

# **Misplaced**

By: Shivani/Grazhir

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**Pairings:** Seymour/Tidus

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**Spoilers:** FF X

**Warnings:** Slash, character deaths, gleeful canon mangling, mild sexual situations

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**Summary:** A funny thing happened on the way to Spira. Forced to fend for himself in a world alien to his own, Tidus gains somewhat contradictory friends and allies.

**Notes:** If you've read *Kaleidoscope* then you know my general thoughts on certain aspects of FF X. If not, then I'll be brief and say that Tidus isn't going anywhere, and Seymour never killed his father. This sort of follows game canon, but not, meaning the general time frame and many of the basic events remain the same, but how the people are involved may differ quite a lot.

Because this is a PDF and there's a ton of Al Bhed, it's rendered in English. Also, please don't ever get the idea that I don't like Auron. I love him to bits, actually. And I should apologize in advance for getting a tad flowery at times during this. All mistakes are my own. Hell, I'm just thrilled I actually managed to write something!

“Tidus.”

His head snapped up at the sound of a voice he had not heard since the failed pilgrimage of Lady Ginnem; they had gone separate ways after escaping that wretched cavern. It had been years since he had unceremoniously been ripped from his home and dumped in this strange world, left to fend for himself. Tidus had, in a rare stroke of common sense for his age (some might call it genius), feigned severe memory loss after arriving, and the locals he stumbled over were more than happy to accept the lie, and set about educating him.

He had spent his time whittling down the endless fiends, all of them appearing unwilling to shed the vestiges of the humanity they allegedly despised, and thus was he able to keep himself comfortably on the spoils of those battles. Why else would a fiend carry gil or items?

He was surprised she even recognized him, dressed as he was. “Lulu,” he acknowledged with a nod. “How fare you?”

“I am well. You seem to be fine.”

“Have a seat if you like,” he said. “It’s been a long time.”

She settled in on the bench, her movements much more graceful with time. “Are you here for the tournament?” she asked, her tone rather bland.

He supposed it was a reflection of her diffidence regarding the game. “Not specifically, no, though I expect I’ll watch. Surely you aren’t here for that.”

She shook her head, braids rustling and beads clinking softly. “I’m here on pilgrimage, my third as a guardian.”

He smiled thinly. “Better you than me.” His one and only experience as a guardian had soured him and left him jaded to the workings of Spira and Yevon, though he acknowledged to himself that someone had to do something, even if he did not quite agree with commonly held beliefs. “Passing through, then?”

“Yes, with a brief stop. One of my companions is the captain of the Besaid Aurochs, but after this, he’ll become a full-time guardian. He was one, before, with me, but the summoner abandoned his pilgrimage in the Calm Lands.”

“Ah.” There wasn’t much to be said to that. Given the trials of the journey, it was a wonder any summoner managed to defeat Sin in the first place. The sound of hurried footsteps caught his attention and Lulu’s, and both turned to look. A young woman with light brown hair and an excited expression approached, a member of the Ronso trailing her.

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“Lulu! I’ve heard that Sir Auron was spotted in town, in the café. Kimahri and I are—” She stopped, processing that Lulu was not alone, then said with an apologetic bow, “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

“Lady Yuna, Sir Kimahri, allow me to introduce Sir Tidus. Tidus, Lady Yuna is a summoner on pilgrimage and Kimahri is one of her guardians.”

Tidus shot Lulu a narrow-eyed look before nodding to both the newcomers. “I am pleased to meet you, but there really is no need to use that title.”

“You were a guardian,” Lulu replied calmly. “The honor remains.”

He stopped himself from scoffing rudely and instead aimed something like a smile at the summoner. “Let us not lose track of things with a debate. You mentioned something about Sir Auron?” he prompted, wondering if the rumor was accurate or just a case of mistaken identity. He had wondered for as long as he had been in Spira what had happened to the man, wishing for some kind of explanation for the man’s disappearance, even if he did have suspicions about that original altercation with Sin back in his Zanarkand. His new friends had given him plenty of things to think about.

“Oh, yes! We’re going to the café, Lulu. Do you wish to come?”

“What of the tournament?”

“It’s a little while yet before it starts. We have time to check before we must be back to find our seats.”

“Go on ahead. I’ll be just another minute or two,” Lulu replied.

Yuna nodded and turned to Tidus, performing Yevon’s Prayer, and seeming startled when all he did in response was nod. After a puzzled look and a quick assessment of his clothing she turned and headed toward the café not far away, the Ronso silently following her.

“She’s young,” he commented quietly.

“Yes. She’s like a sister to me, essentially having grown up on Besaid. She’s very resolute and determined, though sometimes I wonder at her choices.”

“I really don’t understand how you can bear it. Well, do not let me keep you from your duty. I am pleased to have seen you again.”

She nodded and rose, but before she could step away he spoke again. “Lulu, keep a close eye on her.”

She arched a questioning brow.

“I’ve heard some strange things lately, that’s all,” he said cryptically, refusing to explain further.

Lulu turned without another word and followed her charge.

He sighed, having a feeling that things were about to become mightily uncomfortable. Deciding that he had wasted enough time Tidus got to his feet and started for the stadium, absently pulling his hood up to help conceal his face from casual perusal. On arrival he flashed his gilded ticket and was promptly escorted to the maesters’ box, and quietly took a seat at the back left. The maesters were already there, of course, which made him wonder anew just what he was doing, and why he was flirting with heartache.

He must not have been quiet enough, though, as Lord Seymour suddenly slipped from his seat to approach him, bestowing a slight smirk on him. “I did not think you would come.”

He had not been sure he would, either. It was a difficult position to be in, after all. Tidus looked at the maester and shrugged. “Something came up.”

“Oh? Would it have anything to do with Lady Yuna’s presence in the city?” Seymour asked as he took the next seat up and angled to face him.

Tidus rolled his eyes and nodded. “I met her just a short while ago, while speaking to an old acquaintance. I suspect between you and others, her life is about to become quite exciting.” He paused, a pained expression on his face. “Do you really mean to go through with this?”

“It is just a bit of excitement,” Seymour said smoothly.

“Yes, of course. It has nothing to do with you wishing to play hero, then?”

“You wound me.”

He snorted. “Were that true, I would not have needed to ask. I don’t know why I bothered to come here. It’s as though my feelings mean nothing. I guess if you want to go chase after some girl, so be it, but don’t expect me to stick around.”

Seymour’s expression softened. “What would you have of me? There are things I need to do.”

Tidus shook his head violently. “Do? Do what? You have power at your disposal now, and people respect you, so what need have you for revenge? It’s one thing to perpetuate the spiral, but to actively and without restraint wish to become a direct and enduring part of it? I think I must be a fool to have believed I make you happy if you’re so willing to go through with these plans. And what of when you do? Shall I be one of the first people you go after so you can release me from my suffering?”

Seymour simply stared at him, his lips compressed into a thin line, so Tidus continued, keeping his voice hushed, “You know, had I known any of this in the beginning I would never have allowed myself to care. I thought you were safe, having given up your own pilgrimage, and by the time I had any inkling I cared too much. And now you’re wanting to go to a place I can’t follow. How do you expect me to feel or react?”

“I have a duty—”

He interrupted with a bitter laugh. “A duty to whom? You are a maester of Yevon. Nowhere in the holy writ does it say you have a duty to march off and become a sacrificial menace to society.”

A throat was cleared nearby, rather irritably, causing Seymour’s face to go blank. After a moment he shook his head slightly and rose, then resumed his seat next to Maester Mika; Tidus wanted to scream. To distract himself he scanned the stadium for any familiar faces, but the distance and angles involved defeated sure recognition, not to mention the sheer number of people packed into the stands. His gaze jerked back to the front of the box when Maester Mika rose to open the tournament.

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The final game was almost at its conclusion. Tidus muttered under his breath and pushed up from his chair in order that he might leave, not wishing to bear witness to anything his lover might do. He cast a lingering look at the man before slipping away, only lowering his hood once he was far enough off that the guards stationed around the outer circumference could not pinpoint where he had come from.

He was almost to the exit when a gruff voice halted his progress and caused him to turn, a voice he well knew. Auron approached, looking much the same as always, but this time there was a difference that Tidus could detect. Perhaps he had spent too much time in Guadosalam, but he was certain that one mystery of his life had been solved; Auron was an Unsent.

He stared at the man for some few seconds before speaking. “So, you finally decide to show your face. It’s been five years.”

Auron dropped his chin to gaze at him over his sunglasses, a look of mild surprise on his face. “Five years,” he repeated.

Tidus nodded. “Where have you been? I didn’t think you so cruel.”

“Walk with me.”

“Fine.”

Auron turned and headed toward one of the tunnels to the seating area of the stadium, the last place Tidus wanted to go, but he followed nevertheless.

It wasn't until they were bathed in sunlight that Auron said anything more. "You should have arrived the same time as I, though not necessarily in the same place."

Tidus eyed his former guardian sidelong and repeated, "Five years, Auron. I've made a new life for myself, not that I had much choice. Are you telling me you've only been in Spira a short while?"

"Yes. There are things I need to tell you, and promises to keep."

A mighty cheer rose amongst the crowd as the Aurochs scored another goal, widening their lead against the Goers. It made him want to laugh at the absurdity. And then, time ran out, ending the game. He stepped forward, far enough so that he could turn around and gaze up at the maesters' box, and was in time to see Seymour look toward the back, then face front with a mild frown on his face.

Auron stepped forward as well, the sun reflecting off his glasses in a blinding shaft of light, and Seymour's head turned sharply toward it, spotting the two of them. The frown deepened before the man's face took on a blank cast.

"What's so interesting up there?"

Tidus glanced at Auron, not at all inclined to explain. "What promises?"

"I promised Jecht I would watch over you, and I promised Braska I would watch over his daughter."

"And what have you to tell me?" he asked, his gaze back on Seymour.

"It's about Sin."

He grimaced, shooting another quick look at Auron. "I think I already know, and I don't think you need to worry about that promise to Jecht. I've managed just fine on my own and I'm no longer a child in need of a caretaker."

"It's not that simple."

"I don't see why not," he said, then shifted as people began streaming past them. It took a moment, but he blinked in realization and a radiant smile blossomed, aimed directly at Seymour. Forgetting about Auron entirely, he whipped up his hood and raced off, back toward the maesters' box. He got there in a matter of minutes, despite going against the crowd, and arrived in time to see his lover exit the box.

Seymour strolled by him, taking a moment to press a piece of paper into his hand, but otherwise not acknowledging him. It was quickly tucked away as he scented Auron coming near. "Sorry," he said quietly, "there was something I needed to take care of. You know, Lady Yuna is in town. You should go see her."

Auron walked around to face him. "You've met her?"

"By accident, yes. An old friend happened to see me and stopped to speak. It turns out she's a guardian again, this time to Lady Yuna. Who, by the way, has heard rumor that you're in town, and has been looking for you. It would be unkind to not seek her out, don't you think, especially as you have that promise to keep." He had no need to say more, as they were found at that moment by the very people he had been speaking of.

In the excitement and confusion he was able to slip away and head for his rented room. The note, when read, advised him to make haste to Guadosalam if he did not wish to be held up by the operation to come. Tidus packed up his meager traveling possessions and left, well ahead of his earlier expectations.

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Seymour came upon him as he was lounging in the man's bed, a book in one hand a plate of sliced fruit within reach. The greeting he was given was a terse, "What were you doing with Sir Auron?"

Tidus blinked slowly and sat up, setting the book aside. "He knew my father. That's the first I've seen of him in five years. I asked him where he'd been."

His lover relaxed minutely and came to sit on the bed. "And his reply?"

He shrugged. "A non-answer, actually. Getting information from him is like getting blood from a stone. He claimed he had made a promise to my father to watch over me. Of course, he also claimed he made a promise to High Summoner Braska to watch over Lady Yuna." After a moment of hesitation he added, "He's an Unsent."

Seymour reached out and placed gentle fingers under Tidus's chin, then slid them up his cheek. "I don't like him."

"He's probably very annoyed with me. I slipped away as soon as a distraction arose so I could read what you gave me."

Seymour's fingers tightened. "Quid pro quo, my sweet. I cast aside my plans in Luca for your sake, and while that smile was indeed rewarding, I think you owe me."

"Hm?"

“He knew your father. So, just who *is* your father, since you’ve always shied away from answering that particular question.”

Tidus’s brow furrowed in reaction, and in expectation of pain. “I never . . . wanted anyone to know. I hated living in his shadow. I hated being compared to him, never measuring up to him, always feeling like a failure. I hated that I was almost invisible to my mother if he was around.” He laughed mirthlessly. “I’ll tell you, but you might not like the answer.”

“Quid pro quo,” Seymour repeated.

He nodded sadly. “My father is Jecht.”

Elegant brows rose. “That delusional drunk? The one who claimed he was a blitzball star from Zanarkand, and was later taken on by Lord Braska as a guardian?”

“Yeah.”

Seymour gave him a searching look, then frowned. “You’re hiding something, my sweet.”

“I answered your question,” he protested.

“Tidus,” Seymour said patiently, “once we became closer I did not hide things from you.”

“You’re not going to believe me anyway. You’ll probably kick me out of your life.”

“All the more reason for you to tell me,” Seymour said firmly.

He tried to turn his head, but the fingers still at his face prevented him. “I remember, when I arrived here, I was really confused. I pretended I had amnesia so I could ask questions without it seeming suspicious about things that anyone ought to have known. I was told Zanarkand was destroyed a thousand years ago, and it crushed my heart. Jecht wasn’t delusional. If he was, then so am I. Sin brought him here ten years ago, and ten years after that, Sin came back to bring me and Auron.”

Seymour shook his head. “Supposing that’s true, it doesn’t make sense. I’ve known you for nearly five years.”

“Something obviously went wrong. Auron only came back recently. I was rather short with him at first, thinking he’d abandoned me after so many years of watching over me.” He took a deep breath and said, “I know it sounds crazy, but I was seven years old when Jecht disappeared. Auron showed up maybe a year later, and my mother died not long after.”

His lover released him and stood up to begin pacing. “They’ll be here soon, you must realize that. Sir Auron has become a guardian for Lady Yuna. It would be ill done of me as a maester of Yevon to not offer the hospitality of my home to a summoner party.”

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“Yes,” he said quietly.

“I must think about this.”

Tidus nodded, even though Seymour was not looking his way, and slid off the bed, preparing to head for his own bedroom.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“My room, so you can think.” *And to start packing, in case you decide to tell me to leave.*

Something of his thoughts must have shown on his face for Seymour said impatiently, “Don’t be a fool. I have never known you to lie to me, my sweet, only evade questions you did not wish to answer. You were so willing to fight for what you wanted in Luca, and now you look as though you’re ready to slink away like some defeated cur? Get back into bed.”

So he did, and could not prevent the nervous fluttering in his chest when a short time later Seymour doused the lights and slipped in behind him. He was startled when his lover whispered, “Jecht is your father.”

“Yes.”

“Then he’s. . . .”

“Sin?”

Seymour’s arms tightened around him, pulling him closer. “Given that Auron is still around, yes.”

“I think that’s what Auron wanted to tell me, but I already suspected.”

Seymour kissed the back of his head before saying, “You don’t have to see him if you don’t wish to.”

“What, and lurk behind a door so I can at least overhear what happens?”

“You don’t trust me, my sweet?” came a teasing whisper.

Tidus struggled to shift around so he could face his lover. “It’s more a question of whether or not I’d be a coward to avoid the situation. I can’t imagine that Auron would cause a scene; he’s not the type. I just get the feeling he wants to drag me along on Lady Yuna’s pilgrimage, and I have no intention of taking up the role of guardian again.”

“I see.”

“Also, while I wonder if Tromell might find it strange that I was there, that’d be your decision, right?”

“In what way?”

He wrinkled his nose. “Don’t play ignorant, it doesn’t suit you. Tromell expects you’ll either go ahead with that plan, or find some proper maiden to marry so you can sire heirs. I have no permanent place in your life in his eyes, and he’s hardly happy about the people I call friends.”

“Tromell conveniently forgets that those pictures up on the entrance hall walls are hardly indicative of a hereditary line. It’s a miracle I was chosen to take over as leader what with my ‘impure’ blood. Guado are insular.”

Tidus leaned in to quickly kiss his lover’s lips. “But you have a power none of them have ever wielded, and they respect that. No Guado has ever been a summoner to hold such incredible allies at their command.”

Seymour gifted him a return kiss and said, “What of your Al Bhed, hm? You may not have been aware, but they attempted to kidnap Lady Yuna during the tournament. I would not be surprised if they have tried yet again, or will keep trying until they succeed.”

He considered carefully how to respond to that before saying, “I warned Lulu to keep a close eye on the girl. I suppose that wasn’t enough, but I couldn’t openly betray my friends. I owe them too much, and it’s not like I entirely disagree with their plans, even if I can’t see it as a viable resolution, either.”

His lover began stroking his back in lazy patterns designed to heat Tidus’s blood, signaling that their conversation was nearly at an end in favor of things more intimate. “You may wish to visit them in the very near future, my sweet.”

Tidus opened his eyes, which had fallen half-closed at the touch of his lover, and looked at him intently. “They’re in danger?”

“Maester Mika does know about Home,” was the even response.

“And if he knows about the kidnappings, he’ll move against them.” Tidus closed his eyes briefly, a shudder rippling through his body at the imagined carnage.

“I’ll let you borrow one of the scouts if you promise to visit only long enough to warn Cid, and come straight back. I do not wish you to be caught up in whatever assault may happen.”

He smiled beatifically and pressed closer, latching onto Seymour’s mouth demandingly. And his desire was answered when his lover’s lips parted to give him entrance. He set aside his glee that Yevonite hypocrisy would allow him swift passage to Bikanel Island via machina and

concentrated on showing Seymour just how much he loved him, and wished to be loved in return.

Seymour moved to press him against the bed, hovering over him to deepen the kiss and shift to rest between his legs, causing Tidus to groan in pleasure as his lover began a pressured friction between them. He minded not at all that it was apparently his turn to receive rather than take, and abandoned himself to Seymour's sure control.

Those abnormally strong hands began sliding over his skin, long fingers tweaking his flesh or gripping him tightly, nearly manhandling him. Eventually one hand drifted to the side, letting him know, even through his honey-thick haze of pleasure, that his lover was becoming impatient and wanted more, wanted to dominate his body in the most primal of ways. And he welcomed it, wholeheartedly.

Later, when he thought he could not possibly stand the sweet torture much longer lest he die of it, Seymour drove him into the abyss, forcing a hoarse shout from his lips as his body jerked out of control, arching almost painfully.

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"I have something of a surprise for you, my sweet."

"Oh?" He cast a sidelong look at Seymour, curious but knowing that pressing would avail him nothing but frustrating obstinance.

"If you plan to be in attendance, yes. I am sure it will please you," Seymour said rather smugly, then turned sharply at the sound of a knock at the door. "Enter."

The door opened and Tromell stepped in, pausing to bow before saying, "Word has arrived that the summoner's party approaches, Lord Seymour." The elderly Guado studiously avoided looking at Tidus, a silent reproach.

"Go to meet them. Offer them our hospitality."

"At once, my lord." Tromell bowed again and backed through the door, closing it.

"Shall we?" Seymour invited.

Tidus nodded, beyond curious about this surprise, and knowing it was something of a bribe. He would go along with it, taking comfort in Seymour's strong presence.

Down in the dining room he waited, controlling his urge to fidget restlessly. He was cautiously relieved when the hallway door opened to admit the summoner party, and it did not escape his notice that both Lulu and Auron showed barely concealed surprise on spotting him.

“Lady Yuna, be welcome,” Seymour said rather grandiosely, performing Yevon’s Prayer. “And your guardians. We were just about to partake of a meal, and would be pleased if you were to join us. Furthermore, should you wish to rest before journeying on, we would be happy to shelter you for the night.”

Yuna returned the prayer rather stiltedly; Tidus wondered if she felt awe at being spoken to so directly by a maester. He had to conceal his own jolt of surprise at seeing an Al Bhed with them, Cid’s daughter.

“Lord Seymour, you are too kind. Thank you.”

Seymour swept an arm out, hand gesturing at the table before sitting. “Pray be seated. Surely you are hungry, and there is much here to appease the appetite of anyone.”

Tidus took his own seat, directly to the left of his lover, and reached out to fill his plate. Auron was propped up against the wall, behavior that would have seemed strange to him had he not known the man was an Unsent. Of course, he had never noticed anything out of the ordinary in Zanarkand, but he’d had no particular reason then to question the peculiar eating habits of his guardian. He knew, thinking back on it, that he had been typically self-centered during those years.

“Guadosalam is a very beautiful place,” Yuna said in an attempt at small talk as she made her selections.

“Thank you,” Seymour responded. “It is a place of serenity, I think, allowing the mind and body to relax, to forget for a time one’s sorrow.” He paused, then assumed a look of mild chagrin. “Pray forgive me, for I am remiss. I realize that some of you are already acquainted, but allow me to introduce my good friend Tidus.”

Auron and Tromell scowled slightly in response, while the redhead opted to say, “Nice to meet you, ya? Name’s Wakka.”

Tidus smiled and said, “It is a pleasure to meet you, Sir Wakka,” then swept that smile over the remainder of the party.

“Where’ve you been?” Rikku asked insouciantly. “I haven’t seen you in ages!”

He allowed a small grin to escape. “I get around, you know that. I’m glad to see you looking so well.”

Rikku bounced out of her chair to bound over and give him an affectionate hug, and whisper in his ear, “*Don’t make reference to the Al Bhed, okay? Wakka hates us!*” Then she bounded back and plopped into her seat, taking up a piece of fruit and biting into it hungrily.

“You . . . know each other?” Yuna asked hesitantly.

“Yep!” Rikku said cheerfully. “He’s like a big brother to me.”

Discussion degenerated into polite conversation as they ate, and it wasn’t until Seymour decided to reveal his big surprise that Auron made any kind of a move. His lover set into motion a sphere hanging from the ceiling, causing the room to go dark. As Auron stepped up beside Tidus pinpoints of light began to appear, then exploded outward to reveal something Tidus had never thought to see again: Zanarkand.

He ignored the touch of Auron’s hand on his arm to cast a deeply grateful look at Seymour, and was amused to see the smug expression on the man’s face. And while his lover was explaining to the others what they were seeing, Auron was demanding his attention.

“How is it that you’re so close to a maester? And why did you leave when you knew we needed to talk?”

Tidus looked at him evenly. “Look, you weren’t there for me, so I made my own way in the world. You have no right to question my choices any longer. And I already know what you wanted to tell me, okay? About Jecht, about Sin? I know the score.”

Auron shifted impatiently and dropped his chin. “And you aren’t curious as to why you were brought here?”

“I’m not sure I care,” he retorted. “I do know that he was never able to return, and that killed my mother’s will to live. Maybe he wanted me to suffer even more, tearing me away from my life and shoving me into this place.”

Auron shook his head, revealing mild exasperation. “He loved you, you little fool.”

“Yeah, sure, and there really was a Jecht Shot Mark I and II.”

“You’ve changed so much, grown up so much, but in some ways you’re still that sullen, resentful little child.”

“Save it for someone who cares, Auron. My old man tolerated me, nothing more. He was a lousy father, never passing up an opportunity to degrade me when I couldn’t measure up to his impossible standards. And you say he loved me?”

Auron shifted again. “He changed, here in Spira. He came to understand he could never go back, and that made him realize things about you. Why do you think I was sent to you, to watch over you? He knew your mother wouldn’t last, and wanted someone he trusted to be at your side and protect you. He wanted you here, I think to help end the cycle of Spira’s suffering.”

Tidus had a hard time even beginning to process those statements, never mind accept them. “You’re a more likely candidate for that than I.”

“Tidus, we can’t hope to know what he knows now, given what he is, so we must do our best to reach toward understanding. Don’t you think he knows you hate him? Don’t you think he knows it would please you to be one of those to defeat him as Sin, to gain some kind of closure?”

Darkness turned to light as the memory Seymour had drawn forth was banished. Tidus immediately moved away, closer to Lulu and Rikku. Aside from the maelstrom of feelings brought on by Auron’s words, he was rather upset that he had not been allowed to fully immerse himself in that memory of home. Perhaps if he asked nicely, later, Seymour would show it to him again, without anyone there to interfere. Or maybe, he could use it to trigger his own memories of that place, to show to Seymour and reinforce the hard-to-accept truth for him.

Rikku latched onto him again and squeezed. “Wow, that was amazing!”

“It was, wasn’t it,” he murmured, drawing her into a hug from behind so he could whisper in her ear. “*Wakka does not know you’re Al Bhed, or that Lady Yuna is your cousin?*”

She shook her head. “*Everyone knows but him.*”

“*Be careful, sister. You know I hate to see you place yourself in harm’s way. I can’t say I approve of you being a guardian.*”

“*You were one,*” she retorted sullenly. “*And besides, my mission failed, so this is my backup plan.*”

He released her with a laugh, reaching out to ruffle her hair, causing her to duck away and scowl at him.

“Meanie!”

“Whatever you say, sis.”

Seymour interrupted their mock spat by saying, “Please feel free to avail yourselves of what Guadosalam has to offer, and know that dinner and rooms will be waiting here for you whenever you’re ready.”

Lady Yuna performed another prayer by way of thanks and headed for the door, most of her guardians following. Lulu hung back to murmur, “You have a surprising mix of friends,” but then she, too, departed.

The moment they were alone Tidus hastened over to his lover and cast a flirtatious look at him.

Seymour responded with suspicion, not unexpected. “What?”

“You said, from what I was able to catch before Auron demanded my attention, that that was a recreation gleaned from memories of those on the Farplane?” When Seymour nodded he asked, “Can it do the same for the memories of someone still living?”

His lover appeared briefly startled, then thoughtful. “Perhaps.”

“May I try? What would I need to do? I want to show you, to give you proof so you need not doubt me.”

Seymour threaded the fingers of one hand into his hair, to grip his neck in an affectionate grasp. “I can’t bring myself to doubt you, my sweet, no matter how fantastical the story, but yes, you may try. Reach up and touch the orb, and concentrate fully on what it is you wish to show me. Then, set it in motion. We shall see if it works, for I had never before considered trying to use it in that manner.”

Tidus went up on his toes to kiss his lover, then pulled away to do exactly that. A relatively short time later, after a couple of failed attempts, he was able produce several memories of his past: one which depicted a rather painful (for him) overheard conversation between his parents as they stood on the deck of their houseboat; one of Jecht taunting him regarding blitzball; one of the attack by Sin during the last game he ever played; and finally of when Sin ripped him and Auron from Zanarkand.

When the room regained its normal appearance once more his lover looked exceedingly thoughtful, not to mention mildly impressed. “I think I understand now why you hate him so, and why you feel as you do about the game. Having been brought to Spira against your will, only to find out that even here Jecht was something of a legend. . . .”

“It’s petty, I know,” he said quietly. “You’ve managed better than I the demons born of one’s father.”

Seymour cast him an uncommonly empathetic gaze and closed the distance between them to draw him into a hug. “You’ll need to leave at first light, my sweet, so let us make the most of our evening together.”

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He heaved a sigh as Home came into view, and gave thanks once again for the ability of the scouts to move so quickly over land and sea. He had left at first light, before even the summoner party had awoken. He, of course, had been coaxed up from the depths of sleep by his lover’s intent to give him a proper farewell.

A few minutes later he was guiding the scout into a level area within an uprising of rock which would conceal it, and was shortly outside, locking the hatch behind him. Goggles found a place over his eyes to protect them from sun and sand alike before he took off at a steady, ground-eating pace over the dunes. He was hailed more than once after he passed the outer

boundaries of Home, and waved in greeting even as he kept up his pace and finally slipped into the cool depths of the city.

Tidus pushed the goggles up onto his forehead and glanced around. *“Keyakku! Where is Cid? I must see him.”*

*“Eh? He’s—”*

*“What do you want, you sun-blasted brat?”* came a gruff voice.

Tidus spun around, a smile of relief on his face. *“Cid! We need to talk, now!”*

*“What’re you all fired up about, eh?”* Cid questioned with a wry grin. *“Ah, c’mon, we’ll go to my office.”* The older man strode off down one of the hallways, so Tidus followed, and once inside Cid pinned him with an intent stare. *“So?”*

*“I come in warning. Bevelle is aware of your plans, Cid, and may attack Home. They know where you are. You must prepare in case they do.”*

Cid frowned and slammed a fist against his desk. *“And how the hell d’you know that?”*

Tidus favored him with a scornful look. *“You know with whom I keep company. It sure as hell wasn’t Mika!”*

*“This is for real?”* Cid asked, like he did not wish to believe it.

*“He wouldn’t have practically pushed me out the door before the sun barely rose if he didn’t think it possible. He only let me have a scout on the condition that I came here, warned you, and returned straight away. And by the way, are you aware that Rikku is now one of Lady Yuna’s guardians?”*

Cid slammed his fist against his desk again. *“What!?! That little minx! I’ll tan her hide when I get my hands on her.”*

*“She failed in her attempt at kidnapping, so she decided to keep a more direct eye on her cousin. I told her I thought it was a bad idea, but she wasn’t inclined to listen to me. You know how she is. But you need to be more worried about Mika and his warrior monks right now. At least have everyone on standby. Did you get the airship functioning?”*

*“Yeah, she’s ready. I’ll have a team go over her, and more to double-check the control mechanisms of the city. If they do show up we can lock them out.”*

*“Try not to forget that Bevelle also uses machina? You can’t be sure the barriers will withstand a siege against something other than fiends. I expect if they come they’ll do so*

*with an eye toward 'rescuing' the summoners and also toward eliminating anyone in their way. After all, the Al Bhed are heathens, right?"*

*"Blasted hypocrites! Talking out both sides of their mouths all with a smarmy smile on their faces. All right, boy, I hear you. I'll get people on it right away. And you"—Cid reached out to roughly tousle Tidus's hair—"get back to that damn Guado maester of yours before he sends his own people after you. I don't want them knocking on my doors, either!"*

*"Please be careful, Cid."* He laid a fleeting hand on the man's forearm, then quickly loped out, back to his borrowed scout.

When he did arrive back in Seymour's manor all he received from his lover was an arched brow on the subject, to which he nodded. "The summoner and her guardians left a few hours after you did and are surely in Macalania by now. I think the Al Bhed girl was disappointed she could not say goodbye to you."

Tidus laughed quietly. "She's going to want to smack me silly when she finds out what I told her father about her current activities." He stepped up to slide his arms around Seymour's taller frame and press close. "I'm glad you're here," he whispered.

Arms wrapped around his shoulders and a kiss was dropped on his hair. "You forced me to admit to myself just how much you mean to me, my sweet. Of course I'm here."

"I love you so much," he said huskily.

"As I love you."

He tightened his hold, finally having heard the words he had for so long ached to hear from those lips. It made him want to repeat himself. Instead, he pulled back slightly and lifted his face, angling for a kiss, which he promptly received.

"I wonder if that's the last of it," he mused when his lover's lips eased off his.

"Auron's wish for your involvement?" Seymour murmured, then bent to bite his neck. "He strikes me as being quite persistent. However, he has no particular reason to return to Guadosalam, where you are now, in my arms, shortly to be in my bed."

Tidus shifted his hips teasingly before saying, "Excellent point."

A few days later they were enjoying a quiet meal in Seymour's sitting room when someone rapped on the door. Seymour bid entrance, and the door opened to reveal Tromell, who stepped in a moment later and bowed. Tidus ignored the elderly Guado just as he was being ignored; it was simply easier that way, and less stressful for everyone.

"What is it?"

Tromell cleared his throat and said gravely, “Lord Seymour, word has arrived on several matters. To the first, it has been brought to my attention that another kidnapping attempt took place at Lake Macalania, on Lady Yuna’s way back from the temple. While they were able to hold them off, unfortunately the ice shattered due to the stress on it, and she and her guardians. . . .”

Seymour arched a brow in concern. “Are they all right?”

“We’re not sure, my lord. They ended up at the bottom of the lake, but before anyone in the vicinity could even attempt to find a way to assist them, Sin appeared as well.”

“From under the lake?” Seymour asked incredulously.

Tromell nodded, looking rather distressed considering it was Humes and a Ronso he was speaking of. “After Sin’s departure people managed to find a way down, but there was no trace of the lady or her guardians. Also. . . .”

“Yes?” Seymour said rather impatiently.

Tromell flicked a disdainful glance at Tidus before saying, “Confirmation has been received that Bevelle has moved against Home.”

He stiffened involuntarily, then forced himself to relax. He had given warning, and him being there personally would have been of no particular help.

“All right,” Seymour said with a nod. “If you have not already, send the men back out. Keep me informed of any new developments, as always.”

“At once, my lord.”

After the door closed at Tromell’s departure, Seymour turned to him and tilted his head to the side. “You do realize, had they been killed, bodies would have been found.”

“Or they could have been washed away,” Tidus pointed out. “Maybe most of the area is frozen, but there is free-flowing water down there.”

“I suppose,” Seymour admitted. “That does not mean they are dead. I am compelled to wonder if Sin appeared because of Auron.”

“Or maybe Sin expected to find me there.”

“Also possible.”

“I admit, I’m kind of torn. That’s my adoptive sister out there, an old friend, and my substitute father. And I’m worried about Cid. But I can’t go haring off wildly. I wouldn’t have a clue where to begin to look for the others, and by the time I reached Home. . . .”

“Tidus, I won’t stop you if you wish to go search,” Seymour said carefully.

He looked up, a bare smile on his face, and shook his head. “But you’d be upset if I did. And I’d like to think you’d worry about me.”

“You know I would.”

He sighed heavily and poked at the food on his plate. “Heh, if I went and actually managed to find them, Auron would probably take that as a sign that I was caving in to his and my father’s wishes. I don’t . . . actually know what to do, Seymour. Am I a heartless person if I stay right here when my friends and family might be in danger or dying?”

“If you truly thought that possible you would have joined the pilgrimage in order to keep an eye on the Al Bhed girl,” Seymour said with a slight snort.

“Rikku. Her name is Rikku.”

“Sorry,” Seymour conceded. “Even if you took a scout, Tidus, and found them, those can only carry two people. And let me remind you that you are not a one-man army. While you wield that blade of yours with exquisite skill, you are still but a single man, and you are not immune to the call of the Farplane.” He reached over to still the restless movements of Tidus’s hand and said further, “Look, I *can* send out several squads on your behalf. You know my people hold some measure of control over fiends and they can use that gift for the benefit of others.”

He lifted his gaze hopefully, taking in the sincerity clearly writ on his lover’s face. “Please?”

“Consider it done.”

The next news they received came after they had arrived in Bevelle, Seymour having been summoned for a meeting of maesters of Yevon. Not only had Cid and his people escaped Home with their lives, but also with several missing summoners. And, with Lady Yuna and her guardians. The idea that they had somehow managed to wash along the currents straight to Bikanel Island was a bit much to believe, but apparently it was so, and they had arrived in time for the assault by Yevonite forces.

The Guado reporting in revealed that Cid had discreetly landed his airship in the Calm Lands for the debarkation of a number of people, then flown off again. Tidus could not quite puzzle his way through that line of action until Seymour pointed out that there were very few places in Spira that an airship could land without much notice. True, Bevelle was nearby, but the cliffs surrounding the shattered plains would provide cover, and no matter how well

appointed, it was highly unlikely that Cid's airship could provide comfortably for so many people all at once.

"I don't really understand," he said after some thought. "I mean, I barely know her, but I don't really get why Lady Yuna would feel compelled to follow in her father's footsteps. It's like people expect it of her, and she thinks she has to comply. She's probably already here, at the temple, if not back in the Calm Lands."

"I think," Seymour said slowly, "it has to do with the fact that she is one of the few children of a High Summoner. It is almost unheard of for anyone to choose that path in life if they have a wife or husband or children. I imagine Lady Yuna has heard all her life about her father, and people have made blind assumptions about what she will choose. Hearing something often enough . . . you tend to begin to believe it."

Tidus snorted softly, considering the decisions he had made, and his father, then realized that Seymour was also speaking of his own life and trials. "Yeah, I guess so. But that doesn't mean we have to accept it." He ran a rough hand through his hair and shrugged. "Ah, whatever. Maybe she'll be the one to change things. She was at Home, however that happened, so she must have seen what Yevon is capable of."

He resolutely put it out of his mind for the time being, partly out of denial, but he was pleased when another messenger arrived with a note for him from Cid, assuring Tidus of their continued welfare, even if they had been forced to flee Home for a time. Cid was, however, angry that his niece had slipped away when he wasn't looking.

He started to hand the note to Seymour before realizing with a sheepish look that his lover was unable to read the Al Bhed cipher. He tucked it into a handy pocket instead, intent to briefly summarize the contents, when he felt something like a forewarning of lightning cause the hair on his arms and the back of his neck rise.

Seymour noticed it as well, and they both looked around cautiously, only to blink in surprise at the appearance of a small figure cloaked in a purple robe. Tidus gasped and said, "You."

The figure nodded. "Yes. I had expected you to be with the summoner's party."

"I tried that once. I won't go through that pain again."

"I see." The figure seemed to sigh in disappointment. "We so wish to rest. We had hoped you would be the one."

Tidus shook his head in confusion and glanced at Seymour, who seemed equally confounded. "Rest? I don't know what you're talking about."

"We dream, we Fayth. We dream an echo of the past. You were born of that dream, you and your father."

Misplaced

He gaped, unable to comprehend what the figure meant, and watched as it seemed to sigh a second time.

“Fayth Bahamut,” Seymour said. “Forgive my bluntness, but you speak in riddles, and we are ill-equipped to understand.”

The figure turned slightly and appeared to regard Seymour for some few moments, then said, “*His Zanarkand is a dream. Do you recall, summoner, maester of Yevon, the Fayth of Mt Gagazet? They are comprised of the survivors of the last advance by Bevelle on Zanarkand. They, under the direction of Zanarkand’s leader, Yu Yevon, became Fayth for the summoning, what he wished to summon, a desperate echo of his beloved city. From that place which exists not directly of this world comes your companion, torn from the dream by Sin, by Jecht, and brought here to Spira.*”

“Are you saying Tidus isn’t real?”

“Oh, he is real enough, summoner, due only to the fact that Sin transcends reality. Touched by Sin, Jecht, and then Tidus, became as real as you.”

Tidus was barely listening, feeling distressingly faint by that point, and sidled over on the sofa to lean against his lover for support and comfort. An arm quickly snaked around his shoulders, holding him close.

“But you wish . . . to stop dreaming? What exactly do you think Tidus can accomplish? He’s but one man.”

Tidus lifted his head. “Why speak to me now? When I was a guardian you said nothing.”

“You were misplaced in time and Sir Auron was not present. The circumstances were not propitious. We also feared that Lady Ginnem would not have the strength of will to see the journey through, nor listen to our pleas with any measure of belief.”

“But I’m real?”

“You are real.”

He pressed a hand to his forehead against the headache that was fast building and laid his head against Seymour’s shoulder.

“You should expect a visitor soon,” the figure said. “They will come seeking answers. If you cannot convince them we will accept a compromise from *you*, summoner.”

“Oh?”

“Yu Yevon must be destroyed. Once he is gone we can be released from our eternal slumber and seek the bliss of the Farplane.”

“Yu Yevon . . . is the controlling force behind Sin? He is the reason it comes back? This is what Lady Yunalesca spoke of, correct?”

“Yes.”

“But how?”

“Nothing exists forever, summoner. Therefore, there must be a way. Summoner Yuna is presently the best candidate we have for that task, should it be possible to open her eyes to the truth over the lies that Yunalesca and Bevelle perpetuate.”

“And what of this compromise?”

“Lady Yuna, should she succeed, may not be strong enough to send us to our rest. If so, we ask that you do so. Surely”—the figure tilted its head to the side—“your mother would wish to rest, too?”

Seymour growled softly in reaction to something Tidus considered a rather underhanded tactic. Guilt was a nasty weapon, especially aimed at someone who had been too young to object at the time and win the argument.

“You can’t possibly be asking Seymour to use Anima against Sin,” he said wearily.

“No. That would only perpetuate Spira’s sorrow. Should Yu Yevon be defeated and the summoner not have the compassion to release us, we would ask Summoner Seymour to do so in their stead. After all, we will no longer be necessary, and we wish to rest. And you, summoner, would have the knowledge and means to not only do that, but also encourage the Grand Maester to release hold of his unnatural existence, and take Yevon in a new direction. Even if you delayed for a few years, that would still be acceptable.”

Seymour glanced at a slant to the side, at Tidus, then nodded. “I will do so if necessary, you have my vow.”

“We are pleased.” The figure flicked out of sight a second before a sharp knock sounded at the door.

“That visitor?” Tidus questioned rhetorically, pulling away from his lover to sit up properly. “Tell me you have a potion handy? My head is splitting.”

“Of course, my sweet,” Seymour said, and proved it so, handing one over a moment later, then calling out, “Enter!”

Auron appeared as Tidus knocked back the contents of the vial while praying for speedy relief. "Somehow, I knew it would be you," he commented dryly.

"Your meaning?"

"The Fayth warned us someone was coming," he said with a shrug.

Auron dropped his chin in that peculiar gesture of surprise.

"Seymour," he said rather plaintively, hating how he sounded, "do you think you could possibly. . . ? I can barely think straight and I only took in half of what the Fayth said."

His lover reached out to pull him close against his side again. "Of course. Just let that potion work to ease your head. I will explain."

He sighed and got as comfortable as he could, and managed to drop off before his lover managed to say much more than two sentences. An indeterminate time later he was being gently shaken, and so opened his eyes slowly, not exactly happy about being disturbed.

"Tidus? Sir Auron wishes to speak to you before he leaves."

He sat up and shot a disgruntled look at his former guardian. "All right, I'm awake."

"Are you sure you do not wish to come? This may be your last chance to confront Jecht."

He sighed, something he seemed to do too much of lately. "I read something once," he replied. "Holy writ, actually, and not something I would normally pay attention to. But right now it seems appropriate. 'When I was a child I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things.'"

"And how does that apply?"

"It means, Auron, that I'm no longer a child, and I don't feel a child's need for revenge. Maybe I might never believe it when you say that Jecht cared for me, and maybe I will, it doesn't really matter. I do know that I don't need to have a hand in his defeat as Sin. Telling him I hate him is meaningless. I'm not even sure I feel that way any longer, and he's suffered enough already. I know you mean well, but if I become so desperate to see his face one last time, I can do so later at the Farplane." He hesitated, then added with false humor, "Someone just needs to remember to send him."

Auron produced a memory sphere, tossing it to him. "Suit yourself. But do take a look at that. We found it in Macalania Woods, and it was made with you in mind."

“I really do appreciate that you were there for me, Auron. I would have been lost without you then. But I’m happy now, truly happy. I trust you to do what needs to be done, and Yuna is the one who needs your strength and wisdom now.”

Auron nodded. “I understand,” he said and turned to leave.

Before he was gone Tidus said, “Goodbye, Auron,” fairly certain he would never see the man again, lest one count the Farplane. Once the door had closed he looked at Seymour and said fiercely, “I need something from you. I need you to prove to me I’m real.”

His beloved Seymour smiled and took his hand, then led him to the bedroom.

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They were in Guadosalam when they felt that hair-raising sensation again. Fayth Bahamut flashed in long enough to say, “It begins.”

Speculative looks were traded back and forth between the two of them as a result, and they carried on with attention only half on what they were doing. Admittedly, most of the reports Seymour had to deal with were on the order of mind-numbing boredom, but they still needed to be appropriately assessed and responded to, even if it was to laugh derisively and scrawl a denial.

Several hours later the sensation came again. Fayth Bahamut flashed in again briefly, this time to say, “She sends. Farewell.”

Silence reigned for a short time, then Seymour said briskly, “I think we should take a scout and visit Macalania Temple.”

“Yes. And then Bevelle?”

“Indeed.”

They had visitors not long after they reached the holy city, not long after Grand Maester Mika had an apoplectic fit and accidentally departed for the Farplane when he lost his mental grip on things. Lady Yuna and her guardians arrived, minus one. They all seemed horribly distraught that Auron had been an Unsent; he had obviously kept that to himself until the very end. Surprisingly, though, it had not been Lady Yuna alone who had defeated the combined issue of Sin and Yu Yevon.

Lady Dona, it seemed, had arrived in Zanarkand ahead of them, and had obtained a Final Aeon, her sacrifice being the loyal Barthello. She managed to slip past them as they made their own way to Lady Yunalesca. And while they were challenging the so-called natural order of things and forever removing the possibility of Lady Yunalesca ever fashioning another Fayth for a Final Aeon, Dona was making her way back to the Calm Lands.

They were not long behind her, though it was enough for Lady Dona to provoke a confrontation with Sin and defeat it. It was then, as the newly reborn Sin was readying itself to retreat in order that it might fully regenerate, that Lady Yuna and her guardians attacked.

She recounted a number of things which led to that decision. Auron, several conversations with Maechen, and the urging of Bahamut's Fayth. They picked apart the barely formed armor with weapons and Aeons alike, exposing the sad remains of a once proud leader, and then smote him. And after that, Lady Yuna began the sending, just as she had sent Barthello, and she did not stop nor falter until every last semblance of the Fayth were gone.

Lady Yuna gave a twisted sort of smile when she was done, tears shimmering in her eyes, and looked straight at Seymour. "I think it's best if High Summoner Dona be recognized for the Calm. As far as I know, we here are the only ones who know what truly happened there. She deserves the honor."

"As you wish, Lady Yuna. People will realize soon enough that this Calm is eternal. I assume you are all agreed on this?"

Lulu lifted her chin and said, "Yes, Lord Seymour. It is not important who, so much as that it is. Such high honors are best left to those who must not suffer them in life. We all agree that Lady Dona and Sir Barthello deserve to be recognized for what they accomplished, especially as it cost them their lives in willing service to ease the suffering of the peoples of Spira."

They stuck around for a week or so, taking their ease in Bevelle and enjoying the celebrations, though not without some measure of sadness and loss. Rikku took the opportunity to attempt to get back at him for having told Cid what she'd been up to, and Lulu took the time to see if he was really happy in his life. But eventually they all left, back to whatever lives they wished to lead.

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## One Year Later

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He gazed solemnly at the floating image of Jecht, wondering if there was a point to his actions. He gave a half shrug and said, "I watched that sphere you left for me. You can thank Auron for making sure I got it, but I guess he'd have already told you, huh? I still have trouble believing that you changed so much, that you stopped losing yourself in alcohol, and that you really did care about me, but I'm trying to accept it. I've tried really hard to understand what you must have gone through when you ended up in Spira.

"I was so confused and frightened when you dumped me here, but I did okay. I made a life for myself that didn't feel tainted by the past, and I'm happy. So thanks, even if I didn't do what you wanted. I hope you're happy, too, now that you're free." He sighed and fiddled with his hair, feeling quite foolish for speaking to a wavering image that could not respond. "Well, I'm going. I have someone waiting for me at home." He stared for a few more moments, then turned and walked away, back to Seymour.

On the other side, regretful that he had never been given the chance to say anything, Jecht nevertheless smiled.