found himself both pleased and saddened that the fire left her eyes to fade fully back to the sharp blue that was her normal color.

Her voice, however, was still sharp, and low enough that it was for his ears alone. "You have a respite Hojo. Only for the day." She looked across the room, eyes lighting with something both dark and amused. "After all, my lovely son is doing such a wonderful job in dealing with the other guests that I feel I must find my way to him. I can't very well leave without giving my blessing, now can I? It would be so horribly rude of me."

He followed her gaze to Sephiroth's red eyed slave and chuckled softly, picking up her need to lovingly flex her claws on something she still considered hers. "You're right, of course. Shall I escort you?"

"Oh, I do believe that is something I can agree to."

They shared a sharp edged smile of accord before Jenova went to speak to her son.
Delineated

Chapter Notes

Zack hath retaken the perspective.

He'd wanted to check in on Sapphire. He'd wanted to ask the lady priestess what went on out there. He wanted to mingle or deal with greetings. He didn't really want to be here.

He'd never not wanted to be here before, but this time was different. This time he had to… well, he had to give his king away to someone who might just never give him back, that's what he had to do. He didn't think she would do that to them.

He didn't think she had been false about becoming their friends, in her way.

He didn't think that things were going to go wrong now that things were nearly finalized.

But he didn't know.

And not knowing was making this entire situation so much more difficult. He was the only one in the room with them, the head of a harem between two rulers from two nations, and he didn't delude himself in thinking that he was anything more. He and the other three may be of much value to their king, but there were times when that simply could not matter.

The night of a wedding bind was really one of them.

Moving forward silently at a gesture, he was careful to not look too closely, to show he saw the mutual tension in the air. They'd all known this was where this would lead, and there was no more or less to be done. Moving deftly around his king, the black haired man took the ceremonial clothes, one layer at a time until all had been removed.

He wanted to stop and look, but he did not, instead turning and bowing his head to his new queen, watching her through his lashes. The silence grew heavier, but she said nothing to either of them, so he stepped forward to carefully start to undo her dress. For all her talk of not wanting slaves, not liking them, she ignored him well enough after the first few moments of sharp attention.

Just like anyone else of noble or royal blood knew how to do.

There was really very little heat between them at all, none that resembled desire, too much that was anger and a battle of wits. It would not help them complete this part of their duties. For all things that he could and would do for his king, in this instance it was something that was not to be done, and he could not really help these two find what needed found.

Pale violet eyes flicking from one to the other, he slipped away with the gown to lay it aside. She was tense, incredibly so, and apparently her nudity was something of an issue for her before the current audience. His king, by contrast, internalized it far better, and was critically studying as he was being studied. The only way it was clear he was uncomfortable was the straighter than normal posture of his back and the way he was keeping his attention utterly focused.

If he'd thought it would ease the tension, he would have gone to crouch by his king in offer of
petting, giving a place to send his nerves, but he knew it wouldn't work out, not how it was supposed to at least. So he didn't, even if it would have made him feel better as well. Instead he moved to the bed, fingers lingering over the covers for a moment before he shifted onto the mattress and walked them down, the top left corner in his hands as he padded back towards the bottom right.

"My king." He turned, taking a deep breath as he stepped down, forcing himself to clear the path with a bowed head as he slipped aside. His voice grew quieter. "My queen."

Neither seemed to want to get closer to the other, nor the bed, which was ironic, but after a moment they seemed to work themselves out, his king resting his hand at the base of the new queen's back as he part steered, part pushed her along. She wasn't deliberately digging her heels in, something he heard more than saw, his own hair blocking his line of vision, but she was hesitant.

Perhaps that was a good thing. He closed his eyes as he heard the rustle of cloth, finally. If she was hesitant, then perhaps she would not grow possessive.

It was a hope, and he focused on such thoughts as he lifted his head, then moved to stand at the foot of the bed to bear witness, fingers curled tightly around a bedpost.

Feelings, of course, had no place in politics.
Chapter Summary

It's an alternate universe where Sephiroth is a king, while Zack, Cloud, Vincent, and Rufus are his harem slaves, who he has renamed as gems.

Chapter Notes

This section is from Vincent's point of view. Follow the tags to get to previous parts, which are in order. Comments appreciated!

Everything in the days after the wedding was hectic, intense- and somewhat depressing. Those times he watched Amethyst, the man was distressed. It was unusual for him, the senior slave often being the most content with his life here, though a portion of that, he was sure, had to do with the security of being the favorite among them.

That hadn't, of course, changed. Other circumstances had however, and there was little to be done with the legalities and uncertainty of a god blessed marriage between royalty. It was a complication, and his uneasiness wasn't without cause. The Queen held their lives in her hands, and all they could do was wait.

The King's things were his own, but what he had he shared with her, and she had the power to keep him from them, even if she had no allowance to set them free, desire or no. That, at least, was something he was grateful for, since in an obscure way it ensured he wouldn't lose the first place where he had been truly of use, even if in perhaps an undefined capacity.

None of that would alleviate Amethyst's upset in the telling, and all that left him was offers of comfort and to watch. When he and Diamond had arrived in the king's hands, the violet-eyed man had been similarly unsettled, unsure what to do with the new attachment to his king's attentions. It had not had this edge of fear. Observing him now caused his hair to stand on end, the air of restrained something, not violence, not power, hovering around him in a tangible aura.

He was not the only one off color and off balance. Sapphire was often seen to be in talks with the priestess who had followed him to this nation. It had only become more disconcerting when his sight had returned two days after the ceremony. He watched them all, considered, and said nothing. There was something there to be said, it lurked in his eyes and on his kisses, but it was never spoken.

The fact the blond had something to say made him want to know, but he did not ask, and was wise to the fact that if he wasn't told, then the man had to have a cause. No matter what he was now, the blond had been a priest first, powerful in his faith, and powerful in truth. Just watching him at work was enough to humble the unbelievers, and he had no regrets in saying that he had had no faith before seeing the man do his special magic.

It had been most curious that as soon as the man had recovered he had set to the wards in the castle, renewing them rather aggressively and causing more than the smallest bit of chaos on the premises.
Still, them being who they were, it had apparently been anticipated that the marriage would send them off spiral, leaving unexpected oddities with more slack and unquestioning indulgence than was typical. They were, after all, slaves.

Diamond had strayed close to him. He knew just by meeting the young prince's eyes that they were seeing the same things. Whether they had come to the same conclusions was not discussed, and they were the better for the inference that they agreed, even if they ultimately shared no opinion at all.

It was how they did many things, and considering their once enemy status, he believed that they had come far to be at this point. There was no new undertone to his kisses, no grief, fear, or words unsaid. There was annoyance, impatience, hunger, but all of those things were old, common to most situations where languor wasn't the chosen medium. Considering the ambience in their rooms of late, he knew that this was understandable, and he was glad that something had remained properly in place.

In the week since the wedding, too many things had been different. The king had not come to see them. He knew there was no time, not yet, but the way Amethyst would slink into the beds of the others as though chilled was one of the things that made it so hard to be in a good mood. The man often did not smile, he did not pick at Diamond, in spite of the man's apparent attempts to draw him into it for the sake of normalcy, and he himself did no better. Sapphire's attempts resulted in the physical, and ultimately, sex seemed the only placation the man would accept.

All of this worried him, and he knew that among them, Amethyst most needed the reassurance of their king. Thus, when the door finally opened and the man stepped through, he did not move from his place, nor was he stunned that the black haired man was the first to reach their owner.

Looking to the others, he was far from surprised to see that they were doing as he was, giving the king a chance to soothe the one who had been with him longest without interference.

Tears of relief were still tears. When they were through, then they would greet their king in proper fashion.

For now, they would wait.
Lights

Chapter Summary

It's an alternate universe where Sephiroth is a king, while Zack, Cloud, Vincent, and Rufus are his harem slaves, who he has renamed as gems.

Chapter Notes

Follow the tags to get to previous parts, which are in order. Comments appreciated!

Things felt different.

At first it hadn't been something readily apparent, just small niggles on the edges of his vision when his sight had finally come back to him after the intense marriage ceremony he'd led.

He could tell that the others were curious. Even Amethyst now that the king had finally resumed allowing the man at his side again. He hadn't taken to the separation well in the least, and sadly no matter how powerful he was, he wasn't a cure for heartsickness. Still, he'd done what he could, and it had restored his own flux of magical balance as well.

That alone had been a relief, because for the first day after he'd regained his sight it had been almost unbearable, the way his power teetered from nil to overmuch. It wasn't just a personal issue, it had been the gods doing as gods did. However, he was still human, avatar or no, and he had needed to do something with the overwhelming sense of Them.

Usually, when he was ridden in ceremony, the sensation was gone at the end. This touch and go was new, odd, and he wondered if it would last for the remainder of his life now that…

Well, the ceremony he'd led for his king seemed to have changed much, and the gods apparently approved of their choice in the way they had declared the blessing. Still, though, he didn't believe he'd ever fortified the castle so well as it was now. He could, when he'd looked after the blindness had passed, see the holes, either worn or torn into his former barriers, and he'd fixed them.

So many holes, so many ways that things could have gone wrong, things that could have allowed a dangerous spell or hex through. So much that he had left to inattention without realizing at all. But, this had been fixed as he slowly came to terms with his new sight. The Sight had never been among his talents, but the whispers at the edges of his vision said it was no longer so, and the clarity of his magic sigils said ever so much more than those glimmers did.

This, he didn't mention to anyone, not the other gems, not Aeris. The Sight was rare, the manifestation of it being different from god to god, person to person. Apparently his was not yet something he could embrace, as looking directly at a person ruined whatever his sight was trying to tell him in the first place. It was frustrating, though it made him wonder if the subtlety was actually common among those gifted this way from birth.
It would explain why those who did have The Sight he had met in the past had refused to explain how it worked. It would have taken all the mystery out of it if they had to admit that it was fleeting, intense impressions more than something truly like sight. In other words, one could not rely on their eyes to do it. He could be wrong in this thought, of course, but it was amusing to consider it as just one more trick in a cadre of small magics that he'd seen at temple.

Shaking away the musings, he Looked. Well. He tried to look. Inanimate objects were so much more cooperative, but then, he'd spent many years refining his touch with the magic just so he could wind the magic into a spectrum he, and others, could see. The new developments had made that a little less obvious, but people just plain weren't cooperative, especially by comparison.

Grimacing as he got a half glimpse of something perfectly nasty on looking out the window, he let his curiosity lead him and turned his gaze down so he could tell who that black swarming mass belonged to.

Hojo. Hmm. He couldn’t say he was surprised. Though…

He hadn't expected the man to be staring upward toward the window when he looked.
Mistress

Chapter Summary

It's an alternate universe where Sephiroth is a king, while Zack, Cloud, Vincent, and Rufus are his harem slaves, who he has renamed as gems.

Chapter Notes

Follow the tags to get to previous parts, which are in order. Comments appreciated!

He should have expected this. A loophole. Or rather, a political nightmare.

The marriage was official, he had his queen for his kingdom, he had a woman to bear his heir and be a settling piece over how the lineage would be carried through.

The council, however, seemed to disagree. They declared her unfit because her father was her grandmother's child, not her mother. It was a small detail, one Wutai had overlooked for the simple fact that lineage, there, traveled through the sons, and while daughters were at times prized, and might even rule if no other options were present, they were not ultimately important. Here, in Galetha, that was not so. He had right to rule because his father was a queen's only child, and thus, the magic passed leadership through him to his only child. He took after his mother in looks, a lady of the royal line who had been found to keep it from deviating too far from where it ought to be.

He had been expected to do as his father had, to find a wife of the line for the sake of genes, even though the magic would work through him as it had his father. And now, he was being told he still hadn't completed that task. The line was broken at his wife's father, and thus, it rendered her unsuitable. They had only decided this once the marriage was finalized, of course.

In all, the news was... unpleasant. He would not, honestly could not, back out on the marriage now. Not only had the people seen, accepted, even rejoiced at the wedding, but the gods had looked on that ceremony, and the gods took those who turned on their gifts very poorly. It had been a long time since any gifts had been given, and he wouldn't be the one to cause the gods to once again turn a blind eye to them all.

Thus, a quandary.

How was he to get an heir that might be accepted by law and not have his wife ousted?

A mistress.

The very idea, unfortunately, displeased him. In a way it even offended him. He had his Gems. He had his wife. His wife, by necessity, lay before the Gems in the hierarchy, only unable to oust them because they were not hers. A mistress would be a nebulous middle ground, a person who wasn't fully controlled, yet recognized as something more powerful than bed slaves.
Thus, he paced. He walked his room, for once alone, even Amethyst tucked out of his sight while he tried to work through this new problem. Think through his second cousins and further for anyone that might be suitable. Anyone who would not cause more upset in his household than the marriage itself had already done.

He came up with nothing.

He wanted to ask his Gems, Diamond in particular, but with his own mixed feelings, that would be unwise. He was their king, not their equal, and he had to keep up such appearances, no matter how it at times pained him or them.

No, in this instance, he had to speak to Tifa. His wife.

She already knew some of the issue, though not the fact he was already being forced to bend her position as the only female in his household. That he would unfortunately have to tell her when he spoke to her.

Among other things, such as why he was finding this such an onerous chore. After all, why should a king protest more women in his bed when it had long since been made more than obvious to his queen that what they had was nothing at all like love?

He could not point and say he had enough people to satisfy, as, while not a lie, it was not acceptable. The Gems were discounted. If they were deemed to interfere, they would be set aside until he had time for them again, no more no less.

He could not say that he was devoted to Tifa alone, as she would know it was a lie, just as he would. He did not touch her more than he had to, and she would resent even this in light of her child not taking the throne.

No, he had to admit his disfavor towards women. They were not to his taste, and while only the Gems, not even all of them, were thus far aware... his wife had to be informed.

Else, she would never accept that he had to find another woman to clutter his household.

Closing his eyes, he sighed deeply. If only this once, the matter could be resolved simply, he would thank the gods in a most fitting way.

Nodding slightly at that silent vow, he gathered his dignity, chasing his troubles from his expression as he moved to leave his rooms. The king, after all, did not fret, and the mantle had to be worn to that certain view.

That did not, however, mean he could not be surprised.

Standing in front of the door was the priestess, and she looked, well, as if she had gotten unwelcome news.

"I apologize for coming to disturb you unannounced My King... but I have a few things I must discuss with you. They're about the ceremony."

That simply, the matter of a mistress was put on hold.

For the moment.
Visitors

Chapter Summary

It's an alternate universe where Sephiroth is a king, while Zack, Cloud, Vincent, and Rufus are his harem slaves, who he has renamed as gems.

Chapter Notes

Follow the tags to get to previous parts, which are in order. Comments appreciated!

She wanted to be there already! Shifting side to side in her saddle had only irritated her mount to no end, and that had irritated her escort to no end. It wasn't her fault that her bird had skittered sideways into his!

Still, he'd threatened to paralyze her for the rest of the journey if her bird did it again, which had effectively killed her fidgets. Him being her escort meant he wasn't supposed to do things like that. Him also being a mage meant that she couldn't count on getting him in trouble if he did do it.

She was a princess, he was a mage. Her aim of being a Queen didn't mean diddly when not dealing with someone from her own court. Even if he looked it. She bet his mom was from Wutai.

Shaking thoughts of the mage out of her head, she looked around the city. Mideel. She'd heard about it, but she'd never seen it before. In fact, she'd missed her sister's wedding because of something political back home. She'd totally saved Reeve's cookies this time, but that didn't make up for not seeing Mr. I'm-too-mysterious-for-my-own-good.

But! She was here now! That was what counted. She was here now and she was going to see her sister, and meet the rumor laden Sephiroth.

And maybe, if she did it right, she could find someone fun to talk to here too. A someone that wasn't a stuff shirted mage who needed to get laid, and wasn't doing their level best to suck up to her. She eyed up the back of her escort's robes. Green, of course. Galetha's noble colors and all that. Why couldn't he have worn any of her noble colors? She'd bet a good penny he'd look good in them.

"Lady Yuffie, you can't get us there faster by giving me dirty looks."

"Oi! I wasn't! I just... was thinking. You know, we're back to your home and all so, well, you got a special someone here that you were staying all stiff lipped for back in Wutai? Huh?"

Dark eyes glanced back to her, and she felt a grin coming on at his horrified look. The mage was so fun to tease. "No. Nothing of that sort at all Princess."

"Riiiiight, so there's nobody here who calls you just plain 'Tseng' huh?"

"No." He turned forward again, kicking his white bird up to a trot. If she didn't know better she'd think he was trying to get away from her. He cut off her next tease though, and his words made her
look from him to the road she'd been ignoring. "We're almost there, so just settle down for a bit longer Lady Yuffie."

She nodded, but was a bit too busy taking in the tall spires of the castle only just visible past the wall in front of them. "Yeah."

There was only a few moments of silence before she had another thought though. "Hey Tseng?"

"Yes, Lady Yuffie?"

"Do you think they'll try to make me wear a dress?"

There was a long pause in response to her question, then finally a sigh. His tone was very put upon, which she thought was totally unfair. "Yes, Lady Yuffie."

"Damn."

Ah well, at least she had one thing to look forward to anyway.
Telling

Chapter Summary

It's an alternate universe where Sephiroth is a king, while Zack, Cloud, Vincent, and Rufus are his harem slaves, who he has renamed as gems.

Chapter Notes

Blame this bit on 🎉althaea101 Follow the tags to get to previous parts, which are in order. Comments appreciated!

It wasn’t often that he was summoned to the King’s rooms. At least not on his own. He was, after all, the priest, not the favorite, and that made a world of difference in the needs he was called for.

Thus, it was slightly disorienting to see the King out of sorts on his arrival, a long fingered hand tapping the arm of the chair he was sitting in with something like restlessness. He’d never seen him do anything like that before. He imagined that Amethyst likely had, at some point, but this was not then, and he didn’t understand why he’d been brought if the man was upset.

Had he done something unsettling? He tried to recall anything that might have made the King unhappy, but there was nothing. He’d been busy, yes, a major rite like the wedding used all sorts of energies, but he was certain the man knew that.

“Stop hovering in the door Sapphire, I would have words with you.”

Taking the statement at value, and as the command he did not doubt it was, he padded quietly over to stand beside the chair, looking to the King. After a moment of study, the man had him settle on the pillow at his feet, facing him as he waited for his King to speak. When it became clear nothing was forthcoming, he dared to ask instead. “What words would my liege have with me?”

He was relieved that the boldness wasn’t met with displeasure. “Earlier today, I had the priestess come to call on me. She had heard of my council’s murmurs and sought to help. Interestingly, she offered a solution that is both intriguing and suspicious for its convenience. It can cause a great many problems if it is not true.”

When the man met his eyes, he nodded, knowing that if he broke away to look aside while he was making a point, in privacy, the man would be displeased.

Apparently satisfied with that answer for now, he continued. “Your lady priestess mentioned to me two things, either of which would make my life, for once, less complicated. The first was her lineage, a poor daughter of a poor daughter of a landless daughter from a third daughter of a cousin. It was a branch of the family that has since been... lost to record keeping, but if she can follow the family lines she would be acceptable for her proposal. I would need look no farther than her offer and keep peace with the people and my household as my Queen has no issue with her as a person as things are.”
“My King?”

“I was informed my Queen was not a suitable choice to bear the heirs of my family. It is possible that the priestess is, and she offered to do me that chore, on provision I understood, and acted, on another matter. That matter is why I called you to my attention.”

The blond stared at him for a long moment, then felt his eyes widen a bit. That was kept as a secret for a reason.

“Explain the wedding to me Cloud. Explain it to me, and tell me what my Gems now are to me in the eyes of the gods, won’t you?”
Expectations

Chapter Summary

It's an alternate universe where Sephiroth is a king, while Zack, Cloud, Vincent, and Rufus are his harem slaves, who he has renamed as gems.

Chapter Notes

smokyglass (of LJ)'s long involved comment made me pause and think, then reread all my old chapters of this. At which point you finally get a new chapter. Thank you for your enduring patience with me.

“"My King... I...” The blond looked away from him, and he felt an odd sense of vindication. Why had his Gem kept such a thing secret from him? Why did he think that he ought not be aware?

“Sapphire. I will take no excuses about this.” His tone was mild, and he knew that even then the warning in it was clear.

“’There are always those that might hear my King.”

“I will have my answer.”

There was silence, the blond staring at the ground as the king stared at him. When he finally spoke, his voice was very quiet, and it was clear he’d lost his resolve to silence. “What did she tell you?”

“She told me that I had my answer, and that I no longer had to fear so keenly for the safety of my Gems because they were mine in a far deeper way than before.”

”Because of the ceremony.”

”Yes, because of the ceremony. What happened that day Cloud? What did the Gods do?” The blond twitched when he spoke his given name. Good.

“They... invoked Binding. It wasn’t meant, nor the symbols used... Please forgive me this, it was not what was intended in any way.”

”Was it everyone in the ceremony Cloud?”

The young man’s voice got softer still. “Yes.”

”Reno of two lands, my gems, my Queen, the Priestess, you? All of you?”

”Yes my King.” His voice, at this point, was barely audible.

“You were not going to ever tell me.”
“No my King.”

"Why?"

The silence that followed that was stifling, but he would wait. He would have this clear, and then the blond would be punished for keeping it from him. Binding or no, he would ever be his Gem, and his other Gems would remain with him ever after as well.

However, he wasn’t without awareness that the blond was afraid, and he moved to him, resting his hand on his hair to stroke it. He wouldn’t strike him. No, there were more effective ways to make him see his errors. “Tell me Sapphire.”

"I was afraid.” He held his silence, waiting. Sapphire seemed to realize why and his tone was forced as he continued. Was he afraid now? “I was afraid that something would change, with you. Not... Not that you would turn me away, or hurt the others, but... do you still trust me my King?”

Unfortunately, he could not immediately reassure. He had to think about it. Clearly, his Priest hadn’t intended this. Clearly, he hadn’t had these designs for several years. No, he would have determined something, found something. The blond wouldn’t have defended the castle so well with his magic. The blond wouldn’t be terrified if it were anything but an accident. But he’d been tied with two who had nothing to do with him. Tied to people he didn’t particularly care to be, no matter how advantageous this might yet become.

Did he trust?

He wasn’t entirely sure, but the blue eyes that looked up at him were filled with a spirit that he didn’t wish to shatter, and he knew that he could do that. He could break him irreparably. “I do Sapphire, but never again will you do this to me. Never again.”

When the blond folded to his knees to show how thankful he was, he decided that being soft wasn’t always the worst way. He would see, however, if this softness and the man’s value were worth trust he wasn’t certain he’d wished to continue giving.

Either way, they were his forever now, so the point was, of course, moot.

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