

Phase 4: Changes

Carmoi shook the sleeping Sephiroth in an effort to wake him but the young general merely grunted and rolled over.

"Seph – get up!" He shook him again but still he slept.

"SEPH!!" An idea came to Carmoi and he went into the bathroom and came back with a glass of water. He dipped his fingers into it and flicked water on Sephiroth's face.

Still no response and by now Carmoi had had enough – he tipped the entire glassful onto Sephiroth's head who sat up in bed with a start, coughing and spluttering.

"Praise the lord – it's a miracle!!" Carmoi chuckled, "Time to get up!"

Sephiroth stared at Carmoi for a moment then leapt at him, knocking the startled man to the floor and pinning him down.

"I suppose you think that's funny don't you? – let me up!!"

"Oh, and this comes from the guy who just tried to drown me?"

"Trust me – if I'd wanted you drowned I'd have done it – now let me up! I'm serious!!" Carmoi struggled but to no avail – Sephiroth had him hopelessly trapped.

"So am I!" Sephiroth released one of Carmoi's hands for a second but only to grab a pillow and start beating him mercilessly over the head with it.

"Hey –mpph- Stop that -oof- Sephiroth you'll kill my last brain cell!! –urf-."

At last satisfied Sephiroth stood up leaving Carmoi to rub his aching head.

"That was completely unfair! You could at least let me take you one-on-one!!"

"I guess..." Sephiroth pulled on his trousers "...nah – I don't think so – you deserved that!" He grabbed a white shirt from his closet and put it on – he was glad that he didn't have to wear that godforsaken uniform today – he'd been wearing it nearly non-stop since his promotion and that was five years ago!!

Carmoi was dressed similarly in jeans and the baggiest green jumper Sephiroth had ever seen. Today was their day off and they were meeting Gerald and Reno and heading into the city.

It would normally have been a pretty run-of-the-mill affair but Gerald was retiring after 25 years as a Turk (A record) and they were going to send him off in style (Or at least pickled in alcohol!).

Sephiroth noticed Carmoi staring dejectedly at the mirror.

"Something wrong?"

"Yeah... My entire face is wrong!! Not a bloody wrinkle in sight and I still don't have a clue why!!" He turned to Sephiroth "I mean for Christ's sake I'm FIFTY!!"

"Fifty-one actually." Carmoi gave Sephiroth a filthy look – Sephiroth merely smiled sweetly. "And this is a problem because...? Look anyone else would love to be you so quit flapping around about it! What is – is."

"Woah – very deep, colour me impressed – maybe I should give you me philosophy degree!!" He sighed, "It's not just that either – there's something I hate even more!"

"What?"

He turned back to the mirror and made as face at his reflection. "My damned hair – it's really starting to annoy me now and one of these days I'm just going to cut it all off!!"

"You'll break their hearts if you do that!!"

Carmoi stared at Sephiroth quizzically "Who?"

Sephiroth grinned "Your fan-club, don't tell me you've never noticed them coo and sigh as you walk past!"

"Heh – can't go failing my adoring public I suppose."

"C'mon lets go – Gerald and Reno'll be waiting!"

With one last disapproving glance in the mirror Carmoi followed Sephiroth out of the room.

"I am **not** going in there!!"

"Aw c'mon, Reno – don't be such a little coward!" Carmoi laughed at the youngest Turk "It's only a strip-joint!"

After crawling from bar to bar for most of the day the foursome had finally come to a stop at the newly opened Honeybee Inn in Sector Six.

"NO!"

"Oy, I told ye he's still just a wee lad! Prob'bly hasn't e'en had a woman!" Gerald added taking a final swig from his bottle of beer and throwing it to the ground

Reno scowled at his friends who were all having a great time at his expense. "Seph, help me here!"

Sephiroth was doubled up laughing.

"I hate you lot – I don't know why I bother to hang out with you!" Reno turned and walked a few steps away in a huff.

The others looked at each other and grinned before pouncing on the helpless Reno and dragging him into the club kicking and screaming.

The club itself was packed with people and extremely dark, save for the odd coloured light here and there. The stage itself however was extremely bright as a scantily clad young woman tried her best to sing amongst wolf-whistles and cries of "Get-'em-off, love!"

Sephiroth noted that most of the customers were middle-aged businessmen, some of whom he recognised as ShinRa employees. He resisted the temptation to go over and say hello, they'd probably be as embarrassed as hell – then again he could always threaten them and get them to give him money. He swallowed a laugh and marked that thought as one to dwell on in the future (or when he was strapped for cash.)

[Author's Note: I've changed the layout of the Honeybee Inn – sue me!! Actually – don't I'm very poor! Instead of being separated into different rooms it's now just one big club.]

"I don't wanna be here, I don't wanna be here, I don't wanna be here.." Reno muttered to himself as they found a table and ordered drinks.

"Heh, they're all dressed as bees!" Carmoi commented on the girls who served them.

"Reno what exactly is the problem – you've always got one girl or another on your arm – I don't understand why you're so nervous of this place!" Sephiroth said, extremely confused by his usually out-going friend.

"Trust me you don't wanna know – it's just..."

Their conversation was suddenly cut short by a high-pitched squeal from behind them.

Reno groaned.

"Reno-Baby!!! What are you doing here?" A tall blonde woman flung her arms around Reno's neck as he went a shade of red that perfectly matched his hair. Gerald recognised her as the woman who'd been singing on stage and chuckled.

Carmoi and Sephiroth merely looked at each other wondering how Reno always managed to pick high-pitched tarts to spend his time with.

"Lolly, let go!" Reno yelled at the woman, disentangling himself from her grasp.

She placed her hands defiantly on her hips "Anyone would think you weren't pleased to see me." She looked at Carmoi, Gerald and Sephiroth "You could at least introduce me to your friends!"

Reno sighed in defeat, "Lolly, This is Sephiroth, Carmoi and my soon to be ex-boss Gerald. Guys this is my sister – Lauren."

Not for the first time that day Reno found himself being laughed at as the others tried to stop tears running down their cheeks. Ignoring them he turned back to Lolly.

"Uh, look – I don't want this to come out the wrong way Loll, but could you um, Y'know... get lost. I'm in the middle of something here." He tried to give her his best little-boy-lost face but it had no effect.

"Oh so now you're ashamed of me?" Lauren looked very upset at her little brother's words. "Well FINE – don't expect me to send you a Christmas present this year!! I'm finished now anyway – good bye!!" She turned and stalked away and Reno couldn't help but laugh as the tail of her costume swayed as she walked.

"No wonder ye did'nae want us t' come in here!" Gerald laughed and took a mouthful of his drink to calm himself down.

"Yeah, well Y'know – if she wants to do this for a living then that's up to her right?" He shrugged.

"Heh, I guess – look if you don't want to be here then we can go somewhere else." Carmoi said.

Reno grinned, "No way! She's finished for the day and the stage show starts in 10 minutes! I'm going to get pissed and ogle beautiful half-naked women!"

Sephiroth rolled his eyes skyward "At least you're back to normal now!"

"Or as normal as he'll ever be!!"

"Shut it, Carmoi!"

At around midnight they finally crawled out of the Honeybee Inn, drunk and loving it. Somehow they had to find their way to the train station in Sector Seven to get back up to the plate.

"It's definitely this way" Sephiroth said as they approached a small playground.

"Hey slides!" Reno ran-wobbled over to them and started climbing up the steps before sliding down.

"Reno, come on – we've =hic= gotta go!" Carmoi dragged Reno away from the swings that he was now playing on and through the gates to Sector Seven..

After nearly an hour they finally reached the train station – covered with mud after Sephiroth had shoved them all into a puddle just for the hell of it.

The conductor gave them all filthy looks, silently blaming each of them because he had to do night shifts because of drunken idiots like them.

As the train pulled noisily out the station Reno curled up in a tight ball on the floor and went to sleep.

"If a had a pen I'd draw on him!" Sephiroth giggled stupidly.

Seeing this as the greatest idea ever thought of they all set off in search of a pen and finally harassed the sour-faced conductor into giving them a black marker. Extremely pleased with themselves they headed back to the sleeping Reno.

Five minutes later Reno was looking like a chimp and the others were all greatly amused.

"He's gonna =hic= hate us in the morning!" Carmoi slurred.

"Aye, heh-heh I'd love to be there when the lad wakes up with a bitch of a hangover and sees himself in the mirror for the first time, he'll prob'bly jump out've his skin!" Gerald laughed loudly.

Sephiroth felt the urge to comment but couldn't summon the energy, in truth he wanted to go to sleep as well but didn't trust Carmoi and Gerald with that pen. The drunken stupidity had gone and he was feeling a little depressed. It had been a good day but it all came down to the fact that Gerald, one of his closest friends was leaving ShinRa and in all probability he'd rarely see him from now on. All that and the fact that Tseng had been assigned to take over leadership of the Turks made for pretty morose contemplation.

He was also disappointed that Zahra had decided not to join them, preferring instead to busy herself with other things – in short the idea of saying goodbye to Gerald was upsetting her and she was afraid she'd cry and ruin her 'tough-girl' image.

Breaking out of his thoughts Sephiroth turned to talk to Carmoi only to find him asleep with his head resting on Gerald's shoulder, similarly Gerald was asleep, his head atop Carmoi's.

Sephiroth grinned wickedly and gently prised the pen out of Gerald's fingers...

Tseng entered Professor Hojo's laboratory and pushed a few strands of his long black hair out of his eyes. He took a note of the sterile surroundings – the room was incredibly white...not a touch of colour anywhere. Along one side were rows and rows of test tubes with rubber stoppers in the tops. The rest of the room was filled with masses of electrical equipment and a large computer screen filled most of the back wall.

Hojo himself was typing rapidly at a small laptop that leant on a dissection table in the centre of the room. As he did so results were deciphered and dozens of formulae flashed onto the large screen. Seemingly satisfied the professor went over to his tubes and examined a number of them.

Tseng cleared his throat.

"You wanted to see me, Professor?"

Hojo looked up in annoyance from his test tubes, however his expression changed when he saw who had interrupted his work. "Ah yes, Tseng...It is 'Tseng' isn't it"

The Turk nodded.

"Right. I have a task for you – but before I tell you what it is I must warn you that it must be kept completely secret – even from the President himself. Do you understand?" The scrawny man pushed his glasses up his nose with his forefinger.

"Yes, Sir"

"Excellent then I can trust you to follow my orders to the letter, without question?"

"Of course, Professor."

"Good, now then...I need you to fiddle with some of the SOLDIER postings – you see there are two people – One's just reached First Class - Zack something-or-other and a new recruit – Cloud Strife. Make sure that they're put in Sephiroth's squad rather than Travers'."

"No problem, Professor – any reason?"

"Nothing that you could comprehend..." Hojo picked up one of his test tubes and studied it carefully "heh, no – nothing someone like you, or anyone else for that matter could even begin to understand."

Tseng decided not to push it. "Very well, Sir – if there's nothing else I have to go and see off Gerald, I suppose I should show my face."

"Actually there is one more thing... Sephiroth's friend – 'Carmoi' I think, dispose of him..." He looked straight at Tseng and smiled, "If you know what I mean – he's corrupted my experiment for too long. And while you're at it, be sure Sephiroth drops by – heh, we have 'things' to discuss..."

"Just =sniff= be careful okay! I =sniff= wanted to =sniff= well y'know =sniff=..." Zahra suddenly threw her arms around the startled Gerald and started sobbing, "I told myself I wasn't going to cry!! Good luck you old codger!!" She gave him one final squeeze before letting go.

"Aye, well th..thanks – heh heh...T'be honest wi' ye, Zahra – 'tis strange t'see ye so...emotional...I'm afraid ye have me off guard!"

Zahra wiped a tear from her cheek and slapped him on the arm, mumbling something about being emotional really.

Gerald began making his way along the line of friends who had come to say goodbye. They had gathered outside of the ShinRa building.

"So what're you actually going to do now? You never told us." Carmoi shook his friends' hand.

"I'm movin' somewhere warm – with lots've attractive young ladies in skimpy swim wear. Yup – the Costa Del Sol – I cannae think of anywhere better t'be a dirty old man!"

"You're not going back home then?"

"Up North? No way – I'd freeze me ass off. No, I want sun!"

"Yeah I can just imagine you lounging on the beach ogling all those women, heh! Good luck, Gerald – give me a call when you're settled alright?"

"Sure."

"It's not going to be the same around here without you." Sephiroth said miserably.

"Yeah well – you take care of yerself, kid – If Hojo bothers ye just slice him t'ribbons or somethin' – bastard deserves it anyway!"

Sephiroth chuckled, "I'll keep that in mind."

Tseng held his hand out stiffly "Good luck, Sir."

"Aye, well I'm sure ye'll do a good job in me place."

Tseng simply nodded and turned back to the ShinRa building.

"Cold assed bastard." Carmoi commented when he was out of earshot "It's not going to be much fun around here with him leading the Turks".

"Aye...hang on a minute...Where's Reno?"

Zahra shrugged "I don't know – I haven't seen him all day!"

"He wouldn't miss this, I'll go find him" Sephiroth ran inside to the reception desk "Is Reno in the building?" he asked the young woman.

The receptionist fiddled with her computer "Yes, in the cafeteria."

"Thanks."

Several minutes later Sephiroth stepped out of the elevator and spotted Reno hunched over a table stirring a cup of coffee. Sephiroth shook his head – Reno was obviously upset that Gerald was leaving. He pulled up a chair opposite the Turk.

"Not coming to see the old man off then?"

Reno shrugged.

"Ah, c'mon, Reno – he'll get upset – he already thinks you don't give a shit. If you don't come then he'll leave thinking that, when in truth you care more than you let on."

"What the hell d'you know?"

"Enough. You're sat up here; totally miserable because your friend's leaving and you don't want to say goodbye, as if that will somehow mean that he's not really going." He stood up and grabbed the dejected Reno up out of his seat. "I'm not leaving you up here to wallow in self pity so get your ass in gear and hurry up!" He dragged the Turk over to the elevator and shoved him inside.

"I hate you." Reno folded his arms indignantly and stared out of the glass in a huff.

"No, you love me really – you know you do...And don't put on that stropky little boy act – It may work with the girls but I'm afraid that I'm quite oblivious to it."

"Humph."

Minute's later Sephiroth had dragged the protesting Reno out to where Gerald was about to climb into a cab.

"Now stop getting so stressed out and say goodbye!" he ordered.

Reno shook himself out of Sephiroth's grasp and turned to Gerald, "Yeah well, umm bye I guess. Good luck and stuff...uh...HEY!!!"

Gerald squeezed Reno in a hug, half choking him before he let him go, "Heh, I'll send ye a wee record of me conquests of young, bikini-clad ladies!"

Reno grinned, "Yeah, Gerald – you do that..."

"Well folks, I guess I'm off" Gerald said, addressing the entire group. "Ye'll have t'come visit me, we'll keep in touch." He smiled sadly and got into the cab "The end of an era, eh?" he shut the door and gave a quick wave before the car moved off.

"The end of an era..." Sephiroth echoed quietly.

Carmoi left Sephiroth with Reno and Zahra and wandered back into the ShinRa building intending to grab a bite to eat before going and meeting C squadron's new recruits.

He stepped into one of the elevators where he found Tseng.

"Uh, what floor did you want?" he asked the Turk.

Tseng shrugged

"Aaallrighty then..." He punched his destination into the keyboard and the doors slid shut. The elevator had moved steadily up the side of the building but just before they reached the 60th floor Tseng pulled out his gun and fired at the control panel. They came to a sudden jarring halt, which threw Carmoi to the ground.

"What the hell?!?! Are you nuts?"

Tseng smirked, "Not at all – I'm just following orders."

"WHAT?!! What are you talking about??"

Tseng smiled again, "I hope you're ready to die Mr. Valentino."

Panic suddenly gripped Carmoi as Tseng aimed his gun at his head and opened fire. Carmoi dived and barely managed to avoid the shower of bullets that shattered one of the glass walls of the elevator. Crafty bastard Carmoi thought as he dwelled for a second on his predicament No way out! He crouched low while Tseng stood confidently over him. Carmoi stared wide-eyed as Tseng tossed the gun out of the broken glass – what the hell was he up to?

Tseng noticed Carmoi's confused expression. "An order may be an order – but who's to say that I'm not allowed to enjoy it?" He pulled a dagger from the inside of his boot and took a fast swipe towards Carmoi's stomach but he jumped back out of the way.

Carmoi frowned and aimed a punch at Tseng's face that landed with a thud at the Turks' temple. Tseng steadied himself before slashing the blade down into Carmoi's shoulder.

Carmoi cried out in pain and dropped to his knees, hot blood trickling through his fingers as he grasped the wound.

"Bastard!" he seethed and rammed his entire body into Tseng's who crashed into the side of the elevator with a thud.

Again Tseng retaliated with his dagger, slicing it into Carmoi's side, just above his hip before ramming it's hilt against the wounded man's skull.

Carmoi fell with a cry to the floor, trying desperately to fight off dizziness and nausea. He felt Tseng grab hold of him by the collar as he was yanked to his feet. The Turk dragged him the few steps to where the wall had been obliterated holding him so that he stood precariously on the edge.

"Ever considered bungee-jumping, Carmoi? Of course you won't have the elastic, but I'm sure by the time you hit bottom there won't be much of you left so you can hardly complain or ask for a refund."

Carmoi forced a swallow, ignoring the coppery taste of the blood in his mouth. "Why? ...Why are you...doing this?" He forced out the question as another wave of dizziness hit him – if Tseng let go of his shirt then he fall anyway, he wouldn't need to be pushed.

Tseng chuckled evilly, "Orders – I thought I'd already told you that! You're getting in the way of Professor Hojo's experiments – he wanted you...dealt with. Naturally I complied – besides, he could hardly have asked Reno or Zahra since they're all buddy-buddy with you." He laughed again "Actually I'm really quite...OOF!!"

Carmoi summoned his final reserves of strength and rammed backward into Tseng's stomach the dagger clattered to the floor and Carmoi kicked it over the edge before turning and slamming his knee into Tseng's groin. The Turk bent double with a loud grunt.

Carmoi took this opportunity to find the handle on the floor that would open the emergency panel. With a great deal of effort he wrenched it open and dropped through to the ladder below. He clung on tightly as another bout of dizziness engulfed him – he couldn't afford to lose it now – he was 200 feet up in the air. Ignoring the pain in his side he began the decent down the ladder.

Meanwhile Tseng had crawled over to the control panel. He fiddled with a few of the inner workings and the elevator hummed to life – he grinned and punched the 'down' button.

Below him Carmoi heard the elevator start up again – he had reached to opening for the 59th floor and was struggling to get it open. He glanced up and saw the elevator moving toward him.

"Shit!!" He clung to the ladder with one hand while pulling at the door with the other. "C'mon, c'mon, C'MON!!!!" He pleaded with the door. The door made a painful screeching noise as he finally managed to drag it open – he jumped into the opening, landing clumsily before turning to see the elevator travel down past the opening – Tseng stared at him through the glass with a murderous expression lighting up his coal coloured eyes.

"Hey, buddy are you alright?"

Carmoi looked up to see a handful of people staring down at him. He thought for a moment and then burst out laughing, much to the surprise of the others.

"Ha - Do I look alright?! Heh heh – what a bloody stupid question. Some bastard just tried to kill me, I nearly get chucked to my death from an elevator and then I barely escape getting squished by said elevator! Of course I'm not bloody alright!!!"

"Umm do you want us to help you to the infirmary?"

Carmoi continued to chuckle and then winced as another flash of pain ripped through his side, "Y'know – I think that just might be a good idea!"

"R...Right – sorry. Stupid question."

"No duh!"

"For crying out loud, Cloud – will you stop fidgeting? Everything's going to be fine – we just have to get out formal introduction to General Sephiroth – it's no big...Hold up!! What am I saying? We have to talk to Sephiroth!!! THE Sephiroth!!!!!" Zack Mandez let the significance sink in...Here he was, in ShinRa HQ, about to meet the greatest, most famous soldier of all time. His knee began itching as it always did when he was about to go into a blind panic and he scratched it furiously

Cloud Strife frowned as he tried to fit his mass of spiky blonde hair under his helmet. "Yeah well – it's all very well for you, Zack – you just got to First Class, but he'll be expecting me to screw up 'cause I'm just a crappy Escort Guard...Ack – I give up with this stupid hat!!"

"THE Sephiroth – oh man!" Zack began prancing around in circles still scratching his knee, tracing the pattern of the huge ShinRa emblem that graced the floor of the elegant conference room. Normally it would have been filled with a huge table but the induction for SOLDIER recruits was taking priority. He glanced sideways at Cloud and stifled a laugh – his hat was never going to win the battle with his hair.

"Would you shut up – I'm nervous enough as it is! I have to talk to my hero face to face! I'm going to say something stupid like 'I prefer peas to carrots' when he shakes my hand!!"

Zack laughed and pushed the helmet down onto Cloud's head.

"Hey that really hurts!"

"Do you want the hat on or don't you? Now while I'm holding it down you do up the fastener!"

Cloud grumbled but did as he was told. But as Zack stopped pushing down, the strap under Cloud's chin began to choke him. While he coughed and spluttered Zack loosened the strap, tears of laughter streaming down his cheeks at the same time.

"I'll tell you what, Cloud – life in SOLDIER's never dull while you're around!"

Cloud managed a croaky 'thank you'

Zack was about to reply when they heard the doors of the conference room open with a loud ping and they turned sharply as the door opened and Sephiroth entered, flanked by a bandaged Carmoi. His long silver hair fluttered out behind him along with his coat and he clutched the hilt of his sword even though it rested snugly in its clip, it was a nervous habit and

it gave him something to do with at least one of his hands while he was addressing crowds. He knew he must look great to the recruits but he felt like a total ass.

Carmoi knew that Sephiroth was having problems keeping his 'I'm a mighty general – worship me' riff together. He also had to force his brain to stop his mouth from laughing at his friend's situation...mainly because it wouldn't be proper for a commander to laugh at his general, but also because it would really hurt.

"Wow." Zack whispered to Cloud as they ran to line up with the other soldiers. "I know he looks impressive in photographs but ... wow...!"

Cloud merely nodded as he felt his palms go sweaty Don't say something stupid...Don't say something stupid...Don't say something stupid He held his breath as Sephiroth moved down the line greeting each one of them in turn and secretly feeling stupider by the minute. Finally he reached Cloud.

"You're Cloud Strife, correct?" Sephiroth asked

"Y..Yes, Sir." Cloud gulped and prayed silently that his sweaty hands didn't leave marks on Sephiroth's shiny black leather gloves.

"Welcome to C squad, Cloud." Sephiroth shook Cloud by the hand.

"I eat Jelly-Babies on toast..." Cloud squeaked.

"Pardon?"

Cloud flushed a deep shade of pink. "I...um...I mean...Thank you, Sir!"

Sephiroth gave Cloud a puzzled look before turning to the entire group. "Thank you all for waiting – I had urgent matters to attend to which is why I'm late." He glanced at Carmoi. "Welcome to C squadron – do yourselves proud." The recruits saluted as Sephiroth and Carmoi left again.

"You eat Jelly-Babies on toast'? Cloud you are unbelievable sometimes!" Zack laughed and thumped his young friend on the back.

Cloud groaned – why did he have to mention the Jelly-Babies?

An hour or so later Sephiroth and Carmoi were seated at a table in the corner of the canteen.

"I really think that we should report this to the President, Carmoi. Turks can't just go around trying to kill people."

"Actually they can, Seph...That's the whole point."

"You know what I mean – stop being such a smart ass. You said that Hojo ordered it right?"

Carmoi nodded and stirred his near-cold coffee. "You think maybe we should confront him with it?"

Sephiroth shrugged, "He wants you dead for a reason – maybe it's best if I go alone."

"ARE YOU CRAZY?!" Carmoi's bright blue eyes flashed with panic. "He's a psycho-maniac!!"

"I know, but if he tries anything then I'll just do what Gerald said – slice him to bits. I'm not a little kid anymore – I can handle him."

"Maybe so – but you never know what that bastard's got up his sleeve...I'm not about to let you go talk to him on your own."

Sephiroth stared at his friend thoughtfully – he had a point but Hojo wasn't Carmoi's problem. He was his – he had always been his problem and he wasn't about to drag another friend into it...not again.

"I'm sorry, Carmoi but I'm doing this on my own." He pushed his chair away from the table and stood up, "Go and get some rest...consider it an order."

Carmoi frowned, "Your getting more and more fond of throwing your weight around, Seph." He gave a small smile in defeat, "And I'm too fond of letting you get away with it...just be careful ok?"

Sephiroth tightened his grip on the hilt of his sword and took a deep breath before knocking on the door to Hojo's laboratory.

"Come in."

Sephiroth let the breath out again and pushed the door open. He took a moment to note row upon row of test tubes full of some green substance. Suspended in the liquid was a small lump...for a moment Sephiroth thought they looked almost fetus-like but pushed it out of his mind – where would Hojo get hundreds of fetuses? They were probably just bugs or leaves or something...

"Ah...That was fast – I didn't think Tseng would find you so quickly!" Hojo gave one of his humourless smiles.

"He didn't."

"Oh...Then to what do I owe this visit?"

"Tseng made an attempt on my friend's life this morning...On your orders – I'd like an explanation. Now."

"My, my – haven't we got brave all of a sudden...I remember a time where you would cower at my feet and now you're all domineering. How nice."

Sephiroth frowned, "Cut the crap, Professor. Why do you want Carmoi dead?"

Hojo shrugged and turned away from Sephiroth and began fiddling at his desk. For a moment Sephiroth thought that Hojo was ignoring him, he was about to ask him again when he heard a soft cackle from the scientist.

"Do you know what, Sephiroth." Hojo said with his back still turned "When you were small you used to wander around the mansion afraid to make a sound, you accepted all the tests dutifully and never once argued. Now you're here confronting me...heh, to be perfectly honest I'm a little disappointed...that isn't the way someone should speak to their father, even if you are all grown up..."

"W...Wait a minute!!" Sephiroth spluttered "What did you just say?? F...Father?? I don't understand?"

"I suppose it's inevitable that I'd tell you eventually..." He turned to face Sephiroth who, in his confusion, failed to notice the syringe in the professor's hand. "So, how does it feel knowing after all these years that the person you hate the most is actually your father?"

"NO!" Sephiroth screamed and drew his sword. "You are nothing to do with me, I don't understand what your motive is this time, you bastard but I'll be damned if I'll fall for another one of your sick little mind games!!!"

"What are you going to do with that?" Hojo asked, pointing to the sword that Sephiroth was clinging to, "Kill me? What will that achieve – you'll never learn the truth if you do that will you?"

"I've heard enough!"

"I doubt that...Do you want to know about your real mother? How about the purpose of all those tests, and I haven't even begun to tell you why I killed off Gast!!!"

"Gast...y...you did th...everything, it, it was all...oh god..."

Hojo smirked as he watched Sephiroth drop his blade to the floor and sat dejectedly down next to it. He crouched in front of Sephiroth and gripped the younger man's chin, forcing him to look at him. He chuckled cruelly, "Poor little baby, you really don't get it do you?" His smile was sickly sweet as he ran a thumb over Sephiroth's flushed cheek. "All this is for you" he motioned the test tubes "If anything ever happened to you then I have all these little replicas...hundreds of clones of you...isn't that nice? Of course they'd be identical so..." He pulled the glove off of Sephiroth's right hand and turned it palm up so that he could look at the '1' tattoo. "I had to have a way of knowing the original..."

Sephiroth pulled out of Hojo's grip and turned away. "Why are you doing this to me?" The question came out as a sob.

"Because...I can."

Sephiroth felt the cold needle puncture his neck, a second later his head span and he collapsed to the floor.

"Besides, Daddy knows best."

[Author's Note – Need cheering up yet folks?? Hojo's such a bastard....grrrr – poor little Sephy, why do I continue to torture him? Why do I feel the need to make Carmoi bleed, why don't I stop interrupting the story with my babbling?]

Reno sat on the edge of the bed in Tseng's room and frowned at the door. He'd been sat there for over an hour, ever since he'd heard about the incident in the lift and he was fuming. He fiddled with his nightstaff, sending bursts of Electrical energy into the air.

When he got bored of that he looked around the room a little – not that there was much to find...the place was practically empty – anything that was there was immaculately put away, even the bed was perfectly made. Reno made a face at it and then un-tucked it a little out of spite.

"What do you think your doing?"

Reno span around in surprise on hearing Tseng's voice and then cursed himself for losing the element of surprise.

"I said what are you doing, Reno?!" Tseng stood in the doorway with his arms folded across his chest.

Reno shrugged; "Not a lot, waiting for you actually, boss."

"Oh really?"

"Yeah...and to find out what the hell you thought you were doing attacking Carmoi earlier – what kind of a bastard are you?"

Tseng noticed the nightstaff crackling in Reno's hand. "So what're you going to do? Beat me around a little for being a naughty boy?"

"If necessary."

Tseng laughed softly and went over to his closet, putting his jacket away.

Angered at being ignored and laughed at, Reno span the nightstaff around forming a circle of energy that flew at Tseng's back. Tseng went flying into the closet, hitting his head on the rail and dragging half of his clothes to the floor with him.

"You....are going to regret that." Tseng hissed and drew out the knife from his boot before leaping at Reno.

Reno flipped back out of the way and sent another electric burst at Tseng who cried out as it fizzed across his abdomen.

"I'm going to what, boss? Regret what?? I'm having a blast!" Reno laughed but it soon turned into a yelp as a small shuriken pierced his upper-arm.

"Regret this, punk!"

Tseng dived at Reno again and this time succeeded in knocking him to the floor, the head Turk grabbed a handful of Reno's bright red hair and used it to smash his head into the corner of the dresser.

Pinning Reno to the floor, Tseng traced the tip of his dagger along Reno's cheekbones, creating two thin cuts that oozed blood down the younger Turk's cheeks.

"I damned hope that scars you little punk – every time you look in a mirror you'll know that you're a loser!"

"Nah." Reno croaked groggily "Your the loser...Sir...heh, heh – blindly following orders – enjoying kicking the snot out of the people under your command – a...real...lo..se.r."

Tseng left Reno passed out on the floor and went over to his window to let the cool night air in. He closed his eyes against the wind and let it ruffle his hair.

A single tear trickled down his cheek.

"I know." He whispered to the stars "I'll never amount to anything." He opened his eyes and cast them skyward. "You always told me I'd never amount to anything, didn't you Father? Well – you were right...here's the proof!! I'm nearly 30 years old, I have no friends, no social life and I kill people for a living. A loser!"

He slammed the window shut angrily.

"I even killed you..."