

ONLY after several weeks in Zanarkand does he realise that he hasn't had the time to think about Spira once. There is so much to do, new customs and machina to learn, paperwork to be settled, half-true explanations to be offered. The boy and his mother occupy most of his time, especially at the start, when most of the neighbours still seem to think Jecht is going to come back at any moment, resurface from the sea with a grin as if he had never left.

Auron wonders if becoming unsent might have robbed him of his emotions. There is surely no other explanation: yes, he has been busy, but surely something as big as this ought to have made him feel sorrow for at least a moment. Braska, his dearest friend, dead by his own inertia; Jecht, a companion whom he came to respect, transformed into the most feared being in Spira. And the place itself, his own homeland – he knows, now, that it is doomed, that even the best summoner will never be able to break the cycle. His faith, the teachings to which he and so many others dedicated themselves: empty. He ought to feel something. But – because of his condition, he supposes – that feeling never comes.

His belief is finally proved wrong when he eventually gets a few moments to himself. Even dead, his body has needs, and a short stop in Jecht's guest bathroom ought to be enough to let him see to them, a brief moment of handiwork before he goes to check that the boy is sleeping. He tugs his clothes away from his crotch, ready to satisfy himself in as perfunc-

tory a manner as he can – and yet, as soon as he lays a hand on himself, he suddenly remembers. Gagazet, where the climate forced the three of them, by then already closer than friends, to voice thoughts previously unspoken and lie together for the first time. Braska’s hand in about the same place on Auron’s dick, confident but gentle, his slender fingers taking hold; Jecht, bolder, approaching from the other side with a diligence Auron had never thought him capable of. He remembers trying to stifle the first moans of pleasure, then abandoning the attempt, crying out with joy as he shared with them both the most wonderful of all experiences, gazing into their faces and wishing it would not have to end so soon and so brutally.

And as he remembers it, it finally sinks in: both of them are gone, Spira is on the path to ruin once again – and the burden of knowing these things and going some way towards righting them is solely his. All of that rests on the shoulders of a man who is dead, and who, apparently, cannot even masturbate without breaking down. Because he is crying, for the first time since the Final Summoning, gulping out sobs as his hand continues to work rhythmically against his dick, which is no less hard than it might ever have been with such stimulus, even though both his cheeks are wet with tears and he feels completely wretched, suddenly experiencing the grief that should have come over him weeks before. Somewhere in the middle of all this, he comes, but continues to weep, too miserable to clean himself up, huddled into himself on the floor of Jecht’s

forsaken guest bathroom as he remembers the feeling of their hands on him, knowing now that dying certainly did not deprive him of his capacity for emotion.