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Chapter 1

Blend

Jecht and Braska are the ones who stand out as they journey through Spira, but Auron wonders if he should stop pretending he is any more the model Yevonite than they are.

Chapter 2

Stain

The blood washes out, eventually, but the shame stays, soaking and slowing him just as much, until he feels wet through.

Chapter 3

Island

More Sin attacks per resident than anywhere – he's looked into the statistics – and yet they are happy; each time he hears a laugh, he wants to seize them by the shoulders and ask how they can stand it.

Chapter 4

Apple

A young girl unaware of the intricacies of Yevon's favour offers them a basket of fruit one morning; Jecht bites in enthusiastically, letting a trail of juice dribble down his chin, while Auron finds that his own pick has begun to turn.

Chapter 5

Paper

In each temple he ignores Jecht's scoffs and asks if they have any information; they direct him to their archives while Braska frets about his trial, and point out the places in the scrolls that record the summoners who have passed through, and he does the calculations in his head and tries to align the numbers in a way that might mean something.

Chapter 6

Relax

Even after learning the truth about Braska's fate, Jecht seems curiously unbothered; it merely demonstrates his irresponsible attitude, of course, but Auron finds he could almost envy Jecht a little.

Chapter 7

Leaves

The trees are shedding their leaves the second time they pass through Macalania Forest; one falls onto Braska's shoulder and somehow stays there until Auron eventually reaches out to brush it off, rewarded by Braska's fleeting smile.

Chapter 8

Proof

The pyreflies circle around Jecht's ankles; he's gone through with it, then, and Auron feels his eyes stinging.

Chapter 9

Ugly

Jecht made scars look good, somehow, but whichever way Auron twists and views himself in the gold-framed mirror in the bathroom of Jecht's own houseboat, he can never succeed in finding an angle that won't make him cringe in disgust.

Chapter **10**

Book

Braska gave him an Al Bhed primer once, long ago, and it took him days to realise the significance of being brought into a heretic's confidence.

Chapter 11

Brood

He likes spending the evenings alone, undisturbed even by Braska, with just a glass of something and a memory or two.

Chapter **12**

Mesh

Even the clothes are different in Zanarkand, itchy and not right for his warrior's frame; he feels self-conscious wearing them, as if they might be yet another sign that he doesn't belong.

Chapter 13

Soft

Braska's fingertips are gentle as he heals Auron's wounds; there's nothing in the teachings that says white magic should make him feel safe, but he's been learning there are many things the teachings fail to describe.

Chapter **14**

Shelf

He gathers the potions in Braska's emptying house and packs them into his bag while Braska waits outside, impatient for the journey to start, not knowing that Auron is trailing his fingers through the dust and trying to find some forgotten item that might make him rethink his decision.

Chapter 15

Alone

Zanarkand is ten times busier than Bevelle, and yet he has never felt surer that out of all the people in this city, not one of them would understand.

Chapter 16

Fall

Rejecting the marriage is enough to put an end to a run of promotions, and to make men who once stopped to shake his hand in the street turn away and pretend they never knew him at all.

Chapter 17

Knot

On the days they have less luck with fiend encounters, his hair is tangled by the time they make camp, sore to tease through in front of the handheld mirror they brought along; nonetheless, he combs it enough to erase the evidence by the next morning, and to make himself a presentable and worthy guardian once again.

Chapter **18**

Crowd

They'll all be gathering in Bevelle to celebrate the Calm; he wants to be as far from the city as possible, untarnished by the human gaze.

Chapter 19

Denial

Yunalesca will help, he thinks as he crunches through the snow; after a thousand years, she must want to see this cycle ended.

Chapter 20

Train

He's counted the times he's tried telling Jecht how to improve his sword technique: fifty-one, as if it's ever made a difference.

Chapter **21**

Fur

A woman at a stall sells them a shawl for Braska to wear on the mountain, and Auron watches as the summoner drapes it around his neck and regains the energy to move on; if he could surge forward and rip it away, he thinks, maybe –

Chapter 22

Chrome

Braska's ease with machina should be disturbing, but he can't help admiring that confidence, and watching those deft fingers as they operate the device.

Chapter **23**

Heart

He wakes in the night, and sees Braska sleeping beside him, and counts how many days are left.

Chapter **24**

Intention

Jecht is ignorant, chaotic, distracting, a liability, blasphemous, poorly dressed, drunk (to begin with), unskilled, infantile, gauche, and despite everything, once the first few difficult days are over, Auron doesn't entirely dislike him.

Chapter **25**

Push

"Why do you always seem to know the quickest way to get on my nerves?" he asks Jecht, and Jecht laughs and says, "I can read you like a book, dude."

Chapter **26**

Look

Braska disrobes keenly, eager to sink into the warm bath; Auron permits himself just one glance, and feels his face heat even though the steam has died down.

Chapter **27**

Weight

Scooping a fully grown man into his arms is no trouble when it's urgent; but it's when Braska regains consciousness and murmurs his name, so grateful and vulnerable, that Auron suddenly worries he'll buckle and let him slip to the ground.

Chapter **28**

Spider

Jecht is surprisingly uncomfortable around insects, and the number of them that Auron has to scoop into his hands and remove from the tent multiplies once his fellow guardian is sober enough to be aware of his surroundings.

Chapter 29

Robe

He goes to find it before Jecht arrives: time to return to Spira, and be the legendary guardian he once swore to become.

Chapter **30**

Umbrella

Zanarkand's climate catches him out more than once, and Tidus laughs when he comes in, tired and soaked through, still not having learnt his lesson.

Chapter **31**

Surface

The water remains still and dark until Jecht emerges with an enormous splash; Auron lowers his head to hide his relief, and says, "Took you long enough."

Chapter 32

Idea

Jecht said he would think of something, but the longer he waits, the less believable it seems; there are other concerns by the time the Final Summoning comes, and for once Auron forgets to blame his friend's hubris.

Chapter 33

Diamond

He clears out Tidus' mother's belongings after it happens, trying not to guess which possessions were gifts given in the name of Jecht's love.

Chapter **34**

Blind

Both eyes would have been worse, he reminds himself, but perhaps having his sight robbed entirely would have been a mercy, sparing him the need to watch the embarrassment of this pretended existence.

Chapter **35**

Flow

Auron immobilises the fiend while Jecht moves in to strike; Braska scorches it with a tendril of fire that snakes under Jecht's sword; their foe bursts into pyreflies, and Auron meets Jecht's exhilarated hi-five with one hand, and clasps Braska's with the other as the summoner congratulates his guardians with a few choice words of praise.

Chapter **36**

Movement

Climbing the mountain the second time is quicker, without a summoner's party to look out for, propelled by sorrow instead of cautious hope, nothing in his head except the need to go on.

Chapter **37**

More

He could have done something else to stop Braska choosing this fate, perhaps; he should have kept searching, despite everything.

Chapter **38**

Honey

Breakfasts are about the only time they have the chance to breathe: Braska and Jecht taking it in turns to read the newspaper, Auron making sure everyone is nourished and knows the drill for the day's walking, as if they are three ordinary men with ordinary duties.

Chapter 39

Weather

The sun is bright in the Calm Lands, in poor taste if he stops to think about it.

Chapter **40**

Blue

In Bevelle they would have been disgusted to hear he had entrusted the High Summoner's daughter to a wandering Ronso, the final delicious insult to Yevon.

Chapter **41**

Double

It's days before he can forgive Braska for taking on a second guardian, and days more before he forgives its being Jecht specifically.

Chapter 42

Braid

The spinners of Besaid show off their wares, and Braska seems truly interested despite his upcoming trial at the temple; Auron hangs back, staying alert for fiends so Braska can dedicate all his attention to this rare moment of happiness.

Chapter 43

Thread

White magic can't mend their clothes, but Jecht turns out to have a talent for sewing, and Auron wonders how someone so boisterous can sit still long enough to guide the needle.

Chapter 44

Angles

They meet three dead ends in the forest; each time the sky is a little darker than the last, and as Auron turns on his heel, he hopes Braska won't think it's his fault.

Chapter **45**

Daydream

Maybe if he asks Braska to turn back, if he takes him by surprise – maybe Braska will say yes, if Auron catches him at the right time, and they can go back to Bevelle and pretend none of this ever happened.

Chapter 46

Nightmare

Tidus never says anything, but he must have been woken up a few times by now; Auron drags the bed to the furthest corner of his room, double checking every evening that the door is shut.

Chapter **47**

Honor

A man on the road intimates when Braska's back is turned that it's not too late to abscond from this fruitless pilgrimage and return to Bevelle to accept the girl's hand after all; Auron laughs, without humour, and spits onto the ground between his feet.

Chapter **48**

Palm

Braska's are pale and slender, the hands of a mage, not a warrior; and cold, sometimes, ice-cold like a portent of his fate.

Chapter 49

Screen

He doesn't feel like explaining to Jecht which machina are permitted yet again, so he slinks away to bed, leaving the others to catch up on the blitzball scores without his sobering presence.

Chapter **50**

Warmth

Braska smiles, and it seems enough to melt all the snow on Gagazet.