

Final Fantasy VII: Children of Jenova

Chapter 27

Cid just couldn't take it anymore.

He'd sat in Reeve's room making nice for about an hour, then did the same in Reno's room for about the same length of time while he waited for Doc Murphy to get done looking Junior over. And that was all he could stand. He finally excused himself from Reno's presence, made a beeline for the one patio on the premises where smokers were not looked at like the scum of the earth, and happily lit up. He went through well nigh an entire pack before Doc Murphy finally found him.

"There you are," the doc said. "Been looking all over for you. Your friends suggested I look here."

Cid made a sort of agreeable grunting noise as he lit up another cigarette on the smoldering butt of his previous one. "What's the news?"

The doctor shrugged and flipped through several pages of notes and charts and such on his clipboard. "Well, we ran C.J. through a complete lineup of physical and psychological exams." He continued to scan his notes, pausing to scratch his head. "Never seen anything like this in my whole medical career."

"What?"

"Well, the first thing we did was check for Jenova cells. Didn't find a single one, living or dead."

Cid nodded and gave a little sigh of relief. "That's good."

Doc Murphy shrugged and continued. "She has the lowest cholesterol level I've ever seen, her EKG and her brain scans look like they were copied out of a textbook, and she has the hearing, vision, and reflexes of a fighter pilot. Of course, that might just be from you. In short, she's a perfectly healthy young woman." And he seemed to stress those last two words just a bit.

"Go on," Cid said a little warily, sensing there was more to it than that.

"Okay. I'm going to level with you. Just for shits and giggles, I sent her down to the psych guys to see what's going on in her head. She talked to three different shrinks, and they all came up with the same results...all of her mental processes are functioning at a level comparable to an eighteen- to twenty-year-old woman. So it's not just her body that was affected; her mind grew up too, and that's what really has me stumped."

Cid puffed silently on his cigarette for a few moments, seemingly lost in thought. Then he spoke again, slowly. "Doc...you think there's any way to...y'know, get her back to normal?"

"Cid..." The doc was picking and choosing his words now, in the time-old fashion of doctors getting ready to lay down heavy news and trying to soften the blow as much as possible. "We know almost nothing about the effects of Mako exposure on children, and the little we /do/ know we learned from checking your daughter out. It would take a /lot/ of time and research." He sat down on the bench next to Cid. "Theoretically, speeding up the aging process is easy. It's like baking a cake. You can turn the oven up hotter and it'll bake faster. But once it's baked, that's it. You can't un-bake it. Are you following me?"

Cid just sat there, letting the words sink in. "You're saying there ain't a chance in Hell."

"Basically, yeah." Doc Murphy nodded. "I think it would be best for both of you if you just accept the fact that she's not a little girl anymore, and she most likely will never be again." He glanced over at Cid, then stood up. "Listen, I have a few patients I need to check on, and I've got to do the paperwork to release Reno and Reeve, since they're both now well-rooted in the land of the living. I'll keep you posted if we find out anything new."

Cid nodded and stabbed his cigarette into the ashtray as the doctor walked off.

/We'll see about that,/ he thought darkly.

* * *

C.J. had to make a pit stop before going in to see Reeve. She was sick of the damn uniform. She ducked into a strip mall across the street from the hospital and bought herself a T-shirt, some jeans, and yet another leather jacket which she put on in the fitting room, leaving the blue suit crumpled on the floor when she left. The gloves she kept, as well as the boots, but the rest of it she was glad to be rid of.

After a moment's thought, she decided to pick up some clean clothes for Reeve too...white button-down shirt, pair of jeans, pair of sneakers. She guessed at the sizes, trying the stuff on herself since she figured they were pretty close to the same.

When it came down to underwear, though, she found herself in a bit of a bind.

For one thing, she had no idea whether Reeve was a boxer man or a brief man.

For another, she simply could not look at a pair of either and imagine Reeve wearing them without turning several shades of red, much less pick some out and plunk them on the counter.

So she skipped the unmentionables and went back to the hospital, laden with bags.

On the way to Reeve's room, she passed and waved to one of the people the doctor had sent her to talk to. Dr. Baker was a kindly, slightly pudgy white-haired old guy that reminded C.J. of Santa Claus to some degree, and he had spent some thirty minutes just making nice small talk with her and writing stuff down on a note pad. This came as a great relief to C.J., who had spent two hours prior being poked with needles and X-rayed from head to toe and listened to with a stethoscope that was probably stored in an industrial freezer, and who was /not/ thrilled at the prospect of being passed off to yet another doctor.

And the doctors had all been looking between her and the clipboard she guessed held her medical records with facial expressions that approximated a monkey trying to solve a quadratic equation.

C.J. did /not/ like that. At all. What was the big deal, anyway? She was still C.J., maybe a little bigger, but jeez...it wasn't like she'd grown a third eye or an extra head or anything.

Other than talking to the psychiatrists, the only fun she had was running on the treadmill thingy until the computer program that was monitoring her progress crashed. Apparently its programmers had not taken into account that there just might be someone in the world that could endure a stress test for more than half an hour.

* * *

Scarlet rolled her eyes. "Vail!" she snapped. As usual, no response. "Vail! Would you wait--the fuck--up!?"

Vail sighed and turned around to see what the problem was this time.

The ground they were traversing had grown steadily more rocky as they neared the desert surrounding the Gold Saucer, and of course Scarlet was still in high heels. Not a good combination.

"Why," Vail said slowly, as if talking to a four-year-old, "don't you just take those infernal shoes off?"

"Because," Scarlet shot back in an equally condescending tone, "these rocks would shred my feet if I did..." She thought about it a second. "Oh...right."

Vail nodded and rolled /her/ eyes. "Right."

Scarlet kicked off the offending footwear, baring her tender tootsies to the sharp rocks beneath them. She concentrated a bit, willing the flesh on the soles of her feet to harden like a pachyderm's hide. As she did, that incessant buzzing in her head tried to solidify into a coherent thought once more

/xxxreunionxxx/

but as it always did, it slipped back into static the moment that small transformation was complete.

After a moment's thought, Scarlet bent down and picked up her shoes. Bad enough that she would be walking into the Gold Saucer clad in a charred and filthy red dress; she'd be damned if she'd show up barefoot as well.

* * *

Doc Murphy had come soon after Cid left to remove the ghastly needle from Reeve's arm. Not a moment too soon, either. The happy sleepy medicine from the previous night had finally worn off completely, leaving a shuddering, pale, and yes, sweating-bullets Reeve lying there hooked to the nasty needle. Five more minutes, and Reeve would have pulled the damn thing out himself.

With the needle gone, Reeve felt fine. A little tired, maybe, but fine. Someone had even been nice enough to bring him a pair of pajamas to replace the lame hospital gown he'd been dressed up in when he'd arrived. Reeve was certain that it had been designed by someone named Seymour Butts. He got up slowly, wincing a little at the stiffness in his muscles, and plodded to the tiny washroom in his room to take a shower.

The next fifteen minutes were the most heavenly fifteen minutes of his entire life.

Reeve stood almost motionless under the spray for about half that length of time, letting the warm water rinse away--three? Four? He wasn't sure--days' worth of sweat and dirt and other unlovely debris. And it did not escape his notice that the water swirling down the drain took on a disturbing reddish-brown hue when he rinsed his hair out. Archer must have beaned him a really good one...that asshole. He hoped either C.J. or Reno had given that son of a bitch what he had come--

"YIKES!!"

The water, with no warning whatsoever, turned from pleasantly warm to arctic, giving Reeve a very sudden and chilly wake-up call. He fumbled with the tap and shut it off, then he leapt out of the little shower stall and wrapped himself in a towel. Teeth chattering, he dried off quickly and pulled on the pajama bottoms. Well, he was certainly awake now.

As he was toweling his hair dry, he heard a knock on the door of his room. He decided that he was decent enough to be seen, and he answered the door, towel still draped around his shoulders.

"Hi!" C.J. chirped, arms laden with clothes. "I got you some--"

And she just /stopped,/ staring at Reeve, who was clad in a pair of pajama bottoms and a towel and nothing else. "I--uh--" Her eyes were wide, her jaw just a bit slack. Despite her somewhat catatonic appearance, her mind was chugging at full steam, comparing Reeve to the cute guys on the high school swim team and finding the high school guys sorely outclassed.

"C.J.?" Reeve blinked and took the stack of clothes off her hands. "You okay?"

C.J. blinked back. "Huh?"

Reeve would never know what possessed him to do what he did next, and a little voice in the back of his mind would call him an evil bastard over it for the rest of his life.

He cautiously reached out and gave C.J. a little poke right between the eyes...and watched her fall over backwards like a tree.

He poked his head into the hall and looked around quickly to make sure nobody had witnessed this bizarre little incident, and then he picked C.J. up and deposited her in a chair. That done, he closed the door, gathered up his clothes, and ducked back into the little bathroom to make himself presentable.

The shirt was a little loose; the jeans a little tight, but they would do. The shoes, at least, were perfect. No underwear, though, and Reeve had a good idea why. He made a mental note to pick up a pair next chance he had as he brushed his teeth and combed his hair.

Thankfully, when he came out decently dressed, C.J. had returned to the land of the living. He sat down on the foot of the bed and rolled his sleeves up to his elbows. "Thanks for the clothes," he said. "I think they burned my other ones."

"I shoulda had 'em burn mine while they were at it," C.J. replied. "I just left 'em in the dressing room at the store. I like the gloves, though."

Reeve nodded. "That uniform didn't do anything for you. I like that biker lady look on you," he said with a smile.

"You do?" C.J.'s eyes lit up, and Reeve cleared his throat.

/Argh...no no no stop that C.J. six years old Cid'll kill me/ "I--uh--well--"

"Well, well, well! Look who's alive!"

Reeve rolled his eyes as the way-too-chipper voice of Reno greeted him from the doorway. "You ready to blow this joint yet, or what?"

"Don't you know how to knock, Reno?" Reeve sighed, staring daggers at him.

"Course not. We're free men, Boss. You wanna hang around here and stuck like a pincushion some more, or you wanna get the hell outta here?"

"I vote for 'get the hell outta here,'" Reeve replied, standing up. "What's the game plan now?"

"Daddy said something about meetin' Cloud at the Gold Saucer," C.J. piped up. "I think Zack's there too. This is gonna be /cool!/"

Reno's eyes met Reeve's, and a single thought flashed between them...that if Zack was indeed at the Gold Saucer, their outing there would most likely turn out to be anything /but/ "cool."

* * *

Most of the upper floors of Shinra Tower were deserted right now...with Scarlet and Vail gone, Raven in charge, and the Wonder Weenie off trying to get some manpower together, the building was pretty much unoccupied.

Perfect.

The door to a storage room up on the 68th floor creaked open, and...something...came bouncing out into the hall. It was an odd sort of something. Actually, truth be told, it was made up of two somethings, one riding on the other's back.

The top something frowned a little and ducked back into the storage room. No weapons. There hadn't been enough time before the Bad Stuff happened at home. That was okay. They would just have to make do with what they could find. The something hopped off its mount and rummaged around the room, at length finding a Zippo lighter in the pocket of some overalls on the floor and several aerosol cans of air freshener. That would do.

Satisfied, the somethings bounced out into the empty hall again, toward the elevator that would take them up to the top floor and from there, to the office Raven was currently occupying. But as they passed a door marked with the nameplate "Bob Palmer, Aerospace Research," they stopped and thought for a moment.

There was something their previous incarnations had always wanted to do.

They pushed the door open a little, and were pleased to find a fat little man in a too-small beige suit sitting behind a desk, drinking what appeared to be a mug of coffee.

"Hi," the top something said, and Palmer looked up sharply. "Nice chins."

"Wha--where'd you come from!?" Palmer blubbered, fumbling to push his chair back enough to stand up, and not having much luck thanks to the fold of rug one of its casters was stuck on. "What do you want? I didn't do anything!"

"We have some unfinished business with ya, my chubby little pal," the top something said in a dark and menacing tone as it reached up to adjust the crown perched on its head. It gave its mount a little kick, and the two of them began to advance on Palmer, as menacingly as a cat and a stuffed Moogles could possibly advance.

"Oh no--" Palmer blubbered and babbled some more, gave a mighty shove...and fell over backwards, chair and all, as the stuffed beast came closer...closer...

Then it just /stopped,/ right next to the sprawled-out ponderous bulk of Palmer. "We've been waitin' to do this for a loooooong time, chubby," the cat hissed with a wicked chuckle...

And with no warning whatsoever, the cat leapt from its mount, bounced up and down on Palmer's belly a few times (complete with squeals of "Boingy! Boingy! Boingy!"), leapt back on its mount, and took off cackling. "See ya, lardass!"

Palmer just lay there for a few moments catching his breath.

Then, when he was quite sure he was alone...he hauled himself off the floor, poured the contents of his coffee mug into the nearest potted plant, and did likewise with the bottle of bourbon from which he'd been filling the mug. "Gotta stop drinking that stuff," he wheezed. "I'm seeing things..."

* * *

Stuart had still not moved from his sofa.

He was probably the first to realize that the last days of Shinra were at hand. Scarlet had gone insane. Vail had /been/ insane. While those two were off chasing their super troop, the regular members of SOLDIER were slowly losing their grip as well as whatever Vail had done to them began to take hold. Fifteen of them AWOL this morning, and two more gone over the course of the afternoon. Nobody had seen them go, of course.

Stuart was beginning to get some vague idea where they were headed, though. He could hear the call too, a summons he had hoped never to hear again. He hadn't been able to follow it the first time...perhaps Hojo had known what was going to happen, and the members of SOLDIER had been thrown into quarantine to keep them handy until Sephiroth ceased to call for them. But this time, there were no such measures in place.

/xxxrexunxxxionxxx/

Yes...that was why Vail and Scarlet had gone to the Gold Saucer...Sephiroth was there. They were not pursuing him, they were being summoned by him. What would happen when they found him was anyone's guess, but Stuart seriously doubted that it would be pleasant.

/xxxrexunionxxx/

/Is this all I am?/ he thought, still staring at that photo on his coffee table. /His puppet?/

Under Sephiroth's control, he had killed the only real friend he had. What other sins could he be made to commit when that--/thing/ pulled his strings and said "dance?"

/xxxreunionxxx/

Now, as he continued to stare at the photo of himself and Kain and Archer on the coffee table, the answer to the question he'd asked himself the previous night came to him.

His heart was heavy, like a stone in his chest, but he stood up anyway. He plodded up the stairs to his bedroom and opened his nightstand drawer, extracting from it a pistol which had been fired exactly two times since he'd had it.

/reunion/

He checked the clip. Three rounds. Two more than he needed.

/reunion/

He pressed the muzzle of the gun to his temple.

/REUNION/

"Fuck that," he croaked, and pulled the trigger.

* * *

The Highwind took to the air once more, fully loaded as before. Of course, C.J. had to come along too. She insisted on it. She wanted to see Zack, so by Ramuh she was /going/ to see Zack, and Cid really didn't feel like trying to talk her out of it at this point. On top of that, Reeve had decided to come along as well. He didn't really have anywhere to call home at the moment, and he didn't want to be a burden to Shera or Elmyra or anyone; in addition, he was /pissed/ now that his happy drugs had worn off. He wanted to find Scarlet and give her what she had coming.

That in and of itself wasn't much of a surprise.

What /was/ a surprise was that Reeve was now armed with a nasty little whip. He'd gone and bought the thing just before he boarded the Highwind, and it looked vicious, to say the least. Its length was spiked with wicked little barbs pointing in both directions, and attached to the end was a small spiked ball, sort of like a morning star.

"The hell you gonna do with that?" Barret snorted upon seeing the weapon. "Shit, Reeve, y'coulda got a gun or somethin'..."

Reeve shrugged. "I had one of these--well, minus the spikes and stuff--when I was a kid," he said simply, uncoiling the thing and cracking it experimentally as the others looked on. It responded with a satisfyingly loud report, and Reeve gave a pleased little nod.

"Oh, GAWD," Yuffie snickered. "Do you have ANY idea how silly you look with th--"

Her words were lost in a little gasp and a yelp of "Hey!" as something hissed through the air, wrapped itself around her own weapon, and yanked it quite forcefully out of her hand. "What the f--"

Reeve just stood there, smiling quite innocently, the whip coiled neatly in one hand...and Yuffie's cross in the other. "Now just imagine if that'd been your neck," he offered, still smiling.

Vincent raised an eyebrow. "Impressive," he muttered, which meant he was probably /really/ impressed.

"Wh--w--h--HOW'D YOU DO THAT!?" Yuffie wailed, staring open-mouthed at Reeve, who just shrugged again.

"I told you," he said, handing Yuffie her weapon back. "I had one when I was a kid." He glanced around to see if anyone else cared to comment on his choice of weaponry, and was more than a little amused to note that nobody did; other than

a grumble of "goddamn showoff" from Barret and scattered applause from Reno, Rude, and C.J., the bridge of the Highwind was silent. Satisfied, he clipped the coiled-up whip to his belt.

* * *

Sephiroth Obscura sat up suddenly. He'd fallen asleep at some point, but even in his sleep, he felt the life of one of the puppets blink out.

No matter. He had more.

In fact, he realized as he reached out with his mind and felt around a bit, two of them were getting very, very close.

But before he could determine /who/ the puppets were, the door to the hotel room he and Cloud were sharing swung open noisily, and Cloud bounced in through it. "Good news, buddy," he chirped. "Guess what?"

Obscura rolled his eyes. "What?" he asked, flatly.

Cloud perched himself on the edge of the bed and and grinned vacantly. "I just got off the phone with Shera, and Cid and Mom and everyone else are on their way! I bet you can't wait to see everyone!"

"The anticipation is killing me," Obscura replied with a forced smile.

Either Cloud didn't hear the sarcasm, or it just didn't register in his mind-controlled state. "Shera said C.J. can't wait to see you."

"Hmm?" Obscura looked up then, quite curious. "She's coming too? Strange...I thought..." He shook his head, as if to clear it. "Never mind. When will they be here?"

"Any minute now," Cloud replied, still grinning like an idiot. "C'mon, let's go wait at the station for 'em."

With a half-weary, half-annoyed sigh, Sephiroth Obscura stood, stretched, and followed the disturbingly chipper Cloud out of the room.

* * *

Somewhere between Rocket Town and Corel, Reeve's cotton mouth from Hell decided to return. He excused himself from the bridge and padded down to the galley, waving cheerfully at Yuffie as he passed her; she was, of course, in her usual perch, doing her usual thing (hurling).

Reeve shut the galley door behind him, and turned around to find C.J. rummaging through the box of MRE's trying to find something edible. "Oh, hi," she said, looking up at the soft "click" of the galley door shutting. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, just thirsty," Reeve replied, grabbing himself a cup of water and finding a chair. "Still a little tired...and stiff...but I'm okay."

C.J. nodded, and then snapped her head to one side. A sound followed that motion that was not unlike a string of firecrackers exploding; she repeated the motion in the opposite direction, and a similar sound came forth. "Ow, god!" she grimaced, rubbing the back of her neck, then she laughed a little. "Sorry, that was gross...I know how you feel. I've never been so sore in my life."

/No way,/ Reeve tried to admonish himself. /Don't do it. Don't you dare.../ But it was too late. "Come over here and have a seat," he offered, even as most of his brain continued to protest that this was a Bad Idea in the extreme.

C.J. sat in the offered chair, next to Reeve. He cracked his knuckles and went to work on her poor sore neck, gently rubbing out the knots he found there. From time to time, a little "mmm" or "ah" or "ow!" would escape her lips, but he didn't think much of it.

* * *

The little "mmms" and "ahs" and "ows" drifted through the closed galley door, through the engine room, and into Yuffie's ears. "What the hell..."

Motion sickness forgotten for the time being, she tiptoed over to the closed door and laid her ear upon it just in time to hear another "mmm" followed by Reeve's voice saying "You can take that jacket off if you want to."

Yuffie's brain began to chug, and it came up with an answer that made her eyes fly wide open and her jaw drop. "Oh. My. GAWD..."

Quickly, quietly, she tiptoed up to the bridge and slipped through the door to tug at Elena's sleeve.

"What?" Elena sighed, turning a rather pained eye upon her.

"Come here," Yuffie replied simply, in a whisper so that Cid would not hear as he did his usual pilot things. "I need someone to verify that I'm hearing what I think I'm hearing." With that, she got a grip on Elena's sleeve and began to drag her down toward the galley.

Red XIII and Vincent, whose ears were quite a bit keener than those of the others, perked up a bit as well, and after a moment they followed.

Yuffie and Elena stood in front of the closed door listening to the odd noises that still issued forth from behind it. And in response to them, a similar expression to the one that had appeared on Yuffie's face moments before now showed itself on Elena's. "Is that...Reeve and C.J.!?!" she whispered, and Yuffie nodded.

"Are they doing what I think they're doing?" Yuffie asked simply, and Elena nodded.

"I think so--"

From behind the closed door, another soft "ah" drifted to their ears. This was followed by Reeve's voice asking "How's that?"

C.J.'s voice replied, "It's great...but--ow--it kinda hurts a little..."

And this was followed by Reeve's voice again, preceded by a soft chuckle. "Yeah, I should have warned you...it might hurt a little at first...okay, is that better?"

"Mmmhmm."

Elena clapped a hand over her mouth as Vincent joined them, with Red XIII padding along behind him. "What is it?" Red asked curiously.

Neither Elena nor Yuffie were in much of a condition to answer that. The former still had her hand clamped tight over her mouth to keep from making too much noise; the latter had her hand over her mouth in a similar gesture, but she was turning several interesting shades of violet and her entire body shook with suppressed giggles. So Red just pressed his ear to the door and listened; Vincent did likewise.

"It might be a little easier if you lie down," Reeve's voice was heard to suggest, followed by "Okay," from C.J.

"Oh my." Red XIII backed away from the door, as did Vincent, who appeared paler than usual. "Oh dear."

By now, various other passengers of the Highwind had noticed that their comrades had gone missing, and they came down to investigate...Tifa was coming up to the door, followed by Reno and Rude, and then by Barret.

"What's up?" Barret asked, looking around quizzically. "Why's everyone--"

"Shh!" Yuffie and Elena hissed, and pointed to the closed door.

Reno and Rude pressed their ears to the door in time to hear C.J. groan loudly and exclaim "Ohmigawd!" Rude just backed away; Reno burst out laughing.

"Is that Reeve in there with her!? Holy shit. I didn't think he had it in him."

Red XIII and Vincent had heard something, however, that had escaped Reno's hearing...something that sounded like...popping vertebrae.

"This isn't funny!" Elena pleaded. "Someone's got to go up there and keep Cid occupied until--until they're--done. If he hears this, they're /both/ dead!"

Now it was Tifa's turn to listen in...and she heard C.J.'s voice commenting, "Wow, that was great...I bet you're pretty tense too."

This was followed by Reeve replying, "Nah, it's okay...you don't have to do anything..."

And then C.J. again: "No, really...it's okay, I don't mind..."

There was a little sigh, and then "Well, okay," from Reeve.

Tifa just backed away from the door. "Oh my GOD..."

There were a few shuffling sounds as, Yuffie guessed, C.J. got up. After that, she heard C.J. suggest to Reeve that he might want to lie down as well...and a few seconds later, a /very/ loud groan from Reeve floated through the door.

Vincent and Red XIII frowned. More of those weird popping noises. "What IS that?" Red asked, and Vincent shrugged.

"Ramuh on a raft," Reeve's voice came soon after, "where'd you learn THAT!?"

"I saw Mama doing it to Daddy once," C.J.'s voice replied, and a few of the assembled folks outside the door shuddered visibly.

"Okay," Reno sighed, rubbing his forehead. "I did NOT need to know that." Barret just nodded his agreement.

"Too much information," Rude concurred. "WAY too much."

* * *

Cid turned around to ask Vincent a question, and found that aside from the aircrew, he was alone on the bridge. "What the hell...where'd they go?"

More annoyed than curious, he stepped off the bridge and took a quick look around the engine room...and found everyone except Reeve and C.J. congregated around the closed door to the galley. With a sighed oath, he crossed the engine room, stopping behind everyone else. He noted that they all seemed to be listening through the closed door, and he also again noted Reeve and C.J.'s absence.

"What's up?" he asked simply, and everyone whirled around to face him. Yuffie and Elena were sweat-dropping.

"Uh, nothing," Reno replied. Cid squinted at him.

"You're a lousy liar, Reno," he sighed. "What the hell's goin' on here?"

Before anyone could answer, the voices behind the door came through it once more, answering for them...Reeve's in a loud groan of "Oh /god!/" and C.J.'s in a giggle followed by "You like that?"

Cid turned blue...then white...then vivid red. He barged through the assembled mass of people in front of the door, threw it open, and roared over the din, "WHAT THE /HELL/ IS GOING ON IN HERE!?"

Reeve--fully clothed, lying on his stomach--looked up and blinked. "Beg pardon?" he asked.

C.J.--equally fully clothed aside from her jacket and shoes, standing on Reeve's back in her stocking feet--blinked as well. "Hi, Daddy...what's wrong?" She shifted her weight from one foot to the other, and Reeve's spine answered with a loud pop. Reeve himself answered with another loud groan.

Vincent and Red XIII looked at each other, and an unspoken "Aha," passed between them. So /that's/ what those popping noises had been.

C.J. stepped down from Reeve's back, and Reeve stood up slowly and stretched. "Oh, man," he groaned. "I feel about four inches taller now. Thanks, C.J. I needed that."

Cid looked between the two of them, jaw hanging. "You're not...you weren't...oh, man." He flopped weakly in a chair with a gale of relieved laughter and lit up a cigarette.

C.J. raised an eyebrow. "What'd you THINK we were doing?" she asked, then shook her head and raised one hand...the universal sign language for "don't go there." "No. Forget it. I get the feeling I don't wanna know."

/If I have anything to say about it, you won't know till you're fifty,/ the voice of the overprotective father in Cid's head piped up. "Oh...nothin'..."

Reeve seemed to suddenly catch on to something, and he turned an interesting shade of red at the thought of whatever it was.

Author's Notes: I have been saving that last scene up for a long, long time. It turned out better--and funnier--than even I had hoped it would...and Cait Sith going "boingy boingy boingy" on Palmer's belly was inspired by a friend's cartoon of the Warner Brothers and Warner Sister doing likewise...three new Turks down, one to go. Ugh. I was actually starting to like Stu the Wonder Weenie. I kinda hated to kill him off, but...ah well.