Swords and Sorcery

by Serpent_Tailed_Angel

Summary

Link's dreams of heroism are cut short when he's forced to train for sorcery instead of knighthood, but he gets an unconventional chance when he unwittingly unseals an ancient evil that he's soon forced to team up with to defeat a mutual enemy.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Link knew his first day at the academy was going to be a good one when a train almost hit him as he rushed to orientation. This was the most obvious of the good omens. Sleeping in and only stirring when the school bell sounded across Castle City had been the first. The second had been to discover that his knew uniform, a pure white tunic and pointed hat, had been stained green by some Chu Jelly that he hadn't realized was in the pocket of his old junior patrol gear before dropping his clothes off to be washed.

He still hadn't been sure, as he pulled the oddly green tunic over his head while running out the door to try and make it in time to an orientation that had already started, but once he ran across the tracks just as a train came around the corner and nearly turned him into a pancake, there was no denying it: It was going to be an absolutely fantastic day.

The king had outlawed cursing students as a punishment for inept behavior some three decades ago, but with the way things were going, Link fully expected to be turned into a toad anyway as punishment for showing up late.

By the time he reached the gates of the academy he was panting. Once upon a time the run wouldn't have bothered him. Only a year ago he'd been en route to join the royal guard, and often patrolled the outskirts of the city and keeping the streets clear of monsters. It had been rare for one of the knights to let him join in the fight, but carrying their supplies around had done plenty to keep him in shape.

Then some nasty sage at the Sorcerer's Academy had declared that he was fit to learn magic. Even though he was from a long line of swordsmen, descended from the hero who had defeated Malladus, all of a sudden his grandfather wanted him to do nothing but study. After twelve months of self-inflicted torture, confined to his room or the library in preparation for the day he started his training as a sorcerer, part of him hoped that his tardiness would be enough to have him booted from the academy before he even started. Link missed the fields.

To his disappointment, when he passed through the gates and stopped for a minute to catch his breath, the sorcery student on watch to make sure that only magic users entered the academy didn't turn him away. Instead, the fiend snickered at his green tunic and waved him past.

"New students are to attend the opening ceremony speech in that building." The student pointed to a building made almost entirely of glass on the left side of the academy's courtyard. "You want the room at the far end of the hall. Might be better to wait for the other students to come out, though. The dean hates having people interrupt him by coming in late."

"Thanks."

Since he knew it was going to be a wonderful day, Link didn't think he would be so lucky as to be kicked out of the academy, but he still kept the upperclassman's advice in mind. When he reached the door at the end of the hall, he threw the doors open and strode in. The day having gone so well so far, he ignored the looks of all his fellow incoming students as he scanned the lecture hall for an empty seat.

An elderly man standing at a podium in the front of his room cleared his throat. "Link. How nice of you to finally join us."
Oh. Great. The dean already knew him by name.

Actually, now that he got a better look at the man, it was the same wrinkled old fellow who'd cursed him with a career path as a sorcerer. Link did his best to smile despite that. It was the man's job to recruit those with the most potential for his school. Unless he had some sort of mind reading spell or prophetic powers, which he just might, he wouldn't have known how badly Link wished he hadn't been scouted.

Staring at the man, Link became horribly aware of the fact that they were wearing the same shade of green. Though in the dean's case, it was probably something his status permitted. Was that shade of green supposed to signify something? He knew the long beard and bun the man tied his hair in were signs of his status as a master sorcerer, a sage, and the old staff with a bird carved into it was traditionally held by the kingdom's best magic user, but he couldn't remember hearing anything about clothes colors.

He must have stood staring too long, because the dean felt the need to point in front of him and say, "You can take a seat up here at the front, boy."

"Yes, sir."

With his attention on the empty seat right in the center of the front row, Link didn't notice the dean step back from the podium, nor did he see a student step up to take the dean's place. When he sat down and looked up, he was surprised to see a gorgeous young woman where the seedy old man had once been.

She smiled out at the incoming class and brushed a lock of golden hair back under the white veil that female student wore before speaking. "It's wonderful to see so many bright young minds eager to take up the art of magic. In these peaceful times, I'm certain we can find many ways to use our gifts to better the lives of those in our kingdom."

Her gaze swept across the room, and Link blushed when it stopped for a moment on him. Then he realized her eyes were on his green tunic rather than his face, and he blushed for a completely different reason.

"As the newest professor here at the academy, I hope that all of you will be able to come to me with any struggles you might encounter in your studies. I specialize in light based spells. Those of you who have the same element as me will be in my class."

She bowed and stepped back, letting the next instructor take the podium.

"I am Sage Salbrush. It's nice to meet you. As the school's best wind sage..."

Link tuned the voice out, looking past the aging woman now speaking to the lovely blond girl. He'd been told that his affinity was for earth magic, but of all the other types of magic he'd studied, light was the one that made the most sense to him. If he had to go to this school instead of become squire to a knight, and if he couldn't be one of her students, he might still be able to persuade her to tutor. What had she said her name was.

Since he'd already caused enough of a disruption, Link didn't feel he made much worse of an impression of himself by leaning over and asking the boy sitting next to him, "Did she introduce herself?"

"Salbrush?"

"No. The girl before her."
The boy turned to stare at him, eyebrow raised. "You think the princess needs to introduce herself?"

The princess?

Oh.

Link looked back up at Princess Zelda, who was nearly unrecognizable in her sorceress garb. He'd only ever seen her in the elaborate pink dresses she wore during public events, when her hair was tied up and tucked under a hat. In the plain white tunics the sorcerers wore, with her hair showing through that transparent veil, she looked like a completely different person. Even the way she held herself was different. The times he'd caught a glimpse of her while helping the guards get ready for patrol, she'd seemed so refined and distant. As if she were in a completely separate world. And this school, it seemed, was that world. She looked perfectly at ease among her fellow magic users. For the first time that he'd ever seen, she looked like someone could actually reach out and touch her.

She caught him staring, and smiled at him. Seeing that warm gesture directed at him made his heart skip a beat, and Link swallowed audibly. Yes. He would definitely ask her for help in learning to be proficient with a second element.

Maybe it actually would be a good day.

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When teacher introductions ended, the new students were filed out of the lecture hall for a tour of the facilities. Link intended to keep to the front of the group, looking interested and asking good questions to make up for the bad first impression he'd made, but the dean pulled him into the first room the tour group walked past.

"I want you to know I couldn't be more disappointed in you. What kind of fool thinks it wise to come so late on his first day?"

The statement came before Link could even get his bearing on the fact that someone had unceremoniously yanked him into an unlit room, and for as long as it took him to process that it was the dean who'd said it, he didn't have a response ready before the man spoke again.

"Oh, I'm sure you feel sheepish about this whole thing, and you should. You should feel twice as bad as you do now. Our school only takes the best and brightest. For you to... Blast it. Where's the light switch? It should be... Oh, never mind." And orb of light manifested around the man's hand and illuminated the room. The dean, Link recalled, had a light element the same as the princess did. "For you to come two hours late on your first day would suggest you care very little for this wonderful opportunity. Not only that, but you missed hearing about the precautions one must take as a beginning sorcerer. We can hardly start you casting spells with you not knowing the risks. It would serve you right to hurt yourself if you tried, but I'm expected to keep my students in one piece. Now I understand that your grandfather has been helping you prepare for this day, which only makes your disregard for it all the worse, but we can't leave anything to chance. I'll repeat the lesson for you, and we can go around the school by ourselves. Just the two of us. Won't that be nice?"

Link forced a smile. "That's very generous of you, sir. Thank you."

He'd should have known better. After nearly being hit by that train, it had been so obvious that nothing was going to go right for him. He'd been silly to get his hopes up, thinking he might be able to get closer to the princess.

"Now, I'm sure you've practiced a few basic spells at home, but the magic we work here is much
more complex. The slightest error in your technique can cause an advanced spell to spin wildly out of control. For that reason, we will have to reteach most of what you've taught yourself." The smile the dean gave Link then sent a familiar chill down his spine. The captain of the guard smiled the same way whenever he was looking to humble one of his men. "Now, Link, can you think of any shortcuts you've been taking with your technique?"

"My technique in what?"

The dean brought his bird staff down on Link's head, leaving Link rubbing the soon to be goose-egg beneath his hat in confusion. He really didn't know which technique he was supposed to be self-critiquing.

"Spell casting, Link."

"Oh. Um... I don't know. Did you see anything strange?"

"When would I have seen something strange, boy?"

"That day in the square. When the cart spun out of control and I made the street slant up to stop it." Some horrible part of Link wished he hadn't done that, since that accidental bit of magic was what had landed him in the Sorcerer's Academy, but he couldn't bring himself to truly regret saving the children who that cart had been speeding towards.

"That was a year ago. Surely you're not so lazy as to have gone a whole year without practice."

"I haven't been able to cast anything since."

Seeing the dean's face fall made Link's hopes soar. He'd assumed it was normal not to make any magic work from independent study alone, but if his failure to spell cast was some indicator that he wasn't sorcerer material after all, then his grandfather would have to let him return to training with the royal guard.

"Well, I suppose that's it's not unheard of for beginners to struggle with the... ah... basics." The dean's smile returned. "You had so much magic potential though, I hadn't expected you of all people to encounter an issue such as that. No matter. I have other tasks requiring my attention, but I can take you through the steps of casting a spell. Do you understand the theory behind how magic works?"

Link did. To prove it, he recited exactly how the process of spell casting was supposed to go.

The dean was scowling by the end. Link had given the explanation word for word from the text he'd been given to study from upon being declared a future sorcerer. Meaning he'd read that passage. A lot. More times than most would ever bother. Possibly as many times as someone might when they kept checking back over the passage to try and figure out why, over the course of an entire year, they hadn't successfully cast a single spell.

Which, it just so happened, was exactly why Link had read that passage from the text so many times that he knew it by heart.

Looking over his shoulder, the dean grabbed an onyx marble and held it out for Link. "Try and make this hover above my hand. You know the spell for moving earth, don't you? For such a small object, it should be simple."

"It won't-"

"Did I ask you what you thought, or did I tell you to try and cast a spell?"
Taking a deep breath, Link held his hands over the marble and gathered his magic. This was one he ought to be able to do. It was the spell he'd cast that day in the square without thinking-without even knowing that he could use magic, much less how it worked. And he now knew the theory perfectly. By all means, the way he manipulated the energy gathered in his fingertips should have made the stone lift off of the dean's hand.

But the marble stayed in place.

"I see."

"It might be that I can only work magic when there's some urgent need," Link suggested.

The dean brought his staff down on Link's head once more. "And here I was thinking you'd studied. Magic doesn't work that way. Under situations of intense emotion, such as the panic we all felt back then, it can burst out easier, but need alone has little bearing on this."

Link had probably read that, but he couldn't recall it being a subject he'd given significant attention to. And he'd had a lot to read up on in only a year. Most sorcerers came from families with a history of magic, and prepared from childhood for the day they were old enough to join the academy. What all was expected students to know before they even showed up for the first day was... a bit much to commit to memory in only twelve months.

"Well, no matter. I can see where the problem is."

"So... I'm not being booted out of the academy?"

"Goodness no! Why, a little practice and you could be at the top of your class." The dean beamed at him like this was good news. "We just need to find you a casting tool first. It's not unheard of for those with the potential for magic to only be able to work it through other magical items. I believe the man who helped found Hyrule was quite adept at manipulating the winds, but only when he used an enchanted baton. Come to think of it, you're named after him, aren't you? I suppose that's fitting."

Link had been named after his great grandfather, the hero swordsman who saved New Hyrule from the demon Malladus, and bit his tongue to keep himself from scowling at the suggestion that he might be named after the Hero of Winds. Granted, that was a perfectly respectable namesake. Hyrule's founder had been a swordsman as well. But when the whole affair was given a magical spin, it left a sour taste in Link's mouth.

"Alright. Let's find you something to cast spells with. We can't send you to your first class to have your spell casting corrected if there's no spell casting to correct. Although," he beamed, "I must say, watching you go through the motions of working a spell, you seemed to have it down flawlessly. Perhaps having to go exclusively by theory prevented you from finding the shortcuts that other students develop a bad habit of using? Granted, casting through a tool is different from working with your powers alone, but I'm sure you'll do well once you've had a chance to get the hang of it. Don't drag your feet, now. Follow me."

Link followed the dean out of the building and across the courtyard into a small brick shed tucked between the walls surrounding the academy and another glass building. They paused at the door, where the dean cast a spell to undo a barrier surrounding the building. Once the barrier was down, he opened the door to reveal the insides of a shed stuffed with all manner of object.

"This is where we keep all our old relics," the dean explained. "Usually, we would find a normal staff for incoming students. But due to a... ah... unfortunate mishap with our advanced class last month, we have none at the moment. A lesson in not taking shortcuts with your spells. Not
everything here is especially valuable, so it won't be a problem to lend it to you while you're on academy soil. Once we have replacement staffs, we'll give you one you can take home. Until then, we can make due with something in here."

While the dean dug through a pile of dusty rods and poles in the closest corner of the room, Link scanned for anything that might be nice to use until he had something more final to cast with. The first thing to catch his eye was a vase with a wind pattern pained around it, and he worked his way towards it, slipping between the various old magic gear strewn haphazardly across the floor. The school did a shockingly poor job of caring for its relics.

Just as he was getting in reach of the vase, his foot caught on the strap of a purple messenger bag, and he tumble to the floor.

"You'd better not have broken anything."

With a groan, Link pushed himself into a sitting position and inspected the items he'd fallen on. "I think we're good."

"Good. Come back over here without any of that clumsiness and help me get this umbrella out."

Link turned to say he would rather not use an umbrella for casting magic, and froze. Tucked behind a pot filled with dragon scales was a sword. About the length of the ones the knights he'd tagged along with wielded, it had a guard shaped like the talons of a dragon, with a deep red gem set in the pommel.

"Are you deaf? I asked you to come and lend me a hand. It's caught under a trunk. I would hate to tear the fabric pulling it out for you. It's not valuable, but it still ought to be able to deflect rain."

Ignoring the old man, Link crawled over to the sword and lifted it up, testing its weight. His upper body strength wasn't as good as it had been after a year of study, but it wasn't too heavy, and the hilt felt right in his hand.

"Could I use this?"

"That?" The dean grimaced. "That blade is... We have a few other magic swords. That one is too dangerous."

"This one feels right," Link insisted. "Isn't it supposed to be that if a magic artifact feels right upon first glance, it will let you handle it easier?"

"That... often is the case," the dean acknowledged. "But it might be nothing more than a fascination with swords. We have several other magic blades on display in the main hall. If you insist on using a... a sword to cast spell, you would be better served to use one of those blades."

He said the word 'sword' the same way some might speak of bathing in pig muck, which Link supposed was fair. When he'd told the captain of the guard that he had to stop helping with patrols and study magic, the knight had talked about spell tomes in much the same tone of voice.

"I like this sword."

"Well, let's hope you like some other sword more."

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There were, in fact, three swords on display in the main hall. Link suspected all three were the sort of
'old relics' that were of high enough value that he couldn't use them as a placeholder for a staff, and the dean must have been eager to dissuade him from the sword he'd found in the shed.

It almost worked. The one on the left he recognized as the sword his great grandfather had used to defeat Malladus. Link would have liked a chance to wield it, but it wouldn't feel right to use the weapon like a wand. And the sword with the dragon claw guards really did feel... right. There was no other word for it. Like the blade sang in his hand and made his skin vibrate with a warmth he'd needed all his life.

"Do any of these suit your tastes?" the dean asked. "This blade was used by one of Hyrule's founders. It can freeze time temporarily, although that's much more advanced magic than we want you attempting right now. Time manipulation is a top tier light spell. Nothing a beginning earth mage should tamper with."

"What's wrong with this sword?" Link asked, holding the one he'd already claimed up. If they were offering him the power to stop time, then whatever his sword did must have been really incredible. Or dangerous.

"It's more of a... knight's blade, I suppose. These are all meant more for people who prefer brute force, but that one in particular..." the dean shook his head. "What about your great grandfather's blade?"

Link shook his head. It deserved better than to be a substitute magic stick.

"This one, then," the dean decided, pointing to the sword that rested in the middle.

While the swords on either side of it had been set on stands, this one was embedded in a pedestal, with several chunks of, mossy stone spreading out beneath it. The stone was in better shape than the sword, and the stone was in poor shape. The sword might as well have been made entirely from rust, and there wasn't a single detail of it that had remained intact. At least the stone had some decoration that hadn't been completely chipped away. If he squinted, Link could just barely see the worn out etching of an eye on the old, cracked rock.

He cast the dean a skeptical look.

"It was fished up from the floor of the great sea. Supposedly, it came from the legendary lost kingdom of Old Hyrule. The man who donated it hadn't been able to pull it form that stone, but your family has a way with magical swords, doesn't it? Wouldn't you like to wield a blade from Old Hyrule? This blade is a favorite of mine, you know."

"You would rather have me use a rusted sword that you can't even draw than this one? Are we even allowed to touch that thing? It looks like it would turn to dust if you poked it."

"Just test it, Link. It can't be more dangerous than the sword you've already picked out."

Scowling, Link pointed his preferred sword towards the old stone, and attempted the spell to levitate earth again, this time trying to channel his magic through the blade. The stone shifted and wobbled, then rose a few inches from the ground before falling back down.

The impact on the old stone was enough to send a crack running through it, stretching from the edge all the way up the pedestal, and the old sword groaned.

"Don't break it!" the dean snapped.
"I think it would break if I tried to pull it out," Link told him. "This sword works. I want to use it."

"But that... that blade..."

"That's the first time I've gotten a spell to work in a year," Link pointed out. "And it's only until you get new staffs, right?"

"R-right." The dean took a deep breath, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Right. But understand that you aren't to use the edge of that blade against anything. It's only to be used for casting."

"Because I'm to be a sorcerer rather than a knight," Link said, struggling to keep from sounding bitter.

"That too. But more importantly, that sword has a strange ability," the dean explained. "The Beast Blade can store the forms of monsters it slays, and transform its wielder."

"Against their will?"

"No! Then it would be a cursed blade. We don't deal with cursed items." The dean crinkled his nose in disgust at the thought. "But you have to be careful with transformation magic, Link. Particularly with transformations that turn you into a monster. The longer you maintain an inhuman form, the more you lose grasp of your humanity."

Link's grip slackened, but before the sword could slip from his hand, he clutched it tight again. "Then I'll be sure not to use it to that end."

"You'd better not. Let's get you back with the rest of your class. Your teacher can see what adjustments will need to be made to your curriculum."

The dean took his shoulder and led Link from the hall, dimming the lights in the room with a wave of his hand as they exited.

In the dark, there was no chance of anyone seeing the black mist that seeped out of the stone Link had cracked. The rusted sword groaned once more, and the edges began to crumble off.

The giggle of one who had been without their humanity for millennia echoed across the empty room.

Chapter End Notes

I'm back!

"Back? Who are you, horrifyingly mutated angel, and when were you here before?" you might be asking. Well... I'm someone who's done fuck all in this fandom since... idk... 2009 or something. People still said lemons and wrote author's notes that looked like scripts of them arguing with their story characters the last time I wrote a Zelda fic. If AO3 even existed then, it's news to me. Anyway, Vaati and Link-centric fic. No romance plot threads, save for some minor crush stuff that's just an excuse for Link asking Zelda for lessons. Last time I did something like that, I was anxious about whether or not I'd fit in at high school and there was a reasonable expectation that Vaati might actually appear in another game.

Okay... Deets about the setting. Somewhere 100+ years past Spirit Tracks, if no one's
figured that out. Spirit Tracks is in a different timeline from Four Swords Adventure, so nothing from that game applies here. I'm kinda BSing a little with the magic because I know you don't see nearly so much from non-monsters in the games, but whatever. Fire, Earth, Water, Air, and Light and Dark elements. You're not confined to one, but you're only good at one. Weak to and also more difficulty with learning opposing element. Aside from the randomness of Link being earth (don't remember what I was thinking when I picked that, but okay) all alignments should be pretty obvs. Zelda is dark, Vaati is fire, Ganon is water… No. I kid.

Actually, I almost revised this story to be post-BotW. The main details that matter are that the kingdom got wrecked since last Vaati was scene and that my Link is descended from another Link, and it might also kinda make sense if he had canon knight in his ancestry? But I kinda liked the idea of a kingdom that was more established, since BotW is kinda… rebuilding. Seemed like the kingdom that didn't get wrecked and also has more advanced transportation would have an easier time setting up a school. Besides, there's a lot more undeveloped space in ST to work with. I can put the characters anywhere on the map that isn't somewhere you can actually stop your train and y'all can't tell me that's not what the area looks like. If I went with BotW, I'd feel obligated to constantly check the map and maybe even boot the game up five times a chapter to make sure I've got the geography right.

Also this way I can have both Link and Vaati almost get hit by trains. That's not really integral to the plot, but it matter to me.
The princess, Link discovered, was a busy woman. It was her first year teaching, and she made her lesson plans only a week or two in advance. Not to mention all the time she spent giving those lessons. Her royal duties, he imagined, didn't do much to free up her time.

He didn't bother to ask her for lessons. She might have appreciated the thought, but she might have been annoyed to be asked to do one more thing when she already did so much. Link couldn't work up the nerve and risk upsetting her. He'd always been told by the captain of the guard that courage was his best asset, but it wasn't an asset that seemed to apply when it came to women.

Not that he didn't win the attention of any women. Just not the ones you might want. Middle ages storekeepers would light up when he came to buy groceries from them, talking about what a sweet boy he was. Old women who he gave directions to at the train station would pinch his cheeks and say they were happy to be helped by such a handsome young man. And now he had Sage Rosemary, who he suspected was at least two-hundred years old, smiling at him all throughout her class.

He couldn't cast magic as fast as the other students, nor could he tweak spells with the same ease. They'd been successfully practicing spell casting all their lives, and he'd seen consistent success with it only a week ago. Thanks to the rule that the Beast Blade not leave academy grounds, he couldn't even practice after the academy closed up for the day. But the dean had been right. He did do a better job of following the steps exactly as explained in the magic theory text. Whenever they were sent to practice with whichever teacher had the same elemental affinity as them, Sage Rosemary would set him to practicing with basic spells and getting used to the feel of properly channeling magic while lecturing the rest of the class on why they, the ones who had been spellcasting for more than a week, all needed to learn from the boy who didn't cast as naturally as them and had to wave a sword around to make his spells work.

Sage Rosemary, happy to have such a studious young man in her beginner class, seemed oblivious to the negative impact this had on Link's popularity. When students of all affinities were grouped together for lessons in theory or the history of magic, Link was unwelcome to sit with fellow earth mages. Thus, he ended up making friends with the light mages. Not only were they much better company, not sharing any specialized classes where he was propped up by the teacher, but it meant he got to see more of Zelda. He even had the chance to get one of his classmates, a boy named Cargan, to show him a simple spell for creating a brief but blinding flash.

Unfortunately, no amount of begging would get him transferred to the light class. He was stuck being the teacher's pet among a group who were certain they were better than him and hated hearing that there was something he excelled at. Link found the whole thing absurd, considering that his following the proper steps closer than the rest of his class didn't even have a noticeable impact on the basic spells they practiced.
Link already hated the Sorcerer's Academy when he went in for orientation on the first day. By the
time he'd been there a week, he was willing to feed himself to a lizalfos if that's what it took to get
out of having to attend another class.

He should never have been a sorcerer, and it was cruel of the dean to go and convince his
grandfather otherwise. The only thing that made the academy tolerable was the Beast Blade. Telling
his grandfather that he needed a sword to cast his spells had given him an excuse to take a little time
away from study each day to get back in shape. He needed the strength to hold the sword properly,
after all. And when he got to swing it while casting spells, he could imagine he was out in Hyrule
Field fighting some monster.

That fantasy had grown too tempting for Link not to try and bring it to reality. So while Sage
Rosemary pestered the other students on their technique, Link took a break from his spell casting
practice and inspected the Beast Blade. It seemed to be in good condition. Unlike that rusted old
sword that someone fished out of the ocean, his sword had been well maintained. Impressive when
you considered how haphazardly things were stored in the dean's shed. He would have liked to have
a wooden block to test it on, but as far as he could tell it would hold up if he took it out and tried it on
a real monster.

Sneaking the sword off academy grounds was easier than Link expected. He'd braced for some sort
of anti-theft barrier, telling himself that if he was expelled for taking the sword, that meant he could
go back to helping with patrols. The captain of the guard knew him well enough to understand when
Link explained that he was only going to borrow the sword for the day. It sat in a storage bin where
the dean discouraged anyone from touching it while Link was gone, so it wasn't like he was
hindering anyone by taking it out for a few days.

Sage Rosemary had set him to practicing with forming earth into specific shapes his fifth day in class.
Over and over, he'd made dirt likenesses of the Beast Blade. He made them so many times that by
the end, some of his recreations bore a fair resemblance to the sword. When he caked the real thing
in dirt and claimed he was going to bring one of his creations home to show his grandfather, she
didn't think to question him.

From there, Link crossed over the train tracks and headed for Hyrule Field. He knew the royal
guard's patrol schedule by heart, and exited Castle City into a section of the fields that they wouldn't
come and check for over two hours. It was almost discomfiting how easy it was to get around the
law when you knew it.

Only once or twice had Link ever been allowed to fight the monsters that roamed the fields. Usually
when the knight he'd been attending was already preoccupied and Link had a weapon he could
manage on hand. Now, with no one to tell him to let the grown-ups handle it, Link had the chance to
prove to himself that he was a swordsman. He was his heroic great-grandfather's descendant, more
so than he would ever be his scholarly grandfather's. He wasn't one to dismiss the value of intellect,
but if it came down to a sharp mind or a sharp blade, the blade was what he was meant for.

He took a few practice swings before scanning the field. To his north there was a small cave where
Chuchus often gathered. A little past that was a rocky outcrop where one could find Octoroks when
the weather was nice. Link decided on the Octoroks. It would be dark in the Chuchus' cave, and
even if he now knew a spell that could sort of fix that issue, he didn't want to spoil his sword fighting
fun with any magic.

Octoroks were easy. Link had watched them enough to know when he needed to dodge their
projectiles, and it only took a single, well aimed stroke to fell them. He would have started training
on them months ago, had someone not hijacked his life plans.
After clearing out the area he checked the sun's position. That hadn't taken too long... but it would be best to move to another site if he didn't want to be caught by the patrol. They would linger in the octorok grounds, wondering why a monster population they had to prune daily had diminished on its own. Wherever he stopped next, he would have more time to play.

After that... Link hated to admit it to himself, but he would need to return home. His grandfather thought none too highly of swordplay, and the old man would do a better job of tracking him than knights who didn't know to be on the lookout for him. He would be in a world of trouble for coming out to fight alone. If he was caught with the stolen-ah, borrowed sword, then he might be pulled from the academy so his grandfather could lock him away in the attic forever.

Okay, maybe that was a bit of an exaggeration. But he still didn't look forward to whatever punishment would be in store for him.

The old man fancied himself a great intellectual. As Link knew, the man only walked further from his house than the bookstore when he needed to track down his errant grandson. His grandfather made it no secret that he'd hated being a hero swordsman's son. He complained every time Link asked for stories about his namesake that the hero who stopped Malladus had been too busy protecting the kingdom to bother with his family. To have his daughter fancy herself a lady knight and dump her child on him so she and the mercenary she'd taken a shine to could run off together had only worsened the old man's impression of swords. As a child, Link had only gotten away with pursuing his own interest in swordsmsanship by claiming he wanted to understand why his mother had chosen it over him.

Nonsense, of course. If the old man strayed far enough from the bookstore to go visit the post office, he would have known that Link was still in contact with his mother, as well as the mercenary who was probably his father. At least, as he'd grown up, Link had become aware of how much he was coming to resemble the man in the photos they sent him. Link had never felt fully abandoned, nor had he ever wondered why they left. Whenever he looked at the photo of his mother that hung over the mantle at home, a broadsword in hand, a crazy grin on her face, and Death Mountain in the background, he'd longed to take up a sword and set out on some grand adventure the same way she had.

Maybe his grandfather saw that. Maybe that was why, the second the dean had insisted that Link ought to study magic, his grandfather had told the royal guard to stop admitting him into their training grounds. A sorcerer would have to study for years in the city his grandfather called home. Another swordsman in the family could run off on some quest and never return.

No. His grandfather would be less than pleased to find him practicing sword fighting with a blade he snuck from the school.

Frustrated with that thought, Link slashed at the air, creating a small crevice in the stone as if he'd cut through it.

Maybe he could be a magic swordsman. If he begged, he might be allowed to keep using the Beast Blade. He could study magic like he was supposed to, and practice with using the sword as it was intended on the side. As soon as he was old enough that his grandfather could no longer dictate what he did, he would sign up to join the royal guard. A swordsman who could use magic to back up his attacks could be useful, right?

"I haven't had a chance to peek in on your training, but Sage Rosemary was right. You do seem to hold that sword with more ease than you work spells through it."

Link jumped, almost dropping the Beast Blade, and whirled around to see Zelda standing behind
him. Dressed in her sorceress garb with a scepter in hand, she was probably better prepared to defend herself on in the fields than he was.

"I... I... uh..."

Her eyes stayed on the sword as she spoke to him. "You're the boy who used to train with the royal guard, right? I've seen you around the castle."

"Y-yes."

"I always assumed you must have had your own sword."

Link swallowed. "Only a wooden one. Up until I was told to learn magic."

"Do you miss it? Wielding a sword? It truly is an uncommon tool for someone to cast spells. You must have a real inclination towards the sword, to pick one to work magic with." She smiled, finally looking up at his face. "But this is a very precious sword, so you shouldn't take it without asking."

"I was going to return... Sorry."

She shook her head. "It's alright. I may have broken a few rules myself when I was starting at the academy."

Link had never thought about Zelda starting out at the same school as him. She only looked a year or two older than he was, while most sorcerers took ten years to complete their basic training at the academy, and several decades more to be considered masters enough of their craft to teach.

She must have been a true genius with magic.

"If you promise not to take it off the academy grounds again, I can ask the dean if he might consider letting you use the Beast Blade even after our new staffs arrive. I sense you wouldn't do as well with them as with this sword." Her voice was serene, as if she spoke from a place of deep wisdom. The upturn of her lips, however, suggested she knew the truth. Link without a sword was a Link without motivation.

Link sensed he should have felt insulted, but if he got to keep using a sword, he wasn't going to complain. "I would be grateful if you could do that, Princess."

"And you won't sneak this sword out into Hyrule Field again?"

"No."

Her smile turned into a playful smirk. "You won't have any temptation to?"

He should have told her no again. So long as he had permission to keep using the sword at school, he could claim that he was happy... but Link had never been a fan of lies. "I would like to, but if you let me continue to use it during class, I'm sure that will be enough."

"I'm sure it was enough this week."

Link stammered, trying to come up with a decent protest, and Zelda giggled.

"I'll speak with the captain of the guard. We'll see if it might be possible to arrange something to keep you satisfied. A weekly trip out with the patrol, perhaps? It's my understanding that you used to do that often."
Yes! Oh, Farore, please! "You would do that?"

"That's what you want, isn't it? As the great-grandson of the hero who slew Malladus, it's no surprise that you would have a similar fighting spirit. Wouldn't it be a shame to lose such a promising student because your spirit compels you to break the rules? It makes more sense to me to tackle the root of the problem, though if you do this again, I will have to punish you. Understand?"

Her voice, which had a regal gentleness to it, had turned hard, and that playful smirk had turned into an authoritative scowl.

"Yes, Princess."

Smiling again, Zelda gestured for him to come with her. "Let us return the sword then. I won't mention our meeting here to the dean."

Link had hoped to have a little more time to enjoy using the sword like it was... well... a sword. But he could cut his playtime short if it meant more sword time later. Joining the patrols again! How he'd missed going out with the royal guard!

He followed the princess back towards Castle City, taking the same path he'd come from. Under her escort, there was no reason to worry about being spotted by a patrol, and it was the fastest route to the academy.

As they passed the cave where Link was used to spotting Chuchus, he thought he felt something rumble, and stopped walking.

Zelda didn't seem to have noticed, but when the sound of his footsteps stopped, she looked back at him.

"Is something the matter?"

"Did you feel that?"

A roar echoed from within the cave before she could respond, and the princess paled.

"Did you hear that?" she asked. "There shouldn't be anything large enough to make such a noise here in Hyrule Field. What was that?"

"It sounded like a dodongo but..." But too deep. Too loud. Link knew the fields well after all his time helping with the patrol, and she was right. Whatever made that noise, it shouldn't have been there.

He felt the rumble again. Stronger this time, sending vibrations through his bones. It only took him a moment to realize what was coming, and he grabbed Zelda's sleeve and yanked her away from the mouth of the cave just in time for the two of them to dodge the King Dodongo that burst out.

Letting go of the princess, Link dropped into a fighting stance. Usually, someone on the patrol squad carried bombs when they expected to face a dodongo. He had nothing of the sort.

"Stay behind me," Zelda commanded.

"But-"

"Stay behind me. It's a teacher's duty to protect her students."

It was also a knight's duty to protect the royal family, but Link wasn't a knight yet, and disobeying
Zelda when he didn't know how to protect her anyway wasn't so much courageous as stupid.

"Do you have a plan?"

"Yes. I should be able to handle this." She held out her hand, palm outstretched towards the monster, and a glowing red orb no larger than a fist formed in front of her. "Speed isn't my forte, though. If it rushes us, please help me get out of the way again."

That made Link feel a little better about standing down and letting the princess fight for him. He lowered the sword and took a step to the side so she could throw her glowing ball towards the dodongo when it inhaled. If it breathed fire before her attack worked, he would pull her to safety, Link decided.

There was no need, as it turned out. The orb exploded in the monster's throat, and Zelda threw another as it shrieked in pain.

He recognized that spell. Din's Fire. One of the three Goddess Spells said to have been used by the Hero of Time himself, then passed down through the royal family. At least, supposedly. Until then, he'd never so much as heard that someone's brother's friend's uncle's drinking buddy's nephew's girlfriend's father knew a guy who had seen a member of the royal family use one of the legendary spells, much less been presented real evidence that the spells could be cast by anyone.

The spell didn't pack as strong a punch as he'd expected, though. And her third shot missed.

The monster growled and stomped towards them.

"We should run now," she advised.

"You can't do that again?"

It opened its mouth and inhaled.

"No. Run."

Taking her hand, Link dashed towards the town. He wasn't as fit as he'd been a year ago, and Zelda slowed him down as much as he sped her up, but every dodongo he'd seen before had been slow as molasses. So long as they didn't tire, he saw no reason to worry that they wouldn't make it back safely. How lucky for them that they were en route to encounter the patrol too.

But then he felt the ground rumble again, and looked over his shoulder.

"You've got to be kidding me!"

The King Dodongo had tucked itself into a ball and was rolling towards them fast. Faster than he could run even without an unathletic girl to drag along with him. It passed them seconds later, twisting around and uncurling in front of them.

"I think you made it mad," Link said, digging his heels into the ground to halt before they crashed into the thing. "Are you sure you can't use that spell again?"

"I can only cast the Goddess Spells so many times a day," she told him. "They were gifts for the one with the Spirit of the Hero, not the royal family. We merely hold onto the spells in order to gift them to the next hero who shows potential for magic."

"So..."
"Can we outrun it?"

It was inhaling again.

"No. Do you have another plan?"

"No. Do you?"

"Maybe. You can't channel something similar to that explosion into the Beast Blade, can you?"

He lifted the sword. As far as plans went, his hardly counted, but they were too far from the city and the patrol still to escape safely, and if he was going to be killed by an overgrown dodongo, he was going to go down fighting.

"Probably not." But she grabbed his sword arm as she said so, and he felt a fire run through his vein and into the hilt.

He didn't wait to be certain she'd finished her spell. Any second they were going to be blasted with fire. Before that could happen he rushed forward, leaping into the beast's mouth and stabbing the sword as deep in as he could reach.

The sensation of power in his veins flared up, burning through him as the part of the King Dodongo's tongue that he had pierced exploded.

The monster shrieked and shook its head, causing Link to tumble back and forth in its mouth, and he swung wildly to try and anchor himself.

He drove the sword into something and made sure to press in hard. Something in the monster shifted, an explosion happening deeper down, and the beast shuddered, then collapsed.

Link waited for it to turn into smoke and vanish as monsters usually did. Instead, the King Dodongo glowed, turning into a white light that was sucked into the blade. This, Link thought, was probably something that should concern him. But he'd just been in a King Dodongo's mouth, and had overloaded on his daily quota of worrying.

"That was stupid of you," Zelda admonished. "What if it had swallowed you?"

"Then I would have died a few seconds faster."

"That is not... you don't know that... we might have..." She sighed and shook her head. "I suppose you're probably right. Which is all the more reason that you should not have come out here alone. Does the sword feel any different?"

Link held the Beast Blade up, inspecting it for any obvious changes. The fire that had run through him from the spell Zelda put on the blade seemed to have burned off, but some new bit of magic seemed to be present. At least, he thought he sensed something new. For as new as he was to magic, he could easily be imagining it.

"That sword can steal the forms of monsters it slays. I've never seen it happen before, but that must be what the white light was."

"Is that so?" Link gave the sword a test swing. It still felt just as right in his grip. "Well, I wouldn't want to turn into a dodongo anyway, but that might be nice for whoever uses this sword next."

"It might. Let's get back before anything else you don't plan to use comes after us."
Zelda took the sword when they reached Castle City, promising to return it so it would look to anyone who spotted them that she was the one who had taken it out.

"I can claim I was studying it, which I would like to not be a lie. It's a fascinating weapon, really. I don't know where it came from, but if I ever have the time, I intend to research it."

"Would the dean allow that?"

"Of course. Most of the relics the academy keeps watch over belong to the royal family. If this sword isn't among them, then seeing how generous my family is as to let the dean handle our priceless artifacts, surely he can let me look at one for a time. Particularly one he let that new student he was so excited for use." She attempted to hold it up to inspect, but found it too heavy. "One way or the other, I'll be able to see what exactly it's capable of."

"It conducted Din's Fire well," Link mentioned.

"Oh. It... yes." She tried to smile, but Link thought she looked more distracted. "Yes, it did. I... intend to study that. I won't forget to ask the dean to let you continue to use it, though."

"Thank you." Link bowed and turned in the direction of his home, but remembered something.

"Princess?"

"Yes?"

"Is there any chance, if you aren't busy, that you could teach me light spells? I know we don't start learning other elements until year three, but I think I could manage. I know how to make a flash with magic."

She tilted her head, pretending she needed to think about it at all. "Hm... I think we can arrange something. Not during school time, but as soon as I'm not so busy, there are a few spells I would like to teach you."

"Really? Thank you!"

She smiled, genuinely, and waved. "It's no problem. I'll be happy to teach the great grandson of the hero who slew Malladus. I know a few spells that I think were meant for you.

Chapter End Notes

To be honest, I wrote the first five chapters of this in like March 2015. (So yes, I'm sitting on chapters I've yet to upload. I like having a schedule. Helps to have a bit of a buffer when you do that. This is updating on the 1st and 15th btw, barring any computer troubles or other such issues.) I kinda ditched the project because I was trying to plot shit beyond the intro and couldn't come up with a solid character arc for Vaati, which meant I had no idea what conclusion I was working towards for him, which meant I had no good feel for the story conclusion period, which meant I was just spinning my wheels no matter what I wrote post-setup, but I more recently found the inspiration to actually
address that. So I wanted to give this another go.

Anyway, all that backstory is basically to explain that I had to proofread this chapter two years after having written it. There are a couple lines of Zelda’s that I looked at where I was like… goddamn, I know where this is going and if I were a reader I'd prob let it slide because Link, but if this were a book I picked up from the library and not a fanfic, I'd be super reluctant to keep going after reading a line like that.

Oh! Also, I remembered why Link has an earth alignment: It's because Vaati has wind. Silly me.
The next Monday began with a fight. Link had been minding his own business, eating pancakes and skimming over a book on the basic principles of light magic like a good little future sorcerer grandson, when someone knocked at the door.

"I'll get it," his grandfather told him, which was really his way of saying 'don't stop studying.'

Link had suffered through a whole year of having to spend his every waking moment studying. He had long ago run out of energy to care about the little ways his grandfather kept him from even taking a half a minute break. There were fight to be waged, but who answered the door was not one of them. When his grandfather went to check the door, he gave a half nod and took another bite of pancakes.

Too large a bite. Syrup slid onto his chin, and a drop fell onto the book. He cursed and wiped his chin before trying to rub the sweet, sticky substance off the page. Every book he read was his own, his grandfather having been overly enthusiastic about starting him on magic study, and Link didn't want to damage the pages.

By all means, he should have pleased his grandfather. Studying over breakfast and trying to take care of books. So he was baffled when, a minute later, the old man stomped up behind him and hissed, "What's the meaning of this?"

Was he that upset about syrup on the page? Then he shouldn't have required meal time studying. "It was an accident."

"You accidentally signed up for those reckless patrols again?"

What? Link looked back to see his grandfather holding a letter written on the maroon stationary the royal family used. Although why the royal family would...

Oh yeah. The princess had said something about letting him rejoin patrols. So he wouldn't try and take the Beast Blade off school grounds again. He should have told her that anything involving him pursuing his actual dream had to happen behind his grandfather's back.

"What is this, Link?"

"The princess thought I should join the patrols on occasion," Link said, thinking to come up with some reason he could give as to why before he could be questioned on-

"Why?"

"W-well... she... She saw me practicing with that sword they're letting me use at school and... uh..." And what? "She said she thought... my form wasn't too good. A lot of the spells they're teaching me, I cast by slashing. She thought I should learn how to use a sword properly. That it might help my spell casting."

Had his grandfather studied a tenth as much magic as Link, he would have known magic didn't work like that. As if was, Link was certain his story crafting speed made the lie obvious. But if he stuck to it, and maybe persuaded Zelda to stick to it, then his grandfather would have to accept his story.
"When are they going to switch you over to a staff like a proper sorcerer?"

Never. "I don't know."

"This is ridiculous. Making you wave that sword around like some... some... some fool knight errant. You have brains. You can do so much more with yourself. It's like they want you to end up like that woman."

"Your daughter?"

His grandfather flushed. "You can do better than her. You have a gift."

"So did she. For swordplay." Like I do. "And maybe if you let her use it more, she wouldn't have run off."

"You want to defend a woman who left you behind as a child so she could live out some foolish knight fantasy?"

"Why not." Link pushed his plate back and stood, forcing his grandfather to move out from behind the chair. "I've lost count of how many times I've thought of grabbing the first sword I see and running away from you too."

That hadn't been the right thing to say to convince his grandfather not to worry about him rejoining the patrol or using a sword at school. Running out of the house immediately after probably didn't help either, but it made Link feel better to be away from the man.

"The woman who left you behind," he muttered to himself, wandering towards the general direction of the academy. "Give me a break. You're the one who pushed her away."

-0-

Link was still sulking by the time he reached the academy, and by that point he'd let his resentment reach his feelings for his mother too. Had she not run off, his grandfather wouldn't be half as harsh on him for wanting to be a knight. In fact, had she stayed, or at least waited until he was old enough to run away with her, he would be in the custody of someone who encouraged that ambition. He would have given almost anything to trade those letters telling him how wonderful it was that taking up a sword made him happy for someone physically there, encouraging him and taking his side when his grandfather said no.

Seeing Zelda waiting just beyond the gates of the academy, Link tried to pull himself together and smile for her, but then he saw she wasn't smiling either.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

Two other students who had passed through ahead of him looked back with looks that told him she'd ignored the same question from them, so Link was ready to shrug off her ignoring him and move on but Zelda spoke.

"Did you come back here over the weekend?"

He stopped. "Was I supposed to?"

"No... So you weren't here?"

He shook his head.
Zelda's scowl deepened, and she looked towards the main hall. "Is there any chance you saw someone come by here?"

"No. Doesn't the guard have people stationed to watch the city?"

"Not near the academy. Not during the day. Usually there are one or two sages conducting research, and this section of the city is under supervision of the magic order. It is our duty to defend the kingdom as much as it is the knights, you know." She sighed. "I suppose it's good it wasn't you. We could have returned it before the dean noticed anything, but I would have hated to discipline you so strictly."

Link felt his heart contract hard enough that he could feel each beat in his chest. There was only one thing he could think of that both he and the dean would care about. "Someone stole the Beast Blade?"

Zelda's eyes widened. "The Beast Blade! We've been keeping it in Rosemary's classroom while you use it. It wouldn't have been half as secured."

She grabbed his wrist, pulling him past a growing crowd of curious students and towards the training room Link had his practical lessons in. Sage Rosemary was already there setting up for the day, and she smiled when they entered.

"Good morning, Princess. This one hasn't given you any trouble so early in the day, has he?"

"No, ma'am." Zelda glanced around, looking for signs that anything might be out of place. "I was hoping to see the sword he's been using."

"Ah. The Beast Blade." Sage Rosemary bent down and pulled a wooden chest from under he desk. "It's right... Oh! What is this?"

Both Link and Zelda went pale.

"It's gone, isn't it?" Zelda asked.

"Gone? No, it's right where it should be. But how did all this dirt get into the chest?"

"Is the chest... not supposed to be dirty?" Zelda asked, looking back and forth between the sage and Link. "I assumed... since you work with dirt..."

"That doesn't mean I can't keep my chests clean," Rosemary's tone said she was offended Zelda would think such a thing, but as she held the sword up for Link to take, her eyes crinkled with laughter. "Link, you were practicing molding earth last week, weren't you? Did you put any of your creations in here? I should have warned you that in the hands of an unskilled sorcerer they would fall apart after a few hours."

"I hadn't realized," Link muttered as he took the sword. He'd hoped that his fake Beast Blade would hold up all weekend, so it wouldn't be so obvious when he snuck the real one back in before class.

Had Zelda not caught him and taken the sword back herself, Rosemary would have noticed for sure.

"But why would you think it was gone?"

"That..." Zelda bit her lip. "We've had a robbery."

-o-
Link was disappointed in the thief. Of all the swords they could have taken, they'd made the stupidest possible choice.

He and Rosemary had followed Zelda to the main hall. The princess had grudgingly sent a student to fetch the dean as well, and all four stood at the front of the display where the school's prized magic swords were set up. A crowd of students who had already noticed the change in the display was gathered behind them, standing on their toes to see over the authority figures and get a good look at the crime scene.

The Phantom Sword that the Hero of Winds had once used was in its proper place. Granted, it wasn't the blade the Hero of Winds used when he gained that title, but it had still be a sword of his, and it was strange that the thief hadn't taken the sword that could stop time briefly. That was a pretty useful ability to have. The Lokomo Sword that Link's great grandfather had fought with to save the kingdom, for all its recent and historic significance, was also right where it should be. The thief hadn't wanted it either. It may not have only barely qualified as magical, with the ability to repel evil that was fairly common in magical swords, albeit to varying degrees, but it still irritated Link that his great-grandfather's sword wasn't worth stealing.

No. What the thief had taken was the old, rusted blade from the bottom of the ocean. The one that looked so time-worn that butter could cut through it. The one that people hadn't even been able to pull from that stone.

The pedestal it had been wedged in, and the stone attached to it, was split apart. Split along the crack Link had made. He hoped the dean didn't notice that detail. Sage Rosemary was studying the stone closely, but she hadn't been there to see Link damage it.

"We never did find out what the enchantment on that sword did," the dean said. "It's possible that whoever took it knew the sword's purpose. It might have warranted greater protection than we had provided. The sword came from the old, sunken Hyrule. Their must have been some significance to it we didn't know. Some legend we hadn't come across, or didn't preserve. You could feel so much magic stored within it, but we didn't pay attention because we couldn't use it. How foolish of us."

"We might not have recognized the sword from a legend we did know," Link couldn't help but point out. "It wasn't exactly in pristine condition."

"Well, it was at the bottom of the Great Sea for centuries," Zelda reminded him.

The dean shook his head. "There's no telling how long ago they stole the sword. We may never see it again."

"The stone broke only an hour ago," Sage Rosemary informed him. "The break came from an external force, meaning it was done using magic. The thief is likely still somewhere in the city. They're likely someone affiliated with the academy."

Zelda perked up at this. "I'll alert the guard. We'll inspect anyone trying to leave the city. The sword won't get away from us."

While she ran off, Sage Rosemary rose and brushed dust from the shattered stone off of her clothes before facing the dean. "Have you seen anyone acting unusual this morning?"

"Only Salbrush. Hold on."

He turned to the crowd of students behind him and rose his voice to say, "One of our enchanted swords has gone missing. The blade with the golden hilt. Inform the student guard that everyone
leaving academy grounds must first pass an inspection. If whoever took the blade is still here, we
won't let them leave."

Not everyone left to carry out the orders, but the crowd thinned.

"Where was I...? Salbrush! She came into my office complaining that there was an 'ill omen on the
wind' or some other such thing. Thought classes ought to be canceled for the day. Perhaps she
sensed the thief? Link, go find her."

"Yes, sir."

The crowd parted for the princess when Link followed her in, but Link had to squeeze his way
through his fellow students to get out of the main hall. Once outside, he looked around, trying to
remember which building the wind affinity students practiced in.

Maybe they practiced outside. It felt as though the wind was picking up, rushing past in rhythmic
pulses. He could almost hear a beat with each breeze, growing louder as the wind grew stronger.

Actually, that was definitely the beat of wings he heard.

Link looked up and balked at the large, black dragon descending on the city. To encounter two giant
monsters in one week was already insane, but something so large entering a Hylian settlement was
unheard of.

Maybe it was a friendly dragon. The Hero of Winds had been aided in his journey by a dragon spirit.
Dark-scaled dragons tended to be evil, but it was bad to stereotype.

The dragon opened its maw and shot a fireball into the far side of the city, and Link gave up hoping
the thing wouldn't need to be fought off.

He braced, ready to fight with... with what? An old sword he'd found in a storage shed? That dragon
was still a few hundred feet above ground. He wouldn't be able to help stop it until it came lower
down. No one in the guard would, nor would most of the sorcerers. Maybe someone who worked
with winds, but that was it. The winds were picking up. Sage Salbrush must have already seen that
there was a need for her talents. Link lowered the sword, relaxing his grip...

Which he promptly tightened again as another giant monster seemed to appear from nowhere to
swoop out at the dragon.

Was this one friendly? Giant, bat-winged eyeballs struck Link as even less likely to be good than
dark-scaled dragons, but he had no precedent to go off of for this one.

A voice echoed from above, it's tone snide. It's words were in the ancient tongue. He'd been required
to read the language, since some of the lore on magic that had been salvaged from Old Hyrule was
written in it, but hearing and speaking it was a different matter.

The dragon opened its mouth and let forth a roaring laugh before giving an equally incomprehensible
response.

It swiped at the eyeball, which zipped out of the dragon's reach. The dragon pursued, but it was
pushed back strong winds that spun around the eyeball. Winds that were beginning to look
alarmingly like a tornado,

Snarling, the dragon shot a fireball at the monster. Then another. Then another. Each more massive
than the one before. The first was dissipated completely by the tornado that had begun to tear roofs
off of houses, but the other two were only deflected, and came crashing into the city.

Link swallowed. The enemy of their enemy was not their friend. Neither beast cared what happened to Castle City. He had a sinking feeling that even if the dragon was stopped, the eyeball would only start attacking the city indiscriminately.

Looking around, he spotted Sage Salbrush, but rather than turn her attention to the monsters in the sky, the woman was pursuing Sage Ladd, a master of water magic. They'd assigned her to help put out the fires? Granted, that was an important task, but stopping the source of the fires would make it a much smaller task in the grand scheme of things. What good did it do to tackle a symptom and leave the source at large?

No one was willing to engage the monsters. If only there were some way to reach them...

Link's breath hitched, remembering the was the King Dondongo from the other day had burst out of that cave. It had rolled out, going up an incline at a high speed, and flown several feet in the air. If he went fast enough, if he had the right incline, could he do the same? It would be great to ground one, if not both of those monsters. Supposedly, the sword would let him turn into that massive monster. And so long as he was careful not to lose himself to that form, having one beast of that class fighting for the city out to help.

Pointing his sword at the far wall, he willed it to bend, creating the ramp he needed. An image of it giving out under his weight flashed through his mind, and he tried to make the ground beyond it rise up to support the wall. He couldn't see for sure that it had worked, but he would have to risk it. Those beasts would destroy the city before they ever stopped one another, and who knew what would happen when the victor didn't have anyone getting in their way?

No one had told him how to use the sword to change forms, probably because he'd been instructed not to use it to that end, but it hardly mattered. The blade, Link suspected, was meant for him. Or it had at least chosen him. Or some other such magic mumbo-jumbo. His gut guided him through the process, urging him to hold the sword above his head, pointing it to the earth, and grab the jewel in the pommel. Suddenly aware of all the different type of monsters the sword had killed, it took him a moment to identify the form of the King Dodongo.

As soon as he was set on it, the gem seemed to melt around his hand and stretch down his arm. The blade flashed, blinding him until the gem covered him completely. Then he felt himself change. His body thickened. Bone snapped and reformed, forcing him to hunch over. His legs and arms grew until both were the same, massive size, and his head stretched to be more angular, his jaw splitting all the way across his face. The gem hardened and merged with his skin, splitting into scales, and he felt a tail stretch out behind him.

When he finished the transformation and could notice something beyond the odd sensation of his body becomes something it was not, he noticed a few classmates staring at him.

"I'm still on your side," he told them, or tried to tell them. It came out sounding more like a horrid, raspy roar.

All the more reason to take out those monsters and get back to normal fast.

The students were scrambling to clear out of the Academy courtyard, giving Link no obstacles to dodge on his route to the makeshift ramp. Even though the body was unfamiliar, the magic of the sword let him knew how to move, and he tucked into a ball and rolled, looping around the space he had once to build up speed before bolting for the ramp.
For one brief, glorious moment, Link flew. He unfurled in the air, relieved to see that one of the monsters was in his trajectory after all. The winds around the eyeball beast had been meant to stop fire, and weren't strong enough to disrupt the trajectory of something as massive as a King Dodongo. Link crashed into it head on, and wrapped his arms and legs around it as best he could as they went down. The Dondongo limbs were much larger than his own, but proportional to his current body, they felt stubby.

The bat shrieked in the ancient tongue as they went down, flapping its wings furiously and sending poorly aimed winds every which way. It didn't stop them. It hardly slowed their fall. They crashed into town square hard enough to leave a small crater.

Up above, Link hear the dragon roar. Because he'd taken its opponent away? He looked up and saw a barrage of arrows aimed at it, each enchanted with light magic. The royal guard! Zelda had reached them.

Each flap of the dragons wings sent gusts of winds knocking most of those arrows aside, but those that still reached it hit hard. He needed to keep the beast that controlled the winds occupied, so the dragon could be dealt with.

This proved harder than Link had thought. Attacking something in so large a body while trying not to damage the city further was near impossible. Just turning, his tail took out the wall of someone's home. But he had to preserve. At least until the dragon had been driven away. If he could at least stall the...

He shook his head, refocusing. The eyeball monster. He had to kill the eyeball. It would be easy to crush in his current body. So very easy. And then the town next.

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The King Dodongo never noticed when the dragon flew away, worn out from its first fight, irritated with the arrows, and not wanting to risk attack from three forces at once. Locked in battle with the eyeball, it hardly even noticed the two of them flattening buildings with their blows, and it didn't care at all. It was the buildings' fault they were getting destroyed. They were in the way. The eyeball was in his way too. The King Dodongo wanted to break more of those buildings. Barrel through them and crush them, but it couldn't do that while the eyeball was attacking, so it was going to kill that pest first.

Caught up in its fight, it didn't see the dean walk up to the edge of the square, another old man behind him, both keeping a safe distance from both monsters as the dean raised his staff into the air and began the incantation for a spell to undo the curse that turned one from a human to a monster.

What the dodongo did notice was the spell striking it. That was hard to miss, since it hit him with the force of a train, ripping him from the ground and sending him into a nearby wall. His bulky, thick scaled body should have smashed right through the stone, but instead he smacked against it with a low moan. What hit the wall wasn't scales, but skin.

No longer the King Dodongo, a blond boy in a tattered green tunic slid down the wall and fell to the cracked ground, the sword that had made him a monster clattering down at his side.

At first he seemed to be unnaturally still, but then he stirred. The boy woke slowly, moaning. He raised a hand, trying to get a hold of where he was, then stopped, staring at the appendage in front of him. His skin was pale, and his fingers were long and slender. Nothing like what a monster such as himself should have.
It took him a moment to realize that, actually, that *was* what his hand should look like. When he remembered, he laughed, amazed he had ever forgotten.

"I'm Hylian," Link said to himself.

"Of course you are, you insolent boy."

He flinched at the sound of the dean's voice. His recent memories were jumbled, still rearranging themselves to fit his humanoid brain, and the last thing he could clearly recall was going against instruction and using the Beast Blade.

"Hello... Sir." He rolled over, wincing slightly. The back of his head hurt, and his body felt stiff. A side effect of transforming? Or because he'd gotten into a fight after? His immediate reaction was to want to try and change forms again to find out, but when he stood and looked around, all thoughts of trying that again fled his mind. Taking their place was a sick guilt that twisted in his gut as he looked at the destruction around him.

"I did this?"

"You and the eye," the dean said. His gaze as he looked down at Link was stern, his mouth curved in a frown so deep it doubled the wrinkles on his face.

Link stood on his toes and peered over the man. He couldn't see the eyeball anywhere. If he had chased it away then good... except from where he stood, it looked like he'd caused just as much trouble as those monsters.

No... as those *other* monsters.

"I'm so sorry. I just... I just wanted to help... Everyone was focusing on the damage and I thought if I could remove the source..."

The dean shook his head. "Your heart might have been in the right place, boy, but Nayru knows where your head was. That wasn't the well thought out planning of a true sorcerer."

"I'm not a sorcerer. I'm..." It wasn't the valiant rescue of a knight either. Link looked away.

The dean watched him, waiting for him to finish his protest. When Link couldn't find the will to say any more, the dean spoke instead.

"The damage you've done was mostly to brick. Sage Rosemary can show you how to mend the cracks in stone tomorrow, and we can set you to that. It will be a good way to practice that spell, and to make up for the trouble you caused."

"And you'll do it with a staff."

Link jolted, stirring from his shock enough to realize who the man with the dean was.

"Grandpa..."

"Master Sage, Link is to use a staff from now on," Link's grandfather told the dean. "If there was every any proof that Link isn't fit to hold a sword, it's this. I don't want him near that thing ever again."

"The sword responds well to him," the dean argued, "I've never known anyone to take to casting through a tool so fast. But it does seem like we might want to wait until he's grown a little more
responsible before trusting him with it. The princess thought it best we let him continue to use it, but in light of this... well... we'll have to consider a different route for him."

The chill that settled into Link wasn't from the possibility that he would lose the sword. That he would go back to nothing but books and spells after finally being able to at least pretend he was a swordsman again. No. For the first time, part of him thought his grandfather might be right. He couldn't be trusted with the Beast Blade. Maybe he wasn't meant to have a sword, no matter how his heart screamed for one.

To have that uncertainty settle into him, to still want to be a swordsman so badly, but to be afraid of what might happen, or what other damage he might do, made Link feel as though he were going to be ripped in two from the inside out. He bowed his head and made no protest. Not when the dean asked him to hand over the sword. Not when his grandfather said that he was going to speak to the princess later about rejoining the patrols, if that's what it took to cancel them. And not when his grandfather grabbed his arm and dragged him home, going on about how it was better that his mother had run off and abandoned the both of them, because just imagine what poison she would feed his mind had she been there to see him rushing into battle without a single thought to the consequences.

When they reached home, he didn't speak at all as he pulled off his boots, and ignored his grandfather asking if soup for lunch would be alright. He went into his room, curled up under the covers, and hid from the world.

He was no swordsman. He wasn't a valiant, future knight who would defend the city. He had wanted in on the fight, and had ignored the dangers. He had endangered everyone. He was a monster.

The Link who defeated Malladus, the Link who became Hero of Winds and helped found New Hyrule, and every hero of legend before them who's footsteps he'd always imagined himself following in would be ashamed of him. It would be best if he gave up any dreams of swordsmanship. His studies of sorcery too. What he needed to do was lock himself away from everyone, where he would do them no more harm.

All he wanted just then was to disappear. He was no hero, so it was hardly as if some great evil that he was supposed to slay would run amok if he wasn't there to stop it.

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In the rubble at the edge of the town square lay a ghastly pale boy with lavender hair, no larger than a child's thumb, and easily overlooked by the townspeople as they picked through their wrecked homes to salvage what belongings they could, making note of what would need to be replaced. Only a hundred feet away, the dean of the Sorcerer's Academy and a man whose home now lacked two walls were discussing repairs. How much could be done with magic? How much would have to be handled with insurance? Caught up in their debate, neither heard him stir.

The boy woke slowly, moaning. He raised a hand, trying to get a hold of where he was, then stopped, staring at the appendage in front of him. His skin was pale, and his fingers were long and slender. Nothing like what a monster such as himself should have.

It took him a moment to realize that, actually, that was what his hand should look like. When he remembered, he laughed, amazed he had ever forgotten.

"I'm Minish," Vaati said to himself.
Chapter End Notes

Shock upon shocks! Who could have foreseen that Vaati would be in this fic? What a gripping plot twist that absolutely no one saw coming.

Yeah tbh this fic half exists because the passage in the Hyrule Historia about how Vaati forgot about his origins always bugged me. The whole monster transformation mind fuckery thing was just my excuse for that, and then it was like "Hm. I wonder if I could make an interesting fic out of this excuse I've made up?" I do realize that according to Minish Cap he supposedly has his original body destroyed, but fuck that noise. Every fic that involves him not reincarnating has him resume a human for again anyway, so whatever.

Also, cookie for whoever can tell me what the insult 'fool knight errant' was inspired by. (Not sure enough people are reading this fic for there to be someone who knows another character that was accused of that.)
The Minish

Chapter Notes

Friendly reminder that no FSA in this timeline. Vaati has been sealed since before Ganondorf came around, and also slept through Malladus, for which he is lucky. I had fun with ST, but Malladus was kinda lame. We all could have slept through him.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There were a few problems. Little problems, really. A few hurricanes and maybe a well-aimed petrification or two would correct most of them, but Vaati wanted to get a better grip on his situation before he tried twisting it in his favor. Poor research had caused him to waste too much time not stealing the Light Force when he first came to Hyrule, and he hadn't been able to take all of it's power as a result. Even now, while he could sense what of the Light Force he'd stolen still inside of him, he could tell that it wasn't enough. If he wanted power such that a mere hat couldn't stop him, he needed more. He wasn't going to charge blindly into things again without at least a basic grasp of what he was doing.

First off, his clothes. They were tattered. Not even close to presentable. Like all Minish, Vaati was deft with crafting and repairs, and could sew up most of the damage fast enough, but magic was faster. He had lost his wishing hat, but he vaguely recalled having lacked it the last time he was freed from the sword. The first Link he encountered must have stolen it. No matter. He already had all the power it could grant him and then some. Since he'd woken up in the wreckage of a house, he could easily grab some spare fabric to quickly enchant into a hat. It lacked the decorative gem and golden band of his old hat, but it would have to do. All of the clothing would return to its previous condition if cut off from his magic, but he could find the time to mend it properly once he had addressed all the other slightly less pressing issues.

Second. where was he? Some of the land marks looked... sort of similar, but most he didn't recognize. His memories during his time in his monstrous Wrath form were still sorting themselves out, and the ones he could recall had a fuzziness to them from having been formed while he was disconnected from his original identity. He knew Hyrule had changed a little between when Link first defeated him and when he had managed to break free of his seal the first time, but this was too much. It was all good and fine to completely restructure cities over the centuries, but land masses weren't supposed to move around that much.

The geography was too different. The people around him weren't even speaking the right language, which was going to get annoying fast. When he'd switched into a Hylian form to move around easier, several people had run up to him asking questions. Probably whether or not he was okay, based on their tone and expression, but he hadn't been sure. When the only response he'd given was to stare stupidly and ask what they were talking about in proper Hylian, they had given up and gone back to picking at the rubble.

That had irked him. Using the wrong language made him look like a fool. And he knew there were other, similar looking races, but the people he saw had the pointed ears of a Hylian. By all means it should have been Hylians around him.

Third, when was he? It seemed he'd been fortunate enough that no one noticed him changing from a
monster into a Minish, and then something that resembled a Hylian. That so few noticed Minish in the first place no doubt helped. But surely so much time hadn't passed that stories of the great Wind Mage Vaati had faded to the point where even his monster form didn't alarm someone. Everyone was unsettled, but it was the kind of unsettled you would expect from any run of the mill monster attack on a town or city. There was none of that panic that had accompanied Vaati's last break from the sword. Usually, when a sealed evil escaped it's prison, there was a panic. Did they not realize what had happened? The Wind Mage was loose again, and with the Four Sword shattered his mercy and restraint was all that kept them from turning to statues. That he should be that forgettable after all the trouble he caused made him bristle.

Then again, maybe that much time had passed after all. The sword had been awfully rusted when he broke it, and while wandering into parts of the city he had come across a bit of street with an odd pattern on it. The stone tile had stopped abruptly, replaced with two parallel metal strips with wooden planks running between them. He had stood there, staring at it, until a whistle made him jump and a stranger yanked him back just before a large, metal object sped past.

Vaati had gawked at the thing. A wheeled monster that was pulled by nothing and ran without the power of any magic that he could detect. What in Din's name was it, and how had people figured out how to make it do that? He attempted to ask the stranger who had pulled him to safety, and from the confused look they gave him, wondered if he has mistakenly spoken in Minish before recalling that whatever language the people around him spoke, it wasn't Hylian.

He would need to learn a new language before he could get anywhere. Frustrated, he kicked a piece of roof that had fallen from when the dragon had tried to set the city on fire.

What was with that stupid dragon anyway? Vaati had never known a dragon to come out and attack on its own. They jealously guarded their hoards or nests, and only came out to initiate an attack when someone who won their servitude ordered them to. The city might have had some enticing treasure, but from the moment Vaati announced his presence, the dragon focused more on him than anything else. That could easily be because he put himself between the dragon and whatever the real target was, but most dragons were self-assured enough not to stop and focus on an obstacle Vaati's size before taking at least a few hits. That arrogance made them easy to subjugate, but also easy for crusaders of justice to overcome.

So who had ordered the dragon out? It wasn't him, obviously, and Vaati couldn't think of any others who might have wrestled such a beast into obeying their will. But then he wasn't in Hyrule anymore. Maybe there were other great villains in other lands? Which meant he would need to show up whoever it was that liked to loom over whatever kingdom he was currently in. He was, after all, the greatest sorcerer alive. There wasn't much point to a title like that if you didn't show off a little.

What a pain. He still didn't know where he was and now he needed to show up some villain he knew nothing about. He plopped down on what little was left of the wall of a home that had been burned, sulking. The last time he'd been freed from the sword, there had been a princess right there for him to grab. A Sky Palace for him to head right to. A land he was somewhat familiar with to make plans to wreak havoc across.

This time he had to start from scratch.

He had to start from scratch with competition. Scowling, the brief conversation replayed in his mind, and he wished he'd kept the dragon talking longer. Monster him had been too eager to kill it and move on.

What's this? Here I am thinking that with the sword broken, I can have free reign of the skies once more, only to have an overgrown lizard like you think he can flaunt his pathetic fire in my turf.
How strange. I was thinking it was finally time to claim the land I had been preparing for my rule over for years now, only to have an overgrown eyeball think he can show up out of nowhere and claim what is mine.

What an obnoxious dragon. And it seemed to be the only thing around for miles that he could talk to, no less. Assuming it hadn't already flown miles away. That second monster that joined the fight was one he didn't recognize. A species that had emerged since the last time he'd been free? Whatever it was, it fought too intelligently to be dismissed as the same rabble as the common monster, even if it hadn't seemed intelligent enough for speech.

Vaati was still fuming over them both, as well as this whole strange place he'd been released into, when an old man stopped in front of him and started babbling in the strange language everyone around him spoke.

Vaati glared up at the man, then quickly averted his gaze. Something about that voice, that hair, that wrinkled face irritated him. He could sense the old man was a powerful sorcerer, but not more powerful than him, and therefore not worth paying attention to.

The man repeated what he'd said, firmer than before.

"I don't know why you bother. A brighter man would have noticed by now that I'm not interested."

The man paused, then switched to proper Hylian, speaking with the fluency of much study, and the speed of someone with little practical practice. "Are you studying ancient magic?"

"No." What was there to study? The only power he had yet to master was his portion of the Light Force, and there were no books on how to do that. Practical exploration of his magic would suit him fine once he had a better sense of who made for the best target practice.

The old man laughed, apparently taking Vaati's remark for sarcasm. "Dedicated to learning it, are you? I can help you practice with the language, if you like. What is your area of study? Who approved that color for your clothes?"

Vaati looked down at his clothes. Cape, tunic, shorts, and sandals. The man was dressed similarly, albeit in a shade of green that gave Vaati bad flashbacks. If that was what scholars all wore in this new kingdom, he was going to need to find a new outfit.

"No one. I wear what I want."

The old man scowled. "Students at the academy must keep to the uniform. Was that cape approved?"

Academy students? Vaati eyed the man suspiciously. This had to be some kind of setup.

But when he looked closer, he saw that not only was the old man wearing an emerald green tunic, but that quite a few of the civilians wandering around in shock from whom Vaati could sense magic were in similarly cut tunics, many white, all with pointed hats. A school uniform?

"I'm not a student."

"You're not?" The man looked confused. "Your clothes look like our uniform, and no one outside of the Sorcery Academy learns Ancient Hylian in this day and age. And I can see you have a great potential for magic."

That last one was praise that Vaati would usually have eaten up, but his attention was locked in an earlier point of the conversation. "Ancient?"
"Yes. What else would it be called?"

"Hylian."

"I suppose that as it's an ancient version of Hylian, you're not wrong, but the Hylian language has evolved a great degree since the last known record of the ancient version you speak."

So... it was Hylian that everyone around him spoke? But... But everything was too different.

"Hyrule's change a great degree since they used the ancient language too," he said in a sad attempt at cautious probing.

"Of course it has. They had to reestablish the kingdom in a new land after the great flood."

Vaati's awareness of the world beyond the Four Sword while sealed hadn't been the greatest. When the seal was weak, when the reincarnations of those brats who first sealed him visited his shrine, he could pay attention to what happened around him, but when alone, he was trapped within the sword, sensing only what effected the sword directly. Because the sensation of wind breezing over the metal had helped to keep him calm all those years, he did remember the blade being surrounded by water rather than air. There was no sense of time in the sword to help him know how long it stayed wet, but given how the Four Sword had ended up in such a pitiful state when he broke free, it must have been more than just his imagination that it was a long time. But even then, that the entire kingdom had flooded was news to him. He would have guessed that the sword's shrine was hidden by some water maiden before he guessed the kingdom at large was submerged. Hyrule had so many sacred grounds, too.

"Why didn't they wait for the water to recede before returning?" Vaati asked, giving up on trying to look like he might be at least tangentially in the loop. He'd clearly missed too much for that.

The man laughed. "The Great Ocean is not about to recede. Are you from further inland? I did not realize they speak Ancient Hylian in other lands."

It made Vaati bristle to be laughed at... but until he resolved this language issue it would be a little tricky to tell his soon to be subjects what he expected of them. If this was where Hyrule resettled, then any important bits of Hyrule that could move, such as the royal family and the last bit of Light Force he needed from them, were likely still there. He was where he wanted to be, and this obnoxious old man was his best bet for getting his footing.

"I come from very far inland," Vaati told him. "I heard legends of the old Hyrule, and wasn't expecting this."

"I think you'll find the new Hyrule to your liking."

"I might." It made him feel sick to say it to this man, but it was the best way to get what he wanted fast. "You say there's an academy for sorcerers here? I would like to join, if my not knowing the local language isn't too big an issue."

The man smiled, happy to have a new pupil. "We have several sages at the academy who studied the ancient tongue, and could work with you in learning to speak with your fellow students. Myself and Salbrush are best versed in it, but the princess, Zelda, is also quite skilled." He probably said something after that about how they could accommodate him, but Vaati didn't hear it.

Zelda was at this academy? It wouldn't be the same princess as before, but it would be a descendant, and that was exactly what he needed.

He hadn't been able to steal the Light Force for himself in full before, with Link and his obnoxious
old master Ezlo getting in his way. And when he'd freed himself from the sword for the first time, he had worn the body of a monster so long that he truly thought himself one. His desire to claim the princess he remembered, but the reason for his fascination for her had been forgotten. Now he could remember what he'd meant to do as a Minish. Where his failings had been trying to steal the Light Force all those years ago. He could even remember a few details of where he'd failed his second time.

As a monster, he'd been too hasty, too barbaric, really, and too much of a blasted amnesiac to learn from his past mistakes, but he had the advantage this time. He had encountered Link and Zelda twice before, in their different incarnations, and this latest set would be facing him for their first time with, it seemed, not even legends to warn them of what he might be capable of.

If Zelda was there, Vaati had no doubt Link was lurking somewhere, ready to spring out at him like some fool hero.

This time he wouldn't make any of the mistakes from before. He would pose as a student at that silly academy and keep an eye on Zelda while watching for Link. That thorn in his side would be removed from the equation before he moved in to take what of the Light Force still lingered in the royal line. Who would break the curse on everyone when he petrified the hero first?

Chapter End Notes

Honestly I'm not so clear on what the parameters for Vaati's magic are. He's a wind mage, but he also does a lot of shapeshifty stuff, petrifies people, summons monsters, and sets things on fire. He could change his clothes between the various humanoid forms he transformed into, so I'm just assuming he has a spell for that. (I blame Nintendo for being vague on this stuff. And Capcom a little too, I guess.) I totally love the trains by the way. At some point in this fic, I need to have them actually hit someone for real. This will happen. It's a must. The story will not have fulfilled it's purpose in life if I don't find a good spot to fit that in.

I don't usually announce schedules so much as count on people to maybe notice them and maybe not, but it occurred to me that if I'm trying to do two evenly spaced updates a month, then the 1st and 16th works better than the 15th. So this isn't a day late. I just posted it a day early last month. (Also, the possibility exists that some months from now I'll drop down to once a month? One of the things really holding my attention on the Zelda fandom kinda crashed, caught fire, and then I poured gasoline on it. I hate giving up on stories so I will see this one through, but it does require a bit more self-motivation on my part so there is a greater risk of slowing down. Just a heads up.)
The New Student

Chapter Notes

Sorry. This was supposed to go up yesterday but life happened. Also, apologies if anyone got an update note the other week only for chapter 5 to not be here. I accidentally posted chapter 36 of my other fic to this story and then deleted it really fast.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Vaati quickly discovered that academy was awful.

For one, most of the students were taller than him, which was just embarrassing. You looked absurd if you tried to look down your nose at someone when they stood half a head over you. Having a very different frame of reference from the larger species as to what constituted a reasonable size, the form Vaati had crafted for himself all those years ago to appear Hylian was a little smaller than he had learned that most Hylians entering the school were. At the time of its creation he hadn't been used to being so large anyway, but any sentimentality for his original form was long dead, and his shorter body was now a nuisance. There was no fixing it either. Not while he put on the appearance of someone who needed to learn the basics of magic.

Worse, he still didn't speak the same language as most of the students. Although he suspected they had mistaken him for a child who wandered into the school grounds after some older sibling, given the way they smiled broadly at him and spoke slowly and sweetly, gesturing to the door. He was an ancient being who they all ought to kneel to and beg for mercy. It took much self control to not curse them on the spot for their impudence.

Sage Salbrush, who was to be his main instructor, had done the same, to which he had rolled his eyes and told her, in proper Hylian, that he was a late start student who the dean had said could attend.

Unfortunately, she stopped treating him like a child only to treat him like a bio-hazard, keeping her distance and refusing to touch him. He wouldn't have minded the hands off policy. She was at least eighty, and old women weren't his thing. But the old lady was so... so... in the personal space of everyone else in the class. She would hold their hands and guide them through the wrist motions needed to create a simple breeze. He couldn't understand what anyone else said, but the way people side-eyed him whenever the hands-on instructor kept her distance made him certain there was quite a bit of speculating about him being discussed openly.

Since he could tell that the students were mostly being corrected on their terrible form, he made a point of showing off how excellent his was. In part this was to be the best in the room, but it was also to excuse her avoiding contact with him. Several of the students had already picked up on the fact that he had somehow unnerved the old lady, and if too many people took to avoiding him, then he would be hard pressed to get worthwhile information from the worms. Not to mention, it might tip Zelda off.

He had caught sight of the princess surveying damage done to the walls running around the academy earlier that morning. One section of wall was bent over for no reason Vaati could understand. His tornadoes had been more for ripping things from their foundation, and the dragon was more the burny type.
She vanished before he could get close. Not that it mattered. Just a glimpse had been enough to
determine she was the real deal. What of the Light Force Vaati held enabled him sense that she
possessed the rest of the power he sought. That meant she might also be able to sense part of the
Light Force in him, but until he noticed her acting strange in his presence, he wouldn't worry about
that. No one seemed to know his legend, and he was looking at the silver lining in that. No one
remembered his greatness, but they also didn't remember his failure, and his relative anonymity made
it easier to lay out plans that his enemies couldn't possibly know to prepare for.

Still no sign of Link, but Vaati kept his eyes peeled. The white tunics everyone wore resembled his
memories of that blasted hero too closely, and while he doubted any incarnation of that idiot had the
brains to learn magic, he half suspected to see Link turn up in a class for the clothes alone. Maybe
even in green instead of white. Vaati had forgone the cape, but kept the rest of his attire the same,
and while his disregard for the school uniform contributed to the odd looks he received, he refused to
be so average as to wear an identical uniform to hundreds of children.

During any class time spent on something other than practicing magic, Vaati was lead to private
lessons to help him learn the modern tongue. He had kept his ears on what gossip he could looking
for words with obvious meanings. The new Hylian language being derived from the old one, he had
found that a fair few words were merely adopted from the language he knew, but it was random
which words he could more or less recognize, and the lessons, as much as he disliked having to sit
through them, were necessary if he wanted to speak with anyone and collect the information he
needed.

By the end of the day he was seriously questioning his plan. He'd only caught a glimpse of the
princess, and didn't know where to start looking for Link.

The mere thought of pretending he couldn't do anything beyond basic wind spells had caused him
physical pain, but he bit the bullet and acted like he need schooling, giving a flawless performance of
only the spells that his group was supposed to already know. And he was learning New Hylian, so
even if he never got close to the princess while playing the part of a student, he was being kind of
productive.

Students filtered out of the building when a bell rang to signal, Vaati gathered, that classes were over
for the day. And here was where he encountered a much worse stumbling block than the teacher
having a vague feeling that he was to be avoided.

Where was he supposed to go after school? If he absolutely had to, he could change back into a
Minish form and find some cranny in the school to sleep in. But magic was a power that could be
detected by its strength regardless of the bearer's size. That creepy dean might notice his power
lingering in the building and track him down. Being able to start over with a blank slate, Vaati was
keen on keeping his ability to change forms a secret as long as possible. Shapeshifting was advanced
sorcery, involving multiple elements at once but relying heavily on the dark element. Well beyond
what any student, much less a beginner wind student, should know. And he didn't dare change into
any monster that might be reasonably expected to possess magic and take up some nest in the area
around the city either. Someone should have warned him that you lost your mind when you did that!

Actually... Ezlo probably had mentioned it to him. Up until that whole stealing the Wishing Cap
thing, Vaati had been a decent apprentice to the old man, but he might not have always paid attention
to the risks involved in certain crafts and spells.

Well, Ezlo shouldn't have mentioned so many risks associated with so many spells Vaati had never
cared about! Then it would have been easier to focus on the relevant ones.

That old loony's failings as a master aside, Vaati needed a solution for lodging. He supposed he
could ask the dean, but as much as possible he wanted not to deal with the man. It wasn't that he was afraid. The greatest sorcerer in the world feared no one. Something about the dean just... bothered him. That was all. He wasn't unsettled. He just didn't want to deal with the annoyance.

He looked towards the building he suspected the dean's office to be in, considering the situation. There were only three people in the whole city that he knew he could talk to. One had made a point of avoiding him as soon as class let out, and the second was a princess. There wasn't anything physically stopping him from an audience with the princess, but if he wanted to keep up his act of being a good, foreign student, then forcing his way into Zelda's quarters wasn't the best course of action. Unless he wanted to squat somewhere for the night again, he would need to speak with the dean.

Movement caught Vaati's eye, and his attention shifted from the building to the wall, which was still bent over, but now straightening itself out. A boy stood in front of it, pointing a sword at the target of his spell.

At first, Vaati scoffed. Peons who could only work magic through tools were of no interest to him. But then the boy turned, studying the stretch of wall that he'd repaired, and Vaati saw his face. His breath hitched, and he couldn't look away. That was undeniably Link. Or Link's latest incarnation, at least. He sincerely hoped that the third incarnation of the boy he encountered would have a different name than the last two.

The boy straightened out his hat and looked over at an old man with a similar face, saying something. The old man nodded, and they moved to the next patch of wall.

Link was in a school for sorcerers? His tunic was the same white as all the students, even if he still wore the same green hat. The one this latest Link wore was a simple pointed hat, but it was the same shade of green that Ezlo had been after Vaati cursed him. Was there a word for the disgust version of nostalgia? Whatever the sensation was called, he hated that hat. Why did Link even need his hat to be green when the school uniform was white? He must have picked that color just to be a nuisance.

Link glanced his way, and caught Vaati glaring at him. For a moment he started, then he smiled uncomfortably and offered a hesitant wave. The old man saw him too, and smiled much more pleasantly. Too pleasantly. Vaati suspected he'd been mistaken for a child again.

Well... fine. That misconception had its advantages.

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Link hadn't wanted to show his face at school. There were classmates who'd seen him turn into that monster, and he couldn't bear to face them, knowing that they knew what a failure he was. He couldn't really bear to face anyone knowing for himself what a failure he was. But having done so much damage to the town square, he was obligated to help fix things.

Sage Rosemary had met with him at the town square before class, going over the spell for sealing the cracks in stones. "You can merge separate types of stone with this spell too, but your goal is to make everything look the same as it did yesterday morning. Merging two types of stone can come later."

With his grandfather tagging along to supervise while he held the Beast Blade, Link didn't dare let the woman know what he intended to be drop out of the academy well before getting to that point in his studies. He could find some job or another. Maybe work as a mailman. And he would just pretend he was still in school until he was old enough to leave home.

Fortunately for him, none of the common folk knew who was responsible for their homes being
destroyed. Rather than sneer or snap at him for the damage he'd done, they commented on what a helpful young man he was to sacrifice his day to help fix up the city. It made him nauseas, but having someone lash out at him for it would only make him feel worse still.

"We were probably better off for your help," Sage Rosemary told him before she left. "You kept that demon at bay, and your fight with it did less damage than its fight with the dragon. No destruction would have been ideal, but less destruction is better than nothing."

"Thanks." Not loosing control at all would have been better, but at least he wasn't a total screw up.

He started mending the ground. It was easy to find pieces of rubble and smooth them into the paved surface of the town square. Only once he'd spent the whole morning practicing that spell did he move on to attempting to repair walls of homes made with stone or brick. Getting the walls of homes aligned nice and neat on both sides, however, proved more difficult than he thought. Things would bump out, or he wouldn't be able to properly fuse grout to brick.

After a third home owner insisted they could wait for a more advanced student to come and take a shot at their wall, Link and his grandfather walked back to the school to instead repair the wall he'd knocked over.

This was an easier fix. Just straighten the wall out and smooth down the earth he'd raised up earlier. It was all the basic earth moving magic he'd been practicing almost exclusively the past week in some form or another.

No one stared or whispered as they saw him work, save for the occasional comment on his tunic. With the old one torn, he'd had to replace it with a clean, white one. The hat, which was still in one piece, he'd left alone. He had almost considered getting a new hat and dying both red, to match the updated royal guard outfits, but he was even less worthy of knighthood than he was sorcery. And as he told everyone who asked about his switch to the rule conforming white, he wasn't interested in defying the rules anymore.

Defying the rules had ended with him a mindless monster. And he was lucky that it seemed no one had noticed him transforming until he was far enough along to no longer be recognizable as himself.

He was finishing up on the wall when he felt someone's gaze on his back. He turned, certain that a student who knew what he'd done would be gawking. What he saw instead was a child, maybe twelve or thirteen years old, younger than Link's sixteen in any case. The boy was dressed in dark purple, with lavender hair and concerning pale skin and... were his eyes red?

The child was glaring at him. Did he know Link had been one of the monsters attacking the town? His clothes weren't the right color for a student uniform, but then neither were Link's. Nervous about what the glare was for, Link tried to look friendly and wave.

The child continued to glare.

"What is it?" His grandfather glanced over, spotting the child as well, and smiled at the angry little boy.

"He might be someone's brother," Link suggested, looking back at the wall.

"He might be a student."

"He's too young."

"You don't know that."
"Just leave him be. I think he's throwing a fit."

"He's walking this way."

Glancing back over his shoulder, Link saw that the child was coming closer, glare reduced to a simple, irritated look. By the time the boy reached them, he'd managed to wrestle his expression into what could almost be mistaken for a smile.

"Can we help you with anything?" Link's grandfather asked, and Link felt a pang of jealousy. The old man never spoke so sweetly to him.

The boy stared at the old man, then nodded hesitantly and said, "Help. Am new."

His accent was thick, and his speech rough. There were plenty of non-Hylian and foreign sorcerers at the academy, but Link knew no other new students who had such a poor grasp of Hylian, and in the past week he felt like he'd at least exchanged a few words with everyone else who had just started. Granted, some of the students had moved to the city without their families. Someone might have been there long enough to seem local, with relatives who obviously weren't.

"Do you have a brother or sister here?" Link asked slowly.

The boy scowled up at him but didn't answer the question.

"Are your parents anywhere nearby?"

This time the question went completely ignored, and the boy instead looked him up and down, assessing him. The sword held his attention longer than any part of Link's person did, but even it the boy quickly dismissed.

Then the boy stepped back, seeming satisfied, and walked away.

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It wasn't until he returned to his regular classes the next day that Link learned the boy's name.

"The dean called him Vaati," Cargan explained to Link as they filed into a lecture hall to learn about the history or magic. "He only started yesterday. Mari said he seems like he knows a lot, but Sage Salbrush is scared of him."

"Why?"

"Who knows. He only speaks Ancient Hylian."

"That's... unusual."

"It's downright weird." Cargan corrected.

"Is he even old enough to be a student?"

"I think he's just short. I mean, the dean wouldn't let you in until you were the minimum age, and you're the one he wouldn't stop going on about after you saved those kids in the square. Vaati has to be at least as old as you."

Link looked around, hoping to spot the little guy, and saw him nowhere. He would have dismissed this as Vaati being too short to see among all the regular sized students now crowded into the room, but Cargan shook his head and said, "He doesn't come to these classes. Just does the training periods,
then gets special instruction from one of the teachers. Not much sense in attending a lecture you don’t understand.”

"Ah."

The room grew quiet as the teacher stepped up to the front of the room, and Link and Cargan broke apart and turned their attention to the chalkboard, where the day’s lesson was writing itself down. Sage Duran taught most of the lecture classes, and Link had yet to figure out what his affinity was, but the man liked showing off how second nature his spells were to him.

The subject that day was the history of magic artifacts. Unlike the discovery of magic itself, people learning to build magic into their tools was a subject Link cared about. Even if he no longer felt fit to wield the Beast Blade, he paid close attention, hoping Duran would eventually get to the sword. So far they were still learning about staffs. There were lots of famous staffs, and he would be tested on every single one of them at the end of the week. Which probably meant it would be staffs all week, but he paid attention just in case.

Ironically, the replacement staffs for students to practice with would not arrive until the day after they finished learning about staffs.

His grandfather hadn’t been happy to hear that one. Neither he nor Link wanted him to still handle the sword, but after consulting with the other teachers, the headmaster had reversed his position, saying he felt Link had learned his lesson and the blade was a good match for him. Link could only wonder who advocated for that. Rosemary had made her disapproval of the verdict no secret.

Sword or no, as soon as the city was repaired, Link planned to leave the school. Hopefully, that would be before the test on staffs, because he found himself struggling to match names with spells. So many staffs were just the rod or cane of whoever crafted them, and the effects could be so random. Making items flip over? Who needed a special magic tool to turn a pot upside-down? But apparently that particular staff had been essential in the defeat of some great demon or another from Old Hyrule whose name was lost to the ages, so maybe Link had misunderstood the staff’s purpose? Since it wasn’t the Beast Blade, he hadn’t paid the closest of attention during that part of the lecture.

It felt strange, caring so much about a sword that he was determined to be separated from by the end of the week. The Beast Blade still felt so right in his hand. Like it was meant for him. Like he was meant for it. But whenever he saw the wreckage in the city and thought of what that sword did to his mind he felt...

Scared.

He didn’t like being afraid. He never turned and ran from monsters in the field, but those were different. Enough attacks and they went down. How did you deal with an internal monster? With some primal part of your mind that becomes bent towards destruction when you have the power to cause the most harm you could?

Link glanced over at Cargan, wondering how he would tell his friend that he planned to leave soon. Cargan smiled, so Link smiled back.

None of them knew what he’d become. What he’d done. Even the dean didn’t know how it felt to lose your mind to the monster within.

He felt scared, and completely alone. What he would have given to be able to talk to someone else who had experienced that loss of humanity.
Vaati stood idle in the academy courtyard after classes let out for the day, and Link would have been happy to leave him there if he weren't such a squirt. Those glares and sizing looks the other day still made him feel unsettled, but Vaati looked like a child. Link could only imagine the kind of warped upbringings someone must have in order to end up speaking only a dead language. Who knew where is family was, or if he should even be with them? You would have to be kept isolated all your life to not speak a modern language, wouldn't you? Link couldn't justify walking past without checking on him.

The other students filed out of the academy, heading to home, or to some hangout. Those who lingered grouped together with friends, or headed to the academy's private library. Vaati was the only one standing on his own in the courtyard, going nowhere. The way the boy studied the school, Link wasn't sure if he looked like he was casing a joint, or trying to reorient himself on a map. Granted, the boy had no map, so...

No. No way was anyone who looked so young going to cause any trouble. And even if his glare was something fierce, it wasn't fair to judge the boy without getting to know him. Maybe he was a sweet kid, and being in a country where no one spoke his language had put him on edge.

Smiling, Link went up to greet Vaati. It wasn't until he was only a few feet away, when the boy's attention suddenly snapped to him, that Link realized that there was going to be a language barrier.

"Um... Hi."

Vaati scowled at him, looking him up and down, then looked away.

Link took a deep breath and tried to speak slowly. "Hello. My name is Link. Your name is Vaati, right?"

Vaati glanced back at him. "Yes."

"When did you move here?"

Vaati stared a moment, not understanding the question, then shrugged and walked away.

"Oh! Hey! Wait!" Link rushed after him. "Vaati? Where are you going? Vaati!"

He reached out and grabbed Vaati's shoulder, making the boy jump. Without warning, Vaati spun around, the wind spinning with him and knocking Link back hard enough to leave the boy stunned.

When the wind settled, Vaati looked around to make sure no one had seen. He'd stuck only to the basic spells he'd been asked to perform the last couple days. Making breezes that moved in simple patterns, or keeping leaves afloat. Creating winds strong enough to rip a person off of their feet, even if it only pushed them back a foot or two, was beyond what he was supposed to know.

A few people glanced his way, then to Link, and lost interest. Was the green garbed brat known for getting into trouble?

Vaati glanced at Link too, hoping that he wouldn't get up. It was awfully early to kill Link. The plan was not to kill anyone until he knew enough about his new environment to not be killed himself. But it wouldn't be so bad if the ever present thorn in his side regardless of the era could, say, go into a coma. Or at least stay down for an hour or two.
No such luck. Link picked himself up off the ground, rubbing the back of his head and muttering in the new version of Hylian.

When he stood straight, he tried smiling down at Vaati again, although the look was more strained now. Vaati scowled back. Of all the Link's, he liked this one least. The others had been younger. Closer to his own size as a Hylian, and significantly smaller when he assumed his monster form. This Link dwarfed him. It took extra effort to strike fear in the heart of someone who was a foot taller than you.

The boy held out a hand and started babbling again, slowly, like he was talking to a simpleton. Something, "did you," something something? Most of the words sounded like total gibberish.

Scoffing, Vaati turned to walk away when one of the words gave him a pause.

"What?" He asked, turning back around. Link cocked his head in confusion, and Vaati gritted his teeth and repeated the question as best he could in modern Hylian.

Clearly happy to finally get a non-violent response, Link smiled and repeated himself. This time Vaati was sure he heard the words for "home" and "parents." Concepts the dean had made sure he knew to speak so he could try and explain where his were.

Link was asking the same thing.

For the dean, he'd played dumb. Pretended he didn't understand the question. But Link knew he'd understood enough of it to care what it was. Vaati weighed the options, and decided that while the overbearing dean would have overreacted to an honest answer, there was little Link might do to make himself a nuisance so early. And if he lied, he had a gut feeling that Link would follow him and find out where he lived, which meant someone would see him changing back into Minish form to take shelter in what of the wreckage had yet to be repaired. Vaati hadn't been able to bring himself to explain his lack of a living space to the dean, and until he knew it was safe to go flashy, he couldn't recreate his Palace of Winds.

"No," Vaati replied, shaking his head. The word for 'none' was one he hadn't learned yet, but maybe Link would get what he meant.

From the look of pity on the boy's face, he did. Link patted Vaati's shoulder, making the sorcerer flinch, and said, "My parents... live... grandfather."

Too many gaps in his understanding to pick up on what Link said, but Vaati at least got the subject matter, and knew no good words to sarcastically pretend he cared.

"You... come... me?" Link asked, gesturing from Vaati to himself before pointing out the gate. "Grandfather... home."

What was he even saying? Vaati scrunched his brow, trying to make sense of the words. It was embarrassing, struggling so much to understand others. He could tell how slowly Link was speaking to him too, which only made his difficulty all the more humiliating.

Why couldn't he just go away? He looked like was hoping for something. Probably an affirmative of some sort. If it would make him leave, Vaati was willing to say whatever Link wanted and not make good on his word later.

"Yes."

Link's face like up. "Great. I can't... grandfather."
Vaati nodded, thinking the conversation was over, or at least close enough that Link could pick up on an obvious visual cue that they were done talking. He looked away from Link, turning towards the academy gates, and took a step forward.

Then Link grabbed his hand and pulled him towards the gate, responding to the indignant protests the Minish snapped in Ancient Hylian with an obnoxiously friendly grin. There were people watching him now, curious about the boy yelling in a foreign tongue, and he couldn't get away with another wind based attack.

Gritting his teeth, Vaati resigned himself to letting Link lead him wherever he had apparently agreed to go.

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After Link's brief explanation, his grandfather set to appraising Vaati. He was on the small side. Students at the academy had to be at least sixteen, so he must have been Link's age, but he looked younger. But that just meant he wouldn't have as large a stomach. He spoke enough modern Hylian to communicate that he had no home to go to, and if he spoke Ancient Hylian then he must have been smart. And if he was a top newcomer among the wind affinity students then he was bound to be a good student. It would do Link good to have another magic student around the house.

Most of the old man's babble went over Vaati's head, but he understood enough of it to realize what was going on. What the old man's shoulder pats and Link's obnoxiously friendly grin meant.

He'd taken up the Din blasted hero's offer to share house.

Chapter End Notes

The New Students was one of the first fanfics I ever read. Yu-Gi-Oh/Harry Potter crossover. Found it on Kokoro no Naka back when Yu-Gi-Oh was still airing new episodes in the US. (I was googling Bakura screenshots and then got curious about how the site had stories on top of images. And that’s how I became fic trash.) Actually not that bad, but pretty obviously favoring the Yu-Gi-Oh cast. The first fanfic I ever read was by the same author, although it’s… not as good as I remember it being. Still, it was my introduction to fanfic, so it holds a special place in my heart. And it begins with Bakura’s eye getting gouged out, so no matter what else, it’s got that going for it.

Anywho, I have mixed feelings on this chapter. It's more of a setup chapter than a big things happening chapter. I always feel like I'm wasting words when I write setup chapters. But if I hadn’t written the rest of it, I would feel like things were too rushed.
Vaati was a brat and offering him shelter was a mistake. At first Link had thought that maybe he would ease up once he became more fluent. Maybe once he had the chance to settle in, he would become more friendly. But no. The only thing that changed as Vaati became more and more familiar with modern Hylian was that rather than silently glare, he would return any comment given his way, be it warm or cold, with a tart (and often grammatically incorrect) retort.

It might have helped if Link’s grandfather wasn’t so willing to overlook the boy’s attitude.

"We don’t know his situation. For him to come here on his own, with no home, without knowing the language, something must have happened. Give him a little time to recover."

"It’s hard to focus when he glares at me."

"Nonsense. You’ve never been more diligent with those books. I think a little competition is good for you."

That gave Link a pause. He’d been so caught up the last few weeks with hating dealing with Vaati that he’d forgotten about his plans to drop out of the Sorcerer’s Academy. It was hard to form a plan to hide where he was day after day when he had to share a room with the brat. If Link didn’t get to leave the house and practice with the royal guard once a week, he would have gone mad.

Link’s only reprieve at school that Vaati took different affinity based lessons that him. Although he still heard about the especially talented but not too pleasant to engage with boy who had just begun wind sorcery in between classes. Judging by the way Vaati’s lips curved into a sneer when they were filed into the lecture hall for all new students, Vaati probably heard about the boy who could only cast magic with a sword and knew only a few spells, but could work them better than the students with long pedigrees in earth magic.

Well, no matter. Since learning that Vaati was a spoiled brat who hated him, the two had wordlessly worked out a system to avoid one another as much as possible while sharing a bedroom. And sooner or later his grandfather would realize they had offered to house a the spawn of Demise and send Vaati out to find his own home. Now that the boy was capable of communicating with others, he could probably manage. With his knack for wind spells, there was bound to be some sort of work he could pick up around town to pay rent.

And even if it was too frustrating having Vaati around at home to work out a good way to drop out of the academy without his grandfather letting on-and that brat would probably rat him out if he tried-at least he didn’t have to deal with him at school.

Or so he thought.

Three weeks after he made the mistake of inviting Vaati into his home, the two of them were sitting in a lecture that everyone in their year was required to attend. It was an overview of the magic found in dungeons. The mystic forces that allowed those caves and towers and ruins to maintain a functional condition in order to safeguard whatever treasures they were built to conceal. And the ways that monsters fed off of that magic and flourished.

Link had never been in one, but he’d read his great grandfather’s accounts, and heard stories from
members of the royal guard who stumbled into the Green Ruins outside of Hyrule Field. It figured that something as obnoxious as magic would be behind the monsters' obnoxious tendency to repopulate a dungeon almost instantly.

If he'd gone into knighthood like he'd wanted, instead of being dragged into the sorcerer's academy and wound up turning into some town trashing monster, he could have explored those dungeons. Been a real knight, charging headfirst into swarms of monsters. Maybe uncovering some treasure that would help save the kingdom from... whatever. Vaati, maybe. He had future evil sorcerer written all over him. It was a little scary that the dean didn't seem concerned with the boy.

Daydreaming as he was about going into dungeons, Link almost missed it when the teacher said, "And so, all first year students are to go on a field trip this Saturday. You will each be assigned a classmate to team up with before heading out into the fields to look for signs of this phenomenon. And remember, if you see any monster that might be out of your league, the guard is positioned at all danger points to assist with this exercise, as are advanced students. You need only call for them."

He perked up, thinking for a moment that they were to head into an actual dungeon before realizing what the actual assignment was. Of course. They wouldn't send a bunch of beginner students into a dungeon. Most of them, even the ones who had known all their lives that they would be sorcerers, only knew basic spells. Vaati aside. Link saw him turn a balled up piece of paper into a pen the other day, no matter how casually the brat pretended to have stumbled across his missing pen that Link might or might not have hidden. Whatever Vaati was playing dumb for, the rest of the class really couldn't do anything beyond the basics. Since the school didn't care whether he knew how to wield a sword or not, Link himself could only reshape and slowly lift stone and dirt, as far as they were concerned. They wouldn't send someone like that out into a dungeon.

They would probably be restricted to a section of the fields that the knights had just cleared. He could already picture it. A hundred kids all eager to show off that they were the best magic user from the most prestigious family, all packed into the same little section of the Hyrule Field, clawing around for some vague sense of a magic anomaly.

It let him go out into the fields again. His grandfather couldn't complain about that. He would go on this trip, and he would keep a low profile so Vaati stopped thinking about him at school. Then he'd drop out. Maybe he could score himself an apprenticeship as a cobbler, or a candle maker. Something just as dull as sorcery, but not as dangerous.

"Before leaving class, be sure to draw a number from either the red or blue box by the door. Your partner will be whoever draws the same number as you."

Enjoy one last day in the fields, avoid Vaati, and move on with his life. Link could do this.

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"The Goddesses must hate me."

"Do you think that? I think they have too much like for you."

A truly benevolent classmate might have corrected Vaati's grammar, but Link had spent too much time in close quarters with the boy to care about helping him not sound stupid. The other students snickering at the two of them, who had drawn the red and blue number three tickets, must have been put off by Vaati as well. It was only people who didn't converse with him often who didn't know better than to offer help. Funny that the dean gave them a wink and asked Link to keep an eye out for his partner. You would think that the man who gave the brat private language lessons would know that Link would be too busy watching his own back.
There would be absolutely no way to avoid Vaati if they were partners. This would firmly cement his position in the academy in Vaati's mind. He would have to wait now until the little demon found his own place before he could safely drop out. And even worse, he would have to spend a whole day actually interacting with Vaati.

"I suppose you'll want me to stay out of your way?" Link said hopefully.

"No. I have interest to see how you do."

"Well, fine. But I hope you plan to carry your own weight."

Vaati smiled. It was amazing how unpleasant a person's smile could be.

"I mean it. I'm not good with detecting magic, so that will be on you. I can clear out any monsters we find, though. How does that arrangement sound?"

Alarmingly, Vaati only smiled wider.

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Vaati had wanted for several weeks to see more of the new Hyrule he'd found himself in. In particular, he'd wanted to get the layout of the castle. It was easier to kidnap someone when you knew where their bedroom was and how to get out of there with minimal chances of being seen. Showmanship was a favorite of his, but that could wait for when he had results to show. This latest incarnation of Zelda was a descendant of the first he'd known, and she possessed what was left of the Light Force that he'd failed to fully steal all those years ago. She could rival him if he drew too much attention to himself and made the threat he posed clear too soon. He intended to finish stealing the Light Force with finesse. And once he had that power all for himself, he could be as showy as he damn well pleased.

He'd make quite the show of killing Link, too. No roundabout methods this time. This Link didn't have any curse breaking swords or blades made specifically to seal Vaati. He didn't even have fragments of the broken Four Sword. Vaati hadn't been able to turn the shards of the blade to dust, but he had made sure to blast each fragment away somewhere so no fool hero could have the sword reforged. None of that 'each piece is sealed in a great dungeon and guarded by a gigantic beast' business. That just called attention to where the shards were hidden. Chucking a small piece of rusted metal into the middle of a desert and letting the wind blow sand over it hid things just as well. Now that he knew Link was a threat, he intended to start his reign of terror by turning the blasted hero to stone. And then dropping the statue from the tallest point he could find. Or maybe he would sink Link somewhere in Old Hyrule. See how he liked being left at the bottom of an ocean for Nayru knew how long.

How did Hyrule flood anyway? Vaati was still learning modern Hylian letters, but he would have to find a history book on the subject. Something as significant as an entire kingdom being submerged in a giant sea was a bit too big a gap in knowledge for him to pass off as run-of-the-mill ignorance. Especially when he was known all around the academy as the student who only spoke the language that kingdom used.

He hadn't attempted Minish with anyone, obviously. Although he had spotted Minish helping in their own small way to fix the damage from the attack, leaving spell casting implements dropped behind furniture where others might find them, and dutifully dropping rupees into pots, Vaati had made no attempt to establish contact with his own kind. They probably spoke some new version of Minish, for all he knew.
Minish were longer lived than most races, and more likely to pass on stories of The One Who Turned Bad than Hylians were to preserve the legend of a sealed away mage while more concerned with their entire kingdom turning into an ocean. There was a good chance they remembered him, for all the good it would do. The latest incarnation of Link was too old to still see Minish. It wasn't as though Minish were invisible to adults, but there was a distraction spell of sorts that naturally permeated from them to keep them hidden from threats. Even Vaati wore it in Minish form. It didn't work so well on children, but an adult wouldn't notice them unless they were familiar enough with a specific one to hone in on it. Whatever the Minish did or didn't know, they weren't about to run and expose him to a too old princess and hero in the making.

Vaati was in the perfect position to off Link with no witnesses. The two of them alone in the fields, the nearest help out of sight. No doubt there would be some of his kind out in the fields, hiding things here and there for others to find and be delighted by, but what could they do to stop him? There was a reason Vaati never handled villainy in Minish form. The original plan was to petrify Link, but assuming control of a few monsters and then preventing Link from defending himself efficiently would do. If he died with obvious signs of monster attacks, than he was even more out of the way than if Vaati settled for a breakable curse.

Link was remarkably good at not dying, of course. So good that whenever old age caught up to him, he went back to not being dead after a century or two. But no one had ever called Vaati a quitter.

Their outing began lowkey. Link had stopped talking to Vaati when his grandfather wasn't around to mediate early in Vaati's stay at their house, which suited Vaati just fine. If Link expected him to play the mute dousing rod and find an area where higher magic levels attracted more monsters, Vaati was happy to oblige. It meant less time listening to the hero talk, and no one could blame him for leading Link to certain doom if Link told him to.

There were five spots Vaati could sense from the city gates that might meet the requirements for their assignment, and half the class headed for the nearest one while the other half with duller senses wandered aimlessly. Vaati gestured for Link to follow him, pretending at first to be similarly uncertain where to go. Look confident, and people would think you knew what to do. Then the weak ones would follow you in the hopes of riding off your talent. Vaati wanted no one around when Link died.

The place he had in mind initially was far enough from the city, but as he and Link neared it, something else pinged on his radar. Something stronger. Something suppressed, buried, but not too far away. Vaati had picked up on enough living with Link to know that he was no goodie-two-shoes, and that he itched to be the hero most of his incarnations stumbled into the role of. If they found a more monster dense area, would Link jump for the chance to prove himself?

Vaati took a gamble and changed directions, and the move didn't go unnoticed.

"Do you really know where we're going?" Link asked.

Did he expect an answer?

He keep staring at Vaati like he wanted one.

Vaati hated having to speak in the newer Hylian.

"You have worry?" Vaati asked, knowing it had to be phrased wrong. Verb conjugation was too hard. He had to have and to be down, and he was going to make every possible sentence work with those verbs until he felt confident about the rest. "This is good way. More good."
Link grimaced the way he always did when resisting the urge to correct Vaati.

"Very more good," Vaati said, knowing it was only more inaccurate to say it that way.

"Better," Link corrected, unable to help himself in the presence of such dreadful Hylian.

"This way is better," Vaati said, satisfied. "More magic."

"Does it matter?"

"Yes. School project," Vaati said. There was probably a better grade for finding a better site or something. He didn't really care. As long as Link filled in enough blanks to by the excuse, then it worked. Struggling with a language had at least one advantage.

"I'm sure you could do the best with whatever we're doing even in the worst spot in the field," Link said. Vaati knew that Link knew he was only pretending to be a beginner sorcerer, but if Link wasn't about to rat him out, then Vaati didn't care. Link also thought Vaati was just a kid who had a bad attitude but wasn't really dangerous, and all he knew was that Vaati knew more than he let on, so he wasn't that much better off knowledge-wise than he had been when he first invited Vaati to live with him.

Besides, Link wasn't going to be alive to tell anyone the truth about Vaati for much longer.

Vaati came to a stop directly above where he sensed magic to be, then looked at his feet. Lower still? His affinity was for wind, which meant earth was... not impossible. A sorcerer as great as himself could manage the element opposed to his own. But earth spells were still more draining. A petrification was too effective not to use. It took people out of the way while maintaining the possibility to interrogate them later. But just to unearth whatever cave he detected, and when he had such a convenient servant on hand...

"This." Vaati took two steps back and pointed to the dirt. "Bellow the dirt here."

"You want me to dig?" Link asked. "There have to be places above ground."

"Here is better," Vaati insisted.

Sighing, Link drew his sword and slashed upward with it, tearing up not only the dirt covering the mouth of the cave, but the dirt beneath Vaati as well. He and twenty square feet of dirt went flying across the grass, and no sooner had he gotten his bearing than did he return fire with a blast of wind that knocked Link's feet out from under him.

While Link picked himself up, Vaati inspected the hole the hero made. Wide enough for either of them to slide into, although dark inside.

As if a little darkness was going to stop him. Vaati jumped in, letting his wind catch him before he hit the floor and lower him gently to the ground. Since he had a part of the Light Force already inside him, he should have been able to summon a light to the area, but the power was sluggish, only starting to move at his command when he heard Link drop down behind him, and then he didn't risk casting it. Letting Link know he was more talented than he pretended was one thing. Letting Link know he held part of a sacred power was a whole different matter. There was always the risk that the hero might survive whatever was in the cave, and if he was going to go and tell everyone that Vaati was evil, he wasn't going to tell them Vaati was powerful enough to rival the gods on top of that.

"I can't see," Link reported.
Rolling his eyes, Vaati scanned in the dim light coming down from above and spotted a torch hanging from the wall. Link didn't need to know just how capable of a sorcerer Vaati was, and they were *expecting* monsters.

Vaati could feel the Light Force ready to respond to him, but it answered his call too late. Instead of light the cave the straightforward way, he summoned a sentry eye in the darkness and let it fire a laser at the torch, setting it ablaze.

"What is *that*?" Link asked, pointing to the sentry as it moved down the line firing on the rest of the torches. "Some new form of keese? It started a fire."

"I am aware."

"I thought fire keese *were* on fire," Link said, taking a stance as if he planned to cut the sentry from the sky.

The sentry wasn't a part of Vaati per se, but it was a piece of his magic that took the form of a bat with a single, giant eye. Just a copy of what he looked like as a monster. He couldn't dispel it in full view of Link, but he could order it to fly out of the cave and keep watch over the hole for him. Link wouldn't lower his guard around an unfamiliar monster, and the sentry would alert Vaati via a psychic link if anyone came too near.

"Is it... fleeing?" Link asked as the sentry flew away. "I've never known a monster to flee."

Monsters fled from stronger monsters all the time, but Vaati didn't know how to phrase that. Instead, he ignored Link and surveyed the room. Magic pulsed all around him, but there were no other monsters. Only a great door at the far end of the room with interwoven streaks of green and brown along the outside. The entry to some old dungeon for sure. Who set it and why were details Vaati could have fun working out later. He had quite a bit of history to catch up on anyway. For the time being, he just needed Link a *little* further in.

He tried the handled, but the door didn't budge.

"Should we be here?" Link asked.

"The dean said we have an assignment for magic of a dungeon," Vaati said. "This is a dungeon, correct?"

Link looked at him, then dropped his gaze to his sword. There was a look in his eyes that Vaati had never seen in the hero's previous incarnations, but he recognized it well enough in others. Fear. What fear was doing there, Vaati didn't no, but it was dammed inconvenient for him after going to all the trouble of locating a proper dungeon. Leave it to Link to be so vested in thwarting him as to lose his fighting spirit the *one* time Vaati banked on it.

"I see," Vaati said. "You are a coward."

Link flinched at the words, but didn't move.

At least he wasn't *leaving*. Vaati could just draw the monsters in the dungeon to him. Assuming, of course, that the door would open. He gave it a rough tug and noticed that the green and brown tiles around it rattled. Stepping back, he could see that there was a very specific pattern on the left door while the right was not only looked completely disorganized. Whatever the newfangled word for *puzzle* was, Vaati had yet to learn it, but that was fine. Regardless of the word, the greatest sorcerer in history was too brilliant to be thwarted by a measly slide puzzle.
Ten minutes later, the hero finally decided to take action and came over to solve the puzzle in a maddening fifteen seconds.

"How is that?" Vaati asked, gesturing to the door.

Link gave a hesitant shrug. "It wasn't that complex."

The most frustrating thing about that response was how simply he said it, with a mild look of unease that said he was not only not trying to be condescending, but actually concerned about any offense the remark might cause. As if it really was easy, and Link wasn't sure how to gently break it to Vaati that he was an utter moron for struggling so long on something so simple.

A part of Vaati, a dangerous part that he wasn't going to fall into the trap of listening to, wanted to keep Link alive long enough to show him up. That was the part of Vaati that Vaati needed to suppress until the hero was dead and the princess tapped of her remaining Light Force. In an era where sorcery seemed much more common, it may even needed to assess everyone at the academy to ensure no one might stop him if he succumbed to pride. Nothing wounded ones pride worse than being undone by pride, Vaati had learned. He would take pride in being smart about his rise to power.

Even if...

Even if he wasn't that smart with puzzles.

Outwitting Link where it really mattered would make up for that.

Link took a half-step through the door before hesitating, looking back down to his sword. Vaati, having had quite enough of that, shoved Link forward and stepped in after him.

"Can you find whatever we're looking for in here?" Link asked.

Vaati surveyed the room. They stood on a large stone platform that met only the wall behind them, with vents placed periodically between the platform's edge and the other walls blowing upward. Other, higher, grated metal platforms along the walls suggested the purpose of those vents, although Vaati could generate his own winds to lift himself up just fine. There was no obvious device lying around that could lift an ordinary person in the draft from those vents, however, nor were there any monsters beyond the average keese drifting around the room.

Now that they were in the dungeon, no one would question that something dwelling in the dungeon killed Link. Vaati could turn into a monster himself and quickly take care of things, but until he achieve literacy in the new tongue he couldn't read how to avoid losing his mind in the process. If he wanted the death to look convincing, there couldn't be signs of damage done by a Hylian.

"See anything?"

With perfectly obnoxious timing, a pang shot through Vaati's skull. He shut his eyes to focus on the images his sentry eye sent, and saw the black dragon from the other week circling around the hole where he and Link had accessed the dungeon. So it hadn't been interested in the town after all. He commanded the sentry to follow the dragon, but before it could move, the dragon opened it's mouth and inhaled.

Eyes flying open, Vaati swore and spun to shut the doors to the dungeon. Link's bemused look turned to one of shock as flames licked through the crack between the doors as Vaati slammed them back in place, and ember licking his nose in the process.
"What was that? A trap? Are we trapped."

"It is..." how had no one taught Vaati the word for dragon? He was found in the aftermath of a dragon attack, for Pete's sake! "It is big... black... fire... fire breath. Big black fire breath in the sky. It was in the sky over the city before."

Thankfully, Vaati didn't have to pantomime to get the message across. Link nodded in understanding and took another look around the room for himself, somehow more confident now that there was a giant dragon outside trying to kill them.

No. Trying to kill Vaati. He could no longer sense his sentry, but he had seen enough. The dragon attacking him in the skies above Castle City could be for any number of reasons. Following him all the way out to the middle of the fields and trying to roast him alive in a cave was personal.

"I guess it's probably for the best that we came down here," Link said. "We're probably safer for it. Us being out of the way will make it safer for everyone else who can deal with the dragon properly too." He took a look around and, before Vaati could try and press him for just what that meant, said, "You're better at magic than everyone thinks you are. Don't pretend you aren't. I know. So maybe we could... explore a bit? We're stuck down here until the dragon is gone."

"Yes." Finally.

Link took two steps, then stopped and turned back to Vaati. "Did you know that dragon was coming?"

Vaati tried to think of a suitably vague response.

"Thanks," Link said, taking a stab in the dark at what Vaati's silence meant. "I guess you saved my butt shoving it in here. Hopefully the teachers can protect everyone who stayed closer to the city."

"I have a feel that big... that... dragon?" Vaati wasn't sure if Link nodded deliberately. "I have a feel that the dragon has no want to fire the city."

"Burn," Link told him. "Burn the city. And when you... nevermind."

"What?"

"It's nothing. Can you do your magic sense thing to find what path we're supposed to take."

Vaati pointed to the one and only door that wasn't known to have a dragon behind it.

Link looked up at the door as well, taking note of the platforms and the vents placed beside them. "Yeah. A path that doesn't require being feather light."

Vaati pointed to the gaps between their platform and the walls before telling Link, "I do not have knowledge of what is at the bottom."

"You're so helpful," Link said. "What would I do without you?"

"Burn."

Probably not, since Vaati had been of higher interest to the dragon than Link his first day free from the sword, but the response shut Link up for a few minutes. With nothing better to do, Vaati followed the hero's lead of wandering around the room and inspecting it for clues. The platform, Vaati determined, was in fact a solid floor, with no open space to be seen beneath it when one peered
over the edge. Odd, since he could sense air beneath him, but then while much of the floor was seamless stone, one spot was cracked in a way that just begged for you to try and break through. Even without magic, he could feel a breeze rise up from that point. If you were to create a hole in the floor right there, Vaati was certain you would find a another vent beneath. Knowing how such structures were usually laid out, there was likely a series of puzzles requiring you work your way through other bomb-related barriers in order to get a treasure that would in able you to rise up on the vents.

In other words, a long series of things that Link was better at in order to gain an item that would bring him closer to a level playing field in Vaati's specialty.

Vaati twirled his hand and gathered wind around Link, than hurled him onto the grated platform up above. It was not his poor aim that had Link just miss the door and thud against the stone wall, but Vaati still called "Sorry," as if he had meant for there to be a neat landing.

"No... You're okay." Link said. Dear Nayru was he ever stupid.

Vaati lifted himself up and landed more gracefully, gently dropping to his feet just before the door and striding through. To his delight, the next room was filled with not only a series of vents blowing from one pillar to the next over a seemingly bottomless pit, but also dozens of floating monsters he didn't recognize that cracked with electricity.

"Bari. We don't want to touch those. Hold on," Link said gesturing to his sword with the wall, a chunk of stone the size of a fist broke off and held to the blade's tip as if it were a magnet. "I think my aim will be better than yours."

Before Vaati could ask just what that meant, Link fired the rock and shot one of the monsters from the sky.

That was, Vaati had to admit, pretty good aim for a muscle-headed sixteen-year-old who had only started using magic recently and was entirely dependent on a tool to cast his spells. It was almost as impressive as when Link slashed his sword horizontally upward and made the pillars themselves rise, crushing all but two of the remaining monsters on the ceiling. Link caught the last two as he let the pillars fall into the abyss.

"Okay. Next room," Link said. "I can handle the little monsters. You handle all the empty space between each door. But we turn back before we get to whatever is waiting in the back of the dungeon. I'm not trained to fight anything larger than a skulltula"

Vaati looked down at the chasm beneath them. Just place a hand on Link's back and give him a good push, and that would be one problem resolved.

Probably.

Sometimes dungeons were weird. Sometimes if you fell long enough, you landed right back where you started. There was probably a phenomenon that caused that, and Vaati would have known it if he'd stuck with Ezlo's apprenticeship longer. It might even be an upcoming lecture within the next week at the academy. Vaati could sense all number of old magic auras emanating from different parts of the dungeon, and he wasn't about to be on none of them being one that might keep Link from falling to an early death.

It was better if there was a body anyway, Vaati told himself. Proof that Link died to a monster, rather than leaving possibilities for why he disappeared open. But Link did indeed seem adept at dealing with small fry. Which meant they would have to go deeper.
How deep could they get before any search party decided to call collecting Link's body a lost cause? Dungeons only did so much to restore changes brought about by other people. If Link breaking the entire room wasn't one of those things the dungeon could fix, it would take someone practiced with wind magic to find Link when Vaati told them about the dungeon.

It couldn't be that far to the boss. They probably skirted half the dungeon avoiding going down that covered up hole in the first room. They would probably bring a sorcerer who could make it to the final room.

"Vaati?"

"Yes." Vaati gaged the distance to the door on the far side of the room, gathered wind around Link again, and aimed just a little to the left.

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By the time they came across a door with a massive golden look four rooms later, the only bloodshed had been from when Link broke his nose on a wall. Very clumsy of him. Clearly, he just didn't know how to land properly. Not Vaati's fault.

"This is a small dungeon," Link remarked upon seeing the door. "I guess we turn back here. Think the dragon is still out there?"

Who knew? The dragon reeked of dark element, but with all the magic that permeated the dungeon, it was impossible to detect anything outside. Whether it was there or not, Vaati set out for the dungeon on a mission. Neither dragons nor indecisive heroes were going to stop him.

The gold lock, however, would.

It wasn't that Vaati was incapable of earth magic. No one with the ability to use magic was incapable of using any element. But as someone aligned to wind, he was more limited in the earth spells he could cast. Petrification, luckily, also relied heavily on the dark element, and Vaati had dark down as well as someone not aligned to it could. Shapeshifting was entirely dark magic, after all. But moving metal was entirely earth magic, and higher tier earth magic that Vaati was capable of. To get the key, he guessed he would need to backtrack to the first room and try breaking through that crack in the floor.

Or he could see how well Link's sword fit in the lock. He was good with puzzles, but he wasn't all around the savviest person (or even the savviest Link) that Vaati knew.

"It is too small of a dungeon," Vaati said. "You know this more than me, correct? A dungeon this small should not be a complete dungeon?"

Link gave the lock a cautious poke. "I suppose. Everything in the field guides said ornate locks are usually for alters and other places where whatever treasure the dungeon was built to contain are held, and larger monsters especially are drawn to those treasures, but it's not like we've seen any other locks. It could be that the lock on the final room is really ornate."

There was a lot Vaati wanted to say about Link reading field guides to dungeon exploration, but he held his tongue. Pointing out how studious Link's latest incarnation was regardless of whether anyone made him learn magic or not might make Link appreciate how sorcery seemed like a reasonable path to his grandfather, and Vaati wasn't in the business of providing people any emotional closure right before they died.

"Are you aware how to turn the lock?" Vaati asked. "If I make wind to return us to the first room, I
won't have magic for another trip here and back."

A lie, of course, but while Link knew Vaati was more proficient than he let on. There was no way someone too incompetent to sense a dungeon they were standing right above would be able to gauge how much energy another sorcerer possessed.

"I don't know," Link said, peering into the lock. "They don't teach manipulating metal until year three. Besides, aren't these all enchanted so you can't pick them? I've never been able to pick a lock in any dungeon the guard let me follow them into, and I'm pretty good on most doors."

"Right. What is pick in relation to lock?"

"It... It's when you unlock something without a key. You use little picks... um... little pieces of metal to hit all the spots a key would."

It was too much effort to think of the words to ask Link if he learned to pick locks specifically with dungeons in mind. Instead, Vaati said, "I have a spell to break for a moment the dungeon spell. Can you pick a lock fast?"

"I can try. You really think it's just another room?"

"I cannot see. There is a door in front of me."

Link gave Vaati a weary look, then said, "Fine. Unless somebody can detect the dragon, we're here until someone comes looking for us. It's going to take patrol a while to notice the hole we made in the ground thanks to that dragon. I guess delving a little deeper is a better use of time than waiting for a rescue. Do your magic trick. I'll try my and at the lock."

Link pulled two stripes of stone from the ground and inserted them into the lock, and Vaati lifted the spell over said lock to keep it from being opened by anything other than its designated key. This was hardly a proper dungeon raid on any account, but then Vaati supposed that there was a reason the hero was never an advanced sorcerer who could easily hijack whatever magic already existed within the areas he had to travel to to complete his quest. Heroes who could solve everything that quickly never went down in legend because threats never got past them in the first place Unless they were careless and let a threat go unchallenged until it was strong enough to be out of their hands. At least, Vaati assumed that heroes could fall into the same traps as villains. But this time, as he watched the lock pop open, Vaati planned to get all major threats to his reign out of the way before they had the chance to even realize he required opposing.

The door swung open to reveal a large, circular room that was, naturally, filled with vents. Vaati couldn't help but look at the ceiling as they walked inside, tuning out Link's musing about what trick might be needed to get the next door to reveal itself in order to study the creature above them. It looked to be a large lizard of sorts with thin membranes stretching between its arms. For gliding, no doubt. If Vaati knew the word for lizard, he would have used it when trying to describe the dragon earlier. It totally wasn't his fault if he didn't warn Link in time. Just how was he supposed to explain what watched them from above when no one taught him the words?

Vaati hoped Link would scream a lot when he realized what they were in for. Maybe he would pick up a few modern Hylian words that way.

"Do you see anything?" Link asked.

Vaati was spared having to answer by the door swinging shut behind them. The glob of drool that fell in front of Link's face as he spun to look at the door was a nice touch.
Link looked up, then swore. "What is that?"

"I had hope that you knew the word," Vaati told him.

"You knew it was in here? You liar! I should have known better than to go along with anything you wanted!"

"Yes." Vaati held a hand up to the lizard, entrapping it in a spell to compel it to obey him. Very few among those aligned to the dark element could take control over a fully intelligent creature, but even the smarter of monsters were simple-mined enough for Vaati to reach into the mind of. The instructions he gave were simple. Kill the boy in green. Leave the boy in purple alone.

The lizard blinked, casting Vaati a curious look before dropping to the ground and attacking Link.

Vaati sat back to watch the show, enjoying the sight up that blasted hero being chased around the room by a monster that kept attempting to whip him with its tongue.

Well, he would have enjoyed the show, but Link figured out after only a few tongue lashings how to dodge the lizard's attacks. Even when Link managed, with only moderate bloodshed on his part, to damage the lizard enough that the monster took to zipping around the room by gliding from vent draft to vent draft, Link had a counter. While Vaati readied a spell to slow the hero down and was surprised to find the dark element sluggish to respond to him, dark magic radiated from Link's sword as he grabbed the gem set in the hilt and turned into a deadrock just in time to take the hit and have his skin harden to stone rather than slice open on the lizard's sharp tongue. So that was what the latest Link's latest sword did. Vaati had wondered about the magic he felt from it.

Link ended the spell seconds after the threat of attack lessened and stumbled back, casting an uneasy glance Vaati's way before creating two stone pillars from the walls to crush the lizard between.

"Did you see that?" Link asked, turning to Vaati with fear in his eyes as the lizard stopped twitching.

"You have bad technique," Vaati said. No one had ever called him a graceful loser. "You make too much motion to make your earth spell. It is bad magic use."

"I turned into a monster."

"You use the sword to turn into a monster. That is also bad magic use. Cheating."

"I was kind of under attack!" Link gestured empathetically to said dead lizard, which was fast dissolving into light. Odd. Monsters usually turned to smoke. "It's not like you were doing anything to help. We're field trip buddies. You don't get to leave me to deal with things like this on my own just because the lizard trying to eat me thought you looked too sickly to be a good meal."

Vaati wasn't sure what sickly meant, but it was obviously an insult, and one he could let slide. Link was injured, and his attention was already back to the beams of light flowing into his sword. Of course the sword got stronger whenever it killed something Vaati sent at Link. If Vaati were willing to risk assuming his Wrath form for a minute, or even just changing his arm, then he might be able to get one last gash on Link. He had enough wounds that it wouldn't take much for a surprise attack to fell him.

A red glint falling from where the lizard died and disappeared fell to the ground, holding Link's attention. Vaati seized the opportunity to try and change forms, but frowned upon feeling how sluggish his magic moved. He could use the Light Force to break all the way to his true nature, but surely letting that out would be surrendering his rational mind to that monster form. He was almost as well practiced with the dark element used for more controlled shape shifting as he was his own wind
element, so there was no reason for him to struggle to call upon it. Had he cast the speed hampering spell meant for Link on himself by mistake? Surely he wouldn't do something so foolish.

It was a strain to turn a single hand into the claws his Wrath form possessed, but Vaati managed. Changing back and figuring out why he was suddenly struggling to shape shift could come once Link was dead. Vaati wasn’t going to keep sending monster upon monster after Link until he got stronger again. There was enough damage to make it look like a normal dungeon death, and Vaati could finish the job himself.

"Look at this," Link said, half-turning towards Vaati to show him a ruby half the size of his fist. Light magic radiated from it, causing Vaati to pause for half a second. "Do you think we need this later in the dungeon? I don’t see any obvious traps you would diffuse with it. How does it work? It-Oh, ew. It's wet. Did the monster swallow this thing?"

"Monsters have liking for magic," Vaati said to keep Link from noticing anything amiss. Monsters did indeed enjoy external magic sources, but it was a stupid monster that tried to take in something with light magic. Even monsters that used other elements were heavily dependent on dark magic. No wonder the lizard died so easily.

Any moment a portal would open up for the dungeon to spit its occupants back out at its front door. Since there was no telling if the dragon was still there or not, Vaati could go back out the way they came in, sending a sentry eye on ahead to make sure the coast was clear. But before that, he raised a hand to slash through Link’s back.

Light enveloped both of them as the portal manifested at their feet. The dungeon room dissolved away, replaced with the underground cave they started in before Link unlocked the dungeon’s door. The dirt, once moist, was dry, and neither Link nor Vaati wasted any time getting out from under it when a piece fell from the ceiling.

"Do you see the dragon?" Link asked.

Vaati didn’t. He couldn't feel it either. Someone drove it away?

"I'm climbing up," Link said. You wait here.

The opportunity to kill Link was lost. They were out of the dungeon, and Vaati needed time to change his hand back to a Hylian one. He nodded and let Link climb up ahead, then began the spell for shape shifting once more. Vexingly, his hand returned to normal with almost no effort.

Chapter End Notes

Sentry eye... I don't remember if the various eyes summoned by Vaati for boss fights had their own names or not, and I kinda think they functioned this way in the manga but it’s been too long since I read that for me to be sure. I basically this one from fleets. Also holy fuck this chapter. All of these have been longer than what I normally average (I usually shoot for about 2500 words) but this one just kept going and going and going. I wanted to get the whole dungeon out of the way in one go because the actual spelunking didn't feel worth a chapter of it's own, but I ended up showing a fair amount of dungeon anyway and it really added to the count here.
Vaati seemed distracted by something, which Link wasn't going to complain about. A distracted Vaati was a Vaati that didn't say rude things in broken Hylian and knock him over with blasts of wind every few minutes. Maybe he was reflecting on how useless he was fighting that lizard. Maybe he was worried the dragon might come back. Whatever it was, Link was happy to let Vaati silently fiddle with the ruby won from slaying the monster.

There was no doubt in Link's mind that they broke into the dungeon's altar after all, which raised a lot of questions about the size of the dungeon they went through. But he couldn't mention that to any of the sages at school until he resolved to tell anyone what he and Vaati did while waiting out the dragon. There was no national law against dungeon spelunking, but the royal guard and the sorcerers' academy both forbid any new members from going into densely infested monster areas without supervision. Link couldn't possibly be expelled from the academy without his grandfather finding out after he and his new roommate raided a dungeon together.

At least Vaati seemed to be distracted by whatever was on his mind for him to ask any questions about how Link used the Beast Blade. Unless he was distracted by the Beast Blade, in which case Link be in even more trouble. He glance back at Vaati, hoping to somehow peer into his mind, and saw that Vaati was absentmindedly folding wire over the ruby. Where he obtained wire from precisely, Link didn't know. Vaati was weird enough that he might just carry things like that on him at all times.

"Are you okay?" Link asked. It was kind of Vaati's fault that they had to shelter in a dungeon to get away from that dragon after being separated from everyone, but Link still had to honor the buddy system and lookout for his field trip buddy. If the encounter with the lizard shook him, Link was obligated to reach out.

"I am angry," Vaati said.

"Because I wanted you to help with the fight? I know you're a good enough sorcerer for that."

"I am not angry at you," Vaati said. "There is a thing I do not know. It is angering."

"Gotcha." Link was pretty sure Vaati meant frustrating, but fixing his Hylian was someone else's job.

"What is this thing you don't know?"

"You have no need to know."

Well, Vaati seemed to be doing fine after his dungeon encounter. Link let the subject drop. He had his own worries to get caught up in. No doubt there would be questions about where he and Vaati were when the dragon appeared. They might be able to pretend they hid in an ordinary cave, but Link knew Hyrule Field well enough to know there were no known caves in the direction of their dungeon. The patrol would find their dungeon in the next few days too. No doubt security would increase now that the dragon that attacked the city was known to still be in the area. Link was surprised he and Vaati made it halfway back to town before the patrol picked them up.

"This is an awfully bad time for a couple kids to be out here alone," one guard said, taking Link by the shoulder as if there was a risk Link might go somewhere other than the city if left to his own devices. The guard who tried to the same on Vaati got slapped.
"We were out here for school," Link said. "We got separated from the class. We're trying to get back now."

"Separated," a third guard said. "I'm sure that was an accident, Link."

Sometimes it was really annoying to have the local security and law enforcement all know your name and face.

"It was his idea," Link said, feeling no remorse for throwing Vaati under the bus. "He was the one using his magic sense for the assignment. I just went where he said we would get the best results."

"Link is bad at magic," Vaati said, and offered no more explanation past that. His attention was still half elsewhere as he fiddled with the ruby. Recalling that the gem held enough magic energy to attract an abnormally large monster, Link found himself questioning the wisdom of letting Vaati handle it. A future evil sorcerer was an evil sorcerer in the making, whether he was evil yet or not.

A guard clapped Link on the back before he could ask for the ruby back. "Of course he is. Link's a knight. Thoroughbred for the role. Someone already got your old man to cave and let you come back with us one day a week. Hopefully you can win the other six days back before the year ends, eh?"

"Yeah... Hopefully."

Hopefully everyone would just lose interest in him. Then he wouldn't have to explain that he wasn't knight material because he was secretly a monster and went and transformed again even though he knew how weak he really was. Now the Beast Blade stored that Lizard's form as well. Link tried not to think about that.

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It was hard to say if the guards dropping Link and Vaati off at the academy was done to tease Link, or because civilian safety was their job. Either way, Link smiled and did his best to sound grateful. He would rather *not* go back to school, but he had little choice. The dragon, they had learned, only flew around the fields in the area where Link and Vaati were found before flying off, so Castle City was on alert but not lock down. Classes were still in session, save for a few taught by instructors who were still rounding up missing students. Link watched the guards' backs until the last thread of red uniform disappeared around the corner, then turned to see more red in the form of the ruby Vaati had played with the whole walk back. It was now wrapped around the edges in an intracity woven wire frame and hung from a silver chain.

Link took the ruby, turning it over to admire the craftsmanship before asking, "Vaati, why did you make this into a necklace?"

"It was all I had material for."


Nothing about Vaati made much sense to Link. Following the initial assumption that he had an abusive past, it maybe followed that he was so defensive, but Link suspected that Vaati was just a naturally mean-spirited person. He spoke only a dead language up until recently, but his Hylian, awkward as it was, was spoken free of accent. He was too aloof for most things, but apparently made jewelry out of magic artifacts as stress relief. Next, Link expected to discover that Vaati like to bake elegantly decorated cupcakes to feed to woodland creatures, but only after substituting rat poison for sugar.

"What is this?" The ruby was snatched from Link's hand, and both boys flinched back in shock to
see the dean standing beside them. "This is quite the powerful stone. I don't recall seeing it in our priceless artifacts shed, though."

"Your priceless artifacts shed isn't the most organized of places," Link pointed out.

"It's not my fault if you can't recognize the system we use for sorting objects." The dean turned the pendant over in his hand, inspecting the craftsmanship of it as much as the stone itself. "We lack any records of a gem like this, so we have to make sure it's safe before we can turn it loose on the world. Where did you boys find it?"

Panic flashed through Link. He still had no cover story for their dungeon adventure. But Vaati was already on it.

"The dragon had it. He let it go by mistake when he breathe fire at us."

The dean's attention snapped up from the pendant in his hands. "Risen attacked the two of you?"

"Risen?" Link asked.

The dean looked around. No other students lingered outdoors. Even the wind students had retreated indoors. Still, the dean took Link and Vaati each by the hand and dragged them into the nearest building-the kitchen-to talk to them.

"This new threat looming over Hyrule is-"

"An ancient one," Link cut in. It was always an ancient one.

"Threats aren't always ancient, boy!" the dean snapped.

Link waited.

"This new threat looming over Hyrule... is an ancient one." The dean fixed them both with a glare that said they weren't allowed to laugh. "A dragon from the far side of the Great Sea who had recently made his way to our kingdom. Legends of the Dark Dragon Risen are scarce, since he comes from lands beyond the Old Hyrule. It's believed that he was born around the same time as the great demon who caused Old Hyrule's demise, but we can't be certain of this with what few records we've found so far. All we know is that like many dragons, Risen craves treasures, and he delights in wielding power over smaller races. This"-the dean held up the ruby-"would be a perfect treasure for him to add to whatever hoard he may have. He'll want it back, no doubt. It's best you not have it, lest it mark you as a target."

"Risen does not want for it," Vaati said, holding his hand out. "He will not attack us more if we have it than if we do not have it."

The dean hit Vaati over the head with his staff. "You can say than if we don't, boy. Learn your contractions already. And you don't have to say have it twice. It's implied after the first time."

Link looked away and pretended he'd seen nothing. How much of the speed with which Vaati learned the modern tongue, he wondered, came from his primary tutor hitting him whenever he said things wrong?

Link envied his friend Cargan deeply for being in the light sorcerer classes, but he wasn't so sure he would feel that way if the dean still taught those lessons.

"You are making a change to what we are talking about. Risen does not want the rock. Give it
"Wait, Vaati you..." Link paused, unsure how to dispute the point without admitting that Risen left before they got their hands on the ruby. "You...re supposed to call it a ruby. That's what this particular type of gemstone is called."

"They are all-" Vaati flinched back from the dean, who had yet to lift his staff. "They... They're all just rocks."

Link shrugged and looked away, certain that someone would see right through him if he looked anyway in the eye. Risen wasn't after the ruby, and Link didn't trust the dean and his magic item hoarding ways to give back the memento of Link's first real dungeon experience. (Sure, it had been a short dungeon. Vaati's magic resulted in quite a few shortcuts, Link suspected. But it was still Link's first time in an un-explored dungeon, much less in any dungeon without a squadron from the royal guard letting him follow along.) The ruby was safe, but there was no safe way to say so. Link would deal with that later.

"It's a ruby, Vaati. I'll teach you the names of all the gemstones later, okay?"

Vaati shot Link a lethal glare.

"Well, you two might as well hold that lesson at home. Rosemary is still searching for a student, so there are no earth classes, and Vaati... I think your teacher will be fine if I let you go as well." The dean held the ruby up. "My research workload has grown, so I don't have anymore time to babysit the two of you today."

Vaati huffed and stormed out of the building, but Link hesitated before following after to ask, "What were you already researching?"

For his efforts, he received a bird staff to the head. "The dragon, obviously. He's come too close to the city twice now. We need to know as much as possible if we want to turn him back the next time. Risen wants something from us. He will come again."

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Vaati dropped a rupee in a pot on the way to the town square the next day.

"What are you doing?" Link asked. "Was that mine?"

"No." Vaati had made it himself, along with a few dozen others since learning more about the dragon. Too much had happened since he was last sealed. He needed information, and he needed it from people who hadn't lost as many records. People who Vaati wouldn't need to explain the magnitude of his ignorance to. Since he already found Link treating him like a tentative buddy after the previous day's adventure, it didn't do a whole lot of extra damage to Vaati's pride to act like a proper Minish for once and do a few things to make other people happy. A little good behavior to convinces the Minish that they could come out and talk to him would make for a much safer determination of when to give up on acting like a moderately law-abiding citizen.

It wasn't counterfeiting. All rupees came from the Minish in the first place. It was just a little more minting than normal. Not even enough to inflate the market.

"Why did you throw it away?"

"Some person will find it. It's for good luck."
"Is that some kind of special custom where you're from?" Link asked.

Custom, as Vaati understood it, described something that one had made or modified for his or herself. Since he did make the rupee and also totally made up the claim of a cultural practice that spreading happiness brought luck—as near as he could tell, other Minish just liked making people happy—Vaati nodded. He fully expected Link to nag him for either making rupees or telling such an easily detected lie, but for some reason, Link gave Vaati a half-nod before turning his attention elsewhere.

Running errands with the hero wasn't on Vaati's list of things he ever wanted to do, but he wound up trapped in the act. He had offered to buy dinner groceries for Link's grandfather as part of his Minish courting plan, and then Link was sent along to make sure Vaati didn't get lost. Since classes were still canceled until the last three missing students were reported found to the school or else declared dead, they were both free. Link didn't have any reason to refuse other than that he could spend his time studying, which he obviously didn't want to do. Vaati didn't have any believable reason to refuse Link's presence when he had gotten lost a few times. The silver lining, Vaati supposed, was that Link had made good on what he told the dean about giving Vaati speech lessons. There were a few times that Vaati caught Link trying to teach him something that Vaati knew was wrong, but there were also things Link told him that Vaati hadn't quite picked up on but could notice other native speakers doing once it was pointed out to him.

There was a benefit in it, Vaati reminded himself. He wouldn't put up with so many disgustingly quaint things if they didn't gain him something worthwhile. He would be a good little Minish and play along with Link, and he would learn more Modern Hylian and get to the bottom of why an ancient dragon wanted him dead. Maybe, if he was well-behaved enough without becoming so nice it made Link suspicious, he could even get some half-decent reading lessons.

Chapter End Notes

Seven chapters in before I even got around to giving my villain’s name. I couldn’t get Vaati a scene until the end of chapter 3 either. I’m on the ball with my usual way-too-slow development with this fic! Maybe I can make it all the way to chapter 20 before Risen gets a real spoken line! (*Sweats because at this rate, I might do that*)

Credits to Smak64 for Vaati and his rupees. The Vaati oneshot they wrote forced a headcanon upon me that I couldn’t leave out of this fic. I haven’t actually read anything else of theirs, but a lot of the various Minish elements of Vaati’s character were derived from that initial concept. (I mean, in a very lose way, but that was the base I started with.)
The Coveted Light

Chapter Notes

Sorry. Procrastinated on proofreading. Scrivener is superior to MS Word in almost every way but its spellcheck is not one of those ways, so that's a step I don't want to skip.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

School almost resumed when it turned out that two of the three missing students had just run home when Risen appeared in Hyrule Field. The final student, however, never made it back. Messengers were sent to Aboda Village and Whittleton to see if the missing student turned up there, but after several days, no good news had come back. School had been canceled for a week with the full faculty—even the dean-out looking for the missing girl. Cargan, a genuinely studious sorcerer, had dropped by Link’s house for group study to make up for all the time he was losing with the prolonged break that most students were celebrating.

"We have our year's most dedicated student, our year's most talented student, and our year's most technically precise student. It seems like the perfect trio to me," Cargan had explained.

Vaati, in response, had said, "I'm the most talented and the most precise. Don't give Link praise that is undeserved."

Cargan got a kick out of that, but Link just found it irritating that Vaati wasn't as eager to claim that he was dedicated to learning sorcery. Talent, power, and technique weren't things you could just wish for and then magically be granted. Vaati had to have put some effort into getting to where he was.

Although Link had to admit, Vaati did seem to be bright in general. Old Hylian was the root language of the modern tongue, but even with that excuse factored in, it was becoming less and less obvious with each day that Vaati had been speaking modern Hylian for roughly a month. He had a sharp sense for picking out misinformation, and was perceptive in whatever he observed. It took more than that to master complex sorcery without even trying, but Vaati certainly didn't have to try quite as hard as someone like Cargan to succeed. Not that Link would ever admit as much aloud.

While it was fun to see Vaati's pride or need to put others down get the better of him and leave him in an awkward position, he had enough to be justly proud of going for him that he didn't need an ego stroking.

Link's grandfather was happy to leave him and his study group to their own devices, having taken one look at the three of them sitting on the bedroom floor with a dozen books open and been convinced that his grandson was finally coming to love his mandated calling. This meant he missed that only Cargan paid any attention to the books. While Cargan tried to study, Link took the opportunity to pretend they were just a bunch of friends hanging out like non-nerds to talk Cargan's ear off. Vaati, in the meantime, sat in a corner fashioning some trinket or another. If Cargan complained that he wasn't participating, a wind would pick up in the room and cause everyone to lose whatever page they were on in their textbooks.

Link dismissed it. Vaati had been tinkering with things all week. He fixed the kitchen table's wobbly leg, replaced a window for an elderly neighbor after a few kids down the street decided to sneak an octorock into the city to play ball with, and after one of the times where he tripped Link resulted in
an embarrassing pants tear, he even mended the clothes after they got home. The rupee dropping habit had persisted as well. Pots were a favorite place of Vaati's to leave them—the city kept a great many out for collecting rain water—but Link had caught Vaati tucking them behind plants and even tossing them into less traversed alleys and dead ends for people to stumble across. Where exactly Vaati was getting enough money for that, Link didn't ask. The boy was clearly deft with handiwork in general, and he disappeared on his own regularly for errands, or to orient himself to the city and listen to people speak Hylian. He could easily have a side job Link didn't know about.

When Cargan made the mistake of asking Vaati what he was making and was left scrambling to find the chapter he'd been studying in his book of low-level light spells, Link took advantage of the break in books to ask, "What do you think will happen if they never find Maya?"

"Even if she wandered into the woods, I'm sure she'll manage. She's tough. She could probably wrestle down any of the monsters you usually see in the forest realm."

"Why would she go to the woods? She already thinks the buildings here are too densely pressed together. That many trees all packed in would make her claustrophobic."

Cargan paused in the middle of flipping through pages. "Maya came from the sand realm, right? By one of the Gerudo camps?"

"Somewhere near there, but they're in that general direction."

Since it had been a Gerudo king who led to Old Hyrule's flooding, the Gerudo hadn't been viewed too kindly, and weren't even allowed to settle anywhere within Hyrule when their boats came ashore a century and a half ago. It was only in the last decade that the academy fought to be allowed to admit Gerudo who showed promise, and given that Ganondorf had been a warlock himself, the bar for Gerudo with a dark affinity was so much higher than the average dark sorcerer that there had yet to be such a student admitted. Link could still remember the outcry over Gerudo at the academy even with the roundabout ban on dark sorcerydress, despite having been a small child at the time. The guard likely wasn't looking too hard for Maya, and even much of the academy staff would struggle to put their hearts into it. Maya was fire aligned, but had expressed an interest in dark spells, and the school was almost as cautious with people who showed such an interest as they were with people who were dark aligned. It was rare for an evil sorcerer to have an alignment other than dark. Maybe that was why no one worried about Vaati's attitude.

Thinking of the brat who had to be up to something with how helpful he had been the past week, Link couldn't help but look to Vaati. Sensing the gaze, Vaati looked up at Link and asked, "What?"

Cargan answered before Link could. "Do you think Maya's just chilling in the Lost Woods, that she ran all the way home when she saw that crazy dragon, or that she died?"

Vaati considered Cargan a moment, looked down to see that all of the books were still in disarray from the last gust of wind, then said, "In Old Hyrule, there was a forest also called the Lost Woods. It was very rare for those who wandered in to make it back out. The children who died in the woods became Skullkids. I haven't seen this creature in your new kingdom, so I believe that the Lost Woods here don't kill people quite as often. However, she's been gone one week, and she was a stupid girl anyway. Wherever she is, she probably died from going too long without food."

"We call that dying of starvation," Cargan said, perfectly unfazed by Vaati's attitude. It was commonplace to speak callously of the Gerudo, and Cargan didn't know Vaati well enough to know that the brat treated everyone equally. "You really think she's dead?"

Vaati skipped over Cargan's question to ask, "Do we go back to school once they find her dead
"Nah. The academy takes three days off to mourn whenever a student dies for something academy related. Whichever teacher was in charge of the field trip might get fired for not keeping better tabs on everyone, too. But after that it's back to class." It wasn't a regular occurrence, but the academy was old enough for the precedent to be there.

"The school already had guards posted all around the field. It's not their fault anyone vanished. They did their best," Link argued, but he knew that the guard had been light enough to slip past. He and Vaati managed, after all. He was pretty sure the dungeon they found was well beyond the area that anyone was expected to wander to.

"They'll probably rework the entire outing so the teacher guides everyone to one specific site," Cargan said. "I'm sure the dean's already working out something new. He's only out looking for Maya now because it would look bad if he didn't. He's only doubled down on all his research since the dragon showed up a second time. I think there's more on Risen than there is that eyeball freak."

No one had tried to pull Vaati's attention away from his latest arts and crafts project, but a torrent of wind still circled through the room with enough force to knock Cargan over.

Link, who had to brace himself after that near tornado that came through and left his shelves in disarray, knew better than to complain to Vaati about the mess. "Was the dean looking into both monsters?"

"I thought so. Guess it could also be that he was trying to learn what that missing sword did. It vanished the same morning. Jaylin from the water class said that some agent working for Risen might have stolen it. Old Hyrule had all kinds of ancient powers sealed in one place or another. The sword might be something that he can use, or that he didn't want used against him. If I were an evil sorcerer, I would get rid of any sword in my way before I tried to go on my binge of destruction."

There were no evil sorcerers in history that Link knew of who had a light element, so he laughed at the idea of Cargan as one. Vaati, on the other hand, cringed.

"Well, I don't think I'm really getting a whole lot of work done here," Cargan said, giving up on locating his page and shutting his book. "They're either going to call the search off soon or find Maya. Either way, I'll see you back in class. Until then, I'll be at the library if you need me."

"Isn't the library locked up until school reopens?" Link had snuck into the campus only a day earlier, having gotten permission to practice a little with the sword he wasn't supposed to take off school grounds unsupervised. He had tested his metal-moving spell and it's lock picking potential on a few places, but the library held no interest to him, so he hadn't dared set off any alarms there by messing with the security. He got exactly what he went to the school for, and did nothing else that could get him in trouble.

It seemed to Link like a reasonable question, Cargan stared at Link long and hard before he was certain that the question wasn't asked in jest. "There's... You do know that anyone can use the royal library, don't you?"

"Oh," Link's grandfather had always sent him to the academy's library for study material, having arranged for him to have access a year before he could begin his studies so he wouldn't be too far behind his classmates from established sorcery families. He'd never cared enough for books to go out in search of other places to get his hands on them.

"The dean should hole up there and let us back on school grounds. The school library has more
books on magic. It's the royal library that has all the history records and legends."

The tinkle of rupee's turned Link's head towards Vaati, who had tossed his art project into a bag before shutting his own books and rising to his feet.

"Link, you're useless. You, boy." Vaati pointed to Cargan, who it was entirely possible he hadn't bothered to learn the name of. "You will show me to the library."

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Link followed less out of eagerness to learn where the library was and more to make sure Vaati wasn't up to anything. Vaati occasionally scribbled one or two sentences of (presumably) notes in a mix of ancient Hylian and what Link could only guess was a self-made cypher during group lecture classes, but had never spent more than five seconds looking at any of their textbooks. He was the slowest reader in the city, needing to sound out each letter he read and sometimes go over a word a time or two more before he knew what it was, but he had technically achieved literacy. If he wanted to practice reading, then there were plenty of book on magic lying around the house for him to review.

Sure enough, as soon as they reached the library, Vaati split from Cargan and located the directory, then scouted out shelves dealing entirely with legends. He scanned over all of the books dealing with Old Hyrule once, even dragging a step ladder out to reach the top shelves, and Link discounted it as his low opinion of Vaati that the boy seemed to be mouthing his own name as he looked for a specific legend. Not finding what he wanted the first time around, Vaati restarted from the far side of the shelf anew, this time pulling out books on the Great Flood and, upon reading a page of the first one, going back for books on the Demon King Ganondorf. A few of his books were meant for children, which was closer to Vaati's reading level, but it raised a serious question:

What rock had Vaati been living under that he didn't know the legends of Ganondorf and the Great Flood?

Link sat down beside Vaati and took one of the thicker books selected on the subject, opening it up to read for himself. He was best versed in his great grandfather's exploits, but he knew a bit about the Hero of Winds who supposedly defeated Ganondorf once and for all. His great grandfather had personally known several close companions of that hero, so Link heard stories from time to time. Still, he hadn't paid as much attention to the hero who wasn't part of his legacy, so he supposed he might as well brush up on the subject. Show Vaati up a little with how much faster he could read. He could go through a book four times faster than back before he'd been selected as a future sorcerer.

Several chapters in, Vaati spoke in a hushed whisper. Link discounted it at first. It wasn't Hylian, after all. (Actually, that Vaati had been raised not to speak a modern tongue was probably a sign he was kept in isolation. Maybe his parents hadn't taught him about something so significant to Hyrule's history as Ganondorf? Even though he spoke the same tongue Hyrule used before the flood.) But as Link tried to tune it out, he realized that it really wasn't Hylian. Neither modern nor ancient, which everyone had sworn was all Vaati spoke when the dean found him.

He tried to steal a glance at Vaati and see what he was doing. Muttering to himself? Talking to some stranger who happened to know whatever unrecognizable gibberish he was babbling in. It certainly wasn't the Gerudo language he used. The sounds were less harsh, almost a sweet chirp.

When he realizing what he was looking at, Link gave up and stared openly. Vaati appeared to be in a heated debate with thin air. He was slouched over on the table, chin resting on his arm, eyes focused on something Link couldn't see. His tone was defensive, with a sense of urgency, but he paused regularly as if someone else were responding to him, and his face scrunched in reaction to words
Link didn't hear.

Once or twice, Link thought he saw the outline of something that Vaati had turned his attention to, but he dismissed it as his imagination. Vaati was talking to himself. Clearly.

Vaati nodded at something, then rose to his feet and stacked the remaining books. He looked once more to the empty space and asked something indecipherable, nodded again, then left. Link decided he would rather not follow.

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Reshelving books was a pain, but it was what was asked of Vaati, so he had to do it. A proper Minish, for as little as Vaati wanted to be one of those, wouldn't leave others to clean up their own mess. The Minish who dared approach him still sat on the table, now looking at Link's book, but Vaati didn't expect her to follow. They had their own roundabout ways of getting around a world built for larger species, and many, like himself, never appreciated being helped here and there by other, bigger creatures. She would find her way around on her own time. In the meanwhile, Vaati knew where to find everyone else who lived in the library.

Town Minish, back before Vaati was sealed, had a peculiar way of dressing. They sewed petals together like they lived in the wilderness despite the availability of fabric where they lived. Given what he had read of the Great Flood, those idiots must have drowned. The Minish who lived in high altitudes—who would have survived and stowed away on ships to travel to the new continent—had the sense to wear sturdy fabrics. Vaati assumed that he was looking at Minish descended from those subcultures. Or perhaps Minish who came to the world through a different gate, and who carried over the sensibility of wearing fabric that didn't perish in a matter of days from a world that was built for their own size.

Wherever their ancestry lay, they wore scaled down versions of Hylain clothing. Vaati felt self-conscious as he snuck into an unoccupied row of shelves and transformed into Minish form. His own clothing were the same as when he first stole the hat from Ezlo, save for the hat—obviously. He felt keenly aware of how dated his wardrobe must have been.

Looking up at the shelves when he'd finished changing forms, Vaati felt a pang of regret for agreeing to go somewhere else to talk. He was a rarity among Minish, so it wasn't likely that he was being led into a trap. Most were too soft-hearted for something of that nature. Still, just looking around, Vaati felt uneasy with the size difference. He still had as much magic—as much power—as he did in Hylian form, but the amount of output possible at a time was diminished. There was a reason that Minish, for all their talents, spent more time making enchanted things than casting battle spells. It was easier to gradually imbued things with magic to use later than it was to try and call upon vast reserves that would only respond in bits and pieces. Trying to use all his might at once in his original form would be like trying to squeeze an ocean through a pin hole.

The power was still there, he reminded himself. He could still teleport out of reach of a threat if need be. He was less mass to move, overall. That would buy him enough time change back to a larger form and squash anything that dared threaten him. Perhaps by literally setting his foot on it and pressing down, if he wanted to burn every last bridge between himself and the Minish.

Despite remembering how much scrambling was involved in Minish navigating Hylian structures, Vaati had forgotten how tiring it felt. He was almost panting by the time he had climbed a ladder carved into a bookshelf along the wall and slipped in a hole behind the third shelf to find the village of library-dwelling Minish within.

They eyed him warily, so Vaati took the initiative with the conversation. "If the Hylians ever decides
to replace the furniture here with something that isn't chipped all along the side, you're screwed. Who makes their town this high off the ground?"

Saying that hurt a little. The hole he entered from was about level with his navel in Hylian form, and his Hylian form was short enough that he couldn't reach the upper shelves without help. But it was worth it to see the sheepish looks on several of the Minish as they scurried off.

Only three didn't flee into their homes, roofless structures relying on the library to keep them safe from the elements, with books set up as walls for privacy. Of those who remained, two were a breed Vaati didn't recognize, greyer in tone with blue and green eyes, but the golden one, larger than the others, he recognized as the kind seen in Death Mountain. So those Minish survived the flood.

It was the mountain bred who stepped forward to speak. "Vaati, I presume. We remember stories of you."

"Good. Someone does."

The Minish nodded. "My great, great grandfather is revered among our people. He forged the sword used to defeat you. The technique he used has been passed down in my family."

"Charming," Vaati said, refusing to let himself feel concern. Link wasn't able to see the Minish, and no one large enough to travel as far and wide as would be needed to reach every location he'd hurled a sword fragment towards would know to seek out a Minish smith for help in mending the blade. Especially given that he had yet to stumble across acknowledgment from the new Hyrule that the Minish existed. "Do you greet all your guests with thinly veiled threats?"

"We merely find your behavior curious."

"Curious is a good enough term for it," Vaati said. "I have a few questions for you. Everyone else I've spoken with since waking up has too short a memory to tell me what all transpired in my sleep. Or are you unfamiliar with the dragon as well? I imagine you know about its attack."

"As we know you hid when last it showed up."

Vaati tried not to take the bait. He failed. "I did no such thing! I was already on my way to a location where Risen couldn't reach me. His appearing just gave me the excuse I needed to get Link to follow!"

At least, he supposed, it was good of him to show enough self restraint not to admit he'd been trying to kill Link even before Risen showed up.

Actually wouldn't it have made more sense for Vaati to lock himself in the dungeon and let Risen burn Link to a crisp? He would be kicking himself for that lapse in judgment all week. Possibly for centuries as he bided his time in some seal again, if he couldn't find another golden opportunity to do Link in.

"If you called me back here just to mock me, then I have no business with you."

The Minish considered Vaati's words, then said, "The attack knocked over many of our own homes. But more than that, any threat is a threat we would like stopped, whoever it might take to stop it. It's not as though we've had any luck leaving hints for the Hylians as to Risen's true nature. At this point, you're the only thing left that we're willing to try."

"You haven't killed anyone yet, at least," one of the remaining two Minish pitched in. "Not now or before."
The words 'watch me' were on Vaati's tongue, but he thought better of them. If behaving made him an acceptable last resort, then he could behave until they were done imparting knowledge onto him.

Instead, Vaati said, "My condolences. It must have been hard when your books fell over. You've done a remarkable job reconstructing everything in such a short time. I wouldn't have thought it possible to stand everything back up in only a month."

Vaati had always thought himself a master of the flat, unamused glare, but the mountain Minish posed quite the challenger.

"Since you went to so much trouble to ask us," the mountain Minish said, "Yes, we do have more information to share with whoever may hear us regarding Risen. Although all the races lost something in the Great Flood, we have managed to retain much of what was known of the land before it was submerged. While Hyrule recalls only the years leading to the sinking of the kingdom, we saved records of the land from before its demise. We remember you, Vaati. The dragon is one more creature that remembers you. I think you'll find that all beings who lived before the Great Flood know who you are, and that's no blessing."

"It hasn't caused me much trouble yet," Vaati said.

"You've only met one such being so far, and you've already noticed it's hunting you," the mountain Minish pointed out. "There are evils far greater than you, to whom you would be seen merely as a more useful pawn than the average monster. There are also evils no different from you, seeking the Light Force. I tell you this only because Risen is the pawn of one such more powerful evil, you must not let him grow in power by stealing the Light Force from you."

"You seem to think there's any threat of that happening. I'm not about to lose to someone else's servant," Vaati said. "Frankly, I'm offended that you think his master is stronger than me."

The mountain Minish didn't have the decency to react to Vaati's boast. "We know of both your past attempts, so we know risk of defeat is not enough on it's own to compel you to win. So allow me to warn you of this as well: If Risen is able to steal the Light Force from you, maintain no illusions that you will survive him."

Vaati stiffened, less at the warning than at the reminder that, for all his power, he had been defeated by previous incarnations of Link twice. The Light Force was still stubbornly sluggish in responding to him, working only at certain times. Depending on how powerful Risen was compared to Link, unless Vaati did manage to master the Light Force, then there was a real chance he could have it stolen. It wasn't as though risk of death carried much weight with him. He'd thought he would die upon his first defeat, only to wind up sealed, so who was to say that lightning wouldn't strike twice? Losing, however, was not something he wanted to think of.

Actually, lightning striking twice probably wasn't a good thing to bank on when it came to not dying.

"Almost all of the Light Force is mine," Vaati said. "I'm not about to lose to an overgrown lizard."

"The Light Force was not a power meant for an upstart Minish, but a gift from our goddess who we delivered to theirs. Without the blessing of their Hylia or the Golden Goddesses, the Light Force will never be yours. Not in truth."

Chapter End Notes
I'm perturbed by the fate of the Minish in the adult timeline. It's implied that the people of Hyrule had enough time to reach higher grounds when the flood happened, but would the Minish have been able to travel to mountain tops fast enough? Would anyone have helped them when most believed them to be a legend, and their legend is only referenced in one of the earliest games on the timeline well before when the flood would have taken place? The Minish were spread out all around the kingdom in Minish Cap, but I feel like any that didn't already live on the high grounds would have been left at the bottom of the sea with Vaati and the Four Sword.
Link knew his first day back at the academy since the search for Maya was called off was going to be a good one when Vaati asked him for help with translating the phrase 'to stone with you' from Ancient Hylian. He obviously wasn't scheming anything, and there was nothing suspicious about that request. It came as something of a surprise, in fact, that when they reached the railroad tracks on their way to class and had to stop to let a train pass, Vaati only *mused* about pushing Link in front of the next train they saw. He'd been in such a dark mood ever since their library trip that Link earnestly expected Vaati would shove him into the train *without* warning.

But that was silly. Vaati was a bit of a bully and liked to knock Link's feet out from under him both figuratively and literally, but he'd never tried to see Link *killed*.

That didn't stop Link from expecting something bad to happen all day. He paid even less attention than normal in lecture hall, constantly stealing glances at Vaati to see if he was about to do anything disastrous. The school was talking about grief and loss and who to go to if they felt the absence of a fellow classmate, but even when it was a subject that Link actually cared about, he couldn't focus when all his thoughts were locked on the idea that Vaati was planning something. Even when they were practicing magic, while Vaati was outside with the other wind students and Link was safe inside the earth hall, Link kept expecting Vaati to mess with him.

Finally, as the school day drew to a close, it occurred to Link that it took a haughty man indeed to ask their target for help with what to say while pulling some devious prank on them. Vaati *was* indeed haughty, but he *probably* wasn't *that* haughty. Whoever Vaati planned to humiliate, Link was most likely safe (but he was still going to sleep with one eye open).

Relatively assured that Vaati meant *him* no harm on that particular day, Link didn't let himself worry too much when Vaati grabbed him after class and said, "I need to discuss an important thing with the light teacher. You'll come with me."

"Why?"

"Because I've told you to."

"Why do you want me with you?" Link asked.

"Because she likes you. It's the easiest way for her to agree to the discussion."

"And why do you need to speak with her?"

"That is a secret." Vaati paused in the middle of pulling Link towards the light hall where Zelda had her office, looking back at him in mild concern. "Can you use a contraction for *that*, or is that not allowed in New Hylian?"

"It's allowed, but you have to say something like *in the modern version of Hylian* if you're not going to straight up call it Hylian."

"That's stupid. No one says the ancient version of Hylian."

"Ancient Hylian is a name. New Hylian is not."
"I say it is. New Hylian is the language people speak in New Hyrule."

"It's just Hyrule."

"If you have an Old Hyrule, then this is New Hyrule."

Link gave up the argument. Vaati looked childish, but he was oddly particular about things in a way that reminded Link of an old man clinging to the past. Vaati was also the single most stubborn person Link knew, so if he wanted to make a fool of himself using such ridiculous names, then who was Link to stop him?

Giving Vaati his empty victory in an argument won Link peace and quiet for the rest of their walk to Zelda's office.

It had never occurred to him that the princess would have a cramped office like every other teacher. It seemed too mundane for someone of her status. But sure enough, Vaati walked straight to it. Almost as if he had staked the place out. That he could throw open the door to a room belonging to the future queen as if he had every right left Link in awe.

It also made him want to shrivel up in shame at the withering look the princess gave Vaati.

"Common courtesy is to knock," she said.

"I very sorry," Vaati said, taking on a thick, unrecognizable accent. "Is not rule in my country."

"Knock it off," Link told him. "Sorry to disturb you, You Highness."

"While on school grounds, I am not the princess. I am a teacher. If you have questions for me as a student, then I can oblige so long as you show the proper respect expected from someone who has only begun their studies."

Link was pretty sure respect wasn't a word Vaati knew in any language. He wasn't surprised that Vaati not only didn't apologize, but also sat down uninvited. At least he made up for it by saying, "I've found information about the dragon who attacked."

Zelda immediately set aside the papers she had been grading, Vaati's previous transgressions forgotten as she asked him, "I don't suppose you know what happened to that poor girl too?"

Vaati shrugged, which made Link cringe. It was like he wanted Zelda not to like him.

Actually, Zelda had barely noticed he was there. Link wanted to linger. He'd been offered lessons, after all. Now that it seemed like he wasn't going anywhere fast with his plans to leave the school, he might as well arrange for them. He still didn't trust himself after having shape shifted, but shape shifting was dark magic, so surely it was safe to learn light. Link thought Vaati had horribly misjudged in thinking that he needed Link present in order to talk to Zelda, but Link wasn't going to complain so long as Vaati didn't make her hate both of them.

"I suppose it was too much to hope for. Have you spoken to the dean yet? Did you bring the tome you found your information in with you?"

Vaati looked perplexed, and turned sheepishly to Link. "A tome is a type of book?"

"Basically."

Turning back to Zelda, Vaati said, "It is not from a book. I've spoken with one of the lesser known
races of Hyrule, and they gave me this information."

"Which race?" Zelda asked. "I suppose we should have asked the Rito. Most of them did stay on the islands over Old Hyrule. It's possible they know more about the lands on the other side of the Great Sea than we do."

Vaati looked deep in thought for a moment, then asked, "Have you ever heard of Picori?"

"Never."

"I see. They are a very small species." He held a hand just above Zelda's desk to indicate their heights. Link had to bend over to see how small the space between the two of them was. "They can only be seen by children, but because they are so small and children are so reckless, many avoid being seen at all. They're exceedingly common where I come from, but no one has said a word about them here, so I wasn't sure how well recognized they are. They live even longer than Zora, so-"

"Zora?" Link asked.

Vaati had no response for that, staring at Link in horror. It was Zelda who took pity on Link's ignorance. "The Zora were a race of fish-men who lived in Old Hyrule. It's said that they evolved into the Rito after the Great Flood, but-"

"The Zora turned into birds because the ocean grew?" Vaati asked.

Zelda paused in her story, but neither she nor Link could find it in him to reprimand Vaati for speaking out of turn on that one. After a brief, awkward silence, she looked back to Link and said, "But it's believed that some of the Zora migrated south and now live on another continent. Possibly even the one Risen came from. Zora lived over twice as long as Hylians and had far better memories, so their oral record is less muddied. Much of what we still know from before the Great Flood, we know because the Zora imparted the information to those surviving Hylians before they vanished. Vaati is suggesting he spoke with a species that better recalls Risen. A race who would apparently be hard for him to bring forward."

Link nodded. It made sense, sort of. Vaati had been very nearly roasted by Risen the last time the dragon appeared, and so he would be as invested as anyone else in seeing the dragon stopped. And how could you know the weaknesses of an enemy you knew nothing about? Researching the dragon and sharing your findings with anyone who might be useful in defeating it was only logical.

Granted, Link had always assumed Vaati was too full of petty spite to have room for anything like logic, but you could always be wrong about a person.

"I'm surprised that you do not know of the Picori," Vaati said, seemingly losing track of the topic. "There were many legends of the Picori helping those in Old Hyrule. There was even one among them who became a villain of legend."

"I've never heard the story," Zelda said, leaning in with interest despite it having nothing to do with the dragon. She was a princess of Hyrule, of course. Her destiny was tied to many of the forgotten legends, or so they said. If someone came to her suggesting they knew legends that might relate to her own ancestors, of course she would be interested.

"That's sad," Vaati said. "There is a legend from long before even I was born where the Picori gifted a great power to a former princess capable once of banishing all the monsters of Hyrule, but someone set them free again later. It was called the Light Force, and it was passed down from generation to generation before a sorcerer stole most of it away. Now it is a power split in two, and that power is
what Risen wants."

The story sounded fanciful to Link. Hyrule knew about most of the sacred powers that it once held, and that it still retained. The legend of the Triforce was... well... legendary, for example. Even though it had been lost for two centuries, believed to still be sealed at the bottom of the Great Sea. For there to be any gifts the royal family possessed that they forgot about seemed impossible.

Yet Zelda's eyes were alight with the curiosity of someone who was watching puzzle pieces fit into place in their mind. "So as the latest in the royal lineage, I would have one fragment of this Light Force, which is why Risen attacked the city. And the descendant of the one who stole the rest of the Light Force, that would be you, Vaati, wouldn't it? I thought it was strange. Whenever you stood far away, you seemed like a wind sorcerer to me, but the nearer I drew, the more light element I could sense in you. That would be my portion of the Light Force reacting to yours, wouldn't it."

Vaati nodded, a smile spreading on his face that sent a chill down Link's spine. Things were making sense to the princess, but to Link there were holes appearing in Vaati's story. 'Before even I was born' Vaati said, as if there was something remarkable about being born before him. As if most of the forgotten legends of the Picori he spoke of came after Vaati was born.

Memories of the library, where Vaati almost seemed to be looking for himself amongst all the old legends, resurfaced in Link's mind. But that was silly. Vaati was fast approaching natural Hylian speech, but he still had the occasional misphrasing. It wasn't right of Link to apply the least generous interpretation to everything. He couldn't assume the worst of Vaati just because he was a brat.

"Do you know how your ancestor stole part of this Light Force?" Zelda asked. "Would Risen be able to do the same."

"I do know the process, although I think you wouldn't want me to perform it," Vaati said, holding out a hand that... seemed to be pointed towards Link?

Link rescinded his intentions not to be suspicious just before hearing the four ill omen words: "To stone with you."

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Princess Zelda reacted within seconds of Link's petrification, but Vaati was faster. The latest incarnation of the princess was a prodigy for her time, but he was still barely more than a child. A child cut off from most knowledge of her family's legacy. Blocking her initial magic attack while knocking her to her feet was child's play.

Too bad for her. The Light Force did add a bit of light to Vaati's own alignment—at least at times when it worked like it was supposed to—and there was a resistance that came with magic of your own alignment. Her light magic, once a formidable threat to his reign, was practically his own with the Light Force shared between them. While the royal family was blessed with many other powers that the princess didn't even realize she had, once the Light Force was all Vaati's, he would surely be able to hold his ground against those as well. They said the princess was a goddess in human form, so Vaati would become a god himself to match her.

Although he hardly needed to be a god to overpower the silly girl. Taken by surprise as she was, it was too easy to trap her, encasing her inside a crystal that was the most advanced earth magic he was capable of. The wind spell for dispelling it was a simple one, but oddly obscure. If Hyrule didn't even remember him, then Vaati doubted they remembered such a trick.
One perk of light magic was telepathy, and from within her crystal, Zelda's voice could still be heard. *You played us! You're no beginner sorcerer at all.*

"It's hardly my fault if you're so poor at assessing a person's skill," Vaati said. "But if you want me to be honest about my abilities, then no, princess, I don't know any spells my ancestors used for the Light Force. I do, however, *vividly* remember the spell I used to take what of the Light Force I did from your own ancestor. Lucky for me, because it would be a shame to wait so long to take the rest of it, only to forget how to do so. Don't blame me for this. I wasn't lying when I said Risen wants the Light Force as well, and I'd rather not go toe to toe with an unknown enemy without every resource I can."

He had to work quickly. It was only a matter of time before the princess recovered from her shock enough to realize she could reach people outside the room with her telepathy. Vaati was confident that he could stop any one of the school's sages, but he would rather not fight too many of them at once.

**Chapter End Notes**

Freaking finally. When I look back at my older fics, my main criticism of them is how fucking fast everything happens. I had no sense for how to flesh out a scene, so everything just flies by. But looking at my newer stuff, I feel like I've overcompensated. It takes too damn long for me to really get to the conflict every freaking time.

Actually, I triple dog dare y'all to try and read my first ever Zelda fic. I have to make myself get past the second paragraph. I cringe every time I read the first one, remember how I was trying to create an air of mystery by not using Ganondorf's name, then read the second paragraph where I go ahead and name him. I think I called him "The dark one" or something like an edgy pre-teen. Although if you're reading this on AO3, I never ported all my older, shittier fics to AO3, so you won't find it there.
The princess was left unconscious on her office floor. Her breathing faint by the time Vaati was done with her. Would she die? Vaati didn't know, but if she did, he thought it would look more suspicious if her corpse was found trapped in a crystal. It wouldn't buy him much time before the signs of drained magic were noticed and the death was declared an attack on the royal family, but it bought a little time. Vaati had a statue he still needed to drop in the ocean, and the fewer interferences as he tied up loose ends, the better.

The problem was that his shape shifting magic was acting up again. His entire dark element wasn't sluggish like when he was in the dungeon with Link, but rather didn't respond to him at all. No. To put it that was would imply that it was there. When he reached for it, he couldn't feel the dark element anywhere. That meant no shape shifting. No summoning monsters. No more petrification curses, if he couldn't use the dark component that was a part of every curse to supplement his lifelong weakness where earth magic was concerned. It was lucky for him that his dark element didn't go out of commission until after he cursed Link. As it was, the element had already moved sluggishly at the time. He'd had to stall forever while he worked up enough magic for the curse.

Regardless of the magic one held in their body, different species had different capacities for how much magic they could release at once. Hylians were good at that, and Vaati's Hylian form was vastly superior to his Minish in a battle, but to take on one's true form, the figure reflected in their soul, was to achieve the height of magic potential. If Vaati couldn't access his Wrath form, not only would carrying Link to the ocean be a pain, but he might be in trouble if attacked by enough forces at once.

Unable to shape shift into a form that could easily grab Link and fly off, Vaati tried to teleport, and scowled as he felt his wind element—his proper alignment—resist his summons. He had to grapple with it like a fledgling mage, slowly pulling more and more threads of wind until he had enough to move. And even once he'd managed that, he could focus on nothing other than slowly weaving the magic together into the teleportation spell. Grabbing Link to take him along for the ride nearly caused the spell to fall apart, and when they warped, they only made it was far as the outskirts of Hyrule field.

The critical failure of aiming made Vaati grimace. Any attempt to warp all the way to the ocean might land him smack in the middle of a wall, or a tree, or any other obstacle between him and his destination.

Did Link really need to go all the way to the ocean? Vaati looked around for some place to just...bury him. But the only natural dip in the land steep and close enough that Vaati saw was several hundred yards away and surrounded by charred grass. Not only would that leave suspicious drag marks, but if he filled in that hole, then the guard would know to dig it back up. After all, Link had reported the location of the dungeon they found the same day they found it.

Vaati still wanted the ruby they found in there. He hadn't gotten a full read on it before it was confiscated, but it had seemed like it might be good for repelling magic, which would be handy in a future where magic education was so organized. Besides, it was red, and roughly the size of the old gem. If the wishing hat still existed, it was at the bottom of the ocean and good as gone, but for purely nostalgic reasons, Vaati wouldn't mind owning a replica with a functional purpose. Perhaps he could break into the school and steal it back once he'd disposed of Link.
He would get to that when he got to it. In the meantime, he was out in a highly patrolled area with a statue he needed to get rid of before anyone learned there was a cursed person in need of rescue. With a heavy sigh, Vaati set to work gathering up the wind to teleport again. Out in the open air, the element responded to him better, but still... poorly. Investigating that would be a top priority as soon as the hero was out of his way for good.

Progress was faster than trying to physically drag a stone statue of Link across the land, but painfully slow compared to teleporting straight to his destination. The ocean had just appeared on the horizon when it occurred to Vaati that he was going to have a rough time getting Link deep enough out at sea to drop him somewhere too deep for a boat to find.

Could he leave Link in relatively shallow waters and hope no fishing boat stumbled upon him? If he did Could he hold Link's statue while he worked himself up to casting another teleportation spell while trying to keep afloat? If he marked where he left Link, could he come back once he'd resolved the issue of his wind not responding properly in order to finish the job, or would someone else learn what he'd done before he finished the job?

Before he could decide if it was worth the risk or not, the decision was made for him to instead leave Link lying in the grass and scramble away from a massive, dragon-shaped shadow that passed overhead.

Running was not the strong-suit of someone used to being able to teleport anywhere they pleased. Vaati made it only a hundred yards before Risen landed just behind him, his claw catching Vaati's shoulder and tearing it open. Pain like fire shot down his arm and across his chest as bone cracked. He gripped the wound and gritted his teeth, "Risen."

The dragon leered down at him. "We meet again, shape shifter. Imagine my surprise to see the overgrown bat take on such a mouse of a form? I thought it was the princess I sensed in the fields the other day when I didn't see a fat black ball in the sky, but I realize now that it was you scurrying along the ground."

Something about the barbs being spoken in Ancient Hylain made them sting worse. Vaati bit his lip to keep from saying anything he would regret and ran the numbers fast. He couldn't shapeshift into a stronger form when he couldn't feel his dark element at all, and he couldn't even begin to wrap his fingers around the massive light element now burning inside of him. That overwhelming light made it hard to reach his wind which, realistically, he would do little damage to a massive dragon with unless he could get a firm grasp on it.

He would need more time to learn to work the Light Force into the rest of his magic with finesse. It had never burned in him so strongly before, even though he'd taken only a small fraction of it from the princess.

The dragon was a wholly dark creature, so dark magic wouldn't be good to use on it anyway. But light? Even if he had only a flimsy grasp on the Light Force, it would be devastating.

Vaath threw out a hand and tried to fire a light-based bolt of magic at Risen, but the spell fizzled out well before it reached the dragon's height.

"Was that meant to be a warning shot?" Risen asked.

"That's right. Come any closer and I'll really give it to you." Vaati kept his expression taunting and his tone even. Thankfully, natural paleness meant it was harder to notice a person turning pale.
Risen dipped his head, coming within range of the last shot. He stared at Vaati long enough to draw a nervous sweat, then his mouth parted to form what Vaati could only assume was a smirk.

"For many years, I watched the droplet of light pass from girl to girl on the open sea, and followed that droplet of light to this land, wondering where the rest might be. After so many centuries of watching, looking for the light that would permit me to break free of that man, I found it. A brilliant glow shinning from beyond a crack in stone before it burst out and lit the sky.

"I should have known the legend of the sorcerer who tried to steal the light force to be true. The tales claimed the power you stole to be so intertwined with the life of it's bearer that you would have killed the princess had you robbed her completely, and the girl died mere years into adulthood from the loss you ealth her. I know not how the girl with only a droplet will handle her loss, but little mouse, don't you now carry the full Light Force inside of you? I wonder if you'll live once I finish draining you of it."

Vaati found himself certain lightning wasn't going to strike twice where him living was concerned. The mere act of losing the Light Force must have been what the Minish were talking about when they said he wouldn't survive Risen. And that was their estimate when he didn't possess all of it. It was possible he didn't carry the same risk since he wasn't born with the Light Force, but he was no longer eager to bed on that.

The Light Force almost overwhelmed the rest of his magic, and he couldn't gather wind up fast enough to teleport away when Risen opened his mouth and took a deep breath. He only had the spell half-cast when fire hurtled down towards him.

Vaati flinched away and shut his eyes, unable to dodge the dragon's fire breath in time. The air went dry, heat rising all around him... yet he felt no fire on his skin. Instead, he heard a feral dragon roar, followed shortly after by beating wings causing the a flurry of wind around him.

Slowly, Vaati opened his eye to see Risen back in the sky and a King Dodongo standing over him. The same one from the first day? He hoped it wasn't after the Light Force too. That would just be too much when his magic was going completely haywire on him. Why hadn't he already gotten to the root of the problem after noticing his dark magic on the fritz days ago. Stupid, stupid, stupid! And now with the Light Force resonating in him so strongly... wait...

That was it. The Light Force. So long as he could grasp it, it drowned out any other magic he possessed. If only he'd managed to trigger it sooner so he could be better practiced at using it. It had been so many years since Vaati had to actually practice magic that he didn't even know how. He'd used all his time in school assessing Link or listening for information about the modern era, and he had only begun to learn magic from Ezlo before he stole the hat. The method that Ezlo used wasn't nearly entrenched enough for him to be able to recall it after millennia. Vaati wasn't even all that sure how one went about learning magic the normal way.

It was a problem he would have to solve later. For the time being, with the King Dodongo standing over him, Vaati needed to get away from Risen. Get somewhere that the dragon couldn't follow and figure out some one and off switch for the Light Force-if there was such a thing now that he held the power in full-and from there he could either learn to control the Light Force properly or figure out how to access the rest of his magic despite it.

He had to start from scratch after his spell was disrupted before, and his focus almost slipped twice with a King Dodongo and a dragon waging a battle overhead, but he managed to gather enough power to warp away. Only to the next hill, but it was still something. If Risen was distracted enough with the King Dodongo...
No such luck. Seconds after Vaati materialized, Risen pivoted away from the King Dodongo to go after him again.

Reflexively, Vaati fired a shot of wind and was surprised when he managed to summon a gale force capable of grounding the dragon. The Light Force no longer hummed just beneath his skin and his regular magic was back in full, save that he could still barely feel his dark element. Did using too much non-Light Force magic cause that power to retract? Why couldn't Risen have given him a day or two to figure everything out before coming after him?

Risen rose to his feet and flapped his wings, preparing to take to the sky once more only to have the King Dodongo land on him. From a few hundred feet away Vaati could hear bone crack. Served Risen right. He could barely move his right arm after that surprise attack that led to him dropping Link.

While Risen flailed against the King Dodongo's weight, Vaati readied a tornado. Even a small dodongo was hard to blow far, but dragons were meant to be airborne, and a dragon with a busted wing would be hard pressed to resist. The second Risen managed to throw the King Dodongo off of him, Vaati unleashed his tornado, catching the dragon in a vortex and carrying it away.

Vaati shuddered when he saw the dark mist that grew thick around the injured wing. Whatever power Risen or his master possessed, the dragon wouldn't be wounded for long. He threw more wind into his spell and sent Risen flying beyond the horizon. However much more time it would buy himself, it was the best he could do.

That left Vaati with a broken arm, magic that he was no longer confident he could rely on in any pinch, and a King Dodongo now leering at him.

Monsters that were near impenetrable from the outside were hard for even Vaati's wrath form to damage. He had no bombs on hand, and didn't know any high tier explosive magic. He was running through a list of other spells he knew that might get him out of his latest bind when the King Dondongo curled up and began rolling towards him.

The same reflex as before compelled Vaati to throw wind at the monster to buy himself time for a better spell, but when it drew close he felt the Light Force well up inside him and grabbed it by mistake, causing sparks of light to explode from his palm instead. He then raised his bad arm, shut his eyes, and braced for impact, out of time.

The blow never came. The sound of rolling stopped, replaced with a pathetic flop and a groan.

Vaati opened his eyes to see Link lying dazed on his back. His clothes were torn in much the same way any shape shifter's would be if they forgot to account for clothing right away when they started changing forms, and through the holes in his tunic, Vaati saw the ruby the dean stole from them the other day.

Whatever anti-magic property that ruby possessed, it must have broken Vaati's petrification spell. Vaati would look into that and make sure no one else got the ruby, however Link got the ruby. In the meantime, there was a dragon after him and Vaati really didn't want to deal with the hero who would now know he was a villain on top of that.

Link's sword lay on the ground a few feet away. Vaati picked it up, testing the weight in his left hand. It didn't fit quite right, and it was larger than any blade he was used to wielding, but it would do. He drew a line along Link's wrist and watched blood leak from it to test the sharpness, then held it to Link's neck, no longer concerned with killing him in a way to make things look like an accident. There was no more need to play the barely law abiding child. The Light Force was Vaati's, and the
hero would be out of the way for at least another decade, or however long it took him to reincarnate and grow old enough to fight again.

That thought made Vaati hesitate. Why did this one hero in particular always reincarnate? What made him so special that he should live time and again? Vaati had recognized when he faced off against the same soul twice that it wasn't mere luck that a child beat him when he first rose to power. Ordinary people relying on luck weren't worthy of a second life. Or a third, fourth, fifth... the hero he was about to behead had to be on his sixth life at the very least. There was no doubt in Vaati's mind that the heroes who fought the demon Ganondorf who flooded Old Hyrule, founded New Hyrule, and destroyed the demon Malladus before going on to be the current hero's great-grandfather were all the same hero. (How elitist did you have to be to reincarnate in your own lineage? And people called Vaati vain!) Vaati could only think of one possible reason that someone would be special enough to reincarnate time and again not just to thwart one sorcerer, but any other great threat that befell the same Din blasted kingdom.

Somehow, someway, Link was connected to the gods.

And what was it the Minish told Vaati? 'Without the blessing of their Hylia or the Golden Goddesses, the Light Force will never be yours?' In light of that, it didn't seem like a coincidence that Vaati's magic didn't act as it should-no, that every time the Light Force flared up so he couldn't control his normal magic as he ought to be able to-Link was nearby.

Killing him when Vaati was going to need to master the Light Force to get Risen off his back would be a bad idea, then. Vaati tossed the sword aside and reached down with his good arm to confiscate the ruby instead, only for Link to jolt awake and catch Vaati's hand.

Link's voice sounded dazed despite his firm grip. "Vaati? What are you doing?"

"Let go."

"You're hurt." Link blinked, looking up at Vaati's broken shoulder and right arm, then down to the hand reaching for the ruby strapped to his neck. "Do you want... Wait... Where are we?"

"No time, Link," Vaati said, heart picking up speed. He could recall his own grogginess still when he was zapped from his Wrath to Minish form. He didn't have long before Link remembered the curse, his sword arm was broken, and he couldn't use his own magic in Link's presence. He tried to reach down only for Link to hold firm, but was able to pull his hand away just fine. Looking for anything to ensure his own survival, he lunged for the sword again, raising it not against Link, but to slit his own wrist.

"What are you doing?" Link asked again, sounding more alert now as he struggled to his feet.

"How... Wait... You-!"

Vaati grabbed Link's hand-pointing accusatory towards him-and pressed his open wound to Link's, reciting an ancient incantation as fast as he could. He wasn't well versed in light magic. It was something Ezlo loved, and thus something Vaati hadn't asked the Wishing Cap to make him a master of, but he knew the words by heart. They had been used to bring an ancient evil thwarted in the Minish world to it's knees, and Vaati had started studying that evil's defeat when he decided to steal the Wishing Cap. He'd wanted to know how to ensure the spell wouldn't be used against him.

Before Link could ask once more what Vaati was doing, the final Ancent Minish syllable was freed from his lips. The Light Force flared up, stirring the air around both of them. A glow of pure white whirled around them before wrapping around their connecting wrists, leaving a white band circling the areas where their cuts had been. It was, ironically, the only 'healing' spell Vaati knew, if you
wanted to count it as one. Healing was advanced light magic, and the only simplified version, heart making, was a trick Vaati hadn't reached in his apprenticeship before he betrayed Ezlo.

He took a moment to study the band, disappointed that it had so little flare to it, and was taken off guard when Link socked him in the face.

"Answer me!" Link demanded. "What is going on?"

Vaati rubbed his nose, glaring up at the hero. "It's called a Destiny Bond. If the caster dies, so will the target."

An ancient evil from Vaati's own world had been stopped upon finding itself in a situation where in order to defeat the king it sought to overthrow, it had to give its own life. Vaati hoped that Link's courage only went so far as a willingness to take risks, and not to do anything that was guaranteed to get him killed.

"Why would you need a spell that..." Link's eyes widened into horror. "You cursed me! You cursed me when we were talking to Zelda, and you cursed me again just now!"

Technically, a Destiny Bond was a holy spell, but Vaati supposed he had used it as a curse. It really sounded more like a curse when you thought about what it did. Funny how most spells that the heroes used were suddenly Not Okay when used by the villain. That would be a good moral dilemma to pose to the hero or some righteous philosopher, but Vaati already had a philosophy in life and moral leaning that he was perfectly comfortable with. The strongest could do as they pleased because might ruled about all else. With the Light Force he ought to be the strongest, but just getting Link to cooperate long enough for Vaati to tame his new power would be a feat worthy of legend, what with the way Link was glaring at him.

"Did you curse Zelda too?"

Vaati blinked, taken aback by such a stupid question when he had expected Link to lunge for the sword and attack him at a moment's notice. "Did I... what?"

"Don't play dumb with me. Everyone knows your Hylian isn't that bad."

It took Vaati a second to realize what was going on. Each Zelda, with all their magic power, had been able to watch their hero on his journey no matter what condition they were in, but Link lacked such a gift. Anything that happened after being turned to stone was one big blank space in Link's memory.

Vaati could have just... not put that Destiny Bond on Link, and things would be fine. Their relationship was bad enough to pass off the petrification as a prank. He could have passed off a lie until Link went back home and learned that the Princess had been attacked and told everyone that Vaati was an ancient evil sorcerer. If he'd figured out nothing else, he knew Vaati was the last known person seen with her.

After weeks of biding his time and trying to make sure Vaati knew everything he could about the situation, he went and stumped himself over a critical failure with the Light Force again. He couldn't use the Light Force properly and he couldn't best Link even with the Beast Blade while his sword hand was useless from the fight with Risen, and if he gave himself enough distance from Link to cast magic he could rely on, then Link could turn into a King Dodongo and be all but immune to his wind. Vaati wasn't entirely sure how he reverted Link back to a Hylian form using the Light Force the first time, so who knew if he could pull it off again?
Just a little more time. If he could snatch just a moment more, then he might think of something better.

"Your memory must be..." Vaati paused, unsure what the modern word for scrambled was. "Your memory must be very messy from being a big brown fire lizard." Had the word for Dodongo changed while he was sealed? "I'll tell you everything that happened while you were a monster, but we have to leave before Risen comes back. I don't have the magic to escape him again."

Walking across the fields while a dragon was after him was risky, but so was leaving Link unaddressed. Vaati needed to get that ruby, and then he could curse Link into whatever form he wanted in order to keep him close by while mastering the Light Force.

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Coming out of a monster transformation was disorienting enough when you came to where you lost consciousness, and when you had time to think about what you were doing when you transformed in the first place. Link had woken up from Vaati's curse to the sight of a dragon overhead readying to fry them, and he did the first thing he could to block the fire without any thought to the consequences...

Without any thought... that described him well enough by the time Vaati managed to change him back. In a way, Link was lucky Vaati knew more magic than he let on. Nayru knew what Link might have done if Vaati hadn't been there to save him, whatever else Vaati was up to. That little white band on Vaati's wrist almost blended in with his skin, but it stood out like a scar on Link's. You didn't cast a spell like the one Vaati described unless you were in deep on something serious. But there was that matter, and there was the more pressing issue of the dragon that had now attacked them specifically a second time.

Link had accepted Vaati's explanation for why they needed to leave Hyrule Field fast and led Vaati to the nearest train station (Aboda) before pressing him for answers, but Vaati was still dodging the first question when the train pulled up, and then there was no questioning him. Vaati had, it turned out, known the trains only as large metal objects that sometimes barreled through the city at random. That they were everywhere and people could get inside them was an amazing discovery to Vaati. Wherever-whenever-he was from. Link recalled that there had been some sort of slip of the tongue that made alarms go off in his head, but he also remembered deciding it was nothing. Until his brain was fully finished reorganizing itself, it was hard to say. That half the mental disarray was caused from self-loathing over losing his mind to the Beast Blade a second time didn't make it any easier to think clearly. Part of him regretted buying two tickets back to Castle City instead of taking a separate train to the most remote location he could think of.

The only thing to ease the knot of dread in Link's gut was the look of absolute terror on Vaati's face each time the train car rattled. The boy clutched his seat with his good arm like it would somehow save him in a crash as he asked for the thirty-seventh time, "Are you sure the train won't fall?"

"The last derailing was over a hundred years ago, and that was because the tracks vanished. The people driving the train know what they're doing."

"What if the tracks vanish again?" Vaati demanded, squeezing his seat cushion tighter as they the train shook harder than it's usual rattling. They must have run over a moblin.

"I mean, it's not likely, but if that happens then we'll die I guess."

Link had just assumed that the only color Vaati had was in his hair. (Red eyes meant blood shone
threw due to lack of pigment, right?) He must have been wrong, because Vaati's face turned an even purer white when the whistle blew and the brakes engaged. Unprepared for the sensation of a slowing vehicle, Vaati nearly fell from his backwards facing seat.

"What in Farore's name is that?"

"The train pulling into a station," Link said. "If you would rather walk the rest of the way from Whittleton to Castle City, you're welcome to. But the train is less likely to kill you than Risen is, and it moves faster than either of us could."

"You're confident of this? I think the train is very likely to kill us."

"Everyone in this kingdom has taken a train at least once, Vaati. This is a much larger land than Old Hyrule was. You can't get from one location to the next by foot or even horse in a single day. For most people, the walk is too risky when there are monsters everywhere anyway. You have to take the train if you want to get anywhere in good time, and if you want to go to any of the other realms then you have to take the train regardless of what time constraint you're on. A lot of the islands in the Ocean Realm can only be reached by going across the tracks, and no one is dumb enough to try and walk across those. You would be run over by a train before you were halfway across. No one's died while inside a train in a long time, but very few people live when they stand in front of a moving train."

"So this isn't safe." Vaati rose. "We are stopped in a town now, correct? Let's get off here."

"The outside isn't safe. If you're outside the train when it's moving and it hits you, then it does a lot of damage. We're just fine where we are, Vaati," Link insisted, though he almost regretted it. Whittleton had grown over the years, but it was still much smaller a place than Castle City. If Link had to shape shift again and make another stand against Risen, then it would be better to... No. He couldn't think in terms of casualties.

The only person he could save was himself. Proof enough that he was no hero. Heroes selflessly saved others to save his own hide was a disgrace to the name Link.

"Trains usually stop in Whittleton for half an hour before they depart for the next station. Not a lot of lines stop here, and this one isn't too popular anyway-in case you didn't notice how empty the train is. The villagers can spread out pretty far in the forest, so they need a while to gather whenever anyone wants to leave town. If you want to step off for a minute, we can sit on a bench in the station, but Risen is less likely to see us here. The train won't move for a while, so you can stop clinging to your chair for dear life."

"Don't talk to me like I'm a frightened child," Vaati snapped, which Link had to stop himself from laughing at. He'd worked out that Vaati was probably older than him, but Vaati was still short and baby-faced, and he was still pale from the first leg of their train ride. A frightened child was exactly what he looked like.

"Okay. Deal. Now explain to me like a big, calm boy what happened while I was encased in stone. How many days was I out for? Is Grandpa mad at me for missing class, or worried that I haven't been home? Is my home still there? Did the dragon just attack us, or were there more attacks since you put a curse on me."

Vaati mulled the question over. Link could see him weighing different responses in his mind and knew that whatever answer Vaati gave, it was to be taken with a grain of salt.
"It has only been a few hours," Vaati said. "We've spent as much time in this death trap as you spent as a statue. That stone dispelled my curse faster than even the sword did. Maybe because that's its only purpose, and the sword was forged to be a seal?"

"The Beast Blade?" Link asked. No one had told him anything about a curse breaking power. That would make the sword too valuable to possibly lend to a student, if it possessed such an attribute. Charms that made curses less likely to stick weren't unheard of, but artifacts that could break a curse that had already set in were extraordinarily rare.

"No. A different sword," Vaati said. "It's gone now. May I see the ruby? I'd like to see how it works."

Link had to give Vaati credit for audacity, it nothing else. It took a special kind of person to ask in so innocent a tone for a mysterious artifact from someone they had attempted to curse earlier in the day.

"I think I should hold onto it until the dean takes a look at it," Link said.

"It won't break the Destiny Bond, you know. That spell doesn't register as a curse."

"Well, it sounds like it does neither of us any good then, so let's get on with explaining things before the train starts back up and you get too scared to converse," Link said. He had to raise his voice to carry on over Vaati's indignant stammering. "Who all did Risen attack?"

Vaati grumbled something to himself in Ancient Hylian before saying, "Do you remember me telling the princess about the Light Force? Risen is interested in anyone who possesses it. I'm unsure who Risen is working for, but he is taking orders from another man who is stronger than him, who he thinks the Light Force will let him break free of. If he has not been punished by this man yet, then his master is not an ally to us."

"This dragon's master probably isn't worried about the Light Force either, if he's fine to let the dragon pursue it. Either he doesn't think it will be enough to overpower him, or he doesn't think it can be stolen so easily." Bits and pieces of the conversation in Zelda's office were falling back into place in Link's memory. "Except it must be relatively easy to take, or else the princess's ancestor wouldn't have lost a part of this power. So Risen is after you and the princess, and his master is stronger still. Or would his master not know about the Light Force at all?"

Vaati had to think of the answer before saying, "It's likely he knows of it."

"You don't know for sure?"

"I never met him, but it would have been stolen before he was born. From what I have been told, this man would have been born before Old Hyrule flooded, so he would have heard many of the legends that were lost." Vaati looked down at his own lap, brow furrowed. He wasn't talking for the sake of explaining, Link realized, but to sort out his own thought. "That's assuming this master is from Hyrule. Risen is most definitely not."

Something clicked. Vaati talking about a legend that predated even his birth. As if Vaati were old. Link could remember discounting it as a poor phrasing from someone new to the language before, dismissing such an odd statement even though he had seen Vaati mouthing his own name while looking through legends of Old Hyrule as if he expected to be listed among them. Link had felt generous before, but now that Vaati had tried to curse him and then made an attempt-no, two attempts-at taking the item that broke his spell, Link wasn't feeling nearly so generous.

Link looked out the window, trying to play it cool as his mind whirled. Vaati played dumb with how
much magic he knew, but he had to know something advanced to get them almost to the ocean in so little time. Teleportation? Shape shifting into something fast and strong? Advanced wind or dark magic, whatever Vaati used. One way or the other, he was at least on par with the instructors.

Suppose you had some sort of ancient sorcerer from Old Hyrule who felt himself worthy of legend and possessed a fraction of a sacred power stolen from some past princess. Some sorcerer who went and posed as a beginner student at the school where that princess's descendant who inherited the remainder of that power taught? When you put that much detail together, it seemed too obvious to overlook. Link had always thought that Vaati was a future evil sorcerer in the making, but he'd been wrong.

Vaati had been one for centuries. Possibly millenia.

"So..." Link had to think of something to say to keep Vaati from realizing he was under suspicion. If Vaati was still trying to play innocent, then he wasn't on the attack. Link had to keep him thinking his cover was safe until he could point the proper authorities in the right direction. "You don't have any guesses as to who this man might be?"

Vaati shook his head. "The only villain from Old Hyrule who I'm familiar with is Demise. He isn't in your books, but he was a demon who the goddess Hylia fought. It is said that he can reincarnate, but I think this is unlikely? The hero who founded this kingdom had to fight the man who caused Hyrule to flood many centuries ago, correct? Gandalf? Is it possible he is still alive?"

"Ganondorf. Maybe. Everyone thought the Hero of Time killed him, and then they thought the Great Flood killed him, so it's possible that the Hero of Winds didn't kill him either. The legends say that Old Hyrule has been unreachable for over two-hundred years, though. You do hear about Demise from time to time when you listen to a sermon on Hylia, but there should have been some sign if he were to return. So there really are no other ancient villains, are there?" Link asked.

Was it his imagination that Vaati's eyebrow twitched? "The Four Sword was taken more recently, wasn't it? So Old Hyrule can still be accessed."

"The what?"

"The sword that broke," Vaati said. "The academy was upset when they lost it, correct?"

The missing sword that no one had recognized or been able to identify the purpose of. No one had said anything to Link about it being broken before. As far as he knew, the academy had just declared it to be missing. That Vaati had a specific name for it when he'd come several days after it disappeared was all the more suspicious. No, not just a name. A name and a purpose. A sealing sword that could break curses.

They had spent too much time bouncing ideas off one another. Before he could think better of it, Link's mouth moved in tempo with his mind. "What are the odds that all of this trouble appear the same day that a sealing sword only you know the name of was broken?"

Vaati stiffened, and neither of them offered the proposal that _Risen_, having first appeared the same day, might have been the one sealed while the timing of Vaati's appearance was a coincidence.

Since there was no taking back words he had already spoken, Link gave up and said, "So tell me again how it came to be that you spoke Ancient but not modern Hylian." When Vaati didn't respond, Link asked, "Is Vaati you real name, or did you make it up when you realized no one recognized you face."

An innocent man, Link reasoned, would look confused at such a string of questions, or at least not
glower at Link in such a dark manner. Link took Vaati's brooding silence as confirmation and stood and drew his sword. If he sensed Vaati about to cast another spell in such close quarters, then he would strike first. He was no hero. He was a screwup who only ever endangered others. But the train was nearly empty.

"Don't forget the Destiny Bond," Vaati said. "If you strike me down, you go as well. You think that's worthwhile when you don't even know who I am?"

"I know you're no student, and I know you did something to the princess."

Vaati looked up at Link with an almost bored expression, all traces of fear from being on a moving train gone from his face. "And I know you're not like the other heroes. You don't charge in to save the day like they do. You hide from threats and you fear your own power. Although I find it hypocritical of you to say I hide my abilities when no one knows it was you how destroyed the city the day I woke up. I would not have thought you were good enough with magic to shape shift, so it must be that your ability comes form something other than studies? Now before I turn you to stone again, I need to know what monster your mother had sex with in order to conceive you."

Link held his stance even though those biting words made him question endangering the conductor, but he still to ask, "No one's taught you any modern euphemisms yet, have they?"

"No."

"If I never tell you anything about my father, will you wait indefinitely to turn me to stone again?"

"Also no."

He was dealing with some ancient evil. Some legend lost to the Great Flood that had dealt with people like him before. People better than him. Heroes who were actually heroic. Who the Hero of Time might have looked up to the way that Link looked up to him. Vaati had bided his time for weeks getting to learn about anyone he took an interest in, and even with broken arm, he didn't seem phased by Link.

Seeing Link's sword tremble in his hand, Vaati smirked and said, "If you must know, I took the last of the Light Force from the princess before attempting to dispose of you. Consider yourself lucky my spell wore off before you were at the bottom of the ocean. You think you can defeat me when I possess the power to rival to gods?"

Link wasn't confident he could beat Vaati even without that power. He was untried. Barely trained. But still... if he didn't even try, wouldn't that make him a failure in the one area where he had yet to be a complete let down?

Vaati wasn't even paying attention to him anymore, eyes on something beyond the window. Link lifted his sword, readying a strike on Vaati's already injured side, when Vaati spoke.

"The two men who are about to board, if you don't want anything to happen to them, you'll stay put. You have no chance of striking me before I rain down the wrath of a god upon them, so would you sacrifice them in the hopes that you might be able to defeat me?" Vaati smirked, looking back to Link from out of the corner of his eye. "You seem to think your own life is forfeit, but would you risk sacrificing them in vain?"

Link looked up from Vaati to see two people board, a logger and his son. Grudgingly, he sheathed his sword. He already endangered people as a monster. He wouldn't cause any harm to innocents when he was still a Hylian.
He was silent for the remainder of the trip. The moving train made Vaati on edge, and that was no longer so amusing now that he knew that Vaati was capable of great destruction if startled.

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In a way, the blasted train was a blessing. Link discounted Vaati’s exaggerated pallor and trembling as being shaken up by the ride, rather than worry that his bluff might be called. Vaati could smite people with the Light Force. At least, he sensed he could. He had some vague idea for how to use it to fuel the magic he knew and loved. But mastery of it would take time. If Link attempted anything against him, Vaati would be helpless. It wasn’t a feeling he’d had to cope with since before he stole the Wishing Cap. Even when sealed in the Four Sword, Vaati had known what he was capable of and how to slowly chip away at the seal. It had been a long time since Vaati walked a hairline thin tightrope where he could easily lose his balance and be trod upon by Ezlo, by the couple Ezlo ‘rescued’ him from, and by everyone else in their pitiful village, with only his bowed head and hopes that enough kowtowing would keep him out of harm’s way as a safety net. He didn’t relish being placed in a position where performance was the only thing sparing him again, and yet he walked right into a mess where bluffs of might and skill were the only thing that kept him alive. He let his haste in wanting to be rid of Risen dash everything he’d worked for.

The sword that latest hero wielded was not the Four Sword, and Vaati found himself regretting having destroyed the sword forged to contain him. If the Four Sword were still usable, then Vaati would know that the worst that awaited him was to be sealed once more. It was dull, chipping away at the seal, but it was its own sort of security. The Beast Blade did something peculiar to those it felled. Vaati remembered that lizard turning to light and being sucked into the sword rather than disappearing into smoke like most monsters. But until he knew otherwise, he was assuming the blade held no sealing properties and was thus only good for killing things.

That made it important that he keep up the appearance that he was in control of the situation as the train stopped in Castle City. He only needed long enough to get away from Link to ready some other spell to leave him incapacitated, then he could steal the ruby and come up with a more permanent curse. For old times sakes, Vaati was contemplating using Link as his hat. These plans came to an abrupt halt when the dean snatched the two of them as they stepped down from the boarding platform.

"I ought to expel the both of you here and now," the old man said as he dragged them down the street. While Link let himself be led like an obedient dog, Vaati resisted once the shock of having been grabbed wore off. But the dean had him by his injured arm and a good twist of the shoulder was enough to collapse Vaati’s resistance. "Stealing magic artifacts before we know they’re safe. Attacking the princess. Forget expulsion. I ought to have you two arrested."

"Zelda is alive?" Link asked, all attention off of Vaati.

"Aye. Hurry up. Keep step. We have a lot of talking to do. I don't care if you were a statue earlier. I don't care if you attempted murder."

"I don't care if you want to talk," Vaati replied in Ancient Hylian, which earned him another arm twist.

"Then care that I have news of Risen that concerns you." The dean also spoke in Ancient Hylian, ignoring Link’s puzzled look. "Just when I thought you couldn't possibly top yourself. You've dug yourself a much deeper whole than you realize this time, Vaati."

Chapter End Notes
I made a huge mistake with some magic consistency stuff in this chapter. Had to basically rewrite a half of it. So much work. This chapter was already a pain in the first place too.
Vaati had done a fair deal of research on potential threats. While no one ever uttered the dean's name, he knew the man was an accomplished light sorcerer. The main teacher of light students before Zelda finished her schooling. He knew that the dark teacher was highly restricted in what he could study. He knew that the fire teacher hadn't been able to cast high tier spells for years following a tragic accident. He knew the uses bauble in the shed of magic tools, and had intended to sneak into the shed after disposing of Link's statue in order to destroy that Din blasted cane that flipped items upside down. For as stupid sounding a cane as it was, it had caused Vaati a great deal of suffering in the past. He'd intended to right all of his past mistakes, and getting rid of a tool that was bizarrely effective against his Wrath form met the criteria.

What Vaati's research hadn't turned up was the hidden chamber beneath the school grounds. The walls were lined with stones embedded with a spell similar to that of a dungeon's, so filled with magic that you could sense nothing beyond them. With the school already so permeated by magic, Vaati wouldn't have even noticed the magic chamber from outside if he weren't looking for it.

"This should do for the moment," the dean decided. "We don't have anywhere else in the city to store you where Risen is less likely to sense the Light Force."

It took Vaati a moment to assure himself that there was nothing wrong with his modern Hylian and he'd heard the dean correctly. "Store me? I'm not some trinket to casually throw into the basement with as little regard as you show for the artifacts in your shed. I am Vaati, demon of the winds. I've brought Hyrule to its knees with power to rival the gods."

"The minor gods, perhaps. But if you had power greater than them, they would have flooded Hyrule to deal with the threat of you, not Ganondorf," the dean said, switching to the ancient tongue mid-sentence. "Don't look so shocked, you fool child. You're not the only one who keeps enemies close to watch them. I might not have many records of Risen, but I remember you well enough."

"Good." Vaati would have crossed his arms if one wasn't injured. "At least someone does. Although your memory must be fogged from the decline of age if you think Ganondorf was a greater threat than me. Perhaps he merely took advantage of the groundwork I laid for him? Being a more recent legend doesn't mean you're a greater one."

"There is nothing great about your legend, Vaati," the dean snapped.

His tone took Vaati aback. The old man never spoke kindly. The best you got out of him was a sort of rye sarcasm that left you uncertain if he was trying to be light hearted or just amused by something he looked down on you for. More often, there was a nagging note to his voice, if not a shrill whine as he scolded you. Yet that tone was entirely new. Bitter and cold, like thinly veiled rage. No one had spoken to Vaati in that tone since he was first sealed away. Since he had last slighted anyone
a personal way.

It made his skin crawl.

And Link, blissfully ignorant of anything unusual about the dean that day, piped in then to say, "Um... can I be in on this conversation."

"No one is stopping you," Vaati told him.

"You both are. I don't even know what language you're speaking in," Link said.

Odd. Link couldn't speak in Ancient Hylian, but he was halfway literate, and he could understand simple sentences if you spoke them slowly. He ought to have at least recognized...

With a jolt, Vaati realized that the ancient tongue they lapsed into hadn't been Ancient Hylian, but Minish. Old world Minish, not the dialect spoken in the Hylian world. He looked back to the dean, twice as baffled as Link.

"Obviously I know of the Picori," the dean said. "Despite my appearance, I was a child once. You never forget old friends, and not all of us are blind to the little ones. Naturally, I've spoken with them about you. It was quite interesting to hear the princess cite them as a potential source for information on Risen as well. I'm ashamed to admit, I never thought to ask them about matters so far away when they can't travel far at all."

"Yeah, well, that was your mistake."

"Clearly." The dean stood straighter, tapping his staff against the floor as he attempted to look as authoritative as he could muster. "Had we known the nature of Risen earlier, we would have seen to it that the princess was better protected. Dark magic as tremendous as that dragon's requires light magic of even greater force. The princess, with her many blessings, could have easily defeated it if given time to prepare. The women of the royal line carry many powers in them. According to legends, the blood of the goddess Hylia is in the royal family's veins. The princess still lives, but your antics have weakened her greatly. There's no telling how long it may take for her to recover, and that leaves us with the serious problem of her being unable to defeat Risen for us."

Vaati was pretty sure that Hylia's blood alone wouldn't be enough if he'd already shortened one princess's lifespan drastically, but he said nothing. Even without the look that Link gave Vaati, somewhere between smugly patronizing and indignant, the wind mage could sense what was coming. The irony of it was almost suffocating.

"The princess wields a great many powers, but she couldn't possibly fight a dragon for herself in her current state. If the Triforce were with us, we might still have some hope, but the last king of Old Hyrule left it sealed beneath the sea. Even if it were to break free of him, one part would go to the demon king, and then we would have a much greater concern on our hands than Risen. That leaves us with only one other magic that might be able to stop Risen. You've stolen the Light Force from her, so we have little choice but to place Risen's defeat on your shoulders."

Link's expression gave way to one of alarm as he realized that Vaati wasn't going to be punished for attacking the princess—at least not immediately. Vaati, however, kept his expression level as he said, "And if I refuse?"

"You don't have much choice," the dean said. "Risen will hunt you until he drains the Light Force from you and your life with it, and the Light Force is a blessing from the gods of the Minish world to this one. As someone who wasn't chosen by the gods, you can't use the Light Force without the
gods' blessings. The princess, with her royal blood, can enable you to use the Light Force in her presence. Without her cooperation, you won't be able to use the power needed to save yourself."

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Link complied when told to go and see the princes, but he felt ambivalent about leaving Vaati and the dean alone in the basement. Although there was some means by which the dean was confident that Risen wouldn't find Vaati, Link was more worried about Vaati harming the dean. Even if the dean seemed confident that he could manage Vaati alone...

Link's feet slowed, coming to a halt just past the academy gates. The dean had known about Vaati the whole time, or at least sensed it earlier than anyone else. Why had he played dumb instead of capturing the villain before anyone could be hurt? Had he not known how bad Vaati was? Thinking back, the dean urging Link to keep an eye on Vaati during their field trip might not have been a 'look after him' type instruction, but had there been any other attempts to keep Vaati under control? Was it even an attempt to keep Vaati under control if Link was the only thing between him and going wild? If so, then it kind of made sense that the dean might have been laxer about letting Vaati roam free when he lived with Link, but it would have been nice if someone warned Link that he was the only fail-safe to keep an ancient evil sorcerer from being evil.

Vaati was ancient. Older than the Great Sea. Older than the demon who the Hero of Time defeated, if only temporarily. Older than when the Triforce first split and began to bind itself to people who embodied it's blessings. No wonder he had to read up on all those old legends when he was sealed throughout all of them. Had the dean known Vaati was sealed by the old sword? He hadn't seemed to have a clue what became of it when it went missing, but he'd also seemed to think Vaati was a bright young mind who it was totally safe to let near the princess, so who knew what he thought. Since the dean dropped the ball with Vaati, Link would be the fail-safe to stop him. He set out towards the castle and Zelda again, forming a plan in his head as he went. Vaati had talked about that old sword-what did he call it?-as though it were broken. So Link would need to find a new sealing sword. Or maybe they would need to find a way to fix the old one. The Four Sword, was it? If it could seal four people, then that took care of Risen and Vaati, then left room for two more. No one had found remnants of a broken sword, though.

Except Vaati knew it was broken. He would have seen it. So he must have tried to keep anyone else from seeing it. Why bother to hide something that wasn't a threat?

Link practically skipped as he made his way down the streets to the castle. A vague plan was already forming in his head. There were spells for detecting ores and gems and the like. He would learn them even if he had to teach them to himself, and then he would find the broken sword and fix it. It was metal, so it had to be easy for him to fix... right? Metal was supposed to be more advanced, but he had managed to pick locks with magic just fine, both in the dungeon and when swiping his ruby back. If he was lucky, the Four Sword might respond to him as naturally as the Beast Blade did.

Remembering the Beast Blade, the skip vanished from Link's step. He knew nothing about the Four Sword beyond that it had the ability to seal. If there was any other effect it possessed, would it be wise for him to use it? Despite everything, he still had the Beast Blade strapped to his hip. No one had called him yet on walking out of the academy with it. But every time Link thought of drawing it, he was filled with apprehension.

Heroes didn't cave to monstrous instincts or the brainwashing of a blade. Heroes didn't put their own safety first. Heroes didn't attack the innocent and destroy their homes.

Link was no hero, and he would have to tell the princess and the dean and whoever else that he
shouldn't be around Vaati again. One of the royal guards or sages or anyone else who was actually suited for heroism could take over monitoring the sorcerer. Someone else would find and repair the Four Sword and someone else would deal with Vaati once Vaati and the princess had dealt with Risen. A real hero. Anyone but him.

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While Link dragged his feet above ground, Vaati paced in circles around the basement.

The dean was wrong. Vaati was certain of that. He had used the Light Force without Zelda around. The Goddesses brought Link back whenever they knew Vaati was bound to return. He was certain of that. They did it to mess with him. To mock him. To let him suffer defeat at the hands of the same child that beat him when he was supposed to possess the might of a god. And as some side effect, the hero was close enough to the gods to activate the Light Force.

What was that about some other power that would do the trick? Triforce? Vaati thought he might have heard of it somewhere or another, but he had always cared more about the power the Minish gifted to man. As a Minish, didn't he have a right to that power? But if that power could be released, he would certainly rather team up with that ocean raising demon than with Zelda. She was a pretty face, sure, but Vaati was trying to be practical this time around. Kidnapping a pretty princess in the past only brought him grief. You had to hold them captive even though they had some sacred power or another that made imprisoning them long-term a logistical nightmare, and every knight in the kingdom went after you while your attention was on keeping the maiden in line. If he ever felt the need to kidnap a beautiful maiden, there were plenty of other beauties out there who weren't nearly so great a hassle. If Zelda also activated the Light Force, then Vaati would no doubt be better off taking some other girl until he had the Light Force mastered.

Actually, there was a thought. If proximity to Zelda and Link made the Light Force stronger, he hadn't been able to properly harness it before possessing it in full despite being able to feel it's power, and even a (large) fraction of its power could cause his natural magic to become less responsive to him, then maybe it wasn't a fluke that the hero defeated him when he should have been on par with the gods. Although that raised the question of why the hero and princess had never triggered the Light Force before. All the more reason to become well versed in his new powers. He would still be able to unleash a hurricane to destroy the city. Vaati could sense that much once Link left, even though he felt nothing of his dark element still. But when he faced the hero next and he would face the hero again—the Light Force would be his only weapon.

"Am I expected to stay down here while the princess and I devise a plan to defeat Risen?"

"Goodness no. This basement is only a makeshift room for hiding magic from less sensitive creatures. The average sorcerer wouldn't notice another sorcerer or even most powerful artifacts with a wall like these between them, but the Light Force is no ordinary magic. Several instructors have no doubt already felt the Light Force beneath their feet. A real dungeon might hide you better, but Risen would still sense you if he came close enough to it."

How close that was, Vaati didn't want to guess. Risen had been able to sense him before he even managed to break out of the Four Sword, and the seal on the blade, even fractured, was better than any magic-sense obscuring dungeon walls. As for the implication that Vaati ought to have been able to spot the Light Force himself, he brushed it off. The princess, as the dean said, had a great many light-based powers. How was he supposed to single out one specific light magic when he was new to the Hylian world? It was obviously a reasonable mistake and not at all something that more study could have easily averted.

Since Vaati refused to think about that, he focused instead on the idea of a dungeon. Any dungeon
was child's play for him so long as he had his wind magic. Even without the ability to shape shift or cast curses, he had plenty of combat oriented spells using wind, fire, water, and especially wind. Of course, if they planned on sending him somewhere filled with monsters accompanied by a weakened princess who would cause his magic to be eclipsed by a power he still needed to learn how to use properly, then both he and Zelda were well and truly screwed.

A nonsense concern. They wouldn't send the princess into a dungeon with her attacker. Vaati could make do with wind, even if a lot of his more damaging indoor spells relied on his currently inaccessible dark element.

Biting the bullet, Vaati asked, "I don't suppose you know why my magic is not acting like normal even though the Light Force is dormant right now?"

The words hurt to utter, but he had to ask. He doubted he would have a good supply of magic texts to read for answers while kept in whatever hiding place he was now relegated to whilst a plan for stopping Risen was devised, and his magic wasn't going to return to normal on its own then he needed to know he couldn't count on that. It ought to return to normal. Magic didn't follow the same logic as other forces of nature, but it seemed absurd to Vaati that having almost all of the Light Force was somehow different from having all of it. He didn't like admitting to weakness or ignorance, but he disliked being ignorant and weak even more. Besides, being thought of as weak wasn't as bad when you could put anyone who treated you as weak in their place. If the dean interpreted his question as all of his magic being on the fritz, then it would be easier to surprise him with a wind attack.

The dean regarded Vaati with mild surprise at the question. In all their speech lessons, Vaati had stubbornly tried to downplay flaws in his Hylian. Admitting to ineptitude was out of character for him, but the dean was a teacher of magic at the end of the day. He couldn't help but provide guidance to a struggling student. "You've forced a second alignment on yourself. You're still bound to the wind, and that will sort itself out in time, but your body needs to readjust to how it responds to the other elements now that there's so much light in you. Whether the change is due to your having obtained the final part of the Light Force or due to finally encountering someone who can awaken the Light Force in you, I couldn't say. It may be some mix of the two.

"There's no precedent for a person changing alignments, so you'll make for an interesting study. Will this increase the other elements you can use? Will it restrict you? What if fire is harder to use now that you have two alignments that aren't fire? You'd best pay more attention in lectures from here on out. It seems you'll be relearning quite a bit. This time around, pay attention to the precautions and maybe you won't spend so many centuries as a bloated bat."

Half a day ago, if Vaati went to the dean with concerns about how the Light Force effected his magic, the answer would have incensed him. He was not a curiosity to be studied. But as the dean ascended the stairs back up to the main academy ground, he left a baffled wind mage behind in the basement.

Vaati was a monster. The last two times he had been unsealed, the form he had taken before forgetting his true nature led to people suggesting he may be less a mage and more a demon. He had killed. He had cursed. He had threatened the entire kingdom. Since waking up and recalling who he was, he had attacked the heir to the throne, stolen a valuable magic ability, and nearly ended the royal line. And that was the only crime in consideration because Link hadn't noticed the first murder attempt and declined to report the second one. By all means, the dean should have parted with a warning to Vaati that he would be disposed of once he was no longer useful for stopping Risen.

The old man must have had dementia. Vaati could think of no other reason for why the dean talked
as though he expected to keep an ancient evil sorcerer enrolled as a student.

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One more failing of the so-called-hero Link was that he walked Vaati right into Zelda's office and did nothing to stop her from being attacked. This weighed heavy on his heart as the royal guard led him into her private chambers. The first thing he was sure to take note of was her chest, only taking a breath for himself once he saw the rise and fall of her own breathing. His failure didn't get her killed.

Whoever had moved her to the castle after Vaati fled the academy with Link, they had seen to it that she was changed into a night gown. From the low cut of the garb, it was easy to see while watching her breath that her skin, once fair, had turned ashen. Her golden locks had gone dull. When she turned her neck ever so slightly to look at him, Link wondered for a moment if she could even see through such clouded over eyes.

Her lips moved as the royal guard closed the door to give the two some privacy, and Link couldn't hear her voice over the sound of the door clicking shut.

She tried again.

"Link?"

"Yes, Your Highness?"

A ghost of a smile graced her lips. "Just Zelda is fine. Come closer, Link."

Link caught himself in the middle of dropping to one knee and slunk over to her side. The closer he came to her, the closer to death she looked to him.

"I'm sorry," he told her.

"The dean... warned me," Zelda said. "None of us knew his nature... but the instructors... knew he was not what he seemed. The fault is mine. You... couldn't have known to raise your guard." She lifted a shaky hand to take Link's, but her fingers grazed his palm before flopping back to her side. "It is I who should apologize. We noticed he... tried harder to behave around you. We took advantage of you and... you were attacked when you... didn't realize the need to defend."

Link took Zelda's hand in his, shaking his head frantically. "It's fine. You didn't want me to give away that you were onto him, right? Besides, I came out of it alright." Come to think of it, the dean let him walk away with the sword and the ruby, despite having claimed less than an hour earlier that he ought to expel Link for having stolen the stone back. "You're the one who he hit hard. Will you be alright?"

"It will take more than this... to kill me," Zelda said. "However... I am not in... the best of health."

Unable to think of anything that might not come out the wrong way, Link placed his other hand around Zelda's as well and tried to convey how guilty he felt over her situation with his eyes.

"The dean wished for me to... enable Vaati to fight Risen."

"I..." Link wanted to pledge to support her, to protest her...

But he was no hero.

"If that's what you summoned me for... I'm afraid I can't protect you."
Zelda closed her eyes, and Link's heart seized with the certainty that he was a disappointment. Yet the princess was smiling.

"He has no more need... to attack me. He has gotten what he wants," she told Link. "But I cannot travel in... this state, and I... I fear my recovery may be... slow."

Link could tell where the conversation was headed, and he had no idea how to tell the bedridden princess who showed such concern for him that he couldn't do what she asked of him.

"The one to help defeat Risen... must be you. You mustn't let the dragon... destroy Hyrule. Nor may he free his... master." Zelda lifted her other hand, making two attempts before successfully placing it on Link's. Warmth flowed from her hands into his, and Link might have pulled back, were he not afraid that she would break if he let her go. "And you must ensure... when Risen is defeated... that Vaati does no threaten our kingdom. And so I... I give you this blessing... which is meant for the Spirit of the Hero... to ensure that the wind mage... does not... destroy us."

She let her one hand drop, and Link hesitantly set the other down as well. He felt a strangeness bubbling beneath his skin. A magic foreign to his own body, yet every bit as right within him as the Beast Blade felt in his hands.

"The goddess spells are no more meant for me... than the Light Force is meant for Vaati," Zelda said. "Only in your presence... would Din's Fire work as it did... for the Hero of Time. Please, use these well. You mustn't... let Hyrule fall."
The Hero With No Spirit

Chapter Notes

Aaaaand we're back. Reading over this, I don't hate it as much as when I wrote it. Gonna try reviewing the stuff to come and see if not hating that as much also will help spark some motivation with this fic. (Also, I retyped this entire thing today to see how much fat I could trim that way, and then I didn't have the will to proof-read th re-type. Sorry for the typos. I'm sure they're bountiful.)

(It was like 500 words, by the way.)

Following the third appearance of Risen, a strict curfew was imposed on the city. The trains still ran, but guards rode in and out with passengers. No minors could walk out the gates when the dragon might appear over Hyrule Field again. Citizens were escorted home once the night grew too dark to see the black dragon in the sky. There were even drills to find shelter or deal with fires if Risen returned.

Buildings had been the only collateral damage in the first attack, but a student had gone missing the second time and was presumed dead. The third attack came while the princess, who had been expected to help defeat the dragon, collapsed and fell ill. Castle City would take no chances. The academy went on high alert as well. Upperclassman turned to self-study in between reviewing lessons for younger students in order to free up the professors to help fortify city defenses.

Only the dean refrained from participating, instead dedicating himself to the task of retraining Vaati. Or dealing with Vaati's fits while attempting to coax participation out of him. It depended on how you chose to look at things.

No official reports or even rumors came out linking Vaati with Zelda's illness, and Link didn't bother to start a rumor himself. He'd made it clear enough to anyone who would listen that he thought Vaati evil, and no one cared before. Since he'd been a statue at the time, it wasn't like he was witness to the attack either. No one would pay his continued insistence that the guy who acted mean was a bad person any heed.

The student teacher for earth magic preferred studying to teaching, and never took attendance. As a recent substitute, he couldn't recognize students by their faces. Three days into the change, Link skipped town. He bought a train ticket and hopped off before it had picked up too much speed. His reckoning would come when he needed to get back into the city, but that was a problem for future-Link. Present-Link was antsy about the new magic he'd been gifts, and he didn't dare test it within the city walls. Din's Fire and Nayru's Wisdom could too real damage. And besides, he wasn't ready for people to see that the princess passed on spells to him.

Spells meant for the Spirit of the Hero. Link could already feel how they worked. Know they were meant for him. Every in and out of their powers felt like calling upon an old memory. He just refused to believe they really would work for him. The Spirit of the Hero was too noble to reincarnate as a failure like him. The o9ne chosen by Hylia wouldn't destroy a city and then fear his own sword.

His gut said it was true, but his mind screamed it was false. He had to feel the spells in action. See
himself cast them more competently than the princess. He needed tangible proof that the powers were his.

Field patrols were spares with most of the guard focused on the town. There were no patrols that Link needed dodge, and with the lack of monster pruning, it was easy to find a group of boar-riding moblins.

Link crouched down to hide himself as best he could, pointed his sword at one moblin, and recalled how it felt to cast Din's Fire, which he had never in his life cast before. A feeling not of flames, but of power. Raw might condensed into a small red orb formed at the tip of the Beast Blade, which he could send in the direction of the target. The orb didn't move as fast as he might have liked, and once fired it resisted too large a change in direction, but it moved for Link more or less as he willed it. So long as he pointed the Beast Blade, the orb continued forward.

As one moblin rode up to the orb, Link dropped the sword to his side. The orb vanished, leaving the moblin scratching his head.

Link could still feel power pulsating in that spot, swelling and building on itself as he refrained from unleashing it. He counted on-one-thousand, two-one-thousand, three-one-thousand, and then he swun the Beast Blade up. The orb detonated.

He spent an hour finding more and more monsters to test the spell on. The guards could thank him later for picking up the slack with monster pruning. He'd found a stash of rupees on Vaati's side of their room that he figured Vaati didn't really deserve anyway, and had been able to purchase green potions before setting out. There was stamina a plenty to burn with his tests. Twisting the angle of his blade made it easier to steer Din's Fire the direction he wanted, but there was no way to make it rise or sink faster. Once invisible, the orb stopped moving. The longer the delay in detonation, the larger the explosion. Any difference in magic cost for how far the spell traveled or the size of the attack was too small for Link to feel.

Long after Link lost count of the number of times he cast the one spell, he recalled that Zelda had a limited number of times per day that she could cast it. How many times had Link seen her use it? Three? But she might have used it plenty before the two of them met up. For all he knew, she sat in her office casting it over and over before realizing she needed to track him down. That he cast Din's Fire so many times proved nothing. Besides, Zelda could cast with her hands, and Link had still relied on the blade Granted, he hadn't tried not to use the blade, but that was obviously an effort in futility.

So he could proudly call himself the great grandson of one of Hylia's Chosen Hero's reincarnations, but it was too early for him to accept that he might be the Spirit of the Hero himself.

He stayed out an hour longer, setting markers with Farore's Wind that he could return to and verifying that it worked as intended before using it as a fall-back while he ran headlong into monsters while casting Nayru's Wind. It should have struck him as odd that he called upon power for an offensive spell, wisdom for defensive magic, and courage to flee, but somehow that suited Link fine. People called him courageous from time to time—even reckless when he was too brace—but Link hadn't felt brace ever since he started at the academy. If his attempt to call upon his courage for magic was used to flee, then the spell was meant for him.

Aside from which, he had cast all three spells throughout the day with neither instruction nor struggle. Link had no way to excuse that.

He trudged back toward the city, but changed his mind as he approached the station. There was still a paid for ticket in his pocket. He scaled the side of the next train to ease its way out of the
station.

Castle City had been a strict place even before the curfew. Link felt that after a long day of his entire self-identity being questioned, he needed something to take his mind off of things, and it was easier to get alcohol underage in Whittleton than Castle City.

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While Link explored the fields, Vaati paced the basement.

The academy wouldn't risk releasing him only for his presence to summon Risen, and Vaati (told himself that he) was content to hide away and practice. Without Link, he couldn't train with the Light Force, but at least he'd developed a sense of the new limitations on his ordinary magic in the meantime. The dark element was completely inaccessible to him, and every other element but his own wind was weakened. He'd have a rough time cursing anyone in the near future, but at least he could teleport use most of his offensive spells still.

The basement door was locked, but Vaati had managed to find a spare key. Inside the basement, of all places. Hylians picked the most nonsensical places to leave keys. He had stopped questioning their practices regarding the matter shortly after leaving the Minish world. At least he'd found it on a shelf rather than in a large chest that could easily be put to use holding something larger and more susceptible to dust.

Nothing prevented him from leaving. Vaati could go wherever he damn well pleased. He could rebuild the Palace of Wings and live far from any pesky heroes or deans. With the princess still in her own castle, no one had any reason to invade his home. Except for Risen, who could burst through the walls and suck the Light Force out of him.

Vaati was lying. Nothing physically prevented him from leaving, but he was very much a prisoner of his own fear.

Twice he had fought Risen and only come out mostly intact thanks to outside help. The deal had healed his arm, but Vaati took a serious blow before Link saved him, and he'd done almost nothing to Risen while fighting in his Wrath form. (A form he couldn't access without his dark element.) The Light Force could defeat Risen. Vaati was sure of that. If only he could use the blasted thing. You would think that someone would have given him the opportunity to practice it if they wanted him to fight Risen for them.

He scoured the basement for spellbooks, then passed the time inspecting anything and everything else, and then the next few days mending whatever he found in disrepair purely for the sake of doing something. Out of sheer boredom, he even wove a spell into one cloak so that it would always stir as if blown by a gentle wind when worn. By the end of the third day, Vaati was so bored that he contemplated whether or not he could find enough materials to make a new Wishing Cap. There were parts of the enchantment process that he didn't know. Ezlo kept most of his craft a secret, even from his own apprentice. But he knew it used a magic power similar to the Light Force, so surely he could improvise some manner of shabby imitation.

Fortunately for the world, a distraction arrived before he could make an attempt. Unfortunately for Vaati, this distraction was named Link.

Vaati set down the fabric that he'd been cutting to sew into a hat when he saw Link, pausing mid-snip to ask, "Who let you in?"

"I did. Picked the lock. You shouldn't have had me learn how to do that. This much power was
never meant to be in one man's hands. If locked doors can't stop me, then what can?"

"Crippling self-doubt," Vaati said, recalling the look of horror on Link's face whenever he transformed.

Link laughed, and Vaati smelled alcohol on his breath. Figures he would have a way to overcome his doubts, if only for one evening.

"Let's go," Link said.

"Where. I thought you were done talking to me after seeing what I did to your princess."

"They're gonna lock you in that dungeon, right? Cargan saw 'em shipping supplies over the past few days, so I looked and there's water 'n food 'n stuff. C'mon. You've gotta practice your light thing, so we can do there and do it and not worry about Risen attacking the city again."

"He's close enough to sense me when I leave. What's to stop him from catching us on the way there?"

Link shrugged. "At least we won't be in the city."

"Screw the city. I don't want him attacking me."

"I'll kick his ass then." Link declared, taking Vaati by surprise. He hadn't thought Link knew that word. Must less could use it. "I mean, he's kinda big, but I got him to run once, and I guess that's a thing past mes do all the time, right? Beat up big evil things that everyone else says are too big and evil to bear up? Did you ever meet me before?"

"We lived together for the past month." Vaati made no attempts to mask his irritation, but foled the fabric in his hands and set it down. Link had indeed managed to push Risen back, and the dungeon would give Vaati more room to wander than the basement, not to mention better target practice for his magic and more security should Risen get near. Once he left, the academy might also be forced to push forward their plans regarding him.

"No. Some other me," Link elaborated. "An older me."

Vaati hadn't expected that question. No doubt, the Link he looked at was the same soul that thwarted him twice before in different yet similar looking bodies. He suspected he was also looking at the reincarnation of both heroes who fought that Ganondorf figure as well. However, he'd never once considered that Link might suspect such a thing. It was haughty enough to reincarnate as your own descendant, but an entire new level to think without anyone else planting the idea in your head that you were the reincarnation of multiple legendary heroes.

Then again, Link was at least a little drunk. Maybe it was loose inhibitions. Maybe he was drunk because someone planted the idea, and the Din blasted hero decided to celebrate the validation of his dreams of grandeur. Vaati could just imagine the look on Link's face if those dreams were crushed.

"Yes. And I swear, you get stupider each time you come back."

He could imagine that face well enough that he didn't need to see it for real. Learning where Link was going with this line of thought interested Vaati more.

"They all beat me, didn't they?" Link asked. "Sucks bad enough not living up to your great grandpa. Sucks worse not living up to yourself. So are you commin' or what? You have the magic power and someone thought a shit like me's hero material. That means we gotta go stop the dragon."
Despite the jaw dropping stupidity that was traveling by night across an open field while hoping to avoid a black dragon, Link and Vaati made it to the dungeon unharmed. Relatively, anyway. Vaati was tempted to have Link shoot an arrow through his heart to spare him the hero's half-drunk ramblings about how wrong it was that he be the hero.

Vaati had to wonder, as Link rambled on and on about how amazing the Hero of Time and Winds were compared to him, if he realized how conceited he sounded. He was, after all, talking about his past selves. Vaati hadn't known the second incarnation of Link that he personally dealt with, being a monster at the time, but he'd seen the first go from a worthless smith's son to the most infuriating thorn ever to be in his side. From where he stood, the hero's latest incarnation seemed off to a much better start. He lacked formal recognition as a knight, but formalities were formalities. He had sword training and an alarmingly good understanding of the principles of magic. Almost as if he spent most of his life swinging a sword and an entire year doing nothing but reading those principles over and over until he knew them inside and out. Vaati had sort of just wished he could get good at magic and gotten his way, but as far as conventional learning went, Link had picked a good route for quickly picking up new spells. Once you knew the language of magic, the rest went faster.

Since he struggled to learn magic the Wishing Cap hadn't granted him, Vaati found himself more than a little envious. He hoped Link never realized how incredible it was to magically pick the lock on the dean's she without help. The shed wasn't as strong as the dungeon lock Vaati helped Link with, but Vaati had inspected that shed himself on his first day of school and knew it was a competently set spell. Manipulating metal was higher tier earth magic than a wind sorcerer like Vaati could ever achieve, and far more advanced than someone who had only started spell casting in the past few months could normally manage.

"I get it, Link, You're terrible," Vaati said as they descended into the dungeon. "The worst person anyone ever considered as a hero. Are you done yet?"

"Nah. Would it be easier to listen to me if you were drunk too?"

"Significantly more so, yes."

"Kay. I've got a lot of beer."

"Why?"

"'Cause I needed it." Link reached into a crate set just beyond the dungeon doors and pulled out two bottles of beer. Before passing one to Vaati, he held out a bracelet. "Magic blocker. Comes off easy, but you gotta wear this if you're gonna get drunk. It's the law. They don't want people throwing spells around while they're tipsy."

Vaati took one look at the bracelet, then took the bottle from Link's hand without putting the accessory on. Before he went to sit against the wall and knock back he drink, he peered inside the crate to confirm that Link had set a reasonable armful's worth of bottles inside a crate of food supplies, rather than somehow dragged an entire crate of alcohol into the dungeon. There was only so much he could withstand from the hero in terms of over the top feats.

"Needed it for what?" Vaati asked once settled in.

"Stuff," Link oh so helpfully explained. Since he sat down next to Vaati, he risked being swatted if he didn't elaborate. Wisely, he added, "The princess thinks I'm someone special. That I'm going to live up to all these past heroes. But I'm not as good as any of them. They're supposed to be me and I
suck when you line me up with them. My great grandfather saved the kingdom, and all my life I
wanted to be half as awesome as he was. He died less than a year before I was born. Did you know
that? Before she left, Mom would talk about what a shame it was that I never met him. Except it
turned out I'm him. And I can't live up to what he is. It's like instead of letting his legacy down, I'm
dragging him down."

"I thought your mom was dead," Vaati said. "So she left because you're a failure?"

"Nah. She ran off with some dude who I guess is my dad because Grandpa sucks," Link corrected.
"I mean, he never came around to see me, but I'm pretty sure he's my dad. I was little when they
bounced, so maybe I did see him and I don't remember. Whatever. Grandpa kept nagging them about
how they couldn't do this or that because it was all fanciful nonsense that'd drag them away from the
life they know, so they flipped him the bird and left that life. And me, I guess. Can't take a little kid
on the road with you. You'd think he'd learn, right? Except then he went and pulled that same crap
with me. That's why I'm in the academy. Because it means I can't go anywhere until I'm done
learning, and then I'll still be expected to stay in the city where the largest collection of books is
because that's what sorcerers do. I guess the last me was as shitty a dad as I am a hero, because he
gave Grandpa issues." Link popped his own bottle open and took a swig. "Y'know, I was kinda
hoping for some consolation when I started talking to you."

"Yes, well, we all make mistakes when drunk."

"C'mon. Try being nice for once."

Vaati rolled his eyes, then told Link, "I am over a thousand years old. Hearing a child talk about
what he's aspired to do all his life is laughable. Unless you meet an untimely demise-and the Destiny
Bond only works one way so don't think I won't see to that-then you not only haven't been trying for
long, but have many more years to fail."

"No. You're supposed to say I have plenty of time to learn how to not to fail."

"Link, you can't be so drunk that you've forgotten I don't like you."

"Nah. Just desperate. I can't go to the princess for sympathy 'cause she'll just say I already know
where she stands, and Cargan would think I'm full of it. I don't even wanna know what the dean'd
say. Grandpa would drag me by the ear up to my room and nail the door shut to keep me from ever
leaving. 'Cause he's an ass like that."

Vaati studied Link's face. Despite Link looking older, he was a child to Vaati. Almost a baby. So
young for someone with such a bitter expression. But Vaati knew that look on a child well enough.
Minish facial structure differed from Hylian, but he'd seen that face in the mirror plenty. Back when
he was made to perform menial tasks and forbidden from wandering beyond Ezlo's workshop or
using magic. He went to study under a great sage and was banned from magic. The only time he was
ever allowed to cast as an apprentice was when Ezlo guided him, slowly, through the finalizing of
some charm or another. For all the times the old man used Vaati's magic power to finish a task, Vaati
felt he was entitled to anything in that shop. Ezlo was a genius, but he'd lacked the raw energy to put
his wisdom to use. Not without a battery to exploit, at least.

Vaati might as well have been a slave, kept complacent with the promise of one day learning to spell
cast and cautionary tales meant to keep him from hoping that day would come too soon. To say
nothing of the verbal lashings. Because the old man was manipulative. Because he was happy to take
a naive, desperate little boy on as a power source to compensate for his own shortcoming and
pretend it was an equal exchange.
Vaati followed suit with Link and took a swig of his beer. It wasn't good to stew over someone so long dead. Comforting as it was to find someone else bitter about a childhood lost to a controlling old man, he wasn't about to spill his own guts. He could enjoy their pity part in private.

"Lucky me your grandfather only cares about you. Getting duped into living with you was bad enough without that man trying to boss me around. If I were you, once the dragon is dead, I'd grab a horse and chase the horizon. Forget all about him."

"You mean buy a one-way ticket."

"Whatever."

Link burst out in laughter. "You really are old if trains are that hard for you! I betcha look like a little kid 'cause you're overcompensating for being a crotchety old man."

Vaati tried not to let the remark get under his skin.

He failed.

"I don't need to be mocked by a child who thinks he's unique for wanting to disobey his guardian!"

Someone, Vaati's words hurt himself more than they did Link. The entire rest of the four minute tirade he'd planned died in his throat while Link's laughter merely turned nervous for all of five seconds before taking another swig of beer.

"Y'think I'm just being a brat?" Link asked. "I mean, Grandpa sucks, but he sucks in a good way, y'know? Like, he doesn't let me do what I want because he's afraid I'll leave him, and he doesn't want that 'cause he loves his family. 'Snot like he had to take me in when Mom left, and he cooks my favorite meals on special occasions and when I'm feeling bad or if I make him proud—even if it's not something I ever thought was worth being proud of. Like, he's got a shitty way of showing it, but he loves me and he's trying his best, kinda."

A chill ran down Vaati's spine. "Failure is failure."

"Y'think? I guess I hate how controlling he is, but he cares. Maybe... if I got home now, after being out so late, he'll never give me the chance to leave again. A royal decree wouldn't change his mind. But for as much as I hate being under his thumb... I still feel bad worrying him. Maybe I'll write. Whoever brings you supplies can deliver the letter."

Vaati set his half-empty bottle down and rose to his feet, turning and walking to the cracked section of tile that he and Link had bypassed during their previous excursion of the dungeon. HE didn't need to hear anymore of Link's shepal. He didn't need to hear Link mistakenly trust some old fool of a user. HE didn't care that it made no sense for him to care about Link's home life. Vaati had gone down that road. Endured for years, always being put down, never allowed any freedom, never allowed to learn a first thing about his passion, and told to be grateful for it because at least he had food and shelter. If Link was too drunk to listen, then Demise take him. He could make all the mistakes he wanted.

"Vaati?"

"I'm going to take some alone time."

His wind magic was sluggish with Link so close, so Vaati skipped attempting it and threw whatever of the Light Force he could grab at the floor bellow him, channeling it with his anger rather than his rational mind. The tiles shattered, and he landed almost gracefully on the floor below.
Chapter End Notes

If you think I took my sweetass time with getting the plot underway, please appreciate that it also took me until Chapter 12 to really start on Vaati's character arc. Everything up until now has either been main plot setup or developing Link's insecurities.
Link hadn't been too drunk to realize that following Vaati was a bad idea. He was absolutely confident that he hadn't had too much to fight the standard-fair monsters they'd seen in the half of the dungeon they explored before. He knew his limits. (It wasn't like he'd only recently discovered how to get his hands on alcohol.) But Vaati's magic was another matter. Link had learned from the dean about the conditions for the Light Force, and how it eclipsed Vaati's magic in Zelda's presence. Although he'd said nothing to the dean, Link had deduced on his own that he met whatever same qualification the princess did. If Vaati wanted to explore the dungeon with magic, Link would let him. It gave Link more time to clear his head anyway.

Since Vaati left without finishing his own drink, Link chugged the rest of the bottle before digging through the supplies brought in by the teachers for a sleeping roll. There was only one, but Vaati was small enough that they could both fit in it. Link unfurled it and crawled in, rolling around a bit before settling on his back and starting at the high ceiling. Was Risen circling just above the dungeon? Could Risen detect his soul the same way he did Vaati's magic, or was the Spirit of the Hero harder to detect? The princess had seen him for what he truly was, but Link's brain wasn't in optimal condition for deducing the precise moment she figured him out. He had the sense that something passed between them, but he couldn't remember what.

Could he be blamed for that? He hadn't exactly been looking for signs that he was the Hero of Time's reincarnation. Signs of approval, maybe, but the only one for whom he looked for signs of some sort of incredible past was Vaati.

All that thinking about himself accomplished was to make Link want to drink more, so he shifted to thoughts of Vaati. There was one subtle past event Link could think of that hadn't stood out as much before, and that was the cracking of that stone which the ancient, rusted sword had been set in. No one called Link out on the damage, but what if that was how Vaati broke free of his seal? The sword was in such a decrepit state, and that crack had run right along the podium that the blade was stuck in. He could have damaged the blade itself without noticing.

Link didn't think to hard about the bad that came from that, lest guild over Zelda's attack eat away at him. Instead, he focused on the event in relation to Risen. The dragon wanted a power both Vaati and the princess possessed, and would kill his targets upon getting what he wanted. Vaati hadn't put much thought into sparing Zelda, but hadn't gone out of his way to hurt her, so he was... kinda good? Less evil than the dragon, anyway. If no one had woken Vaati, what if the dragon still attacked and Zelda's drop of the Light Force hadn't been enough?

Satisfied with this line of reasoning, Link shut his eyes and went to sleep.

-o-

Not the type to drink often, Vaati didn't know what normal limits were. Dealing with a Link who was just drunk enough to be loose lipped was one thing. Returning to find a Link who was sloshed or hungover was another matter. Rather than deal with that, Vaati delved deeper into the dungeon, scouring every room he'd skipped before, then looping back six more times. If nothing else, it felt good to tear monsters limb from limb each time he re-entered a room. Why did people ever try to talk out their feelings when action was so therapeutic?
Sadly, the monster that had been the most fun to slaughter didn't regenerate. Not only that, but killing it created a portal to the room directly below Link. Killing things was less exciting after that, and the hero could easily find Vaati if he dallied too long. The nagging fear that Link might drunkenly stumble into the portal became harder and harder to ignore. Sober, Link could handle himself, but drunk, he might die.

The Destiny Bond only worked one way, so it was no urgent threat, but if Link died then Vaati would have only the decrepit princess as his key to the Light Force. With his dark element completely out of operation even when the rest of his magic worked properly, Vaati could neither shapeshift nor cast curses. There was no easy way to transport such a burdensome woman, especially if her health needed tending to. Frustrating though it was, Vaati needed Link alive until Risen was dealt with. Then Vaati could dump Link in the ocean and search out someone less troublesome to be his Light Force key.

Since Link lacked both wind spells and the cape Vaati found after killing one particular monster that enhanced one's ability to jump, he was at least closed off to one route that led to monsters, but he could always drop down the hole Vaati made and be unable to get back to the safe room. Given how prone Link was to going after monsters even when sober, Vaati eventually resigned himself to checking in on the hero. The fun of torturing monsters wore off entirely by his fourth trek through the dungeon anyway.

-o-

Link woke with a wince to the clang of shattered glass. As far as hangovers went, he'd had worse, but even the most minor of headaches didn't mesh well with piercing noises. He groaned, extracted himself from the sleeping bad, and looked up to see the dean tossing still-full bottles of bear down the hole Vaati made the night before.

"That's wasteful" Link said before remembering that he wasn't old enough to legally drink.

The dean cast him a sour look.

"I mean... Those bottles could be used for many things if you just dumped the alcohol. No idea who thought to pack those here when Vaati's supposed to be learning new magic, but there's no reason to waste perfectly good glass over a little booze."

"Do tell. What potential could these bottles possibly have?"

Bottles had featured in accounts of the adventures of Link's great-grandfather—as well as that of the Hero of Winds and even the Hero of Time, but Link wasn't awake enough to recall the details.

"Don't you feel bad about littering?"

"The dungeon will take care of it. Who told you that you could be here?"

"Her Highness," Link said. "Someone has to work with Vaati, right?"

"Princess Zelda will be the one to practice with Vaati. You are to return to school... if your grandfather permits it. He all but broke down the academy gates this morning looking for you,"

Joy upon Joys. Ling dragged himself to his feet and stretched before deciding not to address that one.

"I have orders from the princess-acting as princess rather than a teacher. She doesn't want to travel with Vaati and thinks I'll do the job. You can take it up with her, but until she says otherwise, I obey royal orders."

No matter how ill suited Link felt for the quest, Zelda was in no shape to go anywhere. Link might
not have been the perfect hero his past incarnations had been, but he beat nothing. Besides, supposedly some past version of him beat Vaati, so maybe he wasn't an awful pick for keeping Vaati in line. It was a big maybe, given that Vaati already attacked Zelda once with him in the room before snaring him in some sort of white magic curse, but Link needed something to cling to.

The dean looked unimpressed. Rather than respond, he resumed dropping bottles down the hole.

It was with a vindictive satisfaction that Link grinned as one of those bottles flew back up and smacked the dean in the face. Moments later, Vaati appeared. Rather than lift himself by his wind magic, he rode the current of some turbine bellow. A white and blue clotch in his hands caught the air and held it for him, allowing him to glide swiftly up before landing smoothly on the tile behind the dean,

"It's like you want people to treat you like a child," Vaati said, gesturing to the almost depleted booze stores. Lucky for Link, Whittleton's wares came cheap. "How do you intend to stop me when you can't stop an old man from throwing your things away?"

"Maybe I don't want to stop him."

It was the dean who came up with a mature response. "Link stops you with his presence alone. Until you've learned to master the Light Force, you're more fledgling a sorcerer than he in his presence."

Vaati visibly bristled. "Well, perhaps you have some recommendations for where I should start learning."

"I've already given you plenty of lectures. Are you so poor a sorcerer that you need them repeated?"

The words surprised Link. The dean was an ornery man at the best of times, but he had never taken a negative attitude towards anyone's ability to learn. For as begrudgingly as he accepted that Link needed a tool to channel his magic, the dean never blamed him for the handicap. When he called out inattentive students, he might have suggested that they didn't care about the opportunity to learn that they had been granted, but never suggested that they were outright incompetent. There was an idiot among the new fire students who could ask that the same concept be explained five times, and the deal would reward his lecture with only a little extra irritation in his voice until he was certain everyone understood the material.

Of course, Vaati was kind of a terrible person. Link too was less polite to him than with the average citizen.

"Well, since you're both here, I suppose I should tell you that we're working now on how to lure Risen back. More pressing, however, is what we've discovered analyzing remnants of his previous attacks. It seems Risen is not a free agent. Depending on who he's bound to serve, his master may be able to resurrect him. Until his master has been identified, slaying Risen is not our objective. Since someone is too dense to learn things properly the first time around, the odds that we could slay him before he wreaks too much havoc were low anyway. Vaati, are you at least capable of mastering the Light Force to the point of aiding in sealing Risen?"

"Don't pretend to be vague about who you're calling out if you're going to name me immediately after."

Eager to skip any more arguing, Link asked, "Would it be possible to just... cut Risen off from whoever he's bound to? Don't we have someone with the magic power to do that? We could teach Vaati while he learns to kill Risen."
"What are you talking about? You think I'm going to learn something from you?"

The dean cleared his throat to speak over Vaati. "Knowing who he serves would make the process easier, but I don't suspect we can. Not unless his master is also present, at the very least. It's hard to say when we only have vestiges of magic to analyze, but the power of the contract between servant and master suggests incredible power. The Light Force might be enough, but even then, I wouldn't get my hopes up."

"There has to be-"

"Aside from that," the dean cut Link off to say, "the only power I could think of is... well... out of reach. I'm sure you know the legend of the Hero of Winds? The princess has spoken nothing of the Triforce returning to her family since it was used to submerge Hyrule, and we have no idea where the bearer of Courage may be. To say nothing of Power likely resting on the ocean floor."

"None of that means anything to me," Vaati interrupted to say. "I've been gone for a pretty long time. Anyone care to bring me up to speed?"

"As such, there's no way to address this with our current resources. Trying to summon Risen's master to break the bond between them would be foolhardy. We don't need to deal with anyone stronger than Risen if we can afford to. Even if our sealing of Risen calls his master forward, it will be better to fight this new opponent without Risen also apposing us."

Ling grimaced not at the news that they may have a second threat to deal with, but at the realization that he would be the one left with the thankless task of catching Vaati up on whatever transpired while he was sealed away.

Wait... While he was sealed away?

"Vaati, would we be able to use the same seal on Risen that they used to hold you?" Link asked.

"No," Vaati said. "I destroyed that seal, and you would have to kill me before you could get me to tell you anything you might use to recreate, much less enlist me help in making another prison."

"We don't need Vaati's cooperation in reforging the Four Sword," the dean said, ignoring Vaati's sputtered demands to explain how he knew of the blade. "The descendants of the smith who originally worked the seal into it meant to hold Vaati came here after the Great Flood. Those who have maintained the practice of sword smithing live among the Gorons. The only problem is that the sword itself is missing. It contains properties from another world, and the only gate I know of to that world lies at the bottom of the Great Sea. The four elements that were used to enhance the blade so that it would work against Vaati are similarly sunken. If we had the blade, I'm sure it could be restored. I didn't recognize it before, but now that I have, I can recall the power I sensed from it. The weakening of Vaati's seal must have come from the stone meant to hold the sword, not the sword itself. That sort of supplemental artifact is easy to create, but there's no replicating the Four Sword, and it vanished the day Vaati broke loose."

The dean turned to Vaati, making no pretense of who he suspected was behind that. Vaati, in turn, Folded his arms and stared defiantly up at the old man.

"Is there anything else you're hiding?" Vaati asked.

"Only one of us has hidden anything."

"Lies. There aren't any legends left of the Minish, but you still know that the sword came from their world, and where the gate to that world is. I'm supposed to believe you simply knew all this when
you couldn't even recognize the sword until after it was gone? The blade was rused, but the hilt wasn't in terrible shape and the magic was sound until only a few days before I broke free. There's no reason you could know so much and not realize what you had."

"You think yourself an expert on recognizing blades? Could you even tell me what sword Link wields?"

"No, but I've made no claims to simultaneously know nothing and everything about it. Although if you feel like showing off a little more about how all knowing you are, the enlighten me on why you gave the hero a dark-aligned weapon. Unless you feel like playing dumb again, that is."

Link looked down at the sword strapped to his waist, feeling as though it had betrayed him. He knew shapeshifting magic relied entirely on the dark element. Even a fair few non-sorcerers could tell you that. But he'd never stopped to think about it. The dark element wasn't *always* evil, but evil always seemed to somehow tie into darkness.

Then again, he spent the previous evening drinking with an ancient evil wing mage who now had to master light magic. Perhaps it was bad to stereotype.

"The Goddesses must be having fun this time around," Link said to himself. A hero struggling to control a dark sword and a villain learning a blessing of light. "Vaati, how about you take the Beast Blade and I'll wield the Light Force?"

The dean raised an eyebrow at Link's offer to take up sorcery over swordsmanship, but any comment he might have had was lost when Vaati sneered and said, "I die if the Light Force goes to anyone else."

"Since the faster learner between the two of you can't use the Light Force, mastering it to the point of sealing is our most realistic goal," the dean repeated. "To that end, Vaati, where is the Four Sword?"

Vaati looked at the dean and said nothing.

"It's going to hold Risen, not you," Link said, searching for anything he might be able to offer for Vaati's cooperation. "If the Four Sword needs to be capped in some sort of pedestal, no one would be able to use it on you later without releasing Risen, which is good enough reason to never draw it if you're the only one who can stop Risen."

Vaati turned his gaze, cold and cutting, to Link, and Link stared back. Silence stretched better them. That intense gaze dared Link to back down, to give up and let go of his defense of the dean's plan. Link stood straighter, adding an extra inch to their height difference, and stared down at Vaati until that sharpness in his gaze dulled. The cold never left his eyes, but Vaati at last shut them and surrendered.

"Fine. For sealing Risen. I didn't his the shards anywhere memorable, but I can lead you to the general area where I left each piece."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay. I actually have a lot of reasons, but the short version is: I wanted to polish it a little and life kept getting in the way of that. Glad I did though. I cut almost 400 words in the form of weak phrasings, bad sentences, and flat out unneeded
moments. Writing a ton feels good, but trimming fat feels better.

Three guesses who Risen’s master is. First two don’t count.
Vaati's palms were slick with sweat over the idea of getting inside the death trap that Link insisted was a totally normal form of transportation. With his wind element inaccessible in Link's presence, he could neither fly nor teleport the two of them to the location where he threw the first shard. Since he also wasn't familiar enough with New Hyrule to pinpoint the spot on a map, he had to retrace his steps.

Once there, he was under orders to leave Link and teleport back to the dungeon. It was a safe enough place to be while Risen was on the prowl, and he would be no more useful in finding the shard than anyone else once he'd shared it's general location. In fact, given that he was a beacon for Risen to follow, it was outright counterintuitive to include him on any outdoor task that he wasn't needed to perform.

"Suppose Risen has already recovered from our last fight," Vaati said. Could he knock your train over?"

Link cast Vaati an aggravatingly bemused look. "I'm not sure if the e dragon or the train scares you more."

"The train is a rational fear," Vaati said. It wasn't like he could pretend it hadn't rattled him.

"I've never met another soul who's afraid to ride."

"Then the people of this kingdom are foolhardy. Hylians have no sense of self-preservation."

"Do you think those little thumb-people the dean wants us to have reforge the sword ever take the train?"

Vaati grimaces and didn't answer. Back in his home world, much of the flora and fauna dwarfed him, but the Minish produced things scaled to their own size. There were no other species that could make tools anywhere near their caliber. He'd only had a cursory glance at how Minish lived in Link's world, where other intelligent species were much larger and every bit as abundant, but he had a sense for the cultural differences. Rather than build their own structures, most Minish found nooks in the creations of larger species to call home. Very few followed the practice of adapting existing wildlife to suit their needs. If he were to search under the seats or along some beam that ran across the ceiling of the train cabin, Vaati wouldn't be shocked if he found insane Minish who saw nothing wrong with living on the train. The lunatics would probably even have their own special garb, with little bits of stolen coal decorating their hats and wheel patterns on their cloaks.

"Vaati?"

"Maybe I should draw a picture of the place where I left the shard. You can track it down from there."

"You really don't want to take the train, huh?"

"You look no more enthusiastic than me," Vaati argued, although Link's concern was likely more to do with his travel partner. "Let's not pretend we enjoy one another's company. An arrangement where I don't have to show you the way means less time spent together."
"A lot of places here look similar to one another. Even if you could draw it perfectly, it would take a long time to find. It's risky... but I think we're better off with you here." Link glanced back at Vaati, sizing him up. Vaati thought he saw a hint of fear in the boy's eyes, but Link feared neither trains nor the mage he'd been saddled with. What frightened him then?

When Vaati said nothing, silently searching for the source of the hero's fear, Link turned away.

"Can I trust you to buy train tickets for us while I run an errand?"

"No."

"At least pretend to consider it first."

"No."

"Fine. Will you wait at the train station while I visit my grandfather?"

Because he could, Vaati pretended to consider it before saying, "No."

Link came to a halt, turning on his heels to glare at Vaati. "You're not coming with me for this."

"I enjoy watching you two fight," Vaati said, which wasn't exactly a lie. Seeing Link so miserable in his own home helped keep Vaati from being miserable in Link's home. But he suspected Link wasn't looking for a fight with his grandfather. And what Link was looking for, Vaati wanted to see even more.

Someone who held you down, denied you everything you wanted, claimed they were only doing it in your best interest no matter how obvious it was that they thought only of themselves... To love them and be loved in return was absurd. Vaati wanted Link to try his hardest to prove he was wrong. Try, but not succeed. Vaati needed Link to prove him right by failing to prove him wrong.

For one second, Vaati met Link's narrowed eyes with his own, then he put on a big smile. He made his eyes go wide with feigned ignorance, cocking his head like the curious child Link once mistook him for. "Your grandfather took me in when I had nowhere else to go, Link. If you're going to tell him about this quest I've swept you up in, it's only right that I be there too."

-o-

Vaati didn't know many Hylian legends, but heroes in Minish stories were always noble. All variations of the most famous tail, in which the Minish bestowed the Light Force upon humans-probably another of Link's blasted past lives-portrayed that human the same. Above all vices that most of Vaati's kind would call petty negative feelings, but that Vaati knew would pave the path to power if you surrendered to them. A true hero would stand above the ugliness of the world and pursue his idea of all that was good and righteous.

The Link who stormed ahead of Vaati might have been the hero reborn, but he didn't seem like much of a hero. Not with his temper.

"Are you sure you're not the villain of this legend?" Vaati asked him. "You don't seem that noble. And wielding a dark sword... doesn't that seem like an evil weapon? You practically wear the carcass of your murder victims."

"Shut up, Vaati."

"It's no fun when you don't even try to think of a good comeback," Vaati said, although this latest
Link was ten times more talkative than the others he'd known. Or more talkative than the first, at least. The one who consorted with Ezlo. The Link who cloned himself three times might have been quite the conversationalist, but Vaati lacked a clear memory of his time in beast form. Besides, who chats with a beast?

He waited to see if Link might say something more eloquent upon learning he was letting his new partner in... heroism(?) down, but instead, Link responded by playing mute. The ante needed upping if Vaati wanted to be entertained.

"If you were to kill a human with that sword, would it let you turn into them?"

Link looked over his shoulder to shoot icicles at Vaati with his eyes. "Hold still and we can't test that."

"Hm... Better not. I don't think your evil sword will grant you the Light Force."

Link snarled, but saw the taunt for what it was and picked up the pace towards his home. The sooner they got farewells out the way, the sooner they could start and-in turn-finish their quest.

When they reached the door, Vaati let Link go ahead as he scanned the sky. No signs of Risen. Hopefully the wing Link broke had yet to heal.

"Should we be wasting time here?" Vaati asked. "It gives the dragon more time to track us."

When Link didn't respond, Vaati looked back to earth and saw that the hero had not only gone inside, but couldn't be seen from the front door. He could, however, be heard, as could his grandfather. There was no need to step foot in after them when the whole neighborhood could hear their fight. Vaati gave it fifteen seconds before Link stormed back out.

A minute passed without Link reappearing. Vaati sat down against the side of the house, drumming his fingers on his knee, certain he didn't want to go inside and get between the two, the way they were going at it. He didn't think he ever yelled as much at Ezlo.

If you treated mom half as poorly as you treat me, no wonder she ran away. I ought to chain you to your bed. I'd rather drown myself in a well than live like this. Why do you think I sent you to that school, if not to keep you from running off brandishing some worthless sword?

Poisonous words said to and by a poisonous, controlling man. Link could wish there was something more, but there wasn't. Horrible people who kept you under their thumb were horrible, through and through. It was the right call on Link's part to get away. His only mistake had been to say goodbye to his grandfather.

Two minutes passed. Three. Ten. Vaati heard a train whistle in the distance. Vaati at last resolved to drag Link out if he didn't come in the next sixty seconds.

He counted down, and was just past twenty when he realized they needed to leave a little sooner than that.

"Link?" Vaati called into the house.

The argument paused "Not now!"

"Now, Link!"

"What could be so important?"
"Dragon!"

Link was out the door half a second later. He looked skyward, then back to Vaati to scowl. "He isn't here."

"He's coming," Vaati insisted. He could feel it. A large, dark magic force just beyond the horizon. "Do your trains out-fast dragons?"

"That's not the right-" Link stopped himself. Language corrections could wait. "If they don't, nothing will. Can you sense him? How far away is he?"

Vaati tried to focus on that dark power, then turned his palms up and shrugged. He had always been able to sense the general power of nearby sorcerers, but he'd never had a sharp sense for dark magic before. All he could tell was that one of the new sensations when the Light Force activated let him pick up a large amount of dark energy, and it was getting closer. How far away and how fast it went, he was too new to the feeling to say. "It's coming from there," he said while pointing, hoping not to look totally useless.

Link winced. "We're going that way."

"No you are not." Link's grandfather said, stepping out behind Link. "You boys are going back to the shelter the dean set up, and you're staying there until the adults take care of this. I'm not losing my grandchild too."

Link gestured to Vaati. "There's no adults handling this. He has to seal the dragon and he needs me around to do it."

Vaati grabbed Link's arm and tugged. "I can't do it if we're turned to..." What was the word for ash? "If it sets fire to us. Hurry, Link."

Link let himself be pulled three steps by Vaati, then pulled his arm free. He turned back and ran those three steps to this grandfather, throwing his arms around the old man.

"I'm not going away forever."

Vaati's attempt to tell Link he would be happier if he did was cut short by Link grabbing him and taking off for the train station before his grandfather could think to pursue.

-o-

Evil sorcerers who used wind magic to get around were not good runners, Link learned. While Link purchased tickets, Vaati struggled to catch his breath. His pale skin glistened with swear, and he crouched in the corner of the platform so it wouldn't be obvious that his legs trembled.

Not that Link lived far from the station, or ran at top speed. But if he felt like being a little fair, he could allow that he had longer strides than Vaati.

He didn't feel like being fair.

"Catch your breath on the train," he told Vaati as he took their tickets. "If we can't waste time on goodbyes, we definitely can't waste time on this."

Vaati glared up at him. Funny how he insisted on looking as visions as possible even when he could barely rise to his feet.
"Not all of us trained with the royal guard."

Link shrugged and stepped aboard the train, waiting for Vaati to follow. Truth be told, half the royal guard was in no better shape than Vaati, but telling Vaati that felt like giving him an undeserved win.

Vaati hesitated at the train door, regarding the vehicle warily until something snapped his eyes skyward. He boarded wordlessly and looked around before hurrying past Link to an empty seat.

The train was neither full nor empty, and hopefully none of its passengers would become casualties. Link could find a seat all by himself if he looked, but it was easier to sit beside his evil sorcerer companion. Vaati kept his gaze on his hands, which fidgeted in his lap. Link doubted he even noticed someone sitting next to him.

He didn't bother to ask what suddenly had the Light Force bearer so nervous.

"When we get back, we should practice more," Link suggested. "We can find monsters in that dungeon for you to fight with magic. Even if someone keeps reviving Risen, a reliable weapon to fight him with would give us less reason to worry whenever he comes near."

Vaati gave a noncommittal grunt.

"You're listening, right? You're not just making noise for the sake of sounding attentive?"

He took the silence to mean yes.

Green in the corner of Link's eye made him glance to a row of seats not far back, and without turning his head he spied the dean. They hadn't spoken about anyone coming along with them, but it seemed the dean was more interested in monitoring than dragging him back. That might chance if the dean noticed Risen. Or maybe he realized they didn't have enough time to hide and hope Risen hadn't sensed Vaati.

It hadn't passed Link's notice how Vaati bristled at the dean, and if the two of them got into a fight, the mission might be aborted. He couldn't go back home unaccomplished after fighting with his grandfather the way he had. He nudged his head towards the window and told Vaati, "You're less likely to get motion sickness if you watch the scenery pass b."

Vaati glanced to the window, in the opposite direction of the dean, and bit his lip as he saw the station pull away. The whistle made him flinch. "I still think Hylians are insane to devise something like this."

"Hylians didn't invent the... Wait, what are you?"

Link had noticed Vaati's ears were on the long side, especially when the bloodlines from Ancient Hyrule were thin enough that most people with Hylian ancestry had rounded ears. But he didn't know any other species Vaati fit into. He was too small and male and bone-white for a Gerudo, he had no feathers, no bark, no scales. What else was there?

"It's none of your concern."

"Your main secret is already out of the bad. I don't see the harm in sharing anything more at this point."

Vaati glanced at Link, to the hills flying by out the window, and back to Link again. Apparently, Link was a more pleasing sight, because Vaati's attention stayed on him. "Who else died? I thought the Gerudo girl came to this country alone."
"Who... what?"

"When you and thee old man argued, he said 'I'm not losing my grandchild too.' That means someone else lost a grandchild, correct?"

"He means my mom," Link said. "And before you ask, she's not dead."

"So she wasn't lost."

"She..." It struck Link how little he wanted Vaati in on his family drama, even if he'd naively offered up a front row seat in the past. "It's none of your concern."

He had hoped to see Vaati incensed, or at least defeated that he couldn't call out the dismissal without looking like a hypocrite. Instead, Vaati's attention snapped back to the window. He even pressed himself against the glass to get a better look.

Link didn't follow his gaze. "You see him?"

"Uh-huh."

"Do you think the train can out-pace him?"

"It hasn't yet."

"I thought the trains went too fast for you."

"The train shakes too much. The dragon is the one going too fast for me."

Link clutched his sword, then relaxed his grip. The King Dodongo form had proved effective at keeping Risen at bay, but at the cost of his own mind, and once he forgot himself, he stopped fighting other monsters. Even if Vaati and the dean could revert him back, there were civilians around that he might first hurt.

"You said this... train can harm monsters it comes in contract with. Would it hurt Risen?"

"He's bigger than the train, and I bet his scales are sturdier than the frame." When Vaati gave Link a look that said this mean nothing, he added, "So no. Risen could probably snatch the train up and fly away with us trapped inside."

Link finally looked out the window and saw the black speck in the sky, so far off that he wouldn't know it was a dragon if Vaati hadn't stared at it. It came from the ocean, not quite in the direction they were headed, but close. If the train didn't pick up speed, their paths would cross well before reaching their destination.

"Wind," Link decided. "You can use wind to push the train faster. Get up on the roof or stand outside the car or something. I'll go speak to the conductor."

Link stood, only to have Vaati grab his tunic. "H-hey! Wait! You said outside the train is where it's least safe."

"Yes. If you stand in front of a train and it runs into you, you're going to hurt." Link tugged his tunic away. "Standing on the deck on the back of the car is fine. Way safer than being caught by Risen. Get out their and speed the train up."

As he cast one last glance behind him before exiting the car and explaining to the conductor what they were about to do, Link saw the dean rise from his seat and give a shove to Vaati, who hesitated
by the back door. Maybe, if Vaati failed, they could at least have one competent sorcerer save the day

Chapter End Notes

Okay technically this is late, but it's exactly as late as the last chapter so in a way it's on time.

I had a really rough time writing this chapter, and the second half of the last one, and all of the next one. All this train and Risen stuff. If I had more free time, I probably would have condensed it a lot more than I already did. I still took the time to trim a lot of fat before posting (with the main reason this is 5 days late being that I just didn't have time to slim down the last scene) but I wish I'd done more. Speaking of my editing process, I actually ran this chapter through MS Word's spell check. Found some funny stuff. I really love scrivener for keeping track of larger projects, but its spell check is so much more basic. It's hilarious how many errors it and I both will overlook.

Actually, a major reason I halved my posting rate was because these last three chapters took me over half a year. I haven't written chapter 16 yet but hopefully it will come easier. I'm getting to the point where I have to finally make up my mind on whether or not to make Dark Link a character in this fic
Holy shit is this late. The last thing I uploaded period was a drabble so old that ffn is about to auto-delete it.

Sorry for the total silence. Life has been… busy. I mentioned this on tumblr but I don't know how much people actually follow me there. I got a new job in March that's full time and pays more than any other job I've worked and, but my shifts are at a time that really breaks up when I can work on anything else. Plus I didn't quit my old job cuzz I'd really rather work there if they just gave me a better position. School is also kicking my butt a little with all the hours it demands despite me already having so much work. Still, I hate leaving stuff incomplete once I commit to posting it so dammit all. I will finish this fic. God willing, it'll be easier for me to find time to work on it once school is done. Fingers crossed that I'll also get a better job so I can stop juggling a more than full-time schedule with two different places. (Seriously. Coordinating work schedules between the two is a headache and a half.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Unhand me."

"Your vocabulary has improved tremendously."

Vaati tore his arm from the dean's grasp and snarled at him.

"You always did have a temper," the dean added. His voice fell flat in a way that made Vaati flinch and turn away.

He didn't have time to bicker with the old man. What had Link wanted? Wind. He wanted Vaati to push the train along faster. A race against Risen. And that was all well and fine and probably within Vaati's capabilities if Link hopped off the train and left Vaati behind, but a train cabin's distance apart from Link wasn't enough for the Light Force to go dormant. Wind on it's own was simple enough. Easier than teleporting, in any case. But Vaati wasn't about to bet money on his ability to create a faster wind than Risen while Link was so close by.

How vexing it was that taking the last drop of the Light Force after so many years had made him a less capable sorcerer.

In the short run, he reminded himself. He would learn to control the power, go back to being a wind sorcerer once Link died, and the next time the hero reared his stupid, reincarnated head, he'd have the Light Force at his fingertips again to go toe-to-toe with the goddess-blessed pest.

The train rattled, and Vaati stumbled a step and grabbed the railing, clinging tight even though he was too short to flip over it on accident.

"Trains aren't boats, but these rails have magic in them," the dean said. "Gather what wind you can and see if it will help. I'll set a barrier over the train."
"Why bother with a barrier if it's not enough?" Vaati grumbled, but started drawing on his wind element anyway. Loathe though he was to let others take charge, he had no better ideas than what Link proposed. And in truth, he fully understood the purpose of having backup plans—even if he'd never managed to devise enough of them whenever he faced Link in the past.

"If only we had someone who knew how to wield the Light Force, they could put up a barrier strong enough that no one would worry about Risen breaking through it."

That bird staff the dean carried with him everywhere came down on Vaati's head, shattering his concentrations and scattering the magic he'd gathered. He grumbled, rubbed the spot, and started over with his spell while the dean climbed on top of the cabin.

Vaati hated the dean. In fact, he thought he might have hated the dean more than he hated Link. And more than anything, he hated the dean's staff. If the dean's barrier broke, Vaati hoped that the first thing Risen did with the opening was set the Din blasted thing on fire.

He had a wind spell nearly finished when the dean shouted down to him, "Make sure not to give the train too hard a push when it rounds a corner, or you might derail us!"

His concentration shattered again.

The third time, he wove the spell carefully, tying the wind's direction to the train itself rather than throwing all his weight into pushing it one way. When the spell hit, it hit hard, wind nearly ripping the train from the tracks—even lifting the rear half a foot before it thudded back down. Vaati clung to the railing for dear life and gave thanks to Farore that the train had landed properly. With his spell cast and his magic too slow for him to react in time to needed changes while the countryside whipped past, the sensible thing would be to go back inside. Vaati wasn't sure he trust the train not to throw him off if he let go of the railing long enough to turn around and take two steps to the cabin door.

And hand reached out and grabbed him, pulling him back in. The door shut, and Vaati looked around at the thoroughly windblown cabin. Link released his cape and stood over him.

"Where's the dean?" Link asked.

Vaati needed a second to process that he was inside, that Link knew the dean was there, and that he knew where the dean was. "Roof."

Link swore, looked up, and then uneasily looked back down to Vaati. "And where's Risen?"

Vaati pointed to the window, where Risen was no longer a small shape in the distance.

Link stared at the dragon, so much closer now that Vaati wondered if he could have sped the train up in time even if he avoided distraction. The hero's hand reached for his sword, clenched into a fist, and fell without doing anything of use.

For as much as Vaati loved to goad Link, none of the surprise or accusation in his voice was feigned in the interest of barbing when he asked, "You're not going to fight him if he catches up?"

"That... That's your job."

"You're the hero," Vaati said. "What kind of hero chickens out of fighting a dragon and asks a villain to handle it all for him? I thought courage was supposed to be your thing. I don't know how to use light magic, Link. We're in for a rough time if you don't help."
"And if I become one more problem alongside the dragon?"

"People have been shape shifting since well before I was born. If they could manage to stay sane throughout, you can figure it out too." Vaati, perhaps, was not the best person to say that, but since when had he let little details like fairness of hypocrisy stand in his way?

And since when had Link been the sort to tolerate that from him? The hero pursed his lips and said, "I don't know how to control my shape shifting, Vaati. We're in for a rough time if you're banking on me."

This was the reincarnation of the child who defeated him in two previous lives. Vaati sneered at Link. "Then let's pray the dean's barrier and my wind is enough to prevent him from reaching us in the first place."

Link tensed, hand wrapping around the hilt of his sword, but he still didn't draw it. He sucked in his breath, and if he exhaled, it was too slow for Vaati to notice. It seemed as though he went still as a statue, petrified by his own shortcomings, and didn't move again as Risen grew closer. And closer. And closer.

The train turned faster than it was meant too, its left side lifting off the tracks for a second before it slammed back down, knocking both boys off their feet. Passengers screamed, one woman tumbling from her seat. A man stood the moment they were upright and sprinted out the back door to vomit. Another took off to speak to the conductor about their unreasonable speed.

Vaati lay there a moment, stunned and unsure if he wanted to stand at all, lest the train take another turn. Unlike Link, he had no idea what the tracks were like. Someone needed to warn him that was what happened when a train sped around a curve.

If Link just jumped off the train, Vaati could harness his wind properly and easily escape Risen. He didn't know the location of dungeons in New Hyrule as well as someone who grew up in the kingdom would, but unlike Link, he could sense them. The only downside was that Vaati knew what happened when one was spat out of a tornado and onto the ground at high speeds, and he understood the basics of inertia, and he was pretty sure he could guess what would become of Link if he jumped. But then that would be a few good years where Vaati could lay low, avoid Risen, and maybe kidnap the princess unhindered to hone his use of the Light Force. Whenever Link reincarnated again, he wouldn't have that blasted ruby to prevent Vaati from cursing him.

Link wouldn't jump, of course, but he trusted trains entirely too much. Vaati hedged his bets on the train throwing anybody on that back deck and as he rose to his feet, said, "Link, perhaps you should stand outside the car."

Link's grip on his sword tightened, but he gave a firm nod. "Right. We should both be prepared to do... something... if Risen catches us. Keep the passengers uninvolved. We can fight him outside."

"We?"

"You can use the Light Force to some degree, can't you? And I can still use the beast blade like a regular sword."

Vaati's second defeat had involved the Four Sword and minimal fancy magic artifacts, but he wasn't about to bet on this latest, wuss incarnation of Link to pull off something similar. Particularly when that last incarnation of Link was actively training with a sword while the Link standing beside him presently was a year out of practice. Nevermind the difference in using a sword meant to seal someone on the intended target compared to a random dark blade on a random dark dragon.
Not that there was a chance to tell Link any of this when he grabbed Vaati and pulled him back outside of the train.

Vaati clung first thing to the rail, and second turned to search for Risen, who was now more behind them than to their side. Closer behind them than he would have liked, but at least they were now headed away from the dragon.

The sound of the wind whipping past nearly obscured the voice of the dean as he shouted "Get back inside!"

He was with the dean on that one, but somebody wanted him to help fight the dragon.

Looking at Link, who stared the dragon down and gripped his sword so tight his knuckles were white, Vaati wondered where exactly down the line of possible reasons Link's fears started. The hero was frightened to the point of not wanting to be the hero in his current life, yet given a sword and an impossibly large monster too powerful for either of them in their current form, he was still ready to fight. He even shouted back an argument to the dean for why they should help defend the train. Although if the dragon came within reach of Link's sword, the train was already compromised. Someone should have given the kid a bow and arrows.

Vaati could barely feel his wind element while Link stood right beside him, bickering with the dean in an argument that involve both of them yelling "What?" half the time with all the wind. But since the dean wasn't doing anything more than his one barrier, Link wasn't going to be of much use, and he now found himself outside the train, someone had to do something to try and push Risen back.

Because maybe the dean and Link didn't notice while they argued about where the Light Force was safest, but Vaati could now see that Risen was still gaining on them.

Speeding the train up further was out of the question. Vaati was already afraid the next turn they took would throw him from the tracks. He was in the midst of readying a tornado when Risen opened his mouth to shoot a ball of fire and dark magic at them, and had to instead use his wind to disperse as much of the flames as he could.

The second fireball hit a barrier of light that appeared around the train when the attack got too close. Too fast. Risen was too fast for Vaati while his magic was still adjusting to the Light Force's full presence.

He tried to ready more wind, but barely had anything workable when the third fireball hit. The barrier shattered on impact, but the fire went no further than where the dean's protection had been.

Risen was too fast for the dean as well. The fourth ball struck the train square on the center of the passenger car. The train rattled, heat searing from where they had been hit.

"Slow the train!" Link yelled.

Easier said than done. Vaati couldn't cancel out the spell quickly with Link right there, and his wind was pushing the train. If that force vanished, the train's momentum wouldn't cease. Creating a counter force to slow it would take twice as long.

He thought all that, and then he opened his mouth to say as much, and then the train hit another curve. It wasn't as sharp as the previous one, but it was enough. Risen's next attack hit as the train nearly tipped under its own inertia, and they went flying. Link, Vaati, dean, and the entire rest of the train and passengers with them.
Something grabbed Vaati mid-air and he plummeted down with it, hitting the ground hard enough to be winded. He lay on his back gasping and listening to the sound of metal scraping over stone while the dean released his cape and stood over him.

"I'm too old for this," the dean said. "Link. Check on the civilians. Vaati, see those islands in the distance? Prepare to warp to one of them. Tell us when you're ready."

Vaati tried to protest. Warping took him more time than the dean realized, but he couldn't get words out while his lungs so desperately tried to pull air in.

"I know magic that can help fight him," Link said.

"All of us do. I gave you a different task. Go."

Vaati coughed and found the strength to push himself up. The words to tell the dean how stupid it was to get rid of any extra hands willing to fight were on his tongue, but the dean fixed him with a look that made him choke on them. He'd been young indeed the last time he saw a look that made him feel so foolish. So inadequate. And then there was the dean's words.

"You'll do better if he's not here, won't you? Only one of us possesses magic that can finish this, and they've been too neglectful in their studies to know how to use it. You never did listen to me when I warned of the danger in taking shortcuts. Of course a wish made by a twisted soul would twist on its bearer."

It hit Vaati like a brick to the head, and for a moment he could only gawk at the dean. Had he not been snarled at to get to work, he might have forgotten his job of teleporting. Even when he held out his hands to better focus the energy he gathered between them, he could visibly see himself tremble.

Not once, before attacking Zelda, had the dean ever said anything to him personally about magic. Even after, he'd goaded Vaati a good deal for not paying attention to lectures, but he hadn't given any repeated warnings about learning methods. And... had he told anyone in the current era about the wishing cap? About the shortcuts he took to become a mage? For that matter, Vaati could name exactly two people outside of the Minish world who would have known about his past. Both were long dead, and Link had no memories of any of his past lives.

The princess and the hero were not the only ones the gods saw fit to reincarnate in that era.

"How?" Vaati asked.

The dean scoffed. "You really don't see how your folly has at last backfired on you?"

"How are you here? I... No... Who-"

"Surely you aren't just figuring this out now," Ezlo said. "I remembered everything the first time in this life I laid eyes on you."

It took all the focus Vaati could muster to keep his half-constructed warp spell from falling apart.

"I have a feeling I'll need this one," Ezlo said, "so since you have such a strong light affinity now, the next time we have the chance, let's pick up on some old lessons you skipped over. You're well past due to learn how to make hearts."

Vaati swallowed hard and tuned Ezlo out. Not now. Not now.

He paid the battle around him now heed, bowing his head and letting Link and Ez-the dean handle
holding of Risen while he readied his warp spell. When at last he had the spell prepared, he made
sure he had a tight enough grip of it to hang on even once Link neared, then called out, "Ready!"

"Link!" He heard the dean shout.

"Ready!" Link called back from only a few feet behind Vaati.

At last looking up, Vaati saw Link reaching for his shoulder, Risen just above them, and no more
time to take it all in when the dean shouted, "Now!"

-o-

His aim was off. They ground vanished beneath them and they plummeted into ocean. Vaati
sputtered, grasped for anything to hold himself above water with, and offered no resistance when a
hand grabbed him and pulled him to land.

"We're closer, at least." That was Link's voice. Vaati tried to rub the salt water from his eyes and
look around. "There's a trade post here that the trains sometimes stop at, but we're not too far from
where we started. Risen will probably catch us before another train comes by. Can you warp us
again?"

Vaati took a look around the island they were on. It barely had enough room for the trading post and
a lawn. For as far away from Link as he could get to work most of the elements, the train would
probably arrive before he could manage another teleportation spell. "I'll work on it. Isn't there
something you could do to help? Just because wind is best for transport doesn't mean the other
elements are useless. Make a stone cart for us to ride along the tracks on or something. Can he..."
Vaati paused, realizing too late that the person he meant to address wasn't with them.

"Where is he?" Vaati asked. "Why isn't Ezlo with us? Did he drown?"

"H-hey. The dean would bash your head in with his staff if he heard you using his name."

"So that really is his name! And you knew the whole time?"

"Everyone... knew? Is his name important?"

Vaati fought back the urge to hit Link. "No," he hissed. "It's not. Where is he?"

"You really don't know? Vaati... can you not tell how many people bring along when you teleport?"

Whatever words Vaati might have used, all he heard from his lips was a snarl.

He would interrogate that man another day. Rip the gods themselves from heaven and demand to
know just what they were playing at, reincarnating his old master as if they anticipated the breaking
of the Four Sword decades in advance. He'd have all his answers and then send Ezlo off to be
reincarnated again for mocking him, calling him a bad student and getting a kick out of how he
floundered with the Light Force. Later. He'd have all of that later. For the time being, Risen-survival-
took priority.

Chapter End Notes

All my hatred for this chapter.
Actually, some plans were… altered… by the circumstances that I had set up for myself. I had a different Ezlo reveal written up since chapter 8 or so, but then it just… didn’t fit. Might be able to work parts of it in later, but maybe not. Idk.
Vaati wasn't talking. Normally, Link would call that a good thing. It meant Vaati wasn't goading. But the look on Vaati's face as they sped across the tracks promised a mounting explosion, and he would much rather see him shout out his temper than tamper it all down and build on himself further. If Link didn't know any better, he would think Vaati was mad that the dean had stayed behind.

Since Link did know better, he found himself at a loss for why the dean bothered Vaati so much. Did his name really matter? The old coot insisted he be recognized by his title anyway.

"He's probably alive," Link offered. When that earned him no response, he added, "Risen is only after you, so as soon as we left, he probably lost interest in the train entirely."

Vaati glanced Link's way before he resumed glaring sullenly at the ocean.

"I'm sure you're worried, but-"

"If Risen stayed behind to kill him, that would buy us more time."

What was Link supposed to say to that?

Their cart was gradually loosing speed, so he shot it with more magic to propel it further.

"Let me know if you see the place where the shard is."

Vaati gave no response, and Link was fine with that.

-o-

"Hey. I said we passed it up."

Link gave a nod of affirmation.

"What? Don't tell me there are more places that look like this. The shard should be back there. I left it in the rocks back there."

"And I'll spend hours scanning the area for metal at my leisure," Link assured Vaati, "Where's Risen now? Still following?"

Vaati scowled, going silent for a long moment before at last telling Link, "It doesn't feel like he's moved."

"Do you think the dean is restraining him?"

Vaati leaned back in the cart, looking as though he would rather not answer. "Well... If Risen ate them all, he ought to be done by now. So unfortunately, Ez... he must still be at it. I'm not sure we have hours to search, but the old coot's one stubborn son of a-"

"Where did you learn that phrase?"

"School."
Figured. Link shook his head in disappointment. "I will have hours to search. You I intend to tuck away somewhere safe. My great grandfather once went to a dungeon out here in the ocean. It should meet all the same criteria as the dungeon where we hid from Risen before. I'm taking you there."

Link expected Vaati to protest. To demand that he not be left on the sidelines while others did all the work. Instead, Vaati made a vague noise to confirm he heard and said nothing in reply.

Right. Vaati was an evil sorcerer. The kind who kidnapped princesses and ran off to sit on his evil throne while his evil minions did his bidding. (That was how it went in all the legends, anyway.) It probably pleased him to have someone else handle everything.

The silence that followed was blissful, and Link missed it when, half an hour later, Vaati said, "Okay. He's moving. I hope your dungeon's about to rise out of the ocean because we're moving slower than the deathtrap did, and all I see for miles is water, water, and more water. Except for over that way. That way's got water instead."

"You can't sense the dungeon nearby?" Link asked, unconcerned about their ability to reach it in time. He'd studied the region maps plenty while reading up on his great grandfather's exploits. Or his past self's exploits. He could see the place where the track disappeared not far off.

"Vaguely. Maybe. There's something closer to the ocean floor, but-" Vaati saw where the tracks sank into the water as well. "Are you serious?"

Link, in reply, swung his sword upward and let the excess earth of the cart they drove form airtight walls and ceiling before they plunged beneath the surface.

There was no relying on sight the final minutes of the trip. Sound was similarly useless with all of Vaati's screaming. Link had to focus entirely on his magic senses to tell where the tracks were, when they passed through an underwater entrance, and when the surrounding mud began to shed rather than absorb water.

Nifty thing, magic. He definitely liked swords more, but his grandfather might have been onto something insisting he put his other talents to use.

"Why can't there be one dungeon above ground?" Vaati whined as they reached the end of the tracks. "Just one. You know what I did the last time I was free? I built as palace in the sky. If you have to dump me somewhere, you could at least have the courtesy to pick somewhere with windows."

"I think an underwater dungeon is harder for Risen to get to than one in the sky," Link said. That it immediately shut Vaati up didn't stop him from adding, "It's not like he has no idea where you are. He has to be able to know where he last detected the Light Force."

Vaati made some sort of noise that might have been a grumbled affirmative, and Link stepped back onto his earthen cart.

"If I don't find it by the days end, I'll come back this evening with more supplies, and we can camp out here for the night. How does that sound?"

"Please camp out somewhere away from me."

Link threw his hands up in surrender and jumped back into the cart.

"Wait. Do you have money for supplies?"
"Of course I..." Link patted where his purse should have been and found nothing. "Ah... It must have fallen off when you teleported us into water."

"Blaming me for your negligence? Rude."

Vaati produced three silver rupees from his pocket and deposited them in Link's hand. They glistened even in the dim dungeon lighting. Except...

"Hold on."

Snatching back the one that looked duller than its brethren, Vaati ran a finger across its rim while mouthing words that Link couldn't decipher. The rupee glinted, glowing, and then settled to shine like a regular rupee.

"I Forgot to finish that one." Vaati dropped it back into Link's hand. "I don't have much practice buying my own things, but that should be enough, right? That one was almost finished anyway, but if you need more, it will take me a while starting from scratch."

"I... no. This will definitely cover everything."

"Will it? Good. If you have the chance, but some fabric too. It would be a hassle if I had to hold all our money, so I'll make you a new purse."

A joke about Vaati not looking like the arts and crafts type couldn't make it past the lump in Link's throat. It was wrong. To use forged money was wrong. The entire reason rupees were the favored currency of Hylians was that there was no known way to forge them. Gemstones were worth more in the first place, and any attempts made to enchant glass to pass as rupees couldn't capture their essence. Leave it to Vaati to find a way around that with all his shady history. How many of those rupees he'd dropped at random in the past weeks had been forgeries?

But they would need supplies, and Link had lost all of their legitimate money. He could endure one night of unscrupulous purchases.

-Theo-

The temptation to go back and check on the dean was strong, but Link refused to succumb. Healing was advanced light magic, and well beyond his capabilities. There was nothing he could do that wouldn't be done faster by people on the scene, or by another passing train that might see the wreckage. He had to count on the dean having survived, and to focus on finding the Four Sword shards so they could seal Risen before there could be more attacks and more potential for casualties.

First thing upon reaching the island that Vaati had pointed out as where the shard ought to be, Link cast Farore's Wind. If he had to search for multiple nights, he wanted it to be a short trip back to the region he was supposed to search. And between being able to warp to the island and then having to make a new cart to ride to that dungeon, or being able to warp to the dungeon and praying he found enough dirt to make a cart that could carry him through the underwater tracks and back to dry land, it made more sense to set the return point of Farore's Wind to somewhere outside.

From there, Link held out the Beast Blade like a dowsing rod and extended his senses through it, trying to differentiate dirt around him from metal. What he learned, first off, was that there was a surprising amount of iron mixed into the ground, too fine for him to see at a glance, yet potentially harvestable for some future smith. There was also a surprisingly large number of old, rusted coins and other such baubles buried in the earth. He collected them as he went, noting that while they varied slightly in size and came in a few different colors, there was a pattern in their design. An old
currency from some weird, lost culture that used metal for their money. Had the Lokomo used currencies? Link never paid much attention to anything in history class that didn't have to do with any of the heroes he shared a name with.

The heroes who were his past lives. Nayru, did that make him vain?

He tried to push that thought aside and refocus on his search, but it was no easy feat. The hunt for metal was mind-numbing, and for all the coins he found, he sensed no metal objects that could have been a part of a sword, nor did he sense objects that could have been imbued with magic. Link had the sneaking suspicion that Vaati might not have even properly remembered where the sword shard was (or, equally likely but less generous, that he still didn't want the Four Sword fixed and lied about where he left the shards.) As much as he appreciated Vaati thinking outside the box and discarding the pieces of a powerful weapon randomly in different parts of the wilderness, he would have been ten times as appreciative if Vaati crafted a handful of dungeons to force Link to conquer to collect the shards. Not only did that sound like a more traditional hero's quest, but dungeons were way easier to locate than a random scrap of metal tossed somewhere in probably this or that general area.

The sun hovered low on the horizon by the time Link decided to call it quits for the night. He had enough rupees on hand to buy food in Papuchia Village, and if he didn't hurry, he wouldn't get back to the dungeon with that food until it was dark out.

Not that he necessarily wanted to return. Nevermind Vaati's attitude. While Link searched, he'd noticed Risen circling over the general location of the dungeon for a good hour before flying off to the Sand Realm.

Although it was definitely mostly Vaati's attitude that made returning unpleasant. Risen likely didn't have a good idea of what Link looked like, given that he'd been a Dodongo in all their memorable interaction. Because he failed to face Risen as himself despite knowing the Beast Blade was bad. Because he was a disgrace to the Spirit of the Hero.

Link stifled a sigh as he made himself a new cart to travel along the rails with. Vaati needed him, at least. So long as they had Risen to contend with, whatever headache Vaati might supply, he couldn't do much worse than that. And once Risen was defeated...

Link looked down his arm at the thin white band engraved onto his wrist. The noble and heroic thing to do would be to stop evil, even if it came at great cost to himself. He prayed to Hylia that Vaati, once free of Risen and able to control the Light Force properly, would continue to act like a pest rather than some great villain. Attacking Zelda, hopefully, had been an outlier.

Ha. As if.

Link stood in front of his cart, contemplating the odds that a train might run into him while he was on the tracks and whether or not that would be a bad thing, when a voice calling out in the distance caught his attention.

To his left, a little ways off, a blimp was landing for the night. The sign hanging from its basket read Beedle's Shop. Link stared, torn as to what to do. If Beedle had enough supplies for the night, then he could be safely in the dungeon with Vaati before nightfall. On the other hand, that meant spending more hours with Vaati.

If Risen returned after dark, Link would be hard pressed to see those black scales on the night sky, and he was only assuming that he wasn't a target of the dragon's. He resigned himself to checking the blimp.
"Welcome!" the enthusiastic merchant cried as Link approached. "Come. Take a look."

With a fluid, practiced movement, Beedle flipped a board over to create a makeshift counter and deposited an armful of wears into neat piles. Link had to pause seeing it.

"Do you drop out of the sky to sell things often?"

Beedle nudged a stack of arrows a little closer to Link to pick from as he said, "There's plenty of chances in a day to drop in wherever trains stop for sightseeing. You look like the adventurous type. I recommend these."

It occurred to Link that he forgot to pack a bow.

"I just need food. Sorry you came all the way down here and I'm not buying more."

"I'm setting up camp for the night," Beedle assured him while rearranging wares to put dried fruit and cured meat at the front of his counter. "There's all kinds of good things to find on this island. It used to house a village back before Malladus first appeared. The trading post pays a lot for any old Lokomo coins you can find."

Link would certainly feel more comfortable using rupees obtained from the coins he found rather than Vaati's forgeries. It was too late in the day to justify that kind of a detour, so he put down a rupee and picked up food while hoping Beedle wouldn't look too closely.

"Come to think of it..."

"You wouldn't happen to have any fabric, would you?"

"Not at the moment, but I saw something at the trade post when I was there this morning that might be what you're looking for."

"Did you? You must go often."

Link would definitely visit the trade post come morning. He wasn't in such urgent need of a wallet as to go that night.

"The trader there has an eye for value in things that I can't sell, and a knack for finding people interested in them. I don't know how he does it, but he's confident in whatever he takes. The other day he paid through the roof for a mere scrap of metal. It was so rusted that I can't imagine anyone could really use it. I only picked it up because its shape caught my eye. It looked like it used to be the hilt of a nice sword."

-o-

Amazingly, the trade post was open in the dead of night.

Link had never been to the trade post before. He rarely left the Forest Realm at all, really. He'd only visited the Fire Realm once. And his annual vacation to the Ocean Realm didn't include any stops that his grandfather considered to be shady. Going by what Link heard from others who'd been to the trade post, the business itself was perfectly legitimate. In fact, it was the best possible place to find odds and ends that you didn't know you wanted. Although there was a catch that you often had to purchase them with something other than rupees, everyone agreed that the trades requested were generally fair. The only negative comment Link heard about the post was that the trader himself was weird.
With that in mind, he expected as he let himself inside to find some mad-eyed eccentric sitting at the desk, suspicious contraption in hand and a deranged grin on his face. Instead, while the room was lit, the shop seemed to have been left completely unattended.

Link looked, taking stock of the building's interior. For an unmonitored store front, a surprising number of valuables sat open on shelves. Fine vases and a glass statue depicting the crest of Hyrule glittered in the candle light, making the trade post look more like an art dealers. At least so long as you looked at the wall closest the door. On the opposite side of the room sat items that looked more like rubbish. A worn stone statue that had lost almost all shape. A wooden fishing rod with no line. Beedle claimed the trader could relieve himself of any wares, but why would anyone trade for a broken rod when you could buy a functional one at the next stop on the train line?

The only reason that came to mind was if you were afraid of trains, like Vaati, and planned to survive by foraging on the far side of the island.

No sign of an ancient sword hilt, though.

Failing to spot anything in an initial scan of the room, Link tilted a pot to peek inside.

"And just what are you doing!"?

Dropping the pot in alarm, Link spun to face the man who had appeared from a back room, then winced when he heard shattering behind him.

The man who loomed over him could be described a number of ways. Lanky. Unkempt. Smelling faintly of alcohol. Just tall enough to not be called average. Noting how the smell of alcohol could be detected in his clothes but not his breath, Link judged him to be a high-functioning alcoholic. Someone who was sober in the moment, but likely wasn't at some point each day.

"Do you have any idea how much that pot was worth? I could have sold it for two-hundred rupees!"

Link reluctantly fished one of the silver rupees that Vaati forged from his pocket and handed it to the man before saying, "I can try and fix it for you, but I don't know if it will look as nice as it did before."

"Hmph." The man pocketed the rupee. "It's paid for now, so do what you want with it."

Since it was paid for in fake tender, Link bent down to find two shards of the vase that lined up, and held them together before running the pommel of his sword over the crack. It sealed so that they held together, but a hairline crack remained in the glaze.

"A sorcerer, are you?" the man asked. "What brings you here? If I get my hands on a magic item, I take it straight to you people's academy to trade. No sense in keeping something that might put a curse on me."

"Oh." So the whole trip had been a waste. "Sorry. I just thought... I guess the dean, er... I guess the academy already has that hilt then."

The man stiffened for a moment before leaning over to ask, "Hilt?"

"For the sealing sword that was broken a few weeks ago. I was told it had already been brought to you, but I guess it's been returned. That's a relief. We can move on to looking for the next piece then."

Although instead of moving on, Link found another shard to merge back with the vase he was
slowly piecing back together. Sure, stopping the dragon was a high priority, but he couldn't just break an expensive vase, hand over a fake rupee, and leave like nothing happened. Maybe Vaati would think that was acceptable, but some people had morals.

"It's not part of some cursed blade then?"

"No," Link grumbled. "The evil it was sealing already got out. That's kind of what we need it for." Kind of.

The man straightened, stroking his stubble as he pondered this information. Link had three more pieces of the vase merged back together before it occurred to him why the trade post owner might care to ask and then contemplate the news that the sword wasn't cursed, rather than bemoan that he'd gotten rid of a valuable item over an unfounded fear.

"You... haven't returned it to the academy yet, have you?"

"The school? Is it the academy's possession? I, Linebeck VI, believe I bought that hilt fair and square. It wasn't cheap either. So it's part of one of those swords to repel evil, hm? It might even be a good luck to keep it here and ward off any nearby monsters."

"We kind of need it to stop the evil dragon, though," Link said, too stunned by the sudden bravado with which Linebeck spoke with to offer a stronger protest.

"Has the dragon attacked my little trade post? No? Then what does it have to do with me? This business has been my family's for generations. You expect me to leave it defenseless? Even if I could afford to give up the safety it grants me, I can't afford it financially. I paid a good deal for this item, you know. But you want it badly, don't you? Don't you?"

With a sigh heavier than any Vaati had yet to elicit, Link pulled out the other silver rupee and all his change from the purchases he made with Beedle. He no longer felt quite so bad about paying with forged money. "Will this cover what you paid for it?"

Linebeck took every rupee before telling Link, "No,"

It was too much effort to ask for his money back when Vaati could just magic more into existence anyway. "The hilt won't even do anything without the rest of the blade, and it still needs to be repaired."

"But this isn't what I paid for it," Linebeck pressed. "I can't imagine a kid like you could cough up enough."

Link could see where this was going, and contemplated for just a second too long if he was really annoyed enough with Linebeck to ask a price and have Vaati forge that. Before he could make the offer, another was thrown at his feet.

"You're some sort of magic knight, aren't you? Using magic and running around with a sword. Don't think you can fool me. If you give me something of equal value, I suppose can spare you this hilt. Alongside what I paid for it, of course. I'll need another two-thousand rupees."

"Sure. Fine. And?"

"That's it? You can pay so much with ease? Even the academy would barter-I mean... Good. So we've agreed on a fair trade. Now, let's discuss this other item I want. It's as broken as this sword hilt, so you can't complain that you're giving away something more valuable than you're getting in return, can you?"
Under the current circumstances, the Four Sword shards seemed of higher value to Link than any other magical item in the world, but he knew better than to tell Linebeck as much. He'd probably triple the price if he heard. As it was, he no doubt planned to sell this other broken item for as much as he was already going to make off of selling Link the hilt. "Yeah. Sure. It's fair."

"Good. What I need is part of a mirror. Rumor has it that it's hidden away on an island not far from here. A relic of Old Hyrule. A piece of a broken mirror in exchange for a piece of a broken sword. No one could object to a trade like that."

"What does the mirror do?"

"Details." Linebeck waved Link away. "Run along now. You want this sword, don't you? Hurry up and find me this treasure."

Link had only pieced the vase halfway back together again, but had long since given up on any sense of obligation to Linebeck to make up for the damage he caused. Without bothering to at least gather the remaining shards so they wouldn't be stepped on, Link rose to his feet, bowed, and left the trade post.

At least it seemed he would get his heroic dungeon quest after all.

Chapter End Notes

Felt inspired.

I'm prone to excessive swearing, although I can kinda tamp it down when I put my mind to it. Doesn't come up in my fics too much, but I'm sure it shows in my authors notes, and it sure as fuck shows whenever I comment on anything on tumblr. Sometimes I think people mistake me for being more emotionally invested than I am cuz of it. Been trying not to project that onto Vaati, but while I was writing this chapter I was also working on a tendershipping fic (that got scrapped) and decided it would be easier to write Bakura's speech as crass in the vein of his Japanese dialogue rather than try to emulate his dub mannerisms, and it messed me up a little to go between Vaati and Bakura and have one use "shit" as a synonym for "items" and "fucking" as a way of saying "I'm about to use a verb" and the other not swear at all. Especially because there are a few mannerisms I've given them that line up more neatly. Gotta keep the two from blurring.

Sadly I got over 10 chapters into that fic before hitting a wall. I had a lot of later development character arc stuff I wanted to do, but no concrete conclusion that satisfied me. Now my interest in YuGiOh is waning a little and I really want to write a Rave romance instead, so who knows if I'll ever finish that one? Especially with my current schedule.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!