Left For Dead

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Summary

What if Vincent was in SOLIDER instead of the TURKs? What if he trained under Sephiroth? What would change? (No good at summaries! Sorry! I hope you enjoy this!)

NOW WITH TAGS!

Edit: As of 1/29/19 New tags have been added!

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter 1

The clock ticked as more precious time was lost. Another tick, another step. I have to leave, I have to get out. Faster the clock ticks, slower my steps get. I'm running out of time, so close to the light, so close to my salvation. The clock ticks, I hear another set of footsteps besides my own. No, not Him, not yet! He can't have noticed! I covered my tracks! Covered the sound of my footsteps! The clock ticks again. Not much time left. I'm running now, faster, faster. Faster than the ticking of the clock, though I can still hear the grating sound. It ticks again. Almost there. Almost to the light. The new footsteps fall in a rhythm with the clock. The clock ticks, the steps sound. There sounding louder now, closer. It can't be Him. He dosen't know. I can't go back. Never again. Never...I'm drawing closer to the light now. the clock ticks again. The other footsteps grow closer. Almost there. Closer. Closer. Running out of time. My precious time. Everything's getting blurry. The light is growing dim. I can feel, more than hear, Him getting closer now, for it seems I have gone deaf. The clock is still ticking away though, I am sure of that. The footsteps are getting closer. This can't be how it ends! Not here! Not now! Not like this! Not in the dreaded place! I can feel His hands on me now. Dragging me down. I start to feel claws digging into my flesh. Pulling me back. Their all over my body now. Scratching every bit of skin they can find. I can feel the blood draining from the wounds. I feel weaker now. I see a light again, bright and glowing. I reach towards it and then...
Chapter 1

Vincent woke in a cold sweat, a silent scream leaving his mouth. He blinked and looked around.
He sighed. "Right... Today is orientation..." he said, a bit of nervousness creeping into him as he
showered and dressed. The blue uniform fit him well, but made his already pale skin look
porcelain and caused his black hair and red eyes to stand out. He slowly made his way to where the
event would be held, staring as he saw the place was packed with future SOLDIERS. He found an
empty seat close to the front and sat down to listen.

The orientation started as any other with speeches explaining what the program was about, why it
was created, and what they're job would be. The announcer speaking to all of them had a dull,
monotone voice that made it a pain to keep focused on. A young man with black hair and was
standing to the left of the speaker and towards the back of the stage. His large sword was on his
back and he stood with his hands behind his back as he looked at the crowd. To the speaker's right
and back was a young man with red-brown hair, his red sword on his back and a book in his hand
as he ignored the announcer. Just behind the announcer to the right, waiting to speak, was General
Sephiroth. He hadn't been introduced yet, but everyone recognized his from his white hair, unique
uniform, and favored katana from the recruitment posters. He was watching the speaker silently,
face emotionless as he waited his turn to address the new recruits.

Vincent's eyes focused on the General as he tuned out the voice. His gaze had gone over the other
two briefly, recognizing them as Angeal Hewley and Genesis Rhapsodus, though he wasn't as
interested in them. It was the General that most everyone in the room was excited and eager to hear
speak. The speaker stepped back, allowing Sephiroth to step forward. Sephiroth looked around at
them before speaking. "Out of all of you here, only about half will become SOLDIERs." he started.
Vincent blinked, not really surprised at the bluntness, shifting in his seat.

"The training this next month will not be kind and it will not be easy. While we feel honored so
many signed up, we do need the best and will only be accepting those who pass their training with
high marks. You will not only be trained physically, but mentally. You must be able to think of and
carry out multiple combat plans at once." he continued, explaining what they'd gotten into more in-
depth.

Vincent listened intently, feeling confident, but a little worried due to his build. He knew he
wouldn't be as physically strong as some of the men and his swordsmanship was weak. He was
better with guns, though his melee skills were good.

"Training will begin today, we do not waste time here." Sephiroth noted. "Angeal will call out your
names and a number, the number will tell which platoon you're in. All of you will fall either under
Angeal, Genesis, or myself, though we must sort you before telling you which platoon is training
with who. The sorting is based on the initial aptitude tests all of you did before getting your
uniforms."
Vincent sighed, nervous about where he would place. Angeal came up with a clipboard, starting to read off names and numbers. From the sounds of it, the numbers were scores. After he was done, he had everyone stand with those with the same numbers. Vincent had the number 251, a few people having higher and lower numbers up to three hundred. "Everyone in the 100-200 groups are with me." Angeal began. "200-250 are with Genesis and 251-300 are with General Sephiroth." he explained. Vincent let out a surprised, shaky breath as he stood, slowly approaching the group, nervous, unbelieving that he was in the group and thinking there must have been something wrong.

Everyone in the group was cheering and congratulating each other as they met up, quickly quieting down when they noticed their three mentors were leaving the stage to approach each of them. Sephiroth glanced at the group as he approached, ordering them to get in line. Vincent obeyed nervously, body stiff and nervous. "All of you are here because you scored high in the tactical portion of the test. As such, all of you will be trained in tactical fighting for ambush attacks and covert missions." Sephiroth explained.

Vincent tried his best not to shift, feeling a little disappointed about that, though he knew he wouldn’t really fit in elsewhere. "With this, you'll be training under me. Each of you will be tested to see which weapons you are best with, that will tell us which missions you're best suited for."

Vincent hesitated before slowly raising his hand. "S-Sir....I know they aren't used commonly in SOLIDER, but I was wondering if guns were in the weapon options.." he said shyly and nervously.

"For certain classes and missions, yes." Sephiroth stated. "We do have snipers."

Vincent relaxed a little at hearing that, some of the worry drifting away. Sephiroth led all of them to their training field, explaining that each of them would be tested on weapon proficiency in swords, guns, and staffs so that their team could be further split into specialty groups. Vincent was average with a staff and almost average with a sword, but never missed a shot with the guns, hitting each target perfectly no matter the distance.

Sephiroth took notice, placing Vincent into a sniping troupe with two other people. After that the entire group was sent to run obstacle courses under an officer's watch while their General left to deal with business. They were put through basic training in a similar fashion until lunch time when they were lead to the mess hall. Vincent sighed, looking around, used to being the loner as he sat at a table by himself.

A young man with black hair wearing a 2nd class uniform approached, smiling at Vincent. "Mind if I sit with you?" he asked. When outside of training and missions, no one was allowed to have their weapons with them. There was an exception, of course, for 1st class members, but even most of them preferred not to bring their weapons to lunch. All of the new recruits were wearing a bright colored cuff on the left sleeve of their 3rd class uniforms to indicate they weren't allowed near any weapons or equipment unsupervised and that it was their first two weeks. After the two week period they would get to remove the cuffs and become full 3rd class SOLDIERs. Because of this, most of the new recruits were all together in large groups talking excitedly about what they expected in training. The rest of the 3rd ranks split up into their various classifications, now and then a 2nd class who they’d known for a long time being mixed into a few of the groups. The 1st class were all sitting at one table, Sephiroth, Genesis, and Angeal at their own separate table.

Vincent blinked up at him, slightly shocked as the other Third Class recruits seemed to avoid him, nervous about his appearance.

The man took the silence as invitation, sitting down and smiling at him again. "I'm Zack, what's your name?"
"I-I'm Vincent..." he said slowly.

"Nice to meet you, Vincent. How's training been so far for you?"

"It's been good..." he said before pausing. "I don't mean to be rude, but... why are you talking to me?" he looked around. "As you can see I'm usually well avoided."

Zack shrugged. "I like talking to new people." he smiled. "And you seem interesting."

"I do?" he asked, honestly confused.

"Yeah. I heard about your weapon results, not really good with the flying sickle, are you?" he smiled. "Though you seem to be a prodigy on guns."

Vincent flushed. "I like guns..." he said.

"It's a true talent, we don't get a lot of good candidates for the sniper division."

Vincent smiled a little at that. "Really?"

"Yes. It's incredibly small at the moment." Zack explained.

Vincent nodded. "It's good that it's there though. I'd be in trouble if it weren't."

"True." Zack chuckled. "So, how do you stab someone behind you with a sickle?" he asked.

Vincent blushed. "It slipped out of my hand!" he defended. "Though the almost stabbing the General with it was an accident... apparently no matter how good my aim is with guns... it doesn't apply to flying objects."

"It's because you're swinging it too much. With objects that you throw it's all in your arm movements."

Vincent groaned. "I'm a gunner! I don't have arm movements!" he sighed. "He probably thinks I'm an invalid..."

Zack shrugged. "You show great promise with a gun. That might save you."

Vincent nodded. "I'm pretty good at Melee as well." he added hopefully.

Zack gave a nod of agreement. "How are you at hand-to-hand combat?"

"Pretty good. I've been practicing mixed martial arts since I was a child."

"Good! That will definitely get you some points in training. Make sure you stand out for the right reasons and everyone should forget the sickle incident."

Vincent blushed again. "I didn't mean to hit the General! Maybe I'll just aim for him next time... I might hit the target." he huffed.

"I wouldn't say that. You'll jinx yourself and actually hit what you're aiming for." a voice sounded behind Vincent.

Vincent froze before slowly turning around. "G-General.." he stammered nervously, face flushing darker.
Sephiroth glanced down at him. "Your name is Vincent Valentine, correct?" he asked calmly.

"Y-yes Sir..." Vincent said.

"I'm assigning you to extra training sessions."

Vincent flinched. "Y-Yes Sir.." he said lowly.

Sephiroth paused, glancing at Zack. He recognized the young man as who Angeal had taken under his wing. He then looked at Vincent again. "You can go to the gun range whenever you wish, though." he added, turning to leave.

Vincent sagged and sighed once he was out of sight, letting his head fall onto the table.

"You'll get better at it." Zack offered.

Vincent groaned again. "The General thinks I'm an invalid..."

"That's not true, I'm sure you can still prove yourself. He did compliment your gun work." Zack encouraged.

Vincent blinked. "Was that a compliment?" he asked, honestly confused.

"He gave you permission to use the gun range whenever you wish. It means he trusts you not to kill anyone while there."

Vincent smiled a little. "Well... that's good at least." he said.

"Do you have any hobbies?" Zack asked, wanting to help change the subject.

"I like reading." he said.

"We have a large library in the lower floors." Zack smiled. "I think you'd like it."

Vincent smiled happily. "Really?!"

Zack nodded. "It's one of the few areas open at all times to all class levels."

"I'll have to check it out sometime..." he smiled.

The bell signaling lunch was over sounded, prodding everyone back to their jobs. Zack stood to leave, he had to catch up with a friend of his to get briefed on something going on before training privately with Angeal again. Vincent sighed, returning to his group. The group was watching him with unsure eyes, a few shoving him as they walked to the combat training grounds. Vincent didn't react except for the frown that was now on his face. They reached the field where a 2nd class was waiting for them, putting them in sparing pairs. Vincent waited to hear his, knowing it wouldn't end well. His partner didn't look that strong, and was even a bit nervous. Their trainer spoke up, getting everyone's attention. "This is how we're doing this. I will demonstrate the move, my fellow 2nd class helping me do so, then group A will try it first and then you swap. In a week we'll have a small sparring tournament." Vincent sighed and nodded, happy it wasn't anything to do with blades. The moves being demonstrated were basic martial arts, something that the rest of Vincent's group didn't seem to have ever learned. This would be his chance to put himself up a bit higher on the ranking list and make up for his lack of skill with blades. Vincent smiled at that, executing each move perfectly. The trainer noticed, making note to tell the higher ranked officers how well he was doing. When he saw his partner couldn't keep up, he started to move more slowly, helping
teach him.

The young man hesitated, thanking him. "I was never the best at hand-to-hand." the guy admitted meekly.

Vincent smiled. "You didn't do that bad, though." he smiled.

"Thanks. How are you so good at this? Is it a Wutai thing?"

"No not really. I've just been training in mixed martial arts since I was young," he said.

"Useful," the other laughed, "I should've been smart enough to have learned something like that before signing up for this."

"But you have a lot of potential! As long as you keep practicing you'll be as good as me in no time," he encouraged.

The young man paused. "Y... you think so?"

"Absolutely!" he smirked.

The young man smiled, feeling more confident. "Thanks."

Vincent shifted. "Are you good with a flying sickle? I tried... and I almost stabbed the General... who later told me I'll have extra lessons..."

"Ah, so that was you!" the other smiled, he'd been on the field but hadn't gotten a look at the new recruit. "I'm not great at it, but I'm decent. I don't mind offering help if it's needed."

Vincent blushed. "It's very needed."

The new recruit nodded. "Sure, I don't mind helping you." he smiled. "If you keep helping me with hand-to-hand combat."

He smiled. "Not a problem!"

The guy nodded, excited. "Oh, my name is Jake. What's yours?"

"I'm Vincent." he smiled. "Thank god for not telling me your last name... I... don't like mine very much. Though I'm sure you'll find it out in no time."

"Yeah, I probably will." the other chuckled. "They start to just refer to everyone by classification and last name eventually." he warned.

He groaned. "I know..."

"Hey, I'm sure you're not the only person who hates their last name. Everyone probably dislikes theirs to an extent."

"I suppose 'Valentine' is better than 'That guy who almost stabbed the General.'" he sighed.

The other chuckled. "Yeah, probably is a good upgrade."

"Yeah." he smiled.

"My last name is Beckers, by the way." he said gently, introducing himself fully.
"Nice to meet you." he smiled.

"Same. You're the guy that scored super high on the gun range, right?"

"Ah, Yeah. Guns are kinda my thing." he said, flushing a little.

"That sounds amazing." he admitted. "A lot of people suck at guns."

"Really?" he asked.

"Yeah. It's pretty easy to just swing a weapon or throw things, but aiming a gun and dealing with the force it gives off is hard."

"Well I'm glad I'm good at something..." he sighed.

"You seem good at a lot of things, from what I see."

"Really?!" he asked surprised.

"Yeah, bladed weapons are the only thing you're not good at."

"Yeah, but in SOLDIER that's a thing I should be good at."

"Not necessarily. The higher ups might put you on a specialty team."

"You think they'd actually do that?" he asked.

"Yeah, they like people who are well rounded in everything, but they need specialists, too."

"There's hope for me yet!" he smiled.

"Yup!" The guy chuckled. "Ready to go to our next training session?"

Vincent nodded. "Yeah."

Jake nodded, walking with Vincent back to the main group so they could run laps and do exercises.

Vincent sighed when it was over, realizing he had the extra training and groaning.

Sephiroth and two Second class SOLDIERs were waiting for him.

Vincent's eyes widened in shock. "A-are you here to oversee, Sir?"

"Yes, I'm going to monitor today's lesson so that myself and the other officers can pinpoint your weak areas. I won't be attending all of the lessons, but I will watch again in a few weeks to see if any progress is being made." the General explained.

Vincent nodded before speaking very quietly. "Will I be throwing anything today?"

"No." one of the other officers spoke up quickly. "We're starting small... with swords and movements."

Vincent sighed in relief. "Th-that's good."

One of the two officers with him walked over to Vincent, handing him a fencing blade with a stopper on the end. "Follow me." he instructed, leading the young man to some practice dummies. He got into position, instructing Vincent to stand and hold his blade the same way. Vincent did as
he was told. "Now, we'll start with stabs first, they're easy enough." the officer instructed, stepping forward and stabbing his dummy before stepping back, expecting Vincent to do the same. Vincent attempted the move, failing. The officer demonstrated the move again, slowly. "Try once more." Vincent tried again, almost getting it. "Better. Try once more." Vincent frowned, trying and failing once more. "Again." the officer instructed. Vincent took a breath to try and concentrate before trying again, just missing it.

The officer sighed, walking over and gently grabbing Vincent's arm. "When you step forward, push your blade straight ahead. Do not swing your arm." he instructed. Vincent nodded, trying the move again and getting it this time. "Good, try once more to ensure you really get it." Vincent nodded, doing so and succeeding. "Good, you've got the hang of it." the officer moved beside him and got into position again. "Now we're going to try a downwards swing. Like this." He stepped forward, bringing his arm up and then down slightly diagonal on the dummy's chest. Vincent nodded, doing it slowly and getting it on the first try. The officer nodded. "You're learning. Now we're going to do the same move, but moving the opposite side. So, left to right instead of right to left." He nodded, trying it and missing by just a little. "You're learning quickly now." he stated. "Let's practice one or two more times before moving to the next moves." Vincent nodded, trying again and getting it.

The officer nodded, noting that their General was leaving for another appointment. "Alright, face me now. We're going to try the three moves I showed you, with me blocking. Afterwards I'll have us switch, and you will try to block my attacks. Understood?" Vincent nodded, doing so, only messing up twice. The officer nodded, smiling. "You're doing very well. From what I see you just needed someone to work with you on the basics and give clear instructions." he mused. "We'll do a small mock duel, see how you hold up, and then you're done for the day." Vincent nodded, doing pretty well in the duel. The officer nodded, smiling. "You're doing great. Go get dinner with the other recruits, and then it's recreation time and lights out." he explained, gathering his own supplies, putting the weapons up, and leaving.

Vincent sighed as he went to get food, sitting alone once again. Zack came up to him, another 2nd class SOLDIER following him. "Hello, Vincent." he smiled, sitting down. "Vincent, this is Kusel, a friend of mine who knows a lot. If you ever have questions, ask him." he stated. "Kusel, this is Vincent."

Vincent smiled. "Hi."

"Hello. Zack has informed me that you are the new recruit that almost skewered the General." Kusel mused.

Vincent flinched. "Yeah..." he sighed.

Zack smiled. "It's fine, how did your extra lessons go?" he asked.

"Pretty good actually," he smiled. "I messed up a few times, but the instructors were really patient." he paused. "Though the General was there for the first half."

Zack nodded. "He usually does for special cases like this." he admitted.

"It's so he can examine if there's any specific issues he notices as well as create a base level for your skills to compare to how you do later on. It'll help him make a reliable report on if you're improving or not." Kusel added.

"It also makes the student nervous..." Vincent said.
"True, but you'll get over that eventually. I used to dread when Angeal decided to watch my training sessions, but I'm pretty used to it now." Zack laughed.

"Yes, but did you ever almost impale the Commander beforehand?" he rose a brow.

"No." Zack admitted, shrugging. "But I'm sure that'll be forgotten eventually. The General wouldn't bother watching you if he didn't think there was potential."

Vincent smiled. "That makes me feel better." he smiled.

"Well, I would hope so. There's no point in me trying to encourage you if it doesn't do any encouraging."

Vincent laughed softly. "True."

"So, do you feel a bit better about your chances here after a full day?" Zack asked, curious.

"A little, yeah." he nodded.

"Trust me, the first day always seems the hardest. By the end of this week you'll know your way around and understand things well enough to not feel self conscious."

"At least not about my skills..." he said softly.

Zack nodded. "So, what made you join SOLDIER anyway?"

"I just need a change in my life I suppose. A lot of people are surprised because I'm Wutainian."

"It's perfectly normal that they would be surprised," Kunsel piped up, "considering our past with Wutai."

"Yes well, not all Wutainians agree with the way things are currently running there." he huffed.

Zack and Kunsel both nodded. "I'd imagine the war is hard on everyone on both sides, but the people in Wutai are probably suffering the most." Zack mused.

Vincent nodded. "It was horrible when I left and that was two years ago." he admitted.

Zack nodded. "Well, hopefully things will get better soon. This war can't last much longer."

Vincent nodded. "I hope you're right."
Chapter Two

Chapter 2

It was only six in the morning when a loud horn sounded through the training barracks, waking all new recruits. The horn continued for almost ten minutes before being replaced by a voice on the intercom, exclaiming "Rise and shine! You have fifteen minutes to get ready and out to the front of the barracks for roll call!" Vincent groaned, getting up and dressed quickly, making his way to the meeting place.

A 2nd Class Commander was there, calling out names one by one. Vincent's was at the bottom of the list, since it went alphabetically. "A-M, all of you are running track this morning for warm ups and exercises. N-Z, all of you have warm ups and exercises on the machines. This will last until breakfast, and then the two groups will switch. Do you all understand?"

"Yes, Sir!" he said, saluting with the others.

His group was lead to the gym, a Commander waiting for them. "Ten of you start with sit ups and pushups, ten start with pull ups, and the last ten start on the weight benches." he ordered, counting them out as he explained the groups. Vincent was put into the middle group. Vincent sighed and started to do the pull ups, not having trouble, but not doing it as fast as the others. The Commander walked around, taking note on how all of them were doing. "Some of you should slow down, pace yourselves. We're going to be rotating on these machines and you don't want to get burned out." he warned. Vincent sighed softly, relaxing a bit. The commander let them go for fifteen minutes before blowing a whistle, ordering Vincent's group to move to the weights.

Vincent started, though he was obviously struggling.

"Try lowering the amount on the weights," his spotter suggested. "You can work up to a higher one later."

Vincent did so, ending up on the lowest weight possible. His spotter helped him as he used the weights before switching with him, adding a couple sets higher than Vincent for his own lifting. "Don't worry, you'll get to where you're higher on these eventually."

Vincent gave a small sigh. "I hope so. I've never been quite good at gaining muscle."

"Well, you only have to get up to five pounds to be considered fit for the program. You should be able to get up to that with some work."

He nodded. "The extra training may help with that too.." he said.

"Yes, it should help some," the other replied, setting his weights down when it was time to shift to the push-up/sit-up area. "My name is Marcus, by the way... yours is Vincent, correct?"

"Yes." he nodded.

"Nice to formally meet you. Do you want to do your set first or should I?"

"I don't mind going first. I'm at least good at these."

Marcus nodded, kneeling and holding Vincent's feet to anchor him. Vincent began, doing them easily. Marcus pulled back then, letting Vincent finish. After he was finished Marcus got into
position to do his. Vincent moved to help hold him. The young man took little time to get in the required set he needed, looking over when the Commander ordered all of them to get to the mess hall and get breakfast. Vincent did so, getting his food and sitting down. He was alone at first, before Marcus and Jake came over to sit with him. "Hey." Marcus greeted boredly.

"Ah! H-Hi.." he said, surprised they sat with him.

"How'd you do with the exercises this morning?" Jake asked with a smile.

"I need a little more training on the weights, but other than that, pretty good."

"Sounds better than what we did outside. We're running laps." Jake mused.

Vincent chuckled. "No I'm good at that."

"Cool, then it'll be like a break for you, huh?" Jake asked.

"Yeah!" he smiled.

Marcus glanced up then. "Maybe you can use some of how you train for running to train for muscle?" he suggested.

"Yeah?" he asked.

"Yes. If you're good at running then you must be doing something that makes it easier."

"Stretches." he shrugged.

"Push ups can help with your muscle, then." Marcus assured.

"I'll start doing those more then." he smiled.

The bell sounded, signaling the end of breakfast. All of the new recruits were expected to go to either the track or gym, everyone else going to their various meeting rooms for briefings on missions. Vincent headed for the tracks, feeling a bit more confident. The commander took their times as they ran, wanting to know how fast each cadet could finish ten laps. Most of them started out fast, thinking they could get done faster only to burn out by the third lap. Vincent had started slowly and ended up being the first one to finish.

"Valentine!" the commander called as he ran past the tenth time. "Forty-four minutes, fifty seconds! Keep that endurance up."

Vincent smiled happily, taking the chance to drink some water. Marcus got a time of seventy minutes and five seconds, panting as he walked over to stand by Vincent and get some water for himself, looking out. "You weren't lying about being good."

Vincent smiled. "I ran every morning back home. I love doing it." he said softly.

"It's a good habit to get into."

He smiled. "It is." 

"Do you train in martial arts?" Marcus asked, curious.

"I do." he smiled.
"Would it be correct to assume running helps you with that?"

"Yeah." he nodded.

"That does take a good deal of muscle. Training your upper body won't be much different."

Vincent smiled. "Okay."

"I can help you train if you need to."

"That would be great!" he smiled.

Marcus nodded. "A tip to start you out: wear small wrists weights while you do martial arts or simple arm exercises. It'll help you get used to the weights and over time it'll build your muscle so you can handle slightly harder weights. After that, start with small dumbbells, the one handed ones, and work your way up."

He smiled and nodded. "Alright. Thank you for the help"

Marcus nodded, noting that the majority of their fellow recruits were nearly done with the laps. "I wonder what they'll make us do next." he mused.

"Hopefully nothing with projectiles." he sighed.

"Are you not good with those?"

"You haven't heard?" he rose a brow. "I almost impaled the General with a flying sickle..."

"Oh, that was you?"

"Yeah. I'm sure he thinks me incompetent too... he gave me extra training..."

"Extra training isn't too bad. I've volunteered for extra training on the more high-tech weapons because I'm good with simple things, but... lasers and weird tracking devices I know nothing about."

"I'm good with guns. I even make my own sometimes. And I can hack things... though that's probably a TURK thing..."

"Oh, did you train with the TURKs?"

"Ah, no. I just meant that the skill itself probably belongs there rather than in SOLDIER." he said.

Marcus nodded. "Ah, that makes more sense. What made you choose SOLDIER over the TURKs then?"

"I'm not sure myself." he said.

Marcus nodded, glancing over at their fellow recruits. "I feel a lot of people are that way. You just grow up hearing how great it is and that it's one way to be patriotic and help make a difference. You don't really need to believe it will, but everyone still presses that it's what all children should try to aspire to become."

Vincent nodded. "I don't want to be a Hero... but I want to make a difference. Save people. Do the right thing."
Marcus nodded. Their commander started ordering them all to head inside then, the last of the runners finally finishing their laps. "I think that's something we all want." Marcus said gently, turning to start walking for the main building with the others. Vincent sighed as he followed, wondering what was next.

They were lead into a meeting room and told to each take a seat. "We're going to go over how missions are assigned and carried out." Vincent straightened, paying attention. The instructions on how missions were assigned was given through slide-show, going mostly over protocol. Vincent watched intently, amused as some had fallen asleep. Once the instruction one where to go for missions and the proper protocol for reporting missions was finished, the instructor pulled up a new slide-show explaining the job classifications for their rank. This caught Vincent's attention and he straightened, looking at it carefully. The job listings for his class were guards, ground patrol or foot soldiers, and snipers. He perked up at Snipers.

"The 2nd Class SOLDIERs get command roles for these jobs, as well as the additional jobs of spying, ambassadors, and covert missions." Vincent smiled a little, feeling happier. "Are there any questions about any of the material?" A couple of people asked some. Eventually Vincent decided to ask how to join a certain class. "Classes are assigned on proportion. It's a ranking system and the hire ups will promote you if they see leadership potential in you. As for jobs, you will be assigned jobs after an aptitude test at the end of training. The exam will include various weapon proficiency sections, including guns and bladed weapons. It will have a section for hand-to-hand combat and knowledge in various potions and how to make them." Vincent smiled, relieved.

"All of you will need to make a 300 minimum on this test to keep your classification as a SOLDIER. Anyone who does not reach this minimum will have to leave the program."

Vincent sighed. "I should be able to do that..." he said to himself.

The commander continued. "The maximum points able to be earned is 900, though the average people tend to earn is 350-500." he continued.

Vincent made a note to remember that. Everyone stood once the meeting was over, being told to take two hours of recreational time before lunch. Marcus stretched as they walked out, feeling tired from the meeting. "At least the last exam doesn't sound too hard." he mused.

"Yeah." Vincent smiled.

"Is there a job you're hoping to get? I want to get into patrol and then later, if I can, into covert operations."

"I'm hoping for sniper." he chuckled.

"It would be very fitting for you." Marcus mused, grinning.

"And I know I can do it well." he smiled.

"It's a very good job to get. It's specialized because so few recruits can use guns."

"Well guns and melee are the things im good at." he said.

"Then being a sniper does sound like the best bet for you."

He nodded. "Yup."

"Hard to believe we only have a few days left of training, then our test and after that we can
"I know!" he smiled.

"What are you planning to do now that we have a couple hours of free time?"

"Probably train actually..." he said.

Marcus nodded. "That sounds good. I'm going to study."

"Alright." he smiled.

"We'll be getting a bit more free time after dinner tonight. A few of us are planning to gather together and play cards. Do you want to join?"

"Uh... sure!" he said happy.

"Great! I look forward to it." the other man grinned, walking off.

Vincent smiled, and started walking to a training room. The weapons rooms were locked for the moment, but the combat and the work out rooms were open. Vincent decided to start practicing his martial arts, getting into workout pants and a muscle shirt. After only an hour into his work out someone came in to join him, choosing a punching bag about three feet away to practice on.

Vincent didn't look up, continuing his practice, getting all the hits right and even doing some ones he knew from Wutai. The other person caught notice, stopping his own practice to watch. Vincent kept going, slowly getting faster and more accurate as he went, incorporating a couple of flip moves and different spins. His audience shifted, raising an eyebrow and taking note. After a few more minuets he stopped to take a break, panting a little.

"You're quite talented in martial arts." the other man stated, voice calm and mildly dismissive.

Vincent jumped and turned to see who was there, gasping. "G-General!"

Sephiroth glanced at him. "Your name is Valentine, correct?"

"Y-Yes Sir." he said. "Have I don't something wrong?"

"You're not in trouble," Sephiroth assured, "but I'm interested in what I saw. I'd like you to take a special test at the end of the week to see if you qualify for a special job."

Vincent's eyes widened but he nodded. "Y-yes Sir..."

Sephiroth nodded, starting his own training routine. Vincent paused before going back to more basic moves in order to waste some time, though he was very aware of Sephiroth. Sephiroth was practicing defensive moves, having realized from his last spar that he was lacking in defenses and using offensive moves too much. Vincent paused, noticing before speaking up quietly. "U-Um, Sir... If I may make a few suggestions....?" he asked hesitantly. "Um... O-on the first three moves your stance is too wide and on the last ones you're just moving a little too fast."

The Commander glanced at him. He usually didn't like being corrected by those of a lower rank, but Vincent did seem to have a better handle of hand-to-hand combat than he did. He put his feet a bit closer together and slowed his movements just slightly. "Like this?"

Vincent nodded, starting to move towards him before pausing. "Um... May... may I use an offensive move to help? ... Sir?" he asked, very nervous.
Sephiroth paused, weighing his choices before backing up to face Vincent and giving a nod. "Go ahead."

Vincent went after him, moving slower than normal for him, but still faster than a normal person. Sephiroth quickly went to block, trying to use what he'd watched earlier of Vincent's training session against him. He was able to block the first couple of hits, but at the last ones Vincent managed to get through, gasping and blushing when he actually hit the man. "O-oh! I'm... I'm sorry, Sir!"

"It's... it's fine, this is what is expected in training." Sephiroth assured, holding where he'd gotten hit in the stomach and standing up slowly.

"Oh... Um... On the last block... try moving your leg a little to the left and using your shoulder to block instead of your arm..." he said, showing him the move.

Sephiroth repositioned himself and attempted the move. "Like this?"

Vincent nodded. "Yes! ... Sir." he said.

Sephiroth repeated the move before getting ready for Vincent to come at him. Vincent did so, Sephiroth able to block every attack now. The Commander made sure to repeat the move three times to get the feel of it before backing up. "Thank you, I'll have to try it on Genesis the next time we spar."

He smiled, blushing a little. "It's... It was nothing... Sir." he said. "I'm sorry I hit you... I held back a little..."

"Don't be sorry, the point of training is for the person being trained to learn. If you don't hit me when I don't block correctly, then I won't know I'm doing it wrong. It didn't hurt, just knocked the wind out of me a bit."

"The truth is I used to watch the WARRIORS train and picked it up from them. The rest is because I've trained in mixed martial arts since I was young."

"What made you join SOLDIER instead?"

"I'm... not pleased with the current ruler of Wutai. A lot of Wutainians aren't. Instead of just joining the rebellion, I came here." he said.

"I suppose that is one way of handling it. Are you hoping that Wutai loses the war so the ruler has to be removed from the throne?"

Vincent paused. "I'm not sure I would put it that way out loud... But I suppose I am... coming here certainly it seems that way." Vincent said.

Sephiroth nodded. "We do hope you stay with us. You show potential, I look forward to seeing how you do on the special exam."

"I hope I do well..." he said, suddenly nervous again, realizing he has been forgetting the 'Sir' and quickly adding it.

"If you're as talented as you seem to be, you will."

He gave a smile at that, happy that the General acknowledged him like that. Sephiroth nodded. He looked up at a clock and spoke up again. "It's time for lunch. We should both leave so we can get
Vincent nodded quickly. "Yes, Sir!"

The mess hall was overflowing with people talking and joking around. Sephiroth was at the head table with Angeal and Genesis like normal. Marcus, Jake, and Zack were at another table, leaving a spot open for Vincent to join them. Vincent got his food and sat with them. "How was training?" Jake asked, smiling.

"It's going good." he said, before telling them what just happened.

Everyone stared at him in shock. "The General said he wants you to take a specialized test?"

Vincent paused. "That's... not normal is it?"

"No. If he chose you for specialized training then he saw something remarkable in one area and thinks you'd do best in a special unit. It's extremely rare and can even lead to promotions at times."

Vincent's face heated up. "O-oh..."

"This is a good thing." Zack assured. "I told you the General didn't think you were useless."

Vincent smiled and nodded. "True..."

"I wonder what the special job will be!" Jake smiled. "It sounds amazing."

"It does!" he smiled.

"It could be spy work, potentially." Marcus mused.

"Spy work?" he rose a brow. "SOLDIER does that?"

"At times. It's closer to assassinations, though." Jake shrugged.

"Well... that's fun..." he said dryly.

"Don't be like that. There's other specialty jobs as well, like specialized bodyguard roles for people who need to be more undercover." Zack pointed out.

"I like that one better." he nodded. "I don’t think I could be an assassin... I would doubt if my targets were innocent or not if they looked so. And I couldn’t kill women or children..." he admitted.

"Odds are you'd be sent to kill enemy generals before a battle to pre-empt it. Troops can't fight without their Commanders." Zack added. "But undercover work is much more likely, given your martial arts skills. SOLDIER isn't big on assassins, they use their sniping division for kills similar to that."

Vincent chuckled. "Ironic that I was hoping for that division."

Zack grinned. "Irony seems to live in this building. Part of being in SOLDIER is doing things you never thought you would, that you never thought you were capable of doing, and making decisions you'll later regret."

Vincent smiled. "True..."
Soon lunch was over and everyone had to go back to their training or to missions and assignments. The new recruits had their training with the flying sickles again, then to gun practice. After that was dinner, and after that all of the recruits had free time. Except Vincent, who had two more hours of flying sickle training before getting his free period. Vincent sighed when he was finally done, going to his room drained and just going to bed in his clothes. He gave a sigh, knowing the next day would be the same. He smiled as he fell asleep, remembering the praise from the General.
Chapter Three

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 3

The next two weeks followed the same schedule everyday: Wake up, do exercises, each breakfast, have a lesson, do training, some free time, dinner, more training followed by free time, then time for bed. Today was their final day of training, when they'd take their Aptitude Exams and be given a job based on the grades. Vincent sighed, nervous and excited all at once. They were given the written test that examined their knowledge first in various skills. Vincent felt good about the potions sand the gun maintenance sections, though he wasn't sure how well he'd done with the maintenance of or categorizing bladed weapons. After the written tests was their physical ones. This included a mile run where their times were taken, using the flying scythes to attack targets, and using guns on a gun range. Vincent did exceptional on the run and the guns, and doing surprisingly well on the flying sickle. He sighed in relief when it was done.

One of the commanders came up to him. "Vincent Valentine?" he asked.

Vincent straightened. "Yes, Sir?"

"Come with me. The General requested an extra two tests for you to take." he explained, turning to lead the way.

Vincent looked surprised but followed him. He was shown to an obstacle course, the Commander stopping to explain the test to him. "You'll be timed on how fast you complete the course. Your score will be based upon your time and the decisions you make within the course."

Vincent nodded, starting the course. The course ranged from wall climbs to rope bridges, dodging weapons and hand to hand combat. Everything together was built almost like high-security systems or high stress, limited space combat areas. Vincent flew through it with ease, barely making any mistakes, panting gently when he was finished. "You may go now." the Commander instructed. "All recruits have free time until this evening when the test results will be posted."

Vincent nodded, nervous. By the end of the day, a fourth of the recruits were removed and the others were assigned to their jobs, the majority of them in basic foot patrol positions. Vincent's score was good enough to get into the sniping position, according to what was on the wall, but his score for the extra tested wasn't posted with the others. Vincent frowned at that, worried. Jake found him, noticing the frown. "Hey, why are you frowning? You did amazing on the test!"

"Ah! It's just...The General had me do a specialized test. The results from that aren't up." he said.

"Perhaps they don't wish it to be known to all the other recruits that you took an extra test?" Marcus suggested, checking the list and feeling grateful to get the job he'd been hoping for.

Vincent nodded. "Maybe..."

"It's not dinner yet, so give them a bit of time. They might need longer to score it as well." Jake smiled.

He smiled then. "Alright."
"All of us are going to the bar to celebrate. Do you want to join?" Marcus asked.

"Sure." he smiled.

Jake smiled widely while Marcus merely grinned, leading the way to the elevator to go up to the main building. It would be the first time any of them were truly outside or above ground in weeks, and it was welcomed. Vincent smiled. "This is going to be fun." he said.

The bar upstairs was dimly lit and wasn't the kind of place you went to dance or pick up dates. It was still fine to hang out in, however, with a pool table and areas to play poker. They had a selection of various alcohols and it was clearly more suited for 3rd and some 2nd class SOLDIERS, none of the 1st class frequenting it. Undoubtedly they had their own higher class bar with more expensive drinks and hobbies. Vincent smiled, ordering his drink, a slightly strong alcohol. "This is the first time I've been out like this since I left Wutai," he admitted.

"Really? Why didn't you explore a bit when you got here?" Jake asked, curious.

"No friends." Vincent said.

"That's why you go to bars, to make friends!" Jake laughed.

He laughed. "But going alone is weird."

"It's not really strange here." Marcus mused. "Perhaps that is an issue of varying cultures?"

Vincent nodded. "Maybe."

Marcus shrugged. "You can come with us to bars now, though. I suppose it doesn't matter now that you have company."

Vincent smiled and nodded. "I'd like that!"

Marcus and Jake smiled in response. Both of them paid for three more drinks for he Wutanian man, helping him back downstairs later so he could get dinner. "I wasn't intending to get him drunk..." Marcus mused. "I was unaware the people in Wutai couldn't hold their liquor."

Vincent hung onto them, face flushed and smiling happily, blabbering on about nothing. Jake was laughing. "We should get video of this."

"No, we don't embarrass friends." Marcus retorted, glaring at the younger man.

Vincent tried to stand straighter, though he was a little wobbly. He smiled when he saw Sephiroth come in, moving to the man. "General!" he called out. "General!" he called out. "The test! I did good..." he suddenly threw his arms around the man, kissing him happily.

Marcus and Jake paled, eyes widening when they quickly grabbed their friend and pulled him back. "We're so, so sorry general!" Jake said quickly.

"We took him out to celebrate and gave him too much to drink." Marcus added.

Sephiroth's face was stoic, and he hadn't moved as if still trying to process what had just happened. He blinked, frowning, before handing an envelope to Marcus. "... Get him sober and have him read this. We'll deal with punishments tomorrow..." he commented, turning to walk off.

Vincent had simply gone back to hanging off the two, rambling in Wutainian. Jake and Marcus were terrified of what the General might do later, helping Vincent to the barracks to get him in bed.
Vincent woke up hours later, groaning at his hangover. Marcus looked over at him. "The General wanted you to read this when you awoke," he said simply, handing him the envelope. Vincent blinked, taking the envelope and opening it. It had the time he'd taken to run the obstacle course, statistics on how he'd gotten through, and a score at the bottom. In red pen the score was circled with a small message beside it. "Pass. Report to room 311A at 12:00pm to get new job assignment."

Vincent smiled. "I passed the test!" he paused. "What time is it?"

"Nine in the morning. We woke you early." Jake smiled.

Vincent smiled. "Oh good... It says I have to go to room 311A at noon....do you know where that is?"

"Yeah, it's one of the meeting rooms." Marcus stated. "I'll show you where. It's on the 3rd floor going down."

He smiled. "Thank you."

Marcus nodded, stretching. "My meeting isn't until after lunch, so I can take you there now so you can get ready and get something to eat before meeting the higher in command."

He nodded. "Alright. I wonder who I'll be meeting with..."

"Probably just a group of Commanders." Marcus shrugged.

Vincent nodded. "Alright."

Marcus smiled when they reached the correct room. "Well, here we are. Good luck." he said, patting Vincent's shoulder before walking away.

Vincent took a deep breath before entering the room.

Four commanders were waiting for him inside. "Hello, Valentine." one of them greeted.


"Were you informed at all about what this job will entail?" another Commander asked.

"No, Sir. I received a packet telling me to come here, and that it will be explained." he said.

They conversed with each other before one spoke up. "You are going to be a special agent for SOLDIER, an informant."

"An Informant, Sirs?" he asked hesitantly.

"You've shown a proficiency in hand-to-hand combat and are intelligent. You'd be best suited for getting information from towns and reporting to us. At times you'll be requested to help guard the scientists when they guide new recruits to or from appointments to become 2nd or 3rd class. You might occasionally be called in to take care of any experiments that are... failures or dangers to everyone else in the facility."

Vincent nodded slowly, taking it in. "When does this job start, Sirs?" he asked respectfully.

"Tomorrow, we're evaluating missions and choosing the best one to put you on out of which ones need to be finished the quickest. For the rest of today you will be briefed on the kind of things to
"You are excused to get lunch now. Report downstairs with the other recruits later this evening for the ranking ceremony to make all of you official SOLDIERs."

Vincent nodded before going to get lunch, excited.

Marcus smiled up at him. "How did your meeting go?"

"Great!" he smiled, telling him about it.

"Sounds cool." Jake grinned. "Good job on getting noticed!"

He smiled and laughed. "This does make me feel better."

"You'll probably get a better pay than we do, given how important your job is. Plus, from the sounds of it, you're less replaceable." Marcus mused.

"Less replaceable? I've never been that before." he half joked.

Jake chuckled. "They'll keep you close. You'll have to tell us how good the adventures are, though!"

"I will." he smiled.

"Are you excited?" Jake asked.

"Excited and nervous." He nodded.

"Seems normal enough. Will you be meeting your coworkers today?"

"Yeah, I think so."

"That's good. Hopefully you become friends with a few." Marcus offered.

He nodded. "I hope so."

After lunch all of the recruits went to the main hall where they'd first heard the General speak, this time to get their official 3rd class uniforms and ranks, along with ID and badges that told what unit they were a part of. Vincent took a breath and went to get his. His ID had 'Classified' on the bottom of it, along with a S5 security level. The commander giving them their rank shook his hand and sent him back to sit down. Vincent smiled at the action and went to sit down. Once the cadets had all been given their ranks and IDs, along with shaken the Commander's hand, they were told to stand. "We hereby certify that all of you are full members SOLDIER and that your badges and IDs will now grant you access to all areas related to your work and stay here. All of you have done well to make it through training and should feel proud. Continue the hard work if you wish to one day become 2nd Class."

Vincent smiled, feeling happy.

Marcus and Jake found him on the way out, both slapping the back of his shoulders. "Want to compare IDs?" Jake asked, excited.

"Sure!" he smiled.
They pulled theirs out with a smile, sharing them. Marcus's had his rank and job on it, with moderate security access. Jake was a basic foot soldier with low security access. Then Vincent's had crimson border for high security access.

Vincent smirked. "I'm still surprised." he sighed.

"Really?" Marcus smirked.

"Yeah. I didn't expect any of this to happen to me." he said.

"You're very talented." Marcus stated.

"In some things." he smiled.

"I'm surprised at how ceremonial getting our IDs and jobs was, though." Jake admitted.

"I agree." he smiled.

"You'll have to tell us what it's like being allowed in the upper levels." Jake joked then, looking at Vincent's ID once more.

Vincent smiled. "Sure."

"I've met my coworkers, they're a good people." Marcus stated.

Vincent smiled. "That's good."

"A few of the higher ups say that I might be able to get a promotion to 2nd Class by the end of the year because they see potential." he added.

"Nice." he smiled.

"You're meeting your coworkers after dinner, right?" Jake asked, excited.

"I am." he smiled.

Jake nodded. "I hope all of them are good coworkers," he smiled. Marcus grinned at the other's awkward well wishes before speaking up. "We're all getting new room assignments, into Bunks in our areas... I wonder if you'll get your own or have to share."

"I honestly hope I get my own." he sighed.

"You most likely will. A job like yours is specialized, meaning here are not many working it. You're the only 3rd class with this job that we're aware of, so chances are high you'll have your own room."

"I'm glad of that actually." he sighed.

Jake and Marcus left to meet their new coworkers and get their new room assignments after that, leaving Vincent to do the same. Vincent sighed as he went, worried. He had four coworkers, three 2nd Class and one 1st Class. The 1st Class officer looked up when Vincent walked in, checking his ID before smiling. "It is good to meet you, Valentine."

Vincent smiled. "It's nice to meet you, Sir."

The man walked with him to the table. "My name is Captain Stefens. These three are Commander
Adams, Sergeant Smiths, and Lieutenant Mathews."

He nodded. "It's a pleasure."

"Before we get to room assignments, do you have any questions?"

"Just how everything will work here. And the rules."

"Well, obviously you can't give out classified information." Adams mused. "And you'll have to be strong, follow orders through even if it's tough to do so." Smiths added.

He nodded. "I can do that."

"Now for a room assignment," Stefens mused, pulling out a small file folder, "Your new barrack is on the third floor, it's a small apartment all of us share. We have our own rooms, dictated by rank, but share a small private meeting room, living space, and kitchen."

"This is nice." Vincent said.

The other four nodded, their captain shifting. "We usually meet at nine in the morning in he meeting room in our barracks for job assignments. You'll get your first job assignment tomorrow, but it won't be alone. For the next few days you'll be teamed up with one of us for every mission so you can get a feel for the job."

He nodded. "Alright." he said.

The others grinned. "Want to come with us to your new barracks, then? I's almost dinner so we should be getting ready."

"Okay!" he said. "'And really, you can just call me Vincent. It's better than my last name or the man who almost stabbed the General..." A few of his coworkers were snickering, the captain shaking his head though he had a smile.

Vincent chuckled. "Don't worry, I’ve gotten better." he joked.

The captain gently put a hand on Vincent's shoulder. "I think you'll do well in our group." he smiled.

Vincent smiled. "Thank you Sir."

The man nodded, starting the lead the way out with the others to their barrack. It was set up like a cross between a university dorm and a business's staff room. There were three bedrooms total available, one for each class. They were to the right after entering, two doors on one side of a small hallway, and two doors on the other, the last door being a bathroom. The main area you entered into was like a break room with a small kitchen, a table, a couch, and a TV. To the right was a meeting room and some desks for research dealing with their cases.

"This is nice." Vincent smiled.

Stefens nodded, walking Vincent to where the bedrooms were and showing that one had Vincent's name on the door. "This will be your new room."

He nodded. "Alright. Thank you."

The Captain nodded, walking off to his own room. Vincent moved to enter the room, sighing. It was a plain room, though comfortable. He had a bed for himself, a small desk, a dresser, and a
closet. Vincent sighed, sitting on the bed, still unable to believe this happened. There were some uniforms in his size already in the closet along with a card for him to get a personalized gun from the armory later. A cork board was above the small desk with some tacks, a tiny welcome card tacked up from the others in the group to welcome him as one of their own. Vincent smiled at that, taking the card for the gun, wondering if he could go now. It was almost dinner, and soon the bell signaling the last of the day was ringing. Vincent sighed, deciding to do it the next day, getting ready to lay down and relax.

One of the 2nd class officers knocked on his door. "Are you going down to dinner?" he asked.

Vincent paused. "Ah, Yeah." he said.

The man nodded, smiling. "Have fun with your friends, you might be too busy to have full meals once things get into full swing."

The Wutanian smiled. "Alright. Thank you." he said, going down to dinner.

Marcus and Jake were waiting at a table for him like they'd done every other night. Jake smiled widely when he saw him, waving. "How'd it go?"

"It went great. My teammates seem nice." he said, explaining the meeting.

"Wow... your barracks sound awesome." Jake commented. "Better than mine."

"What are yours like?"

"There's six of us to a room down a long hallway." Jake sighed, resting his head on his hand. "Damn... I'm sorry." Vincent said softly.

"My barracks are similar, but smaller. We have four to a room with desks and storage." Marcus shrugged.

Vincent frowned. "Wow..."

"It's pretty normal for the standards of a military." Marcus chuckled. "Your circumstances are special."

"Still..." Vincent sighed.

"Hey, be excited! You got a special assignment!"

Vincent smiled. "I know!"

"If it has barracks as good as yours then it has to be a highly respected job." Jake added with a laugh.

Vincent chuckled. "That's true."

"What kind of weapon are you gonna get?" Jake asked.

"I'm defiantly going for a gun." he replied.

"Nice. I'm only allowed a flying sickle."

"I'm not allowed near those." Vincent laughed.
Marcus and Jake both laughed. "I'm being issued a short sword." Marcus mused. "They don't expect me to run into large scale combat often."

"Still, shouldn't they train you for that just in case?"

"They've trained me for it, I'm just not going to be using a weapon meant for large scale combat because it would be impractical."

He nodded. "That does make sense."

"What about you? Any hint at the time of missions you will have?" Marcus questioned.

"Classified apparently," he said.

"That means it'll be exciting." Jake chuckled.

Vincent laughed. "Yeah."

After dinner it was free time until lights out. Adams walked over with a smile. "Do you want to play cards with the rest of us?"

He smiled. "Sure!"

Adams smiled, walking with Vincent up to their barracks and sitting down in the main area to deal the hands out for a game of poker.

Vincent smiled, sitting down.

"So, do you like your room?" Adams asked while taking his turn.

"I do."

"Good. You'll probably spend a lot of time there between missions or when dealing with a large mission." the 2nd class admitted.

"Okay." he nodded. Everyone smiled, continuing with their game happily. Vincent was pretty good at it, smiling. Once the game ended everyone stretched, going to their rooms stop sleep.

"Tomorrow's your good job. Good luck." Adams smiled.

Vincent nodded, going to sleep. He was woken at eight the next morning, his coworkers getting some coffee and preparing for the morning meeting where they'd all look at the possible assignments for the day and decide who took which case. Vincent would be the only one not choosing his case, as the higher in command would send a few 'training' missions for him. Vincent looked to see what he would be doing. He would be accompanying Adams to destroy some old and failed experiments. "We just have to kill anything that lives, clean up, and sterilize the place."

He nodded. "Alright."

Adams smiled. "First, though, let's get you a weapon."

"About that. I was wanting to use a gun, and I was wondering if it had to be standard issue or if I could use one I made myself."

"If you want to use one you made yourself, that is fine, but we do have to issue you one that has a tracking number." Adams explained.
He nodded. "Okay."

Adams nodded and stood. "Let's go get you a gun and get some food."

Vincent nodded. "Alright."

Adams smiled as they left their barracks and headed for the armory. "So, you made your own gun?" he questioned.

"Ah... yeah, it's a hobby of mine..." he said.

"Oh, so you've made guns before?" Adams was curious and intrigued.

He nodded. "Yeah." he said.

"I'd like to check them out some time, if that's alright. I get into personalized and craft weapons."

He smiled. "Sure. I have a pretty awesome triple barreled one."

"It sounds nice. You'll like the armory, perhaps you can become friends with Cid and he'll let you take extra parts."

Vincent smirked. "That would be nice."

"What kind of guns do you prefer?"

"Mostly pistols." he said. "A few hand rifles."

"Good choices. I use a pistol and a sniper rifle." Adams mused.

"I'm a pretty good sniper." he smiled. "But I like being closer to the battle better."

Adams nodded, glancing up when they reached the armorer. "Here we are, Cid can show you some of the guns he has for our area and we can assign you a gun."


Cid was an older man with dark hair and pale green eyes, looking up when he heard the two SOLDIERs enter. "Hey, Adams, what can I do for you?" he asked. "We have a new member to our team and need to assign him a gun."

Vincent gave a shy smile. "Hi."

"Hey." the man grinned. "So, what kinds of guns do you prefer?" Cid asked, going to pick up a few of the more common ones assigned to their position.

"Pistols or hand rifles." he paused. "I've... I've made a few myself before... if I'd be allowed to choose my own gun from here?"

Cid nodded. "You're more than welcome to choose your own. I just pulled up the most common ones for right now. I'll show you where the pistols are first, then we can move to the hand rifles. Pick anything you like."

Vincent ended up choosing a long barreled simple hand rifle. "Good choice," Cid noted with a smile, "I'll assign it to you and you're all set."

Vincent smiled. "Alright. Thank you."
Cid nodded, getting to work putting the numbers into the computer before handing the gun to Vincent. "There you go, all registered!"

"Thank you!" he smiled.

Cid merely gave a nod in return before Adams lead Vincent back to the barracks. "Are you going to name your new gun?" he asked along the way.

"I think I'll call it Peacemaker." he chuckled.

"Fitting, given the job." Adams chuckled.

He smirked. "That's what I was aiming for." he said.

Adams nodded, opening the door to their barracks when they returned. "Go get some food, I can fill you in on the case later." he offered.

Vincent nodded, going to put the gun up and then eat.

Chapter End Notes

NOT CID HIGHWIND!!! Just so you know. Cid seems to be in EVERY final fantasy somehow so he is now a default name!
I'll thank everyone for their support in this and let you know, I have no set schedule for Chapter releases as this is being written out by an friend and I, my Friend being the one to Beta this. =^_^=~
Chapter Four

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 4

Adams met with Vincent after breakfast, handing him a file with their mission information inside. "Here, this has a map that will lead us to where we need to go." he explained. Vincent nodded, checking the file. It showed that they would be going down to the lower levels to get failed experiments. They would execute them there then bring the bodies to a large furnace to dispose of them.

Vincent rose a brow. "Well... this may get messy." he said.

"It always does. Good news: most of it is animals... bad news is that once or twice you'll run into something that isn't any known creature."

Vincent shuddered. "Oh joy." he sighed. "Secrets of Shin-Ra, I take it?"

Adams nodded. "Yes, things too dangerous or sensitive for their TURKs to take care of."

He nodded. "Alright. When do we leave?"

"Now. It'll take us a while to get downstairs because they have a ridiculous amount of security procedures."

Vincent nodded. "Alright."

Adams led him down the hall to an elevator. It would take them down half the way, then they would have to go through stairs and security checkpoints the rest of their journey. "How long have you been with this job?" Vincent asked.

"Two, almost three years." Adams said gently, swiping his ID card and hitting the button they needed on the elevator.

"Two, almost three years." Adams said gently, swiping his ID card and hitting the button they needed on the elevator.

"Wow. Ever seen anything disturbing?"

"Plenty of times. It... It does get easier seeing it, but you'll want to brace yourself. I asked for the less disturbing cases to start you off with."

Vincent's eyes went a bit distant. "Don't worry about disturbing me..." he said absently.

Adams noticed, but nodded as they got off the elevator. He began to walk down a hallway, towards the stairs. He swiped his card at the first security door and walked through. "We'll be given gloves and goggles after they're dead, just to ensure we don't get contaminated with anything."

Vincent nodded. "Alright." he said, getting his gun ready.

There were thirteen security checkpoints to get through, but they were finally in the lab. Vincent could make out something moving in cages, indescribable noises coming from them. Getting closer he could see the creatures were monstrosities. One looked almost human, but its head was on the wrong part of the body and its limbs bend unnaturally. Beside it was some animal that didn't look like an animal. "They're failed clones," Adams stated, "let's put them out of their misery. Some are
diseased so we have to be careful not to get their blood on you."

"Any way to tell which ones are diseased?" Vincent tilted his head, loading and cocking his gun.

"Any that have stuff oozing out are definitely sick, but not all diseases show symptoms..." Adams shrugged. "Just grab a mask and smock off the wall, it'll protect you. Best to be safe and assume all are diseased since it's hard to tell."

Vincent nodded. "Alright."

Adams suited up first, aiming his gun and putting the first creature out of its misery. Vincent followed suit, being careful as he shot them, taking them down easily. Adams counted the bodies as they moved: 5, 10, 15..., 40 in all. He frowned, shaking his head as he holstered his weapon and looked at Vincent. "Grab a face mask... after we get the bodies out we have to take them down a floor to the incinerator, we'll want the face mask to ensure we don't breathe any of them in while they burn." he explained.

Vincent nodded. "Alright." he said, grabbing a mask and putting it on.

It took a solid three hours to load all of the corpses into the large metal cart they'd been given and another hour to navigate the maze of hallways and get through the security checkpoint to the furnace. Adams sighed when they reached it, grabbing the first corpse to throw in. Vincent sighed, helping. A few of the corpses were melting, despite not yet being in the fire. Adams glanced at Vincent. "How are you holding up?" he asked, moving to grab a fourth body, he knew how to move fast by now.

"Fine." he said, seemingly having no problem as he disposed of the corpses.

"I take it you've seen something like this before?" Adams mused.

"Something worse." he paused. "My father was a scientist fro Shin-Ra. Worked with a man named Hojo." he shuddered. "If you want disturbing try talking with him. I only met him once, when I was about five visiting my father as I lived in Wutai with my mother. Still not an experience I want to repeat, though I've heard the man works here..."

"He does." Adams nodded. "He... handles the medical appointments for all of the 1st class SOLDIERs."

He groaned. "Oh joy. Something to look forward to." he sighed. "I hope he won't recognize me, but I doubt that. He hated my father and I look like a spitting image of him..."

"Hey, there's time." Adams smiled. "You're only a 3rd class, he doesn't deal with you guys or most of us 2nd class. Honestly, we think he has some personal project set in his stuff with the 1st Class, because he's over the Top Three's training."

Vincent sighed. "Well... it still sucks, but at least I can hold off meeting him." Adams nodded. "Perhaps you'll get lucky and by the time you're promoted he'll have retired. He is getting old."

Vincent smirked. "Let's hope so."

"Speaking of higher ups... have you met any of the big three yet?"

"Only the biggest one." he said, explaining each meeting with the General he had.
"Seems like he took a liking to you." Adams chuckled. "Maybe he'll take you up as a student like Angeal took that Zack kid."

"You think?" Vincent tilted his head. "I'm not sure. I mean he is the General... and I'm nothing more than a 3rd... and Wutainian..."

"He had to of seen something in you to put you in our group. We learn more secrets about SOLDIER than even the General would want to know. Because of this, they have to know they can trust us."

"I almost stabbed him with a flying sickle..."

"Ah, you did mention that earlier when you first came to meet with all of us." Adams smiled. "I still do think that he likes you. He thinks you're talented, though."

A faint flush formed on Vincent's face. "I-If you say so."

Adams smiled at that. "A good lesson to live by is to learn from the past, but never let it haunt you. Essentially, grow from your mistakes... but don't keep repeating them in your mind and putting yourself down just because you made them."

Vincent nodded. "Right."

Adams shifted, throwing two more of the smaller bodies before reaching down to get the last one. He frowned when he couldn't get it to budge on his own, sighing. "Gonna need your help on this last one. He's a large fellow." Vincent nodded, going to help him.

The creature moved when they went to lift it, making an inhumane screech and digging claws into Vincent's arm. "Shit!" Adams hissed, trying to quickly grab his gun to shoot the thing.

Vincent cursed out loud, ignoring the pain and bringing his gun up, shooting it point blank in the head. Its blood was black, staining the cart as Adams moved forward to help Vincent. "Shit. Okay, hold still while I get this out." he explained, grabbing the claws firmly and checking Vincent's arm to see the best way to pull them out.

"Just pull them out." Vincent said. "I'm sure it will hurt less than when they went in."

Adams frowned, sighing and doing so. He quickly disposed of the large, dead body and went over to a medical kit. "There's a med shower over there, strip and then put your arm under the water." Adams instructed. "It'll start flushing the wound while I get cleaned up. I'll then pour peroxide on the injury and bandage it well enough to get you up to med bay."

Vincent nodded, doing as he was told, hissing as the water hit his arm. He looked at the wound, checking how deep it went. He thought he felt the claws come out the other side of it. He could see puncture wounds all around the arm, making it nearly impossible to tell where the claws entered and where they'd exited- if they had at all. Adams came over soon, cleaning the wound thoroughly and bandaging it before turning the water off and starting to lead Vincent out of the incinerating room. "Okay, I'm taking you to the med bay there. Shit, this looks bad... Doc'll probably say you need stitches." he frowned, worried.

"Well, if it helps I can't feel it..." he offered up, completely calm.

Adams's eyes widened. "No, that doesn't help. It doesn't help at all." he said, trying to keep his face calm despite the panic he was feeling internally. "Not feeling it could be a sign of nerve damage." he muttered to himself, reaching to his belt to pull out a communicator. "This is 2nd Class
Commander Adams from Spec. Ops." he began. "Can anyone read me?" he added, still holding Vincent as they walked towards the lab.

"This is Lelia from Lab B. Is everything alright?" a female voice answered.

Adams gave a sigh of relief, that was the one of the labs closest to them. "No, there was an accident. I need a med team ready ASAP, Private Valentine is injured."

"How bad is the wound and where is it located?"

Vincent shook his head. "I'm fine Adams. See? I can move it." he said, trying to lift his arm, frowning when it didn't move. "Okay... so maybe I can't..." he twitched his hand. "Oh! My fingers move."

Adams frowned, sighing before speaking into the walkie. "Puncture in the arm, possible nerve damage. Please have a med team and transport up to med-bay ready by the time we reach you."

"A-alright." Lelia sounded nervous now, but the communicator cut off for a few minutes as she relayed the information. "Have you done anything to control bleeding?" she asked.

"Yes, a bandage and I cleaned the wound a bit. It's still bleeding with pressure on it, though." Adams warned, before turning to Vincent to speak to him instead. "We're almost there, just down this hall." he assured softly. "Try not to move too much incase it increases the bleeding."

Vincent nodded. "I'm sure it's fine though... I do feel a little..." he suddenly stopped talking, eyes fluttering before abruptly passing out.

"Shit!" Adams hissed, barely catching him. He began to yell into the communicator the medical team to come meet them in the hall, explaining the situation. He was doing his best not to panic, but it was frightening to see a new coworker pass out like that. Over an hour later, Vincent awoke in the medical bay on a table, Adams sitting in a chair nearby bouncing his leg nervously and watching a clock. Vincent groaned, feeling pain shoot through his arm.

Adams looked up at the noise, coming over. "Oh, good, you're alive." he said, relieved. "I'll... I'm going to get the doctor to come check on you." he stated, sounding shaken up.

"I can feel my arm now..." he groaned. "I kind of wish I couldn't... It feels like fire is running through it."

"That's either from what they did to save your nerves or from the antidote they used." Adams mused, hitting the call button by Vincent's bed.

"Antidote?" he asked.

"The thing that attacked you had poison on its claws. The doctors had to neutralize it."

"Oh... joy..." Vincent sighed. "Can I still use it?"

"That... They don't know yet. The nurse should be on her way and then the doctor can check you and you'll most likely need physical therapy."

Vincent frowned. "So much for being useful..." he mumbled lowly.

Adams frowned, sighing. At that moment three people came into the room: a nurse, a doctor, and Dr. Hojo. The female doctor spoke up first. "My name is Dr. Miles, I'll be your doctor while you
recover. Dr. Hojo is with us since he's the scientist that developed the antidote to the poison that affected you. His lab was the one overseeing that particular... creation, so he will be working with us as the expert on what it might've done to you.

Vincent immediately shut his eyes, hoping that Dr. Hojo hadn't seen that one identifying feature of his. "Will I lose the use of my arm?" he asked, pretending the action was caused by pain.

"You might lose some," Hojo noted, reading some files he had. "We stopped the poison before it could do any severe damage, but your arm is burned and will be scared forever. You can tell him about the puncture wounds Ms. Miles." he commented.

The woman gave him a side glare for not using her title before walking over to speak to Vincent. "The wounds punctured several vital nerve points in your radials, one of the claws even punctured all the way through your arm scraping the bone. Because of this we will be keeping you to minimal movement of the limb while the stitches heal. Once they're healed we'll start physical therapy to get your arm back to normal movement."

He frowned. "I don't care about the scarring... but how will this effect my job?"

"Well, you'll be on paid medical induced vacation for a week at least while we get your arm fixed. After that you'll slowly be put back into the job you're already in over time during physical therapy, after which we will see what we have to do to move forward." Dr. Miles explained.

"You'll still be part of our division," Adams explained, "the most it will affect is which missions you get... Though, even if you're completely back to normal after this you probably won't be put on lab clean up duty for a while unless it's plant stuff."

Vincent frowned. "This won't hinder anything. I'm ambidextrous." he said. "It's protocol, you're allowed to help kill them but not put them in the incinerators because of risks of psychological distress. This whole nonsense of people being afraid that the employees will run off from the job if they're attacked too many times." Hojo commented uncaringly while looking down at a clipboard.

Adams glared at him before looking at Vincent and sighing. "It's just to give you time to cope with and fully heal from the attack." he explained. "Like Dr. Hojo said, we will call you now and then to help us kill the creatures if needed, but not to dispose of them." he added softly.

Vincent sighed. "I don't have to 'Cope'. I've seen worse from the times my Father was home..." he said, not thinking.

Adams was curious and worried about that, but chose to keep talking instead. "Still, it's protocol. It won't affect your standing or pay so don't worry so much about it." he stated.

Hojo looked up at the comment, though, taking in how Vincent looked. "Ah. You're Valentine's son, then. It's no surprise you could fail at a simple task, then."

Vincent narrowed his eyes. "I'm quite exceptional at my job. You should try not putting poison on your experiments next time." he said calmly.

"They're weapons. The poison should is meant to kill anything that it gets injected into within minutes. I see I have to make it slightly more potent."

"Or I have a high tolerance." he mumbled. "Is there a point to these? I don't think SOLIDER will be using such things..."
"You have no need to know their use." Hojo replied simply.

Dr. Miles frowned at the man sighing. "Dr. Hojo, I believe your need here has been exhausted, now that the poison is neutralized. I'm sure you have more important things to do with your oh so valuable time than to waste is with us common folk." she stated sarcastically, though she was hoping he would leave.

The man glanced at her before nodding. "This is true. I have more tests to run and training courses to set up, I'll see you later for a report on any lasting affects the poison has later today, Ms. Miles." he stated, turning and leaving the room.

The woman sighed, looking to Vincent again. "I apologize about him, he believes he is worth more than he really is." she explained as she approached, gently shooing Adams out of the way. She took Vincent's arm to start examining it. "I know this might hurt, but I'm going to ask you to perform some simple tasks so I can test the mobility in your arm. I'll also be testing your feeling in it." she explained.

"Alright. I'll do my best."

Dr. Miles smiled, looking own. "Alright, try to curl your fingers for me." she instructed. Vincent nodded, able to curl them without much pain. "Good, good. Now, try to lift your arm if you can." the doctor instructed. Vincent lifted it about an inch before crying out, letting it fall. The doctor frowned. "Alright, don't move it that much. We'll wrap it and put a plaster over the punctures to be on the safe side. Your arm will be kept in a sling until it's mended enough to move." she explained.

"For how long?" he asked.

"A week at the least, a month at most."

He groaned. "I'll be practically useless..." he said to himself.

"That's not true!" Adams defended, hoping to cheer him up. "You still have your other arm and we always need someone who can handle information."

"I... I suppose so..." he sighed.

"I have to go fill out reports now, but I'll be back tomorrow. You should rest."

He nodded, sighing. "Okay..."

Dr. Miles watched Adams leave before smiling at Vincent. "Are you hungry, dear? Eating might help get your strength up and I can order morphine to help with the pain."

Vincent nodded. "I am hungry actually..." he said.

The doctor nodded. "I'll get you some food, then. Do you want soup or do you feel you could handle something a bit more substantial?"

"Soup for now." he said.

Dr. Miles nodded and left. About thirty minutes later a nurse came with his soup, smiling gently as she got everything set so he could eat on his own without needing help.

He smiled at her. "Thank you." he said softly, before starting to eat.

"You're welcome." she moved the call button so it was within reach of his good hand. "I have to
attend to other patients, but call this when you're finished eating and someone will come to get the bowl out of your way. I'll also send someone to give you a dose of morphine then as well."

He nodded. "Okay."

Dr. Miles smiled and walked off, leaving Vincent alone.

Chapter End Notes

Yes I'm using modern medicine because I am not clever enough to make one up that is convincing...or has some type of story behind it.....Hope you're still enjoying!
Chapter 1.5

Sephiroth watched the new trainees calmly, standing with his arms crossed behind the weapons field. This was his first time getting to see what any of the new recruits could do and he was watching for anyone who might stand out as they handled the new weapons. Vincent looked down at the flying sickle in his hands and sighed. "Has to be like a gun... right? Aim... throw..." he mumbled to himself. He was in the third set to go, getting to watch two groups of three try to hit the dummies before he had to. The commanders on either side of Sephiroth took notes on the throws so they could tell them where they'd messed up afterward. For their safety, the higher officers were standing far back behind those throwing so that they were out of the way of the throwing range.

Vincent sighed as he walked forwards, holding up the weapon and facing the dummies. "Right... not hard at all..." he said, taking a breath before throwing the weapon. The first throw barely even left his hand. He wasn't the only one to fail to reach the dummies, however, and the commanders called for Vincent's line to try throwing again. Vincent frowned at that, trying again. He let go too soon as he brought his hand back, the sickle flying back. Sephiroth quickly moved to the side when he saw it flying at his head, causing it to narrowly miss and stick into the wall. He looked forward, following its direction to who had thrown it and crossing his arms as he straightened his stance. Vincent flinched, slowly turning, his face bright red, eyes widening when he saw who he almost hit.

Sephiroth glared before turning to the commanders. "I'll come back when you move to gun practice. I'm leaving until training with blades is finished, though." he said coldly, keeping an eye on Vincent the entire time while easily and effortlessly removing the sickle from the wall. He casually handed it to one of the commanders on his way out.

Vincent flinched again, shoulders hunching. "I-I'm sorry Sir..." he tried, not meeting the man's eyes.

"Do try not to kill any of the other recruits while you're out here." the General said coldly, continuing to walk.

Vincent's whole body sagged as he sighed. "Y-yes, Sir..."
Chapter Five

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It had been two days since the attack, and Vincent was still stuck in the infirmary. Dr. Miles didn't want to let him leave until she was certain his arm wasn't still dying, checking the arm and its muscles constantly. She smiled as she looked it over. "Good news is it won't get any worse, and it has been healing well. Does it hurt you when we clean it?" she asked, not wanting him to feel discomfort.

"A little," he admitted. "But I can bear it."

She nodded. "We're going to clean it up a bit more today then put more ointment on for the burn like scars," she explained. "Dr. Hojo will be visiting to examine the damage done as well a little after noon."

Vincent frowned. "Is there no other doctor?"

"Not from the labs. He's the highest ranked scientist they have down there and has taken a personal interest in your case so we cannot deny him."

Vincent flinched. "Personal... interest?"

Dr. Miles nodded with a frown. "I'd imagine it's because that... thing was one of his pet projects. He wants to study the damage done for future research. I'll be in the room with you anytime he is, though, and won't let him harm you. Any medical samples needed I will take care of, such as blood work, so he will not be able to do anything to you."

He shook his head. "Dr. Miles... My father was a scientist he worked with. They... weren't on the best of terms. They were working on a project and my Father was killed. They called it a 'Lab Accident' but..." he paused frowning.

"He's not allowed to touch you." the woman reiterated, wanting to keep Vincent calm. "None of us will let him harm you and he's only allowed to visit today, then you won't have to see him again."

He took a breath and nodded. "Al-Alright..."

Dr. Miles smiled and began to check Vincent over. She made note of his vitals while getting his medicine ready. "Do you feel up to eating breakfast this morning?"

He nodded. "I'm starving actually."

The doctor nodded and offered a small smile as she finished checking his vitals. "I'll ask one of my nurses to bring you up a meal, then."

"Thank you," he smiled.

He only had to wait ten minutes for a nurse to come in with a tray. It had scrambled eggs, toast, yogurt, and cereal for him. "Thank you," he smiled at her.

The nurse smiled back. "You're welcome, sweetie. Do you need help with anything or do you feel that you can do everything yourself?"
"I think I can do it all myself. It doesn’t look like I have to cut anything." he smiled.

"Alright, use the call button if you need anything, dear." she smiled, turning to leave.

"I will. Thank you." he smiled.

Just after lunch was when Hojo came to visit him, taking notes on the scars on Vincent's arm and the movement he still had while mumbling to himself. Dr. Miles was the only one in physical contact with Vincent, taking a few blood and skin samples gently as she examined him. Vincent kept an eye on Hojo as the man moved around, still nervous. Dr. Miles kept between Hojo and Vincent, not wanting to give the scientist an opening to do anything questionable. "Do you have everything you need?" she asked him after thirty minutes had passed of him taking notes.

"I have most of it. I'm assuming you'll be taking x-rays and scans later. I want copies of the images." the man replied inquiringly. His tone was as if he were talking about paperwork, not someone's body.

Vincent scowled. "It's a wonder my father could stand working with you." he mumbled lowly.

Dr. Miles glared at the scientist as he left before shaking her head and giving a sigh. "I apologize you had to deal with that."

He smiled. "I apologize you have to work with that."

"Don't apologize for him. You're not the moron higher up who hired the jackass."

Vincent nodded. "I wonder what they were thinking..."

"No doubt it has to do with money. Shin Ra will hire anyone who can make them money, no matter how insane." the doctor sighed out.

Vincent sighed. "It seems that way."

"Are you ready for your physical therapy?" Dr. Miles asked, wanting to change the subject.

He nodded. "Yes. I think I am."

Dr. Miles nodded and sat down, gently taking Vincent's arm to move it up and down, left and right to help with its movement.

It was still sore, but it was pain he could handle.

"Does it hurt less than before?" Dr. Miles asked.

He nodded. "Yes. The pain isn't that bad anymore."

"Good, that shows you're healing faster than the expected rate." she gently released his arm. "Do you want to try and move your arm on your own a bit?" she asked. Vincent nodded, trying to do so, able to move it minimally. "You're doing great." Dr. Miles said happily. "We're working with some of the mechanics to make you a guard that will help with movement. We'll slowly move down how much work it does for you over time until you don't need it, but it should help while you're getting the movement back."

He nodded. "Alright." he said.

Dr. Miles smiled at him. "We're planning on releasing you either tonight or early tomorrow"
morning." she explained. "You're stable again and will be able to live in the barracks again, you'll just need to come to physical therapy every few days."

"Alright." he smiled. "That's great!"

Dr. Miles smiled at him, glad to see him cheering up. "Are you excited to be with your team again?"

He nodded. "I am." he said. "And to, hopefully, see my other friends."

Dr. Miles nodded, smile growing. "Life won't be too abnormal for the next week. They might put you on easier assignments as you heal, but your daily routine should not change."

He smiled. "That's good." he said.

The doctor smiled again before leaving. Later that night, just before dinner, she returned with Cid. The man was holding something in his hand, something metal. "Vincent, Cid here was kind enough to make that support system for your arm I informed you about." she explained.

Cid grinned. "It doesn't look like much, but it'll help you get back to normal quickly."

Vincent nodded, looking at it. "Th-thank you."

The arm was simple and silver in color, looking like a brace more than anything. "If you ever want something more complex after you're healed, come talk to me and we'll work something out." Cid explained. "For now, though, the doctor said your arm had to be visible incase anything went wrong and so she could tighten and loosen its resistance as needed." he held up so he could let Vincent see the support more clearly and so they could slip it on. It was composed of four loops with a bar on either side following through all of them. The elbow had a sleeve instead of a ring, and a larger bolt.

"How freely will I be able to move my arm?" he asked as they put it on.

"Best way to know is to try it out." Cid mused, getting the straps tightened where they needed to be and stepping back.

Vincent nodded, seeing how he could move his arm.

He had an almost full range of movement, only having mild trouble with if he lifted the appendage over his head.

Vincent smiled. "This is good."

Dr. Miles was beaming as she watched. "Thank you for making this, Cid." she stated.

"It was nothing," Cid smiled back, laughing, "It was a nice change from always making weapons." he admitted.

Dr. Miles nodded before holding a clipboard out to Vincent as Cid went to leave the room. "Here, these are your discharge papers so you can go back to your friends. Cid has offered to escort you back."

He smiled, taking the papers. "Thank you for all you've done, Dr. Miles."

"You're quite welcome, dear." she smiled, taking he board back after it was signed and leaving the room. One of Vincent's spare uniforms was sitting on the small table in the room for him, ready to
be changed into. Vincent sighed, getting dressed without much difficulty, smiling as he did, happy to be released.

Cid grinned when he saw him, starting to lead him out of the infirmary. "So, how do you feel about your job after such an eventful first assignment?"

"Oh I still like it," he smiled. "My father was a scientist. I'm not sure how famous he was around here but his name was Grimorie Valentine."

"Ah, the name sounds familiar. A lot of the science people in the lower levels speak of him all the time. I don't really keep up with all of that, though." the mechanic admitted, shrugging. "I never was one to keep up with who was famous and who wasn't."

Vincent smiled. "I suppose that's better than keeping track." he said.

Cid grinned. "So, what go you anyway?"

"I'm not allowed to say." he said. "Sorry."

Cid nodded. "Alright. I understand that. What are you gonna do first when you get back to the barracks?"

"I'm not sure yet..." he sighed.

"If I was you, I'd get some alcohol and relax."

He blushed. "I'm seventeen... I can't drink it."

Cid stopped walking, staring at the man in shock. "You're only seventeen?!"

Vincent nodded. "Yeah... is it that shocking?" he asked.

"I suppose it isn't given the age most people join. It's just that you act a lot older."

He smiled. "I'll take that as a compliment." he teased.

Cid grinned. "You know, now that you're here, you could have alcohol anyway. I saw you go out drinking with your fellow recruits to celebrate getting jobs." he laughed, remembering the parties going on after the ceremony.

Vincent blushed. "Right... I don't think I should do that again. I don't remember what happened, but my friends were giving me awkward, slightly worried looks the next day..."

"Probably because you kissed the General." Cid mused. "I was coming back from the bar about the same time as you guys and was right behind your group when you decided to do that."

His eyes widened an he blushed brightly. "I did what?!"

"You kissed the General. Never seen him look that confused before."

Vincent groaned. "Oh dear Lifestream, kill me now."

Cid laughed. "Ah, don't be too worried, kid. He's probably forgot all about it by now with how busy the higher ups keep him!"

Vincent sighed. "I hope so." he said.
"You seem to have a knack for embarrassing yourself when he's in the room."

"I've noticed that. I'm going back to the statement that he thinks I am an invalid... Or insane... or both."

Cid shrugged. "He possibly just thinks you're unlucky."

"The first one is unlucky. The second? I kissed him, Cid! The General of SOLIDER! Probably in front of a lot of people! Granted I was drunk... But how many people have drunkenly kissed the General?!"

"You're the first man I've seen do it, but a lot of women have tried." Cid smirked.

"Which makes this worse...." he sighed.

"Eh, less of the women have been successful. The General's got good at dodging, guess you caught him off-guard." Cid laughed. "I wouldn't worry about it too much, you were drunk and he's probably forgotten all about it by now."

Vincent nodded. "R-right... And... probably everyone else?"

"I doubt anyone else saw. The other new recruits were pretty drunk themselves and celebrating and I only saw because I was right behind you and your two friends."

He nodded. "Right..."

Cid chuckled when they got to the elevator, pressing the button to go to the barrack level Vincent lived on. "So, other than being attacked, do you like your job so far?"

"So far." he chuckled. "And the people I work with are nice."

"I've known Adams and the group for a long time. They'll all look after you, kid. It's like a family for them because of the types of missions you guys do." Cid nodded. "They're probably going to throw a party after we get you back to them."

Vincent laughed. "I'll have to get used to that!"

Cid nodded, looking up. "Well, here we are. See you later, kid." he waved, turning to go back to his workshop.

Vincent smiled, opening the door to enter. His troupe was already waiting inside with alcohol, a meal from the mess hall, and cards. Adams was the first to welcome Vincent back, giving him a pat on his shoulder. "Dr. Miles called to say you were on your way. We couldn't do much, but we figured we could get a drink and games ready to welcome you back."

He smiled. "Thank you!" he said happily.

Adams smiled, passing Vincent one of the drinks. "Here, you deserve it. You gotta share the story with the guys, too. You were so calm during the whole thing!"

He smiled and took the drink. "Well my father was a scientist. I've seen some freaky things. Never been stabbed by one though, so that might have been adrenaline..." he said, before explaining what happened to the others.

The others smiled. "So, how’s that new arm work?" Mathews asked, poking the supports gently and raising an eyebrow. "You stuck with this forever now or is it a temporary thing?"
"It works great! And it's temporary. I'm still going to go to physical therapy."

"Those scars will make a great conversation starter with people, at least." Smiths smiled.

Vincent laughed. "You think?"

"Of course! Women love battle scars."

Vincent shifted nervously, looking away. "Right... Women..."

"Have you dated yet?" Adams asked curiously, casually sipping from his own drink.

"W-well no....but...um..." he stopped flushing. He took a long drink before speaking again, not making eye contact. "I... uh... I don't really like women..." he quietly admitted to Adams.

Adams paused. "Do you just not like dating or are you into guys?" he asked simply, raising an eyebrow.

"I like men..." he said softly and paused. "You act so casual when you ask that..."

Adams shrugged. "Because it's not a big deal."

Vincent's eyes widened. "What do you mean... 'Not a big deal'?"

"Most people here don't care about sexualities, it's not seen as a big issue." Adams explained.

"R-really? That's... that's strange to me... good though..." he smiled.

"Is it frowned upon in Wutai?"

"Not in all of it, but it was where I lived." he said.

Adams nodded. "That couldn't have been easy."

"It was hell really." he sighed.

Adams frowned. "I'm sorry. Hopefully here it can be easier."

Vincent nodded. "Me too."

Chapter End Notes

I'm not saying in all of Wutai the being gay is considered wrong, Just where Vincent lived
A few days later Vincent could go around completely on his own again, Jake and Marcus meeting up with him at lunch to see how he was going. Jake tilted his head when he saw the supports and scars. "What happened to your arm?" he asked concerned.

"Oh. Got attacked on the job." he said, telling them all he could without giving anything away. He suddenly narrowed his eyes, moving closer to them. "Why didn't you tell me what I did when I was drunk?!" he hissed.

Jake shifted. "Oh... you, uh... found out, then?"

"We didn't wish to embarrass you." Marcus stated. "Out of curiosity, how did you find out? Did the General bring it up?"

"Oh dear Lifestream, No! I haven't seen him since. Cid was walking by and saw. Told me while I was in the hospital." Vincent groaned. "Do you think he forgot?" he asked, hopeful.

"Probably. I mean, you're just one face out of hundreds and it's been over a week." Jake tried to encourage, giving a smile.

"Right." he nodded.

"So, is your job awesome?" Jake asked, smiling. "Even after the whole... attacked thing."

"Oh yeah." He smiled.

"Do you really get to see the labs?!" Jake asked, a bit more excited.

"He probably can't tell you that." Marcus frowned.

"Sorry, Jake. Marcus is right." he said softly.

"Oh... well, did you at least get to meet the higher ups in your job? Like, is it small enough to meet them?" Jake tried.

He smirked. "No. I've only met my squad." he chuckled.

"So, I know you can't tell us what attacked you... but can you tell us if it hurt? And how bad recovery was?"

"I didn't really feel it when it happened, but it hurt a lot later in the hospital. Recovery wasn't too bad. Dr. Miles was nice." he said.

Marcus and Jake both smiled. "She's amazing," Jake laughed, "she helped me when I had an accident in training that almost cut my thumb off."

Vincent laughed. "I'm still having to go to physical therapy, but it's not too bad."

"You'll heal quickly, I'm sure," Marcus mused. "Do you want to hang out at the shooting range later?"

"Sure! I can show off my new gun!" he smiled.
"Great!" Jake beamed. "And, since it's guns, there's no risk of you accidentally killing one of us."

Vincent glared and groaned. "I thought we were done with this..."

"You'll never be done with that. It'll be held over you forever just as Jake's lack of hand-to-hand will be held over him." Marcus grind. "It's something to tease you about and we need something to keep us amused."

Vincent chuckled. "Which is funner to tease about? Almost killing the General or drunkenly kissing him?"

"About even, one is just more common knowledge than the other." Marcus replied.

Vincent groaned. "True..."

"Which one do you find more embarrassing?" Jake asked.

"Oh the kiss. I don't even remember it and I feel like digging a hole and hiding in it." he said.

Jake laughed. "If it helps, you're still alive and still a member of SOLDIER so it couldn't be that bad." he pointed out.

"Right. Cid said a lot of women do it, so maybe he did just forget about it." Vincent said hopefully.

Jake paused before chuckling. "I'm sorry, I'm just trying to imagine what the General has to go through every time that happens. Maybe that's why he avoids the new recruits after their acception ceremony."

Vincent chuckled. "Yeah."

"It's been a while since the three of us could spend real time together, do you two want to play some poker later tonight in the large commons area?" Marcus offered.

"Sure!" Vincent smiled.

Jake smiled, finishing his meal quickly so that they could go by the gun range first then play poker.

Vincent smiled, showing off his gun and shooting skills.

"You're so lucky that the injury didn't ruin your arm." Jake mused, amazed. "I don't notice any difference in now from then!"

"I am lucky, but I'm ambidextrous." he smiled.

"That's awesome!" Jake laughed. "You're just all full of surprises."

He chuckled. "Yeah, so watch out." he teased.

"Is that a challenge?" Jake asked, grinning.

Vincent smirked. "Maybe." he rose a brow.

"Fine, whoever loses in a shootout has to buy drinks."

Vincent smirked. "Oh you're on."
Jake smirked, looking to Marcus. "Pull some targets up for the both of us!" he called.

Marcus sighed, but did so, smirking as he got five ready to go for each of the men and waited. "Three... Two... One... Go!"

Vincent smirked, hitting both the bulls eye in the heart area and in the head in each one, easily. Jake was a decent shot, but more of his bullets hit in the larger targets of the stomach and chest without the heart. This easily gave Vincent more points. Marcus laughed as he looked at Jake. "Well, looks like you have to buy the drinks for the poker game, hope you brought your wallet," he told the younger man.

Vincent smirked. "You aren't bad though." he said.

"Thanks," Jake laughed. "Let's go get some drinks, snacks, and somewhere to play."

"Alright!" Vincent smiled.

"You want to help me find the snacks while Jake buys our drinks?" Marcus asked as the three of them left the shooting range and headed for the commons area.

"Sure!" he smiled.

Marcus smiled, leading the way to the small shop. "What kind of chips do you want?"

"Anything cheesy?" he shrugged.

Marcus nodded, getting something like that for Vincent, some pretzels for himself, and potato chips for Jake. "This should do, let's head back to the commons to find a table. I have my cards on me so we can use those."

Vincent nodded and smiled, glad to be out and doing things with friends.

Jake met up with them soon, handing everyone a type of soda. "I was going to go with alcohol, but I think we should lay off after last time." he teased lightly.

Vincent playfully hit the back of his head and laughed. "That is a good idea, though I don't think the General will be anywhere near here at this time."

"It's not just for your sake," Marcus laughed. "Jake got drunk a few nights ago while you couldn't be with us and ended up climbing up onto the light fixtures. Some of the higher ups used a water hose to knock him off."

Vincent laughed loudly. "R-really?!"

"Yep. He was just lucky enough to land on a couch in the commons area so he didn't die."

"That may be worse than my experience. At least a lot of others, mainly women, throw themselves at the General. When they aren't even drunk. I've never heard of anyone else getting on the light fixtures."

Jake was blushing by now, shifting in his seat. "I wanted an adventure, alright? I didn't break anything."

"Thankfully," Marcus smirked. "You're extremely lucky it was higher ups who were still 3rd Class, otherwise you might've been kicked out."
Vincent nodded. "That's true."

Jake nodded. "I'm going to be more careful from now on. I'm honestly not sure why I acted like that while drunk, I haven't done anything like that before... that I know of, at least."

"Maybe someone convinced you, or that wasn't an alcohol you were used to?" Vincent suggested.

"Or a mixture of both," Marcus offered.

Jake laughed. "Yeah, that's probably it. I don't remember much from the night, so who knows what I was thinking."

Vincent laughed. "True."

Jake dealt his hand for the poker round, glancing at Vincent after doing so. "So, does that support... thingy feel weird?"

"At first." he nodded. "I'm used to it now."

"Is it alright to touch it?"

He held out his arm. "Sure, go ahead."

Jake reached out eagerly, marveling at the structure. "Whoever built this put a lot of heart into the design. It has so many tiny parts!"

"I think Cid did it." he said.

Jake laughed. "I swear that man's a genius."

"Yes. But he also said I could use one of the guns I built myself." he said.

"That's awesome. He must really respect your handiwork."

"Well the one I want to use is a triple barrel." he smiled.

"Sounds awesome." Jake grinned. "Could we see it sometime?"

"Sure!" he smiled. "I'll bring it to the shooting range next time."

"Great! I look forward to getting to see it."

"I hope you guys like it!" he smiled.

"I'm sure I will, it sounds amazing!" Jake laughed.

Marcus just grinned, shaking his head. "You two and the things you get into."

"What? This time it's only a gun I made!" Vincent defended.

"I just find it amusing how the two of you can talk so excitedly about guns."

"Because guns are so fascinating!" Vincent smiled.

"To you... I've never had a huge interest in them," Marcus admitted.

"Then what do you like?" Vincent asked.
"Knives and blades."

"Oh! The things I need to stay away from," he chuckled.

"Which is why I am never showing you my collection," Marcus joked.

Vincent laughed. "I swear it's not all bladed weapons!"

"Just to be safe, though, I'll keep everything locked away securely."

"Alright, alright." he chuckled.

"So, any news on if you're going to get missions assigned to you while your arm is healing?"

"I don't think so" he said.

"Well, if you want something to do we could spend time with you whenever you don't have mission." Jake smiled.

"That'd be great!" he smiled.

"If you're free tomorrow then you and I could watch a movie. I brought a bunch of them on my PDA," Jake added. "Just make a day of it since I don't have any shifts tomorrow."

"Sure!" Vincent smiled.

Jake smiled, excited. Marcus chuckled and smiled at the two of them. "I'll have to skip hanging out with you two tomorrow because I have my first field mission. You two have fun," he said with a smile.

Vincent smiled. "Alright. Maybe some other time it will be all of us."

Jake smiled at Vincent again as he played his next hand of cards. "I'm so excited now!"

Vincent nodded, playing his own. "Yeah! It'll be fun!"

"So what was Wutai like when you grew up there?" Marcus asked, curious.

"Well up until I was about three, it was wonderful. Then we got the current king... and things went downhill." he frowned. "I lived in what would be called the Slums here." he explained.

"Was there anything you could do to take your mind off of it as a kid?" Jake asked, frowning gently.

"It's how I got into making guns. It started with toy models and by high school, what I did of it anyways, I was creating real ones," he frowned. "I had a step father, my mom and dad divorced because of dads job, but he... well I don't really want to talk about him. I had one best friend, my next door neighbor. He used to come help me." Vincent smiled at that.

"My best friend lived one town over," Jake mused. "We used to climb trees all the time i the evenings to kill time... pretend we were fighting in the war like our dads. One day some bomb goes off and half his town is wrecked. He survived but his parents didn't so he had to move away to live with extended family."

"I actually come from a lower-middle class family," Marcus admitted. "In our town just about everyone goes into the same jobs all the time, and I was supposed to take over my parents' shop
with my siblings. Decided to join SOLDIER instead to get out of town. Do something meaningful."

Vincent nodded. "I'm hoping I can help make a difference, or at least make this king step down. I would've joined the rebellion, but it was smaller and getting smaller everyday. Also I was hoping to meet my father again. Sadly he was already dead when I got here."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Marcus frowned. "Perhaps you can at least meet people who knew him and can tell you about him."

"I hope so. He was a scientist here. Grimorie Valentine."

"I would ask some of the scientists and 1st class SOLDIERs. They would know the most."

"I already know one does." he frowned, shivering. "Dr. Hojo. He worked with my dad and apparently hated him."

"Ugh, that guy's a creep!" Jake made a face of disgust.

"That's an understatement." Vincent said.

"I heard rumors that he's the reason some of the 1st and 2nd class SOLDIERs have gone missing," Jake whispered. "He's kidnapping them for experiments."

Vincent thought back to what he had seen, keeping his face straight. "I wouldn't be surprised." he said neutrally.

Jake shuttered. "He just... he gives me the willies! I don't like him."

"I don't think anyone does," Marcus commented. "Even the top three avoid him as much as they can."

Vincent suddenly smiled. "On a change of topic... I think I've won."

Jake and Marcus both stared in shock before Jake laughed. Jake didn't give any warning before he stripped of his shirt, Marcus watching him with a raised eyebrow. "What are you doing?" he asked.

"Well, we have nothing to bet and Poker's no fun if everyone keeps what they started with, so we'll just do strip Poker," Jake declared with a smile. "Come on, take your shirt off, Marcus!"

"... No."

Vincent chuckled. "I think it's a good idea. C'mon Marcus!"

Marcus sighed, rolling his eyes and stripping his shirt off. "Happy now?" he asked.

"Yes," Jake smirked as he dealt out a new hand for them. Vincent chuckled, looking at his new hand. Jake grinned, looking determined to win this hand.

Vincent laughed a little into the game as Jake got more intense in playing. "I bet you just want to see me shirtless." he joked lightly.

"Maybe... Or I just want to keep from sitting in the commons naked," the other teased back with a grin.

Vincent chuckled. "That second option is more likely." he teased him.
Jake just stuck his tongue out, playing a decent hand. "I think I've run this one."

Vincent showed his hand. "Just barely." he smirked, waiting to see as Marcus lost again and easily taking his shirt off.

Marcus frowned, sighing as he stripped off his belt to avoid having to remove his pants. Jake laughed, looking at Vincent. "You're well built," he teased.

Vincent flushed a little but chuckled. "Well I am doing martial arts all the time," he pointed out. Jake smiled, chuckling as they all got new hands. Vincent looked at his new hand, keeping his face straight and feeling confident about it.

Jake played his hand first, sighing. "I fold," he laughed, seeing his hand was so bad that he couldn't even bluff his way out of it. Vincent rose a brow at Marcus then, face carefully blank. Marcus didn't fold, feeling confident in his hand. Vincent shrugged, showing his hand. It was a good one. Marcus glared at seeing he'd lost. He sighed and took his shoes off next. Jake laughed, standing and stripping off his pants before sitting down in his combat boots and boxers.

Vincent chuckled to hide his blush and the fact that he was subtly checking Jake out. "Moogle boxers? So manly," he teased.

Jake laughed softly and stuck his tongue out. "I just happen to like them. I have a pair with Chocobos, too," he laughed.


"Hey, could be worse. I could've gone commando today and just flashed the two of you all of my pride," Jake teased.

Vincent choked on a cough. "Maybe we should all head to bed before that happens."

"Awe, but that's the point of the game!" Jake pouted. "Besides, you're winning, you're doing fine."

"True, but I'd rather not risk anything." he winked.

Jake laughed. "Oh? Are you going commando today and worried you have fewer chances that we do? I think Marcus would lose before you do, though."

"I agree that we stop for tonight." Marcus stated.

Vincent blushed brightly at that, obviously flustered. "See? Marcus agrees..." he said, trying to deflect the statement. "It's getting late anyways."

Jake stuck his tongue out. "Party pooper," he said with a mock pout as he stood to hand the cards back to Marcus and grab his pants, standing before them in just boxers and shoes.

"Want to see me naked that bad?" Vincent teased lightly, eyes once again subtly running over Jake.

"Maybe I just wanted a good excuse to streak across the commons," Jake joked back.

Vincent rose a brow. "Pretend you're drunk?" he chuckled.

"After last time? No," Jake laughed. "Besides, this lets me compare the two of you."

Marcus rolled his eyes. "Save your silly crush for elsewhere."
Vincent rose a brow. "Oh? A crush?" he smirked.

Jake's face heated up. "Ok, time for bed!" he squeaked out, moving to retreat.

Vincent caught him. "No, Let's talk about this!" he teased.

Jake shook his head gently. "No, that's fine. We don't need to discuss it now."

"Why not? I want to know who you're crushing on!"

Marcus glanced after Jake as he rushed off, shaking his head. "It's a guy," he spilled. "I don't know who because he refuses to say, but I think he's unsure how others would take his orientation. You're gay, though, so I don't know why he's scared to tell you."

Vincent blinked. "How do you know that?" he asked.

"I had a hunch, you just confirmed it," Marcus smiled. "It's fine, though. I sort of guessed after the drunken kiss because you still knew it was the general while drunk... you just didn't think your actions through."

Vincent groaned. "Must we get back to that subject?"

"Until something more embarrassing comes long? Yes," Marcus laughed.

"Hopefully not by me this time..." he sighed.

"Don't worry, I'm probably bound to be next since you and Jake have had your turns," Marcus laughed.

Vincent laughed. "Right."

"Want to make a bet on if I'll be drunk or not?"

"Sure. What kind of bet?"

Marcus shrugged. "Hmm... I guess we could fulfill one request the other asks, whatever that request is."

"Alright. What's your request?"

"Hmm..." Marcus thought for a while. "I'm not sure what I want to request yet."

Vincent chuckled. "Same for me. Let's think about it for a little then." he said.

"We'll make the bet and come up with what we want as we wait for the bet to become reality," Marcus chuckled.

"Agreed." he smiled.

"I bet that I'll make a fool of myself with alcohol. Keep the trend."

"Or embarrass yourself in front on one of the few women here. You check out the receptionists sometimes." he joked.

Marcus laughed. "I guess we'll watch and see."

"Yup." Vincent chuckled.
Chapter Seven

Chapter Notes

WARNING!!!!! THIS CHAPTER CONTAINS GORE!!!!!

Vincent's unit had put him on dealing with files and smaller jobs- killing but not disposing of experiments, while he was doing physical therapy. This change in job assignment kept him busy and working for most of the day without putting him in danger for another injury and leaving the nights free. Jake called when the work day was finally over. "Hey, you free for our movie night still?" he asked.

Vincent smiled at that. "Yeah. I'm off now." he told him.

"Yay!" Jake cheered. "I'll get the snacks ready."

He smiled. "Where should I meet you?" he asked.

"My barrack, it's in the lower levels, the huge set of B barracks that are for 3rd class. I'm room B12."

"Ah. I know where that is. I'll head out now then." he said, having changed into simple black yoga pants, a black tank top, and a red loose jacket.

It was a quick walk to Jake's room. Jake smiled when he saw him, welcoming walking out with a large bowl and a bag of movies. "We're gonna watch them in the barrack's common area. It has a TV and most of the other guys are staying in," he explained. Vincent could hear Jake's five roommates laughing and playing cards inside the bedroom.

Vincent smirked and nodded. "Alright. I bet the TV is bigger anyways."

"Not really, but it's better than using my PDA and everyone else went out to the bar," Jake smiled. He was in the same pajamas Vincent had gotten used to seeing when they were just recruits. "It'll be great!"

"It will." he smiled. "Got any drinks?"

Jake held up some soda he got for them. "Yep! Figured we'd stay away from alcohol, both of us have made fools of ourselves enough."

Vincent laughed. "Yeah. Last thing we need is me trying to make out with you," he joked.

"At least if it was just me word wouldn't pass around," Jake joked back, though his laugh was nervous. "I, um... You remember the crush thing Marcus brought up?" he asked nervously.

Vincent nodded. "Yeah," he said gently.

"I... um... I sort of like Marcus, but please don't tell him!" he said gently. "I, um... I know he's straight so I'm trying to just... get over it."
Vincent smiled softly. "I won't tell him. I promise. I'm gay too, so I kinda know how it feels. I was in love with my best friend back in Wutai."

Jake looked at him and shifted. "Did... the two of you ever get together? Or did you ever confess?" he asked, curious.

"No. Neither. He was straight, had a girlfriend. He knew I was gay but didn't know about the crush. His girlfriend knew, but she was cool about it because I never acted on it. I was too afraid it'd ruin our relationship." Vincent said softly. "And then I left without ever confessing. Being gay in the part of Wutai I was... It's like a taboo. I knew my friend didn't agree with that... but still."

"It... can be scary coming out... it must've been even more terrifying there."

"Practically a death sentence." he nodded. "It was scary here as well. But Adams, one of my group, said that it wasn't such a big deal here. And now you and Marcus know, so I guess it really isn't."

Jake gave a reassuring smile. "I... don't mind Marcus knowing I like guys, I just... I don't want him to freak out if he finds out I have a crush on him."

"Well, he already knows your crush is a guy." Vincent said.

"Yeah, but he doesn't know it's him. Straight guys are... complicated. There's a huge difference for them between 'I have a friend who is gay and likes guys' and 'I have a friend who is gay and likes me,' they... They most often times don't really like the second version."

Vincent nodded. "I understand that."

"So, can... do you promise not to tell Marcus?" Jake asked softly.

"I promise." he nodded.

"Thanks, it... feels good having someone to talk to about all this..." Jake paused before giving his usual smile again. "Have you seen anyone around you think looks cute?"

Vincent blushed brightly. "Yeah... but my chance is worse than yours..." he said.

"Oh, it can't be that bad. Who is it?"

"Oh it's bad..." Vincent sighed. "It's kind of..." his voice got very quiet, basically into an inaudible whisper. "The General..."

Jake paused, only barely catching it. "Is that why you kissed him when you were drunk?"

"Probably. I could just be a very affectionate drunk you know." Vincent said.

"Oh, if that was the case you would've groped Marcus and I at least a million times before we got back. We were keeping you upright all the way from the bar to the main area," Jake laughed. "We figured you'd only kissed him at first because you'd gotten through the tests and didn't fail any area."

"Well... that is true, but it's more like... it was an excuse to do so that didn't out me." he sighed.

Jake shrugged. "We all do things like that while scared. I used to come up with excuses all the time for things I'd do before I became brave enough to tell my parents."

"And they accepted you?" he asked softly.
"After a while, yes... It was a shock and my father left the house for a few hours. When he came back, though, he sat me down and talked more about what it meant... Then he accepted it and said that he supported me."

Vincent smiled. "That's good though."

"Yeah, I was really worried when he first left. Not everyone in my life accepted or supported it, but having even a few who did helped me a lot."

"I'm sure it would." Vincent smiled.

Jake shifted. "So, what was it like for you? What made you brave enough to come out to your friends in Wutai?"

Vincent laughed. "I never did. The only one who knew was my friends girlfriend. She just guessed it."

"Oh, how did she manage that?" Jake asked, surprised.

Vincent smiled. "I kept subtly checking out her boyfriend."

Jake laughed. "Did she just come up to you and say she knew or did it come up some other way?"

"She just came up and asked. When I tried to deny it she pointed out that she noticed. She was okay with it, though," he said.

Jake smiled. "My sister teased me for a month saying that she knew before I told them and she apparently had a bet going with five other people on if I was interested in guys or not."

He laughed. "Your sister sounds fun," he teased.

"Oh, yeah, she is. She was always doing crazy things and stunts."

Vincent smiled. "Sounds nice. I'm an only child..."

"It's good and bad," Jake laughed as he got the movie started and opened the snacks. "I got some horror movies, some science fictions, do you like these?"

"Of course! Those are the best," he said.

"Good," Jake laughed, putting in the first movie and turning it on. Vincent sat back happily, starting to watch. Jake was smiling throughout the movie, sometimes whispering that the characters were making a bad decision. Vincent joined in, laughing at some of the older horror movies. They stayed up late, until Vincent had to go back to his barrack and Jake had to get some sleep. Vincent woke in a good mood the next morning.

Adams chuckled when he saw. "Have a good evening yesterday?"

"Yeah. Hung out with one of my friends and watched movies all night," he said happily.

"Ah, it's good you're able to get out a bit," the older man smiled.

"Yeah it felt good." he nodded.

"That's something a lot of people start to forget about this job, that they need to take days off to just be with friends now and then. Try not to forget that fact yourself, I've seen far too many 2nd higher
3rd class SOLDIERs getting themselves killed by stress."

Vincent nodded. "I'll try my best not to forget it."

"How is your arm doing?" Smiths asked as he looks up from his seat.

"Great. I haven't had any problems with it yet." he said.

Smiths nodded and smiled at him. "Let us know if it starts hurting or anything, we'll get the doctor up here to check it."

He nodded. "I will," he smiled.

"If it's just minor pains, though, Mathews keeps some pain killers in the bathroom cabinet," Adams added, glancing at his two coworkers.

"Well I do get those every once in a while... but I'm sure that's just from the healing," he said. "They only last for a minuet."

"It's only natural that it will hurt some, I just want you to know about the medicine incase you need it."

Vincent nodded. "Alright. Thank you." Later that evening, Vincent, Adams, and four others were sent on another clear out mission. Vincent's arm was in pain, lasting a little longer than usual, but he ignored it.

Stefens looked at everyone in the group once their gear had been passed out and equipped. "Everyone ready to go?"

Vincent made sure his gun was loaded and nodded. "Yeah," he said, having taken some of the pain medicine before they left.

Everyone else nodded, following Stefens down the long hallway and onto the elevator. "This is a big clean up, given that they called all of us down, so I want everyone to be on the lookout. Mathews, you'll be with me. Adams and Smiths are with Valentine. Use your communicators to stay in contact, kill all of the specimens, even use an extra bullet right to the temple if you're unsure, and then we'll start loading them. Understood?"

"Yes, Sir!" Vincent said. They got to the area and split up, the mission seeming to be going well with only a few scratches as damage. It was when Vincent went to reload his gun that he realized he couldn't lift his arm. Suddenly a sharp pain shot through it, Vincent screaming and the gun dropping from his hand as he tore off his sleeve. His face went pale at what was revealed. Big blobs of skin, muscle and all that went with it were dropping off of his arm in a thick, almost soupy and red mixture from where the wound started and down, leaving only the bone, which was a little blackened. It had stained the sleeve and looked as if that small bit of cloth was the only thing keeping everything in place as it melted off, the support he was wearing being the only thing keeping his hand and wrist attached with everything between it and his elbow melting away, long strands just hanging off the bars or seeping into the screws. He screamed again, falling to his knees.

Adams and Smiths quickly turned at the scream, eyes widening at the large mess behind them. Smiths gagged before turning and starting to get sick, the smell a noxious mix of death and fermentation. Adams turned green, seeming to be just as close to losing it as he inched closer in fear, looking around for signs of an escaped experiment. "D-did something attack you again?" he managed to get out just barely.
"N-No..." Vincent panted. "I-I felt pain... then my arm wouldn't move so I tore the sleeve off to look at it..." He closed his eyes, turning his face away from the sight. "Dear Lifestream, what the hell is happening?!"

Adams looked back, noting that Smiths was pretty much useless at the moment with getting sick. He quickly pulled up his communicator to call for help. "W-we need a doctor down here! Valentine's arm is melting off, not sure if he got attacked again or if it was from the first attack. Get medical help here [i]now[/i]!"

Vincent's vision had started to go in and out. "A-Adams... I-I thin..." he suddenly fell to the floor, having passed out from pain and shock.

He woke up in a hospital room, several machines hooked up to him and frantic voices whispering outside the room. Vincent groaned, trying to speak but unable to due to a tube down his throat helping him breathe. He started to cough around it an get it out of his throat, now that he was breathing on his own. Nurses rushed in to stop him, helping him get the tube out gently. "C-calm down, dear, we'll get that out for you," one urged. Vincent let his hand fall away, gasping once it was out. He coughed a couple of times, trying to ask for water, but unable to talk.

One of the nurses brought water over, used to the usual requests, while the there rubbed his back to calm him down. "There you go, deep breaths now. Easy."

"Wh-what happened?" he croaked out after he had calmed and drank some water.

"You passed out while on a mission," the second nurse explained gently. "We don't want you to be alarmed and the doctors did all they could to save your arm, but..." she frowned.

"Mr. Valentine, I'm sorry, but we had to amputate to keep the toxin from spreading further. We're unsure what caused it, but it seemed to be coming from your original wound that you received right before your last stay with us," the first nurse explained for the other.

Vincent went pale. "Amp... amputate it...?" his eyes widened as memories of what he saw happening to his arm flashed through his mind. He shot up and managed to lean over the bed before being sick. When he was finished he panted for a little, before slowly glancing at what remained of his left arm.

It was bandaged securely so that he couldn't see the damage, though he could see everything from the elbow down was gone. One of the nurses gently rubbed his back and handed him a damp rag to wipe his mouth with. "Take it easy, dear. I know it's a shock and I'm sorry we couldn't do more. The doctor is working to get you a prosthetic, but for now we have to focus on healing..."

"But... It... It was healing fine... I... Wh-what happened?" he asked slowly, trying to process everything.

The nurses frowned as a soft knock came from the door, signaling the doctor had arrived. Dr. Miles was giving him a sad look, sighing as she walked over. "We... don't know what happened. All that we can come up with was that the poison used was more advanced than we knew, or than we were told, and the antidote only put it in remission."

Vincent frowned, laying back down with a sigh. "How... how long until the prosthetic is done?" he asked, feeling empty.

"Cid will come up in a bit to speak with you and tell you the time frame we're working with," the doctor said gently. Vincent nodded silently, staring blankly ahead. Dr. Miles frowned, sighing. "I'll
give you some time... I honestly do apologize, we did everything we could."

Vincent nodded again, eventually sighing and hesitantly touching the bandages on his arm. The limb was numb, though it wasn't from the damage. He could see where several numbing agents had been put on the arm so that he wouldn't be in constant pain upon awakening. Vincent bit his lip against the tears that were swelling in his eyes, threatening to spill over. He moved his right hand to put his face into it.
Vincent was left alone for the next five days. Nurses and Dr. Miles came and went to check his vitals and get him to eat and Cid came by explaining the prosthetic and how he was going to build it. It all just melted into a blur, the heartache and shock being the only real focus point. Finally, after almost a week, a set of familiar faces came into the room.

"Oh, thank the life-steam you're alive!" Jake exclaimed, hugging Vincent without a second thought. He had tears in his eyes, fear on his face. "They wouldn't let us come see you after we heard you were hurt... W-we thought..." he let his words drift off and hugged Vincent tighter.

"Adams came and found us... he couldn't tell us what happened, but he let us know you were in the infirmary and that he was unsure when they'd allow visitors," Marcus added with a frown. "How are you holding up?"

Vincent hugged Jake back with his arm. "I'm... I don't think I've fully processed it yet... It's been a while but..." he shook his head. "It's good to see you guys."

Marcus nodded and sat down in a nearby chair. "We would've come sooner, but they weren't allowing any visitors until now," he explained gently. "Were you attacked or do they think this is linked to what happened last time?"

"It's linked to last time." he said softly. "It... it just... started melting off..." he said. He was still extremely pale.

Jake and Marcus's eyes widened, making Jake move forward quickly. "Don't think about that right now..." he said gently, worried for his friend. "Don't focus on it."

"I-It's hard not to... seeing that... and feeling it..." he shook his head, closing his eyes.

Jake hugged Vincent tighter. "A-at least you're alive."

Vincent lay his head on Jake's shoulder. "Yeah. That true." he gave a choked laugh. "I was joking when I said it didn’t matter if that arm didn't function..."

Jake gently combed his fingers through Vincent's hair with a frown. "H-hey, we'll figure something out. There's other guys in SOLDIER missing parts, so it's not like you'll have to leave."

"At least I can still use my guns..." he said.

"Yeah," Jake nodded. "And if Cid is making your prosthetic, he might slip something cool into it! I know a 2nd Class who has blades in his."

"That does sound useful..." Vincent mused.

"Yeah, see? You'll get through this," Jake said gently. "Do you want some real food? We snuck some in."

"Dear Lifestream, yes!" Vincent said, managing a chuckle.

Jake smiled, chuckling and pulling out a bag. "We got you some fries and a hamburger."

"Thank you!" He said gratefully, taking a bite of the burger happily.
Marcus laughed. "I brought a brush, too, and a couple hair ties. I got to thinking about how long your hair is... best to not let it just be free while you're stuck in here," he said gently as he walked over.

"Yeah, that’s true. Thank you." he smiled a little, feeling a little better.

Marcus nodded, walking over to start gently brushing the knots out of Vincent's hair and braid it tightly so it couldn't tangle again. "Other than the horrible injury, how has your stay been here?"

"Good, I suppose. I've been out of it a lot," he said softly.

"I'll take that as a sign of them giving you good pain killers," Marcus mused. "You need anything for when we come back next time?"

"Some books maybe." he said. "Oh... it might be hard to read..." he sighed.

"I have one of those electric things that have books loaded onto them," Marcus stated. "I can bring it. It's light weight so you can hold it near the bottom and hit the buttons to turn pages."

"Thank you! That will help a lot," he said.

Marcus and Jake both smiled, relieved to see Vincent's spirits start to pick up. "What books do you like?" Jake asked.

"Fantasy. Mystery. Comics." he said.

"I'll help gather what's needed," Jake smiled. "I have a collection of comics that you might like."

Vincent smiled. "That would be great, thank you guys."

"It's no problem; we want you to get well soon," Jake smiled.

"You're helping a lot." he said happily.

Marcus finished braiding Vincent's hair and tied it off, smiling as he moved back. "I'll bring some movies, too, you can play them using a laptop."

Vincent smiled. "That'd be great."

"Have the doctors and nurses been nice?" Jake asked.

"Yeah. It's mainly been Dr. Miles again." Vincent said.

"That's good, she's one of the best doctors here, I think," Jake smiled.

"She is," Vincent smiled.

"Maybe they can get you a prosthetic with a built in gun!"

Vincent laughed. "Maybe."

"When you get out we'll take you drinking to help ease the stress," Marcus offered.

"Yeah, I'd like that." he said. "You embarrass yourself yet, Marcus?" he gave a small smile. "I think I'll take your arm if I win," he joked lightly. "Or maybe your leg. Can't run from strip poker without a leg..." he sighed. "Sorry... my humor is a bit morbid right now."
"That's fine," Marcus stated. "You're speaking to someone who makes jokes about death. Some of us just have morbid senses of humor. For your other question: no, I haven't embarrassed myself yet. I'm doing quite well at keeping out of trouble."

"I had someone switch the hot water off yesterday while I was showering. Some of the guys in my dorm thought it'd be a good prank to get me out of the shower with that, then throw a thing of flour on me," Jake sighed. "I'll take morbid spoken humor over that any day."

"I suppose Marcus is the lucky one out of the three of us." Vincent sighed with a smile.

"Oh, I'd say we're just too busy to play pranks in my group. There's a surprising amount of work," Marcus laughed.

"Really?" Vincent chuckled. "Well, Jake and I can start pranking you if you feel left out." he teased.

"Oh no, I don't need that!" Marcus laughed. "I like having peace once in a while."

Vincent chuckled. "Thank you, you two. You're really helping me feel better."

"Good! That's what we want to see is you happy."

Vincent smiled. "You guys are great."

The two smiled, chuckling. A nurse entered then, smiling. "Mr. Valentine? Commander Adams has come to see how you are doing, would you like to see him?"

Vincent nodded. "Yes, thank you."

She nodded and left with a smile, sending Adams in. He gave Vincent a nervous smile as he walked forward. "How are you feeling?"

"Better. These two are helping me," Vincent said softly.

"That's good," Adams smiled. "You've gotten a lot of your color back, which is also good."

Vincent smiled. "Yeah. Cid is coming by eventually."

"That's good. You should be able to move about again soon," Adams smiled.

He nodded. "Yeah."

Adams fell silent for a long while before speaking again. "Does... does it hurt?"

"Not right now. They keep it numbed and I'm on a pain pump," he said. "Adams... what exactly happened? I don't remember much but... it... it melted off...? I think..."

Adams paused, frowning. He was quiet for a long while before giving a half nod. "It... wasn't pretty."

"I imagine..." Vincent sighed. "All I remember is pain..."

Adams nodded, bringing over some flowers he'd gotten along the way and setting them on the nightstand. "Do... you think you'll need to talk to anyone about this? Get things off your chest?"

"Honestly, yes. But... I don't want to talk to a psych. Or a counselor... they can listen... but they
"Well... I don't mind listening. I was there, and it might help. Since I was there you don't have to worry about the things we're not allowed to disclose to those outside work," Adams mused, glancing at Jake and Marcus solemnly.

Vincent nodded. A nurse came in and, having overheard, spoke up. "You might want to speak with the General as well. He's seen a lot and, though he may seem cold, he really cares for the heath of the SOLDIERS."

"Hey, that could help..." Jake agreed, gently touching Vincent's shoulder in silent support. It was for Vincent's crush more than the injuries at that point, knowing the other man would need a lot of encouragement and strength to talk to the General.

"He has helped other SOLDIERS in the past," Adams mused. "He also knows best what everyone's job entails, so you wouldn't have to worry about disclosing confidential information."

He flushed. "I-I could... but... well everyone knows what happened the last time I saw him..." he sighed. "Though he has probably forgotten... is... there a way to get a request to him?"

"I can send a letter to him," Adams mused. "I'll explain what happened and ask if he'll help with getting you through the trauma of it."

"That would help..." he nodded.

"He might be able to get some of the higher ranking doctors to look at the damage as well."

Vincent nodded. Adams stayed and spoke with Vincent for a short while before everyone left, so that Vincent could rest. While gone, Adams wrote and sent the letter explaining Vincent's situation and what had happened to the General, hoping to get a response. It was a few days before the General came to visit, Vincent half asleep due to pain meds, but coherent. Sephiroth regarded him with calm eyes, his hair pinned up for the moment to keep it out of reach of the various medical equipment that seemed to be everywhere on this level. He had spoken with Dr. Miles to get a more detailed review of the wound and what they were dealing with, before speaking with Adams about the creature that first attacked Vincent. He sighed, walking up to the bed and speaking. "Can you understand me?" he asked, wanting to ensure Vincent wasn't too incoherent on pain medicine to actually talk.

Vincent looked up at him, nodding. 'Yes, Sir.' he said. Through the time that had passed the last few days Vincent's moods had switched from him being fine, to angry, to extreme depression. Right now he was sliding into the depression stage.

Sephiroth shifted when he noticed, sitting down. "I was informed of what happened."

Vincent nodded, looking at his left arm. "I can't really move the stub..." he said lowly.

Sephiroth nodded. "That creature that attacked you was a bioweapon. You're extremely lucky."

"Bioweapon?" Vincent asked.

"Yes. It attacks the cells and their structure."

"Oh... I see... so there was never really a chance for it to get better..." he said, mood growing darker.
Sephiroth shifted. "Not without the proper medicine. It looks like someone gave you the wrong antidote."

"Professor Hojo is the one who did it. As creepy as he is, he's not one to make a mistake like that..." Vincent frowned. He paused then. "You don't think he did it on purpose? I-I know he hated my father but... he's a professional... right?"

Sephiroth frowned at that, sighing. "I will open a case up to look into it. I doubt he did this to fill a personal vengeance, but there have been rumors of secret tests and experiments. I wouldn't put it past him to see if his weapon worked without having to sign the necessary paperwork for actual field studies."

Vincent glanced at his arm. "If that's the case... I'm pretty sure it worked." he frowned, hanging his head.

"I'll put in an order not to let him, or his experiments, near you," Sephiroth said calmly. "I'll also get it set up to pay you for not telling anyone about the creature or exactly what happened with your arm."

"You don't need to do that... I don't even want to think about it much less speak about it..." he said.

"You still could use the money for medical compensation," Sephiroth mused. "Is there anything I could do to assist you with your recovery?"

"A nurse suggested I talk with you... about this. I didn't want to talk to a psych or counselor about it.... they wouldn't get it. But... she said you might, with some of the things you've seen. If... if you don't mind... I don't remember much but what I do... I can't sleep. They have to give me medicine for it... and it'll replay in my head sometimes when I'm awake... the sight and the smells... they are vivid..."

Sephiroth paused, regarding him before nodding. "Is there anywhere specific you want to start?"

"It... it was healing fine. Only a little pain but it was manageable. We were halfway done with the latest mission when I felt this blinding pain... it felt like I blacked out... but I was still conscious. The next thing I know my arm... it was melting off. The smell was terrible... Then I was waking up here on a ventilator..."

Sephiroth frowned at that, shifting. "You've been through a lot," he mused.

"I guess... It was probably hard for the others... actually seeing it..." He frowned. "When I don't have the numbing medicine the pain comes back."

"Part of that might be psychological. I'll set up a mirror test to help with that."

Vincent nodded. He was silent for a while before suddenly speaking. "I apologize for what I did when I was drunk."

Sephiroth paused for a long few minutes before finally speaking. "I had forgotten about that until now," he admitted, his tone not giving away if he was upset or not at being reminded.

"Oh... then I'm sorry for bringing it up..." Vincent said.

"You were drunk, I have seen worse. Genesis is worse."

"I... I can imagine that..." Vincent said.
"I'm honestly surprised you remember doing that. You were drunk enough that I inhaled alcohol."

"I... I don't really remember. My friends and Cid told me about it." he admitted, wincing. "And that makes it worse... I'm admittedly only seventeen..."

Sephiroth paused at that, seeming mildly surprised. "You're seventeen?"

"Yes, Sir," he nodded.

"You do not look or act like a teenager."

Vincent shifted. "I'm not sure about the looks part... as for acting... I have... an interesting past." he said.

"The civil war happening in Wutai?" Sephiroth asked.

"That too," he nodded. "Mostly different kinds of abuse from my step father..." he said nonchalantly.

Sephiroth shifted at that, seeming calm. "You seem to trust me a great deal..." he mused.

"Despite people saying you're cold and uncaring, I don't think it's true," Vincent said. "I think it's okay to speak to you about personal things. I don't think you'll use it against me or judge me."

"Judging others doesn't serve any use..." Sephiroth reasoned. "As for using it against you, I have no reason to."

"Not a lot of people think like that. Or maybe it's just the ones I've met in the past." he sighed.

"Most people are... illogical."

Vincent tilted his head. "Am I? Or am I insane? Most would be out of their minds by now. Hell one guy on my team only saw it and now he's being detained and going crazy."

"He is not going crazy," Sephiroth assured. "He is just suffering horrible nightmares and they have him in therapy."

"Will he recover? Shouldn't I be in a similar state?" Vincent shook his head, hanging it.

"Eventually it'll clam down..." Sephiroth shrugged. "Everyone handles things differently, so you might be able to stand up to the trauma easier. From what I've been informed your coworker is already showing a great improvement."


"Have you been having nightmares?"

"Yes," he nodded. "Even with the sleeping medicine."

Sephiroth paused before reaching into his pocket and handing some herbs to Vincent. "Try these... the doctors don't really believe in them, but they've helped me."

Vincent took them slowly. "Thank you..." he said softly.

"You're welcome. It should relieve the nightmares so that you can rest easier. I understand that the gun-maker is creating a prosthetic for you. I'll have you reassigned to a position under myself if it
appears you start having trouble doing your work where you're currently assigned."

He nodded slowly. "Thank you." he repeated. "I... have a feeling that may help more, but I'll try
one more mission where I am assigned at least."

Sephiroth nodded. "That is admirable. I will ask your coworkers to keep notes on how you're doing
for me."

He nodded again. "I should be able to get back to them soon..."

Sephiroth nodded. "Would you mind me looking at your arm?"

Vincent shook his head. "It's alright if you do."

Sephiroth leaned forward to slowly and gently unwrap the wound, examining the stub. The doctors
had cut just higher than where everything started to melt, to keep it from spreading, before stitching
what they could closed. The general frowned, gently maneuvering the limb to tell just how bad the
wound was. "The creature that attacked you, it did this using a claw instead of a fang, right?"

"Yes. Two claws sunk into me," Vincent replied, unable to feel anything in his arm right now. "I
honestly didn't notice at first. I couldn't feel it and then I blacked out."

Sephiroth nodded. "And it took how long from the attack to this incident?" he asked.

"About two weeks," he said, looking confused at the questions.

Sephiroth frowned at that and nodded. "I'll come back to visit you again soon, I have to check into
some things and fill out some paperwork about this," he explained as he put fresh bandages on
Vincent's wound and stepped back.

Vincent nodded, still confused. "Thank you, General. F-for listening. And everything..."

Sephiroth nodded as he turned to leave. "You're welcome. Rest, you'll need it."

Vincent nodded, laying back and closing his eyes, falling asleep quickly.

Three days later Cid came to visit him with a smile, holding something that was wrapped loosely in
a cloth. "Hey, how are you?" he asked as he walked over to Vincent's side of the bed.

"I'm alive." he said, sighing, "Is that the prosthetic?"

"Yep," the man grinned, setting the arm down on Vincent's lap and unwrapping it. It was a golden-
bronze color and was made of three main parts, letting him have an elbow and wrist again. The
fingers were spiked and had several small rivets in them so that they could bend and move. "What
do you think?"

Vincent smiled. "It looks amazing, Cid!" he said.

"Want me to help you get it on?" the man asked with a grin.

"Yes, please." he said softly.

Cid gently took Vincent's arm, putting a pad with small electrodes connected onto it first before
securing the prosthetic. "Ok, think of your hand flexing, see if we can get it to move."

Vincent nodded, doing so, able to move the fingers. He smiled brightly at that.
"Good, I was worried I would have to tweak a few things after you tried it. Does it feel comfortable?" Cid asked.

Vincent moved it again, able to move it like an actual arm. "It will take some getting used to, but it does."

Cid nodded. "I can make adjustments over the next few days to make it work a bit easier."

"Alright. Thank you, again," he said softly.

"It's no problem. I'm glad I can help a friend of mine get back to being himself after an injury."

"I'm glad I'll be able to leave here soon. I'm getting a bit stir crazy," Vincent sighed. "Oh! If you see the General tell him I said 'Thank you.' Those herbs he gave me are working great."

"Sure," Cid grinned. "I take it you're not feeling as down as a few days ago?"

Vincent nodded. "I'm doing better." he said.

Cid nodded and took a seat. "Is there anything I can bring you while I'm here?"

"Have any actual food?" he asked.

The man laughed and winked. "I'll get you some right now. What're you in the mood for?"

"Meat," he said automatically. "And maybe some soda. Any kind."

Cid gave a nod and left. He came back about twenty minutes later with a small bag of food, putting everything on Vincent's table. There was a soda, some fries, and a hamburger.

"Thank you!" Vincent smiled widely, starting to eat.

Cid laughed, sitting down again. "I'm happy to help. Tried to stick with stuff that you didn't need utensils for."

"Thanks for that. At least it seems easy enough to eat the burger," he said.

Cid nodded again. "What have they been feeding you here?"

"Broths and unidentifiable soups," he said. "Sometimes solid foods but... well I can't tell what those are either."

Cid made a face. "That doesn't sound good."

"It wasn't," Vincent said.

Cid shook his head. "You think they'd know to give people real food if they want 'em to get better quicker."

"One would think so." Vincent chuckled.

"Well, I'll keep sneaking you real food if they won't. How is everything else doing, though?"

"They've stopped numbing my arm, so I'm getting pains now." he sighed.

Cid frowned at that. "And no pain killers?"
"No. They are trying to wean me off them since they plan on discharging me soon." he said.

Cid's frown deepened. "Have they tried doing anything else to try and help with the pain?"

"Not really. Pills, but they don’t do anything. They DC'd both the shots and the IV meds." he explained.

Cid thought for a bit. "I'll talk to some friends, see what I can get done for you to help out."

"Thank you," he said gratefully.
Chapter Nine

Vincent was discharged three days later, Cid and Jake waiting to walk him back to his barracks. Cid was grinning when he saw the Wutanian approaching them. "Are you hungry?" he asked.

"Starving," Vincent smiled.

"Good, I got enough to take the three of us to a fast food joint. I think you'll like the food there," Cid grinned.

"He said they have chicken strips, that's what I'm planning to order at least," Jake chuckled.

Vincent chuckled. "Of course you are," he said softly.

"What about you? What are you in the mood for?" Jake asked.

"Chicken doesn’t sound too bad," he said.

Jake smiled, excited as he took Vincent's good arm to lead the way. "The General wanted me to hand this to you," Cid mused as he held an envelope out to Vincent.

Vincent paused, taking it. "Oh...okay..." Inside was more of the medicine he'd given Vincent before, along with a letter to meet him when he felt up to it, the location of his office printed on a little map so Vincent could find it. Vincent smiled a little, tucking the note away for now. Cid took Vincent and Jake out of the building, their first time out since arriving as recruits, and to a nearby diner that served burgers and chicken.

Vincent smiled. "This feels good," he said, happy.

"Right?!" Jake smiled, twirling. "It feels like it's been forever since we've actually been outside!"

Vincent laughed. "It has."

"We should sneak out more often," Jake joked.

"You don't have to sneak. You're not trapped down there," Cid pointed out.

Vincent smiled. "That's true."

"I can start taking you guys out more often if you need it," the weapons maker offered.

"That would be nice," Vincent said.

"Yeah, we can actually feel like we're people instead of some weird underground race," Jake joked.

Vincent laughed, chatting and eating with the two before excusing himself to go meet Sephiroth. The young man was reading over some documents when Vincent game in, looking up at him. "Hello, Valentine. How is your arm doing?"

"Better. Cid gave me something to help with the occasional pain, and I'm getting used to using it, Sir." Vincent replied.

Sephiroth nodded. "I take it, since you're here, that you received my letter?"
Vincent nodded. "Yes, Sir." he said. Sephiroth nodded and turned to face Vincent fully, glancing down at papers he was holding. Vincent straightened. "W-was there something I need to be informed of, Sir?" he asked, nervously.

"I finished going over the paperwork, I have a restraining order against Dr. Hojo for you. There's also claims to pay for lost wages, since your injuries happened while working with us," he explained while motioning for Vincent to come closer. "Some of these will need your signature, but it will help you in the long run."

Vincent moved closer. "Oh! Right," he said, signing what he needed to.

"Has the medicine I gave you helped with the nightmares?"

Vincent nodded. "Very much, thank you, Sir." he said.

The general nodded. "Good. Is the pain manageable?"

"It is with what Cid gave me, Sir." Vincent said.

He nodded. "You don't have to keep using 'Sir' when we're not in a formal setting. It's... unfitting."

"Unfiting?" Vincent asked, barely holding back from adding 'Sir' after it.

"Yes, I'm around your age. It's... strange having people who are my age, and most of the people here are older, refer to me like that."

"Well, that is true but your rank is higher..." Vincent shifted.

"It is. It's been higher since I was eleven."

Vincent's eyes widened at that. "S-so isn't it more respectful to use 'Sir'?"

"It's respectful and expected, it just feels... off."

He nodded. "Alright. I won't use it if you don't like it," he said.

Sephiroth nodded. "Does your prosthetic fit correctly?" he asked, wanting to change the subject.

"Ah, Yes." Vincent nodded, raising the arm. "I was told within the next two weeks, that I should be able to try another job." he said.

Sephiroth nodded. "You should be able to, yes. I'm not scheduling you for any jobs down the labs, though. You'll be given other jobs indicative of your rank and place, but sending you down to the labs is too risky."

He nodded. "Alright..."

Sephiroth noticed the slight change in tone. "Are you disappointed with this decision?"

"N-no but... Is it because of what happened or because of any reaction it may cause me to have?" he asked slowly.

"It is for your safety. It was one of Dr. Hojo's creations that attacked you and he is known for being... eccentric. I put a restraining order on him to keep him from trying to get close to you and insisting that you should go to him so he can study the after affects of your injury, part of this restraining order would naturally keep you out of the labs since he works there," Sephiroth
explained dismissively. There were concerns of Vincent being a liability risk because of panic attacks in a stressful situation, but Sephiroth had learned from experience that no one liked learning that.

Vincent nodded, relaxing a little. "Well, yes that is a good enough reason," he sighed.

"To deal with the new assignments and ensure that you're given the correct ones, you'll be reporting directly to me from now on. I'll make a schedule for which days to come see me to get new assignments and report on ones you're already working on or have completed. I'm thinking two or three days a week would work."

"Oh! Y-yes Si-Um... Alright." he nodded, shocked, pleased, and nervous at the same time.

Sephiroth nodded. "You may go now, take the next week to adjust to being out of the infirmary. We'll slowly work you back into working again."

"Yes. Thank you." he said, turning to leave.

"I left something in your room to assist you and help with adjusting to the new assignments." Vincent paused, but nodded and thanked him again, going to his room to see what it was. Setting on his desk was a new laptop, a folder with information on new assignments, and a headset for hands free typing and communication. Vincent smiled at that, knowing that it was for his job, but blushing a little still. The folder held files on various things he’d need for his new missions, along with resources for him to use while he healed to help him adjust to missing an arm and to the new prosthetic. Vincent sat down and started to read through it. Most of the information on his prosthetic was stuff from Cid: how to clean it, how to get it on and off, checking the screws, springs, and gears to ensure they worked correctly. For help it had a list on ways to contact Sephiroth and a doctor Vincent had never heard of for medicine and medical treatment. Vincent mentally noted everything before turning on the laptop and setting up the head set to learn how to use it. It was a simple set up and had a few practices he could run through to get used to it. Later that night before dinner Adams knocked on his door.

Vincent answered it, smiling at seeing the man. "Hey."

Adams smiled at seeing him. "Hey, you hungry? You've been cooped up in here since you got back."

"Oh, yeah! Sorry, I've been reading manuals," he chuckled.

Adams grinned. "I figured when I saw all of that get dropped off. Want to come with me to get something to eat and us get filled in."

Vincent nodded. "Yeah," he said. "There have been some changes."

"I heard you won't be going on missions with us anymore, but on special things for the General. That's pretty big."

"It is but... I think it's also because they fear I'll have attacks or panic if I go back to the jobs in the labs..." he frowned a little.

"At least they care about you enough to consider that," Adams pointed out.

"That's true. The General of all people... He actually made the offer when I was in the hospital," he said.
"You're valuable to SOLDIER, he sees potential in you and doesn't want you to give up working here because of an injury. It's kind of exciting knowing you'll get higher ranking jobs now."

"Exciting and nerve wreaking," he said.

"Really?" Adams asked. "Why is it nerve wreaking?"

"Because... I'll be working directly under the General," he said, blushing slightly.

"I suppose that is intimidating, but I'm sure it'll be no different from taking jobs like you do here. He'll probably email you most of the details every week with occasional meetings."

"Yeah, you're right," he nodded, sighing.

"So, what do you want for dinner? We can go down to the cafeteria or go out to a restaurant," Adams mused, noting how Vincent didn't seem to like their current topic of conversation.

"A restaurant sounds good," he said.

"How about the steak place?"

"Oh! That sounds good!" he smiled.

Adams chuckled, smiling as he lead the way out. "Let's get going, then. I'll pay for it."

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Yeah, I have more than enough. Think of it as a reward for living."

Vincent smiled. "I'm sorry... you had to see that."

"You have no reason to apologize... I am just grateful you survived," Adams said gently. "I consider you a friend."

Vincent smiled. "Thank you. I'm glad about that," he said softly. "I'm not used to having friends, yet I've made so many here."

"Really? You didn't have any back in Wutai?"

"I had one. And then the people who hung around him just hung around me because I was there. Never saw them without my friend."

Adams nodded. "Well, it's good you're getting along with so many people here."

Vincent smiled. "It is."

"I've noticed you seem close with that a couple of the people recruited with you. I haven't seen many be so close to those they come in with, not when they're all put in different departments at least."

"Jake and Marcus are good people," he smiled.

"I've noticed. They've done a lot to care for you."

"Yeah. They were the first friends I made here." he smiled.
"Good, it's always good to have close friends in a place like this."

He smiled. "That's true. The work will tire you out if you don't."

Adams nodded in agreement. "Is there anything you're hoping to learn under the general?"

"I'm not sure yet. I guess I'll see what I'll be assigned then make that choice."

Adams nodded. "Fair enough... Are you excited about the new position? It's kind of a promotion."

"Very excited and very nervous," he nodded.

Adams chuckled, opening the door for Vincent as they left the building and began to approach a black car. Adams unlocked it and climbed in so he could drive Vincent to the steak house. "So, out of curiosity, does the new prosthetic move or is it just pose-able?" he asked, noticing that Vincent hadn't moved it a lot while they talked to each other.

"Oh! No, it moves," he said, moving his left arm, bending it and moving it like a normal arm. "I'm just not quite used to it yet."

"That's amazing!" Adams praised. "I have to give Cid credit, he is quite talented."

Vincent nodded. "He really is."

"Is it comfortable?"

"It is," he nodded.

"That's good, I'm glad that he was able to make one so quickly. It looks cool, too."

"I am too. And it does," he smiled, raising the arm.

Adams stopped the car and got out first, locking it once Vincent was out and leading the way into the steak place. "I've notice not a lot of recruits ever leave the main building and just eat in the cafeteria or the built in bar... Did... none of you know you were allowed to leave until now?"

Vincent chuckled. "I don't think we knew. I wasn't aware." he said.

Adams chuckled. "I might have to talk to the higher ups about including that in the graduation speeches, then," he joked.

Vincent laughed. "Yeah. Might be a good idea."

Adams nodded, letting things fall quiet as they found a table to sit at and placed their orders. He waited a long while before speaking up again, tone a bit more serious. "About the recent injury... are they going to make you attend any new training to get used to operating with it?"

"I'm sure they will, but so far I've only gotten a manual," he said.

"Really? What does the manual include?"

"How to care for and clean it. How to store it when I'm not wearing it," he explained.

Adams nodded. "Reasonable. Do you think this will affect your talent with your gun?"

"No. As I said, I'm ambidextrous. And I usually favored my right hand anyways," he smiled.
Adams smiled, nodding and continuing the conversation excitedly. After dinner they went back to their barracks, Adams pausing before entering. "Hey, if I ask you something... can you answer me honestly about it? It's important."

Vincent rose a brow but nodded. "Alright?"

"How are you doing mentally... with nightmares and stuff? And... have you visited Smiths since the incident?"

"I'm alright with nightmares... The General gave me herbs that help. I... I haven't seen Smiths yet... I'm not sure if he'd want to see me."

"He might, he'll be glad to know you're alive."

Vincent nodded. "I might go see him later then."

Adams nodded. "He's... not doing that well. It's frightening at times, seeing him like that when we've both seen so many messed up things down in that lab," he admitted.

He nodded. "That's why I wasn't sure if he wanted to see me. Because of what happened."

Adams nodded. "I have to admit, I've been shaken up, too... They have me off missions for the next month so I can attend therapy and get back into the groove of things... Seeing you healthy and alive is a large relief, though."

"I'm still not quite sure how it happened. Just that the former injury," he sighed.

"The doctor tried explaining to me that it could've been a delayed set off or the antidote wasn't as strong as they thought it was."

Vincent nodded. "That's what they told me."

Adams nodded, opening the door to their barracks. "You're stronger than you might realize, if we stick together we'll get past that horrible memory," he mused as he walked in and then went to his bedroom.
Chapter Ten

Chapter Notes

SORRY! I apologize that this update is so late! I ended up in the hospital on the 22nd of last month then at the beginning of this month both me and my co-writer went to my Sisters wedding renewal. I didn't have my computer with me in the hospital and had no time during the renewal to work on this! But! here it is and I hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 10

There was an email on Vincent's laptop the day he was supposed to start working underneath Sephiroth. It was a reminder of where and when to attend his briefing for his first assignment, along with a small overview of what he should know for his first briefing. Vincent read through everything before heading out to the meeting place. Sephiroth was already there waiting for him with some files, glancing up when Vincent entered the office and offering a small smile. "Good morning, I'm glad you were able to navigate your way here easily. I know this part of the building can be a bit of a maze."

Vincent gave a smile back. "I'm good with directions," he said.

Sephiroth nodded, holding out a file. "This is your new assignment, it isn't anything exciting but I want to introduce you into this job slowly."

Vincent nodded, taking the folder. He shifted. "Do I read it here?"

"You can if you wish or you can read it back in your barracks. This is a work space for you now, so feel free to stay here as long as you'd like while working on a file, even if I'm not here."

"O-Oh... Alright." he nodded, taking a seat. he was trying to hide it, but he was still getting used to moving around a lot. He had been doing exorcises in his room and sometimes jogging, but he was still tired out easily.

Sephiroth noticed. "It's normal," he assured, "to be tired easily after a long hospital stay. Take your time, you'll gradually get back up to moving around without tiring soon."

Vincent nodded, blushing a little. "For some reason I sometimes feel like I should be able to just get back to normal instantly."

Sephiroth nodded. "We all feel that way, we're eager to get back to our normal lives and routines after something traumatic. It takes time, though."

Vincent nodded. "Thank you," he said, starting to read what Sephiroth had given him.

The first assignment was simple enough, just do some background checks on a few SOLDIERs. Sephiroth wanted to keep Vincent on assignments he could do from a laptop without going into the field until he'd gotten some of his energy back and was more used to his prosthetic. Vincent, having brought his laptop with him, started to silently work on his assignment, slightly nervous and aware of Sephiroth. The general would glance over now and then, but otherwise didn't bother
Vincent. He was working on his own work reading reports from the various towns about concerns and emergencies. He would have to plan outings to the more battle heavy areas soon. Vincent shifted in the silence, sometimes pausing to stretch and move his left arm as he was instructed to. Sephiroth stood after a while, noting the time. "I'm going to get some food, would you like me to bring something back for you?"

"Oh! Um... yeah. I'm not really picky so anything is fine..." he said. "Thank you..."

Sephiroth nodded and left. He returned after almost an hour with a hamburger and fries for Vincent, having a chicken wrap for himself. Vincent thanked him, starting to eat as he did his research. "How are the background searches going?"

"Good so far. Nothing suspicious," he said. "Though I can tell most of the younger ones are joining for the supposed fame."

Sephiroth nodded, offering a grin. "They tend to do that. SOLDIER plastered my face everywhere and convinced half the population they can become famous just from being part of the program. Others, I've noticed, join to get out of bad towns or poverty." Vincent nodded, shifting at how close that was to his situation. "I've yet to find anyone who joined just because of the cause behind SOLDIER," Sephiroth mused. "But I suppose that's hard to do when it isn't even sure of its cause."

"I'm... in between I suppose. I joined to escape and in hope that with this war, Wutai can change for the better," Vincent said softly. "The current ruler... he's cruel. I don't exactly want him dead; just removed from power somehow."

Sephiroth nodded. "Well, hopefully we won't have this war for too much longer."

Vincent nodded. "I hope so as well."

"You grew up in Wutai, what is life like there?"

Vincent gave a dry chuckle. "Well, I grew up in the slums," he said. "It was...hard. A lot different than the slums here. Rougher, though a tad bit cleaner." he said. "I never really wandered into the middle or upper class sections. A slummer could get killed doing so. I sometimes would sneak to the Warrior headquarters to watch them train though, so my melee is a mix of that, street fighting and proper mixed martial arts." he said. "But unlike the slums here, you could always see the sky. And there were plenty of plants and flowers. That's what I miss the most I think. The sky and flowers. Grass and the scent of fresh air." he smiled softly at that. "Fruit trees as well. Fresh rushing water. And the temples. I miss those." His face had lit up speaking of everything, almost glowing.

Sephiroth nodded, thinking about what Vincent had said. "Perhaps, in time, we could bring the plans and water here. Make our lands less... enclosed. Would people prefer that?"

Vincent nodded. "Yes, but to do so we'd have to remove the plates. Moving whole sectors... that's a lot of work. And Shin-Ra would have less control over Midgar like that." he sighed.

Sephiroth nodded, glancing at his own laptop and quietly getting back to work so that he could plan some important things out. Vincent continued his own work, finding a couple of men that seemed suspicious and keeping those resumes up to show the General later. Sephiroth finished his own work and stood, walking over to Vincent to check on how he was doing. Vincent looked up at him and paused on his current resume, pulling the questionable ones up. "I'm not so sure about these four," he told him.
Sephiroth took them gently, reading their names and looking at the notes Vincent had written on them. "I'll do a more in-depth check. A few of their names look false and a couple might be spies. Thank you for noticing this, you might get a future mission if any of these prove problematic."

Vincent hid a small smile and nodded. "Go get yourself some dinner and take a break."

"O-Oh I'm alright to work a few more hours..." he said slowly, not realizing how long it had been.

"Vincent, it is almost four in the afternoon. Get something to eat and take a break before you start to work again."

Vincent blinked. "It's... that late? I didn't realize it..."

"You've been working hard on your task, which is appreciated. It might do you good to go see your friends and get some dinner now, though."

Vincent nodded, closing the computer and standing to stretch. "I am getting hungry actually..." he said, blushing slightly. Sephiroth nodded and moved to leave the room so he could get dinner and run some errands for the higher-ups. Vincent packed up his things, deciding to go meet Marcus and Jake to see if they wanted to go get dinner.

The two were playing cards in the main recreation area. They looked up when Vincent approached and offered smiles and greetings. "How was your first day at the new job?" Jake asked.

"It went well, but..." he sighed before continuing, knowing they both knew about his crush. "I was in a closed room with the General the whole time... The work distracted me mostly... but I think the Planet is trying to kill me."

"Ah, it can't be that bad," Marcus chuckled. "I bet you didn't even notice the time ticking by."

"Well no, but I was hyper aware of my impossible crush sitting across from me the whole time..." Vincent said.

"Maybe it's not impossible. I mean, at least now you can get to know him better, right?" Jake smiled.

"True, but... It's the General... I'm pretty sure any romantic relationship is impossible. I [i]might[/i] reach friendship... maybe... I mean... Only Commander Hewley and Genesis have reached that stage with him..." Vincent said, sitting down.

Marcus shrugged. "At least he sees potential in you. That has to speak for something."

Vincent nodded. "That's true." he said, smiling.

"How was the work itself?" Marcus asked.

"Fine. Easy and all computer work. They don't want me out in the field yet. I was mad at first, but... I'm still getting tired out just from walking too long," he sighed. "So I can see why they want me to wait. That and possible PTSD."

Marcus nodded in agreement. "Has your physical therapy moved on to walking short distances to help you get your strength back?"

"Yeah. I have to admit that sometimes I overdo it and do more than I should..." he sighed.

"Well, at least you're trying?" Jake offered with a smile.
Vincent nodded. "Oh! The General told me not to call him 'Sir'... it's weird... but I guess he doesn't like that. He said we were close in age and I didn't need to."

"Oh wow, that is cool! I wonder if that means he trusts you more," Jake mused.

"Perhaps it makes him feel old when people call him 'sir','" Marcus shrugged.

"I never thought of 'Sir' as an age thing, but I guess some do?" Vincent shrugged.

Marcus shrugged again. "I think it's a regional thing. I've noticed that, mostly in the north, people don't like 'Sir' or 'Ma'am' because they think it makes them sound old. I'm not sure what they expect to replace those, though, since I only grew up with those terms for anyone I don't know."

"That's true." Vincent sighed. "I'm not sure weather to say General or his name now... I think I'd feel weird saying his name though..."

"I don't see any harm in asking him which he'd prefer to go by," Jake smiled.

Vincent smiled. "That's true. I'll do that tomorrow then."

"Anything else happen today?" Jake asked.

"Not really," Vincent sighed. "Though I suppose that's a good thing. What about you guys?"

"Today was boring, like normal," Jake sighed.

"I helped with some of the other new soldiers who were having problems," Marcus shrugged.

Vincent nodded. "All and all boring days." he chuckled. "But I can use some boring for a while.." he sighed. "And I apologize but this may get awkward." he added, moving to take off the prosthetic for a little bit.

His friends didn't react, relaxing as he got things settled. Jake smiled gently. "Can I see your prosthetic?"

"Sure. Be careful though. The fingers are sharp." he warned, smiling.

Jake chuckled, picking up the limb to check it out. "Wow. There are a ton of tiny parts in this."

"Does it still feel awkward to wear it?" Marcus asked, giving the fake arm a side glance.

"Not really. It feels like a part of me now. But sometimes, like now, I have to take it off to give my arm some air," he said.

Marcus nodded and glanced at him. "How is your arm healing?"

"Fine. Hopefully better than last time..." he sighed.

"I'm sure it'll be better," Marcus assured. "There's no reason for it to get worse."

"That's true." he said.

"How's adjusting to the new computer stuff going?"

"Not bad. I'm pretty good with them, but just sitting there is unnerving sometimes. I want to get up and move but don't want to pace around like an idiot." he chuckled.
"Maybe you could ask him for a chair you can move in?" Jake asked, smiling. "I have a bouncy exercise ball at my desk for the few times I have to sit."

Vincent chuckled. "That does sound like you. I suppose I can ask for one," he nodded.

"If anyone asks, say it's to help with your physical therapy."

Vincent laughed. "An exorcise ball chair for my arm therapy?" he teased.

"Well, say you need it to help get the strength back in your legs."

Vincent nodded. "I could do that."

"It might help distract you, too," Marcus mused.

He nodded. "Yeah. That's true."

"I think a black one would work well for you," Jake joked.

Vincent laughed. "I like red too, you know," he teased back. "And green."

"Green would be easy to find," Marcus nodded.

He smiled. "I'll talk about having it cleared then."

Jake laughed, excited. "Do you get weekends off?"

"For now." he smiled.

"Great! We should go to a club or something this weekend, then."

"I haven't been to a club here yet." Vincent said.

"I think you'll love it here," Jake chuckled. "It's a great party scene."

Vincent smiled. "Okay!"

"Do either of you still have casual clothes?" Marcus asked while raising an eyebrow.

"I do!" Jake smiled. "I snuck some in."

"Me too. They let me keep all the things I came here with since it was really only a duffle bag. I think it was because, unlike most SOLIDER members, I don't have a home I could go back and visit or keep my stuff at." Vincent said, shrugging.

Jake and Marcus paused at that. "You... don't have a home?" Marcus asked.

"Not here, no. I came straight to here."

The others frowned. "Well... what would you have done if things didn't work out here?" Marcus asked.

Vincent shrugged. "Lived on the streets? It wouldn't be much different than the slums."

"Well, if you need a place to stay when we're allowed out of the barracks then stay with me at my house," Jake offered. "It's in a town not far from here so we can stay there on breaks and I can
show you around."

Vincent smiled at that. "Thank you, Jake."

"No problem," Jake beamed happily with a smile. "You're like a brother to me!"

"Really?" Vincent asked, slightly surprised.

Jake nodded. "Yeah, I don't think I would've passed the end of training exams if you hadn't helped me. You've also kept me sane throughout these past few weeks and I talk to you about everything."

Vincent smiled. "I... thank you..."

Jake chuckled. "Don't thank me, I should be thanking you! Anyway, when the break hits and we're sent home for our time off, you can come with me."

"Alright." he smiled. "I'd like that."

Marcus smiled as well. "Hey, how about we set up days to hang out together when we're off for holiday? I know some good restaurants and a couple beaches."

"That sounds great!" Vincent said, getting excited.

Marcus smiled. When Vincent got back to his room he had an email from Sephiroth complimenting him on his work done that day and pointing out that one of the three files Vincent had pulled had been a spy.

"Thank you for being observant enough to catch this, it might have saved us millions of lives as the suspect was looking for weapons information."

Vincent smiled at that, blushing a little. "I... I was praised... maybe..." he chuckled to himself and sighed.

The next day there was a new stack of files on his desk in Sephiroth's office, though this time it wasn't just personal to run background checks on. Some of the files were mission reports that had to be checked for inconsistencies because of injury or death and others had to be checked because of missing equipment and other suspicions.

Vincent got started quickly, pausing halfway through the stack to take off the prosthetic, having no problem using one arm to read through the files. He had set a couple aside that were suspicious already.

Sephiroth glanced over at him, noting the removed arm. "Was your prosthetic bothering you?"

Vincent looked up. "Oh! Sometimes it gets too much and I have to air out the rest of my arm," he admitted. "The amount of time and how often I have to do that is lessening though," he added.

Sephiroth frowned gently. "Have you spoken to Cid about adding a breathable mesh to it? See if that will help?" he questioned.

"Um... No..." he blushed a little. "I... I wasn't aware they had those..."

"I've seen him slip them into armor. It might help with the irritation. Do you need anything for pain?"

"Not at the moment. The pain is going away the more I use it, but... if there is something for
itching? It may be because it is healing, but sometimes it itches terribly."

Sephiroth nodded. "I have some ointment in a medical cabinet up here, I'll get some for you."

"Thank you." he said and paused. "Would you mind helping me put it on? It's... hard with one hand..."

Sephiroth rose an eyebrow, but gave a slow nod. "I can help, is it hard because of the angel?" he asked, mildly confused how rubbing ointment in could need help. He could understand opening the bottle and getting it into one's hand.

"Yes. I can only reach about half of it properly." He said, reaching over to show him. His finger tips barely reached the end of the scar. "I mean... I can reach it all, but... Most of any ointment or cream ends up on the floor..." he frowned. "Adams is usually the one helping me whenever I have the creams."

Sephiroth nodded, opening the ointment. "Hold your arm out so I can reach the scar more easily."

Vincent did, feeling embarrassed to have to ask the General for help with such a thing.

Sephiroth rubbed it in gently before pulling back. "There, does that help a bit?"

"Ah, Yes. Thank you. Sorry to ask you to do something inconvenient like that..."

"You're welcome and it wasn't a large inconvenience. During your lunch break you can speak with Cid."

He nodded. "I'll do that, thank you."

"You're welcome," Sephiroth said simply, glanced at the files Vincent had sorted already, picking them up to glance over the reports. He sat the ones that were done with in one pile, for a filer to put away later, and began his investigation on the suspicious ones.

Vincent resumed sorting the files, not realizing when lunch break hit.

"Do you wish to get something to eat?" Sephiroth asked.

Vincent blinked, looking at the time. "Oh! Uh... yes. And I'll speak with Cid..." he said, standing and putting his prosthetic back on.

Sephiroth nodded. "You have an hour," he instructed. "That should be enough time."

Vincent nodded, deciding to go to Cid first.

Sephiroth watched him leave before standing and going to get his own lunch. Cid was working on a new gun in his work shop, fiddling with small parts to try and get it to work just right.

Vincent knocked on his door. "Umm... Cid... Sir?" he called.

"Come in! What can I do for you?" the man smiled.

"Well... the prosthetic... I have to take it off sometimes. The General suggested asking you about the breathable mesh?"

"Oh, sure! Here, let me see it," Cid said, holding a hand out. Vincent took it off, handing it to Cid. Cid adjusted the size to account for he mesh before removing the cloth he originally had to
measure, cut, and slip in mesh instead with some of as a cushion as well. Vincent watched in fascination. Cid smiled when it was done, holding it out to him. "Here, try it on and let me know if I have to adjust how tight it is or if you'd like a different mesh if that one is itchy."

Vincent put it on, moving it around and smiling. "Oh! That feels much better!" he said happily.

Cid's smile widened. "I'm glad. Let me know if you need any other adjustments done to it."

"I will. Thank you!" Vincent said before going to get some lunch.

Marcus and Jake were already downstairs eating, laughing as they discussed various things.

Vincent joined them. "Hey guys," he said, sitting down.

"Oh, you're joining us today?" Jake teased.

Vincent chuckled. "It's lunch break and I had to stop by Cid's," he said, explaining what happened, blushing and frowning after. "I really asked the General to put cream on my arm..." he groaned.

"Well, it's less embarrassing than other options and he actually did it!" Jake chuckled. "He actually touched you which is amazing!"

Vincent blushed more. "Yeah... he took his gloves off and everything," he half joked.

"Hey, take it as a sign," Jake added. "You're very lucky."

Vincent chuckled. "True..." he said.

"You mentioned you visited Cid, did he fix something on your arm for you?"

"Oh! Yeah I had him put the mesh they use with armor on it. It's helping a lot. The general suggested it actually."

"Hmm... I wouldn't of even considered that, I wonder what made him think of it," Marcus mused.

Vincent paused at that. "I'm not sure..."

"Maybe he's seen similar injuries before?" Jake shrugged.

"I wouldn't be surprised," Vincent said.

Jake just smiled at him. After lunch there was a note on the door that some important matters had come up that Sephiroth had to deal with, so Vincent could choose to work alone in the office or take his work home and do it in his room, as long as he locked the office on his way out. Vincent gathered his work and left, locking the door, having decided to do the work in his room, not wanting to be alone in the office. He worked hard until he fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Also...Um....As I have VERY little knowledge about prosthetic limbs and how they work, feel free to correct or help me improve my writing of the problems/workings of such! It would help me greatly!
Chapter Eleven

A week had passed since Vincent's relocation. It was working well and he had a routine to follow now and the holidays were drawing near. Jake and Marcus were already packed, eager to see their families again after being away from them for months. Vincent sat in his room, unsure about what to do, knowing he would be spending the holidays here, having momentarily forgotten Jake's offer. Jake knocked on his door, a wide smile on his face. Vincent opened it. "Ah! Jake?" he rose a brow, obviously confused.

"Yeah, I came to help you pack. You're spending the holiday with me, remember?" he smiled.

Vincent visibly brightened. "Oh yeah! Sorry, I forgot!" he smiled, letting Jake in. There wasn't a lot in his room. Very few street clothes, some books, his lap top, and his guns. The room was painfully under decorated.

"Marcus and I need to take you shopping," Jake noted as he looked around.

"Shopping? For what?" he asked.

"Decorations, clothes... a bit of everything."

Vincent looked around. "It's not alright like it is?" he asked, obviously unused to things like that.

"Well, it is... but wouldn't you like to have things? Like... maybe a gun rack for your weapons or some posters or something? Maybe a bookcase?"

"Yeah... I suppose that would be nice." he said, giving a small smile.

"Plus, we should get you some more street clothes so you can hang out with us," Jake laughed. Vincent smirked. "True."

"Would you like to leave today or tomorrow?" Jake asked.

"Today is alright." he said. "It's not like it will take me long to get ready," he added jokingly. Jake chuckled, smiling. "I'll go get some snacks for the ride, meet me in the commons area upstairs."

"Alright." Vincent said, starting to pack his few clothes as Jake left.

Jake was waiting in front of a small jeep when he got out, the jeep's trunk already holding three suitcases. Vincent held only a simple duffle bag. Jake took it and sat it with the suitcases, smiling. "Ready?"

"Yeah!" he said, excited.

"Alright, climb in," Jake laughed as he got into the driver's seat. "It's a two hour drive. We'll eat at a local restaurant when we get to my home town."

"Okay!" Vincent nodded. "Where is your hometown?"
"I live in Kalm," Jake smiled. "It's small but nice."

Vincent smiled. "A small town is probably best for me at the moment."

"I'm sure you'll love it! You can meet my family, too."

"I'm getting more and more excited!" he chuckled, before pausing and turning more serious. "Does your family know? About you?"

Jake paused, shifting. "Only my sister does."

Vincent nodded. "I wanted to know so I'd know if I had to be careful." he said softly.

Jake nodded. "We won't have to be overly careful, I just... won't say much."

Vincent nodded silently.

"So, do you like steak?"

"Oh yes!" Vincent smiled. "I haven't had it in a while."

"Then we can stop at a small steak house when we get to my place!"

"Oh that sounds great!" he said happily.

"We have a park in town, too. Some small stores... it's not much, but we should be able to keep you entertained."

Vincent nodded. "I'm sure it'll be fine." he smiled.

"I think you'll get along with my siblings, too."

"What are they like?" he asked.

"My younger brothers love sports, my sisters are all fighters but are kind and would love to mess with your hair," he joked. "My one older brother owns a gun shop, and the other older brother owns a restaurant."

"They sound amazing." Vincent smiled.

"They are! Maybe you can get some new parts for your gun's at my brother's shop."

"That would be amazing! A scope or a silencer maybe."

"Those would do you good," Jake mused happily. "I think a scope would look awesome."

"Yeah. I'm hoping to get back to doing missions soon." he said. "Not that I don't like being in a small room with the General all day..."

"Maybe they can put you on simple stuff? Like bodyguard work?"

He nodded. "I'm thinking of talking to the General about it."

"It'd be good to get yourself out there now and then."

"Yeah, I'd like to. Starting to get antsy sitting around all the time." he admitted.
"We could go hiking and mountain climbing while you're here with me. Get some exercise in."

"That sounds fun," he smiled.

"I was sure you'd like it," Jake chuckled. "I can't wait to show you around." He was excited as he told Vincent about the town, stretching when they finally reached it and could get out of the jeep. "Do you want to eat at a restaurant first?"

"Yeah," he nodded. "I'm quite hungry."

Jake nodded and lead Vincent along the sidewalk to a mall shop tucked away in the buildings. "This is the steak place I told you about."

Vincent got a wide smile. "Nice."

Jake found them a seat and some menus, handing one to Vincent. "Order whatever you want, my treat."

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Yeah, I don't mind. Nothing here is really expensive, either, so I can definitely afford it."

"Okay." Vincent smiled. "Thank you."

Jake smiled happily as they grabbed a table. "So, how has it been working with the General anyway?"

"Quiet." he chuckled. "Not as awkward anymore, but... still uncomfortable being so close. We talk sometimes and he makes sure I eat, cause I forget to sometimes." he said.

Jake smiled. "Well, at least he seems to care."

"True. Even though it's probably in a 'You're a subordinate, you need to be healthy to do your job' kind of way." he chuckled.

Jake chuckled. "Possibly," he paused as the waitress came ordering a steak filled potato.

The woman wrote down the order before looking to Vincent with a smile. "And for you, sir?"

Vincent ordered a steak pot roast like meal. Jake smiled as the waitress left, looking at Vincent again. "How are you doing with this new job, anyway? Doing alright at catching stuff?"

"Yeah. So far what I've thought was off has been true." he said happily.

"That's great! You're making a name for yourself, then."


"Maybe you could start there? Ask the General if you can be on the investigation team for one of the cases you find?"

"That's... a good idea actually." he smiled.

"It'd be a start. Slowly get closer to the field until you're on it again," Jake offered. Vincent nodded, feeling better. "I know it's pretty boring down in my section. There's so many of us that there's really not much to do," Jake added on.
"Yeah. I've heard a rumor that there are fewer missions being given though," Vincent said. "Yeah, I've seen guys leaving... a few haven't come back."

Vincent frowned. "I wonder why..."

"It... might have been a dangerous mission... Or maybe a long one?" Jake offered.

He nodded. "Maybe..."

"I try not to think of it... It's not really a good sign when I know I'll eventually get sent on a mission as well."

Vincent nodded, changing the subject. "So, tell me what your sisters will do to my poor hair."

"Wash it and brush it first, then probably braid it or try out different hair styles. No cutting, though."

He chuckled. "Well that doesn't sound too bad. Besides, I don't have siblings and my mom never did anything like that so," he shrugged. "It could be fun."

Jake laughed. "You'll think that until they start following you everywhere asking about if they can style it."

Vincent laughed. "It really can't be that bad."

Jake chuckled. "So, think you'd like to join in with us when we tell stories?" he asked, looking up when their orders came and were set on the table before them.

"Yeah." he smiled. "I don't have many family ones, but I have some of the stupid things me and my friend tried to do."

"I can't wait to hear those," Jake chuckled. "You'll probably get a lot of stories from my mom about the dumb adventures I used to have. I wasn't the brightest kid."

Vincent chuckled. "That would be interesting."

"So, how do you like this little town so far? I know we haven't been everywhere, but there's not much to explore."

"It's nice." he smiled.

Jake beamed at that, feeling proud. "We do our best!" he laughed.

"I can't wait to explore it." Vincent said happily.

Jake smiled. After their lunch he gave Vincent a quick tour of the town on the way to his house, smiling as he opened the door. Entering the small house, Jake's family was waiting inside, cheering at his return. A small banner was hung up with "Welcome home" painted on it as Jake's mother rushed over to hug him tightly.

Vincent smiled as he shifted, feeling a little awkward.

She released Jake soon, moving straight to Vincent to hug him tightly. "It's nice to meet you," she said with a smile. "Jakey's said so much about you!"

Vincent stood shocked, before smiling and awkwardly hugging her back. "It's nice to meet you,"
Ma'am," he said, turning his head and mouthing 'Jakey" with a smile and a raised brow.

Jake was blushing. "Mom, please don't call me that in front of my friends," he sighed.

"But it's your nickname! I've called you Jakey for years, I won't change now," the woman laughed as she released Vincent. "Was your trip here alright, dear? He didn't drive too crazily did he?"

Vincent smiled. "It was great," he said.

"That's good, I apologize we don't have a proper guest room, but you can share Jake's room with him if you feel comfortable with that."

Vincent nodded. "That's fine. I'm used to sharing a room. Unless you are a first or up, you don't get your own rooms in SOLDIER."

The woman nodded and smiled. "Do you have anything you can't eat so I know not to make it?"

"Not that I've found so far. I'm not really picky about food." he smiled.

"Great! I'll make a family favorite, then."

Vincent smiled. "Thank you for letting me stay here."

"It's no problem. You're more than welcome here!"

Vincent felt happy at hearing that, though he was still unused to it.

Jake's sisters rushed Vincent next, talking over each other about his hair and what to do with it and about how he looked. Jake sighed, physically getting between the girls and Vincent. "Alright, back off! Don't drown the man!"

Vincent chuckled, looking at them. "I promise to let you play with my hair after Jake and I are all settled and fed," he told them. "On the condition that you don't try dressing me as a girl. It's happened before, and yes, I do make a pretty one. I have pictures on my phone," he added quickly.

The girls perked up, storming him again begging for pictures. "You've opened the flood gates now!" Jake yelped.

Vincent chuckled, looking up the pictures in his phone to show the girls. "My friend had little sisters who were twins." he said. Some of the pictures were just him in make up with his hair done, but some had him in dressed, and sometimes heels as well.

"You're so pretty!" one of the girls gushed.

Vincent chuckled, blushing a little. "Thank you."

"You're amazing! Do you still wear makeup?" one of the girls asked.

"Um... well when I went to the bar I put on eyeliner...but I don't wear it regularly." he said.

"We should do your makeup then!" another cheered.

"Ah, but wasn't part of the deal to let you mess with my hair not to dress me up as a girl? Make up counts," he said, smiling softly.

"No it doesn't, not if we don't make it girly," the oldest beamed.
Vincent laughed. "Hmm... well you have me there."

"We'll make you look amazing!"

Vincent fake pouted. "Oh? I don't already?"

"You do, but we'll make you look even more amazing," the middle daughter laughed.

Vincent laughed. "Oh fine."

The girls beamed, running off to get their supplies. Jake sighed and glanced at Vincent. "You've doomed yourself."

Vincent chuckled. "I've resigned myself to my fate."

Jake just laughed. "Here, follow me to my room. You can put your things there and we can just hang out for a bit before my sisters get you."

Vincent smiled. "Alright." he said, following Jake.

Jake's room was up some narrow stairs and to the left. It was a small room with a bed, desk, and dresser, random objects strewn about inside. "Sorry for the mess. The bed has another one that pulls out from under it, so that's where you'll sleep."

Vincent smiled. "It's fine." he said looking around. "You have a cool room."

"Thanks, I know it's not much but I do try."

"So far I like your family." he said softly.

"They like you, too. Oh! Do you have any hobbies or anything? If you like reading we have a small bookshelf downstairs incase you get bored at some point. It doesn't have much, but it might help a bit."

Vincent smiled. "I do like reading." he chuckled.

"I have some games, too. Mom will probably want you to join in on family game night with us, if you don't mind. We can play charades."

"As long as I am welcome, I don't mind at all." Vincent said softly.

Jake chuckled. "Trust me, you're more than welcome."

Vincent chuckled. "Am I adopted already?" he joked.

"Most likely."

He laughed. "I'm okay with that."

Jake smiled, shifting as he found a place for Vincent to sit. "What do you usually do for holidays?"

"Stayed with my friends family," he said. "Had dinner with them at least."

"At least it's something... Do you have anything you're interested in? Hobbies or such? We could see if there's anything that interests you in town."

"Well... I like hiking but you can't really do that here." he chuckled. "Though I'd like to check out a
couple of the shops.

"We can definitely do that," Jake nodded. "Do you like art or collect anything?"

"I do like art. I also collect unique things." he said.

"What kind of unique things?"

"Mostly little trinkets or drawings. Or old historical things and books."

"There's a trinket shop in town. It even sells dream catchers."

"Oh! That sounds nice." Vincent said, excited.

"I'm sure you'll love it, it's owned by a family and their son is hot."

Vincent smirked. "Hotter than Marcus?" he teased, keeping his voice low.

Jake's face lit up ten shades of red. "W-well, b-but he's still really good looking," he replied, shifting. "You'll just have to see him to understand."

Vincent smirked. "I'll trust you on it then."

Jake shook his head, chuckling. "Marcus likes one of the girls in the other sections."

"If it helps, you can always think of the utter hopelessness of my romantic crush choice," Vincent chuckled back.

"Hey, you're not completely hopeless."

"Jake, The General is like... a plant. He's shown no interest in any one. For anything romantic at least," Vincent pointed out.


"I don't even think he's realized the, probably obvious, crush I have on him, so no worries there." Vincent snorted.

Jake shrugged. "Maybe, if you keep getting close, you can eventually ask."

"Maybe," Vincent nodded.

Jake smiled, shifting. "There's enough time before dinner if you want me to take you looking around or if you want to nap."

"I wouldn't mind looking around." he smiled.

"Cool," Jake said as he stood up and stretched. "I'll take you by that shop I mentioned and show you a few of the other shops in town."

"Okay!" Vincent said, excited.

Jake nodded, leading the way. He took Vincent to the small trinket shop first, smiling at the building as they entered. It had key chains, small statues, toys, and more all over the store. Vincent smiled, excited as he found a couple of statues and other things to buy. Jake smiled, blushing when a young man with a muscular build, tanned skin, and dark hair walked past them. "That's the son,"
he said softly to Vincent.

Vincent rose a brow. "Wow... I... I see what you mean," he breathed out lowly.

Jake nodded, watching as the man came back to them a few minutes later. He gave a small half smile to them, green eyes bright. "Good to see you again Jake, are you and your new friend finding everything alright?"

Vincent smiled at him. "Yes, thank you. This is a lovely shop," he smiled, holding out a hand. "I'm Vincent."

"It's nice to meet you, Vincent. I'm Michael," he introduced, flashing a bigger smile. "I'm glad you like our shop."

Vincent blushed faintly. "It's really amazing. I like collecting things like these so I'm happy Jake showed me this place."

Michael smiled and nodded. "Well, it is what we specialize in! My family makes all of these trinkets. Do you have any types that are your favorites? I could show you where we keep that type."

"I like the more odd ones. Or anything with bats or dragons on it," he said, chuckling.

"We have a whole selection of dragons over this way," Michael said while leading him to a shelf. "Feel free to see if you like any of them."

Vincent smiled, spotting a couple he liked. Jake smiled until Michael was gone, sighing. "I was telling the truth, wasn't I?"

Vincent smirked at him. "Yes, but... Jake I think there are no adequate words to describe that man," he sighed. "Let me guess, straight with a stunning girlfriend?"

"No... Try bisexual and with an uncertain relationship status."

Vincent rose a brow and smirked. "Oh?"

Jake chuckled. "Acquiring a new target?" he teased.

Vincent chuckled. "Maybe," he teased back. "It wouldn't hurt..."

Jake smirked. "Do try to leave some of the good-looking men for the rest of us," he teased.

Vincent laughed. "I really don't think I stand a chance against you if you decided to try." he admitted.

"No, you're chances are better than mine. I've noticed he mostly goes out with people with black hair. No idea why."

"I think looks would win out over a hair color, Jake." Vincent said seriously.

Jake paused. "You're more muscular, you have flawless skin, awesome eyes, and are a good height. You look better."

Vincent gave him a blank stare. "I'm much too pale, my eyes are freaky, and I'm taller than most boys my age." he said. "I'm quite average in looks anyways." he shrugged, being honest.
"Your eyes are awesome! And being pale isn't anything bad."

Vincent rose a brow. "They are red..." he pointed out. "Naturally. It's weird."

"It's cool! Red's an awesome color."

"Yes, but not really for eyes," he said, shrugging.

Jake frowned. "Well... I think your eyes are cool," he offered.

Vincent smiled at that. "Really?"

"Yeah. It suits you, too. All mysterious and cool."

"You think I'm mysterious and cool?" he rose a brow.

"Well, yeah. You're from a foreign country, you're amazing with guns and survived more than I'd expect anyone else to, you're proving yourself quickly in the SOLDIER program," Jake began to list off.

Vincent began to blush, holding up his hands. "Okay! I-I get it!" he chuckled.

Jake chuckled at the reaction. "Seriously, I think you have a good chance."

Vincent smirked. "Well I'll defiantly try."

Jake grinned. "Go ahead, I'll just stay back and let you flirt."

Vincent chuckled, thanking him and approaching Michael again.

Michael smiled. "Did you like the dragons?" he asked.

Vincent smiled. "I did thank you." he said, shifting. "Um... I-I was wondering if you were free after your shift is done?"

"I am, would you like me to show you around town?" he grinned.

"I'd love that." Vincent smiled.

"I get off in two hours, want to meet up here in that time?"

"O-oh! Yes." Vincent smiled, face flushing a little.

Michael winked at him as he turned to head for the back of the shop. "See you then," he said with a grin.

Vincent's blush brightened as he went back to Jake. "So... I have a sort of tour date in two hours," he said. "I... think I might need better clothes..."

Jake grinned. "I'll take you shopping real fast, then."

Vincent chuckled. "Thanks. I... honestly wasn't expecting him to say yes."

"Why not? You're mysterious and new."

Vincent laughed. "True."
Jake laughed, letting Vincent buy his knick-knacks before taking him to a local tailor to shop for clothes. Vincent bought a few pairs of pants and some new shirts and shoes as well, usually asking Jake for fashion advice. Jake was more than happy to give the advice, smiling. Vincent smiled when they were finished. "Red and black look good on you," Jake noted.

Vincent smiled. "Really?"

"Yes. It just suits you."

Vincent smiled. "Thanks."
"No problem," Jake grinned and gave a chuckle, leading the way back for the date.
Chapter Twelve

Chapter Notes

SORRY THIS IS LATER THAN USUAL!!!! A lot of stuff happened!! Im kind 'Eh" about this chapter but I hope you enjoy it anyways!!!

Chapter 12

Jake waited at his house as Vincent went on his date, smiling when he saw Vincent return. "How'd things go?" he asked, looking up from the book he'd been reading.

"Great!" Vincent smiled. "It was a little awkward at first, but it ended well."

"That's good. See things going anywhere with him?"

"Maybe... I'm not sure," he said. "We clicked, but I think a few more dates would help."

Jake chuckled at that. "Guess you're less average than you thought, huh?"

Vincent chuckled. "I suppose."

Jake nodded before deciding it best to change the subject. "We're about to start family game night, do you want to join?"

"I'd love to, if I'm welcome." Vincent smiled.

"Of course you're welcome! We're going to play poker."

Vincent smiled. "Great!"

Jake nodded, standing up to stretch before calling out to his family that Vincent was back. "Mom made some snacks for tonight, so dig in to anything that looks good if you want."

"Thank you," Vincent smiled.

"No problem," Jake chuckled. Game night lasted hours and Vincent learned quickly that Jake's mother was highly skilled at the game, beating her children easily.

Vincent smiled, being pretty good himself at the game.

Jake chuckled as he folded his hand. "You two are just too good at this," he joked.

"We should switch to a board game after this," one of his sisters added with a smile.

Vincent smiled. "Sounds fun."

The girl got up to look through their games, finding a trivia game to play and one based around SOLDIER, that game seemed popular as it helped recruit new people by making the program look good.
Vincent rose a brow. "Really?" he smirked.
"What? It's a fun game," the girl defended.
"True, but you'll be playing against two SOLDIERS." he chuckled.
She stuck her tongue out at him. "I bet I can do better than you," he teased.
Vincent chuckled. "Well we shall see about that!" he teased back.
The girl smiled, setting up the game board so they could start.
Vincent smiled, letting her.
The game had a spinner, its board, and classic SOLDIER icons as the game pieces.
"Ready to get beat?" he teased.
"You wish," the girl laughed.
Vincent chuckled. "We'll see."
The girls knew a surprising amount about the trivia being asked. Most of the questions were culture type ones, things that SOLDIER didn't mind civilians knowing. This ranged from uniform designs to favorite foods or colors of the top faces of the program, when the program was founded to why it was so important for the community to support the program.
Vincent smiled, impressed with their knowledge.
"We all followed this stuff as kids. We were constantly glued to the TV any time stuff about the program came on," Jake laughed.
Vincent smiled. Then I suppose you have your dream job?" he asked Jake.
Jake laughed. "Yeah, kind of," he admitted.
Vincent smiled. "That's great!"
"What about you? What made you interested in joining?"
He shifted. "Well...back in Wutai I was actually in the Wutainian Rebellion...when I moved here...well it seemed fitting to join. Wutai isn’t being run right with it's current King."
"Did you know anything about SOLDIER before joining?" Jake asked, curious.
"A little. I did a couple months of research when I moved here before joining. Mostly at libraries and internet cafes."
"That's good. I'm surprised you didn't get bombarded with posters and dolls like the rest of us."
"Well...they were informed I had no where to put such things." he said softly.
"It could've been wherever he was living. They randomly send promotions out to every house in certain cities," one of the sisters, Maria, spoke up. "And there are stores for the dolls."
Vincent shifted. "The... um... the only place I have that equals a house or living space is my room at SOLDIER...." he admitted. "Which I didn't have until I finally signed up and got accepted to
train."

"Oh, honey," Jake's mother began. "Do you want to live with us? I can make up the top bunk in
Jake's room for you so you have somewhere to stay when you're allowed to leave the base."

Vincent flushed. "I wouldn't want to impose..."

"It wouldn't be imposing," the woman assured with a smile. "You're a friend of Jake's and the way
he talks about you, well you might as well be family!"

Vincent blushed and smiled softly. "Thank you."

"You're welcome dear," the woman smiled.

"Is it alright if I ask what Wutai is like?" Jake's youngest sister, Nina, asked.

Vincent smiled. "Generally, It's a lovely place. Very attached to their customs and probably a bit
'Old-Fashioned' to anyone outside of the country. The main part, the one that everyone sees, is
filled with little houses and shops. The King's palace is there, too. It used to be that everything but
the palace itself was open to the public, but this King has closed off most of it. Then there are the
slums, which actually aren't as bad as the ones here, but still horrible. The people are closer there,
though." he smiled as he continued to explain customs and celebrations that went on there. Jake's
family were all interested in his explanations, eager to learn more about him. Vincent smiled,
happy about their interest.

Jake smiled as his family spoke before deciding to ask his own question. "So, how did you get here
from Wutai anyway?"

"My friend's father owned a boat company. Helped me get a ticket and sail to here." he said. "I
honestly didn't think past getting away from Wutai... which is why I have no place to stay."

"Well, now that you're part of SOLDIER then perhaps they can get you into classes of some kind?
Further your knowledge for jobs after the program, incase the war ends or you stay there so long
that you get to retire," Jake's mother smiled.

"I never really thought of that. It's a good idea, though....I'm only seventeen so I still have some
things to learn."

"I'm not sure how good it is, but I overheard some of the higher ups discussing a literacy program,
sort of like a book club. One of them wants to ask those in charge if we can get a small library,"
Jake smiled. "I think a library would be awesome to help with the boredom. Maybe some basic
strategy games like chess, too."

"That would be great! Maybe I could ask the General about it?"

Jake smiled. "It'll help with teaching people how to do battle strategies, too, if we have stuff like
chess to actively practice with each day."

Vincent nodded. "Great idea!"

His mother chuckled. "You boys must not have a lot to do there, hmm?"

"Not really." Vincent admitted.

"Hmm... I'll donate some board games the next time they ask for gifts, I'm sure all of you boys will
get use out of them."

"That would be lovey, thank you." Vincent smiled.

"You're more than welcome, young man. I want all of you to be able to focus and you can't do that
if you're bored out of your mind," the woman chuckled.

He laughed. "That's true."

"Do you like being part of the SOLDIER program so far, dear?"

"I do. I've had some... difficulties." he said, left arm twitching. "But all in all It's not bad."

Jake noticed the twitching and frowned. "Do you want to take the prosthetic off? You can if it's
bothering you."

"Umm... If nobody minds... The mesh helps... but I've had it on all day and I'm still not used to
that."

"We don't mind at all, dear, do whatever makes you most comfortable," Jake's mother said softly.

Vincent smiled and thanked them, still a little embarrassed as he took off the arm. Jake's mother
smiled at him gently. "I'm going to get everyone drinks, what would you like dear?"

"Soda is fine." he smiled softly.

The woman's smile grew as she stood, getting him a bottle and bringing it out with everyone's tea.
"I'm glad you're enjoying your stay here so far."

"Yes it's wonderful!" Vincent smiled, having no problem opening the bottle.

"Oh, Jake, you should take him shopping for decorations! Make the room feel more home-like
since he'll be living with us when not on base now."

Jake chuckled. "Sure, mom. I'll take him tomorrow."

Vincent smiled. "That would be wonderful!"

"Do you want any memorabilia from SOLDIER? There's a little shop around here with calendars
and stuff with the generals on them. There's even Sephiroth dolls and plush toys."

Vincent managed to hide his blush, giving a subtle half glare to Jake. "I'm... not quite sure what the
General would think of me having a plushie of him." he chuckled.

"I'm sure he won't say anything, you can keep it in your bedroom. Besides, it's not like you're the
only person to own one. He's the most popular SOLDIER ever," he chuckled.

"That's true." Vincent chuckled back.

"I bet you every other member has a poster or action figure of him," Jake teased.

"Do you?" Vincent asked, curious.

"I don't... I have Genesis and Zack, though."

"I can understand Zack, as he is kind and awesome, but... Genesis? Really?" Vincent rose a brow.
"I got it for free with the Zack figure," Jake shrugged.

"Huh. Okay." he smirked. "I'd think they'd give away and Angeal one with Zack, since he's always tailing the Commander like a puppy."

"It was a mystery pack," Jake chuckled. "I honestly was surprised Zack was in it, I was expecting Angeal more than him. Anyway, I bought one of those combo mystery packs of miniature figurines and the two that just happened to be in it was those two. I was hoping to get an Angeal or Sephiroth, truthfully."

"Maybe I can buy us a couple? I haven't had much to use my salary on so I have a good amount saved up."

Jake chuckled. "That would be great."

Vincent smiled. "Then we have a plan."

Jake chuckled. "There's a little shop down the road that sells Wutai decorations, too, if you want fans or anything."

"That would be nice." he smiled.

The rest of the night was spent playing various games. Jake was smiling when they went back to his room later. "So... how did you like your first day here?"

"It was amazing." he smiled.

Jake chuckled. "I'm glad. Do you want the top bunk or the bottom one?" he asked while changing into his pajamas.

"Umm... The top," he said.

Jake nodded, climbing into the bottom bunk with a smile. "Hope you sleep well."

"You too. And thank you for everything."

"Hey, you don't need to thank me. You're family now."

Vincent smiled. "Hey, Can I ask you something?"

"Sure, ask anything!" Jake smiled.

"Why are you afraid to tell your parents about being gay? They seem like they would be accepting," he asked softly.

"I'm... not really afraid, I just don't want to make a big deal out of it. Knowing my mom, she probably already has suspicions. If she thinks I have a crush, though, she'll try to set me up and not let go of trying to help me with dating tips."

Vincent chuckled lightly. "It does seem like she'd do that."

Jake chuckled. "Just wait until she learns you have a crush."

"On Michael or the General?" he joked.

"Either. She will do everything she can to help you out."
He laughed. "I don’t need that much help, do I?" he rose a brow. "And I don’t think she can help with the General... what would she do? Write a letter?"

"Knowing her, she'd flood you with posters of him."

Vincent laughed. "I might like that actually."

"Hey, it's your risk to take. I won't get involved."

He laughed. "I'll just wait to see if she notices."

"Good choice," Jake chuckle as he yawned and rolled over to get some sleep. The next morning they were woken early by Jake's mother, she'd made breakfast already and had plans for the day to ensure Vincent got to see most of their little town. Vincent smiled, unused to it but happy.

Pancakes were waiting for them downstairs with syrup and fruit. "I hope this is alright, dear," Jake's mother said with a smile.

"It's amazing," he smiled. "Thank you."

"You're welcome, dear. I'm glad you like it," she said gently.

Jake smiled as he walked over and sat beside Vincent. "She'll spoil you with food."

Vincent chuckled. "No objections."

"So, what do you want to check out first? There's a small fair going on during this time of year, there's shops, and a few other things."

"I'd like to look for some decorations for my room back at Shin-Ra if you don't mind."

"That's fine. We'll shop for those first, then just explore," Jake smiled.

Vincent smiled. "Okay."

Jake ate quickly so he could get dressed. He walked with Vincent to a little shop with several Wutai decorations. Vincent smiled, looking around, loving the fact that the items were authentic. "See anything you like?" Jake asked. Vincent found a couple of figurines and posters that he liked.

"What about a lantern or two?"

"Yeah. I could get one." he smiled.

Jake picked up one made to look like a dragon. "What about this one?"

Vincent smiled. "Oh! I like this one!"

Jake chuckled, setting it in the little basket. "We're getting it, then." Vincent chuckled, picking out a few more things happily.

"Your room is going to look awesome now."

"It is." he chuckled. "Thank you."

"Do you want some fans, too?"

"I could get some, but I think after that my room, or at least the walls, will be full."
"Hmm... true... what about some book ends instead? I know you love to read."

"Sure!"

"They have some that are dragons or you could go with simpler designs."

He smirked. "I'll stick to dragons," he said. Jake chuckled, getting the book ends. "Want to stop somewhere nearby and grab something to eat?" Vincent asked next asked.

"Sure! There's a little diner nearby, they have good food."

Vincent smiled. "Let's go then." The diner was small, decorated with older SOLDIER posters and a few old newspaper articles. It had a tiny radio on one side, booths and tables, and a bar. The menu was simple: hamburgers, fries, hot dogs, pizza, and the like. "This is a nice place." Vincent smiled.

Jake smiled. The rest of their time off was spent in a similar fashion, with Jake's family showing Vincent everything they could think of. Before they knew it, it was time to return to Shin-Ra and their dorms. They were one of the first groups to get back, though something felt... off when they returned. "This place is creepy without everyone here..." Jake muttered.

Vincent frowned. "I know..." he said, looking around. "It's... unsettling."

"Maybe we should just... get our rooms sorted," Jake suggested nervously, giving a tiny laugh. "The others should be showing up later tonight or sometime tomorrow, right?"

"Yeah..." he nodded. "Um... meet down here when we're done if no ones back yet?"

Jake nodded. "Yeah, good idea."

Vincent went to his room, setting up the things he bought and putting away the clothes. He sighed, looking around and agreeing that it was eerily creepy while abandoned. He could hear the building creaking around him, echoes sounding from empty halls. Sitting still, he could faintly hear what sounded like footsteps down the hall from him, far from where Jake would be. Vincent frowned, pausing and listening to see if he could tell who it was. The steps were heavy and quick, the person was running. Vincent decided to see who it was, worried. He could see Adams turning a corner to keep running away from him, the commander not spotting Vincent as he kept going. He was speaking into a radio as he ran by, a noise sounding from the other end of the hall where he was running to. In the distance was one of the weaker, but fast, abominations that the lab had made. It had to of escaped while everyone was on holiday, so Adams was now trying to catch it on his own quickly before anyone got back. Vincent frowned, returning to his room to grab his gun and follow the man.

"I can see it three yards ahead!" Adams yelled into his radio. "Please tell me you guys have a container ready for this damned thing."

"What's going on?" Vincent called as he got close.

Adams blinked at seeing him. "Vincent?! It's one of the weaker creatures, some engineered animal."

"Can I help?" he asked.

"Yes, go around and try to cut the thing off! If you take this right and I go left we should be able to corner it."

Vincent nodded, moving to do so cautiously.
"It's small, but quick," Adams warned.

"Thanks for the notice." he nodded.

Adams nodded and rushed off. The creature in question looked almost like a spider, though it had a strange snake-like head and kept hissing as it tried to escape. Vincent inwardly shuddered as he herded it, hoping to trap it either between him and Adams or him and a wall. It screeched at him in response, running forward and screeching louder when it found itself in a corner. Vincent reached out with his prosthetic arm, catching it quickly. It began to lash out and screech loudly, trying to attack him but only hitting the metal of his arm. Adams rushed over at hearing the noise, radioing that the creature was restrained. "We're getting a cage for it!"

He nodded and smiled. "At least this has come in use." he said, gesturing too his prosthetic.

Adams nodded, looking up as a scientist he was working with ran towards them with a container. "I'm glad you got back early, I was the only person from our unit here other than Smiths, and he's still out of commission," Adams explained.

Vincent smiled, placing the thing into the container. "I'm glad I could help." he said.

The scientist took a deep breath, getting the container shut tight. "At least it wasn't a big one. That would've been scary. Would you two mind escorting me down to put it back? In case it tries to escape again?"

Vincent nodded. "Sure."

The scientist smiled, leading Vincent and Adams down. Adams sighed. "I've been chasing that thing for at least twelve hours now."

Vincent looked shocked. "Really?! How long has it been out? And are there anymore?"

"There aren't any more that are free," the scientist assured. "But it was out for a long while. It's quick, so every time we tried to catch it, it ran off," he added with a frown. "The thing jumped onto the ceiling at one point and started knocking things off the shelves at me," Adams sighed.

"I'm glad I managed to corner it then." he said, surprised. As they talked he hadn't noticed that they had gone deep within the lab. He stopped to look around, almost freezing, heart starting to race as he started to panic as memories hit him, grabbing his arm.

The scientist paused. "Are you alright?" he asked Vincent with a frown.

Vincent took a deep breath. "Y-Yeah... I'm fine..."

Adams frowned, keeping an eye on his friend. "It's been a long time since you've been down here... do you want to go back up?"

He shook his head. "N-no. It'll be fine." he said.

"Vincent, you don't have to stay down here if you don't want to."

He gave a sigh. "I need to get over this sooner or later," he said softly. "Besides, It's not a bad panic attack."

Adams frowned and gave a sigh. "Alright, if you feel you can continue. Stay close."

He nodded. "I will."
Adams nodded, starting to walk with the scientist again deeper into the lab. Vincent followed slowly, trying to keep calm. Their footsteps echoed through the abandoned halls, leading them in a maze. Soon they were in the same area where Vincent's arm had began to melt, some of the creatures shifting around in their cages further down the hall. Coming near the spot, Vincent's body froze as visions of what happened flashed through his mind.

He grabbed at his arm, heart starting to race as he sunk to his knees, breathing harshly, blind to everything but the memories. He didn’t see that no one had noticed, leaving Vincent alone in the room. Vincent was having trouble calming down, eventually getting too worked up. He blinked, noticing that the others were gone, trying to call out but unable to as he began to feel faint. He started to fall and pass out, everything around him turning into a black nothingness.
UPDATE AND WARNING!!!!

I would like to warn everyone that it might be a while before Chapter 13 of LFD (Or any story) will come out or be updated because I will be losing my internet next month. I apologize deeply. I'll still try to get it up (via Apps) But there is no guarantee. Thank you for being patient with me! I love you all!!!
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Okay so despite the warning I will have internet next month so Yay! On the other hand I am getting ready for a move...not so much yay. I'll be sure to update on time though XD Thank you for staying with me for this ride!

Chapter 13

Vincent woke up alone in an unfamiliar room. The walls were a dark grey, the hall quiet and lights dimly flickering above. He was in a medical cot. He groaned, closing his eyes again for a moment before trying to sit up. The walls were bare here. His prosthetic had been removed and sat on a table across from him, his shoes setting in the corner of the room. He groaned, moving to stand and get his arm. Everything was eerily quiet. He could see two doors, one to his left that probably lead to the hall and one to the right that lead to another room. Putting his arm and shoes on, he cautiously went to the left door, opening it. The halls showed he was in the lab, further in it than when he'd fainted. Vincent frowned, slowly walking around to look. He was deep inside the lab, among the private offices of the various head scientists.

Vincent frowned, looking at some of the paperwork on the desk. From the notes he had wondered into Hojo's office. Most of the notes were about Sephiroth and his mother. Vincent frowned as he read them.

"Ah, you weren't supposed to be awake yet," a voice spoke up behind him calmly.

Vincent jumped and turned to see who was there.

Dr. Hojo was standing at the door calmly, gun pointed at Vincent's chest. "You really shouldn't go through people's private notes."

Vincent's eyes widened as he tried to stay calm. "Why was I left in your office to start with? And what did you do to my arm?"

"I brought you here when I found you unconscious in the hallway," the scientist shrugged, speaking calmly. "And what are you accusing me of doing to your arm? I simply removed the prosthetic so it wouldn't get damaged if you started to move unconsciously."

Vincent's eyes narrowed. "I'm speaking of before I lost it. You were the first to examine it. It was fine, and then later it's melting off of me. What did you do to it?"

"I didn't do anything. We hadn't had anyone get poisoned by that creature yet, so the anti-venom was experimental. It must not have worked as we originally thought it had."

Vincent glared, shaking his head. "So now you're going to kill me?"

"You know too much," Hojo stated, pulling the trigger. Vincent's eyes widened as he stood, frozen to the spot, as the bullet flew into his chest. He fell back, looking up at his killer as his vision slowly went out.
Above ground, people had noticed he was missing. Adams had informed the rest of his squad that he'd gone down to the labs and disappeared, so the group would know to keep an eye out for him. Nursing personal were told to keep an eye on all patients coming in in case he showed up on the list. Jake and Marcus discussed the disappearance with each other, hoping he was alright. One day of him being gone caused mild worry, three made everyone question security protocol. By a week people were wondering if Vincent was even alive. It was a month later that, on another clearing out the labs mission, Adams and Sephiroth found a very disoriented and seemingly half-conscious Vincent walking around. It looked like he had been attacked by various different creatures, though his prosthetic seemed to be fine, if not slightly dented. His eyes were dazed, not really seeming to focus on them, though he was looking directly at them.

Adams frowned, walking over to him. "Vincent? Can you hear me?" he asked, waving his hand in front of Vincent's face gently. He was grateful to see him, but was worried. Sephiroth took his radio out of his pocket and began to call some doctors down, informing them that they'd found Vincent.

Vincent's eyes followed the hand, yet they seemed unfocused. [i]"You're not real..." he said in Wutainian.

Adams frowned at that, not understanding. "What?" he gently reached out to touch Vincent. "Where have you been so long?"

Vincent flinched, eyes going wide. "NO!" he cried out, stepping back.

Anders frowned at that, looking back at Sephiroth. "Mr. Valentine seems disoriented and doesn't seem to see what's around him. He's acting fearful of coworkers and mumbled something about us not being real in his native language," the general reported to the medical staff who were on their way. He took a step forward, putting a hand on Adam's shoulder to make him step back before he tried speaking. He didn't know a lot of Wutainian, but he hoped he could speak enough to help Vincent feel at ease. "Help is on the way, Vincent. We're not going to harm you."

Vincent tilted his head at the familiar language, seeming to calm a little. "It's just another hallucination... I'll just wake up in the dark again... with the pain..." he mumbled.

Sephiroth shifted, trying to coax Vincent to the wall. "Here, sit down and wait for help. You're going to be fine," he said softly before looking at Adams. "Ask the medical team where they are."

The team was about three minutes away and Vincent would switch from mumbling in Wutainian to just staring as if not seeing anything. The doctors frowned when they arrived, gently moving him into a wheel chair and strapping his hands down to it before taking him up to the medical ward. The minute his hand were strapped down, Vincent began to panic, struggling to free himself. "Shh, calm down, this is just to keep you from hurting yourself," one of the nurses stated, giving him a mild sedative. Vincent went limp when the medicine started to work, eyes glazing over as he stared ahead.

He was taken upstairs to the infirmary and placed in a bed, the nurses starting to get him on fluids for dehydration and check his vitals while they waited for a doctor to get in and check the strange injuries they saw. The doctor stated that most of the wounds were from the experiments down there, though some were identifiable claw marks. He paused when he got to the bullet wound. "General... can you confirm the type of wound this is for me. And the location."

Sephiroth looked over and frowned. "It's a bullet near the heart..." he noted. "It must've barely missed the vital points if he's still alive... it might still be lodged inside of him."
"I thought so too, but..." he pointed to faint scaring on Vincent's chest. "That resembles and autopsy scar... You can't do that if someone is alive... Yet this young man's heart is beating fine. And the results from his blood work came back like nothing is wrong."

Sephiroth frowned. "Odd... Keep an eye on him for now, try to make him stable."

He nodded. "Of course, Sir." he said. It was a few days before Vincent fully regained consciousness, having been going in and out of it, mostly to mumble things that didn't make sense.

Adams was there when he woke up, frowning and leaning over to check on him. "Vincent? Can you hear me?" he asked softly, seeing him move around. He'd do this every time Vincent moved, hoping to get him to recognize his voice or face.

"A-Adams?" Vincent got out, his throat dry. "W-where am I?"

"Oh, good. You're coherent... You're in the infirmary, do you remember anything?"

"We... were returning that...thing... that escaped. I know I started to have a panic attack and... and then I blacked out..." he said, twitching as his head started to hurt.

"Alright, don't push yourself. I'll get General Sephiroth and he doctors."

"H-how long have I been here?" he asked.

"About a week... You were missing for a month before that."

His eyes widened. "A-A month?!"

"Yes, you've been missing a month..."

His face paled a little, and he closed his eyes on a sudden dizzy spell.

"Just stay still for now, we're going to help you," Adams promised, calling the others.

"B-but a month?!" he breathed.

"I know, it's shocking. Try relaxing for right now."

Vincent nodded, trying to take deep breathes to calm down.

"You're safe now. No one can get you."

He nodded. "I-I don't remember anything...." he frowned. "Not after the panic attack."

Adams nodded, watching the doctors and Sephiroth walk in. "You seem to be much more stable now," Sephiroth noted as he walked over.

"Does... does anyone know what happened?" he asked, flinching as a vague memory of reading something with the General's name in it flashed quickly through his mind before it was gone again.

"Not really," Sephiroth admitted. "For right now we'll focus on helping you get better and get back to walking around. After that we can focus on what happened."

He nodded slowly, taking a breath. "Right."

"You show signs of being attacked... does anything hurt?"
"Everything... but that could be because I'm strapped down." he said.

Sephiroth nodded. "We had to do that because you weren't acting like yourself. Do you have any memory of Adams and me finding you?"

"No." he said, shaking his head.

Sephiroth frowned, but gave a nod. "You were speaking in your native language... you mentioned us not being real and were delirious."

He frowned. "I don’t remember any of that. I remember having a panic attack and passing out. Then waking up here."

Everyone nodded, the doctor walking forward and checking all of his vitals. "You do seem stable, we'll undo the straps for now and get you some broth."

Vincent nodded. "Thank you," he said.

A nurse quickly finished with the straps while the doctor checked Vincent's vitals and his eyes. "Alright, we'll give you time to rest and get some broth. Do you need anything for pain?"

"No... I feel kind of numb actually." he said.

The doctors frowned at that. "Can you move?"

Vincent nodded, shifting his arms and legs "I can but... I can't really feel it... If that makes sense."

"It might be from not moving much while you were out of it. We'll start you on physical therapy, see if things start to wake up."

He sighed a little but nodded. "Alright."

"Do you feel nauseous at all?"

"Not right now." he said.

The doctor nodded, helping Vincent sit up to finish taking his vitals. "Everything seems in order other than you not feeling anything. I've just got done checking your body's reactions and it still reacts to pain and negative stimuli, you're just not feeling it," he noted, showing the pin he'd been gently poking Vincent with as they talked. "I'll get some prescriptions ready incase pain starts to come back and get you started on physical therapy. In the mean time we'll get all these tubes out of you so you just have the I.V.’s, and the nurse can help you drink your broth."

He nodded. "Alright. Thank you.."

Sephiroth and Adams left with the doctor, the nurse bringing Vincent's broth over to help him drink from the mug gently.

Vincent did, only getting about half of it down.

"There, don't push yourself too far," she said softly. "How do you feel? Anything you want or need?"

"I'm okay right now. I may sleep a little more... But if there are nay books for later, Maybe?" he said softly.
The nurse nodded, smiling. "I'll bring some to your room. Any kind you prefer?"

"Fantasy or mystery." he smiled.

"Alright, I'll find some books in those genres for you."

He smiled. "Thank you." he said, holding back a yawn. She nodded, running off to get the books happily. Vincent closed his eyes, falling asleep quickly. He awoke to a stack of books on the nightstand along with some flowers. At the foot of his bed a nurse was checking his chart while adjusting his IV to ensure it was giving him the correct dosage of all his medications. Vincent smiled at that, rubbing his eyes to wake up more.

The woman spotted him and gave a gentle smile. "Did you sleep well, dear?"

He nodded. "I did, thank you."

"Good to hear, is there anything I can do for you?"

Maybe some more broth?" he asked.

She nodded. "I'll go get you some, would you like some juice or water with it?"

"Some juice." he said.

She nodded. "I'll get you some apple juice, then," she smiled as she left. Five minutes later she was back with a glass of juice and a mug of broth. "Do you need help drinking?"

"No. I think I can do it on my own." he smiled.

"Alright dear," she sat the call button close to him, so he'd need little effort to push it. "If you need me just press this button and I'll come tend to you," she explained before getting his tray set up and leaving. Vincent smiled, slowly drinking the broth and juice. It took a while, but he eventually finished it.

The nurse checked on him a while later to take the empty plates away. "Would you like me to bring you some water, dear?"

He nodded. "Yes, thank you."

"I'll go get that for you dear. How is your pain by the way? It's almost time for your medicine."

"The only things that are hurting is where my left arm was and my chest... but yes... I think I'll take the medicine now," he said.

The woman nodded and walked away. She came back thirty minutes later with a large thing of water with a straw to set on the nightstand. She then went to his IV, getting his pain medicine ready and injecting it for him. Vincent thanked her, falling asleep not long after. She smiled at him sleeping, going to tend to other things. He woke up to Sephiroth waiting for him to wake up.

Vincent blinked. "General?"

"Ah, you're awake. How are you feeling?"

"A little better. I'm not so numb but... that means I'm slowly starting to feel pain. There's a lot in my chest... I'm a little worried." he said.
"You have a lot of scarring on your chest... it appears you were shot there."

Vincent paused. "I was... shot? But... I-I don't remember..." he trailed off, a headache starting with his confusion.

"Don't try to remember... it might be too traumatic to think about when you're still so injured," Sephiroth assured. "Do you want to sit up?"

He nodded. "Y-yes, please." he said after taking a few breaths to calm down.

Sephiroth walked over, helping him sit and looking him over. "Is that easier?"

"It is," he nodded before frowning. "There's a huge black hole in my mind between my panic attack and waking up here," he said. "Adams said that I was speaking in Wutainian and mumbling that you two weren't real when you guys found me but... I don't remember any of that. And I'm sure I'd remember getting shot..." he frowned. He moved to try and look at the wounds on his chest, paling when he saw the autopsy scar. "Is... is that... w-what I think that is....?"

Sephiroth sighed and gave a nod. "It is."

His eyes widened. "H-How... you... you aren't supposed to be a-alive for those... h-how did... wh-who..." His breathing started to quicken as he started to panic, shaking.

"Calm down," Sephiroth said gently, leaning over him and grabbing his face to meet his eyes and help him focus on something.

Vincent met his eyes, slowly focusing on them as his breathing eventually calmed. His eyes still looked pained and confused, though the panic wasn't there. "What happened to me?" he barely whispered.

"We don't know yet, but we're working to find out," Sephiroth assured. "Do you trust me?"

"Yes," he answered without hesitating. He was calming down but the pain was starting up. He was trying to hide it.

Sephiroth nodded. "It is fine to admit that you're in pain. I'll ask the nurse to come give you a dosage of medicine. After that we can continue speaking, alright?"

Vincent flushed but nodded. "O-Okay."

Sephiroth made the call before sitting down to wait. "Other than the pain... does anything feel off or abnormal?"

"I'm having weird dreams. About monsters or demons... They keep happening. And when I wake up my chest hurts more and my body aches." he frowned. "And... I'm not sure if I'm hearing voices... or hallucinating... it's never in a language I understand and never happens for long... I feel like I'm going crazy."

Sephiroth nodded. "Alright, what... do these monsters look like? Can you remember?"

"Only one stands out in my memory. It's... bat-like... yet Human like at the same time. A purple-ish color... golden eyes... I... I can't remember much else. I think I get flashes of three others... a purple beast... a... thing with a mask... something that looks like multiple people stitched together..." he shuddered. "It's frightening...."
Sephiroth frowned, nodding. "I... think I have an idea of what's going on."

Vincent blinked. "Y-You do?!"

"I'll need time to prove if it's what I think or not... for now don't focus on it. I'll ask the nurses to give you a sedative at night so you can sleep through the nightmares. As for the voices... do they sound like they're trying to talk to you or threaten you in anyway?"

"I'm not sure if it is to threaten, but definitely to talk to me. I just don't understand them."

Sephiroth nodded. "If I handed you paper... do you think you could write down some of the thing you heard? What it sounded like?"

"M-maybe? I'm not sure. I can try." he said.

Sephiroth handed him a small journal and pen. "Don't push yourself too hard and don't get upset if you can't make anything out," he offered.

Vincent nodded, writing down the one sentence he could make out. It said: "Nunc hospes meus es tu" He frowned, unable to read it but handed it to Sephiroth.

Sephiroth frowned, understanding the phrase. "Alright, try to just relax for now. I'll go get you a treat."

Vincent nodded and paused. "Do... you know what it means? You don't have to tell me the meaning, but do you know it?"

Sephiroth nodded. "I do. It isn't a threat, at least, though it... or they are trying to communicate."

He nodded, a bit more relieved. "I was... changed somehow, wasn't I?" he asked softly.

"... Yes," Sephiroth admitted. "Vincent, because of this... new situation, I want you to stay close to me when you get released from the infirmary. Don't go off on your own."

He nodded silently, eyes far off and dazed. "Yes, Sir."

"You're strong. You'll get through this."

Vincent gave a weak smile. "I'll certainly try my best."

"I'll stay with you every step on the way. Let's focus on getting your body better first, then we'll deal with these... demons, for lack of a better comment." He nodded, sighing when the nurse came with his pain medicine. He tried to fight the feeling of sleep coming over him.

Sephiroth noticed and leaned forward, gently combing the hair off of Vincent's face. "Rest. I'll keep you safe."

"You'll stay?" he asked, eyes falling halfway shut at the touch.

"Yes, I'll be keeping watch here. Just get some rest."

Vincent nodded, falling asleep not long after he closed his eyes. Sephiroth was still there when he woke up, though the general was drifting off to sleep in the armchair. "You can go, if you need to." Vincent said, still drowsy.

"Hmm? I don't need to, I'm fine here," the young man assured. "How are you? Did the sedative
keep the nightmares away?"

Vincent nodded. "It did." he said, taking a sip of water.

"Good, I'll ask the doctor to give that to you every night from now on so you can rest more. Is the pain lessening?"

"It's gone right now." he said softly.

"Good," Sephiroth nodded. "Do you need anything?"

"Um... maybe broth? I-I don't want to try solid food yet..." he said softly. Sephiroth nodded, leaving to get a mug full of the broth, bringing it back and handing it to Vincent gently. "Thank you," he said softly, taking it.

"You're welcome," Sephiroth said gently as he sat down again. "Do you feel you'd be safe returning to your dorm when you're better?"

"I... I'm not sure. These nightmares... I know with the last ones I'd wake up screaming and thrashing... and... if there's something inside of me now..." he sighed.

"Don't think about that," Sephiroth offered.

"It's hard not too..." Vincent admitted. "And I try to distract myself... but I just can't find a good enough distraction..." he sighed.

"You'll be fine, I promise. I'm watching over you and nothing can get you."

He smiled. "Thank you for that. Still... perhaps I should have my own room somewhere... or in isolation..." he said the last part quietly.

"You're going to be staying near me, so I can keep an eye on your condition."

"But what if I... What if something happens?" he asked.

"Nothing will. I'll be there to stop any possible incidents."

He nodded slowly, thinking privately about if he ended up hurting Sephiroth himself. Sephiroth continued to stay with him every hour of his time in the infirmary. Once Vincent was better Sephiroth lead him out and up several floors to an area Vincent had never seen before. Vincent looked around, confused. "Sir, Where is this?"

"My apartment."

Vincent blinked. "O-oh... Um... may I ask why?" he asked, confused and a little flustered.

"I'm going to keep an eye on you," he offered.

"Y-You are?" he asked. "B-But aren't you busy?" he asked.

"Not always, this is the best way to ensure you're safe."

"A-alright. Um... will I be doing my work here?"

"Yes. Here or down in the office we were working together before. You don't have any missions for now, though. I want to give you a chance to settle in again and monitor how your chest and
mind are doing."

Vincent nodded. "In all honesty... I don't think I could handle a mission." he admitted.

Sephiroth nodded, stopping in his walk to open a door to the left. It was a decent sized bedroom with a queen bed, nightstand, desk, and attached bathroom. The bed had a crimson canopy on it with black sheets and blankets and was setting on dark wood floors. "This is your room."

"Th-thank you. Um... I'm afraid anything I have at my old dorm isn't that much..."

"I'll have someone bring the items up for you. Do you need any special accommodations for your room?"

"Um... not really... I don't think..." he paused. "My gun... I had it with me when we were returning the experiment. I... don't suppose I had it when you found me?"

"No, you were in tattered clothes and looked delirious... Cid even had to make you a new prosthetic," Sephiroth admitted. "I can ask some of the others to keep an eye out for it, though. I already have them searching for the prosthetic in hopes of discovering what happened to you."

Vincent frowned but nodded. "I-I see."

"We'll find it, I'm sure."

"If anything, I can make a new one but... I... I didn't realize how bad it was... I can't remember anything. I... think I get glimpses but it all goes away quickly..."

"Don't push yourself too hard, I'm sure it will all come back to you in time."

Vincent sighed. "I know...." he said. "Th-thank you. For letting me stay here."

"You don't have to thank me, I am glad to have company here."

"I'll try to be good company." Vincent said, smiling.

Sephiroth nodded and left. He continued on then. The first week was spent settling in, Sephiroth coming to check on him every morning to start the day and then staying close to him throughout it. Every other day he brought books to Vincent's room, trying to fill in the bookcase there so he'd have something to keep him busy.

Vincent was flustered at everything. He would have terrible nightmares that he never remembered, and the voices would continue on and off, that one line being the only thing that stuck in his head.

Sephiroth frowned, ordering more of the sedative for him. "Here," he said after noticing the bags under Vincent's eyes. "This should help you sleep at night."

Vincent blinked. "O-oh... Thank you." he said.

Sephiroth nodded. "How are the voices? Are... they calming down any?"

"Not really... that one sentence I told you stands out and..." he paused. "Sometimes I think I hear a human voice... but it never sticks."

Sephiroth nodded. "Do you think you could make a rough guess at how many voices there are?"

"Five, including the human and the one I always remember." he said. "I know that much."
Sephiroth nodded. "Here, I'll make lunch for us and we can get your mind off of this."

Vincent smiled and nodded. "Alright. Thank you."

Sephiroth nodded, leading him to a small kitchen. He began to cook, making it obvious that he'd been making all of Vincent's meals for the past week.

Vincent blushed a little at that.

"Do you mind salads?"

"Not at all." he said, sitting down.

Sephiroth nodded, starting to get things ready. He was quiet as he worked and as they ate, observing Vincent. "I spoke to Dr. Hojo today," he mused after they'd finished eating.

At hearing the name, Vincent flinched, a sudden headache coming over him. "D-did you?" he managed to say, hiding his pain.

Sephiroth noticed, but didn't comment. "Yes... no one can account for his whereabouts the day you went missing."

Vincent frowned, flashes of things running through his head. Documents. Sephiroth. Hojo. "You know too much now." A gun. Pain. Blackness. His eyes were distant and he didn't notice that his nose was bleeding harshly now.

Sephiroth reacted quickly, leaning his head back and putting a tissue up to catch the blood. "Vincent?" he called. "Vincent!"

After a few more calls of his name, Vincent snapped out of his daze, blinking. "G-General... What happened?"

"You zoned out. Don't move, your nose is bleeding profusely."

Vincent frowned, shocked. "O-Oh...okay."

Sephiroth frowned, helping stop the bleeding before pulling back. "I think you should lay down."

Vincent nodded. "What were we talking about?"

Sephiroth paused, choosing to change the subject. He made a mental note to never bring up such a sensitive topic again as he got Vincent cleaned up and into his office. For the rest of the day he kept a close eye on him, not letting Vincent leave his side.
Chapter 14

It had been almost a month since Vincent got out of the infirmary. Sephiroth had been accompanying him to physical therapy two times a week while having his minions search for any evidence of Hojo's involvement in Vincent's initial disappearance. So far they had found nothing and with each passing day, Vincent's nightmares grew worse. He finally suggested seeing the therapist for help. Sephiroth shifted, looking at him. "Here, I've made an appointment for tomorrow morning. You need the help."

Vincent nodded. "Thank you..." he sighed.

"For tonight, I ordered some slightly stronger sedatives. Hopefully it lets you sleep."

"Thank you... I'm sorry I'm a bother..." he said softly.

"You're not a bother at all, you never asked for any of this."

"Still..." he said.

Sephiroth sat beside him, putting a hand on his shoulder gently. "You have nothing to apologize for. The person who did this to you is responsible."

He nodded. "Right."

Sephiroth handed him the sedative. "Go ahead and take this so it can start working. Get some rest."

"Thank you," he said, taking it.

Sephiroth nodded. He lead Vincent back to his bedroom. Once Vincent was a sleep he went into his room, shifting through security footage from he labs from around where Vincent disappeared and reappeared. It showed when Vincent passed out, Hojo coming onto the screen maybe a half an hour later and smiling, picking Vincent up to bring him into the room that Vincent later woke up in. Later he could see Hojo going into a room and hear a gunshot, just barely, in the audio of the video. Hojo walked out with something in a blanket shortly after and walked back to his personal laboratory. Days went by in the footage before a bat-like, demonic creature Vincent had described busted out. It wondered about the halls, killing any guards who attacked it, before seeming to tired itself out and passing out, slowly transforming into Vincent. He woke up hours later and started to wander once more, running into Sephiroth and Adams.

Because all of the cameras were in the hallways, some of the angles weren't the best. Sephiroth sighed, having watched these videos multiple times. He hadn't seen Vincent change like he did the footage, meaning that there had to be a trigger for it. He stretched, picking up his phone to call one of his special teams and order them to check Hojo's area of the lab for Vincent's gun and prosthetic, tapping into the monitors to watch the team work. The next morning Vincent did his therapy in Sephiroth's apartment, where he was safe, as Sephiroth worked in his room where he could watch but not hear them.

Vincent sat awkwardly with the therapist. "Um... I'm... not quite sure what to do here..." he said, nervous.

"Well," the therapist smiled. "We're here to try and deal with your nightmares, so why don't we
"start there? Just... tell me what happens in them?" the woman suggested with a gentle voice.

"I don’t really remember all of them..." he said. "The ones I do are filled with death and destruction... the bodies are of people I know usually..."

The therapist nodded, making a note of it. "And do you ever see monsters in these dreams? Or an... enemy of some kind?"

"N-No... f-from the point of view in the dreams it's like... It's like... like [i]I[/i] did it." he said softly, frowning deeply.

"Does it feel like you have control during those times or are you just watching as your body moves itself?"

"Just... watching..." he frowned. "I can't do anything."

The woman nodded. "And does this version of you attack the way you do or does it feel different? Move different?"

"Moves different. The movements are stiff... like... like I’m not used to my own body."

"And does this version of you say anything or make any noises?"

"I can't understand the language and the words never stick." he frowned.

The therapist nodded, jotting this down. "Anything else you can remember?"

"None that stay. I'll get flashes, but then my nose will start to bleed and I'll forget. I... I think a name triggers those attacks... but I can't remember it..." He said.

The woman made a note before speaking. "I think that is enough for today. For right now I'm going to hand you a journal. Jot down anything that comes to mind, whether it's that you just woke up and had a dream or that you remember something for a second... it might help gather your thoughts together. I'll come speak to you again in a week."

Vincent nodded, taking the journal. "Thank you."

"You're quite welcome," she smiled as she stood. Sephiroth noticed and walked out of his room to meet up with her. The two talked as he lead her out, the doctor filling the general in on some of her findings. Once she was gone Sephiroth waked back to sit beside Vincent.

"Did the sedatives help last night?" he asked.

"It did." he nodded. "If I dreamed, I don't remember doing so."

Sephiroth nodded. "I can't give any details, but I can assure you I am making progress in our search for who did this to you."

Vincent nodded. "Alright."

"Are you hungry?"

"I am." he nodded.

Sephiroth nodded, going to make them some sandwiches for lunch.
Vincent sighed softly, letting his head fall back and his eyes closed as he tried to remember anything.

Sephiroth noticed, frowning and keeping a close eye on him as he brought their food over. He was preparing himself incase Vincent had another episode from the memories.

Vincent's face twitched a couple of times before he sighed. "I think I remember a room... but... I was in the labs... it could have been the room I was taken to for the first treatment of my arm... It looked similar."

Sephiroth nodded. "Alright, that will help," he said gently as he began to eat. "I think I've gotten a good lead from the security cameras."

Vincent blinked, looking up at him. "So... do you know what happened and who did it?"

"I have an idea of what happened and who was involved, yes. For your safety and health, though, I can't tell you more than that."

Vincent frowned at that. "Is it because of the nose bleeds?"

"Partially, yes."

He nodded. "I know... that it's usually a name that causes it." he admitted. "Or me trying to remember something from after I passed out."

Sephiroth nodded. "We want to keep you from having those..."

"It's why I just stopped trying to remember. I figure it'll happen at some point or not at all." he said softly. "Though the latter bothers me."

"If you don't remember then it is probably for the best."

Vincent frowned. "Is it, in this case?" he asked softly. "I mean... I was... [i]changed.[/i] Into something. Or multiple things... I... I'm so confused..."

"You went through something traumatizing, sometimes it is better not to remember the event to heal the wounds."

"But... something serious like this... if I am changed somehow... shouldn't I know about it?"

"I'll figure out what happened. If you are changing then we'll deal with the changes and find a way to stop them if they're negative, you don't need to remember the trauma you went through to stop this."

Vincent nodded. "O-Okay... Alright." he said softly.

"I'll tell you later tonight if we were able to find your gun," Sephiroth encouraged.

He gave a smile at that. "Thank you." he said.

Sephiroth nodded. "Would you like to get out of this apartment for a while?" he offered.

Vincent blinked but nodded. "Oh. Um...Yes. Yes, that would help."

Sephiroth nodded. "I'm going to town to get supplies and some dinner. Come with me."
Vincent flushed faintly. "O-Oh. Alright."

Sephiroth nodded. "There is a Wutai grill in town... would you like to have dinner there?"

Vincent smiled at that. "O-Oh... Yeah!" he nodded.

Sephiroth gave a small smile and stood, going to get what he needed. "Let's go, then."

Vincent quickly got his things, moving to follow Sephiroth.

Sephiroth lead Vincent out to a black and chrome motorcycle.

Vincent's eyes widened when he saw it. "This is yours?"

"Yes, I've had it for a few years now."

"It's... amazing... and a little intimidating..." Vincent chuckled nervously.

Sephiroth rose an eyebrow as he grabbed his helmet and handed one to Vincent. "What makes it intimidating?"

Vincent blinked. "It's a motorcycle... a vehicle without doors... or any kind of protection... what's not intimidating?"

"Just hold on tight and you'll be fine."

Vincent glanced at the bike. "Hold on to what?" he asked.

"To me," Sephiroth said simply, as if it were obvious. He climbed onto the bike after getting his helmet on, waiting for Vincent to climb on behind him.

Vincent hastily put on the helmet to cover his now rapidly growing blush, getting on and hesitating before putting his hands on Sephiroth's waist, thinking that that would be enough.

Sephiroth sighed, gently grabbing his wrists and pulling Vincent's arms so they were around his waist instead. "You have to hold on tightly or you might fall. Don't worry about holding too tight, you won't hurt me."

Vincent's eyes widened and he took a deep breath, feeling flustered. "Al-alright..." he said, holding onto the man more firmly. Sephiroth started the motorcycle and began to speed off, seeming to not mind how tightly they were being pressed together. Vincent, on the other hand, was tense and nervous, trying not to think about the horribly awkward dreams he could remember. Embarrassingly sexual ones where, though he never saw the face or heard the voice, he knew starred the General.

Sephiroth smiled when they reached their location, stopping the bike and glancing at him. "We're here."

"Ah, Y-yes. I'm fine."

"Did you enjoy it?"

"I... I did." he said, trying not to blush.
"Good," Sephiroth began to lead him towards the restaurant. "We'll eat first, then do the other errands."

"Okay." he said. "Um...what other errands, if I may ask."

"I'm getting some supplies for the apartment and getting what I need to do maintenance on my gear."

He nodded. "Alright."

Sephiroth smiled as he lead Vincent into the restaurant, the place was small but very authentic.

Vincent smiled. "This place looks wonderful!"

"The food is very enjoyable, too."

Vincent's smile brightened as they got their table and menus.

The menus had a variety of foods from his homeland, including some of his favorites.

Vincent smiled happily, ordering them and some tea. "I never thought I'd see these here." he admitted.

"Really?" Sephiroth asked. "Why is that?"

"Authentic Wutainian food has been hard to find outside of Wutai." Vincent said.

"Ah, well this is owned by a small family that moved here from Wutai, they were quite happy to share their culture."

"I'm happy about that." he smiled.

"I'll introduce you to them after we eat. They're very kind."

Vincent nodded, eating happily when their food came.

Sephiroth smiled, starting to eat his meal contently. "Are you adjusting well to your new home?"

"I am. Though I'm not used to people cooking for me." he said.

"Really? Do you usually cook for yourself?"

"Yes. I did it all the time in Wutai." he said.

"We could buy some ingredients for anything you'd like to cook while we're out," Sephiroth suggested with a smile.

Vincent smiled. "That would be nice."

"I look forward to trying your cooking, then," Sephiroth smiled. Vincent gave a small blush at that, continuing to eat. "So, how long have you cooked for yourself?" Sephiroth asked next.

"I started with simple things when I was five." he said.

"Do you have a dish that is your favorite to make by now?"

Vincent thought for a moment. "Rice noodles and veggies." he said.
Sephiroth nodded, smiling. "We should make that tonight for dinner, then. I could make some chicken to go with it."

Vincent smiled. "That sounds wonderful."

Sephiroth smirked. After their lunch he went to some supply stores to get things he needed before taking Vincent with him to a grocery store.

Vincent smiled, finding the things he would need to make everything.

"This looks like it will be an enjoyable meal."

"I hope it will be." Vincent said.

Sephiroth smiled, getting all of their items secured on the motorcycle before climbing on. "Ready to return?"


The ride back was less frightening, Sephiroth parking in his usual spot before leading him back up to the apartment. Moving with Sephiroth he realized they were staying on the top floor instead all of the other SOLDIERs below them.

Vincent stared. "I didn't realize... that this is where we stayed."

Sephiroth nodded. "We like to keep things orderly."

Vincent nodded. "I was wondering, once I'm a little more... stable, if I could visit Jake and Marcus again."

"If you feel safe doing so, yes," Sephiroth nodded. "You're free to go where you please."

Vincent nodded slowly. "I... I should be fine."

Sephiroth paused, taking Vincent's cell phone to put his number in before handing it back to the Wutanian. "Here, if any trouble does come up... call me."

Vincent froze a little before nodding, sending a small text so Sephiroth would have his number. "Th-thank you."

Sephiroth nodded. "You're welcome."

"Shall we make dinner now?" Vincent smiled.

"Shall we make dinner now?" Vincent nodded.

Sephiroth nodded, starting any prep work Vincent asked him to do. Vincent smiled happily as he cooked, starting to hum. Sephiroth rose an eyebrow at that, watching him curiously. He seemed more relaxed than he had been in days, moving easily through the motions as he cooked. He smiled proudly when the food was ready.

"This looks amazing," Sephiroth complimented.

Vincent bushed and beamed. "Thank you."

Sephiroth stole a bite, pausing. "It tastes wonderful as well."

Vincent's face grew more red, pleased. "I'm glad it came out okay."
Sephiroth nodded, making a bowl and sitting down to eat. "You're quite talented at this."

Vincent smiled. "Thank you."

"You enjoy cooking quite a lot, don't you?"

"I do." he admitted.

"I can buy you some cook books, if you'd like."

"O-oh... Y-You don't have to waste your money on that..." he said, face flushing.

"It's not a waste of money at all, you have a real talent here and it should be fostered."

Vincent blushed harder. "Y-You really think so?"

"Yes, it's a very useful skill and many seem to have forgotten it."

Vincent gave a small nod. "B-But still... I-I could pay for them..."

Sephiroth glanced up, blinking. "It isn't a burden to buy them. I have plenty of money to spare from what I make here, I don't really use it for much."

"B-but to have you pay for such a thing for me..." he started.

"And I want to, so it is not a waste."

Vincent blinked, feeling confused. "W-why?"

"Why what?"

"Why would you buy me something?"

"Because you don't seem to ever buy yourself anything."

Vincent shifted. "Well... I'm not used to being able to do so." he said. "Or at least having the means to do so."

"Then let others buy you things now and then."

"I-If you insist..." he said softly.

"It's settled, then. I'll buy them tomorrow."

Vincent blushed and nodded. "Th-thank you. For this. And everything you've done. You didn't have to do any of it."

Sephiroth shrugged. "You're welcome," he said simply.

Vincent nodded, starting to eat again.

After dinner Sephiroth washed the dishes and smiled. "Would you like to do anything?"

"Um... we could talk? I... we don't really know much about each other... and we are technically living together... It's a bit... awkward..." he said, blushing faintly.

"Of course, ask anything you'd like," Sephiroth offered with a smile.
Vincent nodded, sitting on a chair in the living room. "Hmm, what kind of books do you like?"

"Mystery mostly... some horror and historical pieces."

He nodded. "Um... for future reference for foods... any allergies or things you don't like?"

"No allergies and I am not really picky."

He nodded, giving a smile. "That makes it easier."

"What about you? Are there any foods you prefer?"

"Well, I don't really like fish or liver. I'm not picky with vegetables though. And I have a bit of an obsession with chocolate." he chuckled.

"Ah, have you tried any of the local chocolate here?"

"I haven't had the chance to, actually." he admitted.

"I'll get some when I go in for the cook books, then."

"Y-You really don't have to..." Vincent said.

"You should try it, it's good."

"Alright..." he said.

Sephiroth smiled, shifting. "So, what do you do for a hobby?"

"I like to read." he said. "Or put together guns."

Sephiroth nodded. "Hmm... you might speak with Cid, then. He might let you help him in the armory if you want something to do between missions."

Vincent tilted his head before smiling. "I'd like that."

Sephiroth chuckled. "Perhaps you can help him create new weapons. He is always looking for new ideas."

"I have a sketchbook filled with schematics..." he admitted.

"Could I see them?"

"Oh! Um... Yeah. Hold on..." he said, going to his room to grab his sketch pad and show it to Sephiroth.

Sephiroth smiled, starting to look through the book. "Ah, you draw people too?" he asked, curious.

Vincent's eyes widened, hoping that it wasn’t one of the General. "S-sometimes," he said.

Sephiroth turned the picture to show doodles of Vincent's old work team and his two friends. "Are these all the friends you've made so far?"

Vincent smiled and nodded, naming them all. "My old team and my two friends." he said.

"Interesting, this is very good artwork," Sephiroth mused gently as he flipped the pages. "Have you drawn for a long time?"
"I started at ten... so seven years." he said, thinking the ones of Sephiroth were in a different pad.

"That's a long time," Sephiroth mused. He paused when he came across several drawings of himself. "You like drawing anyone, huh?"

Vincent seemed confused. "N-not really." he said. "Only people close to me or that interest me," he admitted.

"Ah, so am I an interesting subject, then?"

Vincent tilted his head before blushing brightly as he realized the drawings were there. "O-Oh... u... um....." he stuttered.

"It's alright... it is expected when SOLDIER parades me around as its mascot."

"W-well... it's not just... I-I... just like drawing you..." Vincent said, shifting.

"Really? Why is that?" Sephiroth asked, curiosity in his voice.

Vincent blushed a little more. "W-well... it's very... pleasing to draw you... th-the shape of your face and such... it's kind of... relaxing? I'm not sure if any of this makes sense..."

"... It doesn't, really... but I'll take it as a compliment, thank you."

Vincent gave a shy nod. "I-I'm sorry if it's weird." he said softly. "I... I can stop, if you want."

"You don't have to stop, it's perfectly natural to draw things around you," Sephiroth smiled. "It is good that you have a hobby."

Vincent smiled. "Thank you."

"Do you play chess?"

"I try to." he chuckled. "Not sure if I'm any good. I've really only played with kids."

"Would you like to play a round or two against me?"

Vincent smiled. "Alright." Sephiroth stood, getting out a gold and glass chessboard. He sat it down and began to set up the chess pieces, the black pieces being made of onyx while the white were made of marble. Vincent's eyes widened. "This is beautiful!"

"Thank you, it was a gift from one of the scientists here."

Vincent smiled at that, setting up his pieces. "That's nice."

Sephiroth nodded, setting his own up and getting their game started. Vincent turned out to be pretty good strategy wise, though in the end he didn't win. "You're not bad. I'm happily surprised."

Vincent smiled. "I'm glad. I was worried."

"Something I was told when I was young was that playing chess was a lot like coming up with war strategies," Sephiroth mused.

"No wonder you're good at chess." Vincent chuckled.

"It's great for helping me come up with critical thinking skills," he agreed, looking up at the clock.
"It's late, we should get ready for bed. We can talk more in the morning."

Vincent nodded, standing up and stretching. "Goodnight." he said softly, heading to his room after helping clean up.

"I hope you sleep well," Sephiroth said gently.

"You do too, General." he said.

Sephiroth nodded and left for his room. He paused, glancing at some reports he'd picked up when they'd returned. He frowned at them before looking towards Vincent's room, thinking about the Wutanian's hobbies and personality. Vincent headed to his own room, putting his sketch book away and yawning as he got changed for bed. He woke up to a stack of cookbooks setting on the coffee table in the living area. Vincent smiled as he saw them, sitting down to look through them. They had recipes from all over the world. Vincent smiled at that, going to put the books up in his room before texting Jake and Marcus to see if they were busy. It took a while for him to get a reply, saying neither was busy. He asked if they wanted to meet him in the company cafeteria.

"Sure, I can meet you in fifteen minutes," Jake typed back to him.

"I can get there in half an hour. Go ahead without me and I'll catch up," Marcus added to the group text.

Vincent smiled at that, getting dressed before heading down to the cafeteria. Jake was waiting for him when he got there, smiling. "You seem happy."

"Well, I'm happy to see you." he smiled, before blushing a little and shifting. "And... I may be living with the General due to recent events..."

Jake gasped. "You're living with General Sephiroth?! Are you dating?"

"No!" he said quickly. "I mean... I wish, but... It's because of what happened to me... months ago I suppose. Not sure if you heard about it? I'm... being targeted possibly... or it's all coincidence. I'm not actually sure what I can tell you, but it's been decided that I'm staying with him until further notice."

"Yeah, they said you got attacked but we couldn't see you because it was so bad."

Vincent shifted. "Bad... might be an understatement. I don't remember a lot of it. I know when we came back to the place empty there was an experiment on the loose. I helped catch it and went back down into the labs to help return it. I know I started to have a panic attack and blacked out... but then... I woke up in the hospital with a tube down my throat and learning that I had been missing for months and out of it for a while. With no memory of anything, but clear signs that someone... messed with me." he frowned lowering his voice. "I have an autopsy scar, Jake."

Jake blinked, paling. "That... no, it must be something else. Right?" he asked softly, caught off guard.

Vincent took out his phone, showing Jake a picture of it that he took in a mirror. "No mistaking it." Vincent said.

"That's... messed up is putting it lightly. What are you going to do?"

"I honestly have no idea." he sighed. "The General said he and some others are investigating, but I haven't heard anything from him about finding anything yet."
Jake nodded. "I hope they find who did this soon, then."

Vincent nodded. "I...think I know who did it, but anytime I try to remember the name I get bad nose bleeds and pass out. I think I had a seizure once, too."

"That's... scary."

"It is. And... there are voices sometimes... and terrible nightmares... I'm seeing a psychiatrist about them..." Vincent sighed, shaking his head. "I'm also off duty... again."

Jake nodded slowly. "It's... I hope things get better for you."

Vincent nodded. "Either someone has it out for me, Or I am the most unlucky person on the Planet..."

"Could be both," Jake joked, trying to lighten the mood.

Vincent chuckled. "True." he said, then started to tell him all that has happened living with Sephiroth, including the cookbooks and Sephiroth seeing the drawings.

"It sounds like he likes you," Jake smirked.

Vincent blushed. "I-I'm sure he's just being kind..." he stammered.

Jake chuckled. "Or he wants to bed you."

Vincent's blush deepened. "Jake!" he hissed. "I'm pretty sure that's the last thing on his mind!"

Jake laughed. "If you say so."

"I'm positive about it. He hasn't showed even an ounce of interest in anything like that." Vincent said.

"You don't know. He might show it in a strange way."

"Like how?" Vincent asked curiously.

Jake shrugged. "He's buying you a lot of gifts."

"He bought me cookbooks. They benefit him as well." Vincent corrected.

"He also took you out to eat and is trying to get to know you."

"We were both hungry and there isn’t much else to do besides sit in awkward silence. Besides, I was the one who suggested we talk." he said.

Jake chuckled. "Well, what did you learn about him?"

Vincent frowned when he realized that they ended up mostly talking about himself. "Um... well... I learned what type of books he likes and that he's good at chess... um... other than that, I think we talked a lot about me..."

"Hmm... Maybe you can learn more today?"

"Yeah, I can try. But... I'm not sure what to ask." he said.

"Ask his hobbies or if he does anything other than work," Jake shrugged.
Vincent nodded. "Yeah... I guess I could." he said.

"At least he's conversing with you. It's a huge step forward."

Vincent smiled. "That's true."

Marcus walked up to them then, waving. "Hey, how are you feeling? You were gone for a while," he said to Vincent gently.

"I'm okay as I can get right now." he smiled, telling him everything he told Jake. "And as a result I am currently living with the General."

Marcus blinked, taking a few minutes to absorb the information. "That... is very eventful."

Vincent nodded and sighed. "It is."

"Are you feeling alright?" Marcus added.

"Honestly, I don't know. Sometimes I'm fine and other times I feel like I'm going crazy." Marcus gave him a sympathetic. "I'm sorry, that is awful."

Vincent sighed. "I know..."

"Are you safe now? They've made sure whoever attacked you can't come back, right?"

"They don't know who did it." Vincent said. "That's one reason why I am staying with the General."

"Is it safe to be here, then?" Marcus asked.

"Yeah, we're here and in public. No one would attack him in the open like this," Jake added.

Vincent nodded. "The General said it was alright as well."

Marcus nodded, relaxing. "It's good to see you again, I was worried when they wouldn't let either of us visit you in the hospital."

Vincent smiled. "Yeah. I missed you guys."

"We missed you as well. We should plan something to do together again." Vincent nodded. "Yeah."

"Oh, I know!" Jake smiled. "There's a shooting competition and gun show coming up, we should get tickets to watch the competitors and check out what they have."

Vincent brightened at that. "That sounds amazing."

"It is," Jake laughed. "A lot of the top SOLDIERs who use guns will participate in the show."

Vincent smiled at that, feeling excited.

"Hmm... perhaps Vincent could sign up for one of the smaller competitions and win a prize?" Marcus suggested.

"I could do that?" Vincent rose a brow.
"Some of the smaller competitions, yes. You can't go against the pros, but they hold smaller competitions."

"I'd like that." he smiled.

Jake smiled widely. "It’s settled then, that’s our plans for Saturday."

Author’s Note:

Hey, this is Demon’s little Angle, the co-writer. Saigo and I are both so sorry this chapter took so long to get out. During the time of writing this chapter, my computer’s charger died and so I lost it for about three weeks, Saigo moved and had to wait for her internet to get set back up, and then we both got really busy with real life stuff that interrupted our usual writing schedule.

We thank you guys for your patience and for staying with us for this unannounced mini-hiatus we just got through. We’ll try to get back to a semi-regular update schedule.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Sorry for any OOCness in this chapter. (Making a cute drunk vincent is fun though!!!)

Chapter 15

Before they knew it, the gun festival was here. Jake was excited to get off the base for a while, smiling widely like he'd won a prize. Vincent was smiling too, feeling excited. "I've entered into one of the smaller ones." he said.

Jake and Marcus were cheering him on from the sidelines eagerly. Vincent smiled before getting focused, starting the competition. Jake was smiling brightly before spotting one of the other onlookers and staring wide-eyed. His smile widened at seeing General Sephiroth there, and he cheered louder for his friend. He was now hoping Vincent would win so Sephiroth would be impressed. After five rounds, Vincent ended up winning first place in his group, smiling widely and surprised as some of the other contestants congratulated him and others were puzzled as to how he could shoot like that at his age. Sephiroth smirked from where he was watching on the side, approaching Vincent as he was leaving the range. "You did quite amazing out there."

Vincent turned, surprised at seeing the General and blushing lightly. "Oh! Um... thank you..." he said.

"Congratulations on your victory. Do you have plans on where to put the prize?"

"Oh, probably on a shelf in my room. It's not really decorated yet."

Sephiroth nodded. "We could get a small protective case for it, to keep it safe from dust and such."

Vincent smiled. "That would be nice." he said.

Sephiroth smiled back. "Are you going to be watching the distance shooting later?"

"I am." he nodded. "Jake and Marcus are here as well."

"That is good. It is nice to see you having fun instead of worrying."

"It's actually relaxing to be out again." he admitted.

"I would imagine. Even I get stir crazy if I'm stuck inside too long."

"We could go out more when you have free time." Vincent offered without really thinking.

"I would enjoy that."

Vincent beamed at that. "Great!"

"Do you want to visit the vendors with me?"

"Ah... Okay." he nodded, blushing a bit.
Sephiroth nodded and began to lead the way. Behind them, Jake was smiling widely and giving Vincent two thumbs up before mouthing "Go for it!"

Vincent blushed brightly but smiled back. "Do you like the show so far?" Sephiroth asked as they walked.

"I do," Vincent smiled. "I've learned a couple of new things already!"

"Oh? I thought you knew everything about guns with how skilled you are," the general joked.

Vincent chuckled. "Well I am only seventeen. I can't know [i]everything.[/i]" he joked back, feeling a little more relaxed.

"Hmm... could have fooled me, given how skilled you are."

Vincent blushed at that. "Th-thank you..."

"Are there any events you're especially excited for today?"

"Well, the main gun competition. There are supposed to be a lot of experts in it. Also I think they have a sale for gun parts going on. It'd be nice to get some new ones and some oils."

"You can sit with me for the main show," Sephiroth offered.

"R-Really? Th-thank you!" Vincent smiled.

"It's my pleasure."

Vincent was practically beaming.

Sephiroth smiled as they continued to the vendors, looking over the various weapons and parts before moving on to the food vendors.

Vincent picked up a couple things from the weapons vendors, following after Sephiroth when he was done.

The general took him to a booth that had various hand-held foods. "Choose whatever you like, my treat."

"R-Really?" he asked, blushing, already eyeing one of the sweet things.

"Yes, anything at all." Vincent's blush darkened as he chose the sweet, feeling happy. Sephiroth smiled, paying for it and choosing something more filing for himself. Vincent ate happily, though got a little more nervous as they continued to walk around. Sephiroth took him everywhere before the long distance shoot, taking him to sit in the VIP box with him. Vincent was flushed brightly, sitting next to him.

"Enjoying it so far?" Sephiroth asked, motioning to the show.

"I am. This is amazing! Thank you!" Vincent smiled brightly at Sephiroth.

"You're quite welcome, I enjoy having you with me."

"Y-You do?!" Vincent asked, shocked.

"Yes, you're quite interesting."
"I am?" Vincent asked, blushing and confused.

"Yes. You're knowledgeable in several subjects, you bring up interesting topics of conversation, and I like being around you."

Vincent blinked. "I-I'm sorry, but... why?"

Sephiroth paused. "I'm... unsure. I just like being around you."

Vincent gave a slow nod. "Um... O-Okay. I-I am happy about it." he said, giving a small smile. "A bit confused, but happy."

Sephiroth smiled back. "Good, I'm glad you're also enjoying this."

"I am." He smiled.

They enjoyed the rest of the distance shooting before Sephiroth took Vincent around more, letting him sit in the VIP box for a few other competitions until the general got called away, allowing Vincent to regroup with his friends. "So," Jake smiled as he looped an arm around Vincent's shoulders, "how's your date going?"

Vincent blushed brightly. "It's not a date!" he said quickly.

"Food, conversation, laughing... All with your crush. Sounds like a date."

"Maybe, If it were with anyone else but the General. This isn't a date, Jake." Vincent insisted.

"Then why did he buy you lunch?"

"He's being kind. He's bought me lunch before." Vincent said, not remembering he never told Jake or Marcus any of his and Sephiroth's past outings.

"He has?" Marcus asked, raising an eyebrow. "$I think that's more than 'being kind,' Vincent."

"Yeah, it's totally a date," Jake smiled widely.

"I really don't think it is." Vincent said, shaking his head.

"Suit your self," Jake laughed. "I still think it's a date."

Vincent rolled his eyes. "Why would he want to go on a date with me?"

"Because you're amazing!"

"Okay... you are both crazy..." Vincent said, shaking his head.

"You're really the only person I've ever seen the General buy lunch for," Marcus mused.

"I'm sure there is someone else. Commander Hewley or Genesis probably. Those two hang out with him a lot. Maybe even Zack?" he paused. "$No I take that last one back... the Commander probably pays for him."

Jake chuckled. "$I wouldn't be surprised if those two are secretly dating," he joked. "$But, seriously, the General doesn't buy anyone food."

Vincent sighed. "$Maybe it's just being nice mixed with pity? A ton of shit has happened to me
"recently..." he frowned.
"Vincent, he smiles a lot around you. He really likes spending time with you."

"So I've made a friend.." Vincent rose a brow.

Marcus shrugged. "Perhaps. I do think you're closer to him than most other people."

"I guess I am. We [i]are[/i] living together at the moment," He said.

"Are you at least enjoying time with him?" Jake asked.

"Yeah." Vincent smiled widely. "Did you know he likes to cook? He's is really good at it!"

That surprised both of his friends. "No, I was not aware of that," Marcus said gently.

"So he's cooked for you?" Jake smiled.

"Yeah. We actually take turns doing it." he said.

"That's awesome!" Jake beamed. "It's like a married couple."

Vincent blushed brighty. "Let's not go that far. We're roommates. Thats all."

Jake chuckled while Marcus shook his head, walking with Vincent to see some of the smaller shows around the area. Vincent had fun with them, chatting and watching different shows until it was time to return. Sephiroth approached when he spotted him, smiling. "Did you enjoy today?"

Vincent smiled at him. "I did! It was great spending time with Jake and Marcus. And with you outside of here." he chuckled at the last part.

Sephiroth nodded, glancing at Vincent's two friends. "Would you like to have dinner somewhere before we return to the apartment?"

Vincent nodded, smiling, thinking Sephiroth was offering it to all of them. "Okay!"

"Here, come with me," Sephiroth moved to lead Vincent away. Jake and Marcus grinned at the invitation, saying goodbye to the two of them and turning to go home. Vincent blinked in confusion, but waved to his friends as he followed Sephiroth. "There is a stake house not far from here, if you'd like to eat there."

"That does sound good but... aren't those a bit expensive?" he asked softly.

"They can be, but I am paying so you can order anything you'd like to eat."

Vincent blushed. "Y-You've paid for all of these... outings..." he said softly, not knowing what else to call them and not wanting to say 'Dates'.

"Is that a problem?" Sephiroth asked gently. "I enjoy treating you."

"I-It's not!" he said quickly. "I... Just feel bad sometimes. I'm sure there are better uses for your money."

Sephiroth shrugged. "Not really. Like I said, I like treating you."

"You do?" Vincent asked shyly.
"Yes," Sephiroth assured, leading Vincent into the restaurant. Vincent followed him, happy and a little confused.

Sephiroth smiled as they were seated at a booth, Vincent being handed a menu. "Order whatever you like."

Vincent smiled and did so, ordering a steak with potatoes and gravy, cooked rare. Sephiroth smiled and ordered his own steak with a baked potato and a salad. He ordered tea for the drink and gave their orders to the waitresses before looking at Vincent. "I am glad you enjoyed today."

Vincent smiled. "I did. I had a great time!"

Sephiroth smiled. "If you're interested, there is a blade show in a couple days, I'd like you to attend with me."

"I-I'd love to!" he said, smiling brightly.

Sephiroth nodded. "I look forward to showing you around, then."

Vincent smiled, feeling nervous, eventually blurting out the first thing he thought of. "You know, Jake keeps calling these outings 'Dates'!" he gave a nervous chuckle. "I know that's not true though."

Sephiroth paused, thinking. "They could be called dates, it is only the two of us."

Vincent froze, blinking. "Th-they could?" Sephiroth nodded. "Um... But... aren't dates... usually for people who are dating?" Vincent added.

"They can be for people getting to know each other and decide if being a couple is right for them as well."

Vincent blushed. "O-Oh..." he said softly, unused to things like this.

"Do you mind that?"

"Not at all!" he assured him quickly.

Sephiroth smiled. "Good, I'm glad you enjoy these dates, then."

"I do..." he said softly. Sephiroth's smile grew. He looked up as there plates were brought over to them and began to eat happily. Vincent did as well, feeling shocked and happy at the same time as he ate.

They kept talking softly throughout their meal before Sephiroth ordered them both some dessert. Vincent was feeling elated, though still in a bit of shock at this actually happening. After they finished eating they returned to base, Sephiroth letting Vincent know he'd see him later. "I'll cook dinner tonight," he added before leaving.

Jake rushed over with a smile, dragging Marcus along behind him. "So, how was it?"

"Really?" Jake smiled widely.

"Yeah.." Vincent smiled, explaining what had happened and Sephiroth's invitation to the blade
"That's amazing!"

"It's unbelievable." Vincent chuckled.

"It's good, though!"

"It is! It's just... wow..." Vincent gave a dry chuckle.

"Perhaps you can go on more official dates now," Jake offered.

"M-maybe. I hope so."

"Of course so, you're doing really well so far if he's started dating you."

"W-we aren't 'Dating'..." he said, blushing. "We're... getting to know each other." he said, quoting Sephiroth.

"Ah, but you said he called your outings dates~" Jake teased.

"Well... yes... but he also said what I just told you..." Vincent said. "So... we... we aren't dating... just... yeah."

"Well, at least there's hope to start?"

"Yeah." he smiled.

"Do you have any date ideas you'd really like to do?"

"Not... not really... I've... never really gone on a date before this..." Vincent said, shifting.

"Well, then this will be fun for you," Jake encouraged.

"Yeah, take all this as a learning experience."

Vincent chuckled. "So you guys want to actually hang out before we each go back?"

"Yes," Marcus nodded. "I have my card deck, if you two want to play a card game."

"Sure!" Vincent smiled. Jake smiled as well, following them happily to sit at a table.

"So what should we play?" Vincent asked, sitting down.

"Well, poker is popular," Marcus shrugged.

"Alright." he smiled. Marcus began to deal the cards happily with a smile.

"Are we going to bet anything?" Vincent asked.

Marcus shrugged. "I guess we could bet who buys lunch next," he mused.

"Oh, or we could bet weapon upgrades," Jake smiled.

"That last one's not fair, Jake. You two don't use guns." Vincent chuckled.

"Well... We could do alcohol bets?" Jake suggested with a laugh. "Take a shot every time you
Vincent rose a brow and shrugged. "Alright?" he looked at Marcus.

"I'll get the alcohol," Marcus chuckled.

Vincent smiled. "Don't let me be stupid and kiss the General while drunk again," he told Jake.

"I'm not making any promises."

Vincent gave him a playful glare as Marcus came back. Jake laughed. "Hey, maybe I'll be the one to make myself a fool instead!"

"Maybe." he chuckled, smiling as they started the game. Marcus won the first two hands. Vincent won a couple after that, Jake winning some as well. By the end of it they were all a little drunk.

Jake laughed, leaning against Vincent and kissing his cheek with a chuckle. "You... you're the brother I didn't get," he teased.

Vincent chuckled, wrapping an arm around his neck. "And you're the brother I never had." he teased back.

Marcus laughed. "You're both dorks."

"Are not!" Vincent said, sticking out his tongue.

"Yeah!" Jake stuck his out as well.

Marcus just laughed. "Sure you're not," he joked.

"How are you not drunk?" Vincent pouted.

"I'm actually good at poker," Marcus laughed.

Vincent huffed at him playfully. "You cheat." he insisted.

"Are you sure you just don't know how to play?" Marcus teased back, looking up and raising an eyebrow when he saw Sephiroth approaching them from behind Vincent.

"I know how to play!" he said, pausing when he saw Marcus look up. "Hmm, What is it?" he asked, turning and smiling brightly when he saw Sephiroth. "General!~"

Sephiroth rose a eyebrow at all three of them. "Sephiroth is fine," he assured Vincent before taking in his condition. "You're drunk."

"No I'm not!" Vincent tried to insist before falling out of his chair after trying to leave it too fast. "Okay... maybe a little." he said, chuckling, still on the floor.

Sephiroth watched him for a few seconds before helping him up and holding onto him to keep him upright. "Let's get you back up to the apartment... Hopefully getting you to eat can help subdue some of the effects of the alcohol."

Vincent leaned against him happily. "You know... You're reeeaaalllllyyy strong." he said.

"Am I?" Sephiroth asked with an amused tone as he lead Vincent towards the elevators.
"You are," he nodded. "And nice. You're really nice to! And cool... and a little intimidating..." he chuckled. "And, like, insanely hot."

Sephiroth chuckled. "Vincent, you're starting to babble," he mused.

"I am? Is that bad? Am I bothering you? Should I stop? I don't want to bother you... How do I stop......?" he continued to babble.

Sephiroth gently put a hand over Vincent's mouth to quiet him once they were in the elevator. "You're not bothering me," he assured. "Just try to calm down a bit. We're almost home and you can eat something and get some rest." Vincent blinked at that, but nodded, chuckling behind Sephiroth's hand. Sephiroth helped him make his way back into their apartment and to the kitchen to sit down. He then grabbed the plate he'd made for Vincent and sat it down in front of the Wutain. "Can you eat on your own or do you need help?"

A mischievous looked came into Vincent's eyes. "Well....if you're offering you can feed me!" he teased. Sephiroth rose an eyebrow, picking up the fork and offering Vincent a bit of the chicken he'd made. Vincent blinked, having not thought that Sephiroth would do it, before smiling and taking a bite.

"Do you like it?" the general asked.

Vincent nodded. "It's really good. You're really good at cooking!" he smiled.

Sephiroth laughed, handing the fork back to Vincent before moving to sit and eat his own meal. "Did you have fun with your friends?"

"I did!" he smiled. "We played poker... but bet alcohol instead of Gil."

"Ah, so that's how you got like this. Eating should help a bit."

Vincent gave a pout. "I'm not really hungry you know..." he said, but still took another bite.

"You do need to eat. You'll sleep better if you do," he chuckled.

"Fine. But only because it's delicious." Vincent pouted, eating more. Sephiroth chuckled and shook his head, finishing his own meal before standing to get started on the dishes. Vincent finished his own meal, stretching and yawning afterwards. "Will you sleep with me?" he asked absently, not thinking on how he phrased the question.

Sephiroth raised an eyebrow at that. "I think it'd be wiser for you to ask that when you're sober and can properly consent," he teased gently. "And wait until we've had a few more dates."

Vincent blushed brightly. "O-Oh! No! No I didnt mean like that! I...I mean....the nightmares are still there.....and having someone near might help..." he clarified.

Sephiroth nodded. "I'll see what I can do."

"Y-You don't have too..." Vincent said, still highly embarrassed.

"I can't really sleep with you, but I can stay in your room with you until you fall asleep."

Vincent gave a nod. "O-Okay..."

Sephiroth smiled, helping him stand and get to his room, setting him on the bed and keeping an eye on him. Vincent had a little trouble falling asleep, and it was clear his sleep was a troubled one.
when he finally drifted off. Sephiroth frowned at that, sighing and getting some incense to help ease Vincent's nightmares. Vincent only calmed down a little, though stayed sleeping. Sephiroth sighed. "I'll have to buy you something to help you sleep better..." he whispered softly. Vincent seemed to calm a little at hearing his voice. Sephiroth rose an eyebrow at that, sitting down and starting to talk softly to help him calm more. Vincent eventually calmed down, relaxing into a more comfortable sleep. Once he was settled Sephiroth left to his own room. Vincent woke in the morning with a bad hangover.

Sephiroth was cooking breakfast for them both in the kitchen, coffee already made. Vincent went into the kitchen, groaning. "How much do you remember of last night?" Sephiroth asked calmly. "I have coffee made and there is some headache medication by the coffee pot," he added.

"Everything before we decided that betting alcohol in poker was a good idea." Vincent groaned out, taking the medicine and getting some coffee.

"Well, you asked me to sleep with you," Sephiroth smirked.

Vincent's face turned bright red. "I-I DID WHAT?!"

Sephiroth chuckled. "Do not worry, you didn't mean it sexually."

Vincent sighed in relief. "Thank the Lifestream." he said. "N-Not that I wouldn't want to... w-with you... but... there are a lot of things in the way...and...and you'd probably never... with me... and.... and I'm going to shut up now before I make this awkward."

Sephiroth chuckled. "Here, eat up." Vincent thanked him softly, starting to eat.

"You should drink less often, I don't think yo hod your alcohol well."

Vincent blushed a little more. "I actually don't drink often. Maybe thats why it effects me like that?"

"Most likely. Try not to use alcohol as a bet in the future."

"Well it was that or our clothes." Vincent joked lightly. "And I dont think I'd want to have to run here naked."

Sephiroth shook his head. "You three have no shame," he teased.

"Well, we didnt have anything else to bet!" Vincent laughed.

"Hmm... try buying candy to use as bets next time."

Vincent smiled. "That could work."

"It would certainly be safer."

"True." Vincent nodded.

"Is the coffee and medicine helping with your hang over?"

"It is, thank you." Vincent nodded.

Sephiroth just grinned. "Any plans for the day?"

Vincent shook his head. "No."
"Would you like to accompany me into town, then?"

"I'd love to." he smiled.

Sephiroth smiled. "Good, I'd like to take you to a show today."

"A show?" Vincent asked.

"Yes, it's a play."

"I... don't think I've ever been to a play before." Vincent said.

"I think you'll like it," Sephiroth mused.

Vincent smiled. "Okay."

"Have you watched movies before?"

"Yes. But not any plays." Vincent said.

Sephiroth nodded and gave a chuckle. "I love plays because it's a much more personal experience to me."

Vincent smiled. "I can't wait then." he paused. "Is... um... would this be considered as a date... or just an outing?"

"A date."

Vincent blushed but smiled brightly. "Have you ever been on a date before?" Sephiroth asked.

"Only once. And it was recently. With someone I met in Jake's hometown." Vincent admitted shyly.

Sephiroth chuckled. "Well, I hope you enjoy mine more."

Vincent blushed. "I-I'm sure I will."
Hey, this is Demon’s Lil’ Angel. I’m leaving this update on behalf of Saigo, because her computer’s keyboard is having issues. We are still trying to write out the next chapter and I am currently editing what we have so far, we just wanted to put up a warning that this chapter might be a bit later than normal and the one after it might take a longer time to write than usual for us.

We’re sorry for all of the technical issues that have happened these past few months, just a lot of stuff is breaking at once. Sorry again and thank you for your patience.
-- DLA.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

So! It's finally here! Yay! Sorry about the delay. There's been a lot of difficulties during the last couple of weeks. Since I have missed both New Years and Christmas and all other Holidays.....HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO YOU ALL! I hope everyone had a wonderful time!

Chapter 16

Sephiroth was double checking how he looked in the mirror as he waited for Vincent, this would be the first outing where they put a name to what they were doing and, despite everything he'd seen in life, it made the general nervous. He was still trying to figure out what had happened to Vincent in the basement labs, but he was getting nowhere new in his investigation and was starting to feel at a loss. He'd investigated the labs himself, scoured all the surveillance footage they had, checked Vincent's medical documents... everything he could think of, he'd tried to look into. He was hoping that going to this play could take his mind off things for a bit and give him a chance afterwards to learn more about the strange man from Wutai who had taken up so much of his time recently.

Vincent looked in the mirror, nervously smoothing his hair and clothes down for the thousandth time. He took a deep breath to calm himself, feeling nervous and excited for this first official date. He had chosen to wear a pair of the black skinny jeans he had bought while with Jake, and a deep violet button down with a black vest, mixing casual with formal, going with nice black boots to complete it. He took another breath before making his way to Sephiroth. "Um... I'm ready." he said softly.

Sephiroth glanced at what he was wearing before offering a smile. He was wearing the pants and boots he usually did but with a crimson shirt. "You look good," he complimented. "Let's get going."

Vincent blushed. "Thank you. You do too." he said, following Sephiroth to his car.

Sephiroth drove them into town, exploring some of the landmarks as they passed them as they moved towards the theater. Vincent looked out the window, staring at everything with excitement.

"You don't get to go out much, do you?" Sephiroth asked curiously.

"No. I didn't really go out much before... all this," he said, gesturing to his arm. "And obviously recently it has been hard to."

Sephiroth nodded. "We'll see what we can do to remedy that."

"By more dates?" Vincent smiled, attempting to tease.

"Possibly," Sephiroth chuckled.

Vincent blushed a little. "If this one goes well."
Sephiroth smiled when they reached the theater, getting out of the car and opening Vincent's door to lead him inside to their seats in the balcony. Vincent smiled widely as he followed Sephiroth, amazed. The play was of a popular mythology, an epic about its founding and the founding of their world.

Vincent was amazed as he watched. "This is beautiful." he said softly.

Sephiroth smiled. "Isn't it? I've always loved this tale."

Vincent smiled, clapping happily when it was over.

"Did you like it?" Sephiroth asked as they stood to leave.

"I loved it! This was amazing."

"I'm glad. If you're hungry, we can stop by one of the local restaurants before we go back home," Sephiroth said gently. "I'd love to take you to several more plays if you want to see them."

"I'd like that." Vincent nodded. "And I am a bit hungry."

Sephiroth smiled. "Do you like sea food?"

"I do." he nodded.

"I know a small place that gets a decent import of it, we can eat there before returning."

Vincent smiled. "That sounds great!"

Sephiroth smiled as he started the car to drive them. The building had a sign shaped like a fish on its roof. Inside it was like a small tavern. Vincent smiled. "I like this place. It looks cool."

"I used to sneak here all the time when I first met Genesis, he showed it to me."

Vincent smiled at that. "I can see him in a place like this." he nodded.

Sephiroth chuckled. "It does suit him. He knows a lot of very... interesting places in Midgar."

Vincent chuckled as they entered the restaurant. There were cleaned fished bones hanging as decorations on the ceiling, a large fish tank along one wall with several tropical fish. A couple were even ones native to Wutai instead of Midgar. It was such a strange mix of a homey tavern and an upper class restaurant. "I like the places you take me." Vincent said, smiling.

"Well, that is good. I'd worry I was boring you otherwise."

"Not at all! It's been amazing!" Vincent smiled.

Sephiroth chuckled and gave a smile as they found a table and looked over the menus for what to order. Vincent found a dish he liked easily, ordering a drink as well. Sephiroth ordered the crab, smiling as he sat his menu aside to wait. "So, do you like what you've seen of Midgar so far?"

"I do. It's quite different from Wutai, but I'm getting used to it." he said.

"Where have you explored so far?"

"Only sector 7. I went with Jake to Kalm during the holidays. But that's pretty much it. I... I haven't been feeling up to going out alone... after everything."
"Understandable. I could escort you to the other sectors over time."

Vincent smiled. "I'd like that."

"I know a bookstore nearby if you'd like to go there. I can show you different shops along the way."

"I'd love that. I do need some new books."

Sephiroth smiled. "Do you have any other interests you get into? Or things you'd like to do for future dates?"

"Well I like art. All kinds of it. And music," he paused at this. "Are there places to dance here? Not like at bars, but not quite ballroom dancing."

"Yes, there are a few clubs. I believe there is a concert hall somewhere, too."

Vincent smiled. "I'd like to go dancing, if you don't mind."

Sephiroth nodded. "Alright, I can take us to a club."

Vincent's smile brightened. "That sounds great!"

Sephiroth chuckled. "You seem to like music a great deal."

"I do," he smiled. "It was my escape back in Wutai."

"Perhaps you would like to see some of the concerts one day, then?"

Vincent tilted his head. "I'd like that."

"Is there a type of music you prefer? I know some of the modern music is interesting, though I still favor classical."

"I like both, actually. I'm not too picky with music. As long as I can get lost in the melody and the lyrics, I like it." Vincent said softly.

Sephiroth nodded. "Then there are plenty of concerts we can look into," he mused, looking up when their food was brought out and sat on the table. Sephiroth began to eat, smiling as he waited to see if Vincent enjoyed the food.

Vincent took a couple bites of food, smiling happily. "This tastes amazing!"

Sephiroth chuckled. "I'm glad you enjoy it. I was worried, I'll admit, given that usually Wutai has much better sea food than Midgar."

"Well that is true, But this isn’t that bad." Vincent chuckled. "On the other hand... Most of your Wutainian food is terrible."

Sephiroth chuckled back. "To be fair, most of our 'Wutai' chefs have never actually visited Wutai."

Vincent chuckled. "If I can find the proper ingredients, I could make you almost any dish you'd like."

"I would like that. I've always been curious about Wutai, but I've never been allowed to visit it."
Vincent smiled. "We can stop by a market and get some ingredients and ill make it tonight. Do you have a favorite dish?"

Sephiroth paused to think about it. "I suppose that chicken dish? It comes with stir fry and the chicken is on a stick. They call it a strange name here that I know isn't Wutain, despite big based off Wutai's food."

Vincent tilted his head, thinking. "Oh! I know what you mean! That should be easy to make."

Sephiroth smiled. "I'd also love to try some of the sushi your country makes."

"I'd love to make that!" he smiled. "I enjoy it."

Sephiroth chuckled. "I look forward to it."

"Do you like sweet things?" Vincent asked.

"I do. Do you know recipes for desserts?"

"Yes. There's one called Castella that I really like. It's like a sponge cake."

"I look forward to trying it."

Vincent beamed happily as he finished his meal. After the meal Sephiroth escorted Vincent around Midgar, showing him anything interesting he could think of along with the concert halls. Vincent was in awe of the place, eyes wide and excited. "Do they have concert halls back in Wutai?"

"Not where I lived." Vincent admitted.

Sephiroth nodded. "That's a shame."

Vincent shrugged. "Honestly it was the last thing on my mind. Those kinds of things didn't matter."

"I see... Well, I do hope you'll enjoy them here."

"I'm sure I will." Vincent smiled softly.

Sephiroth smiled, leading him to one of the halls that were currently playing music. Vincent smiled when he heard the music, staying close to Sephiroth. "Would you care to dance?"

"I would love too." Vincent smiled. Sephiroth took his hand, beginning to lead Vincent in a waltz with a soft smile. Vincent smiled, glad he knew the dance.

"You're a good dancer."

"I learned some dances from a friends mom in Wutai." he said. "Not many though."

Sephiroth nodded. "She must've been a fabulous teacher."

Vincent blushed lightly. "I can't be that good..."

"You actually are, you're perfectly on par for the formal dance training myself and some of the other officers were forced to attend."

"I...I am?" Vincent asked happily.

Sephiroth nodded. "Yes, you're very talented."
"Thank you.." Vincent said softly, moving his face slightly so his bangs could hide his growing blush.

Sephiroth rose an eyebrow at that. "You aren't used to compliments, are you?"

"Not at all..." he admitted softly.

"Well... I hope you know I'm being honest with the compliments I give, I really do mean them."

Vincent peeked at Sephiroth through his hair. "Thank you."

Sephiroth smiled. "You're welcome. I'm glad you're starting to trust me enough to not fully hide."

"Well, you've helped me so much with everything that has happened, and you're very kind."

Vincent said softly.

Sephiroth shrugged. "You deserve it. You've shown you are strong and are capable, but anyone would feel stress after going through what you had."

Vincent nodded. "Those nightmares... they are still there.." he sighed.

Sephiroth frowned at that. "Hmm... is the tea at night no longer helping?"

"Not really. Sometimes they aren’t as bad... but they aren't gone."

"I'll see about getting some stronger sedatives, then."

Vincent nodded silently. "Thank you."

Sephiroth watched him for a couple seconds in silence before speaking. "I know it is hard, but, from what I've seen of your abilities, I fully believe you can get through this."

"You really think that?" Vincent asked softly.

Sephiroth nodded. "Yes, you haven't broken yet."

"I... I came close to it." he sighed.

"You did come close, but you didn't break. That is what is important."

Vincent nodded, eyes looking down. "I... suppose that is true."

Sephiroth tilted his head up so he could meet his eyes. "What is on your mind?"

"It's just... I haven't felt quite... right since everything. And... I can't usually remember the nightmares... but the ones I do... they are frightening..." Vincent said softly.

Sephiroth nodded. "Let's go somewhere more private and talk about this, discussing it might help you... even if it doesn't solve the issue it might help you feel better and help sort your thoughts." Vincent nodded silently, letting Sephiroth lead him to a more private place. "What... happens in these nightmares?"

"They get all mixed up...there's death. A lot of it. Different places and people, but always ones I know. And...and it's always in the first person. Like I'm the one doing it. I look down and only see claws instead of hands. Like a monster or demon....." Vincent started quietly, shaking a little and not mentioning how the dreams sometimes turned twistedly sexual or how sometimes, whatever
creature he was in the dream, felt a sick thrill at the deaths and the feeling of blood covering it's entire body.

"I think it could be a side affect of not knowing what was done to you while you were unconscious. Your mind might be playing horrible scenarios of what might've happened, even if they're far from the truth..."

"It all seems so real though.." he said.

Sephiroth nodded. "Does... anything help?"

"I'm not sure...." Vincent said. "Last night they disappeared for a little." he added, talking about the time when Sephiroth was close to him, but not knowing the reason.

Sephiroth paused, considering that. "I... have an idea, then. If it works, then I'll tell you what I'm doing and we can see if we can plan something out."

Vincent tilted his head, curious, but nodded. "Alright."

Sephiroth nodded before suggesting they go home. They had dinner together later that day before getting ready for bed. "Don't worry, I'm positive this will help at least a little," Sephiroth encouraged.

Vincent nodded slowly. "Alright... what... um... do I have to do anything?"

"No, just try to relax."

Vincent nodded, getting into his bed and closing his eyes, not knowing what to expect. Sephiroth got prepared for bed like normal, though he went to Vincent's room instead of his own after he was ready. He shifted, setting out a futon by Vincent's bed and laying down, watching the other. Vincent would sometimes make little noises of discomfort in his sleep, but none of his usual screams or whimpers. Sephiroth began to drift off slowly, glad it seemed to be helping at least a small amount. Vincent awoke in the morning, surprised and pleased at having no nightmares.

Sephiroth was already in the kitchen making breakfast. He smiled when Vincent came in. "Did you sleep well?"

"I did." he smiled. "I didn't have any nightmares last night. At least none that I could remember."

Sephiroth nodded. "Then I'll keep doing what I did last night... I want to see how often it helps."

"Alright... Um... what did you do?"

"I stayed in the room," Sephiroth said simply. "The last time you didn't have nightmares was when I was in there cleaning up a bit while you slept, so I felt it would be worth a shot."

Vincent blinked, blushing. "O-Oh... um... you didn't sleep on the floor did you?" then he paused. "You did/ right?"

"I slept on a spare futon I have."

"It wasn’t uncomfortable, was it?" Vincent asked, worried about it being a bother to Sephiroth.

"Not at all, I'm used to my futon."

"And... I don't bother you? In my sleep?"
"Not at all. Why would you?"

"W-Well... I'm not sure if I scream... or snore... or make any other noises while I sleep... or move around to much..."

Sephiroth shrugged. "You were quiet, as far as I know."

Vincent nodded. "Oh... okay. If I do end up bothering you, tell me..."

"I will, I assure you."

Vincent nodded. "Do you have work to do today?"

"I do. You will be on your own today to complete your own tasks."

Vincent nodded. "Alright." he said, knowing he had a bunch of files to go through.

Sephiroth brought their plates over and turned off the stove. He'd made them each an omelet, some sausage, and toast for breakfast. "I should be able to come back here during lunch, if you wish to eat together."

"I'd like that. I can make us something to eat." he said.

The general smiled at that, giving a nod before continuing with his breakfast. After eating, Sephiroth washed the few dishes and left for his duties, leaving Vincent alone.

Vincent had gotten to work, doing so peacefully for a few hours before he heard the first voice. A deep, demonic, twisted voice that almost sounded like his own. His whole body froze, recognizing it as the voice from his dreams. It spoke in a language he couldn’t recognize, yet somehow understood, speaking of bloodshed and death, Destruction and Chaos. Describing acts it would like to do, horrible gruesome things that had Vincent closing his eyes and covering his ears, curling into himself, as if it would silence the voice. He hadn’t realized hours had passed as he sat like this.

A hand gripped his shoulder, shaking him gently as a voice called out to him in worry. Vincent jumped back, falling out of the floor, eyes wide and still hazy with panic, unseeing. "Vincent!" arms caught him, the voice panicking. "Vincent, it's me, it's alright. You're safe... Come on, just look at me..." it spoke softer. Vincent fought against the arms at first, before the voice slowly registered in his head, his body relaxing as his vision came back, looking at the one who caught him. Sephiroth was there, pulling him close and talking gently to him in a calming voice.

Vincent was clinging to him, skin paler than normal. "A voice... there's a voice... it's saying horrible things... it wants to do... to kill..." he was rambling, a very quiet, practically a whisper of "It sounded like me... twisted... but my voice." at the end.

Sephiroth frowned. "Let's get you off the floor, I'll make you some tea and call the doctor to come up and see you." Vincent nodded, absently obeying. Sephiroth sat the tea in front of Vincent before calling the doctor, explaining the situation and going to sit with Vincent again. Vincent gripped the tea tightly, but he hadn't drank it.

"Vincent?" Sephiroth asked gently. "Do you know where you are?"

Vincent blinked, as if clearing his head. "Y-Your house..."

Sephiroth nodded. "Yes... Do you feel safe here?"
"I..." he paused taking a breath. "Yes. Yes, I'm safe...

Sephiroth hugged him close, rubbing his back. "Yes, I won't allow any harm to come to you." Vincent closed his eyes, leaning into the embrace and trying to calm down, slowly relaxing.

"Do you feel better now?"

Vincent nodded. "I do. Thank you. I'm...I'm sorry about all of this."

"There is nothing to be sorry about."

"I'm not sure how... I don't know what triggered it this time. I was just working. And... this wasn't a dream. I was awake when it started..."

Sephiroth nodded. "Relax for now. The doctor is on the way up, she can see if you're having auditory hallucinations or if there are any other issues."

Vincent nodded. "Alright."

Sephiroth stayed by Vincent's side as they waited for the doctor to get there, he then stood by listening as Vincent was examined. When asked what happened, Vincent explained. "I was just doing my paperwork, when I suddenly started to hear this voice. It was the one in my dreams I told you about. But... this voice... hearing it clearer while I was awake... It sounds like a twisted and demonic version of my own. And the things it was describing... they match what happens in my dreams. Tearing people apart. Reveling in the death and the blood. Wanting more. Never being satisfied." he gave a shiver. "It... it didn't seem like...just a voice. It had the same feeling of it being my own thoughts. And that strange scar on my chest and stomach... it was tingling. There was a strange pulse in my chest as well... over my heart. It wasn't painful though."

The doctor frowned. "Remove your shirt for me so I can examine your scars and then I'll write for a full psychological analysis to be done."

Vincent obeyed, taking off his shirt to reveal the strange, autopsy-like scar, along with a few other small ones scattered across his chest. There appeared to be a small number of new ones, the marks matching his nails, as if he had clawed himself during his sleep. He frowned at them, not having remembered doing so. The doctor's frown deepened and she sighed. "I'll send the psychologist up to give you an evaluation. We might have to put you on medication to control this." Vincent frowned at that, but stayed silent, nodding. "It could be possible that you damaged neural pathways when you were injured, causing signals to get mixed up and changed. Otherwise you could be suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, but I'll leave it up to the psychologist to determine if that's the case. It could, at the very least, explain your nightmares. For your self harm, you're probably doing that in your sleep. I'll look into finding something to help get your body to stay still when you sleep to help with this."

"Alright..." Vincent said slowly, his frown deepening. It was clear the news upset him, and that he didn't really believe all of what she was saying. Sephiroth put a supportive hand on his shoulder, hoping to encourage him. Vincent looked up as the doctor left to get the psychologist. He sighed. "I... I don't believe this is just in my head. I'm not crazy." he said softly. "That voice is real..."

Sephiroth frowned. "Do you feel it is out to harm you?"

"Not me, no." he said. "It's more like its.....I'm not sure...trying to get me to obey it?" Vincent sighed and hung his head. "Maybe I am just crazy..."

Sephiroth nodded. "We'll find a way to stop it."
"Right..." Vincent said softly.
Chapter 17

A month after the checkup, Vincent was put on a combination of sleep aids and anti anxiety medications. Sephiroth seemed to be the only person taking the voice seriously instead of thinking it was just something in Vincent's head. Vincent started taking the medications. They only seemed to make him subdued, sometimes making him space out, and though the sleeping pills worked, he would awake much later than usual. Sephiroth had edited his daily schedule to account for this, giving Vincent fewer jobs to do. This went on for a few weeks. Vincent was working on more papers when the news of the first murder reached him. There was a corpse, almost torn to shreds, found near an empty bunker.

Sephiroth frowned as he came back, closing the door behind him and sighing. He had to help figure out who the murderer was, for the sake of everyone's survival. He had a hunch it had something to do with the experiments downstairs. Vincent looked up at him. "Do you want me to make you some tea?" he asked softly.

"Quiet," he said, getting up to make the tea.

"The voice hasn't talked to you today?" Sephiroth asked, tone gentle but concerned.

"Not today, no. I'm... actually worried about that, since it's been talking in short bursts everyday..." Vincent frowned.

"Perhaps... it's tired?" Sephiroth offered. "Or it's angry you're ignoring it?"

"Maybe..." Vincent nodded.

"Would you like to talk about it? Or do something to take your mind off things?"

"I don't really want to think about it.." Vincent said, handing Sephiroth the cup of tea.

The general nodded. "Understandable. Have you been eating well?"

Vincent paused at that. "I'm trying, but... it seems like my appetite has vanished."

"Do you think it's from stress? I can ask the doctor if it's a side affect of the medications, too."
"I... I guess... it could be."

Sephiroth nodded. "Well, I'll make something light. Try to eat it so you're still getting nourishment."

"Okay. Thank you."

Sephiroth nodded, standing to make a light soup. Vincent did a little more work as he waited. Sephiroth came over with a bowl when it was ready, sitting across from Vincent. "So... I heard about the murder. Any ideas on what did it?" Vincent asked. "If you can talk about it that is."

"... My best guess is something from the labs."

Vincent flinched and shivered at the thought of the labs. "I wouldn't be surprised..."

"I've put a team together to search for any signs of loose experiments."

"Whatever it is, I hope it's caught quickly." he sighed.

Sephiroth nodded. "Have you had any nightmares lately?"

"A couple of them, Yes." he nodded. "Though I don't remember a lot from them."

"Have they been... as aggressive as they were previously?"

Vincent was silent for a moment. "Some...The ones I do remember. Sometimes I wake up with scratches from my nails on my skin. Or red marks as if I hit or held a certain area too long." he frowned. "Those times... I don't even feel or remember doing it." Sephiroth nodded and wrote something down on the papers he was handling.

Vincent looked at him curiously. "May I ask what you're working on?"

"It's the murders... I'm trying to figure this out before we lose more men."

"Is there anything I can help with?"

"No, the information is too sensitive."

Vincent nodded. "I understand."

"If you want something to do, however, I do have a couple of errands that you can run."

Vincent perked up a little at that. "Alright."

Sephiroth stood from the small dining table to get a list from the fridge. He returned to Vincent and held it out with a small smile. "This is a list of rooms that need deliveries, let me grab the documents that have to be dropped off at each office," he explained as he walked off to his room. The stack of papers he returned with was small, but it would take at least an hour to get everything delivered to the different floors.

"At first I thought you were going to give me a grocery list." Vincent chuckled with a relieved smile.

"I'm afraid that doesn't need doing for another week or so..." Sephiroth mused. "Go on, now, I'll have dinner ready when you get back." Vincent nodded, saying goodbye and heading out to deliver the papers. Sephiroth smiled as he watched Vincent leave, making sure he was gone before the
smile fell. He sighed and pulled out his phone to call some of the higher ups. "I think we have a suspect for the killings... It's a hunch, but I need a tracker and some supplies..."

It was two hours before Vincent returned, feeling tired. Sephiroth looked up from his paperwork when he heard the door and frowned. "Vincent, are you alright?"

"Yeah... I'm really tired for some reason though..."

The general frowned. "Do you think you might've over exerted yourself?"

Vincent nodded. "Maybe a little."

"Go get some rest, thank you for making that delivery."

"I'm sorry to just go to sleep so suddenly." Vincent said softly.

"Do not apologize, you have a lot on your mind and I'm sure the medications are taking a toll on your body."

"I think they are." Vincent sighed. "But if I stop them... I'm not sure what would happen."

"Of course..." Sephiroth nodded. "Go rest, I'll get things prepared for dinner while you do so."

"Thank you." Vincent nodded, going up to his room to sleep.

Sephiroth gave him a few minutes to fall asleep fully before standing and slipping into the room. He took out a small syringe and needle, injecting a small tracker on Vincent. Once he was sure it was in and working, and that Vincent was still asleep, he left back to the kitchen to get started on a roasted chicken. Vincent slept deeply, having an almost dreamless sleep before waking an hour later. The entire apartment was filled with the smell of food. There was chicken roasting in the oven along with potatoes, corn, and fresh green beans cooking on the stove. The delicious smell over took everything. Vincent groaned happily at the smell, going into the kitchen. "You're spoiling me."

"There is nothing wrong with eating well," Sephiroth chuckled.

"Yeah but this... this is like a feast!" Vincent said.

"It is a normal meal for us in this region. A meat, a starch, a couple vegetables and a sauce," Sephiroth explained with a chuckle.

"Really?" Vincent asked, amazed.

"Yes. It's not quite done yet, so feel free to watch TV for a while as I finish."

"Alright." Vincent nodded, going to look through the channels. Most of the channels were talk shoes or news, the one internal news channel that only reported inside for Shin Ra doing a cover of the murders. Vincent stopped on the channel, listening closely.

"No suspects have been named at this time. All employees are being asked to report any suspicious activity you see. Along with this, the highest ranking officers are issuing a curfew to any and all SOLDIERs who are not on duty at night: do not leave your rooms unless absolutely necessary." Vincent frowned at that, wondering just what creature had possibly escaped.

The TV turned off right before they were going to show pictures of the latest victims. "Dinner's almost ready," Sephiroth said gently. "I just have to make the gravy and it doesn't take long at all."
Would you like to set the table and move everything over to it?"

Vincent blinked before nodding. "Sure," he said, getting up to do so.

Sephiroth smiled from where he was beside the stove. "Did the nap help you any?"

"It did," Vincent said as he set the table. "I feel more rested now."

Sephiroth smiled and gave a satisfied nod, stirring the gravy as he waited for it to thicken a bit. Once it was ready he brought it over to join the rest of the food on the table, sitting so that he and Vincent could make their plates and eat. "Would you like to see a museum tomorrow?" he asked.

Vincent tilted his head. "Yes. It would be nice to get out for a little."

"I thought so. There is an art museum that I think you will like. You can spend time with your friends tomorrow as well."

"Yes. I haven't seen them in a while." Vincent said.

Sephiroth smiled. "It's decided, then. You can text them tonight to know the plans and we can set something up."

"Alright." he said before pausing. "So, what kind of art do you like?"

"Hmm... classical paintings, I'd say. I like the old depictions of how our world used to be the most, though I'll admit I have a few favorite Wutai classics as well."

Vincent smiled. "I like those as well, but admittedly my favorites are the more fantastical paintings."

"Oh? What draws you to them?"

"They're like another world you can fall into." Vincent said. "Just like the same with the genre of books. You can lose yourself completely in another place and time."

Sephiroth nodded. "True, that does seem like a good way to escape the things happening in this world for a short while."

"It really is." Vincent said softly.

"Speaking of escaping... you seem lost in your mind a lot lately. Is there anything you want to discuss?"

"I just keep thinking back to the last time I was in the lab. Trying to remember. Nothing comes to me." he sighed.

"That must be frustrating..."

"It really is." Vincent sighed.

"It's a controversial method," Sephiroth began slowly, "but having you visit the labs might trigger something. We'd have to wait until it's safer, of course."

Vincent nodded. "I'd like to do that."

Sephiroth nodded. "Then when things calm down we will visit the labs. It might jog your
memory," he mused before taking a bite of his meal. Vincent nodded, eating as well.

That night, after Vincent went to sleep, Sephiroth stayed up to watch the monitors he'd put up. He always had access to the security footage around the building, but was watching a live feed this time, keeping a smaller monitor dedicated to the tracking device to his right. If he could get any hints as to where this killer was coming from, or a hint that any of his suspicions were correct, then he could make progress and save their other SOLDIERs before this became a full on massacre.

A half an hour into watching, a figure appeared on his feed. It was a large beast with purple fur covering its body and a crimson mane that two long horns emerged from. It moved in a hunched over fashion, in between walking on all fours and moving upright, its snout pulled back in a snarl. The creature's sharp claws that were dripping with blood, staining the tile as it walked, the back claws leaving small marks on the floor with each step. The beast turned to look at the camera, eyes brilliantly golden, before giving what sounded like a growl and moving at an astonishing speed out of view. Sephiroth cursed softly under his breath, looking at the tracker to see where Vincent was, only to see it showing Vincent's room on the map.

Sephiroth sighed, giving an order for all personal to evacuate the halls as he began to shut down sections to try and trap the creature. He glanced at the blurry print out they had of the first murderer... this beast was definitely something different, the first had been more humanoid. After a while of searching, it seemed that the beast had vanished completely, nowhere to be found and, surprisingly, no trace of where it could have gone. Everyone felt uneasy about this fact. Sephiroth sighed, giving up the search for the night and ending the shut down. He stood and left his room to check on Vincent. Vincent was in his room, curled tightly under the blankets, dead asleep, face tight as if he was having a small nightmare.

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Sephiroth sighed, sitting down in a small chair beside Vincent's bed, combing his fingers through Vincent's hair to attempt to calm him. Vincent relaxed, moving closer to the hand. "Haha...watashi o saranaide kudasai." Sephiroth rose an eyebrow at that in confusion, tilting his head. Vincent seemed to be quiet the rest of the night, any other mumbling being under his breath and unheard. Sephiroth left back to his own room to sleep. He was awake before Vincent was the next morning, cooking breakfast for both of them. Vincent woke up, groaning, his body feeling stiff. He figured he just slept curled too tightly, going to take a quick shower and go to the kitchen.

Sephiroth looked up from where was standing in front of the stove. "Good morning."

"Morning..." Vincent said, sitting down. He was still stiff and a little sleepy.

"Did you have any nightmares last night?"

"I... I think so... I... don't really remember much of it." Vincent said, rubbing his neck.

"Hmm... is there anything you... do remember?"

Vincent tilted his head, pausing before answering. "I... think I may have dreamed of my mother... it's a little foggy." he shrugged.

Sephiroth nodded. "A lot has been going on... memories of her probably comforted you."

Vincent shook his head. "No. memories of her... they are far from comforting." he said softly.

Sephiroth frowned at that. "What do you mean?"

Vincent blinked, as if just realizing that he had spoken. "Oh... um... well, it's nothing really... she left me when I was young to stay with my step-father." he said, trying to shrug it off. His voice
tensed at the mention of his step-father.

Sephiroth frowned. "I apologize..." he said gently, hesitating. "Let's change the subject."

"It's alright. You didn’t know." Vincent said softly. "Did you sleep well last night?" he asked. He got the feeling Sephiroth didn't sleep much.

"I slept fine," he general lied gently.

Vincent nodded, hiding his frown. "Do you have much work today? I was thinking we could go out... maybe... on a date..." he said, saying the last part softer.

Sephiroth blinked. "I do have a lot of work this morning, but I can plan for us to have a date in the after noon. Would seeing those museums and having dinner at a good restaurant do?"

Vincent gave a pleased smile. "Yeah. That sounds great."

Sephiroth smiled. "It's settled, then, I'll get things ready. You spend the morning relaxing, visit your friends."

"Alright." he said, nodding happily. He finished his breakfast before getting ready and going to meet up with Marcus and Jake.

They waved at him with smiled, chuckling at how happy seemed. "Good news?" Jake asked.

"Sephiroth and I are going on a date later today." Vincent smiled.

"Awesome!" Jake smiled.

"It is. I'm slowly learning a bit more about him." he smiled.

"That's good. Anything interesting that you're allowed to share?" Marcus asked.

"We have the same art and book interests. And he's an amazing cook!" Vincent said. "He seems to like the Wutainian food I cook as well."

"Huh... never would've thought the General could cook," Marcus admitted.

"Has he made you anything special?" Jake asked with a large grin.

"Yes, he's made a few Wutainian dishes." Vincent smiled.

"He knows how to cook Wutai food?!" Jake asked, shocked.

"Yeah. He has a whole cook book filled with foreign recipes." Vincent smiled.

"Hmm... I suppose it pays to be prepared," Marcus mused before chuckling. "Still, it goes against everything we're shown in the promotions, huh?"

Vincent nodded. "Yeah. He's actually....really kind. Sometimes, when my nightmares get bad, he'll sit with me or sleep on a futon in my room. Apparently he found that I calm down when he does that."

The other two just stared at Vincent in awe. "Did you use a spell on him or something?" Jake joked.
"Maybe that flying sickle did hit him and none of us noticed," Vincent joked back.

His friends chuckled, shaking their heads. "You certainly are something special," Marcus mused.

Vincent rose a brow. "I don't really think so."

"Vincent, you managed to somehow get the strongest fighter SOLDIER has ever had to cook for you and be protective enough of you that he stays in your room when you're having a nightmare."

"He's just talking care of me after everything that happened." Vincent said, shaking his head. "It'll go back to normal as I get better." he added, pausing. "Have you guys heard about the murders going on?"

Their smiles fell instantly and the air grew heavy with tension. "Yeah... we've heard," Jake sighed. "It's... not a good sign."

"Sephiroth is on the case, but obviously can't talk about it. He said he had a hunch though. If anyone can solve this quickly it will be him." Vincent said.

"I hope so, this is very... scary, to put it lightly," Jake sighed.

"It's unsettling and concerning," Marcus clarified.

Vincent nodded. "I know." he frowned a little. "It's strange, though. Sephiroth goes to lengths to avoid the topic with me. He even turned off the news report I was watching when it went to show the body..."

"Well, they think it's an escaped project, right? You got attacked by two of those monstrosities now, so maybe he's afraid it'll trigger something," Jake shrugged.

"I hadn't thought of that." Vincent said, tilting his head.

"How are you doing anyway?" Marcus asked.

"Honestly, terrible." Vincent sighed. "I keep having nightmares that I don't remember. I still have trouble going to sleep. I woke up this morning sore as all hell."

"Have you talked to your doctor about it?" Marcus asked.

"Yes. And I have another appointment soon." Vincent said.

Marcus nodded, sighing. "Well, hopefully it helps."

"I hope so too." Vincent sighed. "On a lighter note, have you embarrassed yourself yet, Marcus?"

Marcus rose an eyebrow. "What do you mean?" he asked. "Do you know something I don't?"

"Did you forget our bet?" Vincent asked.

Marcus blinked, chuckling. "Ah, yes, I did actually. No, I haven't embarrassed myself yet."

Vincent gave a pout. "It'll happen soon! I'm telling you! I can't possibly be the only one here with such bad luck!"

Marcus chuckled and gave a nod, smiling. "What are you planning to do this weekend?"
"I don't really have anything planned." Vincent said.

"Perhaps we could go to the bar together, then," Marcus offered, Jake perked up at hearing the suggestion.

"That's a great idea! We can do karaoke! And we can get drunk and dance and--"

"I think he gets the point," Marcus chuckled, interrupting his friend.

Vincent laughed. "That sounds like fun. And something I probably need."

Marcus nodded. "I believe all of us need this."

Vincent smiled softly. "It'll be great."

"Hmm... perhaps I'll embarrass myself while drunk," Marcus teased.

"I'll be looking forward to that!" Vincent laughed.

Jake laughed as well, eagerly working things out before they had to each go their separate ways. Vincent was smiling when he got to his room. Sephiroth was busy working in his office, a phone pressed up to his ear as he sat before a computer. Files were scattered about on his desk around him. Vincent was curious but made sure to be quieter so he didn't interrupt Sephiroth, going to the kitchen for a drink to take with him. It was at least three hours before he General walked out, tiredly heading to the coffee machine.

There was fresh coffee already brewed and Vincent had made him some food before he had gone to his room. Sephiroth blinked, pausing as his tired mind processed the situation before he gave a small, thankful smile. He got himself a large cup and took the food, sitting down to eat. Once done he gently wrote a note thanking Vincent, taped it to the other's bedroom door, and went back to work. Vincent didn't sleep well that night, keeping quiet and staying awake after the first nightmare so he didn't disturb Sephiroth, going to the kitchen for a drink to take with him. It was at least three hours before he General walked out, tiredly heading to the coffee machine.

Vincent slowly sat up. "I... just can't sleep..." he said.

Sephiroth frowned at that, but sighed and gave a nod. "Well... I'm about to start cooking breakfast, if you want to eat."

Vincent nodded. "Yeah. Okay." he said, getting up.

Sephiroth walked with him quietly, starting to cook. "Thank you for last night," he mused.

"I figured you'd need it. I didn't want to disturb your work." Vincent said softly.

Sephiroth nodded. "Did you have fun on your outing yesterday?"

"I did. We're going out this weekend." Vincent said.

"Where to?"

"The bar." He said. "Thinking that it's a bit overdo."

He nodded. "Just be careful not to drink too much."
"I won't. I don't need to embarrass myself again." he chuckled.

Sephiroth gave a small smile. "Oh, like that poor performance with the melee weapons?" he teased.

Vincent blushed brightly. "I've gotten better!... A little..." he said. "And I was sober then!" he paused. "That doesn't make that better...."

"Let's just keep you with a gun," Sephiroth chuckled.

"I agree with that." Vincent said with a light chuckle.

"You seem talented with it," Sephiroth offered. "It suits you more."

Vincent gave a smile, blushing faintly at the praise. "Thank you."

Sephiroth nodded, pausing as he ate. Silence fell between them for a few long moments. "Have your nightmares eased up?" the General asked, wanting to break the awkwardness.

"Not very much." Vincent sighed.

Sephiroth frowned at that. "I'm sorry to hear that. Do you need more medicine? Or perhaps some lavender oils?"

Vincent shook his head. "I honestly don't think the medicine is helping. I'd rather not take any more of it." he admitted.

Sephiroth nodded. "We can still try the lavender oils, or even incenses. I'm unsure how much they'll help, but it has natural calming abilities."

"Alright. We can try tonight."

Sephiroth nodded. "We might make your training more strenuous again, too. Exhausting yourself might help."

Vincent nodded. "I actually look forward to that."

"We could spar together, you could use improvement on your hand-to-hand combat."

Vincent looked at his left arm and nodded. "That's true. I need to get used to this."

"Have you tried fighting with the prosthetic yet?" Sephiroth asked, curious.

"Admittedly, not a lot." Vincent said.

The general nodded. "We'll have to fix that, then. You might want to visit the shooting gallery as well at some point, I'd imagine you'll have to get re-acquainted with your preferred weapon after everything that has changed."

"That's true, though I'm not at as much of a disadvantage with my guns as I can use both hands to shoot." he agreed.

"It's still a change, especially if you've had to change your dominant hand."

Vincent nodded. "Also true." he said, then smirked a little. "I suppose we should really keep me away from the sickles now." he teased softly.
Sephiroth snorted. "You're banned from touching them."

Vincent blinked. "You know... I can't tell if you're joking or if that's really true." he mused with a smirk.

"Both."

"I... I wasn't told I was banned.." he said, raising a brow.

"I'm banning you now, for your safety and my own," Sephiroth deadpanned, though there was the barest hint of a smirk on his face. "I think, given your knack for guns, it shouldn't be a hard ban to follow."

Vincent gave a chuckle, smirking. "Yes, Sir." he teased softly.

Sephiroth nodded. "We could train together today, I have some openings in my schedule."

Vincent nodded. "That sounds good."

"Would tomorrow afternoon be a good time for you?"

"Yeah. I don't have a whole lot of work to do recently." He said.

"Then we'll meet at training ground A. We'll go through some warm ups, then a spar."

Vincent nodded. "Alright."

"Do you have any plans for today?" Sephiroth asked.

Vincent tilted his head, thinking. "Not that I know of."

"Would you like to accompany me throughout today?"

Vincent blinked. "I'm... allowed to do that?"

"If I say you can, yes."

"Then... I would like that." Vincent gave a small smile.
Chapter 18

Sephiroth took Vincent with him to the various training grounds, showing him new areas and telling him some of the history or what various sculptures in the large complex. The moments between the facts and just general talking were filled with work, Sephiroth explaining a little bit of what he did and letting Vincent give his opinions on how some new recruits could improve.

The next day Sephiroth got things ready for their spar, bringing out several pieces of training equipment that was usually kept in storage during spars. He wanted to test where Vincent was currently in sparing and see about strengthening the new arm. He was standing in the middle of the room in only a pair of loose sweats when Vincent walked in.

Vincent blinked when he saw that, a blush filling his face before he shook his head and concentrated, looking to see what was laid out. He had on sweat pants as well, paired with a black muscle shirt. Some training mats were on the ground so they wouldn't be injured when tackled or thrown, a couple punching bags hung up in the back, and a bag of pads and targets were on a bench nearby. The treadmill was set up in the corner, out of the way but plugged in to be used, and some weights of varying sizes laid by the bench. A bag of simple medical supplies was also there incase it was needed.

Vincent looked it all over as he approached, having time to gather himself. He glanced up at Sephiroth. "So, where are we starting?"

"Some stretches and a mile on the treadmill as a warm-up."

Vincent gave a nod. "Easy enough." he said, getting started on the stretches. Sephiroth smirked, leading him through the common stretches before heading for a treadmill to start his run. After warming up he left for the mat and waited for Vincent to join him. Vincent did a couple laps on the treadmill before doing so.

"Do you have a preferred sparring style?"

"Not especially. I honestly always mix everything I know together. It confuses the enemy because they don't know what to expect next," he shrugged.

"Mixed fighting, then," Sephiroth grinned as he got into a ready stance. "Let's see what you've got."

Vincent took his own stance, smirking. "Shall I attack first?"

Sephiroth shrugged. "If you prefer to."

Vincent nodded, quickly assessing Sephiroth for any weak spots before attacking. Sephiroth waited for him to get close, quickly grabbing his good arm to throw him down. Vincent's breath left him as he hit the floor, making him cough a little.

"Are you alright?"

Vincent gave a rough laugh. "Yeah... I guess I didn't expect to get stopped that quickly." he said, sitting up. "Seriously... that took, like, point five seconds."

Sephiroth shrugged, smirking as he took a step back so they could continue. "I'm well practiced."
Vincent chuckled. "You are the General of SOLIDER... Still... everyone has some kind of weakness." he mused.

"True," Sephiroth nodded his head as he agreed, watching Vincent with a smirk. "Think you can find mine?"

"I can certainly try." Vincent smirked back.

Sephiroth attacked first the second round, moving like he was going to kick Vincent's legs out from underneath him. Vincent moved to block it, also keeping an eye on the rest of Sephiroth's body. Sephiroth quickly changed which leg he was using at the last second, trying to catch Vincent off guard. Luckily, Vincent caught it, dodging at the last second and attacking Sephiroth. Sephiroth blocked, hopping back a couple feet to get some distance. Vincent fell back into another stance, eyes scanning for anything off or and unbalance in Sephiroth's posture. Sephiroth's shoulder rolled down as he moved to attack again. Vincent charged at him as well, taking a chance and using his left arm for an attack.

Sephiroth quickly moved to block it. Vincent spun around, using his leg to try and hit him. It caught Sephiroth in the side, just above his hip. He grunted, stumbling and losing his balance but staying upright. Vincent used the momentum of his last attack to try and hit Sephiroth with his right hand. Sephiroth grabbed the hand, flipping Vincent over again with a chuckle. "You're good."

Vincent managed a chuckle, sitting up. "I have been doing this for most of my life." he said. "I started learning when I was very young."

"It's rare to see such dedication."

"I like doing it." he shrugged. "And... it's a good distraction. I can lose myself in the motions and not have to think."

"That is understandable, I use sparring and exercising for a similar reason." Vincent flexed his left arm. "It doesn’t feel too off with this either. The prosthetic is a little heavier than my actual arm was, but not enough to off-balance me."

"That is good. The extra weight might help make your punches have more force."

Vincent nodded. "It will still take some getting used to."

Sephiroth nodded. "Want to move on to some training instead of just fighting each other?"

"Yeah. There's no way I'll beat you." he chuckled.

Sephiroth grabbed the targets, slipping them on his hands and walking over. "Let's work on that balance a bit."

Vincent nodded, taking a deep breath in to center himself.

Sephiroth lead him through a series of practices, having him try different punches to hit the targets and telling him how to adjust his balance.

Vincent had a little trouble at first, more unbalanced than he had thought. After a while he started to get the hang of it.

"Does it feel easier to control?"
Vincent nodded. "Yes."

Sephiroth smiled. "Do you want to take a short break?"

Vincent nodded. "Yeah. I guess I'm still not quite recovered. I'm already getting tired.." he frowned.

"It's fine, you're just out of practice," Sephiroth assured as he lead Vincent over to the bench and passed him a bottled water. He took his own seat beside him, opening a water for himself. "I didn't expect you to be at your full potential again in one day. These things take time and you have to build yourself back up to the level you used to be."

Vincent sighed and nodded as he sat down. "I know." he said softly.

"If it helps, you did much better than most do after not practicing for so long. Your muscle memory is amazing."

Vincent blushed lightly at the compliment. "Thank you."

"You're quite welcome," Sephiroth smiled. "What kind of exercises did you used to do, before the injury?"

"I used to do stretches and run regularly. Sometimes go to a gym and use the machines. Back in Wutai I would spar with my friend regularly." Vincent replied.

"We can do all of that together, it'll help. We can run every morning, do a sparring session twice a week, and stretches three times a week."

Vincent blinked, happy and shocked. "That won't interfere with your work? I don't want to burden you."

"It wouldn't be a burden at all, I can work it in with my own workout schedule easily."

Vincent smiled. "Thank you." he said. he shifted again. He had tried to keep the vision of Sephiroth out of his head, but he was young and it was distracting. He just made a point to not really look at Sephiroth.

Sephiroth smirked. "Come on, let's do some stretches and a run before we call it a day and hit the showers."

Vincent gave a swallow at that thought, nodding. "Y-Yeah. Sounds good.." Sephiroth helped Vincent stand and lead the way to the mat so they could stretch again. He lead Vincent through some different stretches from what they'd used as a warm-up before walking with him over to the treadmills. Vincent took a deep breath, just trying to focus on running and not where his thoughts were wanting to go. Sephiroth tied his hair up for his run, setting his pace just a bit higher than Vincent's on the treadmill. Vincent tried not to stare at him, but kept sneaking small glances hoping his blush would be mistaken as being caused from the exorcise.

"Are you feeling alright?" Sephiroth asked when he noticed the flush, wanting to ensure Vincent wasn't pushing himself too hard.

"I-I'm fine." Vincent said quickly, giving him a smile.

"Are you sure? Your face is very red."
His blush deepened. "It... It must be the exorcise." he said.

"Would you like us to shower early? You shouldn't push yourself too far after recovering..."

Vincent nodded, thinking about a nice, cold, shower and not a wet and naked Sephiroth nearby. Nope... defiantly not. He blushed harder, reaching his ears. Sephiroth stopped his own treadmill, getting off of it and going over to the bleachers to retrieve his gym bag. He took out some spare clothes and a towel, leading Vincent to where the showers were. They were situated like small cubbies, each having its own curtain. Sephiroth chose the one furthest in the back, setting his clothes down on the shelf beside it and hanging up his towel before slipping behind the curtain. Vincent let out a relieved breath at the curtains, choosing the stall furthest from Sephiroth's. He slipped into the shower, turning the water completely cold and stepping under it, groaning a little. He really had gotten a little overheated and the water felt heavenly on his skin. Sephiroth finished before he did, getting dressed and leaving to wait on the bench in the gym for Vincent to also finish.

Vincent took a little longer, first just relishing in the water, then washing himself and dealing with... problems. He sighed when he got out, drying and dressing. He didn't realize how long he had been in there as he walked out of the room.

Sephiroth looked up from where he was sitting. "Are you alright?" he asked.

Vincent fought back a blush as he nodded. "Yeah. Just...got lost in the feeling of the water." he said.

Sephiroth nodded and stood, grabbing his bag. "Are you hungry?"

"I am actually." he said, noticing that he was.

Sephiroth smiled and nodded his head towards the exit. "Let's go back up to our apartment, I'll make lunch."

Vincent followed him, happy with how the day was going so far. Sephiroth lead him back home, smiling as they walked in and sat down their bags before he walked over to start cooking lunch for both of them. Vincent went to his room to change into something besides sweats before going to the living room to watch TV while he waited. He turned it on, frowning when an image of a reporter appeared. The reporter was saying they found another dead body that morning, though the approximate time of death was the night before. Sephiroth frowned at that, looking over his shoulder at the television. "It shouldn't be out to the public yet... but I suppose something like this couldn't stay quiet for long," he sighed. "We're thinking of adding curfews now and locking up living areas to keep whatever it is at bay..."

"There's been one every night, hasn't there?" Vincent asked.

"Almost every night. A few nights we just found some halls destroyed, but no blood or casualties."

"Still no clue on what's doing this?" he asked.

"No, not really," Sephiroth sighed. "There are very few leads."

Vincent frowned. "Nothing at all? The deaths are all different... can it be multiple things? Did things from the lab escape?"

"That's our best guess. We'll have to just do the best we can to figure things out."
"Is there anything I can do to help?" he asked.

"No, I don't want you getting involved in something so dangerous."

Vincent rose a brow and looked at his prosthetic. "A little late for that." he said dryly.

"You know what I mean," Sephiroth glared.

Vincent gave a small smile. "I was teasing you, Sephiroth." he said softly. "I just... I want to do something. What if it's my fault those things got out?"

"I highly doubt it's your fault," Sephiroth stated, going back to cooking. "It's better not to let yourself get dragged in... I don't want you becoming another casualty."

Vincent nodded slowly and sighed. He decided to flick through the channels and find something they would both enjoy. He smiled when he saw something. "Hey, Sephiroth! How much do you like cheesy movies?" he called out.

"Depends... what kind of cheesy movie? I'm not a big fan of the romances, those are more Genesis's interest."

"It's a cheesy horror movie," he smiled.

"Hmm... sounds interesting," Sephiroth nodded, turning back to his cooking to finish making their lunch.

Vincent nodded, putting it on and waiting for Sephiroth. Sephiroth made the two plates and brought them over to set on the coffee table. He went back into the kitchen for a few minutes to bring back some water for them to drink with their meal. He'd made some grilled chicken with a small salad as a side dish. Vincent smiled and thanked him, starting the movie when they were both settled.

It was a classic slasher with bad special effects. Sephiroth would snort softly at some of the more overly gruesome killings, shaking his head and commenting softly that it would never produce that much blood. Vincent would laugh at the effects. He had been slowly, subtly, scooting closer to Sephiroth and was now awkwardly leaning on him. He wanted to curl up to him but wasn't sure how to ask. Sephiroth glanced at him when he noticed. "Are you alright?" he asked gently.

Vincent blushed. "Oh... y-yeah. I just... um..." he fidgeted. "Never mind," he said, starting to move away.

Sephiroth frowned, gently reaching out to grab him. "Are you tired?" he asked, concerned.

"No... It's not that. I... It was just a sudden stupid idea." he said.

"I am sure whatever idea you had wasn't stupid," Sephiroth assured. "What was it?"

"I just...wanted to curl up with you..." he said softly, not meeting Sephiroth's gaze.

Sephiroth paused, thinking the request over. "Alright," he shrugged. "Would that make you feel safer?"

"I... I guess... to be honest I--I just wanted to. There wasn't really a specific reason..."

Sephiroth watched him for a few moments before hesitantly reaching out to pull Vincent closer, a silent statement that it was alright and he wasn't going to judge him for the desire. Vincent shyly
curled up to him, mentally sighing with relief and comfort. Sephiroth noted how quickly he
relaxed, focusing on the movie once more without a word so that he wouldn't make Vincent worry
or feel awkward. Vincent continued to watch the movie, still making comments about it to
Sephiroth. He felt content for the first time in a while.

Sephiroth snorted softly when the main character hid under a table. "She's going to give her
position away by screaming... these movies always do that."

"Or moving and knocking something down. Or waiting a few minutes in silence and assuming the
bad guy is gone and trying to run." Vincent added, chuckling.

"Or, when they're running from him, tripping over nothing at all. Or never running to their car and
driving away like sensible people."

Vincent laughed. "Always running into secluded places like forests."

Sephiroth nodded. "Or calling their friends instead of officials or personnel who could actually help
them."

"Or dropping their phone or forgetting it so they can't call."

"The best thing, though, is that they find the first signs that there's something dangerous around,
even if there isn't a victim yet, and do something stupid by ignoring it. Like going out to swim
alone, or sneaking off to get lucky..."

"Or seeing something that is obviously a trap, or a dark basement or something, and going in it
anyways."

Sephiroth paused in thought. "I never understood why they go towards the creepy noises instead of
away from them... I can understand when it's officers, soldiers, or something that do it because it's
their job to investigate... when you're a normal person, your instinct should be to run away from the
noise."

"I know the feeling. In the labs, the first time, I wanted to run and get out of there, but like you
said, it's our job. The second time..." he paused. "Well obviously I wasn't quite with it..."

Sephiroth nodded, absentmindedly combing his fingers through Vincent's hair. "You'd been trained
for it, so you still fell back on your job training even without knowing," he mused. "I can
understand those whose job it is, or who used to be in that job, investigating because they've done
so for so long."

"I'm....actually very surprised no one really ran when my arm started to melt off..." Vincent said
calmly, he didn't seem too bothered discussing it at the moment. "I'm sorry but if I saw that, I'd be
out of there. Like... fast." he said, relaxing more into Sephiroth with the stroking of his hair.

Sephiroth chuckled. "Trust me, I imagine your team wanted to... but they were also trained for that
kind of stuff and you were the youngest on the team. They couldn't just leave you to die when there
was so much they could do to help you."

"Well... pretty much everyone but Adams and a couple others were getting sick. Which I
completely understand."

Sephiroth nodded in understanding, rubbing the back of Vincent's back as they continued watching
the show. Sometime in the middle, Vincent had fallen asleep against Sephiroth, snuggling closer
eventually. He hadn't told Sephiroth but he hadn't really been sleeping at all recently. But he did
have fits of blacking out, though it was never for more than an hour. Sephiroth stood carefully, laying Vincent down on the couch and finding a blanket for him before sitting beside him to work on some documents he needed to finish. He would let Vincent sleep for now. Vincent seemed to sleep calmly near Sephiroth. Sephiroth woke him after a few hours, letting him know he'd be making dinner soon.

Vincent woke, frowning. "I'm sorry! I fell asleep..."

"It's perfectly fine," Sephiroth assured, hand still on Vincent's shoulder. "You looked like you needed the rest."

Vincent nodded. "I... haven't really been sleeping. Maybe an hour each night..." he finally admitted. "Nothing's been helping so I didn't want to bother you with it."

Sephiroth frowned, pausing to think. "Would it help you if I started sleeping in your room? I could set up a futon."

"I... I really don't want to bother you..." he said.

"It wouldn't be a bother at all," Sephiroth assured. "You sleep easier when we're in the same room, don't you?"

Vincent nodded slowly. "It seems I do, yes."

"Then I'll sleep in the same room as you."

"O-Okay." he said softly. "Thank you."

Sephiroth nodded, offering a reassuring smile. "We'll get through this."

Vincent smiled gratefully. "I'm going out with Jake and Marcus tomorrow... if you aren't busy... would you like to come?"

Sephiroth was quiet for a couple minutes before shrugging. "It might be nice to get away for a short while," he mused as he stood up and headed for the kitchen to cook.

Vincent smiled at that, texting Marcus and Jake to let them know. Jason texted back a wink-y face while Marcus just replied with an affirmative that he'd gotten the text. Sephiroth was looking through his cabinets and pausing. "Does grilled salmon sound alright for dinner?"

"Yeah." Vincent said, going into the kitchen. "Anything I can do to help?"

"Mind cutting up the vegetables for me?"

"Not at all." Vincent smiled, washing his hands and getting started. "I told Marcus and Jake about you coming. They seem happy about it."

"It's good to know I don't frighten them," Sephiroth chuckled as he plugged in his small electric grill and got started making the seasoning for the fish.

"Oh I'm sure you do, but I think they are also excited just to hang with you."

"Is it really that exciting to see me?" he asked while raising a brow.

"Of course it is! You're the General. It's a huge thing to even be acknowledged by you." Vincent said, a small blush appearing. "And I'm dating you." he paused. "About that... do... would you
"It doesn't really matter to me if people know or not," he shrugged, pausing to glance at Vincent. "Would it make you feel more comfortable being open about it? Or... would you prefer if others don't know?" he asked, seasoning the fish and putting it on the grill before turning to face Vincent completely.

"I..." he sifted, blushing a little more. "I would like others to know..."

"Then share the news with whoever you like," Sephiroth said with a smile. He paused for a few moments before glancing at what he was cooking. "I... was hesitant to ask earlier incase it was too forward, but... would sharing a bed be more comfortable for you and your nightmares compared to me sleeping on a futon?"

Vincent's blush brightened. "I... I would prefer that... if you don't mind..." he said softly.

"I don't mind. It helps you, so... it's worth it. I'll set things up to move you into my room."

Vincent nodded. "Thank you," he said softly.

Sephiroth gave him a reassuring smile before focusing again on what he was making. Once the salmon was grilled well enough he began making plates. Vincent had finished cutting the vegetables long ago, cooking some and turning the rest into a salad. Sephiroth smiled, walking over to the refrigerator to get them both drinks. "What do you want? We have water, some lemonade, sodas... and I have some wine."

"I'll take a soda. I should probably stay away from wine," he gave a small chuckle.

Sephiroth laughed back, shaking his head. "I take it that, before that incident, you never thought your alcohol tolerance would be low?"

Vincent shook his head. "I never considered it. I was old enough to drink in Wutai, but never really had the interest, so that night was my first time," he smirked. "Though, admittedly, I wish I remembered it."

"We'll work on your ability to drink socially together. You should be fine with low amounts," he said as he grabbed their drinks and walked to the table to sit down.

Vincent smiled and followed him. "I certainly hope so." he chuckled.

"We can also make new memories in time... better than what you can't remember."

Vincent fought a blush at where his thoughts immediately went, and he coughed. "I would like that," he said softly.

Sephiroth chuckled, starting to eat. "What are the plans for when we meet up with Marcus and Jake tomorrow?"

"Well we were going to a bar. Karaoke was mentioned." Vincent chuckled.

Sephiroth rose an eyebrow. "Is a bar a good idea after last time?" he joked.

"Hey! They serve soda!" Vincent laughed. "Or we can start on the 'Drinking Socially' thing then." he added teasingly.

Sephiroth chuckled. "I'll monitor how much you have and cut you off if you start to get tipsy."

"I do admit, I've never been to karaoke before, though..." Sephiroth mused, taking a bite of his fish to give him time to pause and think.

Vincent's smile widened. "You do realize you are singing at least one song, right?"

Sephiroth frowned. "I never agreed to that."

"You didn't have to. It's the rule of Karaoke." Vincent said happily.

The general snorted. "I've never heard of such a rule," he commented while raising an eyebrow.

"No one has to speak of it. It just is." Vincent chuckled. "Everyone has to sing at least one song."

"I'm not singing," Sephiroth commented, shaking his head to accent the point.

"One song." Vincent insisted, his mood turning playful now.

"Why?"

"It'll be fun. And everyone else will be singing too." he said.

"I'm not a good singer..."

"It's Karaoke. You aren't supposed to be good."

Sephiroth shook his head. "I'll watch, thank you."

Vincent gave a fake pout. "Not even one song?"

"You would have to get me very drunk in order for me to sing."

Vincent chuckled. "Be careful. I will try that." he teased.

"You can try," Sephiroth laughed, taking another bite of his food before leaning back and pointing at Vincent. "Unlike you, I have excellent alcohol tolerance."

Vincent gave a faked offended look. "I'm sure most of that is the MAKO." he joked.

"Or I'm just naturally built for it," Sephiroth joked back.

Vincent chuckled. "That I believe."

"Honestly, though, I am more used to it. I've had to attend social dinners as long as I can remember and wine is a common drink no matter your age."

"I don't think we'll be drinking wine there." Vincent rose a brow.

"I know," Sephiroth chuckled. "It just means I was introduced to alcohol, even if it was mild, from a young age. I've built my tolerance slowly over time."

"Lucky," Vincent teased lightly, finishing his dinner.

Sephiroth chuckled, finishing his own meal before standing and taking their dishes to wash them. "If you want, go ahead and move your pillows into my room and we can watch a movie or two before bed."
Vincent smiled happily. "Alright!" he called out, going to his room to get the pillows and letting out a huge sigh. He was happy and nervous.

Sephiroth began looking through movies while Vincent was busy, finding a few more cheap horror movies they could watch. Vincent set up the pillows on Sephiroth's bed, taking in a deep breath before sitting down and getting comfortable. Sephiroth sat beside him, getting comfortable and starting the first movie on the list. Vincent smiled, leaning back and hesitantly curling up to Sephiroth again. The general glanced at him before wrapping an arm around his shoulders to show it was alright. Vincent snuggled up to him, body relaxing fully as he did. Sephiroth began to comb his fingers through Vincent's hair absently. Vincent gave a small smile to himself. He liked the feeling, so he said nothing and continued to watch the movie. Around the middle of the third movie he had fallen comfortably asleep.

Sephiroth smiled when he noticed, turning off the TV and laying down himself to get some sleep. Vincent slept with no nightmares that night, sleeping through all of it peacefully. When he woke up he blinked at the feeling of a body underneath him, before remembering the night before and smiling. Sephiroth shifted, rolling over in his sleep and curling up a bit. Vincent used that opportunity to move a little closer, not really wanting to move yet. Sephiroth absently wrapped an arm around him to pull him closer in his sleep. Vincent decided to wrap his own around Sephiroth, smiling and giving a small happy sigh as he closed his eyes.

Sephiroth shifted, opening an eye before yawning. "What time is it?" he asked, sounding half asleep.

"Around eight." Vincent said softly, not bothering to move.

Sephiroth hummed, closing his eye again, snuggling into Vincent's embrace. It was nice, the warmth and slight comfort.

"This feels nice..." Vincent said softly. "I slept well, too. Through the whole night."

Sephiroth shifted so he could face him, offering a small smile. "That's good, I'm glad this worked."

Vincent smiled. "I am too." he said softly. "Thank you."

The general shrugged. "There's no need to thank me, I wanted to help."

"I know. But...well you always seemed like you didn't like contact with others." Vincent said softly.

Sephiroth blinked. "I... it's not that..." he shifted, rolling onto his back and staring up at the ceiling. "I've been a part of SOLDIER since I was a child. I'm not used to contact outside of formal greetings, check ups, or fights."

"So it's more nervousness than an aversion to it?" Vincent tilted his head. He smiled. "I suppose we are a little similar in that regard."

Sephiroth rose an eyebrow. "You get nervous about this kind of stuff?" he asked, curious.

Vincent nodded. "Yeah. I..." he paused. "My childhood wasn't so great. Being touched by someone I don't know became a kind of fear. Even if they are friendly." he said softly. "Even this...I'm happy. but still a little nervous. But I trust you."
Sephiroth nodded, slowly wrapping his arms around Vincent and pulling him close. "I'll do what I can to help ease that fear then..."

Vincent pressed his face against Sephiroth's chest. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," he replied before stretching. "Are you hungry? I could make some omurice."

Vincent smiled, looking up at him. "That sounds great."

Sephiroth nodded and got up, stretching as he walked to the kitchen and got started on making breakfast.

Vincent got up, taking a quick shower and dressing before going into the kitchen. Sephiroth was moving their breakfast onto plates as he walked in, setting the plates on the table before turning to get them both drinks. "This looks great." Vincent smiled, sitting down.

"Thank you. Do you want any sauce or ketchup for your omurice?" Sephiroth asked, glancing at him.

"Ketchup, Please." Vincent said happily.

Sephiroth smiled, getting it out and handing it to him. He then sat down to start eating his own meal.

Vincent took a bite and smiled. "You're a great cook."

"Oh? Didn't the meals I've cooked before this suggest that?" Sephiroth joked with a raised eyebrow.

Vincent chuckled. "Yes, but it still amazes me every time. I'm also not used to people cooking for me."

"Yet another thing I'll have to remedy," Sephiroth joked, giving the smallest bit of a smile before taking another bite of his food. "Tonight is when we're spending time with your friends, right?"

Vincent nodded. "Yes. We're meeting up around seven."

"Do you want to do anything before then?"

"Maybe walk around the market and grab lunch?"

"That sounds good to me," Sephiroth smirked.

Vincent smiled. "Great!"

Sephiroth finished his breakfast and stood, placing his plate in the sink and leaving to get dressed. Since he was already dressed, Vincent did the dishes and cleaned up. Sephiroth walked out while tying his hair back loosely. He smiled as he walked over to Vincent, thanking him for cleaning up. "Ready to go?"

Vincent nodded. "Yes."

Sephiroth smiled, offering his arm so they could walk out together before locking up his apartment and leading the way out of the building and to the market. Vincent smiled as he held Sephiroth's arm, thinking of how surreal this all was. The market wasn't crowded today, making it easy to maneuver and explore. Many booths had new merchandise out for the month and some were
preparing for the various holidays approaching.

Vincent looked around happily, feeling excited. "This is so different from Wutai. The marketplace is quite small there."

"Oh? I'd imagine it would be huge, given the population."

"You'd figure." he chuckled. "There are more indoor stores than outdoor. But... with the war... nobody is selling much of anything."

Sephiroth gave a slow nod, frowning. "That is a shame."

"It really is. Wutai can create some amazing things."

"We sometimes get crafts from Wutai in our marketplace. Perhaps we can find you a piece of home?"

Vincent smiled. "I'd like that."

Sephiroth smiled, leading him deeper into the marketplace and looking around for any booths that looked interesting. Vincent found some fans and some other small trinkets that he liked, chatting happily as he and Sephiroth walked. Sephiroth was smiling throughout their conversation, glad to see Vincent seeming so at ease after everything he'd been through. When they were through shopping, Vincent pointed to a small café. "Want to sit and eat?" he asked.

Sephiroth gave a nod. "That sounds nice," he mused as they wondered over. "Have you been enjoying today so far?"

"I have been." Vincent smiled, his face flushing a little. "This is... what a real date is like, isn't it?" he asked, somewhat shyly. "I haven't really been on many. Actually I've only been on one. With one of the store owners from Jake's hometown."

"I haven't been on many myself, but... yes, I suppose so. Zack said it was like one when I informed him where we were going, at least."

"So... would this be... our technical First Date?"

"If you'd like it to be," Sephiroth said with a grin as he relaxed in his chair and sat his menu down. Vincent smiled wider behind his menu. "I would like that very much."

"Then this is our first date," Sephiroth chuckled. "I'd say it's going very well."

Vincent set his menu down and nodded. "I'd agree." he tilted his head. "So... I was thinking, since we don't know a lot of personal things about each other, asking the more mundane things about us? Like... hmm... what's your favorite animal?"

Sephiroth considered his answer. "Well, I like wolves and ravens," he admitted.

"I like cats... well, felines in general. And oddly bats." he chuckled. "I think they are adorable."

Sephiroth glanced over to see their waitress approaching, greeting her and handing off their orders before returning his attention to Vincent. "I don't think liking bats is odd."

"You don't?" Vincent asked. "I mean... it's not one of the more popular liked animals."
"They're extremely social creatures," Sephiroth mused, "at least with each other. I've found them very interesting to watch at night. There's an amazing amount of species within them, too."

Vincent smiled happily at that. "So... next question. What do you usually do with your spare time? Whenever you get it?"

"Well... before I met you I would train, occasionally read or get dragged off somewhere by Genesis or Zack," Sephiroth mused, shifting in his chair. "Now, though, I like to spend it with you, read, or just watch movies."

Vincent chuckled at that. "Zack seems to be perpetually in a good mood."

Sephiroth scoffed. "If I didn't know better, I'd believe he wasn't human. It's not normal to have that much energy."

"Well, doesn't Commander Hewley call him Puppy? It fits quite well." Vincent chuckled.

Sephiroth chuckled and shook his head gently. "I don't think even puppies can match Zack's energy."

Vincent laughed. "That may be true."

"He seems to have taken an interest in your friends. Do they say they're getting any extra work because of it?"

"Not that I've heard, but we can ask when we see them." Vincent replied.

The waitress came by with their food then, setting it down and letting them know to call her if they needed anything before leaving to attend to other customers. Sephiroth smiled, taking a bite of his meal and humming in approval. "This place is always worth the wait," he mused.

Vincent tried a small bite of his food and smiled. "Oh! This is amazing." he said happily.

"I'm glad you like it. I found this place by accident last year."

"I'm happy you decided to share it with me."

Sephiroth nodded, chuckling. "Is there anything else you'd like to do for later dates?" he asked, tilting his head curiously. "I mean, is there anything you've been wanting to do for a while or that you've wanted to try?"

Vincent paused, thinking. "Well... there are a couple of different competitions going around in Sector 7." he mused.

"Ah, yes... they always seem to have something going on. Were there any specific competitions that caught your interest?" Sephiroth asked, stretching in his chair before going back to his food.

"There is a couple of melee ones that looked interesting."

Sephiroth nodded to show he was listening as he thought of his response. "If you want to enter them then I don't mind cheering you on," he offered. "I'll have to admit, though, that some of the competitions held here just... aren't in my interests, most of the time. There have been ones I've liked, though."

"If I ever enter any it would be a gun one." he said before tilting his head. "Which ones do you like?"
"I've entered a sword fighting competition once, but I've mostly done the ones that were less competitive and more for fun. Like races or obstacle courses."

"Oh those do sound like fun!" Vincent smiled.

"They are, the obstacle courses are great for increasing your reflexes as well. People don't always play fair during them," Sephiroth chuckled.

"That's to be expected." Vincent chuckled.

"We could try some of them out next week, if you'd like."

"I'd love that!"

Sephiroth chuckled at his enthusiasm. "I was thinking that, after we finish lunch here, we could go the square. See if there are any little events or fairs going on."

Vincent nodded. "That sounds good."

Sephiroth chuckled gently. After lunch he took Vincent to the square, looking around at the large mass of booths and vendors with games, trinkets, and shows. Vincent took instant interest in the shows, curious about them. Sephiroth smirked as they walked over.

"I've never seen anything like this before." Vincent said, awed.

"Really? We have shows like this all the time in the streets..."

"That's amazing." Vincent said softly.

"We can try to come out more often to see them, if you'd like."

"That would be wonderful." Vincent said.

Sephiroth smiled, watching the current show being performed. It was a tale about the city's history. Vincent smiled, leaning a little against Sephiroth as he watched. Sephiroth smirked, enjoying how this felt to watch the show with his lover and how it felt to just relax like this. "Thank you for coming out with me like this." Vincent said softly.

"There's no need to thank me, I feel we have both needed this for a long time."

"You for longer than me, probably." Vincent smiled. "When was your last break?"

Sephiroth paused, face blanking as he thought before he slowly frowned and looked down. "I... can't remember..." he admitted slowly after a long while.

Vincent shook his head. "Yeah. You needed this a lot."

Sephiroth chuckled. "It's... strange not being scheduled to work."

"It's a good thing, though. You're obviously overworked." Vincent said softly.

Sephiroth shrugged. "It's all part of being the General."

Vincent frowned at that.

Sephiroth noticed the frown and tilted his head while raising an eyebrow. "Is something wrong?"
"They should treat you better. That's too much work for one person..." he said softly.

"Perhaps," Sephiroth started in a thoughtful tone, tilting his head, "but it is the kind of work I was made for. I understood the burdens and trials going into it."

"Still... I think you need a few more breaks than you are getting." Vincent insisted gently.

Sephiroth rose an eyebrow at that. "You do? Others usually never consider that...." he mentioned honestly.

"Well... I really don't think most others see you as Human." Vincent scowled softly. "You're just... their symbol? A Hero that's invincible... It's ridiculous."

Sephiroth shrugged a bit. "It's... what I'm used to."

"Well, I won't treat you like that. And I'm sure once they've hung out with you like we're about to, Jake and Marcus won't either."

"... Thank you," Sephiroth said gently, unsure how else to respond. He wasn't used to someone putting him first instead of the goal or mission.

Vincent smiled, hugging his arm. "Come on! It's about time to meet them."

Sephiroth nodded and stood, leading the way back to their headquarters.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

SO sorry this is late, though it is a tad bit longer than the other chapters. I hope this doesn't disappoint anyone! I know it get's OOC (but a lot of this will be OOC) But I hope you all enjoy this!

Chapter 19

Vincent smiled widely when they met up with his two friends. "Hey you guys!"

Jake and Marcus both perked up, waving to Vincent while laughing. Jake ran over to practically tackle his friend. "It's been forever!" he cried over dramatically before laughing. "Are you excited for tonight?"

Vincent laughed, hugging the man back. "I am!" he nodded. "Oh! I guess you can be formally introduced. This is Jake and Marcus." He said, turning to Sephiroth, hesitantly taking the man's hand.

Sephiroth let him before turning his attention to the two knew guests and giving a nod of his head in place of more formal greeting gestures. "It's nice to finally really get the chance to meet you. Vincent's told me a lot about both of you."

Jake awkwardly laughed, feeling nervous and a bit unsure how to act around someone so high in rank. "It's nice to meet you too! Are you and Vincent getting along well?"

Vincent smiled at Jake. "You can relax, Jake. He's a normal human like us." Vincent chuckled. "A normal human who just so happens to, technically, be our boss," Marcus mused from behind Jake, though he was smiling and gave a chuckle afterwards. "We should be fine, as long as we don't have another incident with Vincent getting drunk and confessing to random strangers."

Vincent blushed. "I didn't confess! I just kissed him!" he said. "At least I wasn't hanging from the ceiling."

Jake just grinned. "So kissing a random stranger is better than saying you like them?" he teased.

Vincent's blush darkened. "He wasn't a random stranger... I knew who he was... and I'm not making this any better..."

"You really aren't," Marcus agreed with a nod and a small smile before turning to Sephiroth to give him a small greeting. "I apologize for all of us acting a bit foolish, we don't get to see each other often and so we like teasing each other," he explained, one of his hands coming up to boredly wave as he spoke, the other staying in his pocket.

Sephiroth just gave a nod and one of his own smiles. "It's alright, I don't mind. It's entertaining to watch and I've teased Vincent plenty about that night," he shrugged before tilting his head and looking over Marcus and Jake. "But what is this story I'm hearing of someone hanging from the ceiling?"
Vincent chuckled. "Marcus or Jake would have to tell that one. I wasn't there."

"I'll tell you on the walk to the bar, I doubt Jake remembers much of that night," Marcus shrugged as he turned to lead the way.

Vincent laughed, continuing to hold Sephiroth's hand as they walked. Sephiroth was grinning as he listened to their stories during the walk, looking up when they reached the bar. It was a modest place, setup inside a concrete building with wooden doors and a small stage inside.

"Now you two need to help me get Sephiroth to sing!" Vincent chuckled.

Marcus rose an eyebrow. "Help... how?" he asked slowly while looking over his friends.

"We could get him drunk," Jake suggested casually while wrapping an arm around Vincent's shoulders. Sephiroth sighed at the idea and shook his head.

"I do not get drunk easily."

Vincent laughed. "That was my plan, Jake. We even discussed it." he added to tease Sephiroth.

Sephiroth sighed. "I told you, it won't work."

"Worth a shot?" Vincent rose a brow at his friends, smirking.

"Definitely worth a shot," Jake smirked, releasing Vincent to walk on the other side of Sephiroth.

Marcus sighed good naturedly. "I'll be our designated friend and keep all of you from embarrassing yourselves too badly, then."

Vincent looked at Jake. "We still need to get Marcus to embarrass himself!" he said, laughing.

"Not tonight, though," Marcus chuckled, "tonight is the General's turn. You can try me on another night when I'm not acting as your common sense."

Vincent chuckled, leaning against Sephiroth. "We're still doing this, but I have a feeling this will backfire on us."

Sephiroth just smirked at him while Jake and Marcus discussed what drinks and food orders to get to start everyone off.

"So how have you two been?" Vincent asked after everything was ordered.

"I've been well," Marcus said, smiling as he sat down and stretched a bit in his seat. "I'm in consideration for a promotion," he added with a shrug.

Jake chuckled beside him, leaning on the table some. "I'm doing good, too. I'm getting better jobs and I'm no longer stuck on cleaning duty half the time."

"You were only stuck there because you were the one who'd made the mess," Marcus pointed out with a sideways glance at his friend.

Vincent chuckled. "Congratulations, Marcus." He turned to Jake. "Yeah... I can totally see that being true."

"Hey!" Jake squeaked, frowning while throwing his hands up. "I'm not that bad!"
"I've seen your room Jake." Vincent teased.

"It's honestly not that bad!" Jake defended, crossing his arms and pouting.

"It was like playing Hide and Seek with the floor." Vincent chuckled. "Though it was mostly clothing everywhere."

"That was one time," Jake added, sitting up straighter in his seat to make a point.

"I know for a fact Vincent's been to your room to hang out with you more than once," Marcus pointed out in a bored tone while leaning on the table. "You can't try to blame your bunkmates for the mess, either. We know what your clothing looks like."

Vincent chuckled lightly.

Jake hid his face in embarrassment, groaning while Marcus chuckled. Marcus turned to Sephiroth next, smiling at him. "So, how's living with Vincent?" he asked.

Sephiroth shrugged gently with a gentle smile. "It's nice. We both cook and we help each other out with the chores. We work well together."

Vincent smiled. "Sephiroth is an amazing cook!"

"Vincent is also good," Sephiroth mused while relaxing in his chair.

"That's actually really cool that you guys cook for each other. Are you learning any recipes together?" Marcus asked.

Vincent nodded. "We trade some and look up new ones we'd both like to try."

"I admit that I'm quite enjoying the Wutain dishes Vincent has taught me, I've always wanted to learn some of them but it's hard to find reliable recipes when you don't know what to look for," Sephiroth explained while setting his menu down and offering a small grin.

"That's so cool," Jake laughed, looking up as their waitress came over to get their orders. Things quieted long enough for them to each say what they want, before going back to their conversation when the waitress left. "So, any favorite recipes so far?" Jake asked, looking at both Vincent and Sephiroth.

"There is a stir-fry Sephiroth makes that I love." Vincent said, nodding.

"You should bring some for us to try sometime," Marcus mused, absently checking his phone for the time. "It'd be nice to have something other than what the cafeteria serves."

Vincent looked at Sephiroth. "Would that be okay?"

Sephiroth shrugged and offered a smile. "I don't mind, it's nice cooking for others now and then."

Vincent smiled happily at that.

"What foods do the two of you like?" Sephiroth asked towards Jake and Marcus, he'd need an idea of what to make if he was going to start cooking for them occasionally.

"I like just about anything, I'm not really picky," Marcus replied with a shrug, smiling as their drinks were brought to them and accepting his to start sipping on it.
"I like old style and simple meals myself," Jake answered while inspecting his drink, absently sliding Vincent's across the table to the other man. "Though, I do like spicy things, too."

Vincent chuckled, taking his drink with a thanks. "I noticed that when I stayed with you over break. I really don’t know how you can eat such spicy things."

Jake just shrugged. "I grew up with it," he stated simply before chuckling. "My big sister only knew how to make spicy food when I was a kid, so I guess I got a taste for it after years with her cooking."

"I'm surprised you can taste anything at all after all of that," Marcus shot back with a raised eyebrow before shaking his head. "I made the mistake, once, when we first got to know each other to accept something he offered me from his lunch box. I'm never going to make that mistake again."

Vincent nodded. "I was lucky. I smelled the spices first." he chuckled. "That and I don't really like spicy food to begin with."

Sephiroth watched them all curiously as they continued to discuss food, looking up when he saw the waitress approaching once more. "Our meals are here," he pointed out.

Vincent looked up, smiling happily. "They smell wonderful."

Jake was beaming. "I love this place's food! It's never ceased to be worth the price."

Vincent chuckled, taking a bite of his food. "Oh! This is amazing!"

Jake was scarfing his food down already, Marcus scolding him to slow down before he choked. Sephiroth was smiling at the scene, enjoying how... normal everything felt. Vincent was eating slower, chatting happily.

"So, how did you guys find this place?" Sephiroth asked before taking a bite of his food.

"By accident. We were all just walking and talking and missed where we were going to eat. We saw this nearby and decided to try it."

Sephiroth paused at that, thinking it over along with the other stuff he'd learned about Vincent. "Is... this a habit of yours? Finding interesting places by accident?"

Vincent laughed. "It seems to be." he said.

Sephiroth shook his head. "I should be worried at how often you get lost."

"Does it help that I get lost with other people with me?" he rose a brow.

"Vincent, that makes things worse," Marcus said gently, reaching a hand out to his friend. "Think of how that sounds."

"I know it sounds bad, but at least I'm not alone?" he shrugged.

Sephiroth sighed. "You're hopeless," he mused while shaking his head.

Vincent chuckled.

"So, how is living together going?" Marcus asked, pointing the question towards Vincent and Sephiroth.
Vincent blushed lightly. "I'd say it's going well..."

"Yes, Vincent is a good roommate," Sephiroth agreed gently while continuing his meal, not seeming phased about the question. Jake and Marcus both chuckled at such a simple answer. Vincent smiled at that, pleased with his answer.

"And the two of you started dating, how'd that happen?" Jake asked with a wide smile, leaning against the table while looking at Vincent.

"Well... we kept going out together... you guys kept teasing me, so I just kind of asked and..." he shrugged and smiled. "It just happened." he looked at Sephiroth. "Unless you can explain it better?"

Sephiroth shrugged. "Your explanation is plenty. We started spending time together, we got to know one another... those 'hang outs' became 'dates,'" he mused with another shrug, taking a sip of his drink.

Marcus and Jake smiled at the two of them, chuckling at how nonchalant they both were. "This is good, though... for both of you," Marcus mused before taking a bite of his food.

Vincent rose a brow. "You think so?" he asked.

Marcus nodded. "Yes. You were both too reserved before."

Vincent gave a small smile. "I suppose that's true."

"Plus, you both worked way too hard before your accident," Jake pointed out, pointing his fork at Vincent for extra emphasis to his words.

"Pointing your fork is rude." Vincent joked, sticking out his tongue playfully at Jake.

"I'm friends with children," Marcus sighed, laughing when Jake slapped the back of his head gently and huffed in mock offense.

Vincent chuckled happily. "So you and Sephiroth are the designated adults." he chuckled. "Unless Jake and I can get either of you to act childish. Or drunk."

"Good luck with that," Sephiroth smirked.

"Anata ga sasainakoto o shite iru nodarou ka..." he mused to himself looking at Sephiroth with a smirk.

Sephiroth frowned at that, raising an eyebrow. "I have no idea what you've just said, but I feel like I should be concerned..." he noted while grabbing his drink to sip from. Marcus and Jake both laughed at the reaction, shaking their heads.

"Sounds to me like he's planning something," Jake joked with a grin, gently elbowing Vincent.

Vincent grinned. "Maybe." he said, sipping his own drink.

The conversation fell into more laid back topics after that, just catching up and getting to know Sephiroth a bit more before Jake got up to try karaoke. Vincent smirked, calling that it would be his turn next. He was waiting for Sephiroth to get more relaxed to test his theory. And about how to do it. Sephiroth was smiling as he watched, chuckling softly at Vincent singing while shaking his head. After Vincent finished Marcus stood, Jake pulling him over to the stage to sing a duet.
with him. Vincent smiled at that. He was happy Jake's crush didn't affect his and Marcus’ friendship, but was also a little sad for Jake, thinking that it must be hard for him.

Jake was smiling as he sang, hanging off of Marcus jokingly before they came back to the table, Jake out of breath and Marcus laughing. "You'd be in better shape right now if you'd go to those swimming lessons I'd told you about."

Vincent rose a brow. "Can you not swim, Jake?"

Jake blushed, frowning. "I can swim..." he said defensively.

Marcus shook his head. "He can barely swim. Our commanders are offering water endurance training, it helps with your breathing and stuff... Jake here keeps refusing, despite the fact that they do have lessons for those who can't be on the same level as everyone else and can slowly build him up to what we do."

Vincent smirked. "I can teach you." Vincent offered to Jake.

Jake pouted. "I should know how to swim," he sighed.

Vincent smiled encouragingly. "I'd be glad to help you. I'm a great swimmer."

Jake sighed. "Yeah... I guess..." he frowned. "It'd be better than admitting to the higher ups that I need lessons."

Vincent glanced at Sephiroth and chuckled. "You already did... kinda."

Jake glanced at Sephiroth as well before shrugging. "He's different, he's dating you and he's not directly over me. It's less embarrassing since I rarely see him for business, if I'd ever see him."

Vincent tilted his head, nodding. "I suppose that's true."

Sephiroth chuckled. "Glad to see that my preferences in relationships is what deems me worthy of being spoken to," he joked.

Jake glanced over and grinned. "Well, you're dating part of our group... so it makes you part of it by extension!"

Vincent smiled and hugged Sephiroth's arm. "It's true."

Sephiroth relaxed a bit at that, though he still felt a bit unsure about all of this. He wasn't used to just... hanging out with people, so he was just trying to follow their lead. After all, Genesis wasn't the best role model for social interactions, from what he'd observed at base.

Vincent smiled at him. "If I sing will you come up and do it with me?" he asked.

"I honestly can't sing," Sephiroth frowned. "I don't think I'd do well on stage."

"It's Karaoke, Sephiroth. You aren't supposed to be good." Vincent chuckled.

The General shifted, giving a frown. "I am fine with watching, thank you."

Vincent's playful smile wilted, turning into a small frown as he sighed and pulled away from Sephiroth, standing. "I'm going to get a drink..." he said suddenly, motioning to a nearby bar. "I'll be right back."
Sephiroth frowned back, a confused look on his face. He moved to follow Vincent, but Marcus's grip on his arm stopped him. "Let Jake handle this, if Vince is upset he can cheer him up pretty quickly," he assured.

Sephiroth hesitated, glancing between Jake and Marcus as Jake stood and began to move towards the bar. Sephiroth slowly sat down with a sigh. "I upset him," he stated matter-of-factly with a frown. "Does singing mean that much to him?" he questioned. Marcus simply shrugged in response.

Jake caught up to Vincent quickly, gently grabbing his shoulder so he wouldn't startle him as he approached. "Hey... are you alright?"

Vincent sighed, shaking his head. "I don't know. I guess..." he sighed again. "I just wanted to try to do something fun with him that wasn’t cooking or talking about work. And hanging around here is fun, but... I saw you and Marcus up there, and even though Marcus wasn't as into it as you, the two of you seemed to be having fun... I guess I forget that Sephiroth is a bit different than dating a regular person." he shook his head, shoulders slumping. "I'm just being stupid. This shouldn't upset me."

Jake frowned. "It's fine to be upset," he assured while wrapping an arm around Vincent. "Have you tried talking to Sephiroth about this? No offense, but from what I've seen in media I don't think the guy's really had a... normal childhood or is used to normal social interactions."

"We haven't spoken about this in particular. We've really only just started to have normal, comfortable conversations that aren't about work." Vincent admitted.

Jake paused, thinking over what Vincent had shared before sighing. "Maybe you should try to talk... maybe get him to open up about what he used to do before SOLDIER or something? It might help. At the very least it can give you an idea of what kind of experiences he's had."

Vincent frowned. "I know he was raised in Shin-Ra..."

Jake nodded. "Then you," he gently poked Vincent in the chest, "need to figure out how much of a normal childhood he had. We probably have to start from square one social wise with him."

"You'll have to help me with that. I'm socially awkward with most people. You and Marcus are exceptions."

Jake beamed as he hugged Vincent close. "Of course I'll help!"

Vincent smiled. "Thank you."

"No problem!" Jake smirked, slapping his shoulder. "Now, let's get back to the table before your boyfriend starts to worry."

Vincent smirked and nodded. "But I really am grabbing a drink." he said, laughing. He grabbed one for Sephiroth as well, heading back to their table with Jake.

Marcus and Sephiroth were talking quietly when they returned, Sephiroth frowning in confusion at whatever the other man was talking about. Vincent sat down, feeling a little embarrassed that he had just walked away like that before he noticed their faces. He tensed a little, silently moving the drink he got Sephiroth towards the man.

Sephiroth blinked at the movement, looking up to Vincent and offering a small, uncertain smile. "Thank you," he said gently as he accepted the drink. "Are you alright?"

Sephiroth shifted before shaking his head gently. "You don't have to apologize... I should be apologizing since I didn't mean to upset you."

"I should of realized this would be something you aren't used to." Vincent said softly. "And besides, getting up and just walking away without saying anything is a bit childish."

Sephiroth paused at that. "I believe it is more mature than what Genesis usually does. He would've thrown a drink on me," he pointed out, unsure if it would help. Marcus and Jake stared in shock before bursting into laughter, Jake falling to the floor and curling in a ball as he did so.

Vincent chuckled, shaking his head. "Now that is a bit more childish. And really, only Genesis would be brave, or stupid, enough to throw a drink at you."

Sephiroth gave a small smile. "I accidentally insulted a book he liked without meaning to," he shrugged.

"That's ridiculous." Vincent laughed.

Sephiroth shrugged. "I admit I am not the best at most social interactions... I sometimes do not catch myself before I make others upset, though I do my best. Genesis is just... more sensitive than most."

"Especially with anything to do with Loveless." Vincent smirked.

Sephiroth paused, frowning. "Please do not remind me of that phase he's going through."

"Is it really just a phase, though?" Vincent teased. "I mean... he finds ways to quote it in normal conversations... it's more of an obsession.."

Sephiroth gave him a long-suffering expression before sighing. "I try to ignore it the best I can. It's starting to become problematic and mildly worrying."

Vincent laughed again, patting Sephiroth's arm. Marcus and Jake just quietly watched in amusement.

Sephiroth relaxed at that, offering a shy smile. "I... can try to go on stage, if... it means that much to you."

Vincent returned his smile. "You really don't have to if you're uncomfortable with it. I... I just wanted to try something fun together." he said softly.

Sephiroth nodded slowly while shifting. "Thank you," he said gently. "I'm sorry."

"It's alright." Vincent assured him.

Marcus smiled at the two of them. "How about we visit a different bar?" he offered. "Sephiroth might not feel up for karaoke, but he might know how to dance..."

Vincent smirked. "That sounds like a good idea!"

Sephiroth thought for a bit before nodding in agreement. "I would feel more comfortable doing that," he agreed.

Vincent's smile brightened. "Alright! Do you know a good place, Marcus?"
Marcus smirked. "I know several," he said while standing and giving chuckle. "Just follow me," he added as he turned to leave. Jake was cheering as he stood to follow Marcus, Sephiroth smiling gently and shaking his head as he stood. Vincent stood to follow them, feeling excited.

The club Marcus lead them to was only a couple blocks away, already filled with people and playing music loud enough to hear it outside the building. Jake lit up at seeing the sign, starting to jump a bit with each step the closer they got, while Marcus chuckled and tried to calm the man down. Sephiroth rose an eyebrow at the scene, looking around curiously.

Vincent tilted his head and looked at Marcus. "I'm guessing this is some kind of famous place?"

Marcus shrugged. "Not overly so, Jake just really likes it here."

Vincent chuckled. "Ah, okay."

"I'm sure you guys will love it," Jake encouraged with a smile. "It has great music and a decent atmosphere. It even has side rooms incase you want to party with a smaller group instead of in the crowded main room."

"That does sound great."

"They have food from all over, too!" Jake added in excitedly, hopping in place a bit. "I love the kabobs they have from Wutai."

Vincent laughed at his friend. They reached the door then before they all walked in, Jake hopping around a bit excitedly.

"Too bad the nickname 'Puppy' is already taken." Vincent joked with Sephiroth and Marcus, chuckling at Jake's eagerness.

Jake stuck his tongue out at him. "I'm not as bad as a puppy," he laughed. "I just have a lot of energy that I haven't gotten to expend lately."

"Sounds like a puppy to me." Vincent teased.

"Nuh-uh!" Jake defended. "I'm more like a rabbit."

"Okay, then we'll call you Rabbit." he laughed.

Jake laughed, smiling as he hugged Vincent and looked around. The club was decorated with an industrial design, large lit up platforms around to dance on along with a large dance floor. "Do you want to dance?" Jake asked Vincent.

Vincent smiled brightly. "Yes!~"

Jake grabbed Vincent's hand, eagerly dragging him out to the dance floor so they could get started while Marcus and Sephiroth walked around the outskirts of the club to find a table they could claim and order some food and drinks. Vincent followed Jake excitedly.

Marcus laughed as he sat down with Sephiroth glancing at him. "You seem much more comfortable," he noted.

"I am," Sephiroth nodded in agreement. "This is more wild than I am used to, but it is something somewhat familiar."

Marcus nodded back, smile growing. "That's good." He fell silent for a few long moments, simply
watching Vincent and Jake dance. "I'm glad you and Vincent found each other," he mused to break the lull in conversation. "He was in a dark place, but I can tell you make him very happy."

Sephiroth blinked, glancing over at the other man before slowly giving a small smile. "He makes me happy as well," he admitted. "He's... very different from what I am used to, and I admit I like that."

Marcus chuckled, eyes closing as he shook his head. "I think Vincent's different from what any of us are used to," he joked.

On the dance floor, Jake was spinning Vincent around, trying teach him some of his dances from home. He glanced over and smirked. "You've got someone's attention~" he teased.

Vincent glanced over, blushing slightly, hiding it with his hair as they continued dancing. "Don’t point it out! You're going to make me mess up!" he said, giving a chuckle before pausing. "Do I at least not look like an idiot trying to dance?"

"You're doing fine," his friend assured with a smile. "Sephiroth is lucky to have you."

Vincent gave a small chuckle. "You know, If I hadn't had such a huge crush on him, I probably would have tried to get with you, even before knowing you were gay." he said softly. "But I'm more than happy to have you as a friend."

"Same," Jake laughed, bumping shoulders with Vincent. "I like having you as an honorary brother, though."

Vincent smiled. "Yes, your family does seem to have adopted me."

"They're good at that," Jake laughed.

Vincent laughed with him.

"Still... your boyfriend looks a lot more relaxed here," Jake mused.

Vincent looked over at Sephiroth and smiled. "He does." he agreed.

Jake hugged Vincent while laughing again. "At least we know he prefers dancing now," he chuckled.

Vincent laughed. "True."

Jake smiled and spun Vincent around with a laugh. "Let's make sure tonight's the best night ever for all of us, then!"

Vincent grinned widely. "Yes!"

Jake kept Vincent dancing with him for a while before dragging him to their table to eat some of the snacks laid out and get drinks. Sephiroth smiled at Vincent as they sat down. "You looked wonderful out there," he complimented.

Vincent blushed lightly and smiled. "Thanks." he paused. "Would you like to dance after the drinks?"

Sephiroth nodded. "I'd love to," he assured gently.

Vincent smiled happily, leaning against Sephiroth a little. Sephiroth stood after he'd had a couple
drinks, gently taking Vincent's hand and requesting a dance. Vincent took it happily. Sephiroth smiled and lead him out to the dance floor, pulling him close as they began to dance.

Vincent let him, smiling brightly. "You're a great dancer."

"Thank you," Sephiroth chuckled. "I spent many years learning."

Vincent smiled. "It shows."

Sephiroth spun Vincent with a soft chuckle before pulling him close again. "You're a good dancer yourself," he complimented.

"I'm just learning," Vincent chuckled, happy with the compliment.

"Oh? I would've thought you'd been dancing for at least a year just going off your skills," the general smiled.

Vincent blushed. "I'm just following you..."

Sephiroth shrugged. "Even that is hard for some," he pointed out.

Vincent smiled up at him, hesitantly pressing closer as the song changed to something more upbeat. Sephiroth smiled as he let one hand gently grabbed Vincent's hip, helping steady his movements and hold him close. Vincent moved with Sephiroth, feeling less nervous as he started to lose himself in the music.

Sephiroth smiled at that, spinning Vincent around gently. "We should do this more often..." he mused in a soft voice, barely audible over the music.

Vincent heard him fine, nodding. "We should. I like this."

Sephiroth hummed in thought, hesitating before kissing Vincent's forehead gently. Vincent froze for a moment before hesitantly tilting his head up. Sephiroth smirked before giving a gentle kiss to Vincent's lips. Vincent smiled into it, kissing him back softly.

"I'm glad I can spend time with you and your friends."

"I'm glad to see you relaxing around them." he smiled.

Sephiroth glanced over at Vincent's friends before shrugging. "It's easy to do so with you beside me."

Vincent smiled happily at that. Sephiroth relaxed a bit, watching him with gentle eyes. Vincent continued to dance for a little while before stopping for a drink.

Sephiroth ordered one beside him, chuckling. "Are you enjoying yourself tonight?"

"I am." Vincent said happily. "I hope you are as well."

"I quite enjoyed today. I'm glad I could spend time with you and get to know your friends."

Vincent smiled and leaned against Sephiroth.

Sephiroth smiled at him, glad Vincent seemed to be feeling more at ease. "I apologize again for what happened at the bar... I just am not a big fan of singing."
"It's alright, really. I shouldn't of pushed so much." Vincent said softly.

Sephiroth slowly gave a nod before smiling. "We can talk later... figure out more things we wouldn't both mind doing."

"I'd like that."

"Do you enjoy swimming?"

Vincent nodded. "I do. I haven't been swimming in a while. Not since I left Wutai."

"I know where a small lake is in the forests outside."

"That sounds wonderful."

Sephiroth chuckled, taking a sip of his drink. "I look forward to it."

Vincent smiled happily, sipping his own drink. They began to make their way back to Vincent's friends, Marcus smiling up at them from where he was drinking a glass of water.

"Hey." Vincent greeted them.

"Are you both having fun?" Marcus asked with a smirk, leaning onto the table a bit.

Vincent chuckled. "Yes." he said as he sat down.

"I'm glad. You both looked a lot more comfortable out on the dance floor than at the last club."

Vincent smiled. "Yeah, we both decided we liked this better."

"Great, this can be our usual hang-out spot when your boyfriend joins us, then."

Vincent smiled happily at that.
Chapter 20

AGH!!! So nervous for this one guys!!!! It's the time! It's happening!
It's................SMUT! And I'm SO very nervous. I hope it came out enjoyable and not
/too/ OOC and not awkward or anything. Cant say we're the best at writing it, much
less for others! Feel free to leave comments and input or suggestions for (possible)
future scenes. I'll stop my nervous rant now and let you (hopefully) enjoy this chapter!

~Saigo

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Chapter 20

The trip back to their suit was a quiet one, Sephiroth holding Vincent close to his side and
chuckling. "I believe you've had a little too much to drink," he said softly.

Jake was drunk enough that Marcus was carrying him back to the base.

Vincent chuckled back. "I haven't.." he insisted, though his voice slurred a little.

"Oh? Is that why I'm basically carrying you?" Sephiroth teased in a soft voice, raising an eyebrow.

"My feet are still on the ground." he pouted.

Sephiroth chuckled and shook his head, readjusting his hold on Vincent as they got in the elevator.
He gave a wave to Marcus before hitting the button to ride up to his suit. "Let's get you to bed," he
assured as the doors opened again and he began leading Vincent into the suite.

Vincent clung onto Sephiroth, chuckling a little. "I want a kiss." he said playfully.

Sephiroth thought about it as he carried Vincent through the living room. He kicked the bedroom
door gently to open it, slipping in and laying Vincent on the bed. He kissed his forehead before
moving to start taking Vincent's boots off so they wouldn't leave dirt on the bed. "There you go... try to get some rest now."

Vincent frowned. "That's not what I meant..."

"Hmm.... I'll consider something more intimate, but first I want to get your shoes off and help you
get comfortable in bed. Then I'm going to take a shower," Sephiroth explained calmly with a small
smile. He didn't trust leaving Vincent alone too long with the state he was in and he didn't want to
risk moving further in their relationship until Vincent was sober once more.

Vincent sighed softly, a little too tired to fight. "Fine..."

Sephiroth ensured Vincent was comfortable in the bed before leaving to get his shower, relaxing
under the spray of the warm water. After the shower he grabbed a pair of pajama pants to slip on. He wasn't surprised to find Vincent asleep when he returned, smiling and walking over to climb into bed beside him, pulling Vincent to his chest. Vincent gave a small, pleased, grunt in his sleep,
unconsciously cuddling closer.

The next morning he awoke to the smell of eggs and bacon, a glass of water waiting for him on the nightstand with a couple headache pills and a note to come eat and drink some coffee to help diminish his hangover. Vincent grimaced as he sat up, closing his eyes against the light as he took the pills, slowly getting up and going to the kitchen, finishing the water as he did so.

Sephiroth glanced up and smiled. "Coffee's on the counter," he said softly while pointing before going back to what he was making. "How bad is your hangover?"

"The light hurts and my head is throbbing." Vincent groaned softly, getting the coffee.

"It'll pass soon," Sephiroth assured with a soft smile as he moved the eggs onto two plates that already had toast and bacon on them. "Did you take the medicine I left on the nightstand?"

Vincent nodded. "Yes," he said. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," Sephiroth sat a plate in front of him before sitting across from Vincent at the table with his own plate and coffee. "Did you sleep well?"

Vincent nodded. "No dreams of any kind. At least that I can remember." he replied, starting to nibble on his toast.

"That's good. It's better than the nightmares at least," Sephiroth mused before starting to take a bite of his breakfast. "Do you think a warm bath later would help with how awful you feel?"

"That does sound good." Vincent nodded.

Sephiroth smiled a bit at that. "So... what happened to hold back on the drinks?" he asked teasingly.

Vincent blushed faintly. "We were having a lot of fun... I didn’t really keep track..." he said. "I didn't do anything stupid, did I?"

Sephiroth chuckled, considering the best way to tell Vincent without embarrassing him too much. "You kept requesting kisses," he shrugged.

Vincent blushed and groaned. "I take it that it wasn't only when we were alone?"

"It actually was, while we were with your friends you were too preoccupied with a drunk Jake getting you to sing with him."

Vincent laughed. "That's not as bad then." he smiled.

Sephiroth nodded. "I do think it'll be better if you can remember future nights out, though."

"I agree." Vincent said softly.

"We could try drinking in moderate amounts when it's just us now and then... help to slowly build your tolerance."

"I'd like that." Vincent smiled.

Sephiroth smiled in reply, finishing his breakfast and standing to set the plate in the sink. He returned to the table to sip at his coffee more while glancing at Vincent. "Would you like to do anything today?"
"You're not busy?" Vincent asked, a little surprised. "Not that I mind!" he quickly added.

"Not very busy, at least. I have a couple meetings later today, but that's it."

Vincent nodded. "We could stay and watch some movies, maybe?" Vincent tilted his head.

Sephiroth smiled. "That sounds wonderful," he agreed with a slight nod, finishing his coffee and standing. He refilled Vincent's coffee mug before putting his own in the sink. He began to fill it so he could wash the dishes, figuring Vincent would finish before he was done so he could wash his plate as well. "After you finish eating you can select a movie for us."

"Okay. What kind of movie do you feel up to watching?"

"I'm fine with anything," Sephiroth shrugged, "I guess find anything you'd like."

"Alright." Vincent said, finishing up his breakfast before handing Sephiroth his dishes and going to search for a movie.

The selection on the shelves was still small, though a few of Vincent's favorites that he'd mentioned before in passing had appeared among them without his notice. Vincent smiled, choosing one of those and setting everything up. Sephiroth came in soon and sat down on the couch, smiling when he realized what was waiting for them. "I see you found the new movies."

Vincent smiled brightly. "I did. Thank you!"

"You're quite welcome, I'm glad you enjoy them."

Vincent curled against Sephiroth happily as the movie started. The general wrapped an arm around him, relaxing and letting his thoughts wander as they watched. He wasn't truly focused on the film, instead thinking of what he had to do and about Vincent's requests the night before. Vincent didn't notice, as he himself, was focused on the film.

Sephiroth broke their silence once the movie ended, glancing at Vincent. "I enjoyed last night... Your friends are interesting."

Vincent smiled. "They are. Just as strange as me." he chuckled. He looked over at Sephiroth. "I enjoyed it too. It's nice to see you relax so much."

Sephiroth rose an eyebrow, smiling at him. "It was?"

Vincent nodded. "Yes. I know, with everything that has been happening lately, and possibly with things that have been going on with me and my psych, you've been so stressed."

Sephiroth paused. "... I have, but I'm also very used to it," he said softly. "There's no reason to worry about me," he added as an assurance, glancing at Vincent again and rubbing his shoulder in an attempt to be reassuring.

"I'll worry about you anyways, just so you know." Vincent smiled softly, pausing before giving him a small, light, kiss on the lips.

Sephiroth blinked at the action, mind going blank for a few moments before catching up with what had just happened. He chuckled then. "I suppose you were still wanting that, hmm?" he asked in a teasing tone.

Vincent blushed but smiled. "Yes."
Sephiroth paused, tilting his head in thought before leaning forward to kiss Vincent back. Vincent froze for a second, before sinking happily into it. Sephiroth pulled him close in response. Vincent wrapped his arms around Sephiroth happily. Sephiroth gently stroked his sides encouragingly. After a moment, Vincent moved to sit in Sephiroth's lap, deepening the kiss a little as a result. The general opened his eyes slightly in mild surprise, not expecting the other to be so forward.

Vincent pulled back a little, face flushed and breathing hard. "Is...is this too much?"

Sephiroth shifted a bit. "... No," he assured, though he was still in shock. "Just... extremely unexpected."

Vincent tilted his head down, hair falling to hide his face. "I-I'm sorry... I'll move..." he said softly, making to motion to get off of the General.

Sephiroth held him in place. "I told you that I didn't mind," he assured softly. "You don't need to move."

Vincent settled back down. "Do... would you like to... continue?"

"I wouldn't mind continuing," the general smiled gently.

Vincent smiled, slowly leaning down and kissing him again. Sephiroth kissed back gently, wrapping his arms around Vincent to pull him close. Vincent let him, sliding his hands onto Sephiroth's chest.

Sephiroth broke the kiss to meet Vincent's eyes. "How far do you want to go?" he asked, bringing one of his hands up to brush hair from Vincent's face.

"F-Farther than kissing, but..." he paused. "I... I don't know how much farther... we... we can just keep going and I'll say if I get uncomfortable..."

Sephiroth nodded, leaning forward slowly to kiss Vincent again. Vincent kissed him back, arms slowly moving around his head. Sephiroth slowly began to relax into the kiss, hesitating before letting his hands start to explore Vincent's body. Vincent sucked in a breath, letting him as his body slowly relaxed. Sephiroth leaned back against the couch, pulling Vincent with him as he let his hands move to start undoing the buttons on Vincent's shirt.

Vincent paused a moment before starting to do the same to Sephiroth. Sephiroth let him do so, shrugging the shirt off once it was undone. He paused to take in how Vincent looked and regain his bearings. Vincent's eyes traveled over Sephiroth, his hands moving to slide over his chest slowly. Sephiroth leaned back, letting him explore.

"I never thought I'd be able to touch you like this." he breathed before giving a small chuckle. "Well, not outside of my dreams."

"Even after we started dating?" Sephiroth raised an eyebrow, tilting his head.

Vincent nodded. "Yes." he said softly.

Sephiroth gently combed his fingers through Vincent's hair. "Well... is it more believable now?"

Vincent nodded slowly. "Yes." he breathed out. He leaned in slowly, placing a light kiss onto Sephiroth's neck.

Sephiroth leaned his head back to let Vincent explore as he liked. Vincent kissed down his neck,
pausing at his pulse point and giving it a small lick and nipping it gently. Sephiroth closed his
eyes, smirking a bit at Vincent's growing confidence. Vincent continued downwards, hands
following his mouth.

Sephiroth's eyes opened again, blinking before moving to watch what Vincent was up to. Vincent's
face was bright red by the time he made it to Sephiroth's hips. He gazed up at him though his hair,
meeting the other man's eyes. Sephiroth rose an eyebrow, curious.

Vincent hesitated, seeming to lose a bit of his courage as he slowly moved back into Sephiroth's
lap. He spoke, face still hidden in his hair. "Will... will you... touch me?"

Sephiroth reached forward, tilting Vincent's head up before pulling him closer to kiss him, letting
his hands start to move down his chest and memorize every dip of his muscles. "Warn me if I do
something you don't like," he offered.

Vincent sucked in a breath at the touch. "I will..." he breathed.

Sephiroth leaned forward, slowly starting to kiss along Vincent's jaw and down his neck. Vincent
tilted his head back, hands staying placed on Sephiroth's chest. Sephiroth slid his hands down
further, pausing at Vincent's pants before starting to undo them. Vincent sucked in a breath, letting
out a shaky groan as he let Sephiroth continue.

"You're more muscular than I'd thought," Sephiroth admitted as he took everything in.

Vincent blushed. "It... it's only happened recently."

Sephiroth shifted. "It suits you..." he admitted gently while letting his hands explore and trace
Vincent's muscles again.

Vincent shivered, a groan slipping out of his mouth as his stomach muscles tightened under
Sephiroth's touch. Sephiroth kissed him again, fingers dipping into his pants while undoing them and
starting to push them down. Vincent kissed back, rising up to his knees to make it easier for the
older man.

"You're very beautiful."

Vincent gave a breathless chuckle. "If you say so."

"It's true," Sephiroth assured, tracing the curve of Vincent's hips with his fingers, "I'm not used to
such elegance."

"Do you own a mirror?" Vincent asked softly, shuddering at the touch.

"I do, but I also think elegance suits you more."

Vincent arched up to Sephiroth's touch a little. "I'd have to disagree."

"And why would you disagree?" Sephiroth asked, smirking as he kissed Vincent's shoulder.

"You're the definition of elegance." Vincent breathed out.

"I am?" Sephiroth rose an eyebrow at him. "I always figured that I was more on the side of power
than elegance."

"Well, yes... but... the way you move just walking or especially when you fight...there is a
beautiful, deadly, elegance to it." A small blush settled on his face. "I always loved watching you train with the others. I could never take my eyes off of you."

Sephiroth paused for a bit in thought before grinning. "Thank you," he replied gently as he pushed Vincent's hair out of the way. "I think you're amazing when you're on the shooting range as well... even if your swordplay could use some work."

Vincent chuckled softly. "I'm trying."

Sephiroth chuckled. "Swords aren't for everyone," he shrugged. "I can assure you I am horrible with firearms."

Vincent smiled, leaning down to kiss him softly. "A sword fits you very well."

"Oh?" Sephiroth rose an eyebrow, kissing back leisurely.

Vincent made an affirmative sound against Sephiroth's mouth.

Sephiroth moaned back. "Mmm... you're a lot better at this than I was expecting," he admitted softly between smaller kisses to Vincent's mouth and jawline.

"Am I?" Vincent breathed, tilting his head up so Sephiroth could reach more.

"Yes, though I admit I probably do have less experience than you when we compare how we grew up."

"I'm not sure about that. I grew up in the slums of Wutai. Not a luxurious place." he said before blushing. "And I have no experience with... all of this."

Sephiroth blinked at that, surprised. "You don't?" he asked, tilting his head. "You've mentioned dating before, though... unless I'm wrong?"

Vincent shook his head. "I've had dating experience, but... nothing really sexual. With any of them." he said softly.

Sephiroth thought about that for a few moments before kissing Vincent again. "Then we'll learn together," he offered.

Vincent's eyes widened a little. "Y-You've never... I mean... I didn't mean to assume, but..." he stammered, blushing. "You... seem to know what you're doing..." he finally finished, almost in a whisper.

Sephiroth chuckled. "You're the first person I've ever been with," he admitted softly.

"I'm... kind if glad for that... we can embarrass ourselves together." Vincent chuckled lightly.

Sephiroth stroked his back, kissing him again. Vincent kissed him back, slowly deepening the kiss. Sephiroth let his eyes slip closed, moving his hands from Vincent's back to his sides before letting one slide up to the other man's hair. Vincent made a small, pleased, sound, his hands running down Sephiroth's chest. The general was interested in that, experimentally tightening the hold he had on Vincent's hair and giving it a slight tug out of curiosity. A moan escaped Vincent's lips, the younger man's eyes widening in surprise at the noise, a hand going to his mouth.

"Hmm... Do you like that?" Sephiroth asked, tone turning intrigued as he repeated the action.

Vincent moaned again, louder, though it was smothered by his hand. He removed it enough to
"Interesting," Sephiroth mused, tugging Vincent's head back by his hair to reveal his neck. He began kissing along it, nipping and sucking now and then to mark it while observing Vincent's reactions.

Small moans escaped Vincent's mouth as he began to writhe a little in Sephiroth's lap, his good hand going up to Sephiroth's shoulder to steady himself. Sephiroth purred, stroking his side with the hand not in his hair, wanting to feel around and explore. Vincent leaned back a little to let him have more access. The general slowly began to slide his hand down the front of Vincent's pants, taking his time to see if he could discover more sensitive areas on the Wutainian's body.

Vincent breathed out a moan as Sephiroth's hands passed over his hips, slightly arching into the touch. Sephiroth made a mental note of that before sliding his hand down further to between Vincent's legs. He gently squeezed the bulge he felt growing there. Vincent gasped out, his hips bucking into Sephiroth's hand as a moan escaped him. Sephiroth undid the button on the front of Vincent's pants, wanting to explore more. Vincent watched him through lidded eyes, face flushed. Sephiroth slowly slid his hand inside, finding Vincent's length and giving it a slow stroke.

Vincent cried out, eyes going wide as his hips bucked up hard, hands tightening their grip on the General's shoulders. "Se-Seph..." he gasped out.

"Am I doing this right?" Sephiroth asked, feeling curious. "I'm not hurting you, correct?"

"N-No..." Vincent moaned. "Good...F-Feels good..."

Sephiroth kissed him, continuing the action before starting to push Vincent's pants down. Vincent shivered and moved to help him, moaning softly into the kiss. Once the pants were out of the way, Sephiroth moved his hand down Vincent's back, pausing on his backside and thinking for a bit. "Should we find something to use as a lubricant?"

Vincent flushed and nodded. "Yeah..."

Sephiroth nodded and pulled away, moving Vincent to sit on the couch before standing and leaving for the bathroom to look in the drawers. He searched for a few minutes before returning with a small vial.

Vincent looked up at him, tilting his head. "What did you find?"

"This is a oil used for massages," Sephiroth shrugged. "I... think it should work."

Vincent nodded. "How... what position do you want me in?"

Sephiroth paused in thought, shifting. "Lay down on the couch and face me... it might help make preparing you easier."

Vincent nodded, obeying him. Sephiroth kneeled between Vincent's legs, putting some of the oil on his fingers before reaching forward to gently press a finger in, watching Vincent's face to gauge his reactions. Vincent sucked in a breath at the feeling, not painful, but strange. He forced his body to relax, knowing it would make things easier. Sephiroth took his time loosening the muscles, waiting until things seemed to be moving easily before he added a second finger. Vincent winced at the stretching feeling, moving his hips a little.

"Is it uncomfortable?" Sephiroth asked gently as his fingers continued to move, he was keeping a close eye on Vincent's facial expressions to ensure he wasn't harming him.
"Not in the way that it hurts... it just... feels strange still." Vincent said, voice breathy.

Sephiroth nodded. "Let me know if you need me to pause for a bit so you can adjust or get used to this, or if it starts to hurt or become too much," he ordered gently, voice firm as he watched the other man.

"I will." Vincent assured him.

Sephiroth leaned down to kiss him, curling his fingers just a bit and hoping the kiss would help distract from any discomfort. Vincent kissed him back, closing his eyes. Soon a third finger joined the first two, working at a steady, slow rhythm. Vincent grunted at that, feeling a little pain, but not so much that he couldn't handle it.

"Is this still alright?" he asked gently as he spread his fingers just a bit and curled them.

Vincent gave a groan and nodded. "Yes."

Sephiroth nodded, continuing the action for a bit longer. "Do you think you could handle me now?" he questioned.

Vincent paused, shifting his hips a little and feeling no discomfort. He slowly nodded. "Yes... I think I can."

Sephiroth nodded, removing his fingers and taking a deep breath as he used some of the oil on his length before positioning himself. He leaned down to steal a kiss from Vincent as he pressed his hips forward, hoping to distract from any discomfort. Vincent moaned into the kiss, spreading his legs a bit more and relaxing his body.

Sephiroth took a deep breath once he was fully sheathed, kissing Vincent again. "Let me know when you're ready to move," he offered softly.

Vincent kissed him back, giving his body time to become accustomed to the feeling of Sephiroth inside of him, letting the older man know when he felt comfortable enough for him to start moving. Sephiroth started them on a slow, steady rhythm while kissing up his neck and along his collarbones. Vincent tilted his head back, body arching into Sephiroth's mouth as low moans escaped him.

"You're beautiful," he breathed.

Vincent blushed lightly at that, anything he was about to say stolen by a loud moan when Sephiroth brushed his prostate. "Th-there!"

Sephiroth blinked, pressing into that spot again before kissing him gently. Vincent moaned louder into Sephiroth's mouth, kissing him back as he began to slowly move his hips in time with the older man's. Sephiroth groaned in response, letting one hand grip Vincent's hips while his other hand gripped the couch to steady himself. Vincent moaned louder, the action letting Sephiroth reach deeper inside of him. He wrapped his good arm around the man, letting the other hang off the couch, afraid he might hurt Sephiroth. Sephiroth groaned, thrusting his hips harder in response. Vincent cried out, his body arching up and his head falling back. Sephiroth kissed along his shoulders and neck eagerly, nibbling on the skin to mark it.

Vincent tangled his hand into Sephiroth's hair. "H-harder.." he breathed out.

The general sank his teeth into Vincent's sensitive skin at that, clamping down until he tasted blood. Vincent cried out at that, squeezing around Sephiroth's length as a reaction, fingers gripping
his hair harder and pulling at it. Sephiroth growled in response, grinding into him harshly and
digging his nails into Vincent's hips.

"S-Sephiroth!~" Vincent moaned loudly, eyes squeezing shut. He could feel himself getting closer
to his climax, breathing the warning to Sephiroth.

The general groaned, kissing Vincent harshly while moving harder. Vincent's orgasm hit him
suddenly, the young man moaning loudly into the kiss as his body arched off of the couch and
squeezed around Sephiroth's erection tightly, nails digging into the older man's back. Sephiroth
gasped at the sudden sting, groaning as he slammed his hips forward a few more times before
climaxing himself. He pressed his face against Vincent's shoulder as his hips gradually slowed to a
stop, panting harshly as he rode out the high. Vincent lay beneath him, panting and limp, eyes
closed as he tried to gather himself.

Sephiroth slowly pulled out, sitting back on the couch for a few minutes before standing to get a
wet rag from the bathroom. Vincent was slowly recovering, his breathing returning to normal,
though a deep blush was filling his face at the realization of what had just occurred.

Soon a damp rag was being held out to him, Sephiroth tilting his head. "Would you prefer to clean
yourself up or would you like me to help?" he asked in a gentle voice.

Vincent slowly sat up, taking the cloth. "I can do it, thank you." he said with a small smile.

Sephiroth smiled back, sitting beside him and stretching a bit. "Once you're clean, would you like
me to help you get to the bed so we can nap?"

Vincent nodded, chuckling a little. "That's a good idea. I'm not sure if my legs would hold me up
right now." he said, starting to clean himself.

The general snorted softly before smirking. "I'll take that as a compliment."

Vincent's smile widened a little as he finished up, playfully raising his arms up. "Help me?"

Sephiroth nodded, shifting to lift Vincent bridal-style and carry him to the bedroom. He laid
Vincent down and helped him get comfortable before going around the bed to climb in himself,
shifting until he was comfortable enough for Vincent to snuggle up to.

Vincent was blushing as he curled up to Sephiroth. "I was teasing. I didn't mean for you to actually
carry me. Just help me walk." he said, giving a soft chuckle.

"I don't mind carrying you, I said earlier I'd help you get to bed."

"Thank you, then." Vincent said softly.

"You're more than welcome," Sephiroth shrugged while wrapping an arm around Vincent and
closing his eyes.

Vincent let a soft, happy sigh escape him as he closed his eyes, quickly falling into sleep.

Chapter End Notes

And, Yes, our dear Sephy was a virgin in this one. Also sorry it has taken so long to
get the recent (and probably future) chapters out. It's due to lack of motivation on my (Saigo's) part and things that are happening to me (Saigo once again) in RL. My mom recently underwent surgery for Chronh's (this will be her fifth) and she's doing well now but I was gone for about a week to be with her and I've been going through random down moods. I'm working on that and hopefully the next Chapter can get out faster! I hope you all are still reading and enjoying this! The random Kudos and comment's I've received have made my days and I love them all!

~Saigo
Chapter 21

The commons room was packed, several people crowding around the pool tables and dart boards to play games. The entire room was filled with energy as people caught up with friends and unwound from the long work week. Jake, Marcus, and Vincent had claimed a table in the corner, a bit further from the main floor, and had already ordered a roast for dinner to be shared between them.

"So, have you gotten any further with the General since our last bar trip?" Jake asked between bites, practically inhaling his food as if he hadn't eaten in days.

Marcus rolled his eyes beside his friend, reaching out to push the food away just a bit from Jake in an attempt to force him to slow down. "No one's gonna take it away from you, take a breath between bites and actually chew what you're eating."

Vincent's face had turned red, hidden partially by his hair, as he choked on his drink. He coughed a couple of times to clear his throat. "Um... well... a-about that..." he mumbled lowly, barely audible.

"Oh, something juicy happened!" Jake grinned, leaning over the table a bit while watching Vincent. "Spill the beans!"

"Well... I'm..." he scratched the back of his head, hiding more in his hair. "We might have had sex..."

Marcus rose an eyebrow. "Might have?"

"Okay we did..." he sighed. "On a couch..."

Jake laughed, leaning over to punch Vincent's shoulder. "Way to go, man!"

Marcus snorted and shook his head. "Congratulations," he mused with a smirk.

Vincent blushed harder. "Is... is that normally something you'd congratulate someone on?" he asked, embarrassed.

"Not normally... but considering it's your first and you were so nervous around him?" Marcus smirked.

Vincent chuckled softly. "Yeah, that's true." he looked up at them. "It was... nice, though. He was very gentle."
"How'd you win him over?" Jake asked, tilting his head while smiling.

"We just... talked about it." Vincent shrugged.

"And... talking just lead to sex?" Jake asked, tilting his head.

"Well... to be fair, it was just supposed to be seeing how comfortable we were with it and what
would be too much too soon and then..." he shrugged again. "Sex."

Jake chuckled and relaxed a bit. "Well, I guess you two answered your questions. You two are very
comfortable with each other," he leaned forward and lowered his voice to tease him. "Did you suck
him off?"

Marcus beside him made a face, rolling his eyes before standing up to head for the bar so he could
order something to drink and escape what Jake was talking about.

Vincent's blush returned. "N-No! We didn't do anything like that." he said.

Jake chuckled, sitting back. "It wouldn't be bad if you did," he shrugged with a gentle smile.
"Maybe it can be a future goal as something to try."

Vincent's eyes widened. "I... I don't think I could fit that into my mouth... I'm honestly not sure
how it fit inside me!" he blurted out without thought.

Jake stared at him wide-eyed before snorting, slowly breaking down into a fit of laughter.

Vincent groaned when he realized what he had just said, burying his face in his arms on the table.

"How big are we talking here?" Jake laughed as he calmed down, grinning. "Like, bigger than that
toy I showed you and joked about or...?"

"Jake!" Vincent groaned before slowly peaking his face out. "... Bigger. Length and girth wise."

Jake's smile slid off his face, instead he was just gaping at his friend for a few moments before
shaking his head. "How... How did you walk down here today?" he asked.

Vincent shrugged. "He might have used a Cure on me when I was asleep. I couldn't walk at all last
night." he admitted.

"I'd imagine," Jake gave a low whistle as he thought it over. "Let me guess, you laid on your back
for him? Try riding him next time, you can control things more and might not be as sore after."

Vincent blushed but chuckled. "I never thought I'd be talking sex positions with you. Or about how
well endowed the General is."

Jake shrugged, sitting back. "I figured we'd get to the level of friendship to advise each other about
positions eventually... but I agree I never thought I'd learn so much about the General's size," he
laughed.

"And I never expected to get first hand knowledge of it." Vincent laughed back.

Jake snorted. "I bet you never imagined he'd be that big."

"Not at all." Vincent said.

Jake couldn't help but snicker. "You might want to buy some toys so you can better prepare
"Well, yeah, but it might be hard to be sneaky with practicing. We do live together after all," he chuckled.

"Why be sneaky? He might take it as a compliment that you have to practice to take him easier," Jake grabbed some chips to eat while smirking. "He might even want to watch," he said in a sing-song tone.

Vincent's face went bright red as he buried his face in his arms. "Oh, Dear Lifestream! I do not want to think about that right now!"

Jake laughed, reaching over to rub Vincent's shoulder. "I'll stop now, I think I've teased you enough."

"Thank you." Vincent sighed, shaking his head. "That last one is a thought I won't get out of my head for a while..."

Jake snorted. "Can't be that bad of an image, though, right?"

"Oh, I never said it was a bad image." Vincent chuckled.

Jake laughed again. "Have I signed the General's death warrant now by corrupting you?"

"Maybe. Or maybe you signed mine as I die of embarrassment." Vincent joked.

Jake chuckled again, looking up at Marcus walking back towards them.

"Is it back to safe topics?" Marcus asked as he sate down.

"Just in time." Vincent laughed. "We just finished."

"Thank the Lifestream," Marcus muttered, sipping at a new drink and relaxing in his chair.

Jake laughed. "Oh come on, we weren't that bad!"

Vincent shook his head, smirking. "I can't agree with that, Jake."

Jake shrugged. "I was saying 'we', not just myself. I'm that bad, but you're so easily embarrassed you would've melted if I went any further," he smirked, leaning forward on the table to poke at Vincent's chest.

Vincent groaned but chuckled, agreeing. "Yeah, I suppose you're right."

"You'll get used to it over time, though. One day you'll get the chance to tease me just as mercilessly back," Jake laughed.

"I don't think that will happen at this rate." Vincent sighed.

"Hey, don't just assume I won't ever get with anyone!" Jake retorted, pouting back. He was teasing for the most part, trying to make his movements and tone more over dramatic than needed.

"I didn't mean it that way. I just meant I don't think you can out embarrass me when you do." Vincent chuckled, correcting himself.

Jake laughed back. "Hey, it's not a competition," he assured.
"I almost wish it was. Then I know you would at least try to win." Vincent teased.

"You want me to embarrass you, then?" Jake smirked.

"No! I want you to embarrass yourself!" Vincent said quickly.

Marcus rolled his eyes. "He's teasing you again," he pointed out gently while smiling into his drink.

Jake was simply laughing on his side of the table, hiding his face.

Vincent huffed, pouting before glancing up. His face instantly brightened as he saw Sephiroth entering the room with Angeal, Zack following after them. The General's posture was relaxed but poised, some files in his hand that he was handing to the other two to examine. He didn't seem to notice Vincent just yet, too absorbed in work as Angeal corralled him towards a free area to sit, asking Zack something before he broke off from their trio towards one of the small counters to get coffee.

Jake noticed Vincent's reaction and looked back himself, observing the three before looking back to Vincent, calming. "Do you want to greet him or should we all move towards the pool tables and stuff to give him space?" he asked seriously.

"Well, he seems to be working, but they haven't really noticed us yet and don't seem bothered, so I think we can at least finish our drinks and food before moving." Vincent said, shrugging.

Jake nodded and gave Vincent a smile. "Figures they're working during their lunch break, though," he mused while looking back at the trio.

Vincent gave a sigh nodding. "Yeah. I'd like to have lunch with Sephiroth here sometime." He glanced at the General again.

Jake paused in thought. "Well, you guys aren't keeping your relationship secret, right? I mean... you two told us," he began.

Vincent nodded. "We talked about it and said we didn't want to keep it secret." he said.

"Then you should be able to say hello, at least... Don't distract him from his work, obviously, but just go over and greet him, maybe ask if he wants to join all of us for dinner tonight?" Jake offered.

"I suppose I could do that..." he nodded, getting up before hesitantly approaching the three SOLDIERS.

Angeal looked up at him as he drew near, raising an eyebrow while continuing to listen to what Sephiroth was speaking about. Zack was setting down the coffee he'd gotten the three of them, also turning to look at Vincent while tilting his head gently in curiosity. Sephiroth hadn't noticed Vincent just yet, his back to him as he focused on the files before him.

Vincent waited for Sephiroth to finish speaking before getting his attention. He smiled shyly. "I'm... I don't mean to bother you at work, but I was wondering of you'd like to join Jake, Marcus and I for dinner here tonight?" he asked, nervous. "If you're free!" he added hastily.

Sephiroth blinked before nodding and offering Vincent a small smile. "Of course. Are they here with you now?" he added as an after thought, glancing behind Vincent in an attempt to spot the two. Jake eagerly waved from their table. "Good. I don't want you wondering around alone, given some of the problems going on lately," Sephiroth mused softly towards Vincent. "Have you already eaten lunch?"
Angeal and Zack just stared at the two, Zack smirking in amusement while Angeal seemed confused.

"We're in the middle of eating it." Vincent said. He blushed and shifted then. "I saw you all come in and wanted to say hi, but I didn't want to bother you. Jake said I should just go and say it and offer the invitation to you since... since we aren't really hiding anything." he said shyly.

Sephiroth nodded. "Would you like to join us, then?" he offered. "Jake and Marcus can join as well, if they'd like."

Angeal rose an eyebrow. "You two aren't hiding... what?" he questioned them, setting down his own files to lean forward.

Vincent blushed brightly, shifting. "Oh... Um... we're dating." he said softly, not quite looking at Sephiroth, a little nervous actually saying it out loud to someone other than his friends. "And... if it wouldn't be a bother to everyone, we'd love to join you."

Sephiroth nodded. "I'd like you to join," he encouraged.

Angeal blinked in shock across from them before glaring at Sephiroth. "You've started dating and didn't say anything to Zack or me?" he questioned while folding his arms.

Sephiroth glanced back and shrugged. "It didn't come up."

"So, how long have you been dating?" Zack asked, smiling as he passed their meals out and took his seat.

Vincent had motioned for Jake and Marcus to come join them before sitting down himself. "A few months," he said.

Angeal pouted at the news, glaring at Sephiroth. "You've been in a relationship that it magically never came up?" he interrogated while leaning forward. "I thought we were friends."

Sephiroth sighed, shaking his head tiredly. "It honestly never came up. You never asked and I didn't think to tell you. It's not like Vincent and I are hiding our relationship," he explained while massaging the bridge of his nose.

Jake and Marcus came to sit down, choosing to seat themselves in between Vincent and Zack. Jake had brought over Vincent's food along with his and Marcus's, while Marcus brought over all their drinks.

Vincent smiled at the two, thanking them softly. "To be fair... a lot has been going on around here, Sir." Vincent said timidly to Angeal.

The older man looked Vincent over before sighing and offering a smile. "So, how did the two of you meet?"

"It was after my arm...." Vincent stopped talking, hiding a flinch. "I was in the hospital. He came to ask if I remembered anything."

Angeal glanced at Vincent's prosthetic while giving a nod. "I remember hearing about that, you had a lot of back luck following that incident from what I remember of the reports. Part of your grew got taken out soon after when all of you went back down," he let his thought trail off at the discomfort he saw on Vincent from the topic. "Are you the class three he took in when the attacks started happening? I heard you were found deep in the labs after a mission around the time they
started."

Vincent nodded. "I am. I... don’t remember much about what happened while I was down there. Just flashes and even those are usually fuzzy." he said softly.

"I'm glad you're recovering," Zack cut in before Angeal could speak, reaching out to put a reassuring hand on Vincent's shoulder, despite having to lean back to reach around Jake and Marcus.

"Vin's strong," Jake mused with a smile, glancing at his friend and nudging him. "He'll just get stronger as the days go by and the General's been a huge help in his recovery."

Vincent blushed a little. "I'm not that strong." he objected softly. "But Sephiroth really has helped a lot."

"I think you're very strong," Sephiroth mused, taking Vincent's hand. "You wouldn't still be here if you weren't."

Vincent's blush deepened a little at that, but he smiled. Angeal and Zack both looked over the new couple before glancing at each other.

"Perhaps you can get Sephiroth to take a break once in a while," Angeal mused, sipping at his drink while watching Vincent. Zack chuckled gently beside him when Sephiroth glared in his direction.

Vincent gave his own small chuckle. "I can certainly try to." he said lightly.

Sephiroth sighed, shaking his head as the others chuckled.

"So, are you Sephiroth's secretary now along with dating?" Zack asked Vincent while tilting his head.

Vincent blinked at that. "Well... I suppose I am, for now." he nodded.

"I must thank you, then. The reports we've gotten from Sephiroth haven't been this put together for years, and he usually sets times himself instead of being on time to the meetings that were already planned," Zack laughed.

Vincent chuckled. "I'm glad to be of help then."

"I was always on time, thank you," Sephiroth retorted while glaring at Zack. "You're the one who always made us late."

"Speaking of," Angeal smirked at the younger man, "you still haven't introduced us to your supposed girlfriend."

Vincent smiled. "You have a girlfriend, Zack?"

Zack's face immediately turned red. "W-well there's a girl I like... a-and I visit her a lot... I-I wouldn't say we're dating just yet..."

"That's great!" Vincent smiled encouragingly.

Zack looked down at the table while Angeal chuckled and rubbed his shoulder comfortingly. "You'll win her over soon. From how you speak of her, I'm sure she likes you back."
"I'm sure he's right." Vincent said.

"She's very kind," Zack mused and shrugged. "I was planning on attempting to ask her out later today."

"You'll do great!" Jake encouraged with a bright smile.

"You will." Vincent nodded.

Zack cleared his throat, blush still in place, before glancing at Vincent and Sephiroth. "So, do you guys have a weekly date night or anything?"

"Well, more like monthly, but yeah we have an agreed date night."

Sephiroth nodded in agreement. "We felt it best to start small, given how busy my schedule can get at times," he explained.

"Sounds reasonable enough," Angeal mused. "You know I don't mind covering for you if you ever need an extra day, though. You're always working, so it's nice to see you relaxing now and then."

"He still works a lot even back at our room." Vincent chuckled.

"Oh, you two live together?" Angeal asked with a smirk. "Separate bedrooms or a shared one?"

"Normally separate, but Sephiroth stays with me sometimes. I'm still having bad nightmares and his being near me seems to help."

Marcus frowned at the mention of the nightmares. "Is any of the tea I gifted you helping?" he asked gently.

Jake rubbed Vincent's back gently. "Hey, they said that psych was supposed to help with those, yeah? I'm sure it'll get better eventually," he offered.

Sephiroth had reached over to take Vincent's hand reassuringly as Angeal's teasing smirk slipped from his face, eyes softening as he took in Vincent's form. Zack was watching the younger SOLDIER while shaking his head gently in sympathy.

"The tea and therapy started to work, I even had pills to take, but it's been getting worse recently. I don't always remember what I dream, but I know it's violent... mostly" he sighed.

"You went through something very traumatic," Zack mused, leaning back in his chair and resting his chin on his palm, "I wouldn't be surprised if it's glimpses of that in your dreams."

"The question is why they would be getting worse when they'd originally been doing better," Angeal commented, leaning against the table.

"Yes, we've been trying to figure out why," Sephiroth nodded. "He's talked with the psychiatrist about it and she's adjusted his medication, but it hasn't done much."

"Hmm... You mentioned they get better when Sephiroth's near?" Angeal asked, turning to Vincent again.

Vincent nodded. "Yes. I don't have the nightmares then, or at least they aren't bad enough for me to remember or be affected."

Angeal nodded and relaxed a bit, resting his chin on his hand in thought. "It could be stress, then,
if you often feel calmer around Sephiroth. The current events going on could also be frightening you, whether you know it or not, and his being near makes you feel safer after all the help he's given."

Vincent tilted his head, nodding slowly. "It could be..."

"If it's stress-based, then perhaps doing something to take your mind off things before bed could help," Zack offered with a shrug.

"Hmm... like what?" Vincent asked curiously.

"Puzzles might help or meditation," Zack mused before taking a bite of his food.

"If it's just ways to take your mind off things, then possibly TV shows or games might help," Marcus suggested.

"Music and exercise help me blank my mind," Jake smiled.

"I'm sure Sephiroth can help you clear your mind," Angeal commented offhandedly while sipping at his drink.

Vincent gave a soft smile, honestly not having expected so many suggestions. "I'm sure you're right." he said to Angeal.

Angeal just smirked, motioning to Vincent's neck. "You know I'm right, I bet you didn't have any nightmares the night you got those marks," he teased.

Vincent blushed darkly, a small sound escaping his mouth as he hid face in his hair. Jake chuckled beside him, trying to hold in his laughter.

On the other side, Sephiroth gently took his hand. "There's no marks, he was simply trying to get a rise out of you," he said softly.

Vincent peeked out at him. "Really?"

Sephiroth nodded reassuringly.

"Yeah, you're good. I don't see anything," Jake added with a soft smile.

Vincent relaxed a little, sighing.

Angeal chuckled and shook his head. "Your reaction is proof he's at least attempted to mark you up a bit before," he teased.

Vincent blushed harshly. "M-maybe."

Jake and Angeal both chuckled at that while Zack shook his head in sympathy and Marcus snorted. Sephiroth merely sighed, rubbing Vincent's back consolingly.

"Ignore him," the general offered. "He's just attempting to embarrass you for his own amusement."

Vincent let out a chuckle and looked at his two friends. "That sounds familiar." he teased.

"We're your friends, it's our job to embarrass you now and then," Jake smirked. "It'll keep you from getting a big ego."
"I wouldn't be sure of that, my teasing's never stopped Sephiroth's ego," Angeal joked back.

Vincent chuckled. "Well, I think Sephiroth deserves his ego," he said.

"Thank you," Sephiroth said softly before glancing at Angeal. "I don't have a large ego," he defended.

"Sephiroth, you've been general for years despite how young you are, you're bound to have an ego by now," the other replied with a laugh. "Or should we bring up how you're always certain you'll beat me in a spar?"

"You have a track record of losing."

Vincent chuckled softly at their friendly spatting, just watching them interact. Their conversation lasted for almost an hour before Sephiroth checked the time and sighed, standing up. "We have to go," he stated calmly while gathering the files he'd been going over earlier. Angeal and Zack stood up with him, Angeal looking drained at the mention of leaving while Zack just looked accepting.

"I hope we can see all of you again soon," Zack smiled at Vincent and his friends.

"Yes, I have a lot of questions for you," Angeal offered towards Vincent.

Sephiroth rolled his eyes at the two, motioning for them to start moving before he turned back to Vincent. "I'll see you tonight at home, I just have a lot of work right now. Should I cook tonight or do you want to?"

"You'll be working, so I can." Vincent smiled. "Is there anything specific you want?"

"I'm not really picky," Sephiroth shrugged, "everything you make is good so surprise me."

Vincent brightened a little at that and nodded. "Okay." he said happily. "Don't overwork yourself, alright?"

"I cannot make any promises," Sephiroth mused with a small smirk as he walked off, Angeal laughing as they walked away.

Vincent chuckled and gave a small, happy, sigh as he watched them leave.

Jack nudged his shoulder with a smirk. "So, what are you planning on making tonight?"

Vincent blinked before tilting his head. "Do you know how to play rummy?"

Jake shrugged. "Any thing the two of you really like?"

Vincent nodded. "Alright. I have an idea now." he smiled.

Jake laughed. "So, since we're done eating, want to go play in the commons room for a bit?"

"Sure." Vincent said happily.

Jake gave a small cheer of victory at that before digging into his food again. Soon they were moving to the commons area, Jake already shuffling a deck of cards in his hand. "So, what should we play?"

"Do you know how to play rummy?"
Jake nodded. "Yeah, used to play with my sisters all the time!" he declared with a smirk, almost dropping the cards when he tried to perform a trick shuffle.

Marcus laughed, picking up the few that fell to the floor and slipping them back to Jake before answering. "I've played before with some of the other recruits," he admitted.

Vincent chuckled lightly. "Then let's play that."

They found a table and sat down to play excitedly. They managed two hours before Marcus had to leave for a drill. Jake played another hour before he was needed to prepare for a mission.

Vincent bid them each goodbye when they left, cleaning up their mess and headed back to his and Sephiroth's room to start dinner. Sephiroth looked exhausted when he entered the suite, dropping his bags by the door before moving to sit on the couch.

Vincent was almost done with dinner and he peeked into the room to check on him. "Dinner is almost ready. What would you like to drink?" he asked softly.

Sephiroth sighed, sitting up and stretching before standing. "I'm fine with tea or water," he mused while making his way to the table.

Vincent nodded and went to finish their dinner, deciding to make some tea to try and help relax Sephiroth, setting the table when he was done.

Sephiroth moved to the table, watching him. "Thank you for cooking."

Vincent smiled. "It's not a problem. I like cooking." he said, looking Sephiroth over gently. "Would you like a shoulder massage before we go to sleep tonight? You look really tense."

The general paused before giving a slow nod. "That sounds nice," he admitted with a sigh, sagging in his seat. "I apologize for not being more energetic, it's just been an extremely long day."

"It's alright. I understand." Vincent said softly. "I figured after I saw you today that you would have a lot of work."

Sephiroth nodded. "I did, Angeal just made things more complicated."

"How did he do that?"

"Angeal always finds a way," Sephiroth shrugged while laying his head on his hand. "He told Genesis about us, and Genesis kept spouting quotes from the latest book he was reading and attempting to pry more out of me about our relationship. Angeal just smirked as it went on and didn't offer any help to make it stop."

Vincent frowned a little. "I don't think Genesis and I would ever get along." he admitted.

"He's not a bad person, he's just... extremely eccentric."

"And either super jealous of you or super in love with you. Or both." Vincent chuckled.

"I doubt he loves me," Sephiroth reassured.

"I don't know... the way he looks at you sometimes..." Vincent commented.

Sephiroth shrugged. "I think he just likes making me annoyed."
Vincent gave a small chuckle. "You really don’t see it..." he said mostly to himself before shaking his head. "What do I look like when I look like you? Was it different before we got together?" he asked curiously.

Sephiroth thought about it for a while. "I'm unsure. I know for a while you looked at me the same as all new recruits. You were awestruck."

Vincent nodded. "That's true. You are the face of SOLIDER. Most think they'll never actually see you up close or in person."

"Which is exactly why the higher ups have me be present at so many practice drills. They can't have people being star struck during a battle, so having me meet all of you in small doses helps make you less shocked when I'm around."

"Well, less star struck." Vincent chuckled. "You're still much more beautiful in person than on the posters." he teased lightly.

"You're flattering me," Sephiroth mused with a smirk, glancing at the stove. "What did you make for dinner, anyway?" he questioned, sipping at his tea.

"I made some Gyūdon." Vincent said, smiling as he served it.

"It smells amazing," Sephiroth complimented, shifting in his chair to sit up straight and watch Vincent move about the kitchen.

Vincent's smile grew as he set their dishes down, taking his own seat. "I hope it tastes good."

"You made it, so I'm sure it does," Sephiroth smiled, starting to eat contently.

Vincent waited for Sephiroth to start before happily eating. "So other than your friends giving you a hard time and the, assumed, massive amount of paperwork, how was your day?"

"Alright, I suppose. We're still no closer to finding the source of those murders... though, I'll admit I'm grateful there hasn't been another body for almost a month now. It's unsettling not knowing what the cause is. Angeal's admitted he hopes the reason behind the lack of sightings is that the creature died in a ventilation shaft somewhere."

"We can only hope so." Vincent said, sighing, then frowned. "But... weren't the wounds different?"

"On a few of the bodies, yes. Angeal believes it might still be one thing, though, because there were chimeras in the lab."

Vincent frowned but nodded. "That makes sense."

Sephiroth watched Vincent for a few moments, mulling over his thoughts. His eyes drifted to Vincent's prosthetic as he let his mind wonder before going back up to Vincent's face to observe him. The general could only sigh before reaching a hand out to grab Vincent's good hand, giving a light squeeze. "I promise we'll catch this thing. I won't let it harm you."

Vincent's smile returned slowly as he looked at Sephiroth warmly. "I know you will." he said softly, squeezing his hand back. "And I might be ridiculous, considering it's you who I'm saying this to, but you don't get hurt either."

"I'll do my best not to," Sephiroth promised, squeezing his hand again before taking a deep breath and going back to his meal. He washed the dishes after they finished eating then began getting
ready for bed. He kissed Vincent's forehead as they got situated to sleep, pulling him close and hoping the tea he'd given Vincent would help calm his nightmares.

Vincent curled up close to Sephiroth, closing his eyes and relaxing a little, falling asleep soon after. His dreams were filled with screams and blood, unfamiliar hallways and gunfire. A siren blared overhead as security doors began to close around him, cutting off his escape from the noise and smell. He saw Sephiroth screaming out towards SOLDIERs rushing at him, yelling orders that Vincent couldn't make out. Shots fired and a burning pain cut through his middle. Vincent awoke with a start soon after, cold sweat clinging to his skin.
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Vincent awoke with a start, cold sweat stuck to his skin. He was in the suite he shared with Sephiroth, laying on the bathroom floor. His stomach felt as if it'd been lit on fire and his head was pounding. Vincent groaned, slowly trying to sit up and figure out what happened and how he got here from a nightmare. There was blood coating the floor beneath him and making it slick. The smell of iron was heavy, blocking out the lemon scent that usually followed the cleaning products kept in the room.

Vincent paled when he saw it, immediately looking over himself to see if he was injured. There were no obvious injuries at first, but a small scar was visible on his stomach where there used to be none. Vincent shuddered, deciding to look into it later and quickly clean himself and the bathroom. He was panicking slightly, unable to remember anything after he fell asleep. The suite was empty when he looked around, Sephiroth no where to be seen. Vincent sighed, both relieved and worried about that. He went to the kitchen to make himself something to eat before deciding to text Sephiroth.

On the other side of the facility, Sephiroth was doing a count of the dead and cursing under his breath. That creature had been terrifying, if he was being honest, nothing like the creatures he'd seen before in the lab. Its cries almost sounded humane when his SOLDIERs had fired on it. He was sure they'd hit it, but it had moved too quickly for him to see where it fled. Blood coated the walls, floor, and ceiling from those unfortunate enough to not escape and the count he was doing was already in the double digits. He didn't see signs of a blood trail in any clear direction, so there was no telling which way the beast had gone. Even with sending a team down each hallway to track it, they hadn't seen anything. It was worrying and upsetting, and the General jumped slightly when his phone chimed at him. He checked it quickly incase it had news of the beast, taking a deep breath when he saw Vincent's name before opening the message.

"Sephiroth, It's Vincent. I woke up and you weren't here, so I figured you'd be working, but wanted to contact you in case it was something else. I might go to see Jake and Marcus today, but in case you come back and I'm not here, I'll make some food and put it in the fridge for you. Don't overwork yourself! Have a good day."

Sephiroth smiled at that, taking a deep breath before replying to the message. "I'll be back to the suite soon, we can spend some time together before you go. I'll walk you to the commons to meet them, I don't like the idea of you wondering around alone for now. The beast attacked again not too long ago, so most of the halls are closed right now."

Vincent paled as he read that, frowning. "Okay. I'll wait for you. See you soon!"

Sephiroth sighed, glancing up at the team he was in charge of before spotting Zack and motioning
for him to approach. "Can you handle the clean up here?"

"I should be a able to," Zack nodded, crowding his arms and tilting his head as a frown crossed his face. "Is everything alright, Sir?"

"Yes, I just... have an uneasy feeling," Sephiroth admitted, his eyes glancing back at the blood painting the hallway. "Vincent is awake and I want to check on him, he wasn't in bed last night when the call woke me up. I assume he'd just been in the bathroom, but incase it was his night terrors instead I don't want to leave him alone," he explained, crossing his own arms and glaring at the floor. "Something just feels wrong."

Zack's arms slowly fell to his side as he watched the General, taking a quick glance at the team. "Go check on him, your instincts are usually right and it's best no one be alone until this thing is caught," he spoke in a soft voice before turning to approach the team and keep them on track.

Sephiroth watched him walk off before giving a half nod, more to himself than anyone else, and turning to leave back to his suite. Being the General, he was allowed easy access past all the lockdown points which allowed him to make it home relatively quickly. He took a deep breath when he reached the door before inserting his key and entering, glancing around the suite.

"Vincent?"

"I'm in the kitchen!" Vincent called out. "The food is almost done. It's just some soup and grilled cheese."

Sephiroth released a soft sigh before giving a tired smile. "Great, I'll be in soon. Let me wash up first," he called, walking quickly. He didn't want Vincent to have to see how much blood was on him.

Vincent finished up the food, setting the table and getting their drinks while he waited, cleaning up in the meantime.

Sephiroth came into the kitchen clean and dressed in some loose, casual clothes while drying his hair with a towel. He looked Vincent over before walking over to him, hugging him close and kissing his neck. "Are you alright?" he asked softly.

Vincent gave a small smile, hugging Sephiroth back. "I'm alright." he paused before speaking again. "I had a really bad nightmare last night. I don't really remember all of it, but enough that I was scared when I woke up."

Sephiroth frowned, combing his fingers through Vincent's hair. "So the tea didn't help any?"

"It doesn't seem to have." Vincent sighed softly.

"We'll figure something out, I'm sure of it," Sephiroth reassured. "Has everything been calm here while I was gone? No strange noises or anything?" he questioned while playing with Vincent's hair, his free arm holding him closer protectively.

"No, everything has been fine." Vincent said. "Is something wrong?"

Sephiroth was silent for a long while, brows furrowing as he considered what he could and couldn't share. "I... I got my first good look at the beast today," he admitted in a soft voice, staring at the counter. "It was honestly terrifying, more so than when I'd only caught glimpses. One of our SOLDIERs were able to injure it, I saw the bullets hit, but there was already so much--" he cut himself off, thinking over what he wanted to say and how it might make Vincent worry more. He took a deep breath and looked up, gently grabbing Vincent's jaw to meet his eyes. "Despite injuring
it we couldn't find any trails, the only way I could think of the beast escaping without notice was that it used the vents. There's no way for us to actually check them, however, so I want you to be extra cautious and I'm considering adding bars to the vents here to keep you safe.'

Vincent gasped, eyes widening, many thoughts flowing through them, before they softened. He smiled at Sephiroth. "Alright. I'll make sure to be extra careful as well." he promised.

Sephiroth nodded, sighing. "I'll do what I can to keep you safe, I promise we'll catch this thing."

"I know you will." Vincent said confidently.

Sephiroth kissed Vincent's cheek before releasing him and getting them each something to drink from the fridge. He helped Vincent set the table before sitting down to eat. "How has your day been while I was gone?"

"It's been alright. I woke up a little late and cleaned a little." Vincent smiled.

"That sounds nice, did you get back to sleep after I left for work, then?"

Vincent nodded. "Yeah. I was in the bathroom when you left." he chuckled.

Sephiroth smiled. "I thought so," he mused. "We should do something to relax after this... perhaps a movie or something until the lock down is cleared."


Sephiroth smiled back. After they finished eating he washed the dishes, then checked on the vents around their suit. He didn't find anything, not from what he could see at the moment, so he closed them off.

Vincent then told him it was time for him to meet up with Jake and Marcus. "Would you like to join us."

Sephiroth nodded. "Yes, it'll be nice to just clear my mind for a while."

Vincent smiled and held out his hand. "We're meeting in the Commons, as usual."

Sephiroth took the hand, standing and leaving with Vincent.

Jake and Marcus were already in the commons when they got there, talking quietly and looking a bit worried.

"Hey guys." Vincent greeted as they reached the other two.

"Hey," Jake waved back half-heartedly. "Did you hear about the attack last night?"

Vincent motioned to Sephiroth and nodded. "Yeah." he said softly.

"Some of my troupe were victims," Marcus admitted with a sigh. "It's scary how close to home these attacks are getting."

Vincent frowned at that. "You should both be very careful, then. That's really close to you two." he told his friends.

"We know," Jake sighed while combing a hand through his hair. "It's... it's terrifying, really."
"It is." Vincent agreed softly.

Jake took Vincent's hand, squeezing it. "The higher ups are implementing a curfew to help protect everyone. No one leaves their rooms after seven, except the Hunting Team."

Vincent squeezed Jake's hand back, leaning a little on Sephiroth. "I hope everyone will obey it." he sighed. "I know there are some who aren't taking this seriously despite the evidence."

"I hope the Hunting Team stays safe," Marcus sighed. "Some of my platoon are being assigned to it, I can only hope they return safely after each mission."

Vincent looked at Sephiroth. "Will you be assigned to the hunting team as well?"

He gave a nod. "Yes, I'll be over one of the teams. Angeal and Genesis are over a team each as well."

"Well, with you three, the teams are a safe as they can be at least." Vincent said softly.

"We can only hope," Sephiroth sighed while shaking his head. His shoulders were sagging in exhaustion, brow pinched as he went over everything he had to do. "Zack is going to be second in command for my group, I admit I haven't checked who is second in command for Angeal and Genesis just yet."

"I'm sure that, whoever it is, they're just as capable as our Commander," Marcus encouraged with a nod. He shifted and glanced down at his hands after that and shifted. "Do you know who all from my Platoon is being assigned? I know the list given to us isn't the last, they made that clear when they gave it to us."

"No, I don't," Sephiroth shook his head. "If you get assigned to one of the groups then all I can tell you is to be careful. This... thing, isn't what you're used to dealing with. It's not like anything any of you have dealt with."

Vincent put a hand over Marcus's. "It'll be okay." he tried to assure. "If you do get assigned, then Jake and I will treat you to drinks afterwards." he gave a shaky smile. "Maybe get you to finally embarrass yourself in front of us."

Marcus nodded and took a deep breath. "Yeah... yeah, that's what we'll do," he reasoned.

Jake took Marcus's other hand and gave his own shaky smile. "We're in this together," he reassured before standing up and taking in a deep breath. "Let's all find something to do, yeah? We'll pull out the cards and the four of us can play a few rounds."

Vincent nodded. "That's a good idea."

Jake stood and grabbed one of the extra card decks from a shelf nearby, bringing it over and starting to deal everyone a hand. He was smiling and laughing enough that anyone who knew him less might think he was fine. His friends could see the crooked set to his smile, though, the way it didn't quite reach his eyes the way it normally did and the way his gaze kept glancing over to Marcus as if ensuring he was still there. Vincent would notice and give him subtle, encouraging smiles, trying to keep his own smile on his face and his worry off of it.

"How have you been doing with your nightmares and everything?" Marcus asked while glancing at Vincent after their fourth round of the game.

"I had a bad one last night. I can't really remember it now, but I know I woke up and rushed to the
bathroom. I didn't get sick, but dry heaved for a while." Vincent said, partially lying.

"Do you think the creature coming back is what made the nightmares worse?" Marcus asked. "It would make sense, right? If hearing about them or hearing people discuss them makes it worse?"

"That would make sense…" Vincent said after a moment. "It does seem to match up with the attacks and my really bad nightmares."

"You were kidnapped around the time these things first started popping up," Jake mused with a frown. "Maybe one of them attacked you and that's why you react so badly?"

"It's possible." Vincent nodded. "Kind of makes me wish I remembered anything about that time."

"It's not surprising you don't, though," Marcus pointed out.

"Yeah, it was a traumatic experience. You always hear stories about people who block things from their memory because they were horrible," Jake added, a hand motioning to his own head as he talked to accentuate his point.

"It's more common for the memories to ingrain themselves and repeat," Sephiroth spoke up, eyes never leaving his cards as he played his hand. "It's more likely that the memory loss was caused from an injury or from contact with one of the leaking drugs. There were plenty of things down there that could've affected it outside of just trauma."

Vincent gave a small smile to Sephiroth. "You are all true, though." he said softly.

The general glanced up at that, blinking at the other three before his eyes widened just a fraction. He set his cards down and gently grabbed Vincent's hand. "I apologize, I wasn't trying to insinuate..." he let his voice drift off.

Vincent let out a small chuckle. "It's alright. I understand." he said softly, squeezing Sephiroth's hand.

Sephiroth sighed, massaging the bridge of his nose. "I know it was traumatizing for you, but... I do feel your issues might've been from injuries. We found you unconscious and we still have no idea what knocked you out."

Vincent nodded. "I know. And who knows all of what is down there." he said.

Sephiroth gave a nod of agreement. "We'll figure out a way to get your memories back one day," he assured.

Vincent sighed softly. "I'm honestly not even sure if I want those ones back." he said.

"Yeah," Jake mused, "it had to be something messed up for you to forget like that... still, I'd think you'd like to at least remember what knocked you out."

Marcus stared at his cards in thought before speaking. "Some therapists say remembering the memories helps ease the nightmares afterwards. You have to first remember what's causing your trauma, then overcome it and learn how to willingly forget instead of repressing it."

Vincent shifted a little. "It makes sense but... I don't know. Some of the scars that got left behind on me... maybe it's better off not knowing."

"All of us will stand with you no matter which choice you make," Sephiroth assured while
squeezing Vincent's hand. "We should find out what happened, even if the memories don't come back, though. I have a team working on it so that we can better treat your wounds and have a better understanding of any side effects you might be experiencing."

Jake leaned over to pull Vincent into a hug. "Yeah, we'll all stay with you and we'll figure out how to help you."

Vincent smiled. "Thank you. I'm so glad I have all of you with me."

Marcus smiled back. "You don't have to thank us, we're glad to have you with us."

Vincent's smile softened. "That's my first time hearing that." he said softly.

The other three stared at him in quiet shock, glancing at each other. Jake was the first to react, setting his cards down and moving to sit beside Vincent on the love seat, pulling him fully into a hug. Sephiroth sat his cards down next and leaned closer to comb his fingers through Vincent's hair before standing slightly to kiss his forehead. Marcus was the last to react, setting his own hand down and moving to stand behind Vincent and squeeze his shoulder.

"This isn't Wutai," Jake said softly, tightening the hug, "you're not alone anymore. You'll never be alone again."

Vincent froze for a moment before tears welled in his eyes, making him blink them rapidly. "Thank you." he whispered to them softly, relaxing into their embraces. Jake held Vincent closer as he cried, gently rocking Vincent back and forth to calm him. Vincent calmed down slowly, hugging Jake tightly. "I'm alright now...." he said lowly after his tears stopped.

"Are you sure?" Jake asked in a soft voice, gently making Vincent look at him so he could get a better read of his facial expression.

Vincent gave a small smile and nodded. "I am." he assured him.

Jake gave a nod then and let go, moving back to his seat beside Vincent and picking his cards back up. Marcus squeezed Vincent's shoulder one more time before returning to his own seat as well. Sephiroth released Vincent from the hug but took his hand, staying where he'd perched beside him. Vincent squeezed Sephiroth's hand gently, giving a small, unsteady, smile.

"You're strong," Sephiroth said quietly while picking up his cards, "you'll get through this. We'll all get through this."

Vincent gave a nod. "I know. Though it's a little easier, as we all have each other."

Sephiroth gave a nod before looking at his cards once more. They played card games for a few hours until Sephiroth noticed the time. "We should probably all get back to our rooms, it'll be dinner time soon and I know Angeal plans on posting the new squad assignments then. I should start getting prepared for tonight's hunt," he sighed.

Vincent nodded, standing to give his two friends a hug. "You both be careful." he said softly.

"I promise we will be," Jake replied while hugging back.

"You be careful as well," Marcus reminded as he accepted the hug. "Try to stay in a safe place and don't go wondering in dangerous areas."

"Don't worry, I'll keep him safe," Sephiroth promised as he stood up and stretched.
Vincent nodded. "Yeah. I'll probably just stay in the room unless I'm with you two or Sephiroth." he said softly.

They nodded before turning to start for their rooms. Sephiroth took Vincent's hand so they could return to the suite, watching Vincent as they walked. "Are you really alright?" he asked softly.

"I am right now, but... well I can't promise something like that won't happen again." he said softly. "I didn't have much of a happy life in Wutai. I'm still getting used to... well, everything I do have here."

Sephiroth nodded and squeezed his hand. "We'll always be here if you need us," he promised, "know that you can come to any of us for anything. We'll help remind you of what you have here and that it's not going away."

Vincent smiled up at him. "I know. And thank you for that." he said as they reached their place. They went in and Vincent sighed. "I know it's still silly to tell you, of all people, but be careful tonight." he said softly.

Sephiroth kissed his forehead while pulling him into a hug. "I promise I'll be careful," he said gently. "I'll make sure to come back for dinner before we have to leave for hunting, you promise to take your sleep meds tonight and try not to worry. I'll make some chamomile tea during dinner to help you calm down."

Vincent nodded and smiled. "I promise."

Sephiroth smiled, kissing his cheek before leaving to deal with what he had to. He was truly worried about Vincent's safety, but the best thing he could do at the moment was prepare their team for what they'd face that night and get to know the new members being added to the team.

Vincent sighed, feeling nervous about the upcoming night. While Sephiroth was gone he tried to do some paperwork, but found he couldn't focus on it, deciding to leave it be. He got up and started to clean anything he could, feeling the need to move around.

The hours ticked by excruciatingly slow. It was now six at night, a text popping up on Vincent's phone confirming Sephiroth would see him for dinner at seven or eight. Vincent smiled when he saw it, deciding to start making dinner for them both. Sephiroth was going over who was recruited, frowning at just how many more men were in each group. He could count twenty new faces in his own group and frowned, concerned about how the hunt would go and how many of them would still be around when the night was over. He was grateful when he could leave to have dinner with Vincent, hoping to just forget about everything for a while before he had to focus on the hunt.

Vincent gave Sephiroth a gentle smile when the man returned, having already set the table. "I just made a stew." he said softly.

"It smells wonderful," Sephiroth commented with a smile of his own, stretching as he walked to the table and sat down. "The new lists were up, I didn't see Marcus or Jake on any of them for tonight. Curfew starts in twenty more minutes, so I trust they'll be safe," he offered after a period of silence, having just watched Vincent quietly serve their meals. He hoped this small bit of hope would cheer the other up and ease his worries.

Vincent gave a small sigh of relief at that. "I just hope everyone going is extra careful." he said afterwards.

"We gave everyone instructions to protect themselves. We believe the creature might be moving through the maintenance vents, so we're having everyone seal those areas off in hopes it traps the
beast."

Vincent nodded, setting their food down and sitting at the table. "That makes sense."

"How have you been? I know it was only a few hours, but... I know you're worried."

"Well, I have been really worried, but I cleaned to distract myself." Vincent said.

"I'll check the vents here before I leave for my shift tonight," Sephiroth commented, hoping that could ease some of Vincent's worry, "I can seal any that need it to ensure nothing gets in."

Vincent gave a nod and a barely there smile. "Thank you."

Sephiroth nodded back. The rest of dinner was quiet before Sephiroth washed the dishes and began checking the vents. He kept trying to figure out how to help Vincent worry less as he did his work.

Vincent was antsy and nervous, trying to keep calm as he watched Sephiroth check everything. Sephiroth took a deep breath after everything was checked and left for the hunt. He shook his head to clear it before he continued on to meet his team. He had to focus.

Vincent made some tea to help him relax and eventually go to sleep. Sephiroth was on guard as his team slowly went through each hall to ensure everyone was following the curfew. After those rounds he moved to just patrolling. Vincent slowly fell asleep, curled up on the couch instead of using the bed.

Things were quiet for hours before Sephiroth saw movement. He radioed for his men to follow it, trying to cut the beast off. It was quick on its feet, and Sephiroth cursed when it cut down three of his men before he could get there. It turned and began heading east when he'd almost cornered it. He glanced at the signs and paled.

"Zack, contact Angeal and Genesis! We have a code red, the beast is heading for the B and D Block!" he warned over the radio. "I need men guarding the rooms to ensure no one gets attacked in their rooms."

"On it!" Zack said back. "I think I may be closer to the location than the rest of us as well, so if they need back up I'll provide it."

"They'll need it," Sephiroth confirmed. "I'm two halls away, see what you can do to help slow it down or protect the barracks."

"I'm only one hall over, I'm already going in with a team," Angeal spoke up over the radio.

"Alright. I'll see if mine could possibly cut it off, if we get there in time." Zack said.

"I'm just passing B Block. Nothing here yet. Should I stay in this position?" Came Genesis' voice over the radio.

"You're in a good position," Angeal replied quickly. "I'm coming from the direction of C Block, so we should be able to head it off."

"I'm only one hallway away now," Sephiroth updated while shifting. "Zack, which direction are you coming from?"

"Almost at D Block." Zack said. "I don't hear anything, but that could be good or bad. Not in visual yet, so I can't confirm anything."
Screams sounded suddenly, followed by gun shots and more screams. Sephiroth cussed from hearing it over the intercom and from the echoes in the halls. The screams were coming from near Genesis, coming from the B Block as the sounds of things crashing sounded inside.

Zack let out a small curse through the radio. "I'm too far from B, guys!" he said.

Genesis burst into the barrack, most of the men inside fleeing out of the large dormitory. The creature was standing over several dead bodies, hissing when Genesis fired at it before fleeing. It climbed up the wall and into the maintenance shafts, noise following it as it fled.

"It's heading for C Block!" Genesis warned Angeal as he backed up to chase after it with his men.

"Should I head there?" Zack asked, pausing in his running.

"No," Sephiroth stated quickly, checking one of the PDAs he was given to show a map of the area. "It might run your direction next, start evacuating those on D Block incase it does and send a few men you can spare to Angeal."

"Yes, Sir." Zack said, moving quickly to do as he was ordered and sending a small group of his men to Angeal.

Angeal was already evacuating C Block, sending everyone towards Sephiroth's team with the survivors from B Block.

"All of you head towards the mess hall," Sephiroth ordered the evacuees, frowning when spotted Jake and Marcus among the groups. He took a deep breath, catching up to Zack and praying the mess hall would be a good base. He muted his radio once he was close enough to Zack, motioning for him to do the same. "You and your men go with the evacuees and shut off the entrances to the mess hall. Give the men weapons if needed, just make sure as many survive as possible. Genesis, Angeal, and I will fight that thing with our teams."

Zack gave a nod. "Be careful, Sephiroth." he said, before going to his men and giving them the orders he was told.

Sephiroth could only nod, quickly rushing towards where the beast had last been spotted. He saw it rushing down a hallway and gave chase, drawing a short version of his favorite sword that was better suited for the narrow hallways they were running around in.

The creature cried out when some of the men managed to get a hit, charging for them and ripping through their armor as if it were paper. They didn’t stand a chance as it rampaged through the halls, a few teams attempting to trap the creature with cages in hopes of making it easier to kill. The teams pushed from all sides until the large beast was cornered, Genesis and Angeal to either side of it with Sephiroth in front and a wall in the back.

The three leaders took in the beast’s appearance, quickly trying to think of the best strategy against it. The creature’s deep purple fur looked thick, there was no telling how well that defended against their weapons or magic without trying to hit it. The red main that spread from its head and over its shoulders was even thicker, the lion-like face growling bearing its razor like teeth. The horns were at least three feet long, making them a danger to anyone who got too close.

Sephiroth glanced at the creature’s claws and frowned. They were sharp and were at least three inches long, possibly five inches for the hands, but those didn’t look big enough to cause the marks they’d seen on the walls before. That could mean this creature wasn’t alone or that it was in a weaker form at the moment. Both options were not ideal.
“Everyone keep your shields up!” Angeal ordered sternly, not wanting to risk the beast charging them and killing the group. The SOLDIERs did so, backing up a bit and drawing their weapons to aim at the creature. Angeal, Genesis, and Sephiroth each pushed to the front of their teams to be on the front line.

Genesis took aim with a tranquilizer gun, hoping to put the beast to sleep, it was too devastating a creature to simply send back to the labs but they could weaken it while they had the chance. There was no guarantee that it couldn’t outrun them otherwise. Angeal had his buster sword drawn, keeping a wary eye on the claws the beast kept swiping at them with.

The creature was growling, hair raised and swiping blindly in its irritation and fear. No animal likes being cornered, and no one knew better than the three men standing before it how dangerous anything cornered could be.

Faster than anyone could blink, Angeal rushed forward, grabbing the beast’s wrists to pin it against the wall. “Now!” he snapped towards Genesis as he struggled to hold the beast against the wall. Sephiroth was there before Angeal’s cry was fully out, blade against the beasts legs to keep its back paws pinned and a hand holding firm to one of its horns to pull its head to the side away from Angeal. Genesis shot as soon as he had a clear line, keeping the weapon trained on the beast incase one dose wasn’t enough.

Angeal and Sephiroth grit their teeth as the beast thrashed, pressing it harder against the wall. Angeal waited for the creature to slump down, its full weight resting on him, before speaking out. “Watch out,” he warned Sephiroth before starting to drop the creature.

Sephiroth moved to the side easily enough, releasing the beast’s limp head and frowning as it collapsed to the floor with a loud thud, dust floating up from the impact and settling in its fur. “You think they’d learn to be careful when making beasts like this,” he muttered before shaking his head.

“That… was much easier than I was expecting,” Genesis frowned and raised an eyebrow. “Are you sure this is the thing we’ve been looking for and not just another random pest?” he questioned while lowering the gun.

“I honestly don’t know,” Angeal replied while rolling his shoulders, “there haven’t been any reports of anything escaping, but their records are barely even updated.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if we were looking for multiple ones this entire time, it would explain how high the death toll is,” Sephiroth admitted, raising his blade. “Either way, this one was fast and took out several of our men just catching it. I’d rather not see it again while we’re hunting the main prey,” he mused, swinging his blade down towards the large beast’s neck. It’d be best to end this now before a stronger form could show, if there was one.

Lightening flashed as the sword hit, throwing the General back a couple yards into his men, knocking those in the front to the ground while those behind tried to hold them up.

“Sephiroth!”

“General!”

Angeal slipped into a fighting stance, trying to spot the creature despite having been blinded in the blast with his friend. Genesis, meanwhile, quickly moved to ensure Sephiroth wasn’t seriously injured.

The General was dazed and disoriented, but conscious. The resounding flash had temporarily
blinded him and the clap that had resounded had his ears ringing. Genesis frowned, unsure if touching him would cause a second shock or not as he kneeled to get a better look at the damage. He could see minor burns, but nothing worrying as he handed Sephiroth a potion and tried to help him get back onto his feet. Now wasn’t the time to make remarks, but he was remembering this incident for later to remind Sephiroth that he isn’t always flawless.

“How’s that thing still moving?” Angeal commented while shaking his head to clear the few spots still in his vision.

Genesis glanced over at the comment, staring in a mix of awe and annoyance that the thing was getting back up. He paused when he realized it wasn’t the same creature as before, though. Instead of a animal they were facing what looked like a stitched together person with dead eyes and wisps of hair. Its head was separated from the body, proof that Sephiroth’s strike had hit, and yet it was moving.

Angeal stared in shock when he could see clearly, feeling dumbfounded at the sight of a beheaded thing just grabbing its head to put back on its body. It was groaning as it stood, wobbling a bit on its feet. Angeal put aside his own fear and rushed the beast to grab it, trying to be mindful of the stitches to it couldn’t just rip off a limb to flee. The source of the lightening was clear to see now, two small prongs in the creature’s shoulders that zapped and arched with electricity.

Angeal wondered if removing those would stop the beast, but he was already struggling just to keep a steady hold on it. “Genesis!”

The younger man was already taking aim with the tranquilizer again, a frown on his face. “Are you sure this will work on it? I’m fairly confident it needs a pulse to be put down.”

“Those things could knock out Behemoth, just shoot it already!”

Genesis shrugged, firing at the beast’s chest. The creature didn’t seem phased, not seeming to notice the dart as it reached back go grab Angeal and throw him into a nearby wall.

“I told you,” Genesis commented, dropping the gun and his Rapier. “You might need to sit this one out. Sephiroth and I are better with magic,” he reminded.

Sephiroth was finally on his feet again. He ignored the regular sword he’d been using to account for the hallways and drew Masamune. “I admit I dislike the limits the labs placed on us… while I value their opinions I believe this incident gives us the right to ignore their regulations in favor of minimizing damage.”

“I’d agree,” Genesis grinned, charging Rapier. “The rest of you can go, we’d have to hold back if all of you are here,” he called towards their teams.

Angeal felt wary. He didn’t want to risk leaving the battle, but he knew even he would eventually reach his limits fighting something he couldn’t really touch. “Follow me,” he called to the lower ranked men, “we’ll fall back to the evacuees and make a barrier around them so they can treat any injured,” he sighed as he backed up. “Team Alpha, go check the evacuated blocks to ensure there aren’t any people still stuck there,” he added before leading the other two teams away.

Genesis waited until the men were out of range before charging forward to attack the creature. He felt proud when he landed a direct hit, sure it would have an affect, but the creature simply got back up with a groan. It punched through one of the walls, hands wrapping around wired hidden within to rip them out.
The halls went dark, Sephiroth and Genesis quickly casting spells to light up the hallway. The beast was gone, though. Sephiroth frowned at that, noticing no marks of where it could’ve left to. “It’s not working alone,” he reasoned with a frown.

“You believe there’s a master we haven’t found?” Genesis asked, walking towards where the beast had been to kneel down and examine the floor. He couldn’t be sure, but he felt a teleportation spell had been used.

“That, or a smarter experiment that can pull the strings,” Sephiroth admitted. “You and I both know they aren’t above human experimentation,” he added in a low voice. “We could be dealing with prisoners instead of simple creatures.”

“That seems likely, especially with how human that… thing looked,” Genesis nodded and sighed as he stood up. “It could’ve teleported anywhere, we have to think ahead of it somehow.”

“The evacuees,” Sephiroth reasoned, eyes widening at the realization. “I didn’t say where we sent them, but that’s no doubt where it’s—”

“Help needed—Block,” the radios they still head chimed up. Its connection was bad, being overtaken by static now and then. “Monst—taken out several me--. Can’t stop—“ Screams could be heard now and then in the background, along with fighting.

“Which block are you at?” Sephiroth asked after pulling his radio off of his belt. “We’re having difficulty hearing you,” he added, glancing at Genesis.

Genesis frowned, but listened closely, already expecting, like Sephiroth, that it was the creature that had just fled from them.

“Hallway—D and—“ came back to them over the static.

“I suppose we’re heading for D Block, then,” Genesis mused, starting to lead the way. Sephiroth returned his radio to his belt with a nod and followed.

It didn’t take long to find the men after they had a direction to go, the sent of blood leading the way. They came onto a massacre with few survivors. Sephiroth approached one of the men and kneeled to speak with him while Genesis began to investigate.

Most of the men had died in a strong lightening attack, the electricity still in the air being what caused the issues with their radios. Those who survived the initial attack were apparently beaten to death, blood and gore splattering all over the floor. Towards the edge of the hall Genesis could spot claw and scorch marks near some shredded bodies.

“We were attacked by two monsters,” the man Sephiroth was questioning explained. He had a large gash to his side that Sephiroth was healing.

“What did they look like?”

“One was stitched together. I-it attacked first… A-after the lightening wore down and things went dark it… it disappeared and a damned animal of some kind came out of no where, attaching me and one other guy before running off.”

Sephiroth glanced at Genesis and nodded, standing up with a sigh. “We’ll follow it. You,” he pointed to a man who wasn’t as injured as the other two survivors, “get these two to the infirmary downstairs.”
“Y-yes, sir!”

Sephiroth didn’t wait to see if they were following orders, simply turning to Genesis. “Each one of us take a hall?” he suggested.

“It’s the fastest way,” Genesis nodded, “I’ll radio if I find it so we can keep in touch. I’ve never seen a monster jump stages like this before, though, it’s… concerning.”

“I agree, I have a feeling there was something bigger than we were ever told going on with this project,” Sephiroth sighed, choosing the left hallway to head down.

“When do they ever tell us anything,” Genesis called back in an annoyed tone while walking down the right hallway.

They were lucky to have their magic to give them light, the stitched together creature had managed to knock power down for the entire Barracks area on this floor. The commons area and cafeteria were on a separate system, so there was hope they still had lights.

Angeal’s team was moving by flash light and magic until they got to the cafeteria. He was grateful to see everyone fine at the moment, locking the doors behind him and having his team of second classes make barricades. “Is anyone hurt?” he asked Zack.

“A few, those who were training or have already trained to be medics are caring for them now. What’s going on out there?” Zack looked concerned, glancing back at all of the people with him. It wasn’t only members of SOLDIER, as the barracks in Block D were faculty members who kept the place running and Block A had lower ranked laboratory members.

The floors leading towards where Vincent used to live with his team, the higher ranked scientists and their personal quarters were all blocked off already. The floor to the class two barracks, all of the training facilities, and the like were also closed off.

“It changed stages,” Angeal sighed, shaking his head. “Thing started as an animal of some kind, then became a stitched together person. It controls electricity, so I guess it killed the power while fighting with Genesis and Sephiroth.”

“And the emergency generators didn’t kick on?” Zack questioned, raising an eyebrow.

Angeal could only shrug in response before turning to catch someone’s attention. Before he could call out, though, the power went out in the cafeteria. People yelped in surprise and everyone fell deathly quiet and still.

Normally Angeal would have already turned on his flashlight and began investigating, but right now it was better to stay hidden. There was no telling where the power had been knocked out at, exactly, and they had to ensure that monster wasn’t close by. He slowly reached for his radio and turned it off, Zack following suit along with the other SOLDIERs.

Jake pressed close to Marcus from where they were near the kitchens, holding his breath and trying to be brave. Yes, he signed up to fight. Yes, he signed up to be a protector… but that was against foreign invaders and criminals, not unearthly creatures out of a horror movie.

Marcus squeezed his hand in reassurance, holding his sickle close and listening for a sign of anything nearby. They heard wheezing from somewhere near them, one of the faculty shushing their friend quietly to try and hold off a panic attack. The wheezing moved to behind Jake and Marcus and they frowned, hoping the person would be alright.
The next moments happened in a matter of seconds, but felt like eternity for those involved. The sudden sound of a body falling and a scream. Zack was on high alert, realizing it came from the direction he’d left Marcus and Jake, he knew the scream was Jake’s.

Anyone who knew magic attempted to use a spell to bring light, but nothing was working. It was as if they were trapped in an abyss, even Angeal’s flashlight wouldn’t turn on. The lights returned and Zack quickly glanced towards where he’d left Vincent’s friends. The only thing still there was a large puddle of blood and an abandoned sickle.

Chapter End Notes

I repeat.....I'm sorry. Took Creative Freedom with the Demons. Hope it all came out well! I thrive on comments and Kudos!!!!!
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

So so so so SO SORRY!!!! I know it's been MONTHS that I haven't updated. Life happened. Been going through some stuff mentally and kinda lost motivation for a while. Getting better now and back to posting! I really am sorry that I left that cliff hanger for so long. Didn't expect life to Falcon Punch me. So! I hope you guys like this chapter and sorry if it's a little off or lacking! Thank you for sticking by me and for all the Kudos and comments left! They really do mean so much to me!

~Saigo

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 23

Sephiroth frowned when he began receiving static on his radio, panicked screams coming from it between the white noise. "Is everyone alright?" he asked into it, pausing in his walking to try and figure out what was going on. His frown deepened when he didn't get a response, contacting Genesis and Angeal next to get updates from them.

"Nothing in my hall," Genesis admitted, looking around in irritation. "I don't see any signs of where it could've gone, either. Angeal, are you alright?"

Sephiroth frowned, sighing when there wasn't a reply. "I think the static we're receiving is from Zack and Angeal, they were in the cafeteria, we should head there to offer assistance," he reasoned, already starting towards the room in question.

"Right. I don't like that this thing can apparently use teleportation magic," Genesis admitted with a sigh, "it's making it harder to track and means there's not really anywhere safe."

Sephiroth didn't reply back, though he agreed. He was silently hoping Vincent was safe in their suite, it made him uneasy realizing that none of his protective measures meant anything now.

Back in the Cafeteria Zack and Angeal were trying to keep the rest of the people safe, the SOLDIERS with them surrounding the civilians in a protective wall. The lights kept flashing off, each time followed with that same eerie, wheezing cackle before a portal would open and another person would be plucked away. Soon after blood would spray from the portal, coating those surrounding it.

"It just had to use Curse magic," Angeal hissed under his breath, glaring around. He had to figure something out or they were all dead. He looked towards the side to check on Zack just in time to see one of the portals open vertically beside him, a saw coming out towards his chest. Angeal didn't have time to think, drawing his Buster sword and shooting forward to use it as a shield to keep the younger man safe. He grit his teeth under the strain of holding the saw off. "Don't just stand there," he snapped, "get back!"

Zack seemed to snap back into reality, face pale and eyes blown wide. "S-Sorry.... this... this is crazy..." he said shakily, as he began to back away. "How... how many has it gotten so far?" He
shook his head. "We're standing in a death trap and I can't get a hold of anyone from the radio."

"I haven't been counting," Angeal admitted as he used his blade to knock the saw away from himself, backing up and readying it. While he didn't like using his sword, now was a good time to bring it out. He charged quickly before the saw could swing again, stabbing this Buster straight into the portal as far as he could without entering the portal himself. He heard a hiss of pain from the abomination on the other side and twisted the blade in hopes of injuring it badly enough it would retreat. The portal began to close after another hiss was released.

Angeal backed up and glanced back at Zack. "Are you alright?" he asked.

"I-I'm fine..." Zack nodded. "Did it manage to hurt you?"

"No, I blocked it," Angeal assured, keeping an eye out for more portals. "Start evacuating the civilians," he ordered.

"On it." Zack nodded, obeying.

Angeal called out to some of his men, having them split into two groups. He'd have one help Zack evacuate the scientists and other employees while the second group accompanied him in following the blood trail to check for any injured or dead.

Sephiroth was almost to them now, pressing the button on his radio once more. "Zack? Angeal? Do either of you read me?"

"I hear you." Zack replied as the connection finally cleared. "We were attacked. The damn thing can teleport. Uses portals. It's gone now, but we haven't chased it. Doing damage control and we don't even know a possible direction or location for it to go. It sounded like Angeal was able to injure it though."

"Genesis suspected it could teleport when it fled from us, it's worrying to hear confirmation. It's good Angeal might've harmed it, but we'll have to figure out what to do. Are you still near the cafeteria?"

"Yeah, we both are. We're evacuating the survivors right now," Zack said. He paused. "Listen... during one of the attacks I was with Jake and Marcus, but we got separated and I saw some blood in their general direction. I haven't been back to that area yet. I'm not sure if it got them or not."

Sephiroth felt ice in his veins at that. He cursed softly under his breath as he thought of how hard Vincent would take the news and of his, now possibly broken, promise to keep Marcus safe. He took a deep breath before replying, "thank you for informing me. I'll try to find them and get them medical help if needed. I'm almost there, I think I can see your flashlights. Stay away from the barracks areas, they're completely trashed, your best option for an evac. route would be through hallway F and down the stairs at the end of it."

"Got it." Zack said, turning to relay the information to the others helping. He paused before radioing Sephiroth again. "Have you tried to contact Vincent?"

"No," Sephiroth frowned. "He should be safe, given how far my suite is from here. I don't want to potentially lead that creature to him when the only way of contact is to head back to my suite."

"I didn't know if you had your phone or not." Zack replied.

"I do, but there's no guarantee of a reply with all the interference with communications and the like."
"I hadn't thought of that." Zack sighed. "Well, I'm sure he's fine. Probably asleep."

"I hope so," Sephiroth sighed as he reached the cafeteria. He waved to Zack before waving him to continue on and went inside to help Angeal and his men sweep the room for injured and dead.

Angeal was panting inside, looking around for any signs of another attack and preparing to stab through another portal if it opened. Right when the two spotted each other was when the beast decided to make a re-appearance, a portal opening right above Angeal. His eyes widened, body moving on instinct instead of thought as he plunged his sword up to block the chainsaw aimed at his head and stab into the beast. He pulled down this time, pulling the creature out of the portal. It had a muscular but slim build, long black hair, and bandages hiding its face. It wheezed out, blood gurgling from its mouth, before trying to stand up. Sephiroth reacted quickly, using a lightening attack on the monstrosity before it could attack.

Zack noticed the attack, quickly getting someone to take over for him before running over to help. The beast gave a wheeze to show it was hit before swaying in place and beginning to limp towards Sephiroth. Zack called out a warning, eyes trained on it.

Angeal moved into the creature's path, readying his sword again. "Zack," he called out to get the younger man's attention, "Sephiroth and I can handle this thing. You go find the injured before they run out of time."

Zack nodded, running to do so. The creature kept moving forwards, seemingly not on the offensive as it moved, staying in the path to Sephiroth as if Angeal weren't there threatening it with his sword, making almost desperate wheezing sounds now. Angeal blocked its path again, stabbing his sword through its middle to push it back as Sephiroth moved to the side, preparing another magic attack.

The blood lead Zack out of the cafeteria and into the kitchens. From there it continued towards the pantry.

The monster hissed, though continued to move, despite the sword and readying spell, towards Sephiroth, once again ignoring Angeal. It reached it's free hand out towards him, though it wasn’t attacking, and made another desperate wheezing sound. Sephiroth cast and ice spell to stick the monster in place. He readied another attack, but one of its portals opened up and it fell out of sight. This portal hadn't looked like the others, but it had to be the creature who produced it as it just disappeared from before the two SOLDIERs. Sephiroth lowered his sword, a glare of annoyance and confusion marring his face as Angeal cleaned his sword off and returned it to his back. He felt just as confused, he had his sword stuck inside the creature and yet it just... popped out when the portal appeared.

Sephiroth sighed finally and looked back towards where they'd sent Zack. "We should check on Zack, he might need help with the injured," he reasoned before starting to walk off. Angeal glanced once more at where the monster had disappeared before giving a nod and following.

Zack had gotten the large pantry open and went inside, following the blood trail. He could already see a few dead bodies and stopped whenever he spotted someone still alive to stabilize them enough for moving. At the very back he could hear crying and a panicking voice, the voice was too familiar for comfort. Zack blinked before cursing under his breath, heading towards the voice. He found Jake near the back, sobbing uncontrollably and muttering pleas under his breath. He was covered in blood, hands pressing firmly against Marcus's middle as he begged his friend to stay with him, as he begged him to stay alive. Marcus was slit from just under his left pectoral to his right hip, the cut was deep and his skin had already lost color. He didn't seem to be responding or breathing from where Zack stood, no matter how many times Jake begged the other man to open
his eyes.

Zack placed a hand on his shoulder gently. "Jake... you have to get up... we're evacuating..." he said softly.

Jake shook his head. "I-I can't move until the medic team g-gets here, Marcus will die i-if I do..." he sobbed, trembling.

"Jake... Jake, he's already gone." Zack said softly.

The young man just shook his head again. "W-we gotta get him help... i-if the doctors get here quickly, then--"

"Jake!" Zack said, a little sharper. "We have to go now, before that thing comes back. Marcus is... he's gone, Jake..."

Jake shook his head again. "I-I'm not leaving him," he replied brokenly as he curled over Marcus. "W-we can't leave him h-here!"

Zack frowned a little. "I know how you feel, Jake, but we can't take him with us right now." he said softly.

Another SOLDIER came in to help Zack move the injured out, though he paused when he found the scene with Jake and Marcus. He glanced at Zack. "Should I radio someone to help?" he asked softly.

Zack nodded. "See if the General can get here." he said quietly.

The man nodded and ran off. Sephiroth and Angeal were standing warily in the main room. The monster had retreated after they'd seriously injured it and Angeal was radioing all teams to see if anyone saw signs of it, or if it was hiding for the night once more. The SOLDIER walked up to Sephiroth and saluted.

"General, Sir, Zack needs your help with someone in the back. We've finished moving all other wounded employees and SOLDIERs, but the person Zack's tending to refuses to leave."

Zack was staying near Jake, a hand on his shoulder and speaking softly to him, still trying to get him to leave as he waited for help to come. Sephiroth gave an unsure glance at Angeal before turning to follow the second who was leading him. He felt the blood leave his face when he reached where Zack was, shaking his head and taking a deep breath before approaching to check on the scene. Zack looked up at his approach. "Marcus is... gone. Jake is hysterical and refuses to leave him." He said softly.

Sephiroth's frown deepened and he sighed, kneeling on the other side of Jake. He leaned forward, putting his hands on the wound Jake had been trying to put pressure on. "I'll stay with Marcus, you have to follow Zack to a safer area. You'd be in the way of the medical team if you stay here," he offered, watching as Jake processed what was said. He numbly nodded, though it was clear he didn't want to leave, and let Zack help him stand.

Zack took his arm, gently leading him away. "It's alright. The General is there now." he said softly. "Let's get you checked out. Marcus would be angry with you if you let yourself stay hurt, right?"

Jake gave a slow nod as he followed Zack out of the pantry. His eyes weren't really focused and he was muttering to himself softly. Sephiroth frowned at that, glancing at Zack. "Tell the med team he's going into shock."
Zack nodded. "I will." he said as he led Jake to the medical team on site.

Sephiroth glanced down at Marcus, checking for a pulse out of habit before pressing his eyes closed and standing with a sigh. He wasn't looking forward to breaking the news to Vincent about this. He shook his head and walked back out to the main room to help with the injured and dead before he'd have to make his report. Zack made sure that Jake would stay with the medic team before leaving to do the same.

It was almost five in the morning when Sephiroth returned to his suit, covered in blood and sweat and feeling miserable. Vincent was on the couch, seemingly asleep, curled into a ball and shaking slightly. Sephiroth frowned and moved to wake him up before pausing and looking down at himself. He hesitated before going to change clothes and visiting the bathroom to clean as much of the blood off of himself with a rag as he could before returning to the living room. He kneeled beside Vincent and gripped his shoulder, calling out to him gently in an attempt at waking him. Vincent woke after three attempts, shooting up with a scream on his lips, face pale, eyes wide but unfocused, sweating, and panting harshly.

Sephiroth gently gripped his shoulders, pushing him back onto the couch. "Vincent, you're alright," he said in a firm but gentle tone. "You're safe. We're at home, I'm here," he assured, combing his fingers through Vincent's hair.

Vincent's eyes met his, focused, and filled with tears. "S-Sephiroth?" he breathed.

Sephiroth nodded and pulled him close. "I'm here," he said softly as a reassurance.

Vincent clung to him closely as he started to cry harder.

Sephiroth gently rubbed his back and sighed. "You're alright now," he assured, "whatever nightmare was plaguing you is over now..."

"I-I'm sorry..." Vincent said in a quiet, broken voice. "I... I don't really remember all of it...."

"That's fine," Sephiroth assured as he shifted so he could look at Vincent's face, "you don't need to share with me... would you like some water? Or tea?" he offered. He knew he had to tell Vincent the news about Marcus, but he didn't want to do so when he was this terrified from a night terror.

"Tea..." he said softly. "But... not... not yet.. could you hold me for a little bit longer?"

"Of course," Sephiroth tightened his hold just a bit. "I'll hold you as long as you need."

Vincent relaxed against him, slowly calming down. Sephiroth waited until Vincent could handle him letting go before he stood and left to make the tea. He frowned as he worked, worrying how he could break the news about Marcus to the other man. Vincent sat on the couch, face in his hands as he tried not to think about anything. He wasn't sure if what he saw was a dream or real.

Sephiroth gently put a hand on Vincent's shoulder when he returned, sitting down beside him. "Here," he offered quietly, holding out the mug. "I... the outing tonight didn't go well."

Vincent frowned but didn't react otherwise. "What..." he started, before shaking his head. "How many did it get?"

"It's... there were a lot... It can change forms, apparently," Sephiroth sighed as he leaned back. "Marcus... Marcus was one of the losses, despite not being in any of the platoons."

Vincent paled, eyes wide. "H-he... wh-what...? H-how..? Is... Jake?! How is Jake?" he asked, the
questions falling from his lips in a panic.

"Jake isn't harmed," Sephiroth assured, his frown deepening, "though he was in shock. We've taken him to the medical area to be under observation until he is calm again. I'm... not exactly sure how Marcus was caught. I know he and several non-combat employees were in the cafeteria after the dorms and barracks were attacked, the power went out... and chaos followed."

Vincent swallowed, sitting stiffly as he got paler before suddenly standing, saying a quick 'Sorry' and rushing to the bathroom before throwing up. Sephiroth stood and walked to the bathroom, keeling beside Vincent to pull his hair out of the way with a frown.

After he was done, Vincent groaned, sagging a little. "I'm sorry..." he mumbled, throat raw now.

"It's fine," Sephiroth assured, standing to wet a rag for Vincent and get him some water to rinse his mouth with. "You couldn't help it, and everyone reacts to this stuff differently."

Vincent was silent for a moment. "There's no way he could... Marcus... he's defiantly dead?"

Sephiroth gave a nod, rubbing Vincent's back while glancing down at the floor. "Yes, I... I checked."

Vincent closed his eyes, leaning against Sephiroth.

Sephiroth held him tightly and gave a soft sigh. "I'm sorry," he said after what felt like eons. "I failed him and you, I shouldn't have ordered for all of the evacuees to be taken to such an enclosed area. If I knew the beast could teleport--"

"It's not your fault!" Vincent insisted quickly. "All of you thought it was using the vents and had everything covered! No one could have guessed it could do that!"

Sephiroth glanced away before sighing and lowering himself to sit beside Vincent, pulling the other to lean against him again, though so that Vincent's head was laying on his shoulder this time. "I know we couldn't have known, but I still feel we could've done better."

"You did the best you could with the knowledge you had." Vincent assured him softly, cuddling close.

Sephiroth sighed, but gave a nod. He stayed on the floor for several minutes, though it felt like hours, before starting to stand once more. "We should both get some rest, it'll be a long day tomorrow."

Vincent nodded, pausing as he got up. "Could I... would it be alright if I shared your bed with you tonight?"

"Of course," Sephiroth assured, pulling him close.

Vincent stayed close to him as they got ready for bed, curling up against him when they got in. Sephiroth combed his fingers through Vincent's hair lazily, hoping to calm the other and himself enough to actually sleep. Vincent did eventually fall asleep, though it wasn't completely restful.

Sephiroth woke up early to make them breakfast and coffee, sighing as he pulled out his tablet to check for any record updates from the night before. He was hoping someone got a lead on the monster or could tell him how Jake was doing. Jake was resting in the clinic, having been given a sedative to calm him down. There were no more reports on the monster, or anymore casualties. The death count was high, as well as the injured. The general shook his head, frowning and trying to
think of how to handle the monster from now on. It changed things, knowing it could teleport and had multiple forms.

Vincent woke up soon after that, yawning and making his way to the kitchen.

Sephiroth paused at hearing movement behind him, glancing back and relaxing at seeing Vincent. "Did you manage to get any sleep?"

"A little." he said softly. "Did you sleep at all?"

"A little," Sephiroth parroted back, focusing on the waffle batter he was mixing. "I have a meeting in a couple hours with Angeal and Genesis, the rest of the day should be a day off after that..." he explained.

Vincent nodded slowly. "You should just come back here and relax then." he said.

The general nodded. "That sounds nice..."

Vincent gave a small, fragile smile. "You defiantly need it."

"Are you alright?" Sephiroth questioned, watching the other man with concern.

Vincent nodded. "I am. Still a little shaken up."

Sephiroth nodded at that, pouring the waffles into the little waffle maker before moving over to the coffee machine again. He poured two cups and got them ready before walking to the table, passing one cup to Vincent before returning to keep an eye on the waffles.

Vincent thanked him softly, taking a sip of the coffee. "Do you think I'd be able to see Jake today?"

"You should be able to, we'll just have to ask the doctors."

Vincent nodded gently.

"Have you taken your morning medications yet?"

"Not yet. I wanted to eat first." Vincent said softly. "Sometimes I get nauseous if I don't."

Sephiroth gave a small nod of understanding. "I'll get them for you after breakfast, then."

"Thank you." Vincent said, giving a small smile.

Sephiroth returned the smile, glad to see Vincent starting to come back to himself. He was still nervous about their visiting Jake, unsure of what to expect and still feeling weighed down by guilt for losing Marcus.

Vincent noticed, setting his hand hesitantly on Sephiroth's. "It'll be alright."

"I wish I could believe that," the general sighed, reaching up to massage the bridge of his nose. "I keep replaying everything that happened last night in my mind. We should've been more prepared..."

"The enemy is an unknown. There is no way to be perfectly prepared for it." Vincent said.

"We still could've done something. We should've evacuated everyone before starting patrol."
Vincent stayed silent at that, knowing it was true.

Sephiroth took a deep breath. "I just... I don't know what to say to Jake when we see him. I'm not sure he'd even want to see me."

"He won't blame you, Sephiroth. It's not your fault. It's this monster's." Vincent said quietly.

The General's frown deepened. "And yet, I still feel I could've done something..."

Vincent nodded. "I think that's normal." he mused softly.

"I'm honestly glad you were so far away from everything, though I suppose even with your old location you still would've been on another floor."

Vincent gave a weak nod. "Y-yeah.... I am too."

Sephiroth reached out and grabbed Vincent's hand, giving a squeeze to comfort the other man. He couldn't change the past, but he was grateful the monster hadn't changed its hunting grounds during this entire time they were finding it. They needed to figure out a way to capture or kill it. Vincent squeezed his hand back, finishing up his breakfast and moving to take his medicine and shower, getting ready to visit Jake after that was done. Sephiroth had cleaned their dishes and the kitchen while Vincent had showered, getting his own shower next before they headed off. The infirmary was busy, medics rushing around to deal with all the injuries and casualties from the night before. Jake was stationed near the back in a room with a few other survivors who had minor injuries and were just in shock.

Vincent knocked on his door softly, slowly walking in. "Jake? It's Vincent..." he called out.

The young man looked exhausted, glancing up with dull eyes. "...Hey..." he greeted before looking down again.

Vincent took a seat next to the bed, reaching out to hesitantly grab Jake's hand. He was silent, not quite knowing what to say.

"Did... did they tell you what happened?" Jake asked softly.

Vincent nodded. "They... they did..."

"I... It's my fault..." Jake choked out, tears starting to swell up in his eyes.

Vincent's eyes widened and he immediately moved to hug Jake. "No! Jake it isn't your fault!" he said quickly.

"He died because he had to protect me..."

"No, No." Vincent said gently. "None of you would have known. They found out the monster could teleport. There was no way to know where it was." he said gently, combing his fingers through Jake's hair.

"But if I was stronger he... he wouldn't have had to protect me..." Jake whimpered.

"Jake, you know Marcus. You could have been as strong as Sephiroth and he would have tried to protect you." Vincent said softly.

Jake fell silent, he couldn't argue that. Marcus always looked out for those around them, no matter who they were. He always played the hero. "I... I wasn't cut out to be in SOLDIER..." he mused
Vincent hugged him tighter. "I think you'd be a great SOLDIER... but, if you want to leave, I understand. After everything...."

Jake hid his face in Vincent's chest, pressing close to him. "I... I don't know... I just..."

Vincent moved his hand to stroke his back. "That's alright. Just focus on healing right now." he said softly.

Jake nodded, closing his eyes and curling up against Vincent. "Thank you... for being here..."

"You don't have to thank me. I'll always be here for you, Jake."

Jake nodded, falling silent. Sephiroth walked into the room about an hour later to check on them, finding Jake asleep against Vincent's side. "How is he?" he asked in a whisper.

"He spoke of leaving SOLDIER, which I understand. I hope I helped him a little by being here." Vincent said softly.

Sephiroth hesitantly slipped into the room, quietly closing the door behind him before walking over to Vincent. He rubbed Vincent's shoulders comfortingly, leaning down so he could speak softly. "I'm sure you did. You two are close and I'm sure you're one of the few people he's happy to see right now."

Vincent leaned into Sephiroth, still holding Jake. "He said the same thing you did." he said softly. "About how he should have been able to stop it. Save Marcus."

Sephiroth frowned at that, sighing. "We... we'll all feel we could've done more. I know, rationally speaking, that Angeal and Zack feel the same," he said softly. He stayed where he was for a bit before hugging Vincent and starting to pull away. "I'm going to get some paperwork, fill out what's needed to give Jake some time off with permission to leave the base. It would do him good to be with his family once he's a bit better."

Vincent nodded. "Alright. I think I'm going to stay here for a while." he said.

Sephiroth smiled and kissed Vincent's forehead before leaving to get the paperwork taken care of. He was worried for both Jake and Vincent, but he had to be strong for the two of them at the moment as well.

After Sephiroth was gone, Vincent pressed his face into the bed, tears filling his eyes finally. "I-I'm sorry... so sorry..." he said in barely a whisper.

Chapter End Notes

Also, guys...I have 78 Kudos and 1977 Hits with 3 Bookmarks! I know it doesn't seem like a lot (it probably isn't) but...YAY! I never expected this story to be doing so well! Honestly I can't thank everyone who reads this enough!
Chapter Notes

I AM SO SO SO SO SOOOOO SORRY!!!! That this is so late. It's been MONTHS I know. I've been going through some stuff and kinda lost motivation so my Co-Author and I werent writing a lot (on my part) and then said C0-Author was able to come up and visit me (we've been long time friends and are now in different States) and that kinda kicked my motivation up.I hope the quality is good, as I have said it's been a trying few months for myself! Anyways, I'll let you get onto the chapter! Enjoy!

~Saigo

Edit: 11/27/19: THIS HAS BEEN GOING OF FOR THREE YEARS????????!!! AH!!! Thank you all for keeping up with this and dealing with my....mess of a self! =^-^=-

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 24

The papers for Jake to leave were finished within the week. Soon after he was off to spend time with his family, along with several other traumatized workers. Sephiroth had spoken with the head scientists, moving their assistants and anyone of importance to another location. In wake of the previous massacre, dorms were being re-assigned and re-arranged as well, with several escape routes being added and drills for an evacuation being ran. During that time, Vincent had fallen to speaking less, becoming more withdrawn from everyone and everything.

"Vincent," Sephiroth called as he returned from his tiring work. "Are you hungry?"

"I had some soup earlier." came the soft reply from the couch. Vincent was wrapped in blankets, reading a book.

The General frowned, walking over to Vincent and sat beside him. "... Are you sure? I can cook, it'd be good to eat more."

Vincent leaned against him and nodded. "I'm alright. Not very hungry right now."

Sephiroth frowned and gave a soft sigh. "You haven't been eating a lot lately, it's making me worry."

Vincent kissed his cheek. "I promise I'm alright. I just haven't been that hungry. I do make sure to eat, though."

Sephiroth sighed. "I just worry about you. You've been taking all of this pretty hard, and that's fine, but I do worry it's getting worse. I just want to know you're safe and will be alright."

Vincent smiled softly. "I'll be fine."

Sephiroth kissed his forehead and pulled him close. "Vincent, please don't lie to me," he said softly. "I can tell by the look in your eyes that you're not fine."
Vincent leaned into him, sighing softly but staying quiet. Sephiroth frowned at that. "... Are your nightmares acting up again?"

Vincent nodded. "A lot." he said softly.

"Have you been taking your medications?"

"I have." Vincent nodded. "They aren't helping anymore."

"Would you like to move your appointment with your therapist up? We could see if she's free sometime today or tomorrow..."

Vincent paused before nodding. "I...I guess I should."

Sephiroth kissed Vincent's forehead. "Are you scared about meeting with her?" he asked.

"I'm not sure. A little, I guess." Vincent sighed. "I think I'm more scared to talk about my dreams."

Sephiroth nodded. "If you don't wish to discuss that, then I'm sure talking with her about Jake and Marcus would also help, or just discussing anything that's upsetting you."

Vincent nodded a little. "I'll try."

Sephiroth kissed his forehead. "Would you like some warm tea for now? It might help you calm your mind for a bit."

Vincent nodded slowly. "Yeah. It does sound good."

Sephiroth smiled gently at that, standing and moving to the kitchen to start preparing the drink. He decided to add honey to it in hopes it would help calm Vincent more.

Vincent leaned back into the couch, sighing softly and closing his eyes for a moment.

Sephiroth watched him from where he stood while preparing the tea. He brought it over when it was ready and kissed Vincent's forehead. "You're strong, I promise we'll make it through this together."

Vincent opened his eyes and smiled a little. "I know we will." he said softly, accepting the drink.

Sephiroth smiled and sat beside him, letting Vincent press against his side. "Is there anything you'd like to try eating later, since you're not hungry right now?"

"I'll probably try some soup." Vincent said softly.

Sephiroth nodded. "I'll start getting things ready for that, then."

Vincent smiled faintly. "Thank you."

Sephiroth kissed his forehead. "You're welcome," he said softly before standing and leaving for their kitchen. He began to boil some water to begin making a broth before starting to cut up the other ingredients he'd need.

Vincent lay on the couch, closing his eyes for a moment.

Sephiroth returned after he had everything going, checking in on Vincent quietly before sitting beside him, combing his fingers through Vincent's hair slowly. He just wanted to take in this quiet
moment, to enjoy this rare peace.

Vincent sighed softly, relaxing and leaning into the touch.

Sephiroth smiled at that. He let the silence hang over them until their dinner was ready, getting up to get the food and some tea before returning. "Would you like me to find something on TV? Even if it's just for background noise?"

Vincent paused, thinking about it, until nodding. "Yes. That sounds good."

Sephiroth grabbed the remote, picking out some random day-time show to watch. He would usually pick the news, but he felt that would be a bad choice given Vincent's current state. This would do. He took his seat beside Vincent and began to eat, giving his lover time to gather himself and decide if he wanted to just keep their silence or start a conversation.

There were a couple of times that it looked like Vincent would try and say something, only to close his mouth and stay silent.

Sephiroth frowned gently at that, reaching over to rub his back. "It's alright, you don't have to talk until you're ready."

Vincent nodded silently. "I... I know. It's.... last night's... dream was really bad..." he said in a near whisper, not ready to bring up what he suspected. Not ready to even face it himself.

Sephiroth watched him before giving a slow nod and rubbing his back again. He pulled Vincent close to hug him and kiss his forehead. "We'll get through this."

Vincent nodded, curling into Sephiroth in need of the reassurance. The older man just hugged him tighter, resting his head on top of Vincent's as they fell into silence, the noise from the TV the only thing to fill the empty feeling room.

Vincent spoke after awhile, voice quiet. "Sephiroth... did... did you see it? The monster?"

"I did."

"Could you describe it? How did it act?"

Sephiroth paused, considering the best way to explain it. "... The first form was beast like... more animal than anything else. Angeal handled it easily. The second form was a... monster, some patched together thing. It was harder to fight, but not unreasonable, though it was startling at first to discover certain attacks don't work on it," he explained slowly. "The... the last one could teleport. It seemed to be the most blood thirsty of the three, though I think its targeting me to attack probably wasn't helped by my stabbing it. It was most likely attempting to get the sword out."

Vincent frowned as he listened, growing pale. "There... there are three...?" he asked quietly.

Sephiroth hugged Vincent tighter. "It's not unusual for monsters to have different forms," he explained, "I won't let anything happen to you, though. I promise. I've taken precautions to ensure that thing can't get to you."

Vincent frowned but was unable to reply as he clung tighter to Sephiroth. "You... you'll take it down... right?"

"I'll try my best," Sephiroth stated, not wanting to make a promise he might not be able to keep. "It... looked like it was looking for something. If we can figure out what then it might help us
either defeat or subdue it."

Vincent let out a shuddering sigh and nodded.

Sephiroth frowned. "Are you worried about yourself or about Jake?"

"Both." he said honestly.

Sephiroth combed his fingers through Vincent's hair. "I've given Jake sick leave. We're sending him back home to his family until all of this is settled."

"That's a good idea. I'm sure he needs it. He and Marcus were very close."

Sephiroth nodded. "I'd give that to you as well, but... I don't want you to be alone."

"I... I don't really want to be alone..." Vincent admitted softly.

"You won't be," Sephiroth assured, "that's why I haven't put for you to leave yet. I'll have someone stay with you as much as possible."

"Some one strong?" Vincent asked.

"Yes," Sephiroth nodded, kissing Vincent's forehead. "Zack has already agreed to help, as has Angeal."

Vincent sighed and leaned into him. "Thank you."

"You're welcome, though you don't need to thank me."

"I'll still thank you." Vincent said.

Sephiroth smiled, pulling Vincent close again. "I know... We should try to sleep now, would you like some of the chamomile tea to calm you?"

Vincent shook his head. "But will you sleep with me? I don't want to be alone tonight."

"Of course," Sephiroth smiled. "Here, let's get ready together then we can both get some sleep."

Vincent nodded, standing slowly. Sephiroth helped him brush his hair out and braid it for the night, curling up with him under the blankets once they were both ready and settling in to sleep. Vincent held him tightly, burying his face in Sephiroth's chest as he slowly fell asleep. Sephiroth stayed awake a while longer, simply holding Vincent close and going over ways to stop the beast. Not long after he fell asleep, Vincent started to twitch and move because of a nightmare. Sephiroth shifted, hugging him closer in his sleep with a mumble under his breath. Vincent cuddled closer, slowly calming. Sephiroth shifted, waking up just partly to roll onto his back and pull Vincent onto his chest so the dark haired male's head was nuzzled just under his chin. Vincent let out a soft sigh in his sleep. Sephiroth relaxed once more to sleep.

He was the first to awake the next morning, stretching before kissing Vincent's forehead. Vincent hummed, slowly blinking open his eyes.

"Morning dear," Sephiroth spoke softly, combing a hand through Vincent's hair, "you don't have to get up yet, but I'm going to start making us breakfast."

Vincent gave a small smile and nodded. "Okay."
Sephiroth shifted to slip out from under Vincent, getting up and leaving for the kitchen. He got what he needed to make them omelets before beginning to cook, turning on the coffee pot before starting. Vincent curled back under the blankets, closing his eyes. Sephiroth was more than happy to let Vincent sleep until the smell of food reached him in the bedroom, setting up the plates and their coffee for the day. He'd made sausage and bacon to go with the omelets and hoped it would encourage Vincent to eat more. Vincent blinked open his eyes as he woke up due to the food. He yawned and sat up.

"Did you sleep well last night?" Sephiroth asked, entering the room to check on him.

Vincent gave him a small smile. "I did, actually. I think I had a small nightmare, but I don't remember it."

"Good," Sephiroth nodded with a small smile of his own. He lead Vincent out to the kitchen and let him take his seat. Vincent's plate was already waiting for him with a three egg omelets made with cheese, bacon, and some vegetables. Beside that were two mini-sausage links and another three pieces of bacon. Vincent gave Sephiroth a smile, knowing he wouldn't be able to eat all of the food, but trying his best to eat what he could.

"I was thinking of visiting the shops today, if you'd like to join me," Sephiroth offered after giving them both a moment to just enjoy the food.

Vincent paused before nodding. "Okay."

Sephiroth smiled encouragingly, hoping to make Vincent feel better. He finished his breakfast and let Vincent eat what he could before washing the dishes so they could get ready. Vincent got dressed slowly, feeling a little better that day. Sephiroth held his hand out to Vincent when it was time to go, wanting to stay close. Vincent took it, clinging to it.

"I won't let go," Sephiroth promised.

"Please don't," Vincent requested quietly.

Sephiroth squeezed his hand reassuringly before starting to lead the way out. He held his hand the entire walk to his car, only letting go after Vincent was safely inside and only long enough to climb into his own seat before taking Vincent's hand again. Vincent clung to Sephiroth, though relaxed throughout the day.

They visited the more necessary shops first, such as refilling a few groceries they needed and getting some other home supplies. After that, though, Sephiroth simply walked around looking out for anything that Vincent might show the faintest interest in. He spotted a small gift shop and entered with Vincent, hoping one of the trinkets, knickknacks, or stuffed animals might perk Vincent up. Vincent looked around, eventually finding a small charm that looked like a cross with three dog heads at the top.

"Would you like that? It might fit on your gun."

Vincent brightened a little at that, nodding. "I would."

Sephiroth took the charm, walking over to the register to buy it before handing it back to Vincent with a smile. "Would you like one of the lavender things here, too?" he mused.

"If you don't mind getting it..."

"I wouldn't have offered if I minded," Sephiroth smiled, walking Vincent over to the lavender
items so he could choose whatever he liked best. He chose a lavender scented Chocobo plushy, shyly holding it up.

Sephiroth smiled, gently taking the plush to buy it before handing it back to Vincent. "It suits you," he commented. Vincent blushed a little.

Sephiroth smiled at that. "Would you like to look around some of the other shops a bit more?"

Vincent nodded. "Okay."

Sephiroth nodded. He took a deep breath as he took Vincent to another area of the shopping district, hoping to take the other's mind off Marcus and the monster. While the two of them were out, Angeal was leading a full on sweep of the building for signs of where the monster might hide during the daylight hours. There were no clues as to where it had escaped to or where it was currently hiding.

This pattern continued for the next week. Sephiroth would take Vincent out during the day to clear his mind and keep him away from the base while his men scoured Shin Ra for signs of the monster. The General was growing more concerned and irritated each day that passed without signs of it, taking a deep breath to calm himself. He didn't want to think back to earlier thoughts he'd considered when Vincent had started living with him, but if they didn't find something soon he would have to look at those earlier leads once more. Vincent had fallen asleep on the couch, curled around the plush as he slept. Sephiroth smiled at the sight, covering Vincent with a warm blanket before sitting down at his desk to begin looking through security files, videos, and reports to piece together the beast's past paths and any patterns.

The beast rarely appeared on cameras and when it did it simply appeared there or vanished, leaving no possible paths to follow. Sephiroth frowned, starting to look at the times it appeared for a pattern there. The times were random, seemingly having no pattern at all. Sephiroth sighed, taking a deep breath before deciding to check what he had feared. He began comparing the times to all employees to see if it matched with any persons who were unaccounted during attacks. The only thing that stood out was the times when Vincent was at their rooms but also lined up with when some people from the science department were missing as well. Sephiroth began to write down names. He couldn't help thinking back to when Vincent had gone missing for so long in the science wing, he wouldn't put it past the scientists to be running an experiment without warning anyone.

Vincent had woke up from a nightmare just then, moving to the kitchen for food.

Sephiroth blinked and glanced up, looking at him. "Is everything alright?" he asked, tone laced with concern.

"I had another nightmare." Vincent said softly, getting a drink from the fridge.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Sephiroth offered.

"I... don't really remember it," he sighed. "I haven't been lately, but I know they are bad. They leave that feeling."

"Would you like your Chocobo?"

Vincent nodded, sitting down. "Please."

Sephiroth stood and left for the bedroom, returning with the plush. He handed it off to Vincent before taking his seat once more at his desk. "Let me know if you get hungry, it won't take me long to make something," he offered.
Vincent nodded. "I will." he promised, curling up with the Chocobo.

Sephiroth watched him go to sleep before sighing and calling up Angeal. He passed the list he'd made on to him, asking him to investigate all of the scientists on the list.

Angeal confirmed that he would. "But, Seph... why are you investigating Vincent?"

"... He's had nightmares of the attacks, and those nightmares told him things I hadn't told him," he explained quietly with a frown. "These attacks started happening around the same time he disappeared down there for a month... It's a straw, and it might not go anywhere, but... one of these scientists might've done something to him or he might be the only survivor we have of this thing and he can't remember. Either way, it starts with where he disappeared."

Angeal sighed. "Alright. Keep an eye on him, then. How is he doing, Physically and mentally?"

"He's alright physically, but... he's having a hard time sleeping and his appetite is very slim. I'm slowly getting him to eat more."

"Is he alright right now? Does he know what you do?"

Sephiroth sighed. "He knows the gist of my job, but... not what I'm doing right now. He's attempting to sleep now with a stuffed animal I bought him."

"That's good." Angeal said.

Sephiroth nodded, pausing. "... He asked me about how the beast acted the other day... about what it did."

"What did you say?"

"... I explained how it attacked and such... I left out when it targeted me and kept trying to get closer."

Angeal paused. "Knowing what you do now and what you suspect... do you think it was trying to attack you still?"

"... Not after re-watching the tapes... I... it looked more like he was crying out for help."

"... Do you think he was... aware?"

"Not fully... He definitely wasn't in control of his actions," Sephiroth noted, moving to rest his chin in his hand as he thought. "It's possible he was just kind of watching things unfold until he saw me, then reacted."

"Do you think he remembers? You mentioned him having nightmares he says he can't remember one time."

"I think he remembers bits and pieces sometimes. Not always, and not often... but it's definitely there now and then."

Angeal sighed. "What are you going to do?"

"For now, keep an eye on him. I don't want him alone from now on, it'll always be either myself or you with him at all times. There hasn't been an attack since I've started staying here with him, so... I'm hoping this is a good sign."
Angeal was quiet for a moment. "You realize if he finds out he's going to break, right? I mean... Marcus was his best friend... and all those innocents..."

Sephiroth's frown deepened. "I think he's already broken and that he already knows..."

"Really?" Angeal asked, surprised. "What makes you think that?"

"He can't bear to look at Jason and he keeps having nightmares about it... he... I think he remembers bits and pieces of that night."

Angeal frowned at that. "I hate it, but there isn't much we can do for him right now..."

Sephiroth nodded. "The best we can do is figure out what's causing the changes and stop them, that'll ease him."

Angeal sighed. "I agree," he paused again. "Just... watch him closely... If he remembers killing Marcus..." Angeal paused, not sure how to voice his concern that Vincent might try to kill himself.

"I know," Sephiroth said solemnly before turning to re-enter his suite. He ensured Vincent was still asleep before walking over to make some tea in the kitchen. Vincent woke up after an hour, a silent scream on his lips from his dream as he shot up.

Sephiroth rushed over to him, holding him close. "Are you alright?"

"It... it was another nightmare." Vincent panted, clinging onto Sephiroth.

Sephiroth combed his fingers through Vincent's hair. "You're safe now," he assured.

"I'm sorry." Vincent said softly.

"Don't be sorry, you have nothing to apologize for..."

A small sob left Vincent's mouth, but he didn't say anything else. Sephiroth held him tighter, starting to gently rock with him in hopes of calming him down. "There... there was blood in this one... A lot of blood."

Sephiroth frowned and sighed. "Would you like some water?"

Vincent just nodded. Sephiroth kissed his forehead before slowly standing up, walking over to get water and returning before handing the water to Vincent. He sat beside him and began to rub his back.

Vincent drank it slowly. "You're safe, no one is injured here and no one can harm you here," Sephiroth assured softly as he sat with Vincent.

Vincent leaned against him, still silent.

"Do you want me to light some of the incense?"


Sephiroth nodded and stood, lighting a couple lavender incense and a vanilla one. He ran a bath with some vanilla oil as well before helping Vincent stand to lead him to the bathroom. "Here, this should help a bit. At least to prove you're safe."

Vincent clung to the man as Sephiroth led him to the bathroom.
Sephiroth helped him undress and get into the water, sitting behind him and starting to massage his shoulders. Vincent slowly relaxed, sighing softly. "Thank you."

"You're welcome, love," Sephiroth said softly, moving to start washing and combing through Vincent's hair.

"I'm just happy I can help."

"You help a lot. Vincent said softly. "More than you know."

"That does cheer me up," Sephiroth mused, "I love seeing you happy."

Vincent finally gave him a small smile.

Sephiroth smiled back, rinsing Vincent's hair before kissing the top of his head. "After your bath, do you want to just cuddle in bed with the TV on as background noise?"

Vincent nodded. "That sounds good."

Sephiroth smiled, helping Vincent finish washing before taking him to their room. He got the stuffed animals and made the bed into more of a nest before turning on the TV and joining Vincent. He checked things were comfortable once they were both in, pulling Vincent close. Vincent snuggled closely, sighing happily and feeling relaxed for the first time in a while. Sephiroth began to absently hum an old lullaby he knew under his breath. He couldn't remember where he'd learned it from, though if he had to guess he would assume his mother. He didn't really know her, didn't have any memories of her, but everyone had a mother at some point in their lives. Vincent listened to him, closing his eyes. Sephiroth began to doze off after a while, holding Vincent close and burying his face in Vincent's neck. Vincent lay awake for a little while longer before the feeling of Sephiroth's arms and his scent surrounding him made him fall asleep.

Sephiroth groaned when he finally reawakened, feeling around for his phone to check the time. He yawned before pulling Vincent close to nuzzle his neck. He stole a kiss from his cheek and waited for Vincent to begin waking up. "Are you hungry?"

Vincent yawned and nodded. "A little." he said.

"If I made omelets, do you think that'd be light enough to not upset your stomach?" Sephiroth offered.

"I'm not sure... we can try it." Vincent said.

Sephiroth made a noise of confirmation while stealing a kiss before getting up. He stretched as he stood, heading for the kitchen and starting to get everything down. "Would you like some juice or anything to drink?" he called back.

"Just water is fine." Vincent called back.

Sephiroth got the pitcher out and got each of their drinks ready before starting to cook the omelets. He was making Vincent's a bit more plain than his own just in case the other's stomach couldn't handle anything more. Vincent sighed as he sunk back into the couch. Sephiroth brought him the omelet and water when their breakfasts were ready. He sat beside Vincent and began to eat his own meal, hoping Vincent could eat this. Vincent ate slowly, unsure how much he could eat, and only getting halfway through it in the end before feeling sick.

"Don't push yourself too far," Sephiroth encouraged. "If you're full then that's fine."
Vincent nodded. "I feel sick."

Sephiroth frowned and stood, getting some nausea medicine from their cabinet to pour up for Vincent. "Here, try to take this... it might help."

Vincent nodded, taking some and giving a small sigh.

"Do you want to just cuddle today and watch TV?"

"If you don't have to work, yeah." Vincent nodded.

"Today is my day off," Sephiroth nodded, offering an encouraging smile. "It would be good for both of us to just take it easy today."

Vincent smiled a little and nodded. "Okay then."

Sephiroth kissed his forehead before finishing his own breakfast, washing the dishes, and gathering some things so they could cuddle on the couch to watch movies. Vincent fell asleep on and off, though it was obvious he had nightmares whenever he did sleep. Sephiroth held him tightly through all of it, hoping it would help Vincent feel a bit more rested later.

The last time Vincent woke up, he was shaking. "I can't sleep... they won't stop..."

"The nightmares?" Sephiroth asked softly, worry in his voice.

Vincent nodded. "And they get worse and worse."

"Do you want me to call the doctor to see if she has anything that can help?"

"No... I... I don't think anything will help..." Vincent sighed.

"Maybe talking would help? Do... you remember what the dream was about?"

"Death. There was death and blood. So much blood." Vincent said shuddering.

Sephiroth frowned at that, pulling Vincent close. "... Do you think sedatives would help?"

"No!" Vincent said immediately, tensing up.

Sephiroth jumped a bit at the volume, quickly starting to rub Vincent's arms in an attempt to appease him. "Alright, no sedatives," he assured in a soft voice. "I promise we won't try anything that makes you feel uncomfortable, it was just an idea," he offered.

"I... I just need to be in control... of my sleep..." he said in an almost whisper.

"That's understandable," Sephiroth soothed, pulling Vincent close to kiss his forehead. "Can you explain what scares you? Is it not being able to wake up when you need to?"

Vincent was silent at that, trying to think of how to phrase his fear. "It's just... not being in control of my body..."

"That's a perfectly reasonable fear to have," Sephiroth offered. "Maybe fresh air would work, then? Or a change of scenery?"

Sephiroth nodded, kissing Vincent’s forehead before he got up to gather things for them. He would take Vincent on a walk to take his mind off of things, taking out his phone to text Angeal as he did so. “I think he’s already aware, his nightmares are getting worse and he fears losing control of himself. Keeping a close eye on him.”

Angeal frowned as he read the text. "Alright. Keep me updated." was his quick response. He shook his head. He felt bad for the kid. Maybe he would have to dig deeper into what happened in the labs during that time.

Chapter End Notes

P.S. I thrive on comments and kudos!
Not a new chapter but an Update

So...I want to apologize to everyone for the lack of Chapters. I am really upset to say I have to put this story on a temporary Hiatus. I'm going through a rough spot mentally, and am just really lacking the energy to write more on this. I'm really sorry for all of those who are enjoying this story, and to the new readers! I'm trying my hardest to get up and moving on this again, but I do need some time! I hope everyone is staying safe and well through the current issues going on! Thank you all for being patient with me! I promise I will continue and finish this!

-Saigo

End Notes

This is one of my few Fanfictions, I wont claim to be an amazing writer so critic is welcome, but try not to be too harsh!

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