

“S^{IR} Auron?”

She stood before him neatly: it was so clearly early in her pilgrimage. Braska too had stood there, or somewhere else like it, and his eyes had been hollow and afraid. He had been burdened with four, five aeons, and felt their entreaties within his soul. He had stumbled over his words in exhaustion. But his daughter stood there now, alert and proper, just about the opposite of her father in all respects apart from the gleam of determination in her eyes.

“Yes?” he said.

“May I sit here?” she asked.

It was not the question she wanted to ask, he knew. Politeness, he supposed, prevented her from getting to it. She had avoided him on the road so far; intimidated, he suspected.

“You want to know about Braska,” he said.

She bowed – a great irony of which she was unaware. “Yes,” she said. “Please. If you don’t mind?”

“Are your memories not enough?” he said.

“But I know nothing of his pilgrimage,” said Yuna.

“That is what you wish to know about?”

She nodded keenly. “Please.”

He gestured towards the seat opposite; she hastily sat, drawing herself close to the table in anticipation. He straightened himself up, and grimaced: after a day of fighting fiends for the first time in a decade, everything ached.

“You’re hurt,” she said. “I’ll fetch my staff –”

Braska had healed Auron without his staff, the intensity of his magic flowing straight from his hands to the wound; the sensation had almost made Auron cry out loud on more than one occasion. Braska had leant in close, and brushed Auron's hair out of his face, and smiled. He had so carefully checked him over for injuries after battle, his gentle touch assiduously traversing Auron's skin, finding and dispelling the pain.

"Just tired," he said.

Yuna paused; then she said, "Please: tell me how it ended. How did he feel about – about it?"

"His own death?" he said.

She nodded.

"He was ready," he said. So ready, although it would have hurt Yuna to hear the extent of that readiness. Yes, Braska had left his young daughter behind, and declared that he was unfit to raise her alone, even after three years of trying; he had been sad to part from her in Bevelle, but with his one tie to the mortal world taken care of, he had embraced his impending death. He had marched towards it eagerly, even while Auron attempted to claw him back from the brink, trying unsuccessfully to convince him that more death would just mean more sorrow.

"And," she said, "at the end –"

"He made me take cover," said Auron. "He left me in a hollow in the Calm Lands, and then he walked off." He had held Auron tightly, for so long; he had kissed the tears away

from Auron's cheeks; he had responded to Auron's increasingly incoherent protests with the unanticipated calmness that had come over him during the last few days of their journey. He had walked off, even after Auron had told him that he loved him – not for the first time, but in a way that sounded so broken that it felt new and strange, an unfamiliar taste of bitterness on his tongue.

“And Sir Jecht?” said Yuna.

“We had already parted ways,” he told her.

She nodded as if she understood.

“I found Braska,” Auron added, “two hours later, lying on his back in the fields, soaked with so much water I wondered if he had drowned. He was bleeding from a wound I couldn't staunch – so weak he could barely take my hand.”

But he had taken it, and squeezed it with the little strength he could muster, and murmured something incomprehensible to Auron as Auron knelt by his side, waiting for one last miracle.

“Is that what you want, too?” he said. It shocked her, he could tell: her hands trembled a little on the table, her lips tightened. But she needed to know what she had chosen for herself. She needed to understand the reality of the summoner's pilgrimage: a horrible, ugly, wretched death, worlds apart from the glorious High Summoners' statues in the temples, even from the quiet respite of the Calm.

“I am prepared,” she said, her eyes still wide. “I know I must die for the people of Spira. I have accepted it.”

“Braska wanted you to live,” he said quietly, and wondered if, at last, he had gone too far.

And perhaps he had: because Yuna stood then, scraping her chair against the floor a little; she tucked her hair behind her ear, and looked at the ground, and said, “Thank you for sharing your memories, Sir Auron,” in a voice that was only slightly strained; and then she walked away.