

## Sliver

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It's a sliver...  
It's a sliver that I can't dig out. There, under the surface of my skin. Penetrating. Deep. Painful and full of hurt.

I try to dig it out, but it just goes in deeper. Always deeper.  
Maybe it'll get infected... enough to push itself out. Maybe it'll get infected enough to kill me... I can only hope.

I'm a killer. I torture people for information. I kill them as a reward. Sometimes I just kill them because it's an order – those are the lucky ones. An order. Never personal. Never an issue.  
And here I am worrying about a sliver.  
But it's not like any other sliver.  
It's white... always white. Almost metallic and cold... and it never comes out.  
It's always there, under the surface.  
Take a drink. Clear my head. Take a quick look around. Arm myself. Kill or be killed. Kill and be killed.  
Die inside... but never notice until it's too late.  
It's always too late.  
Don't feel. Try not to feel.  
Fuck it. I always feel.  
I feel too much. Never for the enemy - Always for the enemy. I don't even know who the enemy is anymore.

Me or myself?  
Do I care? Should I care?  
Stop thinking. Been down this road before. Been down this road too many times.  
Take another drink. Swallow hard. Light a cigarette. Inhale. Exhale. Curse myself for this cursed stick of death in my hand. The need. The weakness. The addiction to everything that destroys me. Fuck it.  
Close my eyes. Stop my thoughts. Stop the wheels in my mind from turning. Who am I kidding? Stop my thoughts... there's a feat.  
They never stop.  
It's a whirlwind in my head, and I can't get this damn sliver out of my mind.  
I have a job to do. Get in. Shoot. Shoot. Bang! Get out. That's it. That's all I have to do. No thought required. No need to think. Thinking will get me killed. But that's what I want. Isn't it?  
Take another drink. Inhale some more smoke. Feel sickened by it. Internally burned by it.  
Glance to my right. Flash a quick smile. Hand over the flask.  
He takes it. He always does.  
Not a word exchanged. Never a word exchanged. Never a need... not on the job. Eyes do the speaking. It's all routine from here. Never a need.  
Solid mass. Movement is stiff and hard. Powerful. Strong. A cause for envy.  
There's envy. He doesn't seem burdened by thoughts.  
Envy.  
Envy and admiration.  
Admiration for his strength. Admiration for His conviction.  
A pillar of stone. Cold and unfeeling. But never unfeeling, and never cold.  
It's like a switch. He controls it. Turn it on. Turn it off. Play with the buttons as needed. He makes it look easy. Too easy.  
Is it?  
I've tried.  
I've tried and failed. The more I try to shut myself off, the more the wheels churn against my will.  
It makes me furious... or something. Something that can't be controlled. Not even by myself.  
I lose it.  
I lose it every time. On the job. Off the job. I go insane. Can't control it. Try to control it. Lose it even more.

I hate it.  
I hate it, and I love it.

I hate it cuz I've lost it. I love it cuz I've found it. My lack of control turns into that which controls me. I hate that I love it.

The flask returns to me. Take another drag. Take another drink. Stop. A thumb points to the end of the alley. Take a look. Smile and say "Fucker" under my breath.

Some John and a hooker invade our space. Should we chase em off? Scare em a little?

Nah. Can't risk attention. Must stay focused on the job. Focus.

*Fucker.*

He knows.

He knows what I'm thinking. That's why he points out the distractions. He doesn't like the fact that I can't stop. He doesn't say it. He never says it. He shows it. It's in his eyes. The way they peer at me through those dark shades. I can see them. I can feel them. Always judging. Always questioning. "Are you hurt?"

*Nah. Never...*

*It's just a sliver....*

I go numb a little. Emotionally cold. The thought eats away and leaves me empty... Maybe angry. Should never have felt in the first place. Never did before. Never thought I would.

But I did.

I failed.

I failed because I did... and this fucking sliver won't come out.

Close my eyes. Curse silently. Take another drink. Take another drag. Toss the remnants of my cigarette somewhere to my left.

"Ready?"

"Ready."

Count to three. But I only make it to two. Lost it again. Couldn't wait. Have to kill. Have to be killed. Have to die. Why? Because I have to. Have to make it quick. Take as many with me. Take them all if I can.

Bang. Bang. Pain. Finally. About time. Shoot once more. Fall to the floor. Damn. Arm is numb. Vision blurry. Only focus is on movement. Shoot it. Down one more.

This is what I needed. No more thought. Nothing. Nothing but focus, as focus slips away. The light show ignored. Unnecessary distraction. Sound gone. Silence. Quiet. Mindless.

Shows over. Arm hurts. Look down. Fall down. Hands rush to me. Pick me up. "You'll be all right. Stay with me."

Job's done. Assessed and noted.

Sleep now. Find my freedom. Escape. Don't care if it's another prison. Maybe he'll be there. Maybe he'll be there and take this sliver out.

No. I wake up.

I wake up in a starchy bed. Almost healed by Materia and Mako. I curse again. Get up. Curse again. Throw the machine that was monitoring my vitals to the floor and smash it with something else. I don't know what. I don't know what I grabbed. I don't know anything.

Strong arms restrain me. Nurses and doctors rush in. A needle. No. *No more needles!*

"Let me go!"

"No."

"Let me go!"

"..."

It's futile. I lose. I lose every time. The needle comes close. A strong arm reaches out and grabs the wrist. "No."

Knees go weak.

"He doesn't need it."

I'm safe. I'm always safe with him. He always keeps me safe. Because he knows.

"Are you hurt?"

*No... never.*

*It's just a sliver.*

"Home?"

"Yeah..."

*Home.*

Can I even call it that anymore?

It hurts.

It hurts too much.

The door is in front of me. The keycard is in my hand. Hesitate. Wait. Wait for what?

“You okay?”

Turn. Stare. Silence. Choke.

*Am I okay?*

“Reno... You okay?”

“He’s gone.”

Defeat. Loss. Admittance. Requital. Pain. Emptiness that can’t be satisfied. Need. Desire. Agony. Pick one.

Which one? All of them? None of them?

All of them.

It’s just a sliver.

It’s white... always white. Almost metallic and cold... and it never comes out.