speed of love

by skeletalparade (boythighs)

Summary

Over and over in his head, there was a voice telling him that he could not mess this up. Someone as gorgeous as this taking an interest in him was something of an anomaly, absolutely unheard of. Link’s mind could not supply him with any memories of the last time he’d been on a date, or so much as spoken with someone the way that they had been speaking for the better half of an hour. He knew nothing about this man - not even his name - but Link was positively desperate to learn more about him.

Everything about him.
my entire fic writing career leading up to this point has been a mistake, because never
have i once posted a fic featuring hardcore daddy kink before this very moment. but it's
happening. we're doing this, and nobody is gonna stop me.

currently, the aforementioned content has not yet occurred, but it will eventually. the
rating of the fic is obviously gonna go up when it does, so keep those peepers on the
lookout.

i’m not 100% satisfied with the writing in this, but what can ya do. ¯\_(ツ)_/¯

the places i call home: twitter & tumblr.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The clock mounted high on the wall at the opposite end of the campus library had been broken for
many months now, but it was still instinctively ingrained within Link to lift his head every few
moments or so to check and see how long he had really spent studying. Each time he would sigh
once he realized that he’d fruitlessly done it again, forced to hit the home button on his phone to
check the time that way. Next to him, Zelda giggled quietly behind the hand propping her chin up,
dainty fingers cupped around her mouth in lax formation. She’d picked up on his inane habit after the
third or fourth time of him doing it during their afternoon study sessions, and Link remained, as ever,
flustered and embarrassed that he simply could not bring himself to unlearn the memories of the
movement in his muscles.

One of these days, he signed in quick succession, relying on Zelda’s ability to both read and speak
his unspoken language, the clock will finally be fixed, and I’ll be the first one to notice.

Again she giggled, eyes rolling and head shaking as she returned her attention back to her biology
textbook. Whispering very softly to Link, Zelda pushed a lock of hair behind her ear. “You’ll be the
first one to notice only because you’re the only one who still checks wall-clocks. There’s a reason it
hasn’t been fixed, you know.”

She had a point. Link puffed his cheeks up indignantly, flapping a hand uselessly at his friend and
leaning back in his chair. There was a godawful crick in his neck from spending so much time bent
over his books, and even as he tried to pop it the tension just refused to loosen. Finals were fast
approaching. Link felt like all of their time these days was time wasted locked between the four walls
of the student library, so much so that the smell of the old books lining ceiling high shelves had
become synonymous with sagging eyelids and aching, exhausted limbs. With a sigh released
skyward, Link let his head flop over the back of his chair, going boneless against upholstery that was
frayed around all of its edges. All he wanted to do was go back to his apartment and take a hundred
year long nap, finals be damned.

Just as he was contemplating closing his eyes and taking that very nap right there in his seat, his
phone flashed with the notification of a text message. The light did not disturb Zelda, the same way
that none of Link’s melodrama had, all of her attention devoted solely to her notes and books - she
was clearly the more studious of the two, reflected in her grades - just barely.
Link leaned forward to slide his phone closer to the edge of the table so that he could unlock it and read his message, which was from Midna.

**MIDNA, 6:54PM:**

*Do you want to go to an art gallery with me tonight? My professor is offering extra credit if we attend and write a small response paper about it, and I really need the points.*

Link cocked an eyebrow as he typed out his reply with a single finger, bemused that Midna, of all people, needed any sort of extra credit - but more importantly that she was inviting him to attend the gallery with her. Their friendship was a lot more teasing and bickering than it was swanky art galleries.

**LINK, 6:56PM:**

*You're inviting me why...?*

Midna’s response was immediate.

**MIDNA, 6:56PM:**

*Because I refuse to go alone, jackass. Will you come with me, or not?*

The blond snickered to himself, and it was that which garnered Zelda’s attention, finally. Her expression read like an open book, words in the downward slant of her full eyebrows that said why on Earth are you slacking when you know our biology final is in less than a week? Link slid the phone across the table for her to take a peek at his messages. Once she had read over them, all her exasperation with Link had morphed into the same sadistic amusement that Link himself was currently sporting.

“Are you going with her?” She mumbled, gently passing the phone back to him, her grin subdued by teeth digging into the corner of her lower lip.

Nodding and shrugging simultaneously, Link typed out a quick reply to their mutual friend, knowing that if he chose to keep her waiting any longer than necessary that Midna would feel no shame in blowing up his phone in order to force him to respond to her. Wouldn’t have been the first time.

**LINK, 7:01PM:**

*What time?*

**MIDNA, 7:02PM:**

*8:30. Make yourself look presentable. As in PLEASE brush your goddamn hair.*

Self-consciously, Link passed a hand through his hair, fingers catching at the subtly curling ends of
Alright, maybe she did have a point. Could he actually remember the last time he’d used a brush…?

Link snapped his own biology book shut, scooting to the edge of his chair in order to begin gathering up his things, picking his lax bag up from the floor to shove things haphazardly into it. He’d only been given an hour to get back to his apartment and get dressed, really, assuming that he would need time to get to whatever venue the gallery was at. Directly following that thought, Midna shot him a text with the address listed, which Link only vaguely recognized as being on a street that was somewhat near the campus.

He scooped up his bookbag, swinging it over his shoulder and pushing his chair back under the table at the same time. Zelda’s eyes stayed on him as he moved. As Link passed by her, he leaned over to press a very soft kiss to her forehead, noting the very subtle way her lips turned up at the corners. “Have fun.” She said as he pulled back.

Link signed a very fast, I will. I’ll text you when I get home, before heading for the door that opened out into the stairwell.

There was very little in Link’s closet that might be passable contenders for what Midna would consider ‘presentable.’ Truthfully, he had no need for fancy clothing. Very few occasions arose that called for anything other than a pair of jeans, a t-shirt, a sweatshirt. Link could not recall the last time he had been to an event even remotely fancy, certainly not a bougie art gallery presentation - which Midna assured him it would be. This was going to be the very type of event that country bumpkins like Link avoided at all costs, with their grass stained pants and tattered shoes, messy hair, and bruised skin.

In the end, his hand was forced to pluck a plain, navy blue button-up shirt from the rack, followed by the nicest pair of pants that he owned. Simple, black slacks. The hardest part was deciding on shoes, considering he only had two pairs: old, beaten, black converse, or… an even older, more beaten pair of the exact same shoes. No one would pay any mind to his shoes, of this he was almost certain. By the time his outfit had been pulled together and Link had stared at himself in the floor length mirror attached to the back of his bedroom door, stressing over his appearance for an indiscernible amount of time - something he never did - it was 8 o’clock on the dot. With just half an hour to spare, Link forced his brush through his hair one time before tossing the old, useless thing aside, opting to flatten out any kinks in his locks with his hands as he rushed out the door of his apartment.

The venue was a fifteen minute walk away, spent dodging puddles remaining from the rainshower earlier in the afternoon. Every time he glanced down at his feet, though, he became a little more aware that his shoes sincerely did stick out amidst the rest of his fairly dressy clothes. Converse with slacks and a button-up? Really? The rest of the walk, from that point onward, Link spent praying that no one made any comment on his lackluster attire.

Outside of the museum was the bustle of people waiting for the doors to open, all of them looking… so much nicer than Link did. He caught sight of Midna climbing out of her Uber, hoisted high on three inch heels that laced up over her ankles with black, silk straps, the dress she wore fitted round every curvature of her slanting body. It was a pitter-patter design of asymmetrical blues and blacks, something Link could only think to deem as avant garde if he’d ever seen it. Her red hair was tossed over her shoulder in a loose, effortless braid that ended just at the swell of her breast. She looked beautiful, putting Link to shame with little to no trouble whatsoever, Link looked down at his outfit with a dismayed sigh, straightening out his shirt self-consciously as he made his way over to her.

Midna cast her gaze around the busy steps that led up to the ginormous glass doors which were
currently shrouded by a black curtain from the interior. Clearly this was done to instill a feeling of mystery in all of the patrons. Link did have to admit, it was doing a fair job at it. He wasn’t normally into this type of thing but he found himself intrigued about what they might be seeing tonight.

It wasn’t until Link was a few feet away from Midna that her brown eyes finally found him. Oh, and the look on her face when they did. Her disappointment in Link’s attire was palpable; it oozed off of her, stronger with every step that brought Link closer. The blond swore he could taste her distaste for his appearance in all of the breaths he was sucking in, making him shrink in on himself as he came to a halt in front of her.

“That’s the best you could do?” Midna mumbled, cocking a hip out to the side and resting a hand on it, elbow out. Her eyes rolled at Link’s sheepish, reassuring grin. He was sure this would be fine! No one would even notice him.

“You look nice,” he signed, clearing his throat when he remembered that Midna’s sign wasn’t the best, yet, and that she was still on a learning curve for the language. Her face was a puzzle of perplexed emotions with a mouth opening to ask him to clarify, but he didn’t need to be told.

“Young dress is very pretty.” He said, voice soft and timid. Link didn’t feel particularly anxious tonight, making it so much easier to actually vocalize. It was hard, most of the time, to speak. High stress situations made it nigh impossible. Talking was difficult, but signing and writing - those things came naturally. His tumultuous moods and debilitating anxiety never prevented him from communicating in those forms, and he didn’t have to rely on the fickle nature of any situation’s given factors to determine whether or not his voice was usable. Even when it was an option for him to speak, sentences of his were often stunted, choppy, and were very seldom done any other way than choked out through clenched teeth, steeled resolve.

“Thank you.” Midna said, equal parts relieved that Link was capable of speech tonight and pleased that her outfit really was just as dazzling as she had expected it would be. Straightening up her posture, her head turned to watch as people began to move in small droves up the stairs. “Looks as though they’ve opened the doors.”

They began to follow the crowd of people, Link turning out the idle chatter around them to focus on himself and staying as calm as possible. Social obligations were not his forte; in fact, he was rather dreadful at them. Having Midna at his side helped, her familiar aura keeping him grounded, but he was sure that the night would pass by in awkward moments of silence as that was just his default setting. Silent.

Beyond the doors and the people, Link could see an exhibit right in front of the entrance, though he was too short to make anything more out than the vaguest of outlines of an unidentifiable piece. It looked to be a sculpture, the merit of which he could not determine. Unlike Midna, Link was no expert on art. His areas of preferred study rested in creative writing, where he could bend written words to his liking, constructing worlds out of them that he could not with any other form of expression. Not being able to speak much did not in any way inhibit him from having a way with words when it came to pen and paper. Such was his pride.

At the doors, people parted like the Red Sea around the opening exhibit, small hums all around them as everyone sucked in the beauty of it. Despite having no understanding of its meaning, Link could say that much, at least: it was a truly beautiful piece. It looked to be melded silver cast in the shape of a trident, rising from shaky waters, which were carved at its base and surrounded it from all sides. The tips of the trident were red in places, green in others, and at the very, very bottom of the sculpture was a little plate which read only ‘Mipha.’

Midna and himself parted to the right of the piece, moving further into the museum amidst throngs of
people walking in all different directions. Link was so, so incredibly thankful that the nature of the
night was not one of loudness and boisterous voices, but one of soft words and a dull roar that did
nothing at all to his nerves. Still, there were a lot of people around them, and that in and of itself was
enough to have Link somewhat on edge.

“This must all go above your tiny, air filled head, hm?” Midna teased as they stopped before a large,
immaculate painting framed in simple black wood. This one was a landscape done without any harsh
outlines. At the forefront of the painting was the side of a mountain running from bottom to top.
Further back there was a bridge crossing over a lake painted to reflect the purple, pinks, and oranges
of the setting sun colored sky. Small masses of land littered the water, and at the way back were the
uneven peaks of more mountains, offsetting a volcano with billowing smoke rising from its mouth
into the cloudy evening air.

“I do have eyes, you know. I know what looks good and what doesn’t.” Link retorted, rolling his
eyes. Midna snickered, crossing her arms and eyeing the painting with an empty expression. She
seemed unimpressed, a look that Link knew well after the three years of their unlikely friendship.

“I suppose it’s alright. In all honesty, I had never heard of this guy before. He’s an up-and-coming
genius, according to my professor, but nothing so far has really struck me as particularly
groundbreaking.”

“We’ve only seen two pieces.” Link mumbled to Midna’s back as she began to stride off in another
direction, to the next piece. With every new painting and sculpture that the two looked at, Link found
that his opinion of this mystery painter became increasingly the opposite of Midna’s. She may not
have been wowed at all, but Link absolutely was. This man clearly had an eye not only for colors,
for what should and could inspire the onlooker, but also an eye for storytelling. Every painting, every
sculpture told a new story, though Link wondered if they weren’t all connected by some single
thread of ongoing narrative. Regardless, Link was invested, and by the time they had finished
looking at the entire gallery, Link felt some unnamed, heartfelt connection to the man behind all of
the art.

Their perusal had led them back to the front, which was now fairly barren except for a pair of
security guards standing by the front doors, passing quiet chit-chat back and forth between them.
Behind Link and Midna was the Mipha sculpture, and gazing upon it now Link was curious as to
what it could possibly mean. A lone trident, sunken partially beneath warring waters but remaining
upright nevertheless.

“I’m going to go grab a drink from the refreshments table. Want anything?” Link shook his head and
Midna shrugged as she stalked back into the museum without another word, leaving Link alone with
the sculpture and his curious thoughts. Only a moment or two was spent observing it before Link felt
compelled to wander back inside, quelling any anxiety with the overbearing need to relive some of
his favorite paintings. The crowd had thinned out enough over the course of the past half hour or so,
many migrating back to the cocktail bar or simply having had their fill and leaving entirely, that Link
did not feel so stifled or smothered by the amount of people, and saw no difficulty in being alone.

For some reason, Link’s feet carried him back to the first painting they’d viewed that evening, the
one with the mountain, the bridge, the volcano. The vivid colors really were enrapturing, and there
was something about the fact that the artist hadn’t even needed any outlines to make his vision a
reality. Link was awestruck by it, envious that nothing he could fathom could ever evolve into
something as beautiful as this.

“What do you think of it?”

Link startled at the unfamiliar voice, the blonde tufts of hair that fell in front of his ears jumping as he
turned to look at the man who now stood beside him.

His breath caught in his throat, the roar of blood rushing through his ears practically deafening as he drank in the sight.

Next to him was the tallest man Link had ever seen, twice his size at the very least, billowing red hair cascading down his back in gentle waves. Beneath the red there were layers of soft pinks and whites, an offset for the fire that framed his whole upper body. Tan skin was pulled taut over defined lines of muscles, flesh mottled in faint freckles everywhere Link’s eyes could find, lighter than Link’s own, or maybe drowned out by the darker tones of this man’s skin. He was a tanned masterpiece, even with his skin smothered by the charcoal grays of his tux.

To simplify the thoughts racing through Link’s mind, a summary in short: the man was the most beautiful thing Link had had the pleasure of encountering in all twenty two years of his pitiful life, and the blond could not, for the life of him, form words. This type of mutism, however, was not his normal brand. Mutism of this variety Link was not used to in the slightest, and therefore had no clue how to go about handling it.

The cotton in his mouth - wait, that was his tongue - was heavy with intimidation, despite the cheery, easygoing disposition of the man before him. All smiles, he was, not the tiniest bit scary, and Link still couldn’t function like the average person. Go figure.

“Uh…” Link searched through catalogues of words he had stored and memorized in his brain, but it was like everything in his vocabulary had been narrowed down to nothing more than unintelligible noises and dumbfounded stuttering. He had to clear his throat once, twice, watching as his new companion’s amusement mounted with each passing second Link spent trying to locate his brain. It had clearly hightailed it to reaches unknown.

“It’s - it’s good.” Was all the young adult could squeeze out of his constricting throat. Even then, with a sentence so short and simplistic, it felt like forcing that last, microscopic bit of toothpaste free from the tube. Link needed to save this conversation, and quick. “I like his use of colors, and the way everything seems to tell a story.”

Humming, the man turned away from Link to gaze at the painting. When he lifted a hand to brush hair from his face, Link found his eyes drawn to the stranger’s wrist, which sported a sterling silver cuff. At its center was a blue jewel, glinting softly beneath the spotlight fixed above the painting and pointing down at it, at them.

“What story do you think it’s telling, then?” He asked, returning his eyes back to Link. They were the most unusual, perplexing shade of brown, almost yellow if Link had no other way of describing them. Beautiful, just as the rest of him was. Link felt his face flush when their eyes met, muscles scorching with the desire to turn away, yet all the same he found himself mesmerized by the beauty of this stranger. Looking away was not an option.

“One of adventure, surely.” Link said, voice soft. Yes, this was something he had been thinking about all evening. Saying it aloud now, though, was difficult. What with their eyes locked and the smoldering, golden embers of the man’s own pair boring so wholeheartedly into his depths, Link could not properly convey his feelings about tonight’s show, so he forcibly wrenched himself free of that piercing scrutiny. “A hero traversing far and wide in some unknown kingdom, worlds away from our own. I imagine that his journey is one unlike any other, a story to be passed down from generation to generation.”

“My, you sure have given much thought to this!”
Link slumped sheepishly, a gentle grin forming on his face. He scratched at the back of his neck out of pure embarrassment, resolutely looking anywhere but at the man.

“I suppose so. I couldn’t quite help myself, though. Everything I’ve seen here tonight has been extraordinarily beautiful.”

*Especially you.*

“Well,” the man began, crossing his arms over his massive chest. Seriously, how his muscles weren’t bursting through the fabric remained a mystery to Link. Not that he was staring - or, rather, not that he would be caught staring. “There are things I believe could be vastly improved upon. All in all, however, I think that the exhibit is passable. Not the best work this artist is capable of, but definitely not his worst, either.”

“This is my first time being exposed to his stuff, I’m afraid.” Link’s admission came softly as he regarded the man, who pulled his eyes from the painting to look at Link once more. Something unreadable had come over him, and Link was curious as to what he could have been thinking. The hand that had scratched at Link’s neck now ran through the length of his hair, an old, nervous tic he’d picked up from Zelda years ago. In high school, maybe. “I’m here with a friend of mine tonight, you see. She’s an art major here to analyze some of the pieces for extra credit in one of her classes. I’m not so much an art buff the way she is, but…”

He looked at the man, peering into his eyes, feeling emboldened by the fact that he hadn’t stumbled over a single word since the conversation had started. Besides, what did a little, harmless flirting really matter in the grand scheme of things? It would be inconsequential - tomorrow, this man would have forgotten about him.

“I know something beautiful when I see it.”

The man was taken aback by Link’s words. Those eyes widened, the line of his mouth gaping in a lax ‘o’ as he sucked in an audibly sharp breath. Across his nose a blush lit up his skin, fanning out beneath the freckles and arcing with the apples of his carved cheekbones. When he released his breath, it was exhaled in the form of a shocked laugh, abrupt enough to startle Link. He found himself grinning in response to the sound, pleased with himself and his ability to shock even the most gorgeous of people.

“You are a walking surprise.” He breathed out, shaking his head at Link with his expression softening again. Wide hands slid into the shallow pockets along the front of his pants, the gentle look on his face trapping the oxygen Link still had in the confines of his chest. Already Link felt oddly breathless, high off of the adrenaline of their easy back and forth.

No one was this easy to verbally talk to - sometimes not even Zelda, who he had known all his life. But this stranger… for some reason, he made Link feel at ease. There was something in the aura radiating off of him that made Link equal parts nervous and entirely comfortable with him. Few people possessed a quality such as that.

“I must admit that I had been watching you all night prior to approaching you. From the moment you walked through the doors, I found you to be… quite charming. There was simply something about your demeanor! To learn that speaking to you would floor me even more than your appearance - I am truly gobstopped.”

It was now Link’s turn to stare on at the other in coarse shock. This - this gorgeous, breathtaking beauty of a man had been watching *him*? The information fell heavily onto Link, leaving him shaken down to his core, swallowing becoming more of a challenge than he feared was natural. Words?
Link didn’t know her.

“Ah, I hope I’m not coming on too strong. We did just meet, after all, and I would understand entirely if this was making you uncomfortable!”

“No.” Link said in a rush, giving a harsh, stinted shake of the head. Over and over in his head, there was a voice telling him that he could not mess this up. Someone as gorgeous as this taking an interest in him was something of an anomaly, absolutely unheard of. Link’s mind could not supply him with any memories of the last time he’d been on a date, or so much as spoken with someone the way that they had been speaking for the better half of an hour. He knew nothing about this man - not even his name - but Link was positively desperate to learn more about him.

Everything about him.

A smile spread itself gradually across the man’s face, more natural than spring showers and May flowers.

“My name is Sidon.” The man said. Sidon said. Link swept the name over on repeat in his head, a broken record of beautiful white noise that Link would have said out loud if not for the fact that he was currently having a difficult time forming any sound of meaningfulness. “And who might you be?”

After letting out a slow, hefty breath that had been resting in his diaphragm, Link whispered, very delicately, “Link.”

Sidon extended his hand, palm up, and Link offered his hand in return, thinking, what a strange poise for a handshake, so he was stunned when Sidon lifted the hand Link had given him to his mouth and pressed a chaste kiss to the back of it. Cheeks flaring with heat, Link was suddenly quite distinctly aware of Midna’s absence, and very thankful for it all the more. Had she seen an act like that, she would have been laughing her ass off, tittering about him being some sort of blushing virgin.

“Might I trouble you to ask for your phone number so that I may see you after tonight?” Sidon asked as he lowered their joined hands once more, though he dared not vanquish his soft grip around Link’s hand. “If that is what you would like, of course.”

Nothing in the world could have pleased Link more. He nodded and procured his phone from the back pocket of his slacks, fumbling in his haste to hand it over, which Sidon laughed softly at, and they exchanged phones. Once they’d both entered in their numbers into the appropriate phone, the devices were returned to their respective owner. Link’s heart was pounding madly, his stomach twisting itself in knots as Sidon returned his own phone to its proper place. It was only then that he freed Link’s hand, and Link missed his touch sorely already.

Was it normal, or stupid, perhaps, to feel so much for someone he had only just met? Only time would tell, Link supposed. Time which, it seemed, they would have more of. The thought brought a smile to Link’s face, eyes glittering with hope.

There was a voice, another voice - something darker and tinged with dread - that was reminding Link of past mistakes, ones he had been harboring inside of him for years. Ignoring it would do him no good, for this was the sound of logic speaking to him for the time since Sidon had walked over, but Link dared not listen to it. It would not matter if he did, surely.

“Talking to you… the pleasure has been all mine, dearest Link. I hate that I must go now, but we’ll speak to one another soon - I’m sure of it.”
Never had Link thought of himself as anything slightly resembling a romantic, fantasies of romance and love not something he fancied anymore. It had nothing to do with a lack of desire for them, and everything to do with an understanding that most people just could not, or would not, be capable of dealing with him. Too high maintenance, people had said in the past. Watching Sidon turn his back to Link, any residual inhibitions - and there were not many - were a dwindling feeling that only nagged him from the back of his mind.

Once Sidon had disappeared from view, Link’s eyes were drawn to the figure of Midna standing next to a piece a little further down the way, the one closest to the painting Link still stood rooted in front of. His cheeks were aflame, but as Midna rushed closer to him, she paid no mind to him, only looking over her shoulder the way Sidon had gone.

“Link,” she hissed, and Link swore he could hear the popping and cracking of her neck’s muscles as she whipped her head around to gawk at him. “Do you have any idea who that was?”

Perplexed, Link opened his mouth to ask her what she meant, and why she looked so horrified that he had just exchanged numbers with Sidon, all of which he assumed she had seen. If she was going to tease him about being far, far out of Sidon’s league, and not in a positive way, then Link was going to kindly ask her to refrain from restating what he already knew and knew well. The sound of an announcer speaking at the center of the exhibit cut him off, though, and the two of them went silent, though Midna still bore an expression of shock and stunned awe alike.

They looked to the podium situated at the middle of the gallery, where a woman dressed in a well-fitted black dress was regarding the crowd with questions about how their evening had been, and how appreciative she and the rest of the staff were that they had made it out tonight. Link caught sight of the flame of Sidon’s hair through gaps in the crowd gathered around the podium, a flute of champagne in hand, a small, gentle smile resting on the plush of his lips. He was so, so beautiful, and Link groaned, full focus on Sidon instead of the woman talking about the exhibit and how lovely all of the art was.

As such, when the woman said, at the end of her speech, “And without further adieu, we will now ask that the artist himself come forward to offer us all a word about tonight’s exhibit,” Link saw, in high definition, hyper-focused view as Sidon moved forward to the mounted podium, stepping up onto the slight elevation to stand behind the mic. His heart stopped.

“Oh my god.” Link said, loud enough that several of the people closest to where he and Midna stood turned their way, scowling at him and shushing him, and certainly loud enough for Midna to have heard. When Link looked at her, he wore an expression of dread to mirror her own, a wordless exchange as Link raised both hands to cover the entirety of his face, which now felt too hot for safety.

He had spent the entire night flirting with the artist of tonight’s gallery, and he’d had no clue. The things he had said. Oh, god, he was so mortified, his chest so tight with embarrassment that it was all he could do to turn around and stalk right out of the front door, Midna’s heels clacking as she followed behind him. Fuck. Fuck.

Chapter End Notes

ooohh, cliffhanger.

i hope to have the next chapter out soon. thanks a bunch for reading. xoxo
If Link wasn’t even good enough for Ganon, how did he expect - how could he ever *dream* of being good enough or worthy of *Sidon*’s attention? The feeling had been haunting his chest, his heart. So much of him wanted. Wanted to text Sidon, wanted to see him again, wanted to take a shot in the dark, hoping for the best, and wanted everything to work itself out. Wanting was such a dangerous, dangerous thing, though. Nothing good ever came out of Link’s wanting - only pain, only torment.

**Chapter Notes**

The reception of the first chapter was more positive than I could have hoped for, which really made writing this one just kinda flow. This chapter packs an angsty punch, so be prepared for lots of vague backstory that I plan on exploring more in later chapters!

Wanna be pals? Follow me [here](#) and [here](#)!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Zelda spat laughter directly into his face when Link relayed the events of the previous night to her the following morning before their biology class. It would be the class’ last time meeting before their final, and Link really did not need this kind of drama in his life at such a crucial time. He shoved her shoulder as she poured her amusement out into her hands, cupped around her mouth to stifle some of the noise. So far they were the only ones in the room, sitting front and center, and despite her best efforts to keep herself quiet, the sound echoed around the empty lecture hall and left Link sinking down into the cushioned chair he sat in.

“I can’t believe such a thing happened to you!” Zelda was still wheezing with laughter between words, though of course Link failed to see what was so funny about his misfortune. He did suppose that if their places had been swapped, he would very likely be in Zelda’s present situation: bent over the mahogany table in front of her, arms wrapped around her stomach which bounced with every giggle, mirthful tears pricking the corners of her eyes. Link had half a mind to shove her out of her seat, but bottled up the urge by unpacking his notebook.

“You’re evil,” he signed to her, slapping his spiral notebook onto the table and shooting her a very frustrated glare. Link’s stabbing look did nothing to dissuade Zelda from displaying her overjoyed disposition in full, though she was finally beginning to calm down, following Link’s suit in unpacking her stuff to prepare for class. A few more students were filing into the room, talking in soft voices, masking yawns with their hands. Link doubted there would be much of a turn out today, people choosing to skip in favor of studying in the comforts of dorms, apartments, or homes. Today would be a review day, their professor had informed them during their last meeting, so there wouldn’t be any new content being taught. Really, Link hadn’t planned on showing up himself, especially after last night’s debacle, but Zelda had persuaded him into coming anyhow. For her sake.
He was beginning to have his regrets, showing her any sort of kindness.

“Really, though,” Zelda was saying as she flipped to a blank page in her own notebook, penning down a proper header at the top of the page. “Your luck is simply atrocious! Something as horrible as that could only happen to you.”

Link groaned, elbows dropping onto the table so that he could cradle his head in his hands. He didn’t need to be reminded of what he was perfectly aware of, thank you very much, Zelda. For a few years now, Link had been mulling over the idea of someday writing an autobiography, and if he ever did finally make his mind up about it, there would be no doubt in what he would be titling it. Link: A Lifetime Collection of Awful Experiences.

His phone vibrated in his pocket and Link jumped, dropping his head and blinking down at his pocket in horror. It couldn’t have been Midna - she was never awake before noon on Tuesdays, and she’d been up extremely late last night giving Link the ribbing of his life, relentless teasing over what had transpired at the gallery. With her shock gone, she’d been ruthless. Link hadn’t blocked her number, but it had been a damn near thing. No one else really texted Link outside of Midna and Zelda, and if Midna was sleeping, and if Zelda was sitting next to him, then Link feared the worst of all possible scenarios.

Sidon had not texted Link last night, and there was absolutely no way in hell that Link was going to text him first, if at all. He did not possess the guts, he did not have the audacity, and he wasn’t prepared to make more of a fool of himself than he already had. Link had no business entertaining anything with someone like Sidon, not now, knowing who he was.

As soon as he’d gotten home last night, Link had done extensive research on Sidon, discovering more than he had been prepared to. While his reach had not yet touched much of the general public, Sidon was, in recent times, something of a big name amongst the art community. He was from overseas, where he was more well-known by far, and everything, every article, every review, every essay Link had found online, said the same thing that Midna’s professor had told Midna’s class: Sidon was a genius. He had so much raw talent that it was almost impossible to find any fault in any of his art, though all the interviews he’d done so far were mostly him playing bashful.

“What is it?” Zelda asked him softly upon seeing the pallor of Link’s face, the abject terror with which he was staring down at his legs. Their professor has just walked in, looking as frazzled as he always did.

Link shook his head, but when his pocket vibrated again Zelda realized without needing Link to say anything, and her eyes darted to his legs, too.

“Is it him?” She whisper-hissed, bowing her head and pawing at Link’s thigh, trying to ease his phone out.

Link wasn’t having it; he smacked her hands away, resolute in his decision to avoid checking his phone for as long as he possibly could. The two of them must have made quite the sight in that moment, shoving at one another’s hands in the fight for Link’s phone, the usual stoic and well-mannered Zelda Hyrule dissolving into a red-faced, huffing, petulant child as she conceded at last, slumping back in her seat, leaving Link triumphant.

Even if he had wanted to check his phone, and clearly he didn’t, he couldn’t have. As soon as Zelda and Link were finished being children, their professor, having missed all of their scene, spoke up to initiate class. The whole time Link could feel Zelda’s eyes glancing over between taking notes, staring him down in what he could surely assume was her patented glare. He would never know for sure, though, as he just as resolutely refused to look her way for the duration of the lecture.
Ignoring her could only go on for so long. As soon as class was finished, she was already on his case again, hounding him to check his phone which had thankfully not gone off again since the first two messages. Zelda was spitting venom at his back about how much of a baby Link was being, about how he really did need to pull his boot straps up and just check the damn thing, and Link could not deny that she was right. He was being a baby.

But part of it was less about humiliation, about saving face, and more about the fact that Sidon was famous. No one had told him that Sidon was too far out of his league, though he’d expected it from Midna, but it was true. Sidon was too good for him; there was no logical reason to pursue anything.

Why should he, when Link knew that there was nothing he had to offer someone who could pick… anyone, anyone he wanted. Forums online were filled with women and men alike nothing but willing to fling themselves at Sidon. Link had no business entering into a world that would chew him up whole and spit him back out as mulch, fodder for rabid animals to pick at the remnants of.

Not to mention that there other, more pressing concerns that were manifesting in ugly, unforgettable ways.

“Link!” Zelda had finally had it, grabbing at the handle of Link’s backpack to bring him to an abrupt halt. They were halfway out of the science building now, all of Zelda’s demands and jeers doing nothing to stop Link from trying to flee her rage. Now, though, she refused to relinquish her grip on him, try as Link might to free his person from her, struggling to tug his backpack free without abandoning it. One thing was for sure: Zelda was a hell of a lot stronger than she looked.

“Why won’t you just check your phone?” She asked, exasperation coating her voice in its toxic fumes.

Why do you care so much? Why do you want to see what he said to me so badly?

Zelda’s expression grew weary at Link’s frenzied hand movements, flinching at every aggravated jab his fingers made. He wasn’t meaning to be annoyed with her, really - but Link was having a hard enough time dealing with everything as it was.

So what if he texted me?

Link was propelled by his frustration, even more by the thoughts he’d been harboring ever since last night.

I text him back, we talk, we see each other once or twice - and then what? He drops me when he realizes that I have nothing to offer him.

With every sign, every word, Zelda withered more and more, until none of her overzealousness remained.

“Link-”

I refuse to go through this again. I’m not putting myself out there just to be hurt. Again.

“And you finished?” Zelda said, watching the way the blonde’s chest heaved with a heart-heavy sigh. Link could see in her eyes that she was exhausted, not with him, per se, but with something unidentifiable. He raised and dropped his shoulders in a weighted shrug, looking off to the side in search of something to focus on, anything that wasn’t the pitied look in his best friend’s eyes.

“The last thing I want is a repeat of what happened with Ganon,” The way she said his name made it sound like a curse. And maybe it was one. Maybe all Ganon was was a curse - Link could believe
it. “But it’s been two years, Link. Have you dated anyone since then?”

Link didn’t bother with a response when they both already knew what his answer would be. Zelda placed a hand on his upper arm, guiding his gaze back to her with the gentle touch. She looked so sad for him, and all of his anger left him in favor of feeling bad. Of course all she wanted was his happiness, it was all she ever wanted for him, but there was a pain in Link’s heart, and a fear in his soul.

“This morning, there was a light in your eyes when you talked about Sidon, one that I haven’t seen in a very, very long time. Even though you feel embarrassed, or ashamed, or whatever other things that you’re feeling, part of you still wants to give him a shot.”

*I don’t like it when you’re right*, he signed, huffing at the small smile forming along the curves of Zelda’s lips.

“I know you don’t. But sometimes life is about taking risks, and you’ll never know unless you give it a try. All I want - all I have ever wanted,” she took a breath before pulling Link into a tight hug that he melted into straight away, arms wrapping around her and holding her just as closely. “All I’ve ever wanted is for you to be happy. It kills me to think that Ganon hurt you so horribly, to the point where you’re afraid to give anyone else a chance.”

When she pulled back, she held him at arm’s length, looking at him sternly. “Don’t let him keep doing this to you. If you do, then he’s won. Don’t let him win, Link. He doesn’t deserve that.”

*God*, he really hated it when she was right.

Before Link could lose what little spark Zelda had ignited in him, whatever it was made of, he shook her off and pulled his phone out. For a moment, all he could do was stare down at it in his hands, the slender device shaking minutely in a way that reminded him of the past. He remembered well this feeling of anxiety stripping him down to his bones, baring him for the world to see. What were the differences between being like this and the way he had held his phone when he’d gotten all those texts about Ganon, all those messages from an unknown number telling him everything in vivid detail?

The difference was that right now, he wasn’t alone, and his whole world wasn’t being deconstructed piece by broken piece. Zelda gave him a nudge, and he turned his phone on before he could chicken out. He called upon all the optimism that he’d had the night before, the fluttery feelings he’d harbored in the heat of the moment when he hadn’t been thinking about past hurts. Link put himself back in the museum, with breath catching in his throat at the sight of Sidon, with the cool wave of Sidon’s voice shuddering down his spine. Before he’d known that Sidon was famous and that he had no real reason to be interested in Link.

But he had been. He’d looked at Link in all of his awkward, half-assed attempts at appearing put together, his simple clothes and ruined shoes, and had deemed him *charming*.

Link took a deep, steadying breath, and opened his messages.

In truth, only one of them was from Sidon. The other was much more shockingly unexpected, as it had come from Ravio, who Link had not spoken to in *months*, now. He would read that one later, when Zelda wasn’t quietly urging him to open Sidon’s text - or when she wasn’t taking it upon herself to do it for him when Link hesitated a second too long for her liking. Zelda was pressed all along his side, peering over his shoulder to read the text right alongside him as his heart hammered.

**SIDON, 8:10AM :**
Good morning, Link! I do hope that this text does not wake you, but I woke this morning positively dying to speak to you. I wanted to thank you for indulging my conversation last night, and to apologize for not being entirely transparent. I caught sight of you just as you scurried off during my speech, fearing, perhaps, that me being the featured artist came as a shock to you. I know I should have told you, but I did not want to come across as cocky, or to intimidate you. I merely wanted to speak with you. I hope this does not prevent further communication between us.

“Wow.” Zelda breathed, pulling herself away from Link’s shoulder, having finished reading Sidon’s text. “I can’t believe he read you so easily.”

Link managed a nod, unable to look anywhere but at the screen of his phone. The words began to fade, a blare of white light as Link lost focus. Things began to loosen in Link’s chest, though there were other, more logical things that grew more tight, a noose around his heart. Sidon seemed nicer than Link could have anticipated, but did that make any difference in the grand scheme?

“You should text him back.” Zelda said, jarring Link back into his body. The look he passed her was one of utter horror. Link was shaking his head at the same time that Zelda was nodding her own, insistent that he should text the older man immediately. Link sank his teeth deep into the flesh of his lower lip, gnawing. He had no idea what he would even say, what he could even say. Sidon had hit the nail directly on the head in assuming that he had frightened Link, which in and of itself was already embarrassing.

Ignoring him seemed rude, though. A vast many things could be said of Link, but to call him rude would be a misjudgement of character.

Later, Link settled on, not giving in under the pressure of Zelda’s sigh and the testy look she gave him. This he would not budge on - he needed some time to deliberate on what in the world he was going to say back to Sidon. Having Zelda watch him while he did so was too anxiety inducing, even merely in theory.

“Alright.” Zelda caved, adjusting her backpack before checking the watch on her wrist. She was one of the only people Link knew who used watches for more than the purposes of accessorizing, an endearing trait. “I have to go to my next class, but you had better keep me posted, Link, or I’ll shave you bald.”

Link shoved her playfully, eyes rolling, because she was being all bark and no bite again. He waved her off as she exited the building, watching as she stepped out into the windy, sun littered day, the loose golden hues of her hair catching every drop of light and sending it dancing along her back.

Even after Zelda had disappeared from sight, Link stood there a long while, staring off blankly as people passed him by, giving him weird looks. It took quite some time before he remembered the other message waiting for him on his phone, which remained in his hands. He thumbed out of Sidon’s message and opened up Ravio’s in its stead, reading the text with a quizzical look.

RAVIO, 8:13AM :

heya, link! i’m gonna be in town this week with my sister, and i was wondering if we could have lunch at some point? maybe today if you’re free! i think it’s finals week for you guys, right?! take a breather and let loose with your old pal ravio, huh?? it sure has been a WHILE!!!

“It’s been a while because someone never responds to my text messages,” Link mumbled to himself, blowing out a breath. It was a little after ten; Link didn’t have any other classes this morning, and
didn’t technically have any other classes, period - much like their biology lecture, all of his classes were having reviews this week, and since there was no Zelda to nag him into attending them, Link had no intentions of it.

Going out for lunch with Ravio didn’t sound like such an awful idea, though Link understood entirely that he would be the one paying, and that Ravio only wanted to meet up in order to pry into all the nooks and crannies of Link’s life. Still, the ordeal would be a very nice, welcomed distraction. He hoped, anyway.

LINK, 10:10AM:

That sounds fine. Nowhere expensive, though, since we both know I’ll be paying for everything.

RAVIO 10:11AM:

aw, come on! that’s an awfully rude assumption to make, link!!!! but alright, we can meet at that cafe next to your campus, the one with the really great paninis. 12 on the dot, and don’t be late, or you have to buy me TWO paninis!!!!!

With a snort, Link put his phone away and headed out of the building. There was plenty of time left to kill, so he decided to hit up the library for some obligatory studying. The entire downstairs area was a mess of students writing last minute papers, printing out study guides, and cramming as much as they could in the short window of time they had left before their fates would be sealed. Link watched as one kid, younger than him but probably not a freshman, chugged an entire cup of coffee before stumbling out of the library to whatever awaited him in the world beyond.

Some things about college were positively horrifying.

Link set up shop on the second floor in the way, way back, where he and Zelda always studied. And he tried so hard, he really did; he tugged out his notebooks, but his eyes only glazed over as he eyed the sloppy scrawl in each of them, and trying to look over the most recent chapters in his textbooks proved to be no better. There was no shaking the anxiety, staving it off coming up completely fruitless.

His phone weighed a million pounds in his pocket, pressed firmly to his thigh like a brand in the shape of Sidon’s message. Every word was seared into his flesh, permanent and impossible to ignore.

He was such a mess.

Link sighed, dropping his face into his hands and squeezing his eyes shut. Images of the past played out in vivid detail in his mind’s eye, his brain incapable of stopping even for a moment. Nothing but reasons why he should drop the Sidon issue were plaguing him, fitful reminders of what had happened the last time he’d tried to put himself out there for another human being.

He and Ganon has been so good, for a time. Things had been sincerely excellent. They’d been really, really happy together, the people around them all so sure that they would end up married, someday. Link used to think about it, too. Marrying Ganon. Having kids when they were ready, when they were both out of college. High school sweethearts seeing things through, that’s what Link had wanted. Looking back, Link couldn’t figure out where things had gone awry, at what point the strands of fate binding them to one another had began to unravel and tear, until all that remained were shattered hopes for a future he would never get to have, now.
When he opened his eyes again, they were stinging. This was how it always felt, thinking about Ganon - like everything inside of him had been ripped apart, his chest an empty, gaping hole that Link was always going to be afraid of filling up again, no matter how much time passed him by.

Link didn’t know where things had gone wrong, he probably never would. He just wanted to make sure that it never happened again.

♡

“Link!”

There was no time to brace himself for the onslaught of arms and body that barreled into him at top speed, sending him stumbling back as Ravio tossed his arms around the blonde’s neck and delivered unto Link a death-grip hug. All of the air left Link in a groan, the hug he gave Ravio in return a much more sober affair. Ravio was babbling into Link’s ear about how good it was to see him again, how he’d missed him, how sorry he was for never returning texts or calls, but he was so busy and school was so hard and he was going to try harder, for sure, Link! You’ll see!

Link laughed at him and shook his head. Some things would never change, and Link had grown to accept it years ago. What did it matter, honestly, when it always felt as if no time had passed whenever he saw Ravio again? Months could have gone by and often did, but speaking with his dear friend from one time to another felt like picking up exactly where they had left off. That’s how Link knew that they would always be close, regardless of physical distance.

With paninis in tow, the two of them found a small, round table sandwiched in the corner of the cafe, between a wide window and a stone wall. Link had also gotten a cup of coffee for himself, forcing Ravio to get a water since he’d chosen one of the more expensive paninis on the menu. The dark haired male had pouted the whole way to the table, and now stared at his clear cup glumly, casting pitiful, longing gazes at the mug Link was holding in his hands.

“Stop being a brat.” Link teased, taking a sip of his coffee. It had a nice, earthy smell. Nutty, too, because he’d asked for hazelnut in it, but it tasted like spices.

“I’m not!” Ravio’s voice was a whine uttered right before taking a huge bite out of his sandwich, talking between chews. Yeah, some things really never did change. “So… Zelda told Hilda that you’re on the market for a new man. What’s that about?”

Because of course she had. Link wanted to be surprised, but he wasn’t. Not even a little. He took a bite of his own panini and propped his cheek on his hand, folding one of his napkins into a square with the other while he chewed. Unlike Ravio, he wasn’t a savage animal with no table manners.

“I wouldn’t say that.” Link mumbled. He was so tired of talking about this. His friends very clearly wanted what was best for him, or what they thought was best for him, but Link would rather be dealing with this on his own. Which, he supposed, was why Zelda was trying to help him along. If it were just Link dealing with this, then it wouldn’t be getting dealt with at all. She truly did know him far too well. He sighed.

“I don’t think it’s going to go anywhere.” He took another bite, ignoring how Ravio leaned forward in his seat with his arms folded across the table in front of him. His panini was already halfway gone, his water untouched.

“Do you want it to?” Ravio sounded way too eager for Link’s liking, his earlier assumptions that their lunch would be nothing but Ravio’s prying only confirmed by the mischievous glint in his friend’s eye. So much for a distraction, huh?
“I’m not sure. On the one hand, he’s really charming. On the other, I’m still…”

The sentence fell, hanging incomplete in the air, for neither of them needed Link to finish it. Ravio’s expression dropped, his mouth puckering as he began to chew on the inner corner of his lips. That pitying face he was making made Link want to wipe it off with his bare hands. He didn’t need all of the pity he was getting today.

Or maybe he did.

The chair creaked as Link sat back in it, and it felt like all he was doing today was sighing.

“It doesn’t matter, anyway. This guy is - he’s way out of my league. He’s, like, 35 years old, and a famous artist. He probably lives in some giant house and drives flashy, expensive cars.”

Ravio let out a low whistle, eyebrows raised high on his forehead. Impressed to boot.

“Wowie, buddy. How’d you find someone like that?”

“It’s a long story.”

A long, traumatizing story that Link had no desire to relive right now. He’d spent enough time today reliving things he didn’t want to, and this was not going to be one of them.

For a while after that, neither of them said anything. Quiet settled down over their table. Normally, Link would have liked it, appreciated it, even. Right now, it felt heavy, and stifling. Something from Ravio’s side of the table was charging the air, tensing it so thick that Link thought he might actually start choking on it.

Ravio wasn’t telling him something.

“What is it?” Link asked, wasting no time beating around the bush. Ravio may have liked to play coy, but Link did not. Cutting to the chase, being blunt, and forward - those were things Link much preferred to whatever games Ravio was playing. He was making another face that told too many stories, hunched over the table and scratching at the wood.

“Well…” Ravio cleared his throat. “I may have run into Ganon on campus the other day.”

The coffee in Link’s mouth slid down his throat too soon, scalding him from the inside. Truth be told, it didn’t feel much different than the heartache as it consumed him from head to toe. Someone had lit a fuse of anguish in the pit of his stomach, and now its fiery tendrils were snaking their greedy, destructive hands around the basin of his heart. Plundering him, pillaging the air directly out of his lungs.

His face, of course, betrayed none of his inner turmoil. Link didn’t even flinch at the hot coffee’s scorch, placing his mug back down on the table with fingers that were beginning to shake. He hoped Ravio didn’t notice.

He’d always known that this was a possibility. Link and Ravio went to schools on opposite sides of the city, a good hour away from one another, and it just so happened that Ganon went to the same university as Ravio. And by “just so happened,” Link meant that Ganon had transferred there after he and Link had broken up. The school was much, much smaller than the one Link and Zelda attended, so it stood to reason that Ravio or Hilda or any of their other friends that went there had all the chance in the world of running into Ganon.

So it made very little sense, this agony he was feeling over the single degree of separation keeping
“Oh?” Link said, trying to play it cool. Ravio looked tormented, his now empty plate offering him no solace. He looked like he wished he’d taken his time eating, now. “How did that go?”

“It went about as well as you’d expect it to.” Ravio licked his lips, finally plucking his plastic cup of water up to busy his mouth with. Anything to keep him from talking. There must have been a reason, a need, for him to be bringing this up, though. He wouldn’t have been doing it for absolutely nothing. Link’s throat felt tight for whatever was coming next. He didn’t know if he had it in him to keep talking, but Ravio had always struggled with sign language. “We talked for a little while. He asked me how I’d been.”

What felt now like decades ago, they had all been a tight-nit group. Himself, Zelda, Ravio, Hilda, and a few others - Ghirahim, Zant, Vaati, Malon, Urbosa, Saria, Revali. Others, too, on the edges of the group, friends with some but not necessarily all. They’d run together in high school, some of them even going as far back as middle or primary school, and while college had made them less communicative, the straw on the camel’s back had been Ganon and Link’s separation. Never had it been said that any of them were forced to pick sides, but in many ways it had been like that. Unspoken. Then Ganon had transferred, and the chasm between their friend group had spread so far wide that there was nothing, no one, to bridge the gap.

Ravio swallowed a large gulp of water, refusing to meet Link’s eyes. Something more to be said, something he knew Link would not like.

“I didn’t know what to say at the time, so I told him I didn’t know, really, which wasn’t a lie - because I didn’t! It had been so long since I’d heard from you, you know?”

“Ravio, what did he say?” Link’s heart was taut with nerves, his words coming out between clenched teeth. He was trying to keep his breathing even, forcing himself to be verbal.

“He asked me how you were. If you were seeing anyone. I don’t know why, we haven’t spoken in - jeez, since he - since the whole,” Ravio swallowed nervously, slumping back in his seat, unable to even put his thoughts together.

In reality, it wasn’t all that serious. It wasn’t a big deal. Rational parts of Link’s brain knew that, understood that he should just take Ravio’s information and pay it dust.

He was still fucking furious.

“Who does he think he is?” It didn’t sound like it was Link’s voice shaking with anger, coated in malice and dripping with disgust. But it was - it very much was his voice punching out the words. “Why does he think he has any business asking about me, after everything he’s put me through?”

Link watched his friend melt into his seat, shrugging and looking lost, wincing at the tone of Link’s voice. None of the anger was directed at Ravio, but he was still taking the brunt of it, as he was the only one within proximity.

“Like I said, I didn’t tell him anything. He said he was - thinking about you, that’s what he said.”

Thinking about him? Link hoped he would choke on his stupid fucking thoughts. He was going to spend the rest of his days praying that Ganon Dragmire’s guilt suffocated him, shoved itself like a gag down his throat until he was coughing around it, smothering to death with all of the horrible things he’d done to Link.

Thinking that Ganon had any guilt, though - that was giving him far too much credit, more good than
his character deserved.

“If I ever see him again, I’m going to punch him right in his smug, ugly face. I’m going to throttle him with my bare hands, and you’re going to help me bury the body.” Link raised his coffee to his lips, taking in a deep, heady breath of the earthy aroma, and released what anger he could when he exhaled. This was exactly what Ganon had wanted, probably: to get some sort of rise out of Link. He’d always been after making Link lose control of his emotions. The disgusting bastard had gotten off on it their entire lives.

Link released the iron-clad grip he had on his mug and set it down, pinning Ravio with naught but a look. “If he asks about me again, tell him that he can shove his big, meaty hands right up his own urethra.”

Ravio nodded with vigor, less amused than Link wanted him to be. What a disaster of a lunch…

Link tried to salvage what he could of it. Calming down was a feat all its own, Link eventually managing, but doing a fantastic job of hiding it even before the rage had dissipated in full. They talked about Hilda, how Ravio knew most things by word of mouth via her and Zelda’s gossip, which they did a lot of, more than Link had ever been aware of. They talked about how weird Ravio felt now that he was almost done with college, only a single semester left between himself and a degree, and if Link felt just as weird about having only a year left. He did, and he didn’t. His feelings on the matter were complicated. It was mostly about what he was going to do with his creative writing degree, if he’d go back for a masters at all.

By the end of their time together, which rolled over into the later parts of the afternoon, Link felt sufficiently better. It wasn’t until Ravio was hugging him goodbye and swaying him back and forth, laughing with him on the sidewalk outside of the cafe that Link realized he had not, in fact, thought about his Sidon situation at all since the topic had initially been broached.

Walking home with no chatty friend to occupy his time and mind made for an entirely different story, of course. One that began and ended with the same thing: Link was still, hours later, at a loss for what he was going to text Sidon. He couldn’t keep him waiting forever; something had to give, and it needed to be soon.

His apartment was by no means anything luxurious. It was a tiny thing in a part of town which very rarely saw much traffic, so his rent was cheap - but so were many other things in the building. His plumbing was a disaster, the AC unit was constantly breaking and his landlord refused to come out and take care of it, ignoring Link’s continual reminders that it would be summer soon and that the heat was unforgivable.

It was home, though. It was the only thing his parents were willing to send him the money for in terms of a place to live, and Link had spent enough time in the dorms his first year of college to know that it just wasn’t worth it.

Coming home to an empty apartment still had all of its charm, to Link. No conversations needed to be had when it was just him. Everything could be done in silence without any of the pressures of talking. The apartment was his sanctum, the only place he had where he could go and be one hundred percent free of societal restraints and expectations. There was no one to judge him, not here.

Link dropped his backpack by the door and toed off his shoes, dragging himself over to the couch and collapsing onto it. The cushions sank beneath his the weight of his body, threatening to swallow him whole. The springs inside had given out long ago, the old hunk of furniture providing no sort of
support anymore. Most people who visited him would not sit on it if it could be avoided, but Link liked to recline on it and stare up at the chipping paint on the ceiling, watch as flakes of it peeled off to swim in the air with motes of dust.

There was no TV in the living room. Just the couch, an old recliner his mother had thrifted for him, and a low sitting coffee table with a glass top. All of the carpets throughout the apartment were stained, some from Link’s time here, some from before. In the kitchen, the leaky sink faucet had become white noise over the years, and hardly bothered him at all unless he was in the living room trying to study. Link’s remedy for that was to mostly study in his bedroom, unless there were guests, almost always meaning unless Zelda was over to study with him.

Link’s phone slipped out of his pocket of its own accord, perhaps a sign that Link needed to take whatever action needed to be taken. Which… he was unsure of. Still.

Splayed out on the couch and staring down at his phone, hanging half out of his pocket, Link’s face was contorted into something remarkably similar to pain.

Ganon’s betrayal had left him scarred, devastated. Until now, until today, Link had never been forced to reckon with just how much ruin it had done. People didn’t take interest in Link, the silent kid that always hung around with Hyrule corporation’s heiress. Running with Zelda in college meant that Link was untouchable, in every sense of the word. Yesterday had been… last night had been different. As Link had wrongfully assumed at the time, it was meant to be inconsequential. Sure, he had willingly given his number over to Sidon, but there hadn’t been any real expectations of a text, or a call. All of that had been heat of the moment wishful thinking.

It hadn’t taken long at all last night for Link to realize that he wasn’t cut out for this, wasn’t prepared in the slightest.

Lines of straight teeth worried at his lips, hand darting to snatch his phone up and track his password across the screen. Sidon’s message mocked him, the words saying one thing but Link picking up something different altogether.

If Link wasn’t even good enough for Ganon, how did he expect - how could he ever dream of being good enough or worthy of Sidon’s attention? The feeling had been haunting his chest, his heart. So much of him wanted. Wanted to text Sidon, wanted to see him again, wanted to take a shot in the dark, hoping for the best, and wanted everything to work itself out. Wanting was such a dangerous, dangerous thing, though. Nothing good ever came out of Link’s wanting - only pain, only torment.

That should have been the end of it. It should have been left at that. Link should have put his phone down and gone to his room to do his nightly studying. His fingers should not have typed out a message that was all heart and no brain, because his brain knew that longing and wanting were terrible things that never did him any favors, but his heart had a mind of its own, and that selfish, idiotic mind was telling Link that some things were okay to want.

**LINK, 5:16PM**:

Sorry for taking so long to get back to you, I had a pretty busy day. Last night certainly did catch me off guard, I must admit, but I can’t hold it against you. You were coming from a well-intending place and I get that.

**LINK, 5:16PM**:

I’ve been thinking about last night all day, and I’d love it if we were to keep talking. You’re pretty alright at holding a conversation. :p
All of the words came naturally, and they had to, really, since all of Link’s wits had seemingly left him. Perhaps that would be common with speaking to Sidon. Link wasn’t going to sit around and wait for Sidon’s texts, if they even came tonight, because he had things to do. First on his list was a shower, cold tonight because the hot water in the building was finicky. Didn’t bother Link, though. His skin was tacky with sweat and the cold water was refreshing, wiping him clean. He dried himself as best as he could be bothered to do, then flung the towel over his shoulders and went out into the kitchen to throw together a small dinner.

Studying was when things got hard, the reality of what he’d done finally reaching him through his haze of temporary invulnerability. Anxiety crept up on him, slowly, and then all at once as he pushed himself back from his desk and slinked into the living room again to check his phone. Three messages were waiting for him.

His chest was tight.

SIDON, 5:30PM :

No worries! I, too, was busy all day, with interviews and the like. Hearing that you hold no grudges does wonders for my nerves, though.

SIDON, 5:31PM :

Pretty alright…? And here I was this whole time thinking that my conversational skills were something to pride myself over! What a fool I am...

SIDON, 5:40PM :

Reading my last message, I am uncertain whether or not my tone came across as particularly playful. It was meant to be. Please do not feel like you have actually hurt my feelings.

Link was smiling down at his phone like it was everything precious in the world, a light, restive, foreign thing taking root in his chest. His brain reached down to try and swat it away, but Link’s heart was putting up a valiant fight, winning out in the end over all of his steeled resolves and conflicting emotions. Sidon was nice, and easy to talk to, and playful. No one in his life had made Link feel like this in years. Even knowing that he didn’t deserve it, and that it wouldn’t take much time for Sidon to figure out how far from Link’s walk of life he was and how much better he deserved, Link wanted to continue entertaining his selfish desires of getting closer to Sidon.

He plopped onto the couch and curled up comfortably on his side, yawning as he sent his next text.

LINK, 6:02PM :

You’re a lot sillier than I expected you to be.

SIDON, 6:03PM :

Were you expecting some stodgy old man?

LINK, 6:03PM :

Kind of.

SIDON, 6:04PM :
Then I am very sorry to disappoint you! My personality still retains some of its flame, even in my old age.

Imagining that Sidon was somewhere in his own home, resting as cozily as Link was and waiting for Link’s replies, hanging onto Link’s every word was too easy, and equally as dangerous. Maybe Sidon was reclining on some massive bed in some immaculate room, clutter-free and pristine, not a speck of dust anywhere to be found, holding his phone close to his chest with the same, dopey smile that Link was sporting.

He’s going to hurt me, Link thought, closing his eyes and taking his imaginations that much deeper, running rampant in his mind. No, I’m going to hurt myself.

In the end, it wouldn’t make any difference.

**LINK, 6:06PM:**

35 isn’t THAT old.

**SIDON, 6:08PM:**

Someone did his research, then.

**LINK, 6:09PM:**

After last night? Of course I did. I made a fool out of myself in front of a famous artist by not even knowing who he was. Educating myself was a must.

**SIDON, 6:10PM:**

I didn’t think of you as a fool, Link. Many people here have yet to discover me outside of the art community, as I’m sure you also now know. What truly matters is that you appreciated the art, and gave it careful, thoughtful consideration. At the end of the day, what more could an artist want?

Warmth spread under Link’s skin, admiration flowing through his veins at the way Sidon regarded his own passion. Link could understand now why all of those people online had such a devout love for the man - he was an art form all of his own, the physical embodiment of beauty and charm.

Back and forth, they went on like that for a while, texting for hours. They talked about Sidon’s works from the gallery, what each of them meant. Link’s favorite, which he came to know as *Breath of The Wild*, was one of the first pieces Sidon had done for his latest show. It had set the tone for the rest of the works, all of which centered around tumultuous adventure and exploring a world unknown. The sculpture that had also caught Link’s eye, the opening piece, was actually made in honor of Sidon’s sister, Mipha, who was fighting an ongoing battle with cancer. Link’s heart ached for him upon learning this.

Everything had meaning, Sidon told him. For Sidon, art was a means of self exploration and preserving the things that were most important to him. Each piece he created had more depth than any onlooker would ever be able to comprehend, try as they might to dissect it to pieces. They were personal, private pieces of his life that he was encoding into things to share with the world. It had never been about fame - that had been pure happenstance. He never sold the things in his exhibits, either; Sidon did other paintings, ones less personal, and sold those as his livelihood. People paid a pretty penny for them, too, Link learned. Sidon’s career had gained so much traction that he could sell a single painting for upwards of ten thousand dollars, which was ten thousand dollars more than
Link had ever seen in his life, unless one accounted for the mass amounts of debt he was in from university.

They talked about Link some, too, though there was less to be shared on his end. His major, which Sidon seemed very impressed by, for he could not write to save his life - his words, not Link’s - and Zelda, as well, who Sidon claimed he could tell Link felt deeply for from just his texts alone. Link brought up his mutism towards the tail end of the conversation, unsure of how to approach it, but knowing that it had to be discussed. If they were going to keep being friends (and that’s all Link was allowing himself to hope for right now), then addressing it was pertinent.

**LINK, 8:41PM:**

*I’m selectively mute, by the way.*

**LINK, 8:41PM:**

*I don’t have any way of putting it more delicately than that, so sorry for the abruptness of it.*

**SIDON, 8:42PM:**

*Oh, I see. At risk of sounding stupid, what exactly does that mean for you?*

**LINK, 8:43PM:**

*You don’t sound stupid. It means that high stress makes it impossible for me to be verbal. There are also certain people that I can’t talk to, and sometimes talking is exhausting, period, so I don’t do it.*

**SIDON, 8:45PM:**

*Do you use other means of communication, then?*

**LINK, 8:46PM:**

*Sign language.*

**LINK, 8:47PM:**

*For people who don’t know ASL, I usually use my phone to type things out, or force myself to say small phrases where I can. Talking is just… really hard, and my relationship with it is difficult to explain.*

Sidon didn’t need any explanations, though. He rolled with it, accepting it for what it was, and moved on as if there was nothing else that needed to be said of it. Link relaxed considerably, uprooting himself from the couch and heading to his room instead. Exhaustion was beginning to sink into his bones. Link set his phone aside for a moment to tie his hair up into two, tiny buns on either side of his scalp, shutting off the lights and using the glow of his phone to navigate his messy floor, sliding onto the bed on hands and knees. There was no point in fussing with sheets and blankets - it was too fucking hot, even when he was already shirtless.

The night kept going, and so did his conversation with Sidon, until it was almost ten and Sidon informed Link that he had a photoshoot for an art magazine tomorrow, first thing in the morning. At several points, Link had almost forgotten how much of a socioeconomic gap there was between the two of them, the pair on almost opposite ends of the spectrum, but then Sidon would say something
that reminded him of his lot in life - one worlds more fortunate than Link’s - and the self-consciousness would come back tenfold. Like a rock, taking stock of Link from a heavy place in his gut.

SIDON, 9:51PM:

*Talking to you has been a pleasure, Link, just the same as it was last night. I maintain what I said about you being charming, and my wish is to continue speaking with you, if that is also your wish for us.*

Tearing his eyes away from his phone to stare into the dark of his bedroom, Link dropped the device on his chest and raked his hands over his face. He dug the tips of his fingers into his eyes, torn with himself, warring with all the different things inside of him.

Sidon was too good for him. Tonight had only driven that home, really packed it in with a punch. No two ways about it, the truth was what it was: Sidon lived in a world beyond Link’s realm of possibility. The public eye owned Sidon, or maybe Sidon owned the public eye, it didn’t really matter - Link didn’t belong somewhere like that.

But he liked him so, so, so much, even as nothing more than a friend. He was content spending hours texting him, avoiding all of his responsibilities in favor of getting to know the artist. Just 48 hours ago, nothing had been like this. Link’s life had been somewhat normal. His definition of normal, and what it looked like for him, anyway. Right now, everything was shaken up, and *nothing* felt even remotely normal. Everything inside of him was all jumbled, something Link was not used to; things were always orderly, monotonous, stuck to a specific schedule and way of existing.

Zelda’s voice echoed in his head, bouncing around the inside of his skull:

*Don’t let him win, Link.*

Before he could change his mind, Link picked up his phone again. Now was the time for honesty. Not tomorrow, or the day after, but right this very instant.

LINK, 9:59PM:

*I want us to keep talking, but I don’t know where I want this to go from there. Someone in my life really, really hurt me, Sidon, and I’m still dealing with it even years after the fact. Which sounds... very pathetic, as I’m well aware, but it doesn’t change the reality of it. A lot of my reservations about you and whatever you want us to be are stemming from that, and I’d really appreciate it if you’d let me take things at my own pace. If you can do that for me, then I’m willing to maybe give things a shot. Eventually.***

SIDON, 10:01PM:

*Oh, I’m so sorry, Link. How anyone could hurt you in a way that still affects you to this day is beyond my comprehension, but I’m willing to do whatever you need, even if that means remaining as friends. I admire your honesty, as well. It must be hard for you to be transparent, having been hurt so horribly. You’re a very strong man, I think.*

SIDON, 10:03PM:

*I hope rest finds you well tonight, my friend. I shall speak with you in the morning.*

SIDON, 10:03PM:
Goodnight, Link.

LINK, 10:04PM:

Goodnight, Sidon.

LINK, 10:05PM:

And thank you.

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Chapter End Notes

i know i was told by someone to keep chapters really short, but, uh... i failed pretty miserably with this one. sorry if it's hard to read.

don't forget to leave a comment if you liked this chapter, and smash that mfn kudos button.

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