

Aged Youth

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SPOILER WARNING: The premise of this fic is a major spoiler for Kingdom Hearts II. Please wait to read this until you are finished with the game if you don't wish to have a majorly cool scene ruined for you.

Provided by Fanart Central.

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1 - Chapter 01

Kingdom Hearts

Aged Youth

by Vash/PrettySephy/RikuDawntreader

-Chapter 01-

Ansem was gone, and with him most of Kingdom Hearts. Only a small fragment of it remained, and it was this tiny piece that the last member of Organization XIII now focused on.

Sora got to his feet and saw Riku lying on the floor a few feet away.

The apparently older man, though in truth Riku was about a month younger than Sora, got to his feet. Golden eyes that had once been bright turquoise scanned the area, looking for signs of trouble as Riku got to his feet, staggering slightly.

"Are you okay?" Sora inquired.

Donald and Goofy also wore concerned expressions, as Kairi, who was the closest to him, hurried over to Riku and helped him to stand.

"I'm fine," Riku told them, once he had steadied himself. He staggered a bit when he stepped forward, again.

"You don't look too good," Goofy said, in concern. "Ya know, maybe you ought to rest a little before we continue?"

"He's right," Sora agreed. "We can wait until you've rested up. Right, Kairi? Donald?"

Both of them nodded in agreement. Besides letting Riku catch his breath, both of them were in need of a moment to recover themselves as well.

"Riku," Sora asked. "I don't mean to pry, but how old are you anyhow? Your physical age I mean, not your true age?"

"Very old," Riku confided.

"According to what Ansem told me," King Mickey told them, "Even though

Xehanort was himself only thirty, his heartless had a body that were it human, would have been that of an eighty year old man."

"Eighty?!" Sora was horrified. Assuming they ever got home, how would he explain this to Riku's parents? He doubted that Riku's mother would be pleased with her son's new look. Maturity was one thing, but bypassing your entire life was something else altogether.

"Is everyone ready," King Mickey asked.

They all nodded in agreement.

Riku opened a dark gate back to his and Sora's hometown. It wavered as it opened, and the King looked on him in concern.

"Riku," he said, solemnly. Then he stepped through.

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-Chapter 02-

After everyone else was through the dark passage, Riku stepped through. He wasn't at all surprised to see that they were standing on his mother's front porch. That had been deliberate.

His mother, on the other hand, had been rather startled to see a talking Mouse King, a duck, and a strange-looking two-legged dog land on her doormat.

She had been as polite as it was possible to be while being totally flummoxed. And Sora's arrival shortly afterward brightened her spirits.

"Where is Riku?" she asked, looking around. She saw Kairi, the three newcomers, and an older man she did not recognize brushing dirt from their clothes, as they straightened themselves out.

Wordlessly, Sora pointed at the older man.

Riku's mother went over to him and looked at him, imploringly. "If you know where my son is. Please, tell me."

Riku wanted to lie to her, to tell her he didn't know where her son was, and to depart from this house for what remained of his life. But he couldn't bring himself to do it.

"Mom, I..."

Something in the way he spoke revealed his inner soul to his mother. She gave a cry of both joy and despair, and hugged him.

"Goodness," she agonized as she took in her son's current appearance. "You're older. A lot older. What happened?"

"I couldn't let the world be swallowed up by the Heartless. So I gave up my youth in exchange for a body that would allow me to protect it."

"A noble sacrifice," the round-eared mouse-king praised, "you should be very proud of your son. Even though he has joined with the Darkness, his heart is still pure."

Riku blushed at this. His mother, on the other hand, frowned slightly. "What do you mean joined with the Darkness?" She turned to Riku. "You're not evil, are you dear?"

Riku laughed at the way she had asked the question, as if deciding to be evil were some kind of current fashion trend designed to appeal to young people while annoying the older generations.

"No, mom," he assured her, "I'm not evil. The Darkness has a magical power which I have learned to put to good use."

"I'm glad," his mother smiled. "Now, let us have no more talk of Darkness today. It is almost suppertime. If you expect me to feed the lot of you, you will wash your hands and set the table."

"Of course," Riku nodded. He turned back to his friends. "Hey," he called, "come lend a hand."

His mother watched them as they set the table, wincing as Riku suddenly staggered, dropping a glass to the floor.

"Sorry, mom," he told her. He wanted to sweep it up, but as he bent down, a sudden wave of dizziness overtook him and he lurched forward, his mother catching him and helping him into a chair.

"Perhaps you should rest a bit," she offered, "I can keep a plate of something warm for you."

"I'll be fine," Riku assured her. "I just keep forgetting this isn't a young body."

"Don't argue with me, Riku," she told him, sternly, "you may be older than me, now. But I'm still your mother, and I know what's best for you. Now, get some rest."

"Okay, mom," Riku was too weary to argue, and after more than year of lying alert night after night, lest he be overtaken by his foes, he was looking forward to a night of uninterrupted sleep.

Once his eyes were closed, his mother gave him a small kiss on the temple. She watched him for a moment, from the door. Then she returned to the kitchen to find the table set, and her guests tidying up the kitchen.

"Thank you," she said, glancing back at the bedroom. "You guys take your seats." She didn't really like using the word 'guys', but couldn't think of a better one to fit a dog, a duck, and a mouse. "Kairi, why don't you help me serve dinner?"

Kairi agreed, and soon they were all seated at the table with plates full of food.

Sora couldn't help remark that it was a nice change from the tidbits he and his companions had been eating during their adventures.

The comment was well-received, but Riku's mother did not smile, despite her thanks. Instead, she turned to King Mickey, her eyes glancing in the direction of the bedroom where Riku slept as she tried to gather up the courage to ask the question that was upon her tongue.

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-Chapter 03-

It was a full five minutes before she managed to ask, "He's not going to live much longer, is he?"

The others set their utensils down, and awaited the King's reply.

"There's no real way of knowing what will happen when the time comes," King Mickey told her. "But I'm afraid you're probably right in thinking that his current body is dying."

Riku's mother sat there, silently for a moment, then she got to her feet and walked into her son's room. From within, she could hear his labored breathing. Her heart was troubled greatly by this and she went inside.

Riku woke as soon as his mother sat on the bed. "Is it morning?" he asked.

"No, dear," she told him. "You've only been asleep for half an hour. The others haven't even finished eating yet."

"I'm starting to feel a little better," Riku told her. "Really."

"Labored breathing doesn't equall better in my book."

"I snore."

"That wasn't snoring."

Riku's mother put her hand on her son's forehead and frowned. "Your skin is cooler than it should be. Maybe I should sit here with you for a bit."

"Nonsense," Riku refused, "I just cooled off a little when my body became accustomed to Darkness. That's all. You go finish your supper. We can talk more in the morning. We'll both be recovered by then."

"Riku..."

"Good night, mom," Riku yawned as he rolled over and went to sleep.

His mother watched him for much of the night, until weariness got the better of her. Then, she went to her room and got into bed.

An hour before the sun rose, Riku's breathing stopped.

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-Chapter 04-

Sora was yanked from sleep by a scream of anguish. Getting to his feet, he ran to see what had happened.

As soon as he saw, his heart shattered. Riku's mother was seated on the edge of her son's bed, cradling Riku to her and rocking him, gently as tears of grief ran down her face.

He didn't need to ask what had happened. He knew right away that Riku's older body had finally given in. That Riku had died in his sleep.

The others arrived shortly after he did. After a moment, King Mickey put a hand on Sora's shoulder.

"Gee," he said, sadly, "I'm really sorry, Sora. He was a great friend. I sure will miss him."

"Me, too." Sora said, rubbing his eyes with his fists. "Riku was my best friend."

"We should go," Kairi suggested quietly.

Riku's mother finally laid her son's body back down onto the mattress and stood up. "No," she told them. "Stay. I'd really like your company right now. You were all his friends, right?"

They nodded.

"He would have wanted you here," his mother told them, as she closed the door and led them into the kitchen. She started getting things out for cooking, Kairi hurrying to help her "I'll make breakfast, and we'll try to collect ourselves a bit. Then I'll begin f- ..." the word stuck in her throat for a moment, finally coming free in a choked sob. "Funeral arrangements."

"For whom?"

Riku's mother dropped everything she had been holding and whirled around in shock.

Riku was standing there in the hallway, smiling sleepily at her, his eyes still hidden under a blindfold.

"Riku!" She forgot the eggs that now lie broken in the middle of the kitchen as she ran over to her son and threw her arms around him. "How is this possible. You... died."

"Xehanort's heartless died. It was only an assumed form, to use the power of Darkness." Riku patted his mother's back, reassuringly.

"I'm glad you're not dead," she told him. "When I thought I'd lost you, I was so dreadfully upset."

"I'm sorry I worried you," Riku told her. "I'm fine for the moment."

"For the moment?"

"There is still one member of Organization XIII out there," he told her. "And I intend to fight him alongside Sora. I may not survive the battle. But if I don't fight, Sora definitely won't. I'm not going to let Sora die, mom."

"My Riku," his mother sobbed, hugging him as if she had no intention of letting him go. "Must you go out in the darkness?"

"You needn't fear the darkness while I live," Riku promised. "As long as any part of me dwells within it, I shall do my best to make it as safe as daylight."

He stood back from his mother after a moment, then turned to Sora. "Do you want to see your mother before we go?" he asked.

Sora thought about it, then shook his head. "Sooner we go, sooner we get back." He turned to Riku's mother. "Tell my mom..." he couldn't think of any words.

"I understand," Riku's mother smiled. "Now, make sure you're snug and warm. I wouldn't want you catching cold while you're saving the universe."

"Yes, mom." Riku promised.

He and Sora stepped out onto the porch, feeling somehow that this was the proper way to start the last leg of their adventure.

"Ready, Sora?"