

Phase 5: Nibelheim

Carmoi finally arrived back at the room he shared with Sephiroth. He'd spent the last 2 hours with Reno who was screaming blue murder about Tseng...and the introduction of some new guy called Rude...and the fact that he had blue plasters all over his face. Carmoi smiled as he pushed the key into the lock – Reno was obviously more upset about the plasters than anything else. As he pushed the door open he noticed Sephiroth lying in a crumpled heap on the bed which wouldn't normally have been odd – Sephiroth tended to sleep in improbable positions but not usually while fully dressed. Carmoi rushed over to him and turned him flat on his back – he was a sickly pale colour and Carmoi noticed the pus filled wound on his neck.

"Shit...I told you not to go up against that psycho, Seph...but you never listen!!"

Ever so carefully he pulled Sephiroth's coat off and removed all of the useless ornamentation of the uniform so that he was left wearing only his trousers. He rested his friend's head gently against the cool pillow and covered him with the blanket.

He rushed into the small bathroom and came back with a water soaked flannel, which he draped over Sephiroth's forehead in a vain effort to battle the alarming speed with which his fever was growing.

Carmoi sat on the floor for a moment wondering what the hell to do.

"Damn, damn, damn...if God had told me that I may have had to save Sephy from dying today I'd never have believed him...I'd've said 'nah...Seph's a tough nut...he can handle anything!!' Why the hell did I bunk off those first aid sessions when I was 10? ...First AID!! Zahra knows first aid...she can tie those pesky reef knots and everything!!"

Seconds later he was on the phone to a very drowsy and suitably annoyed Zahra.

"Zahra! Hi...did I wake you --- sorry but it's important --- Yes I know you need your beauty Sleep, Z but --- I'm sorry I interrupted your dream about a cute guy with pink eyes who enjoys hounding people...have you been at the Calpol again Zahra? I mean who the hell has dreams like that?!?! --- Anyway, can you come over here? --- No I'm not coming on to you!! --- It's Seph --- No Seph isn't trying to come on to you either! --- Will you let me finish just one senten --- Ack --- Look, Z Seph is sick and I need help --- I did try to tell you that in the first place!!!! --- Just please hurry up OK? --- Thanks."

Feeling mentally exhausted Carmoi put the phone back down again. He glanced askance at his unconscious friend who looked dangerously pale. A trickle ran down Sephiroth's nose and Carmoi could not figure out if it was water from the flannel or sweat.

He got up from the floor and walked over to remove the formerly cold flannel from Sephiroth's forehead before going into the bathroom to soak it in cold water again. He just didn't know what else to do to help.

He returned the flannel to his friends' brow and perched himself on the edge of the bed. Sephiroth moaned slightly as if in some terrible nightmare that he was unable to escape from.

"Well, at least you're not dead yet..." Carmoi whispered. "Though knowing Hojo I wouldn't be surprised if..."

A knock on the door broke Carmoi out of his rather morbid thoughts. He opened it to see Zahra looking extremely ragged. Her hair was tied back into a haphazard pigtail and she was wearing her pajamas under a long black trenchcoat.

"You look like you just crawled out of bed."

"You look like you could do with a punch in the face."

Carmoi suppressed a grin; Zahra was never her best without adequate sleep.

"I swear, Carmoi if you called me over here to nurse a snuffle then I'm going to kill you. Dead. Are we clear?"

Carmoi stepped back so that she could enter the room and inspect Sephiroth. She

"Why the hell didn't you get him to hospital you ditz!!"

"Well, I thought that you could..."

"Are you some kind of idiot? What the hell could I do?"

"Well, you umm...know First Aid and I thought...OW! There's no need to hit me! I panicked, I didn't know what else to do."

She hit him in the arm again.

"Go and phone for an ambulance *now*!! And..." She paused "What the hell is that scab on his neck."

"How the bloody hell should I know?!"

"Don't SHOUT at me!!!"

"ME?? You're the one who started it!!"

"Why don't you *both* stop yelling?"

Zahra and Carmoi looked at each other blankly for a moment and then turned to face the bed where Sephiroth was futilely trying to turn onto his side.

Carmoi dived over to assist Sephiroth.

"Are you OK, Seph...I told you not to go and see Hojo on your own! What the hell happened?"

"Hojo?" Zahra interrupted. "How the hell does he fit into this?"

Carmoi sighed "I'll tell you later." He turned back to Sephiroth. "What happened?" He waited several minutes while Sephiroth stared blankly into space, lost deep in thought. "Seph?"

"I.... I don't...remember." he said very quietly before lying back against the pillow again. He shut his eyes and rubbed them tiredly.

"How can you not remember...It can't have been that long ago. I know you're feeling bad but we really need to know what he did."

"No you don't understand...it's not just the lab, there are... gaps everywhere. Carmoi, before I joined SOLDIER what did I do? The earliest thing I recall is being in president ShinRa's office where I met Reno...and then I remember everything up until I asked him why he sent Tseng to attack you. Then...nothing at all."

Zahra sat herself at the foot of the bed. "How can that happen...people don't suffer memory loss like that do they? Surely it's not that selective."

Carmoi shook his head and shrugged. He was about to question Sephiroth further when he noticed that he had fallen asleep again.

"Leave him be for now...maybe it's just confusion...his temperature is pretty high, it could be that he's just not thinking straight."

He looked at her sadly. "I hope you're right"

Several weeks passed and Sephiroth's lost memories refused to return to him. He attempted to ignore the problem which worried his friends greatly as he watched him get more and more depressed.

Carmoi grew especially worried when Sephiroth was assigned a 'special' mission with just a few of the new recruits to go and inspect a faulty reactor. Determined to keep an eye on his friend he approached one of the soldiers assigned to the mission.

"Yeah, yeah, what the hell do you...Oh my!" The recently woken and now extremely nervous Escort Guard saluted Carmoi hurriedly. "Um...w...what can I do for you, C...Commander?"

Carmoi gave him a pleasant smile. "You're assigned to the Reactor mission with Sephiroth aren't you, Hibbert?"

"Y...Yes, Sir."

"And you're about my height and build too aren't you, Hibbert?"

Hibbert gave Carmoi a puzzled look.

"Yes, Sir I suppose so."

"Excellent...Give me your uniform – boots, helmet...all of it."

"Uh...Right."

Hibbert rushed back into his room and returned presently with the required garments.

"Most appreciated, Hibbert, Thank you." The young soldier nodded. "By the way...you're not going on the mission – I'll be taking your place. If you breathe a word about it or let yourself get seen while the General is away then your days in SOLDIER are at an end. Understand?"

Hibbert gave Carmoi a look of total panic and nodded numbly.

"Excellent!" Carmoi gave him another smile and left.