

AURON glared at the four of them: Wakka, Lulu, Kimahri, Rikku. They had all failed him. Yuna too would not have been exempt from his rage, had she been there.

“None of you told him,” he spat. “*None* of you.”

“I was going to!” Rikku wailed. “On the way to Macalania Temple.”

“But you didn’t,” he said.

“I tried to –” she protested.

“Shut up,” said Auron. “Just be quiet. If you don’t have anything useful to say –”

“Hey, you knew him before any of us did,” Wakka pointed out. “You shoulda told him.”

“You *all* should have told him,” said Auron, ignoring the valid point, “as soon as you left Besaid with him. Before, even. Having him accompany a pilgrimage without any idea of what would happen – it’s inexcusable. You should all be ashamed of yourselves.”

“We thought he knew,” said Lulu.

Auron gritted his teeth in the face of such dimwittedness. “He’s not from Spira. How would he?”

“We didn’t know he wasn’t from Spira,” Lulu went on, her voice rising quite considerably in pitch. “We thought he’d remember everything after a few days, we thought it was Sin’s toxin. By the time we realised he really was an outsider, it was too late – we’d been on the road for days.”

Auron thought of Jecht: he had had the same experience. He and Braska hadn't sat Jecht down and explained the matter to him until much later than they should have done, and the consequences had been ... messy. "That's no excuse," he said, trying to put the thought out of his mind.

"With respect," Lulu insisted, "you are being unreasonable, Sir Auron –"

"Don't," he growled. As much as he tried, he couldn't forget that evening with Jecht; that whole doomed journey with the two of them. "Don't call me sir," he said.

He turned around – he couldn't bear to look at any of them – and stormed out.



The sound of footsteps behind him disturbed him from his incensed thoughts, and he turned around, preparing a scowl: but it was Kimahri, the member of the group whose presence he always found least objectionable.

He looked away and adjusted his collar.

"Auron should tell them," said Kimahri. "Not right to suffer alone."

"*You* know," Auron muttered.

"Kimahri not good at helping," said Kimahri. "Better to share problem. Others can comfort."

“I don’t need *comfort*,” said Auron. “I’m not a child. My problems are my own: they don’t need to concern the living.”

He turned to face Kimahri, staring up at him with an intensity he hoped would make him back down.

“Tell *someone*,” said Kimahri, undeterred. “Not just Kimahri.”

Auron understood, then: Kimahri felt burdened by his secret. He was the only one who knew the truth about Auron: *he* was hardly able to discuss it with anyone else. Suddenly, Auron felt guilty about it. It wasn’t as if Kimahri didn’t have problems of his own.

He considered who else he might speak to about it. None of the Yevonites: they would be too shocked to hear such things said about the cherished Lady Yunalesca. Rikku was a possibility, although she would inevitably blab. Tidus wasn’t much more discreet, but he seemed the best option.

“I’ll tell Tidus,” he said. “Not now – he’s got enough to worry about at the moment, poor boy. Later.” After they all realise there’s another way, he thought.

Kimahri grunted in assent.

Auron sighed. “Look, I’m sorry. For losing my temper with you all, as well.”

“Auron act rashly, sometimes,” said Kimahri.

“Can’t disagree with that,” he muttered.

“Don’t forget,” said Kimahri. “Friends here.”

He pushed his glasses further up his nose, and said, “Yes. Thank you.”