

BRASKA had thought of a thousand ways that he could explain to Yuna what he had to do, and yet none of them seemed quite right. He had had enough trouble talking it through with Auron: he had tried to insist, quietly, that when a person understood that they were being called to the pilgrimage, that was their fate decided, and it was useless to fight. Auron had known nothing but fighting all his life, of course, but that was something Braska couldn't help with.

So he walked the cloisters at the main temple complex in Bevelle, up and down, past monks training and priests engaged in what they believed to be profound theological discussions; he took no notice of the way they turned their heads when he passed, as they had done for years. He concentrated on the slow, even progress of his own feet, working their way around the cloister clockwise and then anticlockwise countless times – and he thought once again about how he would tell Yuna.

He had made no progress by the time she was released from school. At that point, he had already made his way to the alley where the parents waited to collect their children, all of them giving him a wide berth as usual; it had unnerved Yuna at first, but she was as accustomed to it as he was now, and she made her way towards him with confidence. He waited until they were on the way home to embrace her: she had reached that age where a child became embarrassed by their parent's emotions.

They returned to the little house, and sat in the kitchen, and

Braska got Yuna a snack and a glass of water, and he watched while she ate and still couldn't find the words to explain it to her.

But he had to begin, somehow, so he took a deep breath, and laid his arms on the table so his hands wouldn't shake, and said, "Yuna, I have to tell you something."

"I think I know it," said Yuna, as she finished off her biscuit. "There were rumours, at school – the teachers – you're going on pilgrimage, aren't you?"

Braska cursed them internally: of course the wretched teachers would gossip about him, even if they refused to acknowledge his existence otherwise. "I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean you to find out that way. Do you – do you know what it means?"

She looked at him matter-of-factly. "I'm not *stupid*. We did it at school. If you get all the aeons, and you go to Zan-Zanna-

"Zanarkand," he murmured.

"Zanarkand," Yuna repeated. "If you go there, you –" And she suddenly faltered. "You won't come back."

Braska nodded; he could barely bear to look at her, but he owed it to her. "That's right," he said. "Yuna, I'm sorry. I don't want to leave you – that's the very last thing I'd want. But I've felt this call for so long, and I never truly realised what it was, until your mother –" He couldn't go on; this was too cruel.

"How long?" said Yuna.

“As long as I can remember,” he replied truthfully. “All my life.” Even when he was a boy, in service at a minor temple of Bevelle – he hadn’t known what it meant then, of course, but he had understood that the duty to which Yevon called him was different. He had become a priest because he thought that the only vocation possible to experience, and then, as he had settled into his duties, he had realised he still wasn’t satisfied.

“That’s a very long time,” said Yuna solemnly, stirring Braska out of his recollections.

“Yes,” he agreed. “I’m extremely old.” She laughed at that, and he let himself chuckle too. Perhaps, he thought, if he was laughing, he wouldn’t cry.

“Do you understand, Yuna?” he said. “Why – I have to go?”

She nodded. “I think so. You feel like you have to help everyone. And white magic isn’t enough, is it? You have to *save* them.”

“Yes,” he agreed.

“When we did it at school,” she went on, “they said it can be heredity.”

“Hereditary,” he corrected her. “Yes. Oh – you mean –”

Yuna could already perform some simple white magic; she had shown promise even as an infant, displaying more aptitude for the craft than Braska ever had when he was a boy. He had heard stories, working their way through the Bevelle grapevine to the few people who consented to speak to him:

she was already healing her schoolfriends' little playground scrapes. He had never thought that these tendencies meant she too was experiencing the calling to become a summoner, but now he realised how foolish he had been: it *was* hereditary. Not in every case – his own parents were barely inclined towards magic at all – but almost half the people who took the pilgrimage were the children of former summoners.

“You want to save everyone too, don't you?” he said.

“I think so,” said Yuna. “But I don't know how – there's so many people, and they hurt so much, and –”

She really did feel the same way he did: that connection with Spira's sorrow, the one that Braska had gradually come to realise that none of the other boys was burdened with, and, later, that becoming a priest was not enough to appease; it had taken him so long to work it out. At least Yuna would be spared those directionless years – but on the other hand, she would grow up knowing what needed to be done, knowing that she would need to throw her life away as soon as she reached adulthood.

“I don't think I'm strong enough,” she admitted, and Braska stopped himself before he could say *I don't think I am either*, and said “Come here,” instead, and he scraped his chair away from the table as she hurried over to him and climbed into his lap, and he took hold of her tightly and rocked her gently back and forth, stroking her hair as he felt her hot tears gradually begin to seep into his shoulder.

He raised his hand to wipe his own eyes, and murmured, "You don't have to do it. Not yet. Let me try first, won't you? Promise me, Yuna?"

"Yes," she sobbed, "I promise," and he kissed the top of her head and said, "Good girl. I'm so proud of you."

"I'll miss you," Yuna whimpered.

Braska held her tighter, and buried his face in her hair so as not to let her hear him crying, and said, "I'll miss you too, sweetheart. So much."