

Phase 1: Beginnings

The young boy sat up in his small, soft bed. He blinked his eyes slowly as they grew accustomed to the morning sunlight that shone brightly in through the window. The room was fairly large but had a cosy feel to it. Despite belonging to a child it had no toys whatsoever scattered across the floor or on shelves, not even a teddybear accompanied the boy in his bed.

Stifling a yawn he kicked aside the heavy russet bedspread and ran his fingers wearily through his cropped, silvery coloured hair. He wandered sleepily over to the window and opened it to the intoxicating scent of sweet smelling flowers. Looking out onto the vast gardens he suddenly grinned mischievously and his incredible emerald eyes twinkled in the sun.

He rushed over to the door and opened it cautiously, peering out into the corridor he checked up and down to make sure that no one was about. After seeing that it was all clear he crept deftly down the hall, taking extra care to be quiet as he passed the end bedroom. He didn't want one of the scientists that he lived with to find him creeping about.

When he reached the top of the tall staircase he giggled to himself and, feeling especially brave, slid down the banister rail all the way to the bottom. He rushed over to the heavy oak front doors, feeling the soft carpet tickle his bare toes. It took a great effort to pull open the doors and go out into the sun-kissed gardens.

He wandered lazily around the flowerbeds, kicking at tall tufts of grass and appreciating the warmth of the early morning sun on his pale skin. He didn't get to come out here much, if ever. The scientists didn't like it and he often felt that all he ever did was get poked and prodded by them in their laboratory in the basement. He sighed and looked back at the huge mansion that he had just left. It looked quite pretty now - better than at night when it was just plain spooky - like a haunted castle.

He stopped his wanderings at the gate that led out into the small village of Nibelheim. It was a quaint country town set deep with the Nibel Mountains. He had only left the village once, when Professor Gast had taken him for a walk. The boy liked Gast much more than any of the other scientists. Even though he did lots of tests that hurt him, he always showed the child consideration and greeted him with a warm, crinkly smile whenever they met.

Yes he definitely liked Professor Gast the most, much, much more than that horrible Hojo he decided on reflection. He hated Hojo - he was an evil, slimy, skinny man who always seemed to enjoy making the boy feel as discontented as possible. But it wasn't just hate - the child was afraid of the cold-hearted professor, and he never felt comfortable in his presence.

He was about to return to the mansion when he noticed the Bakers' delivery boy making his morning rounds, taking pre-ordered loaves and rolls to different houses in town. The child watched as he grabbed another parcel of bread from his small cart, placing it outside a door and knocking twice to alert it's occupiers that a delivery had been made.

The delivery boy suddenly noticed that he had an audience, he stared at the small boy at the gate of the ShinRa Mansion for a moment before grinning broadly.

"Mornin'" he said cheerily, giving a friendly salute at the strange haired child.

The boy started a little at the greeting. Usually the townspeople ignored him. He smiled back and was about to reply with a friendly hello, when he felt a hand gripped his shoulder.

"What do you think you're doing out here, Sephiroth!?" a voice demanded coldly.

Sephiroth recognised the seething voice instantly - it was Hojo. All the happy, carefree emotions that had congregated within him suddenly vanished when he realised whom had caught him. He turned dejectedly to face the man, he took one look at his stern gaze and immediately regretted it, he dropped his solemn gaze to the ground and fixed his brilliant green eyes on Hojo's feet.

"I'll ask one final time, boy" the professor said with even more malice "What are you doing out here!?"

"N..Nothing, Mr Hojo" he replied timidly.

Hojo glared contemptuously as the small child in front of him. He watched as young Sephiroth shifted uneasily in his nightclothes, unsure of how to act. His eyes were shimmering with unshed tears - he was obviously terrified. Hojo's thin lips twisted into a disgusting wry smile, secretly pleased at the effect he was having on the quivering child.

"Get back inside" he spat "Professor Gast wants to begin today's tests early. You've already had me running all over this damned estate looking for you!"

"Y-Yes, Sir" Sephiroth replied shakily and he turned and ran into the house as fast as his legs could carry him.

Hojo watched the boy scurry away. He smiled slyly - everything was running to schedule.

Sephiroth plodded dismally down the tall winding staircase that led down to the basement laboratory. It had taken all his self-composure to stop himself from shaking - why did Hojo treat him like that anyway - it wasn't like he'd done anything wrong.

As he reached the bottom he felt the cold stone that made up a long narrow corridor under his feet. He looked down at himself - he was still wearing his nightclothes - a thin, white T-shirt and a pair of shorts. It had been very hot and stuffy in his room the previous night - too hot for regular pyjamas. He wondered if he should quickly go and get dressed.

He shook his head decisively - no, he was already in trouble for wasting time.

He continued down the corridor - it was very dark - only a few, well-placed lanterns allowed him to see where he was going. Hanging from the walls were several skeletons - he suppressed a shudder - he wished that someone would take them away, despite using this corridor several times every day they still frightened him a little.

He let out a quiet sigh of relief when he reached the end of the corridor. There were two doors here, one, directly ahead of him led to the laboratory and it's adjoining library. There was also a door on the left-hand wall that Sephiroth had never opened. He'd never been shown around it so it was probably off limits - he had often tried to imagine what was hidden inside.

Probably monsters he thought *Or even scarier - Hojo clones* he grinned at his joke. Hojo was definitely more frightening than any two-headed, drooling monster.

He was about to head into the lab when he heard a strange moaning sound - like when people talk in their sleep. It was coming from that other room.

His curiosity peaked; Sephiroth tiptoed over to the door and placed his ear against it. He tried the door handle and found it to be locked. He listened carefully to see if he could hear anything else. The moaning came again - this time he managed to make out one word - 'Lucrecia'.

What's a 'Lucrecia'? He thought - extremely puzzled by the strange word.

He listened a little longer until he heard a creaking sound, like an old door being opened, followed by shuffling and scraping noises.

Summoning all of his shattered courage, the child managed a whispered

"Hello?"

No reply other than a continued shuffling, coming closer to the door. Sephiroth froze - what if it was a monster?

"I..Is anybody there?" he called again.

Still no answer, the locked room was completely silent. Sephiroth shrugged in defeat, put it all down to an overactive imagination and turned back to the door to the laboratory.

"Who are you?"

Sephiroth jumped at the cold voice - he turned around quickly, expecting to see Hojo or one of the servants. But no one was there.

It must be from that room!! He thought

Unsure of what to do the child stood for a moment fiddling with his shirt.

Then the voice came again, firmer but just as cold; "Who are you?!"

"I.. I'm Sephiroth," he said quietly

"Ah, I see" The voice from behind the door said knowingly "And what are you doing down here, Sephiroth?"

"Ummmm..I have to go and talk to Professor Gast - he probably wants to run some more tests and stuff like he always does. It's no big deal." He paused for a minute thoughtfully before asking: "What's a Lucrecia?"

"What do you know of Lucrecia??" the voice snapped. "And it's not what - it's who!"

Rather taken aback the boy continued "I..I heard you say her name just now - I was just wondering who it was that meant so much to you"

"How old are you Sephiroth?" the voice said with just a hint of amusement.

"Ten"

"Ten eh? You're a very observant ten-year-old." He paused "Yes Lucrecia did mean an awful lot to me. She was an extremely beautiful woman, I loved her very much"

"So what happened?"

"She..died - I was unable to save her," the voice said quietly - as if trying to hide a deeply imbedded sense of guilt.

Sephiroth chose not to push the topic any further - it was obviously a strain on the stranger. "So what are you doing locked in there?"

"Sleeping" he replied flatly

"Oh" The boy was a little surprised by the simplicity of the reply "What are you doin.."

"Enough!!" The voice interrupted "I thought you had to meet with Professor Gast?"

Sephiroth's eyes grew wide with alarm - he was late. Again! "I..I have to go now," he said hurriedly and headed for the lab. As an afterthought he added; "can I come and talk to you again?"

The voice chuckled softly "And why would you want to do that?"

Sephiroth hung his head "Because you're the only person who talks to me. And I've only just met you!"

"I'm very sorry, Sephiroth, but I'm afraid that's impossible - I must continue my sleep," the voice said apologetically.

Sephiroth took a deep breath and sighed. "Ok, can you at least tell me your name - I promise I won't bother you again!"

"Vincent"

"Ok, Vincent - bye!!" he said as he scurried into the laboratory.

[Author's Note (there could be a lot of these!!): YES YES YES -Vincent's in there, baby. C'mon, everybody dance with pure unbridled joy!!! Ok maybe not. On the other hand all fellow Vincent nuts probably are!! Hehhee]

Professor Gast sat at the large and terribly overcrowded desk placed in the centre of the Mansion's small library. All around him were files, reports and books piled so high that they often threatened to fall from their designated piles and scatter all over the floor. He was glancing through a pile of papers with great interest. He sighed and scratched his balding head - these results didn't make sense - the boy should be progressing much more rapidly than this.

Glancing up he noticed Sephiroth standing awkwardly in the arched, book infested corridor that led from the lab into the library. The old man grinned broadly at the nervous young boy.

"Ah there you are, Sephiroth!!" he said cheerily "come in, come in - don't be shy!"

Sephiroth obliged and sat himself down in the chair that Gast offered.

"So how are you this glorious morning, my boy? Keeping well?" before giving Sephiroth a chance to answer he continued "Good, marvellous, wonderful" He glanced quickly at the small boy who was looking terribly fidgety. "Is there something wrong, Child?"

Sephiroth stared at his toes and wiggled them as he thought, "Hojo yelled at me again," he said finally.

Gast sighed "What happened this time?"

"I was out in the garden - he came out and yelled at me and made me come down here." Sephiroth said indignantly.

The ageing professor smiled kindly at Sephiroth "Pay no attention to him, Child, Hojo's in a terrible mood lately. He was up all night running tests again - he's probably just tired."

"But he's always.."

Gast raised his hand to silence the boy "Enough, Sephiroth, let's not talk of this again - alright?"

Sephiroth wriggled in his chair but nodded in agreement - how could Gast possibly understand? Suddenly an idea hit him.

"Professor Gast, why is there a man locked in the basement?" Gast looked understandably shocked by this unexpected statement - how did Sephiroth know about that? "He's called Vincent" continued Sephiroth "He keeps talking about a lady called Lucrecia - who's she - do you know her? And he says that all he does is sleep - how can he sleep all the time? And he knows Hojo, and you! Why is he locked in? Is he bad? Or maybe he's a monster!! How come you never told me about him before? And..."

"Whoa, whoa whoa - slow down!!" Gast cried, throwing his arms in the air in exasperation "My poor old brain's not what it used to be y'know - one at a time!!"

"Sorry, Sir" said Sephiroth apologetically before gazing at Gast awaiting answers to his questions. Gast looked at the huge green eyes staring at him expectantly and shook his head.

"You don't have to worry about Vincent," he said "In fact I think that you should just forget all about him. And yes - all he does is sleep. He's just an experiment gone awry."

"Experiment?" asked Sephiroth in confusion - why would anyone want to experiment on Vincent?

Gast frowned "Yes one of Hojo's - now forget about it, he's crazy" he pushed himself away from the desk and stood up "come now, we have some more tests to run - and I know how much you enjoy them!" he grabbed Sephiroth's hand and began leading him into the laboratory. Suddenly he felt the boy resist him, he turned to see him standing with an extremely puzzled expression on his face. "Come on, Sephiroth" he said, trying to pull the boy on but he stubbornly refused to move.

Sephiroth shook his head. "Vincent didn't sound crazy - just upset!"

"I SAID FORGET ABOUT HIM!!" Gast bellowed

Sephiroth stood dumbfounded - Gast had never yelled at him before.

He yanked his hand away from the old man's and ran out of the library as fast as he could, tears flowing freely from his emerald eyes. He kept on running until he reached his bedroom. He flung open the door then locked it behind him before collapsing onto his bed, sobbing piteously.

He'd had enough. All the agonising tests, Hojo's cruel treatment, his new 'friend' Vincent refusing to allow him to talk to him again, and now this - Gast, the only person he trusted, yelling at him!

It was too much for him too bare - he didn't have a friend in the world.

Sephiroth gasped as he sat up sharply in his bed. He looked around himself in confusion - it was pitch black, hadn't it been early morning just a moment ago? He rubbed his eyes trying to wake himself up only to find them still damp with tears.

Suddenly it hit him and he slapped himself on the forehead for being so stupid - it was just a dream - a nightmare, reliving a portion of his past. He pushed the quilt away from himself and leaned over to turn on the lamp at his bedside, he wandered over to the small washbasin in the corner and stared at himself in the mirror above it.

Yes - he was definitely himself, no longer a lost ten year old child - he was fifteen now, nearly sixteen. Surer of body and mind, and a little less afraid of Hojo. Just a little. He shook his head to try and get rid of all the cobwebs that had formed in his brain. His now long hair swept along his shoulders - he smiled, it suited him better at this length, falling a short way down his back.

He checked his watch - nearly five. He sighed, there was no point going back to bed now - he'd only have to get up again in half an hour anyway. He walked over to his closet and pulled out a loose pair of black pants and a sleeveless blue T-shirt. He dressed quickly, not bothering with shoes - he preferred to walk barefoot.

He glanced over to the corner of the room where his murasame sword laid against a wall. It was huge - seven feet long, he remembered when he had first been given it by Gast and Hojo - he couldn't even lift it - now, three years on he wielded it with deadly accuracy. Soon he'd have to use it all the time - when his sixteenth birthday finally arrived he'd be off to Midgar to join SOLDIER.

Until then he was stuck in Nibelheim, being trained to fight and allowing the scientists to undertake their continual tests. He frowned - he hated those tests, in fact he was even looking forward to joining SOLDIER, at least he'd finally escape them, not to mention getting Hojo off his back!

He grabbed the sword by its hilt and left the room. He wandered casually down the hall to the staircase, which he descended and headed into the tearoom that doubled as his training area.

He approached the training dummy in the centre of the room, smiling as he recalled how it had had to be strengthened after he had decimated it the previous week - he was definitely getting better! He took quick swing at it, pleased at the sparks that flew off as metal struck metal.

He lowered his blade to the floor and then sat down next to it before laying down on his back atop the mats which covered the area. He stretched himself out before letting his mind wander. He was ready to doze off when he heard the door open and light footsteps enter the room. He sat up sharply to see one of the houses handful of servants polishing the Grand Piano that sat in the corner. She was young, about his age, and he'd never seen her in the mansion before. He watched her for a moment and listened to her hum some song to herself. She was slim and pretty with long dark hair tied loosely into a ponytail that hung over one shoulder.

"Hello" he ventured

The girl jumped in fright at his greeting, she had thought herself to be alone. Sephiroth rushed over to her and picked up the dusting cloth she had dropped when he'd startled her.

"Sorry about that", he said humbly, handing her the cloth. "I didn't mean to frighten you."

The girl blushed as she accepted her cloth, "It's ok," she said "I didn't realise there was anyone in here - it's not due for use for another fifteen minutes."

Sephiroth scratched his head, "Yeah, well I couldn't sleep so I figured I'd get some extra practice in." He thought for a minute "Oh, hey, I'm Sephiroth" he said, extending his hand.

She took it and shook it gently "I know who you are" she said with a small smile "Everyone who works here knows - we're all instructed to make sure that we don't disturb you." She blushed "I'm Kathryn" [Author's Note (just a quick one!): Hi Kathryn ^_^] she added.

"Pleased to meet you" he said sincerely "I haven't seen you around here before, I mean they're all ugly old heifers who work here so I'm sure I'd remember someone like you, I" he broke off after realising what he was saying and flushed crimson.

Kathryn smiled broadly at him and fiddled with her curls. "Don't stop on my account," she said coyly and then blushed in spite of herself. Quickly changing the subject she asked, "Do you do this everyday?"

"What - meet pretty girls?"

She giggled and playfully slapped his arm "No, silly, I mean come here and practice using your sword!"

Sephiroth shrugged "Pretty much, I don't take a break too often - Hojo and Gast keep telling me that I have to be the best."

"Why?"

He shrugged again - he had no answer to that. Suddenly Kathryn gasped as she glanced at her watch.

"Oh God - I have to go or I'll be in so much crap." She began heading to the door.

"Hey wait" Sephiroth called, with just a tinge of panic in his voice "Are you going to be here tomorrow?"

She turned back to him "It's my day off tomorrow". Sephiroth's hopes shrank - seeing him so deflated left a small pang of guilt in her heart - it was obvious he was very lonely. "Tell you what" she said "meet me outside the village tomorrow at noon".

Sephiroth's brilliant emerald eyes lit up at her invitation "Noon it is then" he said with a dashing smile before she hurried out of the room.

After their first encounter Sephiroth began meeting with Kathryn on a regular basis. Often they'd just walk for a couple of hours in the vast countryside that surrounded the small village, other times the mansion's friendly cook Annie would pack them food and they'd go on a picnic.

Naturally all this was kept from Hojo and Gast, if they ever inquired where he was the staff would always make up some excuse.

Sephiroth enjoyed their excursions immensely; after all he'd never really ventured beyond the confines of the mansion, let alone out into the 'big wide world'. But there was more to it than that - he'd never know anyone his own age before, it felt good to have a friend at last. Sometimes he'd dwell gloomily on the fact that he had to leave for Midgar in a few months, but most of the time he managed to force it out of his mind. Until he'd met Kathryn he'd seen no reason to stay in Nibelheim, now he couldn't imagine leaving it, and her behind.

One such trip took place in the late summer, just a month before his birthday when he'd be forced to leave. They'd stopped at one of their usual haunts, an area of trees a little under a mile from town.

"Let's take a break here," Kathryn said "It's really hot today considering the time of year and I'm so tired - I think it's the weather!"

Sephiroth readily agreed - it was incredibly warm. Kathryn sat with her back against a gnarly old tree whose leaves were just beginning to turn a deep auburn colour in anticipation of autumn. Sephiroth plonked himself down next to her and ran a hand through his long, silky hair. Kathryn watched him for a moment.

"Your hair's a really unusual colour" she commented "has it always been that way?"

Sephiroth pulled a section of it in front of his face and stared at it. "For as long as I can remember" he said, brushing it back over his head again. "I'm just unique," he added with a grin.

Kathryn sat and stared at him for a few minutes, taking in his fine features wondering why it had taken her so long to realise that he was incredibly handsome. Especially his beautiful eyes she decided - they were one of his greatest assets, she smiled to herself - not to mention the fact that he had a great body. She suppressed a laugh - she'd never really noticed that before either.

Sephiroth noticed her intent gaze and felt a little uncomfortable under her scrutiny "What?" he asked.

Kathryn woke up from her daydream "hmm?"

"You were staring at me." He said flatly

"Oh - sorry, I was a million miles away!" she said apologetically.

He reached over and pushed a few strands of her chestnut hair out of her face, making her blush ever so slightly as his fingertips brushed her cheek.

His playful face suddenly turned very serious "You're very beautiful, Kathryn" he said gently, studying her delicate face, her bright blue eyes and her slender body.

"Sephiroth, I.." she trailed off as he pressed a finger to her lips.

"Shhhh" he said quietly, moving slightly closer to her. "Kathryn there's something I have to tell you." He glanced at the ground for a moment - trying to figure out how to word what he was going to say. "You know I have to go to Midgar in a few weeks, but I..I guess what I'm trying to say is that I'm really going to miss you - you're the greatest, the only friend I've ever had."

He slipped his hand gently over her stomach and held her waist ever so lightly. "Kathryn?" he said quietly.

"Hmmm?" she replied feeling his hair drape onto her bosom as he leant closer to her; she gazed intently into his wonderful, intoxicating eyes.

"I love you" he said, his tone was barely audible and filled with so much suppressed emotion. "I don't think I can live without you."

She smiled up at him, feeling his other hand snake up around her neck. She could feel his warm breath on her face, closing her eyes he allowed him to lower her down so that she lay on her back on the warm grass.

"I love you too," she said, stroking his soft hair that hung loosely down around his face.

Sephiroth looked down at the beautiful girl in front of him, with her wonderful curls spread out like an ocean beneath her. Slowly he brought his head down to meet hers and kissed her tenderly, he felt her body tremble beneath his touch. Taking this to be a good sign, he continued his kiss, firmer now, revelling in the softness of her lips.

He'd never been this happy.

[Author's Note: awwwww cute! Sorry about the slush!]

Later that afternoon, the young couple finally made their way back to Nibelheim. Walking slowly, their hands locked, they chatted casually until they reached the old well in the Town Square.

Sephiroth turned to face Kathryn who smiled warmly up at him. He took this opportunity to wrap his arms around her waist and pull her into him. He kissed her and she wrapped her arms around his neck, unwilling to let go. They stood this way for several minutes until both finally decided to come up for air.

Kathryn glanced over at her shoulder to her small home. "I should be getting back," she said "my parents will wonder what's keeping me." She giggled "I said I'd only be gone for an hour!"

Sephiroth gave a sigh of false annoyance and kissed her forehead. "I guess."

As they made their farewells neither one of them noticed that they were being watched from the shadows.

Hojo was not best pleased of the actions of his 'experiment'.

The girl will have to be..dealt with he decided - nothing was going to get in the way of his greatest achievement!

A week later Sephiroth was lying lazily on his bed, thinking about the day he'd shared with Kathryn. They hadn't ventured far - in fact only as far as her home. He grinned to himself - while the parents are away their baby girl will play!

Not that they'd done anything really serious, after all, he mused, we aren't even sixteen yet. There'd be plenty of time for that!

Suddenly a terrified scream from downstairs broke into his thoughts. He recognised it instantly!

Kathryn!!

Jumping off the bed he pelted out of the room and down the stairs to come face to face with Hojo's sneering visage. Behind him knelt Kathryn - he clothes were bloodied and torn and two men in dark blue suits were holding her down. They both carried guns, Sephiroth took a moment to regret leaving his murasame in his room.

He looked from Hojo to Kathryn and back again - a terrible feeling of apprehension gripped his heart.

"What's the matter, boy?" jeered Hojo "Do you know this pathetic little whore?" Sephiroth felt his blood boil at Hojo's insults but managed to keep his head. "Of course you do" continued Hojo "After all you helped her gain her reputation as a slut, didn't you!"

Unable to contain his rage Sephiroth lunged at the evil man only to feel hot lead rip through his left shoulder as one of the gunmen reacted to his attempted assault on the scientist. Sephiroth dropped to his knees, gripping his bleeding wound.

"Have you met the Turks, boy?" Hojo cackled evilly - gesturing to the two men "Meet Gerald" he said indicating a man of roughly forty "and Tseng" who looked about 20.

Sephiroth studied the two men for a moment; Gerald looked used to this sort of thing - he calmly held Kathryn to the floor with his gun rammed into her head as she sobbed. The other, Tseng was a little skittish, perhaps new to the job. Still, he had shot him - he'd remember that face.

Finally Sephiroth found his voice, "What the hell are you trying to do?" he demanded angrily, allowing the sound of his bitter hatred and resentment seethe into his tone.

Hojo tutted "Boy, when are you going to learn? We have rules here. Unless we tell you that you can do something then it's not allowed." Sephiroth glared at his tormentor - how could he do this?

"You are truly sick!!" he breathed heavily, wincing slightly as the wound on his shoulder cried out for attention.

Hojo grinned, but it was devoid of any humour - it was obvious that he was enjoying this immensely. He motioned to Tseng "Tie him to the banister" he ordered "I want him to see this".

Tseng nodded once, he pressed his gun against Sephiroth's neck - forcing him back to the stairs where he forcefully yanked his arms behind his back and tied them firmly. Tseng looked down at Sephiroth and smiled before turning away.

Sephiroth fumed "Bastard!" he yelled at Tseng. Tseng merely turned, aimed his gun at Sephiroth's stomach and fired twice. Sephiroth screamed in agony.

"Idiot!!" Hojo yelled at the younger Turk "I want him damaged as little as possible"

Humbled, Tseng mumbled something of an apology. Hojo nodded at Gerald who promptly dragged poor Kathryn over to where Sephiroth was bound. He grabbed a handful of her dishevelled hair and pulled her head up forcefully so that she stared into Sephiroth's eyes. He looked back at her, blood dripped from a gash on her forehead, and bruises were beginning to form all over her face. She was still beautiful.

He looked into her teary blue eyes "I'm so sorry" he whispered. She nodded at him - too afraid to speak.

Suddenly Hojo burst out laughing. "Oh this is too much!!" he hollered "The pathetic little boy honestly thinks he's in love!!" His face became deadly serious again, he glanced at the older Turk. "Do it" he ordered with the utmost malice.

Gerald nodded "Aye, Sir" he agreed, bringing his gun up to Kathryn's temple. A single shot ended her life and she slumped to the floor, a pool of blood forming beneath her.

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!" Sephiroth was horrified, how could he do that to her? HOW??

At Hojo's order, Tseng cut the ropes that prevented Sephiroth from going to his love. Finally free of them he bent over her, and cradled her in his arms, willing her to open her eyes, to breathe, to come back to him.

Tear's streamed from his eyes as he stared at her bloodstained face in disbelief. He turned to Hojo and glared at him "Why?"

Hojo smirked at him "Because I can"

Feeling rage take over from his grief, Sephiroth went to attack the cruel professor only to feel the butt of Gerald's gun crash down on the back of his head.

His world went black.

[Author's Note: Sorry, Kathryn - but you had to go! It's for the greater good! Hey - put the knife down! And why are your eyes all bloody and evil looking! STAY BACK EVIL DEMON!!!!!!!!!!!! AAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!]

Sephiroth stared gloomily out of the small window at the rain lashing down outside. Strong winds rocked the boat as it made its journey from the Costa-Del-Sol to Junon harbour.

It had been three weeks since the end of his life. This wasn't a life he was living now, just an empty and hopeless existence. He was on his way to Midgar to join SOLDIER. He used to get excited about it, then later ,after Kathryn had entered his life, he'd dreaded it. Now it made no difference.

He rested his chin on his hand and lost himself to a myriad of thoughts until he heard the door of his small cabin open. He turned to see Gast stood looking at him apprehensively. The old man smiled nervously, what had got into him?

"Sephiroth" he said quietly "There are things that I must tell you before we get to Midgar"

Sephiroth got up from his perch at the window and walked over to the professor. "What is it?" he asked.

"Sit down Sephiroth" Gast instructed, the young man obeyed, sitting on the edge of the bed. Gast sat next to him. "Do you remember when you told me about your discovery of Vincent in the basement?:" Sephiroth nodded, puzzled at Gast's sudden interest in the topic "Well you also asked me about a woman called Lucrecia correct?"

Sephiroth nodded again. Gast took a deep breath but ended up coughing severely. Sephiroth reached out to try and help him but the ageing man waved him away.

"Do you know who your mother is, child?" he asked in a croaky voice.

Sephiroth was by now deeply confused but he nodded "Jenova" he replied.

"Yes well you see there's more to it than that, I..". Suddenly Gast's body began shaking violently, as if possessed by some demon, his chubby face went bright red and then blue as he struggled to breathe.

Sephiroth looked on in horror, as Gast dropped from the bed to the floor, Sephiroth went to aid him, rubbing his back in order to get air into his lungs. Instead of helping it only seemed to make matters worse as the old man vomited up bile in his efforts to breathe.

This continued for a full minute, with Sephiroth yelling for help as he tried to assist his oldest friend. Suddenly Gast's trembling body relaxed and Sephiroth gave a sigh of relief at the end to the seizure. He rolled the older man onto his back, expecting to see him smiling up at him. Instead all Sephiroth saw was Gast's lifeless eyes staring blankly into space.

It was Sephiroth's turn to start shaking as he reached to the professor's neck, trying desperately to find a pulse, but there was nothing.

Sephiroth sat with Gast's body in his lap for what seemed like an eternity, tears flowing freely from his tortured, emerald eyes.

From outside the door Hojo had listened intently to the events unfolding within. He sneered at Gast's pathetic attempts to tell Sephiroth the truth and then congratulated himself for ending the miserable, small-minded old coot's pathetic existence.

He felt inside his coat pocket for the half full vial of poison that he'd managed to purchase when they'd stopped in Gongaga. It was amazing what you could get your hands on in this world for a price.

No one was going to get in the way.

No one.

[Author's Note (sorry!): Ok, ok so I know that this isn't what actually happened to Gast but it fits my story better so live with it!]