Garnet Guns and Twin Blades

by Gothams Only Wolf

Summary

Vincent Valentine is awaiting the end of the world when an old friend comes to call.
Awakening the Slumbering Demon

Chapter Notes

Alright, two things. One; I blitzed through Blue Exorcist on CrunchyRoll. Two; Vincent Valentine never really leaves once he becomes a Muse, I think.

Therefore you get this, lovely readers.

Some knowledge of FF VII and Blue Exorcist is preferred going into this; otherwise it won't make a lick of sense. I have some clue as to where this is headed but not entirely so hang in there. This is gonna go pretty fast.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Vincent Valentine was normally found sleeping in a coffin. It's incredibly hard to open and even harder to wake said occupant. And yet-Yet here he was, standing in a meadow full of flowers that matched those grown by an old friend. Golden and ivory blooms swaying in the wind that playfully tugged on a cloak that snapped back.

I have a request. The intense presence took familiar shape in one Aerith Gainsborough.

"A request?" Vincent murmured in the same velvet voice he's had for millennia. "It isn't time for Omega to be released." Glowing crimson eyes gazed impassively over a scarlet cloak that seemed to move on its own.

Aerith sighs. Dilly-dally, shilly-shally. Chaos's time will come. It's actually about something-Someone else. They're important; like you and Cloud.

Vincent pressed his lips together at the comparison. "I see. Will they be fighting?"

"No. Not just yet, anyway. They've just been born, silly. I want you to teach them."

"There is... more than one?"

Mmm-hmm. Twins. Thier names are Okumura Rin and Okumura Yukio. You get the chance to exercise that rusty Wutainese! But... Only if you say yes. Aerith clapped her hands together with a sweet smile as she told him, the LifeStream bringing thier faces up for Vincent to see. There is just one other thing, Vincent.

He glances up from the tiny, sweet faces to see her with a serious expression.

They're part demon.

"Cubs?" Chaos rumbled to life, Vincent's vibrant crimson flickering to a stunning gold. "After all this time, you would grant us a chance-"

Satan's offspring; half-human, half-demon. They will be different, shunned at times. Will you still undertake this task? Aerith pinned Chaos with her cool malachite gaze, as if willing him to
"There is no question, Goddess-blessed. We will take great care with the little ones. Defend them, teach them, whatever you so name, we will do." Chaos fervently promised, his normally savage visage crumbling to reveal something tender and soft. "They will not doubt that they are loved."

I thought that might be your answer. Aerith hummed as she glided across the flowers, touching down in the grass before Chaos. I hereby appoint you Soul Guardian of the twins. It's not going to be easy. She paused briefly and made a noise of understanding. Oh. You're gonna need records for the real world after so long. Lemme see, Mephisto should still be at True Cross. He'll vouch for you.

Chaos's eye twitched at the mention. "That brat would sooner throw us under a bus,"

He's your way in. Attempt to be decent; if not for me nor him, at least for the cubs?

"Very well. For the cubs." Chaos grumbled as Aerith opened a portal to True Cross Academy with a ghostly key.

-True Cross Academy; December 28-

Chaos doesn't appreciate the one-way-trip nor does he like the way Mephisto was looking at him like a piece of particularly tasty meat.

"So, I understand Assiah has given you a... mission. Why not do it from Gehenna?" The sly remark grated on every nerve all five of them owned but still they sat.

"You know as well as I do, Mephisto, that neither realm is what it once was," he snorted quietly as he kicked up his boots on the foot-stool. "Gods, Goddesses, Dragons... No one remembers the time when both were united."

"You do, don't you?" Mephisto was very good with manipulation but Chaos was, frankly, too old for it to work.

"Wouldn't tell you even if I did, impertinent pup. I'm here to watch over a pair. It's from a plane higher than any you've known. You're... supposed to vouch for me." Chaos murmured as he explained.

"Vouch for you? On whose's word?"

"Aerith's." The smile that pulled his lips up was something he was unable to help as Mephisto nearly choked on his tea.

"Calling in that favor, is she?" the calculated eyebrow raise only widened Chaos's smile.

"Mmm. So, what's the cover, pup?"

Chapter End Notes

Why is it when there's a blank space in the fandom that I have the urge to fill it?! Ah
well. Comment, complain, ect. please~
Chapter Notes

I have a bit more of this written but I may be editing this as I catch up on the manga. Heads up, I guess?

Couple of things:

Vincent is speaking what he considers Wutainese (my Headcanon is that he's half-half) but what most people would call Japanese. For those of you with a little less knowledge on FF VII, Wutai reads as Japan basically.

He's not in the kid's lives for a bit since the Vatican is suspicious of him. Plus more than one demon who 'reneged' on 'Satan' in one place is bound to make them antsy. Vincent lays low and becomes an Exorcist in the time that he's away.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

-Six Years Later; Tokyo Monastery-

Vincent glances at the hidden magical circles that keep out demons. They won't work on him, of course, but it's nice to see that the Paladin understands that demons will be after the twins. The smell of brimstone, springwater and asphodels comes from the house portion of the church. He's not the only one who can smell it; he stomps on the Coal Tar trying to scrabble up his cloak away from the circle. It explodes into black dust that fades out with Vincent flicking his cloak to get rid of the remnants.

He steps over the circle, careful not to disturb the meticulous work as he knocks on the church doors.

"Hello. Are you lost?" One of the many priests opens the door, having to look up to see Vincent in the gloom.

"No. I come from the Japan Branch of the True Cross Order. I wish to speak with Father Fujimoto."

Vincent states quietly as he flexes his gauntlet under his cloak. The Wutainese flows off his tongue after considerable practice with a priest and a tutor.

"One moment. Your name, sir?"

"Valentine."

"Is that a surname?"

"Yes." Vincent leans on the pillar supporting the porch and waits. He hears the patter of tiny feet and then-The door opens again and there's a gun pointed at the back of his head. He hears the other priests herding the twins off to bed.

"You. Mephisto vouched for you at the Vatican; you've gone on to become an Exorcist, I see." Shiro Fujimoto is still as intense as the day Vincent met him.
“Hmph. I only had Mephisto vouch for me so that I wouldn't have to sit in a coffin regrowing my face after some hot-shot tried to blow it off. I have been given a task.” Vincent sneers at the mention of Satan's pup.

"By him?"

"Please, that whelp? I am here for them."

"Did Faust-san put you up to this?" Hmm. Distrustful and protective; Chaos approves from his place in Vincent's mind.

"No. May I... explain?" The safety clicks on and Fujimoto shoos the little ones back into their room. "I will leave my weaponry with your fellow priests, if that is alright."

"It is." Fujimoto watches as Vincent removes all three of his holsters and hands them off, Cerberus and Death Penalty requiring more than one priest to carry them. The ammunition is next, followed by a good two-thirds of his Materia. He keeps three with him as he needs their effects.

He drops the bag full of both tranquilizers and holy water canisters off with the remaining priest, parting with his cloak at last to hang it on the coat rack. He pats the cloth, clucking his tongue when it curls around his fingers.

"I cannot remove my gauntlet. There is much scarring and your little one is listening at the door." Vincent smiles at the childish gasp and consequent scuffle back to the futon. "It is not something for little ears to hear either. I trust you have an office?"

"I do." They walk in after Vincent has removed his boots and greaves.

"Silence activate. Detect activate." Vincent murmurs, the Materia in question glowing under his touch. "It is so that no one else can hear what I have to say."

"Well?"

"I was sent here by my Goddess." Vincent pauses, sighs and continues his story. "She's Gaia, if you need to know. She sent her blessed to tell me of your boys. They're important."

"To Gaia?"

"To the world and the roles they will play in events yet to come. She gave me much, this blessed, to be able to be here. I know who's offspring they are," Fujimoto grits his teeth as Vincent continues, "I know that even with one of them sealed, the other is also full of potential to become like his brother; demon blood is not easily suppressed, nor ignored. I'm here to help."

"With what, exactly?" Fujimoto has lost the bristle from earlier. Interesting.

"Raising them. It's not easy," Vincent spins the third Materia to show the scene with Rin hitting him. "Is it?" Fujimoto sighs but ends up wheezing a little. The broken ribs are a problem that Vincent can fix. "Cura." Fujimoto looks up as he breathes in an unbroken breath. "I will be teaching them once they reach the age when the blood outs them. You and I both know that seal can only last so long."

"Teach them what?"

"How to be a demon."

"Why you-"
"I don't mean in the sense that you see with Mephisto and the other intermediary demons. I mean teaching them to harness their powers and to not harm others with said powers. Yukio is going to take longer." Vincent finishes flatly, glancing at the pictures of the twins in the office.

"Mephisto isn't intermediary. He's technically our boss as well. I'm afraid I don't understand your, to be frank, dismissal of him." Shiro murmurs as he rubs at his ribs. "You mean, he's only human because he refuses to acknowledge his... other side."

"Mephisto is a cut above the rest, certainly, but I am... much older. He can take a poke or two at his strength without collapsing in a delicate heap." He remarks as he rolls the Silence Materia across the dark wood. "Exactly the reason, though he does not conciously do so. I noticed your kitchen is a little," Vincent chooses his next words carefully, "empty."

"Rin is learning but he's very little." The rueful remark means the man's eaten at least one of the cub's creations. He admires the patience Fujimoto seems to have a great deal of. "You are either very brave or very strong to be saying such things."

"Would you allow me to stay? I do not have any current assignments. The Vatican is... puzzled to say the least about why yet another demon would defect over to Assiah. I think it best to lie low for a while." Vincent asks, part of him wondering if the Paladin will extend the mercy he's shown several other demons. Rumors, of course, but experience with the Turks has taught Vincent that a strand of truth remains in such things. "And I suppose it's a little of both."

The old whispers that he has to atone for his mistakes are slammed down by an irate Chaos. **That again? You have paid for your mistakes a thousand times over.**

*I know. Old... habits die hard, I suppose.*

**Indeed. Pay attention, Host, I think he's come to a decision.** Chaos shoves him to the fore in time for him to catch Fujimoto's words.

"We do need a cook. Would you be satisfied with your Exorcist pay and board here?" Fujimoto states as he scrubs a hand down his face after removing his glases. "You can stay."

"Thank you and yes to both questions." Vincent deactivates his Materia and stands the same time Father Fujimoto does.

"During your time here, please use what name you see fit for me." The man replaces his glasses and opens the door.

"I will address you by title, I think. You may use my surname." Vincent replies as Fujimoto leads him up a set of stairs to a space that looks vaguely like an attic. He chuckles a little at the irony.

"Something amusing?"

"Memories. An old friend used to call me the bat." Vincent murmurs as he investigates the space. "This will do. I will collect my things and move in tommorrow while the cubs are out."

"Cubs?"

"Demons... do not have many children and they are very treasured where I come from. My apologies if it discomforts you." Vincent says with some caution.

"You're serious." Fujimoto shakes his head at Vincent's words.
"I am very serious about my task. It is simple but something I will enjoy."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to the lovely Love_Psycho for the informative comments. They're really helpful and something I can definitely use in the future of this fic.
The bustle of the monastery is a quiet hum that Vincent ignores until he hears the patter of smaller feet.

"Who're you?" This one must be Rin, still scruffy and with mud up one side of his shirt. The one behind Rin was Yukio, the glasses making Vincent smile at the memory of Reeve and the WRO.

"I'm the cook." He replies as he gets back to slicing razor-thin strips of cucumber. "Your snacks are in the fridge, second shelf to the right."

"You're not gonna yell 'bout the mud?" Yukio asks with wide eyes as Rin helps his little brother up onto the stool, picking up the containers full of nori rolls and Korean bimbop.

"Mm, no." Vincent hums as Rin sets the containers onto the counter, hauling himself up to watch Vincent and help Yukio coordinate his chopsticks. "Should I?"

"Dad says it's bad to get into fights but they were makin' fun of Yukio again." Rin huffs sharply, the barest hint of brimstone wafting off of him.

"I see. Did you hit hard?" Vincent murmurs as he transfers the cucumber into a container, puts it in the fridge and goes back to switch out the board. He sets the thawed meat out onto the counter and hums as he cuts the wagyu into thin pieces.

"No. I shoved him." Which would explain the scrapes on his palms, no doubt.

"And he shoved back," he shakes his head but continues preparing the ingredients while listening to Rin.

"They c'n make fun of me all they want but Yuki's different." The stubborn moue makes Vincent almost laugh.

"Yukio-san, what do you think of it?" Vincent gently asks as he absently fixes Yukio's grip for him.

"They're always mean to Rin. I don't like it."

"You know, it's only a reflection of themselves."

"Huh?" The confusion makes him chuckle softly.

"When someone makes fun of you, they're pointing out flaws about themselves that they don't like." Vincent offers as he cuts the bean sprouts on a new board. "Or it's something thier parents said and they're repeating what they heard; it does not, however, excuse what they say."

"Oh. So, when they call Nii-chan a demon, they're upset?" Yukio is very perceptive and Hellmasker
purrs. **Oh these two will be quite the pair.**

**Quiet you. No scaring the cubs.** Chaos chides the younger demon.

"In a manner of speaking." Fujimoto comes into the kitchen and both cubs scramble for him. Galian whines faintly at losing thier attention.

"Rin, Yukio, this is our new live-in chef, Mr. Valentine. Sometimes he's going to watch you when I need to go out, alright?" The man kneels down to thier heights and talks to them with a smile.

"Why're his eyes red?" Rin asks with the whisper only a child could manage.

"He's a special kind of Exorcist." comes the wry response.

"Oh. Okay." The shrug and acceptance made all of his demons purr.

**Sweet cubs. We have much to do.**

**Much to teach.**

**Guide them into solid hunters but capable of pack.** Galian remarks with a snort, confident in his place as Beta demon.

**Teach them to kill, maybe?** Death Gigas offers.

Hellmasker snarls sharply, *Idiot. Killing will strip them of being. Berserk cubs and we cannot have that. They will kill them both if that is the case.*

They are not even out of cub stage yet. It is a slow thing, this growth. We must be careful and steady. A space they can run to when it is harsh. Chaos adds as Galian pads away from them.

**We cannot teach them to kill. It would undermine the task given to us.** Hellmasker points out with a long sigh.

**Do you think this Satan will care if the cubs can hunt? Mephisto is proof that he does not care to pay attention to his offspring. If we cannot teach them to kill, we will kill for them.** Gigas stands their ground with a solid stance.

**That we can agree on.**

Vincent pulls back to reality and Fujimoto asks, "Are you alright? You gave us a blank face."

"It is bound to happen now and again. Nothing bad, mind, just a bit busy up here." Vincent points to his brain and goes back to prep as Rin and Yukio sit at the kitchen table to do homework. Once he's done with with ingredients, Vincent sits across from them and helps them color as well as solve simple maths.

"Why's it busy? Your brain." Yukio asks with wide teal eyes.

"Hmm. I don't think I can tell you," When the little one's face falls, Vincent revises his statement. "I can but only after something happens."

"What?"

"For one, you'd have to be... older."
"Older than six?" Yukio's incredulous tone has Vincent suppressing a smile.

"Yes. Much older than six."

"How old?" comes the question.

"Fifteen." He counters.

Yukio sits back with a furrow between his brow, "That's way too long."

"It will pass by faster than you think, Yukio-san. When you're that old, ask me again."

"You promise to answer?"

"Pinkie promise." He links his actual pinkie with Yukio's as well as Rin's.

Chapter End Notes

Enjoy! I'm off but please comment~
Catching up on manga is hard when you're getting ready for college. Whoo!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Rin is the first of the twins to approach him, quietly tugging on his pant leg as he makes breakfast for the entire staff of the monastery.

"Can you teach me, Valentine-san?"

"I suppose so," Vincent murmurs as he sweeps his longer hair into a quick braid that he flicks over his shoulder. "May I ask why?"

"Cause Dad ate my omelette when I made it but it had eggshells in it." Rin scuffs his foot against the floor and Vincent, Gaia-help-him, can't say no.

"Very well. There's an apron for you to wear," Vincent had sewn it with thick canvas so that even if Rin tugged with demonic strength (as he was likely to get frustrated), it wouldn't tear. "We'll start with the eggs, hmm?"

"Okay." Rin gives him a serious nod and a determined expression.

"Eggs are fragile. You have to tap them just right in order not to get eggshells. Here, your hand under mine to gauge the strength needed." Vincent sets Rin on a chair next to him and cracks the first egg against the counter with a little tap. "Tap it again and remember, gently."

He pulls his hand away and Rin finally cracks the internal membrane. He squeaks and holds the dripping egg over the glass bowl, looking at Vincent with wide blue eyes.

"Now what?" Vincent makes an opening motion and Rin mouths 'Oh.' The egg drops into the bowl with a wet plop and no eggshell. "That's a lot easier than I thought."

"Most things are, Rin-san. Carefully place it in the bag on the counter please." Vincent directs as he sets Rin to cracking the eggs. He slices vegetables, flips the board and slices thick ham steaks into tiny cubes that he offers Rin on occasion. "Taste your food unless it is raw. You can't taste egg unless it is cooked; same with meat and fish. Season well before cooking and taste again after it's done to check."

"So a good chef taste-tests?" Rin asks for clarification.

"Yes. Now, how many eggs?"

"Eight, I think." Vincent absently counts the shells in the bag as he tilts the glass bowl.

"Eight it is but we need most of the carton for your brother and the other monks. Continue cracking, please." Vincent absently guides as he starts the kettles for hot water and a small percolator for his coffee (he's the only one to drink it, though he'll often go for tea as well). He leaves two of the six burners free so that Rin can attempt scrambled eggs first.
The other burner is for Vincent to do most of the cooking.

They work together, Rin peeling the potatoes with a paring knife. Vincent watches his young charge and Chaos purrs softly at the sight of a concentrating Rin.

He enjoys cooking. I am glad Cid, Yuffie and Aerith insisted on making us competent cooks. Cloud burnt everything he touched and Tifa... Leviathan help us all should she decide to cook. Chaos murmurs as the demons watch their young charge.

Vincent snorts mentally while still keeping a sharp eye on Rin, Just because she made a mess in the kitchen doesn't mean it wasn't good.

It was warm and yes, excellent but I did not envy Cloud for the mound of dishes.

I miss him. Vincent admits with a pang in his chest.

Maybe our old friend could help us with that? Chaos points out as Rin proudly holds up an entire bowl of peeled potatoes. Very good.

I'll ask. Vincent answers as he turns his full attention to Rin. "Well done, Rin-san. Would you like to try cooking eggs again?"

"Yeah!"

The pride when Fujimoto eats Rin's eggs is something Vincent keeps (mostly) to himself as Rin looks up for approval. Vincent gives his cub a small encouraging smile and a blink-and-you'd-miss-it wink. Rin giggles as he settles into eat the breakfast spread Vincent cooked for the household.

Vincent finds himself softly smiling when Yukio compliments his brother's cooking and presses against Vincent's left side.

Chapter End Notes

Comments welcome~
So my fav anon commenter pointed out something last chapter that I intend to incorporate later on.

Cloud is coming to Assiah. He'll be doing a few things first before meeting the twins though, so hold your horses.

Also! Love_Psycho, loved your theory but I think my actual plot will throw you for a loop. Hint: it's heavily involved in FFVII rather than Ao no Exorcist.

Yukio is the shy one, certainly, but when he decides to engage it's while Vincent's out grocery shopping. The twins had asked to join him on his twice-weekly trips and Fujimoto had relented but allowed Vincent Cerberus as well as an Exorcist's overcoat. The boys needed as much protection as possible. It certainly hid his weapon but did absolutely nothing in deterring the cubs from peeking under the coat-tails.

"Why'd you bring it?" Yukio asks while they're in the produce aisle.

"Because I'm on duty."

"What's duty?" The younger twin inquires as he picks up an enormous bok choi. Vincent takes it from him to put it in a bag and sets it in the cart. It's the cleanest of the bunch (Vincent had done a cursory check to make sure) and had no problems.

"Hn. A job." Vincent's lips press thin as he thinks about how to explain something so complex to a pair of six-year-olds who were fairly smart. "It's not one you like sometimes but one you have to do. Most often it's to protect someone. It's not all bad."

"Oh. So, are we your duty?"

"No," Vincent laughs at that, picking Yukio up when he raises his arms, followed by Rin on his back. It leaves one hand free to reach for Cerberus and to push the cart. They weigh practically nothing thanks to his enhanced strength. "I'm protecting."

"Who?"

"People from demons. That's what Exorcists do." he replies as he picks out ingredients for both Japanese and Korean dishes. He's thinking about introducing the Midgar puffy pancake with chocolate chips into the menu.

"Oh. Are all demons bad?" Yukio prods as they move further into the store. Vincent can feel people staring but it's mostly at his overcoat and insignia.

"Mmm, depends."
"On?" Rin asks this time, a quaver to his tone. Chaos and Vincent would love to get their hands on the people who'd said that to a small child, of all things.

"Many things but mostly on how they react to kindness." Vincent wisely doesn't tell Rin that demons are what people make them; treat a demon with enough kindness and don't expect anything in return... Well, he's got first-hand experience in the matter.

"Oh." Rin sounds so relieved that Vincent feels like shooting out the kneecaps of the adults in question. The Turk of old rarely rises from his many depths but when it does... Turks were feared with good reason. He feels a rather wicked grin on his face which prompts Yukio into giggling.

"Nii-chan is the best."

"Of course," Vincent agrees as he steps into the dairy portion. "What do you think we should have for dinner?"

"Tonkatsu," Rin says before he continues, "and I wanna help."

"Or yakitori?" Yukio's been getting braver around Vincent. Chaos has a hard time not slip-shifting to cuddle the twins but both Vincent and his demon share this particular problem of cuteness overkill.

"Both are good suggestions. How about we text the others at the monastery?" He suggests to keep the twins from fighting.

"Yeah." They reply in unison, sticking their tongues out at each other. Vincent just shakes his head as he mass-texts the monks and Fujimoto.

"Votes are fairly even and your Dad gave me the Order card... So we're having both," he murmurs and laughs when the twins cheer.

He gets odd looks all the way to the check-out.

"Are they yours?" The cashier asks, smiling at Yukio and Rin. Vincent blinks and shakes his head no. "They act like it."

"Mr. Valentine's our chef," Rin inputs as the groceries go into bags. "He said we could tag along."

"Oh my." The older woman murmurs as she rings them up. "Well, he must be very nice."

"He is." Yukio hums as he slides down to hold Vincent's gauntlet. Vincent swipes the card, not even flinching at the amount. He tucks the card away, picking up the groceries and smiling at Yukio who is dutifully holding onto his overcoat on the opposite side of Cerberus. "Can I watch you cook?"

"Of course."

Vincent doesn't understand the cooing of at least half the line when Yukio buries his face into the fabric and looks up with a bright smile of his own.

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Yukio tried every bite he's offered, offering advice to Rin (small things like less salt and such) and humming around the bites of Vincent's food.

Dinner is cheerful and Rin basks in the compliments he's given. Yukio falls asleep on Vincent and he softly scoops up both twins, carrying them off to bed. He sings an old Wutainese lullaby that his Kaa-san used to sing to him at night. Yukio has a hand wrapped around the apron fabric and hasn't
let go. Vincent's torn between leaving the apron and just laying there until Yukio releases the bunched fabric.

The younger twin makes the choice for him when he also grabs a handful of Vincent's actual shirt. Rin curls up against his stomach and Yukio against his chest. Chaos purrs softly at the sight, eyes shifting to a soft golden color as he takes over with Vincent's full permission.

"Valentine-Why are you like that?" Fujimoto asks as he sees Rin and Yukio practically piling against him. "... You're not Valentine."

"Good eye," Chaos huffs out quietly. "They've got ahold of the shirt as well as the apron. They'll fall limp enough that we can move soon."

"Yukio or Rin?" Fujimoto asks as he settles in to watch the sleeping cubs.

"Yukio," Chaos murmurs as the cubs shuffle to puppy-pile on one another, Rin underneath.

"We'll be here a while yet. You... mentioned that you're older that Mephisto." The Paladin is finally giving into the curiosity that Chaos smelled on him since day one.

"By at least three millennia," Chaos snorts as he watches Rin bury his face in his pillow. "but that isn't why you're asking."

"True. Why haven't you taken them away?" Dark, serious eyes watch as he gently smoothes back Yukio's hair with his claws.

"As if I would distress them and take them away from the only thing that has made them happy. They love you, very much so; I cannot do that to them." he replies as he looks up from the boys.

"... You're very odd for a demon." Fujimoto finally says after a long moment of scrutiny.

"I told you, I have no want nor need to conquer this place. My duty lies with the Planet and the souls therein." Chaos promptly informs the man after setting up barriers so that no one else knows. "My priority is your cubs. If they are hurt, if they are saddened, it is my duty to do everything in my power to rectify said hurt. Speaking of which... Do you know the adults who told Rin he was a demon, by any chance?"

"I do but I will not give up thier locations. What are you planning to do with them?" Fujimoto responds defensively.

"No killing. That would draw far too much attention and I am not fond of blubbering humans. No, just put-what would he say-a little fear of the gods in them. Nothing... bloody." Chaos harrumphs as Fujimoto gave him a suspicious look. "I can ask our Goddess-blessed if you're so worried about it."

"You're going to scare them straight?" The man looks relieved at that.

"Basically." He finally gives in to demonic instinct and starts grooming Yukio's hairline. The cub drops his hold as he curls around his older brother. He absently washes Rin's too, leaving his scent and the twins utterly relaxed. Chaos looks up to see Fujimoto giving him an odd look. "Demons are much like cats when it comes to cubs. Grooming is a necessity to keep other demons from touching what is yours. They'll be safe with my scent on them."

"... Who am I to question these things. May I write down what you've told me?"

"It applies to several species of demon, especially the daiyokai, who can shift to humanoid forms.
They've gotten good at avoiding detection, before you ask." He informs the Paladin wryly before Fujimoto questions why they haven't seen any. "And yes. Anything you find pertinent, please record."

Chapter End Notes

Comment please~ My Tumblr is bamfcoyotetango and my inbox is always open if you wanna chit-chat about the fic!

"Did-Did you know? That we're-we're-" Yukio doesn't even finish his sentence he's so miserable. Brimstone practically floods the room as the emotion strengthens briefly.

"I do."

"Did Dad tell you?" Little fists strike at his chest and he huffs out a breath at the strength hidden in them. Vincent purrs sub-sonically to calm Yukio down; it works as the brimstone fades to a faint hint.

"No."

"Dad said you were here just for us. Why?" Yukio looks up with a fresh scent of salt intermingling with the spring water and asphodel of his usual scent.

"I was sent to help you." Vincent sees no point in lying now. The cub's had enough trust broken in one day. "My Goddess, she adores you. Rin too, before you ask. She told me there are things yet to come."

"You're not lying to me." The unasked question is something he can and will answer.

"Of course not. You're obviously being pulled in more than one direction already. There would be no reason for it." Vincent replies with a raised brow. "Why would I start now?"

"Right. And your promise, the silly one?"

"It still holds, Yukio-kun." he states as he picks Yukio up. "Would you like some rice cake?"

"... Yes please." Yukio just wraps his arms around Vincent's neck, his breath hitching a little as he looks at Vincent again. "Does Nii-chan know?"
"No. You only know because you're seeing demons. Rin is safer with fewer people in the know."
Vincent pauses on his way to the door, his lips pressing thin as he pushes aside several contingency plans. "Do you think Rin-kun should be told?"

"I... I don't-I'm not sure. " Yukio frowns as he buries his face against Vincent's neck. "Maybe?"

"You do realize that knowledge is power. If Rin-kun is forewarned, he is armed with the knowledge that he must be careful. The power will eventually overcome the seal placed on Kurikara." Vincent informs Yukio and that causes the younger half-demon to raise his head.

"Seal? What seal?"

"It was to keep Rin looking human. Rin-kun is also the one who gave you the mashou. It enables you to see demons even if you are not one. His strength is yours but that blade isn't just keeping his power, it's keeping yours too." He answers as he shifts Yukio to his hip and descends the stairs. "It is your choice, Yukio; not Father Fujimoto's nor anyone else. If you cannot decide, that is equally valid."

"You're the only one who said that," Yukio sighs as he watches Vincent make fresh rice-cake. "Does it have something to do with that promise?"

"It does," Vincent allows as he packs the rice against his palm, "to a degree."

"Still not old enough, right?"

"Correct." He sets down the plate of sweet rice cakes as he spins on his heel to make some more for Rin and the other monastery occupants. Rin had surpassed him as far as cooking went but it was still nice to help the younger half-demon prepare the food.

"Mr. Valentine, may I call you something else?"

"My given name is Vincent. You could use that if you like." He offers as he packs the rice just so and sweetens it with a little bit of sugar at a time. Vincent seals the rice cakes in a container that won't let air in and places it on the shelf in the refrigerator. "How long have you been seeing the demons?"

"Pretty much all the time. They stayed back though. Something was keeping them at a distance."

"Eat. I know why." Both Rin's innate power and Chaos's scent had been enough to deter the lower-level demons for quite some time.

"More of that story behind the promise?" The younger twin is much smarter than he likes to let on and not just with books.

"Indeed." Vincent murmurs as he listens for Rin's footsteps. "As I said, it's up to you to disclose what you have learned. Take this with you if you want to tell him." He hands over his Silence Materia (the Materia in question having spawned a new one a few days ago) that glows a glossy blue when it touches Yukio's palm. "To activate, merely say Silence activate and vice-verse. Silence deactivate." The blue glow fades almost entirely from the sphere, leaving it to look like a large polished marble. "Only use it when you feel you are ready."

"Thank you... Vincent. You can call me Yukio-kun, if you don't mind being a little less formal." Yukio offers as he tucks away the Materia.
It takes nearly the entire year for Yukio to decide while he's in the page cram school for Exorcists. He knocks on Vincent's door and tugs a confused Rin in with him.

"Silence activate." The room is lit with a cobalt glow before it dies down.

"What's goin' on, Yukio?"

"I... I need to tell you something. Vincent knows already."

"Huh?" Rin cocks his head to the side and then a thoughtful furrow appears on his brow. "I'm gonna sit down. You can, I dunno, explain, I guess." He plops onto the mound of cushions Vincent usually uses for Galian when the demon wants out.

"Okay, umm, we're not human." Yukio stumbles over the words but manages to get it out in one piece. Vincent waits patiently but Yukio takes in a deep breath and sits down on the floor, stealing a cushion from the pile.

"Uh-huh. You sure you're okay, little bro?" Rin asks as he looks at Yukio.

"I'm serious, Nii-chan." Yukio snaps back and Rin blinks as he turns to really listen. "We're half-demons. Specifically... Satan's sons. You gave me a mashou, a temptaint, when we were born. I've been able to see demons since I was really young."

"Wait, wait, you've been crying over demons?! Is there any way I can help?" Rin says after a long, long moment of silence. "I mean, am I helping at all?"

"You are," here Vincent takes over for a very grateful Yukio. "You were distracting the demons up until about your seventh birthday. But how your brother smells? It's like catnip to demons, whether he wants them there or not."

"And what's Mr. Valentine got to do with this anyway?" Rin directs this question to Yukio.

"Part of that promise he made us but he's here to protect us. His Goddess sent him here to help us out. I knew last year but... I couldn't live with lying to you. Over and over again. I just can't... I need you to know." Yukio starts sniffling and then Rin's hugging Yukio, both of them wafting off more asphodel than any other scent.

Vincent slides down until he's near the twins but not interrupting their time together. Both of them turn and bury their faces against his chest and sniffle quite audibly.

"So, now what?" Rin almost swipes the snot on his t-shirt but Vincent offers him a handkerchief to blow his nose, offering a second one to Yukio without thought.

"Well, you and Yukio-kun have been sealed. Your powers are in a demon-slaying sword known as Kurikara. The seal, however, is only strong enough for one demon." Vincent informs them, Yukio wide-eyed as he figures it out mere seconds ahead of his brother.

"... Means that it's gonna snap, right?"

"It will, shortly before your fifteenth birthday if my Goddess is correct. The sword will go to Rin to keep his powers concealed. Your own will take longer, Yukio. It will not be easy either; it might even hurt."

"There a but, isn't there?" Rin presses as he wipes away Yukio's tears with his thumb.
Vincent can't help the wry chuckle. "For all that your teachers are going on about how you don't pay attention, you are very sharp Rin-san. However, both of you are stronger together than apart. This is not an easy road, Yukio-kun, but I am glad you chose it."

"Me too."

"So does that mean I can call you Vincent?" Rin teases and Vincent nods as he cuddles his cubs. Yes, he knows that Shiro is the one they call Dad but he's the one they run to when they're world-weary and heartsore.

Chapter End Notes

Comment, complain, ect. Love all the support this has been getting!
Rin blooms under the extra attention Vincent pays him; not that Rin had been a wallflower to begin with but the older twin often stole the cushion to Vincent's right when sleepy or frustrated. He'd also stopped skipping school quite as much when Vincent helped both twins with their homework.

Vincent noticed a pattern when Rin was scraped or bruised with the scent of pigeons that he'd practically crawl under Vincent's cloak (when he was wearing it) or under the blanket Vincent had around his shoulders.

"Rin... If I may ask, what is the source of your troubles?"

Rin stays silent and the brimstone scent reaches a dangerous point. "There's these... guys that throw rocks at pigeons. I started feeding them a while back an' now they're getting hurt. Dunno if it's because of me or..."

"Or they're hateful human beings, sparing no thought as to what they're doing to an innocent animal?" Vincent offers into the sullen space between them.

"That." Rin agrees with a sharp nod. "I keep runnin' them off and they keep coming back. Some of the pigeons follow me up to the roof but a lot of them are hurt so they can't make the flight."

"I think I can help with that last part." He says as he pulls on his cloak and hands Rin his white jacket (it's a little oversized but Rin likes it). "Show me your birds."

The birds are mostly bruised but a few have broken wings or feet. Vincent wants to snarl at the damage but holds back due to Rin's uncertainty. He heals what he can and sets the wings to heal them properly.

"I recommend the feeding be done on the rooftops now. Does anyone else come up here?" Vincent asks as the birds flutter and coo around Rin. The gentleness he sees makes him hum softly while the birds investigate Rin and his clothes for feed. The older twin pulls out a small package and scatters the food on the rooftop with a soft expression. Rin's far too young to be trying to take on the world but that's exactly what he's doing.

Reminds him a little of Cloud, actually.

"No. Just me and it's quiet." Rin appreciates solitude in a way most people mistake for distance.

"Quiet is good. What about nature sounds?"
"Yeah. They, umm, they help when I'm doing homework." He understands why Rin has to be shown things physically now.

"You're a kinesthetic learner. It's why you're so good at cooking." comes the absent reply as Vincent's cloak snaps in the light breeze.

"Kin-what?" Rin wrinkles his nose and Galian flickers briefly to the surface, Vincent's eyes flashing a deep blue much like Rin's.

_Pup's learning faster than we give him credit for._ Galian purrs in approval.

_He is._ he replies as Rin spits out pigeon tail feathers.

"Kinesthetic. It's an English word that means you need to touch in order to understand what you're learning. It's why you learn things better outside as well. Memory is more powerful when you're motivated." Vincent responds as he moves at twice the speed of a human and Rin spins around to exactly where he lands. "Hn. Cloud will have his work cut out for him teaching you proper swordsmanship."

"Who's Cloud?" Rin asks and Vincent feels the pang again.

"An old friend of mine. We're rather close. He's been... busy for lack of a better word. What he does is difficult and would be near impossible if it weren't for his abilities." He replies as he watches the sunset.

Rin pokes his face out from under the cloak and says, "I hope I can meet him. He sounds nice."

Vincent and his demons miss Cloud very much but they have a feeling both twins know.

Chapter End Notes

Comment, complain, ect.

Thank you to my readers for support~
Aaaaaand Cloud has arrived in Assiah! With a bang, no less. *laughs*

It's gonna start picking up after this.

Enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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-Twin's Tenth Birthday; December 27-

When the twins blow out the candles of the cake Rin made, Vincent hears a loud whistling noise that turns into a crash in front of the monastery.

"What in Ifrit's name did you two wish for?" Vincent asks the sheepish twins as the other monks investigate.

"Valentine, he's asking for you." Fujimoto stomps his snow-covered boots on the mat and then-

The overwhelming scent of engine grease, clove oil and spicy, sweet cinnamon belongs to exactly one person in Vincent's knowledge: Cloud Strife.

He takes off at a speed that would frighten the other monks if it wasn't for the fact that they all knew after multiple missions with him. Familiar arms wrap around his waist and he's tugged down for a deep kiss with his husband.

"Cloud." He breathes out as tears streak down his face. It feels like an eternity since he's seen Cloud in person.

"Vincent." The glowing Mako blue eyes are teary too, both of them laughing wetly as they stand in the other's embrace. "Think we need to go inside, Vin. Promise you can still hold onto me." Cloud murmurs as they sway in the snowy crater Cloud left in his wake. "We'll fix it later. C'mon, show me those two who wished me here."

"Brats, both of them." he snorts as he presses his forehead against Cloud's own.

"Still yours." Cloud teases as they enter the church.

Cloud introduces himself as Vincent's husband and all of the monks, though a little confused, accepted that Cloud would be staying for the time being.

"There's a few things you need to know." Vincent murmurs in Nibel, smiling as Cloud slips into his native tongue with ease.

"So much so that we're speaking a dead tongue?"

"It's complicated. Aerith sent me here to watch over the twins and... I couldn't stay neutral. They're
half-demons." He sighs as he inhales Cloud's scent for the fourth time in an hour. Both of them have been discreetly scenting the other, given that Cloud's enhanced senses also needed a calibration point.

"Chaos has always wanted cubs." Cloud murmurs as he watches the twins open their various gifts with glee. "Do they listen to you?"

"I'm the one they come to when they have a problem that isn't fixed by normal means. Still haven't told them our story," he replies as he buries his nose against Cloud's throat and purrs just loud enough for Cloud to hear.

"You're getting weird looks, hun." Cloud points out as he pillows his cheek on Vincent's hair. "Hn. My husband, my time with you." Vincent huffs as he smiles.

"How're the rest?" His husband gently cards through his hair, untangling knots and petting as he goes.

Chaos takes control as Vincent settles back in the mind palace. "We're pleased to see you as well, my Sky. What took you so long?" The demon pouts as he presses against Cloud's touch.

"Fixing things, Chaos. It looks promising. Aerith said I could come here with you because one of the twins uses a sword. Which one is he?" Their Mate asks as he continues to pet a little harder, the pressure a warm feeling as they cuddle together.

"Rin. He's bold and brash but cares deeply. Reminds me a little of you, my Sky." Chaos counters with a soft chuckle. "Yukio is more like Reeve than I care to admit. Perhaps more like Cait Sith than actual Reeve."

"What about the priest who's been staring me down since Aerith gave me physical form again?" Cloud inquires lightly as he shifts his body to settle Chaos's weight across his lap.

"Paladin Shiro Fujimoto of the True Cross Order of Exorcists. He's been hiding the twins from the Vatican and certain death. Made a bet with a demon." He divulged as he kept watch on both twins. "One of Satan's cubs."

"He does manage to make it hard for us." comes the dry response. "But... Things are going well."

"Spent enough time with the Puppy?" Chaos asks lightly.

"Zack says hi. Seph too."

"The Calamity's influence is gone now?" Now that is news.

"Uh-huh. Did you know that Genesis has the entire play of LOVELESS memorized to the point that he doesn't even need the copy of the book he carries around? Apparently he's had it memorized since sixteen. Angeal confirms that he was always reciting the lines when they were in Banora." Cloud continues, gesturing with his hands the way a certain Puppy had. "... You pulled me off-topic on purpose."

"The monks don't know you and the Paladin is wary." Chaos agrees and Cloud rolls his eyes. "You'll have to be vetted against their defenses for demons."

"Not that any of them work on a being that's part of the Planet. Didn't work on you at all." Cloud teases but understands the awkward necessity of getting splashed with various substances; even if
neither of them appreciate it after time spent under Hojo's tyranny.

"Nor will they work on you but it must be done."

Chapter End Notes

Comment, complain, ect. Please, please, even if it's anon. Love hearing your thoughts.
**Goddess Blessed**

Chapter Notes

Ta-da! A Cloud POV chapter; mostly as an outsider looking in sort of thing?

Also, some serious plot in this.

Enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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**-New Years Day; Tokyo Monastery-**

Cloud tolerates the various liquids, plants and chanting until all avenues of Exorcism have been exhausted. He dries himself with an Aero/Fira combination spell and sits with Vincent while waiting for the Paladin.

"What business do you have here?" Fujimoto asks wearily. The man's under a lot of pressure, raising two half-demons (even with Vincent's help and that's nothing to shake a stick at) plus running an entire order.

"Mission, actually. I'm here to help my husband and do a few things that my fellow Goddess-blessed can't do from her place." Cloud replies as he laces his fingers with Vincent's, pressing a kiss to his husband's palm. He knows it's Vincent because each of the demons affect the air in different ways (not that he'd tell them, it's too much fun getting kissed for guessing right).

"You are also a disciple of Gaia?"

"If you want to put it that way," Cloud murmurs dryly, "She's many things, Gaia. Depends on what deity you source."

"I... see." Fujimoto settles into the chair but his body language reads as uncomfortable.

"Honestly, Father, we're here to help you with your dilemma. Raising two half-demons can hardly be easy on top of running an organization while also making sure the twins don't end up like thier brother or father." He points out with brutal honesty. "Chaos and I talked quite a bit these last few days, before you ask where I got all of this. Gaia's put quite a few things in motion and had to speed up a few things due to the twins. However," here Cloud pauses, "There are things to come that we have no control over."

"Your Goddess has expressed an interest in my sons for quite some time. Even sent Valentine ahead of you to keep them safe. Why?" Fujimoto speaks plainly and like the father of his children as opposed to a leader.

"I'm not my Goddess but... She thinks the time for separation is over. This Planet was pulled apart for it's own good once. It's healed but now it's time to put magic back into the world. Your sons are pivotal in that role. They need to stay alive and happy for it to work at all." Cloud remarks softly as he caresses Vincent's cheek with his free hand.
"Happy?"

"Or at least generally in a state of contentment. The wording's... complex and it's not like I can directly translate it from the text." It's not a precise language and the old Cetrans loved to waffle on.

"May I see it?"

Cloud laughs at that, shaking his head as he pulls the Cetra family grimoire from his item pouch. "Now you see what I mean?"

The pages are yellow but not brittle, though by all rights they should be crumbling at a single touch with how ancient they truly are. Curling, sleek writing fill the pages full of line after line of invocation runes and protective spells. Cloud only knows this because Aerith taught him how to read it before he left the LifeStream with it.

"Ah. This text is old," the Paladin says quietly as he runs a finger along the spine.

"About as old as I am, give or take a few thousand years or so. It's a family grimoire and it's been passed down from generation to generation. The most recent owner... She's quite a bit more blunt but I find her text better than the elder by far." Cloud responds as he turns the pages until he reaches Aerith's section. Her writing is both Cetran and Common (English in this new world) and is mostly for growing things even in the most barren of soil. Aerith also writes about the LifeStream and how it connects everything.

"This LifeStream she mentions... What is that?" Fujimoto's practically buried in the grimoire, his eyes lighting up with a faint hope.

"The souls of every being on this Planet. It's got a will of it's own and frankly, the untapped LifeStream around this area is probably what keeps most of the intermediate and above level demons out along with the seals. It's boosting the wards." He answers as he flexes his ungloved hand. "I arrived here because of it."

"True Cross Academy rests on a fount of it. The reason Mephisto can stand it is because he's fairly old and powerful." Vincent adds from his spot, carefully tracing the thick edging of the grimoire with his gauntlet. "However, as it is an entity in its own right, it does tend to pick out... favorites."

"Favorites." The Paladin's voice goes flat and sharp at that, expecting an answer.

"People it will reincarnate into a better life. Since Cloud and I are here, it will deign to take an interest in the twins as a result. Nothing bad, Father Fujimoto, but something to keep in mind." His husband murmurs as he gently closes the book and tucks it away. "As for living arrangements, Cloud will stay with me if that is alright."

"It is. I'd rather have you two close than to lose sight of you." Cloud read between the lines; friends close, enemies or at least allies closer.

"I'll tell you the full tale someday, Fujimoto. It's not something I take lightly but it will... come up eventually." Vincent offers as they stand together, deactivating the Silence and Detect Materia with a non-verbal command.

"I'll listen when the time comes." Fujimoto agrees and the air between the three of them clears somewhat.

Chapter End Notes
Comment, complain, etc. Please, even if you're on anon and wanted to say something. Feedback is good!
Omake: Cloud Strife and the Garden of Amahara

Chapter Notes

Whoops. Sorry for the chapter dump but I'm on a roll-

Timeline is a few months after Cloud crashes into the courtyard.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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-True Cross Academy Apothocary; Okumura Twin's Spring Break-

Cloud steps onto the pathway leading to the Apothocary with Vincent smiling softly as Cloud swings their joined hands.

"So, this Apothocary... What's it like?" Honestly, he's just glad to be outside of the monastery and not get strange looks for his sword now that he carries an (honorary) Exorcist badge.

"The owner is busy but her child is very shy. She tends to the garden here with her grandmother." Vincent replies as he gently bumps shoulders with Cloud. They've always been like this; constantly touching, brushing against one another and always with the permission of the other. It's reassurance and also a way to keep intimate without offending people too much. "Since your rank is not exactly set in stone, you'll have to wait outside. Do you mind?"

"Not really. I always did have a fondness for plants, y'know." Cloud quips and they both snicker as a brisk wind tugged on Cloud's battleskirt and Vincent's cloak. "Only teasing, Aer." The wind gentles and swirls at about shoulder height to reveal a ghostly Aerith.

I know~

"Hopefully things stay peaceful for a while." Cloud sighs as she spirits away, a familiar wolf following Aerith back into the LifeStream. "Could use a break."

"Hn. If only it wasn't so warm."

"No kidding. We're both better off with cold." he huffs out as Vincent reaches the portal. He inserts the key and the first thing Cloud smells is flowers. Hundreds of them and the scent of asphodels are the most potent.

He companionably settles on the stairs just outside the shop, waiting for Vincent to re-stock up on mostly ammunition. He's starting to teach Yukio how to hold a gun and basic marksmanship. Cloud hasn't taught Rin anything; both twins are cautious around him, though they have been more welcoming than the staff of the church and the Paladin.

"We've got a visitor?" The older woman leans heavily on her cane and her eyes take in First Tsuguri with an evaluative look. "You might be?"

"I work with the Exorcists." He replies politely, giving her a respectful bow. "Your garden's
wonderful, ma'am."

"Ah. Thank you. So hard to find polite young men nowadays." She smiles brightly, the corners of her eyes wrinkling. "Would you help me water my flowers?"

Cloud spins the main blade and assembles the rest before it comes to a stop against his opposite palm.

"Yes ma'am." He stands up and settles the assembled blade on it's handle with the tip propped up against the plastered wall. Rolling up his sleeve as well as pulling off his gloves, Cloud flicks aside his battleskirt to help her dig holes and plant flowers. About several minutes in he feels a pair of eyes on them.

The woman chuckles softly and points out quietly, "My granddaughter. She is quite shy."

"Mmm." Cloud hums in understanding as he digs a deeper hole than the rest for the woman to plant a small sapling.

"She loves the tale of the Garden of Amahara." The older woman says a little louder than is strictly necessary, drawing the little girl in.

"Oh? What's it like this garden?" he questions lightly, noting with some amusement that Vincent is leaning on the demon-repelling gate and it hasn't reacted at all.

"It has all of the plants in the world that God put on this earth."

"Sounds familiar." Cloud murmurs wryly as the tulips sway in the breeze. "I've been in some gardens that could probably pass for it."

"Cloud, we can go now." Vincent says through the gate as he shakes his head at the dirt on Cloud.

"Nice meeting you miss." He gives a short bow and washes his hands under the water pump, drying his hands with a discreet Aero spell. First Tsuguri is broken back down into it's many blades and sheathed accordingly.

"You as well." She says as the granddaughter finally comes out with a small tulip bloom in a tiny pot. "Shiemi?"

"Cloud-san! Here. So you can start your own garden." The blond girl says, thrusting the pot upward to about waist high on Cloud. He gently takes the plant and kneels down to her height.

"I'll take good care of it, Shiemi-san." He smiles at her blush as she runs back to hide behind her grandmother.

Cloud hums as he putters around in the kitchen (which is normally Vincent and Rin's domain). He's been having lessons with Angeal in the LifeStream and he wants to surprise Vincent with at least breakfast. He looks up like a puppy caught with a ripped pillow but it's Yukio as opposed to his twin.

"Sorry. Just getting a glass of water." Cloud catches the lingering glance at the thick white scars and Vincent's Mark that's normally hidden under his usual shirt. The scent of brimstone brings Cloud to one conclusion; this one had a nightmare.

"Stay." He says and his voice is soft though the word itself is a command. "I could use the company."
Yukio sits without complaint as Cloud hums the Wutainese lullabies that Vincent had taught him centuries ago. Before too long, the younger twin has pillowed his head on his arms as Cloud cuts the green onions (Vincent's favorite aside from red), marinated ham and the tiny cube of raw wagyu (for Galian and Chaos).

He washes the board each time to prevent cross-contamination before he flips the board into the sink and it lands with a quiet thump. He cracks the eggs with a single tap, whisking them and smiling as he hears a sleepy Vincent descend the stairs.

"Saiai, what are you doing?" Vincent's mix of Junon and Wutainese gives him a unique accent that only AVALANCE and Reeve ever learned to decipher. Yukio looks completely lost as they talk in a language so old that it was before the split.

"Making you n the demons breakfast," he counters in Nibel as he leans up to peck Vincent on the lips. "Even got a cube."

"Which one had enough patience to teach you?" comes the sleepy question, Vincent draping over his shoulders to watch.

"Angeal. He said if he had enough patience for the Puppy, he had enough for me." Cloud hums as he leans back against Vincent for a moment before pouring sesame oil into the pan he'd heated in the stove. "I'm limited to breakfast and Nibelheim staples though. And they don't have wolf steak here."

Vincent wrinkles his nose at the mention of the only meat big enough to be turned into food in the Nibel Mountains. "Hn. That was Galian's favorite."

"Yeah." Galian and Cloud had a surprisingly cordial relationship that meant Cloud could use the massive wolf demon as a pillow. "All done." He handed over the omelette to Vincent and worked on one for the now awake Yukio and himself.

It was peaceful, the calm before the storm that Cloud was certain would come.

Chapter End Notes

Comment, complain, ect.
Vincent smiles as Yukio starts interacting with Cloud more and Rin, Leviathan bless him, can't stay away for long when he's curious about something.

"What's he like?" Rin asks after Yukio bandages yet another set of scrapes and bruises. This time the offenders in question were cat-calling and Rin is as chivalrous as they come. Yukio makes a noise of agreement as he starts putting away the remaining materials into the kit.

"Cloud, you mean?" He chuckles at the synchronized head nods. "He used to be a leader. We fought together against a great enemy and then he helped me with mine. Our group... AVALANCHE was like family. But Cloud was always something more. He convinced me to fight when I had all but given up. Vincent recalls the first time Cloud had opened the coffin and asked if he knew Sephiroth; he does know that if Cloud hadn't convinced him to join the party, he would have eventually passed out of history altogether.

A smile tugs at his lips as he continues, "We started to see each other as more than friends but Cloud didn't shy away. If anything, he chased me."

"But that doesn't tell us what he's like, Vincent." Rin chides as they move into the kitchen so Rin can cook out his stress.

"True. He's... persistent, stubborn and when the world comes crashing down, he pushes back. He's loyal to his friends and takes strays under his wing. Excellent swordsman, likes to tinker with motorcycles and he'll drop whatever he's doing to help you." Vincent lists off. "Sweet but guarded. He's incredibly intelligent. Hmm... Can't cook anything aside from breakfast, meals that are an acquired taste and eggnog."

"Eggnog?"

"Purest recipe you can find with increasing amounts of alcohol the older you are. Seeing as both he and I take an incredible amount of said liquid to get even tipsy, I wouldn't recommend anything but the kiddie version." He points out with a shake of his head.

"Hey Vin." Cloud glides into the room with a near silent tread as he pecks Vincent's forehead. "What's this about Nibelhiem eggnog?"

"I was telling Rin and Yukio about the limit of your cooking ability, I mentioned eggnog and well-" Vincent replies even though they both know that Cloud heard all of it. Both of thier senses are so hyper-tuned that they have to let most things fade into white noise.
"Fine, I'll make you some. But! The recipe has been passed down for nearly a century and has remained untampered with since. I'm passing it on to you but you can't pass it on to anyone else." Cloud taps his chin but smiles as he explains.

"Why not?" Rin challenged and there's the stubbornness Vincent had equated to Cloud. Vincent and Cloud trade an amused look over the twin's heads.

"Because only people born in Nibelhiem even know the recipe. Unless you're a direct descendant or learning it from me, you'll never find it elsewhere." Cloud points out as he pulls the ingredients out of the refrigerator.

... Vincent may or may not have been craving a very specific eggnog for a few weeks. Cloud only shakes his head a little and kisses Vincent on the cheek as he directs Rin.

Cloud passes the Exorcist exam with flying colors; he spins the mid-sword of First Tsuguri to flick off the black dust before sheathing the blade.

"I have to work my way up but nothing unusual." Cloud hums as he leans back against Vincent. A good quarter of the others who'd passed scowl in their direction as Cloud continues to cuddle with Vincent. "You've managed to gain a reputation here too?"

Vincent chuckles at the light teasing and allows Hellmasker forth. "My Sky, you do realize that you're cuddling with a demon Mephisto vouched for nearly a decade ago and you're completely relaxed around said being?"

"Hey Hellmasker. I was starting to think you slipped into the LifeStream. Missed your sass." Cloud looks up and grins as Hellmasker wraps his arms around their Mate.

"You're making enemies in your peer group, my Sky." Hellmasker tells their Mate flatly but Cloud only shrugs and reaches up to stroke Hellmasker's cheek. "... You're doing that on purpose."

"The written and oral exams both had questions on exorcist lineage and how much demon blood happened to be in a line. They shouldn't be scared of you or our interaction at all." Cloud succinctly replies as a fellow Exorcist walks directly towards them. Hellmasker notes the Doctor miester and the generally friendly feeling.

"You're rather comfortable with Valentine, Strife."

"We're married. Why wouldn't I be?" Cloud dryly states. Hellmasker snorts at his Mate's straightforward attitude.

"Oh. For how long?"

"Mmm, a while now. This one's Hellmasker."

"Right. Heard about the multi-demon theory but it's real? Huh." The woman holds out her hand and Cloud shakes it without hesitation. "Kieko Yukimura."

"Cloud Strife. Looks like the others aren't too keen on meeting my husband." he murmurs as Kieko looks back.

"Cowards, the lot of them. He's probably the only one with any sort of power they've come across." She huffs as Hellmasker leans over Cloud. "Hello."
"You are brave," he comments as he flares open his wings, the membrane thickly scarred as he stretches it. "I can count on one hand the amount of Exorcists brave enough to approach us when we're not human."

"How's your poker face?" She inquires with a wide smile.

"Oh. I like this one." Hellmasker's smile is a little bloodthirsty but it's been some time since he played poker last. "Hn. You'll have to tell me if the rules have changed much in the past century. Chaos gets all the fun, you know..."

Chapter End Notes

Comment, complain, etc.
Chapter Notes

I maybe lied about there being only one more chapter of fluffy sweetness. Cloud wants to wear yukata. :3

Enjoy~

A note: Shura's an immature teenager @ this point and kids are mean.

Yukio is a natural, keeping his finger off the trigger until he wants to shoot something. Vincent's pleased that he has such a wonderful student. He doesn't lavish praise but his nods of approval appear to be enough for the now twelve-year-old. The hugging is nothing new but Vincent can't find it in himself to push Yukio away.

"Vincent?" Yukio asks quietly after a particularly difficult 'mission' that he'd run his student through.

"Yes, Yukio-kun." Vincent replies as he cleans Cerberus alongside Yukio's smaller guns; Yukio cleans his weaponry with Vincent even though he knows the basics.

"The first time you shot a demon... How did it feel?" The question's serious, Yukio setting down the q-tip he was cleaning the gun with as he looks at Vincent.

"Killing isn't easy, no matter the species." Vincent remarks as he continues cleaning and oiling Cerberus. "Demon, dragon, human; they die and it changes you."

"I thought that might be why you're teaching me. Should I not fire until I'm absolutely sure?" Yukio asks as he picks the second hand gun up, putting the first off to the side to dry a little.

"Fire when you feel threatened or fear for your life. The only other reason you should be using your weapon is for practice or to protect someone you love." Vincent points out. "Anything else is unnecessary."

"How long have you been an Exorcist?" Yukio changes the topic suddenly and Vincent engages him on it, letting the discussion of death fade into the background.

"Ten years and counting. It's been... interesting." He shakes his head at some of the demons that had detected Hellmasker or Gigas (neither of them cares to conceal their power when facing the demons of this world), fleeing before them. The Exorcists that used to accompany him are always miffed when the demons do that. Coal tars disperse when Vincent turns on even a fraction of his demon's power.

"Good or bad?" The hint of a smile says he knows which it is.

"Good, mostly."

"They challenge you." Yukio murmurs as he reassembles his guns and loads them with different ammunition. One is full of non-lethal bullets and the other with silver-tipped explosive rounds.
"It is by turns unkind and full of mercy. The latter comes from your Father. He works in ways that shock those under his command. It is far braver to be kind that not in this world." Vincent admits with a shrug as he holsters all three of his cleaned and oiled guns, sliding Cerberus to the front for easy access. "You and Rin-kun have mastered that same touch, though Rin's is not as obvious to those who don't care to look."

"Everyone always underestimates Nii-san." Yukio comments dryly as they walk out of the training room.

Fujimoto's apprentice picks on Yukio, though Vincent lingers until she leaves the practice room. Death Gigas wants to sucker punch the older teen but Vincent reigns them in; the last demon generally hates most things but the twins have wormed under every piece of armor they have pulled up.

**Maybe just... a scratch?**

**No, Gigas. Should she truly hurt one of the cubs, she is fair game. As she has not...**

**We leave her in peace. Yes, yes, I know.** Gigas grumbles as they watch Yukio through Vincent's eyes.

"... Yukio?"

"Vincent." Yukio is subdued, swiping at his tears angrily. Vincent sighs and gathers Yukio to him, the younger twin's gun hanging limp from his hand as he hiccups against the thick fabric of Vincent's cloak. "Hate that she has so much talent and she's so... So blasé about it!"

He waits as Yukio rants a bit more before opening his cloak entirely and wrapping them both in it. Vincent knows the teen is there, her gaze unreadable as he purrs sub-sonically.

"Feel better?" he asks after Yukio's slumped against him and has tear-streaks down his face.

"Yeah." His charge blows his nose on the kerchief Vincent offers.

"Raw talent is something that cannot be taught. However, Yukio-kun, it also does not teach persistence nor patience. I was much the same when I first learned how to use a gun." Vincent decides this is as good a time as any to teach that lesson. "Marksmanship takes dedication to the craft as should any discipline. Now, what rank are you?"

"I just passed my ExWire exam." Yukio sighs, a frown pulling his brow down.

"And what rank is Kirigukure-san?" He asks patiently.

"Apprentice to Dad..."

"Who happens to be the Paladin." Vincent points out before it clicks.

"Oh."

"Kirigukure-san is in a precarious place. She's here to learn how to be human again. You are learning how to isolate your feelings; don't do it, Yukio-kun. Be honest but fair." Vincent offers as he loads another magazine into Yukio's practice weapon. "Would you like to try again? I'll be taking
"Yes. I want her to stop calling me scardey-cat. The only way to do that is to beat her at her own game." Yukio nods sharply as he loads the first round and Vincent removes Quicksilver from its holster. He chambers a round and starts off slow, building up the same speed as Yukio, both of them eliminating several targets at once.

Neither of them notice that they sport matching expressions of mutual joy.

Chapter End Notes

Comment, complain, ect.
Cloud lays out his swords one-by-one, spinning the main blade and adding the others as it continues to whistle in his gloved palm. He spots Rin watching with wide eyes and patiently waits for the blade to stop on its own. The handle sways briefly so Cloud grips it until he can settle the blade guard against his right shoulder.

Rin shuffles around the corner and in his hand... Two shinai that look well-used. Rin sneezes, both of them coating his shirt in cobwebs and dust.

"I... I want to learn how to wield Kurikara." The older twin pauses before stating his intentions. "Can you teach me?"

"I can. I won't ask you to call me Sensei." Cloud replies as he critically eyes the shinai. "We won't be needing those."

"We won't?" Rin looks down at them in confusion but Cloud knows the shinai won't hold under either of their strengths.

"No. Would you come with me?" The underlying question is, of course, do you trust me?

Rin noticeably hangs back; Cloud thought he might balk at that question.

"If you cannot trust me now, you will not listen to me as a teacher." Cloud presents it in a light that Rin understands and the older twin looks torn now. "We can meet here if you want to try-"

"I'll go." Rin says but his legs are shaky. "I'll go with you."

Cloud waits for several long moments before Rin takes a step forward. It's a good start for someone who's been shunned for most of his life.

Cloud would know; he'd been bullied so much that it turned into chasing SOLDIER, to become stronger.

Rin's notably nervous on the bus-ride to the warehouse district and he stays closer to Cloud the seedier it gets. They stop at a dinky food stall and Cloud hums as he offers a Materia chip to the kitsune running the place. They appreciate the fragments of the LifeStream as it protects the stall from unwanted harm.
“Rin? Are you hungry?” Cloud turns around to find a family of tanooki peering at Rin from the other side of the stall.

"I could eat, yeah." Rin scrubs a hand along the back of his neck as he accepts the styrofoam bowl of kitsune grilled meat. "Oh wow. This is really good." Rin compliments the chef and the demon yips in thanks. "... I understood that. Should I...?"

"You should be able to hear them with your lineage." Cloud deliberately omits the Satan part and Rin's brow raises at the response. None of the kitsune or demon regulars blinks an eye at Cloud's comment. "It's a fairly common ability if you listen long enough."

"Oh. And Yuki?"

"The same, though I suspect he's been suppressing anything to do with that ability."

"Right." They eat in silence for a bit, Rin glancing over at Cloud occasionally. "Umm, Strife-san?"

"Hmm." He hums as he swings his foot under the bars they're sitting on. Cloud has his right foot tucked under the lower bar as he balances the food in his hands. "It's Cloud, y'know."

"When do lessons start?" Rin presses forward as they finish their bowls and toss them in the trash can.

"When you," Here Cloud reaches over to pat Rin's hair and the kid pulls away unconsciously, "no longer do that. Swordsmanship requires touch and a great deal of trust. It's the same for guns."

"This is gonna take a bit, isn't it?" Rin frowns as he stays close to Cloud.

"It is." Cloud agrees. "You took a big step just coming here with me."

"So, when you reach out..." The older twin murmurs thoughtfully, "I have to lean in?"

"Mm-hmm. You're rather intuitive, Okumura-san." He comments with a glance at the half-demon.

"Rin, please. 'M not a Mr. anything."

"Progress." Cloud smiles at the metaphorical extended olive branch.

It is slow, the process of Rin trusting Cloud enough to touch. He knows that Zack had to dial back with him; though he'd only learned that after being in the LifeStream and getting his oldest friend to talk. So he did the same, though he was careful to leave his left side open when he cuddled with Vincent on the couch.

Neither twin had a problem with laying near or on his husband. They were often a tangle of limbs as the two continued to have growth spurts courtesy of the demon blood. Chaos had mentioned something about the scent being a calming influence.

Cloud was pleasantly surprised when Rin extended his cuddling to Cloud himself. He was napping, half-way between sleep and wakefulness when he felt someone wriggle under his left arm, sighing contentedly. The scent of blood wakes him up entirely with Cloud looking down to see Rin with a split lip and a shallow cut across his cheek.

"Rin?" He nudges the kid, trying not to get more blood on his arm from the sluggishly-bleeding cuts.

"Nhmm?"
"Rin, you're getting blood on my arm."

"Mmm." Rin just snuggles closer and snuffles at Cloud's throat before relaxing fully. Cloud sighs, manages to snag his phone from the end table the first time around, taking a picture and sending it to Vincent (currently on a mission with the Paladin and Yukio) with an accompanying text.

_U know why he's like this? -C_

**You're the only one with my scent on you. -V**

**It's the Mark. -V**

**Should I wake him up? -C**

**No. It's probably the first time he's slept all week. -V**

**I think he'll start to trust you after this. -V**

_Thanks saiai. Love u. -C_

He heals Rin with a non-verbal Cura, gently wiping away the crusting blood with a kerchief dipped in the water on the end-table. Cleaning off his own arm takes some serious finesse as he doesn't want to jar the now snoozing Rin. Pressing a soft kiss to Rin's forehead, Cloud shifts to get comfortable and dozes off with his student using him as a pillow.

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Thier relationship changes subtly after that afternoon. Rin tends to cuddle with them equally, having discovered Cloud's a furnace pretty much 24/7. Cloud just tends to wrap an arm around Rin whenever it happens and they cuddle until Rin stiffens when seeing one of the monks or the Paladin. Then it's back to Square 1 until Rin is brave enough to try again.

It goes on for nearly three months before Cloud and Rin can cuddle until Rin falls asleep.

When that happens, Cloud commissions a set of reinforced spirit metal shinai made from bamboo from the ghost of Muramasa himself. He presents the shinai to Rin the weekend after; he surprised when Rin starts swiping tears away.

"Sorry, it's just..."

"Your Father looks out for you but someone from outside of the family has never bothered to pay this much attention to you aside from Vincent in a while?" Cloud offers even as he hands over his kerchief for Rin to use.

"Yeah. How'd you know?" Rin questions after he hands back the kerchief.

"My best friend bought me a scarf after ruining mine; I had the same reaction. He was a lot more perceptive than I am now." He replies as he offers a sheath for the shinai.

Rin takes that as well, sliding the shinai into it and closing the lid, slinging it over his shoulder to test the weight.

"'S heavier than what I picked up."

"It can handle your strength and mine. Plus shinai splinters are a bitch to pull out." Cloud snorts as he shows one of the few scars not from Hojo or any battle. "See?"
"Wow. Now what?"

"Warehouse district again but this time to the training area I have picked out."

"You... You were waiting for me."

"Mm-hmm. I promised a lot of people to take care of you. They're rather fond of you even if they're spirits." He says with a laugh as the wind ruffles Rin's hair. "Aerith, c'mon. Kid's already had a pretty full day."

_I think he can handle a spirit when he's been seeing demons properly for about a year now._

Hello~

"Hi." Rin blushes at Aerith's bright smile. "Are you...?"

*One of the people Cloud promised? Yes. You've grown a lot. Hmm. You think he could handle the Buster?* Aerith asks as she pecks Rin on the forehead and giggles as he rubs at the spot with an even darker flush.

"Not right now but maybe when he's grown a bit more. Don't want the tip dragging." Cloud points out with a teasing grin. Aerith laughs, the bright sound causing Rin to smile; the kid's gonna be a heartbreaker for sure when he's older. Yukio too, though the kid's still a little wary of Cloud.

*He's cute.* Aerith speaks to Cloud in Nibel, causing Rin to frown.

"Mm-hmm. Did you want to go to the Kitsune stall or the newer one with a meat sprite?" Cloud asks as they board the bus, Aerith having vanished after another sweet kiss to Rin's cheek.

"Kitsune. The sprite doesn't like me." Rin sighs as they settle into the back seats. Cloud generally garners more looks than Rin due to the pieces of First Tsuguri and the badge.

"Oh?"

"'S a cooking sprite." His student admits as the bus moves forward.

"Ah. They can smell your cooking mastery." Cloud teases and Rin uses the back of his hand to rub at his nose in embarrassment.

"I guess."

Cloud nudges Rin and gently pokes fun, making sure Rin knows that fact as they sit shoulder-to-shoulder. From the outside they look like family or close friends who've known each other for a long time; especially as they turn to discussing training, Cloud gesturing as Rin nods and adds his own thoughts.

Chapter End Notes

Comment, complain, ect.
Hey! So there's a few chapters coming up that might not interest the Ao no Exorcists among you~

The chapters in question (18-20) will be detailing Vincent's life up until he goes to sleep before the split of the world in-verse. It might squicked some of you and it might not.

Rin's sword training and Yukio's marksmanship generally don't occur at the same time but Vincent likes the warehouse Cloud had bought and renovated into a training center.

"Today we're training with Vincent and your brother. That okay?" Cloud asks as he finishes cleaning the hollow blade and sheathes it.

"Uh, sure."

"You'll be training in both swordsmanship and with one of your brother's guns. Weapons proficiency never hurt anyone." Cloud replies as he hands over the sheath for Rin's specialized shinai with the reinforced bamboo already inside.

"Rin? Where are you going at this hour?"

"I asked Cloud to teach me how to use a shinai for kendo. He was really cool about it." Rin says while pulling the wrapped handle out for Fujimoto to see. "We've been practicing for a while now." His student pauses and asks quietly, "... Do you want me to stop?"

"No. It's good that Mr. Strife is willing to teach you." Fujimoto says with a ruffle of Rin's hair. He looks over Rin at Cloud and mouths Thank you. Tell me later?" Cloud nods in agreement as Rin bounces under the affectionate hand. "Go have fun."

"Awesome. Thanks old man!" Fujimoto shakes his head but the love for Rin is clear. Cloud passes Fujimoto with a respectful nod and the Paladin does the same.

"Keep him safe." Fujimoto murmurs before Cloud leaves, causing him to pause at the door.

"Always do."

They're munching on kitsune grilled meat when Vincent and Yukio arrive. There's two more containers in a bag, the smell drawing over both marksmen. Cloud accepts Vincent's kiss and smiles as the twins touch foreheads.

"There's some for you two; then we figure out where Rin and Yukio stand in the opposing weapon after our normal training routines. Sound good?" Cloud presents after Vincent settles into his lap to steal bits from Cloud with lightning fast reflexes. Cloud just starts eating from Vincent's portion until his husband sticks his tongue out and his eyes flare blue. "Not sorry, saiai. You stole mine first."
"Fair enough." Vincent shrugs but eats from his own portion, leaning down to pillow his cheek on Cloud's hair.

"Uhh, never asked but feel it's important now... How long have you two been married?" Rin asks as he finishes his food.

"Not counting the time we were in spell-induced comas? Mmm, eight or nine thousand years, give or take. Vin?" Cloud has to think back that far, scrunching his nose as he remembers the Deepground incident and then the rather pointed first war.

"Eight and a half before we grew tired of the constant civil wars after ShinRa collapsed entirely and beseechment to take the opposing side. Aerith let us sleep and created the split. You could say that it's an annoyingly long war but more like battles than the actual thing when facing demons." Vincent agrees and Cloud hums as his husband takes their dominant hands and laces the fingers.

"So Assiah and Gehenna... They were whole once?" Yukio asks after Rin closes his open mouth.

"Once, yes, and eventually-" Vincent states seriously.

"They'll be reunited." Cloud finishes as Vincent nods. "You two play a pivotal role in that. But that is yet to come."

"How... How long?" Rin questions and Cloud chuckles at his student's curiosity.

"Oh, not for another fifty years." He chirrups and watches them both face-palm. "Told you it'd take a bit."

"Right. Training?" Rin asks and Cloud nods as Yukio and Vincent check over their guns. They draw out the shinai as the other pair line up targets to shoot at from ten, fifteen and fifty meters away.

Cloud falls into the sword katas, Rin's speed now enough that the shinai whistle as they cut through the air. Each move is in perfect sync as they run through each of the kata twice and then strength exercises for Rin to control his touch. The eggs are rotten and will explode if pressed too hard so his student has learned to balance them with extreme care.

Rin manages to set the eggs down without exploding a single one. That's definite progress. Now they could try to summon flames without breaking the seal; Cloud doubts the malleable properties of Satan's flames as Kurikara is still sheathed. Though—if Rin or Yukio has an affinity with flames—they might be able to use the Fire Materia.

"Alright, they're about done shooting." Cloud hums as he freezes the eggs solid with a Blizzard Materia in hand, tucking away the eggs until next session. "Would you like to try something new?"

"New? What's it for?" Rin perks up at that, having mastered the katas and the current speed over the course of nearly four months.

"Control, like the egg but with a twist." he explains as Vincent and Yukio wander over. "You think they can handle a LV. 1 Fira spell? My Materia spawned another one yesterday."

"New? What's it for?" Rin perks up at that, having mastered the katas and the current speed over the course of nearly four months.

"Control, like the egg but with a twist." he explains as Vincent and Yukio wander over. "You think they can handle a LV. 1 Fira spell? My Materia spawned another one yesterday."

"It won't do any harm, certainly. This place is warded to just about be indestructible. You spent a lot of time on this." Vincent murmurs as he hefts the shinai with approval. "Try this one first."

Yukio almost drops it, his arms shaking as he keeps the metal tip off the ground. Vincent sighs as he gives Yukio a long-suffering look.
"What did I tell you about your demon half?" comes the question, laced with Vincent's disapproval.

"... The more I ignore it, the bigger the explosion." Yukio mutters as he looks down at the floor. "At the rate I'm going it will burn an entire city when I let go."

"Yukio." Vincent clucks his tongue and tilts the younger twin's face up, gently swiping away the frustrated tears. "I am proud of your recent accomplishments. I love you as I would my own. This is not a task lightly taken nor ignored. I will be here every step of the way."

Yukio nods and presses into the soft touch, letting the shinai tip touch the concrete floor before raising it again to waist-height with a serious expression as Vincent moves out of the way. The younger twin is a quick study as Rin holds the gun at arms-length with an unsure look at it. His finger, thankfully, is away from the trigger.

"Pull it in, Rin. The weapon isn't going to bite." Vincent chuckles softly as Rin does just that.

Cloud adjusts Yukio's stance and they start training again. The corrections are different, not as harsh as the two get used to weaponry that they've never touched before now. By the end of the quick session (because that's all it really is), both are sweaty and giving each other mutual nods of respect.

"You can sit down for this part but it might actually take more energy than either training session. Do you still want to try?" Cloud admits frankly as he pulls the LV. 1 Fire Materia out.

"Yes." The twins reply in unison, leaning against one another as they sit down on the cushions.

"Alright. The spell is Fira. Don't be too disappointed if it doesn't work. Magic's different now than it used to be." he explains as he hands it over.

"Fira." Yukio states and there's a flicker of yellow before it turns blue. They all blink at that. "I don't think it's supposed to be blue."

"I thought that might happen. Hand it over for a moment?" Vincent sighs as he holds out his gauntlet for the Materia. "Fira." The flames burn a bright red until Vincent shifts to Gigas and then they turn a sickly green. "It's responding to your blood."

"What's with the green flames?" Rin asks before Vincent returns them to red.

"Part of the promise." Cloud's going to ask about that later.

"Not much longer on that. Are you sure you can't-No. You said fifteen for a reason." Yukio shakes his head as the Materia settles against his palm and the flames merrily bob in mid-air as brilliant blue.

Rin touches the Fire Materia and the flames flare up a lot higher. He drops it with a startled shout and the flame disappears. His student looks horrified; Cloud picks up the Materia and watches as Vincent soothes them both. His husband and Rin look up before reaching out an arm for Cloud.

"Rin, that's nothing to be scared of." he says after they're all in a cuddle pile.

"It... It isn't?" Oh, this kid is going to steal the Hero Trio's heart along with Zack's.

"Nah. It just means you have a high affinity for Fire-based spells. I knew someone like that." Cloud reassures as he touches foreheads with Rin.

"Genesis. He was a hero and excelled at using the Fire Materia. I believe he's a spirit like Aerith." Vincent replies calmly, the deep velvet practically a purr to soothe the inner demons of the twins.
"Perhaps he can teach you to master it."

"That'd be nice of him." Rin says as they settle into the cushions and cuddle some more.
Okay, so a very good friend of mine has agreed to help me with the Genesis Omake!
Which means you get Genesis and possibly Angeal interacting with the twins.
Sephiroth's got a role but it won't come up until much, much later.

Little bit of Vincent's past pops up but it's not too bad.

Aerith's playing ten levels above Mephisto, in case you're wondering, and always three steps ahead.

Enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

-Summer; Tokyo Monastery-

Vincent gently raps on the shared room of the twins, wanting to take them out to Yokohama for the festival.

"Yukio? Rin?"

"C'mon in!" Rin says through the door. Vincent waits a beat before entering and Rin's pouring over the textbooks for the next year along with Yukio. Both of them smell strongly of brimstone, frustrations high and on the brink of snapping at each other.

"What are you studying?" he asks as he settles into the desk chair.

"Science." Rin sighs as he closes the book and thunks the cover against his head.

"Physics." Yukio looks like he's about to do the same, only with a tic under his left eye.

"Ah." Vincent hums as he watches them concentrate. "It is rather warm. Would you care to take a small break and come with me to Yokohama?"

"For the festival?" Rin lights up with the book completely forgotten. The older twin could do with a practical lesson, Vincent supposes.

"Father Fujimoto has asked Cloud and I to run a small booth there when night falls, serving food and selling charms against evil," he explains as they pull away from the thick air of frustration, the brimstone giving way to clear springwater and asphodel once more. "We could use the help."

"But..."

"Demon pharmacology can wait, Yukio. Downtime is essential to Exorcists, especially ExWires studying for the Exorcist exam." Vincent argues back with a pointed look at the swapped book covers. "When was the last time you had a solid break from Exorcist-related matters?"

"It's been three months." Yukio admits with a sigh. "I do want some fresh air."
"Good. The yukata are washed, dried and hanging under the Shield I set up." Vincent offers as he grips thier shoulders lightly to push them out of the room. "Go change and meet Cloud and I at the entrance."

The twins shove and bicker with thier usual enthusiasm as Vincent strolls to the attic, pausing at Fujimoto's office.

"Did they say yes?" Shiro asks with a sigh.

"They did. Perhaps you should take the night off yourself." Vincent suggests as he leans on the doorway.

"... Anyone ever tell you that you're far too sneaky for your own good?" Fujimoto sighs as he leans back in the oak chair.

"Enough that I should also tell you I was also very persuasive along with persistent." He counters dryly with a half-smile.

"Very well. You'll watch them?"

"We'll guard them without very last breath, Fujimoto-san." Chaos murmurs as he flashes his golden eyes. "That you can count on."

-Harbour Festival; Yokohama Harbour-

Vincent removed his usual headband and instead wrapped it around the lower part of his hair, leaving it in a tail that he could flick out of the way should he need to for combat. The yukata matched his hair ribbon down to the shade and he used the harness for Cerberus that wrapped over his waist and slung it across his hip with the Exorcist badge in plain sight on the tooled leather.

Cloud was dressed in navy blue with his sword still in its many sheathes. He also had the shinai sheath for Rin should any true trouble arise. Vincent had given Yukio the other hip harness (made for dual pistols) that draped just right across the yukata and made it hard to distinguish against the deep green silk.

It was better to be prepared than to be caught entirely unaware. Turk training had made that perfectly clear and made it one of the few things that Vincent practiced years later. They all boarded the bullet train, people giving them a wide berth due to Cloud's sword and Cerberus. Rin was excited, chatting away with Cloud as Yukio's shoulders lost the taunt line and relaxed while he joined the conversation.

Yokohama was busy, more people in traditional clothing the closer they got to the festival. The booth was a small one but it was swamped by young ladies and gentlemen who were looking to keep any "bad luck" off of thier significant other or a potential someone. The grill/ fryer combination was empty but the cooler next to it held prepared meats and fresh shrimp on ice.

Vincent and Cloud relieved the Exorcists on duty and Rin set up the cooking station with Vincent's help. The crowd hardly dispersed the entire time they were there. Mephisto showed up in more... discreet attire than his usual, watching them work until Vincent shifted Hellmasker to the fore and lanced a particularly sharp flare of demonic energy his way.

It was a challenge: either approach and state what you mean or leave. Mephisto sauntered through the crowd and motioned that Vincent follow him.
"I'll be taking five sai'ai. Business with our 'friend', as it were."

"Yeah. The pressure's not something to mess with but he's arrogant." Cloud shakes his head but keeps an eye on the wares along with Yukio. Rin's enjoying himself with serving the food.

"Hn. He's got a brain behind that power and knows how to use it for his own means," Chaos sighs before pressing a kiss to Cloud's forehead. "Maybe when we get relieved, we can go for the lantern lighting?"

"I'd like that." Cloud murmurs with a soft smile. Half of the line sighs in disappointment; their Mate is a popular one to flirt with tonight.

They slip into the crowd, making a bee-line for Mephisto on the pier. "Keeping an eye on your chess pieces?" Chaos states as he leans on the railing.

"Something like that. Who's the new one?"

"Our Mate. Don't even think about sniffing around him. We do not tolerate advances." comes the cold response. "We will kill you. There's nothing in our contract to our Goddess that says we can't."

"Not even to play?"

"No." Now he's tolerant on most things but Cloud... Cloud they kill for with absolute glee. "This isn't up for debate."

"Such severity. Does he approve?"

"He licks the blood off our lips when we're done ripping the offender limb-from-limb." Chaos purrs as he bares his sharp canines. "He likes it."

" Completely loyal to five demons. Now that is interesting."

"When you're like us, you take what you can find and hold onto it." Chaos murmurs as he glances at the Director. "You make deals and steal souls. What would you know of true loyalty?"

"Are you always so prickly with your interactions?" Mephisto asks with a wide grin.

"Making it clear we want nothing to do with you or your plan but we will be interference until the cubs are old enough to confront you themselves." Chaos promptly rebuts with a casual stretch of his wings. "Touch me and that hand will have to grow back."

The last remark is because Mephisto's hand is hovering just near his left wing, right where Hojo stuck a particularly enormous needle into Vincent's ribs to get a response from his comatose body.

"Such fascinating scarring," the sly remark is paired with a smug look.

"Demons don't scar normally and you're wondering what caused it." Chaos translates with a sour expression. "Nothing you would want, I promise you that." He mantles his wings back into Vincent's body and nods to Mephisto. "Your pieces are safe with me and mine."

The Ferris wheel stops with them on the top. Vincent curls into Cloud, relishing the strong scent of his husband.

"He was checking on his pieces. I do not like what I see, especially under his hand." Vincent snarls softly, "He'll be trying our cubs harshly but exploiting Rin. Yukio would keep in his frustration and
anger, getting worse and worse until he slipped; became a demon for him to use. Mephisto is playing a game that does not end well for the people he chooses as pieces on his board. I do not fit into his plan and neither do you."

"Glad Aerith decided to intervene?" Cloud asks as he laces thier fingers together.

"I am grateful to her for many, many things but I do not think I can repay her for the chance she gave us." Vincent sighs and he feels a brush of cool air against his cheek. "I understand that there is no debt between friends."

"No. She wanted this, for you to be a part of it. An end to all the conflict and discord between worlds." Cloud reassures with a sweet kiss. "Aerith's plan is a hell of a lot longer. She's utilizing who she can to keep the peace, as it were, until the merging. I say she picked well, saiai."

"At least she asked." Vincent snorts as the Ferris wheel starts up again.

Chapter End Notes

Comment, complain, ect.
Omake: General Rhapsodos and the Lessons of LOVELESS

Chapter Notes

... So I'm back? Genesis was fighting me at every turn. He's not easy for me to write and I'm 50/50 on hating this chapter/throwing it away.

I'm posting because you, my lovely readers, have waited WAAAY too long for the next chapter installment.

Things should be easier from here on out.

Enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

-August of the Twin's 12th Year-

Genesis normally wouldn't have left the domain that he'd made for Angeal and Sephiroth after meeting them again in the afterlife. He was content to let sleeping dogs lie the fuck down.

Except... Cloud had asked him to teach two (Two! What did Cloud think he was, a babysitter?!) brats with an affinity for Fire-based spells. Angeal sadly wouldn't help because of his specialty in Blizzard-based spells (mostly due to the fact that Genesis set things on fire that rightfully shouldn't be on fire, but still). Sephiroth had only mastered the Cure, Summon and Thunder Materia to make him a better SOLDIER.

So here he was, with a decent body (that wasn't degrading, ayyyy) and nowhere to go aside from the essentially indestructible warehouse. Yay. Aerith made him promise not to go outside because people might mistake him for some sort of demon or a gang member. She'd make the three of them solid for a week or so to explore the city they found themselves in, but only if Genesis made an honest effort to teach the kids.

There was a reason he terrified SOLDIER Seconds and not Cadets, dammit.

He paced on the flat rafters before Cloud and Valentine showed up with the brats in tow, carrying what looked like a baggie meant just for him. The joy of unknown presents!

"Infinite in mystery is the gift of the Goddess/We seek it thus, and take to the sky/Ripples form on the water's surface/The wandering soul knows no rest." He quoted as he took a step forward and off the rafter, floating down with his wings spread wide. Yes, plural, the Goddess was generous. They'd grown in the LifeStream, leaving him with four gloriously sleek jet-colored wings. "Strife."

"Rhapsodos." Cloud stated with minimal monotone expression before holding up the baggie with a half-smirk at their inside joke. "We brought you dinner."

"Thanks Cloud. Go train. I want to see how you move." Genesis made a shooing motion and settled on the gymnastics bar Cloud put in to keep up his strength.

He took a bite of the meat and nearly groaned out loud. Genesis missed food you could actually
taste; the LifeStream didn't really put out when it came to food. He hummed around each bite and frowned when it was gone. Genesis was definitely taking his lovers to wherever this came from first thing. Valentine directed from the sidelines for the younger twin (Yuki something) and glanced at Genesis every now and again.

Neither of them knew the other, not really. Their sole connection was the blond currently teaching some impressive swordsmanship. Maybe Cloud would've made a good SOLDIER, like Zack but infinitely calmer. When the other kid sat down and started holding onto rotten eggs, Genesis made a face but understood; strength was to be tempered by gentleness, as his and Angeal's instructor used to say.

When both of them finished and ate to replenish what strength they lost, Genesis gauged their personalities. Rin (the one holding the eggs) was a bit like Zack, while Yukio (who shot with terrifying accuracy for a 12 year old) reminded him of Sephiroth when they were younger. The intensity and strength these two were displaying now was amazing but he suspected it was tempered when it came to magic use.

"Now, Genesis is going to treat you like adults. He won't lie to you or pull any punches. What he does is magic, plain and simple." Cloud stated seriously. "Gen, your assessment?"

"Raw untapped potential but it will require a lot of training. I'm talking years here." He remarked as he crossed his arms. "With the way you two are, though, this is something you'll do together."

"Together?" Rin asked with a furrowed brow.

"One of you has immense power and the other impressive control for a pair of 12 year olds. It's so you can access each other's strengths and combine it for a deadly attack, should you need it." He explained, now in General briefing mode. "You should be proficient in each other's weaponry in case you get separated from your main. That's what Strife and Valentine are for; I am here to teach you how to take down any enemy within a distance of a thousand mile radius. Do we understand each other?"

"Yessir." Yukio said and Rin nodded.

"Verbal answer. Fire gets loud and in the way." Genesis pinched the bridge of his nose to keep from flinging Fira at them.

"YESSIR!" They shout in unison.

"Better," he conceded as he sat with them. "Now, since you're younger, controlling the flames will take time."

"Like learning to trust you." Rin muttered as he stared at the Materia with a mix of raw fear in his abilities and a determination to protect. Maybe Genesis should bring Angeal with him next time; the kid was shaping up to be an interesting adult, with the proper guidance.

"Rin!" Yukio chided, exchanging a glance with his brother that meant something to both of them.

"He's right and wrong." Genesis pointed out with a wry half-smile. "You don't have to trust me with anything but your training but to gain an understanding of your flames will take time that will foster a relationship between us. Shrewd, that one, at least when it comes to emotional intelligence."

Rin opened his mouth, thought about it and closed it with a thoughtful look.

"Good. Now, watch me." Genesis summoned the red flame of Fira and steadily increased the power
fed to the spell until the LVL. I broke it's Limit and hit his first specialty spell Emulsion. "Don't touch this. Your hand will melt off to the bone and then that'll melt too. You can power a spell into another spell but it takes years of practice. I came up with this one during the sleepless nights of the Wutai War campaign. It's called Emulsion because it destroys everything it touches; used it on a bunch of assassins who were trying to kill a ShinRa General to reduce morale. They were ash and so was half the camp."

Both of them look horrified. Valentine gave him a look Genesis suspected no one living had seen again.

"Genesis..." Cloud growled lowly as he snatched the Materia out of Genesis's hand; he can see why Seph was defeated by the blond. "I said teach, not terrify. I should've gotten Angeal."

"Fire is destructive. It's what it is, what I am. They need to understand that." He snapped back, holding his hand out for the Materia. "Plus, I wasn't done. The ShinRa SOLDIERS survived unharmed."

"Huh?" Rin tilted his head to the side in confusion.

"I kept them from burning. I'd given each of them a Charm that protected them and their belongings. Now, you can't do that today because Magic is limited but you can control your flames to a degree that those you trust and are friends will remain unharmed should you need to do such a thing." He explained and all of them relaxed.

"And the Wutainese ninja?" Valentine asked coolly.

"Ash; they weren't authorized by Godo and they disobeyed him. He told me, frankly, that they'd been loud about their plans the night before and he was going to let them do it. Attacking the three strongest men on Gaia at the time was a monumentally stupid idea, seeing as how Godo'd signed a peace treaty a day earlier." Genesis answered with a shrug as he powered down the Fira.

Valentine shook his head at that, muttering about idiots in mountain Wutainese slang. Cloud chuckled and replied in something that Genesis had never heard.

"Nibel, if you're curious Gen," Cloud said in Common with a laugh. "from my hometown."

"Uhh, are we gonna touch it again?" Rin questioned outright.

"Yes. I need to see what it does."

He left them exhausted but able to bring the flames down to only a foot instead the immense tongue of flame that flared with Rin.

Genesis had learned a great deal and he was willing to tutor them in the art of the flame.

"Even if the morrow is barren of promises/Nothing shall forestall my return/To become the dew that quenches the land/To spare the sands, the seas, the skies/I offer thee this silent sacrifice."

Chapter End Notes

Comment, complain, ect.
Constructive feedback welcome!
Catching Up On The Past

Chapter Notes

Okay, this is the start of Vincent's story. It's more FFVII-centric than the more recent chapters.

It traverses his birth, his enlistment to the Turks and a few other things. If you want to skip the next three to five chapters, I will summarize at the start of Chapter 21.

Enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

-Two Weeks Before the Twin's Thirteenth Birthday; Tokyo Monastery-

Chaos paces before nodding sharply.

"We're telling him?" Cloud asks from his place on the window nook.

"It is past time he knows our story, my Sky. Vincent cannot endure another telling. This is not a pleasant task." Chaos sighs as he pillows his face against Cloud's stomach.

"No it isn't. I don't envy you babe." Their Mate agrees as he gently detangles Chaos's messy hair. His true form will not technically be necessary but he likes to stretch out on occasion. The others are content to stay inside unless called for or when stretching themselves.

"It is such a long tale. You do not show up for quite some time." Chaos purrs as Cloud's clever fingers dig deeper and scratch just so. "Mmm, little to the left."

"If I keep petting you, you'll never get around to it. Go on." Cloud murmurs as he reluctantly pulls away.

"True enough, my Sky." Chaos shifts back to Vincent's body and exits the room, intent on seeking Fujimoto out.

None of the other monks seem to notice as Chaos slips past with a silent tread. He knocks briefly and is amused when Fujimoto mutters something about decorations before opening the door.

"If this is about the lights we need to change-Valentine?" Chaos clears his throat and allows his presence to flare. "The other one. What do you want?" They enter the office (which looks like Christmas has exploded in there) with Fujimoto shutting the door and Chaos activating the Materia needed to keep it secret.

"That tale Valentine promised you a few years ago, if you're willing to hear it." He remarks lightly as he leans against the door with a subtle tilt of his head. "However, it will take some time. The material is not for those with a faint heart and even I find it... disturbing at points. Are you still willing to listen?"

Fujimoto leans back at Chaos's blunt assessment. "I have only one question; where does Valentine
go when you come out?"

"He goes in. As I said, his story is not something lightly told. He has endured enough that I have
taken over telling it," Chaos sighs as he mentally embraces his Host.

"Very well. I will finish this and we will regroup in an hour." Fujimoto decides and Chaos nods his
approval. "Will Valentine come out again?"

"In time."

They meet at the door, Chaos holding a tea set and a large plastic bucket.

"Will I-

"Yes. The last three who heard it were trained torture specialists and they vomited. I suggest you take
the bucket." Chaos states as he offers the item in question. Fujimoto takes it with an expression of
hesitance. "Should you wish to no longer hear this, tell me."

"No. I will hear it out." The Paladin settles into his chair and Chaos on the couch. "It starts fairly
normal, I suppose?"

"Hn. It does, to a point." Chaos pours himself some tea as he waits for Fujimoto to get into the right
frame of mind. "It starts millennia ago, before the spilt, before a great deal of many things..."

-Junon City; Valentine Residence-

Megumi Valentine née Himura screamed as she pushed for what felt like the thousandth time that
hour.

"Almost, almost, PUSH!" The midwife barked in Wutainese and Megumi wanted to slap her but
didn't have the strength.

"I AM PUSHING!" She snarled back as she practically crushed Grimoire's hand. And then... A
clear, happy squeal came from the bundle in the midwife's arms.

"A boy! You have a son!" The midwife passed her son to her as she cooed at her baby boy.

"What should we name him, Grim?" She asked tiredly after feeding thier child.

"Vincent. Vincent Grimoire Valentine." Grimoire said softly as he cradled Vincent's head.

Vincent grew to be a happy, healthy child. He was sweet and incredibly willing to do anything his
Kaa-san or Otou-san asked of him.

... But something happened to Kaa-san. She got sick and Vincent was forbibden from seeing her. He
snuck in anyway, soon laid up himself. The fever raged and burned but the Healer managed to heal
Vincent with the Cure Materia. Something about those with stronger Magic surviving seemed to be
the Healer's solemn word.

Kaa-san didn't make it.

Vincent went to the funeral with his father, tucked under Otou-san's arm and an umbrella. The sky
opened up the day Kaa-san was to be buried. H didn't smile and he didn't laugh for months after the
funeral. Something had changed; Vincent's smiles grew rarer and rarer, as did his laughter and silly
By the time he was seventeen, Vincent was quiet but still affectionate towards his Otou-san and small collection of friends.

He helped run the Junon Library with his Otou-san, pleased to help those seeking knowledge at the University. He learned to tell fake antique books from real, always catching the misprint and/or the person handing it over.

Vincent was... strong for his age and often was found helping older persons across the street along with helping them carry things. The Professors at Junon University held a soft spot for Vincent; the teen with a thoughtful expression and generally helpful attitude.

When Otou-san started coughing up blood, Vincent went looking for answers. What he found made him horrified and shocked; cancer. ShinRa had doctors that could heal it or at least make it go into remission but only offered such things to ShinRa employees.

He signed up the following day, starting basic training to help his Otou-san live a little longer.

Grimoire lived to see Vincent graduate training at 19. They both looked over the letters of recommendation and service terms to see where Vincent should try to continue his education. They were surprised by the Department of Administrative Research requesting that Vincent report to the eighth floor with his measurements and a sturdy pair of black shoes.

"Isn't that-" Otou-san started before coughing into his handkerchief.

"The Turks. It's their front. Should I go? They're also offering that new SOLDIER exam." Vincent's hair is getting long and he pushed it back with a brush of his hand.

"Do what you want, Vincent. I would suggest getting out of ShinRa after three years. Maybe do a stint in actual administration or even under an old friend of mine, Tuesti. You can tell them no." came the sound advice. Vincent trusted his Otou-san's judgement and he tended to be right.

"Hn. They have ways of making you cave. No, best if I report with my measurements. They better take good care of you." Vincent stared up at the Turk who thought she was being sneaky, the MP radiating off the woman almost off-putting. "They've probably been watching me since Junon."

"Still have that Himura thing," Otou-san chuckled softly as the woman shifted deeper into the shadows. "Probably why they want you with them, though I'm sure they'd let you take the exam first if you asked."

"Too new. I don't want to be a test-subject while they work out the kinks in the Program." Vincent replied as he offered his elbow to his Otou-san, "Besides, ShinRa is going to go after Wutai. I don't want to have to fight my cousins."

"What makes you say that?" His father asked lightly as they headed for a decent tailor in Sector Four, just above the Plate.

"Dunno. Something's lingering in the air."

"I'll take your word for it, son."

Chapter End Notes
Comment, complain, ect.
Hey folks, sorry about taking so long on the chapter. Again, if the FFVII aspect is not your thing, you can go ahead and skip this chapter. I'll be summing up what happens in Chapter 21 when things get back on track for the Ao no Exorcists among the readers.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chaos pauses, reheats his tea with a faint Fira and drinks or a long moment.

"Wutai... What was there that this ShinRa Company had to go to war for it?" Fujimoto asks finally after a drink of his own tea, also heated with the Fira.

"The LifeStream sometimes bubbled over onto the physical plane and became Mako. Materia is made of crystallized Mako and forms naturally. Mako was used to power the Eastern Continent and the West had a supply that would last them for centuries. SOLDIER was formed so that no government could possibly take over the company." Chaos answered as he stared into the golden liquid that moved as he tilted his cup.

"The Turks... They did the wet work, the under-the-table deals with drug lords and politicians alike. You understand why he chose the non-confrontational path?"

"They went to war, didn't they?"

"Yes. But not for quite some time."

-Turk Headquarters; Vincent's First Day-

Vincent reports to the eighth floor, wearing his ShinRa-issued graduate uniform and a strong pair of broken-in boots. He barely steps through the door before he's diving into a somersault to avoid the whistling knives that embed themselves into the spot he'd just been in.

"Is that how you greet recruits?" He questions as he shifts his crouch into something that will allow him more movement should he need it.

"Oh, Veld picked a smart-ass." The woman from before appears from the shadows and collects her knives calmly as if she hadn't just thrown them at high-velocity. Vincent doesn't keep his gaze off of her, sensing at least two more in the room.

"I didn't want to be here but I'm smart enough to listen to the rumors that circulate among the Cadets." he counters with a minute shake of his head. "And it's not fair, three-on-one."

"Oh-ho. You are good. Can you avoid them too or... is that too much?" Vincent waits for movement, the MP waves steady and sure as he shifts just a tad more to spring in any direction away from them. "Strong silent type, eh? Let's get him."

Three projectiles launch forward and Vincent jumps up, touching the solid steel bar for a moment
before he swings up onto it. The shadows here are crisp and dark enough that the uniform blends in entirely. The fourth presence lingers near the bar but hasn't attacked nor shown any interest at all. The MP, however, gives the fourth a special tick; the latter is merely observing the fight.

"Where'd he go?"

"Shut up, Knives." The second voice is more mature and Vincent shifts just in time to avoid the massive shuriken from below. "He's above us."

He manages to avoid the next three attacks, only to grunt in pain when the whip from the third and final person brings him down. Vincent's quick to cut the whip with his knife, spinning to protect his back in a corner, his hold loose enough to spin the weapon if needed.

Kaa-san and Otou-san had been excellent teachers; his Himura cousins had only increased the need to protect himself after Kaa-san had passed with their rough-and-tumble 'ninja' games.

"Cease." The fourth person orders sharply of the other three before addressing Vincent personally. "It seems you are qualified to join us."

"So it would seem." Vincent tilts his head to the side a little and spots the MP suppression Materia. "That's cheating."

"Is it?" The man's tone sounds amused and Vincent bristles internally, keeping the outside cool and composed.

"Just a little." He offers with a raised brow.

"Weapons training?"

"Don't you have a file?" Vincent flatly inquires as he collects his duffle-bag. "And give back my lunch. I made that."

"Whip, put it back." The obvious commander snaps and the bento box is handed over by the now sheepish Whip. "You're right; I want to hear it from you."

"Basic martial arts and self-defense, courtesy of my parents." He doesn't mention the throwing knives and the boot-blade along with the small katana tucked into his pants. Vincent sheathes the small knife and waits for the commander's response.

"Oh you are a liar." The man's face lights up into a smile that would be terrifying if Vincent wasn't a mix of stubborn Himura and level-headed Valentine. "A good one but still a liar."

"You see anything else on me?" Vincent opens his stance up just enough that the throwing knives can't be differentiated from the folds of the ShinRa uniform.

"The ShinRa uniform is rather roomy. But you're concealing weapons and you're doing it well." Vincent doesn't flinch at the words, knowing he has much to learn. "Welcome to the Turks, Valentine. I am Veld and I will be your senior partner."

Chapter End Notes

Comment, complain, ect.
Lessons of The Turks

Chapter Notes

Only one more chapter before we get back to our regularly scheduled programming, folks! Again, skip if FFVII isn't totally your thing. Also, if you can spot the fic Easter egg you get a short side-fic!

Enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Veld is fair but hard, driving Vincent until he's agile enough to pull a knife or gun on his partner without looking up from the pile of paperwork which ends up being a great deal of his duty. It's *supposed* to teach patience but Vincent inherited that in spades from the Himura side.

More often than not, Knife ends up pinned to the wall while Vincent spots the legal traps that make up ShinRa paperwork. He sticky-notes each, explains what it means exactly in plain Common, and hands it back over to Veld. The senior Turk is frankly amazed the first time he does it.

The thrower of the giant shuriken turns out to be a talented woman named Cessnei. She's a senior Turk and incredibly well-tuned to how people work. She takes a shine to him after he helps her dodge a seriously disgusting bit of contract that states she can become a ShinRa experiment.

Cessnei takes him out to watch interactions, always in civilian clothes that lead them to look fairly normal. She gets Vincent to pull up his hair, tucks it under a beanie that Whip (also a woman and surprisingly sweet under the taciturn exterior she shows everyone else) crocheted and tells him to lose his good posture. He never glances too long at anyone, though his slightly slanted eyes garner him attention from the Honey Bees.

When they drop into the slums, Vincent is more at home than Cessnei seeing as there's a thriving Wutainese culture beneath the Plate in Sector 6. He leads her around with a teasing look every now and again.

"You fit better above Plate, 'Nei. It's nothing against you but you're not dirty, scruffy or working as a lady of the night. Too well-cultured," Vincent points out as he scrubs some soot over her and a little bit of spilled Mako on her ripped jeans. "Now you fit better."

"And you look at home."

"Junon has Wutainese immigrants and the towns are clean but not that clean. My Kaa-san is well-known."

"Himura! Good to see you escaping ShinRa clutches. Come join us for dinner." Vincent's friends below the Plate (that he hadn't told her about) love inviting him to dinner; something about him being too skinny still. "You know Kaa-San makes your favorites and mine when you come over..." Toro wheedles as Vincent shakes his head.

"Fine. This is 'Nei. She's from Sector 4 n wanted to see what it was like down below." Cessnei looks good and offended, which is what he intends.
"Hope she's not too picky."

"If it's food, I eat it." Cessnei snorts at Toro's comment. "Wasn't always squeaky clean, Himura."

-Turk Headquarters; Year Six-

He slips from the shadows to see the new recruit. Vincent doesn't attack, not like the others, but he's not in Veld's place either. Time and experience has led him to watching the trials with an air of curiosity; the Turk mindset is the rule that no one messes with the Turks or those they keep close rings true even with the recruits.

The latest lasts longer than most and Veld accepts him into the Turks as well. Veld tends to take Vincent's assessments a little more seriously than the rest, especially with his ability to read and sense MP.

"Well?"

"He's paired best with Elena." comes the prompt answer. MP can't lie and Vincent has long since learned to trust that ability.

"Elena, hmm? Two new recruits in a pair. You're sure?" Veld inquires lightly but they both know that the pair is now linked.

"I'll be senior partner."

"If you think you can handle it." comes the blasé response.

"Results will show themselves." Vincent murmurs quietly as Tseng Kisagari meets Elena. Both MPs spike and settle at the exact same rate, causing him to give Veld a rare smile. "Magic never lies."

Immense progress is made and then Tseng and Elena are fully-fledged Turks.

Vincent practically purrs at the sight of them taking down a drug lord and stabbing him in the knee for questioning. They replace him with Don Corneo, an upcoming underling who just... needed a little push. The man supports ShinRa and even has a section dedicated to keeping him in power.

"Perhaps we should pull you for recruiting duty." Veld states dryly as he watches the monitor.

"I'm buried in your paperwork, my paperwork and Knife's which she conviently 'forgets' on my desk even though I'm also a senior Turk. I was only there because I managed to wade through it all." He huffs sharply even though he's pleased with his pair. Vincent will be taking them out for a discreet drink and a small present (weaponry that they'll use for thier future with ShinRa).

"Sticky-noted, summarized and which pitfalls/traps the wording really is, of course." The other Turk snorts while turning to face Vincent.

"As if I would leave anything to chance." Vincent sniffs delicately. "I worked at Junon Uni for so long that I can tell legalese from ordinary traps."

"Maybe you would have been better as actual Admin." Veld teases as Vincent starts on Veld's pile first, earning the older Turk a frown.

"I'll use Quicksilver and shoot you in the ass, Veld. Don't make me." He growls as he continues to sticky-note the paperwork. "Shoo. Go bother some recruits."
"Going, going," Veld pauses at the doorway to watch Elena take down at least half the cell before they're replaced with ShinRa employees that can't be bought off. "You've been assigned a mission."

"Where?"

"Nibelhiem."

Only Elena and Tseng see him off. Veld's on his PHS, checking the time for the truck to take him to Nibelhiem.

"Be careful. War is brewing and your talent with Wutainese is going to fall under close scrutiny when it does break out." Vincent murmurs quietly as they stay to the shadows. He's going to be on monster duty, protecting the supplies and the driver (who will back him up with Cure, if he's lucky) on the way there. "Keep it up but stop speaking it in public areas that house Turks and the recruits for the SOLDIER program."

"Yessir." They reply in Common and Vincent nods in approval.

"If an order doesn't sit well with your gut instinct, don't obey it. Make it look like you have but do not waste bullets that could be used for more worthy opponents." He pauses, thinking over the layout of ShinRa and the Turk space. "Elena, stab Knife if she sets her paperwork on your desk. It saves you about a week's worth of trouble. Tseng, shoot Knife if necessary; you two will be taking my position."

"Yessir."

"One more thing. If I don't come back... Pick the lock on my second desk drawer and send the letter you see to my Father in Junon. It's keyed to the two of you so you'll have to open that compartment together." Vincent hums as the truck backfires into the sleek parking garage of ShinRa.

"That's all?"

"Hopefully you do not fall prey to ShinRa's claws. Stay safe, flexible and alive." he accepts the hug from both of them, looking at Veld with some amount of amusement over their heads.

Veld mouths 'Be careful. The rumors about Hojo are true.' Vincent nods minutely and separates himself from his protégés.

"Leviathan bless you." He taps each of their foreheads with two fingers and gets on the truck.

Chapter End Notes

Comment, complain, etc.
Nibelhiem: CONTAINS SEMI-GRAPHIC VIOLENCE

Chapter Summary

Seriously, if the mention of blood and various descriptions of mutilation are not your thing, *skip this*.

Chapter Notes

This does contain material that may squick people. Skip if violence and creepy Hojo is not your thing!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The drive was monotonous and the driver is decent with a Summon so Vincent drove half of the trip out to Junon. They transfer there to a helicopter and fly over the Nibel Mountain Range to land at ShinRa's Mansion on the outskirts of town. He barely set his foot down before he's being greeted by one of ShinRa's assets.

"You must be Sniper!" Gast shouted over the helicopter's rotor blades as it took off again. The pilot's got three more deliveries after this stop and can't stay.

Vincent waited until the noise faded to reply, "Yessir. Assigned as a bodyguard to one Dr. Gast and one Dr. Crescent."

"Well, Sniper, I hope you're patient. I'm afraid this job's nothing but busywork for you. I'm Dr. Gast." He shook Gast's hand and followed him into the spacious mansion. "Oh. One more thing; Dr. Hojo is working with something classified. May I have your word that this doesn't leave the Mansion?"

"A Turk's word is his or her bond. We may proceed."

"Oh you are professional. Wonderful."

'Professional' is used like an insult, though the actual Doctors tend to use it properly. Vincent was the unwilling subject of lab techs who liked to harass him by sloshing Mako and various glowing substances. He finally shot them with stun bullets and left them in a pile for Hojo to see when he can stand it no longer.

"What is the meaning of this?! You useless peons cannot even properly mix Mako and Dragon venom?" Dr. Hojo was not a good man. Vincent kept his distance and didn't like to be alone in a room with the greasy scientist. "Turk, pour this into that flask."

"...Yessir." He poured it simply and stuck it into the centerfuge after he's capped it off.

"How is it you are more capable than these... assistants?" Hojo interrogated as Vincent stepped back
to his position against Dr. Gast's lab.

"I don't fool around trying to scare the resident Turk into quitting, sir, and almost spilling Mako on the floor." He coldly stated while keeping his distance.

"Morons, all of them. Who are you assigned to, Turk?"

Vincent repressed the urge to run very far from this man. "Dr. Gast and Dr. Crescent, though I have not met the latter."

"Dr. Crescent is a competent scientist and a good colleague." Those are the first and last words he hears that are positive from Hojo. The man kicked the lab techs and hissed something in their ears to get them back to work. Whatever it was can't be any good; they're white as sheets from the Inn and quieter than mice.

Chaos paused to take a break and the Paladin's lips are pressed thin.

"I'm afraid for Vincent at this point." The man told him with a concerned look. "It gets worse, doesn't it?"

"Much worse," Chaos agreed with a heavy sigh. "Would you like me to stop?"

"No, no. Well, perhaps a pause for dinner, even if it is going to come right back up again." Fujimoto admitted with a shrug. "I hear Rin's got something special up his sleeve this year?"

"An old family recipe from the city of Kalm. He's using Vincent's recipes now." Chaos informed as they walked out together.

"Vincent! I did it! The soufflé didn't break this time!" Rin hugged Chaos tightly around the waist and grinned as he looked up into the crimson eyes of Vincent. Chaos knew how to act like his Host; only Fujimoto and Cloud would know the difference.

"Did you now?" He stated with a warm look and a small smile. "How many attempts after the first three blew up in your face?"

"I-How'd you know that?" Rin wrinkled his nose and Chaos chuckled softly.

"Because I did much the same my first few times."

"You did?" Rin craned his head back to make sure, the teasing smile enough to get them both laughing.

"Oh yes. Quite a few mistakes in the kitchen while Cid, Aerith and Yuffie taught me," came the admission.

"But you're so good now." Rin hummed as they sat down to dinner. Chaos pressed Galian down when the other demon wanted to surface.

**Why not?** Galian demanded sharply.

I don't know how our Host puts up with you... The cubs are getting used to us still and the Host has set the date already. Chaos remarked as he rolled his eyes internally. **Be patient.**

**Then can I be the first shift?**
As if, Galian. I am oldest. Chaos huffed as he drew back to the present, the internal bickering taking less than half a minute.

"Hey Vin." Cloud is nudging him in the side gently. "Falling asleep on the table, are we?"

"There has been that rash of demon outbursts out in the country and in other countries." One of the priests offered as Chaos continued eating. "Mr. Valentine has been invaluable these last few trips."

"Yeah, that's Vin for you." Cloud murmured as he laced their fingers. "Chaos, babe, you alright?" He asked in Nibel.

"Vincent is a bit strained but there is nothing we can do about it until dinner is done. The cubs are still too young to know." Chaos sighed and Cloud nodded his head in understanding.

"Want me to distract 'em?" Thier Mate inquired with a sweet smile.

"You are an angel, my Sky." He crooned as they touched foreheads.

"Glad to be of service, babe."

When they sat down again, Chaos scooted the bucket over.

"I'll be needing this at some point, I suppose?"

"Indeed."

Vincent's stay slowly grew darker as the seasons passed. Gast and Hojo argued even more frequently resulting in him breaking up quite a few fights. He took no sides but watched as Dr. Gast retreated more often, shying away from any attention Hojo gave him. Ifalna, Dr. Gast's wife, often invited him into the civilian side for what she called a 'chat'.

"Sniper, darling, can you help me with the tea-set today?" She asked him after he'd separated the two scientists into separate rooms. She was a Gaia-send when Vincent felt like putting the two under a Sleep spell.

"Yes ma'am."

"I do have another guest. Her name is Lucrecia. I hope that won't bother you." Ifalna murmured with a friendly nudge.

"Not at all, Ifalna." He assured as he set down the tray and looked up. Vincent's eyes widened but he gave her a faint smile. "Hello."

"Are you Sniper?" As she leaned forward, her light brown hair slid off of her shoulders.

"Yes ma'am." he repeated, pouring the tea for Ifalna first and then for Lucrecia.

She laughed at that, her eyes bright behind her glasses. "I'm no ma'am, Sniper. Dr. Crescent at your service."

"You are my second charge? Well met, Dr. Crescent." Vincent shook her hand politely but he felt warmer than he had in days.

Ifalna gave them a sweet smile and offered some of her home-made cookies.
Dr. Crescent, as she preferred in professional settings, often had 'need' of Vincent over most of her staff, though they were more competent that a good portion of Hojo's assistants.

"Sniper, back here." Lucrecia's eyes crinkled at the corners as she ushered Vincent into a new lab area. "This is my pet project when I'm not working on Hojo's things."

"What is it, exactly?" He questioned with a soft expression.

"You're the most curious Turk I have ever met, Sniper. You might want to keep that a secret from Hojo if nothing else." She warned seriously before brightening again, "It's called a Protomateria. I have an idea which beast it belongs to but I can't be entirely sure."

"What would you need for such a thing?" Vincent's rather attached to both to her and Dr. Gast, though Lucrecia has more pull.

"A volunteer and a... Oh dear, a cadaver strong enough to hold the beast once it's been summoned." She seemed to shy away from the subject for a moment.

"Oh." He's encountered enough bodies to understand what she means even if she doesn't say it out loud.

"Hojo has asked me to join his research team but I'll hold off just yet. What is the amount of scientific knowledge do you have?" Lucrecia asked him suddenly and Vincent, smitten fool that he is at the moment, cannot deny her anything she asks of him.

"I was at Junon University for a while. The papers there were amazingly well done..." They lean in close, talking long into this night and for many nights after.

The trouble started after Hojo repeatedly emailed Lucrecia about the major ShinRa operation he had going. She refused him time and again until after a 'personal' meeting which left her in tears.

"Sniper, tell me the truth. Is your last name Valentine?"

Vincent thought briefly about lying but he knew it would only prolong the hurt he saw on her face. "Yes, though I don't know how you got that information."

"Hojo. He's black-mailing me into participating in that disgusting experiment of his." She wiped at her tears angrily. "I knew a Grimoire, is he related to you?"

"Yes, Lucrecia, but Hojo is the major concern right now. What does he want you to do, yozora?" He wrapped around her in a secret floor of the ShinRa complex. It was their code word for be careful as well as to allow secrets with just them.

"Be impregnated and then... He wants to inject that white-haired Cetra into the child." She whispered, horrified by the sound of it. "He wants it to be his as well but I told him I was already-" Lucrecia sobbed quietly and Vincent understood with a horrifying clarity.

"Our child. And there is no way out. Gast has already vanished. Security is much tighter and there is no way to get word to the higher-ups in time or they know—I will help as best I can, yozora, but I do not think there is any way but killing him." Vincent replied somberly.

"We can't even do that. He has Libra equipped at all times and an MP booster." She snarled the last part.
"Then we wait." Lucrecia looked up at his soft, almost pleasant tone. "Hojo cannot keep his guard up forever."

It turned out Hojo didn't need to keep his guard up; Vincent did. Hojo grabbed Quicksilver from the holster and shot Vincent with his own weapon, blood spreading over white and blue fabric to soak it through.

"Sorry, my yozora." He coughed out more blood before hitting the lab floor with a thud. Hojo didn't even wait for Vincent to be fully dead.

"Take the specimen to Lab Six." came the sharp order. "Someone clean up that mess. Dr. Crescent, time for it's injections."

The last thing he remembers is Lucrecia whispering, "It isn't an it, we have a boy."

The body of one Vincent Valentine responded to various stimuli after it had been vacated of what the lab technicians had deemed a soul. Pumped full of Mako, it healed itself and seemed to keep the body in a state of perpetual youth.

Hojo added Mako injections to Project J to see if it would help Dr. Crescent. She remained ill, occasionally muttering something in Wutainese that meant nothing to the project. He left her to her own experiments with the Turk's body.

He stabbed it, sliced it, burned it (on several memorable occasions), poured acid onto it but it did not seem to hold any of his changes aside from the initial Mako. Finally, and in complete disgust with the unchanging subject, he handed it off entirely to Dr. Crescent.

Lucrecia looked at her former lover with a sadness that she couldn't help. Scars crossed his once warm chest and down his body. She dressed him again, smoothing back his slightly longer hair. Ifalna had mentioned that some day she would do something with the Protomateria that would change the world. She hoped Vincent, wherever his soul had gone, would not hate her for this.

"I am sorry my yozora." She implanted the Protomateria and Chaos with it, hoping against hope that she did this with a reason.

He did not wake but faint color returned to the man's cheeks.

"Farewell, my Valentine."

Silence reigned in that portion of ShinRa labs until nearly thirty years later when a blond swordsman cracked open a coffin with the words, "Do you know a man named Professor Hojo?"

Chapter End Notes

Comment, ect.
Chaos finished with the tale of AVALANCHE, the fall of Sephiroth, ShinRa and Deepground.

Fujimoto, as predicted, had vomited more than once while Chaos implacably described what that true monster had done to Vincent.

"And you made your peace with him after Deepground?"

"We did. It made no sense to share a body and fight for control. He will be quieter than usual once he appears again. Do not pity him. We have spent years teaching him that he is no weakling to have endured such a thing. Cloud knows." came Chaos' response, surprising the Paladin.

"He played a rather important part from what I recall." Fujimoto sounded impressed.

"Sephiroth now resides in the LifeStream, cured of the Calamity's taint and strives to spend his days in peace with his beloved friends." Chaos murmured as he stood. "I thought at least someone else should know."

"But why now?" Fujimoto pressed seriously.

"I will have to censor it for the cubs in two years' time; you and I both can feel the storm that is approaching." Chaos admitted softly.

"... You are more sensitive than most would peg you as." Shiro (and it is the father he has the pleasure of speaking with, not the Paladin) responded. "The demons are becoming restless in their search for the Demon Princes."

"Kurikara will not last much longer, I think." he added as he picked up the bucket and paused at the door. "You might want to place another seal on the door. I had to kill an intermediate who thought he smelled asphodel."
Vincent returned a few days after Chaos told his past but Shiro (and they were on first-name basis now) did not seem to pity him.

**I told you, Host, most do not think you weak for having endured him.** Chaos snorted dryly as Vincent trained with Yukio and Rin. Both twins were fairly accurate with each other's weaponry but practice was necessary to keep up the skill they had acquired.

General Rhapsodos came twice a week to teach the cubs mastery of the Fira. Rin was beginning to become resentful that he couldn't get it down to the level the General demanded.

"Rin," Vincent tapped his cub on the shoulder and got a frustrated waft of heavy brimstone. "will you come with me? Yukio, target practice at sixty feet and then a hundred. Standard drills."

"Vincent, what-" He held a finger to his lips and brought Rin to the rooftop. "I... I can't do it."

"Yes, you can." Vincent patted the cushion next to him. Rin sat with a harrumph and crossed arms. He raised his cloak, smiling as Rin ducked under to cuddle. "General Rhapsodos is demanding. He doesn't understand the need for a break because he is a prodigy with fire. Yukio should be up shortly."

"I thought... Oh. He gets that done in fifteen minutes or less." Rin made a noise of understanding as he cuddled close. Yukio also cuddled under the cloak, the soft noises of the night relaxing the tense twins.

"Vincent..." Yukio hesitated but Rin seemed to know.

"Everything's going to change, right?"

"So you both can feel the pressure in the air. Good." They looked up expectantly. "The Paladin's seals can only hold for so long and even with a bolster from Mesphisto, they will run out shortly before your fifteenth birthday."

"Bad things are going to happen." Rin muttered as he buried his face into Vincent's shoulder.

"They will." He's not going to lie. There's no point to it when they're tense and unhappy. "But while the seals hold and before any demon can think about touching you, Cloud and I will be your first defense."

"We shouldn't let on that we know anything?" Rin asked, frowning at the thought of not being able to use what he's been taught.

"Element of surprise, Rin, but yes, at least you will have to pretend to be helpless. Yukio... Not so much." Vincent teased lightly and Rin blew a raspberry at him.

"'Cause he's been a page n now he's an Exorcist." Vincent chuckled at the reply.

"Precisely. Cloud and I will start escorting you after your fourteenth birthday but discreetly."

"I needed a break. Genesis is driving me nuts-Hey guys. Mind if I join the pile?" Cloud asked as he scrubbed a hand down his face. "Gen went back to the LifeStream. Said he wasn't coming back for a bit."

"He may not be the best teacher but he is smart enough not to press." Vincent translated and the twins giggled as Cloud fit himself into Vincent's lap. "Hello, my Sky."
"Hey babe." Cloud pressed a soft kiss to Vincent's lips before turning to the twins and kissing their foreheads. "Hey kiddos."

They sat together and watched the sunset peacefully. All of them knew such days would be in short supply in the next couple of years.

Chapter End Notes

Comment, complain, ect.
Chapter Notes

I honestly contemplated not posting this chapter. I really did.

I have a very-shall we say-*persistent* reader who states that I should use the manga instead of the anime.

*Rant* I'm going to say this again: I chose the anime because I'm familiar with it. I like the solid ending. I *might* use some of the manga if it suits me. I realize that I'm missing arcs and character development; I understand not liking the anime.

However, I do not fucking like being told how to tell *MY STORY*.

I DO NOT HAVE THE TIME TO CATCH UP ON NEARLY 60 SOMETHING CHAPTERS OF MANGA BETWEEN WORK, COLLEGE AND AN INTERNSHIP. *end rant*

That being said, I can't bear to leave this unfinished. I love this fic and the enthusiastic people who follow it.

Enjoy and apologies for the late update~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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-Week Before The Twin's Fifteenth Birthday-

Cloud stared up at the massive amounts of Coal Tars as he glanced out of the window.

"Damn demons are like locusts. I've cleared a wide swath but Rin is still going to start seeing more of them." he mumbled against Vincent's pale shoulder; not that he had much room to talk but at least he was three shades darker than Vincent. Cloud absently traced a scar from Vincent's shoulder all the way down to his stomach, frowning as it flared out into a spikey mess along his side.

His husband never mentioned his time under Hojo's knife and Cloud suspected that Chaos knew more than Vincent did at some points. Cloud kissed along all the visible scars, Vincent awakening around the fifth one to watch him with faintly glowing red eyes.

"Our cubs will begin to see many things, husband mine, that we protected them from in the past. We will help them when they ask for it." Vincent responded as they watched the Coal Tars avoid the church like the plague. "You set up a Protega?"

"Mm-mm. Dual Shields Materia. Was buried in the left corner of your inventory pack." Cloud rolled over to stare down at Vincent lovingly. "I'm going to be heading with Yukio to help him with his moving and teaching materials. Will you be alright with Rin?"

"Yukio will likely remain human for a time after the seal breaks open. Rin... Rin will feel the full effects," Vincent sighed as he brushed back one of Cloud's more stubborn strands. "Chaos and Satan will be meeting shortly even with our plans. We both know that the first plan always falls apart."
"Pppft. We're the kings of 'hey, that never works the first time round', Vin." Cloud snorted and grinned against Vincent's skin. "That's why you've got at least three on hand and about eight or so behind those. Turks were good about drilling that in."

"Hmm. I do seem to be in possession of an intelligent husband. Tell me more?" Vincent rolled them over and purred against Cloud's neck, right above the Mate mark.

Breakfast is quick for the twins, especially Rin, with his wrapped hands and sweatband.

"Gym again?" Cloud hummed around his mouthful of omlette.

"No. Warehouse. I'm getting weird vibes from this part of town." Rin shook his head. "I think I'm seeing Coal Tars."

"You probably are," he responded as he set his plate in the sink, rinsing it off. "Want me to accompany you or is Vincent okay?"

"I'd like it to be you but do you have anything going on?"

"I think I can spend some of my time off with my protégé..." Cloud teased with a nudge against Rin's shoulder. "Besides, there's someone I want you to meet."

Cloud scat-sings a certain tune as he set the glowing green Materia down.

"Spikey!" Zack zipped through the portal and tackle-glomped Cloud, pouting when Cloud just laughed and caught him. "You're supposed to fall over. Seph's mastered this one."

"Not today, Puppy." Cloud pressed a kiss to Zack's forehead and patted him on the cheek. "I want you to meet my protégé," He motioned with his head to a wary Rin... Not that running would help. Cloud knew that from experience, thank you very much.

"Ooo, demon!" Zack wriggled out of Cloud's hold and paused. "Shy one, hmm?" His best friend softened immediately, a fond and familiar look on his face. "Y'know... Cloud used to be like you."

"Like what?" Rin fell right into Zack's favorite tactic for ShinRa Cadets.

"Scrappy, covered in bandages cause you can't stand bullies 'n cuddly but wary," Zack hums as he leans against one of the warehouse pillars. "How'd I do?"

"... Pretty good." Rin admitted with a shrug. "What was Cloud like?"

"You mean before or after the angst-flavored muffin phase?" Zack chirruped and Cloud slapped a hand over his face with a groan. That particular phase had been due to his memory loss and subsequent defeat of Sephiroth.

"'Angst-flavored muffin phase?'" The half-demon repeated with a raised eyebrow.

"Yup!" Violet eyes glimmered with amusement as Zack patted the ground next to him after unclipping the Buster Sword from his back. "Cloud can hold one hell of a mood."

"Oh?" Cloud chuckled softly as Zack drew Rin into his grip and then cuddle piled with him.

"Spikey, c'mere." Zack raised his other arm, Cloud snuggling close with a happy hum. "Missed
cuddling my favorite Chocobo."

"Jerk," Cloud replied with a snort as he swatted Zack's chest with the back of his hand.

"Aww, Spikey... You wuv me." They both cracked up laughing at Zack's response.

"I do, don't I?" He murmured with a shake of his head.

"So, Cloud used to be this itty-bitty kid..."

Chapter End Notes

Comment, complain, ect.

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