Delicious in Wilds

by midnasass

Summary

All of the wilds combined cannot sit at a campfire and share stew from a communal cooking pot. And once you get the cooking pot, there's no reason not to cook every dish in Hyrule.

A novelisation and significant rewrite of The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild, inspired by Dungeon Mashi, with a focus on world-building, character development-driven plot, and a recipe for every chapter.

Note to readers: In this fic, Link is mute, a trans girl, and a lover of food. If any of those
things doesn't sit well in your stomach (I can understand how a heroine loving food might put you off), there's no need to leave your vitriol in the comments.

Notes

Foreword

Hello there, dear reader. I hope that you enjoy the journey ahead as much as I enjoyed my journey through the vastness of Hyrule.

The full foreword, which I have curtailed, can be read at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1t7wLaoF03OsFO8RGwjCjWOyTOIwRipH8nIstbJPkpNw/edit

The following forward is entirely optional and is mostly composed of my long-winded, unedited musings on why I am going to write Delicious in Wilds. In fact, I am writing this forward prior to doing any work on Delicious in Wilds, including any form of planning. These words represent my thoughts, my hopes, my expectations, and my fears, and for the sake of those curious about what will go into Delicious in Wilds (or what went into it, since you will be reading this after the fact), here they are. I am going to sit here and write this without breaks until I finish, and so you have here my unfettered thought process. Spoilers ahoy! I recommend briefly glancing at the FAQs on my profile page before continuing.

Delicious in Wilds is inspired by and named after Kui Ryōko's Danjon Meshi Delicious in Dungeon, a manga that follows a group of adventurers in a tabletop-inspired world as they must quickly descend into a dungeon without the time or funding to purchase supplies. Instead, the adventurers learn to eat the monstrous wildlife of the dungeon as they go. Delicious in Wilds takes this concept and runs with it: Every chapter of Delicious in Wilds will involve and provide a recipe for a meal. I intend to take liberties with the cooking system present in Breath of the Wild. Most if not all of the recipes will be based on a real recipe in Breath of the Wild, which will be provided to the reader at the end of each chapter.

The in Wilds epithet comes from the "of the Wilds" set of clothing, being the tunic of the original legendary hero provided by the monks. As the title of the game is Breath of the Wild and its key experience the exploration of the wilds, I felt Delicious in Wilds an appropriate moniker.

In Breath of the Wild, [...] the few moments in which Link emotes revolve around the cooking and consumption of food; small victories such as during the sand-seal race; and when it comes to the attainment of rupees, at least according to the item description of rupees. Link also emotes when alone, responding to temperature changes and so forth. Link's greatest beats of emotion, however, come from the aforementioned cooking: The interest with which Link observes the pot, the absolute glee upon a successful meal, the literal jumping for joy and celebrating upon a new recipe, the excitement at eating a meal, the satisfaction derived from delicious food.

I had thought myself simply reading too far into something that was central to the game and thus had had attention lavished upon the animations, but then I encountered Zelda's diary. In this diary, Zelda records Link's explanations for silence, as I noted above. Upon speaking to Link, Zelda comments that Link is a "glutton" who cannot turn down a delicious meal. Other than the explanation of Link's stoicness and desire not to burden others, this is Zelda's only comment on Link's personality. My, my. You can see where Delicious in Wilds began
to form in my mind.

[...]

For me, The Legend of Zelda is about the gameplay. Please, go play Breath of the Wild if the gameplay appeals to you. Now when I turn to novelise the game, I cannot put the gameplay to word. So, instead, I must face the story and, finding it lacking, will change it to suit the tale I wish to tell.

In particular, my intentions for Delicious in Wilds are: to expand upon and improve the worldbuilding of various races and settlements; to give more backstory and significance to the Champions; to resolve the question of Zelda's sealing magic in a more interesting way than a deus ex machina of the highest calibre; to strip Breath of the Wild of its reliance upon fate and provide an alternate take on destiny; to make death meaningful instead of having ghosts wandering about who can apparently interact with the physical world but who couldn't be assed to try to beat up Ganon in the intervening hundred years; and, of course, to showcase as many delicious recipes as I physically can.

[...]

I hope that you enjoy Delicious in Wilds. And if you do not, then I will strive to do better in the future. Now, the Hyrule Fantasy awaits.

Fruit and Mushroom Skewer

Chapter Summary

A certain food enthusiast awakens in spring. Using the "tablet" found in the chamber of awakening, our travelling chef awakens a strange tower, looks down at the world to realise the chef stands on a great plateau, and remembers a name: Link.

Chapter Notes

A brief note to those reading after the seventh of December, 2017: Breath of the Wild's expansion, Ballad of the Champions, has released and given us quite a bit of new information regarding the Champions. Among other things, none of which is reflected in Delicious in Wilds, the expansion confirmed Urbosa not only significantly older than Zelda, but also the previous Gerudo Chief. As this information was not available during the writing of Delicious in Wilds, it is notable that Urbosa is only two years Zelda's elder in Delicious in Wilds and not the previous Parapan queen. If that makes the story uncomfortable for you to read, I understand and do not blame you. However, I promise that I would have no intention of supporting a pairing between an adult and a minor; had I been aware of this this prior to writing, I would not have included a relationship between the two in Delicious in Wilds. Because the relationship cannot be removed without rewriting a significant chunk of the story, I have chosen to leave it as is. Similarly, other content from the expansion will not be included in Delicious in Wilds. Thank you for reading!

midna's ass. 07 December 2017.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Floating in warmth, she waits.

A faint sound resonates somewhere under her. A body. Her body. Something soft yet firm beneath her, supporting her head, her upper back, her rear. A breath of chill whispers over the top of her chest and radiates down her form. Her heart beats.

She lives.

The darkness brightens steadily, and then gives way to light; her eyelids flutter up of their own accord. A blur of blue and white above. She flexes her fingers, wriggles her toes, pushes against the now-hard material underneath her to sit up.

The sudden ache in her head closes her eyes for a moment as she adjusts. The blueness throbs behind her lids. Her palm splashes liquid. She registers the water receding. The air feels cool and dry. She breathes in and the somewhat stale scent causes her to cough.

The pain subsides as the last of the water drains. She opens her eyes. Her vision focuses.
An unfamiliar ceiling.

She sits up on some sort of—the word does not come easily to her—altar. The material slips enough that she cannot find purchase on its surface, no imperfections that she can detect as she runs her fingers over the side. Above her glows a blue crystal that dims as she watches. To her right: a featureless blank wall. To her left: the rest of the chamber. Two pedestals, inlaid with the same faintly gleaming orange pattern, though the pedestal closer to the door appears to lack the middle of its face. On the far side, she notices the wall broken up by a complicated mechanism.

Door.

She scoots herself to the edge. The muscles of her arms protest slightly at the motion. Her legs hang out. All ten fingers, all ten toes. She hops off and the impact on her feet nearly sends her into the floor.

Her legs shiver as she stands with her left hand on the altar for support. She tightens and relaxes her muscles until the quivers ebb. One step. Another. She approaches the first pedestal to rest on her way to the door.

The moment her palm makes contact with the pedestal, the pattern on its face shifts to blue. The pedestal hums. Instinctively she retracts her hand, but the surface of the pedestal begins to open as a flower blossoming. The centre of the pedestal, inscribed with a strange symbol resembling an eye, rises.

Sounds. No, words. A voice.

"...masurr..."

Leaning on the pedestal she tenses and listens. The syllables jumble, the words incomprehensible. The voice falls silent for a moment, then starts again. The voice continues without pause, seemingly emanating from everywhere and yet nowhere at once, as though the sound resonates through the very walls of the chamber.

She turns to look back at the altar. Then at the door. The second pedestal. The missing piece of its face has the same dimensions as the proffered rectangle of the first.

As the voice goes on without ceasing, she carefully takes up the rectangle. A stone tablet. Not stone, but of the same perfectly smooth material as the altar and the pedestal. It fits almost perfectly in her palm between her thumb and fingers. The pedestal returns to orange.

When she inserts the tablet onto the second pedestal she does so symbol-side-down. No response. She flips the tablet over, and it slots neatly within. Not a second later the pedestal gleams blue. The voice cuts off.

For a moment she hears nothing but the hum of the pedestal and the huffs of her own breaths. Then the door grinds out a noise and shifts to blue as well. The tablet rises up from the second pedestal. She picks it up without hesitation. After another brief respite by the second pedestal she pads to the immense door rising nearly twice her height. Two doors, with a split now visible down the line.

She pushes on the doors. They swing open with surprising ease. The sudden light blinds her; she lifts a hand over her eyes, squinting through the brightness. Dampness and freshness roll over her at once. A tunnel. And there, at the end:

Light.
She steps out. Water pools on the ground. As her vision adjusts she spots a wooden table in the centre of the cave alongside a wooden chair. Moss grows over the surfaces. On the table sits a metal container. A chest.

She raises the lid. Softness. Fabric. A shirt and trousers. A leather strip with a cupped pouch along its length. A pair of boots. She becomes aware of her own nudity and takes the time to slip on the clothing. She fashions the strips into a belt about her hips. The tablet, she finds, matches the pouch perfectly. The clothing and her body form another story: the shirt and trouser sag over her skin. The fabric stinks of mustiness; the hems have torn or unthreaded; patches seem to have gone amiss; the boots have cracked.

They cover her.

She removes the boots and tucks them under her arm for now lest the water from the tunnel floor creep inside.

She moves forward through the tunnel. Abruptly the land slopes up to a steep wall. She looks around: no other path forward, except perhaps dragging over the table to use as a stepping stone. Though in places the rock gleams damply, she finds purchase on the slippery stone. Digging her fingers in she hauls herself up. The muscles in her limbs threaten to go out. Bracing her elbow against the edge she pushes up and rolls herself onto the higher ground. Her heart thuds heavily in her chest as she catches her breath.

The light. Green along the ground. A peek of blue.

She half-walks, half-stumbles out from the innards of the cave. The clearness of the air overtakes her. She finds herself running, invigorated, nearly soaring over the ground. The enclosed tunnel above her gives way to the vastness of a blue sky. Her bare feet touch grass. Blades of grass, poking her to tickle the bottom of her feet, to cushion her footfalls. The wind that caresses her face and runs through her hair. The trees swaying under the same caress. The fragrance of the world.

A cliffside.

She pants and every lungful frees her further. At the edge the entire earth falls away beneath her to slope down in an endless sea of green. Trees. A lake further beyond. And there, in the centre of her view, a massive structure looming over the horizon, quiet, immutable, imposing upon the heart of the world.

Her head spins. To the right rises a spine of mountains piercing the heavens. To the left, in the distance, waits something like a massive thunderhead that does not move. Below her the plains roll forward in the gentle wind.

She has not words enough for all she sees but one burns at the tips of her fingers. She signs the word to herself, touching her hand to her cheek, to her eye, to the centre of her chest, a path she has shaped over and over in her life.

*Home.*

She stands on the cliffside for a long, long time.

The rumble of her stomach leads her away. She spots a tree heavy with spring apples down the hill. As she walks she scoops a fallen tree branch from the ground. Absentmindedly she strips the branch of twigs and leaves to leave something resembling a wooden stick. Her left arm goes through familiar motions, horizontal swings, vertical arcs, a forward jab.
Something to practise daily.

She fits the boots onto her feet. Standing, she taps the toe of her left boot against the ground. Something jingles by her hip. The trousers. Pockets. She reaches within the right to find a thin blue band. Her fingers move instinctively, to tie back her hair into a ponytail behind her head, secured with the band. Within the left she finds two hard blue circles and again her hands rise up automatically to open them and clip them in the lobes of her ears.

She faces the tree. The leather belt includes a loop at the back in which she slots her stick. She scales up to catch herself on the lowest branch.

She stretches out. The apple, round and red, sits in the curve of her palm. Dropping down from the tree she bites down and the sweetness brings wetness to her eyes. She eats in shade of the apple tree. The juices run down her chin.

The tree runs short of spring apples and her stomach runs short of room. She wipes her mouth on the back of her hand. Presently her throat burns. Somewhere close must reside the lake she spotted earlier.

Viewing her surroundings from the top of the tree she notes where the woods thin. She sets off in that direction down the hill. A stump—or rather, the long rusted handle of the axe embedded in the stump—gives her pause. From the handle hangs a satchel, the material softened by time but still usable. She unties the satchel and slings it over her shoulder.

As she walks she watches the ground. The tracks of animals reveal the existence of boars. Birds flitter by in the trees. When she follows one such bird on its flight to the next treetop her gaze alights on the mushroom growing by the roots.

Not poisonous. She harvests it from the ground and places it in her satchel. Onwards. More mushrooms along the way. Another apple tree fills the remainder of her satchel.

As she continues her downwards hike the forest levels out and then abruptly ends. Just beyond: the lake, broken up into several large ponds. On the other shore a strange domed structure protrudes upwards, decorated with a similar pattern to the tablet she carries. Closer to her a golden spire sticks from the ground, holding up the entrance to some kind of cave. To her right, on her side of the lake but a fair walk away, looms a building. The outer surfaces crawl with ivy. Strange weathered statues litter the walls and nearby.

She kneels by the lake. Her knees sink into the yielding soil of the bank. Cupping her hands, she drinks. Fish dart beneath the mirror of the lake. She lunges for one and splashes into the water. Collecting the mushrooms and apples that float out of her satchel takes her enough time to teach her not to catch fish with her hands.

The building draws her. She trots off to it. The statues reach long arms up to the sides of the building. Most of one wall and half of the roof have broken, leaving the insides to the elements. She enters through the broken wall. The weathered white stone within yields little information. At the end of what once must have been a massive chamber she sees an altar. Three depressions line the front of the altar, the scratches within indicating that three things must once have decorated the altar and been pried out. Beyond the altar stands a circle of seven statues, at its head a winged woman. One wing has broken off. The weathered face shows a kindly smile yet, matching the long gazes and wise smiles of its sister statues. Further behind that, a broken wall reveals a second chamber, seemingly empty save for a vacant crater in the floor.

She traces her finger over the inscriptions on the altar below the carved-out depressions. Symbols,
letters. Blowing the dust from them she struggles to make them out. For a moment she simply
stares at the characters to make sense of them. Then—as if struck by a flash of clarity—the
inscription resolves itself into words.

Hyrule, protected beneath the Light of the Golden Goddesses,

Farore - Nayru - Din

and held in the loving embrace of the Seven,

Hylia - Sageru - Sheik - Kokir - Goro-goro - Zola - Erito

we are Your People, and we thank You for our lives and our peace.

Below the inscription lies a golden triangle with the heart missing. Gazing at the gold, she lowers
herself to her knees.

She bows her head. She stills her breaths. She waits. She listens to the faint beat of her heart. She
prays without words or thought.

The moment passes. She rises. Placing her palm against the golden triangle, she nods to the
Goddesses and Their broken altar. When she turns back around she observes a metal chest waiting
between the rows of pews.

Its contents reveal a wooden bow with a brown-tan quiver of arrows alongside a pouch of flint. She
straps the bow to her back and finds space for the quiver below. The pouch of flint slings across
her hips.

Further investigation turns up a collection of parchment and a tube in which to hold them, rolled
up, on her back. Another satchel, small, containing lead pencils, ink, nibs, and a short ruler. She
takes those along with her.

She quits the temple. On the journey back to the lake she notices a sword wedged in a gap of one
of the statues. Grasping the hilt with both hands she pulls. She lands on her rear, sword in hand.
Though the hilt has rusted, the blade seems sharp enough to function for now.

Approaching the lake from another angle brings her close to the golden spire. Not a cave at all. A
landfall appears to have collapsed onto the inside of the small spire, blocking access save for one
side. She peers down. The floor of the spire extends about a metre and half into the ground. And
there, in the centre: another of those pedestals like those in the chamber where she awoke.

The blank space on the face.

She crouches on the edge of the hole, then swings her body down. Her boots smack heavily on the
ground; a hollow sound rings through the structure. She knocks her knuckles against the rocks
wedged into the open space between the platform and the roof of the spire. They seem steady.

The tablet slides into the open space. No reaction. She moves to slip it back out when the pattern
along the surface flashes orange, then a blue bright enough that she stumbles backwards, eyes
stinging.

The structure shakes. She catches herself on the pedestal, desperately floundering to rip the tablet
up from the pedestal before the spire sinks her into the earth or collapses entirely.

A sudden force throws her to the floor as though an invisible hand had slammed into her chest.
Gasping she stares up. The spire rises. Grass to sky. Clouds passing at an alarming rate.

The ascent slows. As soon as she can move she scrambles to her feet. When the spire stops, the impact jolts her a half-centimetre from the floor. Lights blaze blue over a great black crystalline structure just above the pedestal. Symbols shimmer on the facets of the crystal, though not in a language she can read. Liquid gathers at the point.

It drips onto the tablet. The tablet lights up. It rises up from the pedestal, and she can see the underside glowing as well. Hesitantly she picks the tablet and flips it over in her palm.

The tablet goes dark, then light. Symbols unrecognisable to her blink on the surface. The tablet makes a noise and darkens once more. She returns it to the pouch at her hip.

When she lifts her head to look out at the world around her with the spire raised, she faces a multitude of orange towers in the distance. High above the land, carved into the clouds. Her mouth opens involuntarily.

She backs away from the edge. She forces herself to breathe. Then she looks, again.

High up. Ridiculously high up, so high that leaping from the structure would take her minutes to descend to the ground, and there to splatter into blood and bone. Yet she spies strange platforms dotting the sides of the tower at regular intervals, spiralling around.

From her vantage point she surveys the land around her. A vaguely oval-shaped plateau. She unfurls one of the lengths of parchment from the tube. In the centre she sketches the plateau and begins to fill in what landmarks she can stop from her present viewpoint. Mountains, there, icy. A river. Something that resembles a cabin, possibly. The strange structure on the other shore of the lake, and similar structures scattered throughout. She marks four. The woods. The chamber where she awoke. The lake. The temple with its broken altar.

Curling the parchment up again she pauses to munch an apple. Then she begins her descent. Carefully she drops off of each platform. The material down the sides of the tower consists of a metal—possibly metal, though not cool to the touch, but the same temperature as the palm of her hand—grating that she can climb down. The exertion leaves red marks deep in the flesh of her fingers.

She rests. Another apple. She tries a mushroom. Earthy, she finds, yet satisfying. She pats the satchel. Half-empty.

Onwards, and onwards. The sun moves down with her as she drops from platform to platform. Eventually she can spot the end. A few more. A few more. Ten to go. Nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, slip.

She misses the third platform from the bottom. Her hands slap the edge as she flails but her fingers bounce harmlessly off the curved surface. She falls.

The impact knocks the wind from her lungs and slams her knees into her chin. Her jaw sings out in pain along with her head. Woozily she starts to rise to her feet, discovers the migraine throbbing at her temples, and lies back down.

She holds her head in both hands, face-down in the dirt. At least her body cushioned the fall of the items on her back and the satchel at her hip. The grass pokes at her face. The wind ruffles her hair. The scent of the earth settles in her bones.

An insect buzzing near her ear prompts her to turn her head and open her right eye. A grasshopper,
hopping through grass. Its wings flicker from its back. She observes the grasshopper near her. Its antennae twitch. She puffs out a breath towards it and the grasshopper becomes absolutely still for a second prior to speeding away with all the haste that its tiny wings can give it.

A sound rumbles up from her stomach. It erupts from her throat as a laugh. She lies face-down on the ground, body aching, muscles hurting, regarding the grasshopper's escape, and she cannot stop laughing.

Her shoulders shake. Each time the mirth subsides she doubles up again in laughter. The edges of her mouth curve upwards in a grin that crinkles the corners of her eyes. As she laughs a blade of grass rubs the underside of her nose, and she sneezes with such force that she laughs all the harder.

She lives. She breathes. Her heart beats. Her body moves. *She is alive.*

No matter what else, these remain true.

By the time her head has ceased spinning and the laughter has left her with a goofy smile, she notices the sun dangerously low in the sky. Gold sinks through the forest and ushers liquid light over the lake.

A place to sleep.

The rusted axe. She embarks up the hill to locate the stump. Near the stump lies an overturned log with a protective overhang jutting out above it: a place to spend the night.

She struggles with the heft of the axe, her muscles unaccustomed to its weight. Still she chops down three smallish trees and breaks them up into variously sized pieces of firewood. Her arms ache. She drags them towards the overturned log. When she fumbles with the flint found in the temple no fire catches.

Grass. Blades of grass, sprinkled in a dry heap. This time, when she strikes the flint with the flat of the blade, sparks dance over the snippets of grass and take hold. She puffs breath onto the tiny ember until it roots into a steady fire that wards off the encroaching dark.

She slips the stick from her belt. Holding the branch and the blade at awkward angles she sharpens the tip of the stick and taps it against the log. From her satchel she produces mushrooms and apples. Using the flattened top of the log, she cuts them into thick, uneven chunks. By her fourth mushroom her slices have become somewhat passably even. She slides the chunks onto the tip of the stick, alternating mushroom and apple.

Her first attempt at holding the stick over the fire leads to the chunks burning to a crisp. The second attempt goes more smoothly. Those at the tip still burn, but the remainder has gone soft and juicy. She bites, chews, swallows. The sweetness of the apples balances the earthy, savory taste of the mushrooms.

The combination warms her belly. She inhales; the smell waters her mouth and she takes another bite.

A voice. The voice of a girl with golden hair sitting across from her, holding a skewer of fruit and mushroom over a campfire, studying a sheet of paper, hand closed around the golden and violet charms at her throat, raising her head. Looking directly at her. Saying a word.

Saying her name.

She blinks and shakes her head. The memory dissipates. When she finishes eating, she piles on
firewood, trying to estimate the lengths of the flames and the night. Then she curls herself up by the fire with the satchel under her head.

The stars shine a path to the land of slumber. She follows.

The girl with the golden hair, saying *her* name.

*Link.*

—

*Fruit and Mushroom Skewer* (two hearts) - apple, hylian shroom

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Thus begins *Delicious in Wilds*, which was written from 01 June 2017 to 24 August 2017. Eighty-four chapters in eighty-four days. I would like to thank my marvelous beta reader, Emma, for having dealt with me over the past eighty-four days and continuing to deal with me now.

I originally intended to plan *Delicious in Wilds* chapter-by-chapter, yet I ended up beginning to write shortly after wrapping up *adrift*, based on *Link's Awakening*. As such, *Delicious in Wilds* was written by the seat of my pants, with me not knowing what the next chapter held until I sat down to cook a meal for it. Perhaps partially due to *adrift*'s influence, as well as Link's own memory-less awakening, I adopted a somewhat dreamier style. I strove to differentiate this Link from those I have written previously. I chose to make Link left-handed instead of right; thus, Link carries the slate on the right hip rather than the left.

It may appear strange that the chests left near the shrine seem untouched despite their age; however, I do have an explanation prepared later in the story.

Seeing all of Hyrule for the first time left quite an emotional impact on me, which I wanted to accurately capture. Link signs the word for *home*, based partially on the ASL sign, which involves lifting your hand to your mouth and eye to indicate where you eat and sleep. Dialogue spoken out loud is recorded in unitalicised text; dialogue signed, in italicised text.

I patterned the Temple of Time after that in *Ocarina of Time*, notably not my most-beloved Zelda title. This chapter introduces the *Delicious in Wilds* cosmology. While the Golden Goddesses Farore, Nayru, and Din are worshipped in some form or fashion near ubiquitously, different parts of Hyrule have their own local religions and faiths. Many worship of the Seven Goddesses, who are regarded as the progenitors and patrons of the seven major races of Hyrule.

Regarding the names of the Goddesses: Hylia comes from the franchise directly; Sageru comes from the "Goddess of the Sand" worshipped by the gerudo in *Ocarina of Time*, as well as the prefix "sa" common to the language spoken by the gerudo people in *Breath of the Wild*; Sheik comes from Zelda's disguise in *Ocarina of Time*;
Kokir comes from the "kokiri" who became the koroks in the backstory of *The Wind Waker*, the latter being seen in *Breath of the Wild*; Goro-goro refers to the gorons' tendency to end their sentences with "goro" in the Japanese, as well as referencing the onomatopoeia of gorogoro (ゴロゴロ) for rolling rocks; Zola comes from the mistransliteration of "zora" in the English manual for *The Legend of Zelda*; and Erito is a phonetic portmanteau of "air"/"airy" and rito.

Link has been compared or linked, no pun intended, to grasshoppers throughout the franchise, such as Romani's nickname for Link in *Majora's Mask*. I thought it appropriate, therefore, to have a green grasshopper indicate Link's aliveness.

The first food I cooked was a fruit and mushroom skewer. The first memory Link remembered would have to have impact, and you'll see us return to the memory a few times to expand upon it. Note, too, the golden and violet charms around the speaker's throat; those will come into play at a later date.

Link remembers here the first clue to an identity: a name. Names, as you'll find out, become a crucial aspect of *Delicious in Wilds*, with one particular name held off until the very end. The journey, I hope, will be well worth it. Thank you for reading; see you topside.


Beta reader's comments: Looking back now, it strikes me how different this chapter, and the few that follow it, are from the rest of the series. It's so much more lighthearted and meandering (not at all in a bad way, mind you) than the rest of it, which ended up very character-driven. It's actually that which makes it a really fun chapter in my eyes. It's really relaxing. The rest of the series is my Final Fantasy, and these first few chapters are my Rune Factory. I love it, but I also love what the series develops into. I think the fact that it starts off so meandering but becomes more focused is a very good thing; it's a great tonal shift that's paced really well.

Fun fact: The memory at the end, the very first memory in the series, is my favourite memory. Its abruptness makes it stick out really clearly to me. It feels really significant in its short length, if that makes sense. The scene with the grasshopper and the "home" scene are also some of my favourite scenes. Odd that a chapter I definitely wouldn't consider an absolute favourite has so many of my favourite little bits.

Spicy Pepper Steak

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef visits four strange orange structures that lead the chef through curious puzzles and appear to unlock powers the "tablet's" powers. The chef remembers a girl who smelled of horses. After venturing towards icy mountains to the south and stealing a bokoblin's furred clothing, the chef comes upon a cabin in the wood and falls asleep within.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

A loud snort shudders her awake. Link springs to her feet to come face-to-face with a boar rooting through the grass by the ashen remains of the fire. The boar ceases in its motions, its ears pricked upwards. She draws her blade, the knuckles of her left hand whitening with the severity of her grip. Then the boar continues its rooting.

Gathering her satchel, Link carefully backs away from the campsite and the fallen log. She unfurls the map drawn from the top of the tower. A nearby tree serves as a perch while she marks her area.

As she passes by a berry bush, she stops to pick a handful. She pops them one by one into her mouth. The sweet-tart juice slides stickily down her throat.

Link drinks again from the lake. The structure across the water gleams yellowish in the light of dawn. Another tower could steeple from the earth, with no guarantee of a way down.

Though now the structure glows where before the patterns lay inert. She fills up her satchel with mushrooms, apples, and berries gathered from the nearby woods, tests the sharpness of her sword, and picks up a branch to serve as a suitable club.

She walks along the bank. Fish flip through the water. A bird flies off when she nears. The structure appears larger on this side, about thrice her height. Hands on her hips she looks it up and down. A short overhang; a pedestal to the right identical to those she has seen before; and beyond that a circular pattern on the floor.

The action of slipping the tablet from its pouch and sliding it into its spot on the pedestal comes more easily to her now. The patterns blaze blue, the circular pattern on the floor shining most brightly of all. The structure hums; she grabs the tablet and bolts to tumble onto the grass. From this safe distance, she observes.

A transparent blue curtain surrounds the circular pattern. The structure does not move.

Link waits. She counts the time passing with the repetitive caws of nearby birds.

She approaches. The tablet in her hand hums, warm against her flesh. Testing the curtain of light with the back of her hand, she detects no heat. When she pokes the tip of her sword into the curtain nothing occurs, except that the blade reflects the light.

Faintly smiling now, Link enters the curtain of light. Abruptly the platform rumbles and she jumps
up, startled. She turns to step back out but then faces forward again, briefly clenching her hand. The platform descends. Darkness and silence, broken solely by the faint curtain of light around her. The platform moves along. She tracks its movement with her sword against the circular wall, the upwards pull a signal of her continual descent.

The platform slides into a brightly lit room. A small chamber. To the left at the back: a pedestal with a black crystal above. A metal square occupies the centre of the floor. The platform slows, stops. The curtain around her dims into nothingness.

Link steps out.

A voice—though not the same voice as the one in the chamber in which she awoke—greets her, everywhere and nowhere at once. It resonates through the floors, walls, ceilings. The words pass by beyond her understanding.

The pedestal, however, does not. Again strange characters flash over the crystal, and again a droplet splashes into the eye at the heart of the tablet. When she plucks the tablet from the face of the pedestal, the tablet surface continues to glow. She regards the tablet. A curved red symbol appears. She touches the symbol with the tip of her finger. The surface blanks out, then flashes back on to display the floor as if that rectangle had been cut out from the tablet, save for the translucent overlay. Link tilts her head to one side. She lifts the tablet up and about. No change that she can see: the rectangle has become akin to a window. She passes the tablet over the square in the floor. The metal viewed through the tablet glows a lurid pinkish-red, yet remains dark grey when she looks around the tablet to look at the metal with her own eyes.

Something flashes for a second on the tablet. Link blinks at the rectangle she holds. She swings it about in an effort to get the flash again. When she orients the crosshairs onto the metal square it flashes again, the crosshairs becoming a red circle that blinks.

She waits. Nothing. Gripping the tablet tightly in her right hand she taps the circle with her left. The metal square glows yellow. She can hear the square clank quietly, but otherwise nothing occurs.

When she moves her hand up to relieve her wrist of cramps, she finds the square rising into the air. Bewildered, she steps back; the square follows, floating. The tablet. She rotates it about and the square responds to her movements. Link sets the square down carefully on the ground beside the hole. She wriggles the tablet to stop the function, and the metal square grinds along the floor. A few experimental taps later she discovers that touching the crosshairs renders the metal pink again, and the square inert.

The shenanigans have revealed a square-shaped hole in the centre of the floor. The sound of running water beneath prompts her to drop carefully down the ladder. She walks forward. A metal board serves as a ramp up to a higher platform, then as a bridge to the next, and then the next. Something about the steady progress forward to a pair of metal doors along the far wall feels out of touch with reality—with the world of stone and grass above—yet her curiosity spurs her onwards.

A whirring somewhere behind her snaps her to attention. She looks over her shoulder to spot a strange creature scuttling towards her on many legs, an overgrown arachnid half her height. The size prompts her blade to leap to her hand.

The creature's eye—or something like an eye—shines white-blue. A spark of blue fire shoots outwards towards Link's feet, where it leaves a singed mark in the material of the platform.

Link stares at the creature. When its eye beams again she swings the metal board in front of her in
lieu of a shield. She takes steps towards it. The creature pings uselessly against the thick metal.

If she can trap it on a corner of the platform she could leave it on the other side of the board, or crush the creature entirely if need be. A sudden skittering. She listens: a splash, a buzz. Carefully she peers over the edge of the board.

The creature, now obviously of a mechanical nature, lies still in the running water. A loose screw floats. Link cautiously leans over the edge to scoop the screw up. She holds it up. A screw, but not metal. Nor stone nor wood nor any material save for the smoothness of the tablet, the spire, the chamber in which she awoke.

In anticipation of other such creatures—perhaps guardians of whatever treasure waits ahead, or perhaps guardians of the treasure already obtained for her tablet—she hurries on. The metal doors open.

On the other side she can see a great cube-shaped curtain of light similar to the circular one from before. The voice returns. Slow and steady. She approaches the curtain. A barrier prevents her from simply walking forward. When she reaches through the curtain it does not allow her fingers through but shatters entirely.

The voice continues. Images—flat, like mirages—flicker on the platform formerly surrounded by the cube-shaped curtain. A figure holding up a tablet not unlike her own. She observes the figure move the tablet up and about. Another picture indicates the crosshairs. The figure lifts objects made of metal, but shakes its head at rocks, at trees, at living beings, at one of the mechanical guardians, at a block made of something she cannot identify. Perhaps the size, or the weight.

Instructions for what she has already figured out.

The images repeat. She turns away, and the voice changes, says a few more words, and quiets. Part of the floor glows. She steps onto those tiles, and the platform moves frictionlessly over the ground. In awe she watches it go until it takes her back to where she entered.

Link steps onto the circle of light. It takes her up.

The instant she can taste fresh air she runs out to stretch her legs. Lake water soothes her throat. She splashes it over her face in wonder for all that has happened.

She takes an apple from her satchel and nibbles on it as she sits idly at the shore. Something in which to carry water. Perhaps if she could empty a pouch, or find another somewhere on the plateau.

Perhaps if she left the plateau.

Link takes a peek over the cliffside to find a steep drop farther than her body might safely take. Perhaps elsewhere a gentler slope exists. For now she turns back.

She leaves the structure now glowing blue on the shore. With tablet in hand she wanders around the ponds, seeing what she had lift out of the waters with the tablet. She grins to herself every time she fishes something out, useless iron boards and all. In the distance a thin line of metal, on the far side of the temple she visited earlier—she has seen another, smaller lake there, with a high hill above it—takes her away from the lake. Her smile widening further Link lopes up the hill with an easy stride.

Nearing the temple she spots another one of those structures. From the top of the spire she saw it in the labyrinthine remains of the walls of a complex that must have once stood proud by the temple.
She clambers over a wall towards the structure, then hops another.

Orange.

Confidently she awakens the structure with the tablet and descends down on the platform. Another black crystal.

This time, alongside the red symbol appear two blue ones: a circle and a square. She taps the circular one first, and atop the surface of the tablet a blue sphere appears.

She starts backwards. The sphere drops to the floor and rolls away from her. The surface of the tablet retains the three symbols, though now the blue circle has lit up and blinks at her. Below the symbols a larger white circle has appeared, this one blinking more rapidly.

Link walks one step at a time towards the ball. She picks it up and it sits, shockingly light for its size, in the palm of her hand. She taps the blue circle and the sphere vanishes, the white circle fading with it. Another tap. The ball and the white circle reappear.

She tries the white circle.

The impact slams her into the floor. Her nose cracks; the stench of blood fills her mouth. Her left shoulder and hip—which took the brunt of her fall—throb agonisingly. She curls inwards on herself. Her vision smears and doubles. She lets the waves of pain crash over her again and again. When it settles into a dull rhythm on her nerves, she sits up and waits for her head to cease pounding. Lifting a hand to her nose she wipes the wet blood from her upper lip.

Though the apples and mushrooms in her satchel remain in one piece, she cannot say the same about the berries, which have smooshed against the sides. She takes the time to scoop out what mush she can and slurp it up.

She'll clean the inside later. The repetitive motion clears her vision and settles her stomach.

When Link regards the tablet now she throws the ball to the opposite side of the chamber. She races to the other side. She touches the white circle.

An explosion. A bomb.

Her nosebleed continues, unabated, as she finds her way through the maze comprising the inside of the structure. The circle produces spherical bombs that roll; the square, cubic ones that stay flat on the ground. The final chamber, again, rolls through instructions in a language she cannot comprehend.

She takes the lift up.

When she exits she notes a massive rock wedged in-between two walls of the complex. Link places a cubic bomb at the base of the stone and walks back towards the structure. She detonates the bomb.

The rock cracks. The explosion pushes it away, clearing a path. She gazes at the statue visible through the opened wall, similar to the statues around the temple. The tops of the statue look like they should spin in the wind, she notes to herself with a smile, and makes her way out.

When she passes by the statue, it hums. Link turns her head towards it.

Blue.
A single blue eye.

Link sprints towards the nearest wall. Her knees smack painfully against the edge as she throws herself over it. The bolt of blue fire arches over the top of the wall. She flattens herself against the wall, panting.

The statue whirs and chirps for a few seconds more. Silence. Link wheezes, her hand over her chest.

She sets off towards the lake, where she dumps the contents of her satchel out and scrubs the insides.

A grey pigeon lands near the apples and mushrooms on the bank. The bird lazily picks at one of the apples. As quietly as possible, her movements deliberate and steady, Link draws the bow from her back and notches an arrow.

She looses it.

The arrowhead pierces the ground. The pigeon has flown off. She plucks the arrow from the earth and, checking it for defects, slides it back into the quiver.

Link studies the map, glances at the other two locations she marked on the top of the tower. Both of them in the snowy mountains that ridge the plateau. She runs a finger over the parchment, nods to herself, and gets to walking.

She takes her trek at a leisurely pace, stopping frequently to jot down the boundaries of the woods, the places of particularly tall trees, the existence of a seemingly animated boulder that she stumbles upon, watches awaken, and avoids. When she spies a campsite surrounded by strange red creatures with an assortment of shields and weapons beside them, she encircles the area on the map and sneaks around them. The creatures burst out cheering, or roaring, or both. Link looks back to see two of them carrying a boar over their heads. Another red creature pulls a horn from its belt and blows it, which summons the attention of the entire aggregate. After some preparation the creatures lash the boar to a massive spike. She squats down behind a rock and peers at them. They set the boar up over a fire. Two of the creatures rotate the boar about in unison while the others dance around the pit. One of them flings a wooden pot lid in its excitement. It lands near enough to the stone behind which Link hides that she risks peeking out for a second to nab it. Solid enough to serve as a shield. She continues to watch. When they take the boar down and rip into the meat, her own stomach grumbles.

Stuffing her face with an apple, she faces the mountains once more.

The air grows colder the higher she hikes. In a gap between two great mountains rearing up into the clouds she finds a pass, long and thin. Her boot crunches snow. The chill raises cuccoflesh along her skin. Her teeth chatter; her muscles shiver; the ice sinks into her bones.

Red catches her attention. A clump of plants near where the snow begins. Peppers. By some inkling deep in the recesses of a foggy bank she can almost taste the heat contained within. She strips herself of as much weight as she can, then runs across the white with only her satchel. Sweat breaks out on the back of her neck. The immediate cold freezes the slope of her shoulders and down her spine. Her fingers stiffen. She harvests as many of the peppers as will fit.

On the race back down Link grabs her things. The warmer clime down the mountain does little to ease the chill embedded within her skin. She finds her way back to the campsite from the previous night. The axe remains where she left it, leaning against the overturned log.
Shaking hands let go of the flint. On the second try the newly cut grass catches fire. Link plops herself cross-legged before the fire. The warmth radiates. She leans forward.

Closing her eyes, she soaks up the heat.

When the shivers subside, she spills the peppers onto the bed of leaves beside her and regards them. Link picks one up from the pile. She sniffs experimentally; her eyes water. She licks the surface, pauses, and bites down.

The race to the lake leaves her breathless. She skips at the bank and drops to her knees. Without stopping to inhale she dunks her entire head into the water and drinks.

She gasps for breath. Her bangs and forelocks plaster to her face. She splashes water over herself. The front of her shirt sticks to her chest.

Link breathes out.

She pats a rhythm on her knees with her hands while she considers how best to prepare the peppers. She glances at her reflection in the water. Brown hair frames her features. A slightly downwards sloping nose sticks crookedly—not yet healed from the earlier strike—beneath her eyes, the lashes thick and dark. She grins at herself. She touches her hand to her face, cocks her head to one side, pokes out her tongue, makes faces. She laughs at herself until she starts coughing from her own uncontrollable laughter.

Picking herself up from the ground she starts back up to her campsite.

Link pauses at the edge of the clearing.

On the log near the campfire perches a fat pigeon, facing away from her for now. The bird does not move. Her gaze flickers onto the bow near the other end of the log. She crouches down onto the leaves. She tries not to breathe. Her hand reaches for the upper limb of the bow. She winces at the rustling of the leaves as she drags the bow—and the quiver hooked to its lower limb—towards her.

Now she aims more carefully.

Though the pigeon breaks into a flurry of movement, the arrow strikes through its throat. Link springs up, takes two long strides, and grabs the bird with both hands as she snaps its neck to ensure a quick death.

She holds the bird in both hands. She seats herself by the fire. Then, thinking better of it, she carries the pigeon into the woods a far distance from the campsite. The feathers come out easily from the still-warm body. Wielding her sword as an awkward stand-in for a knife, she slits the pigeon vertically to remove the intestines, the crop, the bony windpipe. She leaves them in a fleshy pile for now. Wrinkling her nose she skins the remainder of the fowl and drains the blood onto the grass.

Link comes back to the campsite. She rests the pigeon onto the log momentarily while she quarters the peppers and removes the remaining seeds with a fingernail. Link stuffs the fowl with the peppers and closes the bird's meat as best she can. She glances between the stuffed fowl and the fire.

Branches, branches.

She uses the axe to chop down some of the branches from the nearby trees. Finding some of an
appropriate thickness and length, she sets up something resembling the spit that the red creatures had. A sharp, thinner branch becomes the skewer. Link tests the weight of the branches stuck in the ground, and they stay mostly upright.

She stands by the spit and rotates it. The red creatures swirl behind her lids when she closes her eyes.

"Bokoblins." A girl smelling of hay. Golden-brown hair curls up over her forehead. A cube of sugar in her hand. Green eyes wet in lamplight. Her arms moving to form the words on her fingers. "Some of the bokoblins have been taking the horses, Link, since the last time you were here. Be careful when you're out delivering, all right? I wish I could travel by your side. My father..."

Her gesture blur until Link can no longer make them out. She shakes her head.

The scent of fowl fills her nose. She inhales deeply. Her belly aches. Link lifts the spit up from the branches. When she looks down she notices that the sticks in the ground have leaned over. One falls unceremoniously.

She stifles a snicker. The meat steams up. Her stomach claws in emptiness. Link takes a plunk down onto the log. Putting one boot over the other she bites into the fowl. The heat of the peppers warms up her body. The flame rises up her back, her neck, her face. She exhales and almost expects smoke to billow up out of mouth. Blood reddens her cheeks and the tips of her fingers.

Link leaps, slams a foot onto the log, and whips out her sword to point it towards the mountains. Onwards, she signs to herself.

It takes her a moment to realise that she has set off in the wrong direction.

She brings the fowl with her and nibbles on the trek up. The heat continues to course through her. Though the snow chills her skin the peppers stave off the worst of its effects.

She makes her way upwards to she spotted the first of the structures. A better name for them. As she walks she collects more peppers that sprout here and there amid the ice. Snow lines her boots and melts around her feet.

Screeches to her right alert her to the existence of leather-winged keese. They track her with long ears and almost longer fangs hanging from their grotesquely wide maws. The sword makes quick work of them. She leaves them in the ice.

The fowl can only last her so long.

The sight of orange propels her forward. Onwards she hikes, up and up.

The tablet brings the lift to life. She descends. The warmth buoyed her and she steps out.

 Appropriately enough the symbol on her tablet, a light blue in the shape of a snowflake, allows her to create pillars of ice from water. As the surface freezes over and floats up, the water directly below freezes as well, into a sizeable column. She scales a waterfall, faces down another of the strange guardians of the symbols, and takes her leave at another panel of instructions.

As the lift returns her to the surface the cold air curls around her. Her eyes widen. Unprotected from the chill Link rolls off of the platform into the snow. Ruins on the side of the mountains. She could take shelter there, could attempt to cook another dish.

A pillar of ice becomes her support up. Link climbs in through a cracked window free of glass. The
second her boots hit the floor she hears grunts from the floor below. The wooden door of the room has partially rotted away and fallen from its hinges. She pelts down the hallway only to find a lone blue bokoblin, dressed in furs, at the top of the stairs.

It looks at her. She looks at it. It fumbles for a horn at its belt, the same kind of horn she saw call bokoblins at the boar feast earlier. She charges headlong into it and tackles it down the stairs. They tumble downwards. Her fingers close around the horn. Its claws hook into her skin. Her shoulders and hips pound against the stairs repeatedly. Its head slams into the steps. She wrests the horn from its grip just as they spill out onto the main floor. Holding it up over her head like a prize she laughs to herself.

Her grin freezes as she finds herself looking at the dozen bokoblins ogling her. One, in the middle of eating, drops its skewer of meat.

Link grabs the collar of the furs of the unconscious bokoblin by her feet and yanks it off of the bokoblin.

Then she runs.

The bokoblins mob after her. She pelts down the corridors of the ruins, head snapping left and right as she seeks a way out. Grabbing her satchel she overturns it behind her. The yells of bokoblins behind her brings a lopsided grin to her face despite the danger. A puff of cold cause her to veer right from a closed doorway. She hears bokoblins smash into the door.

There. There, light, white. Freedom.

Link snags the pot lid affixed to the strap of the satchel. She counts her strides forward. Just as she passes the threshold she leaps up, bending her knees up towards her chest, and slips the cord attached to the pot lid's back over her boots. The impact nearly knocks her forward but she throws out her arms to balance. The pot lid holds.

She speeds down the icy hill quickly enough that it takes all of her concentrated efforts not to capsize herself into the snowdrift.

The bokoblins scream at her. She turns her head to wave at them. An arrow strikes the rock scarcely half a metre from her right, and she faces forward again, crouching down to go as rapidly as she can.

She leans into the bends. The frigid wind would water her eyes if not for her tears freezing on her own face. The pot lid tips. She crashes face-first into the snow. Spitting it from her mouth and sticking her tongue out, Link tugs the furs she took from the bokoblin out from under her arm. She wriggles inside. A touch small, the sleeves too short, but serviceable. Rubbing her hands together, Link stands up. She pauses to admire her handiwork, a thoroughly Link-like shape in the snowbank, her arms flailed out, her legs awkward and spread-eagled.

Link adjusts the furs over herself. She collects the pot lid, slings it over her shoulder to slide onto the strap again, and pats herself on the back. Still cold, and uncomfortably so, but not shivering so badly that lying down in the ice appears a better option than carrying on.

She taps out a rhythm with her boots as she walks. Occasionally her boot sinks into a snowdrift and she has to pull herself out. She finds herself turned about, but by now night has fallen. Her breaths whisper out in clouds as she leans against a rock. She whips out her map to consult it.

She traces an arc around the sky with her hand until the fixed star of the north sits on her open
palm. Aligning her body properly Link nods to herself, touching her chin.

Furling the parchment back up, Link tramps through the snow towards the fourth structure marked on her map from the top of the spire. The adrenaline fading from the bokoblin chase leaves her weary. She presses on.

Her arrival marks the appearance of a fifth symbol on the surface of the tablet. Yellow. She snaps her fingers: lightning. The tablet indicates a moving gear in gold. To turn the machinery on and off. She waits for the plank to make smooth land from one platform to the next. Strutting over it, Link busies herself with puzzling out how to proceed to stave off the fatigue beginning to weigh her down.

Then she comes upon a boulder, clearly not machinery, but indicated in yellow nonetheless. Perhaps inside. Link touches the boulder on the tablet and waits patiently. No reaction. She scratches the back of her head. Her ponytail bobs.

In frustration she lightly hits the base of the boulder with the heel of her boot. When the tablet displays an arrow her mouth opens.

She looks around. Her eyes narrow: a heavy sledgehammer against the wall. She grips the handle with both hands. Freezing the boulder in stasis again she rapidly shoves the tablet into the pouch and takes a swing.

When the stasis breaks the boulder flies off.

Link pumps her fist into the air. For having no understanding whatsoever of what the voices try to tell her, she hasn't done so shabby for herself.

The fourth structure glows blue. The moon rides overhead when she finally makes it back to the grassy woods.

The darkened skies bring her difficulty in reading the map. She considers making a fire by which to see but exhaustion leadens her limbs. Up ahead an oddly regular something or other blocks out light.

A cabin.

She trudges towards it. Dust clouds rise up when she tries the door and finds it open. She coughs. The dim light through the window reveals the shape of a bed. Without bothering to remove the furs Link collapses down.

The rest will come in the morning.

—

**Spicy Pepper Steak** (three hearts, low cold resistance for 03:00) - raw bird drumstick, spicy pepper

Chapter End Notes
pulling through in proofing this chapter and pointing out some early installment weirdness that I believe I have fixed. As Delicious in Wilds rooted in my head like a weed, the ideas in it changed and grew over time, so that some of the characters in their introductions are a bit different than they end up being.

This chapter was a blast to write. After writing the first chapter, I recall thinking to myself, "Am I really going to do this?" Then, after I wrote the second chapter, I thought to myself, "Oh hell yes I'm doing this." I adore adventure-y chapters. I sought to stress Link's natural inquisitiveness and interest in the world around her. Though Link is not well-educated and often conceives of herself as not very intelligent, she's very clever and exemplifies a certain worldly wisdom alongside a curiosity that makes her very fun to right.

One important note I have to readers is that this chapter introduces a character in a flashback who is actually lifted from a previous game in the franchise. Just as a "Beedle" exists in The Wind Waker, Phantom Hourglass, Spirit Tracks, and Breath of the Wild, or a "Malon" exists in Ocarina of Time, Oracle of Seasons, I believe Four Swords Adventures but could be wrong, and The Minish Cap, I pull characters from other Zelda games to flesh out the world. However, just as all of those "Beedles" and all of those "Malons" are separate characters (like every "Link" and every "Zelda" minus those obviously linked like The Legend of Zelda and The Adventure of Link), these characters in Delicious in Wilds are their own characters, i.e. if I were to include a Malon of my own, she has nothing to do with the Malon from Ocarina of Time or The Minish Cap except for her superficial appearance and other such traits.

You also do not need to have played the games to know the characters. I purposefully wrote them under the assumption that the reader has only played Breath of the Wild, if that, though I hope that Delicious in Wilds can stand alone.

I was not able to think of an adequate way to represent the Spirit Orbs in Delicious in Wilds (you can take a look at adrift for a story in which I do account for how heart containers work), so instead I made the shrines have instructions. Of course, they're in a language several thousand years old.

I sought to make the bokoblins cute but threatening, similar to their depiction in Breath of the Wild.

You'll note here that Link snaps her fingers. She does a few times throughout the story, and it's a mannerism she picked up from a certain someone.

Finally, this chapter is where I really started to develop the slapstick style of humour that comes to dominate Delicious in Wilds. I have a liking for good-natured slapstick that I was worried wouldn't work as well in text. I suppose it's up to you to determine how well I ended up translating the images in my head to the word.

Thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoyed.

midna's ass. 27 August 2017.

Beta reader's comments:

With this chapter begins a semi-recurring joke about spiciness, which makes me laugh every single time.
We first see a certain girl who smells of hay in this chapter. The evolution of her story is one of my most treasured parts of Delicious in Wilds, and this memory along with a later one are my very favourite parts of her story, for similar reasons to why I love the memory in chapter one so much.

I really love this series when it goes to cold places. That's kind of a weird specific thing, but I feel like the author nails the atmosphere. Plus, the scenes in the cold in this chapter are just so damn fun.

Emma. 27 August 2017.
Salt-Grilled Greens

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef finds that the previous owner of the wooden cabin left a letter intended for someone who happens to share the chef’s own name. Since the chef has nothing to do, the chef resolves to deliver the letter to the intended recipient in Kakariko Village. The chef takes the cooking pot from the cabin and sets off. The chef travels to the town of Kasuto, where a kind woman informs the chef that the chef speaks with the slang and mannerisms of an elderly person. The chef leaves Kasuto and begins to travel to Kakariko.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Yielding softness beneath her. A crick in her neck. Her left leg askew, hanging off of the side of the bed. Her right arm seemingly nonexistent. The second she lifts her head, feeling roars into her limb full-force, the prickle of static bringing her to flail her arm repeatedly until something resembling normal sensation returns.

Her gaze sweeps the room. The cabin. Everything covered in a thick layer of dust. Two windows, facing north and south, through which she can see the pale pink sky of early morning, already deepening to blue. The bed pushed up against the wall. A table with a chair, the top covered in papers, some of which have fallen to the floor. Another axe, similar to one she found near what became her designated campsite, leans against a wall beside a pair of sturdy boots. Clothing folded neatly on a dresser catches her eye, and Link sits up on the bed.

She checks around the cabin for signs of recent activity. Coughing from the dust, she opens the door to let in fresher air. Outside she finds a wooden bench, knocked-over, and nothing else. Nothing in the cabin appears to have stirred for some time.

When she picks up the clothes—several shirts, undergarments, trousers, gloves, socks, hoods—both on top of and within the dresser, she discovers the vast majority riddled with holes and others eaten away entirely. From the bottom-most drawer she pulls an iron chest. She salvages a dark blue hood that she wraps around her shoulders; a white undershirt; a quilted green tunic, thick and warm; and a pair of sturdy leather gloves lined with wool.

Despite the stale scent of the fabric, they smell better than the rotten-meat stench emanating from the bokoblin furs and fit her better besides. Link opts to leave the furs outside the door to the cabin so as not to stink up the small room within. She investigates further. Various tools line the walls, many of whose uses she could not name. She pockets a hunting knife and notes the location of a metal pot. Under the bed Link makes another discovery: a relatively flat locked safe. The lock has rusted enough that a swift kick snaps it off.

Setting the safe on the bed, Link lifts the lid. A jumble of red fabric and wood greets her. She takes the whatever-it-is from the safe and unfolds it, marvelling at its size. Wooden supports line the undecorated underside of the fabric, while the top presents a white-painted symbol she has seen somewhere before. A hard cylinder falls from the whatever-it-is and Link catches it: a thin
telescope the same red colour of the whatever-it-is's fabric, with a string-and-wooden attachment that loops through rings in the supports of the whatever-it-is.

When folded up the whatever-it-is takes up little space. A cord running between the supports suggests she carry the whatever-it-is about her shoulders for easy access.

The incessant rumbling of her stomach puts on hold her attempts to figure out the whatever-it-is's function. Link takes the whatever-it-is with her outside to gather, to hunt. Berry bushes by the woods near the cabin provide a snack. Climbing a tree for a better look at her surroundings yields a nest of eggs that she carries to the cabin.

Link hauls water from the lake in the pot. Her efforts at preparing the birds' eggs result in barely edible, over-boiled nonsense. Nonetheless she scarfs them down with gusto. A less delicious meal merely grants her the strength to cook a much more delicious one later, after all.

After responding her body's most immediate needs, Link rifles through the papers on the desk. A bound book contains a variety of handwritten songs and poems. She flips through a few, then sets the book aside and turns to the papers strewn about the desk and the floor. She finds that she cannot read the majority for want of words she does not understand; the handwriting, cramped and personal; and the fact most of the papers have been eaten away by time. Some proceed in a language she does not know. Many of the pages she can read detail the daily life of whoever lived in the cabin previously. Thoughts on hunting boars and fish. Where to find various insects, herbs, spices. The author describes the bokoblins and their behaviours, their habits, where they make their camp, how they have proliferated in number of late. Strangely, she sees the same phrases repeated over and over again, set apart at the beginning or end of entries. No activity today. I wonder when this 'hero' wake up. _ _ for you, I will stay here for as long as you need me to. The more recent entries, marked by their prominence on the desk and the comparative lack of yellowing and damage, take on a more somber tone, and the careful dates marking the start of each entry become less and less regular. The author asks She won't, will she? at the bottom of one page, and then the author ceases mentioning the mysterious 'she' altogether.

The oldest sheet she can find—judging by the date marked at the top, if she can assume how the author has written the date, and by the half-eaten nature of the parchment—lies hidden away in the bottom drawer of the desk.

Link stares at the words, or at least those that she can piece out.

I've checked on some of the gifts left for the 'hero' around the Great Plateau. The bokoblins mostly stay in certain areas and avoid others. I've seen none in the Temple of Time, and none in the immediate vicinity of the Shrine of Resurrection. Whatever sacred power compels them stay away will prove instrumental, I'm sure. I haven't yet thought of the best way to ensure the 'hero' receives the doublet, that dratted telescope, or the paraglider. I could put the paraglider near the Tower as _ _ suggested in the letters, but I've seen the bokoblins about, and there's no evidence they will still function, especially if the last sheikah slate defects as well.

Though I cannot get into the Shrine of Resurrection, I've done my part in leaving some clothing for _ _'s oh so precious knight. The last thing I want to see is the so-called Hero of Hyrule running around buck naked.

An entire paragraph here is scribbled out, illegible. Link's gaze drops downwards, seeking words she can read.

I have no idea what _ _ was thinking. I trust _ _, of course I do. But this all seems so incredibly silly to me. I could simply give the 'hero' all these instruments of heroism myself. But _ _ told me that _ _
voiced concerns about disorientation; it has been years already, and still the supposed hero has not awakened. A controlled environment is a must, so _ made me promise, so as not to overwhelm the Champion. Pah, if this could overwhelm our 'hero', then what chance has the Champion to defeat the Calamity? I don’t suppose that our great 'hero' gotten a smack on the head as well as all those injuries.

What if the supposed chosen hero wakes up and simply falls down a cliff? What if the supposed chosen hero is beaten to death by the reddest of red bokoblins? What if the supposed chosen hero fails to be the chosen hero at all? Would the blade of evil's bane forsake all of Hyrule for a single ranchhand? Has the sword that seals the darkness abandoned us on _ _'s wishes?

And yet, I cannot break my promise to _...

The remainder devolves into a scrawl. Link sets the paper down. The metal chests. The bow, the satchel, the ink and quills.

She sits on the edge of the bed and munches an apple.

The fruit does much to restore her balance. Link takes another look at the safe that held the paraglider and the telescope, still open on the bed. A black envelope. She opens it with the hunting knife to find a letter in a slightly different, loopier handwriting, though significantly easier to read. The letter seems written with different characters than the others, though Link finds herself able to comprehend them.

Champion of Hylia, Hero of Hyrule, Her Majesty's Knight, Courageous Link—

You will have found your paraglider in the same shape as that which you left it. I have taken the utmost care with it. It will see you safely from the Great Plateau.

Her Majesty has entrusted you with the last sheikah slate. If the slate responds to you, attempt to commune with the Great Plateau Sheikah Tower, and the four shrines. I have left a map on the back. Ensure that no monster ever touches the slate, nor does it fall into malice.

An unsteady hand has stricken through the next few paragraphs. Instead, in handwriting and with characters identical to those of the first pages Link read, a new paragraph scrawls in the margins:

Head to Kakariko. If you have never been to the plateau before, head east from the Tower and through the Dueling Peaks. Ask for a woman named Impa. She or her descendants will explain what has happened in the intervening time.

The letter resumes in the loopier, easier handwriting.

Do not tell anyone of your existence. Do not tell anyone who you are. This is of utmost importance. No fanfare surrounds your awakening for Her Majesty's request of secrecy.

Go quickly, with all of the courage, wisdom, and power that you may muster. Precious little time remains. Her Majesty needs you.

May the Golden Goddesses light your path, and may Our Goddess watch over you.

Link turns the letter over. Two maps on the back. One of the plateau, with the tower and the four shrines—the structures that she's seen—marked, alongside several major landmarks. The other, a far less detailed map that shows vague arrows pointing eastwards, a sketch labelled The Dueling Peaks, another sketch of what appear to be needles labelled Pillars of Levia, and a large circle near Lantern Lake labelled Kakariko Village. Link copies the names of the landmarks from the
back of the letter to her own map. She rolls the papers up.

The hero's paraglider.


She must have mistaken the girl from her memories, the girl with the golden hair and the skewer of fruit and mushroom. Link refers to someone else, someone for whom these words, these weapons, this task is meant.

She knows nothing of any of this.

Yet she has seen no one else on the entirety of the Great Plateau, and even this cabin—the first sign of life she has witnessed besides the buildings in ruins—has filled with the dust of ages unattended.

No one will come to claim the paraglider nor the telescope if she doesn't.

But Link. Surely not her name, except by way of coincidence. Yet she has nothing else to call herself, and so Link will do for now.

At the very least she can bear the news to this Impa at Kakariko Village. If nothing else that gives her something to work towards beyond the ache in her belly and the dryness of her throat.

She finishes sorting through what she can glean of the cabin. Flint, always useful. She exchanges her boots for sturdier ones, replaces the threadbare clothing with those in the best shape that she can find. The shirt and trousers she select hang somewhat loosely from her frame, their previous owner clearly bulkier and taller than she, and she ties off the sleeves at her wrists and the pants' legs at her ankles. A whetstone. More ink and blank parchment. Rope. Threads, a needle. More arrows, which she slots into her quiver. A water-skin that makes her grin. Several pouches that she sews onto her belt. Somehow her fingers go through the motions automatically: akin to the act of picking up an apple, the sewing simply comes to her hands despite no recollection of ever doing it before.

The metal pot, which she affixes to her back. The heaviness weighs her down, but for delicious meals on the road she would do most anything.

Link collects the paper and the book of poems and places them safely into the iron chest, where they might keep longer. She smooths out the covers on the bed. She glances around, tidies the cabin and the mess that she has made.

She stands in the doorway. Inhaling the mid-morning air Link steps a step east. The door closes.

Off she walks.

As she takes the journey to the eastern edge of the plateau, she collects herbs, mushrooms, apples, berries, acorns, whatever she can grab. In the meantime she reflects on how to best prepare birds' eggs for the next time she happens upon a nest.

The cliffside comes into view. As if the cliff were the end of the world, the land drops away. She detaches the telescope and ties the cord of the thin cylinder through the loops of her trousers to rest at her left hip.

Link unfolds the paraglider.
She should have practised, on the roof of the cabin or elsewhere. Yet she pushes forward. Walking towards the edge, then jogging, then running. She springs up, leaps.

The paraglider catches the wind. The draft breaks her fall, and also possibly her arms.

Suddenly supporting the entire weight of her body, the clothing, the sword, all of the various doodads she's stuffed into pouches, and the beloved metal pot with her spindly arms, still weak after rising from the chamber in which she awoke, does not seem like the best idea that she's ever had.

Link closes the paraglider. She hurtles towards the ground. Her eyes, already watering from the wind, widen further. By force she manages to open the paraglider again. Her arms burn. Her shoulders threaten to pop.

She tumbles to the ground into a patch of grass. The pot smacks the back of her head as though admonishing her. Link lifts herself up from the ground, rubbing where the pot hit her. The sight of the green grass smeared over the knees of her trousers makes her laugh. The laughter stops as she realises the implications of her fall.

In a frenzy she checks on the most important thing that she carries: the satchel of food.

Most has remained in one piece, barring a few unfortunate berries bumped by apples. Safe. She grins to herself.

Link re-ties her ponytail. Glancing up she looks eastward with the sun as her compass. A mountain rises up in the distance. Squinting, she makes out the split in the centre. Not one mountain, but two, curving into one another. As though a single peak has been cut down the middle.

The Dueling Peaks.

A massive river curves around to her left. Far off in the distance, by the left mountain of the Dueling Peaks, another of those spires pierces skywards.

Link trots forward. The ruins of destroyed buildings litter the ground, most inhabited by monsters. Mostly bokoblins, but she spots some of the larger moblins as well, sleeping in patches of sunlight. She avoids them as best she can. After some time she notices a long road—trampled out from the grasses surrounding it by the passage of travellers—that winds up to a bridge over the river. She marks the road, the river, and the bridge on her map and moves forward towards the Dueling Peaks.

As she crosses the bridge, she notes someone approaching her from the other side. Not a monster. A man with short brown hair, a sword at his hip and a shield at his back, walking with the relaxed gait of someone not expecting danger. He waves at her.

"Mornin', friend," he calls once she comes into earshot. "Haven't seen your face 'round these parts. You new?"

Link nods.

"Wha'cha lookin' for, buddy?" He stands with his hands on his hips. "I know these parts like the back of my hand, y'know."

She signs out the name of the village letter by letter: "Kakariko Village."

The man looks at her, frowning. She repeats the motion, more slowly this time, and he snaps his
fingers. "Aw, sorry there, but I don't know my signs like I should. You might find someone up at Kasuto who knows, though. Lotsa folks do. Let's see here...just go 'cross Proxim here, and keep on following Squabble River." He points her in the right direction. "You'll wanna go through the Dueling Peaks. On the other side, you'll see a pair of bridges. The short one's the Little Twin, and the long one's the Big Twin. On the other side of the Big Twin Bridge you'll find Kasuto on the road. Got all that, buddy?"

Link bobs her head eagerly, grinning at him. "Thank you," she signs before remembering he can't read the words off of her hands. Instead she touches her thumb to her index finger, making a circle in the common gesture for approval.

The man blinks at her, features contorting in confusion. Then he shrugs. "Take care of yourself out there, buddy. Hope to see 'round sometime."

The more she closes the gap between her and the Dueling Peaks, the more her feet twist in the direction of the tower. The tablet—no, the Sheikah slate—on her hip bobs with every step.

She veers off the path and wades into the river. Ascending the tower takes significantly longer than descending, but curiosity drives her up and up. The air grows cold though the doublet staves off the worst of the chill. Her body grows weary. But she can see the last of the climb.

Up, up. Finally she slaps her right palm onto the top platform of the spire. Link scrambles, pushing herself up, and tumbles onto the viewing platform, wheezing.

She sets the Sheikah slate into the pedestal. While the black crystal distills a droplet, Link sits down by the edge to rest. She looks over the world.

The tower glows blue. She pulls out her map. Dueling Peaks Tower. From this height she sketches out what she can see below her and the names that the man on the bridge gave to her.

From her vantage point orange specks draw her eye. Shrines, on top of the Dueling Peaks. And not only there, but scattered about. Even one beside the bridge, that she hadn't paid attention to earlier.

After she delivers the news, she'll investigate. Perhaps she can find a translator for the strange language in which the voices of the shrines speak.

Lifting herself back on her feet, Link takes the Sheikah slate from the pedestal. She could climb back down as she did before. Or—the muscles of her arms scream at the notion—she could kick off and glide down in style.

This time she braces herself and the initial weight on her arms shocks her less. She glides through the heart of the Dueling Peaks, tracking the river down to the twin bridges. Changing her course with the tilt of her body and the sweep of her legs, she aims for the centre of Big Twin Bridge.

She crashes into the river.

Several minutes of frantic swimming later, she crawls onto the shore and collapses, gasping in breaths in-between trying not to laugh.

No matter what misfortune may befall her, as long she is alive, as long as she can laugh, so too will she be all right.

As the man on the bridge told her, a small village nestles along the road and spills out to the banks of the river, with plowed fields visible further beyond the wooden buildings with their thatched roofs. Link picks herself up to limp up the path to Kasuto. Scents mingle: cooking rice, meat in
smokehouses, fresh straw, carved wood, that of horses and goats, the mixed smells of the lives of people. A simple sign by the edge of the first building reads Welcome to Kasuto. A woman in light armour leans by the sign. An outdoor cooking area of sorts in the heart of the village draws Link’s attention immediately. The people of Kasuto sit at large round tables, chatting amicably, while many more stand around the several large cooking pots and grills in the area, preparing meals. Near the pots she observes a long table covered with massive dishes of raw ingredients that the chefs take from. She observes a man approach one of the cooking pots with a basket. He removes handfuls of different berries from the basket and places them into the appropriate dishes, then selects other ingredients before picking a pot.

Communal cooking. Each person bringing ingredients and then taking the ones that they need. Link pats the satchel.

The guard clears her throat as Link enters Kasuto. "State your business, traveller."

Link blinks. "I'm hungry," she says honestly.

The guard slams the butt of her spear against the ground. Link cocks her head to one side. "State your business, or leave Kasuto."

Link touches her chin, her brow knitting together in thought. After a moment she beams, her memories in order. "I brought ingredients with me, so don't worry."

The guard's eyes narrow. "Do you take me for a fool?"

Link blinks again, twice. Perhaps the woman does not know signs either. "I'm delivering a letter to Impa, in Kakariko. The man on the bridge told me to come here because it's on the way."

The guard's expression does not change as she stares Link down. Link calmly gazes back at her, disturbed only by the rumbling of her stomach. The guard shakes her head. "I'm keeping an eye on you. If you do anything suspicious, you're out."

"Thank you," Link signs. She jogs up to the communal table, her path straight as the keese flies, and overturns her satchel, leaving just enough mushrooms and apples for the road to Kakariko. The residents of Kasuto turn to stare at her as she unloads the contents of the satchel. She glances around. No meat, but she does find salt and spices. She sets herself to one of the unattended stone grills and gets to grilling. The Hyrule herbs she picked on the plateau make for a fine bed on top she adds salt and every spice she can see, liberally shaking entire handfuls over the herbs. The fragrances of the spices make her mouth water: some sharp, some tart, some hot, some bitter, some tangy, some slightly sweet, each a unique flavour to add to the chewy herbs. She adds a smidgen of butter from the communal table. The butter melts over the herbs into a coat of glistening gold.

Delicious.

Link sweeps the herbs from the grill into her own personal cooking pot in lieu of a plate. She seats herself at one of the round tables. No utensils, but no worries: she eats with her bare hands. The freshly grilled herbs burn her palms yet she cannot resist the fragrance of salt, spice, salt, seasoning, and more salt. She stuffs her mouth.

An olive-skinned woman with long black hair braided into two loops on either side of her head takes the seat across from Link. She brings her own plate boasting an omelette and a baked apple. Link looks up from her pot of herbs to the woman.

She moves her hands in a gesture Link does not recognise. "You sure caused a stir, going in for the
Link does not pause eating but nods. The woman raises her brows over her red eyes. "We don't get many travellers in the springtime. Where are you from, stranger? I don't —" Another word that Link does not know. "—you've been to Kasuto before."

Link munches down the last of the herbs. The tender exterior coupled with the still-crunchy heart; the myriad of every spice under the sun giving each bite its own explosion of tastes, some better than others; and the butter melting on her tongue have brought a smile to her mouth and leaked the tension from her shoulders.

She places the pot on the ground to free her hands.

"My name's Link. I'm headed to Kakariko," she answers, spelling out her name and the village's character by character.

"Seems like you haven't been there either. It's called—" The woman makes a gesture, which Link replicates. "That's how you sign Kakariko."

She cautions Link that while the residents of Kasuto speak Central Hyrulean, those of Kakariko tends towards the Necludan tongue, though most know enough Central Hyrulean to get around. When the woman switches to Necludan signs to prove her point, Link finds that she can read the words off of the woman's hands with almost the same accuracy as she could Central Hyrulean. Moreover her body knows to form the words.

Eventually the talk turns to Link and the woman. She introduces herself as Lami and apologises on behalf of the guard. "Maggi's new to the force, and she's trying her best." Link shrugs. Lami attempts to wheedle information from her, though Link can say little but "I don't know." to most of Lami's questions. She cannot recognise some of the gestures that Lami makes, and the overall speed and angles of Lami's movements make communication slightly difficult. Occasionally Lami interjects to inquire what certain words of Link's mean. Link asks of the meaning of Hyrule, and Lami's eyebrows threaten to shoot off of her own face. "It's where we live, I guess. The dynasty fell one hundred years ago, but we still call this land Hyrule. Not like anyone's taken up the castle since. Wait, where are you from if you don't know that? You're—" A missing word. "—aren't you?"

Link's utter perplexion spurs Lami to explain. The Seven Goddesses, she says, that created the Seven great races of Hyrule, or so goes the legend. Some residents of the village sport the pointed ears of those blessed by the Goddess Hylia; others, the red eyes characteristic of the blessing of the Goddess Sheik; though most have both, such as Lami herself, a dual blessing for a dual lineage.

"Seeing as you're certainly not from around here, and seeing as you don't have any rupees," Lami observes, "I'll pay for a night at the River Beetle." The local inn, Link gathers. She shakes her head at the offer. "Oh, but I insist. By the way, what's with the talking like an eighty-year-old? Is it part of your character or something? You seem like a pretty humble kinda person so I can't say I understand what's up."

When Link tilts her head to one side in response, Lami explains further. The signs Link employs and the manner in which she speaks resemble those of an earlier age. "The way my grandma talks," Lami clarifies. For the first time Link finds herself consciously reflecting on her own movements. She emulates Lami's gestures increasingly as the conversation draws on. After some time Lami insists on the offer of an inn again, and Link stands from the table.

"Thank you, Lami. I'm off to Kakariko."

Lami props her chin up in her palm. "If you ever come by again, try not to scare the locals so much, y'know?"
There, that last gesture. One that Link has just learned.

"I'll try," Link responds with a sheepish smile. The cooking pot on her back, her belly full of warmth, and the strangeness of her speech weigh on her in different ways. Still she takes the path forward.

To Kakariko she goes.

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*Salt-Grilled Greens* (two hearts) - Hyrule herb, rock salt

**Chapter End Notes**


Author's notes: Rereading this chapter, it blows my mind how much I fucked up between writing chapter one and writing chapter eighty-four. At least I can fix issues of early installment weirdness; while there haven't been any *major* continuity errors, there were a few things left more ambiguous than I thought. Another thank you to my wonderful beta reader, Emma.

Regarding the letters, I'll note what languages they were written in. You won't know what these terms mean just yet, but those who come back after chapter sixty-eight or so will have a better idea. The letters that Link cannot read written in the looiper handwriting are in an eastern dialect of Faronese; the letters that Link cannot read in the most cramped handwriting are in the Medli dialect of Tabanch; the cramped letters that Link can read are in the Dueling Peaks dialect of Necludan; and the final letter that mentions Kakariko is written in Central Hyrulean, albeit with parts in both the looping and the cramped handwriting. Hm! Interesting!

Kasuto, which is in the same place as the Dueling Peaks Stable in *Breath of the Wild*, was named after the town in *The Adventure of Link*; while *Breath of the Wild* has only seven villages, I decided to give the world of *Delicious in Wilds* many more, just as I have expanded the size of Hyrule to take a few months to pass from one end of the country to another. Lami and Maggi were partially named after Mila and Maggie from *The Wind Waker*.

I thought it unfortunate that Link in *Breath of the Wild* does not seem to have any difficulty adjusting to culture or language despite the hundred-year absence. To that end, I've made Link has to adjust to the various languages. Necludan in its various dialects is spoken, well, in Necluda; Central Hyrulean used to be a *lingua franca* before the fall of Hyrule one hundred years ago. Link can read, write, and sign both. Link will not be so lucky with other languages; Link cannot read Faronese or Tabanch.

In *Delicious in Wilds*, gerudo, sheikah, and hylians are all human. Their patron Goddess or Goddesses are noted by specified phenotypic markings: pointed ears for the hylians, red eyes for the sheikah, and red hair for the gerudo. Therefore, someone with both pointed ears and red hair would be considered both hylian and gerudo, for example. To this end, I did not give the sheikah white hair and red eyes as in *Breath of*
the Wild, but only the red eyes; Lami, for instance, has dark hair. I'm not really sure why the developers chose for everyone to have pointed ears in *Breath of the Wild*, since traditionally only the hylians did, but it has the unfortunate effect of hylians being "the default" while sheikah and gerudo have very characteristic phenotypes. We also don't see any mixed-race individuals despite seeing interracial couples. Therefore I took some liberties. The traits of the markings of the Goddesses are hereditary; a child of a sheikah-gerudo couple could be sheikah, gerudo, or both. In the legends, the Goddesses Sageru, Sheik, and Hylia worked together to jointly create humanity and then blessed a third with each of Their respective markings.

Although Link is implied if not outright stated to seventeen in *Breath of the Wild*, Link is eighteen as of the first chapter of *Delicious in Wilds*; Zelda, too, was eighteen rather than seventeen at the time of the Great Calamity in *Delicious in Wilds*. I should note that there will be no sexual content in *Delicious in Wilds*. I'm simply more comfortable writing the violent combat scenes with characters who are eighteen or older rather than minors.

Thank you for reading.

midna's ass. 28 August 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Rereading this chapter now, it blows my mind how well the author carefully constructed things in later chapters and connected back to these early chapters, despite not planning ahead. The letters Link reads in these chapters get elaborated on later, and it all ends up making sense in a really great way. Things like that make *Delicious in Wilds* feel like such a cohesive whole.

I really like Link's encounter with the man on the bridge who doesn't know how to read sign language. That's a cool detail, that not every person in this world knows how to read it. Link leaping off the edge of a cliff with zero paraglider practice is the most Link thing in the world, and I love it. Lami is a solidly underrated minor character. This series has really great small characters, characters that just pop up for a chapter or two, but are still really well realized. The fact that Link talks like, well, like someone from a hundred years ago would talk is an awesome detail to me. Things like that make the world feel so real and alive.

Emma. 28 August 2017.
Chapter Summary

On the road to Kakariko, the travelling chef assists a tree-person in retrieving their maracas from bokoblin. Once the chef arrives at Kakariko, the chef discovers that the matriarch of Kakariko appears to have mistaken the chef for a hero named Link. The chef passes out from hunger and learns about the village from a young aspiring cook and her father, a village guard. A strange memory returns to the chef, of two girls arguing about someone chosen by some "sword that seals the darkness," by some "blade of evil's bane."

Chapter Notes

There is a brief combat sequence in this chapter; however, it's not bloody at all and does not fit the "Graphic Depictions of Violence" archive warning; later combat sequences warranted the warning. For those who do want to skip it, it starts at "With that Link sets off." and ends at "Link shakes her head and continues up the hill."

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The path to Kakariko winds long through the mountains. She burns the daytime hiking and sleeps in the boughs of roadside trees. Occasionally travellers on horseback pass her by, in both directions. Most pay her no mind; a few slow down to chatter briefly about the coming spring weather or inquire why she has no horse. She asks instead about the names of landmarks to write them on her map.

"If you're clever about it, you can catch your own steed," advises a man on a brown and white horse. "There's plenty of 'em near Kasuto. Or you can buy one from the stable there, if you're scared of a li'l filly. Speakin' of buying things, you seem in sore need of some..."

By the time Link can see the Pillars mentioned on the back of the letter jutting up into the clouds, like some deity had thrown stone darts into the earth, her thighs burn from the week-long uphill hike. A lone tree by a bend in a path serves as a place to rest. Link drops her things beside her and then plops herself down at the base of the tree.

She leans against the trunk. The wind up the cliffs shifts her bangs and lifts her sidelocks. The leaves rustle a lullaby overhead. Steadily she lowers her eyelids.

A mournful cry awakens her from her nap. Rubbing her eyes on the heels of her hands, Link finds herself staring at something like a human-sized, human-shaped tree with a patterned leaf for a face, who stands not a half-metre away from her. The tree-like person blubbers loudly, their branch-like hands covering what amounts to their eyes.

Link checks her supplies but nothing seems amiss. Shouldering her satchel, she glances between the crying tree-person and the upwards road.
She shakes her head at herself and touches the person on the shoulder.

They leap up into the air at the contact; Link flinches back. She raises her head. The tree-person hovers high above her. If she squints, she can make out a spinning green something or other in their hand, not unlike a maple seed.

She watches the tree-person return slowly to the ground. Link takes the opportunity to nibble on a mushroom she steamed last night, timing the tree-person's descent with how much she has eaten.

When they float about a metre about soil, the tree-person cries out—their voice high-pitched as steam from a kettle—something in a language she does not know. Link shakes her head. The tree-person says other things, and still Link does not know. At last, accented by a sound like tumbling blocks of woods, the tree-person speaks words she can parse: "You can see Hestu!?"

At that Link nods.

The tree-person alights in front of her, one and a half times her height, though with a demeanor and timbre more suitable to a child. "I did not know your kind could still see mine! Oh, oh, oh! Shalakah!" Abruptly the tree-person grabs Link and pulls her into a hug tight enough to squeeze the breath from her lungs. They swing her this way and that, yelling "Shakalah!" as they spin, before letting her go. Link stumbles a few steps backwards and then stands, swaying in a daze.

"Hestu says hello!" the tree-person proclaims, pointing at themself. "And Hestu is overjoyed to meet you!" Hestu reaches behind their back, then stops. The leaf over their face—or making up their face—droops. "Hestu's maracas!"

Link blinks.

"Oh, friendly friend, could you help Hestu!?" Hestu clasps their hands before them. "Hestu must return to Grandpa, but Hestu lost...Hestu lost Hestu's precious maracas! Shookoolooh..." Now Hestu's entire form slants towards the ground. Link nods in response, if only to stop Hestu from flopping into the dirt. Immediately Hestu springs back up and twirls around in dance. "Thank you, thank you, thank you, friend! The boko-bokos took them. Hestu can still hear them from over here! Kookoo..."

Link gazes at the direction in which Hestu points. A plume of smoke from the other side of a small hill reveals the location of the bokoblin camp.

She leaves her things by the tree for Hestu to watch over. When she draws her blade Hestu grips her arm.

"Do not hurt them, friend! The boko-bokos just want music. Oh, oh, a gift of friendship!" Hestu produces a giant leaf from behind their back. "Hestu thinks your kind calls these korok leaves!" They dance excitedly.

Link takes the leaf in hand. She turns it over, then swings it horizontally in a sword-like motion. To her surprise, the shape and size of the leaf blow a powerful gust of air from the slice.

She grins.

With that Link sets off. The letter to Impa will wait. She climbs up to the top of the steep hill and crouches down. Below, three bokoblins sit about a fire. One of them bangs a large red bulbous thing against the ground. A maraca, Link supposes.
She pulls the slate from her hip and readies a bomb. Then she stops: that could break the maracas. Exhaling she dismisses the bomb.

She reaches for her bow before she recalls that she left everything with Hestu. Then Link scans the campsite for the other maraca and spots it hanging from the belt of the same bokoblin banging the first one.

Link launches herself from the top of the hill. She glides downwards and closes the paraglider to land on the same side as the other two bokoblins. Before they can react, she winds up her arm.

The sheer force of the korok leaf's gust knocks them over and pushes the furthest bokoblin entirely off of the cliff. The maraca bokoblin struggles to its feet. Barking a battle cry it rushes her. She tries to snag the second maraca from its belt but merely succeeds in having the first maraca crack her in the head.

Link narrows her eyes at the bokoblin that hit her with a maraca. Hestu told her no blade: She punches the bokoblin in the face. The impact burns her knuckles, and she flaps her hand to get the pain out. The bokoblin topples backwards to the ground. Link squats over its body to wrest both maracas away. Triumphant she holds them up to the sky.

Shuffling behind her alerts to the second bokoblin. She spins around to find the bokoblin brandishing a spear, the tip aflame. Link jumps back. The bokoblin chases her while she drops the maracas for the korok leaf. It swings too slowly. The bokoblin thrusts the spear towards her. She dodges to the left and rolls forward, snagging a maraca with her right hand. The bokoblin readies another thrust. She chucks the maraca at its head.

The bokoblin falls backwards. Link snags the spear from its relaxed grip and breaks it over her knee, then tosses the pieces over the cliff. She looks: both bokoblin appear unconscious.

She catches her breath with her hands dangling at her sides. Picking up the maracas and slotting them into her belt, Link begins the climb upwards.

Something sharp and rock hits her in the small of the back. She glances over her shoulder. There, on the edge of the cliff, the third bokoblin roots for a rock to throw at her.

Somehow it must have climbed back up the cliff. Link shakes her head and continues up the hill.

On the other side she returns Hestu's maracas. They reward her with another hug. While Link gasps for air Hestu tells her to come visit the Korok Forest, that their grandfather would love to meet her, that the other koroks would be delighted to learn of the hero that saved the maracas.

"Take care of yourself. And your maracas," Link signs.

Hestu beams. "Twee hee! See you later, little hylian!" With that they skip up into the air. The giant green maple seed-like leaf they wield propels them down the mountain.

Link watches them go.

She slaps her cheeks with her palms to awaken. With the excitement passed, Link gathers her supplies.

Her satchel feels oddly empty. Hastily she opens it, only to discover her deepest nightmare come true.

All of her food.
Gone.

Link yelps at the mere sight of the absence. She closes the satchel, waits three seconds, and opens it again.

The food does not reappear.

In that moment Kakariko transforms from a mere destination from a letter to a holy beacon of a prospective hot meal. Adrenaline seeps through her entire body. The fire in her stomach rises to energise her until she can feel the heat at her toes and fingers. She propels herself up the side of the mountain, windmilling her arms and legs as if to catch the wind.

A series of carved gates line the inner passage. She stops by the first to catch her breath. Removing the slate from its pouch, Link glances between the design on the back and the symbol, in red, at the crest of the gate.

The same single eye with a teardrop below, though the eye on the door bears wooden arrows pierced through it. The sheikah slate. The sheikah symbol. The Goddess Sheik, of whom Lami spoke, and whose name resides on the plaque of the altar of the Temple of Time.

The sheikah towers, and the shrines.

All roads lead to Kakariko. Link proceeds through the gates. She can hear music. A live performance of some sort, of strings and wind. The crackle of fire. The lively speech of a discussion. A pair of guards waiting at the entrance to the village, sporting loose armour painted white and curved hats with red rims.

They bear the red eyes and light brown skin that Lami did, yet without the pointed ears of a hylian. Sheikah.

The guards peer at her suspiciously as she approaches. Mindful of Lami's comments on her speech, Link signs slowly: "I am here to deliver a letter to Impa of Kakariko."

The guard on the left frowns, while the guard on the right raises his eyebrows. "May we see this letter?"

Link nods. She reaches into her satchel. Her hands close around empty space.

Whoever stole the food from under Hestu's nose—in fairness to Hestu, she did not explicitly ask them to keep watch—also took the letter. She lifts a hand to her chin. "...I don't have it anymore."

The guards look at one another, then back to Link. The guard on the right lifts a hand towards the one on the left. "Do you have any manner of identification?"

Link pats herself down for anything else that she might have brought with her. She shows the guards the paraglider, which they decline after a brief conversation of *didn't Lady Impa say she had one of those years ago?*; the red telescope, which they also decline; and the doublet she sports, which they—to her surprise—decline. At length she removes the satchel strapped around her shoulders, lifting it from her right hip, to investigate its contents more thoroughly. The guards inhale in unison.

Link takes a step backwards. Her stomach growls. She hasn't eaten since she met Hestu, countless hours back.

"Excuse me, but from whom did you obtain the slate you carry on your hip there?"
"...it was just there when I woke up." Link touches her chin. The two guards continue to stare at her. "I don't really know much, but there was a pedestal with the slate on it. I picked it up and went out. I think it was called the...the Shrine of..." She does not know the word resurrection in Necludan. "...bringing back to life or something like that?" She smiles sheepishly at them, shrugging her shoulders in apology. "There was a name on the back of the letter."

The guards whisper amongst themselves for a few seconds.

"What do you know of Lady Impa!?" the guard on the left barks.

"...nothing, but I found a letter addressed to her, in a cabin in the woods that no one had used for a while. I wasn't doing anything else, so I thought that I'd deliver it to her. Well, no, the letter wasn't addressed to her, but it was telling someone else to go find her, but since the letter was collecting dust, I guessed the 'Link' it was addressed to never picked it up." Link pauses. "Though maybe that other 'Link' really did read the letter and go to see Impa already. But then the paraglider and stuff were still there..." She scratches her head. Somehow her story carries far less impact, yet, when she stood in the cabin with letter in hand, her logic had seemed sound to her.

The left guard's jaw opens. The guard on the right sagely inclines his head. "We will have to blindfold you first, but we will take you to Lady Impa."

Link nods. Her stomach rumbles again. Perhaps after she explains the contents of the letter to Impa, they will reward her with food, or at least a chance to prepare a meal. The guard ties a red blindfold around her eyes. She feels them take her either hand. They lead her. As she walks, she listens to the music that grows louder when they enter the village proper, to the snippets of conversation she hears that hush when she nears, to the whispers of "Who's that?" and "Why're they blindfolded?" in the voices of children, to the clucking of cucco, to the splash of a nearby waterfall, to the creak of herself and the guards passing over a wooden bridge and then the steady footsteps over a stone path.

She tastes the air: the smoky scent of torches; the fragrance of apple and peach; the mild stench of farm animals; a savoriness so familiar that her mouth fills with saliva, yet that she cannot name. Link senses the odd lightness of her own body. Her stomach rumbles out its emptiness.

"Hey, walk straight," one of the guards snaps.

She wobbles nonetheless.

"Careful of the steps." She walks up one, two, three steps, and almost trips when she expects a fourth one. The waterfall sounds closer now, and the music farther. A sudden departure of warmth indicates that she has come under the shade. "Wait here." The guard on her right side lets go. She hears creaking, and then muffled conversation. The creak returns. "Come in. Kneel."

Link kneels down. A hard floor. A slight pressure on the back of her head foretells the removal of the blindfold. As Link adjusts to the sudden change in light, her vision focuses on the person kneeling before her upon a thick red cushion, their face more a mass of wrinkles than features, their silver-grey hair even whiter against their brown skin, small and shrivelled upon the cushion, clothed in robes of white and red. An elderly woman. Her breaths rattle. Her withered hands shake with intensity as she raises them, a violet bracelet curled around her right wrist.

"I cannot believe my eyes. Is it really you, Link?" The woman peers at Link. "I know it must surprise you to see me in this state, Link, but bear with me. I am just as surprised to see you...as you are." She lowers her voice. "...unchanged."
Link shakes her head. "I know that our names are the same, Lady Impa, but I'm not the Link from the letter. I just took the name because I don't have anything else to call myself."

Lady Impa's fingers sprawl over her knees. "...what?"

Link explains briefly, about awakening in the Shrine of Resurrection, whose name she signs character by character; about finding the cabin; about uncovering the letter; about the resolution to bring the letter to Lady Impa to let her know that this 'Champion of Hyrule'—or whatever the epithet was—had not received the letter and would not come to receive the message from Lady Impa; about losing the letter to theft while attempting to recover a tree-person's maracas.

She finds that her gaze cannot focus; her arms move a touch too slowly; and the constant ache in her stomach hastens her to speak quickly. When she finishes, she bows to Lady Impa and prays that the guards lead her away so that she can sink her teeth into the apples and peaches she smelled outside.

Lady Impa kneels in silence for a lengthy moment. Link's stomach threatens to devour itself. Then Lady Impa speaks. "Link. What do you remember before you awoke?"

"Before I woke up today?"

"No, Link...before you awoke in that shrine you mentioned. The Shrine of Resurrection, you called it."

She raises her hands; they fall to her knees again. Her first memories arise from the moment she opened her eyes. Those, and the brief flashes of the girls, the one with the golden hair and the one who smelled of horses. "...nothing."

"Link. Do you not recognise me? Have you lost your memories?" Tears well from the corners of Lady Impa's eyes. "Champion of Hylia, Hero of Hyrule, Her Majesty's Knight, Courageous Link. Now, more than ever, we need you."

Link blinks. Once, twice. Her head circles around itself.

She tips forwards into the dark.

A heavenly fragrance rouses her. She sits up, but Lady Impa and the others have gone. Instead she faces another unfamiliar ceiling. An unfamiliar bed with unfamiliar covers, and a very unfamiliar little girl sitting on a stool by her left side, with a more familiar man resting his hand on the little girl's head.

The heavenly fragrance emanates from the bowl that the girl holds.

"Can Koko give it now!" the girl yells, more a statement than a question, and pushes the bowl towards Link. She seizes it in both hands.

"Wait, it's hot," cautions the man—the guard who had stood to the right, who had argued to let Link in—but the pain in Link's palms is no match for the force of her determination.

Tipping her head back, she drinks the stew. Hot, too hot, burning her tongue and her throat at once, yet so delicious, thick and creamy with the taste of carrot and just enough salt that she licks her lips afterwards. While she wolfs down the soup as if she may never see another speck of food again, the little girl jabbers on eagerly.

"Koko made it herself! First Koko warmed up some hot water and put the swift carrots in it! Then
Koko let the carrots simmer for a long, long time, so long that Koko almost fell asleep, but Mama always said that Koko gotta be patient, so Koko was patient! Then Koko grated the carrots until they were real tiny, and then Koko grinded them up real good with a...what was it called? Oh yeah! A mortal 'n' pest...and then Koko heated up milk and added a pinch of salt, like this much salt, just like how Mama taught Koko. See? This much 'xactly. And then Koko stirred and stirred and stirred till her arms got all tired, and then Koko added all the grinded up swift carrots and kept stirring and stirring and stirring and stirring and stirring," the girl says, repeating and stirring for some time before she continues, "and now Master Link's eating it! It'll make Master Link go super fast, since Papa told Koko that Master Link was all woozy and wobbly and stuff!"

The guard moves his hand to the girl's shoulder. "That's enough, Koko. Don't be overwhelming."

Link surfaces from the bowl of stew. She licks her mouth and collects stray droplets from her chin in the palm of her hand to lick it.

"Do you want more, Master Link?" Koko asks, and Link nods more vigorously than she ever has. "Papa, help me!"

Obediently the man hefts a pot from over a fire. Koko takes the bowl from Link and scoops up more soup. This time the man offers Link a spoon, which she accepts and then ignores entirely in favour of draining the stew directly from the bowl, as swiftly as the soup can flow down her throat.

"Link." The man pulls up a chair beside the bed as Link eats her way through the pot. "I understand that that was a lot to bear. You must have fainted from shock." More from hunger, really, but Link does not dare take her palms from the bowl to interject. "Please, feel free to consider my house your own. My name is Dorian. This is my daughter, Koko. My other daughter, Cottla, is asleep." Link nods again. "I have a few questions for you, both from myself and from Lady Impa." Link nods again. "Do you remember anything of Lady Impa, or the Princess?"

She shakes her head.

"Do you know of the Great Calamity?"

Another shake of the head.

"You awoke in the Shrine of Resurrection, and you remember nothing from before."

She nods.

"You go by Link?"

Another nod.

"And, as Lady Impa told me, you're a girl."

Once more a nod.

"I see." Dorian sits back slightly, running a hand over his lower jaw. "Link, once you have eaten, I'd like to ask you to tell me about everything that has happened since you awoke in the Shrine of Resurrection. Lady Impa has decided not to see you for now. She worries that her appearance may cause you great distress."

Link shrugs. Koko fills up her bowl again.
"Link, you have lost most of your memories, and I do not know when you might recover them, if ever. Yet Lady Impa has for you a task. A task which, thank the Goddesses, you have already begun to fulfill. Perhaps we are not as lost as we feared." Dorian quits the stool. "Please rest here for as long as you would like, Link. When you are ready, come find me so that we may talk. Koko, please take care of her."

Link dips her head in affirmation. The instant Dorian leaves the house, closing the door behind him, Koko launches into a verbal tour of all that Kakariko has to offer. Link tries to listen but her thoughts drift.

Unable to remember anything before the Shrine of Resurrection.

Before Lady Impa spoke to her, before she suggested that Link ought to remember something, Link has never considered her lack of memories. A non-issue since she awoke in that blue-lit chamber. And now, now she understands how much must be missing from her head, the girl she may have been before the Shrine of Resurrection, all of the people that she must have known and now forgotten, all of the meals that she must have eaten and now cannot recall.

Yet Champion of Hylia? Hero of Hyrule? Her Majesty's Knight? Some mistake. Some quirk of fate. Some coincidence of another who shares her name. Prior to meeting with the woman in Kasuto, she had no knowledge of Hylia or of Hyrule. Lost memories or not, she does not feel too heroic.

Link scrapes the bottom of the bowl with the spoon, having finally slowed down enough to make use of the utensil. She lifts the remains of the carrot cream soup to her mouth. She sniffs.

A memory. Half a memory, of two girls arguing at the base of the stairs, one tall and thin, hair cut short save for a single strand that hangs over her face, clothed in black save for a sash of red around her middle, the other a head shorter, red hair tied back to a thick ponytail with a band of green, golden earrings glinting in evening torchlight, robed in a dress of blue and gold. Link herself held a bowl of carrot soup as she watched from the top step.

"There is no reason for the sword that seals the darkness to have chosen that wielder. We need find another, and you—as one of our own Champions—know it as well as I. That scrawny thing, the Champion of Hylia? The Hero of Hyrule?" The face of the girl in black contorted into a grimace; she spit out her next words. Link tries to place her voice, familiar, so familiar. "Her Majesty's Knight, when I have trained my life for this very moment? And what do they call me, in turn? The Princess's shade."

The other girl, of dark brown skin, her scarlet hair framing her sharp features, tipped back her head to laugh.

"The blade of evil's bane chooses who She wishes to choose. The Goddesses have decided. Your envy means little, and I suggest that you accept Her judgment. The only one you're harming is yourself."

"But why? Why choose someone who has scarcely held a sword before? Why did it pass over the hundreds of knights, of Her Majesty's own attendants, for some wanderer who has no knowledge of the destiny that Her Majesty bears?"

the girl with the green hairband turned the top step. Link tried to back up, but the girl with the golden earring met her gaze. "Link," she said with a smile, and the taller girl fell silent. "I thought I smelled soup! Come on down here to join us."
Link felt herself begin to walk down the stairs. She leans forward, but the girls blur, the hallway fades, the stairs dissipate like mist in the morning sun. The memory falls through her fingertips.

"...and then there's the arrow lady, Rola," Koko continues. Blinking, Link desperately attempts to nod along to the rhythm of Koko's words as if Link had not just lost herself in thought. The speed of her nodding and the rapidness of her heart make her fear that her chest will burst open. She recalls Koko mentioning something about swift carrot. She prays that the hasty carrot soup will not hasten her to her own demise. "Koko thinks you'd like her! She's not from around here so people sometimes treat her funny, but her husband left her a while ago, and she's sad. Koko thinks you two could get along! She's hylian too!"

The past remains the past. For now, Link has a present. So long as she lives, everything will be all right.

She lets Koko tell her about Kakariko. The fullness of her stomach and the sound of Koko's stories lull her back to an uneasy sleep.

—

_Hasty Veggie Cream Soup_ (two hearts, low movement speed boost for 03:20) - rock salt, fresh milk, swift carrot

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Another big thanks to my beloved beta reader Emma, for her herculean effort at pointing out where poor readers might wallow in confusion. It's easy for me, as an author, to think I'm being clever, when really I'm just being needlessly obtuse. It should be hopefully clear to those who have played _Breath of the Wild_ the identities of the two characters in the memory, but for those who might be lost, the girl with the green hairband is Urbosa.

Right, another note on character's ages: At the time of the Great Calamity, Zelda was eighteen, and Urbosa was two years older at twenty. "But wait!" you say. "Urbosa is so much taller and seems like an adult!" That appears to be due to the fact that all gerudo models in _Breath of the Wild_ are ridiculously tall, extremely muscled, etc. Even Riju, who is supposedly a child, is sexualised with much more wide-set hips and whatnot than expected of a literal child. This is not to say that children cannot have such features (early sexualisation of those who develop precociously is another matter), but these design decisions are deliberate on the part of the Zelda team. I've altered the Champions to, honestly, better fit with the actual worldbuilding present in _Breath of the Wild_ as well as to further narratives and give them development that they sorely lack.

Impa's design in _Delicious in Wilds_ takes notes from her portrayals in other games of the franchise, most notably her recurring role as Zelda's guard and her depiction in _Skyward Sword_. In _Breath of the Wild_, we don't see younger Impa in any of the memories and know little about her except that she was a researcher on the Divine Beasts; it's unclear how she obtained a frame of the final photograph that Zelda took, and her entire relationship with Zelda is unclear. Therefore, I've opted to switch things
up a bit. While Impa's sister Purah was indeed a researcher on the Divine Beasts, Impa herself worked as Zelda's bodyguard, thus known as "the Princess's shade," as in a shadow that follows the Princess about. This not only allows me to give Impa an more active role in the story but also allows me to better elaborate her relationship with Zelda.

Note that Impa seems rather surprised to see Link like this, nor does she immediately know the name of the Shrine of Resurrection. Hmm!

Since the koroks are literal plant-people, I opted to refer to them as they/them, because as far as I know trees don't really have genders. They tend to refer to themselves in third-person, in the tradition of child-like characters. Note, too, that Link does not the koroks' native language.

Foods and elixirs still have effects just like in Breath of the Wild. I have endeavoured to make these effects have both pros and cons. We don't really see much of the swiftness in this chapter as it's mostly counteracting Link's own exhaustion, but in future chapters, we'll see more impact. The "hasty" effect is essentially a dose of epinephrine.

On my playthrough of Breath of the Wild, I preferred to run around in the wilds than to wander around the villages and towns. It was Emma who gave me a newfound appreciation for the towns. The added focus on Koko and her family is directly a result of Emma's influence, which I think has added a lot to the story overall. I'm grateful that I could have someone with whom to discuss the game who had and has such different experiences from myself. Delicious in Wilds, as well as my own opinions, are all the stronger for it.

Finally, while Breath of the Wild Link simply accepts the saving of Hyrule set out before her, I wanted to treat that a little more realistically. She'll get there, but it'll take a while.

Thank you for reading. We'll be sticking in Kakariko for a little bit, and then it's off to adventure in chapter six and particularly seven.

midna's ass. 31 April 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This chapter introduces one of my favourite (relatively) minor characters in the series, Koko, who the author has told me was given focus specifically because of my love of her in Breath of the Wild, which makes me feel all warm and fuzzy.

This chapter has my second-favourite Hestu-related scene. My favourite is yet to come.

The memories Link gets at the start of the series are all very jumbled and short and vague. There's something I enjoy about that. It's really fun going back afterwards and piecing it all together.

Emma. 29 August 2017.
Hot Buttered Apple

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef stays for a few days in Kakariko, activating the village shrine, meeting the townsfolk, and acquiring a new set of clothing in green. The wise matriarch of Kakariko requests that the chef deliver a letter to Hateno, then venture to the Eldic capital of Darunia and report back on how fare the gorons and other peoples of Eldin. Agreeing, the chef sets off with a pumpkin gifted by the sister of the village's aspiring cook.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Worries of fate, of lost memories, of whatever happened before the Shrine of Resurrection—of whoever had awaited her in the cabin only to vanish and leave the letter drowning in dust—of the flickers of remembrance that pass through her, of whispers of names and words and motions she has forgotten, or never known at all.

She relinquishes the slate to Lady Impa on request. Lady Impa and her council of guards bid her to stay in the village for a few days while they determine what to do. They tell her not to panic, not to distress herself, but she does not miss the wrinkles of their brows, the shifted glances, the fear and anxiety.

Yet she keeps her head down. Whatever Link they knew from before the Shrine of Resurrection, whatever Link they expected, has been replaced by the Link that kneels before them now, a Link whose greatest achievement revolves around eating an entire pot of stew in less than half an hour.

In the peaceful days that she spends in Kakariko, she allows Koko and Cottla to show her about. In return she aids Koko with the daily cooking; the girls' mother, she gathers, has been away on a trip for some time. In the meantime, Koko has taken over as the family chef, trying desperately to recall the recipes left by her mother. Link helps her gather ingredients, prepare dishes, and—of course—eat the meals. Koko and Cottla introduce her to nearly everyone in the village, so many people and faces that Link cannot recall them all. The kind woman who runs the market. The man who tends to cucco. The bored-looking woman who runs an arrow shop and perks up when Link enters. The travelling painter come briefly home to put to canvas the landscape of his homeland. The carrot farmer and the pumpkin farmer, ever at odds with one another. The elderly lady who tends to the peach trees blossoming even now, who picks one for Link. Ripe and round, the spring peach resembles a full moon as it sits in the curve of Link's palm. The juices run down her chin when she bites in. Koko exclaims happily at Link's enjoyment while Cottla stomps her feet and demands a peach of her own.

Two of the women from the village—Lasli and Claree—offer to fashion her new clothing, as those taken from the previous owner of the cabin scarcely fit her frame. She agrees. Guiding her to their tailor shop Enchanted, they take her measurements, ask her for her favourite colours, and stitch together an outfit of brown and green with accents of blue.

"How can I repay you?" she asks, smiling, as she admires the tunic in the mirror they offer her.
Claree waves a dismissive hand. "*Nonsense, darling. You'll repay us all enough when you save Hyrule.*"

Link does not realise how tightly her nails have dug into her palms until warm wetness slicks her palms.

Lasli clears her throat loudly, and Claree winces. "...*that is, please consider it a gift. Besides, as a firm follower of the faith of fashion, I could not merely stand by while a lost one struggled through this world in such ugly rags!*" She hefts up the clothes taken from the cabin. "*I swear these must be a century old!*

Lasli glares at her again, but Link merely bows and takes her leave.

When she exits the boutique, she inquires as to the location of her things. Koko shows her where her father has kept Link's belongings: the blade, the korok leaf, the cooking pot, the paraglider, and the rest. She takes up the sword, no longer for its own sake, but to improve.

Her body remembers what she does not. She practises with the blade alongside several of the swordsmen from the village. Even if the terms have fallen from her memory, her legs take the stances and her arms the motions. She loses the first handful of fights resoundly, and then some inklings in the back of her head awaken. She strikes the swords from their hands; she clashes against their blades and thrusts her own forward; she hovers the tip of her sword not a centimetre the hollow of their throats.

Dorian and the other guard return the slate to her. "Lady Impa has requested that you try to activate the village shrine," the second guard explains brusquely, and Link looks up towards the top of the hill.

While the lift takes her back up, she considers the mechanical creature that she fought, the slow and calculated manner in which it continued to swing its weapons in such repetitive motions until she ceased trying to attack and instead dodged. The mechanical creature went through an axe, a lance, and a sword before simply shutting off. The lift opened thereafter. This time she studied the images: of how to best dodge or parry certain types of attacks in combat, though she could not discern several of the more complicated pictures for lack of understanding of the language in which the shrine-voice spoke.

Instructions, but for what, she cannot say.

Standing in front of Lady Impa's home, Link relays the information to Dorian, who strokes his chin and nods. A sudden gasp from afar makes Link glance towards the house, to find a sheikah woman of about her age staring at her. When the girl notices Link's gaze, she gasps again and covers her eyes.

Dorian chuckles. "Don't mind her. She is Lady Impa's granddaughter, and she believes greatly in the old stories that Lady Impa has told her, of the time before the Great Calamity."

"*The old stories?*

His expression darkens. "I'll need to talk to her about that later," he mutters. Then Dorian smiles at Link and claps her on the shoulder. "That you could activate the shrine is proof that you carry the blessing of the Goddesses yet. May Sheik's own Truth guide your path." He pauses. "Or rather, may Hylia's. My apologies, I haven't spoken to a non-sheikah in quite some time."

Link shrugs. "*I'm happy with whichever Goddess wants to guide me. That I made my way here*
without getting lost is a miracle, you know?"

Abruptly Dorian's hands clamp around her shoulders. She flinches; he draws himself up and forces her to meet his crimson gaze. "Link. Do not sell yourself short. Whatever has happened can be undone, and already you've proven yourself a capable girl."

Link nods dumbly. Dorian releases her, and she sinks to her knees.

"Sorry, Link. Listen, when we come to a decision about what to do, you'll be the first to know." He glances left and right, and Link tilts her head to one side. "Now, if I could have the slate again, so that we may investigate it further...?"

As Link removes the slate from its pouch and drops it into Dorian's outstretched hand, she hears a voice from the house. The girl. Paya. "U-um, Do-dorian," she stammers, her fingers nervously drumming the banister, "Grandmother said that you could lea-leave the slate with Ma-Ma-Ma-Master Link."

Dorian's smile stretches a little too thin over his mouth. "Oh, is that so? Thank you for letting me know, Paya." He holds the slate out. Link accepts the slate. His fingers close around empty air, and he clicks his tongue. "Well then, Master Link..."

"Please don't call me that."

"...I believe that Lady Impa will have a message for you soon," Dorian finishes. He wipes his brow with a red-lined kerchief. His posture relaxes, and his hands settle loosely on his hips. "Thank you for taking care of my daughters, Link. They've been much happier the past few days. If nothing else, you could consider staying here. I don't think it would be a bad life."

Link rubs the back of her head and laughs uncertainly.

"Well, whatever you decide, you always have a home here, sheikah or no."

With that Dorian leaves Link to her own devices, and to her own device: the slate, which she now regards with some suspicion. Still, she looks up towards the Pillars of Levia that pierce the skies.

She spends the afternoon hiking among them, gathering herbs, roots, and seeds as she does so, alongside a collection of tart spring apples. She brings them back to Koko in the evening only to discover that Koko once again has neglected to bring together all of the ingredients needed for supper. With the apples Link has gathered and the great tub of goat butter that Koko purchased from the marketplace, however, they piece together Koko's mother's old recipe for buttered apples. Link aids Koko in heating the butter in a small pan, to which they add sprinkles of sugar, cinnamon, and a hint of salt. They bake the apples in the sauce over a low fire. The fragrance of caramel and warm butter spreads through the entire house. Link and Cottla perch cross-legged, staring at the apples,licking their lips in unison, while Koko keeps tracks of the time that the apples have baked.

The apples come out soft and sweet, the pinch of salt adding exactly the right amount of offset for Link to tear up. Cottla seems to relish the idea of something so sugary. "Dessert for dinner!?!" Cottla yells. "Link's the best big sister ever!"

Link grins sheepishly at Cottla; Koko's slight frown vanishes the smile.

As night falls, Link gathers several of the buttered apples into a bowl. She inquires to Koko of where she might find Lasli's home. Koko hmms to herself, but Cottla leaps up and eagerly waves an arm. Grabbing Link by the hand, Cottla drags her around the village to the other side, to a small
house at the periphery of the insulated scoop of the valley that protects Kakariko from the elements. "Ja-ja! There it is!" Cottla twirls around in an impromptu dance. Link laughs good-naturedly.

She raps on the door to Lasli's home with her knuckles and steps back. After a moment the door creaks open. Lasli stands in the doorway in a white nightgown, her hair loose around her shoulders.

"Link! I didn't expect you," she signs, and Link runs a hand over the back of her neck. "Do you want to come in?"

"It isn't much," Link says, cradling the bowl of apples in the crook of her arm, "but it's at least a small token of my thanks."

Lasli makes an oh sound in the back of her throat. She takes the bowl and motions for Link to follow her inside. She does so, closing the door behind her. Within the house, she finds a simple room, with a small mat for a bed pushed into the corner; a nightstand-like item with a tea kettle, cups, and various wooden instruments on the top; and several articles of clothing neatly folded on a stand. Lasli lays out a mat and gestures for Link to take a seat. She complies.

Lasli kneels on another mat across from Link. Lasli splits some of the apples into a second bowl, which she slides towards Link.

"Thank you, Link. At least share the meal with me."

They eat quietly, although Link, as always, wolfs down her portion with gusto. She sets the bowl aside.

Lasli finishes more slowly. "Thank you. I haven't had good buttered apples like that since Umi...never mind. My apologies for making you wait."

Link shakes her head, partially confused on why Lasli would apologise for eating of all things. "If there's anything else that I can do for you or..." Her wrists go limp, and she ducks her head, her cheeks flushing. "...I forgot the other woman's name."

"Claree?"

She bobs her head. "If there's anything that I can do, please let me know."

"You don't need to do anything, and I'm sorry for what Claree said in the shop today." Lasli sighs. "We've been told about the great hero for so long that we weren't expecting you to show up like this."

Link gazes at the floor. The slate carries the power to generate apparently limitless bombs. If she were to climb up to the peak of one of the Pillars of Levia, then perhaps...

Lasli swings her head fervently from side to side, her eyebrows nearly flying from her face. "That's not what I meant, Link, not at all. It's not fair that we've placed so many expectations and burdens on you. You're just a person, like any of us." She giggles to herself, and Link cocks her head to one side. "When I was younger, I thought of myself as a great adventurer. I romanticised the notion. If I could make the trip down to Kasuto, why, that was the same as going across the entire world. I used to catch the sunset fireflies to light my way at night, oh...I miss those days." Her shoulders slope downwards; the corners of her mouth tug towards her chin. "Nowadays, especially of late, there are too many monsters around to travel safely, and I can't say I know my way around a sword. But what I wouldn't give to see the fireflies again..." She covers her mouth with her hand. "Oh, but listen to me rattle on about things. Tell me about yourself, Link. You, not the hero
They talk. Link recounts all that she remembers, recounts the inner workings of the shrine at the top of the hill, recounts how the tower rising up from the ground on the plateau nearly killed her from shock alone. Lasli answers her questions about the village, or at least some of them. "I'm sorry, but...there are some things that Lady Impa has asked us not to tell you."

She talks about the feud between the pumpkin farmer and the carrot farmer, about the sacred burial grounds towards the other exit to Kakariko, of how Lady Impa came to lead the village. Once a retreat for monks that served the Goddess Sheik, a century ago Kakariko transformed into one of the largest sheikah villages left.

"Left?" Link repeats.

"After the Great Calamity," Lasli says and then curls her fingers inwards. "Ah, sorry, I wasn't supposed to..."

At length Lasli bows to Link. Thanking her again for the buttered apples, Lasli returns the bowl and sees her off.

Link practically skips on the way back to the house, a smile lighting up her lips and a mischievous twinkle in her eye. Though Koko and Cottla have already fallen asleep, Dorian has not yet arrived home. She finds the girls sleeping on mats by the bed. Scooping Koko up with her left hand and Cottla with her right, Link gently places them on the bed and covers them, then takes her own spot on the mats.

She can hardly sleep.

The second the rooster crows, she springs out of bed. After downing a breakfast of leftover buttered apples, she inquires of the possibility of procuring a bug net.

A bug-lover in the village, the son of a rice-growing couple, allows her to borrow his. She sneaks up to the hill to the woods behind Kakariko. Link hops up into a tree and settles between its branches to wait. Her leg cramps. She slides out to find a more suitable tree in which to nap until nightfall.

A strange circular base across a fallen log causes her to quit her search for the ideal tree. The lights glow the same orange as the shrines and the towers. She touches her chin in thought. The circular depression in the base does not respond to her sitting in it, nor waving the slate over it, nor setting the slate down in the depression, nor her stepping on it, nor her jumping up and down, nor her signing somewhat rude comments in its general direction, nor her tapping her foot as she looks about. Nothing in the general vicinity speaks to the secret in unlocking the mysterious whatever-it-is on the ground.

She crosses her arms and launches a more thorough investigation of her surroundings.

Instead of the key to the orange whatever-it-is, she finds a patch of flowers, white and blue, of a particular star-like shape whose petals appear to glisten. Link crouches down beside one of the flowers. The underside of the petals feels fuzzy against her palm. She sniffs.

The fragrance of the petals brings her to close her eyes.

She remembers: the girl with the golden hair, on her elbows and knees in the grass, her blue tunic bunched up around her waist, her spring green eyes wide, the pupils nearly swallowing the irises whole. "A silent princess," she breathed out, while Link squatted beside her, attempting to make
out the flower that had captivated the girl so. Her words slur in the memory. "They're endangered, and are seen as a symbol of the blessing of Hylia, but none of our botanists has managed to grow them in captivity. Only in the wilds do they thrive..."

Link leaves the silent princess alone in the quiet safety of the oak above. She discovers the perfect tree and so curls up in its boughs.

She awakens to the buzz of fireflies. When she tries to twirl the bug net as she would her blade, the air catches in the mesh and she topples headfirst from the tree. Link stifles her snorting laugh as she picks herself up.

Bug hunting.

Losing her boots so that her bare feet make less noise against the soft earth, she sneaks silently towards the fireflies. She misses her first few swings. Soon she gets the hang of the bug-netting art. One, two, five, ten. She bottles the fireflies up—with holes poked in the cork—and starts the trek into Kakariko proper.

Link makes it to the base of the hill, stops, and runs back up to grab her boots.

She creeps towards Lasli's house. The slide-closed window marks the perfect opportunity. Link wedges her blade into the thin crack between the window and the wall and jiggles it until the window slides and she can squeeze her fingers in. She opens the window just enough to fit the mouth of the jar through. Then she reaches over, uncorks the bottle, and shakes it. The second the last firefly buzzes out, Link slides the window shut again. She hides behind the house and waits.

Just as she starts to nod off, she hears the door slide open and closed. Link presses her ear against the wall.

She hears Lasli gasp.

Her grin could light all of the torches in Kakariko at once.

Without revealing her presence, Link stealths through Kakariko towards Dorian's home once more. Cottla rolls around demanding supper, while Koko bemoans what an awful sister she herself is. Link prepares her newly crafted two-minute root-'n'-herb stew from the leftovers of yesterday's gathering to quell Cottla's stomach and Koko's nerves.

"You really are the best big sister ever!" Cottla squeals, and Link pats her head. Koko turns in earlier for the night.

Morning brings with it summons to Lady Impa's home. Link arrives flanked by Dorian and the other guard whose name she cannot recall. Once more she kneels before the old woman on her cushion.

"Link." Lady Impa inclines her head. Before she can speak again, she coughs violently, hacking at her own breath. Paya kneels by her side to offer her a cup of water. Link waits patiently. A droplet of sweat rolls down the back of her head. "I will not beg you to be someone that you have no desire to be. It does not matter who you used to be, but who you are now. However, if you will listen, I have a request." She lifts a hand and faces her palm towards Link, the fingers splayed. "But first, I can sense the questions burning in your eyes. Please, ask me anything that you want."

"...what happened?" she signs immediately. "I know that I lost my memories, but I must have known people beforehand. Who is Her Majesty? Who..."
Lady Impa does not respond for enough time that the droplet of sweat slides down the crease of Link's spine. "Link, I do not believe that the answers you seek will come easily, but I have faith that you will recover your memories in your time. I see that you are unsatisfied still. Then, allow me to ease one burden. You need worry not about the people whom you knew then."

Link tilts her head, blinking twice in quick succession.

Impa sighs heavily. "Link..." A storm of emotions too complex for Link to decipher storm over her features, and then the tension bleeds from her face. "All that you would have remembered, save for perhaps the zora, and perhaps those as ancient as I, will not recognise you, nor do I know those that you have left behind. Do not worry of them for now, Link, until you yourself can recall them and seek them out."

Link numbly nods. The words pass over her without sinking in, as if someone had thrown her into the air so violently that her feet still felt planted solidly on the ground.

"Now, I have a favour to ask of you. To the northeast of here lies Eldin and Death Mountain, the homeland of the proud gorons. I ask that you travel to their capital of Darunia and see how they are doing, then report back to me. Worry not, for you will not go as a hero, a champion, or a knight, but merely as an envoy. Can you do this for me, Link?"

Another nod, fainter and number than the first.

"Thank you, Link. As you begin your journey to Eldin, I suggest that you head further east, to the village of Hateno. I have a letter for you to deliver."

Link takes the sealed red envelope in hands that could not form a single word if she tried.

When she bids the villagers good-bye, Cottla thrusts a full pumpkin into her hands, insisting Link take it with her as thanks. Link takes the pumpkin with a stranger's touch. "What's wrong!?" Cottla cries out, loud enough to wake the village.

Link ties the pumpkin to her back and turns away.

By noon, Kakariko faces her receding back.

—

*Hot Buttered Apple* (two hearts) - goat butter, apple

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: *Delicious in Wilds* has a bit of a slow start due to the shortness of the chapters, because I kept trying to contain myself to 4000 words or less per chapter. Things pick up once we hit Eldin with chapter ten and I gave up. As the famous meme goes, "Why contain it?" It's quite wild to me how meandering the early chapters are in comparison to the greater focus towards the second half of the story, though I suppose that that reflects Link's character development and mental state to some extent.

Each of the Seven Goddesses (Hylia, Sheik, Sageru, Kokir, Goro-goro, Zola, and
Erito) has a particular "virtue" associated with that Goddess. Sheik's is Truth: Throughout the franchise, the sheikah are associated with items that literally reference truth (including the lens of truth and the mask of truth), and Impa herself is oftentimes given the role of a truth-dealer, from her informing Link about the Triforce and Princess Zelda in the original The Legend of Zelda, to her role in aiding Zelda uncover the truth of Hylia in Skyward Sword. And, of course, Breath of the Wild Impa serves to coordinate Link's quest and assist Link with recovering Link’s own truths via the memories.

In Delicious in Wilds, I play with Impa's characterisation and role, as I play with larger themes of faith. This will become magnified in later chapters, but for now, she seems to be more truth-hiding than truth-dealing.

The boy who lends Link the bug-catching net is a reference to how Link obtains such a net in A Link to the Past.

Those who have played Breath of the Wild might have an inkling as to Dorian's strange request for the slate.

You'll note that I describe Zelda's eyes as green here; this is Link's original memory of her. That becomes a minor point later, as one of the minor themes of Delicious in Wilds is the fallibility of memory.

I named the capital of Eldin Darunia after the town from The Adventure of Link and the Sage from Ocarina of Time; indeed, the Divine Beast Vah Rudania is named after Darunia, so I felt the moniker appropriate. Fun fact to those who have never played the underrated The Adventure of Link: All of the Sages from Ocarina of Time were named after the villages from The Adventure of Link! The only missing village is Kasuto, although there is some evidence in the game that Kasuto was originally meant to be a character and the seventh Sage, to follow in the footsteps of A Link to the Past's seven "Dark World/future" dungeons, but that Rauru and "Kasuto's" dungeons were cut for time. But that's just speculation with minor evidence. At any rate, it's fun to note.

More time has passed than you might think. Going from Kasuto to Kakariko took roughly a week; from the Great Plateau to Kasuto, about double that length. Since Link stays a few days at Kakariko, I would say that nearly one month has passed from the first chapter. At any rate, we're off to Hateno, and then Eldin. That'll be fun. I might speed up my chapter posting so that we can move through these early chapters (given their shortness) and progress into the great wide somewhere.

Finally, another thank-you to my most wonderful beta reader and partner-in-crime.

midna's ass. 30 August 2017.

Beta reader's comments: I really really really really really love Koko.

I also really love Kakariko in-game, so it makes me super happy that the author basically devoted a whole chapter just to exploring the town I’ve spent so many hours in.

Emma. 30 August 2017.
Fried Wild Greens

Chapter Summary

En route to Hateno, the travelling chef befriends a horse who responds to a whistle that the travelling chef remembers from a youthful memory about a certain girl who smelled of horses.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

She walks the southern road. Though she has existed, awake, in the world beyond the Shrine of Resurrection for less than a month, already she has grown in strength, her stride longer, her time spent resting from the walk shorter.

No one will recognise her, as Lady Impa said, save for the slate that she carries on her hip. This time—mindful of the theft—she folds the envelope in half and tucks it between the slate and the inside of the pouch. The slate sticks up at an odd angle from the added tension of the paper.

Another set of directions, noted on a piece of fine parchment she inspects with her tongue poking out of the corner of her mouth, instructs her to take the eastern fork in the route back to Kasuto. Dorian's looping handwriting angles down the page, until she can see the words of the final line curve to scrawl up the margins of the paper. Creasing the paper into quarters, she leaves it on the top of her satchel.

To Kasuto.

To the communal cooking pots.

To the stables that she ignored on her first trip.

She glances east, at the long road that she can observe from her current vantage point, curling around the swamplands into a far-off pass, and whatever lies beyond.

Then she glances south, towards the grasslands sandwiched between swamp and forest, towards the grass rising nearly waist-high that sways in the leisurely wind not unlike the ripples of a calm lake, towards the small herds of horses that traverse the sea of green. Black and brown, tan and white, full-bodied and speckled, white socks and white markings on their long faces.

She steps away from the road. Her left boot sinks down into the wetland mud. She grips the hem with both hands.

Link pulls.

Her left hand ends up with the boot, and the girl ends up on her rear.

Crossing the swamp with her boots tucked under her arm, Link lets the cool mud squelch between her toes. When she reaches the drier ground of the grasslands, she cleans off her feet as best she can and ties her boots back on.
She could have simply taken the walk down the road to Kasuto and then veered off to the plains, but then she would have missed the shorter route of cutting straight through the swamp. Although, considering the amount of time it took her to tramp through the wetlands, the alternate path would have proven shorter after all.

Link fixes her gaze onto the grasslands themselves. Slabs of stone cloaked in ivy rise from the ground here and there, ruins that could pass for tilted gravestones if not for their size and whiteness. The horses graze idly at the grass, ears flicking to and fro, tails swishing over their backs. A black horse with a white mane trots apart from the rest of their herd to peruse an apple tree growing between two of the slabs, the roots cracking through the stone.

She crouches down until the waves of grass cover her. Link creeps forward on her knuckles to position herself behind the horse. She looks up at the horse, their physique far stronger and larger than they appeared at a distance, so powerful that a single well-aimed kick could well knock off Link’s entire head. Their ears tip backwards. Link stops. When the horse relaxes, Link readies to spring.

The horse's tail swishes over her nose and she sneezes.

Not a second later her head hits the ground and her lower chest throbs in a hoof-shaped ring of pain. The horse whinnies loudly. Link watches the horse rear and scrambles backwards, shuffling like a crab on her back. The horse's hooves slam into the dirt.

They paw at the ground, then launch into a trot. With a gasp Link rolls out of the way. As the horse passes her, not yet galloping, she leaps onto their back, smacking her abdomen into the curve of their spine. She swings her leg around and grabs the horse's mane, pulling back. The horse shakes their entire body. Link squeezes their sides with her thighs.

The horse rears.

Her muscle move where her conscious thoughts blank. She coos from the back of her throat, running her hands over the horse's neck, tightening the grip of her thighs just enough not to fall from their back. Her limbs strain as she fights to stay on.

Her efforts reward her with a faceful of earth.

The horse gallops off while Link pulls herself into a sitting position on the ground. She wipes the dirt off on her sleeve and bursts out laughing at herself, swinging her feet out as she presses her arms into her stomach. She checks her chest under the tunic. Nothing broken, though a welt of bruises in the form of a hoof has marked her chest as property of the black horse with the white mane. At least her head has not lopped off.

She plots her next move: the apples that the horse so covets. Link scales the tree the horse from which the horse sought fruit to pluck every apple she can reach. The final apple hangs infuriatingly far on a thin branch that wobbles beneath her weight. She drops a bomb at the base of the tree and detonates.

The impact flings her off; she lands on her back a few metres away. The fallen tree and the apple remain intact. She snags the final apple from the thin branch and tosses it into the air.

When the apple smacks back into her palm, Link shields her eyes with her left hand to scan the grasslands for the black horse. She spots the horse not too far away, rolling one of the detonated tree branches with their nose. Link squats down. She sneaks towards the horse, calm, quiet, so as not to spook the animal. Link balances the apple in the centre of her hand: a sacrificial offering.
The horse's nostrils embiggen. They swivel their ears about. One step at a time the horse approaches Link.

Link does not breathe.

The horse nudges the apple with their nose, then folds their upper lip over the shiny red fruit. They crush down the apple and snort.

Moving with excruciating steadiness, Link lifts a second apple to the horse. She watches the horse's eyes. They meet her gaze, as if the horse were studying her face. The horse accepts the second offering as well.

Link begins to coo softly at the horse to soothe them while she continues to feed them apples. When the horse bends their neck to take a fourth or a fifth—Link has long lost count—she turns up her palm to touch the horse's nose. Their ears flick forward, but the horse does not trample her.

Not yet, at least.

The supply of apples runs low. She inches her way to the horse's side. Gradually she rises up from her crouch. The horse's lips tickle the palm of her hand. Their warm, slippery tongue seeks another apple not forthcoming. When she senses the horse's hot breath over her fingers, Link seizes the moment.

She lands astride the horse. Within an instant the horse has reared again. Their hooves leave imprints in the ground so sharp that Link swallows heavily, and then the horse begins to buck. Link coos as before in their ear. This time her endurance wins out over the horse's desire to rear, and instead the horse launches into a full gallop.

The wind pushes Link's hair into her face. She lowers her head to the horse's neck, clinging to their body for dear life. Wherever the horse takes her, Link will powerlessly follow.

The horse's muscles bend and bulge beneath Link's form as they cross from grass to swamp, the transition audible in the sudden splash of water that accompanies each stride.

Link holds on.

Her arms ache. Her fingers, tangled in the horse's mane, have grown leaden. Her thighs threaten to fall off entirely.

She holds on.

She feels the horse slow beneath her, down to a canter, then a trot, then an unsteady walk, and then the horse comes to a pause. She dares not open her eyes yet. The horse shuffles their hooves and whips their head back and forth. She leans herself back at the motion.

She lifts her eyelids, blinking the wind-watered tears from the corners of her eyes.

The horse waits on a fairly dry patch of grass in the midst of the swamp. Amid the ruins sinking into the mud she can see the same statues as those she noticed at the Temple of Time, seemingly frozen in mid-crawl. The horse snorts out. They step forward, then back, then turn themselves around and around on the patch of grass.

Link allows the horse to proceed as they will. She sits up straight on the horse's back. Curling and uncurling her fingers, she massages her own hands to ease the coiled tension.
The horse has evidently forgotten of her existence, or else has gone mad.

She strokes the horse between the ears, pats them along their neck, makes soft noises to them.

The horse stops once more.

As gently as possible, Link presses down with her thighs. The horse responds by shaking their body to and fro. Another light press, and the horse moves forward, then halts at the edge of the patch of grass. Link looks around the ruins again, for tracks of predators, for signs of a storm on the horizon, for anything that might spook a horse.

She cannot make out anything of note, neither with her eyes nor with the telescope.

Link squeezes again. The horse neighs plaintively. A fourth squeeze proves the charm: the horse walks forward.

A sudden sharp noise pierces the calm. And then another. And another. And another. And another.

Six or seven crimson dots speckle Link and the horse alike. Six or seven single glimmering eyes—a flash of violent violet that gives way to the same blue as on the plateau—brighten immeasurably. Six or seven bursts of light and sound rid Link of all of her senses save for the feeling of the horse beneath her moving with the wind.

She wraps her hands in the horse's mane. The pounding of the horse's limbs push away Link's legs. Sensing herself tip left, she twists her body to regain her position. The statues loose their arrows of holy fire—or whatever they radiate from their singular eyes with the brightness of the sun—in great arcs that burn up the grass and smoke towards the sky. The statues' lines of fire blaze towards them, catching up to the horse's galloping. Link pulls the horse's mane left. After a moment the horse responds to her. The bolts of fire miss to the right. She tugs the mane to the right; the horse changes direction again. Racing in zig-zags, they outrun the statues until Link hears nothing but her own breaths, the *splish* of hoof in water, and the croaking of wetland frogs.

The horse does not halt, yet their speed no longer has the potential to toss Link off like a bag of meat. She relaxes her grip. The horse continues their canter across the field. A lone tree sprouts at the top of a small hill.

The horse pauses by the tree. Link strokes their neck. Unlike before, the horse neither bucks nor rears.

She slides off. Her boots contact soil. Her legs shiver up to her hips.

Her knees buckle.

Link lets herself fall to the ground. She lies down with her right cheek in the dirt, glancing at the horse through blades of grass with her left eye. The horse steps towards her body. They nudge her in the side with their nose.

She lifts her right hand, palm out. The horse sniffs her fingers. Their upper lip protrudes as they taste Link in some sort of test. The horse licks her between the fingers.

A ladybird lands on the bridge of her nose. She crosses her eyes as the speckled insect explores the tip of her nose and then crawls onto her cheek. She puffs air gently in its direction. The ladybird flutters off.

Link grins.
The horse steps away from Link and lowers their head into the sea of green. Link pinches a blade of grass between her thumb and forefinger.

She holds the grass up to the sky. The strip of green curves over her vision. In that moment the grass dwarfs even the sun.

Something so tiny, yet so vastly vital, from the angle at which she looks.

The wind whispers over the grass and over her face alike. It lifts the hem of her tunic and the sidelocks of her hair. She splays her fingers, still wet from the horse's mouth. The skin facing the wind cools with a sensation of such simple pleasure that she cannot help but laugh at the giddiness of life.

Since she awakened in what she now calls the Shrine of Resurrection, she has spent such time merely lying in the grass, marvelling at the act of being alive.

Whatever she used to be and whatever she chooses to be now, she can always stretch out on the green, can always listen to the song of the breeze over the hills, can always live in awe of her own living.

Her belly rumbles. She rests her hand on her stomach, patting herself. Food. Right, food, which she hasn't had any of since she fed all of those apples to the horse.

Food, the other simple pleasure that brings bliss and meaning to her existence.

With the increasingly dulled blade from the Great Plateau, Link cuts down the tree. Within a circle of stones that she lays out for a pit, she starts a fire. "Stay here," she says to the horse, who grazes contently by the campfire. She looks around for any sign of the river that runs near Kasuto.

When she makes out the woods in the distance, at least a day's ride away, she nods to herself and puts the pot back down. She opens her satchel instead: apples from Kakariko, slightly smooshed; endura and swift carrots crushed and partially juiced against the sides of the satchel, given to her by Koko as thanks for helping with dinner; a few odds and ends of Hyrule herbs and blue nightshade picked in the woods behind the village. And the pumpkin that Cottla pushed into her hands.

She allows herself to fall down onto her rear by the fire with the pumpkin in her lap. Link carves off the cap of the pumpkin. She flicks the cap off with the edge of the knife. Picking it off from the ground, she gives the inside a lick.

Pumpkin-y.

She quarters the apple and carrots, then slices the pieces, then dices them further. Into the pumpkin they go. She repeats the procedure for the herbs, cutting them from one end to the other into thin rings of vaguely similar thickness. Some end up about four times as thick as others, but variety's the greatest spice in life. Or so she tells herself.

After quitting her gloves, she wipes off her sweat-caked hands as best she can. She empties half of her water-skin in her efforts to scrub her skin.

She smiles at her own fingers, as clean as she can get them without a trip to the river.

Link mixes the insides of the pumpkin with her bare hands. She scrapes the pumpkin goop from the inner rind, the seeds pressing into her palms. She wriggles her fingers and squishes the goo between them.
Half-giggling as she works, Link thoroughly blends the vegetables and fruits within until she can no longer find pockets of just one ingredient. Satisfied, she pulls out her hands. She cleans her fingers off with her own mouth. The fusion of bits of herb, apple, carrot, flower, and of course pumpkin makes for a guessing game of what flavour will she taste next.

She scoots herself to the stump of the tree that she has converted to firewood. Carefully she cuts away a rectangular if uneven plank of wood roughly twice the dimensions of her open palm. She thins it down with the knife. Link empties the contents of the stuffed pumpkin onto the stump, leaving the mostly vacant rind, and sets the rind onto the fire upside-down. While the pumpkin cooks, Link spreads the mixture of chopped fruits and vegetables onto the thin plank. She holds the plank out over the fire, not close enough for the flames to catch onto the wood, but enough that the goop becomes tender. She cooks about half of the stuffing to softness and leaves the other half just undercooked enough to provide a bite. As she sits about and patiently waits, she leans forward into the fire to smell the baking pumpkin. The scent alone could feed her for a month. Her stomach yawns in its emptiness like a dog begging for a treat.

Link removes the pumpkin rind from the fire. She checks the inner edge with the back of her hand: warm, heated.

She stuffs the pumpkin full again with the raw ingredients and mixes the two sets of stuffing: half baked and half uncooked. A sudden weight at the crown of her head startles her into nearly letting go of the pumpkin. She looks up to find the horse, which has now wandered over to her again, browsing through her hair.

Link returns her gaze to the pumpkin she has cared for so meticulously. Sitting for so long that she has lost some of the feeling in her rear, and she shifts around to sit straighter. She inhales the smoky, tender scent of the stuffed pumpkin. Scooping out a handful of the mix into her mouth, she swallows the sweetness that moistens her throat on the way down.

The scent of the pumpkin. A scent she has come across before.

She remembers: the yellowish-brown-haired girl who smelled of horses, cross-legged on the ground beside her. Leaning on the wall of the stable, though she cannot recall the colour of the wood. A pumpkin between them, nearly stuffed to the brim with chopped fruits and vegetables. Celery and carrot, apple and lettuce, yam and pumpkin, leftover watermelon rind and even a banana that Link had brought with her from her travels to town. Link and the girl who smelled of horses sat there—in the dusky evening—dicing treats for the horses.

The girl who smelled of horses paused to flex her knife-wielding right hand and scoop up the yam she had prepared. "Thanks for helping."

Link wiped stuck bits of lettuce from the knife into the pumpkin gourd. She shook her head. The least that she could do, for the girl who smelled of horses, who took care so fondly of Link's horse.

Link's horse.

Link's horse.

She had a horse.

"You're one of the kindest girls I've met. I'm sure—" She cannot remember the word that followed. "—will love it. Can you call her over?" The girl who smelled of horses glanced at her own palms. "My hands are all sticky."
Link lifted her hands to her mouth. She wets her fingers and curled them into a instrument. She whistled. A dark mass cantered towards them, with features that blur and melt to the edges of her recollection.

The girl who smelled of horses laughed. She leaped to her feet to greet the horse.

Her horse. Link's horse.

The name of the horse. The name of the horse. She strains to sift her fingers through the fog of memory. She inhales the scent of the warm stuffed pumpkin gourd.

A jumble of words float to the surface of her mind. She seizes one.

Ilia.

Emulating the gesture over her mouth from the memory, Link whistles, loud and low. Abruptly the horse gallops barrelling after her. She sprints out of the horse's path, tumbling down into a roll. The cooking pot, at least, did not bear the brunt of the horse's fury. The horse comes to a stop not half a metre away and twists their head to gaze at Link with gentle eyes.

She backs up some twenty paces away from the campsite and whistles again.

The horse launches themself at Link. This time Link holds her ground, and the horse rides by her right side to another half-metre distance before halting.

She ogles the horse, already trained by someone else to come at the command of a whistle.

Unless the twisted threads of fate have somehow brought her to her own horse, she has found herself someone else's horse, turned out to the wild. A horse taught to respond to the same whistle.

The ranch, the girl who smelled of horses, the place where she sat in the dusky evening to dice leaves of lettuce could lie somewhere nearby. Somewhere near the swamp, near the plain, near Kasuto, or somewhere close enough that a traveller could have ridden their horse here and then left them.

Link rests her palm on the horse's nose. "Ilia." The gesture ends on a curve in front of her chest not unlike a horseshoe. The horse's name.

If one day she remembers of the girl who smelled of horses, if one they come face to face, maybe by then she will catch another name from the fog of her memories; maybe the whistle will send the name running into her arms.

"Ilia," she says, solemnly facing her horse, "will you accompany me to Hateno?"

Ilia swishes her tail. She huffs warm air into Link's face, then pushes her nose further into Link's hand. Her ears slope downwards. Ilia whinnies.

Link leads her horse to the campfire. With some difficulty she half-cuts, half-breaks the pumpkin into two halves. She sets the smaller piece in her lap and the larger at Ilia's hooves.

Ilia sniffs the warm innards of the pumpkin. She licks experimentally and then munches. Snorting out a laugh to herself, Link pats Ilia's neck soothingly as the horse eats. She scoops the insides of her own half of the stuffed pumpkin into her mouth. The symphony of sweetness and tartness, the tender warmed fruit combined with the crunch of vegetables not fully steamed, brings her to lick the goo from her palm and fingers.
When Ilia finishes, she browses the inside of Link's pumpkin rind, then turns her attentions to Link's hands, which she inspects to cleanliness. Link cannot help but shake her shoulders in silent laughter the proceedings.

"Am I a cleany-clean enough girl for you now, Ilia?"

The horse grazes in Link's hair in response.

The following morning, together, they set off east. A horse and her girl.

—

Fried Wild Greens (three hearts) - apple, fortified pumpkin, swift carrot

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Speaking of infallibility of memory, I just noticed that I've been erroneously reporting my comments for previous chapters as written in April instead of in August. I have since fixed them. All of these comments are being written immediately prior to uploading each chapter.

The sixth chapter introduces Link's horse, whom I chose to name Ilia; Epona is the name of the horse that Link rode prior to the Great Calamity. Ilia is the name of the horse that Link rides now, based on my own horse in Breath of the Wild. The name "Ilia" comes from the girl associated with horses from Twilight Princess; the reader is not expected to be familiar or have played Twilight Princess to appreciate the "girl who smelled of horses," especially as I have changed her significantly from her original appearance. See my note for the second chapter for more information on characters lifted out of other games.

I wished to introduce for Link a "childhood friend" character without resorting to OCs—not that there's anything wrong with OCs, mind, but I prefer to use canon characters for such important roles when possible—and Ilia from Twilight Princess was the most appropriate candidate I could think of.

Horses do indeed like stuffed pumpkin, and I believe that all of the ingredients I listed are safe for horse consumption. If you do know a horse, please be sure to check before relying on anything I write!

Interesting that Link somehow met a horse who knows the same whistle as Epona recognised prior to the Great Calamity.

I really enjoyed the horse affection feature from Breath of the Wild. Slowly having to "teach" a horse and watching the horse learn to trust you more and more warmed my heart. Here's out to you, Ilia, for guiding me throughout Breath of the Wild and taking me along many a scenic road.

"A horse and her girl," of course, reflects Link's conception of her relationship to Ilia and to Epona. While Ilia is "Link's horse," in the sense that the girl who smelled of
horses would be "Link's friend," Link does not see herself as her horse's master, but as her friend and companion.

midna's ass. 31 August 2017.

Beta reader's comments: We meet Ilia in this chapter! Ilia is one of my very favourite characters in this series. She's adorable and I love her.

The pumpkin is important. Its use here is a detail I love.

Emma. 31 August 2017.
Energising Glazed Mushrooms

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef meets a local historian who tells the chef about a famous hero of a century ago who defended Fort Hateno from guardians; a local archaeologist who inevitably clues the chef in on a nearby shrine; and the curious researchers of the ancient technology laboratory in Hateno. The head researcher not only helps to repair the apparently corrupted the slate to allow the chef to produce incredibly accurate illustrations known as pictographs, but also directs the chef to the town shrine.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Maybe Ilia warms up to her, or perhaps Link better understands the horse, or some combination of the two. Whatever the reason, Link finds that she merely needs to gently squeeze her thighs for the horse to set off at a trot. Travellers on the road fall over themselves to sell her everything she might need for her horse, from hay to sugar cubes to horseshoes to saddle to brindles to charms of the Goddesses to strange mechanical contraptions that Link does not recognise but which a man on a blue horse assures her would be absolutely necessary for the continued well-being of her horse.

Contraptions aside, Link does consider horseshoes and a saddle, to protect her horse. Yet she does not have the rupees. She scratches her head at these mysterious rupees, evidently exchangeable for goods and services, as Ilia canters forward.

She passes through mossy ruins of stone cracked and crumbled. "The remains of Fort Hateno," a local historian of sorts jabbers excitedly, the pale skin of his pointed ears reddened with sunburn. Over a vegetable stew medley of whatever both of them can bring to the cooking pot, he regales her with the tale of a great hero from a century ago who defended the fort on his own from the menace of the guardians.

"In the end, he was overwhelmed, his body spirited away by a beautiful Sage of Hylia, her hair gold as the radiant sun and her eyes blue as the heavens above," the man observes, pouring himself a generous second sampling of their joint soup, "but the records show that he slayed hundreds of those things himself." He tears up; his voice cracks. "His sacrifice gave everyone enough time to evacuate. W...what a hero. If I could just be a smidgen like him, why, I could do anything..."

Link drinks her fourth or fifth helping of stew. "Is that what those statues out there are?"

"The guardians?" The man nods. "Most of 'em have broken after so many years. It's said that the guardians were the army of the Calamitous One—" Link ogles him. "—but it's also said that the monsters are the army of the Calamitous One. Why, maybe it's a little of column one and a pinch of column two, eh? Dunno why they're called guardians. My research hasn't turned up much."

Link nods slowly.

"Why, it's funny, really. You see, I was sure that a full century would have been enough for all of them to shut off." He pulls on his own nose. "But I've seen a couple working ones this past month."
I'm still investigating whether they have somehow repaired themselves over the century, or if some of them have been working all this time. Or those monsters are repairing them. Ooh, I hadn't thought of that possibility before." He crosses his arms over his chest. "And I'll need to investigate how the Hero of Fort Hateno could have taken them down. If they're coming back alive, then the world will need a new hero, won't it?"

Link checks that her satchel neatly covers the slate on her hip.

When she takes her leave, he shakes her hand so vigorously that her shoulder aches. "Thanks for stopping by. Come on back whenever you want."

She passes through the woods on the other side of Fort Hateno. The horizon has darkened with a brewing storm that hastens her towards Hateno: as the spring warms up, the frequency of summer thunder grows. Yet the buzz of a nearby beehive prompts her to leave Ilia by a tree, with her satchel, Dorian's instructions, and Lady Impa's letter safe on the horse's back. She plans her escape route: a pond in the heart of the forest. Plucking a long stick from the ground, she snaps off its twigs for a makeshift spear. Link locates the hive nestled in the boughs of a formidable tree. She practises throwing once, twice, thrice and then hurls the stick like a javelin.

The second the pointed end connects to the hive, Link turns to make her escape. The loud buzzing behind her pushes her legs faster in her efforts to reach the pond. She half-dives, half-rolls in to the water. Flattening herself against the sandy bottom, she tries to focus on the bees swarming over the surface of the pond.

Her lungs burn. Her body propels itself up for a breath. She inhales rapidly and plunges back into the water before the swarm can descend.

Eventually the bees give up. Link breaches the surface of the pond. She pants to catch her breath. The drenched fabric of her clothing sticks to her as a second skin. She checks the slate, which flashes at her and displays its symbols without indication of a lick of damage.

When Link returns, whistling, to the beehive tree, she finds a mob of animals fighting over the honeycomb. She wheezes in laughter at herself.

Next time she will snag the honeycomb before she runs for the water.

She takes the opportunity to browse the woods for mushrooms, herbs, fruits. Walking around the trees with Ilia—after shoving Lady Impa's letter back into the slate pouch—she pats her full satchel.

The storm breaks out when she has hiked halfway up the hill. A light shower transforms into a heavy downpour in the span of thirty paces. Link pulls her hood up over her head. Ilia shies to a trot. Link leans forward to listen: so long as the hoofbeats clip with the road and not the muddied grass on the sides, Link and Ilia continue towards Hateno.

A far-off thunderbolt spooks Ilia into a gallop. Link tugs back on her mane, cooing into her ear, until Ilia calms down enough that Link can hear the splash of mud beneath her hooves.

Mud, not well-worn path.

Leading Ilia cautiously back and forth, Link attempts to find the road again. The curtain of rain keeps her reliant on her ears and on the distinctive contortions of Ilia's muscles over damp terrain against which the horse struggles to lift her sucked-in hooves.

Lightning rends the sky. Ilia freezes rather than spooks. In the brief glimpse of light, Link spots the
dark strip of road off to her right, with a solitary figure standing in the middle of the path. The afterglow blinds her. She leads Ilia towards the right.

The squelch of muddied hooves gives way to the hard clops upon the beaten path, and Link releases her breath. She squints into the unceasing torrent. Ilia walks forward through the rain. Despite the curtain of rain, the crackle of electricity in the air lifts the hair on Link's arms and the back of her neck.

Link reaches for the blade that she has kept with her since she left the Great Plateau. She hurls it towards the clouds, as far as she can throw it.

At the highest point of the sword's arc—prior to the blade even hitting the ground—lightning strikes it in a blaze of light and thunder that sends Ilia rearing.

"He-e-e-e-elp!" someone screams. The figure, now close enough that Link can make out their human shape, thrashes their arms upwards. Steadily she pushes Ilia forward. Lowering her arm towards the road, Link feels around the air from around the height of Ilia's shoulder with her hand until her palm makes contact with something solid, who shrieks. If not for the rain, Link could reassure the screaming figure or could at least sign her words—character by character if need be—into the person's hand, yet whoever-it-is continues to yelp out loud until Link simply lifts them bodily onto Ilia.

"Are you kidnapping me!" the whoever-it-is shrieks directly into Link's ear. Without acknowledging their shrill cries, Link turns Ilia about to trek back to Fort Hateno.

The rain lightens up before she can make it to the fort. The dissipating clouds and emerging sun reveal her unruly passenger as a pallid and balding man with dark grey hair, pointed ears, and the bushiest eyebrows that Link has yet seen.

"Well, well, well," the man says, once Link has named herself as a traveller and temporarily a courier of sorts, and once Link has established that she has no intention of selling the man for his body parts, "you have made the acquaintance of the esteemed Doctor Calip." He points to himself: an archaeologist, local historian, and expert on the nearby ruins.

Link inquires if he's met the other local historian, the aficionado of Fort Hateno, and Calip scoffs at the mere implication that Fort Hateno has any meaningful history.

"No, no, my boy," Calip corrects her with the air of someone who refers to anyone in his vicinity as my boy regardless of sex or age, "I am wounded that you would put the field of archaeology anywhere near the woefully insular local historians. While they consider the span of a few years, we archaeologists consider the world on the scale of aeons. And I am Necluda's leading expert in the ancient religions! Before the faithless of our era abandoned the old ways—a cause of the Great Calamity, I tell you—our people lived directly in the skyward paradise of the Goddesses, communing with them on a daily basis." He goes on and on. Ilia flicks her ears. Link retrieves a mushroom from her satchel to bide the time. "...indeed, I know of one such site of communion myself. When I finally complete my research, then you will find me at Inpaz where I belong."

Link asks where she can drop him off, "Doctor Calip?"

Calip cleans his spectacles repeatedly, though the lenses appear to become dirtier with every wipe of the rag. "Oh yes, Doctor Calip...I quite like the sound of that..." He nods to himself. "Well, now, now, allow me to extend a gift for saving me from that dreadful storm. I will let you see this very site of communion!"
Link tries to ask again where she can drop him off. Calip gives her directions that send her wheeling in circles around the area.

"Ah, to the left. No, no, the other left. Or was it that left after all? No, my boy, just over there, past that tree. Oh no, by Nayru, it wasn't that tree, but this other..."

At long last they arrive at the site of communion. Link glances around a rocky clearing flanked and protected by cliffs that slope inwards to a natural bowl of the earth. Here a sea of small weathered statues rise from the ground: a third of them winged women with pointed ears; a third with flower blossoms in their right hands and teardrops carved under their left eyes; and a third with stars upon their chests and with six-stringed harps resting in their upwards-turned palms. Most have broken. Arms and heads lie partially buried in the ground. Time has swallowed some of the statues whole. Slightly in front of the semicircle of attending statues sits another with a drawn brow, its circular head and scowl setting it apart from the repeated motif of three.

Calip draws a bound volume from his coat. He clears his throat. "You will notice that this statue in front, albeit made of a similar material, was crafted after all of the others." Link has difficulty noting anything other than the earthy taste of the green mushshroom in her hand. Calip begins to pace about the clearing. As he talks of distinctive archaeological techniques that he has pioneered in the study of these statues, Link returns to Ilia, saddling her up. "No, no, my boy, archaeology is not merely the study of the stone, but the study of the mind, as well. Allow me to translate from Old Hyrulean." He stops. "That is to say, Loftean. Of course, this book is so old, that I must translate it from Loftean." Another pause. Link can feel him staring at her as if expecting a reaction, but the word Hyrulean means little to her, much less Old Hyrulean and much much less Loftean. "The inscription says, 'When a dark light resides in the cursed statue's eyes, pierce its gaze to purge the seal from the shrine.' Well, well, well, such a poetic translation, no?" Calip continues on to describe his heroic feats of translation; Link's gaze fixes upon the scowling statue.

Shrine.

Link drops her hands from Ilia. While Calip speaks of how the religious ceremonies must have gone, if these statues of the Goddesses now known as Sageru, Sheik, and Hylia could have represented early versions of the Golden Goddesses—or if the Golden Goddesses and the Patron Goddesses of humanity were once one and the same—she crouches down beside the scowling statue. The spiral patterns along its sides resemble those of the shrines, the spires, and the slate. Link turns the words over in her mind: dark light.

Dark light.

"...and say, you'll take me back now to my home, won't you? After all that I've done for you? Shown you the site of communion and all that?"

Link looks at Calip over her shoulder. Night has encroached as she stood wondering at the statue and at the promise of a shrine.

"You simply must pay me back for how I've lavished you with secret knowledge," Calip pleads.

Link allows him onto Ilia's back. After another all-too-long period of running about in circles, Calip shows Link the way to his cabin. He dismisses her at the door without offering her a place to stay or even a meal.

She narrows her eyes: a meal, a meal.
Bidding Ilia to stay put near Calip's cabin, she sets out into the wood under the darkness of night, with only the pale crescent moon curving into the sky like a lynel horn.

A lynel. The word plinks into her memory without an image.

She listens; she sniffs; she looks. Before long, she comes upon another beehive, this one quiet with the blanket of night. She circles the tree in search of the pond. Thirty paces, she estimates.

Link inhales sharply. She pulls the slate from its pouch at her right hip to take careful aim, lining the golden cursor just so with the beehive.

The hive locks in place.

She leaps up towards the hive and just manages to snag the bottom curve with her fingers. As gravity propels her downwards, the hive rips from the branch of the tree. She starts to pelt towards the pond. The slate beeps to warn her of time running out. The beeping intensifies. Link kicks her right foot into a rock. She tilts forward. The hive leaves her grip. She senses more than watches the beehive curve through the air and land in the water with a thunderous splash as she herself drops into the grass.

The slate beeps a final time and makes a tone like the breaking of chains.

Link crawls forward to the edge of the pond. She sticks the hive underwater to drown the bees within. Digging up the pebble on which she tripped from the ground, she dashes the rock into the beehive until it cracks open. Dead bees float out from the inside. She takes off her outer tunic, leaving on her undershirt, and uses the tunic as a net in which to keep the honeycomb. Link breaks the hive into the tiniest chunks that she can. She shakes each chunk to rid it of bees. Then she lifts up the tunic to drain the water.

Link considers her handiwork. Surely she must have a better way to harvest honey than destroying an entire productive hive. She scarcely knows what to cook with so much honey.

For now she takes the washed honeycomb and carries it back to where Ilia waits.

Her legs aching in fatigue, Link finds a leafy tree under which to make a campfire. Ilia browses the grass while Link sets to work on the handful of mushrooms she collected earlier, not the lovely red mushrooms plentiful on the Great Plateau, but small green affairs that thrives between Kakariko and Hateno. She removes the honey from the comb as best she can. Too much honey, far too much. A pot of liquid gold. She adds the last of the rock salt from Kasuto and stirs, then dips in the mushrooms. Skewering the mushrooms on the tip of her knife, she holds them out over the fire until the honey warms to a thick glaze.

Link bites down. The honey spreads sweetness through her mouth. Her eyelids lower of their own accord as the scent of the honeyed warmth overtakes her.

She has eaten glazed green mushrooms before.

A medley seated around a campfire. The girl with the golden hair, the golden and violet charms at her throat. The dark-skinned girl with a red ponytail tied back in a green hairband and golden earrings. A great blue falcon. A scarlet girl with a shark on her head—or was the shark her head? An orange mountain of a rock-like man. And the woman in black with the single strand of long hair and the teardrop tattoo under her eye, leaning against the tree. Several horses grazing at the periphery: one brown—Link's horse; one white and standing out against the night; one light blue with a saddle that sported patterns similar to those on Link's armbands. Beyond the dark edges of
the campfire, Link could see a small sea of tents. She remembers: the rock-like being clapping
Link on the back for her ingenious efforts in smoking out enough hives to gather golden
honeycomb. The blue falcon scoffing.

The girl with the golden hair ignoring the rabbit glazed with honey that Link was preparing. She
paced about the perimeter of the campfire. "I just know it. The poem speaks of the time when the
light and darkness meet, and I believe the phrase they use has connotations of twilight. The
piercing might refer to reflecting the light, or...piercing by a blade or an arrow. If we can simply
wait here until dawn, or maybe tomorrow's dusk—"

The woman in black narrowed her eyes. "We have been given very specific instructions. We have
no time for loitering. We are to see the spring and return immediately to continue your prayers."

"Your father did give us a stern talking-to," said the girl with the green hairband as she helped
herself to a honeyed leg of rabbit, "as much as I'd pay to see your smile—" The girl with the
golden hair's cheeks faintly reddened. "—when you finally figure things out."

"She speaks the truth," the shark girl chimed in. "We don't know how much more time we have.
The sooner we reach the spring, the better."

The girl with the golden hair turned on the party, her hands clenched into fists, her shoulders
squared, her jaw set, her mouth so thin that Link could see blood beading on her lower lip.
"But this could be our chance to make a breakthrough! We still don't know how the guardians and
the Divine Beasts work! We still don't know to turn them on! I know that the shrines haven't
responded, but perhaps there's a shrine that activates the others, or perhaps all of the shrines have
some sort of triggering mechanism to their activation. Perhaps it has something to do with the
towers. This is the closest we have to finding such a trigger, and the shrine described in the text—"

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towers. This is the closest we have to finding such a trigger, and the shrine described in the text—"

The rock being grunted. "Come on. It's our first foray out as a team. There's no need to—"
The falcon barrelled forward, pointing to each of the people around the fire in turn. First, the rock being: "He could level a mountain." Next, the shark girl: "She could leap a hundred waterfalls and arrive in time to heal an army." Third, the red-haired girl with the golden earrings: "And she could level that army again in half the time. And your shadow over there could have that army's general murdered before he could realise what's happened to his army and the mountain it was standing on. But who's the chosen hero?"

The girl with the green hairband clapped her hands onto her knees. She twirled the rabbit leg. "Better silent than spouting nonsense."

"Shut up! I'm serious. Who's the chosen hero here?" The falcon lifted his right wing, his feather-like fingers curling inwards until his index feather points directly at—

She can't remember.

"Fate's unfair," the falcon repeats, crossing his wings. "The sooner you get with the program, the easier it'll be on everyone."

The girl with the golden hair's expression twisted, a grimace contorting her mouth and wrinkling the edges of her eyes and nose. She whirls around, nearly trips, and storms off into the trees. The others rise partially from their seats around the campfire, Link quickest of all, her hand already on the hilt of her blade.

But the woman in black takes off first, shadowing the girl with the golden hair.

"Nice going, fish-for-brains," the girl with the green hairband snaps, and the falcon returns a rude gesture.

The shark girl has covered her face with her eyes. The orange rock being shakes his head. "It will be a long, long trip."

The taste of honey fades from her mouth. When her stock of mushrooms runs out, she licks the honey out of her palm to fill her stomach. She cannot so much honey carry in her satchel, and so she gorges herself now.

Her belly warns her of fullness at the halfway mark. She continues to eat through the burgeoning pain. By the time she has emptied the pot, her stomach aches enough that she curls up on the ground, her satchel a makeshift pillow, tucking her knees under her chin. Yet her body has other plans: her exhaustion has fled; her heart races so quickly that she can scarcely sleep.

The sheer quantity of honey consumed leaves her ill but not tired even in the morning. To avoid Calip, she spends most of the day restocking her satchel from the forest. Towards evening, the pain ebbs.

She hops onto Ilia's back. Up the road. When they pass by the entrance to the clearing with the cursed statue, Link checks the position of the sun in the sky.

Twilight soon.

She directs Ilia towards the sea of statues. Dropping down from the horse's back, Link examines the statue from every side.

She waits to dusk, and waits, and waits, and just when she gives in, she notices a violet glow upon the statue's brow.
Pierce. By blade or arrow.

Link notches her bow. She looses the wooden arrow.

The ground rumbles. From the depths of the earth, upon a grinding mechanical lift, rises a shrine that gleams orange. Ilia neighs. Link runs a hand over the horse's shoulder to soothe her.

She signs a thank you to the girl with the golden hair from her memory.

Link descends into the shrine.

When she returns to the waking world, the moon greets her. She does not bother with a campfire but simply sleeps against the side of the shrine.

With dawn Link and Ilia resume their journey to Hateno.

They reach the village by midmorning.

The guard at Hateno—calling himself more of a greeter than a guard—lets Link through without much hurrah. The residents here speak the same Necludan as did those in Kakariko, though they tilt their vowels in a differing dialect. The village sprawls over the mountainside. From the base of the village, she craness her neck towards the fields of rice and other crops terraced up the mountain. From the peak protrudes a short white tower—a windmill, she decides. Shops of every sort line the main street, from a smithy, a fabric dyer, a tailor, a shoemaker, a butcher, a grocer, a candlemaker, a jeweller, to a stable offering a special on horse training courses. She enters something advertising itself as a trading post. Within, shoppers examine shelves of rarities: gems shimmering in every colour, pickled monster appendages, ancient books, exotic wares from faraway regions. A brown rock-like being nearly steps on her foot on her way to the counter. The being rumbles out an apology: "Whoa there, bud. Almost didn't see a li'l hylian like yourself."

The red-eyed man at the counter looks her up and down.

"You not from around here? Most 'venturers in these parts get their rupees off of looting old treasures or from selling monster parts. That said, I think most places've been stripped clean by now. The number of 'venturers's dropped like a rock since I took over."

Link thanks him for the information. She exits the trading post and sets about the task of inquiring as to the whereabouts of the intended recipient of Lady Impa's letter, someone named Purah, as written on the red envelope. Villagers glance at one another, shake their heads, tell her that there's no one in Hateno with that name. At length, a red-haired woman, introducing herself as Kyrta and studying the outside of the envelope, snaps her fingers. "You could try the laboratory on the summit." She thumbs towards the mountain. "Whoever lives there likes to be secretive, but I've seen this eye-like mark—isn't that the symbol of Sheik?—on their front door." The woman presses her lips together as she looks Link up and down. "You should be careful with that horse of yours."

Link tilts her head to one side.

Kyrta rolls out an easy laugh. "Folks would prefer manure in the fields, not the streets." Blushing at the implication, Link directs Ilia up the mountain road. Kyrta calls out after her: "If you don't know where else to stable your horse, I could help you out."

Link waves back, nearly bumps into a merchant with a cart of cabbages, and resolves to pay attention. As she nears the peak she looks again at the white windmill. Though the tower does have the spinning blades of a windmill, she notes the torches at the front burning with blue fire, and the eye-like symbol of Sheik on the door.
Link raps twice in the centre of the symbol. A sliding click reveals a panel of glass within the red iris of the symbol of Sheik, and a large yellow eye with a slit pupil peers at her.

She waves a hand. The eye does not blink. She produces the red envelope and lifts it up. The slide clicks again, and Link regards the letter in her hand akin to a foreign appendage.

The door opens. Link raises her head to meet the yellow gaze of what looks like a giant green stingray on a human body some two and a half metres high. The stingray wears circular red glasses that give them an owlish appearance. Their white and red robes resemble those of the sheikah in Kakariko. Somewhere in her inner gut churns a flash of recognition.

"Welcome to the Hateno Ancient Technology Research Laboratory," the fish creature rasps out. A strange reddish membrane wipes horizontally over their eyes. "You can call me Doreli. May I help you?"

"I have this letter to Purah." Link holds the envelope towards Doreli, who takes it between her webbed fingers to inspect it.

"Wait here."

Leaning against the now-shut door, Link waits. She yawns. She wipes the sweat from her brow. She finds half of a carrot in the bottom of her satchel and feeds it to Ilia.

By the time the door opens with Link still leaning on the frame, her legs have fallen asleep. Link tumbles backwards, banging the back of her head on a hard floor. She looks up to meet the crimson gaze of a woman who appears somehow older than even Lady Impa. The woman wears a long white robe, her spectacles thick enough that Link can see rainbows dancing in the lenses.

Or perhaps she's hit her head a bit too hard.

"You are Link."

Link nods. The light from the torches forms a blue halo around the woman's head.

"Hello there," the woman says, now in Central Hyrulean, evidently unfazed by Link lying on the ground. She scribbles something down in the notebook she carries and flips the page. "Thank you for delivering my sister's letter." Link listens to her mutter under her breath in Necludan as she writes: "Subject...appears to...lack knowledge of...properly entering door. Possible...social memory loss?" She raises her voice. "Symin, put the tea on, would you?"

"On it, ma'am," comes a voice from the other end of the room. The woman—Purah, Lady Impa's older sister—tours Link around the inside of the facility. Mechanical marvels glow with the same blue light as the slate. Purah dodges any questions that relate to the contents of the letter. Occasionally Purah pauses to jot something in her notebook.

"Do you...know who I am?" Link asks at last.

Purah chuckles at her. "My sister trusts you and has pleaded that I assist you. I need know nothing else."

She introduces Link to her two assistants. Doreli, a zora engineer from the apparently-destroyed village of Rutela, and Symin, a sheikah mechanic from Kakariko. She has a third assistant, a rito from Hoskit, currently on surveying duty of the guardians. "They've been on the move lately," Purah says vaguely. "Now, Link, hand it over."
Purah sighs. "Subject...fails to...grasp implications...of speech." It takes Link a moment to realise that Purah has switched, abruptly, to Central Hyrulean. "The slate, Link. Let me see the slate on your hip there."

She complies. Symin takes Link's attention while Purah works. He strikes up conversation over tea. "You're going up to Darunia next, eh?" Link nods and Symin launches into a thorough test of her knowledge of the Eldic tongue. Again she knows the language, from some deep recess of her memories, though Symin corrects her outdated slang.

Eventually Purah retrieves the slate for Link. "I believe that I may have fixed some of the corrupted elements. Go down to the shrine in Hateno. You'll find it behind the general store. What's called, Symin?"

"East Wind," he remarks.

"East Wind," Purah repeats, wrinkling her nose. "Just ask for Pruce or Ivey's place and go 'round the back."

Symin adds in: "If it helps, the shrine is near some dread 'model houses' or something like that."

Link inspects the slate. She arches her eyebrows at a newly appeared green symbol; now all six—red, two blue, yellow, light blue, and green—run fully from left to right.

"Subject...refuses to follow orders...until intellectual demands are met..." Purah mutters in Necludan as if not expecting Link to understand. "The slate is capable of making incredibly accurate drawings of whatever you point it towards. We refer to this as the *pictobox* function, and the resulting illustrations as *pictographs*. I am quite certain it will be an *immeasurable* asset, particularly as far as your memories go." Link starts to ask what she means, but Purah grips her by the wrists. "Now off you go. To the shrine. Chop chop, Link."

Link rubs the back of her head. "Thank you for...all of this?" She hesitates. "Do you have anything for me to take back to Lady Impa?"

"Hm? Oh." Purah tears a leaf of paper from her notebook and scrawls out a brief note. She folds it up. It crumples into Link's open palm. "That'll be enough for her, I should think. Now go on, shoo. If you need any help with the slate, or if anything about the slate changes, do come back. Not another moment wasted now. Go!"

She goes.

—

*Energising Glazed Mushrooms* (five hearts, four-fifths stamina vessel) - courser bee honey stamella shroom

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: The story of Fort Hateno refers to the hero as a man; this is a reflection
of the expectation of the Knight to be a man, as the legendary stories of the Knights passed down usually refer to the male Knight and female Princess. I won't say much about it for now, except to note that we'll be coming back to this topic later, of the expectations inherent in the prophecy versus what actually happens.

I included Calip! He'll come back later. When my beta reader was reading this chapter, she asked me what Inpaz means; just wait until chapter seventy-seven or so. The language spoken in the shrines that Link does not know is referred to as Loftean by Calip, but was not actually the language spoken in Skyloft, if Skyloft existed. Take Calip's worldbuilding with a grain of salt; he was speaking to impress Link.

We don't spend much time in Hateno in Delicious in Wilds, and I don't have Link get the house here. There are a few reasons for that, namely that Link thinks of herself as a traveller and that she doesn't actually have any rupees. Given the sheer size of Hyrule, it did not make much sense for me to tie Link down to a specific place this early in the story. Link does get a home later on, around the tune of chapter thirty or so, though it may not come in a form that you'd expect.

Regarding Purah, it does not make much sense for the ancient guardian technology to include an age regression beam, nor for said age regression beam to conveniently leave Purah at about six years old. As I don't care for her strange sexualisation in Breath of the Wild with the thigh-highs and randoseru, I just made her an elderly woman.

The zora, such as Doreli, have a third eyelid, also known as a haw, akin to sharks and some other aquatic species; this is known as the nictitating membrane and evolved to protect their eyes while swimming. The rito also have one, though it is much less noticeable and nearly transparent. The village of Hoskit is named after the rito guard on Dragon Roost Island from The Wind Waker; the village of Rutela is named after Queen Rutela of Zora's Domain from Twilight Princess. Interestingly, while Queen Oren from A Link Between Worlds has a bridge named after her, Rutela, from a more prominent title in the franchise, does not have any landmarks named after her. There are some landmarks named Rutala, which may be a misspelling of her name. If so, I wonder if the misspelling was intentional or not, or if perhaps this came as a result of some mistranslation.

Pictobox and pictograph also come from The Wind Waker. I like these terms better than camera or photograph, words which arose from our development of these items rather than the Breath of the Wild understanding of the slate as producing incredible accurate illustrations since there is no native developed camera.

Another thank you to my most beloved beta reader, Emma, for helping me proof and fix a minor continuity quibble.

midna's ass. 1 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: I love this chapter because I really love, in-game, the stretch between Dueling Peaks and Hateno. The walk there is so cozy.

Calip is definitely a character. He's hilarious, and I love the author's take on him.

Emma. 1 September 2017.
Spicy Meat and Mushroom Skewer

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef is arrested for crimes of defacing the Hateno shrine, but the researchers of the laboratory bail the chef out. After cleaning the laboratory kitchen and preparing a meal in thanks, the chef heads off for Eldin.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The shrine resides on a hill above Hateno, high enough that climbing up takes a full minute of exertion. The platform at the front of the shrine nearly bursts with the number of offerings upon it, from bowls of rice, to carved wooden dolls, to sketches, to feathers, to leafy flowers, to smooth painted pebbles, to pearly star-shaped objects that gleam in the afternoon light. Despite the attention given by such offerings, some clearly recent, no one guards the shrine.

Link retrieves the slate. The shrine glows blue. She steps forward. Gasps from the main street accompany her descent into the ground.

The curtain of blue light parts and she steps into the bowels of the earth. A now-familiar voice welcomes her. The instructions float over her head.

If Calip knows of Old Hyrulean, or of Loftean, of whatever that language the shrines speak, then she may have to enlist his assistance after all.

She walks up the stairs from the lift. A pedestal awaits her at the end of a raised platform. Affixed to the crown of the pedestal is a set of three thin rings attached at different points to one another, such that one ring sits horizontally, one vertically, and one perpendicular to both. A flat rectangular box—one side perfectly level, the other marked with tiny fences—hovers in the centre of the rings.

Link looks past the pedestal.

A giant version of the same box, with the fences in the same places, floats out in the void, with an orange sphere in the centre. She follows the path through the fences to a platform to the left of the box that juts out into the space below. This platform feeds into a long slope that ends with a bowled depression perfectly sized for the orange sphere.

And on her left, in a straight walk down the stairs and forward from the lift, she notes erected bars in the wall, beyond which she can see the cubic blue curtain of the goalpoint.

She touches her chin. She considers: to move the sphere from the box to the depression in the ground to open the bars.

For nothing else to do, Link places the sheikah slate onto the pedestal.

The rings, the little box, and the pedestal all burst into life at once. When she moves the slate off of the pedestal she discovers the box within the rings moving in tandem, along with the giant version floating beyond the pedestal. The rings rotate.
Simple enough, then.

She sets the slate flat on the pedestal; the positions of the box, the rings, and the giant version reset. Link begins to guide the orange sphere through the fences. She tilts downwards and the sphere rolls. When it reaches the mouth of the next corridor she tilts right but the sphere continues forward by momentum and falls.

She stares at the box. "Only one shot?" she says to herself, placing the slate onto the pedestal to speak.

She can hear a mechanism grinding below her. After a moment the sphere—or another similar sphere—drops from the ceiling into the heart of the box again.

Again, she tries.

Again the sphere falls.

Again and again. She manages to direct the sphere into the second corridor. Just as she begins to celebrate the sphere shoots off of the end. The sphere drops from the ceiling.

Again and again and again.

Falls and falls and falls.

She bangs her head against the pedestal. The impact leaves her forehead pounding. Link runs a hand through her hair, brushes her chin, taps the toe of her boot against the ground.

When the sphere falls yet again Link leaves the pedestal. She walks back down the stairs over the walkway to the bars. Squatting beside them, she inspects them and the goalpoint every which way that she can in search of some trick by which she could bypass the impossible puzzle.

Nothing.

Link returns to the pedestal with a newfound deliberateness to her step. She holds the slate with both hands. She can sense the magic of the moment in her very bones. This time, with her hands steady and her mind clear, she cannot fail.

She fails.

Her left hand rises to her face to pinch the bridge of her nose. The slate dangles limply from her right.

The sphere falls again. Link lowers her hand from her eyes. Because of the position of her right hand, the box had turned ninety degrees counterclockwise. When the sphere dropped from the ceiling, she had assumed the sphere would end up perfectly in the centre of the box, but no: the sphere lands slightly left of centre. In the counterclockwise orientation, the sphere drops directly into the final corridor.

Link does not breathe. She manoeuvres the slate into its previous flat position. Cautiously, cautiously, her touch gossamer, she tilts the slate to the left to roll the sphere onto the platform.

She keeps her gaze riveted on the sphere. It picks up speed down the slope. The sphere overshoots the depression; the bowl-like shape keeps it from flying off, and it rolls around the perimeter, spiralling downwards.
Into the depression it goes.

She has never felt such relief and joy upon a change in colour.

Link ignores the instructions entirely in her exhaustion. She allows the lift to take her back up from the inside of the shrine. As the lift hums, Link devises her plans: to have dinner at the laboratory if she can, to rest for the night, to begin her journey to Darunia in the morning. To inquire about the path to Darunia, as she has no full map and no direction of where to go except vaguely to the north and to the east.

Sunlight and fresh air wisp around her. She breathes in, steps out of the blue curtain of light, and finds herself surrounded by half a dozen spears.

The village guards march her down the main street. The residents of Hateno eye her with a mixture of suspicion, fear, and simple curiosity. She keeps her head level. They push her up the steps of the tallest building in the village, painted a light grey, five intricate statues visible on the roof to reach for the clouds. She enters to find a long, wide hall of pews and an altar on the other end with two great figures, some two metres in height, flanking either side. On the left, a winged woman. On the right, a woman with a blossom in her hand. A row of five small statues runs between these two large, exquisitely detailed carvings of Goddesses, each with heaping of offerings at their feet. Behind the two statues, a circular carving takes up the majority of the far wall, three Goddesses depicted curled around the arc of a wheel, their arms and hands making up the spokes. One breathes out wind; another weeps rivers; the last brandishes fire in her palms.

In front of the altar stands a pair of older women, both robed in highly decorated fabrics that swirl with green, blue, and red. Each has her eyes closed. The pale woman on the left wears a pair of feathery white fabric wings upon her back. The ochre-skinned woman on the right bears a pink blossom in her hand.

An attendant to the side announces the presence of the accused as Link enters. The guards push down Link's shoulders until she kneels before the two women.

"Sage of Hylia, Sage of Sheik," the attendant intones, his booming voice radiating an aura of formality, "we leave the faith of the Goddesses to your courage, the judgment to your wisdom, and the sentence to your power, Your Graces."

The Sages open their eyes at once and fix their gazes upon Link, who meets them blankly, more confused than worried about the proceedings.

Then the Sages accuse her of defacing the ancient Shrine of Sheik that has watched over Hateno since the establishment of the village. They demand to know of her origins. Link replies honestly, of how she lost her memories, of how others have informed her that she is a hylian, of how she might, possibly, know Central Hyrulean better than other languages.

"The accused may bear the mark of Hylia, but the accused is no hylian if the accused would deface a shrine of another Goddess. The Wars of the Seven have long passed," the Sage of Hylia spits. The attendant and guards nod approvingly.

The Sage of Sheik resumes the inquiry. They interrogate her on the defacement of the Shrine of Sheik. Link tries an explanation, of how she has visited other shrines, of Purah directing her to activate the shrine—she does not mention the slate—and of the contents of the shrine in the form of a simple puzzle rather than anything one could take for a measure of faith.

Her words ringing in the open chamber of the temple, the Sage of Hylia answers first. "The recluse
of the windmill that the accused calls a laboratory has systematically refused to heed our summons, and the summons of the Sages before us. They do not believe in the jurisdiction of the Goddesses, though we have beseeched them in the names of the Seven and in the names of the Three."

The Sage of Sheik responds next. "That the accused would come before us and willfully claim that the Shrine of the Goddess Sheik has no measure of faith says volumes of the accused's moral calibre."

"Please, try to talk to Purah. She'll explain things." Link hesitates. "I think."

The Sage of Hylia wrinkles her lip. "We have no need for the words of one who disrespects the Goddesses."

But the Sage of Sheik raises her free hand. "I see no reason for us to judge arbitrarily, particularly of a foreigner whom we do not know well. The accused may be telling the truth."

"Even if the accused were telling the truth, the Shrine of Sheik would be yet defamed!"

The Sage of Sheik shakes her head. The beads in her hair twinkle quietly. "If the accused speaks truth, then the Goddesses would wish us to see the accused innocent, for the accused did not intentionally defile a holy space. Did not the heroes of old enter temples far more sacred than a shrine to fulfill their destinies?"

"The accused is no hero."

"The accused defers to the Goddesses and did not intend to cause harm. If the village hermit did intend to cause harm and the accused was aware, then my view will change. Remember that the greatest wisdom of Sheik is that of mercy."

The Sage of Hylia looks aghast at her counterpart. "Yet it is not a Shrine of your Goddess that has been defaced?"

"Indeed, and so I should hope that you will defer to my judgment on matters concerning Sheik the Truthful." Link bows her head in thanks. The Sage of Sheik continues. "While we investigate, take the accused away. See that the accused does not escape."

Link lifts her arms to protest. The guards drag her from the temple and around the back to a village prison comprised of six entirely empty holding cells of metal and wood. They strip her of her belongings and leave her in an unfurnished cell just wide enough for her to stretch out yet not tall enough for her to stand. Though the prison has no windows, the guards leave a candle on the floor.

She recognises the guard who greeted her on her way to the village, who now regards her with a gaze of hate and hurt. Link lowers her head.

They slide the metal bars down. She hears the turn of a key. Without sparing her another glance the guards leave her in silence.

The dust on the floor of the cell speaks of its relative disuse. Link lies down on her stomach. Propping up her chin on her hands, she resolves to waiting.

She sneezes.

And here all she wanted, upon leaving the shrine, was a hot meal at Purah's.

She tells the time by the drip of the candle's wax. When the candle smothers out and darkness
snuffs her thoughts, Link allows herself to sleep.

Noise, light, and the incessant squabbling of her own belly rouse her from her dreamless slumber. She blinks the sleep from her eyes to see a fire bobbing in front of her. The fire resolves to a lantern's flame, and the lantern's flame resolves to a lamp held by the guard who served as a greeter.

After her, a pinkish-feathered bird-like creature almost twice her height ducks through the door to enter the prison. Link recognises the white and red patterned robes, clipped together by a pin in the shape of the sheikah eye, though the bird's version of Purah's uniform seems streamlined for easy movement.

The bird—the rito, that familiar word of which Purah reminded her—brushes the air with a wing. "$Link? Purah told me to come get you." He speaks with a jerky quickness. "$If you will follow me."

The guard—the greeter—hands the lantern to a fellow guard. The click of the key makes Link leap up so suddenly that she smashes her head against the ceiling of the cell.

"Thank you," she answers, rolling out of the cell before rising to her feet.

He shrugs. "$Just doing my job, kiddo. Come on."

The rito has to fold himself practically in half to squeeze through the door of the open cell. The guard pats Link on the back as she shuffles her feet on the dusty prison ground. "$Sorry 'bout that. The Sages take their jobs seriously."

The other guard coughs loudly. "$Let's take the accused—that is, the innocent—up already."

Warmth on her shoulders causes Link to look up. The rito, walking by her left side, has extended his wing to cover her like a cloak. She faces forward.

The hue of the sky matches the rito's feathers. She must have slept until morning. When the guards motion for her to re-enter the temple, she steps back, and the rito brushes his feathers over her shoulders.

"You're good to go, kiddo. They just want to apologise."

Link steps in to find the Sages, Symin, Doreli, and Purah waiting, the latter on a cushion instead of standing. The attendant proceeds through the announcements.

Purah sighs. When the Sages do not react she sighs again, more pointedly. "$Can we get on with this? The stuffy formality's going to crush these old bones, and then you'll have the murder of an old lady on your hands."

The Sage of Hylia narrows her eyes, but the Sage of Sheik bows her head. "$In the justice and mercy held sacred by the Goddesses, by name of the Goddess Sheik, the Seven and the Three, the Sage of Sheik..."

"...and the Sage of Hylia," the other Sage finishes, "$find the accused innocent of the defacement of the Shrine of Sheik."

"You are free to go, Link," the Sage of Sheik says kindly, and Link thanks them until her hands grow numb. The attendant retrieves her things.
Link lets the sheikah slate weigh down her hands once more.

Doreli and Symin lift up Purah on the cushion and carry her on their shoulders. She salutes the Sages, then gestures towards Link. "Subject...appears to...not understand that religious shrines...can be important to the people around them...even if they were not meant to be religious...they can acquire such a status due to the historical importance."

"How was I supposed to know?" she asks in return. She keeps up with the procession on the left, while the pink rito takes the right.

"Subject...believes that ignorant...makes the subject innocent..."

Link exhales. "Thank you for explaining it to them."

Purah dismisses her with a flap of the hand. "They kept telling me to come down to the temple. Unless Farore wants to send over Her wind, these bones aren't going to go anywhere by themselves, I tell you, and they wouldn't come up there." She scoffs. "Besides, if they really think that the Goddesses want their priestesses playing dress-up and calling themselves the Sages, then it's no surprise they'd label someone like me...what was it they called me?"

"Disrespectful?" ventures Symin from underneath the cushion.

Doreli tries her hand, or fin, as well: "A nonbeliever?"

"A traitor to the Goddesses?" the rito suggests.

"Ah, thank you, Balin. A traitor to the Goddesses. It's got a nice ring to it. I should put that on a sign to the lab. Then we'll stop getting so many solicitors. Now, Link. There's not much else for you to do in Hateno at the moment, is there?"

"What if I wanted to enjoy the town for a few days?" Her stomach rumbles. "And try some of the local cuisine?"

"You've got a date with the gorons," Purah insists, "and I don't think that sticking around town will be the brightest idea. Even if you've gotten your name cleared, people will look at you funny for having been the one to turn the shrine blue and all."

Link stops walking. "Did you put me up to this so I would be kicked out of Hateno?"

Purah chuckles, and Link resumes, now shaking her head. "I'll give you directions. You can copy one of my maps. I don't know much about local cuisine, but I'm sure that I can whip you up something. And by I, I mean that Symin can."

"Of course, ma'am," Symin answers. Balin the rito snorts back a laugh.

They return to the laboratory. While the others bundle Purah inside, Link runs ahead of them, nearly tripping over herself. She covers her mouth with her hands and whistles, loud and low. For a second she hears nothing, sees nothing. Her heart drops out from her chest to thud against her heels.

Ilia rounds the corner of the laboratory. She barrels towards Link full-gallop. Link throws open her arms. Ilia knocks her over into the grass and licks her face until her cheeks soak in horse saliva.

Link doesn't stop laughing until her mouth hurts.
Once satisfied with Ilia's condition, Link opens the door. This time Link takes a better look at the inside, at the various sheikah contraptions that resemble those from the shrines, at the guardians in different states of disassembly, their gears and springs wobbling on the tables spread out with every possible size of wrench and ratchet. Link watches as Doreli descends into the basement. Balin sates her curiosity: In the cellar of the laboratory, Doreli investigates the ability of the ancient materials to withstand high heat and pressure, such dangerous work relegated downstairs.

"Will she be all right?"

Balin snickers. "Dori? Now that's the million-rupee question." He brushes imaginary dust from his robes. "Theoretically, Doreli shouldn't be working downstairs by herself, but nothing's ever gone wrong, and Purah's fine with it." He glances left and right. Purah sits at her desk; Balin turns so that his back faces her. "Kiddo, Purah and her sister don't see eye to eye too much. If Impa ever asks you 'bout how Purah's doing, just say she's fine."

Purah clears her throat. The feathers on Balin's head flare up. "Right, well, I've got some guardians to survey. See ya 'round, kiddo!" He dives for the door while Purah calls Link over.

"Your slate isn't fully repaired." Purah taps her pen against the notebook. Her crimson gaze fixes on Link, who blinks at her. "You know, I have my doubts about this technology truly being of the sheikah, despite the prominence of the eye motif in both. Something catastrophic must have happened for such technology to have been lost after ten thousand years. The sheikah people as we know them may not even have existed back then."

"...ten thousand years?" Link echoes.

"Oh, you didn't know? Yes, the guardians, the slate, the shrines, those great towers that rose from the earth not long ago..." Purah flips through her notebook. "Signs, both historical and scientific, point to their construction approximately ten thousand years ago, within the span of a few centuries. The towers are the oldest, and the shrines the youngest." She clears her throat. "Regardless, if you could harvest parts from guardians, I could finish repairs on the slate. Unfortunately I don't have all of the parts here, even with all that Balin's salvaged. Just keep that in mind. Rare parts, mind. Their cores look like this." Purah thrusts a paper with an illustration into Link's face. "I have enough gears and springs to last a lifetime. Speaking of which." Flicking the illustration away again, Purah demonstrates how to make use of the realistic pictograph option, which she refers to as the pictobox rune, as the other symbols on the slate are stasis, magnesis, bomb, and cryonis runes. The paintings that the slate makes appear indistinguishable from the real world. Link twirls around, snapping pictographs of everyone in the laboratory. Symin acts positively giddy over the development and tasks Link with taking pictographs of as many different things as she can.

"I'll pay you for them. Animals, plants, every which thing that you can. Monsters, too. We can built an entire collection of data." Symin claps his hands together. "It'll be an enriching experience for everyone!"

"Symin, I believe I asked you to make Link something of a local specialty," Purah calls from her work at the desk, where she writes so furiously Link fears her notebook may catch fire.

"Right away, ma'am." Symin bows to Link. "Please excuse me, miss."

"Can I help? I like cooking."

Symin's eyes widen as though Link had asked him to set his own body aflame. "If you want to, miss."
"Make her something simple, will you?" Purah adds. "Something...oh, of course. Hateno's famous for its sunshrooms. Make her a sunny-bird."

"One sunny-bird, coming right up."

Symin shows her the kitchen. A cramped affair of a single washbasin, a repurposed tank full of dirty bowls, plates, and utensils, a pantry of things vaguely emulating ingredients, long past the point of throwing out. Link's stomach threatens to turn inwards on itself from the sight alone.

"Don't mind the mess. I'll have you a sunny-bird soon. Now, let's see. We should still have that bird from last week..."

That people could subsist on such a kitchen, when food comprises the first, second, and third most vital aspects of everyday life—and fourth, if one counts snacks—boggles her so badly that she has to sit down for a few minutes. Then Link stands up, inhales, and removes her tunic. She rolls back her sleeves to the elbows.

While Symin watches she cleans the entire kitchen from floor to ceiling, dusts and washes every countertop to a point of proper cooking ability, tosses out the vast majority of the encrusted shlock in the pantries, and sorts the remainder.

She turns on her heel.

"What do you need for the sunny-bird?"

Link walks out with her satchel, her bow, and a written description of the appearance of sunshrooms. Retsam Forest becomes her home for the better part of the day. She returns by mid-afternoon with her prize of several pigeons alongside a satchel bulging with yellow mushrooms and acorns.

Symin guides her. She oils the bottom of a saucepan while he cuts up the sunshrooms. "Feel them, miss," he offers. She picks up one of the chunks and gazes in amazement at the warmth radiating from the piece of fungus. "If you ever go somewhere cold, these things can heat you right up."

Link fries the mushrooms with salt and pepper. She chops up spicy peppers, hearty radish, and hearty garlic, some taken from Retsam, some from Symin's stores, frying them as well. Honey melts with salted butter, then steeps with sunshroom to soak in the warmth and flavour. She adds a sprinkle of cinnamon for a kick.

She sets aside some of the fried vegetable and mushroom mixture with honey sauce for Balin upon Symin's gentle note that followers of the Goddess Erito do not consume poultry.

The pigeons have cooled too far for defeathering, and so she skins them. She stuffs the innards with fried sunshroom mix. Holding the birds upright she drizzles in honey sauce. She crushes in acorns for a nutty hint. Link whisks bird egg, oil, and vinegar together into a thick cream-like substance that she smears over the outside of each bird. She sets the birds to bake in the hearth. For dessert she glazes acorns with salted honey sauce and roasts them into candied shells. She wipes her forehead.

Crossing his arms over his chest, Symin whistles. He brings her a stool. Link drops herself heavily onto the stool and only then recognises that she had been swaying from hunger.

Symin serves dinner. Balin praises her relentlessly for the candied acorns. Doreli jokes that she was right to open the door for a stranger. Purah arches an eyebrow at her. "Make sure you have problems with the sheikah slate more often, Link." She takes an entire stuffed pigeon to herself.
"Though how in the world am I supposed to go back to Symin's cooking after this?"

Link rubs the back of her neck and grins sheepishly at them.

After dinner Link helps Symin wash the plates. She roasts and salts the leftover sunshrooms and acorns, as many as will fit into her pack for the journey ahead. She goes to Ilia with a handful of salt that the horse licks greedily from her palm.

Link swings a leg over Ilia's back. She unfolds the map drawn on the parchment from the Great Plateau, copied from one of Purah’s atlases.

She could venture up the road, from village to village, but the quicker route—less distractions, less shenanigans—lies in the wilds of wood and creek, valley and mountain, stone and grass. North, she goes. North, to the wilds of Eldin.

—

**Spicy Meat and Mushroom Skewer** (four hearts, low cold resistance for 03:30) - acorn, raw bird drumstick, sunshroom


Chapter End Notes

Author's notes: Well now, that was a fun chapter!

I really like the apparatus shrine in Hateno. Link figuring out how to do it and accidentally realising that you can use a ninety-degree rotation to bring the ball right to the entrance is exactly how I solved it. This shrine fascinates me in how many people solved it different ways: some flipped it over and let the ball roll underneath, while others climbed into the apparatus itself and used stasis to physically push it around. Marvellous. There are so many shrines that I solved the "wrong" way; of course, there is no "wrong" way to solve any shrine.

In *Breath of the Wild*, there are naturally no consequences for players who choose to enter shrines, as befits gameplay. I thought to myself that, given the nature of the shrines, it would make sense for many shrines to be regarded as holy or at least culturally significant objects. Some foreign hooligan with a slate will be regarded with suspicion.

High priestesses or monks of the Golden Goddesses are known as Oracles, such as an Oracle of Farore; this, of course, is a reference to *Oracle of Seasons* and *Oracle of Ages*. High priestesses or monks of the Seven Goddesses are known as Sages, such as the Sage of Sheik and Sage of Hylia noted in this very chapter; this is a reference to the Seven Sages from *A Link to the Past* and *Ocarina of Time*.

In ages past, there was a single Oracle of each Golden Goddess and a single Sage of each of the Seven Goddesses, but since then, most villages and towns have their own Oracles and Sages for whatever religions/faiths are prominent there. Hateno is mostly comprised of worshippers of Sheik and Hylia, so they have a Sage of each.
The shrine is regarded as belonging to the Goddess Sheik due to the existence of the symbol of Sheik (the eye-like mark of the sheikah).

Link's blank stare is something that we'll come back to. I'm sure that anyone who has played *Breath of the Wild* has noticed Link's rather...blank expression during the memories and so on. Link has some difficulty in properly expressing emotion on the face, which causes people to misinterpret Link's intentions.

Future chapters will explore Purah's line of thought regarding the origins of the "sheikah" technology from ten thousand years ago.

Followers of Erito, the Patron Goddess of the rito, do not consume any birds, as birds are seen as messengers of Erito. Legends say that Erito Herself designed the rito after the loftwings that serve the Golden Goddesses. On the other hand, followers of Zola, the zora Goddess, do indeed consume fish.

Another great thanks to my marvellous and extremely talented beta reader, Emma, for proofreading the chapter. And another most wonderful thank you to all of my readers. I hope that you have been enjoying.

Next chapter is the first really fun one, in my opinion, of Link's *adventure*. If I remember correctly, it also features a fight scene gory enough to warrant the archive warning, so please be advised. I'll include another warning at the front of the chapter.

Beta reader's comments: I really love the author's representation of this shrine. This shrine fascinates me because so many different people solve it in different ways (if you're curious, I, a stupid woman, did it the hard way and got the ball through the whole maze). I also really like how the implications of going into an important thing like a shrine are explored.

The laboratory's messy kitchen involves one of my favourite jokes in the series. You'll see.

Emma. 2 September 2017.
Fireproof Elixir

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef begins the journey to Eldin. After dispatching a quartet of lizalfos attempting to eat the chef's food, the chef travels northwards, where the chef learns how to trade in monster parts for rupees; hears of the zora seeking a strong hylian for some strange mission; and arrives in the foothill town of Medigo to hear the Ballad of the Sealing War from a certain travelling minstrel. The chef assists a local stablehand with the brewing of fireproof elixirs in exchange for the boarding of the chef's horse.

Chapter Notes

To all readers: Please be advised that this chapter features a rather gory fight scene. If you wish to skip it, it begins at the paragraph starting with "She breaks a branch over her knee" and ends at the paragraph starting with "Link remains in her stance."

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The northwestern path takes her in the direction of Kakariko. She takes her time, now, unburdened from the sensitivity of time. Link veers from the road in the Ginner Woods in pursuit of an apple tree. The crunch of a fresh apple, the first bite that sprays juice over her mouth, never fails to bring a smile.

She bathes in Nirvata Lake. Scooping sand from the bottom of the lake she scrubs herself down. For the first time since she awoke in the blue chamber, she has a moment to regard herself. Scars criss-cross her abdomen in raised ridges that she traces with her fingers. Some long and thin that curve through her flesh like a road; others, patches of bumpy skin in mottled red and violet like points of interest on a map. She carries someone else's lifetime on her skin. A spirit taking shelter in an abandoned shrine that bears yet the marks and burden of its previous deity. Like the monkey from the fable who, upon stealing the clothes of the Knight, struts about in his image until the moment the Calamitous One awakens.

She wears someone else's skin.

When she swims to the edge of the lake, she hears a peculiar chirping by the shore. A band of hunched-over lizard-like beasts her own size have gotten into her things. One wears her shirt on its tail; another uses her trousers as a wind net; a third has pulled her undergarments over the horn on its face. The light armour over their green hides, and the slight violet tinge to their eyes, reveals them of the same maliced monstrous breed as the bokoblins.

Suddenly the monkey of the fable has grown scales.

Engaging the lizard-beasts in the nude without even her sword—which the shirt-wearing lizard swings about, bumping it into every rock on the shore—seems like a death wish waiting to happen. If she sneaks away now, whistles for Ilia, and regroups, she stands a better chance.
Then she notices the fourth lizard-beast rooting through her satchel. It lifts its head to reveal a mouthful of dried and roasted sunshrooms in its open maw. Its jaws snap shut. Link watches the lizard swallow, run its long tongue over its teeth, and then dive into the satchel for more.

She breaks a branch over her knee. Scaling a nearby tree, she crouches in its boughs, startling a squirrel that scurries down the trunk. Link eyes the shirt-lizard using her blade as a stick with which to poke the soil. She inhales. She springs.

The thick of the branch crashes down upon the shirt-lizard-beast's head. It twitters, stumbling for a few steps, and then flops backwards while she whips the sword from its limp talons. Laughing to herself, Link twirls the sword in her hand; abruptly her palm feels empty and damp.

The lizard wearing her undergarments as a mask has wrapped its tongue around the hilt of the sword. It retracts its tongue and succeeds in smacking the flat of the blade against its companion digging through the satchel. The food-thief-lizard chirps at the undergarments-lizard. Ignoring Link entirely, the two engage in a slap fight, whipping one another with their tails.

Link rolls forward to grab her satchel from under the food-thief. With her most vital possession back in place, she glances over the campsite. Ilia, nowhere to be seen, presumably ran away at the sound of danger. The fourth lizard, holding her trousers, squawks at her presence while she twists around the squabbling lizards to try to wrest her sword from the undergarments-lizard still wielding the blade with its tongue.

She closes her fingers around the blade and pulls. The sudden pain in her palm from the undergarments-lizard's twitched motion of the tongue forces back her arm and brings her to drop the branch. The trousers-lizard spits a glob of saliva towards her. Ducking behind the undergarments-lizard nibbling on her sword, Link cracks her elbow down on the lizard's spine. It coughs up the sword. While she dives to catch it, she feels something curl around her ankle. Trousers-lizard snags her leg with its tongue and knocks her to the ground. Link twists around. Something thin and green slices towards her from the right. She barely has time to lift her sword. Warm blood sprays her face as the food-thief-lizard cuts off its own tail on her blade. The still-wriggling severed tip of tail slams into her face. The scales drag across her skin. A bolt of pain cracks diagonally across her back. Eyes stinging from the blood trickling down in rivulets from her scratched brow, Link grips the slimy tongue around her ankle with her right hand and drives her blade in with her left.

The food-thief-lizard shrieks. Another bolt of pain criss-crosses her back.

Link scramble to her feet. Wiping the blood from her face with her right arm, she spins around to face the three lizards that remain. The food-thief-lizard kneels on the ground spitting blood from its ruined mouth. The second lizard struggles to rip Link's undergarments from its head. The trousers-lizard picks up the heavy branch. It lunges at her, talons outstretched.

She flips backwards, allows the trousers-lizard's momentum to carry it forward into tripping, and brings the blade down on the back of its neck just under the lower edge of its helmet. The blade sinks into its flesh. It spears through the trousers-lizard's throat. The lizard-beast's body writhes around the sword.

Link pulls back to rip the blade from its body in an upwards arc.

The blade snaps off inside of the trousers-lizard. The impact thunders through Link's arm to send her flying backwards. Landing with her rear end on a hard rock, Link stares at the unevenly broken stump of metal that remains, twisted and warped around the edges. She crouches down to snag the branch from the trousers-lizard's hand. She readies a swing. The other two lizards hiss at her. She
observes them: leaping side to side. Movements erratic. Limbs telescoping back and forth.

The undergarments-lizard rears back its head to spit saliva at her. She dodges to the left only to notice the food-thief-lizard rushing her. The branch rises on its arc to ram into the food-thief-lizard's abdomen. It flies backwards. Link steps forward. The undergarments-lizard attempts to spit at her again, but she sidesteps the projectile and cracks the branch across its head.

Too slow.

The undergarments-lizard ducks. Its jaws open wide around her arm. She reels her hand in but all too late; although she pulls her arm in enough for the undergarments-lizard not to bite off her limb entirely, its teeth tear through her flesh. She punches it in the eye with her weaker right hand. A second later the agony of the bite burns through her muscles. Her left hand spasms. She controls herself enough to flex her wrist and smash the branch into the undergarments-lizard's face.

Pushing her elbow into its already bleeding eye, Link drops onto its body. Her weight knocks the undergarments-lizard to the ground. Its teeth loosen from her skin as she grinds the point of her elbow into its throat and lower jaw. She springs backwards. The skin of her arm has broken; several thick holes reveal her red muscle to the open air, throbbing in pain.

Yet the wound does not reach her bone.

She lets her left arm dangle limply at her side. Wet heat spreads from the epicentre of agony. Blinking tears from her eyes, Link stands to thrust her bare foot into the undergarments-lizard-beast's throat. She brings the branch down on the lizard-beast's face with her right hand again and again, grinds in her foot, until it gurgles wetly and she can no longer feel its breaths.

Clutching its stomach, the final lizard—the food thief—lifts its head up to her as Link raises the bloodied branch, the wood oozing with some clear fluid from its former companion's head. It chirrups at her, flicks out the bloodied leftovers of its tongue, turns tail and vanishes into the brush.

Link remains in her stance for another few moments. She pants. The flame-sharp rush of the fight licks up her chest and dries out her mouth. Her arm pulsates. She stumbles forward and drops to her knees on the ground. A convulsion worms up her spine. With her right fingers she grips her left upper arm.

She forces herself to collect her clothing and sling them over her right shoulder. Weakly she whistles.

Ilia comes racing towards her. Her nostrils flare. She whinnies: at the sight or smell of blood, or the corpses of the lizard-beasts, or at Link's own bedraggled body. Link coos soothingly until the horse nears her, neighing softly. She drags herself onto Ilia's back. With her free right hand, she directs Ilia down towards the lake.

She cleans her clothes first, scrubbing blood and lizard-beast saliva off the fabric as much as she can manage. The warm afternoon sun keeps away the chill when she tugs the wet clothing over her body. Then, gritting her teeth, she sinks her arm into the water.

The wounds sting so deeply that for a half second she can see a mirage of the lizard-beast's fangs breaking her flesh once more. She cleanses her arm in the water. She wraps her tunic around the bite marks and ties off the ends, not too tightly.

Herbs. Medicinal herbs. Even if their names have drifted from her knowledge, she can envision their petals and leaves. On Ilia's back, she returns to the campsite to regain her strength with the
remaining roasted sunshrooms. The grove flanking the lake of the shore yields little in the way of medicinal plants, but she works with what she can gather. Chewing the leaves and roots up in her mouth, the bitterness dredging bile to set her inner throat aflame, she spreads the salve into the bites.

The pain splotches black at the corners of her vision. She removes her cloak and slips on the tunic. The cloak serves as substitute gauze for now.

At the next town, she'll need to stock up on medical supplies, trading with the rupees that she does not have.

Rupees.

Trading.

*Monster parts.*

The words flash into her fingers with such speed that she performs the gestures automatically. The red-eyed merchant at the trading post in Hateno who, somehow guessing she was a traveller, had advised that she take up hunting monsters for their coveted horns, their scales, their tails.

She takes her hunting knife to the lizard-beasts. She washes out the parts that she harvests and folds them up in her paraglider, which she closes. No matter how much she scrubs or how carefully she packs the horns and talons into the paraglider, the stink of monster blood radiates from her.

Link dries her eyes. She could return to Hateno, but instead she pushes forward. She passes villages in the distance that spot the mountains, but she cannot climb up the hillsides with Ilia.

She hikes the Peak of Awakening, skirting the actual mountain peak for the sake of Ilia, who shies from the increasingly steep cliffs. Even if she wanted to, she could not make the climb. She rinses her left arm whenever possible and reapplies the makeshift salve. No infection sets in, and ever so slowly the wounds close in on themselves.

Crossing the reservoir between the Lanayru Bluffs and the Phalian Highlands, Link observes—and with the red telescope, confirms—a tunnel winding under the waterfall. She opens up her paraglider and, taking a branch from a nearby tree, set in a wooden support to force the paraglider to stay open.

She leaves Ilia on dry land to investigate.

Her left arm aches. The tendons bunch and spring. She can feel the wounds stretching and reopening from the strain, and so she drops down instead, holding the paraglider by the middle. The wooden strut holds as she drifts towards the tunnel. She passes into the waterfall.

The wooden support snaps under the pressure.

The paraglider closes.

She falls like a rock onto the jutting platform of the tunnel. Twisting through the air, she smacks her right side on the hard stone. Her wrist creaks audibly in pain. The right half of her face, having kissed rock, stings. Link sits up and takes stock of her body.

At least she landed in one piece.

Link ties the paraglider to her back. She follows the tunnel down into the darkness. The dampness
of the cavern ceiling drips moisture onto her shoulders, her head, her arms. Her boots slosh in the thin layer of water. Here and there her foot slides on a patch of moss.

The tunnel curves upwards and to the left. An orange gleam light her path. A shrine.

To her relief the puzzle of the shrine takes little effort to solve, and she works at it one-handed. This time when she touches the cubic curtain of blue light at the end of the shrine, her left arm tingles. The skin near the wounds begins to itch, then burn. She jerks her hand away from the blue light but the sensation continues, as though a million tiny needles had burrowed beneath her skin and begun to crawl towards one another.

Link steps backwards. Her foot expects another step to the stairs, but instead she feels empty air. Gravity takes her down. She clutches her arm to her chest. Frantically she claws off the cloak to stare at the horrors unfolding on her bare skin.

Her flesh puckers visibly inwards towards the holes where the lizard-beast bit through her arm in furrows that mark where her skin has stretched. The bites themselves have capped with angry red-brown scars that radiate thin lines, starring her flesh with the memory of the agony. She counts the starry scars on the left and right sides of her arm in arcs of ten apiece.

The burning diminishes and then halts. The voice of the shrine takes on a different tone, and she looks up at the glittering shards of blue that have broken from the curtain.

The shrine must have healed her.

"Thank you," she signs to no one in particular. She runs her fingers over her arm, to feel the texture of the irregular bumps, like inverse craters over her flesh.

Her own scars, that speak of her own experiences, that tell of her own survival, that affirm her own existence. Not the scars of someone else's body whose skin she has stolen.

Her own.

And she has the lizard-beast to thank.

Link breaks out into laughter. She rocks back and forth on the floor of the shrine. The sides of her mouth ache; her stomach hurts; and she thanks the lizard-beast over and over until her arms weary.

She emerges from the shrine, from the tunnel, from under the waterfall. Climbing up the slick walls on the other side of the falls leads to her slipping downwards more than once, but she accompanies every fall with a laugh. She perseveres. When she passes beneath the waterfall, she tilts her head back to drink of the fresh water flowing over the cliffside. The clean water washes the sweat from her body and the salt from her face. Her hair and the fabric of her clothes stick to her frame.

Soon she has hooked her arm over the top of the fall once again. She pulls herself up into the grass. Link draws her face near the earth and smells the scent of life.

Ilia cycles more readily through her gaits now, walking to trotting to cantering to galloping and back again with the slightest touch. Link directs her left and right with a tuft of her mane. She could fashion a brindle for her horse herself if she has not the rupees to buy one. Then again, a mishandled brindle could cause her horse pain and grief.

Link continues on the western border of the Lanayru Promenade. She picks bananas and durians from the trees that sprout here and there, though she gives up on the durians after her first effort at
eating them without prior preparation. The bananas, however, she can eat one-handed, flipping up
her chin to thrust the banana further into her mouth for the next bite.

When she approaches the forest outside of Kakariko and the mystery of the depressed platform on
the hill, she takes time to prepare for the road ahead. She fletches arrows from wood; the dove she
catches for supper supplies the feathers.

The arrows she carves do not fly as far or as straight as the arrows taken from the Great Plateau.
She could make the trip to Kakariko to stock up; with Link's reputation as the hero, the shopkeep of
the Curious Quiver—Rola, as Cottla and Koko called her—would give her as many as she asked
terribly for free.

For that reason alone, Link busies herself making her own arrows.

She wraps the Great Plateau arrows with a strip of fabric torn from her cloak. She tucks them
deep into the quiver for a spare stash of true-flying arrows. Her misshapen arrows will work well
for now.

She moves to the northeast, then follows the road west around Quatta's Shelf. She stops by a
fishing village inhabited mostly by sheikah and zora, where she attempts to trade in the lizard-beast
—lizalfos, the zora at the counter calls the beasts—parts for rupees.

The zora's head/tail swishes about. He chastises her for bringing in such sloppily prepared horns
and talons and attempting to trade a severed tail too short to bring much use. When she ducks her
head and admits her ignorance, he softens.

She leaves the village with three boons: first, the knowledge of how to better select, prepare, and
preserve the parts of monsters; second, a new wooden strut for her paraglider that she carves by
hand; and third, a belly full of hylian bass.

As she passes the Rabia Plain the sound of an accordion reaches her, but when she turns in
direction the music, the song of the accordion fades. Link marks the spot on her map and continues
her journey north, and north, and north.

The Lanayru Wetlands bring with them their own share of woes. Insects buzz around her at
alarming densities. She awakens in the middle of the night to bitemarks welting up her arms. For
want of a sword, she accepts a rusted halberd sticking up from the half-sunk ruins of the islands
near the Millennio Sandbar, the name gleaned from a passing rock-being in a wooden boat who
stands a full metre away from the water's edge at all times. The rock-being helps her record the
names of local landmarks in exchange for half of her flint pouch. She shares her bananas with the
rock-being, but he merely rumbles out a chuckle and offers her a fancy supper of inedible rocks.

The orange glow of a shrine brings her to wade through the waters toward a rocky outcropping
called—she checks her map—Shrine Island, appropriately enough. A blue-scaled zora sunbathing
on the warm rocks on the island shore dives into the water at her approach. She lunges towards
Link, who starts to sprint in the other direction, gripping the halberd tightly in both hands. The zora
catches up to her.

"A hylian!" the zora yells. "Finally! I was starting to think my fins would fall off!!" Link stares at
her, her fingers easing off of the handle of the halberd. The zora arranges herself in the shallows
and explains herself: the Prince Zora of the Lanayrish capital of Ruto has sent zora to recruit a
strong hylian adventurer to come to the aid of the Lanayrish, for a mysterious mission she cannot
disclose, but which threatens the whole of zorakind.
Link pries the zora's webbed hands off of her wrists. Smiling apologetically, Link backs away one step at a time. "You must be looking for a hero. I can't be that."

The zora pouts at her but swims away. Link watches her jump up from the surface of the lake, her body glittering with droplets of water, and then dive back in.

She approaches the shrine on Shrine Island. The challenge involves using the magnesis rune—she grins at herself for remembering Purah's name for it—to scoop orange balls from pools of water. She finishes easily enough; as she works, she wonders at the strangeness of these puzzles; at the strangeness of these shrines ten thousand years ago that toy with her and make her physically put herself through tasks of the mind; at the strangeness of the voices and the instructions that she does not know. Whoever made the shrines must have built them for a reason. Yet she cannot see how playing a game of fetch with a piece of metal would assist anyone, hero or no.

Then again, perhaps not comprehending the shrines marks her as not the hero and frees her from such a burden. She pats the shrine in gratitude.

Her journey continues northward through a series of isles. Goponga Island hosts ruins, while Linebeck Island boasts the waterfront of New Goponga, not on the isle but around the isle, the houses floating on great wooden rafts. On Kincaen Island, Link observes the reason for the rafts' existence: a giant rotund being, like an overinflated balloon, that she mistakes at first for a tent or a decoration prior to noticing the giant monster breathing. When it rampages, the villagers cast off the shore to float safely in the deeper waters the monster cannot reach. Link takes the villagers' wisdom to heart and goes around the island, for Ilia's safety as well as her own.

Link dispatches a crowd of three lizalfos on her path to Mercay Island. She preserves their body parts somewhat properly this time. At the very least, she manages to confirm the still-twitching movements of the tail of the bluish-purple lizalfos who seemed to serve as the squad's leader. She takes the forked boomerang that the blue lizalfos wielded and the bony shield. The afternoon sees her practising aiming, throwing, and catching the boomerang repeatedly until she can wield the weapon with confidence.

She rivets her gaze on the orange-tinted golden spire at the peak of elevated rock. Leaving Ilia at Boné Pond in a lush grassland, Link sneaks her way past the camps of bokoblins and lizalfos that infest the base. To her amusement, she catches them fighting amongst themselves at times, over fish or fruit. Link can understand the motivations for such quarreling. She hides behind a crate of arrows—which rapidly fill up her quiver—and uses the forked boomerang to bonk one of the blue bokoblins on the head. Squealing loudly, the bokoblin wheels about, its clawed fists up. It seizes the nearest lizalfos and suplexes the green monster over its head into the water. The lizalfos tongues the bokoblin's snout in response. The bokoblin throws a left cross at its supposed ally's mouth, and suddenly the two wrestle one another in the mud. Another bokoblin joins in to pull on the lizalfos's tail. The commotion draws the attention of other bokoblins and lizalfos who leap into the fray for apparently no reason but their own bloodlust.

Link covers her mouth with her hand to keep her laughter in as she sneaks from crate to crate towards the tower. She watches one bokoblin grab a flammable barrel. The lizalfos shriek at it, but the bokoblin rears and slams the barrel on the head of the nearest monster: a napping red-skinned bokoblin. The resulting explosion sets half the camp aflame.

She ascends the tower. She places the slate into the empty rectangle on the pedestal. As she waits for the black crystal to distill a droplet, she sketches the land to the east on her map, a view of glittering blue-black stone cascading like ripples frozen in time, and farther beyond that, a ridge of mountains snowed at their caps.
To the north the volcano—the pulsating forge of Hyrule—takes up the skyline. It belches smoke into the heavens. Death Mountain.

The slate buzzes to catch her attention. She slides the slate back into the pouch at her right hip. Her hands hold the paraglider tightly as she kicks herself off of the rim of the tower. Below her, bokoblins and lizalfos panic. Some ready their bows, yet she glides too far above them for their arrows to reach.

Link lets go of the right support to waves at them. The paraglider nearly rips from her hand as the wind knocks up the right side of the paraglider. The earth rushes to meet her. She scrambles for the wooden support again. Her right fingers barely reach the strut, and she breaks her fall just before crashing into the ground.

No longer high above the bokoblins and lizalfos, she breaks into a sprint, whistling the entire way down. The monsters give chase. She rips the lizal shield from her back. Throwing the shield down to the ground and wedging the toes of her boots into the handguard, Link attempts to surf down the rocky path. She can hear the shield disintegrating under her feet. She whistles, whistles, whistles until her throat scorches and Ilia's neighs reach her ears.

She twists her body up to maintain speed as the path curves skyward. The shield launches her into the air. Ilia gallops towards her. Before the peak of her rise, she frees her left boot from the handguard and swings down her leg.

Bracing herself for impact, Link lands astride on Ilia's back. The sharp pain of contact thunders up her skull. An arrow cleaves the air by her right ear. She squeezes in her thighs as hard as she can. Ilia rears. When the horse's hooves crash down to the dirt, Link speeds her forward.

They leave the monsters and the tower far, far behind.

Ilia and Link cross the river. A travelling rito hawking rare insects informs her that she walks the Tierno Trail. A group of gerudo and rock-being jewel traders coming down from the mountains share a meal of hot curried rice with her, courtesy of the special goron spice on which they have loaded up. The rice steams her body and reddens her face. Goron spice. The rock-beings. She remembers: not rock-beings, but gorons. Thanking them profusely, she tries to pay them back in monster parts, but the red-haired woman in charge of the group shakes her head.

"A pleasure, instead, to hear of your travels," the woman says in a lilting tongue Link recognises as Eldic. The jewel trader concludes every sentence in the phrase goro; Link recalls what Symin told her, of goro indicating the end of each phrase.

Peppering her speech with goro, Link regales the jewel traders with a story of her tricking the monsters into fighting one another. They share a hearty laugh to accompany the hearty meal. She asks about the monsters, about the violet violence in their eyes, about how they continued to pursue her with ruined mouths and ruined limbs as though unafraid of death.

One of the gorons grunts. Despite the silliness of their actions, he growls in explanation, the monsters pose a threat to people over the land once known as Hyrule, for their tendencies towards destruction and chaos, for their hate that brings them to attack on sight, for the malice that courses through their bodies, their forms animated by magic rather than flesh and blood alone. While the monsters murder one another in cold blood, the same lust for violence chases them towards villages, and they replenish their numbers at such rates that more always rise on the horizon.

The woman in charge of the group nudges him. "You can kvetch down the road. For now let's commemorate another sunrise we've gotten to see."
At the fork in the road, Link bypasses a village that better resembles a fortress. She has had enough of guards and proving herself.

The path grows steeper as she ascends into the mountains, and the air hotter. She removes her undershirt to ride in the sleeveless tunic. Plucking broad leaves from the trees that line the trail, Link fashions herself a fan.

Faint strains of an accordion carry over the mountainside. The sound murmurs an eerie familiarity, caressing her ears with the promise of mists forgotten. Link presses gently on Ilia's sides to quicken her. Over the next hill, the village at the base of Hyrule's spine comes into view. She examines her map: the foothill town of Medigo. The stone buildings give the village an appearance of a pile of pebbles organised by a child playing house. As she approaches Medigo, the carve of individual houses and flowers painting the ground breathe the village into life.

Her gaze settles first on the bulky orange-brown rock-beings that she recognises now as gorons. Other denizens of the village look more familiar: a smaller quantity of sheikah and hylians of varying tones of skin, and many zora bathing in the warm waters of the lake below. She faces no guards on her entrance. If she cranes her neck up, she can observe a goron at the top of a stone guard-tower.

The sound of the accordion pulls her onwards.

A blue- and gold-feathered rito stands in the village square with a sky-coloured sash around his chest. The fountain behind him sprays a fine mist to the air; the rainbows glittering in the droplets pale in comparison to the colourful green-blue-red-feathered adornment the rito bears on the side of his head. The accordion in his hands seems to move of its own accord. The bellows rise and fall. The tones mingle from clear to resonant as the rito, his eyes closed, gradually shifts his hands along the manuals. Passersby toss rupees into the open instrument case by the rito's feet.

Link pats her pockets, but no rupees have spontaneously generated while she looked the other way. She rummages through her satchel, seizes the pouch of candied acorns from Hateno, and drops that into the accordion case. The noise of the nuts tumbling into the case seems to rouse the rito, or perhaps by coincidence he opens his amber-green eyes.

"Greetings, traveller." The rito's rich baritone soothes her exhaustion with the euphony of his voice alone. He speaks with an unplaceable accent that tilts the corners of his words just so, as though his song could rise into the clouds at any moment, as though the rito could take to the heavens without a single look back. "Would you care for a song, passed down by generations in this land?"

Link dips her head in acceptance.

"Excellent. I apologise for any mistranslations on my part; all errors are mine own. The Ballad of the Sealing War has passed through the mouths and memories of nearly every people in the old kingdom of our Hyrule. You hear, now, a reconstructed verse thought to closely resemble the original, translated from Old Hyrulean, to Faronese, to Tabanch, to Eldic. Without further ado..."

He lifts his right wing from the accordion. The singer regards the skies with a gaze so heavy that Link expects the clouds to fall. He hums a low, low note that vibrates visibly in his chest. Singing up the octave, he raises his hand in tandem until he holds the highest tone, feathers outstretched. His voice thrums to harmonise with the very air. Even the passersby still their course to listen.

He sings:

"O Din, grant me Your Power, truths I seek."
"O Nayru, may Your Wisdom freely ring;

"O Farore, Your Courage lets me speak;

"O Erito, lend me Your Voice to sing!"

The final note dies down. The singer bows his head as his wings return to the manuals.

The melody lifts her from her feet. Once more the bellows rise and fall with the whisper of the wind, the song of the heart. Humming with the melody, the singer waits, and waits, and then lends his voice to that of his instrument until both sing as one.

"O Our Hyrule, O Kingdom blessed by Three,

"the Golden Light of Earth, of Sky, of Sea,

"the shadowed Malice chokes Your sacred lands,

"so ravaged by Calamity's dark hands.

"Yet Hope survives: the Princess and her Knight,

"two souls of Courage sent by skyward light.

"whose Goddess-blesséd blood and sacred sword

"repel the vile Malice and its horde.

"I sing of Wisdom's song and Power's blade.

"O Goddess, may their Story never fade!

"For Heroes ours, I sing that you may know,

"the Sealing War, ten thousand years ago.

"O Our Hyrule, O Kingdom blessed by Three,

"long lived in peace and in prosperity,

"yet Seven knew that Malice would arise,

"and so prepared for War against Demise.

"The Seven raised an animated force

"to aid our Heroes on their destined course.

"To match the monsters spun of Maliced spawn,

"they forged an army of automaton

"and built behemoths four whose hearts did shine

"with holy power, named the Beasts Divine.

"To guide each Beast, a Champion pledged his life
"to guard the Kingdom through this darkest strife.
"The Princess with her Knight and Champions four
"awaited fate's predestined Sealing War.
"When Malice struck, its hate eclipsed the sun,
"yet bright with Hope, Hyrule stood strong as one.
"The Guardians turned back the monstrous blight,
"as Beasts Divine unleashed their holy light.
"Though Malice gnashed its jaws of sable rage,
"Hyrule's own heart became its curséd cage.
"With sacred sword, the Knight struck towards the skies.
"With blesséd blood, the Princess sealed Demise.
"For Heroes now I sang, that you may know,
"the Sealing War, ten thousand years ago.
"O Golden Light of Earth, of Sky, of Sea.
"O Our Hyrule, O Kingdom blessed by Three."

The accordion and the singer resonate together on the final tone. The crowd that has gathered around the singer bursts into applause. The singer bows. While the audience disperses, he offers Link a warm smile.

"Thank you ever so much for listening, traveller. Well met." Kass dips his head. "I am Kass, travelling minstrel. I collect songs and stories from the old kingdom of our Hyrule over, so that they may be remembered when all who know them have passed. Even if Hyrule no longer survives, its memories live on in song" Link thanks him, to which he responds with another smile. "If you should care to hear another song, seek me out, traveller. I hope that we will once more cross paths along the road." He rests his hands upon the manuals once more. "Take care, and may the light illuminate your path."

The waves of the crowd sweep Link away from the minstrel. She allows the passersby to carry her forward through the large town. Shops on street corners advertise every kind of product she could think of and many more that she could never. The words, the bright signs, the merchants yelling of their wares, the excited shoppers bartering back just as loudly—

Link uses Ilia's bulk to carve herself a path out of the throng. Her heart has grabbed her ribcage and started to shake as though attempting to free itself of a prison. The blood roars in her ears.

She closes her eyes the instant she extracts herself from the crowd. She breathes.

She trots Ilia to the stable at the edge of Medigo. A woven horsehead with great painted discs for eyes makes the building stand apart from the rest of the town. Link lets her loose to munch on the grass outside while she rests her legs in the shade of a weathered tree.
With the sun dipping down in the horizon, she begins to consider what to have for supper. She makes a grasswhistle in the meantime. Its tinny sound brings a smile to her face as she fails to produce any meaningful music.

"Ho there. I don't suppose you're planning to take your horse to Death Mountain."

The grasswhistle fizzes out with a noise like a deflating balloon. Link spits the blade of grass from her mouth and sits up to stare blankly at the woman who stands over her with crossed arms. She wears the white-hatted uniform of the stable workers, her pointed ears lifting up the sides.

"I also see that you have neither registered your horse nor gotten her fitted for a saddle."

"Can I register here?"

"Sure. It's only twenty rupees, you know."

"Ah," Link responds, "that's why I haven't registered, then."

The woman arches an eyebrow. Link explains her lack of rupees, and the woman—Gaile, she says; Gaile of Medigo—suggests that they also deal in monster parts, jewels, and alcoholic milk if necessary.

"Alcoholic milk...?" she echoes.

Gaile shakes her head. "Never you mind. C'mon. Let's get you set up."

The stable workers fit Ilia with a fine leather saddle and a durable brindle. They affix horseshoes to her hooves. On a wooden table outside of the stable at which Link and Gaile sit, Gaile sorts the monster parts Link has brought. "This'll be enough to board her here for a month or so if you've got business on the mountain."

Link nods.

"Well, you know. If you want to go to the mountain, and don't like to spend a month burning alive—I can never tell with folks these days—you'll want to pack a couple of fireproof elixirs." Gaile enters the stable for a moment. She returns with a box full of large glass vials, swirling with a dark reddish concoction. "They'll keep your body sweating and free from flame, guaranteed as long as the effects last, and they don't come cheap."

"Could I...cook for you instead?"

Gaile's eyebrows, already in a perpetually arched state from Link's ignorance about seemingly every aspect of horsekeeping, threaten to bend so much that they break. "Are you tryin' to flirt with me now?"

Link touches her chin.

Gaile rubs her temples. "All right. I don't want your death on my hands, and I can see you're going
up whether you have the elixirs or not." Link bobs her head. "If you help me cook up the next vat of elixir, I'll give you some for free, but only because I can tell your horse likes you."

Link leaps to her feet. She assumes a stance as though about to launch into a race.

Gaile frowns. "Just...come on."

She gestures for Link to follow her into the stable. The stench of horses rolls over her all at once, thick enough to make her eyes water. The hay, the feed, the warm bodies of the horses, the manure, the faint trace of milk.

A flash whirls through her vision. A girl with red hair. A girl in a sky-blue dress with a violet sash around her waist, who holds a basket of cucco eggs half her size, her blue eyes sparkling, her brown skin almost golden in the light of afternoon. A girl who sticks out her pinky, who makes Link promise, promise to...

"Ho there. You planning to help, or should I take back my generosity after all?"

Link snaps from her reverie. Gaile pushes her through a beaded curtain into a tiny galley taken up by a massive pot and two great wooden crates. In front of the pot sits a platform on a spring, with a dial showing three colours in order of green, blue, and red; the thin metal needle points at the base of the green. A glass hourglass that reaches to her knee rests by the platform. The stink radiating from both crates—one of ash and smoke, the other of rotting meat—could keel her over then and there.

"Here's what you gotta do. First: fill up this pot with water. There's a couple'a buckets here, and you can get the water from the spring out back. Second: skin the black lizards from there." She indicates the first crate. "Weigh them there. You want to enough that the arrow reaches red. Load them up five times and put 'em in the pot." She demonstrates how to skin a lizard. Link watches her discard the guts into the second crate of rotting meat, leaving only the outer layer of skin. Vomit wells up in her throat; she swallows it down. "Third: weigh out three loads of talons or horns. Doesn't matter which. They're behind the pot. Don't put them in yet." Gaile points to the hourglass. "Fourth: steep the lizards in the pot until the hourglass is done. Then put in the first load of monster bits. Turn the hourglass over again. Do that for the other two loads. That'll take all night, so I hope you rested up. Did you get all that?"

Link blinks.

Gaile exhales. "Listen. You mess this up, and you have to pay for all of the ruined product, you hear me?"

She bobs her head.

"Good. I'll see you in the morning, Din help us all. And don't come crying to me if you go up in flames."

Link scribbles down the instructions as best she can remember in whatever language comes first to her hand. Not Central Hyrulean or Necludan, but something for sure. Wielding the bucket over her shoulder, she makes the run from the spring to the pot ten or twenty times. Skinning the fireproof lizards takes far longer than she expected. Without practice of the deft motion with which Gaile bisected the lizard in a final slice, Link struggles to flip out the guts. By the final batch of five, however, she wields the knife nearly as quickly as Gaile did.

She turns over the hourglass, which weighs—she feels—heavier than herself.
The night draws long.

Whenever the fire runs low, she adds in a log of wood from the tall pile behind the pot.

Perched on the edge of a short stool, Link plays games with herself to keep herself awake. She accounts for the scars on her abdomen, her limbs, her back where she can reach and pictures a story for each. She closes her eyes to re-envision the snatches of memories that have whispered through her, brought on by scents she knows.

And then, the one memory that stands clearest in her mind.

The woman in black, whom someone in the memory of that party of six named Impa. Impa must be a common sheikah name, she notes to herself, reflecting on the other Impa she knows, of Kakariko. Her thoughts drift to the rest of the party. The hylian girl with the golden hair, with eyes of green—or maybe blue; she doesn't remember—and skin of light brown. The blue-feathered rito, the brown-rocked goron, the dark-skinned gerudo girl with the green hairband, the red-scaled zora, and then herself: Link. The talk of the shrines, of the duty of the girl with the golden hair, of fate isn't fair.

Perhaps not a memory at all, but a dream. A dream that she has conjured up for herself.

She nods off. She slips from the stool. At least banging her head against the floor bids her rise again.

When she adds the final batch of lizalfos talons she notices the firewood running low. She pokes in another log to be sure, then bolts out from the stable.

The sky has begun to blush with dawn when she returns with armfuls of hastily gathered firewood gathered through the miracle of sheikah slate bombs. The last few grains drop in the hourglass.

She lets the fire die.

Curling up on the floor of the galley, Link lowers her eyelids, and the darkness takes her.

—

Fireproof Elixir (low fireproofing for 03:10) - fireproof lizard, lizalfos talon

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Another thank you to my most wonderful beta reader, Emma.

Thus begins the character arc of Link feeling like a stranger in her own body. With regards to the combat sequence in this and later chapters, I really want to drive home why Link, well, is one who ends up everything that she does in Delicious in Wilds; I don't know about you, but I would be unable to accomplish half of what Link does.

Completing a shrine in Breath of the Wild brings Link's hearts to full, so I represented this in Delicious in Wilds by the natural healing of the shrine. Don't worry; there's an
actual explanation for the healing later, which ties into something already implied about the shrines.

Because the King of the Zora was known as King Zora in *A Link to the Past*, I have rendered Dorephan's title as the King Zora, and Sidon's as the Prince Zora.

In the Japanese, gorons tend to end their sentences with the word *goro*. For the Eldic language (Eldic being the adjectival form of Eldin, as Tabanch for Tabantha or Lanayrish for Lanayru), I decided to have this reflected by making Eldic speakers literally end their sentences with *goro*. The followers of Goro-goro view this as a constant and gentle reminder of their deity's influence on their lives. Since I "translate" all language to English, I don't include the word *goro* at the end of every line, but there it is. For the curious reader, *goro* in Eldic sign language is rendered by bringing your right hand up straight at around chin level, the thumb pointed towards the signer, and quickly curling your fingers into a circle twice.

The town of Medigo is named about Medigoron from *Ocarina of Time* and *Majora's Mask*, and replaces the Foothill Stable from *Breath of the Wild*.

*Regarding* Kass's song, the English lyrics to the song in *Breath of the Wild* are terrible (I'm not sure if they're better in the Japanese, but I hope so): they lack rhythm or flow, and some of the rhymes are insulting. Therefore, I chose to rewrite it from scratch in iambic pentameter. I'm sure that someone out there could do a much better job than I. Feel free to say it out loud in rhythm; I actually have a melody that goes along with what I wrote, but there's no place for me to record it in the fic. Of course, I also adjusted the lyrics to better fit with the changed lore of *Delicious in Wilds*, but many of the lyrics are simply rewritten versions of the appropriate lines from the original in *Breath of the Wild*. Though Kass uses the word *his* for the Champions, note that this is from the assumption that heroes ought to be men, just as we saw with the story of the hero of Fort Hateno.

The virtue of Erito is Voice, not as in *literal* voice, but as in self-expression.

Alcoholic milk, of course, is an old *Zelda* stand-by, as seen in the Milk Bars of *Majora's Mask*, *Phantom Hourglass*, and *A Link Between Worlds*. *Breath of the Wild* even had a joke with Link asking for milk in the bar at the Noble Canteen. I couldn't *not* include alcoholic milk. Of course, alcoholic milk is a real-life thing: I've personally purchased kumis (I'm not actually sure how to write it in English?) at my local deli. It's usually only about 1-3% alcohol; the *Delicious in Wilds* version can be significantly more alcoholic.

I wanted to make the process of elixir-brewing significantly different from the process of cooking meals, and I hope that I succeeded.

Ah! And with regards to Zelda's design in *Delicious in Wilds*, I was bothered by the world of difference between the design of Zelda and her father. Obviously, some children do not resemble their parents, but the degree to which Zelda does not resemble King Rhoam is truly incredible. In particular, while King Rhoam is rather brown-skinned, Zelda herself is incredibly pale; even if her mother were the palest of the pale, Zelda herself should have darker skin by genetics. This reminds me of similar issues in *The Wind Waker*, wherein Tetra's skin becomes pale upon becoming Princess Zelda. In *Delicious in Wilds*, I have opted to make Zelda more resemble King Rhoam; she has facial features similar to his, including a wide nose, and shares a more similar
skin tone, which I describe as light brown.

To everyone who has read this far: thank you from the bottom of my heart. I'm glad to have you along with me on this journey. Next: to Eldin!

midna's ass. 3 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: The fight scene here is both really funny and really good as a fight scene.

I really love Kass. He's the best. The song rewrite is really impressive.

Emma. 3 September 2017.
Poultry Curry

Chapter Summary

Leaving the horse in the stable at Medigo and fireproofing the chef's belongings, the travelling chef begins the trek towards the capital city of Eldin. Along the way, the chef saves a young couple from lizalfos and travels with the couple to the village of Zubora, where the couple rewards the chef with gifts of food: rice, spice, and everything nice.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A weight on her shoulder. Undulating, as if pushed and pulled by waves breaking over her back. Then the sting of a slap.

Link's eyes open to an unfamiliar ceiling. The stench of the stable galley fills her nose all too readily. Two people look down at her: a goron with a tattoo of an equine figure over his abdomen, and a dark-haired man of crimson eyes and pointed ears. The goron extends a beefy hand to help her up. The dark-haired man thanks her for her help in making the batch of fireproof elixir. "...even if Gaile was supposed to do it herself, but I will honour her agreement to you."

They call themselves Rogor and Ozunda, co-owners of the Foothill Stable. Ozunda, the man with the red eyes and pointed ears, grants her a waxy-red wooden box of fireproof elixirs. "You'll want to take one every twelve hours."

Rogor bumps the palm of his left hand with his right fist. "That clothing you got: is it fireproof?" the goron booms; his words take up the entirety of the stable interior. Link hears one of the horses neigh. "I can't help but take pity on ya. The elixirs'll keep ya body from burnin' up, but ya clothes'll still catch fire if they're not sealed with fireproofing paste. I'll get ya some, on the house."

"I can pay," she insists, yet Rogor shakes his head.

"One of my own stablehands pulled a fast one on ya. A night's pay in the stink's worth way more than a box'f elixirs. Lemme help ya out." He produces a pot of a thick red wax. "Here is it. One jar'f fireproofing paste. Homemade." Rogor instructs her to coat the outside and inside of all of her clothing and items with the paste to form a waxy seal. The paste will not last forever but will need to be re-applied about once a week, he warns her, and will wash away at the slightest hint of water or dampness. "Yeah, the paste won't feel too cozy when it hardens, but it'll keep ya stuff from burning up 'till ya can get some fireproofed threads, ya get it?"

She gets it. Link excuses herself to the woods outside of Medigo. She removes her clothes, one article at a time, to smear a thin layer of red wax over every square centimetre, digging the paste into the hems and stitches with her nails. Stretching the fabric, she lifts her clothing to the light to check for gaps in the fireproof seal.

After the wax hardens, she slips the clothes back on and grimaces. The waxy coating rubs uncomfortably against her skin, like the uneven surface of an unfired clay pot. Instead of moving with her limbs and settling on her frame, her clothing—undershirt, tunic, undergarments, trousers,
and socks—now retains its shape as firmly as ceramic.

Link coats the inside and outside of her satchel, the paraglider, the telescope, the quiver. She regards the wooden arrows that she spent so much time carving and waxes them over as well. She smears paste over a handful of apples and bananas to wash off and eat on the road, except for one. Then she finishes off the remainder of the unwaxed food in her satchel.

With preparations complete, Link returns to the stable. She finds Ilia's stall at the very end. When she approaches the stall, Ilia whinnies in her direction. Cooing, Link extends the apple to her.

She commits to memory the feeling of Ilia's soft lips browsing her palm for the apple.

Her own memory.

She strokes Ilia's forehead along the white spot against her black coat. "I'll be back for you, I promise. The stable owners here will take good care of you."

Ilia's ears flick downwards. Link rests her forehead against Ilia's for a moment.

Then she shoulders her burdens once more.

She avoids the centre of the town and instead takes the long way around the outskirts of Medigo. She inhales sharply at the all-too-familiar sight of a shrine on a hill behind Medigo. Carefully she nears, but unlike the shrine of Hateno, this shrine has no offerings at its base and no signs of worship or use. Link glances between the shrine and Medigo. Sweat beads down her shoulder blades, and not merely from the heat of the climbing sun.

Link enters the lift. The shrine proceeds smoothly. The challenges teach her another set of skills to use with the magnesis rune. She marvels as the rune's usefulness. When she quits the shrine and takes the lift up, she holds her breath, but no one rushes to arrest her.

She sneaks off away from Medigo before anyone notices the change in the shrine's appearance.

The volcano of Death Mountain takes up the majority of the sky as a constant fixture by which to orient herself. As she passes along the cliffside overlooking Cephla Lake, the shimmer of something orange down below gives her pause. Link cautiously nears the edge of the cliff and looks down.

Another shrine.

The second shrine she has found today.

Opening up the paraglider—taking effort to avoid breaking the hardening seal of fireproofing paste—Link glides down towards the lower level of ground. She keeps close to the wall of the cliff in case the paraglider breaks again; a sudden dip in the waters of the lake would not spontaneously give Rogor enough compassion to give her a second jar of free paste.

The fireproofing proves more immediately useful than expected. The entire shrine appears to hold a theme of fire, with every puzzle or challenging forcing her to reconsider her assumptions of how and for what she can use flames. Magnetising a metal lantern hanging from a cord at the ceiling, Link attempts to swing it into a bed of dried, flammable material that covers the obvious entrance to the next chamber, alongside most of the floor. Yet no matter how she times her swings, the lantern does not quite reach the flammable. After enough tries that Link has started to smack her forehead against her palm, she manages to bump the metal against the flammable material.
Except only the metal bumps; the fire does not catch.

She sets the slate back into her pouch and stands back. The lantern pendulums back and forth. The cord's angle grows smaller until it hangs still once more.

Link touches her chin. She taps the toe of her boot against the floor. Then she grins to herself.

Notching her bow, she looses a waxed arrow into the cord.

The arrow hits but does not cut the cord.

Link steps forward to pluck the arrow from the floor. She scrapes the waxy coating of fireproofing paste from the head and runs a finger over the point. The prick of blood on her fingertip confirms its sharpness.

She notches the same arrow.

The cord breaks. The lantern falls. The impact sets the flammable material ablaze.

Link pumps a fist into the air right as the fire spreads to the material directly beneath her feet. She scrambles backwards. At the safety of the periphery, she checks her boots: no fire, no ash, no smoke, only the orange coating of dried fireproofing paste.

Whenever she comes back from the mountains with entire barrels full of monster parts, she will have to pay back Rogor a hundredfold.

The flammable material burns quickly. The ash gives off a strangely pleasant fragrance. She scoops up a handful of soot and takes a closer sniff.

By the time she finishes coughing out the inhaled dust, she finds herself face to face with a mechanical creature. A guardian.

The words of the Medigo minstrel's ballad whirl around her: the army of automata. The Divine Beasts. The shrines, ten thousand years old. The instructions in a language she does not know, despite having understood most of the languages she has come across, from Central Hyrulean to Necludan to Eldic.

And the slate, built of the same material as the shrines and as the guardians, too smooth to climb.

Instructions for a hero. For the hero of ten thousand years ago. Trials for him to overcome.

The guardian's beeping grounds her. It attacks her not through the blue bolts of fire-light that she has seen from the other guardians nor with the strange blue weapons, but with a nozzle from which it spews forth fire. She makes short work of the guardian, circling swiftly around the automaton and slicing through its limbs with the halberd. The guardian plops over with an almost comically exaggerated motion. She stabs the pointed tip of the halberd head through the automaton's eye.

The guardian ceases to move. The lights fade.

She takes the guardian's body apart. Purah's description of rare parts leads her to shift through the inner workings. At the heart of the guardian glows an orange sphere about size of an apple. She reaches inside, mindful of the gears that could crush her fingers, and tries to rip it out.

It does not budge.

Link braces her boots against the guardian's chassis. She grips the heart with both hands, inhales,
and pulls upwards as she pushes down with her legs. She can feel the muscles of her back strain up and down.

The heart begins to shift. One by one the cords leading out from it sever. She strains harder.

It pops out, and her momentum pops her entirely off of the guardian to land on her rear.

Link bursts out laughing. She lifts the heart—bits of grey cord still emerging from the spokes—up as if to show the glowing orange sphere to the world. Then she drops the automaton's heart into her satchel and moves on to the end of the shrine.

She watches the instructions at the end of the shrine. Though she cannot understand the voices, she can see figure demonstrating the many uses of fire.

Perhaps the shrines meant to teach the hero of ten thousand years ago. Or perhaps the shrines meant to teach others, not merely a single hero. The song that Kass sang—the Ballad of the Sealing War—could be nothing more than a song.

After all, she has passed through the shrines. And if the Seven from the song, whoever those people were, had built the shrines for the hero, then she—not the hero, never the hero, even if she has inadvertently stolen the former hero's body—could never have completed even the first.

She may as well give up on the shrines entirely.

Yet the shrines do change their colours from orange to blue, and the writer of the letter—and Lady Impa, and Purah—have all tasked her with overcoming as many shrines as she can.

That reasoning would not suffice. Yet, more importantly, to her, the shrines are...fun.

For her enjoyment of the puzzles alone, for the smile she bears upon rising up to the challenge, she resolves to continue seeking out the shrines whenever she comes upon them.

Climbing back up the face of the cliff exhausts her. She lies down in the sparse yellow grass for a brief respite. Her eyes close, just for a moment.

She awakens at night. Her head pounds for dehydration, and she drains her water-skin. Link shakes her head at herself.

By the light of the gibbous moon, she treks towards the maw of Death Mountain. She fills her water-skin with the warm water of Lake Intenoch, careful not to let the lake wash away the fireproofing paste on her clothing. When she tastes the water, her features contort and she spits the liquid back up. It carries the stink of sulphur and the metallic tang, thick as blood, of iron and copper.. But she has no other water to drink. Squeezing shut her eyes, Link forces the sulphur-warm water down her throat.

The inside of her mouth tastes like she had sucked on an old metal brooch. She licks the back of her hand in a failed effort to rid her tongue of the bitterness.

Link rubs the back of her head. She has a long, long journey up the Eldic mountains ahead of her. Yet Lady Impa asked her to report on the gorons, on their capital of Darunia, and she has nothing else to do with her existence but disappoint for wearing a hero's skin.

She sets herself up the trail. No sooner has she passed under the second arch of stone beyond Medigo than a lurid beeping speeds her up into a run. Link looks over her shoulder to the right only to see a giant guardian—stretching some eight metres into the sky and thirty paces wide—scuttling
about on far too many leg. It twists its head this way and that with a sound like grinding stones.

Its singular eye comes into view. The guardian ceases to move. Then, all at once, the automaton hastens towards her, its too many legs a flurry of chaotic movement that tears up the rock beneath it.

Her mouth dries.

Link sprints forward on the trail. Behind her she can hear the guardian gaining in its rampage of claw on stone. Snapping her head right and left, she sees only water on either side: Lake Intenoch falling away beyond the right-hand cliffs, Gero Pond gushing steaming hot spring water up on her on her left. She nearly trips over herself as she veers left off the trail. Link shakes off her belongings as she runs, tears off her clothes to leave them behind, and dives into Gero Pond.

The heat of the water rips a scream from her throat, not enough to boil away her skin but enough to punch hot needles of pain through her flesh. She forces herself to stay under the cover of water. Link tracks the guardian's movements by listening to the sounds of its beeps and the clangs of its steps, distorted from the liquid around her ears. It scurries back and forth along the shore of Gero Pond but does not step into the water.

Just like the guardian from one of the first shrines, which broke down when it fell into the water, the automaton cannot pursue her into the pond.

Her lungs throb from lack of air. She waits as long as she can bear. When darkness eats away at the corners of her vision, she rears up. Her head breaks the surface of the pond. She inhales.

She dives back down.

After some time, the beeping fades. Silence. Link surfaces again. She climbs out onto the shore. Her skin has turned a violent red from the steam bath, and she lies down, panting, by the pond. She does not have to wait long for her body to dry: the water vaporises almost immediately in the scorching arid air of Eldin.

Link finds her discarded clothes and belongings and slips them back on. She notes with satisfaction that nothing has caught on fire yet.

Along the path, she meets a pair of fellow travellers besieged by a fire-breathing lizalfos. She aims her boomerang. The metallic blade slices into the lizalfos's skull and shatters into shrapnel. The lizalfos shrieks as the very air ignites the unprotected flesh of the open wound. She rushes the lizalfos as the monster stumbles about—its talons grasping the sharp piece of boomerang still sticking out of the crown of its head—and pulls the metal out in a thin mist of vaporised blood. Link skids to a halt beside the lizalfos. She chops into its left thigh with the blade of the halberd. The lizalfos lets out a guttural cry. It flails a hand at her. Link blocks its arm with the handle of the halberd and carves out its throat.

Crouching beside the body, Link works rapidly to cut off its tail. The flesh of the stump sizzles. She coats the open wound with fireproofing paste and wraps the tail in her cloak. Before the flames can burn up the fleshy inner parts of the lizalfos's horns and talons, Link covers those in fireproofing paste as well.

At last she shoves the cloaked bundle of monster parts into her satchel, closes the satchel, and exhales. The hot air stings against the inside of her lungs.

The travellers thank her profusely, one a burnt umbre goron with a cap of white crystals growing
from the centre of his head like a six-fingered hand, the second wearing a barrel of blue armour that covers the traveller's face. After draining a vial of fireproof elixir through the holes in her helmet, the traveller removes the face-plate to reveal herself as a tall hylian woman of pale skin and thick golden hair. Elisa, of the village of Mutoh at the base of Ulri Mountain, and her spouse, Blaryd of Zubora.

"As our deepest thanks," Blaryd says, in Necludan rather than Eldic, "allow us to do something for you, stranger."

Link shakes her head. Elisa insists, and Link relents to Blaryd's offer of making her a proper Eldic meal at the next village over. She walks with the travellers up the dusty road. Whenever the heat of her skin begins to rise from uncomfortable to physical pain, she downs another elixir. Elisa gently suggests that Link should consider investing in fireproof armour as Elisa herself has.

"I don't have the rupees for armour."

Elisa thumps towards northern Eldin. She speaks in Necludan as well, although her words lilt with the rock-rolling rumbles of an Eldic accent. "It's expensive in the Eldic Foothills, but much cheaper in Darunia. Cost of transport and all that noise."

Blaryd pounds his palm against his thigh. "And those in Medigo know that they can force people going into the mountains to buy either elixirs or armour. It's no wonder that they sell it so high. Bunch of thieves."

"Now, now, sweetie." Elisa pats her spouse's shoulder. He beams at her. "So tell us about yourself, stranger."

She tells them about herself. Link, on the road to Darunia to see how the gorons—and other inhabitants of the city—are doing, sent by Lady Impa of Kakariko. Elisa arches her eyebrows at Link's mission.

"Just to see how the people of Darunia doing?" she inquires.

Link bobs her head.

Blaryd claps her on the back so strongly that she flies forward into the stone. While Elisa chastises her spouse, Link picks herself up, rubbing her cheeks and feeling the scratch-marks the road has left against her face. Elisa apologises on her spouse's behalf but Link shakes her head.

"It's okay. I don't mind."

Elisa explains the purpose of their own journey. Though the couple lives in the not-hot-enough-for-the-air-itself-to-combust village of Mutoh for Elisa's sake, the two have wanted a child for some time. Blaryd's blush reddens his rocky cheeks; he hides his face with his hands as Elisa speaks, which causes Elisa to smile for some reason Link cannot fathom and stroke her spouse's shoulder. Elisa elaborates: gorons craft their children of molten stone, forming them with their own hands and breathing life into them with the blessing of the Goddess Goro-goro. The process can only take place in the volcanic forges of Eldin, guided by the watchful eyes and skillful hands of the Goddess. "So we're going to my sweetie's home village. A dream come true, isn't it?"

Blaryd shuffles his feet nervously. "You don't need to tell that to everyone we come across, cutie-pie."

"Oh, but I want the world to know, sweetie!" Elisa turns towards Link. "You understand me, don't you?" Link looks back at her with an unsteady blankness of gaze. "You see? He gets it!"
"I'm a girl," she signs in response, still sporting that unsteady blankness.

"Oh!" Elisa claps her hand to her mouth. "I'm so sorry. I'm used to Eldic too much. Call all people he in that language, you know." She twitters a laugh to herself. Blaryd coughs. "You looked so scratched up that I couldn't imagine a girl putting herself through that..." Her voice trails off. Blaryd coughs again, more loudly this time. "But I'm not sure how I made that mistake, looking at you now."

Link stays blank and quiet on the remainder of their journey together.

The village of Zubora overlooks Medingo Pool. The village sprang up around a vein of luminous stone, as Blaryd explains on the path to his family's home. Mostly gorons live here, alongside a few aspiring sheikah and hylian miners, and a pair of zora geologists who live at the northern end of the village investigating the quality and growth of the vein. "Or something like that. I don't know much about rocks myself."

Blaryd introduces his brother Jibo and father Kragg, who embrace Blaryd with tight squeezes and carefully pat Elisa on the head. Link stands in the doorway of the house carved into the hillside and taps the toe of her boot against the ground. Despite the overbearing heat, her chest aches with a strange empty cold.

The family welcomes her, hails her as a hero who saved the couple's life, and asks her a thousand and one questions. Blaryd defends her from their prying inquiries; he takes Link to sit in the kitchen at stone table.

"And time to make you what I promised." She offers to help cook but he denies her. "You can watch if you want. I'll make the meal myself. You've done enough help for today."

Link props her chin up in the palm of her right hand. From the open window of the kitchen, she can see Medingo Pool itself. A lake of lava, bubbling up so bright that her eyes hurt to look at it. She fingers the case of fireproof elixirs in her satchel.

Blaryd cooks this and that. She cranes her neck but can barely see snatches of the stove over his broad shoulders. A red-feathered bird. Rice on fire. A pot of crimson powder.

A heavenly fragrance hot enough to bring tears to her eyes.

When Blaryd finishes at last and gifts her his meal, Link holds the bowl of ostrich rice curry with both hands. Blaryd provides a fork. Yellow rice, lightly salted, mixed with roasted slivers of poultry that somehow does not burst into flames, and a red-brown sauce—a curry—that brings the scent of a burning fire. Not the smoke or the ash but the fire itself, like the crackle in the air just before a lightning strike.

The first mouthful of curry jolts through her. She has eaten this before. Someone has made this for her—

A goron. A goron, tall and broad, wearing a sash of blue. She recognises his voice from the dream by the campfire. She stood beside him on a cleared brown field marked with white chalk. He swung around a giant two-handed grey something that could break a boulder in a single thrust.

"Now, li'l buddy, don't feel bad if you can't get the hang of it. Soon you'll wield it like a champ, eh? Everyone'll see you and say, 'That girl's the hero for sure.'"

Link extended a hand to take the weapon. The rocky handle scraped the insides of her already calloused palms. The instant the goron let go of the handle, the weapon dropped to the ground from
which she strained to lift it.

"I fail to see the purpose of this," injected the blue-feathered rito, having leaned against the fence surrounding the training court. "She's got the sword. She never has to use anything else. Just swing that sword around a couple of times and the incarnation of evil Calamitous One itself runs away with its tail between its legs. You know, I don't even know why we're here, seeing as she can chase away all the big baddies by herself." Giving the rito a sharp look, the goron grunted. Link looked on blankly, the rito's words soaring far over her head. The rito shrugged his wings. "I'll be here all week, folks."

The goron rested his hand on Link's shoulders, his fingers alone stretching the span of her shoulder blades. "Don't listen to him. Hey, I know what might make you feel better, lil' buddy. You ever had some proper Eldic curry?" Link shook his head. The goron rumbled out a chuckle. "You're gonna love this, lil' buddy!"

"I don't...think that she's listening to you."

Elisa's voice focuses Link's gaze onto the hylian wife and goron spouse sitting across from her at the table, the former having joined during Link's reverie.

Blaryd shrugs. "I was just asking you if you liked it. It's my cutie-pie's favourite recipe." Nodding enthusiastically, Link raises the bowl to her mouth and shovels in curry at the speed of fork. Blaryd snorts. "Don't choke on it."

She licks her lips, the fork, and the bowl free of curry before giving them back. Blaryd covers his face with his hands at her stream of compliments about his cooking.

"You'll make him erupt like a volcano if you carry on like that," Elisa jokes. Link thanks them again for the meal.

Blaryd gives her a parting gift of hylian rice in a fireproof pouch. "If you're ever in Zubora again, feel free to come by. My father and Jibo said they'd be happy to see you."

When Link leaves Zubora, facing to the south for the first time since she embarked onto the spine of Eldin, she sees the orange-golden tower spiralling up into the clouds on the other side of Medingo Pool. Closing her eyes, she tips her head back to drain another fireproof elixir. Not even the taste of smoke can overpower the delicious fire of the curry.

She breathes in the air of the mountainside, itself on fire, coursing through her body to set every muscle, tendon, and sinew ablaze with the promise of adventure.

Adventure.

Link whoops out loud. She laughs at the joy of it all. She takes the first step of every step thereafter.

—

Poultry Curry (four hearts) - goron spice, hylian rice, raw bird drumstick, rock salt

Chapter End Notes
Gaile pulled a bit of a Tom Sawyer on Link. Fireproof elixirs shouldn't be *that* expensive. When I first went into Eldin, I spent the journey eating food every few minutes on my poor three hearts.

Although it makes "sense" (in the magical, fantasy term) how fireproof elixir might render one's *body* fireproof, it does not appear like fireproofing should extend to clothing, especially as *Breath of the Wild* specifically has wooden weapons and so on catch fire. As a result, I introduce fireproofing paste, which hardens into a temporary fireproof seal. Note that this is vulnerable to dampness, including sweat!

We never see how gorons reproduce in *Breath of the Wild* as far as I'm aware. I decided to make the gorons quite literally fashion their own children from stone and eat rocks to embiggen themselves.

The village of Mutoh is named after the leader of the carpenters from *Ocarina of Time*, *Majora's Mask*, *Oracle of Ages*, and *The Minish Cap*, as well as King Mutoh of the Cobble Kingdom from *Phantom Hourglass*. The village of Zubora is named after one of the smiths of the Snowhead Mountain Smithy from *Majora's Mask*, where they take their time to make a good point.

The Eldic language has three main sets of pronouns. Firstly, there is the set of pronouns for all inanimate objects, including non-animated rocks, which is translated as the equivalent of "its/its" in Central Hyrulean; secondly, there is the set of pronouns to refer to elevated beings and spirits as the Golden Goddesses, which is translated as the equivalent of "she/her" in Central Hyrulean due to the usual hylian depiction of the Goddesses as female; thirdly, there is the set of pronouns for all animated beings, which is translated as the equivalent of "he/him" in Central Hyrulean, since some hylian scholar had to make a decision about how to refer to gorons.

Incidentally, something similar happened to the gerudo of Parapa (the Gerudo Desert), who have a single cultural gender rendered as "she/her" because the outwards expression more closely resembles hylian expectations of how women rather than men should appear. Speaking of the gerudo, the Parapan tongue itself has a complicated weave of pronouns indicating different levels of formality. They have one set of pronouns referring to deities such as the Goddesses, and they have another set of pronouns exclusively used to refer to their current leader, known as the *Makeela*, traditionally translated as *King* but nowadays as *Queen*. Because early hylian scholars used "she/her" to refer to the average gerudo person, they took to using "he/him" for the ruler of Parapa, which led to the misconception that the only man among the gerudo is their king. This is entirely untrue. As for why I renamed the Gerudo Desert, I don't really like to say: the zora of Lanayru, the gorons of Eldin, the rito of Tabanthy, and the gerudo of, uh, Gerudo. Therefore, I substituted the name Parapa, which comes from *The Adventure of Link*. But we'll talk more of the gerudo once we get to Vah Naboris.

Necludan *does* have gendered pronouns (or, more accurately, gendered words, so that Elisa was more saying "[that] boy" than "he"). Elisa is used to speaking in Eldic but switched to Necludan to speak to Link, since Link seemed to her and Blaryd like a
foreigner. I think too much about language. It's irrelevant to the story which is why I don't mention it much in the fic, but oh baby, do I think a lot about language.

Link is mistaken for a boy for in this chapter due to her, well, bloodied and soot-covered appearance. She doesn’t much "dress like a girl should" while travelling. Though, as you can see, it does unfortunately dampen her mood for obvious reasons.

I changed Daruk's nickname for Link to li'l buddy to avoid, you know, having Daruk call Link a man.

Another great thank-you to my readers. Next chapter we have another interesting flashback coming up, this time with another pre-Great-Calamity friend of Link's, who was actually mentioned briefly in the ninth chapter. Note that since the mark of Sageru is red hair, everyone with red hair is gerudo, which is why that certain character has brown skin in Delicious in Wilds rather than pale as in her initial appearance in the franchise.

midna's ass. 03 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Fun fact: This chapter was the thing that got me to try curry for the first time.

The author manages to do an incredible thing in this series, making me genuinely enjoy Eldin. Quite a feat, since I DESPISE it in Breath of the Wild.

Emma. 03 September 2017.
Curry Rice

Chapter Summary

Continuing through Eldin in search of somewhere to cook the rice and spice received from the couple the chef assisted, the travelling chef comes upon an abandoned village destroyed by monsters; helps defend another village from a rage of lizalfos and furnixes; and gains employment as a sellsword protecting two merchants' wagon of sapphire on their trek to Darunia. The fog of memory parts to reveal name of the the girl with the violet sash whom the chef recalled earlier: Marin.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As Link sets the slate into the face of the pedestal, her mouth already salivates at the prospect of a meal atop the Tower of Eldin with Death Mountain as her companion.

Cooking in temperatures so high that the air itself combusts does not come easily. If she had paid attention to Blaryd's recipe of curry, she would have already fixed herself some food, instead of sitting in the approximate shade of the cliff—though being in the sun or in the shadows makes no difference when the very ground beneath her feet threatens to melt her into a puddle of flesh—tapping her middle and forefingers against her chin.

Her iron pot and its accompanying pot lid hold no match to the boiling heat around her. Yet somehow non-gorons live in Eldin, and with living comes eating.

Gently she opens the carved jar of rice Blaryd presented to her. Almost immediately she catches the scent of burning rice and closes the container just as speedily, sealing the rim so that no air can flow in or out.

Link unties the fireproofed band that holds her ponytail in place. She runs her hands idly through her hair.

She dare not check her map, which remains safe from combustion, furled in the fireproofed cylinder. Instead she stands at the edge of the tower. Shading her eyes with a lifted hand, Link gazes out onto the world. The spire juts into the sky, and yet the mountains of Eldin—the spine of the world—rise even further, culminating at Death Mountain that towers over half of the heavens.

Lava flows down channels along the sides of the mountain. Pools and lakes of liquid fire and molten rock sear her vision, and she looks upwards to the sky. To the peak of the mountain. She squints. Something seems to move along its surface. Not a plume of lava, but brown and gold, shifting horizontally.

She leans out.

The whatever-it-is moves again, blurred by the heat rising from the land and the sparks of fire that cascade through the air. She can just make out what look like projectiles of some sort spewing forth from the brown and gold mass.
Link follows the downwards arc of the projectiles. They disappear behind the other mountains of Eldin. Her gaze snaps back up to the whatever-it-is, which continues its horizontal path winding about Death Mountain.

She leans out further.

Her boots, waxed with fireproofing paste, slip.

She hurtles through the air towards solid rock. With great effort she manage to snap open the paraglider. Link spirals around the tower until she lands on one of the platforms dotting the sides of the spire. She tumbles forward. Spreading her limbs out on solid ground, she takes a moment to laugh at herself.

And then she climbs back up the entire tower to retrieve the slate.

When she kicks off of the tower for the second time, she glides over uneven cliffs and mountains. She aims for the highest structures that she can reach to walk across plateaus or climb up to a higher hill before launching herself into the wind again. Down below she can make out ruins of villages and camps of monsters. Fire-breathing lizalfos. Strange brownish seals with blue bulbs upon their heads. Hunched crocodilians—not the lizalfos, but scurrying about on four legs—with armour of stone covering their bodies. Toad-like creatures that rear up from the rivers of fire to spew rocks into the sky at her. Spinning turtles that carry crawling maggots of flame upon their backs. Hard-shelled centipedes with long jaws and singular beady eyes ringed i blue and violet. Great birds her own size that loop through the air above the camps and breathe out flame. She avoids the monster camps whenever she can, but one of the flame-birds pursues. Link looks back at the beast: gold and scarlet with four wings that flare out in vibrant feathers of tyrian and blue, and a tail that blooms like a blossom of fire.

If not for the flames that burst from its throat—flames that not even her fireproofing paste may withstand—she would stare in wonder at the bird's iridescent beauty. But as the bird gains on her, she notices the sharp blades of its outer wings, the talons tipped in serrated steel, the whip-like undulations of its tail whose hollowed end could serve as a noose.

Not a natural thing. Not a natural creature that could heave magma from its belly, but a monstrous thing animated by an ancient power. In its glazed eyes lurks the violent violet of malice.

She shuts the paraglider and whips out her bow in a single motion. As she falls, she pulls the bowstring back.

The paraglider opens again at the same time as the arrow pierces the bird's breast, just below the juncture of its body and its wing.

Link watches the monster long enough to see the bird dropping through the air. It flaps wildly to slow its ascent, but with its wing disabled, the monster swiftly approaches the ground.

She twists her body northwards. Taking out the bird caused her to fall further down than expected, and she nearly crashes into a cliff. As she climbs up, the skin of her hands starts to sting, as if she had plunged them into scalding water. The effect spreads over her flesh. The stinging grows worse by each passing second.

Link pulls herself up to the top of the cliff. She downs another fireproof elixir, and the blessed cool showers her from her stomach outwards. She wipes her mouth.

From the precipice of the tall cliff, she surveys the land about her. The river of lava below her
flows smoothly south, though she knows not the river's name without the map she cannot check. Far along the river she spots villages and towns, most of them set next to great tunnels or caverns bored into the earth, the caves' mouths large enough that she can make out their innards from where she stands. Massive quarries dug up from the ground lie down below the cliffs. For every mine on the surface, she can count three or four entrances to underground tunnels. Stone bridges cross the river of lava. She observes movement along one bridge. Gorons? She squints. The beings scurry too quickly and too jerkily for gorons.

Lizalfos, on the move.

Link continues north. She follows the river from the relative safety of the high clifftops. Occasionally the scree of a fiery bird or the cry of a lone lizalfos draws out her halberd, the head of which shatters halfway through the day, embedded in a lizalfos's shoulder. She takes its weapon—a forked metal spear—and walks on.

At least she will have plenty of monster parts to sell in the future, if ever her horse Ilia needs anything.

When she notices a village on the next hill, she glides towards the settlement for the possibility of cooking a meal that will not instantly erupt in fire. Link looks up at the homes carved into the mountainside and down at the quarry hewn from the base. Gemstones glitter blue and red, white and yellow in the eye-searing brightness of the lava. Link lands on the terraced hillside below the crag on which the village sits. Eagerly she starts the trek up the vertical cliff.

When her head clears the rocky edge of the cliff, she looks out at the village, at the people, at the potential warm-yet-not-ablaze meal.

A lizalfos squatting in the middle of an empty village square greets her.

First its left eye turns its pupil towards her, and then its right eye follows. Chirruping, the lizalfos stands on its tiptoes. Other lizalfos crawl out of the broken doors of the village houses, chirping at one another, their eyes cold despite the heat.

Link ducks her head back and climbs a half-metre down the cliff. Flattening herself against the rock, she feels her chest rising and falling, her skin broken into cuccoflesh, her mouth drier than the volcanic stone around her.

A village in ruins. Run over by monsters. And whoever once lived there—

Link drops to the lower level of the crag. She walks around the summit of the cliff to avoid the lizalfos. The ground litters with small bones, discarded weapons, broken pottery, misshapen metal pieces she cannot identify, and here and there half a larger skeleton, the bones charred to black, partly smashed from the impact of having fallen from the village on the cliff.

The bile rises in her throat. She swallows down and the acrid stench of her stomach contents exhumes her mouth. Link removes her water-skin. She makes a seal of her lips around the throat of the water-skin before she takes off the cap.

The hot sulphurous water from the lake only churns her stomach further. She chokes for breath. Her knees hit rock. Her spine hunches over until her shoulder blades threaten to rip through her skin.

She gasps. Her tongue feels too swollen, her lungs too shallow, her throat constricting in on itself.

She vomits over the ground. The taste of curry smokes up her tongue, twisted from a pleasant spice
to an inferno of disgust that keeps her heaving. The vomit sizzles upon contact with the too-hot rock. The stench of its vapour miasmas from the stone. She stares at her hands. The edges blur; her fingers double. Under the protective gloves she can picture the scars that rake across a stranger's flesh, a stranger's body, a stranger that once had the sword—

Link covers her face with her hands. She trembles. She has nothing left to throw up and so she rocks back and forth in the fog of the scent of her own vomit.

She kneels there for a very long time.

The ache in her knees and the aridity in her throat lift up onto her feet. She rivets her gaze onto the peak of Death Mountain. She trudges forward.

She does not look down.

Link hikes up an arch of stone that crosses half of the river of lava. From her perch she spies another village on the waterfront of a hot spring. The hunched homes excavated from stone drops her to her hands and knees again. Like the village overrun by monsters. Like the village the hero could have protected. Like the village from which she could only turn away.

She dry heaves.

When her limbs cease fluttering, Link claps her palms against her own cheeks. At the very least she can refill her water-skin in the spring.

Her stomach grumbles but, despite her desire to try every meal that the great wide world has to offer, she does not have the physical capability of consuming literal fire. Although, if she chips off the fireproofing seal from one of the apples she still carries in her satchel and shoves it into her mouth with sufficient deftness, she could choke the fruit down before it catches too much on fire. Link dips her hand into the satchel to feel around for one such apple.

Focusing on anything but the village.

Her fingers close around something spherical. She picks out the apple. With the knife taken from the cabin on the Great Plateau, she peels off the fireproofing paste.

The fruit blazes. The apple burns to ash in her hand.

Link stares at the pile of grey dust in her palm. She pokes her tongue out and licks the tip against the ash.

Dust.

Paraglider in hand, Link pushes herself off of the arch of stone. She glides towards the village under the indigo sky of the coming night. The darkness of the sky does little to lessen the blinding glare of the molten rock.

She lands near the hot spring on the far side of the village. Something large and dark moves in the water and she whips out her fireproofed bow faster than she can even process the whatever-it-is waiting in the spring.

"Who's there?" grunts out a voice with the rolling pace of a goron. Link lowers her bow. "I said, who's there, 'less you want my fist in your skull." Link kneels down on the side of the hot spring. The goron strides through the water towards her. A fire sparks to life in his hand—a lantern, she realises—and his silhouette melts into the sight of a goron in a coiled-rope loincloth. "Who're
"Just a girl," Link answers honestly, her brow furrowed at the goron's odd question. She lifts up her water-skin. "I stopped to get some water, and also maybe food."

The goron scratches the crown of his head. "What're you doing in Gabora, Justagirl?"

Link tilts her head to one side. "I'm here for water." She crouches beside the water and fills the water-skin. Quitting her gloves and cupping her hands together, she drinks from the spring until the parchedness of her throat has lubricated with the oily water.

The goron shrugs his broad shoulders. "Don't do any funny business, and don't creep 'round Gabora at night. We've been up swimming up our necks in furnixesandyiga as is, and I don't like that look on your face."

Link nods. The word furnixesandyiga means nothing to her. He grunts and splashes back into the hot spring. She scoots away to keep her fireproofed clothing dry. A sudden sound—a chirp—to her right sends Link's head in the direction of the noise.

Something thin, red, and swiftly bobbing its head up and down from the hot spring.

The spear finds its way into Link's hands. The goron in the hot spring yells something at her, yet her world has narrowed down into the red thing, the lizalfos, the whatever-it-is.

She grips the spear tightly. Her arms bunch together in preparation for a thrust.

The whatever-it-is raises its head, too fast for her to process in the darkness. It twitters at her. It lunges.

She stabs forward but the whatever-it-is speeds off away from her. As it runs in panicked circles around the periphery of the spring, she lowers her spear.

"You got a stone loose in your head, Justagirl?" the goron roars. "Don't scare me like that! Nearly jumped outta my shell. You've never seen an ostrich before?"

She stares at the bird that abruptly shoves its head downwards, flaps its stubby wings, and continues to sprint in circles.

An ostrich.

The goron approaches her again with the lit lantern. "What's wrong with you? Look, I don't know who you are or what you're doing, but if it's up to me to chase some loony away from Gabora then by Din I'll gladly take things into my own fists." He punches his other forearm for emphasis.

"It's been a long day." Link's gaze sweeps from the ostrich to the village across the water. "Is there a place I could rest at...the village?"

"Don't think we got an inn. And if you think you're gonna go tunnel to tunnel you got another thing coming." The goron frowns at her. He punts his fist onto his hip. "What're you doing out here? And if you say getting water one more time..." He makes a crunching noise in his throat.

"I don't know what you're asking." Link pauses. She touches her chin. "I'm hungry. I wanted water. I'm going to Darunia on a task for Lady Impa of Kakariko."

"To Daru-darunia?" The goron pats the crown of his head. "I dunno who this Impa-imp, is but if
you know what's good for you, you'll want to stay outta Daru-darunia. That blasted lizard's been
driving them outta here."

Link blinks.

The goron sighs. "Fine. Doesn't take a scholar to see you got no clue what's going on around here.
Enjoy getting mauled by the first lizalfos you come across, Justagirl." He extinguishes the lantern
and wades back into the hot spring. "Hylians. The whole lot of them, thinking they can go
anywhere. Former royalty my foot."

Link tucks her gloves into her satchel and removes her shirt. She rubs her face clean with the water
of the hot spring, careful not to let the water drip onto her trousers. She slips the undershirt and
tunic back on. The surface of the water reflects lights from above; someone at the village must
have lit torches against the dark. Her fingers slide into the gloves. She flexes her hands to settle
them back in.

The goron yells again and she looks up. This time, however, he runs not at her
but towards the

Screams from the village. The goron breaks into a roll. Link can just see dark figures crawling in
the pandemonium of the blaze.

Gripping the spear she took from the lizalfos, Link sprints forward around the hot spring. The
village: far, too far. As she draws near, the scene unfolds before her, of lizalfos against goron in the
streets, the fire-breath of the monsters hot enough to melt the very mountainside rock into lava.
Overhead, birds soar to spit molten globs down below. The denizens of the village—gorons and
not-gorons in barrel-shaped armour alike—have formed a barricade in front of the entrances to the
tunnels. To the homes. They tear through the lizalfos with axes and blades, lances and gauntlets,
drillshafts and hammers meant for breaking rock, but for every lizalfos that falls, two take their
place. Burning insects—no, slugs, oozing burning oil as they go—crawl forward between the legs
of the villagers. One villager notices and shouts out an alarm. Everyone dashes madly away.

The slugs explode into an inferno.

Link skids to a halt a distance away from Gabora. She notches her bow.

Her first arrow misses. Her second hits one of the flaming birds. She looses an arrow at a third
monster only for someone else's arrow to shoot the bird from the sky in a burst of lightning that
makes Link stop and stare for a second. She focuses again. Together with the other archer's arrows
—theirs somehow ringed with lightning—the arrows she filched from the bokoblin camp make
quick work of the birds.

Just as she scans the heavens for any birds she might have missed, a trio of lizalfos terrorising the
village notice her with a war-cry of screes. They rush towards her. One lizalfos falls to an arrow
through its throat. The next arrow rips through the lizalfos's thigh but does little to slow its run. Its
untouched companion reaches her first and she flips backwards as she fumbles for the spear. It
thrusts its own spear at her but the point merely grazes her left arm. She rolls forward under the
next jab to slam her spearpoint up between the segments of the lizalfos's armour. The spear pierces
its belly. The lizalfos leaps back; the motion tears the spear from her hands. The shaft sticks out of
the monster's stomach, the point embedded in its innards. Link hastens to notch another arrow.

An abrupt pain in her left shoulder knocks the arrow astray. She feels warmth soak into the fabric
of her arm. The lizalfos with the arrow in its thigh catches its boomerang and throws it again. This
time Link ducks the first sweep. She swivels about to track its arc and catches the boomerang on
the return. She turns back at the arrow-thigh-lizalfos and grins at the monster while it jumps up and down shrieking at her and thrashing its limbs. She chucks the boomerang at its head.

The arrow-thigh-lizalfos catches it.

Link squints at it. Before she can respond, she hears the spear-lizalfos charging her and leaps forward. The whistle of the boomerang brings her to roll forward thrice. Her head spins but she comes out unscathed as she springs back to her feet. The arrow-thigh-lizalfos has just thrown the boomerang again, while its companion strains to pull out the spear embedded in its stomach. The spear-lizalfos succeeds only in snapping off the handle. Link pelts behind it and grabs the still-together spear the monster holds in its other hand. The spear-lizalfos pulls back. They engage in a pulling contest over the spear until Link dips her head at the approach of the incoming boomerang. The forked edge slices through the spear-lizalfos's face at the level of its eye sockets. The monster releases the spear. She stumbles backwards yet catches herself and jumps forward to drive the spear down into the spear-lizalfos, clawing at its ruined eyes. The point of the weapon deflects off of the spear-lizalfos's armour and slams into the rock. She rips the spear from the ground. The lizalfos writhe beneath her. She straddles the lizalfos while its arrow-thigh-companion races for the boomerang that has skidded off the cliff. Wedging her fingers under the lizalfos's helmet she rips it off. The spear-lizalfos meets its end under the sharpened spear-point.

She flips backwards off of the spear-lizalfos. The arrow-thigh-lizalfos grabs the boomerang at last and does an impromptu dance with the weapon. She sprints towards the distracted lizalfos. It turns towards her with a questioning chirrup and she punctures the spear into its lower jaw. The spearhead sinks through its flesh. She meets the resistance of bone.

The arrow-thigh-lizalfos flails the spear around in its jaw. Its talons rake furrows into her chest. She senses it lifting a leg. The kick to her chest knocks the breath from her lungs but she stays firmly upright. She twists the spear around to drive it deeper. Bringing up her knee she slams the lizalfos in the stomach. The impact lifts up its spine. She knees it again. A crunch emanates from its upper back. The lizalfos droops.

Link throws the lizalfos to the ground. She braces her boot against its chest and pulls out the spear. For good measure she takes the monster's boomerang as well.

When she looks back up at Gabora, the villagers seem to be winning. The forces of lizalfos have thinned out, and the bloated corpses of already exploded fire slugs dot the ground. She hefts up her spear as she approaches the village square. She watches a pair of gorons physically tear a lizalfos in two. One of the strange seal-like monsters inhales to spew lava, but Link stabs the spear through the top of its nose down to its lower jaw, effectively clamping its mouth shut. It breathes fire into its closed maw and writhes until she hacks through its head with the boomerang—silencing the monster—and joins the fray with the villagers.

The monsters do not flee but continue to fight until the villagers and Link have driven every last one into the dirt. The victory rings hollow: Link can see the still-molten surfaces of houses reduced to lava. Other homes have cooled down into misshapen blobs.

She exhales and drinks another fireproof elixir.

She stays out of the way of the villagers as they begin the process of accounting for the damage done by the attack. Instead she sits down on a spread-out glob of stone in the middle of the square that might have been a statue or bench before the monsters' rampage.

Her stomach rumbles. Link tries the trick with the apple once more, except this time she pops the fruit into her mouth to remove the fireproofing paste with her teeth. The saliva washes the paste
The wax fills her mouth with an acrid taste and she grimaces, but at least she can eat something to quell the storm in her belly. As long as the fireproofing paste does not contain poison, the sweetness of the fruit makes the bitterness worth the swallow.

A goron seats himself next to her. Link glances at him. A dribble of juice runs out of the corner of her mouth and evaporates against her skin. The goron slaps his knee. Link scoots a centimetre away.

"Name's Fernok." The goron grins at her. The hair-like white crystals cap his head in a small pyramid. A tattoo of a lizard stretches across his chest. She swallows another chunk of the whole apple in her mouth, her cheeks bulging. The goron pats her knee. "Figured someone oughta thank you for taking out those furnixes." He gestures to one of the downed corpses of the flaming birds. A furnix. "Nasty little buggers, they are."

Link notes the quiver at his hip and the metal bow gleaming on his back. "Were you the other archer...?" she signs, still crunching on the apple. "The one with the—"

"What's that?" She repeats the question, more slowly this time. Fernok pounds his palm against his chest. "Me, the lightning archer? Nah. I'm an archer, but you can't get topaz arrows easy 'round here. But I do know who the lightning was. And, you know, speaking archer to archer, you're not a bad shot yourself."

"So what's a lone ranger like you doing out here, swooping in to protect this little ole village of ours?"

"I might know someone who can help you out there, lass." Link can't help but smile slightly at him calling her lass. "You did some first-rate arrowing. Hey, I know things look bad, but Gabora's been through worse."

Link looks out at the destruction of the village, at those kneeling in the street, at those weeping, at those digging through rubble. She could offer to help, yet she only passes through. A traveller. A lone ranger with barely a name.

What would she have to offer the mourners who have had their livelihoods destroyed while she sits by and struggles to eat an apple?

Fernok drums his fingers on his chest. He rests a hand on Link's shoulder. She can feel the pressure on her right collarbone.

"I'll be straight with you then, lass. Donte asked me to keep an eye on you, said that there was some hylian mucking around the hot spring who didn't seem all there in the head."

"So, I figured I would check in on you. Say, lass, you're not Yiga—"

"I don't know what that word means. I promise I'm not lying."

He releases her. Gingerly she runs her index finger over her collarbone to sense the outline of the already forming bruise. When she moves her arms to sign, her shoulder stings. "I don't know what that word means. I promise I'm not lying." She explains briefly about her amnesia, about not even knowing what the word Hyrule meant. Fernok hums in response.
"You say you don't know who the yiga are. Yiga. They're murderers, is what they are, and serve as the leaders of vile armies of monsters." Link cocks her head. Fernok goes on: "I'll be straight with you: We've seen some evidence of Yiga activity 'round these parts the last few days. Now I'm not saying it was you. But I'll ask you to leave, lass. Nice and sweet. Say, you wanted to meet that other archer, right? I got some folks who would be willing to leave with you and take you to Darudarunia. Some jewel merchants that arrived a couple'a days ago and should be off'n the morning." He hums again. "And if you stir up trouble in Darunia, there'll be plenty of people to take care of you."

"I really didn't do anything." She tries to give Fernok something of a smile, yet her mouth feels frozen in a thin line, her gaze dull and vacant.

"I'm sure you didn't, lass, but we can't ever be too safe nowadays. I trust you understand." He raises his hand and she flinches, which prompts him to chuckle. "Long as you leave town, lass, it'll be right. Thanks again for taking care of the furnixes. So. How about you follow me, lass?"

Link stands up to do so. She stretches her arm behind her back to rest her hand on the iron pot. She lowers her gaze to the ground.

The apple churns in her stomach. She winces but swallows herself down, down again, down again, down to lie in the bowels of the earth.

"We're here. You see," Fernok says, while Link continues to stare at the stone with the silent prayer that the ground open up and swallow her whole, "there's some merchants passing through down. They're headed up to Darudarunia. Lass. Yo, lass." He slaps his palm against her shoulder and she raises her head.

A particular home, not carved into the mountain, but sitting by itself on the periphery of the village. On metal wheels, she realises, staring at the sloped wagon.

Fernok knocks on the door with the back of his knuckles. From within Link hears: "Coming right away." A shuffle and a banging. A hiss of air. Another loud bang. A second hiss of air, and the door slides open to reveal a tall figure in barrel armour with a helmet obscuring their face. The person wears a metal bow on their back, the limbs glimmering with polish, a sight affixed to the front. "Yes?"

"Evening, Glepp. Thanks for helping us wrestle off those buggers. Dunno what we would've done without those topaz arrows of yours. All the way from Parapa, weren't they? Wew lass, must be expensive." Glepp says nothing. Fernok thumbs at Link. "Lass, this is Glepp. Glepp, this is...

"Link," she signs.

Glepp signs back: "Hello." Then she returns to speaking audibly, her voice low and almost careful. "Yes?"

"The lass here needs a ride to Daru-darunia."

Glepp makes a sound in her throat.

"She's a sellsword. Just took out some furnixes and a pack of lizalfos without breaking a sweat. Says that she doesn't have anything to do and that she's been sent by someone from Kakariko."

The door behind Glepp opens. A second barrel-armoured character steps out. "What's going on here?" the second person asks.
Link crouches down on the ground while the three talk to apparently decide her fate. Fernok does not seem to know how to speak in Eldic sign, and so Glepp translates for her companion who, Link gathers, is deaf. The companion introduces the inhabitants of the wagon: Glepp and Misan, travelling merchants who run the circuit of the sapphire trade, loading up in the frigid tundras of Hebra and shipping the ice-infused sapphire out to Darunia and the rest of Eldin. However, the sightings of monsters have grown significantly worse of late, making the road that much more dangerous. "Aw, and our previous guard," Misan bursts out, "left us stranded in Gabora. Said that it was too much for him! Even after I promised to up his commission!"

Glepp pats her on the shoulder.

"So, Link, come on in. Make yourself at home and we can hash out a plan."

"I leave 'er in your care." Fernok glances at Link while Glepp translates for Misan's benefit. "You make sure to get on out of here, lass." Fernok's eyes narrow slightly. "And you merchants should get goin' too now that you've got a guard and no reason to hang around."

Link dips her head in acknowledgment and thanks. Misan extends a hand to her, still crouched on the ground, and pulls her up. Glepp opens the door to the wagon.

The blue from the inside of wagon—coated in sapphire—shines directly into her eyes. The sudden chill from the wagon's bowels washes over her at once if she had suddenly run onto a bank of ice. She takes a step backwards but Misan hurries her forward. The cold.

The cold.

The floor, the walls, the ceiling—cold, cold, icy cold. She drops herself to the ground to hug it. The glittering rock cools her cheek. She rubs her face over it affectionately.

Cold.

Something nudges her shoulder. She opens her left eye. Misan, who has removed her helmet and armour, stands over her: a black-haired sheikah woman in a green and gold tunic. She winks at Link.

"Nice, isn't it? The sapphire here exudes cold. We run a trade circuit from here to Hebra. It's a long trek but mighty worth the profit, eh? The sapphires absorb the power of ice in Hebra and then—badda bing badda boom—exhale the cold out here, where it's way too hot! With spring just ending and everyone thinking about how active the volcanoes get in the summer, business is booming! Then in Darunia we load up the exhausted sapphires and ship 'em all the way back to Hebra to get nice and cold over the winter again." She flashes a thumbs-up. "And all you have to do is fend off the monsters that could try to attack us on the trip up and back. You'll only have to take us back to Medigo or about there. Nice and—"

Link's stomach rumbles. Loudly. Misan's hands freeze and Link's face reddens even against the icy chill of the sapphire.

"Aw, you want some food, there, Link?"

Link sits up. The pot on her back clangs against her other belongings. "Do you mind if I cook in here?"

Misan claps her hands together. "Ooh, no need to talk so formal. We're all friends here." Link rubs the back of her head for her century-old style of speech while Misan shows Link to the galley in the back of the wagon, similarly inlaid with sapphires. Link takes the pot from her back to set it onto
the counter. At last she can open the container of hylian rice without the grain erupting in flames. At last she regards the little red jar of goron spice in her satchel. At last, at last she realises that she has no poultry of any sort.

If only she speared the ostrich earlier.

She might not have poultry, yet she does have acorns. And rice. And spice. And all those things are really nice.

With Misan's assistance and Glepp's silent watchfulness—the latter a purple zora with some resemblance to a koi fish—Link heats milk in a saucepan. She sprinkles in goron spice and stirs. Misan has little in the way of vegetables, but she produces what she can: ginger, red pepper, onion, garlic, and Hyrule herb. Link fries them lightly in oil and adds them to the curry alongside crushed and roasted acorns.

She steams the rice as she stirs the curry to a thick consistency, until the very fragrance makes her stomach pound against her innards in its desperation to have some of that. When the rice finishes steaming, she divides it into three bowls provided by Misan. Link pours a generous portion of curry for herself; Misan takes some as well, though Glepp declines the offer of curry and has her rice with a sprinkle of seeds from her own pack.

Link sits on a mat on the floor; Misan and Glepp kneel. The cramped space in the wagon, Misan explains cheerily, means that they set up and put away the beds every morning and have as little furniture as possible. Link nods throughout Misan's words, although she focuses more on the welcome weight of the spoon in her left hand and the bowl in her right.

"Have a good meal," Glepp says.

Link practically shoves her face into the bowl to shovel the curry rice into her mouth and swallow the meal down. The first mouthful of rice goes down easily, but a second later a fireball follows it down. The mixture of goron spices burst over her tongue as though she holds a literal flame in her mouth, the warmth sliding down her throat to heat her belly. Her nose clears. Her eyes water. The tensions in her temples and the ache of her head relax and ease like the morning sun clearing away the fog gathered over the night.

Curry and rice.

Rice and curry.

Not with these exact ingredients, but the weight of the bowl and the spoon remind her. She closes her eyes: a party of four. First, the goron from her memories, the one who called her li'l buddy. Second, the older girl with the green hairband she remembers arguing at the base of the stairs, for whom Link made a bowl of carrot cream soup, with the red hair tied back with a band of green and gold, a dark blue dress garbing her well-toned body the golden earrings framing her sharp features. Third, the girl her own age, also with red hair, in the sky-blue dress with the violet sash. And fourth, herself. On a horse, the brown horse with the white mane—Ilia? Ilia. Her horse, Ilia, after whom she has named the black horse currently resting at the stable in Medigo.

She remembers sitting behind the girl with the violet sash atop the horse with the white mane, her cheeks slightly flushed at the rocky road that bumped Link against the girl with the violet sash. The goron walked next to her, and the older girl with scarlet hair tied back by a green hairband rode astride a blue horse beside Ilia, a bowl in her grip. Ilia's reins in hand, the girl with the violet sash led the horse forward. Link cupped a bowl in her right hand, a spoon in her left. A bowl of curry rice.
The goron and the older girl with the green hairband laughed alongside the girl with the violet sash while they ate. The girl with the violet sash opened her mouth for Link to feed her, and Link took turns giving herself and the girl spoonfuls of rice. She cannot recall the trail they followed, but the horses walked slowly. The party of four spoke of life, of raising horses, of a woman—who lived in the village of the girl with the violet sash—determined to raise cucco despite her own allergy to them.

They came to the edge of a village golden with fields of—of something. Not rice. Something else. Link could see a pond atop a hill below the boughs of a tree. The girl with the violet sash hugged Link good-bye and then did something else—something that Link cannot quite recall—that prompted Link to bury her face in her hands.

Link watched the girl with the violet sash's back recede into the distance of the village. One of her other companions—the older girl with the green hairband—ruffled Link's hair. "You have good taste in friends, Link," she said, a mischievous quirk to her lips.

"Yeah, li'l buddy," boomed the goron. "Thanks for letting us meet Marin."

Marin.

Link does not know whether to cling to that name like a life-line or to banish it away. Marin, who must have known the previous occupant of Link's body. Marin, who would not recognise Link as she is now. Marin, who must have...meant...something...to...

Movement startles Link from her thoughts. Misan has stood up to gesture to her. Link blinks. "So what do you say? You protect us on the way up and down, and we get you into Darunia." Misan cocks her hip. "Or Daru-darunia, like the Eldic call it. While in Eldin do as the Eldic do, eh? And if you can cook like this for us the way there, I'll throw in enough fireproof elixirs for you to last a year."

Glepp crosses her arms over her chest. The zora's red-membraned third eyelid slides horizontally over her eyes. Misan pouts at her companion, who sighs and shrugs, acquiescing. Clapping her hands together, Misan grins at Link.

"So, whaddaya say, eh?"

Despite the slang not making a lick of sense to her, Link attempts to nod and spoon another mouthful of rice into her mouth at the same time, which lodges the spoon into the roof of her mouth. She chokes on the curry. Glepp slaps her webbed hand onto Link's back and the spoon flies from her mouth to land in the bowl.

"Aw, no need to get that excited." Misan winks at her.

Link rubs her throat. She bobs her head.

"So you'll do it?"

She nods again and picks up the spoon.

Misan claps her hands. "Great. How much do you charge?"

Link swallows more rice. She lowers the spoon. "How...much do I...charge?"

Glepp and Misan turn their heads towards one another and back to her.
“You're not going to do it for free, are you?” Misan signs, and Glepp rubs her temples with her hands.

"I just want passage to Darunia. Or is it Daru-darunia?” Link tilts her head to one side. "I don't mind doing it for free."

Misan looks at Glepp, who shakes her head. "Can't say I'm comfortable with you doing it for free,” Misan signs. "Gotta make sure you'll have some incentive to bring us out there in one piece, eh? Better to rest in peace and not in pieces." Misan scuffs her boot on the floor. She claps her hands together. "We'll give you a two-point-five percent commission on all the sapphire we sell. That's zero-point-one-nine above average for a job of this calibre, you know! How's that?” Link does not know the meaning of two-point-five or zero-point-one-nine but nods anyway. "I promise it'll be more than worth your time."

Link inclines her head in gratitude. She polishes off the curry rice and prepares herself a second bowl, just as creamy and spicy and sweet as the first. The coolness of the sapphire house washes over her like a spring shower. When Glepp rolls out a bed for her, the blankets interwoven with sapphires, Link crawls into the cocoon of coolness.

For the first time in her very, very long day, Link rests.

—

Curry Rice (three hearts) - acorn, goron spice, hylian rice

Chapter End Notes


Author’s notes: A thank-you to my most wonderful beta reader, Emma, for assisting me with figuring out the costs of living in Hyrule! And thank you to you, the reader, for continuing to read. I hope that you're enjoying yourself as much as I am.

Link feels sick from seeing the remains of the destroyed village, and also guilty. To some extent she feels responsible for "stealing" away the hero, since she herself is not a hero.

The village of Gabora is named after the other blacksmith from the Mountain Smithy of Majora's Mask.

Breath of the Wild has limited enemy variety, so I decided to expand. Enemies seen in this chapter include: dodongo, furnix, heatoise, magtail, pyrup, spume, torch slug, and winder.

Here's our first mention of the Yiga! Rumour has it that the Yiga have magical powers and can actually lead around monsters, which isn't true at all (though the Yiga are capable of provoking monsters).

Misan is deaf. Glepp can speak out loud out signs when Misan is around. Topaz arrows are expensive and life on the road is dangerous; hiring a sellsword or two is what most merchants do.
In *Breath of the Wild*, the description for topaz reads, "This precious yellow gem contains the power of electricity." That for sapphire reads, "Sapphires contain the very essence of ice." I took this concept and ran with it for *Delicious in Wilds*. Basically, gems are capable of absorbing and then giving off certain elements. Sapphires stored in the cold of Hebra slowly absorb the essence of ice; they can then be transported to the rest of Hyrule, where they function as a coolant to slowly release cold until they're exhausted, at which point they're transported back to Hebra (or other cold regions) to absorb cold again. Ice arrows use a shard of sapphire that, when broken, rapidly freezes whatever it touches. For people in Eldin, this is *vital*, because homes lined with sapphire are cold enough that non-gorons don't need to don protective armour or rely on fireproof elixirs. Misan and Glepp can hang around in their regular clothing in the cold wagon. Similarly, topaz can absorb lightning and electricity from thunderstorms common to Parapa (the Gerudo Desert in-game) and Lanayru, which are then used in the crafting of shock arrows and can even be utilised as batteries. For the curious, rubies are indeed used to make fire arrows as well to warm and heat homes.

Marin is someone else that Link knew from before the Great Calamity and was originally from *Link's Awakening*. Because Marin has red hair in *Link's Awakening*, Marin is of gerudo descent in *Delicious in Wilds*.

Now, regarding Link's commission and being a sellsword. Staying at an average inn costs about twenty rupees a night and an average meal of about three non-specialty ingredients costs around thirty to forty rupees. Three meals a day at forty rupees plus twenty rupees a night comes out to 140 rupees. I factor in another twenty to sixty a day for living expenses and round up to 200 a day as the cost of living as a sellsword in reasonable comfort. A job of this calibre (the trip across Darunia takes around a month and a half) should be able to keep a sellsword for about a month, so we can expect around 6000 rupees. Sapphires are worth 260 rupees a piece, and Misan and Glepp expect for 1000 units of sapphire to make it to Darunia. 1000 * 260 * 2.31% = 6000 rupees, so the average market wage for a sellsword is 2.31% of what makes it to the destination. Misan and Glepp are offering Link a hefty 2.5% commission, which is a shiny 6500 rupees. For perspective, a keese wing is worth just two rupees, so Link would have to slaughter 3250 keese to get the same amount. Lynel guts are worth 200: 32.5 lynel right there. Of course, this doesn't take into account gathering and hunting and so forth; that commission could well keep a sellsword capable of doing such things alive for several months stretching out.

A bigger issue is where Link is going to keep all of that money, if she gets it.

As always, thank you for your support. Next time: to Darunia!

midna's ass. 04 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Misan and Glepp get introduced here! I love them a lot, especially Misan. They're adorable and really fun to be around. The chapters involving them and their road trips are really really comfy. Especially now, with their wagon full of sapphire.

This chapter's memory is my third (probably?) favourite individual memory in the whole series. It has an amazing atmosphere to it, and I love how scrambled and vague it is with regards to its place in the timeline. Plus it's cute as heck. Marin and Link are really really cute.
Emma. 04 September 2017.
Herb Sauté

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef arrives in Darunia, witnesses the destruction wrought by the Divine
Beast Vah Rudania, is admitted into the city, and does some exploration in
anticipation of fulfilling the request tasked her by the matriarch of Kakariko.

Chapter Notes

To all my readers: Sorry for the relative lateness of this chapter; I had some personal
issues come up. Chapter thirteen might be relatively late as well depending on how
much time I'll have to fix formatting issues (it's a long story but for some reason AO3
doesn't like how my word processor did the italics, which means manual fixes), but I
should be back after that. There is no plan to cease working on the fic. I do plan to let
you know ahead of time for long chapters (such as chapter sixteen, actually) that might	take me a few days to fix up, but if worst comes to worst and I really run out of time, I
can always post without the formatting fixes (or just link to the public google docs
folder I have all the chapters uploaded to). So, please don't stress about the fic not
being complete!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Link spends the majority of the month-long trip on the roof of the wagon of sapphire, scanning for
monsters. When she asks whether she ought to look for these strange Yiga as well, Glepp assures
her that she need only worry of monsters. Glepp and Misan take turns directing the Eldic ostriches
that pull the wagon forward, which squabble with one another, but their constant cries signal that
the ostriches still live.

Every once in awhile Link clambers into the wagon, affording herself a breath of sapphire-coldness
to keep cool.

She keeps vigilant. About once every half an hour, she looses an arrow to shoot a furnix from the
sky or a torch slug from the road before it can become a problem. Once an hour or so, she stops the
wagon momentarily to toss a bomb at a seal-like pyrup or lizard-like dodongo or living rock
igneous peblit or—on one occasion—a rock octorok that inhales stones to spit them out back in
molten blobs. She tosses a bomb in its direction. The octorok attempts to chew the explosive down,
and she taps the button on the slate.

About a week into the trip, Link spots a strange monster that appears to form and reform from a
flock of keese; every waxed-wooden arrow of Link's merely prompts the monster to fly apart into
keese, too many keese for her to tackle. Here Glepp intervenes to loose one of her expensive topaz
arrows. The impact of the arrowhead in the heart of the flock crushes the shard of topaz within—as
Glepp explains upon Link's curious inquiry—and the electricity leaps wing to wing and keese to
down the entire flock at once.
Only once do they come across lizalfos, in the form of four lizalfos tearing apart a discarded wagon at the side of the road. Link picks off half of them with arrows from afar and heavily wounds a third. She meets the remaining one-and-a-half with the spear. She walks away with prepared tails, horns, talons, and the long cut of a clawed hand reopening the wound left on her shoulder from the Gabora-lizalfos's boomerang.

Glepp takes her inside to apply red medicinal salve from a jar to the injury. Washing away the blood with cooled water, she cleans out the inside of the wound, meticulously picking out rocks and bits of debris caught in her flesh with a needle. Link stifles her yelps of pain as the needle plunges into the open wound. Afterwards Glepp bandages her shoulder.

Link thanks her profusely. Glepp shrugs.

Misan procures needle and thread; Link stitches up the tear in her tunic and undershirt. "You should consider getting some actual armour, eh? You can get some nice chainmail commissioned in Darunia."

She dips her head in gratitude. She downs a fireproof elixir once every twelve hours. When they stop to give the ostriches a rest, Misan teaches Link how to catch fireproof lizards from underneath Eldic rocks; Glepp gives her pointers on how to carve truer-flying arrows and how to better her aim.

They ride on in the wagon. Three weeks into the trip, they pass by a group of travellers in the opposite direction with their own sellswords, a pair of burly gorons with laughs as large as their two-handed clubs. From the traveller—a goron buyer and seller of gourmet rock—Misan, Glepp, and Link learn that matters in Darunia have gone from bad to worse. The Divine Beast's rampages have grown worse, and the Council of Elders have spoken of evacuating the aboveground portion of the city. On the bright side, the barrages have kept the monsters at bay.

"Those monsters aren't natural," the merchant rasps, steepling his twitching fingers under his chin. "Those things don't have an instinct to survive. They'll get themselves killed if it means they can take someone's life. When they attack, you either stamp out every last one or you still have a problem. You know how many times I've seen one of those things dragging themselves forward on one arm just to clamp their jaws 'round someone's leg?"

Glepp pats the merchant's shoulder.

Link lifts her hands to ask about the words Divine Beast, but her question ties on her fingertips in the chaos of so many people at once, and instead she excuses herself to lie down in the wagon of sapphire.

They carry on. A month after setting off from Gabora, with the summer sun high in the sky, they enter the trail up to the southern mines of Darunia to the south of the city. The wagon passes the checkpoint at the entrance to the mine; Link emerges from the checkpoint with a red bracelet around her left wrist to indicate approved clearance. Misan comes to sit with Link on the wagon's roof. She tells Link of the region's history as they trundle through the mine. The mine spreads in a vast network below the surface of the mountain in pursuit of different veins, from metals such as iron and copper to rarer precious gems of topaz, diamond, sapphire, and ruby, the latter of which represents one of Eldin's most prominent exports. In the forges of the volcano, the ruby jewels capture the essence of fire and heat, for use in weaving into clothing to ward against the cold; for the preparation of fire arrows, rods, and weapons; and as emergency firestarters in times of need. Traders from other regions gather spent and exhausted rubies to bring them back to Eldin, where the miners pack them into emptied mine veins. Years down the line, the rubies reignite their spark—having absorbed heat from the land—and can be used once more.
Most of the explanation flies over Link's head. She focuses more on the steady bump of the wagon wheels over the road, on the luminescent stone torches that shadow the insides of the mines in blue, on the silhouettes of gorons wheeling barrows of metal and hefting drillshafts their shoulders, ever continuing their excavation of the earth, down and down and down below.

The heart of Death Mountain plumes magma up from the centre of the world and, with it, casts wide its net for bringing up metals and gemstones. Mines build on top of older mines when the older tunnels plug up. A cycle of destruction and rebirth.

At some point she nods off despite her efforts at vigilance. She awakens again to Misan shaking her; lifting her head, Link stares at the great golden gates of Darunia that arch over the entrance to the city. Giant stone statues—portraits of gorons Link does not know, except maybe for one particular face that Link forces herself away from to look instead at the ground—gaze down upon those entering Darunia from either side of the gates that span a full twenty metres across and some ten metres high, their intricate designs of loops within loops running from top to bottom in a cascade of gold interwoven with gemstones that stand in for the eyes and hearts of animals and monsters side by side. The centre of the gate opens up on the jaw of a dodongo with two massive rubies for unseeing eyes.

They wait in one of two lines outside of the city. Individuals or families on foot pass through with relative speed. Those come to the city on business face a more stringent and thorough process as border guards inspect contents of wagons, demands documents for verification, and interrogate purposes for the visit. Link observes the guards strip down a barrel-armoured non-goron—after giving the dazed sheikah man a fireproof elixir—to pat him down prior to allowing them inside.

From here in the line, Link watches Death Mountain. The brown and gold whatever-it-is on the mountainside resolves into the appearance of a lizard squatting over the ground. If she had no point of reference, she would assume the volcano were relatively close to her and the lizard about the size of the black fireproof lizards that scurry over the rock. But Death Mountain carves into the heavens, and the brown and gold lizard spans the entire horizontal curve of the volcano.

As large as an entire village. A monstrosity upon the mountain. Link ogles the still and silent beast.

The line crawls forward. Link curls up on the roof. She yawns. Just for a moment, she allows her eyelids to lower.

The next sensation she processes: flying through the air. Then she hits solid ground on her knees and rolls forward to her feet. A boom deafens her. She clamps her hands over her ears as another impact knocks her from her boots. The creak of a nearby wagon—the patted-down rito's wagon—falling over prompts Link to crawl quickly away to avoid broken limbs. A choking fog of spreads out through the golden gates.

Her hands fly to her throat. She coughs, sputters, heaves. The smoke dissipates as tears roll down her cheeks. Squinting past her blurred vision, she lifts her head towards Death Mountain.

The gold and brown lizard on the mountainside. Its head has sunk into the flank of Death Mountain. From holes on its back, the giant lizard issues forth molten rocks that soar with agonising slowness over the city of Darunia, hang in the air for a breathless second, and crash down upon the land. Every impact vibrates through the ground; the projectiles nearer to the gate bring people to their knees or make them topple over entirely. Smoke billows from the cracked and molten stones.

The gates close with a resounding clamour above the din of rocks falling into the city. The lines scream and riot but the guards tell them to shove off and to take cover.
Some people in the lines run for safety. Others, including Glepp and Misan, take the opportunity to skip much of the line. Dragging their wagon forward to near the front of the gates, Misan and Glepp step from the wagon's bulk to wait beside Link, their barrel armour preventing them from sitting down. Another earthquake tips the wagon over. They stand by the side of the road and watch it fall. Link sits between them, blankly flicking her gaze from Glepp to Misan to the wagon and back again, trying to discern what she should do. Glepp and Misan both seem entirely unconcerned.

None of the rocks drop outside of the gates, but some come dizzyingly near, so close to the gate ringing Darunia that the ground threatens to fracture beneath their feet.

When the giant lizard on the mountainside pulls its head out of Death Mountain, it leaves a gaping wound that sprays out lava like blood from a mortal injury. The holes in its back close. As the lizard scuttles forward to disappear behind the far side of Death Mountain, Link's ears continue to ring and her eyes continue to water.

The gates remain shut.

The evening darkens to night. Those still in the lines take stock of one another. A goron and a sheikah work together with Glepp, Misan, and Link to right the wagon. In return, Misan and Glepp go to assist the helpful merchants, gathering their wares that have scattered over the ground after the earthquake broke the merchants' barrels. Link joins in. The repetitive motion of picking metal craftwork—cutlery, jewellery, springs, gears, various bits and bobs for which she has no name—calms her.

They spend the night inside of the sapphire wagon. Misan assures Link that the gates will open once more in the morning. "And we'll bang bang right through since most people left. But earthquakes can't do much when it comes to sapphires, eh?" She knocks on the walls.

Link nods. "I'm going to cook," she announces, to give herself something to do if nothing else, and Misan claps at the prospect.

"Make enough for all of us!"

As she passes into the galley, she notices Glepp, seated on a mat on the floor with a book in her hands, looking at her. She returns the glance. Glepp closes her eyes and gives Link a nod.

Link moves to the galley more confused than ever. Here, in the tiny squeeze between the sink and the counter, she feels at home. Whether the cramped space of the galley or in the open ranges of the sky, she feels better alone, with only her shadow at her side, the clamour and heat of other people melting away into the calm silence of her own motions.

Alone.

She prepares to sauté Hyrule herb; sunshrooms; strange blue mushrooms that she has not seen before but which crisp icily when she bites in; onion; ginger; another sort of blue flower that she has not seen before but which comes apart into tiny blue nibs in her palm; and a single brown-yellow squash that Misan, wandering in briefly to rummage around the kitchen for Link, finds at the back of the pantry. She dices them into bite-sized chunks. She shimmers goat butter at the bottom of Misan and Glepp's saucepan. The stove has no spot for wood but instead a small compartment of ruby shards that erupt in flames when she breaks them open with metal tongues. The air in the tiny compartment heats up immensely to the point of combustion—as Misan explains, having perched on the counter to watch Link cook supper—and this warms up the thin metal top on which the saucepan sits, thereby heating the saucepan.
Link listens to her speak on about the many applications of gemstones that the world has yet to crack. She cannot help but smile at Misan's infectious enthusiasm even as she focuses her attention on flipping and stirring the vegetables at regular intervals. As they near the perfect crispiness, Link adds in salt, dried pepper, and more of that delicious goron spice.

She attempts to twirl the pan when she takes it from the fire. Her efforts land vegetables all over the galley and into Misan's hair. She stands there with the empty saucepan, butter still sizzling at the bottom, and bursts out laughing.

After a second, Misan starts to laugh with her.

As Link cleans up and helps Misan wash the vegetables from her hair, their laughter builds on one another's until even Glepp checks in to see what has stormed up in the galley. Link's eyes open wide as Glepp begins to guffaw more loudly than Link and Misan combined. With a mmph, Glepp withdraws.

Link fries up another round of vegetables. This time she does not twirl the vegetables, but takes them from the rubies' heat to pour them into a bowl.

She carries the bowl out into the main room of the wagon. Link seats herself by the low table. Misan badgers Glepp into showing off "that thing you do," and with some restraint Glepp spins three plates and the bowl on her fingers, juggling them to pass them out. One plate lands squarely in front of Misan, a second in front of Link, and a third in front of Glepp herself before she lets the bowl come to a rest between all three of them.

Misan claps wildly. Link whistles in appreciation and takes the bowl of sautéed vegetables into her own hands. She inhales. Without the rice as a base, the dish has a less layered feel; nonetheless she practically inhales the vegetables. The spices firecrackle on her tongue. The pleasant warmth brings her to close her eyes as she crunches through a vegetable medley, the next bite—tangy or sweet, bitter or hot—a mystery until she takes it.

She knows this smell.

The smell of these vegetables, of these mushrooms, of these herbs, fried in goron spice.

The goron. Link beside him. On a cliffside overlooking a sea of lava. Below them fell away a city of bridges over the sea, intersecting one another in measureless layers that span ten or fifteen stories from sea level to halfway the height of Death Mountain. The details blur in her memories, but she had a plate. A plate of vegetables and mushrooms and herbs. She faced the city below as she ate. The goron beside her had removed his blue sash to lounge freely on the edge of the cliff. Not a cliff, but one of the statues of goron heroes. On his own plate, twice the diameter of hers, sat a partly molten rock with a stone skewer sticking out from its centre. "How're you liking Darunia, li'l buddy?" The goron picked up the skewer and took a bite of the rock. She listened to the crunch. "It's Goro-goro's blessing to us. Speaking of blessings, I'm blessed you came out all this way to spend some time with me." He wiped the fragments of stone from around his mouth. "I'm the second of us you're visiting, huh?"

Link said nothing. She ate slowly as though attempting to occupy her hands.

"Once we get the ole lizard up and running—we really gotta name 'em something, y'know?—not even the big bad boar will stand a chance against us." He punched his left palm with his right hand. "We'll be ready to roll against anything that comes our way. You can count on me, li'l buddy."

Link shivered, ever so slightly. She dug her nails into her palms to still herself but the goron's eyes
"You know, li'l buddy, I want to be your friend." The goron bit off another chunk of the stone. "Fate has brought us together, true, but that doesn't mean we can't also get to know each other." She stared blankly at the floor as she continued to shovel spiced herbs into her mouth. The goron rubbed the back of his head. "Not one for talking, are you? The li'l lady isn't gonna come up here to observe, I promise." Link's fingers twitched. "Look, I heard a little about what happened in Parapa. This time, s'just you, me, and my family. No court swordsmen, no Impa, no interruptions, no Impa, no li'l ladies glarin' at you, and did I mention no Impa? You can take it easy. Relax. I hope a couple of days away from things will help clear your head. So, how's about it?"

She said nothing, and the goron exhaled.

"Say, I know a little secret a certain fried-banana-loving—" She nearly choked on her food; the goron winked. "—girl we know told me: how's the food, li'l buddy?"

At that, Link could feel her mouth curve up, and the goron grinned at her. "Now that's what I'm talking about, li'l buddy. Told you I heard about what happened in Parapa. And I gotta hand it to you: you know what you're doing with that cooking of yours." Link could sense the blankness of her expression shifting into something resembling a smile; the goron muttered half a prayer under his breath. "All right, so feel free to jump in any time if you've got somethin' to say about the food. The thing about Eldic food is..."

She finishes eating the spiced vegetables and herbs in silence while Misan gives her a verbal tour of Darunia. Link cleans up. She sleeps. In the morning they pass through the checkpoint. The goron guard who pats her down stares suspiciously at the slate, but the screen remains dark and she responds with complete honesty of her intentions in the city. Not a Yiga, she assures the guard, just a sellsword looking for a hot meal and a request for Lady Impa of Kakariko.

Crossing his arms over his chest and pressing a bare foot against the ground—to check, as Misan later elaborates, through the vibrations of the earth whether or not Link is lying—the goron nods to her.

They enter Darunia not through the main gates, which remain tightly shut, but through a side tunnel packed with other travellers and merchants granted passage into the city. When they exit out into the open air once more, Link blinks at the light that floods her vision. The ground criss-crosses with patterns of dark and light with the spans of bridges overhead.

The Eldic capital of Darunia spirals up through the hollowed-out core of a mountain as though a giant the size of the moon had drilled into the earth. Far below the city seeps the sea of lava that emanates from Death Mountain, ever-flowing waves that lap at the rock base of the city rising up from the lava. Tunnels extend down into the ground, away from the city and towards the solid rock of the surrounding mountains: the second underground half of the city that meets with mines both to the south and north of the city.

Despite the recent attack by the giant lizard, the city bustles with life. Gorons roll along the bridges. Skylines wire upper and lower levels of the city, some thick enough for carts loaded with people to roll across, other skylines smaller for the transport of goods in metal crates. Several skylines have broken, some with boxes of cargo still hanging awkwardly from the bent edges. Now that Link has a chance to look more carefully, she can make out where the bridges that stretch over the city have fallen to the lower layers, where the regular patterns of dark and light twist into fragments, where the once-densely-populated regions of the city seem surprisingly bare save for the ruins of pooled metal and shattered stone.
The lower level of Darunia—through which the guards of the city usher the sapphire wagon—hosts the city's marketplace. Fireproof fabric billows in the updrafts of the smouldering heat from below. Stone stalls, both the permanent, and the temporary like the sapphire wagon headed by Misan and Glepp. The merchants sell everything under the sun, including fireproof lizards, molluscs, and tiny pebbits as pets; parchment-like paper and accompanying ink that does not burn; metal clothing in every size for hylians, sheikah, gerudo, gorons, zora, and rito alike; street food for gorons in the shape of stones and for non-gorons in meat and vegetables dusted with goron spice, evidently fireproofed; pure ore of gem and metal pulled from the mines; shining metalwork of every possible material, shape and size from adornments to cutlery to weaponry to tools of the trade; glittering gemstones of sapphire, ruby, diamond, topaz, opal, and amber; books made of metal and stone with the raised-dot written Eldic language a symphony for the fingers; dice and sticks with which to gamble; increasingly detailed stonecraft from furniture to statues to piercings to street paintings made of pouring lava onto stone and letting the heat sink into the rock to form pictures of lighter and darker stone, all crafted from every manner of rock, many of the names completely unknown to her; elixirs and salves promising everything from healing to nearly immortal life; organs and other assorted parts harvested from monsters; and more still, more than she could browse in a lifetime. Services offered in the bazaar range from tattoos to oil massages to sapphire cooling chambers to inns to tours of the city to personal training sessions of every kind imaginable to haircuts to rock chiselling to street entertainment to lessons on investing in the goron mining market to restaurants—these prompt Link to pause and stare—to this and that that spins her head.

Link watches Misan park the wagon in the midst of a large circular plaza next to other merchants selling gemstones and rarities. She helps Glepp and Misan set up the stall to advertise their genuine Hebra-cooled sapphires, limited supply, willing to barter. Glepp gestures to Misan, who turns towards Link.

"We'll be in town for a few days. So you can do your thing, whatever it is you gotta do, eh?" Misan counts on her fingers. "You've got five days. Come back here on the morning of the sixth. You got that? We'll be right here. That's when we'll give you your commission. Two-point-five, as promised."

Link nods. She gathers her belongings. As she turns, her gaze already fixed on the skyline that leads up into the city, she feels a tap on her shoulder.

Glepp. Holding a box. She opens the top. "Fireproof elixirs. Please, accept them," she says out loud, her voice firm. "Otherwise you may run out, without an advanced payment on commission."

When Link lifts her hands, Glepp presses the box into them instead of letting her speak.

"And good luck with whatever you need to do. Keep out of trouble. If you hear anything about the Yiga, run the other way to keep safe."

Link bobs her head. She takes the box of fireproof elixirs and replaces the empty vials in her pouch with full ones, placing the empties into the box to give back to Glepp.

Lady Impa tasked her with checking on the gorons, but as she stands on the centre of a metal bridge looking up at the checkered skies above her, her feet could go anywhere in this city and still not come to a rest.

She walks. Without a sense of direction she drifts higher and higher along the spiralling city. She peels the layers of Darunia away one by one. As she explores the city from the bottom to the top, she finds evidence of devastation and vacancy, the layers more and more empty the higher she goes, until she climbs onto the highest flat ground in the city: a single metal bridge near the gates
with a rough semicircle torn out of the middle as though a giant beast had taken a bite. Her gaze sweeps over the city of Darunia and up to the summit of Death Mountain behind it, to the reptilian nightmare lying in its shadows.

She is not the hero. She has never been the hero. She will never be the hero.

Closing her eyes, Link lifts up her arms. The wind kisses her skin. The warmth embraces her as an old friend.

She steps to the edge of the bridge where a falling rock has ripped clean through the metal. She breathes in. She leaps.

Link glides across the city from the bridge, straight as the guay flies. She lands on the other end of Darunia below Death Mountain, at the precipice of the gorge that falls away into the sea of lava. Spires of stone from the sea spear the skies.

For now she steps away from the cliff. On the abandoned upper edge of the city, she rests her boots at the mouth of an orange shrine.

When she emerges from the shrine she will fulfill Lady Impa's task. She will ask every citizen of the city if she must.

But first she will enter the shrine, for that she knows how to do.

—

*Herb Sauté* (two hearts) - Hyrule herb, goron spice

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Another thank you to both my beta reader, Emma, for helping me make sure that the timeline of memories is consistent throughout the story, and to you, the reader, for reading along. I hope that you're enjoying the journey.

Journeying across Eldin takes a little over a month! I based these calculations on how long it takes to cross countries in Europe on horseback. Hyrule is really a big place, you know?

The monster that Link mentions which can form and reform from keese is a vire.

Of course, passage into Darunia is very carefully controlled to try to minimise the influence of Yiga, as well as to help keep the monsters out. The statue of the dodongo on the gate is a reference to the dodongo from *Ocarina of Time's* Fire Temple, which "sees red."

The Divine Beast Vah Rudania doesn't just make up projectiles from nothing; instead, Vah Rudania uses its drill-like head to bore into the earth and "eats" rock to pack it into projectiles and shoot out of its back.

As a reminder, Parapa is what I have supplied for the name of the Gerudo Desert, so
the girl who loves fried bananas is Urbosa. Note that they don't have names for the Divine Beasts yet; you'll actually get to see how they ended up picking 'em. For the memory, I suggest coming back here after about chapter, hm, forty-one or so?

"Straight the guay flies" is a reference to the idiom "straight as the crow flies" which is "an idiom for the shortest path between two points (on a map, disregarding the vagaries of intervening terrain); the geodesic distance" (thanks, Wikipedia!).

And we will see "what happened in Parapa" in a later chapter.

I want to emphasise Link's (current) preference for solitude over people. That'll be something that she struggles with in the future.

Another thank you to you, the reader, for accompanying me so far.

midna's ass. 05 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: I love the call-forwards to what happened in Parapa during this chapter's memory. It gives the memories a sense of scrambled-ness, and makes them SUPER fun to lay out and timeline and decode as chapters go by and we learn more and more information.

Daruk is a really great guy. He's not my favourite champion, but I love him nonetheless.

Emma. 05 September 2017.
Tough Fragrant Mushroom Sauté

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef asks the citizens of Darunia, capital city of Eldin, about their lives and about the Divine Beast that menaces them; the chef learns a little about the mysterious Great Calamity, which seems to have occurred some time ago. After a surveyor suggests that the chef help out in the northern mine, the chef travels to the Isle of Rabac only to find the mine apparently abandoned and broken down. However, the chef does meet a particular Eldic youth in a blue shawl who appears to be searching a "Champions' slate" just like the one the chef has.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Link stands on the shrine platform looking down at the city of Darunia. If she can best swinging flames and mechanical beasts, then she can surely ask the inhabitants of the city about their lives.

She claps her palms onto her cheeks to wake herself up. She stretches out her arms. She rolls her shoulders, massages her neck, holds a hand over her chest and breathes in and out.

Enough procrastinating.

Link glides into the more inhabited parts of the city, tightly packed with life except for the sites of the freshest wounds of the attacks. Gold-robed Darunia officials gold endeavour to clear debris or to raise new bridges to compensate for those that have fallen. A single team works on the vacant higher levels, not to fix the abandoned into a habitable condition, but to place protective struts over key open areas of lower levels. Few workers have the time or energy to spend on the inquiries of a hylian half their height, but Link gleans what she can.

The Divine Beast Vah Rudania.

The monster on the mountainside. Not a living being. A mechanical marvel from an ancient age that supposedly once protected Eldin. Since the Great Calamity—that phrase, that phrase again, which she attempts to ask of but only receives looks of incredulity, of kids these days and vague descriptions of a catastrophe two generations ago—the Divine Beast has lain mostly dormant on Death Mountain for years, for the entire lifetimes of the Eldic citizens with whom she speaks. When one goron refers to four Beasts Divine, Link recalls the ballad of the minstrel of Medigo, of the fantastical automata, piloted by Champions to protect the Princess and her Knight against the Calamity. The Divine Beasts of legend, the Eldic tell her, had been forged by the Goddesses Din and Goro-goro Themselves to aid in the Sealing War against the Calamity, that had served as a guardian of Eldin since its unearthing around a century ago. A century ago? "Yep, since the Great Calamity," reckons one goron, carving a chair from a block of white stone veined with red, "but I don't know anyone who was alive back then, so all I've heard are stories passed down from my fathers' fathers' fathers of war and strife and all that. Maybe it was kinda as scary as all these attacks." Occasional sightings of glowing eyes or subtle movement and then stilling once more have gossiped through the city over the past several decades, dismissed as the tales of bored foreigners with little else to do but wag their tongues instead of take part in the holy act of creation.
Yet about two months ago, in the middle of spring, the Divine Beast awoke. At first the Divine Beast simply crawled around the mountain while the city dwellers observed it with curiosity but little fear.

Then the barrages began, and ever since death has rained from above.

Some worry about how the attacks have grown more frequent. They fear that the barrages will turn into a daily occurrence. That soon they will become a ceaseless discharge, that the inhabitants of the city, permanent and temporary alike, will have nowhere to hide but to abandon Darunia entirely. That between the rising tides of monsters that threaten the villages without and the Divine Beast that has turned on the city within, the whole of Eldin may fall. Others remain optimistic or steadfast, that the Divine Beast will run out of energy. "Just look'it at how many monster bits they got down in the bazaar," one goron argues to her with a metal beam over his shoulder. "They've gotta be on their last legs. Those things got no sense of preservation. Doesn't matter how fast those buggers breed. There's an end to 'em."

But people have died, and with every attack the resources for repair and rebuilding grow thinner.

Some round on Link and demand to know why she asks. Others tell her to leave them to their mourning and their pain, that an outsider has no business sticking her nose into what does not affect her at all.

She asks a trio of workers—two gorons and a sheikah in barrel-armour—on a high bridge surveying and cataloguing damage to the city, carving their notes into one of the metal books she saw at the marketplace. One of the surveyors, a goron red mountain range adorning his abdomen, slams his foot into the ground with enough force to unsteady her; she just barely catches herself to avoid falling off of the bridge. "If you're so concerned about us, little hylian, why don't you go make yourself useful at the northern mine?"

The others nod their assent. Link tilts her head to one side, blinking at the workers.

"If you really want to help," the goron repeats, his motions deliberate and slow as if speaking to a child, "go up to the northern mine and help them clear it out, bud." He gives her directions. With the tunnels blocked, she should go across the lava of Lake Darman. "It'll be a win-win situation for everyone. Sate your curiosity and—" A word that she does not know. "—us at the same time."

The sheikah in barrel armour snickers. The second goron's features distort in something approaching concern, but his companion elbows him.

Link dips her head. She could return to Kakariko now, to see what else Lady Impa would have of her, but she has four and a half days left before Misan and Glepp leave. If she could pitch in to help the Eldic, even a little, then already her hands have purpose.

She climbs to the top of the city once more. With the sun having ascended and more people emerging into the streets of Darunia, a handful of officials along the path inquire as to her business in the more dangerous rafters of the city. The goron in the village of Gabora—Fernok, is that his name?—accused her of being Yiga, accused her of bringing about the attack on the city. But as with asking others what Hyrule might mean she leaves aside the matter of Yiga until she can return to Kakariko. The ore merchant called them murderers. She need know little else.

Link walks up the spirals of Darunia to the shrine she activated earlier. Where before the orange blended into the red-gold-brown of Eldin, now the blue acts as a beacon amid the heat. She clears the final step and stops in her tracks at the swarm of people around the shrine.
A team of gorons and a single rito inspect the strange blue glow. They poke; they prod; they record notes. She does not catch their exact words yet the aura of fear and worry fogs thick enough to choke.

Link presses her palm into her face and shakes her head at herself. She skirts around them with the weight of the sheikah slate burning at her hip.

She orients herself north by the position of the sun. Giant stone pillars rise from the lava. Twisted rock and iron supports cover the surfaces of the pillars, too distorted and warped for her to even hazard a guess as to what once stood. As she gazes down at the pillars over which she needs to travel, she observes monsters swarming. Fire-breathing lizalfos and torch slugs, vire and pyrups, heatoises and chuchu, octoroks and keese, dodongo and deadrocks. Several sets of rails run from this end of Darunia over the pillars towards the northern end of the sea of lava. Link notes where the tracks emerge from tunnels in the city proper and extend to disappear into caverns on the Isle of Rabac—the island that the surveyor mentioned—which holds the northern mines. She tracks each rail from Darunia to yonder shore only to find holes and breaks in every set of tracks but one.

Link glides down to the mostly-collapsed tunnels from which the rails emerge. Metal barricades block the few tunnels that have not collapsed inwards on themselves. Discarded carts pile beside the barricades. Touching her chin, she glances between the dense cluster of tracks and the Isle of Rabac across the sea.

The magnesis rune serves to set one of the mine carts onto the single surviving rail. She takes a moment to drain another fireproof elixir, pushes the cart to accelerate it on the tracks, and leaps inside just before the cart clears solid ground over the sea of lava.

The cart rushes forward. She grips the sides and ducks inside of the cart as it flies over the rails. It nears a bend. She can feel the cart begin to tilt as it moves into the curve and responds by shifting her own weight into the bend. The cart accelerates. She hears the roars and cries of monsters on the pillars, hears the tell-tale horn summoning reinforcements. Link hazards a look back to see flaming arrows hurtling through the air towards her. The cart tilts again, slowing, and an arrow whistles less than half a metre from her right ear. Link shifts her weight into the bend again to counteract the heaviness of the cart; it accelerates forward so quickly that the dry-hot air shuts Link's eyes.

Eventually friction and the level rails bring the cart to a halt. She tries to push the cart forward with her own hands—despite also standing in it—but the laws of physics refuse to yield to her. Link slides to the bottom of the cart. She taps on the surface of the slate.

The yellow stasis rune glows.

She locks the cart in place, then unstraps the spear from her back to thrust repeatedly into the front of the cart. The transparent window on the slate indicates an arrow nearly parallel to the track. When the stasis breaks, the cart shoots forward so rapidly that the wind waters her eyes and the inertia crashes her into the back of the cart.

Eventually the cart slows down again; she repeats the stasis procedure, and again. In the meantime Link looks around as best she can to find the location of the northern mine, somewhere on the Isle of Rabac. She notices the giant signs—written in a language she cannot read—in front of a yawning maw in the largest pillar just as she passes it, the cart hurtling forward.

While she stares forlornly at the receding pillar, the cart speeds along the rail. A sudden shadow brings her attention forward. Before she can react the cart enters a tunnel, still flying at high speed, and the tracks abruptly end at a massive molten rock of orange lava. Link scrambles backwards. She grabs for the slate to stop the cart with emergency brakes yet the stasis rune has yet to
recharge. Bracing herself for impact, Link grips the sides of the cart tightly enough for pain to splinter through her knuckles as the cart smashes against the rock and her hands rip from the metal and she soars through the air like a loftwing of legend towards the molten rock—

—and slams into the cool surface of a shrine.

Not a molten rock at all.

A shrine.

Link smacks her face against the ground. Her legs fall to the earth shortly thereafter. She sits up in wonder at her lack of having burned to a crisp and, rubbing her aching nose, looks up at the shrine whose orange gleam resembled lava.

Her shoulder shake in silent laughter at her own worry. As she wobbles to her feet to set the slate into the pedestal and trips into the lift, Link welcomes the relative chill of the inside of the shrine.

The lift descends into the bowels of the earth. She lies down on the floor of the shrine to soak in the coolness for a few minutes before beginning on the puzzle before her, which involves the passing of blue fire. Not the blue fire-light that the guardians loose from their eyes, but the same odd blue fire-torches that she witnessed in the southern mines of Darunia. And then, because of course she would, Link comes upon a guardian that spews the same odd blue fire, the flame burning hotter than any she's faced elsewhere in Eldin. Despite the longer distance she has to keep from the guardian to keep from burning alive, she dispatches it with relative ease: a well-aimed toss of the spear pierces its chassis to disintegrate the guardian into a finely polished pile of wire.

Link collects its core. Her satchel bulges. She makes an effort to repack the items inside for more room.

She completes the shrine. The instructions explain the effects of blue fire. She stands back to follow along. She has already learned from the puzzle itself the first few lessons, simple enough to communicate over image; the more complicated instructions pass through one ear and out the other in the melodious tongue she cannot understand.

Shrugging, Link exits the shrine and returns to the sweltering light and heat of the outside world. She pushes the mine cart back towards the pillar of the northern mine with the stasis rune, this time more slowly so as not to overshoot the mine again. She nears the pillar and guides her cart onto the proper set of tracks. The cart begins to vibrate. The metal of the cart tracks creaks so loudly that she pokes her head out from the side of the cart to see what has happened: the rails themselves bend under the weight of the cart, groaning as though about to break in two.

And then the tracks snap.

The cart plunges down. Link leaps off of the falling hunk of metal and flails for the rails. Her hands close around the tracks. Pulling herself up, she finds herself on hands and feet, spread-eagled, awkwardly stretched between the rails that hang just barely close enough her to reach if she extends her limbs as far as they will go.

She inches her way forward on the tracks. Before long her limbs ache and her back muscles strain from holding herself up on the rails. She perseveres onwards. Not ten paces from the entrance to the northern mine, the sweat slicking the back of her neck begins to tingle with heat.

Link reaches the shade of the mouth of the northern mine. The solid ground beckons her. She releases the rails—her wrists and ankles bump painfully against the tracks as she drops down
between them—and allows her body to plop dustily onto the rock.

Lying on her stomach, Link tenses and relaxes her arms and legs to gather the feeling back into them. Satisfied she stands up and drinks a fireproof elixir for the rising pain; the sense of coolness spirals through her from her belly to her fingers and toes.

She glances around the entrance to the northern mine.

The maw of the cavern looms around her, dwarfing her in its size. About a dozen tracks—nearly all of them broken—run outwards from the mouth. Carts filled with ore gather dust in the wings. Huge pipes line the walls, their mouths towering over scooped-out ramps of earth piled high with ore of varying shape and dimension. Metal plates bearing the raised-bump carving of the Eldic language decorate the walls. Tunnels lead further into the mine, although the majority seem to have collapsed, and iron boards covered in writing Link cannot read block off the other tunnels. Link blinks.

No signs of life.

No signs of life that she can see.

She cups her hands over her mouth and yells out a wordless *hyaa*.

No response.

Link paces back and forth to return the flow of blood to her legs after having crouched in the mine cart for so long. She touches her chin as she regards the apparently abandoned mine.

The surveyor *did* tell her to go to the northern mine to assist in efforts to clear out the mine, didn't he?

Perhaps she spent so long in the shrine that those working in the mine have left for the day. She walks towards the blocked off tunnels. The signs feel dusty under her fingertips. So do the rocks in the mouths of most of the collapsed tunnels, except for a looser pile of rocks in front of one of the smaller tunnels along the periphery. She estimates the tunnel about two metres in diameter in a roughly rounded square shape. When she brushes her hand against those stones, they fall further downwards to press more tightly against one another. Recent enough to not have yet settled. Not more than a day old.

The team—the surveyor told her there would be a team—must have worked on this tunnel before departing. She touches her chin. Though setting off an explosive in the middle of a mine smacks of trouble, she calls up a bomb from the slate anyway.

Link sets the cubic bomb by the tunnel. She takes cover behind a metal barrel full of some manner of metallic ore. The explosive detonates.

The rock blockage in the tunnel shatters into a thousand fragments. The explosion kicks up a cloud of dust that sends Link into a coughing fit until it settles. At least the rest of the northern mine does not come crashing down on her head. She wipes her bleary eyes and looks forward into the tunnel to spot blue light shimmering from within the mouth. Perhaps another shrine, she reasons, albeit one already active.

Link grips her spear just in case. Readying herself to thrust at a moment's notice if necessary, she creeps out from behind the barrel towards the tunnel. The blue light resolves into a torch—lit with that odd blue fire—along the walls leading inwards. Not a shrine. She exhales.
Someone must have lit the torches, perhaps if the team were here earlier, and the tunnel became
collapsed only after they left for the day. Mindful of the ceiling above her with layers upon layers of
thick rock that could crush her bones with ease, Link creeps forward into the tunnel.

More torches line the walls. Irregularly. Not all of the holders glow, unless some have gone out.
The recent attack on Darunia—by the Divine Beast—may have brought about the collapse. But
then the surveyor would have had no reason to send her out here, unless he did not know that the
team had not yet passed through after the attack, unless...

Link shakes her head. If she can help out in the mine, regardless of circumstance, she'll do so.
That's enough for her.

She continues onwards. The lack of monsters bolsters her movement. The tunnel winds further and
further. Regularly spaced iron supports allow her to pace her progress. The air feels cooler here, if
more stagnant. When she rests her hand against the wall her fingers, come away cold.

She hears nothing but the sound of her own boots against the floor alternating stone and metal, the
rustle of her fireproofed clothing, the faint clang of the metal pot upon her back, her slow breaths,
the infrequent drip of water, and from far beyond in the tunnel a shuffle-whisper.

The latter brings her to a halt in her tracks. Readying the spear, she scoots forward.

Something yelps.

In the faint blue light of the scattered torches she cannot make out the form of the whatever-it-is.
She listens to it racing away from her with a speed like an animal on all fours. Link chases after the
whatever-it-is for fear of an ambush the instant she turns her back. She hears it scrambling, to the
scraping of rock on rock—a dodongo or kodongo, or something with a shell—and then a loud
thump as the beast halts or falls in the shadows between two torches. She raises her spear.

"D-d-don't eat me p-p-please!"

The Eldic speech tenses her arms. She steps back, spear still lifted and in line to strike.

The—not a monster—sobs openly. The whatever-it-is sits up. The scarce light halos around the
silhouette of a goron.

Link lowers the spear.

The goron's weeping slowly dissolves into sniffing and choking. Link watches him rub his eyes,
then peel his hands away from covering his face, then sob again. After a time the goron hiccoughs.
He sniffs again. He squeaks out a few words, once, twice. On the third try she catches what he
says: "Y-y-y-you're n-not going to eat m-me, right?"

She shakes her head.

"H...hello?"

Link blinks. She taps the slate; the light of the surface serves as a makeshift torch to brighten her
face, which sends the goron rolling away from her, yelping in terror. Startled she jumps back
before following him. When he settles down again, sitting on the ground, he takes out a hand-held
lantern and lights it. The bright yellow glow casts the inside of the tunnel in sharp relief, and she
looks at him for the first time.

A somewhat pudgy goron, young, with a rotund face and white crystalline hair that curls over his
forehead. Around his shoulders he wears a blue shawl or cape of some fashion. His dark eyes widen as she nears, holding out her hands as though approaching a frightened horse.

"Y-y-you're not a m-monster."

She nods.

"You're a h-hylian."

She nods again.

"Oh! I kn-know what to g-give a hylian." The goron seems to count something on his fingers. He lifts the lantern over his head as he beams at her. The strange gesture complete, he rummages about in the pack strapped to his back and pulls out a mushroom made of metal. "Th-this is for you, I guess! I th-think that h-h-hylians like these, right? I-it's an ironsh-shroom." She knits her brow. The goron shakes his head. "I s-seen hylians eat th-these before! Y-you just r-remove the metal cap. I know that hylians can't eat metal or r-rocks, and..." He trails off.

She crouches down beside him to take the ironshroom. The outside of the cap does feel hard as metal beneath her fingers, but she can stretch and squish the inner gills. She quits the pot from her back to nestle it in her lap.

The goron watches her in silence while she works. She removes a corked skin of oil to pour some into the bottom of the pot; she has less than anticipated even after she turns the oil-skin inside out to shake out the last few drops. Cutting up the ironshroom becomes an art that she strives to master, as the outside refuses to yield to her knife.

"May I?"

She bobs her head.

The goron rips the ironshroom into chunks with his bare hands. He clamps down tightly on the stalk. The pieces with which he presents her appear of nearly the same thickness.

"Thank you," she signs. She sets them into the pot and gestures for his lantern, which she places under the pot to warm the oil until it begins to sizzle. She watches cautiously as the chunks of mushroom cook. The goron pops the metal cap of the ironshroom into his mouth; she listens to the crunch of his rock-like teeth fragmenting the iron apart. The tip of her cooking knife serves as a poker of shroom undersides to test their tenderness. She adds a pinch of rock salt and goron spice. The jar that Blaryd gave her has started to run low.

Link stirs the mushrooms into the salt-and-spiced oil. She removes the lantern from underneath the pot and tilts the rim towards the goron, who pushes his palms towards her to decline.

"I'm m-more of a stone person. Eating l-living th-things just s-seems...you know." Link tilts her head. The goron taps his index fingers against one another. "B-but don't worry about me! I had plenty to eat earlier, and I j-just had the c-caps, so I'm f-fine." His mouth twitches into a smile and she shrugs in response.

Not even the strangeness of finding a goron in an abandoned mine could shake her desire to eat. She digs in with gusto. The heat has leeched the hardness from the caps. Despite the name, ironshroom brings a tangy, crispy crunch, slightly slimy, with an almost nutty aftertaste that prompts her to noisy chow down.

The taste—and the scent—whisper with familiarity. The goron from her memories, showing her
the city, his family, his father, his brothers, his sons, all of whom accepted Link wholeheartedly in
the days she had spent in the city, even if her memories of the exact events remain hazy at best,
even if she had done nothing but stare vacantly at them or shy away from too many at once, even if
she said nothing to them except ask what they wanted to eat. "When the long war's all over, li'l
buddy," the goron boomed at her, wrapping her shoulders in a bear-like hug that forced the air
from her lungs, "you should visit more often. Whenever you want. And if you ever—"

She rubs her temples. The goron spice eases a headache she hadn't known she'd developed. Her
nails draw against the bottom of the pot; she polishes off the final chunk of ironshroom.

"...s-so, um, wh-what are you d-doing here, hyl-lian?" the goron asks at length. He pauses. "P-p-
papa d-didn't send y-y-you h-here for me, r-right?"

"A surveyor in Darunia sent me to help the team clearing out the northern mine," she answers.

"Oh." The goron stops. Starts again. "H=huh? What t-team?"

Link blinks at him. He stares at her. He explains in-between bouts of sniffling; she busies her hands
pretending to scrape out the last bits of ironshroom. No one has gone to the northern mine since its
abandonment over a month ago. The Divine Beast Vah Rudania has torn apart the entire mine and
the surrounding area of processing facilities to such a point that the pillars outside look more like
garbage than a previously highly advanced processing line; shortly after the beginning of the
barrages, monsters moved in. "And if w-we don't do something, I'm w-w-worried the c-city's going
to..." He sniffs. "B-but that doesn't involve you. I m-mean, I'm s-sure you h-have your own p-
problems, h-hylian."

"Link."

"Huh?"

"Call me Link." She does not know how to read Eldic, but she spells out her name in Necludan
and in Central Hyrulean and in another language that comes so easily to her but whose name she
does not know. He recognises this last tongue, calls it the language of the eastern lands.

"L-l-l—" The goron clears his throat. "Link. Link, r-right?" She nods. "I'm Yunob-
bo. Yunobo. Yunobo." They settle into silence. She could leave and return to the city to continue
her task. "You're p-probably wondering why I'm here th-then. Well...I thought that Vah Ruda-
rudania had to have a reason t-to...attack this place first, right?" He puffs out his chest slightly as
he speaks. "They've sent out men to try to quell Vah Ruda-rudania. The only thing that w-works is
hitting Vah Ruda-rudania with everything we've got until She g-goes away, but...we can't hold H-
her off forever. But no one can actually board Vah Ruda-rudania. You can only open Vah Ruda-
rudania with a Champions' s-slate." Yunobo scratches his jaw. "Have you ever seen one of the s-
shrines along the sides of the r-road? There's one in the c-city." She nods. "They have these little
th-thingies in front of them with a part m-missing." The pedestals. "The Ch-champions used to
have these things c-called the Champions' slates that th-they could use to...h-how should I say it?...interact with the thingies in f-front of the shrines. It's been a r-really long t-time—"

Yunobo reaches a hand to the blue shawl around his shoulders, and his voice firms. "—but I think Lord
Daru-daruk had one."

Her breath catches in her throat.

Yunobo continues to speak but her gaze sees past him, past the silent corridors of the abandoned
northern mine, past the lava of Lake Darman, past the gates to Darunia, towards the carvings of
gorons that she noticed upon her arrival to the city.
Though she cannot see the carvings through the wall, she remembers all too well the one statue she recognised, the statue of a goron who once wore a blue sash.

Lord Daru-daruk.

"Papa t-told me to stay c-clear, but I can't just s-sit by while m-my p-p-people are in danger!" He seizes the corners of the blue shawl just prior to breaking down into sobs again. "I'm not the b-best at this, I kn-know that! I j-just have to try! So I've b-been looking everywhere at any p-place that Lord Daru-daruk m-might have been. He worked in th-this mine before he b-became a Ch-champion, and I know h-he had a room here, so I thought m-maybe his s-slate could still b-be here..."

Link shifts the satchel at her hip. She unclips the slate; she holds it up. Yunobo goes on. Link listens to his elaborations, to how he has sought out the city over, to how no one believes that the Champions' slates could still exist.

"...r-right?" he says, and looks at her, and at the slate she holds in her hand, and his eyes widen.

—

Tough Fragrant Mushroom Sauté (one heart, low defense boost for 03:20) - goron spice, ironshroom, rock salt

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: As always, a thank-you to both my most wonderful beta reader, Emma, and to you, the reader, for sticking through. I hope that you've enjoyed the journey.

The "proper" way to use the mine carts in-game is to put a spherical bomb in the little thingy in the back of the cart, then detonate it; Link will be protected from the explosion. However, I didn't realise this at first and instead used stasis to go-kart around, breaking many a weapon. The bit about having to lean into carts is a reference to the cart gameplay from Skyward Sword in one of the most fun heart pieces of the franchise.

It's hard to tell the orange glow of the shrines from the surrounding lava! No wonder Link thought she was about to crash headfirst.

The gorons double-up the first two syllables of someone or something's name to indicate respect, i.e. the one goron referred to Lady Impa as "Impa-impa," and Yunobo calls Vah Rudania "Vah Ruda-rudania" and Daruk "Daru-daruk." You can even see this in the name of Goro-goro! As mentioned in my author's note a while ago, gorons refer to deities and so forth with special pronouns that are usually translated as "she/her," hence Yunobo calling Vah Rudania "She" and "Her" instead of it, as Vah Rudania is viewed as a living being. Other gorons might instead refer to Vah Rudania as a non-living being depending on their point of view (and might just call it Vah Rudania instead of Vah Ruda-rudania), just as gorons who don't want to show respect to the capital of Darunia might call it Darunia instead of Daru-darunia. Note that Darunia being the capital of Eldin is due to being a cultural/financial hub rather than
some organised structure; while Lanayru and Parapa do have organised kingdoms with a monarch, most of the rest of what was once Hyrule is scattered. Darunia is more of an informal than an actual capital; Impa sent Link here because of Vah Rudania.

This is as bad as Yunobo's stutter gets. It'll get better over time, and it's worse at the beginning then lessens as he gathers his confidence. I know that it can be a touch annoying to read, so I wanted to clarify that this is as bad as it gets. For my readers who stutter out loud, I feel your pain entirely, and I understand. I plan to expand upon Yunobo's character beyond what we see in *Breath of the Wild*. Time will tell if I succeeded.

Ironshrooms suck up iron from the ground to form protective caps; they're found in places with lots of iron and come in different varieties (coppershroom, etc). As a result, they're farmed for their iron, which the gorons remove and typically leave the actual mushroom intact. Followers of Goro-goro are not allowed to consume living beings unless lack of consumption would threaten their lives (so the non-gorons that follow Goro-goro do, indeed, eat things, but typically are expected to only eat things that have died of natural causes and so on). Yunobo happened to find the mushroom in question in the tunnels he's been examining.

The Eldic word for "east" is aka; "west" is def or deph. The Dephlian Badlands come from the Eldic Defla, meaning western lands. I wonder how they might say eastern lands.

And ohoho Link is finally getting hints about her past she will not be able to deny.

midna's ass. 07 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: We meet Yunobo here! One of the things I most adore about this series is the author's take on both the four champions of the past, and the four pilots of the present, and this is where that begins to truly shine.

The Ironshrooms being tough is one of those tiny details I really love. Those hints of realism and detail make this series really shine.

Emma. 07 September 2017.
Roasted Bird Thigh

Chapter Summary

As the "courier of the slate" the travelling chef accompanies the Eldic youth towards Death Mountain, facing trials and tribulations on the way. They come upon a small sentry shack and, with the Divine Beast currently too high up the mountain to reach, decide to wait there until the Divine Beast begins to crawl downwards for another attack on the city of Darunia.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As Yunobo leads Link through an alternate exit from the northern mine that takes them atop the pillar; as Yunobo explains the route to the Divine Beast Vah Rudania that the two youths will strive to board; as Yunobo elaborates on his plan to calm the Divine Beast himself, Link's movements take on a certain slipperiness like the uncertainty of a fever dream.

Lord Daru-daruk.

The carving on the golden gates.

Her own speech like an old woman's.

Impa's words about her looking just the same.

The gleaming Darunia drifting in her memories and the destroyed Darunia seared into her retinas.

The suspicions sink her stomach further down. She says little as Yunobo gestures for her to climb into a larger, flatter mine cart on a straight shot towards the side of Death Mountain. He clambers in behind her. Link can sense the jerkiness of his movements and how his entire frame trembles. She does not know what to do with her hands. She could say something; she could embrace him; she stays silent and still.

He sets the mine cart in motion by fiddling with something on the back. The cart hurtles forward at a reasonable pace. Link dizzies. The lava below swirls into a single pool of sweltering brightness, and the spiced ironshroom weighs her down as though she had swallowed a block of lead.

The cart arrives safely on the survey post on the ring of pillars just outside of Death Mountain. A tiny rock affair that has escaped destruction for being unassumingly perched on what Yunobo calls Lake Darman. From here, Death Mountain looms so close that it swalloweth up the entirety of the world. The largest mountain in Hyrule, a volcano that pumps the blood of the heart of the earth, surrounded by stone claws like the many-fingered hand of the Goddess Din protectively grasping the world fires in her palm.

The view takes her breath away.

In the meanwhile, Yunobo wrings his hands. The usual track he would take has broken from barrages, "so w-we'll have to g-go across the B-b-bridge of Eldin," he notes and leads her on another set of rails cascading downwards to the large mass of land that makes up the majority of
Eldin. She can just barely make out the blue of the shrine she activated at the upper levels of Darunia. And there, across the gorge of impenetrable lava so hot that not even gorons can survive indefinitely, affixed to a cliffside of Death Mountain itself, rises a massive stone and metal pillar into the heavens themselves. Despite Death Mountain dwarfing the Bridge of Eldin in width, the Bridge of Eldin spans as long as the peak juts high. Between where they stand and the side of the mountain, the valley of flooded lava stretches on for eternity.

"That's the bridge. The Elders r-raised it so Vah Ruda-rud-dania c-couldn't cross into the city...but we'll n-need to set it r-right, right? You kn-know how much that means, to t-t-take something built by your own p-peoples hands and h-have to take it ap-part to prot-ect them." He frowns. His body, nearly twice her height, shivers. "Do y-y-you really th-think that th-this is a g-good idea, Link?" His voice threatens to break. "Can—c-can we—c-c-can we r-really d-do it ourselves?"

She is no hero. No matter what memories she might regain—no, those memories do not belong to her, but to her body—no matter what memories her body might regain of its previous occupant, she is no hero. Link returns his glance with her own concern.

Her features smooth into blankness.

Somehow, instead of being put by the vacancy in her eyes, Yunobo nods. "Y-yeah. Y-you're right." Link stares at him. "W-we got this." His voice strengthens as he wraps the shawl around his fist. "You've got the Champions' slate and I've got Lord Daru-daruk's protection."

Link raises her hands. The words do not form immediately but she forces them from her fingers. "He's alive?"

"Huh?" Yunobo ogles her. "L-lord Daru-daruk? H-h-he...he...h-ee's been with the G-goddesses for years now. I w-wish I c-could've known him."

"How long?" she asks, no longer looking at him but keeping her gaze on the line of the horizon. The bridge on the other side of the gorge blurs at the edges.

"Huh? How l-long...?" Yunobo scratches his jaw. "Um, s-since the G-great Calamity. Decades ago." He counts on his fingers. "A hund-dred y-years or so, right?"

Link dips her head very slowly. "What was the Great Calamity?" She flattens her hands in the insides of her pockets.

Yunobo scratches his jaw more furiously. "You d-don't know? Huh? Oh, is it a l-l-language thing? I don't know h-how to say it in Central H-hyrulean, but you know wh-what happened a century ago." She shakes her head and Yunobo scratches his jaw so fervently that Link wonders if his fingers won't carve a furrow in his rocky skin. "H-h-h-huh? Do hyl-lians not care about it anymore? I g-guess that it happened a l-long time ago." The fingers of his free hand twitched around the shawl. "I th-think my g-great...great?...grandpa was a little k-kid then, so it's not l-like I know what things w-were like before that...b-but that's when H-hyrule fell, and Lord Daru-daruk passed on to the Goddesses" Yunobo offers her a small smile. "I heard that the C-calamitious One w-wasn't really stopped, just sealed a-way like it'd b-b-been before. But w-with any luck it'll be another t-ten thousand years, right?"

Link nods and says nothing else. If she moves even a single step, the ground will fall out beneath her.

"I know I'm n-not Lord Daru-daruk's descendant by blood, b-but..." Yunobo grips the corners of
the shawl. "...I feel like w-we were hewn of the s-same rock. Have you ever f-felt like that? I guess it's kind of silly t-to feel like you c-could be a hero from legend, but—" He curls his right hand into a fist, a corner of the blue shawl caught between his thumb and forefinger, and then looks at his own hand as if he'd never seen it before. "—I think we can do it. Let's go, Link."

Without a word Link follows behind him. He directs her attention to a giant metal cannon that once stood as one of three, its brethren having since been reduced to scrap. Link watches Yunobo aim the cannon, curve himself into a ball, and spontaneously drop into the chase of the cannon.

She rubs her eyes.

After a few moments Yunobo pokes his head out to call for Link. "F-fire the cannon. I'll be fine; I p-promise! This is the only way to l-lower the B-bridge of Eldin, right?" He ducks back down, then pokes his head out again. "Unless you d-don't have anything to f-fire it with...? I d-don't know much about h-hylians."

The slate—the sheikah slate, or maybe the Champions' slate—provides a circular bomb that fits into the cannon's explosive chamber. Closing the cover, she seals it with a turn of the knob and detonates the bomb.

With a boom loud enough for her to automatically cover her ears, Yunobo shoots from the cannon's muzzle to crash into the rock struts at the base of the Bridge of Eldin. The impact sends him recoiling back the same direction. Link throws herself to the ground to avoid the bouncing ball of rock that rolls to a stop some five metres behind her. The Bridge of Eldin groans. She raises her head to stare at the bridge.

For the longest moment the bridge remains upright, visibly swaying back and forth, before gravity beckons it down. She watches it fall. Slowly at first, its inertia keeping it aloft, and then more and more quickly.

Just before impact Link spreads herself out flat on the earth and braces her body.

The ground itself seems to wave, bend, break as metal contacts stone. Its weight splinters the cliff. Link feels herself lift from the rock into the air a full centimetre by the sheer force of the bridge smashing across the gorge.

When she can breathe again, she checks her belongings, checks the pouch of fireproof elixirs. A single vial has broken, which she drinks down to ward off the liquid sloshing away when she least expects.

Her legs wobble up into a position approximating standing. The wind across the Bridge of Eldin brushes the sidelocks from her face, and she looks outwards and upwards towards Death Mountain, over the truly massive bridge that has fallen and yet not broken, a beast of steel and stone, wrought of the finest metalworkers that Eldin has to offer, which has withstood the test of time and the barrage of a Divine Beast.

"L-link?"

She turns her head, then her entire body towards Yunobo, who grips the hem of the blue shawl. The breeze ripples the fabric behind him and it spreads slightly out like half of a cape. With the shawl unfurled, Link can see the sewn together tears, the patches of a slightly different colour of blue, the age of the shawl.

"Are you r-ready? W-we should h-hurry. They'll c-come to investigate why the b-bridge came
down." Yunobo taps his index fingers against one another. "A-and if we don't calm down Vah Ruda-rudania soon, th-they'll have to r-raise it again. Th-the bridge, I m-mean. N-not Vah Ruda-rud-dania."

The unspoken hangs in the air. Link nods decisively.

They walk the bridge. With its sheer length, the journey takes them no small amount of time. By the time they reach the other end, Yunobo requests a brief respite, and they take shelter under a rock arch.

While Yunobo rests, Link stretches and practises with the spear and the boomerang. She knows how to use a sword, yet the lizalfos from which she has filched spears mostly prefer their own particular weapons. The usual tricks she can pull with a blade do not necessarily translate to a spear, which has its own advantages. Link finds the unanticipated centre of gravity a detriment to the flips and jumps on which her body relies to keep herself mobile.

She should have taken up Misan's advice on commissioning chainmail.

Fighting lizalfos one on one or knocking keese from the sky with arrows comes a far cry from whatever may lurk in the Divine Beast. Then again what could she possibly accomplish with a simple metal spear and a forked boomerang against a being of that magnitude, where a single toe of the Divine Beast spans two or three times her size?

She does not play hero, merely escort. If not for the slate in her pouch necessary for Yunobo to enter the Divine Beast, she would wait with Glepp and Misan. Yet the author of the letter on the Great Plateau urged her to keep the slate with her, and so she will follow Yunobo to the ends of the earth if it would mean helping the people of Eldin. She will unlock the gate for Yunobo, and then Yunobo will become the hero that he wishes to be.

She has no such wish but to retire to a comfortable existence where she can prepare delicious meals for herself every evening, and perhaps to find those faces she has seen in her memories.

Her memories.

Her stomach tightens. She narrows her world to adjusting her stance, to learning to control the shift of her weight in line with the spear.

Yunobo begins to tell her what he knows of Death Mountain. With any luck the Divine Beast will not commence another attack during their mission, as it has only moved every few days. Men sent to the Divine Beast, he says quietly, folding and unfolding the shawl repeatedly in his hands, have reported strange mechanical flying beings that the Divine Beast can release from its form that can blaze through even the thickest of armour with sufficient heat. The Divine Beast spends most of its time inside of the actual caldera of Death Mountain, where the overwhelming heat dispels even the approach of gorons, much less a hylian with fireproof elixirs, yet the Divine Beast crawls up onto the exterior of Death Mountain several hours prior to making its move.

"S-so...if we can c-catch it during that c-crawl, we can h-h-hit it where it h-hurts, and have some time to f-figure out a way to shut it off." He scratches his jaw. "Do y-you think we can do it?"

Link simply meets her gaze again, her expression blank as she struggles to fish for something to say.

Yunobo beams. "I-if you say so." She has said nothing. "All r-right! We sh-should probably go, right?"
Link starts to tilt her head in confusion, then simply stands up without further ado. Yunobo verbally traces the map, of travelling counterclockwise around the caldera to the further half of the volcano in order to wait. Along the route they will have to cross lava falls, but plenty of bridges and supports should exist. "Assuming th-that Vah Ruda-rudania hasn't b-broken them all."

They start the trek. This close to the hottest temperatures in all of Hyrule save for the fierce blaze of a lightning bolt, she breaks out in a sweat, fireproof elixir or not. The prospect of liquid against her clothing—and its implications for the layer of fireproofing paste—makes her sweat further. She quickens her pace. The first lava fell does indeed sport a single intact strut arching over it. Link and Yunobo cross it cautiously; the strut holds.

They exchange glances, Yunobo smiling nervously, Link grinning broadly.

A whirr brings Link to a halt. Yunobo walks into her back and bumps her forward. "Oh! S-sor—"

She hushes him with a finger over her lips. Dropping her belongings at Yunobo's feet, she climbs the stone cliff to their left up to try to catch the noise of the whirring. There, over the bridge of the next lava fall, hovers a strange circular thing with a glowing blue eye. It casts a pool of sapphire light beneath it and patrols back and forth along the bridge.

Link notches an arrow, yet she cannot find a good angle to aim at the eye on the automaton's underside from her higher vantage point. She glances around. A half-fragmented rock with a diameter of a metre—perhaps one of the projectiles, or a piece of one of the projectiles, of the Divine Beast—close by. She checks magnesis.

The boulder has enough iron content to be magnetised.

She grins to herself. Lifting the rock with the slate, Link guides it over to the hovering bird-like automaton. She positions it ever so deliberately above the guardian, inhales, exhales, and slams the guardian into the ground.

The guardian shrieks loudly in response as she raises the rock and sends it crashing down yet again. The automaton breaks into mangled crushed bits and bobs. Link drops the rock on the bridge beside the guardian's corpse. She looks about: the automaton's cries for help have not summoned anything nearby, at least not yet.

She glides down to land beside Yunobo, who stares openly at her with an expression she does not know how to read. Admiration? No, that can't be. Who would admire a ghost of the shell that once held the hero, before she awoked? "J-just who...wh-who are y-you, Link?" he whispers in awe, and she gazes at the ground.

"...it doesn't matter," she signs. She does not check whether he has read her words but simply goes on ahead with a steady gait. The sentry guardians patrol each bridge, some in clusters. They do not appear to have much intelligence. The automata investigate noises, she notices, but do not see anything outside of the pools of light cast out from their undersides. When she strikes down one with another guardian hovering nearby, the second attacks her by spewing forth that odd blue fire she learned of in the Darunia shrine. She barely escapes with a well-aimed arrow directly into its eye, blinding the automaton, and a bomb thrown that she happens to detonate at the right second. Link collapses to her knees afterwards to catch her breath and drink another fireproof elixir, less for the protection and more for the moisture in her hyperventilation-parched throat.

Still panting, she gestures for Yunobo to follow her.

She tests the radius of each sentry she comes across to lure them away one by one with noise, then
bash them to death with magnesis-lifted rocks or stasis-kicked boulders. Yunobo cowers in the face of monsters and automata alike. Instead of forcing him to accompany her into the eye of danger, she whistles for him whenever she clears the path.

They go slowly.

The higher they climb up Death Mountain, the more monsters swarm. She discovers to some alarum that she has fewer arrows than she thought left in her quiver, and so furnixes shift from a minor nuisance to a major threat. They breathe out fire so hot that it burns more blue than red, and she dispatches them with well-thrown bombs. Packs of lizalfos hunt her down. Heatoises nearly spin her off of the precipices of the volcano. Winders turn the very ground into a hazard. She unties the red telescope from her left hip and learns to scope them from afar. She picks them off with arrows from a distance whenever she can and retrieves the arrows from their heads, praying that none breaks.

Some of the bridges and struts over the lava falls have gone out. Link's paraglider cannot hold Yunobo's weight. In place of gliding over the gaps, they rely on the unbroken cannons scattered here and there, previously used for gorons travelling rapidly around Death Mountain prior to the descent of the Divine Beast; Yunobo's explanation cuts off abruptly when Link shoots him from the cannon and then races to meet him. The journey goes long into the day. The spear that she has carried breaks, but she simply picks up another from the very lizalfos in which the spear shattered.

She leaves her fights with scraps and scratches of her own. The first time a lizalfos talon tears apart the skin of her lower leg she screams for the agony of heat, of the fire that cauterises her very flesh. But the scars she gains tell her own story in her skin.

At length, with the sun halfway down its descent into the night, her companion halts in front of a rock that Link recognises as a stone shack. "H-here it is." Yunobo exhales. He taps his index fingers against one another. "N-now, when the Divine B-b-b-beast comes down t-to attack, we can t-try to use that Ch-champions' slate and f-f-follow in Lord Daru-daruk's footsteps."

"Why do you sometimes double up words, like Daru-darunia or Vah Ruda-rudania?" Link asks as Yunobo begins to slide open the door.

"Huh? Oh. Oh, I g-guess a h-hylian wouldn't know...but it's respectful! Like how we call Our Goddess Goro-goro, so we can say Daru-darunia when we talk about our city as...as you know, our city." He speaks with an unusual confidence, his words firmer than before; Link nods. "If I became an important figure—and I w-won't, s-so don't think I'm putting on airs—p-p-p-people would call me..." His voice trails off again. "Sorry, i-it f-feels too arrog-gant to say."

"Yuno-yunobo?" Link completes.

Yunobo blushes fiercely, as if his cheeks were molten. Hiding his face from Link he opens the door.

A squawk from within has Link lifting up her spear forward through the doorway before she registers the noise. Something thumps; the resistance of the spear jolts up her arms. It takes her a moment to become aware of the Eldic ostrich impaled onto the tip of the spear.

The wounds sustained by the bird have already begun to smoulder and smoke, if not as swiftly as she had anticipated. Her eyes widen. She can hear in the back of her mind a voice dredged from a memory:
"Ah!" A blink of eyes, maybe green as spring, or maybe blue as the guardians' fire-light. A smile, a clap of the hands, a wriggle of carving her observations into a metal tablet. "The Eldic ostrich must eat the fireproof lizards and smotherwing butterflies that inhabit Death Mountain freely and thus gain some measure of protection from the fire-resistant secretions of their scales and wings. It's brilliant!"

Link stares at the red-feathered bird that writhes on the spear. Before Link takes the bird out of its misery, she removes one of her fireproof elixirs. She squeezes the spear between her thighs to free her hands. Grabbing the ostrich by the neck—it pecks at her fingers but she moves out of the way—she stuffs its beak into the neck of the bottle and forces the fireproof elixir down its gullet. Yunobo covers his face with his hands as she lights the torches on the inside of the stone shack. She observes her reflection in the walls inlaid with sapphire. Yet the gems do not give off cold, the essence of ice trapped within them spent.

When she defeathers and skins the bird, it does not burst into flames thanks to the fire-resistant secretions of the fireproof elixir coursing through its system at the moment of death. She opens the door to set the raw meat onto the hot ground; she crouches down and watches it cook.

As she turns the bird over and over, she imagines a song to time her wait. The music swells; the meat cooks to well-done: though she would prefer medium-rare, she takes no chances in the middle of a volcano where her source of heat comes from the very volcanic rock.

Link brings the roasted bird back inside. Now that she has a chance to look about the small stone shack, she can see it as a sentry post of sorts, with chairs, desks, files upon files of metal books and the utensils to write in them. She plucks herself down on the floor next to Yunobo, whose eyes have grown to mirror the dimensions of her fist.

She blinks at him as she half-cuts, half-tears one of the bird's thighs. Her teeth crunch into the crispy outside skin that gives way to the layer of fat on the underside, deliciously chewy, and then into the meat of the dish. She digs in to delight in the textures of sinews and tendons, of the disparities between the more corded muscle and the more tender, sweeter meat. She bites the softened ends of the bones where they connect to the rubbery-in-texture-yet-delectable joints. Licking her lips for the taste of ostrich, she cracks open the bones and carves out the marrow with her knife. She sucks the flavour from the bones where they grow too hard to cut apart. Finished with one leg, she feasts upon the next.

Yunobo shakes his head. "I don't know h-how you eat living c-c-c-creatures like that. I'll s-stick with my rocks, I th-think. B-but that's n-n-not an insult!"

Link laughs. She wipes her mouth before continuing to chow down. While she eats, she notes Yunobo stand to gaze out the window at the western end of the survey shack.

"...Vah Ruda-rudania w-will come down soon. I j-just feel it in m-my gut. Y-you know what I m-mean, right?" She asks her gut: her gut wants more roasted ostrich, and Link obliges. "I don't know when exactly, b-but it's been c-coming down more f-f-frequently over the past t-two m-months, so it'll have to c-come down at some point, right? Once every f-f-few days so far, so it'll be tomorrow o-or the day after, right?"

Link shrugs. They agree to take turns on watch. When the Divine Beast comes down, she and Yunobo will face it.

For now, for this moment, cross-legged on the stone floor, a warm meal in her lap, a roof over her head, and the starry night above, she's alive, and nothing else matters; she's alive; she's alive.
In the distance, the mountain rumbles.

—

Roasted Bird Thigh (two and a quarter hearts) - raw bird thigh

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Link isn't going to be able to deny herself for long. She's kind of putting it off for now, but oh baby, once life calms down a tad and she gets the chance to reflect on this.

At the moment, Link sees herself as a courier of the slate. Yunobo needs the slate to activate Vah Rudania, and she can't give him the slate, so she'll walk over, use the slate to activate Vah Rudania, and then let Yunobo in. She's not seeing herself as the hero, just the person who happened to pick up the slate.

Note that Link doesn't exactly find out about the Great Calamity here, and also note that people don't actually know exactly what happened to Calamity Ganon. Yunobo mentions that with luck Calamity Ganon will be sealed another ten thousand years. Hmm!

If it's not clear, the girl in the memory is Zelda herself.

The little thing about Link hearing the music as she cooks until the meat becomes well-done is a reference to cooking in Monster Hunter.

I actually wrote this in response to a review on the FFN cross-posted version of this fic, but I'll add it here for the curious reader: "The shrines carry different meanings in different places. The gorons are less outwardly religious inclined. Goro-goro is all about the holy act of creation, of making something new, whether that's something physical or more of a performance. For the gorons, taking a statue or carving that someone else made, breaking it up, and making something new of the same stone is "better" than preserving something just because. As a result, gorons are less worried about older monuments and instead more concerned with religion "in the here and now," if that makes sense. While the shrines are notable for being really old things that no one understands (you saw the team investigating why in the world the Darunia shrine suddenly turned blue in the previous chapter), they're not viewed as religious items or sanctuaries here. Yunobo knows about the slate due to his own research into Daruk from his hero worship; he's trying his best to become like his hero, and we'll learn some more about why he took Daruk as his personal hero many chapters down the line, once Link is a little more emotionally equipped to ask people questions.

As for what Link was thinking, the description of the Champions' slate seemed to match the sheikah slate. And even though Link doesn't want the responsibility, she also has a sense of justice strong enough that she can't just walk away when she has the very tool the gorons need to do something about Vah Rudania. But note that she doesn't suggest they go back to the city for help. She's not ready to be recognised as a
hero, or even to call herself that. She's just "the courier of the slate" for now."

You can indeed cook just by dropping food down in Eldin! I recommend the roasted mighty bananas; you cannot cook everything however, i.e. you can't cook silent princess. Another thank-you to my beloved beta reader, and another thank-you to you, the reader, for having journeyed with me so far.

midna's ass. 08 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This series is really great at ending chapters, but this is actually probably one of my low-key favourite chapter endings.

Emma. 08 September 2017.
Omelet

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef and the Eldic youth weaken the Divine Beast by temporarily paralysing its joints, then prepare to board the Divine Beast with the intention of figuring out some way of calming its rampage.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The ground shivers in short bursts. The tremors strengthen second on second, amplifying their effects with one another. Link moves in the brief windows of time between each burst. She need not wake Yunobo; he already sits up, wide awake, his eyes have grown dark and wide with anxiety, anticipation, the gathering of courage—she cannot say for sure.

When they exit the survey shack, Link looks up. The Divine Beast Vah Rudania perches at the very lip of the summit of Death Mountain, crouched halfway over the outer side and halfway still on the inner edge. Its segmented head points straight towards them and she meets its multi-eyed gaze.

Moving three alternating limbs of its six at once, the Divine Beast lifts its appendages, carries them forward, and sinks them down into the ground with such slowness. Wherever its feet land, the rock fractures. Magma once held within the volcano spurts out between its toes. Each step curves its frame to the left or to the right as it sweeps down the mountainside in a great undulating line.

The ground trembles. Or maybe her body trembles. Perhaps both.

"Y-y-y—you don't h-have to d-do this," Yunobo says suddenly from behind her. Link glances at him over her shoulder. "Y-you..." He clenches his fingers around the blue shawl, then relaxes his fingers. "I-d-don't know who you are, L-link. You h-have a Champions' s-slate somehow, and you've been d-dutiful—" He clears his throat. "—in b-b-bringing me here. You've d-done everything while I cowardly hung back and l-let you. G-g-goro-goro must've b-brought—" Another second of calm. Link's gaze flicks up to the Divine Beast continuing its steady descent, though Death Mountain protrudes high enough into the heavens that she could not reach it now if she latched onto the cliffside and climbed half the day. "—us tog-gether, right? And the Hyli-hylia, t-too, s-sorry, I d-didn't mean t-to f-forget your Patron G-goddess." Link cocks her head; she does not know who Hyli-hylia is or what her Patron Goddess might refer to. "Th-there's no other explanation, that Th-they brought us t-together...but y-you don't have to do this." His voice continues to shake, yet Link can see Yunobo struggling to steady his words. "I w-would've been fine just to borrow the Champions’ slate. Once y-you get me up there, you c-can leave."

Link returns her gaze to Yunobo, who stares earnestly at her. She opens her palms yet no words gather at her fingertips.

"Th-though I'm n-n-not even going to force you to get up th-there. I c-can't promise I'll c-come back with the s-slate in one p-piece...but I'll t-try!"
The letter in the cabin of the Great Plateau told her not to give the slate away to anyone, and Link suspects Lady Impa wouldn't want her to hand it over to someone she met less than a day ago, even if that someone did give her an ironshroom. "We should go," she manages at last, and Yunobo's fingers dig into the shawl to furrow the fabric.

"Yeah. Y-y-yeah, let's go."

They stand there another minute to watch the Divine Beast crawl down the mountain. Link turns questioningly towards Yunobo.

"We n-n-need to stop it, right?" Link nods. "All r-right. All right. We can d-o this." Sinking to his knees—she stares blankly at him—he clasps his hands together. "Goddesses, if Y-you're out there, please, we n-n-need Your help. O Din, grant me the power to...to do s-something about Vah Ruda-rudania bef-fore She d-destroys the city. O Nayru, g-grant me the wisdom to know h-how to do something about Her. O F-farore, grant me the c-c-courage to...to d-do it once I know what to do and that I can do it! Grant m-me the courage to g-go through with it! O Goro-goro...grant me Your p-pride in m-my abilities, Your b-b-blessing of creation, so that I m-may yet c-cease the end this destruction."

The next quake of the ground booms significantly stronger than the previous; it catches Link off-guard and she nearly wobbles into a fall, but stops herself.

"All right. All r-right." Yunobo mumbles to himself. Link squats down to better prepare herself for subsequent quakes. "We've k-k-kept Vah Ruda-rudania at b-bay in the p-past by l-launching into th-those purple things on Her shoulders." Link looks up at the Divine Beast straddling Death Mountain; its shoulders do indeed have violet-gleaming domes. "They're sensitive, or s-something. I think..." She can hear the fear and confidence simultaneously waver and bolster his words. "I th-think if we wait until V-vah Ruda-rudania is at the l-l-lowest point and we l-l-launch m-m-m-me, then w-we can stop Vah Ruda-rudania a-and board. Then we j-just need to use the Ch-champions' slate to t-take control, right?"

For lack of a better plan, Link inclines her head. Abruptly Yunobo extends his hand. Link looks vacantly at him.

"C-come on, Link. Take m-my—" Yunobo breathes in. "Take my hand."

She has heard these words before. She has heard someone, standing over her with an arm outstretched, a mild smile parting their lips, the gentlest eyes she has ever seen. Come on, Link. Take my hand.

She takes his hand.

Together they wheel out the cannon kept safe in the survey shack. The Divine Beast has completed nearly half of its vertical journey down. Whirling about, Yunobo grips Link's hands in his much larger ones, and for once—not hunched over—he seems to fill his comparatively giant frame. He speaks slowly, carefully. "Vah Ruda-rudania is m-moving. I'm going to t-trust you to aim that c-cannon, Link. M-my life is in your hands." He squeezes her fingers. She has never seen such genuine and honest trust as she does in the openness of his features. The blood roars in her ears. Her muscles have locked in place in reams of frost; the inside of her mouth ghosts with the aridity of sand.

Yunobo squeezes again and nods. "W-we—" He touches the blue shawl. The vibration of the ground and the rush of air accompanying the Divine Beast's descent unfurls the shawl. A full cape. "We can do this, Link!"
She watches him climb into the cannon. She cannot move. She cannot play hero. She cannot bear the weight of another's life. The Divine Beast curves to the right; its feet break through the rock beneath. The tremor knocks her onto the ground as though the Divine Beast had cut her legs out from under her.

The ice shatters.

When she rolls onto her hands and knees and brings herself upright again, she sprints towards the cannon. The twin levers that shift the cannon on its base prove heavy. She leans the entire weight of her body against them to propel them forward. Link looks up through the slate. Where each limb connects to the main torso of the Divine Beast, she can see a raised dome of a joint, gleaming dully with a violet as deep as the dark unknowns of the bottom of the ocean. She aims the cannon at the first of six. The Divine Beast moves again. She times the intervals between its regular steps by the thudding of her heart. It moves again. Each step, she measures the distance the joints shift. She sets a circular bomb into the chamber. It moves again. She aims below the Divine Beast, then raises the muzzle slightly. It moves again.

Link detonates the bomb.

She cannot look but she cannot tear her gaze away. Yunobo drops too quickly and flies too slowly: she underestimated the pull of gravity. She grips the lever so tightly that her palms burn against the hot metal. Her heart threatens to leap up her throat and throttle her.

The Divine Beast moves again.

Yunobo slams just off-centre of the left downmost joint.

The Divine Beast's limb spasms. It clings on with the other five but the limb comes to a limp rest to hang uselessly down the mountainside. Yunobo hurtles back towards her. She flings herself out of the way as Yunobo crashes into the ground where she stood not a second ago.

"I knew y-you could do it!" he bursts out, his chest puffed out. "C-come on! Just a f-few more times!"

He extends his hand towards her again. The Divine Beast, having regained some semblance a footing, resumes its journey. She grabs his hand and he pulls her up to stand.

They nod at one another.

She aims and times as she did with the first, purposefully aiming higher and releasing so that the Divine Beast takes a step. Its other front limb: injured. Yunobo speeds backwards and clambers back into the cannon for a third round.

Before they can celebrate, Link notices movement along the Divine Beast's back. Panels slide open. A veritable cloud of guardian sentries pours out. Link's eyes widen. She quickens the aim and fires, then brings out a bomb.

The sentries swarm. Numerous but individually weak, Link abandons the cannon to draw their fire. Instead she summons bomb after bomb from the slate and simply allows them to drop behind her, detonating them once she has run a far distance away. So she circles the sentry shack several times. She zigzags and rolls to clear the sentries' blasts at her back. The bombs pick off the sentries one by one.

When Yunobo crashes onto the platform, she stares at him in horror. He staggers backwards. Yet after a moment he regains his footing and grabs the nearest sizeable rock with which to chuck at the
sentries.

The stone lands closer to Link's own feet, forcing her to stumble over it.

Yunobo clenches the sides of his head with his hands. As Link runs past him to continue the circle she signs: "Again!"

He tries again. Now the rock smashes two of the sentries from the air. Link scarcely has a second to flash him a sign of victory prior to returning her attention to kiting the sentries with bombs.

In the meantime the Divine Beast moves. With half of its six legs missing, it presses forward at a sluggish pace. Link disposes of the final pair of sentries with a well-timed bomb and Yunobo rolls back into the cannon.

She aims again. The Divine Beast has now reached its nadir—below them for the first time rather than above—and it starts to turn clockwise along the mountain to crawl horizontally towards Darunia. Link detonates the bomb.

Yunobo does not return in a straight shot. The impact angles him upwards yet not enough Link watches him crash into the cliffside itself. "I'm f-fine!" he yells up at her. "I'm c-climbing back up!"

Link waits. The Divine Beast stills. Again panels on its back open, and the blood drains from her face as she finds herself looking down the empty muzzles of cannons. Seven of them, one situated between each two of the joints.

They seem to aim at random. Rearing its head up, the Divine Beast crashes its face into Death Mountain. She watches its head spin, slowly at first and then with such speed that the segments of its face blur into one, drilling into the side of the volcano.

Yunobo's fist smacks into the level ground. Link crouches at the base of the cliff and reaches out a hand. Yunobo slides his hand into hers, but when he tries to pull himself up his weight brings Link to her knees. He gets himself up while Link's face burns.

"Thank you," he says to her anyway; again his features lie perfectly open, perfectly trusting. "C-come on. T-two more! No." He claps his hand onto his chest and speaks again without a flicker: "Two more."

Link aims yet again. She can spot the glowing red deep within the barrels of the cannons protruding from the Divine Beast's back. Not long now. Link fires at the Divine Beast's hindmost left quarter. Its other limbs dangle. They swing slowly from side to side as pendulums marking time.

Yunobo flies straight and true. Just as he smashes into the penultimate joint, causing Link to pump her fists into the air, the Divine Beast's cannons fire at once.

Seven molten rocks soar from the muzzle. Link paces backwards as she tracks their movements. The lowermost projectiles crash against the cliff; but the five upper ones clear. She dives to the ground. The heat of the rocks sailing just overhead brings a scream from her aching throat. The impact not two metres from her sends her tiny frame flung into the sky. The heavens and earth spin about her.

Warmth. Around her shoulders and her hips. Link's vision continues to whirl for a few seconds until her gaze settles on Yunobo's face.

He carries her in his arms.
"Link? Link, a-are you okay?" he asks, his voice nearly an octave higher. "L-link?"

The pounding in her head dwindles. She manages a nod, and Yunobo exhales as he sets her on the ground. Her knees nearly collapse, but she pulls herself up.

Even with only a single functioning foot, the Divine Beast retains its grip on Death Mountain. Its head bores into the magma within the mountain.

"It's charging again," she signs, hardening her eyes. "You said that we need to take out all six limbs."

He dips his head. Acquiescing he rolls back into the cannon for a final shot. Link aims.

She fires.

The Divine Beast's last joint breaks.

She watches its body writhe back and forth. It slides along its belly down the slope of the volcano. The fall rips its head from the mountainside as she might remove a tick gorging itself on her blood. It descends, more and more quickly, its frame thrashing, its limbs spasming uselessly.

The Divine Beast plunges whole into the sea of lava below. A scant few high points still protrude from the liquid rock here and there. A constellation of metal stars in a blood night sky.

Link downs herself to her hands and knees to look over the edge of the cliff. Her arms shake. Yunobo climbs up beside her. She feels the heaviness of his hand on her shoulder.

"Sh-she'll get out of there before long. Usually w-we chase Her away after t-taking out a few limbs, but I th-think that Papa mentioned h-he got all of H-her limbs out. O-once."

They watch.

The hairs on the back of Link's neck rise with the cuccoflesh that crawls over her skin. She watches the lava.

A dark shadow wavers below the surface. It breaches the surface of the lava: the Divine Beast floats atop the surface on its stomach, its six limbs splayed out.

"I...I think we n-need to get down th-there, right?" Yunobo squeaks, tapping his index fingers against one another. "B-but what if She goes under the l-lava again?"

Link opens the glider. She meets Yunobo's gaze.

"Huh?" And then his expression creases over, and he stoops over to point to the Divine Beast. 
"...th-the thingy is there on its back, you see it? Th-that's where I think the Champions' slate goes."

She confirms the pedestal by examining the Divine Beast with the telescope. Slotting the slate into her pouch once more, she turns towards Yunobo. "Can you make it down there?"

He shakes his head, asks her to repeat the question. She signs again. He scratches his jaw.

"...y-you—" The breath hisses through his teeth; his fingers stretch on the fabric of the shawl. "You can shoot me down th-there, right?"

She manoeuvres the cannon as far down as it can go. The Divine Beast floats too far for a clear shot but she approximates; fortunately the Divine Beast's entire back could rival half the span of
the Bridge of Eldin, and missing would require an extra level of incompetence, ill luck, or both. She holds her breath as she detonates the bomb and Yunobo flies out at breakneck pace.

Link observes the goings-on through the telescope. He lands roughly on the Divine Beast's back. He waves at her; she waves back and leaps off of the cliff to glide downwards.

The burning hot air rising from the surface of the lava keeps her aloft. Link has to close the paraglider repeatedly to fall and open it again to break the descent. She spirals around the Divine Beast's back. At any moment the Divine Beast could rise again, but for now the violet lights of the joints have gone out.

She angles herself towards the pedestal by which Yunobo stands, having crossed over the back while she made the downwards plunge. The bottoms of her boots touch solid ground. Link rolls forward. She lets her body slump onto the back of the Divine Beast with the paraglider covering her shoulders like a particularly flimsy blanket. Feeling the curve of her chest rising and falling against the Divine Beast, she allows herself to breathe.

"L-link?"

She raises her head to look at him and offers him a grin at her landing, to which he smiles back.

"We d-did it. We did it!" Yunobo claps his hands together. Link nods. Removing the slate from the pouch at her hip, she approaches the pedestal, which differs from those she has seen before. This pedestal looks to have one of the black crystals curving up from the back, not hanging down from the ceiling as in several of the shrines and in the towers. The circular face of the pedestal retains the same depression, the same circuitry, the same orange glow that has come to curl with such familiarity in her chest.

Yunobo asks if he can have the honours and Link offers him the slate. He slots the slate into the face. She can hear whirring within the pedestal, the vibration, the resonance. Blue words shimmer on the black crystal. Rather than distilling downwards the words seem to pour into the black crystal from the bottom up as though the slate were filling the crystal with water.

When the blue words reach the top, the very ground beneath her feet shines as those circular pads on the shrines. Beyond the pedestal she spies motion. Another circular pad of similar design but significantly larger, which before her very eyes opens up like the petals of a flower in bloom to reveal a staircase spiralling down into the behemoth's belly.

The entrance to the Divine Beast.

"Huh...?" She listens to Yunobo stepping forward towards the second pad, towards what beckons them within. "D-do we have to...g-go in there?"

Link removes the slate from the face of the pedestal. Its surface gleams with a cool blue light. She looks down. One blue dot and six orange dots have appeared on the lower right corner. She tries to tap them. Any of the orange dots give her a message in a language she does not understand; the blue dot shows her a display image, a drawing of sorts, of the very pedestal she has just activated.

She forces herself to breathe. The carrier of the slate. Helping out the Eldic. Not the hero. No. No, that's Yunobo. She...merely carries the slate.

When her heart stops squeezing as though about to cave in, Link pats Yunobo's shoulder to get his attention. "I think there are six more down there," she remarks. "Or somewhere on the Divine Beast. I don't know where."
Yunobo bobs his head up and down. "B-but since we have one of the t-terminals, Vah Rudarudania isn't g-going to wake up again, right?"

Link squats down by the staircase. The inner workings of the Divine Beast lay in silence and darkness save for the faint light from the entrance. Though Yunobo carries his lantern at his hip, she does not relish dropping into the gaping maw of shadow.

She lifts her head again to the pedestal, to the black crystal that towers over it, and something brown at the very top gives her pause. Where everything on the Divine Beast sings of blue or black or gold, a rock has lodged at the peak of the crystal.

Link returns momentarily to the crystal while Yunobo inquires after her actions. She attempts to climb, but the material of which the Divine Beasts consist—as with the shrines, as with the slate itself—proves too slippery for her to grasp a clean hold.

"Could you throw me up there?"

"Huh? Up...up th-there?"

Yunobo tosses her up. The power in his strike transforms her into a hylian-shaped javelin. Link breaks open the paraglider and drifts towards the pedestal to land on the very top.

She lands in a deep bowl of a birds' nest of stone and red and yellow feathers, complete with a pair of round brown eggs nestled in the softness blanket of down, and a third egg that has broken and fried inside of the bowl.

Eggs.

Birds' eggs on the peak of a pitch black crystal on a glowing orange on the back of a Divine Beast that regularly awakens, climbs up and down mountains, and rains devastation from its back.

Birds' eggs.

A nest that has somehow kept the eggs mostly safe for the weeks since the Divine Beast began its assault.

*Birds' eggs.*

The laughter rolls from her belly. She nearly tumbles backwards off of the crystal but catches herself. Unable to stop laughing at the sheer joy of the resilience of life that, no matter the danger, thrives everywhere, she bends down to scoop the two remaining eggs from the nest: The broken egg suggests that the parents have abandoned the nest, and with the Divine Beast currently in the lava they may never return.

When she stands back up with the eggs in hand she cannot help but grin at them. *Birds' egg.*

She marvels at the world.

Her boot slips.

She could cling to the rocky nest, but that would involve letting go of the eggs that will make up her breakfast. In that split second she grips the eggs all the more tightly, and cradles them to her chest to protect them when she slams into the ground.

Yunobo catches her for the second time. She bumps into his waiting arms. Link grins at him even
more brightly and springs out of his embrace to whip out the cooking pot.

He ogles her.

"Can't adventure on an empty stomach." Link thumbs to the opening behind her. "It's dark in there. We should wait until morning to get the most light we can." She hesitates. "You don't eat eggs...what do gorons eat?"

Yunobo grimaces. "S-sorry, but eating eggs sounds—I don't w-want to call something disg-gusting...b-but I have no idea h-how you eat those!"

Link shrugs. She dusts the bottom of the cooking pot with goron spice and rock salt, mixing them for an evening coating, as the second that she cracks open the eggs the heat from the air alone will cook them through and through.

"Um...we eat r-rock. Not just rocks that you find on the g-ground, usually—" A strange flicker of guilt passes briefly through his features; Link blinks but does not press. "—though I guess in a time l-like this, Goro-g-goro wouldn't m-mind..."

"Throw me up there again," Link answers.

She glides back down with the nest itself and presents it to Yunobo, who blushes as he takes it from her. She grants him the pot first, scooping up the goron spice and salt into her palm while Yunobo cooks the rock for himself. Link licks up salt on her fingertip a touch at a time—surprisingly difficult with how the heat dries her hands immensely; she never realised how much she takes the light layer of moisture on her skin for granted until she came to Eldin—as she watches him carve out the—best?—chunks of rock and cook them with some oil from his lantern. He asks for a pinch of goron spice which she provides. She cannot help but drool at the mere sight of the rock roast even if she could not eat it.

One day, with the help of the Goddesses, she will acquire the ability to do so. That shall become her next quest once she has finished running errands for Lady Impa: to gain the awesome power of tasting all of the cuisine that the lands formerly known as Hyrule have to offer.

After Yunobo finishes, he returns the pot. "I'll w-wait for you to start. I'm not in a r-rush, except I g-guess for the f-fact that Papa and the E-elders c-could be looking f-for us..." Yunobo glances down his own palms. "...and b-besides, I'd rather we eat t-together, right?"

Yunobo, willing to wait her to finish cooking before he eats his own meal. A true martyr, worthy of Sagedom. She wipes the salt and spice from her palm, then cracks the two eggs inside and whisks them with her knife. The eggs cook quickly, though as the goron spice sets, it has a fireproofing effect on the soon-to-be-omelet. She pushes and flips the eggs. Her mouth floods with saliva as she smells the eggs that she failed to make however many days ago.

She stabs the omelet with the knife. Her ravenous stomach clamours for a meal; she shoves the entire thing into her mouth at once.

As she chews and lets the festival of flavour dance over her senses, the aroma of the spiced omelet dredges up an image.

The goron from her memories. No, not her memories, but the memories of the chosen hero whose body she has stolen. The goron with the two-handed club-like thing on his back, now sitting across from her in his home in Darunia on a blue mat that matched the one beneath her own feet. On two plates before them on a short table: an omelet and a rock roast.
The goron spoke first. "How much Eldic do you know, li'l buddy?"

She shook her head. "Only a little bit. My courier duties didn't take me that far into Eldin...just the eastern bit, sometimes, closest to home."

The goron stroked one of the points of his stone beard, then slapped his palms onto his knees. "We can't have that! You gotta have the whole city at your fingertips. What do you say? I'll teach you so we can roll like pals through the whole of Daru-darunia. It's the crown ruby of Eldin, li'l buddy, and I couldn't be happier to let you see all of it."

Her brow furrowed; the corners of her eyes creased; in the reflection of the plate she could make out the purple puffiness of her lower eyelids.

"Shouldn't we be...preparing? Impa...told me that we have to—"

"Li'l buddy." The sudden sharpness of his tone made her bristle. The goron rumbled in his throat. "First off, we got plenty of time. Second off, I know that destiny's decided to drop down on your shoulder like a fall of rocks, but that isn't fair to you. Besides." He crossed his arms over his barrel chest and tapped his temple. "Honing the mind is just as important as honing the body. Just take it from me."

Her fingers curled inwards.

"Please, li'l buddy."

Slowly her head dipped down.

He taught her through the morning. The specifics of the lessons escape the memory, but the lessons seemed to stretch on forever. The goron's brother, likewise mute, showed her the signs with which to speak, and the goron himself how to understand what she hears.

Towards the end of the afternoon they took a break. He brought her a fireproof elixir and asked if she wanted to see the market instead of spending the day practising with her blade.

She regarded him in the reflection of the sword. A bastard sword that she had learned to wield with either one or two hands. A sword with a title. His eyes held nothing but kindness, but she had never judged emotion well.

"...why are you doing all of this for me?"

"Well, li'l buddy, I figure s'a good idea to learn Eldic either way." He winked at her. "And you know, after all of this is over, you could come live here if you wanted."

Her hands took the shape of the words that her ears cannot resolve. "...you want me to live here?"

"Like family." He clapped his hand on her shoulder. She lowered the blade. "I don't know who you've got back home, but if you wanted—"

She pressed her face into his chest. She stood absolutely still. Ever so slowly his other hand came to a rest on her empty shoulder. "Link...it's all right. Of course I want you to live here, li'l buddy, if you want to be here. You can't defend home if you don't have a home, if you don't have people to come back to."

She did not cry. Neither did she move away. She kept her eyes closed, her fingers trembling at her sides. She said nothing, but stood there, still and silent, in his half-embrace.
"...Link?"

Yunobo’s voice. Her eyelids flutter as she looks up at him, his eyebrows sloping downwards, the corners of his mouth creased in concern.

"Are you f-feeling well?"

She nods.

"The s-sun's coming up. W-we should head down, right?"

She tilts her head back. The dawn has rosened the sky, the sunrise the emblem of hope.

"Let’s go."

"Right." Yunobo swallows. "Right."

They go.

—

Omelet (five hearts) - bird egg, goron spice, rock salt

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: I apologise sincerely for any typos and the like. I didn't proofread this chapter as closely as I would have wanted and will probably re-upload in the future, but it's a short chapter and oversights shouldn't affect too much. Thank you for your understanding and patience.

I chose to make Vah Rudania have six limbs instead of four as a reference to the six-legged mythical salamander associated with fire. Also, I think a six-limbed design would just look cooler and more alien, so there's that.

Hey, Yunobo's slowly getting better about the stuttering! And about his own development. Although Link isn't yet at a mental point where she can probe into the people around her, Yunobo is desperate to prove himself to some degree, which is part of why

Link knows Eldic because she learned it from Daruk. Obviously this process took several months at least while she was training with him; she's not fluent and she doesn't know how to read the language (as I've mentioned) but she's conversational.

Link's got some implied family issues. Hmm. Wonder what's up with that.

The Eldic have a saying: "Links tempered in the same flame fit together stronger than those forged from the same ore." It doesn't come up in this chapter (you'll have to wait for the fifty-eighth for that), but it means that shared experience (tempering in the same flame) is more conducive to forming a strong bond than happening to be related by birth (forged from the same ore). It's equivalent to our own saying: "The blood of
the covenant runs thicker than the water of the womb."

Thanks again to my beta reader for pointing out my many, many, many fuck-ups as a writer and a human being, and thank you to you, the reader, for coming with me so far. Next time: the Divine Beast Vah Rudania.

midna's ass. 09 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This series continuously finds ways to end chapters in really, really beautiful ways. This is the best example of that so far. This memory and how it leads into the end of the chapter made me cry.

Emma. 09 September 2017.
Deliciously Grilled Rock Roast

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef and the Eldic youth activate the seven terminals of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. Working together, they defeat the Malice that has blighted the Divine Beast since the Great Calamity. The travelling chef remembers the previous Champion of Goro-goro's promise to the chef as the torch is passed on to the Eldic youth.

Chapter Notes

To all my readers: This one's a bit of a doozy. Buckle up and take your time. It's the longest chapter that's been posted...so far, though it's not the longest chapter in the entire fic. After this, we're going back to short chapters for some time.

Some non-spoilery author's notes that didn't fit in the end notes: Hey, thank you so much for reading this far! That's one Divine Beast cleared out! Just three more to go. And then, you know, the second half of the fic after that.

I use the lower-case-m "malice" to denote the purple liquid, and the upper-case-M "Malice" to denote Fireblight Ganon (or the other Blights).

Wew! So I wrote this entire chapter in one long sitting with breaks just to use the loo. This is the moment where I thought to myself, "Ah fuck, I can't just live with 3600 word chapters, now can I?" I tried rather desperately to shorten the length of chapters after this as I was writing, but...well, you'll see as we get further in the fic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Together they descend into the belly of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. The circular opening on its back spirals into a staircase to its dark interior. As Link walks ever downwards the air grows strangely cooler, until the sweat on her forehead and her back feels not burning hot, but cold. She wipes the sweat from her neck. Her hand comes away damp and stays damp instead of boiling away against her flesh.

Yunobo lights his lantern. It casts around them a thin yellow shell of light that barely cuts through the dark except for the area directly around their feet. Even the light from the opening in the ceiling does little to shed the suffocating shadow.

They walk down, down, down.

She looks about as they take the plunge, and her gaze narrows onto the faint glow of orange scattered in various directions of the bowels of the behemoth. Link stops on the stairs to take a glance through her telescope. Yunobo stoops to look as well.

From their present position she can make out three, possibly four of the six: the first
somewhat from the bottom of the stairs; the third and fourth on either side, jutting out horizontally rather than vertically; and the possible fourth far in front of them and raised up on a higher platform, but so far and so faint that she cannot resolve the details.

As they go further, the potential fourth pedestal vanishes from view, along with the first. She goes up and down the steps where the first pedestal at the stairs disappears: it seems to go behind a wall.

At length, Link takes another step, only for her foot to crash against the floor. She nearly trips.

The base of the stairs.

Yunobo lifts the lantern. Instead of a wide flat ground, the floor of the Divine Beast consists of something like a labyrinth, the walls high enough that not even Yunobo could merely climb over. Link touches her chin. She reaches her arm towards the the left-hand wall. He follows her as she walks forward tracing the maze with her palm. They dip in and out of a dead end, take a curve, continue to walk. She tracks their progress by how well she can see the two horizontal pedestals.

A splash.

Halting in her tracks, Link glances down. Yunobo bumps into her from behind and immediately begins to apologise, but she squats down and brushes her right fingertips against the floor. They come away wet. She sniffs: water, somewhat oily.

Oily.

She takes a step or two forward, sliding her feet along the ground rather than picking them up to avoid making noise. The oil pools further in a thin layer. Backing up, she gestures for Yunobo to follow her out of the oil.

At the edge of the oil, Link removes a shard of flint from her flint-pouch. She hears Yunobo suck in a breath. She sets the flint down at the corner of the pool, then walks away from the pool even further.

"I d-don't think th-this is a g-g-good idea," Yunobo whispers to her; she can hear the tap tap tapping of his fingers against one another.

Removing the boomerang from her back, Link glances at him. "Better if the oil burns up now than after we've stepped in it." She swings the boomerang. Her first attempt bounces the boomerang off of the wall. The second try strikes against the flint. It sparks.

The oil catches fire.

The brightness fwooms up around them to light up the innards of the Divine Beast as the oil burns. She watches the fire spread up the corridor and swerve left. Something on the other side of the wall explodes so loudly that Link's ears ring. Then another. A series of explosions further down the maze that vibrate the ground. Yunobo drops the lantern to curl up into a protective ball while Link picks it up and puts it out.

The explosions come to an end. The oil burns itself out. She pats Yunobo on the back; he recoils away with a yelp of monster and speeds away down the corridor from her lightest touch. Hastily lighting the lantern, Link jogs after him. When she hears him slam against the wall, she winces.

He sits back with his head in his hands. When she offers him the lantern, he takes it. They look down the leftmost wall. The burned chassis of multiple guardians scatter through the corridor, some still smouldering with residual oil. Link carves each one open to take the cores.
They walk onwards through the labyrinth to a continuous stream of guardians. Repeatedly they pass through dead ends, but they worry not of the charred automata guarding the corners.

A steady *drip...drip...drip* prompts Link to look down again. No oil on the floor this time. The dripping grows louder.

Amid the darkness that lies ahead comes another light from around the corner. She squints and indicates for Yunobo to put out the lantern. Without the lantern's brightness, she resolves the colour of the dim glow: orange.

Grinning to herself, she quickens her forward pace. Yunobo yells for her to wait. The lantern shimmers a yellow path forward. She rounds the corner with her left hand still against the wall and the maze opens up to a courtyard that fades into black, so large she cannot see the edges from the illumination of the lantern. The floor spirals inwards in concentric circles to another pedestal with a black crystal behind it. Yunobo raises the lantern higher towards the crystal; Link can make out the statue of a lizard. Behind the lizard range a bird of some sort, something with a long neck—a camel—and a third strange beast for which she has no name.

The *dripping* comes from somewhere nearby. Link approaches the pedestal. The pattern on the face appears blurry. She wipes her palm over. A thin film of the same oily substance. It stings her hand. She shakes her head.

*Drip...drip...drip*...

A droplet plinks down onto the face of the pedestal. Link cranes her neck upwards but cannot see into the gloom above.

She dries the depression in the pedestal prior to slotting in the slate. As before the pedestal whirs, vibrates, resonates. As before, the blue words rise up from the bottom of the black crystal, but when they reach the top, the pedestal does not immediately give up the slate. Instead the statue of the lizard glimmers. Blue words sink down its surface to coalesce into a drop from the lizard's snout, which drops down into the tablet.

The surface glows. Two of the seven dots have now glimmered to life, though the second dot still retains an orange smaller dot in the middle, and a strange picture approximating a lizard spreads out over the face of the slate. She feels Yunobo's warm bulk just behind her. "On the Ch-champions' slate...is th-that Vah Ruda-rudania?" Link bobs her head. She tries to touch the various parts of the diagram and finds that she can rotate and change the scale of the schematic. Two blue dots and five orange ones dot the model. The blue: one on the back, one in slightly upwards displaced from the centre. The orange: two on the sides that she saw before; one up high near the head; one near the back end; and another one on the underside of the chest. When she touches the new blue dot, seven sky-blue spheres the same colour as the bomb runes flicker onto the screen. Upon a tap, the sky-blue sphere takes the shape of a cannon with aiming by a rotation of the finger or the slate. The ceiling groans. Link's gaze shoots up: the panel slides open to filter more light into the belly of the beast. She holds her finger down on the sky-blue sphere and it begins to pulsate. She releases.

They hear the cannon explode.

Yunobo swings his head violently from side to side. "D-don't d-d-do that again."

Instead she slides open all of the plates. As they open one by one, the light entering grows brighter and her vision adjusts to the brightness. Link can see her own hands, can see beyond the shell of yellow, can make out the courtyard in which they stand that spans nearly the width of the Divine Beast. Above them run gears of complicated machinery alongside numerous ladders and platforms.
with which to get around. Strange blobs of purple ooze cling to the walls, to the floor, between the
gears. Here and there guardians patrol the interiors of varying shapes and sizes, though she reports
no monsters in the fray.

Another drip splashes on the back of her hand and she recoils, wiping it from her hand on her
trousers: In the cool inner regions of the Divine Beast she need not concern herself with
fireproofing. Link look upwards to pinpoint the source of the constant drips.

Her lower jaw drops.

Hanging from the ceiling overhead: a massive violet thing that throbs in regular time, the pulses
arching from the top to the bottom. As her vision adjusts further she resolves its shape.

A heart.

A great tyrian heart that beats and glistens wetly with a primordial ooze. From the bottom of the
heart the oily flammable liquid plinks down. She finds herself repeating the words of the minstrel,
as best she can remember:

"To match the monsters spun of Maliced spawn,
"they forged an army of—" She does not recall the word.
"and built behemoths four whose hearts did shine
"with holy power, called the Beasts Divine.
"To guide each Beast, a Champion pledged their life
"to guard the Kingdom through their darkest...

Their darkest hour, though neither rhyme nor rhythm match. Their darkest night? She begins again
to remember.

"Huh?" Link hears Yunobo's breathing speed up. "That's...that's the s-song about the War of the
Seven S-sages, right?"

"I heard it from a minstrel," she offers.

"Papa t-taught a s-song like that to m-me. Well, it went a l-little differently than that...I think. And
th-there was a bit in there about the guardians b-being built to last a really long time, like the v-
virtue of Goro-g-goro...b-but it's the s-same song, right? Or I think it's the same s-song." Yunobo's
voice trails off.

Touching her chin, Link turns the words of the ballad over in her hands. Link hmms for a moment
prior to blinking in epiphany: the Eldic sign for heart doubles as the sign for a gesture for a
precious gem. She keeps her gaze fixed on the heart, though she can see no holy power shining. If
they could shine a light onto that heart somehow, perhaps that would bring out the sacred power
from the song.

The violet of the heart and of the ooze scattered through the innards of the Divine Beast calls to her
with the same malicious glitter of the eyes of monsters, of lizalfos and bokoblin that have no
desire to live or to thrive as do the creatures of nature, but solely to spread as much chaos and
destruction as they can in the short window of their lives. She has never seen a hatchling lizalfos or
a baby bokoblin.
The heart beats. The oil had built up considerably in the length of the maze, not to mention what must have spread over the courtyard before having burned, and yet the heart drips so slow that accumulating so much must have taken at least a century.

"I think I kn-know what these are," Yunobo says while Link stares at the far-too-organic heart of the Divine Beast. "They're _t-terminals_, and you use th-them to control Vah Ruda-rudania. B-based on the p-plays written about him, Lord Daru-daruk would stand near the h-head of Vah Ruda-rudania and use the Champions' slate to m-manipulate H-her, or s-something like th-that. So the more terminals we activate, the m-more control we'll have over Vah Ruda-rudania, right? And m-maybe we can..."

"_Let's get the others._" Link starts with the left. She cannot from here see the pedestal past the myriad of machinery connecting the joints of the limbs on the Divine Beast's left side, and so she takes to the first ladder to climb up. She hears Yunobo racing and then rapidly climbing to catch up. Lifting herself up on the low platform, she spots the pedestal in the gap between two giant gears that straddle either end of the platform. It protrudes out horizontally below the half-sphere of the middle joint. Strangely the entire left wall has vertical platforms running up and down, as if built so that the Champion would have access to the pedestal—the terminal—while the Divine Beast were itself vertical.

No ladders. She touches her chin. Yunobo, who has managed to clamber onto the platform in the meantime, likewise scratches his jaw at the sight.

"If you can throw me up, I might be able to glide there," Link suggests. Yunobo sends her sky-high. She waits until the highest point of her arc; when she feels herself slow she rips open the paraglider. With this height she might yet reach the terminal. Here and there guardian sentries buzz about but she curves around them and they leave her be. The vertical platforms rush towards her. She tries to land with her boots on the thin topmost face, slips, and smacks herself straddling the platform between her thighs.

The impact makes her wince.

When Link regains her bearings, she perches on a platform four away from the terminal. The pedestal of the terminal itself seems covered by the violet ooze. Shifting herself cautiously with movements small and slow, Link rights herself into a crouching position on top of the ever so skinny face of the platform. She tries to stretch out a leg to reach the face of the next platform; between the platforms run ladders, but scaling a horizontal ladder made of such smooth material sounds like a one-way ticket to falling. Then again, she has little luck at the present.

She makes the leap.

Her right foot misses entirely but the flat of her left boot pushes her up enough for her to grasp the face of the platform with both hands. Slipping, she throws her body forward until she lies physically with the platform pressed into her abdomen. She alleviates the pain in her gut with a mad scramble to get on top of the platform once more.

One final leap.

She looks down. A veritable lake of violet ooze spreads over the floor. One of the larger guardians
with too-many legs, almost identical in appearance to the automaton patrolling the maw of Death Mountain.

Link looks forward. She rubs her ankles to release some of the tension and strain, then winds up another jump.

Somehow she leaps so far that she lands on the corner of the platform and nearly tips over on the other side. Catching herself, she rivets her gaze to the final objective.

She sits on the top of the closest platform with the terminal in reach. A white pole made of the same slippery material—she checks via the stasis rune—runs from floor to ceiling. Link merely has to stretch herself over, around the pole, to physically place the slate into the face of the pedestal.

Her arm proves too short.

Link leans further. The fingers of her right arm strain and ache as she stretches, stretches, stretches over the pedestal. The ooze does not cover the depression in the face where she need slot the slate. She could throw it, but she were to miss or if the slate were to bounce off, she might lose it entirely in the sea of ooze.

She glances around for anything else she could use to get a touch more distance. If she had rope, she could tie it to her spear. Link lifts her hands from the pedestal—leaving only her boots flat—to run her fingers through her sidelocks.

She tries the slate—stasis and magnesis—to check for anything around her not made of the impossibly smooth material. A glint of red towards the bottom of the display snags her attention and she tilts the slate down. A metal something or other on the floor. She magnetises the whatever-it-is and finds that while it resists movement horizontally, she can slide it upwards.

Upwards on the pole.

She laughs a light little laugh as she hits the jackpot. Raising the metal up to the height of the platforms, she sees a metal pillar affixed to a wide platform of that slippery material, the perfect size to fit between the platform on which she crouches and the terminal.

Had Link checked out the floor prior to leaping for the vertical platforms, she could have simply stood on the lift and used magnesis to propel herself up to the terminal.

Her mistake merely makes her laugh all the harder. She rolls forward onto the platform and lifts it higher with magnesis, higher, higher, nearly to the ceiling. She walks to the edge and looks down at the terminal below. When she shuts off the slate, the platform begins to fall. Grooved ridges in the pole greatly slow its acceleration as the platform chunk chunk chunks over each grove. Still the platform gains speed.

As the terminal passes by, she attempts to slam the slate into the face but hits the rim of the pedestal instead.

Magnesis resets her efforts to the ceiling. She tries again, and again, and again, and on the fifth try—she does not propel the platform as high as possible but instead brings the platform to a height just above the terminal to keep it from accelerating too much—manages to slot the slate in. The platform starts to drop; startled, she jumps up from it onto the side of the terminal itself. The material slides under her but she claws up over onto the curve facing the ceiling. She wraps her arms and legs around the rounded pedestal. With the ooze coating the base of the terminal, she
scoots herself forward to avoid it, her chin touching the terminal in her efforts to cling to the surface. Link can feel herself slipping to one end or the other and so adjusts her weight to keep firm.

The terminal flashes from orange to blue.

Wobbling on the terminal, she reaches for the slate with her less dominant right hand. Her fingers close around the corner. Pinched between her thumb and forefinger, the slate swings back and forth. The moisture of her sweat slicking her fingers could release the slate from her grasp.

Link holds it to her face. She cannot free her other hand without potentially falling. Instead she pushes the newly glowing blue dot with the tip of her nose.

Instead of the seven sky-blue spheres, she can see the three limbs on the left side highlighted in orange, alongside a few larger symbols at the bottom. She boops a limb with her nose and several buttons with varying symbols appear, the same set of symbols as the larger ones. Link selects one of the larger symbols at random.

The machinery within the Divine Beast begins to whir and come to life. The giant gears grind against one another. The whole of the Divine Beast shifts. The left side starts to angle up and the right side down. Link feels herself sliding off of the terminal. Hastily she bites down on the slate to hold it between her teeth as she grabs for the paraglider on her back and accidentally takes off her cooking pot instead. The Divine Beast continues to shift. Grunting into the slate, she straps the cooking pot back and rips out the paraglider just as her chest clears the crystal on the end of the terminal.

Through the open panels at the top of the Divine Beast, she can see the side of Death Mountain, or something that looks similar, moving further into the distance. The Divine Beast crawls leftwards.

The terminal that controls the three limbs.

She glides down towards the rapidly moving gears, the various pulleys, the magnets and blazes of orange and blue light that manipulate the limbs of the Divine Beast. Link lands on top of one of the gears with no hazards on the top face save for a pole that whirls around at high speeds. The gear takes her spinning right round. She dizzies, light-headed, and tries to look down to find a path through the gears.

The Divine Beast starts to tilt the other way, to right itself again. Her boots slide on the surface of the gear. She opens the paraglider in a panic only for the pole to whip into her side and send her soaring off of the gear. Smarting with the bruises that will undoubtedly purple the right half of her body and the slight pain whenever she takes a breath, Link lands on the platform between the two biggest gears on which Yunobo stood before, although she cannot see him now.

The Divine Beast continues to crawl. She spits the slate out of her mouth and presses the same button again. The Divine Beast groans once more; it slows, then ceases to move. Link tries to glide down, but her right side cramps into pain and her right hand lets go of the glider. She drops to the floor to look around for Yunobo. She finds him cowering on the ladder to the platform.

He hugs her tightly, blubbering that he thought she had died and that Papa was right about him not being able to help and that the time of the Champions had ended and that the Divine Beast had risen again and that it would reduce all of Darunia to dust and ash. His arm only worsens the agony in her right side. She apologises quietly. Once Yunobo calms to sniffling instead of openly sobbing—she rubs the back of her head with the search for some words of comfort to say—she indicates the slate.
They examine the controls together. The various buttons move the limbs from side to side as well as forward and backwards, as well as a particular control that appears to cause the limbs to flail erratically, as Link and Yunobo learn after the vibration discombobulates them, and another that causes the limbs to stomp in random order, presumably in event of ensuring enemies cannot scale the Divine Beast. Each individual limb has the same set of controls; the larger buttons control all three limbs at once.

"S-so, the terminal on f-for the right limbs should be j-j-just like that on the left, right?" Yunobo rubs his palm over the crown of his head.

"I think we could make it climb up Death Mountain again. Then we could scale the ladders to the second terminal."

"H-huh?"

Link repeats herself, but Yunobo merely ogles her in confusion. She can see him straining to understand. She muddles through the words she tries to say. "Vertical. We could scale the ladders, if it's vertical."

"Oh. If V-vah Ruda-rudania is oriented v-vertically, we e-could use the ladders." Yunobo slaps his right hand into his left palm; Link rubs the back of her head. "W-wait...we'd have to go back th-through the c-caldera, right? But then the l-lava would flood the place."

Link touches her chin. "We can close the panels on the top."

"Huh? But then h-h-how would we s-see where we're going?"

She can see the plan so clearly in her mind's eye, yet her arms do not cooperate into the gestures she needs to make. Link has to drag every word from her fingertips. "...Yunobo. Take the slate and get on top of the Divine Beast using the stairs. You can use that terminal—" She demonstrates. "—to close the hatch at the top, and the panes. Then have it crawl to Death Mountain. When you're past the lava, open everything again and come back down."

"W-why me?"

Link gestures to her clothes: wet with oil and damp with sweat. The fireproofing paste on the inner layer has all but washed away. "I don't have enough..." She does not know the word for fireproofing. "...no-fire-burn paste to coat the inside again."

Yunobo nods fiercely. "Wh-when we g-get out of here, I'll get you a lifetime's s-supply for free. I swear it! O-or s-some armour!" He slaps his hands against each other. "I won't e-even have to d-d-do it myself! They'll treat y-you like a hero!"

Link shakes her head. "When we get out of here, don't tell anyone I was involved, in any of this."

Yunobo frowns. "B-but...forgive me for the d-disrespect—I d-don't know if humility is Hyli-hylia's v-virtue—" Neither does Link. "—but Goro-goro always w-wants us to take pride in what we do, especially f-for others. It's not right to h-hide bashfully in the shadows. That's...that's why I decided t-to go out and do something." His fingers curl into the shawl. "Not because I want to be a hero...but because I don't want to hide when there's something I could do."

"It's...," she answers, her hands slow. "I wouldn't...know the—the virtues?—if you asked. I j-just..." She lets her fingers tangle limply before she can evoke the feelings into physical form with the motion of her arms. "Please."
"I w-won't tell anyone unless you tell me I c-can, I promise." Yunobo taps his index fingers against
one another. "You're not...you're n-n-not one of the bad guys, are you? I m-mean, if you don't
even...kn-know about Hyli-hylia even th-though you're a h-hylian..."

The talk of heresy again, as in Hateno. "I lost my memories a few weeks ago." Yunobo makes a
noise of sympathy. Link counts: two months ago, give or take a few days. That number feels
familiar to her somehow. Like she heard of something else that happened two months ago that she
can't put her finger on. "I even forgot what my name was. It's not that I don't believe, but that I can't
remember."

Link meets Yunobo's gaze to search for signs of distrust; she finds nothing but that same open
genuity. Though the words of the letter from the cabin pounds on the glass at the back of her
thoughts, she hands the slate over to him. He accepts it gingerly and practises opening and closing
the circular entrance and the panels before beginning the climb up.

She waits.

Sure enough the inside of the Divine Beast plunges into darkness. She sits on the floor by the
terminal in the middle as the Divine Beast roars to life. With only three functional limbs it crawls
unsteadily. Yunobo seems to have difficulty turning the Divine Beast in the proper direction, but
after some time it begins to move in what feels like a straight line. She can detect the differences
between when the Divine Beast crawls into lava; when the Divine Beast swim through the lava;
and when the Divine Beast begins to emerge from the other side. She starts to slide along floor
towards the maze as the Divine Beast shifts to an upright position and slaps her palm over her face
for not having gotten herself up to the terminal. She hits her back on the wall of the maze. Her right
flares up in pain.

Abruptly all of the panels open. The brightness sends her to duck her face into her knees while her
hand massages her right side. After a few minutes she hears Yunobo calling out for her and
attempts a wordless yelp to signal her position. She raises her head to see Yunobo having rolled to
the wall of the maze beside her.

"I got the terminal," he says breathlessly, his voice fuller than before. "I think we sh-should have
Vah Ruda-rudania climb up Death Mountain and try to get access to the t-terminal on Her s-
stomach, right? What do you think?"

Link clenches her right side with her hand, pressing down into it and rubbing circles with her palm
to try to tease out if something has pulled or fractured. She nods to Yunobo, who grips the hem of
the blue cape.

"I'll do it r-right away! You stay here. Y-you're all right with that, right?"

She dips her head. Yunobo's fingers clatter over the surface of the Divine Beast and he rolls away
up the incline.

Link lies down on her side. The Divine Beast, now with six limbs working in tandem, moves
swiftly up the volcano. She can feel the impact of its body curving left and right with each stroke.
As it crests the summit the floor angles back. She forces herself to stand. Her right leg nearly
buckles beneath her. The floor starts to tilt the other way as she half-walks, half-stumbles to find
the entrance into the labyrinth. She swings herself inside of the maze. The angle of the Divine
Beast pushes her against the opposite face of the wall.

She groans and closes her eyes. The hit of the high-speed pole has done a greater number on her
than she anticipated.
She waits there. From the open-air panels she looks out to the magma in the crater of Death Mountain. With the panels slid back the heated air of Eldin and the cool air of the inside of the Divine Beast must mix. Unless the Divine Beast somehow cools its innards, the heat will reach her.

Link squeezes herself into a ball.

She inhales through her nose and out through her mouth. Idly she searches through her satchel full of bits of monsters and the cores of guardians for something to eat. Her efforts bear an apple, softened and bruised by its journey here. She scrapes the seal of fireproofing paste from its surface to bite down.

The sweetness of its juices calms her and seems to alleviate the pain in one fell swoop.

The Divine Beast rights itself. She rotates her paraglider to cover her face from the light shining from the panels open directly overhead. The heart drip drip drips on the face of the pedestal.

Yunobo finds her cuddled against the wall with the drip drip drip so loud in her ears that her heart beats with the same rhythm. He shakes her shoulder gently. "Link?"

She wriggles her fingers. When she sits up he hands her back the slate, with the terminal on the chest now also glowing blue. Two left: one near the head, and one at the tail. Link stands up and almost collapses again. She props herself up on Yunobo's shoulder.

"Are you s-sure that you're f-feeling well, Link?"

"I'm fine. I hit my side is all, and it hurts a little." She exhales a sharp hiss of air as she massages her side again. "Let's get those last terminals."

The terminal near the head, on the higher level, proves easy to reach once they move the Divine Beast to face the bottom of Death Mountain. Link walks up the high platform, using the stasis rune to sneak past the stalking guardians that would become aware of Yunobo's heavier steps in a flash. She slowly pitches the Divine Beast forward until she can simply walk up the previously vertical wall. Once she hops the edge, Link tilts the Divine Beast back and then makes the short simple walk to the terminal. The slate slots into the face. The terminal grants them access to the ability of the head of the Divine Beast to bore into the earth.

As she returns to Yunobo, slightly limping for the pain still gouging out her right, she neglects to stasis one of the smaller guardians for not having seen it. She hears the charge of its blue bolt and ducks into a side roll as the automaton carves a path of fire-light.

With the stasis rune not yet charged from its previous use, Link whips out the boomerang. She swings back her left arm. The boomerang releases. Her side bursts into cramps of agony, but at least the boomerang slices through of the guardian's legs and arcs back to her. The automaton falls onto its side, but not without firing at her again, which she defends against by throwing herself to the floor and scrambling away on all fours. Another hit with the boomerang pierces the guardian's eye. The automaton lifts up a battle-axe of blue light but she rolls under it to thrust her spear through its heart. From there she stabs through its remaining claws legs with the spear and takes it apart. She rips the axe from its body. Yet she comes away holding merely the axe handle, the blade having vanished or broken off. She knocks on the base of the handle. Only when she swings the axe does the axe-blade stream out bright with blue light. Link spins the axe around and grins to herself before strapping the axe onto her back with the spear and boomerang in her steadily growing collection of weapons.
She pants.

She hears a whirr to her left.

The far larger guardian that she put into stasis earlier has come alive.

But Link has a plan!

She blinks rapidly, turns on her heel, and runs.

Pain shoots through her right side with every step. She leaps from the higher platform and glides one-handed to manage her plunge. Link rolls forward to a stop in front of Yunobo, looks at him, and takes off again.

When they manage to lose the guardian at last, they turn their focus onto the terminal at the tail at the other end of the Divine Beast.

Yunobo and Link cross once more through the maze. Every few steps Link winces. "I could c-carry you," Yunobo says quietly, and Link—having become a burden either way—acquiesces. On the other end by the staircase, they face a large gate with flames burning horizontally on the other side. Neither magnesis nor stasis can make an impact on the gate, though Link notes the steam escaping from the chamber beyond. She downs a fireproof elixir for the sake of standing near the gate and touches her chin while Yunobo mirrors her with a hand at his jaw.

While Yunobo takes a more head-on approach—quite literally, judging by his efforts to steamroll the gate with sufficiently fast rolling—she inspects the sides of the gate for anything that could give them a hint. On the far end, away from the flames and steam, she notes something glistening on the ground. Here the steam condenses to water that pools under the gate.

She kneels down beside the water and pulls out the slate. Though shallow, the pool sits deep enough that the cryonis rune can build a small pillar from the water, which forces the gate up. Link crawls inside of the gate to find herself in a long chamber. On the opposite end, the flames boil water to provide energy in the form of steam. She looks towards the wall closest to her: Similar long tubes protrude from the wall to fire their own flames, though these seem eerily silent. By the light of the inferno from the far side, she makes out a doorway leading further in. The fires block most of the entrance.

The fireproof elixir will keep the heat from burning her, but leaping into the flames with her clothing unprotected would likely encompass the last mistake she would ever make.

Link builds cryonis blocks in front of her as she approaches the fires to test how rapidly they melt, and to inch the water closer to the entrance. If she can shield herself with ice, she can squeeze past to access the next chamber.

The flames melt through the majority of an ice pillar in the span of two and a half seconds. She times several rounds of melting, then—pressing down on her bruised right side as tightly as she can—she raises a pillar and dash-rolls directly into the entrance.

She feels heat on her rear and looks back to find the back end on her tunic on fire. Link drops onto the floor to roll back and forth until she puts the flames out.

The right half of her torso feels as though someone had shoved a knife between her ribs and jerked it up to break through the cavity of her chest. She exhales. She inhales. She exhales again.

Link stands up straight. Steam escapes into the dark hallway. Without Yunobo's lantern, she raises
the slate to use it as a source of light. The dim blue light illuminates the space barely in front of her. She walks steadily forward step by step, step by step.

The room opens up into a larger chamber based on the light no longer reflecting from the walls. A terminal gleams orange at the farthest reach of the room. Link picks up her pace, but the Divine Beast would not merely have an empty chamber. Something must lurk in the shadows. Something.

She steps forward into the chamber and something glints on the floor. Link looks down to see: sentry guardians. She jumps back but they do not stir. Squatting by the entrance to the inner chamber, she flashes the slate over the sentries. Asleep. Inert.

If she places her weight on one, the automaton could awaken. Or if she runs across them, they could awaken. If they awaken to any weight whatsoever, then running would get her in and out in safety, but if they awaken only to rapid movement and heavy weight, then crawling or slowly walking would keep her from becoming the sentries' dinner.

Her stomach grumbles and she clicks her tongue at herself.

She grips the slate in her right hand, her left arm still wrapped around her torso. One, two, three—and she sprints.

The guardian sentries whirr to life.

They start to lift up beneath her feet even as she runs over them. The whirring grows to a buzz that fills the entire room and bangs against her eardrums until she—half a metre from the terminal—jumps up with the slate now grasped in both hands and *dunks* it into the face on the terminal. As she falls and her hands slip from the pedestal, she makes out the black crystal becoming soaked in blue words. The sentries directly beneath her lift up to smack into her chest, her abdomen, her legs, her already hurting right side, and only the chaos in the room prevents the sentries from setting her ablaze.

The blue light flicks on and all of the sentries freeze in the air at once, then drop back onto the ground. She flops with them. Their hard round bodies land on her head, her shoulders, her back. Link lets out a groan.

The sentries roll off of her. She lifts herself out of the pile and shakes the remaining ones off of her body.

Link crawls forward to the terminal to wrest the slate free of the face. She rests her forehead against the pedestal to catch her breath.

She's no hero.

Whoever that person was who inhabited this body before she awoke in the Shrine of Resurrection—whoever that hero was that could have borne the destiny of the entire world on her shoulders— whoever that hero was that could have faced the Calamitous One has died.

She lives as a ghost in the shell, a spirit in mortal form, an imposter passing in the skin of a hero. She could never summon the power, nor the wisdom, nor the courage, to do anything befitting of a hero.

All that she may do will lead to disappointment from those who expect a hero.

Link rubs her forehead against the pedestal back and forth. She lowers her eyelids. She has no time to doze off, even though she has slept less than four hours over the past two days since she entered
the northern mine and met Yunobo for the first time, since she decided—out of nowhere, out of the need of someone else, out of having nothing to do—to accompany him, since she decided to subconsciously play hero.

The pedestal.

The last terminal.

Anyone could have done this. Anyone able to move and twist and leap could have gone through her same motions, and possibly come out unscathed if they did not repeat her mistakes.

She could never have completed the Divine Beast on her own. Perhaps if she had brought fireproof armour, or if she thought to stock up on fireproofing paste in Darunia, but her short-sightedness and presumption that she would serve as a courier of the slate and nothing more would have left her dead inside of the Divine Beast if not for Yunobo at her side.

The laughter bubbles up in her throat. At herself. At her situation. At the frailty of life. At her existence from one meal to the next. At the pain in her right side that throbs with every shiver of mirth that trembles her body.

She lets herself rise to a stand. Her hands settle on her stomach as she doubles over in laughter. With slate in hand, Link walks back through the chamber. The terminal grants her access to turn off the flames of steam. She opens the gate, crosses, and closes the gate to activate both sets of fire. Yunobo pelts towards her to squeeze her into a hug that cannot stop her overbearing giddy laughter.

No matter what else, at least they have activated the terminals.

"What now?"

Yunobo itches his jawline. "I d-don't know. M-maybe we should g-get back to that main t-terminal with the four s-statues of the Divine B-beasts. You know, um...w-what were their names?" He holds out a finger for each one. "Vah Ruda-rudania...Vah Medo-medoh...Vah Nabo-Naboris...Vah Ruta-ruta..." He slows his words down; the quivers at the corners of his voice ebb as he strengthens his timbre. "I think that that's the four of them. The Divine Beasts."

The dripping heart.

It must shine now with the holy power mentioned in the minstrel's song. Link nods her head and examines the slate. All seven dots glow blue. The dot in the centre of the seven that activated when she received the map still retains the smaller orange dot within. One more activation at the main terminal.

They return through the maze. Before Yunobo enters, Link gestures towards the end of the maze, where they can bypass the twisting innards entirely and simply go around. Yunobo bounces up and down at her brilliance and she shrugs.

"I can't b-b-believe we did this. It feels like...like a dream c-come true! P-pinch me. Pinch me!" She pinches him. He squeals. "Darunia's been under att-tack for so l-long. I can't believe that th-things were just that...they weren't easy and w-we couldn't have done it without the Champions' slate, but we did it ourselves. W-we did it. We did it, Link. And to think that we only met a few days ago. I f-feel like I've known you forever." She can hear the barely contained sob in his voice, and Link rotates her hands about her wrists in blanking on what to say.

The sight of the main terminal cuts her distress short. She and Yunobo stand before the terminal.
Link offers him the slate.

"W-what?" Yunobo starts to push the slate away; Link holds it in front of her. "No, you're the one who has the Champions' slate. It's only fair that you should activate..." The fingers of his right hand worm into the blue cape. "Are you s-sure?"

She nods.

Yunobo gingerly picks it from her palms. She listens to him struggle to even his breathing. He removes the blue cape to sling it over his shoulder as a sash.

He plants his feet firmly on either side of the terminal. Holding the slate up to the statue of the Divine Beast, its eyes inlaid with rubies, Yunobo intones: "Divine Beast Vah Ruda-rudania...with the b-blessing of the Golden Goddesses, under the p-protection of the Goddess Goro-goro, hear my words. I, Y-yuno—" Yunobo stops, inhales sharply, and speaks with a voice as firm and loud as thunder over the mountains.. "Yunobo, son of Bludo, of Darunia of Eldin, summon You. For the good of the land, of the sea, of the sky; for the good of all of the people beneath the light of the Golden Goddesses; for the good of the future and all that it brings: awaken!"

Yunobo slams the slate into the terminal once more.

At that moment Link lifts her head to look at the heart that should awaken with holy power and sacred light. The heart thumps, pulsates, beat-beat-beats.

*Drip drip drip.*

The insides of the heart thrash and writhe. Link takes a backwards step. Her fingers close around the spear she readies, just in case.

Yunobo is saying something but she cannot make out his words over the roar of blood rushing through her ears.

The heart bursts open. Link whips her beloved metal cooking pot over her head; the liquid splatters over the top and the floor but its wide bottom keeps her dry. Immediately she returns the cooking pot to her back and squints against the light.

Something that dropped onto the peak of the statues. Link steps another step to squint at it. Glistening wetly, the giant mass slides off of the terminal to thud with a splash to the floor.

The gleaming-wet mound does not stir.

Yunobo gasps. "W-what is that?"

She moves towards it. A vaguely round bulk more than twice her height and span. Covered in that ooze that festers throughout the insides of the Divine Beast, the slope of its back rises up and down as though breathing. It rasps.

It lifts itself up. Link's entire frame trembles. Her hands threaten to drop the metal spear; tears gather at the corner of her eyes. She blinks them away.

The whatever-it-is rises up. Ooze slides off of its form. Her eyes widen as its form beneath the violet liquid starts to take shape.

Like a bloated, mutilated blasphemy of a goron's corpse the mountainous monster towers over her. Just beneath the surface of the amber-brown skin of the monster violet ooze pulsates, bulging out
in unnatural undulations under its flesh as though crawling with maggots, the ooze barely contained like it could burst free at any second. An overripe, rotten corpse, its features twisted and expressionless, its eyes gouged out, its mouth overflowing with the same flammable oily substance that spills forth from its maw.

In its loose approximations of fists it carries a massive, ornate variant of the two-handed mining tools she has seen throughout Darunia, decorated with symbols of the gorons. Of a particular family of gorons.

The symbols burn in her mind. In her memory. The day that—not she, but the one who possessed this body before—the day that the goron from her memories let her practise with the weapon, the day that the goron had—

The goron.

The goron who taught her Eldic.

The goron who offered her a home and a family once the Sealing War had ended.

The goron that had piloted the Divine Beast Vah Rudania one hundred years ago, who had fallen during the Great Calamity.

The Champion of Goro-goro.

Daruk.

She raises the spear up. The monster steps towards her. Its foot slams against the floor and she watches the ooze expand and then retract.

It raises the boulder breaker over its head. Slowly the weapon comes crashing down. Link jumps out of the way to the side and thrusts the spear into its leg.

She cannot pull it out again.

The monster swings the boulder breaker in a circular arc, and Link flips backwards. She tries to sprint in again to pull the spear from its leg. When her boot comes in contact with the monster's skin as she braces herself, she can see the ooze eating away at the boot.

She jumps away from it. "Yunobo," she signs. "You can't touch it. Do you hear me!?"

Yunobo has grabbed the slate from the terminal. Lifting it up, he desperately stubs his finger against prods the surface of the slate. "Stasis isn't working!" he yells.

The boulder breaker comes hurtling down. Link rolls to the side. She aims the boomerang which sticks in the monster's neck but does not faze it in any way. The monster rears back its head. She recognises the motion akin to a lizalfos about to breathe fire and sprints backwards. The monster projectile-vomits the seeping oil from its maw after her. Then it rears back again, lifting its arms, and slams the boulder breaker down onto the puddle of liquid it splattered over the floor.

The boulder breaker sparks against the liquid, and the fire blazes.

Link makes a mad dash away to the edge of the puddle and begins to race around it. Her abdomen cramps. She reaches behind her for else that she could use.

"Link, catch!"
She whirls around to see the slate spinning through the air towards her. Link nabs the slate out of the air at the same time as she pulls the handle of the guardian's axe. She swings outwards with the axe; the guardian-blue blade curves into existence with its terrible light.

A weapon that cannot stick itself in the limbs or the head or the torso of the monster taken roots in the remains of someone who once was her—of someone who once was the friend of the person who inhabited this body before her.

Kass's voice rings in her ears.

"To match the monsters spun of Maliced spawn,
"they forged an army of—"

—of automaton. Of guardians.

To fight against the Malice, she needs: weapons that will not get stuck in the malice, but which she can jerk free because they do not exist except in the second of the attack.

Link whips her head around searching for the monster. It finds her: she hears its steady footsteps behind her and spins about, dodging to the left with a hop as it crashes the boulder breaker into the ground. She swings the axe in a wide arc. The light blade slices through the monster's leg and Link jumps backwards as malice spews forth from the wound.

The monster staggers with its leg dismembered, but instead of toppling, it lets the malice form a gelatinous structure on which to support itself. It limps towards her now.

She exhales. She can do this. One hit and she will breathe her last, but until that hit comes—no, if that hit comes, which it won't—she will not fail.

The monster slings the boulder breaker over its shoulders to raise a hand. Its thick fingers lengthen and thin into claws. It opens its palm. She watches from a safe distance as she assesses its abilities.

It slams its claws into the terminal. Something slithers up the palm to ripen and inflate the hand to a ridiculous size, like a bloodsucking insect gorging itself. Its hand grows while Link stares, mouth open, brow knit together, until it rivals the span of the monster itself. With its other hand supporting its elbow, the monster struggles to lift its grotesquely disproportionate hand, the size and shape of one of the projectiles that the Divine Beast shoots from its cannons.

Her eyes widen.

The malice of the hand peels back to reveal a giant, gleaming metal boulder.

Metal.

She fumbles for the slate. The monster swings its arm back. Her sweaty palms slip the slate to the floor and she bends to pick it back up with her heart pounding at her throat. She lifts the slate. The monster begins to arc its arm towards her.

In the window of the slate, the boulder glimmers a brilliant red.

Link magnetises the stone.

The monster's hand sprays against the boulder as the metal suddenly ceases to move. Inhaling—before the monster can realise, if it even has a mind, what has happened—Link lifts the boulder up
and sends it crashing down onto the monster's own head. The skin of the monster's face and upper shoulders rips; malice issues forth from the upper half of its body. Link raises the boulder and tries to slam it down again, but the monster rolls along the ground in a twisted mockery of gorons curling up into balls. It spins towards her and she sprints out of its range. When it wheels again to dash, she keeps her stance first to ready her axe.

Yunobo screams.

She leaps up to swing the axe below.

The axe's blade lights up the violet and carves through the remaining tatters of the monster's nont-flesh. Malice sprays. She lands on her feet in Malice—the hiss of her boots dissolving alerts her—and flips backwards out of the ooze to face the monster. Nearly bisected in two the monster struggles to keep itself together. The malice bulges and collapses into a formless pool with the boulder breaker in the midst of the ooze. Something that almost resembles a mouth rises from the foul violet fluid to spit oil at her, but she rolls nimbly to the side. The mouth curls its lack of lips yet dissipates into the pool prior to spitting again.

She breathes heavily. Her lungs burn; her arms ache; her right side shrieks in agony.

She adjusts her grip on the axe and stares at the Malice. It writhes and pulses, but without the corpse of the goron cannot take shape.

"Link! Get to the staircase! Right now!"

Yunobo screams from across the Divine Beast. Link half-turns and in an instant understands Yunobo's warning: All of the malice that has languished in the innards here and there on the Divine Beast have begun to coalesce into a singular Malice. The malice drips down from the gears, from the ceiling, from any surface, and oozes along the floor as might a mould, a blight upon the land. Whatever happens when all of the Malice comes together, she would rather not witness.

Link stows the axe on her back and makes a break for the stairs. The fight has exhausted her. Her leaden limbs no longer function as she urges them to. She jumps or sidesteps the incoming blobs of Malice. Going around the labyrinth, she rolls towards the stairs. In her fatigue she ascends the stairs on all fours for speed, her hands pushing her forward as much as her feet. The stairs draw long, too long, but she pushes herself up. Yunobo waits for her at the top. When she sees him, he rushes down towards her to pick her up like a doll and carry her up.

As soon as she clears the top, her clothes catch fire. She rips them off of herself to throw them down into the stairs where she can retrieve them later. The belongings strapped to her back—the axe, the paraglider, the cooking pot, nothing that has touched her sweat-dampened bare skin—she keeps on. She has not the time to rid herself of the undershirt before it vanishes into ash against her flesh, but she saves her tunic and trousers. Yunobo ignores her debacle and stammers something out. It takes her a second to pay attention, to resolve what he says.

"C-close it close it close it!" He jabbers the same words over and over. She reaches for the slate and he snatches it out of her hand. He jabs the screen. The panels and the entrance slide shut.

The adrenaline drains from her body; fatigue sets in instead. She closes her eyes and sprints over the ground. The fireproof elixir that she drank before activating the final terminal continues to course through her body and will for several hours. First she considers the damage to her boots. After surviving her traipe over the entirety of the lava-filled Eldin, the flats of the boots have given way from the bite of malice.
She'll have to get new ones. When Glepp and Misan pay the commission for the sapphires, she will storm the market and buy herself a brand new pair of boots. They'll wait for her, of course. They'll wait for her to return so that she can lead them back through Eldin to continue their merry business.

Link promised them that she would protect them from any monsters. Such is the task that she took on. And that includes taking care of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. Just another monster, like any pebblit or chuchu.

She covers her eyes with her arm and lets out a shaky laugh.

Yunobo sets the slate down beside her. Link picks it up but does not yet put the slate into her pouch, instead tossing it between her hands. She glances up at him to find him rocking back and forth.

"What do we do? I d-don't know how long that'll c-contain th-that monster, and I d-don't know if it's going to r-retake Vah Ruda-rudania again." He scratches both sides of his jaw with two hands in his desperation. "At least we know wh-why the Divine Beast g-got like this, right...? Th-that monster must've..." He presses his palms into his face to leave imprints of his rock-like nails in his skin. "...oh, L-lord Daru-daruk. Oh Goddess, no."

The name alone shudders Link into action: "We could sink it," she interjects. "Sink it into the lava."

Yunobo grasps the sides of his head with his hands. "But wouldn't that b-break all of V-vah Ruda-rudania?"

"Better to break it than to put the city at risk."

"But She was s-sent to us by the Goddess. Th-there's got to be a w-way to put H-her back together, right? There's g-got to be something that we can d-do."

Link lifts her hands but Yunobo has not finished.

"W-we could come back with an entire army. We could c-c-come back with all of the gorons in Eldin. We c-could..."

"I don't want to put anyone else in harm's way." Link pauses. The words came out so suddenly that she scarcely needed to force herself. "You can leave if you want. But I don't want anyone else to suffer because of something that I did. I don't want to burden anyone else."

Yunobo inclines his head. "I...I just d-don't—"

The terminal on the back of the Divine Beast blazes purple.

It swells up, and up, and up. The black crystal fills with violet. And then the tip bursts into a fountain of malice that spouts outwards. The terminal itself fragments and breaks; malice coats the shards, animating them. It swirls in the air to once more take form.

No longer a shambling corpse of a goron that once carried the sun in his smile, but a mass of hate and malice, a blight in the truest sense of the word, holding the pieces of the shattered terminal like armour around its vile violet innards, and a flare of fire from something approximating—she cannot say a head for the Malice has no head, no discernible features, nothing that would mark it human or even a living being in any sense of the word—and somewhere from four to eight spindly limbs that form and break and reform as it scuttles with surprising speed towards them. From the black crystal, the Malice incarnate fashions the blade of an axe, so much sharper and so much more
terrible than the heavy boulder breaker that Daruk had used for his daily work in the mines, corrupted and perverted into a weapon of war by necessity. The axe of the terminal and the Malice craves no purpose but war and carves nothing but blood and death.

The slate fumbles from her grip. Link jerks the guardian's axe from her back. The Malice rushes her with the axe. She tries to jump then attack as before, but this time the Malice's swings—no longer burdened by its corporeal form—come much quicker. Link spins around. Her beloved cooking pot takes the brunt of the blow. She feels it fracture if not break.

The cooking pot.

The cooking pot that has been by her side since nearly the moment that she woke from the Shrine of Resurrection.

Link rounds on the Malice. Yet she cannot let the cooking pot's injury cloud her judgment. While the Malice leaps back and prepares to rush her again, she flicks her gaze towards Yunobo.

She yells wordlessly for his attention. He stares at her, eyes wide.

"Grab the slate!" she signs as fast as her arms will move. "Use the cannons! Use the cannons against it!"

Yunobo's pupils swallow his irises whole. He breaks into a roll and dashes for the slate. She hears the panels open, feels the vibrations of the Divine Beast drilling its head into the ground.

She focuses on drawing the Malice's attention.

It rushes her again. She sprints out of the way, horizontally this time, and watches as the Malice skitters to a halt at the edge of the Divine Beast. If she can lure it out, then she might slide in an attack.

Yunobo screams at her from the sidelines. "Cannons charging up! P-please be careful, Link!"

Link focuses. The Malice does not merely charge at her, but instead scuttles back and forth on a zigzag. Link rolls forward between its legs. It tries to slam into the ground on top of her but she rolls out too quickly. She hears the cannon explode.

The projectile—the ball of molten rock and steel dredged up from the heart of Death Mountain—soars into the Malice. It does not make a sound but for the foul squelch of Malice spurting out from the opened segment of armour.

The terminal armour around its core breaks into pieces. Bits fall to the ground in fragments. Much of the armour. Yet she can see that the Malice will not withstand an eternal barrage.

The Malice grabs the cannon's projectile in maliced limbs and spins it about to throw the projectile at Link. Sidestepping easily, she readies her axe.

They continue their dance. Each time its attacks become more difficult to avoid as it learns her patterns and as she becomes more fatigued. As long as she feints attacks, she keeps the Malice's attention on her and not on Yunobo, who cowers near the head to perform the much more important function of aiming and firing the cannons.

Another direct hit nearly knocks the Malice from the Divine Beast entirely. More of its armour fragments off. As Link twirls the axe in front of its face, the Malice roils. It spews forth flammable oily liquid, farther than before. The fluid sprays against Link's lower legs. The oil stings, burns,
and Link yelps and leaps back to shake the oil from her skin.

Fire blazes from the Malice's body. Its entire form ignites along with the oil, and she realises that—even though the Malice moves more slowly than her on foot—the Malice slides along the oil much faster than she could run. Bleeding fluid more from its injured mass, the Malice shortens its own life to ensure that she burns.

Like any of the monsters she has faced that never value their own life but instead attack, attack, attack until spent, to wreak as much chaos as their short lives allow, the Malice will use its own wounds to murder.

The gap between Link and the Malice closes. When Link tries to change direction, the Malice merely glides on the oil to cut her off. Every muscle in her body quakes. Her tendons tauten. Her legs shiver on the verge of giving out entirely.

Another projectile from the cannon smashes into the Malice. Slamming it off-balance, the projectile grants Link a scant few seconds in which to run. She glances up the length of the entire Divine Beast. Her leaden limbs carry her slowly, too slowly.

She cannot keep this up forever. The battle needs to end. Soon. Now.

"Tilt it!" Link signs with motions as wide as she can. "Tilt the Divine Beast down! Get ready!"

Yunobo screams back a what!? yet the Divine Beast starts to angle itself vertically. Link feels herself sliding downwards. She waits for the Malice to pick itself back up and fling the projectile at her. Instead the projectile rolls away from the Malice as gravity takes hold. The oil dribbles towards the sea of magma in the caldera below; Link flings herself down in advance of the fluid's path.

Either this works, or she burns.

The Malice skates towards her on the oil. She turns her head to observe it over her shoulder as the Malice picks up speed. Once more the gap closes at an alarming rate, aided further by the downwards tilt of the Divine Beast. The Malice cocks its arm back to swing towards her. She throws herself to the ground and the Malice vomits out its own guts to spread the oil more quickly down the Divine Beast's back. Oh-so-soon the front of the flammable fluid will reach her. The Divine Beast continues to tilt. It passes the halfway point.

Her feet lift from the ground.

She opens the paraglider.

Shoving the guardian's axe onto her back, she close her hands around the fireproofed wooden struts.

Her right side throbs in pain but she does not let go. Her arms flare in agony but she does not let go. The Malice starts to arc its axe towards her. Link snaps her legs towards her torso; the axe carves through empty air. The Malice slides under her and out of reach. She watches the Malice attempt to skate up towards her.

Yet the Divine Beast has gone nearly vertical, and gravity takes the Malice down.

The Malice clings to the very edge of the Divine Beast, to the slightly raised rim that runs at the back where the Divine Beast transitions into the tail. Link hooks her right arm through both supports of the paraglider and grips the guardian's axe with her left hand.
She has one shot.

Link aims, patiently letting herself glide downwards, and waits until she floats just above the Malice. If she merely throws it, the axe-blade might not spring into existence: only when she swings does the blade emerge. Twirling the axe in her wrist, she hurls it towards the Malice with a twist as though spinning a flatbread dough. As the axe whirls through the air, the fire-light blade shimmers to life.

The axe cleaves the Malice's limbs in two.

Unable to hold on, the Malice—

—falls.

She dares neither blink nor breathe as the Malice descends, not until she sees with her own eyes that the Malice plunges beneath the magma of the heart of Death Mountain.

The Divine Beast begins to tilt back. At the same time it crawls downwards on Death Mountain, moving more quickly than her glide descends. She drifts aloft on the updraft from the burning oil ignited by the Malice until her feet touch down on the dry ground.

Her legs collapse beneath her.

She curls up on the ground with the paraglider as a blanket. When the adrenaline drains this time, the exhaustion sets in that much faster. Yunobo approaches to return the slate to her, to ask if she feels well, to inquire if he could carry her again.

Link wobbles back to her feet.

Barely hanging on to the edge of consciousness, she opens the entrance to retrieve her clothing and dress herself again. Yunobo rolls down to the main terminal; she glides. The Malice has vanished under the magma of the Death Mountain crater.

All that lies left on the ground: the boulder breaker, and a slate much like Link's.

Link sways back and forth. Yunobo falls to his knees to collect the boulder breaker and the slate. "Th-this...this is Lord Daru-daruk's Champions' slate...right?" he murmurs, more to himself than to Link, who fights against the darkness seeping into the corners of her vision. "...Vah Ruda-rudania needs a new Champion."

"Yuno-yunobo," she signs, her head light, her lungs aflame, her mouth wet with the taste of iron.

He shakes his head. "Huh? Me? I...I can't. P-papa's always said I'm n-not...r-ready for..." Link blinks blearily at him. "...a-and there are so m-m-many others who could genuinely be h-heroes, and I'm just..."

"...you're 'just' the one who freed the Divine Beast from the Malice that killed Daruk," she finishes, her fingers sluggish. The bluntness of her words recoils Yunobo back and squelches in her own innards like she had clawed her fingers through her guts. One hundred years. Daruk, dead. "It's up to you, you...know...but if you ask me...there's no one...better..." Her arms limp to her sides.

"D-do you think Papa w-will be proud of me?"

Link tries to nod but her head lolls drowsily to the side. Her eyelids droop. Her breathing slows.
"Link. You've done so much." She feels firmness under her shoulder and her hips, feels the warm bulk at her side, feels his gossamer touch all around her, lulling her to rest.

"I'm going—" She senses his chest rise and fall against hers. "I'm going to get you back, I promise. You just take it easy."

She nods drowsily. Fatigue lowers her eyelids.

Daruk.

She remembers his favourite dish. Rock roast. Deliciously grilled rock roast, he called it, and once he had taught her the recipe for the first time, she grilled a dish of it for him every day that she stayed in Darunia. An unspoken payment for his kindness.

Every time she brought him the deliciously grilled rock roast, he thanked her and told her, over and over, that she need not feel pressured to 'make up for' anything that he did for her, anything that he gave to her, anything that he offered her.

"I want to be your friend, li'l buddy," he explained again and again. "The only payment I ever want to see is a smile. And I mean a genuine one, li'l buddy."

"...why?"

"Because I like you. You ever had someone say that to you? Well you're 'bout to hear it again. Because I like you, Link. You're a good lass." His features open and genuine. "If I could have a daughter I'd want 'er to be just as selfless, just as resilient, just as courageous as you are."

She said nothing.

"You grill a mighty fine rock roast and Goddesses know I won't turn my nose up at a good meal. And Link, you know as well as I that you are, indeed, the Champion of Hylia, Hero of Hyrule, Her Majesty's Knight, O Courageous Link—" His timbre reverently cradled every word. "—as I am the Champion of Goro-goro, Hero of Eldin, Divine Beast Vah Rudania's Pilot, O Powerful Daruk, but that does not mean that I am not also Daruk, son, brother, father, miner by trade. That the Goddesses have blessed me in this Sealing War does not discard that which I am, nor does it that which you are, as the diamond in ore or in jewel remains a diamond."

He sighed as Link remained silent.

"You have said little about your life before the Blade of Evil's Bane chose you. You keep it all inside, like if you wagged your tongue for a second all the evils in the world would come rushing out."

She said nothing still.

Daruk propped his chin up in his hand. "Who were you? A courier, I've heard. What friends did you have? Urbosa's told me a little, sure, but I want to hear it straight from the ostrich's mouth. I would delight in meeting them, Link. Any friend of yours is already a friend of mine. Like a friend of the family, you know."

"...they won't get in trouble? Th-they won't...be used...to..." Her hands twitched as the shudder up her spine spasmed her otherwise vacantly neutral pose. "Impa said that..." Her arms fell limply to her sides. "...that if I waste time again—" The words spill into one another in the fog, and Link can just faintly recall at the edges of her memory a phrase that iced her veins despite the overwhelming Eldic heat: your charge.
"Trouble?" Daruk stared at her before bursting into laughter. "No, no. His Highness isn't that cruel, either, whatever Impa might've scared you with. The li'l bird's safe in the Castle. And if anyone's threatening your friends, I'll—" He punched his left palm with his right fist. "—them myself. You got that? No one hurts my family without going through me."

Link's fingers curled into her palms. Daruk loosened his fist to settle his hand on her shoulder instead. She flinched at the brush of his thumb against her neck and he drew his arm back.

"Li'l buddy, I just want to know what kind of gal you are. I want to be your friend because I want to be your friend, not because we've been swept together by fate. And when it comes to taking down the big bad boar—" Once more he punched his left palm with his right fist. "—I'll be there all the way for you, li'l buddy. You've got my protection to the last. That's what family's for."

Family.

On the final day of her time in Eldin, she brought him the same deliciously grilled rock roast, but this time she left out the goron spice, left out the little tips and tricks that she had used over the past weeks, left out what made her cooking her cooking.

She told him that she had made a surprise. That she had poured her heart and soul into this rock roast. He had raised his brow at that.

He bit down. She watched him chew. She watched him grimace.

"Whoa there, li'l buddy, what is this?" He listed off her efforts: the blandness, the off-timing of the grill, the overall inadequacy of the meal, and then turned to her. "You feeling well, li'l buddy?"

Without another word, she hugged him.

"You've been telling the truth," she said and left it at that. They went to the kitchen together to prepare a deliciously grilled rock roast. Together. Family. She can still recall the aroma of the black stone melting to liquid gold. She can still remember the gentle strength of his hand patting her shoulder. She can still hear his voice, saying her name, brimming with pride.

Pride.

Daruk had cared for her.

No, not for her.

He had cared for that other Link, that other Link who could be the hero, that other Link that died in the Shrine of Resurrection.

She wonders.

She wonders if he would have cared for her, too.

—

Deliciously Grilled Rock Roast (zero hearts) - rock roast

Chapter End Notes

Author's notes: I like writing adventure! And I like writing figuring out puzzles. I changed up the interior of the Divine Beast for two main reasons: (1) you can't replay them once you've cleared them, and I didn't want to delete my previous save file, so I was worried I would get minor details wrong, and (2) in Breath of the Wild, the interiors of the Divine Beasts feel very "gamey" in the sense that they were clearly made for the purposes of being, well, a video game. I think that works great because the Divine Beasts are among the best "dungeons" that the franchise has ever had to offer with how many different ways you can solve the puzzles therein! That said, that works a little bit less well in the scope of a fic that aims to be a touch less "gamey" about things. Rather than unlock all of the movement of Vah Rudania at once, I made each terminal grant use of a different part of the Divine Beast.

The malice "eats away" things that it touches. It's how when matter and antimatter come in contact with one another, both are destroyed. So, as the malice "eats away" things, the malice itself goes away. A pool of malice exposed to the air will eventually go away by itself as it eats away at the air.

I thought about how the guardians were intentionally made ten thousand years ago to fight off the malice. So, (1) they're made of material resistant to being eaten away by the malice, and (2) their weapons can't get stuck or eaten away by the malice, but instead will temporarily make a blade out of energy to injure the malice. Since the malice eats away anything it touches, you need to attack the malice with a weapon capable of forming and re-forming the blade over and over again. That's precisely what the ancient/guardian weapons do in Breath of the Wild. As for where the weapons—and the guardians!—draw their energy, I'll cover that in a later chapter.

I really wanted to make the Blights a big deal to fight. They don't have an HP bar and can't be killed through normal means. You have to destroy all of it at once or it'll regenerate, hence them dunking Fireblight Ganon in magma (which is inside the volcano, hence magma, not lava).

My sincerest apologies to Link for making her fight in the nude. That's what happens when you don't re-apply your fireproofing paste! Since the inside of Vah Rudania was cool, the sweat didn't instantly evaporate from her skin, but washed away the paste on the inside of her clothing. Readers, please don't make it weird.

Deliciously grilled rock roast is something that you can indeed cook in Breath of the Wild, as seen in the side-quest "A Brother's Roast." Rock roast has also been known as rock sirloin in previous Zelda games such as Majora's Mask and Twilight Princess. If you're confused, Link was worried that Daruk had been lying to her about all of the family business, so she devised a "test" for him by purposefully making him a crappy rock roast. Fortunately, he was honest to her about her cooking, so she realised that she could trust him.

It's been mentioned in the fic before, but Link flinching away from people touching her neck...hmm.

We don't see that much of Daruk's relationship with Link in-game except that Daruk's protective of Link, so I gave my own spin on it.

Yunobo actually gets to become a Vah Rudania's pilot! That's right. No ghosts hanging around. This is just the first major difference between game and fic.
A round of applause to my beta reader Emma for making sure that I don't fuck up the original pace of the fic with unnecessary additions during revision. Thank you so much, Emma! And a round towards you, the reader, for sticking it through.

midna's ass. 10 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This chapter was the moment I fell in love with Delicious in Wilds. The length, the pacing, the clever solutions, the fight scene, the desperation, the ending. It all works so well.

Every time Link clears a Divine Beast in this series - and I hope this isn't a spoiler - every time, there's this amazing feeling of catharsis, as she gets to just pass out. It's a really great feeling.

This is probably my favourite ending line to a chapter in the whole series, and that line is easily one of the best in the whole thing, as far as I'm concerned.

This series really conveys the joy of figuring out the Divine Beasts in Breath of the Wild, putting its own little spin on them as it does. It makes these chapters really fun to read.

Emma. 10 September 2017.
Steamed Fruit

Chapter Summary

Awakening in an inn and receiving a farewell letter from the new pilot of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, the travelling chef reunites with the merchants and begins the journey out of Eldin to return to Kakariko and fulfil the task given to the chef by the wise matriarch. Along the way, the chef experiences a disturbing and vivid memory of the chef's childhood.

Chapter Notes

A big thank-you to every kudos, comment, bookmark, and view that Delicious in Wilds has received so far. With this, I've officially posted one-fifth of the chapters, and we've just hit 100,000 words on the FFN cross-posted version of Delicious in Wilds. Thank you for all of your support, and I hope that you continue to enjoy the journey.

This chapter features implications of abusive parents, although the abuse is not shown "on-screen" so to speak. Please be careful in reading.

See the end of the chapter for more notes


Falling.

Her eyelids flutter. A blue coolness caresses her cheeks. Her fingers twitch. Her toes. She tenses and relaxes each muscle in turn. Her neck and right shoulder blade ache from her sleeping position. Gingerly she slides her hand over her right side. The skin twinges with the bruise, and she can sense a slight discomfort when she breathes in too deeply, but no longer does the injury keep her down.

The Divine Beast Vah Rudania. Not a dream, nor a shadow of a memory.

She lies on a pillow, on a mattress, with a blanket over her. Steadily she opens her eyes to find herself gazing at a sapphire ceiling. She draws herself upwards into a sitting position. Her head pounds. Her parched throat and dry lips bring her to sweep the room with her gaze. All inlaid with sapphire, with some odd tapestries or paintings of sunrises and mountain views along the walls. Atop a stone stand by the left side of her bed she sees neatly folded clothing—some hers, some that she does not recognise—and a large jug of water beside a small cup.

Link pulls the blanket off of her to sit on the side of the bed. Her hands close around the base. The muscles of her arms strain as she lifts the entire jug. The rim of the jug proves too thick for her to put her mouth around comfortably but she perseveres. Water splashes over her face and onto her chest. She drains water like she had not taken a drink in years. The water cools her mouth, rejuvenates her tongue, smooths her throat, and rids her of the taste of sand and mud. Her stomach complains with its fullness. Eventually she sets the jug down, half-empty, and lies back on the bed.
She sleeps.

She awakens again to drink the remainder of the water, then slips into slumber yet again.

Upon the third awakening, she dresses herself. She sorts through the clothing left for her: her trousers and tunic, albeit patched up in places; a new undershirt and undergarments, to substitute for those that must have burned up; her old boots, but with the heels replaced and the outside buffed to shininess.

On the floor she notices a set of fireproof armour in sky blue: metal barrels with sapphires along the inner walls. She takes a chance to try the armour on over her non-fireproof clothes. She paces back and forth, leaps up and down, twirls around, attempts a flip that bumps her into the wall. The heaviness restricts her movements to some degree; in particular the heavy metal presses down on her shoulders. Raising her arms takes significantly more effort than without. Yet she would consider the armour manageable, and it undoubtedly would protect her from monsters better than a simple cloth tunic.

Her satchel, the paraglider, and the cooking pot await her. She turns the cooking pot over to see that the entire bottom has been reinforced with a new plate of metal. Glancing inside from the top, she notes the cracks in the bottom that have been carefully filled in, the newer metal of the same material as the old, but less scratched and worn so that she can clearly see the repairs.

She hugs the cooking pot to thank it for saving her life in more ways than she could recount.

She takes stock of her body. She clips her blue earrings back in her place. She ties her hair into a ponytail with the blue hairband that leaves a red mark around her wrist. She straps the cooking pot to her back. And then Link touches her hand to her chest.

When she exits the room, Link stands in a long hallway of similar doors. The welcome mat beneath her feet greets her to room 2-B in a few languages, most of which she cannot read, but the Central Hyrulean at the bottom comes easily enough to her. Another language below that seems more familiar to her, even if she can't quite name the curve of the characters. Shrugging, Link walks down the hallway of the inn, descends a short flight of stairs, and enters the reception area. The same theme of sunrise runs throughout.

Or sunset, now that she considers the decals of the sun halfway on the horizon.

The elderly goron seated behind the counter waves to her. "$Lin\text{-}link?" She nods. "$Wonderful. Just wait here a moment," he signs, pointing her to one of the chairs in the lobby. She takes a seat. A few other guests lounge about the varying tables and couches. A pair of gerudo women—one wearing a long red and yellow dress and the other a rider's outfit—play some sort of game over a checkered board. A brown-feathered rito peruses a book. Another rito snores loudly beside a nervous-looking and rather pallid sheikah man. A red-haired woman with pointed ears and a particularly large hat that reminds Link of a tiered cake chats animatedly to her goron companion, whose round spectacles offset his hawkish eyes.

Link waits patiently. The elderly inkeep passes along a message to another goron, who nods sagely and disappears into the back. He emerges again with an envelope, which the inkeep passes on to Link.

On paper rather than on metal. Link raises her eyebrows to see symbols of Central Hyrulean on paper in the midst of Darunia. The back of the envelope merely reads to Link, with a small sketch of a smile inked next to her name. She opens the envelope with the knife and unfolds a letter worn and creased over, though new enough that the pages remain crisp.
Link,

Thank you for everything that you've done for Eldin, for Darunia, and for me.

A letter from Yunobo. She reads further. His voice differs in word than in speech. He describes bringing her back to Darunia, putting her up at the Rollin' Inn—the name makes her laugh—and patching up her cooking pot and her clothing as he promised, on top of replacing that which she lost. He insists that she not worry at all about paying him back, because all of this is the least that I can do in return. Yunobo—or whoever wrote the letter—has circled and underlined the least repeatedly. She reads on.

On her request he has agreed to keep all that happened a secret. He fears lying, but he will do anything to protect her. No one knows yet, except for the Council of Elders, that Yunobo has done that thing. Once the Elders understand the implications for the city as a whole, they will announce the goings-on to the world.

The thought both excites and worries him. Several weeks ago he had just begun his apprenticeship as a miner as his forefathers before him, and now he may become that sort of person, you know?

Link reads on: his father scolded Yunobo upon his return to his home. His father, Yunobo explains, does not know yet where Yunobo has been, and the Elders whisked Yunobo anyway, but when Papa finds out, he'll be proud of me, right? You said you thought he would. I trust your judgment, Link!

She rubs the back of her head.

Yunobo asks Link to come back once she has finished her travels, once she has completed the task she mentioned to him for Lady Impa, and that he will always welcome her to the city. Perhaps, Yunobo offers, next time she comes, he could introduce her to his father, and we could make rock roast or ruby pie together.

That waters her mouth.

I know in my heart that the Goddesses brought us together. Though we have known one another for such a short time, the Goddesses would not err. Someday we will see one another once more. I don't know when, but someday.

Take care of yourself, and thank you again, for everything. May the fires of creation ever warm your forge.

Your friend,

Yunobo

Postscript. I don't know if you can read Eldic, so a translator transcribed this for me. I hope that it's legible and that my feelings can carry through to reach you.

Another postscript. I know that I have left some things vague, but I hope that you can understand why.

A third postscript. I hope to see you again soon. I can't go see you at the inn right now to avoid suspicion that you helped me, and because the Elders want me in their council. Someday, the Goddesses will bring us together again. Thank you, my friend Link...

She folds the letter up and tucks it into her satchel. Thanking the innkeep, she asks for the bill, but
the elderly goron informs her that someone has already paid.

When she steps out into Darunia, the city itself has grown livelier and lovelier all at once. Even if citizens and visitors to the crown ruby of Eldin do not yet know the truth of their own safety from the rampage of the Divine Beast, she cannot help but close her eyes and lean forward on the railing of the nearest bridge to let the warm air kiss her skin.

They can rebuild the bridges, can mend and renew. The time of hiding in fear has come to pass. She need not take on a hero's mantle.

In the marketplace down in the lower levels of Darunia, she finds Misan and Glepp's sapphire wagon. They bid her welcome. Her commission comes out to a tidy sum: more rupees than she has seen in one place in her entire life, and more rupees than she even knows how to carry back. When Misan offers her a timeliness bonus, Link shakes her head and crosses her arms over her chest to decline the gift. If anything, Link asks if she can take a smaller commission, lest she overburden herself on the road.

Misan claps her hands together. "I see someone's been busy cookin' herself up some new armour!" Link shrugs. Glepp notes that they will head out on the morrow and that Link should spend the rest of the day enjoying the city as she has before.

"Glepp thought you'd run off," Misan signs, winking at Link, "but, aw, I just couldn't see you doing that."

Glepp says little, yet Link can spot a glint—of gratitude?—in her eyes.

And a glint of something else that Link cannot place.

With the hours she has in Darunia, she makes a few purchases—namely fireproofing paste—and browses the possibility of adding chain mail to her arsenal. She shops for swords to replace the weapons that she has lost, as well as bows, but none catches her eye. At last she does sell the monster parts that have ripened the satchel. She delights in the merchants beaming at her for the quality of her wares. Once or twice the crowd presses in on her too tight—voices too loud, bodies too warm—and she breaks away to climb to the less populated heights, to take a moment to breathe in the wind, to quell the rapid thunder of her heart.

Every time she glides back down, for she has a mission to her mouth and a destination in her stomach. And then, here, at the end of her road, Link stands in front of the quarter of the marketplace dedicated to food.

She tries everything that she can. She stocks up on so many ingredients that she purchases a box specifically segmented for easy travelling, carrying and sorting, as chefs might bring them with them, and a metal lid for the cooking pot to go along with the wooden one she already has. She takes a respite away from the masses. Then she returns to trying everything, more of street food than restaurants, to understand what makes Darunia Darunia.

Eventually her belly fills. Though the city shines with a thousand lights, the wilds call her name. Once more Link climbs to the upper levels of Darunia to set off. Lizalfos bathe in the midmorning sun of the pillars leading up to the northern mine. Link glides down to the surfaces and sneaks about. She steals one of their metal spears and a forked boomerang. A pyrup wearing a hard shell catches her on the way out and attempts to scorch her into a snack, but she dispatches the monster with a circular bomb rolled into the hole in its shell.

She carries on.
On the other side of Death Mountain she spots a shrine which has apparently become the sacred training ground for a trio of gorons, who scoff at her attempts to access the shrine. They tell her to overcome their challenge of climbing the entire rock face if she considers herself worthy of even existing upon the Platform of Champions. Raising her eyebrows, she simply nods at their request.

When she scales the final few metres and stands atop the cliff, the gorons ogle her. The leader of the trio grants her the platform, calling her a true goron, to which she bows her head and thanks them. Link slots the slate into the face of the pedestal.

The gorons leap backwards at the shrine bursting into blue light. "It's a whole new future for the brothers!" one cries, pumping his fist and flexing. "We've levelled up!"

Link enters the shrine; the gorons jumble into the lift with her. Squished together they slide down in the tiny chamber. Someone's elbow ends up in her face; another goron's knee against her spine. "If this doesn't let up soon," the eldest of the trio grumbles, "we'll end up metamorphic for sure."

The curtain lifts. The gorons and Link fall out. Link shakes her head. The shrine has no puzzle but instead delivers her directly to the goalpoint: she looks at instructions in the language that she cannot comprehend. The instructions speak of the climbing of cliffs, of how to properly select footholds, of pieces of equipment or clothing that she has never seen before. She turns to leave.

The gorons crowd around the images that flash. One of them squeezes her into an embrace for showing them the wonders of the shrine that they have protected all these years; another calls her a messenger of the cliff-climbing spirits.

She laughs and rubs the back of her head, giving them a modest smile in return.

As the sun begins to dip, she glides and climbs back towards Darunia. She passes the Bridge of Eldin again. Here she notes a shrine that she must have previously missed, for the orange and brown of the shrine on the orange and brown of the Eldic ground; the first time that she walked across the bridge she had preoccupied herself with escorting Yunobo, with the Divine Beast's imminent attack. Now she takes her time.

The shrine challenges her mastery of flight and wind. She soars around a pillar. The instructions, as expected, regard vertical flight and the use of updrafts, but once more the more advanced techniques—the ones that she might have wanted to learn—pass her by without imparting their meaning.

The skies have melted into liquid gold of just after noon. A cavern serves as a place to rest, though when she enters, she meets a goron collapsed with a mining pick still in his hand.

She kneels down beside him to shake his shoulders. The goron rasps for her to come closer. She dips her head towards him; his hands shiver and she feels her mouth dry.

"P...please...please..."

"What is it?" she signs, her blood curdling in her veins.

"Please...if I don't get it...I'll die for sure..."

Link's breathing quickens. "I'll do it! Just tell me what it is!"

"I..." The goron's eyes close and he droops. Link's gasp catches in her throat. "...please...get me..." She leans in. "...get me..." She leans in further. "...a rock roast, or I can't go on..."
She sits up straight. Her fingers curl into fists at the indignity, at the unfairness, at the injustice in the world. Tears stream from her eyes only to immediately evaporate.

For a fellow lover of food she would risk her life and then some.

Link sets out to nab her hands on the most delicious rock ore that she can find. Another goron, understanding the plight of a goron without his rock roast, mobilises to assist her. Together they drag the juiciest, most metal-y, most rock-y roast-y rock roast in the vicinity to the tunnel.

While the other goron massages his fallen brother, she uses up the last of her goron spice and salt to grill the roast in her beloved cooking pot.

Deliciously grilled rock roast, just as Daruk had liked it.

The smell alone brings the fallen goron back to life. Link flips the rock roast out of the pot and the goron catches it out of the air.

He bites in, swallows, and roars. "This...this is the greatest rock roast I've ever had!" The second goron asks for a sample. The two dig in voraciously while Link, rubbing the back of her head, ducks down and blushes at their praise.

The goron who had fallen jumps up. He sweeps an arm towards the wall at the end of the tunnel to declare what he has been mining out for the past several weeks in anticipation of the Divine Beast. "The treasure of the hero," he calls it. Link tilts her head to one side. "Yeeeppp. This right 'ere? S'where the old hero buried his treasure! Or that's what I've heard. S'not like anyone listens to a kid like me, but—hey, tell ya what. You believe me, don't you?"

She nods.

"Since you rejuvenated me with that rock roast, I'll split it with ya fifty-fifty." He glances at the second goron. "Forty-thirty-thirty." The second goron flashes him a thumbs-up. "Don't move!" The goron flexes his bulging muscles and whirls up the pick again. "I could mine through a hundred mountains with this baby! Yow! Oooohh yeah!"

The goron rolls forward towards the end of the tunnel. His arms spin like a windmill gone mad. Standing back with wide eyes she watches shards of rock fly off every time he strikes. From the cracks in the stone filters orange light.

A vein of magma?

No—a shrine.

Grabbing the drillshaft leaning against the wall she takes it to the wall to aid him. The second goron, yelling at his own lack of self-control, takes his fists to the wall.

Stone flies out. The wall breaks down into bits. And there—there—yes, there lies the shrine.

With a grin that she couldn't wipe off her face if she tried, she slams the slate into the face of the pedestal. The second goron, paling at the sudden blue light, quickly makes an excuse of having to feed his house or clean his pet pigeon and rolls out, leaving the miner and Link to descend into the earth.

The hero's treasure comes in the form of a hill covered in the rarest of gems. Link and the goron exchange glances with the lustre of jewels reflected in their eyes. She allows the goron to collect the majority.
Then she notices the barrels crashing down the slope of the hill.

Yelping at the goron for his attention, Link uses magnesis and stasis to cover them throughout their journey up. She slumps down to her legs at the top to pant at the instructions that seems to suggest she never take the gems, for the difficulty of carrying them alongside escaping the hill.

The goron exits the shrine with his arms laden and every available pocket absolutely stuffed to the grim with jewels. He thanks Link over and over.

She beams and thanks him for the opportunity to make a delicious roast.

At long last she approaches the city. A young goron wandering around the hot springs just outside of the city limits spots her and demand her to join in on their team of tag; they need one more player. Grinning, she sets her belongings down to join in their game. They roll about at higher speeds than she can run, yet she outsmarts them as they cannot see their paths forward while rolling.

After rounds of tags that tucker them out, the children pester her about the world outside of Darunia. She seats herself cross-legged on the shore of the hot springs. They crowd around her with a million questions. She tells them about her horse, Ilia. She tells them about the stalking guardians that nearly fried her rear. She tells them about Hateno, about Kasuto, about Kakariko. She tells them about the bokoblins wearing furs in the ruins of the mountains on the Great Plateau and about surfing down the snow. She tells them about snow, of ice and cold. She tells them about how she ended up arrested for a night in Hateno. The children ask question after question and her hands cannot move quickly enough to answer but she tries her best to keep up with their curiosity.

As evening falls the children’s parents come to find them. The children introduce their newfound friend with the eagerness that only children can. With the utmost awe and respect in his voice, one of them gestures wildly to Link and crows out: "And she got arrested once!"

The parent gorons stare at her. She laughs nervously and takes the opportunity to make her escape.

She arrives at the sapphire wagon with the cover of night. When she crawls onto the mat that Glepp and Misan set out for her, she falls asleep in the span of a few seconds.

The morning after, Misan and Glepp set back out. Perhaps the Divine Beast's quelling and new Champion have cleansed the land, for the monsters bother them significantly less frequently, only once or twice every of handful of hours. Misan jokes that Link must have cleared them out so efficiently that she has become a one-woman army to eradicate the threat of malice.

She smiles humbly at them, undeserving of their words.

They pass by Eldic villages over their month-long trip. In Zubora, she stops to say hello to Blaryd, who shows her his progress in selecting the perfect ore from which to craft a son. With Misan and Glepp's allowance at a night's stay, Link cooks dinner for gorons and non-gorons alike in the form of meat balls with curry and another deliciously grilled rock roast. The happiness of everyone at the table chowing down on food, the stories that they tell one another, the grins that they share, the communion of mind and hearts through the aroma and deliciousness of food—for that and for that alone does she live another day.

By the time they arrive in the foothills of Eldin, the heat of summer has started to give way to the coolness of the coming autumn. The smells of the approaching harvest lull Link into a sense of security. In Medigo she says her farewell to Glepp and Misan—and leaves with them her fireproof armor for lack of ability to carry it with her—who go west while she goes south to Kakariko, and
thanks them for everything that they've done for her. Misan embraces her in return, in a hug with far too much hair for her to breathe. Glepp pats her on the shoulder.

Only when the sapphire wagon has set off does Link realise that one of them slipped an entire golden rupee into her satchel.

She tears her way to the stable and nearly runs down Gaile in her haste to see Ilia again. Shaking her head, Gaile reminds her that the stabling fee carries no refund, and Link has the rest of the month in which to stable Ilia if she so chooses. Link cuts her off from the details.

"I'll be out of your hair. I have no idea if I'll ever even come back here. Please, let me see my horse."

Gaile lets Ilia out and Link's mouth hurts from the size of her smile at the gentle eyes of her horse. She strokes Ilia's face and neck as Ilia whinnies at her and noses her cheek.

Link rests her forehead against Ilia's. Closing her eyes, she writes a promise into Ilia's shoulder to never stable her again for so long if she can help it.

"If you're done," Gaile says, her tone unaffected, "I'll ask you to stop taking up the hallway."

She leads Ilia outside to the grassier areas south of Medigo, stopping briefly to stock up on fresh fruits that she has lacked in her time in Eldin. The ripeness of those sold in the marketplace could not match those she picks by hand, but after a drought the slightest drop of water more resembles an ocean.

The rocky path gives way to green. The coolness of the breeze in her hair and the warmth of her skin, the freshness of the grass and the scent of life on the late-summer wind. She lets Ilia go where she pleases to stretch her legs, and for Link to remember how to ride, how to soothe her, how to work the bridle.

When the sun paints the steppes gold, Link finds herself and Ilia shelter beneath a tree, its boughs spread out as the arms of one praising the Goddesses. To share a meal with her horse she foregoes meat. Instead she collects water from the river, clean, free of the tang of metal and sulphur, and wraps diced apples, watermelon, cantaloupe, green beans, rosehips, and yam in the leaves of thyme and oregano, echinacea and fenugreek. She sets the metal grate from Darunia onto the top of the pot. Tying the rolled chunks of fruit-in-leaves off with string made of hay from Medigo, she spaces them out on the grate to steam them.

Her mouth waters at the fragrance of sweetness that drifts around the campsite.

She splits the meal eighty-twenty for Ilia, who digs into them eagerly, her tail brushing over her back as she eats. Link glides her hand over the base of Ilia's ears and, leaning against her flank, eats her own meal.

The girl who smelled of horses, who taught her the whistle, who knelt in the musty darkness of a closet—or something like a closet—beside her while her heart throbbed a thousand paces. When she was younger, much younger, she can feel in the smallness of her frame and the weakness of her body. Through the cracks of light in the frame of the door Link could just make out her pupils, large and wet in the shadows of the closet. The girl who smelled of horses, who signed into Link's trembling upturned palms.

"It'll be okay," she repeated over and over into Link's hands. "It'll be okay. They won't find you here. I promise."
Her own arms moved stiffly at best and froze with the thickness of her blood at worst, like a marionette left untouched until the wood within warped to rot. "What if something happens? What if something happens while I'm not here to stop it?"

"They're just arguing with each other. It's not about you. It's not your fault."

"But I should be there. I could stop them from fighting. I...if I don't, isn't it my fault?"

"Link." The girl who smelled of horses gripped Link's hands tightly in hers. "You're twelve years old. You shouldn't be a peacekeeper. And—" A word she cannot make out in the memory. "—is with your grandmother. She's not in any danger."

"But—"

"Please. Please, Link. Please, you shouldn't have to..."

The memory twists, contorts, and suddenly she sees herself laughing as her horse noses leaf-wrapped fruits, softened and tendered by steam's embrace, from her palm, while the girl who smelled of horses stood beside her with a basket of freshly steamed snacks hanging from her arm. Older, now, but she recognises the girl in the memories nonetheless.

"You'll spoil her," the girl who smelled of horses said with a grin.

Link, her hands occupied with her horse, merely smiled sheepishly at her. When her palm emptied, she spoke prior to reaching to grab another handful. "She'll have to ride hard tomorrow. It's a last feast before we go."

"You'll only be gone a month this time, right?" the girl who smelled of horses asked, and through the brightness of her smile, the slowness of her gesture hinted at a fog over the bay.

Link nodded. "It's just the delivery of a single sword and shield."

"All the way to the Castletown," the girl who smelled of horses countered.

Link shrugged. "You know how much I usually take. This trip's just there and back."

"I think Rusl could ask you to take all of Death Mountain and you wouldn't flinch." The girl who smelled of horses shook her head. "I don't know how you do it."

"It's not all bad. My parents are nicer when I come back." The girl who smelled of horses's features distorted into a scowl and Link hurried on. "And I come back with stories and recipes. And the pay helps. And I get to see the whole province."

The girl who smelled of horses winked at her. "Say hi to Marin for me."

Her face flushed red and she hid behind the horse, which only provoked the girl who smelled of horses to laugh. "Bring back something for—" The word, the word, lost in mist. "—too. You know how much she likes souvenirs. She asked me to start teaching her how to ride. One day she'll cross the world."

"...keep her safe while I'm gone."

The girl who smelled of horses smiled. "On my life, Link." She raised her hand to her mouth.

"And when I come back," Link said instead of a good-bye, "I'll make you something." She grinned. "Your favourite."
Her greenish-brown eyes twinkled. "Catfish stew?"

Link held out her hand. "In a pumpkin gourd."

The girl who smelled of horses embraced her. The girl who smelled of horses wrapped her arms around her. The girl who smelled of horses did not say good-bye but see you later.

The girl who smelled of horses, who said I love you.

Link looks up into the branches above her, towards the stars scattered in the seas of the heavens that peek out between the gaps of the leaves like so many glimpses into the past.

Not a hundred years. It can't have been one hundred years. Even if she knew Daruk, it can't have been one hundred years. She can picture the loss of memory, but if a hundred years had elapsed, she would barely be alive, much less look eighteen years of age.

And if one hundred years had elapsed, then Marin, and the girl who smelled of horses, and everyone else from her memories, who knew the original inhabitant of the hero she has stolen, must be—

No.

Not a hundred years.

She rolls over to curl up on her right side. The dank smell of the earth; the crunch of early-autumn leaves beneath her weight; the fragrance of blossoms that have begun to swell to fruit ripe with juice to sticky her fingers and run down her chin: these are her world. Her world. That which she can see, and taste, and touch.

Not a hundred years.

—

Steamed Fruit (three hearts) - apple, Hyrule herb

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: This was a fun chapter to write! Link's been unconscious for over a day during her recovery; fortunately, she didn't need to go to a hospital or anything like that (yet), just some good bed-rest after nearly dying. Yunobo's a sweetheart who unfortunately can't see Link at the moment, which is really for the best from Link's point of view: now she can rapidly slip away before she has her own actions as heroic.

Also, I neglected to mention this last chapter, but I definitely went for a more horror-like feel with the actual Blights themselves. Namely, the Blight actually "possessed" the (essentially pickled) corpse of Daruk, using his own boulder breaker weapon, and carried the Daruk's slate with him. Speaking of which, I know that there was only a single slate in Breath of the Wild, but how in the world where the Champions supposed to control their own Divine Beasts without slates? Therefore I opted to give the others slates as well. The slate aren't coded to a specific Divine Beast, hence why
Link could activate the terminals yet Yunobo could register himself as Vah Rudania's pilot. And don't worry; we'll certainly see more of Yunobo before the end of the fic, though it might take a very long while to get there.

If you're having difficulty imagining what the "heart" looked like last chapter, I was picturing the "heart" similar to Calamity Ganon's one in Castle Town in-game.

Ah, right, speaking of Castle Town, I refer to it as the Hyrule Castletown (one word) in Delicious in Wilds; a "castletown" is an actual thing for unaware readers, as many castles did indeed have towns spring up around them.

Almost every single moment in this chapter is a reference to a side-quest that you can take on in-game. And, of course, a reminder that Link has been arrested. What fun! So Link spent most of the summer in Eldin, and it's now about two-thirds of the way through the summer. It's been about four months since she awoke in the Shrine of Resurrection.

Link picking up a metal pot lid is a reference to the progression of shields seen in many Zelda games starting from A Link to the Past: first wooden, then metal, and finally mirror. A mirror pot lid? Wonder how she'll get that one.

Link leaves behind the fireproof armour with Glepp and Misan since she doesn't exactly need it and it's heavy and cumbersome to carry around. Yes, I'm aware that in-game Link carries every outfit just like that. However, life is a touch more complicated than that. Similarly, she doesn't take the full commission. There's no such things as "checks," and carrying around a bunch of rupees is actually much heavier and difficult than you might imagine. That's not the last we'll see of the mercantile duo!

And here we see a little snapshot from Link's childhood. Since we know almost nothing about Link's childhood other than that Link's father was a knight, I decided to put my own spin on things.

The catfish soup in a pumpkin gourd is "the girl who smelled of horses's" favourite dish. It's also one of the strangest recipes in Delicious in Wilds. You'll see.

Link's still making a valiant to deny what's going on, sort of. It's a little like depression, where she knows that it's been one hundred years, yet the implications of that are so terrible that she's clinging to any hope that it hasn't been one hundred years. What she needs now isn't just the truth: she needs an emotional boost.

Thank you once again to my beloved beta reader, Emma, for staying with me for so long, and thank you to you, the reader, for enjoying the first fifth of the fic. Now, onwards we go, to explore the remainder of Hyrule. By the way, it's worth noting that red telescope of Link's that she's been carrying around since the third chapter. Does it remind you of anything?

And, now that we've finished the first fifth of the fic, I'd just like to make a moment to thank everyone who has come so far with me. Without your help and support, Delicious in Wilds wouldn't exist. So, thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

midna's ass. 11 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Like I said last chapter: Catharsis. Link getting beaten to hell
and then being able to just sleep for a while after a boss is a really nice feeling.

Here we are: My single favourite memory in the entire series. It's so nostalgic and bittersweet and scattered and feels like home and longing all at once. This series gives you nostalgia pangs sometimes, longing for something you've never even had.

Emma. 11 September 2017.
Chapter Summary

Returning to the village of Kakariko, the travelling chef is tasked by the wise matriarch with delivering a letter to the chief of Medli in Tabantha. The chef spends a night in the village preparing supper for a certain guard's sisters before setting off.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The journey back to Kakariko winds her down the foothills of Eldin, through the wetlands of Lanayru and past several villages along the banks of the Hylia River. As she rides Ilia along the eastern side of the river, she pauses every here and there to climb up to the tops of cliffs, of fir trees, of sentry posts erected by people and monsters alike to whip out the red telescope hanging at her left hip and sketch the entirety of the land onto her map. She marks the orange points of shrines in the distance, especially at night when their golden fire-light draws her. As she who bears one of the two Champions' slates—or sheikah slates, or whatever they're called—descending down into the shrines marks a reason for her existence.

And if she meets someone, anyone, who can understand the language of the shrines, maybe she could invite them along.

She prays that she never does.

Most of the shrines lie abandoned in the wilderness, between the forks of rivers, hidden away in forests, atop the tallest peaks. Yet nearly every village has a shrine in its midst or nearby. Even those occasional towns that regard the shrines with little religious significance—as she discovers—describe the shrines as having protective influence; most villagers she passes pay careful attention to their shrines: laden with candles and offerings, or watched over by Sages, or crowned at the town square. Nonetheless she finds her way into the shrines under the cloak of night and wrapped in a cloak of fabric to protect her identity.

She has no desire to harm or worry those who live peacefully by the riverside or in the grassy hills that swell into the Dueling Peaks. Yet an inexplicable urge rises in her belly, somewhere between the insatiable curiosity of the unknown and the comforting familiarity of a challenge of the body and mind rather than of the words and heart.

In the coolness of the shrines, with the only sounds the hum of the air and the pace of her own breathing, she can lose the noise of the crowds, can lose the pressures of interaction and expectation, lose herself. Like in the days on the Great Plateau before she entered the cabin, before she entered Kakariko, before Lady Impa's words transformed her from a being simply existing in the wonders of the world into a ghost with weight her frame can no longer possibly bear cracking down her shoulders to splinter her spine. Like when she naps in the boughs of a tree while Ilia grazes below, nothing but the sun and the wind and the leaves brushing her cheeks.

She loops across Proxim Bridge to pass between the Dueling Peaks. Though she purchased so many ingredients in Darunia, the meals taste best with those meats and roots, those herbs and fruits that she hunts and gathers herself. For that very reason, she enters Kasuto to off-load everything
from Darunia at the communal outdoor kitchen while onlookers stare at her.

In exchange she takes samples of spices and salts, measuring them in her own palm, given freely by the spirit of communion.

The burden lifted from her shoulders, she leads Ilia up the climb to Kakariko.

She arrives as a messenger of dusk, bearing the banner of night behind her. The stars greet her and she lifts her gaze to the narrow slice of sky she can see between the Pillars of Levia.

The stars, infinite, uncountable, shining brightly, nameless in their glow. She reaches her arm up to open her hand towards them. She catches starlight on her fingertips to pool into her palm.

The eye in the gate of the village weighs down her arm. She slows Ilia down to a walk.

She enters Kakariko once more, and the name Link gains a bitterness under her tongue.

Despite the time of night, Dorian immediately ushers Link to see Lady Impa, whose eyes glimmer with an emotion that Link cannot identify. Lady Impa asks her of the gorons, of Eldin, of Darunia.

She answers of the monsters that she has witnessed crawling over the land, of the ruins of the village, of the threat of towns overrun, of the goron and his wife who desire a child, of the merchants of sapphire, of the liveliness of the marketplace of Darunia, of the many different people she met on her journey, of the sheer tenacity of life to cling no matter what disaster may strike, of the smiles of those in Darunia, of the deliciousness of goron spice. When she begins to recount the recipes that she has learned, her motions become more animated, her gestures more wild. She sits forward. Her hands twitch from one sign to the other in her haste to impart as much knowledge as possible.

"I could cook it all for you if you wanted! It's some of the most delicious meals I've ever had! If I could just share—"

Quietly, Lady Impa inquires of Darunia in particular.

As if words alone could inject hot lead into her fingers, Link drops her hands to the floor. She dips her head to gaze at the wooden boards in the floor, at the thin cracks of darkness between them. "I think that everyone in Darunia will be all right," she answers slowly, "even with the monsters in Eldin. The villages in the rest of Eldin are at greater risk."

The wrinkles of Lady Impa's face deepen. Each syllable shudders out of her frame with the years that have worn her down. "Link...did you...and the slate...?"

Link says nothing. Her hands lie flat against her knees. At the end of the questions, Lady Impa thanks her for fulfilling the request. Link keeps still.

After a moment Lady Impa inclines her head. "Would you take on another task for me, if you have naught to do?"

She nods. Her existence breathes on the mountainside, in the wind rustling the leaves, in the steam rising from the cooking pot. Wherever she goes, as long as she can call the wilds to her name, she can live as she does already.

Lady Impa bids her to check on the largest city in Tabantha—home mostly to the freewheeling rito —far to the western side of what was once Hyrule. The quickest route will take her through the former Central Hyrule and across Tanagar Canyon on the Bridge of Tabantha. Instructing Dorian to
provide an atlas and map, Lady Impa asks another attendant to bring her an envelope. The violet bracelet on her right wrist jangles with the movements of her hand over the parchment. And now she has another letter for Link to deliver. A red letter closed with a symbol of thick wax of the symbol of Lady Impa's house. "Asking you to check on the gorons of Eldin without specific instructions was unfair to you, Link. For that, I apologise. This should make things easier for you." Link swallows. "Please deliver this letter to the current chief of the rito," Lady Impa tells her, "whoever that may be."

"You don't know...?"

Lady Impa's explanation comes careful, every word deliberate. Though she softens her voice, Link can taste the edge of sharpness at the blade of every sound. After all that has happened, Lady Impa elaborates, communication has lessened between the scattered villages remaining in the vastness of the land once known as Hyrule. Yes, merchants continue to bring information alongside their wares, but few would make the trek from Medli to Kakariko, even fewer yet than the handful that would make the trek from Darunia to Kakariko.

Though the past decade or so has seen a rise in travellers between towns, the world has grown more isolated and secluded over the years, as comes in times of tragedy, of stress and fear.

"I should know, more than anyone, that peace will not come from isolation, nor from bearing the world on a single pair of shoulders." Lady Impa's voice trails off. Link raises her head; Lady Impa gazes directly at her with a sadness so deep that Link can sense herself slipping in to drown beneath the weight of the years that she does not possess, of the lifetimes that her body has lost, of the emptiness in her head that she fills instead with the robustness of her own heartbeat. Lady Impa closes her eyes. "As before, keep the letter sealed before it arrives, Link. Good luck. Goddesses be with you."

Link bows her head.

Dorian walks her to the stable to put up Ilia, though she shakes her head and pleads for Dorian to let her keep Ilia beside his house instead under the safety of the wooden awning. He acquiesces. They approach his house. Now that she has returned after weeks away in Eldin, Cottla and Koko's mother—Dorian's wife or lover—must have similarly come back from her trip; so Link says cheerily to Dorian.

Dorian frowns ever so slightly and swings his head from side to side. Link lifts her hands to ask; instead of answering Dorian indicates the door of the house.

Removing her boots, she enters quietly so as not to wake Koko and Cottla, but the girls spring to life the instant the floor creaks. They jump towards Link and climb over her in squirrelly fashion while Link laughs and spins them around. She catches Dorian smiling softly at them. Cottla and Koko ask Link a thousand and one questions about the gorons, about Eldin, about Darunia. Cottla leaps onto the bed and starts to jump up and down with her hands on her hips. "Want big sis Link to make supper! Supper! Now!"

"But Koko already made supper!" Koko counters, joining her sister on the mattress. Link stifles the first round of laughter but has no defenses against the second that doubles her over. "You can't have two suppers!"

"Who says there's a rule 'gainst two suppers!" Cottla yells back.

"Everyone knows that you can't have two suppers!"
Link manages to control her mirth just enough to offer a suggestion: "We don't have to call it supper. We could call it a very big midnight snack." Dorian frowns at her and Link rubs the back of her head, apologising with a sheepish smile.

"Cottla! How come Link lets you have two suppers!" Koko bounces down harder than before.

"Maybe if we had more suppers Mama would come back!"

Koko stops bouncing. Her limbs hang limp; her eyes draw downwards at the corners. Cottla jumps one more time yet Koko simply drops down to the mattress. Dorian clears his throat loudly. "Just to celebrate Link's return," he announces with a forced note of cheeriness in his words that makes Link blink and step backwards, curling herself inwards to make her frame as small and unobtrusive as possible, "we'll have another supper, and then it's off to bed with everyone."

Something knocks against the wooden window. A hush falls over the four standing—or lying, in Koko's case—in the house. Link turns her head towards it. Another knock. Not the steady knocking of a person. Link shifts her left hand behind her back to ready her spear. The sash holding the wooden panes closed gives way.

Ilia's head pokes through the window.

She pokes Koko's hair with her muzzle to chew on her hair. Her ears flick back and forth. Lifting her head, Ilia nickers at Link and strains to fit more of herself through the window.

Cottla and Koko squeal in happiness together at the horse. The tensions melt away; Link can breathe again.

Kneeling on the bed, Link rubs Ilia's forehead and brushes what she can reach of her horse's mane. "Are you hungry, Ilia?" she asks.

Ilia whinnies.

Link inquires for a pumpkin. She taps Koko on the shoulder. "Know any good recipes?"

The features of her face, drawn and wrinkled since Cottla's outburst, brighten into a grin so wide that Link could swear the sun had risen spontaneously in Dorian's home. "Koko knows every good recipe that Mama taught her!"

"That's because you're the most wonderful little sister I could ask for," Link tells her, and the motions of the words warms her arms with such familiarity that she goes through them again. "You're the most wonderful little sister I could ask for.

Just as her body knows how to wield a sword, just as her body knows how to ride a horse, so too does her body know how to form these words.

She trembles.

"Link? What's wrong?" Koko waves her hands in front of Link's face. "Koko knows that breathing that fast isn't good for you."

Link claps her palms against her face, once, twice, and wills her heart to slow. "Let's cook," she says and immediately occupies her hands with the cooking pot.

They prepare two pumpkins, one with meat following Koko's instructions, and one with fruit for
dessert and for Ilia's supper. Dorian supplies the smoked meat of cucco raised in the village, the leftovers of the earlier supper from a few hours ago. Link chips in the herbs and mushrooms that she has gathered on the path through the Dueling Peaks.

She helps Koko choose fruits, herbs, a touch of spice for flavour, for both sets of pumpkins. As Koko slices the ingredients into fine and regular chunks, Link inspects what she has set aside for the dessert pumpkin to weed out anything that could cause colic or otherwise make Ilia ill. Satisfied, she assists Koko in grinding together the ingredients.

Koko tastes the insides of the meat-stuffed pumpkin so far. She leans back from the pot while Link leans in to face her day of judgment.

"Koko thinks it needs more salt!" she declares with her finger pointed directly at the sky. Koko scoops a towering handful of salt into her palm. Swallowing hard, Link cups her hands under Koko's smaller ones; she teaches Koko to sprinkle pinches in, stirring each time and tasting again rather than throwing in half of the pot of salt. Koko's jaw drops open at the epiphany. "Koko remembers Mama telling her that too! Did you ever meet Mama?"

Link shakes her head. Koko deflates; Link flicks a goop of pumpkin onto Koko's nose until Koko scrunches up her face in giggles.

Together they close the pumpkins, sealing the edges with wax. Link suggests that they in small holes to prevent the pumpkins from detonating from the build-up of steam, yet Koko yelps out a loud "No!" that makes Link blink at her.

Koko takes Link outside to fill the cooking pot with soil, which makes Link raise her eyebrows, but she listens to Koko's instructions of what her mother taught her. Koko mixes the soil in the pot with pieces of charcoal that Dorian gives them; Link can see the twinkling in his eyes at Koko's smile. Link and Koko wrap both of the pumpkins tightly in linen that Dorian provides and pack them into the soil. Covering the top with a layer of charcoal, Koko pours a small dribble of oil over the surface. She holds a candle-flame to it until the oil ignites.

Link on the left and Koko on the right, the two girls kneel in front of the cooking pot as the charcoal catches the blaze.

"Now Koko waits!" Koko rubs her hands together. "Thank you, big sister." She wobble slightly and Link catches her with an arm around her upper back; Koko leans her head against Link's shoulder. The warmth of her tiny frame brings Link to hold Koko more tightly against herself.

Movement at Link's left side opens her eyes. As if on cue, Cottla has nestled into the crook of Link's other arm, her head drooping onto Link's thigh. Cottla murmurs something on her breath that Link does not catch and does not need to catch. She wraps her arms around each girl, stroking their hair with gentle fingers. Cottla dozes off first, and then Koko, the night far too deep for them to stay awake.

Though she has been in the company of Koko and Cottla for less than a week, her absence has made the heart grow fonder. She need not know them long to have seen the goodness in their hearts and the brilliance of their eyes, and she need not know them long to have taken that eminent position of big sister.

A family.

"You look like a mother hen," says Dorian. When Link glances up at him, tidying about the house and the mattress on which Koko and Cottla were jumping, she finds his face bearing the wear and
exhaustion that he hides when Cottla and Koko can see him.

"If you start clucking, you're sleeping outside." He raises a hand, palm outwards. "Just kidding. Warms my heart to see that my daughters have taken to you like that. I think they've...needed someone like you in their lives."

"Someone like me?"

"Someone like you," he repeats, nearly inaudible.

The pumpkins finish. Link awakens Koko and Cottla by patting them on their heads and stroking their cheeks. Koko starts up. She hangs her head. "Koko is the worst sister ever," she bemoans. "Koko fell asleep!"

"The best sister ever for making supper for her little sister."

Cottla bobs her head up and down. Squirming out of Link's embrace, she crows: "Koko and Link are the best big sisters ever!"

Cande-light shines in the wetness of Koko's eyes.

With Link's aid Koko removes the pumpkins from the soil and unseals the wax. She slaps her palms against the rind. "They sound cooked, just like Mama taught Koko!"

Link laughs. They cut into the pumpkins, the meat into quarters and the dessert in an eighty-twenty split, to Cottla's dismay. Link carries the bigger chunk of the pumpkin out to Ilia. While her horse eats, Link takes a few moments to brush her coat and mane, to check her for injuries, to ensure that the horseshoes have stayed on properly, to examine where the straps of the saddle and bridle sit and ensure she has worn nothing too tightly. Link embraces Ilia's neck.

"Good girl," she spells into Ilia's shoulder. "Have a good night."

Upon her return to the house, she finds that the sisters have split the entire remaining fifth of the dessert pumpkin between them. Dorian shrugs and Link tells them to enjoy.

The only sweetness she needs is their smiles.

She digs into the meat-stuffed pumpkin. The cucco meat mixed with steamed herbs and pumpkin innards bring out a tender delectability, the meat having absorbed the flavours around it to conduct an orchestra of tones and aromas on her tongue. Link claps her hands together and kneels in front of Koko.

"Koko knows the best recipes," she signs once she has finished bowing, and Koko's cheeks flush as red as her eyes.

Link wolfs down her portion of the pumpkin with gusto and licks her fingers and lips after every bite. The flavours dance around her with a subtle familiarity that sparks recognition.

She closes her eyes.

The girl with the golden hair, who held the skewer of fruit and mushrooms. Sitting in front of the campfire. At dawn, early dawn, with a pile of books beside her. Her tongue poked out of her mouth as she combed through a tome, a pencil tucked behind her ear.

Link, seated across from her, steamed a pumpkin over the fire. She dabbed honey and butter into
the quail meat she prepared for their breakfast. A tall, thin figure lay curled up by the campfire with a blanket pulled over her, having fallen asleep while sitting.

"I'm so close to figure this out," the girl with the golden hair said out loud. "The key to sealing away the Calamity might have nothing to do with prayer at all. If we can access the Sacred Realm, then we should be able to strike at the very heart of the Calamity. You'll fight with me, won't you?"

Link stirred the innards of the pumpkin. She nodded.

"At least you believe me." The girl with the golden hair exhaled. She propped her chin up in her hand. "No one in my family has had to play the part of the Goddess in generations. What if the sacred power has nothing to do with prayer? If we can unlock the secrets of the slate and the Divine Beasts—if we can understand the purpose of the shrines—if we can puzzle out all of these folktales about the Sacred Realm—then we could avert the Calamity without ever resorting to prophecy or superstition." Setting the book down into her lap she wet her fingers to turn the page. "I feel like there's just one missing piece to the puzzle, but, oh, I don't know what it could be." Her features twisted into worry. "There's the story about the mirrors, but that seems too silly even for me...oh, I feel like I'm so close."

"I believe in you." Link signed, and the girl in the golden hair's mouth relaxed into a smile.

"If only I could get Father to believe me as well."

The woman in black sprang to her feet. She threw her head back and forth, and the girl with the golden hair laughed. "Good morning. I'm glad you got some sleep."

The woman in black prostrated herself before the girl with the golden hair. "Please forgive me for my lapse in duty. I will not let that happen again so long as I live."

"You don't need to apologise." The girl with the golden hair dismissed the woman in black with a wave of the hand. "You've barely been sleeping since we set out. Link can take care of me just fine, you know."

"...Your Majesty, I would nonetheless prefer to be there for you. Need I remind you that I have been with you since birth—"

"And I appreciate every second of you protecting me, but you're still a human being. You need to sleep. When did you sleep before last night? Three days ago? I worry about you." The girl with the golden hair closed the tome with a soft pomf. "I'll not hear another word about this."

"...of course, Your Majesty." The woman in black's glare bore a hole through Link's back. She focused her attention on the meat-stuffed pumpkin that would bring another smile to the face of the girl with the golden hair, just as Link presently focuses her attention on anything but the words Your Majesty.

With the pumpkin finished off, Dorian sends Cottla, Koko, and Link to sleep. In the middle of the night, rustling near Link's bed alerts her to blearily open her eyes. Sitting up, she sees Dorian going through her satchel. She rubs her eyes. Dorian places her things back. "I thought I smelled something rotting," he explains, beaming at her while she attempts to blink sleep from her eyes, "so I hope you didn't mind me taking care of some of the things in your pack. Say, you didn't lose the slate, did you?"

Link shakes her head. She yawns.
"That's good to hear. Where is it, if you didn't lose it?" Link starts to sink back down into the bed instead. "Link? Ah. Hn. Well. I took care of the rotting—the rotting—the rotting apple, right, that is the thing I thought was rotting, yes—so have a restful night."

Dipping her head, she drifts down into the softness of pillows again. The slate presses into her right hip.

The next morning, with Koko pushing a bunch of carrots into her arms, Link and Ilia set off once more, this time south to Kasuto, between the Dueling Peaks, and to western Hyrule.

Or rather, the western land that was once Hyrule.

Before she leaves the confines of the mountain valley that have protected Kakariko for so long, Link lets Ilia rest in the shade while she scales atop a Pillar of Levia. The morning passes. Her world narrows to the scent of the dew-damped stone, the coarseness of rock beneath her calloused palms, the rhythmic movements of her upwards climb. The sun reaches its zenith when, at last, she breathes in the coolness of the air at this height.

She looks out over the world. At the dips and rises in the land, at the forests of green and rivers of blue, at the paths walked to soil by the feet that have trodden before her, at the flowers sprinkled through the grassy fields that sway under the gossamer touch of the same wind that ruffles her hair as an old friend and lifts the fine hairs on her arms.

She inhales the scent of this world that she calls home.

She raises her hands. Her arms sweep physically through her existence with the beating of her heart and the breathing of her lungs. "It doesn't matter who Link used to be," she says, to the world, to the Goddesses, to herself. "I'm not going to let this haunt me forever. I've had enough of being haunted. I'm what I make of myself. I'm going to live, and be myself, and that is going to be enough."

She says it again. And again. Until her arms tire and her fingers stiffen she repeats herself into the wind so that it may carry the shape of her words. Cupping her hands over her mouth, she yells out the love of life that wakes her every morning and calms her every night.

Her life is her own. As long as she is alive, she is herself.

—

Tough Meat-Stuffed Pumpkin (six hearts, low defense boost for 03:20) - fortified pumpkin, hylian shroom, Hyrule herb, raw drumstick, rock salt

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Wow, here's a comment I meant to make back in the fourteenth or so chapter and completely forgot: I was disappointed by the Bridge of Eldin in Breath of the Wild, so I made the Bridge of Eldin in Delicious in Wilds the much more impressive size of the bridge-of-the-same-name in Twilight Princess. Similarly, I renamed the Great Tabantha Bridge as the Bridge of Tabantha to keep the name-
scheme going.

Anyways, as for the chapter: at least one reader has mentioned expecting Link's anger towards Impa. Not quite in this chapter, but you'll see how it goes in the future.

Regarding Cottla and Koko taking to Link and Link taking to Koko and Cottla, similar things have happened to me in the past. It's quite easy for people to get close rather quick, especially for those who are missing people. I wanted to better emphasise the effects of the loss of the mother on the family, hence the (terrifying to Link) moment of Cottla engaging in the self-blaming/bargaining behaviour here.

Speaking of the sisters, hey, you haven't forgotten about that red telescope, have you?

The Sacred Realm (as seen in other Zelda games) is known in folk-tales passed down to the time of Delicious in Wilds, regarded a little bit like how we might regard a story like Santa Claus or Neverland from Peter Pan. There are those who believe in the Sacred Realm as a heaven or afterlife of sorts, or as the realm where the deities reside depending on faith. For the average person, however, the Sacred Realm is a fantastical place lifted from nursery rhymes and not something to take seriously. Zelda, who is of a cold and scientific mind, has turned to anything that might explain her lack of sealing magic. But is it so simple?

My, but Dorian's behaviour was suspicious. Link's too sleepy and naive to really think about what Dorian might have been doing.

And now we have Link's major character breakthrough in terms of how she views herself and who she wants to be. It's certainly a step towards something.

Another most wonderful thank you to my amazing beta reader, Emma, and my amazing readers (all of you). In particular, I'd like to thank Emma so much for much support she has given me almost since the very beginning of the project. Just when I was getting dejecting that Delicious in Wilds was a waste of time, she came on-board as my beta reader to cheer me on. And now, thank you to all of my readers for enjoying the journey so far.

Next: to Tabantha!

midna's ass. 12 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: I love Koko! Her story in Delicious in Wilds is really subtle but really, really well done.

Dorian tries to be sneaky. He's not very good at it.

Have I ever mentioned how amazing the prose in Delicious in Wilds is? Seriously, read this line again: "Lady Impa gazes directly at her with a sadness so deep that Link can sense herself slipping in to drown beneath the weight of the years that she does not possess, of the lifetimes that her body has lost, of the emptiness in her head that she fills instead with the robustness of her own heartbeat." That's some good prose.

We get to go to Tabantha next! The Vah Medoh portion of this series is my favourite part of the whole thing.

Emma. 12 September 2017.
Spicy Meat Curry

Chapter Summary

As the travelling chef travels from Kakariko in Necluda towards Tabantha, the chef encounters two old friends; conquers a cooking challenge like no other; and remembers a certain little girl in pigtails.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

She exits Kakariko to the south. Link has run the path through Kasuto between the Dueling Peaks so frequently that the bends in the road have etched not only into the map she curls up in the tube on her back but also in the map of her muscles. Her body guides Ilia along the path while she takes the time to look about. The lizalfos spear strapped to her back bumps against the back of her head with every hoof-beat.

She continues westward. A sudden low horn indicates a camp of bokoblins on a tall wooden shenanigan that spirals around a thick tree by the side of the road. They screech at her as she passes by. She turns herself backwards on Ilia to wave at them. Their arrows whistle by, missing by entire metres. The glint of a blade in one of the bokoblin's hands reflects her giddy smile. She swerves Ilia behind a bend before dismounting.

Sneaking back towards the camp through noisy bushes, she notices a cluster of blue octoroks floating in the river. She lifts her head towards the camp: the bokoblins have returned to dancing, sparring, and—in the case of the one bokoblin with whom she feels kinship in her very gut—salivating over steaming fish.

Two bokoblins, one blue and one black, squat on the bank of the river and take turns trying to scoop fish out of the water with their bare hands. The black bokoblin carries a traveller's sword on its back. She joins them to fish by the side of the river, albeit from a safe distance away. Crouching, she observes the silver shimmer of fish just below the surface.

With every failed attempt of catching fish, she scoots closer to the bokoblins.

Link watches them to study their technique. The blue bokoblin startles the fish while the sword-bokoblin, anticipating where the fish will dart, coils up its arm just in front of the fish.

She tries the same approach but—like the bokoblins—comes out empty-handed. Frowning, Link readies the lizalfos spear and stands up.

The first few thrusts hit the sandy bank of the river. But the fifth catches a fish's fin. The fish darts away nonetheless, yet the scrap of fin on the pointed tip of the spear propels her onwards.

She readies her spear. A particularly large bass swims lazily downcurrent. She tracks its movement, aims just in front, and strikes.

She spears the fish.

Flipping the spear from the water that sprays her and the bokoblins alike, she thrusts the spear aloft.
to show the flopping bass to the world. The bokoblins on the riverbank shriek shrilly. Instead of
them attacking her, however, Link finds them dancing and slapping their hands against their
bellies.

She drops the fish on the ground in front of them. Their heads snap down from the fish to her and
back to the fish again. The blue bokoblin snatches the fish to run back up to the camp with the bass
lifted over its head. The sword-bokoblin stares at her.

She waves at it.

Without dropping its gaze from her, the sword-bokoblin swivels about on its heel. She stands
perfectly still. The moment it turns its back, she leans forward, grabs the hilt of the sword on its
back, and pulls the blade out from the leather sheath.

She sprints off in the opposite direction.

The now-empty-sheath-bokoblin screams behind her. She can hear it lunging towards her while she
laughs her way down the river right up until three more bokoblins burst out of the bushes in front
of her.

A trap.

She skids to the right. The bokoblins chasing her and the bokoblins from the bushes smack into
one another while she pelts forward.

The *hiss* of an octorok sucking in its breath trumpets the agonising pain that knocks her face-first
into the sand under the water. Scrambling to her feet and gasping for breath, she summons a bomb
to chuck the explosive at the bokoblins. It detonates in the air and flings the bokoblins away. When
the octorok hisses in again she rolls forward between the legs of the empty-sheath-bokoblin whose
sword she has stolen. The empty-sheath-bokoblin wheels on her in a frothing rage. She winks at it.

The octorok's rock smashes into its head.

While it slumps forward, unconscious, she wriggles out from under the bokoblin and pauses to
shake the leather sheath from its body. The strap catches on the bokoblin's shoulders. She jiggles
the bokoblin more vigorously. Its head flops from side to side. At last she gives the bokoblin a final
violent shake and the sheath pops off.

With her theft secured, Link runs off into the bushes before the other bokoblins can recover.

As she makes her escape, she bursts out laughing all the way until she smacks her face into
something tall and blue. Craning her neck she finds a long snout with a wagging tongue sniffing
her.

Link raises a shaky hand to greet the moblin.

With her sword.

The moblin swings its wooden club at her and she manages to flip backwards. Shoving the sword
into the sheath, she whistles. The moblin cringes backwards with its palms over its ears. She
whistles again and a crop of two or three red moblins poke their heads drowsily from the bushes.

She ogles the moblins. They ogle her.

The neighing of her horse fills her with more relief than even the demise of the Malice of the
Divine Beast. Mounting Ilia in a single bound, Link tears up the grass up and away.

Though the route suggested by Lady Impa and Dorian would take her across Central Hyrule around the Great Plateau, she need only take a brief glance across the wide flat plains and spot the swarms of giant guardians stalking the grasses through the red telescope before she promptly turns about, much to Ilia's neighing confusion. Link regards the map she scribbled out from Lady Impa's atlas. To the north she can wrap around Eldin to follow the thin strip of land between the Hylia River and Lake Mekar along the province of Rauru.

Once more she tries to avoid settlements on the riverside, though a pack of bokoblins and other beasties approaching a village gives her pause. Hiding her face in the rider's cloak, she joins the villagers in their defense. She looses arrows from the sloped dome roof of the stable until her quiver runs dry down to a handful, then takes to the ground with her sword. The rusted blade breaks. Link steals a silver longsword from a bokoblin to continue the fight.

When the last of the forces disperse to dust and she tears the sword out from the torso of a bokoblin, she takes a moment to collect arrows from the fallen bodies of monsters. A villager, potentially mistaking her for a monster, lodges an arrow into her thigh.

She tries to flee. To avoid becoming known as a traveller who might step in upon the attack of monsters. To cower from the title of hero. Yet she can only go so far before the archer who shot her catches up to her.

Link spends the night in Japas, a zora-established fishing village with a healthy population of gorons and sheikah, a few of whom also sport pointed ears or scarlet hair.

The village healers—a thin and giggly goron with a shock of white hair and an overly excited zora who closes her wounds with an application of thick red salve—remove the arrow with little effort: the arrowhead, having spared her bone, moves and shifts with ease. She thanks them for their help. They decline payment; Link insists on pushing silver rupees into their hands. The healers ask her name and she shakes her head. As soon as dawn breaks, she saddles Ilia and takes off.

On the road north she takes more frequent breaks to rest the ache in her bandaged thigh and to cool off from the broiling heat of the summer that day by day starts to slacken its hold. The fragrances of harvest come ever closer. The forests she passes burst with the promise of the feast just over the bend as the nights cast longer and longer shadows over the earth. Link travels over the Thims Bridge and crosses the Trilby Plain.

Near another village on the waterfront of the Hylia River, in the heart of the arable land around Pico Pond, she catches the strains of a song she has heard before. No, not a song, but a certain instrument. Music.

Maracas.

Hestu—the tree-person she met on her first journey to Kakariko, which seems like a lifetime ago—conducts a choir of five frogs in the pond with their maracas as conductor's batons. Link approaches on Ilia, who shies at the sight of a living tree. Dismounting, she seats herself at the bank of the pond to listen to the frogs' singing.

"Shakalah! Da na na naaa...!" Hestu shakes their maracas to bring the frogs to lift themselves out of the water for the final note. They open their mouths in harmonising turn: first the grey, then the blue, then the turquoise, then the yellow, and finally the reddish-orange with their highest treble. Hestu bows to them and they to Hestu. Hestu speaks to the frogs in a language of whistles and whispers. The frogs croak back, then disperse into the water.
Link applauds wildly. Hestu leaps up onto their twirling leaf that steadily drifts back down to earth. "Yahaha! Hestu did not see you there, friendly friend!" Hestu claps their stubby hands. Link snorts back a laugh. "Kalalah! Hestu is still on Hestu's big journey to meet up with Grandpa again! But kookooloo..." They sniff. "Hestu wants all of the friendly friends in the world to be happy, and there are so many sad..."

She has little to proffer in the way of making people happy, save for food. Hestu bops their body back and forth while Link starts a fire with a piece of flint from her pouch. She keeps the logs hidden under the cooking pot lest the sight of burning wood upset her companion. Link leaves some of her belongings with Hestu—keeping all of the most valuable things, namely the satchel of food, and the letter as afterthought, with her this time to avoid another theft—and tasks her bow with bringing down a rabbit.

While she finishes the hunt, breaking the animal's neck to put it quickly out of pain, she notes a crop of spicy peppers growing in the shade of a tree. She licks her lips.

In her communion with the harmony of food, Link must brave the deepest forests, the iciest tundras, the most red-hot combination of goron spice and pepper that she can envision.

With the very last handful of goron spice in the jar that she washes out in the pond, she will set her own mouth on fire, or she will forever doff the hat of a food aficionado.

Link sets to cooking. While she produces a campfire with the help of her pouch of flint, she asks Hestu about their first meeting on her initial trip to Kakariko, when she retrieved their maracas yet came back to a vacant satchel.

Hestu responds that some boko-bokos seemed very sad indeed but cheered up when Hestu offered them the contents of Link's satchel. "Hestu doesn't think the boko-bokos liked the wood jerky too much!" Hestu remarks. It dawns upon Link that Hestu refers to the letter from the cabin. Touching her hand to her chin, she shrugs: as long as someone enjoyed the food, that satisfies her.

Even, she supposes, bokoblins.

She occupies her hands with cooking. Hestu tells her the tales and myths of their world, about the forest where their Grandpa lives, about a sword that they have treasured since Hestu can last recall. Link nods to the rises and falls of the stories. Hestu speaks of the constellations, of the fixed star to the north—Anouki, they call it—that tips the stars making up the Sword in the Stone, and its nearby Reflection of the Sword that arches away as if viewed from the surface of a lake. There, the Seven Sages cluster together, one to serve each of the Seven Goddesses who have protected the races since time immemorial. And there, the Hero of the Silver Arrow who wears a sash of three stars, each one a gift of the Oracle of the Golden Goddesses, bestowing the Hero of the Silver Arrow with the gifts of Courage, Wisdom, and Power enough to drive back the Boar of Malice.

"Grandpa tells Hestu so many funny stories like this, shalah!"

Link dips her head. The world of the stars soars above her; her world lies here in the contents of the pot, in the rabbit that has given its life so that she may live hers, in the peppers that she deseedes with a deft hand, in the hylian rice pressed into her palms by a friend on the road.

She leaves the counting and naming of stars to others; for her their light is enough.

At last she completes the spectacle. A bowl of rice mixed with fresh herbs, of wild onion and leek, and meat cooked with pepper to absorb its heat into the flesh, with thick goron curry forged of the powdered concentration of the fiery heart of Death Mountain itself.
Hestu, she gathers only after she has prepared the dish, does not eat meat and moreover seems confused at her slaughter of the rabbit. She nods to herself and sets about making a second supper for them, also of spicy curry, but without the meat. She supplements instead the hard yet sweet carrots that Koko gave to her.

Link cuts up most of the remainder of the carrots, both swift and endura, and steams them with salt and a pinch of Kasuto sugar for dessert and for Ilia, who grazes calmly by the campsite.

At last she leaps to her feet. Dropping to one knee before Hestu, Link unveils her greatest creation yet: spicy curry.

She digs in.

Pico Pond proves her saviour. She gulps down enough water to drown a horse and yet every swallow only fans the flames. Link rolls herself into the pond. Face-down in the water. Hestu plops to the ground beside her and pokes her ponytail, which bobs at Hestus's touch, leading Hestu to giggle happily and prod Link's ponytail further. Her breath burbles up until she feels mildly quenched. Link crawls onto the shore to Hestu's low wail of dismay at the bobbing ponytail cruelly ripped from them.

She lies in the sand a moment longer. Planting her foot in the ground, Link—having left the silver sword at the campfire—whips out the red telescope to jut it into the air in the direction of the camp.

"You shall not best me, curry!" she signs in defiance and marches back to the cooking pot.

If she trains herself on small bites, then Link can build up a tolerance and with that consume all of the deliciousness of the peppered steak. Yes, just as she could build up tolerance to broadswords by stabbing herself repeatedly with a pocket knife.

She begins to reconsider her actions.

Hestu sits down across from her. They take up their own bowl of vegetable curry. All too late Link flails for them to halt, that they cannot possibly control the power laden in the fiery bowels of the bowl—and the fiery bowels that might result from its consumption—and Hestu places their hand into the rice. Link ogles them as their fingers, like roots, draw up the sustenance. She regards them in awe, that they seem entirely unfazed by the curry.

Then Hestu bursts into flames.

The second trip to Pico Pond accompanies Link heaving Hestu bodily over her shoulder. She trips and the two topple into the water together.

Shakily Link offers the steamed sugar-salt carrots as sacrifice. Hestu "shookoolooohs" at her.

"These won't set you on fire, I promise."

With the immense trust that only a featureless leaf mask of a face could present, Hestu takes the carrots in hand. Link leans in to watch their response. They jump up into the air and dance about, shaking their maracas in a song so infectious that Link finds her tapping her feet in rhythm.

"Thank thank thank thank you! Oh oh! Shakalah!"

Link beams at her handiwork. After setting carrots aside some for Ilia, she wraps up the rest for Hestu to take back to their friends and grandfather.
Hestu retires to sleep with the darkening of the sky; they curl up as a flower at night. Link tends to the campfire as she listens to Hestu's snores, which more resemble the rustling of leaves and the tumbling of wooden blocks than breathing.

She faces the trial of the spicy curry once again. Now Link comes prepared with a full water-skin. She nibbles a tiny bite and sets the spicy curry down, waiting for the fire in her throat to clear. Then again. *Unlike* with the stabbing herself with a pocket knife, she discovers that her tongue and mouth steadily acclimate to the heat.

Though Link has not eaten something this fiery before, the taste brings with it a sense of homesickness, almost. She made this for someone else.

For someone else...

The girl with the golden hair. In a long blue dress that flowed to the floor, in a library lined with windows of stained glass, mythological figures whose names could not roll off of her fingertips. "His Highness the King has promised," she said, her gaze hardened to the sharpest point of steel, "that she will be safe here with us, as recompense for your taking up the *great mantle* of the Champion of Hylia, Hero of Hyrule—my own Knight—" The girl with the golden hair's eyes narrowed slightly. The golden and violet charms at her throat jingled with her visible swallow. "—O Courageous Link."

Link knelt before the girl with the golden hair. She touched the ground with her forehead. "*Thank you.*"

"...now do your best to stay out of my way. The sword has chosen you, and you are...the Knight..." Her eyebrows angled into a pointed *V*; their thickness merely contributed to her disdain. "...but you have your own destiny to fulfill, and I mine. At least *I'm* actually *trying* to do something besides pretending that we can ape the looking-glass of *ten thousand years ago!*" She raised her voice on the last part and glared up at a closed door of a study set into the wall of the library. Clearing her throat, the girl with the golden hair turned back. "You are *dismissed.*"

The following minutes of the memory fade and faze. She cannot recall how she left the library, or perhaps it was a temple, but Link was holding the hand of a girl far younger than she, with two short pigtails, her blue dress patterned with red flowers, who *ooed* and *aahed* at the castle around them, who sneaked into the kitchen in the midst of the night—with Link's help—to snag sweets, who pestered Daruk into giving up a pot of goron spice though he cautioned her of its heat, who begged Link to make her something to *prove* to him that she can eat *aaaaaaaall* of the goron spice in the whole world. The spicy meat curry that Link made, that the girl swallowed down and grinned, that brought laughter to the gathered party: to Daruk, who seemed to make the girl's entertainment his personal mission; to the older girl with the red hair and the golden jewellery, the green hairband and the gently piercing gaze, who spoke softly to the girl with the pigtails and told her stories passed down from ages lost, whom Link caught more than once holding both the girl with the pigtails and the girl with the golden hair in her embrace as they napped against her; to the red-scaled zora whose laugh revealed her shark-like teeth, who taught the girl with the pigtails how to swim in the moat around the castle, and how to identify the multitudes of fish, and how lovely that she could see her again since her appointment as Champion had her with precious little free time to mingle in Ordon as she had before; to the blue-feathered rito who *hmphed* and *tched* at the girl with the pigtails, yet indulged her nonetheless, as she threw up pumpkins into the air and called out gleefully when he shot every one from the sky, the arrows fletched with his own flight feathers.

The girl with the pigtails, who climbed regularly to the highest points in the castle, who looked out at the world with a red and gold telescope, who called Link her—
Link looks at her hands. She looks, very carefully, at her own hands, at the creases and valleys that thread along her palms, at the scars that have faded over time; the scars that have tightened to raised white ridges; the scars that have hardened to flat brownish-red splotches, at the fingers that she flexes and the thin rings of dirt beneath her nails.

Her left hand curls around the red telescope at her hip. Red and gold. The scratches in the metal. No, not scratches, but the pictures of seagulls that a clumsy and unskilled hand has tried to etch.

Pulling the cloak over her head, Link sleeps with the telescope nestled tightly in her arms.

Link and Hestu part ways once more in the bend in the road. Hestu points to the fogged island in the centre of the lake. "You should come visit! I think that Grandpa and all of my friends would love-love-love you!" Link shrugs. "I hope I see you again! Twee hee!"

Hestu unfurls the whirling leaf. She watches Hestu fly across the waters of the bay until the fog swallows them.

Link continues the path north. Another golden tower sears her vision orange, in the midst of an oozing swamp littered with monsters that blaze electricity. She keeps Ilia in the safety of the nearby Minshi Woods to sneak through the roving camps of lizalfos bearing lightning from their horns; keese that channel it on their wings; floating red jellyfish that alternate current and quiet and that split into two just as lethal daughters when she attempts to slice them in half; flashing balls of light that cling like barnacles to the wooden struts of the enemy camps in the water and shock her when she unwittingly puts her hand over them; gigantic snail-lobster-things that charge at her when she nears, whose shells serve as perfect stepping stone over the water; flat winged monsters that look like sheets of paper floating on the surface before they jet into the air and ram her in the face, delivering a nasty shock.

Despite the administration of electricity beyond what she imagines to be the recommended dose for a healthy diet, she successfully—perhaps more on the part of the monsters' sleeping than her own utter lack of stealthiness—manages to clamber onto the tower.

If the spicy meat curry did not kill her, then these monsters stand not a lick of a chance.

She scales the climbable mesh of the spire. The platforms on which she can rest, she notices, lie further from one another than the towers she has climbed before. Nonetheless her body has grown stronger, her movements swifter, her muscles more enduring.

At the peak of the world, she watches the spire brighten blue. Link sketches the surroundings into her map, writing down the names that she has heard from travellers and merchants offering her information and wares on the road. The village of Japas that she visited earlier. The Trilby Plains. The fogged island in Lake Mekar. The rolling hills of the province of Rauru. Helmhead Bridge. The Crenel Hills that feed into Mount Crenel. Further ahead to the west where she travels: Elma Knolls. Aldor Foothills. Ich Plain. Mount Drena, around which she will go. The uncharted lands to the north, the mountains to the west.

The north.

Link looks out to the barren badlands to the north, and the mountains beyond. Something might lie yet north of the land once known as Hyrule. The northward wind tugs her a step forward before she catches herself and turns her head western.

She rolls up the map, collects the slate, and peers outwards with the telescope to mark her path. Her palms dampen with sweat the longer she holds the scope. It drops from her grip.
Link dives after it. Grabbing the telescope out of midair, she has barely the time to open the paraglider but not enough for it to slow her fall. She crashes into water hard as stone.

When she surfaces, the wetlands crawl with monsters.

She escapes back up the tower, which they cannot seem to climb or touch. Sticking her tongue out at the monsters, she holds onto the red telescope more firmly and loops the cord around her wrist. She blinks suddenly with the flash of an idea. When she had first encountered the paraglider, she had found the telescope affixed to it with a wooden strut of sorts. Unfolding the paraglider, she experiments with attaching the telescope again.

Sure enough, when she holds the paraglider over her head, the wooden support leaves the telescope firm at the perfect height for her to look afar while gliding.

She glides directly onto Ilia's back, which startles the poor grazing horse; Ilia rears and gallops off while Link tries desperately to untangle her hands from the paraglider to grab the reins. The telescope bonks her in the eye.

By the time she has calmed Ilia down, they have run far west of Lake Mekar. She can sense Ilia's exhaustion latent in the unsteady gait of her trot and the heavy undulations of her chest. Link whoas her, coos at her, slows her down. She dismounts. From her pack she draws out the last of the carrots, which Ilia gobbles up.

Link lets herself breathe and Ilia rest for the remainder of the day. On the morrow they continue their circuitous journey around the moat. She does not near the castle, but in the distance she can make out its foreboding shadow. Great curved pillars rise from the ground around it, like a hand threatening to crush the castle in its maliced fingers. The castle lies quiet, it seems; in the night she can see no lights in the distance.

They pass through Irch Plain. Along the moat she comes across the ruins of a village, or something like a village—the spacing of buildings far too regular for a normal settlement—and finds within gears and springs, the chassis of guardians, emptied and looted by people or time or both. She pats the cores in her satchel.

When she returns from Medli, she will take a detour to Hateno, for Purah to see about the slate, and potentially for her to end up in jail again for violating some other law she knew not about. Link laughs a light little laugh to herself and brushes Ilia's mane.

Purah.

Balin, Doreli.

Symin.

The pictobox.

Link sits up on Ilia's back. She disembarks, pulls out the slate, and taps the green rune. With her hand on Ilia's shoulder, she takes a pictograph of the horse and her girl.

They continue along the grassy hills. Occasionally they run into bokoblins on horseback; she observes them chasing after a boar, but does not bother them until one of them looses an arrow at Ilia.

She returns to Ilia with a satchel significantly weighed by the sum of their horns, guts, and claws.
On the horizon booms the last hurrah of summer thunder, the clap loud enough to scare Ilia. Link soothes her but the storm has not passed by morning. She guides Ilia closer to the storm. Near the curtain of rain she can make out another tower. Link consults the terrain from the highest point she can find—a fir tree that climbs the stars—but the mountains and highlands obstruct her view of villages where she could leave Ilia with utmost safety. She turns Ilia out by a grove of trees, making sure to remove her bridle and saddle, anything that could pose a threat to her. Touching their foreheads together, Link promises a swift return.

She scales the tower. The thunderstorm appears centred in the valley between highland. Fortunately she can simply go around the thunderhead and not worry about the rest. And yet, in the crackling claps of thunder, ever so faintly she can hear the strains of an accordion.

Link touches her chin. She looks back at the safety of the hills. She sighs to herself.

And then glides out directly into the thunderstorm.

She has just enough time to make four strange statues with wide mouths and four strange glowing orbs scattered around the basin before she promptly feels, physically, the pesky trouble with gliding out into a thunderstorm to become the highest thing in the sky.

She crash-lands to the ground and ducks her paraglider into the nearest pond to put out the lightning-sparked fire. When she raises her head, she stares at a pair of large black talons, and then up to a pair of grey trousers, and then up to a blue- and gold-feathered body with a blue sash, and then up to an accordion, and then up further to the face of a most familiar rito.

"Hello there, traveller. Fancy meeting you in a storm as thunderous as this one, I do hope that you're all right," Kass says with a smile. She nods, and Kass's smile widens. "I'm pleased to hear you're well. Say, I happen to know an ancient verse passed down in this region. Would you care to hear it?"

Link blinks at Kass, who regards her warmly, and she nods.

"Wonderful. Once more, any errors in translation from the native tongues to Central Hyrulean are purely my own. And without further ado..."

He hums a note; the accordion follows as his feathered fingers dance over the manuals. Once more he invokes the Goddesses, and then begins the song:

"Farore, Nayru and Din, and Our Sheik:
"theirs are the guides for the light which you seek.
"Statues that hunger for gems to be whole
"open the shrine for a lightning bolt's toll."

The word shrine catches Link's attention.

"Surely the statues refer to the four facing inwards on Thundra Plateau," Kass notes, "and the gems, to those spheres scattered. But how to make the statues whole? And the toll of a lightning bolt?" Kass hrms. "I should say, traveller, that the fourth Goddess in the song was not explicitly identified as Sheik, but with the symbol of the Goddess Sheik upon the statue, I felt it poetically appropriate."

Link thanks him for the song, and he laughs lightly. "No, thank you for allowing me to perform for
you, traveller. I wish you well. May the light guide your path."

Accompanied by a swell of heroic accordion music, Link stands to face the thunderous landscape. Four statues, four orbs, and enough lightning to make all of the electric monsters around the tower by Pico Pond put together fry themselves into a tizzy.

She removes anything metal, including the silver longsword, in favour of her wooden bow. The rain makes the statues too slippery to climb; she locates the differently coloured orbs and knocks them from the statues' heads with well aimed arrows. Red, green, blue, and purple. The statues, she notices, have carvings on them, three of which match those that she saw in the Temple of Time on the Great Plateau, and the last of which bears the sheikah eye.

She takes a glance around the statues. Each of the statues possesses a mark engraved upon its chest: Farore, Nayru, Din, and Sheik, in order clockwise around the thundering basin. Yet when she—using stasis and well-timed kicks to launch the balls into the air, which miss more often than not—lodges the orbs into the statues' mouths, nothing happens.

Link touches her chin. She inspects the statues again.

As she stares intently at the statue with the symbol of Farore, a strike of lightning cleaves the night. In the second of illumination she can see another symbol on the statue's left hand. She slaps her fist into her palm.

Kass's accordion crescendos in time to her pumping her fists into the air.

The silver longsword serves as the perfect lightning attractor. Link allows lightning to strike each statue twice as she observes the symbols on their left and right hands; their backs remain clean and unmarked.

The orbs must correspond to the missing symbol.

Now the order proceeds Sheik, Din, Nayru, Farore counterclockwise with the statue of Farore receiving the orb of Din. As she puts the final orb into its place, with the fourth attempt being the charm and also breaking the wooden stick she has been using, lightning strikes the four orbs at once.

The ground quakes. The accordion music reaches a sharp peak and relents as the clouds part and a shrine rumbles in ancient machinery from the ground.

She whirls about on her heel, nearly stumbling over, and grins at Kass, thumbing at the shrine while waggling her eyebrows. Kass arches his at her. "How ingenious," he remarks quietly. "I would not have thought to use the lightning to search for hidden symbols, nor that the orbs might not match the visible engravings. Well, thank you for illumining the true meaning of the song, traveller. I hope to see you once more. May the light guide your path."

Link thanks him once again. "Could I offer you a meal sometime?"

The accordion slows. "Pardon?"

"I like to cook food for people. Could I cook for you sometime?"

Kass chuckles softly. "Perhaps I will take you up on that someday, when I have fulfilled my promises. Until then, I cannot allow myself such comforts except in the rarest of circumstance."

The corners of Link's mouth twitch downwards. "I have promises to keep, and paths to walk before I sleep, and the world is lovely, dark and deep." She tilts her head to one side, and he plays a little
ditty on the accordion. "That's from an old poem my mentor's father once wrote. Ah, but let me not keep you."

Link nods at him. If she had the words, she could say something, could convince him to break the fast with her, could ask if he would like to accompany her. Instead she steps up to the shrine to swipe the slate over the face of the pedestal and descends into the darkness.

Merely instructions again, on lightning and thunder. Nodding sagely, Link exits the shrine.

No accordion music greets her. Only the lonely wind. She returns to Ilia to curl up for a nap against the warmth of her horse's flank.

When dawn breaks, she begins the trek to Medli.

—

*Spicy Meat Curry* (five hearts, low cold resistance for 05:30) - goron spice, hylian rice, raw meat, spicy pepper

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Here we go, off to Tabantha! The city of Medli, of course, is named after Medli from *The Wind Waker*, who is Vah Medoh's namesake. It's also appropriate as a pun on the word medley, given the singing among the rito.

I had a lot of fun writing this chapter. It's nice to be able to wind down and just enjoy what Hyrule (or the land that was once Hyrule) has to offer. Link's a very fun protagonist to write. I sincerely hope that the humour in this chapter was at least worthy of a wry smile.

You can actually defeat enemies through friendly fire in this game! I've used guardians to take out overworld boss monsters (the first hinox I ever dispatched was with the help of a "friendly" guardian), and I confirmed that you could use an octorok in this manner by killing the red moblin that stands on the banks of Lake Jarrah, near Midla Woods using nothing but dodging/parrying its strikes and standing perfectly in place for an octorok to hit the moblin repeatedly. It's quite satisfying considering the number of times that octoroks have done me low.

Hestu's frog choir is a pretty blatant reference to *Majora's Mask* and the frog choir therein, down to the same colours of frogs. I picture the koroks as being capable of photosynthesis, though they also require nutrients from the soil as plants do. Since they have no mouths, their limbs (both hands and feet) can split into "fingers" that act as roots.

Hey, there's an answer to that question of who stole Link's food and letter back way back when! You didn't think I'd let something like that go unanswered, did you?

The village of Japas is named after the musician from *Majora's Mask*, the Indigo-Go's own bass guitarist.
As before, I've included more monsters than those in *Breath of the Wild*. Monsters described in this chapter include: bari, spark, ampilus, and stinger.

And, of course, the memory here...those of you who have played *The Wind Waker* already know the girl with the pigtails's name. The thing with the girl throwing up pumpkins while Revali shoots them from the sky is a reference to Fledge's minigame from *Skyward Sword*. Honestly, the heart piece minigames from *Skyward Sword* are among the most fun in the franchise (much better than the dumpster fires of *Majora's Mask*'s minigames, ahem) other than *that one minigame you know exactly which one I'm talking*. I should also note that while I portray Link as a pretty good older sibling here, to any of my readers who have older siblings who have been less than fantastic, just remember that the blood of the covenant runs thicker than the water of the womb. My own older sibling is not one whom I would consider an ally of any sort. You needn't feel bad or guilty.

Hyrule was generally divided into provinces, such as the province of Rauru mentioned here, and another province that'll become relevant later.

In *Breath of the Wild*, the Trial of Thunder is given to Link by a mysterious voice of the monk in the shrine. Since I did away with monks who have sat around for ten thousand years, I instead gave those tasks to Kass. Additionally, I made the actual trial a little bit different to keep things fresh for the reader. The poem that Kass says is written in dactyls with ten syllables per line, so the beat so "FArore, NAYru, and DIN, and our SHEIK: / THEIRS are the GUIDES for the LIGHTS which you SEEK" and so forth. Since the Ballad of the Sealing War was in iambic pentameter, I thought I'd do something different for a song in a different style.

The poem that Kass mentions is an adaptation of "Stopping by the woods on a snowy evening" by Robert Frost. I'm not the biggest fan of Robert Frost myself, to be honest; however, I do like those selected lines of that poem. We'll learn more about Kass's mentor and his mentor's father later in the fic. And we'll also learn more about Link's efforts to get Kass to have a meal with her.

As always, a round of applause to my beloved beta reader Emma, who pulls through with truly herculean efforts, and to you, my readers. Thank you for cheering me on.

midna's ass. 12 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: The beginning of our journey to Tabantha! This whole arc is so cozy. Seeing Kass again is a joy.

Delicious in Wild does slapstick humour so incredibly well. Hestu being set on fire is one of my favourite things I've ever read.

Here Link begins her incredible tendency of taking selfies.

In this chapter we see one of several reasons why the Medli arc is my favourite in this series: The girl with the pigtails. Her shadow is cast over the entire series, but it's most prominent here, and it makes me cry every time.

Hearty Salmon Meunière

Chapter Summary

Journeying across Tabantha, the travelling chef is turned away from Medli yet manages to sneak in under the cover of night. The chef prepares a late midnight snack for a resident of the city in exchange for information about Medli's chief. While the resident reveals little, the chef is invited to the resident's home to speak to the resident's mother, who might know more. The chef also remembers a certain conversation with the Champion of Erito, a conversation that calls into question the coincidence of fate.

Chapter Notes

Bonus author's note: Hey, this is actually something that I meant to add in to the previous chapter's notes and completely forgot: Hestu's stars! For those of you who have read *adrift*, you'll recognise many of the constellations. Hestu's stars are versions of constellations from our own world, except that I altered the stories to those that would be thought up in Hyrule, since their traditions and legends differ from our own.

Anouki, the Fixed Star, is our Polaris; the star is named after the northern-polar dwelling race from *Phantom Hourglass* and *Spirit Tracks*.

The Sword in the Stone and the Reflection of the Sword are our Ursa Minor and Ursa Major, respectively; just as Polaris forms the tip of Ursa Minor's "tail" (or the Little Dipper's "handle"), Anouki forms the jewelled pommel of the Sword in the Stone. If you take a look at Ursa Minor/Major, you can see that the "tail" looks like a sword and the "box"/"body of the boar" looks like a rock or pedestal, hence the constellation (to me) resembles a sword in a pedestal. This, of course, refers to the Master Sword, specifically when it's found in a stone pedestal of a sacred grove like we see in *A Link to the Past*, *Twilight Princess*, *A Link Between Worlds*, and indeed *Breath of the Wild*. Ursa Major does look like a reflection of Ursa Minor, at least to me, hence the Reflection of the Sword.

The Seven Sages are our Pleiades, also known as the Seven Sisters, and are a reference to the sages from *A Link to the Past*, *Ocarina of Time* (yes, Zelda is the seventh sage), and *A Link Between Worlds*.

The Hero of the Silver Arrow is our Orion the Hunter, who appears (to me) to wields a bow and to be holding an arrow in his other hand (though most legends regard the arrow as a sword or a club). Orion the Hunter has three very bright stars forming his famous belt. I heard the word "three" and ran with it: the gifts of courage, wisdom, and power. The Oracles of the Golden Goddesses are of course a reference to *Oracle of Seasons* and *Oracle of Ages*, while the Silver Arrow is the item necessary to defeat the pig-like Ganon in *The Legend of Zelda* and *A Link to the Past*. More modern games in the franchise, including *Breath of the Wild*, use Arrows of Light or Light Arrows as the ultimate key to defeat Ganon. I'm not really fond of the holy light motif or symbolism, and there's something interesting to me about using *silver* instead
considering its historic implications against things that go bump in the night.

The Boar of Malice, naturally, refers to Ganon/Ganondorf.

Finally, for those confused about last chapter's memory, I'll make things a little explicit. Link had a little sister prior to the Great Calamity whom Zelda and her father agreed to keep safe within Hyrule Castle in return for Link agreeing to wield the Master Sword that had chosen her. I mean, the Master Sword did choose her. You can imagine, however, that Link might not have been too keen on suddenly becoming the legendary hero.


The road to Medli, largest city of the rito homeland of Tabantha, winds high into the windy mountains. The air around her grows steadily colder. In the evening the skies give up their warmth far quicker, while in the mornings the sun takes longer to penetrate the chill that sets in over the increasingly longer night. Eventually the chill takes root and refuses to part, and she begins to cook spicy hot peppers into her daily meals. The heat burns through her veins to keep the cold at bay when even the warm doublet from the Great Plateau fails. As she climbs higher in altitude, Link finds herself increasingly short of breath, but she acclimates over a few days at the same elevation only to once more feel weakness upon ascent.

The strange dark splotch in the heavens—like a thunderhead fixed against a blue sky—that she first noted upon awakening in the Great Plateau becomes clearer with every step. Her curiosity drives her and Ilia forward.

In villages like Hoskit and Ilari along the trail, Link takes the time to observe the speech of their people, the cadence and rhythm, the gestures and signs. Her body knows the shapes and forms of Tabanch where her waking mind has lost the conscious knowledge. Yet she learns the words and phrases, through study and context and occasional blatant inquiring, that have evolved in the tongue since she last walked the land, and unlearns those that have long since passed out of favour.

Her hundred-year-old speech draws attention nevertheless. She simply ducks her head and, rubbing the back of her head, apologises for her non-nativeness.

For all the coldness of the mountains, Tabantha imparts a special warmth on the hearts of those raised under the winds' protective wings. On one occasion a village guard, eyeing the Champions' slate, makes a passing reference to the Yiga, but beyond this incident she suffers no distrust in the many settlements of the region.

Moreover she learns the recipes. The rito, as well as the many sheikah, gerudo, gorons, and others who live in Tabantha, display a remarkable sweet tooth—or sweet gizzard, perhaps, more appropriately—that leads to the popularity and abundance of sugarcane that thrives in the icy Tabanch weather. Link harvest the cane on her travels. When she rests each evening, she boils the cane to distill a thick saccharine syrup. Crushing the cane for powdered brown sugar takes more effort; Link enlists Ilia's powerful hooves to aid her. As a reward, she steams carrot in sugar and salt for Ilia's supper, the homemade sugar that much sweeter.

The hillsides of Tabantha bustle with arable land, and no crop so evident as the plentiful and ubiquitous wheat. She gathers that before the Calamity, Tabantha had exported wheat—alongside
other products—to the rest of the land once known as Hyrule, but since Hyrule's fall and the loss of over seven-tenths of the population, wilder and wilder varieties of wheat have overrun hills once used as farmlands.

With sword in hand, she mounts her own autumn harvest. The nutty-sweet scent of wheat widens her eyes and growls her stomach with the promise of limitless possibilities; bread and cakes, pies and pastries, porridges and pancakes.

Link knows precious little about the baking of bread.

But that will never stop her from trying. And failing. And vomiting her guts out when her experiments fail to work as intended. And laughing at herself, at her efforts, at the joys of being able to try again. And then trying again.

After passing by the sister villages of Bisht and Basht on either bank of a lake shaped like a bird's foot, Link realises that she has not found poultry sold or eaten anywhere in the whole of the Tabanch countryside. She has seen birds abound in the open air, with wheat for consumption free on the hills, and yet no one eats it.

She cannot recall who first said to her something along the lines of, "when in Eldin do as the Eldic do," but she phases poultry from her diet in favour of beast and fish.

Fashioning herself a fishing pole of wood, Link sets about teaching herself how to fish. Her arms retain the knowledge of how to cast and reel in a line. Still, the first time she endeavours to fish in the fresh waters of Strock Lake, she inadvertently hooks her own boot to the line instead of bait.

She dives into the water to retrieve her boot and takes the next several hours to climb back out.

Link spends the day feeding her cooked bait to fish, having played herself like a fiddle in her assumption if she just stares at the water hungrily enough, the fish will take mercy on her and leap bodily into her waiting arms and plate. Sadly the fish value their lives more than the clamours of her empty belly.

She keeps doggedly at it. She experiments with different bait, with different lines, with different strategies for sighting the shadows of fish beneath the surface and anticipating where they may dart next. A slightly heavier bob and a gentle side to side motion attracts the salmon of the lake best. When she reels in the big one and holds aloft an entire six centimetres of freshwater fish, Link half-cries, half-laughed at her own exhilaration and at the promise of fish for dinner.

She curls up beside Ilia with a full stomach of fish.

Happening upon a camp of bokoblins, she filches furs warmer than her doublet quite literally from their backs.

Along the route to Medli, Link activates shrines as she goes to leave a breadcrumb-trail of blue that she can see down the mountains at night. She purchases needle and thread in Basht. With her tongue poking out of the corner of her mouth in concentration, Link removes the furs from the smallish bokoblin clothing and uses them to line the insides of her gloves and boots.

More than a month and a half of travelling gives Link plenty of time to appreciate the Tabanch harvest: wheat, blackcurrant, beet, pomegranate, rye, tarragon, kale, barley, sycamore fig, parsnip, mustard. She arrives at Lake Totori with the warm aroma of mid-autumn. Within the natural moat of the lake, the great Pillars of Erito jut from the surface of the water to pierce the heavens to a dizzying height. For those not gifted with the wings of Erito, thin and heavily monitored wooden
bridges run between the pillars to lead up to Medli. Ilia shies at the swaying bridges. The guards at the checkpoints demand to know her purpose, to know her station, to understand why she has come. They neither know nor care of a Lady Impa at some village of Kakariko, and they certainly have not the time for a foreigner requesting an audience with their chief in the midst of a crisis.

Something or someone has attacked Medli of late. She can mark the tensions in the guards' shaking pupils and in the harsh corners of their timbres.

They turn her away.

Link rides Ilia around the lake. Monsters of wind and ice alike thrive in the natural conditions of the cold, from slow-flying guays that divert her senses with noxious droppings to giant behemoths of frost, visible only by their twisted multitude of ruby eyes, that hiss freezing breath at travellers that near. Yet for all of these monsters, easily dispatched by paying attention to the road and comprehending their natures, she finds her match in the wolfos that howl with the moon. As though some foul hand had taken wild wolves and grotesquely shaped their forms, for leaner muscles and larger claws, for sharper fangs and crueller thirsts, for the ability to bear a sword or spear or axe between their paws, for the razor tail apt to slice themselves as well as their enemies. She avoids the wolfos when she can, but they ambush her upon the trail.

If not for Ilia she would set off at a glide, but Link cannot leave her companion to die.

The encounters leave a steadily accumulating collection of cuts and scrapes across her body, down her arms, on her abdomen and back. One cuts diagonally along her right cheek from just to the right of the corner of her eye to her jawbone. Again she has neglected to stock up on medicinal salve; the blood heats her face.

The orange glimpse of a shrine leads her astray from the trail around the lake and up another road, this one far less frequently travelled as judging by the snow piling up so high that she can scarcely make out where the path ends and the ground begins. On top of a cliff that overlooks a sudden drop the shrine awaits her.

She climbs the cliffside.

Her eyes widen when she takes notice of a white rito paying respect to the shrine, his head bowed, a splendidly feathered bow curved at his back. Hiding behind a rocky outcropping, Link observes him without interfering. Snowflakes settle on her lashes. She pulls the hems of the hood more closely around her scarred face.

The rito kneels in the snow before the shrine. He places a bowl of something-or-other onto the circular platform, then, laying his quiver across the width, plucks singular arrows from a pile to his right side, dips the arrowhead into the bowl, and fits some spherical cloth-wrapped thing on the arrowhead that he retrieves a basket at his left.

He holds each arrow before the shrine and intones an invocation prior to slotting it into his quiver.

The process goes on for sufficient time that Link's head begins to droop, and the snow weighs down her shoulders with the welcome heaviness of a blanket. She dips down. Her eyelashes rest on the curves of her cheeks.

When she comes to, the white rito has vanished and the moon has risen. Link peers around. The blood from the wound of her cheek has frozen over, as have the other injuries inflicted on her by the wolfos. She has her belongings: the slate, the red telescope, the satchel, the paraglider. She retains the food inside of the satchel and, on a less vital note, Lady Impa's letter, her consciousness,
and her unharmed form. Nothing stolen, nothing changed, save for the rito leaving and the moon
beckoning her to the night.

Shrugging to herself, Link crouches in the snow and sneaks her way towards the shrine. The rito
left an offering of a white substance she cannot identify. The surface of the bowl has frozen over
with a layer of ice. Link need not disturb the offering.

She goes immediately to the shrine.

The shrine tests her mastery of the paraglider even more arduously than those shrines that came
before. The shrine gifts her with a black bow made neither of metal nor of bone, but of the peculiar
slippery material. Discarding her wooden bow at the entrance to the shrine and taking note of it on
her map, Link accepts the trial ahead. Here she must also clear small platforms of enemies whilst
on her paraglider. She rides updrafts to the highest point of the shrine.

Sure enough, the instructions depict the merits of aerial combat, of how to account for the rush of
wind of the fall, of how to nail targets with pinpoint accuracy.

Link stands before the goalpoint, the wolfos's scars still stinging on her face. She braces herself.
The blue curtain of light once more heals her injuries, accompanied by the terrible pain of her skin
evidently stitching itself back together. She signs her thanks to the quiet shrine and returns to the
world.

Outside: no white-feathered rito.

She exhales in relief. Link returns to Ilia and completes the half-circuit to the other end of the lake.
From here she looks out over the lake, pooled silver by the moonlight, and to the stone pillars
around which wrap the vast city of Medli in spiralling multi-storied wooden rings that curve
around each pillar, with wide bridges connecting the different districts of the city separated pillar
from pillar.

With the darkness around her, Link rests her forehead against Ilia's once more. "I'll be back soon.
Stay safe, girl." Ilia licks her face. Link hugs her neck tightly. Then, warming the metal of the red
telescope with her palm, she scopes out the distance between herself and Medli, scales the highest
tree in the vicinity, and kicks off towards the Pillars of Erito.

And flies directly into the nearest tree, hidden in the shadows of the first.

When she excavates herself from the snowbank under the tree, she tries again, this time with
just slightly more focus. Link spreads her wings over the lake. The wind ripples the fabric of the
sail and runs its soft fingers through her hair. She tosses back her head and nearly lets her laughter
echo on the water before the sight of motion along the upper rings of Medli silences her.

With the red telescope, she peers through her left eye to watch the movements of guards. She notes
a handful here and there patrolling the various decks of the city that spirals up the stone pillars.
Landing in the shadow of the great pillar in the centre, the wind howling through the hole carved
out of its heart, she rolls forward under a bench facing outwards.

Link hides beneath the bench while she catches her breath and assesses her plans. She need merely
find someone for directions, someone beside the guards that would kick her out of the city or get
her arrested again.

She rolls out from under the bench to glance around at her surroundings. The wooden platforms
that make up the majority of Medli feature muted paint of murals and symbols along the ground.
Though she cannot read the Tabanch signs on the nearby buildings, Link gathers that she currently stands in in some residential area, with the wooden houses offshooting from the curved path up the pillar—some large enough for two stories, some incredibly small, and most somewhere in-between —being the homes of Medli city-dwellers.

Closing the paraglider, Link sits on the bench and looks at the other Pillars of Erito visible from her perch. Parts of the city, she can see from here, have been closed down, off-limits. Other entire portions of the city contain massive gaps between levels, temporarily patched by rickety wooden ladders that bob in the slightest breeze.

She lowers herself to her knees to pray that a Divine Beast has not affected the people of Medli as the Divine Beast Vah Rudania attacked Darunia.

With that, Link begins her spiralling stroll upwards. She keeps to the shadows and avoids the drowsy guards on their night shift. She asks the first villager of Medli she spots about where she might speak to the chief, for she has a letter to deliver, from Lady Impa of Kakariko. The villager of Medli—a short child, feathered green, squatting at the edge of a pond on the upper decks of Medli—rivets glimmering wide-pupiled eyes upon Link.

"Are you the feather faery?" the child asks.

Link cocks her head to one side.

The child stomps her foot on the ground. She brandishes one of her wings out towards Link and points towards the lower curve. Alongside the downy, lighter-coloured feathers that comprise most of the wing, Link can spot a few longer and darker feathers growing in at the top, and patches of sparser feathers near the bottom. "See? Genli lost these feathers there and Genli needs the feather faery to take 'em so Genli can grow in flight feathers already! You're funny looking for a feather faery though. You're not a rito. And Genli's never seen a gerudo with brown hair!"

"I'm a hylian," she signs. "I think?"

Genli sniffs loudly enough for her nostrils to flare. "And you talk funny. You gotta be the feather faery right? Where's Genli's salmon!?"

"Your salmon...?"

The child kicks the pond water with her foot and trips. Link catches her, hands on the child's narrow shoulders, and helps her up. Genli brushes herself off. "You're one dumb faery!"

"So you've noticed I sign instead of say out loud," Link comments with a smile.

Genli makes a gesture that Link does not gesture, but one which makes Genli snicker. "That's not what Genli meant! Anyways, since you're clearly new at this whole feather faery business, let Genli let you in on some suuuuper secret trade secrets. Ready?" Link nods. "When good kids like Genli lose feathers, the good kids give 'em to the feather faery, and then she makes Genli salmon meunière so that Genli can grow our flight feathers big and strong! So make Genli some salmon meunière and Genli'll forgive you for not knowing anything, and Genli won't snitch on you to the Great Faeries!"

Before Link can even lift her hands to formulate anything aping a response, Genli jumps up and down.

"Genli's hungry," she declares, a feeling to which Link can relate so highly that she bobs her head eagerly at Genli's comment. "If you can make Genli some salmon meunière—there's hearty salmon
in the pond; see the red swimmy-swim things!—Genli'll tell you what Genli knows about the chief!"

The promise of a meal and information knocks Link out of even the question of bartering. She uses the fishing pole to snag a pair of hearty salmon—one for herself and one for Genli—from the pond and inquires of the recipe for this salmon moe-n-yeh-r.

Under Genli’s tutelage, Link strips the wheat from the Tabanch hillsides of their kernels. Genli leads her to—Link assumes—a communal cooking area of sorts, currently empty given her nighttime activities, where the rito child points out a hand-cranked grain mill affixed to the edge of a table. Link grinds the wheat into soft white flour by hand. Her fingers ache; she switches hands repeatedly though her right proceeds even more slowly than her left.

Eventually she collects a tidy sum of flour. Link slumps into a chair to flex her fingers, which tense uncomfortably from the grinding. Genli stamps her foot.

"If you want Genli to tell you about the chief, you gotta make it," she says, her feathers flaring out furiously.

"Just one more minute." She cracks her fingers and rolls her wrists. She unties and re-ties her ponytail. Then, with one final curl and uncurl of her hands, she rises to her feet and begins the more fun part of cooking.

Link washes the hearty Tabanch salmon carefully under Genli’s hawkish eyes. Mixing rock salt with a dash of thinly diced red pepper, she kneads the spice into both sides of the fish before spreading out a layer of flour—her paraglider comes in handy as a flat surface—and placing the fish in the flour on both sides. She dabs the salmon repeatedly, shaking it to remove excess flour each time, until the fish has an even coating of white on its entire outer front: juicy meat wrapped in a cocoon of what will become heavenly crispiness.

She sets a rimmed iron lid onto her cooking pot, courtesy of the marketplace of Darunia, to serve as a saucepan. Link butters the bottom and leaves it over the fire until the goat butter turns to molten gold. She adds a touch of herbs for taste and frowns at her own lack of citrus fruit. Instead she sprinkles in a pinch of sugar for an edge to the taste.

At length the outside of the salmon takes on the same sheen as the butter. Link transfers the fish to a plate Genli sets on the communal table and drizzles half of the sauce over the salmon. Then she repeats the procedure with the second hearty salmon, this serving for herself.

Genli perches on a wooden projection that protrudes around the table. Her talons close around the projection and she nestles herself with the table at chest height.

Link watches Genli watch her cook the second salmon. When she finishes pouring the other half of
the sauce over the fish, Genli applauds her. "Thank you for the meal!" she crows, less at Link and more at the skies, and promptly grabs both plates of fish.

Link stands at the table with the saucepan in one hand and the cooking pot tucked into the crook of her other arm. Her stomach gurgles pitifully. She gazes blankly forward as Genli proceeds to rip through both places of salmon meunière, without even a chair at the table at which she can sit, and sinks slowly to the ground on her knees.

She licks the drippings out of the saucepan and the cooking pot. If she lowers her eyelids, Link can smell the aroma of that lightly fried salmon, the juicy innards contrasted so perfectly with the crispy skin, an aroma she has smelled before.

The blue-feathered rito, with the face of a falcon, and two red marks beneath his eyes that she mistook for a perpetual blush at first. He strutted around her in a circle. A circle. On a wooden platform, marked with the same symbol as the decorated back of her paraglider. Something like midmorning or afternoon, the sun frozen halfway up or down the sky. She with a plate of salmon meunière, holding it out to him.

"You think that you're better than the rest of us, don't you." Link merely continued to hold the plate while the blue rito circumscribed her with his talons. "You know, my mastery of the air is considered unparalleled of all of the rito." As if to demonstrate he swept his wings downwards in perfect circular arcs and gracefully launched himself metres into the air. Link looked up at him; she covered the dish with her right hand to avoid his gale taking the fried salmon with it. The blue rito called out audibly his control of his own glide downward, his hover, his ability to barely adjust the angle of his wings to change the entirety of his path of flight.

"I ride the wind like a lover." He drew himself down to Link's height to eye her with enough condescension to drop a lesser being through the floor, but Link—entirely missing the disdain—simply offered him the salmon once more. "They say I fly so beautifully that they call me the painter of the winds. I have been regaled," the rito continues, strutting about Link once again, "as one of the greatest innovators of my craft that have ever lived. Not merely as the Champion of Erito, Hero of Tabantha, the Divine Beast Vah Medoh's Pilot in all of her beautiful glory truly worthy of someone such as myself, but as a visionary of flight whose teachings and skills will spread the wings of future generations."

He notched the golden bow with an arrow bearing a long blue banner as its tail and indicated a tree on the other side of the lake. "And none of that touches my expertise in archery. I can't count how many have hailed me as the modern Hero of the Silver Arrow, that when I vanquish the Calamity forevemore, the legend will pass on to use my name. Not that I need to puff myself up with words. Let me demonstrate my skills, something that you haven't been able to do."

Link did not respond. She continued to gaze directly at the rito and proffer the plate of fish.

"Now, do you see that tree?" Drawing back the string, he closed his eyes and spun himself around twice before loosing the arrow. The blue banner fletched to the arrow's end unfurled in the wind. Even from the massive distance across the lake, she could make out the banner fluttering from the very tip of the tree.

"I could annihilate the Calamitous One with my own wings. With enough arrows I could wear it down to nothingness." He smirked. Link held the plate, her expression blank, and steadily the corners of his mouth curved downwards, the slope of his beak hooking down as though he had scented a noxious fume. "I and the other Champions have trained for this our entire lives. Even before we knew we were Champions we rose to the very heights of what Tabantha, Eldin, Lanayru, and Parapa have to offer, and what have you done? No one ever heard your pitiful little name"
before you pulled the blade from the stone. Where are you from again?" The rito notched another arrow. "Don't think that I speak from a place of nobility. Oh, no, just like you, I was born in the village of nowhere, but I crawled out on my own talons and put my homeplace on the map. Now the name Ilari sits like gold on everyone's tongue where before they spat it out like dust. What have you done before the blade of evil's bane chose you?"

He loosed the arrow, then another, and another. She watched them soar straight and true across the lake to mark the highest of firs with his blue. When he finished the circuit he turned on her.

"Go on. Tell me. What did you do? Nothing. You lived and kicked mud around in the same dusty nowhere's land while I was training to get ahead. When they chose me as the Champion of Erito, I could hear the Goddess smile down upon me for the work I've done, with my own wings. And you just faffed about. Being a courier for the village blacksmith." His smirk returned. He gusted out a laugh. "Courier, huh? Fancy term for a vagabond.

"You don't have the great skills that the Champions're acclaimed for, and you barely even know how to use the blade of evil's bane. You don't know the first thing about anything. I suspect you didn't even know what the blade was there for when you decided to get your slimy hands all over it." He snickered to himself. "No. But the...oh so esteemed royal family wouldn't let anyone they didn't know touch it. Not anyone who didn't have your widdle pointy ears—" He snapped his fingers against Link's ears. She winced. "—and I don't think they even let anyone with the blessings of Sheik or Sageru near the damn thing. A big parade of their own precious jabby-eared hylians. So you showed up one day. On a job for your courier business. Probably out doing the horizontal waltz with your fellow couriers in the city, eh?" She tilted her head to one side in confusion, and he grimaced for an instant before the leer took hold of his features once more. "So here's my theory: the blade picked you because you're the first person who touched it who wasn't a complete farce. Oh, don't misunderstand me. You're even less skilled than they are. But at least you wouldn't pawn the blade of evil's bane for two rupees like the fools at the Court. So the blade, out of desperation, picked you."

His eyes narrowed, glimmered.

"If you hadn't been a hylian like the Princess's dear old daddy wanted—and if Mipha hadn't recognised you—you would've been arrested. Jailed. Executed publicly." He snorted. Link said nothing, but as her arms had tired, she lowered the plate, which deepened his smirk. "Oh, I know I'm supposed to be imparting my great lessons of the bow onto you, like the other Champions have supposedly done before me." He curled the edges of his beak. "Supposedly. But let's face it. You'll never be this good. Maybe in ten or twenty years if you put yourself through the gruelling work I have. But you? Nah. You're gonna stand there and look pretty with that sword while we Champions—" He slammed his wing into his own chest. "—do all the real work. And when the Calamitous One's gone for good by our hands, I swear on the Goddess that we'd better get the credit or I'll train the minstrels myself! So. Then. O Courageous Link. Great hero, chosen by the blade of circumstance and desperation, whose only point in existence is physically carrying the blade like a pack mule so you can bap the bwad bwoar when we Champions are done ripping and tearing. What do you have to say for yourself, O Courageous Link?"
What she had to say. Link glanced down at the plate. She balanced it precariously in the crook of her arm as she spoke the only words that came to her fingertips. "The salmon's going to get cold."

The rito opened his beak. "Anyone," he spits out, word by word, "could fry some awful salmon so docile you can scoop it out of the water yourself. You get me some carp from the eastern side of Hyrule, on the other side of the world, as far away from me as possible, and then maybe I'll pluck myself for you."

"I thought you would be hungry." Link remembers searching seeking out words. She seized upon Daruk's. "We might've been brought together by fate, but we could be...friends?"

His hands closed around the golden bow; she noted him trembling. "I don't need your pity." He stood erect, spine straight as the arrow he had notched in his bow, towering over Link with the arrowhead pointed towards her. "I don't need your pity." His eyes glazed to sightlessness, and she lifted the plate above her head in a final offering of peace. "Don't give your damn pity!"

He loosed the arrow above her. She felt the impact against the ceramic of the plate, the dish slip out from her fingers, and the salmon meunière she had fished and ground and fried herself scatter over the floor, and the wind whooshing under his wings as he flurried into the skies with a bolt of laughter so forced even she could hear the pain rasped out from his throat.

She sits up. The fragrance of salmon meunière has faded with Genli polishing off the meal. Link observes her licking the fried butter and crumbs from the plate.

Her hands shake just enough that she promises herself a proper supper thereafter. "May you please take me to see the chief?" Link signs.

Genli puts her chin on the table. "Genli's just a kid. Genli doesn't have permission to talk to him!"

Link blinks at her.

"Genli doesn't know what you were expecting...but wow! Genli only said that Genli'd tell you everything Genli knows about the chief. Here's what Genli knows: nothin'!" Genli giggles. "Genli doesn't know what to say. Thanks for the grub. In my gra-ti-tude I won't snitch on you!" Genli hops off of the perch and flaps her wings out. Link stares at her receding back as she moves to quit the communal cooking area.

And a hoard of four other rito children swoop down, fluttering to a fault in front of Genli: red, yellow, blue, purple. The blue one steps out of line to lift her hand in Genli's hand. She calls out in a sing-song voice: "The visitor made you food!" The surrounding rito children nod in approval. "No one else has the patience to do that!"

Genli scowls. "Now what's that s'posed to—"

"We should at least," the blue one adds in, "take the visitor to Mother. Maybe Mother can help the visitor talk to Chief Kaneli!"

"Visitor! Visitor!" The red and yellow children, clearly the youngest, walk and fly towards her in one motion. The red takes her left hand; the yellow, her right. Their feathers warm her palms. "Let's go! To Mama! Notts and Kotts'll take you aaaaaall the way!"

Genli hangs her head. "B-but then Genli will get in trouble for sneaking out."

"We'll all get in trouble for sneaking out," the purple one announces, pointing her feathers towards the sky.
"...that doesn't make it any better!" Genli wails, but the others usher her along.

Almost more confused than relieved, Link lets the rito children escort her wherever they would take her. She would thank them if not for her otherwise occupied hands.

But whatever she faces, she faces with an open heart and an open mind, and an open acknowledgment of the blue rito who haunts her the memories of the person who once inhabited this body.

—

*Hearty Salmon Meunière* (full recovery, five golden hearts) - cane sugar, hearty salmon, goat butter, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Another thank-you to my most marvellous beta reader, Emma, for her continual efforts, and to you, the reader, for coming along with me on the journey.

All of the Tabanch villages (Tabanch is the adjectival form of Tabantha) are named after rito in *The Wind Waker*. The fruits of Tabantha are based on those endogenous to Europe and the Mediterranean, where the cultivation of wheat originated. Making sugary syrup from sugarcane is pretty easy, though you need a press (or a heavy horse) to actually make sugar.

Other than the named guays and wolfos in this chapter, I make mention of ice-breathed freezards.

For those unsure about what's going on in the scene with the white-feathered rito, that's Teba preparing bomb arrows for his attempt to attack Vah Medoh. People who have played *Breath of the Wild* already know that how that ends.

Leaving your horse in the middle of the woods doesn't sound like a good idea, especially with how long Link might be gone. I hope Ilia will be all right.

And here we arrive in Medli! I renamed the pillars in the lake to the Pillars of Erito. Link will find exactly what's attacking Medli soon enough.

We see here my take on Revali. I adopted the showboating and the comment about destiny from *Breath of the Wild*. We also get a glimpse at how Link obtained the Master Sword, something that we'll revisit in more detail. The "big bad boar" (bwig bwad bwoar) is, of course, a reference to Ganon/Ganondorf being rather porcine even in his original appearance. The world of *Delicious in Wilds* makes many a negative reference to pigs, including the phrase "treacherous boar" instead of "treacherous snake" which comes from the biblical serpent that doesn't exist in the *Zelda* world. Well, technically there was usage of Christianity and a literal bible in *The Legend of Zelda* and *The Adventure of Link*, but that's since been phased out or retconned in favour of the religion of the Golden Goddesses and so forth.
Note that Link’s time training with Revali took place at a different time than her time training with Daruk, which is why she acts so differently in those two time-spans. Revali’s not entirely wrong about his criticism of the King and their adherence to the prophecy, which in its modern incarnation calls for a hylian and is usually implied to be about a boy. Of course, the prophecy is less a prophecy than people might think and has been changed during the ten thousand years that it was passed down.

I should remind any confused readers that only hylians have pointed ears in Delicious in Wilds; Sheik is the sheikah goddess, and Sageru is the gerudo goddess.

The title of the chapter and the recipe therein spring directly from the side-quest in the game.

Readers will note that I swapped the ages of the rito siblings. Cree is the oldest, then Kheel, then Genli, then the twins are the youngest.

Readers might be slightly surprised at how Medli goes. It’s a pretty significant departure from how the Rito Village segment of Breath of the Wild goes, with quite a surprising twist at the end.

midna’s ass. 13 September 2017.

Beta reader’s comments: So this chapter really shows off a lot of what I love about the Medli arc. Its atmosphere is just incredible - Link flying into Medli in the middle of a cold night is such nice imagery. The entire thing has a feeling I can’t really put into words, but I adore it.

This arc also has Genli and the rest of the kids, who I adore. Plus it has Revali, who ends up being one of my favourite characters (even though I hated him when I first read this chapter).

A little anecdote: I actually read this arc before doing the Rito quests in Breath of the Wild. That ended up being perfectly alright, because stealing into Medli at night and finding Amali and her five kids in person was just magical.

Chapter Summary

The children of Medli bring the travelling chef to their home, where the chef meets a Tabanch housewife who agrees to take the chef to the chief of the city in the morning. Over the baking of carrot cake, the chef finally coalesces memories together to recall the chef's little sister.

Chapter Notes

To all of my readers: my sincerest apologies for that lapse. With this chapter, we're back to our usual release schedule, now that my beta reader isn't busy. I sincerely hope that this sort of delay won't happen again; I've made plans so that even if my beta reader is busy, I'll be able to keep the chapters rolling out. Thank you kindly for your patience. There should not be any more blips.

She learns the children's names on the short path to their house. Cree, the blue one; Kheel, the purple; the inseparable red and yellow whom she cannot differentiate for their constant Notts and Kotts or Kotts and Notts; and Genli, the green, who makes her sisters promise not to snitch on her for having sneaked out in the middle of the night for food of all things.

As they walk upwards, Link listens to the strains of tinkling music. Windchimes, hung nearly everywhere, of various sizes and assortments of wood, different shapes: some cylindrical, some hollowed spheres, some strange twisted helices that she has never seen before. They harmonise with the breeze and Link notices that the children flutter-walk in step with the music. The children's home perches on the wayside of the residential area from what Link can gather, on the very edge of the wooden spiral that juts out over the lake, with the path immediately to its left closed off. The wood that marks the edge of the world has to it a look almost of petrified stone. Beyond the grey border and a hastily erected wooden barrier painted over with large blocky characters, the skies drop into the lake.

Link need not know how to read Tabanch to hazard a guess of keep away or danger or watch out.

The house itself: wooden, as with the others, and painted brightly, mostly in blue, but with a rainbow of highlights. The most prominent recurring symbol, painted not only on the winding path that leads to the house but also displayed over the door to the home, comes in the form of a thick bluish arc, like a crescent moon with the horns cut off and replaced by golden-tan rectangles, and below it a line of musical notes in red, yellow, green, blue, and purple. The roof slopes upwards to a characteristic point similar to its neighbours' roofs.

Instead of a hard door, a curtain of navy fabric hangs from the front of the house.

Notts and Kotts drag Link forward. Cree and Kheel part the fabric to reveal the dark innards of the home, lit by the light filtering through the open windows on the sides.
When the children pull her in, a flame lights in the middle of the foyer room. Link's vision adjusts to the sudden brightness to see a rito woman perched upon a curved wooden branch with a candle in her hand.

The turquoise that feathers her features does not hide the fatigue etched into the violet rings around her golden-green eyes, or perhaps rito simply look like that; Link hasn't seen enough to tell. She has tied back her plume of yellow feathers into a ponytail and sits upon the rito equivalent of a chair—like a bird perched upon a twig—with nothing obscuring the intensity of her gaze as Link studies her studying the children and Link.

Link glances at her escorts for advice and nearly topples over in laughter: all of them have puffed up into nearly unrecognisable balls of fluff and feather, like dandelion puffs standing on pairs of taloned sticks. Genli hides behind Link with Notts and Kotts stepping backwards to emulate their older sister.

Only Cree and Kheel try to stammer something out.

"Th-the visitor made food for us," Kheel explains, her timbre shrill, yet Link can hear the melody beneath her words.

"Meunière," Cree adds, fluffing up her blue feathers. "Salmon meunière."

"And we were really hungry..." Kheel continues.

"...and, that is, er, the visitor wants to see Chief Kaneli, so we said, 'We'll take her to Mother,' since Mother knows everything in the whole world." Cree beams hopefully at the rito woman with the candle, who arches her brows. "The visitor is really nice!"

Notts and Kotts butt in in unison: "C-can we keep it? Please?"

Kheel's feathers flare out further. "You're not s'posed to call people it."

From behind Link, she can hear Kotts leap up and down by the clatter of talon on wood; the child grips the hem of her tunic for support. "But the visitor doesn't look like any gerudo lady or sheikah not-rito I've seen and I dunno what to call it! It's weird!"

Notts agrees: "It's weird! It's weird! They don't have feathers so you can't know what to say! It's weird!"

"I'm a girl," Link offers to alleviate their distress, "and not a gerudo, or a sheikah, but a hylian."

"Ohhhhhhhhhhhhh," the children—save Genli—say together, and then Notts and Kott yelp out together: "What's a hylian!?"

The rito woman brings her free wing to her mouth to laugh softly. She sets the candle down. "Girls, thank you for bringing her here," the woman signs with a flight of feather. "Please go to bed. I'll take care of the visitor."

Notts and Kotts abandon Link first to run off past the fabric door behind the foyer and disappear into the dark. She listens to their muffled jabbering of hylians and what in the world that could mean. Cree hugs her mother good-night, and her mother gives her head feathers a quick preen. Kheel follows in Cree's talonsteps.

Genli scoots a centimetre at a time out from behind Link. She salutes her mother. "Night, Mom."
Her mother signs a wide arc: a word that Link does not know, but suspects represents Genli's name. "Good night. If you want a midnight snack, you can just tell me, you know."

Genli's facial feathers darken to a forest-green and she scampers off.

With the children gone and the tensions relaxed Link allows herself a glance around the foyer, or main room, or sitting room, or wherever she may be. A circle of branches around a decorated floor. Paintings and portraits of the children adorn the walls alongside pictures that—Link assumes—the children have painted themselves. One depicts a family line-up. She recognises Kotts and Notts, Genli, Kheel, and Cree in a row, with their mother on their left side, and a broad blue rito holding some sort of rectangular banana on their right.

The children's mother taps Link's shoulder so abruptly that Link momentarily sprouts wings and jumps backwards. Instead of hitting the door, Link passes through the fabric barrier to smack her rear into the wooden path outside. The sudden chill of evening air hisses just under her skin.

One way to kick out a visitor.

But the children's mother lifts the veil and gestures for Link to come back into the home.

"Wait here a moment," she instructs Link, vanishing into the innards of the house. In the meantime, Link endeavours to learn to perch upon one of the branches that serve as chairs. Her feet cannot curl around the curved top even after she removes her boots. If she attempts to sit normally, the thin branch imprints a painful line into her bottom and thighs, and she falls over either way.

The children's mother returns just after Link has slid off for the fifth or sixth time, her face planted firmly in the floor and her torso in the air. The mother brings a foldable chair for guests.

The children's mother begins making tea. Link could offer her own cheeks to boil the water for the burning flush as she seats herself in the wooden chair.

"Call me Amali," she says. Amali pours tea into two cups and places the pot—green and blue, painted with songbirds—on a stand between them. The wooden cup warms Link's palms. The tea smells of rosehips, of warm cinnamon, of herbs she has scented before but for which she has no name. "Thank you for taking care of Genli." Before Link can react Amali resumes: "I know she asked you for the salmon. Kheel likes porgy, like her father; Cree has a fondness for trout; and the twins like carp." She smiles tiredly at Link. "Of course, they like it because carp sounds halfway to a swear word."

Link reflects her smile for lack of words to say. They fall into quiet. The tea soothes Link's startlingly dry throat. Draining the cup, she rolls it between her palms for the delight of the wood grain texture against her skin.

At length Amali speaks again. "You're more than welcome to more tea if you want it, you know. Now, that is...you wished to speak to Chief Kaneli?"

Link inclines her head. "I have a letter to deliver to him from Lady Impa of Kakariko," she rattles off mechanically, removing the red envelope from her satchel as proof. She notices Amali's eyes widen and then narrow into thin slits of golden-green.

When Amali resumes conversation, Link observes the deliberateness of her motions, the steadiness of the arcs through which her hands sweep, and how her feathers bristle as if prepared to leap away at any second. "If you wished to see Chief Kaneli, you should have passed through the checkpoint, you know."
Link makes an oh noise. "They turned me away!" she explains eagerly, latching onto something to say. "They said he was busy with matters of Medli. Something about recent attacks...?"

The feathers of Amali’s brow arch outwards. "Have you not heard of Vah Medoh?"

She lowers her arms to her lap and shakes her head. Once more Amali studies her under a gaze so heavy that Link defaults to staring blankly ahead.

"Where did you say you were from, and whose letter is this?"

"The letter’s from Lady Impa of Kakariko." Link learned enough from past experiences attempting to justify her actions to elaborate rather than state her basest honest feelings, though she is hungry. "She's been asking me to go to different towns and see how people are doing. She says that since the Great Calamity—" Link touches her fingers to her chin to recall. "—communication has been lacking, is what she said, I think? She asked me to see how they were doing in Darunia, and she didn't give me a letter then. So I went around and asked all the people in Darunia. But I don't think I did a very good job—" Her realisation comes upon her as a storm in the night. "—because this time she gave me a letter for Chief Kaneli directly. I don't know what's in the letter."

"To Darunia, and now Medli?"

Link nods excitedly.

"I suppose you truly have travelled far, you know." Amali’s feathers have settled from their outwards fluff. Fluff. "Who did you say sent you?" Link repeats herself. "Lady Impa of Kakariko..." Amali brings her hands behind her head to fiddle with her ponytail plume. Then in a rush of feathers she flutters down from the perch. "Wait here." She returns within a few minutes with a slitted wooden cylinder, from which she pulls out a long sheet of parchment. A letter or book of some form. Link watches her scan the paper from right to left with a gaze so intense it radiates heat.

After a few moments Amali nods to herself. She returns the paper into the slit and looks up at Link.

"Yes, I've heard of a—Lady, you called her—Impa before. I think my husband..." Amali’s feathers curl inwards; Link blinks vacantly at her. Amali polishes the side of her beak. "Well, that isn’t relevant, you know. I might know why the checkpoint turned you away." Leaning forward, she asks for the envelope. Link lays it flat in her palms. "Do you see the mark upon that envelope?" Amali places a feather against wax seal: the eye with the teardrop. "That is the symbol of Sheik, you know. Yet, if you turn it upside down..." She rotates the envelope so that the tear points away from Link. "...that is the symbol of the..." She signs a word.

This time Link asks directly. "What's that gesture mean?"

Amali spells it out. Yiga.

Link blinks. Instinctively her hand moves to her right hip and Amali inhales sharply, prompting Link to shake her head. "I don't know who they are, but I've been asked before if I'm Yiga."

"You don't know who the Yiga are...?" Amali’s frown etches deeper. "If you speak the truth, then you seem to know very little for a traveller, you know. I mean to bear no insult."

Link rubs the back of her head and smiles sheepishly at Amali instead; the corners of Amali’s mouth hint at an upwards curve.
"The Yiga are...honestly, even I don't know that much about them. They've raided and ransacked villages all over southern Tabantha, and every year they come further north. Some say that they're worse than monsters. Monsters you can hear coming, you know, but Yiga." Amali covers her face with her wings; Link hears her breathe in through the curtain of feathers. "What would possess people to hurt others, to willingly serve the Calamitous One, I don't understand."

Link tries to inquire of the Calamity but Amali pays her little attention. She can see the wet shine of Amali's eyes. In the unsteady jerkiness of her wings, in the way that her words slur and muffle into one another, Amali seems to talk more to herself than to Link. "Since Vah Medoh started attacking things have become even worse, but...few people want to move out, because where would we even go? If we leave, there's no guarantee of safety, but neither is there if we stay, and yet I..." Amali's gestures die away entirely and she hides her face in her wings.

Link continues to sit in the foldable chair with the cup rolled between her palms. Impassively she unfocuses her gaze, the portraits on the walls blurring to a kaleidoscope of colour. She dare not breathe.

Eventually Amali tucks her wings at her sides. Link can see the darker tracks of tears down her cheeks. At least Amali cries no longer. "I'm sorry you had to see that. Recent events have...exhausted me, though that is no excuse, as I know." She flicks out her feathers as if shaking the excess thoughts from her hands. "Would you like more tea?"

Link dips her head.

Amali pours her another cup. "There are those who say that Vah Medoh's attacks are a punishment, you know. They say: if we had not settled down in villages, then our guardian would not have turned on us. They say: the winds that storm from Vah Medoh's wings and the light that burns from Vah Medoh's beak are the Goddess's warning and the Goddess's fury. They suppose that the Goddess should wish us to take to the skies as our foremothers did and keep to a nomadic existence. If I knew more of the world, then I might have my own thoughts, but for me, all I wish is to see my daughters and my husband at peace." She tucks her wings against her boy. Link blinks at her. "I suppose that Lady Impa of Kakariko would be interested in knowing that, you know. If you wanted to write down my words to bring back to Lady Impa, then that would be fine." Her feathers darken slightly in her blush. "Ah, maybe leave out some the things about the daughters and husband."

Link's sheepish smile returns. "Thank you..."

"Now, if this is acceptable, then I will take you to see Chief Kaneli in the morning. I do not suppose that he would find much pleasure in being woken up in the middle of the night, you know."

Link laughs. Amali raises a wing to cover her mouth as she joins in the laughter, up until Link nearly slumps from her chair in a combination of exhaustion and hunger. Apologising to her host, she climbs back into the chair to pour herself another cup of tea.

"Can I do anything to repay you?" Link asks while Amali follows suit on another helping of tea. "I have monster parts." When Amali's features contort she hastily adds: "And rupees."

"Hm? No, no worries at all. I should thank you for making Genli salmon meunière that even she would like." Amali pauses. "The most I could ask of you would be your name, if you were willing to give it. Link? That's a pretty name." Amali sighs. "I suppose I should ask you for another favour. If you wouldn't mind, then could you make a batch of salmon meunière for her?"

Link straightens up in her chair as though the seat had pricked her rear. "I'll whip up anything you
Amali relaxes visibly, the tension leaking from her shoulders. "She's been picky about everything lately. Please, let her antics not get to you. It's the anxiety of Vah Medoh, you know."

"I don't mind at all."

"You say that," Amali replies, her eyes slightly narrowed, "yet your face and your words seem at odds."

Link flinches back. She cannot wash her features of that hollow vacancy. Self-expression. Voice. Instead she feels her fingers pressing against her palms.

Then her stomach grumbles loudly, and Amali pushes her hand over her beak. "I've been a terrible host, haven't I?" she signs with a laugh. "Would you like something to eat?" Link leaps out of her seat; the promise of food has chased away her fatigue so thoroughly that she could wrestle the Malice and win. "Did you not have any of the salmon yourself?"

"It'd be enough if you could let me cook," Link answers honestly.

"I'll come with you, then, lest someone happen upon you." Amali rises from the perch. She dons a cloak of sorts and parts the fabric into the cool night. Link follows her. Where before the slight heat of the afternoon had kept the communal cooking area to a reasonable temperature the onwards march of night has sapped away the warmth. Link shivers.

But neither snow nor sleet nor rain nor fog could keep her from a warm meal.

"Let me help you out, at the very least. Have you ever eaten a Tabanch cake?" Link shakes her head from side to side, and Amali brightens. "My husband tells me I bake so well that I make it look like..." She pauses. Before Link can make known her confusion Amali resumes with a smile: "...a piece of cake!" She laughs to herself. The mirth that wears away the wrinkles at her eyes brings Link to laugh as well for the sheer joy of it even if she knows not the joke.

Link browses her satchel. The very last of the carrots that Koko and Cottla gave her. Endura carrots, only, all of the swift carrots having disappeared here or there into Ilia's belly, as the horse seems to prefer their immediate sweetness to the slow release of endura carrots. Amali inspects the long orange vegetables.

"I haven't seen carrots in ages. You brought these all the way from Necluda? Does everyone in Necluda speak as formally as you do? If you wanted to use that, then I don't see why we couldn't." She breaks off the tip of a carrot to nibble it. "Carrot cake it is."

They work by candlelight and rest by moonlight. While Link grinds out another round of flour—Amali insists she need not do so given the already-made flour that she has available, but Link finds the work a calming reprieve from the pressures of justifying her existence in speech—Amali grates the carrots. She boils sugarcane into a thick crust of brown sugar that she mixes into the carrots, which takes enough time that Link finishes the flour far before Amali has completed her task. After cleaning the grain mill, Link picks out acorns from her satchel, washes, and crushes them into tiny bits. In Link's cooking pot, Amali bids Link to beat goat butter, sugar, and vanilla extract—the latter from a small glass vial that Amali produces with a wink, referring to it as Tabantha's own special ingredient—alongside rock salt and a dash of cinnamon. She adds a white powder that she refers to as aerated salt, though it does not taste salty to Link when she tries it on her tongue. Link's arm threatens to fall off. Amali lets her rest as she mixes in the flour as well, to create a thick batter. When her muscles cease aching, Link takes over yet again to combine the grated carrots, as well as
the crushed acorns, much to Amali’s perplexed yet approving nod. Link butters, then flours, the bottom of a pan. With a grunt, she hefts up the cooking pot and pours the batter into the pan nearly to the top.

Amali demonstrates the use of the wood-fired oven. She slides the pan inside. "It'll be a few hours or so," she remarks. Without a chair, Link seats herself cross-legged on the floor and slaps her cheeks to keep awake. "I suppose you're not used to cooking at night. If you want, then you nap."

Link shakes her head. Not with the scent of carrot cake slowly enfolding in an embrace of warmth.

While they wait, a city guard passes by. Amali chatters animatedly to him, far too quickly for Link to keep up with her words; the conversation reminds her of her relative lack of fluency in Tabanch. The guard leaves them be.

Amali prepares frosting. Under her instructions, Link stirs together the remainder of the sugar with goat butter. Amali dribbles in drops of vanilla, tasting every few drops, until she nods with satisfaction. A splash of milk completes the white substance. Link beats the frosting; it becomes thick and fluffy. Amali retrieves what she calls a piping bag, into which she scoops the frosting and seals the top.

Then the two rest and await the cake in relative silence save for the grumbling of Link's stomach. Lowering her eyelids, she wonders at the whisper of cold across her skin, in the kiss of wind on her cheeks, in the wash of moonlight over her hair. If she listens, she can just make out a song on the wind, and then she realises that she has not conjured up the music, but that the night breeze conducts an aria in the windchimes.

When the wind dies down, Amali breaks the quiet.

"When my husband was here, we would sneak out to the kitchens at night. I would bake long into the wee hours of the morning while he serenaded me." Amali strokes her fingers through her plume of feathers while Link sits without words. "You've travelled a long way. Perhaps you've seen him on the road."

Link glances up at her to meet Amali's expectant gaze. She blinks at her.

"If you haven't, you don't need to feel bad, you know. He has dedicated his life to collecting folksongs from the world over, so he has gone nearly everywhere. To Parapa, to Hebra, to Lanayru, to Faron, to Eldin, to Necluda...and always he brought back songs. When Vah Medoh began its attacks, he left, promising me to return when he's fulfilled a promise he made." She exhales. "He...he has the gentlest eyes of any man I have ever known. Have you met him?"

Link tilts her head to one side, and Amali blushes.

"And of course I haven't given you anything to identify him with. Ah, he's a rito, of course. Blue and gold, and white too, with a black beak. You might know him by his accordion of trade, if you've seen a travelling minstrel."

She sits up. "Kass?"

Amali buries her face in her wings, only the green of her eyes visible behind the crown of her feathers. She nods, and Link pulls herself up the table.

Her arms become messengers of Amali's comfort. She tells Amali of her first encounter with Kass in the foothill village of Medigo on the other side of the land once known as Hyrule, and again at the Thundra Plateau more recently, far closer to Medli. She tells Amali of the songs that Kass has
sung for her and the beauty of his craft both of instrument and voice. She tells Amali of the way that the entire village quieted to listen to him sing.

"...thank you, Link." Amali bows her head. "If you see him again on the road, tell them his daughters and I love him very much."

The cake continues to bake. At some point, Link notices that Amali has dozed off, while the cloak has fallen down to her shoulders. She leans over to pull the hood back up to keep Amali warm.

Link trains her gaze onto the oven. The cake rises up from the pan. She licks her lips.

By the time the cake has finished, the aroma alone has brought tears to Link’s eyes and pink to the edges of the sky. She wakes Amali with a nudge to the shoulder.

They take the cake out together. She wipes drool from the corners of her mouth. Amali decorates the cake with white frosting before they carry the pan between them back towards Amali’s house.

The windchimes meter out a rhythm to their walk, a method to their madness, and Link steps in time.

They barely pass the threshold of the home when five familiar faces pop out from behind the fabric door in a column. They half-fly and half-tumble in at the same time to swarm Link and Amali with demands of cake cake cake for breakfast. Link lifts the pan over her head while Amali bursts out laughing.

"Only after a healthy breakfast," Amali insists. Genli pouts and demands salmon. Notts and Kotts continue to run circles around Link begging for cake, while Cree and Kheel patiently take their perches.

"Can we pleeease practise singing right afterwards?" Kheel asks, puffing up her feathers. "You can conduct us right Mother?"

"I have to take Link to see Chief Kaneli, you know," Amali answers. She sets out breakfasts of seed-and-vegetable salad. "After that, of course, Kheel."

Kheel rustles up her feathers while Genli stamps her foot on the ground. "Genli isn't not not not not eating this!

"Only good girls who have eaten breakfast can have this carrot cake that our visitor made, you know."

Genli glances at Link, who waves at her. "She made it!?" Link bobs her head, and Genli mopes towards the table. "Genli gueeeeeeesssss it's okay to eat salad, if it means Genli gets the cake."

Cree giggles and Genli tries to chuck her spoon a her. Link catches the utensil; she returns it to Genli who exacts her violence on her bowl of salad.

Eventually the salad vanishes into their stomachs. Amali cuts the cake. Link expects none after the fried salmon, yet she finds a plate with a hearty slice pushed into her hands.

If she sobbed for a year, she would not properly express her gratitude.

*Carrot cake.*

Endura carrot. Link has eaten mixed swift and endura carrots before, but never endura by itself.
She has noticed Ilia quicken her pace on swift and ride longer on endura.

She foregoes the spoon and scoops up the slice of cake in her palm. Her teeth pass cleanly through the sweet frosting that melts in her mouth and dig into the moist flavour of the cake, its mild sweetness a perfect complement to the texture of acorn. Warm cake, cool frosting, sugar and substance all at once.

She has tasted this cake before. She stood—her body stood—on a field pillared with stone. A giant bird-like beast of gold and brown, its eyes a dull orange, perched in the centre of the field, dwarfing the city of tents erected at its feet. She stood there nearby with a plate of carrot cake, while the girl with the golden hair conversed with a sheikah woman in a white robe, the latter eating a slice of the cake that Link had prepared.

"...I still believe that the activation of the Divine Beasts has something to do with the sheikah slate," the girl with the golden hair said. "There has to be some way to link the two together."

"Pah, I know," the woman replied, pausing for a moment to pull her dark hair into a taut bun before resuming her attack upon the cake. "Why else do you think we gave the slates to the Champions? Believe me that we are looking at this from every possible angle. You've been traipsing around—"

"...please me, you've been working hard at unlocking that sealing magic. That's what you need to do."

Furthermore, I have reason to believe that the Divine Beasts are associated with the Sacred Realm." The girl with the golden hair rummaged through her pack to retrieve a bound notebook. "I have with me a report—"

"No need." The woman polished off the cake. The girl with the golden hair looked at Link, who cut the woman another slice. She remembers feeling the girl with the golden hair's mounting desperation thick as the scent of carrot in the air. "We have plenty of evidence of how the Divine Beasts functioned and precious little about the Sacred Realm, if the Sacred Realm even exists. We're working on building a dictionary of Loftean as we speak. That'll give us much more to work with than fanciful folk-tales."

The girl with the golden hair opened her mouth but the woman cut her off: "Maybe if you unlock that sealing magic you'll gain access to the Sacred Realm, and then you can test all of your own theories. And I don't want you to get yourself in trouble—or get me in trouble—with your father."

"But that conversation didn't get me much of anywhere. What did Purah say about her sister?"

Link looked behind her to find the woman in black carried aloft by the blue-feathered rito. He set her on the ground and then dropped himself down to cross his wings over his chest.
The woman in black stepped forward. "Your Majesty." She knelt before the girl with the golden hair, who hid her face behind the notebook. "I apologise, Your Majesty, but you cannot run off from your daily prayers. His Highness has given me these very instructions to guard you with my life. If you do not dedicate yourself to studying the sealing magic before the Calamitous One unseals, I will give my life to protect you but that will not be enough. Please, Your Majesty. You must understand."

The girl with the golden hair squeezed the notebook until her knuckles paled to whiteness. She said something, muffled, against the leather binding. "...like I haven't been trying..."

The rito clicked his tongue. "Tch. That's the problem with destiny. We've got the Princess and her Knight, 'cept the Princess can't do the sacred sealing and the Knight can't do the blessed blade-ing. Whumph."

The woman in black glared at him with a gaze so sharp that Link could feel its edge cutting into her despite the distance. "Revali. One more word and we will have to select a new Champion of Erito."

Revali shrugged. "Right, 'cause you could 'select' another one. S'not like the Princess or the Knight, huh? The King could even 'select' another you, ey, Impa?" The woman in black's face remained impassive as tone, and Revali spat on the ground. "Tch. So, are we getting back or what? The other Champs are waiting for you two walkabouts. See, like layabout, except you two have a tendency to walk off and make me fly around searching for you."

"That's enough, Revali."

The girl with the golden hair sank into the grass on her knees. "He's right. I don't know why we're playing at this farce. No matter what I do, it's never going to work."

Revali clapped his wing onto the back of the girl with the golden hair. "Hey now, cheer up. You've got plenty of time before the bwig bwad bwoar shows up. In the meantime there's tons of opportunity to run away, worry everyone to death, and waste everyone's time."

The woman in black looked to strangle Revali, but instead she narrowed her eyes at Link. "And you. She remembers recoiling from the cut of the woman in black's words. "We have to tolerate you for that sacred sword on your back, but how could you encourage Her Majesty? Are you trying to sabotage us?"

The girl with the golden hair stood back up with the knees of her black pants greened by grass. "Leave Link alone," she pleaded. "I begged her to help me. I ordered her to. It's not her fault."

"She's enabling you. Knight or not, if this happens again, I will be reporting this to the King." The woman in black's mouth thinned into a line. "And may I remind you of your sister's conditional stay at castle. Or would you prefer her returned to your parents?"

The memory fades into the curdling of her blood and the thudding of her heart at the fear of the threat, yet she feels no fright at all at the woman in black's final words.

No, not fright, but hope.

Whatever happened to the silent castle on the horizon—if her little sister could have been sent away—then maybe—

Link licks the frosting from her fingers, counting the names that she has collected like so many scars on her skin. The Champion of Erito, skilled with the bow. Revali. The Champion of Gorogoro, who offered her a home. Daruk. The girl with the golden hair, scholar of the shrines. The
Princess. The woman in black, the Princess's shade. Impa. The girl with the red hair, who made her promise—promise something. Marin. The horse with the white mane, who came at her whistle. Ilia. The girl with the golden-brown hair, who smelled of horses. No name. The girl with the pigtails, with the red telescope, with the blue dress patterned in red flowers that Marin had given to her—she remembers this so distinctly that her breath catches. Marin, the sunrise honeying her fiery red hair and dark brown skin, with a box. *For your sister. I hope she doesn't mind a hand-me-down.*

The girl with the pigtails. Who found the seagull drawn into the lapel of the dress and screamed out loud with her surprise and joy.

*Your sister.*

She stares at her reflection faintly visible in the ceramic of the empty plate.

A sister.

The girl with the pigtails, who loved carrot cake.

She lifts her head to the children. To Cree, to Kheel, to Genli, to Kotts, to Notts. They poke fun at one another, laugh with one another, insult one another, support one another, distract their mother together to filch more of the carrot cake.

A little sister.

Her lips part into a grin that she could not stop if she tried. She can sense the tears brimming at the corners of her eyes.

Carrot cake.

She helps Amali to clean up. While she stacks dishes and the pan to wash in the basin of the communal cooking area, Amali leaves Cree in charge of the other girls, to Genli's vocalised dismay. Link stifles a laugh. She leans over to Genli to promise her another meal of salmon meunière tonight.

"For a feather faery who doesn't even know what a feather faery's s'posed to do," Genli says with half a grin, "Genli thinks you're not so bad!"

A touch on Link's shoulder makes her turn towards Amali, tilting her head up to look at her. *Come on," she signs. "I'll take you to see Chief Kaneli."

"And then afterwards, I can teach you to bake cannoli." She laughs at her own joke.

Link wonders if her sister would have liked cannoli.

—

*Enduring Carrot Cake* (six hearts, two-fifths golden stamina vessel) - cane sugar, endura carrot, goat butter, rock salt, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes

Author's notes: Hopefully next chapter will return to my previous release schedule. The delay actually isn't my fault for once and I have it prepared for release as of the evening of the fifteenth of September, but my beta reader had other plans.

I don't have time for a long author's note tonight, so I'll be fairly brief. Amali is Kass's wife from the games, if you recall. I decided to make her more prominent here than she was in the game. Interesting that Kass has heard about Lady Impa of Kakariko! I wonder from where Kass might have heard that name. Perhaps just on his travels, sure. But perhaps...

The Yiga being around southern Tabantha is a reference to the location of their headquarters, so they would necessarily move from south to north through Tabantha.

Unlike Yunobo, who referred to Vah Rudania with reverence, Amali calls Vah Medoh "it" which is a change of pace.

And hey! It's a younger Purah. The Champions here were selected for merit, and Impa herself is replaceable; the Princess is of course by blood, while the Master Sword chose the Kight.

Indeed, Link now remembers fully about her sister, except for a name, which will have to wait. She does, however, remember Revali's name at last.

Anyways, thank you to you, the reader, for reading along with me this far, and thank you in advance to my beta reader for pulling through whenever she does.

midna's ass. 15 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This chapter, again, is everything I adore about our time spent in Medli. Amali's five children are written so well, and Amali herself is a wonderful character, and they play so well into the atmosphere of the arc.

Link remembers her sister here. It's so very bittersweet in the most beautiful way.

This chapter has a cool memory, too. Getting to see Purah in the past is really neat.

Emma. 17 September 2017.
The travelling chef delivers the Kakariko matriarch's letter to Medli's chief. After activating the city shrine, the chef witnesses the Divine Beast attacking Medli. The chef, the Tabanch housewife, and the Tabanch housewife's children escape to the flight range at the outskirts of the city to regroup with the city's most renowned archer and warrior. When the archer leaves to collect his wife and son from the besieged city, the chef strives to convince the Tabanch housewife that they need to do something about the Divine Beast now.

To my readers: I thought I posted this twelve hours ago, but apparently AO3 had a hiccup and didn't post it. Well, it's posted now, and the twenty-third chapter will be out within another twelve to fifteen hours.

In the early chill of the morning, Link shivers and rubs her arms. Medli crowds with rito alongside a sizeable population of gerudo and fewer numbers of sheikah and gorons, the latter mostly tourists or merchants from other regions, though most clamour to leave the city rather than to stay. The attacks of the Divine Beast have constricted the city immensely with entire blocks no longer permissible for entry, leading to people turned out of their own homes and the establishment of temporary huts that take up even further space in the already-crowded liveable portions of Medli.

Amid the hubbub, in the jostle of the masses, the heat of bodies pressing in too close and the din of voices rising up too loud, Link loses Amali. She pants heavily and finds the sky spinning around her in wheels of blue and brown. Link sits down in the middle of the street with her knees tucked up her chest to try to catch her breath and quell the heart that thuds so loudly she can no longer hear the windchimes.

Her mouth dries; her lungs ache; passersby crash into her and yell for her to get off the road; she can do little but shake her head back and forth, her fingers twitching and her hands shaking. No words come.

When a warm and feathered hand grips her wrist, she dare not look up. The scent of carrot cake lifts her eyelids.

Amali.

She leads Link through the masses, holding her hand, and Link lets herself drift along, eyes closed.

Eventually the crowds thin out. Amali speaks to guards here and there. Chief Kaneli, they discover, cannot meet with Link right now, for he works on preparations of how to handle the Divine Beast. Link leaves the letter with a messenger who bears resemblance to a secretary bird.
and who promises to deliver the letter post-haste.

On the return trip Link keeps her eyes open. A most familiar orange glimmer catches her attention. With her fingers still wrapped around Amali’s, she drags her companion towards the shrine. She whips out the slate to demonstrate to Amali, taking the rito woman’s wide pupils as a sign of encouragement, and activates the shrine.

When nearly everyone in the nearby vicinity turns to gawk at the now robin's-egg blue shrine, Link covers her face with her hands and considers paragliding off of the side of the city. Even landing in the lake would make for a better experience than all eyes on her.

While she panics, something pushes her into the shrine. She thumps against the inner circle of the lift and turns back to look at Amali, who runs her fingers repeatedly through her plume of hair.

Her fingertips ache to ask yet her arms have leaden and numbed.

The lift takes them down. The lift slows. The lift opens.

Amali steps out to peer about the inner workings of the shrine. "...where are we. Link."

Link hazards half an explanation. That someone she has never met before—someone who wrote her a letter on the Great Plateau—told her to activate as many shrines as she could. That Amali’s own husband has, before, given her a song with which to turn such a shrine to blue. That Lady Impa has offered the same suggestion for her with the village shrine in Kakariko.

Amali shakes her head and gestures to the slate Link holds. "Do you know what that is?"

Tilting her head to one side, Link shrugs. "I’ve heard it called a sheikah slate and a Champions’ slate. Your people should have one of these too, right? I know the gorons did." She pauses and the truth that she has fought down to the pit of her stomach shoots up her throat to dawn upon her. She swallows back the rising bile. "The Divine Beast," her hands say almost without her making the motion. Her fingers tighten around the slate.

"If I may be honest..." Amali exhales a shaky breath. Link can see her frame trembling. "In the Great Calamity, the slates were lost, you know. My husband has told me of the stories passed down from that time. If you have a working slate, then we need to deliver the slate to someone who can access Vah Medoh." She shudders. "Where did you even get it from?"

Link tells the story that she has, by now, oft repeated, of awakening without memory, of finding the letter, of acquiring tasks from Lady Impa. She leaves out any mention of who inhabited her form before she awoke at the Shrine of Resurrection.

"I think the slate was meant for someone else, but I have it now."

Amali paces back and forth. Her feathers ruffle further and further from her skin until she looks more akin to a wall of loose cotton than a rito. Link would laugh if not for the pressures above her head threatening to cave in on her shoulders. "Of course Lady Impa would know about of the slates’ function. If she sent you here with the slate, then she must have meant you to help us." Amali stops in her tracks. "And the letter would have contained that information, you know. But then why would she send someone with no memory?"

She has no answer for Amali. Yet the truth of the events in Darunia—of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania—and of the reason behind Lady Impa sending her, or rather her body, churns within her.

"If Chief Kaneli won't see you, then I have a suggestion." Amali turns around to grip Link by her
wrist. Link tries to step backwards and nearly slips down onto the ground instead under the weight of her gaze. Amali releases her. "You will help let us use the slate, won't you?"

Link bows her head. She hears Amali exhale again.

"I'm sorry. You shouldn't be forced into this, you know, but I don't know where we would even acquire another slate." Amali covers her beak with her wings, breathing heavily, before she resumes. "If I'm to be honest, then I don't know the first thing about any of this. But, But I do know someone who can make use of that slate." She starts pacing once more. She ties and re-ties her plumed ponytail. "Come on. How do we return to the surface?"

With the relief easing her nausea, Link focuses on the task of the shrine: a series of windmills that she need activate at the same time. She tests the patterns of each switch, altering them sometimes through careful thought and sometimes by the frustration that brings her to slap the switches about a bit and see what happens. Eventually the slapping-them-about strategy pays off and she lucks into the correct solution.

The cubic light of the goalpoint and the instructions in an ancient tongue startle Amali into soaring a full three metres backwards. Link gestures for Amali to follow her back onto the lift.

"When we return, everyone will demand to know what's happened, you know." The lift hums around them. "If I grab your shoulders, please don't be alarmed."

She's alarmed. The lift opens to the chill of the day, bright and unbearably loud. Abrupt weights on her shoulder coupled with sharp pinpricks around her collarbones and shoulder blades make her yelp. Link's feet lift from the ground. She reaches up to grab Amali around the ankles as the rito woman pumps her powerful wings and rises into the skies.

The yelling of the crowd. The screaming resonating against the open air. Just like Hateno. Just like the village shrines she has broken into. Every time she does this and every time she does not learn; every time she answers the calling of the shrines, more to escape the city than for the shrine itself.

Yet the cries of the city-dwellers do not sound angry, or indignant, or wanting-to-her-arrest-her.

They sound—

—like fear.

When Amali's shriek rips through her ears, Link opens her eyes to find herself staring directly into the violent violet eyes of Malice.

Of the Divine Beast.

Not the shrine. Not her actions.

But the Divine Beast, who sweeps around the city, agonisingly slowly, the rush of wind beneath its wings knocking back Amali and buffeting the masses below. Link stares at the giant windmill-like structures set into the wings as the Divine Beast's beak folds backwards into segmented joints like the blooming of a flower.

The inside of the Divine Beast's head brightens by the second into a blinding flash of violet.

The heart. Not the twisted heart-like cocoon that held the Malice, but—

"and built behemoths four whose hearts did shine"
"with holy power, called the Beasts Divine."

—at last, Link understands.

She feels herself dropping out of the sky just as a bolt of fire-light emerges from the Divine Beast's core. She observes the bolt cross the skies, the after-image seared into her retinas, and crash into the wooden supports of the city. The wood parts in two. The bolt arcs upwards into the stone pillar.

She ogles without comprehension as the city falls apart before her eyes.

Link continues to plummet. The pressure slackens around her shoulder. Her hands move of their own accord to open the paraglider. Amid the rito diving from Medli into a veritable storm of feathers, she tracks the blur of turquoise diving down to the lower levels to land in front of Amali's home. Amali bolts into the house; not a second later she emerges with the children in a rainbow-coloured cloud of overfluffed feather. She spares Link little time; Link follows closely behind her, nearly tripping over the children's nervously clicking talons.

The wood quakes beneath Link's boots. She can hear the screams from the upper strata of Medli. Amali leads her daughters and Link to the nearest diving platform. Link demonstrates the paraglider and Amali, glancing between her talons and the distant shore on the horizon, nods to herself.

"Follow me," she signs, her hands shaking so badly that Link can hardly make out her words. "To the flight range. Can you make it across the lake?"

Link nods.

"Take Cree and Kheel. If anything happens, they can fly a little themselves." Amali crouches down in front of her children to embrace them one by one. A sudden shudder through the floor makes her stand up again. Gathering Kotts, Notts, and Genli into her arms, she leaps off of the platform.

The spread of her wings resembles the paraglider.

Kheel and Cree, their flight feathers still growing in, their down puffing them into terrified balls of fluff, cling to Link's sides. She steps out the platform. The paraglider catches the wind. She leans forward to accelerate her flight after Amali, dodging other escaping rito and the people that they carry.

She does not look up. Yet from the upper bow of her vision, she can just make out a pulsating purple light.

They glide across the lake. Here: silence but for the whisper of the breeze. Amali lands on the shore near the shrine, where stood the white rito with the arrows. When Link clears the cliff-side she does not close her paraglider as usual for the sake of the children burying their faces into her chest, their talons gripping her thighs and hips tightly enough to draw blood. Instead she hovers down gently.

The flats of her boots touch ground.

Amali helps to peel Cree and Kheel from her sides. Link touches the poked-through holes in her fur-stuffed trousers; her fingers come away wet with blood. She says nothing while Amali checks on every one of her daughters, for injuries, for scrapes, for bruises.

Link rubs her arms. Her breaths murmur out in fogged clouds.
Amali rises. It takes Link a moment to recognise that Amali signs at her. "Link. I don't know what happened between the shrine and Vah Medoh, but we need to get up to that flight range." She points to the cliff above, where Link entered the shrine. "Can you—"

"I'll climb. Take your daughters to safety." Link pauses. "You'll meet me there?"

Amali nods.

Link scales the cliff. With every movement of her legs, she can sense the wounds on her thighs, can sense the slate's weight at her hip, can sense the fate pressing in behind her eyes.

Her eyes sting from the cold. A tremor through her limbs halts her climb. She rests her forehead against the wall of stone.

Every second that she does not move, people die.

For the sake of the person that once inhabited this body, and for the heaviness of the slate thrust upon her before she even knew her name.

She scales up to the shrine and walks the path to a ravine littered with thin needles of stone. Wooden targets hang here and there from the needles. Along the lip of the ravine perches a wooden structure with a tall diving platform that juts outwards, as a tongue from the maw of the flight range.

Atop the platform she spots Amali next to a white-feathered rito. Link hastens her step.

The path ends abruptly at ground level. Triangular supports lead upwards to the flight range with no ladder in sight. She shrugs and sets to climbing.

The strength ebbs from her legs motion by motion. By the time she clambers onto the main deck, she supports herself almost entirely with her arms while her thighs ache and throb.

A series of squawks accompanies a set of warm arms lifting her up. Amali and the white-feathered rito carry her aloft—without Link asking—into the wooden structure. Inside, the white-feathered rito drops her unceremoniously onto a mat. Amali coughs and the white-feathered rito's eyes angle.

Link has scarcely time to sit up and start to pull the slate from her hip when Amali pushes a wooden box at her: a first-aid kit, with medicinal salve and bandages. Before her hands can even form the proper questions, Amali has dragged the white-feathered rito outside.

She can make out their argument—at least, she can hear the white-feathered rito's harsh caws of, "For Farore's sake!"—but she focuses elsewhere to avoid eavesdropping. Link glances around the room. Simple dark wood, without much in the way of furnishing. A pair of mats—one of them of hers—upon the floor, too small for a bed, just large enough for a place to sit. Several curved wooden perches. Bows hanging from the walls. Arrows and quivers in varying styles. A series of carvings into the wood at the front: words that she cannot read accompanied by two sets of numbers. A fabric door leading further in. She listens to the excited-scared jabbers of Amali's daughters beyond the fabric door. Kheel and Cree poke their heads out to apologise for hurting Link, but she waves them off.

Link removes her trousers to inspect her legs. Cree and Kheel's talons have more than torn through her flesh. Quietly she cleans out the wounds, applies salve that makes her wince when her fingers brush against her sensitised skin. She wraps her thighs in gauze.

Her trousers. She turns them inside-out to sew the holes back up, re-distributing some of the furs.
When she pulls them back, she can sense the slightly colder patches where Kheel and Cree's talons poked through.

Link stands up to test her limbs. The sudden pressure on her legs nearly buckles her, but she keeps firm and the pain fades to a dull ache. The shrines have healed her in the past. Perhaps she could return to the shrine outside the flight range and enter to allow that blue healing to stitch her skin together as before.

The argument outside dies away. Amali steps in. The purple around her eyes has set in more darkly than before. Link need not ask: "When Teba comes back...until then, all we can do is wait."

"Teba?"

The greatest living archer of Medli; so says Amali. The man whom Amali mentioned would know what to do with the slate. He and the skilled bowmaker Harth mounted an attempt to disable the Divine Beast several nights ago. Link recalls: Teba, praying at the shrine, preparing strange cloth-wrapped arrows. Though they successfully staved off attacks for this handful of days, Harth came away with a wound so nearly fatal that they fear he may face a permanent injury. Yet for all of their efforts they could not find a method to actually cause damage to the Divine Beast, nor to enter, only the blankly blinking terminal that mocked them with its orange gleam.

Teba has gone, Amali explains with lowered eyelids, to bring his wife and son to safety before he considers the possibility of the slate's existence.

"Can't we do something now?" Link asks, the jerkiness of her gestures bumping her shoulder blades against the walls.

"I..." Amali lowers her head. "If I were an archer, then I would fly out there now. But if we have only one more chance, then I would rather wait for someone who can and has disabled Vah Medoh before, you know."

Link dips her head.

Amali seats herself on one of the wooden perches. She adjusts her plume, then hides her face in her hands.

When the fabric rustles and Notts and Kotts step inside, Link notes Amali forcing herself to smile. Kheel and Cree wander out, and finally Genli. Amali gathers all of them into her arms, takes them protectively under her wings.

Link cannot help but recall Dorian's words. Like a mother hen.

She curls herself up on the mat to substitute her knees for the emptiness in her chest.

Genli breaks the silence to demand a meal. The aggression has left her timbre entirely, given way to terror, the search for something she knows amid the fear blotting her out against the vastness of ten thousand years. Link offers to make something for them, and Amali hugs her children more tightly to her.

She finds an open-air kitchen beyond another set of fabric doors. Pushing the cloth aside she comes onto an open wooden platform. From here she can see the city around the pillars. She pulls the telescope from her hip: no sign of the Divine Beast. That alone sinks her to her hands and knees in relief.

Before the Divine Beast strikes again she will take the slate to its heart. If it costs her life, then at
least she can sleep without the weight closing in on her at all sides.

Cake.

She has no carrots left, but she does have almonds. Link checks the pantries for the ingredients that she recalls from Amali’s demonstration. A glass vial. She uncorks the top and confirms the scent of vanilla. The not-salty taste of aerated salt. She spots no grain mill but does find a bag of flour with a clip in the shape of an arrow, the paint uneven and worn down from use. Goat butter, which keeps from melting in the chill of the snowy air. No cinnamon, but she finds other spices: cloves, ginger, nutmeg. She sniffs too hard and sneezes so hard that the jar of ginger almost flies from her hand. Hastily she sets the jars down upon the wooden table.

If she had the time, she would boil her own sugar from sugarcane, yet the sooner she prepares the meal the sooner she can bring warmth to their bellies and smiles to their faces, no matter how transiently. With that in mind, she seizes a bag of brown sugar.

Link whisks the sugar with aerated salt, butter, and flour in her beloved cooking pot. Without milk she adds in a splash of water from her water-skin to break up the batter. She stirs in the spices and the vanilla a dash at a time, tasting the batter as she goes to avoid an overpowering heat—with no lake nearby, except for one at a plunge of several hundred metres, she does not much enjoy the risk of setting someone else on fire with her cooking—and then crushes and scoops in the acorns.

Something—muscle memory, her hands automatically reaching for her belongings—compels her to chop some apples she has in her satchel. Fruit-and-nutcake should do it.

Buttering a pan, she pours the batter in and sets it into the hearth to bake. She breaks up a chunk of flint from her pouch; the spark alights the wood in a blaze of flame.

After a round of clean-up, Link sits cross-legged on the table itself. She props her chin up on one elbow and stares into the flames to chase away unwanted mutters that creep in at the periphery of her awareness.

The frosting. The frosting! Link first prepares the frosting on water, which gives it a blander taste than she had hoped; she discards her first attempt. In the second she simply beats together the butter, sugar, and vanilla. The frosting comes out far too thick. Dribbling in water a single droplet at a time, she adds a sprinkling of nutmeg and cloves to make up for the lack of milk.

She waits.

She waits.

She waits.

She halfway dozes off.

She hears an odd sizzle.

Link looks into the hearth to find the batter having risen up over the sides of the pan to soak into the fire. She rips the pan out from the hearth to save what cake she can.

Fortunately the majority of the nutcake remains edible. She cuts away the crusts on the sides and top that have charred to black. At least she can salvage the cake with liberal application of frosting. She has no piping bag and so spreads the frosting with a spoon instead. To hide the unevenness of the frosting she cuts acorns in half and arranges them in the shape of an accordion, with apple-slice manuals on either end.
She admires her handiwork.

The instant she finishes the second round cleaning up, she wonders at the exhaustion of her all-nighter not yet setting in. Even though she slept the previous day, staying up all night to bake the carrot cake may not comprise the wisest decision she has ever made.

Then again. She ate carrot cake.

With endura carrot.

She snaps her fingers at herself before she takes the fruit-and-nutcake into her arms to bring it inside to Amali and the children.

Genli’s face brightens first, followed by Kotts and Notts, and then Cree and Kheel follow suit once they catch sight and smell of the cake. Link cuts the cake into—she counts on her fingers—ten slices, five slightly larger, the other five slightly smaller. She distributes the larger pieces to the children and one of the smaller pieces to Amali, who declines at first. *"You should distribute my piece to the children too, you know. I'm fine. I'm their mother."*

Link holds out the plate until Amali sighs and takes the slice.

She observes the children dig in. For not boiling her own sugar or having milk, the cake has evidently come out well, judging from the way that the children lick the frosting from their feathers and try to steal cake off of one another’s plates.

Link smells the warmth of the cake herself, the heady combination of baked apple and roasted almond, the sweet and savory in one.

The morning that she rose to view Medli—larger and vaster then, far larger than the Medli that she knows now, with an entire other two pillars that have broken or toppled or otherwise no longer exist, unless her memory has failed her—from the viewing deck of her host's home. In these early hours her host would wake before her and then chide her when she rose with the dawn instead of in the preceding twilight; every day she awakened slightly earlier. Now she stood on the viewing deck lifting up the bow with which he had taught her. She drew her arm back.

The tree across the lake, where even now Revali’s blue banner soared proudly.

Link loosed the arrow.

The red telescope she had borrowed that morning—from whom, from whom, she cannot recall—confirmed that she fell short of her mark and had missed by a wide margin. Exhaling, she tried again.

Throughout the morning she practised until she heard a flurry of feather from somewhere below. Not the usual smooth glide of a rito. A child practising flight for the first time, maybe. She balanced herself on the edge of the viewing deck to take a glance down as a respite from shooting practise.

Revali. Carrying the girl with the pigtails atop his shoulders. She banged her small fists into his head and tugged on his feathers, propelling him upwards. Revali twisted this way and that in the sky. "Stop, stop, if that brat sees me like this I'm going to lose my cool factor—"

The girl in the pigtails responded by tugging harder.

No matter how hard Link clapped her hands over her mouth, she could not contain her laughter.
She rolled away from the edge before Revali noticed her. In an effort to compose herself, Link lifted up the bow once more.

A few minutes of missing every tree in view passed before Revali strutted in from the entrance to the viewing deck. "Sleeping in as ever, I see. Champion of Hylia? No...more like Champion of Hibernation. Ha, that one's good. I'll have to save that for Urbosa." Revali cleared his throat. "I mean, tch. Still slacking off?"

She tucked the bow carefully under her arm. "Thank you for spending time with my sister," Link signed. "She likes you a lot."

"She does?" Two words, two single words in which Revali's voice lost all of its edge and pretense, and his mouth nearly drew up into a smile—though Revali contorted his beak at the last second into a smirk. "That is to say, of course she would. Who doesn't recognise how amazing I am? After all, there's a reason that I was selected as the Champion of Erito. The Hero of Tabantha. The Divine Beast Vah Medoh's Pilot. O Powerful Revali. More than one reason, in fact. As many reasons are there are arrows in those trees." Revali leaned in. "And how many such arrows have you hit?"

Link returned to her archery. Revali insulted her form but in every comment she could make out the shape of a truth. She widened her stance to that of her shoulders; she moved her right foot just in front of the shooting line; she lowered her chest instead of puffing it out as she had before.

Somewhere by the drippings of the afternoon, she heard Revali breathe in. "Well. I'll be plucked." Link lifted the telescope to confirm that—lower than Revali's arrow, and off-centre, and barely threatening to fall out—the arrowhead had plunged into the bark of the tree. "Now do that again consistently and maybe I'll check if my incredible skills have dusted a feather or two off on you."

That night she baked nutcake as gratitude and another peace offering to Revali. She had learned that the quickest way to someone's heart was through their stomach, and she prayed that the gizzards of the rito had similar effect. Her sister slapped her palms on the table and insisted that Link add apples to the acorns, walnuts, and chickaloo tree nuts she was stirring in.

Link did. Fruit-and-nutcake. Revali arched his feathery brow. Her sister referred to him exclusively as big bird or falcon, although in her young age she clipped the ends of her words, so she more often than not called him bi' bir' or falco', and in return he called her pesky monkey, or annoying ape, or occasionally, as now when the sweetness of the cake—or her sister's inquisitiveness—tempered the gale of his frustration: little lemur.

When she finishes the fruit-and-nutcake, she rolls back on the balls of her feet. Amali and Kass's daughters. Amali, waiting for her husband to return. Koko and Cottla, in the shadow of their mother's absence. Yunobo, the weight of destiny freshly thrust onto his shoulders. Whatever may have happened to her sister—to the Champions—to the woman in black, to the girl who smelled of horses, to the girl with thee violet sash, to the girl with the golden hair—she cannot, and will not, let the same happen to anyone else as long as she has blood in her veins and breath in her lungs.

Link fixes Amali with her gaze. Amali shakes her head. "Teba isn't back yet. I suppose that he may be helping with reconstruction. If he were, then I would tell you, you know."

"I don't know if we have time to wait."

Amali continues to shake her head at Link's words but Link reaches out to take Amali's hands into hers. She does not let go. Her fingers form platforms for Amali's palms, her thumbs pressing down just enough to keep Amali from looking away.
As she cannot speak, she lets her gaze dart towards Amali's daughters. The golden-green of Amali's own irises glints with wetness.

She releases Amali. "It's not fair for me to ask you," Link whispers, her gestures contained enough so that the children pay her little attention, "but I can't fly to the Divine Beast myself. If you can take me there—just close enough for me to glide—I'll do the rest myself."

"It's unfair of me to expect a visitor to do anything like this," Amali counters, "and I would only be sending you to your death, you know."

Link's turn to swing her head from side to side. "Please. Trust me. Do you know how Teba and Harth did it the first time?"

The glimmer in Amali's eyes indicates that she does know. "I can't. I'm not a warrior. I'm only a mother and a wife."

"You can fly. That's all I'm asking."

Her motions stiffen. "If you die, then we won't have a slate." She clips the final gesture with the finality of a sudden-dying wind.

Link hesitates. She curls her fingers inwards; her nails print crescent moons of pain into her palms. "As soon as Teba returns he can join me. Or retrieve the slate from my corpse. But we only need to activate the Divine Beast one time, and then it'll stop to attacking. I don't know how long the peace lasts—you have to purge the Malice, or something—but it'll mean no more attacks."

She studies Amali studying her. No noise but for the chatter of the children gobbling up their cake, the clatter of utensils against plates, Genli and Cree arguing about whether they can help themselves to seconds or for whom Link meant the last three slices.

"...and how do you know this?"

Link's hands flatten against her knees. Not a hero. Not the hero. If the word spreads of her having lent a hand to the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, people might expect things from her. She merely bears the slate. A messenger. Nothing more. She could pass on the slate to any other and they could retrace her steps much more efficiently than she could. Yet if she stands idly by and the Divine Beast attacks once more she will never forgive herself.

"Please. Trust me."

Amali rubs her eyes. "I've known you for less than a day, you know. There's only so far I can trust a stranger."

Link stands up. She sets the plate down on the table. Every second, the Divine Beast takes another life. "Can we talk outside?"

"I suppose." Amali takes the pan of cake with her while Genli squawks in indignation. "Stay here."

Not to the diving platform, but to the open-air kitchen. Here Link feels more at ease as she washes out her already clean cooking pot and once more rinses the pan in water boiled from the snow. Amali perches on a branch and watches her.

She rests the pot and pan on the table to dry. The wind whisks the droplets of water from her wet hands.
Link draws in the cool autumn wind, the scent of the harvest on her tongue. She lifts up her arms. Her fingers take the shapes of the skies.

She speaks. In jittered spurts. In slurred gestures. In fits and bursts that almost refuse to come.

Of the journey to Eldin. Of the shrine in Darunia. Of the surveyors who wisely suggested she try the northern mine; Amali interjects to point out that the surveyors seemed more like they were making fun of her than giving actual advice, and Link pauses, touching her chin, and then dismisses the interpretation. Of Yunobo. Of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania.

Of the Malice.

"You don't have to believe me. I didn't do it because I'm some great hero, but...whoever the slate was meant for, I have it now." She forces the words out from her fingertips. "I could give it to someone but I don't know to who."

"To whom," Amali corrects, and then she blushes. "Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm so used to making sure my daughters are speaking properly that I—"

The juxtaposition of the Divine Beasts and the correction of the children's mother make Link double over in laughter. When she wipes the tears from her eyes, she finds the words flowing from her hands that more smoothly. Administration of the best medicine—at least, the best other than food—has loosened her muscle. "I know that this isn't any of my business. But please, please trust me with activating the Divine Beast. Or at least trying to activate it. If anything goes wrong at all, I'll pull out immediately and give you the slate."

Amali paces up and down the kitchen. Link watches her as she continuously looks up at Medli across the water; Link herself glances down into the lake.

The two missing pillars. She can see their stumps protruding from the surface of the water.

Amali crouches down on her haunches by the edge. She starts to move her wings and Link looks on, but the words Amali signs she means for the stars above.

"O Erito, is this Your voice? O Erito, help me. O Nayru, grant me Your wisdom to make the right...the right decision. O Din, grant me Your fire; Goddesses know we'll need it. O Farore, grant me Your wind beneath my wings. O Erito...please."

She straightens up and tucks her wings into her sides. She turns.

"I'll tuck my daughters to bed," she says, her gaze trained on the skies rather than on Link, "and then we fly."

—

Nutcake (six hearts) - acorn, cane sugar, goat butter, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Sorry, Link, if you thought that you could escape from Vah Medoh.
It's not going to be that easy. And poor Link, who gets taloned up by the kids so scared that they cling to her with everything they've got. Of course, Link isn't going to complain about that; that doesn't mean it's not painful.

Gee, Link sure is spending a lot of time with Amali. We get a brief glimpse of Teba, but he's more concerned with getting his family Saki and Tulin safe.

Link does indeed have a panic attack in the middle of Medli because of too many crowds. She's not that good with so many people around.

Link actually managing to speak to Amali for once is a huge step in the right direction. She prioritises the livelihood of the people around her over her own fear. It's also really hard to talk about her experiences like that.

Aha, and here we see why I've been talking about Link's little sister and Revali in these memories, because they finally meet here. Urbosa has a thing for puns.

We get a little insight on the struggles that Amali has as well. It's a radically different experience from that with Yunobo and for good measure. While Yunobo had nothing but praise and encouragement for Link, Amali will be a different story.

Medli has two fewer pillars in the present than it did before the Great Calamity; the two "missing pillars" were knocked into the water during said Great Calamity.

Another big thank-you to said beta reader for continuing to pull through for me every single day, and to all of my readers. You're all wonderful. You're all incredible. Soon enough: Vah Medoh, though not quite yet.


Beta reader's comments: Revali and Link's sister's interaction is so very adorable.

We've gotten hints at Link's issues with crowds before, but here we get to see them in pretty horrifying detail. Poor girl.

One thing I love about this bit is how, despite the circumstances being vastly different, Link still follows the basic progression of Medli - Flight Range - Vah Medoh.

Emma. 17 September 2017.
Spicy Elixir

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef and the Tabanch housewife brew spicy elixir and set off to bring down the Divine Beast of Medli in the hopes of boarding.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Amali invokes Din's Fire in her prayers, Link learns, she means fire.

Literal fire.

The arrows that Amali packs into Link's quiver tip with shards of ruby that shatter apart on impact to deliver a rush of heat and flame. "They can only be prepared in Eldin or Parapa," Amali notes; Link wonders if Glepp and Misan have ever dealt in ruby, "and we don't have that many, you know. If you can, then please be careful and don't waste them."

She instructs Link to pick out one of the crafted rito bows, quick to fire, particularly made just for aerial combat. Her short stature contrasting against bows intended for tall rito, Link runs her hands over them until she finds a bow small enough to strap to her back without bumping against her inner knees.

Amali sketches the Divine Beast Vah Medoh on a sheet of parchment. She taps the piece of charcoal against the back of her feathered hand. Link leans forward on the table while Amali gestures to herself. "I suppose I remember what Saki said. Most of it." Amali draws in the eight rotating fans that Link has seen on the Divine Beast's wings, three on each side, one at the base of the tail, and one at the throat. "If we overheat these areas around the fans...the areas look like window-blinds if you can imagine that..." Link nods. "...then Vah Medoh is grounded until it cools off or repairs itself. I don't really know...but with good aim, Saki told me, each of fans takes one or two arrows to ignite."

Seems simple enough. Link bobs her head. "Vah Medoh circles around. We've seen it make the same circuit over and over until it descends to...to attack." Amali takes a moment to breathe before resuming. "It has small crossbow-like weapons all over its surface, with these projectiles that look like a sunray, if rays were made of solid fire." She frowns at herself. "That didn't make sense, did it?"

Link assures Amali that she understands; she has seen the bolts of fire-light before, and she knows how to avoid them.

"Vah Medoh can also create miniature twisters. I suppose it has to do with turning fans on and off. I don't know that much about its capabilities; the sunray weapons are what injured Harth." Hesitating, she picks the charcoal up again, then stops and sets it down, then plucks it from the table once more. After several such cycles, she sets the charcoal down decisively. Amali folds her hands over one another in her lap. "Before I fly you to Vah Medoh, why don't you practise
Link cocks her head to the side.

"You'll need to be proficient at archery to ground Vah Medoh quickly, you know. I...I suppose I can't help you until you've proven some competence, on my conscience."

She can tell—from how Amali brings her hands up to her face—that Amali is biding her time for Teba's inevitable return, that Amali is delaying the flight to the Divine Beast. Yet at the same time Link would appreciate the chance to test her skills and learn the weight of Tabanch arrows. Amali shows her to barrels upon barrels of arrow reserves; she leaves the ruby-tipped arrows on the table and takes to the flight range with those of wood.

Amali tasks Link with shooting all twenty targets in three minutes. Teba's own record, she notes, reading from the markings carved into the wall by the entrance, clocks in at just under a minute. Link swallows at the gap between her and Teba's skills—and at her own lack of wings—but better to discover her inadequacy at the flight range than in the face of the Divine Beast itself.

Wind gusts up naturally from the ravine down below to form a column of updrafts. Opening her glider, she glances at Amali, who holds an hourglass filled with sand.

Amali nods.

Link takes off.

The updraft flings her high up above the needle-like stone pillars jutting up from the ravine like a miniature copy of the Pillars of Erito. She fights to close the paraglider against the strength of the wind. Looking down, she finds wooden targets arranged in approximately clockwise spirals along the pillars of the ravine. The wooden struts of the glider snap closed; she plummets. She closes her fingers around the bow. Lighter than the traveler's bow she bore before, the rito bow draws more swiftly. As soon as she notes the first target at the bottom curve of her vision. she looses the arrow.

Link hears the arrow thunk into the wood: a sound so satisfactory that she finds her bow notched before she has put word to thought.

She twists herself in the air clockwise towards the next target. Link finds that she cannot draw the arrows with sufficient speed to accurately hit every target, but she can—with reasonable accuracy—try for every other. At the bottom of the ravine, she juggles the bow and paraglider. The telescope smacks her in the face.

Two, three, four, five.

The updraft takes her back up.

She drops down in the same location again to pick off the targets she didn't on her first time around. Then up on the merry-go-round again. She struggles with the gliding horizontally when the winds bluster her ever higher.

Eight, nine, ten.

She manages to get far enough to access a new set of targets. Again she takes the plunge, this time setting herself to spin around before she even closes the paraglider. She looses arrows at every other target. Most hit, many close to the centre; others drift afar or miss entirely. She counts them on the ascent.
Fourteen, fifteen.

The longer she stays in the air, the stiffer her fingers become. By the fifth or sixth plunge, her accuracy has dropped to one in three targets. She tries to crack her fingers to loosen them yet she has precious little time between holding the paraglider and gripping the bow.

Eighteen.

Nineteen.

Twenty.

She lands heavily on the flats of her boots only to eat a faceful of wood. Amali puts a wing over her mouth to make a noise halfway to amusement, and Link tilts her head. "Is that a black eye?" asks Amali. Short of breath, Link lifts her hand to her left eye where sits the telescope; the skin around the socket feels tender and sensitive.

"How did I do?"

Amali sweeps a wing towards the hourglass on the wooden table, its sand halfway out. Link grins. Scrambling to her feet, she pumps her hands into the air and attempts an impromptu shuffle that—for lack of balance—sends her back onto the floor.

"You weren't the most accurate, but the targets on Vah Medoh are fairly large, so I don't think that'll be an issue." She fiddles with her plume of hair while Link stretches her hands and massages her aching-iced fingers. "Ah, that's right. We'll be flying up high, you know—" The sloping of her flight feathers betrays her concern. "—and what you're wearing might not be enough. If your tunic were stitched-in with rubies, then I suppose I would acquiesce, but...let me prepare some sizzlefin trout. It'll increase your core body temperature."

Settling her hands on her hips, Link nods. How could she say no to a meal?

"How does fish pie sound? If the stories are true, then the Champion of Erito adored that dish."

Link raises her eyebrows. "Baking a pie would take a while," she signs.

"So it would." Amali glances away. "But what do you suggest, then?"

She touches her chin. The fireproof elixirs she downed as though dying of thirst in Eldin spring to mind. Steeping great vats of them took her all night, but a more manageable quantity should boil quickly.

"Elixirs?" Amali frowns. "If I'm to be honest, I'm not familiar with them."

"Then," Link answers with a grin only possible by the promise of cooking, pausing to roll up her sleeves, "I'll show you."

In the open-air kitchen behind the flight range, Link scoops snow into the cooking pot; the melted water soon begins to boil. Amali digs several iceboxes out of the snowbanks. One contains red and yellow fish—and a third species that seems to give off a faint glow—jammed in together; another, pinkish-red flowers and orange-gold blooms of flowers; the last, green insects with scarlet wings, all three boxes packed with ice. Link ogles the third box.

"Have you never had a warm darner?" Amali inquires. She plucks a darner from the box and crunches it whole. "They're considered delicacies, you know."
Link braces herself. She takes on a stance of shoulder width. A true lover of food has the courage to try anything. Link pinches the body of a darner between her thumb and forefinger. A film of ice glistens on its wings.

Bottoms up.

Emulating Amali's example, she pops the darner into her mouth. The insect's fuzzy body tickles her tongue. She almost sneezes as she pushes the darner to her cheek to bite down.

The way the insect brushes against her tongue almost feels as if the darner were moving. Its legs wriggle. Its wings flutter against the roof of her mouth.

It buzzes.

Her hands fly to her throat. Link spits the darner out to see it take into the skies before very her eyes. Amali catches the insect from the air between her hands.

Link grabs the rims of the cooking pot in both hands and hefts it up. Not even the pain of drinking nearly boiling water could overpower her need to clean out the insides of her mouth. The cooking pot slams heavily back onto the wood-fired stove. She pushes snow into her mouth to rinse out the remains of live darner.

"They're alive," she sputters out once she finishes, and Amali pats her on the back.

"The darners are frozen, you know. It's difficult to transport them here alive, and so I suppose they're a delicacy. But..." She smiles apologetically at Link. "If I'm to be honest, I'm not very fond of them myself."

By now, the children have taken note of Link and Amali's activities. They crowd around asking what Link intends to make next and if it will be sweet and if they could have some more cake, please, pretty please, both the carrot cake and fruit-and-nutcake were delicious although they wouldn't say no to more salmon meun—

Amali proposes that the children practise their singing; Kheel hops up to the plate. She conducts her sisters through practising their octaves and arpeggios while Link and Amali cook.

Link begins with monster parts. The tail of a fire-breathing lizalfos, still twitching in her satchel from Eldin, which makes Amali grimace. She looks briefly over the monster parts she has collected from the Tabanch hillsides, but Link knows little of their effects.

One tail should suffice.

To facilitate the speed of steeping, she dices the lizalfos tail as best she can. The tough scaly exterior and even tougher layers of a fibrous, fireproofed skin make cutting into the tail a heroic feat at best and a mistake at worst. In the meantime Amali crushes or chops up the crimson fish she names sizzlefin trout; the aforementioned warm darners that heat up and wriggle about as she holds them in her hands; and the pinkish-red blossoms she refers to as warm safflina.

The warm darners, Link finds, are pretty cute when they're not actively crawling around on her tongue. She pets one on the head with a fingertip and it flicks its wings at her.

Everything goes into the pot. Instead of a vat large enough to make enough fireproof elixirs to last the stable a month, she pours in sufficient water for a handful. The elixir boils speedily. The collected herb, fish, insect, and monster starts to coagulate into a thick mass at the bottom.

Whipping out the sword she filched from the bokoblin—Amali leaps a full metre back—Link stabs
through the mass and awkwardly hacks into the lump to break it up, then stirs with the metal sword.

"That's...certainly one way to do that, I suppose."

Amali's comment brings Link to laugh so hard that she almost knocks over the cooking pot. Instinctively she reaches out to wrap her arms around its rim only to remember too late of the boiling water within.

Link lies face-down in the snowbank for a time while the children push and pull her shoulders and ask Amali if she's died.

Eventually the water turns a bright and opaque scarlet. When she stirs the blade around, she no longer has to hack into the amalgam, instead rotating the sword through a thick consistency.

She lets the elixir simmer down a while longer to concentrate. Then she removes the pot from the stove and inhales. Even if Link would not necessarily describe the mixture of scents that coalesce together as delicious, the smell bears a striking difference from the stench of the stable's galley at Medigo.

That more than works for her.

The children take notice and beg for their mother not to force-feed them the whatever-it-is; Genli assumes something 'healthy' while Cree and Kheel fear potential medicine. Amali assures them that the elixir is meant for herself and Link. Cree puts her hands on her hips. "Is it for adults? C-can Cree have some too?" Suddenly the flood-gates have opened and all the children but Kheel demand a sample.

Link glances at Amali, who sighs, brings a hand to her forehead, and relents. She cools off spoonfuls of elixir with her breath and presents them to each child.

Cree, the first to step up, grimaces slightly and opens and closes her beak repeatedly. "Everything for adults is so bitter," she mumbles, and Amali preens the crown of her head.

Not a minute later her entire body darkens with blush and her breathing jacks up into hyperventilation. Amali pleads with her to know what hurts, what has gone wrong. Desperately Link looks left and right for anything that could cool Cree off. With a snap of the fingers she gathers Cree into her arms—Amali lets out a squawk of surprise—and divebombs herself and Cree into the snowbank.

Cree rustles herself into the snow. Link picks herself back out. A cold slickness trickles down the back of her shirt and she yelps. After she shakes the snow from her clothing, she turns back to the other children.

Who stare at her and at Cree, the latter currently steaming in the snow.

"Uh...Genli has changed her mind! Genli s'poses that might ruin her singing voice and then Kheel would be upset, right?" Genli backs away. So does one of either Notts or Kotts. The other one sticks her wing up into the air for a sip; her twin grabs her wing and forcibly pulls it back down.

The box of fireproof elixirs in her satchel comes to the rescue. By Amali's suggestion, they line the box, inside and outside, with cloth to prevent the metal freezing to anyone's fingers. She picks out the empty vials and scoops them into the pot.

Amali leaves Kheel in charge for Cree continuing to sit in the snowbank. When Teba returns,
Amali says—she says *if* at first and then corrects herself—Cree should let him know where she and have and Link have gone, and ask him to accompany them. The violet-feathered rito embraces her mother. "Kheel will do her best!"

Link promises Amali that the elixir will wear off in less than a few hours, that its potent effects—from what she has heard of the making of elixirs—cannot harm, only make uncomfortable.

She touches her chin and then snaps her fingers. Link brings Cree one of the Eldic elixirs to drink. Cree starts to resist, no doubt imagining the horrors of what *this* elixir could wreak upon her already overheated body. Yet Link explains that two elixirs, quaffed in a short time, tend to nullify the effects of one another. And if not, then at least she will gain an immunity to fire for several hours, "*and isn't that neat?*"

Cree drinks the elixir down. Its effects take root more immediately. She slides off of the snowbank to plop onto the deck of the kitchen.

Amali hugs Cree tightly.

Link pulls the slate from its pouch on her right hip and presents it to Amali. "*If I fail downing that big bird thing,*" she says, "*then you'll have it. If I succeed, then you'll give it back to me.*"

Tears wetten Amali's eyes. She tucks the slate away for safekeeping. "*...thank you, Link.*"

"*Don't thank me yet.*"

And then, with preparations complete, they go.

Link and Amali drink down a spicy elixir apiece. Once more Amali grips Link's shoulder blades in her talons. Once more Link's feet lift from the ground as Amali takes flight. With Amali's wings occupied and the pressure of her talons around Link's collarbones and shoulders preventing her from moving her arms, they have little communication. Her skin begins to heat up; she can feel her blood pumping more speedily through her body and her breaths grow quicker. Droplets of sweat coat her brow, her upper back, her entire form as the spicy elixir's effects take hold to a nearly unbearable fever. As if a bobble of bokoblins had captured her and tied her up for a roast, then forgotten about her until morning with the flames licking her from below.

The higher in elevation Amali and Link ascend, the cooler the air. The frigid wind kisses the bare skin of her cheeks and neck; if she could she would tear off her outer layer of clothing to bask in the cold. Higher and higher. The air thins out. She swallows one breath after another.

Link should have made an elixir for high altitudes, if such an elixir exists. Or waited for the fish pie, which would have tasted much more delicious. Her mouth waters—the saliva freezes at the corners of her mouth—as she considers the breadth of what *pie* could mean, of what other sorts of *pie* Amali might make, of what *pie* awaits her when she returns from the Divine Beast.

She notices a hum on the very threshold of her hearing that steadily becomes louder. With difficulty for the muscles kept in place by the sharp points of Amali's talons, Link lifts her head up towards the thrumming.

Above them yet, a good fifty metres away, glides the Divine Beast Vah Medoh.

A bird of gold and brown, its massive wings spreading out from either side of its more compact torso. Its long tail streams behind it and curves flexibly to its circular path. Its head sports four violet eyes, or eye-like jewels: at the top, the bottom, the left, and right. Its beak juts outwards to end in a sharp point; she has seen that beak blossom into a tool of calamity.
Eight windmilling fans. On the underside of the wings she can see metal grating circumscribing the fans in another layer around the same radius as the fan itself. The hot air that exhausts from the grating leaves behind a tell-tale fog that the fans then push down. More violet eyes, or something like them, spot between each of the fans. She can see the darker circles on the eyes rotate and twist about.

She tilts herself back to confirm the weight of the bow at her shoulders and the quiver at the base of her spine.

Amali soars up.

The Divine Beast Vah Medoh nears them at a breathtaking pace. Forty metres away. Thirty. Amali soars upwards to clear its path and then flies higher still. Twenty. Link can feel the pressure loosening around her shoulders and braces herself for the drop.

At about ten metres, the wind rushes up around her and Link lets herself fall.

The Divine Beast passes under her. She clenches her fingers around the wooden struts of the paraglider so firmly that her knuckles could break through her skin. She dare not miss. The Divine Beast continues to pass under her. She makes out the terminal along its spine. The ground rushes up to meet her.

As do the guardian-like eyes on its back.

Just before she slams into the Divine Beast's back, Link breaks her fall with the paraglider. The speed of the Divine Beast's flight and the slipperiness of the floor beneath her boots knock her backwards. She scrambles against the ground to gain purchase. The wind pushes her back; Link lands on her rear and slips rapidly towards the Divine Beast's tail. The dark pupils of the guardians' eyes nearby train on her, but their bolts of fire-light miss for the quickness with which she slides over its back.

If she cannot reach the terminal like this, then she will simply have to down the Divine Beast first.

Link keeps slipping; she rolls left into the Divine Beast's counterclockwise flight. Bursts of noise and sound blaze around her yet Link continues to roll, eyes closed, hands at her sides, until she feels nothing beneath her.

She draws the bow.

She has not the time to pay attention to the eyes that glow with fire-light. Her world narrows down to a thin slice of sky, to the fogged grate that surrounds the furthest fan on the Divine Beast's left wing. As she draws back the arrow, the pressure of the string upon the shaft breaks the fragment of ruby. The arrowhead blazes into the glories of flame.

*O Din.*

She leads her shot but not enough; the arrow nearly whorls into the fan. Just barely does the arrowhead catches onto the inner rim of the grate to explode in fire. Smoke wisps from the grate. Link notches another as she spins through the air to hit the grate on the other side. Something like a detonation booms in her ears. A scraping noise so loud that she covers her ears with her palms.

The Divine Beast drops a fraction through the air.

She notches a third arrow but the Divine Beast has soared too far away and the arrow misses entirely into the lake. Link opens her paraglider; it catches the wind. As her fall slows to a hover,
the sky ceases to move around her. The abruptness of the halt nauseates her.

The Divine Beast glides away.

Link drifts downwards. No matter where she turns her head, she cannot spot Amali. And if Amali has left, Link has no method of flying back up without wings.

The low rumble laughs itself out of her belly. No wings with which to soar to the Divine Beast. Just like the rito in her memories said. Revali.

Perhaps her success with the Divine Beast Vah Rudania comprised nothing but a fluke. The fates granted her one mercy, and now their patience has cut short with her efforts at playing the hero.

The Goddesses have never reached out to her, not can she feel Their gazes on her now. Yet Link does feel something else: a sharpness at her shoulders that makes her look up to see Amali supporting her once more. With a single nodl Amali lifts her up into the air.

They repeat the process, although this time Amali releases her at twenty metres apace instead of ten. The extra distance allows Link to plummet below the underside of the Divine Beast rather than land on its back. The fan that she disabled in the first round has ceased to rotate; the thick smoke that billows outwards swoops into the gusts created by the other fans to blur the grates with grey. She aims for and hits the grate of another fan on the left wing. The second arrow sweeps into the fan and detonates in fire in its midst; the third plunges into the grate and explodes.

Link waits until she can no longer hear the shrill chirping of the guardians' eyes to open her paraglider. Once more Amali does not retrieve her until the Divine Beast has passed a safe distance away.

The third round on the left wing brings her the closest to the centre. The smoke has grown thick enough that Link chokes on it. The acrid stench burns her nose, her throat, the insides of her lungs.

Still the spicy elixir keeps her hands from stiffening, keeps her eyelashes from frosting over, keeps her blood flowing to relax her muscles and keep her focused on the prize.

The third fan gives up the ghost in a belch of smoke.

The Divine Beast begins to lose altitude. Its left wing drags downwards and its spiral around the lake tightens down.

Amali flies her up once more. Link starts to work on the right wing. She lines up her shots to avoid wasting arrows, but the Divine Beast's instability brings her to miss: this time around, Link fails to take out a fan. Only in the fifth round does she polish off the fourth fan.

As Amali takes her up, Link counts the fire arrows she has remaining in her quiver. She has enough to account for two more misses.

Four fans to go.

Link aims more carefully. She tracks the Divine Beast's downwards spiral before she even notches the arrow: applying too much pressure to the shaft could break the shard of ruby on the string instead of against the fan. She dispatches the fifth fan, and then the sixth, with a single missed arrow between them. The Divine Beast starts to plummet so rapidly that her paraglider glides with a barely high speed, and she waits far longer for Amali to retrieve her again.

She lands once more on the back of the Divine Beast. When she slides off, Link twirls herself in
the air to aim for the fan at its lower abdomen. Her first arrow hits square in the centre of the grate. She notches another but—with her position behind the Divine Beast—the sudden influx of smoke into her lungs triggers a boll of bile into her mouth. Link vomits; the jerk of her arms releases the arrow and it shoots off to plunge into the cool waters of the lake.

Panting heavily with the mixed tastes of fruit-and-nutcake and spicy elixir—all soured and bittered by its time in her stomach—fighting one another on her tongue, Link opens her paraglider. She stares at the lake below.

No more misses. The next three arrows must fly to their marks straight and true. The spicy elixir courses heat through her form and yet her blood runs as if packed with ice.

Amali carries her into the heavens once more. Link detects the relative strain with which Amali flaps her wings, the latent exhaustion of having to drag Link's bulk up again and again catching up to. Biting her lower lip until the coppery tang of her blood overpowers the nausea, Link resolves herself to *finish this*.

Her next shot strikes the middle ring of the grate. The fan breathes out its last gulp of smoke; this time Link ceases to breathe until she has dropped out of the grey cloud's range.

Two arrows. One more fan.

The Divine Beast plunges so swiftly downwards, kept aloft by a single fan, that even her paraglider drops more slowly. Yet the same fan continues to propel it horizontally forward just as speedily as before. Staying atop the terminal would prove impossible.

Just one more fan.

Even without the paraglider, she scarcely inches down compared to the Divine Beast's plummet. She and the Divine Beast fall at nearly the same downwards speed. Link lines up the shot with unparalleled ease, needing to lead solely horizontally and not vertically, and her assault on the final fan takes its first hit.

Then Link hears the shrieking of the guardians' eyes as they charge fire-light. The relative speeds of her descent against the Divine Beast's that has protected her—that has caused the bolts the fire-light to hit too high—until now has given way.

The wind whips about her. Her ponytail flails up like a flag above her head. Her clothes billow. Red sights train upon her. Scarlet dots on her chest, her abdomen, her arms, her legs, her own face.

She notches her last arrow.

Even if the guardians shoot her from the sky, Amali has the slate, and Chief Kaneli the letter. Amali will pass the slate on to someone who can use it for the better, who need not *play* hero but who can *be* hero. Chief Kaneli will send a response back with a merchant or a messenger to Lady Impa. At most Link's death will burden someone with a trek to Kakariko.

At most, she will fail in her promises to Genli, and to Ilia, and to herself.

Ah.

If only she could have tasted all the flavours of the world once, but maybe her body already has. That she does not remember them consciously, after all, does not mean her body has forgotten.
She remembers fish pie. Baked into a crust. She remembers sitting over the lake with a fishing pole. She remembers catching fish: blue and yellow. Trout, mostly, and salmon. She remembers the fragrance of the oven. She remembers her sister's glee and Revali's silent respect, and the other rito around the table. Someone Revali knew. Parents, or siblings, or friends, or lovers, she remembers not, but she remembers the taste of fish melting in her mouth, of the crispy crunch of the crust, of the crumbs that she licked up from her lips.

She remembers fish pie.

She looses the arrow and the first bolt of fire-light strikes it from the sky in an inferno of heat she can sense on her face. The second bolt of fire-light grazes her left side and her clothing catches aflame.

A third beep beep beeps at her. Link reaches automatically for the slate in her pouch, to conjure a bomb, but her hand slips into the emptiness of the pouch and her fingers close around nothingness.

The slate remains with Amali.

Link should have waited for Teba.

Something crashes into her back and she wonders at the physical impact of the fire-light, braces herself for the inevitable rush of pain that does not come. The abrupt wind at her face makes her eyes water and squeeze shut, and then Link feels that sharpness at her shoulder blades and her collarbones.

She lifts her head.

Amali.

Link hears the fire-light detonate behind them as Amali flies out of range away from the Divine Beast. But if Amali takes her back now, with a single arrow between them and downing the Divine Beast—if Link does not activate the terminal—the Divine Beast will rouse itself once more in a scant few days.

She cannot let this end here. She cannot let Amali take her back to the flight range. She cannot let a single fan keep the Divine Beast aloft.

And she won't.

Despite the pressure of the talon normally keeping her from moving her arm, Link reaches upwards. With Amali's legs tucked behind her, she can just brush her fingers on the hem of Amali's pockets.

Her hand closes around the slate.

Link twists her shoulders until Amali lets her go.

The telescope smacks her eye again when she opens the paraglider, the slate trapped between her left palm and the wooden strut. She glides down. Link can hear Amali flapping beside her, can see her eyes wide with fear and confusion, but she keeps gliding. The Divine Beast makes its course around the periphery of the lake. She glides until she can make out the shape of the final fan through the Divine Beast's chest. Looping her right arm through both of the wooden struts, Link taps at the slate's surface with her left thumb.

Amali lets out a shriek: a circular bomb. Conjured up in Link's palm. And then tossed towards the
Divine Beast.

The fan sucks in the air around the spinning blade to direct the bomb into its vortex. Link observes the explosive's journey. The sweat on the inside of her palm freezes in the chill of the air and the slipperiness of the slate threatens to slide it from her fingers.

She twitches her left thumb.

The bomb detonates.

The fan continues to whirl.

She inhales, exhales, and closes the paraglider.

As Link descends in front of the Divine Beast, she prepares another explosive. Amali screams wordlessly above her and Link tenses back her arms. The instant she sees the grate, Link chucks the bomb at it with the entire weight of her body behind her; she drags the korok leaf from her back—still waxen red with fireproofing paste—to send it further.

Just as the wind starts to push the bomb away from the fan, she slams the slate with her thumb.

The bomb explodes.

The fan scrapes to a stop.

Link crashes into the water a few seconds before the Divine Beast smacks into the lake on top of her. Its impact thrusts her down; the icy water drenches her clothing to seep cold into the very marrow of her bones like the spicy elixir had drained from her system. The undercurrent carries her. She clings to the slate with whatever ebbing strength she can muster.

Once the water settles, the breath in her lungs floats her upwards. Her limbs dangle beneath her. Something hard stops her skyward journey. Link tries to twist about in the water but the shadow of the Divine Beast darkens her view.

The shadow of the Divine Beast.

*She floats below the Divine Beast.*

Already her lungs ache for air; already her muscles throb pain from fatigue and lack of breath. Link replaces the slate in its pouch before starting to pedal her arms out. Keeping her eyes open beneath the waves sends needles of ice stabbing through them, and so she blindly picks a direction and swims.

In the frigid waters the night whorls at the edges of her vision, darker yet than the inkiness of the deep. The lake is lovely, dark and deep, and if she just rests for a moment, just stops her struggle, just releases the breath she has been holding, she can sleep.

But then Link will never again taste fish pie.

She anchors the memory to her chest as a sole ember in the heart of winter. If she stops struggling, then never again will she taste fish pie. Never again will she bake stuffed pumpkin for Ilia. Never again will she candy apples for Koko and Cottla. Never again will she dream of the dishes she has tasted and forgotten, and the dishes that she will taste in the future, and the dishes that people create for the first time even now across the land once known as Hyrule, across Necluda and Eldin, across Lanayru and Faron, across Parapa and Tabantha, across Hebra and Akkala, and across the
She swims on.

The waters lighten. When Link creeps up her eyelids a hair, she can just see the end of the Divine Beast's form. The promise of air grants her a second wind. She paddles up with such fury that she swallows the water she churns.

Link surfaces.

The first wave of breath to hit her lungs hurts but she laughs through the pain because that very agony means that she is alive. She inhales and exhales again and again through her nose and her mouth at once to revel in the delicious taste of the air itself, cool and crisp and letting her survive.

She takes stock of herself. Her legs have jellied under the water and her arms nearly frozen, spicy elixir or no. Her left side—where her clothing caught fire before the wind put it out—pulses out in occasional pain but the water has numbed her sensations. She cannot quite feel her right foot. Shaking her head, Link makes the short swim to the perimeter of the Divine Beast to hunt a place to drag herself aboard. The Divine Beast floats halfway atop the water, and her hands cannot find purchase on its surface.

But a familiar flurry of feathers fades away her fear.

Amali drops her onto the Divine Beast's back. She helps Link lie down on her back. Link cannot even stop laughing long enough to thank Amali, who reaches into Link's satchel to pull out another vial of spicy elixir. The second helping radiates heat throughout her body. Without the frigid altitude of the high heavens, Link feels hot, too hot, like she should dunk herself back into the water. Yet Amali presses her down onto the back of the Divine Beast. The feverish warmth serves to dispel the last of the chill from her dip in the lake.

Link wants fish pie.

She crawls towards the terminal. Amali aids her to stand.

"Link," Amali signs, then stops. "If I'm to be honest." She stops again. Link stumbles forward and nearly falls; Amali holds her up while Link pulls the slate from her pouch. Her hand falters. Amali sets the slate down into the face of the terminal. Link slumps over the pedestal; the black crystal hums. She can picture the words draining down and filling it back up, though she keeps her eyes closed and focuses on her own breathing.

She feels a stroking motion on her back. Amali, gently rubbing her shoulders. She listens for the sound of the Divine Beast's back unfolding to gain access within. Link rouses herself up into something almost resembling a standing posture. She regards Amali with a sheepish smile. "I'm sorry for taking the slate," she says, "but we were only one arrow away from disabling the Divine Beast."

"Link." Amali covers her face with her wings a moment. Link waits patiently. "I don't even have words for this."

"I'm alive, and you're alive, and no one got hurt too much." Link grins. "And the Divine Beast is down. C'mon."

She steps towards the circular hole that has opened in the Divine Beast's back. Squatting on the edge where the staircase begins, Link looks inwards to find that she can spot the reflection from the surface of the water. Instead of diving into a Divine Beast submerged she could sleep. Yet the
boost in endurance of the carrot cake continues to kick her exhaustion into orbit. That, or the exhilaration of life.

When she does not hear Amali following, Link looks back to see Amali ogling her. "Do you want to wait for Teba?"

"Yes."

"Do you mind if I go on ahead? I can activate the terminal down there at least. Shine some light on the situation." Link closes one eye. "Literally."

Amali grabs Link by the wrist and drags her from the edge like she were scolding a small child. "Absolutely not. What if we lose the slate? You have to bear that responsibility, you know. We should wait for Teba and Chief Kaneli." She pauses. "I suppose I can fly up to Medli to see where they are." Link sighs but inclines her head. She offers her shoulders; Amali frowns. "I don't think I could carry you up there, you know. I'm sorry, but...would you mind waiting?"

Link shakes her head and seats herself by the terminal.

Amali watches her, her feathered hand covering her mouth, her golden-green eyes searching for something in Link's face. Link rubs the back of her head. She watches Amali dip her her head, to turn towards Medli, to crouch down and then to fly up to the city. Her wings flap slowly, unsteadily. Link tracks her flight away from the Divine Beast until Amali disappears behind the pillar. Link's gaze slips down to the entrance to the Divine Beast.

She shouldn't.

But the maw beckons, and the weight of the slate presses into her hip, and the wilds call her name.

—

*Spicy Elixir* (two hearts, high cold resistance for 10:40) - red lizalfos tail, sizzlefin trout, warm darner, warm safflina

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: As always, thank you not only to my beta reader who strives to make every chapter and every sentence better, but also to all of my readers who come with me thus far along the journey. You're all wonderful and you make these fics worth writing.

I feel like some readers might not have paid Amali much attention in-game! Amali, indeed, is Kass's wife in-game, and the mother of Notts, Kotts, Genli, Cree, and Kheel. She's not given a major role in-game. But given Kass's importance (I highly recommend that anyone who hasn't done so finish his quest), I thought that I would give Amali a more prominent role here. I find her a frankly more interesting and fleshed-out character than Teba. Don't get me wrong: Teba's great in his own way, being a warrior but also a father, and so on and so forth. However, when I sat down to think of characters with whom Link should interact, I couldn't help but think that
Amali might prove a better foil than Teba. I stand by that decision. Of course, it's ultimately up to the reader to determine whether I made the right one.

I didn't realise how quickly we pass through the Vah Medoh arc. I believe that I was still in my "yes this is going to be 40-50 chapters long if that" mental state; if I could rewrite this in full now, I would slow down for more fleshing out and character development, but that's just how things are. I think that I cover Vah Rudania and Vah Ruta a touch better, although that's really for the readers to decide.

I didn't mention in the past few author's notes due to the aforementioned time conflicts and whatnot, but I really wanted to emphasise Medli as a medley of music. As the saying goes in-game, rito grow up to be either warriors or singers. The presence of windchimes lends the city a constant music.

The fact that Medli lacks two pillars in comparison to how the city prior to the Great Calamity was my effort to actually change things up, to actually show the effects of the past one hundred years on the world.

Why does Amali sign? There are a few reasons: firstly, I wanted to include another significant and major mute character, so that Link would not stand alone. Secondly, the "virtue" of Erito is self-expression, usually poetically translated as Voice into Central Hyrulean, although in the native Tabanch it includes non-vocal communication as well; to encapsulate this theme, I wanted to include a mute character, so that voice would be explicitly rendered as self-expression. Central Hyrulean, of course, doesn't have the exact same nuances and connotations to words that Tabanch does; hence why the translation to voice can be confusing. It's a bit like how you might talk about an author's "voice" when it comes to writing; the author is not literally speaking out loud, yet you can still discern their voice.

After all, with Yunobo, Link learned to have pride in her own actions, learned that she can successfully (with help) calm the Divine Beasts. After Amali, and in this arc in general, Link is learning about her own voice and to be honest to herself.

So, why Amali at all? Teba is a warrior and a serious, business-like character who wouldn't serve to challenge Link emotionally that much by himself. On the other hand, Amali, a housewife and a more sensitive character with her husband on the road, fulfilled a perfect archetype of a foil for Link to grow and develop. Teba is also important to Link's development, as you'll see in the next chapter. Yet he wouldn't be able to fulfill that role just by himself. Besides, it helps keep the fic fresh for readers.

Vah Medoh supports itself on a series of fans not unlike the way that a helicopter works. I also gave Vah Medoh four eyes to help keep an alien appearance. For those confused, what Link was doing initially on Vah Medoh's back was checking to see whether she could be able to activate the terminal without bringing down Vah Medoh. When she realises she can't, she switches to shooting arrows at it.

Darners and other bugs are good sources of protein. Rito, being bird-like, eat them frequently.

See you tomorrow for another doozy. Up next: Vah Medoh!

midna's ass. 18 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: I really enjoy how the Flight Range minigame from Breath of
the Wild is incorporated in here.

The scene of Link bringing down Medoh is absolutely epic.

This series does comedy super well - the scene of the kids trying spicy elixir is hilarious.

Emma. 18 September 2017.
Chapter Summary

The travelling chef strives to activate the seven terminals of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. With the assistance of the Tabanch housewife and the Tabanch archer, the chef cleanses the Divine Beast of the Malice and remembers something vital about the previous Champion of Erito.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

She walks down the circular spiral of stairs. As Link wobbles tiredly down the stairs, she pulls from her satchel an apple to munch on. Teba, Chief Kaneli, and whoever else Amali sends will come to her aid—she's sure—before she even sets the slate onto the terminal.

If they select a Champion of Erito, surely they would choose Teba for his skills of archery and flight that Amali described to Link, just as they chose Revali before the Great Calamity.

Link taps her left heel twice against the lip of each step before she walks down another flight. When her boot splish-splashes, she looks down to confirm that half of the Divine Beast's innards submerge in water. She crouches down on the step.

While the frigid water of Lake Totori chilled her to the bone, the water within the Divine Beast feels milder. Refreshingly cool. Link cups her hands, pooling liquid in her palms, and tilts her head back. Her parched throat relaxes. She splashes water onto her face, claps her palms onto her cheeks, and rubs her eyes with the heels of her hands.

Time to wake up.

Link tries to dive into the water to check the depth of the main terminal, yet her body floats up to the surface no matter how much she strain to swim down. It takes her a moment to discover the culprit: the closed cooking pot with its wooden lid, full of air that buoys her up. She opens the cooking pot and fills it partially with water until the pot floats without either rising or sinking. Capping the pot again, Link dives down to the bottom.

The water goes deeper than she anticipated. Still, Link can spot the main terminal's orange glow. The bird, the elephant, the lizard, and the camel, with the long-necked bird facing the terminal side this time instead of the lizard.

The other two Divine Beasts must come in the form of the elephant and the camel. Though she can picture a camel's shape, she cannot do the same for an elephant.

She takes a deep breath and plunges back into the depths.

Link just manages to place the slate into the terminal before her lungs start to burn. Paddling wildly up to the surface, she opens her mouth too soon and swallows water. When she drags herself onto the spiralling centre staircase, Link hacked the water out of her lungs by slamming her hand repeatedly against her chest. She eats another apple to make up for nearly drowning herself, then
takes the plunge once more to retrieve the slate.

As before, seven dots appear on the surface of the tablet. She inspects the map of the Divine Beast Vah Medoh. Five terminals remaining. One in each wing; one at the head; one at the tail; and one down on the lower curve of its abdomen. Link spins the map around to look further. By her judgment she cannot access the terminals in the tail or the lower abdomen for the flood of water. The terminal near the head might be outside of the water's range though. No matter how she twists the map, Link cannot tell about the two terminals in the wings, smack dab at the Divine Beast’s middle, the terminals possibly above or below the water-line.

She touches her chin. If she can activate the terminals of the wings, then she could lift the Divine Beast out of the lake. The water would drain, and she would have access to the rest of the terminals.

Link grins to herself and tries to snap her fingers at her brilliance; for her efforts, the slate plops from her fingers. Link dives after it only to realise that the lightweight slate floats.

As she crawls onto the stairs, she regards the ancient tablet in her palm. If the slate floats, then she need not worry about accidentally dropping it. Unless she has fit the slate into the face of a terminal, the slate will simply float back up.

She almost snaps her fingers again at her insight. Link stops herself, sets the slate very carefully onto the dry portion of the stairs, and then snaps her fingers at her brilliance.

With that, she inspects the innards of the Divine Beast. A chrysalis extends from the ceiling where rests the heart of the Malice. Instead of dripping ooze, a flap at its bottom exhausts a translucent purple fog. Similar to those in the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, gears and cords take up either side of the Divine Beast, but Link notices openings into the hollow portions of the wings. Curiously, the upper level of the Divine Beast contains a grate of white lines running horizontally up and down, and left and right. She remembers the white material of the pole with the metallic lift from the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. Sure enough the white grate contains upon it metallic blocks. For now they lie inert. Unlike with the pole of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, Link can spot no lift, no material affixed to the blocks of metal. Merely blocks on a grate. Counterweights, perhaps.

Link shrugs to herself. She climbs up half a turn of the staircase to glance at the back of the Divine Beast. Although she peers with the telescope, she cannot look at much of the tail for the dark depths of the lakewater.

At least the Divine Beast Vah Medoh does not shroud itself in shadow. The openings of the fans and other slits for air flow over its surface—through which the water of the lake has seeped into its belly—provide some light.

She glances left and right. Sliding the sword she stole from the bokoblin from its sheath, Link spins it through the air. It lands in the water angled slightly to the left. The left wing first, then.

Unlike the slate, her sword sinks.

Once Link has hastily retrieved the blade before it disappears from her reach, she considers the route across the water. The carrot cake has given her enough alertness to stay awake, yet her muscles have tired too much to swim across the breadth of the Divine Beast twice over. Link looks pleadingly at her slate.

The snowflake icon.
Cryonis.

She taps the icon to make a small pillar of ice near the stairs. Climbing upon it, Link makes another, and another. She crosses the Divine Beast to where the gears and cords begin. With the gears immobile, she spots a space between three gears where she could possibly squeeze herself through under the water. First she aims the reticle of the slate between the thin gap of two cords to form a pillar of ice on the other side. Then she steps off of her own pillar into the water.

Checking that her cooking pot and paraglider float without sinking, she pushes them through the opening. Link rises to the surface to take another breath. She dives down and fits her head through the space between the gears. With some struggle she manages one arm, and then the other, clearing her shoulders and waist.

Link gets stuck around her hips.

Not for the span of her hips—she hopes—but for the angle. She braces her hands against the gears and tugs herself forward. The teeth of the gears press into the bone of her right hip. Wincing, she tries to twist herself, only to discover that she has lodged her right hip between two teeth of the gear. Her surprise bubbles precious air from her nose. She tries to back up through the space in the gears. Her lung start to ache. In desperation Link reaches into the spot between the gears and struggles to pull out the slate.

Nothing to magnetise. Stasis would hardly help her. Nor could cryonis.

Ah, but this last rune! Perfect.

Link takes a second to snap a pictograph of herself stuck in the gear.

Then she produces a bomb atop the slate. Tossing the explosive as far as she can in the water, she detonates it at a safe distance. The ripples of the explosion shoot her backwards through the gear. The teeth of the gear scream two furrows of pain on her right hip and side. At least she manages to surface before running out of breath.

Link runs a hand over her hip and abdomen. The gear has ground two bruised rows along her skin, but the thickness of her furred trousers has protected her from drawing blood or eating through her flesh.

The thickness of the furred trousers.

She wriggles herself out of the trousers and squeezes herself through the space, carefully angling her hips to avoid jamming them anywhere they do not belong. On the other side Link strains to put on her trousers in the water. On the bright side, the coolness of the lake helps to take the edge off of the spicy elixir which continues to fever her even though she has long since quit the frigid high heavens.

If she can work the wings into the freezing upper altitudes, then the spicy elixir crashing through her system will find use once again. For now it does little but paint blush on her cheeks and dizzy her head from the heat.

The pillar of ice has somewhat melted. She scampers upon it anyway and fishes her cooking pot and its affixed paraglider from the water via magnesis. Link takes the opportunity to pour the water back out of the cooking pot and lighten her load. Then she continues her journey, one ice block at a time.

More than once she pauses to find a path through the gears and cords that block her. Eventually
Link reaches the entrance to the hollow of the wings, marked by circle of light from the opening of the fan on the overside of the Divine Beast and the gentle flow of water pulsing from the underside. She can see a ladder from the floor of the wings down to the floor of the Divine Beast; the water has rendered the ladder useless. She simply tappity-taps the cryonis rune to carve her own path into the wing. To mark the border between the main body of the Divine Beast and the wing, she attempts do a back-flip onto the next pillar of ice. She lands the flip, yet her left foot skids on the slippery ice and she plunges into the water.

She hugs the cooking pot in a makeshift buoy. Something bumps against her head as she surfaces. A metal-like spring. No, not just one spring: a handful of springs and screws.

She follows the trail of mechanical bits to the broken chassis of a guardian bobbing on the water.

The water, she understands, has also given her another boon: everywhere, she can see guardians spritzing out into piles of malfunctioning parts. Had Link not dunked the Divine Beast into the lake she would have needed to fight them. As is, she collects the automata's cores and moves on to the terminal.

According to the map, Link will find the terminal at the very end of the wing. The generators for the fans sit below the water at the floor and connect through cords to the ceiling. She curves her path of pillars to go around the machinery. Simple enough. A straight shot to the end of the wing.

But fate does not give in so easily.

She reaches the wall at the far side of the chamber. No terminal. She raps her knuckles against the wall. No response. Link turns away from the wall, counts to three, and turns back.

The wall remains, stubborn and resolute as ever.

Narrowing her eyes, she sticks her head under the water. The wall runs down into the depths, but by the light of the third fan, she can see a doorway in the middle by the floor. The terminal must lie in a chamber past the fans for safety.

Link touches her chin. She has no guarantee of air on the other side of that entrance, nor can she judge the exact position of the terminal, nor rule out the possibility of enemies she might encounter.

However, with the relatively raised floor of the wing compared to the main body of the Divine Beast, the swim should be shorter. Leaving the cooking pot atop a newly frozen pillar of water, Link attempts reconnaissance.

She dives down to the floor of the wing and frog-strokes her way through the opening. The other side reveals little but darkness in the chamber within, save for the light coming from the entrance. Link swims upwards seeking air. Just as her lungs begin to throb, she surfaces and gasps.

Paddling at the surface of the water, Link looks about. The dim orange gleam of the terminal beckons her further into the chamber. Without a solid surface beneath her boots, she has difficulties finding a good angle at which to make an ice pillar, but she realises that she can use the slate to figure out where the water ends by where the reticle no longer shows freezable water.

The terminal appears to sit on a platform, submerged an arm’s-length under the water. Strangely, sporadic patches near the terminal, as well as on either side, decline cryonis. Link avoids the patches as best she can for safety from the unknown.

A sudden pain at her left heel followed by the rush of water into her boot brings her to a halt. Still
stroking with her right hand, Link touches her boot with her left: the back of the boot has been eaten or ripped away, and the skin of her heel burns with raw flesh.

The sensation of the burning. She has felt it before.

Malice.

Link shifts even more carefully through the waters that sludge with malice. Occasional stray droplets of the stuff—like oil, the malice does not mix with water but drifts freely—burrow burns into her clothing or her exposed skin. The thick furs serve as a natural aegis: a single drop can only do so much.

She bumps her knees against the platform and has to paddle away for the abrupt burst of agony. Water rushes against her now bare knees. The entire platform crawls with malice. Angling her body towards the ceiling, Link attempts to swim over the platform.

Carefully, so carefully, she extends an arm towards the depression in the face of the terminal. The slate does not fit and she inhales sharply and turns it over. Again the slate does not fit. Her eyes widen; she turns the slate over a third time to theoretically the same position as the first, and this time it somehow fits. By the light of the blue on the black crystal, she can see the pulsating violent of the oozing malice, the colour of a bruise, or the spread of blood under the skin from a broken vein. It throbs and beats like the exposed organs of a living creature.

The second that the terminal finishes Link snatches the slate from its face. She kicks off of the terminal to dive back into the water.

Back in the main chamber of the wing, Link straps the cooking pot to her back and begins the quest for the terminal on the other side of the Divine Beast. She examines the slate. When she taps the button that has most recently sprung to life, she gains control over the three fans in that wing.

Link considers. Just with this left wing she could lift the Divine Beast out of the water.

She tries to turn on all three fans, but a message she cannot read appears on the surface instead. She does so repeatedly: the fans do not stir. Link hits the buttons in random orders until—suddenly—the entire Divine Beast jerks at once and starts to tilt. Water crashes into her legs and knocks her from the pillar of ice.

The Divine Beast does not rise out of the lake. Instead the fans on the left side of its body push it nearly vertical—the newly activated terminal pointing skyward, and the other pointing towards the lakebed—and force the Divine Beast to move sideways through the lake. The water gushing down from the wing above presents Link with a brisk shower that nearly drowns her. Out of nowhere something heavy thumps onto her—a cone of some material that covers her head and shoulders—that she dredges off of herself after a round of flailing. A guardian chassis. Link uses it as a buoy until the water settles.

And then a wave crashes her into the wall. From the left half of the Divine Beast comes an angry schwa schwa schwa noise accompanied by a scraping loud enough to hurt her ears. When she gasps for breath, Link notices that the inside of the Divine Beast has darkened. The entrance at the Divine Beast's topside has plugged with something.

A message appears on the slate. She turns off the fans; the awful din grinds to a halt. The Divine Beast begins to tip to the left. Link can barely make out a sliver of sky from the entrance at the top. She touches her chin.
The Divine Beast must have smashed into the cliffside at the bank of Lake Totori, the plug in the entrance one of earth and rock.

And this is why she will never become a pilot of one of the Divine Beasts.

With the slate she figures out a method of reversing the flow of the fans so that they expel air from the top rather than the underside; this accelerates the Divine Beast's plunge back into the lake.

Once the Divine Beast has returned to its earlier position of floating half-submerged, Link takes the tried and true method of hopping across pillars of cryonis ice. She pats the slate at her right hip to thank it for the immense help.

Link wonders if the slate that Yunobo carries has the same runic capabilities, or if Yunobo would have to trek to the Great Plateau to gain them from the shrines there. She wonders if Yunobo can activate and proceed through shrines through which she has already proceeded. She wonders if those who constructed the shrines, the slates, and the Divine Beasts ten thousand years ago could have known what would come.

She wonders about the Great Calamity.

Yet she need not understand the details to comprehend how long its shadow has loomed over the land once known as Hyrule.

Again Link squeezes herself past the gears and cords. Again she passes below the fans amid the guardians that have broken. Again she prepares for the dive to activate the terminal on the other side.

A strange chirruping gives her pause. Link looks behind her to find a purple lizalfos bobbing on the water. She stares at the lizalfos, who stares back at her. The lizalfos opens its mouth to flick its tongue at her and she blocks it with an aegis of ice. Through the reflective surface of the pillar, she notices the lizalfos missing a limb.

She must have picked her lizal hitchhiker up by accident in the lake while cruising the Divine Beast into a wall of dirt.

Link considers dispatching the lizalfos with her boomerang but it poses little threat in its injured state, and she has not time to collect monster parts.

With the cryonis Link makes a thick mat of ice. Grabbing the mat, she pulls the ice out from the water and dives. The ice nearly pops out of her grasp but she holds it in place.

In the next chamber she lets the mat of ice go. She climbs onto the mat and sits at the edge: solid ground. Here, too, the malice spreads. Instead of swimming through the sludge and potentially sacrificing her clothing or skin, she hops across pillars of ice that she creates close together. Once more Link relies on the slate as a method of second sight to discern where each pillar lies.

Eventually she reaches the terminal. Link bends down to slot the slate into the face. She watches the black crystal through its now-familiar system of draining and filling.

And now, now she possesses the power to bring the Divine Beast to the skies.

With a grin Link collects the slate from the terminal. Not even the burble of the malice oozing around her could dim the exhilaration of flying. Her excitement bubbles through her and twitches her fingers as she activates all six fans at once.
The Divine Beast shudders. Link crouches on the pillar of ice; the spicy elixir keeps her knees from feeling the effects of the chill on her bare skin.

She breathes in.

"Medli," she signs to herself, "we have liftoff."

The draining water shatters the pillar. Link lands directly in a pool of malefic and yelps, scrambling to leap to the floor and avoid the Malice from chomping at her legs and rear. Quitting the chamber, Link enters the long inner portion of the wing. The fans churn great gales of wind from the ceiling to the floor. The pull of air through the fans nearly pins her against the ground. The Divine Beast's upwards thrust forces gravity down upon her further as it accelerates. The complicated machinery that she could avoid by the surface of the water becomes a deadly trap of spinning gears and heated exhaust. She takes heavy steps as far away from the fans as possible. Yet at the widest horizontal point of the fans there exists barely a metre from its rim to the wall, and Link cannot proceed.

One by one, Link turns off each fan, rolls forward past its vicinity, and then turns the fan back on before the Divine Beast starts to fall through the air.

Two terminals down, and three more to go: the head, the tail, and the abdomen.

When she completes the trek back to the central chamber, Link encounters another issue. The gears and cords rotate as the fans spin. Their teeth grind against one another; metallic pendulums swing to and fro; the cords move at speeds so high she could lose a hand just by grabbing one. She turns off the fans for a second—a sharp scree echoes from the inner body of the Divine Beast—and sprints through the nearest opening before slamming them on again.

As she pants with her hands on her knees to slow her breath, Link lifts her head to see Amali and the white-feathered rito—Teba, Teba his name—on the floor of the Divine Beast, spread-eagled, wind pounding on them to pin them down to the ground. She looks up: the constant upwards flight of the Divine Beast pulls air into the circular entrance on top and slams it into the ground. Hastily she pulls the slate from its pouch. Before Link downed it, he Divine Beast was cruising easily around the lake. It must have the capability to glide at a constant elevation without plunging. She taps buttons, pushes what she can, and the Divine Beast begins to decelerate and then to slow. The white-feathered rito flaps himself to his feet. He helps Amali up, asks her how she feels—Amali wobbles woozily—and then snaps his head towards Link.

He steps towards her with such deliberation and speed that she barely registers his motion before his hands come upon her shoulders. Nearly twice her height Teba stands over her, staring her down with sharp golden eyes ringed in black.

"What in the heavens is wrong with you?" Teba barks in Central Hyrulean. "You put Amali in danger. You could have put all of Medli in danger. You were given direct orders to stay and wait. You promised to wait. By Erito's talons why? Have you not a bone of Nayru in your body?"

Link flinches back. But she has no words, no excuses, no justifications. The truth: she had fun, and she felt confident in her skills, and she didn't see the danger so long as she kept the Divine Beast from far away from the city, and the conceivable goal of activating terminals could overshadow her terror at the unknowns of the future, that she might have to explain to Chief Kaneli of her actions with the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, that the letter to Lady Impa might have revealed she who once inhabited her form, that her life could expand from bearing the cooking pot to the destiny of the entire world once more.
"You can't treat this as a game. I suppose you think you can waltz in here, fix up Vah Medoh, and then waltz away without giving a feather about the people who have lived with Vah Medoh for centuries. Vah Medoh has killed people. Do you understand that? It will take years to repair the damage Medli has experienced. I don't care who you are or what your problem is, but I cannot have you as a liability."

She can't treat this as a game.

For all of her fear at becoming the hero, Link has taken to the part without the promise. To the spirit of adventure without the responsibilities that heavy the burden.

When he finishes speaking, Teba does not wait for an explanation. He releases her, then holds out his wing. "The slate. Give it to me."

Meekly she hands him the slate.

"Show me how it works."

Her fingers have frozen to her sides. No matter how Link tries to lift her arms, her shoulders merely tremble. Her muscles strain. She shakes her head.

The effects of the spicy elixir have begun to fade. The fire of her inner abdomen subsides; ice encroaches.

Teba hisses out a breath. Amali rests a wing over his shoulders. Link raises her head: where Teba glares at her as hard and cold as ice, Amali merely has the look of someone stabbed through the abdomen, with Link's own hands on the hilt of the blade, the hurt and fear clouding her eyes and softening her features. Link looks away.

Teba swings his head towards Amali. She removes her hand to sign: "Give her a little space."

"She's not a child," he snaps, "and I'll be plucked before I let her put anyone in danger again."

"...give her space, and when she calms down, she'll tell you, you know. Believe me. I'm a mother."

"And you're good at that," Teba says, his timbre quieter. "But this is a matter beyond the hearth." He squares his shoulders. "It's already gone beyond the Harth. It's a matter of Medli's safety. Of Tabantha's safety. Now's not the time for mollycoddling."

Amali's eyes narrow; her beak sets firm. "And I suppose you'll figure out the workings of the slate yourself then? No? Give her space, Teba."

Link drops her gaze to the floor as Amali and Teba argue. They speak of her as though she were an unruly toddler, as though she were not standing in front of them. And what has she done, but act the part of an unruly toddler eager to play with a new toy?

She does not let herself cry, not in front of them, not for the truth. Instead Link flattens her arms against her sides. Slowly she flexes her fingers, then her hand, then her wrist, then her elbow, and finally her shoulders.

"Let me show you."

Link explains as best she can about the map of the Divine Beast visible upon the surface of the tablet, about the different runes, about the seven terminals, about how to control the fans, about the chrysalis that hangs from the ceiling that will likely awaken once the terminals have activated,
about the registration of a new pilot thereafter with the slate likely to drop from the Malice, about the Malice, about the guardians, about how sorry she is for everything, about how she will keep out of his way.

Teba fiddles with the controls. "Tell me how to stop the fans."

Link takes a look; the slate beeps out its message of errors. "I don't know. I can't read that language."

"I see." Teba rubs his temples. "Amali, watch over her."

Amali nods. Teba flaps off with the slate in talon.

Link sits down upon the floor. The cold sinks into her skin. Her face, her neck, the patches where the malice has eaten through through her clothing. Her eyelids weigh downwards over her eyes, but she keeps herself awake on Teba's words.

She cannot treat this like a game.

Amali sits across from her. "I'm not going to ask you for explanations, you know." They settle into silence. Link digs her nails into her knees. "I don't know what the letter said. Chief Kaneli told us that the letter asked for confidentiality."

Link nods.

"I'm going to refrain from asking who you are." Amali's feathers droop from her wings. "I don't think that you broke your promise maliciously, you know. But if I'm to be honest, I don't understand." Amali pauses to fiddle with her plume. The entrapment of the wind has knocked the tie from her feathers, and she re-ties the plumage. "You took care of my daughters. You ate with us. You helped Cree and Kheel to the flight range at your own expense. You've still got the wounds to prove it too, you know. You nearly died disabling Vah Medoh. I suppose I don't understand what motivates you, or what thoughts run through your head, or how I can predict you enough to trust you. You brought us hope with the slate. I don't understand." She swings her head from side to side. "I don't understand what compelled you to the shrine in the midst of the crowd, you know, and even if I were to sit and think for a year, I don't suppose I would have the slightest clue why you broke your promise."

Link stares at her hands, with which she has gathered apples and hunted pigeons and stuffed pumpkins and cleaned catfish and fried salmon and baked cake and steamed herbs and glazed mushrooms and ground flour and diced fruits and skewered meat and stirred elixirs and embraced so many people and stroked Ilia and revealed all of the colours of her heart. She has no words but three: "I don't know."

Link swallows.

"I'm sorry. I don't know. It felt...it felt right. I don't know. I was afraid the Divine Beast would awaken again. I was afraid...no. That's not what I was thinking about."

She cannot fight the tears that blur the edges of her vision. Her gaze slips past Amali's shoulder; she observes Teba fly down from the head of the Divine Beast. He soars over their heads, headed towards the abdomen or the tail. The rush of wind ruffles Link's hair. She runs her fingers through her sidelocks.

"I don't know," she says at last, and Amali does not reply.
She wants to stand, to stretch, to walk the length of the Divine Beast. Yunobo had to activate on several of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania's terminals himself due to her exhaustion, and he—her own age—had done nothing but waited for her to return when she did activate terminals. Somehow he had trusted her immediately and in full and had never questioned her. Somehow she had not questioned herself. But Amali and Teba—adults, parents, in communication with their people instead of youth her own age working alone in their hero's shadow—have questioned her, and now Link knows not what to do, or what to say.

She could leave the slate in Teba's capable wings. She could apologise to Lady Impa with Chief Kaneli's response. She could never look at another shrine. She could return to the Great Plateau and live out her days on apple and mushroom, on bird and fish.

She could never, ever, so long as she lives, so much as be in a position where she could hurt anyone, where she could disappoint anyone, where she could do anything to cause that look in Amali's eyes ever again.

Perhaps one day she could travel again. To taste the meals that the world over has to offer. But only as a traveller, never staying anywhere more than three days, flitting off before anyone could learn her name.

Link wipes her eyes.

"...I don't know where you'll go in the future," Amali signs after the silence has crept its maliced fingers around Link's throat, "but please don't hurt others like you have me. I trusted you, you know."

Link could form her sorries for a thousand years and that would not change the promise that she has broken, how she treated the guardian deity of the rito as something to puzzle out for fun.

"I'm sorry," Amali adds suddenly, and Link meets her gaze. "I suppose I've already said enough, I think. I can see the goodness in you, you know. I don't know much about losing your memories. Just...please, be more aware of your actions. If nothing else, do that."

Link manages a nod.

Amali turns away. She continues to speak as they wait for Teba's inevitable return, for Teba's successful activation of the other terminals. Link notes that Teba never seems to turn or twist the Divine Beast, but why would he have to? Unlike Link, he can fly to each terminal over whatever obstacles the Divine Beast's design may present.

A better candidate for the slate than she will ever be.

"If you were curious, then I'll tell you that Saki and Tulin are all right. Teba's wife and son, that is. If I'm to be honest, I don't think he believed me about the slate and so didn't want to come back until he had helped in the city with clearing rubble. It seems like there were...only...only two casualties, thank the Goddesses. Even two is too much, you know." Amali sniffles. She lowers her wings, then covers her face with her hands.

Link continues to sit.

Teba flaps back to land between Link and Amali on Link's right side. He crouches by Amali and asks her questions in Tabanch so speedily Link can only make out a phrase here and there. She dips her head.

Teba rises to his feet and regards Link. He clicks his tongue. "Follow me," he says in Tabanch, and
then corrects himself in Central Hyrulean: "Follow me."

"I know some Tabanch," Link offers, and Teba's eyes harden.

When he speaks, he does so with a calmness edging to ice. "I would rather communicate with you in a language I know you understand. Now. Follow."

She follows.

Teba leads Link through the maze of gears, pulleys, spinning discs, ropes and cords, strange glittering blue crystals that remind her of the switches she has seen in shrines, and contraptions for which she has no name. At the very end, he shows her to a small circular opening of what she supposes leads to the tail set in an otherwise impenetrable wall.

"The final terminal goes through there. As you can see, I cannot fit inside."

Her fingers twitch. "What about Amali?"

"Amali," he responds frigidly, "is a mother and is not to put herself in danger." Link recoils. Her hands limp to her sides. Teba looks her up and down. "Pay attention. Can I trust you with this?"

Link inclines her head.

"Good. I'll wait here." He holds the slate out to her.

Its once-comforting weight now sinks lead into her hands. She tucks the slate into the pouch at her hip. "I can't fly like you, so I might need to tilt the Divine Beast."

"I see. I'll keep Amali safe." Teba gestures to the opening with his beak. "When you return, do not reactivate the first terminal without me."

She cocks her head to the side and Teba points over his shoulder.

"You said that the chrysalis is likely to contain one of the Calamitous One's elite monsters." She nods. "You also said that the chrysalis will only open after all terminals are active, and the first terminal is reactivated. Is that right?" She nods again. "Then I wish to see if we can destroy it before we reactivate Vah Medoh." She nods for a third time, and now Teba nods with her. "Good. Now, go."

She leaves the cooking pot, the boomerang, the blade, the paraglider, all of the assorted items that she has gathered over the course of her journey, and takes with her the slate and the red telescope. Link could loop the telescope into the belt at her hip but that would enlarge the width of her frame. Instead she tucks it into her left sleeve.

Link inspects the inside of the opening. It burrows away into darkness. Sniffing, she can smell no foul stench emanating from it, merely the dusty-dry scent of the same material that makes up the slate. For the ninth or tenth time that day, she squeezes herself into a tight entrance. Link pulls in her shoulders. Her hips just clear the inner radius, and, though the rim presses down upon her, she fits snugly inside.

She inches her way through the dark. When she feels the tunnel tilt upwards, Link wriggles the slate out of her pouch. She has to crane her neck at an awkward angle to fit her arm around her head, but at least the glow of the slate gives off enough light to confirm no obstruction in the tunnel.
Link scoots her way upwards. The tunnel inclines sufficiently gently that she does not need to move the Divine Beast, at least not yet. Still, the angle grows with every motion. Up and up. She senses herself begin to slide backwards. Link finds that she cannot free both arms at once, and so once more must rely on her nose to push the buttons of the slate.

Teba has granted the slate access to the other fans on the abdomen, she observes. With this she increases the output of the fan near the head and decreases that near the tail.

Slowly the Divine Beast tilts down to allow her to crawl forward again. She cannot tell if the passage narrows: the inner curve seems to put more pressure on her hips and now on her shoulders as well. Nevertheless Link pushes herself forward.

The darkness begins to lighten. She squints. The promise of the chamber ahead. She inches forward more rapidly.

A faint chirp. From up ahead.

Her eyes widen as she recognises that chirp. The twittering chirrup of a lizalfos. A lizalfos, in the tunnel, somewhere ahead of her.

She squeezes herself forward bit by bit. The loudness of the chirrups increase along with the brightness of the light. She feels the sides of the tunnel vibrate on occasion. As she continues forward, she notes the source of the light haloed around an obstruction of some kind.

Something wet and slimy and forked flicks against Link's face. It takes all of her willpower not to yelp in surprise; she scoots herself backwards quickly and quietly as her cuccofleshed body will allow. Link watches the obstruction move as the halo of light shifts. Its chirps grow more anxious and alarmed. She hears its long tongue pamf pamf pamf against the rim of the tunnel in its desperate efforts to find the girl wedged in the same tunnel.

A lizalfos with its head stuck in the tunnel, unable to pull itself out or push itself in.

Link backs up. She conjures a spherical bomb on the slate; it rolls off of the slate and into her own face. Exceedingly cautious not to detonate the explosive on her own head, Link angles the Divine Beast further back, and further back, until the bomb starts to roll away from her. She waits and listens: after a few seconds the lizalfos starts to twitter even more loudly than before. Link moves to hit the button and abruptly something hard and round smacks her square in the face.

It takes a second to realise that the lizalfos has batted the bomb back at her. Not enough tilt. She angles the Divine Beast further; she feels herself starting to slide and attempts to brace her arms and legs against the slope of the tunnel. If she doesn't explode the bomb soon, she'll find her fate in a lizalfos's snack.

She counts to ten and then detonates.

The explosion sends her hurtling backwards through the tunnel. At least the slipperiness of the material keeps her elbows and knees from scraping. She scrambling forward once more.

Much brighter. And colder.

Link tilts the Divine Beast back enough for her to climb without slipping and sliding down, and to give Teba and Amali a break. Eventually she pokes her head out of the edge of the tunnel.

Instead of a chamber, the wild whipping winds of the heavens greet her. The frigid air caresses her cheeks.
She stares out at the clouds and at the tail that curves flexibly behind the Divine Beast. Link pushes herself up further. The cold sinks its teeth into her shoulders, into her left side where the outer layer of her clothing has burned away. The wind pushes her forward and threatens to knock her over entirely if not for her legs still in the tunnel.

The lizalfos stuck in the end of the tunnel must have kept the warm air inside by virtue of its own neck.

The tail, she can see, divides into seven segments connected by a thick cord about a metre long. In the next segment she can see another tunnel entrance.

And the metre cord between them.

Link checks the slate again. The terminal: at the end of the tail. She removes the telescope from her left sleeve and peers through.

When her gaze passes over the very tip of the tail, she spots the black crystal extending outwards from the Divine Beast, with the terminal itself hidden within the final segment of the tail.

Link claps her palms against her face. Her fingers already have become stiff in the barest of the few moments she has spent outside.

The cord between the segments of the tail, at least, appears composed of a material not quite as slippery. Though she cannot stasis the entire tail, she can stasis the metre length of the cord.

Calming herself with a deep breath, she wraps her arms around the cord. Slowly she pulls her legs out from the tunnel—the cold stings against her knees—and then curves her legs around the cord as well. Like an inchworm, Link steadily makes her way across the cord while the wind rushes past her.

She does not look down.

Link can hear nothing but the wind in her ears and the thud of her heart so hard that she can feel her chest pounding against the cord.

She crawls, and she crawls, and she crawls, and she has never felt fear more deeply embedded in the marrow of her bones than in the moment when she comprehends she will have to climb up onto the slippery segment and into the tunnel.

Funny how fear moves her when she faces a monster but freezes her here. She has no paraglider. If she falls, she falls. And she cannot wait for the Divine Beast to land nor can she assume the safety of the ground below.

She gulps down lungfuls of ice.

Link could go back. She could go back, explain to Teba and Amali, and land the Divine Beast, and simply walk to the terminal.

But going backwards terrifies her even more than going forward.

She balances herself. Straddling the cord at the very tip, she senses herself sway with the wind. Link fits her arms first through the tunnel. Pushing as hard as she can against the sides of the tunnel for support, she unfolds her legs enough to lift herself.

Her head clears the entrance, and then her shoulders. The rim of the segment presses
uncomfortably into her abdomen. She unfolds her legs further until she practically kneels on the cord. Her boots slip, but with half of her body already inside the tunnel she does not fall out. Instead, as if she were jerking her body back to fit an entire fish into her mouth without using her hands, she shudders her frame repeatedly to get herself into the hole. At least the tunnel slopes downwards; she slides until the tunnel evens out and begins to slope upwards.

She crawls through the sixth segment and repeats the process for the next cord. The fifth. The fourth. In the chill of the high heavens, in the constant danger of falling, in the quiet of herself and the challenge that she faces, she loses herself to the mechanical efforts of traversing the tunnels.

When Link reaches the final segment, a cold pellet of disappointment chills her belly. She wriggles inside. No bright light at the end of the tunnel, but the orange glow of the terminal.

Link sets the slate into the pedestal. Although she cannot see the black crystal from here, she waits for the blue shine of the terminal.

All seven dots on the slate: blue. All except for the tiny orange dot in the blue dot in the middle.

On the route back she encounters her greatest challenge yet: turning around on the cord. Her right foot slides off and Link clings to the cord for dear life. To balance herself out she has to extend her left arm, to dangle herself away. She swings back the other way and clutches the cord with her entire body.

From that moment of clenching the cord with only her right hand and the crook of her left knee, nothing else fazes her.

Nothing at all.

She empties out onto the floor of the Divine Beast and sprawls out her limbs. Link flails her arms and legs to bring back feeling to them, though she can hardly make out the sensation of her hands and feet in the cold. Faintly she hears a voice above her, and then a warm, soft bulk around her.

Link snuggles into the heat.

Something cool touches her lips. Weakly she squirms away; something holds her fast. The coolness gives way to a splash of warm liquid that she swallows down: she did not recognise the aridity of her own throat except in comparison to the wetness of the fluid that she suckles.

The first gulp of liquid goes down dry. And then, a second later, a fireball scorches the inside of her mouth and throat.

Heat.

Fire under her skin.

The fever breaks out. Her whole body sweats for the inferno that has injected in her flesh. Gasping, Link wrests out of the too-hot embrace to shiver on her hands and knees while the first wave of the spicy elixir courses through her.

Her throat constricts. Her heart makes a valiant effort to either punch through her sternum or choke her or both. She claws at the floor, and then all at once the inferno releases its hold on her.

Something soft brushes the crown of her head. She snaps her head up.

Amali.
"Link, are you all right?"

The abrupt sensation pulsing through her limbs, especially through her fingers and toes after the numbing of the frigid air outside, feels like a thousand needles pricked through her skin all at once. She tries to nod and ends up spasming her head, while Amali looks on with concern. It takes Link a second to recall the proper muscle contractions for nodding and nods.

Amali sighs. "You came out of the tube looking blue, you know. I might not be an expert on hylians, but I supposed that that is not how hylians should look."

Not even the cold can keep the laugh from her mouth. She breaks down in laughter, slumping onto the ground and rolling back and forth for her own foolishness and recklessness and stupidity and yet her coming back in one piece as though the Goddesses have guarded her life all this time.

"You really are a strange one," is all Amali can say, and somehow that only makes Link laugh harder. Her stomach aches. The feeling returns to her fingertips and to her face and to her heart.

She wipes tears of mirth from her eyes. Automatically her hands drift down to her hips. Link retrieves the telescope from her left sleeve. Yet the slate has vanished.

Link's eyes widen. As if reading her thoughts, Amali gestures towards the centre of the Divine Beast.

Teba has taken the slate. He circles around the tyrian chrysalis as it beats and exhumes its purple fog. Link observes him land by Amali's side; he starts to cough. "That air is toxic, I fear," he warns them, then resumes coughing. "Stand back."

Link and Amali take to the stairs.

He notches his bow with a arrow. A ruby arrow, Link judges by the burst of sparks that radiates from the arrowhead.

The arrow strikes the heart and explodes. When the smoke clears away, the chrysalis looks exactly the same.

Teba attempts to loose from different angles. Nothing fazes through the thick skin of the cocoon. He endeavours to throw bombs from the slate at the heart. No impact.

"I see." The tips of his flight feathers sweep the floor as he turns. "Can you fight?"

Link nods.

He turns to his right. "Amali—"

Amali raises her wings like an aegis. "There must be something I can do."

"You can keep yourself safe for your daughters," Teba answers, his voice dipped more in warmth than anything. "You said yourself that you are a mother."

"And you are a father," Amali counters. "What of Saki? And Tulin?"

"I'm doing this because I'm a father. If anything happens to me, Tulin has Saki. With Kass abroad, your daughters have no one else, Amali. And you have not trained in combat." Teba frowns. "Don't be selfish now, Amali. Please. I...I don't know how I would face your daughters if I let anything happen to you."
Link glances between Teba and Amali. Amali and Teba study one another with an intensity that 
drops Link's gaze to her own feet. She wiggles the toes of her left foot, where the malice ate the 
boot away.

The flutter of feathers indicates for her to once more lift her head. Amali ascends the stairs.

Teba has riveted his gaze to Link. "What are your skills, and what do you know of our enemy?"

She tells him what she knows. About the animated corpse, that could not be hurt except for the 
weapons of the guardians, and about the living Malice that used the terminal itself for armour.

Teba folds his wings at his sides. "I see. This will be more difficult than I thought. I take it you 
have no 'guardian' weapons." She shakes her head. "I see. Then we will have to murder it another 
way." He turns his head towards the chrysalis. "Do you have any suggestions?"

She touches her chin.

The fans.

The fans that circulate. The fans that keep the Divine Beast aloft. She had to take down every last 
fan for the Divine Beast to fall. The blades spin faster than even the Malice could reform.

She grins. The line of Teba's grimace deepens.

"Actually," Link signs, barely able to keep her arms steady from her excitement, "I do. But you 
have to trust Amali."

Teba curses under his breath. Link waits; Teba clears his throat. "...Erito help me, but I'm 
listening."

On the top of the stairs, Link explains the plan to both. Teba works out the logistics in a sort of 
pained resignation; Amali dips her head in understanding. While Link takes the opportunity to test 
that she can keep track of the fans at this distance with the help of the red telescope, she catches 
Teba whispering something to Amali. She turns her head back in time to see Amali's response:

"If I'm to be honest, I suppose that you fail to understand, Teba: if something happens to Medli, 
then my daughters would have nothing at all. You were right in saying that this has extended 
beyond the hearth. We have the whole of Tabantha to think of." Teba says nothing. Amali does not 
look away. "As a friend, as a child of Erito, as a father, I suppose—no, I know you understand. If 
you did not understand, then you wouldn't be an archer."

Teba strains out an exhalation. "...at least, promise me that you'll keep yourself as safe as you can, 
for your daughters' sakes if not mine."

"I promise." Amali's shoulders slope down. "...I really do promise."

"Fine." He raises his voice; Link jumps. "I'm going down. Wait for my signal."

A few moments later Link waits—with the paraglider—on the overside of the Divine Beast with 
Amali gripping her shoulders. The wind would boot her from the Divine Beast's back if not for 
Amali's slow flapping against its current. Below Teba must follow through the steps of the plan: to 
place the slate into the terminal; to wait for the signal of the heart; to fly up into the air and to the 
entrance as soon as he can. And then, the second act of the plan, formless as the clouds around 
them: to lure the Malice.
Link can hear the measured strokes of Amali's breathing, even and slow, each breath a prayer.

She waits.

They wait together.

From the rim of the entrance she can hear the squelch of the chrysalis bursting against the ceiling.

She braces herself.

Teba spins out from the entrance with the slate in hand. He curves towards Link. Rushing past her, he extends her wing and she snags the slate from him. Not a second later the Malice pursues him.

Link's breath stills in her throat.

The Malice of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania had moved sluggishly, had arced its weapons slowly, had more stumbled about than actually fought her, at least before Link exorcised it from the corpse of the former Champion. But this Malice blitzes through the air. Link cannot make out its form for the blur with which it flies.

She hears the intake of Amali's breath.

The perversion of the corpse of the Champion of Erito, the Hero of Tabantha, Divine Beast Vah Medoh's Pilot, Powerful Revali.

Sharpness pricks her collarbones and shoulder blades. Amali lifts Link up from the back of the Divine Beast per their plan. Link's hand hovers upon the slate over the terminals associated with the fans.

She tracks Teba as he soars towards one of the fans with the Malice close behind.

He trusts her. With this, with *this*, he trusts her.

Link stops the fan just before he enters. It grinds to a halt and he *fwoops* through. Immediately she sends the fan spinning again to catch the Malice—

—yet the Malice has already sped itself through, hot on Teba's trail.

Teba arcs through the air to try again.

Monsters will never preserve their own lives, she knows. Monsters will continue to attack, to claw, to maul, regardless of whether or not they themselves bleed out. The lack of fear of death makes them nightmares to encounter, for simply wounding them will never be enough. Until the monsters are taken apart limb from limb and head from neck—and even then their severed jaws will chomp down in their last sap of strength—they will continue to sprint, to run, to walk, to stumble, to crawl, to drag themselves by the remaining stumps of their limbs, to slither their ruined bodies towards whatever life they seek to snuff out.

And yet that same lack of fear of them means that they will never turn back from a chance to attack. Never will they regroup, even if that could lead to further deaths in the future. They attack and die and somehow they rise again to attack in the future.

Teba hurtles through the air into another fan. Link turns the fan off earlier and turns it on earlier to make up for the delay; both Teba and the Malice pass through.

She inhales.
The shorter the time window, the greater the chance that she will catch Teba and not the Malice in its blades.

But Teba left his life in her hands, has left the life of Medli in her hands. Whatever comes, Link will lay her life to protect the city that he would die for.

Not unlike the monsters, yet not for death, but for life.

Teba shoots towards a fan: the third effort. Again the Malice passes too quickly. He swings out his wings to carve a fourth path through the air, and Link sees how he has begun to slow down from exhaustion. She focuses. Teba will not give in; he will fly until his body gives out for Medli and she will not let him die.

*She will not get anyone else hurt for her mistakes.*

On the next pass through the fans, she twitches her fingers a second before her prior timing. Teba arcs back over the Divine Beast and Link breathes out. Half a second: no Malice.

Before she can celebrate, the terrible violent violet of the Malice oozes over the side of the wing. It catches—the fan screams—and then bursts free. At the instant of its climb, she can resolve the shape of its maliced form: a bird now missing its lower torso, clutching a golden bow in the ooze of its nearly shapeless fingers, its wings exhausting that noxious fume instead of flapping.

Revali.

What's left of him.

Fighting down the nausea and terror that coil up to strangle her at once, Link darts her gaze through the heavens to locate Teba. Not here, not here—there. His movements look more strained, his flaps more lethargic. She looks back at the Malice kept aloft by a cloud of maliced vapours. Teba's increasing sluggishness: not only for fatigue, but for breathing in the toxins that the Malice's body gives off.

But she has ripped off its lower half, and she notices the malice dripping from the gaping wound of its torso. The droplets fly off into the heavens or else slide from the back of the Divine Beast.

The fan that bisected the Malice refuses to move. Gunked with malice, it sits inert. Still, the other seven fans should hold the Divine Beast aloft.

Teba makes for another working fan. Again Link stops-and-starts a smidge early, yet Teba and the Malice both shoot out of the other end. She resolves herself: even earlier.

She tracks Teba's movement. The next fan. Even earlier this time. The Malice flashes by so quickly her eyes don't register its movement—

—and agony erupts at her left shoulder. She nearly drops the slate. Amali shrieks. Link's flesh ignites. Worms burrow into her skin that eat at her muscle, that convulse her muscle, and the pain blurs her vision until her world becomes a sludge of blue and white and gold and brown. She falls or she rises or she hovers in place: the skies above and below have blurred into a sea thick enough to drown. Never letting go of the slate despite how every throb of her heart pushes fire through her veins and needles of numbness through her nerves, Link reaches for her shoulder with her right hand. Her fingers closed around an arrow. The agony bolts through her gloves into the exposed flesh of her hands. She squeezes her eyes so tightly that her tears freeze on her lashes.

Link wraps her hand around the shaft just beneath the head.
She braces herself.

And then she tears the malice-coated arrow out of her skin.

The arrowhead shears her flesh on the way out. She cannot hear herself scream. For an instant her vision blacks and then lightens again. Something grasps her shoulders.

She clenches the slate.

Link forces her eyes open. The sudden chill of the wind frigidly ice over the corners of her eyes. She blinks through the pain dizzying her head until her vision sharpens. The Divine Beast sways side to side below her. Teba and the Malice dance through the air, he with his bow and it with its own.

She yells.

Teba drops through the air. Towards a fan. She cannot feel her left arm; she grips the slate nonetheless. With her right Link slams the button of the terminal and then again so soon so soon so soon that Teba must have caught into the whirling blades.

The blade shrieks against the rim of the fan. She watches the golden bow arc outwards from the fan, released from that terrible tyrian hand.

Link shakes her shoulders until whatever holds her in the air releases.

She plunges.

The telescope. Her useless left arm dangles. She holds the telescope to her right eye amid the wind that swallows her up. The slate. The slate that falls from the ruined mass of the Malice, as the slate and the boulder breaker dropped from the corpse of the Malice of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. Not from the Malice's second form, but its first.

Link falls faster than the slate. She catches up. It flits by her face and she catches it against her chest. Folding her limbs inwards, she shoves the slate into her mouth to clench it between her teeth.

She loops her right arm between the wooden struts of the paraglider and forces it open with a bump of her head. The abrupt catching of wind nearly breaks her neck against the wooden support.

Link glides downwards. Slow. Oh-so-slow.

The cold air kisses the injury on her left shoulder. She looks down to confirm that her fingers still clutch the slate, and then she closes her eyes.


She lets Teba and Amali cocoon her in one wing apiece, her body too fragile and battered to accept talons.

Link feels something firm beneath her. The Divine Beast.

Teba curses. "Erito take my voice: look at her shoulder. She needs medical attention, and soon. I know. I know. You haven't noticed that we've been flying in a straight line? I don't know where we are. Mm. Wait, which slate?"

Link lifts her head. She jerks her neck to indicate the one in her mouth. Through bleary eyes she can just make out Amali removing the slate from her teeth. Her jaw unclenches; her bones ache.
"...of course I will do the honours," Teba is saying. "Becoming the pilot wou—hm?"

And then she feels it: the Divine Beast begins to lose altitude. She closes her eyes. They must be landing.

"What was that!?" Teba cries out, and her eyelids fly up.

The generator of the fan that sliced the Malice bursts into a cloud of vapour. A jammed single fan—well, a second fan—should not cause the Divine Beast to drop as it does. Yet even as she watches, the fans on the wings start to smoke.

She ogles the wings for a second, and then observes the flecks of malice that spread from fan to fan, gunking each in turn like a fever, oozing over the gears and cords that link the fans in the machinery to jam the workings of the entire Divine Beast.

Link can smell the noxious fumes of maliced vapour.

The Malice's parting gift.

The Divine Beast slopes forward, its heavier head dropping more swiftly than its lighter tail.

Amali and Teba spring up at once and Link can feel herself sliding backwards on the Divine Beast. Weakly she lifts her right hand. Her fingers curl around something solid, but her arm gives way and the wind overpowers her. Something warm wraps around her.

Something warm.

Her eyelids flutter down. A blur of turquoise into the opening of the entrance. And white around her. On a downy bed of feathers.

Her left shoulder throbs, once.

She wants fish pie.

She remembers the fragrance of fish pie. She remembers the table. Revali's parents, who asked him affectionately how went his training, how went his life as the Champion, how went his life as an archer, how went his search for a mate and about when they could expect grandchildren, and who were these hylians at the table. She remembers Revali warning her not to breathe a word about her being the chosen one, that for the night she would simply exist as a houseguest of Revali's, a friend of a friend that he had graciously agreed to put up.

She remembers his parents inquiring as to whether she had any interest in their son. She remembers Revali looking at the utensil in his hand as though trying to calculate how much carving out his own throat with a wooden spoon would hurt.

She remembers her sister slapping her hands against the table and wanting to know who the big bir' were and what they had to do with her falco'. She remembers Revali gripping her sister very seriously by the shoulders. "For the last time, you annoying monkey: Revali. My name is Revali. My name? Revali. Now that ain't falco', or big bir', or whatever else comes of your little banana-grubbing meathole, but Revali. Do you understand me?"

She remembers her sister's missing-tooth grin. She remembers the reply:

Sure thing, big bir'.
She remembers his parents requesting for Revali to explain why he let an unruly child disrespect him, the Champion of Erito. She remembers Revali slamming his wings onto the table in a storm of feathers just as her sister had done. She remembers his voice, low and rough. "If you don't want to be driven from the home of your precious Champion of Erito, Hero of Tabantha, Pilot of the Divine Beast Vah Medoh, then you will respect my guests. Is that clear?"

She remembers sitting upon a wooden chair at the same table. She remembers how the meat of the fish melted in her mouth. She remembers how she had abused cryonis to bring an icebox of sanke carp from Necluda to Tabantha, from the monastery of Sheik to the pillars of Medli. She remembers, on the night after she baked the fish pie, after Revali's parents had said good night and left, the expression on Revali's face when she elaborated on what she had done.

The night had grown cold, but her feathered coat kept her warm. She and Revali stood upon the landing where she had skipped a week of practise to drag a box of fish across the country, where Revali now stood over her with the curved horns of the silver-lynel moon crested above his head, giving him a pair of rabbit ears.

"You told me you wanted to try some, didn't you?"

"Well," he said, and she detected a trace of a smile at the corners of his mouth, "I'll be plucked. You're even more of an idiot than I could have previously imagined. You know that I thought you'd run away or died. I was about to celebrate. But you know, Aryll said you'd be back. I told the little brat that I'd sooner see my parents again than have you back. Do you know what that snotty lemur did? She found out where my parents live and invited them over." Revali shook his head. "Aryll said she wanted to know what parents meant to me, if what that means to me is the same as what they mean to her, or something like that. What that means, I don't got a clue. You know what else I don't got a clue about?" He threw up his wings. "Why you quit training for a week to bring back some carp that doesn't taste any better than the salmon we got here."

"You called her Aryll."

Revali froze in place. He forced a sneer onto his features but she could see the hint of genuine affection in the trembling of his irises.

"You can hate me if you want," Link told him, "but please don't be mean to my sister."

"Fate's the cruellest and ficklest mistress of all," he snapped in return, "and if the Goddesses have picked someone as useless as you to be the oh-so-chosen one then the hell does that mean about me? If the Goddesses don't owe the world a hero then why should I owe anyone anything?"

"Revali."

He crossed his wings over his chest. "Tch. Don't make me say it."

"I've already seen how you treat her. So thank you." Link hesitated. "I never asked to be the chosen one, or the Hero of Hyrule, or any of those...things that they call me, that I'm not."

"Oh woe is she. The sob story of the century." Revali snorts.

"But if I had to do it again I think I would." Link raises her head to stare Revali directly into his eyes; his wings loosen. "Because it means that Aryll has a better future."

"And what about the rest of the world? You got that through your little rat brain, right?" Revali flicked the back of her head. "If we don't pull ourselves together and beat the bwig bwad bwoar, then Aryll and everyone else will die. You get that, O Courageous Link?"
Wearily she rested her elbows on the balcony around the landing. "Don't call me that. Please."

"You need to step up. That's all I mean." Revali spat out from his beak. "If a future for Aryll means that much to you, then don't blow it."

"I'm training. I'm trying as hard as I can."

"And if you don't want her to die you'll try harder. The Calamitous One could finish popping off that seal any day." Revali brushed imaginary dirt from his shoulder. "And we need to be prepared the second it does. No matter what. Nothing else can come between us and that."

"Revali, can I ask a question?"

"Is it about how incredible I am?" Yet she could hear how the edge had dulled in his timbre. "What is it?"

"Why do you dislike your parents?"

For a second she heard nothing but the windchimes of the city. When Revali spoke again, his voice effected a strange tone that she had never heard before. "You weren't around for what they were like before I became the Champion of Erito. And that's all I'm gonna say."

She reached out. Not with a plate of food, but with her hand, the hand with which she cooked and which more often than not lost the words that she needed, but which now settled on his shoulder.

He returned her gaze with a glare. She kept hers firm on his. "I don't need your pity."

She let go just long to ask a single question: "Do you know what I meant when I said that I want a better future for Aryll?"

Revali said nothing. She continued to gaze into his eyes for the words that would not come to her fingertips but could to her features. Revali continued to say nothing for a few minutes, and then continued to continue to say nothing.

In the deepest recesses she could see his pupils dilate. Though he retained the painted smirk on his beak she observed the softening of his brow, the crease at the corners of his eyes, the slight hoarse whisper of his timbre.

"This crows for a festival. The first time that you looked at me with something other than a totally blank expression. Y'know, even when you were rattling off that little speech you prepped about us being friends—don't think I didn't recognise Daruk's usual spiel—you looked like the whole world bored you. Couple of times there I thought you didn't have any emotions." Revali barked out a dry laugh and somewhere in its aridity she could hear the peal of something genuine, deep down. "Isn't that how the story goes? The spirit in the blade of evil's bane just some emotionless girl?"

Link drew her brow together.

Revali quirked his eyebrows in return. "You don't know how icy you are, huh?"

She shook her head and brought a hand up to her features.

He tipped his head back in laughter. "Well, bud, I don't know much about you and I don't care to. But you've got one thing going for you." Revali clicked his tongue. He tried a smirk but ended up on a smile. "Keeping that little brat of yours safe is something we can both agree on."
She couldn't help but smile back.

"So. Tomorrow, let's get back to training our tail-feathers off. For a better future and all of that." Revali shrugged. "Don't get me wrong, now. I still think you're just about the worst for the job that sword on your back could've picked. And I still think that it's a load of garbage the high-and-mighties at court only let their own people try it out. But you're what we've got for now. If the Goddesses care about anything at all—" He cupped his hands around his beak and lifted his voice to the heavens."—then they'll pick someone else!" He tipped his head back towards Link. "But all right. Life gives you sanke carp and you make sanke carp pie. Life gave me Ilari and I put Ilari on the map. So even if I have to drag you in an ice-box across Hyrule to whip you into shape, I will. I will turn you into a Champion."

Her smile widened, but before she could thank him Revali added hastily:

"But not for you. For Aryll. All right? Just making that clear."

"Clear as day."

Revali looked out towards the moon. "I really thought you'd died, idiot. How was I supposed to face Aryll after that?"

Aryll.

She wants fish pie, but more than that, she wants to hug the girl with the pigtails.

She settles for the red telescope that she nestles in her arms.

—

Fish Pie (seven hearts) - cane sugar, goat butter, rock salt, sanke carp, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Two Divine Beasts down, and two to go. "Wait, midna's ass, if we're only on the twenty-fourth chapter, what in the world is going to happen after we finish the rest of the Divine Beasts?" Don't worry; it'll make sense when we get there.

I should note that Medli was not destroyed in the attack seen in the twenty-second chapter, merely attacked, as Vah Medoh has attacked before.

My heart goes out to those two poor lizalfos who got stuck in Vah Medoh this chapter.

Link gets called out! After her success with Vah Rudania, she started to view herself (rightfully) as skilled enough to take on the Divine Beasts. Yet she refused to take on the responsibility of being the hero. Much like some players of Breath of the Wild, she has been treating things like a game. And this is going to have some pretty repercussions for her.

Teba gets called out, too, of course, for being hypocritical. Amali's struggles with being a mother versus being more than that are something we'll have another look at
The fight was a lot of fun. I sat there thinking about how you could really rip up the Malice all at once, and I figured that you could do so through Vah Medoh’s fans. Once the malice gets gunked like that, it’s not really in a place to form again. That’s Windblight Ganon!

I sincerely apologise for including the "that ain't Falco" meme, but I set it up in the previous chapter and everything! Ahem. I'm not usually one to include memes. I felt it appropriate this time.

There's a reason that Revali cares so much about the fact that he put Ilari on the map. Note that I'm not meaning to say that people with bad parents automatically become surly or what have you; there's a pretty prominent counter-example in Delicious in Wilds alone. I wanted to give Revali more development and explanation to his actions and attitudes than merely being a stereotype/trope of the "hot-blooded rival ace" that he seemed to be in Breath of the Wild. We simply didn't have that much time to spend with the Champions in-game. We do here! So Revali has a bit of a soft spot and a flair for appearances. He's emotionally constipated. He's also very right about issues with how the royal family was going about following the prophecy, about the royal family only allowing hylians to try to pick up the Master Sword and even then only allowing the knights and nobility to do so.

The parent thing is something that Revali and Link can certainly bond over. And, of course, Aryll herself, who has broken through Revali's carefully built up walls.

The careful reader will notice that in the twentieth chapter, Revali mentioned that he would be impressed if Link obtained for him some fish from the other side of Hyrule. Well, Link did just that! In Breath of the Wild, you can easily catch sanke carp in Kakariko. If you recall, I mentioned that Kakariko had been a monastery to Sheik prior to the Great Calamity. In fact, Kakariko was the training grounds of servants to the royal family, termed the "shades" as in "the Princess's shade" due to how they were supposed to act as the royal family's shadows.

In The Wind Waker, Aryll allows Link to borrow her prized telescope for Link's birthday. That isn't far from the truth, as you'll see. Giving Link a little sister was something vital for giving her a grounding in this world and for presenting her with a very personal motivation to be the hero. I've changed Link's circumstances from the game to follow for the telling of a different story, as we'll see in the future.

The astute reader will note that it was Amali who took the slate from Link's mouth. Teba's the one who said that he would "do the honours" of becoming the pilot. But, well, we'll see.

Thank you so much for all of your support, my dear and beloved readers. And thank you so much for all of your support, my dear and beloved beta reader, Emma, especially for having sat down with me the past three hours straight to get this thing edited and ready for all of you.

midna's ass. 10 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Aryll, Revali, and their interaction are what makes this whole arc of memories my favourite past events in the series. It wraps up so beautifully (I definitely cried at this chapter).
The ending here is my favourite last sentence in the whole series.

This is Link's first big character moment (and probably her second most important in the series), and it takes us to some pretty wild places. Her reactions and development are really complex and interesting.

I like that Teba isn't just a flat "guy who is right". He's a pretty interesting character, even though he has so much less time in the sun here than in Breath of the Wild.

Emma. 19 September 2017.
Electro Seafood Meunière

Chapter Summary

Recovering from injuries, the travelling chef likewise recovers a certain companion: the chef's steadfast horse, last left upon the lake. The chef recalls a vivid memory about the girl with the violet sash: a memory of an ocarina; a memory of a harp.

Chapter Notes

I received a question about the twenty-fourth chapter on the FFN cross-post version of this fic, so I'll include it with the author's notes here. About Teba and Amali chewing Link out: Link wasn't "just" activating the terminals. Remember how Link literally drove Vah Medoh across Lake Totori to crash into the cliff? Imagine if that had crashed instead into the Pillars of Erito. Or imagine if Link had accidentally turned on the whirlwind function of the fans. Why did Amali feel betrayed? Because Link promised her that she only wanted to make Vah Medoh cease to attack (go back and read the twenty-second chapter). Their goal was to go through Vah Medoh safely together. Nothing bad ended up happening, but it sure could have. Imagine leaving a nuclear weapon in the hands of an eighteen-year-old foreign girl who has already demonstrated being fairly reckless (like with the shrine); she promises not to touch any of the big red buttons, but as soon as you leave, you immediately observe her doing so from outside. I don't know about you, but I'd be right terrified if I were Amali. Remember, Amali has known Link for less than forty-eight hours.

Hey, we're about three-tenths of the way done with Delicious in Wilds. Thank you so much to my beta reader, Emma, for all of her help, and to you, the reader, for yours.

To all my readers: Please note that this chapter features a rather bloody and violent combat sequence. If you wish to skip it, it begins at the paragraph starting with, "Ilia strains against the bokoblin riding her but the thief-bokoblin smacks her shoulder" and you can safely skip to the paragraph beginning with "She slides her blade once more into its sheathe" if you so choose. Stay safe!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The softness of the pool in which she lies keeps her in restful slumber. She hears voices over her, feels warm hands on her body, lifts herself up when asked and keeps herself limp when left alone.

She takes stock of herself: the discomfort of her abdomen, from roughly below her armpit to her waist. The pinging pain of her left heel. And, more than anything, the creeping agony of something hard inside of her left shoulder, that seems to swell without end to push aside her muscle and bone and make her cry out. She can feel the bones of her collarbones pushed aside, can sense the constriction of her arteries until her entire arm prickles with numbness and deadens entirely. Sweat beads over her skin. Her body flushes like flame. The fever reaches its zenith, throbs, and begins to subside until she can sense the heat no longer. The pressure-pain at her left shoulder vanishes. The
aching fades. She melts into sleep.

Words drift in and out, incomprehensible. Sometimes moisture dribbles into her lips and she drinks deeply down; sometimes the aroma of a hot meal warms her nose and her mouth instinctively knows what to make of it while her consciousness continues to bob along the safe darkness.

When she opens her eyes at last—before even her eyes have adjusted to the light—she hears something scream in her ear.

The stampede of colours and touches and sounds all around flings her off of the bed. She lands on her feet and whirls around, her hand automatically reaching to her back for a blade she does not have. Her left shoulder burns from the exertion that pulls on her flesh. Her fingers clench about nothingness. She looks over her own shoulder.

The paraglider. The telescope. The slate. Gone. Missing. She shifts into a defensive stance. Movement at her left leads her to throw a punch. Her fist connects with something firm, eliciting a gasp.

"Oi." A voice she knows. "Calm down."

Her body goes rigid. She blinks. The figure resolves itself: a white-feathered rito.

Teba.

Link recoils her arm as she looks him up and down. He masses his stomach where she socked him. "You throw quite a punch." Teba turns towards the bed from which she sprang. Link follows his gaze to find Notts, Kotts, Genli, Kheel, and Cree staring at her. "Don't shock her like that next time."

Link looks down at herself. On her frame she wears a loose white-feather robe of sorts: with sleeves, but without pantlegs. The cloth comes down to her ankles and then some. Two unfamiliar rito, one feathered in dark red and the other in pink, stand near the bed, alongside a dark-skinned gerudo woman with crimson hair.

Teba introduces the red-haired gerudo woman and the red-feathered rito man as the healers who have taken care of Link these past three days. "Three days!?" Link echoes, and he nods. She took a battering with the Divine Beast and the Malice thereafter. Teba elaborates on the proceedings: After the fan sliced off its lower body, the Malice did not follow Teba into the fan, but—by intelligence or by chance—attacked Link with an arrow coated in malice, which spread through her shoulder and festered in her flesh. The healers know not of how she acquired the infection, Teba tells her. But they need no justification for saving her life.

"Over the past three days," the red-haired healer explains with a weary smile, "you've successfully fought off malice fever." With no known cure but for removing as much malice as possible, the healers have repeatedly sliced into her shoulder to drain the wound of malice and done their best to keep the infection from spreading.

Sliding her hand under her robe, Link feels her left shoulder. Bandages and gauze surround the wound, which the healers have kept open and exposed with the insert of a thin hollow tube. When she moves her left arm, the tube hurts. Yet letting the injury close would trap the malice within her skin where it could spread at will.

"We'll have to keep you here until we're certain that the infection is truly gone." The healer wipes her forehead. "But thank the Goddesses, we think you're in the clear."
Link thanks the doctors profusely and offers them rupees, monster parts, whatever services she can provide. They decline. When she insists they not treat her as anyone special, the red-feathered rito shakes his head. "I've never heard of paying for healing. Is that what they do in other places?"

The pink-feathered rito thanks Link for thanking good care of her husband. Saki, as she calls herself, appears to have taken on the responsibility for caring for Amali's daughters. During the first few hours of the hospital visit, Link does not notice. But when she tires and the doctors shoo her visitors out of the room, the fear of Amali's absence chokes her.

Genli breaks the news first. "Mom's been picked on a super secret mission that Genli's not supposed to tell anyone about," she whispers loudly, and Cree hides her face in her wings. "What? Genli didn't tell her about it!"

While Saki takes the children out of the room in the healing ward, Teba stays behind to clarify. In the chaos and noise of the Divine Beast Vah Medoh suddenly ceasing to work, Amali and Teba made a break for the slate. Link started to slip backwards from the wind. Teba grabbed her first to keep her from flying off. Without time to discuss plans, Amali—who had by chance taken the slate from Link's mouth and not yet handed it to Teba—dived towards the main terminal. Her activation of the Divine Beast gave her full control of the fans to clear them of malice. "And now Vah Medoh won't accept anyone but her. The Sages believe it would be an insult to the Goddesses to try to transfer ownership of Vah Medoh to me." His voice trails, and then his timbre firms. "I think that Amali can handle things. She wanted me to thank you, and to remind you to take responsibility for your actions." Teba does not quite smile but he doesn't quite frown, either. "And to remind you of your promise to Genli."

Chief Kaneli, resumes Teba, passes on his gratitude. However, in the interest of both Link and Lady Impa's wishes for confidentiality, none will hear of Link's existence in the official story of the Divine Beast Vah Medoh, wherein Teba, Harth, and Amali themselves dispatched the Divine Beast with the assistance of a slate found by Amali, clearly chosen by the Goddess Erito to undertake the mission.

Link asks Teba to thank Chief Kaneli for her, and he nods.

She spends the next few days gathering her strength. Link paces about the inner corridors of the hospital, stretches her limbs, practises flips and rolls to retrain her dexterity up until she trips over the mattress and thwacks her nose on the floor. Though most of the malice has drained, the healers re-open the injuries twice a day and fish out violent sludge with hooked needles that bite into her raw flesh. She clenches rolled-up fabric between her teeth to avoid snapping off her own tongue. The blood drains into a basin made of a guardian stalker's head. Link watches tyrian lumps of malice hiss and bubble as they eat through her own blood.

On the sixth day, no malice emerges from the wound in her shoulder. The healers wash the injury over with warm water. Nor on the seventh, nor on the eighth. Link asks when she can go free and the healers ask back how badly she wants to live.

The children visit her on a daily basis. With Amali busied by the immediate chaos of having the destiny of the Divine Beast thrust upon her, her daughters live with Saki, Teba, and their son Tulin, the latter of whom broke his right wing defending a flightless girl—Molli, her name, according to Cree—from one of the Divine Beast's whirlwinds during its final attack on Medli. Link hears an awful lot about Tulin from Amali's daughters and from Teba: she has scarcely seen a father more simultaneously proud and concerned.

Eventually the famed Tulin swings by to visit as well. A kind boy who dreams of becoming a warrior like the Champion of Erito from before the Great Calamity. Link holds back a laugh; she
tells him that she knows a little about Revali. His eyes shine with the twinkles of stars.

"How!? From where!?" Tulin crows out, grabbing her hands in his and bobbing her wrists up and down. After letting go, he blushes. "I-I forgot you're a hand-talker for a second, sorry."

Link does not lie. She tells him that she has heard first-hand from some people who knew Revali themselves and does not mention that the phase some people refers to herself. She skims over Revali's tendency to insult others, his remarkable talent at consistently saying the wrong thing, and his scapegoating of everyone around him except for himself, nor does she expound on his skill with the bow or his talent with the wind. She speaks instead of the Revali she remembers. The Revali afraid of failing, of not living up his selection as a Champion, of not having the backing of fate but having to rely on his own wings. The Revali who let a little girl worm her way into his heart, who gave her rides around the city while she banged her fists on his head, who defended her to his own parents that admonished her for disrespecting him. The Revali who had a taste for sanke carp since his first visit to Necluda, who would never admit it but nearly cried over fish pie.

Genli complains that she prefers the Revali of folktale, who never missed a single shot and could wake the very winds. Notts and Kotts agree noisily. Cree waves a wing and declares that she wants to try the sanke carp, too. With pride welling her eyes with tears, Link kneels before Cree and makes her a solemn promise to make sanke carp pie for her one day; she cannot let down a fellow lover of food. Kheel takes the opportunity to convince her sisters to sing a song of Revali's triumphs that sounds as if Revali wrote the lyrics himself.

Tulin's eyes sparkle. "And even though he was afraid of so much, he was still the greatest warrior ever!" he yells out loud enough for the healer to poke his head in and shush him. Tulin's cheeks flush. He resumes more quietly but no less enthusiastically: "Wow wow wow! You know what this means!? I don't have to be a stern no-nonsense archer. Just 'cause I'm afraid of things doesn't mean I can't also be strong."

"Courage doesn't mean not being afraid," Link says with a warm smile, repeating something that someone once told her, though she remembers not the who or when, but doing the right thing despite your fear."

Tulin bobs his head. "And I understand now." Link quirks her eyebrows. "No, really! I get it now! The secret to his success. I've got it all figured out!" Link leans in. Tulin glances left and right. He cups his hands over his beak and scoots in close enough that Link can feel his warm breath on the outer shell of ear, his voice lowered to a conspiratorial whisper. "Keep this between you and me, will you? I've figured it out." He takes a deep breath. Link listens carefully as he opens his beak. "Sanke carp. The breakfast of Champions!"

Link bursts out laughing until she topples over to wheeze on the floor.

The children keep her entertained. Link inquires of recipes from the doctors and cooks them for the children when they fly over, recipes that she might never have considered eating herself, recipes that incorporate insects and rodents but which she finds taste just as delicious as the dishes she's made for herself. A reminder to try everything new.

She wonders how monsters might taste. Her mouth waters at the entire world of cuisine she could yet open for herself.

And in the moments in-between talking to the children or cooking, Link continues through her daily routine of practise with her body and her blade alike.

Yet her gaze returns again and again to the windows through which she can see the snowy
mountain peaks of Hebra to the north.

The wind sings her name and the waters hum in harmony. Her body yearns for the gentle swaying of the grass, for the scent of the earth after a rain, for nothing but herself and her horse in the wilds of the world.

Her horse.

Ilia.

Link convinces the healers to allow her on an excursion, to do some fishing and to purchase a new tunic. They let her go on the condition that Saki chaperones. The instant Saki takes Link outside to the hustle and bustle of a Medli celebrating the new pilot of their Divine Beast—Link missed the public ceremony while unconscious for three days—she rounds on Saki.

"I need to see my horse. Please. Please."

Saki relents. They glide out to the edge of Lake Totori, to the grove of trees near Passer Hill where Link left her loyal companion. She wets her fingers to whistle for Ilia.

No response.

Link finds the saddle and bridle where she left them on the trees, undisturbed over the two weeks she has spent in Medli. She can feel the quickening of her heart and the shallowing of her breaths. Saki yelps for her not to overexert herself. She runs into the wood whistling, whistling, whistling, until her lips chap and her fingers raw, and even then she continues to whistle through the pain of her mouth.

On the other side of the hill she hears a familiar neigh.

She lunges. Saki flies after her, shrieking that Link has lost it. Yet none of that matters: as she rounds the crest of the hill, Link stares down into the grassy wetlands surrounding the mire to find a pack of bokoblins on horses. Five of them. Three on horses, and two sitting beside a campfire fletching arrows.

And one of the bokoblins: on Ilia.

Ilia, covered in sores, legs wobbling under the weight of the black bokoblin that straddles her.

She whistles.

Ilia strains against the bokoblin riding her but the thief-bokoblin smacks her shoulder. The second its palm connects with Ilia's neck, Link closes her fingers around the hilt of her sword, and all that makes up Link gives way to an extension of the blade.

She half-rolls half-sprints down the slope of hill. The pain in her heel, in her side, in her shoulder with the metallic tube still jammed into her bone: forgotten. She hears the bokoblins take notice of her with cries and blowings of the horns, and she vaults her blade at the thief-bokoblin astride her horse as she closes the gap between herself and the thief-bokoblin. The sword cracks the thief-bokoblin on the side of the head. It starts to slide backwards off of Ilia, then digs its claws into Ilia's shoulders. Ilia whinnies in pain and bolts.

She snags her blade from the grass. A second bokoblin on horseback—a hollowed horn hanging from its belt—charges to run her down. She bids her time to cartwheel to the left at the last second and thrust her blade out as she does. The sword slides between the horse's neck and the horn-
carrying-bokoblin. The monster slices itself onto the sharpened edge.

The sudden resistance of the horn-carrying-bokoblin's sternum jerks her backwards. The horse continues on without its rider. She swings her arm down to bash the monster hanging from the blade into the dirt. It tries to kick her; she slams her boot over its inner thighs to pin the spotted-bokoblin down. She grinds the boot in, braces herself, and rips the sword from its chest. The monster shrieks. She thrusts the sword down into its open mouth. Once, twice, thrice. It claws at her leg. She angles the blade into the roof of its mouth and lifts her foot from its lower body to press her entire weight into the hilt. She feels the sword crunch slowly forward, then slide with ease, then crunch again until the tip touches dirt.

The horn-carrying-bokoblin gurgles.

A bolt of agony throbs through her upper back just below the shoulder blade. The arrowhead pierces through the feather-warm tunic. She rolls forward, leaps up, tracks the remaining bokoblins. The two by the campfire have taken up arrows. The third bokoblin on horseback has loped to the campsite and dismounted from the horse to root for weapons.

The one on Ilia has ridden away to the edge of the field.

She flicks her gaze at the archers. She watches them watch her. She feints left while her hand closes around the boomerang—the tube in her shoulder grinds against her bone—and curves it through the air at the leftmost bokoblin. The bokoblin ducks and the forked edge of the boomerang wedges itself into the neck of the rightmost monster. The injured rightmost bokoblin drops its bow. Moaning in pain, it wraps its hands around the boomerang to yank it from the wound. The plume of blood from its throat splatters its companion as it rears its arm back to throw the boomerang back.

She tries to feint again but the leftmost archer-bokoblin leads its shot. The arrow grazes her left thigh; a spurt of blood warms the skin of her leg and unbalances her. She bends her knees inwards to turn the fall into a somersault closer to the campsite. She hears the boomerang curve back around and hit the ground. The dismounted-from-horseback-bokoblin rips a branch from a nearby tree and sets it on fire. The rightmost bokoblin, bleeding profusely from its neck, tries to pick up the bow again. She lunges forward to bring the sword down across its wrists.

She senses the splintering of its bones under the weight of the blade and then the edge cuts cleanly through. The fingers of its hand yet twitch as the rightmost bokoblin falls softly to the soil. Its companion screams out and notches another arrow. The now-handless rightmost bokoblin pounces at her, but she thrusts her sword up to pierce through its chest. She spins the monster caught on her blade around, using it as a meat-shield to catch an arrow loosed by the archer-bokoblin.

With a grunt, she swings the sword stabbed through the rightmost-monster's body into the archer-bokoblin to push them both into the flames of the campfire.

The bokoblins screech.

She swivels around for the flaming-torch-bokoblin but the monster finds her instead, with a stabbing pain across her cheek that throws her into the ground. Her hair and the shoulder of her tunic catch fire. She rolls forward through the dirt to extinguish the flames and an agonising weight crashes onto her right hand. Dust stings into her eyes and blinds her. When she closes her eyes the right lid does not fold properly and instead catches against the wetness of her eye. She cannot react to the pain of her eyelashes squirming against her own eyes: the bones of her right hand scream from the pressure. With her hand as a pivot, she twists her entire body to bring her legs up.
Her knees connect to *something* and the weight relieves from her hand. She jerks her arm inwards and opens her dusted eyes. She rubs the heel of her hand against her left eye until the lid rightens itself. Her eye swells. The middle finger of her right hand has broken at the knuckle. She finds the torch-bokoblin slumped in the grass in front of her. The torch smoulders; the grass catches the fire and the hot air drives the wind upwards.

The torch-bokoblin stirs. She glances at the campsite, looking out through her right eye: the archer-bokoblins have picked themselves from the fire. The handless bokoblin lies still in the dirt but the other lurches to its feet.

She rips the paraglider from her back and opens it. Her broken finger dangles. The stretch of her muscle over the knuckle hisses a breath from her lungs. The updraft from the torch kicks her upwards. She hangs her right arm through both of the wooden supports. With her left, she pulls the slate from its pouch and conjures a bomb.

The first bomb lands on the chest of the torch-bokoblin. The monster grabs the bomb to stare at it, and it detonates to shear off the bokoblin's face and blow its limb from the rest of its body. She glides towards the campfire to drop another bomb but the archer-bokoblin—flesh charred—aims its bow.

She sees it twitch its hand and immediately closes the paraglider. The arrow whistles over her head. The archer-bokoblin notches another.

Her boots connect with its skull.

She lands heavy on the monster's head. The force of the impact knocks her to her feet. Beneath her weight the archer-bokoblin's face crumples inwards to a sick puddle of bone cleaved through the skin and blood. Still it raises its arms to furrow its claws through her leg.

Her sword carves through the monster's throat. The remains of its decapitated head sink into the red earth. Its limbs writhe. She bisects the monster from neck-stump to tail-bone; the stench of its ruptured innards mingles with the coppery ooze of its blood.

She raises her head. The muscles at her shoulder flex over the arrowhead still lodged in her body. Her eyes narrow.

The thief-bokoblin on Ilia urges her across the field. She can see the long metal spear the bokoblin holds in its hand as it charges her.

She reaches for her bow. She lights the tip of the wooden arrow in the campfire. She lines the shot.

Then she tilts her bow up.

The arrow curves through the air. The thief-bokoblin charges and the arrow drops downwards onto its back. Though the arrowhead does not pierce its hide, the monster's clothing catches flame.

Yet the thief-bokoblin does not slow.

Inhaling sharply she throws herself out of Ilia's thunder-hoofed path. She senses the sudden coolness through her lower right leg from the back to the front, a space about a thumb's-length long. She listens to Ilia neigh and rear. The coolness leaves her leg and pain sets in instead. She thuds into the mud. When she tries to scramble to her feet, the agony in her lower right leg buckles her to her right side.
Ilia's hooves slam into the dust. She rears again.

The smouldering archer-bokoblin falls back. It hits the ground with a gasp.

Still curled up on her side, she pushes her hands towards her mouth. The middle finger of her right hand spears pain up her arm.

She whistles.

Ilia's hooves come down on the thief-bokoblin's chest. She whistles again and Ilia repeats the motion, stamping the monster through its cries of agony. She pulls the blade out once more. The trampled bokoblin lies still and silent in the ice-flecked earth. She crawls towards its muddied corpse.

She studies its ruined body, its collapsed chest, its innards swollen from its abdomen, its broken jaw frothed with blood.

Its pupils dart towards her. Its claws twitch.

For the pain through which the monster has put Ilia these two weeks, she raises the blade above her head. Her breath heaves the weight of her form. She plunges the sword between its eyes. The warmth of its spraying blood heats her face and drains into her eyes, but she need not see to hear the burble-slosh of its dying gasp.

It does not move again.

She slides her blade once more into its sheathe. Rising to her unsteady legs, her right foot dragging behind her for the clean slice through her lower leg, she approaches Ilia. The horse shies from her. She raises her arms up to stroke Ilia's neck and jaw. Her hand shakes whenever she brushes her fingertips against Ilia's skin but she does so nonetheless, cooing hoarsely to calm her companion.

She rests her forehead against Ilia's. Ilia whinnies. In Ilia's breathing she can hear her own name.

Link.

Link limps Ilia to Saki, whose eyes have widened. Saki steps backwards when Link approaches.

"Well," she manages to comment, her timbre stiff as Link's cold-numbed limbs, "I can see why Teba trusted you to fight against the Malice."

"...this is Ilia," Link says by way to explanation. She keeps her swollen left eye closed, viewing the world solely from her right. "My companion. They hurt her."

"I know they're monsters, but—"

Link turns away.

On foot Saki and Link escort Ilia to the stable near the checkpoint at Medli. The stablehands scatter when they see her soaked in blood and limping, her horse covered in scrapes and sores. The stable owner inquires if Link means any funny business.

She pleads for them to get Ilia to the stable healer. Link pays for Ilia's care by the stable healer. The healer does not know how to read sign; Link does not know how to write Tabanch. Grabbing the healer's hand, Link drags the healer outside to the bloodied and battered Ilia. The healer chastises Link for allowing Ilia to grow to such a terrible condition until the healer gets a good look at Link
herself, breathing heavily, barely tremble-holding herself against the wall, pooling blood onto the stable floor.

Link would stay in the stable through the night if not for Saki insisting she return and physically dragging her to the medical wing. The healers beg her not to do anything that reckless while she recovers. They pull out the arrowhead; dress her leg; set a cast for her finger. Link waits for nightfall. Under the cover of darkness, she glides back out to the cliffs of Lake Totori and sneaks—limping—into the stable to spend the night by Ilia's side.

A horse and her girl.

Like Link, once again plunked into the medical wing after the encounter with bokoblins, Ilia recovers. With a mere handful of days her coat once again shines with health. The sores have all but faded. For the second time in the same week, Link purchases a new feather-down tunic, asking for the same forest-green affair she did the first time around, and the rito shopkeep thanks her graciously for her patronage.

"Like 'em so much you just had to get another, right?" He winks at her. She looks blankly ahead. "I under-know."

Teba, stopping by to thank Link for her words to Tulin and to inquire as to why Saki called the girl terrifying and not someone who should be around the children, mentions once more the promise that Link made to Genli.

The morning thereafter Link checks in with the stable healer, who confirms that Ilia will be healthy enough to ride in another day or two. Link swears to Ilia that she will return as soon as she fulfills her promise.

Link takes the children fishing. Teba, in the process of teaching Amali her skills with the bow, cannot accompany them. Saki does; she keeps her distance from Link. She can sense Saki's suspicious gaze following her back wherever she goes.

Cree and Kheel teach her how to fish with long Tabanch poles. The first time something tugs on the string, Link jerks the pole out too quickly. The fish—a hearty salmon—tears through the line and whomps her directly in the face. With a mouth full of salmon tail Link flops backwards onto her back and nearly chokes on the fish before it slaps her face twice to spring itself back into the water. The children giggle. She curls her thumb and index finger into the circular sign for being all right.

The fish do not bite.

Kotts and Notts fall asleep. Genli gripes of boredom, and even though Kheel tries to sing a song to keep them alert—the Sonata of Awakening, she calls it—Cree takes a nap against Link's shoulder.

Link frowns, touches her chin, and whips out her slate. Saki yips in surprise as Link summons a bomb and chucks it into the water.

The detonation floats up several trout.

Saki admonishes her but Tulin cheers. "Hylian bomb fishing!" he calls it. "I've never seen anything like it!"

The children cheer, yet Saki confiscates the slate from her. "You can have it back after we leave for the day," Saki says with a shiver of the spine, and Link can see the terror shaking in her eyes. She acquiesces without another word.
Back to the fishing poles.

Her efforts of the next several hours net her no salmon; nonetheless the aspiring fishers come away with a bucket of voltfin trout. Genli watches their sleek yellow bodies flip through the water and demands to take the bucket up to Medli herself. Under Saki’s protective gaze, Genli wraps her talons around the handle of the bucket and tries to fly off.

She flaps. Two metres. Four. Six. And then she topples back to the ground. Link and Saki leap forward at the same time: Saki snags Genli from the air, and Link catches the bucket of fish so perfectly that only a single droplet of water splashes over the rim to plink her on the nose.

The kitchen near the stable of Medli suffices for Link to make the meunière. With the help of the children, she harvests the wild wheat from the rolling hills around the stable, then grinds the kernels into flour. Link skins the fish and chops off their heads and tails in preparation for cooking, then removes the less tasty parts of the guts. Saki fries the heads herself and serves them to the children as a pre-supper snack. Link rolls the voltfin trout in flour and dashes of spice. She fries the fish on butter. The bright-gold innards spark with static. The saucepan blazes up in a burst of electricity that stands her hair into a fluffy cloud of brown.

Voltfin trout, Link discovers, means voltfin trout.

She serves the meunière with a splash of lemon that she purchases from the stable. The children chow down.

Link offers Saki a plate as well, and— with some trepidation visibly slowing her movements—Saki accepts. While they eat, Link enters the stable to present two special deliveries of trout meunière: one to the stablehand who takes care of Ilia, and one to the healer who has aided Ilia's recovery.

Upon her return to the kitchen outside, Saki nods to her. "You're not that bad of a chef."

Link smiles sheepishly. She takes the final helping of voltfin trout meunière for herself. The sun setting beyond the mountains has flooded the lake with gold, and the evening breeze rolls across the gentle fields. The cool air pinkens her cheeks above the feathered collar of her new tunic and makes the warmth weight of the plate of meunière in her hands all the more comforting.

The tickle of static gives way to a delectable sweetness like the inner stem of honeysuckle. Though her body knows the taste not as meunière, her tongue remembers who taught her the recipe. The brown-skinned girl with the red hair, with the violet sash about her waist, who pressed the red telescope into her hand. "A gift for Aryll," she said, "to look at the birds she loves so much." Who gave her a wooden charm in the form of a brown-painted horse, and a leather-bound book of myths. "And a gift for—"

The girl with the violet sash.

With the basket of cucco eggs. Whose mother had a farm of wheat and cucco in the hills, who bottled eggnog for passersby, who sang every night for her patrons that joined in with voices that boomed up to the rafters and quaked the floor of Marin's room. Whose other mother ran an adjacent stable to take care of the horses of travellers and to keep a row of stalls full of pregnant mares. With their urine she brewed an elixir as green as spring, which she tried to gift Link for free but which Link staunchly paid for every time.

"I'm glad you're like me," Marin told her one day as Link packed a case of elixirs for the month or two before her courier trips would take her back west.
Link shook her head. "I'm glad I found this place. I never would've...known I could...be a..." She made a wibbly-wobbly circular motion with her hands.

"Well there's nothing else you are 'cept a girl. Well, no, I can think of one other thing." Marin paused and propped her hands on her hips. Link trembled as she awaited Marin's judgment. Marin grinned at her. "Someone who should visit more often, dummy."

In the evenings before her bedtime, Marin would sing. Her voice filled the inn and seemed to bring down the moon and the stars to listen. Her mother strummed a six-stringed harp painted red and blue that resonated the very air with the timbre of her daughter's voice. The night after she first heard Marin sing, Link told her that she had never heard anyone sing as beautifully as Marin did. Marin blushed, and her mother laughed. "If you want to learn to play the harp," Marin's mother signed to Link with an easy smile, "I wouldn't mind teaching you."

So Link set herself to learning. She could stay only a day or two a month, once on her route to deliver blacksmithy goods—the blacksmith, the blacksmith, and Rusl his name, the signs bubbling up in fish-tang under her tongue—and once on the return. Her skills barely improved. On the first day of spring, Marin took her aside with a lump in her throat. "You don't have to force yourself if you don't want to, Link."

Link looked at her, cocked her head to one side.

"I c-can tell you don't really want to learn the h-harp," Marin forced out around the tears beading at the corners of her eyes that made Link want to run away and stick her head in the pond up the hill from the ranch, and then Marin lifted her hands to speak in sign where her throat had failed her. "You haven't gotten any better and I don't have to be a genius to figure out why!"

Link blinked. "I'm only here a little bit every month." Her turn to cry, now, with her eyes stinging for how she'd hurt Marin with her own incompetence. "I forget all the songs while I'm gone. I'm...sorry I'm stupid."

"Link you dummy!" Marin hugged her. "I hope you don't forget me like you forget those songs."

"Never ever," she signed against Marin's back.

On her next visit to the ranch, Marin gave her a present tied with a violet bow. "You don't have to like it," she said with a hint of anxiety behind the smile that crinkled her eyes. Link unwrapped a crudely carved wooden ocarina painted blue as the skies that Marin loved. She tilted her head to one side, and Marin tucked her hands behind her. "It's so you can practise the songs while you're out. If you want to sing with me."

"There's nothing else I'd rather do."

Link played the ocarina on every trek there and back to memorise the songs. She never learned the harp well enough to perform with Marin in the evenings, but she never stopped trying.

A farm of cucco and wheat. Wheat. Wheat must mean: somewhere on the western half of the land once known as Hyrule. She strains to remember where, to see the mountains in the distance, to make out the castle that rises over the moat, any point of reference, but her memories centre on Marin's smile so brilliant that she could rival the sun, on the voice that sang with the songs of the wind, on the reddening of Link's own face as if she had broken out with fever.

They fished in a pond that fogs at the edges of her memory. They had to turn the grain mill together to grind down the kernels of wheat Marin had brought from the farm. She had not goat
butter but mare butter to glisten gold on the saucepan strapped to her back. "Buttered trout," she sang in a melody that she made up as she went, "buttered trout, pat in flour 'n' fry it out." Link drew the blue ocarina from her pocket to accompany her. Not in harmony but in cacophony, they failed to guess the next note the other would sing or play. Marin could scarcely sing for laughing at every discordant chord and Link's ocarina took on the sound of a sadly deflating balloon. When the trout had fried to honey-coloured perfection, Link wolfed down her portion in the span of a few seconds, then propped her chin up on her elbow and gazed at Marin polishing off her own fish.

"How'd you make it taste so good? When I try doing it back home it doesn't come out the same."

"The secret ingredient," Marin said, balancing her plate in the crook of her arm, "is lots of love." Link's cheeks flushed. "Or that's what Mama says." She giggles and Link can hear the wind laugh with her. "I think it's the horse butter. Speaking of horses. I know you're goin' tomorrow, so don't forget your promise." She booped Link on the nose and her fingertip thundered electricity down Link's spine.

"I promise," she signed with a sheepish smile. "There's nothing else I'd rather do with my life, I swear."

Marin embraced her so suddenly that she had not the time to register the arms wrapping around her or the abruptness of the warm bulk in her lap. She toppled backwards into the water and they rolled together, shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip, through the shallow end of the pond to the bottom of the hill. When they untangled themselves, Marin laughed and Link covered her face with her hands.

Marin touched her wrists. Her warm fingers rested on Link's wristbones. Lowering Link's arms, Marin leaned in until Link could feel her breath on her nose, on her cheeks, on her lips.

"Don't forget, Link." Her eyes twinkled. "And even when you leave, don't you ever forget me, or I'll never forgive you."

"I promise."

Genli tugs on her sleeve and the memories fade. Link blinks, looks down at the young girl with a question burning on her features. "Genli wanna know! How come your meunière's so good?"

"The secret ingredient," she says, balancing her plate in the crook of her arm, "is lots of love."

Electro Seafood Meunière (four hearts, low electric resistance for 04:50) - goat butter, voltfin trout, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Indeed, just as with Yunobo, Link doesn't have a chance to speak to Amali due to Amali immediately becoming busy. However, Link does spend more time in Medli than she did in Darunia. That's a step up! And yes, before you ask, Link won't be cucked out of talking to the other new-generation Champions/pilots in the
You don't mess with Link's horse. I mentioned that leaving Ilia in the wood for some time was a bad idea. Well, here's why! Link's lucky that some traveller or Yiga didn't steal the horse and just run away with it entirely. I don't really want to say that I had "fun" writing the scene. I don't blame Saki for finding Link terrifying, when Link was much bloodier than she usually is in combat.

"What's that spring green elixir stuff?" In real life, some trans girls (as a reminder, Link is trans in this fic) take oestrogen hormone replacement therapy in the form of **premarin**, which stands for PREgnant MAres' uriNe (I didn't make that up). While it's not used as much anymore due to better methods of obtaining and administering said hormones, Magic Fantasy Premarin HRT Potion™ seemed reasonable to me. If elixirs can allow people to venture into volcanoes with no real threats to their body, etc., then it's perfectly reasonable for Fantasy HRT™ to also exist. That's what Link was buying from the ranch (Marin is also trans). I suppose that spring is often a symbol of growth, new life, and hope, which are to me associated with the possibility of transitioning. Green is associated with Link and with courage in general throughout the *Zelda* franchise, and believe me when I say it takes a whole heaping of courage.

"Why does Marin have two mothers?" She's gerudo and as such her mothers are both gerudo women.

"Why Marin, even?" I like *Link's Awakening*, and of all of the "love interests" that Link has ever had throughout the franchise, Marin's the one that I personally think was the best-written (considering technical limitations and so on). While I couldn't carry the existential themes of Marin in the limited space of *Delicious in Wilds*, I recommend any interested readers in checking out my other fic, *adrift*.

The six-stringed harp is a reference to *Oracle of Ages*. In Central Hyrulean, the Faronese eight-stringed harp is called a "harp" while the Parapan six-stringed harp is called an "ages harp" (pronounced ah-guess), similar to how in real-life, English often refers to the Sahara as the "Sahara Desert" even though Sahara itself already means desert, or how certain speakers might distinguish "tea" and "chai tea" or "bread" and "naan bread" even though **chai** means **tea** and **naan** means **bread**. Conversely, in Parapan, the six-stringed harp is called the "ages" and the Faronese eight-stringed harp is called the "harp ages" (essentially the inverse). Other languages tend to differ on which word(s) they adopt based on which harp their historical populations encountered first. For example, Tabanch uses "ages" and "harp ages" for the eight-stringed variant, while Necludan adopts "harp" and "ages harp" instead. Other languages have their own words for harp, such as Lanayrish, which uses the word **surf** to refer to the traditionally-silver Lanayrish fifteen-stringed harp.

While Link thinks that Marin's family was out west because of the wheat and voltfin trout, the truth is...

Up next: moving on to the next arc. Link getting chewed out is going to come back big time.

midna's ass. 21 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Marin is really, really cute. Link is really, really cute. Link and Marin together are really, really, really cute. This memory is extremely
cozy. I don't always like romance in fiction, but it's done so well here.

Wrapping up in Medli is nice, too. Though Amali is busy, it's nice to be able to simmer down with all of the other characters, unlike in Daru-darunia, where we basically left as soon as Link got better.

The fight scene in this chapter is *intense*. Amazing stuff. You can see why Saki ends up so scared.

Hylian Bomb Fishing is the one true acceptable way to fish in Breath of the Wild.

Link's fond memories of Revali are really sweet.

We follow this, my favourite arc, with what is probably my second favourite. This chapter's memory was important, after all.

Emma. 21 September 2017.
Chapter Summary

After saying good-bye to those in Medli, the travelling chef journeys back to Kakariko. Along the way, the chef remembers the girl with the golden hair, remembers the first contact between her and the chef. In Kakariko, the chef inquires to the wise matriarch about the little sister in the chef's memories. When the matriarch says little in response, the travelling chef makes a decision regarding the slate.

Chapter Notes

To all of my readers: I received a question on the FFN crosspost version of this fic regarding Link being trans, so I'll copypaste the comment I made in response there.

"You're right that Link has always been a girl, just that her body hasn't always matched what she wanted it to, and she hasn't always been out. Her being trans hasn't been a big deal in the story because she came out prior to the Great Calamity, when she was around twelve years of age. It's been mildly relevant at times (i.e. Dorian asking to confirm that she's a girl). In the twenty-fifth chapter, Link reveals that she only came out after meeting Marin, because prior to that—in her home village—Link didn't even realise that not-being-a-boy was an option. Once we get into memories more relevant to Link's early childhood, we'll see a greater impact, and we'll see when Link figured out that she was a girl. The "always been a girl" is more in reference to certain narratives that (while perfectly legitimate for trans people to talk about themselves in that manner) conceive of trans people as "they were originally a boy/girl, and then they had The Surgeries, and then they popped out the other end a girl/boy" which, again, some trans people do conceive of themselves like that and that’s legitimate of course, but it is not a narrative applicable to all trans people and is rather harmful for a number of reasons I don't want to get into on an author's note. If you want to learn more, please PM me.

It's a minor aspect of Delicious in Wilds and not really something to worry about if you don't care. But for those who do care, it is one of the threads that influenced and continues to influence Link's development, especially now that she has the spring green elixir back in hand.

Being trans is more immediately narratively relevant to a different character, as you'll see in this chapter. Again, it's not a big deal if you don't care and the story can frankly be enjoyed (almost) entirely without grasping the situation. If you have any concerns or questions feel free to message me."

Moving on, the ocarina that Marin gave to Link in the memory of the twenty-fifth chapter is actually a reference to Link's Awakening rather than to Ocarina of Time, as Link obtains a blue ocarina from the Dream Shrine therein. Of course, the blue ocarina actually comes from A Link to the Past, where it was localised as a flute (but the sprite is a blue ocarina).

Also, I forgot to mention this but Revali talking about the emotionless girl who sleeps
in the sword in the twenty-fourth chapter is obviously in reference to Fi from Skyward Sword.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

By the time Link and Ilia recover enough to travel, Amali has not yet disentangled herself from the duties descended upon her shoulders. She passes on a message with Teba to thank Link for everything, and Teba—giving her a letter from Chief Kaneli to Lady Impa—tells her to come back again in a few weeks.

"She'll want to talk to you beak to beak, or wing to wing in your case," he says and, effecting Amali's upwards lilt, adds, "you know."

"I'll see what I can do."

Rising early on the morning after the stable healer confirms Ilia's health and three days after the doctors remove the metallic tube from her shoulder, Link wishes the children good-bye with a final round of carrot cake. Carrot cake, she notes, the kind her sister loves.

"I think you should bring over your little sister sometime, if she wants to meet us." Cree beams at Link, and Notts and Kotts bob their head to agree. Genli makes some pretend noise about wanting more carrot cake to herself, but even she confesses wanting to meet Link's sister, if for the novelty of seeing another hylian.

"Oh Miss Link!" Kheel tugs on her sleeve, and Link glances down at the purple-feathered girl. "Mother told us that you've been looking for shrines, so I asked all around Medli, and I heard a few songs—"

Link can sense herself leaning forwards to give Kheel the fullness of her attention. For the puzzle of riddling out a shrine and for the prospect of seeing the shrine itself. And then her own pattern of excitement dawns upon her. Her smile folds into vacancy. Link rests her hand on Kheel's head until the girl closes her beak and gazes curiously at Link.

"Thank you for thinking about me," Link signs, her arms curving sluggishly through the air as if Kheel had suddenly dunked her into a vat of honey, "but I promised your mother I wouldn't go hunting after shrines anymore."

"Oh." Kheel tips her gaze downwards. "But..."

The stiffness of her limbs softens. "When I come back from finishing my last errand, you can sing for me. Just to sing. No shrines." Kheel nods. She wraps her arms around Link's torso, and Link hugs her back.

"Promise you'll come back, Miss Link?"

"I promise," she signs into Kheel's back; Kheel snuggles against her.

Link waves to them by Ilia's side. The children bring her gifts before she goes. Cree: a wooden box of goat butter sealed off with wax. Kotts: a pouch of flour that she ground herself—with the help of her sisters, of course. Notts: browned sugar that she boiled herself—also with the help of her sisters. Genli: a glass vial of vanilla extract. Kheel: a skin of fresh milk.

The latter reminds her of the spring green elixir from her memories. Perhaps, after the task, once
her life passes from the urgency of living for someone else to tracking her own needs without purpose, Link could find the ranch.

She promises to use the milk before it goes rotten and Kheel covers her face. "I forgot that milk goes bad! I'm sorry."

"I'm glad you thought of me," Link says instead, offering her a smile, and Kheel sniffs but the corners of her mouth curve up.

Tulin comes by with a bundle of wooden arrows fletched himself. Link stuffs her quiver and thanks him. Blushing, he shrugs. "It's the least I could do."

"I'll come back someday. I promise." Link swings a leg over Ilia's back. The children wave to her and she waves back. Ilia flicks her ears back; her tail swishes over her back and brushes against Link's lower spine. Link rubs Ilia's neck. "I can tell you're itching to go, girl," she signs into Ilia's shoulders, "so let's answer the call of the wilds."

She traces the road she intends to take on her map: through the ridgelands of the land once known as Hyrule, up around the curving Hylia River, through the thin sliver of land between the mountains of Eldin and the wetlands of Lanayru, through the Dueling Peaks, and up to Kakariko for one last visit. At the close of the first day, she sets up camp at the base of Thundra Plateau. The clear skies make the basin a spot of safety, though she misses the strains of accordion music. Link considers using a bomb to hasten the process of gathering firewood for her campfire.

Yet when she gives up the slate, she will give up the runes as well.

Link struggles to chop down a tree by thwacking it repeatedly with her sword, which catches in the wood. When the vibration hums up her arm and threatens to shatter the blade, she sheathes the sword again. Instead she scoots herself up the thickest tree she can find to rip off the branches at the top. The tree's crown rewards her for her ingenuity with a nest of dove's eggs.

She has eaten neither bird nor egg in weeks.

Link makes it all the way to Ilia before she realises she completely forgot about the firewood.

Leaving the eggs in a satchel of Ilia's saddle, Link scampers up the tree again. She tears and drops branches to the ground, then chops them into short, manageable pieces. Soon she has a fire going by which to rest and consider what to do with the eggs. She sits cross-legged in front of the fire and touches her chin.

Egg pie. Or egg cake. Something of that sort must exist, and she has the milk to use. Link follows the process of the carrot cake, or the fruit and nutcake: sugar, flour, and butter in the bottom of the cooking pot, whisked together with the—cleaned—hilt of the boomerang. She cracks an egg and finds the batter pleasingly thicker. Next she plinks in a droplet of vanilla extract from the glass vial. Dipping her fingertip into the batter, Link sucks on her finger: sweet and thick, rich and creamy. She has to stop herself from gorging on the batter alone. She continues to whisk and mix until the batter thickens further to a dough that she scoops from the cooking pot to roll to smoothness between her palms. Slightly damp, the dough sticks to her hands. She dusts her fingers and palms with flour. No more sticking. Grinning to herself, Link molds the dough into a round pie shell with her fingers at the bottom of the cooking pot.

Carefully so as not to break the shell, she peels it from the cooking pot and drapes it over her knee. To start the filling, Link simmers a syrup of sugar-in-milk, then removes the cooking pot from the fire and lets the cold evening air cool the thick syrup down. A thin crust forms over the surface.
She cracks the remainder of the eggs into the bottom of the pot and adds another helping of milk alongside a drop of vanilla. Once more her trusty boomerang stirs up the filling until she achieves a smooth and creamy consistency, no lumps, no chunks.

A tad overly sweet. Too much sugar. But perhaps within the shell of the batter the sweetness will even out.

Then she clenches her hand. No oven—and she has not the time to fire her own. "So it's come to this," she signs, and nearly lets the shell slide off her knee.

Link pours the filling into the empty elixir vials she still carries in her satchel so that she can reuse the cooking pot, which she cleans out and pre-heats upside down in the fire. While she waits for the cooking pot to heat up sufficiently, she glances through the different lids she has available before selecting the wooden one.

With the back of her hand she tests the heat of the cooking pot to ensure an even spread of heat. Link flips the pot back over to scrape out the charred bits of leftover filling stuck to the bottom.

She sets the shell into the inner curve of the pot. With her tongue poking of the corner of her mouth, Link adjusts it just so to sit evenly in the centre. Uncorking the vials to pour the filling into the shell, she finds that she has made slightly too much filling. She tries to crimp the rim of the shell—irregular and crudely done, her fingerprints visible in the dough, a personal touch of her relative inexperience with cooking that brings a smile to her lips at how much she has yet to learn—and sets the cooking pot into the flames. Link clamps the lid to stop the escape of steam, albeit not as firmly as she could. If the cooking pot explodes from the built-up steam—not that the entireties of the batter and filling combined have enough steam between them to fill the pot—the lid should pop off first.

Link pours the leftover filling onto the solid iron pot lid. Swirling it about with her finger, she helps herself to a sample. Ilia nickers and pushes her lips onto the back of Link's right hand—the broken-and-healed middle finger remains tender, the base swollen—and Link speedily shoves the pot lid over the fire to prevent Ilia from ingesting raw egg.

She waits for the filling to solidify into a golden brown. When Link pokes it with the tip of the metal boomerang, it appears firm enough, and she removes it from the fire.

It sticks to the inside of the pot lid. Grunting, Link digs her fingernails in to peel it off, but the hands that have brought Malice to their knees lose the fight against the solid filling. She wrings her hand to ease the ache from her fingers. She narrows her eyes at the filling.

Time to bring out the big 'rangs.

The filling proves no match for a sharpened edge. She scrapes it from the pot lid with the help of the forked boomerang. The entire underside has charred to black. Link ogles at her handiwork.

She burned the filling.

She touches her chin. She taps: once, twice. Before she even hits three she makes up her mind.

Burnt filling, she discovers, tastes more akin to soot than anything resembling actual food.

She hacks and coughs the ash from her mouth. Link grabs the skin of milk and tips her head back to wash down what in the name of the Goddesses she just stuffed into her mouth.

Though she will give it one thing: at the very least the burned filling had a nice texture to it.
Crispy.

Link checks on the egg pie-cake-thing more frequently to avoid another mistake, but her makeshift oven seems to work just fine. The shell firms to the shade of freshly baked bread, and the inner filling takes on a brilliant honey tint that promises sweetness.

Removing the cooking pot from the fire, she lets the pie-cake-thing cool off. She leans back against Ilia's flank. Yawning, Link rubs her eyes.

Saki called her terrifying.

Link glances down at her hands, the scars and bruises merging into a history both hers and someone else's. She counts the scars on her body that she can attribute, for sure, to her own actions. The bite marks on her arm. The callus on her left heel. The rigid stripe from the corner of her eye to her jaw. The thin pale line up her lower leg. The fading purple left by having slammed into the bar with her side back in Eldin. The circular scar in her left shoulder, like a cork-plugged cervix of a wine bottle.

But what of the bruises and scrapes she has received without knowing, that blur together who she is and to whom her body once belonged?

Link gazes at a particular row of scars that run vertically up her right forearm, like a monster has sunk its talons into her wrist and clawed down to her elbow. Try as she might, she cannot make out their age: maybe older scars that have healed, or perhaps newer scars that did cut so deep. She could have scratched the skin while climbing sheer rock, or scraped her skin during one of her immeasurable falls, or even splintered it against the wooden struts of the paraglider with how many times she has supported herself on her right arm alone.

She does not know and that sliver of grey—that lack of separation between that which she is and that which she is not—breaks sweat out on the back of her neck and sallows her skin.

Ilia neighs. Link lifts her hand to stroke Ilia's nose. She checks the pot to see that the egg pie-cake-thing has cooled to firmness. When she reaches down it comes easily off of the bottom of the pot. The filling wobbles slightly.

She inhales: the scent of vanilla.

The creamy filling coats the inside of her mouth with sweetness while the crumbly shell provides a base even as it melts to a golden taste on her tongue. The sugary flavour keeps her from eating it too swiftly, and Link sits by the campfire, by her companion, steadily nibbling and licking her way through the delicious dessert.

Egg tart.

The name comes to her in a flash. Egg tart. Egg tart that she baked for the girl with the golden hair. Link remembers. She remembers the ceremony, where the girl with the golden hair read off an ancient text that Link did not understand. Daruk had suggested the ceremony, as the King of Hyrule had not publicly announced her as the Champion of Hylia, Hero of Hyrule, Her Majesty's Knight. Only those who had seen—had seen—had seen something that lies out of reach of the lantern fueled by the fragrance of the egg tart—knew of the identity of the hero.

On the official count, the King declared that the blade of evil's bane had chosen at last a knight, and that for the protection of the prophecy the knight would go anon until the hour of the Calamity drew nigh.
Daruk had proposed the ceremony to bolster their spirits and unite them, yet the same ceremony left Link with more of an aching emptiness and confusion than before. But the girl with the golden hair and the King had promised Aryll a life in the castle as long as Link fulfilled her duties as the hero of legend. And for that alone, she would take up the mantle no matter if it cost her her life.

The King had tasked her with keeping watch over the girl with the golden hair at all times, save for her time training with the Champions, which Daruk and the woman with the green hairband had insisted upon. The woman in black had interjected that she had kept the girl with the golden hair safe since she was a wee babe, and that an untrained courier from the rural countryside would surely fail in the protection of the most important charge in the entire land of Hyrule.

The King had sighed and reminded Impa of the prophecy. "We must do all the same as ten thousand years ago if the Goddesses are to smile upon us. You may retain your duties, but her Knight must protect her as well." He had not hesitated but rumbled on. "And, by the help of the Goddesses, the sword that seals the darkness may awaken something within her. I wish her to be in its vicinity as much as possible."

Not a few days after, the girl with the golden hair had escaped from her daily tutors. To investigate a shrine near the castle. Link had followed her, as the King had instructed.

The girl with the golden hair had whirled about, had screamed for Link to leave, had shrieked for her to stay away. Link had merely looked vacantly at her, puzzled for her anger and puzzled for her actions, and had offered to cook the girl with the golden hair something to make up for it.

When Impa found them and escorted them back to the castle Link had witnessed the King—who met them on the bridge between her room and her study—yell at the girl with the golden hair. No, he did not yell. He addressed her as sternly as one would speak to a hunting dog that had relieved itself on the carpet. He spoke of prophecy, of fate, of the girl with the golden hair's latent blood that carried within it the sealing magic granted by the Golden Goddesses and passed on to mortals by the Goddess Hylia. As the legends went, the girl with the golden hair bore the blessed bloodline of the Goddess Herself. "With diligent study and prayer," the King intoned in his sermonising boom, "you will learn to wield it."

The girl with the golden hair screamed back: "I have studied. I have prayed. I have spent my life praying. In all of our written records no one in our family has demonstrated any kind of sealing magic!" Her shoulders shook; her brow knit so tightly together Link feared her forehead might rip clean of her skull. "At best we have some wishy-washy talk of miracles a few thousand years ago. Do you know what evidence I've found about ten th—"

"Because," the King said in his low timbre, interrupting her to silence with a single motion of his lips, "no one has needed to use the holy protection granted us for ten thousand years. As the sword that seals the darkness only awakes in times of crisis, so will the sacred blood of the Goddess Hylia."

She seethed out her words like smoke from a fire. "The longer you willfully ignore the facts in front of you the less time we'll have to prepare for the Calamitous One!"

"The more time you spend seeking excuses for your own failures—" Though the King had not moved, the girl with the golden hair gasped outwards as if he had hit her in the stomach. "—the more the entire peoples of Hyrule will be in danger for their lives. You are not ten years old anymore, fancifully thinking that a dignitary you considered scary was plotting to take over the kingdom. You are not ten years old anymore, hiding behind my throne while I apologised on your behalf. You have lived your life pampered by all of the pleasures I could afford you as the Princess of Hyrule, but the time has come to feel the weight of the crown you will one day bear."
The girl with the golden hair's face reddened along with the tips of her ears. Link could see the glistening of tears at the corners of her eyes and averted her gaze. "If we do not prepare for the Calamity in ways that do not involve banking on mistranslations of old wives' tales from ten millennia ago," she snapped, her voice breaking on the final syllable, "then there may be no crown for me to bear."

"Enough!"

The girl with the golden hair flinched back.

For a moment the King did not speak. Then he did. Calmly. Word by word, slow and deliberate, with the inevitability of the great glacier rolling across grassland, not a question of if, but a question of when. "All of the daughters of Hyrule have been passed the blessed bloodline of the Goddess Hylia." Link could see Impa's eyes narrow slightly at the King's words. The girl with the golden hair's tears had begun to trail glistening wetness down her cheeks. "Are you or are you not a daughter of Hyrule?"

The girl with the golden hair responded even before he had finished. "Yes," she said coldly, the ice in her timbre rivaling that of her father's, her hand closed around the golden and violet charms that she wore at her throat, "I am a daughter of Hyrule."

"Then you should be able to wield the sacred magic passed down to all daughters of Hyrule. Do I make myself clear?"

The girl with the golden hair did not answer.

"Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Father."

They glared at one another. Though she stood less than half his height, her frame all the more petite against his most robust, Link could see the similarities of father and daughter, in the same thick brows, in the same broad nose, in the same light brown skin the colour of the very earth they sought to protect in their own ways.

He dismissed her. The girl with the golden hair turned away.

That night Impa took watch at the door of her chambers. The King ordered Link to spend the night within at the foot of girl of the golden hair's bed. "So that she may sleep beside the sword that seals the darkness and be awakened by the voice within," he said civilly, though Link could think of nothing but the frost that formed and sharpened his words as he had stabbed within into the girl with the golden hair's chest. "I trust you to act wisely around her, for your sister's sake."

She bowed to him.

For her sister's sake she would do most anything, and she knew that the King knew.

The girl with the golden hair cried aghast at the knowledge that Link would share her chambers for the night. Impa calmed her by placing the mat near the door rather than at the foot of the bed, as far away from the girl with the golden hair as possible. "It will be a temporary arrangement, Your Majesty. I am certain—" Impa glanced at Link over her shoulder, the strand of her single long lock of hair swaying back and forth like a pendulum ticking down the minutes to a calamity about to unfold in the room. "—that things will improve once Your Majesty accesses the sealing magic."

"And what if I don't? What if...what if I'm not..." The girl with the golden hair shook her head. "I
don't think the powers even exist but that doesn't make me—it doesn't make me hate myself any less—it doesn't make me doubt—!

Link closed the door behind her a tad too loudly, and the girl with the golden hair looked up. She snapped her jaw shut.

As Impa passed the threshold she turned to glare at Link. "If you do anything that displeases Her Majesty," she signed, her arms hidden from the girl with the golden hair's view, "I will personally rip you limb from limb. Am I understood?"

Link nodded.

She expected chambermaids, but the girl with the golden hair, she found out, insisted on taking care of her own room and on preparing herself for her own bed. Link sat cross-legged on the mat Impa had prepared for her with the sword that seals the darkness in her lap, its sheathe violet and gold, the hilt winged, the blade of evil's bane shimmering faintly blue, and her pack against her back. The girl with the golden hair slept in a large circular room that nonetheless felt cramped and constrained for the mountains of books that threatened to topple over every which way. To the right of the door a fireplace—that could easily double as a hearth for cooking, Link observed to herself—carved into the wall, the flames warming the inner chambers. The girl with the golden hair's bed lay on the other side, though the tomes and volumes strewn over its surface gave Link concern about where the girl with the golden hair might actually sleep. On the nightstand stood a sapphire-inlaid pitcher of iced water and an empty glass, alongside a corked glass jug containing a sparkling light green liquid. A white nightgown draped over the nightstand, weighed down by a small stack of books. A golden bow hung above the fireplace for reasons that Link could not fathom. At the corner of the girl with the golden hair's desk she spied a pot full of soil but devoid of life. A golden harp stringed eightfold leaned against a tower of books on the left half of her desk.

Link prepared for bed herself. She checked on the conditions of her satchel, her boots, her travelling clothing. As Her Majesty's Knight she could request armour whenever she wished, but that would burden others, and so she preferred to sew up any tears. She checked upon her more recent injuries—a run-in with an unruly helmasaur had left with a scrap on her right knee—applied medicinal salve, and changed her bandages. She uncorked a helping of spring green elixir from her satchel and tucked the empty vial back into place. She shined and waterproofed her boots, then polished the blade of the sword, though its glowing surface revealed no blemishes.

The girl with the golden hair did not speak a word to Link. She seated herself at the writing desk beside her bed. By the light of two candles that smelled like baked apples, she pored over a volume. Link listened to her alternate flipping pages and writing. Occasionally the girl with the golden hair would leap up, tear through the stacks of books, seize a particular tome, yelp a-ha!, and throw herself back into the chair to scribble furiously.

Link curled up on the mat. Lying on her right side she faced the wall. She closed her eyes.

The candles burned quickly, too quickly for normal candles, unless the nobility used a special brand of candles for the sheer sake of their ability to afford to utilise however many candles they wished. When the candles flickered, choked by their own pools of wax, the girl with the golden hair shuffled to light a pair anew. Rather than the bustling-about with her usual fervor, Link heard her tiptoe softly about the room.

"Your Majesty," Impa said quietly, "the promise was that you would have half an hour to read, no more."
The girl with the golden hair lowered the candles she had retrieved. "How did you know I was cheating?"

"Good night, Your Majesty." Impa took the candles from her and blew out the sputtering flames of the dead. The room cast to darkness but for the barest motes of light from the grate of the fireplace.

"...good night, Impa. You know that you can just call me—"

"Good night," repeated Impa, "Your Majesty."

The door closed once more. Link turned herself over onto her back to sleep. She listened to the girl with golden hair pomf onto the bed. Something thudded—a book?—to the floor.

The girl with the golden hair fidgeted restlessly. Link could hear her rolling from side to side, shifting her limbs, cracking her neck, flipping the pillow over and over, alternatively pulling up and kicking off the blanket. The constant noise bothered Link little. Rather, her own sleeplessness resulted from her spending the first night in the castle without having first said good-night to Aryll. Nonetheless the exhaustion of the day weighed down on her limbs, and she drifted off.

A soft whimpering awoke her. She sat up. Aryll? Her sister, whimpering, crying? Were her parents fighting once more?

Drowsily she lifted herself to her feet and approached the source of the whimpers. But Aryll's voice sounded different. Link blinked back her bleary vision and the chambers of the girl with the golden hair came back to her.

Link stood at the foot of the girl with the golden hair's bed, the girl who presently lay weeping into her pillow. Surely a freezard had breathed upon Link's legs, or an icy-winged keese had headbutted her in the knees, for her feet had fear-frozen to the ground.

A sliver of moonlight crept in from the crack between the blinds to cast the girl with the golden hair in silver.

Link knew not the words, nor the actions, nor the inactions. In that moment a pengator could have chomped her legs out from under her and she could have felt no shorter, no smaller, no more impossibly powerless, than she did listening to the girl cry.

The girl with the golden hair wept. For the sealing magic of which Link knew little, for the King who had treated her so harshly, for the 'courier girl from the rural countryside' who now shared her chambers, for one or more, for none. Link understood nothing at all of the situation.

No, that was a lie. She understood one thing.

She understood that she understood absolutely nothing at all.

She barely knew the girl's name, only her title. Princess of Hyrule.

But she did know something that cheered her up no matter the occasion, that cheered up her sister, that cheered up the girl who smelled of horses and hay. Link turned back to the hearth with its metal grate and set about uncovering a method of lifting the grate.

Her hunting knife served to unscrew the bottom of the grate. She raised the grate up and set it aside to reveal the merry flame dancing within the hearth. Link scooted her pack towards her. Always she carried with her cooking supplies on the road: skillets, baking pans, a variety of ceramic bowls, oil, butter, a wooden box of spices, salt, sugar, pepper, a bag of flour she had ground out with
Marin upon her last visit to the ranch, when Daruk and the girl with the green hairband had come with her to meet the girl with the most beautiful voice Link had ever heard. Link examined the contents of her satchel. No meat, few fruits or vegetables, though she did have a nest of eggs that she had collected while tailing the girl with the golden hair to the shrine.

Egg tart. She remembers the same process of cooking, of whisking together brown sugar, mares' butter, ground flour, a drop of vanilla extract, and eggs. Link added pinches of different spices from the wooden box, a dash of this and a sprinkle of that, tasting the batter as she went before thickening it into a dough. She whisked and whisked, and whisked and whisked, and the smell of the dough grumbled her stomach.

"What are you doing?"

Link looked over her shoulder. The girl with the golden hair had climbed out of the bed and now stood there blinking at her, the long white nightgown draped down to her ankles, a white nightcap with a fuzzy pomf at the end tilting crookedly from the top of her head. The girl with the golden hair held a lavender pillow in front of her chest and abdomen: a downy aegis. Link noted how her eyes puffed out red and purple. The girl with the golden hair rubbed her eyes with the knuckles of her right hand as if to pretend that she had not just been sobbing.

With her hands occupied, Link did not respond but instead turned back to the task at hand: the baking of egg tart.

"Oh, are you...cooking?"

Link nodded.

The girl with the golden hair took a step closer. Still clinging to the pillow with her left arm, the girl with the golden hair hovered over Link's shoulder to watch her cook.

Link looked at her again. "Do you want to help?"

The girl with the golden hair crouched down beside. "...can I?"

"If you want to, I'd appreciate it." She did not know what to say and so she spoke the truth instead. At least the girl with the golden hair had ceased to cry, and Link had ceased to want to fling herself out of a window to avoid a situation where she had no inkling of how to comfort. She guided the girl with the golden hair in patting her hands down with flour, in rolling the dough between her palms, in flattening the dough out on the inside of the baking pan, in forming the shell of the tart.

"What about crimping the corners?" asked the girl with the golden hair. The nervousness of her tone cuccofleshed the back of Link's head. "Don't you need to crimp to do it right?"

"I don't know what that is." Link touched her chin; her wet fingers left a mark of white on her jaw. "You can do it if you want to. There's no right or wrong in cooking. If you make something that you love, then that's all you need."

"...oh." The girl with the golden hair dipped her head. She moved her hands over the lip of the shell. Link watched her scoop her fingers in to make little angled furrows that ran around the rim of the shell. Like those cupcakes she had seen sold by street vendors. Every time a furrow did not come out perfectly even and straight compared to its brethren, the girl with the golden hair smoothed the entire section to start anew.

In the meanwhile Link prepared the filling. She added a pinch more sugar than she normally
would. Whenever Aryll cried, her sister craved sweets and salts more than anything. Salt. Link nodded to herself. A bit of rock salt.

Link poured the filling into the shell and together they slid the pan into the fireplace.

They waited together. The girl with the golden hair yawned; she nearly drooped against Link a second or two before rapidly sitting up. Link leaned forward to gaze at the egg tart. Egg tart. Egg tart. Unaccustomed to a royal hearth, she checked its firmness with some frequency.

At last the shell hardened while the inner filling remained fluffy. Link and the girl with the golden hair pulled the egg tart from the hearth together.

Link broke the egg tart in half with her hands and gave the girl with the golden hair the bigger piece. The girl with the golden hair stared at Link. "I'm sorry. I don't have any cutlery—oh."

Having already crammed half of the egg tart into her mouth, her cheeks puffing outwards, Link tried to smile at her and merely succeeded in dribbling egg tart filling over her chin. Hastily she swallowed, choked on the tart, and jerked her body backwards to gulp the egg tart down like a bird gulping down a live meal, complete with squawks and seal-honks as the piece of egg tart travelled slowly down her throat.

The girl with the golden hair ogled her wide-eyed. And then the corners of her mouth lifted up, and she tried to stifle her laugh but it bubbled up anyways, and the girl with the golden hair laughed, and Link laughed with her and then promptly choked on the egg tart again.

The girl with the golden hair—Link discovered—knew how to perform abdominal thrusts. Link wheezed out the egg tart.

"So much for protecting me," the girl with the golden hair said softly while Link licked the filling and crumbs from her fingers, "when it looks like you need protecting from yourself."

Link shrugged. "I like to eat."

The girl with the golden hair shook her head. "Oh, do you even know about the prophecy?"

"Something called the Calamity will happen. Wait, no, we're supposed to prevent it from happening? The Knight...has to use the blade of evil's bane to strike the...something One...down, and the Princess has to seal it away again. And the Champions do something."

Link rubbed the back of her head in her efforts to recall. "People just told me to practice with the sword, and I will."

The girl with the golden hair exhaled. She brought her hand up to pinch the bridge of her nose.

After a moment Link raised her hands. "The egg tart is getting cold," Link signed. The girl with the golden hair covered her mouth with her hand.

She stood up to rummage around the room while Link followed her movements. Eventually the girl with the golden hair came back empty-handed, her hands forming the shapes of missing forks and spoons. "I'm not used to eating with my hands." Link said nothing but smiled encouragingly at her. The girl with the golden hair scooped up her half of the egg tart in her palms. "Oh, it'll get crumbs everywhere." But she sounded less anxious now, more observant. Raising the dessert to her mouth she bit down and let out almost a moan, which surprised Link more than anything.

"It's...it's so moist," said the girl with the golden hair, muffled around the egg tart; she blushed hard enough that Link could see the pink on the light brown of her cheeks. "A-and delicious. I mean no
"Food tastes best when you help cook," Link answered. "Thank you for helping."

The girl with the golden hair ducked her head.

Eventually they finished eating. Link cleaned up as best she could within the limited space; the girl with the golden hair offered her washbin. "Let me help." Link drew a pouch of sand from her pack. Taking a handful, she showed the girl with the golden hair how to scrub the baking pan clean. The sand collected grease and oil better than did water alone, and soon they hung up the implements to dry.

When she put up the last bowl, Link turned to the girl with the golden hair, who fixed her with a gaze so heavy Link nearly dropped to her knees then and there.

"Please don't ever tell Father when I go out to do research again. Please."

Link looked at her unsteadily. At length she signed a universe in a single gesture: "Aryll."

"What?"

"My sister."

The girl with the golden hair gazed at her for a long time, until Link's eyes started to sting and she had to blink. Then the girl with the golden hair lowered her eyelids. When she broke the silence, her voice had dulled like a blade, meant for battle, used instead to carve stone. "I suppose I understand."

With that the girl with the golden hair went to bed. At least this time she did not weep.

The morning after, the girl with the golden hair still gazed at her with hardened eyes. Link could detect some change, somewhere in the green—or was it blue?—of her irises or the taut pull of her mouth or the set of her jaw. But interpreting what the change could possibly mean went so far beyond her capabilities that she shrugged.

The quickest way to someone's heart was through their stomach, but even the stomach did not work over the course of a single meal.

And sometimes a heart could close that tender bridge between itself and the gut, could sever that connection that made her life worth living, could isolate itself away from everything at all.

This she knew all too well.

But the girl with the golden hair did not seem to have burned this bridge, or at least not entirely. And if Link could mend the bridge by rolling up her sleeves and preparing every dish she could think of and more, she would.

Ilia whinnies in her ear.

Though delicious, the egg tart does not fill her as would the warmth of a stuffed bird or the savory bitterness of roast mushrooms. Link has had dessert enough for a while.

On the journey back east, she harvests wild herbs and roots. The harvest serenades her with fruit and berry at first, yet by the time she reaches Necluda, the trees have all but lost their leaves of red and gold, and the fields lay barren and bare. Link keeps the sugar and flour for a time when she
might cook for someone else. In the meanwhile, she stuffs her belly with bird and boar, rabbit and rodent, and occasionally beetles, which she judges make an *excellent* substitute for recipes that call for nuts. One night she takes shelter in a yawning cave, finds herself face-to-face with a bear preparing for hibernation, and rides Ilia out of dodge.

Ilia.

For her faithful companion, Link selects and steams herbs of all kinds. She holds out palmfuls of salt for Ilia to slurp up. Link avoids giving her companion sugar when she can, but at the end of a particularly hard ride, or when beset by monsters, baked sugar-apple treats and honey—when she can successfully spirit away a beehive—serve to calm her beloved Ilia.

She stops by Kasuto to unload her extraneous wares and to once more stock on bits and bobs of spices and salt. Adjusting to Necludan after so long spent hearing and signing Tabanch leads to more than a few misunderstandings. She runs into Lami once more and bakes fruit-and-nutcake for her, much to Lami’s gratitude.

Then up to Kakariko.

Link arrives not in the middle of the night but in the midst of the day. The guards—not Dorian's shift—let her through. The coming winter has shed the petals from peach and cherry trees alike; a thin ream of ice trembles at the edges of the pond, the usually-energetic sanke carp now slow and lethargic.

With a smile she makes her way to Lady Impa's home. With a smile she greets Paya, who blushes and covers her face, stammering about her honour to meet the hero of legend. With a smile she tells Paya that she need not fluster herself.

No hero of legend.

She delivers Chief Kaneli's letter to Lady Impa, who gazes expectantly at her while she kneels upon the cushion.

"I have noticed," Lady Impa says after the formalities of *wonderful to see you back and safe*, "that the Divine Beast Vah Medoh no longer hovers on the horizon."

Link replies with raised eyebrows. "Is that what that thunderhead was?"

Lady Impa studies her, but the heaviness of her gaze no longer drops its burden onto Link's shoulders. Like rain on waterproofed wax, the burden slides off.

"Whether or not you wish to admit to me what goes on, thank you for fulfilling your obligations." Lady Impa nods curtly.

"*Delivering letters isn't so hard,*" Link answers. The sticks of incense surrounding Lady Impa's home—camphor and peach resin—burns thick enough to choke. She closes her eyes for a moment to muster her courage, straightens her shoulders, and tilts up her chin. *"Lady Impa, may I ask a question?"

"You may."

"*What happened to Aryll?*

The winter comes to Kakariko all at once. She watches Lady Impa's mouth slacken. She observes Lady Impa touch her left hand to the violet bracelet on her right wrist. She counts the seconds that
pass on the heartbeat she can feel from her fingertips pulsing into her knees. The guards exchange glances with one another. Fearfully, Paya inquires if Lady Impa needs water.

Lady Impa rests her hand over her chest. "I do not know how many of your memories you have regained, Link, but now is not the time for such answers. Although your body has grown stronger, your mind remains frail in this new world. Whatever formless shapes rise in the seas of your unconsciousness, I fear that concrete details could unbalance you."

Link feels her arms shaping the question rather than asking it herself. "Is she dead?"

"Link, what if you were to speak to her, and you remembered nothing of who she was or who you were beyond that you once knew her? Do you not see how much pain that would cause both of you?" Lady Impa leans forward. Her red eyes, sunken deep into her wrinkled face, almost glisten. "It pains me to do this, but I am only protecting you."

No, Link wants to say. No, you think you can dredge the hero out of me. You think that I'll play hero to keep her safe. But she's dead. Isn't she. Instead Link inclines her head. She moves her hands to her belt. On the Great Plateau she looped the belt with its pouch perfect for the slate around her hips, and never has she removed that belt save for bathing. Not even when she gave the slate to Yunobo or to Amali.

But now Link unclips the belt. She clenches it tightly in her fingers, so tight that the rim of the belt imprints lines into her palms, and then relaxes her grip. She rests the slate upon the floor in front of Lady Impa with the belt curled up beside it.

"Thank you for all of your help, Lady Impa." She bows with her entire body. The weight of the incense tries to wrap fingers around her throat, yet she finds the shapes of the words in her fingers. "I resign from being your messenger."

Lady Impa does not respond, and Link cannot stop herself from offering a hint of justification.

"In Medli, I nearly put a great number of people in danger, and I have disrespected shrines that mean things to real people. I have been called terrifying. I have been told that I was treating people's lives and livelihoods like playthings. I do not know who used to have this body before I awoke at the Shrine of Resurrection, but I am not fit to bear the slate. Someone else can take it. Someone more worthy than I."

Lady Impa still does not respond.

Link touches her chin. "I do have one more thing to give you." From the satchel she retrieves the guardian cores that she has collected since she left Hateno. They roll noisily along the wooden floor. "Your sister can use these to repair the slate, I think."

Lady Impa still does not respond.

Link bows again, so low that her forehead touches the ground, and then she stands up. The guards exchange glances. Lady Impa inclines her head.

Link turns. She takes the first step of the rest of her life, and she could nearly float to the heavens for the lightness of her body.

The guards outside take her either side. Link asks, gently, to say hello to her friends, to Koko and Cottla, to Lasli, to the others in the village she knows. The guards whom she can name, the guards whose children she has met, the guards who have welcomed her prior, in silence lead her to her horse.
She saddles Ilia.

"I'm sorry," she signs, though she knows not to whom she speaks, her hands shivering as if the winds had whipped her into the Hebric summits, "but I can't do it. I promised someone I would take responsibility for my actions. That's what I'm doing. Right?"

Neither guard replies. One—Inya, whose husband cares for a grove of cherry trees—looks down. The other—Hirako, whose son once lent Link his prized bug-catching net—glares at her with a sternness tempered by the shock of betrayal.

She does not say farewell.

Link takes the reins in hand to silence herself, wraps the straps around her palms like gauze over a wound, and gently presses on Ilia's sides. Ilia trots forward.

Down the mountains. Down, down, and west.

Though she has no ocarina with which to practise, she taps out on the reins the rhythm of the melodies she has heard in the dreams beyond dreams.

—

Egg Tart (four hearts) - bird egg, cane sugar, goat butter, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Well, people have noted that they expected Link to be angry at Impa or to seek out information on what's going on. Here it is! Link asks Impa what happened to Aryll, who lived one hundred years ago and who meant and means quite a lot to Link. Impa is trying to do the right thing from her point of view. Of course, things aren't going to go so smoothly when your plan mostly involves trying to keep Link in the dark. Impa is rightfully worried that Link might freak out and run if she tells Link that everyone Link cared about is dead. After all, when Link first showed up and Impa called her the legendary hero, Link fainted (partially out of hunger). Impa is trying to avoid the same mistake.

Just as when Link was testing to see if Daruk would lie to her with the poorly-made rock roast, she was testing to see if Impa was willing to tell her the truth. Link is taking Amali's words very much to heart. She doesn't want to be the hero, and if she can't accept the great responsibility, then she shouldn't be wielding the great power of the slate. It's time for a little detour of set-backs. We've still got nearly sixty chapters to go, after all (though I can tell you that we'll wrap up the Divine Beasts around the fifty-fourth chapter or so).

And yes, there you have it as to why Link stopped going after the shrines. Don't worry; this isn't the end. Or is it?

Because the hero of legend was prophesied to be a hylian man from the knights of Hyrule, but the Master Sword chose a girl from the countryside, Link's identity is not
revealed publicly. Instead, the official description given out to the general public (to keep hope alive) is the one that matches the "prophecy" from ten thousand years ago. The Yiga don't necessarily know what she looks like, only that she's been sighted with the slate.

The memory in this chapter is an amalgam of two memories from *Breath of the Wild*: the memory recovered near Tabantha where Zelda becomes angry at Link for following her, and the memory recovered on the walkway outside of Zelda's room, where her father argues with her as he does in this chapter. As a reminder, I've slightly altered Zelda's design to more resemble her father's.

The comment about ten-year-old Zelda being paranoid and convinced that a "scary-looking" dignitary would take over the kingdom is a reference to *Ocarina of Time*, where a similar scenario basically kicks off the main plot (except that Ganondorf in *Ocarina of Time* did turn out to be evil).

Zelda's self-hate for being unable to access the sealing magic comes in large part due to disappointing everyone around her as well as fearing that Calamity Ganon will slaughter everyone if she doesn't. But there's also the fear of "if all princesses [daughters of Hyrule] can access the sealing magic, then does not being able to access the sealing magic make me not a princess [not a woman]" which Zelda's own father uses against her to keep her to the regiment of prayer. Ouch.

Pengators are an enemy first seen in *A Link to the Past*.

So this is the beginning of Zelda being more warm and welcoming to Link, though they have a long way to go. As a reminder, the memories are mostly presented out of chronological order except for the memories that make up explicit arcs; for example, this memory takes place before the memory from "Enduring Carrot Cake" and so on. I'll not say more, since it's up to the reader to piece things together.

Thanks to Amali's guidance with the darners, Link is being more adventurous in her eating! Just look at her substituting in nuts for beetles.

We're headed towards winter, which is appropriate enough considering Link's own emotional state. I actually didn't mean for that to happen; I determined that travelling across Hyrule should take about a month to a month and a half, and I wanted for Link to awaken in the spring. Link leaving the slate just at the onset of winter was a happy coincidence of symbolism. I'm not nearly enough of a brilliant writer to do that on purpose.

Thank you to my most wonderful readers, and thank you to my incredible beta reader. Next up: Link does some searching, both of the land and of her own spirit.

midna's ass. 21 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This chapter is key in a lot of ways, but in one, really, really big one: This is where Delicious in Wilds becomes, in part, Zelda's (ahem, *the girl with the golden hair's*) story.

We get shades here of Link being mad at Impa, which boils over later on in the story. We also get hints of Link seeking out Aryll.

Unlike what I originally thought while reading, Link does not, in fact, immediately go
back to Impa and get the slate back. She has some soul searching to do.

Emma. 21 September 2017.
Milk

Chapter Summary

Having left Kakariko, the travelling chef journeys throughout the land once known as Hyrule in search of a clue that could lead the chef to Marin, who might, although old, still be alive.

Chapter Notes

Non-spoiler author's notes that couldn't fit into the end notes: Link has a very deep and very disturbing sort of epiphany in this chapter regarding her own discomfort around people and regarding her own adoration of the quiet of the wilds. She does indeed have major issues with anxiety and with agoraphobia when it comes to crowds, but that doesn't excuse her own actions. This will lead into one of the most important character arcs for her in the entire story, something that could only really happen once Link is allowed to exist by herself, without the burden of the slate.

Link gets compared to grasshoppers quite a bit throughout the franchise, including by Agitha from Twilight Princess and, of course, by Romani from Majora's Mask.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The land once known as Hyrule is very, very vast, and she is very, very small.

To avoid the town she defended on her first trip to Tabantha—lest they recognise her, lest they seek to thank her—Link cuts across Proxim Bridge towards the land once known as Central Hyrule. The days grow colder as autumn breathes out the last of its warmth. The winter wind whistles through the flat plains of the Hyrule Field barren save for the great guardians that patrol the area, some scuttling about and locking their fire-light upon anything that moves, others lying dormant until vibrations in the earth or nearby sounds awake them. The field lies strewn with the ruins of what once was. She passes by the remnants of memories. Half of a fence. An privy with a fallen roof. An arrow wedged into a tree. A single stall of a stable, the remainder a broken and rotted shamble of wood.

And then: the houses. The homes. The hearths cold for decades. The broken ceramic. The torn scraps of fabric. The caved-in roofs and shuddered walls. The rotten lumps of wood that once stood as barrels. The metal skeletons of furniture. The faded paintings and torn tapestries yet hung upon disintegrating walls. The stuffed dolls ruined by wind and rain.

First merely in the cold, and later beneath a thin blanket of snow that covers the living and the dead alike.

The guardians do not deter Link. They track her without end, but she learns to deceive them by ducking behind an outcropping or a tree. She discovers that upon losing sight the automata will march in a straight line to wherever they spotted her last, and so she tricks them only to glide away in the opposite direction and summon Ilia with a whistle.
When caught in the more open portions of the field, Link finds that if she rides Ilia in a straight path perpendicular to their movement, the guardians do not lead their shots as well as even the octrooks on the water. She keeps a store of fireproof elixirs and medicinal salves on hand in case she ever miscalculates.

Less for her own sake, and more so for Ilia's. If anything happens to her own body, Link will accept the recklessness of her actions, but she resolves to never hurt Ilia for her own stupidity. Never again.

She learns to travel at night when discerning her motions comes less easily to the guardians. Yet the automatons alone do not prompt the change in her schedule: one night she awakens to find a white wolfos clawing through her belongings, her paraglider, her spare clothing. Link simply lies in the grass for a time to see if the wolfos will retreat without noticing her.

But then it sticks its snout into her satchel and pulls out with a muzzleful of her food.

By the time she finishes excavating the inedible remains of the herb-stuffed whole pigeon from the wolfos's abdomen, Link makes her decision to sleep in the day.

Monsters, more active at night, can no longer sneak up on her—or her food—while she rests. Whenever she tires from riding in the darkness, barely able to see the light ahead, Link need only recall the lizalfos who wore her undergarments over her face and ate the food out of her satchel to set her jaw and tighten her grip on the reins.

She does notice to some measure of satisfaction that few monsters live in the field, and those that do tend to come under the fire-light of the guardians as often, if not more often, than she. The first time she spots a pack of bokoblins attempting to hunt down an automaton, Link bursts out laughing. The guardian makes rapid work of them. The day after, she spots a larger group of moblins and lizalfos that manage to chop off the automaton's spindly legs and turn the guardian over to expose its underside. A lizalfos of white-patterned scales with strange whorls of violent violet—the patterns reminding Link of the golden spiral patterns on the shrines—crawls over the automaton's head to cover its eye with a lizal shield, and strangely the guardian does not pierce it through with fire-light. The monsters hack away at the automaton's innards until they rip out the core and the guardian ceases to flail.

Link trails the monsters their campsite, where the moblins heft the guardian over a fire. She observes them dance and cry out to one another around the flames. Their tongues loll from their mouths. The monsters stamp impatiently upon the ground. At length a lizalfos knocks the chassis of the guardian over with its tongue. A mound of gears and springs topples into the flame and spills out onto the grass.

Another lizalfos snatches up a gear. Link leans in: it flicks its tongue at the gear, chirrups, and bites down.

With an irritated twitter the lizalfos blehs its tongue out to fling the gear away at high speeds. Link snorts back a laugh. The lizalfos immediately spins about, ogles the pile of machinery on the fire, picks up an identical gear, and bites down just as hard as the first.

Link nearly falls from Ilia laughing at their efforts to cook and eat a guardian until one of the moblins grabs a spring and shoves it into its maw. As its jaws clamp shut, the sharp ends of the metal burst the upper face of its snout in a shower of blood. The spray of red stills her mirth.

She tugs gently on the reins and leads Ilia away.
With the guardians seemingly intent on tracking anything that moves, meat comes by scarcely. Link subsists mostly on roots and tubers, on fruits, on occasion berry bushes. Sometimes she spots white doves in the trees. Tulin's arrows fly straighter than any she has wielded before, and even when they pierce through flesh, most require nothing more than a cleaning for reuse.

Unlike in the quieter lands up north—quieter only in the sense that she would sooner meet a bokoblin than a nigh immortal mechanical beast with limitless stamina capable of pursuing her to the ends of the earth—Link passes by a single traveller in the course of her entire trek. A sheikah man of dark skin and bushed brown hair, alongside a ragged-looking spotted horse and an even raggeder-looking hunting retriever, who warns her of guardians ahead.

"They were right," he says, wiping the sweat from his brow, "about never takin' the short way. Lost the whole pack, I did, all of 'em except Fay here. Good girl." Barking, the white-furred retriever wags her tail. "I think it's 'cause they can't see white or something. I dunno. Look, if you're keepin' on through here, take good care of yourself."

They break bread together. She stuffs a pair of mourning doves caught the previous night while he provides a confectionary filled with a semisweet red paste. "They say the mark of Sheik's in our red eyes, but I think the legends've got it all wrong." The man snickers to himself. "I think the real gift's in these red beans. Though hey, your cookin' ain't half bad neither."

When evening comes they part ways.

When Link retires at dawn, she rummages through her satchel for a snack. Her hand bumps something satin-smooth. She withdraws a wrapped red kerchief. Five—and a broken sixth—of those red-stuffed confectionaries within.

The traveller must have slipped the parcel into her pack while she looked the other way. She heads west. West, west, west. The sun follows her. Link keeps the fixed star—Anouki, Hestu called it—to her right and the snowy Tabanch mountains at the centre of her vision.

When she comes upon a field of wheat, Link disembarks from Ilia to kneel in the grain. She lies down amid the swaying wheat; she closes her eyes; she inhales the scent of growth.

She listens to Ilia graze. Her companion wanders nearer and farther. As Ilia nears again, she nibbles on Link's hair; lifting her eyelids, Link hugs Ilia around the neck and pulls herself up.

Link follows the wheat over the hills.

Where the Hyrule Field ends, the threads of villages begin. Outskirts. A house or two here or there. A family that lives off of fish on the river. A tiny village of aging folks, their children mostly moved away in search of safer pastures. She tries to ask. But "a ranch, with horses, and a farm of wheat, and the owners were gerudo, and they had a daughter with red hair who had the most beautiful voice in the world, and she wore a violet sash around her waist, and they sold an elixir green as spring, and there were voltfin trout in the pond nearby" does not much make for much of specific description, particularly with half or more of the people whom she asks themselves sporting hair in various shades of red.

One elderly woman, a hedgewitch of elixir brewery who herself bottles a spring green elixir, asks if perhaps instead of a pond Link remembers the shallower portions of Lake Hylia in the summers when the level of water tends to run low; the brewer suggests that she try the villages near the Faronese grasslands. Link inquires about the elixir. The brewer offers her a sample and Link lets the taste her body knows all too well wash down her tongue.
The brewer trades for the spicy elixirs that she still has from her time in the Tabanch skies. Link pays the difference in the horns of moblins and the tails of lizalfos, the gizzard-stones of aeralfos and the canines of wolfos. She walks away with twice-daily doses for a month in tiny glimmering vials.

She heads south. Towards Lake Hylia. The Bridge of Hylia crawls with lizalfos and other monsters in numbers too large for Link to risk Ilia's life, and so she skirts the cliffsides between the Great Plateau and the lake instead.

Link stops along the path when she spots a cloaked traveller sitting, shuddering, at the side of the road, the pale skin of their cheeks barely visible and nothing else. Pulling up her hood to hide her face, Link inquires if something has gone amiss.

The traveller either does not or cannot respond. Link dismounts from Ilia to crouch in front of them. She catches a sickly-sweet scent. "Are you all right?" she signs again.

They rasp out something under their breath. Link leans in, and this time she catches the traveller's words: "Know you of the slate?"

Link's eyes widen. Rocking back on her heels, she feels her arms form the words. "How do you know about that!?

The traveller springs to their feet and Link catches a glint of silver in their hand as they raise their arm. By instinct Link kicks her left leg in an arc low to the ground. She sweeps the traveller's legs out from them her. Before the traveller can collect themself, Link flings herself onto Ilia and spurns her on.

She does not look back.

The experience leaves her shaking, at the compulsion that would lead one person to hurt another.

But she no longer has the slate.

She no longer has to worry.

Link passes into Faron.

Over the grasslands, a patchwork of ranches stretches out alongside sparser regions where—without the fertility to support agriculture—Link shares meals with nomadic practitioners of pastoralism, marked with scarlet hair or pointed ears or both. She spots them by the great saddlebags of fermenting mares' milk that their horses carry. Link learns handfuls of Faronese, enough to inquire about their cuisine. The nomads explain that the constant motion keeps the milk from spoiling while it liquors. They invite her to taste some. The first sip alone creeps a blush into her face. Hiccuping, she asks about wheat; she asks about a singer of the harp; she asks about a girl named Marin.

She asks. She asks. She asks.

She asks until her hands grow sore. She asks until the words cease to carry meaning. She asks until she fears she will have no one else to ask.

She drifts further south from ranch to ranch, from traveller to traveller, occasionally venturing into towns before panicking and fleeing on Ilia.

The days turn to nights turn to days.
The encroaching cold cloaks her shoulders. The dew beneath the dawn sheathes grass-blades in ice. Her eyelashes frost overnight. She awaits the first snow of the year. She could lie down at the side road. She could—

And then in the village of Koume in the grasslands of Taobab, its rito and gerudo inhabitants living half on the ground and half in the pillars of stone—not pillars of stone, Link observes when she nears, but ancient trees with flattened tops not unlike those she could see in the distance when she travelled to Medli—she happens upon a trail of meunière crumbs, in the very stable where she stops by to have the stablehand check on Ilia.

While the stablehand inspects Ilia’s horseshoes, then the saddle and bridle, then the horse’s general health of eyes and ears and muscle, Link poses her questions yet again in her fumbled attempts at Faronese. The stablehand knows little.

But the master of horses overhears them.

Her lengthy hair entwined in a long braid that she wears clipped on the back of her head, her light green and silver dress worn over sturdy riding breeches, the elderly master of horses asks why exactly Link wants to know.

"I want to see her," Link answers honestly, "but I lost most of my memories, and I don't know where she is."

The master of horses wipes her spectacles on a blue cloth and settles them on the bridge of her sharp nose. She signs in Faronese: "I don't think you know what you're talking about."

"I knew her family," Link explains, her hands trembling in her earnestness, "but I haven't seen her in years. Please, please help me."

The master of horses crosses her arms over her chest. "I'm not like to give away the histories of Koume families to strangers with strange ways."

"Please. Do you...do you have a harp? A six-stringed harp?"

The master of horses raises an eyebrow but produces a harp, an unpainted practise harp rather than the beautiful red and blue instrument that Marin's family has. They move to a further room in the stables, something that looks like a storage shed, that smells of oiled leather and dried hay and horse and the sharp acrid tang of metal and the sweet dust of old wood. Link apologises for her lack of practise. Sitting upon a wooden chair with a raised back that better resembles a carved stump, she strums the harp. The notes jumble. The master of horses quirks her eyebrows higher.

Link inhales. She stills her hands.

She remembers the song from her memory. Not the song that Marin sang in the evenings, but the one taught to Link by Marin's mother. She remembers not the name nor the fullness of its melody. A scant few notes. She plays them over and over. Closing her eyes, she breathes in through her nose and out from her mouth. Her brow furrows; her tongue pokes from the corner of her mouth.

She reaches out past the fogged banks of her memories, reaches out for that which she cannot feel, reaches out.

The memories fail her.

Link squeezes her eyes more tightly shut until her lids strain with the pressure and her teeth grind against one another.
She plays the same few notes over and over but nothing more comes. A single note plinks onto her fingertips but she cannot tell if it has descended as a link to the past or if she conjures her own music.

The harp rests upon her thighs. Her left hand falls away first to her side. She runs her right over the swell of the harp.

"I'm sorry." Link lowers her head. "I don't remember the rest of it. It's been too long and I've..."

A slow clap.

She lifts her gaze up to the master of horses, one leg crossed over the other, who applauds her. "I wasn't expecting you to know any, but I know those opening notes." Link blinks; the master of horses pauses for a moment. "How do you know of their family?"

"I...I remember her. That's all. I'm sorry. I haven't remembered where we met, or how, but...the blacksmith of my village employed me as a courier. I think. I would travel around from..." Link presses her fingers to the sides of her head as though she could squeeze the memories from her temples like juice from a fruit. "I can't remember. Swords and shields, and pots and pans, and sometimes things like horseshoes or big orders like furniture, or bits and bobs. And the ranch where Marin lived was as far west as I would go. And then I had to deliver something to the castle..." Her fingers twitch; the bones of her arms seem to vibrate up from her shoulders to twist her wrists. "I don't." She stops, then starts again. "I don't know. I don't remember. I visited her once or twice a month, whenever I had commissions to deliver. There was wheat, and the cucco, and voltfin trout, and I think one of Marin's mothers had a stable and the other one ran an inn? Or a bar? And she taught me to play the harp, except it was only once or twice a month so I never got too good and I don't remember where it was except the wheat and the horses and the vials of green elixir—"

A weight upon her shoulder. The master of horses's hand. "No need to strain yourself. You say you lost your memories. Have you thought you might have gotten names confused?"

Link blinks at her, and the master of horses leads Link from the stable—Link pauses for a moment to say hello to Ilia and pat her nose for being such a good and patient girl—and into a library; the gerudo lady at the front desk greets them enthusiastically as they enter and gripes to Maron about some trio of long-overdue books. Maron promises to help out later. For now she pulls a dusty tome from the library annals. Maron sweeps her hand over the cover.

"Marin, you said?" the master of horses signs, and Link dips her head. Maron flips slowly through the volume. Link cannot read the characters that run across the pages right-to-left, but from the shapes she can make out records of family trees and genealogies. "...yes, her mother once lived here, but, years before she had Marin, she moved to Central Hyrule with her first wife." Maron curls her fingers in. "Marin’s mother was my grandmother’s older sister."

Link's hands fall to her sides.

"They moved near the village of Mabe with a small group from Koume. Lon Lon Ranch, it says here." Maron flips to the end of the book where Link can see a map imprinted on the yellowing paper, oriented such that Parapa faces the top and right of the page. She traces a path from Taobab to southeast of the castle. Link stares at the map. So clearly she could recall herself riding west to
the sunset. But then—her home village must lie east of Central Hyrule. "Here, about." Maron flips back to the family tree. She signs as she reads, summarising the records: "They brought wheat and voltfin with them and sent back money when they could. It says here that she remarried at some point. She assisted several more villagers in the move to Mabe. It seems Lon Lon was a great success." She lowers her hands and Link shakes her head.

"Is that it?"

"No," says Maron, and Link exhales in relief. "The Great Calamity destroyed almost everything in Hyrule Field." The exhalation stings sharp in her throat. "The records say that the family came back to Koume to recuperate, and then left west and north." Maron hesitates. "The last record indicates they went somewhere near Mount Satori. There were once villages all the way from here to there, and...I don't know what's left of them."

"Mount Satori?" Link echoes.

Again Maron indicates the map. Link studies the paper. If she heads north and loops again around the Great Plateau, she can take the path through the Forest of Time, around Lake Kolomo, over the Manhala Bridge, and from there she can explore the shadows of Satori. The names burn bright behind her eyes: Dalite Forest. Safula Hill. Sanidin Park. Nima Plain. Rutile Lake. Somewhere in the fertile valley nested between the Rivers Tamio and Regencia, she will find Marin.

Tears prickle at her eyes, and then she cannot stop herself from weeping. Maron pats her shoulder while Link half-chokes and half-sobs into her own hands at the closeness of an honest life. Then she wipes the tears from her eyes. Link bows low to Maron. "Thank you so much. Thank you so much for everything. Is there anything I can do repay you?"

Maron pushes the spectacles up on her nose. "Would you mind delivering a letter? We haven’t heard from that side of the family in years."

Link spends the day in Ilia's stall while Maron scribes her letter. The sun sets upon Link mounting Ilia for the journey ahead.

Maron lashes a load of saddlebags sloshing with milk upon Ilia's flanks. Link tilts her head. "Ride it all the way to Mount Satori," Maron instructs, "and don't drink it until you get there. Tell them it's a gift, from Koume with love, to whatever they call their new ranch."

Link inclines her head. "Thank you again. Thank you for everything."

Maron adjusts her spectacles. "You're a strange one, to be sure. But you're welcome. Farore be with you. May Her wind quicken your course."

Link rides as she has never ridden before.

She does not dare to push Ilia to the point of exhaustion, especially not in winter's cold. Instead Link obsesses over her map at night to find the most optimal path. When Ilia tires of the burden of her rider, Link disembarks and continues the walk on foot until her legs grow sore. On the trek south to Koume, she meandered about to ask every which way she could. Now Link pushes herself to the limits of her abilities, to keep her eyes fixed upon each landmark she herself has mark on the parchment taken from the chest in the Great Plateau.

As the history of the land once known as Hyrule paints her body with bruises, so too does it paint the roads with ruins.

She remembers the road to the city of Darunia, the long stretches of nothing but rock and monster.
She remembers the loneliness around Lake Totori, the windchimes of villages given way to the howls of wolfos.

She remembers the hills upon hills of wheat goldening the countryside of their own accord. She remembers the groves of fruit trees of the forests sprung from orchards sprawled into the wilds. She remembers the sea of statues of the Goddesses, abandoned to the wind and the rain, and the forests overtaking the stone fort, the roots of the plants cleaving apart the stone, until one day she could brush the leaves of the trees and never know that there had stood a fort at all.

She remembers her own memories, of a time when a girl of twelve and little knowledge of the sword could ride the roads without a second thought. She remembers the towns upon the path, remembers the neatly queued fields of crop, remembers how the only emptiness of space lay in the farmed furrows between homes, remembers how even at the furthest point between two villages she could look over her shoulder and see the one she had left, could look forward and see the one coming up.

She remembers the weights of the gazes of the people of Kasuto. She remembers the awful row of Darunia's lower belly where dwell the people and the wind-song promise of the mountaintops around the city. She remembers herself stranded in the spirals of Medli, blinded, deafened, every tendon and sinew aching, the medley of words—of voices—of people all around her, that lifted her hands to her ears and lowered her to the ground.

She remembers.

Her companions: her horse, her shadow, her own breath. In the openness beneath the skies, in the confinement of the deepest forest, alone, she feels at home.

No one should die. The ruins—the Calamity—

No one should have had to die.

And yet.

And yet.

And yet no matter how she clenches her teeth until her jaws and her temples alike ache, no matter how she grips Ilia's reins until her knuckles whiten and the bones of her hands stand up like the ridges of mountains, no matter how she buries the truth beneath layers of the smiles and the laughs and the meals she has shared—

Without the ruins, the wilds would not exist to call her name.

Saki called her terrifying.

Her vision blurs. Though the sun has not yet risen, she dismounts from Ilia. She stumbles unsteadily on legs she can no longer feel. She pitches forward; the grass kisses her cheeks; she breathes in the wild.

She senses the laugh that has borne her aloft since she awoke in the Shrine of Resurrection bubble from up her belly. The laugh of the joys of living.

She's alive.

She's alive.
She's alive and for the first time since her awakening, she is afraid of what that might mean. But she has given the slate. She has given up the slate. She has given up the slate. She has.

Hasn't she?

Silent, Link rides on.

Over the bridge. Sanidin Park bears the statue of a colossal rearing horse. In the valley below Mount Satori lie patchworks of ranchland and fields of wheat. A small village at the base of the mountain draws her attention.

Its lights guide her home.

She wants them to. She needs them to. She begs them to.

As the moon rises, silver and full as ripened fruit, upon the darkness of the night, Link raises her head to an aurora of blue and green that dances upon the mountaintop.

A thin ember of curiosity swells within her, the same curiosity that led her to take the slate from the pedestal in the chamber where she awoke, the same curiosity that bid her activate the golden spire upon the isolated plateau, the same curiosity that burned her through the laval lakes of Eldin and the snowy mountains of Tabantha, the same curiosity as vast and wide as the horizon, the same curiosity that she squeezes down into a loop small enough to choke herself with.

She rides Ilia into the village. She asks the guard, breathless, her hands numb from the cold of the night, her face red from the warmth in her chest, of a ranch, of a girl with red hair and a violet sash straddling her hips, of a flower—a flower that springs clear as glass into her memories—a flower the same colour as the sash—of the flower that the girl wears in her hair at her left ear. She remembers.

She remembers.

The guard—her own braid scarlet as flame—arches her eyebrows at Link. She thumbs up towards the mountain. "You might be talkin' about Romani Ranch," she says in a Faronese faintly hued in the susurrus of Parapan vowels. "It's where we get all milk. They're up that path." The guard leans to look at Ilia's sides, at the saddlebags sloshing milk. "Is that chateau romani?"

"Chateau romani?" Link signs.

"That's what we call," the guard explains with a wink, "the Romani specialty blend of—" She says a word Link does not know. "Ah, hm." The guard scratches her ear, then winks again. "In your tongue I believe you call it liquored milk."

The guard says the words in Central Hyrulean and yet Link does not know if Central would be her tongue.

Her hands feel to flow the forms of Necludan, their signs shaped most smoothly, but she knows not enough of herself. That other language, that Yunobo called the tongue of the eastern lands, shapes more smoothly still.

Focusing her gaze on the present, Link thanks the guard profusely. The guard waves her off; when Link offers, she declines a saddlebag of liquored milk. "I'm not one to drink, and you look a little
young for it, too. Take care of yourself out there, and have a good night."

She thanks the guard again.

With a flick of her wrist Link leads Ilia up the path towards the mountain, towards the aurora of green and blue.

She releases her left hand from the reins to rub the back of her head. Link slides her middle and ring fingers around the tie of her ponytail to bob the hair up and down. The tail whisks against her neck and soothes the tremors shaking her legs from the hips down.

The path winds up the mountainside. Link pauses to glance at a wooden signpost by the road, painted with a bottle of milk and a horse, with blue and purple characters that she cannot read. In small fine lettering beneath she observes the name in other alphabets and syllabaries. At last she happens upon those in Central Hyrulean.

Romani Ranch.

Her heart throws itself so hard against her sternum that the kick nearly flings her from Ilia's back.

She hastens Ilia into a speedy trot. Up the rise Link can see the sloping roof of a stable, the same general shape as that of her memories. Ilia gaits into a gallop as the ranch comes into view: the silo, the barn, the stables, no fields of wheat but instead fields of tall grass and grain for the horses and other beasties to graze, now whitened with snow, and so close that she can almost taste the promise she made to the girl with the violet sash straddling her hips—to Marin—

The barking of a dog, suddenly so close to Ilia's hooves that the horse rears. Link lets go of the reins to stroke Ilia's shoulder.

"You're not gettin' any of our cows!"

She senses rather than sees the arrow that pierces through the air. With Ilia rearing up, Link jerks the reins to twist the horse about, to shield Ilia with her own body. Pain punctures the feathers of her tunic and the flesh of her right shoulder. The impact of the arrow and her own spasms knock her from Ilia's back.

Link rolls forward into the snowy grass and lifts her left hand to the wooden shaft jutting from her flesh, stabilising the arrow to avoid tearing her muscle more than necessary. A tiny dog circles her, tail vibrating, and yips.

Reaching for her blade, Link snaps her head up at her assailant.

Her left hand falls limply to the ground.

A girl. A girl in a white dress. Of around the age of twelve. With red hair that reaches nearly to her feet, her bangs parted over her eyes, framing the roundness of her brown-skinned face, her soft features so familiar that Link's heart seems to have fallen from her chest to pulsate somewhere on the grass. The arrowhead in her shoulder pierces her less than does the steady gaze of the girl who stands over her with her hands on her hips.

Though she bears no violet sash about her waist, and though she appears so impossibly young, Link knows her, knows her, knows her.

*Marin.*
The girl stares at Link. "What's the big deal? You're not one of Them." She stops. Link *ooof* out a gasp as the girl's boot connects with her stomach. "Definitely not one of Them!" Cupping her hands around her mouth, the girl whirls around. "Mooooooooooooooooom!" she yells. "There's a giant grasshopper on the lawn!"

—

*Milk* (one and a half hearts) - fresh milk

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Thank you again to my most wonderful beta reader, and thank you again to my most incredible readers for having come along so far with me.

I've touched here and there on the ruins due to monsters and to the Great Calamity, but the outer rim of Hyrule was left mostly spared relative to the destruction of Hyrule Field. With Link in one of the nadirs of her character, I thought it was a very appropriate time to, well, take the opportunity and hammer in the point about the ruins of Hyrule.

Those strange whorls of violent violet over the silver lizalfos's body might come back to haunt you.

Fay, the dog, is a reference to the character from *Star Fox 2*, as this chapter was written right around when it was announced that *Star Fox 2* would be included on the SNES Mini. Red bean paste is delicious and I recommend you try some if you haven't already.

Link also her first actual run-in with the Yiga! This was based on the travellers that you sometimes see ambushing you around Hyrule. Note that the Yiga didn't know Link, but instead simply asked if Link knew anything about it. Again, the Yiga don't necessarily know Link's description.

Unlike with the big languages that Link has encountered so far of Central Hyrulean, Necludan, Eldic, and Tabanch, Link *does not know* that much Faronese. She picked up a little from Marin's family from before the Great Calamity, and she's now learning more (over the course of these weeks she's spending hunting clues about where she could find Marin), but she's barely conversational in it. I should note that Marin herself mostly spoke Central Hyrulean to Link.

Because I've been naming all villages after characters from previous *Zelda* titles, the towns of Koume and Kotake are named after their friendly versions in *Majora's Mask*. Unfortunately, there are very few named gerudo women in the franchise outside of *Breath of the Wild*, so I had to get creative with some of the names of the various settlements and peoples related to the gerudo. Western Faron is mostly populated by gerudo, hylians, and rito; eastern Faron is mostly populated by hylians and zora.

Of course, I threw in a little reference to *A Link to the Past*, and quite literally at that. The librarian is a reference to Maggie from *The Minish Cap*. 
Link misinterpreted her memories: she remembered wheat and voltfin trout and assumed that Marin must have lived out west, when in fact the people who established Mabe brought wheat and voltfin trout with them. Hence what you see.

The ruins of Lon Lon Ranch are present in *Breath of the Wild* right next to the ruins of Mabe Village. Since Marin (and Tarin) in *Link's Awakening* were direct inspirations for Malon (and Talon) in *Ocarina of Time*, who in turn was the direct inspiration for Cremia and Romani in *Majora's Mask*, I couldn't not make the connection between Lon Lon and Mabe (Mabe being Marin's home in *Link's Awakening*). Romani Ranch is lifted from *Majora's Mask*, as is chateau romani, which is a milk-based drink that only adults are allowed to drink in *Majora's Mask*. And speaking of chateau romani, alcoholic milk is a real thing! It's called *kumis*. I think I've mentioned this before but I can literally buy it at my local deli. That's right! All of the milk bars of various *Zelda* titles are actually selling alcoholic milk.

midna's ass. 21 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: There's a moment in this chapter where Link realizes that she's almost sort of half glad that everything is ruins and wild now, and how, well, sort of fucked up that is. That's an important moment - probably one of the linchpins of Link's whole character arc.

The mysterious girl at the end is kind of a brat on her introduction, but trust me, you'll come to love her.

Delicious in Wilds makes western Faron a really great place. I like it in *Breath of the Wild*, but it feels too much like a collection of small valleys than the large open grasslands that what is effectively "horseland" probably should be. This series rectifies that, makes it feel like the wide open space that it really ought to be.

Link meeting the traveler on the road is one of those small, intimate moments that really make this series shine.

Emma. 21 September 2017.
Chapter Summary

The travelling chef gains safe passage into Romani Ranch in exchange for the ranch's aspiring archer beef stew and learns of an old woman at the ranch who might know something about the girl with the violet sash.

Chapter Notes

More non-spoiler author's notes that didn't fit into the bottom comments:

So, why are we spending so much time at a ranch? Well, for one thing, Link is about to get learned on some things that happened in her absence. But moreover, Link doesn't really have a home. Sure, there's Kakariko, which is sort of a home-base. In-game, Link can purchase a house in Hateno. Yet there's a completely different feeling from coming home to a bunch of weapons hanging on a wall and nondescript photographs (I honestly can't believe that Nintendo didn't give players the opportunity to hang photos they'd taken into the frames) and coming home to a family.

Another great thank-you to all of my readers who have come with me this far, and a thank-you to my marvellous beta reader, Emma, for taking care to ensure that I don't ruin my own story with overzealous editing. Next time: getting acquainted with Marin.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The girl leads the grasshopper into the barn. The warm dank scent of hay and animal rolls over her: stalls of dappled horses on the far end, and speckled cows with curved horns nearer to the door where the girl and the grasshopper enter. The girl gestures for the grasshopper to sit down on a stool that the girl drags out from near the cows.

The closest of the cows, splotched with black and white, moos plaintively at the grasshopper.

The grasshopper's horse pokes her head into the barn. She trots forward to browse the hay, ears flicking back and forth at the company of other animals.

The grasshopper perches on the stool. The girl inspected the grasshopper's shoulder from which extends the shaft of an arrow. She warps her fingers around the wooden shaft and the grasshopper grinds out a stifled noise of pain. "Y'know, Grasshopper, you really shouldn't've been going around looking like one of Them! I gotta keep vigilant." She cups her hands over her eyes as though mimicking a pair of binoculars. "Sharp-eyed! They'll never take another cow while I'm on the job, mark my words!"

The grasshopper's hands lift up to form the shapes of Faronese. "My name is Link," says Link, and the girl shakes her head.

"That's a silly name, Grasshopper! And I don't know how to say it!" The girl taps her fingers
against her chin. "Right, I've got it!" She pumps her fists into the air. "Yup yup! You just sit there and I'll pull it out real fast.

"I can take out the arrow myself," Link signs, sweat beading on her forehead.

The girl bobs her head from side to side for a second. Then she seizes Link by the shoulders and shakes her. "B-but do you promise promise not to tell cremia!?"

Link lets the word cremia bounce about her memories of Faronese, but it connects to nothing and sadly spits itself back out. "I promise," she says in turn after raising her hand to her chin, "but I don't know what a whatever-it-is-that-you-just-said is."

The girl blinks at her, her features open and wide in her bewilderment, and then presses her arms into her stomach to double over with laughter. Toppling over she rolls back and forth along the floor of the barn to hoot and howl so loudly that Link observes the cows and horses stirring and startling. The girl coughs out a last few peals of laughter and wipes the tears from her eyes.

Her easy laughter brings a smile unbidden to Link's own mouth.

"With any luck you won't find out or I'm not gonna get sweets for a month." Straightening her back, the girl march-paces from left to right, waggling her index finger. She effects a deeper, sterner tone of voice. "You can't keep accidentally injuring people, Romani. Think about all the trouble that you've caused for the people of Kotake. No one is coming for the cows." She stops, stamps her foot down, and whirls around to face Link. In her normal voice the girl flings her arms up in the air and bursts out: "You know the reason why she thinks no one's coming for the cows? Right, it's 'cause I've been the one protecting the cows from Them this whole time!"

Link nods repeatedly at the girl's speech while its meaning flies so far over her head that she imagines the words sticking in the inkiness of the sky to form a new constellation dedicated to her confusion. "Your name's Romani?"

The girl bobs her head enthusiastically. "Oh wow wow wow! I guess my archery skills are pretty good, but I never thought people'd know me from aaaaaall the way to..." Romani leans forward into Link's face, close enough that Link leans back, and squints. "...wherever in the world Grasshopper's from!"

"I don't know where I'm from."

"Even better! All the way to a place so far that you forgot about it by the time you got here! That's how renowned I am!" Romani claps her hands. She whips the shortbow from her back and Link reaches for her cooking pot for protection. Slamming her foot onto a nearby crate, missing and hitting the floor, scooting the crate a centimetre closer to her, and then slamming her foot triumphantly onto the nearby crate, Romani poses with the bow. Link admits that she has proper form, at the least. "Right, hear me out, Them! My heroic deeds have travelled to the very corners of the world! No one is safe for you to hide, so stop messin' with the cows or you'll get...the horns! Of my arrowheads!" She attempts to spin an arrow in her hand and succeeds solely in breaking the shaft. "G-get it? The arrows...the arrowheads are made out of cow horn. Mess with the bulls or get the...it's funny! I promise it's funny!"

Link smiles despite herself, and then snorts, and then breathes out a silent laugh, and then breaks out in laughter until her stomach aches, less at the horn-arrows and more at the sheer infectiousness of Romani's lease on life. Romani grins widely. She pretends to brush dust from her shoulders.

"I know, I know. Thank you; thank you. Did you know that Sageru Herself's come down to talk to
me before? She's the one who told me about Them! *That's* how important I am to the whole world!” Romani puffs out her chest. "When I'm bigger I'm gonna walk all the way to the big ole castle myself and I'm gonna kick the Calamity Bore—more like Calamity Bore amirite? Amirite? It's funny, I swear!—back to the spirity spirit mumbo jumbo world so *hard* that all the stuff that happened ten thousand years ago's gonna not...have happened! Right, *thaaaaat's* how cool it's gonna be!"

The lingering warmth of Link's laughter ices her fingers into shaking claws. When she forces her hands to move, her fingertips have numbed. "*Calamity...?*" She has no shape for the word *bore*, only the knowledge of how it sounds.

"Yup yup! Y'know, the bwig bwad bwoar that's trapped up in the castle where all the royals 'n' stuff used to live?" Romani waggles her eyebrows while Link listens on in quiet. "She's told me so many stories though I fall asleep listening to them. Between you and me, Grasshopper—" She lowers her voice. "—sometimes I gotta pretend to stay awake so Grandma doesn't feel bad—"

Romani's grandmother.

**Her grandmother.**

Someone who might know *Marin.*

A sibling, or a cousin, or—

Before Romani has even finished her story, Link has leaped to her feet. The surge of agony from her shoulder spasms her right arm and she digs her left fingernails into her skin. Romani stumbles backwards. Link grits her teeth and signs through the bolts of pain that convulse her hands. "*Your grandmother?*" Romani blinks at her and Link strains the words from the sieve of her fingers. "*Can you take me to her?*

"Whoa! Did Grandma cheat you at cards too!?" Link stares at her. Romani stares back. When Link blinks, Romani grins at her. "Ha! I won." Link sinks further into confusion; perhaps she knows even less Faronese than she expected, and she *knows* that she knows Faronese less than Central Hyrulean, than Necludan, than the major languages of the four great capitals where her body trained with the Champions. And she does not even know *what* she knows of Akkalan or of Hebric. "Well...if you *don't* rat me out to *cremia...then* I guess that maybe I could let you meet Grandma. *But* then you gotta do something for me first! Yup yup, you gotta do *something.* No freebies in my kingdom! This is *Romani Ranch* y'know!"

Link tips backwards to land her rear on the stool again. "*What do you want?*

Romani rhythms her fingers against her chin and hums out half a song. "'Y'know there's so many things I could ask for! So many things. What should I ask for first? What could Grasshopper give me?" While she thinks aloud, Link glances more thoroughly about the barn. She can see little in the dimness of the barn except for the cows and horses. "What could Grasshopper gi-i-ive me? Right! I know!” The girl swivels on her heel to put a hand to Ilia's nose. Ilia snorts but does not shy away. "What's in those saddlebags, Miss Horsey?"

"It's..." Link recalls the shape of the word. Liquored milk. "*A woman from Koume told me to bring it here.*"

"Oh! Oh wow wow wow!" Romani leaps up and down. Her smile crooks craftily, and she wags her index finger at Link. "Well if you lemme have some of *that* then I'll take you to see Grandma straightaway, yup yup! Since you brought it all this way 'n' stuff!"
Tilting her head Link considers what she has heard from the guard at the village. "I thought that it was made here, too?"

Romani's smirk drops for a second before she changes positions as though physically employing a new argument. "Y'know, I'm the official arbiter of all the liquored milk that passes through here! That's me. Romani of Romani Ranch. It's suuuuuuper official. So lemme try it."

"I met a woman in the village, who said that I looked too young to be drinking it..." Link looks Romani up and down. "...and aren't you even younger?"

Romani puffs out her cheeks. "No fair!" Crossing her arms over her chest, she hmphs and turns her head indignantly away. "If you don't let me have a taste, I'm not showing you to Grandma. Right, I know Mama says that stuff's for adults only buuuuut I've figured it aaaaaaaall out. So you gotta let me have some. Please?" From her huffing she suddenly clasps her hands in front of her chest and sticks out her lower lip. "Pretty please?"

"I can make you some food with milk in it," Link counter-offers.

Once more Romani beats out music against her chin. "Are you a good cook? I don't know if Grasshopper can cook!"

"If you don't like it, I'll make you something else," she promises.

Romani grins. "Will you really? What if I just say that I don't like it?"

"I promise I'll make you something else then."

"If you saaaaay sooo," she sings, and something about the timbre of her voice swells an ache dampness behind Link's eyes. "Right, we gotta be real quiet though! Sneaky sneaky. Can you do that?" Link nods. "Yup, that works! C'mon. And take some of that milk!" Romanin skips forward, then turns back. "Aren't you coming?"

Link gestures to the arrow still jutting out of her right shoulder. Romani claps her palm against her forehead.

A few hasty moments of removing the arrowhead, cleaning out the wound, applying salve, and wrapping around her shoulder with gauze later, Link pulls on her undershirt and tunic. Romani gestures for Link to follow her.

As promised, Link removes one of the saddlebags; she carries its weight in her arms and listens to the slow sloshing of the milk within as she accompanies Romani out of the barn and towards the farmhouse.

The dog yips at her. Now that Link has taken a better look at the animal, the beastie more resembles a cat crossed with a dog, with sharp upturned ears and fur striped in orange and black. Tearing her attention away from the high-pitched barking, Link creeps quietly behind Romani, though the girl seems more concerned with giggling about them sneaking in the dark than actually staying silent.

Link glances up at the risen moon that silhouettes a cucco on the roof of the house. No, not a cucco, but a weathercock, somewhat deformed and dented as if having borne the brunt of multiple rocks thrown at its head, or perhaps the night mist plays tricks upon her. Romani takes her around the back of the house, where she winks at Link and gestures to a glass window set low in the wall.

"Watch. And. Learn."
Romani jiggles the glass pane, then lifts it entirely from the frame and places it in the grass. Picking up her cat-like dog companion, she drops the beastie on the other side of the window before hopping over herself. "Right, you coming?"

Blinking at the secret passageway, Link ducks down to step into the open window. She strains to see anything in the darkness within. A sudden light prompts her to close her eyes.

"Welcome to the kitchen, Grasshopper!" As Link's eyes adjust to the brightness, she makes out Romani standing on top of a table, holding out two pans like a sword and board. "This is where dreams born and die, where girls become women! This is where the Champions of the Divine Beasts will be chosen to accompany the future Knight!" Romani thrusts the pans into the air, then looks down at Link from her position on the table. "That's me, if you couldn't tell. The Knight. Though, y'know, I could probably pilot all the Divine Beasts too! Hey, Sageru, you hear that? I said, I could probably pilot all the Divine Beasts too!"

Link looks around the kitchen. Spacious, she notes first. She spies a wash basin, a hearth, a stove, pantries upon pantries, baskets of fruit and vegetables, something that looks like an ice-box. Small knickknacks and statuettes abound, tucked in corners or displayed on the table. She pokes about some of the drawers. In the ice-box, she finds neat trims of meat individually wrapped in wax.

"Do you like meat stew?"

"Do I ever!" Romani answers back. "Just make it with that milk and everything will be go-o-od."

She removes the cooking pot from her back and sets it upon the stove. Soup, soup, meat soup. Link removes some of the frozen beef from the ice-box, although she has not time to wait for the meat to thaw. Instead she heats water to boiling and plunks the chunk of icy beef inside.

"Don't ever cook like this."

The very act pains her, and yet she presses bravely on through the boundaries of unacceptable cooking. She butters the bottom of the cooking pot, then adds oil, a pinch of rock salt, a sprinkle of crushed black pepper, and a dash of mixed Eldic spices for flavour. While the pot heats up on the stove, Link pulls and cuts the beef—or she assumes beef; she has not had the chance to cook with beef since she can last remember over the past eight or nine months since her awakening—into bite-sized portions to sear in the pot. As the bits of meat sizzle in the oil, Link turns them over and over. In the meantime, Romani paces about the kitchen, sniffing even more intensely than her cat-like dog companion and remarking hungrily the fragrance of beef.

Link sets the saddlebag on the counter. While Romani begins to regale her with a story of her own personal heroism, Link rummages through the pantries and the ice-box. In the coolness of the sapphire-lined box, she uncovers a pitcher of milk to use as the base of the soup. She squats on the kitchen floor to perform the switcheroo. She shakes out the saddlebag into an empty pitcher; the liquored milk gloops out thickly, the scent slightly sour. Pushing the pitcher into the ice-box, Link pours the fresh milk from the ice-box—she prays fresh milk—into the saddlebag.

"I'm adding the milk," she signs to Romani, who claps eagerly. The girl pushes a stool towards the stove to stand over the cooking pot and look inside. Link empties the contents of the saddlebag onto the browned beef. She cleans the boomerang, then uses its edge to scrape up pieces of beef from the bottom of the pot and carefully stir. With Romani's help in using the stove—Link cannot figure out the mechanism by which to lower or raise the heat—she sets the beef and milk to simmer.

Link wipes her forehead.
"Y'know-ow-ow," Romani suggests, poking her tongue out of the corner of her mouth, "if you're thirsty we could wash it aaaaaall down with some liquored milk, yup yup. What'd'ya say?"

"We should make vegetables."

Romani pouts. "Why? Veggies don't taste good."

"They'll taste good in the soup. I promise. And if you don't like it, I'll make something else, just for you." Link snags another skillet from the counter and twirls it. An empty skillet, to avoid getting anything into Romani's hair as she did to Misan all those weeks ago in Eldin. This time Link catches the handle again with an expert flourish. Romani's expression brightens and her mouth drops open in awe and excitement. "Tonight, I'm your personal chef."

"Oh wow wow wow! I never knew how many good things could come from shooting arrows at strangers!" Romani paps her hand against her cheek. "Is this what Mama meant by stranger danger?"

"What vegetables do you like?"

Romani wrinkles her nose. "Is chocolate a vegetable?"

No matter how Link endeavours—and she really does try—to stop the laugh from snorting up her nose, she finds her eyes watering from how much she has laughed tonight. She digs through the pantries. Into the same skillet that she twirled, she chops up herbs from her satchel alongside vegetables from the house: onion and potato, corn and garlic, tomato and rhyme, amaranth and orange-yellow mighty thistle long said to increase one's prowess in battle. Link examines this last ingredient which she picked by hand along the sloping grasslands of Faron.

She looks up at Romani, standing on the table and brandishing a pan as she continues her story of how she alone fought off a pack of Them. She looks back at the mighty thistle. She looks up at Romani. She looks back at the mighty thistle. She looks up at Romani.

"So there I was," Romani crows, stabbing the air with the rounded side of the pan, "toe to toe with five of the nastiest Them I'd ever seen! Light beams shooting outta their eyes like guardians but ten times worse! Claws sharper than the look cremia gives me when I warn her about Them! Slowly...all ten of Them surrounded me." She casts her arm across her face as though aghast. "But did I surrender?" Romani fwips the pan out so quickly that Link ducks under the assumption it will fly from her hand. "No! I summoned my highly trained killer instincts and pounced!" She kicks the air. "Hyah!" She throws a left cross. "Hyuh!" A right cross. "Hyaa!" Romani attempts a backflip only to slip and land on her rump on the table—Link stifles a gasp—but not even this mistake can deter the future legendary Knight. Instead Romani punches the air with the skillet as if she meant to do that. "Hyyyyaaaaaah! And when the dust cleared..." She glances at Link as if to check whether Link pays attention; Link bobs her head and Romani beams. ". . .there were twenty less of Them in the world!"

Link looks between the thistle and the girl panting heavily on the table. Then she shrugs and tosses the thistle into the skillet. She fries the vegetables, adds salt and spice, and simmers the vegetables on.

With that, Link waits.

In the warm lantern-light of the kitchen rather than the dim candles of the quiet stable, Link can observe Romani more readily. Her features differ from Marin's, some more slightly than others, but Link notices now how her ears curve up into long points, the deep blue of her eyes, the more
earthen tone of her skin. The higher set of her cheekbones, though just as prominent; the comparative roundness of her nose, though still downturned; the hair straighter and thinner, the red deeper and darker. Not Marin. Not Marin at all. Yet so similar that Link can see the relation with ease. Marin’s family for certain.

Strange, that, since she cannot recall Marin having any siblings, but then again Link nearly forgot her own sister.

Romani launches in on another tale that seems an alternate version of the first. Link listens. Despite her youth, Romani knows how to weave a story together, where to slow down and where to speed up, where to lay on the fear and trepidation.

And in these stories Link knows that no one will die, that the great Romani will always prevail without a scratch, that Link need not fear the similarities to her own tales of monsters.

"...so Mama told cremia to look over me but I kind of ran off to do some exploring myself. Anyways I ended up getting lost—wow wow wow no I don't mean that I got lost; right-o, I was exploring as a brave hero and I knew exactly where I was going yup yup—and then we saw a huge guardian! Bigger than any I'd seen before! It must've seen the size of the whole castle!" Romani pauses. "I've never been to the castle but I know what Grandma’s told me. Right so I thought I was gonna die. But then outta nowhere this dog jumped from the bushes! And then she clamped her jaws right around the hem of my dress and just started dragging me all to where everyone else was. She was practically carrying me while the guardian was just bearin' down and down on us! When I got back, Grandma said the Goddess must’ve sent her so I named her Samiyu but really she's just Miyu. And she's been with me every since. And I love her. Yup yup. Good girl, Miyu."

Link feels herself smile at that. "That's the best story I've ever heard," she says; Romani blushes. The dog in question stretches out luxuriously on the tabletop and lolls out her long pink tongue. Link addresses the dog solemnly: "Thank you for saving her life."

"Thank you for saving her life." Link signs hastily. "Please?"

At length the vegetables simmer down and the beef becomes tender and smooth. Link mixes the vegetables into the creamy broth and stirs. She samples the stew on her tongue: not enough salt. A touch more salt and she lifts up her hand to curl her thumb and forefinger together to signal the soup's readiness.

Romani rubs her hands together. Link splits the stew between three bowls: one for herself, one for Romani, and one for Miyu, who lowers her head to lap up the thick soup, her tail sweeping low.

Suddenly Romani throws her hand up. "Wait we can't eat it like this, Grasshopper! Stay right there. Don't move. Don't even breathe or I won't forgive you!" Link makes a gesture as though tying up her mouth. Romani rushes out.

Link holds her breath. Just when her lungs feel fit to burst, Romani sprints back in holding a pair of hats that—Link ogles—look like the heads of cows. She drags over the stool and clambers onto it to plunk the hat onto Link's head.

Her lungs throb in pain. Darkness invades on the corners of her vision.

"Can I breathe now?" Link signs hastily. "Please?"
Romani tilts her head. "Lemme ask. Romani, can Grasshopper breathe? Uh huh. Uh huh." She claps her hands. "Romani says yes!"

Link exhales. She pants. Romani slaps the second cow-like hat onto her own head and presents herself to the cooking pot. The girl climbs onto the table to sit with the bowl in her lap. "Now we can drink it!"

"What are these?" Link asks, but Romani has already seized the bowl of beef stew in her hands and lifted it up to her mouth. Romani puts her mouth on the lip of the bowl, spwaahs as she burns her tongue, and then immediately puts her mouth on the bowl again. She tilts her head back and drains the entire bowl before Link can so much as take hers. At last Romani smacks the bowl back down on the counter. She wipes her mouth with her hands and belches. Then she closes her eyes.

Link watches her.

Romani peeks open one eye; her pupils darts downwards. She frowns and closes the eye again.

After a few moments the girl slaps her fists on the counter. "Wow wow wow maybe the milk only works if it's fresh. Yup yup, I bet that's it. Maybe if you steam it all the adult-ness leaves."

"All the...adult-ness?"

Romani nods furiously. "Mama says that only adults get to drink it! So if I drink it then I'll become an adult, right!? Isn't that how it works!?"

Link looks at her. Romani looks back. They look at one another.

Just before the laughter can reach Link's mouth, her body stiffens almost prior to her making out the sound.

Footsteps.

By the kitchen.

A voice.

"Romani, are you practising archery at night ag—"

Link turns her head ever so slowly to the doorway of the kitchen.

A man in the doorway. A older hylian man, guays' feet visible around his eyes, with dark brown skin and straight black hair silvering at the bangs, holding up a lantern in his left hand. Link stands frozen in the kitchen with her bowl of stew still in her hands and the cow hat on her head while Romani sits cross-legged on the table.

The man in the doorway opens his mouth.

Romani leaps off the table to skip towards him. The man grabs her protectively and hides her behind him, still staring at Link with wide blue eyes. Her left arm twitches up but she keeps herself still.

The blade on her back burns in its sheathe.

"Papa!" Romani says. "This is Grasshopper. She made me food! Beef stew. Except the liquored milk didn't make me an adult." Romani pouts. "But I promised Grasshopper that I'd let her see Grandma if she made me stew!"
The man straightens himself. He clears his throat and speaks slowly, enunciating his words with care. "Who are you?"

"My name is Link," she signs. "I'm hungr—Lady Impa from Kakariko sent—" That no longer holds true, and she closes her eyes a moment before forcing her hands through the proper motions. "I'm here to deliver a letter from Maron of Koume. She said that she was related to your family."

"Koume?" The man narrows his eyes. "What kind of letter?"

"It's with my horse in the stable." She does not know how to sign Romani's name, nor how to spell out the letters in Faronese, for she knows not the Faronese alphabet. "If you come with me I'll show you."

"Romani." The man kneels down beside the girl. "Why did you let a complete stranger into the house, again?"

Romani scuffs her foot on the ground. "Wееееел I kinda maybe sorta a little bit within the bounds of imagination kinda maybe hit her with an arrow?" She raises her hand to show her forefinger and thumb a centimetre apart. "But it was only a small arrow. So I had to help!"

The man shakes his head. He stands back up. "I'm sorry for my daughter's actions. How far have you come? You don't seem to be from around here." He pauses. "I didn't mean that as an insult. I'm Vish."

"I don't mind," Link answers, and Vish arches his eyebrows. "About the arrow. I've had worse." She stops. "I don't know how to sign your name. I'm sorry."

Vish puts a hand on his hip. "I didn't catch your name either. Could you spell it?" Link shakes her head. "Well, then, do you mind me calling you Grasshopper for the time being?" Link shrugs. "Well then, Grasshopper. As for my name." Vish shows her the gesture, a swooping crooked finger that reminds Link of a fish hook. "Now, Romani, why don't you head off to bed?"

"But I wanna see the letter!" Romani huffs out her cheeks. "Right, you can't send me to bed. Y'know I'm the one who found Grasshopper!"

"Romani..."

The girl sticks out her lower lip. "What if They abduct the cows in the middle of the night?"

Vish crouches beside her and kisses her forehead. "Off to bed, young lady. I'll help you fortify the shed from Them in the morning. How's that?"

"Fiiiine." Romani hugs her father closely, then scampers off with Miyu.

Vish lifts himself to his feet. He sighs and looks over at Link, his gaze slightly hardened, and Link flinches back. "What did you make for her?"

Link holds up the still-full bowl of beef stew. Her stomach rumbles.

Vish takes the bowl and smells it. "Do you regularly come into people's homes and cook with their food?"

"...your daughter asked me to," Link signs back.

"My daughter is also ten years old." He rubs the back of his neck. "There's no alcohol in this, is
there?"

"No, I used milk from the..." She cannot fathom for the life of her the Faronese word for pitcher. Instead she makes a round gesture. "...in the ice-box. I promised her I would use milk in the stew." Link hesitates. "I put the liquored milk into the...round thing...that's in there."

"Round thing?" His brow wrinkles. "The pitcher?"

"Yes. That. The round thing."

"...well then, let me impart a piece of advice to you, Grasshopper." He clears his throat. "If you want to deliver a letter, you should deliver it during the day, and not the middle of the night, and you should ask for the woman of the house, not a ten-year-old girl practising archery so recklessly she would injure a stranger."

Link says nothing. Even without the weight of the slate pressing down on her, she cannot step into conversation without actively plunging herself off of a gorge. She demonstrates instead the windowpane that Romani took off to let them inside.

Vish slaps his palm onto his forehead.

She stares down at her boots. Vish replaces the pane. "I'll have to fix that up in the morning." He clicks his tongue. "She's brighter than I'll ever be, I'll give her that, but she's a right handful sometimes." Vish glances at Link as though expecting an answer, and Link balls up her fingers instead. "Well then. Your horse?"

In the stable Link removes the liquored-milk saddlebags from Ilia's flanks and hands them to Vish. He staggers under their weight. She fishes the letter from her satchel to pass on. Vish takes the envelope and reads.

"Maron from Koume..." He nods to himself. "Thank you for bringing this out here. Now, I can tell by the look on your face you're looking for a reward." Link shakes her head. "Oh, is it already paid?"

"The letter was my payment for Maron telling me where this family lives." Vish frowns at her. Link moves on: "I want to talk to your daughter's grandmother."

"Why?" He tucks the letter under his arms. "At any rate, you'll bring a letter back to Koume, I assume. Well then, come with me. My dearest will want to see this." He sighs. "Best to have waited until the morning, but I know my mother-in-law all too well."

"...I think that she might know someone I'm looking for. An old friend. I promise, I mean no harm."

"Well." Vish gestures for Link to follow, and she does. He lets her through the front entrance of the house this time. "Take your boots off by the door." She does, setting her boots beside one small pair and two large; Vish removes his own. "Make yourself at home. I'll be right back."

When Vish leaves, Link does not so much as move.

Though she does breathe. He did not tell her not to breathe.

Link allows herself to explore the foyer with her gaze. Tacked to the walls Link can see hand-drawn pictures done by the clumsy hand of youth. Two small figures with jumbles of red hair beside two taller figures with jumbles of red hair, and a third taller figure with black hair. And Miyu, next to one of the small figures. Another picture depicts a brown horse with a white mane.
Another shows a pasture of cows, with something that looks like a wedge of cheese sticking out of the ground lifting up the cow. As Link squints at this last picture, her stomach grumbles to the tune of the stew in the kitchen yet the thought of *Marin Marin Marin* keeps Link rooted to the ground.

Purah still lives, however old. And Impa.

Marin could—she might—after all of these years—

Vish returns, holding hands with a heart-faced gerudo woman blinking sleep from her eyes, her frame hidden in loose purple pyjamas, her age—about the same as Vish's—visible in the lines of her face. She yawns. "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be rude." For lack of knowing what to do, Link half-bows to the pyjamed woman, who waves dismissively. "You can call me Malon. That's —" Malon gestures through her name, and Link forms the shape in turn. "Thank you for delivering the letter." Link dips her head. "Oh, we haven't talked to our family in Koume in years, huh. All these monsters." Malon opens the envelope. Vish massages her shoulder and she rests her head on his hand. "Her name's Maron...ha! Great minds think alike." She scans the letter.

Link says nothing but waits. She observes the emotions that pass over Malon's features, which resemble Marin's far more than did Romani's: joy, sadness, confusion, contentment, surprise, and then something that Link cannot name, that wrinkles the corners of her eyes and draws her mouth into a line.

After a few minutes of silence, Malon folds the letter again. "My darling told me that you wanted to speak to my mother." Link inclines her head. "If you wouldn't mind waiting until morning comes...then of course you can talk to her. You can have the guest room."

Vish arches an eyebrow. "Do you trust her?"

"Maron trusts her. She says that—" Malon glances back at the letter. "—Link knows Epona's song, or at least part of it. Apparently she lost her memories." Malon covers her hand with her mouth. "Oh, Link, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to talk about you like you weren't here."

Epona.

The name crashes against the inner pillar of her memories and yet for the life of her she cannot draw it free.

"Link?"

She blinks. Malon has taken a step closer. "...how do you know Epona's song?"

"*I used to...when I was younger I knew someone from your family. I'm sorry. I lost my memories, and..."* Link dips her gaze towards towards her feet to stare at a crack in the wooden floorboards.

"Oh, no, I hope you can remember. It's just that I've certainly never seen you, so I'm worried that you're looking for a cousin or other fragment of our family, not us at Romani Ranch. The name *Link* does sound familiar..." Link inhales. "Oh, I guess my mother would know the family genealogy better than I would." Malon *hmms*. "Link...do you mind if I sing to you?"

Link tilts her head to one side. Vish makes nearly the same gesture, and Malon covers her mouth to laugh.

"You only know part of Epona's song, is that right? If I sing the rest to you, that could help jog some of your memories. Since you delivered the letter all the way here, and made supper for Romani—" Vish chuckles and brushes a lock of hair over Malon's ear. "—I could at least do this
much for you."

For a moment Link feels her feet lifting from the ground as though the wedge of cheese from the drawings on the walls had mistaken her for a cow. Then the fullness of Malon's words crash upon her. "Thank you," her hands manage to sign where Link herself cannot move.

Malon smiles warmly.

Link's stomach growls. She blushes, and Malon laughs a soft little laugh. "Speaking of supper, let's get you to the kitchen."

Vish, Malon, and Link return to the kitchen, where Link nearly bursts into tears.

The stew.

The stew.

The stew has vanished. Her cooking pot remains, emptied of its contents, but the stew. Oh, the stew-manity! Link runs her hands over the table where the stew once sat before going missing-in-action. She prepares a eulogy and a prayer. For that stew that smelled so wonderfully, for that stew which she did not have the blessing of tasting before it departed, ripped so cruelly fresh, from this world.

Malon hums out a sigh. "I'll put some tea on. Oh, darling, could you handle the tea?"

"Of course, dearest."

She turns towards Link, smoothing the front of her pyjamas. "So, Link, what would you like to eat?"

A blade to the face, though Link does not know the word blade in Faronese. "Anything," she says.

Malon's shoulders shake in silent laughter. "One anything coming right up."

Vish bids Link to sit at the table. While Vish makes them tea, Malon stirs something in a pot and asks Link generally about her life. Link inquires back. About the cow-head hats: a family joke and not an indication of anything resembling what adults wear. About the something called a cremia, the word Link does not know: Malon and Vish exchange glances and burst out together in laughing, affectionately rubbing their shoulders together.

"Cremia is our older daughter," Malon explains, wiping tears from her eyes in a motion remarkably akin to Romani's, "and Romani our younger. There's been a tradition in our family to name our daughters starting with the character Ma for generations...ha! Oh, but my darling and I couldn't think of any good Ma names that hadn't been used. So Cremia and then Romani it was!"

"My dearest thought of plenty of good names," Vish corrects, "but every time we discovered that someone else in the family line already had the name, and my dearest wanted no repeats."

"That's what I already said, darling." Malon touches her nose to his, and Vish laughs, and Link looks down at her hands as her cheeks slowly begin to steam.

Vish sets down three cups of tea, leaves and herbs dark clumps in the bottoms. Link holds the round cup in both hands to inhale the soft fragrance. Beneath the herbal scent she detects a hint of sharpness that drowns her mouth with saliva and rumbles her stomach further.
Malon sets a plate in front of her and Link scarcely has time to register something with meat before she rips and tears into it. Supper at last, no utensils, hands only. Link wrenches the soft beef in half with her own hands and crams entire chunks into her mouth, swallowing the meat down with tea just in time to stuff her cheeks with more. The tender beef falls apart to juiciness in her mouth. The euphony of herb and spice brings her to lick the plate when she finishes until the entire ceramic surface glistens with her saliva.

Her breaths short and shallow, Link lifts her head, wide-eyed, at Malon.

"Seconds?" she asks, and Link has already begun nodding before Malon finishes the word.

Link does not count how much she consumes but soon enough she has a stack of plates beside her taller than herself. She ceases eating more for Malon admitting they have run out of beef in the ice-box than for the filling of her bottomless stomach.

She could still go for more.

"Well then," says Vish, a note of surprise and awe sneaking into his timbre, "I have to hand it to you. I can't remember the last time I was afraid someone might actually eat me out of house and home.'

"Oh, darling, she's a growing girl. Leave her be." Malon winks at Link, who stops licking the last plate long enough to stack it onto the table with the others. "I remember how much I ate when I was around seventeen."

"I'm eighteen," Link notes, "and I can pay if you want."

Vish and Malon shake their heads at once. "Not at all," Vish responds. "You're our guest now. Link, you said her name was, dearest? Right, Link. Well then, Link, if you want to pay for anything, you ought to pay to hear my dearest's most beautiful voice."

"Oh, stop it, darling." Malon's face flushes redder than her hair. "Less flattery, more harp-fetching, if you would."

The harp. Vish carries the harp in both hands. The harp that Link knows all too well. Six strings that he lovingly tunes to the hum of Malon's voice. The swell of red and blue, the paint faded over time but no less beautiful. He strums the harp with a lover's hands, and then nods to Malon.

"I'm ready."

Malon sings.

La na na...la na na...la na na, na na...

The melody carries no words that Link can understand, a tune of far-off harmonies of years upon years of memory, a song passed down from hand to hand and lip to lip, from Marin's mother to Marin to the rest of Marin's family, to Malon who now sings for her.

She remembers the song.

She remembers.

She remembers the village. She remembers the girl who smelled of horses. She remembers the children who looked at her strangely, the boys she did not care to play with and the girls who shunned her. She remembers the whispers to the girl who smelled of horses in the middle of the
night, huddling by a campfire in the woods, the secret that she held within her breast for those long years of her life.

She remembers the people of that house. She remembers the loudness of their voices. She remembers her sister, years younger than she, an accident, a surprise, a blessing. She remembers working in the village. She remembers the ranch; she remembers the goats; she remembers the meagre pay. She remembers collecting enough to send Aryll to live with their grandmother, to send Aryll anywhere but in the house with the rafters that shook at night.

She remembers Rusl.

She remembers the blacksmith teaching her how to wield a blade and ride a horse. She remembers the blacksmith offering to make her his courier. She remembers the blacksmith, having gotten himself married, who could no longer make his own deliveries.

She remembers accepting. For the pay. To keep her sister fed. And for no other reason that she could admit to herself.

She remembers.

To Eldin in the north. To Lanayru in the east. To Necluda in the south. To Central Hyrule in the West.

To Central Hyrule.

To the village of Mabe.

The girl with the violet sash, singing to herself in the field, singing to a brown horse with a white mane. She remembers standing, standing, listening for the longest time to the voice of the girl with the violet sash, whose song called the stars to creation and rose the land from the tides.

She remembers delivering something to the girl's mothers. She remembers the girl, learning of her work as a courier, asking her about the entire world, grinning so bright that the sun came in through the window to see what rivalled its light. She remembers the girl telling her of the elixir in spring green.

She remembers.

She remembers the girl telling her her name. Marin. When she signed the name of the girl with the violet sash, she lay her left wrist over her right and curled up her fingers like the wings of a bird in flight.

She remembers the girl with the violet sash gifting her the horse. "Take good care of Epona, will you? What? Why am I giving her to you? You're such a dummy, Link! It's so that you come back quicker with more stories. You're gonna come back for more elixir right? Then you pay in stories. Don't forget to come back or I won't forgive you! Of course I miss you, dummy!"

She remembers the first girl in the entirety of her life save for the girl who smelled of horses who wanted to talk to her, who wanted to be her friend, who wanted her to come back.

She remembers.

She remembers the song.
Mighty Creamy Meat Soup (six hearts, low attack boost for 05:00) - fresh milk, goat butter, mighty thistle, raw meat, rock salt

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Here we see the issues with translating from audibly spoken word to sign language. Link can sign her own name, but she doesn't know how to translate this into audibly spoken word. Usually, Link would get around this limitation by spelling out her name, L-I-N-K, or whatever the alphabet/syllabary of the language allows. However, Link does not know how to read or write Faronese! In the end, Malon learns Link's name by reading Maron's letter, where Maron had to write out Link's name.

Malon, of course, is named after Malon from Ocarina of Time, Oracle of Seasons, Four Swords Adventures, and The Minish Cap, while Romani and Cremia are named after Romani and Cremia from Majora's Mask, which is also the original of the cow's-head mask. Miyu is named after Miyu from Star Fox 2.

Much like how the patron goddess of the gorons, Goro-goro, includes the respectful "doubling" of her name, the patron goddess of the gerudo, Sageru, includes the respectful prefix "sa-" which players of Breath of the Wild will recognise from the gerudo language presented in-game: sa'oiten means good heavens; sav'otta means good morning; and sarqso is a polite way of saying thank-you, among other words presented in-game. In that sense, "Samiyu" is a name that indicates how the family considers Miyu a blessing or sent by the goddess.

In Parapan, the suffix "-do" means "people of" and so "gerudo" literally means "people of (Sa)geru". To this end, the Parapan word for zora is "zolado" and for hylians is "hyiado". The prefix "e-" means "daughter of", and gerudo families in both Parapa and western Faron traditionally use a matronymic, adopting the name of the mother of more powerful or notable rank of status, such that Romani's full name, for example, would be "Emalon Romani", the matronymic being given first. Families and family lines are important to Parapan culture; the virtue of Sageru is the support, loyalty, and love of one's family and friends, which is loosely translated as "blood" or "kinship" into Central Hyrulean. Incidentally, this can lead some children to be very confused when they first learn of goddesses other than Sageru: the name "Erito" sounds like it should mean "daughter of the rito" rather than be the name of their patron goddess! Anyways, ahem, as usual, I think too much about fictional languages.

Writing Romani's dialogue is a lot of fun.

Malon, due to having red hair, is gerudo here, and Vish is hylian. The hylians of Faronese/southern Hyrule generally resemble those from Lurelin Village in Breath of the Wild, hence the dark skin and blue eyes. Cremia and Romani's blue eyes come from Vish's side of the family; Romani and Cremia are thus both gerudo and hylian.

The memories in this chapter give you a bunch of small little glimpses into Link's childhood. We'll explore more of these as we go, but here's your taste of things to come.
Readers who have played *Twilight Princess* probably already recognise the village that I've lifted to give Link a home. I didn't want to use Hateno, where Link is implied to be from in *Breath of the Wild*, because 1) frankly I don't like Hateno that much, 2) the location of Link's home village becomes relevant later in *Delicious in Wilds*, 3) I wanted the village to be something that Link could look for later, rather than right next to Kakariko, and 4) I didn't want Purah right next to it.

Just as I lifted Aryll and Link's grandmother from *The Wind Waker*, so too have I carefully lifted Link's home village from *Twilight Princess*. Why that village? Because in my opinion the village from *Twilight Princess* is the single most grounded and well-developed "birthplace" for Link in the franchise.

midna's ass. 23 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Romani is really cute! She's kind of a brat but a cute brat.

Her and her family are even more important to the story than they appear.

Link's relationship with Marin is - still - really really nice.

Emma. 23 September 2017.
Chapter Summary

The travelling chef learns of what happened to the girl with the violet sash.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

They offer her the guest bedroom; Link insists on sleeping with Ilia in the barn. The musty scent of hay calms the beat-beat-beating of her heart. She curls up beside Ilia, the tears still fresh on her face, but despite the comforting warmth of her companion beside her the entirety of her frame trembles. The few hours until dawn find her alternating between closing her eyes to try to squeeze out a wink of sleep and staring into the darkness to recall the patterns of red and blue from her memories.

The sound of the six-stringed harp. The call of Marin's voice.

Epona's song. Whatever Epona's song might mean.

Epona.

At last the light filtering through the crack at the top of the barn door silvers, then reddens, then goldens. Link stretches to loosen the tension in her muscles, to crack her spine, to roll her head and shoulders. She rests her forehead against Ilia's.

"I'll be back, girl. Stay safe for me."

Ilia whinnies. Link embraces her companion around the neck.

A young woman about Link's age comes to collect her, bearing the same red hair as Romani and Malon, though the features of her face more closely call to Vish's. "You must be Link," she signs, smiling gently, as though encouraging a filly to take her first few steps into the world. "I'm Romani's older sister, Cremia." Link blushes from recalling her misunderstanding of the word cremia. "Is your wound all right?"

Link blinks.

Cremia taps her right shoulder. Link reaches up to her own and feels the gauze around her skin. She smiles sheepishly. "I've been through much worse, I completely forgot about the arrow."

Cremia brings her hand to her mouth; Link cannot read her expression. "Is tha so? You'll have to tell Romani and Mother of your travels later. They love hearing those stories." She hums to herself. "Would you like to help me milk the cows?"

Link raises her hands to ask about meeting Cremia's grandmother, but she is nothing if not helpful, and the family of Romani Ranch has already given her so much. Cremia demonstrates how to milk. The cows' udders feel damp and slick in a manner that reminds Link uncomfortably of shifting through the entrails of monsters. Where Cremia pumps the teats with an expert hand that splashes milk into the wooden pail at an alarming pace, Link's own efforts reward her with uneven spurts.
and increasingly urgent mooing from the cow. She pats the cow's flank in apology. Link has scarcely finished milking a single cow by the time Cremia has finished off the rest of the row.

"Thank you for your help." Cremia beams warmly and takes the proffered pail from Link, a quarter full. She sets it down near her own three pails, white to the brim. Link glances over at the horses; Cremia nods approvingly. "Would you like to help with them as well? I'd be very grateful."

Link shovels manure out and hay in. Cremia checks on the horses' health as she goes; she goes quietly about her work, meticulous and steady. Occasionally she lifts her hand to her temples and winces. Link could say something, could ask if she needs anything, and yet—as so many times before—Link's hands stay still and silent. She busies herself shovelling harder.

"Has your horse ever been bred before?" Cremia inquires. "She's lovely, you know."

Link tilts her head to one side. "I don't know. I met her in the wilds."

Cremia hums. "You should be careful. It'll be around their mating season soon, and a pregnant mare won't get you far."

"Thank you so much for helping me." Whenever she finishes a sentence, Link observes, Cremia folds her hands in front of her to hold them at rest. "Today is market day, so Mother and Father are out delivering milk. And—" Cremia blushing slightly. "—browsing for this year's studs."

Link could say something, could ask if she needs anything, and yet—as so many times before—Link's hands stay still and silent. She busies herself shovelling harder.

"I'd like to talk to—" Her belly, seemingly at odds with her wishes, reaches up through her throat to throttle her brain. Link hangs her head in defeat. "...yes, please."

Cremia curseys.

Link follows her to the house. Miyu yips at her heels. And where there's dog, there's girl: Romani runs up to Link to jabber about a little of everything in the world, switching topics so rapidly that Link simply bobs her head as the words rebound off of her like rain from waxed leather.

Link offers to help cook breakfast. Cremia rebuffs her. "You're our guest."

Link seats herself at the table and droops her head while Cremia cooks. Romani bounces up and down on the chair beside her. Link catches about one in twenty words—the Faronese too quick for her to understand—but Romani seems to need little encouragement to continue, so long as Link continues looking in her direction.

Without the expectation of having to respond, without the expectation of having to arrange the features of her face appropriately, without the expectation of needing to know just what to say, she can listen and relax into a hylian-shaped puddle on the table.

Cremia produces plates of vegetable curry, not as overwhelmingly hot as those Link has tasted in Eldin, but much meatier and more filling, with a greater variety of spice and a steadier body. Cremia excuses herself with a plate and a cup of tea. Romani wolfs down her portion and continues to chatter at the same time. Somehow she does not choke.

Link whistles her appreciation for Romani's skills at eatery.

Cremia returns after a moment. "Grandmother is awake," she explains, and Link congeals herself back into a person rather than a chuchu absorbing the curry with her face. "Would you like to talk to her?"
Standing up so suddenly that the chair *screes* out her resounding affirmation, Link nods sharply.

She should have brought flowers.

The same flower that Marin wore in her hair. She has not seen that kind of flower anywhere in her travels but it must exist, somewhere. If the silent princess could yet bloom, then the flower that Marin bore on her left ear must as well.

Somewhere.

*Somewhere.*

With every step, she can hear the boards of the house creak beneath the weight of a century. With every step, the sweat that dampens the back of her neck clings her undershirt more tightly to her shoulders. With every step, her legs threaten to buckle more and more, until Cremia stops in front of a door at the end of the hall and Link could just about claw off her own face.

The words. The words that have never come to her. Why would they come now if not then, why would she know what to ask, what could she even bring herself to do with the answers? The scent of home has driven her so far, and now, at the end of her journey, she might have naught at all to say, and naught at all to live for after.

Cremia opens the door.

A bedroom. A bedroom with a simple bed taking up the middle of the room, the covers a gentle blue. A window facing north, through which she can see the clouds upon the radiance of the sunlit sky. A nightstand with a pitcher of water and a half-full glass beside it. A pair of fluffed pillows, and the elderly woman sunk into them, her face more a mound of wrinkles than recognisable features, what remains of her hair entirely white, her eyes sunken deep, her pupils barely visible for the refraction of her spectacles, her breath rasping weakly with a sound like rustling leaves.

She has a look about her as though fashioned out of folded paper, or a house of playing cards; that one breath would knock her over and dissipate her ashes to the wind.

Link stands in the doorway. The muscle below her lungs has tautened and she cannot expel her breath. If she stays here, she feels, she might age herself, second on second, minute on minute, day on day, year on year. Century on century.

As though all of the time she has lost would come upon her at once, as though she would drop her blade to rest upon the grass forever more.

Cremia sits by a chair on the right side of the bed. "Grandmother, this is Link. She has come to speak to you. Would you like to talk to her?"

The ancient woman upon the bed raises a trembling hand to adjust her spectacles up on the bridge of her nose. She makes an expression vaguely emulating a smile and Link despises herself for the thread of revulsion that pillars up her throat.

"Link," the woman says, and in that instant of hearing her voice Link knows her not to be Marin. "It can't possibly be."

Link blinks at her.

The woman struggles to sit up. Her skin moves and folds over her frame as though attached to nothing underneath, like a cloak or a bag over bones that shuffles of its own accord. Cremia helps
"...do you bear the name—" The ancient woman coughs and Link flinches back. Though age has worn her down, the woman's words bear with them a surprising modicum of strength. "—of a great-grandmother of yours, Link?"

While Link continues to stand, staring, Cremia clears her throat. "Link, would you mind shutting the door?"

Link steps into the room and the sands of time do not crunch their jaws over her spine. Instead she turns to close the door only to find Romani and Miyu looking up at her.

"Can I come in too!? I can right!? Yup yup, bet I can. Grasshopper wouldn't leave the great Romani out of something like this!" Romani skips inside and Miyu pads in behind her.

Cremia lifts her hand to the side of her head to massage her temple. "Link, you can tell her to leave if you want."

Romani pouts. "Oh wow wow wow are you gonna tell me this is some adult-only thing too! Pleeeeaaase Grasshopper? You owe me one!"

For lack of a response Link rolls her shoulders.

"You can come in, then," Cremia tells Romani, who starts to circle the bed, "but please, be quiet, Romani."

"On it!"

The ancient woman on the bed makes a gurgling noise that flinches Link backwards into the closed door. After a moment Link recognises the oscillations in the sound: laughter.

"Romani, Cremia, please leave. Both of you," the woman croaks out, her timbre progressively scratchier, as if a wolfos were raking its claws along her vocal cords every time she spoke. Inclining her head, Cremia rises from the chair and physically hoists Romani over her shoulder out. "Samiyu can stay."

Miyu barks and wags her tail. The ancient woman smiles.

"Come." It takes Link a long minute to realise the woman means her. "Sit down."

Link sits upon the chair warmed by Cremia's back. She says nothing. Her nails dig into her knees through the fabric of her trousers. She looks down upon her feet, her boots left by the entrance to the home.

The woman shifts to look at her. Link trains her gaze even more narrowly upon the floor.

"Do you bear the name of a great-grandmother of yours, Link? Or of someone else in your family?"

Link shakes her head.

"Then...tell me, Link. How do you know of Epona's song?"

She shakes her head again.

The woman stays silent for a moment, and Link's shoulders shake. Then the woman speaks again:
"Do you not know Faronese?"

The back of Link's neck heats up and the fever spreads to her cheeks. Her fingers twitch uncontrollably. She forces herself to count her breaths, in through the nose, out from the mouth.

"I know Faronese," she signs. "A little. I know a little."

"Then talk to me, as you wanted to do."

The tremors up the bones of Link's hands raise the ridge along her inner wrist.

"In that case, excuse an old woman for her rambling." The woman sinks her back into the pillows. "You may call me Maryll." The top of Link's left eyelid twitches; she blinks repeatedly. "My mother knew a girl who bore your same name, and named me after that girl's sister. Mm. I never knew my mother's friend. Ah, but, my mother would tell me so many stories of that friend." Link glances up for a second. The woman has closed her eyes. "It has been...years since I heard my mother's voice. She passed away when I was still young. She had waited to have children, you see, for as long as she could. Mm.

"Ah, not that she didn't want children, but she was waiting for her friend to return.

"She had given her friend many things, and her friend in turn had given her many more. She gave her friend a horse—ah, Link, you're hylian, aren't you? Yes, you must be unfamiliar with the tales of Our Goddess Sageru, who rides a horse spun of lightning, quicker than the wind, stronger than the storm. On Sapona She rides. My mother gave her friend a horse named for the Goddess's: Epona, daughter of Sapona. A tradition in our family handed down, that the horse belonging to the firstborn daughter would bear the name of Epona, and would be taught to respond to our family's song."

Epona's song.

"A song that you know, despite not knowing the origin of the name.

"Our family did not always live in Kotake. Years ago, when my mother was a young girl, they lived in the Hyrule Field, and the ranch was called Lon Lon, after the names of her own two mothers. When the Great Calamity...well, I wasn't born then, but I've heard stories of it. When the Great Calamity burned everything near the castletown, my mother and her family fled and moved here to establish Romani Ranch. Ah, but you already knew that, didn't you?"

Link keeps absolutely silent, absolutely still. Any sound, any motion, any sign of life could wash away the words. She has asked Lady Impa for what happened so many years ago, and only now, months after her awakening, has someone offered to tell her.

"Mm. My mother wanted to know what had happened to her friend, to her friend's sister, to her friend's friend. I know little about the friend's friend, but my mother knew someone in the same village as her. Ordon, I think is what the village was called.

"Ah, but in the chaos after the Great Calamity...no one spoke to anyone. Everyone retreated to the safer patches. The four great cities in the corners of Hyrule had been mostly destroyed, and there was little left of the Hyrule Field but smoulder and ruin. People vanished into villages in shrine-safe valleys that they could defend from monsters.

"Communication from the west to the east side of Hyrule? Unthinkable. Or so my mother told me."

Maryll reaches for the glass of water on the nightstand. She drinks heavily before replacing the
glass on the stand.

"Would you be a dear and refill that for me?"

Link springs up in a flash. Her hands shake so badly that she nearly tips the pitcher over, but she steadies herself. She inhales; she exhales; she fills the glass once more, then sits down so swiftly she nearly misses the chair.

"Thank you. Link, no need to fret so. I'm not going anywhere." Maryll rasps out that terrible, terrible gurgle of a laugh. "I've lived this long. Surely I can live another few minutes to ramble on until you've figured what you want to talk to me about.

"Now...where was I?

"Mm. Every year my mother would go back to where the old ranch once stood in the spring. My mother's friend had promised her something, after all, and my mother would wait until her friend could fulfill that promise.

"She waited for years, until her parents passed away. My grandmothers' dying wish had been for my mother to have children and carry on the ranch. And so, my mother married my other mother and had me. She loved her wife and family dearly, make no mistake. Every year, nonetheless, my mother would go back to where Lon Lon once stood, to await her friend.

"For you see, her friend had never come back, yet my mother steadfastly believed to the end that her friend had not perished but would return. She told me that she could almost hear the Goddesses assuring her. My mother marched out to a temple of Hylia—her friend was hylian, you see, though from what I understand her friend bore closer to the faith of the Three than the Seven—and threatened the Goddess with her own two fists that if She didn't protect her friend, my mother would personally see to the Goddess's demise.

"Mm. She was chased out of the temple for that."

Maryll laughs long and loud; abruptly she convulses into coughing. Link stares at her with quickened breath until Maryll calms. The smile the ancient woman has kept up on her lips begins to fade.

"Ah, but the friend...the friend never appeared. And although we worry of the weather, or of monsters, or the natural disasters that may befall, the only inevitability in life is the passage of time. The greediest thing of all, you know. I should think that the Calamity itself is nothing but a manifestation of time.

"...my mother passed away. Even in her final days she held on to that thin thread of hope that her friend would return, and she told me to welcome her friend if this Link ever did. My mother would not believe that her friend had abandoned her, and no matter how much time had passed, she never wanted to lose hope.

"She named me Maryll after her friend's precious sister, and thereafter I named my own daughter Malon after one of my late grandmothers." Maryll winks. "Between you and me, I've never been the creative type. Malon married a wonderful young hylian man from eastern Faron, and she decided that she had had enough of our little 'ma-' tradition, for not finding enough names. And so she bore Cremia, and then Romani, who took on the name of our ranch.

"Mm. What else? My mother told me that her friend...her friend had something important to do. I'm not entirely certain what," Maryll says with a tone that suggests she does know exactly what,
and Link stares more intensely than ever at the ground, "but her friend had some sort of destiny to fulfill. My mother believed more than anything that her friend would fulfill this destiny or would die trying. My mother often said that her friend was not the strongest, nor the smartest; she had little in the way of power or wisdom, to be sure." Link blushes to her ears. "But what her friend lacked in the virtues of the Goddess Din or the Goddess Nayru she made up for in her determination and her courage.

"Like an Oracle of Farore, my mother said.

"Even though her friend's birth had not served her friend the best of lives, her friend had done everything she could for my mother, for her own sister, for the friend who lived in Ordon, and never once did she falter.

"Courage, and determination, and kindness. My mother said that her friend was the kindest girl she'd ever met. That her friend could make a new pantheon of Golden Goddesses. Courage. Determination. Kindness."

When Link next makes soup, she'll not need to ask Romani for help with the stove: the flush of her face to the tips of her pointed ears will suffice.

"Ah but the Goddesses are of Courage, of Wisdom, of Power, blessed be Their names. So it goes, and such is life.

"Mm. Quite a story, isn't it? The family history of us here in Kotake."

Maryll nods to herself. Link continues to sit in silence.

"Ah, now, Link. Perhaps you know the answer to the riddle that I've considered all these years. Do you know of whatever happened to my mother's friend?"

The blood that has risen to her cheeks drains to a pale frost. Link sits. The edge of the chair imprints a bow along her thighs. She would weigh words to select those she needs but she has no words to weigh, only the endless chasm across which no words can ever pass.

Marin will never know.

She continues to sit.

Her entire body screams with the need to speak, but all that issues forth: silence.

With Marin, with the girl who smelled of horses, here and there with certain people Link has met on the road, her arms have taken on the freewheeling care of a bird in flight. Somehow, with those people, the words flood from her hands, the riverbanks bursting with all that she need say.

And yet—and yet here, as with the Champions, as with the girl with the golden hair, as with Yunobo in Death Mountain, as with Amali in the Divine Beast Vah Medoh, as with the people to whom Link has desperately wanted to speak, the people whom she has desperately wished to comfort—the words stall, and quiet, and die.

"The friend...was injured. I don't know how the friend was injured, but then...something happened, and the friend went to sleep for a very long time. When the friend awoke, she lost all of her memories." Link hesitated. "And the friend...the friend who lost all of her memories...she didn't remember the promise she had made, and no one told her what was going on. Little by little she remembered, and she...discovered that she had awoke too late. At the moment she awoke, your mother already...your mother already..." She repeats the words again and again until the gestures
lose all meaning and she grinds out the repetitive motion. 

"...and so the friend could do nothing but realise that she was too late, and that she was no longer the person your mother had known."

"I see. Thank you for telling me your side of the story, Link. If ever you remember how you learned Epona's song, would you tell me?"

Link nods.

Silence.

Her hands shift of her own accord. 

"May I ask a question?"

Maryll inclines her head. "Of course you may."

"Her name...was Marin, wasn't it?"

Maryll nods. "Yes, that was my mother. The woman who waited. The villagers would joke that she had become a widow with her wife still alive. My other mother was nothing but understanding her entire life. They had married to care for the ranch and to bear children, and sometimes friendship in such things is enough."

Link repeats the same motion, comforting in that her arms move automatically. "May I ask another question?"

"Of course."

"What...what did the friend promise your mother?"

"Ah, now that's a question, isn't it?" Maryll smiles kindly at Link and Link's heart once more makes a valiant effort at throttling her. "Perhaps you could tell me. What did my mother's friend promise her?"

"The friend..."

A soup. A soup that Marin made for her. Thick, and creamy, and a specialty of Parapa, Marin told her, made from fruit native to the lush greens of northeastern Parapa and the sandier desert of the southwest, that her mothers purchased from merchants passing through Mabe. The family had tried to cultivate these crops alongside the voltfin trout and Tabanch wheat they had brought with them from their home of Koume, yet—unlike trout and wheat—the Parapan fruits had failed to prosper in the milder climes of Central Hyrule, and so the family relied on merchants from Parapa and western Faron. Prickly red pears that sparked with static on her fingertips: voltfruit. Round green fruit that seemed more water than anything else, like natural balloons encased in a hard striped rind: hydromelon. Marin cooked the fruits of Parapa into milk and flour for a creamy, heavy base that warmed Link's belly as little else could.

But the prize of the dish: hearty radish, pink and tender, moulded into the shape of a heart.

A cold soup meant for a hot summer's day. Marin prepared it in the thick of the afternoon heat where the fires of Eldin rolled down the mountains to suffocate the field. In a bowl laden with sapphire around the rim to keep the soup cool.

Link took the bowl in hand and her eyes widened at the sight.

At the pink heart of the radish, a single chunk sliced perfectly thin to float upon the surface of the stew. She raised her head to meet Marin's gaze, and Marin lifted a hand to her blush-heated cheek, a
sight in turn pooled all the magma of Death Mountain into Link's face.

They sat next to one another in the shade of the porch outside of the stable. Out in the field Link could see the horses and cows let out for the day, lowing and neighing at one another above the grass green as spring that danced to the tune of the wind.

"Do you remember," Marin whispered, "how we met?"

Did Link ever. The thunderstorm that had raged and the slippery road that ran beside the ranch. How Link had fallen into the lake on foot—this before Marin gave her the horse with the white mane—and the voltfin trout had shocked her into darkness. How she had washed up, unconscious. How she thought she had died for she could hear the choir of the Goddesses, and how the choir of the Goddesses had resolved to the voice of the girl who rescued Link in more ways than either of them possibly could have known.

The girl with the red hair and the blue dress with the violet sash straddling her hips. The girl who spoke of the skies and the seas. The girl whose name resembled a bird in flight.

Marin.

The first girl in the entirety of the world outside of Ordon who had ever loved Link.

"Marin," said Link, with a suddenness that dropped her bowl of stew from her lap. The soup splashed up over the rim to stain her trouser thighs. "Marin."

Marin inhaled. "Are you sick?" she asked anxiously. "Is the soup that awful?"

Link blinked at her, then shook her head. "No, I—I need to tell you something—"

The girl's eyes widened all the more, and she lay her hands on Link's shoulders. "Is the stew so bad you don't want to eat it? I've never seen you not finish eating something."

"No, Marin—" Link shook Marin's hands from her shoulders. "Listen, this is more important than the soup—"

"Something that's more important than food to you!?" Marin covered her mouth with her hand. "What's gotten into you!? Are you dying!?"

Link leaped to her feet. The bowl of stew toppled to the dusty ground and every fibre in her frame yelled at her to pick it up and wolf the soup down but the words had finally come to her fingertips. Closing her eyes to the squelch of stew beneath her boots, Link started to sign with all the speed she could shore up for fear of the rain drying out.

"Marin I've been thinking about this for a long time we met when I was ten years old and it's been years since then so I've been listening to how beautiful your voice has gotten and I know you're always asking me about the places I've been to and I know you want to sing for everyone you can so when my sister grows up and I save up enough money I want to travel the world with you so you can sing to everyone and I'll learn to play the harp better if you want so I'm not useless and I want to see you sing because you light the room so much I keep thinking I'm looking at the sun and I don't know I think that everyone in Hyrule and outside of Hyrule and everywhere should hear your voice and would you travel with me someday I promise I won't be useless I promise I'll do everything I can I promise I'll—"

Warmth.
Arms around her neck and shoulders. The heat of Marin's body pressed against her, shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip, as Marin embraced her tightly, her breath warm on the outer shell of Link's ear as she whispered.

"You really are a dummy. You make me happier than anyone else. I've spent my whole life hopping from farm to farm; all I've wanted is to see Hyrule, and the rest of the world, with my own eyes and walk it with my own feet. And sing for everyone I can. I don't just want to sing for the travellers who pass through here. I want to sing until I make the whole world smile, if that's what I can do for this world that's done so much for me." The corners of Link's eyes welled with wetness. "And you, dummy...you'd be willing to travel with me. And you'll come back home with me after we see the world, won't you?" Link could only nod her chin on Marin's shoulder; she felt the curve of Marin's smile against her cheek. "Dummy, you don't need to make yourself *useful* to me because you're already everything to me. Do you promise you'll see the world with me one day?"

She promised.

"And do you *promise* we'll come home at the end of it all?"

She promised, even more fervently than before.

"I'll hold you to that. Even if something happens and you can't make it back for a long long time—don't ever forget me. Or I'll never forgive you."

Link traced the letters into the back of Marin's hand that she could not bring herself to sign, and she could feel the heat of Marin's blush against her own cheek.

"I love you too, dummy."

...who had ever loved Link.

She sits. She sits, and she trembles, and she feels the tears press in at the backs of her eyes, and she cries, and she bawls, and she curls up on the chair by the side of the bed as the understanding of all that she has lost wracks through her in waves.

"Link," says Maryll, her voice so quiet that for a moment Link wonders if she has hallucinated. "...I hope you know how much my mother loved you."

Link presses the heels of her palms into her eyes.

She does.

She knows.

She remembers.

—

*Creamy Heart Soup* (ten hearts) - fresh milk, hearty radish, hydromelon, Tabantha wheat, voltfruit

Chapter End Notes

Author's notes: It has been a very long time since Link first awoke without even a name.

People move on. People die. One hundred years is both a long time and not long enough. While Impa and Purah might have lived longer than the vast majority of people will, not everyone is like that. And while Impa and Purah have kept themselves alive by not doing much of anything except sitting in one spot and letting other people do the work for them, Marin would never be that kind of person. Marin prefers quality of life over quantity of life. And she did have a good life. She may have never been able to achieve her dream of singing for everyone in the world because she had promises and obligations, and because the world crawled with monsters that destroyed the Hyrule she longed to sing for, but she did have a good life.

And now Link has found Marin's family again. She did promise, after all, that she would come back home to Marin after she finished her adventures.

Epona is a very common name for horses in southwestern Hyrule! It's kind of like naming your dog "Spot" or "Buddy" (where I'm from, the most popular name for a dog is "Шарик"). Similarly, the most common name for pet birds is Etori (Sageru's hawk in the legends is named Satori, which Mount Satori was named after, and is associated with wisdom, benevolence, and protection). Indeed, this association with protection and wisdom is so well-known in Hyrule that Princess Zelda's full name (Zelda Satoru Miyahon Harkinian) includes the middle name of Satoru, with the "-ru" ending, like at the end of Nabooru's name, being a declension indicating a girl's name, not unlike the real-world "-ko" in Japanese.

Of course, the out-of-universe reason for Zelda's full name is that I wished to pay homage to Satoru Iwata, after which Mount Satori was named. Miyahon, for those curious, comes from Shigeru Miyamoto's name in the credits of The Legend of Zelda, where he is credited as "S. Miyahon"; being credited under a pseudonym was common in those days to avoid talented employees from being stolen by other companies. In-universe, "Miyahon" is a sheikah name, being a famous historical orator from Necluda similarly associated with wisdom, in this case of rhetoric. But, uh, that's not relevant to the current chapter. Whoops, got away from myself there. Ahem.

Aryll from The Wind Waker was originally going to be named Maryll. Hence, the name Maryll, named after Aryll. Marin had other daughters, not only Maryll, but those have moved away per tradition and are the "cousins" that Malon mentioned in a previous chapter.

Marin's family brought various crops with them when they went to the village of Mabe. The idea of Mabe was to attempt to bring various Faronese, Tabanch, and Parapan crops and animals closer to the heart of Hyrule for easy shipping and transport. Some of these things worked, like wheat and trout; others, like hydromelon and voltfruit, did not. Creamy heart soup is a recipe that in-game Link learns in Gerudo Town, so I thought it appropriate to make the dish a Parapan specialty in Delicious in Wilds.

Link rambling when anxious is something that you've already seen a few times and something that you'll see again in the future. Poor girl has a bit of an on-off switch when it comes to talking: either she struggles with saying anything or the floodgates come out all at once.
Marin calling Link the kindest girl she's ever known is a direct reference to *Link's Awakening*. Kindness being a virtue is also a reference to *Majora's Mask*, where you have four virtues referenced: courage, wisdom, power, and kindness.

I don't much like writing chapters where it's just someone telling Link a story. Sadly there are a few chapters like that throughout *Delicious in Wilds* because I couldn't conceive of a different way to divulge the information, and there's something very important about the act of sharing stories anyhow. I hope that I've made the chapter interesting enough despite it being mostly people talking. We'll get back to the adventure soon enough!

I'm being light-hearted, but this chapter took quite a bit out of me. If you've ever experienced loss, I truly and honestly wish you the best.

Next time: Link becomes a ranchhand.

Thank you kindly for reading, and thank you to my beta reader for everything that she has done for me.


Beta reader's comments: This is one of my favourite chapters in the series, perhaps my single favourite. I'm not sure what I can even say about it that isn't just felt. It made me bawl my eyes out, and feel nostalgia and loss for something I never even had. It's special.

Emma. 24 September 2017.
Energising Honey Crepe

Chapter Summary

The no-longer-travelling chef winters in Romani Ranch. The snowy months give the chef much time to think and to feel. When a certain guard from Kakariko chances upon the village of Kotake, the chef faces a decision of destiny.

Chapter Notes

As with some of my other chapters, here's some non-spoilery author's notes that couldn't make it into the author's notes at the end, because I write too much:

Sea lily's bells (Marin's favourite flower), of course, is a reference to one of the Instruments of the Sirens in *Link's Awakening*.

Tantari Desert is named after Tantari Desert from *The Adventure of Link*.

Ingo, the man to whom Maryll nearly lost Romani Ranch through too much gambling, is a reference to Ingo of *Ocarina of Time*.

Takkuri (the monsters that Link and Romani fight) are enemies from *Majora's Mask*, *Oracle of Seasons*, and *The Minish Cap*.

Postman's tendon is the Hyrule version of the Achilles tendon, named after the constantly-running postmen of *Majora's Mask*, *Oracle of Ages*, *The Minish Cap* and *Twilight Princess*.

She does not leave Romani Ranch.

She cannot know if Maryll spoke to Malon and Vish, or if they themselves draw patience from a well as bottomless as her stomach for food, yet somehow she slips between the cracks of having to deliver a letter back to Koume. She prays to whomever might hear her—whatever Goddesses, Three or Seven, that she has forgotten—that Maryll not tell Malon and Vish of her identity.

If Maryll knows.

Vish and Malon give no indication. They call her a friend of the family on Maryll's word and say little else.

She helps around the ranch instead, with whatever the family needs. As the winter ever so slowly begins to die down and the spring ever so slowly begins to bloom, with planting and mating seasons swelling, the blossoming flowers in the field sweetening the air with their saccharine scents, their whispers of *come to life*, their intoxicating promise of new life, the ranch grows busy. She learns to milk the cows without spending the entirety of the day. She learns to collect how to
collect the urine of horses. She learns to gather the eggs from the henhouse without disturbing the
careful pecking order established by the cucco. She learns how to facilitate in calming the horses
during mating; she discovers that oftentimes while the chosen stud takes the mare from behind,
they bring in another horse—a horse the mare knows, a horse from the ranch rather than a stranger
—to caress the mare from the front, to set the mood as Malon calls it and to keep the mare tranquil.
She prefers the afterwards: the cleaning of the horses, the mixing of feed, the soft wordless praise,
the brewing of spring green elixir, the preparation of liquored milk in saddlebags tied to horses'
backs to ferment.

She buries herself in the manual nature of the work over the entirety of winter. Her wounds heal.
Her muscles strengthen. She carries boxes, cleans out stalls, does the lifting of hay, assists with the
plowing of the fields. One morning upon Vish's comment she strips the paint from the entire
outside of the stable then repaints it from top to bottom. In the slow even strokes of the brush, she
need not be herself. She could be anyone. And in that moment her self rests upon the back and forth
of the paint.

She does not speak.

She cooks. Day by day over those months she spends at the ranch, she takes over cooking for the
family. They teach her recipes and she takes them to heart. If she has precious little memory for
anything else, she knows the cooking of food. Curries and risottos, pies and stews, skewers of meat
and the sweetest of desserts. She cooks for the cows and horses as well. Treats of oats, honey and
molasses, of carrot and apple, of steamed fresh vegetables lightly salted.

She has no pumpkins. If she did, she would even them out and roast them as the girl in her
memories—

The girl in the memories of the person whom no longer exists.

Romani poses question after question of her travels, but she stays quiet. Without a hint of
discouragement, Romani merely continues to regale her with stories of her great triumphs
against Them, who visit the ranch every once in a while in a great swarm to take the cows. Romani
enlists her aid. In the afternoons she practises archery with Romani until the two of the tire and she
cooks supper. No longer does Romani stay up at night to use strangers as target practise but goes to
sleep after extracting a promise for more practise against Them on the morrow.

"Finally!" Romani crows over dinner, while Malon asks Romani how her day has
gone. "Someone believes me about Them!"

After Romani has marched off to her room, Malon stops by the kitchen to help clean the dishes and
to thank her.

She says nothing.

Her body weighs with the burden of her mistakes and her sins.

The physical exhaustion of constant work from morning to night keeps her busy. Her muscles ache.
The fatigue keeps the fog steady over her eyes. The instant she lies down upon the mat in the stable
by Ilia's side, her body craves sleep. No time to gaze upon the ceiling and remember wisps of a
stranger's life, or even to consider her own since she awoke in the Shrine of Resurrection.

Somewhere under the surface she can hear the faintest of voices, the blurriest of words, characters
in a language whose name she does not know. Her horse's name. Not Ilia, but Epona. But then who
was Ilia?
She closes her eyes and a dreamless sleep takes her.

When she does dream, she dreams of food and little else, food that she makes herself the day after. She does not experiment. She does not try out something new.

She makes the same foods day in and day out, the dishes and platters asked for by Vish, by Malon, by Cremia and Romani, by Miyu lounging at her feet, by Maryll when one of the others pass on the old woman's wishes.

Maryll has nothing but kindness for her. She avoids the old woman as much as she can yet no one bothers her of it; the rest of the family spends frequent time with Maryll, talking, laughing, playing games, speaking of the family's history, enjoying the time that they have.

She turns away. She cooks. She eats. She sleeps.

She remembers nothing but what happened the day before. She remembers nothing but the basest strenuous connections of the people around her. She remembers nothing of herself.

If she could melt away to become a faceless character in the story of the family of Romani Ranch—a stagehand dressed in black, fit simply to draw the curtains and arrange the props—she would.

She tries, very hard, yet her facial features greet her every morning in the lake.

She takes her existence one day at a time. She awakens early, early in the morning, to take Ilia on a morning ride and to bathe herself in the cold waters of the lake in the nearby forests upon the rise of the mountain. She rides Ilia back to prepare breakfast, oftentimes alongside Cremia, or Malon, or Vish, or whoever has decided to start before she comes, more often Cremia than the rest. She and Cremia work in the easy space of silence. Sometimes Cremia will grip the counter, will lift her hand to her temple, will wince fit to break her concentration, and then she will take step in to take over whatever Cremia was cooking at the time.

She turns out the horses, the cows, the cucco to graze the fields. She assists with the daily routines of eggs and milk and the cleaning of the henhouse and the barn. She weeds and waters the field of wheat. Exactly which she does changes day by day with the needs of the family. She takes on most any task assigned her. When her hands idle she asks, and she asks, and she asks, and they give her work, and she works until her eyes blur and her head spins and her bones ache to the marrow.

At night, on occasion, she observes the aurora over the mountain. At night, on occasion, that murmur of curiosity casts her gaze upon the mountaintop. At night, on occasion, she cleans the stalls of the barn over again despite the lack of need, sweeps the floor of the barn, exhausts herself to the brink of fainting.

She sleeps, and she forgets, in the nepenthe of her own fatigue.

Vish invites her to help with the market. She goes, once. The villagers of Kotake treat her warmly and kindly: mostly gerudo of Parapa and Faron, with sizeable minorities of Faronese hylians and Tabanch rito, and many who bear both red hair and pointed ears. She aids with setting up their weekly stall to sell their wares: elixir and milk, butter and eggs, the last of the wheat from the previous harvest, offerings of foals and calves in preparation for the mating season.

While Malon minds the stall, Vish goes shopping. Malon bids her to rest in a stool at the back to heft up barrels and crates as necessary, to bring out boxes from the back. Malon introduces her—not by name, which brings her to relax her shoulders in relief—as a friend of the family who has come to help out at the ranch. Malon fields any questions and diverts customers instead to the
promises of spring. "You know we rear the very best young cows—and horses—in the whole valley. You might as well reserve one now. We've never had an ill batch."

Still the villagers display a certain curiosity about her. Less of her foreign appearance—Kotake has plenty of hylians, though of the darker complexion of southern Faron than the lighter more common to Necluda and Akkala, according to Malon—and more of the scars and bruises that criss-cross her body as rivers do the land.

The scratches and burns that have permanently marked her face bring her to draw up her hood to avoid attention, but those on her bare hands attract questions nonetheless.

Despite the discomfort of curious gazes, she sinks herself into the process of being useful to someone. Malon thanks her. The customers thank her. She pulls up a barrel of milk for one, pours some into a jug for another, brings up a small box of vials of spring green elixir for one young girl who blushes at her, and a crate for rito who winks at her and tells her much obliged.

When the afternoon grows warm, the marketplace closes for an hour or so. Malon treats her to an icy glass of sweetened milk. "Oh, Link, could you mind the stall for a few minutes? I'm going to check up on my darling."

So she sits at the back of the stall with the glass of milk. It leaves a white froth upon her upper lip that she laps up with her tongue. Passersby converse to themselves. She tries not to eavesdrop; nonetheless she catches snatches of conversation.

Someone planning birthday festivities for a parent. Another concerned about what the more recent encroachment of monsters might mean for the harvest. A recent wedding, and talks of what to gift the brides. The best kind of saddle for a horse with a slightly weaker heart than their siblings. What to make for dinner. A love triangle involving some rito boy who has caught the attention of nearly every girl and boy in the village, evidently more out of a spirit of competition than from wanting a relationship. A merchant passing by with fish from Lanayru and whether they can trust her wares. A travelling musician spotted upwards on the road who might make his rounds to Kotake. Two women discussing rumours of a Divine Beast. The Divine Beast Vah Medoh, she hears, flying around Medli, once more under the control of the city's inhabitants. One of the women worries a bruise onto her lower lip. At the spread of the Tantari Desert; at the family the woman has in southern Parapa, possibly in danger; at the thunder-sand storms that have raged across Parapa for the better part of the last year with no signs of abating.

The Divine Beast Vah Naboris.

Malon finds her sitting behind the stall, her knees tucked up under her chin, her spine curved to the point of pain.

She more senses than sees Malon crouch down beside her, more senses than feels Malon's arm around her shoulders. "Link? Oh, Link, did something happen?"

She shakes her head.

She does not help with the market again.

The winter continues to loosen its hold over the earth. She helps in soothing the studs come to bred the mares; milks the cows and carries the great wooden buckets from barn to house; churns butter until her hands ache; cleans the stalls of droppings and rotted hay; cooks every morning and every night; rises with the downwards curve of the moon and beds herself at the zenith.
On the first night that sees the pond not freeze over with the drop of the sun, Malon catches her before she piles into the hay by Ilia's side. The straw leaves scratches on her bare wrists and weaves into her hair at night. Sitting her down on a stool in the barn, Malon takes a brush to her hair to work out the sweat-caked knots and comb out the hay. Though Malon works carefully, she feels the comb-tugged hair pull painfully on her scalp.

"Oh, Link. You know that you don't have to sleep here in the barn, don't you?"

The brush susurrures through her hair. The crown of her head tingles and twinges.

"...maybe I should hold my horses...ha! Do you like it better here? Or are you worried about your horse?"

The slightest downwards tilt of her chain.

"Oh, Link, are you worried about being a burden on us?"

Her fingers tense against her knees, the nails leaving marks through the fabric of her trousers. The brushing does not slow. The slow rhythm of Malon's hands matches the even breaths of her words.

"You're not a burden, Link." The lulling softness of Malon's voice washes over and over the distant shore. "You think I haven't seen you working harder than anyone else? You think I haven't seen you bottling up your pain? I know you were in mourning, but it's gone past that, hasn't it?"

Despite her biting the side of her tongue and trying to tighten her muscle, her shoulders have started to shiver. Malon says nothing, and then continues to say nothing for a moment so long that the silence wraps its fingers around the hollow of her throat to choke ther, to strangle her, to squeeze the very last and dying breath—

"Oh, Link. I'm probably completely wrong about you. I can only think of about how I was when I was younger." Her spine arches forward, her shoulder blades rising up as if to protect her own throat. She hears Malon humming behind her. Every syllable tightens its hold around her throat with the grace of a song. "...when I was younger, I never talked about myself because I didn't want to burden others. I saw what my mothers were going through after the Great Calamity; I thought it was best if I stayed quiet. I never reached out, because I felt like I never knew what to say, and saying nothing at all was better than saying something wrong.

"I thought that if I lived my life in helpful silence, the people around me would accept me."

Malon's speech remains as soft and lulling as ever, her fingers continuing on the same rhythmic pace that her heart has started to match in its slow and and steady beats. "They wouldn't leave me. When people left anyway, I couldn't understand why. Then I realised..."

Malon starts to unweave a knot of hair, the motions tugging on her scalp. The suddenness of the pain makes her wince.

"I said to myself: 'But that's selfish, too, isn't it? You tell yourself that you won't reach out for the sake of others. You're afraid of being a burden, not because you don't want to burden people, but because you're afraid that they'll hurt or leave you if you do burden them. You can't just be an island.' Well, of course I couldn't be an island: I've never even seen the ocean...ha!"

Malon slackens the knot in her hair to move down further. She senses the vibrations of Malon's lilting singer's voice resonating against the back of her head.

"Oh, but you've had enough about me blabbering on about myself I'm sure. Mm. You know, Link. This world will not fall into place for you, yet if I've gleaned anything about you at all, you don't
seem the sort of person satisfied with letting life slip uneventfully past you. You've an adventurous streak." The stiffness of her back threatens to snap her own spine in half. "Oh, Link, I don't think you could sit still for too long if you tried. What do I know, though? You haven't said a word to any of us." The bones rooting her to the stool ache in her tautened trembling, like a metal coil shivering from being wound too tight. "You don't have to. Oh, Link, you know that we're not going to kick you out, even if you decided to spend all day lying in the straw, don't you? If you do want to talk, and if you feel like you can, you should. That's all I wanted to say. Oh, but listen to me go on and on about my own life! You needn't pay attention to the prattle of an old woman like me...ha!"

She feels Malon smoothing out the locks of her hair, the brush tucked under Malon's arm.

"Your hair's a very pretty colour, Link. I think you'd look nice in a sundress. Well, thank you for all of your hard work. You're welcome here any time, whether you work or not. And we have a spare room in the house I've already prepared for you. Oh, you can sleep out here if you like. Just don't let it be because you think you're a burden." Malon pats the back of her head. "There. That should do the trick. Thank you for letting me disturb your sleep."

As Malon moves away from the stool, she watches Malon take a moment to comb through Ilia's mane and brush a palm over Ilia's forehead.

She can feel a ghost of the velveteen fur Malon must sense in her hand.

"Thanks for taking care of Link," Malon whispers, "from me, and from Mother, and from Grandmother, too."

For a moment Malon stands silhouetted in the doorway to the barn.

"Good night."

Then the door closes quietly behind her, and once again she is alone, adrift.

She withdraws the blue hairband that she has kept with her since the Great Plateau. Holding the band in her mouth, she reaches behind her to collect her hair into a ponytail save for the sidelocks that fall over her ears.

When she curls up beside Ilia, her companion licks her freshly brushed hair. She closes her eyes and rubs her shoulder against Ilia's hoof.

What would Marin have seen in her? What would...

The hay pokes into her cheek.

Maybe if she sticks her head in the straw again, Malon will brush her hair. Maybe if she asks, Malon will brush her hair, straw or no.

Maybe she could ask.

Days turn to weeks. Malon's voice settles through the sediments of her skin to cement into her bones. The mares and cows swell up with new life, and she works ever more diligently to keep the stable clean and warm, to keep the mothers-to-be safe and fed.

Weeks turn to months. She learns of Vish's childhood in Lurelin, of how Vish sends back rupees to his parents every month and visits them twice a year, of how Vish as a lad wanted to see the world and became a courier only to recognise that he did not have in him the violence necessary to walk
those dangerous roads, of how Vish delivered a letter to Kotake on what would have been his last trip and recognised that he also did not have in him the ability to never see Malon again, whom he had seen time and time again on his courier duties, with whom—he recognised—he had fallen in love. She learns of Vish's earlier struggles to assimilate into Faronese gerudo culture. She learns of him learning the harp initially to impress Malon yet taking to the instrument as an art in due time. She learns of Vish's fear of insects and of Vish's delight in cows, his favourite animal; she catches him mooing to them in communion one winter morning, and she learns of how he swiftly adjusts his collar and fixes his hair when embarrassed. She learns of Vish's adoration of the simple pleasures in life: "Nothing like a slice of beef on bread. What more could a man ask for?"

She learns of Maryll's deftness with card games and with horseriding, of how Maryll became the local gambling queen in her youth, of how Maryll once lost the ranch to a man named Ingo in a stupor of drunken betting but won it back the following night. She learns of the tension between Malon and Maryll in Malon's youth, a tension that has tempered to tenderness as Maryll ceased her wilder escapades.

She learns of Malon mostly taking care of the ranch herself as a child, of Malon's younger sisters marrying out of the family and moving away, of the checkbooks balanced and the finances accounted for. She learns of Malon shouldering every burden, of Malon terrified of speaking to people, of Malon more concerned with keeping the dilapidated ranch to the family's name than ever confronting her own feelings. She learns of Malon's realisation in morning—nineteen years of age and without a single friend—that life could not go on. She learns of Malon's steady fight against herself to furl outwards instead of inwards, to study how to communicate with people, to learn to love. She learns of the wide-eyed courier boy who came to see Malon sing every time he stopped by Kotake, of the romantic idealism in his eyes that could take the pond by the ranch and drew it out into an ocean vaster than the horizon, of Malon marrying later than most but no less happily. She learns of Malon's thrice-daily ritual of prayer that Cremia, too, follows. She learns of Malon's adoration of song and of music, of the way Malon tucks her hair behind her ears before she starts to sing, of that same singing that kept Malon's heart beating those first nineteen years of her life. She learns of Malon keeping not merely the records of songs about the ancient heroes—popular as those ballads are—yet also those about the histories of the world. She learns of Malon writing her own tunes, adaptations of stories picked up from book-peddlers, that speak not of heroes but of farmers and herders, of sailors and tailors, of bakers and candlestick-makers. She learns of how gently Malon scoops a handful of earth into her palm to breathe in the fragrance of the coming spring. She learns of the tenderness with which Malon cares for the pregnant mares and cows. She learns of Malon's fondness for baby cucco and of her tendency to jump at thunder. She learns of Malon's worries that she has not raised her daughters as well as she could, of Cremia's anxiety and own sense that Cremia must shoulder burdens to ease Malon's. She learns of how much Malon loves her family; she learns of how much Malon loves the people of this world; she learns of how much Malon loves her cooking.

She learns of Cremia's secret room into which Cremia disappears for hours at a time, which Cremia makes her promise never to enter without Cremia's permission. She learns of Cremia's frequent migraines, worsened in the cold of the winter months. She learns of the way Cremia seems to know everyone in the village—of how Cremia prepares birthday gifts and holiday pies nearly every week, of how Cremia keeps a calendar of weddings and births and celebrations—yet prefers to stay with the cows and the horses, to whom Cremia signs out the stories of her life. She learns of Cremia's love of darners. She learns of Cremia's fear of causing trouble for anyone, of Cremia's worry of bothering people. She learns of Cremia's stutter as a young girl, so anxiety-inducing that Cremia switched to using sign language and never looked back. She learns of Cremia's terror at the sight of human blood. She learns of Cremia's laughter at the sight of Romani's antics, even if Cremia would never let Romani know that. She learns of Cremia's secret anxiety in the dead of the
frost-feathered night when the family stays awake to nurse a Romani fallen ill with fever, "Sometimes I think I need Romani more than she'll ever need me." She learns of Cremia's horse, not named Epona, but Elsi. "Since I wasn't named in the 'ma-' tradition of the rest of the family," Cremia explains, gaze averted, "I hoped it would be all right for me to name Elsi outside of tradition as well."

She learns of Romani, who reads voraciously every book from every peddler who comes by Kotake, who shares with her all of the stories she glean's from the pages in Faronese, in Parapan, in Tabanch. She learns of Romani's love of language, of how many late nights Vish has spent with his daughter teaching himself and her the tongues of the world. She learns of how her own heart clenches when she sees Romani lick the tip of her forefinger to flip the page of the book—some left-to-right, most right-to-left—for reasons that she cannot fathom. She learns of Romani trying her darndest to make Cremia see her as the adult Romani feels she is, of Romani wanting nothing more than Cremia's approval, for everything that Cremia has done for Romani. She learns of Romani's belief in a mysterious entity known as Them comes to abduct the cows, who practises her archery in anticipation of the arrival of Them. She learns of Cremia's assurance that no such Them exist, that the family has never noticed tracks of any sort near the cows, although some do go missing in the winter months. She learns of the very real murder of gleaming-eyed takkuri that roosts on the Satori mountainside which swoop down at night to carry whole cows aloft. She learns of Romani's very real skill with the bow. She learns of Malon and Vish's worry when she and Romani take an excursion to the mountain. She learns of how takkuri nests smell when lit ablaze, and she learns of Romani's whole-body laughter as the girl stands, arms outstretched, amid the inferno, shouting to the heavens that Romani knew They existed! She learns of Cremia, Vish, and Malon's grace in admitting their errors, in apologising for not having believed Romani, and she learns of Maryll's bemusement. "Mm. Well, you should always listen to the young."

She learns, more than anything, their favourite dishes. She learns of Romani's favoured pancakes and voltfruit muffins, of Cremia's favoured honey-glazed calf, of Maryll's old-age-favoured bread soaked in milk, of Malon's favoured clove-spiced buttered apples, of of Vish's favoured blueshell paella—a little taste of home, he tells her.

She learns how they like their meats cooked, when they take their meals, how frequently she should serve sides and what sorts. Day by day she prepares more of their food; day by day she takes over the kitchen; day by day she becomes not merely a guest but a fixture of the home. "The quickest way to someone's hearth is through their kitchen," Malon jokes. "I'd say the quickest way to someone's heart is through their stomach, but you've already got that part down pat."

She says nothing in response. "I can see you smiling, you know."

Months turn to seasons. When the last of the snows have melted into the earth; when she rises and the water in the washbasin no longer reflects a thin skin of ice; when the farmers she can see in the fields behind and beyond the ranch break up the cold soil to furrow the spring wheat; when the sharp-dry crispness of winter's scent gives way to the earthy-sweet wetness of spring; when she feels the northward wind quicken the beat of her heart with the promise of adventure that she chokes down into the thick of her belly; when the spring merchants come from the eastern realms of the land once known as Hyrule, Vish brings home a jar of honeycomb. "Worth every rupee," he says as Romani dances around the kitchen and Cremia beams, "just to see how bright my girls look tonight. Should help with your headaches, too, Cremia."

Cremia's smile fades. "You don't have to worry about me, Father."
"Well then, what should we make with it?" Vish inquires.

While the family talks, the 'family friend of the ranch' quietly moves to the counter and begins to wash out dishes, pots and pans in preparation for whatever lunch they intend to make. She listens to Romani demand pancakes, and she listen to Cremia agree. "Would you mind drizzling them with honey, Link?" Cremia asks of her.

She nods and chalks up a victory to herself: Marin's family acquiesces to her cooking.

"...and, would you mind if I help?" Cremia offers her a smile. "I don't want you to do all the work yourself, Link."

She nods. She whisks cucco eggs while Cremia removes a pan of dried sugar—having been boiled and cooled from sugarcane several nights ago—to add in. Then a splash of cow's milk from that morning’s milking. A pinch of rock salt to temper the sweetness, and a hint of oil. And, last but not least, sufficient flour ground from Tabanch wheat to thicken the batter and two spoonfuls of aerated salt.

"Is it called aerated salt because the rito use it?" she asks.

Cremia raises her eyebrows. "I think that's the first time I've heard you say so many words in one sentence since the first day I met you." She feels the heat rise in her cheeks. She starts to shake her head but Cremia touches her wrist. "No, no. I'm glad to hear you talking. I hope you talk to me more in the future, if you would like to. Aerated salt...is that so? I didn't know it had anything to do with the rito."

"They seem so...air-y...I thought it was..." She shakes her head again and goes back to making the pancakes. Whisking. Whisking, whisking, whisking, until every muscle in her body primes its focus on the motion of her hand. Whisk, whisk, whisk.

She shows Cremia how to make a piping bag as Amali showed her in Medli. She packs in a small amount of the batter; Cremia watches her curiously all the while.

"...trust me," she says, and Cremia nods.

"I do. You're the travelling chef, not me."

She has heard Cremia speak more to her in the past few minutes than she has in the preceding week, and for the first time in that week the corners of her mouth could almost, almost ghost an upwards crescent, to paint the warmth in her chest onto the features of her face.

Food, more than anything, brings people together.

Pouring another splash of milk into the remainder of the batter, she whisks away until her hand feels fit to fall off, then sets the batter aside. She cuts off the tip of the piping bag and proffers it like a religious sacrifice to Cremia.

"Could you...draw a dog's face?" Cremia stares at her. She rubs the back of her head and nods at Miyu, curled up around Romani's shoulders. "I'm no artist." Link has heard Cremia speak, once or twice, of a certain artistic inclination, but nothing more.

"Is that so? I wouldn't call myself an artist either. And certainly not a painter. I'm not that good. Still, if it's for Romani's sake..." Cremia takes the piping bag. Her eyes narrowing in her concentration, her shoulders set as though off to face the most terrifying of Malices with her own two hands. On the cool metal of the saucepan Cremia draws in the face, grimaces to herself, wipes
it off, and tries again. She leans over to watch Cremia work. Slowly but steadily the form of the cat-like dog takes shape. "Would you like me to draw in the ears too?"

She signals Cremia a negative. Instead she lights the wood-fired stove to heat up the pan. The batter sizzles. Once the batter from piping bag has begun to golden, she pours in some of the batter set aside, the batter with a higher content of milk, to make a roughly round face for the pancake-Miyu. With a spoon she curves the edges into a longer, more angular face to fit the dog's snout, and paints the shape of Miyu's long upturned ears. When the pancake dimples, she flips it over for the other side. Miyu's face gazes up at her from the saucepan.

She removes the pancake. While Cremia draws another, she whisks cow's butter together with milk, adding in the milk drop by drop, until the icing beats clean and smooth. Cremia stacks three pancakes on each plate: for herself, for Romani, for Malon, for Vish, for Maryll, for Miyu, and for the travelling chef.

She draws a snout of butter onto the first pancake of each plate, then fits a piping bag with honey. The honey does not flow as thickly as the whipped butter and she squanders more pancakes than she paints, but eventually she manages to figure out how to grip her wrist and constrict the opening of the piping bag just so that the honey squeezes out in a somewhat controlled manner. Upon the pancakes and the white butter, she draws in Miyu's stripes with honey.

Cremia powders sugar over the dog-pancakes' ears and the whites of their eyes. She curves her middle and forefinger to show her appreciation.

Together, she and Cremia present the pancakes. Malon excuses herself to bring a platter of pancakes to Maryll. She and Cremia wait for her return. Miyu barks and wags her tail. She spins the plates on her fingers. Vish lifts up his hands as if expecting them to fall, but no pancakes end up on anyone's head. With her tongue poking out of the corner of her mouth, she flips the plates up and slides them spinning along the table, to Malon, to Vish, to the empty seat for Cremia, to the empty seat for herself, and to Miyu, who snaps up the pancakes and swallows them down.

She holds the final plate in her hand. Romani, sitting in a higher seat than the rest, slaps her palms on the counter and puffs her cheeks out at her.

She grins at Romani.

"Mama, tell Grasshopper to stop bullying me!"

Malon's shoulders shake in silent laughter.

She spins Romani's plate, rotates it about on her finger, and then dances it along the rim of the table until it slows to a stop just off centre of Romani.

Romani looks down at the plate.

She leans inwards to watch the girl's expression carefully.

Romani's pupils dilate, the blue of her irises darkening to black; her nostrils flare out; the colour rises along the brown of her cheeks; her mouth drops open. Romani's head snaps up.

She and Cremia glance at one another with accompanying smiles.

And then Romani bursts into tears, taking her aback. Malon reaches out a hand to comfort Romani
but Romani shakes her off. "How am I supposed to eat Miyu!?" the girl wails. "I love Miyu! I can't eat her! Miyu's the best and how am I supposed to eat her! Waaaaaaaah!"

"Romani..." Vish stands from his seat to cross around the table towards his daughter. "It's only a pancake. Look, Miyu ate hers."

"Buuuuuut what if Miyu thinks that I'd eat her, then!" Romani sniffs. "I don't want her to hate me! Oh wow wow wow I'd die if she hated me! Y'know Miyu has feelings too!" Still bawling, Romani grabs her dog around the waist—Miyu chokes on her pancakes in shock—and holds her tightly. Malon extracts Miyu from Romani's fingers to set the battered dog back on the floor, where Miyu hacks out the choked pancakes.

Cremia has covered her face with her hands. She has no words of comfort, no gestures, no motions. But she does have food. She regards the piping bag on the counter. Quickly she swipes it into her hand. Leaning over Romani, she draws a new face onto the pancake. The ears become tusks, and the snout a single glowing yellow eye. She turns the plate upside down and adds a mouth to transform Miyu into a monster.

Sniffling, Romani stares at the pancake on the plate. "What's th-that supposed to be? It's so...ugly."

"You're going to be the hero," she reminds the girl, "so this is practise. That's the Calamitous One."

"Is it really!? Oh wow wow wow! But Grandma said that they called the Knight's friend called it the bwig bwad bwor! And this looks more like...an ugly thing I'd pretend to be to scare Cremia!"

"Then you'd better give it an all-out attack, to spare the world of such ugliness," she signs, and Romani's squiggle of a mouth opens up into a massive grin.

"Right!" The girl grips the plate in her hands to lift it to her mouth. Opening wide, she shoves all three pancakes into her mouth at the same time. Romani chokes the pancakes down. Vish extends an arm to slap her back but Romani swallows them down. "Pwaah!" Romani gasps for breath. The girl scrambles onto the table to puff out her chest. "I did it! Oh wow wow! I did it! I beat the Calamity Boar! See, Grasshopper!? See, Mama, Papa, Cremia, see—if I could eat the Calamity Boar then I can definitely take it down!"

The antics around the table continue while the family eats. With the tragedy averted, she settles down to eat for herself.

The honey glides smoothly over her tongue. She closes her eyes. The pancakes that Romani asked for—

She's made them before.

Marin loved the sea, and she loved the lake along which she had lived when she was young: Lake Hylia, before her parents took the long journey from Koume to Mabe. Along the shores a flower bloomed, the petals red, the centre gold.

Sea lily's bells, they were called, for the bell-like shape before their blossoming.

Link begged Rusl for an assignment south. Rusl sighed at the schedule of his orders, and at how far Lake Hylia lay from the province of Ordona, "but I can't say no to a lovely lass like you, Link," he said. Not a week later she set out for Lake Hylia. She spent less than an hour in town and the rest of the day along the beach on her hands and knees.
Up to Mabe she rode on her horse's back, with a bouquet of flowers. Sea lily's bells. She asked Marin to close her eyes. The girl did, and stood there with her hands behind her, giggling, swaying her hips back and forth, trying to guess at the surprise.

Link withdrew a single flower from the bouquet to tuck it behind Marin's left ear, smoothing the petals over the side of her head.

"Wait..." Marin's voice trembled, and Link grinned to herself. "...that smell..." Her eyelids fluttered. She gasped.

"For you," Link signed, while Marin pressed her hands to her face and covered her mouth, her eyes sparkling in her surprise, "and enough to plant by the pond. I don't know if they'll grow but—"

Marin tackled her to the ground to thank her, pressing her cheek against Link's, and held her close. "Thank you," she whispered. "Thank you."

She cannot recall if on that day or another Link and Marin made pancakes, but she remembers sitting by the shore. She remembers splashing her feet in the coolness of the water, remembers the voltfin trout that darted through the water, remembers the wheat rolling over the hills.

"I've moved around so much. Kotake, Koume, Mabe. I know home isn't just somewhere physical. I know it's where the heart is. Still, still, if I could just...have one place all my own in this wide world..."

She remembers the sea lily's bells that had begun to bloom around the pond.

"But this...it's like a little piece of home, come to Mabe."

She remembers smiling at Marin, remembers smiling at Marin lifting her hand to the flower at her ear, remembers smiling at Marin smiling at her. "...I'm glad to hear that."

Marin met her gaze, her expression soft as the silken petals of the sea lily's bell. "...and you, Link. Being home means you, too."

Link's shoulders loosened down.

"Link, I know...I know what you've told me about your parents in Ordon. A house, but not a home." Marin rubbed her thumbs over her fingers. "I know I don't really get it all the way, but she was like that, too, before Mama remarried and we moved here." Her gaze flicked down for a moment. She remembers trying to find words that dissolved to dust at her fingertips. "Just—no matter what happens, don't forget who you are, or what you're capable of." Link could see how wetly her eyes glistened. "And someday we'll travel the world together, with Aryll, and with—" The word warps into the wharf of her memories. "—and we'll never worry about this again. And we'll pick out somewhere to call our own. As long as we have a home to come back to, we can travel the world as long as we want." Marin lifted her hand to her mouth. "I guess that doesn't make much sense, does it?"

Link shook her head. "It makes perfect sense. I...I feel like that, too."

"Then, as long as you have me to come back to..." Marin's eyelashes trembled against the curves of her cheeks. "...I'll pay you back for the flower. If you can't have a home in Ordon, I'll just have you make you one here."

She eats the pancakes and hides the tears behind the ceramic of the plate.
Malon and Vish compliment her and Cremia on their talents, both in the realm of art and in the realm of cooking. She blushes; Cremia beams. Suddenly Malon snaps her fingers. "Oh, Link! Vish told you're from Kakariko, is that right?" Malon beams at her. Before she can respond Malon continues on: "I hope you'd like to know that there's a man from Kakariko in the village right now. Said he was just passing by on this way south, but someone recognised his Necludan accent. Let's see...what did he say this name was, darling?"

"Mm. Sounded like a fruit, I think." Vish scratches his ear. "A hearty durian?"

Dorian.

"A hearty durian...ha!" Malon laughs. "If you want to talk to him you should go fast as Sapona, Link."

"I don't think I..."

"Nonsense, nonsense. Oh, I know you're worried about being a big help around here, but you've already done so much for us." Malon gently shakes her shoulder. "It's good to see the people you know, isn't it? I could tell your recognition by that look on your face, you know."

She says nothing.

Malon raises an eyebrow. "...something wrong, Link?"

She shakes her head. "...I'll go talk to him. Thank you."

Her legs have stiffened to joints of wood. A wasting disease. A puppet-plant taken root in her toes that has crept upwards to slowly taunt her skin until she can hardly move.

Perhaps she could become a tree person, like Hestu, and then no one would have expectations for her. Or a dog, like Miyu. She could eat, and sleep, and occasionally chase her own tail. Destiny would pass over her without noticing. She could only disappoint if she relieved herself indoors, and she suspects herself of sufficient willpower not to do so.

She takes Ilia. Down to Kotake. The villagers here and there recognise her from Vish and Malon's stall and greet her. She turns Ilia round and round in the square of Kotake, but she knows not where to search for Dorian.

"Time to head home, right?" she signs to Ilia, who flicks her ears back. "I looked for him, but I don't know where to find him, girl. What more can I do?"

She starts to walk Ilia back up the road to Romani Ranch. The winter has finally closed her eyes, and she can smell the spring all around her in the fields and in the skies and in the people.

And then, faintly, faintly, as though carried on a whispered breeze, she hears the strains of an accordion.

She turns her head. A small crowd has gathered at the far end of the main street, just past where the last of the stalls of the market end and give way to the homes of villagers. Upon Ilia's back she can see over the heads of the people that would normally tower over her.

A blue-feathered rito with an accordion.

Kass.
He sings the Ballad of the Sealing War, not in Eldic, but in Faronese. She marvels at how the lyrics have changed but the meanings, by and large, have not.

When Kass's voice resonates the air with the destiny born of the Calamity, she grinds her anxiety into Ilia's reins. Kass bows low. The passersby applaud; some toss rupees into the case, others various foodstuffs. Kass quiets the accordion and the throng disperses. He shifts his hands on the manuals. The bellows creak as he launches into a practise of arpeggios.

She moves to lead Ilia away. Abruptly the accordion stops and she looks back to find Kass gazing directly at her. He gestures for her to approach; she does so, still on Ilia.

"Well met, traveller!" Perhaps she has forgotten how he originally looked, as she has forgotten much, but it seems to her that his frame has grown thinner since she last him, his feathers droopier, his voice a touch less rich for the exhaustion audible in his timbre, like cords stretched too far. "It has been a while since I last saw you. I am grateful that the Goddesses have carried you safely here." Kass smiles to her as though he had known her all his life, and she stays silent. "I'm grateful, as well, that my suspicions were proven right."

She tilts her head to one side, and Kass plays a chord upon the accordion.

"They say that where there's smoke, there's fire, and where there's slate, there's surely the traveller most appreciative of my music. I see that you travel now with a companion!"

She ogles him.

Kass raises his eyebrows at her. "...I know a song passed down in this region, if you would care to hear it. Perhaps you could unveil its mysteries for me as you did the song of the Thundra Plateau, but even if not, I would adore the chance to share a song with you. Music, like a meal to be eaten, only lives in the moment of its performance."

"...why did you think I would be here?" She swallows down the acidic panic that has begun to foam up the hollow of her throat.

"I saw your companion bearing the Sheik-marked slate you wore at your hip."

She asks. She asks where. With Amali yet in Medli, and Yunobo yet in Darunia, without a sign of either of the Divine Beasts about Kotake, whoever holds the slate—and whoever travels with Dorian—must have the slate that she held for a time. At last, at last Lady Impa has passed on the slate to another; at last the weight has lifted from her shoulders.

Kass packs his accordion. Together they walk. She does not recognise the building—nor can she read the name in light blue and red lettering beside the painting of a horse lying on a bed—but Kass opens the door of the inn for her.

An inn. A set of stairs along the left side of the foyer seems to lead up to the rooms. To the right Kass leads her into a small bar that smells of baked bread and fermented milk. The rito behind the counter wipes a glass and dips his head at them as they enter. A hylian woman has fallen asleep on one of the tables. A gerudo lady nurses a drink over a book. And a sheikah man sits in a corner with his back turned, evidently poring over a map, yet she knows the frame of his shoulders.

Dorian.

With the slate at his hip, with the pouch still on the same belt that she has worn from the Great Plateau.
"Is this not your companion, traveller?" Kass inquires, his voice soft.

She does not reply. She feels her hips moving; she feels her legs swinging; she feels her feet taking the steps towards the man who wears the slate that no longer burdens her.

She touches her hand to his shoulder. Dorian flinches and she recoils her arm back.

He turns his head towards her. For a moment neither of them moves, and then Dorian launches himself so rapidly from his seat that the chair explodes into her gut. The gerudo woman with the book jumps up from her own table to assume a defensive position. The rito bartender loudly clears his throat.

Dorian watches her as if she had transformed into the Calamitous One herself, his face paling, his eyes wide as an hunted wolf's, his shoulders drawn back. The fingers of her left hand close around the hilt of her sword. She does not draw the blade consciously, but through the instinct of the wilds she observes in how he curves his spine, in how he tenses his legs, in how he sweeps the stance of his feet.

"So you found out, did you." His timbre rasps over sandpaper. She holds her blade before her as an aegis. She has not heard Necludan in some time, and the familiarity of the speech shakes her hand. "And you've come to collect. I thought that you left the slate. Don't tell you went crawling back to Kakariko after all. Did Impa put you up to this?"

Her free arm twitches into the word for affirmation but she cannot speak with her left hand occupied by her sword. Instead she watches him.

"This does not concern you any longer, so stay out of my way."

Something wrong. Something amiss. *Something*. Dorian speaks not with the disappointment she might expect from her declination of destiny, but with the desperation of a dance with death.

The bartender clears his throat again. "Uh, I don't know what's going on here," he declares in nasally Faronese, "but you two need to knock it off. No fighting in the—oi! Oi!"

She throws herself to the left before she even registers Dorian's movement. The *thunk* of metal into wood rings on her right; she glances back to see Dorian having plunged a blade of his own into the back of the bar.

The hylian woman drops out of her seat to snore on the bar floor.

Dorian rounds on her, his blade longer and sharper than hers. She hears Kass moving behind her. She glances left and right, grabs the mug from the gerudo lady's table, and chucks it at Dorian's chest.

When Dorian sidesteps left, she rolls forward to slam his leg with the flat of the blade. He leaps upwards; she catches his foot and unbalances him. He lands into a roll and she kicks a table into his path. He takes the blow on his shoulder. Twisting about, he lunges towards her; she readies her knee to deflect him back, but the lunge proves a feint. He whirls himself towards the door.

The doorway where Kass now stands.

She inhales a breath sharp enough to cut the inside of her throat. Dorian charges Kass with the sword. Her right hand grips the lizal boomerang; she spins it low, nearly towards the floor.

When the metal edge cuts into the back of his right foot, she winces for the smear of wetness she
feels as she catches the boomerang in her palm. Dorian lurches forward. The blade comes down.

The accordion case.

With a noise like a wet balloon exploding, the edge of the sword lodges into the case of the accordion. Dorian drops to the ground and she throws her weight onto him. Knees against the back of his thighs, though he can walk nowhere with his severed postman's tendon, her elbow grinding into the wrist of his right hand while she wrests the sword from him. He socks her in the left hip with his free hand. She grabs both of his wrists to pull his arms behind his back until his shoulder blades bunch up under his shirt.

She glances up Kass, who stands there with the accordion case, the front ripped and feathered where the blade pierced through the thick fabric.

Dorian bucks under her, but she holds him firmly pressed downwards on the floor. The bartender squawks at them to leave, for someone to call the guards, for anyone to help. The gerudo lady tells him to stuff his beak.

The hylian woman continues to snore on the floor.

After a few minutes, Dorian goes limp. He mumbles against the floor. Without releasing her body weight, she lowers her head towards him to hear his muffled speech.

"Please. Please let me go. If you care about Koko and Cottla at all—if you care about their lives at all—you have to let me go. Please. Please. I'm doing this for them."

Not the Calamity. Not the burden of the hero. Not Lady Impa passing on the slate for Dorian to calm the remaining Divine Beasts. Something else has happened and she knows not what.

"Please, oh Goddesses, please, I never meant to hurt anyone. Please."

He continues on, his words slurring into one another, and she can feel how he quivers, and how jerkily his lungs rise and fall as if punctured, and how the fear has plunged him to incoherence. She holds onto his wrists with her right hand. Undoing Dorian's belt proves difficult with her single free hand but she manages to open the buckle, to thread the belt over her hips.

Only when she once more senses the warm weight of the slate at her right hip, balancing the red telescope on her left, does Link rise to her feet once more.

Still panting, Dorian lifts his head. His hand flies to his hip. His empty hip.

Once more she bears the slate.

Link gazes at him; the terror in his eyes could make him attack, could make him flee, could make him do anything.

Yet for once she finds the words.

"Tell me," signs Link, that northward wind welling up in her belly no matter how she might try to snuff it out, "what happened."

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Energising Honey Crepe (thirteen hearts, two-fifths stamina vessel) - bird egg, cane sugar, courser bee honey, fresh milk, Tabantha wheat

Author's notes: A wonderful thank you to you, the reader, who has stuck with me thus far in my romp across Hyrule and Link's psyche. And a wonderful thank you to my most marvellous beta reader, Emma, who regularly pulls feats of wonder to keep me on schedule with releases and with proofreading.

Having a family to come to (whether blood or found family, as Link has found in this case) is important. As Marin says in this chapter, you can travel the entire world and never feel lost as long as you have somewhere to come back to.

We've seen that northward wind before, the one that calls for Link to adventure, and we'll see it again. What does lie north of Hyrule anyway? I'm not sure why I associate the northward direction so much with adventure, but this isn't even the first Zelda writing I've done where adventure is correlated to a northward wind.

This chapter was rather difficult to write. Several times in Delicious in Wilds I have referred to Link solely with pronouns to represent moments of lost identity. However, in the vast majority of scenes or chapters like that, Link was (and will be) alone for all or most of the chapter. In this chapter, Link was constantly interacting with people, nearly all of them girls other than Vish. I was tearing my heart out at times trying to keep things straight. I hope that I've mostly succeeded, but let this be a lesson: just because you can do something narratively, doesn't mean you should.

Link needs time to heal. She's not exactly fully healed, but she has something to fight for now that isn't just guilt: a family, both the good and the bad. I didn't want to portray some idyllic fantasy family, instead a well-meaning and functional family that also has its realistic issues and doubts. They'll be okay.

The bit about how horse breeding works is accurate as far as I know.

I mentioned back in the twenty-seventh chapter that one of Marin's mothers remarried. Here you see what Marin was talking about, where one of her biological mothers (since all gerudo are women, according to Nintendo) wasn't really the best person, as happens. Her stepmother was much kinder and loved Marin very much, no need to fret.

At least Link has learned much about Faronese in the meantime, enough to be able to communicate to some extent.

The line about Link being "alone, adrift" is an accidental reference to another fic of mine, adrift. I must've been thinking about it subconsciously due to the Marin connection.

Link has accumulated very many scars over the course of Delicious in Wilds. While Link in Breath of the Wild keeps a pretty face throughout the game, minus the scars that Robbie scars but which the player never sees, I prefer for Link's trials and tribulations to be physically manifested. Though I never actually wrote down Link's steadily growing catalogue of scars, and thus I just sort of remember them as I go. As a
reminder, *Delicious in Wilds* was entirely written by the seat of my pants.

It's rare for people to go toe-to-toe with monsters as frequently as Link does, not to mention her recklessness that has gotten her into trouble repeatedly. As a result she carries with her many, many scars now, certainly enough to turn heads.

And here we meet up with Kass again! As well as Dorian, who has been rather busy during the past few months. Hmmm. Writing Kass's dialogue is always fun to me, and the bar fight is a slightly different kind of action than we've seen before, since Link was purposefully trying to disable Dorian rather than to injure him as she would to monsters.

Up next: Link finds out what in the world has happened while she wintered in Romani Ranch. It's funny that we have a word for spending the winter somewhere—wintering—but not something similar for spring, summer, or autumn.

midna's ass. 25 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This is one of the coziest chapters in the series. It's nice to take a break from adventure and heartbreak both, and just sit back for a while. We also delve even deeper into these characters than we do many others, which is really cool.

The final scene, with Dorian, Link and Kass at the bar, is one of my favourites in the series. It has a really cool atmosphere to it, and is super well written.

Emma. 25 September 2017.
Carrot Stew

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef and the guard from Kakariko discuss the Yiga; the guard's past; and the chef's future. In determining how to best keep the guard and his daughters safe, the chef comes to some personal conclusions.

Chapter Notes

Author's notes that didn't fit in the ending note: This chapter is, in my opinion, one of the worst chapters in Delicious in Wilds. I didn't like writing it and I don't like reading it. There's too much exposition for my liking. That said, there wasn't something else I could really do and this was vital information that Link needed to know, in addition to finally booting Link onwards in the adventure. Kotake is directly on the road from Necluda to Parapa, so it makes sense for Dorian to pass through.

I'm actually quite tired while writing this, so I'll probably forget to mention something and then have to include them in notes in the future.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The bartender kicks them all out and tells them to stay out until they can pay for damages. Dorian retrieves rupees from his satchel; he glances once and again towards the slate on Link's hip, and Kass steps in smoothly to stand between them.

At Dorian's request and Kass's hesitation they take Ilia up to the fields of wheat. For privacy, says Dorian. By some unspoken rule, Kass accompanies them, though he waits at a respectful distance.

"I'll not eavesdrop, traveller," he tells Link, "but I do worry for you."

On the short walk-ride there Link watches Dorian collect himself. He stinks of sweat and exhaustion. Leaning upon his blade-turned-walking stick, his right foot—the postman's tendon severed by Link's boomerang—in the air, he hobbles forward until the budding stalks of spring wheat surround them. She waits for him to speak.

"...if I do not bring the slate to them," Dorian begins, his voice even, level, oddly soft, "they have promised to take my daughters' lives, as they took my wife's."

She has not the slightest response. The words float around her without clinging, as when Lady Impa had told her of her body's identity. Still Link lifts her right hand from the slate. ".I thought your wife was on a journey somewhere?"

"...how was I to tell my children that their mother had perished from my own failures?" Link stares at him. Dorian casts his gaze upon the earth. "Link, have you...heard of the Yiga?"

Between fits of silence Dorian explains, his shame and guilt evident in the alternations of hardened
and sloping features even Link can read, in the curve of his upper back, in how a tremor ripples through his shoulders here and there. The wheat has scarcely grown to their ankles. The wind sways the tips of the plants to rustle against her trousers. Her boots leave imprints in the soft furrowed ground.

She listens to him speak.

When he was younger, Dorian tells her, he believed in the message of the Yiga. They saved him as a child, gave him life and purpose in an age of drifting between villages too preoccupied fending for their lives and their children's lives to care for a youth on the road. But when he travelled the world on the missions the Yiga tasked him, Dorian came to know, little by little, of the truth of their actions.

The blood on his hands of his earlier years stain him yet.

At long last he could no longer bear to continue. On a routine mission he escaped instead to Necluda, as far away from the Yiga's fortress as he could without arousing suspicion, to where a simple sheikah man could blend into the valleyed villages hidden from the eyes of monsters.

When he tried to settle in Kakariko, Lady Impa—younger then—inquired of his past. In the end Dorian told her; he expected her to run him out at best, and to execute him at worst.

"But she told me that people change, and she herself was living proof of that." Lady Impa trusted Dorian and took him in to Kakariko, where he would find shelter from the Yiga. He met a wonderful woman who would become his lover, his wife, and the mother of his children. Dorian lived and served in the village, his skills honed under the Yiga's tutelage serving him well to defend Kakariko from monsters and interlopers alike.

The Yiga found him anyway. It had taken them years and Dorian hoped beyond hope that he could keep his daughters safe—but they found him, in the end. And debts must be repaid.

He begged them to take his life. They took his wife's.

"The first time you came to the village, I...knew that if I did something as important to the Yiga as the capture of the Hero of Hyrule—as the capture of the slate that the Yiga thought could be used against the Calamity—I could bargain for them to never touch me or my daughters again. I...I only wished for my daughters' safety. Believe me, I know that everything I've done was wrong. Yet what is a father to do?" Dorian's voice breaks and fades. He roots his feet to the ground; his body shakes, the makeshift walking stick nearly slipping from the earth.

She says nothing, but waits.

Dorian invited Link into his house. To Lady Impa, he meant a show of loyalty and gratitude for having taken him in; to Link, he meant to use his daughters to gain her trust. During those first few days Dorian tried to take the slate from her upon her first visit. Paya intervened—Link widens her eyes in recognition of Dorian's odd request for the slate—and he did not have another opportunity until she returned from Eldin.

"After your actions in Darunia, the Yiga learned about your existence. That the Hero of Hyrule had returned and that he—" Link does not flinch; nonetheless she can feel the sudden cold of her blood-drained face. Dorian coughs. "—that she; sorry, Link, but the Yiga don't know that much about you, and the hero is traditionally a man—had come through Kakariko. They...they sent for me. They told me to find a way to bring them the slate, or they would take my daughters' lives as well.
"I...I feared that if I told Lady Impa the truth, she would—rightfully, as if I were in her position, I
would not put the lives of two ch-children over the fate of all of Hyrule—not wish to take the
chance. She would surely run me out of the village. Perhaps she wouldn't have; perhaps she would
have protected me. Nevertheless, the risk of leaving Koko and Cottla without a home and at the
mercy of the Yiga..." He shakes his head. "I'm a coward. A coward, a fool, and a liar."

When Dorian failed to take the slate a second time, the Yiga's agent informed him that there would
not be a third chance. Either Dorian would obtain the slate upon Link's return from Medli—or else
assassinate her—or the Yiga would murder his daughters.

As it happened, Link gave up the slate. Kakariko fell into internal turmoil as Lady Impa sought to
reconsider her actions, sought to trust someone else with the slate to fulfill the destiny that Link left
behind, to calm the Divine Beasts Vah Naboris and Vah Ruta.

Link touches her left hand to her chin. Vah Ruta. The first time Link has heard of that name.

Amidst the talks Dorian promised the Yiga he would convince Lady Impa to allow him to become
the new bearer of the slate. His skills in combat and his sharpened wits would naturally give him
talent at activating shrines, at solving the mysteries within, and at finding and calming the Divine
Beasts through whatever means that took. His knowledge of languages—thanks to Yiga training
around the land once known as Hyrule—would allow him to pass through lands beyond Necluda
with ease, and former contacts in Parapa would surely assist with safe entry to the city of Nabooru.

Lady Impa passed him over.

For his own sake, she told him. The Yiga know of his appearance, while they do not of Link's,
except for the descriptions handed down the past century. And the descriptions of the Knight as
revealed by the King of Hyrule, who did not let anyone see Link herself, do not match the girl who
bears the slate. They speak of a man of nobility, tall and strong, with golden hair and sky-blue
eyes, and not of a girl from Ordon, short and skinny, her hair a light brown, her eyes more grey
than bright.

Link can go unnoticed save for the slate on her hip, a slate that she should ideally wear elsewhere
and keep concealed. But if Dorian were to go, the Yiga would know him.

Thus, Dorian had no recourse but to steal the slate at night and leave.

En route to the Yiga fortress he passed through Kotake, and the Goddesses once more threw him
into the dust.

Link rubs the palm of her hand against her chin.

"...what are the Yiga?" she signs, spelling out the Necludan characters of their name. "I know that
they hurt others. I think I might have been attacked by one on the way here. But I don't understand.
Why would they want the slate...?"

"The Yiga...the Yiga worship the Calamitous One. The Purifier, they say." To the Yiga, he
explains, the Golden Goddesses themselves have sent the Calamitous One to rebirth the world
anew. Of late the Golden Goddesses have been more and more forgotten, while the Seven have
risen in prominence; nowadays most every temple takes for the Seven rather than the Three. "Most
Yiga do not believe that the Seven look after our world any longer, if ever the Seven did exist." That
ages ago, the royal family that established Hyrule had lied, had fabricated the story of being
the incarnation of the Goddess Hylia. The family may have known a powerful magic, or may have
had access the fabled Sacred Realm, if such a realm exist, or may have simply amassed an army
numerous enough to conquer the land. But regardless of the source of their influence over Hyrule, no holy power flowed through their veins.

And to punish the people for their sins of worshipping a false Goddess of the Seven over the rightful Golden Goddesses that created this world, the Golden Goddesses sent the Calamitous One to purify the land.

"To usher in the new age of paradise, the Yiga believe the Calamitous One must cleanse this world. And they believe that, if they help in this sacred purification, the Golden Goddesses will spare them." Dorian's breath shakes upon its exhalation. "When I was younger, shunted from place to place, it was so easy for me to agree. The world had turned its back against me, and I turned my back against the world. The world was wicked, its inhabitants cruel. I wished nothing more but than to burn it all down. Or, at least, all of the people who had hurt me so." Link shivers; it takes Dorian a moment to compose. "And yet...then I truly started to look at the world. I...I still think that the world needs to change, for even without the Calamitous One there are evils in this land born of human hands, but to destroy everyone would only hurt the innocent."

Link knows not what to say. The heaviness of Dorian's gaze slides off of her towards the earth beneath them.

"I know how selfish I am. I know how vile. I know that nothing I've done can ever be forgiven—"

And then she finds the words. Not the best words, but words that will have to do. Link gestures for him to look up. When Dorian raises his head, she lifts up her hands. Her arms move with a conviction as wide as the caldera of Death Mountain, as tall at the Pillars of Erito, as vast as the skies of the wilds from which she could never turn away for long. "I'll go myself."

Dorian stares at her.

Link repeats herself: "I'll go. You said that the Yiga either want you to bear the slate or to murder me."

"That's true, but—"

"Then I will go to them myself."

Dorian's head swings from side to side. "This is madness. I cannot let you risk your life like that. And even if you went, how are you going to prove that you're the Hero of Hyrule? And what if they want the slate any—"

"You would hand over the slate that can be used to calm the Divine Beasts and save lives upon lives, but you wouldn't let a single person die?"

Other slates exist: the slate that controls the Divine Beast Vah Rudania; the slate that controls the Divine Beast Vah Medoh. Yet she knows not if those slates can still activate other terminals—being now tied to a Divine Beast—nor does she expect the Eldic or Tabanch people to potentially risk the lives of their Champions to calm other Divine Beasts.

"If you die..." Dorian wipes at his eyes. "...then there's no hope anyway. Only the Champion of Hylia can wield the slate. The Goddesses might choose another to bear the burden; by then, however, it will be too late." He clasps his hands before him; the blade he uses as a cane falls and he nearly goes with it, but Link catches him and rights him again. "If I give up the slate, we will still have hope. Well, not me. Hyrule will still have hope."

"No." Her words have never felt firmer on her fingertips. "There's no such thing as the chosen
"Hero."

"Link. No matter how you try to run from your—"

"I'm not even the only one who can use the slate. In Eldin and in Tabantha I couldn't have calmed the Divine Beasts without the help of others, others who not only could use the runes, but who could themselves activate the terminals." Link senses the curve of her own smile as she speaks. "I don't know why I was chosen, but you know that others can use the slate too. It's never been about me. It doesn't matter if I die."

Dorian hangs limply onto the blade, its sheathe wobbling in the dirt. "The prophecy..."

"The prophecy doesn't mean anything. There's no princess anymore either, and no Calamitous One. We only need someone to calm the Divine Beasts because they are a threat in the here and now, and I don't want anyone to have to suffer." Link pauses. She flexes her wrists, aching after the days of disuse, and then continues. "Someone needs a slate to activate the terminals, but that's it. No special person.

"Keep the slate. Help the Divine Beasts. I'll go to them myself to keep Cottla and Koko safe, if you can promise me you'll pass the slate on."

"Link..." His voice has hoarsened to an apologetic whisper. "If the Divine Beasts continue to awaken, the Yiga will know I failed anyway."

Link shifts her weight between her feet. "Even if the Yiga know, how would they find you? Are the Yiga everywhere? Can't you find somewhere safe? What about Darunia? What about Medli?"

Dorian shakes his head. He no longer knows, he says, the extent to where the Yiga operate, but he could not take such a risk to Cottla and Koko's Ivies. "Anyone could be a Yiga. Do you know how many passing merchants or couriers bear some connection to the Yiga, because no one else wants to take the risk of travelling between villages through countryside infested with monsters? The Yiga are just normal people, like you and I. Yet they've spread rumours that they can commune with the monsters, and the people of Hyrule believe them." Link recalls the goron in the village of Gabora in Eldin, who suspected her of being Yiga, who suggested she herself might have caused the attack, and now her eyes widen in recognition. "Some know about Yiga travellers. Nevertheless, since the Yiga truly do moonlight as merchants and couriers, those who know tend to look the other way. They are convinced no one else could travel the monster-infested roads. And if just one of the Yiga found out where I was..." He cuts a finger across his throat.

Link gazes at him. She holds in her right hand the lives of Koko and Cottla whom she herself has known and in her left hand the lives of those beset by the Divine Beasts that have awakened. The Divine Beast Vah Naboris, in Parapa; and the Divine Beast Vah Ruta, wherever that Divine Beast may be.

"I have friends in Medli and in Darunia. You can be protected. I promise." She rubs the back of her head. "It's not my place to make a decision like this. What I do know is...if the slate's destroyed, then...the people of Parapa and of wherever the other Divine Beast is won't have another chance."

"I know how selfish I am," Dorian echoes. "I know. If you had children, Link, you would understand."

She remembers Amali; she glances at Kass, some fifty paces away, watching carefully of the goings-on.
"Please, trust me." Link does not look away from Dorian again. "Cottla and Koko matter to me, too. I think...I think that if you just told Lady Impa the truth she wouldn't turn you away. And if she does then Amali or Yunobo will take you under their protection. I know Chief Kaneli, kind of. I could get in contact with the elders of Eldin." She pauses. "Amali'd help for sure. I can feel it in my gut."

Dorian raises a hand to the side of his head. "Link, I don't know about this. I'm afraid that any move I make will jeopardise my daughters' lives."

"Then...then maybe we could get tackle the Yiga together. We could go there. You said that you know where it is. Their hideout. Fortress. Whatever you said it is." She bobs her head to herself. "You could pretend to keep me prisoner. Then, when they've accepted us, we could fight our way through." She touches her chin. "No, that would be too difficult. But if we were to sneak in, we could try to get at—the Yiga have some leader right?"

"What?" He ogles her incredulously and she lets her hand fall to her side. Is she playing hero once more? "I...I'm sorry, but I find it...difficult to believe how naïve you're being. Do you honestly think that you could traipse in and defeat the Yiga yourself, that you know better how to sneak in than adult men and women who have trained their entire lives to defend the fortress with their lives?"

"I..." The words die away, and Dorian's head begins its pendulum swing, like ticking down the seconds to a judgment.

"Link...you're highly skilled. More skilled than I am, I would say. But you are not a one-woman army. You could enter the Divine Beasts where no one else could because you happened to have the slate, and—most importantly—because the Divine Beasts were meant to be used by people. The Yiga stronghold is so well-defended that even though people have tried multiple times, they haven't been able to do it because they couldn't amass a strong enough force. To break through the Yiga stronghold would require raising an army."

"If they believe in the Golden Goddesses, then can't I...I don't know." She considers the stories she has heard, from Marin, from the girl who smelled of horses, from the Champions, from the girl with the golden hair, from the travellers she has met along the road. "Maybe I could offer myself. Since I'm the chosen hero, then...then maybe I could convince the leader duel me one on one. Wouldn't that prove on whose side the Goddesses rest? Surely They'd help Their own chosen one? I think I could..." She reaches down to her right leg where the bokoblin in Medli stabbed her through with the head of its spear. Under her boot Link feels the faded wound. Her fingertip traces the thin spine of mountains that marks the scar, but no longer does it weaken her leg. "I think I could do it. Defeat someone one-on-one."

"And by what Goddesses' wish would the leader of the Yiga ever agree to that? They are faithful, not foolish. Even if we could somehow assassinate the head, the Yiga wouldn't suddenly disperse or stop existing, Link. They're people, not body parts that will die out without their head. They have chains of command and they have been doing this for hundreds of years. Again, to break through the Yiga would require raising an army."

Yet Link has had enough to hiding and of backing down. She knows not the virtue of the Goddess Hylia, but she does know that of the Goddess Farore. "Then we will raise an army."

"We—what?" Dorian rubs his eyes and blinks.

Link nods again. "Then we will raise an army. The Yiga are hurting people, too. When we calm the Divine Beasts, when we help rid the land of monsters, then people won't have to fight by
themselves. Then people will be able to travel again. Then we could have a coordinated 

Then people will be able to travel again. Then we could have a coordinated 

effort." She shrugs. "I'm not too smart or too strong so I don't know how this all works. Maybe I'm 

being naive again. But I really do think we could work together. Once...once the Divine Beasts 

have calmed. Once people don't have to think about their own worries and can start looking out. 

And to calm them..." She considers the women in Kotake worried of the Divine Beast Vah Naboris, 

raging in the sands of Tantari even at this very second.

Link need find someone else to carry the slate, for she remains no hero. Yet she need not be a hero 
to escort the slate safely to the Divine Beasts.

Touching her hand to her chin, she considers the span of time her journey would take. "I need to 

head south to deliver the slate to, what did you call it?"

"Nabooru," Dorian answers quietly, evenly, his features firm. He shows Link the gesture—in 

Parapan, he tells her—and she signs the name. "The Parapan capital."

“To Nabooru. I don't want anyone else to be get hurt. Do you know how to write in Tabanch?"

He nods once.

"I'll write you a letter. To Amali, the...I forgot what the big fancy title is." She tugs on her 

ponytail. "But she's the pilot of the Divine Beast in Medli. And she's a mother. She'll understand, 

and she knows me. I'll write you a letter and she'll take you and Koko and Cottla under her wing."

The fear that quickens Dorian's breath and sinks in his eyes starts to manifest in the trembling of 

his frame. "...Link, I can't—"

"Please trust me. Please. Amali will keep you safe for now. I'll bring the slate to the south. I'll 

make sure the Divine Beasts are calmed. The Yiga—the Yiga will know you failed but Amali will 

keep you safe—and then I'll...I'll..." Her own hands tremble now; still Link resolves herself. Alone 
she can do little, but if her friends can pilot the Divine Beasts against the fortress, then the Yiga 
should pose little challenge. "We'll raise an army. With the Divine Beasts there's no way we can 
lose. And when this is all over—" She steps forward. "—when this is all over you can come back to 

Kakariko and I can make Cottla and Koko and you buttered apples again."

Dorian's expression softens. Link clenches her hands.

"I know I'm not wise enough to think through things, and I know that I've been reckless before. I 

know I still think like a kid. But I don't have to be a genius to understand what'll happen if the Yiga 

get the slate."

"...so this is all I can get." He pinches the bridge of his nose. Link waits, and watches him, and 
holds her breath. "All right. All right. I'll put my faith in you, Link, because I have no other choice. 
I hope that this friend of yours will keep Koko and Cottla safe." He clasps his hands together 
before his chest, his pupils darting upwards towards the skies above, his timbre lowering to a 
humble murmur. The weapon he uses as a cane falls. Dorian drops to his knees.

"Goddesses...please do not let my sins wash to my daughters. They deserve none of this. Take me 
if you must, but...oh Goddesses, please..."

When Link hears the tears in his voice, she steps away. Her arms have frozen to her sides. She 
could reassure him again, could tell him that everything will work out, could remind him that 
Amali herself has children and will not let innocent girls perish for anything that their father might 
have done, but her hands can do little but hang uselessly.
"I trust you," Dorian repeats. "I trust you. All right. Link, if you're going to Nabooru, you should keep that slate safe. The Yiga are more numerous around here. Just...keep that in mind, and don't let them find out who you are. I fear that with you wearing that so prominently on your hip that you've already given the Yiga what they need to know to track you. Hylians are less common in Parapa than in Eldin." He runs his hand over his jaw. "Though I suppose they're not that common in Tabantha either."

She has usually kept the slate hidden under the weight of the satchel at her right hip, although that does not excuse her keeping the slate so in the open. Link ducks her head.

"We should go back. For the letter."

"...can you help me up?"

Link saddles Dorian onto Ilia once more. Kass inquires if anything has gone amiss, and she shakes her head but thanks him for worrying about her.

They return to Kotake. Link invites Dorian up to the ranch, for the bartender will not allow him back into the bar of the inn to write the letter, and also because her stomach has begun to gnaw itself open. She invites Kass as well.

"...as payment for the song." She rubs the back of her head. "You said that you knew a song from around here, didn't you? A song passed down...?"

For a moment Kass simply looks at her, his head tilted, and then she can see the grin that spreads his beak. "Why thank you, traveller."

"You should sing for the rest of the family, too. That's why I'll make you dinner. As thanks."

"I will have to pass on the dinner," Kass notes, "but I will certainly sing for you."

Link frowns. "I won't make anything with poultry in it."

"Ah, thank you for thinking of me, traveller. However, I have my promises to keep. Worry not of me." Kass gestures towards the village. "Shall we, then?"

Link, the wounded Dorian upon the horse, and the minstrel with the ripped accordion case arrive on the doorstep of Romani Ranch. Vish opens the door for them.

He stares at the trio on the doorstep. Link smiles sheepishly at him. "...you brought your friends."

She nods. "Well then." Vish looks over his shoulder. "Dearest, we're having company for dinner!"

Link asks if Dorian has brought anything from Necluda. "I suppose you could smell it on me," he remarks as he unfolds carrots from his pack, wrapped in velvet, swift and endura alike. The sight of the orange and green socks made Link in the gut for not having had a chance to say good-bye to Koko and Cottla. But next time she stops by Medli, next time she can greet Amali's daughters and listen to them sing and make for Cree the sanke carp pie she promised, she'll be able to see the Cottla and Koko again as well. "You can take some for your horse as well. Goddesses know that you'll need it."

"How do you feel about carrot stew?" Link inquires.

Dorian shrugs.

She makes stew. Romani insists on trying one of the carrots, crunches down into it, and swears off weird orange vegetables that look like fingers for the rest of her life. Link shows Cremia how to cut
the carrots, and she prepares them, endura and swift both, while Link starts the base of the stew on a stock of flour and butter, thick and creamy for the journey ahead.

No eggs, of course, for Kass's sake, but a spoonful of honey, for Cremia's.

The carrots simmer. She stirs them, and stirs them, and thanks Cremia for all of her help, and stirs them.

"You're leaving, aren't you."

She nods. Cremia bows her head.

"...that's so, then. Would you..." Her fingers shiver. "...please don't forget about us, Link."

With the pressure of tears just behind her eyes, Link sets down her spoon to face Cremia.

"I promise I won't forget." She hesitates. "And even if I do, it will only take me some honeyed pancakes, or a glass of cold milk, and I'll remember you all again, I promise."

"...I hope that you'll always retain that spark of strangeness that makes you, Link." Cremia touches the back of Link's wrist. "And I hope you'll come back." Link dips her head.

The carrot stew finishes.

The table has not enough room for all of them, and besides, Maryll requests to meet Link's guests. They hoist chairs into Maryll's room to pile around her bed and share heated bowls of carrot stew.

"A true fusion of Kakariko and Kotake, I see," Maryll jokes. Malon sits by her side and steadies her mother's trembling hand to spoon in the soup.

They eat, save for Kass, who declines a meal on some principle of his. Nonetheless he compliments Link and Cremia on their presentation and the scent of the soup. Dorian says little, but Link can see how his features lose their tension when he spoons stew into his mouth; that alone brings her to smile and to bring her own bowl up to her mouth.

No matter what happens to her, no matter how many injuries she receives, no matter how many truths threaten to rip her innards from her gut and her bones from her spine, Link can always rely on the comforting warmth of a hot meal, on the refreshing chill of a cold one, on the promise of something delicious.

She drains her portion of soup down in the space of a few seconds and dips her bowl into the pot for seconds. Link estimates herself about to eat half of the stew herself, and Romani the other half. Between them, the girls wolf down some twenty bowls full of soup, until Link's belly aches and her throat tastes of orange.

Carrot stew.

She made this once. On the road. On the road to a spring, a spring of something, for the girl with the golden hair to pray once more. The King had asked Link to ensure the girl with the golden hair spent her days in prayer and fasting in preparation to offer her body, mind, and soul to the Goddesses that might hear her.

Link had nodded and had promised to do her best.

The girl with the golden hair spent every break and every night reading the books that she brought
with her, recording notes in her notebook, speaking out loud of her research to Link, occasionally snapping her head up to ask Link a question and then answer it by herself, thanking Link for helping her out.

On the evening before they arrived at the spring, Link cooked her carrot stew with the flour she brought from the castletown and the carrots Aryll loved so much. Over stew the girl with the golden hair told her eagerly of her research. "I think—mm, this soup's really good!—that I might be close to figuring out how to access the Sacred Realm—is this cinnamon? Oh! I love it!—from the Castle, though I'm not—it's so creamy!—entirely sure—!"

Link grinned. "I'm sure you'll figure it out." She reached behind her to rest a hand on the hilt of the blade of evil's bane, and the girl with the golden hair managed a smile back. "If I can just get that last piece of evidence I'm sure Father will listen to me, if the Goddesses won't."

The day thereafter they visited the spring. The Spring of Power. Before a worn statue of the Goddess Din, the girl with the golden hair knelt in the water. She lit a candle. She waited for the evening breeze to pick up, and then she prayed.

Link stood back in the shadows so as not to disturb her; she could hear the girl with the golden hair begging the Goddesses, begging for the Goddess Din to have mercy on her, begging for the Goddess Hylia to tell her what she need do to access the sealing magic that should run through her veins.

"Please," she pleaded, and the tears in her voice bid Link to close her eyes and consider instead what to make for supper to cheer the girl with the golden hair up. "Am I not a daughter of Hyrule? Am I not worthy, O Our Goddess, O Our Hylia? Please...my father does not believe me when I tell him that no actual records show any sort of sealing magic, except the old legends. Please, Goddesses, if You can hear me, we need You more than ever. If Yours is the prophecy, then grant me Your Wisdom, Your Power, Your Courage. Grant me the Wisdom to understand Your will, the Power to enact it, the Courage to see it through no matter the hardship. For Hyrule I would do anything, but I know not what to do."

Her voice broke. The girl with the golden hair choked on her own tears, suffocating on the weight of ten thousand years of dust. She lifted her arms instead to sign to the Goddesses, her hands carrying her on where her throat had failed.

"If You're out there...please grant me a sign. I don't know what to do. I don't know if I should keep praying when nothing comes or if..." She weeps. "It's no use, isn't it? I have spent years praying and giving myself to the worship of the Goddesses, yet They remain as silent as ever."

Link made her carrot stew once more, this time sweetened with honey that she took from a beehive, the sweltering stings on her wrists and on the back of her shoulders sparking in pain where they rubbed against the fabric of her undershirt. Link poured out two glasses of spring green; she tried to clink her vial against the girl with the golden's hair before downing hers in a single gulp. The girl with the golden hair swirled her own glass around in her hand.

"Link," she said, her timbre softer than the susurrus of the whispered wind through the red-leafed Akkanalan trees, "thank you. For believing in me. I don't blame Impa for not believing me. She's been there since I was young, taught to protect me, taught that I was the Goddess reborn since I first told her I was a girl. But still. Link. Thank you for trusting me." The girl with the golden hair
scooped a spoonful of stew into her mouth, and the blush rose in her cheeks. "And thank you for the soup."

Link comes to when she hears Kass open the accordion case. To Link's own relief, the accordion has not sustained damage, and he withdraws the instrument to settle his feathered hands upon the manuals. "Would you care to hear a verse passed down in this region?" he inquires. "I promised my fellow traveller—" He indicates Link. "—to sing her a song, but I do not wish to disturb the rest of you."

"I live on music," Malon answers, and the rest of the family nods after her. "By all means, minstrel. Sing away."

Romani races around him begging to know what exactly kind of instrument he carries. When Kass extends the bellows, she erupts into laughter at the sound of the wheeze. Yet once he runs his fingers over the manuals; once he adjusts the accordion to its proper position; once he hums a note, her laughter fades into a gasp of awe.

Kass beams at her.

Nearly everyone in the family, Link notices, leans forward to listen. Kass thanks them for allowing him to break bread with them. Once again Kass apologises for any errors in translation, and once again he invokes the Goddesses before he sings.

"To begin, a song passed down in this very region. My apologies if I do not do it justice. Without further ado..."

He sings.

Link closes her eyes to listen.

"When the tip of the peak meets the lights of the seas,

"the great king of the mount shall sing 'neath the trees.

"On his head ride the antlers of knowledge asleep,

"the crowned key to his throne that awaits in the deep."

By the requests of Vish and Malon's family, Kass sings his rendition of the Ballad of the Sealing War, and once more it differs in Faronese than what she has heard of Eldic. He transitions smoothly into other ballads, into other songs, into other histories and legends forgotten by time but kept alive by the careful reconstruction of his research: of the Hero of the Skies, of the Four Heroes as One, of the Hero of the Picori Blade. Fanciful tales of cities in the sky, of people splitting into four, of a mysterious cap that could transform the hero into a miniature being to speak to the fae of the wilds. The evening draws on. Vish takes out his harp to join him, and Malon warms up her voice. She and Kass take turns telling the stories in song, rhymes in rhythm. They improvise and sing together, sometimes on-key and sometimes off, in undulating melodies that sometimes speed away from one another but then always come back to twirl around one another in a dance of delicious discord.

A Kotake-Medli medley.

When the moon has created her zenith, Kass packs his accordion once more, "Thank you all for having me. Take care, and may the light illuminate your paths, all of you." Malon offers him a room to stay; he declines with utmost politeness. "I do not stay longer than needed to collect songs
in any village—I've a promise to keep—but your offer has touched my heart. May others always show you the same kindness you have shown me."

Link meets him at the door. Kass rests a hand on her shoulder, and she looks up at him.

"Your wife has a message for you," she says. She can feel Kass's fingers tighten their grip ever so slightly. "I chanced by Medli."

Kass responds after a moment of quiet; Link can just barely make out the tremor in his timbre. "What does she have to say?"

"She wanted me to tell you...if I see you on the road, to tell you that she and your daughters love you very much."

Kass inclines his head. Link senses more than sees the tears that sparkle in his eyes, and when he speaks again his voice fractures into an arpeggio of warmth. "Thank you, traveller."

"Have a safe trip. I hope that we'll meet again."

He embraces her, suddenly. Wings around her shoulders, her face pressed into his chest, feathers and softness and kindness wrapping her up in the promise of friendship. Link knows not what to do with her hands, and then she does, reaching out her own arms to hug him back. "I hope to see you once more, traveller, and thank you for the meal." Kass releases her. She brings her arms up to her chest as if to trap the warmth. "May the light illuminate your path. Take care of yourself, traveller."

Link returns to the main room. She thanks Maryll for everything that she has told Link. She thanks Malon and Vish for all that they have done for her. She thanks Cremia for being her companion in so much, and she thanks Romani for training her to fight Them and wishes her the best of luck with one day taking down the Calamitous One, and she thanks Miyu for saving Romani's life.

She faces the family. Malon indicates for her to speak; Link bows to them all. "I have to leave. There's something that I need to do, and I do not know how long it will take, or if I'll ever be able to come back. So thank you all again. For everything." She puts her hands together. "I can't tell you how much I needed this time here with all of you. I'll come back if I can, and if you'll all have me. Thank you, and good-bye."

To her surprise everyone rushes towards her at once. To embrace her. To hug her. To take her hands into theirs. To thank her.

Link gathers what little of her things that she has left in the kitchen. Her cooking pot. Her pan. A soup ladle that Cremia insists she take.

Everything else she brought with her remains on Ilia, ready to go at a moment's notice. That curiosity and that wanderlust never left her. For better or for worse, for good or for evil, Link cannot silence the wilds that call her name.

Yet neither can she silence the desire to cook for others, not only for herself.

They all give her something to take with her on the journey, Cremia and Malon and Romani and Vish and Maryll, wheat and trout and milk and dried beef and spring green elixir. Miyu brings her a stick in her mouth.

With utmost solemnity Link kneels down on the floor and accepts the stick in both hands. She tucks it into her belt loop.
"Thank you, Miyu."

Miyu's tail wags.

Before she leaves, Link and Dorian retire to the kitchen. He transcribes her words into Tabanch. He rolls up the letters to Amali and to the chief. She wishes him good luck and a safe journey.

In the doorway Dorian taps her shoulder. Link turns around. The pain in his expression steps her backwards; her heel nearly slips off of the stair and she barely tips herself forward.

If she could make a question mark with her arms, she would.

"...Link, there's one more thing you should know." Dorian inhales. "I don't know how to say this, so I'm sorry. I've never been to Parapa myself and I hope that I'm wrong." Link tilts her head to one side as she listens to what Dorian has to say. "But I've heard from people around their capital...they only allow in women, and the gerudo aren't like hylians or sheikah." Link takes another step backwards. The words crash down upon her ears as a gust of wind that presses her down into the ground. The bones of her legs have melted into carrot stew. "Sorry, I...hadn't meant to startle you. Lady Impa told me you were a girl when you came to the village, is all. And I'm not saying that you're anything but that, but I don't know much of Parapan culture and I don't know how they...define being a woman." He clears his throat and raises his voice. "Anyways, I'm sorry, Link. I—"

"—what in the world are you talking about?" A voice in Faronese. Link and Dorian turn their heads at the same time. Malon. Malon stands on the front step with a basket of laundry at her hip. She shakes her head at them. "Oh, I didn't mean to be rude. Perhaps I misheard; I don't know much Necludan beyond what my darling has taught me. I know you're from the other side of Lake Hylia, and maybe over there you don't learn much about us over here, but that's no excuse for ignorance.

Link keeps her gaze fixed on Malon. Amid the tornado of Dorian's words, Malon has walked in with the eye of the maelstrom on her tongue.

Dorian bows his head. "Forgive me my ignorance," he says in his unsteady Faronese.

"For one thing, Link's a girl as any other, as much as I'm a girl, as much as my mother and my grandmother were women. Not that she needs me to tell her that." Malon smiles at Link, who does not know whether she should faint from relief or smile back, or maybe both at once.

Dorian nods as Malon speaks. Link can hear the murmured apologies rolling off of his tongue.

"But even if you—" Malon taps a finger onto Dorian's chest. "—wanted to come traipsing down to Nabooru, 'course they'd let you in. Just because we gerudo don't distinguish between—" She makes a looping gesture with her hand. "—this sort of thing for ourselves doesn't mean that we're some women's-only club. Though..." She laughs lightly to herself. "...they might not let you in for being such a stick in the mud...ha! Oh, you don't have to look so crestfallen. Do they not have jokes in Kakariko?"

"Of course, ma'am. Thank you." Dorian bows to her.

Malon dismisses his concerns with a nonchalant wave of her hand. "It's all right; you didn't know, and now you do. Now then, you two are going, aren't you?"

Dorian dips his head. "Link, thank you again for the letter...and I hope that one day you can forgive me. I will pray that Cotta and Koko be safe."
"I know so!" Link grins at him. "Amali'll help you in every way she can. People are better than you think they are."

"...I hope so. Ma'am, thank you again for letting me loan a horse."

Malon smiles. "You paid your money. No need to thank me. Be safe." She and Link watch him lope off towards the barn, still limping, still walking upon the weapon turned into a cane. "I hope that friend of yours will be all right, and that he didn't take my stick-in-the-mud joke to heart. Oh, they really don't know much about much in Kakariko, do they?"

"I'm sorry."

"Oh, no, you don't need to apologise for anything. I'm glad I cleared that up for you." Malon squeezes Link's shoulder. "Y'know plenty of folks change their bodies when they don't feel right with them, but that's no different than folks who decide to train their muscles, or lose weight, or trim their hair, now is it? It doesn't make them any less of who they are. Don't you beat yourself up." Link dips her head. "Oh, Link, but don't let me keep you. You should go. You've got a long ride ahead of you."

Link turns back towards Malon, who carries on her lips a smile born of affection and trust, and she blushes. "When the time comes, say hello to the foals and calves for me."

"I sure will." Her expression softens. "Oh, Link, if you're ever around here again, feel free to come by. A friend of the family's a friend of the family forever, no matter how long it's been. More than that: you're family, too. You're our kin, now, in the eyes of the Goddess. You'll always have a seat at our table, and a pot on our hearth." Malon's hands fly to her hips. "Oh, and next time you come back, little lady, you are not sleeping in the stable. You've a bed under our roof, you hear? It's your roof too."

Link blinks at her. Perhaps Malon suspects of how she knew Marin; perhaps Maryll has told her after all; perhaps Malon means something else entirely.

But, whatever the reason behind Malon's affections, Link does know, now, that she has something, something that she has not had since she first awoke in the Shrine of Resurrection.

She signs the word to herself, touching her hand to her cheek, to her eye, to the centre of her chest, a path she has shaped over and over in her life.

When the Divine Beasts have calmed, when the Yiga no longer trouble the world, when she can lay down her blade, she has a house to come back to, a people to call family, and a place to call home.

—

Carrot Stew (eight hearts) - courser bee honey, fresh milk, goat butter, swift carrot, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: So, here's where Dorian is actually a Yiga (a plotline from Breath of the Wild; apologies for spoilers) comes in. Breath of the Wild introduces the Yiga but
then doesn't do much with them. We don't learn much about their motivations at all beyond having split from the sheikah for ? reasons, and they desert their hideout after Link defeats Master Kohga. Really activated my almonds. At any rate, I think it's silly for a single person (even a legendary hero) to be able to waltz into the hideout of an organisation that has apparently eluded efforts over at least a century (we see the Yiga active prior to the Great Calamity in that one memory of *Breath of the Wild*), face down their leader in a one-on-one duel, and basically

So the Yiga believe that the Great Calamity is an act of purification; it's also notable that they feel support in their claims given that the royal family of Hyrule is now dead. Interestingly, Link herself doesn't know much about worship of the Seven; if you've paid attention throughout *Delicious in Wilds*, you'll have noted that Link only really calls upon the faiths of the Golden Goddesses rather than the Seven (Hylia, etc.). We'll explore this more! But my point is merely that just because people worship the Golden Goddesses (also known as the Three) doesn't mean that they're Yiga or bad necessarily. Just that there are different faiths.

The Yiga do in fact moonlight as merchants and travellers. Many people put up with them as necessary evils, and the Yiga do not always attack villages (although obviously many of them do, depending on what it is that's going on or what their mission is). They oftentimes recruit otherwise abandoned children for indoctrination, as they did to poor Dorian. But this isn't the end for Dorian by a long-shot; this is a beginning for him.

Link is still not quite yet seeing her worth. This is something that she'll struggle with for some time. She's ever so slowly getting there. At least she's letting herself have a family for once.

The ballads mentioned in this chapter refer to *Skyward Sword*, *Four Swords* and *Four Swords Adventures*, and *The Minish Cap*.

Kass's song, which I made up, is in reference to the Lord of the Mountain from *Breath of the Wild*. Kass's steadfast refusal to accept food or a home is a contributing factor to him looking so much more haggard than before.

While most hylian and sheikah have two cultural genders (man and woman), the gerudo have a single cultural gender (which is what Malon was getting at). Gerudo are just regular humans though; the difference is cultural, not biological, because the depiction of gerudo in-game sucks.

Sageru's virtue, as I mentioned in a previous author's note, is translated as "blood", or "kin", or "loyalty" because the word in Parapan doesn't have a clear and singular translation to Central Hyrulean; it's sort of like "family" but encompassing friends as well as family. Kin's the closest I could come up with.

The sign that Link forms is the sign for home, as I noted in the very first chapter. It's been quite a while since Link last signed home. But now she has a home. Just like she promised Marin: a home to come back to.

A dear and darling thank-you to my beta reader, Emma, for helping me make this chapter less eye-clawingly awful, and a dear and darling thank-you to you, the reader, for bearing with this chapter. Up next: beginning the journey to Parapa, and Link getting a taste of the character development to come! I think either the next chapter or the one after that contains the quote that made it into the *Delicious in*
Beta reader's comments: I love the author's decision to have Kass be here. His inclusion seems sort of random, but it works so well, sets up a bunch of stuff later, and the intersection of him, Link, and Dorian is a really cool setup in my mind.

This chapter is, unfortunately, mostly a bunch of much-needed exposition. It has to be done, after all! But the author makes it work, and the exposition is, luckily, never boring, and even gives us some cool character moments.

Plus, Link leaving Romani Ranch is a super cool and emotional sort of watershed moment (plus it's just, really sweet).

Emma. 25 September 2017.
Monster Curry

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef journeys from Kotake to the Parapan Canyon Pass. Along the way, the chef receives a gift of monster extract from a merchant and recalls a memory of fighting, both the real and the imagined.

Chapter Notes

As usual, author's notes that didn't fit into the end: As always, a warm thank-you to all of my readers who have supported me this far, and a warm thank-you to my beta reader, Emma, who is always there for me, even when I don't feel much up to snuff as a writer or a person myself. You're all wonderful and I wouldn't be here without you.

Back on the road at last! It feels so good to get back into the adventurous spirit after Link's winter of soul-searching, and I think that Link would be inclined to agree.

She rides south. The moment Link clears the gates of Kotake—Ilia leaps over the fence and lands heavy upon the other side—the laughter that she has bottled up within her comes pouring out of her all at once. Closing her eyes, she lets the sound roll over her, shoulders shaking, stomach curling inwards, and every time she thinks the laughter passed and tries to pull in her mouth she smiles again and laughs again. Her mouth hurts and her belly aches and the corners of her eyes sting with tears nothing short of life.

Alive.

Alive, with the wind at her back and the world before her.

On the road again. Beneath the embrace of the sky above her and the welcoming of the land below her. Every scent upon the horizon, every touch of the wind, every noise of wildlife or the clopping of Ilia's hooves upon new terrain—Link laughs until Ilia runs over a sleeping lizalfos in the middle of the path. She watches the lizalfos arc through the air, screeching at its severed tail, and then plant its face in the dirt.

Link takes blade in hand. In return she trades in her dulled boomerang for one newer and sharper and slightly larger, bearing a more forked design than the last. Experimentally, she tosses the boomerang to observe the wideness of its arc. When she lifts her right hand to catch it, Link feels nothing but coolness across her palm, and then a bolt of pain through her hand. Retracting her arm, she stares at her palm, at the boomerang that has grazed right through the base of her fingers while the boomerang itself clatters in the grass behind her.

Link wriggles her fingers.

Still attached.
Good enough for her. She grins and applies gauze around her hand, then goes back to practise with the boomerang, this time wrapping a leather belt around her palm to protect herself. Link throws and catches it repeatedly until she discovers the trick of sandwiching the flat between her palms to avoid ever touching the sharpened edge. She continues to practise. When she catches it consistently ten times in a row, Link figures out a way to strap the boomerang to her back for easy access, and without stabbing herself in the neck or the lower back.

She tilts it just so, takes a single step, and stabs herself, not in the neck or back, but in the top of her left hip.

Once she has finished falling and then rolling back and forth on the dusty path, Link lurches to her feet and adjusts the boomerang again.

Another step, more careful this time.

She winces as one of the serrated tips scrapes against her jawline. Touching her chin, Link glances between the boomerang she has kept throughout her journey, and the new boomerang intended for a monster twice her size.

Link takes both. She wraps the larger boomerang's blades in gauze and straps it to Ilia's saddlebags.

She rides. In Dalite Forest Link stops briefly to gather fruit, root, and nut. The budding spring coaxes squirrels from their hidey-holes and bears from their hibernations. Deer bleat and snuff through the sprouting bushes. Link feasts on the velvety-soft meat of spring fawn. The wooden struts of Manhala Bridge find her looking back over her shoulder, towards Mount Satori.

Someday she will return. Someday she will listen to Kass sing the song once more. Someday she will puzzle out mysteries of the ancient verse.

But not today.

Today she rides. She passes a village on the waterfront of Aquame Lake and consults the map that she drew from Maron. Link dismounts Ilia by the Digdogg Suspension Bridge to climb atop the nearby hill and check her surroundings. To her right across the water rise mountains of ice, the farthest summit so high into the sky that the peak breaches the clouds.

She cranes her neck up to look at it.

One day, she decides, she's going to climb it.

As Link turns back towards Ilia, a hint of orange on the ledge below her catches her eye.

A shrine.

She inhales. She touches the fingertips of her left hand to the fingertips of her right, then brings both hands to her jawline for a thinking-session twice as intense as her usual.

Link shrugs.

She sets the slate into the face of the terminal, and down she goes.

Somehow Link has nearly forgotten the fun of solving the riddles of the shrines. Twin switches, she notices; a depression and a bright orange orb that should fit perfectly inside; and rotating platforms that close one door or another to obstruct her path to the goalpoint.
A platform in the centre slams upwards at even intervals. She attempts to climb on top to let it launch her into the air only to remember, all too late, that a thing known as a ceiling exists. A ceiling that greets her with a physical smack to the face. Her body curves downwards. Her shoulder blades hit the ground first, and her heels shortly thereafter.

Link coughs.

She sprints out and whirls around to squint at the switches. Link rotates the platform and observes with a light laugh that the new 'ceiling' of the platform contains an opening. She puts her hand on the platform. It slams upwards before she has had the chance to clamber on.

Her arm nearly rips out of her socket.

Link shakes her head at herself. Perhaps the instructions at the goalpoint will teach her the art of patience.

The instant the platform returns to ground level, she flings her entire body weight onto it, landing on the flats of her feet. The platform accelerates her up. The speed lifts her bodily from the floor to transform her—however briefly—into a particularly non-aerodynamic and very hylian-shaped arrow.

As she feels herself slowing down, Link opens the paraglider to steady her descent. She glances downwards.

The goalpoint.

She drifts down towards it. With a mischievous grin Link closes the paraglider and allows herself to drop to the earth. She falls, and falls, and the ground rushes up to meet her, and at that thin final metre-second between the sky and the floor she extends her arm once more.

She opens the paraglider just fine.

But the impact in her feet wobbles her bones into chuchu jelly. Link staggers left and right. Her knees warp this way and that.

Her shoulders hit the floor.

Somehow opening the paraglider at the last second before landing, by itself, does not slow her fall to a safe speed.

She bursts out laughing at her own recklessness—again—for as long as she has hurt no one else but herself she can tolerate her mistakes. Better to learn from her errors here by herself than to repeat them on the Divine Beast.

Link has lived now for nearly a full year in the time after her awakening, and nonetheless she understands so little of the world. And what a world she has to look forward to: to learn it all.

When she emerges from the shrine, a sudden roar of thunder startles her back into the lift. The shrine takes its cue to sink her down into its depths again. When she emerges for the second time, Link observes the thunderstorm that has brewed in her absence and the wind that whips rain into her eyes.

For a second she can make out something like a horizontal lightning bolt amid the darkness of the clouds. Link cups her hands over her eyes, squinting, and then claps her palm against her forehead. She retrieves the red telescope at her left hip.
A flash of bright yellow. Weaving in and out of the clouds like a serpentine scarf billowing in the wind. Link cannot make out the details for the rain that blurs the telescope's lens.

She glides down to where she left Ilia, spooked and shying away from the bolts of lightning that spear the horizon. Link coos and rubs her cheeks and strokes her neck and shoulders and retrieves a carrot from her satchel to calm her companion. Without shelter from the storm, she takes Ilia down the bridge. They walk at a steady gait. Link listens for the difference of her companion's hooves on the grassy ground to her hooves on the wooden bridge, and then again on rock. Beneath the arch of the bridge, she makes out a glow that looks like a campfire. She leaves Ilia on one of the round rock islands that the bridge connects with a blanket over her head to shield her from the rain.

"Don't go anywhere, girl. I'll be right back."

Not a campfire, but another shrine. Link grits her teeth. To her relief the shrine proves to have only a single guardian, a small scout that she dispatches with ease. She takes the guardian's spear. As with the axe she held in the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, the spear only comes alight in the instant of the thrust and otherwise remains hidden in its dull orange shaft. She examines the spear every which way but cannot ascertain the source of its power, nor does her ignorance bother her, but excites her instead at the possibility of one day finding out.

Link returns to Ilia amid the downpour.

"Thanks for waiting for me, girl."

Ilia noses her cheek and Link laughs a light little laugh at the warm wetness of her companion's breath.

They ride onwards over the bridge. A strike of lightning to the cliffside across the water brings Ilia to rear. Link shushes her, soothes her. Yet Ilia does not budge. She steps backwards, ears flicking back, neighing at the lightning. Link squeezes her thighs to usher Ilia onwards.

Ilia shies again. She scrapes her hooves along the ground. Link dismounts her companion to take the reins and lead Ilia on; her companion plants her hooves firm on the rock and does not go on. In the darkness of the thunderstorm, Link can see little for the curtain of rain that obstructs her vision, but she cannot leave them out in the open like a pair of sitting kamonano waiting for the inevitable strike of lightning.

Link turns around to stare at her companion.

And then she makes out the faint noise of two rocks rubbed against one another, and beneath that, the rasp of a breath.

Ever so slowly Link swivels around on her heels. Ever so slowly she can make out the silhouette amid the curtain of rain. Ever so slowly she reaches for the sword at her back.

Lightning parts the darkness for a flash and she can see, clear as her own face in a lake's reflection, the one-eyed monster that towers over her with saliva drooling from its parted jaws.

Link vows to never distrust Ilia again.

She can see the monster's shadow rear back. It roars and in the stench of its breath she can smell rotten fish. A sludging ooze of saliva splatters her face. She chokes on the odor. A thread of the saliva splashes into her mouth. The slimy texture, the stench of decay, and the boil of pus that slicks the inside of her mouth leads her to pitch forward. Link vomits out her guts on the rock.
The massive monster lifts its hand and she throws herself out of the way. The rain at least washes the sludge from her face. Hastily Link reaches into her pack. She scrambles for the loaf of bread Cremia gave her. Opening the bag she crams dampened bread into her mouth and swallows it down until the taste of ooze and vomit clears from her throat.

The monster lurches unsteadily towards her. With its size it cannot move as swiftly as she can. A bolt of lightning once more reveals its form.

The eye.

The single yellow eye enveloping most of its face like a glistening tumour.

But in the dark of the storm Link cannot make out just where to strike, and she has precious few arrows to guess. Still she removes the bow and notches an arrow, walking backwards as the monster lumbers towards her, trying to estimate the monster's head by the pattern of the rain.

She notices the sparks around the metal curve of the bow a second before she fires. Link takes another step backwards away from the void. Suddenly her left foot continues to drop past where the ground should have caught her. Link feels herself falling backwards. With her breath snapping in her throat, she senses the bow skid out of her hands as she scrambles to grip the edge of the cliff. Lightning strikes the bow. She stares at the electricity that bursts the metal to light.

The monster thumps back from the bolt of lightning. Its rear hits the ground with such force that the vibrations nearly knock Link from the slippery rock. She pulls herself up.

Metal.

Metal.

She unstraps everything metal from her. The cooking. The blade. The monster starts to gather itself back to its feet. Thunder booms.

Her eyes widen. A flash of lightning goes off above her head, and Link whips out her slate. Magnesis washes the area in red and pink. She snatches up her cooking pot from the ground.

Her trusty, trusty cooking pot.

When lightning cleaves the skies once more, she memorises the monster's height and moves the cooking pot towards its head. The cooking pot bumps against something squishy-wet. The monster roars and tries to swat it out of the way. Link pokes her tongue out of her mouth as she concentrates on keeping the pot in contact with the monster's eyeball.

Lightning blitzes the heavens.

It strikes the pot, white and hot, and the monster with it.

The electricity spasms the monster's limbs. She swings the pot away and then slams it back; the monster topples and skids over. It slips on the rainwater. She brings the pot down upon the monster's head and lightning strikes the metal yet again.

The monster falls over and off of the cliff. Link listens for the tremendous splash of its massive bulk hitting the water below.

Ilia rears. Link sprints towards her to check her for injuries, but fortunately the Goddesses have left her in one piece. She hugs Ilia tightly, then pauses to run her hands over the saddle and bridle for
anything metallic.

Safe.

Link breathes. She looks out over the thunderstorm that rages on, and then remembers the sacrifice of her beloved cooking pot. With a gasp Link uses magnesis to search for its rounded form. There: nearly teetering on the lip of the cliff. She races towards it, slips, and ends up sliding the last half-metre on her backside.

Despite the lightning, the cooking pot remains whole as ever. She exhales a sigh of relief and wipes her forehead. With that, Link gathers all of her metal items. Swinging her leg over Ilia, she forces her companion into a gallop over the remainder of the bridge to find shelter before the storm fries her as badly as the monster.

Fried monster.

She marvels at how monster meat might taste. True, her previous efforts have yielded nothing but toxic dishes inedible to the stomach and unpalatable to the tongue save for elixirs made of extracting juices, but one day—with care—Link might yet uncover a method to prepare monster meat as food.

Eventually the rain lets up. On the other side, the great arms of the Parapan Canyon Pass welcome her. She enters the narrow pass, entrapped by walls of sheer cliff on either side, sedimented in layers of orange, tan, and light brown. The wind picks up dust and sways the bushes that thrive along the sides of the road. A hare hops out from the bush. Link aims her arrow at the animal's head but then considers the heat that would spoil the meat quickly. Instead she rides on. Around the bend she comes upon a caravan of merchants beset by bokoblins on horseback. Between her bow, her blade, and her boomerang, she bangs the bokoblins to the bone alongside the owners of the caravan.

The rito and gerudo that head the expedition thank her, while their third party—a goron with a tattoo of a horse painted upon his abdomen—hangs back and crosses his arms over his chest. "I can tell by that expression of yours alone that you're expecting some reward for chipping in, eh? Well we're not paying for that," he grumbles, and Link shakes her head, trying to clarify that she does not want any reward at all. The goron ignores her frantic efforts: "And we're taking all the monster parts."

The rito rolls his eyes at the goron and asks Link if she does want recompense, to which she declines. The gerudo woman bows politely to Link. She explains their identity: jewel merchants, carrying sapphire from Tabantha and ruby from Eldin, as well as topaz exhausted of its stores of electricity. "Would you at least take a meal with us, traveller?" she inquires.

Link's entire body responds at once.

They carry goron spice and hylian rice and Link has not had curry for so long that she begs them to have mercy on her. She offers to cook her own portion, to pay for the ingredients; the goron nods and tells her to pay, and the rito and the gerudo shush him. Nonetheless Link insists, and when the rito discovers that she carries with her saddlebags of fermenting milk from Romani Ranch, all talks of whether or not Link can eat with them vanish at once.

Malon and Vish left her, she realises, not only with fresh milk, but also with the liquored milk that she left in the pitcher in the ice-box in the kitchen. She hands over all of her fermented milk. The merchants toast her.
Link retires to the outskirts of the merchants' campfires with a bag of rice, a pouch of spice, and half a litre of water graciously provided by the jewel traders to make herself a proper hot meal. Sitting cross-legged in front of a campfire in a circle of pebbles she has arranged, Link boils the water with the pot lid clamped tightly on the cooking pot to keep the steam inside. Then she adds in the rice and examines her satchel for what ingredients she would like to curry.

Infinite bowls of infinite sorts of curry exist all around her. She need only extend her arm and grab one to warm her stomach.

And for Ilia, of course, Link plans to steam carrots with salt and sugar in the water along with the oats Vish and Malon gave her.

As she rummages through her belongings, she hears a slight cough. She looks up. The gerudo woman—an expert in topaz, as she introduced herself—stands before Link with a vial of violet elixir in the crook of her arm. The merchant arches her eyebrows. "I was wondering. Have you ever tasted monster extract?"

Link emulates the merchant's gestures. "...monster...extract?"

"Made from monsters. You'd be surprised at how it tastes."

Link's jaw drop open and she can feel her mouth flood with saliva. So she can eat monsters after all, and without even finding some special power or magic, simply with the right preparation. Perhaps someday she will discover a similar method to prepare ore so that she can herself try deliciously grilled rock roast.

Smoothing the front of her long dress, the merchant sits down across from Link. "Trust me. You can have a bottle on me if you like it!"

Link could not stifle the grin that brightens her features if she wanted to. She snags the bottle from her saviour with such speed that the other woman flinches back. Smiling sheepishly, she apologises. "...thank you so much," she signs.

The merchant giggles. "You've got an appetite! I can respect that. Besides, fellow food lovers should always help one another out! Wouldn't you say so?"

Link bobs her head eagerly. At the merchant's instruction, she uncorks the vial of monster extract. It smells like danger in a manner that raises the hairs on the back of her neck and cuccofleshes her skin. Something between savory and sweet, with a hint of sweat-like salt and almost the metallic tang of blood, although not unpleasant, more akin to the fresh coolness she tastes while sliding on her shield down the side of an icy mountain, or the exhilaration of the wind pushing up upwards on the updraft of a flame.

"Whoa there!" The merchant waves her hand in front of Link's face. "Don't add too much all at once, champ. Try a little and see how strong you can handle it! And I mean that. Just put in a drop or something. Don't hurt yourself!"

Link snorts. She rolls up her sleeves. Taking the vial in hand, she gently lifts the lid of the pot, and just as gently she flips over the vial to pour out its entire contents.

The cooking pot explodes.

The force of the water and rice sends her physically flying backwards. Her lower back smacks against something long and hard and she flops forward into a bush, her face in the brambles, her
arms sloping over the leaves as her hands hit the dusty ground.

The pot lid lands on her rear and slides down her back to bonk her on the head.

Weakly Link lifts her gaze, her head swaying with its heaviness and how hard she must work to hold herself up. She glances over long enough to see that her beloved cooking pot remains in one piece, even if the pot lid has flown clean off.

The merchant takes a step towards her, her concern evident in the furrow of her features.

Link wriggles the fingers of her left hand to confirm their existence, then flashes her a thumbs-up. She plops out of the bush on her right side. The pressure on her right hand—still injured from the boomerang incident earlier—makes her wince. "I'll...pay for more water and rice and monster extract," Link signs to the merchant, who snrrks back a laugh and then gives in to the fit of giggles.

Eventually, with the merchant's help, she adds in a single drop of monster extract and watches how it purples the rice, even more so than the goron spice could redden it. She pours the rice into a bowl and mixes in the extract and spice alongside steamed and chopped vegetables and a hint of salt. Link holds the bowl in her palms.

She has no spoon but the soup ladle she took from the ranch, yet Link needs nothing else. She scoops the ladle high with curry rice. Her mouth can barely fit around the width of the ladle. Her cheeks bulge with rice.

Link chews. The monster extract pushes her heartbeat higher, her breaths shallower, her limbs quivering with the need to attack or flee or both at once. The essence of danger spilling over her tongue with the heat of the spices and the deliciously uneven texture of rice and vegetable she pushes against the roof of her mouth.

The richness of the flavours clashing and uniting and clashing again as rice more concentrated in spice or in monster extract slides under her tongue. The spice warms her skin with spice and the extract with the instinct of fight or flight.

The instinct of fight or flight, the scent of curry—

She remembers the skyline of Eldin. Standing back to back with the woman in black—with Impa. Link herself wielding that blade just faintly glowing blue, Impa bearing a sword, long and curved, that cleaved the wind more sharply than a korok leaf. Around them in circular waves lay the corpses of monsters. Bokoblins and furnixes, magtails and moblins, chuchu and dodongos, lizalfos and pyrups, a single silver lynel that had taken all of their combined efforts to finally bring down.

Between them cowered the girl with the golden hair, hiding under a book she held over her head.

Impa knelt beside her to examine her for injuries. Link circled the perimeter of the area to check for any other monsters approaching—at least monsters would not run and hide as creatures with any sense of self-preservation—and then returned to where Impa soothed the girl with the golden hair.

"...Your Majesty, as long as you have your guards with you, you have no need of such things."

The girl with the golden hair was shaking her head. "But what if something happened? What if I'm not with you or Link—"

"...and why would that happen, Your Majesty?" Impa exhaled. She took the girl with the golden hair's hands into her own, her fingers nestling between the knuckles. Link began to pick up their
belongings to avoid exerting her presence any more than necessary. "Please, you need to focus on the—"

"—on the sealing magic. I know, I know, Impa." The girl with the golden hair closed her eyes. "I know that that's all I'm good for."

Impa stifled a breath. "Your Majesty, that's not—"

"You don't have to say it for it to be true." The girl with the golden hair stood. With the supplies gathered, Link began to carve into the monsters to take what they could for the brewing of elixirs. Impa had told her to leave them, that they could obtain ingredients of higher quality from the King's suppliers, that they need not brew their own elixirs. Yet the elixirs that have worked best she has brewed herself. Not for her skill, but for her own knowledge of herself. And if Link could focus herself on elixirs and monsters, on talons and horns, on tails and eyes, then she could avoid eavesdropping on matters that did not concern her. Still she could hear the girl with the golden hair's trembling timbre. "It's fine. It...it doesn't matter."

"Your Majesty..."

"Oh, would it kill you to call me by my name, Impa?" Impa recoiled as though the girl with the golden hair had punched her across the face. The girl with the golden hair flinched back herself. "...I'm sorry, Impa."

Impa knelt before her and pressed her forehead to the ground. "Forgive me, Your Majesty."

"You didn't do anything wrong, Impa." The girl with the golden hair rubbed her arms. "I know my own failures. This doesn't matter. Oh, we've got to get back to the Castle, don't we. To report to Father that I've messed up again and that praying at the holiest sites of Eldin has yielded nothing." She lowered her voice to a mutter. "As expected of me."

Impa inclined her head. "...as you wish, Your Majesty."

When they camped for the night, she remembers, she made curry with the goron spice they had purchased in Darunia. Link had stuck by very close to the girl with the golden hair. The noise of the crowd in the marketplace had pushed her hands to shaking as if beset by monsters, but she could not cut down those around her as she could bokoblins; the people of Darunia posed no threat but that which her mind conjured up, a threat of colour and sound and all too much at once.

The exact mixtures of spices differed from that Link eats now from her bowl, the popular tastes having changed in the last hundred years. No monster curry. But she had tasted that metallic tang, that salt of sweat, that flicker of the quickening of the heart and the breath that accompanied the dredging of some instincts from deep within that moved her body and arranged her limbs and shifted her weight and thrust out with the blade and transformed her into an extension of the sword in her hand.

She made curry.

The girl with the golden hair ate. Link sat beside her eating her own while the girl with the golden hair told her of the research she had done in Darunia. Though Link said nothing she listened, and nodded, and smiled at the girl with the golden hair's excitement, at her joy, at the passion with which she spoke of her research. Link did not need to understand a single word the girl with the golden hair said to know of the sparkle in her eyes and the fire in her voice.

Impa's mouth thinned into a line. When the girl with the golden hair finished her curry Impa
gestured towards the sleeping bags. "Your Majesty, we have a long road ahead of us tomorrow. You should get some rest."

"—and so we have five distinct references to a mirror from five distinct sources—"

"...Your Majesty."

"—and though two of the references seem to refer to something compact and the other three talk of something much larger, it seems clear that there's a consistent link between a mirror and this other world, which I believe to be the Sacred Realm." The girl with the golden hair held up an index finger. "Now, one might suspect that these accounts merely refer to the usual sorts of stories about the world beyond the looking-glass—"

"...Your Majesty. You should get some rest."

"—but the world that they describe on the other side of the mirrors appears identical, or at the least very similar within reason! One of the accounts indicates that such a mirror shattered, while the other account, seemingly written far later, indicates that the mirror was passed on to the hero of that age and later to the royal family—"

"Your Majesty." Impa lifted herself to her feet. The girl with the golden hair leaned forward to speak more rapidly, and Link followed suit to listen to her.

"—which makes me think that the entrance to the Sacred Realm may have required a mirror and that multiple of such mirrors existed—"

Impa placed a hand on the girl with the golden hair's shoulder. The girl with the golden hair took in a breath to continue and Impa squeezed her shoulder.

"...Your Majesty, forgive me my impudence, but you should rest. Your father the King wishes for you to do so."

The girl with the golden hair dipped her head. "Of course, Impa."

After the girl with the golden hair had fallen asleep, Link stayed up to clean the plates and tend to the fire. Impa seated herself across from her, and Link kept her gaze trained on the flame to avoid the harshness of Impa's watch.

"You have improved."

Link blinked into the fire. She cleaned her ear out with her pinky finger.

"...I meant that. You've improved since you first drew the sword." Impa folded her hands into her lap. "I am honest about my remarks. As I told you at the beginning that you lacked the proper technique or training, so now I tell you that you have improved. You have yet a long way to go." Her words fell to silence.

Link had nothing with which to respond, only the aching void of not knowing what to say.

"You need to stop encouraging her."

She ducked her head.

"...it will only lead to tragedy."

A cough brings her back. Link looks up. The merchant perks up her eyebrows. "So then so then,
Link grabs her hands and wildly bobs her head, grinning at her in thanks. The merchant giggles and nods back. When Link releases her hands the merchant gestures to the vial of violet. "You can keep the rest of the vial! And if you want more, we're selling them pretty cheap."

Link thanks her again. Plunking puts the cooking pot into her lap, she shovels the remainder of the rice into her mouth and wolfs it down. The cooking pot empties. She scrapes the bottom. Her heart continues to pound long from extract after she has finished eating.

The caravan sets off again. Link travels alongside the jewels merchants, on foot rather than on Ilia, for if she sits now her heart might beat entirely out of her chest. For a few hours she feels like she might die.

But then again, if Link dies now, at least her final meal will have been a delicious one. Not the worst fate of all.

Dying from food: the dream.

Eventually the effects wear off. In the evening the caravan stops for the night. She waves them farewell and rides onwards herself until Ilia tires. Link lets her rest in the safety of a rock overhang while she herself scales up the cliffside nearby. Perched on the higher elevation, she consults her map.

There, on the other side of the canyon: a shrine.

She glides across the canyon beneath the silver crescent of the moon, curved like a white lynel's horn, and lands upon the face of the cliff. Her hands take to the rough surface of the rock, her feet to the fissures and uneven juts of stone. Link climbs. She lifts her head to the stars above.

The stars of which Hestu told her.

And the stars of which Hestu did not, that carry their own stories she may never know, but that she loves nonetheless for their light and for the promise of what she may one day discover.

When she exits the shrine and raises her head up, another glow lifts her gaze ever higher. In the mountains to the north and to the west, rising up over the canyon of Parapa.

A golden spire.

A tower.

Link glides back down to where rests Ilia. She feeds and waters her companion, leads her beside a pond in the crook of the bend, and touches their foreheads.

"I'll be back in a day or two, girl. Stay here."

Ilia whinnies. She nudges Link's cheek with her nose, and Link embraces her companion.

She sets off.

She climbs. She scales. She rests along thin wooden struts set here and there in the cliffside. She fends off the attacks of bokoblins, of lizalfos, of keese, of massive birds that fling their faeces at her, of strange monsters that mix cacti and cats to prickle her hands with their spines.

Every step takes her closer to the tower.

When she reaches the base, her hands stuck with quills, her boots chewed through by monsters'
talons, a fresh cut running across her cheeks and over the bridge of her nose, she curls up to sleep in its shadow.

She rises with the sun. From her satchel she crunches on acorns and tree nuts, feeling the blood rush once more through her veins. She withholds her gloves from her belt loop to protect her hands.

Up she climbs.

Up and up and up.

The air grows colder and thinner. She pauses more frequently to rest, to inhale and exhale, to ease the aching tension in her muscles for lack of breath. The feathered ruff of her tunic and the constant motion upwards keep her warm.

Her left palm flattens against the platform at the top of the tower, then her right arm, and she pulls herself up, the muscles taut on her shoulder blades and the backs of her thighs, until she has sprawled out on the tower.

She lies there with her limbs spread out and the tower cooling her cheek. She feels her chest press against the floor as her lungs expand and contract in the slow cycles of life. Her eyelids flutter and weigh down. Languidly she blinks at the sliver of the sun she can see beyond the pedestal.

She lifts herself. She stands on her own feet. She touches the slate she has worn at her hip and the destiny she has worn around her shoulders.

Someone else tied that fate around her neck, but she tied the belt—and the slate—to her waist.

She looks out at the snowy mountains that crest to the northwest. At the grasslands that give way to desert to the southwest. At the forests that slope down to the sea at the southeast. And to the northeast: at the isolated plateau, and beyond that, at the castle, awaiting her in the silence of one hundred years.

She looks over the land once known as Hyrule, the land that before that must have been known as something else, the land that needs no name but the breath of the wild whose whisper she has known all her life.

She needs neither destiny nor fate nor wyrd to do what she can for the people of this land that she loves. To walk the land step by step on her own two feet. To help as many as she can with the slate that coincidence and chance have given her. To seek communion around campfires; to split stew with strangers; to hear the tales of lives she will never live over a bowl of curry rice.

And someday, to try everything, to taste every dish, to learn every recipe that she can, to strive for all that is delicious in the wilds.

She sets the slate into the depression in the pedestal, and she laughs to the same melody as sung by the wind that calls her name.

—

*Monster Curry* (five hearts) - goron spice, hylian rice, monster extract

Chapter End Notes
Author's notes: The giant boomerangs in *Breath of the Wild* always seemed so unwieldy to me! It seems rather difficult to catch them considering how sharp the edges are, and it looks too big to be able to carry. I mean, some of the weapons in *Breath of the Wild* are laughably oversized. Hell, the Master Sword—which itself must be some sort of bastard sword, and I wish that you had the option to wield it two-handed as you see Link do in the memories—is so ridiculously long that it actually clips into the ground! And you wonder why Link doesn't wear it at the hip as one would with most swords (it's very hard to get a sword out of a hilt when it's on the back unless only the tip is in a true hilt and the rest is in a 'holster' meant to be ripped of and flung away upon drawing the blade).

I faced the hinox on the Digdogg Suspension Bridge in a thunderstorm. As it happened, I had an axe on me and decided to try to use magnesis to slice at the hinox's eye with the axe. Lightning struck the axe, which proceeded to OHKO the hinox. I used a similar trick for the stalnox in the Trial of the Sword, which by the way is one of the favourite parts of *Breath of the Wild* hands-down and doing it on Master Mode took me countless hours but **damn** if it didn't feel good.

"Cuccoflesh", by the way, is the Hyrule version of gooseflesh (also known as goose bumps), and "sitting kamonano" is the Hyrule version of "sitting duck" (named after the kamonano ducks from, ahem, *Freshly-Picked Tingle's Rosy Rupeeland*, which I would not personally recommend to anyone interested in playing other games in the *Zelda* franchise); speaking of which, the line "guay's feet" from a previous chapter was the Hyrule version of "crow's feet", but I'm a dummy who neglected to write it in the author's note for that chapter. As expected of me!

Hey, there's more jewel merchants! You surely didn't think that Glepp and Misan were the only ones, did you? We also note Link's 'icy stare' that Revali mentioned. More than once in *Breath of the Wild* you have people commenting that Link has an expression of one expecting a reward.

Monster extract provides a pounding rush of epinephrine which emulates that sense of danger; this is sort of what monsters feel all the time, and it cues in a memory of Link having fought against monsters. Of course, the memory in this chapter is lifted in part from a real memory in *Breath of the Wild*. In *Breath of the Wild*, monster extract is a gamble that can either enhance the food you make or make it heal only a quarter-heart. I made every single recipe that I give at the end of each chapter, and I wrote down faithfully the effects I got. For this chapter, I received a bonus!

While Impa might seem unduly harsh on Zelda, I would like to gently reminder the readers that she does so with the best of intentions. Of course, the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and this does not excuse her actions.

Throughout the *Zelda* franchise, mirrors or mirror-like items are often used as portals to other worlds. In this chapter, the two accounts that reference compact mirrors are *The Adventure of Link* and *A Link to the Past*, while the three accounts that reference larger mirrors are *Four Swords Adventures*, *Twilight Princess*, and *Skyward Sword*.

Climbing up a tower and activating it to reveal the map was always one of the most
exhilarating moments in *Breath of the Wild* for me. There was nothing I wanted to do more than try to capture that feeling, as well as how Link is ever so slowly accepting her position as the bearer of the slate. In both Eldin and in Tabatha, Link had the ulterior motive of doing tasks for Lady Impa. Now she's bearing the slate to Vah Naboris of her own accord. She's come so far.

midna's ass. 27 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Link is herself again! It feels really good to see her being more like her after an arc of her being very much not that. Her personal growth was good, but what would we do without all of her great quirks and tics and bits of personality?

The trick with the cooking pot and the hinox is really awesome. Delicious in Wilds was what taught me that I could do that in *Breath of the Wild*. It's an important trick for later, too!

This is around where you start to hate Impa. She's a great, complex character who definitely had reasons for the things she did… But that doesn't make her any less easy to hate.

Emma. 26 September 2017.
Chapter Summary

Arriving in Aveil, a town on the Parapan border, the travelling chef waits to gain permission to enter Parapa and remembers something about the chef's past: Ordon; letters; taking the chef's little sister to the castle without alerting the chef's parents.

Chapter Notes

As usual, author's notes that don't fit into the ending box: I name all of the monsters in-chapter here, so I'll just comment that the bari in *A Link to the Past* that split in twain can heck off, especially the ones right next to the fairy fountain in the Palace of Darkness and the ones on the conveyer belt hell-room in Thieves' Town. You know who you are. Damn you! The comment on peahats being an excellent form of travel via hookshots is a nod to the various games in which such travel is possible, such as *Twilight Princess* and *Skyward Sword*. Fun fact: peahats were introduced in *The Legend of Zelda* as "p. hats" which may have stood for "propeller hats" considering their resemblance in their original appearance.

Just as we saw more rito and zora in Eldin than gerudo due to the proximity of Tabantha and Lanayru compare to Eldin (and more gorons and gerudo than zora in Tabantha), so too we see more zora and rito in Parapa than gorons.

In *Breath of the Wild*, the entire Gerudo Desert is one huge hostile desert in which the gerudo live. I think that it's nonsensical at best and a harmful stereotype at worst. Parapa does have deserts in the south, in the rain shadow of the mountains, but much of Parapa is fertile steppe, with lush Faronese forests in the northeast. It's a habitable place. Deserts are habitable too, populated mainly by pastoral and/or nomadic peoples.

The canyon swarms with bokoblins that raid travellers and caravans from on high. Arrows tipped with ruby, with sapphire, with topaz, and even with explosives rain down upon the innards of the mountain pass. With the canyon as the only still-existing route to Parapa—seeing as neither horses nor wagons can float over the snowy mountains on either side of the pass—Link finds travellers few and far-between. Those that she *does* encounter come heavily armed. A zora she passes attacks her in the middle of the road, mistaking her for a Yiga due to the hood that she has pulled over her face. A trader of rock salt from the sea extols the many uses of her wares, from seasoning food "as you have never tasted it before, dear customer!" to exfoliating her skin "for that lovely sparkle and shine that'll make you a hit with all the gerudo ladies, you know!" A great train of ice merchants, transported in crates encrusted with sapphire, bustles with sellswords employed to defend from monsters and Yiga alike. One offers Link a commission after watching her make short work of an electric lizalfos that drops nearly upon her head from a nearby cliff to attack her out of spite. As she slices off its tongue and skewers its soft throat upon the tip of her blade, Link shrugs at the merchant. She assists a gerudo woman and her hylian-sheikah wife, on the road to their hometown,
in escaping from a pack of floating cacti that bear down upon them. And then she continues on.

Not all monsters come in vaguely humanoid shape. She learns of their Parapan names from travellers. Keese lit up the night with their electrifying yellow wings. Link need only watch a traveller's horse fall to the earth as though struck by a bolt of lightning to learn to dispatch the yellow keese first. Giant centipede-like geldarm crawl up from holes bored into the ground to wave with the wind. She comes to know the floating cacti from earlier as peahats; they apparently make for an excellent method of transportation with special hookshots crafted in the Parapan region. A single bomb—or the impact of Ilia's hooves—retreats the peahats into the rock. Floating red monsters that Link initially mistakes for lanterns—bari, as the travellers call them—generate fields of static that zap her through the metal of her blade or her cooking pot. She remembers these from the tower on the wetlands near the Thundra Plateau, but there, months ago, she simply executed her master plan to defeat them: running away at all costs. Here, she notches her bow and cleaves the bari in two.

Both halves reform, throbbing with electricity, into twice the trouble as before.

Link touches her chin, nods sagely, and returns to her previous master plan.

Running away at all costs.

At the end of the pass, within a bowl of the mountain protected by guards stationed around tall pillars that serve as sentry towers, Link reaches the town of Aveil. A massive steel fence laced with topaz to deter monsters runs around the border of the settlement. A similar electrified gate spans over the archway between the pass and the whole of Parapa.

The guards at the checkpoint examine all those who pass through for suspected Yiga activity. The line of merchants and other visitors stretches on. At the front of Aveil sit tables and umbrellas for shade from the rising heat of the afternoon; locals sell food and drink for those queueing up.

When Link arrives at the gate, just over a fortnight since she set out from Kotake, a guard hands her a slip of paper with some writing. She glances down, then glances back up at the guard with an unsteady smile. "I can't read Parapan," she signs.

The guard looks at the paper. "Your number's, let's see, fourteen-oh-one-eighty-seven. Wait until you're called to be checked." She pauses; the corners of her mouth curve up and Link finds she can breathe again. "Relax, kid. No one's going to bite you. Is this your first time in Parapa?"

"...that I can remember."

The guard pats her on the back. "Enjoy yourself. May the Goddess guide your feet."

Link takes a seat beneath one of the umbrellas. Her stomach rumbles. She glances around at the tables of other travellers, some asleep, some fanning themselves, some conversing of their destinations. Her gaze alights on a young girl selling ripened slices of hydromelon.

"Do you take monster parts?"

The girl does. Eltah, she names herself, who picks hydromelon from her own garden to sell during the afternoon and invests all profits back into her garden. She speaks shyly. Link has the impression that Eltah would rather run off to dig herself up to the neck in garden soil, and so she gives Eltah double the asking price.

Eltah's entire expression lifts up all at once. The girl raises her hand to her cheek to pinch herself. Link finds herself laughing a light little laugh; she chips in another red rupee's worth of bari jelly.
Link watches Eltah walk off, arms laden with keese wings and geldarm antennae, to show her sales to an older woman who watches over the young girl from beneath a parasol. Eltah beams and the older woman smiles at her. The latter lifts her gaze towards Link, who steps backwards as the hairs on the back of her neck stiffen, but the woman merely shows her a gesture of appreciation.

Link bites into the hydromelon and the icy sweetness makes her eyelids flutter. She retrieves rock salt from her satchel to sprinkle onto the flesh of the fruit, making the melon all the sweeter by contrast. As she eats, she listens to the numbers called.

"Twenty-one-oh-two-eighty-six!" yells out the guard, a curved rock-hewn cone serving to amplify her voice.

Link considers her own number on the sheet of paper she cannot read. Ye twenty-one-oh-two-eighty-six does not count like fourteen-oh-one-eighty-seven.

She eats, and she listens, and she waits. Link removes the feathered tunic and rolls up her undershirt's sleeves. When she polishes off the hydromelon, she sucks the last of the juice from the rind, then finds another hawker to purchase not a slice but an entire fruit. The afternoon draws on. Sweat drips salt over her skin. The queue piles up. As the sky heats up from the sun bearing down upon Aveil, more and more exit the queue to take shelter in the shade.

Link observes that the travellers tend to wear thin, loose robes that cloak them from head to toe. She considers the possibility of desert, the hot wind and tossed up sand. Still, others wear clothing more casual.

The travellers around her discuss the rising and falling supply and demand of their various wares. They talk of family in Parapa, of the villages and towns to which they return, or of those to which they have never been. They talk of the outside world, of the never-ending torrent around Zora's Domain that blocks their travels, of parties of hunters attempting to bag the lynels that roam the Hebric snowfields, of a new trader's town forming in Akkala. "Akkala?" spouts one zora, folding her arms across her chest. "I don't buy it. Who's gonna make a hub tucked up in a corner like that?"

"You'd be surprised," answers the sheikah who bears the news. "These guys are tough. They're architects by trade, I think, but they could sell back Zola Her own flipper, and She'd call it a steal." The zora glares at her. She lifts her hands in self-defence. "Just saying. I think they're trying to develop the land since no one's lived up there in nearly a century."

"Akkala was," murmurs a goron with a softness that brings the conversationalists to look upon him for the first time since Link sat down near them, "the hardest hit outside of the Great Field. May my extended family be hewn anew."

Some mutter their sympathies; others clear their throats and endeavour to move on. They talk of the monsters more recently sighted out in Parapa, of not even how the stone-closed mountain tunnels and the topaz-electrified gate have successfully kept most out. They talk of how the monsters have migrated over the mountains regardless of the best efforts of the guards, though—as one rito trader of Parapan pottery notes—Parapa appears to have a smaller monster problem than the other regions he has visited.

They talk of the River Sageru that cascades from the icy mountains of the Parapan highlands down through the fertile land below. They talk of the river polluted with water octoroks and other monsters that have travelled down from the snowy peaks. They talk of the prospects for the coming wet season and whether the river will flood enough for them to grow enough crops until the next wet season comes.
They talk of lighter things.

They talk of music styles becoming more popular in Parapa, of the return of the traditional six-stringed harp known as the ages to more frequent use after having fallen out of favour with the last generation. They joke of how the pendulum of culture swings so easily back and forth, of how every daughter wants to do something separate from her mother and ends up doing the same as her grandmother. They talk of the upcoming celebration of the new year; two red-haired sisters—traders of potion and elixir—express anxiety about how long their travels have taken, how they may not return to their home village in time for the spring festival. They talk of weddings and feasts; a sheikah man takes suggestions on what gifts he could present to his gerudo fiancée's family. They talk of family and birthdays; a gerudo woman relays the story of having thrown a birthday bash for a goron friend of hers only to realise all too late that gorons do not eat cake. They talk of all of the foods that they long to try back home—so say the returning—or for the first time—so say the visitors. Here Link listens in closely. She withdraws parchment on which to scrawl down names of foods or snatches of recipes. Even if she cannot write in Parapan, she can approximate names and ingredients in Necludan.

Then a different conversation catches Link's attention: Nabooru, she hears from a woman with red hair and pointed ears, has closed off its borders to everyone not expressly from the city for fear of the Divine Beast and from frequent attacks by the Yiga. "And at such a time, too!" she bemoans to those sitting nearby. "If any of you know some way of getting into the city, I'd be grateful."

A gerudo woman, looking up from her glass of cool voltfruit juice, props her chin up on her hand, then sets the glass down on the table. "What're you trying to go there for?"

The first woman opens and closes her mouth. "Is it so wrong to want to visit a capital once in your life? I long to see the famed golden palace!"

"If you don't have a reason, you might as well wait for this sandstorm thing to blow over." The second woman chuckles to herself. "No pun intended, but I'll take what I can get. It's been, what, a year? It'll calm down. Until then it's a deathtrap. Can't recommend trying to be an Oracle of Farore here. Right, Nissa?"

Another gerudo woman—a green headscarf shielding her head from the sun—chimes in, her voice soft and melodic. "Savah Naboris has been moving ever closer to the city. I...cannot recommend visiting unless you absolutely need to go. They have shut the gates for a reason. You know as well as I that Makeela Riju—" It takes Link a second to infer that makeela means queen, or something close. "—may Her Majesty live long by Her Grace, would never do so without reason."

The woman with the pointed ears slumps backwards in her seat. "Yadda yadda. Look, I don't mean to disrespect Her Majesty, but even a queen's wrong sometimes. She's only human."

"What'd you say about Queen Sariju!?" A woman on Nissa's other side has leaped to her feet. The one called Nissa rests a hand on the angered woman's arm; with a huff she returns to her chair. "Don't let me catch you with Her Majesty's name in your mouth ever again."

Nissa puts a finger to her lips. "She's not wrong. Even Her Majesty is fallible. That said, I do not think she has erred."

"Yeah, listen to your girlfriend," snides the woman with the pointed ears.

The barely-calmed woman springs up again, hands clenched and fists raised. Before the situation can escalate further, a red-scaled zora stands up. He clears his throat and claps his webbed hands. "Ladies, ladies, there's no need to fight. You're all pretty."
The woman holding the glass of voltafruit juice snorts out a laugh. "Pretty dead if you go near Nabooru, that's for sure."

The one named Nissa once more convinces her short-tempered companion to sit. The woman with the pointed ears does not comment on the city instead; she slinks off with her hood pulled up over her face.

They talk of the desert that has spread. Once confined a small portion of the southwest of Parapa known as the province of Tantari, the homeland of a pastoral gerudo people called the Zuna. Yet the Divine Beast Vah Naboris's storms of sand and thunder have spread the Tantari Desert further and further with each passing day. Already the border villages have evacuated, and raids by the Yiga have grown alarmingly more frequent.

An enterprising merchant attempts to use the opportunity to hawk his sand boots, "ideal for waltzing on the dunes!" The glances of others less amused lead him to gather the boots in his arms and sulk like a cat denied dinner.

They talk of the city of Nabooru closing down. They talk of the marketplace having moved outside Nabooru to an almost completely unprotected location out of desperation of visiting merchants to find a place to peddle their wares. They refer to the marketplace as the *khara khara bazaar*, though from the snickers in their mouths and the manner in which one gerudo mother holds her hands over her daughter's ears brings Link to suspect that *khara khara* may not reflect the marketplace's true name.

They talk—

"Fourteen-oh-one-eighty-seven!"

—and Link lifts herself to her feet.

By now evening has washed the sliver of sky visible from the canyon in hues of blue and violet. The orange sandstone cliffs of the mountains wind upwards towards the sparse white clouds overhead.

Link has never seen a bluer sky, not in all of the land once known as Hyrule, than the skies of Parapa. She memorises this exact shade of blue. A tint of the sky that she wants to wrap around herself like the wind.

Someday she will find fabric of that hue, or a method of dyeing, and someday she will wear that sky around her shoulders as she wears the loftwing around her neck.

"Once more: fourteen-oh-one-eighty-seven! Going once! Going twice!"

Link shakes her head, clapping her palms against her cheeks to awaken herself, and walks towards the guard that calls her name; the guard directs Link to a pair that stand before the topaz gate, one holding a clipboard, the other some sort of squirrel-like beastie with a long snout.

The border guards ask her for her name, for her place of origin, for her destination, for her purpose, for all that she plans to bring with her. The volume of questions slams against her like a tidal wave or a too-spicy bite of curry. Link sways back and forth. She can no longer feel her hands attached to her wrists. Her The woman holding the long-snouted creature notices first. She calls over a chair for Link, who sits down heavily, and then the guard asks the questions again. More slowly this time.

Link answers them one by one with a smile halfway of gratitude and halfway of exhaustion. The
long-snouted beastie sniffs all of her belongings as well as everything she carries on Ilia.

When she remarks that she has no destination but the Divine Beast Vah Naboris, the guards exchange glances. "How's that again?" asks the woman with the clipboard, now tucked under her arm.

Link touches her hand to her chin. If she tells them now of the slate, they could either suspect her of being Yiga, or of faking, or of a thousand other possibilities, or they could herald her as a hero when she wants nothing more than to deliver the slate to capable hands that can calm the Divine Beast without her potentially running it into Nabooru as she nearly the Divine Beast Vah Medoh into Medli.

She has no words but three: "Please believe me."

"Do you have some kind of death wish?" inquires the woman with the long-snouted creature; the beastie sneezes.

Link shakes her head. "Not at all. I've got Ilia to take care of, and many promises to keep."

The woman with the long-snouted creature raps her knuckles against her jawline. "I don't know about this."

"Is this your first time in Parapa?" asks the clipboard woman, seemingly less interested in Link's well-being, or possibly trusting Link to not commit suicide against the flank of the Divine Beast, and Link nods. "Steer clear of the sand. Not only do we have a monster infestation on our hands, but you don't appear to have the proper attire. It's hot in the day and cold at night, and if you think you can strip yourself bare to escape the heat, you're asking for a sunburn and a sandburn at once."

Link swallows.

"If you're some tourist intend to going sightseeing to Savah Naboris out in Tantari, you'll only end up injuring yourself and others. If you insist, get used to the desert and hire an expert." The woman with the clipboard peers down at Link from half again her height. "Is that understood?"

She touches her chin again, more firmly this time, as though gripping the bone of her chin could flex more blood to her brain for thinking. "I'll be at a safe distance," Link says. She does not lie: "I have no intention of dying." She grins at them and snaps her fingers. "And I've already gone sightseeing at the Divine Beasts of Eldin and Tabantha!"

The two guards look at one another again. The long-snouted beastie makes a blepping noise as its tongue lolls from its jaws.

The woman calling out numbers yells at them to know the nature of the hold-up. The woman with the clipboard shrugs. "I don't see any rules being broken."

Her companion's brow knits. "...Goddesses help me, all right. State your name, age, and origin one more time for the record, please."

The woman with the clipboard dips her brush into ink and raises her eyebrows at Link, who takes a moment to rehearse her words in her head before she lifts her hands. "I am Link, nineteen years of age—" She does not remember her birthday, but she has been eighteen for more than a year now. "—of Romani Ranch of Kotake, near Mount Satori, south of Tabantha and west of Central."

The woman with the clipboard nods decisively. The guard with the long-snouted creature pins to
Link's chest a folded yellow sheet of paper bearing writing that she cannot read, alongside a stamp that looks like a tiny camel.

"Don't lose that. It's a sign that you've been checked in; it states where you're going, and for what purpose. If anyone stops you and asks, you have to present your pass." The woman with the long-snouted creature narrows her eyes until Link starts to bob her head. "Without that pass, you can't purchase anything from merchants, and people will report you to the authorities. Am I clear?" Link continues to bob her head. "Now go to the waiting area up ahead."

She reaches towards Ilia to stroke her companion's forehead. Then: "...thank you."

"Wait." The woman with the clipboard, tucking it under her arm once more. "You've got anxiety problems or something?" Link pales. "I'm talking about when we were asking you questions. If you're going to start panicking like that in the middle of a crowd, folks might not get what's going on. Tensions have been tight lately with the Yiga on the rise. You get me? Just be careful."

Link nods without understanding, and the woman with the long-snouted creature gestures her forward.

The waiting area up ahead, she discovers, consists of a smaller lounge of tables beneath umbrellas, this time of merchants and visitors checked in and found sufficient to pass. Unlike the gates of Darunia which allow travellers throughout the day, the topaz gate opens only at sunset to let everyone through at once, in that thin sliver of twilight when daytime monsters have ceased their activities and the night is about to start bumping.

Link waits, and waits, and waits some more. The sun begins to sink. Her head droops; she paps her own cheek to keep herself awake. Standing up from her seat, Link smacks her cooking pot onto the table.

The other travellers stare at her as she steps out from under the umbrellas' shade to feel the rocks with her hands. With the evening only having just arrived to sink the world into blue, the stones retain their spring-sun warmth. Link nestles the pot on top of a domed stone. She whistles for Ilia, who trots over to lick the crown of Link's head. Her bangs stick upwards from her companion's saliva.

Link bursts out laughing.

Once she has finished doubling over, she retrieves the milk from Ilia's saddlebags. Link opens the cloth skin and sniffs: not rotten at all, though she detects a slightly sour scent, albeit not the same sourness of spoilage. She shrugs and pours the milk into the pot, alongside flour and butter for a thick stew. Link has nothing in the way of meat, but she does have a vial of monster.

She uncorks the vial. The savory-salt-sweetness rolls over her and she closes her eyes, simply inhaling the elixir for a time. Then Link adds a single drop to the stew. The violet spreads out like a corruption of malice.

If only she could eat the malice with equivalent gusto. Then she could take on the entirety of the Divine Beast herself. Fighting the forces of Malice with the forces of her stomach.

Perhaps then Link could believe herself the chosen hero, on account of her bottomless void of a belly. Perhaps then Romani could take over for her, having a stomach so bottomless that she may even one day surpass Link.

While she waits for the stew to simmer down, Link retrieves a vial of spring green elixir from Ilia's
saddlebags and tips her head to down it. She returns the now empty vial into the wooden box she acquired months ago in Medigo. Link wipes her mouth, then licks the back of her hand to lap up the last few drops, then licks the back of her hand again as though emulating a cat lapping up slightly salty taste of sweat on her skin.

When she realises what she's doing, she slowly lowers her hand, her tongue still poking out of her mouth.

Link lifts the lid a crack and inhales the steam that vapours up from the cooking pot. She wafts it towards her. Already she can sense the cuccoflesh riding the line of her spine and stretching outwards across her shoulders to her hands. Her legs shiver restlessly. Her body curls inwards as the cool evening air chills the sweat that slicks the back of her neck.

Link lifts her beloved cooking pot to her lap. Its curved bottom warms her thighs and abdomen, and she embraces the pot protectively.

Then she regards the other travellers.

"Does anyone want stew with monster extract?" She pauses. "No poultry or meat."

The travellers shift in their seats. Link holds up the pot. She uses the soup ladle—the one Cremia gave her—to scoop out a portion. Tilting her head back she drinks deep, then pwahs out her satisfaction as the heat rises up her body.

A woman sitting not a chair away—Link recognises her by the green headscarf as the quiet one earlier named Nissa—politely holds out a bowl. "If you wouldn't mind...I would have some."

Link ladles the thick purple stew into Nissa's bowl. The woman in the green headscarf brings the bowl to her mouth and sips experimentally. Link can hear the collective held breath of everyone in the waiting area, leaning forward, eyes widened of those that can see, hearts pounding in anticipation of the inevitable judgment.

No one stirs.

Link can hear the roar of her own blood in her ears.

Her greatest challenge yet: convincing others of her cooking.

The corners of Nissa's lips wobble. The crowd leans in.

A smile.

"It's wonderful!" she cries out, and her companion slaps her knee.

"Goddess Din burn me up, that's the loudest I've heard you talk since Miurah proposed, Nissa!" Nissa's companion guffaws while Nissa herself drains her portion of stew. Suddenly everyone has produced a bowl or a cup, reaching their eager hands towards Link.

She gives every outstretched hand she can find a ladleful and then begins upon seconds once everyone has had some. Link leaves the very last portion at the bottom of the pot for herself. Most thank her; some do not thank her vocally but express their gratitude with the grins on their mouths and the joy-angled tilt of their eyes.

For that brief moments beneath the umbrellas the motley medley of merchants and travellers, of the homeward-bound and the starry-eyed, come together as one to taste of the stew. In their smiles and
their glances at one another, in their sharing of bowls and utensils, in the spices and salts passed around, she can see a thousand promises.

And as for Link: she has her own portion, and with the fragrance of danger comes the remembrance of another danger.

Not monsters.

But a fear that reaches far deeper into her gut. A danger that she cannot quell through application of blade.

The faint stirrings of memory do not come in all at once but in snatches. The royal escort to the village of Ordon and her begging to enter the sleepy village alone, to hide from the fanfare, to avoid the swarm of people, to go as quiet as she can.

Her creeping into the house, into that house. The three letters that she had written with hands shaking so badly she could scarcely hold the pen long enough to complete them.

The first letter left on the kitchen counter.

The second for the girl who smelled of horses, and the last for the blacksmith who had given her the ticket to freedom. To the latter she added an apology for having failed the final courier task Rusl set out for her: sword and board to the castle. To the former she tucked in a small carving of wood painted light blue. She had not time to wake them. She had not time to explain what had occurred on her seemingly routine visit to the castletown. She had not time to say farewell.

She would, later. Or she wanted to, at least.

But now the escort had given her less than an hour to do what she must and then return to once again take up her position as she, chosen by the sword that seals the darkness.

She remembers the thunder in her chest, the gale in her lungs, the monsoon in her veins.

She remembers: her sneaking into the bedroom she shared with her sister.

Her scooping Aryll into her arms along with the blanket, along with Aryll's most precious things, clothing and stuffed dolls and the red telescope Marin gave her and the book of birds the girl who smelled of horses gave her, everything that Link could fit into a satchel to carry with her.

Aryll's eyelids fluttering. Aryll stirring in Link's embrace as she crossed the shadows of Ordon with the blade of evil's bane's weight burning at her back.

The movements of Aryll's hands. Reaching up to touch Link's cheeks, to stretch her ears, to poke at her nose.

Herself, pausing at the boundaries of the village, sitting Aryll down upon the cool ground and crouching beside her. Waiting for the drowsiness in Aryll's eyes to fade just enough to catch the spark of recognition.

"Aryll," Link signed, the trembling in her hands shuddering her words, "you're the most wonderful little sister I could ask for."

Aryll rubbing at her eyelids with the heels of her hands. Aryll answering back in the sleepy swaying of a child aslumber: you're the best big sister I could ask for too.
And then.

*I love you big sister!*

And then.

*It's cold.*

Link wrapped the blanket more tightly around her. "*It won't be cold for much longer,*" she whispered with her fingers against Aryll's chest, tracing the words into her sister's pyjamas. "*It won't be cold ever again.*"

"All right, ladies and non-ladies, welcome to Parapa." The woman with the long cone shouts so loudly that the fragments of memory flicker once more into fog. Link looks up to see the woman attentive before the topaz gate. "Open it up, girls! All of you, present your papers, please."

The travellers shuffle forward into a queue. This line proceeds much more rapidly than the last as each traveller presents their respective yellow pass. Link holds out hers in the palm of her hand like a paper bird. The guard opens it, reads it with a squint to her eye, and stamps it firmly in orange. "Welcome to Parapa," she says.

Link beams.

The topaz gates lattice the entrance to Parapa in silver and gold. As she cranes her neck upwards, she watches the crest of the gate open first: a sliver of light passing through the crack, a sliver that cascades downwards into a torrent as the gates part in two.

The bluest sky that she has ever seen stretches onwards beyond the gate, rippling with bands of violet to blue to scarlet with the faint lingering whispers of the day, a last wave farewell before the moon rises for her nightly watch.

Link lifts her hands to the faint scattering of the early stars. Here the stars differ than those of which Hestu told her. Here the constellations warp their angles; here the constellations of the north fade away to darkness; here new constellations she cannot recall with her conscious mind but which her body remembers rise from the southern sands.

Yet no matter the names or the count of the stars she feels their warmth upon her skin, and when she holds out her hands, her palms catch starlight all the same.

As with the smiles of the people around the campfire, seeking communion in the warmth of a meal and one another's eyes.

She could wander the world and find a home wherever she sets down her cooking pot. She need not know a word in a stranger's tongue to know the melodies tasted on their tongue. Every region, every village, every being with their own preferences, with their own tastes, with their own stories conducted in the passing of meal to mouth.

For all of the stars in the sky combined, they shine their light upon the land that rolls in green beneath her feet, a gently sloping flatness across to the seas far on the horizon. From here the view encapsulates an entire world in the cradle of the white-crested mountains and the white-crested waves alike, bisected by the river of their Goddess that carries life in Her waters, curving greenery where She bends, emptying Her arteries into the oceans that surround the land known as Hyrule.

Link bends her left knee. She presses her foot down upon the rock of Parapa, and the heel of her boot clicks against the stone.
"What do you say, girl?" Link lifts a hand to her companion's cheek, to stroke the tender skin on the underside of Ilia's eye with a gossamer thumb. She speaks not with her arms but with the gentle cup of her hand, the soft motions of her fingers, the warmth of her palm. "How many delicious things are we going to find here?"

Ilia pushes her wet warm nose into Link's cheek, and the horse's girl bursts into a laughter that brings tears to her eyes.

So long as she remains alive; so long as she has blood in her veins and breath in her lungs; so long as the sun, the moon, and the earth exist, everything will be all right.

—

Monster Soup (one-quarter heart) - fresh milk, goat butter, monster extract, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: So this is a bit of a different chapter, since most of the chapter is spent Link simply sitting around waiting for the gate to open while she observes the sorts of people who are trying to Parapa.

Proper attire for going out into the desert: light, loose, and long robes that cover your body entirely. They shield you from the sand and the sun, and the loose robes keep air circulating over your body to cool you off. Contrary to Breath of the Wild, going out mostly-naked is a surefire way to get yourself seriously injured if not killed.

The border settlement of Aveil is named after the gerudo woman whom Nabooru leaves in charge in Ocarina of Time and her Terminan counterpart, Aveil, pirate queen of the Great Bay in Majora's Mask.

We find out in this chapter that the city of Nabooru is closed to outsiders. That'll be relevant later!

The comment about the zora goddesss Zola's flippers is a reference to the zora flippers that Link can obtain in a variety of games, including A Link to the Past, Link's Awakening, Oracle of Ages and Oracle of Seasons, The Minish Cap, and A Link Between Worlds.

The "Great Field" is another name for the Hyrule Field, since different regions of Hyrule can refer to things differently.

The numbers called out by the guards reference dates. The number called before Link (21 February 1976) is the release of The Legend of Zelda. The number assigned Link (14 January 1987) is the release of The Adventure of Link.

"Makeela Riju" is how Riju signs her name in Breath of the Wild, so I extrapolated that "makeela" is her title. Riju also prefers to be called Riju, but some of her bigger fans like the woman here elevate her to godly status by calling her Sariju.

The joke about Kara Kara Bazaar ("khara khara") is just an amusing bilingual throw-
in. Given how much the gerudo in-game are racially fetishised caricatures of Middle Eastern women, particularly Arab women, one would have expected the writers of *Breath of the Wild* to at least make sure that their major named gerudo settlement outside of Gerudo Town wouldn't mean something *rude* in the language of the people they're fetishising, but that would mean that they'd have to do the tiniest bit of research instead of just drawing a group of sexualised brown women whose entire culture is built on them having to seek foreign husbands whom they literally refer to as *mates*. Really makes me think. Really activates my almonds. Ahem.

Link really does consider Romani Ranch her home. And yes, it's been over a year!

The memory might seem a bit confusing. We'll go more in-depth later, but essentially, after acquiring the Master Sword, Link goes to retrieve her little sister Aryll to bring her back to the castle.

The Zuna (pastoral people) are named after the Zuna who dwell in the Desert of Doubt in *Four Swords Adventures*.

The sand boot merchant, of course, is a reference to the sidequest wherein Link can obtain sand boots and snow boots.

The city of Nabooru, of course, is named after the Sage of Spirit from *Ocarina of Time* as well as the town of the same name from *The Adventure of Link*.

As always, a warm thanks to my marvellous and wonderful beta reader Emma for being patient with me as I frantically cross-referenced twenty other chapters to ensure that I haven't been tripping up my own world-building! And thank you to you, the reader, who has stuck with me all this way.

Next time: Link's first foray into Parapa—and our (not really first) look at Urbosa. As a reminder to the reader, in *Delicious in Wilds*, Urbosa is two years older than Zelda (i.e. when Zelda is eighteen, Urbosa is twenty).

midna's ass. 27 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This is such a cool chapter to me. Its pacing and setup are so completely unlike pretty much anything else in the entire series. How often is a chapter comprised mostly of dialogue, but also features mostly characters who don't recur? Not many - maybe not any, outside of this one. Plus this chapter has some really great bits of dialogue. As a whole it's a very unique bit of Delicious in Wilds, which is something I really enjoy.

This chapter's memory is really sweet and, due to stuff that happens later, made me cry on reread. Aryll deserved better.

Emma. 27 September 2017.
Chapter Summary

Exiting Aveil, the travelling chef begins the journey through Parapa and reminisces about the previous Champion of Sageru.

Chapter Notes

As usual, notes that can't fit into the ending box: By the way, while I describe some characters as wearing headwear or headscarves, it's notable that those are for protection against the sun and as traditional in some parts of Parapa (similar to say headscarves worn by certain Eastern European groups) and is not meant to be reflective of real-world religious beliefs (i.e. those worn by some Jewish and Muslim women, etc.), except that such traditions could have sprung from somewhat similar circumstances.

The bows with strange mechanisms mentioned in this chapter are in reference to those such as the duplex bows, which let you fire two shots with a single arrow (a savage lynel bow with five-shot burst can loose fire shots with a single arrow). The radiant shield is an in-game item, although here I have also included elements of the mirror shields from A Link to the Past, Link's Awakening, Ocarina of Time, Majora's Mask, Oracle of Ages and Oracle of Seasons, The Wind Waker, and The Minish Cap. It's important to note that, while in Breath of the Wild, you can parry any attack with a simple wooden pot lid including guardian lasers, I find that silly. Parrying guardian lasers required a specific kind of shield with a mirrored surface inlaid with diamond, which is capable of absorbing the laser energy (diamonds are utilised to craft in-game items that provide anti-guardian defense, after all). Because the mirror shield is associated with the gerudo in Ocarina of Time, I opted to give the making of such shields to the gerudo, who are known to creatively work with jewels in Breath of the Wild.

Scimitars are indeed intended for use on horseback rather than in hand-to-hand combat, at least as far as I know. The lizalfos mask and pheromones are in reference to the lizalfos mask that Link can purchase in-game.

Oh, right, the River Sageru mentioned in the previous chapter is a complete fabrication, but it's akin to the River Hylia and the Zora River from Breath of the Wild. It runs from the snows of the highlands down through Parapa into the ocean. Speaking of the ocean, instead of having insurmountable mountains that Link can't climb for no reason, I expanded the size of Hyrule and opted to make Hyrule its own continent. It's surrounded by water, except to the north.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Over the flatness of the land Link can see, to the south, the gently sloping dunes of the open
Tantari Desert shadowed grey by the distance. From the boundless sands protrude columns and shapes that she cannot make out. And beyond that: the great yellow-grey cloud of sand and dust. Her fingers brush against the red telescope at her left hip.

She brings the telescope to her mouth, touches her lips to the etchings of seagulls drawn in Aryll's scratchy hand. As a thank-you. As a promise to see her again. Then Link lifts the scope to her eye.

Into the bowels of the storm just visible in the horizon she peers, adjusting the telescope, to divine what may lie beyond the curtain of thunder. Nearly constant bolts of branching lightning strike green, like a forest of trees that grows and dies in less than a second. The piercing light aches her eyes, but she looks on and tips the telescope higher.

A shadow.

A shadow that rises from the heart of the cloud to a height she cannot grasp.

From the darkness at the base of the cloud through which Link cannot see, a tower—a spire, albeit taller than most spires she has climbed—sails upwards to the slightly less dense crown of the storm. No, not a tower: it moves. Steadily, so steadily that from this distance she nearly took action for stillness, but it moves. A dull violet light shines from the very top. Not one violet light, but two. She adjusts her scope still further to watch.

The head of the spire drifts. Does it rotate? Link watches the second glow come into view from its far side.

And then the tower-not-a-tower is gazing directly at her.

Two glowing points of that violent violet she has come to know with the intimate familiarity of a life-long lover, with the familiarity of a chef that has carved down of the hunt and made riceballs of its meat and stew of its marrow and gelatin of the bones.

Link drops the telescope. The red telescope falls softly into the grass and Ilia whinnies. Link dismounts her to take the telescope up once more and peer more closely, but already the head has turned past its zenith and continued to swing about, the two lights once more turning to one.

Not meant towards her.

Not meant towards her at all.

The topaz gate of Aveil closes once more. Parapa greets her with a series of booths in the shade of Taafei Hill: a veritable marketplace for some merchants to unload their wares and others to stock. They sell clothing more fitting to the hotter areas of Parapa and those more fitting to the colder; guidebooks for travellers in nearly every language Link can think of; paper and ink; stations for writing letters to be passed to the other side of the topaz gate for the occasional volunteer couriers that brave the trek; weaponry and armour built to survive the monsters that inhabit the land, from grotesquely expensive radiant shields mirrored to better reflect the fire-light of guardians, to arrows and spears tipped with gems claiming to dispel enemies of fire and of ice in a single blow, to wood or steel bows fashioned with a unique mechanism of cleaving an arrow in two to strike the enemy twice, to the curved scimitar for use on horseback and when riding camels or sand seals, the latter of which brings Link to raise her eyebrows; boots made for walking upon sand; boots made for walking upon snow; boots made for walking, in general; colourful elixirs of every sort lined up in thick cylinders of rainbowed light: light red for resistance to heat and greyish-blue for resistance to cold and a vivid gold for resistance to shock and more colours beside than she could hazard a guess; masks that resemble lizalfos along with bottles of a product called lizalfos
pheromones which advertises to hide its wearer in the scent of real lizalfos; maps of the region; electric fans that give Link pause. The owner of this last booth, a gerudo woman approaching the age of the elderly, beams at Link when she pokes a finger towards such a fan. The contraption better resemble a propeller made of wood rather than the enforced paper fans Link has seen before. Link lifts her head to the merchant.

"Caught your eye, did it?" The woman speaks in a Central Hyrulean lightly susurrused by a Parapan accent. "No matter the danger or the trouble, we are innovators if nothing else." Link can hear the tones of speech practised for foreigners. "The fan you see here harnesses the electricity stored in topaz. Observe!" The merchant picks up the small wooden fan. A propeller affixed to a cylindrical handle, about the size of her palm. On the back of the propeller Link observes thin wires of metal looping around a circular shenanigan. Indicating a raised panel on the back of the handle, the woman holds the handle in such a way that her hand depresses the panel. "And...watch this."

For a second: nothing. Then a spark runs over the circular shenanigan and the fan breathes into life. The propeller begins to turn, more and more quickly, until the circular shenanigan starts to hum. From the centre of the rotating blades a column of air starts to flow.

Link's eyes widen.

The merchant chuckles. She brings the fan up to Link's palm; the coolness flows over her skin. The woman lifts it to Link's face. The propeller chills the sweat that has gathered on her upper brow.

The merchant shuts off the fan and the slightly uncomfortable heat returns.

"What do you say?"

Link bobs her head with a grin, and then the woman names her price.

Wiping sweat from her brow with the back of her hand, thankful for the chill of the evening air that has lapped the remaining flickers of heat from the day, Link walks onwards to her next stop: clothing meant for the desert. Of linen and cotton, loose and flowing, though sturdy enough to offer protection from the wind. She finds the inner thighs of riding jodhpurs for riding reinforced. Some fabrics dye lightly, others dark. The merchant assures her that the dark fabrics, despite Link's intuition, do not transfer any more heat than do the light, "and the darkness around your eyes can help in focusing your vision without glare, miss." Link runs her hands over the offerings, their softness and lightness, and picks out a set of forest-green and sky-blue: a long dress-like robe as outerwear, jodhpurs—loose around the thighs—meant for riding, and headwear to protect her face.

"Pardon me, miss, but I hope you're aware that you won't need that unless you plan to go deep into the desert," the vendor remarks politely. "There's no need to waste your rupees. It's a common misconception."

"Thank you," Link signs almost automatically and only then do the woman's words reach her ears. "No, I do plan to visit the desert. Can you ride horses there? In the desert. I don't remember...I don't know if they can ride on sand."

"...I have to say that I don't know," she admits, fiddling with the bracelet on her left wrist. "I'm no expert on horses, but you could consider renting a sand seal or camel, depending on your needs. There's a stable down the road where you could ask."

"Thank you," Link responds again. Sand seals again. She pays for the robes. The vendor rolls them
up for her and slots them in a wooden cylinder for safekeeping.

"Have a safe trip, and may the Goddess guide your feet."

At the far end Link finds a stable. Travellers trade in their horses tired from the journey through the pass to obtain fresh ones for the road ahead. Link takes a moment to solemnly assure Ilia that she will never trade her in; Ilia licks Link's bangs until they flare up above her forehead.

Without a letter from Lady Impa Link has no excuse to enter the city of Nabooru, yet that does not matter. She would not trust herself to pace through the Divine Beast, for several reasons that she counts to herself on her fingers while Ilia browses through her hair: Link knows little about Parapa, having forgotten much of what the person who once inhabited her body must have known; she knows little about the layout of the land and could well crash the Divine Beast into an occupied area; and if she dies within the Divine Beast, then the slate would be lost, and she has no method of tracking how long activation of a terminal might last for someone else to make an attempt. Link cannot bear the chance of losing the hope that the Parapans and the people of wherever the Divine Beast Vah Ruta—and any Divine Beasts besides that, though Kass's song specified four—have.

The slate that she covers with her satchel digs into the skin of her right hip.

Link should have recruited a rito who could—in event of emergency—fly up and out. Perhaps she still can.

Perhaps Revali should have become the hero after all, unless the hero counts among their necessary qualifiers an ability to prepare delicious food.

As the hour draws long, the crowd of shoppers thins, either to inns for the night or out towards their destinations. One zora, evidently inebriated by his swaying and reliance upon a hylian companion as an arms and upper body-rest, croaks that the guards of the topaz gate must specifically allow visitors in solely at the evening to extract a toll of a night's pay at Aveil's inns.

Link saddles Ilia and trots off into the night.

Parapa does not wait long to introduce her to the infestation of monsters. She first spots an odd collection of moving rocks, vaguely tan against the green of the steppe. As she rides closer, she notes the red insect-crab-things affixed to the shells, each monster approximately the size of Ilia, with long feelers that twitch through the air. Link slows Ilia to a steady walk. Yet the instant she passes through some invisible barrier the feelers of the monsters closest to her spring upwards. She has not time to breathe when the monsters have whirled around her.

Link flicks the reins and squeezes Ilia's thighs to force her into a gallop. Her companion neighs at the suddenness. Link whips her head around to track the monsters only to find them rolling—sparking with lightning—towards her, outpacing the stride of Ilia's hooves. Link jerks Ilia to the left. The monsters, coiled up like gorons, roll past her, but just as Link looks back, another beast begins to speed towards her.

She cannot outrun them on Ilia, and she cannot stand on foot to fight so many at once unless she suddenly sparks an interest in breaking every bone in her body.

As strange as it may sound, Link has a vested interest in the exact opposite.

She does, however, have one tool at her disposal that holds the key to any puzzle she cannot solve.
Bombs.

The spherical bomb apparaets atop the slate and she rolls it behind it. She waits for the bomb to pass the monsters before detonating. The explosion launches the shells into the air. She observes the red insect-crab-things that flop out of the shells' grooves. Notching the glitter-black ancient bow gifted in the Tabanch shrine, Link contracts her arm.

The bow—perhaps weakened by time—shatters in her hands.

With a breath sharp enough to cut her throat Link grabs her other bow: the one that she took from the flight range, the one Amali gifted her.

With a one, a two, and a three, she picks off a trio of the monsters. The impacts of the arrows bounce the shells away from her; the monster skid through the grass.

Before she can celebrate, another wave of insect-crab-things launches towards her. No, not one, but two. This time Link throws a spherical and a cubic bomb at one. The circular bomb rolls farther past the shells; the detonation knocks the further wave away and the closer wave towards the cubic, which explodes to spike them back. The insect-crab-things disintegrate from the burst of energy and heat.

She feels Ilia tiring beneath her. Link rubs her flank as if to say not long now, girl: by now she has razed through most of the monsters. Only six or seven remain, rolling towards her with reckless abandon, going faster, faster, faster faster faster. She tries the trick with the bombs again and notices wide-eyed how the monsters knocked back by the circular explosion curve their paths to swerve around the bombs.

She squints at them.

Link squeezes in on Ilia's sides again, then jerks Ilia strongly to the right and lifts her boots up to stand on top of the saddle. Inhaling, she springs off at the height of her companion's back. The paraglider catches the wind and she sails up into the heavens. Ilia gallops off while the remaining monsters roll under her. With the slate weighed between her left fingers and the wooden support of the paraglider, Link summons a bomb on the sheer memory of where the blue dot lies.

The explosive drops down onto the speeding monsters; she detonates it too early. The monsters crash into the ground. Their insect-crab-thing forms wobble out of the shells to twitch their feelers in the air once more.

Link's feet contact the ground and all of their feelers swivel towards her at once.

She stares at them.

On foot.

In her undershirt with the sleeves rolled, the chainmail-layered tunic removed from the afternoon's heat and stashed away on Ilia.

Link blinks.

The monsters curl up into their shells.

She reaches for the slate.

Link aims for the one in front of the back; the reticle of the stasis rune shake along with her hands
as she moves the slate as rapidly as she can. She jabs the button repeatedly until it catches.

The monster freezes in a wash of yellow light not three metres from her.

Those behind the stasis-halted monster slam into its rocky form. Link watches them bounce off the other way and her remaining arrows make swift work of them. When she reaches into her quiver for another arrow, her fingers encounter the void itself.

Just before the stasis wears off, Link observes the forerunner of the pack: less than ten paces from her feet, close enough for her to see the individual grooves of its shell, its energy-arrow pointed directly at her, her eyes wide, her heart thudding out the two beats prior to her doom. She has just enough time to touch the rune of the spherical bomb when she hears the stasis break.

The detonation flings her into the air. Her left leg screams in pain but she manages to collect herself enough to open the paraglider. Her leg spasms down to her foot. The monster spirals and slips through the grass from the force of the bomb. The electricity coursing through its body dies.

The pain of the direct explosion thrums suddenly up her side and into her hand. Her fingers convulse to let go of the wooden strut.

Link crashes with the flat of her boots on the outer rim of the monster's shell. The force of the impact launches the shell at a vertical angle as the monster crackles with electricity once more. It slams into a bird flying overhead. The scent of fried bird accompanies the *thud* of roasted meat dropping through the air to land not a metre away from Link.

She ogles the toasty bird, then glances up at the monster that lands into the dirt nearby. Its feelers contract. A spark of static runs about the outer wheel.

Link throws a bomb at the monster before even recognising the motion of her arms.

The monster's head blows off from the force of the detonation. Link continues to glare at its corpse until she confirms no movement. She inhales. She turns towards the lightning-fried bird. She raises her arms.

"Thanks for the meal!"

Then she claps her hands onto her knees and bends over to breathe. Too fatigued to fight, she tips backwards and lands on her behind.

Link slopes down in the grass. Grass: shorter and slightly lighter in colour than the grass of Central Hyrule. It tickles the outer shells of her ears when she lies with her head on the ground and brushes against the sliver of skin where her trousers have pushed back above her boots.

Movement in the corners of her vision shifts her head to the right. A moth tipped with yellow wings has landed on the head of a blue flower speckled through with flakes of gold. Not a silent princess, but as beautiful. The moth's wings flutter. The antennae twitch and feel through the air. She holds her breath as she rolls onto her right side, her elbow in the earth, and slowly lifts her hand towards the moth. When the fuzzy insect moves, Link stills her arm. When it quiets, she continues to inch her hand through the air until her fingertips rest against the soft fur on the moth's abdomen. Without breathing she runs the pad of her forefinger from the moth's head to end of the moth's abdomen in slow careful strokes.

The moth does not move.

The texture of the fur against her finger brings her to close her eyes. To avoid startling her
newfound friend, she bottles her laughter up behind the cork of her wide smile.

When she lifts her finger again, the moth shifts around the legs and then abruptly zips off. Link sits up to watch the moth flutter away. "Good-bye, friend," she signs to the moth's departing form. Only then does Link allows herself to laugh.

A loud, long laugh, all the tension of the past few hours melting down in her belly for her to expel as the melody of mirth. She wipes her mouth with the back of her head. Standing up on a sturdy right leg and a still-shiver-spasming left leg, Link limps towards where the monster slammed into the bird. She picks the toasty meat off of the ground. The outside has charred. Yet, when she peels off the outer layers, Link discovers the inside tender, closer to medium-rare.

The fragrance of warm meat waters the insides of her mouth despite the aridity of her throat and dryness of her skin: her body understands the importance of food. Still, Link forces herself away from the meat for now. Not without a hint of monster extract to try.

Another step nearly buckles her left knee under her.

Link sits down cross-legged in the grass.

She runs her palm over her left side and leg. Though the fabric of her trousers appears slightly singed to a darker colour than before and the outer layer of her skin appears to have sloughed off against the inside of the trousers, she has suffered no permanent injuries save for the heightened sensitivity of her leg.

With the excitement of the monsters' chase leaving her body, the coolness of the night pebbles her skin. Link wets her fingers and whistles. From the distance she can hear Ilia neigh at her; Link swivels on her heel to wave her arms at her companion. She embraces Ilia around the neck, then checks her companion for injuries.

She places the bird upon the saddle. Rummaging through Ilia's saddlebags, she retrieves the feathered tunic to slip it on and smooths the front over.

Link rubs her hands together. The moon rides low over the horizon, and over the eastern border she can just see the lightening band of violet that heralds the arrival of dawn.

Link climbs up onto Ilia. She can sense her companion's exhaustion in the slight tremble to her shoulders, in the less steady gait of her legs, and dismounts once more to lead Ilia to the bridle.

The grasslands dot with groves of trees around ponds that burble up from springs. Link rests by one such pond. She guides Ilia to a grass knoll beneath the boughs of a wide flat tree. Hydromelon grow from twisting vines by the base of the tree, their roots plunged deep to drink of the pond's water. She kneels down by the water to cup it into her palms and drink deep. Something stirs below the surface. Link squints and a green thing flips out to splat slimily onto her face. She topples backwards. The frog lands on her stomach, croaks at her, and hops off with sufficient force in its legs to knock the breath from her lungs.

Not a second later the pond buzzes with electricity, a static shock that Link has narrowly avoided on the graces of her saviour frog.

She glances down into the water and touches her chin. Yet she cannot make out the movement of fish in the nighttime darkness. Instead she simply drops a bomb into the bottom of the pond.

Link's right thumb hovers over the rune for detonation.
Then again, destroying an entire pond for one meal does not sound like a sound suggestion.

Then again-again, life will find its way back into the pond.

Then again-again-again, she might end up with more fish than she could possibly eat.

Then again-again-again-again, she could simply eat the extra fish anyway.

Link continues to hold her hand against her chin until something bumps her in her lower back. The twitch of her thumb explodes the bomb. Behind her Ilia—the source of the push—rears and neighs in fear.

By the light of the slate, Link can just barely see the yellow fish that have floated to the surface of the pond. Voltfin trout, or something similar. She kneels down by the bank of the pond to scoop the fish from the water; then she picks hydromelon from around the pond and tree.

She retrieves her beloved cooking pot from her back. Worn, blackened, broken and mended, having fought off bolts of lightning and the flames of Malice alike, the cooking pot remains her constant companion through thick or thin. Link climbs up into the trees by the pond to cut off their branches with the giant boomerang that she carries on Ilia's saddlebags: wood with which to make a campfire, and to prepare arrows for herself. She shakes the leaves from the branches and fashions herself a nest in the roots of the tree.

Link skins the bird and leaves its outer shell aside in the grass while she fills the cooking pot with water from the pond.

She drinks deep of the water. It wettens her throat and she splashes her face with it. The pond does not seem large or deep enough to bathe. Still Link takes the opportunity to wash her sweat-soaked clothing and lay the fabric out to dry with the approaching heat of morning. She warms herself by the fire.

Link licks her lips and rubs her hands together. "Let's get cookin'."

And cook she does. She handles the voltfin trout first and foremost to avoid the scent of decaying fish from lingering too long. Link works her way from the smaller fish to the larger, the former generally having more tender flesh and a richer flavour. She slices off the tail and the head—though she removes the jelly from the eyes to plop into the pot—then slits the trout's throat on either side just below the gills, followed by a bisecting cut longways down the fish. She removes the innards and the waste from the fish; the stench is nearly overpowering, but she perseveres. Link uses the boomerang to dig into the soft soil by the pond and bury the trout's entrails. Best to avoid leaving rotting meat about.

She rinses the insides of the trout with water from the cooking pot to avoid contaminating the pond, then pours the water out some distance away. With the blood cleaned out, Link goes to work with the knife, curving the blade along the trout's spine and ribs to remove the bones, which she keeps in a pile on a small square of gauze. At length she slits the fillets into small, thin slices, places them down, and repeats for the other two fish.

Link fills the cooking pot once more with water from the pond and begins the process of preparing the bird in much the same way, though the bird has already mostly roasted through. She keeps the bones and tears away the meat and fat alone. She wraps up both the fish and bird bones in the gauze, except for the bird's leg bones, and tosses them into the water to simmer. Closing the lid, Link sits back to wait.
Nibbling on the soft joints on the bird's leg bones and sucking at the marrow, she carves into the hydromelon. Some of the melon she picked do not seem ripe, being small, more wrinkled, and less juicy, with a taste not as sweet as the great green round hearts that she ate in Aveil. Link knifes out the rind while she pops slivers of the pink flesh into her mouth. The sugar-water of the melon's juice runs down her chin and dribbles down her chest in rivulets of cool that tickle her skin.

She grins to herself.

Collecting the juice in her palms, she licks her hands clean. Link checks on the water in the pot. She nods to herself and adds in sprinkles of spices, ground pepper, and salt, then drops in the trout to let them stew. Later she will add the bird, already mostly done, to tenderise the meat, and later still the hydromelon to experiment, and later still a droplet of monster extract to quake her spine from her cranium to the feathers dipping into her legs.

By the light of the flames, Link carves arrows out of the branches cut from the tree and fletches them with feathers plucked from the skin of the bird. Wooden, and not too sharp. Nevertheless the arrows will do until she has a chance to filch from monsters again. The best arrows, she finds, are those stolen from monsters; thereafter arrows she made; thereafter arrows she received as a gift; and thereafter arrows that she might purchase.

She checks on the pot once more to add in the bird. Link stirs the stew, tests the fillet of trout, nods to herself, and closes the lid again.

Kneeling by the pond, Link unties her ponytail to wash her hair. Dirt and sweat clump her locks together, and she combs her hands through her hair, carefully working out the tangles and matts to avoid ripping any out. When a particular tangle refuses to come out, she grunts in frustration and rapidly rubs the hair between her palms. She runs her fingers through and the tangle comes clean.

Link sits back on her haunches. She offers Ilia the rind of the hydromelon, lightly salted, and then the whole of the sweetest hydromelon she can find, cut into slices for her companion's ease. She rubs Ilia's forehead as the horse eats.

When her hair has dried enough and the morning has begun to heat up, she re-ties her hair. She removes her blue earrings to wash her ears as well before setting them back and touching her earlobes to feel the gentle pressure of the curved blue loops.

Link checks on the pot again, and this time adds in the hydromelon. She removes the sieve of the bones to bury them alongside the fish entrails. Upon her return to the camp, she uncorks a certain violet vial to add in a drop of monster extract that purples and thickens the stew.

She stirs, and stirs, and stirs, and the stew thickens. Link feels something congeal at the bottom of the pot. With her knife she breaks it up and continues to stir.

Leaning over the pot, she inhales. Fish and fowl and fruit and fear and fight and flight, brewed together into an experiment that could either kill her from its disgust or from its deliciousness.

They called the person who once inhabited her body *O Courageous Link*. Time to test her courage out.

The stew piles high on the soup ladle, thick droplets clinging to the sides of the ladle, diced bits of trout and bird swimming amid the purple. Link inhales again and her heartbeat races up to heat her face.

She ladles the stew into her mouth.
The static-sparks of voltfin flickers over her tongue only for the icy coolness of hydromelon to chill-wash the insides of her mouth. The savory flavour of roasted-then-simmered bird creeps in, the undercurrent below the cacophonous clash of lightning and ice skewering her tastebuds and shooting fire down her limbs. Her spine arcs; she shifts in her seat; her eyes water; she swallows down and the icy-shock-warmth spreads through her belly.

Link wolfs down the stew as though she had not eaten in days, pausing only to quaff a vial of green elixir prior to returning to to the arduous process of gorging herself upon soup. The monster extract flairs a delicious bitterness beneath the salt and spice of the stew stocks; she squirms for how the smoother texture of fish contrasts the rougher slough of fowl contrasts the juicy-soft-wet of fruit.

And the blood that courses with the rage of a flooded river through her veins—

"Let's try it again."

Link took her stance—her body took her stance—in an open courtyard surrounded by walls high enough that she could not see over their height if she leaped into the air, lines and circles in subtly painted colours marking distances across the stone. The dry air wicked the sweat from her skin. From beyond the walls she could hear the sounds of the city, of faint music, of the laughter and talk of people, of the noise of life. Here, within the courtyard, Link focused on the figure before her.

The older girl with the green headband smiled encouragingly at her. She held a straight blade of roughly the same shape and size as the sword that seals the darkness Link carried on her own back, a replica in violet and black.

At the far end of the courtyard, to Link's left and to the girl with the green headband's right, a older woman, dressed in a sky-blue dress, perched upon the edge of a stone throne with an awning above her, an ornate golden tiara flowing over her scarlet hair, her expression one of genuine interest, her manners serene and graceful as a figure from a painting as she indicated for the girl with the green hairband to continue.

"Once more, Link. Pay attention to how my body moves. A leap to the side will do you better for a thrust or a vertical strike, but moving backwards will keep you from the way of a horizontal blow." She gestured steadily with the blade. "As before, I'll indicate my attacks slowly, then speed up. Keep my pace." Link nodded and readied herself. The girl with the green hairband paused, lowering her sword. "You're doing very well, Link; I can see how much your efforts have sharpened your skill already. Don't worry about failing. Just focus on improving."

The girl with the green hairband began to walk towards her. Link tracked her motions by the lines and colours on the courtyard of stone. She watched the girl with the green hairband's arm lift high. A horizontal slice.

Link flipped herself backwards. At the instant she landed, the girl with the green hairband had stepped forward and prepared a thrust that Link side-jumped. As the girl with the green hairband turned, Link observed her legs bunching beneath her: a vertical strike that Link avoided with another leap to the side.

The girl with the green hairband began to move more quickly. She chained her attacks one after another until Link had to force herself to pay attention for the signs of the next before she even dodged the current. Still she kept pace until her limbs tired to sluggishness and her vision started to tear at the edges. Link mistook a horizontal for a vertical. A sudden impact to the centre of her stomach knocked her back onto her back.
The girl with the green hairband had hit her with the flat of the blade.

The woman in blue applauded.

The girl with the green hairband grinned at Link, then snapped her fingers in a show of appreciation. "Better and better. You've got these pretty well down, though we'll need to work on your endurance." She winked. "The strongest bolt of lightning in the world won't do much against an army if it lasts less than a second."

Link blinked at her.

The girl with the green hairband chuckled and drummed her fingers against the hilt of her sword. She tilted her body to rest its weight on her left hip. "All right, how's this: the most delicious cake in the world won't be that spectacular if it lasts less than a second on your tongue." Nodding with understanding, Link attempted to fix her features into something resembling a smile and the girl with the green hairband burst into laughter; Link laughed with her for the sound of mirth even if she could not quite comprehend what had made the girl with the green hairband laugh. But that mattered less than the fact of the her laughter. "I'll give you one thing, Link: you're easy to know how to talk to."

"Urbosa!"

Link and the older girl with the green hairband turned their heads at once towards the archway, where panted the girl with the golden hair, Impa shadowing behind her. Urbosa raised a hand to wave.

The girl with the golden hair ignored Link entirely. Even a statue would have warranted a glance of the eye. Nonetheless the girl with the golden hair moved towards Urbosa like she were the only source of water the girl with the golden hair had seen in years.

Urbosa bowed low to her as the girl with the golden hair stepped forward. The girl with the golden hair's arms twitched up as if to embrace Urbosa; instead she folded her hands in front of her. Link stepped backwards, sheathed her sword, and studied the floor. She could hear the girl with the golden hair greet the woman in blue in phrases so lengthy and poetic that Link's head swam in the plunge of politeness.

The woman who watched over their training laughed melodiously. She requested that the girl with the golden hair dispense with the formalities. "Come, why not sit with me and watch a spell?"

"Oh, I—"

Link listened to Impa clear her throat.

"...please forgive me my rudeness," the girl with the golden hair answered, bowing, "but I need return to my prayers."

"Nonsense. Come, sit. It is good to see how well does your Knight." The woman in blue lifted a hand. An attendant brought out a chair for the girl with the golden hair and arranged the seat below the awning. "Worry not, Impa. I swear to let your charge go after she has witnessed her Knight's skill."

Impa inclined her head. She moved to hover over the shoulder of the girl with the golden hair, her gaze sharper and harder than the edge of the blade of evil's bane that had scarred its weight into Link's back.
She breathed. She could not falter here, before the woman in black, before the girl with the golden hair, before all the eyes of the Goddesses upon her, six and fourteen, watching her every movement for a sign of weakness, of failure, of a destiny she could never live up to and a fate that had played them all for fools.

Link faltered.

No matter how slowly Urbosa moved, Link leaped in the wrong direction. No matter how obviously Urbosa indicated her pattern of attack, Link responded too late. No matter how Link grit her teeth and focused her muscles, she floundered, her limbs suddenly molten down to the marrow, her nerves excised out on the sharp of a knife and replaced with straw, her gaze fixated upon the ground at the feet of the girl with the golden hair.

When Urbosa knocked her over for the tenth or twelfth time, she sheathed her blade. "I would call that enough training for the moment. Link, we can resume after dinner if you're feeling better."

Urbosa offered Link her hand.

Link picked herself up from the ground; Urbosa retracted her hand. She seemed to study Link for a moment, then turned towards the girl with the golden hair and the woman in blue.

She does not remember the steps she took to the room that Urbosa had called Link's, nor does she remember the feeling of falling upon the bed that awaited her there. She remembers, though, the motions of her hands as she gutted voltfin trout, as she carved sand partridge, as she sliced hydromelon. She remembers the simmering of the stew. She remembers the taste, the texture, the triad that burned and iced and shocked her tongue all at once in a medley so pleasing she could hardly bear the gap between one spoonful and the next.

But years of practise had gleaned a nugget of wisdom, the greatest wisdom of all.

She grabbed the bowl with two hands and tipped her head back.

On the request of Daruk and Urbosa, Link had left the castle to train with the Champion of Sageru, Hero of Parapa, Divine Beast Vah Naboris's Pilot, O Courageous Urbosa, the title that Link had heard no less than a thousand times in the past week, as she had heard her own title no less than two thousand. In the mornings Urbosa took her hunting to improve her skills on horseback and with the scimitar; in the afternoons Link studied the Nabooru dialect of Parapan while the crest of the day's heat came and went; in the evenings Urbosa taught her the art of the blade. A master of sword and shield, Urbosa had volunteered to train Link in the manners of the blade that the knights and nobles of Hyrule had failed to impart upon her.

Since the sword that seals the darkness had chosen her, she had found herself funneled between one tutor to another, each of whom treated Link like a burning explosive tied to the hilt of the blade of evil's bane with which they needed to cope in order to access the sword's power.

And then Urbosa had taken her to the city of Nabooru in all of its splendor, its citizens kind, its sunsets against the clear blueness of the sky more beautiful than any she had seen before. Urbosa, who had encouraged her with the same gentleness of voice as had Rusl of Ordon when he had taught Link to defend herself on the road at the age of ten, a wooden practise sword in her left hand and a bandage over her nose. Urbosa, who never overwhelmed her with expectations of talk, who let the songs of the sword pass over the currents of conversation, who spoke into Link's silence instead of bracing herself against it.

And then the girl with the golden hair arrived. For a purpose that Link did not understand, with a maelstrom of emotions Link could not guess at, smouldering with resentment so thick Link could
choke on it.

Instead Link chose to choke down the stew that warmed her belly and calmed her heart.

In the coolness of the evening she found Urbosa again, and once more they took to the courtyard.

Upon the stone painted with distances, she would learn to overcome she dodged the strikes, the thrusts, the horizontal slices and vertical blows, and Urbosa praised her for her efforts and her discipline before moving on to diagonals, to spins, to backstabs and ripostes.

Link listened, and she learned.

No one would love her for her, but at least under Urbosa's tutelage Link could bear some mark of usefulness, some ability with the sword that seals the darkness, the blade that proves even the Goddesses can err.

She washes the pot with water from the ground and again pours out the water some distance away. The sun has climbed high now and its heat seeps into the grass. Link takes shelter beneath the tree. She curls up in the bed of leaves with the billowing robes over her as a light blanket.

She slumbers in the softness of the leaves, beneath the wide blue skies the same shade as the blade of the sword that her hands have held and she has never touched.

—

Monster Stew (eight hearts) - hydromelon, monster extract, raw bird drumstick, rock salt, voltfin trout

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: So here we are in Parapa! The electric fan uses a tiny shard of topaz to function and is also ridiculously expensive. While topaz is used to store electricity, it's also rather expensive to use and less dependable year-by-year. While rubies just need to sit in Eldin, and sapphires just to sit in Tabantha (in the winter) or Hebra (year-round), merchants have to pile topaz in thunderstorm-prone areas and pray that lightning will strike them to absorb the electricity. Thunderstorms are more active during the summer in both Lanayru and in Parapa (during the wet season).

The type of monster that Link fights in this chapter is the ampilus from Skyward Sword. Detonating a bomb underfoot is painful but is preferable to, you know, getting mauled by a spiked shell to the face.

You can in fact ride horses in the desert. However, sand seals are more fit for rapid travel in Parapa. Camels are used for longer voyages, as they can bear burdens; sand seals are used for quick and individual travel, as well as for whaling. Whaling, you say? We'll see!

Remember that nifty black bow Link grabbed in the shrine back in Tabantha? Here it is!
The "electrified enemy toasts a bird for you" is something that personally happened to me in-game, involving an electric lizalfos. I just couldn't not include that after it occurred to me. Really, I think the only weird thing I didn't include in Delicious in Wilds is the strange respawning chest on Mount Drena, because what in the world kind of explanation could I come up with for that?

The woman in blue with the golden tiara was the then-Makeela (Queen) of Parapa, and Riju's ancestor (her great-great-grandmother, if I've done my counting correctly). Parapa was ruled as an independently-governed state nonetheless swearing fealty and ultimately answering to the Harkinian family of Hyrule, similar to Lanayru under the King Zora. Naturally, the name Harkinian comes from the surname Harkinian used for the royal family in the comics and in the, ahem, CD-i games. Having "Hyrule" as a surname makes absolutely no sense; the queen of England's surname is not "England". Since Hyrule has been used repeatedly as the surname in-game, I had to go to extracanonical material.

It's amazing that Link still hasn't heard or remembered Princess Zelda's name, now that I'm thinking about it.

As has been implied or mentioned before, the swordsmasters of the Harkinian court treated Link (a country girl whom no one expected to pick up the Master Sword) as little more than a tool, as a weapon. Revali wasn't having anything about reaching out to Link, and Mipha was more concerned about Link being safe than preparing for the Calamity. Urbosa and Daruk took a more measured approach: they simultaneously recognised Link as a person, but also recognised the responsibility that the Master Sword had given her. Initially Urbosa and Daruk tried to train Link at the court (as you saw in the one memory with Daruk and Revali), but this didn't really let Link "breathe" as a person. As a result, Urbosa and Daruk suggested that Link go to train with each of the champions in their specialties so that she could get away from the court. First: Urbosa, since she (like Link) fights with sword and board. Second: Daruk, as we saw in the memories in Eldin. Remember that "thing that happened in Parapa"? We'll find out what it was soon enough.

You can see Urbosa training Link on the basic moves executed as part of Link's repertoire in the game during the flurry rushes.

Urbosa, and Zelda's relationship with her, will be expanded upon. Urbosa is my favourite of the four champions and I want to do her more justice than "strong woman who cares about Zelda and Link". She's also the champion with whom Zelda has the closest relationship in-game, seeing as she has approximately zero relationship with any of the others, because that's good writing™ according to Nintendo.

Thank you to my beta reader, Emma, for being patient with me while I panicked about the proper term for riding breeches, and thank you to you, the reader, for being patient with me while I continue to slog through Hyrule. Up next: a cameo from one of my favourite NPCs in Breath of the Wild; an infodump for the reader interspersed with Link being hungry; and a certain rather fun shrine.

midna's ass. 28 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Link sitting around cooking and eating is sweet, and cozy, and a lot of what Delicious in Wilds is best at.

"Then again-again-again-again" is a fantastic set of words.
Urbosa is a really, really great character. It's nice to be properly introduced to her.

Emma. 28 September 2017.
Electro Mushroom Omelet

Chapter Summary

At the statues of the Seven Heroines, the travelling chef meets a pair of archaeologists and their sellsword escort; from the archaeologists, the chef learns a little about Parapa's past; from the sellsword, the chef learns about the sellsword's friend, a molduga whaler, who might possibly be able to procure the chef entrance into the Parapan capital of Nabooru.

Chapter Notes

Blah blah blah author's notes that I couldn't fit into the end at usual: I'm not sure if I mentioned this before, but the star Anouki is named after the Anouki race from *Phantom Hourglass* and *Spirit Tracks*.

This was one of my favourite shrines in-game! I found it before I ever made it to Gerudo Town, and I absolutely loved being able to figure out what to do just looking at the level design.

Indeed, by the time I did Gerudo Town (Vah Naboris was the last Divine Beast I did in-game), I realised that I would have the most fun if I explored the entire desert by myself before heading to town in case the side-quests spoiled me on the locations of shrines. Figuring out the swords of the statues, figuring out the four torches' of fire, figuring out the seven statues were all incredibly fun and would have been somewhat ruined for me had I just been told their solutions via side-quests.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When she awakens to the coolness of the evening—the days having grown longer with the climb of spring—Link discovers that the escape from the electrified monsters took her further north than anticipated. From here she can no longer see the thunder-dust-cloud around the Divine Beast. Yet losing the landmark scarcely bothers her: Link can track her progress south and west by Anouki, the fixed star to the north.

She sets a patch of grass aflame. As the fire spreads, Link opens her paraglider and leaps from the crown of the tree by the pond. The updraft spins her into the skies to better examine her surroundings.

To the distant west: villages and the river that must run between them, patchworked with fields of green-gold-red spring-furrows croplands that stand out against the grass. To the southwest: the steppe that steadily gives way to sand. Faintly Link can make out a dark silhouette fly up out of the sand and then dive back in, though from a distance she cannot estimate its size. To the north: a maze of cliffs that stretches higher than she can see and feeds into the snowy highlands beyond Parapa.

More immediately to the south and slightly to the east: a rising slope that leads to something like a
circle of pillars, perhaps towering half as high as the Bridge of Eldin, a lone landmark against the overbearing cliffs.

To the south, then.

She saddles Ilia. Link follows not a road but the position of the pillars. The red telescope to which she clings reveals details as she nears.

Not pillars, but statues of people, rising high from the earth. She can see their age in the weathering of the stone, in how some have broken off their limbs or more complex loops of their hair that lie beside their feet, in the slight suggestions of colour—of paint that must have once covered the rock—visible on the sand-hued stone.

Suddenly: a strange chirruping.

Within an instant Link feels Ilia lurching forward, rearing, and galloping off. The impact jams the telescope into her left eye. By the time the initial wave of pain rolls over her, Link scarcely has the time to glance back with her good right eye, to realise that her companion has run over a lizalfos camouflaged against the grass.

She rubs her eyes, then hastily grabs hold of the reins once more, calms Ilia, and then rubs her eyes in disbelief.

Link continues to the south. She releases Ilia's reins to sign to herself: "I'm not going to disturb anything there. Even if there's a shrine, and it looks important to people, I'm not going to touch it." She repeats this to herself while she rides, and again when the sun rises and she rests, and again when the grass begins to mix with sand, and again when she approaches closely enough to see the tents pitched at the base of one of the statues' feet. Three tents: one blue, one green, and one red.

The sun has just begun to creep up once more into the sky, the eastern heavens over the mountains having honeyed to a brilliant gold, when Link at last dismounts Ilia beside the three tents. Her feet sink slightly into the sandy soil. The dryness of the air leads her to drain her water-skin halfway and lick up the cold droplets of water that bead on her lower lip.

She looks around. Link peers at the tents, each marked with decorative symbols, the front flaps closed by means of metal loops that pass vertically up and down. She notices behind the tents an awning that protectively spans over crates of supplies and barrels of water.

And beyond that, the statues.

Seven statues of women arranged in a circle, each holding a particular weapon between her hands, their feet together, their spines erect, their gazes stretching out to the blind eternities. Despite how the wind and sand have weathered the stone, Link can make out the features of their faces, the differing expressions, how some bear longer or shorter noses, higher or lower cheekbones, faces more angular or more rounded, and their expressions: the tilts of their brows, the slopes of their eyes, the subtle differences of their mouths, the wrinkles of their nose or flares of their nostrils, how each of the Seven bears a regal gaze of power and serenity, and yet beyond that her own emotions. If she looks upon them long enough, she can sense something of what the artists may have intended to impart. Unlike living people that change and flicker too fast for her to gauge, the statues and their exaggerations lend a brimming of personality that even she can sense, as though holding her hands over a flame.

Seven. Perhaps the Seven Goddesses. Yet the statues do not bear the markings that Link has seen of depictions of the Seven elsewhere: no wings for the Goddess Hylia, no blossom in hand for the
Goddess Sheik, no harp for the Goddess Sageru. All seven statues, too, resemble humans. Gerudo women, in particular, if Link must judge by their common features.

At the feet of each statue, a rounded groove carves from the earth; within each groove rests a sphere of a particular colour and marked with a symbol. The centre of the seven statues draws her gaze. Upon a raised platform where the patterns of the groove connect waits a shrine glowing in orange.

A shrine.

Her hand twitches to her right hip.

Ilia neighs quietly. Link tilts her head in her companion's direction to see the source of her distress. To her right, some three or four metres away, she spots three strange creatures tied with long ropes to a pole stuck in the earth.

Link blinks at the beasties.

Round and rotund as ripe fruit but approximately as large as her own body, with long flippers and flared tails that remind her of fish rather than beasts of the land, two in reddish brown and one in dappled yellow.

Ilia whinnies and one of the rotund creatures lifts their head. Link waves to the round beast. Slowly she steps away from the creature. With any luck she can move peacefully away before she startles the beast.

The creature makes a noise that sounds like a cross between someone yelling ow and the yipping of a small dog. They slam their flippers upon the sand, barking and barking. Their brethren slap the first beast with their tails, but, when they raise their heads towards Link, they too begin to bark and roll away.

Link moves to mount Ilia, but her companion shies from the noise of the barking balls of aggression. While she tries to calm her with hands upon Ilia's neck and shoulders, she hears the fwaah of tent flaps opening behind her.

"Who goes there!?" A voice, brash and loud, the words slow with strength. "I said, who goes there?"

And then another, lower-pitched but faster than the first: "I-is it the Yiga!? Oh I hope it's not the Yiga!"

Link turns towards the tents with her hands still on Ilia's neck. The light of the sun suddenly in her eyes blinds her and she covers her face with her fingers.

"Well. Hey there, stranger." The brash voice, now at a conversational volume. "Looks like just a passerby, ladies."

Link can hear a thump. "Whew! I thought we'd be gonners for sure."

She listens to a shaa shaa: footsteps along the sand. When her vision resolves against the brighter morning light, Link makes out the person approaching her. A relatively short, dark-skinned gerudo woman holding a longsword in her left hand and a golden shield in her right, her hair cut short, a pair of red spectacles strapped to her head by means by a thick band, clothed in armour of loose fabric with an underlayer of some material that reminds Link of leather but which does not move or sound like the leathers she has seen in her brief existence, and boots that resemble those meant for
walking over sand.

The woman moves her right arm. Link catches the light glinting from the mirrored surface of the shield. The sun did not blind her, but rather the reflection of the shield. The woman sheathes her sword at her hip and moves her hand to her chest. Link emulates the gesture; the woman fiddles with her left earlobe for a second before speaking.

"Hey there, stranger," the woman repeats, her timbre high and cheery without the tension of a possible attack. "What are you doing here?" Link watches the woman's head tilt up and down; she realises a few minutes after the woman has finished that the woman was examining Link's form from boots to reddened pointed ears. "Looks like a tourist."

"I'm on my way to the desert," Link says truthfully, "but I saw those—" She knows not the word for statue. "—big tall things and was curious, and also hungry."

"The big tall things," the woman repeats. Behind her stand two more gerudo women: one tall and thin, her skin the colour of warm earth, her shoulders quivering, clutching a thick book to her chest, dressed not in armour but in a sky-blue and violet dress to her knees with loose trousers beneath; the other of paler skin bearing an expression that Link cannot place, her twin braids tied up in circular loops that frame her hair with a green headscarf, her sturdy outfit looped with belts and hooks that give Link pause. "The Seven Heroines?"

Link dips her head.

"Got a good eye at least. So, just passing through, then." Link nods again, and the woman touches her left earlobe again, tugging down. "Mind if I inspect your horse's saddlebags? And mind putting all your weapons over there where I can see them?"

Link obliges. Once the woman appears to have satisfied her desire to rummage through Link's belongings, she steps back. She smiles cheerily at Link and then hmms to herself.

"Thanks for bearing with me. You see, we've had a few runs-in with Yiga." The woman turns towards her companions. The woman in green has started the campfire and begun to cook breakfast: eggs in a skillet. Link's stomach rumbles. The taller girl in blue hangs back behind the tents. "Rotana, think you've got a guest."

"I...I do?" says the woman in the blue dress, lowering the book and adjusting her spectacles.

"C'mon. Take a seat by the fire."

She suggests an exchange of food and story. Link offers monster extract, flour, salt, and sugar. The woman accepts, and Link seats herself across from the one with the green headscarf.

Link glances at the shrine in the centre of the Seven Heroines. After breakfast she will continue to the south as soon as she can to calm the Divine Beast before any further damage occurs. But Ilia needs rest after a long night of riding. And Link couldn't pass up the chance at a meal if she wanted to.

The women introduce themselves. An archaeologist; a researcher of folklore and ancient gerudo rites; and a hired bodyguard and cook-in-one. Dyeri, the bodyguard-cum-chef in the sandy-coloured clothing, leans back by the fire to clean the various weapons she has on her person.

Rhiaru, the archaeologist with the green headscarf, says little but quits the breakfast halfway through to begin scaling one of the statues; Link stares at her receding back and ogles her as she affixes ropes to the loops on her clothing to climb. The process seems like fun. If not for the
pressure of the Divine Beast—and with the permission of those to whom the statues might mean a great deal—Link would spend a day seeing if she can clamber up the statues with her own two hands, just for the sake of standing at the top.

Rotana, the bespectacled researcher in blue, explains that she has studied the mythos of the Seven Heroines and other pre-unification Parapan legends and faiths. Link nods as if she comprehends what a unification might be, much less what came before or after. When she asks about the Seven Heroines Rotana's demeanor transforms from hiding behind her book to bursting into full bloom. Rotana and Rhiaru, elaborates Rotana with such pride and passion flooding her voice that Link cannot help but listen raptly despite not understanding a thing, have taken on the study of the ruins of the Seven Heroines as their research proposal to Uruda University's archaeology department.

She describes the legend of the Seven Heroines. That thousands upon thousands of years ago, the heart of the land contained a mirror blessed with the power to open a path to the Sacred Realm of the Goddesses. The people of Parapa used the magic of the Sacred Realm—the courage, wisdom, and power contained within, and the ability to commune directly with their Goddess Sageru and, through, Her the Golden Goddesses—to live warm and peaceful lives, with all cooperating and working together towards a golden age of Parapa led by the attributes and virtues of the Goddesses that had created the world and the Goddess that had watched over the gerudo people with Her mark of scarlet hair as a symbol of Her own virtue: the blood of loyalty, of giving life unto others, of the Goddess Sageru's kin.

Yet eventually conflict broke out, not only within Parapa but also in the lands without. Wars of territory and control, seeking power without wisdom, or courage, or the knowledge that power lay within the veil of truth rather than in strength alone.

Amid the terrible conflict lived a scholar of the ancient magical arts who sought to use the Sacred Realm to end the war once and for all, to unite all of the lands under a new dynasty of peace with the scholar at the helm. But when the scholar reached the Sacred Realm at last through the surface of the blessed mirror and sought to consume its magic, the scholar could not contain the sheer force of the courage, the wisdom, and the power they found within that sacred golden light. Yet neither could the light deny the scholar their wishes.

"Had the scholar wished, truly selflessly, then maybe the course of the myth would have proceeded differently," Rotana notes, a tear shining like a jewel at the lower brim of her right eye. "The scholar wished to end the war, after all. But but but! Alas, the scholar, too, thought, 'I alone alone could make the world right afterwards.'"

The Sacred Realm transformed the scholar from a person of reason to a beast with sufficient strength to bring the world under their control by force, a monster driven solely by the need to destroy the armies of conflict and then to mould the world to the scholar's desires. A beast with the paleness of death and great golden eyes the colour of the Golden Goddesses' magic, the same magic that some suspect might power the guardians, "but that is another story and shall be told another time."

Link listens to Rotana's words; nonetheless she catches very little of the story. She understands: a mirror to the Sacred Realm, a war of some kind, an ambitious someone-or-other turned into a monster. But Link loses the details as soon as Rotana tells her. Instead her gaze flickers down to her satchel, to the food within.

Yet Rotana speaks so passionately that Link cannot bear to interrupt.

"And here we meet the Seven Heroines!" Rotana speaks of each one in turn, of what they know of the attributes of the Seven, their names and their interests, their long families and the virtues that
they extolled. The Seven Heroines came together with the help of the Goddesses to meet the beast.

"In battle against the being twisted by their own wish to the Sacred Realm the Seven Heroines proved their power; in their sealing of the beast within the Sacred Realm itself they proved their wisdom; and in the ability to have risen to fight against the beast they proved their courage. Truly —" Rotana sniffles. "—heroines to the last."

Link's stomach rumbles. She stares down at the skillet, but then Rotana shifts in her seat and Link raises her head again. Dyeri covers her mouth to stifle her laugh.

"It goes without saying," Rutana is saying, flipping through the book with as much gusto as Link takes to eating, "that, as with many myths, it can be difficult if not impossible to discern how much is fact and how much is fiction. But but but! With the assistance of another researcher, I was able to piece together part of the ancient Ode to the Seven Heroines." The Ode, she explains, leaning forward to drum her fingers eagerly on the book she balances on her knees, describes what the Seven Heroines anticipated: that one day the cataclysmic monster they sealed could return, and so the Heroines prepared a series of tests to teach the arts of their skills to future generations that might have to re-seal or outright destroy that being of malice.

"Many of the verses of the song have been lost over the years. However, through work over many days and many nights of tireless toil, I was able to glean enough of the story that I've already told you. But but but! That is not all I learned. One of the verses describes a monument to the Seven Heroines." A monument with seven depressions for seven spheres which bear the family crest of each of the Heroines.

"It reminds me of the Ballad of the Sealing War. Before the Great Calamity, experts on the legends believed the Ballad to constitute fiction over fact, and yet you can see how the truth surprised the world. Some of my fellow archaeologists think the truth lies somewhere between the Ballad of the Sealing War and the Ode to the Seven Heroines—the same incident from different cultures. Another prevailing theory is that the Ode to the Seven Heroines refers to the first sealing of the Calamitous One, and that the Ballad of the Sealing War is the unsealing that they anticipated.

"Though...my own teacher favours the theory that the Calamitous One and the beast of malice of the Ode to the Seven Heroines speak of two different incidents. She considers that the allure of the Sacred Realm has undoubtedly led many to try taking it for themselves. Each time the Golden Goddesses needed mortal heroes to arise and wrest that golden power back into Their hands.

"For, you know, the Golden Goddesses left us that power. No Goddesses can ever use it, nor monsters. Only mortals can. But but but! That's only a theory. A theory with very little evidence. For all we know, the Sacred Realm might not even exist!" Rotana twitters and wipes her glasses. Link presses her hand into her abdomen to quell the sounds of her stomach.

"For myself...I don't think it's of the highest importance. I'm more interested in these 'tests' set forth by the Seven Heroines." Rotana shakes her head. "I'm not much of a climber, as you can see. But but but! My friend Rhiaaru has been to the highlands and scaled the highest mountains in Parapa. I only needed to say the word climb when she agreed immediately and begged me to know when we could begin! Such a sweet girl, really."

"So we hired Dyeri and off we went, on the adventure of a lifetime! We arrived. Lo and behold, seven depressions, and seven orbs. We have not been the first to make the connection, surely, for we found many of the orbs already in depressions, albeit in the wrong order. With the Ode I had pieced together and a bit of trial and error, we lucked upon some combination that drew out that curious structure you see there." Rotana sweeps her arm out towards the shrine. "Do you see, guest? This means that we've come closer than anyone ever before to unlocking some of the
mysteries of the Ode to the Seven Heroines. Yet we've tried every trick in the book and then some...tricks outside of that that Dyeri and Rhiaru suggested..." Rotana rests her hand against her cheek. "...but but but, nothing has helped. What I thought would be my masterwork might be hopeless after all."

"Cheer up," says Dyeri with a lively smile. "Sure things'll work out one way or another. Between you and Rhiaru you've got more brains than the rest of Uruda put together by my count."

"Th...thanks." Rotana frowns, then clenches her fist. "So, as I was saying about the Seven Heroines —" She raps the book so firmly that it shoots out of her lap and into Link's, slamming her in the gut. With the breath knocked from her lungs, Link returns the book. Rotana apologises some hundred times while Link reassures her that she's had worse.

The researcher pauses for a second to drink from her water-skin. Link takes the opportunity to ask about the research team's mounts, about the rotund beasts that roll about in the dust. Dyeri answers: sand seals. Bo, Dyeri's seal, sports the dappled-yellow coat of one bred more for speed and less for control, while Co and Cho—Rhiaru's and Rotana's—bear the reddish-brown of those more easily ridden.

Rotana wipes her glasses on a bit of blue cloth, although the lense seem to dirty the more she rubs. "N-no need to tell our guest about the—"

"No shame in prioritising comfort of ride over speed, Rotana," Dyeri interrupts with a cheerful beam, rubbing Rotana's shoulder.

The researcher cleans her spectacles more furiously before settling them back on her nose. "But but but! What if the guest doesn't...think that I'm cool?"

Link tilts her head to one side and Rotana's hands flutter up to her face. Dyeri laughs joyously. Rotana hides her expression behind the book.

The smell of something burning turns Link's attention to the skillet that Rhiaru left.

The eggs Rhiaru cooked have burned clean through.

While Link wipes the tears from her eyes at the sacrifice of the omelet, Dyeri scrapes the charred mess from the bottom of the skillet. She scrubs the skillet with a handful of sand, then bangs its base against a rock to shake the sand out. "Right. Let's get cooking."

Rotana asks when breakfast will finish. Dyeri answers that she'll call Rotana and Rhiaru over when the omelet has finished. Rotana thanks her; she excuses herself politely to return to the blue tent.

Dyeri holds her hands out with an expectant sort of smile. Link cocks her head to the side. "Food," says Dyeri with a cheerful arching of the eyebrows, and a grin springs to Link's lips.

Link digs up her satchel to provide all that she promised. Dyeri glances through the wooden box of spices, inspects the monster extract, tastes the quality of the salt. In turn she produces eggs in velvet boxes from the crates under the awning and a silvery-wrapped stick of butter. A thick, creamy butter, yellower than any butter she can recollect, the cow butter of Romani Ranch or the goat butter of Kakariko. Dyeri quirks an eyebrow at her. "Never seen seal butter before?"

"...how do you say that word?"

"Seal?" Dyeri fiddles with the lobe of her right ear, then relaxes and shows Link the gesture.
"Seal butter?"

Dyeri laughs. "Hey there, see those sand seals over there? Seal butter. Guess they're not from those sand seals in particular, but it's the fattest, richest butter you've ever taste, swear by the Goddess. With Nabooru the way it is, getting a good batch's not the easiest job in the world. Except Rotana and Rhiaru can go willy-nilly there and back. Got special passes from Uruda and all."

"You can go to Nabooru? I mean, they can?" Link sits forward, elbows on her knees. "Do you know if there's a way to get in?"

"Hey there, thought you wanted to go to the desert." Dyeri's eyebrows have arched again, and her hand has drifted to her left ear. Her timbre has shifted; Link cannot place where her words lie now.

"I think it would be easier if I could go to Nabooru first. I know they're closed off, but..."

Dyeri shrugs. "Why are you looking to go?"

Link rubs the back of her head. "It's a long story."

"We've got a long time," answers Dyeri, though not unkindly, that cheery smile still curving up her mouth. Link tries and fails to gauge whether Dyeri asks the question of suspicion—as have others before—or of genuine curiosity.

"...I want to see the Divine Beast."

"Savah Naboris."

By now Link has noticed that the Parapan greetings, too, begin with the syllable sa. Perhaps like the Eldic double up to demonstrate their respect, so does sa mean something, as in the name of the Goddess Sageru.

To Dyeri, Link nods. Dyeri's eyebrows quirk still further up. Link has the sense that the future of Dyeri's eyebrows rests on her fingertips: another strange answer, and her eyebrows will rip off from her forehead to float up above her face to arch still further. "Got an obvious question for you. Why?"

"...I think I can do something about it. About the Divine Beast."

Dyeri lifts her hand to her left earlobe and tugs. "Can you help chop up those zapshrooms? Careful with your hands. Sting, those babies do."

Link follows to where she points. A crate marked with labels she cannot read. She opens the top to peer inside: mushrooms. Yellow as yellow can get. While the sunshrooms of Hateno sported a shade closer to the orange of a sunset just begun, the zapshrooms blister with the brightness of their hue.

She sticks her hand in.

When Link comes to a second later, face-down in the sandy dirt, Dyeri holds back a laugh. Rotana emerges from her tent to inquire about the yelp she heard.

Dyeri grants Link a pair of gloves made of a slippery squeaky material that carries a scent entirely different from leather. A dull scent. A scent that sneaks her a headache when she inhales too long.

"Rubber," Dyeri notes, her voice lilted up. "Faronese rubber. It'll protect you from electric shocks."
Just don't let the caps touch your bare skin. The rest of the mushroom's fine."

Link takes her knife to the zapshrooms. The thick rubber of the gloves limits her usual nimbleness of fingers, but she removes the caps nonetheless and places them in a container that Dyeri indicates, a wooden bucket with a tiny shard of topaz at the bottom. "Dice 'em up. We'll stick 'em in the omelet."

Link nods. She cuts thin slices of the zapshrooms' stalks, then ribbons the tender ribbed flesh exposed with the caps cut off. She dices through multiple rounds until she can balance the pieces of zapshroom on her fingernail.

"Whoa! I said to dice 'em, not grate 'em. Gotta say this is pretty great, too." Dyeri chuckles to herself and Link laughs with her despite not understanding the joke. Dyeri wipes the bits of shroom from the cutting board into the skillet, where the eggs have started to firm into omelet. She salts and spices the omelet, then flips it over. Link can see the golden sheen of seal butter on the newly exposed half of the omelet. Globules of fat congeal around the edges, which Dyeri knocks off with the spatula before smoothing the rest of the butter into a clean yellow shimmer.

"You're probably wondering why we'd go to the trouble of bearing zapshrooms like that, eh."

"...because they're delicious?"

Dyeri looks at her, and Link tries a small smile. Dyeri bursts into laughter so loud that a nearby sand sparrow launches into the air with a series of alarmed chirps. "You've got the right idea. That's part of it. Other part's that having their insides in your system keeps you safer. They absorb static like nothing else. And with monsters around that's becoming a higher priority than ever, swear by the Goddess."

Link nods. The protection from electrocution sounds like a pleasant minor boon from a tasty dish.

On the other hand, she has never been the best judge: she expected deliciousness in exchange for electrocution, and would've happily made that bargain to boot.

"Almost done. Here, stranger, you get the first portion." Link tilts her head, but Dyeri has already cut off a quarter and set it onto a plate. She proffers the plate to Link.

Link takes the plate without a second thought. She holds it up to her mouth. The omelet radiates heat and the double-savoriness of cooked egg and fried mushroom, the spices lending a sharp sweetness that runs her tongue over her upper lip. She tries to grab the omelet with her hand and winces from the heat. Bringing the plate to her mouth, Link grips the omelet directly between her teeth.

She jerks her head back and flings the omelet up into the air. Opening her mouth wide, Link catches the omelet whole in her mouth. It burns against her tongue and the roof of her mouth but she chokes it down anyway. Sparks of static course over the insides of her mouth, crackling the tip of her tongue down to her throat, like the burning sensation of a touch too much cinnamon. The outer layer of fatty seal butter provides a protective coating that lessens the impact of the shocks from painful to pleasant. And the richness of the butter slides the omelet down her throat. Almost too rich. She fights to keep it down. The sting of salt lingers on her lips as she licks it off.

Omelet.

Sand partridge eggs. The taste slightly sharper and slightly richer than cucco eggs, the white more watery and less firm, the yolk fattier, with a tendency to burn if left on the skillet for too long.
Urbosa taught Link to watch for the bubbles of air at the rim between the yolk and white to know when to flip the omelet over. In the shade of a stone pillar, the girls sat with the morning's hunt strung up on their horses. Whatever they did not eat, they would bring back whole. Link had learned that the Parapan queen kept a store of food for any civilian, particularly those on harder times. At sunset, from the roof of the palace, she watched wagons of produce quit the city to travel during the cool night to distribute to villages with poorer harvests than usual from the recent influx of monsters.

Since the girl with the golden hair had arrived in Nabooru, Link's training with Urbosa had taken a steady dive in pace. Urbosa ushered the girl with the golden hair and Impa alike away from their sessions; once alone, Link's skills improved. Yet under the heaviness of Impa's judgment and the girl with the golden hair's resentment, the sword slipped from her palms as if made of buttered ice.

Urbosa, Link noticed, had taken on a slightly different air. More stressed than usual, though she kept it from her expressions and her words. But Link had learned to detect that faint difference in atmosphere as she had learned to detect the crackle in the air just before the storm.

And Urbosa's change in demeanor which Link could not place made her tremble at what it could bring.

Urbosa stretched her legs and massaged her shoulders. "So, Link, how are you enjoying Nabooru?"

Link did not reply. She kept her gaze trained on the omelet in the skillet, on the rim between the white and the yolk.

"If you don't like the city crowds, Link, we could always move elsewhere." Urbosa smiled at her. "My home village's quiet compared to Nabooru's bustle. I think you'd like Rovah."

Link kept quiet, patient. Urbosa rested her hand on her hip. "...what do you think of the food? That's what I remember from my first visit to Nabooru way back when. The way everything smelled. All the vendors on every corner, with food I'd never heard of. I'd never even had hydromelon before. Doesn't grow in Rovah."

The omelet bubbled. Link flipped it deftly; Urbosa flashed her a signal of approval.

"Nicely done. You've learned well. So, Link. What recipes have you learned?" Urbosa continued to probe. Link's stomach started to rumble from the images of hot and cool meals dancing through her memories. She lifted her hands to answer Urbosa's next question: "And the hydromelon?"

"They're delicious. Icy and sweet." Urbosa snapped her fingers and then fell silent. Link's hands faltered; she gazed at the Champion of Sageru's face to read her features, to check for resentment, to anticipate a blow across the face or hands around her throat, yet Urbosa's expression held nothing but warmth. "...if it's not too much trouble I want to bring some melons back to my sister."

"Your sister?"

Link snapped herself back to the skillet. She flipped the omelet over again. From the edge of her vision she could see Urbosa shift.

"You should tell me about her, Link. I've an older sister myself, and some younger cousins besides." Urbosa speaks of them briefly, of her mothers, of growing up in Rovah and learning the ways of the blade from the village swordsmith. She took to the blade as Link had taken to the preparation of food and soon outstripped her mentors. Her mothers proudly sent her to Nabooru to train further in the Queen's own garrison. When knowledge of the Calamitous One's return had
spread and the Queen had taken on the call to appoint a Champion of Sageru, Urbosa had proven her mettle in a tournament of strength and then another of wit. The Oracles of the Temples of the Goddesses had run her through gauntlets of trials.

She had entered a girl and emerged the other end a woman prepared to take on the fate of the world on her shoulders.

Since then her life had busied, and Urbosa had found little time to visit her family. "But once we bake that boar, I look forward to taking a nice long rest with my folks. You and your sister are invited to come visit. I'll show you my mother's own special recipe for fried bananas if you do."

Link lifted her head slightly at that, and Urbosa laughed.

"I mean it, Link."

The omelet had cooked through. Link slit the omelet into two pieces, one larger than the other, and offered Urbosa the larger half, which she accepted. "This is delicious, you know. You've got a way with food. Maybe you're the Sage of an eighth Goddess with a virtue of food. Mmhm!"

Link could feel her cheeks heat up in a blush. Urbosa patted her shoulder.

"I don't know much about you, Link, but we'll be stuck together for some time. We should enjoy it. And if you like talking about food, then we'll keep talking about food. Link, how do you feel about boiled goose eggs? Have you tried them yet?"

Despite herself Link could sense her hands rising up to reply. So the conversation went. Urbosa asked about food and Link answered; Urbosa inquired of recipes and Link responded; Urbosa shifted the conversation to any other topic and Link fell silent until the talk turned once more to food.

Even so, she listened.

She listened to the stories of Urbosa's childhood, of Urbosa having fought tooth and nail to become the Champion of Sageru, of Urbosa's sister and mothers and cousins.

She listened.

That night Link unfurled the map that the King had given her. She searched the whole of Parapa for Rovah but could not find its name no matter how long she searched. Without meaning to, Link fell asleep with her face on the parchment.

In the morning she awoke to a plate of omelet, speckled with zapshroom, and a bright red dot inked into the atlas near the southeast of Parapa. An elegant hand had written a name beside the dot in looping Parapan script.

She needed not to know how to read Parapan to understand the name Rovah.

Link licks the last of the salt from her lips and wipes her mouth on the back of her hand. She rubs the corners of her eyes. She catches Dyeri eyeing her over the skillet.

Dyeri nods to herself.

"Hey there, stranger." Dyeri folds her arms across her chest. "You said you could do something about Savah Naboris. What do you plan on doing? Goddess doesn't take kindly to ritual sacrifice."
Link touches her chin. "Can you keep a secret?"

"Depends on its nature."

"I can activate that shrine."

Dyeri's eyebrows rise up once more into points. "The shrine?" Link points to the shrine in the centre of the statues, and Dyeri nods slowly, keeping that lively grin curling the corners of her lips. "A shrine, eh. And you don't want me to tell Rotana or Rhiaru how you did it, that right?" Link dips her head. "If you can do it without turning out to be Yiga, I'll see what I can do about Nabooru, swear by the Goddess."

Link blinks at her.

"What, you expected some fanfare? Hey there, if you figure out a way to stop Savah Naboris, be my guest." Link blinks again, and Dyeri exhales, her cheer slipping for a moment to a look of seriousness that makes Link take a step back. "Only a matter of time before that thing gets close enough to a town that we can't just evacuate. Already hit Dhoruf. Don't worry about me, though: my family got out just fine. Like I said, the Queen's been evacuating everyone weeks before they're in danger." She shrugs. "But there's only so much we can do. You think you've got something no one else does, go for it. I've seen enough people try to play the hero that I'm not buying it until someone does something. Someone passed through wielding a legendary 'master torch' or something like that. Told the traveller things were only going to end in misery. Insisted anyway and I got the traveller a lift. Goddesses know where the traveller is now. So. You see that sort of thing happening all the time, and hey there, you don't have time to care about everyone trying to throw herself into the halls of legends. But I'm nothing if not optimistic. I keep at it and someone's bound to get lucky." She coughs. Her wrist blocks her eyes from Link's vision, and Link stares down at her own boots. "...so." Dyeri's timbre has regained its earlier brightness. "Go on. Show me your magic and I'll get you out there."

Link swallows.

Dyeri tends to the omelet approaching finished deliciousness upon the skillet. Link sneaks towards the shrine at a crouch. She glances up to discern Rhiaru's location with the red telescope; Link spots the woman with the green headscarf sitting on the head of the northernmost statue, facing the highlands.

She steps onto the platform of the shrine.

The same as all the others. The depression in the pedestal. The platform piles high with scraps of weighed down paper and varying tools for which she has no name. She skirts the materials so as not to disturb the archaeologists' work.

Leaning over, Link slots the slate into the pedestal.

The blueness of the glow. Like the fire-light of the guardians. Like the shimmer of the blade that once weighed upon her body.

She returns to the fire and Dyeri's eyebrows have all but disappeared from her hairline. "Hey there. What do you know. Well, I swore by the Goddess." Dyeri leans in, propping her chin up on her elbow. "You'll be gone before I call Rotana for breakfast, understand?"

Link nods.

"So, stranger. What do you know about whaling?"
Electro Mushroom Omelet (three hearts, low electric resistance for 06:20) - bird egg, goat butter, rock salt, zapshroom

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Wew and now you understand why I put my worldbuilding in the notes instead of in the fic proper! Thanks for enduring this, dear reader, and thank you for reading along despite how dry Delicious in Wilds can get at times. And thank you to my beta reader, Emma, for bearing with me as well.

Sand seals are cute! In-game, the red ones are both faster and better behaved, which I don't think is a fun trade off. So, in Delicious in Wilds, the yellow ones are faster but wilder, and the red ones are better behaved but slower.

Rhiaru's outfit is based on the climbing outfit in-game. The three archaeologists, of course, are colour-coded after the Golden Goddesses for good luck.

Rubber is mentioned as being some ancient material in Breath of the Wild, but I simply stuck rubber trees in Faron.

The mentioned unification is the unification of Hyrule and the establishment of the royal family (though it's unclear if the royal family has actually been the same one the entire time; after all, ten thousand years is a very long time, and the family name is Harkinian, not Hyrule) from the collected nation-states that composed the land now known as Hyrule, the southern half of the continent. Pre-unification myths and legends are ancient. Many of them existed before the establishment of the Seven Goddesses as a religion.

The legend of the Seven Heroines in-game was interesting to me, so I wanted to expand upon them and their role in Parapan legend. Who were they? Could they be the gerudo version of the tale of the Seven Sages? Were they someone else, given how often the number seven repeats over and over again throughout the franchise? We just don't know.

There's also, of course, the matter of infodumping on you regarding the mirror (remember what Zelda was talking about?). A civil war, and a scholar who wanted to end the fighting, but who became instead a beast...what a strange story. How much is fact, and how much is fiction? And what real relevance does it have to the backstory of Delicious in Wilds? After all, we don't actually have much backstory on Calamity Ganon or even on the original construction of the Divine Beasts.

Take the names of Dyeri, Rhiaru, and Rotana's sand seals, and try to rearrange them a little bit. You might see a name of a certain other mount from a different franchise.

Rhiaru is a bit of Link's counterpart in a certain sense; she just silently walks off to go climbing places, which is why I put her in as green.
Because of locations named after characters from previous titles in the franchise and my own running out of previously named gerudo characters (thanks Nintendo), I started to turn to other gerudo-affiliated characters. Therefore, Rovah is named after Twinrova, and Dhoruf is named after Ganondorf, with appropriate corruptions of those names.

We get some rather painful hints about Link's past here, alongside more choking metaphors. That's been coming up here and again in the fic.

I wanted to give Urbosa something resembling an actual backstory and a family. She's trying her best to get through to Link, but as you can see she's having difficulty with getting Link to say something, much like how Daruk was doing. But it's notable that Link is also terrified of doing anything to make Urbosa angry in any way, while she wasn't with Daruk. This isn't because Urbosa is scarier than Daruk; this is because of Link's own past. Urbosa's the one who helps Link moves past that when it comes time for Daruk to take over.

Rotana is one of my favourite NPCs in Breath of the Wild. I adore how excited she is about her research; it makes me happy that they actually modelled glasses for her; and I wanted her to be the one to solve the shrine in Delicious in Wilds. They had everything but the slate.

Next time: molduga whaling and other joys of cooking!

midna's ass. 30 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: But but but! The entire scene of Link dealing with Rotana and her excitement while dreaming of food is one of the funniest bits of this series. Plus we get some great worldbuilding out of it.

Sand seals are so cute!

Emma. 30 September 2017.
Electro Elixir

Chapter Summary

Following the archaeologists' sellsword's suggestion, the travelling chef travels to the town of Ache's Veil, participates in a whaling excursion, and convinces the leader of the whalers to take the chef to the Divine Beast Vah Naboris.

Chapter Notes

As usual, non-spoiler comments I couldn't fit into the end: As always, thank you to my beta reader, Emma, for assisting me with this chapter, and thank you to you, the reader, for being with me all this time, and also for reminding me to post my chapters on time.

Much like how sapphires are used to keep cool in Eldin, sapphires are used (albeit more sparingly) as a form of air conditioning in the hot summers of Parapa. Conversely, rubies are used during the colder winters.

The sky-blue statue of the Goddess Sageru that Link sees in Nabooru is meant to resemble the Goddess of the Sand from Ocarina of Time and more notably Twilight Princess, albeit with a seven-pointed star upon her chest, which is a more recent addition to her mythos that was added to her design after the Seven became a unified religion.

I finally completely ran out of gerudo from previous games after whom to name the villages, so Ache's Veil is another reference to Aveil and also serves as a reference to ache, the monster from The Adventure of Link; there's a brick-joke. You know, if you're reading this and has never played The Adventure of Link, I recommend looking into it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Link leaves the shrine for Rotana and Rhiaru to solve. With Dyeri's map opened in her hands and the ex-whaler's letter of recommendation tucked carefully in her satchel, she follows the sun to the west.

She has not read the letter, sealed in wax and stamped with the imprint of Dyeri's ring, a mark of a triangle emerging from wavy lines. For all Link knows Dyeri could have fooled her, could have sent her on a wild cucco chase. And yet the people of the land have done nothing but help her, from the first gorons who bid her to explore the mine in which she encountered Yunobo, to Amali's endless kindness in believing her and aiding her.

Link passes abandoned villages, sparse and far-between, smaller than she anticipated for a village. Not in ruin, ancient and inert, like the villages on the sides of the road through Central Hyrule, but recently abandoned, windows still paned with glass, inner layers of sapphire still cool to touch, the paint over the top of the doors still vibrant. Those further to the south that she observes through the
red telescope swarm with monsters, which have not reached those further to the north through which she travels.

The settlements in the more arid parts of the desert congregate around oases. When she veers slightly to the north, she understands why the villages appear so small: only a few structures immediately surrounding the water seem permanent, made of stone and brick, painted white alongside brilliant hues of decoration. Tents and other fixtures make up the rest. Link watches from afar the evacuation of a village north of her camp. Within the span of those few hours that she can see the village, she watches over half of the settlement bundled up and carried away on the backs of its people, taking their animals with them.

Link rides on.

The robes purchased beyond the topaz gate of Aveil save her from the wind and the sand alike. Their billowing looseness keeps a current of air flowing over her skin where bareness would welcome in the heat. At night, the fabric serves to warm her, and she dons her feathered Tabanch tunic.

When they reach the windswept dunes, Link does not allow Ilia to gallop. They take the journey at a slower gait; she keeps watch for rock beneath the surface of the sand or for deeper sandbanks. The first time they encounter the latter, Ilia nearly drowns.

Only with an application of stasis and injuring her own horse does Link save her.

She takes water from the oases of vacated villages and catches what food she can. Birds and small creatures when she can have them—desert hares and strange squirrel-like creatures for which she has no name—and lizards and snakes when she cannot. Link learns to dig in the banks of oases to uncover frogs that provide both water—in the form of their urine—and meat. She acquires a taste for their legs smothered in fat. Over spots of water Link snags darners and butterflies from the air and cooks them down—as Amali taught her—to serve as substitute nuts.

To feed Ilia, Link breaks into stores of the villages in search of hay and dried grass, and any vegetables or fruit that she can gather up. Her first run-in with a cactus leaves pulling spines out of her abdomen and left arm for hours, but she retrieves their pear-like voltfruit for her companion to eat.

They rest wherever Link can find higher ground: pillars of stone, slopes of rock. She aids Ilia in climbing them and in leaping back down. Ilia shies and whinnies; Link can feel her companion's heart thudding with the fear.

Yet she has no recourse except to risk Ilia's life, for the sands contain their own dangers.

Link does not need to know their name to learn to avoid them. Where monsters she has faced on foot die to a blade through the throat, the monsters of the sands slip away into the ground only to re-emerge under her own boots. In banks of deeper sand lie great pincered monsters with suctioning mouths large enough to swallow her whole. They hide in wait beneath the surface of dunes. She watches a sand grouse waddle over such a bank of sand. Within an instant, a funnel like a whirlpool has opened up, the monster's pincers jutting from the dunes as a pair of sabres. Squawking, the grouse scrambles to escape, yet the downwards force of the whirlwind leads the bird directly into its waiting circular maw. The grouse disappears.

The monster slips back into the sand.

The deserts bring more than sedentary perils. Some monsters she mistakes for a plant, only to reach
out and nearly have her hand cut off when the monster begins to spin. They emerge and descent from the sand like gambling tops, spined and spiked. Fearing for Ilia's life, Link avoids them at all costs: a single broken leg would spell the end for her companion, and she could not forgive herself for that. Other monsters resemble sharks, with tall fins that signal their approach and rock-like bone protrusions over their heads that act as half-helmet and half-battering ram. Though she successfully escapes one at a time, Link spots them more often in groups of three, patrolling around their territories. They leap out of the sand to crash into anything that moves in their abyssal jaws. She learns that whistling will prompt them to jump up and out, much to poor Ilia's confusion. A dose of bomb to their softer undersides drops their innards over the sand and leaves them to rot.

The rock pillars, Link discovers, do not guarantee safety. She falls asleep on top of such a pillar; she awakens to Ilia's neighs of distress.

Something crawls over her body.

Link yells, jumping back on the stone. Inside her clothing. On her bank, under her shirt, too many legs, too many legs. She rolls over the rock to crush them against her body. Their ooze slicks her skin; their squashed corpses cling to her flesh. She tries to scrub them off in a bath of sand and uncovers their identity: one-eyed scorpions capable of expelling fire from their tails.

From then on Link inspects every pillar before she sleeps to cleanse it with her blade.

The malice seems to have spread to the sand itself. In the distant deeper Tantari Desert of the south, she witnesses the sand merge and rise into monsters with outstretched arms that speed across the dunes before disintegrating a few seconds later. She swallows at the prospect of passing the sand-beasts en route to the Divine Beast.

Steadily, steadily, the sand give way once more to steppe.

When she sees a scarlet-striped lizalfos for the first time, she exhales in relief. The lizalfos breathes flame and Link knows just how to dispatch it. A yellow lizalfos gives her pause: from its horn the monster discharges a shock sufficient to convulse anything within a metre radius.

But Link can control the discharges too: the impact of an arrow to the horn triggers a bolt of electricity. The yellow lizalfos become her unwitting second companion to eliminate groups of monsters from afar and then ride on past before the surviving lizalfos can leap to their taloned feet. She turns around on Ilia to sign her thank-you at the lizalfos's spent body.

When she first smells water—about a fortnight after leaving Aveil—she considers the scent a hallucination. But the red telescope reveals densely populated line of villages and towns in the distance. Her mouth opens. Link can feel the saliva dripping from the roof of her mouth, thick and tasting of mud.

The River Sageru.

Wide, so wide that she cannot make out the other bank, some three kilometres across. As the Hylia River feeds Hyrule so does the Sageru River feed Parapa. Link rides Ilia to the point of exhaustion. Her companion's legs tense and shiver; the muscles of her back ripple with fatigue; her head sways. At the bank of the river, Link dismounts her.

She drops to her knees in the mud by the water.

She dips her hands into the river.

She drinks.
It flows over her fingers, and Link dives headfirst into the river.

The water stings in her newer wounds, the scraps on her back and stomach from the scorpions, the angry red welts where a lizalfos's talons hooked into the skin of her right leg, the thick cut across her left palm from the spinning-top plant that leaves her barely able to hold her sword without wincing in pain. She drinks as she bathes. Stripping away her clothing, she allows the sand, the salt, the sweat to wash from her skin. She scrubs her body with the softer sand from the riverbed and digs her nails into her scalp to draw out the sand ingrained to the roots of her hair.

She drinks too much.

On the bank again, she vomits. Mostly water, with a greenish hint of bile. The acid burns up her throat.

She passes out by Ilia's side.

Link awakens under the warmth of midmorning. She drinks again, this time more carefully, and snacks on the leftovers of frog fried the day before. Wiping her mouth on her tunic sleeve, she inspects Ilia. No wounds, no injuries. Her companion walks normally.

"Only a little farther. I'm sorry for how far I pushed you yesterday." She caresses Ilia's cheek. Her companion pushes her nose into Link's hand. "I'll be more careful in the future. You mean more to me than my own life does, you know that, don't you, girl?"

Ilia whinnies. She snuffles Link's chest; Link embraces her.

They do not follow the river exactly. Travellers avoid her on the road until she remembers to pin the yellow pass from Aveil to her chest. When Link comes too close to the towns on the waterfront, guards demand to know her purpose, pass or no. She recognises the tall white-sandstone walls of Nabooru from her memories and—intent on avoiding trouble—skirts the Parapan capital by a wide margin. Even from here Link observes the rise of the statue of the golden-and-sky-blue Goddess Sageru; a fountain of water pumped from the river flows from the seven-pointed star upon the statue's chest, double-crescent mark of the gerudo curving over either breast. Raising the telescope to her eye, Link can discern the details of the three statues surrounding that of the Goddess Sageru: the heads of the Golden Goddesses in green, in blue, and in red.

All else falls within the walls.

Down south. Link rides on past Nabooru, past other villages and towns, until she reaches the final settlement along the river not yet evacuated, slightly further north than Dyeri's map indicated.

Ache's Veil.

A series of metal struts around the village perimeter spark with topaz. Unlike the topaz gate, tall and thick enough to deter monsters even without the sparks, Link notices the fragility of the thin weaves of metal, more like a cobweb than a fence. Some struts lean forward or back instead of standing straight up: a temporary measure, hastily erected.

Link arrives at the northern gate of the village. The guard within the greeting booth—a metal box similarly covered in topaz shards—inquires about her purposes for visiting Ache's Veil. Link reads the words from the guard's hands via a thin, lower-chest-level window in the steel shutter. She slides Dyeri's letter through the shutter. The guard repeats her question.

"I'm hungry," Link signs immediately, and then stops herself. "...Dyeri told me that I should sign
up for a position whaling here."

Since Link cannot see the guard's face, she watches the guard's fingers drum on the desk. "You know Dyeri?"

"Is...is she from around here?"

The guard does not reply for a moment. Her hands vanish from the shutter. Link hears footsteps, then the shuffling of papers, then a few noises that she cannot identify. Link waits. The heat climbs along with the mid-spring sun. The wet season should start soon, from what she has heard. From late spring to the harvest. Idly considering what she has learned from passing, Link taps her boot against the dirt. One, two, ten, twenty, one hundred...

At last guard's hands return to the window. She passes over a sheet of parchment. "Here's the whaling contract. Are you familiar with what whaling entails?" Link is not familiar; she nods anyway. She can learn on her feet, as she has before. "Read this, then sign your name here if you agree. If you have any questions about the rules and regulations, feel free to ask."

Link looks at the paper written in three different scripts: in Parapan, in Faronese, and in Tabanch, none of which she knows beyond the recognition of their characters. Nonetheless she signs her name in Central Hyrulean at the bottom.

Anything less might jeopardise her passage into Nabooru.

The guard takes the paper, then pushes an envelope towards Link, who \textit{flips} it into her hand. "Please come around to inn at the southern entrance. I am...very sorry about our lack of hospitality, but I hope that you understand." Her gestures tinge with an apologetic steadiness. "The last time we allowed someone in with such a letter, she revealed herself to be Yiga. Boss trusts you, so I've been told to show you to the inn." Trust, for the stamp of Dyeri's ring.

Then again, a Yiga could have stolen the ring from Dyeri.

Link dips her head in understanding, thanks the guard, and comes around the other side of the town. An inn awaits her. Beneath an awning of a miniature stable, she notes a trough of water. Link leaves Ilia there and enters the undulating-cloth curtain of the inn's doorway.

A sandstone-skinned woman in the midst of the foyer sets down the broom in her hands to greet her. "Welcome to Tune on the Dune, Ache's Veil premiere inn. Oh, are you the guest?" The inkeep moves her hand to her chest; Link repeats her motion. "Please accept my apologies for the dust. We haven't had visitors around here in months. I certainly haven't been here until I was called in just now. It's a pleasure to meet you. My name is Vaike and I'll be hosting you while you're here." Link hands her the envelope from the guard. The inkeep flicks it open, scans it from right to left, and closes the envelope once more. "...you signed a whaling contract." Link nods. Vaike's timbre affects a more professional edge, and Link sets her boots together. "I see. Take the bed upstairs, first door on the left, if you have no objections." The inkeep produces a silver key which Link takes and pockets. "Get a good night's sleep. Be careful out there. Monsters have been known to get in. If you need anything, there's a bell next to the window. It'll alert me and I'll come see what's going on in a few minutes, but if monsters come, you signed the waiver that you're in charge of your own life." She exhales and returns to her normal tone. "I hope you enjoy your stay."

Link blinks. "I left Ilia...I left my horse outside. I hope that's all right."

After a few moments of Vaike's silence and Link's panic, the inkeep explains that she does not know how to read sign from her fingers. She \textit{does}, however, know how to read Central Hyrulean.
As Vaike fetches Link paper and quill, Link struggles to write legibly enough for Vaike to read.

"That's what the water-trough's there for," Vaike answers agreeably, noting Link's words from the paper. "I'll feed and water your horse while she's here."

Link writes: "Is Ilia going to be left out there?"

Vaike grimaces. "I'm afraid so. We used to able to bring them in but...there have been incidents. Yiga forcing their horses to swallow explosives." Link pales. "But I haven't lost a horse yet."

Link bows in gratitude. "How much do I have to pay...?" Vaike quirks an eyebrow; Link blushes from her forgetfulness and writes down the question instead.

Glancing over the paper, the inkeep shakes her head. "Didn't you read the contract?" Link smiles nervously, but Vaike seems to pay her little mind. "A night's stay is included. You only have to pay if you desert, though deserting in the desert doesn't sound like a plan much blessed by Nayru." She laughs gently to herself. "Make sure you dress in layers. Don't worry about armour; dress light and make sure you can move. If you can, I suggest a hasty elixir."

Link nods.

"And most of all...unless you decide to become a whaler full-time, it's a once in a lifetime opportunity. You might as well enjoy yourself."

Vaike takes her leave once she has shown Link to her room and provided her with dinner in the form of a creamy stew on seal milk. Globules of fat bubble at the edges of chopped voltfruit and Parapan radish from the richness of the milk. Link glances at the inside of the offered room, at its neatness and tidiness, at the pitcher of water on the nightstand, at the candles arranged artfully, at the softness of the bed. She takes the pitcher and then lopes down the stairs to sleep with Ilia under the awning.

The morning after she bids Ilia a temporary farewell. Her companion noses her cheek, and Link brings their foreheads together to comfort her.

Then she meets her employers: five gerudo women in robes the colour of sand, and a sixth dressed in dark green, her hair dyed emerald. The leader—an athletic woman of obsidian skin and practical gaze, her hair drawn back in a series of braided locks, her stature shorter than the others to just a few centimetres above Link's own height—introduces herself as Nadyne. Nadyne provided a pair of sand boots; Link gratefully puts them on. "Ho there, traveller. You have a name?"

"Link."

Nadyne emulates the gesture. As Link cannot write Parapan, or Tabanach, or Faronese and Nadyne knows no Central Hyrulean, they seem to come to an impasse, until one of the other women ventures that she knows a little Necludan. "Link," says Nadyne, and Link inclines her head. "Welcome aboard. I take it you've never been whaling before, so allow me to introduce the team. Ahni—" She indicates the dark-skinned woman who knows Necludan, her earrings glittering with amber; Ahni shyly raises her hands to her mouth. "—and Luavan—" Nadyne indicates a short-haired woman of sand-coloured tone and green dye at the tips of her locks, who gives Link a smirk and a salute. "—are the harpooners. They're in charge of bringing down the molduga whale itself."

"Molduga whale. Dyeri taught her the sign for the word molduga, which she now repeats to herself.

"Pleiade—" The tallest and palest of the assembled women, her mouth a stern line, a golden armlet coiled up her left arm in the shape of a sand shark. "—and Dilani—" The woman bows gracefully
to Link as though performing a move in a dance, before lifting her head so that Link can see the golden triangle tattooed under her right eye, vibrant as the sun against the warm onyx tones of her skin, its brilliant matched by the easy smile upon her lips. Her long hair fluffs around her head, her curly bangs dyed blue. "—are our spotters. They're the ones who risk life and limb to get our harpooners close enough to spear the molduga."

Dilani smiles. "You don't need to go on and on about us, Boss."

"Oh. It's the least I can do for how much courage you all have. I can tell you that much." Nadyne grins warmly at her team. "You'd make the Courageous Champion of Sageru herself proud." She turns back to Link. "And this, may Her winds bless us all, is our Oracle of Safarore." The woman in the green robe and the green hair dips low, and Link bows back to her. "Listen to anything that She tells you, for She comes with us to bring our Goddess Safarore's wind and our Goddess Safarore's courage. She can read Her Courageousness's will better than anyone and so tells us where to move to always catch the wind."

Link inclines her head at the Oracle, who offers her a smile as she strums a note upon the three-stringed lyre she holds in her hands painted green with circular markings that remind Link of the symbol on the back of her paraglider. Link blushes though she cannot quite tell why.

"And you, Link, will come with me. Got any questions about what you're supposed to do?"

Link shakes her head. She has no questions if she does not know the first thing about her assignment.

"Then I hope that your courage is well up to the task, because you'll need it." Nadyne brings her right hand to her mouth and whistles. "Let's get whaling."

The team moves outside to where sit sandships of bone hull and linen sail. Four such ships, one smaller than the others. Link's arms fall in surprise to her sides.

The Oracle of Farore brings out four giant leaves painted over with blessings in red, blue, green, and sky blue, symbols of the Goddesses. Korok leaves, Link realises. The women fan out. Dilani and Ahni take one of the ships, and Luavan and Pleiade another. Link watches them lash themselves to the masts with woven lifelines. Upon her left wrist, each spotter ties a rope looped around the mast, which can open, close, and twist the sail; to her right each spotter fastens the korok leaf. The harpooners carry with them massive hooked harpoons bladed with gems of sapphire crackling with frost. Each one carries a supply of four.

The Oracle of Farore takes the smallest ship. Nadyne ushers Link onto the last of the larger sandships and loops a belt around Link's waist with a rope attached. Link observes that the rope does not immediately tie around the mast of the sandship like the other lifelines, but rather winds itself over and over and over around a strange contraption affixed to the lever. Nadyne turns the lever repeatedly and the rope tightens, then locks the lever into place. "Don't worry, Link. There's over one hundred metres of rope in this thing. You're not going to get dragged around the sands."

Nadyne reaches up to fiddle with her right earlobe as she saw Dyeri do. "Oh, right. If things do go north, though, and you suddenly feel yourself getting dragged, don't panic. Calm down. The clothing you're wearing will protect you from the worst of the sand, and it'll keep you from becoming molduga chow. You'd rather get a sand-burn than end up a molduga's lunch, I can tell you that much."

Link rubs the back of her head.

"Thanks for coming along with us. Wait here."
Nadyne leaves her ship. The Oracle of Farore's sandship sits a valley of the dunes in front of the other three. Together, the Oracle and Nadyne invoke the Goddesses, Nadyne asking for Nayru's wisdom, Din's power, and Sageru's protection of Her kin, the Oracle asking, at length, for Farore's courage and Farore's wind.

"O Our Goddesses," the Oracle of Farore intones, "may our whaling please You, and may You bless us with success." The Oracle removes a green ocarina. Raising the instrument to the Oracle's lips, the Oracle sings a long note, then tucks the ocarina back into her robe to withdraw again the emerald lyre.

Nadyne takes her place with the korok leaf beside Link again, and the sandship lurches forward.

The ships slip slow over the sand at first. Yet, as Nadyne, Luavan, and Dilani keep the paces of their korok leaves to the song that the Oracle of Farore strums, the sandships quicken over the waves of sand until they fly over the dunes. Clinging to the mast, Link looks out over the desert through which they speed, at the golden light reflecting from the pale sands, at the clear blueness of the sky, the bluest sky that she could imagine, stretching out to the infinites of the world, a sea in the heavens.

Link laughs. For the exhilaration of the wind that billows her robes, for the beauty of the expanse of sand and sky and the line of the horizon where the two blur together into the sea, for the joy of riding a ship over the sands of a desert—

She laughs, and laughs, and when she thinks that she cannot laugh anymore another wave of mirth crashes over her, and she can hear Nadyne snickering, and then chuckling, and then breaking out into laughter so infectious that Link catches the laugh back from her and Nadyne from Link until she has doubled over with her aching stomach against the mast and her mouth threatening to split in half, and the sinew on the underside of her tongue throbbing from the stretch of having laughed for too long—

The Oracle of Farore's lyre-song shifts.

Nadyne's laughter stops with such abruptness that Link gasps out another few seconds and then claps her hand over her mouth to halt her own.

They arrive to a flat expanse of barren sand, lone and level. The other two sandships break away from the formation, and the Oracle of Farore's ship slows to a halt. Only Nadyne and Link's proceeds forward.

"Oh. It's almost showtime, Link. Don't worry about us," Nadyne instructs softly, her words just audible above the soft whisper of the bone ship over sand. "We'll make our ways towards it ourselves. Just focus on luring it out. If you hear me whistle, run straight towards me in a line. Otherwise, zigzagging is your friend. I know you know this already, but first-time whalers can get their nerves in a bundle, so just focus on what Dyeri taught you."

What Dyeri taught her. Link knows how to sign the word molduga. And nothing else.

"Get off the ship, Link. And good luck." Link forcibly uncurls her fingers from around the mast. Nadyne steadies the ship. Link takes a step off. "Stand still until I'm out of range," Nadyne calls softly over her shoulder, "and don't make a sound."

Link gulps down air. The sand boots keep her from sinking into the sand, and she spreads her Feet wide to her shoulders to firm her stance. The sandship speeds away. Link watches the rope fixed to her waist unwind and trail off over the dunes.
She hears the song of the emerald lyre.

Link turns her head this way and that. The ships wait along the periphery of her vision. The sun reaches its zenith to bear its heat upon the sands. She blinks. A strange fatigue of confusion paints the inner curves of her eyelids dark.

She should have asked. Asked someone, anyone.

For want of what better to do, Link takes to pacing back and forth. The rope around her waist wriggles back and forth on the sand.

The sand vibrates.

Link pauses. The ground continues to shake, with increasing intensity. She looks around her for monsters, her hands reaching automatically for her paraglider, but no pincers emerge from the sand and no outstretched arms race towards her.

And then she notices the furrow of sand behind her.

A long, long furrow that collapses ten metres after the head rushes towards her at an alarming speed. As it nears, she can hear the noise of something digging out the sand beneath the surface.

Like one of the sand sharks, but larger.

Far larger.

Far, far, far larger.

Link whistles but the giant sand shark does not respond, perhaps too far away. She shoves her hand into the loose robes to remove the slate from its pouch and rapidly summons a bomb that gets stuck inside of her sleeve. Hastily she scrambles to stick her other hand down her robe to recover the bomb. The vibration of the earth knocks her onto her knees. She struggles for the bomb.

The rope around her waist tugs and suddenly Link skids along the sand at breakneck pace. The bomb rolls around down her sleeve to tumble around her torso and between her legs. As she slides, she shoves her hand down her trousers and grasps hold of the spherical bomb, pulling it out and holding it aloft in the air. The furrow charges towards her. She throws the bomb over her head at the sand shark. No matter how gigantic the monster, enough explosives should take care of it.

The wind blows the spherical bomb away from her. Before her very eyes, the furrow angles towards the bomb. She stares at the furrow's form, wider than Ilia's length from head to hindquarters, the immediate collapse indicating its massive depth.

It reaches the bomb.

Link sees the thing emerge from the sand a second before the impact of its breach reaches her and the shockwave of sand tosses her up into the air. The rope around her waist slackens; she opens her paraglider to float above the sands and witness the monster that has leaped from the bowels of the earth.

Larger than the coalesced Malice of Eldin, larger than the stalking guardians with their fire-light, larger than ten sand sharks put together, like a moving mountain of muscle and meat, a whale of the sands with a mouth carved halfway down the entirety of its body, its jaws opening as a flower blooms and snapping shut around the bomb.
The molduga twists through the air. A great whale shadowing the dunes. For a single squeeze of Link's heart that stretches into an infinity of numbness in her chest, its bulk blocks out the very sun.

More by instinct than by thought, Link's left forefinger slips along the surface of the slate.

The bomb explodes inside the molduga’s mouth.

She hears its roar resonate through the air as the detonation splurts blood from the corners of its massive maw. When the molduga topples to the ground, the storm of sand kicked up chokes Link’s nose and coarsens her throat. The monster writhes. Its weight sinks steadily into the dunes. The beast flails its mouth open and closed, and a pearly-clear liquid begins to drain from its jaw, liquid that moistens the sands with its pale sheen.

Link slowly floats down on the paraglider.

Only in the stillness of the air can she hear her own heartbeat pounding so painfully against her eardrums that they might burst. The other sandships race towards the downed beast. She watches—Ahni, with the amber earrings—drive a harpoon into the molduga's left eye. The monster roars out again. The sapphire of the harpoon must have broken inside the jelly of its eye; the monster spasms against the sand until the entire beast trembles at once into silence, the ice frigiding its muscle and stilling its motion. The sandships slide away and then curve backwards to return just as the molduga starts to stir again. Pleiade readies a harpoon of her own.

Suddenly pain explodes at Link's left side, harsh and sharp enough for her fingers to rip from the wooden struts of the paraglider. Blue and white and sandy-tan spin around her. Agony strips meaning from her left shoulder. Her left hip catches her wrist and then her right knee smacks against her left, the impact of her boots landing in the dune slightly knocking up her head.

She rolls woozily onto her stomach and lies there with her face in the sand. Her left side throbs. When she breathes in, a line of agony sears just under the skin at the base of her lung.

Link buries her face into the sand. A hiccough runs through her that pulls the skin over her left ribs and shoulders in a blaze of pain, and then darkness overtakes her.

When she comes to, the agony in her left side has ebbed and the sun has lowered. The mountainous corpse of the molduga lies still and quiet, its face around its eyes torn through with a series of eight harpoons. Hands over her side prompt her to turn her head to her left. Her vision resolves: Pleiade, kneeling beside her. Link finds herself on one of the sandships on a stretch of fabric with the whalers around her. Pleiade presses a compress to her left side while Luavan checks the wounded area with the practised hand of a healer. She confirms that Link has neither broken nor fractured those ribs, only bruised them heavily. "Microfractures, maybe. I'd believe that." She frowns. "You'll want some pain relief."

"...what happened?" asks Link, blinking blearily through the pain.

"The molduga's tail hit you," Lauvan replies with a sympathetic wince. Link nods blankly at her words. When Pleiade quits her hand, Link presses her own pain into her ribs; the pressure keeps the edge off of the pain.

At this Nadyne arrives. Link attempts a vacant smile at the whaling of the molduga, and Nadyne shakes her head. "For Goddess's sake, when you heard me say that you need courage, you really took it to heart, didn't you?" Link retracts herself back. Nadyne's frown deepens. 'I'm blacklisting you from ever whaling for anyone again at your blatant breach of protocols, and you really should
have warned me that you were packing anything explosive. There's a reason we sapphire instead of topaz or bombs: a convulsing molduga's one of the most dangerous things on the sands.

Link lowers her head.

"...but whatever kind of explosive you used didn't make it spasm nearly as much as what I've seen before. You've got moxie. I can tell you that much. I have the feeling that you don't know how to properly whale—" Nadyne's eye widen. "—you don't know Parapan. Oh. Oh." Link blinks down at her own two hands. "You didn't read the contract. Did Dyeri even tell you what whaling meant?"

Link pauses, then shakes her head.

"For Goddess's sake," Nadyne says, more to herself than to Link, and then repeats the phrase again. "You didn't know the first thing about whaling; you signed the contract without reading it; you obviously aren't here to hunt molduga. So why did you take on the contract at all?"

Link hands shake at how badly she has once more messed up, at how her fears and anxieties have brought misfortune on those around her.

By herself she can act as recklessly as she wants. But she cannot continue with the assumption that others will dredge the answers out of her, that others will sit with her and talk to her about things like food as did Urbosa and Daruk.

Instead of bowing her head in silence and relying on her skills, she needs to speak, and so she does. Link explains: of how she met Dyeri by chance, of how she inquired a path to Nabooru, of how Dyeri suggested she take on a whaling contract in exchange for safe passage to Nabooru, of how Dyeri had told her that the whalers of Ache's Veil could guarantee her travel on the basis of their prized molduga oil. As she moves her hands, Nadyne's eyes widen further and further, until the whaler grasps her head in her hands.

"Oh. For Goddess's sake." Nadyne presses her fingers to her forehead. "Link, I can't take you to Nabooru. The city's shut tight as a moldworm trap since the most recent raid. I don't know who Dyeri's friends over at—what'd you say, the statues of the Seven Heroines?—are, but even if they're from Nabooru, they're likelier to sprout fins than they are to get back into the city for a good long while. They'll be stuck out there. I can tell you that much."

Still pressing her palm into her injured side, Link simply looks at Nadyne, panting, her fingers curved in between her ribs, her wrist aching, her knee shuddering with the effort not to drop to the ground.

Nadyne breathes out. "But I'll do you one better, Link. I can't take you to Nabooru, but Goddess curse me if I don't keep my word, and that goes for Dyeri. What did you want from Nabooru? I might be able to arrange something."

"...I wanted to go to the Divine Beast. But I was hoping that I could...get someone from Nabooru..."

Nadyne's throat makes a strange crrk noise and Link's hands still. "You 'want to go to' Vah Naboris."

"...you didn't say Savah?" Link tilts her head as she asks the obvious.

The whaler blinks back at her, then laughs quietly. "You think that piece of murderous junk deserves the Goddess's respect? I can barely stand referring to it with vah and for Goddess's sake you want me to add the sa. No, that damned camel can go—" She says a word Link does not know.
"—itself. Doesn't deserve to carry Nabooru's name. But if you've got a death wish for going there, I'll take you, Link. I'll do that much."

Link grins widely. "Thank you thank you thank you—"

"No need to thank me yet." Nadyne reaches up to her right ear in a gesture that again reminds Link of Dyeri. "Though if we're going out there, we'll need some protection. Have you ever made elixir?"

Link nods, and Nadyne beams.

"Attagirl. If you forego the right to molduga organs from your contract, we can use those parts to mix one for electric resistance. We'll want it for Vah Naboris. I can tell you that much."

They sail back to Ache's Veil, Link sitting cross-legged rather than standing on the deck of the sandship. She watches as the team lashes the molduga's corpse to the four ships' masts. They fan out to begin the slow trek, the wind of korok leaves steadily pulling the molduga across the sand. For the molduga's massive size, it does not weigh nearly as much as Link anticipated; then again, the molduga whale could leap out of the sand and thus must be less dense than it looks.

When they arrive again in Ache's Veil, the Oracle of Farore tucks the emerald lyre under her arm; she touches the green ocarina to her lips. Its song opens the gate and out flood the villagers of Ache's Veil. Link observes from the shade of the awning as the villagers take the molduga whale apart, slicing into its flesh to remove its bones and teeth, draining oil from its thick skin and from lumps in its head, cutting off the stretchy material of its fins, removing the twisting innards of its guts. She watches them set up giant vats of boiling water over great open flames in which they drop the fat, the oil, the guts, alongside powders from massive barrels, closed over with huge lids and stirred with ladles that require two or three to move at once.

Nadyne clicks her tongue. "So, what say you and I make like camels and get that elixir?" Link blinks absently at her, and Nadyne laughs. "Silly joke. C'mon, Link."

Under Nadyne's instructions, the two weigh out zapshrooms, voltfin trouts fished from the river, and electric darners that Link herself has caught and which Nadyne notes makes for an excellent ingredient of high potency. They simmer in Link's cooking pot, dwarfed by the giant vat of elixir right next to it. Nadyne handles the molduga guts with thick gloves. The stench of the molduga's innards nearly knocks Link unconscious: acrid and burning, the stink stings her throat and waters her eyes. She dry-heaves but has nothing in her stomach to vomit out. Instead she holds a voltfin trout close to her nose: the overpowering fishy scent smells better than the rot and decay of decomposing molduga entrails. Nadyne lays a thin film of fin sail—nearly translucent, tinted lightly in a reddish pink of the blood vessels that run through the skin—over the top of the cooking pot, and Link shuts the lid. A webbing of sail sticks out from under the rim.

The elixir simmers, and simmers, and simmers. As the other vats near completion for their own simmering—to congeal soap out of the molduga's fat and wax from its oil, to brew its guts into elixirs, to condense its thick and slimy meat into a distillation of monster extract, to prepare an acidic cleanse for the bones removed from its corpse—the air thickens with clouds of stench that settles down into her lungs and fills up her throat. Link drinks; the water does not drown out the smoke that clogs her nose and stuffs her mouth.

At some point the corners of her vision darken. She blinks her eyes to stay awake, to fight the current, and she hears—as though from the water—Nadyne speaking to her.

She closes her eyes and the darkness swaddles her in its comforting warmth.
The scent of soap. The fat boiling away to leave a cake of soap behind. The fragrance of flowers and herbs added in to sweeten and soften the scent.

In the dark cover of the night, after Urbosa had dismissed her from another session of training in which Link had taken her own blade against the Champion of Sageru, Link remained in the courtyard to practise. To go through the stances. To measure out her vertical strikes and horizontal swings, to practise the thrusts and jabs, to examine how rapidly she could twist her limbs to parry, to begin going through the forms of diagonal strikes.

The scent of soap had drifted down from one of the balconies above. Above the aroma of simmered fat, she could smell voltfruit and aloe. Link had explored little of the palace; she charted the course from the kitchen to her own bedroom to the courtyard and back again. She knew of the stables where Urbosa took her to select sand seals for the morning's hunt, and she knew of the grasslands to the north and the sands far, far to the south, in the landlocked stretch of Parapa in the shadow of the mountains.

Beyond that, Link had spent the majority of her waking hours training. Practising. Learning the blade not as a tool of self-defence on the road but as a weapon of war.

The sun had long set; the moon had taken her place to crest into the sky as though frowning upon Link's efforts. The cool air of the young night left the back of her neck cold with sweat, the hairs sticking uncomfortably to her skin. She wiped off her neck with her hand. When she blinked, she strained to lift her eyelids again.

She sheathed the sword. Where the blue glow faded, so too did the last of her energy. Her body's exhaustion led her to quit the courtyard. Spent, she wobbled through the archways and up the stairs to her room.

The scent of soap. Stronger, here. Blearily she rubbed her eyes on the heels of her hands. From her door Link could smell the fragrance of voltfruit and aloe more strongly than from the courtyard. She swung her head with her eyelids closed towards the source of the scent. She padded forward with her worn feet aching in her boots to the balcony at the end of the hall.

The clouds beneath the moon obscured her view of the balcony, yet she could hear—

Voices.

Link paused, her hand on the wall, as she listened to that particular timbre she knew well and yet not at all.

The girl with the golden hair.

Speaking, softly, about the Divine Beasts, about the shrines, about the slate that she carried at her hip though her father had threatened her with taking it away if she did not comply to her studies. Of her research into the sacred power supposedly passed down her bloodline, of the revelation that her blood may not harbour any power at all, of something she has seen repeated in folklore again and again, of another realm, sacred to the Golden Goddesses.

Of Impa's insistence on her prayers. Of how the girl with the golden hair had adored and depended on Impa all her life, and now knew not how to expel the resentment burning inside her chest. "I know it's not Impa's fault. I know that Father is forcing her to force me. It's not fair to her, but oh, whenever she's around I know I can't do anything—" She sniffed. Urbosa murmured something Link could not catch. "...I don't want to blame her. But it's so hard to separate these emotions..."
The clouds shifted. In the smile of the pale moon, Link could just make out Urbosa reclining back upon an arrangement of pillows on the balcony, her arms wrapped softly around the girl with the golden hair who clung to her with her head against Urbosa's chest and her body stretched across her lap, her legs tucked up beside Urbosa's. Link could see how her golden hair glistened wetly as Urbosa ran her fingers through it, the scent of soap undoubtedly from a recent bath.

The girl with the golden hair glanced up at Urbosa. Her green irises—green, weren't they? Link can't remember, green or blue—reflected the moonlight and the brown of Urbosa's eyes. "You're the kindest anyone has ever been to me," she whispered.

Urbosa turned her head towards the skies. "Only because I can be."

"But you believe me, don't you?"

"...you've worked your entire life for this, praying to no avail, pushing yourself past the point of exhaustion. If the royal bloodline does carry some magic, then more prayer won't ever unlock it."

Urbosa rolled her shoulders. "And if you don't, then I would rather know we can best the Calamitous One on our skills than waiting on the whims of a Goddess. You are many, many things—" Urbosa laughed lightly and the girl with the golden hair pouted. "—but a Goddess is not one of them. You're human. I don't know about you, but I wouldn't have it any other way."

Link stepped backwards. Her hand retracted from the wall; she nearly toppled over but caught herself. She shook her head, returned to her room, lay down upon the bed and attempted to sleep despite the thickness of the scent of voltfruit and aloe and soap.

Not a conversation meant for her.

Not a friendship meant for her.

Not a life meant for her.

—

*Electro Elixir* (three hearts, high electric resistance for 12:30) - electric darner, molduga fin, molduga guts, voltfin trout, zapshroom

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: The enemies described in this chapter include: devalant first introduced in *A Link to the Past*; geldman first introduced in *A Link to the Past*; leever first introduced in *The Legend of Zelda*; malgyorgs first introduced in *Spirit Tracks*; and aruroda first introduced in *The Adventure of Link*.

Link whistling in order to disorient the malgyorgs (sand sharks) is a reference to how in *Spirit Tracks*, Link can use the train whistle to prompt the sharks to jump and then fire at them using the train's cannon.

The bit about Ilia nearly drowning in a sandbar was inspired by a similar scene in *The Neverending Story*: the death of Artax in the swamp. Fun fact: you can actually force your horse into the Gerudo Desert (I did so by putting my horse onto a metal crate and
then utilising magnesis) but the horse becomes stuck in a single pose and the horse cannot be ridden without being teleported out.

The inn is meant for visitors such as Link to stay, since they're not allowed in Ache's Veil proper due to concerns about Yiga attacks. Why are the Yiga attacking places like Ache's Veil? If the hero of legend were to come through to the Divine Beast, the hero is likely to pass through the village nearest to Tantari. At the moment, that's Ache's Veil.

Vaike's silver key is a nod to the silver keys used to open locked doors in dungeons throughout the Zelda franchise.

While most people do know how to read sign language (at least many more people than know how to read it in the present day, due to the higher usage of sign language in Hyrule), not everyone does. We've seen bits and pieces of this before, such as the man on the bridge whom Link met back during the earlier chapters, and I've mentioned it here and there with travellers Link has met.

Molduga whaling was a lot of fun to thinking through logistically. I really liked the molduga in-game, and it saddens me how often the overworld bosses were merely left as that instead of being interwoven with the worldbuilding. Even though we don't get to spend much time with Nadyne's team, I took some time to sit down and design them. Of course, the songs that the Oracle of Farore plays on the lyre are none other than the molduga tracks from the OST, with the different songs meaning different signals for the whalers. Although the instrumentation in Breath of the Wild wasn't a lyre or anything close, since the main instruments used in the song are strings, I felt the lyre an appropriate enough approximation. While I use the word lyre to refer to the instrument, it's not quite a lyre. Sadly I can't show it to you all visually.

"Going north" is the Parapan equivalent of saying "going south", as in, "if things go south" (meaning, if things go bad).

Farore is invoked with an ocarina because the ocarina is the instrument traditionally associated with Farore. The lyre, however, is traditionally used for big game hunting in Parapa, not to mention that its sound carries farther than an ocarina.

By the way, this is actually in relation to the harps, but I was reminded by the lyre. Parapan harps (the ages) are six-stringed because the harp in Oracle of Ages has six strings, while the harp that Zelda play is eight-stringed from Skyward Sword has eight strings. The lyre here has three strings because the mark of Farore has a circle and two crescents.

Electric darners are one of the ingredients with the highest potency in-game, while other insects tend to have low potency, despite their difficulty in being caught. Preparation of the molduga's various parts is inspired by what actual whales were used for during the heyday of whaling.

Instead of an elixir, today's memory has been brought up to you by the smell of: soap! Please do remember that Urbosa and Zelda only have an age gap of two years here. We do not actually have an age for Urbosa in-game, and all of the gerudo are ridiculously tall and modelled as being 'mature' (look at poor Riju, who is supposed to be a child, and yet is sexualised), so I don't think that the liberties I took with her are too far-off.
midna's ass. 30 September 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Whaling! I really like this very specific thing that happens in fiction where there are ships that sail on sand. I don't know why, it's just a really neat concept to me.

The ending of this chapter is really devastating. Poor Link.

Emma. 30 September 2017.
Gourmet Spiced Meat Skewer

Chapter Summary

The molduga whaler aids the travelling chef in arriving at the Divine Beast of Nabooru, whereupon the molduga whaler remains at a safe distance while the chef attempts to board and ends up meeting a Parapan food enthusiast and fellow Divine Beast delver.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They go by sand seal. Nadyne provides Link with a sturdy plate of molduga bone. "It can double as a shield, too. Keep it as part of your contract payment." She ties a rope around Link's waist and gives her a crash course on steering the sand seal with careful tugs on the rope and how to balance out the seal's movements to avoid tipping into the sand. "It's the second-fastest way across the sand, and unless you want your horse drowned in a sandbar, the fastest way. I'll tell you that much."

Link's first effort at controlling a sand seal catapults her headfirst into a nearby dune. Her second leads the bone shield to flip up from under her boots to crack her hard enough against the forehead that her hand comes away damp with blood. Nadyne cautions her but Link just grins toothily, bandages the wound with a gauze around her brow, and tries again.

Her third and fourth and fifth and sixth attempts go just about as well as the first two. But each time she controls the sand seal for a few minutes longer before capsizing.

On her seventh try Link curves smoothly around the track set out for her and returns again in front of Nadyne. Nadyne folds her arms across her chest. "Do that five times in a row and I'll declare you fit enough for an emergency run across Tantari."

As Link completes each circuit, Nadyne sets out obstacles for her: metal gates studded with topaz—though Link discovers, upon slamming directly into one steel strut, that the topaz has spent its reserves and does not shock her—and large boulders, alongside Nadyne's own sand seal skills.

In the distance, the Divine Beast Vah Naboris pierces the heavens with its shadowed form amid the greenish cloud of sand and silt. As the violent violet of its eyes ebbs and flows, the Divine Beast circles the perimeter of the barren wasteland born at its feet, a wasteland that grows by the day.

"I'm only taking you close to Vah Naboris," Nadyne cautions Link while they saddle up for the journey ahead. They stock up on supplies in their satchels, brimming with water-skins waxed and curiously studded on the inside with opal, enough to last the week's-long journey and come back again. "For Goddess's sake, don't kill yourself. I've seen enough tourists die the past year."

At Link's request—and begging, and offer to pay—Nadyne convinces the owners of the Ache's Veil stable and the rest of the village to allow Ilia within. Link catches herself almost referring to her companion with another name. She nuzzles Ilia a farewell. "This time you'll be safe here. I promise, girl, that nothing like what happened last time will ever happen to you again, as long as
I'm alive."

Ilia neighs warmth into her ear. Link touches her own eyes; her fingers moisten with tears.

When the bottom of the sun touches the horizon, they ride.

To the south and to the west, towards the land once green by the banks of the River Sageru, but which the Divine Beast has trampled and driven to ash.

They wear the long billowing robes with headwear of cloth that wraps around the whole of their faces, leaving nothing exposed but a band around their eyes. Nadyne hands Link a pair of goggles to strap around her head: protection for her eyes. The lenses may scratch and cloud, but better to obscure her eyes than to scratch them permanently.

They run into monsters, but Nadyne eliminates them with a proficiency at archery—about on par with Link's own skills, she suspects—and a familiarity with the beasts—far and away above Link's own. She studies from Nadyne's methods of dealing with the beasts. Many of the monsters of the sand, Link notices, fall prey easily to weapons of sapphire. Or, at least, those that breathe flame. Nadyne avoids or hits the electric beasts with bone-head arrows that cause the same exhaustive bolt of discharge that Link has seen from the lizalfos: keese to their talons, those shelled monsters that she comes to call ampilus directly on the tips of their feelers. Link practises and discovers that her aim while surfing behind the swiftly-moving sand seal could use significant work.

When the water in the skins runs low, Nadyne shows her how to roll the skins between her palms to crush the shards of opal and reveal the water within, effectively doubling or tripling the amount of water that the water-skins can bear.

The sand seals sport a remarkable stamina. Though they cannot maintain high speeds for very long, they can continue at a slower pace for lengthy hours. "To stop moving this deep in monster country is death," Nadyne warns, and so she teaches Link to sleep on top of the bone shield, her body tied to it and to the sand seal. "I'm a light sleeper. If you get knocked off, whistle and I'll wake up."

Link cannot sleep the first day, yet by the second fatigue wins her over. The steady motion of the shield up and over dunes of sand, the wind flowing over her body as she curls up on the shield just large enough to fit the core of her form, lulls her to slumber.

They approach the Divine Beast Vah Naboris. The winds pick up and the monsters thin out. From this distance, she can hear the thunder that rumbles from the lightning, louder and louder the closer they near, until that rumble becomes the entirety of her world, greater than the sound of the shield over sand, greater than the pounding of her heart in her ears, greater than the noise of her own yelling.

The only proof that she still lives comes in the sensation of her blood thudding against her eardrums, in the mere pressure against her sternum, in the pain she feels when she digs her nails against her palms.

Nadyne indicates for her to drink a vial of the yellow elixir. When Link signs that she can no longer hear Nadyne's words over the storm of the Divine Beast, Nadyne gestures to her instead. "For Goddess's sake, only drink one every half-day. One at sunset, and one at sunrise. Oh. It doesn't matter if you think it's wearing off. Those things are high potency. Drink more than one and you're apt to die then and there. I can tell you that much." Link quaffs it down; the elixir seems to suck the very static from the air and still the resonance of her body. Her movements become more sluggish, her muscles less responsive to her efforts to move, her breaths shallower, her heart beat slower. The sensations of her body dull: the colours less vibrant and prone to
blurring; sound distorted; the pain of the sand that enters through the shutter of her headwear lessened to a numb throb. The disorientation frightens her and yet the fear does not seem to affect her body's lethargy. Her pulse does not quicken and her breaths come no faster, which terrifies her all the more. When she tries to swallow from her water-skin, she—unaccustomed to the longer time her throat takes to push the fluid down—nearly drowns herself.

Nadyne asks if she wants to turn back.

Link curls the fingers of her left hand into a fist.

They go on.

When lightning strikes the sands not forty paces away, Nadyne slows her sand seal to a stop. Link does the same. Over the roar of the thunder, Nadyne signs her words in Parapan, her gestures slowed by the effects of the elixir: "This is as far as I go."

Link raises her head to the Divine Beast Vah Naboris. The Divine Beast towers on four cylindrical legs, its hoofed feet spreading out in spinning discs wide enough to balance the Divine Beast's weight upon the sands. Even if she cranes her head nearly to the point of breaking her neck, she cannot see up to the Divine Beast's head. It moves away from Nadyne and Link. Its approximation of a tail hangs down and swings like a pendulum from side to side. The swings come slow, slow, marking out the time of its steps. As she watches, the limbs on its right side lift up together, and the discs contract and lower, like the extendable telescope, brought closer together by the force of gravity. The limbs rise and bend with a steadiness befitting their massive heft. While the pendulum of the tail swings to balance the Divine Beast's weight, its feet crest and then descend. Crashing heavily into the sand, the discs spread out to grip the earth. The pendulum swings the other way. The Divine Beast begins to lift the limbs on its left.

She lowers her gaze back to Nadyne.

"Thank you," Link signs back.

Nadyne's mouth thins into a line. "What are you doing to do?"

She touches her chin. Her sand seal opens their mouth but she cannot hear the noise over the hiss of the wind and the clash of the thunder. "I'm going to climb it."

Frantically Nadyne waves her arms. "You're doing to die. Not even a possibility, but a fact. You can't climb it."

"I have a...a thing that lets me fly."

"I know. I saw you use that paraglider during the whaling, but you must be daft if you think lightning won't strike you from the sky."

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Link touches her touches to her chin.

Nadyne presses her fingers into her forehead. "For Goddess's sake, turn back. I haven't the slightest clue why you're so desperate to get up there, but whatever it is isn't worth your life."

At that Link shakes her head. "I have to try." She pauses. "Nadyne, I have one more request."

She watches Nadyne exhale, watches Nadyne wipe sweat from her brow, watches Nadyne tug at her earlobe like Dyeri did. "You're killing me here. What is it?"
"I have. This." Link holds up the slate. The wind buffets her hand to scratch the skin of her fingers even through her gloves, and she lowers her hand into the sleeve of her robe once more. "I don't have time to explain everything right now, but if I die, could you recover this for me and pass it on to someone in Nabooru, or someone else you trust?"

Nadyne's eyes threaten to pop from her skull as she ogles Link incredulously, her mouth open, her tongue pushed against her lower teeth in bewilderment so clear that Link cringes back. "What in the Goddesses' realm is that?"

"...a slate." Link says the word slate in Necludan for lack of the gesture in Parapan. "It's the only thing you can use to calm the Divine Beast. If anything happens to me I can't let the slate be lost. Please. If I die then you can have everything that's on my person and on Ilia."

The paleness of Nadyne's wide eyes stands out starkly against the dark of her skin and the deeply-hued cloth of her headwear. She rolls her earlobe between her fingers, pushes her hand against her brow, and allows her arms to fall to her hips. Link watches her say something to herself. Then Nadyne tilts her head back. "Fine. I'll wait here on the periphery. If anything happens, I'll try to recover the slate." Nadyne's emulation of Link's motions better resemble the word book than slate but Link understands her meaning. "I'm not making any promises and I'm not going into the cloud. There's a difference between courage and needless recklessness, and it's one I've learned well." She rests her hand on the left of her abdomen and Link cocks her head to the side, but Nadyne offers no explanation. "Here." Nadyne reaches into her quiver to produce a bundle of sapphire-tipped arrows. Link can feel the cold radiating from the arrowheads. She blinks at Nadyne, who throws a hand up, fingers splayed, palm facing outwards. "I can do this much for you. I don't know you that well, but I can tell that this is something you're going to do whether no matter how much I tell you it's a terrible idea. I don't know a thing about this slate of yours or 'calming' that piece of junk, but just in case you're not delusional, I can offer you this help. That's about all I can say. Now, if you're going to go, just...go already."

Link's grin surprises even herself and she dips her head low. The movement unbalances her enough to topple her into the sand. As she wipes sand from the band of skin exposed around her eyes, she glances up to see Nadyne offering her hand.

She takes it.

Link unties the rope around her waist. The sand seal flips their tail at her but remains in place, their pudge spreading out over the sand, apparently unaffected by the whirlwind of lightning and dust not fifty paces away.

She kneels down for a moment in the sand and lays her palms flat against her knees. If anything happens to her—if anything causes her to lose the slate—

She's sorry.

With that, Link stands.

With that, she begins to walk.

Her feet burn hotly in the boots she wears, although they do keep her from sinking into the loose sand deposited by the storm. The Divine Beast walks with lengthy strides, and yet it moves so slowly that she can keep up with it if she runs. A loud crack and a sudden sharp agony in her right foot shudders her into the sand: a piece of glass. Wedged into the arch of her foot, having sliced through the skin. Wincing, her cries silent to the roar of the rolling thunder, Link gingerly touches her fingertip to the flat of the glass.
The pain hones itself against her muscle, against her bone, slicked with the blood that runs in rivulets down its transparent surface. She grips the shard of glass in her hand. The corners of her vision blur. Link inhales, and then she jerks the shard out of her foot.

With the lethargy in her limbs she cannot rip it all out at once. The glass catches against the inside flesh of her foot as she pulls and she doubles over herself, ripping the headwear from around her mouth just in time to vomit up something more mud than stomach contents into the sand. The wind claws across her cheeks. Her mouth fills with sand that stings in the cracks of her lips.

The glass comes free and the emptiness in her foot twinges and pulses.

Her head swims. Link throws the shard behind her as far as her arm can toss. Gauze. The gauze from her satchel. She cannot wash the sand from her wound; instead she wraps the injury with the grit still inside. Lifting herself to her boots, Link tests her right foot. The pain could drop her to her knees.

But she can stand.

And if she can stand, then she can walk.

And if she can walk, then she can still calm the Divine Beast.

Glass.

Link glances at the thunderstorm; she nods to herself. Where lightning strikes, the sand melts into glass. As Link hobbles along, the wound on her foot throbbing as though stabbed through with a knife at every step, the sand within grinding mercilessly against her raw flesh, she pushes herself to keep pace with the Divine Beast.

Even if the lightning strikes her, the elixir should protect her.

Or something like that.

She pulls the fabric of the headwear more tightly over her eyes until she scarcely looks out through the thin slits. Even with her eyes protected by the lenses, she can feel the force of the sand scraping her skin.

Link retrieves the paraglider.

No sooner has she opened it than has storm lifted her feet from the ground. The winds whip her upwards. Link can sense the crackle of static in the air that speedily dies down and then starts back up in fits and spurts. The elixir, or else the intermittent lightning, or else something else that she has no time to consider. She climbs up upwards to the heavens. The silt and ash block out the sun above. In the darkness, she cannot make out where the entrance terminal could be.

But Link can see the maliced tyrian of its eyes on the head that swerves as the Divine Beast changes its course.

If the Divine Beast Vah Naboris has a build similar to the Divine Beasts Vah Rudania and Vah Medoh, then the terminal must lie somewhere upon its back.

She closes the paraglider to lower her height back down before opening it again. Too high and the lightning will strike her. Even if the elixir will protect her body, the cloth-and-wood paraglider would go up in flames, and the paraglider has proven one of the most vital companions she could have brought with her, almost on par with her beloved cooking pot and her sister's trusty red
telescope.

Link drops down again and then back up, then down and up and down and up, attempting to avoid the upper banks of the cloud. A strike of lightning hurtles towards the ground near enough for her to feel its heat against her skin even through the fabric of the robes.

The paraglider catches fire but the winds put the flame out again not a second later.

Her arms ache. She notices her limbs tire much more rapidly than usual, and she hastens her glide towards the Divine Beast's torso.

When she can see the shadow of the behemoth's bulk beneath her, Link closes the paraglider. She drops downwards. Thunder booms in her ear and lightning blinds her. She opens the paraglider in time to soften her landing. Tumbling forward along the spine of the Divine Beast, Link scrambles to find purchase on the too-smooth material.

Instead of the flat back of the Divine Beast Vah Medoh—her falling-off caused by the wind of the Divine Beast's flight rather than the shape of its back—or of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, the torso of the Divine Beast Vah Naboris slopes gently downwards on either side. She senses herself sliding to the left. As her vision clears from its brightening by the lightning, Link whips her head back and forth to seek the terminal.

Yet the terminal eludes her.

Either facing away from her, or else hidden from view by the darkness of the storm, or else not on the Divine Beast's back at all.

Just before she slips off of the Divine Beast entirely, Link looks up to its neck. No orange glow. Perhaps on a side, or somewhere else she cannot—

She falls.

Link forces the paraglider opens but a sudden impact on her legs kicks her high into the air. The pain in her bones tremors up her spine to seep a migraine into the back of her skull. A crash of thunder lowers her eyelids. The wind knocks her back around until she opens the paraglider once more.

And then the loudness of thunder so close to her head spins her to startle. The white-hot streak of lightning sears her eyes. Pain burns against her palms. In the next second her fingers close around the avoid.

For a heartbeat that stretches impossibly long, Link hangs in the air with her hands still in the shape of the wooden struts her fingers curled around. Her world narrows into the emptiness of her palms and the sudden lack of strain upon her arms and the muscles over her shoulder blades.

She feels herself falling.

Down, down, impossibly down, the winds' effort to keep her aloft straining against her body, pushing her up by her stomach, forcing back her limbs until she falls spread-eagled, scraping sand on her downturned face.

Link closes her eyes.

Abruptly two hard rods slam into her body from below and break her fall, one across her stomach and one across her thighs. They knock the breath from her lungs and buck up her hips. Her eyes
The agony numbs to a breath of the night, lovely, dark and deep.

And then: the smell of food.

Of meat. Poultry. The smoky, savory scent floats down over her in heavenly ways that bring her to inhale deeply. Her eyelids flutter.

She can smell the cooking of the fat, the roast of the meat, the hint of spice—a medley of those both known and unknown; she detects the sourness of sumac and the bitterness of turmeric but cannot identify the rest by name though she has certainly tasted them before—clinging to the roof of her mouth. And above that notes of a nutty flavour. Roasted. Not nuts that she can name but nuts that her body knows. Acorns, she realises, and something else beside that.

Food.

Food that her body knows, food that melds together the fog beyond her memories into figures.

The girl with the green headband and the dark blue dress, the hoops of gold in her ears and the pride in her features, the kindness of her hands and the deftness of her blade.

Urbosa.

Gradually Link’s skills with the sword improved, as the girl with the golden hair ceased to attend her training sessions and instead split her time between investigating the great royal library of Nabooru and the Divine Beast Vah Naboris that Urbosa would one day pilot. Urbosa informed Link one day over a breakfast of honey-glazed crepes that the Queen of Parapa considered the library of Nabooru—the largest in the land, with the library in the Castle of Central Hyrule itself only the second most extensive—one of the most brilliant jewels of her rule.

Link inquired if the kitchens of the palace comprised another of the crown jewels of Parapa; Urbosa laughed long and loud. "Sadly, no, but I would agree with you that the kitchen's one of my favourite places in the palace. Nothing beats a good meal, you know." She ruffled Link's hair and Link looked vacantly at her.

Vacantly, but not in terror.

Occasionally Link would overhear the girl with the golden hair and Urbosa speaking, or discussing, or sometimes arguing, late at night where she could not avoid listening from her room.

The night before the interruption to her daily schedule, Link returned from training in the courtyard to see Urbosa and the girl with the golden hair once more on the balcony, the former with her arms across her chest, the latter with eyes reddened from tears.

"You're only two years older than I am," the girl with the golden hair snapped, voice quivering, "so I don't see why you're getting high and mighty about this."

"Is this about becoming an adult?" Urbosa answered. Through the coolness of her voice, Link could detect a hardened edge. "If you just want to be in a relationship because you feel it will make you feel more mature than your eighteen years—"

The girl with the golden hair's timbre had all but cracked over itself. "H-how could you say that? It's—it's because—" Whatever she said next, Link could neither make out nor desired to make out. She buried her face under the pillow, yet the strains of the argument reached her nonetheless...
through the thin door to her chambers. "And yet you don't want me. Am I not good enough for you?"

"No. No, that's not..." Link could hear fabric rustling as Urbosa moved. "There's much to like about you, but not this childish attitude of yours. I know that your father has placed unfair burdens upon you, yet demanding things so selfishly from others..." Urbosa's voice lowered to a whisper. "...isn't who you truly are, is it? This is coming from a place of fear. A fear of...abandonment?"

"Don't...don't try to analyse me." The girl with the golden hair stopped herself. "You're doing that thing again. Where you try to hide what you're worried about in your concern for others. Where you reassure them in what you're hoping someone would tell you. What is it? Are you worried about a fear of abandonment? Or of abandoning others?" The girl with the golden hair's timbre cracked so audibly that Link herself recoiled. "You can tell me, Urbosa. I...I want to—"

Urbosa exhaled a *hwoo* of air. "I'm worried about you seeking fulfillment in places you can't get from destiny."

"What!?" Link listened to a sound like footstep on tile, and then another. The girl with the golden hair's voice comes from closer nearby: she must have stepped away from Urbosa. "You...you wouldn't—"

"You're afraid of not living up to fate. You're afraid of what the Sages and Oracles whisper—wrongly—about you behind your back. And even though you logically know that they're full of it, you can't help but be afraid." Urbosa paused. "Am I wrong?"

The girl with the golden hair breathed more quickly now. Urbosa went on: "So if you can't find fulfillment in fate, you're clinging desperately to anyone you think could be stable, anyone you know won't abandon you. Anyone." She emphasised the final word with a heaviness in her voice.

The girl with the golden hair's words burst from her in spurts and fits. "What? No. No no no no. I know I've got—I know I have my own—but my feelings for you are—!

"What would you do if something happened?" Urbosa asked, and the sudden softness of her tone brought Link to cling to the pillow. "What would you do if I...left you?"

"Fine. Fine! If you don't want me, just say so. I'll go."

The girl with the golden hair did not stomp down the hall. That would have alleviated Link's worries. Instead she could scarcely make out the whispered padding of the girl with the golden hair's steps over the tile.

Behind her Urbosa spoke out once more: "Until you take hold of yourself and hold yourself accountable for your own emotions...no matter how I personally feel, I can't let this happen."

The girl with the golden hair stopped at the end of the hall. Link could hear the trembling of her body in the resonance of her voice. "Then just answer me this: why?"

"Because it would be unprofessional," Urbosa responded, and in her steadiness her timbre shook, ever so slightly. "A Princess and one of her Champions. And because of this attitude you have. I don't know why you've prickled it against me, too. Is it because I'm actually training Link?"

The girl with the golden hair snorted in frustration. Now she stomped off as if attempting to sound out her anger and hurt in the beats of her heels. When the pads quieted down the hall, Link listened
to Urbosa mutter to herself on the balcony. "Oh, Goddess, help me. Does she not realise we've a war on? Does she not understand the fight in which we will find ourselves? Does she not understand that I could...?" Link could not catch her words that murmured off to silence. Instead she buried her face in the pillow.

At last Link could go to sleep.

Starting the day thereafter, Urbosa devised a thousand excursions to other parts of Parapa, to better teach Link the language, to expose her to various blades and weapons, and to pit her skills against a diverse array of swordsmen with their own styles. As they rode their horses across the land, Urbosa taught Link the kinds of plants from the wilds that one could feed a horse, the importance of salt on the road, the signs of a horse's exhaustion and how long to allow a horse to rest. "Most travellers trade their horses for fresh ones instead of riding single horses, but...I think you share my feelings on this, hm, Link?" Urbosa winked at her and Link glanced down at her hands.

Marin and the girl who smelled of horses alike had shown Link over the years how to care for her horse—for Epona, her white mane caressing Link's cheek as her horse nosed her ear—but neither of them travelled frequently. Where they could instruct her on how to best care for a horse's injuries at a stable, Urbosa demonstrated what to do on the road. "Be careful," Urbosa told Link one morning over skewers of meat they prepared on the road, "for if a horse breaks her legs, she will never be able to recover. At that point the most merciful thing to do is to simply put her down."

She went on. Link helped her prepare a sand grouse that they had trampled by chance with their horses and which they could not leave by the side of the road. As the Goddess had given them a meal, so they would eat. Urbosa inquired if Link had any nuts; Link brought out chickaloo tree nuts from Lanayru and acorns from Necluda, which Urbosa roasted with pepper and then embedded into the meat tendered and tempered by the heat.

"...because the process of healing the injury...just inflicts more harm on the horse," Link finished for all the times that the girl who smelled of horses had berated her for pushing her horse too hard.

Urbosa nodded. "If you love your horse, then take well care of her. Consider yourself not a girl and her horse, but a horse and her girl." Leaving the skewers of meat to Link, Urbosa stood up. She turned towards her own trusted companion to rest her forehead against her horse's and close her eyes; the light blue horse whinnied. "Care for her, and she will care for you."

Link glanced back at her own horse, who neighed as Link reached up to stroke her nose. Her darkly lashed eyes held nothing but the kindness and trust Link had known from her the past five years of her companionship. Urbosa asked the name of her horse, and Link told her.

Epona.

"E...pona. As in Sapona's daughter?" Urbosa inquired, eyebrows raised.

"My...friend Marin named her. Epona was her horse before Marin gave her to me." Link rubbed the back of her head. Epona rested her head on Link's shoulder.

Urbosa mmed. "And this Marin is the girl who taught you about horses?"

Link shook her head.

"Then...?"

Between bites of food Urbosa coaxed the story out of her, question by question, encouraging smile
by encouraging smile. Link's hands jerked and flinched. The story of her gestures coalesced: how she and the girl who smelled of horses had one day ventured to the neighbouring town of Rofare with the permission of the girl's father, to bring back a case of liquored milk for the harvest feast, how on the way home she and the girl who smelled of horses had taken shelter from a thunderstorm in the autumn-warm woods alongside her—Link's, and the girl who smelled of horses's—their horse; how they had spent the night huddled by a campfire; how their horse had spooked from lightning and nearly run herself into a tree and how the girl who smelled of horses had cried out and how Link had whistled as the girl who smelled of horses had taught her; how the horse had stopped just before the collision; how the girl who smelled of horses had wept and how she and Link had held their horse together.

How the girl who smelled of horses had gently stroked her thumb along Link's eyes to wipe away the tears that Link had not even noticed.

How she had not seen the girl who smelled of horses since the moment she had drawn the sword that seals the darkness from the stone.

And with the blade of evil's bane burning at her back, she did not know if ever she would see the girl again.

"I'd like to meet her one day," Urbosa said. Link—as though seeing for the first time her audience—stilled her hands. She started to shake her head, more and more violently, and turned away to huddle to herself. Link could not feel Urbosa's gaze upon her back until she saw Urbosa's eyes reflected in the plate in her lap.

"I'm sorry," she signed, barely keeping her hands from trembling. "Please...don't be mad at me."

"Not at all, Link. You've done nothing wrong." Link watched Urbosa's gaze drop momentarily to the fire between them. "Here, to put you at ease, let me tell you a story in exchange. A tale of your childhood traded for a tale of mine," she offered. "You know, they say that the exchange of talk and tale is the real economy of Parapa. All the rupees and all the trade come second to the sharing of stories."

Urbosa continued to skewer more meat. "When I was a little girl," she began, her voice measured, "I fell ill, and the healers told my mothers that I would not survive." Bit by bit, the scent of the grilling meat brought Link to turn back around towards the fire. Urbosa handed her another skewer. Link glanced up between the skewer and Urbosa. Very carefully she extended her arm to wrap her fingers around the bone and brought the meat to her mouth. Bite by bite she listened. "The healers told my mothers that if the Golden Goddesses had determined that my fate was to pass on young, that all they could do was to make my passage as painless as possible." Urbosa laughed out loud. She lifted a hand towards Link. Link cringed back, and Urbosa lowered her arm. Her voice softened. "But my mothers believed in me, as did my best friend. Not everyone did. My own sister thought I would die for a time; she believed in what the healers had prophesied.

"Well now, you already know the end to this story." Urbosa laughed once more and offered Link another skewer, which she took, her fingers clinging to the shaft so hard that the skewer imprinted the inside of her palm. "I survived. Because I had my family and my friends cheering me on, I struggled on despite the pain. Before I fell sick I had been somewhat of a timid girl, too shy to speak her thoughts. Yet the illness instilled in me a determination to claw my way through life if I had to. Of course I couldn't have done it alone, but...with my loved ones behind my back, I persevered.

"After healing up," Urbosa continued, "I took a fancy to the sword. You know the rest of that story, too. The experience taught me a few things. Even the Sages and the Oracles do not
always know what the Goddesses have in store."

Almost instinctively Link reached behind her—curving her arm around Epona's neck—to touch the hilt of the sword that seals the darkness as if to check that it still lay across her back. The warmth of the sword alone, even though the sheath, gave her a constant reminder scarred from her left shoulder to right hip. Nonetheless she wrapped her hand around the hilt to confirm its presence.

Urbosa leaned slightly backwards and Link could sense the sudden shift in the pace of her words. She settled her hand back into her lap. The heat of the blade stayed in her palm for a few seconds before fading.

"You know...the Goddesses Themselves, may Their blessings guide us, don't have Their plans set in stone. I'm not sure if the legends are the same where you grew up or here in Parapa, but here..." Urbosa effected a tone of a storyteller, of a teacher, of a tome worn with age. The kind that the girl who smelled of horses would have liked to read. "They say that when the Golden Goddesses first created the world and then soared into the heavens, at the point where They touched, They left for Their people a Golden Force—a sacred light to watch over us—that could grant the wish of those who touched it, but only if their hearts could balance the power to understand the truth beyond the golden light, the wisdom to know what to wish for, and the courage to take responsibility for their own wish." Link nodded. She dared not question Urbosa, though Link could not see where the Champion of Sageru's words might lead. Instead she stuffed her mouth with skewer. "When the Golden Goddesses created this Golden Force, They made it such that only a mortal could wield it, and never any Goddess: neither the Golden Goddesses, nor the Seven that would create the people of the land."

Urbosa resumed in her normal timbre of speech. "The Golden Goddesses left us with that ultimate light. In our hands, not in Theirs. Time and time again, when malicious forces have threatened Hyrule, the Golden Goddesses have given us the tools to save ourselves. The blade of evil's bane. The Golden Force. The Golden Goddesses have taught us to strive for the power in our own hands, the wisdom in our own heads, the courage in our own hearts.

"No matter people might tell you of the Goddesses' plans—and that includes all your Sages and Oracles—They have given us the ability to shape our own fate as we will."

She glanced at Link and smiled. Link's mouth squiggled; she shoved the skewer of meat deeper into her throat. At least between Epona nuzzling her cheek and the food in her mouth, she had enough sensations to fasten herself to. "...you don't need to worry about not living up to your destiny, Link." Link's hand twitched but she did not touch the sword that seals the darkness again. "The Goddesses do not wave Their hands and spin Champions of nothingness. They have judged us worthy to bear that heavy mantle of fate, for They have already seen what we can accomplish. The blade of evil's bane chose you because the sword believes in your abilities. The Goddesses did not judge you worthy as a Champion for something innate about your destiny that you have to live up to, but for the effort that you've already put in. Whatever we will need to fulfill our destined victory against the Calamitous One, you already have."

Urbosa reached out a hand and Link flinched back. The Champion of Sageru continued as though unaffected, and yet Link could hear the thin sliver of hurt in her voice below the sea of warmth. "I know some of the rich brats in Hyrule Castle have been naysayers. I've heard them say that you'd never be able to wield the sword that seals the darkness. But look at you." She nudged Link in the ribs. Link stared blankly ahead. "You've come so far even though we've only been training for so little time. I know it's hard not to worry, Link. I understand. I have felt that way. Back then the Sages warned that I would not survive, and now there are who consider me too young to be a Champion, or claim that I might bring us to perish in the coming battle. And yet. I fought to stay
alive then, and I will fight for Hyrule now. The Goddesses chose me to become the Champion of Sageru, as They in all Their guidance chose you to become the Champion of Hylia."

Urbosa gestured to Link, who tucked herself smaller yet. Though Urbosa conversed to her, Link could sense that she had long left the topic of the conversation. What Urbosa said in her words and what she said on her hands and in the bow of her shoulders and in the tilt of her jaw clashed blades against one another and drove Link further into silence. "And you're every bit as deserving of the mantle as I, or any of the other Champions. The blade of evil's bane chose you because the sword knows that you can take fate into your own hands."

Link could make out now, a strange desperation beneath the soothing cheer of Urbosa voice, almost as if Urbosa were speaking more to herself than to Link.

"Don't forget that. For that matter, you don't need to worry about performing in front of Impa or...or the Princess." Urbosa momentarily set her jaw before she cleared her throat and went on. "I hope that our time training away from Nabooru will air you out a tad."

Link lowered her eyelids. She dared not ask if Urbosa had also arranged the training to, for her own sake, take time from the girl with the golden hair. Instead Link simply sat silent, and still, and barely breathing.

She listened to Urbosa sigh; Link tucked herself inwards at having disappointed her companion.

When Urbosa resumed, she spoke slowly, with a certain deliberation about her words. "I understand your feelings, Link. I haven't had a chance to visit Rovah for some time. I miss my friends and family more I could say. There have been times when I've been afraid that maybe...I'm undeserving of being the Champion of Sageru. Maybe...I don't have the courage to pilot a Divine Beast. Maybe...the war will take my life before I'll have a chance to see my loved ones again."

Urbosa gazed down at her own hands. Then she clenched her hands and snapped her fingers."

"And yet...I know that when this is over, when we have beaten back the Calamitous One, when we have fulfilled what I know the Goddesses have granted us the ability to do, I'll have a chance to see my beloved ones again, in a peaceful future without the threat of the Calamity over our heads. And thinking of them helps me to fight on, to give me something concrete to protect. So, I understand your feelings, Link. I really do. Having courage doesn't mean you can't be scared of failing, or of not seeing your friend again. Yet I promise that these fears are only shadows on the wind, and the lightning that lies ahead will brighten them away."

But Link once more started to shake her head. Urbosa asked of what was wrong; Link drew in on herself. Epona whinnied in her ear.

"Please. I promise I won't be mad at you. I just want to understand." Urbosa's hand lifted from her lap and then she folded her hands again. "You said that you missed this friend of yours, didn't you? You'll be able to see her again after we emerge victorious against the Calamity, and we will emerge victorious. You needn't be afraid of not living up to your destiny. The sword wouldn't have chosen you if you couldn't do it, you know."

"It's not that. I can't ever go back. Not even after the Calamity. I...if I go to to the village, then my..." She snagged the remaining skewers from over the fire and shoved them into her mouth violently enough to nearly stab the back of her throat. Link swallowed them down through the pain that watered her eyes. When the skewers all but vanished from this world, she rose to her feet and moved to check on her horse.
Epona. Warm and calm, smelling of wind and hay and sun.

"...I suppose we should get moving then." Urbosa cleaned up. Link crouched down by the fire to assist her. "Thank you for sharing the meal and the stories with me, Link."

She said nothing in return, though she kept one of the skewers to smell for the rest of the day on the road.

That fragrance.

The scent of meat and nut, of spice, of turmeric and sumac. She understands: in this final moment of falling through the sky, her mind has conjured up for her a delicious meal to ease the pain of her last few moments.

A warm meal that rouses her from her slumber and melts away the pain.

She does not crash into the ground.

No storm.

No wind.

No sand.

Thunder rolls near enough that she recoils back. Something soft beneath her head, and something hard beneath her shoulder, the lower slope of her back, her heels. No boots.

When she hears the sizzle grow louder, Link raises her eyelids fully to yet another unfamiliar ceiling. To her left glows a welcoming orange light; to her right slopes a comforting darkness that whiles away into hues of green.

The loose robes cover her as a blanket. Her left foot remains wrapped in gauze. Beside her feet stand her boots, upside-down.

And close by, to her left: a paraglider.

Not her paraglider—not the red and blue cloth marked with the symbol of the Goddess Farore—but rather a light sky-blue paraglider with a marking in gold. A marking that she has seen elsewhere in Parapa, a symbol she has seen in the Temple of Time upon the Great Plateau, the same symbol that she saw on the chest of the statue of the Goddess Sageru in Nabooru: two golden triangles facing up and down, with a pair of circles connected and circumscribed by a crescent-line between them.

The mark of the Goddess Sageru.

The material of the paraglider shines dully. Not cloth, not linen, nor leather, but a thin layer of that rubber substance, like the gloves that Dyeri allowed her to wear. Link observes shards of topaz studding the rubber in a regular lattice over the paraglider. Instead of wooden, the supports and struts of the paraglider appear made of sandy-coloured molduga bone with a stretch of rubber over them.

She turns her head to the right. A long hallway that exits out into the storm, long enough to protect her from the wind and the sand. She flexes her hands on the floor; her fingers glide over the slippery material beneath her palms.

Link glances to the left.
A girl.

A girl who kneels before a flame contained within an iron cage. Over the top of the metal, she holds skewers of chunks of meat glistening with sauce and laced with spice that she turns by hand. She checks each skewer by poking it through another, and when the meat has softened, she sets the skewer onto a plate at her side.

A girl wearing earrings of topaz that glint in the light of the fire and a sturdy outfit of deep blue fabric, a rolled-up set of loose robes beside her feet.

A girl with dark red hair that she wears in a long braid upon her back and in two thick loops at either side of her head, the sharpness of her nose standing regally against her profile, striking as the centre of her rounded face, her prominent eyes the piercing dark brown of glittering onyx, her arms decorated in bands of gold and topaz, her mouth a steady line, her lips painted blue, her tongue peeping from the corner of her mouth as her eyes narrow in concentration.

Upon the ground beside her rests a strange domed golden thing set in with six gems the same green shade as the thunderstorm's bolt on the back and a wheel of lightning decals on the front.

Link blinks.

The girl raises her head. When her gaze meets Link's, her mouth curves up into a tense little smile. "You're awake," the girl murmurs in Parapan, her voice gentle, and Link nods. "You aren't injured, are you?" She shakes her head, and the girl's shoulders slope down, some of the tension in her brow releases. "Thank the Goddesses. Then, are you hungry?"

Link bobs her head eagerly enough that the girl smiles and covers her mouth to laugh.

"Then, here. Take some."

She does. And with gusto. The skewer, she finds, consists of bone and neither conducts heat well nor burns as might wood. The molduga bone, instead, imparts upon the meat a curious flavour: not quite salty, and not quite bitter, but a tone all its own, like the underlying percussion of a song. As soon as Link takes a bite, the layer of spice and sauce over the meat settles on her tongue like messengers of coming royalty. Alongside those spices she has already identified, Link tastes the sweetness of nutmeg offsetting the less immediately palatable notes of sumac and turmeric into a perfect storm of flavour that blazes down her throat. The meat comes apart in her mouth to reveal the even more tender flesh within and to offer up the roasted nuts embedded inside. The crunch of the nuts and the softness of the meat strike a delicate balance of textures that lowers her eyelids in the sheer pleasure of the sensations on her tongue and her teeth. She scarfs down the first skewer far too quickly, and then grabs another skewer from the girl to swallow it down. Only on the third skewer does she slow down enough to indulge in the song sung by the skewer.

Link licks her lips and wipes the corners of her mouth on her hands to get as much of the sauce and spice off of her skin as she can, then sucks on her fingers. She slurps at her palms and the backs of her hands. Running her tongue on the valley between her fingers, she licks up all of the flavour that she can from her hands.

She swallows repeatedly; the heat of the nutty meat slides down easily and she draws the skewers through her lips to extract the sauce-and-spice clung to the bone.

At long last she drops the completely bare skewers in front of her. Link shifts herself to her knees and bows before the girl, her forehead touching the floor, in her eternal gratitude for the meal that has saved her very life.
The girl holds her own skewer, half-eaten. A chunk of meat falls from the end onto the metal grate.

"You...like it, don't you?"

She can hear in the girl's voice a measure of not quite fear. Uncertainty, maybe. Unease. Link meets her gaze and smiles widely at the food. "It was delicious!" she comments, her motions free and light despite the effects of the elixir. She launches into a robust review of the dish, of how the spices and nuts complemented one another, of the difference in texture between nut and meat, of the crispy outside and the tender inside that melted in her mouth, of how—if she would improve the dish in any way—she would slightly adjust the ratio of spices to lower the amount of nutmeg and allow the others to shine, and to add salt for the missing flavour. The meat and nuts provide the savory; the spices the sour, bitter, and sweet; but without the salt, the meat skewers miss just the thing that could take them from delicious dish to complete masterpiece.

The girl covers her mouth to laugh as Link continues on her review. "...so thank you so much for the meal. I'd love to know everything that you put in it because that was one of the tastiest sauces I've ever had, and embedding the nuts in the meat is something I never would have thought to try in my life!" She pants at the exertion of her muscles and lowers her hands to her knees. Sniffing, Link cocks her head to one side.

The girl copies her gesture, tilting her own head.

They look at one another for a long moment, and then the girl makes a slight noise in her throat. "Thank the Goddesses. I never thought I'd meet someone else who appreciates food as much as I do."

Tears well up in Link's eyes. "Neither did I."

The girl tips up her chin. "Then, may I ask your name?"

Link blinks. "Link," she signs. In the brief scramble that follows, Link discovers that the girl knows how to speak Central Hyrulean even better than Link knows how to speak Parapan, and so Link spells out her name in Central Hyrulean.

"Link," the girl says; Link's name rolls easily off of her tongue, the lightness of her tone bringing a measure of serenity to the name that Link has not before heard except in her memories, in the way that Marin said her name.

Link.

She dips her head.

The girl smiles again. That hint of unease.

"Ah, you can call me Ri—" The girl purses her lips together, closes her eyes, and opens them again. Link blushes slightly for not having asked the girl her name herself. "—Ruboona."

"...how do you sign that?" Link asks, cocking her head, and the girl blinks at her, and she blinks at the girl. Once more Ruboona closes her eyes and opens them before going through a series of motions that Link emulates. "Like that?"

"Yes." Ruboona smiles, this time more genuinely, her shoulders easing. "That's my name. Ruboona. I hope I didn't startle you. I've come here regularly for some time now, but no one else has ever shown up in the storm. I noticed you...gliding out there in the storm. I was scared you could be...one of the..." She looks away for a moment; then she returns her gaze to Link. "When I
saw you fall, I could not simply stand by."

"You saved me, with your paraglider," Link signs in realisation, and Ruboona dips her head. Link bows to her again. "Thank you. Thank you so much for saving my life."

"I'm not sure what happened," Ruboona admits. "Your paraglider might have been hit by lightning, though I would hope that the Goddesses be more forgiving than that, may Their wisdom always guide us."

"Even if my paraglider did get hit," Link says in turn, "at least I got to meet you and your delicious meat skewers."

Ruboona covers her mouth to laugh at that. When she smiles, the blue of her lips curves upwards with a motion like a wave over the seas. "You're too kind."

Link inhales suddenly. Her hands fly into her robes to feel for the items she carries at her hips. The red telescope at her left, and the slate at her right. Her satchel, too, remains in place. Her gaze darts frantically around the room. Ruboona tries to ask her for what she searches but Link jumps to her feet—despite the weakness in her muscles—to tear the hallway apart. Until she finds what she seeks, safe and sound and in one piece.

Link slumps to the floor with her face down. She listens to Ruboona kneel beside her. A hand upon her brow tilts Link's head up. Her gaze meets Ruboona's eyes, deepened with concern, her expression one of soft worry and sharp alarm, her fingers gentle against Link's forehead. "Link...?"

Link raises a shivering hand to point to her beloved cooking pot beside the metal grate.

"I...I thought I had lost...one of my most precious possessions..." she signs over her head, and then Link breaks down into laughter that shakes her shoulders and quivers the rest of her body from her belly to her toes, to her fingers, to the tip of her nose that boops against the floor, at the frivolity of life, at the beauty of someone who has regularly come to the Divine Beast Vah Naboris—perhaps to try to find a way inside—who would notice someone like her floundering in the storm, who would risk her life to save her.

Ruboona simply continues to kneel beside her for a long moment. Then she, too, bursts out laughing. She hides her mouth in her hands but cannot contain the mirth in the gate of her fingers. "Ah, I—I thought that something had gone wrong—yes, your cooking's pot just fine, Link." That makes Link laugh all the harder. Every time Link's mirth seems to die down, Ruboona's laughter spills out another wave, and every time Ruboona tries to control herself by thinning the line of her mouth, she snorts air from her nose and pffts and pshahas and then laughs again until she has tilted back her head and her shoulders bump her braid of hair and the two of them laugh their way into a comfortable familiarity brokered over a shared meal and a shared mirth.

The taste of meat and nut in both of their mouths, the warmth of skewers in both of their bellies, their unification around the cooking pot.

If the Golden Goddesses sent the thunder, sent the lightning, sent the storm to burn her paraglider so that Link might find her way into the Divine Beast Vah Naboris, then she might well thank Them.

But even if the Golden Goddesses have never looked upon Link in her life, or even if she were to discover that They did not exist at all, then that would not change all that has transpired. All those who have helped her, and all those whom she, in turn, will try to help.
As Urbosa could take her life into her hands, so too will Link. Though not for fate, as Urbosa might have, but for her own sake.

Ruboona closes her eyes. She brings her hands together as if in prayer, then raises her eyelids once more. Her irises glimmer with something like the thunder on the distant horizon. "Then, Link...if I may ask...why were you in that storm? Why have you come to Savah Naboris? Why have..."

But even as Ruboona speaks, Link notices something behind the girl. A glow. A glow of orange.

Link sits up more fully. Beyond Ruboona and her cooking grate: the terminal at the entrance to the Divine Beast Vah Naboris.

She rises to her feet. Ruboona blinks up at her.

Link moves her hand into the looseness of her robes. From their depths she withdraws the slate, and Ruboona's eyes widen to darkly shining discs.

"Ah, that's..."

Link takes the slow steps around the cooking grate towards the terminal. She reaches out her hand with the slate weighing down on her fingers and sets the slate into the terminal.

She knows, by now, all too well the passage of the terminal from orange to blue along the black crystal, filling and draining, to open the door beyond the terminal: a circular opening that radiates out in a spiral into the vastness of the Divine Beast.

Below her feet the floor ceases to quake. The Divine Beast Vah Naboris takes its final step and then falls still. Another clap of thunder rolls outside.

The storm drizzles out.

From the entrance Link can see, in the way that she casts now a shadow upon the door, that the mid-spring sun sings high in the sky and shines its light upon the Divine Beast.

Behind her she hears Ruboona mumbling. "Who...what...?"

Link turns halfway towards her. "I've come to calm the Divine Beast," she says, "and also, thank you for the meal."

In a single fluid motion, Ruboona springs to her feet and holds out her hands. "Then, you've come to calm...Savah Naboris," Ruboona repeats. For a moment she closes her eyes, then opens them again with a determination so strong and deep that Link can feel her own feet slide back. "So, allow me to help you. As—as a daughter of the Goddess Sageru, I cannot stand by." She gestures to herself. "Since the reawakening of Savah Naboris, I have nearly every day here attempting to divine some method of entry." Link listens to her whisper something under her breath, something she cannot quite catch, something of I hope Buliara is well. Ruboona notches up her voice. "And you...you have come to calm Her. Then, allow me to join you. Please."

Link hesitates. Ruboona looks young—older than Romani, for sure, but younger than herself—no matter how the girl tries to draw herself up. But the girl has a paraglider with her, and the girl saved her from the storm, and the girl has trekked to the Divine Beast same as Link, without even a slate.

She bows her head, and Ruboona's eyebrows slope downwards as she whispers something under her breath, somewhere between a prayer and a murmur of gratitude. Thank you, Golden Goddesses, for heeding the prayers of our Parapa.
Link gazes into the shadows beyond the heart of the Divine Beast Vah Naboris. The light of the sun that passes through the parting clouds illuminates the Divine Beast's innards shade by shade. As she walks forward, she comes to stand at the very edge; she looks downwards.

There, on the bottom of the Divine Beast, at the floor of the cylindrical torso.

The map terminal.

And there, above, hanging from the ceiling to pulsate and throb: the heart.

The heart of the malice of the Divine Beast Vah Naboris.

The heart of the Malice that, if this Divine Beast follows the pattern of the Divine Beasts Vah Rudania and Vah Medoh—

The heart of the Malice that contains within it the corrupted, desecrated corpse of the Champion of Sageru, the Hero of Parapa, the Divine Beast Vah Naboris's Pilot, O Courageous Urbosa.

Link sets her jaw.

Whatever else happened in the Great Calamity one hundred years ago, she knows this: the Divine Beasts were lost, and the Champions passed away, and nearly all of Central Hyrule was destroyed alongside much of the rest of the land, countless lives passed beyond the veil of death. Whatever else happened in the Great Calamity one hundred years ago, she did not die. She lived, and healed, and slept, within the Shrine of Resurrection or otherwise, for a hundred years until she awoke.

And with her awakening, awakened once more the Divine Beasts.

Whatever else happened during the Great Calamity, she survived, and survives.

And for the future of all of the delicious meals that she may ever eaten—and for everyone that has ever helped her, for her sister Aryll, for the girl who smelled of horses, for Marin and all of Marin's family from Maryll to Romani, for Impa, for the shark-girl, for Daruk, for Revali, for Urbosa, for the girl with the golden hair, for Dorian and Koko and Cottla, for Yunobo and Misan and Glepp, for Amali and Kass and their daughters and Teba, for Dyeri and Nadyne and Ruboona, for the people of this wide wide land—Link will place her life upon the line.

—

Gourmet Spiced Meat Skewer (eight hearts) - acorn, chickaloo tree nut, goat butter, goron spice, raw gourmet meat

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: The electric-resist elixir works by flooding your body, essentially, with capacitors that take up extra electric charge. Because your nervous system (assuming that you, the reader, have a nervous system typical of humans) works on passing signals through action potentials, the elixir slows down your nervous system and makes it much more difficult for your signals to get through. This works both ways, so that your sensations are dulled, and so are your movements. The higher the resistance
of the elixir, the worse the effect.

Sand is used to make glass and lightning striking sand can indeed produce glass.

If it's unclear, the paraglider was struck by lightning and thus Link lost her grip on it. And also the paraglider might have burned up. Whoops!

Urbosa is the champion with whom Zelda interacts most in the memories and the one who displays the most genuine caring about her, since Urbosa's own memory is really about Zelda, unique among the champions.

I should note that there's nothing actually wrong with trading out your horse for a fresh one at stables. It was and is common practise for people who travel frequently.

Unfortunately, what I say about horses in this chapter is also generally true: a broken leg pretty much spells the end for a horse's life, especially back then, because methods of restraining the horse would only lead to more suffering. Be careful with your horses.

Urbosa's horse is light blue, just the light blue horses you can catch in *Breath of the Wild*. The "Epona" naming tradition is common to Faron; Urbosa's horse is named Rivure, meaning "like a bird"/"one who is like a bird". "Vure" means "bird" in-game; incidentally, "ju" means "dawn".

Rofare is named after the village of Rofare from a different story of mine, the name produced by rearranging the characters making up the name of Farore.

The Golden Force about which Urbosa speaks is of course the Triforce, although the name "Triforce" is no longer known to the people of Hyrule.

Daruk, Revali, Urbosa, Mipha, and of course Princess Zelda all have their own views of fate. None of them is wrong and none of them is right. Different characters also have different ways of referring to the Master Sword; "sword that seals the darkness" is more common in eastern Hyrule, while "blade of evil's bane" and equivalent translations are more common in western and northern Hyrule. Thus, Urbosa says "blade of evil's bane".

The mark is of course the gerudo symbol, which I describe poorly, but the two triangles are the ones that appear above and below the symbol. I'm just very, very bad at descriptions, restaroni in pepperonis.

"Ruboona" comes from rearranging the characters of a certain rather significant Parapan name and is not the character's actual name, if that isn't clear.

So, instead of taking a single chapter to wrap up the entirety of Vah Naboris as I did the others, Vah Naboris is going to take several chapters. Why? Because, unlike with Amali and Yunobo, Link doesn't get the chance to meet Ri—I mean, Ruboona—prior to coming to Vah Naboris. I wanted to establish their relationship, and to do so I broke Vah Naboris up into several chapters. It's also a consequence of the memories in these chapters being longer and more involved, since—while I'd like to pretend that I don't play favourites—I really, really wanted to do Urbosa right.

Ruboona and Link hit it off right away due to their shared love of cooking. While Amali does cook (for her daughters), I wouldn't say that cooking is her *passion* in the
way that Link and Ruboona share it.

And a big character moment for Link: though she's been intent on passing the slate off to someone else, and though she's felt like a ghost in her own body all this time, she's really starting to come to terms with her destiny in ways that she hasn't before. Not just bearing the slate for someone else to take over the Divine Beasts, but doing so herself.

As always, thank you for reading, for supporting me, and for enjoying yourselves. And as always, please take a moment to thank my beloved beta reader, Emma, without whom this never could have come to fruition in its current state. Up next: we start on the Divine Beast.

midna's ass. 01 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: The journey to Naboris is really neat. Sleeping while being transported by sand seal must be a super weird feeling.

RIP the paraglider, you served us well.

Link is really, really excited about cooking, and it's really cute.

We get to meet Ri-I mean, Ruboona! She's a really fun character that makes this Divine Beast a joy to get through.

Emma. 01 October 2017.
Salt-Grilled Gourmet Meat

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef and the Parapan food enthusiast begin the process of calming the Divine Beast and capture one of the terminals; the chef recalls more about the previous Champion of Sageru, including a conversation wherein she inquired if the chef fancied anyone.

Chapter Notes

To all of my readers: thank you for your patience. I've since gotten a new hard drive and will hopefully return to my regular schedule, barring any other sudden computer issues. I will note that as these chapters are getting lengthier, I may switch to an every-other-day schedule for the longer ones just to give myself sufficient time to fix any HTML formatting issues and proofread for spelling mistakes, etc. But we'll get there when we get there. For now we're back to our usual. Thank you so much for reading!

Also, as usual, author's notes that couldn't fit in the end: As with Sageru, Ruboona refers to the deities as "Sadin", "Sanayru", and "Safarore", which follows with what I have mentioned before.

Ruboona refers to the slate as the "Hero's slate" (contrast with Yunobo's "Champions' slate" and Amali just calling it "the slate" because that's what Link called it).

Remember, Link agreed to become the chosen hero so that Aryll would be protected in Hyrule Castle. But...what area was hardest hit by Calamity Ganon?

You'll find out what happened to Link's paraglider soon enough. I can tell you for sure that lightning struck it.

Link's finally found a fellow food lover.

While I use the word lute to refer to the instrument Urbosa plays, it's more like an instrument related to the real-world lute or oud than an actual "lute", per se.

As mentioned before, Parapan has three grammatical genders for people: the grammatical gender for the average person, which is usually translated as 'girl/she/her'; the grammatical gender for their leader, which was previously translated as 'king/he/him' but which has since been corrected as 'queen/she/her'; and the grammatical gender for deities, translated as 'Goddess/She/Her'.

Also, if you read the thirty-third chapter (Monster Soup) after the second of October, then this doesn't apply to you, but if you read it before that, I just reuploaded it because I realised that I made a slight continuity error due to copypasting my notes incorrectly. It's nothing major.

As usual, thank you to my beta reader and thank you to you, the reader, for bearing with me.
Ruboona and Link gather their belongings in preparation. Link shoulders her cooking pot, Ruboona her backpack and the paraglider. Momentarily Link peers out of the tunnel to squint at the ground in the Divine Beast's wake, to try to spot the red of the paraglider against the yellowed-white of the sands, but the Divine Beast rises too far up for her to see.

Behind her, Link hears Ruboona pray to the Golden Goddesses. "Safarore of wind...Sanayru of water...Sadin of fire...now, more than ever, please, grant me Your courage, Your wisdom and Your power. Sageru, now, more than ever please, grant me Your kin, Your loyalty, Your blood. Grant me the never-ending faith that courses through Your river. Grant me the endless winds that blow over Your dunes. Now, more than ever, Parapa needs..."

Link turns around. She waits for Ruboona to finish, at which point the two of them step through the doorway to examine the inner workings of the Divine Beast Vah Naboris.

The torso of the Divine Beast stretches into a wide cylindrical corridor, longer than it is wide, though the diameter of its width stretches the same span as the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. The walls curve into a perfect cylinder. Along the sides, Link notices terminals extending radially inwards towards the centre of the cylinder, as well as various strange boxes and domes that may within house machinery or wiring.

Droplets of malice ooze from the walls, congregated around the terminals, and lubricate downwards to pool around the map terminal on the floor in a long line down the Divine Beast's spine.

Holes in the walls lead out towards each of the four limbs, with the usual mess of gears and ropes visible outside rather than within the holes, evidently sheltered by the existence of adjoining chambers affixed to the main room. Further away, Link spots where the head extends forward, up on top of a high platform. A ladder leads down from the platform, but the bottom of the ladder has twisted off and broken. Link gazes at the damage.

She cannot recall the inside of another Divine Beast broken this way.

Along the ceiling and at the sides run loops of metal along the wall, metal currently inert, metal which marks a long straight line from the rear of the Divine Beast to the head.

At the bottom: the terminal that contains the map, with the four statues of animals. The lizard: the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. The bird: the Divine Beast Vah Medoh. The elephant, and then the camel, facing forward to the terminal.

Ruboona gestures towards the central terminal. "It can't be as simple as putting the Hero's slate into the pedestal there, is it?" Link shakes her head, and Ruboona nods slowly. "So, what else?"

Link explains, briefly. The map. The seven terminals, including the entrance and the map. Thereafter the return to the map, which will trigger the final defence of the Malice from the violent violet of the chrysalis that pulsates overhead. The only effective weapon, she cautions, comes in the form of the blue fire-light arms she has filched from guardians. Link reaches behind her to draw out the spear that she took from the guardian, and yet she finds only the hylian-sized boomerang and the blade from the bokoblin upon the shore of the lake.

She lowers her eyelids.
The spear. Packed away into saddlebags. Near the giant boomerang.

On Ilia.

A week's ride by sand seal.

She covers her face with her hands. When Ruboona inquires of what has transpired, her worry genuine, Link can only begin to explain how foolish she must be to have forgotten almost all of her equipment.

"You can't be *that* much of a fool," Ruboona counters. "A fool wouldn't have been able to realise that I forgot to salt the meat."

Link pauses, and then the corners of her lips curl up unbidden, and then she cracks out a laugh. "*You got me there,*" she signs, and Ruboona grins cheekily.

She shows Link her own weapons: a radiant shield inlaid with regular patterns of gems around the edge—exhausted ruby, and sapphire, and topaz, and opal, to absorb flame and ice and electricity and water, and sporting a heart of mirrored diamond, the best material known to reflect the fire-light of guardians—and a curved blade with slight hooks along the outer edge. "It's thin enough to slide between the plates of guardians' armours, and the hooks help to tear and catch the wiring inside. Then, the curve lets you try to pry the armour off." Ruboona rubs her nose, her brow wrinkled, and Link observes how despite her best efforts the tip of her tongue pokes out from her mouth. Ruboona snaps her fingers. "Ah, and it hooks well into the guardians' legs as well."

Link whistles.

Ruboona's smile ebbs away at the corners. Link silences her whistle with her tongue between her lips. She scrambles to draw back that smile.

"...not everyone has access to these kinds of weaponry, nor armour." She folds her hands behind her and tilts herself slightly forward as if bowing to an unseen force. "Ah, but I do. Then, I have to do my part."

Link nods.

Standing at the lip of the precipice, Link looks straight down: another ladder, similarly broken, as though someone or something wrenched it from its hinges. Ruboona nudges Link and points towards the centre of the chamber, where a twisted ladder-like object of the same slippery tan material as the ladder and the rest of the Divine Beast rocks back and forth.

Ruboona kneels down. She touches her hand to her chest, then retrieves from her pack a compact harp strung from a single point with six strings, like the red and blue harp of Marin's family, and *unlike* the golden harp of eight straight vertical strings that Link's body has seen in the chambers of the girl with the golden hair.

She lifts her head towards Link. "Do you mind?" Ruboona asks, and Link tilts her head. "Ah, I...wished to sing a prayer for Lady Urbosa, may her spirit forever ride the winds. I do not know if it would be offensive to a follower of Sahylia."

Link snorts out a laugh. "*I don't know if I'd call myself that. And if I did, no, I can't say I'd find it...whatever that word was.*"

When Ruboona's lips curve up into a smile so small that Link has the distinct impression Ruboona sought to keep its existence secret, Link just grins back at her. Ruboona strums a chord.
She begins to sing.

Ruboona has not the most melodious voice, nor the sweetest timbre, nor the heavenly euphony that she has heard from Marin. But instead Link can hear in her tones the measured hours of practise that she has spent honing her range and her prowess, the quiet determination of bringing to its fullest potential that which life has given her, and so her timbre takes on a wholeness all its own.

Her notes harmonise the air to resonate the very fabric of the Divine Beast.

She sings of Lady Urbosa. She sings of the Champion's triumphs and failures alike. She sings of the Great Calamity, of the malice emerging to swallow the castle whole, of the monsters that fell from the skies, of the land covered in violent violet, of the Champions flying to their Divine Beasts to prepare for the decisive battle against the Calamitous One, of the Champion of Sageru, the Hero of Parapa, the Divine Beast Vah Naboris's Pilot, O Courageous Urbosa trapped within the very Divine Beast the Goddesses had chosen her to guide, of the Calamitous One fading away, of the Divine Beast ebbing cold and still and silent with Lady Urbosa and her slate vanished into its depths, with the Divine Beast closed off to any that might venture to enter its innards to retrieve the body of Lady Urbosa, of the funeral along the river where—without the ashes of Lady Urbosa to scatter to the water—they had scattered the ashes burnt of Lady Urbosa's favoured meal and of her favoured horse so that she might have them in the divine wilds watched over by the Goddess.

The harp strikes with the chords of lightning and flows with the scales of water. The final note vibrates on the lip of the precipice, like the crackle of static just before the thunderstorm, and then fades to drizzle out into silence.

When Ruboona finishes, Link finds wetness upon her cheeks and wipes the tears from her face with her palms.

She reaches down to the red telescope at her left hip. She closes her trembling fingers around the cool metal. Against her skin she feels the roughness of the sketches of seagulls marked into the metal.

The view of the castle of Central Hyrule. Of the violet claws around its perimeter, like a hand about to close, to crush what remains of the lifeless stone.

Link squeezes the telescope tight.

Though she knows not how long she and Ruboona exist in the stillness, at long last she senses Ruboona set away the harp and stand. "Then, let's not waste any time."

Link nods.

Ruboona instructs Link to grip her around the shoulders. Link acquiesces. She wraps her arms around Ruboona's shoulders and braces her legs against Ruboona's waist and thighs.

Ruboona steps off the edge with the paraglider opened above their heads.

With their combined weight—or perhaps Ruboona's paraglider flies differently than Link's own, still somewhere along the sands, and certainly not destroyed by the lightning, absolutely not—they drop heavily. Link lets go to crash first into the ground. Her shoulder blades and the back of her head bump against the hard floor. A sudden heaviness on her abdomen knocks her limbs up: Ruboona lands with her feet on Link's stomach. She bows to Link and starts to apologise a thousandfold, but Link merely breaks out into laughter and shakes her head.

"I'm fine. I'm fine."
"Then," Ruboona offers, her fingers intertwined, "if there's anything I can do to make it up—"

"You could promise to make me more meat skewers," Link interjects before she has even felt the path of her arms.

Ruboona stares at her. Link blinks back. Then Ruboona covers her mouth but cannot cover her mirth.

"Then, I promise." The corners of her eyes crinkle. "I'll even salt them just for you." Link winks at her and she raises a hand to her cheek, then stoops down to fold the paraglider away. "So. The first step is getting the map."

No sooner has Link stepped forward towards the terminal some twenty paces away than she hears a scuttling upon the floor.

Link twists herself back just in time to see Ruboona throw herself between Link and the guardian stalker that crawls out from under the broken ladder. The automaton's eye blazes. The fire-light sings outwards. Even as Link raises her arms to push Ruboona out of the way, the girl hefts her shield. She holds it before her.

The fire-light refracts from its surface and ignites the air to Link's right.

The guardian's line of sight—a bolt of red—centres on Ruboona's face. It lifts itself upon its too-many legs and Link can see how Ruboona's limbs have locked in place and her spine has frozen as if all of the frost of the Hebric mountains had curled into the marrow of her bones. Link rips the boomerang from her back. Staring at the advancing automaton, she draws back her arm to aim for the guardian's single fire-light eye.

She releases.

Link hears the ping of metal. The guardian rears back. Without looking away from the automaton's legs, Link reaches back for her blade. Her hands close not around the hilt of the sword but around the sharp edge of her boomerang.

Link looks up at the guardian to find the blade broken in its head, the lower half jammed into the eye and the upper half having clattered to the floor.

The automaton twirls around on its legs. Ruboona, still iced into the ground, keeps her shield in straight in front of her, even though the guardian bears down over her. Whipping out the boomerang, Link sweeps Ruboona's legs out from under her. The girl falls backwards; the impact rouses her into action while the automaton flails above. It streams fire-light from its sparking eye that crashes at random into the ceiling and walls.

"The legs!" Ruboona yells, scrambling to her feet, dropping the shield with an explosive schwing against the floor to pull the hooked sword from the sheath at her hip. "Cut off the legs!"

Link sprints towards the guardian. The legs—each one thicker than her own head—spasm as the automaton seeks to find purchase on the slippery floor. The guardian continues to spray its bolts of desperation like lightning into the sky. She strikes the nearest leg with the boomerang. Where metal hits automaton, the resonance vibrates up Link's hands to turn her bones to chuchu jelly.

She stumbles back, the guardian unscratched, the boomerang wobbling in her grip.

Ruboona springs out from behind her. As Link propels backwards, she notices Ruboona leap
forward with the hooked sword. Unlike the boomerang that bounces immediately off, the curve of
the blade slides over the automaton's legs, and the hooks latch onto the raised rim where one
segment of the leg connects to the next.

Ruboona pulls back.

Link angles herself forward. Grabbing Ruboona about the waist, she tugs the girl back and the girl
tugs on the sword hooked into the limb. Her arms strain. Her palms slick with sweat and threaten to
loosen her grip.

The guardian's leg shears free.

The stump convulses. The longer end of the limb writhes another second and then falls still. Link
flashes Ruboona a smile as the latter meets her gaze over her shoulder.

The next leg. And the next. And the next. The automaton topples over and its fire-light streams
towards the walls, so close that Link can feel the strange cold heat radiating from the beam of
light.

Ruboona screams for her. Link swivels herself around quickly enough that she loses her balance
and has to perform an impromptu jig of thrashing limbs to keep from tipping backwards into the
fire-light.

Something catches her right wrist before she careens herself into the veil beyond.

Ruboona. Her left hand tight around Link's wrist. Pulling her back up. Her eyes wet with worry and
burning with a determination that balls Link's own hands into fists.

Never before has Link seen the exposed underside of the guardian, all whirring gears and coiled
wires, great shimmering cores and whirling screws. Under Ruboona's request, Link holds the
automaton steady—and then does her one better, locking the guardian in place with the golden
light of stasis. Ruboona slices across with the blade. The hooks clip into wires and cling through
the teeth of gears, tearing the automaton's innards asunder in a rising wave that follows her arm in a
wake of destruction.

The guardian chokes out a final blast of fire-light in a wide arc from one side of the Divine Beast to
the other. As the fire-light scours through one of the lines of metal driven into the ground, the floor
beneath Link shudders. The metal hums, sparking like shattered topaz. The automaton stills. The
Divine Beast rumbles, and shakes, and then begins to tilt forwards.

Ruboona's head twists towards the terminal that contains the map. Link pelts forward in the
direction of Ruboona's gaze. The quaking beneath her feet shakes her out of balance, but she rolls
forward on the ground until her head smacks against something hard.

The terminal.

The Divine Beast starts to sway back when she slams the slate into the depression on the face of
the pedestal. While the black crystal with the quartet of animals brightens and darkens in turn, Link
slumps over the terminal. She drops down onto the ground. Her knees hit the hard floor as the rim
of the pedestal presses against her belly, and then her stomach slumps onto the floor while her arms
slide off of that pedestal for her fingers to flatten against the ground, and at last her chin thumps
against the floor hard enough for her to bite her own cheek.

The pang of copper in her mouth accompanies the slowing of the Divine Beast Vah Naboris, and
thereafter its stillness.
Only then does Link allow herself to breathe.

She wriggles her toes—all ten—and then her fingers—also all ten—and then reaches up to touch her ears—two, pointed, and pierced with blue—and her nose—very sniffy—and the cooking pot on her back— in one piece, alongside the repairs that have left the stories of Eldin and Tabantha onto its metal as her scars have left the regions' tales upon her skin—and the red telescope at her hip— bearing her sister's masterpieces of art—and her ponytail—bobbing away on the back of her head without the knowledge at all that she who bears the ponytail might have well died a hundred and one years ago.

The laughter that bubbles out of her belly carries with it feeling to her extremities, loosening her muscles and flowing the tension from around her eyes. She stands up, swaying, and removes the slate from the pedestal.

Seven terminals.

Two on either side; one at the tail; one near the chest; and one near the very crown of the head of the Divine Beast Vah Naboris.

She hugs the slate to her chest in thanks.

When she turns around, Link finds Ruboona not quite standing but not quite bowing. In her arms, Ruboona burdens the shield, and the boomerang, and the broken half of the blade, and the hooked blade in the shield.

"Ah..." Ruboona dips her head. "Thank you for saving me. I apologise for—for the mistakes that I have made—for thinking I could do it but being too scared to—"

Link shrugs. "Thank you for saving me. The guardian would've burned me alive if you hadn't leaped to my rescue."

Ruboona's mouth thins into a line and Link blanks her expression, her hands before her chest. Her voice has tautened as a bone pushed too far in, on the cusp of fracturing. "...you're too kind. Then, I promise that I won't make the same mistake I again." She inclines her head still forward, inclines her upper body, inclines herself to speak to someone beyond Link's shoulder. "Oh, Goddesses forgive me mine errors and mine pride."

Link lifts her hands, lowers her hands, and lifts them again. She has not the words that she needs. And where Yunobo could talk himself into reading her silences as the encouragement she wanted so desperately to say, Runooba only crumples further in on herself.

Words.

"...we're in this together, and that's what matters," Link says. "We're in this together, and...no matter what, we got out alive. That's what matters. Not how we got there, but that we did." She tilts her head to the side to implore Ruboona with her downturned eyes and slight smile. "You know?" Link slaps the terminal with her open hand to punctuate her final gesture. The Divine Beast rumbles and both Link and Ruboona ogle the pedestal in horror.

Then: nothing.

Link collapses back to her knees. Ruboona wipes the sweat from her brow. They glance towards one another.
Link laughs. Ruboona doesn't. Link's mirth deflates like a popped octorok balloon.

Ruboona closes her eyes. Link listens to her breathe: in through her nose, out with her mouth, her inhalations shaky, her exhalations steady. Then she lifts her eyelids. "Then, as you said, we are alive. Ah, I think this calls for a little celebration," Ruboona offers, and Link bobs her head.

"Here," signs Link, withdrawing the rock salt from the metal ingredients box in her satchel. "You can use this." Ruboona blinks at her. Link smiles sheepishly. ".I thought you wanted to make more meat skewers."

"Oh!" Ruboona hides her mouth with the back of her hand; her shoulders shiver in silent laughter. "You do think about food a great deal, don't you?"

Link rubs the back of her head. "Is that a bad thing?"

"Just a thing. I feel much the same." Ruboona smooths the back of her trousers as though expecting a skirt as she seats herself down upon the ground and removes the metal grate from her satchel. Link crouches across from her, flat on her heels, and leans forward.

"Teach me."

Ruboona clears her throat. Her voice takes on a slightly deeper and more solemn tone. "As you wish, my young apprentice." Link watches her remove a shard of ruby from her pack alongside a thin skin of oil that she drizzles over the bottom of the grate, then lights by dropping and—with a utensil that resembles a nutcracker—breaking the fragment of ruby. Ruboona removes a dressed whole bird from a container inlaid with sapphires. Upon a mat that she rolls out over the floor, Ruboona kneads and pounds the meat to tenderness, then chops nuts of various assortments with Link's help and embeds them in irregular intervals into the poultry. As she works, Link notices the gradual formation of looping Parapan script drawn in the meat.

"Mm? Ah. The nuts read stay strong," Ruboona translates. "Then, you do not know how to read Parapan?" Link shakes her head. "But you can speak it—can understand it." A nod. Ruboona dips her head and does not ask more of Link. No questions of her origin, or her motivation, or how she came upon the slate. "We'll eat and then continue. A small snack, nothing more."

"Are you worried about the time?" Link probes.

Ruboona's palms flatten out against the meat. She closes her eyes, then opens them again and resumes her efforts at patting the bird into chunks. "Yes and no. Yes, We should hurry, but...no, not so quickly that we break ourselves open."

Link dips her head.

To start preparing the sauce, Ruboona indicates how to mix the spices with a red paste that she produces from a ceramic jar. Link adds salt. Together they smear sauce over the meat before stabbing each rolled ball through with a skewer of bone. Her palms feel damp and sticky with the thickness of the sauce. The scents of spices over the folds of her skin dizzy her head with delight.

Just two skewers. One for her, and one for her companion. As Link holds the skewer over the fire, Ruboona examines her shield. The mirror-like surface has fogged somewhat, and Ruboona purses her lips. Link listens to her prayers to the Golden Goddesses, asking for the power of reflex to reflect the guardians' 'arrows of light' as she calls them, for the wisdom to know just when to move her shield, for the courage to try and not simply to make as a turtle would, for the—Ruboona uses the word Link has come to know as kin, although Link feels like she does not understand the
nuances of its definition—to believe in her own capabilities.

"The skewers're done," Link announces. Ruboona, having closed her eyes, continues to pray. Link raps her knuckles against the ground to catch her companion's attention. "Do you want one?"

Ruboona does not quite smile but the lines of her grimace smooth out. Link counts that her first victory today. Ruboona takes the skewer. Leaning in, Link observes her reaction as the girl takes a bite.

First a drawing together of the brow, then a sloping downwards of the eyebrows, then a lowering of the eyelids, then a tilting upwards of the chin, then a squeezing of the mouth, then a little mm of satisfaction that brings the widest grin she's upon her lips today.

Ruboona brings her hand up to her mouth. A tear glimmers at the corner of her left eye.

Link could cry herself, for having found someone who understands. Taking a skewer for herself, she bites down. As before, the textures of the tender meat and crunchier nuts light firecrackers in her mouth, and the added flavour of the salt to the sweet and the bitter, the sour and the savory, waters her eyes with tears of joy.

She remembers meat like this, on the road with Urbosa. She remembers how, during one of Urbosa's sharings of stories, Link let slip she knew a little of how to play the six-stringed ages. She remembers of Urbosa procuring such a harp for her, albeit painted light green and marked with symbols of the wind and the thunder rather than red and blue like the ages passed down through Marin's family.

Link declined a tutor but she could not decline the harp. The first week the instrument gathered dust as Link threw herself deeper into training with the sword. The second she started to clean wooden to polished smoothness. The third she plucked chords from its strings and asked Urbosa of its tuning.

Urbosa knew little of playing the harp—though she could tear up the strings on a lute in playing the sorts of songs that might chase her out of politer company, alongside the court music that she had learned at the palace academy as a youth—but she passed Link along to one of her friends: a court harpist by the name of Enja, who spoke softly but with a precision and brevity of word that made Link hide behind the harp. Yet Enja did not expect answers from Link, nor notes of the harp. She responded to questions and returned to her playing, and in doing so left Link to her own devices in understanding the harp.

From Enja Link learned to tune the harp. She took the harp with her on Urbosa's training trips to play while riding her horse, as she had played the ocarina before drawing the sword that seals the darkness from the stone.

In her memory, she realises, she had not the ocarina anymore. Or perhaps she did have it and she has forgotten.

Perhaps none of these memories happened at all.

She played the songs Marin taught her. When she saw Marin again, she would show off her skills, would let the strings sing out, would weave the music into the smile parting Marin's lips.

She played the songs the girl who smelled of horses had shown her on the grasswhistle, back when she and the girl who smelled of horses had had no responsibilities but those to one another, when they could spend the hot summer evenings fashioning instruments from leaves and blades of grass.
The songs that she had played the girl who smelled of horses on her blue ocarina, the songs that she had played with notes out of tune and rhythm uncertain at best, but songs that she played nonetheless for the girl who smelled of horses's soft smile.

When she saw Marin again—when she saw the girl who smelled of horses again—when she saw again the people who she loved, then she would rest. But she had promises to keep.

Their names buoyed her on.

"So, Link," Urbosa remarked one day, leaning back against the flank of her horse, the mischievous glint in her eyes drawing Link back from the campfire where they grilled skewers in salt, "is there anyone you've got an eye on?"

Link balanced the harp in her lap. She blinked at Urbosa, and Urbosa raised her eyebrows at her.

"Is there anyone you fancy, Link? Anyone that's caught your eye?" In the Parapan language the words she used meant any girl rather than anyone, but Link could not tell if Urbosa meant any girl, or if the confines of the languages tricked her ears more suited to the genders tied up in Necludan or Central Hyrulean.

She turned the question over in her mind.

Anyone she fancied.

Urbosa's gaze darted down. To the harp in Link's hands. And then up. To the sudden fury of scarlet in Link's face.

She could not recall the word for no but she knew how to swing her head from side to side to negate any and all and everything that could have passed through Urbosa's mind or mouth.

In response Urbosa laughed, though not unkindly.

Link felt her hands moving before she could stop herself. "Is there anyone you fancy?"

"A question," Urbosa noted. "Answering a question with a question. Now that's the Parapan art. Well, now, I should honour it, then." She lifted her hand to her chin. Link observed her expression of serenity pass over behind the shadow of a storm. "...forgive me, Link. It was unfair of me to ask you that when I can't even answer it myself." Link's fingers curled inwards and she recoiled back, but And yet simply returned to tending the skewers. She kept her voice level. Yet behind the evenness Link could just hear the edge of something broken, of something splintered in two. "Well, if you ever figure out the answer, you should tell me if you want."

Link responded with a scale up and down the harp. An invocation she and the girl who smelled of horses had heard from the Oracles at the village shrine—painted in the spiralling gold of—of Ordona? but what does Ordona mean? she cannot remember—and thereafter taught themselves to play on the grasswhistle. She strains. The name of the invocation. She remembers: Farore's Courage.

Perhaps the song prompted the pain in Urbosa's constricted features, or perhaps not. Link let the harp die down. And yet the silence yielded no voice.

"Link."

Her eyelids flutter.
Ruboona.

"Are you all right?" Ruboona asks, and Link inclines her head. "Are you certain?"

Link polishes off the skewer. "I was just...remembering something."

Ruboona's eyes mist over; she lowers her lashes as a curtain of warm darkness. "Ah, I understand. I do that too."

Link sets the skewer in her lap.

"We should go."

"Mm." Over the point of the bone skewer, Link watches Ruboona gaze into the fire. "Yes. We should."

—

Salt-Grilled Gourmet Meat (eight hearts) - acorn, chickaloo tree nut, raw whole bird, rock salt

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: The inside of Vah Naboris, being a big cylinder with the terminals all pointed radially inwards, was really impressionable on me!

The ladders were broken in the original fight between Urbosa and Thunderblight Ganon as Urbosa attempted to escape, since unlike the big spiral staircase present in Vah Medoh and Vah Rudania (in Delicious in Wilds), Naboris's exits are reached by ladder. Why? Because the entire torso rotates, so it's not feasible to have the exit from the back. Instead, the exit is at Vah Naboris's rump, under the tail.

Link did indeed leave a bunch of her supplies on Ilia back in Ache's Veil! While you can carry pretty much everything on you in Breath of the Wild and have very few options for actual storage other than the three bows/weapons/shields you can store in Link's house, other games where you have actual storage options can lead to cases like this. Seems like Link will have to find a different weapon with which to defeat Thunderblight Ganon.

Ruboona isn't that good at singing, but it's the thought that matters, you know? It's also the same harp that Link knows how to play: the ages. Since her prayer is intensely devoted to Sageru, Ruboona worried that a devotee of Hylia might not want to hear it, like how some people in real-life could be uncomfortable in the religious temple or other sacred location of a faith different from their own.

The radiant shield is mirror-like and will refract away the guardian's lasers (dubbed "fire-light" by Link). However, diamond can only absorb so much energy at a time, and the jewellers have not yet figured out a way to harness the energy stored in the diamonds properly instead of having that energy be immediately refracted back out. That immediate refraction also damages the diamonds precisely due to this incomplete nature, much like how people don't know how to get rubies to release all of their fire at
once except by breaking them.

Instead of throwing the boomerang at the guardian, Link threw the sword at the guardian. That's what happens when you don't pay attention to what you're grabbing.

Unlike Link, who is used to carrying swords at her back instead of her hip even though that's a very poor method of sword-carrying, Ruboona properly carries her sword on her hip.

Just smacking a guardian's leg with a boomerang isn't going to do much. They're armoured for a reason! The weapon that Ruboona has was based on the ancient bladesaw from Breath of the Wild as well as my own thoughts on how one could effectively fight against the guardians. The purpose of the many hooks is to tear as many wires as possible and damage the internal structure with each thrust. It also makes cutting off the guardians' weak legs much easier, since it can hooked into the tiny gaps between the segments of the legs and then pry them off. I had a lot of fun designing weapons and determining how they would actually work.

In the faith of Sageru, followers are taught to question all that they see around them, to be sceptical, and to seek truth through debate and interpretation. The words of the faith are likened to the water of the River Sageru, pliable and moving. The idea is that following a faith and believing because someone told you to isn't how you cultivate true love or sense of duty; you have to struggle and to decide for yourself to have faith in Sageru, because then your faith is genuine; of course, that's only the faith of Sageru, and the other patron deities have their own views of such things. Incidentally, this scepticism is precisely what you saw in Urbosa's view of destiny and fate as something that people take into their own hands. Hence, answering a question with a question is tongue-in-cheek called a Parapan art.

Farore's Courage is a reference to the song from Skyward Sword. If you want to know what the invocation sounds like: there you go.

Wew, is there anyone Urbosa fancies? Well...

midna's ass. 02 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Ri-I-mean-Ruboona is really great! Link has one of the best connections with her out of all the characters in the series, and seeing their relationship evolve over such a short time is a great experience.

Ruboona being a really religious character is a cool thing to see - while all characters we've seen have been religious to some extent, having a super devoted character is a cool thing to explore.

Link continuing her relationship with music in the past is kinda super sweet.

Emma. 02 October 2017.
Energising Glazed Meat

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef and the Parapan food enthusiast tackle the Divine Beast, while the travelling chef continues to remember about the previous Champion of Sageru.

Chapter Notes

As typical of me, comments that couldn't fit in the end: As always, my deepest thanks to you for reading Delicious in Wilds, and my deepest thanks to everyone who has helped me along the way, most notably my beloved beta reader, Emma.

Basically, what happened in the previous chapter is that the guardian fired its laser into the wiring which runs through Vah Naboris, which provided enough electricity for the wire to briefly take effect on the body of the Divine Beast. In this case, the electric pulse make Vah Naboris assuming the "kneeling" position (the same position you see in Breath of the Wild).

Topaz, if you haven't figured out by now, stores electricity, just like in Breath of the Wild. Green topaz is the most high-quality topaz for storing electricity; the normal yellow topaz is serviceable.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"So," starts Ruboona, "which terminals should we tackle first?"

Through paraglider reconnaissance outside of the Divine Beast, Link and Ruboona learn that shudder and tilt of the Divine Beast from the guardians' fire-light has lowered it to its knees in the sand.

The inner torso of the Divine Beast, Link notes, has little in the way of guardians. Small sentries wait, inert, upon the circular walls, but she cannot say if they have broken over the past century or if they will bring into action when neared. The front and back of the Divine Beast tell a different story. The arched entrance that leads into the tail echoes with the scuttle of guardians' legs back and forth. Link cannot comment on the terminal near the chest area, nor the head.

"This place seems safe," Link points out. "And these terminals probably activate the legs."

Ruboona nods. Her braid and looped sidelocks bounce with the motion of her head. "Then, let's get those first."

The map terminal has brought with it control over the central cylinder of the Divine Beast. The torso, Ruboona and Link discover, splits into three rings: at the front near the head, in the middle, and at the back near the tail. She can rotate the rings of the torso around, but the metal bands upon the floor remain lifeless even when aligned.
After closing her eyes to ponder, Ruboona pulls out a shard of topaz. "I have an idea. Stand back." She shoves the golden thing with the green gems and wheel of lightning decals onto her head. Not a thing, Link realises, but a helmet, with the green gems—green topaz—she thought embedded in the back actually facing front.

Ruboona steps forward towards the metal band and crouches. With a pair of nutcracker-like tongs, she breaks open the topaz upon the metal.

A spark of green electricity runs up and down the band. The Divine Beast groans. The floor quakes; its curved slipperiness sends Link onto her back like a flipped-over beetle. Something on the back end of the Divine Beast rumbles.

When the electricity runs its course, the something in the back of the Divine Beast rumbles again, more quickly this time. Through the floor, Link can feel the hard thudding of something impossibly heavy slamming down.

"So, there has to be some...way of operating Savah Naboris." Ruboona presses her hands together. "If the topaz providing the electricity is spent, I have some in my pack." Link nods at her. "Though I wonder how She's remained operational all these years, before you placed the Hero's slate into that terminal." A tilt of Link's head brings Ruboona to elaborate: "I thought the Divine Beasts like Savah Naboris worked on electricity. Ah, you're not from around here, are you? We use topaz to store it. It's...a rare commodity, but it has uses beyond measure. Not anything on the scale of Savah Naboris, though Parapa's brightest have come far." Link tilts her head further, and Ruboona clears her throat. "Sovah Naboris is wired—" She points to the metal bands, "—but the rest of Her continues to operate even in the absence of electricity. I can't imagine what else could power Her." Ruboona glances at Link with a small nervous smile. "Do you happen to know, with the other Divine Beasts...?"

Link shrugs. "I haven't thought about it."

Ruboona lowers her eyelids. "Ah, you're...here to calm the Divine Beasts. That makes sense." She opens her eyes once more. "Let's go."

"I'm sorry," Link signs, tapping her boot twice against the floor to shake off her excess worry. "I'm not that smart. I just happen to...I just happen to be the one who found the slate."

Her companion claps a hand over her own mouth. "I didn't mean to—!" The horror on her face makes Link lift her hands and twitch her fingers to claw words, any words, from the fabric of the air. "I didn't say you weren't smart, and I didn't mean to imply it. I'm sorry."

Link shakes her head. "I said that about myself."

"...you shouldn't insult yourself like that," Ruboona says softly. She bows towards Link. "Thank you already for what you've done bringing the Hero's slate here, and for saving my life."

The silence that follows squeezes down upon Link's hands and screws her fingers straight, chokes her nose and tightens her throat, drops her down into tension thick enough to muffle her screams. She wants to thank Ruboona for saving her life, and twice now; to thank Ruboona for her kind selflessness to a complete stranger; to thank Ruboona for trusting her.

Instead the only words that Link happens upon grate against her bones before she has even said them. "...thank you for the meals."

Ruboona looks at her, and Link looks blankly back, and then Ruboona laughs with a dryness that
socks Link in the gut. "Then, the terminals."

The terminals.

One terminal on the head-end third of the cylinder and one on the tail-end third. The former currently at the leftmost wall, and the latter on the right.

A sudden warmth at her side makes Link turn her head: Ruboona looks over Link's shoulder while they examine the slate. Link blinks at her companion, who steps back. "Ah, my apologies; I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable."

Rolling her shoulders, Link indicates for Ruboona to come forward again, and the girl does. Link sits cross-legged upon the floor with the slate held in her lap. Ruboona, just below Link's height, crouches behind her. She rests her chin on Link's shoulder. One of her sidelocks brushes against Link's cheek.

Almost involuntarily Link touches the red telescope.

Though she cannot recall the difference in age between herself and Aryll, the barely-felt weight of Ruboona's right hand on Link's back between her shoulder blades, balancing herself, brings a curve to Link's mouth.

With her free hand, Ruboona reaches around Link's shoulder; her fingers brush against the surface of the slate. She rotates the head-end, frontmost ring. Link notices how the movements of the ring alternatively open and block off the entrances that lead to the Divine Beast's joints. The guardian sentries stationed on the cylinder do not fall, even when upside-down on their platforms, apparently held in place by some mechanism around their feet.

The terminal on the front ring—visible as a dot upon the map—sits inside of a tall topless box made of the slippery material, tall enough that even when Link lifts Ruboona up on her shoulders and Ruboona leaps, she cannot quite reach the rim of the box without sliding off of the edge.

They devise a plan. Link stands back with the bow given to her by Amali and Teba, the flimsy wooden arrows she made ready at a moment's notice, and the slate in hand. She rotates the front ring around until the terminal protrudes from the left wall and a box-like platform juts out from the bottom.

As soon as Ruboona steps onto the ring, the sentry on the box-like platform glows. She raises her shield. Its singular eye begins to blaze. Link blinds the automaton with an arrow. While Ruboona rolls out of the way, the sentry shoots fire-light from its broken eye. Link's breath dies in her throat: she ogles nervously how Ruboona dodges the guardian's blitzing fire-light to reach the automaton's head, which she skewers with the hooked sword.

When she has ripped its armour free and torn off its legs, Ruboona squats down on the floor. She flashes Link the sign for being all right, her thumb and forefinger curved into a circle. Link rotates the ring counterclockwise. As the ring moves, the terminal in the box comes to a rest on the bottom, while Ruboona perches on the platform now extending from the right side.

Unfolding her paraglider, Ruboona hangs on the edge of the platform, breathes, and jumps.

She glides into the box, and Link pumps her fist into the air.

Ruboona's voice echoes from the inside of the box. "...Link? How are you going to get me the slate?"
Link lowers her hand. She touches her chin. Arching her arm back, she chucks the slate at top of
the wall.

It hits the edge and bounces back.

Nursing the new bruise on her forehead, Link touches her chin again. Carefully she rotates the ring
one quarter-turn clockwise; she hears Ruboona squeak as the box tilts on its side. Link steps
forward onto the ring to clamber onto the platform. Ruboona, now on her stomach between the side
of the wall and the black crystal of the terminal pointing radially inwards, her head poking out of
the box, peers at Link to ask what in the world is going on.

"I'm going to rotate the platform back and toss the slate in," Link explains. She taps the bruise on
her brow. "Be careful of it smacking into you."

Ruboona holds the shield over her head. Link rotates the ring up and around. When the terminal
once more protrudes from the bottom, Link gently tosses the slate down into its top face.

She listens to it bang off of the shield, then hears Ruboona shuffle around for it. "Thank you! Ah,
how do I...oh! Wait. Oh, I see, thank the Goddesses. It's the other way. Then, like this?" Link can
see from her position the reflection of the blue light shining out from the top of the box. "We did it!
Link, we—we really did it. We can...we can do this."

The earnestness in her voice reminds her so strongly of Yunobo that Link raises her right hand to
her cheek and her left to the red telescope looped around the belt at her hip.

Ruboona rotates the ring back clockwise. At her request, Link stands below the mouth of the box.
Ruboona drops down the slate first which Link fails to catch; she plucks it from the ground to slot
into the pouch at her right hip. And then Ruboona herself: without enough room to open up her
paraglider, she wriggles herself out from the thin space between the terminal and the wall.

She drops down.

Hands reaching for the girl falling through the air, Link catches her, one arm around her shoulders,
one arm under the bend of her knees, and Ruboona half-jumps, startled, in Link's embrace. Her
sidelocks have come slightly undone and curl around her face in a cloud of puffed red.

Link remembers gathering Aryll into her arms. In the nights that followed the day she drew the
sword that seals the darkness from the stone. When she returned to Ordon for the first time since
her hand had first touched the blade of evil's bane, when she left the letter for the blacksmith and
for the girl who smelled of horses and for—her parents, on the kitchen counter of that house.

When she held Aryll in her arms as she now holds Ruboona.

Bending over to set her companion on the floor, Link lets Ruboona stand on her own two feet.
Ruboona smooths her frazzled hair. She stoops down to pick up the golden loops that fell from her
hair to set them once more into her sidelocks, then ties the sidelocks back into loops.

"Thank you for catching me," Ruboona says, her voice betraying her dizziness. Clapping her palm
against her cheek, she repeats her words more firmly: "Thank you for catching me." She fixes up
her braid. Link shrugs, then snaps her fingers and smiles back at Ruboona, who returns the gesture.
"Then, that should take care of the front legs." Link confirms with a glance at the slate. She blinks.
For the other Divine Beasts the terminals have controlled the legs—or wings—in left-and right-
fashion, but here the controls go front-and-back. "You said that the back legs should be on the
other ring, closest to the tail."
Off to the other ring. As before Link and Ruboona, together, clear the ring of guardian sentries. None of them offers any fire-light weapons. Link wrenches her arrows from their eyes. Some shafts have broken beyond repair, but others she can reuse with a bit of sharpening.

This time Link gives Ruboona the slate. While Link stands guard from the main terminal, Ruboona cycles through the various platforms in her efforts to find a perch from which she can glide down into the box.

Yet nothing on this side seems to work.

Link observes Ruboona fiddle with the slate, then look around the innards of the Divine Beast, then snap her fingers.

"I'll be moving it!" she shouts. Link ogles at her: moving what? Not a second passes and the ground begins to slide away under Link's boots. Link's right knee hits the ground first, followed by her hip and then her shoulder and upper arm. Her body starts to roll downwards on the curved surface; she smacks onto a platform. The back of her head aches. As she thrashes her limbs to find purchase on the surface, she rolls off of the platform and thumps back heavily onto the ground. The ring continues to rotate. On the relative flatness of the floor, Link springs to her feet.

At last.

And then a sudden pain on the crown of her head drops her to the ground. Woozily she lifts her chin to find herself hallucinating a broken hive of honey on the floor at her boots. The inside litters with dead bees, but the honey has kept, and the thick golden syrup ooze from the broken halves of the hive.

Link glances up.

The inner cage of the main terminal overhead reveals the waxy signs of where the beehive once hung, nestled between the four statues of animals, over the neck and back of the lizard, the bird, the camel, the elephant.

Some enterprising bees, she realises, must have made a hive here during the Divine Beast's century of dormancy. Its reawakening must have killed the bees but left the hive; when Ruboona rotated the central ring, the stem of the hive—unable to support its weight—must have fractured and let it fall.

Even in such a place that a century ago witnessed the murder of Urbosa and which now bore the evacuation of villages and the transformation of steppe to desert, life goes on.

Link stops.

She stares.

She erupts into laughter, incredulous and joyous and thankful at once.

Ruboona calls down from the upper platform of the middle ring on which she now perches: "Link? Link!? Ah, I'm sorry; I thought I'd warned you I was about to move the middle ring! Are you injured?"

Link cannot call back, and neither can she turn off the flow of the laughter from the steadiness of life. No matter where she goes, to the never-ending thunderstorm of Tantari, or to the icy reaches of the heavens of the ridgelands, or to the fiery bowels of Death Mountain, life goes on.
In the face of the Great Calamity, life goes on.

When Ruboona, on her hands and knees, peers out from the platform above, Link signs to her: "I'm fine. I'm fine." She gestures wildly towards the honey, holding up one half of the hive, and spins around in a shuffle of celebration. When she lifts her arm up to show the honey to the world, she feels the hive leaving her hand entirely to fly across the inside of the Divine Beast. Gasping, Link throws herself onto the floor. She slides along the ground with hands outstretched.

The hive misses her ready palms and lands, instead, on her head.

She wipes honey from her hair.

"I'm going to have to rotate the rings again, so stay on the furthest one!" Link listens to Ruboona count down from ten and—gathering the hive—moves to safety. Ruboona rotates the middle ring, then the ring to the back. Link observes her glide down into the second boxed terminal.

While she waits for Ruboona to return, she busies herself scooping the honey from the hives and picking out bees. She finds Ruboona's pack of supplies by the central terminal. Drawing out the portable sapphire ice-box of meat and the caged metal grill, Link begins to prepare another round of skewers, this time with a drizzling of honey to glaze the sauce alongside the spices and salt.

She hears Ruboona scream.

Link jumps up but she cannot see the inside of the terminal. She cups her hands over her mouth to yell wordlessly as the ring begins to move once more.

She notices the terminal move up and up, clockwise. It passes the halfway mark on the wall and begins to climb to the ceiling. Link's eyes widen. She sprints forward even as the floor beneath her feet threatens to slip her. Ruboona falls out from the open end of the box. Her arms flail to open the paraglider. One of its wings cracks Link across the jaw but nonetheless she catches the girl for the second time that day.

Her right arm around Ruboona's shoulders, her left in the bend of Ruboona's knees.

The slate crashes into the floor beside her.

The paraglider closes again. Ruboona trembles. Link lets her down and watches her kick off her boots. The footwears skid along the floor. Her knees hit the ground. Her spine curved, her hands on her thighs, her breaths thick and fast.

Link crouches beside her to rest a hand on her shoulder, but Ruboona pushes her away. No, not away: towards the central ring, out from under the terminal. Ruboona scrambles herself over as well.

Link need only look up to see why: a droplet of malice splashes down from the terminal onto the ground.

Before Link can react, Ruboona has lifted herself again to her feet. With her gaze fixed on the ceiling, Ruboona dashes through the back ring under the malice-leaking box, picking up the slate along the way, and smacks her palm over its surface.

The ring begins to move, to tilt the terminal and its malice-flooded box back onto the right side of the cylinder, and then the bottom.

With that Ruboona collapses onto the ground to breathe.
Link takes to her side in a flash. She examines Ruboona's torso and legs for signs of malice, but, other than the threadbare singes on the bottom of her trousers, she seems to have escaped the worst.

Her boots, on the other hand, have half-dissolved, eaten away by malice.

"I—" Ruboona coughs as her panting interrupts her. Link raises her head to meet her gaze; sweat beads on Link's brow and on the back of her neck. "—got the terminal, Link." Her companion smiles weakly. Gingerly she reaches down to feel her own feet. "...ah, and I got out in one piece, thank the Goddesses. Thank You, Sadin, Sanayru, Safarore, Sageru, O our Goddesses."

Link hugs her.

Moving without her thoughts, her arms instinctively wrap Ruboona in the safety of her embrace as so many have hugged her. She senses Ruboona stiffen, and then relax; her hands press into Link's back below her shoulder blades, her fingers digging lightly into Link's skin.

"I'm fine, I promise. You seem to worry a lot about me for someone you just met a few hours ago," Ruboona whispers her timbre halfway tense and halfway touched, and Link pulls away just enough to speak to her.

"We'll be more careful in the future." Her movements follow her solemnity. "I promise."

"As long as Savah Naboris is calmed," Ruboona responds, her voice distant in its sudden detachment, "it does not much matter what happens to me, Link."

"I don't know you," Link admits, "but it does matter. I..." She has said those very words before, the words Ruboona speaks. "I have said those very words before, the words you're speaking." But that doesn't mean she doesn't matter. "But that doesn't mean that...that you don't matter." And it matters what happens to her. "And it matters what happens to you."

"Why do you care so much?" Her inflection has not a trace of accusation or vitriol, only confusion.

"...you remind me of someone I knew once." Link hesitates. "And you've come all this way to calm the Divine Beast yourself. You think that the only thing you can do is...be useful to someone, or live up to some fate, don't you?" She does not know from where the words have welled up, but they fall from her fingers. "I don't know your story but I know you."

Silence.

Link rises to her feet.

"Come here," she says. Where her words fail her food will not. Ruboona follows her. From her pack, Ruboona withdraws a second pair of shoes. Not sturdy boots meant for walking in the sands, but round and comfortable flat-footed shoes. She slides them on. Link salvages the skewers of meat that she has made and proffers them to Ruboona.

Ruboona takes one. "Ah, More food." Link nods. Ruboona looks at her, and Link looks at Ruboona, and then Ruboona lifts her hand to her mouth as a little laugh escapes her lips. "...thank you."

"The quickest way to someone's heart is through their stomach," Link signs, and Ruboona's smile takes on a certain shade of fondness.

They toast one another with a touch of the skewers, and then they bite down.
Glazed meat skewers.

Where the nutmeg sweetened the skewers made before, the honey offers a different kind of sweetness. A certain *roundness, a wholeness* not present before. And the scent of the honey wrapped around the salt and nutmeg and sumac and turmeric and the other spices for which she has no name and below it all the meat made tender by her hands and tempered by the heat—

Urbosa.

Urbosa, who gave her the harp. Urbosa, who struggled with her own burdens, onto whose shoulders the burdens of the girl with the golden hair and the burdens of supposed chosen one both fell, for her being slightly older, for her seeming so calm, for her kindness and courage in the face of the Great Calamity.

But she had her own burdens and no one to fall back on.

Link can only see these truths from the reflections of visiting the past through the hallway of mirrors. At the time, she had little knowledge of Urbosa but for a well-instilled fear. Not of Urbosa, but of those who held power over her, of those who reminded her of the people in *that* house—

Link continued to learn the harp. They went to and from the village of Dhoruf, where Link spent several days honing her skills against a master of dual scimitars. Where Urbosa favoured a shield and a scimitar for combat upon horseback, Rhibonne preferred a more aggressive approach. Link fought not only with the blade of evil's bane but also with a scimitar herself, "to diversify your toolkit, Link," as Urbosa explained. They covered their horses in protective armour filled with a green-coloured fluid so that Link could learn to keep her horse safe in the field. Every time Link checked on Epona and noticed the emerald liquid staining her armour, she sucked in a breath through her teeth.

"I'll do better next time, girl," Link promised Epona, who calmly nosed her chest until she gave in and stroked her loyal companion's forehead. "I won't let anyone hurt you, I swear. Besides..." She giggled into Epona's mane. "Marin and—" The fog scatters through the handful of names she has remembered. "—would never forgive me. And I'd never forgive myself, girl."

Epona bumped her nose against Link's chin as though trying to keep Link in high spirits.

"A horse and her girl," Urbosa remarked; Link blushed. The Champion of Sageru watched over their practise as a referee. Though Urbosa kept up her usual cheer and confidence, Link could detect the brewing of a storm beyond the horizon, in the occasional glances to the left and right, in the twitching of her eyes, in the occasional quick flex of her fingers as if trying grasp something hidden from view.

In the night Link lay sleepless. She listened to Urbosa's breaths deepen and slow as she fell into slumber. Link could not shake the sensation that a single wrong word would turn Urbosa against her, that Urbosa's fury—or whatever emotions lay behind the flicker of grimace and downturn of the brow—could in an instant crash down upon her. As lightning agitated by the clouds would strike the tallest in the vicinity regardless of blame, so too would the storms of distress.

Urbosa, who had been so kind to her since she drew the sword that seals the darkness from the stone in the courtyard of the royal castle. Urbosa, who could surely not be kind forever. Urbosa, who would surely one day get annoyed and fed up and *then*—

She'd seen it happen before.
Link ran her fingers so frequently over her own cheeks that in the morning she would find reddened tracks where she had stroked her skin raw.

At dawn she turned her attention to Rhibonne's lessons.

Link found that she fared better with scimitar and shield than scimitars alone. She would hang back for fear of injuring Epona, which would only result in green blooming along the sands. Rhibonne came at her hard and fast.

She drank a glass of cool mares' milk in the shade of the stable while the horses rested for the next round.

"Courage, my friend," Rhibonne told her, hands returning to her hips after each sentence, peering at the supposed chosen one over her dark-tinted glasses. "You lack courage. You should not be foolish, but neither should you be cowardly." She sniffed and ran her thumb under her nose. "Sometimes you should know when to quit and when to flee. True, those are aspects of any battle, whether physical or not. However...you should choose when to fight and when to flee and not allow your cowardice to dictate your emotions."

Link merely studied the geometric shapes in blue and white upon the stable floor.

Rhibonne sighed. "I can hear your thoughts, my friend."

She snapped her head up to stare at the master of dual scimitars, who winked at her. "True, I'm no psychic, and you have expressions so guarded you'd be a natural in the card parlor. However..." Rhibonne stepped forward to jab a finger into Link's chest. "...I know the thoughts of one who loves her companion so. If it were just you in danger, you could charge at me without a second thought." Link nodded. "However, because it's the horse's life at stake, too, you can't." She nodded again, and Rhibonne flicked at her upper lip. "Protecting the horse means being aggressive, too. Take care of the enemy before they have a chance to go on the aggressive themselves."

Link dipped her head, her expression still blank.

"Now, let's get back to it!" Enthusiastically Rhibonne clapped Link on the shoulder. "Show me what you've got, my friend."

Urbosa raised her eyebrows at Rhibonne's speech. "Courage, eh," she repeated.

Rhibonne threw her arms out towards Urbosa. "O Courageous Urbosa, you of all should understand the need for courage, even if it involves the lives of other people. Especially when it involves the lives of other people."

"Mm," said Urbosa. "I'll be back. Good luck with the training."

Urbosa left and Link prepared herself for the trials to come. She stroked her horse's mane before saddling her. Link focused on aggression and every sssh of fluid streaming from the armour around her horse's torso made her wince. Rhibonne chastised her: not foolhardiness, but planned aggression.

The days came and went. In the early morning—before the sun's rise, for practise of fighting in the dark—and during the afternoons Link honed her courage for riding upon her horse. In the heat just
after noon and in the evenings she practised the six-stringed harp. The ages.

With the harpist Enja's comments in mind, Link focused less on the songs and more on the technique. The sounds she drew from the strings steadily improved, or at least stopped sounding like she were torturing a dog.

A sound behind her froze her body and locked herself in place. She curled herself over the harp to hear Urbosa enter the room.

The atmosphere of distress thickened the air. Link's throat constricted.

Urbosa simply sat down by the hearth of Link's room with a plate of skewers of meat and a pitcher of gold. Bee honey. As Link regarded her, shoulders stiff and limbs curled in, Urbosa held the skewers over the fire, turning them over and over, and drizzling them lightly with gold.

The savory scent of cooking meat and sweetness of honey thinned the air once more. Link resumed the harp.

When the empty ache in her belly had just begun to grown unbearable, Urbosa proved her saviour. Link accepted the skewers offered to her; she swallowed them up.

Urbosa took a seat upon the bed next to Link. She set her own half-eaten skewer down in her lap. "The other day you asked me if there was anyone I fancied."

This conversation again.

Link looked blankly ahead while either the spiced meat or a sudden fever steadily heated her cheeks. She let her hands drop from the strings of the harp.

Urbosa folded her arms over her chest to drum her fingers against her inner arms. "So I've thought about it. I suppose there is someone I fancy. I'll tell you of her if you tell me of the one you fancy. She—" Again Link could not tell if Urbosa meant she or if, in another language, the word would follow he or they. "—has got to be one of the most stubborn and pigheaded people I know." Link blinked. "She can be terribly immature and selfish when she becomes self-defensive. She can be pessimistic and, worse, start to consider all of the woes of the universe only her own." Urbosa snorted, and Link wondered if she had misunderstood the question entirely. Maybe fancy didn't mean what she thought. Maybe Urbosa was asking about why Link seemed so scared of her. Maybe — "Sometimes she gets so fixated on a single thing that it's less about missing the forest for the trees and more missing the forest for a single leaf."

"But."

The softness of the but struck a harder blow than if Urbosa had screamed the word.

Link observed: the dark glimmer of Urbosa's irises. The subtle opening of her palms. The slight smile that grew second on second until she grinned with the whole of her body, a smile so wide it reached her nose to flare her nostrils and then her eyes to crinkle the edges. "But she's also...incredibly sweet, and loyal, and brilliant in ways I can hardly imagine. No matter what she does, she does it with passion, and she'll let neither fate nor tradition stop her. You could put a thousand sand seals in front of her with ceremonial candles strapped to their heads and she'll figure out some, oh, 'optimal path' to avoid 'em all. She understands reason without cutting away her heart, and she can follow her emotion without throwing out her reason." Urbosa shook her head and her hair bobbed from side to side. "She has trouble showing it, sure, but she cares deeply for those around her. And when she's not on the defensive she has...a selflessness that frightens me,
sometimes. But when I see her smile, or I hear her laugh, it feels like something I didn't know was missing from my life has come home at last."

Link listened to Urbosa speak and yet she listened, more closely, to the songs Marin had sung for her that rose from the sea of memories, lighthouses upon the rock. The strings of the harp tingled the tips of her fingers; she closed her eyes for the sensation, like that of stroking her hands along Marin's summer-scented hair.

"Link," said Urbosa again, though Link could barely hear her over the roar of blood rushing to her face, "is there anyone you fancy? You don't need to say anything. Look at how you hold that harp, Link." She winked and Link could substitute the fire with her own face. "With the touch of a lover's hands. Who needs honey when we've got that sweetness in your gaze?"

Link covers her face with her hands. Behind her palms her cheeks flush. Her honey-fuzzed tongue pushes against her lower teeth; the slightly angled teeth on either side of her jaw push back.

Ruboona puzzles out the slate. "I've figured out how to guide Savah Naboris's walking," she says eagerly, and Link nods. Her movements graceful, Ruboona kneels down next to Link and demonstrates how to input a sequence of motion using the two terminals, the head-end handling the two front legs, and the tail-end, the back. "So, be careful and be ready. I'm going to walk Her south."

"South?"

"Away from Nabooru. I've—" Ruboona's timbre deepens; the rims of her words tremble. "—that is to say, we've already been forced to relocate so many people who have lost their homes from Savah Naboris's rampage." She looks down and away, then up to the heavens. "Thank the Goddesses, we won't have to run anymore." Her fingers dance nimbly over the slate. The Divine Beast shakes but does not tilt this way or that, instead rising all at once: the upwards acceleration momentarily pins Link to the ground. Then the Divine Beast starts to move. Link resumes eating the honeyed skewer, and Ruboona closes her eyes. Her left hand strokes repetitively along the curves of the golden helmet. "Link, you...told me that if we activate all of the terminals, then the guardian Malice will emerge to fight against us." Link nods even though Ruboona does not look at her. "So. We have...no need of Savah Naboris's powers. Perhaps against...those who seek to hurt us...but I believe that with Savah Naboris no longer hurting m—our people, that we are more than capable of mobilising against those who would hurt us, ourselves.

"Then, perhaps we could leave Savah Naboris as She is. With the Hero's slate, we could control Her to stay far away from people, and we could move Her to avoid interrupting the people of the sands as well. So...do you think that that's possible, Link?"

Ruboona opens her eyes. She gazes at Link with the strangest mixture of confidence and anxiety, or perhaps Link has simply lost the little ability to read people she has struggled to acquire.

Link's hand rests upon her chin.

"I don't know for sure how long the slate's control lasts over the Divine Beast," she replied honestly, "but I can't leave the slate with you. There's another Divine Beast that needs the slate." Ruboona's expression shifts and Link flinches back. "I'm sorry. But the Malice should have Urbosa's slate. If we can take the slate from it, then we can register a new pilot for the Divine Beast...or something like that. I'm not smart enough to get the specifics." Link scratches her cheek. "If I left it with you...without a pilot, I think the Malice could take over again."

"Ah, you...didn't call her by her full title," her companion remarks, her timbre level. "Lady Urbosa,
that is."

Link rubs the back of her head. "Sorry."

Ruboona gazes at her; Link cannot place her expression. She closes her eyes, then opens them again. "In any case, it seems we'll have to activate the remainder of the terminals and register a pilot, as you said. So, how many more?"

Link holds up three fingers.

As they finish eating, Ruboona pauses to pray under her breath, to invoke once more the Golden Goddesses and the Goddess Sageru, for their protection, for their speed of calming the Divine Beast, for the Malice that they will inevitably have to fight.

Link removes the sheath that once held her blade before it broke. Her hands—when they belonged to another—have borne a sword that softly, so softly, glowed in the gentlest blue.

In anticipation of the Malice, she need search for a blue sword once more. Not of metal, but of fire-light.

The sweetness of the honey fades to a dull acridity. Yet she need only look up to see the girl with the scarlet braid sitting across from her, poring over the slate, her tongue poking out of the corner of her mouth—like a certain girl with pigtails Link knew so long ago—to remember why Link has come here, and why she fights yet.

—

_Energising Glazed Meat_ (twelve hearts, two-fifths stamina vessel) - acorn, chickaloo tree nut, courser bee honey, raw whole bird, rock salt

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Ruboona's comments about "how has Vah Naboris been operational all this time" is in reference to the fact that she doesn't where they draw power. But you do get a clue: the "blue light" that of the guardians' lasers, the blue of the shrines, the blue of the slate, the blue of the Master Sword, and the blue of the Divine Beasts' terminals all relate to one another. In fact, we've already _heard_ about where this blue comes from, though not explicitly. They sure don't run on electricity.

Poor Link really has issues connecting. She's certainly more vocal about responsibility now, thanks to what she learned from Amali, but Link doesn't know how to comfort people. And while Yunobo and Amali have their own esteems, Ruboona (as you can see) has some issues and anxieties of her own.

I've purposefully drawn comparisons between Ruboona and Link's relationship and Link's own relationship with Aryll. Their closeness is not meant to be read as romantic, in any way whatsoever, and I hadn't even thought about that until my beta reader pointed out that readers most used to reading romance fics might misinterpret, so here's my _explicit_ notice.
Ruboona couldn't tell if Link were laughing or crying, which is why she asked.

Truly this chapter is a comedy of errors.

Link lifting up new items throughout *Delicious in Wilds* is an ongoing reference to Link's tendency to do so throughout games in the franchise. In *A Link to the Past*, the merchant from whom Link can buy a bottle even asks that Link lift up the bottle as advertisement.

The armour filled with green fluid is meant so that they can keep track of being hit, i.e. if Rhinon slashes Link's horse on the flank, Epona won't be hurt, but the flank will 'bleed' green.

So, Urbosa was struggling with a few things with regards to her relationship to Zelda, as well as herself. She's the youngest of the four champions (Mipha looks youngest but she's at least several decades old due to the much longer life-span of the zora), and while Revali was chosen for already having been determined to be the greatest archer in Tabantha to a point of putting his hometown Ilari on the map, and while Daruk was chosen in part due to his having been head of the mine of Darunia (i.e. already having attained significant positions), Urbosa was chosen in a tournament and a series of trials that anyone could have entered. In other words, she wasn't picked up specifically but had to win her way in on her own skill. On the other hand, having not already attained a position of prominence means that her ability to be a pilot and to protect Zelda are called into question more often. To this end, if it was discovered that she and Zelda share any sort of relationship, the rumours would fly that she only become champion due to Zelda liking her or some such. And it is considered unprofessional, because that would mean that her interests could be in conflict and compromised, if she would make decisions in favour of her relationship rather than decisions that needed to be made for the good of Hyrule.

The other big issue is that Urbosa is afraid of leaving her loved ones, of dying considering that (as she says) there's a war on. But she's also known Zelda for a while. It takes courage to be honest with your feelings. Sometimes love isn't the answer. But sometimes...

Urbosa and Link have a certain special connection. After all, they're both labelled "Courageous" (Revali and Daruk are the "Powerful", while Mipha and Zelda are the "Wise").

I really didn't want to reduce Ruboona to "flawless perfect queen" nor make her so flawed that Link would have to save her all the time. Instead, I went for an equal balance of her helping Link and Link helping her.

I'm not sure which chapter my beta reader is referring to as the *wew* chapter but if I had to guess it's the forty-first.

midna's ass. 03 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Link learning how to talk with people better is a really sweet moment.

Links sees her sister in Ri—I-mean—Ruboona, which somehow makes everything all the more bittersweet.
I lied to you last chapter - this chapter wasn't the *wew* chapter. But it's coming up, I promise!

Emma. 02 October 2017.
Energising Honey Candy

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef and the Parapan food enthusiast continue through the Divine Beast; the chef continues to recall the former Champion of Sageru.

Chapter Notes

Notes that wouldn't fit: As always, a warm thank-you to all of my readers; take care of yourselves. And thank you to my beta reader, Emma, for being so incredibly patient with me as I discuss the finer points of Hyrulean rock-paper-scissors.

Wind-water-fire, of course, is the Hyrule equivalent of rock-paper-scissors. It's played by making symbols of the golden goddesses with both hands: for Farore's, you curl your left hand into a fist and cup your other hand around it; for Nayru's, you put the backs of your hands (your palms facing left and right) together and slightly curve your fingers in. For Din's, you touch your wrists together so that one hand faces you and the other hand faces outwards, then curl your fingers into loose fists. It helps if you look up the symbols of the goddesses and try to emulate them. It might sound confusing, but I did sit down and work out how to make those with the hands.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Three terminals left.

Ruboona stands by the entrance at the tail of the Divine Beast; she walks it into the Tantari Desert. Only once she has satisfied herself with its distance from anywhere currently occupied by people do she and Link consider which terminal to tackle next.

After a few moments of discussion and a round of wind-water-fire—water puts out fire consumes wind moves water, as indicated by the patterns of their hands; Link grins at the fact, even that one hundred years down the road, the old standby of decision making remains relevant as ever—the terminal in the chest wins out. Together, they make the trek to the head-end ring, where they remove the remaining sentries affixed to the platforms, and ride the platform up to try to glide into the opening of the Divine Beast's chest.

As before, Link clings to Ruboona while the latter opens the paraglider. And yet—regardless of where they rotate the platform—the opening stands too high. Link and Ruboona bring their hands to their chins at the same time.

"The tail it is," Ruboona announces, and Link snorts back a laugh. "Then, do you have another idea?"

She shakes her head; Ruboona giggles.

They go to the tail. From there run two different entrances: one halfway up and just below the tail
that leads into the spot with the first terminal, where first Link awoke to see Ruboona cooking food—and what better way to meet someone than over the most important thing in the world, really—and another higher than that, above the tail, past which Link can hear the scuttling of guardian legs. They ready themselves on top of a platform. Link sets the ring to rotate, granting them an extra dose of height and momentum. Just as her boots start to slip off of the platform, Ruboona glides off.

Ruboona clears the entrance while Link smacks into the edge by her upper stomach. She senses herself sliding down, dragging Ruboona with her, until Ruboona grabs her wrists and tugs up. But Link's greater weight pulls them downwards still. Hastily Ruboona reaches over Link's shoulders to snag the slate from her hip; Link scrambles her feet up the wall to slow her fall. Ruboona holds up the slate—

—and in the next second Link flies up in an arc to smash down upon the entrance to the tail. She sways swoozily. The tunnel around her spins in circles.

"I'm sorry about that. Ah, here's...here's the Hero's slate." Link's vision swims. Two Ruboonas carry two slates in their four palms. Link reaches out double to grab both, and her left hand closes around the slate, twice. "I had to use the...the gold one. The golden mark."

"Stasis."

Ruboona blinks at her, lips pursed, and Link repeats the gesture.

"The yellow rune. It's called stasis."

"What's a..." Ruboona emulates the motion for rune; Link rubs the back of her head. She fishes out Purah's explanation and relays it to Ruboona in a garbled mess that seems to leave her companion more perplexed than before, but nonetheless Ruboona nods. "Thank you. Then, let's continue."

Continue they do. Upon the inner walls of the entrance stripe white poles with metallic blocks that appear to connect different sets of the wiring together. Beyond the end of the hall, Link can see the Divine Beast's tail open to the afternoon sky, long yet flattened, with a metal strip bisecting the surface from base to tip, like a lengthy horizontal plank affixed to the rear passage of the Divine Beast, wide but impossibly thin, so that if Link lay down near the edge, she could hook her arm around the side and touch the bottom face. The base of the tail stretches some ten paces across; the tip narrows into a point. Most alarmingly, a series of seven turrets, spaced along the tail, whirr as their gazes draw loops around their perimeters. Unlike with the small sentries, a lid of clear material protects the eyes of the turrets.

Not scuttling that she heard earlier, Link realises, but the rock-grinding noise of the turrets' heads rotating around.

And if she or Ruboona falls off the edge of the tail, only the lone and level sands stretch far below. Ruboona hefts her shield on her left arm. "Ah, I..." Uncertainty bathes her voice in a distinct quiet. "...should be able to deflect their arrows of light." Her gaze dips onto the floor. "O our Goddesses, please lend me Your strength."

Words.

Link's words would lose her to the emptiness, and yet the creases in Ruboona's brow and around her eyes breaks through the ice around Link's fingers.

"I could try it," Link suggests, "if you're afraid."
"I'm not—" Ruboona presses her hands together. Closing her eyes, she pushes up the bridge of her nose with her index and middle fingers and breathes out. Link runs her fingers through her ponytail. Again she has said the wrong thing. Again the words that she plucks from the void would have better served her in silence rather than in speech. "I apologise for the outburst."

For want of words, Link simply rests her hand on Ruboona's shoulder and squeezes.

Ruboona demonstrates the flick of the shield that should deflect the fire-light back into the guardian's sensitive eye, and Link marches with the shield before her to try out the first turret headfirst. She takes the first.

The guardian turret chirps at her.

She holds up the shield. The automaton's eye blazes. She waits, preparing to flick her arm, and the fire-light crashes directly into the centre of the mirrored shield. The beam of fire-light streams off to the left to bolt through the sky; its heat leaves a crackly scent in the air as of a candle aflame.

Link glances at the shield. The surface of the diamonds has occluded still further. She holds it up again.

More quickly this time.

When Link angles the shield forward to catch the guardian's fire-light, she hears the *click* of its attack—only after her wrist has moved. A sudden force on her legs collides her face with the floor. The pain in her nose precedes a wet stickiness in her nostrils that dribbles onto the ground. She hears the fire-light sear the air just above her downed body.

Suddenly a broken nose seems preferable to a cauterised hole in her own stomach.

The turret charges up another beam. A vice grips Link's wrist to haul her up: Ruboona.

Ruboona, who takes the shield, who holds it in front of her and Link, who backs rapidly away, pushing Link behind her, until they escape from the automaton's gaze into the safety of the tunnel with the metal blocks on the wall.

Link bows in apology. Ruboona reassures her, and yet Link notices her take a worried look at the fog-gemmed shield. "Ah...another few direct hits, and we won't have a shield at all. O Goddesses, how I've failed You." Her eyelids lower. Link touches her shoulder once more. "...yet, I didn't see a terminal out there."

"You didn't?" Link pauses. "I didn't either. Huh."

She consults the slate. Ruboona leans on her shoulder to look on. "So, according to the map, the terminal looks like it's on the underside of Her tail. There should be a way to rotate or lift the tail." She closes her eyes. "Earlier, when I demonstrated with the topaz...I think that the electricity might activate a mechanism to raise it."

She cracks a topaz at the base of the wire. As expected the tail lifts up, but in its vertical state, the tail blocks the passage to the outside until electricity dies down and the tail falls. Link touches her chin.

Ruboona presses something hard into Link's free palm.

A shard of topaz.
Ruboona's timbre trembles as she explains her plan: while Link remains by the metal strip, Ruboona will work her way through the gauntlet of guardians to its tip. At her signal, Link will lift break the topaz, charge the metal with electricity, and thus lift the tail up. "If the terminal is on the underside...then, when the tail faces the vertical, the terminal should point out horizontally, shouldn't it?" Link cannot quite picture what Ruboona means, but she trusts Ruboona's judgment beyond her own. From the tip, Ruboona explains, she can glide down to stand on the horizontal terminal, and from there she can set the slate into the pedestal. Before Link has even started to sign her approval, Ruboona raises a hand. "When the tail goes back down, the terminal will point down again, and...there'll be nothing for me to stand on. So, I'll have to be fast." She touches her own chin, and Link cannot stop herself from mimicking the motion. "If the tail descends faster than I fall while gliding, I should be able to open the glider, wait for the tail to drop, and then land on the top face, Goddesses willing."

"If all else fails," Link says, her hands defrosted, "I'll catch you."

Ruboona arches her eyebrows. "Just that? No offer to make me a meal afterwards?"

Link bursts out laughing. "$I promise that too."

With the magnesis rune, Link moves the metallic blocks to form a circuit connecting the metal strip on the torso of the Divine Beast with the metal strip of the tail. In hindsight, with the topaz, she need only crack the jewel over the metal strip that runs through the tail. But something feels so right about completing the circuit that Link does so anyway.

Ruboona moves towards the edge of the tail with the slate and the paraglider opened. Taking a breath she starts to sprint forward along the edge. One by one the turrets stationed around the tail awaken to train their sights upon her. Link waits with the topaz held in the tongs. Her hands vibrate with the desire to crush the gem down to release its collected lightning, but she stays her hand. Only when she hears Ruboona yell her name does Link break the shard.

The topaz sparks. The electricity runs through the metal block into the strip. She hears gears below her feet groan. The resonances vibrates up her legs to shimmy her spine.

The tail rises up.

The guardians' fire-light shings around Ruboona, but the girl dodges them and leaps from the rising edge of the tail. The paraglider spreads. Through the increasingly small space between the tail and the wall of the passage, Link watches her glide downwards.

And then the tail thuds against the base of the Divine Beast's spine, now pointing directly at the heavens.

The entrance closes; the Divine Beast leaves her in darkness.

Link paces back and forth. The green sparks of electricity run their course and fizzle into nothingness. The gears groan again, more loudly this time, as the natural weight of the tail forces them to rotate back.

She pelts forward. The instant the tail has lowered enough for her hand to fit through the space between wall and tail, she shoves her entire left arm in and flails it.

Fingers intertwine with hers. Link reaches her other arm through the gap to grab Ruboona by the wrist just as the tension on her left hand increases a hundredfold. The tail continues to descend from its vertical position to its horizontal; Ruboona hangs off of the edge. With the material too
smooth to gain purchase, Link senses herself sliding towards the precipice. She throws herself backwards as far as she can. Ruboona grunts in pain as Link drags her body over the edge. Her inertia sends her form straight into Link's and the two topple over together. Link's body cushions Ruboona's fall.

The latter looks up at Link. Link returns her gaze. The tail shinks into place and the two of them burst out laughing. Ruboona presses her face into Link's chest. Link can hear her companion's muffled words into her shirt: "Thank the Goddesses."

Link reaches up a hand to pat Ruboona's head. This elicits another round of mirth. When Link raises her eyebrows, Ruboona merely shakes her head while she tries to cover her mouth and fails to keep in the laughter pouring out of her.

Strange how two people can have such trust in one another despite not knowing one another for more than a day. For more than a few hours, even.

Strange how danger can bring strangers close. Strange how the cooking of food and the eating of meals can form a bond not of shared experience but of shared eating.

Strange, how—

The sudden chirping of guardian turrets brings both of them to blink at one another, and then Ruboona practically grabs Link—still slightly weakened from the effects of the elixir, brief moments of sprinting aside—and carries her over her shoulders into the tunnel of the tail. Ruboona trips on the crack between the tail and the torso and Link tumbles forward into a half-roll half-splatter. She wheezes a dry laugh out of her crumpled lungs.

"Only two more terminals, thank the Goddesses" Ruboona says between her fast breaths. "Thank you for catching me."

"Thanks for getting that terminal."

Link shifts to crouch upon the floor, balancing on the balls of her heels, while Ruboona sits cross-legged with the slate in her lap. The chest, and the head.

"There has to a way to reach them. If we can't get to them from the inside... then..." Ruboona closes her eyes. Link touches her chin. At the same time they snap their fingers at one another, pause, and then laugh. "Ah, right, where did you pick that up?"

"I don't remember," says Link.

Though she can recall one person whom she has seen snap like this.

A girl two years older than she, who typically wore a dark blue dress, who tied her scarlet hair back with an emerald-green hairband, who favoured a scimitar in her right hand and a shield in her left, who could not strum the harp but who played a mean lute, who unfairly bore the burdens of others upon her shoulders when she had her own burdens already pressing down on the back of her neck.

The terminal.

Ruboona and Link blurt out their ideas at the same time. To ride the tail up and try to walk over the Divine Beast's back to its head.

Link raises her hand, palm facing Ruboona, fingers outstretched. Ruboona looks at Link's hand and
blinks, so Link carefully picks up Ruboona's arm by the wrist and presses her companion's palm against her own.

"I don't remember what it's called, but it's something you do when you've thought of the same thing, or agreed on something, or...or done something neat." Link shrugs. Ruboona nods. She holds out her hand, her expression level and grave. Link snorts. "It's supposed to be fun."

"Ah," says Ruboona. She closes her eyes and opens them again, then reaches with her hand so speedily that Link barely has time to react. Link taps her hand against Ruboona's. "So, like that?"

"Like that." Link smiles sheepishly at her. "I guess it's not a thing anymore, is it?"

"Not a thing anymore?" Ruboona echoes.

Sweat moistens the back of her neck. Link shakes her head.

Ruboona studies her. "Then, here's something that I've...seen." She giggles to herself as if laughing at an inside joke. "I don't have anyone to do it with usually, but. Here." She curls her fingers into a fist and presents her hand to Link. "You do the same and bump against my knuckles."

Link follows her lead. As soon as their fists connect, Ruboona spreads her fingers. Link emulates her. Ruboona catches Link's fingers between her own; she squeezes gently thrice, and Link squeezes back.

"So, it's like that."

Link nods. Ruboona's tight nervous smile has returned. Leaning back, Link gazes unsteadily at her companion to puzzle out what she has now said wrong.

Instead Ruboona ducks her head. "Sorry, it's...pretty silly, isn't it?"

Link swings her head from side to side. "I like it." She holds out her fist.

She watches Ruboona's gaze dart between her face and her fist and her eyes again. Then Ruboona brushes her knuckles against Link's. Link intertwines their fingers.

Ruboona hiccoughs a little noise in the back of her throat. "...thank you." She closes her eyes.

After a few moments of silence, Link stands up and Ruboona follows suit. They glance out at the tail.

"How are your legs?" Ruboona asks. Link tilts her head. "Ah, I didn't mean it like that. I noticed you've been limping a little. Did you get injured in the storm, or is this...?" Link explains about the elixir and the glass shard in her foot; Ruboona dips her head in understanding. "It did save your life from that lightning, if it hit you." She presses her hands together. "So, do you think you could run past those turrets? If we can get to the other end of the tail, we could raise it up."

Link touches her chin. "I think I can."

Ruboona glances her up and down. She retrieves the shield from her back. The once-shining surface has clouded over. "Then, hold this while you run. Just in case."

Link takes the shield in her hands. Cool and smooth to the touch. She brings the shield onto her stronger left arm and whirls around with it to see its weight. The metal and jewels weigh more than the pot lid she has used as a shield before. The effects of the elixir have lessened yet her legs still
twitch and her limbs still move more sluggishly than her usual speed.

"I'm ready."

"Then, let's go."

Ruboona places a shard of topaz next to a cubic bomb on top of the metal wire. Link snaps her fingers appreciatively at her companion's insight. With the slate in hand, Ruboona squats into a runner's crouch at the base of the tail. Link does the same.

"On my count. We'll go up the right edge. Three...two...one."

They run.

The turrets awaken as soon as they near. Link holds up the shield. The fire-light of the guardians blazes behind them. The heat radiates in waves from the beams and the vaporisation of air sucks them back. She notices how Ruboona slows her pace to match her own; Link attempts to quicken her run yet she can feel how her heart thumps in straining to keep up with the demand of her aching muscles. She senses herself lagging. Her stride shortens and the pendulum swing of her legs decreases as if counting down to her final moments.

A sudden warmth at her right hand.

Ruboona's fingers between hers. Pulling her forward. Keeping their paces together. Link concentrates on her legs. When Ruboona throws her right leg forward, Link does the same; when Ruboona draws her left leg back, Link does the same; when Ruboona breathes, Link does the same.

The first row of guardian turrets. The second row. The third. And then the single fourth automaton, which awakens earlier than the others, while Link and Ruboona have yet seven paces to run. Its protected eye blazes. Inhaling, Link pushes the shield into Ruboona's arms to reach for her bow.

She lets go of Ruboona's hand.

Ruboona continues to run. From the corner of her vision, Link can see her slow and start to turn. The sapphire-tipped arrow from the quiver. The turret's eye shines more and more brightly. Fitting the arrow onto the string of the bow. The increasingly loud chirping of the turret's charging. Drawing back the string despite the weakness in her arms that shiver with the threat of snapping entirely like harp strings wound too taut. The blue fire-light the same colour as the sword that her body once carried on her back like a loftwing around her neck.

Her fingers uncurl.

She looses the arrow.

And suddenly the noise fades. The light darkens. The automaton falls still and silent.

So this is death.

The sapphire arrow sings forward. It arcs towards the ground and crashes against the turret just below the eye. The crackle of sapphire freezes water from the air itself. The ice spreads like a spilled bowl of soup or a violet ribbon upon a blue dress worn by a girl who lives on only in the memory of yesterday.

A yell.
A shout.

A scream from ahead of her.

"Run. Run! Run!"

Not death.

Not death, but *stasis*.

A force on her wrists drags her into motion. Without quitting her gaze from the guardian, Link pelts forward. Slowly. Far too slowly. Her marrow molten lead. Her joints fractured wood. Her blood ice and the crystals within her veins press against the inner walls.

They burst.

"I'm gonna detonate the bomb!" Ruboona yells. "So get ready to climb onto the top!"

Link starts to slide backwards. A vice around her lower jaw forces her head forward instead of back. Towards the future.

Link throws her arms forward onto the upper overhang at the end of the tail, a flat about two paces long. The edge bites into her armpits and chest. She pushes herself up to roll onto the end of the tail. Her entire body throbs with every beat of her heart. Her vision has blurred the sun into a vague yellow blob across half the sky. She closes her eyes.

Beneath her shoulder blades, the tail continues to move. The tail rises and flattens out, and then she feels it come to a grinding halt.

Her shoulders shake. No. *Something else* shakes her head.

"Link. Come on. We have to get off the tail before the electricity runs out."

Her eyelids flutter up to reveal Ruboona gazing down over her. Dipping her head, she extends an arm to grasp Ruboona's offered hand.

The overhang of the tail sits perfectly level with the top of the Divine Beast. By Ruboona's grip, Link pulls herself off of the tail to flop onto the Divine Beast's back.

Behind her the tail starts to churn downwards. While Link sways from foot to foot in exhaustion Ruboona clenches her fist. "I can't believe that worked, thank the Goddesses." She wipes her brow. "Link?"

Link nods wearily.

Ruboona draws herself up to her full height. Far from a scared young girl, she exudes an aura of—something—that makes Link straighten her back.

An aura she has felt before.

An aura of one forced to take on weights beyond her age, beyond her time, beyond her capabilities.

"Don't scare me like that again, Link." She exhales. "Please."

Link smiles sheepishly at her; Ruboona reaches up a hand to her forehead, to brace her thumb and forefinger against her right temple.
Link stands on the back of the Divine Beast. The sun has lowered, and the afternoon light—warm and gold as the rest of the honey currently bouncing around the inside of the cooking pot still strapped to her back—pools over the desert that the Divine Beast has treaded in the wake of its hooves. The sands stretch on to seeming infinities, though in the curves of the dunes Link can see where once lay ponds of water and bends of rivers. To the south, where the dunes give way to the sea that laps at the white. To the west the snowy mountains on the coast of the land once known as Hyrule stretch up to the clouds; in their shadow formed the original Parapan desert that the Divine Beast has tracked further and further to the north and to the east.

The gentle sands and the dance of the wind and the sand upon their crests, bathed in the light so golden she can imagine cupping her palms and dipping her hands in the troughs between the dunes to drink the sunlight, harbours a beauty of its own.

Yet the promise of grass and plant, of beast and fowl, of the people once more inhabiting the land, would bring something even more beautiful.

For all of the wilds combined cannot sit at a campfire and share stew from a communal cooking pot.

Two gold domes in the semblance of a camel's humps rise from the back of the Divine Beast Vah Naboris. The door opens by a press of the appropriate button on the slate, unlocked with the map terminal. Ruboona and Link step through into the circular chamber that resembles a lift. Immediately the shrill call of a guardian sentry from overhead prompts Link to look up. An arrow through the eye and Ruboona—turned into a gerudo-shaped spear by virtue of Link's powerful toss—thrusting her sword to cut the sentry in twain leave them alone in the lift.

A metal crank on the side lowers and raises the lift by use of the magnesis rune. As they pass by the central layer of the hump, Ruboona points out a strange metal sphere. Link steps forward to puts her hand on it.

The resultant shock blows her backwards into Ruboona. Link elbows her in the stomach. Rolling off of her, Link apologise profusely until her hands hurt; Ruboona laughs it off.

"So, you should take sphere with us. You never know when you'll find use for it. The Goddesses don't just let things like that lie around for no reason, you know."

Link brings the metal sphere onto the lift with magnesis but keeps it on the other end of the lift. When she magnetises the crank once more, the metal attracts the sphere. With a loud scrape along the bottom of the lift, the sphere snaps to the crank.

A sphere affixed to the crank by magnetism, in turn, makes pulling the crank difficult, if not impossible. Link jerks repeatedly on the crank. The sphere bangs against the floor of the lift. Ruboona covers her ears with her palms.

Finally Link bangs the sphere enough times that it dislodges and flies off. Throwing herself to the floor, she finds Ruboona ducking as the sphere collides off of the wall of the lift and crashes back onto the ground.

Ruboona shoves the golden helmet onto her head. She reaches for the metal sphere and Link yelps, but when girl's palms connect with the steel Link sees the green gemstones in the helmet start to shimmer; the sphere does not shock her as it shocked Link.

While Ruboona holds the sphere in place, Link downs the lift all the way.
And then: a splash.

The bottom of the lift splishes down onto something liquid. The crank ceases to turn. Link breaks the slate's magnesis-connection to the crank and instead turns it onto the metal sphere.

"Ah," Ruboona says; Link glances at her. She has closed her eyes, her lips pursed, her eyebrows bunched together. "I can't imagine that there's enough topaz in there to have kept that—" A word Link does not know. "—electrified for so long. I don't understand. Has someone been in Savah Naboris all this time? There has to be something going on here. Could She not run on electricity after all?"

Link asks for the word and Ruboona answers: battery, a word Link has not heard before, but which designates a store of electricity. Link nods. While Ruboona, thinking, sways back and forth on her feet and folds her hands over one another, Link takes a step into the hallway beyond the lift. Her boot splashes down into the liquid about a thumb's length deep on the floor.

Ruboona steps after her. Link hears her gasp and looks back. Her companion has folded her hands behind her. With a hint of embarrassment in the duck of her head, she nods at her own feet, at the more comfortable shoes—which replaced her waterproof boots, eaten away by malice—that have now bloated with water.

Link offers to carry her, and Ruboona politely declines. They shuffle on through the hallway, though they cannot locate the apparent source of the water. Nor do they spot anything resembling guardians or other security.

Halfway through the hallway, Ruboona and Link find two identical circular depressions approximately the same diameter as the metal sphere; beyond that, covered in wiring, waits another lift that appears to lead up into the second hump. Link nudges Ruboona and grins. Her companion smiles back, and Link takes note of the spark of pride in how she carries herself. She sets the sphere down into the first impression.

They cross the hallway to the second hump and its lift.

Link opens the door.

A single glowing blue eye greets them.

Link closes the door.

She and Ruboona exchange a glance.

Link speaks first. She waves her hands around so violently that the slate ejects from her grip to smack into the ceiling. Ruboona catches it in her palms on its way down. "I don't think there's another route to the terminals."

"Then," Ruboona answers with a huff as she takes her left hand from the surface of the slate, "we should prepare to fight that guardian." She glances down at the slate. "The blue runes summon remote explosives. The yellow causes something to suspend for a brief moment. The pink...red...whatever colour this is serves as a magnet, I think. What about the white and the green?"

Link demonstrates the function of the pictobox to Ruboona. She takes a pictograph of the two of them together, Ruboona smiling despite the guardian in the chamber beside them, Link looking slightly more slack-jawed and blank-eyed. She has never been able to force a smile.
And yet, then she considers the calming of another Divine Beast beside someone with the same understanding of the importance of food as she, considers the girl who reminds her of Aryll—and of Yunobo, and of Amali and her daughters, and of Malon and of Vish and of Cremia and of Romani, and of Koko and of Cottla, and of the girl who smelled of horses, and of the girl with the golden hair, and of every person she has ever met who has taken to life with that same earnestness and passion and love—who has come so far to calm the Divine Beast that she would go without slate.

The corners of her lips curl upwards and the second pictograph catches her in the middle of her light little laugh.

When the four Divine Beasts have calmed at last, she will take a journey to Tabantha, to Medli, to see Amali and her children and to check up on Koko and Cottla. Then, to Eldin, to see Yunobo. Then, perhaps to wherever Hestu lives, to see Hestu, to prepare for them a meal that will not set them on fire. Then to Hateno, at last, to turn over the parts of the guardians to Purah, though she will have no need of the slate by then. And then to Romani Ranch.

When her journey to calm the Divine Beasts ends, her work will begin. To piece together her body's history. To understand what came of those fragmented names and faces that dance through her memories. To start the process of determining where her body ends and she begins.

But for now she has two more Divine Beasts to calm and a guardian to dispatch.

When Link breaks herself from her reminiscence, she observes Ruboona browsing through the other pictographs stored on the pictobox. Link looks on, her chin on Ruboona's shoulder, at the album of pictographs that she has never noticed before.

She remembers taking some of these. The pictograph of herself and Ilia, and of Amali's children and Tulin, and of herself stuck in the underwater hole in the Divine Beast Vah Medoh. Ruboona inquires about the last one and Link blushes from her toes to her ears; her earrings could melt for the heat of her flushed skin.

And alongside the pictographs that Link herself has taken, she discovers finds a flood of others that she has never seen. Pictographs of scenery, of flowers, of frogs in the pond and of beetles on trees, of ruins, of ancient books scripted in looping characters with the pages flaking off, of the Divine Beasts—inert—and of guardians in various states of repair, of villages that Link has never seen, of towns that she cannot recall, of the castletown that she knows from her memories, of Aryll, of Impa, of Daruk, of Revali, of the zora girl with the shark teeth, of Urbosa.

Many, many pictures of Urbosa.

In some of them, Urbosa smiles. In others, she has a more neutral expression as she demonstrates something: a lute, a shield, a doohickey for which Link has no words. Several of the pictographs appear candid: Urbosa cleaning out her horse's stable. Urbosa—blurry—in the midst of a jump with her sword drawn. Urbosa examining a map on a table. Urbosa with her head tilted back, laughing, her lips parted in a grin. Many of those, in fact.

And there, at the very end, a few pictures of—

Herself.

Ruboona says nothing of the pictographs except to return the slate to the seven runes. She jabs a finger at the last icon. "And the white rune?"
Cryonis.

Link focuses. On cryonis. On the guardian. Yes. Those things that currently and materially exist. From the water at the bottom of the hallway, Link raises a pillar of ice to protect herself and Ruboona.

Ruboona prepares her sword and shield. Link readies a sapphire arrow. She keeps the slate in her left hand, flat against the limbs of the bow. With her thumb, she taps open the door.

The guardian.

An automaton wielding a long blade of fire-light in one of its rotating not-quite-metal limbs and a shield in another.

Sword and board.

Link looses the arrow. It does not hit the guardian in the eye but forms a sheet of frost around its head. The automaton responds with a blast of fire-light that breaks the ice and simultaneously knocks it backwards.

Water pours into the lift.

She scrambles over the column of ice while the guardian rights itself and proceeds to sear through the centre of the shield. Her hands steady. Link aims under the automaton's legs. The resultant pillar of ice knocks it over. Its limbs thrash. Ruboona hups over the destroyed fragments of ice. As Link continuously makes pillars of ice to trap the guardian, Ruboona reaches the hooked sword in between the columns to claw off its legs. Link laughs at how effectively they've corralled the automaton—

—and then part of her right forearm goes completely numb as though entirely ceasing to exist.

The fire-light has passed between two of the pillars. She can smell the crackle of the air in its wake. Through the feathered tunic, through the undershirt, the upper layer of her skin of her lower forearm, near her elbow, has ceased to exist.

In its place Link can see the red raw fury of her own muscle beneath the skin. She stares at the blood that begins to ooze out from the patch of her—not skin anymore.

The air makes contact with the meat of her bone; the screams rips through her entire body.

She drops to her knees. The water splashes up onto her lower legs. The guardian becomes two, swims and blurs and fades at the edges.

Link bites down on her own lower lip.

The sharpness of the pain of her front teeth and the tang of copper in her mouth focuses her attention. She keeps her left hand in position, propping up her elbow against the floor. The slate. The automaton. Drawing up barriers of ice to protect Ruboona. To protect Ruboona. To protect Ruboona.

Over and over and over.

Without any gaps.

Without any breaks.
Until she has ripped the guardian limb from limb from limb from limb from limb from limb. Until she has torn its entrails from its innards. Until she has stabbed through with that terrible hooked sword to its very core.

Until the automaton falls still.

Then, and only then, does she allow herself to give in to the darkness.

Agony in her right forearm.

The pain sears up her arm and down her spine to convulse her limbs and spasm her head. Her teeth grit together. Her jaws clamp upon something in her mouth, something that tastes strangely sweet. A round sort of sweetness that softens the blow of the agony.

Her eyes shoot open.

She lies down on a hard surface. A figure kneels over her, a figure with two bunches of hair on either side of her head, a figure with a gaze so gentle and full of softness that Link finds the peace to close her eyes.

Aryll.

Her sister bears something light in her palm that she runs over Link's arm. Slowly the pain fades, and Link slips back into the darkness.

When she comes to once more, she leaps to her feet. Her left hand flies to her forearm. Between the blackened edges of her undershirt, she feels a thick layer of gauze.

"Link?"

She twists around towards the voice.

Ary—Ruboona. Ruboona seated by the iron cage with the fire. And a skillet over it. The scent of something caramelising.

Next to the main terminal.

The map terminal.

Now on the floor, with the four statues. The lizard, the bird, the camel, the elephant.

Her eyes widen.

The terminals could not have been a dream—

"Link. Thank the Goddesses." Ruboona closes the half-metre gap between them. She skims her palm over Link's arm. Link tracks the sensation until it ends—a abruptly—near her elbow and then reappears—just as abruptly—lower on her forearm. "I cauterised the wound. Can you..." She hesitates. "You can move your arm, can't you?" Link tries to flex. Her arm follows her motions, though the skin around the wound aches when it stretches, and Ruboona presses her fingers against one another. "O our Goddesses, thank You for keeping Link safe." Link listens to her murmur out a prayer to the Golden Goddesses and to the Goddess Sageru. Then her breath hitches and Link flinches back. Ruboona pats herself down for a water-skin that she presents to Link, who guzzles it down with gusto.

She did not feel the parchedness of her throat until the lubrication of water. Ruboona asks a
thousand questions about her injuries, about how Link feels, about how much she remembers. When her companion seems satisfied that Link is, in fact, alive, and will not, in fact, perish, Ruboona sits back.

"Thank you for...for saving my life. Ah, even—even injured as you were, you..." The tremors in her voice crack the edges of her syllables, pitch the low of her vowels. "...you still kept me safe with cryonis. So thank you. Thank you, and...

"And I'm sorry."

The water-skin plummets from her mouth into her lap. Link tilts her head to one side.

"Ah, I should have kept watch over you while you were asleep." Ruboona looks down upon her own two hands. "I made sure you were stable. Then, I went to activate the last two terminals myself. I thought about what you told me...about how knowing how long Savah Naboris would keep calm, and I did not want to test Her patience." She grimaces at herself. "I understand if you would not forgive me."

Link rubs the back of her head. The ponytail bobs in a slightly different position than usual. Her hair must have come undone; Ruboona must have re-tied it. As Link unties her hair to fix her ponytail, she raises her eyebrows at her companion.

"There's nothing not to forgive," she signs in a jumble of motion. "Thank you for saving my life. For fixing up the wound and everything. For being able to take care of the guardians like—" She rummages for a suitable analogy. "—like you took care of those meat skewers. Delicious, I mean." Link stops, and then her fingers commence moving once more. "The guardian's not delicious, though if there's a way to cook monsters, then there's probably a way to cook guardians, too. But what you do with the guardians is. Well. It's not delicious but it's sort of the same kind of sort of if you squint—" She makes looping gestures as if trying very hard to conjure a wheel out of thin air.

Ruboona lifts her hand to her mouth. Link recoils, but then her companion breaks out in laughter.

"Link...I don't know where you came from, but thank you for coming." She smiles, and Link grins toothily back. "And thank you for lending me the Hero's slate." Ruboona reaches behind her. She presents Link with two orange objects of the slippery material: the first a rounded triangle of sorts, and the second the hilt of a blade. "These were recovered from the guardian, thank the Goddesses. You mentioned that we needed our own weapons of light, didn't you? Then, I considered it best to bring them for you."

Link accepts the two. She tries out the sword; Ruboona scrambles backwards as she makes a wild swing. Next, the shield, which Link cannot figure out how to make apparate from the rounded-triangle-thingy and thus abandons. Besides, she has her trusty pot lid, and if she cannot deflect her foes with the same thing she has used as an impromptu plate for her suppers before, then why even live at all? As Ruboona observes, Link flourishes the sword into the sheathe. And then, just as her fingers have uncurled from the hilt, her stomach rumbles.

Ruboona covers her laugh with her hand. "...then, do you want some?" She lifts the saucepan from the grill cage and holds it out to Link. Within its depths, Link peers at several golden-brown chunks of something melty and reflective, something in-between caramel and taffy. She reaches in. "Ah, careful. They're hot."

A square of heated honey, mixed with something else that she can neither name nor care to name. In her mouth the crunchiness of the candy gives way to a melted smoothness that coats the inside
of her mouth. The warmth and richness of the taste drain the exhaustion from her body and the fatigue from her mind. Her vision clears. Every sound sharpens. She could heft the Divine Beast over her head and suplex the entire height of Death Mountain. She could, in this very moment, crunch down a deliciously grilled rock roast.

Honey candy.

Honey candy.

Honey candy on a ceramic plate.

She heard Urbosa weeping, once.

In the dark of the night. By the campfire. En route between one village for training and the next. Link awoke in the darkness beneath the ripeness of a nearly waxed moon with the need to urinate. And there she heard Urbosa whispering to herself. A dialect of Parapan that Link could only half-understand. Of promises she had to keep. Of the people she had to protect. Of the strength she needed to keep her heart pumping through the apocalypse. Of the endurance to mediate the tensions of the Princess, the Knight, the Champions, the King, and the Princess's shade, and whoever else the Goddesses might send.

"I trust You," Urbosa murmured fervently, "but sometimes I can't see how You expect us all to work as a team when we can't even figure out what to eat for breakfast."

Link simply closed her eyes as though asleep, or dead, or both. She had not the words. And yet— Link vowed to herself that when she did, she would return all of the favours Urbosa had given to her.

And where she could not bring words, she could bring food.

During their final match with one another, Link had come her closest to besting Rhibonne. Afterwards Rhibonne gave her a final few tips and thanked her for the chance to be her teacher.

Link thanked her, in turn, for the chance to be her student.

And then, she asked of the food eaten in Rovah. If Rhibonne was familiar.

Rhibonne knew little of Rovah, but she inquired up the food chain. The information travelled slowly until Link added that she wanted to cook something for Urbosa.

Suddenly she had recipe upon recipe at hand. Everyone, it seemed, loved Urbosa. And how they spoke of her, stars or mist in their eyes, and of the deeds they had witnessed at her hands—from the cessation of conflicts to the bringing-down of entire molduga that had terrorised a village—marked her, more than Link had ever before imagined, as the Hero of Parapa in the realest sense.

Here she could see the people that Urbosa had aided. Not just in song, or in legend, or in official documentation heralding her as a Hero and a Champion, but in the faces of the people who lived in the here and now and who passed on the deliciousness of Urbosa's childhood to Link's hands.

Recipes of salted durian, of creamy seal's milk stew, of fried banana: Urbosa's favourite, though she ate it as an infrequent delicacy.

And of candied honey.

Link made candied honey. With banana vinegar and vanilla and nutmeg. She boiled the banana
vinegar and the honey into a thick syrup and tested its readiness by spinning a thread of syrup between her thumb and forefinger and dropping the thread into a bowl of cool water. When the threads became brittle, she quit the pan from the flame to add a touch of nutmeg and a few droplets of vanilla, then stored the covered pan in a sapphire ice-box. She waited. The sun set; the moon rose; the candy broke apart in her hands to bite-sized segments.

Crunchy candy that would turn chewy in her mouth and then melt away entirely.

Honey candy on a ceramic plate.

On the evening of their last night in the village Link rapped on the door of Urbosa's room. Urbosa opened it, her features arranged in her easy smile, her baggy blue pyjamas slightly bedraggled, her mass of hair loose around her shoulders.

Without a word Link held up the plate.

Arching her eyebrows, Urbosa held one of the honeyed chunks between thumb and forefinger. Link watched her take the candy into her mouth on her tongue. She started to ask if something was wrong.

Then Link observed her swallow.

Oh-so-slowly Urbosa's eyebrows lost their angular slant, and the thin line of her mouth curved upwards, and her lips parted in an exhale that gave way to a laugh. Her shoulder shook, and then her upper torso, and then her entire body. She laughed and she laughed and she laughed and the sound of her letting go brought Link to laugh alongside her for the sheer joy of being alive. "You know, Link," Urbosa managed between fits of laughter, "the quickest way to someone's heart is through their stomach. You don't need me telling you that though. You've got it down to an art."

Link smiled sheepishly at her.

"Link, can I ask a question?" She nodded. Urbosa exhaled. She lifted her hair to run through the hair cascading down her shoulders. "Why...are you so afraid of me, and the other Champions?"

She remembers—

"...Link." Ruboona's stare fixates upon the space between her knees. Link glances at her, dispelling the weight of Urbosa's gaze. "You said that you don't know how long Savah Naboris will allow us to guide Her. But I won't let this last year repeat. I apologise for asking even more of you when I barely know you, but would you be willing to—" Her eyelids shutter down. Her lashes rest against the curve of her cheeks. "—to cleanse the malice from Lady Urbosa?" She spreads her fingers on her knees. Her lashes glisten wetly. "Walking Savah Naboris to somewhere where I could draw upon those with expertise in arms might take too long, and as qu—and I fear She could return to Her rampage close to the lives of the innocent. I—"

Link tests the strength of her right arm. She flexes. She lifts up her cooking pot. She rotates her wrist.

Her arm has grown weaker; too-sharp movements throb a dull pain into the base of her muscle to shudder a sensation of static down to the quick. But beyond that, she retains nearly her full range of motion.

Lifting her gaze towards Ruboona, she nods decidedly. "I'm here to calm the Divine Beast. That includes fighting the Malice." For an instant Ruboona's features remain smooth, and then her expression collapses inwards like the Divine Beast had tossed her into the thunderstorm with
Link's own hands controlling the slate. "...to cleanse the malice from Urbosa. I-I mean, Lady Urbosa. I'm sorry."

Ruboona inclines her head. "Ah, I suppose you did not know her as Lady Urbosa." Link hides her mouth in her right palm. "I believe that...if we cleanse this malice, then her spirit, at last, will be free. I hope that she would look on us proudly."

"She'd have no reason not to be proud of you," Link signs. The words come to her so swiftly that she recognises she has said them before.

Her companion raises her chin. Her dark eyes glimmer in the light of the flames from the iron cage. By now, Link realises, night has fallen over Parapa, and the inside of the Divine Beast lies dark save for the glow of the pedestal and the flicker of the fire.

"Together," says Link. "We'll cleanse Urbosa. Lady Urbosa, I mean."

Ruboona closes her eyes again. Her shoulders quiver; a thin film of tears shines on her cheeks. "Together."

When Link brings her hands to her own eyes, dampness gleams on her own fingers.

And above her, like a sword hanging over her head, pulsates the chrysalis.

—

**Energising Honey Candy** (two hearts, two-fifths stamina vessel) - courser bee honey

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Link gets stasis used on her! It was the only way that Ruboona (who is lighter than Link given their relative ages) could hoist lift over the edge of the platform.

Remember in a previous chapter how Link heard something impossibly heavy crash down at the back end of Vah Naboris? Yep, it was the tail!

The thing that Link tries to get Ruboona to do is, of course, a high-five.

Hey, this is that chapter! Here's Link's big realisation/character moment thanks for Ri —I mean Ruboona! The wilds are great and all, and Link does indeed have big issues with communication and with people, but what Link really loves doing is cooking for and eating with others. It's her way of talking to people. All of the wilds combined...

Hey, it's all of the pictographs that Link has taken in *Delicious in Wilds* so far, including the one of her getting stuck in Vah Medoh. Ruboona's masterfully graceful at trying not to make Link feel awkward.

Really, Link hasn't done as much exploring of the slate as one would expect, since she mostly just uses it to access the runes and doesn't really know how to "work it" so to speak; she hasn't looked at the map, since she's been drawing her own on parchment,
and before Ri—I mean Ruboona opened the album containing the pictographs, Link wouldn't have ever seen the pictographs Zelda had taken.

And Zelda took pictures of everyone! Including many of Urbosa, and also some of Link, which surprises her given that Zelda has been mostly negative towards Link in the memories Link has remembered so far, although not entirely. The bit about Urbosa looking down at a map on the table is a very minor reference to *Twilight Princess* and Telma's bar, which is one of the coziest locations in the game.

You can actually flip guardians over in-game by using cryonis to put up pillars of ice beneath them. Try it in one of the pond areas during or just after it rains (which changes the elevation of water), like those in Ash Swamp.

The ancient (guardian) weapons activate in the moment of the strike. The guardian shield activates in the moment of detecting something approaching. Think about it this way: since the malice can eat through pretty much anything (the material that the Divine Beasts and slate are made of is resistant but not entirely), so the best thing to do is to create and re-create temporary shields that will eat the malice.

Link receives quite an injury here! The guardian's laser only just grazed her right arm, but that still took off her upper layer of flesh. Ouch! It's no wonder that she fainted from the pain.

Link becoming rejuvenated by the honey is the effect of it being *energising* honey candy! Mechanical accuracy and all of that!

Languages have many dialects. For example, France had a wide variety of dialects prior to the efforts at unifying the language and teaching everyone what was then merely the Parisian dialect of French. Similarly, Link learned the Nabooru dialect of Parapa as it was the most 'commonly' understood; Urbosa slips back into her native northeastern/Rovah dialect, which Link can understand due to similarity, but which much more difficulty.

Ruboona prefers to use the terminology "clearse the malice" from Urbosa's body rather than fight Thunderblight Ganon, since she wishes to release Urbosa's spirit, which under the tradition of Sageru can only occur with the burning of the body to release that which is within (contrast: Teba discussing murdering the Malice).

Up next: the big bad malice, and a doozy of a chapter.

midna's ass. 05 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: I love pictographs! Link taking them is always really cute, and here seeing pictures of Urbosa taken so long ago is a real emotional kick to the shins, especially given what's coming.

This chapter begins the "oh my god that must really hurt" train for Link.

Link getting stasis used on her is one of my favourite moments in this series.

The chapter I've been talking about is finally about to arrive - next chapter is a doozy.

Emma. 05 October 2017.
Cleansing the Divine Beast at last, the travelling chef aids the Parapan food enthusiast in becoming the new Champion of Sageru, as the chef recounts the story-of-the-chef’s-life that the chef told to the former Champion of Sageru.

To all my readers: please note that the fight against Thunderblight Ganon is somewhat more horrific than has been in other chapters. If you wish to skip it, it begins at the paragraph starting with "The Malice collides with the floor." and ends with the paragraph starting with "The pieces of terminal and turret clamour to the ground in a crash so loud that Link's ears ring the bells of victory." I'm not sure how much you can safely skip, but my beta reader informed me that the fight is more graphic than the fights against Fireblight or Windblight, so I figured I would throw in a warning.

As usual, notes that didn't fit in the end: I had to flex my horror muscles to properly convey how horrifying Thunderblight Ganon is. As Link says, Fireblight and Windblight were also horrific and repulsive to her, but it's only when she sees what the malice has done to another human being (Urbosa) that she really gets it.

Of course, the most effective weapon against the malice is guardian weapons, and what better than the guardians' own lasers? Pew pew. They were built for destroying malice after all.

I wish that Gerudo Town had been more colourful and lived-in as far as the actual walls of the city go, and similar with the other locations in the game. Since I made the Parapans more religious in Delicious in Wilds, albeit religious in a different way that the spiritual Lanayrish, I thought that they would express their deep ties to their history and faith through the arts, including music and art.

I love describing marketplaces. Each one's unique.

Link finds it easier to express herself around kids because of a lesser sense of judgment/fear of retribution if she gets something wrong.

Here we get that big backstory for Link! Not only do I provide new information here, but I've also strung together what we've learned so far about Link's childhood, since this (well, technically the chapter after this) is the halfway point of the story.

No, the title doesn't refer to the Yiga. Rather, the Yiga's association with bananas has to do with where their hideout is, straddling northeastern Parapa/western Faron, which is precisely where bananas grow the most and also why Urbosa is familiar with it. Though there actually is another banana-related chapter name that is in fact and indeedy-do about the most wonderful Yiga.

The "name that Link hasn't used" is referring to Link's name from before she chose the
name Link for herself when she came out as a girl, i.e. the name that Link's parents
gave her (her "deadname", in transgender parlance). Mipha knew Link before she
came out. How? We'll answer that in future chapters.

Urbosa and Zelda are pretty cute together; so is Link and Urbosa's friendship.

As always, a kind thank-you to my beloved beta reader, Emma, who has valiantly
endeavoured to continue to work with me even as she had to move around. And a kind
thank-you to you, the reader, for bearing with my various computer delays and the
like.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Together Link and Ruboona stand before the main terminal. The statue of the camel submerges
them in its empty gaze: she who has stolen the body of the former chosen one to riddle it with
delicious food and terrible scars, and she who has chosen to trek over the expanse of the desert
forged in the wake of the Divine Beast to calm it for the sake of her beloved Parapa.

Together they stand.

Link glances at Ruboona at her left, who has closed her eyes and entwined her fingers. She
murmurs prayers to the Golden Goddesses. Inclining her head in respect, Link kneels down herself
upon the floor in front of the terminal. She withdraws another crackle of honey candy from her
pocket. Out of her sincerest wishes, she offers the sweet up on her palm to the Goddesses in
supplication and in thanks.

"Then, do all followers of Sahylia," Ruboona whispers with a hint of a smile in her timbre, "place
so much importance on food?"

Link breaks the candy in half. Ruboona accepts one of the pieces. "Don't you?" she asks. Ruboona
laughs around the candy in her mouth.

Her companion extends her arm. Link gazes at the palm in front of her face, at the creases and
wrinkles of her skin, at the slightly lighter and redder tone of brown on her palm compared to that
on the back of her hand, at the layer of callouses on her fingertips and along the inner rim of her
forefinger and thumb, though not as calloused as Link might have expected from the hands of an
adventurer. The skin soft, the nails neatly clipped and painted blue; the polish has chipped and
cracked, and yet the blue remains.

Link slides her fingers over Ruboona's. Ruboona grips her hand tightly. Curling the fingers of her
right into a fist, Link offers the gesture of celebration to her companion.

Ruboona laughs. "Isn't it a little early for that?" With her hands occupied, Link cannot respond in
word, but she makes a motion with her head and with her eyes. Then Ruboona's pupils dilate in
understanding. "Then, once we have cleansed Lady Urbosa, I promise I'll return it. Keep me to
that."

Link nods.

And then: the slate.

Link holds onto the right edge with her left hand, Ruboona onto the left edge with her right.
Three.

Two.

One.

Together they slot the slate onto the terminal. Together they watch as the black crystal begins to fill with blue. Together they listen to the chrysalis above pulsate, and throb, and then burst open like a rotten fruit.

Link and Ruboona jump—Link to the right, and Ruboona to the back—as the innards of the heart shower them and the floor with purple fluid. Eyes widening, Link moves into a sudden jig to flail her limbs and get as much of the liquid off as possible before the malice can burn through her flesh; it takes her a moment to realise that not only has she remained unharmed, but also the fluid carries a different scent than the oil spewed by the Malice of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. The liquid sticks to her skin and her clothing; she notices the residue of small white crystals forming here and there on her flesh. Like saltwater.

She blinks.

From the centre of the unfurled heart, the cocooned Malice swings, back and forth, as the pulsing arteries that support the chrysalis break off one by one to spray their fluid in cut-jugular fountains. Ruboona brings out her sword and shield; Link draws the guardian's fire-light sword to hold in two hands.

As the Malice continues to swing over their heads, Ruboona shoves the sword back into its sheathe. "Link! Link—your arrows!" Link drops the swords to grasp her bow and notch a sapphire area while Ruboona rolls forward, lunging for the pedestal. Link leans back, takes her stance, and then fires the arrow into the heart of the Malice.

The ice blossoming around the Malice slows the speed of its swing. Ruboona's hand closes around the slate. She jerks it from the terminal so roughly that the slate flies up towards the ceiling. As she fumbles to catch it from the air, Link looses another arrow, maintaining the blanket of frost. The heart of the Malice has almost entirely ceased to move and hangs downwards, rotating in place.

Ruboona clutches the slate in her hands.

Link looses an arrow one more time just as the final artery connected to the tattered chrysalis rips in half. Fluid showers from its stump. The Malice falls. Link yells. Ruboona swivels around and rolls out of the way. Her feet smash against the floor. The comfortable shoes slip against the ground. As Link watches her companion's body angle forward, she prepares to sprint—arms readied to catch—but Ruboona picks herself up.

The Malice collides with the floor.

Its corpse splatters up against the ground. Limbs writhing, it stretches its head up at an angle that would have broken its neck if not for its malevolent form. It rises slowly to its feet.

Link can feel her stomach lurch. The skewered meat, the salted encore, and the honey candy shuttle up her throat at once. The acrid acid stings at the bottom of her mouth; the vomit suddenly floods her mouth as though a boil of pus had burst on her tongue. She retches violently onto her own boots.

She has seen gorons, and she has seen rito, and the Malice of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania and the Malice of the Divine Beast Vah Medoh bore forms that twisted and desecrated the bodies of
those whom she had once kept among her counsel of allies if not friends. Yet she does not know gorons and she does know not rito as she knows humans, as she knows hylians and sheikah and gerudo. The bloated body of Urbosa—of the first Champion of Sageru with whom she ever trained, of the Hero of Parapa who taught her to wield the very sword that seals the darkness, of the Divine Beast Vah Naboris's pilot who broke through the thorny silence that she had wrapped around herself as an aegis—brings another round of vomit to her lips.

The body's skin has stretched almost to the point of breaking to accommodate the malice inside. The pale papery stretch of flesh bulges and recedes with the movements of malice within, spread so thin that at any second—Link fears—the malice could break free and splatter over. The way that the malice crawls just under the surface of the skin reminds Link of a cluster of maggots that have eaten away the inside of a rotted corpse, that could come burrowing up through its flesh to emerge, wriggling and writhing. Its arms bulge, not with the natural toned musculature of a swordmaster's, but repulsively, like thick beads upon a cord rather than human arms. Its legs flow unnaturally downwards as thick columns into wide feet that squish outwards against the floor. Its limbs have grown too long and its body far too short, the hips nonexistent and the shoulders too small, the waist simultaneously bloated out, like a gas-filled corpse, and yet too thin, like a malnourished skeleton. The outline of the cadaver's ribs presses in against the skin stretched so tight. The gut-like malice bulges forward as the stomach to hang and to swing from the space between the ribs. The Malice stands taller than Urbosa did in waking life, slender and elongated. Its face melts and reforms in turn. From the tips of its long fingers, the saltwater-like fluid drips to the ground, splashing on the floor in sticky rings. A human corpse starved of food and then filled with writhing maggots, its limbs stretched out until the bones pop out of their sockets and pull apart, until the sinews rip and the tendons tear and the malice plugs up the chasm. Eaten away from the inside out. The Malice crawling into the spaces of organs, submerging the blood and entering through the arteries to the lungs to bathe the very breaths with violet bubbles mixing in with the blood gushing up from a heart and stomach and liver and intestines dissolved away, the spine compressed in to the point that it folds inwards and breaks through the ribs to protrude out as the stomach, as though something had stabbed the corpse through from the back to the front.

Link wonders, suddenly, just how the Champions met their end. She wonders, suddenly, if the death came upon them all at once, or if—

Ruboona screams. The tail. The exit at the tail. Their only chance. Link looses one more sapphire arrow directly into the Malice's feet. Ice forms around its ankles, although, with the moisture already sucked from the air by previous arrows, the effects have lessened. The shards of frost puncture the Malice's papery skin, and the violet malice beneath floods the icy prison. Even in the split second that Link looks back, the Malice begins to eat the ice away. She grabs the hilt of the fire-light sword—coated in the slime of her own vomit—and follows Ruboona.

They run towards the tail. Abruptly, something flies in an arc in front of them; Ruboona and Link both stop at the same time. Heart clenched, Link glances over her shoulder. The Malice catches the spinning shield—the one it just threw—in its left hand.

The shield.

The shield that Link knows so well. The shield and the scimitar favoured by the Champion of Sageru, the Hero of Parapa, the Divine Beast Vah Naboris's Pilot, O Courageous Urbosa.

Link draws her sword. When she slices down, the fire-light blade springs out, bright enough to set her vision aflame.

The Malice opens its malformed toothless mouth, and violet fluid strings from the roof to its
tongue. It roars. Threads of purple saliva spill forward from its maws to coat the ground. Ruboona's hair has plastered against her scalp and face with the saltwater-like fluid dredged up from the Malice's innards. The Malice spits out another wave.

Ruboona and Link exchange glances.

Link nods and she nods back.

Rolling to the Malice's right and then forward, Link leaps into the air and cleaves down with the fire-light blade. The Malice dodges to the left, but Link has already started to spin on her heel: the sword bites in through the Malice's ribs. The blade hits bone. Malice gushes from the wound; Link jumps back to avoid the spray, but a sudden pinprick of pain on her right leg indicates a droplet of Malice.

Ruboona brings out a bomb from the slate. She shouts for Link to move. The Malice lifts its arms above Link. Link flips backwards over herself, but the Malice dashes too quickly towards her. The tip of Urbosa's scimitar impales a strike of pain through Link's left foot and slams into the ground by her left side.

Caught by the flesh of her stabbed-through foot, Link falls.

Her head smashes into the floor. Her spine aches against the ground. Her vision swims. Her foot burns. The Malice looms overhead. It brings Urbosa's shield down upon Link's head; Link jerks her entire body to the right. The strain pulls the scimitar stuck inside of her leg, and she cannot help the scream that rips out from her stomach at the tearing of skin and the cleaving of her muscle.

She grips the fire-light blade in her left hand. Ruboona yells something at her. Suddenly the Malice lurches forward. Its back takes the brunt of the explosion of Ruboona's bomb and she hears the splatter of malice on either side. While its claw-like fingers shudder over Urbosa's shield, Link thrusts the sword up to catch the Malice's melting face. The fire-light blade slides into where its throat would have been and carves upwards.

She has not time to sign her apology to Urbosa, but she says sorry with her eyes as the fire-light of the blade bisects the Malice's head.

Then Link realises what she has done.

Inhaling, Link curls herself up as rapidly as possible. The violent violet fluid once kept within the Malice's now-split head pours out onto the floor behind her, as if the Malice were retching out the contents of its stomach. Droplets of malice ping onto her lower back. Her spine arches from the localised pain that sinks into her flesh.

The crown of her head bumps against the Malice's protruding gut. If the skin breaks here and now, the malice will drench her face and body.

Link has never been more sure of her imminent death.

A thread of agony at her left upper leg indicates the spread of the pool of malice upon the floor.

She has not time.

Abruptly her foot shrieks once more in a gouging of pain like someone pulling off all of her nails at once in bloody chunks.

When she regains consciousness, Link focuses her vision on Ruboona standing behind the Malice,
trying to drag its body away on the hooked sword that she cannot pull free from its form. The Malice, seemingly dazed, arches back. Thick purple fluid runs from its back and slithers down its body to cover the floor. She hears Ruboona yelling her name; Link leans over to grab the scimitar embedded in her flesh. The saltwater-like fluid from the Malice's hand flows over its surface. When she touches the blade of the scimitar, her left foot throbs. The pain waters tears from her eyes and seizes her sinews. Ruboona's hooked sword keeps the Malice angled away from Link. Gingerly she tries again. At the second touch, she notices movement from above her.

The shield.

The Malice does not roar or breathe out or make any indication that the it has come undazed but for the abrupt upwards lift of Urbosa's shield in its left hand.

It brings the shield down. Despite the pain that cracks up her leg and reverbs through her sides, Link throws herself to the left out of its way. Her foot tears around the scimitar lodged through her flesh and into the ground. The shield cracks on the floor. She watches the force dent the material of the Divine Beast.

Her eyes embiggen.

The shield comes down again. She hears Ruboora screaming as her companion strains backwards with the hooked sword lodged into the Malice's not-flesh. Again Link jerks herself to the side. The shield catches her hair in mid-motion: one of her sidelocks. The sudden pressure against the side of her hair makes her wince and twist until the shield lifts up again.

The Malice has grown—if not smarter, then better able to track her movements.

She catches the Malice feint to the left; she throws herself to the left as the shield cracks down on the right. A spark of malice from the downwards blow splashes on her cheek. She senses the droplet burn through her skin in the wake of how speedily her flesh grows numb, so swiftly that she does not feel the pain until the malice has eaten itself away and fresh air stings inside the pockmark left behind.

Link closes her eyes. As the shield rises, she does not wait for it to come down. Instead she braces herself.

She bends her right knee.

Holding her hands over her mouth, she kicks the scimitar blade lodged deep in her left foot.

The blade cleaves her flesh in half and she can feel the pain of every single sinew and tendon and layer of skin through which the edge cuts. The shield does not come down. She slams again, and again, and one more time, and then she senses the curved scimitar pass between her toes.

Link rolls backwards. Her head presses against the floor and she senses her neck nearly snap before she finishes the roll. The two halves of her foot—sliced by the scimitar—flop against one another. Only a centimetre or so down from her toes. Yet the blood that spurts out of the gap in her boots stains the Malice crimson. It mixes with the violet. The malice and blood steam up to evaporate together. The fumes smell of iron, of death, and of decay.

She wants nothing more than to die.

Link puts the foot back down. Her foot spreads out. The pain of the raw meat of one half touching the other buckles her left knee.
Ruboona's sudden shriek snaps her head up. The desecrated body of the Malice, with its head split in two like a blasphemy of a flower, with its entire back open and the malice draining out onto the floor, with its left hand deformed by the shield that it has again and again crashed into the floor, its fingers congealed together into a formless mass, with its right hand a shapeless blob that drips malice—the scimitar tossed far back away by Link's kick—and its papery skin curling over its front half.

And Ruboona. The hooked sword still caught in the Malice's back. The malice hissing through her shoes, about to dissolve her own feet. Link grabs the boomerang strapped to her shoulders. She runs forward with it. Release.

The boomerang cracks directly into the hooked sword. The sharp edge sinks into the Malice. Yet the force of the impact alone dislodges the hooked sword from the Malice's back and Ruboona falls backwards into the pool of malice.

She cries out. Link sucks in a breath but Ruboona rolls out of the puddle to pick herself up.

The Malice rears up. On its elefantine legs. The upper portion of its body has broken entirely in half except for the arms slowly draining of malice. With the last of the waning strength in its upper limbs, it lifts the shield up with both of its hands. Its arms quiver.

The shield releases.

Ruboona twists around to sprint away from the Malice; her foot slips on the saltwater-fluid-dampened ground and she tumbles to the floor.

Link attempts to leap to the side; the agony of her left foot's wound drops her to her knees. The shield grazes her right thigh. The metal leaves a band of bruised and tender skin as it spins past her to smash into the wall behind her.

She hears the groan of the Divine Beast Vah Naboris denting.

Ruboona has torn off her malice-riddled outer layer of clothing. She looks to Link, who looks back at her. The Malice lurches forward. Its legs drag the rest of its body behind it in the spreading pool of malice, already stretching some five paces across. The boomerang has toppled from its torso to splash in the puddle, hissing as it dissolves, as has the hilt of the fire-light blade.

The Malice stumbles. The Malice trips. The Malice falls and its legs flail. Spasming against the floor, the Malice kicks so hard that one leg and then the other ruptures against the floor.

The Malice breaks apart with a final gush of saltwater-like fluid. The papery skin sinks into the violent violet to dissipate. She listens to the **plink** of a slate dropping down into the malice.

Ruboona exhales. When she speaks, her vocal cords have slightly torn. "Then, is it...is it over? And that...that must be the Hero's slate. Lady Urbosa's slate."

Link shakes her head. She hears Ruboona cry out **what do you mean** and **how could it not be over** and then Link feels the ground tremble. She hears the hiss of Malice slithering across the floor.

"**The tail,**" Link signs.

Her left foot pulsates. She cannot run.

Link removes a sapphire-tipped arrow from her quiver while the malice pools together in the centre
She grips the shaft in her teeth. Bending up her leg with her right hand, she grasps the arrow in her left. And then, biting down as hard as she can on her own shirt sleeve, she stabs the wound with the ice.

The fragment of sapphire in the arrowhead shatters. The blood in her veins hardens to ice and after the initial burst of pain the top half of her foot goes numb. Link can no longer feel the injury, nor her toes, nor her skin, nor anything. When this is over, she may have to remove her foot entirely.

But at least in this very second she can run.

At least in this very second she can fight.

Carefully Ruboona has crossed around the bank of the lake of malice towards Link. The pads of her feet track blood.

"Can you run?" Link asks.

"Of course—!" Ruboona takes a step and winces. She hesitates. "I don't know."

Link’s gaze flicker towards the exit above the tail with its gauntlet of guardian turrets. "Is there another way we can get to the roof from here?"

Ruboona nods. With the slate now under her control to guide the Divine Beast, she explains, they can walk there from the front-side entrance.

"Then I'll carry you."

"But you're even more injured than—"

"If I die, nothing bad happens. If you die then the Divine Beast will no longer have a pilot, and I will never forgive myself." Link pauses. "There's no time. Hold onto that slate. If anything happens, use it to calm the fourth Divine Beast."

"The fourth...?"

Yet Link has already scooped Ruboona up into her arms. While she runs for the front of the Divine Beast—her left foot slaps numbly against the ground; she cannot sense its presence at all but she can move her legs—Ruboona jitters her fingers over the slate. Behind her, Link listens to the crash and push of the malice feeding into the terminal to break it apart, to serve as protective armour, as did the Malice of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, as did not the Malice of the Divine Beast Vah Medoh.

She wonders what form the Malice will take.

The front legs of the Divine Beast bend, and everything tilts down. Link realises with a long laugh that they could have done this from the very beginning instead of going through the tail. Ruboona whispers if Link has lost her mind.

If she hadn't, then she would never have left the Great Plateau chasing down a letter addressed to someone she didn't know.

She runs.

The wall and the higher platform touch to form a triangular point. Link sprints up the slope, holding Ruboona to her chest as she once held Aryll—as her body once held Aryll—
as...as she once held Aryll. Leaping over the vertex, Link lands on both feet on the other half. Her soles slip downwards towards the entrance into the Divine Beast's neck.

The lift.

She hears scuttling behind her. Again with the too many legs, with the hiss of liquid, with the sloshing of the malice held inside of the armour broken from the terminal. Link jumps into the lift; Ruboona flicks the slate to activate it down. Down into the hallway below, the passageway with the twin metal spheres.

Ruboona stops the lift. It *screes* to a halt, the opening between the ceiling of the hallway and the platform of the lift barely big enough for Link to have squeezed herself through. That should hold off the Malice for a few seconds at least.

Maybe. *Maybe.*

The Malice of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, Link submerged into the magma of the caldera of Death Mountain. The Malice of the Divine Beast Vah Medoh, she could dispersed through the fans that would scatter it into a thousand tiny pieces spread by the wind.

Yet nothing of the Divine Beast Vah Naboris suggests such a path to victory.

The lift continues downwards. A noise overhead brings her to look up.

The Malice—bound up in the terminal armour—hangs on the lip of the precipice. And then it springs into the lift's shaft.

Ruboona raises the slate and taps the stasis rune, but the Malice does not glow yellow. The bottom of the lift passes the opening to the hallway. Still holding Ruboona, Link plummets herself off of the lift towards the ground; she rolls into the water. The Malice crashes down not a second later.

She makes out a buzz. Like static. A sparkle of green emanates from the crack between the lift and the floor covered in water.

She can barely see the inside of the tunnel for the darkness of the night, and yet the electricity sparks clearer than the daylight sky.

"Ah. It's electric." Link listens to the fear in Ruboona's voice, observes her companion make a mad dash for the golden helm in her pack. Shoving it onto her head, Ruboona looks at Link with a many-eyed green glare. "Link. Link. *The elixir.*"

From her satchel, Link grabs one of the yellow elixirs. Her muscles, already fatigued by all that has happened, grow more sluggish still. Her limp arms roll out. She hears Ruboona *plssh* into the water. She listens to Ruboona force herself to her feet, listens to Ruboona murmuring a prayer to the Goddesses, listens to the Ruboona pleading for them not to die here.

A spray of pale violet fluid bursts from the slit-opening of the lift. The Malice squeezes through one leg, then another. Link watches its limbs slam into the hallway.

The electric current that runs through the water leaves only a mild tickling sensation in her body.

When she gets out of this alive, she will owe a million thanks to Nadyne.

Yet she has not time to think. Every second the Malice forces itself further and further into the hallway. Ruboona summons a bomb and throws it but the detonation only agitates the Malice. It
courses its electricity through the water again; the bottled lightning affects neither Ruboona nor Link.

The Malice ceases to move. Link lifts her head. She listens to it shift within the shaft.

Blue.

The blue of a single guardian eye, glaring at them from the tiny opening.

She stares: the Malice has taken the armour of not only the central terminal, but also the guardian turrets from the tail.

As the eyes begins to blaze, Link grips the radiant shield on Ruboona's back and crouches down behind her companion. She holds the shield in front of her companion, her arms protecting Ruboona's sides. The Malice's fire-light crashes through the heart of the shield.

"The shield can't survive another blow like that," Ruboona mumbles, her shaking body pressed against Link's chest. "It can't."

It will have to.

Then—

—her abdomen.

The left of her abdomen, just between two her ribs. One of the Malice's legs—curving around the shield—pierces through the fabric of her tunic to pucker into her flesh. The impact knocks her backwards into the water. She cannot feel the tingling of elixir-numbed electricity for the pain that thunders through the bending-to-breaking column of her spine.

The eye comes alive once more with blue, and the shield has clattered to the ground, and Link cannot move.

But Ruboona has already taken her shield anew.

She hears Ruboona scream; her voice condenses to a single word.

"—courage, courage, courage—"

The fire-light, speeding towards them.

"—courage—"

Ruboona's arm, moving.

"—courage—"

The shield, angling just so.

The fire-blight reflected back into the eye. That burns through the eye. That cleanses the Malice.

The Malice melts away as snow in summer's heat.

The pieces of terminal and turret clamour to the ground in a crash so loud that Link's ears ring the
bells of victory.

The Divine Beast Vah Naboris falls silent.

She did it.

Ruboona. Ruboona did it. Ruboona deflected the fire-light.

Ruboona...

Link collapses in the water, arms pressed into her abdomen. Ruboona begs her to move. To come with her. To put the slate into the pedestal of the main terminal.

The Divine Beast will walk to Nabooru. They will get help there. For both of them.

And if Link goes—if Link goes—then Ruboona promises that she will make Link a meal of her absolute most favourite dish.

At that Link's eyes spring open.

Through the pain of both of their injuries, Ruboona and Link drag one another to the lift. They pant as the lift takes them up. Link nearly falls asleep from fatigue and agony alike; she keeps herself awake speculating on the mystery of Ruboona's favourite dish. No, not just favourite dish, but her most favourite dish.

The journey seems to take hours upon hours. Ruboona taps the slate to speed them along; the Divine Beast tilts back. With the bottoms of Ruboona's feet raw and Link's left foot ruined, they crawl. They drag themselves forward. On the slippery material still wet with the saltwater-like fluid but free of Malice, they slide freely until they reach the main terminal.

Urbosa's slate.

Cradling the precious artifact to her chest, Ruboona weeps. She promises Urbosa that she will guide the Divine Beast Vah Naboris to help the people of Parapa. She asks for the blessings of the Golden Goddesses and of the Goddess Sageru.

Link helps to hold her up.

The slate falls from her trembling hand, but she picks it up again.

Ruboona slots it into the depression on the face of the pedestal.

And the Divine Beast Vah Naboris comes alive.

"It is done," she says, and then she cries again, and Link takes her hand into hers, and Ruboona wipes her tears, and Link woozes down towards the ground.

Link and Ruboona lie upon the floor.

Her entire body aches, and she wants nothing more than another round of honey candy, but she lives.

She lives.

When Link tries to laugh to celebrate her triumph, every second of mirth pushes pain against her ribs. She wheezes and gasps for breath until the agony ebbs.
Ruboona squeezes her hand.

"Ah, it looks like...my new year's prayer came true, thank the Goddesses." Link attempts a smile at that. "We have to..." Ruboona's words cut off with a groan of pain. "...we have to get outside. So I can see the direction. Please. To guide Her."

Back to the lift they crawl. This time Ruboona takes them up instead of down. She shows Link how they can emerge from the head onto the back of the Divine Beast.

In the time of their crawling, Link realises, the night has nearly ended.

Ruboona sweeps Tantari with her gaze.

Her fingers dance over the slate.

The Divine Beast begins to walk.

Ruboona and Link sit beside one another, shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip, leaning on one another for support.

The sensation in her left foot has begun to return, along the pulsing agony. The burn in her right arm remains without feeling. Where the shield hit her right thigh will surely blossom into bruises of green and purple in the morning. Already the stars have given way to a band of pink upon the horizon.

But she is alive.

Alive.

Alive.

Alive.

She laughs. She throws back her head, and the hole in her abdomen and the pockmarks in her cheek and leg burn with pain, but she laughs nonetheless because the pain means nothing less than that she remains alive. That she exists.

Link removes her hand from her abdomen to speak; the lack of pressure brings with it a pulse of agony. Ruboona rests her own hand against Link's stomach. "Ruboona, when we go back," she signs without a thought of where back might mean except somewhere where she can set down her cooking pot and have it repaired once more, "I want to make you some fried bananas. You'll still have to make me your most favouritist meal. But I'll make you fried bananas too. The recipe...it just came to me. With the slate, and the scimitar and shield from Urbosa." Her fingers twitch. "Lady Urbosa."

"Is that the first time you've used my name?" Ruboona inquires. Link looks at her; the crinkle around her eyes seems more amused than anything else.

Link smiles sheepishly.

"Then, if the Goddesses have granted you the wisdom to make the fried bananas and the power of the truth of their importance," Ruboona starts; she loses Link with her words, but Link clings on to the yes she hears in her companion's timbre, "allow me to give you the courage of having someone to share the meal with."
Link grins at her. Yet Ruboona's expression has sloped into something solemn, and Link's mouth thins. Ruboona's hand slides from her abdomen. The ache worsens; Link's nails clawed into her own palms.

"And speaking of my name...I apologise for lying." Ruboona's tone carries a ghost of pride, a ghost of sadness. Link glances at her companion, at first from the corner of her vision, and then turning her head entirely to face Ruboona properly. The wind brushes her left sidelock against her nose.

She sneezes. Ruboona smiles with a certain fondness. Even like this, sitting on the floor, she draws herself up to the fullness of her height, and even though she stands shorter than Link herself, Link feels as if Ruboona has grown a metre.

"Link," says Ruboona, and the world itself falls still to hang onto her every word. "My name...is not Ruboona. An alias, written backwards." Link attempts to reverse the characters in the name but without knowledge of Parapan she sputters. "Ah, it's Nabooru, Link. The name of...of my city. Of the capital of my people."

As Link watches, the band of gold that trumpets the sunrise has bloomed to wave below the pink banner of dawn. From behind her companion—from behind the Champion of Sageru, the Hero of Parapa, the Divine Beast Vah Naboris's Pilot—rises the golden disc of the sun to wash Parapa in honeyed hues, now buried in sand but which will one day heal, as is healing the rest of the land once known as Hyrule.

"I—" The sun rises behind, to weave a shawl of light upon her shoulders, to form a halo to frame her face, and then, at last, to set a crown of gold upon her head. "—am Queen Eursa Riju of Parapa." She lowers the lids over her eyes, and then lifts them again. The determination and the strength and the love glimmers in her dark eyes.

"Link," she says, and her voice comes faint as if from the stars above. "Thank you."

The sun continues to rise. Link's head tips back by itself. She senses something warm around her wrists, and something soft at the back of her head, and a whisper somewhere above her.

Do the stars sing?

She does not remember them singing, but she does remember the playing of a lute to the time of her own harp. Urbosa had little in the way of a singing voice but she sang nonetheless, for the joy of it, as Link had little in the way of a talent to play the harp but played nonetheless, for its own end. And the music that rang out from the strings of the harp, as the voice that sang out from the lips of the girl with the green hairband, brought happiness to the girls playing the instruments.

As Link had once, many years ago, had little talent in the cooking of food, but who had made—or more accurately burned—dish after dish after dish. Dishes that she would not share with anyone. Dishes that she would not foist onto anyone for fear of becoming a murderer, but dishes that she tried herself with gusto.

So Urbosa and Link played together. Not for an audience, but rather for themselves. Link demonstrated to Urbosa the songs Marin had taught her. A few, Urbosa knew, but, for many more, Urbosa had never before heard the song and Link knew no lyrics but some from the choruses.

They made up their own.

They sang and they played and Link offered to make her meal after meal from the recipes she had heard of from Rovah. Urbosa corrected her cooking. Over campfires Urbosa taught her how to
properly mix honey, the ratios of spice used more often, when to switch the heat. In the next village, she purchased ground almond to serve in place of flour, although they could not find bananas this far to Parapa's west.

Urbosa asked her: "Why are you afraid?"

They returned to Nabooru and to the sword lessons from Urbosa. Now Link leaped and jumped and sliced and stabbed and parried with much more ease. Not as well as Urbosa. But improving.

Improving.

One day she bested Urbosa. On every subsequent day for the next month, she failed utterly, but then—again—Link bested her. Steadily her skills grew.

Steadily, and slowly, but growing nonetheless.

Link could hear them in the night sometimes. Urbosa and the girl with the golden hair. Talking, quietly. And yet, now as she listened, Link heard more talk of Urbosa's worries than before. She heard more talk of Urbosa's interests, of Urbosa's childhood, of Urbosa's thoughts and of her feelings and of the girl with the golden hair comforting her and of the girl with the golden hair thanking her for opening up and of the girl with the golden hair saying—saying those words. Those words that only three people have ever told Link in the course of her life.

She did not hear Urbosa say those words back. She heard Urbosa exhale. She heard Urbosa murmur that no matter what they wanted, the Princess and her Champion could never publicly consummate anything, that the Princess of Hyrule would need to marry—as tradition—into a noble family to continue the line, that her father would have Urbosa's head mounted on a plate.

"It doesn't have to be public," whispered the girl with the golden hair. "You can say no. All I want is to know your feelings, Urbosa. Your real feelings."

Although Link could not hear Urbosa's response, she could hear the girl with the golden hair weep in her room.

Link paid ever more attention to her lessons in Parapan. Diligently she studied until she became comfortable enough to speak and to understand the spoken language, at least the dialect of Nabooru. The writing could wait.

Other matters could not wait.

Urbosa had said that the quickest way to someone's heart was through their stomach. Then Link could at least do one thing—two things—as thanks for everything that Urbosa had done for her and everything that Urbosa had given to her.

In the courtyard where she practised with the sword that seals the darkness, she could hear the shouting and the laughter and the talking of the streets of Parapa. When Urbosa finished the daily training, Link stayed behind to run her drills, as usual.

But this time, once Urbosa had left, Link shimmied up the wall.

When she dropped into the streets on the other side of the wall, the—mostly women, though some non-gerudo men mingled here and there in the crowd—gasped as she tumbled to land face-first on the sandstone.

The suddenness of the noise and the bodies pressing in and around her brought her to her knees.
She closed her eyes; the world spun around her and the blood drained from her head until she could no longer tell the skies from the floor.

What a fool she was.

A tap on her shoulder. Light, timid.

A little girl. A little girl in a dress the colour of spring green. A little girl asking her hello miss and is anything wrong miss and are you lost miss and I like your brown hair miss and that's a pretty sword miss.

Link practically seized her hand and led her around Nabooru. A city of a thousand colours and sounds and lights. Walls of sandstone formed a labyrinth of painted walls and floors in geometric shapes that dazzled Link's eyes. She could not believe that people could paint such patterns until she watched street artists armed with straight-edges and strange curved implements they used to trace circles extend a pattern in green, blue, and red along a less busy street. The walls of Nabooru came alive with murals of birds and beasts, of the sun and moon, of the Golden Goddesses, of the people of Parapa, of heroines and heroes from legends past, of the stories passed down, of the Goddess Sageru upon Her horse, or with Her hawk on Her arm, or playing Her harp Sanidin, or holding Her seven-pointed star of peace upon Her chest, or smiling down on a mural depicting the history of Parapa's queens.

Musicians played music on the street. Six-stringed harps and lutes and lyres and ocarina and drums and larger instruments for which Link had no names and horns and fiddles and great upright fiddles whose strings the musicians strummed with their fingers and flutes and every manner of singing she had ever encountered and then some. Some solo singers, others in groups of three or four. One entire choir—some twenty women—stood on raised platforms in the centre of plaza before a fountain to belt out a song of various gerudo heroines of the past, that ended with a verse about Urbosa herself and a note that the stories of the heroines were yet being written with ink still fresh. Some songs Link recognised. Most she didn't. The music calmed her where the noise of the crowd had brought her to the ground.

But most importantly: the smells.

Of perfume and ink, of sand and soap, of rock in the sun and stone in the shade, of a thousand spices—some of which she knew and some of which Link had never smelled before—and ten thousand more combinations, of flowers and herbs, of sand seals and camels, of horses and leather, of linen and silk, of brewed elixirs and cooked meals, of fruit and fowl, of meat and fish, of baking bread and steaming rice, of iron and copper, of gold and silver, of boiled eggs and buttered yams, of almond cookies and marinated olives, of sweet liqueur and sweeter smoke, of drying paint and dyed horses' manes, of freshly opened voltfruit and just-pared hydromelon, of a thousand more fragrances she could not name that washed over her and made her hunger to try every food in the city.

And so she did. They offered samples and she ate voraciously of them. The food burned then shocked then iced her mouth and she could not get enough. The little girl giggled as Link gorged herself on fish that froze her lips and then turned around to down an entire iced smoothie of voltfruit that sparked electricity over her tongue and brought her to grab an entire bundle of steamed safflina to shove into her mouth which caused her to belch smoke and prompted her to scarf down a stack of herbed flatbread that slid down her throat and let her breathe long enough to dive anew into a dessert of icy hydromelon and nuts and honey in thin layers of ground almonds.
When her stomach began to hurt, she asked the little girl to show her to the marketplace. As the little girl navigated the entirety of the city with ease, Link had to close her eyes. She prayed to the Golden Goddesses in gratitude of the light spirit they had sent down to save her.

The little girl introduced herself as Boori. Her hands would sometimes get ahead of her when she spoke, her gestures running into one another, but Link could understand the intent if not each individual phrase. The daughter of an arrow fletcher and a librarian who tended to the royal library of Parapa. She asked what Link planned to make with so many bananas, imported from the northeast of Parapa near Faron where the bananas grew natively.

Link demonstrated.

Following the recipe that Rhibonne's sources gave her, she sliced the bananas with the blade of evil's bane in a flourish that left Boori gasping and clapping her hands. With Boori's help, Link smothered each slice in butter and in honey mixed with cinnamon and nutmeg and a tiny hint of salt. She spread out the slices of banana on the sword that seals the darkness. The not-quite-metal material of the blade of evil's bane heated in a flame to fry the slices in fatty seals' butter. A flick of the wrist flipped the bananas stylishly over her head. Link caught them on the other edge of the sword that seals the darkness.

Yes. Her lessons had paid off more perfectly than she could ever have dreamed.

The sweet scent of the bananas caramelised. She gave half of the fried bananas to Boori in thanks. Grinning widely to herself, Link marched out of the kitchen with the other half of the fried bananas in her arms.

It took her a moment to realise that she had absolutely no sense of direction.

After Boori walked her to the same street she had found her, Boori hugged Link tightly. Then she scampered off. Link watched her skip and twirl and sign her joy at the world at having met someone so strange and so funny and so good at cooking.

Link climbed back over the courtyard wall. Sneaking up the stairs to her room, she tapped her knuckles against Urbosa's door.

Urbosa opened the door. Link could see how she arranged her expression from a grimace into something neutral as soon as she saw Link. Though every muscle in her body screamed for her to run, Link rooted herself down and held out the plate of fried bananas.

If anyone could convince her that the Champions would not hurt her as had—as had some people in her life—that would be Urbosa.

Link observed: the way that Urbosa's lowered her eyelids and the corners of her eyes crinkled and her mouth curved up into smile that could lit up her chamber as if the Goddess Sageru Herself had shimmied in through the window.

Urbosa thanked Link over and over and Link could only blush and smile sheepishly and rub the back of her head with both hands for double the embarrassment.

She tried the fried bananas herself.

Delicious.

Absolutely delicious.
Only with her iron willpower alone could she keep herself from wolfing down the entire plate ceramic and all: Link would let Urbosa have them.

Urbosa more than deserved all of the fried bananas in the world.

When the two of them had scraped the last of the honey-butter from the plate, Urbosa asked her once more: "Why are you so afraid?"

For once in her life Link could not say that she had no answer, for she had an answer, an answer engraved on a tiny ember that she had tucked away in the deepest recesses of her innards, that had smoldered and smoked and burned away at the coils of her entrails for all of these long years, an ember that would someday—no matter how deep she pushed it—erupt into an inferno that would consume her from the inside out.

She did not cut open her stomach. She did not reach down through her intestines. She did not pull out the ember that lay hidden.

And yet she found something resembling words. Found a mirror to swallow down her throat, to reflect the ember in her stomach, and another to show Urbosa the reflection of the first.

Link spoke in fits and starts. A word or two, half of a phrase, sometimes nearly an entire sentence before her hands would falter and she would press her palms into her knees. Urbosa merely sat there in the silence to let her gather her strength again.

If Urbosa had apologised, or asked if she were all right, or—worst of all—reached up a hand to comfort her, Link would have crumpled into herself and never spoken again.

But Urbosa kept still and silent, gazing at Link with nothing but warmth in her eyes the comforting colour of the nighttime sky.

The vaguest of words. Someone who had, possibly, not quite hurt her, but arguments that someone had had with another someone, arguments for which those someones would blame her, the constant need to mediate, the burdens of the constant fighting, the hiding, the consideration of running away, the thought of even taking her own—

Her sister.

Her sister's birth.

And then Link could not run. Running would subject her sister to the same fate. Running would simply offer up her sister as a sacrificial goat upon the altar.

She would stay, and she would fight, and she would protect her sister.

When Link mentioned the possibility of making money enough to send Aryll to live with their grandmother, the blacksmith took pity on her. His own wife had become with child, and he could no longer travel the countryside delivering his goods. If he would teach Link to defend herself from the few dangers along the road, then she would return the favour by becoming his courier.

And so she did. So she took to the road. The girl who smelled of horses—her best friend and the only friend she had in childhood and the first person in the world who had learned of Link as a girl—sought to give her a horse but the girl who smelled of horses's own father reacted too stringently to her talking so frequently to a child that they did not see as...as a girl.

Link curled her fingers inwards. Urbosa's eyes narrowed at that, her eyebrows bristling, but she let
So she walked. With the jumble of pots and pans and swords and armour and horseshoes and this and that that would need smithy. She walked on foot to Necluda in the southwest and very occasionally to Faron in the south, to Lanayru in the southeast, to Akkala in the northeast and very occasionally to Eldin in the northwest, to Central Hyrule far, far away. As she went, she picked up the languages. From the language spoken in the province of Ordon, to the Necludan and few strains of Faronese she learned to the southwest, to the Central Hyrulean she heard everywhere and the Lanayrish of the southeast that she—she remembers a zora—a red zora she knew then. Now under the tutelage of her mentors in the Hyrule castletown, Link had learned to read Central Hyrulean, and under Urbosa's hand she had learned to speak Parapan.

She gathered money. In retrospect, the blacksmith gave her too much money. In retrospect, the blacksmith proved far too patient with her. In retrospect, the blacksmith could have chosen a true courier at a far lower wage, but he chose Link and for that she would and will forever be grateful.

With the money, she sent Aryll away to live with their grandmother. She cannot remember the name. An island. An island off the eastern coast where their grandmother had lived before their family had moved to Ordon in search of better work. Link could have run away.

She considered running away. But she had learned not to speak of what happened behind closed doors. She had learned—and so her grandmother could not know—and so instead she kept her sister and their grandmother in safety and in comfort and mailed toys and books and trinkets. Of birds.

The birds that her sister loved so much.

Someday, she promised Aryll, she would take her to Tabantha, to Medli, where lived the rito. The followers of the Goddess Erito whose messengers came in the form of birds.

Aryll laughed and clapped her hands together and asked if they too could become followers of the Goddess Erito. Link tilted her head to one side. She knew next to nothing of questions of the Seven other than their existence. Aryll prayed to the Goddess Farore, the Goddess of Courage and the Goddess of Wind, to one day grant her wings that she may fly as did the seagulls that soared and looped through the skies of the island on which their grandmother lived.

If this Goddess Hylia whose statue Aryll had seen in books could bear wings, then why not the people called hylians?

Link laughed and ruffled her hair.

If anyone could do it, she told her sister, then Aryll could. The best little sister in the world.

During the holidays, their grandmother could send her sister back, and Link would have to keep up the charade. To bring the money back to—those who may or may not have hurt them—and to keep them more at peace for the few scant days of festivals. The celebration of spring and its new year; the feast of the harvest; the festivals of the Golden Goddesses and of the spirit Ordon, sent by the Goddesses, said in those days to watch over the province.

Many then prayed to the Seven but many more that she met along the road prayed to the Golden Goddesses or prayed to spirits.

Here, a hundred years later, Link has seen none who does not pray to the Seven.

At some point on her trips between Central Hyrule and Ordon, Link met a girl singing in a field of
wheat. She slipped and fell into a pond of voltfin trout which she had never seen before. Their electric shocks had knocked Link unconscious. The girl had rescued her from the water and had awakened her with the voice of the Goddesses themselves.

The girl who sang taught her too that she need no longer hide. The girl who sang, the girl who wore a violet sash around her hips, the girl who showed her the elixir in spring green that her mothers brewed.

And, to Link, the rest of those next several years felt a constant spring.

The girl who sang—Marin, her name, signed with one wrist over the other and fingers fluttering as the flapping of a seagull's wings—gave her a horse and gave her an ocarina and gave her the beat-beat-beating of her heart.

At this, Urbosa smirked slightly; Link's face flushed. She hurried on with her story before the words escaped her. The river had opened but at any second it could shut itself again.

And then, one day, the royal family sent out orders to every blacksmith that they could reach. For the forging of swords, and of lances, and of spears, and of armour, and of the articles of war.

A sword and a shield the blacksmith forged to indicate the quality of his work. Link would take the sword and board to the castle, so far away from Ordon. And so the girl who smelled of horses had wished her the best of luck and Link had promised to return. And so Marin had told her to come back to Lon Lon on her voyage back and Link had promised to return. And so she had come to the castletown as courier for the first time in her life. And so Link had delivered the blacksmith's sword and the blacksmith's shield. And so Link had seen the blade of evil's bane set within the stone. The royal family, unable to pull the sword that seals the darkness from the sacred ground where it lay, had excavated the entire rock in which the blade of evil's bane waited. The rock that they had taken from the sacred ground now rested in the centre of the courtyard of the castle, where a parade of royal knights and nobles from across the land would come to try their hand at removing the sword that seals the darkness from the stone.

She does not remember quite how it happened. She does not remember that intoxicating liquor of curiosity and recklessness that had driven her to hop the barriers around the blade of evil's bane. She remembers the fatigue. She remembers the exhaustion. She remembers the smiles that she presented to Marin and to the girl who smelled of horses and to Aryll.

She remembers those who may or may have hurt her, and she remembers being tired, so tired.

She does not remember why her fingers curled around that hilt but she remembers the warmth. She remembers the strange sensation of her strength ebbing from her limbs as she drew up the sword that seals the darkness. She remembers how the fatigue spread through her body and how the exhaustion filled her and how her heart slowed and how her mind fogged and how she was tired, so tired, and how she continued to pull, and how when she lifted the blade of evil's bane from its stone and the strength rushed back into her body with a feeling like static, she could not quell the disappointment that coiled around her neck but not tightly enough to choke.

She remembers the sound. The sound of the sword that seals the darkness, the blade of evil's bane. The sound like windchimes, the sound like an ocarina, the sound like a harp, all at once.

And that soft blue glow, for just a moment, so fast that she thought she had imagined it, and that sound like the far-off laughter of a girl.

She does not remember the chaos that followed thereafter. She remembers Daruk, and Revali, and
Urbosa, and the zora girl with the shark-tooth smile, who stood, and watched, and saw for the first time the scrawny girl with the purple bags under her eyes who would become the Champion of Hylia, the Hero of Hyrule, Her Majesty's Knight. She remembers the guards. She remembers the blades surrounding her, the threats of execution. She remembers the zora girl yelling out the name that Link had not used in years. She remembers the intervention that saved her life.

She remembers the girl with the golden hair. She remembers the promise of her sister's safety if Link would be silent and hide and follow every order.

She remembers the training under the royal swordsmasters. She remembers how she flinched back. She remembers how they declared her entirely unfit for duty and yet the blade of evil's bane had somehow chosen her.

She remembers Daruk and Urbosa forcing the King's hand. She remembers coming to Parapa.

She remembers...remembers Urbosa. Urbosa who opened a door that Link had kept closed shut save for three people in the entirety of her life.

At the end of her story Urbosa nodded, once, and asked Link if she could reply to any of that or if Link would rather she stay silent. Link shrugged. She folded inwards on herself.

Urbosa chose to answer.

To say that one day, Urbosa would like to meet Aryll. That she would like to meet the friend Marin. That she would like to meet the girl who smelled like horses. That she would like to meet the people who have brought together the kind and courageous girl in front of her.

Link did not say anything. But she ducked her head, and she more sensed than saw Urbosa's smile.

Then Urbosa reached out a hand to ruffle Link's hair. Her ponytail loosened. She re-tied it and Urbosa ruffled her hair again.

"You know, Link," Urbosa remarked, her voice light even as Link could hear the thudding of her heart softening and heavying the words, "they call me and you O Courageous. There's O Powerful Revali, and O Powerful Daruk—funny, how they picked the two men for that, but that's another story for another time—and you and I the embodiments of Courage. I thought these to be nothing but monikers: three attributes and six people. I'm surprised that they didn't spiffy it up and round to Seven, but I suppose we have seen no children of Kokir in centuries, if still they exist.

"O Courageous Urbosa and O Courageous Link. O Powerful Revali and O Powerful Daruk. O Wise Mipha, and, of course...the Princess of legend." She laughed and shook her head. "There are those who say that the Princess and her Knight from ten thousand years ago...that they saw one another as lovers." Link cocked her head to the side. Urbosa laughed to herself again. Raising her hand to her brow, she closed her eyes. "We all have worries enough that the oceans could form from our tears. But at least this is one less thing to worry about, and one more thing to be brave in. Thank you, Link."

Link blinked. Urbosa smiled.

"I mean it."

The sun rose and fell, and Link lay on her back in bed resting her aching body after hours upon hours of drills.

From outside of her room, she heard a gasp, and a yell, and a muffled sound, and weeping, and a
sharp inhalation. Link slid open the door. Just a crack. She poked her head outside and gazed in the direction of the balcony.

There: framed by the fullness of the moon in her silvered glory, Urbosa and the girl with the golden hair; the girl with the golden hair standing on her tiptoes, her arms around Urbosa's shoulders and her fingers entangled in her hair to draw Urbosa closer to her; Urbosa smiling and tilting down her head, her arms around the girl with the golden hair's upper back with her hands on either side of the girl with the golden hair's jawline to support her up; the sliver of silver between their mouths fading until their lips briefly touched and the girl with the golden hair's eyes closed while Urbosa's twinkled more brightly than the stars above.

Courage.

Link slid the door shut again. She lay back down on her bed. She hugged the pillow, tucking the corner between her thighs and the side under her chin, curling up around it.

Perhaps someday.

Perhaps someday when she fulfilled her promise.

Perhaps someday when she could take Marin across the world, so that she could sing for everyone, so that Link could catch the starlight glimmering from her smile.

Perhaps someday when she and Marin could come home again to a house meant for them.

Then perhaps, she and Marin could, as Urbosa and the girl with the golden hair did...

...but she will never do so, now.

Never will she hear Marin sing again. Never will she hear Marin laugh again. Never will she hear Marin say those words to her.

Those words that meant, and mean, almost everything to her.

Yet.

Yet after the Divine Beasts and after the Yiga and after she has fulfilled the promises that she has made, she will come back.

She will go home.

To Romani Ranch that calls her name.

A place to lay down her sword.

A place to rest.

A place to be.

—

_Mighty Fried Bananas_ (six hearts, low attack boost for 03:10) - cane sugar, mighty bananas, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes

Author's notes: I can finally say it! Riju! Riju's my favourite of the companions from *Breath of the Wild*, and I feel like the developers put the most effort into her (and Sidon), especially with her daily schedule that includes praying to her mother, playing with Patricia, etc., and the sand seal plushies in her room. It's unfortunate how sexualised she is in-game though, especially given that she's a literal child.

The scimitar went through Link's foot and into the floor. As a result, Link was trapped. Like a fox chewing through their own leg to get out of a bear trap, Link kicked the scimitar out of her foot. She hasn't cut her entire foot in half, just about a centimetre or two from her toes, but that's still pretty significant and pretty painful.

The sapphire arrow to the foot served as a temporary anesthetic, essentially, numbing the pain so that Link could run around. Pretty hardcore of her. I certainly wouldn't be able to say it.

Learning to parry the guardians for the first time can be very scary, especially since—while you *can* just try again and die repeatedly only to try again in-game—a single failed parry means real and significant pain. Riju had a shield with which to parry and the skill to do so, but lacked the confidence in her own skills to try for it. When Link fails to parry the guardian correctly, Riju realises that it's now or never. She's gone this far to protect her people, and she's not stopping now.

Poor Link really got a number done on her this time, to a point where she faints from it.

As I suggested in a different note, "Riju" means "(one who is) like the dawn". The scene of Riju in the dawn is one of my favourites.

I really wanted to humanise Urbosa more so than she was in the game. Zelda is eighteen at the time of this and Urbosa is twenty. They're pretty cute, I think.

We'll see more about Ilia's father, but you get a taste for what Link had to deal with as a child. While Hyrule is much more accepting of trans people than many cultures today, Link's village is small enough and was tucked away enough in the country that there weren't a lot of trans people around, resulting in ignorance; Link didn't even know that being a girl was an option until she met Marin.

The islands off the coast refer to Tingel and company. Link's grandmother, who wasn't aware of the abuse, is based on the character from *The Wind Waker*.

As mentioned before, the new year in Hyrule is celebrated in the spring, although Link has already missed the celebration since it happened while she was travelling around Parapa.

Link delivering the sword and board is based, in part, on the opening plotline of *Twilight Princess*, which is a pretty good way to get Link to the castle. By the way, have you figured out where the province of Ordona is yet? Link's entire childhood is basically an amalgam of her childhoods from *The Wind Waker* and *Twilight Princess*, with the relatively bad childhood of *Ocarina of Time* thrown in for good measure, alongside my own special twists.
The royal family couldn't pull the sword from the stone, so they literally excavated the rock in which it lay. Say, have we seen a certain place that looks like a rock was ripped out of it? In fact...it might be from one of the first few chapters.

We'll find out more about why the sword chose Link later. Perhaps even from the horse's mouth. But that won't be for many, many chapters. After all, Link doesn't even have the sword yet.

midna's ass. 07 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: R I J U! No more Ri-I-Mean-Ruboona. Probably not much of a shock, but hey.

The scene of the sun rising behind her is beautiful. It's one of those scenes where I can just hear the music.

Speaking of music, "Do the stars sing?" is one of my favourite lines in the series.

When I said a chapter was wew, I mean this one. Between the descriptions of the Malice and Link getting her foot chopped in half, it has probably the most amount of squick in the series.

As the author noted, this chapter is decidedly not about the Yiga. On my first readthrough, between Riju mentioning thinking someone else might have been in Vah Naboris and the chapter's title having bananas, I was sure it was Yiga. Of course, I became paranoid about the Yiga on every single situation after this, a paranoia which, as I like to constantly remind the author, I was completely justified in.

Emma. 09 October 2017.
Resting after the cleansing of the Divine Beast, the travelling chef discovers the truth of the Parapan food enthusiast as the Queen of Parapa, who strives to tell the chef more about the Great Calamity and the possibility of the Calamitous One's reappearance. However, the chef recalls something about which the Princess's shade warned the chef over a century ago.

Chapter Notes

As usual, extra notes: So this is the halfway mark in terms of the chapters, and we've cleared three Divine Beasts so far!

The lights in the room are actually powered by topaz—early electricity!

If you don't remember, the spring green elixir is basically Magic HRT™.

And "yet" vs. "and yet" are meant to showcase the different sides of the internal argument that Link has with herself.

Link's coming to terms with her body being her own. Not the body that she stole. But her own body. She's been in it for more than a year at this point.

In case you haven't figured it out, the word that Riju has difficulty saying is Yiga, because they're the ones who assassinated (one of her) mother(s).

Also do note that I occasionally capitalise things in character dialogue that are not usually capitalised! For example, Revali referred to the capital-C Court, while Impa refers to the capital-C Castle (contrast Urbosa saying lower-case-c castle), while Link's narration does not.

This chapter explains the seeming disparity between Urbosa breaking through Link's silence to her newfound silence and fear with Daruk.

As always, thank you so much for your patience with my computer issues, and thank you for reading. I hope that you've enjoyed the journey so far, now that we're at the halfway point in the story in terms of the number of chapters, though not in terms of the length of the story. The longest chapters are yet up ahead. And thank you so much to my wonderful beta reader, Emma, who has done so much for me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Her left foot: a slice on the upper half between her toes. Her right thigh: in a band just below where her hip meets her torso. Her abdomen: on the left side, in a strange winding tunnel. Her right arm: on the forearm close to the elbow, in an irregular patch. Her right cheek: a dotted mark closer to
her nose than the scar long left by a Tabanch wolfos. She can feel the entirety of her body, save for these injuries.

Light dusts her vision. She groans and buries her face further in the warmth of the darkness. Sensations move over her body. Sometimes dry, sometimes wet. Water drips down into her mouth; she swallows. Another kind of liquid—slightly sweet and slightly bitter at once, with a taste so familiar to her—accompanies the water on occasion. Something smelling of food nears her, and she lifts up both hands to grab and shove the whatever-it-is into her mouth indiscriminately until she has scarfed it down with gusto before drifting back into the darkness.

Steadily her consciousness comes back to her.

Beneath her: bed. Or something like a bed. But a bed woven of the hands of the Goddesses Themselves, softer than any bed in which she has ever slept before, yielding enough to swaddle her in a cocoon of comfort, and yet firm enough that she does not feel the fear of falling.

When she lifts her hands, she feels a tug on her left arm. On the crook of her elbow. Her fingers find a cord leading from her skin upwards. She cannot find where the cord ends.

She examines her body with her right hand. She lies under the blanket, nude save for a loose robe. Bandages and gauze cover her skin. Her flesh feels surprisingly smooth, as if someone had scrubbed her outer layer clean. No dirt, no residue of salt, very little sweat.

The scent of food springs open her eyes.

Link sits up so speedily that her head seems to crack open and the cord embedded in the crook of her left elbow sings out in pain.

Her surroundings: a clean room decorated in the calming colours of blue and green. Dark but for the light of candles. No, not candles, but strange orbs of light set with topaz. A bed upon which she lies, set with a dark burgundy and navy blanket. A pair of gerudo women carrying various implements look at her.

One of the women inhales, then quits the room.

Before Link can begin to panic and jump out of her seat, the other woman—a healer in a dark brown healer's robe a shade lighter than the tone of her skin, her short hair curled on either side of her head to resemble a nesting bird—sets a tray by Link's hands. A tray of food. Bread and meat and a bowl of soup and curried rice and another bowl of diced fruits with a sprinkling of salt and several small fried fish and almond cookies and so many things that Link almost plants her entire face into the plate.

After she eats, then she can consider panicking.

But eating first.

Eating always first.

With Link preoccupied by the food, the healer explains. Of Queen Riju who brought Link in a few days prior. Of how Queen Riju, herself injured and battered beyond belief, and thank the Goddesses that Her Majesty had not fared worse, asked the healers to do whatever they could to save the girl who had braved the thunderstorms of silt and sand to carry the Hero's slate to the Divine Beast Vah Naboris.

Link cannot stop herself from eating but neither can she stop her hands from shaking at the healer's
words. Last autumn, the healers of Medli did not know what she had done.

But this woman does.

Yet the healer signs for Link not to worry. "Her Majesty has given us explicit instructions to keep this confidential. Your secrets lie safe with us. We do not even know your name." She taps the fingers of each hand together. "So we have been referring to you as 'the girl' for not having a name." That would bring a smile to Link's face if not for the constant stream of food from the tray to her mouth. "Her Majesty did instruct me to show something to you. Please look over here."

The healer walks around the bed towards Link's right, stopping by the wall. She raises her hand to the curtains over a window that Link did not notice on first glance. The sudden influx of light closes Link's eyes but does not for a moment slow the intake of food into her mouth.

When she looks out again, Link can see a stretch of a city—of Nabooru—before her, though the sandstone walls do not exactly resemble those in her memories. The Divine Beast, or the past hundred years, or some combination, must have destroyed them. And yet the rebuilt walls carry their own murals and their own stories and their own beauty far exceeding that in her memories.

For these walls exist, and for these walls bear upon them those who are alive.

And beyond the walls—

The Divine Beast Vah Naboris. Its head rising up into the clouds. Its eyes no longer glowing with the violent violet, but the softer blue of the blade of evil's bane that her body once held.

Safe.

Link slows her intake of food long enough to ask a single question: if Ruboona has recovered. Then she stops herself at the healer's visible confusion to laugh at herself, to explain of Riju's alias, to explain that she has not the faintest clue whatsoever of how to sign the name Riju.

Riju.

The Queen of Parapa.

"Ruboona...Nabooru..." The healer closes her eyes. "Her Majesty has a way with words, does she not? Queen Riju...some of us refer to her as Sariju, but she herself has asked us not to, for she does not consider herself worthy of such idolisation." The healer glances back at Link. "But a queen who would risk her own life for the safety of her people, and at so young an age after passing of Her Majesty's mother...others may regard that poorly, but I would call that courage. In such times we need rulers who will take matters into their own hands and not trap themselves in their palaces to gorge themselves like parasites while the countryside falls to peril.

"Though I do not know the full story." She smirks wryly. "I am, after all, merely a healer."

Link shoves a piece of bread into her mouth. She chews, and chews, and chews.

She has done acts that others would consider courageous. But she has also—and continues—to do acts that she herself would consider reckless at best and potentially malicious at worst.

To say that someone should always risk their life...

Calming the Divine Beasts does not require needless sacrifice. Had Ruboona—had Riju—thrown herself in front of Link, or had Link in front of Riju, then both would have perished shortly
thereafter. To cleanse Urbosa's spirit needed them both at their fullest, needed them to fight for their lives. And had they brought reinforcements they, perhaps, could have avoided injury altogether.

Yet that would have endangered the lives of others.

And yet if they had had a prepared team and a plan of attack, then no one would have gotten injured.

Yet Riju and Link came out alive.

And yet they could have died. Yet Riju could have died.

Yet Riju, Queen of Parapa, went out to the Divine Beast entirely by herself, with no guards and no entourage, for fear of endangering others' lives.

And yet the assistance of a rito or a zora could have massively simplified the process of accessing the terminals.

Yet that would have taken significant time to recruit, time that they might not have had.

And yet they only defeated the Malice on virtue of Riju's incredible skills with the shield and on the courage to swing.

Yet...yet...yet...

Link has never been the wisest or the most powerful. Instead she picks up another chunk of bread, dips it in the steamed vegetable soup, and plunks it in her mouth.

Yes.

Eating is simple enough for her to understand and to execute.

The healer asks her a few more questions about how she feels, if she can wriggle her toes, if she can track the healer's wagging finger with her gaze, if she can walk, if she can flex, if she can hear in both ears, if this hurts or if that hurts or if what about over here hurts or if yes I can get you more food after this just stay still for five minutes, please hurts.

The healer inspects her eyes, her ears, her mouth, her hands and feet, and the injuries. She removes the cord from her patient's flesh. When Link looks up, she observes the cord leading to a sealed container that dribbles fluid.

The healer declares her with a clean bill of health. She gives Link a set of herbal compresses—to change the bandages on her foot twice daily—and some small round seeds to chew on to kill the pain that she might continue to experience for the next few days.

"There was only so much that we could do. I apologise." The healer makes a gesture Link recognises from her memories: a sign of respect and of sorrow. "The burn on your right arm is unlikely to ever fully recover sensation."

Blinking vacantly at the wall behind the healer's shoulder, Link nods at the big words in Parapan that she does not know. The healer pauses. Her features soften, and she repeats herself in simpler terms.

Link runs a hand over the burn on her right arm. When she applies pressure, she can sense
"But the rest of you should recover just fine." At this Link grins. The healer nods at her. "We were worried about that foot of yours—showing evidence of frostbite—but the rapid medical attention saved you." The healer bows her head. "You must have curried favour with the Goddesses Themsevles."

The healer returns to Link her items. The cooking pot; and the satchel with the wooden box of spring green elixir that Link almost immediately downs before the healer notes that they have given her regular doses twice a day; and the broken halves of the boomerang recovered from the Malice; and the snapped hilt of the fire-light sword. The healer also provides Link with a mirrored shield, a long straight sword, and a curved scimitar, the latter for fighting on horseback. Gifts from Riju, in case Link must leave before they can see one another again.

She ignores the gifts to hug her beloved cooking pot instead. Link notes the curve of the pot that faced her right side at the time of the guardian's attack: the fire-light that carved her arm also disintegrated a portion of the metal. But the metal has been filled in, and the entire inside of the pot re-coated with the same new metal to ensure an even conduction and heating. The pot has healed, as the pot did after her adventures with Yunobo, as it did after her adventures with Amali, and as it has now, after her adventures with Riju.

Her body and her beloved cooking pot both bear the scars of her stories, those she remembers and those she does not yet.

Link shakes her head.

No, no. She cannot claim all the scars for her own. For whoever...whoever owned this body before her.

The slate, which remains in one piece, and the red telescope, which she holds to her chest. Aryll. Aryll. Aryll. The girl for whom she—the former she, not she, or she?—

Her little sister. And Marin, and the girl who smelled of horses. Link keeps the red telescope close to her heart, the red telescope that she remembers all three touching at one point or another.

As a final gift of parting, a messenger adorned with serpentine tattoos up her arms enters with Link's own paraglider, the symbol of Farore still visible on its heart. The top of the struts no longer consist solely of wood but of a material laced with topaz; a thin layer of rubber reinforces most of the underside. Around the tattered fabric that bears the mark of Farore, patches of sky-blue and gold mix in with the original dark blue and red of the paraglider to form a mosaic.

"Her Majesty wishes to extend an apology. We recovered your paraglider. Unfortunately, the lightning had destroyed part of it, or so she told me to tell you. We repaired the paraglider as best we could. Unfortunately..."

Nonetheless Link thanks her. Like herself, wounded and injured and battered and torn and broken over and over and over yet patching herself back together each and every time, the paraglider has healed of its damage and grown all the stronger for it.

Taking the paraglider into her embrace, Link runs her hands over the fabric, to feel the difference between the old and the new, that now come together as one to allow her to continue to glide. She notices the lines of topaz that run through the patches of fabric.

"On the bright side," the messenger signs with a wink, "you can glide in thunderstorms now"
without worry. Or at least not as much worry."

The messenger ushers Link away from the healer and out the door; another woman carries her belongings. While Link tries to protest, the process overwhelms her, though she manages to avoid curling up on the floor. She allows the messenger to lead her on wherever the messenger wishes for her to go.

First, to fit new clothing, she discovers. The tailors have patched to the best of their abilities the feathered tunic, as well as her old undershirt and trousers from Kakariko. They offer to prepare an alternative tunic, which she accepts: although she adores the Tabanch tunic in the cold, the feathers make it much too warm to wear south of Central Hyrule away from the mountains. They measure her and have her select fabric.

Link almost immediately grabs for the forest-green, but then she notices another swatch of fabric, the same colour as the sky.

That light, clear sky-blue.

She moves her hand between the two. She touches her chin with her left hand, then with her right, then with both, and then one of the tailors politely suggests that they make her two tunics.

When Link tries to thank her, she finds that the tailor cannot read sign; another tailor, plucking a needle from her mouth, intervenes to translate and to explain that they have prepared for her, in addition, another set of clothing meant for desert travel. Billowing robes to aid with the sand and with the heat. They fit the blue tunic first, along with a matching cloth sheathe for the straight sword. Link finds that the blade runs too long for her to wear it at her hip, and so she affixes the sheath to her back.

"While the tailors put the finishing touches on your clothing—after which you are free to leave, of course—" the messenger informs her, ",—would you like to have a meal?"

Link's grin could stretch from ear to ear. "Would I!?"

The messenger guides her up to the upper floors of the palace. "We've been given explicit instructions to blindfold you in preparation. You'll eat the meal without looking at it. That all right with you?"

Link blinks. Then she shrugs. "Anything for food."

The messenger winks at her. She ties a heavy cloth blindfold around Link's eyes. Alongside a second messenger who can speak aloud, the messenger with the serpentine tattoos guides her up a curved set of stairs.

Abruptly Link feels the heat of sunlight and the whisper of the wind over her skin. Outside. The second messenger asks her to sit down, and to wait.

She waits.

She nearly falls asleep.

An insect of some sort lands on her knee. Its legs tickle her skin as it crawls about. When she crooks her fingers to pet her newfound friend, the furred moth buzzes away.

"Link?"
Link twists around towards the source of the voice; the disorientation brings her to flop on her stomach. Riju laughs as Link pushes herself up into a sitting position.

"I promised I'd make you my most favouritest food. Then, keep your hands at your sides. I'm curious to see what you'll think about it afterwards. After all...ah, you're an honest judge of cooking, aren't you?"

Link bobs her head.

The blindfold tickles the bridge of her nose, and she sneezes. She hears Riju's hand-muffled laugh. "Ah. You should smell it first." Something warm radiates close enough to her face that she can feel the heat on her lips. Link repeatedly wrinkles her nose to adjust the blindfold.

She sniffs.

The scent: fishy, very fishy, and honey, and spiced with turmeric, and cumin, and other things that she has eaten before but cannot identify. Desperately she opens her mouth and pokes out her tongue for a taste of the fish. The tip collides with spiced honey and butter, not unlike the outer coating of Urbosa's favoured fried bananas, but, instead of nutmeg and cinnamon, the spice flares hot and sour and bitter. And breading: a coating of crumbs.

Riju laughs again. "Ah, I didn't ask you to beg for it. It'd be cruel to keep a food lover like you waiting too long, wouldn't it? Then, here you go."

Link snaps her jaws shut around the offered morsel. She feels the fingers holding the food recoil away as she crunches down on the bite.

All at once the fire and the ice and the shock burst on her tongue. Not like the meal that she had a week ago where every bite led into one or the other, but all at once, barely muted by a fourth flavour that seems to pack down the other three.

She—remembers. Long after Link had left Parapa. When the Champions and Impa and the girl with the golden hair travelled together in efforts to the springs of the Goddesses in the efforts of the girl with the golden hair to unseal the sacred sealing magic supposedly in her bloodline. When the monsters had grown so frequent that villages and towns across Hyrule begged the Champions and the King's armies for assistance.

She remembers Urbosa's words. To the girl with the golden hair. She remembers watching over them with the blade of evil's bane drawn and ready. Not to attack, but to go through her drills. She remembers Urbosa telling the other Champions that she would take Link for training and wished the girl with the golden hair to come watch. She remembers Urbosa asking Impa to stay with the others for the sake of Link's anxiety.

She remembers Urbosa thanking her.

She remembers the girl with the golden hair never once looking at her.

She remembers Urbosa's words.

"You've heard this before, Link, I'm sure. Sometimes these things bear repeating, though." She remembers Urbosa's laugh; she remembers the snap of Urbosa's fingers whenever she thought of
something, the same snap that Link picked up from the Champion of Sageru. "Power isn't about being strong, but about seeing the truth even though you want to cling to the things that make life easy. Wisdom isn't about being smart, but about making the best decisions with what knowledge you have. And courage...well, O Courageous Link, courage isn't about being reckless, and it isn't about not being afraid. Courage is about doing things even though you're afraid." She remembers Urbosa embracing her. "So thank you. For reminding me that courage isn't just about fighting monsters. Sometimes it's about being honest with yourself."

Hands around either side of her head. The blindfolds lifts. The light bathes her.

Her eyes adjust and from the brightness of the open sky before her—the clearest, bluest sky that she has ever seen—Link blinks her vision into focus on the girl. Her companion.

Riju.

Riju, who offers Link her hand, her fingers balled up into a fist.

"I promised you," she says, her eyes twinkling more brightly than the stars at night, "didn't I?"

Link raises her own fist. Their knuckles touch. Their fingers intertwine.

"So, so, how did you like it?" asks Riju. "My four favourite kinds of trout, glazed with honey and fried. You don't fry them separately; you mix them together into fishballs, so that you have every flavour in every bite. A constant explosion of flavour! Ah, what do you think?"

Link finds herself responding honestly: the dish tastes incredible on its first bite, much better than if she had fried them separately, but becomes repetitive and dull in comparison after a time. Instead, Riju could consider making the fishballs out of larger chunks, so that each bite would have more than one of the types of trout with their unique flavours, yet not all of the flavours at once. That way she would never know whether the next bite would burn her, or freeze her over, or shock her, or whatever that fourth slightly subduing flavour held.

For a moment her companion says nothing, merely ogling her with widened eyes, and Link considers tossing herself off of the palace roof. Then Riju bursts out laughing. "Thank the Goddesses that you met me as Ruboona. Do you know how hard it is to get actual feedback on your cooking?"

Link flinches. "I meant no disrespect, Your—"

Riju lifts her hand, palm facing Link, to stop her. "Please, Link. Just Riju is fine. I'm not one for ceremony. You know, when you first awoke, and were signing to me with such formal speech like the eldest of my advisors, I worried that you already knew who I was. Then, I realised that you must have learned Parapan from books written before the Great Calamity." Link feels the blood drain from her face. To her relief Riju moves on: she gestures towards the glazed balls of mixed fish meat on the plate in front of Link. "So, aren't you going to finish?"

"With pleasure."

Even as she signs, she has already reached for the plate; she swallows down the miniature explosives.

Holding her hand in front of her mouth to subdue the continuous giggling, Riju sits down beside her. Link lifts an arm and slings it around her companion's shoulders almost instinctively, as she—as her body—as she has done so many with Aryll.

Riju relaxes against her shoulder.
"It's nice," she murmurs, "to be able to take the crown off sometimes."

Link hugs her.

"Ah, that's why I went to Savah Naboris, you know. As a child, I am hardly fit to rule. Then, I thought, if I could prove myself to my people..." Riju's timbre fades off. "Yet, I succeeded in worrying everyone instead, especially Buliara..." Link pokes a bit of fish into Riju's mouth; the Queen of Parapa giggles and accepts it. "You're right. Let's focus on the here and now. We were successful, thank the Goddesses, and that's what matters."

When she polishes off the plate, Link gazes out at the city of Nabooru and at the Divine Beast watching from above. Perhaps her memories exaggerated its size, but the city—like Darunia, concentrated mostly on the lower levels where once the city had extended upwards into the heavens; like Medli, which has lost entire pillars in the lake and whose villages has only reached halfway up the pillars from the Medli she saw before—seems so much smaller than before the Great Calamity.

She sucks the bread crumbs and honey sauce from her fingers.

"Ah, I know that you have to leave soon, Link," Riju begins, folding her hands in her lap as if holding a cup of tea, "but...you still have to make me fried bananas." Link raises her hands, but Riju halts her with a glance. "I can take a rain check on that. Besides, the legends speak of the trials that the chosen hero has to undergo. The researchers at Uruda have identified and verified the existence of such shrines across Parapa." Riju raises her eyebrows. "Then, shouldn't you look at those before you go?"

Link laughs and her nerves tremble her throat. "The shrines? You said they're for the chosen hero."

Riju returns the mirth, her mouth hidden behind her hand. "And whom might I be speaking to, then?"

The laughter stops.

"You've mistaken me for someone." Link stares blankly ahead at the sky. "I'm not the chosen hero. I'm only a messenger with the slate. The chosen hero lived a hundred years ago. I've just...been asked to clean up the scraps."

Riju's eyebrows arch further. "Then, do you have no intention of endeavouring to—to understand what has happened? To fight against the Calamitous One?"

Link tilts her head to the side. "The Calamity? Wasn't that a hundred years ago? I don't know what happened, exactly."

She watches Riju's eyes widen, and Link hastens to explain:

"I...lost my memories of all that happened to me, a few months ago." Over a year, now. "I don't know much about the Great Calamity except that it happened."

Riju inclines her head in understanding. To Link's relief, she does not press about the memory loss. "Then, allow me to explain. One hundred years ago, on the eve of the Great Calamity, the guardians and Beasts Divine turned against us. Untold destruction. Lives lost, so many that it will take centuries to ever return. Nabooru...I never knew the splendors that my beloved city once held, but the archivists tell me that the rebuilt Nabooru has scarcely reached a fifth of the space that the city once occupied. The records indicate that somewhere between three-quarters and nine-tenths of Parapan towns were outrightly destroyed. Then, when all hope seemed lost, the Calamitous One
was sealed away again. A victory most pyrrhic, for the Princess, her Knight, and the Champions had perished, as had most of the armies of Hyrule.

"Since then, we have had one hundred years of peace. Monsters that existed were few in number, and the Divine Beasts and guardians had fallen silent. Slowly we began to recover. I...am too young to know what the world was like, then." She smiles distantly, and then her smile deepens into one of pride. "Ah, yet my people of Parapa are nothing if not resilient. We have one another, as the kin granted us by the Goddess Sageru. And we have the power, the wisdom, and the courage of the Golden Goddesses. Our ancestors persevered. They cleansed the land of monsters. They rebuilt and repaired. They healed, thank the Goddesses. Then, we thought that the storm had passed. We'd even begun to re-establish trade routes with other cities. Only a few travellers, and we still had to deal with the..." Her voice trails off. "So, life was not perfect. Yet the world was looking up. Thank the Goddesses, we could see peace within our grasp."

Riju closes her eyes. "Then, a few months ago...our world once more spun into turmoil. Overnight monsters teemed from everywhere. Savah Naboris awoke. She devastated the peoples of the desert and carried it with Her wherever She walked. My mother was assa—my mother passed away. And I..."

The taste of honeyed fish. The fish that she and Urbosa honeyed together on their last night in Nabooru before the trek back to the Castle. As Link's training with Urbosa had finished, she would travel next to Eldin, and then to Lanayru, and then finally to Tabantha to complete her circuit of learning from each of the Champions. Daruk insisted on his training next: he and Urbosa had, after all, been the ones to convince the King to allow Link to quit the castletown and go elsewhere to train.

The Queen of Parapa had offered to throw them a feast; Impa had intervened to remind the Queen that Link was not to be shown to the people at large, for the mismatch between the official description of Her Majesty's Knight—as specified in the legends and the prophecies—and the scrawny brown-haired girl currently stuffing herself with herbed flatbread.

Urbosa invited Link to her quarters where the two now sat on the floor around a ruby-fired grill with a sapphire ice-box of bass and a green jar of honey. To Link's left side, her ages rested against Urbosa's lute.

It took Link some ten minutes of mentally going over the gestures to finally force the question from her fingertips. "Don't you want to...spend time with the Princess?"

Urbosa spun the spatula in her right hand. "Hey now, I'm allowed to want spend time with you, too. And it's your last night here. She and I will have plenty of time afterwards. Tonight, I'm cooking with you."

That brought the slightest of smiles ghosting over Link's lips as she drew a pinch of fenugreek from a red pot by her left knee to sprinkle over the skillet on the grill.

"You know," Urbosa mentioned, flipping over the whole Hyrule bass in the bottom of the skillet, the honey slowly deepening its gold in the oil, "you've come really far, Link."

Her gaze riveted on the fish, Link could only cock her head to the side.

"The first month you spent here, I didn't hear a peep from you. You just stayed quiet and went through your drills. I could see you getting physically better, sure. Yet that's not the sole reason behind Daruk and I wanting to train you outside of the castle." Link forced her chin up. Urbosa's warm smile crinkled her eyes. "See? You've come so far. Daruk and I figured that being around all
those expectations in the castle was weighing down on you. I still don't know that much about you. Mostly about your friends, whom I'm grateful to have heard about."

Link could sense a thread of heat rising in her cheeks; Urbosa's smile only deepened as she tilted back her head, her eyes catching a mischievous glint of light.

"It took a lot of food—" Link rubbed the back of her head. "—but I finally figured out the ticket to getting you to talk. So thank you for everything that you've told me about yourself. And, hey, maybe you could come out to meet my family one day." Urbosa's features softened. "I'm taking her out to Rovah tomorrow to meet them. You should come sometime."

Link returned her gaze to the skillet. She could see Urbosa grimacing from the corner of her vision, just for a second before that smile returned.

"You don't have to if you don't want to, Link," she said gently. "Do you want to talk about it? Well, I guess that's an empty question, isn't it? Hm, is it something about the Princess? No? Something about Marin?" Link stared blankly at the fish. "Something about Rovah? About my family? About your family?"

Despite her efforts to keep very, very still—her muscles so taut that her tendons had begun to ache, her sinews shivering from the exertion—Link sensed the tiniest of tremors quiver up her spine to twitch the features of her face.

Urbosa's mouth thinned into a line.

"My family life isn't perfect either, you know, though I do love them very much." Another twitch of Link's facial features. She listened to Urbosa hiss her breath out between her teeth. "I'm sorry. That wasn't the right thing to say. Link, you know you can talk to me about anything. Even if I haven't been through the same things that you have, I'd still like to be here for you." Urbosa started to lift a hand towards Link's face, but, when Link curled her shoulders away, Urbosa retracted her arm down to her lap. "As you have been here for me. Thank you again for helping me find the courage to admit the things that I'd been keeping away from myself." Link kept her gaze trained very intensely on the honeyed bass. She flipped it over again in the skillet. The oil sizzled the frying fish's vapours to waft around Urbosa's chamber. The tangy-coppery scent of the fish and the round sweetness of the honey, sharpened by spice and tempered by heat, loosened Link's hands.

"I didn't do anything," she signed after a time. "All I did was make food."

Urbosa tipped her head back to laugh, though not unkindly. "There's a lot you can do just by listening without judgment. And there's a lot you can do just by giving someone a warm meal when she feels alone. Especially with how much work you put in getting those recipes. Don't think I didn't notice. Is that a blush I see? Hehe. So let me return the favour to you, Link. You don't have to feel alone. You can always talk to me about anything. I'm your friend."

Link scooped the fish from the skillet into a plate; she bisected the bass down the middle for two portions of fillet, half tender and flakey, half drenched in honey and butter.

"Let's not ruin tonight with it." Urbosa ran her tongue over her lower lip. Nodding her head ferociously, Link licked her own lips as saliva welled up in her mouth from the crispy sound of the fried bass dripping in oiled honey. "Instead, let's dig in."

By the time Link emerged from Urbosa's quarters with a belly full of food, a head full of music, and a chest full of warmth, the night had shadowed the inner corridors of the palace in a blue as deep as Urbosa's favoured dress. Link tucked the ages under her arm as she crept towards her own
chambers. In the morning, Link would pack her belongings for the long trek across Parapa, Faron, and Central Hyrule towards the northeast. For now, she would bury herself in blanket and pillow to sleep off the feast she and Urbosa shared.

Link rested her hand against the door of her room. As she began to slide the door open, she observed a second shadow next to hers. An all too thin and all too tall shadow that she knew all too well.

"You."

Even though Impa had not so much as twitched a muscle, Link felt as if Impa had sunk a sapphire-bladed axe into her abdomen to freeze her limbs down to her feet, the bottoms of her boots iced against the ground.

She turned her head. From her left eye, Link watched the woman in black, the tattoo of the teardrop under her left eye in the symbol of the Goddess Sheik, the single strand of hair lifted up from the short cut of the rest, the red sash around her waist like a mortal injury—like the Calamitous One itself had clawed her in half from hip to hip.

"You," Impa hissed again. Even in the darkness of the hallway, Link could see the narrowed eyes, the wrinkles of the brow, the sharpness of the taunted mouth, the angry angled furrows of skin between the bridge of her nose and the corners of her eyes. "Do not think that I do not see what you are doing. Do you not understand the gravity of the situation?"

Link said nothing; she could only stare vacantly ahead at the wall beyond Impa's silhouette.

"The sword that seals the darkness—which you carry upon your very back even now—has chosen you. You, and not anyone else. When the Calamitous One descends upon us, you alone will wield that blade. Her Majesty will rely upon you to hold that sacred sword; her blessed blood cannot suffice to seal the Calamitous One. Do you understand that? You are here to train. You are not here to make friends. The Champions are not your friends. The Champions are not your family. The Champions are the pilots of the Divine Beasts and the protectors of this realm. We do not have time to spend getting to know one another and cooking."

Biting down the syllable with a twitch of the lip, Impa spit out the final word like a rotten fish. Link flinched back; her shoulder blades hit the door to her chambers.

The sudden snapping of something against the floor recoiled Link back.
"May I remind you," Impa whispered, every words as precise as a sapphire-tipped arrowhead driven into the soft flesh just above Link's own collarbones to choke into the base of her throat until she could no longer breathe, "that only as long as you fulfill the role of the Knight is your charge boarded safely in the Castle."

Impa's tone iced her veins and sloughed her skin from her body, marrowing her to the leaden bone.

If Impa had taken the blade of evil's bane and wrenched it through Link's spine to force her erect, Link would have felt less pain than the clenching of her heart—so hard that Link lifted a hand to her own chest—at the implication of Impa's words.

Her charge.

Her charge.

Aryll.

"Do I make myself clear?"

The muscles of her neck ground together like rocks as Link forced herself to nod.

"And do you not understand what you have done to Her Majesty? Do you take me for a fool? I have spent my entire life assisting Her Majesty in assuming her predestined role as Incarnation of Hylia, Princess of Hyrule, the Blessed Bloodline's Vessel, O Wise Her Majesty, and I will not allow you to interfere. This is not about your happiness or your belonging. This is not about her happiness. Impa's voice tightened to a pitch uncharacteristically high. "This is not about my happiness either." She hacked out her own timbre. "This is about the future of Hyrule and all of her people. Do I make myself clear?"

Again Link forced herself to nod.

"If you cannot stop treating the pilots of the Divine Beasts as your family instead of the powerful allies whom they are, then the Calamity shall only end in grief for all of Hyrule."

Link dugs her fingers into the chest of her tunic, sprawled her hands over her sternum, cupped her thudding heart in her palm. Yet she could do nothing but continue to look forward with her features neutral and her eyes vacant.

Impa did not curl her lip. Impa did not shift the chiselled hardness of her expression. Impa continued to speak as icily as she had before. "The Champions do not care about you. They merely pity you. Take it from me, who has spent her life in service to Her Majesty: harden your heart, sharpen your blade, and focus on the destiny that the Goddesses have placed upon your shoulders. Do I make myself clear? If you cannot, then lay down the sword that seals the darkness, and let it choose another. You can do that much, at least."

Her voice washed the taste of honeyed fish from Link's mouth to leave the metallic copper of the cheek she had bitten through.

And now Riju's voice washes the taste of honeyed fish from Link's mouth to leave the metallic copper of the tongue she has bitten through. 

"...I suspect that the Calamity was never destroyed."

Opening her eyes, Riju fixes Link with a gaze as heavy as all of the sands of Parapa over her head at once. "I suspect that the Calamitous One was sealed away, yet I do not know how permanently. Ah, there have been sightings on occasion reported of the malice within the castle that once belonged to the kingdom of Hyrule. Then, it could be that the Calamitous One has—or will—return." She does not cry, but her eyes have wetted. "And I don't know if Parapa could survive
another onslaught." She paused. "...Link? Link, you're bleeding."

A dribble of wetness beaded at the corner of Link's lips. The warmth trickled down to her chin. The pain of her own writhing tongue focused her enough to dredge the words from her fingers.

"...I'm sorry, but I'm not the chosen one." Link shakes her head.

Riju's lips part. "Link—"

Link shakes her head more violently. A droplet of crimson flecks Riju's cheeks, and her shoulders fall.

Link keeps herself signing the words that she marks with her own blood. "After I bring the slate to the fourth Divine Beast, I have...a few promises to keep. And then I'm going home."

"Home," Riju echoes. Link inclines her head. The bead of blood on her chin drops to redden her trousers. "Wait, Link. You said...the fourth Divine Beast. You've calmed two of them, haven't you? Then, which ones?" She takes a step forward and Link cowers behind her hands. "Please, Link."

She forces the words out one by one. Each motion of her arms feels like taking a knife and pressing it against the hollow of her throat, pushing inwards, and inwards, and inwards. "...Eldin. Darunia. Vah Rudania. Tabantha. Medli. Vah Medoh."

Riju reaches out. Her fingers close around Link's wrists. "How can you not be the chosen hero if you've done so much for—"

Link jerks her arms away, flinches back, senses how desperately her body tries to plummet. "I'm sorry." Link rises to her feet. "I'm sorry." She gathers her belongings. "I'm sorry." She turns away.

The present Champion of Sageru speaks but Link cannot hear her above the silence of her own tears, above the roar of memory in her ears, above the dust of ten thousand years.

—

Glazed Seafood (twelve hearts) - chillfin trout, courser bee honey, sizzlefin trout, stealthfin trout, voltfin trout

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: We begin with a cataloging of the injuries that Link received at the hands of Thunderblight Ganon. Remember that she has a scar across her right cheek (from the corner of her eye to her jawbone) back from the twentieth chapter.

What she has connected to her arm is a rudimentary IV drip.

The healer is a pretty big fan of Riju; opinions on Riju vary, as some think that she's much too young to rule and that someone else should inherit the throne, while others consider her a beloved ruler if a possibly tragic figure.
Burn injuries often do not recover sensation if the nerves have been too burned; the skin there is now permanently scarred over, although the deep pressure sensory nerves still work, below where the scar is. Link's foot will be fine as long as it doesn't get infected. The seeds that Link was given are poppy seeds, used for pain relief.

There's the paraglider! Like the cooking pot, it's been recovered and repaired. It did indeed get hit by lightning, but now Riju has fitted it with rubber and topaz, so it's much more lightning resistant. That'll sure in handy in Lanayru!

She's officially upgraded to a blue tunic now from her original green, at this the halfway point, similar to other titles where you acquire the blue mail or blue ring around the halfway point (for most players, although this varies given that you can do things in different orders). Now, how about that eventual red tunic?

Like our modern "They're coming for lunch—we're in a jam!/Keep cool—just open a can of spam!", Riju is an adherent of the Parapan saying, "When in doubt, cook up trout."

The fourth flavour is stealthfin trout, which serves to "mute" other flavours and thus is used to temper flavours that would otherwise be too strong. In this case, Riju tries to throw in a bunch of different flavours at once, including many different spices that aren't necessarily used together, in order to create a "symphony" on the palette. To avoid overwhelming the eater, she also included stealthfin fin trout. Imagine that you were mixing a song composed of many different instruments. You could ask the instruments to all play at their loudest, but there's an upper bound on how much noise someone listening can stand, even if all of the individual instruments are playing well. By lowering the volumes across the board, you can actually allow more variation of individual instruments (in this case, flavours) to come through without being overwhelming. Actually, if you're interested about this sort of thing in music, I recommend looking up the loudness wars; it's a fascinating concept.

Remember what Link said to Tulin about how courage is doing something even though you're afraid of those things, all those chapters ago? Why, it was Urbosa who told that to her!

Urbosa uses some of the "training time" to have alone time with Zelda to continue their relationship, which she obviously can't do in public. Link is happy to oblige. Zelda does not know about Link's involvement.

Riju's comment about Link's speech, of course, is another nod to her "talking like a grandmother". Even though Link has improved in other languages, she (prior to talking to Riju) hasn't had much of an opportunity to improve her Parapan, as she's spent most of her time just wandering around.

I won't say much about Impa in this chapter as it requires context you'll get later, but please note that she doesn't just exist to be antagonistic. Link talks about her friends being threatened with Daruk because Impa threatened Aryll here.

Zelda's full title is the Incarnation of Hylia, the Princess of Hyrule, the the Blessed Bloodline's Vessel, O Wise Zelda Satoru Miyahon Harkinian.

While Link is okay with becoming the bearer of the slate, she's not yet ready to accept the pressure of having to deal with Calamity Ganon ahead. She doesn't even really know if Calamity Ganon exists (neither does Riju). When Riju tries to press her
into becoming the true chosen one, Link flinches and runs. She needs to cross this last hurdle. But Link doesn't leave Riju behind as abruptly as she did Amali and Yunobo! At least she got to talk to Amali, rather than just not seeing her.

Up next: towards Lanayru, and towards Link's home.

midna's ass. 09 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Link leaving Riju behind is so incredibly sad. She's so close to a breakthrough, but just not quite quite there - she needs that final nudge. Soon.

The "yet, and yet" scene is a really cool bit of writing.

We, sadly, have to abruptly leave Riju behind, as abruptly as we left Amali and Yunobo. Don't worry; we'll see her again.

Emma. 09 October 2017.
Creamy Seafood Soup

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef once more travels through Parapa and arrives in Aveil to see some rather familiar faces.

Chapter Notes

As usual: Well now, check out this incredibly short chapter, about the size of the very first chapter! After so many rounds of excessively long chapters that took me significant time to write, I wanted a day's break, and so tried to curtail the chapter length. We'll see how successful that actually was (not very). This is also when my girlfriend was visiting me this summer, which funk'd up my writing schedule quite a bit (along with the fact that the chapters were getting longer).

Link's adventures in Parapa have taken her throughout the spring.

The imprint of the camel on the pass, by the way, was in reference to Vah Naboris.

Link has been forever blacklisted from modulga whaling. However, she hasn't been blacklisted from sand seal racing. One of the places in which Link emotes the most in-game is with regards to the sand seal racing (see my author's notes first written back in April with the foreword). My interpretations of Link's animations were confirmed when I looked up the Japanese version of Breath of the Wild, where Link comments on how fun sand seal racing is, while not saying about other minigames.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She paraglides from the roof of the city down into the grass that surrounds the stone walls of Naboooru. Without the ability to enter the city, Link cannot rent a sand seal, and, perhaps more worryingly, she has lost the slip of brightly-coloured paper that held her Parapan pass with the imprint of a camel.

Link has with her the cooking pot, the repaired paraglider, the red telescope, and the long straight sword in the blue-cloth shield. Yet she has left behind the shield and the scimitar carried by the messengers. She has her satchel with the spring green elixirs. And the yellow elixirs—resistance to electricity—that she could sell if she needs to. She wears the blue tunic and trousers provided by the tailors. But with the rapidness with which she soared off the roof has left Link without the loose robes meant for the desert.

And yet she has no intention whatsoever of trekking through the sands to locate the trials meant for the chosen one.

She will bear the slate. This much, Link can do. She will go to where the last Divine Beast may yet rampage upon the world, and she will calm the Divine Beast, and then she will go to Medli, and then perhaps to the Yiga as she promised Dorian, and then to Romani Ranch.
When she returns to Romani Ranch, Link will have to sit Romani down, to ask about the bwig bwad bwoar, although she has only heard one other person use that particular phrase: Revali.

Link must have relayed that to Marin, and then Marin to Maryll, and Maryll to Malon, and Malon to Cremia and Romani.

No, not Link.

But the one who once inhabited her body.

For now, she has a horse to find and to somehow scale over a series of mountains and highlands and then to the Divine Beast Vah Rutoh. Vah Ruti. Vah Ruda. Vah Rudoris. Vah something or other.

The River Sageru runs past the city of Nabooru, not close enough for the flood during the rainy season to reach the sandstone walls. Through some mechanism of pumping, the city brings the water up from the river to the palace, from where it flows in covered troughs throughout Nabooru for all to enjoy. Link remembers Urbosa explaining the mechanism to her in more detail while she stuffed candied dates into her mouth, but now she can recall only the vaguest of impressions. These same troughs extend down from the city walls to run back into the river. Waste not, want not.

She follows the troughs to the river and then follows the river down to Ache's Veil on foot. In the river's water LInk attempts to catch fish without a fishing pole. Tulin's nicknamed hylian bomb fishing does not work well with the speed of the water swelled by the approaching onset of the rainy season. She notes on her cheek a purple scar left where the malice pockmarked her; when she lifts her undershirt sleeve, her left shoulder—where the Malice's arrow pierced her—bears a similar swirl of violet.

Upon arrival in Ache's Veil, Link returns to the inn outside of the village. She rings the bell, and the innkeep Vaike—who suspected Link might have died—emerges to return Ilia to Link. Link finds Nadyne asleep at one of the chairs in the inn. Vaike whispers to Link that Nadyne has worried for her day in and day out, though Nadyne herself would never admit so. When Link pokes Nadyne's cheek, Nadyne shakes her head and asks for five more minutes. When Link pokes her cheek again, and again, and again, she hears Nadyne murmur, "You're persistent...you find the heart over the ocean...Lover's Pond...I can tell you that much..."

Link pokes her cheek a final time and Nadyne jumps. Instinctively Link leaps back; she finds herself holding her pot in front of her as an aegis. Rubbing her eyes with her hands, Nadyne stares at Link, then chides her for not having returned to Ache's Veil in so long, for having told Nadyne to pick up the slate in case anything happens, for having made Nadyne pace back and forth and follow the Divine Beast around for hours while the damned piece of junk wandered from here to the coast and back again. Only when Nadyne noticed that the Divine Beast eyes had changed colour from purple to blue did she finally return to Ache's Veil.

And then Link had not come back for several more days. "I thought you were dead. We all thought you were dead. What was I supposed to do with your horse? I don't even ride horses." Link listens to her go on and on. She smiles sheepishly. "For Goddess's sake, you'll have to tell me all about whatever in the world you did to that hunk of garbage. That's all the payment I need."

"I thought you said that I don't owe you anything by the contract..."

"Contract shmontract. Sageru Herself could come down right now and tell me to can it and why I'd..." Nadyne sighs. The volume of her voice lowers. "...probably hup to the ground in reverence. Kiss the ground on which She walks and all that. For Goddess's sake, sorry there, Goddess." She
brings her hands up to her face. "You know, people who live in grass houses shouldn't chuck torches at their own walls. Or however that saying goes. For Goddess's sake you've got me all tangled up over a stranger, girl!"

Vaike *snkts* a snort of laughter.

Writing on a sheet of paper for Vaike's benefit, Link explains that she lost her Parapan pass in the storm. Vaike goes off to speak to something she calls the proper people to inquire about a new pass.

Nadyne disappears into Ache's Veil. Link bounces on the balls of her feet. Ilia. Her companion. Her friend.

Over these past few months Link herself has become, she feels, Ilia's shadow. For all of the times that she has had to leave Ilia for a day or week, she always returns.

And, when Ilia emerges from the door to Ache's Veil, Link hugs her tight and feels as though she could never let go.

She waves Nadyne and Vaike good-bye with her companion beside her and a new pass in her hand. Nadyne cups her hands around her mouth to shout that Link will *forever* remain blacklisted from molduga whaling, but that she should come back anytime if she wants to participate in the sand seal races held every full moon. "I'd like to see you end up headfirst in the sand, I'll tell you that much!"

Link brings with her, from Nadyne, a container of sand seal butter and a carton of sand seal milk. The greatest gifts Nadyne could have given her.

On the road she passes travellers full of news about the Divine Beast Vah Naboris, about the sudden ceasing of the storm, about *are you coming from the west and have you seen the Divine Beast? and isn't Nabooru going to be open now? and say, traveller, can I interest you in some extremely rare insects that you'll never see 'round these parts going now for the low-low price of—? and what? You want some of my soup? I don't see why not; nothing like sharing food on the road with a fellow wanderer. The soup tastes marvelous and Link notes the recipe for herself.

She gathers herbs and flowers along the way. Her efforts at removing voltfruit come *slightly* better than before: she *only* gets spines in her *right* arm rather than in both and also in her chest. An improvement. Perhaps next time she will only have to pick spines out of a single hand!

Link raises her eyebrows at Ilia, who whinnies at her. "Don't look at me like that, girl," she signs. "*Unless you don't want the voltfruit.*"

The half of voltfruit that Link almost proffers to Ilia sparks with electricity. Link glances at the fleshy yellow-pink interior of the fruit, notes the static that emanates from its core, and on second thought eats it herself.

Passing by a pond, she pauses to fish: voltfin trout, as expected, and another sort of fish, deep blue in colour and with a face so funny-looking that Link snickers out a laugh and then laughs more loudly and then holds the fish up to Ilia to show her how ridiculous the fish looks. Her companion neighs; Ilia bumps the fish with her nose, then rears from the sudden scent of fish clinging to her face.

Laughing all the harder, Link helps to wash the fish-scent from Ilia's nose.

For the fatigue of the constant trek to the east, Link opts for stew that she can simmer without
paying it too much attention. She removes the flowers from the safflina she has picked and tosses them into a cooking pot of seals' milk and diced voltfin trout—the insides of the fish nearly shudder static up her hands until she places the spent topaz of the paraglider near enough to draw their electricity—and the blue fish with the funny face, which she can barely cut with her knife. Gritting her teeth, Link brings out the big swords.

Literally.

She stands up, draws the sword Riju gave her from the sheathe, raises it up and up above her head, and brings it down upon the fish. The strike vibrates up the blade to turn her arms into chuchu jelly.

It takes three or five or ten strikes to cleave the armoured skin away from the meat of the fish. But oh does the taste make her efforts worth all the while.

Then Link waits for the stew to simmer. Chewing on a blade of grass, she fashions a whistle.

The first few attempts choke and die, but she perseveres. To recall the melodies from her memories, both old and new. That Marin—who loved her—sang for her, and that Malon—who loves her, in a different way—will sing for her when she next returns to Romani Ranch.

Epona's song.

Link wipes the tears from her eyes just in time for her to check in on the other love of her life: cooking.

She laps at the stew; her mouth fills with seal milk. The creamiest, fattiest milk that she has ever tasted.

Link cannot get enough.

Picking up the cooking pot in her hands, she slots her mouth around the rim. Like the Eldic rock octoroks sucking in stone to feed, Link opens her mouth wide to inhale the litres of thick, thick stew that nearly chokes her on its route down her throat in its fishy-flowery-salty-spicy deliciousness.

As she wolfs down the soup, her throat constricting in her gulps, Link considers the existence of the fourth Divine Beast.

A flash of memory comes to her, clear and hot as the stew in her mouth en route to her gut.

The party. Travelling together. To Nabooru once more, for the girl with the golden hair to undergo a trial held by the Oracles of the Goddesses Farore, Nayru, and Din in the great golden temple at the very heart of the city. The Champions taking turns attempting to give the girl with the golden hair advice on how to tap into the magic of her blessed bloodline. The girl with the sharks' teeth suggesting that she think of someone who matters to her, someone she loves romantically. Daruk proposing that she try to bring up all of her feelings for the sake of Hyrule and the people she tries to protect. Revali snorting and spouting out something rude enough for Impa to silence him with a glare. Urbosa saying something about how she could try to channel her passion for research into the quest for the sacred sealing magic.

Around the campfire the Princess, her Knights, the Champions, and the Princess's shade sat. Link cooked them a hearty stew on the milk they had picked up from ranches along the road, the safflina that she had gathered while the girl with the golden hair prayed, and the fish that the girl with the sharks' teeth had caught from a pond.
Suddenly the girl with the golden hair clapped her fist into her palm. "I've got it!" she cried out, and all of her features seemed to smile at once with the flash of insight. Urbosa snapped her fingers in appreciation. Revali arched his eyebrows, muttering something about being plucked under his breath. Daruk made an ooh! noise and slapped his hands together. The red-scaled zora girl with the sharks' teeth clapped politely.

"You did?" Daruk boomed out. "Congrats, li'l lady! How—"

"I've got what we'll call the Divine Beasts!"

The party gathered around the campfire fell silent. Impa's expression remained impassive as ever. The girl with the golden hair did not appear to notice the disappointment and confusion. She continued onwards at a barrelling speed, her words flowing out of her mouth almost more quickly than she could finish speaking them. "We don't know how to read most of Loftean, but there are a few things that we strongly suspect. We think that the name Vah, as in the name of the great sorcerer Ti of legend, indicates something or someone that commands high respect in its use of magic.

"Since the Divine Beasts are supposed to have some form of sacred power themselves—something to do with the Sacred Realm, I think, not simply advanced technology or what have you—it would make perfect sense to refer to them as Vah, wouldn't it?" The girl with the golden hair bounced up and down on the upturned log. "Wouldn't it?"

Daruk opened his mouth and Urbosa placed a hand on his shoulder, prompting him to close it again. Revali yawned. Link watched him fluff himself up and tuck his head under his wing.

"There are four Divine Beasts, each in a corner of Hyrule: Lanayru, Eldin, Tabantha, and Parapa. At first I thought that we could name them after the regions, or perhaps the Goddesses. Yet as I started to look deeper into the archives, I found a suggestion that the names of the four great capitals of Hyrule have come from names of former Sages of their respective Goddesses. We'll use the declensions of each of the ancient forms of the languages most commonly spoken in those regions. Oh, I cross-checked against a variety of sources—" She tapped her fingers on the satchel around her shoulders, with its platoon of volumes marshalling a veritable army of coloured bookmarks. "—and have come up with the following names. For Darunia: Vah Rudania. For Medli: Vah Medoh. For Nabooru: Vah Naboris. For Ruto: Vah Ruta.

Link found herself dozing off. She understood nearly none of the girl with the golden hair's speech, yet the girl with the golden hair's sheer enthusiasm kept her awake. She rested her chin on the winged violet hilt of the blade of evil's bane.

When she squished her cheek against the wing and her ear against the cylindrical hilt, she could almost hear, faintly like a reverberation of a song far, far away, a light little laugh from the voice of a young girl.

The girl with the golden hair spoke without running out of steam. Link watched Urbosa gaze at her with an expression of genuine fascination, her chin propped up on her palms, her elbows on her knees, the fondness of her smile reminding Link of how often she had caught Marin looking at her pay that same curve of the lip. The girl with the sharks' teeth seemed to paid attention half out of interest and half out of sheer politeness, while Daruk rubbed his hand on the crown of his head. After a time, Daruk fell asleep. After a slightly longer time, the girl with the sharks' teeth tipped
forward. Her torso plopped into the dust of the ground.

Urbosa picked the girl with the sharks' teeth's unconscious form up to learn the Champion of Zola against her own shoulder. The girl with the golden hair scarcely noticed. Now she had begun smacking her research notes against her own knees. She vibrated fit to shatter apart into a thousand fragments that could take off into orbit from the sheer enthusiasm with which she went on.

"—and so I believe that what we refer to as Loftean may not actually have originated at the time of the Era of the Sky, but much later than that. Oh the true Loftean could be a language still older than that, perhaps the ancestor of the language we currently refer to as Loftean. On the other hand, some sources indicate that—"

At length Impa stood up. She collected the discarded plates from the slumbering party. "Your Majesty." The girl with the golden hair ignored her to continue on about the differences in various kinds of Loftean—that was the topic as far as Link could tell, though she did not know what Loftean even meant—and Impa gripped her shoulder.

"Your Majesty."

The girl with the golden hair's jaw snapped shut. She stared down at the ground between her knees. She apologised, quietly, and Urbosa thanked her for telling them so much, which in turn caused Impa to narrow her eyes at the Champion of Sageru.

Link offered to take the first watch, seeing as everyone else appeared asleep or close to it. The girl with the golden hair fell to slumber soon—after Impa caught her attempting to read a book in her tent, which the Princess's shade confiscated—and left Link, Impa, and Urbosa yet awake.

She remembers Impa snapping at Urbosa, who merely raised her eyebrows. The Champion of Sageru remarked, in a calm and even voice, that the girl with the golden hair not only deserved their fullest attention, but also that her speech provided the best soporific imaginable in times when waking nightmares robbed them of their sleep.

Impa did not laugh. Urbosa wagged her eyebrows at her and Link stifled back her own laugh to avoid awakening the others while Impa and Urbosa continued their dance of expressions. Eventually Impa bedded herself down to sleep.

Shaking her head, Link sticks her face into her cooking pot to lick up the last few droplets of the creamy stew.

When she tries to pull her head back out, she finds her chin stuck against the neck of the pot. She attempts to touch her chin to puzzle out a way for exit the pot without breaking her neck only for her hand to bang against the rim of the pot. She gasps.

*How can she think* if she cannot even touch her own chin with her hand?

Sand seal butter. The seal butter that she still has. Groping around for the cake of it in her satchel, Link rubs butter around her neck as best she can. When her own body heat does not melt the butter swiftly enough, she sets the pot—with her head still stuck in it—on the fire.

sweat drips from her forehead. The metal heats more rapidly than she anticipated. Grabbing the cooking pot-turned-deathtrap with her bare hands, she struggles to either free her head or else cook herself to death in soup.

Though Link cannot think of a better route of losing her humanity than becoming stew-manity.
Yet the butter works its fatty magic and her head pops out of the inside of the cooking pot with such vigor that the ground comes up to greet the back of her head.

She spreads out her limbs in the grass. The warm cooking pot bonks onto her stomach and rolls off to rest by her left side. Link inhales, pauses, and then with howls with laughter until her stomach hurts as much as the bruised-and-buttered band around her neck.

But for once the memory has proven more immediately useful: Lanayru. Ruto. The Divine Beast Vah Ruta.

Lanayru, somewhere south of the province of Ordona, and east of Necluda. From Necluda—from Kasuto—she need go east. East of Hateno, perhaps.

East, and east, and east, to find where rises the sun.

Link steams safflina for Ilia to eat. Warm safflina and electric safflina. Link tests them to ensure that the fire and shock will not hurt Ilia: heat-tempering the herbs together seems to reduce their elemental properties. Ilia slurps them up. Link rests her head against her companion's shoulder.

"It's good to see you again, girl," she signs. Ilia's ears flick back and forth. When she finishes off the safflina, she browses through Link’s hair, and Link unties her ponytail to give Ilia more hair on which to chew.

They travel onwards. From sand to steppe to grass, from just after the ides of spring to just before the start of summer.

At the topaz gate of Aveil, Link shows the altered pass—the new one that Nadyne and Vaike gave—to the guards. She explains honestly about the storm in which she found herself caught and the loss of her pass. The guards almost turn her away regardless.

And then another woman vouches for her.

Dyeri.

Dyeri, who has finished the contract with Rotana and Rhiaru. Dyeri, who has come to Aveil to work as hired muscle for some merchants in the gem trade. Dyeri, who has saved Link and Ilia's lives.

"Hey there, stranger," Dyeri says cheerily, tilting up her chin. "Don't know what you did with Savah Naboris, but I could swear by the Goddesses that you did good." She says nothing more on the matter and for that alone she has Link's eternal gratitude. "So. Want to come meet the folks I'll be travelling with? Depending on where you're going, we could walk together for a time."

Link nods her head. She feels for the slate at her right hip and the red telescope at her left, and she falls into step—or into hoof—beside Dyeri.

The sight of the wagon alone nearly brings her to tears, and of the sheikah and the zora women who await her within.

—

Creamy Seafood Soup (eight hearts) - armoured porgy, fresh milk, rock salt, warm safflina, voltfin trout

Author's notes: Link forgets the name of Vah Ruta for a moment there.

In *The Adventure of Link*, there's a location called Nabooru Town. There's a certain slumbering ache—normally an enemy—that, if awakened, will offer Link advice: "YOU ARE PERSISTENT/FIND HEART OVER OCEAN," referring to a heart container. In this case, Nadyne is mumbling about Lover's Pond, a location in *Breath of the Wild*, which is in southeastern Hyrule and can be reached by taking a boat from the ocean off the coast of Parapa to the coast of Faron (which is quicker than going overland). It's just something I threw in. Nadyne tried to go there once in search of a true love as is promised by the lore in-game (the pond is shaped like a heart in *Breath of the Wild*), but it didn't really work out for her, so she's resigned to being single.

Nadyne tries her best not to care but she got invested in Link's goings-on, not to mention that she did indeed end up following around Vah Naboris, since she promised she'd pick up the slate in case Link died. "To the coast and back again" refers to Riju walking Vah Naboris away and then eventually back to Nabooru.

Vaike can't read sign language, if you recall, hence the piece of paper.

Back to Ilia again! Link promised that she wouldn't leave Ilia by herself in the woods again, and she hasn't. It's to a stable for Ilia now. Very well taken care of and all.

The fish in question is an armoured porgy, which I think has a very amusing face (google porgy). The armour's pretty hard to get off, especially since the porgy are among the best ingredients for getting high-value effects.

The advice given by the Champions to Zelda is reminiscent of their advice to her in one of the memories of *Breath of the Wild*. Here's why the names of the Divine Beasts fit with the names of the villages, because Zelda did indeed name them.

The great sorcerer of legend that Zelda mentions is Vaati from *Four Swords, Four Swords Adventures*, and *The Minish Cap*. While his name is "Vaati", mistranslations over the years have rendered it "Vah Ti", which causes Zelda to mistake the "Vah" for a title of respect or power. Funny how language works eh? I should note that there's no actual magic in *Delicious in Wilds*, although there *is* access to the Sacred Realm, which is basically where stories of "magic" come from.

Poor Zelda. She has difficulties with "reading the atmosphere" when she gets excited about her research. She also has difficulties communicating her ideas in a timely fashion. Even the dossier that she gave to her own father is full of irrelevant information. She writes much like I do: far too much instead of getting to the point with simplicity. I wouldn't be surprised to know that no one has read this far, given that we're past two hundred thousand words of content. Perhaps Zelda should read up on Miyahon (the famous sheikah orator previously mentioned).

Each of the names of the Divine Beasts are essentially respectful declensions of the ancient versions of the languages.
Impa's title is indeed "the Princess's shade".

The whole sequence with Link getting her head stuck in her cooking pot is truly a comedy of errors.

You'll note that the faith of the Golden Goddesses has been kept the most alive in Parapa, as well as in the more remote areas like Hebra and Akkala, as part of the older faith before the Seven came to be, while Parapa has always looked more towards their past and history through the Sageru virtue of kin.

And hey, it's some people we haven't seen in a while! Remember a certain duo of travelling gem merchants? Yep. It's Misan and Glepp!

As always, thank you for reading and for supporting me all this time. And a round of thanks and appreciation for my beta reader, Emma, for endeavouring to communicate clearly with me. Next time: to Faron, and then to Lanayru!

midna's ass. 10 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: The scene with Zelda ranting about things is hilarious and adorable.

Link getting her head stuck is a prime bit of comedy. Truly, a comedy of errors.

Ilia is okay this time! No more of last Divine Beast's horse-related heart attack.

Emma. 10 October 2017.
Monster Rice Balls

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef, the jewel merchants, and the ex-whaler begin the journey from Parapa to Lanayru, while the chef recalls a fateful encounter with the former Champion of Zola, far before the Champion became the Champion.

Chapter Notes

As usual, comments that didn't make it into the box at the end: As always, the warmest of thank-yous to my readers at large and to my beloved beta reader, Emma, for everything that you and she have done for Delicious in Wilds and for my life, personally.

I normally don't do much self-insertion into my characters, but I did exaggerate my own love of rice (a staple in my favourite dish of all time) for Link.

As a reminder, when I use the words "communal" or "communion", I am not referring to the real-world religious connotations of "Communion", but rather using it in the literal "commune" sense.

Link is mute and thus her voice cannot carry words. She's capable of producing noise, however (we've seen her grunt and yell wordlessly before).

Hey, remember that monster extract? She's still had it all this time! Time to put it into good use.

Monster extract pumps you full of adrenaline and cortisol, so the memories that Link remembers from them tend to be action-packed.

You'll note that travelling with Glepp and Misan from Parapa from Lanayru will take over two months total, partially because it's slower than Link travelling in a straight line via horseback, since the wagon has to travel by roads.

Link really does see everything through food in terms of her connections to the world.

As a general reminder, Glepp is not mute; she uses sign language when Misan is around, because Misan is deaf.

The Zora River in Breath of the Wild has been renamed to the Zola River, as the patron deity of the zora is named Zola.

Monsters featured in this chapter include: mad scrubs from Ocarina of Time (deku are not sapient here); deku baba from Ocarina of Time; quadro baba from Skyward Sword; and snapdragon from A Link to the Past.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Glepp and Misan have for Link a thousand questions and she has for them a thousand recipes. The two seem similar to how Link left them, except for the matching opal earrings the two have taken to wearing. After bringing their load of sapphires to the Hebric cold to sell back to those sapphire farmers who waited for the jewels to once more infuse with the essence of ice, Misan and Glepp took a second load of sapphire; by Glepp's suggestion, they elected to try their hand at the road to Parapa instead of to Eldin. When Link asks if they have seen a travelling minstrel—a blue rito with an accordion—Misan claps her hands. Glepp notes that his music sounded wonderful, while Misan comments on his infectious enthusiasm for local history. It takes Link a thoroughly embarrassing second to remember why Misan says nothing of Kass's singing.

Now, in a wagon laden with spent topaz, the jewel merchants have begun to undertake the journey to Lanayru, where a particular stretch of monster-infested land has become the prime spot for foolhardy traders such as themselves to try and fail to capture some electricity in a much shorter time period than the usual method of waiting for Parapan thunderstorms to brew up.

Misan clenches her hand into a fist to pump it high into the air. "And we are nothing if not foolhardy traders!" A strand of her dark hair curls up over her head, and Glepp reaches over to smooth it down.

They inquire about the scars that Link has gathered in the months since Glepp and Misan saw her last. Link rolls her shoulders. She keeps herself clothed from the neck down, yet she bears a slash across her nose and above over her cheek alongside the pockmarks left behind by contact with the malice in Parapa and the long scar on her right cheek from the wolfos in Tabantha. Her hands show the signs of similar damage, the skin burned and scarred and molted, the fingers of her left hand slightly clawed from how tightly she has gripped the hilt of the blades she has used since leaving Eldin.

Link attempts to pull up her hood only to realise that she left her cloak behind in her escape from Nabooru. Glepp kindly grants Link one of her own.

When Link attempts to protest such a gift, Glepp shakes her head. "Make it up to me by cooking myself and Misan a delicious dinner."

Now that Link can certainly do. Not the chosen hero of the land once known as Hyrule, but its chosen chef.

To her eternal credit, Dyeri has absolutely no questions whatsoever for Link about the Divine Beast Vah Naboris. Instead Dyeri trades recipes with her. Link inquires about the fate of the two researchers—Rotana, who reminded her of the girl with the golden hair, and Rhiaru, squirrely and spry, who reminded her of herself—and Dyeri notes that they returned to Nabooru after the city's slight re-opening. Not fully, not yet. But, with the Divine Beast no longer rampaging to its south, the Queen of Parapa has started the process of renewal and of healing. And, it seems, she has opened Nabooru enough for researchers registered at the university to return.

Misan claps her hands in appreciation. "Aw, I hope Parapa will do better in the future!" She grabs Glepp's hand, squeezing down, and Glepp simply smiles.

Instead of living in a wagon of cool sapphire, they have rented one of wood and sealed in rubber, with the topaz waiting in a separate wagon from the one in which they sleep. Rather than Eldic ostriches, a pair of horses paws at the ground. Link touches her chin to consider how to handle Ilia. Misan suggests that Link can ride alongside them; Glepp remarks that they could hitch Ilia up to the wagon as well.
Link leads the two outside of the wagon to meet the horse in question. Misan embraces Ilia all over and wonders at her striking figure. Glepp hangs behind her in quiet contemplation.

Link rests her hand on her chin. If she could once more bring out Glepp's guffawing laugh, then that would be her first victory today.

Glepp proposes a compromise. Hitch up Ilia to the wagons now to ensure that the horse keeps apace with them while Link makes them all a meal—Link flushes at how readily they accept her presence as a cook: that alone coming from Glepp keeps her feet buoyant for the remainder of the day—and thereafter Link can ride Ilia if she so wishes.

Dyeri quirks her eyebrows. "Can't imagine anyone I'd trust more with the food." Giggling, Misan practically leaps into a sitting position around the table set out for the day, which will fold out into a bed at night.

"Go ahead; go ahead." Misan motions towards Link with an outwards wave of the hand. "We'll get moving after you finish making us something, eh?"

With a flourish of a salute that nearly lands her fist into Dyeri's face, Link apologises profusely and then moves towards the galley at the back of the wagon.

A touch on her shoulder. Glepp leans forward to whisper in her ear: "I mean no insult at all, but please...be more careful and less flashy."

Link blatches up to her ears. "I won't get any more food in Misan's hair. I'm sorry."

Glepp nods in understanding. She takes a step back, raising her hands to sign for Misan's benefit. "Thank you for the meal."

"Of course."

The zora woman follows Link into the galley to point out their supplies as Link touches her chin to consider what to prepare. When she notes a woven basket of rice, she seizes it with both hands. Rice. Rice. That delicious staple of the eastern realms of the land once known as Hyrule, used in everything from dishes with curry to risotto to pilaf to rice-balls. Her mouth waters with saliva; her eyes, with tears.

Oh rice. Precious rice.

Link hugs the woven basket to her chest. She twirls around the galley with it in her arms. She lifts it up to the heavens.

And then she sees Glepp's expression of shock.

Glepp plucks the basket from Link's palms. Opening a drawer, she brings out an entire sack of rice. "Feel free to use this to your heart's content. But please, leave that basket there be."

Link glances at the basket. She cocks her head to the side, and Glepp sighs.

"If you must know, that's rice that was thrown at a certain...wedding." Link notes the violet of Glepp's cheeks darken across her nose. "Misan and I collected some of it afterwards, to serve as a bulwark of memories. A keepsake of one of the happiest days of our lives."

Link blinks. "Whose wedding?" she asks.
Glepp brushes one of the opal earrings and says nothing. Link blinks again. With the tiniest smile Link has ever seen on the bow of her lips Glepp bids her the best of luck with making supper.

After travelling alone from Nabooru to Ache's Veil for the better part of a the late-spring month, Link can think of nothing better than sharing a communal meal.

Link raids the pantries. Her nose knows: what has spoiled and what she can still use, what has rotted away and what she could salvage through application of heat. When she uncovers two flat wrapped packages—she mistakes them for kerchiefs, but they unfold into black dried seaweed and dried strips of fish meat—she claps her hand into her palm.

Rice-balls.

Dyeri helps her fill the cooking pot with water from the pond. Link boils and condenses the water—cleansing it of impurities—before adding a pinch of rock salt. She washes the rice in the galley's washbasin just in case—not that she does not trust Misan and Glepp in general, but she trusts their abilities to keep the galley clean and tidy about as far as her voice could carry words—and then steams the rice in her cooking pot.

Once the rice has simmered for long enough; and once Misan has poked her head in to inquire if Link has drowned herself in the rice water or eaten so much rice that her stomach has exploded or suddenly found a lizalfos hiding in the pantry that has eaten her head off; and once Glepp has entered the room to pull Misan away by her ear, then Link removes the cooked rice from the pot. She pats the rice into circular balls and splits them in half. Forming depressions in the halves with her palms, she tears the strips of fish into small bits and bobs to sprinkle into the rice. Link fills each rice-ball, then finds the vial of monster extract in her satchel to dribble a droplet of violet into the very heart of each.

She could just make rice-balls. But this should make an impression to say the least.

With a flick of the hand that knocks at least one rice-ball to the floor—but not into anyone's hair! She's learning! She's learning!—Link presses the halves together to keep the filling within. She shapes each rice-ball into the form of a rounded pyramid. Wetting the tip of the seaweed with the salted water, she wraps a length around each of the rice-balls and smooths the damp end with the flat of her hand.

Link tries and fails to find seeds to add as garnish, and so she brings out the plate of rice-balls to the others. Misan grants her a standing ovation; Dyeri beams at her.

"You haven't tried it yet," Link protests after she sets down the tray.

Misan hoots in laughter, and Dyeri joins in, signing for her employer's benefit: "Don't need to. Swear by the Goddess, you've got one mean pair of cooking hands."

The tips of Link's ears go red.

She invites them to dig in. Before Link has even lifted her hands, Misan has snapped one up. Glepp follows suit, and then Dyeri. They praise the texture, the flavour, the construction. Link watches, and waits, and when the monster extract kicks in and her companions begin to sweat and Dyeri quietly inquires if Link has soughted to poison them, Link grins.

"Now that's a kick, eh?" Misan manages, following Link's explanation. She has started to jog in place. "I feel like I could suplex a whole moblin!"

Glepp excuses herself outside for some fresh air, and Misan follows suit with a mischievous grin.
Smirking, Dyeri sits back as sweat beads over her forehead to pop another rice-ball into her mouth.

"So then." Dyeri quirks her eyebrows. "Gonna try some yourself, trickster girl?"

She does.

Link raises the rice-ball to her lips. With the rice as a most delicious base to the savoriness of the dried fish and the hint of salt from the seaweed, the rice-ball would balance the perfect blend on the see-saw of texture to flavour if not for the monster extract body-slamming the fulcrum to flip the entire plate over.

That sudden jolt in her entire body, that need of fight or flight—

She remembers the smell of rice-balls. The scent of seaweed and raw fish and sticky rice and something slightly strong and salty and savory at once. Link followed the fragrance from her home at the outskirts near the woods to the heart of Ordon over the river that bisected the village. The village folk had emerged from their houses and come in from the fields to witness the seeming parade passing up the river, a parade of ships in a dazzling array of colours, populated by people with heads that resembled fish. She does not remember if she had before seen a zora, but even if one or two had passed by the village comprised mostly of hylians, she had never witnessed them in such quantities. The zora stood on the decks of the ships so wide that they could barely squeeze through the river and waved to the Ordoners. As the boats passed by—slow in the water—the zora handed out scales of fish and flowers of the water and all sorts of foodstuffs as presents.

Her sister had not yet entered the world, and Link had not yet abandoned her post at the house where the people in *that* house had set her to cook dinner, but nonetheless she could not stop herself from staring at the boats alongside the crowd. The food. The smell of food. Her entire world had squished itself down into a single primal thought that consumed her body and spit out a five-year-old beast of limbs windmilling to push through the crowd: food.

She wanted to try it all.

The other children in the crowd rode on the shoulders of adults or were carried in their arms. Not Link, who pushed and shoved and fought and clawed and carved up a trail between the stampede of legs, utterly lost in the forest of people far taller than she, tracking her promised land solely by the fragrance of food. She sprinted through an opening in the masses to pop out the other end.

Her momentum carried her forward into the river.

Into the space between one boat and another.

As she paddled in a panic to keep her face afloat, the water splashing into her mouth to choke her with the weight of five years of desperation, Link could see the boats closing in one another with herself caught in the middle. Her shout gurgled pathetically in her throat. She who had fought so hard just to try the food—

—suddenly felt something warm wrap around her. An arm around her middle, pressing her up against a slippery bulk that coiled and bunched with her rescuer's powerful strokes. She looked up.

A bright red shark swam just above her head.

Link screamed.

Water flooded her lungs. She kicked and she clawed and the whatever-it-was only held on more tightly.
The shore.

The shore of the river.

She shot out of the whatever-it-was's grip to crawl onto the shore and retch water from her stomach. She could not breathe.

*She could not breathe.*

Wet hands pumped at her chest. The water squirted up her throat and out of her nose. She started to cry.

And then Link smelled something delicious just under her nose. Salty and warm-y and fishy and rice-y.

Still sniffling she opened her eyes to find herself staring at a zora girl. A zora girl with scales of red and white, her too-wide mouth full of sharks' teeth, her frilled silver and scarlet suit clinging wetly to her skin. Link flinched away.

Then her gaze settled upon that which had drawn her nose.

A rice-ball.

The girl with the sharks' teeth held a rice-ball in her webbed hands. "Here," she said. Link blinked at her, hesitantly reached out an arm, and then recoiled back. Her gaze darted between the girl and the rice-ball.

"I won't hurt you. I promise."

Grabbing the rice-ball with both hands, Link stuffed it into her mouth. She swallowed it down all at once; the pain in her throat brought tears to the corners of her eyes. The girl with the sharks' teeth smiled kindly at her.

Link ogled her.

Her and that kind smile, a smile that Link carried with her in her heart through the days and the nights that followed.

She does not remember the chaos, not entirely. She remembers someone yelling out a name or a word that forced the girl with the sharks' teeth to bid Link farewell. She remembers the crowd pressing in on her, loud and hot and much too much. She remembers curling up on the ground.

She remembers—while the girl with the sharks' teeth gave her the rice-ball—the girl who smelled of horses watching her with narrowed eyes. Not from the crowd, but from the window of the mayor's house in the heart of the village. An expression as hard as the stone beneath Link's feet. And then the curtains closing over the window.

She remembers...

The girl who smelled of horses. The girl who smelled of horses, who had not always been her friend.

Link finishes the rice-balls. She washes off the plate and swears up and down not to ever cook with monster extract again without the express permission of her companions.

When Glepp and Misan set off, Link opts to ride on Ilia. Her most precious companion, for whom
she brings out the remainder of the rice, lightly salted. Ilia's ears flick back and forward as she eats. When she finishes off the rice-balls, she tickles Link's face with her tongue while Link laughs and embraces her, burying her face in Ilia's mane.

Ilia.

The girl who smelled of horses.

And her horse...her horse from a century ago who had borne a different name. Epona. Daughter of Sapona, the legendary horse of the Goddess Sageru.

"Who did I name you after, girl?" Link inquires. Ilia snorts her warm breath at her girl.

They ride. To the east and to the south rather than to the north. Link spends as much time outside of the wagon as she can to survey the land that she has not seen since she lost her memory. The grasslands give way to forest and then to a thick, lush jungle that has grown over the road. Spring showers have thickened to summer thunderstorms. Between rainier days, the sweltering heat that mounts day by day clings Link's clothing to her body and glistens Ilia's flank with sweat. The wagons' wheels stick in the mud. While Misan and Glepp work the wagons out, Dyeri and Link defend them from chuchu and keese, lizalfos and bushes that pop up out of nowhere to spit explosive seeds at them. Here and there grow blue or red plant-like monsters whose buds suddenly part into mouths split two or four ways to vomit out their acidic innards. At the very least the carnivorous plants stay rooted to the earth and can only snap at them from afar. Link waves at a far-away one of these flowers, the bud paler with a violet ruff of petals around its stem. The monster's jaws part. Link flashes the monster the curved-finger symbol for being all right.

Abruptly the monster leaps up on cucco feet to sprint right towards her, white-dagger teeth protruding from its maw.

Not all right.

Not all right at all.

A topaz-tipped arrow pins the monster to the earth. A second volley jolts it into stillness. Glepp lowers her bow; Link thanks the zora archer for her life.

The western shores of Lake Hylia bring Link to her knees in the sand. Along the shores a flower blooms, the petals red, the centre gold. The summer wind whispers waves over the waters of the lake and tinkles the blossoms into an undulating sea of gold and scarlet. She gathers the sea lily's bells into her arms. The sun-kissed scent she will never forget.

That evening, while they wait out the night on the lakeside, Link makes for Dyeri, Misan, and Glepp a creamy stew of voltfin trout and hearty radish, the sea lily's bells decorating their pic-a-nic on the shores. "Aw, Link, do these flowers mean that much to you?"

For once Link manages not a blank expression but a smile. "There was...this girl who adored them. And I...I love her very much."

Misan glances at Glepp, then back at Link, her features softened in fondness. "I understand."

Plucking one of the sea lily's bells, Dyeri leans over to tuck it behind Link's left ear. Link keeps herself from flinching back as the former whaler's wrist brushes against her neck. Dyeri beams cheerily at Link and winks. "Hey there. You better go back to this girl of yours when you're done then."
Link wipes her eyes on her undershirt sleeve. "She'd be furious with me if I met her again before I kept all my promises."

At that Glepp reaches over to take Misan's hand in hers, and Dyeri whistles appreciatively.

Link keeps the flower in her hair until it wilts away, as Marin once did years ago. The wilting does not bother her, but instead brings another promise: to come by Lake Hylia again, to smell the flowers, to remember.

As they travel, Link occasionally slips away to seek out a tower or a shrine. Each time she proposes to give up her commission, but Misan excuses her. "Aw, you've already proven yourself. Dyeri here's getting the bigger commission anyway. We're mostly paying you for the food."

Her gaze riveted on Link, Glepp puts a webbed hand over her mouth. Her shoulders go up as if to laugh.

And Link goes off.

She has no interest in the supposed trials of the hero; even if she were, she does not remember ever passing through the curtains of blue light prior to the Great Calamity: they cannot be meant for a hero. Yet the shrines intrigue her for the sheer delight of puzzling herself physically through whatever strange games the creators intended for her, whether honing her skills with attempting to hit moving targets—she frustrates herself to a point of cheating with stasis instead and laughs to herself all the way up the lift at her brilliance—or pacing herself through a genuine marathon of magnesis-pushing-and-pulling that leaves her desperately attempting to divine where the wagon has gone by the time she emerges, sporting a brand new scar on her left hip from a fire-light spear.

Upon each return, Misan asks excitedly of where Link has been, and Link speaks of the jungle and the streams and the monsters on her way there and back again.

Glepp raises her eyebrows to inquire about the contents of the shrines themselves. Dyeri shrugs and shovels food into her mouth.

They ride east.

Another jewel merchant they pass on the road—an enthusiastic if fumble-tongued goron—asks Link about her odd manner of speaking, about her outdated slang and archaic vocabulary. Dyeri pipes up that she's considered the same. Blushing, Link tries to stammer out a response; Glepp covers for her: "She speaks like one from before the Great Calamity, does she not?" The merchant nods; Dyeri touches her earlobe. "It stands to reason that she was taught to speak Central Hyrulean from the proper books scribed before then, does it not? She signs with the movements of a northeasterner, not one from Central." Dyeri and the merchant seem to accept her explanation. Link scratches the back of her neck: she has heard something like that before, and fairly recently, too, though she cannot quite remember where.

The sunrise sees the merchant depart. Link thanks Glepp with a bowl of carp fished out from forest rivers. Glepp nearly declines, her features oddly drawn, but Link protests until Glepp gives in.

They ride towards the sunrise that comes earlier every morning.

Only on the eastern half of Lake Hylia do Glepp and Misan begin the journey north. Past the Dueling Peaks, Misan explains with an energetic grin that Dyeri mimics in a beam of her own, and then up to the wetlands, and from there they will follow the Zola River. Link inquires if they plan to travel to Ruto. Glepp makes an X of declination with her arms crossed over her chest. Misan
bursts out laughing while Dyeri quirks her eyebrows. Tilting her head to the side, Link asks. Glepp coughs rather loudly for her usual quiet. Barely able to contain her mirth, Misan starts to assure Link that she need not worry at all, but Glepp places a hand on Misan's shoulder.

"I'm afraid that we will not. We will go as far up the road as where the electric monsters flourish, and then we will head back down before anyone who might be from Ruto recognises me."

Link blinks.

Misan eyes Dyeri. "Aw, you're not gonna ask, eh?"

The former whaler puts up her hands. "Not like it's any of my business."

They ride north.

The night after they run out of rice and Misan spends time reassuring Link—crying out that a lack of rice just isn't nice—that they will surely pick up more once on the eastern side of Hyrule, Link takes the shift upon the roof of the wagon while Glepp leads the horses. In the wee hours of the morning of the summer solstice, just before the end of her shift and her inevitable slip into sleep, she finds herself gazing at Lake Hylia, barely visible over the canopy of Faronese trees. She squints at a rain cloud that appears to move too rapidly for the wind. Lightning branches through the clouds. The rain splashes down upon the surface of the lake.

A liquid thunderbolt—a golden fluid—pours out of the rain cloud and into the lake. Just as suddenly the rain vanishes, and the night resumes its quiet slumber towards morning.

Link watches the lake a moment longer. Nothing emerges. She tips back her head back to gaze up at the new-moon sky, dark but for the stars. Some of the names come readily to her now, yet those stars account for less than a hundredth, no, less than a thousandth or a millionth or a some-big-number-th of the breadth of the universe.

The skies are very, very vast, and she is very, very small.

Yet the skies change ever so slowly in their annual dance across the heavens, while she can ride across the land once known as Hyrule in far less the time. Already in the past year-and-a-quarter since she has awoken in the Shrine of Resurrection so much has changed about her life that she would not recognise herself.

Though for all that has changed, the core of Link's being has kept, like a vase of honey that never goes foul: food.

No matter what happens, or where her feet take her, or where she rests her sword to sleep, the promise of breakfast that awakens her in the mornings and the warmth of a full belly that slumbers her in the nights will keep her moving forward. A meal alone or a communion with others; to share with her companions or to broker peace between strangers; hot or cold, sweet or sour, savory or bitter, salty or spicy, delicious or a work in progress.

Food.

Something that ties together everything that lives and breathes and thrives. Everyone has to eat, and everyone has their own feelings in their heart that they pour out in the food that they make. Link has never understood more of a person than she does in seeing what food they eat, and she has never felt closer than she has when she shares a meal with someone with someone across a communal cooking pot.
Cooking the ironshroom given to her by Yunobo—Yuno-yunobo, she signs to herself—or deliciously grilling rock roast with Daruk. Baking carrot cake by Amali's side—she prays that Koko and Cottla will find safety in the windchimes of Medli—or dragging an ice-box of sanke carp across half the kingdom to stuff fish pie for Revali. Grilling salted skewers with Riju—her nails dig into her palm until she feels a warm wetness staining her fingers—and frying bananas from Rovah for Urbosa.

All of the travellers on the road who have ever shared with her a meal or a recipe or even a scrap of food—travellers that she may meet once again or travellers that she will never see, merchants and traders and companions of dogs and riders of horses and everyone else with whom she has ever spoken.

The supper in her belly—monster rice-balls with the last of the rice and the last of the monster elixir, just as on the first night—warms from mere food to the laughter of life.

Link reaches up her hands to cup her fingers around the chalice of the moon. If one day she can cook monster and consume rock roast, then one day, too, will she drink silver light from the freshly squeezed moon. Perhaps the land was once known as Hyrule and is Hyrule no longer. For all of its names—Tabantha and Eldin, Parapa and Lanayru, Faron and Necluda, Akkala and Hebra—the land continues the tradition of deliciousness. And in the hundred years that she has slept, the people of the land have continued to innovate, have continued to cook, have continued to eat, all the foods from before and new ones besides.

She does not recall ever tasting the extract of monsters, nor does she remember all of the spices that she has had in her trips to Eldin or Tabantha or Parapa. The world has changed.

So has she.

The Divine Beasts, they can calm. The monsters, they can fight against. The Yiga, they can put to rest.

And then she can eat to her heart's content at the table of Romani Ranch with Miyu begging for scraps.

When she goes to bed after her shift, Link hugs the telescope to her chest, warming the engravings of the seagulls with her tear-dampened cheek.

—

*Monster Rice Balls* (fifteen hearts) - chillfin trout, hearty salmon, hylian rice, monster extract, rock salt

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: You'll see what the opal earrings mean, though I'm sure you can guess based on what you already know about the jewel merchants. I'm mentioned the topaz thing before. That said, there might be another reason why Glepp wanted to go down to Parapa.
Note here that Glepp and Misan indicate that they know about Kass and also know that Link knows about Kass. Misan, if you don't remember, is deaf. Misan and Glepp have never met Ilia before, since she was in the stable at Medigo during Link's first round of travelling with the merchants.

Time for Link to go on a pantry raid. Thank you; thank you; I'll be here all week.

The bulwark of memories is an accidental reference to *Bloodborne*.

Hey, I think that this is the earliest we've seen in Link's childhood. This is a memory from when she was five years old. I continue to use "she/her" pronouns for her, because Link has never exactly felt like a boy, and I have no interest in either misgendering or deadnaming Link. However it's notable that at this point in time Link hadn't yet come out as a girl, and that she was not yet using the name "Link". It's also notable that this is a memory from before she and Ilia became friends.

Because zora (like many aquatic creatures) have internal genitalia zora living in zora-majority areas typically wear clothing for decorative and comfort purposes (i.e. heating) rather than for modesty, which can lead to certain areas (such as the chest or groin) being uncovered. However, because all of the other races of Hyrule except for the koroks do not share this characteristic (the rito do not have breasts and do not cover their chests, but do have cloaca and thus cover their lower torsos), zora who live in non-zora-majority areas or who travel into non-zora-majority areas tend to adopt more covering clothing. In this case, the zora (Mipha) was wearing a red and silver dress somewhat resembling a scuba-diving suit (or an old-fashioned swimsuit meant to cover the body rather than to show off).

Remember that zora are extremely long-lived. Mipha was already an adolescent at the time of Link's childhood. This is supported in-game, by the way, during the memory about Mipha, wherein she says that she was surprised to see hylians grow up so fast. In *Breath of the Wild*, Mipha indicates that she knew Link as a child (saying that she would want to spend time with Link again as they did when Link was younger). Since zora grow very slowly (see Finley, who still resembles a child despite being older than most hylians), and since she expresses surprise at Link growing to adolescence, it would not make sense for Mipha to have also been a child.

Notably, Mipha is also *bigger* in *Delicious in Wilds* than she was in *Breath of the Wild*. Most of the zora are much bigger than Link, so I'm not sure why they made Mipha so small except to serve as one of Link's love interests. In *Delicious in Wilds*, zora continuously grow as long as they remain in water. This means that zora that spend their entire lives in water (such as King Dorephan) can grow to gigantic sizes with enough resources, because water allows bodies to counteract some of the size-limiting effects of gravity (this is why the largest animal on the planet, the blue whale, is aquatic rather than land-dwelling). Therefore, zora who have spent most of their lives away from water, such as Glepp, are in size more comparable to average human height; zora who spend more time in water, such as Sidon, will grow larger. Mipha is indeed smaller than most Lanayrish zora, but we'll see why later.

Link is so close to remembering the girl who smelled of horses's name (Ilia), but she just hasn't connected that memory yet.

Link's letting herself do shrines again, although she's notably avoiding those that are in villages and things like that.
I wonder why Glepp doesn't want to be recognised in Ruto.

We'll see more about the dragons later, though for Link just keeps seeing them in the distance.

Up next: the second half of the journey, and arrival to Lanayru.

midna's ass. 11 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: A road trip episode! This chapter is really cozy and fun. It kinda reminds me of the intro to episode three of Tales from the Borderlands, which is a good thing.

This chapter delivers two of the series' best funny moments, in "She's learning!" and "a lack of rice just isn't nice".

Emma. 11 October 2017.
Mushroom Risotto

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef, the jewel merchants, and the former whaler complete their journey to Lanayru, where the chef parts from the merchants to pursue the chef's own course.

Chapter Notes

Ahem, as usual, comments that don't fit: Thank you kindly to my most marvellous best reader Emma, for continuing to assist me with Delicious in Wilds despite life bearing down all too hard, and thank you to you, the reader, for sticking through.

You'll notice that the forty-fourth chapter was written on the fifteenth of July while this was written on the seventeenth. I was certainly having some issues.

The road-trip chapters are among my most favourite to write. One of the most fun chapters in the entire series (the sixty-fourth) is halfway one long road-trip chapter.

Stamella shrooms and endura shrooms assist with keeping up stamina, as they do in-game, with which makes them popular additives for labourers. It's somewhat similar to how coffee in the real-world is essentially a legal drug that enhances productivity (not only legal, but also expected).

Being able to tell what other species apart can be more difficult than you think. Research in human children in real life has shown that a "critical period" of learning facial features sets familiarity for minor variations in such features, such as the exact width of the nose or the relative height of the eyes. Then, the further that other human features are aware from this "familiar", the harder it is to distinguish them. This is comparable to, for example, the weighing of objects: one can tell the weight difference between an apple and ten apples, because these weights are within a "normal" range. But one would find it difficult to tell the weight difference between one bacterium and ten bacteria, or between one planet and ten planets, because the former is very very tiny, and the latter would crush one's hands. Regardless, this is part of why people growing up in homogenous environments find it more difficult to tell the difference between people of different ethnicities without practise (the other part is bias and discrimination). Thus, Link finds it more difficult to distinguish (by facial feature) zora compared to hylians, so she typically relies on major features such as scale colour, the shape of the head, and so on.

Link also has minor facial blindness, so she tends to rely on specific things (such as hair colour ["golden hair"] or hairstyle ["pigtails"], specific clothing like a green hairband or violet sash, or a particular characteristic like being associated with horses).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Up through the Finra Woods, then over the Farosh Hills and skirting around the Popla Foothills to
pass along the shores of Deya Lake. The ruins of the village in the shallower waters of the lake—the wood rotted away, the stone covered in moss, decaying tatters of fabric still waverling from the metal skeletons of flagpoles—draw her eye. Link lifts the red telescope to her eye. She watches several scavengers rummage through the remains of the village to pick out the innocuous: arrows and cutlery, plates and children's toys, what rags they can carry out. As they emerge from the village, Link notes the scavengers abruptly looking back, screaming, running.

She removes the red telescope. Her eyes widen.

From the heart of the village rises a living mountain of rock not unlike that which she encountered in the Great Plateau.

Link glides down from the roof of the wagon to inform Glepp, who looks over to the village with her hands tangled in the horse's reins. Her reddish third eyelid slides horizontally over her eyes. "Ah yes. The stone talus of Deya. What of it?"

"Will those people be all right?" she asks earnestly. "Should we go help?"

"The treasure hunters? They've already escaped."

So they have.

Already the stone talus lurches through the water to return to its resting place. It jumbles itself once more beneath the surface of the lake. Link rubs her eyes. Glepp chuckles softly.

Later Link inquires about the stone talus to Misan and Dyeri; Dyeri indicates she has only seen them by accident and with the Goddess's help she intends to remain that record. Misan giggles. "Aw, I prefer my adventurin' in the form of new food and new people. Not so much getting my face kicked in by a stone, eh?"

"Stone cold," Glepp says in turn; Misan nearly breaks down in laughter. She strokes Glepp's cheek with her knuckles. Glepp catches Misan's hand by the wrist, and the mirth softens to an affectionate smile.

Dyeri clears her throat. "I'll uh. Take the next shift," she says, then repeats herself in sign language. Link waves her good-bye and settles down at the table. Glepp and Misan look towards Link at the same time, Glepp's brow ridge raised, Misan batting her eyelashes. Link scratches her knee.

Dyeri, currently waiting in the doorway, coughs loudly. "Want to join me, Link?"

Link blinks. "But aren't you...?" She pauses. She glances at Misan and Glepp, who have scooted so close together that Glepp nearly sits in Misan's lap.

She blinks again, and then she stands up to follow Dyeri out. As soon as Dyeri closes the door, she doubles over in laughter, then stands up and sniffs back her mirth. "Swear by the Goddess, should've seen your own face, Link."

Link tilts her head. "I don't get it."

"Probably for the best." Dyeri reaches for the horses' reins, and Link takes watch from the roof.

The wagon shakes.

They continue north.
When Link—sitting on the bench beside Glepp, who leads the horses—once more recognises the slope of the land around the Squabble River, she wipes her eyes with her sleeve. Glepp pats her shoulder. By Link’s request, the well-travelled jewel merchant continues to name landmarks. Link records the names on her hand-inked map, unfurled from the parchment gifted to her over a year ago on the Great Plateau: Nabi Lake and its sister, South Nabi Lake, named as if some enterprising cartographer had wanted to break early for the day—though if the break were for food, Link could understand. Batrea Lake. Owlan Bridge and Horwell Bridge, which would take them to Central, and Eagus Bridge, which continues them further up east of the Floret Sandbar. Link excuses herself from the wagon to inspect the shrine visible on the sandbar.

Flowers upon flowers ring the shrine. As Link approaches, she notices a pale-skinned hylian woman walking the spiral with a watering can. Link steps towards the shrine only for a sudden shrill shriek to nearly jump her bones from her body. She twists herself around to find herself looking at the watering-can-woman nearly in tears, who begs Link not to step on her precious flowers.

Link rubs the back of her head.

She walks around the spiral more carefully. Yet the path between the flowers runs narrow. Stumbling into the flowers, she accidentally crushes one beneath her boots. The woman shrieks again. Link proceeds ever more cautiously, sliding her feet along the ground instead of lifting her legs.

She slips.

The tip of her boot brushes against a flower's stem.

In that second she hears the exact noise of the Great Calamity, the trumpeting of the end of the world, the sound that accompanies the apocalypse itself.

When she wakes up, Link finds a bruise in the shape of a watering can welting on her face. The woman brandishing the can in question towers over her and berates her for her despicable lack of care for plant life. Link sits up, then stands. She removes a piece of flint from her flint-pouch. While the woman continues to chide her, Link cracks the flint open on a patch of grass nearby.

The woman makes a choking noise in the back of her throat. "What by Hylia's wings are you doing?"

"Not stepping on the flowers," Link answers. She opens the paraglider and lets the updraft tosses her up into the air.

She glides to the shrine, enters, takes an easy ride down a current of water that becomes significantly less easy the instant she observes the waterfall that drops away into the abyss of the earth, ignores the instructions in a language she does not understand, and takes the lift back up with the screeches of the Great Calamity itself still ringing in her ears.

Link’s greatest challenge yet awaits her: navigating the spiral of flowers out without cheating through an updraft.

The Malice of the Divine Beasts could not end her. The Yiga attacking her on the side of the road could not end her. Not even the weight of one hundred years of the passage of time could end her. But here and now she has met her match: a woman with a watering can.

Under the hawk-like gaze of the hylian woman, Link attempts to shimmy up the shrine, yet the
slippery material eludes her.

She lands with her rear end smack dab in the middle of a patch of flowers.

Her life flashes before her eyes.

Huh. She really ought to eat meat that's neither fowl nor fish more.

When she wakes up for the second time, Link sports a second watering can-shaped welt on the other side of her head. At least the woman has dragged her outside of the spiral. The watering-can-woman starts to inhale, her reddened face an alarum for the yelling to come.

Before the woman can even begin to shout, Link grabs her belongings and makes a mad dash for the river.

She catches up with the wagon by a whistle for Ilia. Glepp merely arches her brow at Link's mirrored bruises. Around supper-time Misan, barely holding back her mirth, asks Link of which hot meal she fought for to receive such a walloping.

Link replies morosely that—for all of her scars—she has not even wrestled out a single ingredient.

They purchase goat butter from a travelling goron merchant in a particularly stylish hat and a strange violet mushroom from a rito woman who throws in a sudden performance of dance to sweeten the deal. Link pokes the purple mushroom with its star-shaped cap and white spores that reflect the light. Dyeri chips in: rushroom, that quickens the heart and shallows the breath. Not unlike monster extract, really, but while extract prompts a burst of stress and fire-or-flight, rushroom simply stimulates the body into quicker motion. Link sets the rushroom alongside those fungi that she herself has picked: red and orange speckled mushroom that grow through Central and Necluda, and pointed green-capped ones that she gathered in the Faronese forests.

Link touches her chin. Butter and rice and mushrooms.

She snaps her fingers.

Link prepares a thick savory broth on a pigeon that Dyeri caught that morning. Buttering the bottom of her cooking pot, she picks out rushrooms, stamella shrooms, and hylian shrooms of approximately equal size, then slices each in half. Link scoops the mushrooms into the melted butter. She stirs until the mushrooms softer. Chopping up onion and garlic for taste, she butter-fries them in a shallow saucepan, then adds rice. Link watches the rice absorb the butter in its slow transformation from nearly translucent white to a light-tinted yellow, and then she pours in a fraction of the poultry broth. She stirs, and stirs, until the broth has seeped into the rice to stain it a darker gold, and then adds another fraction of the broth until the softened rice cannot hold anymore. Then Link strains the remaining broth from the rice. She drinks the leftover broth down herself; the fatty-salty liquid proves too rich for her, and she struggles to keep it down, but a spoonful—by which she means three giant handfuls, but handfuls in which she traps a spoon between her thumb and forefinger—of rice helps settles her stomach. Adding the fried garlic, onion, and rice into the cooking pot alongside the buttered mushrooms, she stirs again. A sprinkle of salt and a touch more butter gives the mushroom risotto a loving golden sheen. She arranges the mushrooms to form a smiling face in the food. Touching her chin, Link admires her own handiwork.

But the smiling face would leave the risotto less well-mixed.

Besides—she reflects to herself as she stirs the mushrooms back into the rice—the important
smiles are not those that she could represent with her lack of artistic ability, but rather those that the meal draws out from the people who eat it.

Link brings the risotto out to the others. The wagon comes to a screeching halt as everyone piles on in to feast on the mushroom risotto. Even Dyeri, who admits that mushrooms beyond zapshrooms do not exactly constitute her favourite food, notes that, in the butter and rice, the heart-quickening sparks of the rushroom and the low enduring burn of the stamella shroom make for something delicious.

Controlling her initial instinct to simply eat out of the cooking pot with her own two hands, Link scoops some out into a bowl for herself with the ladle Cremia gave her some four months ago. She sits cross-legged on the floor. No cutlery, no problem: the salty-spiced butter leaves her hand all the better for the licking.

Mushroom risotto.

She has prepared this before. For herself. In the dark of the early morning when she alone lay awake in the house on the outskirts of the village.

Not on rushroom, but on stamella and on golden endura, to help her with the fatigue of her work.

The butter of the goats that they purchased from the goron cannot compete with the butter of the goats she recalls from her body's...from her childhood. The Ordon goats, with their horns curving upwards into a connected halo over their heads. Before becoming a courier, she worked as a child in the ranch, herding goats some three or four times her own size. The owner of the ranch hesitated at hiring her, but she begged despite her six short years.

The other ranchhand, a stout lad of sixteen years, asked her: why not play with the other children her own age? She kept her reasons to herself. The girls who shunned her and the boys with which she had no interest. The desire for something she could do with her hands during the day to sleep instantly at night. To bring back something to the house to avoid that word.

That word.

Burden.

That word.

The girl who smelled of horses came often by the ranch though—Link gathered—her father wanted her to do anything but. She would pet the horses—sometimes the goats as well, but mostly the horses—and offer to help with the work, which the owner of the ranch always had to refuse. "You gotta stop coming here, miss," the owner said, lifting up a towel to wipe sweaty from a glistening brow, "or your papa'll have my hide over his fireplace in two shakes of a goat's tail."

The girl who smelled of horses glared at Link whenever she happened to approach, and Link learned to stay as far away as she could when the girl who smelled of horses swung by with carrots or pumpkin or salt. Link would hide in the field with the goats or at the back of a stall or up in the rafters—she would need the help of the ranchhand to get down from how tightly she clung to the wooden rafter—and watch the girl who smelled of horses stroke the horses, brush and clean their manes, feed them fresh foods that she herself had steamed.

When the girl who smelled of horses caught Link in the stable, she would turn around and push Link into the mud, if Link were lucky, and the manure, if she were not. The girl who smelled of horses would fold her arms across her chest, would glare at her, would thrash out her arms to make
her words. "You don't know how good you have it!" the girl who smelled of horses would yell. Her hands would tremble at her sides in fists until she clawed her fingers back to form the words Link could barely read off of her hands. "Papa won't even let me—"

She remembers the girl who smelled of horses's father stalking the path up the ranch with fury hardening his expression and his hand raised.

She remembers looking away.

She does not remember exactly where and when Link and the girl who smelled of horses had become friends.

Before Aryll. Before Aryll was born, the girl who smelled of horses and Link had become friends, and after Aryll was born, Link had met Marin.

She does not remember how they became friends, but she does remember realising that the girl who smelled of horses had never played with the other children of the village either. She remembers the girl who smelled of horses apologising to Link, with her forehead against the floor for how foolish she had been. She remembers herself stepping back, her hands covering her face, shaking back and forth at the suddenness of the attention.

She remembers sneaking into the girl who smelled of horses's room at night through the window of her house, quiet as she could to avoid the attention of her father. She remembers waiting for the peddlers to come by the village with books and scrolls hidden among their rags and utensils and ink and wax and various doohickeys so that Link could line up and purchase or trade for the books that the girl who smelled of horses's father had forbidden her. She remembers the girl who smelled of horses hiding with Link in the closet, signing in one another's hands in the darkness, while the house quaked beneath the weight of the anger and desperation that pressed against the walls and exploded from the windows to swallow the house and all of its inhabitants whole. She remembers cooking.

She remembers cooking.

She remembers how frequently they cooked together. Breakfast and dinner and supper. Yes, she cooked for her household, and the girl who smelled of horses for her father. But mostly they cooked for themselves. Mostly they cooked for the fragrance of food from the skillet or saucepan, for the deliciousness of the recipes and techniques they learned from books, for the new recipes that they would make up and try out and make funny faces at each other and laugh and laugh at the joy of life.

The girl who smelled of horses taught Link how to shrug off the blows of life and she taught the girl who smelled of horses how to laugh at the simplest pleasures. The joys of cooking and other methods to cope.

She remembers—

Her name.

She had not known herself as a girl then, and the villagers had called her a different name. Not Link. Link, she came up with on her own.

Well, almost on her own.

The girl who smelled of horses. The girl who smelled of horses who had listened with eyes wide when Link returned from Lon Lon for the first time to tell her of the elixir in spring green. The girl
who smelled of horses who had encouraged her, who had rebuffed her fear, who had told her—if it
could make her happy, then *that* mattered, and not what those who already pushed Link to the
ground might say. The girl who smelled of horses who had broken out all of the books that she and
Link had collected together in their search for a different name than the one that they—the people
in *that* house—had given Link, the name that had never sat right on her body, wrapped around her
form like the papery shell of a corpse around the Malice instead of her own skin.

The girl who smelled of horses who tossed out the name of every heroine who appeared in any
story. The girl who smelled of horses who offered the names and epithets of the Goddesses, of the
stars, of characters of fiction and folklore. The girl who smelled of horses who lay patiently under
the blanket with her the entire night, signing their words into one another's palms.

The girl who smelled of horses who told her that she linked Ordon to the rest of the world, that she
linked the people of the village to the forests of the wilds, that she through her kindness had linked
herself and the girl who smelled of horses together. That one day the girl who smelled of horses
would accompany her—when her father no longer watched over her as a hawk watched the
fieldmouse—to see the entire world—

"*Link,*" signed the girl who smelled of horses.

And she, the girl with no name, blinked in confusion in the darkness.

"*What about that name? What about...Link.*"

Link.

She remembers intertwining her fingers with the girl who smelled of horses's. She remembers
hugging the girl who smelled of horses so tightly that Link herself could not breathe. She
remembers clinging on to her, the one anchor Link had in this world in those early years in Ordon.

She remembers the girl who smelled of horses laughing and hugging her back and signing the *I
love you* into her back and the *but you'll come back right?* and the *I'll be waiting for you, Link* and
the *you're my best friend, you know* and the *there's no one I would rather be with than you.*

She remembers. When she promised Marin to take her around the land once known as Hyrule,
when she talked of Aryll coming with them, she spoke, too, of the girl who smelled of horses.

She remembers that. She remembers the girl who smelled of horses who gave Link her name, and
yet she cannot remember the name of the girl who smelled of horses.

She cannot remember.

No matter how desperately Link treads the water of her memories, no matter how desperately she
pushes herself through the lake, no matter how she—no matter how she—she cannot—she cannot
remember—she—

Her wrists sink into the cold wetness. The water splashes over the backs of her hands.

"*Link? Hey there, Link. Hey there.*"

Dyeri.

Dyeri's form resolves in the centre of Link's vision. Misan and Glepp flank her on either shoulder.
Glepp's hands. Glepp's webbed hands around her wrists.
She glances down to find her fingernails smeared in blood. Excusing herself to the galley, she washes her face with water. In the light pink swirl of the washbasin, Link can see the marks along her either jaw, the three deepest just under her ears, one smaller along the centre of her cheek, and the mark left by her thumb tracing a curve down the side of her throat.

Already the shallow wounds have ceased to bleed.

Link turns to leave the kitchen. Misan leans against the frame of the door. "If you ever want to talk about anything, you can tell me, eh?"

Link rubs the back of her head. She bows the upper half of her body to gaze at the ground. She waits.

In the slight reflection of the polished wood of the wagon floor, Link can make out Misan signing words of comfort and encouragement. Link does not move.

Misan quits the galley.

Link does not, but begins to prepare another meal. Not risotto.

Not anything with rice.

The day after, she inspects her face in the water of the basin, in the circular rim of her beloved cooking pot. The marks left by her thumbs and her little fingers have faded, while those of her ring, middle, and forefingers have scabbed over. Link busies herself making a breakfast of eggs stuffed with mushrooms.

Neither Dyeri nor Glepp nor Misan question Link about the outburst; she does not hurt herself again, intentionally or otherwise. Instead she spends her time on Ilia's back, whistling, whistling, whistling, as though that thousandth whistle could dislodge something in her head to let her remember the name she seeks.

She met Ilia—Ilia, who responded to the sound of the whistle that the girl who smelled of horses had taught her—in the plains near Kasuto. Somewhere there. Link could travel to Ordon as she did to Romani Ranch. She could ask. She could—

She does not know what she might find, but no longer does she feel that slow thudding of terror at what might lurk in her memories.

After the Divine Beast. After the Divine Beast Vah Ruta. While she finds herself on the eastern half of Hyrule, before she returns to Medli, Link will try, and she will see, and, no matter what she finds, she promises herself that she will carry on to Medli as she promised Dorian she would. No matter what.

They ride on.

A few zora here and there on the trail ask Misan where the wagon intends to go—Glepp always hides whenever they pop up—but leave them alone after Misan introduces the party as a group of merchants. Link possibly recognises one, but she cannot recall for certain where. And so she shrugs and continues sitting on the roof in anticipation of monsters.

They come to the mountains of Lanayru that, somewhere up in the heavens, lead to the snows of Mount Nayru, named for the Goddess of Wisdom Herself. Glepp tells Link that some say the Goddess Din rose the mountain from the land in honour of Her fellow Goddess, while others
believe that, when the Goddess—having flowed the water into the oceans—soared up into the skies, the water followed Her and froze in the chill to form a summit of ice. Still others hold that the Dragon Naydra, messenger of the Goddess Nayru, slumbers within the mountain as Her chrysalis.

It begins raining.

It does not stop raining.

The wagon teeters on the thin band of land between the darkly glimmering mountains to their left and the rushing rapids of the River Zola on their right. Link closes her eyes to listen to the rhythmic roar of the water swollen by the constant rain that has followed them for days like a persistent shadow.

She lets go of Ilia's reins to allow her companion to take the lead.

Link trusts Ilia more than anyone to keep her safe on the road.

At the fork between the road towards Akkala and the path towards Lanayru, Misan stops the wagon. Link continues to trot forward on Ilia for a few paces before hearing that the ground beneath Ilia's hooves has become much rougher. Looking forward, Link ogles the rubble that covers the path to the ornamented blue-grey bridge across the river, as if an entire chunk of the mountain peak had cascaded off down the mountainside to crash into the road. She spots—across the river—a team of zora working to clear the rocks. Her red telescope reveals a particularly tall zora sitting on top of the bridge with an expression she cannot place. Red, with a head that reminds her of a shark.

A zora with sharks' teeth.

For a moment her eyes widen, but Link wipes the rain from the lens of the telescope and looks again. Then she shakes her head. Not the girl with the sharks' teeth. A different zora, albeit one that bears a great resemblance to the girl with the sharks' teeth. Or perhaps Link simply has difficulty distinguishing zora if not for their colour and shape of head.

She backs Ilia up to the wagon to find that Misan, Glepp, and Dyeri have all exited the wagon to look at the rubble, although the taller Glepp has squatted down to hide behind Misan with a rubber umbrella in her webbed hand.

"Aw." Misan sneezes into her scarf. Glepp holds the umbrella higher. "This here's the only path until we have to go straight over the mountains. And we can't caulk the wagon across the river either, eh? Not with it going so fast."

"And with the constant rain," Glepp observes, "transport over said mountain would be even more difficult than usual." She shrugs. "I suppose we have to turn back."

"Aw," Misan repeats. She claps her hands against her cheeks. "Dyeri, Link, any ideas?"

Dyeri tugs on her right earlobe. "Still get commission even if we can't bring the topaz all the way?"

"Your commission would be zero then, eh?" Misan answers with a grin. Dyeri leans back, tapping her fingers against inner forearms, and Misan deflates. "Aw, I'm not that cold. It won't be the full commission, but I can pay a little to compensate. Or you can come with us to Parapa and help us with the topaz there, eh?"

Dyeri beams cheerfully at that. They begin to strike out their terms. Amid the hubbub of bartering
for commission percentages, Link gathers her few belongings. In exchange for the ingredients that she has provided from her own satchel and gathering, she considers it fair to pour for herself out a small portion of rice. She has so many rice-balls and curries and risottos and thick stews yet to make. Link could eat rice for every meal of every day and never tire of the texture over her tongue, the most incredible stock for virtually any dish.

Most compare innovation to sliced bread. But she, to cooked rice.

She checks on her stores of spring green elixir. Enough yet for two months. After that she'll need to head back west, or find someone else who knows the recipe.

But two months should comprise enough. A month, perhaps, to reach Ruto—or less—and then a day or two to find the Divine Beast Vah Ruta and to attempt to discover to whom she can give the slate.

Though already Link feels in her gut that she has evolved from a mere *escort* to the slate to she capable of calming the Divine Beasts herself—or at least physically aiding the pilots.

Or perhaps she always already was.

And if the Golden Goddesses smile down upon her, then maybe the Lanayrish, too, have their own such elixirs, spring green or otherwise.

And if the Golden Goddesses smile down upon her, then for certain the Lanayrish will have their own dizzying array of meals and dishes and snacks and appetizers and desserts and beverages; Link practically falls over at the mouth-watering thought of cuisine in all of its glory.

A creak at the doorway prompts her to turn around; she finds Misan leaning against the frame. "Aw, you're going up to Ruto, eh?"

Link nods. "Do you have plans after that?" Glepp inquires, poking in her head from behind Misan. "Perhaps, one day, we could yet travel beside one another again."

Link taps her index fingers together as Yunobo would have. "Have you...heard of Ordon? In Ordona? I'm looking for it."

Glepp can only shake her head, her gaze strangely distant. "If I discover anything of its location, I will be sure to pass on the message if I can."

Link nods in gratitude; Misan nudges her in the ribs. "Ordona, eh? You sure are a mobile traveller." Her gestures carry nothing but kindness. "Take care of yourself, eh? If you're so banged up next I see you I'll have to put you to bed for a week!"

Link smiles sheepishly. Misan pretends to box her around the ears. She searches through the pantries to offer Link a thousand and one ingredients to take with her on the road. Rice and dried seaweed and flakes of various fish and vanilla extract and sugar and dried fruit less common in this part of Hyrule and Eldic spice carefully preserved from their last visit to Darunia and various spices that they picked up in Parapa and flour from Tabantha and cool safflina from Hebra and even some frozen crabs in an ice-box if Link wants them. "Well, it doesn't provide as much companionship as its unfrozen variety," Misan notes with a smile, "but at least it won't spoil or run away."

Link considers the weight that she has already put onto Ilia and politely declines the extra companion, though she accepts the rest.
She says good-bye with her own variant of Symin's sunny-bird on rushroom rather than on sunshroom. The trio of companions praise her once more. When Link's face flushes at the compliments, Dyeri, beaming, leans into to say that although the topaz trail proved a bust, she doesn't regret signing on to the wagon one bit for the sake of eating Link's cooking.

"Not the most professional I've ever had," Dyeri admits, while Glepp translates for Misan. "But swear by the Goddesses, your cooking's got a touch of the wilds themselves."

Link steams so hotly that she could keep the rushy-bird warm on her own cheeks. Retiring to the kitchen to avoid setting herself on fire—no curry needed this time—she chops up and steams a similar meal—without the meat—for the horses as well. "Fly fast and fly safe," she signs to them as they crunch on stamella. "Keep Glepp, and Misan, and Dyeri safe, and yourselves, too."

The horses neigh at her. Ilia neighs back at them. As Link extends an arm to pet one of the horse's ears, Ilia intercepts with her nose in Link's palm. Her companion lowers her head so that Link's fingers slip to Ilia's ears. Link hugs her companion fiercely.

"Don't you worry, girl. We're going up to Ruto together. I'm not leaving you behind. Not this time."

Link fashions a grasswhistle. She tests the notes along the blade of grass, then whistles Epona's song for Ilia. Ilia flicks her ears forward. She whinnies along the rhythm of the music; Link wraps her arms around her beloved companion's neck.

Misan hugs her before they part ways, and Glepp asks Link where she plans to go in Lanayru and how long she plans to stay, her Lanayrish advice helpful as any Link has received. Dyeri offers Link a spot at her table in Ache's Veil whenever she wants—as long as she promises to cook—and Link, tapping her index fingers against another as Yunobo would, remarks that Nadyne blacklisted her from ever going whaling again.

Dyeri snorts back a laugh. "Not everyone in Ache's is a whaler."

"Sorry."

She pats Link on the head. "Take care of yourself, kiddo."

Standing beside Ilia and leaning on her flank, Link waves to the wagon as Misan leads the horses back down the path. Misan and Dyeri, sitting on the roof, wave back to her until they disappear out of sight. She turns herself back towards the fork in the road with the rubble strewn across the path.

The carved stone sign sparks within a light blue glow, so similar to the colour of the guardians' fire-light and the sword that seals that darkness that Link takes a step back. She reads the inscription carved into the luminescent stone: Inogo Bridge, marked with an arrow to the right, and Ternio Trail, marked with an arrow to the left.

"Ready to start climbing over rocks, girl?" Link inquires, reaching up a hand to stroke Ilia's chin. Ilia noses into her palm with a warm exhalation, and Link smiles. "Always ready, aren't you?"

She looks back at the sign to avoid dragging Ilia across half of the land once known as Hyrule only to discover she has gone the wrong way the entire time.

She blinks at the sign she knows how to read.

Not in Necludan, or in Central Hyrulean.

In Lanayrish.
She can read Lanayrish.

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*Mushroom Risotto* (four hearts) - goat butter, hylian rice, rock salt, rushroom, stamella shroom

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Since most of the actual treasures have been stripped, treasure-hunters generally look for anything that they could peddle or sell; rag-peddlers strip off whatever fabrics, curtains, rugs, etc. they can to sell to those making clothing and so forth.

Link's not too good at reading the atmosphere, but she's also not naive. The "I don't get it" was in reference to Dyeri's comment, although Dyeri mistook what Link was asking about. Glepp and Misan are indeed a couple.

The flower lady here is a character from *Breath of the Wild*, who is similarly obsessed with the flowers in the side-quest "Watch Out for the Flowers". Try to step on the flowers three times and see what happens! There's a tree right nearby the shrine from which you can glide down, if I remember correctly, or you can make your own updraft as I did.

I had quite a few issues with the shrine here as Link ended up in the water on a quarter-heart (I was playing on three hearts and did not let myself eat just anywhere), so it was a heart-pounding few moments of frantically trying to use cryonis to stop Link from dying.

The goron merchant in a stylish hat is a reference to such merchants from *The Wind Waker*. The dancing rito merchant is a reference to myself pulling things out of my ass.

Link typically eats rice with her hands. Many people do, although it isn't too common in the United States, for example. I find it rather convenient myself.

Poor Link. "It's fucked up for a six-year-old to have to work." Yes, that's so. It does happen though.

Ordon goats, again, are from *Twilight Princess*.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Link and Ilia haven't always been friends. Ilia doesn't know Link's story. From Ilia's point of view, getting to work in the ranch near the horses she loves is a fairy-tale-come-true; Ilia doesn't realise (she's six years old) that Link isn't exactly volunteering by choice. Ilia's anger at Link isn't justified in the slightest. Well, her anger at her father is justified, but certainly not her lashing out at Link. Ilia does apologise, as you can see.

Link and Ilia were both outcasts in a sense; Ilia, as the mayor's daughter, was forbidden books about the outside world because she was to be groomed to lead the village, a position she did not want. The mention about the hiding while the house
quaked is in direct reference to the memory in the seventeenth chapter ("Steamed Fruit").

Here’s how Link got her name! "The people in that house" refers to Link’s parents, of course.

The cold wetness, of course, is Link’s own blood. She, well, kind of had a miniature breakdown here, I suppose, about not being able to remember something so clearly important to her and clawed her nails down her face. I suppose it’s not something easily understandable unless it’s happened to you before.

The zora merchant whom Link recognises is the zora that Sidon sent out to try to find a hylian, who has since defected under the assumption that such a hero will never come, to become a merchant.

And hey, it's Link's first contact with Sidon!

Link informs Glepp and Misan about her intentions to go to Ordon, although Link doesn't actually know where that is. And the fact that such well-travelled merchants have never heard of Ordona...

Misan's comment about the frozen crab as providing less companionship is a nod to the actual in-game description of a frozen crab.

The "rushy-bird" is Link's renaming of Symin's sunny-bird that Link learned back in Hateno.

Ilia was jealous of the attention Link was giving to the other horses. Even horses have personalities, you know. Compare and contrast Epona, who is calmer and quieter in the memories, while Ilia is flightier and more skittish.

Being able to read Lanayrish is significant because while Link knows how to speak conversationally in many languages, she does not know how to read or write that many. She knows how to read Necludan, Central Hyrulean, Lanayrish, and one other that you might already be able to guess, because these are the languages that she has spent actual time with.

Up next: meeting Sidon! I've altered him slightly from how he is in-game. Will you be able to see the difference?

midna's ass. 12 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: More roadtripping! Did I mention that I love that?

The flower lady is hilarious, both in game and here. I'm so glad the author decided to include her. This chapter also illustrates yet another thing I love about Breath of the Wild, which is how many different solutions there are for things - I got into that shrine a totally different way than is depicted here.

Emma. 12 October 2017.
Crab Omelet with Rice

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef meets the Lanayrish prince, who requests that the chef undergo a trial of an electric gauntlet to pave the way to Ruto.

Chapter Notes

As usual, that which would not fit: Thank you to you, the reader, for your truly incredible ability to power through my long-winded chapters. No thanks given to my beta reader on this particular chapter.

This is a slow chapter mostly spending time on introducing Prince Sidon and on expanding the memories. The next chapter's a lot more fun (and rather painful for poor Link).

It's Prince Sidon's first actual appearance!

You can actually get your horse up to Zora's Domain in-game. Specifically, you can get your horse up to the long bridge, where the horse won't want to walk, so you'll have to force your horse forward. Then there's an invisible wall right at the steps leading up to the city proper that you can't cross. But you can bring your horse all the way up to there. I did it by following the river up to the Bank of Wishes, felling trees to make bridges across the water, since horses can actually walk along trees if you're careful.

The epithets "the King Zora" and its spin-off "the Prince Zora" are references to A Link to the Past. In Breath of the Wild, the king is named Dorephan. However, Lanayrish zora culture prefers the whole over the one, as in that the community is more important than the individual. To that end, zora who ascend to become the king/queen are stripped of their personal name and simply referred to with the title "the King Zora"/"the Queen Zora". "The Princess Zora" and "the Prince Zora" do not necessarily have to give up their names, and the title of "the Prince Zora" and "the Princess Zora" have arisen from people trying to mimic "the Queen Zora" and "the King Zora" by convention rather than from the "community over individual" tradition.

As I made the rito more bird-like, so too did I make the zora more fish-like, capitalising on the stark differences between humans and fish. In doing so, I without really meaning to made the zora much more monstrous than they are in-game, what with the giant mouths and all of that.

Cultural concepts of personal space differ from culture to culture. In the real world, for example, Slavic cultures tend to have much smaller "bubbles of personal space" than does white middle-upper-class culture in the United States. Even in the United States, different social groups in different locations have different concepts of personal space. Not all zora share these ideas of personal space, but Lanayrish zora from Ruto are very touchy-feely.
Hand-signing is similar but slightly different from regular sign language, as hand-signing cannot rely on locations compared to the body or in movements of the arms. Now, why might Sidon require Link to hand-sign?

The messengers of the Goddesses are depicted as winged birds most of the time, called "loftwing" or "fokka", among others, depending on the legend and the people at hand. According to the Erito faith, Erito shaped the rito in the image of these heavenly messengers and blessed them with aspects of all traits of courage, wisdom, and power; for this, the rito do not consume other creatures that resemble the messengers. The zora have no such creation myth and have absolutely no qualms about eating fish. Indeed, they are omnivores with a high preference for meat; the most devout zora have their own dietary restrictions of only eating that which is harvested from the water, for the water gives them life.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ilia does not budge.

Taking her over the rubble cascaded from the mountains of Lanayru—the rock glimmers in the darkness as though spun of the night sky—becomes a greater challenge than protecting the wagon from monsters. Not that monsters do not delay the voyage: blue-green octoroks floating in the river despite the quickness of its current peek out from the water to spit rocks dredged up from the riverbed at Link and Ilia; small greenish beetles with carapaces the same light-speckled dark of the stones shoot out from under loose rocks to knock Link from her feet. Fortunately a single dose of the most popular medicine for such monstrous maladies—a swing of the sword—makes short work of the beetles, while a well-aimed rock or—when she loses her patience with the octoroks' seemingly prescient abilities that far outpace even the advanced technology of the guardians—a single arrow rids her of her frustrations. Link leads Ilia forward step by step. Her companion neighs and paws at the ground and stamps her hooves down every time she slips on the wetted stone. Slowly they make progress forward. Then clap of thunder scares Ilia back, and Link pinches the bridge of her nose.

She does find an abandoned bird's nest amid the rubble. One of the eggs has cracked, its contents already picked clean by animals, but the other three remain intact. She slots them into the ingredient box in her satchel.

Link hurries on.

Though the journey takes time—and bruises, and occasional cuts where Link trips or slips or is felled by a beetle onto the rough rock that skins her left palm and part of her cheek—she can see the far end of the pile of rubble, just before the bridge.

The zora attempting to clear the path call out to her. Link waves at them. She wets her fingers—shaking her head at herself, since the rain has already dampened her skin far beyond what her mouth could do—and whistles.

When she finally convinces Ilia to cross the last few paces, two of the zora in the cleaning party approach to meet Link. One—dark cyan with the head of a ray—inquires if she has come to answer Prince Sidon's summons. The second—yellowish-green with the head of a koi fish—invites her to the bridge.

Link stares at them. Overhead, thunder booms. Retrieving her paraglider, she sets the rubberised
fabric upon Ilia's head, halfway between a parasol and a hat. The paraglider hangs off of her companion's head at a tilted angle. Link laughs. The zora ask her again.

"Prince Sidon?" she repeats, emulating the motions of the koi-headed-zora. The two rubble-cleaners glance at one another.

A prince.

A prince.

Link reflexively touches the slate at her right hip, curling her fingers around its form.

"O most courageous hylian youth," the dark-cyan-zora intones, and Link steps back, "have you not come to answer the summons of our brave the Prince Zora, Sidon, who has cast his net far and wide to search for a Champion of Hylia such as yourself?"

"O most courageous hylian youth," begins the other, though Link has some difficulty determining the exact words he uses for the hundred years' lapse during which Lanayrish has continued to develop, "have you not risen to answer the call of the prophecy, that only a son of Hylia may calm the Divine Beast Vah Ruta?"

Link rubs the back of her head. "That's one problem." The Lanayrish comes easily to her. "I'm not a son of Hylia. I'm...a daughter of someone for sure."

The zora glance at one another. They speak privately to one another, the greenish-yellow one seemingly worried of something, the dark cyan nodding vigorously, before they turn back towards Link. "Son or daughter does not matter," the dark-cyan-zora declares, "as long as you bear upon your ears the mark of Hylia." Without asking Link, she reaches forward to lift up one of Link's sidelocks and tug her pointed right ear. Link flinches backwards from the suddenness of the motion and the pain. "Good. Then you carry the torch of the Champion of Hylia of one hundred years ago!"

The greenish-yellow-zora pipes up: "Though the prophecy says that—"

"Prince Sidon would be most honoured to meet you," the ray-zora goes on. With one hand over her chest, she bows low to Link, who rubs her offended right ear. The koi-zora and Link look at one another. Shaking her head, Link pats Ilia on the shoulder to keep her from rushing backwards. "Come, O courageous hylian youth. His Highness the Prince Zora awaits."

The two zora whirl around. Link resumes the arduous process of convincing Ilia that no, she need not neigh at every single rock on which she puts her hoof, and no, she need not spook at that lone lightning-struck tree in the distance, and no, she need not gallop all the way back to the other end of the path when this end is so much closer, and no, especially not, she does not need to dash headfirst into the River Zola.

"Say," Link hears the ray-zora whisper to the other as she walks, "is it just me or does that girl look familiar?"

The koi-fish-zora bats the ray-zora's head. "You know hylians don't live nearly as long as we do. And it's rude to imply that they all look the same. Zola take you but you can't be rude to the one from the prophecy!"

"They kind of do," the ray-zora answers, twiddling her webbed thumbs, "except for the colour of their scales and sometimes their fins."
"Hylians don't have scales. They have skin," the second zora corrects, waggling the tip of his fishy head tail, "and they don't have fins, but hair."

The dark-cyan-zora droops her head. "Next you're going to tell me that they don't lay eggs."

The yellowish-green-zora waves his arms frantically about. "Because they don't! They have live pups!"

The ray-zora smooths her hand over her pectoral fins. "Now you're just yanking my tail."

The koi-zora seethes out into a long and fiery discussion of the finer differences between humans—hylians, and sheikah, and gerudo—and zora. The ray-zora nods along his explanation and occasionally asks a particularly ignorant question which brings the yellowish-green zora to stamp his foot on the ground and shake his fists at the air as though attempting to emulate a character in a storybook. The dark cyan zora smirks mischievously behind the webbing of her right hand.

Link takes the opportunity to observe both the audible and the signed word, the former for understanding and the latter for learning how to sign the words in Lanayrish that have just so slightly altered over the century.

At long last, Ilia's front hooves touch the solid ground. Her companion practically bucks and throws herself forward on the ground. She hops; she springs; she prances around kicking her hooves up, her tail flicking up onto her back to sprinkle Link with raindrops. Link laughs. She leans up to hook her arms around Ilia's neck and walks forward, keeping pace with her companion's movements. The trotting gait lifts her boots repeatedly from the ground. Link nuzzles her cheek against Ilia's neck.

Her companion who can make her walk on air.

The two zora continue to argue as she leads Ilia to the bridge. The koi-zora grows increasingly frustrated until he has started to shake the ray-zora scarcely able to able to keep from chortling. Link tilts herself back in her own laughter until something bright red swooshes through the air above her to thud onto the ground behind her. The reverberation echoes up from her feet all the way to her head. She shudders.

Ever so slowly Link turns around, one hand on the hilt of her sword, her other hand reaching for her cooking pot to provide protection.

A zora.

Prince Sidon.

Close.

Far too close.

So close that she can feel the coolness radiating from his skin.

"O courageous hylian youth!" Link cranes her head up to look at the zora man—at Prince Sidon—who towers some two and a half times her height. Bright red and white, with the head that reminds her of a shark, his eyes a dark gold somewhere between butter and olive oil—Link's stomach rumbles, and she rests a hand against her belly—and a mouth wider than the set of his eyes that seems to split open the entirety of his head in half to reveal rows upon rows of shark teeth.

Her first thought upon seeing his head revolves around wondering how good shark might taste. Her
second is to stifle her laughter at herself, and her third is to make a mental note to try her hand at fishing for sharks later and to not consider cannibalising another person.

Link wonders if the followers of Zola disdain from the consumption of fish as much as the followers of Erito disdain the consumption of poultry. Or winged things in general. No, wait, not winged things.

She can still remember the defrosted darner that crawled over her tongue.

Tasted pretty good, though.

Link runs her hand through her ponytail. Prince Sidon does not appear to notice her preoccupied mind.

The two zora that accompanied her rush over to flank her either shoulder. The dark-cyan-zora woman earnestly notes that Link signs rather than speaks, and Prince Sidon immediately bows in understanding. Before he can crush Link with his broad chest the yellowish-green zora pulls Link out of the way, and Prince Sidon flashes them a thumbs-up. He presents the whites of his palms to her, fingers outstretched, the webbing so thick that she cannot see through the film.

Link blinks.

The dark-cyan-zora nudges Link with her hand. "Do you know how to hand-sign Lanayrish?" she whispers, and then hastily adds: "O courageous hylian youth, I mean."

Link tilts her head to the side as she looks up at Prince Sidon, who beams brilliantly at her. "O courageous hylian youth!" he booms in a voice that could shake the stars from the night sky like bananas from Faronese trees. "At last our Goddess has answered our prayers to the prophecy of yore!" He throws up his arms—the back of his left hand smacks Link's chin up and she physically feels her boots clear the ground a centimetre—before pausing and clearing his throat. "My apologies. May I ask for your name, O courageous youth?"

He holds out his massive hands. Each one could curl into a fist the size of Link's head. Hesitantly Link raises her own arms. Stretching out her own hands, she finds that her fingers just barely reach across the breadth of his palm. As with the girl who smelled of horses in the darkness of the closet, she signs into his hands.

"Link," she signs, and Prince Sidon's grin widens until she fears that the bottom half of his jaw will fall off entirely for how little connects the halves of his head together.

"But of course, and a most fortuitous name!" He squeezes her hands. Her knuckles do not go like that normally. "A name worthy of a Champion of Hylia!" He clears his throat. Link sees the other zora staring at her, not only the two who led her to the bridge, but others, and from the corner of her eye she notes an entire tent city sprung up on the bridge, brimming with zora that now gaze at Link between triple-lidded eyes. "Come, let us celebrate! A Champion of Hylia has appeared! Bring this Link—" Link blinks at his already knowing how to pronounce her name out-loud, despite her only indicating the gesture. "—a champion's sash!"

Sudden music blares just behind Link. She twists her neck to find a small symphony swelling out a heroic accompaniment to Prince Sidon's words. A purple zora with the head of a salmon ties a sky-blue sash around Link, shoulder to hip. Link's skin breaks out in cuccoflesh for the coolness of her hands and how much the zora seem to touch one another. Hylians, she has noticed, tend to keep their distance, while others such as the gorons tend warmer and more sociable, but the Lanayrish zora feel no shame in running their hands uncomfortably over her body. With so many around her,
she struggles not to curl inwards in on herself.

She remembers the woman with the clipboard and the woman with the long-snouted beastie in Aveil, who advised her as much; Link holds herself fast by picturing the sorts of foodstuffs that she might yet consume in Lanayru.

"Now then, O courageous hylian youth!" Prince Sidon grins once more at her. "To prove yourself as a Champion of Hylia capable of undertaking the cleansing of our Divine Beast Vah Ruta, our Goddess Herself has prepared for you a trial of the hero along Her banks!" Prince Sidon gestures towards the other end of the bridge. Another zora man, this with the head of a sea turtle, unfurls a map. Link recognises the fork between Tierno Trail and Inogo Bridge at the very bottom of the map. A path criss-crosses the Zola River, winding repeatedly across on a series of bridges and crossings, and coils through the mountains like a serpent with its jaws gaping open around a circular body of water in the heart of the mountains. Around this centre of Lanayru—marked as Our Beloved Ruto with a shining crown and a poorly drawn heart—Link can see other villages and towns marked and crossed-out in the mountains, but no more on the river, in a strangely empty stretch of land.

While Prince Sidon continues to speak Link removes her own map from its curled tube in her satchel. She sketches the river and surrounding area from the the Lanayrish map and traces out the path from the bridge to Ruto.

A trial of the Goddesses.

Prince Sidon gesticulates wildly. One of the zora women near Link pushes her down to make her duck one of his wide swings as he settles his hands in front of himself once more. "O courageous hylian youth! From here to our great city of Ruto in the heart of our Goddess Zola’s Domain, the Goddess has manifested the monsters deadliest to our own kind: they that command the thunder at their fins!" Link blinks. Monsters of fire in Eldin and of ice in Tabantha...and of lightning in both the desert and in the most watery place in the land once known as Hyrule this side of the ocean. She kneads her thigh for something to do with her hands. "To become a Champion of Hylia worthy of O our Divine Beast Vah Ruta, you must brave the gauntlet of our Goddess and emerge victorious! From here to Ruto, you need only follow the trail between the mountains with your head held high! Yes, by the prophecy, in every age of strife, a Champion of Hylia shall rise to deliver us from the evil that poisons our waters!" Prince Sidon smacks his palm with his fist. Link jumps back. The symphony builds to a crescendo in the music. "Now come! Test your faith and your power, your wisdom and your courage!" He claps his palms against one another; the rain responds with a roar of thunder that nearly jumps Ilia off the bridge if not for Link clenching the reins. "We shall follow your progress by the riverside. Falter not! Have faith in our Goddess who has brought you before Her! In Ruto shall we meet—in Ruto shall we greet—"

A trial. A trial of a trail. Sidon expects her to fight her path through a gauntlet of monsters in the rain for the sake of proving her skills in order to risk her life further to calm the Divine Beast Vah Ruta.

And here she simply wished to hand over the slate.

Link ogles Sidon but he—evidently ignoring or unable to read her expression—simply grins again and flashes her a thumbs-up. And flashes, quite literally, as his teeth seem to shine so brightly that they literally catch the light to flash into her eyes. "—in Ruto," Sidon concludes amid amid the symphony's cacophony of horns, "shall we feast!"

She perks up. Link raises her arms to sign into his palms. "Feast?"
"But of course! Where would we be without a feast for our most courageous Champion of Hylia, in thanks to our Goddess who has chosen for us such a Champion!" Sidon grins widely. His shiny teeth glitter. Link nearly slips on the rock bridge beneath her feet but catches her balance. "Come, have you any questions, O most courageous future-certain Champion of Hylia?"

Link swings her head from side to side. Sidon continues to hold his hands out expectantly, and the zora who nudged her earlier nudges her again. She hand-signs a no.

Sidon claps his hands on her shoulders. Link's knees nearly give way as Sidon quite veritably squishes her into an embrace that smushes her face against his torso and leaves her gasping for breath. When he releases her at last, her shoulder blades ache and her arms fill with static.

"Now! Take as much time to prepare for the trial ahead as you need, O courageous hylian youth! Never give up, for I and the rest of the world believes in you! May you always swim with our Goddess's flow!" Sidon bows again—two different zora pull Link back at the same time—and then he flips backwards off of the bridge. Link sprints towards the edge just in time to hear a hearty splash in the waters below.

Some of the other zora follow in an entourage of rainbow colours. Others remain with the tent city. The dark-cyan-zora woman that aided in clearing the rubble slaps Link on the back. "Best of luck there, O courageous hylian youth!" Link glances at her to thank her only to find her features more measured than Prince Sidon's enthusiasm. "May you find more favour with the Goddess than the other Champions of Hylia, hmm?" She pats Link between the shoulder before excusing herself to resume clearing away the rubble.

Link blinks at her receding back. Whistling for Ilia, she leads her companion far enough away from the tents to gather her breath and pinch herself. She does not awaken.

She pinches herself harder.

Still not asleep.

Shrugging, Link touches her chin. To prepare herself for the task ahead. She checks her supplies: the sword given to her by Riju; the fire-light spear; the giant boomerang still wrapped up in Ilia's saddlebags that she perhaps does not remember how to catch. Unfurling the wrapping around the boomerang, Link hefts its weight in her hand. She tosses it up and down. She arches her hand back and throws the boomerang.

It comes back at her fast, too fast, and she ducks. With a light little laugh at her own expert dodging skills, Link stands back up to dust herself off.

Then something thwacks her in the back of the head and she drops like a stone.

The giant boomerang, having returned a second time, clatters onto the ground. Rubbing the back of her head, Link fervently prays her thanks for the boomerang having hit her with the flat rather than with the edge.

A Champion of Hylia without a head without be a sight indeed.

Link practises with the boomerang until she can catch it ten times in a row without slipping up. She wraps the weapon up once more.

She leads Ilia across the bridge. On the other bank of the river, she crouches by the water to examine the possibility of catching fish or possibly river shark, if such a beastie as river
shark exists. Link glances at herself in the water. A welt on either cheek in the shape of a watering can. Scratches down her cheeks of her own hands. And now a bump on the back of her head.

Truly, the picture of the Champion of Hylia.

She looks up the path. A gauntlet of electricity.

She still has in her bag the box of electric elixirs, yet those elixirs also slow her movements, and the monsters have claws and teeth. Even if they cannot shock her through electricity, a talon through her jugular would be no less shocking.

Besides that she has Ilia to worry about, and Link would sooner eat her own foot than do something as terrible as leave Ilia alone on the side of the river with nothing in the way of food.

She ponders how she might cook her own foot. Blinking at herself, she slaps her palms against her face.

Her stomach rumbles.

Right: river sharks. The current flows too rapidly for her to fish. Yet Link catches crabs that scuttle here and there on the river's edge and snails that glow yellow in the coming dark.

Once the sun sets, she will brave the gauntlet, to sneak past as many monsters as she can. For now she has the chance to seat herself down and enjoy supper.

Link finds two different colours of crab along the river: the first blue, with eyes that twinkle luminously, perhaps to resemble the stone that makes up the path to Ruto, and the second with claws so sharp that Link nearly loses the fingers of her left hand snatching one from the water. She snips off the heads of the crabs with her knife to rid them of their lives as swiftly and mercifully as possible. Snapping off one of the pincers of the second crab variety, she need only brush it against her palm to draw blood that pools in the creases of her hand.

She makes a campfire by chopping down the nearby trees—she attempts to use the fire-light spear but succeeds only in smacking the hilt of the spear repeatedly against the tree trunks—and then cracking open a piece of flint.

With branches that she drives into the ground, Link forms a roof over the fire and the cooking pot to keep the flame lit; the rain drains over the rubbery underlayer of the paraglider to drip from the sides. Link pats the paraglider in thanks. Had her paraglider remained spun of cloth, the rainwater would have dripped through. She sits back, grins at herself, and snaps her fingers as Urbosa would have.

She sets water from the river to boil in the cooking pot. While she waits, Link prepares the crabs, removing first the apron of each crab, and then the shell—the innards still attached—and the gills with careful presses of the hand. The bright-eyed crabs break open easily to reveal their meat within. The crabs with the sharp pincers have slightly stronger shells, and she takes her knife to them.

Link rinses the guts from the meat with the not-yet-boiling water, then cuts the crab meat into bite-sized pieces and sets the meat aside.

From her satchel, she withdraws green onion to dice, cooking them in the buttered bottom of her cooking pot for lack of a skillet. Once the onion has turned soft and yellowed from the butter, Link adds in the crab meat and stirs. She dices herbs picked along the road to Lanayru for flavour. Into the pot they go in a sprinkle of green and yellow, red and blue, along with a dash of salt and a
mixed palmful of Eldic spice.

Probably too much, really, but since when has she feared setting herself aflame?

At last she opens up the closed-off package of rice. Licking her lips, Link pours the rice in with another layer of butter to properly fry the rice. She adds finely diced tomato for a sweeter note. Stirring and stirring with the hilt of the fire-light spear that—she finds—does not conduct heat, Link moves the fried rice and crab meat mixture onto one of the wooden boxes for lack of a plate.

Next: the omelet.

She could really use a bowl or a skillet. Touching her chin, she removes one of Ilia's saddlebags. She snaps her fingers at her own innovation. Link uses the leathery bottom to crack open the eggs and whisk them in boiled water. She butters the cooking pot—her store of butter has started to run low, and she makes a mark on her inner wrist with ink to pick up more—and waits for the butter to heat up before adding the whisked eggs. The omelet spreads out and begins to bubble. She tests the bottom of the omelet with her knife. When it starts to firm, Link scrapes the fried rice from the top of the wooden box into the omelet and spreads it over the centre half of the omelet with her knife. She flips up the two edge quarters of the omelet over the middle. To keep the rice inside she presses down on the fold.

After she transfers the hot omelet to her hand—whatever the pain, the promise of deliciousness wins out—Link considers that she should have made something in the way of sauce to decorate its surface.

Yet the lack of decoration does little to deter her from the tastiness that the rice omelet hides within.

Before she brings herself to eat, however, she has Ilia to consider. Fortunately her companion has already moved to graze in the wet grass near the trail of the trial. Link merely sets some vegetables and herbs to simmer with salt-and-sugar to give Ilia a treat for how well she crossed over the rubble; she covers Ilia's head and body with a blanket to help keep her out of the rain. In the meantime, the omelet cools to no longer leave a raised red welt in her skin when Link holds it.

Then she seats herself down to dig in.

A rice omelet with crab. The onion tickles her throat, and the two different sorts of crab meat carry a certain tang absent in other kinds of meat. The tomatoes toss in enough sweetness to offset the more bitter meat of the two. The omelet dilates her veins; she can feel the renewed blood flow alongside the faster pace of her heart.

Crab.

Crab meat, in an omelet with rice. Though she does remember sometimes eating rice in Ordon, the province of Ordona grew less in the way of rice and more in the way of pumpkin, and corn, and squash, and nearly anything that goats from make from butter, to milk, to buttermilk, to cheese, to whey, to cream, to frozen milk of all sorts, to yoghurt. The single pub in the town served mostly liquored milk. She remembers working in the pub in some of the evenings in the winter and early spring when the ranch had less work, though she could not drink. The patrons treated her with some kindness, or at least politeness. Link learned to mix drinks, to serve food with a flair of flicked wrists and tossed. Mostly she enjoyed the preparation of meals over that of liquor.

During the harvest season—when she sought work in other places—the pub served pumpkin wine as well in a special recipe crafted by the daughter of the pub's owner. This the girl who smelled of
horses told her, for her father kept a close eye on the establishment.

Her father.

Her father, the mayor of the village. Her father, who kept his daughter inside the house. His father, who feared what the world could do to her.

She does not remember—she does not remember—she does not remember the girl who smelled of horses's mother.

But she remembers the girl who smelled of horses and she remembers the soft smile and she remembers that bright fire in her eyes whenever she spoke of the adventures she longed for and the horses on which she one day ride to the ends of Hyrule and the promise to walk the trails of the earth together, and she remembers enough.

The river ran through Ordon, coursing through the province of Ordon. In the river the villagers occasionally fished in the water to draw up tiny greengills to fry or feed to their cats, but the waters offered up almost nothing in terms of seafood beside. No crab, no lobster, no shrimp, no snail, except for one hardy species that tasted foul at best and could outright poison the unwary at worst.

*This* she knew of her own experience.

Yet she has before tasted crab.

She could not have tasted crab this fresh in Ordon. Ordon. The province of Ordon. Southeast of Eldin and northwest of Lanayru, wasn't it? The Eldic had their own master blacksmiths and better ore than ever could hope those of a village as small as Ordon, and so she travelled infrequently to Eldin, so infrequently that she had not the opportunity to learn to read their language. But she had learned Necludan—she had *learned* Necludan?—and she had learned Central Hyrulean, and she had learned Lanayrish.

Lanayrish.

The Lanayrish had their favoured weapons of carved stone and of silver. And yet the zora people, with their relative sensitivity to heat, oftentimes relied on non-zora blacksmiths, both local and abroad, to keep up with the necessities of integrated life.

And so Rusl, in the province of Ordon close to Lanayru—close to Lanayru?—had his workshop filled with the delicate craftsmanship expected by the Lanayrish. The local Lanayrish blacksmiths, Rusl told Link, worked tirelessly to provide the smithing for anything that could see use in a religious festival or day-to-day spiritual task, so that Sages of the Goddess Zola could overlook their creation. "But everyday things—too much demand and not enough supply for 'em to make it all 'emselves." Rusl winked at Link. "And I hear some of the zora got a thing for pointy ears, if you're into that."

Link cocked her head to the side.

Rusl chuckled to himself. "When you're older, kiddo." Kiddo. She had not yet called herself *Link*.

And so she would walk, and later ride, that long road to Lanayru.

She would arrive in an odd hour of the day. In the morning, Link would begin her rounds with all of the orders that had piled in the past cycle of the moon. Sometimes to Ruto, though more frequently to the smaller villages throughout Lanayru, whose patrons knew Rusl personally from Rusl's own time as a courier.
Yet, since she arrived in an odd hour of the day, she would take a room for the night.

A room. She remembers a room. Not quite a closed room, but a chamber open to the night air. The walls of a silvery-white stone that stretched into a reservoir. A wide bed—once meant for those who had built the dam but which she had repurposed for herself—on which she slept curled up beneath a warm blanket in the Lanayrish chill. On either side of the bed, two long silvery counters curved like the horns of an Ordon goat. Piled high with glasses and with bottles and ingredients and an ice-box set into her face of the counter.

Link found the room on her first visit to Ruto, when her deliveries to such a large city—even with the help of a local—had tired her so badly that she needed a place to rest, and a place far, far away from people. The local—she cannot remember the face, or the name—told her of the dam’s existence, of the silvery-grey room with the hylian-style bed that had served to house human workers. Link cooked for the local a meal as thanks.

And from then on, she slept on that bed each time she came to Ruto.

And then, somewhere along her visits, when the local would come by to say hello and she would show her gratitude in the form of a meal, others from the city began to come by, too.

She remembers: mixing drinks.

She remembers the zora—mostly girls, mostly older than her by far as she could tell by their casual manner of touch and of talk, although determining the age of a zora fell so far beyond the scope of her abilities that she could only hazard the barest guess at the approximate range—who would giggle and ask for hylian-style drinks and inquire about Link’s own work as a courier. Link would deflect the questions by keeping her hands busy. She did not particularly care for the mixing of drinks, but she indulged herself in the preparation of food that accompanied the liquor. Her visitors would bring her ingredients, and she would relish the chance to try her hand at them.

Sometimes her experiments proved a hit. Other times Link left everyone with grimaces at best and retching out their guts at worst. And yet this, in turn, led another crowd to her that wanted to play what they called Hebric roulette with her newest creations. The ingredients they brought with them for Link to try would range from that legitimately used in Lanayrish cuisine—as explained to her by the few Lanayrish, zora or otherwise, who took pity on her—to the most bitter of herbs and foulest of fish that no one in their right mind would consume but which Link accepted out of ignorance.

The attention of so many asking for meat and drink made her uneasy; Link came on rely on a handful of visitors that would calm the more touchy-feely of her guests. Yet she kept at it for the opportunity of new ingredients, even if some of those ingredients left her unable to sleep for the remainder of the night for how violently ill she became.

The food...she would do it for the food.

Over the years, as she became a bimonthly fixture in Ruto, the flow of more malicious ingredients ebbed away and then stopped entirely. Instead, more and more patrons would come by for the food she prepared and to speak with their fellows in a comfort away from the main city of Lanayru, but not as far as the neighbouring villages like Rutela and Tijo. Some would bring their instruments to liven the atmosphere; others would come to practise in front of a small audience everything ranging from singing, to their religious rites of adulthood, to their stand-up comedy routines.

Sometimes her experiments cooking with Lanayrish ingredients still landed her in bed for a day: the zora, Link gathered, were capable of gulping down even rotted fish with nary an adverse effect,
while her hylian stomach proved far less resilient.

But as she figured out which types of fish and flower the zora could ingest while she could not, those days, too, became infrequent.

Among those who visited her—among those on whom she could rely to help keep the orders, well, orderly—came a zora girl with scales of red and white, whose head reminded Link of a shark, who mostly kept her mouth closed in a thin line with the very centre painted red to emulate much smaller lips, but who—when Link managed to make her smile or, better yet, to laugh—would parts the full span of her jaws to reveal the sharks' teeth within.

The local who had helped her on her first visit to Ruto.

The girl with the sharks' teeth.

Despite her quiet demeanor, the girl with the sharks' teeth commanded a presence that fell the others silent with her merest word. She volunteered little information of her life in Ruto; Link did not intrude. She knew of the girl with the sharks' teeth as kind, and as gentle, and as soft-spoken, and as determined and firm when she needed to be, and as having sufficient knowledge of medicine to help those who lost the Hebric roulette, and as the bearer of the absolute best ingredients that Link received. From the girl with the sharks' teeth, Link learned to fashion rice-balls, to cook squid and octopus, to brew tea with gooey beads of pudding at the bottom.

As the moon began her downwards arc, the crowd would thin. The girl with the sharks' teeth would help pick up the glasses, would clean the counter of stains of drink and meal, would chatter with Link about her duties as a courier, would never say a word about herself. Eventually Link could no longer pretend to buff the same square centimetre of the counter attempting to tease out a nonexistent spot, and she would retire.

"Good night...my Link," the girl with the sharks' teeth would say, long after only she and Link remained in the room open to the night air, when night would constitute a scarce handful of winks of sleep before the sunrise would see Link off to complete her circuit as a courier. "Rest well."

Link would endeavour to smile gratefully at her yet manage merely a look of vacancy. "Good night, Mipha."

Mipha.

That name alone she carried with her, and the fact that the girl with the sharks' teeth lived in Ruto. Everything else that she knew of the girl with the sharks' teeth, Link knew only of her personality, her actions and her words.

Mipha.

Link closes her eyes.

Mipha...the girl with the sharks' teeth.

A Champion she had known before ever drawing the blade of evil's bane.

She finishes the crab meat rice omelet. By the time she cleans off the inside of her beloved cooking pot, the sun has set; the curtain of summer rain prevents her from watching the stars. Link arms herself with the spear on her back, the sword at her hip, and her wooden pot lid on her left arm. She checks herself and Ilia for anything metal other than the cooking pot, with which she refuses to part, and the sword in its sheathe.
Crab Omelet with Rice (eleven hearts) - bird's egg, bright-eyed crab, hylian rice, razorclaw crab, rock salt

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: I should note that the epithet "son of Hylia" is not about the zora misgendering Link (you can actually see that the two zora in question have not had enough interaction with hylians to be able to differentiate them), but about the hero of legend stereotypically being a man. Just as the legendary princess (Zelda) is usually called a "daughter of Hylia" in the legends, so is the knight (in this case, Link) termed a "son of Hylia". I should also note that I am not narratively treating Link as a man: Zelda is also trans (as has been noted in previous chapters, such as in the twenty-sixth) and the role of princess is stereotypically given to a woman.

Just as zora have difficulty telling zora apart, so do zora have difficulty telling humans apart.

In Twilight Princess, the zora armour is weak to both fire and ice. The zora are cold-blooded and thus are usually room temperature, although their skin (like metal) has a coefficient of thermal conductivity such that they feel cool to the touch, compared to other warm-blooded creatures that typically feel warm (rito actually feel downright hot due to their higher metabolism to provide sufficient energy for flight, which is part of why Link feels so comfortable hugging Amali; gorons also feel cool to the touch, as their outer skins are made out of rock-like secretions).

Sidon's quite big! As mentioned, the more time zora spend in water, the bigger they get, and, conversely, the less they're able to be on land.

Zola's Domain, of course, is an adaptation of Zora's Domain.

Naturally Link would be motivated by a feast.

Link is not special. Sidon has been asking for Champions of Hylia since Vah Ruta awakened. Link awakened in the early spring; it's currently one and a half months into summer, so it's been sixteen and a half months since Link's awakening (heheh) In that time, countless hylians have attempted the gauntlet, and countless hylians have given up or, well, failed. The champions’ sash is just like the one worn by the champions in-game.

The crabs mentioned in this chapter are the bright-eyed crab and razorclaw crab. The apron of a crab, for those unfamiliar with the terminology, is the soft shell on the abdomen.

The pub that sells pumpkin wine is the Lumpy Pumpkin, based on the pub of the same name from Skyward Sword. Working as a bartender does not mean that Link was drinking, although I should note that plenty of societies have had young children drink because the available fermented beverages (of low alcoholic content) were much safer
than unclean water.

The chamber open to the night that I mention here is in reference to the East Reservoir dam in-game, which has a hylian-style bed (which Link can sleep in) and is surrounded by various bottles and beverages. If you go to that area in-game, it very much looks like somewhere that could have been a bar.

Hebric roulette, of course, is a play on the real-life "Russian roulette", referring to lethal games of chance. In this case, they would play roulette based on whether or not Link's latest creation would be good or terrible. Since zora physiology is much different than the other races' (the humans are all, well, human; the gorons digest rock; the koroks, as we have seen, eat soil and are very susceptible to effects of their food; and the rito are similar enough to humans)

Rutela is named after the zora queen from *Twilight Princess*, and Tijo, the Indigo-Go's drummer from *Majora's Mask*.

"My Link" is *not* a continuity error. Link did *not* yet go by the name "Link" at this point. Mipha is actually saying "my link", which you'll find out later what that means.

Up next: the gauntlet of electricity, and Link gains a new travelling companion (who *isn't* Sidon).

midna's ass. 13 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Prince Sidon! I really like the author's interpretation of his character. He adds a fun element to the series; he acts with a certain cadence that other characters don't.

Now we get to run through what the author (and I, thanks to the author) affectionately refers to as "the gauntlet". It's a really fun trial of sorts.

Seafood Fried Rice

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef proceeds through the gauntlet of the Lanayrish prince, receives something of a blessing from the Goddess Farore, and meets a new travelling companion, whom the chef agrees to help take home.

Chapter Notes

Author's notes that didn't actually fit in ao3's box at the end because the author talks too much: As always, thank you to my beta reader, Emma, and to my readers, for coming with me this far.

I'm sure that many a reader attempted to sleep through the gauntlet to wait for the rain to let up. I didn't do so because I actually like the rain, but my beloved beta reader Emma mentioned herself doing so, and I snapped my fingers.

If you don't remember, Link got her arm bitten through on the way up to Eldin, the first time that she healed via a shrine.

Note for readers: embarrassingly enough, I somehow neglected to name the chapter the first go-around. This has been fixed as of 23 October 2017.

Chuchu jelly, like gems, is capable of storing elemental effects, although much less so than precious jewels. Much like with gems, which slowly give off their elemental effect over time but which can break open to release all of it at once, chuchu jelly will slowly give off its effect unless much pressure is applied at once. Chuchu are capable of rapidly contracting the outer layer of their bodies to discharge the elemental effects by killing their own cells and thereafter require some time for their internal organs (which store high concentrations of elemental effects) to distribute the effects back into their outer layer. A chuchu cannot generate fire/ice/electricity itself but instead gathers and stores them in its body. This means that chuchu cells can store anything, even those already differentiated. In fact, you can try this at home: just pick up some chuchu jelly of any sort in-game (blue, white, yellow, or red), put it on the group, and hit it with an elemental weapon.

The monsters referenced in this chapter include moldola, from Phantom Hourglass; parasitic tentacles from Ocarina of Time; and biri from A Link to the Past.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Link could hop across the river on pillars of ice, yet Sidon's words indicate that the Lanayrish will watch her brave this gauntlet. More importantly, Ilia cannot balance her hooves on the ice, and Link would sooner give up eating entirely than risk the life of her companion.

She pauses. She touches her chin.
She shakes her head.

Yes, Link really would give up eating entirely than risk Ilia's life.

Though forcing Ilia up the trail of trial in the cold of the storm harbours its own risks.

She considers waiting out the rain. Link could sleep for several days straight if she needed to, arising simply to cook herself a meal, eat, and go back to sleep.

But some feeling in her gut whispers that the rain will continue to fall, for the dampness over the ground spreads the effects of electricity, and Sidon would never refer to the trail of trial as a gauntlet if she could easily walk through it.

And her gut—with its treasure trove of delicious food—has not yet led her astray.

Well, except for the time when her gut brought her to break her promise to Amali, or the time when her gut suggested that she had visited Marin far in the Tabanch west when in fact Lon Lon Ranch had existed in the east of Central Hyrule, or even the time when a group of lizalfos had stolen her clothing and her gut had pressured her to swoop in for fear of them eating through her satchel.

Then again, she had rescued the food, bite arms still scarring her arm or no.

Under the cover of night, Link enters the gauntlet of thunder. The curtain of rain obscures her vision for anything farther than a pace or two out. The slippery ground forces her to walk with an infuriating slowness. No matter the pace she sets, Ilia spooks at every bolt of lightning; though Link would never find frustration with her companion, she senses a long and difficult night ahead.

At the very least she has faced most of the monsters on the trail of trial before. Yellow-winged keese roosting on overhangs fall to spherical bombs that Link rolls across the ground and detonates at a distance, carefully gripping Ilia's reins carefully so as not to send her companion galloping straight into the rushing rapids of the river. The first time that she sets off a bomb, Link underestimates how the shock could travel through the rainwater slicking the path. The electricity tingles up her spine to rattle her skull. She slides backwards onto her rear. For a moment she swears she can see Amali and Kass's daughters float above her head. Then Link feels Ilia's warmth breath the back of her neck. Her companion noses her cheek as if to worry of her.

"I'm fine, girl," Link promises. She hooks her arms around Ilia's neck to pick herself back up. "As long as you're with me, I'll never not be fine."

Ilia whinnies into Link's neck. The rush of air tickles a giggle out of her.

She takes that as an excuse to sit back and roast herself the crab legs left over from the crab meat rice omelet. The legs of the bright-eyed crabs taste sweet and tangy, with a low-burning aftertaste that eases her muscles and clears her vision. On the other leg, those of the crabs with sharp pincers teeter just on the edge of too bitter. Link discovers that careful application of cold rather than heat—as evidenced by jamming a broken-off fragment that sapphire that she finds within her quiver right into the meat—softens the flavour just enough to bring out the unique texture and notes of the sharp-clawed crabs without a bitterness so overpowering her eyes water.

Licking her lips, Link procrastinates by slurping the insides of the crab shells. Her tongue touches entrail firmly enough to burst them open. She snaps back at the abruptness of faeces in her mouth.

"Right, girl," Link signs to Ilia, propping her chin up on her palm, "I don't mean to be crabby—" She snaps her fingers. "—but that's enough crab for now." She snaps her fingers again, then slaps her own knee and winks. "Get it? Get it? I know. I should save that one for Romani when I
Ilia flicks her tail into Link's face. She sneezes, then erupts into a fit of laughter.

With her spirits and her stamina rejuvenated, she continues on. Chuchu spring out from the ground, too close for her to safely use a bomb. Link waits for them to exhaust their stores of static before crouching down and popping their fragile outer membranes with her sword. She kneels down to scoop out the jelly that comprise their innards, which she squeezes in her palm. The jelly squishes out through the cracks between her fingers, and she giggles to herself for the coolness of the slime in her hand.

Then Link squeezes a touch too hard, and the electricity convulses her on the ground. When her head stops spinning and her limbs stop flailing, she reflects that if ever she needs to best someone in a competition of dance, she could merely slip a sample of chuchu jelly down her own back.

Link stuffs the jelly into an empty elixir vial and corks it. She shakes it around. The material of the vial—glass, or something akin—does not conduct the shock that easily, and she feels nothing but a tingling in her palm. Still, the shaken vial glows a brilliant gold like a jar of lightning bugs.

Lasli. The sunset fireflies that Link collected from the hills overlooking Kakariko to bring to her house, to see that smile upon her face, to share with her the hot buttered apples that she had candied for Koko and Cottla.

Koko and Cottla.

Koko, trying her hardest to replace her own mother, and Cottla, trying her hardest to act even younger than she is to keep her family's spirits high.

Link senses her own heart clench inwards. Her chest closes in on herself. She folds her arms across her chest, her shoulders shaking. The rain overhead dampens her cheeks.

She hear Ilia neigh behind her. Glancing back, Link looks at her companion, drenched from the outpouring shower; this time her shoulders shake from mirth.

"I'm all right, girl. You don't need to worry about me."

Instead Ilia worries the hem of Link's tunic. Her ears flick back, and Link can feel the velvety softness of her companion's skin over her cheek. She scratches Ilia behind the ears.

With that, they continue forward. A sudden *hruk*ing from the water leads Link to peer downwards to the river in search of some strange new octorok to populate her nightmares, only to spot a dark shadow in the water surface. She steps forward with the slate clenched in her hand. The silhouette of a lizalfos—black as burned bread—arches its head out of the water to *hruk* its spit at her. The slimy mess coats her face. Stumbling backwards, Link attempts to wipe the saliva from her eyes. Another gurgle webs her fingers. Blindly she poofs a bomb into her hand and chucks it into the water, but the detonation does not accompany the typical screech of a lizalfos tossed away by the blast.

Instead yet another *hruk* glues her hands to the slate. Link steps back and back. She listens to the lizalfos chirruping increasingly close to her. Stasis. Stasis. Unable to see, she waves the slate about, randomly tapping the button to initiate the yellow rune.

Then pain blooms along the centre of her abdomen through her tunic, as of a lash of a whip. Sudden warmth from veins breaking blossoms beneath her skin.
The impact pitches her backwards. Another lash across her chest catches the lower edge of her throat. The suddenness of the wound at the base of her neck along her collarbone seeps heat into the collar of her tunic.

Link reaches behind her for the fire-light spear. When she hears the lizalfos chirp again, she thrusts forward to the centre of the noise. Something hot and slippery slaps her face, then drops into the crook of her arms to writhe before plunging to the ground: the lizalfos's severed tongue.

Her eyes pop open.

The lizalfos raises its talons to its mouth. Blood from the stump left slithering in its throat cascades from its jaws. Link barely has time to make a *ha* noise in her throat when the lizalfos whirls around. Its tail whips into the side of her head. To avoid breaking her neck, Link lets herself fall. The skin of her elbow scrapes on the rock. Rolling forward under the dancing lizalfos's legs, Link thrusts the hilt upwards. The fire-light emerges into a spear to slice into the lizalfos's underside. Its foot slams her in the face; her nose cracks against her skull, pushing the back of her head into the ground. Warm fluid drenches her face and chest. Squeezing her eyes shut, Link jerks her arm up. The spear bisects the lizalfos through its spine to the base of its neck.

With a final cry the lizalfos gurgles into silence. The halves of its body—still connected from the neck up—slump downwards onto Link's face. Pulsating meat smothers her mouth and nose.

Dropping the spear, Link claws at the lizalfos's corpse pressing down on her. The body slides downwards, heavy in her lap. She breathes. Through the coppery tang of blood sucked into her lungs, she inhales fresh air.

She exhales.

Rain washes the blood from her face. Link kicks the corpse off of her. She hears it splash into the river. Opening her eyes, she blinks up at Ilia, who has pressed her ears back, her hooves trembling as if about to bolt.

Link cleans the blood off of herself as best she can before she approaches her companion again.

They continue on.

She spots more lizalfos in the water. Instead of attacking them directly, she uses cryonis to form pillars of ice in the rapids just in front of them. Inevitably the current breaks the columns; heavy pillars of frost crash into the lizalfos. While they struggle to swim back towards her, Link hurries on, Ilia at her side.

Strange worms that blaze with electricity inch their rotund bodies along the rocks. Link attempts to dispatch them with the fire-light spear and with the boomerang, but the monsters continue to inch along. Perhaps not truly *monsters* at all. Something else entirely.

Out of curiosity she extends a hand towards one. Her efforts reward her with Ilia licking her unconscious face. Link rubs her head. As she sits up, she spots the electrified worm inching away from her, having evidently knocked her out. On the bright side, the same shock has apparently seeped into the river, because the nearby bank *drowns* in lightning-cooked fish washed up on the shore.

Link rubs her hands together.

She kneels by the side of the water to collect as many fish as will fit in her satchel. Those that have simply *died* but not roasted, she tosses back to the river, but those that *have* fried through she slots
into her box of ingredients, all the way from Darunia. Link brings one such roasted fish, mottled a glittering blue and with shining yellow lips and a face so amusingly fishy that Link snorts out peals of laughter, to her lips to try a bite.

Opening her mouth, she crunches down.

Did she say fish, when she meant rock roast?

The pain jolts through her teeth up through her skull. Tears stream from the corners of her eyes. She grips the fish between her thumb and forefingers, pulls the stone-hard not-quite-meat from her mouth, and gingerly tests her aching teeth and throbbing gums.

None broken.

Though one of her front incisors has chipped.

She wriggles her tongue through the V left behind in her tooth. When she whistles, the gap brings a high-pitched resonance to the sound.

Ilia answers her call nonetheless.

No matter how damaged, Link remains Link.

She walks on to loop over another bridge and continue on the other bank of the river. The constant patter of rain on her skin grows maddening. Link keeps herself apace on the regular clattering of Ilia's hooves on the stone and on the gathering of mushrooms that sprout up in the rain.

The higher she climbs through the mountains, the more monsters she encounters. Lizalfos with spears and with bows. Occasional moblins wielding spears that she dodges to the side prior to catapulting herself forward and thrusting the gold-hilted sword directly into her stomachs. More keese, which by themselves constitute minor annoyances, but which nearly fell her when paired with monsters that require the brunt of her concentration.

Not only Link she see monsters that she has fought before.

Here: strange seaweed-like growths that stretch across tunnels and sputter static at her. Link stabs through them with the fire-light spear after the metal sword given to her by Riju sends a shock through her arm.

And there: creatures like bari, but blue with violet tentacles instead of the simple red and white-blue that she has seen in Parapa. These do not split when she cleaves her boomerang through them, nor does their electricity course for long through the metal. Link shrugs. Her boomerang makes quick work of them until an entire platoon splat down upon her at once and their tentacles reach for her wrists—and for Ilia.

Her eyes narrow. Her features harden. The fire-light spear slices through their jelly, and she collects it as she did the chuchu.

The chuchu jelly.

Touching her chin, Link nods to herself. She scopes out camps of moblins and lizalfos with the beloved red telescope that once belonged to Aryll. Then she smears an arrowhead in chuchu jelly. Drawing back the string on the bow Amali gave her, Link looses the arrow.

She watches its arc into the camp, where the jelly explodes into a bolt of static that leaves the
once-feared monsters writhing on the ground. Link need only squeeze her thighs inwards on Ilia's flanks to bring her companion forward. The weight behind her hooves crushes through the monsters' skulls.

Link offers Ilia hugs and cooing and salt in thanks.

Then she waltzes into the camp to take the monsters' carved arrows and—much more vitally—their gathered ingredients: mushrooms and herbs, flowers and seeds. Sometimes they have roasted fish or meat for themselves; these she parks herself by their covered fires to eat while Ilia browses crates of apples and grasses in the campsites.

Link continues on, spirits renewed by the ease of chuchu jelly. The lightning continues to branch through the clouds and occasionally crash into the ground. The paraglider that she keeps tied over her cooking pot seems to keep the metal lid from attracting the storm, and so onwards she goes. Up and up and up. The trail of trial broadens as it curls around the hills that lead to the heart of Lanayru. She comes upon such a bend to find a wide muddy expanse overlooking the River Zola far below. Once upon the hill must have rested a village, for in the mud lie metal doors and bits of cutlery and weapons and shields and cooking pots and saucepans and skillets and windowsills and jewellery and candle holders and a thousand small bits and bobs, all coated in rust and sparking with static that draws the lightning.

And then: singing.

She hears singing.

No, not quite singing, but a resonant humming, alongside a sound like wooden blocks tumbling over one another. Tilting up her chin, Link spots someone—a rito child?—skipping through the air, clothed in a long white and gold robe. She brings her hands to her mouth to whistle. Ilia whinnies into her ear. The rito child ceases their flight. They turn their hooded head towards her.

A pair of glowing golden eyes and a single silver zig-zag of a mouth greet her, set in a featureless void of a face. The jaws part to reveal rows upon rows of glimmering teeth.

Link steps back. The monster waves a gnarled hand towards her. In its clawed fingers, it clutches a thin yellow rod pointed with a yellow crystal. A long and pointed shard of topaz.

The monster draws up its arm. It windmills its limb around and around as if it had neither bone nor joint, and then the monster flicks the slender rod towards her.

From the topaz tip strike circular balls of lightning.

Instinctively Link leaps to the left, and yet Ilia remains behind her. She whistles again. Perhaps from the spooking of the balls of sparks floating her way, or from the whistle, or from some combination, Ilia gallops towards her. Link dodges, but one of Ilia's reins tangles around her right arm and drags her forward. Though she scrambles for purchase on the slippery rock, her boots slide; Link senses herself tipping backwards. The rein snags her right arm at an angle that strains her shoulder. Her heels scrape against the stone. Ilia gallops around the perimeter of the village ruins. She trips and begins to slope off of the hill entirely but catches herself to canter onwards.

Agony tears through Link's arm where the rein digs into her flesh and through her heels and lower legs where the rocks bite into her skin. The stress on the bone of Link's right arm worsens. With her other hand Link scrambles for the rein to untangle her arm. But the tugging only rips the pain harder through her right.
And all the while the monster hums its resonating song.

Link feels the crack more than she hears it. The sudden giving way, the numbness in her arm followed by a pain that shudders itself through her body. Her knees hit the ground first, then her left hip, then her left shoulder, and then her head, and only then do her ribs follow. Something rubbery flops across her abdomen; it takes her a moment to recognise her own right arm devoid of sensation.

She remembers—

She remembers the girl who smelled of horses, face reddened and smeared in tears and snots, hands trembling with fear—

She remembers of how easily horses can spook, of how easily their limbs can break, of how easily they can trip or fall or slip, of the only remedy for a horse with a broken leg—

Link whistles.

She whistles, and she whistles, and she does not dare stop whistling until she hears Ilia return to her, until she feels the vibrations of Ilia's hoofsteps in the ground beside her, until she laughs from the ticklish sensation of Ilia's nose on her face.

And then Link hears, once more, that humming.

The monster.

The monster that skips through the air.

But Link has already before fought a monster in the thunder. A bolt of lightning, something metal, and her personal secret ingredient of magnesis say hello.

She reaches for the slate at her right hip.

Her fingers close around empty air.

Her eyes widen so far that they threaten to fall out of her head. Link lurches to her feet. Her useless right arm hangs limply at her side while she digs through the pouch at her right hip. The red telescope—thank the Goddesses, as Riju would say—remains affixed to her belt: the constant dragging on the ground must have knocked the slate from its pouch.

She looks up at the monster.

The monster waves at her.

Link reaches for the giant boomerang strapped to Ilia's saddlebags.

Stepping away from her companion, Link holds the boomerang in both hands as far above her head as she can reach. She can sense the sudden static in the air from the metal pointed up at the sky as an offering to the Goddesses.

The Goddesses. Farore, the Goddess of Courage and the Goddess of Wind, under whose domain also falls the roar of thunder.

O Farore.

Link angles her arms backwards. She watches the monster skip. One skip, two skips, three skips,
and then the monster stops to once more flail the rod in the air.

She throws the boomerang.

It spins through the skies. Lightning does not strike its metal surface, yet the sharpness of the blade slices through the monster's shoulders to lop off its head in a spray of blood that soaks the white and yellow robe in red. She watches the head and the torso plummet separately down; they burble-sink in the mud. The thin topaz rod glops into the cold earth.

Lifting up her left arm up, Link catches the boomerang in her palm at the same moment that lightning strikes.

Her entire body raises itself from the ground towards the lightning that branches through her limbs. Every muscle spasms and convulses at once to contract and loosen and contract and loosen with the rhythm of the lightning that winds her and winds her and winds her and then abruptly cuts her strings.

She splashes into the mud.

She does not move.

For a single teetering moment her heart has stopped and does not start. Then its beat radiates through her. The pulse carries pain along its wave from her heart from her extremities.

She breathes. In through her nose. Out through her mouth.

Alive.

Alive.

Link lies face-up in the mud. The slimy coldness chills her ears, the back of her neck, and her lower back where her tunic has bunched up around her waist.

Lifting up her arms, Link opens her eyes. The sleeves of her undershirt fall down to expose her limbs.

She marvels at her left arm that caught the lightning in her palm.

Golden scars rise up from her skin to map where the lightning burrowed through her flesh. They spiral down her arm to branch outwards. Roots. A tree's roots painted into her skin down to her shoulder. Somehow the lightning branching around the scars of the lizalfos that bit into her arm upon her first trip to Eldin—twin arcs of ten brownish-red puckered circles amid the molten gold drizzled over her skin—bubbles laughter from her belly.

Lowering her eyelids, Link lets the laughter roll through her. Not even lightning can fell her so long as she has a reason to live, to breathe, to fight. With laughter on her lips, she traces the lightning lines with her right fingertips, her arm not broken so much as strained to the point of any movements causing pain. Exactly on the welts she cannot feel the touch of her finger, but she can feel the pressure on the lower layer of her skin. Just like the burn mark near her right elbow. Link extends her arm and splays her fingers. She cannot help but admire the handiwork of the lightning on her flesh.

Link pulls her sleeves back down. She keeps her gaze on the lightning-strike scars as she picks herself up shakily from the mud that shlps around her, as she plucks the fallen topaz rod from the earth and slots into her belt where once she held the branch that Miyu presented to her, as she leads
Ilia through the muddy remains of the village on the bank to hunt for the slate, as she sifts through the mud, as her fingers close around the slate near where Ilia first tangled Link's arm in her reins, as she tests out the magnesis rune upon the massive metal doors that have sunk into the mud, as she hears the sound of wooden blocks tumbling together and a sudden spuf from below one of the metal doors she magnetises.

A korok.

A korok, like Hestu, but much smaller, so little that the korok could stand on Link's palms, with two leafy branches that curl on either side of their head. The korok places their tiny hands against one another. The stiffness of their tree-like form does not allow them to bow, but they curve their spine. As they speak, their leaf-like mask—or face, or something of the sort—quivers back and forth. "Yahahaha!" they call out in whatever language the koroks speak. Link tilts her head. And then, in Lanayrish: "You found me!"

Link blinks. She sets down the door carefully away from the korok, who twirls towards her.

The korok claps their hands together. "This means Sarie can go home now!" Link stares at the korok, who taps their tiny hand against their face, or mask, or leafy...whatever-it-is. "But it's been so long that Sarie doesn't remember where home is..." Sarie whirls their leaf towards Link. "Do you know where Sarie's home is?"

Link shakes her head, and Sarie croons out a mournful koolooloo. She reaches out her lightning-struck left hand to touch the crown of Sarie's head. Far from leaving the korok alone she offers them the most important aspect of life: "Do you want some food?"

Sarie tilts their head to emulate Link's own movements. "Food?"

Fried rice.

The simplest dish that she can imagine at the moment. Nothing but rice, buttered with the last of her stock and sprinkled with chopped carrots, garlic, onion, and mushrooms collected from the rain, as well as the roasted fish from her earlier experiment with the electrified worm. Link cracks open the funny-faced armoured blue fish with the sword Riju gave her and the less armoured red fish with her knife to toss into the rice.

She fries the fish and rice under an overhang of rock farther up the hill, where an overturned log becomes her—and Sarie's—seat.

They eat straight from the cooking pot. Link scoops the hot rice into her palm to chow down, while Sarie reaches in their hand.

Rice with fish. Rice with fish. Someone, someone must have shown her how to prepare rice with fish.

The girl with the sharks' teeth. Mipha. The girl that Link knew from her childhood, from her trips to Ruto.

The first trip to the villages of Lanayru, populated mostly by zora, with smaller numbers of sheikah throughout, populations of gorons to the north and numbers of hylians to the south. Less frequently would she spot gerudo and rito among the towns. She remembers a gerudo geologist who would routinely ask for new strange metal instruments with which to measure the rocks outside of that village perched on a crescent bow in the River Zola, who would smile at her and greet her with a plate of freshly roasted almond cookies and a giant furled list of schematics to bring back to Rusl.
The almond cookies crunched crisply in her mouth. In the centre of each golden-brown biscuit the geologist would press a single almond, roasted and salted. Never before had Link considered the presentation of food to have such a profound impact on its taste, but she could not look away from that single perfect almond.

She remembers a rito crafter of toys—the wife of a zora woman—who relied upon Rusl's blacksmithy to prepare moulds and gears and other small pieces of metal. From gerudo and goron jewel merchants the rito toymaker would pick up shards of topaz which she would snap into the backs of the toys to make them twitch and move. Whenever Link came by with the most recent order, the rito toymaker would have for her sandwiches smeared with cream and dotted with bright red salmon eggs that would burst into tang when Link bit down. From the rito's wife Link heard that every time around the spring festival the toymaker would dress herself in the traditional blue and white of the local river spirit said to bring gifts to well-behaved children and sour slugs to those less well-behaved. Rather than slugs, the toymaker would simply gift small toys to those whose parents could not afford her usual make, and in return those parents would share with her a meal.

Communion through food.

Others, too, but none that Link remembers as well, for the lack of a food with which she could associate.

Link beats her palm against her head. The first trip. The first trip when she did not yet know of anyone, when she followed a smudged map inked on a sheet of parchment Rusl had pressed into her hand, when Uli—Rusl's wife—thanked Link for taking on Rusl's courier duties so that he could remain in Ordon to care for their soon-born son. "Like your little brother," Uli had told Link, her hand on her swollen belly.

The girl who smelled of horses had seen her off that morning with fried greengill from the river that ran through Ordon and a wrapped package of pumpkin biscuits. "For good luck on the journey," she told Link, who could not stop the grin that stretched from ear to ear, "and to help you come back safely."

Link hugged her tightly. Her best friend. The girl who smelled of horses blushed and embraced Link back.

So off Link went. Off Link went to Lanayru. Among the villages she introduced herself as Rusl's new courier. Some of Rusl's patrons wondered at her young age, while others asked for proof of Rusl trusting her, and still more simply accepted her presence with little fanfare. She continued down the road that winded across the River Zola along which resided many of the waterfront villages, or at least the portions of those villages that lay above the water, for she could see from the surface of the water the houses that extended down into the depths where hylians could not tread.

Link arrived in Ruto burdened with packs upon packs of blacksmithy goods. She does not remember the chaos of the crowd but she remembers her own panicked breathing, remembers her body curling up on the ground, remembers her own foot sliding off of the edge of the silvery-white stone of the lower level of the city, remembers the plunge into the water of the River Zola below, remembers the weight of the commissions dragging her down into the murky depths, remembers the all-too-familiar warmth behind her.

She remembers gasping on the bank of the river.

The girl with the sharks' teeth, who looked nearly identical to when Link had last seen her holding
a rice ball in her hands—if slightly taller—who oohed at how quickly Link herself had grown. The
girl with the sharks' teeth, who rested her webbed hand upon Link's back even as Link shied away
from her touch, who asked Link if she could help in any manner, who offered Link a warm meal if
only Link would follow her.

Link followed her.

With the pack of Rusl's commissions weighing down her back, Link let the zora girl led her on, her
hand cold and damp and smooth on the palm but rough on the back. The girl with the sharks' teeth
—Mipha—made her rice, fried with fish; Link perched on the edge of a balcony overlooking the
city of Ruto to feast upon the seafood rice.

The warmth of the meal calmed her, and Mipha began to ask her questions, of where she had come
from and why she had arrived alone at such a young age. Link kept silent on most. And yet she
told Mipha of her duties as a courier, of the commissions that she had brought with her, of how she
had promised the girl who smelled of horses that she would return home as soon as she could.

"Then let me help you, little one," offered Mipha, her voice soft, her lips barely parting with her
words. "Ruto must be larger than the villages you've visited before, and you'll lose yourself
without a guide. And...then, you can hasten back home. Isn't that right?" She smiled yet its corners
did not reach her eyes. Link merely looked at her.

Home.

Years later Link would come to recognise the sadness in Mipha's voice, but then and there, with her
cheeks bulging full of rice, she simply nodded. Mipha took her hand and walked her through Ruto
delivering commissions. At the close of the day, Mipha promised to aid her once more if ever Link
would return. When Link nearly dozed off against her shoulder, Mipha suggested Link take a night
at the inn, but she balked against the thought of so many people.

Mipha's mouth thinned into a line. Link started to recoil, panic trembling her frame. Yet Mipha
once more took her hand; the Ruto girl showed her to an unused bed in the East Reservoir dam.
"You can use it for as long as you like. I'll make sure no one bothers you."

The next morning Mipha remained there when Link awoke. Link made her breakfast as thanks and
shouldered her satchel.

Mipha patted her head, ruffled her hair.

"Now go on back home, little one."

Home.

Link raises her chin. Sarie has placed their hand into the cooking pot of rice. As with Hestu's, their
hand has split into finger-like roots that absorb the food. Unlike Hestu, Sarie does not burst into
flames but instead sways from side to side humming a looping little ditty that brings Link to
consider a walk through a shrouded wood.

Somewhere, somewhere, she has heard this song before.

She asks.

Sarie explains with a cheerful lilt of the voice. That they and their friends split up to play hide and
seek, and that they chose to hide under a rock. Someone moved the rock to build a house and so
they hid beneath the house, and then that house fell and so they hid beneath the big black thing that
toppled in the mud. The door, Link realises.

"But Sarie's friends didn't find Sarie! Though another friend did!" Sarie announces, pointing at Link. "Now Sarie can come home but Sarie forgets. Sarie's forgotten a lot. Sarie doesn't have a good memory anymore!" They knock their hand against the side of their head, or maybe their torso: Link cannot tell where one ends and the next begins. "But if Sarie doesn't know, then how can Sarie go home?"

Link's hands form the words that she wishes someone could have formed to her when she awoke in the Shrine of Resurrection.

"I'll help you go home."

Sarie lifts their own head towards Link. They do not smile for they have no mouth yet somehow Link detects something resembling a smile, somewhere in how they hold their body or in the timbre of their voice. "Help Sarie go home?"

"I'll help you find your way home." Link offers her hand. Her left hand, spiralled in lightning scars. "I think we all need a way home, sometimes."

Below the overhang she sits on the edge of the overturned log. On her left side Ilia noses her hair; on her right Sarie perches on her knee; in the middle Link closes her eyes and thinks of home.

—

*Seafood Fried Rice* (six hearts) - armoured porgy, hylian rice, mighty porgy, rock salt

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: "On the other leg" is a little joke Link makes to herself; she physically waved around a crab leg. Romani likes puns—like the "get the horn"—so Link has been saving up puns for her. Romani Ranch is home for her now, after all.

The spit of a lizalfos, when thick enough, acts as a glue to hold down their prey. The "whip" that Link feels is, indeed, the lizalfos's whip-like tongue, which Link manages to cut off.

Link fights a wizzrobe in this chapter. I was rather impressed by their depiction in *Breath of the Wild*, though I think my favourite version remains *The Wind Waker's* bird-like mages.

Link gets struck by lightning! If you're having trouble picture the scar on her left arm, I recommend googling lightning strike scars so that you can get an idea. Farore, although the goddess of wind, has also been associated with thunder in previous games, since she's really more like the goddess of the skies in general which includes weather (for example, in *Skyward Sword*, the three dragons were likewise themed with fire, water, and lightning), just as Nayru is variously associated with both ice and water, and Din with both fire and rock. In the folklore of some people of Hyrule, lightning is seen as a blessing of Farore; one who has been struck by lightning and
lived is said to have been blessed by the goddess of courage. Note that it's her left arm here that's been "blessed" by lightning, which is her dominant arm/sword arm. That will become thematically relevant later.

I think it's telling that Link looks at the scars and just goes "hey that's cool".

Hey, it's a korok! I told you that they would become relevant. As for the korok in question, I've included a major character from each of the 3D Zelda titles (a certain someone already hinted at from Skyward Sword, from Twilight Princess, Aryll from The Wind Waker, and Romani and Cremia from Majora's Mask) and realised that I hadn't included anyone from Ocarina of Time except arguably Malon. I should observe that I personally don't believe in a unified Zelda timeline, regardless of whatever timeline Nintendo threw together for Hyrule Historia, and treat games (outside of directly stated in-game connections) as their own entities. This provides a hint about that timeline; another subsequent chapter (the seventieth, if I remember correctly) will basically directly state which game this follows, albeit with a gap of ten thousand years.

Ruto is the capital of Lanayru, the replacement of Zora's Domain, and named after Ruto Town from The Adventure of Link and thus Ruto from Ocarina of Time.

The almond cookies are based on almendrados. The bread with roe is based on a food that I don't actually know the name of but which my parents made when I was a child; it isn't with expensive caviar.

Because zora are capable of both breathing out of the water and in the water (they have both lungs and gills), there are plenty of settlements that are partly or fully underwater.

Mipha was using Link as an excuse to get out of doing her princessly duties, as she doesn't want to become the Queen Zora (as you'll see). Zora scales, like shark skin, is rough on the "outer" parts (like where Sidon is red) and smooth on the "inner" parts (like where Sidon is white).

I provide here information on how the nine-hundred koroks in Breath of the Wild came to be. Unlike with Breath of the Wild, most of the koroks have already been found by people other than Link; Sarie is, in fact, the very last korok to not yet return to the forest.

Link having heard the song before is not supposed to be some reference to reincarnation, by the way (and the song that Sarie hums is Saria's song from Ocarina of Time), but instead is a song that she learned from Zelda.

Link will get to go home, too.

Up next: a very long flashback, and Link preparing for her meeting with the King Zora.


Beta reader's comments: Poor Ilia. She's so scared and confused. I feel so bad for her whenever I read this chapter.

Much like Sidon, the author has a really interesting take on Mipha, which is really cool to see unfold over the course of the story.
In this chapter, Link receives what may be the most badass scar in history.

Crab Stir-Fry

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef crosses the Bridge of Lanayru; is greeted by the Lanayrish prince; and gains entry to the city of Ruto—and an audience with its king.

Chapter Notes

Author's notes that didn't fit into the end: As usual, thank you to all of my readers for keeping with me so far, and thank you to my beloved beta reader Emma, for pulling through.

Just as the massive bridge in Eldin is known as the Bridge of Eldin, I renamed the bridge to Zora's Domain the Bridge of Lanayru. Speaking of which, in a previous chapter, I renamed Mount Lanayru to Mount Nayru, because you wouldn't expect the tallest mountain in say, Chad, to be named Mount Chad (indeed, it's Emi Koussi).

The various instruments of the Lanayrish symphony are a reference to the Instruments of the Sirens from *Link's Awakening*.

The triple swirl sigil of the zora is meant to reflect the sapphire from *Ocarina of Time*, which in turn resembles the mark of Nayru.

"Waves" is a unit of time measurement, owing historically to the Lanayrish use of water-clocks before their replacement by pendulum clocks when the advance of technology (yes, water-clocks are a real thing!).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

On the other side of Luto's Crossing, Link, Ilia, and Sarie cut through the last several bends in the road with a combination of magnesis on her giant boomerang—wriggling the metal thing in the middle of a campsite of monsters while they chirp and poke at it; then the lightning strikes—stasis to sneak past more difficult enemies; cryonis to block octoroks and lizalfos from spitting at her in the river; her old and faithful stand-by of bombs; and the pictobox, which with Link snaps a pictograph of herself and Sarie exchanging a slap of palms, one of the topaz-rod-wielding monsters floating in the background of the pictograph with the boomerang just halfway through cleaving its torso.

Link takes the one, two, three steps around the final bend. Suddenly the skies open up before her, and she stands at one end of the Bridge of Lanayru.

She emerges from the gauntlet of thunder with a sprained and throbbing right arm that pulsates in spiralled patterns where Ilia's rein wrapped around her and a left arm welted in golden-orange roots that branch over her flesh. The blue sash tied around her waist has dirtied and torn over the past several days of her struggle through on the trail of trial. The sky-blue hangs on a thread from hip to shoulder. Her trousers cake with mud; her tunic stiffens from dried blood; her undershirt sticks to
But the fish and rice warms her belly. Link will never let anything puncture the aura of fullness that carries her forward, to the ever-many delicious meals that await her.

The Zola River widens into Ruto Lake in the bowl-like heart of the mountains of Lanayru, either named for the capital or the capital named for the lake. The red telescope reveals cascades of waterfalls feeding the lake from the icy mountains further up climb into the heavens to the peak of Mount Nayru beneath the silver moon.

The Bridge of Lanayru spans over the lake, longer the Bridge of Eldin, though not quite as wide. The silvery-white stone glimmers even beneath the dark curtain of rain; great archways carved with symbols of the Goddess Zola spaced every three paces or so along its length. Stone struts drop away into the abyss to hold the span up. Beyond the bridge, Link can just scarcely make out the layered city of Ruto, half above water and half below.

She hears Sarie, sitting atop Ilia's head, gasp and shakannah in awe.

Link looks down at the Bridge of Lanayru itself, and her hands drop to her sides.

Sidon awaits her some five paces in. Beaming widely, he rests a hand over his own chest, his gaze settled blankly on some indistinct point in front of him. Beside him waits a light blue zora woman with the head of a long-whiskered catfish, wielding a small curved horn in her hand. And there, in two long rows spanning the entire remainder of the Bridge of Lanayru, Link ogles flagbearers lofting banners aloft and musicians clutching instruments in their finned hands. Cellos and horns, bells and harps, marimbas and musical triangles, hand organs and drums, and undoubtedly more beyond that she cannot see for the storm.

The rain pours on.

The agony inflicted on her from the monsters and the lightning ebb away as Link takes her first step upon the Bridge of Lanayru. Sarie makes noises of wonder and awe at the Lanayrish symphony awaiting them. The light-blue-zora in front leans towards Sidon, whose grin widens and teeth glint, and then lifts the horn to her mouth.

Her head-tail twists back and forth; she blows into the instrument.

The musicians carry the sound down their ranks in a wave-like fashion—Link would laugh at that if not for the gazes chaining her in place; perhaps stasis works in the same manner—and flagbearers raise their flags—inscribed with the triple-swirl sigil of Zola that resembles all-too-well the mark of Nayru—to the heavens.

Ilia trots forward. The movements of her hooves keep Link walking forward while Sarie bounces up and down upon Ilia's head.

As she nears Sidon, she hears the central hornist change her tune. The prince extends his arm forward towards Link to snatch her once more into a bone-crushing embrace. She can very physically feel the difference between his slippery white skin and his much rougher red scales that leave her lower back scraped and bloody. When he releases her, she wobbles on her jellied legs.

"O Champion of Hylia," booms Sidon, "but of course, you have conquered the trial set forth by our Goddess Zola! I believed in you, and you—O Champion of Hylia, O most courageous Link—" A hushed murmur wavers over the crowd. Link pales as the gazes upon her sharpen. The weight of so many eyes upon her back dizzies her head and bows her shoulders. "—in whom I had absolute
faith, have proven yourself worthy a thousand times over! Welcome, O Champion of Hylia, to the heart of our Goddess Zola's Domain, our great city of Ruto!"

Link teeters back and forth on her feet. She hears Sarie makes noises by her ear, and she hears Ilia whinny, and she hears Sidon continue to speak, and yet the words wash over her ears as sound and fury without meaning.

"And as the Champion of Hylia, we shall welcome you into this great city as a hero, as the chosen one sent by our Goddess to bestow upon us a saviour from the Divine Beast Vah Ruta! Come now, O Champion of Hylia, O Hero of Lanayru, O most courageous Link!"

The gazes of the Lanayrish. All upon her at once. Sidon, his grin so expectant. All upon her, the girl who did nothing but cross over a patch of rubble for all that they know.


Courage.

Courage.

Courage.

She'll show them courage. She'll...she'll...

She'll tip backwards and give in to the darkness.

Link awakens to the smell of crab meat and fried vegetables. The scent curls around her nose to lift her up from slumber. Her hands shoot out from her body to grab a bowl. Her nose identifies the food: crab stir-fry with a healthy blend of ELdic spice—and how!—with herbs, seaweed, and vegetables of different assortments, all served over rice.

She shoves her entire face into the bowl. Without a utensil and far too impatient to wait for the travel of her hand to her mouth and back, Link eats directly from the bowl until her stomach practically threatens to pop like an overinflated octorok and her mouth burns with spice.

Only then do her eyes open.

Link jolts up on a bed that sloshes her around, in the nude. A dark burgundy zora—his head like a trout—greets her with a respectful bow at the foot of the bed. Before she can panic, the messenger indicates her clothing beside her on the watery mattress, which Link rapidly tugs on while the messenger continues to look calmly at her, seemingly oblivious to his own presence.

The messenger explains, briefly, of the situation. Of Link's fainting upon the bridge. Of Sidon carrying her bodily over the threshold to Ruto. Of her horse, Ilia, currently stabled safely in the charge of the royal family. Of her belongings waiting for her to place them back on, including the red telescope—which Link speedily snatches from the messenger—and the slate. Of the royal dress prepared especially for the occasion, for the young lady—O Champion of Hylia, Master Link—to wear in her presentation to the King of Lanayru.

Link chokes on a crab leg. She thumps her hand against her chest hard enough for the leg to shoot out of her throat and into her own lap. The impact claws the leg across her inner thighs. Plucking it from the bed, she wolfs it down whole.

The messenger purses his lips. "Quite. His Majesty, the King Zora," he elaborates with a flourish
of his fins, "wishes to see you personally, O Champion of Hylia, Master Link, to discuss matters of the Divine Beast Vah Ruta. If all goes well...and you are the first Champion of Hylia to make it this far, so I extend my sincerest congratulations by the grace of the Goddess, blessed in Her faith...then we shall return to you your weapons as well." The messenger bows. "If you have no need of me, O Champion of Hylia, I shall allow you to time to awaken. In ten waves hence I shall return to lead the audience of His Majesty, so please prepare yourself."

She blinks. The messenger does not repeat himself and instead turns away. Shrugging, Link decides to play a game of determining just how much stir-fry she can forcibly ingest before she passes out again for however long ten waves might mean. If the King of Lanayru has any sort of moral character, he will understand and forgive her for prioritising the consumption of crab stir-fry over her meeting with him.

The messenger leaves. Link focuses her full attention on the crab stir-fry.

Mm.

Crab stir-fry.

She knows how to make this dish. She could make it here and now if she had the ingredients, as she did make it for someone. As she did make it for Mipha.

Twice.

At least twice.

They say lightning never strikes twice in the same place, but the deliciousness of her own cooking strikes her thrice a day.

Link gathered over the brief years of visiting Lanayru that Mipha's father expected her to follow into the family business, whatever that business may have entailed. She gathered over the brief years of visiting Lanayru that Mipha wished for something else, though what that something was she would not—or could not—say. She gathered over the brief years of visiting Lanayru that when Mipha finally announced her departure, the fear in her features gave way to a secretive relief.

Mipha spoke increasingly softly over the years. Link does not remember when she first began to redden the small line of her mouth, but Mipha would purse her lips and part as little of her jaws as she could. Link could not ask her of why. Rather she kept her mouth shut and simply complimented Mipha on her smile whenever she did beam fully.

Her grin—when she smiled widely—stretched nearly across the entirety of her face. Her sharks' teeth would not quite slot together, and Link would see the rows of even sharper teeth beyond waiting to replace those worn down. Mipha could, if she wanted to, likely snap off Link's head in a single bite.

And yet Link, who had seen Mipha carefully trap flies under an overturned glass and release them outside, would sooner bet that she could learn to breathe underwater than Mipha could ever hurt her.

She would look over the edges of the bottom-most layer of Ruto that lay above the water to admire the other half of the city submerged in the lake, where farmers harvested seaweed and kelp and raised fish to support the massive population of Ruto, and where most zora attended their twice daily religious services: once at the rising of the moon, and another at its setting. The Temple of
Zola that protruded in its silvery splendor from the lake contained a complicated mechanism to drain or fill with water, so that non-zora guests and Lanayrish residents could enjoy the more prominent services; during normal hours, the entirety of the temple waited beneath the mirrored surface of the lake.

Back in Ordon, Link dunked her head for increasingly long periods of time in her efforts to learn how to breathe underwater. Yet, despite her supplications, the Goddesses did not provide her with gills. When Mipha heard of her adventures, she giggled gently, covering her mouth with a small silvery fan. Always so polite that Link would feel dirty just from existing in her presence, except for her aura so inviting that Link could let herself relax.

The years went on. Steadily Link grew in height and in strength, while Mipha seemed, mostly, to stay the same. Link mentioned once of her little sister, of her precious Aryll, whom she had sent to live on an island with her grandmother; Mipha let slip the existence of her own little sister, far younger than she. Only twenty years of age, Mipha noted.

Link blinked rapidly at her.

"Oh." Mipha's cheeks darkened in her blush, as she linked her slender fingers together. "I so often forget how brief live hylians in comparison to us. You've grown so much in the blink of an eye. I remember when I first saw you, and you stood no taller than my sister..."

Link rubbed the back of her head. "Do zora live forever?"

Mipha flattened her hands against one another. "No, not at all." She hesitated. "Yet we live longer than do most others."

Link counted on her fingers. "Hylians, sheikah, gerudo, gorons, rito."

"Yes." Mipha inclined her head. The fins on her face fluttered. "Longer than do most others. I have heard that the children of the forest are immortal, but I have never heard of anyone meeting a child of the forest."

Link tilted her head to the side, but Mipha did not elaborate on the children of the forest. Instead she seemed to draw inwards on herself; the tender membranes of her fins and webbing paled. Link offered her a blanket for the cold.

"Hylians only live some sixty, seventy years, don't they?" Mipha murmured to herself. Link wrapped the blanket around her. She could feel the roughness of Mipha's scales catch on the underside of the fabric meant for hylians. Absentmindedly Mipha's fingers dug into the blanket to pull it over herself.

She continued to gaze ahead, without looking for even a moment at Link.

If she had cut out Link's legs from beneath her, Link would not have felt any smaller than she did in that room open to the night air, Mipha huddled over the counter, the blanket scarcely covering her upper back from their difference in size.

"A bird could love a fish..." Mipha's third eyelids fluttered horizontally over her eyes. Link blinked uncomprehendingly. She took a step from the counter. "...but where would they live?"

Link raised her hands to her own face. She sensed the crescent pricks of her nails on the skin of her cheeks just below her eyes.

She busied herself making crab stir-fry with the jar of orange-red spices that she had purchased
from the foothill towns at the border of Akkala and Eldin before looping around to Lanayru.

With her hands laden with as many different species of crab as she could fit into a single pot, Link served the stir-fry over a bed of rice. She pushed the plate across the counter to Mipha.

She watched the third eyelid slip over the corner of Mipha's eyes to reveal the gold of her irises, her diamond-shaped pupils shrinking in the sudden light.

"Oh...is this for me, my Link?"

Link nodded.

She observed Mipha eat politely, observed Mipha open the tiniest smidgen of her mouth so that only her red-painted lips would part and not the remainder of her jawline, observed Mipha dab her mouth with a napkin. When Link turned her head away to pretend to polish the counter, she could watch Mipha in the reflection of the glass she held: the girl with the sharks' teeth brought the entire plate up to her mouth and swallowed the stir-fry whole.

Link rested her hand against her chin. How to convince Mipha that she could act as she wanted to, even around Link. How to...make Mipha feel as safe around her, as she felt around Mipha.

She set the glass down. It spun around its base before teetering onto its side.

Mipha thanked Link for the meal and bid her good night. Picking the discarded blanket from Mipha's seat, Link turned it over to see the interior shredded, the fabric cool to the touch from the chill of Mipha's skin.

Link slept beneath the blanket anyway. The linen shed on her. In the morning she found puffs of white clinging to her skin and fluffing in her hair.

The years stretched on.

Mipha never changed. Always the same kind and gentle aura, always the same softness of her timbre, always that same small smile, always that same laugh with her mouth carefully covered, always that same serene face that she put on when she thought Link could see her.

Link changed. Step by step Link changed, and grew, and just when her own form had started to make her cover mirrors and shy away from the edge of the water, they chose Mipha.

She did not learn until years later who they were. For all she knew they existed as mysterious shadows in the corners of the world, as strangely flitting in and out of reality as Them against which Romani fights.

When Mipha finally announced her departure, she did so late at night, on Link's last night in Ruto before her return journey to the province of Ordona to once more pet the round-horned goats and feast on slightly sour Ordon cheese.

When Mipha finally announced her departure, all of the other patrons had long since left after spending the evening increasingly reaching across the counter to pat Link's head or to rub her shoulders, and only she and Mipha remained.

When Mipha finally announced her departure, she wept without tears. Link had never seen Mipha cry tears. Instead she simply covered her face with her hands, the fingers splayed, the thin membrane of webbing between them glistening wetly in the light of luminous stone lanterns. "I...have been chosen as the Champion of Zola."
Link stared at her without understanding. Zola, the Goddess. But a Champion of Zola. "Is that the same thing as a Sage of Zola?"

"May I touch your cheek?" Link dipped her head, and Mipha reached over the counter to rest her hand against Link's jawline, to cup her fingers over the curve of Link's cheek. The coldness of her palm could shy Link away but she tensed herself against the counter. "I will have to leave, to somewhere far away, to train to defend Lanayru...and the rest of Hyrule." A Champion of Zola. One of four Champions, or something like that. To defend and protect the kingdom of Hyrule and all of its sovereign states and inhabitants.

Four great sovereign states under Hyrule had given forth their own Champion: from Eldin, from Tabantha, from Parapa, and, now, from Lanayru. Link did not venture to ask why not Faron, or Necluda, or Akkala, or Hebra, nor did she inquire from what the Champions had to defend the kingdom of Hyrule.

Perhaps, just as Link never spoke in confidence to Mipha, neither did Mipha speak in confidence to her.

"And...I have been chosen, as the Champion of Zola. They have a title for me now." Mipha smiled faintly and Link leaned in. "The Champion of Zola, the Hero of Lanayru, the Divine Beast Vah Ruta's Pilot, O Wise Mipha."

Link bobbed her head.

"I don't know how I feel about all of this. O Wise Mipha..." The fins arrayed around her face opened and closed. "I don't feel very wise at all."

Link could have said but I think you are, and yet her fingers froze around the shapes, around the possibility of disagreeing with Mipha, around what that might entail even from someone as gentle as the girl she had known for these long years, and rather she folded her hands in her lap.

"I...wish to tell you that I was chosen for my skills in the art of the spear, or in healing." Mipha splayed her fingers. "But...the real reason I was chosen..."

Her voice trailed to silence.

Link did not press. Instead she asked if Mipha wanted anything to eat.

As she cooked, Mipha asked Link of her life in Ordona, of the village of Ordon, of the goats, of the girl who smelled of horses, of her employment as a courier, of whether she would continue to return to Ruto.

"My Link," Mipha told her with that odd mixture of relief and fear—relief—fear—in the lower curve of her tone, "I do not know when next I'll see you. Will you...will you be all right here, in Ruto, on your own?"

Link had no answer. Rather, Mipha read a different question off her hands: whether Mipha's new position would bring her happiness.

"You needn't worry about me, my Link," Mipha responded, her voice even quieter than usual, her lips scarcely vibrating with her words. "For once...for once, maybe I don't know where my path will lead in the future. That has its own happiness, doesn't it?" She lowered her gaze. "Oh...I know of the river of fate." She affected a certain solemn timbre that stilled Link's hands. But only for a moment. Then Link busied herself making the meal once more. Crab stir-fry, just as Mipha liked it.
"When the Golden Goddesses created our world, the Goddess Nayru, Goddess of Wisdom and Goddess of Water, set flow the current of time, so as to provide a logic and a meaning to a world once embroiled in primordial chaos."

Mipha's voice deepened. Link stirred more swiftly. A piece of crab meat flew from the skillet to smack her across the nose. Stifling her yelp of pain at the sensation of burning, she stuck out her tongue to let the bit of meat fall directly into her mouth. Of course the meat burned her tongue too, although least it tasted great while setting her mouth on fire.

"And, as the Goddess Zola elaborates in Her faith in the Golden Goddesses, the river of time may bend and flow, but always will the water it carries lead to the ocean. The circumstances of fate may seem cloudy to an observer in the river who cannot see where its mouth leads, yet the river will pour out its waters into the ocean nevertheless."

She hesitated.

"But then...if the river runs straight and a fish can see the ocean, the fish may decide not to swim again, for no matter how it swims, the current shall carry it forward. Yet if the river bends and loops in upon itself, the fish instead will swim with all of its might to reach what it cannot see."

Mipha raised her head again to lock her gaze onto Link's, who hastily covered her burned nose with her hand and held the skillet with the other. "The Goddess wishes for us to swim with all of our might and to have Faith that our efforts shall see us to the ocean. Before...before I became Champion, I thought that I could see the ocean. Now I feel as though I can swim again. That is its own kind of happiness. I hope that that...that that made any sense to you, my Link."

Here Link nodded, her hand still over her nose; her breath came out as a nasally whistle.

Link had heard, from the festivals held in Ordon, of the story of the Goddess Nayru, but never of the Goddess Zola. She merely dipped her head.

In time, she can believe. But in fate, she dares not. For the moment that she might consider her life etched in stone, she may as well lie in the grass to perish.

"I'm happy that you'll be happy," Link signed, and Mipha's eyes narrowed. Link sensed her breath freeze in her own throat as she stepped back. Her bare foot slid in a spot of something slippery—oil, or butter, or her own sweat—and she felt herself falling backwards.

"May I—?" Mipha reached for her.

Her cold fingers closed around Link's left wrist.

Link continued to slide downwards another half-second, but Mipha caught her fast. With her other hand Mipha wrapped her fingers around Link's right elbow to pull her up. When Link regained her footing Mipha let go immediately. Clasping her hands together Mipha bowed low to Link.

"My sincerest apologies, my Link, for not asking permission first."

Link shook her head. "Thank you for saving me." Her fingers trembled. "Please...please don't hurt me for asking this, but are you angry at me? For saying that you'll be happy?"

"Angry?" Mipha stared at Link and she shuddered back to cower behind the counter. "No, I...noticed the burn across your nose. Here, let me heal you, my Link. May I touch your face?"

The blue healing salve smelled vaguely of chuchu jelly as Mipha ran her fingers over Link's nose.
Closing her eyes, Link squirmed under the tingling sensation of Mipha's fingertips until Mipha retracted her hand to her lap. She looked down upon her own palm where pooled flecks of the salve she herself had concocted.

Mipha ate of the stir-fry, and Link watched her wide grin in the reflection of a glass. "My Link to the world beyond Ruto...I'll miss your cooking as much as I'll miss your smile."

Link blushed though she knew not why.

The moon drew up, reached her zenith, and began to climb back down through the darkness of the sky. With the closing of the night came the stirring of the city, of followers of the Goddess Zola rising to begin the migration to the Temple of Zola for their morning prayer.

And then Mipha had to slip away back to her own home, to prepare for her journey to Central Hyrule.

She promised to send Link letters, if she could. She hoped that one day they would see one another again. She waved, and then she started to turn away, and then Link's own heart flipped over itself.

"Mipha..." Her hands shuddered. "...may I hug you?"

Mipha smiled.

For a second she beamed from ear to ear, and the full breadth of her sharks' teeth zig-zagged across her face. In the next Mipha had thinned the line of her mouth to only show Link the tiniest smile of her painted lips.

But for a second—for a second—for a second Mipha showed Link the truest happiness, as true as the deliciousness of the crab stir-fry Link made her.

When Link hugged her, Mipha embraced her back; the rough scales on the backs of Mipha's bare arms scraped through Link's tunic to scratch her skin to blood. Cheeks darkening with her blush, Mipha offered to heal her back as well.

She remembers the sensation of Mipha's palms, smeared with salve, upon her skin.

Link carried Mipha's smile with her all the way back to Ordona. When she told Aryll of the smile, Aryll clapped her hands together and drew a picture of a giant shark with a grin that took up the width of three entire sheets of parchment which the girl who smelled of horses helped her tape together. They could not hang the drawing in the house, but the girl who smelled of horses affixed it to the wall of the ranch. The owner of the ranch ruffled Aryll's hair before telling the girl who smelled of horses to return to her house for fear of her father's retaliation.

"Like the girl with the golden hair."

The girl with the golden hair. The girl who smelled of horses. Neither of whom had taken warmly to Link at first.

But the quickest way to someone's heart is through their stomach. The quickest way to someone's heart...

Link glances again at the dress laid out upon the bedside. When she attempts to push herself off of the water-bed, the mattress sloshes back and knocks her onto her spine. She tries to swing herself up by rocking back and forth. Her efforts reward her with sliding her further and further into the centre of the bed. Link flails her limbs like a beetle turned onto its back.
She lets her arms and legs drop to her sides; the impact of her limbs against the bed launches her from the mattress. She smacks against the opposite wall. Stumbling back, Link rubs her nose, already broken by the lizalfos's foot. Her bare left arm retains the golden scars left behind by the lightning, while her right reddens with the spiral of where the reins bit into her flesh.

A dress.

A dress that reminds her of a goldfish's frills and which seems to consist of the fins of giant fish carefully sewn together. In a deep, deep blue. Link runs her hands over the material, cool to the touch, with a texture not unlike candlewax, ticklish to the undersides of her fingers.

She slips on the dress over her undershirt and trousers. Link starts to remove her trousers; suddenly she finds a sensation as if she had abruptly lost her legs. Despite the sweat, dirt, and mud caked into the fabric—though someone must have washed her clothes, for they carry a fresher scent of soap—Link pulls up the trousers again to smooth the dress over her legs.

With that, she almost sits on the edge of the bed before recalling how the water-bed flopped her onto her back. No need for that repeat performance.

Rather, then, Link settles herself upon the floor to sniff her hands still smelling of stir-fry.

And then she waits. For the messenger to return. To bring her to the King of Lanayru. To introduce herself.

She lifts her hand to her chin.

The Goddesses have not sent her. Link happened upon the slate, as she happened upon the blade of evil's bane, through chance. Had she not taken the slate from the depression in the pedestal in the Shrine of Resurrection—had she not found the wooden cabin or read the contents of the letter within—had she not chosen to deliver the letter to Lady Impa of Kakariko—someone else would have eventually taken on that burden.

And yet, with the weight of the slate burning upon her right hip, she has aided in the calming of three Divine Beasts.

Chosen hero or no, Link has the ability and the courage to calm the last.


No, not her. Once upon a time, before she lost her memories, the titles weighed down upon her shoulders like a loftwing around her neck.

And yet now Link has chosen her own path. Not in swimming with all her might to the inevitability of an ocean she cannot see, but in crawling up onto the bank of the river towards that sweeter scent she senses in the grass.

When she takes the slate in hand, her hands do not heavy with obligation. Instead her fingers close around the promise of what she has decided for herself.

And when she has calmed the Divine Beasts, and when she has found a path to Ordona, and when she has ensured the safety of Koko and Cottla, and when she has come back to Romani Ranch, and when she has seen about Romani's bwig bwad bwoar, then she can rest, and she can cook, and she can eat, and she can walk her own trail.

But first, she needs to prepare some food.
**Crab Stir-fry** (nine hearts) - bright-eyed crab, goron spice, fleet-lotus seeds, ironshell crab, razorclaw crab

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: The pictograph Link takes is a mistake; she doesn't really enjoy violence like that.

The city of Ruto has a complex mechanism by which it can be raised or lowered, so that the water level will change based on the needs of the residents. This mechanism was inspired by the *Zelda* dungeons that require you to change the water level, such as the Swamp Palace from *A Link Between Worlds*.

That ceremony was a little too much for Link, especially with having just braved the entire gauntlet; with the fatigue of how long *that* took, as well as her social anxiety, Link just conked herself out. I should note that the journey towards the Bridge of Lanayru took several days, as I mentioned in the fact that Link was taking opportunities to rest at different campsites and so forth.

In *Breath of the Wild*, the Seabed Inn offers Link a zora water-bed. Here's that water-bed.

Mipha's mouth in *Breath of the Wild* bothers me. It looks like the modeller initially forgot to give her a mouth, panicked at the last second, and slapped on the tiniest two red lips imaginable. Instead, in *Delicious in Wilds*, the "tiny red lips" syndrome is explained by Mipha putting on lipstick on a small part of her mouth and learning how to barely part her lips when she speaks, to give the illusion that her mouth is much smaller than it is. This, to keep non-zora from being scared of her in her own self-consciousness. She feels similarly about her size and tries to stay out of the water.

Mipha mentioning a little sister is not a mistake. I realised that although I had included quite a few trans women in the story (Link, Zelda, Marin, Malon, off the top of my head, with every unspecified character being open to reader interpretation), I hadn't included many prominent trans men other than Vish, and I wanted to do something with Sidon anyhow.

"A bird could love a fish, but where would they live?" is a reference to *Fiddler on the Roof*, where the quotation is "A bird may love a fish but where would they build a home together?" In this case, Mipha is *not* referring to romance; rather, she's talking about the inherent difficulties of desiring both zora and non-zora lifestyles at once.

Mipha's departure is in reference to her being chosen to become the Champion of Zola and the pilot of the Divine Beast Vah Ruta, so she is excused from her expectations of becoming the Queen Zora. Her departure is also why she wasn't around for Link coming out as a girl.

The comment about covering mirrors is in reference to Link's growing dysphoria at the
onset of puberty.

Unlike the other zora, Mipha is always careful about asking Link, since she noticed that Link is uncomfortable with the touchy-feely zora culture.

The comment about Nayru and water is based on the description of the goddesses from the manual of *A Link to the Past* and the deku tree's words from *Ocarina of Time*.

As with Urbosa, and Revali, and to a lesser extent Daruk, we get to see Mipha's thoughts about fate. And we also get to see Link's thoughts, Link who somewhat rejects fate, although not out of the same reasons that Revali does. Rather, for Link, she propels herself forward on the thought that she can change her fate, especially since she doesn't want to accept "defeat" at her fate to have to deal with her parents. You also see hints of Link's abuse in this very chapter in her conversation with Mipha.

She's almost there. She's so close to her real break-through about being a hero, although her character development won't end there.

Link's much better about keeping and taking responsibility now (i.e. even though she ran away from Riju, she also has decided to try to find out about Calamity Ganon after she takes care of other more pertinent stuff), but she hasn't lost that playfulness that makes Link Link, like with the stuffing her mouth with crab legs.

Up next: making food; not chatting with the king. And in the chapter after that? Why, what's that monstrous beast you have to fight on your way to Vah Ruta?

midna's ass. 16 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Link using the camera rune never ceases to be both funny and adorable.

Poor Link. Lanayru culture doesn't mesh well with her own anxieties.

We're very near the first apex in Link's character development, which is exciting. She's a wonderful character to watch unfold.

Link in a dress is really cute.

Emma. 16 October 2017.
The travelling chef prepares for the meeting with the Lanayrish king by making a meal of crab legs and meets some very familiar and long-lived faces.

Author's notes that didn't make it to the end etc etc.: Of course, a warm and from-the-deepths-my-heart thank you to all of the readers who have supported me so far, and an equal thank-you to my most marvellous beta reader, Emma, who continues to help me remind to post chapters on time and not twelve hours later.

One moon is approximately the length of a month; twelve hundred moons is a century. Because the moon is tied to the ocean, I figured that it was appropriate for the zora to use it as a unit of measurement. Why do the zora have the most markedly different units of measurement and things like that in the whole of Hyrule? Because zora live for much longer than all of the other races, so they're the most resistant to picking up new standards.

The dress slithers uncomfortably around her limbs as she steps out of the room with her mouth tasting of spring green elixir. Glancing left and right, she does not spot the messenger, but rather peers down a long windowless hallway illuminated by luminous stones.

Link sniffs.

Something fishy—and not the fishiness of her intention to sneak around the palace. Something crabby—and not the crabbiness of the messenger once he discovers that his charge has vanished from the room. Something salty—and not the saltiness she will experience if the messenger or someone else catches her before she can enact her master plan.

She lets her nose lead her through the quiet and empty hallways. Crouching down on the floor, Link sneaks forward step by step, step by step, step by step. Occasionally she hears conversation, which brings her to hang back until the talk passes. Here and there a door slides open in her face, and she leaps back into the shadows until the occupant—she has seen nothing but zora since her arrival, she realises—leaves or returns to their room.

The fishy-crabby-salty scent grows stronger. Link wanders on, and other fragrances join in: frying herbs, salt-grilled fish, smoked meat. She licks her lips.

The hallway abruptly widens into a large circular chamber with a pool of water in its centre and several other hallways leading out. In the pool relax various zora: some chatting with one another, some lying back in the water, some playing a strange game involving red markers at the bottom of the pool, some snacking on a tray of shrimp that floats in the water, some evidently using a game
of wind-water-fire to decide who will bring over another tray of shrimp from the kitchens, some discussing the Divine Beast Vah Ruta while another swimmer shushes them. "Whatever the Goddess has in store for us," the shusher explains, "She will have in store for us. Relax."

"To have faith is to have faith in your own abilities as well," the other argues hotly, "and the Goddess would never have us sit back and wait for fate to come to us."

The shusher frowns. "Perhaps this is a sign from the Goddess Herself."

"Oh, and what sort of sign could that be?" the other responds, now sitting up from the water.

"A sign of our behaviour these twelve hundred moons—"

"I suppose it's simple for you to say so, with little danger of Ruto being swept away," observes the zora who won the game of wind-water-fire while his companion dejectedly picks up the tray of shrimp crumbs. "Have you forgotten the Calamity, or were you too young to remember it?"

The sudden silence in the chamber comes so quiet that Link can hear nothing but her own heartbeat. The zora in the pool turn towards the one who invoked the Great Calamity, who has folded his hands in his lap to gaze coolly back at them.

Link keeps herself towards the end of the hallway; she considers how best to enter the chamber. Then, while the inhabitants of the pool have occupied themselves glaring open-mouthed at he who spoke of the Calamity, she shrugs to herself and starts the walk to tail behind the zora who lost the game of wind-water-fire.

At least wind-water-fire remains popular enough to have lasted the Great Calamity and the century of chaos that followed. Truly nothing could ever defeat that manner of determining who goes first. The land known as Hyrule's national pastime.

Well, not quite. From what Link has remembered of the time before the Great Calamity, Hyrule's national pastime was in fact cucco dodging.

She follows the zora woman with the tray. Up and up, up and up, through the winding hallways that radiate outwards from the pool like the limbs of an octopus, a river of water coursing downwards about two centimetres from the floor.

Link slides her feet along the ground to avoid sloshing the water loudly enough to wake the entire city of Ruto at once.

The dueling scents of fishiness, crabbiness, and saltiness grow even stronger, until Link finds herself wrinkling her nose for their overpowering nature even as her mouth continues to water. She can faintly hear the pitter-patter of rain over the roof of the winding tunnels. Suddenly the hallway opens up to the air.

The zora woman with the tray passes through the brief open space without a care to the roofed hallway. Glancing upwards, Link can see neither the sun nor the stars.

Only the endless blanket of grey and the maddening rain rivuleting down her skin.

Lifting her hands above her head, Link hurries on after the zora woman with the tray. At length the hallway widens again. The zora woman veers to the left into an open door illumined with luminous stones through which Link can see nearly nothing but from which wafts the savory aroma of fish, and crab, and salt, and herb, and seed, and all manner of foodstuff. Even if the Lanayrish catch her in the act, by the Golden Goddesses Link will enter the kitchens and she will try her hand at
preparing food in the kitchens and she will cry over her own meal if she has to.

She steps through the doorway.

The column of scent hits her like a boomerang to the face.

The rot of fish.

Link forces her eyes open.

The kitchens. Not like the tiny galley of Misan and Glepp's wagon, or even the open-air communal cooking area of Medli, but a massive chamber longer than the Temple of Time and as wide as the Bridge of Eldin, stretching outwards past where the glow of luminous stones allows her eyes—less suited to the darkness than the eyes of zora—to see.

Zora. Some ten or fifteen zora that she can see at the counters preparing a variety of meals, from soups in rounded pots, to rice-balls rolled together in their hands, from shrimp fried in oil to fish-shaped pastries baked on a sheltered flame.

Link looks past her fellow food-lovers to examine the kitchens proper.

Long silvery-white counters. Stone pantries and cabinets set between counters. Pots and pans of every size and shape hanging from the backs of cabinets or arranged upon the counters in regular rows. Baskets of ingredients—fruit and vegetables, herbs and spices, mushrooms and salts—ready and waiting. A long ice-box wrapping around every other counter. She can scarcely hold herself back from flinging open the ice-box to indulge in what might await within.

And, hanging from the ceiling on long cords: the fish, and the crab, and the shrimp, and the snail, and the lobster, and the turtle, and every sort of seafood, entirely raw, some partially rotting from the cords.

Before Link's own eyes, one of the zora working at the counters reaches up to grab a carp from a cord and tosses the half-rotted fish whole into her mouth prior to returning to the pot of stew she prepares.

Link takes a step forward. Water sloshes around her ankles; several of the zora nearest to her raise their heads towards her.

She stares at them.

They watch her not head-on but from the corners of their vision. One by one they turn back to their own tasks, and Link exhales.

With the dress floofing around her and splashing the water more loudly than before, Link marches towards an unoccupied portion of the counter. From here she can see the vast majority of the kitchens lay silent and unused. Only the very front row of counters feels the hands of chefs. The remaining nine-tenths of the long chamber has not even baskets of ingredients. When she chances to prop open an ice-box, she feels that the sapphire on the inside has long since exhausted its cold.

Link takes a spot on the further end of the front row counters. The zora man a pace to her right is rolling some form of crepe or pancake made of rice. Link waves to the zora, who ignores her.

Shrugging, she turns to her life's work: the cooking of food.

The counter comes up to her chin. Rubbing the back of her head Link clambers on top of it to perch
on the edge. She finds a space for fire set inside of the counter itself. Instead of wood, the inner chamber for the flame stocks with small black discs that remind her of the goat chips sometimes used in Ordona. She brings a disc to her nose to whiff, and the oily scent of packed fish nearly knocks her unconscious. Eyes watering, Link sets the chip back.

She touches her chin. Her gaze roams the chamber, seeking inspiration. Here: an abundance of fish, trout and carp, those with the funny-looking faces and bass. There: snails with shells curled this way and that. And by her left hand: a cord of two different crabs set in some pattern she cannot discern.

Link reaches for the cord. Her fingers close around the void. Too short. Clambering up onto the counter, she balances on its slippery-wet surface, to paw for the cord. As she stands up on the tips of her toes, her fingertips just manage to catch the very end of the cord. The arches of her feet cramp. She perseveres to push herself higher and higher until she wraps her hand around one of the sharp-pincer crabs at the base of the cord. Grunting, she jerks her arm back.

The crab goes free.

Its momentum swings her arm outwards, and the crab begins to fly from her palm when Link twists the entire weight of her body around to flop her arm against her own chest. The crab smacks her lower jaw, then topples to the counter.

She senses the sliding of her own heels. The swing of the cord clears her boots from the surface of the counter. Breath hitched, Link grips the cord with both hands as the pendulum propels her forward onto a neighbouring counter.

The cord digs into her skin but she does not let go. Her swing reaches its zenith, and she starts to swing the other way. As she passes over her own counter, Link strains to touch the surface with her feet but cannot quite reach.

And then she does. All at once she lands on very edge of the counter; the pain of the sharp corner against the arches of her feet—even through her boots—tips her backwards. The floor rushes up to greet her backside. The impact thunders up her tailbone through her spine. A breath later her legs accompany her fall to the floor.

Her head smacks against the cabinet between her counter and its neighbour.

Her lap fills with crab on a cord. The cord drizzles over her shoulders and around her head to make a crown of crab. The final crab on the cord plops onto the back of her neck to plunge downwards into her dress. Its hard outer shell scratches her back along the spine. Leaping to her feet, Link launches into a dance of desperation until the crab shimmies off her back and onto the watery ground.

Link exhales. She bends down to pick up the cord she has ripped off of the ceiling from the floor only to see that the current has started to carry her precious crabs away.

Once she has rescued the crabs from the current, Link claps her hands against her cheeks to awaken herself. "All right, crabs," she signs at the cord spiralled on the counter, "thank you for aiding me in making a delicious meal."

The crabs do not reply. She pats the closest one on the head.

When Link removes the shell of the first, she finds the insides partially rotted and the entrails having burst over the crab's innards. Swallowing down her vomit, she closes the shell as if setting
down the lid of a box. She checks the legs of the crab instead.

Perfectly safe. Not rotted. Smelling clean and relatively fresh.

With a grin Link sets about removing the legs from the crabs until she has a sizeable mountain of crab limbs piled up upon the counter. She takes a moment to arrange the crabs into a rough approximation of a horse. Link removes the slate from her hip—an affair of attempting to flip up the dress before giving in and simply pulling her arm in through her sleeve—to snap a pictograph of the likeness of Ilia to later show her companion.

Then Link goes on: crab.

Though she just manages to open one of the pantries, she discovers that her hands do not reach the top of the cabinets. She squirrels up the stone, wedging the corner of the cabinet between her thighs, and removes a stick of butter that she holds in her teeth on her way down. Rummaging through the pantries and cabinets that she can reach, Link grates Hyrule herb, garlic, red pepper, and parsley into a fluffy mountain of green, white, and violet. She heats butter in a saucepan and adds the herbs alongside a pinch of salt and a dash of ground black pepper.

She taps her fingers along her jawline. Climbing onto the counter to physically walk between the large pots of ingredients, arranged not unlike the communal kitchens of Kasuto, Link uncovers chickaloo tree nuts. She takes a handful back to her own counter.

The other zora, if they pay her antics mind, keep quiet. No one speaks. Not a single sound, or a single sign, save for the sss of saucepans and skillets and their contents, spiced or salted, seared or sautéed.

Far too short to reach her food from the floor, she crouches on the counter over the saucepan. While the butter sauces away, Link tunnels a small hole through the centre of each crab leg to smoosh the meat onto the sides. She cracks the tree nuts into tiny pieces. Tasting one, she closes her eyes to enjoy the nutty, wooden flavour that laps over her tongue, slightly stronger than the taste of acorns, and with a much meatier base. Link drops the shards into the salted butter sauce. After they have cooked about halfway through, she dredges them back up, burning her fingertips in the process, and stuffs them into the crab legs to the brim before plugging the hole with a packing of crab meat and a generous cork of sauce to function as sealing paste. She smears oil onto the lip of each crab leg with her thumb, then pinches the ends together and folds them over as though sealing an envelope.

Meat stuffed with nut. Like Riju taught her.

Link turns the crab legs over to set the corks directly against the heat of the saucepan. The butter sauce bakes; the oil fries to seal the skin of the legs against one another with the salted-butter nuts inside.

She brings a crab leg up to her ear to shake it and listen to the nuts rattle inside. Link can feel through the rumble within just how many nuts she has packed into the leg.

Perhaps she could lead a choir of frogs with these as readily as Hestu with their maracas.

Hestu.

Koroks.

Sarie.
With any luck Sarie remains with Ilia. Link expires out a breath and rests a hand against her chest.

She cracks the crab legs, then rubs rock salt over the meat on the inside. Link brushes butter sauce over the outer layer until the legs glimmer. Then she rolls her shoulders and dumps the crab legs directly into the saucepan—removed from the heat—to coat them thoroughly. She adds another layer of salt on top of the butter before starting the process of grilling the legs. The utensils used by the zora stretch just slightly too large for her palms, and Link needs to use both hands to flip the crab legs over with a spatula. She presses them down onto the barred metal grill until the meat chars just enough to leave darkened stripes along the meat.

Link shakes her head. In a kitchen made for a people half again or twice her height, she feels like a child. But a child that can make food good.

She laughs to herself. The zora man making rice crepes shushes her; Link stuffs a leftover chickaloo tree nut into her own mouth to serve as a cork.

As she finishes grilling each crab leg, she flips it up onto a plate. Her first attempt at the flip lands the crab leg in her hair, and her second sends it spinning off to orbit where she cannot find it again. Link offers the missing crab leg a eulogy: "So long, little crab."

By her third flip, she misses the plate by only about a metre, and her fourth lands on the edge. Before long Link has compiled a veritable Death Mountain of crab legs. She finishes flipping the final crab legs onto the plate. Wiping her mouth—saliva leaking from the corners at the smell of grilled crab legs and at her own stomach yearning for more despite having eaten the stir-fry not an hour ago—Link pinches a crab leg between her fingers.

She inhales. The peculiar tang of crab, the savoriness of roasted nut within, the nose-tickling garlic butter sauce, the slight acridity of just a touch too much salt.

Link bites down.

She crunches the chickaloo tree nuts between her teeth while the buttered crab meat slips around the shards of nut to coat the inside of her mouth in parsley and garlic, spicy pepper and Hyrule herb. Link tilts back her head to swallow. The crab butters her throat on its way down. The salt stings her tongue and the inner curve of her throat, but the rich flavour of the crab mixed with the woodiness of the nuts fuses the sky and the sea, the deepest catch from the waters and the highest gathering from the treetops.

Crab legs grilled in salt.

She remembers grilling these in the royal kitchens, late at night, hiding in a corner while the other kitchens workers stared at her but would not speak a word against her for the gold and violet sheath upon her back.

She remembers meeting Mipha again. She does not quite remember the pulling of the sword that seals the darkness, but she can still hear the shouts of the guards, the screams of the assembled crowd, the thumping of her own heart convinced that they would either shackle her wrists or slit her throat—or, if the Goddesses favoured her, both. She remembers Mipha's voice. She remembers Mipha who knew her, who recognised her despite the years of difference and change since the last time that they had seen one another.

When she explained to Mipha of herself being a girl, Link lowered the lids over her eyes for fear of Mipha's expression. Instead she heard Mipha ask, in her gentle voice: "May I hug you, my Link?"
Link noted how Mipha only touched her with her inner arms now instead of the rougher outer. The embrace did not leave her skin raw. Yet Link could sense, too, the hesitation and the carefulness of the arrangement of Mipha's limbs that kept the hug from its usual...from its usual something-or-other that Link could not quite name.

"I suppose when I call you my Link now, I am referring to your name, not simply you being my link to the world outside of Ruto." Mipha inclined her head. "I will take the burden of correcting my mistakes to the other Champions. I'm...I'm sorry for how I introduced you to them, my Link."

She remembers bringing the tray of grilled crab legs to Mipha. Not stuffed with chickaloo tree nuts, but simply grilled through. When Mipha tasted of the butter sauce, of the spicy pepper of the Lanayrish mountains mixed with the Hyrule herb of the lower grasslands, Mipha did not weep, but her diamond-shaped pupils expanded to fill the whole of her eyes.

"Thank you, my Link," she whispered, her hands trembling around the tray.

She remembers herself dipping her head. "You're the one who...saved me."

Link crunches down the remainder of the leg. Between the spicy pepper and the salt, her mouth burns with a most welcoming aftertaste. She runs her tongue over her lips to lap up the last of the salty butter sauce.

She cleans up after herself as best she can. Link tucks the cord ripped from the ceiling around her waist as a spare belt, taking the tray of crab legs with her.

Link taps the shoulder of one of her fellow food-lovers on her way out. She balances the tray of crab legs on the crook of her arm.

"Do you know where I can find the king?" she asks, blinking at the zora boy, who takes a look at her, covers his eyes with his horizontal third eyelids, and returns to his work.

She tilts her head to the side. She can respect the dedication to his food.

With tray in hand, Link quits the kitchens, but not before bidding them a tearful good-bye and a promise to return.

She exits with the crab legs and starts the trek back up the hallways in an attempt to return to her own room. When the roof goes out and the rain patters in, Link covers the plate with her own body. The dress smears slightly in butter sauce in the process. But the crab legs make the journey just fine, and she grins to herself.

Link returns to the chamber with the pool of zora. Only when she pokes her head out to look at the hallways leading out from the chamber does she realise that she hasn't the foggiest on where to go from here.

Abruptly: a gasp from the pool. Not a second later everyone has turned their gaze towards her.

Link blinks at them. They stare at her. The zora girl who lost the game of wind-water-fire rubs her eyes.

At length one of the swimmers draws herself up from the water. Link cranes her head back at the zora woman who stands nearly twice her own height looking down upon her from behind the hood of her head fins. The zora woman opens her mouth. Her sharks' teeth glimmer in the dim light of the luminous stones. Link feels her heart shudder against the insides of her ears.

The zora woman leans forward.
"So...are those for us?"

Link shakes her head. The mountain of crab legs on the tray teeters. Once more she balances the tray on the crook of her arm to reply to her interrogator. "I made these for the king. He wanted to meet me and I thought I'd bring a gift."

The zora woman leans back. She loops her hand through the silver sash that straddles low on her hips. "So...the King Zora, eh. Right. And I'm the Goddess Zola Herself, don'cha know?"

"Wait, Frash...isn't that the...?" Another zora man rises from the water. He steps closer to Link, who shrinks back, alternating between holding the tray in front of her as a makeshift shield and attempting to shield the crab legs with her body. "Aren't you the Champion of Hylia? The new one." He looks at the others. "Isn't she? Am I wrong?"

Yet another zora girl claps her hands and Link glances at her. Her eyes have widened. The fins along her face and down her sides have flared up and out. "Link? Link...is that you?"

Link looks at the zora, up and down. Dark green, with a head that resembles the funny-faced fish that have made Link laugh so hard, her head tail fwwipping back and forth, her lips slightly parted in her shock.

Link blinks slowly. Frash. She remembers. She remembers Frash, far younger then, too young to drink but old enough to worry about her sister who wanted nothing more than to become the Oracle of Nayru. She looks at the other zora in the pool. There: a woman who would come in closer to the end of the night for a serving of liquored milk with a single bowl of plain rice, nothing more. Here: a disliker of crab and lover of sanke carp who would pay her extra for bringing in a catch from Necluda. There: someone who would always tredge up a bucket full of blueshell snails for Link to cook in this recipe or that. Here: a girl who would ask Link to stuff pumpkins for her with a glass of wildberry wine on the side. There: a player of Hebric roulette with a preference for cocktails made on spicy pepper, who would take a sip, wait for the fireball down her throat, and then drain it down with a glass of icy water before repeating the process, claiming that she intended to build up a tolerance to the pepper until she could drink them pureed. Here: an aficionado of liquored milk mixed through with squash-sweetened brandy Link kept in a casket of wood under the counter from the province of Ordona. There: one who would gift Link an entire shark or sea turtle pulled in from the coast to cook, who would stand and flex her muscles while everyone oohed and aahed over her in thanks for having brought in the catch of the day.

She does not know all of the zora gathered in pool, but she does know many for whom she has mixed drinks and cooked meals.

And even though the noise of their speech and the chaos of the bodies surrounding her hasten her heart and compress her breath, Link can feel something like—relief.

Not quite like coming home.

But like coming back to a friend after a very, very long time away.

"Your...favourite was the salt-shrimp soup, wasn't it?" Link signs to Frash, whose eyes continue to widen until her pupils and irises have comparatively narrowed for how much of the whites she shows. "The salt-shrimp soup. You...talked about your troubles with your sister..."

Abruptly everyone seems to emerge from the water at once to crowd around Link. They yell her name. They ask where she has been for the past hundred years. The stuffed pumpkin girl inquires how she has lived for so long when, to her knowledge, hylians do not last longer than perhaps a
hundred years at most, "and *those* hylians look like wrinkled boiled potatoes, not like people."

Link backs and away from the masses that surround her. She keeps her hands around the edges of the tray. The corners dig into her shaking palms. She focuses on the crab legs.

"Look! She's still even got that same blank stare! I used to think she was asking for something with that look, a reward or summat," shouts one of the zora men above the din of the masses, "before Rafeau set me straight."

She focuses on not dropping the crab legs into the water.

"Oi, put a trout in it. 'Course she was asking for something when we would sidle up and make her cook for us day in and day out."

She focuses on not spilling a single leg.

"Well then what's she asking for now?"

She feels their cold hands over her—

"I don't know! I read hylian faces 'bout as well as I read Hebric!"

—touching her as they might another zora—

"But you don't know any Hebric!"

—rubbing her back, patting her arms, nudging her hips—

"That's the joke."

—and she steps backwards, and backwards, and her shoulder blades hit the wall, and she flattens herself against it, and—

"Please move yourselves, if you will. Master Link has duties to attend to."

The crowd parts like two halves of a sea suddenly split down the middle. The messenger—dark burgundy, with the head of a trout—steps forward. Pursing his lips, the messenger devours Link with his gaze and spits her back out. "Quite. Follow me, if you would, O Champion of Hylia, Master Link."

Still holding the tray of crab legs, Link inches towards the messenger. The bottom of the dress drags in the water.

"You're no fun, Igli," notes the woman who would ask for liquored milk; the messenger ignores her.

The crowd trails behind Igli and Link. She can hear the zora capable of audible speech chattering amongst themselves. In the reflection of the tray she watches them embrace one another, sign to each other, mimic the cooking of food or the drinking of fluid in their stories, perhaps about her. Link stares blankly ahead.

Perhaps not blankly. Perhaps with an expression that seems to long for something.

Not in the mass of too many at once. Yet when she has calmed the Divine Beast Vah Ruta, she would. She would like to talk. To talk to them. To talk to the people that she knows, and that know her.
That knew the her from before the Great Calamity.

No.

That know her.

Igli leads Link up through the endless hallways. She narrows her attention to the steadily cooling crab legs. She should have brought with her a plate inlaid with ruby or something of that sort to keep the crab legs warm. By the time she will arrive at the hall of the king, they will have cooled down entirely.

The king.

She does not remember how long the king has been king for but she remembers, too, Mipha telling her about him. Once he had been called Dorephan, but since assuming the position of king, he had become the King Zora in the convention of the Lanayrish.

Something about giving in fully to the responsibilities, to the losing oneself for the greater good, and in doing so, losing one's own name. No longer himself, but the king of his people. King Zora, with no room for anything but remaining the king.

The dress feels that much heavier upon her shoulders the lower Link climbs with the masses of zora behind her. Guards become more frequent, as do the open areas of the hallways; suddenly they have exited out of the gloom entirely to the open sky of the lowest levels of the city of Ruto, shaped not unlike an inverted cone, with higher levels spiralling around the palace at the city's heart. Like a lotus flower opened to the heavens, or a lily surrounded by its pads.

Here the water reaches her chest. Link raises the tray above her head. Igli clicks his tongue. She feels the water level lowering even as she struggles to walk through the rapids.

Igli shows her under a veranda, where he signs to the guards who lower their silver spears to allow the congregation through. Link walks on; the tray of crab legs shudders, though she retains her grip fast. She moves through the silvery arch to find herself staring at a massive whale-shark—no, a massive zora that towers three or four times her own height, far larger than any other that Link has ever seen, reclining in a giant pool of water. Behind him range guards with silver weapons. A small symphony plays a relaxing melody of tinkling bells and a resonant water-horn.

By either side of the giant zora in the water, Link sees Prince Sidon, who does not seem to notice her, and a shorter zora, hunched over, his age visible in the droop of his fins and the squint of his eyes.

Link glances between the tray of crab legs and the whale-shark-like zora in the water.

As Igli clears his throat, a zora man seated at an organ sits up suddenly to press his fingers onto the keys. Link has before heard the song that he plays, but not well enough to place it. Something she listened to in the gardens, standing behind the girl with the golden hair, the eight-stringed harp upon her lap.

"O Zola, by Your faith, the Champion of Hylia has come!"

The massive zora lying in the pool rouses up.

Link watches him shift his great bulk to sit up in the water. His breathing seems to quicken until he has once more settled in the lake. Other zora beside him splash him with water, and one rubs a shiny oil over his skin. His third eyelid slides over his golden eyes, and his pupils constrict. Link
observes the silver crown gracing his head. After a moment he focuses his gaze upon Link.

He blinks.

Link blinks back.

She steps forward while the man on the organ introduces the King Zora. She steps forward while a Sage of Zola—playing a cello that glitters silver as a full moon—invokes the Goddess Zola to watch down over them. She steps forward while Prince Sidon perks up and waves, first at the entrance to the chamber and then at her, tracking her as she trudges through the water in the buttered dress. She steps forward while the hunched over zora narrows his eyes at her and curls his fingers against his palms.

She steps forward, and she lifts the plate of crab legs above her head towards the King Zora. He regards her blearily. The guards near the King Zora instantly raise their silver spears towards her, but the King Zora lifts his wobbling arm.

A hush falls over the throne room. Igli's mouth drops open. The guards move away, weapons lowered.

Link makes a motion with the plate, determined not to spill the crab legs, and holds it still higher. The King Zora reaches down towards the plate. She can sense the vibrations through the silver as he selects one of the legs from the top of the pile.

She watches him raise the crab leg to his mouth. She watches him part his jaws into a maw large enough to wolf her down whole. Or whale-shark her down whole, as she has never witnessed a zora with much resemblance to a wolf. She watches him carefully place the crab leg on his tongue, and then to chew, and then to swallow.

And then the King Zora smiles. He scoops half of the entire mountain of crab legs from the plate to stuff into his mouth. He labours in his breathing; his attendants rub his back.

The King Zora regards her, standing there with the water up her chest, arms trembling, fingers clenched around the edges of a tray too large for her, and his smile widens.

"It really is you, isn't it, O Courageous Link?" The King Zora's gaze bears down upon her. "I would know that cooking anywhere, hoo hoo!" Though the blade of evil's bane no longer weighs upon her back, Link can feel the slate at her right hip, the red telescope at her left.

In Darunia, and in Medli, and in Nabooru, she could pull up her hood and wash away the dust of her years. But here she remembers the people of Ruto, and they remember her.

Here Link can no longer run from the scars that weave her past into her body.

But then...

She realises, with a sensation like biting directly into the spicy peppers that grow on the Great Plateau, that she no longer wants to run.

For to run from her past would be to run, too, from the people she has loved and the people who have loved her.

All of the wilds combined cannot sit at a campfire and share stew from a communal cooking pot.

And all of her fears of herself combined cannot outweigh her love.
She, who has a little sister named Aryll, the most wonderful little sister she could ask her. She, who has a best friend in the girl who smelled of horses. She, whom Marin loved, and loves, and would have travelled over the world with, if not for the passage of time. She, whom Daruk invited to his home, to his family, once they had won the long war. She, who has carried on her back an ice-box full of sanke carp to bake Revali a fish pie, whom Revali admitted in caring about. She, whom Urbosa trained in the art of the blade, who witnessed Urbosa's own courage lead her to happiness. She, who met Mipha as a child though never as the daughter of the King Zora, who for her mixed drinks and changed lives. She, who drew the sword that seals the darkness.

She, whom the blade of evil's bane appointed as the Champion of Hylia, as the Hero of Hyrule, as the Knight of the girl with the golden hair, as Link.

She knows little of fate. But she knows much of her own abilities. Since awakening in the Shrine of Resurrection, she has, with her own boots, travelled the land once known as Hyrule; she has, with her own hands, calmed three Divine Beasts, and soon a fourth; she has, with her own cooking pot, taken communion with strangers and with friends; she has cooked for the pilots of the Divine Beasts; she has tasted the wilds.

If she can carry the slate, with its ten thousand years of dust, and the red telescope, with its hundred years of passing, then she can carry the title bestowed upon her for her deeds.

"The Champion of Hylia, the Hero of Hyrule, Her Majesty's own appointed Knight, O Courageous Link." The King Zora bows his head. The ripple of water that cascades from the motion could knock Link backwards, but she holds firm.

"O Courageous Link, I welcome you, not only the Champion of Hylia, the Hero of Hyrule, and Her Majesty's Knight...but as mine own daughter's friend."

Link closes her eyes.

"Welcome home."

—

*Salt-grilled Crab* (five hearts) - chickaloo tree nut, goat butter, ironshell crab, razorclaw crab, rock salt

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Link spends most of her time in *Delicious in Wilds* wearing outfits appropriate for travel, much as many of the women in *Breath of the Wild* (the sexualised and exoticised gerudo women who stroll through the desert in high heels and midriff-wearing 'outfits' aside) wear riding outfits with riding britches. Because of the demands of her rigorous life as a courier; then the chosen one; and now a traveller, she's not too used to wearing dresses or robes. The "strange sensation of being unable to find your legs in a dress rather than pants" is something that I only learned fairly recently is not an idiosyncrasy but a somewhat common symptom among various groups. As I was writing, I felt (given Link's other divergences from 'typical' neural behaviour) that it was appropriate for her to experience this as dress itself is weighed
down with silver and pearls in order to keep it from obstructing the swimmer. The specific gravity of the dress is almost exactly the same as water (or as close as possible) so that it neither floats nor sinks.

The virtues of the goddesses, as I've mentioned before, that we've talked about so far have been: Sheik: truth; Goro-goro: pride; Erito: voice (as in self-expression); Sageru: kin (also translated as blood or loyalty); Zola: faith. We've yet to hear about Kokir or Hylia, though I've already heavily, heavily, heavily implied one.

Cucco dodging is in reference to the mini-game played at the Cucco Ranch in A Link Between Worlds. It's not actually Hyrule's national pastime, but used to be (and still is in, in parts) a festive part of rural communities.

Because zora live for a long time, they also have very low reproductive rates, especially in the face of the Calamity (they are K-selected rather than r-selected). Their population has heavily fallen without yet the means to rebuild, so the kitchens are mostly unused.

Link is short! She's short for a hylian (in-game, Link is literally shorter than every single adult hylian in the game, including all of the women, unless there's someone I'm forgetting) and she's doubly short for a larger species like the zora. We don't actually see many effects of her height in-game, other than her

The plural of zora is zora; "zoras" sounds strange to my ear.

The joke about being able to hear nuts in the crab legs is a nod to the "number of ice cubes in a JoyCon with HD rumble" during the reveal of the Nintendo Switch. I played Breath of the Wild on the WiiU.

So, to clarify: Link grabbed the Master Sword and was able to pull it somehow, then—being some country courier—ended up in hot water until Mipha recognised her (unfortunately introducing her as the child whom she had known years ago, rather than Link the girl). Because Mipha recognised her and vouched for her, Link was able to not be executed but instead be accepted as the chosen one.

Tredge is a combination of trudge and dredge that I didn't realise wasn't a word until just now.

Zora, like many fish and lizards, don't really age but keep growing with age until they die; old zora have droopier fins and hunched backs, but do not wrinkle like old humans do.

The melody that Link recalls Zelda playing for her is, of course, the Serenade of Water.

Dorephan is massive, and, due to spending most of his time in the water, cannot actually survive for long outside of his throne pool. When he sits up from the water, he has difficulty breathing due to the effects of gravity. For more information on this effect, look up the beaching of whales.

This is it. This is the chapter where, after forty-nine very long chapters and three hundred thousand words, we finally arrive to Link's great realisation. Welcome home, Link. Welcome home to accepting who you are, both in the past and in the present. There's just one big hurdle left for her to cover: obtaining the Master Sword.
And, of course, figuring out what to do about Calamity Ganon. I think that the final decision that Link makes regarding the future of Hyrule is one that is going to surprise my readers quite a bit. But we have a great deal many chapters to get here.

Up next: a chat with the king, and a chat with a lynel.

midna's ass. 16 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This chapter is such a cool part of Link's character development. We're finally at the apex of (this part of) her development, and it's really great to behold.

Link coming out to Mipha is really cute.

There's a lot of personality to very brief snapshots of Zora characters, which I find super neat.

Emma. 16 October 2017.
Hearty Salmon Risotto

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef speaks with the Lanayrish king regarding the Divine Beast and the Great Calamity; then, the chef and the Lanayrish prince set off to collect topaz arrows for the coming assault on the Divine Beast.

Chapter Notes

To all of my readers: please note that this chapter contains the most or second-most scene of graphic violence in all of Delicious in Wilds. If you wish to skip, the main fight starts at the paragraph "She listens to the twang of a bow. Link looks up overhead to see the faint yellow spark of the arrow hurtling down directly towards her, too small and too fast to even attempt to catch with stasis," and ends at the paragraph "She lets herself lie in the mud on her side. When she opens her mouth, the mud seeps into the lower curve of her right cheek, but she sucks in breaths stenched of earth and blood and rot through her raw throat that bubbles up blood." However, even after that paragraph, there are continuous mentions to the injuries as well as talk of blood until the end of the chapter. If you choose to skip it, I'll provide a brief summary at the beginning of the next chapter. Please take care.

And now, author's notes that would not fit in the end: As usual, thank you so much to all of my readers for all of the support that you've given me so far. We've thirty-four chapters away from the end now, about six-tenths of the way through the Delicious in Wilds. As I've mentioned here and there, the chapters are growing longer (the longest chapter in the story is just over twenty-four thousand words), so it's probable that I will need to take one or two days to tackle the longer chapters (thus far, I've been proofreading/fixing the longer chapters without complaint because they've been fairly sparse, but it's getting to crunch time).

Another thank you to my beta reader, Emma, for her perseverance in assisting me despite the inherent busy-ness in our lives.

In Breath of the Wild, Sidon has the "flash" effect when he grins; in Delicious in Wilds, Sidon polishes his teeth to achieve that effect, although he's not actually aware of how much of an effect it has.

Dorephan was around before Hyrule fell, so he still refers to it as Hyrule even though it no longer exists.

Zora are unable to cry, as they have no tear ducts! Sharks and related species have salt glands near their recta, which explains what Link was seeing.

Shed some silver on the situation is a Lanayrish-ism equivalent of shed some light on the situation.

Eel in the reef is the Lanayrish equivalent of letting a snake into your garden, except that Hyrule does not have the latter phrase, as it has no Abrahamic religions.
Zola is typically personified as a river, hence the comment on her banks.

Link doesn't quite have complete faith in herself yet. She's getting there. Fragile state.

There's too much talking in this chapter!

Link has achieved a growing understanding of the effects of monsters on the people and world around her. They're not just things she has to deal with; they're things that everyone would have to deal with.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The cheer that wells up from the crowd threatens to bowl Link over entirely. Abruptly, hands are all around, covering her limbs, touching her skin, tugging on her dress, stroking her hair. She squeezes shut her eyes. Link struggles to breathe as the bodies close in around her, and yet, now, not even this can sway the joy bubbling up from her stomach with the taste of crab legs and stir-fry. Not vomit, no, but rather the sensation of wholeness.

Besides, Link hears the Lanayrish around her take crab legs from the tray. She listens to them crunch down upon them. She leans in to their soft moans of pleasure, to their cries of the crab legs' deliciousness, to their delight from the food.

When the tray empties, she feels a pair of hands wrap around her waist, crinkling the dress; suddenly her boots rise from the ground. She wriggles her legs yet her feet do not reach the surface of the water. Link blinks her eyes open to see Sidon physically lifting her above the crowd. He grins at her as he looks ahead to the King Zora.

Sidon sets her down at the edge of the King Zora's pool. Link bows to the King Zora, who barely bows back with his neck, evidently unable to much move the swell of his body.

"We must call an assembly to introduce you as the Champion of Hylia, the Hero of Hyrule—" Link nods her head to the rhythm of the full title she has heard so many times. "—Her Majesty's Knight, O Courageous Link. Many of my people have known merely the hero of propaganda, but have not known you as yourself." She continues to bob her head, and then the words wash over her, and she starts to swing her head from side to side. "No? You would rather not?"

She bows to the King Zora again. "I...I don't want that many people looking at me at once."

"At least you're honest, my lass, hoo hoo!" The King Zora lifts a hand. Link hears the masses behind her walk backwards in unison. "Clear the throne pool."

The Lanayrish shuffle out, along with most of the guards. The waves from the crowds' movement thump Link into the water. Sidon picks her up and holds her like a stuffed animal, his hands around her armpits. Link's legs dangle helplessly; her boots splash the water when she kicks.

At length the masses disperse to leave only herself, the King Zora, Sidon, a lithe purple zora who stands next to Sidon, and the green zora with the drooping fins in the quiet throne room. She corrects herself: that is, the throne pool.

Sidon sets Link back down. The heavy dress submerges once more into the water. He claps her on the back and leaves his hand there, drumming his fingers against her spine enough to vibrate her body.
The King Zora beams at her. He lifts his arms. "Link, it is most wonderful to see you again...though I see that you no longer carry the blade of legend: the sword that seals the darkness. You have surely picked our Champion well, my lad!"

Sidon flashes his father a thumbs up. His polished teeth sparkle and shine. "She picked herself." Link feels her smile curve up. "Our Goddess does not err! I believed that we would find someone." He pumps his fist into the air. "And I have never seen someone take on the gauntlet in such a record time as our Link!"

Our Link. Link inclines her head. The pressure of that our could have crushed her spine beneath its weight several months ago, but not now. Not now. Now she stands erect, her spine straight, her hands at the dip in her hips to feel the slate at her right and the telescope at her left, the twin aeges that carry her forward step by step, right and left, left and right.

"Tell me, my lass." The King Zora flourishes his wrist. "What has happened since the Great Calamity? We heard that you and the Princess both perished...and the Champions as well." He starts to shift in the water though his breathing hoarsens and she can see his gills flapping in the water to keep up.

She can hear the concern in Sidon's voice. "Father, you needn't push yourself too—"

"Is there a chance...is there a chance that my daughter could live yet?" The King Zora forces himself up in the water. The waves wash Link against Sidon but he holds her carefully against the current that threatens to overpower her. "If you could live...then she..." Link feels the blankness return to her gaze, and the King Zora slumps back. The wave splashes into her mouth. She can feel herself drowning down. From the water and perhaps from something else. "I see."

"I'm sorry," Link signs. She hears the purple zora who stands next to Sidon whispering into his ear the same words that Link says. "I don't know exactly what happened. I...lost my memory of everything. " The King Zora's eyes widen. His third eyelids flicker in and out of his eyes. She explains: how she awoke a few months ago in the Shrine of Resurrection, how she picked up the slate without understanding its significance, how she walked the land once known as Hyrule—the King Zora remarks that in Lanayru they still call it Hyrule, for most everyone knows it as Hyrule—how she calmed the Divine Beasts seemingly by chance at first and then more deliberately, how she has gradually regained some of her memories, but not many, and not of the events. "I haven't seen..." She pauses. "The only person I know who was alive then—the only two people—are Lady Impa of Kakariko and her sister Purah of Hateno. But neither of them has told me much of what happened. Lady Impa has refused all of my questions, and...I never asked Purah. I didn't know anything while I was with her. They might be able to answer your questions, though."

"I see," the King Zora repeats. He does not speak for a moment, and when he does she flinches back. "Since the Great Calamity...we have kept to ourselves. Regretfully. We have received few visitors, as we have no villages on the border." Link nods, although most of his words go over her head. She glances at the empty tray of crab legs, of which she only had one, and her stomach rumbles. "Many of the other people in Hyrule may live their lives short and bear as many offspring as they can, not unlike fish that migrate each spring to spawn—" Link blinks at that, but he goes on. "—yet we do not." He beams. "We live long, hoo hoo, yes we do. The Goddess Zola has blessed up with lives as long as the rivers run. Yet..." His features contort. "Since the Great Calamity, most of us have moved inwards to the city of Ruto, to consolidate those that have survived. I have heard that the other people of Hyrule have proliferated well in the absence of the Calamitous One since then, and I pray to their patrons the Seven that the monsters which have reappeared in Lanayru have not spread elsewhere."
Link considers the burnt town in Eldin, the empty lakeside in Tabantha, the evacuated villages in Parapa.

"But few children have been born to us in the interim. Certainly some fear that we may never recover, but I have faith in the most wonderful Goddess Zola."

Sidon snatches a fistful of air. "We won't just recover! We'll surpass! All the way to the stars! I believe in us! With faith and our Goddess at our sides, there's nothing we can't do!"

"I'm afraid we have a wide sea to cross yet, my lad." The King Zora begins to emulate stroking his chin once more. "Regardless, my lass, you have seen for yourself that few in Lanayru live outside of Ruto now. Over the past seventeen moons, the last of the villagers have abandoned their homes to journey here for protection. The awakening of Vah Ruta may wash away the last of our history...if She has not washed them away already. Mm." The King Zora slopes further back into the water, and again Sidon lifts Link up to keep the waves from knocking her prone.

"I can help." Link fishes the slate from its pouch at her right hip. "This slate can activate shrines and the terminals in the Divine Beast. And not just I can use it, too, so if there are any terminals underwater..." She glances at Sidon, who continues to grin as though nothing has gone amiss.

The King Zora's smile returns, if only for a moment. "Most wonderful. We have a shrine in the very Temple of Zola that I would have you activate by the slate. And afterwards..." The King Zora cannot touch his hand to his face for its weight outside of the water; rather, he moves his arm as long as he can and mimics the stroking of his chin as though by a habit from an age long past. "What know you of Vah Ruta, my lass?"

Link rubs the back of her head. "It's a Divine Beast, and it...exists. Yes."

The King Zora erupts into laughter, bellyfuls of mirth that rock the water. Sidon picks up Link to avoid the inevitable drowning of the bearer of the slate.

"Then let me shed some silver upon the situation." He hrms; his timbre grows solemn once more. "Several months ago, Vah Ruta awakened following a twelve hundred moons of dormancy. I had never thought to see Her moving again."

"...when She awakened, She remained in the East Reservoir where She was left after those days of woe. We feared that She would attack directly as She had during the Great Calamity. The Goddess spared us that, hoo hoo. Rather, Vah Ruta lifted Her trunk and began to spray water." He clears his throat. "I see the seeming ridiculousness in the idea of too much water spelling trouble for us who can breathe within."

Link cocks her head to the side; she has had no such thought, nor any thoughts at at all, save for when she can eat next and why she neglected to stuff herself with crab legs while she had the chance. Not that she has no compassion for the zora. She has borne the slate, and she will calm the Divine Beast.

That does not stop the hunger creeping into her belly.

"The current now moves too swiftly. Already we have had to drain more of our city than the reservoirs can hold...and, may their spirits swim swift to the seas of the Goddess, we have had some of our own washed away in the tide."

The King Zora's third membrane covers his eyes.
Link looks down upon her reflection in the water. If only she had moved more quickly. If she hadn't spent the time she did in Romani Ranch.

"At first She let off rain infrequently throughout the day, and we had no fear. Of late She has poured the rain continuously and with a faster pace each time. Three moons ago—" Link counts on her fingers: around the time when she scaled Vah Naboris. "—the rain has become such a torrent that the East Reservoir is draining much more swiftly than we can divert water back to it. In due time even Ruto shall sweep away under the deluge.

"Yet the Goddess have sent to us the Champion of Hylia that She promised." The King Zora bows his head towards Link again, his breathing belaboured once more. "I shall put my faith in Her, and in you, my lass."

Link lifts her chin. Her stomach gurgles again but she pushes down her hunger momentarily to seek answers. "I'm sorry to ask this, but...could you tell me what happened in the Calamity, exactly?" She elaborates on what she has already gleaned, and the King Zora inclines his head.

"There is not much more that I could tell you. The Divine Beasts, as far as I understood, never moved, no matter how the King of Hyrule's researchers sought to understand them. The Champions, the Princess, and yourself were on an expedition to Mount Nayru at the time when the first signs of the Great Calamity—the violet malice that began to seep up from the ground itself, it seemed—awoke, and the Divine Beasts with it. We took this as a sign that the Goddesses were on our side, and the Champions made to their Divine Beast to prepare. But...no sooner had my daughter entered Vah Ruta with her slate in hand did the Divine Beast turn against her. We could only watch in horror as Vah Ruta sealed Herself away, dripping in Malice, and tore through Lanayru with nothing but death in Her wake."

The King Zora's voice falls silent.

He does not weep. She wonders if perhaps the zora cannot weep.

"But you have the destiny to turn back the tides, O Champion of Hyrule, O Hero of Hylia, O Knight of Her Majesty, O Courageous Link." The King Zora coughs. "Forgive me for saying the title wrong. Ahem." Link rubs the back of her neck. "The Champion of Hylia, the—"

"By the Goddess Zola, I cannot allow this farce to go on."

Link notices him signing from the corner of her vision. She and the King Zora turn their heads towards him at the same moment: the elderly green zora, his fins drooping limply from the sides of his head.

"Whatever do you mean, Muzu?" the King Zora inquires, his head fins twitching but evidently unable to rise.

Muzu slaps his hand onto his own chest. The fins quiver. He swims forward through the water. "Does Your Majesty not see that you have allowed the eel to slither into Your Majesty's reef? It is this Champion of Hylia that took our Princess Mipha from us!"

"...our Link did no such thing, Muzu." The King Zora's eyes narrow.

"Your Majesty, have you forgotten that it is this Champion of Hylia who by the Princess Zora Mipha's own admission swayed her in becoming a Champion and leaving us without a future queen!"

His eyes narrow further into thin slits, the diamond-shaped pupils barely visible. "I myself chose
her as the most worthy representative of Lanayru. Dare you criticise my judgment, Muzu? This was no fault of Link's."

Muzu clenches his hands into fists. "Princess Mipha herself told me that she never protested becoming Champion, for her supposed 'love'—including of this Champion of Hylia—that led her to sacrifice herself."

The King Zora coughs. "You would blame Link for my daughter wishing to protect people? You would blame my daughter for trusting in my judgment that she would best represent the Goddess?"

Muzu pulls on his facial fins. He wrings his hands. "Then consider this, Your Majesty. The supposed Champion of Hylia mysteriously vanished with the Princess of Hyrule the moment the Calamitous One struck. The Champions...including Your Majesty's own daughter, might I add...perished in the Divine Beasts. A century passes. Then, as the Divine Beasts awaken once more and monsters begin to intrude upon our land, the Champion of Hylia returns to 'calm' them, but now with the Champions and the Princess of Hyrule out of the way. Does not this seem awfully convenient?"

The King Zora makes a noise of disbelief in the back of his throat. "...by Zola's banks, what are you suggesting, Muzu?"

"I know not the truth, Your Majesty," Muzu signs, "but something smells beastly here. Much too convenient for my liking."

Link draws herself inwards. "Enough! Not convenient, Muzu." The King Zora lifts a hand. "It makes perfect sense that the Goddess would send the Champion of Hylia at the reawakening of the world's woes. The Calamitous One vanished twelve hundred moons ago. Perhaps the Goddess thought best for the Champion of Hylia to vanish as well, until the world needed her most. And now the world has need of her. If the Calamitous One returns, she will face it with courage, wisdom, power, and—you notwithstanding, perhaps—faith."

"If Muzu doesn't believe in her," Sidon adds in, digging his fingers into Link's back with his thumb beneath her left shoulder blade, "then I shall believe in her twice over to make up for it!"

"Thank you, my lad. Now, Muzu, would you tell our Link what you know of Vah Ruta?" The King Zora sits back. "She will need preparation to quell the storm."

"Your Majesty may believe in this false saviour, but I do not." Muzu turns away. Link observes a strange pearly fluid seeping from pores at his throat and the backs of his thighs. "I will not forgive the one who stole our precious Princess Mipha from us. I will not forgive a hylian."

"Muzu—"

Muzu dives into the water. He swims from the throne pool even while the King Zora calls after him. The purple zora by Sidon's side frowns. Link moves backwards to shrink further into herself. She would not trust herself either.

Muzu quits the chamber, and the water grows far too still.

The King Zora sighs. "My apologies, my lass. Muzu was my daughter's mentor when she was younger and in training to become queen. He...was very protective of her. My lad, you were too young to remember then." Sidon nods decisively. "Forgive him, my lass."
Link dips her head.  

"My lad, go with her to fetch Muzu. I am certain that he will calm down once he understands that you hold the only key to quieting Vah Ruta, whether he wishes to trust you or not." The King Zora coughs. His breath comes up full of water. "And for the matter, I swear by the Goddess Zola, may I never touch water again if I lie, that I have nothing but the Goddess's own faith in you, my lass."

Link bows to him. "Thank you," she signs.

When the purple zora finishes whispering in Sidon's ear, he pats Link between the shoulder blades and leads her out from the water. By now the water has drained further, to only halfway up her chest. Link finds it easier to swim after Sidon than to attempt to walk in the dress, the fish-fins weighed down with silver heavy enough to stay submerged rather than float on the water.

Sidon takes her to something of a central square. The Lanayrish milling about gape at Link as she swims by, but Sidon keeps her safely wedged between his torso and his right hand. He calls out to the other zora to say hello, and they call back to him or sign—the purple zora repeats their messages—and occasionally Sidon signs to them, presumably to those who cannot hear. Sidon seems to know each and every one of the residents of Ruto; he inquires about their lives and their days with a knowing intimacy that boggles Link.

From the heart of the square rises a statue that catches Link's breath and chucks it back down her throat to choke her. A statue of Mipha carved of silver, holding a trident in one hand and a medical implement in the other, gazing down kindly upon the city. In front of her, on a small platform raised out of the water by her feet, lie offerings of flowers and food left by others. Link observes rice-balls seeded with fleet-lotus and smiles faintly to herself.

The same rice-ball that Mipha held when she rescued Link from the water for the first time, back in the province of Ordona, in the village of Ordon, in the river that ran through its heart.

Muzu himself stands in front of the statue, his gaze riveted to just below the silver Mipha's face as though turned slightly away in respect. Sidon and Link approach. Muzu does not break eye contact from the statue of Mipha.

"What would you have of me?"

"Father asked you to tell the Champion of Hylia—"

Link rubs the back of her head. "Please...I would prefer to be called just Link."

The purple zora whispers in Sidon's ear, and he nods, clinging tightly to Link. "—to tell our Link what she needs to know to quell the storm of Vah Ruta and to bring our Goddess's favour upon Vah Ruta once more!"

Muzu's gills flare up and down. Then he bows his head. "Very well." He flourishes a hand at her. "Prince Sidon." The purple zora by Sidon's side speaks more rapidly. "You offered this...churl a trial."

"That I did! A trial that our Link cleared effortlessly!" Sidon grins and claps Link on the back so strongly that Link nearly tumbles forward into the water.

"Would you allow me to give her a trial of my own, to further test her worth?" Muzu coughs. "You have given her a trial of power. Allow me to present a trial of wisdom."

Link rests her hand on her chest. "I will do anything."
"Good, good." Muzu pulls on the rightmost facial fin that flops from his face. "We have observed that a strike of lightning quiets Vah Ruta for a time. To quell Vah Ruta, we need to gather a method to administer electricity to Her sources of power from a safe distance. Thus, I considered the concept of a cannon, or perhaps topaz arrows."

"Most clever of an idea!" Sidon cuts in. "As expected of the King's chief advisor, Muzu!"

"Yes, thank you, Your Highness. However..." Muzu touches the back of his hand to his forehead. "To my most deepest regret, we have no such arrows, nor sufficient charged topaz for a cannon."

Link tilts her head to the side. She heard from Glepp and Misan that merchants have come from near and far to recharge topaz in the gauntlet of lightning monsters, and yet the Lanayrish royal palace itself has not sufficient topaz to even make arrows?

Muzu continues on: "There lives on Ploymus Mountain a terrible monster. The lynel, a beast of lightning eyes and thunder hooves. One of the most intelligent spawns of malice, the lynel crafts his own blades and fletches his own arrows. If you are careful and quick, you can surreptitiously filch enough arrows to quiet Vah Ruta for a safe approach. By my calculations you will need two hundred. You will need two hundred. It is the only way that you may near Vah Ruta without fear, lest you intend to swim to the East Reservoir yourself."

She touches her chin. "Has anyone else tried to get the arrows?"

"Yes. We are far too..." He curls his lip. "...fragile to electricity to make the trip. His Majesty the King Zora and His Highness the Prince Zorabe believe deeply in the prophecy: the Goddess Herself shall send to us a Champion of Hylia to deliver us from Vah Ruta. Then, O Champion of Hylia, won't you be the one to bring us the topaz arrows that we need so desperately?"

Link nods. She salutes Muzu. "I will."

"But of course! As expected of our Champion of Hylia! I believe in your most impressive abilities, Link!" Sidon fists the air. "And I will accompany you, Link, to show you the way to Shatterback Point!"

Muzu jumps. "Ah, Your Highness, there is no need for you to trouble yourself so."

Sidon slaps Link heartily on the back, which launches Link into Muzu. Muzu shoves Link away from him, and she stumbles backwards back into Sidon's waiting palm. "Then I shall inform Father! Worry not, Link! Father will send someone with you!"

Muzu clears his throat. "On second thought, it would be best if Your Highness went with the...Champion of Hylia. Most certainly, do not gather the arrows for the Champion, and please stay far from the lynel for fear of your life, Your Highness."

"But of course!" Sidon squeezes Link on the shoulder. "Come, Link! Let us take to the mountaintop, where your trial awaits! I have utmost faith that you will ace this trial with flying melodies! Ah!" Sidon turns towards the purple zora to embrace her. "Thank you kindly for your assistance, Lari! You have my eternal gratitude!"

"Anything for Your Highness." Lari bows and takes Sidon's wrists in her hands. "This is a dismissal, I take it."

"Indeed! Link, you and I will travel up to Ploymus ourselves!" He turns so speedily towards Link that she wobbles to stay upright in the waves. "Link, if you've need of me, a tap on the wrist will
catch my attention!"

"Your Highness..." Lari compresses Sidon's wrists together. "Is this wise? She who cannot speak, and he who cannot see..."

"Ah! I suppose that you're right!" Sidon grins at her. "We need someone who cannot hear to complete the trifecta, and then no evil shall we done by us!"

Lari frowns. "Your Highness, that is not what I..."

"Now come, O Champion of Hylia!" Sidon shakes his wrists from her grasp; he thumps his fist against his chest. Lari lowers her hands to her hips. "Link, please follow me."

Link thanks Muzu and Lari before falling into step beside Sidon, who takes her hand in his much larger one.

Muzu's gaze follows her as they leave. She glances back for a second, towards the statue, just to see Mipha's face once more.

A strange emptiness hollows her belly: she has ever so slightly misremembered Mipha's features.

Link removes the fish-fin dress. She tucks it over her arm to place into her saddlebags. At some point in the future, maybe when the world has settled down again, she might learn to wear dresses without trousers underneath. She asks for Sidon to show her to wherever they keep Ilia to adequately prepare herself; Sidon complies. When Link spots the deep black horse with the white mane that she has knocked all this time, she runs towards Ilia to fling her arms around her companion's neck and hug her tightly. She turns around towards the nearest stablehand and launches into a long explanation of what exactly to feed Ilia, what sorts of foods she prefers, how to stuff pumpkins for her if possible, when to exercise her and how to walk her, how long to let her sleep, how much sugar and salt intake Ilia can receive, where to best scratch her behind the ears, how to make the honeyed biscuits that Link sometimes gives her as treats. Sidon has to lead her away from the harried stablehand, who has taken out a stone notebook to scribble down everything that Link has told her.

Sarie, on the other hand, appears to have poofed into thin air, or perhaps they have shied away from the number of people about. Link notes to herself to find Sarie at a later point, if Sarie has not elected to strike out on their own. For now she need worry of this lynel.

Retrieving her satchel, Link places it over her shoulder, then withdraws the fire-light spear and the sword given to her by Riju. And the topaz rod that she slots in her belt, just in case that proves handy. She pats herself down to ensure she has everything she needs. For a moment she panics, but then: there's her metal ingredient box, still safe in her satchel.

Link gives Ilia a final pet on the head, thanks the stablehand, promises to later cook her a meal of gratitude, stretches down to touch her toes, and asks Sidon to lead the way.

Sidon instructs Link to climb onto his back, to take hold of his shoulders, to not let go. He crouches down in the water and positions his hands behind him to give Link a leg up. By Link's request, Sidon covers the rough scales of his back with a layer of leather he affixes to himself by a series of belts. Under his commands, Link wraps her arms around his neck and attempts to hug his back with her legs, although he proves too broad for her to quite hook all the way around. Snapping her fingers, she removes the length of cord from the kitchens and lashes herself to Sidon's back.

"But of course! How clever you are, Link! I can see why my sister admired you so! Now, please,
"Take a deep breath!"

With that Sidon leaps off of the edge of Ruto. Link screams all the way down until the plunge into the water corks her into a chilly silence. She swallows water; it ices down her throat and she winces, clawing her fingers into the softer flesh of Sidon's throat.

Sidon pops out of the lake beneath Ruto. The second her mouth touches air Link coughs water from her lungs in her desperate bid to inhale fresh air.

"Are you well, Link? One tap for no, two for yes yes yes!" Link waits to catch her breath, then taps twice. "Most wonderful! Up the waterfall we go!" Sidon turns towards her to show off his grin. From this close to his face, Link can see how his golden eyes have clouded over in a foggy silver, and a shard of topaz goes off over her head. "Please keep your limbs on me at all times and don't stretch them out too much! I'd rather you break a limb in the figurative sense than the literal! And let me know if anything's amiss! Just...do whatever it is that you just did with your hands!"

Link nods against the back of Sidon's head. The curve of her cheek catches the patch of rough skin above the leather; she feels the warmth of blood welling up on her face.

"Take a deep breath!"

Sidon points up towards the waterfall overhead, and Link senses the wound on her cheek pucker up as the blood drains from her face and the rain overhead mats down her hair.

Either this will kill her or she will get to see a truly incredible view. And if she gets to see a truly incredible view, then she will have to make herself a meal fit for the occasion. And if that happens—the meal makes itself worthwhile.

She holds fast to the consideration of what meals to make, holds fast to the fish she could fry or the crab she could roast, to the tree nuts she could salt or the mushrooms she could grill, to the butter she could butter or the salt she could salt, to the infinite possibilities available to her, all atop some bed of rice so that she can scarf down the very ingredient that makes her believe in the Golden Goddesses, for only a sacred divinity could have made something as wonderful as rice.

Sidon leaps into the waterfall.

By some force, she could not explain—or perhaps by his determination and his faith alone—Sidon begins to propel himself up the waterfall, accelerating himself against the current, skimming himself out of the water nearly vertically to slam into the cascade once more before launching himself out again. Slowly he edges his way up the waterfall with his hylian-shaped cargo in tow.

Still gripping him firmly with her arms and her legs alike, Link twists her neck to look down below them. Both the rain and the waterfall slick down her back. Her undershirt sticks to her skin. The spray chills over her eyes, and she closes them against the rising splash of water.

Sidon launches himself from the crest of the waterfall into the air; by instinct, Link lets go of his throat to open the paraglider with its rubberised underside and inlaid topaz top. Her paraglider, changed and exchanged by her travels, just as she has been.

She hears Sidon yelp as the paraglider catches him from his dive. "Link? Link, what is that!?"

Swallowing hard, she closes the paraglider again. Sidon pitches forward into a dive. He rolls through the air to cleave into the water of the lake.

Link wraps her arms around his neck again.
They swim up the next waterfall, and then the next, and then still further up the next, until Link has lost track; she hangs on by the dish that she has decided to cook. Salmon risotto. Or trout risotto. Some sort of fish risotto for sure over rice. With roasted mushrooms. And a small bowl of salt-salmon soup with crackers.

Salmon risotto. Salmon risotto. Salmon risotto. Even when the water fills her throat and she chokes on it—even when the chill seeps through her clothing to submerge the underside of her skin with ice—even when the rough scales on the back of Sidon's neck scrape her forehead and nose—she murmurs the words to herself over and over.

Salmon risotto.

Salmon risotto.

Salmon ris—ing up out of the water to land on the shore.

"We're here!" Sidon announces with hands at his hips. He unties the cord around their waists. Link slips off of him into the mud, which sticks coolly to her trousers. Whipping around towards Link, he extends a hand to her, though he does not quite face her, and his hand does not quite point towards her. "Since we're out of the water, Link, it's a little hard for me to tell where you are! So, will you hold my hand until we arrive at the lynel!" He offers his palm.

Link reaches out to him. She signs into his palms an affirmative. Sidon flashes her a grin so bright that she has to squint against the light reflected from his shark's teeth despite the torrential downpour of rain above obscuring the moon. Or the sun. She can no longer tell day from night. Instead she offers Sidon her right hand, which he folds in his left and gently squeezes. Link helps him remove the leather from his back. Wiping the rain from her eyes with the back of her right hand, she glances up the trail that they will follow: a mountain of glittery black rock that looks carved from the night sky, flecks of silver and gold hidden within that twinkle as do the uncountable stars, or like a drizzle of honey sauce over a hearty meal of fish.

Link drools.

Sidon ushers her up the rocky path. A few lizalfos slumber curled up upon tall rocks, their bodies darkened to match the hue of the stone. At this distance, they could pass for cute beasties that Link might have petted or fed flops of fish if not for their having wreaked havoc and chaos over the land once known as Hyrule, if not for their having taken the lives of so many. If she leaves them alive, they could go on to invade Ruto or attack travellers. And yet she could not clamber up the cliffs in the rain if she wanted to.

She tries anyway.

Her efforts leave her plopped in the mud. Link dusts her off—muds herself off—and tries again. Sidon inquires what she is doing. She jumps back up onto the slippery stone. Link climbs up a few handholds before she senses the rain under her slick palms sliding her downwards. With a grunt, she leaps up with fingers poised like a bird of prey. Rather than talons around a mouse, her fingers clutch at the cliffside that betrays her and sends her careening downwards to splat the mud below.

"Link, are you feeling well!? The lynel is this way!" Sidon calls after her, his chin tilted up to the rock. Link reaches up from her sitting position to prod him in the knee. "Ah, there you are! I hope you have been enjoying the most pleasant mud! Come now! I believe in you and your ability to recover the topaz arrows from the lynel! Do be careful, Link!" Sidon puts his hand on her hand, ruffling her hair in the process, and then feels for one shoulder, then the other, to pluck her up from
the mud. "I was too young to know you then, before the Calamity, but I'd like to get to know you now!" He grins widely as he folds her into an embrace that leaves her face planted squarely on his lower abdomen. The hug sways her from side to side. "I am most overjoyed to have had a chance to meet you! So take care of yourself out there, Link! I have nothing but faith in you! I'll meet you after you finish, arms full of topaz arrows and face full of smiles, as expected of our Champion of Hylia! Perhaps, when you return, we may speak yet of the past and people we share!"

Link nods into his stomach. At least he cannot see how badly his scales have scratched her face, nor can he feel her bloodied cheeks for the rain that wets everything regardless.

She glances in the direction where Sidon points.

"Simply walk between those rocks up the mountain! Upon your emergence into a clearing near the summit, you'll surely be at the lynel! You'll know when you find the topaz arrows scattered around! I'll be waiting for you here!" Sidon squeezes her into another hug, this time picking her off of the ground to twirl her around until her head spins and the grey clouds above whirl into a single funnel of darkness.

When Sidon sets her down again upon the ground, Link wobbles around. Her vision doubles Sidon into a pair of zora boys flashing her a pair of thumbs up. She nods at him—though he cannot see her—and starts to tumble her nauseated self down the path. It takes her a moment and Sidon's shout to recognise that she has gone off in the exact wrong direction.

She checks that she still has her paraglider and her slate, her telescope and her cooking pot, her spear and her sword, and then she begins the trek towards the lynel waiting atop the mountain.

Link creeps between the rocks. A few yellow chuchu bother her, but she pierces them and harvests their jelly. If all goes south—or if all goes north, as her Parapan friends would say—she can lob electrified jelly at the lynel while she makes her escape.

Or loose an arrow into the lynel's face.

As the path up the mountain widens, she notes a column of smoke extending into the sky and—more importantly—smells the scent of grilling mushrooms. She sniffs: zapshrooms, chillshrooms, and silent shrooms. A dizzying combination. Link can nearly taste the heady mixture of cooling and tingling, numbed to a pleasant tickle on her tongue.

A single topaz arrow lies in the path. The arrowhead does not consist merely of bone or wood with a shard of topaz within; rather, it has a dual-pronged structure entirely made of cracked topaz, with a metal band riveting it to the shaft. She touches her forefinger to one of the prongs. The sharpness pricks her enough to draw blood. Sucking on her finger, Link notes how the impact of the sharp prongs in flesh would cause the metal band to compress down upon the topaz and unleash the electricity all at once.

The girl with the golden hair would have loved to see this.

So would Romani, in case the Them ever return.

Link slots the arrow into her quiver.

She comes upon the clearing that Sidon mentioned, in a grove of sparse trees and rock. Link notes a small garden of various herbs running along the perimeter. Far on the other end, she observes the summit that rises into a sharp peak that drops off into the impossibly infinites below. Shatterback Point.
And rice.

In a low groove at the slope of the mountain, she spots the tell-tale signs of a small flooded rice-field. Just large enough to feed one or two or four. Running her tongue over her lips, Link wipes her mouth with the back of her hand.

Spent topaz arrows embed in the trees and rocks. Whole ones litter the ground. Link sneaks forward to pluck arrows from the ground.

She counts arrows in bundle of ten as she moves through the garden of herbs, cautious not to step on the plants if she can avoid it. Link crouches behind a rock. From here the scent of roasted mushrooms comes even more strongly. She peeks out from behind the edge of the stone. Her ponytail bobs from the dripping of rain.

In the centre of the clearing rests a person beside a horse. Under a lizalfos-skin tarp. With a horned helmet of some sort upon their head. A water barrel of fresh fish sits next to them. Link studies a fish flap from the barrel only for the person to lightning-quick snatch the escaping fish and chuck it back into the barrel. They kneel or they crouch—Link cannot tell in the cover of rain—over a cooking pot where she watches them chop up zapshrooms without protective equipment, touching the fungi with their bare hands. Zapshrooms, and some sort of strange white mushroom that she has never seen before. A truffle, maybe. She watches the chef *fwip* a salmon from the barrel to shove a fistful of truffle inside the fish’s mouth in mid-air. When the chef withdraw their hand again, Link can see the truffle, stuffed through the fish’s gullet in a single motion of the arm.

Link whistles appreciatively.

The chef raises their head towards her, and Link's eyes widen.

The face that peers at her from under the lizalfos-skin tarp does not belong to any human, any zora, any korok, any rito, any goron that she knows. A face of glowing slitted eyes and a twitching feline nose. A face of a wide mouth and gums set with thick canines longer and broader than her thumbs. A face that holds nothing but violent violet in its irises, a face with only malice to its name.

The lynel stands. Its red mane brushes out like a halo of fire around its head. Its four hooves paw at the soil while its muscular arms reach for the sword and shield at its sides. A sword wider than her own torso, with a cruel curved blade that she cannot picture dodging, and a shield inlaid with hooks on the front that could stab a thousand and one needles into her flesh if it slammed into her.

Link stares.

The upper torso of a muscular beast-man, somewhere between a lion, a bull, and a human who has eaten far too much meat in their life. The lower torso of a horse, or perhaps more accurately a donkey, with thick legs and hooves tipped in metal-studded horseshoes that audibly *shlick* into the ground when the lynel walks forward. Flexing its muscles, the lynel tilts back its head. It inhales, and then it roars, loud and long and low.

A challenge if ever Link saw one.

She tiptoes back to squat behind the rock. Though she knows it will not help, she covers her head with the slate.

She listens to the *twang* of a bow. Link looks up overhead to see the faint yellow spark of the arrow hurtling down directly towards her, too small and too fast to even attempt to catch with stasis.
Link flings herself away. She lands on her back in the mud. The sudden pulse of pain through her right foot—the same foot scarcely healed of having cleaved been in two in the Divine Beast Vah Naboris—sends her recoiling against the ground. Her limbs convulse. She feels her hand thrash against the rock. The lynel's hoofbeats close the distance between them.

She tries to slam her hands against her sides. She tries to lift herself up from the ground. She tries to control the shudders that race pain down her bones and up her veins back to her heart to whip her pulse to the heavens. She tries and she slumps back to the ground. She can feel the vibrations in the soil, can see the plinks in the puddle of rain, and yet her body will not respond.

For all of the Divine Beasts that she has calmed, she has always had beside her the help of Yunobo, of Amali, of Riju.

Perhaps if she cannot shake off a single topaz arrow on her first efforts on her lonesome, she deserves to pass the slate on to another.

A patter of rain plinks onto the tip of her nose. It slides down the bridge to wet her forehead between the eyes.

Her eyelids fly up.

Link clenches her fists. This time not even the spasms of the shock can fight against the determination that courses through her veins and lifts her to her feet directly in front of the lynel.

She tilts her head up. The lynel stands not a pace from her, so close that she can sense the relentless heat radiating from its bulk, as it gazes upon her with its tyrian-tyrant gaze.

It opens its mouth. Link stares at the yellowed fangs curving up from its deep red gums. A breath of rotted fish and putrid egg rolls from its throat to bathe her face in a wall of stench. Her eyes water.

The lynel roars and the sound drowns out Link's heartbeat.

It raises the sword. Just enough heft that Link can see the slight slowness of the arc. There, in that slowness, she sees the barest hint of a promise. There, in that slowness, she sees the thinnest thread of victory.

When the lynel's arm reaches its peak, Link throws herself to the side. The lynel brings the sword down upon the ground; the blade furrows the dirt in two to create a valley of death. Even as her boots touch soil, Link pulls the slate from the pouch at her right hip to lock the lynel in stasis.

She grins and curves her thumb and forefinger into the symbol of all rightness.

Not a second later the lynel rips itself free of the chains of stasis.

Link dodges behind the lynel as it swings its head from side to side in search of her. She rolls towards its hindquarters. Armour protects its chest and sides, but she notes the exposed point on its upper back, around the shoulder blade where its muscles ripple and mountain under its skin with the sheer strain of twisting its thickly veined neck.

Inhaling, Link springs onto the lynel's back, the fire-light spear in her hand.

Immediately she senses the lynel buck beneath her, but she plunges the spear directly into the back of its neck. The fire-light passes through its taut flesh. Link smells the searing of its muscle through its neck. She whips the spear back out—the fire-light disappears again into the hilt—and once more
stabs in, the neck far too muscular and wide for her to dream of simply slicing its head off.

And yet, if she stabs enough, then surely the lynel will fall.

The lynel falls. To its front knees. The impact knocks Link forward. She wraps her hands around the hilt of the spear, hoping to keep herself in place on the spear embedded in the lynel's flesh, but the fire-light—which has aided her so greatly in her fights against the Malice and against that in which weapons might become stuck—quietly flickers off. She blinks rapidly.

The lynel bucks her high up into the air.

For a long moment Link hangs motionless at the zenith of the climb. Eaindrops suspend around her like so many glittering diamonds. She could reach out and balance one on the tip of her finger, to let the raindrop plunge into her palm and shine there.

Instead she draws the bow from her back.

The two-pronged arrow screams through the skies as the lynel sprints by beneath her. It sinks into the flesh of the lynel's brow. The topaz breaks. Electricity spills over the lynel's skin, and it freezes for a moment while the shock thunders down its hooves. She looses another arrow: into its left eye. The prong pierces its eyelids; the wound sprays crimson. Electricity bursts the jelly of the eyeball, and topaz-lightning chars it into a thick caramelised gloop. A mixture of blood, eye jelly, and tears congeals around the open socket in a crust along the lower rim. The upper eyelid hangs limply from the top of the socket, twitching, the eyelashes burned off from the shock.

The lynel roars.

Link lands on her boots to aim another arrow at its second eyeball, but the lynel twists back its left hand and throws its shield at her. Mouth gaping open, she somersaults to the side to avoid the needle-studded weapon.

She hears the lynel string its bow.

Link reaches desperately into the satchel. Her hand closes around the cold glass of the elixir vial. Pitching her arm back, she throws the vial at the lynel's face with every gram of strength she can muster.

The lynel pulls back on its metal bow as the vial of elixir explodes in its face and coats its face in green.

Green.

Not electric chuchu jelly, but green.

The glass shards embed in the lynel's face. She ogles the ruined remains of its collapsed nose, of the blood streaming from its brow, of the shard stuck in its empty socket even as the muscles that once controlled the eye constrict around the shard, which wedges the glass deeper and deeper into its flesh.

The lynel looses the topaz arrow.

Once more Link tries to cartwheel away, but abrupt pain just below her left armpit rips a scream from her lungs. The shock of electricity a second thereafter thumps—first—her knees into the mud and—then—the remainder of her body. Her stomach—her chest—her chin hit the ground. The agony of the lightning pulsating through her thuds her heart. She senses it threatening to break free
of her chest or else shatter apart entirely. Her limbs, convulsing through the mud, can barely move. Link bites her lower lip. The lip split apart under the force of her teeth, and the pain sharpens her consciousness to a single point.

She wrenches her arm into the satchel. Another vial of glass pushes into her palm; Link closes her fingers around it. She hears the lynel charging her with its sword held in front of it and the metal spikes on its hooves leaving holes in the ground—but she will not let it leave holes in her flesh. Grinding the teeth of her upper jaw into the bloody mess of the skin above her chin, Link forces her arm up and lobs.

The vial does not explode in the lynel's face but at its throat. The electricity of the chuchu jelly brings the lynel's legs to a lock. Its momentum propels the lynel forward. It skids through the mud on electrified limbs. Its blade drops into the mud.

She grabs the sword in hand.

Link pulls herself out of the mud that forms a coat of cold over her skin. She listens to the lynel panting as it starts to recover from the shock. Fingers shivering, she grasps the hilt of the blade. So heavy that she can barely pick it up. So heavy that she cannot swing it normally. So heavy that when Link finally lurches it from the mud, the inertia spins her around her heel.

The lynel roars at her. It charges her head-on prior to her untangling herself from the sword, and the sharp curve of the spinning blade carves into its knees. The edge slices its tendons and claws the meat to the bone. The bottoms halves of its legs fall apart in bloody heaps of meat, leaving stumps above its knees. The lynel's front legs buckle. Its momentum launches the lynel launch into her. When its torso slams into her chest, it knocks the wind from her lungs. Blood spews over her waist and legs to warm her flesh through the tunic. She hears the lynel roar in pain as the open stumps of its front knees plunge into the unforgiving chill of the mud.

Link staggers backwards. Her trembling hands draw her bow again to aim for the lynel's remaining eye. Before she can loose the arrow, a vice grips her neck so tightly that she can neither breathe nor swallow. The lynel has her by the throat in its right hand so large that its fingers close around the back of her neck, so wide that its thumb digs into her chin and the base of its hand grazes her collarbones.

Despite the evident pain that shivers the lynel's shoulders, it tightens its grasp on her throat. Link feels the bones in her neck grinding against one another. The sensation pools droplets of blackness around the corner of her vision. Darkness: the promise of relief from the agony that would spasm her hands if not for the tempered iron of her will.

The lynel's other hand makes a grab for her bow; she jerks her arms up to loose the arrow square into its charred eye socket.

The electricity that courses through the lynel's body seizes through hers as well, but it does not let go of her throat. It roars; she recoils from the stench. The blood and jelly from its eye coat her nose and mouth. Vomit seeps from the corners of her lips to dribble onto her chin and the lynel's hand.

She cannot breathe.

Her vision. Her vision goes dark. Her muscles have the strangest feeling of sloughing from her bones, steadily ebbing away into nothingness, until only her bones are left, and then only the words she has left on the fingertips she can no longer feel.

With the last of her strength she reaches for the fire-light spear.
The suddenness of the agony that pierces through her lower belly could pass her out then and there. She feels her flesh constrict around the lynel's clawed fingers that have somehow wormed inside of the meat of her lower abdomen, puncturing the tunic in their entrance. The lynel grips a fistful of her entrails; she retches violently onto the lynel's face. It rips its hand from her abdomen to claw at its own face. The acid of her stomach contents burns into its ruined eyes, into its misshapen nose, into its bloodied maw.

Where the lynel ripped its fingers from her innards, she can feel blood flood down her stomach over her thighs, can feel her entrails slosh downwards to ooze from the holes left in its wake, can feel the hollows through the meat of her own body.

She lifts the fire-light spear above her. Her lungs have all but given out. Her arm shudders; she cannot raise it all the way.

But she need only thrust it speedily enough to activate the fire-light.

The spear sizzles through the lynel's brow between its eyes. She lifts it again and brings it down through the lynel's nose; the fire-light emerges on the underside of its jawline. The lynel gurgles blood. Its breath bubbles red. She cleaves the fire-light through its eye sockets into its skull, again and again, and then angles her hand to stab its jaw through the front of its throat.

The lynel's head tips backwards. She watches the remaining skin holding the neck up rip from the head's weight. The arteries burst under the pressure to blind her in blood.

The hand around her throat does not let go.

Bringing the fire-light spear up once more, she thrusts it down into the lynel's wrist; the stump of its hand wets her chest in warmth. She splashes uselessly into the mud on her right side. The fingers remain locked around her throat. She stabs the lynel's hand over and over with the fire-light. Her arm trembles so badly that she cannot angle the spear: the tip of the fire-light burns her right collarbone, her left shoulder, her sternum. Just before she slips into the comforting night, dark and deep, the thumb falls away and she can breathe.

She can breathe.

She breathes.

She breathes.

She breathes.

She lets herself lie in the mud on her side. When she opens her mouth, the mud seeps into the lower curve of her right cheek, but she sucks in breaths stenched of earth and blood and rot through her raw throat that bubbles up blood.

As she stares at the lizalfos-skin tarp beneath which the lynel sat, one of the salmon leaps from the fish barrel, hits the tarp, and splashes back into the water. Just one second. Just one moment.

But a moment she happened to catch.

She laughs.

She laughs until she can no longer bear the agony through her stomach accompanying each peal of mirth and then she laughs some more until at last she lies there in the stillness with nothing but the patter of the rain and her own laborious breathing.
Flattening her palm against her lower abdomen, she nearly throws herself to the pitch for the pain of the pressure against her innards. She tears off a strip of her bloodied tunic to wad and set between her teeth. Biting down on the makeshift gap, she pushes into the wound to keep everything inside.

She comes to.

Lifting her head, she looks upon the still-steaming corpse of the lynel. Her gaze alights on the quiver strapped to its back. The fire-light spear sizzles through the leather strap. She takes the quiver of topaz arrows. She does not count them. Instead, pressing her tunic over her belly, she crawls through the mud towards the lizalfos-skin tarp—towards the lynel's cooking pot.

She huddles beneath the tarp. The warm mixture of blood—the lynel's and her own—has cooled off in the rain and now clings to her clammy skin. Blood streams down her chin from where she has mangled her own lower lip to a pulpy mess of raw meat and bitten skin. At least the heat that seeps through the fabric of her lower belly continues to warm her.

Link glances at the ingredients before her.

Her salmon risotto.

The salmon stuffed with truffle. Still raw. A gruel of rice cooking in the pot. She can smell butter and salt in the gruel. The pain of her wounds and her bruises and the light-headedness borne of bloodloss compel her to collapse, but she perseveres.

Never will she satisfy herself with a meal shoddily made.

Link takes the time with her limited ingredients to whip the gruel into a proper risotto of rice. She moves her own cooking pot onto the fire to make a broth on the fish in the water barrel that she adds to the rice. Out of butter, she makes due with what the lynel has already added to the pot. Link stirs, testing the rice as she goes, and cooks the risotto until the risotto has attained a viscous, creamy texture that she longs to eat out of the pot. She stops herself long enough to thoroughly cook the salmon with its truffle—and added herbs that she drags over from the lynel's garden, her hand against her stomach to keep her innards from spilling out—inside. Only when the fish and truffles have roasted fully does she spread them over the rice and allow herself to indulge.

With the blood still leaking from her belly and the bruises making swallowing a fight against the pain that threatens to sink her into blackness, Link tears apart the salmon with her bare hands. She scoops up rice with her right hand and salmon-truffle with her left, pelting food into her mouth. The warmth of the meal floods over her tongue. Even though her hands track mud and blood into her mouth, the savory-tang of hearty cooked salmon, the deep richness of the crunchy roasted truffle, the sour-bitterness of the herbs tempered to sweetness by the heat, and the salty risotto beneath it all to lubricate its descent down her throat.

Link senses her strength returning from the deliciousness of the aroma alone; her body seems to stitch itself back together as she eats of its truffles within.

She closes her eyes. She remembers Mipha gazing at her as they stood on a balcony of Ruto overlooking the reservoir, as Mipha pointed out the wall of the dam where lay Link's bed and the counter where she served meat and drink.

Mipha smiled at her. "My Link, do you remember when I first rescued you?"

Link nodded. Mipha recounted the story and Link added in her own experiences, which brought
Mipha to laugh at Link picturing a sea monster that plucked her from the river.

Eventually the mirth quieted down and left Link gazing at Mipha, who herself gazed out towards the Divine Beast Vah Ruta, silent in the water of the lake below Ruto. "Hylians...seem to grow up so fast. I feel like I haven't blinked and you've already become an adult." Link blinked but Mipha did not return her gaze. "Do you think, my Link, when we've done our best against the Calamitous One...do you think that we could return to how things were when we were children?" The corners of her mouth twitched up. "And perhaps you could...perhaps you could cook for me again, my Link. Wouldn't that be wonderful?"

She does not remember her reply. The pain mists over her memories even through the sharpness of the salmon risotto.

When she opens her eyes, Link finds Sidon wandering the clearing, calling her name. She shouts hoarsely back at him, and he moves towards her until he has neared enough for her to touch his wrist. Link tugs desperately at him, to bring him over, to make him listen to her final plea. He offers his hands.

She signs into his palms. "Sidon. Sidon."

He asks her a thousand questions and she asks him one.

"Sidon...do you want some of this salmon risotto?"

—

_Hearty Salmon Risotto_ (full recovery, five golden hearts) - hearty salmon, hearty truffle, hylian rice, goat butter, rock salt

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes:

The King Zora refers to Link as "my lass" and Sidon as "my lad"; he once also referred to Mipha as "my lass".

The hero of propaganda is in reference to the fact that the royal family was hiding what Link was actually like for fear that the greater population wouldn't accept her.

In *Breath of the Wild*, Dorephan comments on why Link no longer carries the legendary blade.

Dorephan compares non-zora to fish spawning. Since you would expect zora to be compared to fish, I wanted to point out that zora do not see themselves as "fish" any more than we humans see ourselves as lemurs.

I think that this is our hint of what actually happened in the time before the Great Calamity. We'll find out more about it in the future.

Mipha's 'love' (in reference to Link) is not meant to be romantic at all. Although she
was apparently romantically interested in Link in *Breath of the Wild*, they have a different relationship here, since (again) Mipha was quite literally an adult when Link was growing up and thus when they met. Rather, the 'love' she means is that Link gave her an outlet of someone who didn't know her as the Princess Zora and someone who did not attempt to foist the Lanayrish traditions on her.

Muzu smells something *beastly* rather than something *fishy*.

Muzu refers to the lynel as a *he*, but monsters do not in fact have sexes (or genitalia for that matter, as they do not sexually reproduce).

In *Breath of the Wild*, Muzu asks you to gather twenty arrows, which is what Muzu almost said before giving Link a much larger number.

Yep, Sidon is blind! The joke about no evil being done is in reference to the "see no evil; hear no evil; speak no evil" adage.

A shard of topaz going off over Link's head is a twist on the lightbulb going off over someone's head gag.

Sidon is able to navigate through the water and to greet other residents of Ruto through a combination of (1) reading patterns from the waves of water around him and (2) electromagnetic signaling, which sharks and other fish are capable of. However, these do not work out of water. Even in water, he does usually have a seeing aid/interpreter (like Lari) around with him though.

In *Breath of the Wild*, Link jumps up waterfalls by donning the zora armour. I found this ridiculous at best (just as Urbosa does not have magic lightning powers, nor does Revali actually call gales). Sidon jumps up the waterfall in a manner similar to salmon, by repeatedly leaping and slowly inching his way up. The paraglider Link opens refers to how Link automatically opens such a paraglider in *Breath of the Wild*, although this understandably freaks Sidon out as he has no idea what's going on.

Shooting an arrow into a lynel's face causes the lynel to be stunned for a few moments in *Breath of the Wild*.

Funny how lynel have magic homing shock arrows if you try to hide, even though that's not how arrows work.

The fight with the lynel is one of the single most violent in all of *Delicious in Wilds*. I did not do this to glorify violence; rather, because lynels are the generally agreed-upon most difficult enemy in the game for most players, I wanted to make that evident for Link in *Delicious in Wilds* as well.

The lynel getting caught in Link's spinning blade as she struggles to stop the inertia of her rotating is a reference to the two-handed spin attack animation, where Link literally spin2wins in place. The heaviness of the blade comes from its in-game description.

Link gets *rather hurt* in this chapter. The lynel literally putting its claws through her lower abdomen was inspired by the "barbarian" armour set, which uses lynel monster parts to upgrade, and which features a red handprint on the stomach. Guess what Link's scar is going to resemble?
Don't worry about Sarie! They're around and will be just fine. In fact they've been around the entire time.

Up next: recovery; preparation for Vah Ruta.

midna's ass. 18 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This is one of the biggest and best fight scenes in the whole series. It's so visceral and desperate and brutal.

...And it's followed up by Link holding her intestines in so that she can make food, which is the most Link thing ever written.

The last line of this chapter is definitely in the top five closing lines. I laughed out loud.

Emma. 18 October 2017.
Hasty Mushroom Rice Balls

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef recovers from injuries and prepares a meal for the coming calming of the Divine Beast.

Chapter Notes

To all of my readers: a brief summary of the "skippable" section of the previous chapter is as follows: Link fought against the lynel and won, killing the lynel, but was grievously injured in the process, specifically with the lynel ripping into Link's abdomen/innards. Sidon then found the mortally wounded Link cooking salmon risotto.

This chapter includes an arguably graphic scene of Link's healing that is skippable, starting at the paragraph beginning with "The sudden pain over the entirety of her form" and ending just before the paragraph beginning "And then, all at once, the itch leaves her". As always, stay safe!

And now, the usual author's notes that didn't fit in the end: Thank you so much to all of my readers for all of your support, and thank you as well to my beloved beta reader, Emma, for everything that she has done for me, including informing me when I'm stuck too far up my own ass.

The opening of this chapter is purposefully written in a very confusing manner because Link is delirious from pain and blood loss.

Because of how feverishly delirious Link is, you get a smattering of memories here, one of which is intensely important, and regards how Link and Ilia became friends (it's probably confusing exactly what happened now, so wait until the fifty-fourth chapter for a revisit and some clarification).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She does not much stay awake the journey back. Link clutches the quiver of topaz arrows with her chest. Sidon swaddles her in the lizalfos-skin tarp. He prays over her to the Goddesses; slightly, just slightly, she lifts her eyelids. He grips her hand, beams at her—at her stomach rather than at her face—and flashes her a thumbs-up.

"I knew you could do it! With these arrows we'll surely quell Vah Ruta! Most fortuitous, Link! Now let me do my part in getting you back! And I have nothing but the utmost faith in your ability to hang on!"

Link nods blearily before closing her eyes again. Weakly she fends off his attempts at picking her up, hugging the cooking pot of salmon risotto. She feels Sidon cautiously touch over her hands until his fingertips ping against the metallic surface of the pot.
"I shall bring that with us!" he announces; Link lets herself go limp. She raises her satchel to push into Sidon's hands, then signs into them, the agony of every breath that shakes through her still-raw throat and her pulsating innards doubling Sidon in two and bringing a sluggishness to her movements. She asks him in broken words to harvest herbs from the garden, whatever he can fit, for ingredients that she did not see at first blush in the kitchens of Ruto. Link hears Sidon spend a moment kneeling over her, panting. Then he empties her palms of the satchel. "Very well! I will most certainly look for anything I have not eaten before! Then I shall be right back for you! Tap thrice for yes yes yes!"

With the little strength that remains in her, she taps.

She does not let her head loll back so much as she can no longer afford to hold up her neck.

Link lowers her eyelids. Despite her best efforts, her arms slip from the sides of the cooking pot. She inhales. Her ribs rattle within her. She exhales. The five-pronged wound on her lower belly throbs as if the lynel were attempting to eviscerate every delicious meal she has ever had.

If only she could have shared the lynel's own salmon risotto with it. If only she could convince the monsters to lay down their arms in exchange for the heat of a meal.

Link listens to the *splish* of mud beside her. Something shifts over her shoulders. The ground vanishes from under her body; something firm and cool surrounds her. A chrysalis. She has become the Malice in her own body, and when someone enters her Divine Beast to calm it, she will slither from the cocoon of the tyrian heart to drop her slate. Neither the fire-light spear nor the long sword given to her by Riju would constitute something of *her own weapons*. Ah, of course: the cooking pot. A formidable fashion of fighting, a warning weapon of war.

Fluid sprays over her face, and then doesn't, and then does, and then doesn't, and then she stops paying attention and starts to consider what food to make for herself when she arrives home.

If the lynel sought to remove her entrails, then she will merely have to replace her innards with food. She'll make a favourite of the girl who smelled of horses: mushroom rice-balls. Her own special, to combine the use of rice in Lanayru with the love of mushroom in Ordona.

Sitting together on the porch by the sunset trees. Cooking over the same pot. Giggling and wiping sauce or butter from one another's noses. Finding Aryll—up high in the trees or staring off the coast towards the ocean she loved so—to surprise her little sister with supper.

The firm thing unwraps around Link. Two—something like planks of wood—support her. A warm bulk presses into her left side. Her entire body remains numb. Her limbs flop uselessly and slide off of the planks of wood; she finds that her individual arms and legs have tensed so that she can no longer move them.

A puppet.

A puppet of wood.

Link tries to laugh and yet she senses only the sting of blood bathing the inside of her throat, the meat constricting in and out, swollen up so thickly that she can only hiss in a whisper of a breath.

A motion at her right hip. Words somewhere far, far away. A brightness that squeezes shut her eyes, and then a hum that resonates through the bulk at her side to tremble her form.

Water.
The rushing of water.

The planks of wood and the bulk at her torso give way to a hardness beneath her. Link lies there with her limbs splayed her. Her stomach hurts. She need eat *something*. Just to eat. Nothing else.

Just to eat.

Just to cook mushrooms and herbs directly in the fire for wanting of a cooking pot. Just to find herself trapped in the darkness of the forest without a means of returning home. Just to feel the pain of her broken left arm. Just to realise that she had no companion but the girl who smelled of horses and a single Ordon goat. Just to end up confessing that she...she wanted to be a girl. Just to hear the apologies tumbling from the fingertips of the girl who smelled of horses. Just to spend the night huddling beside the fire to keep warm. Just to force themselves up in the morning with their hands clawed with frost and their legs numbed to static. Just for the girl who smelled of horses to shimmy up a tree and spot the plume of smoke from Ordon. Just for them to walk until the girl who smelled of horses’s feet bloodied from her sandals, just for Link to offer her her sturdier boots, just for the girl who smelled of horses to refuse, just for the girl who smelled of horses to whisper later her thanks, just for her to invite the girl who smells of horses to the ranch with her to make her a meal, as Link will do now. Now. Mushroom rice-balls for the girl who smells of horses.

The floor beneath her melts. She drifts on nothingness. Her arm—the bones replaced with a long moblin horn she cannot flex, the blood drained and filled instead with molten lead—lifts itself.

The sudden pain over the entirety of her form leaves her screaming and writhing the wooden limbs that refuse to move, the hands and feet she cannot recognise as her own flapping along her chest. Her bones crack and splinter beneath her skin. So many needles stab through her flesh, everywhere on her body, from her brow to her lower lip to the curve of her abdomen to the centre of her right foot between her toes and draw up through her form with threads so sharp and thin that they threaten to slice her meat over again. Like worms burrowing beneath her skin with nothing but fang and tooth. Her muscle squashes together over her bone. Her tendons elongate rapidly, too rapidly, like someone taking her sinews and stretching them out by hand well past their breaking point. The holes in her abdomen collapse inwards on themselves; the sudden swell of new flesh plugging against the raw meat of open injuries gurgles her breath in her throat. Her heart clenches in. The same agony that overwhelms her consciousness keeps her awake.

Something fishy around her mouth. Link strains her neck forward; her efforts reward her with a mouthful of salmon risotto that she wolfs down all at once, even as the inner lining of her throat thicken. The sensation itches, unbearably so. She fights the overwhelming urge to force her hand down her own throat and claw up the skin with her bare fingernails until the pads of her finger come away bloody. Crawling, Crawling, all over her skin, like the scorpions of the Parapan desert. A swarm of ants or termites or locusts coating her and forcing their way inside of every orifice. No, not insects: her skin crawls back together to stitch itself. Her whole body itches, inside and out. Not only the inner rim of her throat, but of her nostrils down to the openings on the roof of her mouth, her lower lip, her ears, her chest, in the insides of her ears, on her lower abdomen *inside of where the holes have plugged up*. She scrabbles at her own skin, and yet the flesh of her stomach prevents her from digging in to scratch the itch deep within. Her limbs thrash. At least the salmon risotto continues to stuff her mouth. It warms her belly and quiets, if only for a second, that overbearing urge to scratch. For that impossibly long span of time, the entirety of her world hangs in the balance of two words: itchy; tasty.

Link feasts on the salmon risotto long after her stomach has started to hurt and the rising tide of bile has begun to sting the base of her throat. Her nails scrape along her skin: she cannot reach the
deeper layers she so desperately needs to scratch.

And then, all at once, the itch leaves her. Suddenly she submerges in the void of no longer having a body, for what body can she have without the feeling of itching giving her its boundaries. Slowly the sensations of her twitching fingers, her shivering limbs, and her thumping heart reach her.

She takes another bite of salmon risotto. She swallows. Her stomach churns. She lifts her head for another mouthful, but her teeth click on emptiness.

No salmon risotto. No need to remain awake, or alive.

She feels herself fall into the dark.

When she awakens again, Link finds herself staring—for once—at a familiar ceiling. She shoots her body forward despite the pounding of her head. She feels a thin layer of water splash at her sides. The silvery-grey room. The luminous stones. The water-bed.

No. No, she couldn't have fallen asleep. She couldn't still need to see the King Zora. She—

"Link! You're awake!"

She snaps her head towards the sound. Sidon. To her right. At her bedside. At her bedside, floating in the water that covers the entire floor of the room high enough that a thumb's-length or so reaches over the bed. Link looks left and right. Her belongings pile on a tall nightstand to her left. She counts the paraglider, the telescope, the slate, the cooking pot, the satchel, a strange blue not-quite-tunic laid out for her.

"How are you feeling!? Lanzu and Oshen told me that you should feel most well now! Our Goddess left the shrine just to heal you, after all!" Sidon beams at her. She blinks. "I believed in you! Not only have you brought back us so many topaz arrows, but you were able to rid us of the lynel once and for all! Link, you are truly most amazing! But of course, as expected of you, Link!"

Sidon bows to her, low enough that his face enters the water. "On behalf of our Goddess and all of the people of Lanayru, thank you! Thank you from the bottom of my heart! Thank you, most wonderful Champion of Hylia!" He stops, then grabs her hand and pumps it. "I am most sorry! I know that you do not wish me to call you that, so let me thank you yet again: most wonderful Link! Who would risk your life for us on the virtue of your own moral sense alone! Link, you should know how eternally grateful I am to you, that we all are to you!"

Link stares at him. When he releases her hands for a moment, she taps his wrist; Sidon's grin widens. "But of course! I should let you get a word in!" He faces his palms towards her. She asks him of what exactly happened, and Sidon bobs his head. "How have I neglected to tell you that! You shine with such music than I forget myself, Link!"

"After your most miraculous and awe-inspiring defeat of the lynel, you risked your life and limb, and the lynel gravely injured you! Our Goddess sent me a sign that you had bested the beast! But of course, you would never let something as a minor as a mortal injury stop you! I found you eating of the lynel's own pot! You even made me a meal, and a delicious one, so thank you for that as well!"

Link tries to swim through the shouting to get at the kernels of truth in Sidon's words, a feat that proves difficult if not impossible. She prays that his compliments of her food do not come from gratitude but from a genuine enjoyment of her cooking.
If not, then she will endeavour to train herself even harder to surmount this challenge as well: to prepare for Sidon a meal he loves.

"Our Goddess would never leave us without recourse! Thank you for allowing me to aid you on your trek back with the burden of the salmon and the quiver of topaz arrows! Once you arrived in Ruto, you went to the great shrine in the heart of the Temple! As expected of you, our Goddess found you worthy of entering Her sacred chambers with the presentation of the Goddess slate! Therein, through wisdom and the faith of our Goddess, the trial set forth by our Goddess was easily passed, as I had faith it would be! Our Goddess, seeing you in your plight, chose to present Herself to heal you with Her own holy hands as part of our eternal gratitude to you as Her chosen saviour, as our deliverer!"

The shrine. The shrine, like the shrine that healed the bite marks left by the lizalfos that tried to steal her food over a year ago, the marks still visible between the branches of the lightning bolt.

When Link looks down at herself to gaze at the lizalfos scars, she at once realises her own nudity. The lightning-bolt scars glisten gold on her left arm. On her lower abdomen, she can see the angry scarlet scars where the lynel's fingers plunged into her flesh: four in a row and one slightly asymmetric for the thumb. She observes, between her second and third toe on her right foot, a scabbed scar where struck the lynel's arrowhead.

She rests a hand on her stomach to gingerly brush her fingers over the wounds. Link has lost feeling, as she expected, on the scars. When she presses in, she feels the deep ache within her stomach where the deadened flesh extends down into her innards. But if she skims the surface her skin remains whole, or if she compresses her stomach or flexes her muscles, Link barely feels the injury except as a slight strain on her less supple skin, a strain to which she can adjust.

Her journey has marked her in more ways than one. Months ago, Link could no longer tell which scars she has received before her slumber at the Great Calamity and which she has received after her awakening in the Shrine of Resurrection. Now she knows enough of her own history—or at least enough to name some scars.

She touches a scar gouged out in her arm by a goat in the province of Ordona from before she and the girl who smelled of horses became friends, and a thin line over her left hip from an arrow while defending the girl with the golden hair sometime shortly after they together baked an egg tart. She touches the vertical scars on her wrist, like a taloned hand clawing up her skin, and she exhales.

If the meals she has eaten map out the memories of her mind, then the scars and the pain she has borne track a tapestry of her trials and trials alike.

"How long was I out?" Link inquires. He responds: not more than a few hours. She wipes imaginary sweat from her brow.

"Ah! How could I forget, if not for your presence as rich and vibrant as the music of the spheres!" Sidon clears his throat. "As the lynel resulted in the most noble sacrifice of your battle armour—"

Her clothing. Gone. The undershirt that she has worn since Kakariko, the trousers that she had worn since Darunia, the feather-ruffed tunic that she had worn since Medli, all stitched up in Parapan style since Nabooru.

"Fear not! For, while your body was resting up, our most talented trio of Laflat, Shalot, and Rulata prepared for you a set of hylian armour! You should thank them later: they had to make a great many adjustments for your size!" Sidon raises a thumbs-up at her, and Link rubs the back of her head. "But of course, as expected of our most incredible tailors, the armour should fit you perfectly, and help you better to swim beside!"
"...where are the remains of my clothing?" she signs into his palms.

"Ah! Would you wish for our most ingenious tailors to try their fin at repairing them?"

Link bobs her head, realises that Sidon continues to gaze expectantly at the wall behind her, and signs: "Please."

"Consider it done! Anything for you, Link! I shall send them for on the double and I have nothing but trust in their expertise!" Another grin that reflects the ceiling's luminous stones into her eyes. "If you try on the armour now, then I could request that they make any adjustments as well!"

She nods.

Link slides off of the bed and finds the water up to her waist. With her back towards Sidon, she takes the blue not-tunic in her hand and feels the slippery material under her fingers. Fish-skin, or shark-skin, but smoother than the rough scales on a zora's back, like the smooth white skin on the underbelly and the soft hollow of the throat, but dyed a rich blue and inlaid with reflective silver and a layer of opal along the inside. To keep her body dry even in the water, at least until the opals fill with water. But then she need only dry them out to swim again.

She dons the not-tunic, or attempts to. If the tailors Sidon mentioned measured her in her sleep, then they measured her down to the millimetre. The armour fits Link like a second skin, perfectly clinging to her form without giving her skin a chance to breath. The opal absorbs her sweat, and the fabric does not constrict her flesh or restrict her movements.

Yet she has always worn her clothing loose and comfortable.

The second skin brings the same sense of discomfort as when Link wore the dress. Without the loose, heavier clothing over her limbs, she feels though she loses the boundaries of herself.

"I have faith that everything will be to your liking, Link!" Sidon booms.

Link puts on the cap. The equivalent of a tail and facial fins flop over her sidelocks and ponytail. She rubs the back of her head and the tail interferes with her usual touch on her ponytail.

She touches her chin.

She removes the cap from her head.

Setting it in on the bed and wading through the water, Link taps Sidon on the wrist. Into his palms, she—sweat pouring down her back in thick rivulets, matched only by how she sweats when she prepares her most precise concentration of cooking—signs. "Is there a way that I could get something less skin tight? I'm sorry."

"Less skin tight?" Sidon grips her hands in his, almost crushing her fingers. "But of course! Of course you can! Though do please think before you do, as this armour made by our most talented tailors Rulata, Laflat, and Shalot should keep you dry precisely for its most perfect fit!" Sidon claps his hand onto her shoulder. "If you still want to, of course I will send the message along to them! I suppose if I were you, I would not fathom wanting to stay dry, for who does not wish to bathe in the waters of our Goddess Herself!"

She nods. Upon Sidon's request, Link removes the not-tunic again. He excuses himself, and she reaches over to rap her knuckles against his wrist.

"When will I get my clothes back?"
“Two flicks of a trout's tail!” Sidon answers, beaming yet again. He leaves her in the room to speak with someone outside.

Her stomach rumbles.

Link takes the opportunity to assess the contents of her satchel. To her eternal gratitude, Sidon did indeed fill the satchel with the contents of the lynel's garden. The heads of fleet-lotus with the seeds rattling around within. Rice that makes her salivate. Hyrule herb in green, longer and with buds more golden than those that she has seen on the fields of the land once known as hyrule. Carrots that she has before only seen in Necluda near Kakariko, that water her mouth at the images of sweet carrot cakes and hearty carrot stews floating just beyond the reach of her fingertips. Violet mushrooms sprinkled in silver that she recognises as rushroom. And violets, as in the flower. Ignoring the petals entirely, Link focuses on the leaves that give off a wonderfully bitter scent. She could brew from them a tea to use as a side, or she could simply eat them raw, or because she could make rice-balls with them complementing the mushrooms.

Link nibbles on one of the leaves. Her mouth washes with the taste of the mud from which Sidon picked them.

Sticking out her tongue, she nods sagely to herself. She does not know what she expected.

Sidon returns to find her with her face practically stuck in the satchel. When she hears him swimming through the waters, Link jerks her head up; the satchel comes with her. Mushrooms and herbs and the wooden box of elixirs thump into her face. It takes her a moment to pull the satchel off her head and set it back on the stand while Sidon merely swims there, offering her a pile of clothing.

_Her _clothing.

But her clothing can wait. First Link needs to pluck and sort the ingredients that have fallen from the satchel into the water. Her top priority. Then she can worry about clothing herself.

Once she returns everything to the satchel, Link takes the undergarments and undershirt from Sidon, then the trousers and tunic, and finally her boots and the hood that Glepp gave her, to replace the one Link has used so often to hide the scars that cover her face. Her trousers and undergarments seem mostly whole. She can see in the patch along the stomach of the tunic and the undershirt beneath it where the lynel's claw entered her innards. As she smooths the tunic over her stomach, she presses her fingertips against the patch, and the scars ache in her flesh.

Link feels for the rings in her earlobes and the blue band around her ponytail. Then she slides the hood down around her neck. Her once-confined sidelocks _pomf_ free, bouncing against her cheeks.

She takes a moment to glance at her reflection in the water. The ripples distort her view, but the scratches of Sidon's scales have left scrapes of scab along her chin and jawline; along with the vertical lines down her cheeks and the diagonal mark from the corner of her eye to her jaw, the scars frame her face. Link runs her palm across her chin: the creases catch the rougher texture of skin over the scar.

She wonders if perhaps the healing of the shrine make scars worse. If perhaps, had she healed normally and waited out the time, Link could have come away without the wear.

But she has not the time. The people of the land once known as Hyrule—of Akkala and Parapa, of Eldin and Faron, of Hebra and Necluda, of Tabanch and Lanayru—have not the time.
Link will take all the scars in the world onto her body if they might mean sparing another's.

Her trousers billow with water. She slaps her hands against her stomach to laugh at the sight of the fabric ballooning around her legs. Link listens to the euphony of Sidon laughing with her, so loudly that his voice resonates within the chamber and vibrates the surface of the water. She grins at him though he cannot see her smile. Her grin lasts not a second before the laughter overtakes her again. She doubles over.

She inhales water.

Sidon has to thump her on the back to choke the water out. Link cannot stop laughing long enough to even try to cough. He thuds her between the shoulder blades, and she flies forward into the water.

She nearly drowns, but at least she does so giggling her fool head off.

Once the mirth has ebbed from her belly and the water has flowed from her lungs, Sidon grabs her hand to pump it back and forth.

"I am heartened to see you in such wonderful spirits, Link! When you have rested up, we can make our move on Vah Ruta!" Sidon makes a circular gesture that Link does not grasp yet which fires her up regardless. She punches her fists in the air.

"And I'm going to make us a meal on the go!"

She punches her fists in the air again.

"A meal on the go!? As expected of you, Link!" Sidon grips her shoulder. "But of course, you would cook something to assist yourself in quelling the storm! Link, I have a request!"

Link nods to him, smiles sheepishly at herself while he continues to look expectantly in her general direction, and signs her affirmation into his palm.

"If you would not mind, I would be most eternally grateful if I could observe your heroic actions!" That she does not immediately turn tail and dive onto the bed to drown herself surprises her for how far she has come. "Our Goddess knows that I have tried to fulfill the duties of the Prince Zora in preparation for my destiny—" Link rubs her eyes. "—but I would most relish the chance to learn from a true heroine such as yourself!"

"Everyone seems to love you," she tells him. Sidon beams.

"I try my best, as I believe all of us do! But if I could push myself to be even better, then I will take any chance I can!" He clings more tightly to her shoulder.

Link scratches the back of her neck. At least the words come more readily to her in Lanayrish than they would in Eldic, or Tabanch, or Parapan. A language her hands, and her heart, know well.

"I'm not a hero," she explains, slowly. "I've...done a lot of things that have helped people! And I'm willing to put my life on the line. I know that I'm the..." She stops herself. She does not quite know how to sign the Champion of Hylia, the Hero of Hyrule, Her Majesty's Knight, O Courageous Link. Instead Link continues on, a slight flush to her cheeks: "You can watch me if you want. But...I've done as much harm as I have good. I'm not perfect. Just...don't forget that."

"But of course, you would be so modest and humble about yourself!" She runs her hand through her sidelock. The strength of his hand clenching her has started to tremor pain down her arm.
"What meal will you cook!?!"

Link touches her chin. Mushroom rice-balls, she's already decided. Yet she has not considered the possibility of making something to assist them.

She makes food for its own sake, and for that alone. To eat and to share and to swallow down to warm her belly.

Then again, the lynel's garden has brought her ingredients for something that could prove useful. Link has not the monster parts to brew an elixir, but perhaps she does not need an elixir. Just as Dyeri showed her the zapshroom and voltfin trout that could help provide some resistance against the electricity of monsters, then maybe she can prepare something that would provide them resistance against the Divine Beast Vah Ruta.

Link could ask Sidon to retrieve the lynel. From its corpse, she could concoct elixirs beyond her wildest dreams. Yet why concoct elixirs when she can get cooking?

"Sidon," Link declares, ripping his hand from her shoulder to sign into his palm. He salutes her with his free arm. "Take me to the kitchens. I have food to prepare."

The lynel must have imbibed its meals with the very essence of speed for the herbs and mushrooms picked from its garden. When in Lanayru, do as the Lanayrish: Link carries her satchel proudly on her hip, its contents that promising mushroom and herb rice-balls. Already she can roll the texture of steamed rice on her tongue, can smell the spark of speed to spritz through her stomach and hasten her heart.

Without the understanding of which ingredients might provide the greatest boon, Link mixes them all: diced rushrooms that leave a glimmery silvery powder on her palms, which she licks up for the kick of a harder pulse; discs of swift carrot so thin that she can see through them; pressed leaves pulled from swift violet. Her heart starts to squish in on itself; her blood vessels dilate, reddening her skin. She pulls on the collar of her undershirt. At least the water washes away the sweat that streams down her back. Link starts to hup left and right to rid herself of the excess energy.

The powder of the rushroom sears through her like a bolt of lightning to curl golden scars over the remainder of her unmarked body. Her muscles scream for her to do something, anything. To take on another lynel. To run a marathon from here to Medli. To jump off the roof and attempt to fly.

She might just have the ability to cucco-flap her way across the land once known as Hyrule on how swiftly she could flop her arms back and forth alone. She could flap her limbs to the heavens and tear open the film between her world and that of the Golden Goddesses to find the Sacred Realm of which the girl with the golden hair so often spoke.

Instead Link pours all of her energy into a frenzied effort at making rice-balls.

Operation cook begins, now.

While Sidon waits patiently by the counter and assists Link in reaching the cabinets she could not before—no more hopping up and down like a particularly aggravated lizalfos in the water that reaches her chest—to withdraw dried seaweed, she steams rice. Her fingers drum hastened versions of Epona's song and the Ballad of the Sealing War on the sides of the heating pot.

Link glances up at Sidon.

She tugs him over.
Into his hands she instructs him how to scoop the sticky rice into half balls and hollow out the centre, how to mix together the flakes of food to a thin filling, how to close the two domed halves of the rice-balls to shape the rice-balls into triangles, how to smooth the seams to ensure continuous rice, how to wet the tip of the seaweed to loop over the rice-balls, how to sprinkle fleet-lotus seeds over the rice and roll them between his palms to make the perfect shape. Together Link and Sidon fashion mountains of rice-balls until they have used up all of the ingredients that Sidon brought with him from the lynel’s garden. As a secret signature, Link adds a sprinkle of salted sauce to the seam of each before she closes the rice-balls, for that tiny extra snap of flavour.

By the time the rushroom wears off, Sidon and Link have amassed enough rice-balls to feed all of Ruto for a month. The other Lanayrish in the kitchen one by one stop their work to either marvel or stare in horror at the pile of rice-balls that spills over the counters.

"You're not adding fish!?” Sidon exclaims at the very end, and Link—after shaking her head—indicates the negative. "I have nothing but our Goddess's own faith in you and your masterful abilities in cooking! Father himself recognised you by your talents in cooking, as expected of you, Link!"

Link rubs the back of her head. The smile on her lips pushes back even her propensity towards vacancy. "I honestly don't think I'm that good."

"Surely the quality of ingredients you use cannot compare to the royal kitchens!” Sidon affirms, and Link lowers her hand. She expected some criticism, yet the truth still stings like the bite of a spicy pepper. "Yet, as expected of you, you manage to far outpace them with your most delicious cooking even with the limited tools you work with! As expected of you, you take what our Goddess has given you and you return destiny freshly served and garnished with your own courage!"

She ogles him. He pants from his speech, his arms outstretched, his grin etched into his lips.

Link cannot discern from his voice if he means his praise genuinely or if he simply says this because he regards her as the Champion of Hylia, the Hero of Hyrule, Her Majesty's Knight, O Courageous Link.

And some Knight she is, without Her Majesty.

She would never want to doubt someone—not even Muzu, whom she need thank for informing her about the topaz arrows—but now she almost regrets not climbing over the mountains towards the Divine Beast Vah Ruta to skip Ruto entirely, or sneaking in instead of attempting the trial put forth by Sidon.

With Yunobo, who barely knew her, and with Amali, for whom she had become part of the family, and with Riju, who had spoken with her honestly about cooking, she had felt herself. With Sidon, she feels like more of an idea than a person, a heroine instead of a girl who thinks of cooking far too often.

Shaking her head, Link slaps the counter to ground herself in the physical. The heel of her hand bumps against the tray of rice-balls. She signs her own death wish in that instant of watching the tray tilt and the rice-balls fly up.

Something small and brownish-green shoots out of her satchel to balance out the tray on the other end. The tray thumps back down. A sole rice-ball from the crown of the mountain tumbles down. Link’s saviour catches it in their tiny hands.
Sarie.

A Goddess in korok form.

Link clasps her hands in front of her. She bows down to Sarie, whose hands split into finger-like roots to absorb the rice-ball. The korok performs a little jig on the tray.

"Thank you. Thank you. Thank you," Link signs, in Necludan, in Lanayrish, in Central Hyrulean.

Sidon's features shift to visible confusion although his smile remains. "Link!"

"Please enjoy as many as you want, Sarie," Link adds to the korok. Sarie's leafy mask shakes back and forth with a sound like wooden blocks tumbling against one another.

Then Link turns to beam at Sidon. She presses her hands against his.

At last, her favourite time of the day, her reason for rising with each sunrise and bedding down with each sunset, her motivation for existence, her belief in the Goddesses, her vital spirit.

Food.

"I present," she signs, with an extra flourish to her wrists that brushes her knuckles against Sidon's palms, "rice-balls stuffed with mushroom and herb!"

With Sarie riding on Link's shoulder, they return to her room—the water somewhat drained—to eat and to prepare for their journey. Sidon explains what he knows of the Divine Beast Vah Ruta. Four tree trunk-like legs, each of which has a sensitive source of energy that they can disable with topaz arrows, at least for a time. Then Link can swoop in to cleanse the Divine Beast of the Malice.

"It would be my honour to accompany you to observe, Link, although I know that you could do it all without me! I promise that I will do my utmost to much get in your way!" Sidon flashes a thumbs-up. Link rubs the back of her head.

"I'll need all the help I can get," she answers.

"Most humble of you, Link! Thank you for believing in me!"

Link sighs.

She hefts a rice-ball into her hand. She rolls it around on her palm. She closes her eyes.

She pops the entire thing into her mouth at once.

The seeds hit her first. Her heart leaps up twice over, and she fears that if she bites inside, her heart will explode, and the shrapnel of her sternum will stud into the walls—and Sidon.

Yet Link could not name a better exit from life than in the waiting embrace of a rice-ball.

As the rice melts over her tongue, she senses the bitter powder of rushroom, the sweeter juice of swift carrot, the tender fibres of swift violet, and her heart thumps tenfold, a hundredfold, a thousandfold.

The thundering of her heart brings to mind the few drills that Mipha had her run with her silver spear, when the Champion of Zola trained Link in a weapon with a longer reach than any Link had used before.
Mipha. Mipha who in her spare time pursued her less-known passions of smithy, where most zora had difficulty with the need to reside in water to support their large and bulky bodies conflicting with the opposite requirement for smithing.

Those those did not live the fullness of their lives in the water, Mipha explained to her, oftentimes did not reach the size of their Lanayrish brethren. Those zora who lived in the rest of Hyrule, in the snowy mountains of Tabantha and tucked away in houses of sapphire in Eldin, fanning themselves in the heat of Parapa or sweltering through the jungles of Faron, would scarcely become taller than a rito or a goron might, to still tower above humans, but not by much.

In the little time she had to spare for herself, Mipha honed her skills in silversmithy, mainly in armour and in weaponry for the long war ahead. Beneath the winter moon Mipha demonstrated the crafting of a new spear for Link's training.

"Perhaps," she said to Link, suddenly, in the middle of an explanation on how to properly balance the metal, "I will not become the Queen Zora after all, if my duties as the Champion of Zola supercede those to Ruto's crown."

Link tilted her head at Mipha. But the Champion of Zola turned the talk to techniques of coiling silver, and Link fell silent.

To quicken the pace of her limbs enough to make the fine adjustments of delicate silver before the metal cooled, Mipha asked Link to prepare her food on rushroom and swift carrot, on swift violet and fleet-lotus seeds, and—at the girl with the golden hair's suggestion—hot-footed frogs, the latter of which the girl with the golden hair endeavoured to convince Link to consume. "For scientific research!" she declared to Mipha's giggling, while Link held the frog in her hands, meeting its yellow-eyed gaze.

Ribbit.

Mipha taught her well to fight with the spear, taught her well to prepare and apply medicinal salves from the herbs and mushrooms she could find most anywhere in Hyrule, taught her well that when they expect a Champion to have certain interests pertaining to their known Champion skills, then never will they speak of anything else that Champion might want, or need, or do.

"Like hopping from one river current into another. At least it's a step up in freedom." Link cocked her head, and yet once again Mipha left the point dangling as an uncaught fish on a hook.

For Mipha, few people knew of her talents as smithing, and fewer still considered her art significant. "If the stories never speak of your cooking, my Link," Mipha remarked while Link felt herself caught between blankness and blush, "I'll learn to write music so I can make my own."

Mipha.

Mipha, whose remains Link may yet have to fight.

But she can consider that later. For now Link has a Divine Beast to calm.

She pops another rice-ball into her mouth, and then another, until her body struggles to process the fullness in her belly and the fastness in her chest at once.

Vigor renewed, she turns towards her preparations.

Link fills up her satchel with as many of the rice-balls as she can carry. She pats herself down. The slate at her right hip. The red telescope at her left. The paraglider and the cooking pot on her back.
The fire-light spear and the long sword given to her by Riju. The bow given to her by Amali and the self-determination given to her by Yunobo. The satchel slung around her left shoulder and Sarie perched on her right.

She rears up her left foot—Sarie makes an oh sound at the suddenness of her motion—and attempts to slam it down onto the edge of the bed. The elastic material of the water-bed springs back up. Link nearly topples into the water if not for Sarie pulling her forward by her left ear.

Bursting out in laughter, she places her boot against the bed once more, a hair more gently this time.

Link flings her arm out to point towards the door. Having struck the pose, she realises that Sidon stands just too far for her hands to reach. She side-hops along the bed with a series of hyaahs until she can sign against his palms.

"Let's go, Sidon! To the Divine Beast!"

He holds her hands in his. "I believe in us, Link! Together with our Goddess at our side, we can do anything, yes yes yes!"

She nods.

They can.

And they will.

—

Hasty Mushroom Rice Balls (five hearts, medium movement speed boost for 05:00) - fleet-lotus seeds, hylian rice, rushroom, swift carrot, swift violet

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: The fluid spraying over her face and then not spraying over her face refers to Sidon going back through the waterfalls.

The two planks of wood refer to Sidon's arms, and the warm bulk is of course Sidon; he's "princess-carrying" Link with her left side against his chest. When he stops carrying her, he sets her down on the floor, which is the hard cold thing.

It's actually Sidon who completes the challenge of the shrine rather than Link, but Sidon then allows Link to touch the "goalpoint" (by the way, I use goalpoint because GOALPOINT is actually written above the place where the monks rest in Breath of the Wild, just like how the official music case has THEHYRULEFANTASY written on it in old hylian or whatever that language is called).

I clarify more on how the healing of the shrines works, but essentially all it does is accelerate natural healing. This has a few consequences: it won't let you bring back someone who would actually die: if Link were to be bisected from hip to hip, for example, the shrine might be able to fix up her lower torso so that her internal organs
were still around, but would be unable to restore function to her legs. As you can see, such healing by the shrine leaves the permanent scars that you would expect, and probably worse than that which would be left by allowing natural healing. The upshot of the shrines is that natural healing takes a long time and you would have to heal with potential infections, blood loss, etc.

The skin fixing itself is indeed very itchy! What struck me was that the inner lining of her intestines would also have be fixed, and itchiness inside the body sounds maddening.

As mentioned in a previous author's note, the zora have different ideas of nudity in their culture; hence why neither Igli (the messenger) nor Sidon particularly cares about Link being nude; it's just normal.

Sidon's constant praise of Link isn't all there is to him. Note how Sidon says that "the trial was easily passed", constructing his sentence in such a way that he does not specify he passed through the trial. It helps that Lanayrish, as a language, is heavily contextual-based and does not require one to state the actor behind an action, allowing for natural constructions that speak entirely about the action; this is related to their general cultural values of the community over the self, where the action is more important than who did it. When translating Lanayrish to Central Hyrulean, translators may either attempt to infer the actor to get at a more natural construction, or may place the sentence into passive voice that does not work nearly as well.

If you forgot, Glepp gave Link a hood in the forty-fourth chapter to replace the one that Link left when she escaped from Nabooru.

The effects of hasty food make everything speed up, which means increased metabolism, quicker heart rate, and increased blood flow. It's essentially a stimulant.

I really love rice balls (I write them as rice-balls to improve readability, but it's just rice balls).

Link, in a relatable way, wants people to tell her when she's doing something wrong, but that doesn't mean that she's still worried about disappointing people around her.

Sarie! Sarie has been in Link's satchel the entire time, and actually was the one to make sure that Link had the right vial of elixir. In the fiftieth chapter, there's the line "Another vial of glass pushes into her palm; Link closes her fingers around it." Who pushed that vial? Yup, Sarie.

The Champions' passions were indeed glazed over by many people, fitting them instead into single heroic archetypes. Silversmithy isn't something you'd expect from Mipha—nor were her fears about becoming the Queen Zora something that anyone seems to care about.

The memory in which Zelda tries to get Link to eat a frog is probably my favourite memory of the entire game, because it's so wonderfully characterising and so very Zelda.

Next up: calming the Divine Beast, and the return of an old strat.

midna's ass. 20 October 2017.
Beta reader's comments: Sidon sneakily finishing the shrine and giving the credit to Link is a cool, subtle little moment of depth for him.

The beginning of this chapter is really superbly written.

One thing I love about this series is how the author attaches serious consequences and really thinks about how different types of elixirs and foods would affect one's body.

Emma. 20 October 2017.
Copious Seafood Skewers

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef and the Lanayrish prince endeavor to board the Divine Beast, but the more difficult challenge lies in bridging the Lanayrish prince's faith.

Chapter Notes

As expected, author's notes that wouldn't fit in the end: Thank you to my beloved beta reader, Emma, for how much she has contributed to Delicious in Wilds, and thank you to you, my beloved reader, for all of the support that you provide me.

While in-game the zora armour is called the zora armour, the zora people themselves would of course call it the hylian armour, since it's made for hylians. Zora armour would mean armour that is meant for the zora, as the world does not revolve around hylians.

Lurelin is one of my favourite villages in Breath of the Wild for the music and the general relation to the land and situation that it carries across. I wish that there was more to it, however. Papuchia is also a blue-themed fishing village in the south of Hyrule, a village from Spirit Tracks. I have a feeling that Lurelin was in fact inspired directly by Papuchia.

Greengill and Ordon catfish are fish from Twilight Princess. Neptoona, skippyjack, loovar, and rusty swordfish can be caught in the open oceans of the world of the Ocean King in Phantom Hourglass. Ambrosial amberjack, goodta goby, Hyrule seabass (actually "Termina seabass"), and grand swordfish can be caught in the Ocean Fishing Hole in Majora's Mask 3D. Since Papuchia and Lurelin are catching ocean fish, I purposefully chose only fish that can be caught from ocean spots throughout the Zelda franchise (for example, I did not include freshwater fish from the fishing hole in Twilight Princess or from the Swamp Fishing Hole in Majora's Mask 3D).

You know what's exceedingly difficult? Writing scenes in which both characters use the same pronouns. This becomes especially a problem in the eightieth chapter, as you'll see, but that's just how the cookie crumbles in English.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They arrive at the docks of Ruto before Link quietly points out that they left the lynel's quiver of topaz arrows in the chamber.

They arrive at the docks the second time with another dose of mushroom rice-balls that gives them the energy to speed through the walk there and back as though the most delicious meal in the world awaited them.

With any luck, Link reasons, one such meal does await them after the calming of the Divine Beast.
She explains briefly to Sarie about the Divine Beast and inquires whether Sarie wants to remain in the city for safety. Sarie shakes their head, which also shakes their entire torso, seeing as the koroks appear to lack anything resembling a neck. "Yahaha! Sarie was hiding in Link's satchel the first time too! Sarie's really good at hide and seek! Sarie didn't get caught for so much time that Sarie must've hidden better than all Sarie's friends!" Sarie touches their tiny hands to either side of their head. "But Sarie's never been that good before. Sarie was usually the first one found, because Sarie's not that good at lying...so maybe all of Sarie's friends are still out there! When Sarie goes home, Link should help Sarie look for them!"

Link gestures towards Sidon, who waits at the edge of the dock, fixing the cords that keep the leather mat affixed to his back. "Will you be all right?" Link asks. "It'll be dangerous."

Sarie bobs their entire body. The motion causes them to fall over with an uungh. Twirling up their korok leaf, they straddle Link's satchel. Obediently she opens it for them, and Sarie slips inside with the tiniest twee hee! Link has heard, not that Link has heard many a twee hee! in her life.

With Sarie snug in the satchel, Link pats the pack prior to joining Sidon, who has once more strapped to himself a leathery—not leather, Link realises upon the second go-around, but fish-skin—mat to prevent his skin from scratching Link. This time she adjusts the mat to sit slightly higher. She lashes herself to him.

Link holds on tightly.

In the waters through which Sidon leaps, she cannot sense as well the relentless burden of rain. Even for a girl who adores rain, the constant plinks of water over Link's skin feel as if they leave marks in her flesh.

"Hold on and take a deep breath!" Sidon calls to her. "Don't lose strength! I believe in you!"

He launches on the now-familiar climb up the falls. The pressure against her stomach throbs the not-quite-fully-healed wounds left by the lynel's fingers. She flattens herself against Sidon's back.

When she returns from the Divine Beast, Link will need to thank Muzu, and thereafter the King Zora, and thereafter everyone in Ruto if she can.

The rice-balls that she left for the other Lanayrish in the kitchens should comprise a fair start.

Sidon clears one waterfall—Link resists the urge to open her paraglider at an inopportune time—and then another, and then he moves down a different waterfall that sends the blood rushing through Link's upside-down body to her head. She closes her eyes. Her temples thud dully; her cheeks flush; the rest of her form drains and pales.

Sidon goes upright again; the abruptness of the motion leads Link to come to a few seconds later. When she blinks her eyes against the spray that chills her face and clings her wet clothing to her skin, Link finds herself ogling a massive silvery-grey dam that spans far overhead to blot out half of the sky.

The East Reservoir. Somewhere in that dam, she might discover again the bed in which she slept and seems bar in which she served drinks and cooked meals. And yet there seems less water than in her memories, where the dam barely held back the tide of water beyond its span. Now the dam soars so far up that Link cannot estimate its height.

Perhaps they have built the dam that much higher.

Or perhaps the water level in the reservoir has become that much lower.
Somewhere behind her, amid the drumroll of the rain and the occasional cymbal crash of thunder, Link makes out another noise against the precipitation percussion. A grinding noise, as of two massive boulders skidding past one another, like a fissure visibly on the move with the earthquake not far behind.

"Link! Link! Are you prepared!? I have nothing but the utmost faith in you! Our Goddess shall not steer you wrong!"

Link understand why Sidon has positioned himself facing the dam: so that she can turn her head without his body blocking her vision.

And so she turns her head.

She stares.

The Divine Beast Vah Ruta. The elephant of the statues, a word that she knows not except that Yunobo told her. The statue—the one she recalls in the three Divine Beasts she has met—stood vaguely upright, with a curiously long tail upon its face, and two thick arms from its shoulder, although the statue had no the legs. The elephant in the water, gigantic enough that she cannot comprehend its size at this distance, presents an entirely different beast.

Like the other Divine Beasts, who could rival the size of the cities from which they took their names, the Divine Beast Vah Ruta does not wait in the East Reservoir so much as the Divine Beast commands the East Reservoir.

A giant cylindrical torso wider and squatter than that of the Divine Beast Vah Naboris. Four limb-like columns that plunge into the water. Upon the outer surface of the limbs, Link observes waterfalls climbing up instead of down to suck into the main torso of the Divine Beast; it takes her a moment longer notice the translucent material that protects the upwards pull of water. At the shoulder of each limb, Link can see a glowing violet disc, not unlike the Divine Beast Vah Rudania's joints, albeit four instead of six.

She would raise her hand to her head—how long ago did she launch Yunobo into the Divine Beast Vah Rudania's joints?—if not for her arms wrapped around Sidon's neck.

As he begins to swim around the perimeter of the East Reservoir, more of the Divine Beast comes into view. Link notes rectangular panels along its back that could hide cannons, also not unlike the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. Although, where the Divine Beast Vah Rudania consumed molten rock from Death Mountain to compress into its projectiles, the Divine Beast Vah Ruta has nothing at its disposal except for the water of the East Reservoir.

Simply streams of water, perhaps, and not much to worry about. And yet, a stream of water at that high of a pressure could probably rip a hole clean through her torso, too.

No such thing as not much to worry about with the Divine Beasts.

A massive tail upon the Divine Beast's rear end pendulums through the water of the reservoir; somehow that brings Link to grin. At least until she cranes her neck further to gaze upon the Divine Beast's head.

The tail upon its face arches into the sky. From the wide flared tip, the Divine Beast emits an endless torrent of water angled in the sky, the jet so powerful that the stream does not spread apart until it reaches over the dam where the torrent unloads.

The violent violet of the glimmering lights that resemble eyes churns her stomach for the presence
of malice. Malice that must once have fought against Mipha. Malice that must once have won.

Malice that must once have taken root inside of her, like the arrow that pierced her shoulder, to which she nearly perished, and which left upon her shoulder a permanent purple whorl. From a few droplets of malice upon an arrowhead.

Link squeezes her arms closer to her body. In the process she nearly chokes Sidon and quickly loosen her grip, apologising a hundredfold while Sidon reassures her.

"Even if you choked me, Link, I would be nothing but grateful! After all, you are Link!" he insists; she loosens her grip yet further.

She focuses instead on the prospect of flinging topaz-tipped arrows into the Divine Beast Vah Ruta.

Link signs into Sidon's throat. "What are we supposed to...do?"

"Ah! But of course, a refresher! To quiet Vah Ruta, you need only apply enough electricity, like lightning!" He beams. "From what scouts have reported, the shoulders of Vah Ruta's legs work the most effectively! They must be pumps to pull the water up, and when disabled, Vah Ruta ceases to rain! So I have heard, though I have only felt models of Her before, and never touched Vah Ruta Herself!"

For lack of the ability to touch her chin, Link stretches herself out to rest her chin against Sidon's neck. That does not quite provide her with the flashes of brilliance of her usual process of thought—for this situation she would require both of her hands and possibly a foot—but nonetheless she considers the Divine Beast.

Even if Link climbed onto Shatterback Point or another tall mountain in the vicinity to glide downwards and attempt to loose arrows at the Divine Beast from afar, the repeated trips up the mountain would take significant time, and the Divine Beast could shoot her from the sky with either the pressure from its facial tail or from the cannons it may or may not possess. And Muzu mentioned requiring many arrows, possibly many more than the two ruby arrows apiece she needed for the Divine Beast Vah Medoh's motors. And-and Link could even not loose two arrows in the course of a sole downwards plunge. And-and-and of course the Divine Beast Vah Ruta could well repair itself in the interim of climbing to the summit.

All that, if the lightning does not strike her. Even if her paraglider has braced against the lightning, the topaz within the rubber has already absorbed much electricity on the way up and she has no means of testing how much more it can withstand.

Sidon's remarks break Link from her perplexed puzzling out.

"By all means, tell me anything with which I could assist! And I will help you posthaste!" He lifts a hand from the water to offer her a thumbs-up. "Anything at all! But of course, our Goddess expects the Champion of Hylia to brave the trial! I did not mean to cast doubt upon your abilities, Link, in which I firmly believe! Yet as you cannot swim and did not accept our hylian armour—"

Link winces. "—allow me to do anything I can in closing the distance between us and She!"

"Could you swim up those waterfalls? The ones that go up its legs?" Link signs. Without the full motion of her arms, she has to spell out more words than usual; to his credit Sidon does not seem to mind.

"The waterfalls up Her legs!?" Sidon echoes. She feels him swim closer to the Divine Beast; Link
herself reaches her left arm behind her to keep for the bow and the quiver.

And the topaz rod, still crackling with electricity.

She snaps the fingers of her free hand. The single snap does not satisfy her, and she lets go of Sidon to snap both her hands. Link nearly topples backwards if not for the cord around her waist. Sidon catches her wrists to right her again.

"The waterfalls go into the Divine Beast, don't they?" Link pushes her fingers faster in her haste to explain. "We could use that to enter it!"

"The waterfalls..." Sidon's voice sounds muffled. That, or quieter. She feels him tense. "But of course, you would wish to act most courageously!" He does not skip a beat in his words, yet she can sense a certain something-or-other slithering beneath his tone, like a droplet of dense oil hiding in the bottom of a barrel of water. "Those who lost their faith in our Goddess endeavoured not to wait for the fulfillment of the prophecy, but instead...to attempt to quell Vah Ruta with their own fins! Most...tragically—" Within a second, his timbre has returned to its previous cheer. Link presses her palms against his throat to feel the vibrations. "—the pumps within the Vah Ruta lead directly to Her trunk!" She senses the tremor quake down his arm as of a clenching of a fist. "They were, as all Lanayrish, most brave, and most clever, and most strong!" Another tremor. His throat trembles. She searches for what she could say. She starts to sign out but he barrels on, through the water and through his words. "Yet all of the courage, the wisdom, and the power in the world will only ever lead you astray without faith in Our Goddesses that watch over our world! But I have the utmost faith in you, Link, as the one chosen to fulfill the prophecy!" Sidon swims closer to the Divine Beast. The torrential rain roars in her ears. Link strains to hear him. "And a most clever idea you've had! When we approach, Vah Ruta will defend Herself! I'll swim around Her, and you'll target the shoulders with topaz, yes yes yes!"

Link blinks. From asking to observe, to offering his help, to entirely taking the lead. And yet she trusts him: he knows of Vah Ruta more than she does, and he wants nothing more than to help his people.

Just as she feels him kick himself into a dive, she jerks her arms back. "Take a rice-ball."

"But of course! Most generous of you, Link! Thank you!" Link carefully reaches into her satchel, lifting it up to avoid too much water spilling inside, and a rice-ball pushes against her palm. She reaches past the rice-ball to pat Sarie thank-you on the head.

She presents the rice-ball, flecked with fleet-lotus seeds, to Sidon. He snatches it from her hand; his teeth graze against her palm. The cool water stings in the thin cuts raked into her skin. Sarie presses another rice-ball into her hand; Link wolfs it down in one bite. Rushroom and violet, fleet-lotus and carrot, rice and the coppery tang of her blood.

Closing the satchel, she faces the Divine Beast Vah Ruta.

Link retrieves the bow given to her by Amali, and in her grip she holds a prayer for Amali and for Kass, Teba and Saki, Tulin and Genli, Kotts and Notts, Cree and Kheel, the healers who aided her, all of the residents of Medli and of Tabantha. And Dorian, and Cottla, and Koko, safe under Amali's wings.

She retrieves the topaz arrows, and in her grip she holds a prayer for those of Ruto and of Lanayru. The lightning coursing with her blood nimbles her hands and defts her fingers.

Sidon closes the gap. Link lifts herself up—keeping herself upright by the cord around her waist.
and the pressure of her legs around Sidon's back, her thighs already aching from the tension—and strings the bow.

With the heavy quiver on her back, she has plenty of arrows. Yet, if the Divine Beast's joints take multiple arrows, she need exercise temperance.

Nodding sagely to herself, Link immediately looses the first arrow.

It arcs towards the Divine Beast, but the rain slows its motion. It falls into the dark mirror of the lake. She watches its descent as she flitches another arrow from the quiver.

The arrows smell vaguely of sweat, and a bit like horses.

Sidon diving into the water snaps her from her reflection on the scent of the topaz arrows. He twists up to skid more swiftly along the surface of the water. The up and down motion leads Link to bite her tongue and compress her thighs. By instinct, she reaches a hand to scritch Sidon behind the ear as if calming a runaway horse. When she comes aware of her actions, she retracts her arm and very busily returns to taking aim with the arrow.

Narrowing her eyes, Link concentrates on the Divine Beast Vah Ruta spannign across the fullness of the heavens above. She can see nothing but its wide torso, its right side visible to her, its terrible head just now coming into view with a single violet eye staring out into the infinite abyss. The water-pumping joints of its limbs turn with audible *clicks* to keep the flow steady. This close, she listens the grinding of the machinery within the Divine Beast, the moaning of the gears and the slithering of the ropes, even over the endless drumming of the rain.

She looses another arrow at an upwards-tilted angle. Link observes the shaft curve through the air. The rain pushes it down but the correction to her aim sings the arrowhead true into the joint.

The arrow bounces off of the golden-brown material and into the water.

"Link!" Sidon calls out. "This should be close enough for you to make your attack! I believe in you! I know that you yourself must have the faith, but if you ever for a moment fear, believe in our Goddess, for She has chosen you, and She believes in you just as much as I do!"

The third arrow meets the same fate as the second.

Link removes her trusty red telescope from its loop around her belt. Through the water slicking the lens, she peers at the joint. While those of the Divine Beast Vah Medoh had wiring open to the chill of the heavens to cool the hot-running fans, *these* pumps have the protection of closed domes. And she has no goron to launch himself and crack them open with his own weight.

Sidon urges her to loose arrows, to send the Divine Beast into shock, but no matter where she aims them, Link finds no openings. No matter where—not only at the joints, but at the waterfalls that draw up water, at the eyes as Sidon curves under the Divine Beast's face, at the trunk—the Divine Beast does not yield. The arrows bounce harmlessly off into the reservoir. Even when she pokes her tongue out of her mouth to provide an extra boost in her focus—like Aryll would have, or Riju—she cannot spot a lick of weakness.

She replaces the bow onto her back. As if on cue, Sidon swims away from the Divine Beast. "She has not yet defended Herself from us, has She!" he notes. "Is that why you are not attacking?"

"I don't think the Divine Beast needs to defend itself." Link bites her lower lip. "How did they calm the Divine Beast before?"
"Muzu suggested that we should use topaz arrows for just the occasion!" Sidon responds with a certain confidence, almost fractured at the corners. "There must be something that we—that I don't understand! Not that you have misunderstood! I would never insult you like that, Link!"

"It's not an insult..." With her right arm hooked around Sidon's neck, Link touches her chin with her left before returning to sign at his throat. "Are you sure we can't go through the pumps?"

"Please trust me! I would never wish to discount your most wise plans, Link, but I myself have—I myself have witnessed what happens! Please."

The plea catches her off-guard; she hugs him. Since she is already clinging to him to avoid falling off, Link does not know if Sidon can sense the difference of her embrace. She could remain silent, pray that he reads her, but—the deep brown of Riju's eyes bubbles up in her memory. Link tells him directly: 'I'm sorry. I can't do anything but hug you right now, but I promise I'll cook you something later.'

The realest comfort she can provide.

When Sidon chuckles into laughter, she feels the vibrations up his body resonating her own and drawing a laugh from her lips. "But of course, your first thought would be that of food! Link, you are unlike any Champion of Hylia I would have expected! I do not intend to insult you! By our Goddess, you have the courage, the wisdom, the power, and the faith to transform this entire world!" Sidon's teeth glimmer despite having no source of light save for the dark violet radiating from the Divine Beast. Nonetheless, his teeth sparkle and shine. "When I have witnessed you quell the maelstrom I would be most honoured beyond honour to partake of your cooking!"

A promise. Link nods to him, and he to her.

"Let me try the pumps. I won't put myself in them, but I'll try to aim the topaz arrows there. If we can get the topaz inside, I think we could shock the Divine Beast from the inside out."

Sidon reaches back to clap her between the shoulder blades. At the awkward angle, he manages to smack the back of her head instead, and she pitches forward to bonk her forehead against his neck.

"Most cunning! We'll try that straightaway! Be careful, and here we go! Remember that I believe in you! Never give up! Have faith in yourself and in your abilities!" Sidon goes on while Link bobs her head and feels her wet ponytail slap against her neck. By the time he finishes, Link has nearly dozed off against his back. Something prods her in the rib; she glances down to see Sarie offering her another rice-ball which she takes. The deliciousness energises her. That, and also the ingredients containing the essence of going fast.

She hands Sidon a rice-ball. "Bring me as close as you can. Depending on how far down the pumps extend I'm sure I'll figure out a way."

They begin the dive towards the Divine Beast Vah Ruta once more. Link relaxes against Sidon: unlike the Divine Beast Vah Rudania with its projectiles, or the Divine Beast Vah Medoh with its fire-light, or the Divine Beast Vah Naboris with its dust and lightning, the Divine Beast Vah Ruta merely stands in the water pouring water out of the face on its tail. Out of its trunk, as Sidon said.

Mostly harmless, at least to her and Sidon.

Mostly harmless.

And then—abruptly—the panels on the back of the Divine Beast Vah Ruta slide open to reveal long muzzles of cannons, and Link almost strangles Sidon.
The four cannons on the Divine Beast's left side—the side nearest Sidon and Link—expel massive columns of pure glittering ice. For a second of clarity, Link studies them glide through the air, shimmering iridescently. Then she comprehends that the blocks of ice fan out in a pattern in the same direction that Sidon swims.

The Divine Beast, by chance or by design, tracks his movements.

Link flaps her hands for a moment before she remembers that she, too, exists.

She whips out her bow to defend them with her first course of action: topaz arrows. The impact of the electricity shatters the blocks of ice into shards that plop into the water and hiss into gas. Sidon shouts something about having warned her of the Divine Beast's icy defence; Link could keep herself from dessert for a month for not having paid attention to the kernels of truth between Sidon's words of praise and belief.

The Divine Beast fires—ices?—another round. She cracks them down. Some pieces require several arrows and before long she—alarmingly—can feel the quiver beginning to thin out. Sidon continues to approach.

She has, she understands, no means of communication to Sidon, not even some crude method to tell him to swim to safety. Not with her hands occupied by the bow that prevents the ice from crushing them.

Sidon skims forward in diagonal lines zig-zagging closer and closer to the Divine Beast. Each time the cannons shoot out another round of four, he changes direction. She knows not if he discerns their direction by sound or if he merely switches randomly. Link has no choice but to put her utmost faith in him, to believe in he who—perhaps, or perhaps not—believes in her.

Each round forces Sidon slightly back. The ice comes more and more speedily now. Even if she runs out of arrows, she has the topaz rod looped into her belt.

She runs out of arrows.

Link looses the final arrow into a column of ice as Sidon closes the gap to twenty metres, to fifteen, to ten.

When the Divine Beast Vah Ruta launches another round, her hand closes around the slate at her right hip and the telescope at her left. She will not let a block of ice end her journey, or the journey of the slate that she has borne with her since before she could even clothe her naked form.

A block of ice *cream*, perhaps, snow mixed with the juices of fruit, a slush that melts in icy flavour on her tongue.

But not a block of ice, and not taking other lives with her.

The telescope may not assist her, but her gaze bores into the runes of the slate. The blue, the other blue, the red, the yellow, the light blue, the green. Light blue. The snowflake.

The blocks of ice identical to the columns frozen by the slate. The blocks of ice that Link has used as shields to fire-light, as stepping stones across a flooded Divine Beast, as a path through the very bowels of flame. And if she can break her own columns of ice, then maybe, just maybe—

Link lifts the slate to the heavens.

In the window of the slate, the ice glimmers red.
She whoops for the joys of the world that have culminated in this very moment, in the realisation that she never had to loose a single arrow, in the comprehension that the Divine Beast Vah Ruta can do to them no harm. Raising the slate higher, Link jabs her finger onto the cryonis rune.

The block shatters into a thousand fragments that melt into rain.

The rest of the blocks from the round meet a similar fate. Shatter, shatter, shatter, the only question one of how swiftly she may move her arm, take aim, and tap the block.

The satisfaction of breaking through a row of four blocks in as many seconds could rival that of a fresh bowl of rice.

Link touches her chin.

No, no it couldn't. But the breaking through a row of four blocks in as many seconds does bring its own satisfaction.

She cranes her neck up to start aiming at blocks directly overhead just as Sidon swims under the Divine Beast. As suddenly as a bolt of lightning, Link feels lighter, her skin more whole. The rain. Or rather, the lack thereof: beneath the belly of the beast, the rain no longer patters against her flesh. She closes her eyes to indulge in sweet release.

A release that bitters to reality when Sidon grunts. The downpour has not ceased even if she has momentarily found shelter.

Link listens to Sidon panting.

"Forgive me, Link! I need a moment's breath! Then we will take to the pumps!"

Link leans over to sign into his throat with the slate still in her hand. "Take all the time you need. It'll be all right." Words of comfort. Words of comfort that she could never have spoken.

Somehow the ice around her fingers has cracked alongside the columns spewed out by the Divine Beast. Maybe she aimed the slate at her own hands without noticing. "You aren't slowing me down, Sidon. If it weren't for you, I never could have gotten this far. We'll do it together."

"You're—you're much too kind to me, Link!" Sidon gasps out. The constant push of the rice-balls must have taken its toll on him, and Link pats his head; her palm comes away bloody. "Most kind! Thank you for believing in me! I should hope that I may one day attain even a fraction of your heroism!"

"Catch your breath. Then we'll try to calm the Divine Beast."

No topaz arrows. But she has the rod.

The slate remaining in her left hand, she reaches for the topaz rod at her belt with her right.

Her fingers hook into an empty loop. She khhhs a noise of surprise.

Link pats herself down.

Nothing.

The rod has gone the way of missing socks: into the abyss.

She hears—faintly, as though through the burble of water,—Sidon asking if she's all right. She hears—strongly, as though migrated into the centre of her skull between the eyes—the slow
thumping of her own heart.

Link stares blankly ahead. The four scars in a row and the fifth slightly offset in her lower belly throb. Useless. Useless. She has come so far. And now without arrows. Now without the topaz rod. Now without anything that she could use to calm the Divine Beast Vah Ruta. Sidon will take her back and she will have to uncover another path. Yet she has taken all of the topaz arrows from the lynel's corpse.

No more.

She stares blankly ahead.

She stares blankly ahead and her gaze drifts to her right hand.

The slate in her right hand.

The slate.

The slate. The slate that she holds in her own hand, and the runes across. Magnesis, and bombs, and stasis, and cryonis, and the pictobox, and magnesis.

"Sidon," she signs into his throat as rapidly as she can, her heart thudding into her temples, "didn't Muzu say that lightning calmed the Divine Beast?"

Sidon nods decisively. "But of course! That's exactly why we are here! Our scouts, most courageous and noble, determined that whenever lightning struck Vah Ruta, Her downpour stopped for a short while! That is precisely why we have brought the topaz arrows!"

The topaz arrows. Not enough electricity at once. Yet an entire bolt of lightning at once—yet an entire bolt of lightning at once could quell the Divine Beast for long enough that Sidon and Link could activate the terminals.

"Sidon, when we go back out there, you're going to have to dodge the ice yourself for a few minutes."

"Link!?" For the first time since she first met Sidon upon the bridge, all grins and speeches of trials, Link detects a note of fear in his voice, a note that sends the hairs on the back of her neck standing on end. "I don't know if I—!

"I know what I have to do. You can do anything you want but keep me in the Divine Beast's vicinity. Please, trust me." As Sidon pleaded with her, so she with him: "Please."

Link reaches to her back. To her old friend. Her trusted companion. Her bright star.

The cooking pot. The cooking pot that she has carried with her since the Great Plateau, upon whose help she might once again call.

"I'm ready whenever you are," she tells Sidon.

Unstrapping it from her back, Link lifts the pot with magnesis. He shifts beneath her.

"Our Goddess," murmurs Sidon, so low that Link would have missed his words if not for the movement of his body while he speaks, "I need more than ever Your faith." He straightens himself. "Come, Link! I believe in you and whatever most crafty plan you have! With our Goddess at your side you shall not fail! You shall not fail, Link! You shall bring us to the peaceful future
promised by our Goddess!

Before she can respond, Sidon lunges forward into the water. Link keeps the cooking pot steady, keeps the bounds of magnesis steady, keeps the slate steady.

The curtain of rain falls upon her again.

Her fingers slip over the surface of the slate with the water that slicks its face while she manoeuvres the cooking pot far above her, towards the clouds of grey that swirl overhead. Amid the rain, Link watches lightning streak from cloud to cloud overhead.

She need only call it down.

O Din, for the fire bottled in the lightning. O Nayru, for the water of the rainclouds. O Farore, for the wind that guides the maelstrom.

O her cooking pot, for her life that depends upon it.

As Sidon skirts away from the Divine Beast, Link hears the groan of the panels upon its back once more opening. She listens to the all-too-familiar chunking noise of water freezing into columns, the same noise as the cryonis rune of her slate.

The further Sidon swims from the Divine Beast the more easily, Link observes, he can dodge the columns racing towards them. Nearly by instinct she shatters the wave with cryonis. But then she turns the ice blocks aside. Her world narrows entirely to the slate in her hand and her beloved cooking pot suspended in the air above the Divine Beast. The magnesis does not quite reach. The fingers of her left hand clinging to the slate tightly enough the edges leave groove in her flesh, Link signs with her right, painstakingly tracing out characters into his throat: "You...need to...get closer."

"...I shall do my best!" Sidon yells back. Though he beams at her, she can sense the tremble down his spine: the Divine Beast spews another wave of ice blocks. Sidon jerks left and right through the water, erratically spritzing forward or rolling himself back. The columns of ice spear the waters around them.

Link focuses on the cooking pot. On forcing the magnesis as far as the rune will go. On making contact between the metal and the back of the Divine Beast. On grinding the cooking pot up. On praying for lightning to strike.

A sudden lurch against her underside knocks her elbow into Sidon's back and flings her arm to the side. She hears the pop of the magnesis failing. Link stares at the cooking pot suspended in the storm, hovering hovering, and then beginning to fall.

A column of ice slams the water not an arm's-length from where Sidon dodged.

Desperation hastens her muscles even more than the rice-balls. Link raises the slate back up to catch the cooking pot in the air yet it dives too rapidly for her to—

—she snaps the cord with a twist of her spine and throws herself into the chill of the lake. Her clothes billow around her. Sidon screams her name. The cooking pot thuds into the water so close that the wave nearly knocks her backwards. Link kicks herself forward. Her fingers brush metal.

Without its lid, the cooking pot has begun to sink, but Link wraps her arms around it. Its weight pulls her down. The muscles on her back ache with her efforts to keep herself from slipping under. She can barely move her aching legs. Water ices over her bones; her eyelids lower of their own accord. But she fights. With the slate in her left hand and her right arm hooked around the pot, she
boops the magnesis rune with her nose. She misses; a cubic bomb apparetes in the water by the slate. Link ogles the explosive.

She boops the slate again, praying that she does not blow herself up, and she listens to the song of the cooking pot magnetised.

Waves splash over her face. Link inhales fluid. Her lungs burn. She keeps her left hand up despite the dull throbbing in her arm and the increasing numbness in her fingers. Her skin clams over. The cooking pot soars through the heavens towards the Divine Beast. She lifts her arm still higher with its lightning-strike scars.

Once more the cooking pot brushes against the Divine Beast Vah Ruta's back. She tracks the cooking pot to keep it as close to the Divine Beast and as high in the sky as she can.

Then, suddenly, she no longer feels the rain over her skin. Link angles her chin up.

Above her, she gazes at the iridescent shimmer of the last thing she may ever see: a pillar of ice directly overhead.

And then something whacks into her from behind.

Sidon.

Sidon who picks her up in her arms amid the columns of ice that crash around them. Sidon who grins at her and presses a thumbs-up against her side. Sidon who calls to her: "You can do it, Link! Quell the storm! I believe in you!"

Link quells the storm.

The lightning streaks down from the heavens like the arm of the Goddess, Her fingers stretched out to touch the cooking pot, and with it, to touch Link's stomach, and with *that*, to touch Link's heart.

The quickest way to someone's heart, after all, is through her stomach.

The lightning paints the skies and seas alike in white. A brilliant flash of Mipha's silver.

Link senses her own smile in that heart's beat of lightning, in that silvery shine that continues to glow even after the sound of thunder has faded.

Abruptly her ears close in, plugged with water.

She hears nothing at all but the sound of her own heart.

No.

She has not gone deaf: the torrent, the relentless torrent of pressurised water spewing from the Divine Beast Vah Ruta's trunk, has lessened to a drip, and then to complete and utter silence.

The pumps halt in their churning. The waterfalls along its legs splash back into the water.

The Divine Beast's limbs groan. The joints bend. The legs crash into the water. The tidal wave pushes Sidon and Link backwards at once. Link gasps. Water floods her mouth; the inner walls of her lungs sear like she had shoved a ruby rod down her throat. Just when her throat collapses on itself, she feels his powerful hands plunging down on her chest. Her lungs compress. The water jets from her mouth, and Link pictures herself the Divine Beast, albeit lacking a tail extending from her face.
A trunk.

The image spills mirth from her mouth. Sidon grins; his teeth catch the light. "I knew you could do it! Thank you! Thank you! A thousand times, thank you! I could thank you more times than there are droplets in the seas and still I would never thank you enough!"

The Divine Beast Vah Ruta lies in the water with the top of its back less than a metre from the surface of the East Reservoir. While Link giggles her head off, Sidon swims them—his arms supporting Link, one hand between her shoulder blades and one under her knees—towards the Divine Beast.

Suddenly they hurtle through the air. Link yells before she comprehends that Sidon has dolphin-leaped from the water to land feet-flat on the back of the Divine Beast.

Limply she spills from his embrace and noodles to the floor. Raindrops dribble down through her hair; she lies face-down, burbling her breaths through the water. Though the torrent has ceased from the Divine Beast's trunk, the rain overhead has yet to quell. A thin layer of water covers the Divine Beast's back, kept inwards by the walls that surround the rim of the flat. Yet her transformation into a hylian-shaped mass of chuchu jelly does not last long: Link spots the cooking pot lying innocently in the centre of the back of the Divine Beast.

And the entrance terminal down the line of the spine, similar to the Divine Beast Vah Rudania and the Divine Beast Vah Medoh.

But more importantly: her cooking pot.

Link pelts forward to tackle her cooking pot. Embracing the pot, she lets momentum carry her forward to roll until she bonks her forehead against the terminal. She jumps to her feet, clinks the heels of her boots together, and spins around with her beloved cooking pot. The metal has blackened and charred from the lightning, but the pot remains whole.

She catches her breath on the walk back to where Sidon stands, his expression trapped halfway between his usual beam of encouragement and a drawn brow of confusion. Link lifts her palms up to the skies.

When she first entered Kakariko, Link raised her hand to catch the stars so far above her that she could only pool their light in her palm. Now she catches the rain that she can feel on her skin.

She hears a splash. Not to her right where stands Sidon, but somewhere behind her. She swivels about on her heel.

The Goddesses answer her prayers so miraculously that she begins to laugh then and there.

To Link's delight, fish of every sort splish in the shallow water. She giggles as she drops her belongings on the ground and picks up her cooking pot. Running across the back of the Divine Beast, she uses her hands to scoop fish into the pot. A bass slaps her across the face with its tail, and she only laughs harder. An enraged carp does the same, and the mighty blow knocks her onto her back in the water. Fish fly from the cooking pot and into her face. Leaping to her feet, Link gathers them up again. The carp attempts to whack her a second time; she catches its tail with her bare hand.

Her palm cries out in pain, but her stomach cries out louder.

Slender trout that ice over her fingers. Crabs as well, small and white and scuttly. Snails that glow a fine gold under her fingertips as if filled with fireflies. She tosses them all indiscriminately into
her pot.

Link returns, panting, to Sidon.

She thuds the pot down and seats herself cross-legged beside it.

"Link!?" asks Sidon, the concern palpable through his usual cheer. "What's going on!?

Link thumps her palm against her forehead. She rises from her seat on the back of the Divine Beast to elaborate to Sidon on what all has happened. Sarie pokes their head out from the flap of the satchel, Link waves to them prior to continuing her explanation of picking up the fish and preparing food.

"A meal?" Sidon repeats. He pauses. "But of course! Truly, we could never have accomplished the quelling of the storm without your rice-balls!" Link tilts her head to the ice. Raising her cooking pot into the air with magnesis does not appear to require much speed. Yet the rice-balls did give her a reason to continue on when the world looked set against her efforts.

And ultimately her cooking pot has saved her yet again. She pats the pot with her left hand. Good pot, best friend.

"Most wise of you, Link! As expected of you!" Sidon attempts to clap her on the shoulder and misses. She catches his hand instead, placing it on her shoulder. He slides it over to rest between her shoulder blades. "My apologies, Link! I am more used to navigating by water! But never mind myself! I cannot wait to see the most delicious and most useful meal you intend to grace me with next!"

Link snorts out a laugh again, covering her nose and mouth with her hand as she giggles to herself. Something useful to the Divine Beast, not at all. But something tasty? She sure hopes so.

She touches her chin. Link has no manner of cooking the fish without wood or Riju's handy-dandy ruby grill.

Nonetheless, she does find topaz arrows: a few scattered shafts lying in the shallow water, misses from her earlier efforts to pierce the pumps. And hands. And, while she lacks lime or lemon, that has never stopped her before.

Grabbing a topaz arrow from her the water, Link thrusts it into the air, grins at herself, and—letting out a whoop of courage-reckless-joy—plunges the arrow into the cooking pot hard enough to fragments the prongs against the metallic base.

When she finds herself convulsing in the water, her laughter buzzes in and out with the seizing of her lungs. Perhaps sticking her bare hand into a metal pot of water with topaz in her palm has not comprised her most intelligent plan to date.

And yet the electricity has fulfilled its purpose and the fish, crabs, and snails lie waiting for preparation.

The chillfin trout keeps the remainder of the seafood cold by exhuming its icy blood, perfect for ceviche. Link guides Sidon through the process of skinning the fresh fish; removing the darker, redder meat of the bloodline; and draining blood to wash away as much possible of that oily, fishy taste in favour of the crisp tang of lighter flesh. While Sidon prepares the bass, carp, and trout—Link gives the mighty carp a look, despite its still form lacking the ability to smack Sidon across the face—Link turns her attention to the snail and crab, to similarly let flow the blood, remove the shells, and clean off the meat. She sets Sidon to dicing the fish as finely as he can while she
prepares a makeshift marinade of the ingredients she has on hand. Certainly not her most brilliant use of the contents of her satchel, particularly without a lick of vinegar or citric juice to her name, yet she makes do.

Link lets the ceviche soak in the juices. She asks Sidon if he knows any songs to marinate fish by. He clears his throat. "I do not sing well! But for you, I would try anything!" Before she can assure him that he need not force himself, he belts out a tune. And out of tune. He sings a song of a zora girl who trades this for that: a clock for a letter, a letter for a scented satchel, a scented satchel for a bone of gourmet meat—Link bobs her head approvingly and wipes the saliva from her mouth—a bone of gourmet meat for a dog-like mask—Link shakes her head and crosses her arms over her chest—a dog-like mask for a set of weights, a set of weights for another zora's own tail, another zora's own tail for a jest, a jest for a book, a book for an oar, an oar for a lyre, a lyre for a broken trident, and a broken trident for a trident made whole, and a trident made whole for a clock. "And all this for a clock, a clock!" Sidon sings out in his warbling voice. "And all this for such a great shock! And all this for a clock!"

No matter how his timbre glides in and out of the octaves like the song itself were a slippery fish he could not keep within his hands, the enthusiasm with which he pours out the music keeps Link's attention rapt until the ceviche has finished its vacation in the juices.

They eat straight from the pot with their bare hands. Sidon scoops up raw fish, and crab, and snail; the webbing of his fingers allows him cradle the ceviche within the juices. Link tries to lace her fingers together, yet the juice tragically drips out. She sniffs.

Sidon offers her his hands to eat out of, juice and all, and she hugs him in response. The ceviche marinated in juice: the tangy freshness of the bass, the tingly refreshing chill of the trout, the subtle notes of sourness and sweetness of the snail that could crawl beneath the remainder of the fishy flavour if not for her experienced and worldly sense of taste, the energising savoriness of the crab, the strong kick of the carp that feels like a literal kick to the roof of the mouth, in the best and most delicious way possible.

Without all of the ingredients she would have needed, the ceviche does not quite reach the same high mark as the other meals she has prepared. Link leans towards Sidon. She raises her eyebrows. "How do you like it?" she asks, and she settles her hands on her knees, and she waits.

Sidon swallows before he answers. His teeth glitter. He swings his hands up and juices spray over her, though with their rich taste she cannot say that she minds. "As expected of you, Link, it's delicious! The best whatever-this-is I've ever had!"

She hangs her head.

Someday Link will extract honesty from him about her meals. But perhaps he does enjoy the tasty buffet of such variety, copious seafood all in one.

At least she does.

She reaches into her satchel for a vial of spring green elixir and in the process remembers to offer Sarie the ceviche, but Sarie contents themself with attempting to fit their entire head into the empty vial. While Link giggles to herself she returns to the ceviche.

Ceviche.

Ceviche like this, but properly in lime and lemon. With greengill and Ordon catfish fished from the
river, and sometimes other fish brought up in boats. Sanke carp from Necluda or chillfin trout from Lanayru. Once a year a barge from villages like Papuchia and Lurelin loaded with Hebric sapphire would push through the river, the boat so wide that it could scarcely fit in the banks.

"We've got all sorts from the ocean!" the Faronese vendors hawked. "Ambrosial amberjack and neptoona! Skippyjack and goodta goby! Hyrule seabass and loovar! And even that miraculous swordfish! Rusty and grand! Come get your ocean fish! Ocean fish!"

Ceviche like this, that she prepared for the girl who smelled of horses. The girl who smelled of horses, with her curled golden-brown hair and her inquisitive green eyes that reminded Link both of the gentle gaze of the horses she so loves and of the sharp glance of a crow faced with a puzzle to solve in exchange for a meal. The girl who smelled of horses, who could not leave Ordon herself, least not the province of Ordona, who could not never come to Lanayru, who could never come to Ruto, who could never sit at the silvery-grey counter with Link while she mixed drinks and cooked meals.

But Link could bring Ruto to her.

Hearty bass and razorclaw crab. Sneaky river snail and armoured carp. Mighty porgy and chickaloo tree nuts. The latter would not go into the ceviche, but Link and the girl who smelled of horses would giggle as they tossed roasted nuts at one another to try to catch them in their mouths while they waited for the fish to marinate.

Along with the Papuchia and Lurelin fishers, every once in a while a parade of Lanayrish would pass through, not with fish to sell to the Ordoners, but en route to meetings of delegation in Eldin or on return groups to Lanayru.

Almost every year Link and the girl who smelled of horses—and later Aryll, sitting on the shoulders of the girl who smelled of horses, who stood taller than Link and thus provided a better perch, and who did not much mind Aryll beating her tiny fists into her head—would see Mipha on the barge. Link knew little of what Mipha did when not hanging near Link's bed or assisting Link in making her deliveries in the massive city of Ruto that would otherwise have long since brought Link to jump off of the nearest waterfall. Perhaps Mipha served as a translator, for she knew enough Akkalan to have spoken to Link the first time they met.

Akkalan.

Link ponders over a mouthful of ceviche. Not Necludan, but Akkalan...? She must have misremembered.

She fears what else she might misremember.

She remembers—or perhaps misremembers—that she did not know much of Mipha.

Link did not learn of Mipha, Princess of Lanayru, until after she had drawn the sword from the stone, until after she had come to Ruto to train in the art of the spear with Mipha's trident, until after she had found herself tripping over the throne pool for the first time to flabbergast herself in front of the King Zora, to see the tiny red zora child who hid behind the King Zora whom Mipha referred to as her younger sister, to recognise the green zora who stood next to the King Zora and gazed at Link with narrowed eyes.

Muzu. Muzu who looked much younger then, as the King Zora looked much smaller.

But Muzu, who already distrusted Link all those years ago. Who had already regarded her as
having stolen Mipha away from them. Who had already long decided that Link would forever
serve on his list of those from whom he would never accept a meal.

She did not know, and she does not know, if that is how Muzu thinks, but that is how she thinks.
The worst of the worst of the worst.

And yet, despite this distrust, Muzu guided her through the topaz arrows, shown her to the lynel,
told her to calm the Divine Beast. Muzu must have changed his opinions after all. Link smiles into
the ceviche and lets her thoughts drift back through the fog to her life in Ordon, to before she knew
of Mipha as the Princess of Lanayru and to when she only knew Mipha as the girl with the sharks'
teeth and the kind smile, to a ceviche made by Mipha's hands.

Less than a month before Mipha told Link that they had chosen her as the Champion of Zola, the
Hero of Lanayru, the Divine Beast Vah Ruta's Pilot, O Wise Mipha. In those days they did not yet
have names for the Divine Beasts, not before the girl with the golden hair made her suggestions
that eventually took root for they needed something else to call the Divine Beasts beyond "the big
bird" and "the big lizard" and for—at least, in Link's opinion—the girl with the golden hair
provided names useful, and memorable, and which suited the Divine Beasts. She does not
remember what Mipha called the Divine Beast Vah Ruta. But she does remember the ceviche that
Mipha made, that final year on the barge.

Never before had Mipha stepped off the boat, save for when she had fished Link from the water
with the lure of rice-balls. Never before had Mipha walked the streets of Ordon. Never before had a
cold webbed hand glided over her forehead and awoken Link in the middle of the night, so abruptly
that she shot herself forward and yelped loudly enough to wake Aryll.

Mipha shushed her. Apologising for the intrusion, she whispered into Link's ears the purpose
behind her visit: for once she had stolen away from the barge, which had stopped overnight to
invite a village further up the river to taste of the bounty of Lanayru, to meet this girl who smelled
of horses of whom Link had so often spoken, to see the Ordon and the lovely family that had
brought forth such a kind and gentle—girl, Link thinks, swallowing down a handful of ceviche and
its juices from Sidon's palms.

Family.

Link hushed Aryll in her arms for fear of her sister's cries awakening other occupants in the house.
She took Aryll with her; her little sister fell back asleep in her arms. With Mipha in tow, Link
sneaked out through her window. She and Mipha crept through Ordon to the house in the heart of
the village, so that Link could show Mipha to her family.

Her real family.

As she had done so many times before, she rapped on the window of the girl who smelled of
horses, and the girl who smelled of horses rappelled out on a ladder made of her bedsheets strung
together. Link saved the introduction for when the trio had made the walk to the ranch where they
could speak in the safety of the warmth of hay and the smell of goats and horses around them.

While Aryll snoozed in her arms, Link introduced Mipha to the girl who smelled of horses, and the
girl who smelled of horses to Mipha. When the girl who smelled of horses spoke of Link, Mipha
inquired in confusion of whom the girl who smelled of horses meant.

"Did you mean—" A piece of ceviche catches in Link's throat, and she coughs it out, to Sidon's
concern. " —sister?" Mipha asked.
Link could have drowned herself in the river then and there.

The shape of the words that Link signed quietly into the girl who smelled of horses's back choked her lungs with acid and shocked her heart to ice. The girl who smelled of horses looked back at her, to apologise, to avoid referring to Link at all in the future except in the vaguest of terms.

Mipha smiled in her ignorance. She brought out an ice-box stuffed with Lanayrish fish that made Link and the girl who smelled of horses's mouths water all the same. Link wiped her mouth on the back of her hand.

The girl who smelled of horses met her gaze, nodded once, and turned to Mipha.

The girl who smelled of horses had for Mipha more questions than Link could keep track of. She kept Mipha occupied while Link made ceviche to indulge in the freshest Lanayrish flavours she could bring to the girl who smelled of horses.

Link had tasted such foodstuffs before, but not the girl who smelled of horses. And what could make for a better meal than the communing of an entire world within the loop of a cooking pot?

The girl who tasted of horses wept at the taste of the ceviche. Mipha—just for a second—grinned. Aryll stirred in Link's embrace and Link patted her sister on the head.

The conversation wound down. The coming dawn woke the horses. Mipha pulled Link aside while the girl who smelled of horses played peekaboo with Aryll.

"My Link," Mipha whispered to her, "when you next come back to Ruto, I might...I might have perhaps found a way to swim in a different river."

Link tilted her head to the side, yet Mipha said nothing more but merely hugged her, carefully enough that her scales left not a trace of a wound on Link's skin.

When Mipha left with the morning crow of the cucco, the girl who smelled of horses stayed with Link, embracing her in the pile of hay for the few moments that they had before Link would have to return to that house to start packing for her next courier trip and the girl who smelled of horses would have to sneak into her room once more.

"I love you," signed the girl who smelled of horses, "and thank you for letting me meet Mipha, and...Link. Link. I know you're afraid of telling people, but...thank you for having told me. I'm here for you. No matter what."

Link nodded. She said nothing—like Mipha had said nothing—but she curled her arms around the girl who smelled of horses as if trying to encompass all of her at once, shoulder to shoulder and hip to hip, Link's cheek against hers, Link's chin on her collarbone, Link's arms curved up with her elbows against her ribs, Link's knees tucked inwards to ball her body against against the girl who smelled of horses's torso.

She said nothing, but she wanted to ask the girl who smelled of horses to never, ever leave.

Then they had to disentangle themselves, and Link carried a slumbering Aryll back to the house, and the girl who smelled of horses promised to see her later at Rusl's if she could slip away from her father's watchful gaze, and Link looked forward to the orders she would pick up today and the trek that she would again undertake.

The girl who smelled of horses.
The name, the name, the name.

The name that must await her in Ordon.

Link opens her eyes. Sarie has failed to stuff their head in the vial and instead has stuck their arm through. They make gentle pew noises as though pretending their hand were one of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania's cannons.

She laughs lightly, and she takes another handful of ceviche to wash down the bittersweetness left behind by her memories. Like a side dish. Or a paired liquor.

When they leave nothing of the makeshift ceviche but a layer of fishy slime coalescing at the bottom of the cooking pot, Link lies back in the water with her hand on her stomach. She gazes up at the clouds that have begun to part, at the silvery moonlight that shimmers through. The moon. Full as ripened fruit. The stars. Like fleet-lotus seeds or grains of rice.

She lifts herself. She taps her right boot against the back of the Divine Beast Vah Ruta. She touches Sidon's wrist.

"Let's go, Sidon. Let's calm the Divine Beast."

Link hears Sidon's breathing, in and out, and the flap of his gills along his torso.

"O Champion of Hylia, O Hero of Hyrule...O Courageous Link." He does not shout out the words with his usual vim and vigour. Her fingers shiver against his palms. "It is you who must yourself cleanse Vah Ruta of the Malice that has taken hold within Her. As the Champion of Hylia...by the prophecy passed down by our Goddess these ten thousand years...you must undertake the journey...alone." His hands curl inwards to fist. He relaxes his arms against his sides, yet still his knuckles twitch. "We can only stand by and watch to await our saviour, O Champion of Hylia. But I believe in you! You can do it! With the prophecy and our Goddess at your sides, you need not fear! With courage, wisdom, power, and the faith of our Goddess, you can achieve anything!"

Link inhales through her nose and exhales through her mouth with a resounding huff. She gives her hands three seconds of rest, and then she speaks. "Sidon. I could never have calmed any of the Divine Beasts without the help of others, and I can't do it alone. I don't know much about the prophecy, or about the Goddess Zola, so I'm sorry. And I'm not saying this because I don't believe in myself. If you want to call me the Champion of Hylia, then that's how you see me. But I also think that we should work together. Not just you and me, but anyone else who could help. That's the only way that any of the Divine Beasts could be calmed."

She squeezes his hands in hers.

"If I'm the Champion of Hylia, then won't you be the Champion of Zola, Sidon?"

He starts to shake his head, and Link can feel the familiar ice beginning to frost her fingers, but she pushes on. She forces herself to. She clings to the thread of hope.

Link has never found the words but if she tries to cook enough times then surely she'll happen upon the right recipe.

"It's like..." She fishes out an analogy from the waters of the lake. "...ceviche. It's like ceviche! I've made this ceviche, and we can eat it, but it'd be even better if I'd been able to make marinade. Trying to tackle the Divine Beast alone is like fish without marinade. But with marinade—with you—only then is the ceviche complete."
"...so if I'm the raw fish, then won't be the marinade, Sidon?" She pauses and reaches up to touch her chin. "Though I guess you'd be more suitable for the raw fish. Not that I'd want to cook you! You're not a fish, like how rito aren't birds, or I'm not a monkey. Though I do like bananas. Though I'm not supposed to eat bananas that much...since that's what Marin's mothers told me." She claps her hand against her brow. "Oh but you don't who they are! They're amazing and I wish I could get you to meet them! Marin's mothers, I mean. Not the bananas. Though if you don't know what bananas are I hope I can get you to meet some too!" Link stops again, coughs, and reins herself in. "S-so won't you be the raw fish to my marinade? But then again I wouldn't make a very tasty marinade either..."

She glances up at him. His grin has given way to the tiniest of smiles, a smile that she has seen before. Not the tiny smile that Mipha would present to others in her efforts to shrink herself down to a palatable size. A smile that stretches his mouth from ear to ear. Yet the tiniest of wide smiles. Not meant to cheer her on, but to reflect something his own feelings.

"I cannot take that title! My...my most wise and most wonderful older sister is the Champion of Zola!" Most wonderful. The most wonderful sister...a phrase that brings a smile to Link's own lips, yet which seems to tug downwards at the edges of his timbre in a way Link cannot place. "But!" Sidon folds her hands into his. "On your request, Link...I shall aid you in calming the Divine Beast! As long as you remain the Champion of Hylia, and as long as you yourself perform the cleansing, then our Goddess's prophecy must still be true! And I can aid you with anything that requires the water!"

She takes his hand. One step forward. But though she herself could not leap a mountain in a single bound, she could climb it, handhold by handhold, pace by pace, until she stood at the summit of the world.

Link tries to slide her fingers between his but the thick webbing stops her progress, and instead she draws her arm back.

"Here. For good luck. Something a...a friend taught me, that I'm teaching now to you." Link holds out her left fist to pat it into Sidon's palm. With her right hand, slowly, she explains: "Ball your hand into a fist and bump it against mine."

She watches his fingers curl inwards. She watches him test for the location of her fist. She watches him rear his arm back and about a second before their fists make contact she realises her mistake. The force of the punch against her knuckles lands her on her rear in the water. Her entire left arm vibrates to needles and cucco flesh until she shakes out. Link smiles, and then she snorts, and then the laughter takes over uncontrollably and she rolls back and forth in the water, clutching her stomach and howling herself to tears.

Sidon asks what has happened—asks if he has hurt her—asks if she has died. Link wheezes out her laughter as she extends shaking arms to explain. He apologises over and over; Link simply hooks her arm around his neck, rough scales scraping her skin and all. "Come on, Sidon. Together, let's go."

Together, they go.

—

**Copious Seafood Skewers** (thirteen hearts) - bright-eyed crab, chillfin trout, Hyrule bass, mighty carp, sneaky river snail

Author's notes: Link passes out from the force of gravity that Sidon withstands more easily, given that his body is built for being able to go both up and down waterfalls, while Link isn't.

The people of Ruto have been trying to deal with the Divine Beast Vah Ruta themselves, which has unfortunately lead to them trying to figure out a way into Vah Ruta that doesn't require the slate. Rest in peace in the seas of the Goddess, you who have sacrificed your lives.

Flitch actually refers to a piece of lumber, but here I have repurposed it as a verb to use as a combination of filch and fletch; it "sounded right" for the action that Link was doing.

Being able to cryonis to break Vah Ruta's ice pillars is something you can do in Breath of the Wild! In fact, I did that on my first time through, because I noticed that the pillars looked exactly the same as the ones that you could make with cryonis. However, after sharing my experiences with anons on /v/ and my beta reader, I discovered that many people had not realised this and instead had used arrows. I did not even know that you could use arrows to break those!

Too much hasty food or elixir—as with any sort of food or elixir—can lead to negative effects, like the overdosing of any kind of drug. Sidon'll be just fine, but it does lead to running ragged.

Cooking pot lightning! Just like with the hinox that Link faced on the bridge.

Link really takes a bruising with Sidon here, as Sidon isn't used to how fragile humans are in comparison to zora.

The song that Sidon sings is based on the Oracle of Ages trading sequence. Zelda games often have trading sequences in them, in a rags-to-riches sense, starting with Link's Awakening, in which Link trades a poe clock for stationary for a stink bag for some tasty meat for a doggie mask for a dumbbell for a cheesy mustache for a funny joke for a touching book for a magic oar for a sea ukulele for a broken sword and finally for the Noble Sword.

Link desires honesty when it comes to her food, just like Riju did. While Link initially enjoyed Sidon's constant praise, she's realised by now that not all of it is genuine: Sidon puts on an optimistic face because that is what he believes his people have needed in this time of crisis. However, in reality...

Akkalan! Link knows how to speak Akkalan. Remember all the way back in Eldin, that Yunobo mentioned that Link knows how to speak the language of the eastern lands? Remember how I mentioned that aka means east and la means land? Link, indeed, knows Akkalan.

With regards to the following line: "'Did you mean—' A piece of ceviche catches in Link's throat, and she coughs it out, to Sidon's concern. '—sister?' Mipha asked." What
happened here (in case it wasn't clear) is that Ilia (the girl) used Link's own chosen name, *Link*, to refer to Link in Mipha's presence. However, Mipha knows Link by Link's deadname (i.e. the name that Link's biological parents gave her, a boy's name). Remember, at this point, Link is only out to Ilia. Mipha asked for clarification and used Link's deadname, the memory of which made Link choke given the sensitivity of the subject. Link then asks Ilia not to call her Link anymore while Mipha is around, for fear of what Mipha might think. I should remind the reader that "my Link" is about Mipha refers to Link as *her link to the world outside of Ruto*. Mipha calling her that also influenced her decision to adopt Link as her actual name.

Sidon and Mipha's relationship might not be what it seems. People and feelings are complex.

Up next: Vah Ruta, and different from what you might expect.

midna's ass. 20 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This chapter is really cool! I love how the author ports the Divine Beast "pre-game" segments into this series.

Sidon is probably the most complex and interesting of Link's four companions. He's not my favourite of them, but he is really cool to follow.

Emma. 20 October 2017.
Seafood Paella

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef and the Lanayrish prince cleanse the Divine Beast Vah Ruta; the chef faces the Malice and the past together at once; and the chef remembers a promise made to the former Champion of Zola, one hundred years ago.

Chapter Notes

As usual: that which would not fit in the box at the end (I don't have this problem on FFN!): The chirruping hitchhikers refers to the lizalfos.

Remember, learning a new word requires double-work for Link, who also has to know how to sign it.

Sidon mentions the Golden Force here. Legends of the Triforce have mostly fallen out of the knowledge of the common folk; I take this from in-game, because no one refers to it in Breath of the Wild, and the Triforce doesn't even come up until Zelda seals away Calamity Ganon at the very end. The Lanayrish zora, being the most long-lived people of Hyrule and having among the longest-surviving records, retain a child-like fairy-tale of an omnipotent Golden Force. As well, its emblem is still used as the symbol of the Golden Goddesses, but that's about it.

The Triforce very much does exist though.

Lanayrish and Akkalan have different idioms and connotations of words, especially when it comes to slang. Lanayrish lacks the slang sense of salty.

Sarie skating over the lake that they make on the back of Vah Ruta is a nod to Fi skating in Skyward Sword.

Link saying "To talk./To Sidon." is a reference to Zelda's diary in Breath of the Wild, where she decides "To talk. To Link."

Time and water are interlinked throughout the Zelda franchise, down to the Ocarina of Time being blue (i.e. the colour of Nayru).

The slate only allows you to have one of each bomb active at a time. In the fifty-second chapter, Link dropped such an explosive into the water. It's been there the entire time.

As a reminder, "malice" in lowercase is used to refer to the purple goop, and "Malice" in uppercase is used to refer to Waterblight Ganon.

The comment about Sarie singing a hot beat is in reference to Darunia (the sage) listening to Saria's song in Ocarina of Time. You know, given that Ocarina of Time is one of my least-favourite Zelda games, I sure do reference it a lot. But that's more to do with the fact that nearly every other 3D game references Ocarina of Time in turn.
"Sidon," Link signs into his palms, "could we flood the reservoir?"

"Flood the reservoir!?" Sidon echoes. Although he cannot see, she nods. They stand at the circular entrance to the Divine Beast that spirals down into the dark depths of the belly of the beast.

When Link first looked down through the opening, she considered herself either on the verge of laughing or crying or both, at how much the Divine Beast Vah Ruta resembles two other Divine Beasts, and not the Divine Beast Vah Naboris. As to why the Divine Beast Vah Naboris differs, she cannot say. Perhaps the Divine Beasts number, or numbered, more than four. Perhaps the Divine Beast Vah Naboris, for its rotating cylindrical torso, necessitated an opening instead behind the tail. Link snickers to herself at the picture; Sidon inquires as to what has most amused her, and she ehehes more loudly.

But by now she knows how this goes. The inside of the Divine Beast litters with guardians waiting to turn their fire-light onto her and Sidon. In the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, the Malice's own flammable oil sparked to burn away the majority of its defences. In the Divine Beast Vah Medoh, the plunge into the lake disabled nearly every guardian she, and Amali, and Teba would otherwise have had to fight, even if the same plunge and subsequent cruise through the lake picked up a handful of chirruping hitchhikers.

Link has no radiant shield with which to defend herself against the guardians of the Divine Beast Vah Ruta.

But she does have water.

Litres and litres of cool water.

"Vah Ruta has so drained the water level in the East Reservoir that its flooding would take several days!" Sidon responds, bowing his head. "Most unfortunately!"

Link touches her chin. "Then there has to be a terminal that activates that..." She glances over her shoulder at the long tail that protrudes outwards from the Divine Beast's face. The trunk, as Sidon called it, except she has no gesture for that word. "...that long thing on its face. The long thing. You know. That looks like a bendy stalk of celery."

"Vah Ruta's trunk!?!" Sidon bursts out, and Link beams at herself for her brilliant food analogy that has once more come to her rescue.

"There has to be a terminal on it." She explains how functions the slate, to steadily give them power over the Divine Beast with the activation of each terminal, and Sidon's mouth gapes open.

"Most brilliant! Most incredible! That we could even directly guide Her in this manner! Our Goddess has granted us an incredible gift, like the Golden Force right out of a faery-tale!" Sidon claps his hands together. While he goes on about the wonders of the Goddess Zola, Link gazes upwards towards the trunk. To determine for certain the location of the terminals would require venturing down towards the main terminal, which could—for all she knows—infest with guardians stalking about.

But perhaps Link could find the trunk terminal first.

Her little sister's trusty red telescope reveals little except for how far the trunk extends, almost
identical to the tail of the Divine Beast Vah Medoh except lacking the thin metre-long cords between the individual segments.

No terminal, at least not that Link can spot. If only Amali were here to take a flight around.

A flight around.

She looks to Sarie, who twirls their leaf around from fish to fish in the shallow water that steadily drains into the circular opening, tossing the fish into the water of the lake to prevent them from suffocating.

This Divine Beast, Link realises, will proceed more easily than any that she has done before. For once—for once, she prays—no one will have to end up injured, and none of her skin will spontaneously cease to exist.

She rubs the burn scar on her right elbow; she cannot feel her own touch.

"Wait here," Link says to Sidon, who salutes her and belly-flops onto the back of the Divine Beast into a prone position which nonetheless retains a regality so foreign that Link laughs to herself.

She rests her hand on Sarie's shoulder. They look up at her with a curious chrr.

Crouching down beside them, Link asks if they wouldn't mind taking a little skyward stroll.

To pass the time, Link and Sidon play an altered variant of wind-water-fire. Link closes her eyes to avoid cheating by predicting Sidon's motions of hand; she finds herself losing two-thirds of games. "Most humble of you, Link, to allow me to win!" he tells her, and she rubs the back of her head. Her ears flush.

Right. Allowing him to win.

Yet the circular symbol for wind reminds her of how she might hold a bowl to eat or a cup to drink. The association brings such a warmth to her chest and a smile to her lips that she throws wind over and over again, only occasionally hooking her fingers into the symbol for fire or curving the backs of her hands against one another into the symbol for water.

As she throws wind to Sidon's fire for the twentieth predictable time, a breeze lifts her ponytail and brings a korok-shaped lump to perch atop her head. Sarie croons their findings into Link's ear: a big black thing on the end of the trunk, "orange as an autumn leaf and tasty-looking as humus loam!"

Link thanks Sarie with a pat to the head and a promise to cook them humus loam, of which she has never before heard, but which she will certainly figure a recipe for, and not even the Golden Goddesses Themselves could stop her.

She taps Sidon's shoulder, then his wrist. He shows her the whites of his palms. "Sidon. Throw me up into the air as high as you can. Trust me."

"I have nothing but trust in you!" Sidon booms in return and—before she can grab her paraglider from the tumble of her belongings waiting on the Divine Beast—spikes her into the air.

Not a hylian-shaped javelin so much as a hylian-shaped yelling rock about to splatter back to the earth.

Sarie whirls alongside her. Out of desperation, Link grabs their torso; they let out an uuungh. The korok leaf cannot support their combined weight, yet neither do Link and Sarie drop heavy as
stone. Instead they glide downwards: more quickly than on her paraglider, although also covering more horizontal distance.

She shifts her weight to speed their push forward.

Her boots alight midway up the trunk. The slippery material, wet with rain, nearly immediately slides her backwards but Link—Sarie latching on firmly to her left hand—lunges forward. On her hand and knees, she scales the trunk, angled more horizontal than vertical, like a set of stairs. Even if her hands find no purchase on its surface, Link keeps herself apace on sheer force of will alone until she spots the orange-glinted terminal of which Sarie spoke: on the very tip of the trunk, like a bump on its nose. Below the terminal, Link notes the opening of the trunk—as wide as Sidon is tall—that spews out the Divine Beast's jet of water.

She dunks the slate into the pedestal with enough force that the slate almost ejects to topple into the water below. Sarie springs from Link's hand to catch and retrieve it.

Only then does she remember how to breathe.

Link hugs the tiny korok. Then she feels herself slipping off of the trunk. Letting go of Sarie, she clings to the terminal until the slate has made its connection.

Even though she has not yet activated the main terminal, the trunk terminal appears as a rune on the slate. She sets the trunk vertical. With Sarie in hand, Link glides back onto the back of the Divine Beast.

The violent violet of its jewelled eyes seem to track her overhead.

She lands. The thin layer of water has vanished into the circular opening. Link lifts her head up to check the position of the trunk, which—indeed, to her enduring smile—can curl over the Divine Beast's back like a snail's shell. Finding the exact angle proves difficult with the strange spherical control that she spins on the surface of the slate. Eventually, after sending the trunk left, right, up, down, and nearly every direction except for towards the circular opening, Link has fixed the nozzle of the trunk to point downwards into the entrance to the Divine Beast. At least sort of. A close angle that will probably send pump of the water straight into the Divine Beast.

Good enough.

And she has never needed *perfect*. *Perfect* refers solely to her masterwork of cooking, that she may one day create with her own two hands and her cooking pot, Goddesses willing. All else can be good enough.

Yet then, glancing over the slate once more, Link cannot for the life of her find anything that allows her to unleash the torrent.

She smacks her forehead with her palm.

The trunk terminal only *moves* the trunk. Some other terminal, or maybe *terminals*, must activate the pumps.

Link laughs at herself and Sarie *twee hees* with her. When she recounts the tale to Sidon, wiping tears from her eyes, he does not laugh but instead beams and flashes her a thumbs-up.

"Already you've—what did you call it!?—cleansed one of the terminals! Most excellent!" He launches into a round of praise, gesturing so enthusiastically with his arms that he backhands Link across the face. While she rubs her nearly dislocated jaw, she catches his wrist with her free hand.
"I couldn't have done it without you, Sidon. And I'm not being humble. You can't make salt-grilled skewers without salt." Salt-grilled skewers. Link will have to apologise to Riju someday. For now she repeats herself: "And you can't make ceviche without fish."

"Then, for the sake of the Champion of Hylia—" Sidon inhales, gills flapping. "—and for the sake of my...most wonderful sister's friend Link, I will strive to be ever more salty, until I have become the most salty!"

Clapping her hand over her mouth to stifle her laughter, Link nudges him down. They descend into the depths of the Divine Beast. She waits to listen on the stairs. The stone-grinding noise of the guardians echoes from somewhere within the Divine Beast's torso, though she can hear nothing in the immediate vicinity of the winding staircase.

Guardians. And Link has no arrows. That makes her think.

The main terminal appears unguarded save for the sludge of malice that surrounds it in a purple pool, the hue of broken blood beneath a bruise. In the drippings of malice, Link notices, here and there, the remains of guardians, of the slippery material that makes up their armour, the innards and more sensitive legs eaten away by the malice that beads on the bottom of the pulsating tyrian chrysalis.

Mipha's chrysalis.

Link can almost hear the sound. Beat-beat-beat.

She tears her gaze away, and yet she can still hear it, as if resonating beneath the floorboards.

Beat-beat-beat.

Link passes the slate to Sarie, who cannot hold its smooth surface well in their tiny fingerless hands. "Just to the terminal," she requests.

"Sarie'll do their bestest!" Sarie chirps back. Their bestest launches the slate into the malice repeatedly while Link digs her nails into her palms. But the material of the slate appears resistant to whatever makes up the malice, and so Sarie fishes it out each time to fly it another few centimetres before dropping it again.

Their bestest places the slate within the terminal. Whooping in exhilaration, Link leaps into Sidon's arms, which causes him to spin about and ask what dangers have befallen them.

Communication.

Communication. That foe deadlier than any living mountain or one-eyed giant.

She communicates what has happened.

Sidon remarks that he did not even know of Sarie's existence, "but thank you for explaining! Most generous of you!" and Link kicks herself.

Sarie returns the slate; Sidon introduces himself to them. Sarie hides instead in Link's hair with their tiny hands prickling her scalp. Link assures them. "Sidon's a friend, not a foe."

"Teeth," Sarie whispers into Link's ear. Link opens her mouth to show the korok her own. "Oh. If Link has them then Sidon's must be good too! Sarie has never seen teeth before!" They sway from side to side with a sound like wooden blocks tumbling over one another. "Or maybe Sarie has.
Maybe Sarie had teeth once! Sarie can't memory very well. Sarie...doesn't want teeth! Too scary. Too sharp. *Shookooloo..."

Sidon beams, then covers his mouth with his hand. And his other hand, where one cannot fit over the sheer span of his smile. Link can see through the translucent webbing of his fingers that he cannot seem to keep himself from grinning. "I use my teeth only to eat!" he declares. "And I would never hurt a friend of a friend! May I call you my friend, Link!?"

Link blinks. She would nod if not for Sidon's inability to read her usual body language. Signing a *yes* heats her cheeks, especially after Sidon envelopes her and Sarie in a hug.

A friend.

The main terminal reveals the state of the remaining four. Two terminals on either side, as expected, presumably to operate the legs; one in the back, maybe the tail, or the cannons; and one inside of the head. If she had to hazard a guess, she would point towards the latter terminal as the source of the pumps.

Sarie *kookooloohs* in her ear. Link glances at them. They point—or possibly extend; without fingers Link finds these things difficult to differentiate—their tiny arm towards the slate.

"*Yahaha!* Link got the pumpity pumps! The pumpity pumps are working now! Pumpity pumpity pump! Pumpity-a-rumpity!" They dance upon her shoulder. Link cocks her head.

The main terminal, she realises, has indeed activated the pumps.

Link ogles the slate, ogles Sarie, ogles her hands, ogles the main terminal, slaps her knee, and erupts in laughter.

"**Come on. Let's head back up.**"

As they move upwards along the staircase, Link peeks at what she would have had to cross in order to enter the head and activate that terminal. Something of a massive water wheel protrudes through the ground, presumably extending into a lower level; she observes complicated machineries of gears and troughs of water that boggle her mind. She would have not only had to *touch* her chin, but possibly stick her hand *through* her chin. Link looks up higher at the armies of sentries and scouts she can see guarding the ladders and lifts that would have taken her up. Cheerily she waves to them.

All of their eyes turn onto her at once, beading her body with red and serenading her with a symphony of *beepbeepbeep*.

She blinks.

By the time Link and Sidon *pelt* up to the open air, her legs ache, her lungs sear, and she loses her balance to plant her face onto the golden-brown of the Divine Beast's back. She wheezes. Link curls in on herself and rocks from side to side on her stomach while she catches her breath.

"So this is why you suggested we flood Vah Ruta to disable the guardians within Her! Most intelligent of you! As expected of you, Link!" She senses him attempt to slap her on the back, not realising that she is currently lying on the ground. Instead he kicks her by accident in the ribs.

She wheezes again.

"Link!? Link, are you feeling well!? Are you hurt!?"
She pets his foot to reassure him.

Once Link has assured herself that her lungs will not spontaneously reach up to her throat to throttle her, she wobbles back up to her very much not fire-light fried legs. She takes the slate and activates the pumps.

Something slams into the back of her head with the force of a brick and pins herself her against the back of the Divine Beast. Link crawls out from under the pressurised jet of water; she returns to rocking back and forth.

She and Sarie sit by Sidon on the far far periphery of the jet. Link listens to the hum of the water sucked up through the pumps, watches the cascade enter the Divine Beast, hears the buzzing of guardians come undone.

Even in the moon's quicksilver light, she makes out the rainbows reflected in the water.

The water overflows. It spills out from the circular opening to pour over the back and flow down the sides. Link shuts off the jet. The water sloshes when she moves her boots. Sidon splashes his feet in the thin layer of liquid, and she shakes her shoulders in silent laughter to see his broadest grin yet.

Sarie, too, begins to skip along the water, their tiny legs rippling circles through the water as they skate over the miniature lake that mirrors the starry skies above.

She sets the slate into the pouch at her right hip. Sidon and Link walk—Sarie riding on her head as usual—towards the circular opening.

She turns towards Sidon. Her fingers glide over his wrist.

"Sidon." Link gestures to the depths of the Divine Beast below. She dips the toe of her boot inside to let it ripple through the surface of the water. "Look." She thuds her palm against her forehead. "...the Divine Beast's underwater."

"Yes! Most brilliant of you, Link! The guardians within shall bother us no longer!" Sidon bobs his head up and down repeatedly. "And now we need only drain the water, and then we can freely traverse Her!"

Link swings her head from side to side. She bumps against Sarie on her shoulder, apologises, and shakes her head more cautiously. "Most of the challenges I've faced in the Divine Beasts have been about getting to this terminal or that." Words. Words. She has them. She can communicate. She can explain. She can tell him, instead of merely running off and doing whatever she wants, instead of leaving Yunobo aside to seek the terminals of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, instead of cruising the Divine Beast Vah Medoh through Lake Totori against her promise to Amali. Riju talked to her, elaborated on her plans, ensured that Link understood what they would do. And now she will return the favour to Sidon.

To talk.

To Sidon.

"I was...thinking that, with it full of water, you could just swim to the terminals. No guardians inside, no fire that could spew out, no malice that you have to hop over. The only terminal that's not inside is the one on the trunk we already got."

"Link." Sidon clears his throat. "Most noble of you, Link! But you are the Champion of Hylia, and
"You said that we were friends, right? And you said that you would trust my judgment." Link pulls Sidon closer, to touch his hand momentarily to her chest above her thudding heart. "Please, trust me. Yes, people call me the Champion of Hylia, the Hero of Hyrule, Her Majesty's Knight, O Courageous Link. But I'm not invincible. I'm just a girl with really, really, really loves food. And I could bet that you're smarter and stronger than me, and—you pushed me out of the way of the ice blocks, and you dodged them all by yourself, and everything that you've done—braver than me, too. The one thing you don't have is..." She closes her eyes. She breathes in, breathes out. She leans forward to rest her forehead against his chest, except she cannot reach his chest, so she settles for his stomach. Better that way.

The quickest way to his heart is through his stomach.

"...faith, in yourself."

"Link—"

"You believe in everyone around you, but not in yourself. I don't know about this prophecy that much, and I don't mean this as an insult, but I'm just a girl. Just one. I didn't fall out of the sky to descend on the world as some hero. I've...become one, I guess. With my own hands. Just like you have."

"—the wheel of time cycles over and over! As the rain pours down upon the mountain streams, and as the mountain streams pour into the rivers, and as the rivers pour upon the seas, and as the seas rise into the rain, so too does time!" His voice has begun to crack like a glacier fragmenting apart in summer's heat. "The heroes of our legends have time and time again fought against the malice, against the Calamitous One, each in their own era, each with a princess at their side. As happened ten thousand years ago, so too must happen now!"

"I never could have calmed any of the Divine Beasts or cleansed any of the Malice alone. When I calmed the Divine Beast in Parapa, I didn't strike the finishing blow. Not even close. In the end, my companion—a girl named Riju—deflected the Malice's own strike back at it while I lay unable to do anything. I'm not magic, and the Champion of Hylia doesn't do things herself."

Link pushes her forehead against his stomach.

"So please..."

"Then this girl of whom you speak, this girl who could deflect a maliced strike," Sidon answers, and she can feel the vibrations of his voice through his abdomen, "had a different prophecy to fulfill! I apologise, Link! Yet I do not know of the prophecies of Parapa or of their Goddess! I only know what has said our Goddess, that we must follow what has come before, what occurred ten thousand years ago!"

Link touches her chin.

When all else fails.

She has food.

"Sidon, I'm just a girl who really, really really loves food. A girl who picked up the slate. A girl who walked over Hyrule. A girl who has shared food with so many incredible people. I thought that I could...make my way alone. I thought that I'd make my home under the stars, with nothing but myself and my cooking pot. But I've realised that the best thing you can do with a cooking pot"
is share it with others, and the best thing you can do when you come against the Calamity is to share that with others, too. If we work together we can accomplish more than relying on a few people that we think are better than everyone else.

"I don't know what happened ten thousand years ago. And I don't know what happened one hundred years ago. I barely even know what happened ten minutes ago." Link jabs a finger into Sidon's stomach. "And I don't think that you know what happened ten thousand years ago, either. But I know what's happening now. And now...is that you should believe in yourself. You've every bit as much to offer as I do. Maybe more.

"Please. I can't do this without you. Just...if you can't believe in yourself, then...believe in the me who believes in you. Have faith in the me who has faith in you. Have faith in the Goddess Zola. She's here for you, too. And when we get through this...when we get through this, I'll make you a paella."

"My...my most wonderful sister's favourite."

She nods against his stomach. Her arms fall to her sides.

If he speaks, Link does not hear. But his abdomen shivers, and he breathes, and his gills *fwip fwap* against his torso, and his hands slide over her shoulders, and he folds her into a hug.

"I...I'll try," Sidon murmurs. "I'll try."

"I believe in you! Don't push yourself and don't activate the main terminal again. If anything goes bad just come back and we'll tackle it together. You don't have to do it by yourself either. I promise."

He breathes. Link can sense the pulse of his heart in his stomach. That, and the gurgle of the ceviche. "I'll try."

"I believe in you."

"...I don't know if I believe in me, but...I'll believe in the you that believes in me, Link."

When she offers Sidon the slate, she does not do so out of a giving *away*, not out of a passing of the burden, not out of a denial of her past, but to put her trust in another.

Link elaborates on the runes and has him test each one. When she taps the green rune with her, finger she asks if she can take a pictograph, and then has to flubber about what a pictograph *means*.

"A memento. A memory. Like how you could keep a skewer after a good meal to smell it and think about what a meal it was and then you get to experience it over again and remember the people you shared it with!"

"What would you have me do!?" Sidon responds. "To have a memento with my friend...but of course!"

Link takes the pictograph of herself, of Sidon and of Sarie. Fitting herself and Sidon into the lens of the pictobox requires a deft hand. After much shifting and moving an crouching and Sarie nodding off, Link perches on Sidon's thigh while he squats down to rest his chin on her shoulder, and Sarie sits between their ears.

She snaps the pictograph.
Sidon grins and Sarie twirls their leaf and Link has her usual blank stare, yet a blank stare tempered with her knowledge of how she remembers the warmth in her belly—from the ceviche—and in her chest—from her friends.

Link embraces Sidon. For good luck. To transfer as much warmth to him as she can.

As so many have to her.

Slate in hand, Sidon bows to her. He prays, briefly, to the Goddess Zola. Sarie twirls over to pat him on the head with their tiny hand. Sidon thanks them with a smile, his much larger palm engulfing the korok's entire body.

They sit back onto Link's head. Link touches Sidon's wrist. She offers him the second to last of the rice-balls, which he takes in to swallow in a single bite. She watches how lovingly he swallows the rice-ball—despite its lack of fish—and how he savours it before he nods to himself to face the water.

"Good luck. You can do it."

"I hope so!" he calls back, and then—gathering himself like a coiled spring—he dives into the dark depths of the belly of the beast.

Link kneels down by the circular opening. She removes the final rice-ball from the satchel and breaks it open, cautious not to spill mushroom and herbs from the halves.

She prays. To the Golden Goddesses. If They exist, and if They listen to her, then may They watch over Sidon, and in return she would make them whatever food of whatever divine ambrosia They might want.

Link gives half of the rice-ball to Sarie and takes the other half for herself.

The rice-ball returns the steady beat-beat-beat of her heart. To rid herself of excess energy she begins to pace back and forth along the back of the Divine Beast. Every splash—every droplet of drizzle—every bird's call sends her reeling to determine its origin, to discern if Sidon has fallen into trouble.

Faintly, so faintly, Link can hear the strains of an accordion. When she turns her head, the wind shifts, and the music fades.

Out of the water, the heat of the summer—even in the nighttime—sweats the back of her neck. Or maybe that's fear. Or perhaps both.

Link fans herself with the hood Glepp gave her. Suddenly Sarie grabs hold of her sidelocks and pulls them up. "Yah!" they cry out, using her hair as the reins of a horse to whip Link into action. She extends her arms behind her and jogs to jog across the Divine Beast.

"Link likes cooking!" Sarie sings out in their wooden voice. "Maybe next time Link cooks, Sarie could help! Sarie could do this!" They tug on her sidelocks again. Link's neck aches, yet she tries her best to keep up, swerving left or right, stopping at Sarie's whoa, speeding up at their yah!, until she hears another splash behind her.

She twists around.

Sidon.
Sidon with the slate balanced on his palm, his right arm held triumphantly up, his head high, the most genuine of grins gracing his mouth, his teeth glittering in the light of the moon overhead.

"Link! Link!"

Sarie whips her hair, but Link does not need them to tell her. She sprints towards Sidon to hug him; the impact of her momentum propels both of them—and Sarie—into the water. Sidon breaks into laughter as he deposits her onto the back of the Divine Beast. "You did it!" she signs without even knowing whether he has or hasn't, because she believes by the sight of his smile.

He palms the slate off to her. There: the seven blue circles, and the tiny dot of orange in the centre, and the map of the Divine Beast Vah Ruta, complete save for that final activation.

"I told you that you could do it! And look! Er, well, you can't, but, you know what I mean! You've activated all of the terminals! Every one of them!"

"With your faith in me and our Goddess at my side, there was nothing that I could not do, Link!" Sidon answers back. He embraces her and whirls her around. Her head dizzies, but her spirit clears. "And now we only have to activate that main terminal again! Isn't that what you said, Link!? This...I..."

"You did it," Link says again, yet her mirth has faded, and she steps away from Sidon. His fingers search the air for her. She offers him her shoulder.

He takes the slate. "I'll drain the water! You asked me to wait to activate the main terminal and so I did! We'll do it together, you and I! The Champion of Hylia and—" He puffs out his chest. "—the Champion of Zola!"

Link tries to lift her hands to join in his celebration yet the slow dawning upon her stills her hand.

The main terminal.

The main terminal. Link covers her mouth with her hand. She touches her chin.

She cannot tell him.

To explain what has happened to his sister, to tell Sidon that he must fight against her desecrated corpse eaten from the inside out by Malice, to force him to face the Malice that bears his sister's face.

Even to herself, the knowledge burns. Link does not retch again, not as she did with the remains of her friend Urbosa, yet she can feel the prickle at the backside of her eyes. She lowers her eyelids. The tears stain her lashes.

Daruk and Revali. Urbosa and Mipha. Names, and faces, that meant nothing to her when she awoke. Whom she will never see again. Who will never know of what happened beyond the Great Calamity. Whose final moments resided in fear and in panic, in horror and in pain, in terror and in agony, and in the understanding that the Calamitous One would bring ruin to Hyrule.

Even if Hyrule itself has sunk under the dust of time, the people and the land once known as Hyrule have not. Will not.

Will not. She will see to that.

Link cannot change back what has passed. She cannot return to a time before the Great Calamity to
set things right. She can only walk forward. She can only continue to step towards the future.

Daruk and Revali, Urbosa and Mipha. They would have wanted her to step forward. For Daruk and his brothers and his sons in Darunia. For Revali, and his beloved Ilari that he put on the map. For Urbosa, and her loved ones in Rovah, fried bananas and all.

For Mipha, and her family, and the freedom that she fought for, and the freedom that Link will fight for, and the peace, of the wilds and the people who make something of them.

She feels Sidon's finger against her cheek. His finger glistens wetly with her tears. "Link...?"

"Could you hug me?" she asks. Without another word, he scoops her up into his arms. The underside of his arms and his stomach feel cold and wet against her, like sweat-slicked skin. Link clings to him nevertheless. Selfish, if only for a moment.

She will tell him, but afterwards. He deserves to know. Not now. Not now, when the knowledge will do nothing but cause him unbearable pain. Not now at all.

"Let's go."

Except they cannot go immediately, because it takes Sidon and Link several minutes to puzzle out exactly how to rid the inside of the Divine Beast of water. Various presses of the circles upon the slate do not help them much: the trunk moves back and forth; the tail swings from side to side in the water; the legs pump up and down as if bouncing to music; the Divine Beast waggles about, and Link cannot comprehend how to remove the water. Sarie seeks to help her, and then Sidon, placing his hand over the surface of the slate. Link hits by accident the rune for the cubic bomb and hears one go off somewhere in the reservoir.

She looks over her shoulder. The bomb that she summoned while attempting to quell the storm. Doubling over Link smacks her hands onto her knees, doubles over, and laughs herself into a blithering mess.

Then she turns back to the Divine Beast Vah Ruta and the fact that she filled it with water without checking if there was a method of draining.

"Doesn't water go away by itself?" Sarie sings out. "Sarie and Link and Teeth could sit around and wait for it to go away by itself like rain clouds! Poof poof! Poof away!"

"For this volume of water, our Goddess might not accept it for years and years! But is that my name now!?!" Sidon calls, patting the korok on the head. "Teeth?"

"Teeth!" Sarie insists.

Link tunes out their exchange. She touches her chin. First with her left hand, and then, when her mind tires, with her right.

She forms several pillars of ice in the water of the East Reservoir and gestures for Sarie and Sidon to accompany her onto them. Sarie, who translates her message to audible speech for Sidon, lubricates the process. Butters it.

Link's mouth waters, and her stomach rumbles, and she stands on the columns of ice powered by cryonis, and she has an idea.

An idea that does not revolve around food.
She raises the Divine Beast Vah Ruta up to its full height, its knees no longer bent. Then Link lifts its left legs and opens the panels on its back.

Balancing on its right limbs and stretching out its left legs into the skies, the Divine Beast rotates its torso until it performs a vertical split with its trunk horizontal to the surface of the reservoir. The water gushes out through the circular opening on its back and through the panels. The trio waits on the pillars of ice for the Divine Beast to finish draining.

In the meantime Link takes the opportunity to warn Sidon of the fight to become, of the battle against the Malice, of the opening of the chrysalis, of the do not touch the malice or it will eat through your skin, of the need to use weapons of fire-light, of the guardians that she just destroyed instead of attempting to find a second spear for Sidon.

Link nods sagely to herself.

"We should come up with a better plan. One that doesn't involve just whacking at the Malice. Last time I tried that, I got whacked myself." Link rubs the back of her head. "I don't know about you, but...this is the first time that I've come so far in calming a Divine Beast without a single injury, and I don't intend to get one now if I can avoid it."

She folds her hands together before she speaks again.

"Sidon, what did you say about the pumps?"

She feels him stiffen. "I..."

"If we can trick the Malice to swim into the pump, then can't we get rid of it that way?" Like the fans in the Divine Beast Vah Medoh. Using the Divine Beast itself against the Malice.

"Forgive me for my impudence, but would not that simply launch the Malice towards Ruto!?"

Link tilts her head. "But if it churns up in the pumps...I think that that's enough to kill it, or to cleanse it, or whatever you want to call it. And we won't point the trunk towards Ruto! We'll point it away, so even if the Malice is still alive and kicking, we'll just dunk it back into the Divine Beast. Here." She manoeuvres the trunk to its position stretching out towards the circular opening in the Divine Beast Vah Ruta.

Sidon thrums his hands along his torso before splaying his fingers again. "Forgive my most ignorant question, but how do you plan to trick the Malice!?"

"The Malice follows people around," Link says with a tap to her nose, "like how I follow food. If we can get it to chase one of us...then the other person can stand with the slate and activate the pump. If we're careful then no one'll get hurt except the Malice. I did something just like with the Divine Beast in Medli."

He frowns, but then he moves his hand over his mouth and—while his fingers cross his face—Sidon exchanges the expression for a smile. "I do not know about this plan! But I will put my utmost faith in you, as you have put it into me! I believe in you! I believe in you! I completely and utterly believe in you, Link! Tell me...tell me what to do!"

Link lifts her hand. She flattens it against Sidon's palm. "If you have a better idea, I'll listen. I'm only one girl. I'm not the wisest, and I'm not the most powerful."

"We shall try this!" Sidon insists. "And if it fails, we shall regroup and try something else!"
They descend into the darkness. The innards of the Divine Beast Vah Ruta have slicked with water; the remains reach up to her ankles. Sarie skates again along the surface of the liquid, but Link picks the korok up.

"Sarie, this is going to be dangerous."

"More dangerous," Sarie asks with a tone of complete innocence, "than the big horned horse cat thingy, or than the toot-toot that Link and Teeth pew-pewed with the lightning?"

Link lifts her hands. She lowers her hands. She strokes her chin. "You got me there."

"What does Sarie got? Is Link going to get Sarie a meal!? Link loves cooking and Sarie loves eating Link's cooking!" They bounce up and down, and Link cannot help but smile at them.

"When this is over, I'll get you some food for sure. Some food that you can eat. I promise, absolutely. Swear on my heart and hope to cook for you again." She hesitates. "But you need to be careful, please. Here." Link holds out her satchel. "If anything goes wrong, please hide in here. I'll do my best to keep you safe."

Sarie bobs their body. They flutter into the satchel and tuck themself away, then reach up to close the satchel. Link listens to them snuggle themself into the satchel; they hum to themself a tune that sounds a tad like one she's heard somewhere before. Hot. A hot beat, a jaunty tune, something that she could dance to. A song she feels she could listen to a thousand times and never tire.

With that, Link turns towards the main terminal. She holds the slate in her upturned palms like an offering upon an altar.

She kneels before Sidon.

He takes the slate.

Link gazes upwards at the chrysalis, at the tyrian heart that beat-beat-beats, at the final resting place of the girl with the sharks' teeth.

She hears the familiar sound of the slate activating the main terminal, hears the noise of the black crystal filling up with light blue and then draining away, hears the beat-beat-beat of the tyrant-tyrian heart above.

Together she and Sidon run.

When her shorter legs do not match his stride, he physically hoists her up into a bridal carry with one arm under her chest and one under her knees. Sidon sprints up the stairs. She listens to the squelching far, far below in the belly of the beast, of the Malice that has taken Mipha's life, that has taken Mipha's body, that has taken Mipha's everything.

Only when Sidon has pelted towards the very edge of the Divine Beast's back does he set Link down. For a moment she does not quite remember how to walk. But then Link pictures a bowl of rice with a sprinkling of rock salt awaiting her at the finish line; she drives her limbs into movement.

Sidon runs towards the circular opening again. He flexes. He waits.

Link looks away.

The memory of what happened to Urbosa has imprinted on the inside of her eyelashes so strongly
that when she beds herself for the night she can still catch snippets of the broken bones, of the protruded-through stomach, of the horror of that papery-thin skin stretched over the violent violet Malice that bulged and writhed within the corpse of the girl with the green hairband who once had shared her life—her worries and her hopes, her fears and her happiness—with Link.

She does not know if she could bear to look again, to see what has happened to...to Mipha.

The Malice slurs up the stairs. Link listens to that dreadful sloshing of its bloated body. It moves quickly, its steps pittering up as rapid as the rain, yet with a certain lurch as though the very act of remaining alive caused it agony unendurable.

She casts her gaze down as she sees—from the corner of her vision—the violent violet crown of the Malice emerge from the Divine Beast's womb.

Sidon—head turning towards the source of the noise—waves his limbs about to catch the Malice's attention. When it takes chase, Link recounts to herself, Sidon will dive down into the water; with luck the Malice will follow. Then he will swim under the pump in the corner by which Link stands. From here she hangs directly above the pump in perfect view. With its transparent covering she will wait, and she will watch, and she will activate the pump just as the Malice passes below the nozzle, and the Divine Beast will take care of the rest, just like that.

Just like that.


Link gazes down at her hands. At her arms. At the right with its burn across the elbow, at the left with its lizalfos bites. At the lightning-strike scar that spirals her arm in the gold of the Golden Goddesses.

O Farore.

Yet the wind lies still.

The best laid plans of lynels and Links often go awry.

The Malice turns its face towards Link, standing there with the slate in hand. It opens its mouth. Mipha's mouth. Mipha's mouth—her smile as wide as her heart was warm—lined with rows and rows of sharks' teeth. The violent violet fluid oozes over the Malice's teeth. Thick strands of drool cascade from the corners of its maw. It snaps its jaw shut and the acidic saliva sprays from its mouth.

Sidon leaps in front of the Malice to snag its attention. The Malice reacts so swiftly that Link cannot see its motion, only the consequence: it has slammed its arm like a club across Sidon's chest, and the impact has flung Sidon aside and off of the Divine Beast, as though the Prince Zora were nothing but a porcelain doll.

She screams.

The Malice steps a step towards Link, and her scream cuts into an inhalation sharp enough to charr her lungs.

Sarie.

Sarie, in her satchel.
Sarie in her satchel whose life Link cannot put in danger. Sarie in her satchel, snuggled away between the remaining grains of rice balls and the wooden box of elixirs and the pouch of ingredients. Sarie in her satchel.

Sarie whom she promised to help find their way home.

The slate drops from her fingers. The Malice lunges towards her, and she rips the satchel from her back. With it comes the fire-light spear, the curved bow, the long straight sword, the paraglider. Everything but her cooking pot, which remains strapped to the lowest layer on her back. The weapons and the tools pile on the edge of the Divine Beast. Link hears Sarie croon in the satchel, hears their koolooloo of confusion, listens to them calling her name.

The Malice bears down upon her. The Malice reaches for her as once Mipha reached her. The Malice approaches her as once Mipha approached her.

She can nearly hear in her ear the whisper of Mipha's words. "May I touch you, my Link?"

"No," Link signs, very simply, in the split-second she has, too quick for her to grab a weapon, too quick for her to pick up the slate, too quick for her to do anything but stare like a deer riveted to a topaz light.

The Malice's papery flesh feels as cool against her body as did Mipha's skin, cold and damp. The wind blows up her sidelocks and tangles her ponytail. The water of the reservoir envelopes her in its waiting embrace.

Her breath bubbles from her nose.

On her heartbeat she counts the seconds she can hold the wind in her lungs.

Floating above her in the water, the Malice extends its hands to her. For a moment, when they have just landed in the water next to the pump that would have served as the Malice's coffin, she wonders if the Malice will merely caress her cheek.

Instead the Malice's warped fingers curl around her throat.

Her throat. Her throat, from her lower jaw down to her collarbone. Burning. The skin peeling away and the raw meat exposed to the icy water and the constriction of her throat. She cannot breathe.

She cannot breathe.

She cannot breathe she cannot breathe she cannot breathe.

Like the lynel choking her again.

The Malice choking her like the lynel had choked her, like her past had choked her, like—like they had—like they had choked—

She hears Sidon. She hears his voice. She hears her name.

Link.

Link.

My Link.

She remembers the feeling of Mipha's fingers, spreading the healing salve the same deep blue of
the sea, across her nose, or on the small of her back, or squeezing the life from her throat with the pulsating hand wrapped around her neck. Like a loftwing. The loftwing that she has worn around her neck for for long, as the entire line of the horizon, boundless and free, spun down into a collar small enough to choke her.

She hangs limply in the Malice's hand.

She has no slate. She has no slate. She has no sword. She has nothing but her dead-weight hands and her lead-bone legs, and she has not even a shrine into which she could throw herself to heal her scars for her foolishness, for her inability to avoid her, for the deaths upon deaths that she should already have died.

"But only cowards die many times before their deaths.

"The valiant...never taste of death but once." The voice of a girl with golden hair sitting across from her, holding a skewer of fruit and mushroom over a campfire, studying a sheet of paper, hand closed around the golden and violet charms at her throat, raising her head. Looking directly at her. Saying a word.

Saying her name.

"...

Saying her name.

"...Link...

Saying her name.

"Link."

She gazes at the ruined face of the Malice. She gazes at the ruined face of the Malice that has her by the throat, and she kicks. She feels her boots stick into its chest. The Malice eats away at her soles but cannot eat away at her soul.

Not anymore.

She kicks, and she kicks, and she feels the Malice reaching for her. Ribbons of agony burrow under her skin like so many maggots devouring her from the inside out, her feet and her legs and her thighs and her stomach and her chest and her arms and her shoulders and the face that has almost come to press down upon hers. She twists herself up towards the pump.

Her body screams. She forces herself onto her back in the water, forces the Malice up, forces its throbbing mass into the nozzle of the pump. She can feel her skin melting away, can feel the rawness of her muscle melting away, can feel the tendons and sinews that hold her very form together melting away.

The Malice holds fast. Holds less fast. Holds—and then the Malice, with its hundred years of dust, its hundred years of agony, its hundred years of having stolen Mipha's form, its hundred years of living as a ghost in someone else's body, its hundred years of the past that has haunted her for so long—

The Malice lets go.

The Divine Beast sucks the Malice up and leaves Link by herself in the icy water, and then she
feels the suction on her own skin. The nozzle of the pump rushing up to meet her.

She panics and her limbs flail and she turns herself around and even with the hand no longer around her throat she can only fill her lungs with water and then the nozzle chokes on her cooking pot.

Link has never quite understood what means the line in Kass's song, in the Ballad of the Sealing War, of how the hearts of the Divine Beasts did shine. But at least she has found the true sacred power of the Divine Beasts.

This nozzle. This pump. This suction.

And the cooking pot on her back that has saved her, yet again.

In that moment alone she has complete and absolute faith that the Golden Goddesses watch over her every second of her life, and also that the Golden Goddesses have a very particular sense of humour.

Link floats in the water, stuck to the nozzle with the cooking pot on her back, her vision failing as she loses the feeling in her lungs. She floats. The pain of her throat, of her shoulders, of her arms, of her chest, of her stomach, of her thighs, of her legs, of her feet burns her into the blackness. She listens through the darkness to the calling of her name in a thousand tongues. She can hear Igli. She can hear the patrons to whom she has mixed drinks and changes lives. She can hear Muzu. She can hear Sidon.

She can hear Mipha.

At the close of their time training with one another, they returned from Ruto to the castletown once more. Link had not mastered her way with the spear, but she had become much more adept at before; at least, she had certainly learned to wield the sword that seals the darkness against users of spears.

On the day that Link knocked Mipha back ten times in a row and pointed the blade of evil's bane at the Champion of Zola's throat, Mipha declared that they would retire for the night.

"I am so proud of you, my Link," Mipha told her. Link blushed so hotly that she feared her ears might burn off entirely; she reached up to her catch her earrings that they would not fall from the ashen remains of her ears.

"I'm sorry for knocking you over so much. I'll make you something in apology!"

Mipha giggled. "May I touch you, my Link? May I pet your head?" Link dipped her head and Mipha patted her head. "You are supposed to learn how to fight against a trident-user, you know. That was part of the purpose of the training."

"...can I still make you food? If you don't mind? Could I?"

Link made her paella. Mipha's favourite. On hearty blueshell snails from the southern border of Faron, culled from the village of Papuchia, and mighty porgy brought in from Lanayru. She never did well in crowds, but she could push through—with frequent breaks—to the food market to search for the freshest wares.

To make food for her friends, Link would do most anything.

She cleaned the blueshell snails with a knife and dropped them into a pot to warm, then rubbed
them between her fingers to cleanse them of their slimey mucous. Setting the snails aside, she cleansed the blood from the mighty porgy, so fresh that the fishiness of their scent had not yet set in and their skin looked clean and glossy. Link could feel the occasional twitch in the meat: the porgy so mighty that still fought on despite its death.

Much like—despite her kind smile—Mipha, who would fight to the last.

She cut off the heads of the porgy and knifed their bones from their bodies with her knife. In a heap of melted butter, Link miniced a sprinkling of herbs, both from Lanayru and from beyond: blue nightshade, garlic, swift violet, onion, cool saffron, thyme, amaranth, leaves of bay, endura carrot, tomato, and the standby of Hyrule herb, alongside spices from Eldin and Parapa—oregano and paprika—and a heaping of salt. Perhaps more salt than needed, but she had had a craving for salt since morning. She steeped the fish heads and bone in the butter for fresh fish broth, then added water. She heated butter in a saucepan and spooned in the rice with the herbal blend, along with spicy pepper and saffron. Next: the fish broth alongside peas and yams. Stirring and stirring, Link scooped the porgy and the snail in to simmer, first the porgy and then the snails for their differing time in cooking. She removed the paella from the heat, squeezed fresh Faronese lemons over the dish, and spread it over a plate for Mipha and herself.

Link sat across from Mipha on a table in her room at the castle. A tight squeeze, as she had specifically asked for a smaller room. Aryll would return soon; she had gone out with Daruk and a very insistent Revali to birdwatch in Hyrule Forest Park across the castle waterfront, sandwiched between the Helmhead and Boneyard Bridges.

Urbosa and the girl with the golden hair had gone with them, as had Impa, the Princess's shade. Though, from the wink Urbosa had given Link, Link suspected that Daruk would do a marvelous job of distracting Impa while Urbosa and the girl with the golden hair slipped away for some time to themselves.

"I never thought that I would become the Champion of Zola, the—" As Mipha finished her title, Link wandered over with the plate of paella weighing down her arms. "—Hero of Lanayru, the Divine Beast of Ruto's Pilot, O Wise Mipha. I still do not know if I could call myself Wise."

Link nodded. She set the plate between them on the table.

"I thought that I would...become the Queen Zora, and that I would lose Mipha. " Mipha hesitated. Link pushed the bowl towards her. "Even if being the Champion of Zola comes with its own expectations, I feel like I can remain myself. Even if no one else but you ever sees my smithing, I see it. And that...that freedom..."

"My Link." Mipha reached across the table. Her fingers covered above Link's hand. "I...hope that the Calamity never comes. I hope that the Calamity never comes, for I never wish to see Hyrule with its calamitous grasp. And I hope that the Calamity never comes, so that I can remain as Champion. Is that selfish of me, my Link?"

She shook her head. Mipha smiled. Not quite the fullness of her mouth, yet beyond the reddened border of her painted lips.

"I hope that someday you, too, may feel yourself free of the burdens upon you. I know that being the Champion of Hylia has not rested easy on you." Mipha squeezed Link's hand. Three times. Beat-beat-beat. "Yet being the Champion of Hylia does not mean that you are no longer Link. I have...seen you grow and change so much. Oh, I know that hylians grow up in the plink of a raindrop, but something else has changed. When I saw you, hand on the hilt of the sword that seals the darkness, you looked a beached fish that had already laid flat its gills. And now...when I see
you listening to Aryll's newest observations of birds, or when I see you walking beside the Princess..." Her voice trailed off, and her cheeks darkened in a blush that spread pink along her chest and stomach until she more resembled a pink-bellied salmon than a zora. "I'm sorry, my Link. I don't mean to make you uncomfortable. It makes me happy to see you smile, is all, is why I have observed you.

"But you've grown so much livelier. And that...that makes me happier than I could ever express in words alone." Her hand continued to hover above Link's. "Your training with the four of us will end, soon. There's not much else I can teach you, that Urbosa, Daruk, and Revali haven't already done. But I'm grateful for what you've taught me."

Mipha's smile widened, just for a flash, before she once more reined herself in.

"May I touch your hand, my Link?"

Link dipped her head. She lifted her hand until the knuckles brushed against the underside of Mipha's palm, smooth and firm. Mipha curled her fingers between Link's knuckles.

"My Link...when we last visited Ruto, I spoke once more with my...father." Mipha exhaled, and Link blinked up at her with her cheeks bulging with paella. "Urbosa suggested I should. She told me that she herself had been too afraid to be honest with her feelings, until you simmered them out of her with food." Mipha beamed. Link blushed from her toes to the tips of her ears, and she hastily shoved a handful of paella into her mouth with her free hand. "She had been so worried that the Calamity might see her perish that she had thought it best to spare her loved ones the tragedy of seeing her again. But the last letter she sent us—she's been so happy in Rovah, hasn't she?" Link bobbed her head. She does not remember the letter yet she must have in the memory, and perhaps one day a particular song of a scent or murmur of a melody or whisper of the water in her cooking pot will remind her. "With her coaching, I was able to talk to him. I do not think we...fully understand one another. But it's a start, and no longer do I fear returning to my home.

"I do not know much of your situation." Link does not remember her own responses. She remembers little but the inwards clenching of her own heart as if she were trying to juice her innards. "I can put two and two together. Aryll, living here with us. My Link, never wanting to return to your home. Whatever has happened between you and your family, you should at least try to reconcile."

She remembers the cold darner that frosted over her veins, remembers the ironshroom that leadened her limbs, remembers the silent shroom that muted her fingers.

"Please, my Link."


She can still hear the pulsing of the tell-tale tyrian heart. She can still see the violent violet of that throbbing flesh, leaking blood like a rotting fruit, one hundred years too late.

Mipha's chrysalis. Which has held her form for one hundred years. Which has metamorphosised her from the girl with the sharks' teeth, the girl with the kind smile, the girl with the rice-balls, to that terrible thing now gunked in the pump.

Mipha...Mipha, who would have lived yet, as she was before. Mipha, who would have remembered her Link. Mipha, who would have once again asked her May I hug you. Mipha, who would have known of the other Champions, who would have shared stories of the girl with the
golden hair, of Urbosa, of Revali, of Daruk, of Impa.

Mipha, who would have lived yet, if not for the Calamitous One, if not for the Malice.

Marin has passed away. The girl who smelled of horses could not have survived these hundred years. The girl with the golden hair vanished on the eve of the Great Calamity. And even if the somehow-living Impa were willing to speak to her about her past, Link can never again show her face in Kakariko.

And Aryll.

Aryll, her little sister, whose fate Impa refused to name.

Mipha told her of how quickly hylians grow up. Of how one moment she saw Link as a child unable to swim through the river, and then within the blink of an eye she had sprouted up like a weed. Mipha would never use the word weed. Like a sea lily, she would say, with a gentle smile and a lingering brush of the hand.

Before the Great Calamity, Link had regarded life as the lengthiest action she would ever take. That remains true. But the sixty-seventy-maybe-eighty years of a hylian's span—as of a sheikah's and of a gerudo's, and the similar courses of a rito's and of a goron's—cannot compare to the hundred long years of her absence.

She lowers her eyelids.

Yet she can retain the memories of the past, of the people she has loved and loves still, and carry them with her forward to the future, to the people that she loves now and will love yet.

If not for her absence, she would never have met Cottla and Koko, would never have met Misan and Glepp, would never have met Kass and Yunobo, would never have met Amali and her children, would never have met Cremia and Romani, would never have met Dyeri and Nadyne, would never have met Riju and Sidon, would never have met the rest of the people—friends and strangers, companions and travellers—that have meant and mean the world to her.

That she swims now in a different bend of the river does not erase the waters that have carried her here.

"My Link," Mipha murmured to her over the empty bowl, the paella warming their bellies and curving their mouths to smiles, "you should return to Ordon, for even a chance to say good-bye. You can decide to leave again if you want. Yet you should try, at least, to reconcile. I think you should try, my Link. Please...promise me that. Leave nothing unsaid."

She promised Mipha, then, to return to Ordon.

She promises herself, now, to return to Ordon.

—

Seafood Paella (fifteen hearts) - goat butter, hearty blueshell snail, hylian rice, mighty porgy, rock salt

Chapter End Notes

Author's notes: And that's the fourth Divine Beast, with thirty-one chapters left in Delicious in Wilds to wrap the story up. Thank you to you, the reader, for having stayed with me for so long, and thank you to you, my most marvellous beta reader Emma, for having assisted me.

Link has in fact not told Sidon about Sarie until this moment. It's not like Sidon could see Sarie himself, although he did hear the "tumbling wooden block" sound.

Just look at how far Link has come. Remember when it was Yunobo giving her a pep talk? When it was Amali? When it was Malon? Remember when Riju and Link supported each other? Remember when, now, Link can be there for Sidon?

I decided to have Link skip Vah Ruta for three major reasons: firstly, Link has already had sufficient time to hang out with and get to know Sidon that I didn't really see what writing out a long chapter would give; secondly, I wanted to focus on the Malice for this fight; and thirdly, I wanted to point out truly that Link isn't the one who needs to do the Divine Beasts. There's no prophecy. She just happens to be the bearer of the slate. That doesn't make her any less of a hero.

Link's truly accepted her past as herself. We've come such a long way, haven't we?

"The best laid plans of lynels and Links often go awry" is a reference to, of course, "the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry".

If it's not clear what's going on, Waterblight Ganon ran into Link and tackled her into the water. Mipha's healing salve is a nod to blue potion, first seen as the Medicine of Life and Magic in A Link to the Past and last seen being concocted from ten monster tails (I think?) in A Link Between Worlds, which usually restores Link's hearts completely, as well as magic in games that use it.

The loftwing around the neck is an Akkalan idiom that refers to someone bearing a burden long after they have been forgiven, because they cannot seem to forgive themself. Loftwings are depicted as the messengers of the Golden Goddesses. In Akkalan, it is said that, years upon years ago, anyone who injured a loftwing would wear its corpse around their neck as punishment to let everyone know that they had sinned against the Golden Goddesses. However, the Golden Goddesses then sent a message: that this practise had to stop, for the concept of sin (in the old Akkalan faith practised in the province of Ordona) is not something to stain a soul with forever. To sin is merely to miss the mark, so that you should try again to meet the target. This was inspired by the real-world "albatross around your neck" from The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.

The line that Zelda reads is adapted from Julius Caesar; I'm not a fan of Shakespeare. And, in case you don't recognise it, I recommend rereading the memory from the very first chapter! Worry not, because we'll revisit this memory yet again so that you can understand the full context. After all, everything comes in threes (and in fours, with the fourth time being a tradition-breaking twist, but we'll get there when we get there). The three-line saying her name is also something that will come back, but it's adapted from Breath of the Wild. Zelda has those lines fairly frequently; at the game of the game, she also says that about Ganon.

Yep, before Zelda came up with the names Vah Ruta, etc., the Divine Beasts were
called "the Divine Beast of Ruto", "the Divine Beast of Darunia", and so forth. That's part of why Zelda eventually decided to adopt the city names.

By the way, do you remember what malice-caused scars look like? Consider the fact that Waterblight Ganon literally enveloped Link in malice—however briefly—from the jawline down. Yup.

And now Link has a new destination: finally figuring out where Ordon is. After all, Impa has lived for over one hundred years (as do some people in real-life). Who's to say that Ilia (the girl) might not be around yet?

Up next: recovery; scars; talk of siblings.

midna's ass. 21 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: The way Vah Ruta is dealt with is inventive and a really cool twist.

This wraps up what you may be thinking of as the "main" portion of the story! As you can see, though, we still have just over thirty chapters left to go. There's a lot of story left in the land once known as Hyrule.

Emma. 21 October 2017.
Chapter Summary

The travelling chef recovers from injuries sustained while cleansing the Divine Beast; the chef and the Lanayrish prince have a heart-to-heart about the former Champion of Zola.

Chapter Notes

As typical, notes that wouldn't fit in the end: Thank you so much for reading along with Delicious in Wilds so far; we are now 64% of the way through the story (actually, last chapter, we were at (approximately) 1-1/e of the way through the story, which is a little mathematical fact that made me smile but which I forgot to put in the author's notes). Thank you to my readers, and thank you to my most incredible beta reader Emma, for doing her best in making sure that my Frankensteinining writing process actually flows well.

Link really got fucked up in the last chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To have a body requires boundaries. To feel where her form ends and where the world around her begins. To sense the distinction between herself, and not-herself.

Yet the boundaries of her body have blended into the earth.

She drifts within herself. The pain has melted away to a nothingness that radiates from her core. No matter how she tries to gather herself up, her essence spills from her fingers as though trying to envelope the ocean in her arms.

She drifts. The endless void before her glows in the softened tones of gold and shimmers with a warmth she has felt before. She has no eyes to close. But she could give in. She could let herself spread out to the edges of eternity.

She senses, somehow, like she has done this before.

But she has a land to walk, and promises to keep, and travellers to talk, and meals to make before she sleeps.

Meals, cooked by her own hands, to warm her own belly, of her own body.

Her body.

Hers.

And all of the memories, and all of the scars, and all of the promises, and all of the mistakes, and all of the feats and feasts alike that have come with it.
Her eyelids flutter. Warmth curls around her nose. Something pushes against her lips.

She *aaaaahs*.

Her jaws snap shut. She chews. She swallows. She tilts her head left. She tilts her head right. This texture, this heat, this savory meat, this salt and this spice, this ball of steamed rice.

Her eyes snap open. She expects a healer. She expects a letter from the Divine Beast Vah Ruta's pilot, or a visit from a trusted confidante, or—at best—a meeting on a rooftop.

She does not expect Sidon, floating in the fluid to the right of her water-bed, and she especially does not expect Muzu, to the left.

When she sits up, Muzu stiffens. As if sensing his body language in the ripples of the water, Sidon turns to the King Zora's advisor, yet Muzu—bolting beneath the surface—swims out from the room into the hallways beyond.

Link stares at his receding tail.

"Link!" Before Link can even begin to process the events occurring much too quickly around her, Sidon has taken her hand to pump it up and down. "Thank you! Thank you! On behalf of our Goddess and all of Her people—on behalf of my father the King Zora and those beneath his protection—on behalf of Vah Ruta Herself—I thank you! I could thank you and thank you again for longer than the rains have poured over the ocean and still those thanks would represent a mere puddle of my gratitude! Thank you, Link! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"

She bobs her head. He continues to speak; she opens her mouth. He continues to speak; she pokes his palms. He continues to speak; she asks where the rice-balls went.

He has them on a floating tray. Link's stomach grumbles; she has never felt emptier, not even when the lynel quite literally made an effort to empty her abdomen. Lowering her eyelids, she stuffs rice-balls one after another into her mouth while Sidon informs her of *what in the world* happened.

He could spare her the details. Her being alive, and Sidon being alive, and the Divine Beast Vah Ruta calmed, and the people of Ruto safe, and her mouth full of food: *these* matter, at least to her.

Sidon elaborates. After the lightning strike quelled the storm, many of the Lanayrish came to observe the goings-on. Link blushes at what a spectacle she must have caused, pretending herself a horse with Sarie as her rider. Then he describes the chrysalis, and her face pales. Although Sidon tried to enact the plan, grabbing the blight's attention, the Malice knocked him into the water. Link looks up at him properly for the first time since her awakening to see the bandages across his chest where the Malice's arm must have connected with his flesh.

She winces.

What she could have prevented, had she acted the wiser.

He goes on: the Malice tackled her into the water. Immediately Sidon begins his endless showers of praise, and Link reaches up to touch his wrist.

She sets the rice-balls down.

She flexes her fingers.

She speaks.
"Sidon...please be honest with me. That's all I want. For you to be genuine, because when you're not, it all feels..." Link strains. She regards the rice-balls. "When I...when I made you the ceviche, it wasn't that good, but you told me it was anyway. If you only ever told me that all my food was good, I'd never get better at cooking! And if you always tell me that everything's good, then I'll never know if you like any of my cooking, because you'll tell me it's good even if it's not! When you tell me that something's delicious, I want to know that it's because it is delicious. And if you say everything's delicious, then I can't know that!"

Link sits up with the fire that roars through her blood and could set her eyebrows aflame in its intensity: the fire beneath her cooking pot.

"So can you be honest with me? About the food and about...the other stuff too?"

Sidon smiles.

A genuine smile that crinkles his eyes and reflects a smile to her own mouth, her cheeks bulging with rice.

She relaxes against the bed.

"...when I call you courageous, Link, I really mean it," he tells her; Link holds his hand in hers.

Sidon resumes the explanation: on Muzu's command, the Lanayrish that had waited to watch the battle came to their aid. Sidon, nearly unconscious from the pain of the Malice chewing through his chest, could scarcely explain the plan, but Muzu understood and activated the pumps.

Muzu.

Link has to thank him yet.

Yet Sidon shakes his head. "You need not forgive him, Link..." She ogles him. For once she can hear a thread of anger in his voice, one so uncharacteristic of him that she shrinks back. Then Sidon clears his throat. "He will tell you himself when he is ready."

He goes on more cheerfully. While Sidon recovered—and the healers did not allow him to participate in the rescue efforts despite him apparently gently suplexing one and tossing another into the water in his efforts to help her—Muzu and his team saved Link from the pump. The inner workings of the Divine Beast brought an end to the Malice. All that the Divine Beast had spat out were the remains of Mipha's slate...and the pump-broken remains of Mipha's light-scale trident.

Link sits up. Sidon squishes her fingers together. "I know, Link." She hears nothing in his timbre but affection and love. "I know. That was the wretched Malice that took my—my most wonderful sister's Goddess slate, that took the very trident handed down our generations—" She tilts her head; Mipha smithed that trident herself. "—and that took her life. I know, Link. We will never forget my most wonderful sister's sacrifice. So thank you again for all of your help, Link! Without your most incredible—"

She shakes her hand from his grasp to open his fingers for him and sign into his palms. "I'm sorry," Link says. "I should have told you sooner. I was afraid you'd be..." The word upset fails to encompass the horror-revulsion-grief that Link felt; she cannot imagine what Mipha's own little brother must have gone through. "...so I told myself it would be easier for you if I told you later." Sidon's features shift into an expression Link cannot read. Hastily she adds: "But that was unfair of me. I...I don't know entirely what it's like." Nor does she want to know, to have lost a sibling; her hand twitches towards her left side, though she touches nothing but her hip. "I do know
It's like to have lost people. I mean, I've been away for a hundred years, and—" The flowers on the shore of Lake Hylia. "—I've lost so many of those I once knew. Mipha, too. I know how important she was to you. And I wish I could have done something different a hundred years ago—to save her, or something—but I can't even remember what happened on the night of the Great Calamity. I'm sorry." Link's fingers falter. Where her gestures slow, the words others have given to her bubble up, like herbs at the bottom of a teacup that nonetheless dissipate through the whole of the tea. "If you...if you ever need someone to...to talk to...?"

Link's wrists go limp. Her knuckles brush against the smooth skin of his palms. She dares not look up at him.

She metres out the moment on the steady thudding of her own heart. One. Two. Three. Then Sidon's gills flutter.

"Link," he murmurs, his voice so low that Link shoots her head up to stare at him, "I told you that I would be honest."

She grips his hands.

"But of course, you would have sought to protect me from the truth, for you are most considerate and thoughtful of those around you!"

Link blinks. "Really? People usually say I'm..." But there was Urbosa, and there was Daruk mentioning what she did in Parapa, and there was Marin and the girl who smelled of horses and there is what Riju has told her about herself.

"But of course, most considerate!" His timbre quiets. "I truly do believe in that, Link. It does not take a divine prophecy for me to have known you this past moon."

Leaning forward, Link rests her forehead against Sidon's chest. Cold and damp, rather than warm and dry, like Amali. But someone she knows nevertheless. He removes his right hand from hers to pat her head; she stays like that for a moment prior to pulling away.

"What were you saying about Mipha?"

His gills flap. The volume of his voice rises again. "And, but of course, I am deeply grieved for what happened to my..." And then drops. "...to my most wonderful sister. Yet I find myself in the sadness of having heard of a hero's passing, rather than someone I...knew." Sidon lets out something that isn't quite a chuckle and isn't quite a groan. "Strange, isn't it?"

Link tilts her head. "I don't...know what you mean."

Sidon makes a noise that she cannot identify. "But of course, you're much a better person than I am."

"Wait, what are you talking about?" She studies his features, yet his clouded eyes reveal nothing of how not-Sidon-like he acts.

He affects a solemn-congratulatory tone. "Our Link has borne the Goddess slate all, despite the loss of her memories, to Ruto! And our Link has battled against the very Malice that felled our most wonderful former of Champion of Zola, and has won!" She winces. "And our Link has even sought to spend her time reassuring the Prince Zora of his worth! And the Prince Zora has...has done little but wait for the prophecy to bring our hero to us, and lead failure upon failure to cleanse Vah Ruta!"
Link shakes her head until the room spins around her. "You couldn't cleanse the Divine Beast if you wanted to. You didn't have the slate. The second I got you that, you went right through the terminals like it was nothing. You're the one who cleansed the Divine Beast. And you saved my life like three times."

"It was not only me!"

"What about the monster? And you would've helped again against the Malice if you hadn't been physically restrained! And that's beside the point." She does not speak from that self-hate, bitter as mugwort and sharp as red pepper, that she has tasted on her fingertips so many times before. Instead Link speaks from a self-reflection, cool as chillshroom and hot as cinnamon. "I'm...not that good of a person. I've been cowardly, and I've run away, and I've hurt people, and sometimes I..." The memory of the winter's chill has remained in her marrow, as the memory of the red-bean confectionery has remained in her belly. "...struggled with realising that some of the things I love wouldn't have been possible without the Great Calamity. If that's not messed up, I don't know what is."

Sidon's mouth opens; Link hurries to continue.

"But I understand now that getting better doesn't mean just putting yourself away and trying not to bother people. It really does mean getting better. I don't really get why you think I'm a good person, but I don't get why you'd call yourself a bad person either. You care about your people. You got through the shrine yourself just to make sure I wouldn't die! You feel bad that you aren't grieving for a sister you barely knew! Also could you put a rice-ball in my mouth?"

He extends a hand towards the tray to pluck one such rice-ball while Link continues on. Obediently she opens her mouth. It takes a few moments to figure out where her head is, and a few moments longer for Link to successfully snap it up into her mouth, but the taste of rice-ball on her tongue is worth the fight.

That, and Sidon's little smile at her antics.

"Sidon," Link tries, "tell me what you know about her. I'm listening, you know." She does not know why the words she longs to say ebb on their path from her heart to her arteries to her hands. Nevertheless she pushes them out one by one. "I care about you. And then I'll tell you what I know!"

"What I know of my most wonderful sister!?" Sidon tilts back his head. "But of course, she was the most—"

"I mean what you know."

"...you asked me to be honest with you, Link, and I shall not lie now."

Link beams. "Thanks." She can almost picture that travelling minstrel—Amali's husband, Kass—flourishing a wingtip and invoking the Goddesses. Without further ado.

Next time she sees him, Link reasons, she'll make sure he breaks bread with her.

Sidon starts to speak, and she shifts her focus. "In all honesty, I remember very little of her! When I was younger, I knew her as the older sister I idolised, who seemed the crown pearl of Ruto. Then, when I was perhaps two hundred moons old, she left. Forever. I could not understand the duties she had a Champion! I could not understand why she had apparently abandoned me without so much as a look back! I thought that I must have done something wrong, to have her hate me forever, that I
had not been good enough, or because I had felt like...yet she had worried and advised me that I should not..." His voice trails, yet Link can sense in the silence feelings that mirror her own childhood. She traces out reassurances in his palms. "I heard much of her many marvellous feats as the Princess Zora and as the Champion of Zola! She was...nearly everything I wished to be, save for the incongruencies I could not—at the time—put to word! And yet she had left, and with her departure, Father...assured me that she would return after her duties to take her rightful place as the Queen Zora!"

Sidon's chuckle drops the chamber's temperature more intensely than a basket of winterwings. Winterwings that Link could cook. Winterwings that she could—no, no, Sidon first, cooking later.

She listens: "...I was scarcely three hundred moons when the Calamitous One struck. I remember little of that time except the panic of those around me, for I had never seen my father afraid until the day when malice welled up from the ground itself. I know only of the funeral, of our prayers that she—who had sacrificed herself so bravely—would swim forever in the seas of the Goddess, as befit someone as incredible as her!"

Link’s fingers curl inwards. Sidon goes on, his voice hoarsening; the water, she notices, tastes saltier than before.

"I have spent all of my years doing my best to fill in the hole that she left in the heart of Lanayru! I have endeavoured to be even a tenth as wonderful of a prince as she was a princess! To know all those in Lanayru; to do my part in protecting and cherishing and nourishing those around me; to bear our Goddess's people through the tragedies that we have borne!"

"And you’ve succeeded," Link tries to intervene, yet Sidon does not seem to pay notice to his palms.

"And yet I do not do enough! But of course, I have been told, again and again, of the many graces of my most wonderful sister! The greatest healer in all of Lanayru; a spear-wielder in a class all her own; kind, patient, and caring deeply for her people; she who could have been the most wise and benevolent Queen Zora perhaps since our Goddess's departure from our mortal realm—"

"But..." The gestures do not come easily to her; they freeze halfway to her fingertips. Her wrists lock. The tendons of her hands rise from the backs like so many mountains. Mountains that she has climbed, and if she climb to the heights of Mount Hylia and Death Mountain and Mount Satori, then she can tell Sidon the truth. "Mipha didn't get passed some family heirloom. She made the light-scale trident herself. She showed me how to do it herself!"

"She was a silversmith!?" Sidon sounds taken aback.

"She was!" Link insists. "I remember that. And she didn't have some magic touch of healing!" She remembers: what Riju said about the radiant shield. "She was just really good with salves and stuff like that, probably because she could since she was the princess and all."

"I..."

"And she didn't even want to be the Queen Zora! When I first met her, when I was little, she didn't say a word about who she was. She always talked about some family business she didn't want to go into. She became the Champion of Zola and went at it with such happiness, that she could leave Ruto. I don't know what kind of a princess she was, but I know she would rather have done almost anything else but be queen."

The sound that comes from Sidon's throat mixes strangling and sobbing. "I never..."
"I don't know what you've been told. And I don't know what she shouldn't done. I don't know if there's something about time, and legends, and death. When I lived before the Great Calamity, there were so many people who hated me, or who thought I'd never be the hero. And now people treat me like a hero and have heard so many amazing deeds I've supposedly done." Like the historian at Fort Hateno whom she met over a year ago. "And I'm still alive!"

To his eternal credit, Sidon offers her another rice-ball, which she accepts with wild abandon. Then, as the rice renews her vigor, Link flails her arms in front of her.

"Don't get me wrong! Mipha was amazing and she saved me from drowning and she fed me a rice-ball and she helped me so much while I was in Ruto and with the delivering of my courier stuff and with the bar and with recognising me and being the reason I didn't get killed in the court—" Sidon starts to say something but fails silent as Link propels herself forward before the words drain from her hands. "—and she's important to me and I'm glad I got to be her friend and I'm not saying that she should've been forced to stick around and be queen or something like that and I'm not saying that she did the right thing or the wrong thing but life's complicated and she was just a person like how we're just people, you and me, and we've done good things and bad things and that's just how life is." Malon's words. "So we don't have to spend our entire lives beating ourselves up for every bad thing we do. and we don't have to be islands. And we don't have to pretend people were invincible heroes. Just...people. Like me and you. People who eat and drink and sleep and eat and try our best. And you don't have to feel bad that you aren't grieving. Maybe it's 'cause I lost my memories but I don't think you have to feel bad at all."

Link gazes directly at him though he cannot see her eyes. She closes her fingers around his wide palms. Beat-beat-beat.

The rice-ball gives her the strength to go on.

"You try so hard for everyone around you, and everyone knows you, and everyone seems to love you, and you're the one who cleansed the Divine Beast! I don't know what Mipha would've been like. But if you become the King Zora, then I can't imagine the Lanayrish in any more capable hands than yours." She swallows; the rice goes easy down her throat. "...if that makes any sense."

For a moment Sidon says nothing. She listens to the steady hum of the water rippling around him. Then his mouth opens to almost blind her with the shininess of his teeth.

"Link, may a question be asked of you?" She signs an affirmative. "You knew her well! Thus, may I ask, what did she say about me!?"

The rice-ball drops from her mouth. Swiftly she snatches it from the air to rescue the rice from the water, yet the question becomes no easier to answer. "I don't remember that much about her. No, well, that's a lie. I've gotten a lot of my memories back, but there's still a lot I don't remember." Link huffs out half a laugh. "I don't even remember my best friend's name. So, please, just, don't..."

"I understand, Link! And thank you for trying your best!"

Closing her eyes, she rubs the back of her head and touches her chin at the same time, endeavouring to do her utmost to dredge up whatever memories of Sidon she can.

"After I drew the blade of evil's bane...we were in Ruto, since the king wanted me to train there, and stuff, even though she didn't want to be there. We met her father." She corrects herself: "Your father. I saw you in the throne room—the throne pool, too, and I think I asked her later. She said that you were her little—" Link's eyes widen. "—brother."
Sidon's fingers close around her hand for a moment. Then he apologises and asks her to go on.

She does. Or she would, if she remembered anything else.

"She never talked about you. I mean, that I remember! I could be forgetting entire years where she talked about nothing but you!" Link moves her hands frantically. "I just don't remember anything else. I'm sorry."

"The last thing you need do is apologise, Link!" Sidon throws his arms around her with such suddenness that she yelps in alarm. "Thank you for your honesty! As you have asked me to be honest to you, so have you been honest to me! Thank you." He sets Link back down on the water-bed; the mattress ghllshs up and down. "It...helps me to know that! I suppose that's a little strange to bear, but it is..." Sidon's head-tail swishes. "...most relieving."

"I don't think that's strange," Link signs immediately. "People feel what they feel. I've learned that that's just how it is. Right?"

Sidon nods decisively. "It is of course a little difficult for me to accept with how long I have told myself otherwise, but I trust you! Thank you, Link, from the bottom of my heart." The sincerity in his voice cannot be mistaken for anything else. "And Link, if you ever need anyone to talk to about those you have lost, I am your friend! May I call myself that, Link!?"

"Yes," she says, and there's little she's been more sure of in her life.

"Thank you again! From the bottom of my heart, thank you! For everything that you have done not only for our Goddess's people, but also..." He squeezes her hand. "...for that which you have done for me."

Link sniffs. Sidon remains quiet for a long and lengthy moment; she lets him have all the time in the world.

And then—and then, he lifts his voice again. She listens to his timbre: he does not resume with that put-on optimism, but rather with an understanding all his own, as she could never mistake the richness of sunflower oil for any other.

"But we are here now. The people of Ruto and Lanayru are safe. My sister's sacrifice was not in vain. And you are here, Link! As am I! That which we can do together is everything in the world! Please...allow me to finish the tale of your—of our—" Link inhales a breath of pleasant surprise and clenches his fingers all the more tightly. "—most triumphant cleansing of the Divine Beast Vah Ruta! Come, listen in!"

Link obliges. She returns her hand to the tray of rice-balls to stuff them again into her mouth.

Whatever Sidon needs, she'll give him, including moving on.

Sidon begins again. Link, stuck in the nozzle of the pump with only her cooking pot.

Link smacks her hand against her own knee.

If only she had had the slate with her, beneath the mirrored surface of the East Reservoir.

If only she had had the slate.

Then Link could have taken a pictograph of herself stuck in the nozzle of the pump with the cooking pot upon her back. The perfect complement to the pictograph taken in the Divine Beast
Vah Medoh.

While she sputters out rice-ball-flavoured laughter to herself, Sidon continues: to remove Link from the pump before she drowned, they had to break her cooking pot. Her mirth turns to strangling; she lifts her hands to her face, but Sidon reassures her: "But course we've put it back together again! Our most talented smiths Reyden and Jiave have tested the new pot most extensively and have blessed it with the silver of our Goddess! Come, I should think that you will find its abilities much enhanced!"

Link pleads: "Where?"

"With your most lovely horse, Link! We have gathered your belongings there along with your most wonderful friend Sarie! I should think that you would like to see your horse and your belongings when you awoke! As soon as you feel fit enough to go, we'll leave this medical ward and—"

Instantly Link attempts to rouse herself from the bed. Sidon places his hand flat against her chest. He apologises, then claps his hands. A pair of zora healers enter. Come to think of it, she has not seen a single non-zora since she entered Ruto.

Though, with the recent floods and the hundred years of isolation, Link supposes she can understand why.

They poke and prod and generally do what healers do. While they test to see what hurts and what doesn't, and while Link ignores the healers entirely to scarf down further rice-balls, Sidon finishes his story.

Sidon wanted to wait for Link's recovery, as she deserved pilothood ever more than he. And yet the King Zora has passed the title on from sister to brother: the Champion of Zola, the Hero of Lanayru, the Divine Beast Vah Ruta's Pilot, "O Wise Sidon," he concludes, and she sets down the rice-balls to hug him while the healers respectfully stand back.

Out of fear that the Malice could return, Sidon made use of Mipha's slate to activate the final terminal.

"And now we can rebuild! And all of this, thanks to you, Link!" Sidon inhales. When he speaks again, she listens more intently than she ever has before: "To you, and to me, and to everyone else. We did it together, didn't we?"

She nods so hard the healers advise her against breaking her own neck.

The healers quit the chamber. Link springs up again. Sidon pushes her back down. He brings her her clothing: her tunics, patched up yet again. She holds them up to the light and starts to laugh around the rice-ball in her mouth at how she can barely recognise them. Instead of her original undergarments, trousers, tunic, hood, and boots with hints here and there of patches, Link finds herself looking at patches with hints here and there her original clothing.

Sidon rests a hand on her shoulder. She glances at him.

"Link, before we go, you might want to take a look at yourself! When you fought most valiantly against the Malice, the Malice...the Malice injured you gravely! You have been recovering all this time! Only now has your skin healed enough that the healers have agreed to let you go!"

All this time. Only now.

For this, Sidon elaborates, the healers have kept Link unconscious. To stop the spread of malice
through her skin, they were forced to burn off the outer layer of her flesh, and thereafter to partially skin her—just the outermost level, twice a day—until they ensured that the malice no longer burrowed beneath her flesh.

Like the malice-tipped arrow shot into her shoulder. Except not just her shoulder, but her entire body, briefly submerged in malice for those few seconds it took her to twist the Malice into the pump.

Link shudders.

She would inquire how long but that would require her to remove her hands from the rice-balls. Sidon answers her unspoken question: for a half-moon.

For two weeks.

She chokes on the rice-ball. He claps her between the shoulder-blades. The rice-ball shoots from her mouth like an ice block from the back of the Divine Beast Vah Ruta.

"Healing from so much malice took time! The healers were afraid you wouldn't make it! I told them that that was nonsense! Of course you would!"

Link whispers into his palm about the elixir in spring green. Sidon squeezes her hand. His voice quiets. Somehow she hears him more clearly when he murmurs than when he booms. "We have records from before the Great Calamity. I myself ensured we had the recipe for hylian elixir." He pauses. "...believe me, Link. I understand. Twice a day, the same dosage as your vials. I'd never leave you in the silence like that!"

Link slumps onto the bed in relief. Then she returns to wolfing rice-balls down. Her stomach starts to hurt, but she presses bravely on until she has polished off every last rice-ball.

"Can we go now?"

"Almost, Link! Before we go, you should..." Sidon clears his throat. "The healers told me that I should ask you to look at yourself before you leave." He sounds as if parroting a memorised message. "They've prepared a mirror for you." Sidon hesitates, then moves to the side.

Link looks beyond him, to the mirror wheeled in upon its stand, tall enough to reflect Sidon's full body from head to toe.

A silver mirror. Covered with a thin blue cloth, so that it reflects nothing but her toes. Link has not seen a full-length mirror, that she can remember, since her awakening. She has seen her face in the water, and she has seen the hand-mirror in Kakariko.

Yet—to suddenly see the whole of her body at once—

Link hears Sidon shifting behind her. "I shall bring you another round of breakfast!" He slaps her again on the back, but for once her body does not budge as if locked in place. "Or maybe two, or three, would better serve you, Link!" He chuckles. She listens to him depart; shortly thereafter, the chamber drains. When she slides off of the floppy bed, the water level reaches her ankles.

She approaches the mirror. Link has not yet looked down at herself, though she can feel the kiss of air upon her bare skin.

She stands in front of the silver. The cloth leaves a gossamer touch upon her fingertips. It flutters onto the water to spread like a stain of wine.
Link looks upon herself.

She reads the stories in the scars that she knows. The bite of the lizalfos on her left arm. The scar of fire-light by her right elbow. The stitches a thumbs-length's down between the toes of her right foot where she ripped herself free of the scimitar. The thin white line up her leg where a bokoblin speared her through. The handprint on her abdomen where the lynel crooked their fingers through her flesh. The streaks of marks under her eyes, drawn in by her own nails. The diagonal curve on her right cheek left by the wolfos. The pockmark of malice like a beauty mark upon her cheek, just to the side of her eye. The lightning-strike scar that spirals down her left arm to the hand that has held the sword that seals the darkness.

And there, from the lower edge of her jawline down to her collarbones, across her shoulders and her arms, over her chest and her stomach, down her hips and her legs: violent violet. Spirals and loops that spread across her flesh in the same patterns of the Malice writhing within the confines of its papery corpse, in the same patterns as the spiral decorations of the shrines and the towers, of the slate and the Divine Beasts.

Like the transfer of maliced ink where the paper of the bestial blight pressed against the paper of her own skin.

The spirals of the lightning-strike scar still glimmer gold above the violet malice.

That brings a smile to her face.

Link runs her hands over her body. The scars do not hurt, but neither do have they lost sensation, unlike the scar of fire-light. She feels with wonder how they raise ridges along her skin as though the Malice has left the contours of the land once known as Hyrule imprinted in her flesh.

Not quite a violent violet.

But the violet of the sash that Marin once wore around her hips, the violet of the sunset over the Tabanch mountains that Aryll loved so, the violet of the ribbons that the girl who smelled of horses wove into Epona's mane.

A violet that carries a beauty of its own. A violet on her skin. A violet not swirling with malice and hatred, but a violet beat-beat-beating in time to her living heart.

Link breathes.

She watches the ripples of her muscles under her skin. The uneasy tension of the scars in her lower belly gouged out by the lynel has lessened in her two weeks of healing; her right foot no longer aches when she puts weight on the tips of her toes.

Link touches her palm to her abdomen, just over the handprint-scar.

When she smiles at herself in the mirror, she can see the tooth she chipped, and that widens her smile further.

She's alive.

Link dons her undergarments and undershirt, then her trousers and tunic, then her boots and the hood.

The fabric clothe the majority of the violet scars, save for those that creep out around her wrists and spiral over her palms, and those that curl over her lower jaw just beyond the border of the hood.
Link draws the hood up.

Her ponytail bobs against the back of her head. Her earrings glint in the light of luminous stones. Her grey eyes shine back at her in the mirror.

She rests her palm against the cool silver.

She.

Link.

The girl who awoke in the Shrine of Resurrection. The girl known as the Champion of Hylia, the Hero of Hyrule, Her Majesty's Knight. The girl who has calmed the Divine Beasts.

The girl who bears the slate.

She remembers the fish-scale dress tucked away in Ilia's saddlebags, and she grins to herself. Maybe someday she could wear a dress the same colour of that clearest, bluest sky that she has ever seen, the colour of Romani's eyes on the ranch that she calls her home.

A little sister.

Sidon returns in the nick of time with two more trays of rice-balls. She can barely keep them down, but Goddesses damn her if she passes up on a chance to *consume*. Taking the trays with her, Link as she follows Sidon out. She wades through chest-high water in the hallways. Sidon chats animatedly to those he comes across; the Lanayrish say hello to Link. Some inquire about when she plans to mix drink and cook meals for them again. Others congratulate her on the Divine Beast.

The majority drop into the water to thank her. Link panics. When the crowd disperses, she tells Sidon the truth: that she would rather they not treat her as a hero. Not because she runs from her destiny, or because she longs to pass on the slate to someone else, or because she fears the burden of a loftwing around her neck.

No.

Like Riju, seeking honest feedback for her cooking instead of praise for the crown upon her head, Link wants to simply be: Link. Link with all of her responsibilities and all of her promises. But still Link.

Just Link.

With crowds like those, she still sweats, and she still wants nothing more than to curl up with her hands over her ears. But—with Sidon at her side, and Yunobo-Amali-Riju's words at her fingers—when the Lanayrish pass by one or two at a time, Link smiles, and she *talks* to them.

And then: the stable.

Link does not notice the motion of her own limbs, nor the splash of her boots along the drained-water ground, nor the pain in her knee where she does not quite leap the stable door right. She notices only Ilia, wrapped in Link's arms, her bulk warm, her heartbeat thumping against Link's chest, her breath warm on Link's ear.

When she has satisfied herself that Ilia has done well in her absence, all four hooves, hoofed in horseshoes—a nose, warm and wet and velvet to the touch—eyes, bright and gentle—lashes, dark and clear—a tail, very swishy—a mane, less swishy but nice to run her fingers through—two ears,
flicky back-and-forthy—and a big ole thumper of a heart, to beat in time to the life of her beloved companion, her wonderful Ilia, only then does Link thank the flushed stablehand over and over, and only then does she move on to check her belongings. The red telescope and the paraglider. The sword Riju gave her, but not the fire-light spear, evidently lost to the waves. The slate—Link tests it to ensure that it continues to work properly, though she no longer has Divine Beasts to calm—and her satchel. She opens the wooden box to find the spring green elixirs restocked, and the vials that once held yellow elixir similarly washed out to produce a sea of green as light as spring.

Link could pick up Sidon and swing him around with her happiness. But first she need check up on the companion that has been with her since the beginning.

Her beloved cooking pot, which has saved her life more times than she can count, and which continues to save her life each and every day of her existence.

Link can tell where the cooking pot broke into four grooved pieces, and where the silversmiths have repaired it. She traces the line of tempered silver up and down the inside of the cooking, notes the sheen of moonlight within where the smiths have done their best to ensure the cooking pot still heats evenly.

A familiar whirl and a sound of wooden blocks tumbling against one another rouses her from her cooking pot reverie. Sarie leaps out from her satchel to smack her in the face. "Link! Link! Link's very pretty. Sarie saw the droopy-droop-fish get Link out of the water!" Sarie whirs around. "Sarie saw the paint get aaaaaall over Link. But now Link is better! And Link's pony-pona is big! She's big and warm! Link's big too but Link's smaller than pony-pona!"

Link pets Sarie on the head. "You're the first person to call me big. But I guess I'm actually tall compared to you."

"Link's super big!" Sarie insists. They drop the hood from Link's head to pap the violet swirls around her throat. "And so pretty! Sarie wants to be painted like this! Sarie's swirlies are all green and brown." They indicate their own bark-like skin, dappled whorls in hues of leaves and clay. "Link's all pretty...like the night heavens."

Suddenly Link snaps her fingers—with a thought to Urbosa as she does—and bats her cooking pot. She grins to Sarie. "I said I was gonna make you food, right? So lemme make you something."

She does not know about loam, but she has seen how Sarie's tiny hands split into so many roots. And trees and plants eat the manure of animals, eat the mulch of fallen leaves, eat the earth.

Soil, and wood. Surely that would suffice a delicious meal for a korok such as Sarie.

"Wait there," Link tells them. Sidon offers to go with her; together they quit Ruto to forage for soil in the hills beyond.

The Divine Beast Vah Ruta remains in the East Reservoir, though Sidon has walked it closer to the dam. The Divine Beast's eyes no longer glare in violent violet.

Light blue. That skylit blue of the blade of evil's bane, of the fire-light, of the eyes of the girl with the golden hair.

They pass abandoned villages that Sidon names Tijo and Rutela, villages evacuated to Ruto on the tide of the rain, villagers that with luck will soon see again their children. And from Tijo and Rutela—Link remembers one of Purah's assistants hailed from there—and other settlements, eventually the Lanayrish zora will again thrive in their home. With the rains gone, the people of
the land known as Hyrule who cannot live in the water—gerudo and sheikah, rito and gorons, hylians and korok, though Link adds the final note herself as she has only ever seen two koroks in her life—can return again to Lanayru, and once more the land can live.

It may take centuries, but the zora will thrive, and the land will live. "All we need is power, wisdom, courage, and faith in our Goddess!" Sidon beams. "And faith in ourselves, too."

Sidon and Link bring back what they can, though Link does not readily know how to distinguish one type of soil from another. She prepares a layered cake of clay and mud, of pressed leaves and flowers, all rounded up with a sprinkle of crushed and dampened bark.

This she presents to Sarie.

Sarie places their hand upon the dish.

"Unngh!" says Sarie, and Link leans in to hear the judgment, her heart thudding, her eyes embiggened, her world narrowed to focus entirely on Sarie. "Sarie hates this! Sarie thinks it's awful!" They bang their tiny limbs against the rim of the cooking pot. "Sarie's sorry but Link doesn't know how to cook loam! But Sarie understands! Sarie will show Link!"

Link looks at them, and they look at Link, with their curved head-branches that loop around, and their green leaf-mask, and their whirling korok leaf, and she bursts out laughing.

She remembers the failed recipes that she cooked with the girl who smelled of horses. She remembers all the overcooked rice, all of the too-thin soup, all of the oh that said one cup not one kilo, all of the what if we just substituted this ingredient with the other wooow how was I supposed to know that would make the pot blow up, all of the well this is awful but at least we made it together and that's what counts. She remembers, even, the night in the forest, the night that one of the goats of the ranch escaped from the open doors, the night that she had tried to stop the goat with her bare hands and her left arm had gotten stuck in the goat's looped horn, the night that the girl who smelled of horses had chased the goat and managed to climb its back only for the goat to speed both her and Link into the woods, the night that she and the girl who smelled of horses had spent huddling together by a campfire, the night that they spoke to one another for the first time, the night that the girl who smelled of horses apologised over and over with her forehead against the forest floor.

The night that Link endeavoured to make a meal of leaves and mushrooms, and the night that Link nearly poisoned them both, and the night that the girl who smelled of horses has never let her forget.

Link wipes the tears from her eyes. She promises to make Sarie a proper loaf whenever Sarie has time to teach Link how to cook for koroks.

"A loam! A loam!" Sarie corrects, and Link ducks her head.

"A loam."

A clearing of a throat.

Link turns around, but Sidon recognises the patterns in the thin layer of water first: "Muzu?"

Muzu.

Muzu who stands there, leaning into a walking stick, his arms shivering, his head bowed beneath the weight of his years.
“...may I speak to you?”

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Rock-Hard Food (one-quarter heart) - wood

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: The comment about the "let[ting] herself spread out to the edges of eternity" is something that will most certainly come back later, not to mention the golden sky. Someone familiar with past Zelda games, particularly A Link to the Past, might be able to hazard a guess as to what this is referring to.

Yunobo left Link a letter; Amali left Teba (the trusted confidante) in charge of Link; and Riju, of course, prepared a rooftop meeting from which Link fled.

At least Link was unconscious for that medical procedure. Ouch! It's the malice-tripped arrow but much more serious, given that it was eating away at her entire body, and it took her quite a while to recover for that reason.

You know how the "silver" tier of enemies have purple splotches over them? Yep, that's from exposure to malice. Most of Link's body save for her face (which, if you recall, Link didn't let Waterblight Ganon touch) is now covered in similar purple marks.

If you don't remember, Link chipped a tooth in the forty-seventh chapter, when she tried to bite into a fish roasted by lightning that turned out to be rock-hard.

Link calling the girl with the golden hair's eyes "blue" here is not a mistake. You've probably seen her get confused in previous memories; memory is fallible and she's now mistaken about this, just as she was mistaken about the location of Marin's ranch, and just as she didn't even remember about Akkala for some time.

Tijo is named after the character from Majora's Mask, and Rutela after that from Twilight Princess. It's weird how many of the landmarks (like the "Rutala" stuff) seem to be misspellings of actual names while others are properly preserved (like "Eagus"), and I can't help but wonder whether that's a mistake in translation.

Regarding Sidon's age at the time of the Great Calamity: the Lanayrish zora measure time in "hundred-moons", owing to their much longer lifespans, so years aren't necessarily a sufficient measure for them. One "moon" refers to a single cycle of twenty-eight days; the Lanayrish utilise a lunar calendar rather than a solar calendar, meaning that their "months" shift from year to year as they are tracked to the moon instead of the earth's passage around the sun. One "hundred-moon" period is roughly 7.6 years. For Sidon, \(300 \times \frac{28}{365.25} = 23\) years. Note that twenty-three years of age is very very young for a zora, and is not equivalent to a human twenty-three years of age. Since Link last saw Mipha (as a child, before meeting her again as an adult) over eight years prior to the start of the Great Calamity, I calculate that Sidon would have been around two hundred moons, about fourteen years of age or so.
The conversation between Link and Sidon in this chapter (the one about Mipha and such, that lasts seven pages: good job, midna's ass) was rather difficult to write. People are complete, and there are no easy answers. But neither should people have to forgive. And remember...not all siblings, and not all families, are the best. Link assumes that Sidon had a similar relationship with Mipha that she had with Aryll; this, she learns, isn't the case. I also have an implication in this chapter that Mipha did not act the most wisely regarding young-Sidon's feelings regarding gender, although Mipha was likely not doing so intentionally but out of ignorance (if you recall, she was also somewhat unsure when Link came out to her). That doesn't change the consequences of her actions.

Rock-hard food comes from cooking ore or trees, and it's very useful when you're trying to take on the Trial of the Sword on Master Mode on three hearts! After all, you get plenty of opportunities to cut down some trees, and every tree then gives you the equivalent of a half heart.

Eyyy, and Link fails to make food! She's not a perfect omniscient cook, you know, and of course she'll struggle with things outside of her usual calibre.

And here you also have the context for that memory regarding the night where Link and Ilia talked seriously to one another for the first time.

Up next: a chat with Muzu; Link's last night in Ruto.

midna's ass. 23 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Sidon's relationship to Mipha is really interesting and complex. I really enjoy that level of complexity being portrayed. It feels so tangible.

Link asking Sidon to put a rice ball in her mouth mid-conversation is an extremely Link moment.

Link's badass scars from getting fucked up get yet more badass from getting yet more fucked up.

Emma. 22 October 2017.
Enduring Elixir

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef speaks to the former Lanayrish adviser; locates the whereabouts about the chef's past and hometown; and spends a final night in the city.

Chapter Notes

I said this in response to a review on the FFN cross-post version of this, but I'll add it here since I find it relevant: Yep, character growth everywhere! I think it's important for Link (and others) to realise that the past is not something to be run from, not something demonised or something idolised, but simply something to be accepted. The past does not define who you are; it just gives you the starting point of who you're going to be. Part of that is accepting the people of your past as people, and nothing more. Mipha was a person who did some good and some bad. So were the rest of them.

As for the labyrinth and the dragons, I will note that we're going to cover a lot of shrines in an upcoming chapter; I won't spoil you on which ones we cover exactly, but you may find some of your favourites among them. As for the dragons, I've already had Link spot them in the distance once or twice (particularly Dinraal and Farosh). But, you know, Link has yet to help Naydra, who is just out there suffering at the moment, like in-game. So we'll get there when we get there.

And for the fic, honestly, if I had my way and had infinite time, I would've gone into massive detail on Link's journey instead of skimming over so much! But I figured that people wouldn't want to reread merely a retread of what they've already played, so I focused on covering the things I had changed or things that I wanted to comment on specifically. This might have been well over a million words otherwise.

And now, author's notes that wouldn't fit in the end: As always, thank you so much for reading and supporting me; thank you for all of your comments and other methods of support, and thank you for sticking with me all this while. I know how long Delicious in Wilds, so thank you again for continuing to read. And thank you to my beta reader, Emma, for how much she puts in and how fine she is with "haha yeah I know it's 1am but let's proof the fifty-fifth chapter anyway."

I noted in previous chapters that Sidon's palms are smooth; zora do not have wrinkles or creases in their palms (especially the larger ones), at least not like humans do, nor do they have fingerprints. Older zora also do not wrinkle as they age: their fins droop and so forth, but their skin remains smooth.

The word emote means to literally show emotion and does not just refer to emoticons/etc (or emotes in video games, for that matter).

Given the huge emphasis on the use of luminous stone in Zora's Domain in-game and the fact that the in-game zora monuments are carved onto such large luminous rocks, I thought that it was appropriate for their actual writing system to also be on stone tablets, given that paper would not survive well in water. It also means that the
Lanayrish written language is similar to real-world Braille in the sense that it can be read by the blind; note that while Braille relies on raised characters, Lanayrish relies on lowered carvings.

In *Breath of the Wild*, the in-game landmark of Kanalet Ridge is right next to the area where I chose to locate the province of Ordona. Kanalet Ridge is named after Kanalet Castle from *Link's Awakening*. I decided to include a river (there are really far too few rivers in *Breath of the Wild*) which I chose to name the Kanalet River (as a nod to the moat about Kanalet Castle, wherein you can get a piece of heart!), as it is known on official maps produced in Central Hyrule. However, locally in Ordon, the river was known as Totaka's River. You see, in *Link's Awakening*, Kanalet Castle was headed by a Prince Richard, named after one of the main characters of *Kaeru no Tame ni Kane wa Naru* (this game's engine was later used for *Link's Awakening*). However, I didn't want to use the name Richard, as it personally bothers me when "real-world" names are used for *Zelda* characters outside of coincidences; there's no better way to pull me out of a fic than suddenly seeing names like "Sheila" crop up (no offence to anyone named Sheila reading this; it's a pretty name and I was just using as an example of a real-world name). I have done my utmost to ensure that all character names in *Delicious in Wilds* follow the conventions set up for names in *Breath of the Wild*. I did know a bit of trivia about *Link's Awakening*: you can hear a certain nineteen-note composition in Richard's house. This nineteen-note composition was written by Totaka Kazumi and appears in many games on which he worked. In a nod to this, the Ordoners refer to the river locally as Totaka's River. There are many real-world examples of landmarks having a different local name, especially for landmarks like rivers which pass through multiple areas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Muzu.

Muzu stands with Link outside of the stable. He inclines his head. His shoulders shake, his back bowed inwards, his facial fins drooping, his pectoral fins having wasted away with his age.

"I apologise," he signs; Link cocks her head. "I understand if you do not forgive me. I do not expect...I do not expect even the Goddess to forgive me for what I have done." Muzu's arms shiver. At least he still speaks with the same Lanayrish of a hundred years prior: Link need not panic about the slight differences that a century of evolution of language can bring.

Link tilts her head to the side. Raising her hands, she gazes at her fingers, at the lightning-strike scar, at the violet scars that whorl in her palms. She pictures the words she cannot speak like a particularly armoured porgy, one even harder than rock roast. Yet, even the hardest of armoured porgy will soften in the heat of a cooking pot, if only she lets it simmer on the fire for long enough. Then she merely has to jump headfirst into the cooking pot. But only with some butter so that she can move her head back out afterwards.

She simmers the words. She simmers the words. She simmers the words, and just when Muzu raises the ridges of his brows at her as though asking whether she has just stuck a sapphire arrow into herself—no thank you; she has already done that once, and it has taken her foot nearly three months to recover—Link manages to speak. "I wanted to come back to thank you."

Muzu stares at her.
"Thank you for all of your help," she continues. "I...know that it must be. Really hard. Since everything that happened. Like with Mipha. And stuff. I know that that's all hard since she meant so much to you. Like how she meant so much to me. Not that she meant more to me than she did to you! I know that you knew her for so much longer than I did! Probably longer than I'm ever gonna live! But she still meant. A lot to me." She's losing her words. She simmers her hands further in the pot. "But but but!" As she motions through the same gesture thrice, Link recalls Rotana of Uruda University, with her overly excited beam and her long talks of the mirrors of the land once known as Hyrule, and she remembers the zapshroom omelet that she and Dyeri made together, and that gives her the strength to push onwards. "So I wanted to thank you. Because even though all this happened, and you probably hated me which I probably deserve but maybe not anymore or something I'm still kind of figuring these things out as I go, but anyways even though! All that happened! You still helped me out. You showed me where the lynel thing was. And you helped me get the lightning-y arrows. And you helped tell me how to calm the Divine Beast. And it's thanks to the lightning thing that you told me about that I figured out the thing with the pot! Or maybe you don't know what the thing with the pot is. Well either way it's thanks to you that after all of that you turned on the pump of the Divine Beast thingy to suck up the Malice. And after all of that you saved my life. Even if that meant that you broke my cooking pot." She touches her chin. "But I forgive you because you helped me! And you helped Sidon! And you helped all the people of Ruto and Lanayru and the entire world since you helped calm the Divine Beast! So thank you!" She remembers Sidon. "Thank you! Thank you! I could...I could...I could thank you so much but the thanks wouldn't even...something about a puddle...something about..." Link sputters. Her fingers twitch. Her hands droop to her sides. She bows instead, so hard and fast that her forehead bonks against Muzu's; both of them stumble apart. Link apologises profusely.

When she raises her head, she sees Muzu gazing upon her with an expression so peculiar that she cannot place it. His third eyelid slides horizontally over his eyes.

Then Muzu sets down the walking stick to kneel upon the ground before her. Water ripples rhythmically from his crouched form.

With a strangled breath in the back of her throat, Link steps backwards.

"In all of the moons that have risen and set in my life," Muzu signs, his arm wheeling in motions that remind her of the tides, "I have never met someone who could change my opinion so drastically in the span of about five waves."

Link cocks her head to the side.

he wipes his palms against his abdomen.

"I should be the one thanking you." Muzu bows again. He seems to bear some difficulty in lifting himself back up. Link crouches down, gathers the walking stick from the floor, and offers it to him. "Thank you. When you...first came here, as the original Champion of Hylia twelve hundred moons ago, I admit that I...I admit that I thought poorly of you. You carried upon your face the expression of one who seemed to either not care of anything around herself, or one who expected the world to fall at her and spill riches into her arms."

Link takes another step back.

"You never spoke. I do not think I ever witnessed you so much as emote, except for when you ate." She smiles sheepishly. "However, I understand now that only a fool would have judged someone for merely her face. I was wrong. I was wrong about you. All of the words in the world, as droplets in the ocean, could not convey my regrets for what I have done."
"When you came to me, when the King Zora and the Prince Zora demanded that I aid you, I felt nothing but the foul bile of bitterness rise within me. In truth...we have plenty of topaz arrows, as we were attempting to use them to quell the storm, and that has failed. I sent you to the lynel to die, and if that did not work, I knew that the topaz arrows could not bring down Vah Ruta."

Link blinks.

Muzu continues, his gaze cast upon the ground: "I was wrong about you. I sent you twice to your death, and twice you have done nothing but aid us. Twice I sent you to where you would meet your end, inadequately prepared, and twice you transformed my actions into those that would save us all."

"Oh," Link signs, touching her chin. "In Darunia, I met a goron...a repair worker, I think? He told me to go to the northern mine. I didn't figure this until way later but he was saying it as a joke. There wasn't gonna be anything there. But I met Yuno-yunobo there, and I helped him calm the Divine Beast that'd been chucking rocks all over Eldin. We even made an omelet together. And some sautéed ironshroom. It was really good!"

Once more Muzu's third eyelid slides over his eyes.

"I don't really mind. I'm not angry. I don't know..." Link rubs the back of her head. "Maybe I should be angry, but I'm...not? I'm really not. Just don't get anyone else to do that. I don't mind if you send me on dangerous things like that! It'd be different if it was someone else, but...I mean, because of that, the lynel isn't going to hurt people anymore, right? It worked out."

He swings his head from side to side. "In all of the moons that have risen and set in my life," Muzu says for the second time, "I, truly and honestly, have never met someone who could change my opinion so drastically in the span of about five waves." He bows once more, and then he offers her his hands.

The Lanayrish custom. Of being touchy-feely.

Link rests her hands in his; he draws her into an embrace.

"I forgive you!" she says again, just in case. "And if you want I'll make you some food!"

Muzu shakes his head.

"You are the most peculiar Champion I have ever met. Nevertheless, perhaps now this is the time for peculiar Champions. For only a peculiar Champion could have struck down Vah Ruta with a cooking pot."

Link laughs and rubs the back of her head. Muzu thanks her again. They part ways. When Link returns to Sidon, he has with him an interpreter whispering into his ear—presumably the contents of her and Muzu's conversation—who waves to Link and departs upon her passage.

Sidon lets her know immediately that she does not need to forgive Muzu. "Father has removed Muzu from his post," he informs her. "He will no longer advise Father, or any of us, for his terrible actions!"

She shrugs. "I already forgave him. I don't know if he's a good advisor or not, but I'm just not angry, I guess."

He grips her shoulders. "You can be if you feel the need to! You do not need to turn the other cheek!"
"I know. But I'm not. I dunno." Rolling her shoulders, Link steps forward to pet Ilia's mane.

The conversation turns.

Sidon asks of what she plans to do now. Enthusiastically he starts to talk of finding proper permanent chambers for her in the palace; she stops him with a touch to the wrist.

She has to leave.

To Ordon, and then to Medli, and then to fulfill her promise to Dorian, and then perhaps to Kakariko to see Impa again and see what she can glean about this Calamitous One, and then to Hateno to finally give Purah those guardian cores, and then somewhere in there to bring Sarie back home, wherever their home may lie, and then to Romani Ranch. The summer has but two weeks until the onset of autumn, and she has a ways to go before the winter's snows slow her travels.

Yet, no matter how far she goes, she will always come back to visit Sidon. In fact, Link promises to visit, and his drooping facial fins perk back up.

"Before you are to set out, then," he announces, "Father wishes to see you!"

Link enters the throne pool. This time, Muzu neither ignores her nor glares at her, but rather dips his head in respect. She bows to him.

Sidon's father the King Zora clears the throne pool as before. Muzu leaves with the others: no longer an advisor.

"O Champion of Hylia, O Hero of Hyrule, O Her Majesty's Knight, O Courageous Link...on behalf of my people, of the Goddess Zola, of all of Lanayru, and of my late daughter...thank you, my lass." The King Zora smiles broadly at her; Link rubs the back of her head. "Thank you for returning to me the memories of my daughter, and for granting my lad his pilot's slate, hoo hoo. I am pleased to see you well, hoo hoo, and I am pleased to announce that my lad has become Vah Ruta's own pilot." Sidon beams. A genuine beam. "Thank you."

They speak for a time. The King Zora inquires if anything ails her, and she responds by thanking him for the healers. When he talks of the Divine Beast Vah Ruta, Link confirms that the other Divine Beasts similarly awoke all over Hyrule over a year ago, but have since been calmed once more. The timing gives her pause: all of the Divine Beasts, awakening apparently at the same time. Yet the King Zora goes on, and Link refocuses onto his words. "Then we will send a delegation to Darunia immediately. Thank you, my lass."

The King Zora proffers her anything that she might wish. Riches beyond her wildest dreams, or Mipha's light-scale trident, or anything that Link might desire.

She wishes, simply, to be able to come back whenever she wishes, and for a free pass to use the kitchens.

The King Zora guffaws a belly-rolling laugh. "You needn't even have asked for that, hoo hoo! I see you almost as a daughter of mine, my lass." Link feels like her mouth might fall off for how widely she smiles.

That, by itself, proves more than enough.

More, so much more, than enough.

The King Zora presents to her the cleaned monster parts of the lynel, if she so wishes to use them,
as a small token of his gratitude for her dispatching the monster. Link accepts enough guts, hooves, and horns to brew herself elixir for the coming trek to Ordon.

Some sort of elixir that might produce the effects of endura carrot on Ilia. Something or other enduring.

She considers making something of the lynel's mane or hide, but she takes one whiff of the lynel's matted fur, nearly passes out from the stench, and—patting it with her hands—puts it back.

Link then makes her own request: she asks the King Zora of whether the Lanayrish might carry an atlas of the land once known as Hyrule. Sidon takes her to the royal library, the books carved in raised letters upon waterproof luminous stones. Sidon skims his webbed fingers over their spines to pick out the atlas, reading the titles from the contours of the characters. "I have heard that non-Lanayrish tend to write upon paper! I cannot imagine! Would not the paper become most wet by the slightest water!?" Link tries to explain that most other places in the land do not regularly submerge in fluid. The librarian, peeking her head around to tell Sidon to lower his voice, takes the opportunity to boast to Link about the superior method of writing up luminous tablets, which allows sighted readers to continue their craft even in the dark, whilst non-Lanayrish papers and scrolls require lights and open flames. Link nods her head, though she understands little. The librarian withdraws.

In a whisper that somehow rings just as loudly as his normal speaking voice, Sidon announces that he has chanced upon a map.

She cannot find Ordon on the atlas. Or Zubora, or Gabora, or Ache's Veil, or Rovah, or Ilari. And if Ilari does not exist on the map, then the atlas must be old indeed.

Another atlas divulges no secrets in Necluda, but, just when Link has begun to give in, she notes the name Ordona Province near the southwestern portion of Akkala.

Near the southwestern portion of Akkala?

Link stares at the atlas. She retrieves her own map—careful not to let the paper touch the water, while Sidon marvels at the texture and inquires how she can read with the entire map flat as, well, paper—and sketches in Akkala. She discovers that she cannot fit the whole portion of Akkala into the parchment that she has remaining, but she can fit Ordon. And somewhere in the heart of Ordona she will find Ordon, and somewhere in the heart of Ordon she will find the house.

Not in Necluda, but in Akkala.

She has learned Necludan, as she has learned Central Hyrulean, as she has learned Lanayrish. But she has spoken Akkalan since her childhood days.

Akkala.

Akkala with its autumn-warmth trees.

Link finds the name Ordon. She traces the characters with her fingers. Along the Kanalet River, far west of the Torin Wetland, northeast of Cephla Lake, southwest of Ulri Mountain, north of the Akkalan Span.

Ordon.

Sidon exclaims—the librarian shushes him—that he has uncovered the most recent atlas, furnished not seventy years ago, but already Link has sketched in a crude heart along the Kanalet River.
She furls up the parchment.

Link thanks Sidon a million times. Before she leaves Ruto, she stocks up on ingredients. A mark of ink upon her wrist momentarily leaves her scratching her cheek until she snaps her fingers and recalls the exact food she cooked on that day: crab omelet with rice. Link worries for a moment that she has seen neither hair nor hide of goats anywhere near Ruto. And yet the enterprising courage of travellers and merchants assuages her fears.

In the two weeks that she has lain in bed recovering from her second dose of maliced fever, merchants and travellers alike have come pouring in to Ruto with wares that the city has not seen in over a year. Link stocks up: goat butter, rock salt, cane sugar, spices, more rice, wheat from Tabantha, a bottle of fresh milk that she drinks down with a pwah and which leaves a fuzzy-white moustache on her upper lip, and ingredients for her elixir.

She consults the merchants. Some of them cannot read sign in any tongue, but she has Sidon at her side. Link walks away, arms laden with endura carrot and endura shroom, alongside an entire tank of frogs that do not stop hopping for even a second. Sidon offers to pay; instead, Link ponies up the last of her rupees and then sets about selling some of the lynel parts. But she does turn to sign into his palms: "If you want to give them a tip, you can!"

Sidon practically pours out entire purses of rupees onto the merchants who have just sold Link a tank of frogs. He welcomes them to "our beloved Ruto, the crown jewel of our Goddess," and they bend themselves over thanking him.

He tells them to stand.

Link returns to the stable. While she prepares the elixir in her cooking pot, Ilia browses through her hair. She unties her ponytail. Ilia grabs hold of her hair to chew it between her teeth. Her companion tugs on the back of her head, slightly painfully, yet Link merely reaches up to stroke Ilia's warm cheek.

And then: the elixir.

She sets aside enough of the endura carrot to feed Ilia on the road. They will go long. Link does not intend to stop until she can catch greengill and Ordon catfish once again to make herself a paella. Just for herself and the girl who smelled of horses.

Who, maybe, still smells of horses.

Link boils the lynel hooves first, since drawing out the essence of the hardened hoof will take the longest. When she tries to remove the softer meat inside of the hoof, she succeeds only in chipping her knife. Boiling hooves it is, then.

While she waits for the hooves to boil out before adding the less hard lynel guts—where less hard still means so tough that she cannot rip them apart without a fire-light knife that she does not possess—she shares with Sidon folktales of one another's childhoods. Link tells him of Kass's Ballad of the Sealing War, of the Four Heroes as One, of the songs that Marin taught her, that Maryll taught her, that Malon and Vish taught her, that Cremia and Romani will teach her yet. She tells him of Hestu's stars, and she tells him of the mirrors of the girl with the golden hair, and she tells him of the stories from the books that she and the girl who smelled of horses read together curled up like a pair of parentheses upon the bed.

Link dices the endura carrots and mushrooms. Into the pot they go. She applies a salve of lavender and clove oil to the bellies of the tireless frogs. Little by little, the frogs cease to move. She tests
their responses by gently pinching their sensitive webbed feet. When they lie still and silent, she beheads swiftly with a knife and minces them. Into the pot they go.

He tells her, in turn, something part history and part folklore, part myth and part legend. The Goddess Zola that blessed Lanayru with an abundance of rain. How long, long ago, when the world was still young and the Seven Goddesses walked upon the land in the same footsteps as Their mortal children, the Golden Goddesses birthed servants in the form of three great Dragons to watch over Their lands. From the Sacred Realm the Dragons would emerge each morning, and into the Sacred Realm the Dragons would pass each night. The Goddess Nayru wound around Her finger the boundless river that stretched from the mountain peak, and from the snows and the waters the Dragon Naydra, servant of water, emerged. Yet this dried the water upon which the zora depended. The Goddess Zola, seeing the distress caused to Her children the zora people, lay Herself down at the peak of Mount Nayru and gave Herself to become the River Zola, to forever protect Her children of Lanayru. He tells of the Sage of Zola after whom the city Ruto takes her name, a Sage that sacrificed her life for the people of Lanayru. He tells her of the East Reservoir, built years ago in cooperation with the royal family of Hyrule, of how the royal family—descendants of the reincarnation of the Goddess Hylia—had united Hyrule under their banner, of how the royal family had not treated non-hylians as best they could in those early years of the kingdom, but of how one later queen, whose forefathers had nearly driven the gerudo people from Central Hyrule, had sought to make amends for the sins of her ancestors, one of whose projects had entailed the building of the East Reservoir dam. He tells her of the guardian stalker that his father threw over a cliff, and of the giant water octorok that had swallowed Sidon whole for three days and three nights before Sidon managed to pierce its belly through with a silver-scale spear. He tells her of a story of star-crossed lovers separated by a flood of the River Zola, and how the Goddess Herself had sent down a rain of opals to absorb the water, quelling the flood and reuniting them with their beloved, and how ever since, opal earrings have symbolised the union of marriage, for the opals that could bring the spouses together even against the maelstrom of flood.

Opal earrings.

Link smacks herself on the forehead. When next she sees Misan and Glepp, she will have to bake for them a belated wedding cake.

The elixir comes out in lime green. Not quite the same colour as spring green, but close enough that Link beams by association.

She gathers her belongings. She checks Ilia's saddlebags. Link examines all that she has, from her cooking pot to her paraglider to her telescope to her sword to her bow. Sidon inquires if she has any requests, and she does: arrows for her quiver, and perhaps a spear in case she loses her sword.

"But of course! All that and more! Please, Link, follow me, and I'll grant you your wishes!" Sidon grins. He flashes a thumbs-up. Link promises Ilia to return momentarily. She leaves Sarie to take care of her companion; Sarie salutes and promises to watch over Link's master with their very life.

Link follows Sidon. As they wind through Ruto again, she notices that the level of the water of the city has been once more raised so that the top half perches above water and the bottom half below, with the non-zora travellers residing in the top. She recognises the zora that used to frequent her bar. Link says hello. She does not quite remember their names, but she remembers their orders and their favourites.

One day, she will cook for them again.

To mix drinks, and to change lives.
Sidon leads her up and up and up. The night has by now nearly ended. At the eastern edge of the sky flitted between the Lanayrish peaks, Link can just make out the bands of pink and orange beginning to lighten the heavens.

They climb up, and up, and up, and up and up and up and up and she loses track at some point but she thinks that they continue to climb up. If only she took the elixir with her.

Up.

And up.

And just when she wants to tell Sidon that if she climbs another step up, the Goddess Erito surely will take pity on her and fashion wings out of her failing legs, the stairs end; Link finds herself standing on top of a massive statue in the shape of a fish.

Before her: a table. And beyond that: Ruto.

The highest point in the city of Ruto. From here she gazes upon the layers upon layers that make up the city, so many of them abandoned as the remaining zora people of Lanayru have headed further down to protect themselves from monsters and the Divine Beast, the once-polished carvings dull or broken, the remains of lizalfos nests visible along the toppled archways surrounding where she stands in the heart of the ruin of the final bastion of the Lanayrish, where the outer villages have long fallen away and the inner ones washed into the river.

She remembers the kitchens, nine-tenths unused.

Link cannot wait to one day return to the splendor of Ruto, so once more full of life that the kitchens cannot hold the amount of food prepared.

Yet, beyond the lingering scars of the Great Calamity, she can see the city that the people of Lanayru love so dearly, can see the people that live and cry and laugh, can see the Lanayrish feverishly working to once more polish the city and to clear the upper levels of monsters even while she looks on, can see the inverted spire of the Temple of Zola, can see the statues of luminous stones and the decorations carved from the mountains themselves over years upon years of each generation building upon the last, can see the cascades of waterfalls down the mountains that glitter as though born of the night sky, can see the slow sunrise that golds the waters.

The iridescent shift of hues over the lake steals her breath.

Link's hands lower to her sides.

The summer sunrise widens her eyes and quickens her heart for its beauty. But the most beautiful sight yet lies upon the table that stretches so long Aryll might have needed not three but thirty pieces of paper to draw its width.

Food.

Food, steaming hot or icy cold, of every Lanayrish manner she could think of, and so many more besides. Two entire pots of rice, one steamed white and the other fried with shrimp. Mountains upon mountains of rice-balls, some looped in seaweed and some not, some triangular and some circular, with fish or with herb or with crab or with mushroom or with all of the above. Thick, salty stews and dark, scented sauces. Clam chowders and fish broth. Shrimp peeled and waiting between bowls of dips in red and in black, in green and in brown. Crabs, freshly caught, stuffed with herbs, or their legs piled high in stacks still wisping heat. Snails cleaned of their shells and set upon beds of spices and salts. Roe spread over omelets. Shellfish wrapped in rice crepes. Oysters waiting in
buckets of ice. Whole lobsters boiled to red perfection. Every manner of fish: salmon steamed with fleet-lotus seeds and trout grilled with salted tree nuts, porgy ceviche in lemon-lime and tuna rolls on rice, swordfish strung with saffron and nightshade and bass oiled and fried to gold, carp gaping with buttered herbs and herrings speared through with truffle. And those: merely the main dishes. Between them lie a thousand tiny bowls containing bite-sized samples of other foods that flood her mouth with more saliva than all of the Goddess Zola's rains combined could have flooded the river.

And the centrepiece: a massive silver shark, cooked whole, smothered in sauce and stuffed to the brim.

"And did I not promise you, for completing the trial of Zola's Domain set forth by our Goddess Zola," Sidon booms, wrapping Link in a hug before unleashing her upon the table, "a feast?"

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_Enduring Elixir_ (ten hearts, one golden stamina vessel) - endura carrot, endura shroom, lynel hoof, lynel guts, tireless frog

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Link shows a lot of enthusiasm in talking. She has a little bit of an on/off switch and doesn't really know how to _regulate_ her speech yet, so either she's withdrawn, or she's (as you can see here) just talking about whatever she can think of.

Muzu was initially turned off by Link after seeing her from afar, not to mention the fact that Link didn't fit the propaganda version of the hero that Muzu had heard of. Of course, the leaders of each sovereign kingdom within Hyrule were informed about Link's true appearance, but that doesn't make the "reveal" any less shocking for most. Since Link always had a vacant expression on her face when it came to big crowds, people got the impression that she was apathetic or that she was only there for _something_, which was certainly not assisted by that in-game thing where people keep assuming that Link has a look of the face that indicates Link wants compensation for something.

It takes quite a bit to make Link angry, especially when it comes to _herself_. You've seen her motivated by the hurt of others, such as her revenge against the bokoblins who hurt Ilia back in Tabantha, but never have we really seen her angry about something that happened to _her_.

In _Breath of the Wild_, Muzu's opinion is changed by showcasing that the zora wedding armour that Mipha made for Link perfectly fits, which causes Muzu to decide to help and trust Link after all. However, that was very lucky indeed that Link lost or gained absolutely no weight or muscle whatsoever during (1) the presumed months between Mipha making the armour and Calamity Ganon showing up, (2) the one hundred years that Link spent unconscious and possibly wasting away given the fact that everyone in the game says that Link is weaker now than Link was one hundred years ago, and (3) the possible significant period of time between Link awakening, growing stronger, and arriving in Zora's Domain. Additionally, even if Mipha actually loved Link, how does that change Muzu's point about Link taking "Lady Mipha" from the zora? Instead, I
thought that Muzu would have very strong feelings about Link that aren't merely about proving that Hylians Aren't So Bad After All Let Me Be Your Saviour.

If you don't remember, Link left a mark of ink on her wrist to remind her to buy butter, back in the forty-sixth chapter.

Link painlessly killing the frogs is how I personally have done it for research purposes. It's the accepted humane method.

In *Breath of the Wild*, opals are noted to hold the power of water. Thus, opals have been used throughout *Delicious in Wilds* to hold water, as topaz with electricity, or ruby with fire/heat. The story that's given about the opal and flood was inspired by the real-world myth of the cowherd and the weaver girl.

Link has assumed, given her familiarity with Necludan and such, that her hometown would be somewhere in Necluda. She doesn't remember a thing about Akkala. But in fact Ordon is in Akkala! You can thank Emma for that suggestion, as I had initially chosen to place it in Necluda before realising that Akkala would be a better fit, especially as we get to visit it in the autumn.

The gerudo people being chased out of Central Hyrule is a reference to what may have happened after *Ocarina of Time*, as we see no gerudo people (other than Ganondorf) in either *Twilight Princess* or *The Wind Waker*, the two games set in Hyrule that claim direct ties to *Ocarina of Time* (*Majora's Mask* aside). This never made any sense to me. Thus, after certain events (that I cover more in the future), the gerudo people experienced intense and entirely unjustified discrimination to a point of exile. Later generations of Hyrule sought to make reparations to the gerudo people. It's been ten thousand years.

The sunrise over Ruto was inspired by Emma's experience with *Twilight Princess*, where she used to spend her nights in villages and preferred to sit at the top of the waterfall in Zora's Domain to watch the sunrise. It's absolutely gorgeous in-game.

Sidon did in fact promise her a feast for completing the gauntlet, remember? And Link talked quite a bit about wanting to try fishing out a river shark. Here's that shark!

Up next: side-quests around Ruto; Link getting repeatedly sidetracked throughout the summer.

midna's ass. 23 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Link is talking so much more! Seeing her become more verbose as time goes on is really cool to me.

The author put in a scene inspired by one of my favourite gaming experiences, which makes me so giddy.

Emma. 23 October 2017.
Enduring Vegetable Omelet

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef embarks on shrine-hunting in and around Ruto of Lanayru and becomes distracted on the trek to Ordon.

Chapter Notes

Author's notes that wouldn't fit in the end: Now we're in the arc of "you have no idea what's coming", because we're done with the Divine Beasts. What do we have left? The Master Sword, Calamity Ganon, and twenty-eight chapters left. Indeed, we'll spend about fourteen chapters on each arc, just as we have spent roughly fourteen chapters on each of the Divine Beasts (and their arcs) so far.

Thanks a million for reading with me all this way, and thanks a million to my beta reader, Emma, for everything that she has done for me all this time.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With saddlebags full of ingredients and bellies full of hay and fish, the horse and her girl set off for the wilds once more, though this time with the miniscule added weight of a miniscule added passenger. Sarie rides on Link's head, her sidelocks wrapped around their tiny hands. As they begin the climb down to the Bridge of Lanayru, Link embraces—not good-bye, but see you later—the people that she has known, the patrons to her bar and those to whom she has delivered smithy from Rusl. She asks Sidon to show her to those who have aided her: to Lanzu and to Oshen, to Laflat and to Shalot, to Rulata and to Reyden, to Jiave and to Igli, to Frash and to Rafeau, to Kodah and to Cleff, to the zora woman that told her months and months ago that Prince Sidon sought a hylian hero, and to the healers that have saved her to life. She thanks all in person. She cooks for them rice balls of salmon and tuna. She lets them—in Lanayrish fashion—embrace her and run their hands over her.

She lets herself breathe.

The city has come alive. Link watches stonemasons and silversmiths work to put right the Goddess Zola's own city; watches spear-slingers and swordsmen—swordfish?—troop out from Ruto or up to the higher levels; watches musicians with their cellos and horns, their bells and harps, their marimbas and triangles, their portable organs and thunderous drums liven up the streets and direct the daily cycles of prayer of the followers of the Goddess Zola; watches the people no longer waiting in pools while their kitchens rot around them but swimming in the lake to fish freshly from the abundance of the River Zola; watches the inverted spire of the Temple of Zola draining its water to allow in sojourners and travellers to once more pray within; watches the city of Ruto live.

She touches Sidon's wrist at the end of the Bridge of Lanayru. He gives her a final gift: a fishing pole. Link promises to come back to visit. She does not leave him with a letter, and she does not leave him with messages passed on through his loved ones, and she does not leave him at the
highest point of the city with the name of the Calamitous One upon his lips.

Link leaves him with a hug, and she leaves him with a promise, and she leaves herself with a resolution to see Yunobo, and Amali, and Riju once more.

As Link and Ilia begin the long trek back down to Inogo Bridge, she takes regular breaks to help parties of warriors clearing the path of monsters. Lizalfos and moblins, bari and chuchu, sparks and yellow-winged keese. She discovers that the Lanayrish call the the humming monsters with voided faces wizzrobes. Link touches her chin: for the white robes they wear and how they whizz through the air, she suspects.

With the thunderstorm clear and the river no longer roiling so rapidly that the current can wash away even the most adept of zora swimmers—and with the power of the Divine Beast Vah Ruta as a reinforcement—the monsters have little chance.

Not half an hour after she says see you later to Sidon, Link notices the Divine Beast begin to move. From the East Reservoir to the River Zola, where its pressurised spray and columns of ice can root out entire nests of monsters. Even with the population of Ruto much reduced from its size before the Great Calamity, the Divine Beast bolsters the abilities of the Lanayrish both by the physical let's hit 'em with ice and by boosting the warriors' confidence and courage a hundredfold.

Link waves to the Divine Beast. Sidon, standing atop its head with the slate in hand, waves back.

She travels on.

Link breaks fast, here and there, with fishers and with warriors, with travellers tackling the trail to Ruto and with messengers and their luminous stone tablets exiting Ruto to once more begin the process of reaching out to neighbouring people and provinces. Link idles her time by the cooking pot. They tell her stories, and she pays them in kind with food.

For the first time since she understood her task of calming the Divine Beasts, she has no need to rush. Link can relax, and she can take her time, and she can peek into shrines, and she can climb towers. Towers like that of Lanayru whose orange glow she spotted from the sunrise feast, that she marked upon her map, that she promises herself to scale.

On Luto's Crossing, Link suddenly stops. Dismounting her companion, she plucks the slate from its pouch at her right hip and attempts to divine how Riju found the pictographs. Flicking through, she comes upon the pictograph of the crabs she arranged in the kitchens in a vaguely horse-like shape. Sarie kookoos on her shoulder, peeking at the image, while Link leans over to show Ilia. "Here, girl! I made this for you. It's not nearly as pretty as you are. When we go home, I'll ask Cremia to make one of you proper-like. She's good with her hands, you know."

Ilia noses the slate. Link observes her lick the slate's face, which slides to the next pictograph of herself, Sidon, and Sarie.

She takes Ilia's head in hand, gliding her palms along her companion's cheeks, to rest their foreheads together. Closing her eyes, Link nuzzles against Ilia; they stay like that for a long moment.

"Who did I name you after, girl?"

Ilia snorts warmth over her cheek and licks her nose.

Link walks on.
A fisher mentions a shrine behind a waterfall, and she spends an entire day checking every cascade she can find. Just when she has about given up, Sarie tugs so hard on her sidelocks that she topples sideways into the mud. Ilia neighs out what Link can only take as a laugh.

"Looky looky! Sarie spotted it! This one this one this one! This watery-water Link hasn't looked at yet!"

Link looks up to where Sarie points; she squints past a bank of fog wisping over the mountainside. Cupping her hands around her eyes in lieu of binoculars, and then shaking her head at herself and grabbing the red telescope from her left hip, Link gazes for the first time at the cascade veiled in mist.

She leaves Sarie with Ilia. "You take good care," Link admonishes. "Promise?"

Sarie salutes her. "Sarie promises!"

Link raises her eyebrows. "I meant for Ilia to take care of you." She pets Sarie on the head. "But you two should take care of each other."

Climbing up the slick rock of the the mountain, Link falls thrice, nearly breaks her neck once, accidentally sticks her head into a crevice of rock that turns out to contain an entire cloud of yellow-winged keese whose sheer momentum of wind allow her to paraglide up and skip the majority of the climb, and lands with her boots in the pond by the waterfall.

She wades through the water, collecting snails, fleet-lotus heads, and tree nuts as she goes, and promptly smacks her face into the absolutely solid rock wall beyond the falls.

Touching her chin, Link lifts the slate. She magnetises her sword and thrusts it up into the air to probe the side of the waterfall. Mostly she encounters solid rock behind the cascade.

But then her sword goes in.

An opening, almost near the very top.

With a grin to herself and a snap of the fingers, Link freezes columns of ice up the face of the waterfall. Scaling slippery pillars of frost proves less easy than it sounds, but she manages to make a stairway to the heavens. At the top, Link finds a long thin hallway carved into the rock, tall enough for even someone Sidon's height to pass through. The hallway widens out into a circular chamber. A pool of bubbling-hot water.

And a shrine.

When Link takes the lift in the shrine back up, she does not leave immediately. Rather, she plops down into the spring to relax her muscles and ease her tensions.

She glides back down to where Ilia and Sarie await her, to find that Sarie has woven for Ilia a crown of nightshade, the blue flowers swaying like sea lily's bells. Sarie proffers Link a similar crown. She kneels down on the grass; Sarie perches the crown upon her head. They tap their korok leaf upon Link's right shoulder and then her left.

"Now Link is Sarie's knight!" they sing. Link beams. "A pretty crown! And Link shouldn't think about eating it!"

Link starts to lift her hands in protest, but then she runs her palm over her chin and hangs her head.
Sarie isn’t wrong.

Along the Bank of Wishes, she meets a zora girl—a child; a single zora shorter than she, a sight that brings a smile to her face—sniffling and clutching a stone tablet to her chest.

Link tries to ask what has gone amiss, and the girl begins to bawl. Stepping backwards, Link whips her cooking pot from her back and sets it on the ground. While the girl wails, Link endeavours to remember how to use the fishing rod. She hooks it, strings the line, and reels her arm back to toss it. Too late she realises that she has hooked the back of her own undershirt.

Once she clambers back up from the river, she finds the girl slightly less weepy and slightly more giggly.

Link casts the line more properly for her second go-around.

A fish, or something, bites. She attempts to reel in the rod. Link pulls, and she pulls, and she jerks her arm up to send a mighty porgy flying into her face. The smack across her face leaves her lips swollen as the porgy’s; the fish flops off into the river.

The zora girl becomes a tad more giggly.

Link casts again. This time she holds the line firm and prepares her right hand to catch the fish. When she snags the whatever-it-is at the end of the line, she holds it triumphantly to the skies, and she can almost hear the music swell behind her.

The music, she discovers, literally swells behind her, for Sarie has waved their tiny arms and sung out a dah-na-na-na-naaaaaaaa!

Then Link notices a distinct lack of flapping against her palm.

She looks back down at her hand. Not a fish, but an empty bottle. Link gazes at the glass, turns it over and over in her hand, shrugs, and sets it into her satchel.

The zora girl: a little even more giggly.

Link casts for the third time. Surely everything comes in threes, and now—on her third trial—the Goddess Zola will grant her the fish she so seeks.

Something bites. She reels in the line. Link catches it out of the air with the spray of the river around her in rainbowed light, the wind fluttering her hair behind her, her fingers curling around the fish of her dreams.

A strange curved bluish crystal with something scarlet embedded within, roughly the size of her palm.

She stares at it.

The crystal stares back at her.

Link shakes it. She thumps it against the flat of her boot. She tries to put it in her mouth, remembers the armoured porgy that chipped her tooth, and slowly draws it back out.

The zora girl bursts into laughter, and Link looks over her shoulder at her.

Link gives her the bluish crystal. The zora girl holds it to her chest in thanks. Link reflects on what to cook. If not fish, then other foodstuffs will also do.
If the fishing pole cannot hook fish, she discovers, then at least it can hook eggs. Her fourth cast of the line leads the hook across the river rather than in; she drags over an entire bird's nest full of tiny eggs the colour of the sky.

Link marvels at the rod Sidon has given her. The zora girl peeks curiously over her shoulder, but Link pays the zora girl little mind.

First: she must cook.

She roasts and salts chickaloo tree nuts, then adds an extra layer of salt to go along with the vial of spring green elixir she sets aside. While she clears her cooking pot and begins to crack eggs for an omelet, Link tosses the nuts up one by one to catch them between her teeth. Mincing endura carrot into long, thin strips and lightly dusting them with sugar to sweeten, Link stirs the carrot into the omelet. She serves the finished omelet in the cooking pot, furnished with roasted nuts, and she presents it to the zora girl.

The zora girl ogles her. Link looks at the zora girl. She shows the zora girl the exact ingredients she used to make the omelet: the endura carrot, the rock salt, the eggs from the nest, the sugar boiled down from cane, the chickaloo tree nuts from the shrine.

The zora girl snaps her head up and down between Link and the pot, the pot and Link.

Her stomach rumbles.

Link waggles her eyebrows as she remembers Urbosa doing.

The zora girl glances between Link and the pot one last time. Then she shoves the entire plate into her mouth all at once. Link whistles. As a child she had prayed to the Goddesses to grant her gills; now she prays to the Goddesses to grant her a mouth wide enough to wolf down dishes in a single bite.

The zora girl does not chew so much as swallows whole. Then she folds up one of her pectoral fins to wipe her mouth.

"I guess I can talk to you...even though Ma says I'm not s'posed to talk to strangers...but if if if you cook so good, you can't really be a stranger." The zora girl reaches out to stroke Link's cheek; she lets the zora girl pat her cheeks. "I'll let you in a secret. Ready?"

Link nods. She leans in. The zora girl lifts her hands in front of her to touch her wrists together and wriggle her fingers as though emulating the fins of a fish.

"My name is...Finley. If if if I've told mine, then can you tell me yours?"

Link arranges her own hands. Like the girl who smelled of horses suggested to her so long ago. "Link."

She cooks another round of omelet, this one for herself. Link drains the vial of spring green elixir. Wiping her mouth, she glances down to find Finley staring at her with widened eyes, like Miyu begging for scraps. Link explains to Finley of the elixir's purpose, and Finley's eyes embiggen all the further.

"Ohh. So the stuff that whatever-you-are drinks for that is different! Mine's all sparkly and silvery, like if if I drank the moon."

"I'm hylian," Link answers, and Finley giggles, "or at least I think I am? That's what people tell
me. It's because I have pointy ears." She tilts her head from side to side. "But...if I had to pick a Goddess to bless me, isn't there a Goddess with the virtue of Food?"

"You're funny," says Finley; Link rubs the back of her head.

She bites into the omelet. The softness of the egg melts in her mouth, coupled to the sweetness of the carrots within. The nuts provide a pleasant crunch. Link licks her lips of the salt.

She remembers bits and snippets of the girl who smelled of horses. She remembers the letter that Link left her. She remembers her hand shaking as she wrote. She remembers the apologies. She remembers the promise that one day, maybe one day, maybe one day, she could come back. She remembers telling the girl who smelled of horses how much she loved her. She remembers begging the girl who smelled of horses not to forget her.

She remembers. The girl who smelled of horses who wanted to see all of Hyrule, and she, Link, who would now travel the paths of Hyrule from Parapa to Akkala, from Faron to Eldin, from Necluda to Hebra, from Lanayru to Tabantha. She remembers how she promised the girl who smelled of horses that one day when Aryll were older and Link had the rupees, she would hook her arm into the arm of the girl who smelled of horses, and she and Aryll and the girl who smelled of horses and Marin would walk the world over together. She remembers the girl who smelled of horses always giving her letters to take to Marin, and she remembers Marin always giving her letters to take to the girl who smelled of horses. She never asked what the letters contained. Marin would giggle with her finger to her lips and say, "It's a secret between us ranch-girls." The girl who smelled of horses would share with her the letters, would read them out loud, would let herself and Link laugh together at Marin's jokes and quips, would grin at a readily reddening Link whenever Marin described particularly embarrassing occurrences, would fold the letters up to place them in a wooden box to keep for herself and Link. Link remembers the oldest letters, read and reread so often that the paper wore down, and the creases became soft. The girl who smelled of horses would over supper write a letter back to Marin with Link watching over her shoulder, her chin against the girl who smelled of horses's collarbone, their cheeks and ears pressed together, her right hand linked with the girl who smelled of horses's left.

She remembers the girl who smelled of horses, who told Link that she would learn an instrument so that she could one day play along with Marin and Link. A travelling band of minstrels, the girl who smelled of horses would say. "The grasswhistle," Link suggested, and the girl who smelled of horses put her hands on her hips.

"Very funny, Link."

She remembers the girl who smelled of horses, who made her smile more than anyone. She remembers the girl who smelled of horses, who apologised to her over and over in the forest into which the runaway Ordon goat had led them. She remembers the girl who smelled of horses nibbling on the mushrooms and herbs that Link had tipped directly into the fire for want of a cooking pot.

She remembers the girl who smelled of horses explaining, her hands shaking, her face smeared with tears, her cheeks reddened to the tips of her ears, how badly she had misunderstood Link. "You were...you were always by yourself, and I didn't think you ever wanted to play with any of us, and I thought you hated all of us, and I thought you thought you were...you were so much better than us." She remembers the girl who smelled of horses sniffling.  "I...I just saw you doing whatever you wanted. You could go wherever you wanted. I thought your parents let you do that. Let you go work at the ranch. That's all I ever wanted, was to work there, with the horses, and when I saw you doing it, I just got so...I just got so..." She remembers the girl who smelled of
horses wiping her face. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm so, so sorry. I should've asked. I shouldn't've just assumed in my...in my anger.

"I didn't...I didn't that your parents...I didn't realise that you were having to...I didn't realise...I'm so sorry." The girl who smelled of horses stood up—Link recoiled—and crumpled herself onto the ground to touch her forehead to the forest floor. "I'm so sorry." She raised her hands above her head to continue to sign while she lay face-down in the leaves. "You don't have to forgive me. I've hurt you so much. I thought you didn't understand, but your parents...even worse than my father. I didn't think that could be...and that we weren't letting you hang out with us...and that you had to work...and that you...and all of that...and that we'd been the ones to push you away...I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I'll never do that again. I promise. I...thank you for telling me. For trusting me. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry." 

She remembers...she remembers her hands, around the wrists of the girl who smelled of horses. She remembers...pulling the girl who smelled of horses from the forest floor. She remembers...the warmth of that embrace, of the first person to whom she'd ever told she was a girl, of the heat in her chest that had tightened and tightened and tightened over the course of her childhood until she had to let the words spill from her fingertips, like a roasted cucco stuffed tightly enough for the skin to split apart.

Link had spent so long with a missing-tooth smile and a missing-string heart that she had forgotten the melody her smile could play when her heart had all its strings. And although the girl who smelled of horses could not give her back that string—that would take years, and a girl with a violet sash, and an elixir as green as spring, and a pond of voltfin trout to knock her out—the girl who smelled of horses held her fingers over the wounds where the string had torn out.

Link starved, and while the girl who smelled of horses could not provide a feast, the few grains of rice that fell from her fingertips kept Link alive.

The girl who smelled of horses.

Link licks her lips, again, of the salt. The omelet has energised her beyond even her usual pep. She glances at the ingredients. Rock salt. Bird's eggs. Endura carrot. Ah, right: endura carrot. Chickaloo tree nut. Finley asks her what's so funny? and Link, wheezing into her hand, takes a moment to explain the humour inherent in chickaloo, reminding her of how Hestu sadly cooed shookooloooh about their missing maracas.

Once Link and Finley finish eating—with Sarie taking a portion for themself while Finley asks what about kind of thing Sarie is and Link questions if she's never before seen a korok—Link asks, again, what's wrong?

Finley explains: For the past few years she has sent down letters from Ruto to correspond to someone who lives beyond the walls, a brave adventurer of sorts who has told her tales of the fantastical world outside of Lanayru, a world that Finley—born after the Great Calamity, Link gathers—has never seen. The letters would arrive by hawk, Finley tells her, and Birds do not fly in thunder.

Link nods sagely. She can understand that much.

The Divine Beast's awakening put an end to the correspondence. In the half-moon—two weeks—since its calming, Finley has sent more letters than she did in the entire previous year. And yet, her mysterious hero has not sent her even one letter back.

"What if what if what if he died! Or what if what if what if he had to go away to fight the big baddy!
What if what if what if...what if what if what if..." Just as Finley's expression begins to screw up in tear-less weeping, Link promises to watch the letter for her on its descent through the river. Clapping her hands together, Finley clings to Link's leg.

And so begins the journey. The River Zola carries the stone letter slowly enough that Ilia's strides can keep up with its passage. A few times, here and there, Link glides into the river to clear an obstruction. She notes other, similar rock tablets tangled in fallen trees or stolen by the monsters that until two weeks ago thrived along the bends.

During the nights, Link fishes the letter out of the river to snuggle it beside her campfire. During the mornings, she lets it flow freely again on the river and continues to track its movement.

The stone tablet comes to a halt in the soft mud of the wetlands of Lanayru, near a house on the waterfront. And there Link finds not some intrepid hero, but a mousy boy of twelve whose red eyes peer at Link from behind a thick pair of spectacles: the son of a fisher and a falconer who welcome Link in with a promise of rice and salt as thanks for delivering the letter.

The mousy boy begs Link not to reveal the truth. She tilts her head; he elaborates: an avid reader but sickly besides, the boy has spent years weaving together stories from book peddlers, for a girl who had never left Ruto and who believed them all. He promised her that if ever the Calamitous One returned, he—the brave hero of legend—could take up arms himself.

The Divine Beast Vah Ruta's awakening and the sudden influx of monsters killed his dream.

For the past two weeks, he has seen Finley's letters wash up again and again, and he has ignored them again and again. For what can he say, when, instead of taking up a sword and board against the Divine Beast, he merely hid under his blankets while the thunder blared around him?

"She must hate me," the boy mutters, seated in front of the hearth, holding the stone tablet that reflects a luminous blue in the lenses of his spectacles. "I know I hate me."

Link rubs the back of her head.

"I don't know much about you or Finley," she signs, grateful that she learned Finley's name off of her webbed fingers, "but it seemed to me that she cares more about whether you are alive than about the hero in the letters."

The boy sniffles. "But..."

Link crouches down beside him. "You know, I've spent an awfully long time trying to get away from who I was. And since I started being honest with myself, I've been a lot happier, and so've the people around me."

He wipes his nose, and he studies the letter, and Link inquires if she can help with making dinner.

The following morning the boy asks his fathers if he could go up to Ruto with Link. Link, choking on her breakfast of spiced cucco skewer, smacks her chest. Rather than allowing the bone to come hurtling out of her throat and potentially spearing the boy in the forehead—as she did with the crab to Igli—Link covers her mouth.

She's learning.

Though Link intended to move north towards Akkala, she is nothing if not helpful.

With his fathers' permission, Link escorts the boy—Sasan, his name—back to the Bank of Wishes.
She walks beside Ilia while Sasan and Sarie ride her companion.

Link judges by the stone tablets she finds in the current that Finley has not yet given up.

Finley leaps onto Sasan so enthusiastically that they topple together into the river. Link dives in to fish them out, yet by the time Link surfaces, Finley has already dragged her friend back onto the shore. He recoils back into himself, as if expecting an assault. She touches her hands on his shoulder.

She asks, her fingers trembling, if he and his family are well.

"You aren't...mad at me...?"

"Mad at you?" Finley's facial fins splay out in her shock. "For what!?"

He twiddles his thumbs. "For...for lying..."

She bats his shoulder. "If if if you didn't want me to figure that half of what you said was just you saying stuff, you shouldn't've told me bedtime stories!" She puffs out her cheeks. "I wanna talk to you. I don't give one single trout tail if if if you're a big buff hero or not. I like how you talk. That's what letters are for!" Finley giggles. Then she pouts. "If if if you still wanna talk to me...I still wanna be your friend."

"...'course I wanna be your friend, Finley." Sasan holds out his hand, pinky finger crooked. "I promise."

It takes them a full moment to endeavour how to make a pinky promise with the thick webbing between her fingers, even with Sarie leaping into help coordinate their hands. At last Link coughs and suggests they try a bump of the fists instead.

Finley and Sasan thank Link for the reunion. She shrugs her shoulders and wishes them well. On her trip escorting Sasan back to his home—after Finley has extracted a promise for Sasan to write back—Link studies her hand. The knuckles that have brushed against Riju's.

She fled less from Riju and more from the weight of a responsibility heavier than the Divine Beasts alone. The far-off rumble of thunder.

Yet.

Link closes her fingers into a fist.

Yet she promised to cook Riju fried bananas. She promised. And she will never, ever, ever go back on a promise to make someone food, not so long as she lives. Just as she will return to Ruto and make Sidon paella, so do will she return to Nabooru and make Riju fried bananas.

As long as Link promises someone that she will cook for them another meal, she has not truly said farewell.

And always, always, she will have to come back.

Only when Link has turned Sasan back to his fathers does she realise with a jolt that she neglected to bring Sarie with her.

She finds Sarie still on the Bank of Wishes, playing in the water, who does not seem to realise that
Link spent the past half-week without them. Instead they merely spring onto her shoulder.

"I'm sorry," Link says.

Sarie tilts their entire body to the side. "Why?"

"For...for leaving you by accident."

"Link left Sarie? When?"

Link looks at Sarie, and Sarie 'looks' back at Link with the leafy-mask that comprises their face, the holes for the eyes and mouth nothing but blackened marks in the leaf. She shrugs.

Link resolves herself to never leave Sarie like that again if she can help it.

And then Link starts, for the third time, the trek down to Inogo Bridge.

This time Link rides Ilia faster to make up for lost time. But not so hard that she would injure her companion.

When Ilia tires of carrying Link, she slides from the saddle and takes on part of the load of the saddlebags herself. Endura carrot for Ilia and lime green elixir for herself, which has to it a certain wholeness of taste, almost like honey, but cooler and more refreshing, like biting into a hydromelon on a hot summer day.

She leaves Ilia—with a blanket over her head, and with Sarie for protection—at the Lanayrish end of Inogo Bridge. Unfurling her map and peering through her sister's trusty gift, Link scopes out the tower that has pierced the heavens. The elixir gives her the strength to climb without stopping. Pushing against the curling patterns through which she fits her fingers, Link leap-frogs up the spire until she sprawls out at the top.

She breathes.

Link sets the slate down in the depression on the face of the pedestal, and she gazes out over Lanayru for the final time. Whenever next she sees the cascades of the River Zola, she will see them with the breath of Ordon in her lungs and the girl who smelled of horses's name upon her fingers.

—

Enduring Vegetable Omelet (seven hearts, two-fifths golden stamina vessel) - bird's egg, chickaloo tree nut, endura carrot, goat butter, rock salt

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Wizzrobes, of course, actually named for the word wizard, not for how they whizz through the air.

Here we see Sidon actually piloting the Divine Beast! This is the first time we actually get to see a current descendant piloting the Divine Beast, as Link has been
unconscious every other time/in recovery. Speaking of my emphasis on the current generation rather than the past champions, recently, the Switch received an update to include more *Breath of the Wild* icons, where they included icon options for the past champions...and for Kass, but not for any of the current descendants (Yunobo, Teba, Riju, and Sidon). That's ridiculous. I adore Kass, but how is *Kass*, who doesn't even get voiced lines, more important than the descendants? Why didn't the descendants also get icons? Because they don't have official art and Nintendo is hacks? Ahem, anyways, in *Delicious in Wilds*, I put more emphasis on the now.

In *Breath of the Wild*, hot water restores health. You can also cook raw eggs in it by dropping them into the water for hard-boiled eggs! No, really. Try it out!

The in-game quest with Finley and Sasan was a little ridiculous. While it is one thing for Finley to have a crush on an adult, it is entirely another thing for said adult to meet Finley and agree to be her boyfriend. I was expecting for a humorous ending, where Sasan basically gets catfished and refuses Finley's advances given that she looks like a child (even if she self-describes as a late bloomer). I was also not expecting for Link to say something like "love finds a way" or whatever that dialogue option was. Ah-hem. I decided to do a different spin on it for *Delicious in Wilds*.

The empty bottle that Link fishes out is a reference to the empty bottle fished out on Hena's Fishing Hole in *Twilight Princess*. The strange blue crystal that Link fishes out is a reference to the piece of heart Link can fish out in the fisher's game in *Link's Awakening*.

Sansa is a sheikah boy, hence my reference to his red eyes.

Here we get the full fleshing out of that scene where Link and Ilia (the girl) became friends, so that you really get a sense of why Ilia resented Link so much and how, after talking seriously to Link, Ilia realises her mistake. Ilia had thought that Link was a very different person than she was, partially due to that same issue with facial expressions (and bear in mind that Ilia is also very young, about six years old, at this time). When Ilia is able to actually find out what Link is like—and Ilia herself is a "weirdo" who is also ostracised although not to the same extent, partially given that her father is the mayor—she regrets what she has done. I did not want for Ilia and Link's relationship to be one-note; I find that challenge and conflict breed stronger ties as long as both parties are willing to work hard to make it. Friendships don't spin out of nothingness. It is important for me to show that perfect relationships don't exist, and conversely that negative incidents do not "shatter" what was once perfection. I dislike the romanticisation of relationships in which much media engages. I am not implying here that toxic relationships need to be continued, by any stretch of the imagination, but rather that normal relationships are healthy because people put in work, which cannot be overstated. But *both* people need to put in work. Thanks for reading.

I received a question about this in a review, so I'll throw it into the notes: Sidon was born blind. Regardless, being disabled isn't a massive tragedy (certainly, it can be for people, as everyone's life is their own, but is not necessarily); in many cases, it is just something that people live with, as Sidon does, much like Link does with her mutism.

Regarding the amount of time that it takes Link to go from one place to another, it did take a while to get through the gauntlet during the rain, but it only takes a few days now that the rain has stopped and Link doesn't have to worry about Ilia slipping into the river or fighting monsters every step of the way. It took her a week the first time,
so on the second go around it takes her around half that time.

Up next: a certain accordion; a meal; an unlikely companion.

midna's ass. 23 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Link and Ilia are really cute, and seeing how their relationship began is really nice.

I like how the author takes the Finley quest and makes it, uh, not awful.

Emma. 24 October 2017.
Porgy Meunière

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef has a chance encounter with the travelling minstrel and attempts to convince the minstrel to travel alongside on the road to Ordon.

Chapter Notes

Something I posted in response to a review on the FFN cross-post of this fic that I thought might be relevant: As for whether I'll write anything after Delicious in Wilds, I admit that I'm not sure. I wrote this because I had an idea for it. If something else strikes my fancy, I'll write that as well, though it might not be under this name (I specifically registered this account to upload Delicious in Wilds and adrift). Perhaps more novelisations of Zelda games are in-store for the future! I've enjoyed taking apart a game as I have in Delicious in Wilds and adrift, so that's definitely something to consider. Whatever it is, however, I will write it to completion before I post it.

Still, we'll get there when we get there. We still have a month left of Delicious in Wilds!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

North. North, north, north. To the north she goes. Up the Tierno Trail, along the right side of Trilby Valley. The worst of the summer's heat passed over while Link splashed in the cool waters of Zola's Domain. Now the cooler winds of autumn have begun to whisper over the world, perched on the precipice between summer and fall. As she passes by the split in the trail wedged between Cephla Lake and Upland Zorana, Link once more catches those strains of accordion music that she heard while standing on the back of the Divine Beast Vah Ruta. Though some four weeks—nearly a moon, as her Lanayrish friends would say—have passed since that day, when she scopes a certain blue-feathered rito with a certain accordion standing on top of a cliff above her, she can only grin at the threads of circumstances and chance that have weaved her and her fellow travellers together.

Link waves to Kass, but he—so much higher than her—does not notice her. She leaves Ilia and Sarie to take care of one another along the road while she climbs up the mountain. Despite the sheer verticality of the cliff, Link ekes out purchase along the nooks and crannies in the rock. Neither rain nor waterfall slicks the stone. She squirrels up, alternating between scaling and leaping where she can see a clear spot to place her hands.

She scrambles over the upper face of the cliff. The stone presses into her chest and then her stomach as she drags herself up.

Link rests momentarily on her hands and knees, wheezing until her sides stop pinching inwards onto her ribs and her lungs cease trying to set themselves on fire. She pulls a roasted silent shroom from her satchel to nibble on. Her heartbeat slows. Her muscles loosen from their tension; she listens to her footfalls flatten and soften against the ground.
Raising her chin up, Link angles her head to spot Kass on a cliff yet higher. She examines her satchel for something to make her climb more rapidly. Seizing a fleet-lotus head, she picks the seeds out with a knife and swallows them down.

As the blood in her veins begins to course with a vigorous speed, Link flexes her muscles. She braces one foot against the cliff to strike a pose.

With this, Link can surely leap up the mountain more swiftly than ever before.

Yet her heartbeat does not rise past its usual speed, but merely returns to normal. She claps her palm against her face: just as with elixirs, eating something that would slow and something that would raise her heart rate within about a minute simply set her body back to baseline.

Link exhales.

She squats down to stretch, opens her palms, and regards the face of the cliff. "You will be scaled by me, you hear?" she signs. The stone does not answer. Link folds her arms over her chest. "Giving me the cold shoulder, are you?" She pats the mountain. "I hope I didn't hurt your feelings too much. Let's have fun together in the climb, huh?" She laughs a light little laugh at herself.

Link leaps up to begin squirreling up the second layer of cliff. When she pokes her head up, she finds herself staring up directly at Kass, who peers down at her over the bellows of his accordion. Grinning, Link lets go of the rock to wave hello.

Her boots slip.

She topples backwards.

Link opens the paraglider. Momentum knocks her legs; the paraglider catches the wind. She sighs in relief.

Then something whumps into her back to prick pain around her collarbones and shoulder blades: Kass snatches her out of the air with his talons around her shoulders. She resignedly shuts the paraglider. The flapping of his wings gusts over her sidelocks. Link blinks at the ground falling away below her. Though Kass's talons prevent her from moving her arms freely, she strains to peer through the telescope. Far, far below her, she can make out Ilia and Sarie. She waves an arm at them.

Sarie waves back.

She nearly drops the telescope out of surprise and fumbles over it in the whirlwind of Kass's wings. It flies out of her hands; by instinct, Link snags it from the air in her teeth.

The sudden resonance through her skull makes her eyes water. But her mouth has not failed her yet.

The flats of her boots touch the ground. Kass lets her go to glide down and land next to her. She whirls around to beam up at him. "Kass!" she signs, her hands looping as if drawing a quarter note in the air. "Do you have a song passed down in this region for me?"

Kass's beak parts in a smile. His eyes twinkle. "We meet again, traveller! It's good to see you well —oh, what's this?" He raises his brows; he chuckles heartily. "I see that you've come to know me well." Link smiles sheepishly. "As it just so happens, I do know an ancient verse passed down in this region. Would you like to hear it?"
"Do I want to eat?" Link responds. When Kass does not reply, her face flushes. She stumbles over the gestures. "Y-yes. It was a joke, you know, like, do I want to eat?" Her fingers twitch; Kass tilts his head. "Yes, I want to eat. I mean. Yes, I want to hear the song. I mean. I also want to eat! But I want to hear the song too!"

"Excellent! Then, without further ado, for the traveller with the telescope in her teeth..." Kass slides his fingers over the accordion's manuals while Link, face reddening further to resemble the prickly outside of a voltfruit with the heat of a sizzlefin trout, spits the telescope out into her hands and tucks it into the loop at her left hip.

Clearing his throat, Kass sings the octave up and down. Link allows his voice to wash away the embarrassment of the metallic taste still ringing her mouth.

"O Din, grant me Your Power, truths I seek;

"O Nayru, may Your Wisdom freely ring;

"O Farore, Your Courage lets me speak;

"O Erito, lend me Your Voice to sing!"

The familiarity of his words loosens her muscles more than even the most silentest of silent shrooms. Link seats herself down on the ground, listening to him sing. The grass cushions her. The coolness of the stone curves pleasantly against her legs. The winds over the mountains themselves seem to resonate with Kass's voice; the rocks vibrate to the melody of the song; her entire core thrums with his voice.

Those words...

Since she first arrived in the foothill town of Medigo, she has walked a very, very long time. Now, sitting on the cliff with the breeze caressing her face, she has come once more within a week's ride of Medigo.

And yet she has walked very, very far.

The music slows and shifts into a different beat. Link sways her head in time. Not, she notices, a beat in thirds as the other ancient verses have been, but in halves, like the Ballad of the Sealing War.

His humming transitions smoothly into words. Link claps her hand against her face and leans in to pay attention.

"Into the vortex you must walk,

"with golden orb upon your back,

"to place the weight into each lock,

"and find the treasure that you track:

"For at the heart of spiralled bay,

"the knowledge of the ages waits

"for she who walks the patient way,
"enshrined within the spiral's gates."

If she were Miyu, her ears would twitch and rotate at the mere mention of the phrase *shrine*. Kass chuckles with a hum from his chest. "I can see, traveller, that you share my sentiments on the purpose of this verse." He gestures from his accordion. "I believe that the spiralled bay of the song refers to the Rist Peninsula, past Malin Bay." He spreads his wing outwards. The wind over the Lanayrish uplands rustles his flight feathers, reminding her of the tumble of Tabanch windchimes. Link gazes on to where he points, cannot see anything over the rocks, and springs to her feet. She clammers over Kass's body to perch on his shoulders. He lifts his head towards her; she looks down at him and smiles even more sheepishly than before. "I hope you are enjoying the view, traveller." Link lifts her chin. "Beyond Toto Lake and the Akkalan Falls...beyond the Ukuku Plains and Kaeopora Gaeopora Pass...on the far side of Lake Akkala...you can see where the land falls away into the sea. There lies Malin Bay." Link squints. If she had a rito's sharp gaze, perhaps she could see the spiral Kass mentions; at present, she senses nothing but a sea of autumn-scarlet that abruptly blurs into a sea of blue, and the metallic taste on her tongue.

The metallic taste on her tongue!

Link removes the telescope from her left hip to gaze through its lens. Far, far on the edge of her vision, within the sea the colour of cool safflina, she makes out a thin brownish spiral like a drizzle of honey over a chillshroom.

Not a day's walk, but a half-month's ride if she can count herself lucky.

"But the golden orb," Kass continues, "and the meaning of the locks, are lost to me. Perhaps, if you ventured there, traveller, you might illumine the meaning of the verse at last." He inclines his head. "I hope to see you again. Take care, and may the light illuminate your path."

Once more his feathers glide over the manuals of the accordion. He resumes playing the same song, though without the words, allowing the strains of the accordion to flow over the mountainside.

Link tilts her head at his blue-feathered back. She taps the toes of her boot against the ground. Kass turns back towards her; she rubs the back of her head. "That is...isn't it lonely to travel by yourself sometimes? And hungry, too..." As if on cue, her stomach grumbles. "Do you want to travel with me? I'll probably forget the song by the time I get to the spiral...I don't even remember the other one you taught me, about visiting Mount Satori when the lights thingy touches it and riding something with horns." Link positions her hands behind her head to curl her fingers into the image of antlers. She wriggles her fingers. Kass gazes at her. She wriggles her fingers more violently as though that could better convey her feelings.

He laughs, though not unkindly; Link leans hopefully forward. "It seems to me that you remember the verse well enough, traveller. I'm afraid that we must part ways, for you have a shrine to seek, and I songs to pass on. Now, may the light—"

Link steps closer to him; Kass closes his beak to gaze at her.

"I'll make you something reaaaally good if you come with me to this spiral. Otherwise I'll probably get lost. And I don't know where I'm going. And since I've got the slate that activates shrines, wouldn't it be easier if you came with me and just told me the songs wherever we went? Then we could figure them out together too!" Link whirls her hands in front of her. "And then you could go visit Amali and your children again, right?"

"Traveller, I appreciate your concern." The accordion lets out a mournful wheeze. Kass's voice
sombers. "But many years ago, I made a promise to my mentor, and I do not break my promises."

Link lifts her hands to inquire, but already Kass has invoked the Goddesses, the bellows of the accordion humming with the notes he has yet to sing. The melody comes slowly. The notes sound as though their edges drag on, like a cake left within the oven a moment too long. She has a sense that the song wishes for a swifter beat, yet something keeps the music slowed.

"As before, any mistakes in translation are my own. Without...without further ado..." He stops.
"No. I shall sing these words in my mentor's tongue. And now, without further ado...but perhaps, as my mentor would say, with further adieu..."

Kass's timbre trembles. Her half-formed question dies on her fingertips.

He sings in Faronese.

"The sleeping Hero shall one day awake,
"to burn the bush of Malice and its wake.
"By blue-lit blade, Calamity shall fall:
"the sacred Golden Force shall heed our call.'
"Thus spake my father in his endless faith,
"who threw away his life for such a wraith,
"his love for her so deep and blurred with tears,
"that he would tend a coffin sixty years,
"that he would spare his breath and waste his ink
"upon these Champions and their missing link."

The words Kass invokes soar over her head. Partly from the muffled tone of his voice, and partly from the sheer length of the words in a language that she does not well understand, Link barely hangs onto a thread of comprehension, thin as a strand of saffron meant for paella.

"I wonder if he ever knew the truth
"that she has died a sweet and martyred youth,
"whose face he held forever in his heart,
"for cherished martyrs do not fall apart
"as people do, and as my father did.
"To understand would mean that he had hid
"some sixty years alone, to wait for naught
"except for hair to grey and teeth to rot."

Link shudders. She may not comprehend the fullness of the song, but she understands that line as clearly as she can feel the press of the lynel's fingers through her innards, as clearly as she can
sense the maliced arrow embedded in her shoulder.

"I have no father left but in these songs

"so now I pass to you for what he longs:

"To wrest the Malice from the Beasts Divine,

"this Hero needs the teachings of each shrine,

"their knowledge passed in verses lost to time,

"yet resurrected in our euphic rhyme.

"So take the songs I leave now in your wings,

"and skate your voice upon the Goddess springs,

"as long ago the Hilted Singer sang.

"And though your heavy-burdened heart may pang,

"until the Malice comes at last undone,

"I beg of you to walk these paths begun

"ten thousand years ago with thunder's crack.

"I beg of you to walk; do not look back!

"To see your wife would cling your heart to home,

"and leave these melodies upon the foam

"of vile Malice and its putrid ooze.

"No matter how you hurt, you must refuse!"

Link frowns. Keeping from visiting his own family sounds crueler than anything she could inflict on anyone.

Even if she, in her rush to calm the Divine Beasts, could have inflicted it on herself.

"My father did before me wait in vain:

"The Hero has not woke to cleanse our pain.

"Yet in his final wish he bid me wait,

"to watch the Hero and the sheikah slate."

Link's eyes embiggen, but Kass's have closed. He continues on:

"As I take up the vigil of the felled,

"so you take up the vigil I once held.
"On morrow's rise I leave to take my post,
"to guard the Hero's long-departed ghost.
"To tell you where could leave alert our foes,
"And so for you adieu I do compose.
"If ever wakes the Hero, you shall hear
"my songs again, if you would have me near.
"Until that day, I by myself shall dwell,
"and if I pass before, I wish you well."

"It is...not the most well-written of my mentor's poetry." The words well up in Kass's throat as though choking him with their weight. "But it is the final verse my mentor left me. He, too, had a promise to fulfill. Though as far as I am aware, he..." His voice trails to quiet with the resonance of the final accordion note.

Link remembers, suddenly, the cabin on the Great Plateau, and the letters within, and the leaves of poetry. She casts her gaze downwards. Kass's mentor, and the mentor's father, and so many things she does not understand, and so many people that she has yet to remember. And then she lifts her chin again. The tragedies of the past, while still visible in the scars on the land and the scars on the people, do not forego the happiness of today.

One day she will remember. This she knows. And if she does not, then at least she can make the most of the life granted her.

"I can't say that I understand, not entirely." Not even a little bit. "But I care about you, and if you're hurting, you can talk to me." Link steps forward. Though Kass's accordion has transformed into a shield between himself and the world, she encircles his waist in her arms. She draws him in for an embrace.

Kass begins to draw away. Link rests her forehead on his chest, his feathers warm as flame, his heart quick as lightning, his breath shuddered as ice.

She stays like that, for his sake, for a long time. Until she feels his spine curve, and his muscles loosen, and his heart slow, and his breathing even, and his accordion lower.

Until she feels the sweep of his warm wings over her shoulders to embrace her back.

And then she stays like that a little longer, for her own sake.

When Link pulls away at last, Kass gazes at her with an expression unreadable, but the tears have dried around his eyes.

"Those scars," he murmurs faintly.

She blinks.

Kass's voice warbles. "On your hands...on your neck..."

Link runs a hand over her throat. "The malice?"
"Mm."

"Promise or no promise..." She tilts her head to the side. "...can't you at least happen to walk the same direction as me for a bit? You don't have to break the promise to do that, right?"

"Traveller, I..."

Link fishes for a phrase, searches for sentence, windmills for a word. She faces again an armoured porgy, but an armoured porgy with her friend trapped within. Neither fingers nor cooking knife can find purchase in its scales.

And then she hears Kass's stomach rumble. She grins slyly. Kass coughs. He turns his head away from her. Arching her eyebrows, Link _hmmms_ up at him.

She remembers Amali's words. That Notts and Kotts like carp, that Genli salmon, that Cree trout, and that Kheel and Kass—

"I could make you...porgy. Porgy meunière."

The wind whispers silence.

When Kass speaks again, Link can hear the knotting in his throat. "Porgy meunière...?"

"Porgy meunière," she confirms, arching her eyebrows still further, until the muscles on the back of her head near her neck strain.

"I haven't had porgy meunière since..." Link observes his wing quiver upon the manual of the accordion. The feathers shiver. She closes her eyes for a moment as if letting a pot boil. When she raises her eyelids, she looks upon Kass holding his own rumbling stomach. "...and from where do you know the recipe, traveller?"

"From your own daughter," Link answers; the shine in his eyes matches the grumble of his stomach. She beams. "You really are a great singer! Even your belly knows how to sing!"

"Ah. That, traveller," Kass tells her, the faintest of curves to his beak, "I picked up from you."

Link rubs the back of her head.

They glide down together to where Ilia waits. Sarie has vanished, although Link hears a most familiar humming emanating from one of the saddlebags. She invites Kass to sit beside her on the shore of the lake while she makes another effort to fish with the rod Sidon gave her. He offers to catch the fish himself with his talons, but Link puts a finger to his beak.

"I'd like to figure out how to use this!"

Within the span of ten minutes the fishing rod lies abandoned on the sandy shores and the slate has sprung into her hand. She dives into the water to scoop up the fish stunned by the shockwaves of her explosives. Link returns to the shore, her arms full of bass and trout, of greengill and porgy.

"That's one way to fish," Kass remarks. With his help, she separates the porgy from the pile and returns the other fish to the lake. Link crouches by the shore to poke the fish until they awaken and swim away. Those that do not, she takes with her.

If not for Kass, then for herself.

Link decapitates the mighty porgy with her knife easily enough. Then she grits her teeth. When she
comes face-to-face with her second greatest challenge—following the Eldin specialty of rock roast—she reaches for the fire-light spear to only to recall that the fight against the Malice left it beneath the waves. Link dumps the armoured porgy into a pile. She reaches into her satchel for flint. The flint-pouch, she discovers, has but a single piece left.

Her hand shakes with how firmly she grips the rock. Inhaling, Link sets the flint down against the pile of porgy and prepares the pyre.

Kass inquires what in the world she's trying to accomplish. Link opens her mouth to show him the chipped tooth. He erupts in laughter. Kass demonstrates the gap between two curved plates of armour where wait the soft gills. By holding the porgy just so, and wedging her thumbs in the gap, and pressing against the gills, Link can easily peel the armour from its head and thereafter from its body.

"Very convenient, isn't it?" Kass nudges her. She gazes up at him as though the Golden Goddesses Themselves had descended from the heavens.

Link seizes his wings. "Is there anything I could ever do to repay you? You just...you just saved my life. Forever." She lifts up the skinned porgy in her hands to the skies above, then hugs the porgy against her chest until her tunic stains with its salty blood.

Washing out the scent of fish that clings to the fabric will later take a feat worthy of the Goddesses, but for the moment she needs to physically show the sheer awe that has stolen her breath away and transformed it into the wind beneath Kass's wings.

"You could," he comments with a kind smile, "cook for me."

Link salutes.

She could cook. She will cook the most incredible porgy meunière that Link could ever imagine. With Amali's words visible just behind her eyes, the swoop of the signs and the gyrations of the gestures, Link reaches out her hand to pet the porgy.

"Let's make Kass happy together."

In the trusty cooking pot that she so loves, she starts by preparing the sauce. She brings out a yellowed vial of lemon juice that she bought from the merchants in Ruto. Link melts goat butter with its dizzying scent—she snacks on a steamed rushroom to quell the roiling hunger in her belly and to grant her limbs a whirlwind's speed to prepare the meal itself—and adds in the concentrated lemon. She licks a drop caught on her finger.

So sour on her tongue that her lips wrinkles, yet so delicious. Not in spite of the sourness, but partially due to the sourness. She licks her finger again. Picking up the vial of lemon juice, she starts to toss back her head. Then she reminds herself that if she drains all of the lemon juice now, she will have none left, and then she will once more have to make ceviche without lemon. Exhaling, Link sets the vial back down. Kass chuckles.

She minces cool safflina into the sauce for a refreshing contrast to the tang of the fish. Once the sauce goldens, Link drains a vial of spring green elixir, rinses the now-empty vial, and pours the sauce in to set aside. She cleans the cooking pot.

"Porgy time," says Link. The twinkle in Kass's eyes hastens her beyond the silvery powder of the rushroom, the possibility of his smile pushing her on.

She tosses together flour—ground from Tabanch wheat—with a healthy sprinkling of spices,
including the stand-by of black pepper, and her personal secret ingredient of rock salt. Link turns to show Kass how to press each side of the fish fillet into the mix and how to carefully shake off any extra, but he with his nimble feathers already knows.

Of course he would. The recipe comes from his own daughter.

Someone must have taught it to Genli, after all.

They heat goat butter to melting in a small quantity of oil at the bottom of the cooking pot. When the two mix into a smooth gold, Link adds the prepared porgy one at a time. She has no spatula; rather, she uses the long straight sword that Riju gave her to press the fillets into the oil-butter. Link listens to the sizzle. Once the bottoms have honeyed to the colour of the sunrise, she flips the fish over to fry the other side as well. Kass washes two flattish rocks off in the lake water to serve as plates. The porgy finish their meunièring. Link scoops the porgy onto one of the rocks for Kass, spooning—with her bare hand, for lack of a utensil, which she really should have purchased from somewhere by now—the lemon-butter sauce over the breaded porgy. His irises sparkle; his pupils have dilated; his feathers have risen up around his face like the rays of a radiant sun.

She grins at him.

Kass holds the flat stone in his upturned wings.

His beak parts. No words but a thin murmur of a melody. In the curve of his smile, Link can read his thanks.

She cooks for herself the non-porgy fish killed by the explosive. Greengill, mostly. As soon as the greengill start to sizzle, the scent hits Link hard as an armoured porgy to the face.

The scent of home.

This scent. The scent of greengill in butter. Not dredged in flour, no, but fried in oil, on the shores of Cephla Lake with the province of Ordona close enough for Akkalan fish to thrive in the waters.

The scent of Ordona. The scent of Ordon. The scent of...

Not the scent of the girl who smelled of horses, who carried with her the fragrance of hay, of warm horses' breath, of carrots and of apple, of leather and linen, of oil worked into the bridle and saddle, of the metallic bite of hands having handled horseshoes, of salt licks and of molasses, of the roasted pumpkins she would prepare for the horses she loved more than she loved herself.

The girl who smelled of horses. The girl who smelled of horses. The girl who smelled of horses whose name Link cannot remember.

The girl who smelled of horses.

The girl who smelled of horses with whom Link would travel the world, with Marin and with Aryll at their sides, to see all of Hyrule. For Marin to sing her songs to the world. For Aryll to observe every manner of flight and fowl in all of the glory of the Goddesses' wilds. For the girl who smelled of horses to learn of the horses she so loved from all corners of the world, and to teach as many horses as she could her whistle.

Her whistle. Link lifts her hands to her own mouth to wet her thumbs and forefingers. Ilia's whistle.

And for Link herself, to travel the world, to taste of its splendors, to try every dish, to cook every meal.
Link and the girl who smelled of horses would perch on the porch and swing their legs over the sides. While they took turns reading from books or preparing meals, they would discuss the golden future that lay ahead. Someday their legs would lengthen, and their feet would strengthen, and they would walk together out of Ordon and never look back. If one day they returned, they would bring behind them the wind of their years; the storms that had buffeted them in Ordon would seem weak as a breeze against the unyielding stone.

"When we come back from our trip around the world," the girl who smelled of horses would say while Link chopped garlic to season the hylian shrooms they were roasting, "I'd like to go to Lon Lon. Or maybe open a ranch myself. No." The girl who smelled of horses clapped her hand against her cheek and hummed. "I'd like to open a stable. Just for horses. I love goats too—they mean the world to me—but I'd like to just...horses. You know what I mean, Link?" Link nodded. "Maybe somewhere near Central Hyrule, or in western Faron, or in the plains of southern Necluda. Somewhere where I could ride a horse straight for days over the steppe."

"Like in the books," said Link.

The girl who smelled of horses's smile crinkled her eyes. "Like in the books."

"I'm glad that we're friends." Link's cheeks reddened as she sighed. "And that I get to spend my life with you." The girl who smelled of horses lowered her eyelids.

"Spending my life with you..." She dipped her head. "To have a stable of my own, and with you and Aryll and Marin." The girl who smelled of horses's eyelashes fluttered over her eyes. Link leaned over to rest her forehead against hers. "...it'd be nice to grow old with you." The girl who smelled of horses opened her hands, and Link slid her fingers into the valleys of her knuckles to hold her fast.

"You too, I see."

Link raises her chin to find herself gazing into Kass's eyes, glistening wetly with tears. She starts to cock her head in confusion, and then she feels the dampness on her own cheeks, pooling into droplets at her chin, dribbling down to wet the greengill she has tried so hard to keep dry.

She brings the greengill to her lips. Her hands tremble, but her mouth firms. Her tears add a delicious seasoning of salt to the greengill meunière; her belly seems to extend itself up her throat to try to swallow the fish whole.

"...thank you, traveller." Kass bows his head. "I have yet my promise to keep, and many paths to walk before I sleep—" Link's eyes widen for the verse that she has heard before. A verse that she may have taken from somewhere, or from someone. "—but I...must thank you for this reminder of why I keep these promises and walk these paths. If there is anything I may do in return..."

The words come more easily to her than ever before. "Your smile's enough. I just wanted you to enjoy a good meal. There's nothing like breaking bread with someone over a cooking pot." Link touches her chin. The corners of her mouth curl up. "And you've already given me a song. So this is my payment back to you. A melody for a meal."

His smile softens. "Then thank you for letting me break bread with you." He hums. "Break fish." Link laughs, and Kass removes a kerchief from a breast pocket to dry his eyes. "I hope to pass on to the songs of these lands, then. May we cross paths once again."

"Actually, speaking of paths..." Kass arches his eyebrows. The slight change in his expression almost filches the phrases from her fingertips, and yet she forces them forth nevertheless. "If you don't mind travelling with me for a little ways," Link says, choosing each word with almost as
much care as she would ingredients, "I'd like to visit my own home before we go to the spirally thing. If that's all right with you." She pauses. "It's on the way and everything."

"An opportunity to learn a song as any," Kass responds with a smile. Sarie explodes out of Link's satchel with a yahaha! so loud that Kass squawks and flaps up from the campfire. The gust of his wings blows the cooking pot from the circular flame. Link lunges for the pot as it curves into the river. Her fingers close around the slate. Cryonis, cryonis—a pillar of ice forms in the river just beyond the bank. The pot bounces off of the column of ice. Link pumps her fists into the air before she realises that the pot hurtles directly towards her.

It slams into her stomach, the metal hot enough to graze pain into her skin. She lands with a whumph on her back.

Link holds the cooking pot in front of her. She checks its contents and finds the uneaten fish trapped within. The impact has flung the sauce onto the sides of the pot.

Yet the meal, for all of its presentation, remains intact.

Safe.

When Kass returns to the camp, his feathers so ruffled that he more resembles one of his fluffed daughters than himself, Link has to snort back her laughter. She introduces him to Sarie, who twirls their korok leaf. Smoothing his feathers with his wings, Kass preens his chest with his beak for a few minutes. He clears his throat. "I am pleased to meet any friend of my fellow traveller."

"Sarie's pleased to meet Floof too!"

He smiles, and Link feels her own mouth curve up. "Floof?"

"Floof's floofy!" They pat down the feathers that have fluffed up around Kass's shoulders. "Floofy floof!"

Kass laughs. "I did not know that koroks still existed except in song. May the Goddess Kokir watch over you, and the light illuminate your path."

"Ooh...Sarie hopes that they watch Sarie too! They sound nice!" Sarie whirs the leaf while Kass glances at Link. The sound of the leaf gives way to silence as Sarie floats down to the earth. "...Sarie's never heard of them before. Should Sarie have?"

"Ah..."

Link waves a hand to catch both of their attentions. She points to the pot. "Do either of you want some, or can I put the whole rest in my mouth myself?" She closes one eye. "I don't mean to be fishy, but...I'm hungry!"

Kass's mirth rumbles out in peals of a melody. Sitting around the campfire, the trio finishes off the porgy meunière. Link cleans the cooking pot in the lake. She scrubs the bottom clean of butter and fish with a handful of sand. By the time she returns to the campfire, the sun has set beyond the horizon. The summer's heat of day has given way to autumn's cool of night. Plopping herself down beside Kass, Link leans back to tap out a rhythm against her full stomach. When she yawns, her eyes tear up.

"I suppose," he suggests, with a flourish of the wing to the darkening skies, "we should rest for the night."
Link scarcely has time to nod before her head droops to the side and sleep overtakes her.

When she awakens the following morning, Link feeds Ilia a handful of salt and an endura carrot to prepare for the journey ahead. Her companion licks her cheek.


Over breakfast of leftover greengill grilled in salt, she unfurls her map. Link traces her finger over the province of Ordona. On the other side of the Akkalan Span, near the citadel that spears the skyline and the spire that rises from the peak.

Close.

So close that she can taste the Ordon catfish.

Even if one hundred years and kilometres yet separate her from her home, she could never wash the taste of Ordon catfish from her tongue.

As the party moves over the Akkalan Span, Link glances over the side of the bridge. Dark shapes move below in an area marked the parade grounds. Kass turns his head to where she looks. "Goats?" he inquires.

Within an instant Link has *fwipped* her telescope from her left hip and jammed it against her left eye. The telescope, she's certain, will leave her eye blackened from how firmly she thrust it, but her thoughts revolve entirely around examining the horns of the goats and possibly milking them.

Goat butter.

The telescope reveals a horde of bokoblins in and around the spire. On the upper levels, a group of bokoblins around a fire. Near the middle, two bokoblins grunt at one another, while a third—hiding behind a crate—pelts the first two with acorns. Each time an acorn hits, one bokoblin punches the other, until the two rage into a wrestling match. The acorn- thrower oinks. Link looks towards the spire's base; she uncovers a row of bokoblin sunbathing on top of rusted cannons. In the ruins of the parade grounds, she makes out the forms of guardian stalkers crawling about. Within a grove of trees sleeps a one-eyed giant like the monster she pushed into the Regencia River by the Digdogg Suspension Bridge. And beyond that, in the heart of the parade grounds overgrown with grasses and trees, the once-level ground torn apart by roots: goats.

Goats with horns that meet together to form halos over their heads.

Ordon goats.

*Ordon goats.*

They ride. Over the Akkalan Span. Until Cephla Lake passes out of view. Through the valley between the hills en route to Kanalet Ridge. They ride on the banks of the Kanalet River, teeming with greengill and hylian loach, the river that Ordoners called Totaka's River where it split in half the fork in the road, where it curved under the rightmost path.

They ride, and they ride, and they come at long last over the crest of the hill of the valley that drops away below into the autumnal forests of Akkala where waits her home.

The village on the fork in the road. The village on Kanalet River. The village through which have passed delegations of the King Zora, through which have passed Necludan and Faronese merchants in their great river barges, through which has passed the very princess of the land once known as
Hyrule with her armies and entourage in tow, when a single girl who thinks of cooking far too often came to deliver letters of farewell and to gather her sleeping little sister into her arms.

The village that—even if Link does not yet remember every detail; even if she has not yet tasted every dish she has ever eaten in Ordon; even if she does not yet know of every scent that has ever tickled her nose from the grasses and the goats, from the horses and the herbs, from the forests and the fish, from the people who were neighbours and friends—she calls home. Home, not for the village that stands upon the ground, but for where the people she loves have walked.

Home, for which she still remembers no name.

Yet she does not need to remember the sensation of coming home, in the smoothing of her brow and the settling of her bones, for she has never truly forgotten.

—

Porgy Meunière (nine hearts) - armoured porgy, cool safflina, goat butter, mighty porgy, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: You'll note that both the fifty-sixth and fifty-seventh were written on the thirtieth of July. I was doing my best to catch up!

Thanks a million for continuing to read and support Delicious in Wilds. Thank you to you, the reader, for coming with me on this long journey, and a round of applause for my most wonderful beta reader, Emma, who rose from the grave at fuck o'clock in the morning to proofread the fifty-sixth chapter.

Regarding the timing of summer: Misan and Glepp's journey from Parapa to Lanayru took almost two months, and then Link going to Ruto took an additional week. She spent a few days messing around with Vah Ruta, then was unconscious for nearly two weeks, and then spent another almost two weeks messing around Ruto. Thus, this entire arc has gone from the very end of spring/beginning of summer, to the end of summer/beginning of fall.

The joke that Link was trying to make is the "is water wet?" stating the obvious sort of gag. Since she signs with sign language, she didn't realise that she still had the telescope between her teeth as she joking about Kass's words.

You might recall that I've mentioned Kass looking thinner and more bedraggled every time that Link has seen him.

Kass's invocation is the same one that he has given before, of course. It's traditional to invoke the goddesses.

Akkala is autumn-themed in Breath of the Wild. It's entirely by coincidence (I didn't actually sit down and plot out the plot of Delicious in Wilds, just figured out how long it would take to travel distances and let the fic fill itself in) that Link and Kass are
heading up to Akkala in the fall, but I'm glad that it ended up that way.

Kass has been very refusing of Link's attempts at making him eat throughout the fic, even when he agreed to sing on Romani Ranch. Given that Link's whole thing is bringing people together with food, of course she would do the same for Kass.

In Delicious in Wilds, Kass and Link run into one another on occasion, though they've only done so a handful of times in a year and a half. Many of their meetings happen with Link hearing the accordion from afar and then coming to find Kass. I can't tell you how many times in Breath of the Wild I suddenly caught that sound of that familiar accordion on the wind and my relief whenever I heard it.

In Breath of the Wild, Kass's mentor was the court poet who knew Zelda and Link and who apparently had feelings for Zelda. It seems ridiculous that Kass would have learned from someone who had already been the court poet at the time of the Great Calamity; the timing literally makes no sense. Therefore, I opted to include a middleman. Kass's mentor is the son of the court poet in question, who has a very complicated relationship with his father. I suggest going back and rereading the letters that Link found in the cabin back in the third chapter. With this information, it should be clear which letters/notes were written by the father, and which by the son.

The poem was written from scratch. It's inspired by the song that Kass sings at the end of his quest. However, unlike the Ballad of the Sealing War—which I also wrote myself but which was purposefully written to be as close to the in-game form as possible, save for my addition of rhythm and rhyme—this song was just written from a blank sheet and I didn't look at the in-game version, as the two are just so different that it wouldn't have been beneficial. I also purposefully made it more awkward than the Ballad of the Sealing War, as it's written by a desperate and bitter man. Hopefully the iambic pentameter worked well!

The Hilted Singer, as before, refers to Fi, who sings the songs of the goddesses to Link in Skyward Sword and is viewed as the first minstrel.

Try arching your eyebrows. You'll feel the straining muscle that Link was talking about.

Amali did in fact talk about Kass's preferences, all the way back in the twenty-first chapter if I remember correctly. Naturally that would come back. Genli did teach Link how to make meunière after all.

Kass knows how to cook porgy meunière, for sure. He's not so great with other things, as we'll see in the future.

Up next: autumn; homecoming; memories.

midna's ass. 24 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: The longest journey in the series begins! This next set of chapters is super comfy. Heartbreaking, sometimes, but cozy. It's probably my second-favourite arc in the series (right after Medli).

Kass is a great presence to have around. He lends something really cool to the cast.

Emma. 24 October 2017.
Tough Steamed Fish

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef comes home and prepares a meal to share with the people whom the chef has known.

Chapter Notes

Hi all, just to let you know: I have a difficult programming exam this weekend that will require up to thirty-six consecutive hours of my time. Therefore, expect a hiatus of at least one day during that period, depending on timing. If I expect the hiatus to last longer (which may be the case), I will let you know as we approach the weekend. My expectation is that I will skip posting on Friday and Saturday, then resume on Sunday, but again, we'll see how it goes.

For those of you back-reading, this shouldn't impact you. Also hello from the past!

Now, in regards to the fifty-eighth chapter: previous chapters have touched on parental abuse. Please note that this chapter is much more direct with respect to that abuse and that this chapter features the explicit and intentionally malicious misgendering of a transgender character (previous times in Delicious in Wilds have been due to misunderstandings or other extenuating factors). Please stay safe.

Now, as usual, author's notes that didn't fit in the end: I first started writing this chapter at 19:32 on the thirtieth of July, and finished writing it at 09:17 on the first of August.

As always, thanks a million for all of your support that you've given me in writing Delicious in Wilds. It truly does mean a lot to me. And thank you to Emma, my beta reader, for helping me desperately try to figure out whether the fifty-eighth chapter actually contained the word "wormwood" or not as ctrl+f failed to load a twenty-five-page document correctly.

Oracles of the Golden Goddesses aren't the only way that the Golden Goddesses have been worshipped in the history of Hyrule. The concept of oracles, in fact, emerged from Parapa/Faron centuries upon centuries upon; this is a nod to the fact that the titular Oracle of Seasons is (presumably) gerudo, and Oracle of Ages is hylian. In the world of Delicious in Wilds, the traditional depiction of the Oracles is one each of the three human races (gerudo, sheikah, and hylian). Akkala, on the other end of the world, does not have oracles. Instead, the main (but not only) faith of Akkala in the part of the world where Link is from believed in a light spirit that looked over each individual province, manifesting itself as a spring. In addition, the people would commune to the Golden Goddesses directly through offerings and prayer, rather than through a more organised form of religion, and generally viewed the Golden Goddesses not as people but more as forces of nature. I'm not saying that one system is "bad" or "good" or whatever (no comments on organised vs. decentralised faith), just that different parts of Hyrule worshipped things differently.
The characters talked about in this chapter (i.e. Pergie and Jaggle) come from the supporting cast of *Twilight Princess*, since Ordon is lifted from there. I know, there's a lot of *Twilight Princess* influence, but that's just because I wanted to give Link's memories actual names! There have been plenty of references to other games; these are just concentrated here. *Twilight Princess* is just the game that did the most work in actually giving Link a particular hometown, at least in my opinion. Other games have tried, but none (in my opinion) did it as well as *Twilight Princess*. Of course, that game has plenty of other flaws, including a forced tutorial, but...well, that's a story for another time.

"Links tempered in the same flame fit together stronger than those forged from the same ore" is the goron version of "the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb", i.e. friends over family.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They follow the road. Link and Ilia, Kass and Sarie. They follow on the left-hand bank of the Kanalet River. They follow the path between the forests of autumnal trees: the sky as blue as the Goddess Nayru's water, the leaves as red as as the Goddess Din's fire, the fragrance of ripeness as green as the Goddess Farore's wind.

She can nearly smell the harvest carried on that wind. Her favourite time of the year. The girl who smelled of horses beloved the spring for its foaling of horses and kidding of goats and for its saddling of late yearlings ready for the ride. Link beloves the autumn for its gathering of the wilds and for its gathering-together of people.

She can almost taste the earthy sweetness of Ordon's pumpkin, the mild succulence of its catfish, the savoured tartness of its cheese.

The forest thins. The river broadens. The sunrise casts the world in gold.

Home.

Home.

*Home.*

Every place to which Link has been has changed over the century of her absence, and yet the spirits of the people have remained. Darunia has lost its upper layers and its underground mines. Medli has lost two pillars of stone. Nabooru has lost the outermost of its rings. Ruto has lost all but its heart.

Yet the spirit of the people, who have lived and laughed and loved there, who have harvested the bounty of the wilds, who have shared with one another recipes and meals and entire lives, has remained.

Link will not find the faces that she has left. She will not see the farmers and the ranchhands, the butchers and the rice growers, the smithies and the tailors, the herbalists and the apothecaries, the fishermen and the mushroom-gatherers, the stonemasons and the woodcarvers, the leatherworkers and the candlemakers, the names and the faces that she has known.

She will not find those faces, that lived then.
But she will find the faces that live now. The faces that make up Ordon. The feet that walk its paths and the hands that build its homes, the bellies that eat of its gifts and the hearts that give the gifts back.

Home.

Upon the accordion Kass plays a merry tune in time to the steps of Ilia's hooves. A song of being lost and a song of coming home. A song of a child on a boat upon the water; a song of a harpist and a violinist who had forgotten who they were; a song of the woken wind that brought their memories back to them; a song of the woken wind that sailed their ships to shore; a song of the woken wind that lost them upon the sea and the same woken wind that returned them home.

When Link pulls up her sleeves to milk a passing goat, she catches Kass gazing at her left hand with its lightning-strike scar, the same gold of the Goddesses. He arches his eyebrows. "The songs say that those who have been struck by lightning and lived bear the blessing of the Goddess Farore," he remarks, a pleasant tone to his timbre.

She turns her hand over. She curls her fingers in. Despite the imprint of the malice upon her palm, the golden spiral of the lightning overcomes to form a set of arches upon her palm, almost like...

"A hand of Her courage, as the songs say." Kass smiles at her. Link dips her head. "So, traveller. You have heard the songs of my home, have you not? Why not tell me of yours?"

Sarie bobs up and down on her head. "Sarie wanna know too! Tell, tell, tell! Maybe the stories'll wake the winds and then Sarie'll remember Sarie's memories, too!"

Kass mms. "If you do remember, Sarie, my heart would be gladdened to hear of your home, and of any songs that the winds may bring." He unfurls his feathers; they wave in the breeze. Again Link remembers the windchimes of Medli. Kass's home. Where his wife and children wait for him. "Now, traveller, have you story or song to share?"

Link lifts her hands to the skies. Somewhere in the distance she can see, just beyond the Eldic mountaintops that tower over the Akkalan valleys, a stream of scarlet that vanishes behind the summit of Death Mountain.

Somewhere in the distance Yunobo rides the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. Her ears thrum with the words he has told her. Of the virtue of the Goddess Goro-goro. Of the pride in what he does. Of the pride that tells him not to hide.

She does not follow the path of the Goddess Goro-goro. But she follows the feelings of her friends, and if Yunobo will not hide, then neither will she.

Link speaks.

She speaks, and she speaks, and memories that she did not even know she still had within her spill from her hands and fall from her fingertips, and she does not stop. She tells him of everyone she knew. She tells him of the spring with its foaling of horses and its kidding of goats and its saddling of late yearlings prepared for the ride. She tells him of the autumn with its gathering of the wilds and its gathering-together of people. She tells him of Rusl and of the girl who smelled of horses. She tells him of the warmth of the goats and the horses and of how deeply the girl who smelled of horses cared for them. She tells him with pride of how many people from the far-flung corners of the land once known as Hyrule would commission from Rusl and of the deliveries that she took to patrons everywhere from Eldin to Necluda, from Akkala to Faron, from Lanayru to Central Hyrule.
She tells him of the food. Of huckleberry and ginseng, of artichoke and bean, of pecan and corn, of cranberry and tomato, of cherry and wintergreen, of chive and crabapple, of pumpkin and prickly pear, of greengill and catfish, of bee honey and goat milk. She tells him of soups and of stews, of roasts and of skewers, of steamed rice and grilled fish, of glazed goat and sautéed nuts, of catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd.

She tells him and Sarie of home.

When they arrive at Ordon to see all that has changed in this hundred years, surely Kass will inquire of why the village differs from her stories; Link may have yet to speak the truth of these hundred years of passing. Yet in this very moment, Kass's eyes twinkle and Sarie's tiny hands pat her hair. In this very moment, she wants nothing more than to hold the hand of the girl who smelled of horses and to make her that promised catfish stew.

Pausing suddenly, Link turns to Kass. "I don't have a song for you, but I have the start of one, if you want to write me one."

"Oh?" asks he.

"I came up with it while I was in Ruto." She flexes her hands as though clearing her throat, and then she loops through the gestures in rhythm:

"This texture, this heat,
this savory meat,
this salt and this spice,
this ball of steamed rice."

Link stops to observe his reaction. Kass gazes at her with something akin to bemusement. "It's about rice-balls," she adds hastily. "I don't know if you've had them before but if you haven't I'll make you because they're really good and also I like making food and I like making it especially for my friends and you're one of my friends so I'd especially like to make some for you especially since Amali's told me all about you and I've seen you so many times and you helped me out with Dorian and I don't even know where I'd be without you and—"

he rests his hand on her shoulder. She lowers her arms. "I must admit, traveller, that never have I composed a song of food. But for you I will certainly endeavour to try. The porgy meunière alone deserves an ode in celebration." Kass lifts up his chin. "What think you, Sarie?"

Sarie bounces up and down; they pull hard on Link's sidelocks until she looks up at Sarie's inquisitive leaf-mask-thingy. "Sarie likes the song! It's very pretty. Pretty as the purple swirlies! Even if Sarie still hasn't had loam, the food is good too!"

Link ducks her head from embarrassment as Sarie goes on; Kass lets out a good-natured chuckle that warms her ears to the tips. Ilia whinnies.

They walk on.

The trees thin. She need not unfurl her map to know her way. Link has walked all over the land once known as Hyrule. The soles of her boots have seen the steppes of Parapa and the forests of Faron, the rivers of Lanayru and the grasslands of Necluda, the mountains of Eldin and the snows of Tabantha, and none more so than the crispness of the Akkalan air and the blueness of its skies.
She has seen the sights, and she has lived the lights, and now she's coming home.

Where the Kanalet River pools into Ordona Spring, her breath catches for the sight of the shrine she has passed by countless times. Ordona Spring, where the girl who smelled of horses would lead Epona to wash her of the dust of the road and heal her of her wearies and her worries. Ordona Spring, with its long reeds that the girl who smelled of horses would fashion into grasswhistles. Ordona Spring, where the girl who smelled of horses had taught Link her whistled song.

Ordona Spring, with its shrine that long lay still and silent. Ordona Spring, with its shrine that the villagers had decorated with the markings of the Light Spirit Ordona, said to watch over the people of its province. The girl with the golden hair told Link, beaming all the while with how carefully she had researched the matter, that once the people of the province had revered Ordona as a Goddess in Her own right. "Though, of course, the Goddess of the hylians of Ordona, such as yourself, is mostly likely to be the Goddess Hylia." The girl with the golden hair shook her head in disbelief. "Though I hear they have no Sage for Her or anything. Not even Oracles for the Golden Goddesses, though they worshipped the Golden Goddesses as the only ones of the world! Honestly, I can't imagine that." The girl with the golden hair paused and raised her hand to her mouth. "N-not that there's anything wrong with that, Link! I d-don't think that Ordona is backwards or anything! Just...just different from what I'm used to, is all."

Link tilted her head to the side. "Do you want to help me crimp this tart? You're better at it than me."

"Oh!" The girl with the golden hair set down the book to kneel herself on the floor beside the cooking pot, where Link busied herself making a wildberry tart. "I'm s-sorry for insulting you."

Link blinked. "Insulting me?"

"With the...talk of not being to imagine not worshipping the Goddess Hylia. Th-the Seven in general."

She shrugged. "I grew up on stories of the Golden Goddesses. I think I get the Seven stuff too. But I've been around a bunch and everyone's got their own thoughts." She watched the girl with the golden hair carefully crimp the edges of the tart, her hands steady, her tongue poking out of her mouth in concentration. Link poked her own tongue out of her mouth. The girl with the golden hair glanced up at Link and blushed.

"I...I saw you doing that," she explained, "and I thought that maybe that would help me focus, too."

Link felt the corners of her mouth curve upwards. "Thank you for all the things you tell me about. It's funny. I grew up in Ordon but I feel like I don't know that much about it."

"W-well, I'll be sure to research all about it! To tell you as much as I can!" the girl with the golden hair promised her, the excitement in her voice making Link bob her head along though she barely understood the sheer length of the words that the girl with the golden hair sometimes used. "Th...thank you, Link."

They worked on the wildberry tart in quiet for a few moments more. The girl with the golden hair finished the crimping and sat back.

"Do you ever...plan to go back there? To Ordon?" the girl with the golden hair asked her.

The light of the fire beneath the cooking pot reflected in the gr—no, the blue of her eyes. Instead Link turned away from her, returned to the wildberry tart, sank the bridge between them into the
depths of silence. Though, when she began to fill the tart shell with the wildberry filling, Link poked her tongue out of the corner of her mouth in concentration, and she caught the girl with the golden hair smiling at her.

Returning to Ordon.

Link grabs Kass's wing and tugs him towards the shrine as long ago she tugged Amali. She guides Ilia into the warm waters of the spring and strokes her companion's mane. "You rest here a little, girl. Epona loved it, and I'm sure you'll love it too." Link searches the spring for the grasswhistle reed. When she spots the reeds growing still around the edge of the spring, she plucks a long blade of grass and cradles the stalk against her cheek. Link folds the grass into a whistle. Upon it she plays Epona's song and the whistle that the girl who smelled of horses had taught her.

Ilia trots towards her. She noses Link's cheek and licks up her face until her bangs stick upwards from saliva. Link laughs. She embraces her companion. "I knew you'd like it here."

She invites Kass and Sarie to come with her. Down into the shrine of Ordona Spring. Link runs her hands over the markings of the Light Spirit Ordona, in the form of a goat with its horns connected into a halo above its head. The golden swirls painted over the shrine. Though the paint has faded, she can still trace the whorls so carefully inked upon the surface of the shrine. The swirls and the whorls of gold.

Link glances down at her hands. She pushes up her sleeves to expose her wrists. The violet scars inked into her body and the golden swirls painted upon the shrine.

The patterns do not exactly match. She can see where the Ordoners have approximated the golden spirals, long before the world knew of slate or Divine Beast. Yet, the resemblance...

"Traveller?"

Kass gazes at her with an expression of such concern and worry that he resembles a cucco smelling roast drumstick. Link pamps her palms against her cheeks to clear her head. She demonstrates the lifting of the slate and its setting into the shrine, then urges Kass into the curtain of blue light.

They descend down into the earth. Link shows off her skills with the slate, grinning all the while as Sarie claps their tiny hands together and Kass blinks—his lower eyelid sliding up—in amazement. Indeed Link shows off her skills all the way until she spends a second too long striking a pose at Kass and Sarie to notice a statised ball loosed from its chains. It slams into her with the fury of a hundred kilograms of Eldic spices, and she smacks her face against the floor.

At least the curtain of light that Link touches at the goalpoint of the shrine heals her broken nose.

Sarie leaps up and down and twirls around while the voice in a language she does not know begins to flow, as usual, accompanied by its matching ensemble of images.

"You can understand this tongue, traveller?" Kass asks. Link looks towards him to notices him studying the images rather intensely; she cocks her head.

"No...I haven't been paying any attention. I think that's supposed to teach people stuff, like about the shrine? But I don't really get it." She scratches her cheek. "Either I already figured it out or the concepts don't make any sense and I can't make head or tail of the paintings."

"Is that so..." Kass murmurs under his breath, more of a statement than a question. He observes the images as they begin to repeat from the beginning, his eyes narrowed in his focus.
Sarie slaps their legs against Link's head. "Shakalah," they say, and nothing more. Link shrugs. She motions for Kass to follow her into the lift back up, and he—after another moment's glance towards the images—defers to her.

They take the lift back up. Link shifts her weight from side to side. She bounces herself up and down. Sarie uunghs repeatedly on her head as the bouncing bumps the korok as well.

As the blue curtain of light parts, the scent of Ordona Spring curls around her. She signs the word to herself, touching her hand to her cheek, to her eye, to the centre of her chest, a path she has shaped over and over in her life.

Home.

Home.

Home, just beyond this forest path, just beyond that bend in the woods, just beyond where Totaka's River flows, and she breaks into a run, and her heart pounds and her lungs burn and she's alive alive alive and she's coming home home home—

Her eyes widen.

Her heart falls away beneath her.

Her body sinks down into the grass.

"Traveller? Trave—oh."

The waterwheel, rusted away, hued in the same red and orange as the autumnal leaves. The remains of the houses, some walls yet held up by ivy and bramble, most little more than rubble, the wood long since rotted away. The fishing dock, broken and bare, its only trace in her memories. The fields of pumpkin and squash patches overgrown in weeds. The paths through the village overtaken by the forest. The wild goats grazing in the grassy meadows that thrive over where once stood the village of Ordon.

Here: Pergie and Jaggle's home beside the broken water wheel unable to turn in the current of the river. There: where she taught Colin how to fish, the bend in the river nearly the same, the dock vanished into the abyss. Here: the market where the villagers of Ordon and the farmers and ranchers from around the village gathered to trade crops and herbs and animals and meat and fish and clothing and candles and tools and implements and doohickeys and everything else beneath the Goddesses' blue skies. There: the house at the heart of the village that Link has climbed and climbed again to rap on the window of the girl who smelled of horses, now nothing but a single curved wall and a rusted well filled up with mud. Here: the path to the ranch over the hill.

And far, far there: the house.

That house.

No longer even a house, but a few planks not yet rotted in the boughs of the tree and the metal pegs that once held up a ladder longer since fallen to dust.
"Traveller..."

She can hear, as if in the distance, Kass's footfalls to her right. She can hear, as if in the distance, Ilia neighing concernedly in her left ear. She can hear, as if in the distance, Sarie kookooing to land on her head.

She rises to her feet. She closes her eyes. She signs in front of herself.

"I'm going to make a meal," she says, and she does not know to whom she speaks. "It might take a while. I hope you can be more patient than you've already been, and I understand if you can't."

"Take all of the time you need, traveller," Kass responds, his voice warm with affection yet heavy with concern. Link feels a weight upon her shoulder, a trickle of feathers along her jaw. "If there is anything that I may do for you, traveller, you need only ask. May the light illuminate your path."

Link lowers her eyelids. When she opens them again, the village of Ordon lies still and silent as it did before.

She sets down the slate. She sets down the wooden box of elixirs. She sets down the metal box of ingredients bought in Yunobo's city. She sets down the curved metal bow given to her by Amali. She sets down the long straight sword given to her by Riju. She sets down the silver spear given to her by Sidon. She sets down her satchel. She leaves the red telescope looped into her belt, and she leaves the cooking pot, and she leaves herself.

Link removes the empty bottle that she caught along the Bank of Wishes. Kneeling Totaka's River, she washes it clean beside the grazing goats. Goats. She lifted her head towards them.

Her first effort at milking one rewards her with a black eye, and her second with a hoof-shaped welt upon her cheek. A miracle that the goats do not snap her neck.

Her third brings her to a surprisingly gentle goat that continues to graze. Link crouches beside the nanny-goat, cooing all the while and petting the goat's head and back, and washes dust and dirt from the goat's udder. Then, curling her fingers around a teat, she pumps, gently squeezing in from the top and undulating towards the bottom to guide the milk through. Warm and earthy, a goldened white, the milk pours down into the bottle. Link massages the base of the udder with her knuckles as she goes. She glances at the nanny-goat to discern any her discomfort, but the goat grazes on.

When she has filled the bottle with enough for the meal—slightly over a third full—Link gives the goat's udder another wash of river water. She stands. Stroking the goat along her woolly back, she feeds the goat a sweet endura carrot in thanks.

Link removes the belt from her trousers and ties it around the bottle—screwing on the lid—as a makeshift rope. Then she gathers one of the metal doohickeys from the remains of a fence to drive into the ground by the river. Looping the belt around the post and knotting it firm, she sets the goat's milk to cool in the river water.

She gazes up at the sky and estimates a half-day. Link has not the time to make cheese, but she does have the time to churn butter fresh.

Kass and Sarie, Link finds when she returns, have set up a camp beneath the towering oak. The metal in the ground, once part of the smithy, has given rise to a growth of ironshrooms more frequent in the Eldic mountains. While she cuts the ironshroom from the ground and sets river water to boil in her cooking pot, Link asks them what they would like to eat, and Kass inquires what she could make.
She settles on carrot cake. Amali's recipe. For the glimmer in Kass's eyes.

For Sarie, she apologises, but Sarie take a sample of the carrot cake, so sweet and sugary that they launch into an impromptu dance that ends when they smack against Kass's leg and flop to the ground with an oof. For Ilia, Link sorts through the wild crops that have grown in the absence of the village. She steams squash and pumpkin to a softened goo and adds rock salt, then rolls the gourds towards Ilia, whose tail swishes and whose ears flick as she eats.

They bed for the night in nests of grass. Link cannot sleep. She rises with the moon to pace around the periphery of the village. Something rustles in the bushes. Her head snaps up, but then silence falls once more; she hears nothing but the calls of owls and songs of crickets.

When the sun gilds the valley, Link fishes the bottle of milk from the river and skims off the cream. She tightens the lid again, then sets the bottle at the campfire. Sarie tries to pop it open, but Link shakes her head.

Another half-day.

While the milk ripens, they eat a breakfast of leftover carrot cake and roasted acorns. Then Link walks off towards the river with empty elixir vials in hand.

She begins by milking goats. She gathers enough for the base of the meal and to soak the meat. Once the goats have given her the milk and a sprained left wrist, she leaves them for the waters.

Sidon's fishing pole.

Link roots in the grass for worms with which bait the hook. With fingers dampened and browned by soil, she seats herself beside the river to cast her line. She catches greengill in abundance and tosses them back into the waters. Only when the sun has climbed to its zenith does the fish on the line begin to fight. Link reaps the catfish that leaves a blow across her face, matching her blackened eye from the goat.

She cuts off the catfish's head and tail, then slits the skin behind the gills to begin the process of removing the fins and guts. Her knife traces the curve of its spine from its tail to the base of its head. Grunting and bracing herself, Link slowly skins the catfish, leaving just the tender flesh behind. She slits the fish in half, then squeezes each fillet into an elixir of milk to soak. Tying the belt around the vials again, she leaves them to cool in the water to delay spoilage.

Link picks out a pumpkin.

She raps her knuckles against the gourds as she had once rapped her knuckles against the window of the girl who smelled of horses. Link spots a pumpkin ripe and firm. Digging her nails into the rind, she feels the resistance against her fingers. She slices off the stem about a hand's width from the gourd and gathers it gently in her arms. Link has not the time to let the pumpkin cure properly, and so she will have to make do with what she has.

But then again, she always managed to make do.

A peculiar Champion, for these peculiar times.

By the time she has finished her preparations, the skies have started to darken, and the milk has ripened. Link seats herself in front of the campfire, taking the bottle of milk in hand, and starts to shake it back and forth to concuss the milk against the glass sides. The cream begins to heavy. Sarie dances to the rhythm of the churn as Link shifts the bottle from one hand to the other to allow herself to rest. She agitates the bottle over and over. At the bottom of the bottle form small golden
granules of butter; then, the mass parts from the buttermilk.

Link pours off the buttermilk and offers it to Kass and to Sarie. Kass does not find the taste agreeable, though he thanks her for the chance to try. Sarie sticks their hand into the vial, shudders from their legs to their hands, and shoves their limbs into the soil to cleanse their palette.

She rolls her shoulders. Tipping back her head, she drains the vial of buttermilk and wipes her mouth on the back of her hand.

With that, Link begins to cook.

She carves the pumpkin to remove the stem and top, then reaches inside with her—washed—bare hands to pulp the insides and remove the seeds into a pile to dry and to roast. The process strains her sprained wrist further than the churning of the butter. The bone of her wrist begins to hurt, begins to ping with pain at the heart of her palm between the middle two fingers of her hand, as though the bone had become entangled with the vein she can see rising from the back of her hand.

She draws up the vials of milk and soaked catfish from the river.

The ironshrooms that have boiled in the cooking pot since yesterday night have by now softened. Peeling away the hardened caps, Link digs the succulent flesh of the gills out with her knife. She minces the ironshrooms and adds them into the pumpkin. Pouring out the water in the cooking pot, she scrubs the inside clean to wash away the metallic tang, then fills the pot back up. Her muscles strain to heft the fullness of the pot from the river to the campsite.

Kass lands beside her to suggest he help carry the pot. Link shakes her head. He follows her as she forces herself on, step by weary step, until her spine threatens to snap in half.

She sets the cooking pot down upon the flame.

While she waits for the water to come to a boil, Link uncorks the vials and splashes fresh milk into the pumpkin. She fishes out the catfish fillets, the milk soak having cleansed them of their muddier flavours, and butters them over. Link drops them into the pumpkin. Into a mesh of fabric, she folds the catfish head, tail, and bones and ties it off: to draw out the flavours of catfish. She dips the mesh into the gourd, leaving just enough fabric draped outside.

With ironshroom, milk, butter, and catfish mixed into the pumpkin goop, she fits the pumpkin over the rim of the cooking pot and replaces the carved-out lid of the pumpkin.

When the water boils, the pumpkin and its contents begin to steam. The milk thickens with the pulp of the pumpkin. The mesh of catfish bones simmers. Link tests the catfish fillets with her knife through careful openings of the lid of the pumpkin. They soften until she can pull them apart with her fingers into strands that simmer further into stew. On butter and pumpkin goo, the stew gilds to a golden-orange. At long last she pulls out the mesh of catfish bones and buries them in the mud by the bank of the river.

Buried fish bones, the villagers would say if still they walked the earth, would over time gather magic from the current of the stream, and could one day spring to life again to swim towards the sea.

If only people could do the same.

Link sprinkles salt and pepper to the stew. Then she lets the pumpkin simmer a few moments more, until she can smell the softening of the rind.
She lifts the pumpkin from the heat. The gourd warms her palms. She settles the pumpkin into her lap.

She raises the lid.

She inhales the scent.

Catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd.

Link inhales the earthy sweetness of Ordon’s pumpkin, the mild succulence of its catfish, the savoured tartness of its butter.

Her lashes brush over the swell of her cheeks.

Returning to Ordon.

Link had promised Mipha that she would return, yet whenever the taste of Ordon catfish or pumpkin crept into her mouth, she would be six years old again in that sepulchre of a house, or she would be twelve years old again with a wooden box from Mabe she hid in the stable for her fear of carrying it home, or she would be—that certain age again—and she would be tired, so tired.

Tired.

So tired that she could lay herself down in the grass to close her eyes, so tired that she could nuzzle the earth until she passed to slumber, so tired that the wilds could take her.

And if the wilds would not take her, then she could give herself to them.

Yet.

Yet the exhaustion had left her. Not after the moment Link had pulled the sword that seals the darkness from the stone, but blink by blink, beat by beat, breath by breath.

Daruk, who offered her a family. Revali, who offered Aryll happiness. Urbosa, who offered her someone who understood. And Mipha, who offered Link her childhood, no longer tied to that house alone.

Returning to Ordon.

To reach the province of Ordona from the castletown, Link needed only follow the smooth path laid out for her. She could close her eyes and lift her hands from the reins, and Epona could gallop her to the place Link supposed she would have to call home.

Yet in the road lurked unseen dangers, lurked brambles and thorns and monsters and malice that no one else could see but her, as if the guardians that Purah repaired had turned against Hyrule but only recognised her as an enemy, as if in that house awaited the Calamitous One itself, and only when she stepped inside would the chrysalis-heart burst open and the nightmare manifest.

Link asked.

She asked. She asked if she should return, and she found her friends around her, whether or not they knew the fullness of whatever had happened. She asked if she should return to Ordon, and their answers carved—through the brambles and thorns and monsters and malice—the same golden road that everyone else seemed to see.

Mipha folded her webbed hands together in front of her as in prayer. "I hope that you can reconcile
with your family as I did." She dipped her head. "Whatever you find, I am here for you, my Link."

Urbosa rested her arm over Link's shoulders. "Just remember to be honest. You don't owe them anything, least of all going back. But if you are going back, then make sure you remember your courage." She smiled warmly. "Though courageous, Link, is never forgotten."

"You better give 'em the talons," Revali snapped, expression hard for a beat before softening, "because anyone who has ever made Ary—I mean, the little lemur cry deserves 'em and more."

"No matter what happens, li'l buddy—" Daruk squeezed her into a hug; she looped her arms around his bulk and let herself rest against his chest. "—you've got a family where it counts, and don't you forget it. You've always got family up in Darunia." His words rumbled his chest to vibrate her body, waves lapping on a distant shore. "And links tempered in the same flame fit together stronger than those forged from the same ore. I don't know what ore you were forged from, li'l buddy—" He boomed out a laugh. "—but I do know there's no flame hotter than protecting Hyrule from the Calamitous One by your side."

She asked, and they embraced her. She asked, and they would carry her there on their own hands if they could. She asked, and the girl with the golden hair gazed at her as though noticing her for the first time.

The smell of home.

She left the entourage around the perimeter of the province of Ordon. Impa gave her three days. "If you do not return on the third morn," Impa warned her, "we will assume that something happened, and we will come get you. The Yiga have not been sighted frequently in Akkala, but I will take no chances with the..." Her lip curled. Link drew inwards on herself. "...with the one that the blade of evil's bane has chosen. You are dismissed." Link bowed to her; Impa's gaze flickered...
to the horizon. "And on behalf of Her Majesty...good luck."

The first time she had returned to Ordon since drawing the sword that seals the darkness from the stone, she had come beneath the cloak of a new-moon night. She had slipped into the village on footfalls hushed by silent violet and stealthfin, and she had left the village untouched save for three envelopes and a missing child.

She had not breathed until she had parted from that house with Aryll in her arms.

The second time she returned to Ordona since drawing the sword that seals the darkness from the stone, she came in with the rays of the rising sun and the blade of evil's bane burning on her back.

The villagers—the people she has known—awake in the golden hues of dawn greeted her. She gave them her name. Her name. Not the name under which she had passed for years for fear of word reaching the house, but the name that she carried like she carried her love of food and like she carried the scars upon her body.

Hers.

Link.

She knew them. She knew all of them, and they knew her; though some called her the name that had never been hers at first, they smiled at her and nodded when she explained. Some remarked that they had suspected. Others asked if that was why she had left the village. Most welcomed her back.

Welcomed her. Greeted her. Absence had made hearts grow fonder, and she was no longer the scrawny girl who stared at her boots lest someone meet her gaze.

Now Link lifted her chin. Now she met their gazes. Pergie and Jaggle, Hanch and Sera, Fado of the ranch, Uli and Rusl.

Uli and Rusl and their son, Colin.

Rusl.

The path to the smithy curved right by the Kanalet River. By Totaka's River, as the villagers called it. Colin—his hair golden as the sunrise, his smile wide as the river long—saw her first. Yelling her name, Colin half-ran half-tumbled out of Uli and Rusl's home with its thatched-straw roof and its passage under the floorboards at the left-hand side of the house. She opened wide her arms; Colin flew into her. The grasses cushioned her fall.

Colin holding her hand, Link wandered the path to the house. Just as she wiped her boots on the welcome mat, Uli opened the door to call out if Colin were all right.

Her eyes widened.

Link waved to her.

Uli embraced her. Despite the swell of Uli's second unborn child preventing her from wrapping her arms fully around the girl who left and who had returned home, Link pressed her face into Uli's chest as Uli stroked her hair.

She entered the smithy where worked Rusl with Uli at her left and Colin at her right. Link stood with her boots halfway through the threshold. She could smell the oils and salts of the smithy, the
metallic tang of the irons and coppers that reminded her, somewhat, of blood.

But a comforting reminder. Of home. Of a home shared by blood spilled rather than blood inherited.

The nature of Rusl's commissions had changed. She recognised none of the swords or shields or spears or axes or drillshafts or horseshoes or pots or pants or implements or cages or this or that.

Yet the smithy itself remained as it had.

There sat Rusl, and there the kiln, and there stood she, the girl who had left and who had returned home.

Link threw her upper body down into a bow, and then the rest of her reached the floor. She pushed her forehead down against the floorboards. She apologised. She apologised for leaving so suddenly; she apologised for having made trouble by neglecting her courier duties; she apologised for potentially hurting the patrons that depended on his deliveries and on hurting him and Uli.

Rusl ruffled her hair.

He extended his hand to her, on the floor, as he had done so many years ago.

And she took his hand, from the floor, as she had done so many years ago.

When he hugged her, Link let herself go limp against him. He smelled warm, of oil and of sweat, of smoke and of iron, of safety and of home.

"When I sent you up there with the sword 'n' board, I never would've reckoned that you'd end up the one with the blade of evil's bane." Rusl put his hand on his hips. "How 'bout that? She couldn't have picked a better hero to bear Her weight. That's for sure."

Link rubbed the back of her head.

"There's other people waiting for you too, you know," Rusl remarked with a wink, and Link's face reddened. "We can catch up later. We'll have all the time in the world now, won't we, lass?"

Tears welled to film her eyes.

She shook her head.

"I'm...I'm leaving again. I just...came by to..." Link reached over her left shoulder. Her fingers curled around the hilt of the sword that seals the darkness; Rusl inclined his head.

"Then whenever you come back, we'll have all the time in the world." Raising his eyebrows, he squeezed her shoulder. "That's a not-so-subtle way to say that we'll see each other again, Link. So I reckon you should make sure you come back when all's said and done, and you can fix me a meal."

"Fix you a meal?" Link echoed.

"Fix me a meal," Rusl repeated with a smile. "You're a woman of your word. As long as you fix on coming back and making me something, you'll do it. I've almost got more faith in that than in the Goddesses Themselves." He glanced skyward. "That's not a challenge there, ladies." Link laughed; Rusl hugged her again. "Now go on. You've got someone else on your mind, don't you?"

Uli frowned, opening her mouth, but Rusl glanced at her and shook his head.
Link swallowed.

She took the path to the ranch but could find neither hide nor hair of the girl who smelled of horses. She stopped a moment to pet the goats and to let the horses lick salt off of her palm.

And then Link took a breath, and then she turned towards the heart of the village.

Always when she had climbed to the second story of the girl with smelled of horses's house—she slept on the upper level while her father remained on the lower, so that he could in theory ensure she would have to pass through him to enter or leave—Link had done so in the stillness of the night, and never in broad daylight. Yet she felt that it no longer mattered whether the girl who smelled of horses's father knew.

In the very marrow of her bones, Link could sense that she would never scale her best friend's house, ever again.

As she had done so many times before, she rapped on the window of the girl who smelled of horses, and the girl who smelled of horses rappelled out on a ladder made of her bedsheets strung together.

Except. Except the girl who smelled of horses did not rappel out. Except the girl who smelled of horses did not slide open her window. Except the girl who smelled of horses did not respond to the sound of Link's knuckles on the window.

The girl who smelled of horses had run away.

The girl who smelled of horses had run away after Link had left. The girl who smelled of horses had taken off in the stillness of the night. Rusl had caught her, he told Link once she returned to the smithy with wettened cheeks and swollen eyes, on the outskirts of the village.

Before Link had gone on that final trip to the castletown, when she still faithfully served her duties as a courier, the girl who smelled of horses had expressed interest in the blade. Link had shown her bits and pieces of what she could in the few days that she remained in Ordon each month.

Thereafter, when Rusl and the girl who smelled of horses had awoken to letters in shaky scrawl—barely legible, Rusl noted, to Link's flushed face—upon their bedsides, the girl who smelled of horses had asked Rusl to teach her. The sword and the shield. Rusl had not had the time to impart on her the full breadth of lessons that he had on Link, but he had been able to tell, even then, that the girl who smelled of horses's gaze lay trained on the line of the horizon.

"She went south." Rusl scratched the back of his neck. "I don't know where. I reckon she's scared of sending a letter. 'Case her pa goes after her." He brushed his thumb over the underside of Link's eyes, wiping away her tears. "She's just as resilient as you are, Link. She'll be fine. I know it. One day you'll see her again. Just whistle like she does. When you hear the horses come running, that's when you'll know you've found her."

Link pressed her face into Rusl's chest. He held her. He held her, and held her, and he did not let go, anchoring her to this world, though not as tightly as had the girl who smelled of horses.

"Sorry for not telling you straight away. I thought you should see it with your own eyes, firsthand."

She nodded uncomprehendingly into his shirt. His grip tightened around her until she almost could not breathe.

Or maybe something else strangled her heart and choked her lungs.
"It'll all be all right, Link. You'll see her again someday. The Goddesses aren't that cruel." Rusl's fingers ran through her hair and untangled her ponytail. Link reached back her hands to re-tie it. He tipped up her chin until their gazes met. "Don't forget her."

Link swung her head from side to side. "If I never see her again I'll always remember her. I don't think I could ever forget."

Rusl smiled. His eyelids lowered. "Good. Don't forget, Link. That's one regret..." His words gave way to whisper, and Link strained to make out his breaths. "...I hope you never have."

Her fingers dug into the fabric of his shirt.

"Now...you got any other business here?" Rusl inquired. Link nodded her head against his chest. "You already been up to the ranch?" She nodded again. "Hm. You already talk to..." He started to name names. She nodded again, and again, again. "You already fixed yourself some breakfast?"

Link shook her head; there Rusl chuckled. His hand slid from her shoulder—she pressed herself closer against his remaining arm—to slap his own stomach in his mirth. "Well now, that's some business. Fixin' to use my cooking pot?"

She shook her head again, and Rusl's laughter faded away to quiet.

"I don't reckon you intend to see your folks again."

Link kept herself absolutely still. She could hear the creaking of Uli's rocking chair behind her, and the shk shk of Colin's knife over the fishing pole he was carving, and the roaring of her own blood against her ears.

She nodded one final time.

"You don't have to, you know."

Link braced her hands against his torso to pull herself away. For a moment, Rusl did not let go and rather clung her against him. Then his arms slackened.

She glanced up at him, into his eyes the same dark brown as the comfort of the earth. "I don't have to. But I want to. It's...it's for myself."

Rusl offered to go with her, suggested that he go with her, begged her to let him go with her. The slow pendulum of her head broke her heart a little further every movement, as though he were watching her spoon watery tomato sauce directly over a gourmet rack of goat meat without even an effort to make the most of the meal.

"...take care of yourself," he said at last, "and come back."

"I'll make you a meal," Link swore; he smiled. "And...and thank you for everything. If you hadn't been there, I..."

"But I was there. And that's what matters." He embraced her again. "Goddesses watch over you." He quirked an eyebrow. "Oh, and Link?"

She tilted her head.

"I hope you don't mind, but...Uli said that she likes the name Link for a girl." He rested his hand on her forehead and swept his palm over her hair. "It might be a little confusing to say Link and have two of my daughters come running at me."
Link looked up at him, eyes wide. He nodded; she cried.

When her boots stepped once more on the beaten path over Totaka's River, her tears were dry and her heart was full.

She walked. With her friends and her family behind her.

With even the girl with the golden hair behind her.

She walked.

The house.

The house at the outskirts of the village in the province of Ordona.

The house that remained just as she had left it, as though she had never stepped forth from the village of Ordon, as if the breath she passed over the threshold she would again find Aryll snoozing in the bed beside her, and she would again find the dusty coldness of the floor of the kitchen, and she would again see them with their lightning eyes and thunder hands.

But she lay her palm flat against her chest to feel the beating of her heart cupped in her hand; she pushed her nails into her skin until she winced from the pain.

The pain that told her she lived yet. She had neither died nor dreamed.

The people of that house held no sway over her.

She stepped up to that house. She rested her hand on the door. She let herself breathe, and let herself live, and let herself be.

And then she opened the door.

She did not know what she expected, but she found them seated silently at the kitchen table with a harvested pumpkin between them. She could smell the catfish stew rise up from the gourd. She could smell where they had erred in the stew's preparation, where they had not churned the butter fresh, where they had let the pumpkin soften for too long in the heat, where they had not soaked the catfish in milk for long enough.

The catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd.

She narrowed her eyes.

The catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd that she and the girl who smelled of horses had cooked. The catfish stew that she had made for them when she had had nothing else, no meat or rice, only a pumpkin and a bedraggled fish that Sera's cat had dragged out of the water and left at her feet as though the Goddesses Themselves had taken pity on her.

She had made the catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd for them. She had made the catfish stew that she and the girl who smelled of horses loved, and they had yelled at her, and they had sent her and her little sister to bed with empty bellies.

Aryll's tears had left her emptier than even the lack of food.

And now they sat at the kitchen table with the catfish stew while the girl who smelled of horses had run away and while she had spent her entire life fighting for her little sister's happiness. And now they sat at the kitchen table with the catfish stew talking about the harvest like nothing had
gone amiss. And now they sat at the kitchen table with the catfish stew and nary a thought of their own daughters on their tongues.

For the first time in her life she sensed something rise within her, bubble up bitter as wormwood and sharp as the blade upon her back.

Anger.

She does not remember which of them looked at her first. She does not remember which one of them spoke to her first. She does not remember which of them called her a traitor, called her a treacherous boar, called her worse than the Calamitous One, for at least the Calamitous One wore its malice upon its face and did not pretend to be their child for nearly eighteen years. She does not remember which one of them demanded that she bring back Aryll. She does not remember which one of them hissed at her to never step foot in the house again. She does not remember which one of them called her a kidnapper, a thief, who had taken Aryll from them again and again, who had forced Aryll to grow up on an island off the coast with her grandmother, who had—only for herself, and never for Aryll's sake—stolen Aryll away entirely. She does remember which one of them spat out the question: whether Link would drag Aryll into the same delusions into which Link had forced herself.

Delusional.

Selfish.

A monster.

She would nearly have believed them if she had not seen Aryll's smile, if she had not seen Aryll's tears, if she had not spoken to Aryll like a human being.

If they had had a smidgen of care in their hearts, then she would never have been able to send Aryll away to her grandmother at all. If they had had a smidgen of care in their hearts, then she would never have become a courier at the age of ten. If they had had a smidgen of care in their hearts, then she would never have ducked past the guards around the stone demonstration at the castletown, and she would never have closed her fingers around that blue-violet hilt, and she would never have drawn the sword that seals the darkness from the stone.

She remembers rebuking them. She remembers—she remembers—the wind at her back. She remembers the words whispered by that wind, the words that cascaded to lightning on her fingertips.

"You will never be able to hurt her, ever again."

She remembers their words.

"Get out of here. We no longer have a son."

She remembers her words.

"No."

She remembers the wind at her back.

"You never had one."

She does not remember which one of them rose from the table while she stood her ground. She
does not remember which one of them approached her while she stood her ground. She does not remember which one of them raised their hand while she—

She remembers that she flinched. She remembers that that flinch—despite everything—dropped the wind from behind her. She remembers that certain unreadable expression in their eyes, that even after everything, she would never be more than that scrawny girl in the dusty coldness of the floor of the kitchen.

She remembers the hand.

She remembers that hand around her throat.

She remembers how many times that hand had curled around her throat.

She remembers that she was no longer that scrawny girl. She did not know if she had yet become the Champion of Hylia, the Hero of Hyrule, Her Majesty's Knight, O Courageous Link.

Yet she knew, and she knows, that she was and is: Link.

She remembers her fingers closing around the hilt of the sword that seals the darkness, the blade of evil's bane. She could feel the curl of her hands against the wings upon that violet hilt, and she could sense the gentle hum of that soft blue blade as she drew it from its sheath.

She remembers that certain expression in their eyes, suddenly readable, somewhere on the cusp between fear and disbelief. She did not know if they recognised the swords that seals the darkness, the blade of evil's bane, but their irises reflected its blue, the brightest blue that she had seen since she drew it from the stone, like the blue of the clearest sky she had ever see, like the blue of the guardians' fire-light, like the blue of the eyes of the girl with the golden hair.

Returning to Ordon.

"I don't care what you do with the rest of your lives," she told them, her gestures calm as a saucer of milk, "and I don't even care that you hurt me. But if you hurt anyone else like you hurt Aryll..."

She does not remember which one of them asked her, voice muffled, as if spoken around a thickness in their throat. She does not remember which one of them called her the chosen one. She does not remember which one of them supplicated the Goddesses for what they had done to deserve the cruelty of such a fate. She does not remember which one of them first broke into tears. She does not remember which one of them cried thereafter.

She remembers sheathing the sword that seals the darkness, the blade of evil's bane.

She remembers standing quietly in that kitchen with the sheath and its strap over her shoulder, with the blade upon her back, with the sacred-blue Champion's tunic and its Hylia-white stitching over her body.

She remembers standing quietly in that kitchen while they sat at the table with the catfish stew in the pumpkin gourd.

Link remembers herself, in that moment, being very, very vast, and them very, very small.

She remembers leaving that house.

Now, nothing more than a house.
She remembers leaving and she remembers saying *see you later*. Not in the cover of night but in the daylight that warmed her skin and cleared her eyes. She bid *see you later* to all those villagers she had known. She said that one day she could return, but that that day could be anywhere. From tomorrow, to a hundred years hence, if ever the Calamitous One came.

But she promised to make them again a meal. To make them all again a meal as Ordon as she could picture: Ordon pumpkin, Ordon catfish, Ordon goat.

Ordon catfish stew on Ordon goat milk, in a Ordon pumpkin gourd.

She promised to make them again a meal, for then she would one day have to return, and then she had not really said good-bye, only a *see you later*.

She promised to make them again a meal.

And now Link has.

The rind of the pumpkin warms the palms of her hands. She has churned the butter fresh, and she has not let the pumpkin soften for too long in the heat, and she has soaked the catfish in milk for long enough.

Catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd.

Link cradles the pumpkin in her arms as the girl who smelled of horses once cradled her. She does not bring it to the heart of Ordon where the girl who smelled of horses's father's house stood, nor does she bring it to the outskirts where *that* house waited.

She brings it, instead, to the ruins of the Ordon ranch. Link can see the ruined stable, its roof caved in, its door missing, its stalls broken by one. She can see the ruined fence that once wound around the stable, now almost entirely rotted away except for the metal posts that Rusl had smithed. She can see where the goats and horses once grazed, the pasture now overrun in weeds dangerous to the horses: boar's milk and red maple, star fragment thistle and fiddleneck, blupeebrush and milkweed.

Link steps over the line of the fence that once circumscribed the ranch in the soft earth.

The tall grasses of the pasture tickle the underside of her arms. Summerwings and warm darners rise like vapour from the green.

She carries the catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd.

Link brings it to the girl who smelled of horses's favourite place in the entirety of the village. She brings it to the pasture where the goats and horses roamed, where the girl who smelled of horses has broken in yearlings and seen to the mares' foaling, where the girl who smelled of horses would lie in the grass beside Link and weave stories from the clouds.

She sets the pumpkin down on the grassy knoll where she and the girl who smelled of horses once lay together, fingers intertwined, the breeze lifting their hair. The girl who smelled of horses would close her eyes, and Link would, too, to let herself melt into the wilds that called her name.

The wilds that called their names, together.

Every once in a while Link would creep open one eye to glance at the girl who smelled of horses, and every once in a while she would catch the girl who smelled of horses creeping open one eye to glance at *her*. They would laugh, and they would pretend to pounce on one another, and they
would roll together through the grass until one of their stomachs rumbled and they started planning
for that day's breakfast, or dinner, or supper, or one of the infinite between-meal snacks that Link
insisted were absolutely real, which she had read about in books.

"What books?" asked the girl who smelled of horses, her hands coming to rest on her hips.

Link showed her the books, where—in the barely legible scrawl of a certain girl who loved food
too much—someone Link certainly did not know had scribbled out the names of locations or
protagonists and had instead inserted second breakfast and sunner-dipper and midnight snack (very
important).

She kneels in front of the pumpkin. Link inhales the vapours of the catfish stew. Ordon pumpkin;
Ordon catfish; Ordon goat. She knows little of the Golden Goddesses and still less of the supposed
Golden Force that They had left for the mortals of Their world. But she knows that if she had to
pick a single trifecta, she would pick: this.

She opens her hands. Marin, and Aryll, and the girl who smelled of horses, who might smell of
horses yet. If she had run far, far away from here, before even the Great Calamity struck, then
perhaps Link need only worry about the hundred years of passing.

The girl who smelled of horses had run away before Link had returned to Ordon. The girl who
smelled of horses had gone south. The girl who smelled of horses had searched for wide
grasslands, perhaps had longed for Lon Lon Ranch.

She lifts her head, and her eyes widen, and she knows.

The whistle.

The whistle the whistle the whistle.

How could she have forgotten? How could the words have slipped her mind? How could the very
song that linked her to the girl who smelled of horses have ever left her, even for an instant?

Link wets her thumb and forefinger. She curls them in an approximation of a grasswhistle. She
whistles as she whistled for Epona.

Ilia's whistle.

Only three people on this world knew or know of that whistle. Only herself, and Marin, and. And.
And the girl who smelled of horses.

Link did not meet Ilia in the wilds of Akkala, but in—

Within three beats of her heart she can hear the galloping of Ilia's hooves despite the distance down
to the village fair. She turns and she whistles again and she watches Ilia leap over the rusted and
bent metal posts still studding the ground. Opening wide her arms, Link catches her companion
into an embrace.

A horse and her girl.

"Where did I meet you, girl? I found you near Kasuto, and you know her whistle, don't you,
girl?" Ilia whinnies. "She must've gone there. And someone had to teach you that whistle." She
pushes her warm nose into Link's cheek to nibble on Link's sidelock; Link laughs as she holds Ilia
tight. "I'm gonna help Sarie get back home, and I'm gonna make sure Koko and Cottla are all
right, and then I'm gonna get you back home, and maybe get myself back my own home too. And
after all that, we'll go to Romani Ranch together. We'll go home together, girl. And everything will be all right."

Her companion neighes into her cheek. Then Link feels something warm and wet on her ear. *In* her ear. "That's not a carrot, girl," Link signs into Ilia's chest; she laughs a light little laugh, and she buries her face into Ilia's shoulder, and only then does she allow herself to cry, and her face is a mess of wetness and heat, and the tears track warmth over her cheeks, and Ilia is warm against her, and she wants nothing more than to go home.

And she will.

And when her boots trace the path to Romani Ranch and her hands rest upon that painted wooden door again, she will learn Faronese as well as she knows Akkalan, and she will tell the stories of Aryll and of Marin and of the girl who smelled of horses, and she will not let them lie forgotten under one hundred years of dust.

And one day, she will remember the girl who smelled of horses's name as she remembered her whistle. And one day she will walk the land once known as Hyrule and she will taste every meal ever cooked and she will try her hand at recipe ever thought up and she will bring them back again to share with strangers and travellers on the road and she will see the people of the land once known as Hyrule heal and renew and make something of the wilds that call their names.

The girl who smelled of horses has told her that she links the wilds and the people.

To the people of the land that she loves, she wishes nothing more than to link all that is delicious in the wilds.

—

*Tough Steamed Fish* (five hearts, high defense boost for 10:10) - armored porgy, fortified pumpkin, fresh milk, goat butter, ironshroom

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: The song that Kass sings is, of course, a reference to *The Wind Waker*. But it's also a reference to the Link of *Oracle of Seasons* and *Oracle of Ages*, the traveller who left Hyrule for a time to travel the world.

The stream of scarlet the Link sees is Dinraal, the dragon.

I think that I first brought up catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd all the way back in the seventh chapter. It's about time I cashed in that Chekhov's recipe. I'm appalled that there's meat-stuffed pumpkin but no other stuffed pumpkin recipes. You did me a dirty, Nintendo.

You might not remember, but Link came up with the "this ball of steamed rice" lyrics in the fifty-fourth chapter.

The signing the word to herself is taken, of course, from the first chapter where Link signed the word *home* for the first time. Everything in *Zelda* comes in threes, so we'll
be seeing that one more time by the end of Delicious in Wilds.

Some people say that catfish has a muddy taste, though I find that that really depends on where the fish is from. At any rate, one method of getting the "muddy taste" out of the water is to soak the fish in fresh milk for a while. Link is using the river as a makeshift ice-box to keep the milk cool so that neither it nor the fish spoils. By dietary law, fish doesn't count as meat, so this preparation does not interfere with the no-mixing-of-milk-and-meat restriction (although such dietary restrictions do not exist in Hyrule, as the religions to which such laws pertain have never graced that world).

Buttermilk is certainly an acquired taste for some.

Nearly two thousand words of this chapter are dedicated to Link cooking! I'm pretty proud of that. After all, it wouldn't be Delicious in Wilds otherwise.

The wooden box from Mabe that Link mentions is the one full of spring green elixir, also known as Magic HRT™.

Epona galloping Link to Ordon is a reference to horses in Breath of the Wild will follow the road by themselves, which is a fantastic little addition until you try doing that one jumping-the-fences mini-game (which is easiest if you take it backwards, by the way).

It's over family issues that Zelda finally starts to warm up and reach out to Link.

You'll note that Rusl refers to it as the blade of evil's bane, continuing with the pattern of "the sword that seals the darkness" being mainly the title mainly used by the royal families of Hyrule and of Lanayru, while most people outside of Central Hyrule/Lanayru, including other royal families, tend to use "the blade of evil's bane".

The comparisons that Link draws between the lynel she fought and her parents are very, very purposeful.

This chapter was pretty difficult to write, as you can expect. I'm prouder of Link than I could say.

I'd just like to say that you don't inherently owe your parents anything. There are many people with wonderful parents; if your parents are good, cherish them. If your parents are not, then you are not indebted to them. Escaping from an abusive situation doesn't make you ungrateful. Please take care of yourself.

Funny how often abusers turn out to be pathetic the second that they no longer hold power over their victims.

The blue and white tunic that Link remembers is indeed that tunic from Breath of the Wild.

With respect to the weeds dangerous to the horses, boar's milk is a spin-off from snake's milk (more commonly known as dogbane); since Hyrule does not have the biblical connotations of snake but does have the calamitous connotations of boar, I thought that this was a fair exchange. Star fragment thistle is a nod to yellow star-thistle; blupeebrush is based on rabbitbrush. Since I patterned the crops that grow in Akkala after those native to North America (as I patterned other places in Hyrule off of other real-world locations), I likewise patterned the weeds of Akkala after weeds
native to North America.

I don't really have the right words to comment on this chapter, so I will let the chapter speak for itself. Home is where the heart is, and I mean that sincerely.

Up next: roasted mighty bananas. The title of the chapter should tell you what it's about.


Beta reader's comments: This is a really incredible chapter, in a lot of ways. It's got nostalgia and heartache and sadness and a really great moment of triumph, all in one. It's one of the best in the series, for sure.

I may have cheered out loud at the moment in which Link wrecks her parents.

Roasted Mighty Bananas

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef reflects upon the tragedy of Ordon's destruction at the time of the Great Calamity along the chef's travelling companions. The party is beset by an unexpected foe, and saved by an even more unexpected ally.

Chapter Notes

An update on the upcoming hiatus: chapters will continue as normal today, tomorrow, and Friday, leaving us on the sixty-first chapter. Then, no new chapter on Saturday. There might be a new chapter on Sunday, but we will resume for certain like clockwork on Monday evening. See you all then!

I posted this in response to a comment on the FFN cross-post version of the fic, but I'll put it here too: with respect to those with bad home situations, I (and I'm not saying that I'm a better writer or putting on any airs here) have found that parental abuse or neglect storylines in fiction tend to fall into one of two things I can't stand. Either (1) the storyline is about the children forgiving and reconciling with their parents—which certainly does happen to some people, as even happened to Mipha in Delicious in Wilds, but which does not apply to everyone who has been in a bad home situation—and anyone who disagrees with it is seen as 'ungrateful', or (2) the bad home situation is done for a 'tragic backstory' that is used as fuel for 'hurt/comfort' narratives which use the abuse as Something To Be Sad About For The Supportive Character To Assist With/other shipping narratives. There's a strange history of fiction (especially that written by women) fetishing trauma in general. As well, many a fictional story uses trauma or other 'tragic backstories' to excuse a character's actions. I wanted to avoid all of this and instead focus in on writing a realistic story regarding abusive/neglectful parents, allowing Link the support she needs and giving her a chance to grow as a person rather than fall into some 'hurt/comfort' nonsense.

Nor did I want for Link's communication issues to be excused by what she has experienced; of course her issues are explained by what she has experienced, and she deserves all of the patience in the world as she heals, but that does not excuse some of the things she has done (such as not adequately informing people out of fear of being hurt). Parental abuse is the kind of thing that one carries with one throughout one's life. It's terribly unfair, but one has to do the work of healing and reconstructing. And both are needed: to heal and to be supported, and to reconstruct and to be challenged to recovery. While recovery isn't an option for everyone, nor am I saying it has to be, it should be the goal of those who can realistically achieve it, for their own sakes.

It was also important to me to not fall into the trap of implying that all trans kids will necessarily have terrible parents; I was careful to include a range of experiences (Marin's mother being wonderfully supportive, Link's being not at all, Zelda's father being in the middle, etc.).
She returns from the grassy knoll with Ilia at her side. She returns from the knoll with the girl who smelled of horses's name for her upon her fingertips. She returns from the knoll as Link.

Kass, seated upon an overturned metal fence post wrapped in cloth, his accordion in hand, gazes up at her with half a question in his irises when she approaches. He nudges Sarie, snoozing in his lap; they twirl into the air to alight on Link's shoulder.

He says nothing. He merely inclines his head as he continues his melodies on the manuals of the accordion. A song she recognises.

Epona's song, that she played upon the grasswhistle in her hand, and Ilia's whistle, that she played upon the harp in her chest.

Link perches on the metal post next to Kass. He raises an eyebrow at her. The accordion never ceases.

She nods.

"Let's go to the shrine. The spiral one."

He does not respond immediately. The accordion sings through the remainder of the verse of Ilia's whistle; only at the closing notes does he allow the hum to resonate the remains of the village in a final eulogy before he rests his wings upon the manuals.

"Are you feeling better, traveller?" Kass inquires. "Perhaps that is not the best question I could have asked, and if so my apologies, but there are only so many questions I know how to ask."

Link senses the corners of her mouth curve up for a brief second.

"Thank...you for being worried about me," she says at length, her hands looping into familiar gestures. "I'm feeling better." Link remembers Sidon, remembers Riju, remembers Amali, remembers Yunobo. "Thank you for being patient with me. It means...it means the world to me. I know you're already feeling like you broke your promise..." Kass winces briefly, and she flinches back. "...but I promise you aren't! And and thank you! And and we can go to the spiral now, and then maybe we can travel around together some more so you can show me all the other shrines, since I've got to get Sarie home and they don't even know where home is, so I have to go make sure that Koko and Cottla are all right it's a promise that I've made too and then I'm going to walk all over trying to figure where Sarie's home and you can show me all the shrines and then I want to go back to say hi to my friends that I promised to make food for but it's kind of like the catfish stew I just made where I had to wait for the milk to set and ripen before I could make cream and I had to wait for the catfish to soak in to lose that muddy-y flavour that some people don't like but I think is just fine and I should thank the goats for it somehow but I only went back to make the stew when I could do all of this stuff so just like the promise I made to Coco and Kottla I mean Cottla and Koko is like the milk I was waiting to settle and ripen and all of that and then the stew is like getting to go around with you so if you just wait to let me ripen we can pumpkin together all over the place for shrines." At least with signing Link need not catch her breath while spilling out the entirety of her thought process in the span of a minute.

As she motions through her future plans, Romani and Riju's words alike settle against her. The Calamitous One. in the castle. The threat of the malice rising up again over the horizon. Yet Link has seen the four Divine Beasts calmed. She has seen with her own two eyes how the Divine Beasts' pilots—at least Sidon—have transformed them into benevolent forces: to help rather than to
harm.

The cities will prosper. The villages will bloom once more. The monsters will be beaten back. The wilds will not lose their call but will gain it all the more for the people who make something of them.

The Calamity can wait. The people that Link knows, and their worries that she has seen with her eyes and felt with her hands, come before any speculation of what may yet lie in the shadows of an abandoned and ruined ghost of a distant past.

Link lets her arms fall to her sides. Then she lifts them up again. "And if you come with me then I can make you something new every day! Or anything you want! Porgy and cake every night! Even porgy cake!" She senses herself channelling Sidon for his enthusiasm, Riju for her care in explanations, Amali for her knowledge of what each person in her life prefers to eat, Yunobo for the pride in her abilities. "I've never made porgy cake before but—" Link pumps one fist into the air and slams her boot down on the metal post like she remembers Romani slamming her shoe down on the crate. "—I've never run away from a cooking challenge! I try out recipes all the time! Half the stuff I make is just throwing things together that I think might taste good and then kind of staring at the pot until I figure out if it's going to pop up something good or turn so sickly green I can't look at it head-on! So if you want me to make you a porgy cake I'll make it!"

She keeps the pose with her boot on the post, her arms locked into the final motion of her gesture: her left curved out as if emulating a cooking pot and her right caught in the chop-chop-chop motion of preparing a meal. She pants heavily.

Link blinks at Kass. He raises his wing up to smooth the crest of feathers that curls over the crown of his head. She leans in, eyes wide. Kass coughs in the crook of his wing. "I make no promises on how long or how far I will travel with you, traveller..." Kass smiles; Link cocks her head. "...but for now we happen to walk the same path."

"Shakalah! Floof comes with Sarie! Floof comes with Sarie! Floofy floofy floof comes with Sarie-sarie-sarie!" Sarie sings out, whirling around on Link's head. Though she cannot sing, her grin echoes the same sentiment.

Link rests her forehead a moment against Ilia's. When Ilia snorts air into her face, the warmth tickles her cheek. With a final hug of Ilia's neck, she steps back, allows herself a brief stretch, and sets to packing up her belongings.

She hears Kass's accordion wheeze out a low note. Link glances back over her shoulder to find him not quite looking her way.

"Traveller, if it wouldn't be too much to ask," Kass notes, hefting his accordion slightly up to hide the lower half of his beak and muffle his voice, "would you mind cooking us a supper before we go? I'm afraid I know little about preparing the local cuisine. While I have been getting by on my own gathered supplies, I...am forced to admit I prefer cooking to darners and almost raw fish any day."

Link blinks at him. He clears his throat behind the accordion, cheeks darkened in blush, the feathers around his face curling upwards until she can see in his feature the same hunger as in Cree and Kheel and Genli and Notts and Kotts's expressions when she told them she would make nutcake. She touches her chin. Her shoulders quiver. A whoosh of air expels swiftly from her nose. Though Link tries to snort back her mirth, the laughter bursts out of her like stew from an
overstuffed pumpkin.

She doubles over with her hands on her knees. Sarie asks if Link has died, and Link's shoulders shake so violently that she cannot lift her arms to reassure the korok. Instead she begins to bob her head up and down. Sarie *oofs* as they slide off of Link's head and *pomf* to the soil. Her boot slips from the metal post. The grasses and the earth cradle her until the mirth has seeped to leave her warm, and content, and very much alive.

Link gestures for Kass and Sarie to follow her. "Bring your stuff. We'll eat and then go."

He stops smoothing his fuzzed-up feathers long enough to ask: "...hm?" She starts to walk; he falls into step beside her. Link whistles, and Ilia bumps her nose against the nape of Link's neck. She leads them towards the path to the ranch, over where the circle of the fence once stood, and up to that grassy knoll. The pumpkin remains untouched, the catfish stew still warm.

Link plops down into the grass. She pats the pumpkin gourd on its side. "I don't have spoons, so we'll have to eat it with our hands, or take turns drinking from it," she explains. Sarie dances down her shoulder to stick their little hand directly into the pumpkin rind.

"Ungh." They stamp their legs. Kass assists in pulling their arm from the gourd. "How does Sarie eat this?"

Laughing lightly to herself, Link lifts the lid on the pumpkin. Sarie *oohs*. They dunk themself inside. Hot stew splashes over Link's face; she licks up what her tongue can reach and gathers the rest in her palm to eat.

"It's fishy!" sings Sarie. "Fishy-wishy! Fishy and mushroomy and rivery and like lightningy! Not loamy-loam but not bad at all!"

Link licks the stew from her fingers. Ordon pumpkin, Ordon catfish, Ordon goat milk and butter. Without the cheese, the stew lacks a certain savoriness, though the ironshroom helps to bulk up its body.

Not quite the same catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd as she would have made a hundred years ago. But, even if the taste has changed, the warmth has not.

Just as she is not quite the same girl that she was a hundred years ago. The paths that she has walked and the friends that she has made, the meals that she has cooked and the strangers with which she has broken fast, have bettered her as a sword tempered sharper, as wine aged deeper, as stew simmered softer.

She made this, once, for the girl with the golden hair, when the girl with the golden hair had asked her about the province of Ordon. Link thought of the girl who smelled of horses, for whom she promised to make catfish stew, and some deep, deep shrivelled part of Link's heart almost brought words to her fingertips that she could never picture herself saying: *"No. Not until I make for my best friend. It's our thing, and you're an outsider."*

But Link knew, too, that the girl who smelled of horses would have wanted her to share the bounty of Ordon with anyone she came across, whatever she could make of it.

She could make of it catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd. So she did, once, for the girl with the golden hair, who had ignored her or spited her or spewed vitriol at her for months after her arrival. Link understood by then the duties of the girl with the golden hair: to pray, to supplicate the Golden Goddesses and the Goddess Hylia, to plead with fate and destiny, to somehow dredge up from
within the sealing magic passed down by her blessed bloodline. The reincarnation of the Goddess Hylia, they said.

Link could believe that. Not for anything of the Goddess Hylia, of which she knew little except for something about wings and something else about pointy ears and possibly something about an eight-stringed harp, but for how the girl with the golden hair glowed when she spoke of her research, when she spoke of her discoveries, and when—increasingly over the months—she spoke of the people of the land she loved.

And Link understood, simultaneously, the desires of the girl with the golden hair: to live as she willed, to do her research, to perform her experiments. Even if Link did not comprehend the breadth of the knowledge that the girl with the golden hair possessed, whose interests ranged from nature to technology and back again, she could feel the same spark of passion glinting in her firelight blue eyes that Link felt when she herself talked about food.

When the girl with the golden hair and her father clashed like thunderheads, the lightning shattered windows and the thunder rumbled the castle walls. So Mipha would say, turning her hands over and over, fretting and wishing that the king and his daughter would somehow make up. Link thought they clashed more like two opposing ingredients, like sizzlefin trout and hydromelon at once, that could pair deliciously well if brought together in a careful way, yet which otherwise would lead to nothing but a burnt pot and a very upset stomach.

Both wanted nothing but the best for Hyrule, and yet neither could agree on how. Both sought the past. Link knew nothing of fate and still less of a Sacred Realm, yet she knew more than anything that the girl with the golden hair and the king both had fallen to a misery so deep not even an egg tart could cheer their hearts for longer than a single meal.

Link could see in their shared features the passage of their blessed bloodline, in the same thick brows, in the same broad nose, in the same light brown skin the colour of the very earth that the girl with the golden hair had vowed to protect.

Urbosa and the other Champions told Link what they knew, what they had seen in the years before Link's arrival to complete the seven travellers that took to the road to travel from spring to spring, from temple to temple, from shrine to shrine. "If only you or she was a korok," Urbosa would joke, "then we could really be the Seven."

Impa would remain in the shadows by the side of the girl with the golden hair. Always there to snap books from her hands, always there to take quill and ink, always there to remind them of the Calamitous One pooling just at the corners of their vision, slithering away when they turned to look.

"The Calamity will come whether we are prepared or not, Your Majesty," she would say, her gaze rocken, her expression impassive. "It is because I care for you that I must push you so. If the Calamity comes, then all of your research will come to naught should the Calamitous One swallow you whole. I fear your life, Your Majesty. The longer you pretend that your research has any bearing on the destiny of the Goddesses, the more likely you will perish alongside all of Hyrule. Do my words sting? Let them."

Yet Link saw, too, the warm affection of those scarlet eyes that Impa only showed when the girl with the golden hair had turned away. Impa was always there to know, first, and better than anyone, when the girl with the golden hair was in distress; always there to tenderly brush her hair and remind her of her worth; always there to do anything for the girl with the golden hair, to fulfill almost any request, to lay down her life if she needed to. Urbosa and the other Champions told her: Impa, the Princess's shade, had trained her entire life to serve the girl with the golden hair for as
long as the girl with the golden hair lived. The king had instructed her to keep the girl with the golden hair to her studies, and Impa could not disobey the king if she wished to keep her post.

"More than anyone, she's the most at risk. The court can't lift a finger against you, Link, since you're the one chosen by the blade of evil's bane. Us Champions...they'd have to think long and hard about their relationships with Lananyru, Eldin, Tabantha, and Parapa for that. But Impa?" Urbosa shook her head; her golden earrings swung back and forth like pendulums marking the inevitable passage of time. "You're the one they can't do anything to, though. Make of it what you will, Link."

Link could make of it catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd. So she did, once, for the girl with the golden hair, who had asked her to prepare the most Ordon meal that Link could think of. The markets in the castletown did not sell muddy Ordon catfish, did not sell hard Ordon pumpkin, did not sell tart Ordon goat cheese not sweet enough for the residents of the Hyrule Castletown.

The girl with the golden hair pleaded.

"I want to know more about you, Link," she said, her face half-hidden behind a thick blue tome entitled Legends of the Light Spirits: Through the Looking Glass of Traditional Akkalan Faiths, Vol. 2. "I hadn't known about...your parents." Link lowered her eyelids. "Oh, I apologise! I didn't mean to—!" The girl with the golden hair exhaled. "Father's right. Even time I open my mouth I immediately stick my foot in. I don't know how to...talk to people at all. I'm sorry, Link."

"Putting a foot in your mouth can't be tasty," Link answered; the girl with the golden hair blushed. "I'll make you something instead."

"That Ordon stew. Catfish stew, you said? We can make do with an approximation, I'm sure, as one might raise a beast in captivity to understand the basics before truly observing it in the wilds." The girl with the golden hair fluttered her fingers out as she spoke. Pausing, she hummed her palm against her chin. "...or is it like the silent princess, unable to grow in captivity at all, that must be seen in the wilds or not at all?"

Link blinked. "I...don't know?" She rubbed the back of her head. "We can try. I can't promise you Ordon, but I can promise you catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd."

"Then someday I'll come with you to Ordon. So you can make me Ordon stew, Ordon-style, natural as the silent princess in the field. I-in the meantime, I really would like to learn more about you, Link." She rubbed her forearms. "A-and I'd like to help you. Crimp more tarts. Sometime. If you would accept my help, whatever you could make of it."

Link could make of it catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd. And so she did, once, for the girl with the golden hair, who closed her eyes and tipped back her head to indulge in the deliciousness of the stew.

Food, meant to be shared.

Licking the stew from her fingers. Link tilts up her chin to find Kass standing awkwardly a few paces away with his accordion case slung over his shoulder. She motions for him to sit beside her. He coughs. "Excuse me for my ignorance, but did you not make that stew for...something, traveller? For the...for the ones who have passed on...?"

She does not have to force the words from her fingers. They roll from her hands as easily as juice from heated fruit. "Food's meant to be shared. Meant to be eaten together." Link shrugs. "Meant to be eaten. If I just left this here, then...it's not like they're going to be able to eat it. But if I do eat it,
then it's like I'm eating with them."

"I see. Then, I hope that you enjoy the meal."

His turn of phrase reminds her of Riju, as Riju reminded her of Aryll. Link holds her hand out to him.

"I want you to eat too. Food's meant to be shared. I know I'm just a traveller to you, but I've baked nutcakes with your daughters, and breaded salmon, and put my life in your wife's hands. And she promised to teach me how to make cannoli when I visit her next." She smiles sheepishly. "And even if you were a complete stranger to me I'd want you to share. I could sit here in the wild grass and eat it all by myself, but there's nothing better than seeing someone's smile warmed by a full stomach. C'mon."

Kass stands there. She reaches her hand further. Kass stands. She curls her fingers in like calling a friendly horse. Kass stands, and then he walks, and then he seats himself beside her. Leaning into his shoulder, Link closes her eyes.

They eat. Catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd. And only when they have finished and she has split the gourd open to feed Ilia the rind does Link tell Ordon good-bye.

Kass sparks a campfire. When Link mentions that she has run out of flint from her failure to stock-up in Ruto—the waters not exactly conducive to the starting of flames—he shares his with her. She starts to shake her head, that she can't possibly accept such a gift. Kass sets the accordion case gently down on her hands to trap them on her thighs.

"My compliments to the chef, traveller."

They sleep beside the campfire on opposite sides. Kass wishes her good night; she wishes him the same. Sarie has long since fallen asleep in the crook of Link's tunic. She slumbers on her side with Sarie curled up by her neck. Their tiny snores resonate her throat. The grass tickles her right cheek. Despite the heat of the campfire that should warm her face and stomach, she discovers that the tailors of Ruto could not replace the rito down that used to line her tunic. Perhaps the promise of returning home has warm-buoyed her through all these chilly Akkalan nights, or perhaps the departing summer has set a deeper chill into her bones than before. She shivers herself off to sleep.

Link awakens with the nearly-full moon gazing down upon her from overhead. She does not remember her dream, but she can feel its sensations linger: a warm bulk at her back, and a feathered blanket tucked around her. A feathered blanket that itches her nose. A feathered blanket that makes her sneeze and open her eyes.

The campfire has smouldered down to embers, yet she no longer senses the cold except on her bare cheeks. Nor can she make out Kass's forma cross the ashes' pale glow.

But the feathered blanket of her dreams has not vanished.

Link presses herself back; she feels the warm bulk curved around her, a heartbeat drumming on her back.

Kass. Curled around her to warm her with his feathers, his wings swaddling her body, his deepened breathing lulling her back to sleep.

But the campfire has gone out.

Link shifts herself carefully out of his embrace to avoid waking him. At least she can build the
campfire back up as thanks. She lifts Sarie from their den in the collar of her tunic to tuck them against Kass's chest.

She would use the slate's bombs for Link's easy homemade firewood, but that would risk awakening her companions and spooking Ilia. Instead she collects fallen twigs and branches from the forest floor and snaps them off of nearby trees. She sets down her first load of wood by the campfire. Squatting in the grass, Link feeds twigs to the embers until the flames come alive again, then sets in a longer branch. She lifts herself back up and returns to the forest.

As she resumes her collection of firewood, Link jumps up to grab a branch slightly higher than she can reach. The branch tears off the three. It bonks her on the head. She lets go. The branch ejects from her hands and whirls through the pitch of the forest. Clicking her tongue, Link wanders deeper, seeking where the branch has fallen. Her boots crunch leaves. A far-off cricket chirps. The trees thin out. The silvery arm of the moon extends through the forest canopy to pool her hand upon the forest floor.

Link stops.

She rubs her eyes. She pinches herself. She rubs her eyes again.

There, in the heart of the pool of silver, like the moon were proffering a gift to Link, as if the Golden Goddesses had descended from Their world to leave the Golden Force upon the mortal realm, lies a single unblemished banana.

Perfectly curved, perfectly ripe, perfectly golden.

Link pinches herself again.

She steps towards that gold, the branch forgotten. A banana. So far from Faron or from eastern Parapa where they grow. She could fry it in butter; she could bake it into bread; she could prepare pudding or a tart or an entire fruit pie; she could stick it in a recipe where it has no business being and try something entirely new.

Courage, courage, courage.

She wipes her eyes. She wipes her mouth. She wipes her mind clear of firewood as her world focuses on the banana before her.

Link walks forward into the moonlight. She stoops down. She reaches for the banana.

Her hand closes around air.

The banana has moved about two paces from her. Narrowing her eyes, she creeps towards it more slowly, crouching down onto her hands and knees. Link slows further as she nears her prize. When she extends her arm, she slithers her hand as quietly as she can through the leaves. Just as her nail nearly brushes against the banana it leaps back another two paces.

Link retracts her hand. She glances away from the banana into the underbrush. Whistling innocently, she walks around the banana in spirals. Suddenly she stops, smirks, and pounces wholeheartedly onto the rogue fruit.

Her fingers curl around its ripened length, so smooth, so yellow, so banana-y. With a laugh to shatter the heavens, Link throws herself to her feet and shows to the world the fruit she has captured with her own two hands. Loftin git high above her head, she presents the golden banana to the Golden Goddesses.
She grins to herself.

And then a twin bolts of pain puncture her left shoulder below the blade.

Link's eyes widen.

She whirs around. The trees around her remain quiet. An owl hoots. She reaches her arm back to feel beneath her left shoulder.

A pair of arrows.

Wood.

Her gaze darts back and forth. Clutching the banana to her chest like a child she must protect, Link pulls the slate from its pouch at her right hip. She taps the yellow rune for stasis.


Wait.

*Person.*

While she swings the slate back, she hears a bowstring set. Link rolls to the side just as arrows zip past her. She draws her own bow from her back. Shoving the banana into her undershirt for safekeeping, she flitches an arrow from her quiver.

She keeps the arrow shaft between her middle and forefinger. Link begins to walk backwards towards the moonlit clearing. The light rains down on her once more. She lays the bow into the grass and lifts her hands, palms facing where she saw the *person* last.

"I'm hungry," she signs, and then pauses. "I don't want to fight you. If you were trying to hunt this banana, I'll give it back to you. I mean no harm. Just hunger. I'll make you a meal if you—"

The *twang* of a bowstring.

Link snags her bow from the grass, stringing it in her cartwheel. As she somersaults to the side, she tracks the passage of the arrows that thud into the tree behind her. The arrowheads embedded under her shoulder blade snap pain through her arm; she nearly buckles into the grass, yet she rises back to her feet. Her hands tremble: to hurt another person, and not a monster. But if she leads this person back to the camp with Kass and Sarie, she could put them in danger, and not all of them can gallop away on Ilia's back as Link escaped from that pale hooded figure she met on the side of the road in Faron.

She listens for the burble of Totaka's River. If she could somehow lose the person hunting her, she could flee safely with Sarie and Kass.

As she rolls back to dodge another arrow—one grazes her cheek just below her left eye, and the droplet of blood forms a tear beneath her lower lid—Link hurtles herself forward towards the run of the river. She weaves herself through the trees with the stasis-slate as a second sight to keep her from ramming into trunks. A bluster of pain through her left toes accompanies a slamming of her boot against rock not a pace from the river.

She tips forward.

And then a hard bar rams into her chest. Choking on her breath, Link flinches backwards into
something warm. She swings back her arm to elbow-punch her would-be captor, but a vice closes around her left wrist. And then another around her right. Her hunter locks her into a hold with their left arm buried into her throat and their right hand around her wrists.

Link tries to throw her body back, struggling against the bonds, yet her captor wrenches back back her arms and drives the arrowheads deeper into her. By the time she recovers from the spasm of agony, her captor has sunk her knees into the muddy banks of the river, their foot braced against the small of her back.

Then she hears a voice—an all too familiar voice—hiss into her ear. "If you do not wish your friends injured, you will come quietly with me. We will not hurt you. We simply wish for you to not interfere with the workings of the Goddesses. You have been lied to and manipulated take up blade against the Purifier sent by the Goddesses to cleanse this world of sin. It is all right. Your time of fighting and pain has come to its close. Come quietly with me, and your friends will not be injured. Nod if you agree." In the water of the river, Link makes out her captor's features. The fabric of their clothing: a dull and dark blue. Tall. Taller than she, about the same height as Kass. A mask upon their face, also in dark navy, though she can just barely see the pattern etched in deep crimson across the surface of the mask.

The symbol of the Goddess Sheik. The symbol that she has seen over the gate to Kakariko. The symbol that she has seen on the shrines and on the towers. The symbol that she carries on her slate. The symbol that the girl with the golden hair drew in her studies of the ancient royal family.

A single eye, like the eye of the guardians, shedding a single tear.

But upside-down, with the teardrop extending towards the sky, or perhaps drooped onto the eye from above.

"I will repeat myself one more time."

Link breathes. She feels the iron bar of her captor's arm against the feel her throat straining against the iron bar of her captor's arm. Her captor tightens their grip on Link's hands. The sudden shift grinds the arrowhead against her shoulder blade; her vision darkens in the sudden agony that splinters through her left arm and down her spine.

"You have been used by those who wish to keep their control over a world that the Goddesses have forsaken. The Goddesses never granted their power to the one who called herself the Princess of Hyrule, for They in Their infinite power, wisdom, and courage have sent the Purifier to purge this world of our sins."

Link glances up and around. She listens: no one else in the forest. She watches: no shadows in the brush.

"All that you have done has only prolonged the suffering of this impure world. You do not need to fight for their lies any longer. One hundred years ago the Goddesses destroyed the kingdom of the damned, and now They prepare to cleanse this world once more. Lay down your selfishness. Understand that the world to come will be clean and pure, and that no one will have to suffer." A thin stream of blood from the wound under her left eye traces the curve of her cheek. "What you call malice is the physical manifestation of our sin." While her captor continues to speak, Link tenses and untenses her muscles and her sinews, to see where they connect to the nerves hit by the arrowheads, to see what she move.

"If you do not wish your friends injured worse than the mercy of death, you will come quietly with me. Nod if you agree."
Link breathes.

She starts to nod.

She senses the grip slacken, ever so slightly—

—and she brings her head back up as hard as she can, swinging her entire body, the pressure against the vice forcing the arrowheads further into her shoulder blade. The back of her head cracks against her captor's head with a sound so wet and visceral Link can feel the mask fragment against her skull.

Link rips her wrists free. She rolls forward into the river before spinning around with her arms blocking her face. Yet nothing attacks her. The river sprays her in cold water. Her vision clears: her captor has fallen to the ground and does not move, except for the steady motion of their chest.

She angles her chin up. By the stars she orients herself to determine where lies the village. Link turns back for an instant to see her captor collapsed unconscious in the grass. The shards of mask have fallen away from their face, and the hood has settled around their head to expose their face.

*Her* face.

Link finds herself gazing at a zora woman, her scales violet, her head reminding Link of a koi, a pair of opal earrings glinting in the darkness, a quiver half of topaz arrows and half of wood at her hip, a polished metal bow with a sight affixed to the front hanging loosely from her shoulder.

She lowers herself to squat beside the zora woman in the grass, halfway extending her hand. And then Link notices the smoke over the treetops from the direction of Ordon.

From the direction of Kass, and Sarie and Ilia.

She runs.

The banana in her chest bounces up and down as she pelts towards the village. Her boots catch in tree roots; she crumples into the leaves. The cut under her left eye stings. She picks herself up and begins again to run.

Link need not use the stars: birds soar past her; deer lope away; a badger passing underfoot knocks her over and a wild boar nearly tramples her if not for her rolling beneath the root of a tree.

She approaches the borders of the village.

Link smells smoke. She smells ash. She smells fire. She discovers the forests near the ranch aflame, the orange-gold of the Akkalan autumn leaves given way to the orange-gold of an inferno.

She draws her tunic up over her mouth, her breathing hot against her collar. The acrid smoke waters her eyes. Although she tries to skirt the worst of the fire, the flaming woods encircle the village like a crown of ruby. Squeezing shut her eyes, Link forces herself through the blaze.

The heat scrapes against her flesh. The ash cloaks her in darkness. The fires sear into her vision until she can see nothing but scarlet.

A burning branch sets her hood ablaze. Clearing the path, Link stumbles into the remains of Ordon, trips on something—a bit of fence or a rock—and rolls forward into the dust until the fires have gone out.
When she set out to light the campfire again, she did not mean for the Goddess Din to help.

The flames of her clothing die down. She can smell: roasted fruit. Sickly sweet. The banana, somehow, has not yet smushed against the inside of her tunic but remains bouncing around, unable to drop lower from the cord of her belt. As the fruit settles down against her stomach, Link shifts her focus to stare at the remains of the village.

At the dozens upon dozens of people. Clad in dark blue. With scarlet marks of the Goddess Sheik drawn upside-down upon their navy masks.

Yiga.

And she, with one sword, one bow, and her meagre quiver of arrows from Sidon. And she, with the slate at her right hip. And she, with a roasted banana stuck down her tunic.

Link has, after all, finished calming the Divine Beasts. In that moment of calming the last, whatever protective hands have guided her along her journey lifted from her shoulders to pass away, no longer needed, no longer with purpose.

She can see the winding path up to the ranch. She can see her boot prints where she descended into the forest to gather firewood. She can see the tracks left by Ilia's hooves up and down; she cannot tell if her companion has been through here again.

The Yiga approach her in a wave of dark, dark blue, like the deepest, bluest ocean she has ever seen, and Link lets herself sink into the ground. Whatever they do now to her, she can only let them.

She prays. She prays to the Golden Goddesses, to the Seven, to the Light Spirit Ordona, to whoever may listen to her, that no matter what happens to her, "let Koko and Cottla be safe from them. Please."

The Goddesses answer her.

The heavens open. The fiery rocks rain down from the skies. The Yiga scatter around them as the earth trembles with the meteors' impacts all around her.

But not on her.

"B-bullseye!" Link hears, boomed so loud that the voice echoes through the ruins of the village to resonate her ears. When she turns her head to the left—to the path up to the ranch—to locate the source of the miracle, a blazing blue light shines from above.

The beam of fire-light carves into the ground. It circumscribes Link in a halo of protection as Yiga leap away to avoid certain death. Swaying as though in a dream, Link observes the formation of the charred earth left in the fire-light's wake, a blackened line about a metre-deep into the soil, until she kneels on a dirt platform to watch the Yiga spread out into the burning trees.

Monsters will continue to attack no matter the threat of death. Monsters will crawl on their ruined bodies to snap at her with their ruined jaws until the very second that their breaths leave their bodies.

But the Yiga are not monsters.

The Yiga run.
And suddenly gorons surround her. Suddenly waves upon waves of gorons, hylians, sheikah, a few zora and rito here and there, spread over the perimeter. She listens to their orders barked out in Eldic, to make for the woods to ensure that not one Yiga escapes. The ground rumbles rhythmically. Something crashes into the earth a few paces to her right; she can sense the soil compress beneath its massive weight.

Link cranes her neck up to see the multi-faceted face of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania staring down at her from above. Over the rim of its mouth lean four faces: Ilia, whinnying, her ears flicking back and forth; Kass, waving a wing towards her; Sarie, perched on Kass's head; and a goron with a swirl of hair-like stone upon his head and a blue shawl around his shoulders, fluttering like a cape in the wind.

She blinks slowly. The arrows wedged beneath her left shoulder blade twinge. The roast banana in her tunic wobbles against her stomach.

"Link!" Yunobo calls out to her, a broad grin crinkling his eyes. "Need a lift, right?"

—

Roasted Mighty Bananas (three-quarter heart) - mighty bananas

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: I started writing this chapter at 09:19 on the first of August, and finished writing it on at 19:20 on the second of August.

Thanks a million for sticking with me all of this time, for reading through Link's experiences, and for coming along on such a journey that's probably more emotional and personal than you may have expected. And thanks a million to my beta reader, Emma, for helping me make the journey as fun as possible for all of you.

Link's thought processes (when she just 'rants out' a lot at once) are purposefully confusing and vague. She's not used to expressing herself. It'll take her a while yet to figure out a balance between being more curt and being more expressive. Besides, she's stressed out in having to convince Kass to travel with him. Her intention is to get Kass to Amali and the kids, which she can do best if she just comes with him to do all of the shrines.

I've noted this before, but while paler humans redden in blush, rito people's cheeks tend to darken when they blush. Kass, of course, is blushing because he's embarrassed about admitting that Link's been right all along when it comes to food.

As before, I gave Zelda an appearance more similar to her father's model in-game, because her genetics don't make any sense. She simply doesn't look like King Rhoam's daughter in-game. It bothered me in The Wind Waker, but there at least the king was an ancient ancestor of hers. Here he's literally her father. No excuse!

Indeed, they travelled in seven: Zelda, Link, Impa, Urbosa, Mipha, Revali, and Daruk.
The line "Do my words sting? Let them" is from *Skyward Sword*. Here's some information on why Impa acted like she did.

*Legends of the Light Spirits: Through the Looking Glass of Traditional Akkalan Faiths, Vol. 2* is a blue volume because it's the second volume; the first volume is green, and the third is red.

As I mentioned before, rito people have faster metabolisms and warmer body temperatures than the other races of Hyrule. They make for excellent space heaters.

I must say that Link is probably the only protagonist I've ever written that could go from tearful seen of Ordon village destroyed, to running into the woods after a banana.

Link was using the stasis rune to highlight trees in yellow to keep herself from smacking into them.

The Yiga wear dark blue rather than red to better blend in with the night, since the Yiga are supposed to resemble ninja in their style of fight and dress as far as I'm aware. It doesn't make sense for them to wear red and black. If they want to actually sneak around at night, then dark blue provides much better concealment.

Zelda actually mentioned this in a previous chapter, but years upon years ago, the "single eye with a tier" sheikah symbol belonged to the *original royal family*. Ten thousand years later, the symbol was taken up by the sheikah that served the hylian royal family most faithfully, and eventually became a symbol of the Goddess Sheik. That's why it's all over the Divine Beasts, slate, etc. The Yiga use it in its original context.

Well now. What a twist! I'll note talk about all of the hints and evidence that I've added into the story. I'll note that you might recognise the bow from the eleventh chapter.

Link covering up her mouth is her efforts to use her tunic as a makeshift air filter. It's nothing than nothing. And yes, the banana roasted in the fire that Link passed through! Try roasting 'em up in Eldin in-game.

And hey, it's Yunobo! I told you that the champions would come back, and that people have been moving during the months and months that Link's been wandering around. It's been over a year since Yunobo and Link cleansed Vah Rudania. It's been a while, Yunobo. Missed ya, buddy.

Now, why was the Yiga using wooden arrow instead of topaz arrows? Because she didn't want to hurt Link.

I'll note that the events of this chapter are not a coincidence. Yunobo has been tracking the Yiga for some time; the Yiga were tracking, in turn, Link and Kass. Yunobo arrives when he does because the Yiga set the forest on fire.

Next time: relaxation; catching-up; and the minuet of forest.

midna's ass. 26 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: I KNEW IT WAS THE YIGA! I KNEW IT! I CALLED IT FOR SO LONG AND DAMMIT I WAS RIGHT!
I'm really excited about that to this day.

We get to see Yunobo again! This is the real start of the last big meta-arc of the series, where a lot of disparate threads all come together.

Emma. 26 October 2017.
Mighty Simmered Fruit

Chapter Summary

Meeting the Eldic youth again and coming to terms with the possibility that a certain jewel merchant has been one of the Yiga the entire time the chef has known her, the travelling chef agrees to travel towards Medli. The chef recalls a song that the girl with the golden hair taught the chef long, long ago; the same song triggers a memory of younger days from the forgetful korok.

Chapter Notes

As per the usual, notes that didn't fit into the ending, etc. etc.: I started writing this chapter at 09:33 on the second of August, and finished writing it on at 00:49 on the third of August. You'll note overlap between me writing this and the fifty-ninth chapters.

thanks a million for reading! It means a lot to me to share this adventure with you. And thanks a million to my beta reader, Emma, for all that she's done in assisting me with this chapter and beyond, and for pointing a finger at the Yiga at every opportunity. By the way, the word "Yiga" means guardian in Old Hyrulean.

Yunobo's stuttering less now! He's come a long way in Link's absence.

"O Powerful Yuno-yunobo" is what Link was listening for, since Yunobo is now officially recognised as the Champion of Goro-goro.

The Eldic forces using drums to communicate is a nod to the Drums of Sleep from Majora's Mask. Two kinds of drums are used for communication in Eldin: those seen in this chapter, meant primarily for marching orders and other commands, which are played in sets of one (i.e. each drummer wearing a single drum); and those meant for peaceful communication and community gatherings, either used alone or as the centrefold of a percussive ensemble, played in sets of five.

The weapons mentioned in this chapter are the weapons that the Yiga use in game, such as the windcleaver.

As for why Marin made Link promise about the bananas, it's because the body is less able to handle high levels of potassium while on spiro (i.e. HRT). Bananas aren't the only food that's high in potassium, but they're the one that Link has remembered most.

Rito people, like geese, do not have teeth proper. Instead they have teeth-like projections along the sides of their tongues, as well as gizzards used for breaking down tougher foods.

The songs referenced in this chapter are those from Skyward Sword.

In Breath of the Wild, rock salt is found all over Hyrule. I'll mention that, as I have before, that I personally don't care for the concept of a single Zelda timeline. However,
for the purposes of Delicious in Wilds, I have chosen to set this Hyrule to be after the events of The Wind Waker. However, in The Wind Waker, Hyrule was sunk underwater, which means that this is actually...

Poor Kass is terrible at asking for amenities.

The line about Yunobo asking to be pinched is also what he asked Link to do back in the sixteenth chapter.

Manbo's Mambo and the Frog's Song of Soul are songs from Link's Awakening. Here, they're songs associated with folk legends.

The coats of a wolfos differ based on their environment. Those in Tabantha have white coats in the autumn/winter for the snow, while those in Akkala have brown throughout most of the year.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Link's boots alight on the head of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania and Kass's talons let go of her shoulders, she first glances at her companions—no injuries, no scrapes, no arrowheads embedded in them that she can note—and then pelts headfirst towards Yunobo, who stretches his arms wide to receive her.

He hugs her so tightly that she feels the banana—roasted by the flames of the burning wood—snoosh against her undershirt, but in that moment she does not consider for a moment the waste of food above the joy of once more seeing her friend.

Yunobo spins her around and sets her back down. He turns back towards the ruins of the village of Ordon.

"I h-have to say, the last thing I expected from following that f-forest fire for the Yiga we've been tracking f-for a few days now was to find y-you." He taps his index fingers together. "B-but I guess that I should've expected that, w-what with you being a big hero and all, huh?"

Link rubs the back of her head.

He pilots the Divine Beast Vah Rudania onwards.

A goron general below booms orders towards Yunobo: to move into the forest and cover the platoon rooting Yiga out from amongst the trees. A rank of drummers bangs the message towards the army at large. As the Divine Beast quakes the ground with each step of its heavy feet, Link listens for the Eldic of what the general says: "O Powerful Yuno-yunobo!"

She grins so widely that she nearly forgets about the banana. Link slips off the tunic to scrape the smooshed banana from the inside. The smoky scent has tempered the banana's sweetness with a flavoursful, not-quite-nutty touch, the innards caramelised to a texture that she would call interesting if not entirely palatable. Link offers the inside of her tunic to anyone else who wants to try some. The other gorons—and one sheikah woman—keeping guard over Yunobo cough and edge away from her, though Sarie eagerly throws their little hand in to suck up the goo.

Over the roaring of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania swallowing earth to catapult its projectiles or firing its fire-light—and one of the gorons, a healer, attempting to remove the arrowheads from
under Link's shoulder blade—Kass fills in Link on what has occurred since she went off to hunt the banana that she is currently licking up from her tunic: he awoke to the smell of burning wood. Noticing that Link had vanished into the dark but left Sarie and Ilia behind, he assumed at first that she had gone off to relieve herself and that the burning scent came from the campfire. However, when she did not return for some time, he flew up to search for her only to see the circle of burning forest cutting off their escape.

Arrows in his left wing brought him down from the sky.

Link looks up, a blob of roasted banana goo on her tongue, to ogle at Kass, who shows her the site of the injury. "I'm fine, now. Barguron here's an expert in arrow wounds, specifically." She nods; at that exact moment the healer—Barguron—rips both arrowheads from Link's back at the same time and she arches far enough to startle Sarie from her head. She apologises; Sarie pats her nose in acceptance. "By the time I landed safely on the ground, the Yiga had surrounded the campsite. I was terrified, for your sake, and for Sarie's." Link opens her palms to inquire about Ilia yet he goes on. "The Yiga promised not to hurt us so long as I told them where you had went."

Link blinks.

Kass clears his throat again. "I told them, truthfully, that I hadn't the foggiest. Even if I had known, I could never...give up a friend."

She tears up. Link throws her arms around him, the squished banana-covered tunic between them. Yunobo begins to bawl at the touching display.

When she peels herself off of him, Link leaves his clothing and part of his feathers smeared in banana. Flinching, she starts to apologise, but Kass merely laughs. "I should've expected it sooner or later. You've a way with getting people to eat your food without meaning to, traveller." He wipes the banana from his feathers and licks it from his wingtip. He raises his eyebrows. "Not bad."

Link ducks her head. Kass resumes his story: the Yiga interrogated them on her location, then fanned out to search in the woods.

The Yiga discussed something—he gathered from their conversations and snapped insults to one another—about an informant. An informant who had told the Yiga what Link and Ilia look like; that Link has been seen at least once before with Kass; and that Link would visit Ordon at some point, though the Yiga expected Link far earlier than her actual arrival.

The Yiga acted less like the organised band of assassins and nightwalkers that Kass had imagined them, and more like a desperate and dying pack of wild wolves.

While he waited with Ilia and Sarie, praying that Link had gotten away, the ground began to shake. Wary of an earthquake, Kass gathered Sarie and Ilia in his arms. Then he heard the sound of an ocarina and observed the Yiga panicking. Within a few seconds, the Eldic forces burst through the brush afield of the ranch.

They ran the Yiga off, taking what prisoners they could. When they secured Kass, Sarie, and Ilia—and confirmed them as friends and allies of Link—the Divine Beast Vah Rudania lowered its head to let them aboard. Yunobo greeted them: qny friend of Link's is a friend of his, he told them. Link rubs the back of her neck and blushes. Kass arches his eyebrows towards her while she continues to lick up the banana on the tunic, now scraping out the remains with her nails.

Marin warned her not to eat too many bananas. But a single banana can't hurt too much.
With Ilia, Sarie, and Kass safe, the forces and the Divine Beast began the descent into the village proper.

"Where they saved me," Link says, finally slipping the cleaned tunic back on and accidentally trapping Sarie in its folds.

Kass nods. "Where they saved you. Ah, traveller, on your nose, you've a little..."

He reaches out his wing, his expression strangely tender, to wipe a dab of banana goo from her nose. She sneezes. Sarie shoots out from Link's tunic with such force that their head smacks Link's chin and knocks her backwards onto her rear. She blinks, snorts, and then bursts out laughing, hugging Sarie to her chest.

"Now then, traveller, would you mind sharing your half of the story?"

The laughter stops. Link rubs the back of her head for so long that she fears she might rub her hair out of existence. She scratches her cheek. She kneads her forehead. Raising her hands at last, Link explains that she went to gather firewood yet happened upon a banana sitting in the middle of the path like a gift from the Golden Goddesses, that she followed the mysteriously moving banana and walked directly into a Yiga's trap. Only the chance luck of one Yiga waiting in ambush—rather than the dozens that attacked Kass, Ilia, and Sarie—let her escape back to the village.

Her cheeks flush redder than a razorshroom. Link buries her face in her hands.

Kass shakes his head. Sarie bobs their entire body. "Sarie knows better than to eat random bananas lying around! Sarie only eats random dirt lying around!"

Yunobo throws her a thumbs-up over his shoulder. "Th-that's our Link!"

Sarie asks her to tell how she got away from the Yiga. Link begins with a thought to Romani, who might've left twenty less Yiga in this world over the course of the story. Like a true disciple of the deities, Romani has the uncanny and magical ability to create something from nothingness, to split a grain of wheat into twenty and a single enemy into one hundred, much like Muzu's ability to split twenty topaz arrows into two hundred. At least when she returns to the ranch, Link'll have a tale or two to tell.

At the thought of Romani's inevitable reactions to Link walking into a trap—and all this for one banana that ended up roasted and smooshed—she begins to laugh to herself so much that her arms shake without letting her speak. Kass pats her shoulder until she calms down enough to continue her story.

The sound of marching drums widens her eyes.

When the Eldic forces report back with the sun's rise, they bring with them captured Yiga. Link begs to see them; Yunobo vouches for her, and the general acquiesces. She frantically searches the Yiga's faces. One or two she thinks she recognises: travellers she has seen along the road, strangers with whom she has shared a meal over her cooking pot, merchants that bid her examine their wares before agreeing to partake in whatever experiment she cooked up that day.

But no Glepp.

Link raises her chin past the line of Yiga captives. She stares out at the ashes of the Ordona forest, burnt from red and gold to grey and black: silt to silt, dust to dust.

Glepp, who must have escaped, or perhaps never existed in the first place. Not here. Other zora
women in purple, other zora women with the heads of koi, other zora women with opal earrings must live somewhere out there in the wilds. Someone else whom Link told of her plans to go to Ordon. Someone else who has seen Ilia. Someone else to whom Link spoke of Kass and his accordion.

Some other zora woman.

The forces do, however, bring back bananas taken from the Yiga, alongside weapons: bows that shoot two arrows at once, cruel hooked sickles, serrated wheels with rusted blades meant for biting into the limbs of foes, long spiralled swords that harness the wind with their blows, and the wooden ocarina one of the Yiga evidently used to signal the others. Link asks for the ocarina, and also for a banana. Just one. She promised Marin that she would not have too many, but since witnessing the banana floating in the moonlight before her very eyes, she has had a terrible craving for the curved firm fruit.

She claps her palm over her face. Marin warned her against bananas. If only Link listened, then she never would have fallen for the trap at all.

Stroking her chin in contemplation, Link takes the Yiga banana, hesitating, and asks instead for two.

She reaches for the equipment on her back; when her hands touch tunic, she realises her belongings rest yet in the ruins of the ranch. Then Kass informs her that he brought with him everything she left at the campsite, including her cooking pot and her satchel.

Her cooking pot.

Link rubs her palms together. She touches her chin. She devises her recipes as the Eldic general might his strategies.

All’s well that ends well with a good meal. Soon Link has plopped down her cooking pot on the back of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, merrily cooking away. Yunobo sits down to watch her. Kass gazes at her with such an expectant that her cheeks flush, and Sarie dances for joy at the prospect of "a meal! A meal! Sarie gonna get some food. And it's gonna be better than that loam! 'Cause nothing can be worse than that loam! Gonna get some food. Gonna get some food food food!"

She melts butter in her cooking pot. With the long straight sword that Riju gave her, Link crushes acorns and chickaloo tree nuts brought with her from Ruto into the smallest crumbs she can manage. The meat of palm fruit she has carried from the beaches of Lanayru and Faron. Mighty thistles, too, gathered from the forests outside of Ordon, which have not flowered fully. Link pricks her palms full of spines, though they do not sting as badly as the cactus needles. And only her palms this time.

For a girl of one hundred and nineteen years, she can sure teach herself new tricks.

Link scrapes the nuts into the butter first to roast and salt them, then adds the minced inner stalks of thistle for a certain bitter kick keeping the banana from becoming too sweet. She lets the butter cool off just enough to be spreadable but not warm to the touch. Then she—with the shafts of the arrows previously jammed into her shoulder serving as skewers—dips two bananas into the butter. One for herself and Sarie, and one for Kass.

Kass takes his banana. Link leans in. He nibbles off the tip of the banana, and she notices for the first time the ridge of teeth along his tongue. The wonders of the people of the land once known as
Hyrule never cease to amaze her.

His broad smile liven her spirit.

"It's delicious, traveller. I never thought that banana, palm fruit, and thistle would go together, but you have once more proven yourself the cleverer."

She rubs the back of her head at the praise. One of the hylians among the Eldic forces—a pale man with bright green eyes—taps her on the shoulder to inquire if she could cook them some bananas as well. A dark-skinned sheikah woman with two long ponytails down her back agrees. Abruptly the non-goron forces swarm her.

As in Ruto, the crowd leaves her woozy. But Link forces herself on: the cooking pot awaits.

When her stores of butter, of nuts, of palm fruit, and of thistle run out, the guards who saved her provide her with more and with other ingredients that she has never seen. Cacao from Faron, cultured cream with a sour taste—though Link does not understand how cream can comprehend culture; if so, that cream would be more intelligent than she—small dried grapes, all manners of nuts and berries, honey of varying tastes. At length she dips bananas for the last of the stragglers. Link signs apologetically at Yunobo.

"I'll grill you some rock roast later, I promise," she tells him, "and learn how to make all of your favourites for when we meet again." He clasps her hand.

"Th-then I'll just have to make sure that we meet again!"

Then, and only then, does Link allow herself to her own dipped banana to munch down the aftertaste of spring green elixir.

The crunchiness of the nuts, the savoriness of the butter, the tang of the palm, and the kick of the tender thistle combine with the natural sweetness and firmness of the banana to a delightful symphony. A symphony. She fingers the wooden ocarina.

The ocarina.

In the chambers of the girl with the golden hair there rested a golden eight-stringed harp over the fireplace. Impa would urge her to practise. "You loved that harp so as a child. What happened, Your Majesty?"

"That was before," the girl with the golden hair responded, a storm brewing upon her brow, "the strings of that harp revealed themselves the bars of a cage." The girl with the golden hair folded her arms over her chest. Her lips curled upwards into a smirk. "Do my words sting? Let them."

Impa's expression remained immutable as ever. The girl with the golden hair's smug smile faded into a thin line, and then a scowl. "Practise, Your Majesty. Play the songs of the Goddesses. Perhaps, as they did for the reincarnations of the Goddess who have walked this world before you, they will bring to you memories untold. Now, practise, Your Majesty. If the prayers do not rouse your slumbering soul, then music—that heirloom of our people—may yet."

The girl with the golden hair seated herself before the hearth with the harp in her lap. She strummed once, then stopped and peeked over her shoulder at Impa, who merely inclined her head. With a huff of her breath and a puff of her cheeks, the girl with the golden hair brought forth from the harp the sounds of a yowling cat strangled and eaten alive by a wolfos. Impa did not allow her features to so much as shift a millimetre. The yowling continued for some time. The girl with the golden hair peered at Impa again and again, but the expression of the Princess's shade remained
Link, on the other hand, fit her palms over her ears. She pressed her left ear against the hilt of the sword that seals the darkness to drown out the twangs of the harp with the blade of evil's bane resonant hum. The vibration sounded almost like the distant laugh of a girl. Perhaps the Golden Goddesses now laughed at her. She had always heard from the villagers that They had a very particular sense of humour.

Mipha came by briefly to listen, sat down for about five minutes, and then happened to remember a duty she had to attend to, on the far, far, far side of the castle.

The first day the girl with the golden hair played nothing but a cacophony that dizzied Link's head with its awful row. The second she made a terrible din, and the third, and the fourth, and the fifth, and the sixth. By the seventh, she had tired.

On the morning of the eighth, she sighed, pouted, and—turning her head away—held out her hand for the sheet music. To her eternal credit, Impa did not press the issue, nor smile, nor say I told you so, but instead simply opened the musical score and placed it upon the stand.

The girl with the golden hair practised her scales and her arpeggios, up and down the octaves. Link asked if perhaps she could join in, juggling in her hand the blue ocarina Marin had given her.

Impa peered at her for such a long moment that Link had to lift her hand to her face to check if she hadn't sprouted a second head.

The girl with the golden hair clasped her hands together. The girl with the golden hair begged. The girl with the golden hair swore up and down that she would most dutifully attend to the playing of the harp.

Impa exhaled. Link and the girl with the golden hair both leaned in observe Impa's face.

"All right. We can try it. But if you distract Her Majesty, even for a second, you will sleep at the door, and the sword that seals the darkness will rest by Her Majesty's pillow."

Link swallowed.

She had never learned how to read sheet music, and so the girl with the golden hair taught Link the melodies herself. The Goddess Farore's Courage; the Goddess Nayru's Wisdom; the Goddess Din's Power; the Ballad of the Goddess Hylia; the Song of the Hero. The ancient songs passed down in the royal family since they had first come to take control over the land of Hyrule, in the days when the people of the land still spoke Ancient Loftean. The lyrics to the songs came to Link in a confusing haze of meaningless noises. Not even the girl with the golden hair knew the translation of the words.

Only a jumble of syllables from an ancient past, a phonetic transcription of the sounds in Central Hyrulean that someone—for all they knew—could have made up on the spot, and the sheet music of melodies perhaps warped by the generations upon generations who had handed them down to the next.

One day, when Link arose from her slumber, she found a second harp on the mantle over the hearth. Stringed in six. The ages that Urbosa had given her in Parapa.

Urbosa, who must have returned her latest trip to Rovah.

The girl with the golden hair smiled at her. Link could see the ruffle of her hair, frizzed and fluffed
"Would you like to play alongside me, Link?" The girl with the golden hair's eyebrows knit together and curved downwards, her fire-light eyes glimmering with the question in her irises. "You don't have to. But I thought, since you've shared with me so much of your life in Ordon..."

Link tilted her head. She had shared precious little. Other than a select few recipes, and other than the location of the province of Ordona, and other than hints at what her parents had done, she had shared almost nothing. "...so let me share something of mine. Urbosa told me that: a story for a story, a tale for a tale. Well, I don't have any horsetails for you to cook—see, it's, it's a little food joke; I know you like those, those food jokes; I, I hope you like it; I came up with it myself that, that horsetail-tale joke; well, Urbosa helped me but—" She cleared her throat. Link tilted her head. "—but I'd like to share with you some songs! If you'd care to listen. I know it's not as food as good—I mean, it's not as goog as foof—I mean, oh, I'm doing that thing again."

"...I'd love to," Link signed, and the girl with the golden hair covered her mouth with her hands.

"You will!? I m-mean, goog!" She stopped and gathered herself. "Good." The girl with the golden hair inhaled. "Come on."

She took the eight-stringed harp from the wall. Link took the ages. They sat across from one another on the bed, legs crossed. Link looked expectantly at her, hands set to strum. The girl with the golden hair's cheeks reddened.

Then she lowered her eyelids until her lashes settled on the curve of her cheeks.

"...before Mother passed away, she...would sing songs to me, lullabies that her mother had sung to her. Seven songs. They say the songs were once odes to the Seven Goddesses, a long, long time ago, when each Goddess had but a single Sage."

When she angled her chin up, her irises caught the glimmer of the morning light.

"Oh, oh, you know! I don't know if they have these legends in Ordona, but there's talk of tree spirits called the koroks. Long, long ago, they were children of the forest: the kokiri, children of the Goddess Kokir. But—we've lost the legends of why and wherefore, although I am very determined to one day find them, to finally put to rest an age-old scholarly argument that I think I have an inkling about considering the abundance of rock salt found all over Hyrule—the Goddess had to change the form of Her children, and so they became the koroks, spirits of the trees. The legends say that many, many years ago, the koroks once guarded the sword that seals the darkness. Of course, that hasn't been true for a very long time."

The girl with the golden hair set the harp down to pluck her journal from her table. She flipped through it until she came to a green bookmark. Link propped her chin up on her elbow. She rested the six-stringed harp on the bed.

"When we brought the sword from the Temple of Time, we had to excavate it with part of the temple still attached! The sacred sword sat out there in the rock we'd pulled it from, since the sword wouldn't let anyone remove it from the stone it out until you came, Link."

The girl with the golden hair beamed at her. Link nodded, though her thoughts had drifted to what food she might cook for the girl with the golden hair to enliven her spirit. The girl in question went on:

"Some say that the koroks don't exist anymore, or maybe that they never existed at all. We still honour the Goddess Kokir in the Seven, of course. But...Mother used to tell me stories about them.
Child-like and innocent, immortal and renewing, since the very dawn of the seven children of Hyrule."

The girl with the golden hair pressed her journal to her chest. She rocked back and forth upon the bed. Her harp nearly fell off to the floor, but Link caught it and replaced the instrument on the mattress. "Just...imagine the questions we could ask them! Such wise and long-lived beings, who have witnessed all the history of Hyrule, maybe even further than the past ten thousand years! Imagine how much of our history we could recover! Imagine what we could learn! Endless information and knowledge! Even the technologies that have been lost to us, like how the towers were built, or how the Divine Beasts work!" The girl with the golden hair hummed contentedly. She ran a hand over the journal upon her thighs like smoothing the pleats of a skirt.

Perhaps another tart, since the girl with the golden hair very much liked crimping those. Or a cake, but Link had little in the way of a smooth tooth. Something heartier, like a meat pie. The girl with the golden hair could crimp that, and perhaps hone some other techniques.

"I'd like to believe the koroks still exist. Somewhere in the uninhabited reaches. Plenty of people say they might be in the mist-shrouded Kokir Forest—that's even why it's named after the Goddess—since no one in living memory has navigated its labyrinth, and—" She frowned. "—everyone's too afraid of the wrath of the Goddesses to try a serious expedition. I'd like to go there one day."

She clapped her hand over her mouth. Link nodded decisively to herself. Meat pie, for certain.

"Oh, but...I'm getting carried away again. You don't care about any of this, do you?"

Link blinked. For a ghastly moment she wondered if the girl with the golden hair had asked if she didn't care about meat pie. Then the words washed over her. "I like watching you. When you talk about the things you love," she replied honestly; the girl with the golden hair's cheeks flushed further. "Your whole face lights up! Looks like the fire under a cooking pot."

"That's a compliment, isn't it? I think it's a compliment..." The girl with the golden hair took up the harp again. Link perked up. "Well...Mother taught me this. She said that it was the ode to the Goddess Kokir. It's a minuet, so...a little slow, in three. Follow my lead. I'll play it slowly."

La ne naaa...da na daaa...la ne naaa...da na daaa...ma da dii, daa...di-di-di-liii...maaaa...

She guided Link through the strums of the strings. They had some difficulty in determining the differences in the eight-string and six-string harps. After a few moments, Link opted for the ocarina to follow the melody. She could learn the minuet for the ages later.

They played. Terribly at first, and so far out of tune that Link could nearly have given up her next meal to make it stop. Yet she kept at it, as did the girl with the golden hair. They played the melody, again and again, and then, suddenly, the two halves clicked together: the minuet flowed like the wind rustling through the forest trees.

When they tired, the girl with the golden hair lay her head down on the pillow, curled up on her right side. Link ogled her with the ages caught in a half-strum, her expression blank, her jaw slack, her gaze steady as she tried to uncover what in the name of the Golden Goddesses the girl with the golden hair wanted her to do.

The girl with the golden hair simply reclined upon the pillow and smiled at her.

Link placed the harp down on the floor at the foot of the bed. She lowered herself to the mattress, letting the softness of its blankets cushion her left hand.
They looked at one another from across the pillows. The girl with the golden hair giggled. "You
don't have to look so serious all the time, you know."

Link rubbed the back of her head. The girl with the golden hair reached out her right hand towards
Link's left. Link flinched back, but the girl with the golden hair caught her fingers and intertwined
them.

They lay in silence on the bed, Link listening to the girl with the golden hair's breathing deepen,
and her pulse slow; her warm, warm fingers curled more tightly around Link's.

Just when Link closed her eyes to try to sleep—as the girl with the golden hair had drifted off—she
heard the girl with the golden hair's voice in the whisper of the wind. "Mother said that that song is
like...a memory of younger days. Something to help you remember the things you might've lost
along the way of growing up."

She hesitated.

"You've had to do an awful lot of growing up, haven't you?"

Link disentangled her left hand and drew her arm to her chest.

"You know, Link..." When the girl with the golden hair looked at her, the fire-light in her eyes
gleamed so bright that it could outshine the soft glow of the blade of evil's bane. "You can talk. To
me. You never, ever talk. Even Urbosa, Daruk, Revali, Mipha—they're all tried so hard to get you
to talk to them, and the most they've done is get out bits and snippets and food. A-and don't get
wrong," she adds hastily, "the food's fantastic.

"But the things you talk about are of other people. You talk about your childhood friend, and the
girl on the ranch, and Aryll, but you don't ever talk about yourself. Even your parents—even that
thing that's been eating you alive from the inside out so much that you didn't tell us—
even that's really about Aryll, isn't it?"

The girl with the golden hair reached out again for her hand, to interlace their fingers. Link flinched
back.

"You can't keep hiding behind stories of other people, Link. Please...please, let us care about you."

Link scooted back, and then she scooted back again, and then she felt her shoulder blades against
the bookshelf by the side of the bed, and then she flattened herself, and then something cracked her
across the skull. The fallen books buried her in their pages.

The girl with the golden hair helped to dig her out. But the moment was lost, and Link turned
away.

Link finishes the banana. She sucks on the skewer until the flavour drains. Then she tosses away
the arrow that once protruded her from her flesh.

The last of the Eldic forces return to the Divine Beast by the close of the day. They break to rest
for the night; the platoons move into the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. Yunobo shows Link inside.

Link wonders at the sight.

The innards of the Divine Beast, once coated in malice and fraught with gears, have transformed
into a multi-story series of beds, galleys, and even a hot sauna powered by the flames that Link
once had to use cryonis to pass by. Yunobo finds a spot for Ilia, comfortable enough for the horse
to fit between two beds; one of the guards returns with a bale of hay for her to eat. Link bows to the guard in thanks. "Already paid in full with that banana from earlier."

Yunobo shows Sarie, Link, and Kass around. A pool for zora, a rock grill for gorons, beds of every sort, and all in-laid in sapphire for travel through Eldin without the non-gorons suffering. "Cozy, right?" Yunobo says.

Kass dips his head. "I can't say I've slept in a bed in months. You don't happen to have...?"

"Tabanch beds?" Yunobo beams. "As a matter of fact, right this way." Link—and Sarie steering her with her sidelocks—follow their footsteps.

As the sun winds low in the sky and the last of the forest fire dies out, Yunobo tip-taps Link's shoulder. She looks back at him, at Yuno-yunobo, at the Champion of Goro-goro, the Hero of Eldin, the Divine Beast Vah Rudania's Pilot, O Powerful Yunobo. She corrects herself: O Powerful Yuno-yunobo. She beams as proudly as the first time she ever successfully grilled a sizzlefin trout without setting it or herself on fire.

"S-so," says Yunobo, drumming his fingers the slate that he carries at his right hip, same as Link, "can I give you a lift? We were going to venture deeper into Akkala, to take care of any Y-yiga still hiding out there, right?"

Reclining a few paces away with a bowl of ruby tart, the general who referred to Link's friend as Yuno-yunobo thumps his chest and grunts out a yep.

"B-but after we'll be heading back to Medli to report. I know y-you've probably got places to be, Link, and awesome heroic things to do, since you're th-that kind of person, right...?" She smiles sheepishly at Yunobo, who bumps her on the shoulder. "So at least let me get you there."

Nodding, Link glances at Kass, who smooths down the feathers of his crest. When she looks at him, he hrmphs his throat. "I...will not go with you to Medli, traveller, but I will accompany you to the border. I hope that that suffices."

Link embraces him. He squawks in faint surprise, then hugs her back. She turns back to Yunobo with a question on her fingertips. "Wait, Medli?"

"Huh?" Yunobo taps his index fingers together. "I thought you knew, since you're the one who recruited the informant, right?"

She cocks her head to the side.

"Huh? The informant? A former Yiga. H-he came to Medli with his daughters seeking asylum—w-what's wrong? What's that grin?"

Dorian.

Dorian, and Koko, and Cottla, safe and sound in Medli. Yunobo goes on explain that, although travel across the dangerous wilds of the land once known as Hyrule has not grown any safer or easier for those on foot or steed, precious little can stop the Divine Beast Vah Rudania in its tracks.

After clearing as much of the areas surrounding the city of Darunia as he could of monsters—monsters that will return with time, but hopefully the city-dwellers will have time enough to build up their defenses—he and the elders of Darunia turned their attention outwards to the rest of the world after a century of separatism: in the distance, they witnessed the Divine Beast Vah Medoh land for the first time in one hundred years.
In Medli, they learned of the informant feeding information about the Yiga's whereabouts. And this time the people of Tabantha and Eldin listened, where before the Eldic and the Tabanch alike dismissed such tales as fanciful follies at best or as reports to ignore at worst. They had their hands, or webbed fingers, or wings full dealing with the threat of monsters encroaching on the very heart of their lands. And the Yiga, despite their nature, brought a useful commodity to the land once known as Hyrule: those willing to travel from place to place in a time where precious few will.

Now at least some of that has begun to change.

Moreover, the Yiga are people: people that can be understood and predicted, with a finite number of members, and a concrete headquarters that they could assault. No one knows from where the monsters emerge; no one knows how the monsters return from seemingly beyond the grave. Yet the Yiga represent something within the boundaries of the mortal world that the Eldic, and Tabanch, and Parapans—Parapans?—can point to, and that they can deal with to make that much safer the land once known as Hyrule.

The people of the land need something to cling to, some hope and faith on which to latch on. Monsters come back, like fish bones buried by the banks of a river.

But people—people don't.

And never before have they had such a detailed and knowledgeable informant, once tasked with the very taking of the Hero's slate.

Monsters still roam the land once known as Hyrule. Day by day, their attacks still grow more frequent. Nevertheless, the Divine Beasts offer safety in the passage between one city to another. No longer do the people need to turn the other cheek and rely on the Yiga to walk where the people could not.

They have yet a long, long ways to go before the common folk can take to the paths. Yet the Divine Beasts represent a start.

And the Divine Beasts represent something even more vital.

Hope.

"The rest of Eldin still needs me," Yunobo elaborates, "but if we crush the Yiga, then that helps everyone. Including my people."

Approximately two weeks ago, he continues, Yunobo and the Tabanch Champion, Amali, working together with Queen Riju of Parapa—Link wipes away her tears—launched an offensive on the very hideout of the Yiga. "Between the awesome might of Vah Medo-medoh, Vah Nabo-naboris, and our own Vah Ruda-rudania, the Yiga couldn't stand a chance!" Yunobo beams.

Link returns the grin. She promised Dorian that she would help him raise an army, but in the end Dorian has raised his own.

When she sees them again in Medli, she'll have to cook for Cottla and Koko. Carrot cake, to see if their tongues sing sweet as Aryll's. Hot buttered apple, and meat-stuffed pumpkin, and veggie cream stew, and anything else she can think of. Honey-glazed pancakes, like the kind Romani loves, and creamy meat stew, and maybe catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd.

"Now we're just dealing with the ones that fled," Yunobo finishes, curling his hands into fists and clenching the blue shawl with a forged flame in his eyes. "And people aren't going to be hurt again. And it's all...it's all thanks to you, Link."
She shakes her head. "And to you, Yuno-yunobo."

Scratching his jaw, he ducks his head. "Pinch me," he says. She pinches him. He squeals. "Pinch me again." Instead Link hugs him.

They bed for the night. In the morning the Divine Beast Vah Rudania begins its trek over Akkala. Yunobo pilots the Divine Beast cautiously so as to avoid on stepping on trees, or on animals, or especially-not on people. The Divine Beast crawls rapidly. Rito messengers serve as informants in the air; zora, in the water. Yiga sightings fan out the Eldic forces. They dispatch as well monsters of every sort, from brown-furred Akkalan wolfos to blue- and white-maned lynels that fall beneath the Divine Beast's overwhelming fire-light. Link spends her time gathering ingredients, learning from Yunobo how much his life—and his father's approval—has changed since becoming the Divine Beast Vah Rudania's pilot, and entering shrines. At the Rist Peninsula, Kass and Link set off to puzzle out the riddle. A series of depressed platforms hued in blue along the vortex and a shrine waiting for a slate greets them, to his boundless surprise.

Someone must have come long before to solve the puzzle of the shrine. At the very least Link takes Kass and Sarie down to sing the shrine to sapphire.

They reach the edge of Akkala. They turn back. To Medli, to report.

Link practises the wooden ocarina. Steadily the patterns of her fingers return to her, that Marin taught her, that she later learned herself. Epona's song and Ilia's whistle, and some of the melodies she learned from Marin's mothers—the Mambo of Manbo and the Frogsong of Mamu's Soul—and some of songs she played with the girl with the golden hair.

She sits cross-legged on the bed with Sarie busily braiding her ponytail. Sarie. A korok. Remembering the minuet of the girl with the golden hair, Link wets the mouthpiece of the ocarina.

"Hey, Sarie."

Sarie kookoos at her.

"I don't know a lot about koroks, but a long, long time ago, one of my closest friends taught me this song and said it was an ode to the Goddess Kokir, or something like that. She said it was like...a memory of younger days. I don't really get what that means. She was a lot smarter than me, and...very dear." In that moment Link feels very much like the girl with the golden hair clutching the volume on Akkalan faiths and asking her about Ordon foods. "Sorry if I mess it up. I'm not too good with the ocarina."

"Ooh! Play it. Play it! Sarie wants to hear. Sarie wants to hear!"

Link lifts the ocarina to her lips.

She plays.

La ne naaa...da na daaa...la ne naaa...da na daaa...ma da dii, daa...di-da-di-lii...maaaa...

Raising her eyebrows, she waggles them at Sarie. "How bad was that?" she asks, a smile on her lips.

Sarie does not reply. Their hands fall away from Link's hair.

"Sarie?"
They stay quiet for the remainder of the evening; Link puts away the ocarina into her satchel. If she plays music so awfully that her companion would even cease to speak with her, then she has no business carrying around an instrument of torture, an implement of war.

They pass by Eldin and begin to cross over into the province of Rauru between the northern wilds and the Hylia River. Link slumbers on a Necludan-style bed with Ilia by her left side and Sarie snuggled in the collar of her tunic to bump their head under her chin. She awakens to a vibration at her throat.

Blinking blearily, Link sits up. Sarie flies out from her tunic. When she merely sways back and forth, rubbing her eyes with the heels of her hands, Sarie twirls back on their korok leaf to tug on her sidelocks, the pull so forceful that the pain sharpens Link into awakeness.

"Come," says Sarie; the sudden shift in their voice opens Link's eyes, her gaze clear and alert. "Come, come."

Sarie wraps their finger-like roots around Link's left forefinger. Her wrist aches from its earlier sprain as Sarie puts her along, up ladders, towards the front of the Divine Beast. With her slate no longer in control of the Divine Beast after Yunobo's synchronisation, Link follows Sarie up to the entrance at the head until they have emerged onto the back of the Divine Beast.

The moon overhead has ripened to fullness. The stars glimmer with the names Hestu imparted on her. Anouki, the fixed star. The Sword in the Stone and its Reflection nearby. The Seven Sages, clustered together. The Hero of the Silver Arrow with a sash of three gifts of the Oracles, driving back the Boar of Malice. And yet, from here, the constellations differ ever so slightly in their locations, and those that she could not see before have crept up from the northern horizon.

To the east stretches the spine of the land once known as Hyrule, the Eldic range cresting with the summit of Death Mountain. To the west flower the plains and gentle hills that slope towards the cool snows of Tabantha. Before her to the south winds the Hylia River that circles the castle, and beyond Her banks, the castle itself, ghostly and silent, quieted under the weight of one hundred years of passing and choked beneath the burden of ten thousand years of dust.

Link rubs her eyes again. Sparks of red on the insides of her eyelids give way to the dark quiet of the night sky. She glances at Sarie; the korok stares down into the abyss to the north. Leaning over the edge of the Divine Beast, Link casts her gaze down to what lies north of the castle, north of the province of Rauru, north, north, north, the direction of the lands beyond Hyrule.

A bank of fog. A forest shrouded in mist. A cloak of obscurity in the heart of a land charted out to map, pulsating with life in the centre of a lake dewed in the veil of the wilds.

Sarie murmurs with the voice of the wind and the forest in one. "Sarie remembers. Sarie...Sarie remembers." Link gazes at them.

"The flow of time is always cruel..." they whisper. "...its speed seems different for each person, but no one can change it..." Their leafy mask faces her with its blankness; she starts to step back, but their roots dig more deeply into her finger. "...a thing that doesn't change with time is a memory of younger days..."

Sarie quiets.

"You're not her," they murmur, and in that moment her voice sounds, so suddenly, very, very distant, "but...I still..."
The wind shifts. Link's fingers curl around her companion's hand. Together they step off.

Together they glide into the lost woods, lovely, dark, and deep.

—

*Mighty Simmered Fruit* (five hearts, low attack boost for 04:10) - acorn, chickaloo tree nut, goat butter, mighty bananas, palm fruit

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Well, now, I can talk about Glepp being Yiga. When we first meet Misan and Glepp in the eleventh chapter, we do so in the context of an Eldic village that has had reports of Yiga activity the past few days. Glepp and Misan are also noted to have arrived a few days ago. Glepp, who is an archer (like many Yiga women in-game), is politely but firmly suggested to leave. They go to Darunia with a sellsword; note that Link does not go for shrines while in Glepp's presence. As a coincidence, Vah Rudania is calmed while Glepp was near Darunia, which heightened her suspicions. We meet them again much later in Parapa, where we learn that Glepp requested that Misan abandon the usual sapphire-ruby trade to try topaz, which brings the merchants near Parapa—and the Yiga stronghold, where Glepp was receiving intel. Misan and Glepp are travelling to Lanayru, the home of the last uncleansed Divine Beast. Glepp also mentions not wanting to be seen by those in Ruto, who—the zora population being small and long-lived—would likely recognise her as a Yiga. During the travel to Lanayru, Glepp (1) reveals that she has met Kass and knows the tune of his accordion, (2) observes Link travelling to shrines and towers, (3) implies she knows Link is over 100 years old, (4) asks Link about her future travels, and (5) specifically is the one to probe regarding Ordon (by the way, your hint that Ordon was destroyed came from Glepp and Misan not recognising it). There's probably more I'm forgetting. Take a look back at the chapters with Glepp in it and check yourself! As for Misan...we'll see in the future.

Hey, remember Zelda's harp that I first mentioned back in the twenty-sixth chapter? Here it is! Zelda's refrain of "do my words sting?" are a clapback to Impa saying those same words to Zelda in the previous chapter.

Music has been a vital part of the *Zelda* series since *Link's Awakening*. The comment about Zelda receiving her memories again is a nod to *Skyward Sword*, where Zelda remembers her past life as Hylia. Of course, in *Delicious in Wilds*, the royal family is not the reincarnation of Hylia, who may or may not have existed at all.

Remember how I mentioned that Urbosa had spent some time in Rovah?

Impa referred to the Master Sword as the "sacred sword" once before. It's an alternative epithet, one pulled from the Ballad of the Sealing War: with sacred sword and blesséd blade.

Go all the way back to the first chapter. Link mentions that the Temple of Time looks like there's a crater at the back. The royal family literally excavated around the Master
Sword set in the pedestal of the temple and carted it to the castle. Ouch!

Kokir Forest replaces the Great Hyrule Forest. The odes to the Seven are passed-down versions of the songs from *Ocarina of Time* (as well as a certain song from *Majora's Mask*). History is written by the victor. Although worship of the Seven didn't exist at the time that the original songs were written (only of the Golden Goddesses), the songs passed down the 'royal family' have been repurposed to fit with the royal family's current narrative. In this case, the song is the Minuet of Forest, originally meant for the Forest Temple.

The memory of younger days is in reference to the line spoken about the Minuet of Forest in *Ocarina of Time*. By the way, I don't really like *Ocarina of Time* all that much, and yes, I played the games in release order, making *Ocarina of Time* the first 3D game I played, on the N64 and all (back when disbelievers were deriding the console as the 'Pretendo 69'). By the way, for those who don't remember from *Breath of the Wild* or who haven't gotten there yet, Zelda's mother died when she was six years old in-game and also in-fic.

What Sarie says at the end is, again, a reference to the speech from *Ocarina of Time*. I'm not sure if I got it right since I went based on memory and only played the game once, but it's about there.

Switching pronouns for Sarie was not a mistake at the end there.

Up next: the lost woods; talk of a previous hero; the pedestal in the woods.

midna's ass. 28 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments:

I'd just like to say that I called it and I pointed the finger at the Yiga and eventually it ended up being *true* and dammit I am proud of that.

The ending bit of this chapter is one of my favourite bits in the series. Sarie suddenly switching pronouns and getting serious is really chilling.

Emma. 27 October 2017.
Hearty Cream of Mushroom Soup

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef and the forgetful companion enter the lost woods, where awaits the sword that seals the darkness. The chef grips again the hilt of the blade of evil's bane.

Chapter Notes

And then, after promising you all a chapter yesterday, I completely neglected to upload it! Here it is, prim and pristine. As a reminder, no chapter today (this is technically yesterday's chapter) and none tomorrow. We resume on Monday. See you all then, and thank you all for reading!

Author's notes that wouldn't fit in the end: I started writing this chapter at 21:24 on the second of August, and finished writing it on at 10:52 on the third of August.

Thanks a million for coming with me all this way and beyond. We're moving towards end-game now. Just twenty-three chapters left. Just a short, short twenty-three chapters. And, as always, thanks a million to my beta reader for everything that she's done for my sake.

Hey, it's another chapter where Link just uses pronouns the entire time, except for in the memory! I have quite a few of these, don't I?

I wanted to get across the absolutely alien and terrifying sensation of the lost woods.

Back when Link was travelling to Lanayru with Glepp and Misan, she realised she still couldn't remember Ilia's name even though Ilia had helped Link choose the name Link, and had in her distress/breakdown gouged out scars down her cheeks.

The memory of this chapter is directly based on/adapted from the "Shelter from the Storm" memory from Breath of the Wild. Though, of course, I've expanded on it.

The techniques mentioned by Link in this chapter are mostly taken from the standard attacks in the 3D titles, although the riposte and the parry refer to a different game series.

Zelda (just like the Ordon kids from Link's childhood, including Ilia) mistakes Link's silence—borne of fear and a desire to be as unassuming as possible, a product of her abuse—for indifference, concentration, or arrogance.

Swords are best kept at the hip. I've mentioned this before, so I won't repeat myself. The Master Sword is ridiculously long, so long that it clips through flat ground in Link's default idle animation. Ridiculous!

The legends that Link mentions in this chapter are in reference to various other Zelda titles. In The Adventure of Link, the Triforce of Courage chooses Link by causing a golden triangular mark to appear on Link's hand, which was later adapted for the mark of the Triforce, as seen in Oracle of Seasons and Oracle of Ages, as well as
in *Twilight Princess* (hence why Link keeps the left hand covered throughout the early part of *Twilight Princess*). Both *Ocarina of Time* and *Skyward Sword* see Link having nightmares of what's to come. Both *A Link to the Past* and *A Link Between Worlds* see Link awakened in the middle of the night by Zelda's telepathetic signal. But none of those happened to the Link of *Delicious in Wilds*.

I think it's relevant to point out how the different people in Link's life (Marin, Aryll, Ilia, and Zelda) view the legends of the past. Link has seen many influences in her life, and none is right and none is wrong. Just different.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"The flow of time is always cruel..." they whispered. "...its speed seems different for each person, but no one can change it..." Their leafy mask faced her with its blankness, and she started to step back but their roots dug more deeply into her finger. "...a thing that doesn't change with time is a memory of younger days..."

Sarie quieted.

"You're not her," they murmured, and in that moment her voice sounded, so suddenly, very, very distant, "but...I still..."

The wind shifted. Link's fingers curled around her companion's hand. Together they stepped off.

Together they glided into the lost woods, lovely, dark, and deep.

The mists envelop her. From the clearness of the sky the fogs surround her all at once, her vision fading to inky white. As they glide lower towards the woods, she listens to the sounds, to the music, to the faint laughter of children, to the fifes of the song that she has heard Sarie sing, to the tumbling of wooden blocks against one another, the noises shifting and blending into one another as if she were erratically spinning in different directions. When her boots touch ground, they sink slightly into the mud. While she stands still, the sounds around her do not shift. Glancing back and forth at the woods about her, she sees nothing but identically-faced trees gazing back at her with yawning maws, all of them seemingly the same, and all of them staring directly at her, like she were at the heart of the forest. She cannot make out farther than a pace or two before the fog overtakes her. The moment she shifts, even a twist of the head, the noises undulate and twirl. Or perhaps they stay in place, and it is she who has lost her orientation in the sea of the same wood.

The chill of the fog presses in. The mists caress her face, lap up the wound under her left eye, intertwine their fingers with hers, reach a finger down the back of her tunic to trace her spine to the small of her back. She shivers.

"Be not afraid," the wind whispers. Not the wind, but Sarie, their fingers still rooting her forefinger. "As long as you are with me, the woods cannot take you. So do not leave my side while we are together, here..." Sarie hovers before her. They do not face her. "...let me be your navigator, Link."

She can hear the thudding of her heartbeat through her fingertip where it pulsates against the roots of their fingers. Her breaths should have quickened, yet something about the coolness of the fog keeps her breathing low and deep, as if she were slumbering.

She shudders in her sleep. Her tunic has no feather lining, and she cannot rely on awakening again in the warmth of Kass's wings.
"I do not...remember the way forward..." Their voice, ever fainter. "...but I believe...in you. You are not her, yet you remind me...in your recklessness...in your foolishness...and in your courage. Do not...leave my side, and I will...not leave yours, Link."

They fall silent. She reaches a hand towards Sarie, but they do not stir from the air. They do not hold a korok leaf. They hover in the darkness like a leaf caught mid-flight, like the moon in the sky.

She cranes her neck up.

No moon. No moon but for the mists shrouding above.

She lifts her boot only to find resistance against her toes. When she looks down, she notices creeping arms of earth threading over her boots to root her into the soil. Inhaling sharply, she jerks her feet up to track through the fingers of dirt and mud.

She starts to jog in place. The identical trees around her that gaze perfectly at her. The music shifting whenever she moves. The lone and level fog that obscures the stars.

And that sensation.

That sensation. That sensation of losing her boundaries. She can sense, almost, how her skin dissipates from her in a vapour to melt into the mist, how her consciousness extends, how her very form warbles into flux.

"You...must...find...the...way..."

She reaches for her slate. Magnesis. Stasis. Anything.

Through the slate, the trees remain as impassive and as silent as before. As still. As absolutely still.

As still as Sarie. As still as herself. Her movement only serves to disorient her further. Yet, if she does not move—

Her boots sink into the mud.

Although she tries to force the hastening of her breaths, the beat of her heart and the speed of her inhalations remain in rhythm with the wind through the woods. She approaches a tree. She skirts her hand over the mouth-like opening of its trunk, seeking for a twig to light aflame.

Yet, when she curls her fingers around one and tries to bend, she has the distinct feeling of someone bending back one of her middle fingers. She braces her thumb against the base of the twig to crack it. Pain splinters down her left wrist.

She steps back.

The tree gazes at her.

She looks back over her shoulders.

All of the trees gaze at her, perfectly in line with her, even though she has walked several paces away. Or has she? Has she always stood in this very spot? She has, perhaps, always stood in this spot, with the trees gazing at her, with her boots sunk slightly into the soil, with the lullabies of the lost lulling her to sleep.

She could sleep. She could close her eyes and given in to the mist. She may be mist, but she will
not be missed.

The fingers of her right hand curl into a ball. She digs her nails in until warm wetness trickles down her fingers. The sudden sharpness of the pain opens again her world. She gasps. She inhales. She breathes out. No matter how quickly she pushes the air through her lungs, the fog steadies her breaths, yet the mists cannot numb the pain that she gouges from her palm.

The agony that keeps her alert. The agony that keeps her awake. The agony that keeps her alive.

She swings her head. The world around her remains the same. Nothing moves. Nothing shifts, save for the music that undulates around in patterns she cannot discern, but stagnant, static, the same music she imagines as sung ten thousand years ago. Nothing, except—

—for the wind. The wind that blows, at her side. A breeze so gentle that she would not have noticed its caresses if not for Sarie's speech. She turns with the kaleidoscope of music until she feels the wind at her back.

The wind at her back.

Urging her forward.

The friends that she has had, that have sung the wind at her back. And if her friends can sing the wind forward, then her friends themselves must wait in its face.

She rotates on her heel with the murmur of melodies that mix and melt about her.

She walks into the wind.

As she walks, the fog grows denser around her. As she walks—whenever she glances left or right—all of the trees continue to gaze perfectly at her no matter how far she steps. As she walks, the wind shifts, and she curves her path through the trees. As she walks, she tires. As she walks, her eyelids heavy. As she walks, her heart slows and her breaths deepen. As she walks, she sinks her nails into her own flesh. As she walks, she leaves flecks of red on the cool earth.

She walks into the wind.

She walks, and she walks, and she walks, and her legs numb from the walking, and her stomach hollows out, and her eyelids lower with every blink, and she could rest here for just a moment, and she could stop and sit awhile, and she could lie down, just a second, just a moment, just to catch her breath, just to sleep.

But she has promises to keep, and paths to walk before she sleeps, and meals to make, and breaths to take, and friends to see, and herself to be.

She walks into the wind.

She rakes her nails in deeper. She numbs her hearing, her gaze, her smell, her taste. She leaves only her touch. She cannot miss a shift in the wind. Her world narrows through the fog to she who reads the whisper of the wind and nothing more.

She walks into the wind, and the wind walks into her. From a gentle caress she can sense the wind building against her skin to a breeze, and then a gust, and then she finds it picking up her sidelocks and ruffling her tunic, and then she has to force herself to continue forward one step at a time while the wind buffets her with the fury of the storm. She protects her companion in the crook of her hand, their roots still tangled around her forefinger. She walks forward, eyes closed. She walks
forward, until her body has all but given up. She walks forward, the pain of exhaustion buckling her legs and her heart crawling to a stop.

And then she forces herself to walk on.

She walks into the wind, and suddenly she has no wind to walk into.

She stands still. Absolutely still. She feels for its whisper, but the air around her has quieted: the eye of the maelstrom. She does not shiver.

Warm.

Warmth.

Not quite like the warmth of sunlight. The warmth of the shade on a day green as spring with the heat of life all around her.

She raises one eyelid, and then the other, and then she finds, in the middle of the path, a single scarlet mushroom.

A single sleepy toadstool.

She bends down.

She curls the fingers of her free right hand around the stalk. She plucks it from the ground. She lets it sit in her palm, the blood oozing up from the four crescent wounds, the cap almost like a heart.

She lifts her head and she finds that the fog has lifted. She stands before a hollowed log, some twice her height in diameter. The grass grows the green of life, the blades as her waist, swaying gently despite that she can feel no wind. Flowers curl and bloom through the sea of green, gold and white, the sun and the moon. She steps onto the inside of the hollow log. Moss leads her down the path inside. Her boots sink into the green. Birds flutter to the treetops, and bunnies bound into the bushes. She can sense the gazes of the grove's guardians upon her, warm and welcoming with the breath of life.

She walks on and she can feel her heart compress like she has been here before.

Not here. Not exactly. But that feeling overwhelming, of coming home, of something long forgotten, of a memory of young days.

When she touches her eyes, her fingers come away wet. Her boots rest at the rim of the hollow of the log. The tears curve down her cheeks to gather at her chin and fall away to the earth.

She has never been here before, but she has felt this. Like a nostalgia for something beyond her past, a melancholy for something she has never witnessed, a poignancy for something that people she will never know must have felt themselves. Like the understanding of the passage of time. Like Ordon, buried to ruin. Like Marin, passed away long enough. Like the land once known as Hyrule after one hundred years of passing.

Like herself.

And here, where she looks, she finds something that has not changed, but something has been passed down generation to generation, far longer than ten thousand years, since the dawn of the Golden Goddesses, since the time when all lay in dust.
A memory of younger days. A memory of spring. A memory of her first laugh, her cheeks tickled by the warm hide of an Ordon goat, her tiny hands reaching out to grab fistfuls of fur, her heart not yet knowing hurt or harm or shame or loss.

She looks on.

Tears trail her footfalls.

A smooth stone greened in moss and ivy. A pedestal with three flowers curved behind, two to the left, and one to the right. The Hylia-white and fire-light-blue of silent princesses.

The white and blue of the favoured flower of the girl with the golden hair.

And there, upon the stone.

The blade of evil's bane.

Resting within the pedestal, its blade the softened white of the flowers, its hilt the violet of the spirals that curl over her skin, its wings folded quietly at its sides, like those of the loftwings, messengers of the Golden Goddesses long, long ago.

She steps forward. She approaches the pedestal. She can feel the roots around her forefinger slackening. Her companion does not look at her.

"You no...longer need a navigator...do you? You've...so much...that...can find your own way...without...by your side..." Their words muffle into murmur. She strains to hear. "And again you'll...take it and...forget me...won't you, Link? You...you always...you told me that you would be my...friend but you...it is our fate that we cannot...together..."

She watches her companion.

Her companion drifts towards the ground, more and more slowly, until they hang for an eternity one brush above the grass.

"But you...are not she, and I cannot look at you and expect her..." they whisper, voice choked on grief. "The sword...always chooses...another in the times of...need but...time does not repeat itself...she and her spirit will...never return. That which...we have lost is...lost...all fall to the flow of time...that which takes all...that which will one day take me...into its embrace..."

They alight in the grass at the foot of the stone. The blades dance about them; her companion lies still.

She takes a step. Then another. She crouches down until the grass brushes against her neck where the violet whorls at her throat; she extends her left hand with its lightning-strike scar of courage.

She rests her hand on her companion's head.

For a long breath, they do not move. Then they turn their head towards her.

Her palm slips away from her companion. She lifts her arms into the canopy of grass.

"I..." Her hands curl inwards. Her right palm dribbles blood onto the green. "...don't know what you have suffered, or what you have lost. I can't pretend to understand. But I...was asleep for one hundred years, and when I awoke, the world changed around me. The people I love—Mipha, and Revali, and Daruk, and Urbosa, and my little sister Aryll, and Marin, and my best friend, and...a
girl with golden hair and eyes blue as a silent princess—have passed, or left, or I don't know where they are. I won't ever see some of them again. I won't ever be able to tell Marin I love her ever again. I left her..." Her arms tremble. "...and she never knew if I would return."

Droplets trickle down the curves of her nails.

"But I...realised that chasing after the past...is only ever chasing an echo. You can't un-ripen fruit. You can't un-rot fish. You can only move forward to other meals. And that's what the people I love would have wanted. For my happiness, I think. I'm still trying to figure these things out as I go."

She rubs the back of her head. Their companion stares through her, or perhaps does not look at all. She cannot tell through the blankness of the mask.

"I want to know what happened to the people I love. And I'll find out if I can. But I've...made so many other friends. So many other people I love here, too. Yunobo, and Amali and her family, and Riju, and Sidon, and that's barely scratching the surface of all of the people I know and have shared meals with and have cooked for and love more than I love myself."

She runs her palm against their forehead. She brushes her knuckles against their cheek.

"I don't know who the she you're talking about is, and I'm sorry that she left you. But she wouldn't have wanted you to cry over her. It's...it'll be all right. It'll...it'll be all right, won't it? You can come with me. I can introduce you to my friends. You've already met Ilia and Kass, and Yunobo, and my cooking pot, too. There's so much world out there."

They say nothing. They do not move. They do not make noise like the tumbling of wooden blocks, but rather like the quiet after the rain.

"I...I know that I'm not any good at this. I've never really known how to use my words, and when I do, I just end up rambling about food. " She laughs lightly to herself. "I'm...sorry."

"What if I forget again?" they whisper suddenly; she stills her hand to listen. "...forgot once. I could...again, if the Goddesses do not want me to remember. I...we are the immortal children of the woods, and for our own sake, They take these things from us...so that we do not feel loss...but what if I want to? What if I want to hurt? What if that pain—"

"—means that you're alive."

She does not understand. Not fully. She has no concept of eternity, no concept of forever. The stretch of one hundred years has already stretched her to the limits.

"I lost my memories when I woke up. I didn't even know my name. But the smells and tastes of all the meals I've ever had are the things that've helped me remember. Maybe for you there's something else. I don't know what you love—"

"The ocarina. I played an ocarina. I made her one, out of wood. She...threw it away when she had to seize her destiny. I don't think she wanted to, but...I vowed I'd remain her friend no matter what happened. No matter if she...threw me away, too." They shudder. When she gathers them in her arms, they do not struggle. She embraces them against her chest. "That song you played. The Minuet...of Forest."

"Is that what it's called?" She snaps her fingers. "Maybe if it's food for me, then it's music for you. You're always humming, aren't you? Just write down the song somewhere. And if you forget, you can listen to it again, and then you'll remember, right?" She bobs her head, but they say little. "...right?"
"Do you not fear what you might have forgotten? Are you not afraid that there could be something...so dreadfully important...that you don't know what you don't know?"

Tilting her head to the side, she raises her hand to her cheek. It took her nearly half a year to recall that she had a little sister, and over twice that besides that to remember that she knew Mipha a child, that she went regularly to Ruto.

Over a year since she awoke.

A year and a half.

She counts on her fingers. She blinks. Perhaps along the line, she wonders, her twentieth birthday has passed without her knowledge. She called herself nineteen in Ache's Veil, to mark the passage of a year.

She does not remember her own birthday.

But she remembers Aryll's, and Marin's, and the girl who smelled of horses's, and Urbosa's, and Daruk's, and Revali's, and Mipha's, and the girl with the golden hair's.

Just not her own.

"I don't know what I don't know," she echoes, "and there are...some things that I wish I could remember. Names I've forgotten. I'm scared that I could be forgetting an entire person somewhere. But.

"I can either sit here and be scared about what I could be missing, or I could just...love those I do remember." She runs her hand over her hair. "It's not the best. I wish that you could just poof remember. Still...

"There's a girl whose name I can't remember, no matter how many meals I eat. I thought for sure if I ate her favourite, it'd spring to me like an epiphany, but it didn't." She touches her hands to her own cheeks where she can still sense the scars left by her nails. "She wouldn't have wanted me to...to suffer for her sake." As she moves through the gestures, her eyes ever so slowly widen. "She wouldn't have wanted me to suffer, whether I remember her or not. Whether I get back my memories or not. None of them would've wanted me to hurt. Well, Revali, maybe, sometimes, but that was more about him being angry at fate. And I can't blame him for how happy he made Aryll." She lets herself laugh again, a tiny peal of a giggle that barely vibrates her lip, but enough. "But they wouldn't have wanted me to hurt. Not over them. They just...just like what Marin would've wanted. They just wanted me to be happy, and safe, and with a full stomach, too."

She holds her companion to her chest; she feels their tiny hands clinging to her tunic.

"I don't know who this she with the ocarina is, but if you two were friends, if you loved her and she loved you, then that's what she would want for you, too. Happy, and safe, and with a full stomach, too. Speaking of full stomachs." She raises her eyebrows. "Hey...can you...show me how to prepare loam?"

They lift up their face at her. She nods.

"You are different from her," they mumble into the fabric of her tunic. "She didn't like food nearly this much. I can't remember ever seeing her eat except elixirs...I don't think she liked food much at all."

She runs her fingers through one of her sidelocks. "I don't want to say I'm offended that you
thought I resembled her at all, but..."

"She'd have carrots with her, always, to feed her horse, but not herself..."

"That's a step up at least," she signs, angling for a smile but only meeting that impenetrable leafy mask.

"It's...courage. That air you give off. Like you could lay down your life for this land and your love. The same air I felt from her." They curl their tiny arms in. "I always knew she would leave one day. From that air...that wind that always blew her forward..."

"Well, I don't intend on leaving any time soon. Not until I figure out how to eat rock roast." She touches her chin. "And maybe loam."

"Then...let me help you. With the loam."

They show her how and where to dig of the soft soil. They show her how to test for its dampness, how to curl her fingers in to feel it crumble, how to seek the spots of the richest black. They show her how to mix in the most succulent leaves. They show her how to puff the loam with air. They show her how to cup her palms with the loam loose between her fingers; she thinks of Sidon letting her eating ceviche from his hands. They place their tiny hands onto hers, and they eat of the loam, and they pat their hand against her cheek.

"Do you mind if I...sleep in your tunic?" They shiver. "It's warm there. I don't have to, if it's strange."

She pulls her tunic open to offer them the inside. For a moment they do not move, simply hovering there with their hand on her cheek.

"If, when I awaken, I forget everything again...let me be happy for a little while." Their tiny fingers press into her cheek. "Then play that song for me. Please."

She nods. "I promise, Sarie."

"I think...I think I used to have a different name. Maybe...when you play that...song again..." They droop. Their hand slides from her cheek. They drift down into her palms. She tucks them not only into her tunic, but also in her undershirt; their snores hum along her sternum.

She sits cross-legged before the pedestal, her companion comforted by the warmth of her body. Placing the cooking pot in front of her legs, she pulls the mushroom out from her sleeve.

The sleepy toadstool.

She pokes through her satchel, at what she has. She has, still, half a bottle of milk leftover from the creamy meat stew she prepared earlier for dinner, to show off to Kass the recipe Romani taught her. She has rock salt. She has a handful of assorted spices. She has some cloves of garlic and onion at the bottom of her ingredient box. She has a little parcel of flour ground by hand using one of the mills on the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. She has a third of a stick of goat butter, and she has little else.

Yet she has this mushroom.

She rises to her feet, careful not to disturb her companion, and investigates the periphery of the clearing. She finds truffles and radishes and a particularly terrified bunny, furred in pink, nose twitching desperately against her palm. No, not terrified. Curious. The bunny noses her hand, flicks
their ears up, and then bounds away into the underbrush.

She watches the rabbit go before she returns to the cooking pot.

She can think of no better salutation to the blade of evil's bane than a meal in honour of the sword once strapped to her shoulder, of the blade once bound to her back.

Before she sets the entirety of the lost woods ablaze, she lines a firepit of stones and collects grass and twigs into a small pile. Kass’s flint melts butter in the bottom of the cooking pot. She adds in the onion and garlic first, then sets about mincing the radishes and carving the truffles and sleepy toadstool into wide, thin slices. Mixing mushroom, radish, truffle, onion, and garlic, she flips them over while they soften into the butter. She shimmies out a palmful of flour to thicken the brown-gold within. Then she pours in the bottle of milk, lest she make floured mushroom butter. She allows the stew to simmer and draw out the flavours of its contents while she sprinkles rock salt and ground black pepper. At long last she quits the cooking pot from the heat.

She offers the cooking pot towards the pedestal. "Want some?" she asks the sword that seals the darkness. When the blade of evil's bane yields no response, she shrugs. "I'll eat it in your honour then, old friend."

Where she has no utensils, she has a mouth and hands. Bringing the cooking pot to her mouth despite its heft, she tries to tip it just enough to swallow down its contents. The thick stew flows slowly, and she tips it higher. Higher, higher, too high.

Half the stew ends up on her tunic.

She holds up the hem of her tunic to pool the stew within. Curling herself into a ball—careful not to disturb her companion—she slurps up the stew from the fabric. Hearty and thick, the mushrooms and truffles bringing notes savory and earthy, the radish contributing a crisp and popping zest, the stew settles in her stomach to warm the very marrow of her bones and rest the slight nervous flutter of her heart.

She remembers taking shelter from the rains beneath a small grove of trees, under which several small statues dedicated to the Goddesses saw offerings of apples and berries left in their bowls. The king had tasked her with travelling by the side of the girl with the golden hair to one of the lesser-known Temples of Hylia along the banks of the river that bore Her name, in the hopes that a simpler faith might spark an epiphany where the complicated and lavish ceremonies of the Hyrule cathedral might not. Impa—having gone ahead to scout for the nearest village—had left them in the grove with explicit instructions that if she returned and found a single golden hair out of place, she would shove the blade of evil's bane into a place where Link certainly would not want it.

The girl with the golden hair scarcely ever looked at her then. Not since Link had inadvertently turned her over to Impa and the king when the girl with the golden hair had attempted to examine the shrine on the island northeast of Carok Bridge.

Link, not knowing what to say, set mushrooms plucked from faery rings raised by the rain into her cooking pot. While the cream of mushroom stew merrily simmered away, she began to practise her daily drills with the blade of evil's bane. The horizontal slice. The vertical. The thrust. The plunge. The parry. The riposte. Diagonal, spiralled, tricks of the blade.

The girl with the golden hair spoke suddenly. So suddenly that her words passed over Link's head for a moment before she registered the girl with the golden hair's speech.

"You truly have committed yourself to your training regime," the girl with the golden hair was
saying, her voice remarkably level. "I hear that you are training extensively with each of the Champions to verse yourself not only in mastery of the blade, but of the Champion's area of expertise as well, both to understand how to fight against such foes, and to wield those weapons in event of an emergency. Your dedication is outstanding, really. I can see why the sword that seals the darkness chose you. You...truly do set your mind to it, above and beyond any of your personal interests. I suppose to be chosen, you have to be willing to give up everything. Isn't that so?"

Link glanced at her briefly over her shoulder. She could not read the girl with the golden hair's expression, which frightened her into silently continuing her drills.

"Of course, not even me discussing you can distract you from your destiny, hm."

The girl with the golden hair fell silent. Link checked on the stew: the onion had not yet softened. When she resumed her drills, the girl with the golden hair likewise resumed her speech, much to the budding beads of sweat down the back of Link's neck.

"What if...one day...you realised that no matter how much you trained with the sword that seals the darkness, it would not unlock its full potential for you? What if...one day...you realised that it simply refused to work in your hands, that it would only ever be a dull sword like any other, unable to strike the mortal blow against the Calamitous One?"

Link dared not look back at her. She kept her back to the girl with the golden hair, even as the girl with the golden hair's voice started to fragment at the edges.

"Yet, no matter how much you warned people, that they should find someone else, that you wouldn't be able to use its powers, they just...just expected you to somehow make it work. 'You're the chosen one, so you'll figure out. And if you don't, then everyone's deaths will be on your head!' What if...that's all everyone ever told you? I wonder if you would have..." The girl with the golden hair sank her head into the crook of her arms, her fingers closed around the golden and violet charms that she wore at her throat. Link listened to the inwards gasp of her breath. "What if you found out that the sword that seals the darkness hadn't chosen you after all?"

The cream of mushroom stew finished its simmering. She divided it into three, leaving one third upon the fire, and offered the second third to the girl with the golden hair in a small blue bowl adorned with markings of the Goddess Hylia.

The girl with the golden hair narrowed her eyes, and grimaced, and turned away to curl up under the tree.

Upon Impa's return, the Princess's shade took her third of the stew from the fire. They ate in silence. The girl with the golden hair drank a vial of spring green elixir yet refused to touch the stew.

Somehow that stung Link worse than any muttered mark of malice or any sharpened sword to the stomach.

When she licks up the last of the stew from her tunic, she cleans out the pot as best she can by licking up the inside—remembering to butter the rim first so that she can pull her head back out without snapping her chin—but leaves the pot dirtied with the residue her tongue cannot pick up, for lack of water.

She'll have to clean it later. By the banks of the river. With a old friend at her back.

Urbosa always kept hers at her hip. Most did, really. But she at her back, for the sword that seals
the darkness proved too long for her short limbs to keep it from dragging on the ground.

Lifting herself up from the ground, she removes from her back the cooking pot, the bow and its quiver of arrows, the sword, the spear, the satchel. She leaves the slate at her right hip and the trusty red telescope at her left. She unties and re-ties her ponytail, smooths her sidelocks, checks that her earrings sit evenly on her lobes. She quits, too, her boots, to let the soil warm her bare feet. The grasses tickle the underside; she wriggles her toes in the earth.

She rests her left foot against the smooth coolness of the pedestal, feeling the sensation of the moss that covers the stone, and then her right.

She steps forward.

The sword that seals the darkness. The blade of evil's bane. In a triangular groove on the pedestal. She stands at the point of the triangle, her left foot at its left face, her right foot at its right. The tip of the hilt reaches the level of her slowly beating heart.

Beat-beat-beat.

She breathes. She gazes at the hilt with its wings. She lifts her hands. She breathes in the scent of the silent princesses blooming by the pedestal. She brings her palms within a breath of the hilt.

"Hello," she says, "again."

She smiles, and she closes her eyes, and she takes the hilt in hand of the sword that seals the darkness, the blade of evil's bane, that one hundred years ago chose a child not yet of eighteen years to bear its weight upon her shoulders, that one hundred years chose a scrawny girl from farmland in the midst of nowhere over all of the nobles and knights of the castle to carry its burden, that one hundred years ago chose her.

Chose Link.

Before she drew the sword from the stone, no golden mark shone upon her left hand, and no nightmares of maelstroms or imprisoned calamities plagued her in her slumber, and no voice of the princess roused her from her sleep, as happened to the heroes in the legends. In the bedtime stories, as Aryll would say. In the songs, as Marin would say. In the books, as the girl who smelled of horses would say. In the warped mythology handed down over generations, if they happened at all, as the girl with the golden hair would say.

She takes the hilt in hand.

She braces herself.

She pulls.

And she feels, for the second time in her life, that completely and all-consuming pain.

A dull ache at first, like every bone in her body pulled on just a little too uncomfortably, like every joint stretched just below the point of cracking open, like every sinew and tendon strung out as if she were shooting up seven years of growth all at once. But she exhales, and she gathers herself, and she begins to pull the sword once more from the stone.

She pulls.

The agony worsens.
She can feel the tendons stretched to tearing, the sinews to shearing, the bones to breaking. She can feel the splintering of her blood vessels tautened beyond what pressure they can take. She can feel her innards disentangling from one another, can feel her intestines splitting open to burn through her entrails, can feel her skin swelled out until it begins to first flake and then slough off in great sheets, can feel the unbridled pain of the warm air kissing her raw flesh.

She pulls.

The agony worsens.

She can sense the pressure upon her heart, her arteries wrenched down and her veins up, and she can feel her heart thudding so desperately away even as the forces pull apart her spine to rip it through the line of her back between her shoulder blades, and one more second with her hands upon the hilt will burst her heart, the pain is buckling her knees and darkening her vision and it's everywhere and it's nowhere and it's worse worse worse than the Malice surrounding her to burn away her skin because the Malice coils inside her to dissolve her from the inside out and she—

—lets go.

The sword that seals the darkness, the blade of evil's bane, glides down into the triangular groove upon the pedestal. It makes no noise. It does not hum warmly beneath her fingertips. It does not vibrate with its soft blue glow. It does not resonate with the sound like the laughter of a little girl.

It lies cold, and silent, and absolutely still.

Resting within the pedestal, its blade the softened white of the flowers, its hilt the violet of the spirals that curl over her skin, its wings quiet on either side like the loftwings, messengers of the Golden Goddesses long, long ago.

She opens her palms.

She opens her eyes.

She opens herself.

Her hands. The palms curled in violet. Her right crimson with her own blood, her left spiralled in the gold of the lightning strike.

Courage, Kass called it. The symbol of the Goddess Farore.

But not courage enough for the sword that seals the darkness.

Not courage enough for the blade of evil's bane.

Not courage enough to lay down her life.

—

*Hearty Cream of Mushroom Soup* (full recovery, ten golden hearts) - big hearty radish, big hearty truffle, fresh milk, hearty truffle, rock salt

Chapter End Notes

Author's notes: Link trying to use magnesis/stasis is a nod towards the Second Sight trial in *Breath of the Wild*.

Sarie's comments about being Link's navigator are in reference to *Ocarina of Time*, where humans require fairies (i.e. Navi, where Navi stands for Navigator) to not get lost in the woods. What Sarie is doing is preventing Link from going into the "foggy part" of the lost woods that causes Link to get kicked out in-game. What happens if a human tries to go in without a korok guide? You'll see.

I accidentally got into the lost woods and figured out the trick with the wind and the torch all by myself; I was astounded at how intuitive the entire sequence was. It reminded me so deeply of *A Link to the Past* that I nearly wept. I do truly believe that the proper place for the Master Sword is in a forest grove. The Temple of Time just doesn't do it for me. *Twilight Princess* had the right idea of it, although they should have sought to actually make the place feel like a forest and not had the weird puzzle for the entrance. I actually really like the puzzle—I think it's a lot of fun—but it should've been some optional heart piece, like the more difficult sliding ice block puzzle, rather than the thing you do right before the Master Sword.

In *A Link to the Past*, you can find a mushroom in the lost woods; in *Link's Awakening*, the mystery woods reveal a sleepy toadstool. The bunnies and birds that part as Link enters the sacred grove are lifted from *A Link to the Past*.

Link has never been here before and there's no reincarnation in this fic. Rather what Link is feeling is...well, have you ever felt a strange melancholy when you enter an old (not your own) house and find everything covered in dust, or when you see photographs of people far older than you when they were young? It's a shared kind of nostalgia. It also has to do with what Link has mentioned feeling before, that sense of dissolution, because the place pangs with the power of [REDACTED due to spoilers]. It's not her accessing memories of a past life or something, because that *isn't a thing* in Delicious in Wilds.

So, essentially, the koroks repeatedly lose their memories and find it difficult to keep anything in their heads. I should distinguish here between *episodic* and *semantic* memory. The koroks know their semantic memory just fine; it's their episodic memory that they cannot remember. Nor are the koroks really immortal, just impossibly long-lived, like some trees.

You can't eat anything in *Ocarina of Time!* Link drinks potions, sure, and (at least in *Majora's Mask*, and I think in *Ocarina of Time*, too, though it's been a while since I played that game as a kid) the little mark for how many "dashes" Epona has left is a carrot, thus the comment about the carrot. If not for Saria, I wouldn't have mentioned *Ocarina of Time* Link at all, but you know, I've always wondered what happened to the kokiri we knew when they became koroks.

The pink-furred rabbit Link meets in the underbrush is a nod to the fact that Link turns into a pink rabbit in *A Link to the Past*.

And, well, *wow*, but this chapter is a massive set-back for Link's psyche. She'd gotten so good. And now...

Who ever said that Link had to be the one to wield the Master Sword?
Up next: old faces, a year later; self-understanding; acceptance.

midna's ass. 27 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Poor Link. The end of this chapter is just soul-crushing. It's actually kinda my fault; I suggested to the author that, after Link's personal character development victory in Lanayru, she needed another conflict to carry her through the last act of the story. Sorry, Link.

The way the Lost Woods are portrayed here is really neat. Very atmospheric.

Emma. 27 October 2017.
Chilly Curry Pilaf

Chapter Summary

Rejected by the sword that seals the darkness, the blade of evil's bane, the travelling chef returns to travelling with the Eldic youth and the travelling minstrel. They finish their journey to Medli, where the chef reunites with some familiar faces.

Chapter Notes

To all of my readers: back to your regularly scheduled Delicious in Wilds, for the few of you reading alongside updates.

In response to a comment on the FFN cross-posted version of this fic, I wrote the following that you might find interesting, with respect to Sarie/Saria: That said, I chose to do what I did in order to (1) shed on light on why exactly the koroks are so...korok all the time, in the sense that they're seemingly carefree and joyous tree spirits who have little to no concept of stuff going on outside Korok Forest in-game beyond vague mentions of cool weapons or that the hero needs something about the shrines. But they have no understanding of it as urgency. The virtue of the Goddess Kokir is joy; the koroks essentially keep their temperament by having no memories. This is in turn a moment of understanding for Link, who has tried to run away from her own memories, but now has accepted them, and so now gets to see what her own experiences were like from a third-person perspective.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

She leaves the woods opposite of the way she came: with the wind at her back; with her guide in her tunic rather than clutching her finger; with every anchor that held her to the earth cut away, like cucco stew without the cucco, like curry rice without the spice. She expects the woods to take her. She expects the cuccoflesh over her body to worsen, shivers giving way to shudders, until she walks into the mist and the fog swallows her whole. The wind nudges her along; she lets it push her wherever it wants her to go.

Instead, when she emerges onto the shore of the lake surrounding the lost woods, on a small strait of land that curves down near a tower, she cranes her neck up to find the ripened full moon where she left it, to find the stars in their positions, to find that the world goes on with or without her.

She walks with her companion in her tunic. If she closes her eyes, she could forget, forget what happened, forget what that means.

She has calmed the four Divine Beasts. She has borne the slate. Since the moment she set foot upon the waking world from the Shrine of Resurrection, everyone she knows has only ever told her to walk forward, has only ever told her that she can do it, has only ever told her that they believe in her.

And yet.
And yet. She carries the slate but anyone could. She has come across shrine after shrine solved by people other than herself, whose only challenge lies in not having the proper tool for the situation, whose only challenge comes from not having the slate to fit in the identical depressions in the identical faces of the identical pedestals.

Like the king—like the father of the girl with the golden hair—and like the nobles of the royal family, and like Impa, maybe everyone has clung to the legend of the hero: sent by the Goddesses and chosen by the sword that seals the darkness to smite the Calamitous One once and for all.

But maybe the Calamitous One no longer exists. Or maybe the Goddesses have chosen someone else, not her, to carry the blade of evil's bane, and she has gone the way of all of the knights and all of the nobles, bitter and downwards-cast from her rejection by the sword that seals the darkness. Or maybe Glepp, and the Yiga, understand the truth. Maybe she has fought for naught. She does not know how many of the people to whom she has entrusted her life could themselves be Yiga, could themselves wish demise upon the world, could themselves strangle her if they realised that she carried the slate.

The sins of the world. The Calamitous One: the Purifier, sent by the Goddesses. The Princess who did not unseal the magic within her bloodline, and the Knight who fell away from the world for one hundred years.

If only she could remember the eve of the Great Calamity—

She walks. She walks towards the Divine Beast Vah Rudania throughout the night. Setting the grass around her aflame, she pushes herself skyward by an updraft and lands upon the back of the Divine Beast. She manages to alight on a limb. As she runs up the slippery material, balancing desperately to keep from falling, she trips at the top and greets the Divine Beast with her face and chest, which wakes her companion in her tunic.

"Link?" they croon, in the voice of wooden blocks tumbling against one another. "Why is Sarie so warm and where have all the lights gone? Did the sunny-sun go out?"

Tiredly, tiredly, she gazes blankly ahead.

She climbs back in through the entrance in the head of the Divine Beast. She passes by a few travellers in the Divine Beast, similarly awake at this time of night, who cook, or read, or embroider, or polish their weapons, or 'polish' their 'weapons' and who apologise hastily when she nears or sit in stony silence until she has passed without so much as a glance towards them, or talk quietly amongst themselves, or rest in the sauna.

She walks on. Or at least towards her bed. Ilia, perhaps roused by the taps of her boot heels against the floor of the Divine Beast, whinnies at her; she lifts her hands up to hush her, but little more.

Curling up on the bed, she starts to tuck the blanket in around herself in lieu of an embrace, but the fatigue has sapped the strength from her fingers.

Somehow, she welcomes the shivers that tremble her body.

She awakens in the morning, and they call her Link. Link. Link from Ordon. She corrects them: Link from Romani Ranch of Kotake.

Isn't this what she wanted?

Just a person again. Just herself again. Everything that she has done, she has done by her own hands with the slate. The Goddesses have not chosen her. Coincidence, and chance, and yet why
does her heart feel as if she pulled up the sword that seals the darkness a fraction too long?

This is what she wanted. Finally, finally, to simply be able to be, without the burden of fate, without the weight of destiny, without all of the heavens pressed down upon her shoulders.

So then, why...?

Why...?

Kass, Yunobo, and Sarie alike ask her if she has fallen ill. She shrugs and stays under the covers. Kass, ever worried, remains by her side the entire rest of the relatively brief journey towards Medli, stroking her hair, trying his hand at cooking for her very badly, offering to play the accordion for her until one of the guards threatens him with a boot to the face. "I suppose that you cannot please anyone," Kass comments, setting his accordion away, "but never have I met a beast so beastly that not even music could tame it. A first for everything." She buries her face in the pillow.

Yunobo comes to see her at night when he does not pilot the Divine Beast. Anxiously he inquires if something within the Divine Beast Vah Rudania has gone amiss, or if she does not like something within, or if the guards have proven cruel to her, or anything that might be the matter. "It's the food, right? It's the food! You d-don't like the food, right...? I m-mean, this is the first time I've s-seen you not eat for a wh-whole day!"

Kass takes Yunobo aside. She listens to them discussing her. Kass explains quietly about their visit to Ordon, about the village destroyed, about how he thought the traveller to have recovered, but maybe the fullness of the tragedy has only just hit her. "Maybe she...not to use one of her analogies, but have you ever hungered yet found that your provisions empty, but you cannot bear to admit it to yourself? And so, instead, you open and close your bag repeatedly in the hopes that if you simply endeavour to open your bag enough, some meal will magically appear in the depths?"

"Huh? Oh...I think I've felt like th-that before, with the lava-box in my r-room."

"I suspect...something like that. As long as she remained in Ordon, then she could one day awaken and see the people that have passed on still around her. Now that she has left, after the Yiga's attack, she has had to come to terms that Ordon truly is gone." She listens to Kass shift. "But there's something that bothers me about this, because she seemed perfectly fine after we spoke about her past."

Sarie kookoos. "Sarie thinks something happened! But Sarie doesn't know! Sarie doesn't remember! Like there's a big fog in Sarie's head! Floof knows her better than Sarie. Sarie is only Sarie, after all."

She closes her hand around the ocarina. She could play the minuet again, the lullaby that the girl with the golden hair taught her. She could try the other songs that the girl with the golden hair played for her, the odes to the other Goddesses.

Yet Sarie asked her to let them be happy for a time. Even if only Sarie has seen what happened in the woods. Even if only they could share the tightness in her chest. Even if only they know her memories, where no one else does.

She slackens her fingers. The ocarina rolls out and over the edge of the bed to clatter to the floor.

She forces herself to rise from the bed, though her bones waver on emptiness. She forces herself to eat, though the food falls to dust on her tongue. She forces herself to cook, though her meals come
out shades of green and violet.

She hears the whispers of the guards. She's the one who helped *their* Yuno-yunobo calm *their* Divine Beast Vah Ruda-rudania?

Although the journey riding hard from Kakariko to Medli took her over a month, the Divine Beast's brisk pace and massive trods shorten the trek to a mere week or so. She spends the days pacing up and down the Divine Beast. The blade of evil's bane did not actually injure her, at least not physically. The pain all in the mind and in the heart. Yet she senses, down in her bones, a lingering ache that she cannot shake.

By the time the Divine Beast Vah Rudania reaches Medli, the soles of her feet no longer pang when she walks. Kass inquires again if something troubles her. "As I have given my troubles to you, traveller, so you, too, can give your troubles to me, if so you desire." He pats his accordion case. "I will even play for you if you'd like, whatever our fellow travellers say." She nods.

He plays for her the Ballad of the Sealing War, and he plays for her his rendition of Epona's song and Ilia's whistle, and he plays for her Sarie's song to which she once danced for its hot beat, and then he plays for her merrier tunes. He talks of Amali, of Notts and of Kotts, of Cree and of Genli, and of Kheel, his daughter who has always loved music the most, who would struggle to stay up to listen long after her sisters drifted off, fighting off sleep for one more melody, one more measure, one more note. He demonstrates for her a song that Kheel wrote a few months ago. Not very good, and not much more than an etude going up and down the scales a few times and ending on the base note. Or so Kass tells her. She has only ever known music in where her fingers fall upon the ocarina, in the motions of her hands. She plays like she gestures when she speaks; just as language translates her motions to words, so too do instruments translate her motions to sound, to song.

She does not know of the reading of sheet music, or what means an octave, or a base note, or especially not an etude. She knows the harp, and she knows the ocarina, and she knows how to speak on them, and that is all she needs.

As she does not know the fancy word for everything she cooks. As she does not know the proper techniques. As she barely even knows what equipment or utensils chefs are supposed to use outside of her cooking pot and her weapons repurposed for the act of creation. She know what tastes good, and she knows what feels good, and she knows what brings smiles to the faces around her, and that is enough.

"Then, why not cook something? Cook something for all of us." Kass spreads out his wings. "This is our last night together before you see your...friends in Medli, yes? I take it that you will go with Yunobo."

She could sink back into the pillow and cover her head with the cooking pot. She could eat enough until her neck thickens and not even all of the butter in the world could force her head out. She could live the rest of her life like that. With the cooking pot on her head.

But she made a promise to see Koko and Cottla again. She has to thank them for the pumpkin, and for the carrots, and for bringing back Aryll to her, forgotten in the fog. And she wants to see their smiles again.

"Traveller?"

She lifts up her hands. "*Are you leaving after I go to Medli? I'll leave Medli at some point. I won't take too long." Though she has little reason to hunt, now, for shrines.
Even if the sword that seals the darkness has rejected her, she has little else to do. She could at the very least bring Kass back to Medli. If she accompanies him on his quest for shrines and helps him fulfill his promise, then she can impart one small bit of good upon the world.

Kass parts his beak. "You're talking again," he says, closing his beak again. Then he opens it once more. "I'm glad to hear that. Well, not hear it, seeing as you sign, but...to see it, shall we say." He coughs. "As for Medli, I will wait outside. There is a village just before the border up onto the Pillars of Erito. When you finish, find me there, so that we may continue for the shrines." He pauses: a delicate silence. "Ah, assuming you still wish to do so, of course. I would understand if not."

"I do," she signs immediately.

To have a purpose.

"I like to travel, and I've got my own reasons for travelling. You're a great companion, too."

His cheeks darken as his face flushes; he holds his wing in front of his beak. "Mm. If you say so, traveller. I'm heartened to see you in brighter spirits. I hope that whatever ails you soon leaves you be."

She does not have the heart to tell him that it has already left her be, and that that its leaving is what ails her. Yet now Ilia has started to once more browse in her hair, and Link leans up to stroke her mane and feel her companion's heartbeat against her palm.

Her meals: enough.

Her friends: enough.

All of this: enough.

They reach Medli at the close of the autumn evening. Yunobo parks the Divine Beast Vah Rudania by the village outside of the city. As they walk out, Link notices the Divine Beast Vah Naboris also waiting quietly by the village. She scopes out Medli.

There, at the very tippity top of the tallest Pillar of Erito, perches the Divine Beast Vah Medoh. Link can only hope that no lizalfos has gotten its head shoved into one of the segments of the tail.

The entourage moves out. Some—especially the gorons who do not well tolerate the cold—remain inside of the Divine Beast Van Rudania while Yunobo goes off to report. Others—wrapped in many, many layers inlaid with ruby freshly warmed by the bowels of Death Mountain—waddle off towards Medli and some of the surrounding encampments for shore leave. The general barks for them not to get involved in too much mischief but otherwise sits back and approves everyone with a yup.

By the time the morning sun has finally begun to rise to clear away the fog over Lake Totori, the entourage has reached the last bridge on the trek towards the main body of Medli curled around the larger Pillars of Erito.

Yunobo himself resembles a massive snowball. The layers upon layers of feather- and ruby-lined fabric over his body bring him great difficulty in motion. Like a buttered apple. "It'd b-be so much easier if I could roll," he jokes, waddling from side to side in front of his entourage.

Link keeps apace with him, Ilia having remained in the stable, Sarie—as Sarie, and not as the one with the other name born of those memories, though the two are one and the same—riding on her
right shoulder and braiding her sidelock.

"If you lie down on your side, I could roll you up like that," she offers.

Yunobo chuckles. He scratches his jaw. "I wouldn't mind you doing that b-but...that wouldn't m-make a good impression, right?"

Link touches her chin. "Everyone in Ruto saw me on the back of their Divine Beast. My friend Sarie was pretending to ride me like a horse. I don't really know what a good impression is, but everyone there still treats me well, I think...? I'm no good at reading people."

"You're p-plenty good at reading me. You've always been there for me when I needed a pep talk!" Yunobo attempts to hug her through the layers of clothing but cannot actually move his arms enough to close the circle. Link giggle-snorts and embraces him back as best she can, which more so involves just awkwardly extending her arms as far as she can reach.

"I really never said anything. You always gave yourself those pep talks. I think you should take some pride in that."

Scratching his jaw, he blushes bright orange. "You're w-way too nice to me, Link."

"Yuno-yunobo," she says.

"S-stop."

"O Powerful Yuno-yunobo."

He tries to cover his face with his hands but fails. Link squirrels up his fluffed body to perch on his shoulders and cover his face for him. Sarie twirls around them giggling as Yunobo wobbles his arms, mumbling about impressions. The rest of the entourage is caught between differing expressions of smile and laughter. Sarie rides on Link rides on Yunobo into Medli.

This high up, the crowds bother her less, when she can breathe fresh air and close her ears from the noise. She dares not shut her eyes. Instead Link looks, and looks. When they pass by the residential areas, she spies Amali's house with its accordion-painted door. Link spots the windchimes that sing the city to life. Lowering her eyelids, she listens to their song. She can see where the people of Medli have begun to repair their city. Not yet to expand, not yet to grow anew, but to heal the damage done.

Enough, for now. Enough.

Abruptly Link hears screaming. Screaming that she knows. Screaming that gets her to nearly twist off Yunobo's head with how swiftly she snaps her entire body in the direction of those yells. Yunobo attempts to throw his arms out for balance, but—wrapped in so many layers—his arms already stick out at vertical angles. With a bwoh! Yunobo topples over in the street; Link and Sarie spill out; and suddenly her entire world becomes one of fluff and feather and warmth.

Notts and Kotts and Genli and Kheel and Cree and Tulin and Cottla and Koko surround her. They touch her and hug her and chatter at her all at once and ask her for food and ask her where she's been and ask her about the violet swirls all over her body and ask her about the scar under her left eye and ask her about the handprint-scar on her stomach—Link pulls down her tunic and tugs Kotts's head out from her undershirt—and ask her for food and ask her about the fancy sword on her back and ask her about the silver on her cooking pot and ask her about the lightning-strike scar on her hand and ask her if she wants to listen to their singing later since she couldn't before and ask her if she has seen the big horsey thing outside of Medli and ask her if she's seen Kass on the road
again and ask her for food and ask her when Kass will return home and ask her how she's so good
to them that she brought them from Kakariko to Medli and ask her if she has any food from
Kakariko to share and ask her if she's seen their mother and ask her about what she's done with the
other Divine Beasts and ask her if she could tell him more about Revali later and ask her to catch
more salmon for her and ask her for food.

Link introduces Yunobo and Sarie to them all, and them all to Yunobo and Sarie. Kotts and Notts
immediately flutters up to nest on either side of Yunobo's throat. "He's warm!" says Kotts, and
Notts bobs her head. "He's warm!"

All together Link, Kotts, Notts, Genli, Kheel, Cree, Tulin, Koko, and Cottla push together and help
right Yunobo to standing, although they cannot quite force him up, and then—they do, as if
another force suddenly joined in. Link stands up and wipes her brow only to catch a flash of white
feathers.

"Welcome back, Link," says Teba, beak curved into a smile of welcome; Link claps her hand over
her own mouth. "It's been a while. And greetings, O Powerful Yunobo."

"Should I cover your face again?" Link asks Yunobo.

"Sarie has it covered!" Sarie calls out, placing their tiny hands over Yunobo's much larger cheeks.

Teba and his brown-feathered friend Harth, a carver of bows and fletcher of arrows, joins the
entourage up. The children pile beside Link on Yunobo's shoulders in a wobbling pyramid, Cottla
and Koko clinging to Link's sides; Kotts and Notts hanging off of her shoulders; Genli perched like
a queen upon her head; and Kheel, Cree, and Tulin halfway on her back and arms and halfway
flapping themselves up in the air for support.

Link promises them all, very solemnly, to make meals as soon as she sees Yunobo off.
Immediately the children start fighting with one another over which meal to have, while Kheel,
Cree, Tulin, and Koko try to mediate the heated arguments. Link claps her hands together.

"I'll make them all," she declares. The children cheer. Yunobo almost falls over again; Tulin moves
to balance him.

Teba falls into step to inquire about goings-on with the Yiga. Link leans over and asks about
Amali. He inclines his head. "I should hope that you have a chance to talk to her yourself. She has
been meaning to make amends." Link blinks, tilting her head. Amends? "She's doing well. She has
a warrior's heart and, though I never would have guessed, a warrior's strength."

"What about...Dorian?"

"The informant?"

Link squeezes Koko and Cottla more tightly to her. Where before, so curled up by her sides, their
heads would not have reached her armpits, now they lean themselves against her shoulders. "Thank
you for taking care of Cottla and Koko. It means the world to me."

"You should thank Amali for that. She believed him the moment she saw the letter from you,
saying that no one else would use so many allusions to food." Link smiles sheepishly. "As for
caring for them...well now, they've become fast friends with Amali's own, and my son. Although,
Saki despairs of having had to remodel our home to make accommodations for sheikah." He
chuckles drily. "She told me, after meeting Koko, that she would not much mind a daughter of her
own."
One of the other gorons slaps a hand on Teba's back hard enough to bowl the lightweight rito man over. "Go get 'er, champ. Not every day you can get to makin' babies." Teba makes a strangled sound in his throat. Harth pats his shoulder.

As the morning climbs, more and more Tabanch and travellers alike take to the streets of Medli. They whoop and cheer, point and whisper, hold up their shorter children or siblings or friends to see the Champion of Goro-goro and the Champion of Hylia.

Champion of Hylia.

Link waves back even as the epithet to which she no longer bears a right compresses down her heart again. She thought she understood her place. She thought she was, perhaps, the Champion of Hylia, the Hero of Hyrule, Her Majesty's Knight, O Courageous Link. So said the King Zora.

Yet the blade of evil's bane that chose her one hundred years rejects her now. As if she were two different...

"—and then Miss Link started dancing all around trying to get the darner off her tongue," says Genli. "I've never seen Mom laugh that hard before!" Koko and Cottla giggle; Link affectionately pets their heads. She notices with a sudden intake of breath that Genli no longer refers to herself as Genli but as I. She gazes at them, the children, who have grown in her absence.

"Mother," Cree interjects indignantly, "was only trying to help!"

"How can someone not like darners?" Tulin bursts in, so aghast that Cottla howls in laughter.

"No one eats darners dumdum!" Her Tabanch clumsy and heavily accented by Necludan, Cottla reaches over to bat Tulin's face with her hand while Koko whispers a horrified Cottla! "Do you eat fireflies too!?"

Tulin's burgeoning crest feathers flare up. "You don't!?"

Link bursts out laughing. Sarie, Yunobo, and the children all look to her once. Her face reddens, but she can only cling to Yunobo's head as the mirth rips through her.

Everything will be all right. So long as she lives; as long as the sun, the moon, and the earth exist, she will be all right.

They reach the higher levels on the tallest Pillar of Erito that still stands. The tallest, Link realises, must have fallen during the Calamity, or else during the hundred years. Link leans out from Yunobo to gaze at the entire city.

Up and up and at the highest point in all of Medli, she finds Chief Kaneli's home. Not a palace, but a rounded hut of painted wood as simple as all the rest in the city, if a tad larger. The entourage salutes Yunobo, who enters with a letter clutched proudly in his hand. Link attempts to slope off of Yunobo to gaze at the entire city.

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With the children surrounding her, Link beams up at Yunobo, who gestures for her to follow him inside.

Link rubs the back of her head. "Can you come...get me when you finish all your important talks? I don't want to interrupt."

"Take your time, L-link." Yunobo winks. "It looks like you've got your hands full with something
else, right?"

He vanishes into Chief Kaneli’s home. From within, Link can hear the voices of those she knows: Dorian, and Riju—her heart squeezes—and of course Yunobo. She pictures Amali there as well, signing away with a newfound purpose in this life beyond waiting for Kass to return.

Link wonders what Kass would, or will, say when he discovers all that has happened in his absence. Her eyes widen: she still has not spoken a word to him about his wife becoming the Champion of Erito, the Hero of Tabantha, the Divine Beast Vah Medoh’s Pilot, O Powerful Amali.

Disentangling herself from the group of children, she creeps towards the side of Kaneli’s home and presses her ear against the door. The guards that flank the door look at her, then at each other; they shrug.

Link listens to the muffled sounds of her friends discussing matters of the Yiga and beyond. She hears Yunobo, beside himself with glee, promising to share something with them at the close of the meeting. She observes them talk of the Divine Beast Vah Ruta and whether they should send delegates to Ruto to see if the Divine Beast has awakened. Riju notes that she has heard reports of frequent rains that have disrupted trade in Lanayru, but she does not know if the rain connects to the Divine Beasts. Yunobo reports that passing goron have heard of the Prince of Ruto—"Huh, what was his name? Sit-on, right?"—seeking a hylian courageous enough to brave some sort of prophecy. Chief Kaneli acknowledges Amali’s contribution, that Link herself might already have gone that way with her nose "not only for food, but also for Divine Beasts," and Riju, snapping her fingers, notes that Link did mention a fourth Divine Beast.

"So, I'm certain that she's already gone ahead of us," Riju says, her voice quiet, "and if that's the case, the Lanayrish are in capable and undoubtedly food-scented hands, thank the Goddesses."

Link blushes hotly enough that she moves her face away from the door lest her cheek melt through the wood.

"No amount of discussing Link will guide her to our door," Dorian comments in his level voice. "She has a tendency to show up just when the Goddesses need her to, and not a second before."

"Not even if we bait her with an excellent meal?" Riju offers. Link hears Amali laugh while Yunobo taps his index fingers against one another.

Coughing loudly and calling the meeting back to order, Kaneli records a decision to approach the Lanayrish and offer support.

On the topic of the Yiga, Yunobo describes the plunge towards Akkala.

"We haven't gotten all of th-them," he admits, "but we've c-captured most."

Riju reports on similar success in the highlands north of Parapa and along the western front of the Faronese grasslands. Kaneli sums up all of their remarks, including Amali’s about Tabantha and Hebra.

"I see that much of the threat has been eliminated, and the Yiga shall soon be nothing more than hoo. Splendid! This war is practically over!"

And then talk turns to the cessation of the hunt for the Yiga. Most of the surroundings areas—save for Lanayru, eastern Faron, and the lands immediately surrounding the castle—have borne the brunt of the search. With so few Yiga still kicking, as Yunobo puts it, perhaps the time has come.
Kaneli inquires about the state of monsters in each of their lands. Riju speaks of efforts to plant trees to recede the desert, even if the constant encroaching of monsters has made efforts difficult. "Even with Vah Naboris now guided by my hand," she says, and Link can hear the heartbreak in her voice, "my people continue to suffer." Her voice hardens. "But I believe that the Yiga are a more immediate and pressing manner. We have them on the run, thank the Goddesses. Then, if we allow them to regroup..."

Yunobo cuts in. "B-but they're powerless in this state, right? And...I still have to take care of my brothers. As their Champion, I h-have to watch over Eldin. We've been working on the Yiga f-for months. Isn't it t-time we took care of ourselves?"

Dorian clears his throat. "If I may remind you, in exchange my information, I was promised safety for myself and my innocent daughters, who know nothing of any of this. As long as the Yiga remain...whom can we trust? Any traveller could be—!"

Chief Kaneli grunts. "And hoo might harm you? Your safety is more than assured."

"Then, what of the travellers?" Link can hear in Riju's voice how the Queen of Parapa draws herself up to stand tallest amongst them despite her relatively short stature. "While we cannot trust our own neighbours, while we must turn away any merchant or stranger at our doors, then we will never reunite as once we did."

"Huh? I d-don't think that the Yiga are in a position to try anything right now, right?"

Riju exhales. "I do not wish to call any of you ignorant, much the less selfish. We have all contributed passionately to the protection of both our people and the one another's. Yet, may I remind you that the Yiga headquartered for years closest to my people. So, we have been the hardest hit." Link hears murmurs of assent. "Then, listen well. The Goddesses have given us the very Beasts Divine with which to protection our people. We still do not understand much of the monsters, yet the Goddesses have not granted the Yiga these same boons. So, they continue to be the perfect target. I do not suggest that we should hunt them down to the last, although that is what they deserve. However...there may still be entire untapped pockets in Faron, Lanayru, and Necluda. Then, we cannot yet end our search."

"Forgive me, Queen Riju, but hoo is to say that this spirit of justice is not a manifestation of you seeking revenge for what they did to your—"

Hastily Yunobo intervenes: "We're all thinking about our p-people, as we should be, for we are th-their Champions, right? Th-then maybe we could compromise, right? Queen Riju, if you think that what's b-best for your people is to continue hunting the Yiga, y-you have Vah Nabo-naboris. And the rest of us can help our own."

"Then, what of the people outside of us, who do not have the luxury of the Beasts Divine? What of the Necludans, the Faronese—?"

"Amali and Riju," Dorian proposes, his voice deep yet strangely calm, "are right. Even if we are fine, the Yiga may still torment in great swathes people outside of those under the direct protection of these Divine Beasts. We know of their hideout in Parapa. What of the possibility of other such meeting palces on the other side of the land?"

"And for hoom would that be easiest to say than he who has no people but the Yiga themselves?" She hears Dorian make a resonant sound in his throat. "With that said, I can see the appeal in your proposal, Amali." Link listens to sighs of relief. "We will move to search southern Necluda, eastern Faron, and Lanayru once we come in touch with the Lanayrish. After that, we will turn our
attentions—with the aid of Prince Sit-on—to the dilemma of monsters and malice. All in favour, say aye."

"Aye."

"Aye."

"Aye...suppose."

"Splendid! This meeting is practically over! Now..." The congregation begins to speak of logistics; the heat of argument gives way to cooler, calmer speech.

Link sits back. Sarie perches on her nose, clapping their hands on Link's brow and scrounging together her eyebrows. She arches her eyebrows at Sarie, who unnghs and tries harder to knit them into one. "What are you doing, Sarie?"

"Link's eyebrows look like caterpillars!" Sarie declares, "and Sarie wants to see them kiss!" Link snorts; then she laughs a light little laugh, scrunching her eyebrows together as best she can.

"Miss Link, are you eavesdropping? Mother says it's not good to eavesdrop."

Link glances up at Kheel, her eyebrows still scrunched together, Sarie attempting to push them into a unibrow; she's certain that she looks the spitting image of a supposed Champion. "You're right." She lifts herself to her boots.

The children ask her a thousand questions about where she's been. Link touches her chin. "I'll answer all of those questions, I promise, but first..." Her stomach rumbles and she rests a hand over her belly. "...who wants some food?"

At the unanimous wave of hands, except for a dozing Kotts whose twin elbows her in the rib until Kotts hiccoughs awake and lifts her wing as well, Link retrieves the cooking pot from her back and thumps it against the wood. Immediately do not only the children perk up, but also the remainder of the entourage as well as those guarding Kaneli's home.

"Now, what do my little sisters and brother want today?" It occurs to her that Tulin now stands taller than she does. Perhaps younger brother rather than little. Link glances in his direction, gauging his reaction, but she finds nothing but a warm shine in his eyes and the ruffled feathers of pleasant shock around his face.

"You...consider me like a brother?" Tulin beams. "I've never had an older sister before, but this means I can force you to teach me all kind of tricks with the bow, doesn't it!?"

Link rubs the back of her head. "I don't know what I teach you better than your father, but I sure can try and fail."

"It's all right!" His eyes have grown wide, his wings pumping up and down in his excitement. "My father knows all about the traditions of Erito, but I don't know anything about those of Hylia! Like hylian bomb fishing, I'm sure there's so much you could teach me!"

Genli shoves Tulin over. "She has to make me some salmon first."

Cottla pouts. "But she promised me buttered apples and she's the best big sis ever so she'd never ever go back on a promise!"

"I'll make everyone everything," Link says for the second time that day, "but I don't have
"salmon or apples or anything else on me right now. You know what I do have?"

"What?" crows Notts, as Kotts sleeps against her shoulder.

"I've got a cooking pot and I've got my hands."

Sarie jumps up and down on Link's head. "And Link has Sarie! Sarie knows all about cooking. Who wants some loam? Anyone? Anyone? Sarie knows how to make other stuff too! Clay, and soil, and lots and lots of dirt. You know what they say!" They sing out: "There's no such thing as home, without a plate of loam!"

"What's loam?" inquires Koko, tilting her head.

"It's like dirt that's super-good for gardens. That is, very fertile soil." Cree responds. She preens her own chest. "You're welcome."

"Ooh." Koko scratches her head. "Thank you!"

Cree blinks rapidly. "Someone actually thanked me...for the knowledge..."

Kotts sticks her tongue out. "Who wants to eats dirt?"

"You mean—" Notts affects a deeper voice and touches her wings in a circle in front of her belly as though emulating a fat stomach. "—hoo wants to eat dirt?" She waddles back and forth; the children around her laugh except for Kheel, who puts her wings to her mouth and shakes her head.

"We shouldn't make fun...I know! Let's sing something together instead. La da dee—"

Someone shoves her; someone else yells; the children squabble. Link claps her hands with same the thunderous crack of an armoured carp's scales popped in two. "We're going to make something for everyone in there. C'mere and help me plan."

Something to bring together everyone in the room. Something to bring together Necluda, Eldin, Tabantha, and Parapa. She touches her chin with her other hand. And if only Prince—she snorts—Sit-on were here, she would include something from Lanayru as well.

Link reflects the times that Sidon bore her on his back, or when she scaled up his body to sit upon his shoulders. She has, indeed, sat on Prince Sit-on. A name so appropriate it edges out Sarie's monicker of Teeth.

Sarie shookooloos sadly. "First no one wants Sarie's dirt. Now Link doesn't want Sarie's name..."

"Why don't you have a name for me, Sarie?"

Sarie pets Link's nose. "Link's already a funny enough name that Sarie couldn't top it!" They giggle with the sound of wooden blocks tumbling together. Link remembers the ocarina lying on the floor of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, and her knuckles whiten on the rim of the cooking pot. She lets herself breathe out.

Food first. Fickle fate later.

Then, with the help of the children, she begins to set out the ingredients pilfered from the dining halls of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania: Necludan rice, Parapan hydromelon, Tabanch cool safflina, Eldic spices. Link gazes at the spice in her right palm and at the hydromelon and safflina in her left. The combination of heat and cold. The fusion of flame and ice. And all bedded down in that
glorious texture of steamed rice and fattened to a peak of deliciousness on the glory of Parapan seal butter.

While she cooks, Sarie proceeds to come up with shorthand names for everyone, though some—as Genli points out—end up longer than the original. "Greeny Floofy should try to come up with names half as good, then!" Sarie counters.

Link could waltz into Kaneli's home and ask Riju for her handy portable flame-starter, but instead she inquires if anyone has rubies. A few of the guards chip in to help her erect a makeshift firepit, a blanket inlaid with rubies as the firewood. First she sautées the rice in her cooking pot in the seal butter until the rice has goldened to the same colour as the sunrise that she saw rise over Riju's head. Then Link sets the water to boil in her cooking pot. She scoops in the sautéed rice prior to mincing cool safflina and hydromelon rind.

With the knife taken from the poet's cabin back on the plateau, Link cuts out the icy-juicy hydromelon meat that would not do well in rice. She passes the slices around to the children, who bite down. In retrospect, eating something so refreshingly cold in the midst of the Tabanch late-autumn indicates well why her epithet, if the blade of evil's bane were to choose her once more, could never be O Wise Link.

Neither, perhaps, could Cottla, who slaps her hands to her head. "Cottla's got a brain freeze!"

Notts and Kotts dance around her. "Cottla's got a brain freeze! Cottla's got a brain freeze!" they chant. Kotts skids to a spot while Notts keeps going and knocks her over. "What's a brain freeze?"

Genli huffs. "No she doesn't. She'd need a brain for that. And I don't think someone who'd shove practically a block of ice in your mouth when you can see snow 'cross the lake could have much of a brain!"

"That's Koko's little sister you just said had no brain!"

While Tulin pulls the scuffling sheikah and rito girls apart, Link grins. She stirs cool safflina and hydromelon rind into the rice, alongside onion and cloves. Sprinkling in the Eldic spices with a dash of salt and hint of paprika, she closes the lid and leaves the curry pilaf to cook to perfection, then glances over at Sarie on her shoulder, to whom she gave a piece of hydromelon.

Sarie: currently frozen in a block of ice.

With the ugliest hh of shocked inhalation she has ever breathed in, both hands pressing into her chin at once, Link seizes Sarie and drinks them headfirst into the steaming rice.

The curry rice warms their body. The ice melts and shatters; they spring out yelling "Yahaha!" as they knock against the rim of the pot. Link throws herself forward, taking the pot into her embrace. Sarie smacks directly into her face and bounces back into the rice before twirling up through the air and gripping their head. Link checks on the rice: safe.

When the pilaf has softened—the art of cooking has taught her patience if nothing else—Link realises that she has no bowls. Nonetheless the children have hands that they cup to receive the pilaf in. To Cree and to Kheel; to Genli and to Tulin; to Notts and to Kotts; to Cottla and to Koko; to Sarie and to the guards that have waited patiently. Link waits, her breath silenced on her tongue, as she watches their expressions.

They break into smiles, into tipped back heads, into licked lips, into cheeks puffed with pilaf, into thanks, into passing around the spice and salt to one another and garnishing the pilaf to their hearts'
content. The arguments die down; the tensions melt away. They laugh, and they nudge one another, and they share pilaf, and they beam, and they sit back with warm bellies. Link closes her eyes and listens: the quickest way to someone's heart is through their stomach.

With Urbosa's wise words, with Daruk's encouragement, with Revali's *hmph* but one-eyed glance of approval, with Mipha's promise to heal if she should fall to injury, with the girl with the golden hair's wince of *do you really want to do this*, Link squared her shoulders and presented herself at the door of the chambers of the girl with the golden hair, where stood Impa.

Impa's face remained as stone. "Has Her Majesty need of something?"

Link shook her head.

"Then why do you bother me?"

*I want to know,* Link asked, summoning all of her courage, *what your favourite food is.*"

Impa lowered her eyelids. Link counted that a success. "None that you would know how to make. Now, do not waste your time or Her Majesty's with such fancies. Leave."

Link turned, then, to the best resource that she could imagine: the girl with the golden hair, who professed that she did not know enough of cooking to comprehend which dish Impa might favour. "If I had to hypothesise based on what I've seen her eat—and she rarely eats in front of me—I think it's something with rice and butter," she remarked, tapping her knuckles against her chin. "I'm afraid I don't know much else. Oh, I can research ingredients native to sheikah cuisine, if you wish! Oh, but...she has grown up here, in the Castle."

Link ran through the royal kitchens' stores of butter and rice, making everything that she could think of: fried butter rice, all manner of risotto from poultry to mushroom to crab to fish to meat, all manner of pilaf from vegetable to curry to shrimp to stranger flavours like nut and snail, cucco or boar or cow stuffed with rice and fried in butter, every recipe that the girl with the golden hair could find. Link inquired if Impa had family. The girl with the golden hair answered: an older sister, Purah, head of research on the Divine Beasts; and her parents, chief advisors of the king. When Link sought audience with them to ask of Impa, they declined her.

"Focus on your training, O Champion of Hylia."

Each night Link would leave out dishes of butter and rice by the door as though attempting to feed a beast from a safe distance. She and the girl with the golden hair would hide together behind a corner, sometimes joined by one or more of the Champions, sometimes joined by Aryll, whom Link or Revali would hold with a hand over her mouth.

At first Impa ignored the dishes entirely. Yet, as the plates continued to most mysteriously appear, Impa sighed, glanced directly at the corner where Link and her cohorts watched, and said, *"Your Majesty, go to sleep."*

"If only we figure out *that* recipe," the girl with the golden hair mused, *"then I'm sure she'll eat it. Oh, this is brilliant, Link! Thank you!"

Link smiled sheepishly. *"It's something Urbosa taught me. The quickest way to someone's heart is through their stomach. I mean, it's something I've always known, but...put to word. I've never been good with words."*

*I've never been good with words, either," the girl with the golden hair echoed, taking Link's hands into hers. "And I've never been good at reading people, either. I can't imagine that I ever*
thought you resented me for not praying hard enough, or judged me for not having awakened my
powers, or were so sure about your own destiny...just...that look on your face..." The girl with the
golden hair shook her head. "Oh, I know that it means, now. If only I'd talked you earlier. I'm so
sorry, Link."

With a thought to the girl who smelled of horses, Link could only laugh. "You wouldn't have been
the first."

Scooping up the pot into her hands, she steps forward towards the door to Kaneli's home. Link
brings with her the wilds that she has crossed back and again, and she brings with her the travellers
and the friends who have taught her recipes a hundred years ago and not a day ago, and she brings
with herself.

All that she can bring.

Link has not the sword that seals the darkness strapped to her shoulder. She has not the blade of
evil's bane bound to her back. All that she has is herself, and her cooking pot, and all that she can
make within, and that will be enough, and she is enough.

Even if her part in the battle for Hyrule has ended, her friendships have not. The Divine Beasts and
their pilots will see to the Yiga, and thereafter the malice and monsters. All that the land once
known as Hyrule will have left is the slow and steady healing.

The world has no more need of the Champion of Hylia, of the Hero of Hyrule, of Her Majesty's
Knight, of O Courageous Link: the Goddess Hylia has no longer need to choose anyone, and
Hyrule has passed to memory, and Her Majesty has vanished, and perhaps she has been courageous
enough.

After all, when she held the sword that seals the darkness in the lost woods, the blade of evil's bane
did not glow with that soft blue fire-light, but rather remained a dull and tepid white.

The world has come to peace.

As Link approaches, the door opens. She hears Yunobo say something like: "W-wait here. I'll go
fetch the surprise. Huh? What's with those faces? Is there—oh. Oh! Link!"

She stands in the doorway with the cooking pot in her arms, her hair mussed up by sleepless nights
and the morning wind, her grin broad as the curry rice warm. Link sees for the first time in months
Riju, for the first time in half a year Dorian, for the first time in over a year Amali, their eyes wide,
their mouths open, Riju—grinning—thanking the Goddesses and Amali with her wings brought up
to her beak and Dorian bowing his head.

Link holds out her cooking pot to them.

"Hi, I'm hungry, and I hope you are too," she signs, and suddenly her friends surround her, and
suddenly she hears her name in a thousand tongues, and suddenly the children pour into Kaneli's
home for seconds and to huddle together for warmth from the cool safflina and hydromelon's
chilling effect, and suddenly Link has become the heart of warmth and smiles and fullness of belly,
and suddenly, without warning, unbidden, she has come home.

She does not need the sword that seals the darkness.

She does not need the blade of evil's bane.

She does not need to lay down her life.
She needs: a cooking pot, and her friends, and a meal and smiles shared alike.

She needs: this, and it is enough.

—

Chilly Curry Pilaf (three hearts, low cold resistance for 08:50) - cool saflina, hydromelon, hylian rice, goat butter, goron spice

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: I started writing this chapter at 10:22 on the third of August, and finished writing it on at 20:02 on the fourth of August. Relatively short author's notes this time, as I'm not feeling too well and barely managed to drag myself through proofing this piece of work.

Thanks a million to those who have supported the story so far! I couldn't have done without all of you. And thanks a million as always to my most beloved beta reader for her putting up with me staying up all night to play Opus Magnum instead of actually working on the things I'm supposed to work on, but damn if I didn't get Climbing Rope Fibre down to 87 cycles and Seal Solvent down to 52!

Not everyone enjoys the sound of the accordion. Of course, if Yunobo knew what the guard had threatened Kass, Yunobo would have had words. But neither Kass nor Link wishes to be a bother.

Link has spent the entire journey preparing herself for taking up the Master Sword again, but that's not how this works. Indeed, the reason why she hasn't been chosen this time around has to do with for what reason she was initially chosen. The reason probably isn't what you think it is. Although, if you've been paying attention to the themes of Delicious in Wilds and how Link feels, then maybe you do know.

"Splendid! The war is practically over!" is a very slight reference to Inferno Cop of all things.

By the way, this is random, but I use punctuation at the end of an interruption to signal whether or not the person interrupted themself or whether someone else did. If a sentence ends "And what in the—!" then the "!" indicates that the person interrupted themself. If a sentence ends "And what in the—" then the lack of punctuation indicates that the person was interrupted of someone or something else.

Just like how Hestu was extremely sensitive to hot things to a point of being set on fire, Sarie is extremely sensitive to cool things and freezes into a block of ice.

Anyways, the chapter speaks for itself. I'll mention that Link doesn't really believe in Hylia and is mostly invoking her Hylia because of the epithet. It's not even Hylia who chooses the Master Sword, but...we'll see. I'll note that when Link mentions the sword glowing, I'm taking very very faintly, like barely perceptibly, and only at certain times.
With respect to the characters now seemingly speaking the same language, I'll note that they were talking in Tabanch for most of the chapter. It's been over half a year since Dorian, Cottla, and Koko moved to Medli, after all. Dorian already knew Tabanch from his time travelling with the Yiga; Yunobo has learned since he's been in contact with Medli for over a year at this point; and Riju already knew it as parts of her lessons as the Queen of Parapa. Koko and Cottla, on the other hand, have had some difficulty learning the language. You'll notice that Amali's daughters and Cottla/Koko act like they haven't talked all that much prior to Link showing up, which is exactly what it is: the Necludan girls have learned some Tabanch given that they've been surrounded by it (no, really, trying living in another country for a few months; you pick it up surprisingly quickly when you literally have to do so, and especially considering how young they are, which makes picking up new languages easier) but they haven't been able to communicate that well until fairly recently.

See you next time, hopefully with more comments and less griping.

Up next: reunion; adjustment to normal life; it's a secret to (almost) everybody.

midna's ass. 29 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Being in Medli again is really nice. I've mentioned this a lot, but I really, really love that city in Delicious in Wilds.

We've already been doing it, but since we still are: Interacting with characters we left behind ages ago feels so cool and refreshing.

This chapter has a really well-written ending.

Emma. 29 October 2017.
Enduring Poultry Pilaf

Chapter Summary

In Medli, the travelling chef reunites with the chef’s friends and allies, including the Lanayrish prince, who knows about the chef that the others do not.

Chapter Notes

Here’s another comment from the FFN cross-post version of this fic that might be of interest to you all, regarding the revelation of Sarie's identity as "that" Saria: Well, uh, as far as the koroks go, in The Wind Waker, the Great Deku Tree says, "Once upon a time, long ago, the Koroks took on human forms, but when they came to live on the sea, they took these shapes." The 'human forms' is in reference to the kokiri; the koroks are literally the kokiri, transformed into koroks by the Golden Goddesses when they flooded Hyrule into the Great Sea. The rito are also the descendants of the zora. Aonuma (the director of The Wind Waker) said this: "We created the Rito as the evolved form of the Zora that appeared in "Ocarina of Time" and the Koroks as what the Kokiri became once they left the forest. They appear different, but they have inherited their blood." This is pretty established canon, that the kokiri were turned into the koroks during/after the Great Flood. The kokiri were described as immortal children, and I'm pretty sure that the koroks have also been described like that too.

Moving on from the canon material, of course, The Wind Waker didn't cover the fact that we should have seen the previous kokiri amongst the koroks. I decided to take the fact that all of the kokiri were transformed into koroks and that they're immortal in order to have Sarie be, well, Saria, but with their/her memories taken from them/her in order to protect them/her (as the other koroks have had their memories taken from them). I refer to the koroks as they/them since they're, well, plants/tree-like beings, which don't exactly have genders, but the kokiri certainly did. I hope that that clears things up. I definitely did make up a bunch of stuff for Delicious in Wilds but the koroks being the kokiri is not one of them.

And now, author's notes that wouldn't fit into the end: Activated almonds but these chapters are getting so long! I started writing this chapter at 04:54 on the fourth of August, and finished writing it on at 12:19 on the fifth of August.

Thanks a million for all of your support so far, for everyone who has read the fic thus far, whether you've commented or not—this is for you. And thanks a million to my beta reader, Emma, who continues to be extremely patient with me while I spend too much time griping about how Nintendo has done Riju low instead of properly working on Delicious in Wilds. She might not have contributed much to the actual writing and revision aspects, but without her, I wouldn't have my motivation, so she's arguably even more important than I am, as without her, Delicious in Wilds would probably have taken me ten years to write.

See the end of the chapter for more notes


The people around her. The people she loves. The people eating from her cooking pot. The people shivering from the unintended chill of hydromelon-safflina and huddling around each other for warmth. Kaneli, resting upon a chair at the fore of the room, rocking back and forth, shaking his head but allowing the proceedings to continue.

And Link at the heart. Link, who has brought them all, one way or another, together. Though the pressures of fate have eased from her shoulders and passed onto their hands, she has had her part in linking together the land once known as Hyrule. For a girl more at ease in the boughs of a tree upon the grasslands than in the heat of a crowded city, she and her cooking pot have gone far.

Dorian—and Koko's—veggie cream soup. Yunobo's fragrant mushroom sauté. Amali's carrot cake. Riju's salt-grilled meat skewer. Like Daruk's deliciously grilled rock roast. Like Revali's fish pie. Like Urbosa's fried bananas. Like Mipha's seafood paella. Like the girl with the golden hair's...

The quickest way to someone's heart is through their stomach.

Link realises as she looks upon her most trusted friends, their gazes so warm even after her months of absence: not only is the quickest way to a stranger's heart through their stomach—the mantra by which she has lived her life—but also her own. She has learned to trust each and every one of them over a meal or meals of food.

As Finley said upon the Bank of Wishes, no one who cooks that well can really be a stranger. Surely that cannot be fully true, for cooking well and being well do not walk hand in hand. But for Link herself, no one who shares a meal with her can really be a stranger. Not Dorian, once a member of the Yiga until he opened his eyes. Not even Glepp, who...who must have something of an explanation, of an excuse, of an alibi. If only Link could see her over the rim of her cooking pot again. Maybe someone out there could share with her a meal yet prove calamitous. Yet not anyone that Link herself has met, at least not for certain, at least not yet.

And now she finds herself apologising, and she finds herself apologised to, and she finds herself thanking, and she finds herself thanked to. Dorian embraces her first, beating out the others with his sheer speed, a hug so uncharacteristic of a man typically aloof that the others hang back. "Link...thank you. For saving my daughters. If there is ever anything I could do for you, please. Please let me know."

Koko and Cottla squeeze into the hug, Koko tucking her head between Link and her father's cheeks, Cottla throwing her arms around them both. Link embraces them all back. When they part, she bows to Dorian. "You already have, by letting me into your family. There's nothing more I could ask of you." Dorian raises his hand to the brim of his hat and tugs it down, obscuring his eyes.

Riju and Amali approach her at once. They turn their heads towards one another, and then Riju dips her head in deference. Amali smiles, for once not tiredly, but with the fullness of her beak. Her daughters crowd around her and Link, Kotts and Notts excitedly leaping up and down, Genli unable to keep up her act of hmphness and instead clinging to her mother's legs, Cree beaming with her wings tucked up, Kheel bursting into a frenzy of song, all of their feathers fluffed up, and Amali's warm wings around her.

Amali crouches down to keep their heads almost level; Link's face sinks into the feathers of her
shoulder as she strokes Link's head. Link can tell, by the fumble of her fingers, that Amali knows better how to stroke feather than hair, but she strokes better than she did a year ago. Cottla and Koko's doing, no doubt.

Link disentangles herself from Amali. Amali starts to raise her wings, but Link shakes her head. "I'm sorry," she says, immediately. She steps away from Amali to bow down on her hands and knees on the wooden floor, her forehead against the boards. "I'm sorry for breaking my promise. I'm sorry for almost hurting the people of Medli. I'm sorry for treating it like a game. I'm sorry for not understanding. I...I've tried to do better. I really have. I hope you can forgive me, but I understand if you can't. And I...hope that you can still show me how to make cannoli again. But I'll understand...I'll understand if you can't, or if you don't want to, and thank you for letting me see your daughters afterwards, and thank you for everything you've done for me." She keeps her forehead pressed against the floor. Her hands tremble. Her fingers twitch.

A warmth over her head. The tickle of feathers on her nose. Amali's golden-green eyes crinkled by her smile as she lifts up Link's chin.

"Link...I've already forgiven you for everything, you know. Before you even left Medli. Before I placed the Champion's slate and, I suppose, somehow became Vah Medoh's pilot. I'd already forgiven you, you know." Her irises glimmer wetly. "If not for you, then Vah Medoh could never have stilled. If not for you, then I don't know if my children would still be..." She wipes at her eyes. "How many times have you nearly died trying to protect us?" Link rubs the back of her head. "Every day I thank whatever wind of chance or current of the Goddesses that brought Genli to disobey me and not only go out for salmon in the middle of the night, but even ask a stranger."

Genli puffs out her chest. "See, Mom? See what happens? Link's right. The best thing that's ever happened to us happened 'cause I got hungry. Well maybe not the best thing. I mean, that was me being born." She preens her beak through her feathers and poses. Cree rolls her eyes.

"...whatever brought you here, I'm grateful it did, Link." Amali wraps her wings around her again, tucking Link's head under her throat as she might hug one of her own daughters. Link senses the heat of Amali's tears on the crown of her head. She hugs Amali back, her chest so, so tight and yet so, so warm. At last Amali pulls away just enough to speak. "And from what Riju has told me, you stopped treating it like a game a long, long time enough."

The heat rises in Link's cheeks like Tabanch bread rising in an oven. Amali gazes at her; suddenly her eyes widen and her beak falls open in shock. Link flinches back. Amali grips her shoulders more tightly.

"Link! What in the voice of the Goddess Erito has happened to you?" Amali's feathertips brush against the scar beneath her left eye, the vertical cuts down her cheeks, the pockmark of malice left behind from the Divine Beast Vah Naboris, the thick ridged rings left by the lynel's fingers along the sides of her throat, the violet swirls of malice that cover her body from the jawline-down, the lightning-strike scar upon her left hand, the thin crescent lines that bisect her right palm from how strongly she dug her nails into her flesh in the lost woods.

"I thought that the bite marks on your left arm were bad enough!" That Amali remembers brings Link to rub the back of her head. "Link, what has happened? Just look at this." Amali pulls up Link's tunic and undershirt and gasps. She runs a hand over the scarlet scars left behind by the lynel on Link's abdomen, visible between the whorls of violet. Link rubs the back of her head ever harder. "You need to take care of yourself more, you know! Just look at you! You know how much I worry about you, Link. I suppose it makes sense with all the adventuring you've been doing, but not even that dreadful being of Vah Medoh hurt you so! If I get my hands on whoever did this to you,
then—then I'll—" Her feathers ruff up around her into a cyan maelstrom. In that moment Amali appears akin to an icestorm so terrible that Link could unleash her and not even the Calamitous One would stand a chance.

Link scratches her cheek. "The Malice of the Divine Beast in, um, Ruto, sort of kind of hugged me? I think? So I got the purpel stuff all over myself." She sticks out her tongue. "It doesn't taste very good, by the way. I was thinking maybe elderberry jam or something. Just tastes like ouch." Amali's pupils dilate to swallow the golden-green of her irises. Link hastily waves her hands. "I'm fine now! I'm fine! The healers in Ruto took care of it all for me! Really, I'm fine!"

"And what is this?" Amali plucks up the collar of Link's tunic, patched up in both Nabooru and in Ruto, charred from the forest fire, coated in the remains of cream of mushroom stew from her time in the lost woods. "I can't let you go out like this! If we have a moment, then I'll have to get you a new tunic immediately." She fusses with smoothing down Link's hair and tucking in her tunic.

aneli hoots out a laugh. "I see that you truly do act like however's mother, Amali."

Amali's cheeks darken. She runs her hands through her feathery ponytail. "I don't suppose you want to lecture me on how to treat my children now?" Link blushes hotly, covering her face with her hands.

While Amali and Kaneli bicker—her daughters, Tulin, and Koko and Cottla taking bets—Link adjusts her tunic to un-tuck it from her trousers. As she smooths her palms over the wrinkles, she hears a soft cough behind her. Link turns.

Riju.

Riju, holding out a ceramic plate of her own on top of the portable ruby-lined grill. Hmning in her throat, she gestures towards the plate with a bob of her chin. Link glances down to see honey-glazed fish. Not minced into pieces so small that every bite will mix heat, coolness, and tingly shock up with just enough of a subdued undercurrent to keep the eater's tongue from exploding, but in thicker pieces, every touch of the tongue a new adventure of the unknown to see what flavours the eater will find.

Lifting her head, Link gazes into Riju's dark brown eyes, the same colour as the comforting earth; she sees in them a simultaneous thread of uncertainty and a blaze of pride.

And something else: the Goddess Sageru's virtue. Loyalty, as they say in Central Hyrulean, translated for less familiarity with Parapan concepts. Kin, or blood, as they say in Parapan, though less that of families by blood and more that of families by friendship and trials tested together. Riju, who has lost her mother, and Link, who has lost nearly everyone.

"I had to make it quick while you were talking to Dorian and Amali, but...I hope you like it." She pushes the plate towards Link. "So, you don't have to like it. Please be honest with me. Then, h-here we go."

Link takes the plate into her hands. Balancing it in her palm, she closes her eyes and randomly selects a piece of fish. Then she pauses to give the plate back to Riju. Before Riju's eyebrows can slope down, Link explains, taking a second or two to slide back into signing Parapan: "You fed it to me the first time. So let's do that again."

Lowering her eyelids, Link obediently opens her mouth. She hears Riju laughing, the mirth muffled; she can picture Riju holding her hand in front of her mouth.
Fish touches her tongue. First: a honey glaze that sweetens the inside of her mouth and presents a certain wholeness or roundness, like sturdy boots to prepare her for the long tracks ahead, mixed with Parapan spices that conduct a symphony of sweet and sour on her tongue. Then: the flames of Eldin sparking to life on her tongue, clashing with the lightning of Parapan thunderstorms that glass the sand. She swallows the roil and opens again only to feel the icy winds of Tabantha frosting over the flames. She swallows again and the thunderstorm returns, this time subdued with the silence of the lost woods' fog.

And salt. Just enough salt, not to overpower, not to take control like a poorly played ocarina wailing above the singer, but just enough to add a bite, just enough to provide another reason to run her tongue over her lips, just enough to keep even the harshest of Eldin, Tabantha, and Parapa from closing her mouth from the fish. Link swallows.

She senses the groan of a meal well-made shudder up from her belly. When she opens her mouth yet again, Link listens to Riju's laugh. "I'm sorry, Link, but that's all I could make. Then, how was it?"

Link raises her hands. She has so many things to say that she trips over herself forcing them all out of her hands in a jumble of praise and advice and exclamations of the deliciousness and suggestions to try incorporating some fish from Necluda and from Akkala and from Faron and from Lanayru and from Hebra that could really make a dish to not only include all of the major provinces of Parapa where sizzlefin, voltfin, chillfin, and stealthfin thrive but the whole of the land once known as Hyrule and how Riju should never fear adding spices a touch more bitter or a touch more savory to help round out the body of the honey meant to offset the fish and Riju could also prepare each of the individual bites slightly differently so that one could have that smoky flavour of grill and another could have the moisture of steam and that would provide an even greater layer of adventure to the dish and Riju has improved so much and Link cannot wait to see what else they could cook up together and she wants to show Riju every recipe and she wants to sit by a cooking pot with Riju and just throw things into the pot and even if they put in a substitute strange ingredient for another and the pot blows up and how were they supposed to know and even if the cooking ends up awful she hopes that she and Riju can laugh and sit back and eat something that they have made together and—

Riju's arms fold around her. She presses her face into Link's chest. Link embraces her around the shoulders; she has held Aryll like this before, when she returned to the castle upon training with the Champions, when she hadn't seen Aryll in several months, when Aryll had run towards her with her arms thrown open, the red telescope in her hand, Revali mouthing off about Link not paying her little sister enough attention and Urbosa nudging him to say that he hasn't been the one reading Aryll bedtime stories and Daruk booming that he's seen his older brothers run at him like that.

Link stays that way, holding Riju, being held by Riju, for a long, long time. Only when they have parted does Riju draw her thumb across Link's lower eyelid and only then does Link realise that she, too, has cried. They try to speak at the same time:

"Link, I'm...really, really, genuinely sorry for trying to pressure you into taking after the shrines and trying to deal with the Calamitous One—"

"Ruboona—I mean Riju—I'm sorry I left you on the roof by yourself I just wasn't ready to accept what it meant about being the Champion of Hylia—"

They look at one another. Riju closes her mouth. Link curls in her fingers. And then Riju raises her hand to laugh, and Link laughs with her, and Riju shakes her head to let her long scarlet sidelocks bounce against her cheeks. She does not wear the practical trousers and layers of fabric that she
wore during her time in the Divine Beast Vah Naboris, but instead a long blue and white dress, simple in its elegance. On her wrists and along her arms clink golden and silver jewellry: ruby and topaz, sapphire and diamond. At her back: a radiant shield. With a scratch here or there to show its scars of battle. Yet the mirrored diamond remains clear and lustrous.

Riju, parrying off fire-light. Riju, no longer afraid of the guardians. Riju, who has learned a courage all her own. If Link could point to anyone in the world, if Link could consider anyone fit to become a Champion, if Link could close her eyes and picture *courage*, then she would see: the Champion of Sageru, the Hero of Parapa, the Divine Beast Vah Naboris's Pilot, O Courageous Riju.

"So...I've got a compromise for you," Link begins. "I don't know that much about the Calamitous One, but I'm going to start going to shrines, actually. I don't have much else to do."

"Really? Oh, thank the Goddesses! That's wonderful!" Riju grins; then her features twist into an expression of worry. "Ah, wait, but—I'm not going to pressure you into anything, but you should really know about the Ca—!

A loud *hoo* interrupts them all. "Excuse me, there," Kaneli says, sitting up in his chest, "but I saw that you mentioned something about the Malice in Ruto. *Hoo* are you to have gone there?"

Link blinks. Two hands touch her shoulder at the same time: over her head, Dorian and Amali glance at one another. Amali laughs. Dorian clears his throat. Then Yunobo speaks first, before everyone else.

"Y-you really are amazing, Link." Yunobo beams at her, and Link reaches out to rest her hand on his shoulder.

"Only because you taught me to be proud of what I could do, Yuno-yunobo." She looks back towards Kaneli. "The Divine Beast in Ruto's been calmed, too. Sidon—oh that's the prince you're all talking about—he's been using it to go around and...help take care of the monsters around Lanayru and stuff like that.

"Anyways, I left Ruto a while ago—I could never forget the shark I ate there; I don't know if Sidon or someone else prepared it but if you've never had shark you haven't lived, unless you're a goron and you can't eat shark, but then you should eat some shark-shaped grilled opal or something—to go to Akkala, where I made catfish stew, and then I ran into my friend Yunobo with these really good butter-dipped steamed bananas, and then we came here with this pilaf." Link plucks one of the grains of goldened rice stuck to the collar of her tunic and pops it into her mouth. She manages to break through her usual blankess and beam at Kaneli, who shakes his head very slowly. Everyone in the room has turned, their gazes focused on Link; she rubs the back of her head.

"I finally meet you, Link, and I see that you're just as, ahem, *hoo-nique* as they say." He brings his wings together. "Splendid! The team is practically assembled once more!"

Amali lifts a wing. When Kaneli does not answer immediately, Genli stamps her foot. "Hello! Mom has something to say!"

Cree folds her wings over her chest and nods in approval. "Mother's ideas are usually good."

Link stifles her laugh with a snort as Kaneli adjusts his spectacles. She giggles at the fact that despite his status as Chief of Medli—and, like Amali has told Link over carrot cake, by informal extension Chief of Tabanth; although each village has their own chief, most would defer that to Medli—he has no qualms about allowing children their say. "I see that I have been overruled.
Amali, you have the skies.

"Thank you. I think that, of all of the Divine Beasts, Vah Medoh is the quickest, isn't She? If that's the case, then I could fly to Ruto in a manner of days." Amali smiles. "I suppose we should have the fourth pilot here for the proceedings."

"Splendid!" Kaneli swings his wings about. "Is everyone fine with staying a few days more in Medli to await the arrival of Prince Sit-on—"

"Sidon," Link signs. Too late realises that she cannot sign how to pronounce his name, much less in a language that she cannot read or write. Riju and Yunobo agree, her with a glance towards Link, him with a touch to the blue shawl.

Blue shawl. The same colour of fabric, Link realises, as she has seen all of the Champions wear in her memories, as she once, herself, wore. And that shawl, with its tatters and its patches, with its sigils of the Goddess Goro-goro along the rim: taken from the sash once worn by Daruk. She lowers her eyelids in understanding.

As the meeting winds down and the delegates summarise their decisions, Kaneli inquires to Link how long she plans to stay. She explains that she has a partner with whom to travel—three in fact, in the forms of Ilia, a certain someone, and Sarie, currently hiding in her satchel—and a plan.

Yet she can wait a few days, to catch up with everyone. Link could never tire of travelling, but a place to put her boots up a little while does not sound too bad, either.

"Huh?" asks Yunobo. "A certain someone? Oh, Kass!"

Amali's eyes widen. She looks between Link and Yunobo, Yunobo and Link, the question wild in her irises.

Link nods. "Kass... said that he made a promise to his teacher, or something like that?" Link starts. "That he isn't allowed to see you or the children until he fulfills his promise and passes on the songs of the shrines."

Amali inclines her head. "If he doesn't fulfill his promise, then my beloved can't come home."

"Right, that. And getting through a shrine takes fo—I mean, takes a slate, and in all of Hyrule there's only..." Link counts on her fingers. Amali holds up five flight feathers, and Link blushes. "...five slates. Four of them belong to the pilots. So...I'm not doing anything else with mine. I thought I'd travel with him to activate them all." Link smiles sheepishly. "To... to get him back home for you, and for the kids."

Amali gathers her up in a hug. Yunobo begins to bawl at the sight; Riju pats his shoulder. "I think it's a fantastic idea to activate the shrines, thank the Goddesses. Ah, isn't it said that they have to be activated, for us to defeat the Calamitous One once and for all."

"Now that's a long ways off," Kaneli interjects, "and hoo are you to speak of it again, now?"

Riju exhales. "We'll have to talk about it eventually."

"Riju-riju's not wrong, right?" Yunobo puts in. "W-we don't know if the Calamitous One's still out there. B-but we can all see that something's wrong at the castle, right? Eldin's s-still crawling in monsters. We could put an end to that if we j-just stop whatever's going on, right? That's h-how this works, right?"
Amali runs her hand through her tail of golden feathers. She looks upon her own children as she speaks. "If we chase off after the Calamitous One before we deal with problems closer to home, then that could be putting everyone in danger. I agree with you about tackling the Yiga, for the sake of those in other regions as well, but." She brings her wings up to her face. Link exhales in relief at Amali speaking out. "If the Calamitous One exists, then it isn't even hurting anyone right now. On the other wing, we can see the monsters, and Yiga, with our own eyes."

Dorian coughs. "We agreed on what our immediate plans are with respect to the Yiga. I don't see why we should be arguing about this at all."

"Indeed. If this Calamitous One even still exists, since after all the Princess did sacrifice her life to vanish it from this world, then we shall see to it." Kaneli whistles. "Splendid! This meeting is practically finished! If no one has any questions, then this meeting is over!"

The minor effects of the hydromelon and cool safflina minced into the pilaf have by now worn off. The huddling together for warmth cools as the congregation moves away from one another to pack up and start to head out. Amali motions for everyone to follow her.

Link reaches down a hand into her satchel to pet Sarie's head. They shudder. She opens the satchel to check if Sarie has frozen again into a block of ice yet discovers that Sarie has fallen asleep, shivering from the cold.

With Sarie tucked into her undershirt for warmth, Link follows.

Amali's home has grown another story. Link learns from Harth and Teba on the way back that the Champions spontaneously decided to abandon the resident houses set out for them by Kaneli for Amali's home instead, with its worn windchimes and its paint dulled by the years. "When my husband returns," Amali remarks, "we'll repaint it together. Until then, I suppose that worn paint's a reminder of what has happened, of why my husband had to depart." She brings a wing to her face. When she signs again, her gestures seem lighter. "And it's also a promise of what I hope to happen in the future. A future where we no longer have to fear if our children will see another sunrise, or if tomorrow will bring the Great Calamity down upon us again."

Riju makes a certain humming noise, yet she does not pres. Link wipes her brow with her wrist.

The next few minutes disappear into a blur of chaos of Riju and Yunobo wishing their respective relegates good-bye—Link, who has not seen much of Riju's own people, smiles to see the Parapans tearing up and promising to keep the Divine Beast Vah Naboris safe for her, even as Link clambers onto Yunobo's shoulders to once more avoid the swarming crowd—and then Kaneli, Teba, and Harth assisting the Champions with setting up beds in the guest rooms of Amali's home. Without a current room to accommodate Link or Sidon, Amali inquires Link and Riju if they wouldn't mind sharing a room for the time being, seeing as they—as humans—have similar demands.

Riju looks at Link; Link looks at Riju. Link grins; Riju covers her mouth to laugh.

They bustle into Riju's guest room. "Ah, before we go in...promise that you won't make fun of me," Riju asks Link, hand on the beaded curtain. Link swears herself up and down on never eating food again. The curtain parts to reveal a room flooded with stuffed animals and plushies, a few in the shapes of camels and horses, but most in the form of sand seals, piles upon piles on the bed. Link springs up onto the mattress, kicking her boots off as she goes, to land on the Death Mountain of softness. She sinks into the plush like quicksand. Riju pulls her out before she drowns. Sarie flies out of Link's shirt to cling to one of the sand seals.

After Riju's initial shock, she bursts into laughter and Link with her. "If only we were home. Then,
I'd show both of you Patricia, the greatest sand seal in all of Parapa—in all of the world," Riju explains, lying back on the bed. "Mother left her for me. Ah, she's a little old, and so, she can't be ridden that much anymore." Link watches her chest rise and fall with her breaths. "But...still good. Still good, thank the Goddesses."

Link reaches across the bed to take Riju's hand. With herself on her right side, and Riju on her left, Link runs her fingers over the valleys of Riju's knuckles to intertwine them, to feel the warmth of Riju's palm on hers. Like the girl with the golden hair, gazing at each other with their heads on the pillows, their hands clasped together.

Link does not flinch away.

Around dinner-time, a phrase which here refers to whenever Link's stomach rumbles next, Amali drags Link off to replace her tunic. Link pleads instead for a refeathering of her existing one.

"Absolutely not," answers Amali.

Link taps her forefingers against one another. "I'll make you carrot cake."

Amali acquiesces. "If you make a face like that, then how am I supposed to say no?"

With a newly refurbished tunic in the fabric of Parapan sky-blue—almost entirely replacing the original green cloth—to ward off the coming winter, Link returns to Amali's home. She busies herself making dinner, then spends the afternoon practising archery with Tulin at his request, which eventually devolves into all of the children begging Yunobo to vault them into the air while Link purposefully misses to give them the sensation of expertly dodging her marksman's arrows.

Before nightfall, Amali brings over a second Parapan-styled bed for Link to sleep on, though two beds in one room prove a tight squeeze. "I suppose I should apologise in advance. While I'm gone, they'll be building a room for Sidon across the way. The awful din might keep you up."

Riju rolls her shoulders. "I think I'm a little too excited for sleep." Link bobs her head.

Amali smiles tiredly. Where before Link would simply glance down at her boots, she finds herself instead stepping forward to touch Amali's hand. "Are you all right? Can I cook something for you?"

For a moment Amali merely stares at her; then she relaxes. "I'm all right now, Link. Thank you."

She hugs Link and then Riju good night. Link inquires about supper; Amali laughs. She relents: Link makes risotto for the children, promising them their favourite dishes in the morning when she has had time to hit the marketplace. For Yunobo, she cooks up an opal-and-iron pie after taking suggestions from some of the Eldic entourage. Then Link turns towards the fishier side. Trout for Cree; porgy for Kheel; salmon for Genli; carp—a breath away from a swear word—for Kotts and Notts, as well as for Koko and Cottla. They know the taste of sanke carp well, after all.

Tulin throws in a vote for smelt, and Riju for trout. After sufficient insistence from Link that Amali's tastes matter just as much as anyone else's, Link learns of Amali's favourite: also salmon. Dorian brings in haddock from the fisheries, and Hath, Teba, and his wife Saki come over to contribute cod and herring. Prior to the end of the supper, Saki coughs, taking Link aside to apologise.

"I called you, what was it, terrifying. But...I didn't really know you. I'm sorry. I've heard so much about since then, and I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me."
Link touches her chin. "Did you like the herring risotto?"

Saki's brow furrows its feathers. "I thought it was fine, although I could tell you're not too experienced in preparing herring. Why?"

Link snaps her fingers. "Teach me how to cook herring better." She hesitates. "You don't have to do that. I don't even have anything to forgive you for. But I'd appreciate it!"

"I hope that herring isn't red," Saki says. Link blinks at her, and Saki runs a hand over her throat. "I-it's a joke. Sorry, does it not translate well?"

The evening shifts to young night. The moon sees the guests off. Link embraces the children and her friends good night. Kotts and Notts demand kisses on the forehead, and soon all of the children have, and Yunobo too.

Amali bids her children farewell. Off to the Divine Beast Vah Medoh. Off to Ruto. Link offers to go with her to help vouch for Sidon, yet Amali wags a flight feather at her.

"It's been so long since everyone's seen you. Stay a few days. I suppose you've the time to say hello." Link sighs in relief. Amali closes one eye. "If you wanted an excuse to stay so badly, then you didn't need to pretend to want to come."

The children, Riju, Yunobo, and Link stand in the doorway; the coolness of the Tabanch late-autumn covers them like a blanket of frost as they watch the Divine Beast Vah Medoh's eyes glow blue in recognition of its pilot, as they watch the Divine Beast spread its wings and rotate its fans, as they watch the Divine Beast lift off from the highest point of the tallest Pillar of Erito to take flight.

Teba ushers them back inside for bed. The children ask for another round of good night kisses, from Teba, from Saki, and from Link.

When they retire to their room, Link and Riju talk long into the night. Riju inquires all sorts of questions about Sarie and how they and Link met; Link comments that Sarie's the second korok she has ever seen. Changed into comfortable pyjamas, Riju flops back onto her pillow. "Mother told me that she found a korok on the roof of the palace," she says, her brown eyes glimmering under the ray of moonlight shimmering through the circular glassless window. "Ah, the korok said something about a game of hide-and-seek. Then, they gave Mother a golden seed about this big and said that if ever Mother comes by their forest, she should give that seed to one of their own." Riju shakes her head. "So, I thought that she was kidding around with me. Like you know, how your own mother must've when she told you bedtime stories. Link?" Riju sits up. "Link?"

Link closes her eyes, shutting out the faint night-time light. She remembers: Urbosa, probing into her past. She remembers: Daruk, saying that he could gather something had gone amiss. She remembers: Revali, and his parents. She remembers: Mipha, even Mipha, who would defer as much conflict as she could, agreeing about that house. She remembers: the girl with the golden hair, asking Link why she never said anything of her own childhood.

They talk long into the night. She talks long into the night. Mostly about other people. But sometimes, here or there, about herself.

They talk. They talk about Riju's childhood. They talk about Riju's mothers; they talk about Riju's mother who fell ill when Riju was but six years old, and they talk about Riju's other mother, the former Queen of Parapa, the Makeela as Riju calls her. They talk about her mother's assassination by the Yiga shortly after the awakening of the golden spires and the closing of Nabooru; Link
emulates Riju's own earlier gesture, gently wiping her thumb under Riju's dampened eyes. They talk about Patricia and about Ilia. They talk about Buliara, the captain of the guard, who has watched Riju day and night for fear of another assassination, of how Riju caught her falling down a flight of stairs for her utter exhaustion; Riju sinks her face into the rito-down pillow while Link listens to her muffled words, beat-beat-beating three squeezes on Riju's hand.

They talk of the Tantari Desert spreading with the Divine Beast Vah Naboris's hooves, of Riju finally deciding to take matters into her own hands, of Riju staging her own escape from Buliara's watch to see what she could do about the Divine Beast with her own hands, of Riju living in the Divine Beast for the better part of a month in her efforts to stop or at least control the rampage, of her having left Parapa without a queen; a droplet of blood beads on Riju's lower lip where she has bitten down too down, and Link takes time to trace out the scars new and old on Riju's palms and the backs of her hands in steady circular motions until Riju finds her voice again. They talk of the triumphant reunion with Buliara and with her people.

They talk of the triumph of the Divine Beast and of how much work they still have to do. They talk of monster attacks growing worse by the day. They talk of evacuations sufficing to protect from the worst effects of the slow-moving Divine Beast—though the displacement of pastoral gerudo peoples like the Zuni tribe has proven heartbreakingly devastating—but that the constant waves of monsters and until recently Yiga that have spread across Parapa have left so many of her people without homes, without livelihoods, without lives; Link glides her hand up Riju's arm to tug her closer and Riju buries her face into Link's chest, tucking her head under Link's chin, until the shudders run their courses through her form.

"I'm just one person. I'm trying my best but...everyone expects so much from me."

Links starts to pull away enough to sign, yet the soft tremble of Riju's breath slows her motion. Instead she shifts her free hand to Riju's shoulder.

"I don't really get it all the way because I'm not in charge of a whole kingdom," Link signs, one-handed, writing the characters onto the skin of Riju's shoulders, her words bringing a slight upwards curve to Riju's mouth and a giggle to her tongue, "but I do kinda know what it's like to have expectations on your shoulders. A little bit. For what it's worth, I think you're amazing, and that's what I've heard from others, too. It's all right to just do what you can! That's all we can ask of you."

Riju shifts on the bed. Her left sidelock has come undone from its usual loop clipped to the back of her head; one of the golden bands slides down the thick lock of hair. She runs an index finger along the inner curve of the metallic ring. "Thanks, Link. I mean it."

They talk of favourite recipes, of the lullabies that Riju's mother once sang to her, of growing up as an only child. "Everyone's always seen me as the heir, and then as the Queen of Parapa. I know that that's what I am, thank the Goddesses. And yet sometimes...sometimes I also want to be myself. So, thank you Link, for letting me be Riju. For treating me the same even after you found out who I was."

The smile dawns on Link's face like a crescent moon brightening the night sky. Riju returns the
same smile with a tilt of her head, just so, that makes Link squeeze her hand all the more.

Riju inquires about Link's childhood. "Ah, you don't have to tell me anything if you don't want to," she says softly, "but it wouldn't be a burden. You're my friend, Link. It is a burden for me to tell you what I have experienced?" Link shakes her head. Riju closes her eyes, breathes in, then opens them to fix Link with her dark brown eyes the hue of the earth. "Thank the Goddesses. Then, it isn't a burden for you to tell me, either. I care about you, you know."

"I want to," Link signs immediately. She looks down at her own hands. "I know more than ever that I want to. I don't know if I can."

She tries. She fails. She stutters. She does not know how to say these things without revealing that she lived one century ago, but she leaves her memories couched in shadow and vaged through time. She mentions: the people in that house. This time Riju holds her until the pangs that wrack her body leave her exhausted and cold save for the warmth of Riju's arms. She mentions: a sister. She mentions: a best friend who smelled of horses. She mentions: a girl with a violet sash whose memory even now quickens the pulse of her heart. Grinning, Riju asks the worst question of all.

"Then, can I meet them?" A beat. She does not know what expression she might have on her face, but she prays to the Goddesses who might not even be listening that her usual blankness wins out. "...take your time, Link. I'm here for you. I'm here for you."

Their talk drifts to happier things. They play wind-water-fire. Riju offers to braid Link's hair; Link finds herself falling asleep against Riju's chest as she listens to the soft melody Riju hums while she gently works through Link's locks.

She awakens to autumn-cold and tremors of the bed. She awakens to Riju pressing the heels of her hands into her eyes. She awakens to Riju whispering apologies for being a bad queen, for being a bad charge who worried Buliara to nearly a heart attack, for being a bad daughter who did not appreciate her mothers enough until too little and too late. She awakens to Riju asking for her mother. She awakens to Riju shaking in a nightmare that shivers the girl who has kicked off her blankets.

Link does not know how it feels to miss a mother. Yet she does know how it feels to miss—

—Daruk, who offered her a home after the long war. Marin's mothers, who would themselves joke of their new daughter-in-law every time she swung by. Malon and Vish, who have given her a home where she can rest her sword.

Link does not have words. But she has her hands, and she has her warmth, and she has her cooking pot.

She shakes Riju awake, gathers Riju into her arms, holds Riju in her lap as she has held Aryll on the nights in that house when the rafters shook and her own throat stung with the imprint of hands, cloaks Riju in the blanket that she draws up from the floor. Riju smells of salt and sweat. Her skin bumps into cuccoflesh. Link lets her friend's tears dampen her own undershirt, lets her friend's nails sink into the flesh of her upper arms, lets her friend tremble in her embrace. Riju rocks back and forth; Link rocks with her.

When her eyes have grown red and puffy from crying long after the tears have run dry, Link offers to cook something with her. They make egg tart on the portable ruby grill. Riju crimps with her tongue poked out of her mouth in concentration. Not in the same way as the girl with the golden hair, not with the measured perfection, but in a very Riju way, that gives a roundness and an evenness to the tart, perfect in its imperfections. Just as Riju reminds Link of Aryll, but in a
very **Riju** way. Link hugs her tightly; Riju embraces her back with a very **Riju** flick of Link's nose.

They fall asleep together in a pile of pillows and blankets and stuffed sand seals, shoulder to shoulder and hip to hip. Link does not remember a warmer night.

The next few days, Link spends cooking meals for everyone in the house, many times with Riju at her side, tasting the stews or batters together to improve upon them and laughing when their experiments pay off in burnt breakfasts and sunken suppers; practising her fighting skills with the sword, the spear, the axe, and the bow; introducing Sarie around and hearing about what all has happened in the time intervening; learning more about Yunobo and Riju's families and friends back home and their childhoods; popping by the stable on a daily basis to feed Ilia, clean her, tell her what a good girl she is, exercise her, and pet her all over; fishing in the lake to attempt to make use of Sidon's fishing rod before immediately giving in to Tulin's cries of hylian bomb fishing; and attempting to make various risottos and pilafs to see if she can't dig in through the fog in her mind and trigger another memory.

She catches snippets of where she has eaten those before. Yet not nearly enough to form something cohesive.

The Divine Beast Vah Medoh nearly vanishes on the horizon. Link sits on the roof with her little sister's trusty red telescope to track its movement. After some days, it begins to return. Link ogles its speed. To cross one end of the land once known as Hyrule to the other takes something like two months by horseback, perhaps one if she were to ride hard and fast on endura carrot and stamella shroom.

"Or tireless frog!" as the girl with the golden hair would say, pushing such a frog into Link's hands. "No, really! Research indicates that it should perk you up just fine! So try it! Really! Try it! Try it! Try it!"

Link laughs to herself. Riju props her chin up on her palm and what has gotten Link so giggly; she shakes her head.

"**Maybe when all of this is over, if you're not too busy being Queen of Parapa and everything, I could show you home.**"

"Home?" Riju echoes. "Ah, I thought you said that Ordon has been...?"

"**My home, now, Romani Ranch. It's near Mount Satori, in that valley.**" Link tilts up her head, gazing at the stars above. "I think you'd like it there."

"Then...I'd love to see it someday."

Link's smile crinkles her eyes until tears film over her lower lashes. In the past few days alone she feels like she has cried more than the last however many months since she began her journey. Sometime in spring, wasn't it? Spring on the Great Plateau. And now: late autumn. Almost a year and three-quarters, or something like that.

Link questions Dorian, one day, if he happens to know Lady Impa's favoured food. Dorian strokes his chin. "I'd like to say that she seems to prefer cucco, just about anything with that. Not the biggest lover of pumpkin, actually, although she has a soft spot for carrots. Endura, I think, not swift. It's caused endless drama and cries of favoritism in Kakariko, with the neighbours who refuse to share with one another." He raises an eyebrow. "If this was a roundabout way of saying you miss being able to eat poultry, I happen to have some frozen cucco. Just don't feed it to Amali's children, lest I end up booted back to Yiga territory."
Link raises her hands to speak, then stops herself. If Dorian can joke about the Yiga now, that only gives her a taste of how far their efforts to eradicate the Yiga have come.

She takes Dorian up on the offer. He dredges out the drumstick wrapped in wax from the ice-box and extracts a promise from her to give at least a sample to Cottla and Koko, who haven't had poultry in months.

"I was going to do that anyway," Link admits, shrugging. Dorian nods his head at her.

"If you didn't, you wouldn't be Link, now would you?"

She takes to pilaf. In her cooking pot Link once more oils and butters the bottom prior to scooping in rice. Tossing, tossing, simmering, simmering, until the rice has taken on a gild of gold. Then she peels endura carrots and onions that she sautées in oil, salt, and a single bird's egg for weight before pouring into the rice to stir, and then, finally, the cucco, defrosted for the better half of the day, braised lightly in onion and garlic for flavour, then added to the mix with a sprinkle of salt and hefty dash of seasoning and spice, stirred in and stirred again to an entire pot of cucco, rice, onion, garlic, and carrot.

Koko and Cottla squeal in delight. Link scarcely has time to divide the pot into sixths—a third for Cottla, a third for Koko, a sixth for Dorian and a sixth for herself—when the girls have eaten away most of it.

She retires to her room with the plate of pilaf. Riju pokes her head in, having followed the scent of poultry, and inquires if she can have some. Link glances down at the sixth that she set aside for herself. Riju—apparently seeing Link's sorrow written over her features—crosses her arms over her chest in an X and begins to back out.

Link takes her hand. She divides the sixth into a third and two-thirds, giving the larger portion to Riju, who starts to protest until Link touches her finger to Riju's lips.

"You don't have to like it," says Link, "but food's meant to be eaten, and meals meant to be shared."

"...thank you, and thank the Goddesses for bringing you to me." Riju tries the pilaf. Link raises her eyebrows. "It's really good!" Riju exclaims in return, her eyes sparkling, the wrinkles in her brow smoothened. "Ah, you want me to give some advice? So, I think the rice is a little bland. Did you just fry it in oil and butter? Then, you could try adding some seasoning into the oil first, so that the rice absorbs it. You should add more cucco and less carrot, and some of these pieces of garlic and onion are a little big. I bit into one when they should just be the flavouring, not the main dish." She pants, taking a moment to catch her breath. "How'd I do? Did I live up to the Link method of critiquing food? Ah, I h-hope my suggestions were good."

Link grins at her. "Next time I make some, you should make it with me. We'll make it together. Riju and Link's Kakariko special."

"Not bad," Riju notes, curling her fingers into a fist, "since neither of us is from Kakariko."

Link bumps her fist.

She turns to her own morsel of food: a third of a sixth. Link tries counting on her fingers to determine what fraction of the original cooking pot full of pilaf she still has, but the numbers escape her.

She rolls her shoulders. Food's food. Good's good. As the girl with the golden hair would say,
goog's foof and foof's goog.

And then Link scoops the rice into her mouth.

This pilaf. *This* pilaf, on cucco from Kakariko, on endura carrot, on Necludan rice. Her eyes widen. She remembers.

She remembers *the pilaf* that finally broke through that impassable exterior of stone. Link remembers *the pilaf* that she and the girl with the golden hair conducted with all of the strategy of the captain of the royal guard waging war against the Calamitous One. Link remembers *the pilaf* with which Purah aided her, convinced by another bribe of carrot cake and wildberry cannoli to divulge her sister's secrets.

The pilaf. The pilaf meant for Impa. The pilaf that they brought to her late at night. The pilaf that they watched on the plate as they hid on the other side of the corner. The pilaf that pounded Link's heart and dried her mouth, that slicked her palms and stole her breath. The pilaf that Impa approached on her return from her nightly report to the king. The pilaf that stopped Impa from seeing the girl with the golden hair off to bed. The pilaf that Impa began to lift up, clearly intent on throwing it away like she had all of the others, and which Link would later rummage up from the bin to clean and see what she could make of it for her loathing to waste food. The pilaf that gave Impa pause. The pilaf that Impa raised to her mouth. The pilaf that Impa—that Impa—that Impa ate.

The pilaf that made Impa raise her voice, to demand that Link and Her Majesty report at once. Sweat beaded down Link's brow. The girl with the golden hair's face drained of blood.

Impa glared down both of them.

And then she spoke. "Frequently," said she, picking grains of rice from the plate of pilaf, "I have wondered if you are truly worthy of that sword that seals the darkness you carry on your back. It is the mark of your position as the chosen hero, before anything else, so wrapped in to your very identity that its emblem identifies the Champion's tunic."

*"The tunic...?"* Link looked down at the sky-blue tunic she wore, decorated with thread same white colour of the silent princesses that the girl with the golden hair loved so much. She noted a sigil in white near the collar: the blade of evil's bane, the hilted wings flaring from the hem, the sword extending towards her chest.

*"That's...supposed to be the sword? I thought it was...a headless lobster, or a crayfish. See, there's the tail, and here's the claws coming off, and it looks like it's about to be boiled or prepared for a dish."* Link traced her fingers over the emblem. *"And the white on the hem looks like a wave to me, so I thought it was sea-like."* She paused and looked up at Impa. *"It looks like a lobster to me."*

Impa blinked at her. The girl with the golden hair covered her mouth with her hand. Link stared vacantly at the Princess's shade. And then a miracle: Impa's mouth curved upwards. Just for a second.

*"...I now see that you have honed both your body and mind, Link. Now all that remains is that you hone your spirit."* Impa bowed her head. *"That you would go to such lengths to make for me a dish of this calibre speaks of your heart. I believe I am beginning to understand why the sword that seals the darkness chose you. Train hard. We may best the Calamitous One yet."*

Link does not quite remember her own feelings, her expression mostly blank in her surprise and acceptance, but she remembers the girl with the golden hair weeping on her behalf.
"And...if you would not mind." Impa glanced away. "I would appreciate more of this in the future."

Link remembers. Those brief days of warmth, when her training with the blade of evil's bane and the Champions brought her leaps and bounds closer to what Impa and the king expected of her, when her relationships with the Champions had improved to friendship, when the girl with the golden hair trusted her more every day, when the king occupied himself more with the Divine Beasts and the guardians and less with his daughter, when Link and the Champions considered themselves possibly the heroes of their own story, who could take up their blades against the Calamitous One, who could seal it or even slay it forevermore, who could promise peace.

She thought that those warm days could last forever. But then, the Great Calamity—that fogged hole in her mind—

"Link...I'm sorry. Then, I won't ask you to share your food in the future." Riju's voice startles her from her reverie; Link looks up to find Riju kneeling beside her, brow creased in concern. "I didn't mean to make you cry."

Weeping again. Link wipes her eyes and shakes her head. "What? No, it's not from the food. It wasn't you. I was just...remembering something."

Riju leans forward. "Remembering something?"

Link nods; a smile comes unbidden to her lips. "From a long, long time ago."

The days continue on. She spends more time with Yunobo and Riju than she did during the whole of her stays in Nabooru or in Darunia. Link learns so much more of them than she could have thought. A friendship forged in the fires of trials and tribulations does not always test well in times of tranquility. Yet these friendships do.

And then, on a night after a supper of steamed crab legs and breaded tilapia and snapper, a certain booming voice that shouts out just as loudly even when attempting to whisper jolts her from her sleep. Link has not time to throw on her boots or tunic before she has lunged for the door, hit the wall instead, leaped back, and properly leaped through the beaded curtain to smack directly into Sidon's chest.

The house veritably shakes with Sidon's excited yells of getting to hug Link again. The waning moon seems to wink at them as Link sets a midnight snack—very important!—of seafood paella on the stove while Sidon introduces himself to everyone his shouts have awakened: to Riju, to Yunobo, to Teba and to Saki, to Dorian, to Kaneli who arrives after half the paella has vanished into various gullets and gizzards and throats, to Cottla and Koko, to Notts and Kotts, to Genli and Tulin, to Kheel and Cree.

The Divine Beasts Vah Rudania, Vah Medoh, Vah Naboris, and, most recently, Vah Ruta, and their pilots, all together.

Sidon clears his throat. His interpreter of sign stands next to him, alongside a translator who knows both Lanayrish and Tabanch; Link realises that while Yunobo and Riju must have picked up the language or known it in these long months, Sidon has necessarily not had the same opportunities. "It is most wonderful to finally meet all of you!" He splays his webbed hands to each of the pilots in turn, as aided by Link herself, who leans against his shoulder to point out where stands each of the pilots.

"I am most pleased to meet all of you, carried forth to this fateful encounter by the currents of our Goddess! O Champion of Sageru, O Hero of Parapa, O Divine Beast Vah Naboris's Pilot, O
Courageous Riju! O Champion of Erito, O Hero of Tabantha, O Divine Beast Vah Medoh's Pilot, O Powerful Amali! O Champion of Goro-goro, O Hero of Eldin, O Divine Beast Vah Rudania's Pilot, O Powerful Yunobo! And I, the Champion of Zola, the Hero of Lanayru, the Divine Beast Vah Ruta's Pilot, O Wise Sidon!

Riju, Amali, and Yunobo start to greet or thank him at once—Yunobo asking out loud a huh? and I thought your name was Sit-on before clapping a hand over his own mouth—but Sidon goes on:
"And, but of course, our most honoured among us!" Their brows knit together, Amali's in confusion, Riju's with a glance around the room, Yunobo's in continued embarrassment, Kaneli's with a suspicious and hoom might that?

Sidon whirls around and seizes Link by the sides of her torso, hoisting her up like a stuffed animal.

"And, of course, let us never neglect our most marvellous friend: O Champion of Hylia," begins Sidon, as Link's arms fall uselessly to her sides, her head suddenly spinning, her heart intent on strangling her intestines, "O Hero of Hyrule, O Her Majesty's own appointed Knight, O Courageous Link, Hero Chosen by the Goddesses, the Bearer of the Sword that Seals the Darkness, the Blade of Evil's Bane!"

The home falls to a hushed silence at Sidon's proclamation, as the translator finishes the words speaking his words in the Tabanch tongue. When no one speaks, the translator apologises for his Lanayrish accent and starts anew, more slowly this time, but Kaneli lifts a wing to stop him.

"We heard," he says, his voice quiet. "And hoo might you be, O Courageous Link?"

Link's heart clenches. The pain in her chest grows worse than when she winded herself against a pole in the Divine Beast Vah Rudania.

"What!? Did you all not know!?” Sidon calls out. Link's heart leaps into her throat, and her stomach bottoms out from an infinite void to a hard constriction of fear. "Yes, the most courageous and talented Link that you see before you is the legendary Link that served Her Majesty the Princess of Hyrule in the final days of the Great Calamity!"

He sets her down upon the floorboards and slaps his hand between her shoulder blades. Her knees have locked in place. If not for the plate of paella in her hands, Link would plummet to the ground like toast landing on its buttered face. Worse than the arrow of malice slung into her by the violent violet of the Divine Beast Vah Medoh.

"But of course! The children of the other Goddesses do not live long as we of our Goddess Zola! Allow me to shed some silver on this most peculiar situation! This Link is that Link of legend! The original chosen one! She fell asleep for a hundred years in the Shrine of Resurrection and awoke without her memories! But, as expected of our most incredible Link, she's been fighting for all this time! Isn't that right, our most courageous Link!?”

All gazes in the room save for Sidon's bear down on her. Worse than the cleaving in half of the top of her right foot in the Divine Beast Vah Naboris.

"Indeed, I met her myself as a young pup!" Sidon explains, his voice filled with pride. "But of course, my father the King Zora recognised her as well! She has personally known and cooked for the former Champion of Zola my older sister Mipha, may her spirit swim swift in the seas of Our Goddess, and for the other Champions: O Powerful Revali, O Courageous Urbosa, O Powerful Daruk, may their Goddesses see them to peace." He goes on, to speak of the Goddess slate, to refer to her skills and triumphs, to remark on the other Lanayrish who have known her and her cooking.
Link can see the glitters of recognition in the eyes of those she loves. Her possession of the Champions'-Hero's-Goddess slate. Her stranger manners of speaking, her lack of familiarity with current slang, her using a tad too many words from a hundred years ago. Her talks of amnesia, of not remembering much. Her shying away from being the chosen hero. Her snapping of fingers in the same manner as Urbosa, referring to her as Urbosa and not with an epithet. Her talk of Revali, of a friend who knew him. Her faint knowledge of Daruk. Her everything that she has said and where she has been and what she has done.

When Sidon finishes, the house settles to a silence so tense that Link cannot breathe. Worse than the lynel strangling her throat, worse than her entire skin melted away to Malice, worse than the water in her lungs while she clung to the pump of the Divine Beast Vah Ruta.

Every sinew of her body trembles. She balances the plate of paella upon the crook of her arm. She lifts her hands.

"Does..." Link breathes. "...anyone want seconds?"

—

Enduring Poultry Pilaf (ten hearts, two-fifths golden stamina vessel) - bird's egg, endura carrot, hylian rice, goat butter, raw bird drumstick

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Link has some troubles with conceiving of the people around her as bad per se. It took her so long to get to trust people that she's having difficulties dealing with the fact that some of the people she has trusted might in fact be terrible.

Yunobo has rubbed off on Amali! Amali's referring to the slate as the 'Champion's slate' now, although note the distinction from Yunobo's 'Champions' slate'.

If you don't recognise what Link is referring to with the paragraph about the "the pot blows up" and such-like, it's the same thing that she reminisced from her talking about what cooking with Ilia is like. This isn't a replacement goldfish. Rather, Link tends to use the words of others to express herself.

If you've never had fried smelt: try it. It's fantastic.

Saki's joke is about the phrase red herring, meaning something that distracts you from something relevant. For example, if I'm writing a murder mystery, and one character seems extremely nervous and suspicious from the get-go, that character is probably a red herring and not actually the murderer.

Just as I aged up Link and Zelda, so too have I aged up Riju, because her age is never stated in-game other than her being a child. So I have her be fourteen years old at the start of the story (which seems reasonable for her age in-game to me) and currently sixteen.

I really wanted to get across Link and Riju's relationship. I mean, Link has
relationships with all of the new generations of Champions, but among them, I think that Riju is slightly special given that both are very enthusiastic about food, and also because Link sees in Riju a younger sister. Because Link didn't get a chance to really get to know Riju on Vah Naboris, given that she only knew Riju as 'Ruboona' and not as Riju herself. Since I robbed Riju of that during the Parapan arc, I gave her a chance to get to know Riju Riju in this arc. Found families are important to me. Please don't mistake this for romance! Link is twenty years old at this point and I had absolutely no intention whatsoever of implying romance between them. For those who have not lost families (and good to hear on that), it might be difficult to understand how two seeming strangers can get so close, but it happens. It did to me.

Link's not too good at maths!

My favourite food of all time is actually plov, which is a touch similar to pilaf but not really. Pilaf's the closest thing that in Delicious in Wilds to it. As for why I opted to give Impa my favourite food, it's more that I was looking for something that would include as many "Kakariko" specials as possible: carrot and poultry immediately sprang to mind.

I unironically thought that the symbol on the Champion tunic that Link wears in-game was supposed to be a lobster or a crayfish akin to Link's pyjamas from The Wind Waker. It wasn't until I did the Trial of the Sword that I suddenly realised that it's in fact supposed to be the Master Sword. You cannot believe my face when I saw that.

It's true that friendships in times of peril don't always well translate to friendships in time of, well, normal-ness.

Young zora children are known as "pups", like shark pups.

And wew there, Sidon's a wonderful person who absolutely cannot read the mood, and it's not like Link told him not to tell everyone. After all, Link had accepted that she would be the chosen one. She was ready to tell them. And then the Master Sword didn't choose her.

By the way, the next chapter is a doozy and will take me approximately two days to finish the editing for (a total of eight hours of work or so). Therefore: no chapter tomorrow. Sorry about that! (Addition on 07 November 2017: this is no longer the case. I went ahead and proofed it all in one day!)

Up next: telling the truth; good-bye; winter played on an accordion.

midna's ass. 29 October 2017.

Beta reader's comments: What a cute chapter! This chapter is the culmination of this period of cozy reacquainting.

Next chapter is sort of cozy, too, but in a different way. It's also my favourite chapter in the series, so look forward to that.

Emma. 30 October 2017.
Spicy Meat Pie

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef tells the chef's friends and allies the truth of having been the former chosen hero, yet also having been rejected by the sacred sword. Then the travelling chef and the travelling minstrel embark upon a winter-long road-trip: the hunt for the one hundred and twenty shrines, as well as the fifteen towers.

Chapter Notes

To all my readers: I'm posting this early because it's very long. It's the second-longest chapter of Delicious in Wilds, clocking in at 22 760 words. Please take it slowly! I probably should have split it up into two chapters, honestly, but here we are. Even if I did, it'd be two very long chapters. Reading such a long chapter online can be quite bothersome; if you're interested in me uploading a file or the google doc that contains the chapter content to download and read offline, please let me know and I'll do so. Because this is such a long chapter, the proofreading for HTML issues/checking for continuity errors/etc. took over eight hours, and both myself and my beta reader were quite tired by the end. Please feel free to tell me if something doesn't make sense or if I just left out a paragraph or something. Wew! Thank you so much for reading, and thank you for bearing with this sort of chapter.

Author's notes that wouldn't fit in the end: Congratulations on getting through the second longest chapter in the entirety of Delicious in Wilds! I started writing this chapter at 12:19 on the fifth of August, and finished writing it on at 09:28 on the sixth of August. I should note that I was up quite literally all night writing this, writing just about non-stop for nearly twenty-four hours. That isn't the first time I've done that though!

This is one of my favourite chapters of the entire fic. I think my favourite might be the eightyeth chapter, but we'll get there when we get there.

We're now over three-quarters of the way through Delicious in Wilds. That's right! We are indeed just about nearing the end here. These chapters have such a different feel to them compared to the ones from the very beginning of Delicious in Wilds. As Link's world-view and priorities have evolved, so has the fic. I tried to match the writing style and what we focus on to match what Link would have focused on, and the longer chapter lengths are a function of her—more and more—seeing her life as continuous instead of just snapshots from meal to meal.

I should probably note that when Link says that she loves Sarie, it is absolutely not romantic love of any kind. I hadn't even considered the possibility until someone else inquired in confusion about it. You can say I love you to your friends, y'know!

Sanidin Park is named after Sanidin, the harp (ages), using the 'Sa-' naming convention, such that the actual name of the harp is 'nidin'.

Link messes up the 'fancy title'; it should be Champion of Sageru, Hero of Parapa,
Divine Beast Vah Naboris's Pilot, O Courageous Riju.

In the faith of the Golden Goddesses as told by the manual of A Link to the Past and first mentioned in Ocarina of Time, the Golden Goddesses made the mythical Triforce at the point where the three of them met as they left the atmosphere. However, by the time of Delicious in Wilds, knowledge of the Triforce has been mostly lost, with a few singular exceptions, such as the Lanayrish faith which refers to a Golden Force that is typically taken as a symbol of the Golden Goddesses' omnipotence in having created the world and not as an actual object.

As a remember, not everyone knows how to read sign language. It's much much more common in the Hyrule of Delicious in Wilds than it is in many places of the real world, but it's still something that not everyone knows. And yes, it's an issue (as you can see here), in addition to the guards being suspicious of Riju for not having a Tabanch accent. Also, reminder that Tabanch is the adjectival form of Tabantha!

The meals taken in Ordon are breakfast, dinner, and supper, as opposed to breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Chief Rouru of Elrora is a reference to the Ocarina of Time manga, the watarara being prototype rito later adapted for use in The Wind Waker. I mostly included the reference for the relationship to The Wind Waker and as a bit of trivia and less as a reference to Ocarina of Time.

The road trip portion of this chapter is one of the most fun things I've ever written.

I use tali as the plural of talus. Beyond that, monsters mentioned in this chapter include: keeleon from A Link Between Worlds and Triforce Heroes; pengator from A Link to the Past; sir frosty (no really) from Spirit Tracks; eeno from Majora's Mask; and freezard from Ocarina of Time, although they're based off of their much cooler depiction from Twilight Princess.

Hebra is absolutely my favourite region in Breath of the Wild. It's just stretches of places to explore without NPCs. Beautiful.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Amali's home explodes into colour and noise and motion and heat all at once. They argue with one another; they discuss the possibilities; they ask her a thousand questions in a thousand tongues and she cannot understand a single one; they question her of why she has not told them before and of how long ago did she regain her memories and of why she has not made an effort to make this known before and of how she survived for a hundred years and of this Shrine of Resurrection business and of what happened during the Great Calamity one hundred years ago and of wait Yunobo how long ago did you say that Link came to Darunia and of wait Dorian how long ago did you say that Link came to Kakariko and of all the towers rising and the shrines lighting up and the Beasts Divine awakening happened at just the same time didn't it and of what are you trying to say, Riju and of and when exactly did Link wake up and of don't you see what this means? and of no what does it mean and of one hundred years ago the Calamitous One's approach brought the Beasts Divine and the shrines to life, and if they have come alive again and the chosen hero has returned to us, then the Calamitous One must be nearing—

Her heart. Her heart. Her heart that beats so loudly she cannot make out their words. Her palms that
have slicked so damply with sweat that she cannot hold a blade, or even herself. Her lungs that have collapsed so deeply she cannot breathe, even if no lynel or Malice or person who bore her into this world has wrapped their hand around her throat.

And worst of all: her mouth that has parched so drily, past the aridity of the southern Parapan deserts, past the rain-less ice of the desiccated Hebric mountains where not even snow will pass from the heavens, past even the wastes of the Eldic badlands where moisture has not existed in thousands upon thousands of years, that she cannot swallow even the paella on the plate.

A month or two ago, standing in Ruto before the King Zora, she would have bowed before the Champions, would have stepped forward, would have—could have—taken her place among them. Maybe.

The skills to carry a slate about on her hip, to dive into a Divine Beast, to puzzle out the methodologies behind how to reach each terminal, to plan out the defeat of the Malice, to at length cleanse the Divine Beast do not necessarily translate into the skills she might need to stop the Calamitous One.

After all, she does not exactly know what happened on the eve of the Great Calamity. The Calamitous One vanished, or perhaps was sealed within the castle, and the girl with the golden hair—the Princess of Hyrule—vanished with it, or perhaps sealed it, or perhaps sacrificed herself to rid the world of the Calamitous One entirely. She does not know how much she contributed, or if she even did contribute, or what the Shrine of Resurrection does, or why she slumbered for one hundred years, or what happened to the blade of evil's bane to bring it to the lost woods, or anything at all.

But no matter what happened, the sword that seals the darkness chose her. Someone, or something, must have believed in her. And now, nothing does.

She does not need to know how to read people well to see the desperation upon their faces, to see the hope beyond hope that could have lead a king to force his daughter to pray years in and years out on the slim chance that the royal family did descend from the Goddess Hylia, that whatever sacred sealing magic might have passed through the bloodline had not left in the long generations of ten thousand years, that perhaps the girl with the golden hair could become their saviour to deliver Hyrule from the Calamitous One.

She does not need to know how to read people well to see that they now look upon her with that same expression, hope beyond hope, that perhaps the girl with the cooking pot can, now, become their saviour to deliver the land once known as Hyrule from the Calamitous One's return.

These days she has tried so hard to prepare herself for a life of a person again. These days she has tried so hard to make do with herself as Link, as Link born in Ordon, as Link who has come to Romani Ranch for the star of the ranch to shoot arrows into her shoulder and to feed Miyu scraps and perhaps to learn to play an ages or an ocarina again in time to the ranch owners' songs. Only this, and nothing more.

And now the ghost of Impa's gaze has returned. They talk about her as if she were no longer a person. Not a person but a Champion of Hylia. She remembers Daruk and his brothers, his sons, his fathers that have never appeared in the legends of the Champion of Goro-goro; she remembers Revali and the Ilari that he put on the map, his pride and joy which goes unremarked, where most seem to think Revali grew up in Medli; she remembers Urbosa and her childhood fighting the fingers of fate in her hometown of Rovah, her mothers and sister who believed in her so, never spoken; she remembers Mipha and her silversmithy, forever unsung.
No longer a person, but a Champion. Like the King Zora, losing his very name in deference to the people that he must serve.

They yell at one another. That another Calamity approaches. That already they have spent six seasons with the Calamitous One potentially in control of the Divine Beasts. That at any moment the Calamitous One could seize control of the Divine Beasts once again. That nothing stops the Calamity but time. That they live on borrowed time.

And then: those words. That phrase. The sword that seals the darkness. The blade of evil's bane. The—

Sidon shouts out that, although Link has not yet retrieved the sword that seals the darkness, he has utmost faith in her ability to seek it. Yunobo scratches his jaw and inquires about why Link did not awaken with the blade of evil's bane already in hand. Amali suggests that they could search wherever this Shrine of Resurrection might be and that she could fly them there on the Divine Beast she pilots.

Waving her hands, Riju jumps up and down in her efforts to catch everyone's attention and, when they ignore her for her short stature, scales up Kaneli's body to perch on his head and yell out at everyone that they could simply ask Link instead of speaking about her like a piece of furniture. And then Link grabs her own cooking pot and smashes it against the floor with a bang loud enough to shake the entire house.

Silence.

She grips the rim of the cooking pot so tightly that the metal imprints arcs along her palms, that the scars on her right hand shiver her arm with pain, that the veins on the back of her hand stand out from her paled skin, and she lifts her chin to stare at everyone in the room.

Kaneli, Riju, Yunobo, Amali, Sidon, Dorian, Teba, Saki, Tulin, Koko, Cottla, Notts, Kotts, Cree, Kheel, Genli. All of them.

She draws herself up. She lets go of the cooking pot and her clammy fingers remain clawed for a few moments before she can move them again.

She inhales through her nose and exhales through her mouth. She counts the beat-beat-beats of her heart. She lowers her eyelids so that she cannot see; she would put her hands over her ears except that then she could not speak. Three, and two, and one.

"I searched for the sword. I found it. I know where it is." She can hear murmurs, can hear gasps, can hear footsteps creaking the floorboards. "And...I tried to draw it again. I tried to pull the sword from the stone. I..." She will not falter. She will not run. She has had enough of running.

She will not fall backwards in faint to someone's words. She will not duck her head and flee. She will not escape under the cover of night to seek something of comfort, to seek someone to dry her tears. She will not leave them on a rooftop with a destiny behind her. She will not venture off on her own time, believing her duty done, while the Calamitous One looms overhead. She will not run.

She has had enough of running.

"I can tell you all where it is. And I can tell you how to get there. And I can leave with you with someone who knows the way and who can help you. But." Link breathes. She can talk. She can talk. Even if she disappoints them, even if they hate her, she can talk. She has herself, and she has
her cooking pot, and she has her hands to cook with and her boots to walk the paths of the land once known as Hyrule, and she has Ilia beside her, and she has Romani Ranch waiting for her, and they deserve nothing but the truth. "Yunobo, do you remember, on the Divine Beast, when I didn't eat for an entire day? Sarie and I went to the lost woods. The woods north of the Hylia River, north of Rauru Province, in that little lake between Eldin and Tabantha. I don't know what it's called.

"They were covered with fog. Sarie said that you need a korok there with you or the woods take you, or something like that. I don't know. I don't know everything about this. But they held my hand all the way. The woods are...I don't know if they're magical or what they are, but you have to ignore the trees and the sounds. There's a wind in the woods and you follow it. You walk with the wind—so it's blowing on your back—to leave, and you walk into the wind to get to where the sword is.

"I don't know much else about it all. You have to lift up the blade, pull it from the stone. When you do, you get this...horrible feeling. I don't know if it's the same for everyone, but it's like pain all over your body. It's not real. It's just the sensation of it.

"But I don't know what happens if the sword doesn't choose you. I don't know if you just..." Her voice trails off.

When Link attempts to reach for her satchel, her hands touch emptiness at her right hip. She opens her eyes, but she does not look at anyone around her. Link pats herself down. Her belt: in her and Riju's room.

She starts to walk. The crowd parts silently as though she drew a canyon in the abyss where fell her feet. She moves towards her room. Some of the people around her start to follow, but she holds an arm up; they stop in their tracks. Sidon continues a few paces forward before Yunobo catches his hand to whisper an explanation.

Link walks on. To her and Riju's room. She opens the door to notice Sarie curled up on the pillow. She closes the door behind her.

She touches Sarie's head. Sensing Sarie stir beneath her fingertips, Link traces her hand down the side of Sarie's face and takes one of their little hands into hers.

"Sarie. Sarie. Sarie." She writes the words into Sarie's abdomen. Link listens to Sarie kooloo sleepily at her. The leafy mask of Sarie's face uncurls as they rouse from their sleep. "Sarie, do you remember the way to the lost woods? Do you remember how to get to the sword?"

Sarie shakes their head. "What's...going on, Link? Who's everyone? Link looks sad. Did something happen?"

"Sarie, I..." To tell Sarie that Link has fulfilled her promise. To tell Sarie that she has taken them at least close to their home. To tell Sarie that she found nothing in that home but the shroud of the sword that seals the darkness. "...have a favour to ask of you. You can say no. But I have to ask.

"You don't remember this right now, but you will. There's a song...there's a song...there's a song that'll help you remember, I think. You led me through the lost woods." Link describes the trip to Sarie, who bobs their head, drowsily at first, and then more alertly. "You talked about another person you met, once. Someone who threw away an ocarina. I made you cream of mushroom stew with radish and truffle, and a mushroom I found in a log. You remember that? It's all right if you don't remember.
"I have a favour to ask."

"What is it? Even if Sarie doesn't remember, Sarie would do anything for Link."

Link lifts her hands to her eyes, but the fingers no longer come away wet. She has cried herself out the past couple of days; now the tears have given way to a quiet resolve, to a tempered blade sunk into her spine, forcing her to stand erect.

"Sarie, when I tried to pull the sword from the stone, it didn't accept me. It didn't choose me. It...it rejected me. I'm not the chosen one anymore, but I want to go activate these shrines. I've got a promise.

"So I want you to help them. I want you to help them. Please. I can't do it. I can't do it. But you can. You can help them, Sarie. They're the Champions. Their Divine Beasts have chosen them. Just look at everything that they've done. But the sword hasn't chosen me. I'm not...I'm not the chosen one anymore, all right? But you can help them find another one."

Sarie tilts their entire body. "Sarie doesn't understand but Sarie will help! What does Link want Sarie to do? Sarie doesn't get all this about chosen heroes, but Sarie knows lots about making Link food if Link's sad!"

"...thank you, Sarie. What I want you to do." To somehow make the blade of evil's bane choose her again. "I want you to stay with my friends here. You've met them all. At least you've met Yunobo and Riju. They're kind. They're good people: brave, and smart, and strong in all of the ways I'm not anymore. So please, stay with them. I'll teach them the song. When you go to the lost woods, just hold their hand and let them walk into the wind. They'll find someone to be the chosen one. Can you do that?"

"Link doesn't...doesn't want Sarie around anymore?" Sarie asks. Link squeezes shut her eyes for a moment before she reaches down her own throat to pull up courage from her stomach. It tastes of paella. She swallows down bile rising up with it. "But Link found Sarie! In hide-and-seek! Link found Sarie!"

"Sarie." Her words. She will not run away. Not anymore. "I do want you around. I promised you that I'd bring you home, didn't I? I'm going to do that. Whether that home is with your other koroks, or if it's on Romani Ranch with me. I'll find you a home. I found myself one, too. They're everywhere, if you look hard enough."

Sarie croons. They raise their tiny hand to curl their roots around Link's forefinger; Link feels the shudder pass down from her crown to her toes. She rocks back on her heels.

"I want to travel with you, Sarie. I've loved having you as my companion. I love you, Sarie, so thank you for being with me all these weeks, these months. But sometimes we have to give things up to help everyone." Link breathes out. "You can say no. You can travel with me if you want. I promise that after you all find another chosen one, I'll come by, and we can travel again for as long as you want. And I'll make you all the loam in the world. No matter what you pick. I'm serious. You can say no."

"If Sarie says no, then...people might be in trouble? Sarie needs to help them find a new chosen one. If Sarie says no, then Sarie's being...selfish."

"I'm being selfish too. I could stay with you all. I made another promise, to Kass, to Floof—" Sarie laughs; Link brushes their forehead with the knuckle of her forefinger. "—for the shrines. You're the one who told me that having a korok around—something about being a navigator for us—"
Link nods. "A navigator...Sarie can do that. Sarie can be the navigator!" Sarie twirls up into the air on their korok leaf to *pap* Link's cheek with their little hand. "Sarie knows how to be a navigator! Sarie just has to hold hands, and then Link—or Link's friends—know where to go! That's all Sarie has to do as a navigator?"

"That's all you have to do, Sarie."

"Then Sarie will do it! And when Link comes back from all the shrines, and Sarie helps find the new chosen hero with the swordy-sword thingy, then Link has to make Sarie *aaaaaaaaaaaaall* the loam in the whole wide world!" Sarie holds out their hand. "Link has to promise!"

"I promise." Link takes Sarie's hand; they shake their entire body.

"No, no. Put out your little finger!" Link obliges, and Sarie curls a root around it. "There. That's a promise. And Sarie loves Link too! Sarie might not remember a lot and might forget plenty of things, but I'll never forget you, Link, not even if you forget me."

Link looks at them, and Sarie looks at her, and Link opens her arms to gather Sarie into a hug. Whatever else happens, she'll come back for Sarie.

"Travellers like us have to stick together, don't we? Until we both get all our memories back, and then some." She buries her face in Sarie, trapped in the crook of her arm. Sarie hugs the closest part of Link they can reach: her nose. "Besides, I promise you that I'll make you all the loam in the whole wide world. That's gonna take me a long time."

Sarie lets go. Link releases them. They drift down to the pillow. Sarie looks back past Link's shoulders, to the closed door, beyond which Link can hear the just-audible murmur of the crowd outside.

They take Link's forefinger in their two very small hands. "Link has places to go now, don't you?"

Places to go. Always somewhere else to go.

She closes her eyes. Her eyelids tremble. Turning, she opens the door: Riju at the forefront, who asks her if they can come inside. Link nods. The sea of people attempts to squeeze into the room or else gathers outside the door, whispering to one another the goings-on, craning their heads to peer at Link and at the korok who whirls up to perch on her shoulder. She turns back towards everyone.

Kaneli, Riju, Yunobo, Amali, Sidon, Dorian, Teba, Saki, Tulin, Koko, Cottla, Notts, Kotts, Cree, Kheel, Genli. All of them.

"One hundred years ago," Link says, and her fingers shake, "I was chosen by the...the sword. I was the Champion of Hylia, the Hero of Hyrule, Her Majesty's Knight, O Courageous Link. I knew all of the Champions. They were among the closest friends I've ever had. And I knew the Princess, too. I...don't know what happened during the Great Calamity. I was honest when I said that I'd lost my memories. I was...I just wasn't entirely honest about when I got them back."

She breathes. Link sways under the weight of their gazes upon her. She listens to her own words parroted back to her through Sidon's interpreter.

"I just...didn't think that I could do it. And then, thanks to all of you, I realised I could." Her hands still. "No, I...I only thought I could. That's why I went after the sword. But the sword didn't choose me. Not this time."
"So I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I'm not the chosen one anymore. I was, and you're right about that. I don't know what happened during the Calamity. I don't have my memories of it. They've come back in bits and pieces but there's still entire years completely blank in my head. Like...like a wheel of cheese missing a slice. It's still cheese, still good, but...but missing a slice. I don't know what happened to the Calamitous One, or who put me in the Shrine of Resurrection, or what happened to the...to the Princess. I can't even remember her name."

Like the girl who smelled of horses. Like the girl with the golden hair, whose name Link cannot remember. Or, maybe, somewhere in her heart of hearts, is afraid to remember.

"This is my friend, Sarie. They're a korok. I found them in Lanayru, and they, too, have lost their memories. I don't know much about them. But there's a song that gives them enough back that they can lead you to the sword. Does anyone have an instrument? An ocarina?" Kheel raises her wing, but Link shakes her head. "I can't sing. It has to be an instrument. An ocarina, or a harp—"

Riju.

Riju, who crosses the room to her own bed, who opens her belongings, where Link can see an instrument case wrapped in cloth. Riju, who opens the case to reveal within a six-stringed Parapan harp.

The Goddess Sageru, a star upon Her chest, holding Her harp. Link can remember Marin's voice. The blessed ages, the Sanidin, in the green, blue, and red of the Golden Goddesses, with its six strings, two for each of the Goddesses. A string for fire and a string for power; a string for water and a string for wisdom; a string for wind and a string for courage.

Courage. Link inclines her head. "I don't know if I remember how to play, so I'm sorry if this sounds awful. But I'll try."

"Then, that's all we can ask of you," Riju answers, holding the harp as the Goddess Sageru would, her voice cracked down the middle, every syllable driving the knives deeper into the pads of Link's heels.

When she takes the harp into her hands, its heaviness curves down into her palm. She strums. She strums the harp, and she presses her fingers down on the strings, and she remembers the chords that Urbosa's friend taught her, and she remembers the notes that the girl with the golden hair taught her, and she remembers the memories of younger days that she has lost and found and denied and accepted and carries with her now, as that which was and as that which she is and as that which influences whom she shall be.

She strums the harp, and she plays for them the minuet. The Minuet of Forest. The ode to the Goddess Kokir. The song of memories.

When she finishes, Link returns the harp to Riju, who repeats the song back to her. Back and forth, back and forth. Kheel begins to sing along. Her sisters join in to add their harmony. Riju strums, and Link passes on the song passed down to her.

"The Princess of Hyrule taught me that song. One of the lullabies her mother used to sing for her." Link closes her eyes. She faces everyone.

Sarie, Kaneli, Riju, Yunobo, Amali, Sidor, Dorian, Teba, Saki, Tulin, Koko, Cottla, Notts, Kotts, Cree, Kheel, Genli. All of them.

Link bows her head, her upper body, down to her waist. "I'm sorry that I'm not the chosen one
anymore. If there's ever anything I can do, I'll do it. And if I ever recover my memories, I'll come see you all." Link dips her head again, yet she forces her gaze up from her boots, meeting the eyes of the people around her. "I hope you can forgive me."

Kaneli opens his beak as if intent on saying something. Teba and Dorian reach towards him to close his mouth at the same time.

Link wavers on her feet. She rocks back and forth again on her heels. "I'll be on the road, but I'll try to write letters if I can. And if you ever need me, there's ways to find me. Just listen for Kass's accordion." She wobbles.

"Link!"

Sidon. Sidon's voice. Sidon, handing his cane to his translator with such force that the translator nearly topples over, stepping up towards Link, pulling her into an embrace, picking her up as though she weighed nothing, gazing her cheeks to blood on the harshness of the scales lining his face.

"Link, thank you for everything that you've done for us! I want to see you around more, selfishly! I understand that you have shrines to see to, doing your part in aiding us in the fight against the Calamitous One!" Sidon squishes Link against him, so tightly that Link almost cannot breathe, but a lack of breathing that feels nearly...good. Warm, and safe, and comfortable, like under a blanket with the air just a tad too stuffy, yet so safe that she would not want to poke her head outside until the heat became overbearing. The comfort of someone who has faith in her, of someone who believes in her, of someone who loves her. "You taught me that prophecies don't always come true exactly as we think they will! If the sword that seals the darkness has not chosen our Link, it is only because we cannot yet see the ocean! Keep swimming! The river will take you there! And even if our Goddess chooses another to take up the legendary sword, that does not diminish for an instant everything that you, our Link, our most courageous, most wonderful, most talented, most skillful, most trusting, most faithful, most loyal, and most incredible at cooking Link has done!"

Link opens her eyes. Sidon cannot gaze at her, yet she prays that he can hear the quickness in her breaths, the thumping of her heart.

No. She does not need to pray that someone will understand past her expression. She has her hands. She has her words.

"...thank you," Link signs against his throat. "That means more to me than you know."

"You mean more to me than you know!" Sidon embraces her again. Her spine does not bend that way, and her neck does not go in that angle. Link wraps her arms around him in turn. "If you have lost your faith in yourself again, then I will believe in you twice over! Thrice over! And not because of some prophecy, but because I've observed you with my own two ears and my own two hands, and I know what you can do, Link!"

"N-not just Sidon. Me too," Yunobo interjects. "I'm not smart enough to know what the Goddesses are trying to do. Th-that doesn't take away everything you've done for us, blade or not. We can find s-someone else for the sword, right? I care about you because when everyone else thought that it couldn't be helped and that all we could do was protect ourselves from Vah Ruda-rudania, you calmed me down, and you went with me, a-and you risked your life to save p-people you don't even know. That's why we're h-here. Even before we knew about this ch-chosen hero stuff, right?"

She notices Amali nodding her head. "I trusted you over carrot cake, long before I learned you carried the slate."
"Whatever the Goddesses have in store for us, we need to believe in Them," Riju remarks. "It may mean that you don't have to bear blade of evil's bane any longer. It may mean that our Goddesses don't think we need it for the fight ahead. We don't have a princess either. Then, no blessed blood and no sacred sword." Link recalls the line from Kass's song. "If They have chosen someone else, then They will guide them to the sword. Sarie—their name is Sarie, you said?—will help. All of us will help. Then, we just need to put our trust in our Goddesses, and we need to keep fighting. All of us."

She meets Link's gaze with her own, Link's the shade of the coming storm, Riju's the hue of the solid earth, and where the land and sky meet Link can see the infinite stretch of the horizon all around her.

"Link, you need look no further than your own body to see all that you have done. You look no further than the room around you—" Riju gestures towards the gathered congregation. "—to see that you have brought us all together. You, and that cooking pot of yours. You gave me your courage, so let me give some back."

Link has no more tears to shed, but, when Sidon places her down upon the floorboards, her eyes sting. Her cheeks remain dry. Yet, as Riju moves in to hug her, and as Amali hugs her, and as Yunobo hugs her, and as Sidon picks up all four of them into a great embrace, she has not just come home to a house, but come home to peace.

Teba crosses his chest with his wings. "Well I'll be plucked."

Dorian clears his throat. "I feel as though Lady Impa should be made aware of these proceedings. You should consider making your way to Kakariko if you're off on the road."

Link tries to nod amid the ball of warmth—of Riju, of Amali, of Yunobo, of Sidon—that surrounds her. When she can't, she sticks out one arm to curl her fingers into the symbol for being all right. She hears Sarie call out: "Link got it! She says she got it, cucco-doodle-doo!"

Kaneli hoots. "Order, order, everyone. As touching as this scene is. As disappointing as it is that we've seemingly gained and lost our chosen one in a single night. As splendid as it is that we now know not only the location of the legendary sword but also how to retrieve it, it is also the middle of the night. Hoo here wishes to stay up? With Prince Sit-on—" Saki whispers into Kaneli's ear. "—excuse me, Prince Sidon here, we should discuss logistics on the morrow. Now, everyone, please have a good and peaceful night. You can continue—" He yawns. "—at some less unholy hour. Even Erito has fallen asleep, I'm sure."

Sidon sets down Yunobo, Amali, Riju, and Link; Yunobo sets down Amali, Riju, and Link; Amali sets down Riju and Link; and Riju and Link hold to one another for another brief moment before parting.

Turning her head towards Sarie, Riju bows low to them. "Thank you so much, Sarie."

"The least Sarie can do for—" Sarie scrunches up their korok leaf. "—Jangly!"

"Jangly?" Riju covers her mouth with her hand to laugh.

"All Jangly's jangly bits jangle when Jangly moves!" Sarie taps Riju's armbands and anklets, her earrings and necklace. She dips her head. "Sarie thinks they're really pretty! Like music wherever Jangly steps. Music-y-music-y-music. Song-y-song-y-song."

Link glances at Riju. "I think you'll have to play that song when we get closer to the lost woods, to
Riju nods. "Then, I'll keep that in mind. And thank you, Link, for figuring this out, thank the Goddesses."

A touch on her shoulder. Link and Riju both look up at Dorian, who waves to Link. "I don't mean to interrupt. I do have a request."

Link tilts her head.

"And a question. When do you plan to leave, do you think?"

She rubs the back of her head. "I was...going to just leave right away, 'cause I thought you'd all hate me or something..."

Riju's brow knits together. Yunobo, Amali, and Sidon all start speaking at once in their haste to reassure her or in their shock that Link would even suggest such a thing. Sidon stops first; Riju waves her arms to quiet Yunobo and Amali, to not overwhelm Link.

Dorian clears his throat again. "Before you leave, I'd like you to make that pilaf again. Goddess knows I can't, and my daughters adored it."

Link nods. She looks up at the others, at Riju, at Amali, at Yunobo, at Sidon. "If you all don't mind," she signs, slow enough that Sidon's interpreter can whisper in his ear without having to trip over herself, "I'd like to cook with you all, too. And then make a promise. Here's our menu: deliciously grilled rock roast, Darunia-style; fish pie, Ilari-style; fried bananas, Rovah-style; and seafood paella, Ruto-style." She pauses. "And sometime, Amali, you should show me how to make cannoli. You promised you would after we met Kaneli."

Amali's cheeks darken. "If I promise anything, then I'll always go all the way. We'll make canoli whenever we can."

Link bobs her head. She feels her ponytail against the back of her neck, untied, and looks back to see Sarie perched on her shoulder, her hair wound around their little hands.

She raises her hands to say something again. Then a yawn overpowers her. Sidon attempts to scoop her up, misses, and drags her up by her legs. A rapid intervention from Yunobo saves her. Riju directs Sidon to lay Link down upon the bed. Link curls up on the pillow. Amali smooths her brow.

"Chief Kaneli has the right idea. Come on. Let's get all these kids to bed."

"I'm fine to talk about the—!" Riju's own yawn cuts her off; Amali arches an eyebrow. Sighing, Riju crosses her arms over her chest. "Then, tomorrow. First thing."

Link sleeps. Not fitfully. Not in the fevers of malice, not in the pain of healing, not under the pressures of the chosen one or not, not under the cloak of her own lies and equivocations, not under anything but the blanket that keeps her warm and the love that she can feel poured onto her with every gaze upon her.

When tomorrow comes, her insecurities may come to bite her yet again. When tomorrow comes, the weight of the sword that seals the darkness may again haunt her. When tomorrow comes, the Calamitous One may strike, and she may not live to see the sunrise at all. But that is tomorrow, and this is tonight.

Tomorrow comes, and the stars do not crash down around her boots to electrify the earth, nor does
the moon splash into the sea to well the waves up into pillars of ice, nor does the sun spread an
inferno over the land once known as Hyrule to burn away the greenery of the wilds she loves and
the people that she loves even more. Tomorrow comes and the Champions hold their meetings.
Tomorrow comes and Link arranges cooking lessons.

Deliciously grilled rock roast, she realises, does not carry over well to the chillier regions of
Tabantha. Instead Link ushers her friends into a field trip to the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, for two
reasons: so that they can turn up the heat, and so that she has an excuse to see Ilia again. She ends
up spending most of the day just on Ilia, introducing Amali and especially Riju more properly to
her four-hoofed companion.

Rijua stands very solemnly before Ilia and kneels before her, offering her her an apple in her palms.
Ilia *cronches* the fruit. "Thank you for speeding Link on her journey," Riju says, her voice entirely
serious.

Link laughs. Ilia whinnies and licks up Riju's face. Her bangs congeal up into a cowlick. Riju
wears the cowlick proudly for the rest of the day. Before they leave the stable, Link snaps her
fingers and catches Riju's attention.

"*Riju, you really like sand seals, right?*" Link moves her hand in circular, approximately seal-
shaped wheels. "Like the soft things on your bed."

Riju covers her mouth with her hand. "Ah, that is to say...I do happen to have a lot of such toys,
yes."

Link flexes her fingers. She takes a stance in front of Riju, legs apart, muscles taut, expression
tensed in concentration. Riju starts to part her lips, a question plainly written on her tongue, but
Link raises a hand to stop her. "*Wait wait wait. I have to get this right. I was practising last night
and everything.*" Dipping her head, Riju's features shift into seriousness. Link emulates a clearing
of the throat.

"*Riju...as the Champion of Parapa, the Hero of Sageru, the Pilot of the Divine Beast of Nabooru,
O Courageous Riju...*"

Link draws herself up.

"*...it's up to you...*"

She inhales. She can do this. She can *do* this.

"*...to sand seal the Calamitous One.*" Jazzing out her hands, Link grins crookedly at Riju. "*Eh? Get
it? Get it? Like seal, like sealing the Calamitous One, but sand seal. It took me all week to come up
with that.*" She brushes imaginary dust from her chest. "*Not bad, right? Seal? Do you seal-i-ously
not see the pun? Do I need to seal the deal with another?*" Link bites her thumb. "*Wait, wait. I
should've said, do you seal-i-ously not seal the pun. Or would that be too much pun in one
sentence? What's the optimal pun density for things like this?*" Link rubs her knuckles against her
cheek. "*I'm seal-ly not smart enough for this.*"

Riju blinks at her. She blinks at Riju. And then, all at once, Riju's entire face alights with a
brightness to rival the sun, as though the Golden Goddesses had met at the point of her nose to
form the world before Link's own eyes. Her brown eyes aglow, her smile broad, Riju laughs with
the purest joy that Link has ever heard and tackles Link into an embrace that lands them in the hay.

Neighing, Ilia lowers her head to chew on Riju's hair. Link squeezes Riju tight. "*That means she*
"Then, that's the highest praise I could imagine."

Riju and Link grin at one another, and Link wonders with a warmth in her chest of just how many homes she has found.

They take a field trip to the Divine Beast Vah Rudania again on a second day for the rock roast. Link stands with her hand on her chin to remember how to best cook the roast without anyone suddenly exploding into flames as Hestu did. Closing her eyes, Riju ponders out loud as well, until Yunobo nervously—tapping his index fingers against one another—points out that they simply have fireproof armour for zora, rito, and humans in stock.

Eventually the rock is roasted, and then grilled, and then deliciously-ed. Link, Amali, Riju, and Sidon present to Yunobo their respective deliciously grilled rock roasts for him to try. Yunobo sniffs at them having made him food, plucks up the rock roast deliciously grilled by Sidon, and crunches it into his mouth.

He spends the next hour nursing the crack in his tooth with a shard of sapphire. With every apology that issues from Sidon's mouth, Yunobo flushes redder, and redder, until Link suggests that Sidon step back lest Yunobo himself become rock roasted.

Next on the agenda: fish pie. Fortunately no Goddesses expressly forbid the consumption of fish, though Yunobo shies away from the thought of cooking with a living being. "Life is precious. That's why we eat rocks, right? So that we don't have to take life. There's a Goddess-given pride in being alive!"

Instead of fish pie, Yunobo makes sapphire and opal pie to go along with Link's explanation of techniques. Sidon stirs the ingredients so enthusiastically that the batter ends up everywhere but the bowl. Riju, less familiar with the baking of pies, leaves hers for too long in the oven. At least Yunobo's swift intervention at the smell of smoke keeps the kitchen from burning down. When they present their pies to Amali, she politely declines tasting them. Yet her eyes well up with tears all the same. The thought that counts.

Next: fried bananas. When Link and Riju—the latter holding the former's hand to keep Link from plunging into panic—descend into the marketplace in search of bananas, the merchants throw them glances so suspicious that the town guards arrive to arrest them. Riju and Link endeavour to explain, but Riju's thickly Parapan-accented Tabanch and the guards' inability to read the Tabanch off Link's fingers thwart their efforts at communication. As the guards march them towards the Sage of Erito that arbiters justice in Medli, Link indicates the slate on her hip and the similar slate on Riju's, whereupon the guards shout out that not only have Yiga entered their very precious Medli, but have also had the gall to filch slates from the Champions!

The arrival of Amali and Kaneli to the Temple of Erito brings the guards to apologise profusely. New to the force and eager to prove that they can defend Medli just as well as those who have left to fight against the Yiga, the guards elaborate, they leaped on the chance to show some no-good banana-lovers that Medli means business.

Amali runs her fingers through her ponytail of feathers. "If you were a Yiga, then would you stroll up to the market in broad daylight to ask for bananas, knowing that a love of bananas is one of the great Yiga stereotypes? I suppose that they've switched to another fruit by now. If that's so, then will you detain anyone seeking the sweetness of produce?"

Genli makes a long ooooh sound. "You tell 'em, Mom!"
Smiling tiredly, Amali looks over at her children—and Tulin—having evidently followed her here. "And what are you doing here, young lady?"

"Ehehehe..."

With bananas out of the question, Link swears to Riju that she will make Riju fried bananas, Rovah-style, another day. "Urbosa taught me how to do it," Link notes, "so I can sort of promise you that it's at least kind of authentic."

"So, that's why you call her Urbosa and not Lady Urbosa." Gasping so abruptly that Link almost jumps, Riju whirls around to grab Link's wrists. "Then, this means that you're an invaluable source of information! Oh, thank the Goddesses! There's so much I need to ask you!"

"I don't know if I remember it all," Link admits, "but I'll try."

Finally they come to the paella that Mipha loved. "It won't be as good as that shark you gave me in Ruto," she warns Sidon, "but I hope you like it."

Sidon shakes his head. His head-tail whacks Yunobo clear across the face and floods him onto the floor. When he swings his head back to the other side, Sidon's translator rapidly moves Amali out of harm's way, while Riju stands short enough that she merely tilts her chin up to blink at the tail swishing overhead.

"My," says Riju, slightly dazed, "but our Goddesses are surely capable of such wonderful creations."

They move all in on the seafood paella. Fish of every sort, crab, snail, and clam, although the selection in Tabantha differs quite significantly from that in Lanayru: more freshwater fish and less ocean, more cold water and less warm. The paella turn out better than either the pie or the rock roast, and certainly better than the bananas that resulted in Link's second arrest in her lifetime.

That she can remember.

They present the paella to Sidon, who eats the dishes voraciously. He pats his stomach when he finishes Amali's, then Riju's, then Link's, and then ends up in the medical ward for a good part of the day when Yunobo's sapphire paella freezes half of his face.

Tapping his index fingers together, Yunobo apologises for having momentarily forgotten that other people of the land once known as Hyrule do not, as a matter of fact, eat rocks.

Sidon takes not the worries to heart. Instead he thanks Yunobo for trying his hardest to make something Sidon would enjoy. He pumps Yunobo's hand and claps him on the back. "I hope that we'll be most fast friends! Any friend of our Link's a friend of mine! I'd trust her with just about anyone!"

Link inquires about how fared the paella. "And be honest, please."

Sidon scratches his throat. He considers with his head tilted that way, and then with his head tilted this way, and then—when the healer on duty asks him to please stop yelling so loudly that he wakes all of the other patients in the medical ward, to which he apologises and begins to murmur in a voice just as thundering—launches in on a long and praise-filled critique which indicates to Link, Riju, and Amali that they have done almost everything wrong.

Link blinks. Her mouth curves up into a smile so wide she could fit an entire plate in her mouth at once.
"See, and Mipha never told me any of this. She was so afraid to hurt me that I ended up making her terrible paella for years. I never knew!" Link claps her palm against her brow. "Thanks, Sidon. I knew I could count on you. I knew I could put my utmost faith in you!"

Sidon grins. Amali and Yunobo shield their eyes from the sheer sparkle of his teeth.

Link stays a few days more, making pilaf—for Dorian, Koko, and Cottla—and salmon meunière—for Genli—and the rest of what she has promised the children, cooking alongside Riju and sometimes the others, until she has no more excuses to stay. Just as whenever Mipha would come to see her in Ruto, and Link would buff out the same spot on the counter for hours on end to justify being able to listen to Mipha speak, she pulls every alibi she can.

At length, though, Yunobo, Riju, Sidon, and Amali must depart with their Divine Beasts to continue protecting the people of the land once known as Hyrule. And Link does not want, ever, to interfere with that.

At the stable, Link meets the captain of the Parapan royal guard: a tall brown-skinned gerudo woman in plate armour whom Riju introduces as Buliara. Buliara. She recalls Riju mentioned Buliara during their talks of her childhood. Link has the impression, in the affection with which Riju spoke, and in the tenderness of Buliara inquiring if Riju has fared well in Medli, something of a maternal warmth in Buliara's eyes. Link proposes to make Buliara a meal in celebration of their meeting and apologises for having left Nabooru before they could learn of one another.

Buliara chuckles. "For as much as my queen has told me about your cooking, I wish I could. Sadly, we have not the time."

"Then, next time," Riju declares. Buliara and Link nod their heads at the same time, their ponytails bouncing in unison.

Link bids them all not good-bye but see you later. First Amali, who goes on to scoop up all of her daughters, Koko, and Cottla; she kisses them on the foreheads and promises that she will soon return. Second Sidon, who gathers Link into an embrace, "most tight and warm, so that you won't forget it, Link!" Third Yunobo, who bawls as he swears to Link that they need to see each other more often than once in a year and a half. Next time Link comes to Darunia, Yunobo promises, promises will have to introduce her to all of his older brothers and his fathers and his friends. And last, Riju, who holds out her hand. Not a fist, but with her fingers together, palm facing Link. "The thing that you were trying to show me the first time." Link touches her palm to Riju's, then leans her arm back to slap Riju's hand. Riju recoils. She wrings her hand. "Is it supposed to sting like that?"

"It's something we did a hundred years ago, or at least that we did in Ordon," Link tells her.

"Ah! Like a little piece of history," says Riju; then her expression softens. "But it's not history to you, is it? It's life."

Link nods. They embrace.

Riju clings to her, and she to Riju. "Don't forget that you promised me those fried bananas."

"I couldn't if I tried."

They part near the stable. The four Champions and she, with Sarie perched now on Riju's head.

"When we next meet up," Link promises them all, "I'll make you all the Princess's favourite."
"The Princess's favourite?" Riju echoes. "Then, what is it?"

Link tugs one of her sidelocks. "I don't know yet. But I'm going to remember by then! I'll make sure of it! And if not, I'll make you something else and promise the favourite next time, so that we have to meet up again!" She beams at Sarie, who has picked up Riju's—much heavier—hair-loops as they once picked up Link's. "And loam for you too, Sarie."

They hug. They part. She waves them off.

And then she collects Ilia, and she trots down the path to the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, and she says hello again to Kass, who asks her how everything went.

Link inhales. She promises herself to tell him. About Amali, about the blade of evil's bane, about...herself. She will. She absolutely will, before they go their separate ways. Yet Link needs some time, and she has some thinking left to do, and she can see the long and winding path ahead of her.

Link cannot see the ocean. Nor does she know if there is an ocean, out there, somewhere. Yet she can swim with all her might.

"Well then," Kass intones, preparing an octave upon his accordion, "the songs say that there are one hundred and twenty shrines scattered throughout the land once known as Hyrule. Shall we?"

Link hooks her arm into his. "We shall."

He inquires, as well, about Sarie; Link explains that their companion has left on their own duties. Kass inclines his head. "I'll miss Sarie," he admits, "and I hope that we can travel with them again someday."

"I'll miss them too. How was the Divine Beast?"

Kass noisily hrmns in his throat and tugs on his collar. "That's a story for another time, I think. We've a journey ahead. Come, traveller."

Link unfurls her map. They embark on the painstaking process of marking down the shrines that she has already seen and activated. Kass points out that the shrines appear to somehow repel malice and monsters alike. Thus, he elaborates, most surviving villages in the present era have a shrine nearby or at their centre that keeps monsters at least somewhat at bay. "Wherever we go, we can start by investigating the local major villages and towns, or where they have been." Kass smooths down the feathers of his throat. "Aside from those, I have at least one hundred songs I know that have been passed down. I believe that some of them may refer to the same shrine. As well, we can inquire of locals if they know of shrines."

"One hundred and twenty," Link repeats.

Kass nods. "One hundred and twenty."

She nods sagely and touches her chin. "That's a lot of meals."

"It is a lot of meals."

Link nods sagely once more. Then she claps her hand upon her knees. "Then let's get going. We don't have much time to waste."

With the approach of winter, the travellers around the land once known as Hyrule become even
sparser than before. Link imagines that the Divine Beasts will soon have their hands, or paws, or wings, or hooves, or claws, or whatever she might call the Divine Beast Vah Ruta's limbs, full with carting around people and produce from place to place.

Link charts her journey from the Great Plateau with the assistance of Kass, who knows vaguely each time that he has seen her. In the spring she awoke upon the Great Plateau with its evergreen apple trees and wild berries; she arrived in Medigo of Eldin to meet Kass for the first time by early summer and returned to Kakariko by summer's end. The long winding road to Tabantha took her towards early autumn. Leaving Tabantha and tracking down Marin's whereabouts took her past the harvest. She wintered with her family—Maryll and Miyu, Malon and Vish, Cremia and Romani—until just the dawn of the breeding season in the following spring, whereupon she met with Kass once more. To Parapa she went, where she spent most of the spring and early summer in its rising heat. From there she came to Lanayru during the thunderstorms of summer. Link met with Kass yet again in the early eaves of autumn and took to Ordon by the harvest. And now she stands again in +

+Tabantha with the approach of winter on the chillier northeastern winds.

"I didn't realise that it'd been that long," Link signs in awe, gazing upon the calendar of the seasons that Kass has written down for her. "Over a year and a half. I'm at least nineteen now. Maybe even twenty. I just kind of lived meal to meal, day to day, breakfast to dinner to supper to breakfast..." Her stomach rumbles and she winces.

Kass chuckles. "It can be easy to forget who you are, and where you're going, when you're a traveller like you or I." He shuts one eye. "And it seems to me that we should set ourselves making a meal."

Link gathers up supplies in Medli first, enough for the coming journey, seasonings and spices, salts and fruits, fish and meats. She asks how long the sapphire in sapphire ice-box would last, if perhaps she might have one that will fair a few months. The merchants have one. She inquires about the price.

She leaves without it.

Since Link will walk on foot beside Ilia—as she and Kass cannot ride at once—she can afford to have Ilia carry greater weight in her saddlebags. She loads up Ilia on that which will not perish. The rest they will gather or hunt along the road.

"Do you mind me eating poultry?" she asks of Kass.

"Hm? No, not at all, traveller. I would prefer not to eat it myself, as such I was raised, but I have no qualms about you doing so."

Link thanks him profusely. That very afternoon she catches a rainbow sparrow and stuffs it with chillshroom to make her own version of a Hateno sunny-bird—though she has not the incredible way with names that Sarie did, she comes up with the term chilly-bird for it—just to indulge in the meat she has craved for months and which the cucco pilaf has reignited. For Kass, she prepares chilly-fish on trout fished out from the waters of Lake Totori. "Sorry," Link signs, rubbing the back of her head, "but I couldn't catch any porgy."

Kass arches an eyebrow. "You remembered."

"I always remember what my friends like to eat." He clears his throat in some semblance of embarrassment. Link leans forward. "I hope you don't mind me thinking of you as a friend."
The experience imparts a useful wisdom on her: the fishing pole Sidon gave her glimmers with luminous stone, bright enough to make fishing at night a breeze; bright enough to prompt slumbering fish into inspecting the light; and bright enough to attract every monster in the vicinity at once.

Kass suggests that they tackle Hebra before the lingering warmth of autumn exhales its last. Link counters that they travel through Tabantha first so that she can hunt monsters, trade in their parts for rupees and return for an ice-box and sturdier winter clothing lest Kass intend to cart around a hylian-shaped block of ice. Kass pretends to consider it for a moment, then relents: "If you were frozen, then who would cook me my meals?"

Tabantha's shrines first. At Hoskit, at Ilari—which Link beams to see surviving after all of these years, the town that Revali put on the map—and at the Warbler's Nest of Elrora, whose Chief Rouru thanking Link to assisting them in fending off a scourge of wayward fire dancers with a quiver of various types of arrows. And several shrines with songs dedicated to them. As Kass and Link suspected, some of the shrines relate to two or more songs that they yoke together to uncover the shrines’ secrets. In Ilari, Link sells off the monster parts she has gathered and purchases an ice-box alongside thick feathered clothing for the winter; many, many blankets; a ruby rod; and bags upon bags of flint and emergency firewood. And, of course, protection from the cold for Ilia.

Then: to Hebra.

Link knows nothing at all of Hebric save for the universal stomach rumbling of I hunger. Kass knows enough to get by and to translate songs. The Hebra region, Link observes, consistently mainly of rito, sheikah, gerudo, and some adventurous goron that brave the cold. Not as populated as the warmer climes of the land once known as Hyrule. the higher they climb, the further Hebra becomes a landscape of snow and ice, of twisted rock and permafrost immutable, so cold that Link even notices the numbers of monsters thin out.

Frost-breathing lizalfos and pebblits of ice greet them. White-winged keese and snowy chuchu swarm around them. White-furred wolfos hunt down the moose and woolly rhinos that populate the mountains. Here and there, massive frost tali awaken to almost bring Link and Kass to ruin on their breaths alone.

Other, stranger monsters appear: floating flowers of ice that belch out explosives; greenish bird-like beings with mouths that open into long serrated jaws and which can slide down their bellies at speeds to match Link's efforts at surfing away on her pot lid; living beings that arise from the snow to chuck their own heads at the travellers; sludge-like puddles that well up from the snowfields to toss giant balls of snow; hunched icy titans with all too many rubied eyes and visible beating hearts that exhale cold onto unsuspecting passersby before their whirling minions drag the frozen corpses to the titans' maws.

At least the wildberry and safflina grow plentifully here.

The hunt for shrines in Hebra proves long and difficult. Navigation among the snow when the frequent blizzards force them to shelter in caves become tedious at best and nightmarish at worse. Kass, furthermore, discovers that the songs do not help when most landmarks look exactly the same as any other in their mountains upon mountains of ice. "I could not guess as to what means a white bird," he muses aloud, examining his notes. "A fir tree, certainly, but would the same fir tree exist however many years after this song was recorded? I have not the slightest idea."

They scale the northern summit of Hebra, the peak of Mount Yeta, to find nothing resembling a white bird. Only several days later do they happen to stumble upon a flash of orange in the side of a plateau, and only after Link has activated the shrine within do they realise that the white
bird referred to a vaguely bird-shaped plateau visible from the summit.

Kass clicks his tongue and shakes his head. "I do believe," he remarks, "that poets best well not write while inebriated."

While Kass takes care of the shrine-hunting, pleading the locals for information that they often give in exchange for Link presenting them something of her cooking pot or agreeing to take part in their local pastimes—for a most modest sum of rupees, of course—Link hunts local wildlife and gathers their plants and fungi. The moose in particular net fine and fatty meat for the effort that they take. After a woolly rhino gouges out Link's right thigh—causing her and Kass to take shelter in the gerudo-rito village of Pashli until she recovers—yet only provides the same amount of meat as a moose and not even as delicious, Link learns to hunt more the moose than the rhino. Not for fear of her own gouging, but for fear of what might happen to Ilia.

Link snaps pictographs of everything that she can. Handiwork of drawings that she makes in the snow. The Hebric tower that rises up into the sky. The black-and-gold shield she wins and declines to take in a competition of surfing down the snowy slopes. The towering metal doors whose iced-over surface clings to Kass's flight feathers while he squawks for her to "do something! What...what are you doing with the slate? A pictograph!?" The ancient skeleton he and Link uncover guarding over a shrine—he wonders if, ten thousand years ago, the ancient Sages had meant for the chosen hero to fight such a beast—and the damned square of water that Link tramps up and down the snowfields to freeze with cryonis before she can trick one of the sludge-like monsters into throwing a snowball large enough to knock down the massive metal doors. The violet-striped silver lynels which beat her to within a millimetre of her life; steadily Link learns how best to approach the lynels from behind and mount them before they notice her, how best to daze them and blind them with arrows to the eyes, how best to understand their abilities and anticipate what they can do to her.

She tries to cook lynel meat.

She becomes deliriously ill from lynel meat.

She promises an extremely worried and three-days sleepless Kass to never again cook lynel meat.

Kass fills in their map of shrines. After traipsing around the whole of Hebra, from Mount Yeta to the north to Mount Yeto to the south, from the impossibly tall Blizzeta Peak to the east to the goron-inhabited, milder Mount Snowhead to the west, conquering eating contests with goron food enthusiasts and shows of skill with gerudo archers who teach Kass an instrumental mountain-song on his accordion, chasing rito thieves of Ilia across valleys of snow and encountering secret hot springs hidden away by sheikah villages, Kass proposes that they move on.

"We've found what we can. Later we can return to fill in the blanks if we must." He pauses. "But I promise you that once we visit all of O Our Hyrule, O Kingdom Blessed by Three, once, I will return to Medli again, even if we have not yet found all of the shrines.

"You call it Hyrule," Link says.

Kass inclines his head.

"As it was once, so it may again be."

He plays the gerudo mountain-song on the peak of Mount Blizzeta. An ode to every courageous soul who has ever braved the Hebric colds, he calls it. They leave Hebra towards the south. Travelling through the ridgelands, they pass both wastes of villages—ruined by the past months
upon months of monsters and attacks by the Divine Beasts—and, as well, the flourishing of those villages that have turtled themselves into garrisons of protection.

In the ravine of the Tanagar Canyon, Kass and Link stumble upon several abandoned archaeologist camps with the tell-tale signs of attacks by the Yiga. They leave Ilia sheltered as best they can and proceed forward.

Roaming further inwards towards a "shadowed temple" mentioned in song, Link and Kass uncover not only a massive hall larger than even the castle—old enough that time has ground down everything to colourless brown stone of the same material as the slate—but also a nest of guardians that leaves Link's cooking pot blackened and Kass's crest singed entirely off.

As they take shelter behind a rocky outcropping, Kass stares at the blackened bits of his crest in his hands. Link asks if she can cook something for him.

"Oh, no, I shouldn't be this shallow, but..." He sniffs. "...my wife has always said that she loves my crest. I've kept it ever so stylish just for her."

"I think that when Amali sees you again," Link observes, "she'll be so happy to see you in one piece that you could return to her looking a moblin and she wouldn't care."

"I know, but...it's just so sad..." Kass sighs. "I'll write a song about it, I suppose." He gingerly touches the crown of his head once more. "At least spring is around the corner. The yearly moult should help, at least a little."

Link hides her face behind her cooking pot, but she cannot stop the laughter that comes erupting out of her. She raises herself to her boots to apologise. The second her head clears the top of the outcropping, she faces about thirty red dots trained on her head, accompanied by a serenade of frantic chirping.

She sits back down.

In that brief glimpse, however, Link noted at—the very back of the dusty temple, beyond the sea of guardians—a trio of statues. And beyond that, the orange glow of a shrine.

Pace by pace, Kass and Link race from rocky outcropping to rocky outcropping. She dispatches a handful of guardians in unsavory locations with the help of most of her stock of arrows. He brings down his accordion case upon another guardian to distract it long enough for Link to shove the sword Riju gave her into its eye.

At the far end of the temple, Link cranes her head up and gazes at the Golden Goddesses. Statues of the Golden Goddesses. Statues far larger than any that she has ever seen, extending metres and metres above the ground.

O Din, the Goddess of Fire and Power. O Nayru, the Goddess of Water and Wisdom. O Farore, the Goddess of Wind and Courage.

She kneels down in reverence, praying for the peace of the land once, and perhaps someday again, known as Hyrule. Link lifts her head towards the Golden Goddesses; she can see her own reflection in the dark mirrored obelisk beyond the statues, its circular face marked with the symbols of the Goddesses Themselves. Yet she notices a strange chip in the rim of the obelisk, as though someone has broken off a vaguely circular shard.

Link activates the shrine to receive its blessing. With that, she and Kass leave and make further south.
South and south they go, roaming east and west. He and Link write letters and send them off to Medli with travellers that they pass by. No guarantee that the letters will arrive, they know, but one or two might just make it. In turn *Link and Kass* carry letters to locations that they intend to visit, including the village of Kotake, near Mount Satori.

Kass checks off shrine after shrine. Outside of the Hebric tundras and mountains the going becomes much easier, even as Link notes that the aggressiveness and quantities of monsters grow every day. She would swear that they seem to appear overnight or drop from the sky when no one watches, apparating out of thin air, usually at night.

On one such night, where the moon hangs low and full in the sky, a pack of lizalfos and mounted bokoblins set upon him and Link. Just as Link considers herself having cleared out the worst of the marauders, she turns about to observe that either a similarly sized pack of reinforcements has arrived without her notice, or monsters have sprung from nothingness. She and Kass escape with an added scar down her from the tip of her neck around the curve of her right shoulder blade.

They reach Kotake amongst the first snowfalls. Romani greets them with a notched bow and an eager cry of *Grasshopper*, although Link survives the encounter without a single arrow in her body. Romani, too, is learning.

Vish and Malon welcome them home, Link as family, Kass as a family friend. Kass gently asks for Link to move along. She requests one week from him. One week with her family, and she'll move along. Kass inquires, then, for the slate. "I'll take care of the surrounding shrines and come back to collect you in a week."

"Antsy to get back to your family, too?" Link asks.

He shifts the accordion to partially hide his beak under the pretense of playing a small song upon its bellows. "I have never been closer to seeing them again. And your family has only reminded me all the greater of why my heart hurts so."

Link's eyes widen. To have forced Kass to see her interacting with the family that has adopted her while he has not seen his own in nearly two years—

—but before she can apologise, Kass takes his leave.

She returns to Malon and Vish, who welcome her with open arms. Link says that she can stay for a week; Malon says that she can stay for as long as she can, as long as she needs to, as long as she wants to, and not a second more or less.

"What did I do to deserve such...wonderful people in my life?" Link signs, barely able to see past the blur of her wettened vision.

"Oh, Link. Like attracts like, don't you know?" Malon beams at her. Link could walk on air. No, not just that: she could leap up to the very heavens of the Golden Goddesses Themselves. Vish's gaze drops down. She hears his sharp intake of breath. "Link...those markings...and on your face...?"

Link rubs the back of her head. "I'll explain over dinner."

"Well then," says Vish; he massages his temples.

Malon pats his shoulder. "Darling, she just arrived. Give her some time before you start brooding over her."
When Link sees Cremia again, Link asks her how her head feels. Cremia lifts a hand to her cheeks—though her skin hues dark enough that she does not blush red, Link still discerns the rush of blood bringing a richer, warmer colour to her face—and shakes her head.

“*You don’t need to worry about me,*” Cremia responds politely. "*I hope that you haven't been too concerned.*"

Link makes vague cycling motions with her hands. Cremia watches her, not quite expectantly, but warmly, affectionately, smoothing her dress. "*Honey helps with the headaches, right? I’ve brought a lot of monster parts. Please, let me pay you back for how kind you've been to me.*"

Cremia begins to shake her head in her voiced reluctance to accept such a gift, but Link holds out her hands, palms up, until Cremia has hesitantly set her fingers down on Link's.

Link squeezes. One, two, three. Beat-beat-beat. She lets go just enough to speak. "*You're my friend, Cremia. At least let me make you things with honey while I'm here.*" She kicks herself for not having taken the initiative and brought honey with her in the first place. If only she had more foresight beyond what she wanted to eat five minutes from now. *I know honey's rare and expensive around here, but...it's plentiful in other places. And cheap! Maybe, when all of this is over, we could...?*

Cremia dips her head. "*I appreciate the offer, Link, and I hope that you believe me. That said, I can't abandon the ranch, or my family. I hope you understand.*"

"*I don’t mean for you to leave!*" Link bursts out hastily. "*I meant that we could go get honey. Or there's some people really skilled in medicine that I know, that could help you out.*"

"*I...*” Cremia loops her fingers around the tie of the yellow neckerchief she wears about her shoulders. "*I'll think about it.*"

Link beams. Then, remembering suddenly, she drops her upper body, bowing to Cremia, who stifles a surprised gasp. "*And I'm sorry for missing the breeding season. I said I'd help out with it. I promise that when I'm come back after everything, I really will help out! I don't know how long that'll take, and it won't be this breeding season, but when I'm done, I promise...I'll make you honey candy, and honey-drizzled pancakes, and this really good honey-covered fish thing that one of my friends made that I think you might like if you're feeling adventurous but I don't know you seem like more a practical kind of girl which I really like since I'm so not-practical I get my head stuck in cooking pot and accidentally set my friends on fire and then threw them right into the boiling cooking pot to thaw but you're so kind and patient and work so hard and I just want to give you back a smidgen of everything you've given to me and—*"

Cremia erupts into laughter. Not only laughter, but a loud, belly-busting laugh that alternates between a donkey's guffaws and a boar's snorts. She throws her hands up to her face in shocked horror. Link, heart thumping against her throat and stomach cheering on her heart, extends her arms to gently touch Cremia's wrists, to gently lower her arms, to gently smile at Cremia as she laughs until her breaths hasten to hiccoughs.

"*Link.* The mirth waters Cremia's eyes. "*You knew me for a few months over the winter; you haven't been back in a year; and you've thought so hard about me all this time?*"

Link nods decisively. "*There's hardly a day goes by when I don't think of a joke to tell Romani, or a recipe to share with you.*" She feels the corners of her mouth curve up. "*You're more artistic than I am, after all.*"
"I hope that you don't mind me saying this," Cremia signs, her hiccoughs running quakes through her arms that make the gestures rocky, "but it's nice to have you talking more."

Link's own face flushes now. She brushes her palm over her cheek. To distract herself from the compliment, Link pours Cremia a mug of water, which she drinks down until the hiccoughs fade to steady breathing. She coughs into her hand.

"Thank you, Link."

Link ducks her head. She inquires to Vish if they have honey in the house, or when the next market day might occur. Vish answers that they don't always have honey at market, and Link understands the dilemma: not of lacking money, but of lacking honey. Of not enough honey available to buy at all.

"But," notes Vish, "we do have half a pot left. I bribe the usual merchants to let me have go at it first." He arches his eyebrows. "Well then, care to make dinner? My dearest would appreciate the help."

She does. Riju's own honey-glazed trout, albeit with porgy and salmon mixed in to make up for the smaller variety of trout in the waters. Link asks Cremia to help her make it, to determine Cremia's favourite kinds of fish and their preparation. Cremia helps to make the fish fillets into the shape of a fish: a small family of sharks, three slightly larger, two slightly smaller, and two smaller ones yet. Link hands Romani one of the smallest sharks first, to which she stamps her foot and cries of unfairness; then Link gives her the other smallest one as well.

"It's you and Miyu," Cremia explains. Before Romani can open her mouth, Link unveils a meaty dog treat meant specifically for Miyu. Neither Link nor Cremia tells her that the two smallest fish combined make up the largest portion.

Cremia thanks Link for her help, and Link thanks Cremia for hers. "Link...I hope that this isn't too much to ask, but, before you leave at the end of the week, I want to show you something." Link promises her that she'll find time before she departs.

She requests again the harp to demonstrate all that she has remembered and learned; Malon claps her hands in delight to learn of her skills with the instrument.

Link tells them—tells her family—of her adventures with the Divine Beasts Vah Naboris and Vah Ruta. She leaves out, for now, the crucial details of her having been the legendary hero, even if she has an inkling that they already know. Link promises to return upon her completion of questing for the shrines. Romani demands that Link at least practise archery with her before she leaves and that she at least makes the future Knight another round of pancakes.

Putting her hands on her hips—as would have the girl who smelled of horses—Link raises an eyebrow. "I'll do you one better. I'll show you all the recipes I've learned since then. Hope you like fish and crab and rice."

She makes pancakes, and paella, and risotto, and ceviche—properly, with lemon and lime—and sunny-bird, and chilly-bird, and moose-meat pie from her ice-box, and fish pilaf that does not go over well, and cow pilaf that goes over much better—Romani declares that she has no beef with it, then waggles her eyebrows at everyone around the table—and every manner of curry under the sun and even some under the moon, and crab stuffed with mushroom, and bananas fried in butter, and Riju's Fishy Fiasco, and mushroom omelet, and all sorts of tarts, and even something in the prickled durians that Vish offers her. He slaps one of the fruit. "I'm curious to see what you can make of these things. They're hearty." He knocks his knuckles against one; Link listens to the
firmness of the sound. "Called the queen of fruits. Well then, I'll leave you to it, Link." He pauses and turns back to her, hand on his hip. "It's not every day that someone rolls up at our door with an arrow in her shoulder after breaking in to try not to feed our daughter liquored milk, but...for what it's worth, I'm glad to have you here. I think my mother-by-kin is, too."

Link falls back into her routine of rising early to assist Cremia with the ranch work. Vish and Malon help as well, as does Romani, increasingly so, the months of Link's absence having seen her grow a few centimetres taller and many more centimetres more mature. Even if Romani still sneaks out in the middle of the night to fight against Them, and she still would let in a total stranger to cook for her beneath the light of the moon, and she still feeds Miyu every scrap under the table that she can manage,

Link doesn't know if she would count those against maturity. After all, who is she, who has gotten her head stuck in her own cooking pot, to say about maturity and years? And, after all, Maryll, too, feeds Miyu every scrap under that she can manage.

Yet, despite the assistance of the rest of the family, ink works mostly with Cremia. Cremia who hums during her work, and Link who taps out rhythms to the sound of her music. They work in comfortable silence. The first few days Link proceeds clumsily, her hands having forgotten some of the motions, having lost the ability to anticipate what Cremia might need or want of her. Yet, by the third sunset, they have settled back into the previous winter's rhythm, and something a little more melodic besides.

Vish notes with pride that Cremia has begun to receive attention from all sorts of boys and girls in the village now that she has come of age. Malon remarks with a wink that Cremia hasn't seemed interested in anyone from Kotake. Link tilts her head to the side. "I'm happy for her," she says; Malon giggles.

Cremia and Link speak, now that she is not afraid to sign her own name. They speak of Cremia's childhood. They speak of Link's. They speak of where Link has been; she tells the stories of her scars. They speak of Cremia's paintings, which brings Link to arch her eyebrows at Cremia. She has mentioned, once or twice, her interest in artistry, from which Link asked for her help in arranging the pancakes in Miyu's face. But never her interest in paintings.

"You never talked, and I was worried from your expression that you didn't much want to hear me talk." Cremia glances away from her towards one of the cows that has just kicked over a pail of milk. While Link moves to clean up the spill, Cremia continues, her gestures even. "It was only at the end of winter that I realised...I'd been misreading you. I'm sorry. I hope you can forgive me."

Link reaches back for Cremia's hand. "You're not the first person to say that. About misreading, I mean. I get that a lot." She tries to push up the corners of her her mouth into a pretend smile, and then she realises that she doesn't need to pretend. "I'm not good at forcing smiles or those sorts of...things that people do to sort of...butter up like...social things like how people butter up food to make more rich and easier to swallow down. And I feel like somehow, everyone else gets told how to butter themself, but they kind of skipped me over." She twiddles her thumbs. "So...I don't even have anything to forgive you for. But I forgive you. And I'd like you to help me make some food later."

Cremia nods her head. "Then I'd love to help."

Link and Cremia prepare buttered and honey-drizzled crab legs, Cremia deftly inscribing the crab with characters and pictures in honey. Malon, Vish, and Maryll all compliment Cremia and Link on their cooking. The two bow together, but Romani gives the highest praise of them all: by
demanding seconds.

The chill of the night has settled in when Cremia rouses Link from her afternoon nap in the hay of the barn. Link lifts herself up. Cremia brushes the straw from Link's bangs.

"I want to show you something." Cremia breathes in. "I hope that you won't judge me poorly."

"Judge you?" Link blinks. "Cremia, you've seen me at probably my worst, or one of my worst. Even if you turned out to, I don't know, be Yiga, or be the Calamitous One in disguise, or even—" She shudders. "—hate food, I wouldn't judge you. I would just...hope that I could make things better."

"I should hope that you would judge me for being the Calamitous One," Cremia counters, but her expression remains soft as ever. "Please...if you won't mind, follow me."

The moon has only begun to rise. The stars sparsely sprinkle the skies as if just now awakening to their nightly duties. The cold exhales its frost down the back of Link's neck, and she huddles her blanket more firmly around herself. Cremia, too, wraps her own fur-lined jacket to protect against the chill.

A colder night than those that have come before. And yet, with Cremia guiding her, somehow warmer, too.

Winter approaches at a rapid pace. Though, as long as she has the cooking pot at her back and the warmth of her friends besides her, Link fears neither ice nor snow. She has yet a ways to go.

Cremia signs for Link to move quietly. They creep through the house—Link notices that the pictures affixed to the walls have changed to some extent, now including more sketches of horses and Miyu; a drawing of Link training archery with a Romani dressed in a Champion's tunic of her own and sporting significantly more muscle than the real-life girl has; and some rather graphic depictions of cow-filching takkuri stabbed through the eyes with arrows—to Cremia's room.

She stops in front of the door. Link can scarcely see her hands in the faint light of the moon that seeps in through the window past the crack in the door, yet she can still make out the silhouettes of her gestures enough to read the words from Cremia's fingertips. "I...want to paint of the world, and into the world," she explains, her hands slightly vibrating from nerves, or excitement, or perhaps from too much voltfin trout at dinner. "I know it seems silly, yet...I feel like if I can touch even a single person with my paintings, that will be enough. If I can paint the world with colours enough, and if people see it and are touched, then I can hope that maybe the world itself could change to match those colours." She tucks herself further into the jacket. "It does seem silly, now that I put it to motion."

"It doesn't seem silly at all."

"A lot of things," Cremia answers with a faint smile of amusement, "are like you and food. But I like that. You're a simple girl, Link, in a...very comforting way."

She beams. "All I want...is to share that food with others. To see their smiles and I know that I've brought them some small satisfaction. Maybe over my cooking pot—and this is silly too—but maybe over my cooking pot I could bring the world together, so we don't have to go through life alone."

"That's not silly either," Cremia objects.

"Even if it is," says Link with a wink of her own, "we can be silly together."
"I think that's the smoothest thing I've ever heard you say." Cremia giggles. "Well, here we go. I don't have that much time to paint. I hope that you can forgive my poor talent."

"I don't have any talent at all," Link responds, grinning cheerfully as Dyeri might have, "so anything you do is already impressive to me."

Cremia bites her lower lip, just a second, but the gesture brings Link to lean forward. "I...hope you can be honest."

And then Link understands. Like she asked with Sidon, so now Cremia asks of her. "I can try. I really don't know anything about art."

"Just give me your honest feelings, if you wouldn't mind," Cremia says, her gestures soft. "That's all I'm asking."

Cremia opens the door. Link watches her silhouette as she lights a lantern, and then the room blooms to life with easels upon easels of painted art.

Link's breath dies somewhere on its way up her throat. Landscapes of grass and of sky, of the steppe with its sea of green, of the horses and cows upon the pasture, of the fields of wheat, of the flowers that bloom in violet and blue and white and red and yellow, of Mount Satori in the distance, of the spirals of stars at night and the passage of clouds at the sky, of Malon riding the horses, of Vish tending to the cows, of Romani and Miyu rolling down a hill, of people Link does not recognise immediately but can discern as villagers from the town proper or as travellers along the road, all painted not more vibrant or more rich than they are, but somehow—in the light strokes of the brush that draw out entire people in one or two movements of the wrist, their featureless faces nonetheless imbued with some sort of emotion that Link can read so much more easily than she can the real people around her.

And food. Nearly every painting, somewhere, anchored in food, in the loaf of bread resting upon an empty rocking chair, in the wedge of cheese with its single slice cut out tucked away into a corner, in the stretch of drying meat that frames the bottom line of a view of the mountain at night, the green-sky-blue aurora touching its peak.

And there, in the centre of the easels, the paint still glistening wet: of Link herself, walking up the path, the collar of her undershirt slightly exaggerated to show the whorls of violet that cover her body from the jawline down, her left hand lifted up with its lightning-strike scar.

The wilds, and the people who make something out of them.

Link glances at Cremia, and Cremia glances at Link. Link raises her hands. She flexes her fingers. In her fumbling stumbles and stumbling fumbles, Link tries to express exactly how the paintings make her feel. Yet the words fall away from her through the cracks in her fingers like pooling water that she cannot bring to her desiccated lips. Again and again she tries, and she falters, and she senses her arms lowering down.

Link breathes out, and then she remembers Riju giggling about her food analogies.

"When I look at these...it's like...I'm sitting on the porch with a friend of mine, and we have a pumpkin between us, and we're picking through vegetables and fruits of all kinds to clean them of stems, and we're dicing them up into tiny pieces, and we're putting them into the pumpkin, and we're talking about what we should give the horses, and then I have a bit of pumpkin goo on my nose, I mean I have a little bit of pumpkin goo on my nose, and then my friend would reach over and
wipe it off from me, and then we'd both sort of look at each other and laugh, and then we pick up the pumpkin together and we bring it over to the horses, and we watch them eat, and I can smell the steamed herbs from here, and then my friend takes my hand and we go home to start supper, and then my little sister is here and she's asking us what kind of things we're going to have for supper, and I'm asking her what we wants, and whatever we wants I'll make it, and then she'll smile at me and then she'll tell me that I'm the best big sister ever, and then I'll say the same to her, and then she'll tell me and my friend all about her day while we're making supper, and it'll be catfish or it'll be milk stew or it'll be fried greengill or it'll be seasoned goat or it'll be steamed rice or it'll be stuffed pumpkin and we'll have baked apples for dessert and then I'll go out in the evening and see the moon looking down on me and see the stars too many to count and feel the breeze that passes and dies and lives again and I'll close my eyes and feel the waves of the grass roll up to the wind in my face and..." Her arms drop to her sides. ", ...and that's what I feel. When I look at your paintings. Sorry that that wasn't much of an answer."

When she dares to lift her eyelids, she finds Cremia gazing at her with an expression so tender that it almost scares Link. "No, Link," says Cremia, her gestures light, "that's all I needed to hear. I hope I can...show you more, again. And I hope you don't mind me painting you, sometimes."

Link shakes her head. "Any time."

"Sometime, if you wouldn't mind, I hope that you could let me study your scars. I want to paint them. To...paint the stories they tell."

Link fidgets. "Whenever. I...I promise I'll let you paint me someday. There. Now I have to come back."

Cremia does not answer, yet her smile broadens. Opening her arms, Link offers her a hug. For a moment Cremia merely looks at her; then she steps into the hug. Link holds her, and she holds Link.

In the final days, Malon gifts to Link a full case of spring green elixir and a Faronese-Central Hyrulean dictionary, complete with signs. "Oh, don't feel like you have to learn it if you don't want to," Malon comments, closing Link's hands around the book. "I thought that I would at least give this to you if you wanted it. After all, you plan to be around here quite a bit, don't you?" She winks. Link rubs the back of her head. "And by the way, next time that you come here, if you think for even a second that I'm letting you sleep in the hay, then you have another thing coming. I know you care about your horse, but catching a cold out there could make you go ho—!" Malon stops and scrunches her nose. "Well, I can't make well a pun about you going hoarse...ha! so I will admit my defeat for now. Next time you're here—" She waggles her finger at Link. "—I'll have a proper pun-ishment waiting for you...ha!"

Link accepts the dictionary with a promise to bring back honey and a second promise to make her family something from outside of the western realms of the land once known as Hyrule when she returns.

On the morning before Kass promised to meet her, Link asks Cremia and Romani if they wouldn't mind going riding with her. Romani jumps up at the chance, begging her parents if she can please please please ride; Vish and Malon relent on the condition that she rides with either Link or Cremia at all times. Link rides upon Ilia, and Cremia on her own horse, Elsi. Romani demands to ride with Link in the face of her impending departure.

Link holds onto Romani. Cremia rides close to them. Together over the grasses, together through the fields of wheat, and together back home.
Miyu brings Link one of her chew-bones as a parting gift, which Link loops into her belt just as solemnly as the stick from before. Romani extracts from Link a promise to come back before another year has passed.

"I'll do my best," Link tells her.

Romani crosses her arms over her chest. Miyu barks at her and laps up Romani's hands, and Romani sighs. "Fiimiiine. That'll do, Grasshopper. That'll do."

"I'll try to bring a pumpkin next time so we can feed the horses," Link offers; Cremia nods. Malon and Vish hug her a see you later, and Maryll waves her off, a certain knowing glint in the old woman's eye.

Kass comes to pick her up in the afternoon. Breathlessly he tells her all about the shrines that he has found nearby, about the trials he has experienced and the trials he has walked, about the difficulty in operating the slate, about how he would very much prefer if she would come with him, about how a lizalfos managed to clip his flight feathers enough to prevent him for flying until they grow back in.

Just as he has reassured her that, medically, Kass has already seen a healer, his stomach gurgles. He thumps his accordion case against his abdomen. "Ah, but...that can wait. I don't suppose that you've had dinner already?"

"Even if I had," Link remarks, "do you really take me for the kind of person to say no to an excuse to cook more food and eat more food?"

He chirrups in amusement. "Point taken, traveller."

And so Kass and Link begin their travels anew, Link newly stocked up on supplies and on spring green elixir. Sometimes, at the edges of the world, she scopes out the movement of the Divine Beasts. The Divine Beast Vah Medoh in the distant skies, or the Divine Beast Vah Ruta in the far-away rivers, of the Divine Beasts Vah Naboris or Vah Rudania upon the hills over the horizon.

Strange, how the Divine Beasts seem so large up close that they could blot out the sun, and yet, in contrast to the vastness of the land once known as Hyrule, they look so powerlessly small.

Onwards Link and Kass journey. To the highlands north of Parapa, where she stuffs their meals with warm safflina and spicy peppers—when she can get her hands on them—to keep them warm against the buffet of the cold winter winds. She discovers that Kass does not consider red pepper spicy at all, although warm safflina still serves the minstrel well. Onwards and onwards they journey. To the grasslands to the south, and then to the slowly receding deserts south of there, where the winter has taken off the bite of heat during the day yet has seeped into the chill of the night.

At least the oceans of the continental edge help the shorelines retain their temperature.

Here, too, Link witnesses the advent of monsters more terrible than before. The Yiga may have lessened their impact with their departure from Parapa, and the Divine Beast Vah Naboris no longer crushes entire villages with the storm in its wake. Nonetheless, she watches the Parapans steadily lose the war against the monsters. Not through any fault of their own, but through the gradual increase in the tide of monsters.

A tide that gathers in the four corners of the land once known as Hyrule. A tide that gathers in the heart of the realm. A tide that will any day spill out into the rest of the the lands, even into the
Nima Plain between Safula Hill and Mount Satori, even into the valley, even into Kotake.

As the winter rages on, Kass, Link, and Ilia scour the snows and the sands alike. Their trials in Parapa and its highland prove mercifully short, for the Parapans have already documented every shrine or suspected shrine in their land. Link insists on a visit to Nabooru, now open once more to all travellers, where she picks a pair of gloves to hide the scars on her hands and a tighter hood that does not fall down around her throat and show off the violet at her jawline—she tires of the gazes that trail her where she walks and the guards that raise their hands to their own throats to signal the whorls imprinted on her skin—and then to Uruda University, where she waves a hello to Rotana and Rhiauru again. Upon Kass explaining that he and Link have come to look for shrines, Rhiauru runs forward towards him and offers her exploratory services. Rotana, foremost an expert in the Seven Heroines rather than on shrines, will not decline either.

Nor will, as Link discovers, many of the other archaeologists and historians of Uruda University.

Link and Kass become the stars of a moving tour of sorts that guides them from one end of Parapa to the other and over the highlands. By the time Link takes the lift back up from the final shrine, she feels like she has amassed a mobile village of very inquisitive, very intelligent, and very informed archaeologists, mostly gerudo women, though she can spot a few rito, zora, and hylians amongst their number.

At last Kass sets down his accordion case. He marks off the songs that he believes correspond to the various shrines. With Link's assistance at cartography, he notes down the locations of the shrines that they have activated.

They bid the Parapan archaeologists farewell. Link fries them a good-bye meal of bananas. One of the rito archaeologists and several of the gerudo researchers compliment her for the taste that nearly mimics the flavour of fried bananas eaten in northwestern Parapa, although the exact ratio of spices differs. She listens to one, a gerudo woman from Rovah with silver earrings in the shape of crescent moons, who pointed out the shrine with lightning illustrated along its rim; the paint has long since worn off, but the archaeologist's research indicated where the markings used to reside. The woman corrects Link mix of seasonings and tells her to leave the bananas in the oil for just a tad longer.

Link follows her instructions. The second round of fried bananas come out to Rovah perfection. "Well done," the woman with the crescent earrings says. Link thanks her in turn.

Through the deepening of the cold, Kass and Link begin to head eastward to pass through Faron, where mostly live gerudo, hylians, and sheikah—many of darker skin; Kass tries to explain about historically higher levels of sunlight exposure, but his words go so far above Link's head that she observes them hurtling through the heavens—as well as zora in the plentiful lakes of the rainforest and in fishing villages along the coast. They stop near the fishing town of Iza along Lake Hylia to examine the shrine on Hylia Island. The winter has grown too cold for sea lily's bells to grow around the lake; still, Link takes a moment to promise her return.

For Marin's sake.

Then, further east. The humid heat of the rainforest seems to disappear the winter's cold, as Link and Kass push through the denser wilds, where before Link travelled solely along the well-trod roads with Misan and Glepp.

Glepp.

They sleep beneath nettings to ward off insects. Nevertheless Link awakens to discover her bare
Food spoils swiftly. Anything that they catch, she cooks immediately. On days when Kass and Link do not gather enough, they go hungrier than usual: they cannot store anything. They eat durians, berries, and bananas where they can. Where they can't, Link discovers with a thought to Amali that collecting and crushing the very insects that bite them leads to a nutritious if not particularly palatable paste.

One night, after a day of unsuccessful foraging, Link filches a durian from a shrine to a local spirit: the Faronese of the southeast, Kass told her, believe in the cycling incarnation of their souls, and so place the heartiest and mightiest of fruits in sacrificial offerings to the Goddess Farore and to Her servant, the Dragon Farosh, in Her spirit form of the Monkey of Faron, to give strength to their friends' and ancestors' spirits as they ride the winds of the Goddess from one corner of the world to the other until they, at last, come upon a newborn child in need of a spirit. Link holds the durian in her palm. Her stomach rumbles.

Exhaling, she sets the durian back and offers a prayer instead.

As Link and Kass continue, she proudly points out the towers and shrines that she has already activated in this area. Kass applauds her with a jaunty tune. Deep in the heart of the Faronese forests, past the Pagos Woods and across the ruins of Zonai, amid the vegetation of the Damel Forest, its leaves so broad that nearly no light passes down through the canopy of its trees, he and Link stumble up through the Dracozu River to the mouth of Dracozu Lake.

"The Spring of Courage," Link recognises from her memories. One of the springs where prayed the girl with the golden hair.

Even after they stain the lake with the blood of lizalfos and moblins and come upon the statue of the Goddess Farore mentioned in Kass's songs, they cannot determine the actual position of the shrine.

When Link's stomach grumbles, she announces that she has had enough. Kass suggests that they try to see if there exist any villages.

In the nearby village of Oakin, Link and Kass inquire of the locals. Or he does, at any rate: the dialect of Faronese spoken here strains Link's limited knowledge of the language too badly for her to understand much. Although initially suspicious, the Faronese relent upon Link's promise to eradicate the lizalfos and moblins that nest around the Spring of Courage, where villagers have traditionally prayed. The elders present to Kass and Link a single green scale that shimmers golden in the light. A scale of the Dragon Farosh, they call it. When Link holds it in her hand, she can feel a mild tingle of lightning, a soft whisper of the breeze.

"Place this in the water before the Goddess Farore," instructs Oakin's Oracle of Farore, her hair dark red, her ears pointed, her eyes clouded over, "and may She deem you worthy to ride upon Her wind."

Link and Kass spend the next few days figuring out the best methodologies of dispatching the moblins and lizalfos. The answer lies in the slate: using cryonis to protect themselves as Link applies stasis in turn to each monster and then either stabs them through the head when possible.

Or simply chucks bombs.

With the lake clear, Link—Kass insists that she do the honours for her courage in eradicating the monsters, however temporarily—kneels down before the Goddess Farore. She offers the scale. The
water shimmers.

A shrine rises up from the ground. Kass bows before the Goddess to thank Her. "Is this the part where you say that you'll be plucked?" Link asks.

He arches an eyebrow at her. "Excuse me?"

"Teba...says that a lot. I thought that it was a Medli saying, or a Tabanch saying, or a rito saying."

Chuckling, Kass shakes his head. "No, traveller, that one is very much a...Teba-ism, shall we say."

He and Link thank the villagers of Oakin, and the villagers thank them for taking care of the monsters. And so she and Kass continue onwards.

They pass through the port town of Mido and the fishing village of Lurelin along the coast, as well as the ruins of smaller villages that did not survive the Great Calamity. Neither, hears Link with a pang in her heart, did Papuchia, where Kass and Link struggle to put together the fragments of a ruined dial described as part of a shrine in Kass's songs.

Upon Koholint Island, they find an extended challenge awaiting them, seemingly a replica of the ancient Ballad of the Wind Fish, which sees Link delving down into eight smaller shrines located throughout the island and dredging up dusty instruments. At the summit of Mount Tamaranch, she and Kass work furiously to play all eight instruments between them. Kass does most of the work, becoming by himself a one-bird symphony, while Link hangs back and pats something meant to approximate the mythic Thunder Drum. A false egg upon the mount cracks open to reveal:

A single shrine.

"All this," Kass mutters faintly, "for a single shrine?"

"And not even a loaf of bread!"

They head north. Shrines and towers, towers and shrines, shrines that have Link stealing from one-eyed hinoxes to retrieve the spheres that must have once served in some sort of puzzle, shrines that—from what Kass and Link can see—someone else has long ago solved for them, shrines near Hateno that prompt Link—begging Kass to stay outside—to pop into the town and see Purah. The elderly researcher chastises Link for not having come by sooner.

Hateno, Link gathers, has in the meantime seen its fair share of monsters. The numbers of guards have increased, while the borders of the village have grown more confined around the shrine. The laboratory run by Purah has its own form of protection: legless guardians the researchers have stationed around the brim that blitz any would-be approachers in fire-light, including the members of the laboratory themselves, who only leave with the rito Balin's assistance.

Amid Purah's yells for Link to get herself together, Link rummages around her satchel. She pulls out one of the guardian cores she has carried all this time. Purah blinks. Her jowls snap shut. Link pulls out another. And another. And another, and another, and another, until she has emptied out her satchel of the cores that have bulged it for so long. Purah's complaints and reprimands drift away as she peers at the light of the orange orbs.

Symin applauds Link for her actions. While Purah snags Link's slate from her grip and embarks upon the process of improving the slate, Doreli and Balin inquire if Link has no qualms about perhaps making them a meal.
Link enters the kitchen, takes one look, and almost leaves again: somehow, the laboratory kitchen is an even filthier mess than the last time she visited. She throws together meat and mushroom skewers with Parapan seasonings, Eldic spices, and a garnish of roasted guts, to taste. Balin and Doreli thank her profusely. Purah returns to Link the slate.

"And next time you come back, do it earlier than two years later! We all thought you were a goner, kid!"

Link rubs the back of her head.

She brings out some meat and mushrooms skewers to Kass, who raises an eyebrow. "You went all the way there past those guardians for food?" Before Link can explain, he holds up his wings. "I'll not question it, traveller."

They go north, and they go east. Once more winter's chill bites down upon them. Now they have come upon the thickest cold of the winter yet. They embark upon the icy mountains of Lanayru, picking up shrines along the way, here and there, there and here, stopping by villages that become sparser the further they go up the mountain, hesitating over the numerous ruins of villages, offering prayers for the departed and the passed away.

"If the Spring of Courage had a shrine, then I bet the Springs of Wisdom and Power do, too," Link announces, snapping her fingers.

"As say the songs," Kass notes.

She rubs the back of her head. "Let me bask in my figuring something out for a second."

"Bask all you'd like. Without you and that slate of yours, all these shrines would be still at stone."

Link plucks a rock from the ground and tosses it into the air, catching the stone in her palm. "Like this one?"

"Very funn—!

The mountains rumble. Link listens to a call, like a screech of pain, that sounds down from the icy peaks. She and Kass exchange a glance as the echoes die away to the stars above.

"...Mount Nayru?"

Grimly Kass inclines his head. "Mount Nayru."

They leave Ilia down in one of the villages at the mountain's base. Then, bringing meat with them for its remaining frozen and fresh in the winter cold, they climb steadily up the summit, taking their time in an upwards spiral, allowing their bodies to acclimate to the difference in altitude. Or allowing Link's body, as Kass acclimates within an hour or two, while Link takes days. So as not to hold him back, she pushes herself harder, hiding her need to take swifter breaths in her struggle to slow her heart. She compensates with nightshade and silent shrooms gathered down below.

By the time they see the hints of malice that drip from the peak to hiss through the ice as it dissipates away, Link wheezes, her breaths shallow and fast, her lungs aflame. Kass insists that they slow down. Link gestures to the peak above. So close. So close. Then they can activate the shrine and leave.

Kass carries her to the summit while she curls up in the warmth of his wings. When she feels his chest vibrating against her, different from his mild shivering against the cold, Link lifts her frost-
coated lashes to find herself staring at a massive white and violet serpent coiled up around the peak, its eyes shot through with a sickly tyrant-tyrian, its scales flaking off, its skin stretched to bloating, the tell-tale signs of malice roiling bulging beneath its skin: not yet fully violent violet—like what Link has seen of the Malice within the Divine Beasts—but well enough on its way that the malice appears to shift and kick beneath the serpent's skin as would a child within her mother's womb.

Kass holds her more closely to his chest. He and Link gaze up at the serpent, and then at another, and then back up at the serpent.

The serpent's jaw falls open. From its throat, great globs of malice rise, filling its mouth and then dribbling down from either sides of its white-fanged jaws. The purple droppings burn through the ice below. A shudder courses through the serpent's body. It writhes upon the summit, violently retching out malice. Kass—his flight feathers not yet grown in—leaps onto a nearby rock to escape the torrent of malice expelled from the serpent's raw-white throat, the flesh dissolved down to sinew.

The flow of malice ebbs to a drooling trickle from the corner of the serpent's mouth. Its eyes bulge. A tear of malice oozes like a boil of pus from under its left eye. If the boil bursts, there will go the serpent's eyeball, and there will go the serpent's face.

Twitching in agony, the serpent forces one of its clawed front paws towards its own face. Link observes, halfway to a fever and halfway to slumbering in Kass's grasp, how the serpent seems to drag its claws down its own face. It sheds scales into the water of the hot spring that Link only now notices—so hard has she riveted her attentions upon the serpent—while a statue of the Goddess Nayru watches over the proceedings with Her serene gaze.

The scales drop one by one into the water, like grains of rice shaken out into a cooking pot. Most of the scales shrivel inwards on beads of malice,. Link has the distinct impression that they should not fall from the serpent's head so easily. So easily. Leaves on an autumn tree. Swept away by a stiff wind.

The serpent plucks a particular scale from its head. Its limb trembles and spasms as it extends its paw towards the Goddess Nayru. It opens its claws; the scale drifts towards the water.

It touches the surface of the spring. The pool alights. A shrine emerges.

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"It opened the shrine for us," Link attempts to say through the frigidity of her fingers, through the shallowness of her breaths. "It needs the...it needs the sword...it needs the sword...to get rid of the malice...I think...so it's telling us to...go to the shrine and come back...with the sword..." Her eyelids flutter. She sinks into the darkness.
When they descend from the mountain, and Link recovers to the point of walking once more, she—seated upon Ilia's back to brush her mane of snow—asks Kass about what occurred on the summit, if she somehow lost herself to hypothermia and began to experience delusions.

For a moment Kass merely polishes his beak with his wing, his gaze distant, his brow drawn. "I...don't know. You said that...I don't know if that was the Dragon Naydra. I did not think that such a being would exist in corporeal form. I don't know what to think." Kass rubs his eyes. "I activated the shrine and took the lift down and back up. Traveller, you yourself told me something about that...that being upon the mountain needing the blade of evil's bane. How did you know?"

Link swallows. "I don't remember," she replies; she only halfway lies.

"...it's as best a lead we have as any. We'll have to pass this on to the Champions whenever you see them next. Of course, I don't even know where we could find the sword—traveller? Is something wrong?"

When her lungs have ceased their efforts to strangle her, Link motions for Kass to resume. He coughs into his wing.

"As for what else happened: taking a feather from your wing, I shield-surfed down the mountain on your pot lid. On the wooden one, to avoid another...unfortunate incident of metal in an icier clime." At Link's widened eyes, Kass adds hastily: "It didn't break, traveller."

From Mount Nayru they begin to once more head west, towards the shrines that litter Lanayru near Ruto. Kass admits that Link has taken care of most of the shrines around here herself: he has few to add. From there they cross over the wetlands in a less-than-optimal route, heading towards Central Hyrule in an effort to begin to mark out several of the shrines there. Link glances at Kass's map with a laugh.

"Is something wrong?"

"We've done shrines all over, from Eldin to Parapa and back again, but we haven't done anything in this central part. So it looks like a donut, see?"

Kass chuckles. "I cannot tell if you have enhanced or ruined my sense of humour, traveller. I'll do with enhanced. And so, without further ado-nut..."

They continue onwards. Shrines and towers, towers and shrines. Link fears they might, somewhere along the trail, neglect some solitary shrine. She cannot bear to imagine how that would look. One hundred and nineteen shrines, out of one hundred and twenty.

In the last few weeks of winter, near the advent of the spring and approaching a full tenth of Link's life spent after her awakening at the Shrine of Resurrection, Link realises that they approach, once more, Necluda.

Necluda. They stop for the night upon a grassy hill where they rest beneath a tree along the southern side of the Squabble River, a day's ride from the Hills of Baumer. "I believe," Kass opens, while Link starts to prepare the boar that she rode into a tree and slew by a strong-enough jerk of the fishing pole whose line accidentally wrapped around the boar's neck, "based on the songs in this region, that there are either two or three shrines in the Dueling Peaks. Then we should finish off this area, and journey further north towards Akkala, where we have only charted several of the shrines." Kass touches the feather of his quill to his beak. "Excellent, traveller. We have made very good progress, far swifter than I anticipated. Certainly, we have had much help, but we have passed over much of O Our Hyrule quicker than most merchants, say." He leans down to rub his calloused
talons. "Although, in turn, I cannot say that we have been left with no scars at all."

Link busies herself making meat pie. Warm safflina grows more readily in the western reaches of the land known once as Hyrule, near Parapa, while the eastern realms of the land once known as Hyrule thrives on its spicy peppers. For Kass, she has saved warm safflina picked from the west and dried in the winter sun.

First, the meat itself, which Link cuts from the skinned boar, selecting only the juiciest and fattiest meat: along the loin and the back of the ribs. She pinches the meat between her fingers, marvelling at how it springs back against her hand. With her handy-dandy knife that she sharpens against a whetstone picked up in Hateno after promising not to deface any more shrines, Link cubes the boar into pieces small enough to serve for meat pie filling.

Next she minces thyme and onion, bay leaf and carrot, Necludan sunshroom and garlic, frying the medley in butter and oil, stirring just for a bit. When the stuffing has just begun to soften in the heat, Link adds in the meat. She tosses meat and vegetable-herb together, then whips out the sword Riju gave her to forcibly rub the softened peppers onto the meat and impart its flavour onto the boar itself. Link pours in a few palmfuls of water alongside one of Tabanch flour to keep the filling moist. A sprinkle of salt, a dash of seasoning and spice, and she lets the contents of the pot simmer away.

Once the meat has softened and enough the herb-vegetable mix has thoroughly flavoured the boar, Link scoops the filling out of the pot and lays it onto a clean blanket, for lack of a bowl.

Now she prepares the shell of the pie on Tabanch wheat, aerated salt, regular rock salt, and goat butter. She mixes the batter and pours it into her cooking pot in lieu of a proper oven. Rolling the batter to mix it in the bottom of the pot to a thorough blend, Link tips in just a palmful of cool boiled-and-condensed river water, then starts to knead the forming ball of dough. When her hands tire, Kass proposes that he chip in.

"I would do this with my beloved wife, wiling away the cool winter nights of our youth," Kass intones in a voice that hums up first few bars of a song.

Link cocks her head. "I thought you mostly sang to keep her company while she did all the cooking."

The crest feathers on Kass's head, though not fully grown in, slightly rise up. He clears his throat. "And this is a good opportunity as any for me to learn to become a better husband and father, traveller." His eyes twinkle. "You never know how much something means to you until you're forced to do without. When I return, I wish to be nothing less than the best that Tabantha—no, O Our Hyrule—has ever seen."

He kneads the dough while Link sits back to massage her wrists. Kass continues to knead. She observes him, as his beak parts in a smile upon his slow epiphany on how the dough need kneading, and then an equally slow widening of the eyes in horror. Kass snaps his head up towards Link, desperation crawling over his features. She sits up, her heart suddenly pounding, and stares into the cooking pot.

They spend a good bit of the next hour plucking feathers from the dough.

Afterwards—while Link pats Kass's shoulder and promises him that next time they see a rito capable of cooking they will inquire how to keep feathers out of food—she forms the dough into the pie shell along the inside walls of the cooking pot. She gathers up the blanket to place in the filling, then folds over the top of the dough to form a cover atop the filling. Carefully Link reaches
in with her knife to cut slots in this upper crust for steam to escape. Dampening the blanket in water and shaking the extra moisture out, she lays it over the pie to help keep the pie from drying out during the makeshift baking. Then Link tightly closes the pot.

Into the fire the pot goes. They wait, and wait, and wait some more. Periodically Link checks upon the pie, testing the dampness of the blanket and the browning of the pie, before she forces the lid of the cooking pot back on.

While they wait, she takes the time to take care of Ilia, to bathe her, to estimate—the elasticity of her skin and the roundness around her middle—whether Ilia has eaten enough, to ensure that she has received an adequate portion of salt and sugar, to feel her mouth watering, to try putting the salt to her lips, to flinch back at Ilia outskilling her in sheer speed as her companion lunges for the rock salt, to sighing and resting her forehead against Ilia's as Ilia slurps up the salt.

Link asks if Kass wouldn't mind singing for her a few songs. He perks up almost immediately. "Excellent! Then without further ado..."

He sings her songs of the sword that seals the darkness. Of the Knight who long, long ago rode upon a loftwing of the Goddesses, who forged the blade of evil's bane from the ancient breaths of the three Dragons Farosh, Naydra, and Dinraal. Of the Hilted Singer, the spirit of the sword that seals the darkness itself, that sang to the Hero the instructions of the Goddesses, that gave Her life to become one with the blade of evil's bane. The first Singer whom all minstrels honour as an inspiration, as one to emulate, as one to become.

In those days, the songs said, the people of the land that would become Hyrule lived in the golden land with the Seven Goddesses and rode upon loftwings that represented the divine connection each and every being had to the Golden Goddesses. The Golden Goddesses had left the Golden Force—a fanciful omnipotence—for Their mortals before departing to the Sacred Realm. In those days, according to the songs, the mortal realm and Sacred Realm were one and the same, the Golden Goddesses residing in its outer sphere, and the Seven living with Their children upon the inner. Yet, as the legends go, this could not last.

In those days, the selfishness of people drove them to fight one another. As a result, the Goddesses cast the people down to the land, where they fought ever more fiercely. To quell the fighting the Goddess Hylia sacrificed Her life to reincarnate as one of Her hylian people, and then calmed the fighting by establishing the Kingdom of Hyrule, alongside a chosen knight—the Hero—wielding the blade forged by the Golden Goddesses Themselves in Their blessing of the Goddess Hylia's mortal incarnation becoming the royal family.

"There are," Kass notes, "other versions of the story, passed down in different corners of Our Hyrule." In one spin of the tale, the people originally lived upon the land, and the initial eruption of the Calamitous One forced the Seven to send Their Children skyward for safety. Only after the forging of the sword that seals the darkness and the sealing of the original Calamitous One could the Goddesses bring Their people back down to the earth, where they had to remember how to live once more upon the world of the surface.

In still another, not even all of the people left. Only the hylians were borne skyward, and only the hylians had to return to everyone else, who already continued to live on the surface as before.

"And, of course, there are those who observe that history is written by the victors. There are those who wonder what true hand the hylians and their Goddess had to play in such matters. There are those who cite that the tales of the reincarnation of the Goddess Hylia came far later than the descent from the heavens." Kass bows his head. "But that is for a scholar of such things, and not a
travelling minstrel, to decide."

Link tilts her head to one side, and then to the other. She rubs her eyes. "I don't really get all that you just said."

"Traveller," intones Kass, his voice level, his hands gentle upon the manuals of the accordion, "do you believe that only a hylian could wield the blade of evil's bane?"

She blinks. "Huh? No. What does being a hylian have to do with it? I don't really know much about the Seven, to be honest."

"I see." He shifts his wings. "May the light illuminate all of our paths, I suppose. Goddesses know we need it."

Link removes the makeshift oven from the flames to pop off the lid of the cooking pot. The scent of the meat pie flutters her eyelashes. She has smelled this. Back in the castle.

She remembers the girl with the golden hair. She remembers the girl with the golden hair arguing once more with her father. She remembers the girl with the golden hair stomping back into her room and slamming the door of her chambers enough to rattle the castle walls. She remembers Urbosa excusing herself to check in on the girl with the golden hair. She remembers Urbosa calming the girl with the golden hair, remembers the silhouette of them embracing one another while Link respectfully averted her gaze, remembers the shadow of their kiss stretching under the door. She remembers Urbosa leaving the girl with the golden hair to avoid arousing suspicion. She remembers Urbosa coming to her.

"Go to her," Urbosa pleaded. "I can't. If her father learns of this, there will be every kind of blood to pay. A relationship between the Princess and one of her Champions: unthinkable. But you can and are expected to. Link, go to her." Her expression cracked with concern for the girl that she so loved. "Please."

She remembers approaching the girl with the golden hair. She remembers sitting down before the hearth while the girl with the golden hair sat at her desk writing. She remembers making the motion of crimping the egg tart.

She remembers the girl with the golden hair glaring back at her. "Did Father—" The girl with the golden hair sucked out a breath on the $F$ to transform it from a mere sound into an epithet all its own. "—send you here to tell me to stop making excuses as well?"

Link blinked. "I don't really know anything that's going on," she said honestly, "but I know how much work you've been doing, and I trust you, and also do you want to help me make some food?"

"You...you trust me?" the girl with the golden hair echoed.

She nodded. "I'm not smart at all, but you seem to be. You spend all your time reading those books, so you've gotta be smart. I was thinking that we could make meat pie if you want, since you could crimp that too." She emulated the gestures for crimping, twitching her fingers as she went.

The girl with the golden hair sidled off from the chair at her desk. Link brought out a cooking pot. "You trust me?" she was asking again.

"Yes. Just wait here." Link left for the royal kitchens—Urbosa, leaning casually against a door outside, quirked an eyebrow at her—and returned with armloads of ingredients. Urbosa nodded in understanding and pumped her fist in encouragement. Link's stomach grumbled.
She showed the girl with the golden hair how to prepare a meat pie. While they worked, the girl with the golden hair began to talk of her research. Link made her best efforts to listen, even if she only understood perhaps one word out of every twenty, including *an* and *the*.

The girl with the golden hair spoke of her blessed bloodline, of the Sealing War, of the incarnation of the Goddess Hylia.

"Did you know that there's a convincing little pile of evidence that what we refer to as Ancient Loftean is nothing more than older Central Hyrulean, and that Ancient Loftean is an even older tongue? You understand how earth-shattering this would be! No? Since the divine right to rule comes from the story of Skyloft...this would mean that there's no such thing as the blessed bloodline! Or at least that it didn't happen like how the official history books have said it!

"What? I'm holding the knife wrong? Oh...I see. Is this right? And just these peppers—oh you wanted me to mince the *onions*. Understood. Oh, that's garlic, is it? I can't tell the difference. *This* is onions, right? Yep! I knew it! My research has once again paid off!

"Did you know, that there's some trace evidence of an actual civil war, with the Divine Beasts possibly fighting each other! In fact, one radical theory I read the other day that had me, oh, quivering in my chair was that there were originally *seven* Divine Beasts, but that they engaged in a fierce war with one another, and in the end, the side with the four Divine Beasts won! The other three were destroyed, and the four buried...perhaps out of fear that the wars would start again! I don't think that *that's* what happened, but just imagine the possibilities!

"We're supposed to rub the meat with...peppers? Like this? Oh, I see. Like this? All right, I'm on it. Leave it to me!

"Ooh! And did you know that some speculate the sheikah symbol didn't actually belong to the Goddess Sheik at first at all, but was originally a crest of the royal family, and that's why it's on the towers and Divine Beasts and everything? The original symbol of the Goddess Sheik was an eight-petalled flower! And then that was later adopted, because there's evidence that the royal family being followers of Hylia came far later, far after the Divine Beasts! That the Divine Beasts came from an earlier era before the faith of the Seven as we currently know it—of course the Seven has always existed, but their worship differs from era to era—or when the royal family wasn't supposedly reincarnations of the Goddess Hylia at all! Can you *imagine* that, Link!? Just think of the implications! That sometime between now and ten thousand years ago, my family rose to power, pretending to be reincarnations of the Goddess Hylia!

"Oh, is this how you knead the dough? I see! Thank you! Hm...I'll have to think of a joke about that later. Knead and need. There's obviously something there, but I'll have to be clever...oh, was I saying that out loud?

"Of course the author who wrote this had to publish anonymously...but when I read their essays, I felt a chill down my spine! I have to corroborate it with my own research, of course, and I plan to do so. But just imagine! Ooh!

"Yes, yes, I'm crimping; I'm crimping! Just look at how I'm crimping! I'm going to become the crimping master; don't you worry!

"Are you listening? I hope you're listening! You said that you trust me, right? Oh, oh, oh, maybe you could help me with some research later! It's not my expertise but I've been meaning to branch out! Isn't this so...exciting!? So there's this species of frog—"

Link could only nod her head. She found the girl with the golden hair's smile exciting, and her
passion exciting. Even if she did not understand fully or even partially what the girl with the golden hair said, her happiness proved exciting and infectious. Link could listen forever. Especially with her also cooking at the same time.

For a time, Link remembers, therein lay their relationship. Link would inquire if she wanted to crimp, and the girl with the golden hair would help Link cook. And, as they went through the recipes, Link's hands occupied and the girl with the golden hair's mouth free, the girl with the golden hair would talk.

Mostly about her research. About the Divine Beasts, about the guardians, about the murky history of Hyrule that she sought to divine. And then, little by little, about herself.


Little by little Link could see the path to the girl with the golden hair's heart. Very much through her stomach. And also, Link learned, through the crimping of her hands.

When she comes to, Link finds Kass thanking her profusely for allowing him to eat his half of the meat pie first, straight from the pot. She grins at him. "You've really changed a lot."

Kass arches his eyebrows. "Whatever do you mean, traveller?"

"When I saw you again in Ruto, you didn't even want me to make you a single meal. Now you're eating it first."

His feathers ruffle up. "Only because your food would befit the Goddesses, traveller."

While she eats, Link looks out again at the Dueling Peaks, their sloped peaks nearly touching, yet separated by a gap that looks—from this distance—thinner than a blade of grass. She remembers the whistle. Ilia's whistle.

"Kass," she says, a hand upon Ilia's neck, her companion's hearbeat against her palm, "do you mind if we take a detour?"

"Not at all, traveller. We've all the time in the world." Kass leans back. "What did you have in mind?"

Link turns her gaze towards the horizon, where she can just see the Dueling Peaks across the waters of the Squabble River, and the promises that hang like mirages of heat beyond the summits' reach for one another. "I think...I might want to see an old friend."

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**Spicy Meat Pie** (twelve hearts, low cold resistance for 06:20) - goat butter, raw gourmet meat, rock salt, spicy pepper, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Link and Kass's issues with finding the 'white bird' and the 'fir tree'
shrine is in reference to the "Bird in the Mountains" shrine quest; I couldn't find a wide bird at all. Instead I wandered around Hebra on foot and accidentally stumbled upon it when I noticed a flash of orange amid the white. I hold that that shrine does not look like a white bird from the tallest point. At least not to me.

In-game, the peaks of Hebra are simply labelled as north, south, east, and west summits, which I find bland and lazy. I named them Yeta, Yeto, Blizzeta, and Snowhead. Yeta, Yeto, and Blizzeta arise from Twilight Princess, and Snowhead from Majora's Mask.

In Breath of the Wild, moose and rhino appear to have the same meat drops, but rhino have significantly more health than moose, taking three swipes with the Master Sword compared to the moose's one. But why?

In-game, you knock down the shrine with the "damned square of water" by rolling a snowball down the hill. Since it doesn't make sense that snowballs would just sit around like that, I had Link in Delicious in Wilds bait the eeno into throwing a snowball down.

You can't eat monster! The meat's full of substance that makes people sick, although not for the reason that you might think. We'll come back to this later. You can extract

Pashli is the name of a rito from The Wind Waker, whose name means "let's go" in Russian. I have no idea if that was intentional.

The gerudo mountain-song is the OST song "Mountain" which plays when you're near a shrine on an icy mountain.

The temple in question is the Forgotten Temple in-game, although I have switched out the statue of Hylia for statues of the Golden Goddesses. Of course, the Forgotten Temple in-game is a reference to Skyward Sword!

Mother-by-kin is the Parapan/western Faronese version of mother-in-law.

In Faron, the "coming of age" is typically at nineteen years of age, so Cremia has turned nineteen.

If you don't remember, Link helped Romani clear out the murder of takkuri back in the thirtieth chapter, who have turned out to be the real Them.

Cremia's paintings aren't actually anchored with food, but that's what Link's attention is drawn to; you'll notice that Link points out the cheese in a corner, for example.

Elsi, Cremia's horse, is named after the cow Elsie from Lon Lon Ranch in The Minish Cap.

Kass doesn't find spicy peppers to be spicy. The "spiciness" of peppers comes from the molecule capsaicin, which tastes spicy to humans, but which is not an irritant to birds (and rito people).

Southern Hyrule is nearer to the equator (Hyrule is in the northern hemisphere), so the humans in southern Hyrule tend to have darker skin compared to those further up north, following the same patterns that exist in the real-world. Speaking of which, I made the gerudo black/brown-eyed rather than green-eyed, as I'm sure you've noticed.
The fishing town of Iza is named after the proprietor of Iza's Rapid Ride from *Twilight Princess*.

The closer to the equator you are, the less variable the weather, so winters in southeastern are less cold in comparison. Note, too, that this is added by the heavy weather buffer provided by the ocean.

In *Breath of the Wild*, there are giant monkey statues in Faron where you can place hearty durians or mighty bananas to get korok seeds. In *Twilight Princess*, the light spirit Faron is represented by a monkey or lemur of some sort; in *Breath of the Wild*, the dragon Farosh makes a circuit from the rainforests of Faron to Lake Hylia. I therefore conflated these into a local religion for the Faronese. While the Golden Goddesses are oftentimes worshipped as a trio, some places just worship one or two. In this case, I just wanted to provide worldbuilding for the giant monkey statues and why you're expected to place durians/bananas there! I also wanted to include a faith that believes in reincarnation, since most of the other major religions depicted in *Delicious in Wilds* don't! (I personally do not believe in any kind of higher power.)

Note: I couldn't fit all the author's notes into either the top or bottom (oops) so I've carried over the last third of the author's notes for this chapter for when I post the sixty-fifth chapter. Sorry about that!

midna's ass. 08 November 2017.

Beta reader's comments: My very favourite chapter in the series! Its length makes it so nice and cozy. Plus road trip chapters are super fun. The chapter in and of itself feels like this amazing long journey, which is wonderful to read.

Emma. 02 November 2017.
To all my readers: Thank you for your overwhelming patience!

Author's notes from the sixty-fourth chapter that have been carried over: The village of Oakin is named after the Star Island korok from *The Wind Waker.*

The port town of Mido is named after Mido Port Town from *The Adventure of Link.* Koholint Island replaces Eventide Island (in-game, the highest point on the island is named Koholit), complete with a re-enactment of *Link's Awakening.*

Rito physiology is well-suited for life in the cold and in the higher reaches of the atmosphere; they acclimate much more quickly to differences in altitude than do humans.

Meeting Naydra was striking for me in-game. I describe Naydra as *singing,* her song is the very song that plays whenever Link nears a dragon in-game! I'm pretty sure that the main instrument on that track is an erhu. In *Delicious in Wilds* lore, the Necludan erhu was actually made to emulate the dragon's singing voice.

It didn't make sense to me that you could repel the malice on Naydra with arrows alone, since the Master Sword is supposed to be the thing that repels it!

Slaughtering a boar with a fishing line is a reference to Ganondorf in *Twilight Princess* being easily distracted by the fishing pole.

As noted before, Kass knows how to prepare simple fish fillet, but kneading dough is a completely matter.

In *Skyward Sword,* Link forges the Master Sword using the sacred flames of the Goddesses. I've adapted that to dragons' breaths to help yoke *Skyward Sword* and *Delicious in Wilds* together.

There are lots of version of Hyrule's origin story, as you can imagine for something that has been passed down for over ten thousand years! The story of *Skyward Sword* is the last one that Kass mentions as a footnote, to indicate how much history has changed. I do actually know the "real story" that I wrote down for myself before I started work on *Delicious in Wilds,* but there's no way the characters of Zelda's age would know that. So what you'll get is the truth mixed with confusion and history. I might post the truth of what happened later, though you'll get some information from one very, very old source.

By the way, the story of *Skyward Sword* could have been so much better than it was, especially since it was meant to be a 'prologue' for the entire series. You've gotta be kiddin' me, Nintendo.

The eight-petalled flower as the original symbol of the goddess Sheik is taken from the motifs of the Ancient Cistern dungeon of *Skyward Sword!* You know how I mentioned that the ancient Sheik statues depict the goddess with a flower in hand? Yup!
By the way, this is the bulk of the shrine hunt, but Link and Kass have yet to tackle the stuff in northeastern Hyrule. We'll cover those in future chapters! Don't think the road trip is over juuust yet. First, Link has to do something.

Up next: frozen crab; the plains of Necluda; a ranch in the woods.

And now, author's notes from this chapter that didn't fit in the end: I started writing this chapter at 09:28 on the sixth of August, and finished writing it on at 00:09 on the seventh of August.

Thanks a million to my beloved beta reader, Emma, who has helped me immensely with keeping in Delicious in Wilds, even through miscommunication errors that have led her to think I was talking about proofing the sixty-fourth chapter when in fact I had already gone on to the sixty-fifth. And thanks a million to everyone who recognises/knows where the 'thanks a million' thing comes from. And thanks a million to anyone who knows what I've been referencing with the 'thanks a million' thing. And also, does anyone know why FFN registers a significantly higher word-count than does ao3, even counting the difference of my author's notes and responses to reviews?

The trip to the Dueling Peaks brings with it Link taking pictographs from the shrines high above and trekking back and forth between the two peaks to solve a pair of linked shrines. "At least these are indeed two shrines," Kass points out cheerily, "and not one, as on Koholint. It is, traveller, strange to me that some shrines appear so much more difficult or pronounced than others. I cannot hope to hazard guesses as to the intentions of those who created these trials, however." Link cannot either.

The third shrine upon the mountains she has already taken care of, and so Link removes the lid from her cooking pot to race down the mountain in her own fashion. Something about the whipping wind and the susurrus of shield on snow brings out a laugh from her as she twists her body this way and that, pulling tricks, kicking down her boots until the pot lid launches into the air and spinning around to whirl—like Sarie on their korok leaf—before crashing back onto the snow swift as before. She practises the spin repeatedly, each twirl eliciting a light little laugh, right until she tries two spins in quick succession and plants directly into a snowbank.

Jerking herself up with a pmf of snow that has gathered in her hair, Link steps back to admire her handiwork: a thoroughly Link-shaped hole in the snow, matching the one she left nearly two years ago on the Great Plateau. And this time, she can snap a commemorative pictograph on her lovely pictobox. Her recent trip to Hateno has brought an upgrade to the pictobox. As Purah explained, not only can Link now make the pictograph bigger or smaller—"I call it, scoping in and out, like adjusting a telescope's depth and field of view!"—but she can even take pictographs without facing the slate towards the subject matter such that she cannot see the face of the slate. And then the laughter stops. Tragedy strikes. Link kneels in the snow, the slate tipped out of her hand, forgotten.

When Kass finally catches up to her—instinctively flapping his wings even though his flight feathers have yet to grow in fully again—he checks her hands and pleads to know if she becomes delirious from the altitude or snow again. "Traveller, what's—?"

Arms shaking, Link points a finger. To the corpse. To the deceased and frozen body lying in the snow. To...to...
"Oh, did one of the crabs you caught freeze, traveller?"

The snow packs down under Kass's talons. Stepping forward, he plucks the razorclaw crab, caught in Lake Hylia, that has fallen out of Link's satchel alongside several leaves of herbs and an apple. "I believe that you can still salvage this. Much as with red meat, freezing does take some of the flavour, perhaps, yet..." He attempts to tap the frozen crab against his accordion case as though to demonstrate. The apparently solid block of crab responds by bouncing off and soaring off out of his grip. Link half-heartedly extends her left hand towards the escaping crab as it flies away down the mountain. "Oh. There it goes." He folds up his wings on his sides. "They grow up so fast, don't they, traveller? Only a few days ago you were holding that crab for the first time, and now it has to leave the nest already." She senses Kass glance at her, still kneeling in the snow, her entire body drooping as if attempting to melt into the mountainside. He pets her shoulder. "The Goddesses give," he remarks, "and the Goddesses take. There, there. There will be other crabs." Kass pauses. Link hears him hum contemplatively. "I apologise in advance, traveller, but...no need to be crabby. Eh? That was terrible, wasn't it?"

She looks up at him, and he down upon her, and her stomach hurts from laughing all the way down the mountain. To ward off future tragedies, she walks alongside him until they reunite with Ilia at the base of the Dueling Peaks.

Kass comments that Link may not have activated the shrine in Kasuto. "A shrine in Kasuto?" she echoes; he nods.

"I'm admittedly surprised that you didn't know about it," Kass responds.

Link smiles uneasily. "I'm not that good with large crowds. I think I just...went in and out quick as I could make myself food."

"Then, traveller, allow me to pose any questions you might have for the locals..." Kass brushes a speck of snow from Link's brow, his wings gossamer-soft on her skin. "...in search of your old friend."

And so they wander along the western border of Ash Swamp towards Kasuto, taking a detour to activate a shrine along the southern bend and then moving back north. The late weeks of winter have brought a cloak of snow upon the swamp and its surrounding forests and grasses.

At least, thanks to the horse clothing that Link picked up in Tabantha, Ilia does not seem affected by the cold. "And the blue looks very cute on you, girl." Ilia whinnies.

In Kasuto, Link relishes the communal cooking area once more and prepares for them the remainder of the crabs from Lake Hylia. While she sits, Kass—without a perch appropriate for a rito, and with a bottom half not easily supported by the harshness of a wooden bench—stands around the communal dining tables.

A boot-tapping sound to her left prompts Link to raise her head. It dawns on her that she looks at a certain olive-skinned sheikah-hylian woman—no longer with her hair braided into two loops, but rather in a single thick braid down her back, affixed with a half-bun, half-ponytail on the frown of her head—and a certain pale-skinned hylian guard who has promoted herself from greeter-on-duty to one of Kasuto's defenses against the monsters that rise up from the river or race down from the plains. Lami, and her friend Maggi.

Link spends some time thanking Lami for all of her help. Lami notes that Link's speech has improved considerably. "You don't sound exactly like my grandma anymore. You sound, hm, maybe like Maggi's grandma?"
Maggi grimaces. "Do you take me for someone who would sit aside while her grandmother's pride is insulted like this?"

"It was a compliment," Lami assures her soothingly. "Kinda."

Kass inquires about the whereabouts of the shrine of Kasuto. Maggi and Lami share a look between them. Lami pats Maggi's shoulder before Maggi can jump up and point her sword at Kass and Link. Lami invites the shrine-seekers to accompany her to the village Temple of the Seven, to pose the question to the resident Sages of Sheik, Hylia, and Zola that watch over Kasuto. Link swallows. Kass promises her that all will be well.

"I just don't want to get arrested for a third time," Link signs, "and that seems to happen whenever I see a Sage."

Maggi snorts. "You want an arrest? You got it."

The Sages, Kass and Link discover, do not immediately allow them access to the shrine. Not for the first time, Link hears accusations of herself as a Yiga. She can only thin her mouth into the blankest expression she can muster and gaze upwards for deliverance from the shadow that trails her wherever she goes.

Kass delivers her: he speaks eloquently of the slate, of the shrines, of the songs he has gathered. Moreover, he offers for Link to make them a meal. The Sages acquiesce.

The Sage of Sheik inclines her head. Although earlier she spoke, presently she signs; Link gathers from Lami afterwards that the Sage of Hylia cannot hear. "While sojourning by the Dueling Peaks for divine inspiration a week ago, the Goddess blessed me with a gift from the mountains. If you can prepare it satisfactorily, we may allow you to see the shrine with our supervision." The other Sages agree.

"Certainly. What gift of the Goddesses?" inquires Kass. Link starts tugging on his wing, trying to alert him to the Sage of Hylia. When he seems peers down at her, she reads the perplexion off his features. Releasing his hand, Link takes the initiative: to apologise and repeat the question in sign to the Sage.

"What gift of the Goddesses?"

An attendant to one of the Sages brings out a small wooden box. Kneeling before Link and Kass, he opens the box and reveals within: a very frozen razorclaw crab.

Kass moves a wing over Link's mouth. "The Goddesses take, and the Goddesses give back," he muses to the Sages. "Allow her to prepare this, as you said, satisfactorily."

Once they step outside of the Temple, Kass and Link both bend over with hands on knees and wheeze themselves free of laughter. She fixes for the Sages a meal of crab risotto with sides of fried-and-breaded crab claws and steamed crab legs stuffed with acorn and hickory. The Sages eat the meal in front of Link, whose stomach complains of its emptiness despite her having eaten less than an hour prior.

"Satisfactory?" asks the Sage of Sheik.

The Sage of Zola bows her head. "Satisfactory."

"Very much satisfactory!" the Sage of Hylia gestures, beaming. The three Sages indicate the hearth behind them. They part, two moving to the left, one to the right, to stand beside the asymmetrical
altar. The flames go out. An attendant lifts the grate.

"Looks like we can get in through the fireplace," Link observes.

The Sage of Sheik agrees, motioning for them to enter. "Step into the hearth, please."

Given Kass's height, he does not quite fit, but Link does. The inside of the hearth appears roughly cylindrical. When she scuffs the ashes away with her boots, she snaps her fingers at the the outline of a circular platform that would normally indicate a shrine's lift. Link pokes her head back out.

"As you can see," the Sage of Zola begins, "the shrine around which our temple was built does not respond. We have seen the shrines upon the Dueling Peaks glow, and we have heard from travellers passing near, yet the Goddesses have not yet deemed us worthy of the call."

Link makes a motion of placing the slate into something. The Sages merely ogle her until Kass intervenes, explaining what that pawing gesture means.

The Sages open a panel on the altar to reveal the pedestal. Link sets the slate within. The hearth blooms into blue. While the Sage of Zola stares at Link in shock, the Sage of Hylia raises an eyebrow at the others as if to say something about hylians, and the Sage of Sheik reverently clasps her hands before her, Link descends into the earth.

Upon her return, Kass spreads his wings in the form of an aegis. "No questions, please," he announces, then signs the same.

"Are you the hero chosen by the Goddesses?" the Sage of Hylia inquires. Loudly clearing his throat, Kass ushers Link out. She glances back for a second to look at the Sages who look upon her with mixtures of surprise, expectation, and faith. Then Link snaps her gaze forward again and allows Kass to physically push her across the floor.

Maggi waits for them outside, Lami having had to depart for her own guarding duty. Link taps her forefingers against one another, but Maggi shrugs. "Relax. I'm not even on duty, and besides, you make pretty mean crab legs. So, you're leaving?"

"Only after a meal," Link responds. She makes herself, and Kass, and Maggi crab legs of what remains in her satchel that has not spoiled. Salted and spiced and everything niced.

Before departing Kasuto, Link turns towards Maggi and nudges Kass in the torso. He blinks at her. "Hm? Oh! Right. Ahem. Are you of you familiar with this whistle, perhaps from some horse ranch nearby? Traveller, the whistle please."

Link whistles. Ilia's whistle.

Maggi shrugs. "Do you take me for some expert on everything around here?"

"But you live around here."

"Do you know everyone around the place where you come from?"

Link touches her chin. Kass apologises on her behalf. Not within a few moments have Link and Kass returned to the temple, to inquire if the Sages know of that whistle.

For the Sages of Sheik and Zola, Link whistles again, and the Sages—the Sage of Zola first and foremost, having regularly travelled south towards the rivers of Kasuto to see the zora people that live along its banks and east towards the wetlands of Ash Swamp to assist in the relocation of the
former underwater village there, now escaping from the monsters—note that they have, indeed, heard of a ranch or a stable in that area that teaches horses to respond to whistles. Link's entire body seems to rise up from the floor like the Goddess Erito had spontaneously chosen her at last.

"That whistle? That whistle exactly?"

The Sage of Zola dips her head. "I do not know if it that whistle exactly, but it sounds familiar."

Link thanks them again. She bounds from the temple, clearing the floor in three strides and a prayer for each of the Golden Goddesses. Kass rushes to follow behind her, yelping and bidding her to wait. She saddles Ilia on the perimeter of Kasuto. Kass skids to a halt behind her and seizes her hand.

"Traveller," he manages between gasps of breath, "I understand that you are excited to see an old friend of yours, but please, do not leave without me. I still cannot fly."

Link looks down at him, chest heaving, limbs shivering, eyes wide. She slips off of Ilia. Her boots leave circles into the thin film of snow, the pressure alone melting it to dew the earth underneath.

They walk together. To the south and to the east, around the wetlands of Ash Swamp, across the Blatchery Plain where Link notices occasional herds of wild horses trotting to and fro, and down towards the Bubinga Forest. The encroach of monsters has all but cleared both swamp and grassland of villages, the villagers seek safety in towns protected by their shrines.

She looks at Kass, a question hovering half-formed on her fingertips. Kass He his list of songs. "I am not sure if there is a shrine there, traveller. Yet, duly note, a song's absence does not preclude a shrine's possibility."

Link nods.

"You do not seem convinced."

She stuffs an apple into her mouth until her cheeks bulge out with fruit. Cleaning the lens of her little sister's telescope, Link presses it to her eye as she watches the line of the horizon. There, in the distance, to the southeast: a plume of smoke.

By foot, the swamp and plains seem to go on never-endingly. Moss-covered guardians in the swamp activate at their presence, driving them towards fleeing from fire-light. Horse-riding bokoblins chase them with arrows. A chuchu wells up out of the ground right under Link's head when she beds down for the night. A school of leever spinning spinily along the grasslands spooks Ilia near to a gallop. Kass thanks her, in his measured tones, for dealing with his present slowness and asks if he can do anything to repay her.

"You could sing me a song," Link says. "I don't have an instrument, but when I do, I'd like to play something for you. I want to know if you know it. But I'm not too sure what the name is. I've heard it under a few different ones."

"Perhaps I know one of the names."

She shakes her head. "I want to play it for you."

He inclines his beak. "I am glad to see that music can touch even a spirit as beckoned by other disciplines as you, traveller."

Over the course of the day, Kass and Link venture south, towards that plume of smoke. It rises
from the wood, or somewhere beyond the forest. The lone and level plain offers no shelter, and so Link and Kass take turns on their watch when they camp for the night. She cannot sleep. Lying awake, staring at the countless stars, she allows her companion his well-needed rest, having already given her her detour. To see an old friend.

"Traveller, perhaps you could try that whistle," Kass suggests. "Your friend might hear you yet and could respond with a whistle of your friend's own."

Link lifts up her hands. She wets her thumb and forefinger. Closing her eyes, she whistles, long and loud and low. Like a bird's call.

"That's where I got the idea from. From the birds," the girl who smelled of horses told her, once. "I was thinking about Aryll, and how much she loves them, and I came up with this whistle for the horses to hear. It's not like any birdsong I know. It's different enough that the horses won't get confused, I think. It sounds natural though, doesn't it?" The girl who smelled of horses raised her hand to her cheek, fiddling with the lobe of her ear. "It's ridiculous, I know."

"I like it," said Link. "Like this, right?" She tried to whistle; it sounded more like a wet balloon deflating. The girl who smelled of horses giggled. "...how do you do it?"

"Here."
The girl who smelled of horses took Link's hands up, to curl her fingers into the proper shapes, to dampen her thumb and forefinger with her saliva, to raise the whistle to her mouth. As she does now.

Link whistles, and she can see the horses down the plain that prick up their ears. Not only Ilia, and not all of the horses, but a handful. Two or three that come trotting towards her. Ilia whinnies and rears as the foreign horses approach, pawing at the air, then stamping her hooves on the earth. Ears flicked back and pressed against her neck, she snorts at the other horses. Link tries to coo Ilia, to soothe her. Ilia gaits forward. With her body, she forms a wall between Link and the other horses. She snorts again and runs her hoof over the ground.

"Girl, I couldn't think of picking another horse," Link signs to her. "I'd rather walk than ride someone else who isn't you."

Ilia continues to snort and bare her teeth at the foreign horses until they lose interest in the whistle and leave. Link exhales. She pats Ilia on the neck. Removing her saddlebags, Link mounts her companion to more fully embrace her, to scritch her behind the ears, to tell her what a good girl she is. Ilia quiets down. When she lowers her head to munch on the grass, Link glances over at her other companion, currently lying on the ground with a stare towards the sky. Kass, she realises, has fainted near dead away.

He did not faint at the lizalfos attacking them, nor the guardians blaring into life, nor even when face-to-face with the serpent on Mount Nayru, but because of a potential fight between horses.

Link starts to dismount, intent on cooking something with which to rouse him, and then the wilds answer her.

The wilds whistle back, long and loud and low, like a bird's call. Somewhere from the south. Somewhere, perhaps, from the woods.

Ilia's ears swivel forward. Link senses rather than feels the abrupt tautness of her companion's muscles, the bunching of her sinews, the pelting of her limbs. The forward push. Her hooves against the earth.
Somewhere between a year and a half and two years ago Link felt this same relentless rush. When first she mounted Ilia all those months ago. Together they have travelled to Necluda, Eldin, to Tabantha, to Parapa, to Faron, to Lanayru, to Akkala, and now—Link's heart squeezes—together they travel home.

She leaves the reins free. Wherever Ilia takes her, she will go. Wherever Ilia takes her, she will follow. With the wind at her back and the clouds above her, with the sea of grass below her and the grove of trees beyond, she rides, and in the riding she both forgets and remembers.

Link whistles, and the wilds whistle back. The plume of smoke comes more strongly now, not a single plume, but several, coiling up from the canopy of the woods. A village. A village in the woods. A village in the woods with the whistle of the wilds.

Ilia slows before the forest. Link observes an uneven arrow painted onto the grass. No, not paint: winter flowers planted in an arrow, pointing inwards to a path into the woods. By the flowers, a wooden sign sticks out from the ground, illustrated in clean white lines with an emblem of a horse, a voltfruit prickly pear, and a pumpkin.

Telma Ranch

This way.

Trainers & breeders of horses.

Faron & Akkala's legendary horse-whisperers,

come to Necluda to fulfill all your horsey needs.

In Necludan, and repeated underneath in a language Link cannot read—Faronese, from the loops of the characters—in Akkalan, in Lanayrish.

Link stares at the sign, the paint slightly worn, the shaft tilted at an odd angle in the earth, the arrow upon the ground fuzzy at the edges. She dismounts from Ilia to the side of the arrow, avoiding even brushing her boots against the flowers, as if the second she touches a single petal this all will disappear.

She understands now the lady who hit her twice with a watering can for almost setting foot upon the flowers around the shrine.

Link leads Ilia cautiously around the arrow. She comes to a halt at the beginning of the well-trod path. When she tries to swallow, the knot in her throat sticks against the back of her mouth. Then Ilia simply whmphs a hoof onto the path. The seal breaks. She can walk. Link can walk.

She enters the forest. Link listens to the calls of the birds in the wood, the susurrus of the leaves in the trees, the soft clip-clop of Ilia's gait. Within the woods, the air grows warmer and slightly more humid, winter farther and spring closer than Link has felt in months. The scents: of herbs and of evergreen trees, of the deadened forest floor beneath the snow, of the stirring signs of life at spring's approach.

The path widens and suddenly Link hears the flutter of wings to the treetops and the swift whispers of pawpads along the grass. A flight of birds and a fleeing of beasts. Ilia rears in fright; Link whoas and croons to her until she comes back down to the earth.

Then Link looks forward to find herself staring at a purple rabbit the size of a human. A rabbit? Not, not a rabbit. A boy. A boy with a violet cloak whose hood resembles the ears of a rabbit.
A boy who sits upon a stump in a small clearing just past the edge of the forest. A hylian boy, his dark black hair falling over his pointed ears, his brown eyes wide in expectation and then in shock. In his lap sleeps a white duck with a blue blanket over their head. In his hands he holds a wooden ocarina that Link recognises well.

Though the blue has long faded to the merest hints along the curves of wood, she knows the ocarina that Marin gave her all those years ago, the ocarina in which Aryll carved a seagull to mark it as Link’s.

"You're not Hilda," the boy is saying, his Necludan softer and more rolling than the Kakariko dialect. His brows knit together. "Oi, who're you supposed to be? Oi, _oi_, where'd you get Gull from?"

"That's...that's my ocarina," Link signs in Necludan.

The boy raises his eyebrows. "Did'ja hit your head on the way here, uh..." The boy looks Link up and down, at the thick coat and the drawn hood that obscure most of her features save for her face. "...stranger? I've never seen ya before, and this here ocarina was given to me by the old lady."

Link shakes her head from side to side. "That's my ocarina. That's my...ocarina. There's a seagull on it. There's a seagull on the underside, where you usually hold your left hand."

The boy makes a _khuh_ sound in his throat. "What." He turns the ocarina over for himself. "There's no sea—see. I see. Whoa." He squints at the back of the ocarina and buffs it out. "I don't know about a seagull. Lookin' more like a deformed dog or some3thing. Or a turkey. Goose maybe. Not a seagull. All faded like. Wouldn't have guessed it's s'posed to be a seagull."

"It's a seagull." Link crouches down to draw the seagull, as best she can remember, in the soil. "And Aryll wrote her name in it. It's in Akkalan. It looks like this." Her stubby finger traces out each character. Her vision tilts. Her head woozes like in a dream. The boy leans over from the stump to look. He sits back.

The boy _khuhhs_. "Did'ja come here to steal it? First you ruin my concert, then you go'n try to filch my ocarina, _and_ I don't even know where Hilda is." The boy clicks his tongue. "Boy, you got some nerve for a stranger."

"Who's Hilda?"

"Boy oh boy, you got some nerve for a stranger who doesn't even know who Hilda is. If you came here lookin' for your _horse_ needs, Hilda's out and the old lady's been all outta sorts. So unless the Goddesses went'n sent ya here, you should go."

Link reaches up to grip Ilia's rein for support. Her companion noses her cheek, and that alone gives her all of the courage that she needs. "Do you know this whistle?" She demonstrates. Ilia's ears flick back and forth. When the boy does not reply, Link starts to raise her fingers to her lips again; he frantically waves his arms until she drops her hands to her sides.

The boy ogles at her. "Who. What. Did'ja hear the whistle'n figure out how to do it? S'hard if you don't already know. And how'd you know about the ocarina? Buddy, _who_ are you?"

As if the very scent of the forest stuck its finger down Link's throat, she feels an abrupt rise of nausea at the back of her mouth, halfway from exhaustion, halfway from fear. "_I'm looking for someone. I'm looking for a girl. A hylian, from Ordon. Her hair's a mix of gold and brown, kind of like caramel sugar blended with honey, and her eyes are the same colour green as steamed Hyrule"
herb, and her skin's sort of the same shade as a pie crust before you put it in the oven. When I saw her last, she had her hair short and curly, to about this length. But that was a long time ago, so I don't know what it'd look like now. She signs! She signs. Ordon, in the province of Ordona, in Akkala." Link touches her chin at what else she might consider. "I remember thinking that she always smelled of horses. She'd carry about sugar cubes and salt and carrots for all the horses. She taught me a lot about taking care of them."

Link hesitates. Horses. The girl who smelled of horses, and Marin, and Urbosa, all having taught her something about horses, all having bridged a gap between them through horses.

"She ran away from home. She said that she was going down south to start a ranch, but I only rem—I only found out recently. So I've come to see what happened." Link squeezes shut her eyes. "I lost all my memories a while ago, and I don't remember her name. I know this sounds far-fetched. But." She opens them again. "Her favourite food was catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd. I don't know if they have catfish around here, but I promised her I'd make her some and I want to tell her I love her very much."

"Hn." The boy on the stump crosses his arms over his chest. "That sounds like the old la—"

Link seizes his hands. She pumps them up and down. The white duck quacks awake in his lap. The boy flinches backwards; Link, too, recoils to apologise.

"Oi, buddy, calm down. Calm down. Look, I told ya the old lady's all out of sorts."

She senses her arms moving through the gestures she never thought she would make: "She's alive!?" Link does not remember dropping to her knees but somehow she finds herself in the dirt, her knees dug into the soil, her body curled over itself, her shoulders shivering. Alive.

Alive.

She must be one hundred and eighteen, one hundred and nineteen years old, one hundred and twenty years old. Link can only ever met a single person to live that long. No, two: Purah, and Impa, both rattling their final breaths, both having lived lives dedicated to outlasting the Calamitous One, both having awaited for when the Champion of Hylia, the Hero of Hyrule, Her Majesty's Knight, O Courageous Link would return from the Shrine of Resurrection, both living so that they might yet assist in the cleansing of the malice of Hyrule, both perhaps aided by the very Goddesses. But the girl who smelled of horses: only a girl. Only a person. Yet somehow, somehow, hope beyond hope, alive.

"She's real old, too," the boy is saying, yet all Link can see and hear and smell and taste and touch is the girl who smelled of horses. "Older'n these hills, probably. Like so ancient she was probably 'round when the Dragons still slithered up'n down the mountains. I don't got a clue how she knows ya. But, khuh. If you can make that catfish stew of 'ers, it could perk 'er back up, I s'pose." Sliding off from the stump, the boy folds his arms over his chest. "Now don't you touch nothin', got it? Follow me. I'll take ya to 'er'n if she's feelin' up for it, you can see 'er."

"Please," Link manages.

The boy tucks the ocarina into his cloak. He whistles—not Ilia's whistle, but a different one—and the duck perches on his shoulder. "Don't you go dyin' on me, now, buddy. C'mon. Me'n Zeffa'll take you." He pauses. "You got a name, buddy?"

The name that the girl who smelled of horses gave her. Link.
She traces out the characters in Akkalan, first. Her name. And then again in Necludan, for the boy, who nods his head and sniffs his nose. "H'all right, Link. Name's Ravio. And I'm her favourite, so don't you forget that. Did'ja catch that?" Link nods. "Now pick yerself up'n follow me already."

Her limbs do not appear to wish to cooperate. With a grunt and a roll of the eyes, Ravio assists her in clambering onto Ilia, where she clings to Ilia's warmth.

"And don't you think for a second that you're gettin' my ocarina. S'a gift from the old lady's. No way, no how." Link weakly bobs her head.

The girl who smelled of horses. The girl who smelled of horses. The girl who smelled of horses.

The duck—Zeffa—on his shoulder burrows her head deeper into the blue blanket. Taking Ilia's reins, Ravio leads her down the well-trodden road. Link listens to him referring to Ilia as Gull. He promises Ilia—promises Gull—that he'll see her returned back home soon enough, swearing that if Link stole her he will personally see to Link's execution. They walk up the forest path. A droplet of snow from an overhead branch plops onto Ilia's mane. Her hand almost limp, Link reaches up to brush the frost away.

Between blurred eyes, Link catches snatches of a village, like a series of pictographs, in a great flat clearing within the forest. A tall sharp fence prickled in thorns and brambles surrounds the settlement. Horses, horses upon horses grazing in a circular pasture, and some Ordon goats with their horns meeting to form halos over their heads, and cows that somewhat resemble those she has seen in Faron but with razorshroom-russet coats instead of splotches in black and white. Near breeding season. Close to spring. Homes of wood and stone. The abodes, stables, and barnhouses of the village—of Telma Ranch—circle around the perimeter near the fences. Small. A small village, likely not more than a few dozen people.

The villagers eye Link and Ilia as Ravio leads her around. Ravio waves the villagers off, swears that he'll tell them about it later, but that right now he's on an errand for the old lady. They wish him the best of luck.

Suddenly Link catches her breath. As if looking around Telma Ranch for the first time, her eyes clearer than before, she extends a hand towards Ravio's shoulder. He snaps his head back with a grinding in his throat.

"Are you taking me directly to her?"

Ravio quirks an eyebrow. "Aye...?"

"Wait. Can I make her the catfish stew first?" In her efforts to sign while lying on Ilia's back, Link nearly falls over and off. "Please. I don't want to go to her with empty arms. Please. I need to have something to give her or I won't know what to say."

"Khuk. You're a weird one, buddy. H'all right. But. You poison 'er'n I'll give you the ole one-two."

A galley. A kitchen. Not filthy, but clean. The salts and the spices and the seasonings in nearly the same places that Link herself would put them. The utensils and bowls in careful order. The ingredients arranged neatly, here the fruit, and here the mushrooms, and here the herbs, and here the meat, and here the fish, and here the assorted everything else.
The catfish: not quite the same as Ordon catfish, growing up in the clearer Squabble River and the streams through the river rather than the weakly flowing Kanalet River. The pumpkin: not quite the same as Ordon pumpkin, grown in a warmer and wetter clime, instead of the cool dry Ordon soil with its shorter harvest season. The cheese: not quite the same as Ordon cheese, the goats fed on different grains and grasses than the yellowish-green of Akkala.

As Marin's family did, years upon years ago, when they moved from Koume to establish Lon Lon Ranch and brought with them wheat and voltfin trout, so too did the girl who smelled of horses bring with her catfish and pumpkin and goats.

And, because of that, Link can make the catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd. Properly now. Properly.

Several hours later she leans back in a chair. A dozen ruined pumpkin gourds litter around her, the catfish and cheese stews within them cooling off, the various mixtures and combinations and times on heat and exact spices and exact seasoning and exact pinches of salt wrong, all wrong, all wrong.

Ravio checks up on her while she stares blankly at the kitchen counter mounted in ruined pumpkins, her eyes glassed over, her jaw slack. He leaps forward. Zeffa quacks on his shoulder.

"Did'ja think you'd just waltz in here'n waste all our ingredients, buddy!?!" Ravio bursts out. Yet, when Link lifts her head up at him, he flinches back. "What's that look s'posed to mean?"

"I want to make it perfect for her. I haven't seen her in so long, and she hasn't seen me, and I just...I just feel like it's not... " Link clenches her hands into fists. "When I was in Ordon I made it, and I even made it without cheese, but it was...it was Ordon. And now this. It doesn't taste like it. It's missing something. It's missing. I don't know what it's missing. I do know what it's missing. A hundred and two years I've been missing. A hundred and two years that she's...without me...and I've...her entire life..." She lowers her face into her palms. Link does not weep—she has no tears—but she shudders, and then her hands fall away, and then she simply stares vacantly ahead again.

"Buddy. I don't give a horse's behind 'bout ya or ya problems. But." He makes a khuk in the back of his throat. "If the old lady's really your friend or whatever, she's gonna wanna see ya, not the food."

Like Finley and Sasan. Except she doesn't have years of letters. She has herself, having promised the girl who smelled of horses to return. She has herself, who crept into Ordon to steal away Aryll and to leave the girl who smelled of horses a single paper of explanation. She has herself, who might have never seen the girl who smelled of horses again after promising, promising, promising that she would return. She has—

"Traveller!"

Ravio and Link whirl around at once, her body ejecting from the chair at the momentum of her movement and crashing onto the floor. She tilts her chin up.

Kass.

She hears Ravio yelping at him and demanding to know how he even got in here. She hears Kass explaining that he, as Link's companion and friend, followed her here after recovering. He describes how he tracked Ilia down and inquired of the villagers and ranchhands where he might find a certain stranger in a blue tunic and cloak.

Link considers that she left Kass almost out cold in the grass, letting Ilia ride her away. Flailing her arm up, she grasps the first part of him that she hits: the accordion case. He looks down, his beak shutting mid-word.
"Can you help me make catfish stew?"

"In a pumpkin gourd?" Kass finishes; she smiles weakly at him. "What...what is going on, traveller? What have I missed?"

Ravio puts his boot down. "You get one more pumpkin. That's it, buddy. Buddies. Did'ja hear me?"

"Well then, traveller," says Kass, shaking his head, "I see that I'm not liable to get answers until whatever goes on here has calmed down. Therefore, without further ado, allow me to offer my assistance. How can I help?"

"You can play that song for me. Ilia's whistle. On the accordion. Or anything else. Just...play something." She breathes. "And please don't leave."

"I won't, traveller." He offers her a curve of the beak. "I've yet to pass on the songs of all the shrines, and you've yet to make every meal beneath the skies of the Golden Goddesses. Now. If there is anything constant in this world that I have seen, it is three, and I do not mean the Golden Goddesses: death, taxes, and your ability to cook no matter what." Missing something.

Missing something: not going alone. The world. The land once known as and perhaps one day again called Hyrule. Even when she awoke upon the Great Plateau, Link travelled with the slate, and then the cooking pot, and then Ilia, and then all of the companions with whom she has fallen in step since then, and now Kass.

Too dangerous. Not to the body, but to the heart. Too dangerous to go alone. Yet she does not have to go alone. Not anymore.

When she prepares the catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd once more, the pieces somehow fall into place. She understands, now, what was missing: not that the catfish did not taste of Ordon, or that the pumpkin did not taste of Ordon, or that the cheese did not taste of Ordon, but that she did not taste of Ordon.

And now, again, she does. Link cradles the warm pumpkin in her arms. Ravio khucks from the back of his throat. "You done?" She nods. Kass lowers the accordion with a final contraction of the bellows that releases a resonant note upon the air. "Oi. Don't you stop playin' that. S'good music. Now come on."

Accompanied by the accordion, Link leaves the kitchen with the pumpkin against her chest. Outside, she pauses a moment to rest her forehead on Ilia's shoulder, though Link—with a light little laugh—moves away when her companion tries to nibble on the pumpkin.

Ravio puts a finger to his lips. Kass slows the accordion. They cross the village to the wooden house located at the northeastern corner. Northeast. Towards Akkala.

"Here's the old lady's home," Ravio elaborates without needing to. Link would recognise the handwriting from anywhere, that white painted portrait of the horse and the Ordon pumpkin that hangs from the brow of the house, that welcome mat stitched with its Ordon goats. "All yours. I'll be comin' too. Juuust to keep an eye on ya, buddy. Birdbrain, stay outside."

Kass does not even acknowledge Ravio's comment. Instead he stands back with the accordion and proceeds to take up once more the instrument, to play the strains of a song Link knows all too well.

Ravio opens the door for Link. The warmth of the inside of the home rolls over her in a wave. The crackle of the hearth. The rattling of laboured breathing. The rustling of pages of a book being read aloud. The quieting of a voice at their approach.
A girl around Link's age sitting by a wooden bed. A goat-fur mattress, with soft goatskin sheets. And upon the bed—

The golden-brown hair, now silver. The spring green eyes, now filmed with white. The bright smile, now wrinkled to more resemble an overboiled potato than a human face.

But the scent that she remembers. The scent, the same as it was over one hundred years ago. The scent, like the smells of the meals that have brought Link back who she was and is and will yet be, that reaches across one hundred years of passing.

The girl who smelled of horses.

The girl who *smells* of horses.

*Ilia.*

—

*Frozen Crab* (two hearts, low cold resist for 01:00) - razorclaw crab

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: If you're shield-surfing in *Breath of the Wild*, press "Y" to perform a spin which causes Link to laugh in-game.

If you drop a crab in a snowy area and let it sit for a few seconds, you will indeed get a frozen crab. The same thing happens to any kind of meat.

This is *incredibly* self-indulgent of me, but in *The Adventure of Link*, when Link enters the town of Kasuto (from *The Adventure of Link*, not the village from *Delicious in Wilds*, and I'm taking about New Kasuto, not Old Kasuto), Link enters a house through a chimney. Upon doing so, Link exclaims, "LOOKS LIKE I CAN GET IN THE FIREPLACE," one of the few times that Link has directly spoken in the entire franchise. Ever since I put in Kasuto to *Delicious in Wilds* as the very first town that Link visits, I eagerly anticipated the moment Link would return so that I could make this really silly reference.

The title "Hero, Chosen by the Gods" is from *Twilight Princess*. By the way, more *Zelda* titles should have actual epithets for their respective heroes, and less should have generic ones like *Twilight Princess* or like "Hero of Man" from *The Minish Cap*.

The shrines providing protection from monsters is something that we'll explore more in the future. In the meantime, pretty much anyone who doesn't live around a shrine is evacuating from how bad it's gotten with the monsters. Ye-ouch!

If you forgot, Link lost the wooden ocarina that had been given for her from the Yiga; it's still floating around on the Divine Beast Vah Rudania, where it rolled away.

Telma Ranch is a reference to Telma from *Twilight Princess*, who—with her red hair
and black-coded features—may have been meant to be gerudo in the game. Unfortunately, her backstory wasn't really touched upon; her design was oversexualised; and she fit right into the mammy stereotype. I wish that more had been done with her. At any rate, for Delicious in Wilds, I went ahead and made her a gerudo woman, although she is no longer alive as of the time of the fic considering age.

As a reminder, Link knows how to *conversationally* speak Central Hyrulean, Akkalan, Necludan, Eldic, Tabanch, Parapan, and Lanayrish; she has also learned Faronese better over the course of her journey with the winter that she spent speaking Faronese at Romani Ranch. She knows how to *read* Akkalan, Lanayrish, Central Hyrulean, and Necludan, and she knows how to *write* Necludan and Akkalan. However, note that she really only knows how to speak the main dialects of Eldic, Tabanch, and Parapan. For example, I mentioned that she had great difficulty understanding the Rovah dialect of Parapan that Urbosa knew natively, as Link had learned the Nabooru dialect. This might seem like a lot of languages, but travellers and couriers throughout ages have tended to know a variety of languages as part of their specialties, and Link is only *conversationally* in these languages. Consider that she does not even know enough Central Hyrulean to comprehend everything that Zelda tells her about the research.

The arrow in the flowers that points into the grove, with a boy sitting on a stump, is in reference to the same in *A Link to the Past*. In that game, the boy on the stump plays a blue ocarina for the animals around, and eventually gives Link the ocarina. The boy on the stump is also associated with a duck that carries Link from place to place as the fast travel in *A Link to the Past*. The character of Ravio was inspired by the character of the same name from *A Link Between Worlds*, whose purple bunny outfit is in reference to Link's pink bunny form from *A Link to the Past*. In *A Link Between Worlds*, Ravio has a white and blue bird named Sheerow; in *The Minish Cap*, the duck Zeffa is the one who carries Link around, also summoned by an ocarina. As usual, I took all of these and mashed them together into Ravio on the stump with a white bird named Zeffa who plays the ocarina.

Ilia's super old. However, there are indeed real-life people who have lived to that age. I admit that it's a stretch, and I was originally going to have her be dead of old age. However, my beta reader Emma convinced me otherwise. You can just picture her staying alive on from a combination of (1) sheer force of willpower and (2) having the luxury of being able to relax and not do anything.

Up next: Ilia, Ilia, Ilia; the Great Calamity; Link's time of dying.

midna's ass. 01 November 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This is my second-favourite chapter in the series. The slow buildup to Ilia is beautiful and haunting, and ended up bringing me to tears.

Emma. 02 November 2017.
Tough Pumpkin Stew

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef reunites with the girl who smelled of horses and learns of the last time the two met prior to the Great Calamity, under circumstances unlike any the chef expected.

Chapter Notes

As usual, author's notes that didn't end up having space to put at the end: I started writing this chapter at 00:09 on the seventh of August, and finished writing it on at 03:44 on the ninth of August.

Thanks a million to you, my beloved reader, who has journeyed with me. We've come a long, long, long way since Link first remembered the girl who smelled of horses, back when Link didn't even know who Ilia was, back when Link was still on the Great Plateau. We've come such a long way. And now we're with Ilia again.

Luda is named after the character from Twilight Princess.

Ilia the horse was originally named Gull, after Aryll's love of seagulls. However, Ilia the woman accepts Link having renamed Gull to Ilia.

I thought that this was a good chance for me to summarise the story so far for the reader, since we've come a very, very long way from where we were, and it's good to look back on everything as a refresher, especially for those of you who have been reading this for over sixty-six days!

Indeed, in the same chapter that I revealed about how Link rescued Aryll from Ordon in the middle of the night, I did mention that Link slipped a 'carving of wood' into the letter for Ilia. That was the ocarina!

The remark about comparatively idyllic serenity is not meant to imply that people were leading stress-free lives, because a poor harvest could mean death. But these are issues that people could understand. What can be understood of monsters, of the skies turning gold, of the very earth bleeding purple?

The village of Kasuto Link has visited is New Kasuto. The Old Kasuto/New Kasuto thing is in reference to The Adventure of Link.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Ilia.

Ilia, whose name she has carried with her for nearly two years. Ilia, whose name she thought referred at first to the horse Marin gave her and the girl who smelled of horses trained. Ilia—
Epona, the horse who walked beside her one hundred years ago. Ilia, the horse who walks beside her now. Ilia, the girl who smelled of horses, the girl, the woman, the old lady sunken into the bed.

Link holds the warm pumpkin in her arms, cradles the gourd like a person, like an old friend, like the very first home she ever had.

The girl seated by the bedside of Ilia—Ilia Ilia Ilia—speaks slowly to the elderly woman upon the bed, to inform her that she has a visitor. When Ilia signs back, she, unable to use her arms, spells out the words in painstaking slowness on her trembling fingers, swollen with age, the joints scarcely moving, the veins bulging out like a pie crust overstuffed. Link observes her gestures. The skin hangs off of her bones as though connected to nothing at all. Like nothing more than a bag of flesh with a jumble of bones within. Like Maryll, like Maryll but even then Maryll could still feed herself.

With the girl by the bedside's help, Ilia sits up in bed. The girl turns towards Link and bows her head. "Lady Ilia welcomes you. She asks of your name, your business, and that heavenly smell you have brought with you."

Link read the questions from Ilia's fingertips, blurred halfway between Akkalan and Necludan, some of the words slipping down to Faronese. Yet she merely nods in acceptance of the girl's words.

Ilia signs, in her slow way, that the girl need not call her Lady Ilia, that Ilia works just fine, and Ravio's old lady too. The girl apologises, "Lady Ilia." Turning towards Link, the girl explains that Ilia has not fared well the last few years and particularly these several months, falling in and out of illness. "She may become delirious or unresponsive, and she may forget how to speak. If so, I'll have to ask that you come back later, if at all." The girl gazes down at Ilia, her expression of a warmth more tender than beef stewed an entire week.

Link glances at her own arms: the catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd.

She holds the pumpkin out. The girl raises her eyebrows, and Ravio declares that Link has made the stew for Ilia.

Even if Ilia can no longer see, her once spring green eyes the milky white of winter, Ilia—Ilia Ilia Ilia—can smell, and she can eat.

The girl introduces herself as Luda. Luda, one of the many villagers of Telma Ranch grown up long after Ilia stepped down from acting as the village's mayor, who knows her better as everyone's grandmother despite having had no children of her own—except, as Ravio huffs out, that nearly everyone in the village, at least everyone worthwhile, considers Ilia more than family—who helps in taking care of her, as thanks for everything that Ilia has done in her life for them.

Luda, of short black hair and brownish red eyes, her eyebrows thick and expressive over her kindly features, her skin the colour of browned baked pie, her simple brown and white goatskin dress clothing a girl who moves her arms when she speaks even though she does not sign.

Luda, who says hello to Link.

Ilia inquires, again, of Link's name. Link, setting down the stew, asks instead if Ilia would eat the soup first.

Ravio grabs her wrist and demands to try it himself, to check to see if Link has poisoned the pumpkin or not. Link opens top of the pumpkin. The scent of catfish stew rises in vapours from its
inner warmth. She scoops her own hand into the thick of the pumpkin, allowing the soup to collect in her palm, and then tips back her head to swallow the pumpkin stew down.

Ravio takes a handful as well, glancing suspiciously towards Link from the left and then from the right. He again ghosts the one-two punch. This time he does not fall off his balance, at least not as much. She nods appreciatively.

"...h'all right. But try anythin' funny'n one-two you're gonna get it."

Ilia pleads for Ravio not to go around driving off any more visitors. He scuffs the floorboards with his sock. Only then does Link note that Ravio has left his boots at the door in Faronese fashion, and so she turns to take off her own.

The gesture elicits a laugh from Ravio, who claps a hand over his own mouth. When Link blinks at him, he pouts and looks away, arms crossed over his chest. Luda relays the goings-on to Ilia. Her smile deepens the wrinkle around her toothless mouth, although Link can no longer tell, for the looseness of her skin, if it reaches her eyes. Yet she knows Ilia well enough to sense it does.

Luda extends her hands to take the pumpkin from Link. She shakes her head. "If it's all right with you and with..." Her hands do not form Ilia's name. "...I want to try giving it to her myself."

Ravio and Luda peer at one another, then decline in unison. Rather, Link perches on the log by Luda's side. Ravio retrieves a spoon—a utensil that certainly exists even if Link has mostly used her hands to eat for the majority of the past two years—and Luda dips it into the pumpkin.

Ilia opens her mouth at Luda's command. Luda tests the stew, checking the size of the chunks and picking out any that might prove difficult to swallow before feeding the spoonful to her. With a laborious wringing of the throat, the pulsations down making Link wince vicariously for how Ilia must fight against the years that long to break her body to dust, the first and best friend she has ever had swallows.

She strains to sit up further. "Traveller..." Ilia signs in her excruciating slowness. Although Luda translates, Link's gaze has fixed upon Ilia's hands. "...who are you?"

Link exhales. Luda and Ravio look upon her, the former bearing an expression of kindness, the latter glaring at her with narrowed eyes that thinly veil his curiosity.

"I think you might know me," Link signs. Luda relays the message back to Ilia, who lifts up her shaking hands. Autumn leaves. No, winter leaves, barely clinging on to the branches that have long since frosted over, but not yet willing to let go of life.

Luda guides Link in allowing Ilia to feel her face. Link closes her eyes. The breath of Ilia's hands over her cheeks carries the sensation of wrinkled paper, of letters written years and years ago, opened and closed so many time that they have become soft to the touch, the creases worn entirely out until the letter does not fold again quite right, until the letter does not fold at all, until the ink has all but faded from the paper, but the words have inscribed themselves onto the inner curves of the reader's eyelids.

Something in her chest recoils away at the touch. Something of bile burns the lower rim of her throat. Something thudding against her sternum finds a thread of revulsion, of a life on the threshold of death.

Link tries to swallow down the feeling. She keeps her eyes shut. In that moment she hates herself more than anything.
Ilia feels her brows, her eyes, her ears, her cheeks, her nose, her lips, her chin. Lower, to her throat, where the pulling away of the hood accompanies Luda's gasp and Ravio's _khuh_. Ilia touches her shoulders, her arms, down to her wrists, where Ilia's fingertips run over the vertical scars raised in ridges on her skin, like a taloned hand sank its claws into her flesh and raked upwards.

The touch leaves her cold, and barren, and all too still. For one dreadful moment of her heart dropping away beneath her and—worse—her stomach turning inside out to never hold food again, Link fears that when she lifts her eyelids again, she will see nothing but the grasslands of the plain, nothing but the marshes of the swamp, no plume of smoke to the south.

Instead she finds herself gazing at an Ilia whose eyes have filmed over in wetness, the green of her irises still glinting beneath the bank of whitened mist after all of these years.

"Catfish stew?" she signs.

"In a pumpkin gourd." Link forms the words against Ilia's palms, spelling out the characters in Akkalan: "I'm home."

Ilia signs back into Link's hands. "Welcome home."

And Link, who has not cried over the wholeness of the winter, feels again that burning behind her eyelids that fogs her vision and traces salt down her cheeks. The droplets fall upon Ilia's knuckles. Her breaths shuddering her body, Ilia lifts her thumb to wipe away the tears forming on Link's lashes.

"I wish I could say that I knew you would come back," Ilia signs. "You promised to make me catfish stew, didn't you? I told myself that you'd never broken a promise of a meal before. I wish I could promise you that I never lost hope." Ilia hesitates. Link dares not close her eyes, not even to blink. "I wish I could tell you all these things. I thought you had...died. But you've not changed at all. Link...what...what happened?"

Link glances at Luda, glances at Ravio, glances at her shoulder only to remember that Sarie no longer rides there. "It's a long story," she says.

The sound that Ilia makes rattles the dryness of leaves together. It takes Link a long moment to recognise the noise as something approaching a laugh. "I have waited a long, long time. I can wait a little more. And besides, I've got your stew to keep me company. No one makes catfish stew like you do."

Link breathes.

"Ilia," she says, "I've waited so long to tell you. I...I love you. Very much."

"Oh, Link." Ilia's exhalation trembles. "I love you too."

Link's heart could burst out of her chest. Rather she takes Ilia's hands in hers. Again, together, after all this time.

Ilia and Link. They talk. They talk of childhood in Ordon. They talk of Aryll. They talk of Link's parents and of Ilia's father. They laugh at old jokes. They speak of Epona, the horse, and of the goats, and of the foods that they would eat. They talk of Rusl and Uli, of Colin and Beth, of Malo and Talo, of Jaggie and Pergie, of Sera and Fado, of Hanch and of the village. They talk of the barges from Papuchia and Lurelin with their Faronese ocean fish, and they talk of the barges from Lanayru with their rice-balls. They talk of the time Mipha visited them. They talk of the books that they would take turns reading, and they talk of the grassy knoll upon which they lay together with
the wind ruffling their hair and their hands intertwined, and they talk of the nights when Link would rap on Ilia's windows, and Ilia would rappel out on a ladder made of her bedsheets strung together.

Ilia apologises again for having said those terrible things to Link so long ago, and Link shakes her head. "I could never find the words when I was younger, but...you didn't give my heart back its missing string, no, but you did...you held the wounds down long enough that I didn't bleed out. Sorry if that doesn't make sense."

"It does, Link." The tears glimmer as the stars upon Ilia's cheeks. You didn't have to say it for me to read it off your fingers."

They talk of the spring with its foaling of horses and kidding of goats and with its saddling of late yearlings ready for the ride. They talk of the autumn with its gathering of the wilds and with its gathering-together of people.

They talk of the faces that they have left. They talk of the farmers and the ranchhands, the butchers and the rice growers, the smithies and the tailors, the herbalists and the apothecaries, the fishermen and the mushroom-gatherers, the stonemasons and the woodcarvers, the leatherworkers and the candlemakers, the names and the faces that they have known.

And then Ilia traces a line down Link's cheek, her thumb on the scar beneath her left eye. "Link...I've wanted to ask you this for so long. But could you tell me what...what happened, after you left Ordon? When you promised me the catfish stew?"

Link nods. She breathes. And then Link starts to talk.

To Luda's credit, the girl faithfully says everything that Link signs, sometimes paraphrasing slightly when Link signs too quickly for her to keep up. Though her eyes embiggen, her brows soar off to meet the Golden Goddesses, and her gestures of arms become wilder and wilder the further Link's tale progresses, Luda keeps on. Ravio mutters at first about the impossibilities. Scuffing up his rabbit-like hood, he pulls it down to obscure most of his face. As Link goes on, however, he ever so steadily inches open the hood, ever so steadily starts to lean in, ever so steadily catches a certain sparkle in his eye.

Link talks of pulling the sword from the stone.

Link talks of becoming the chosen hero, of meeting the Champions, of seeing the girl with the golden hair, the Princess of Hyrule.

Link talks of Aryll, growing up safe at last, and Link talks of Marin, passed away years ago, and Link talks of Ilia, who ran away from the village of Ordon, and Link talks of Rusl, and Link talks of her own parents.

Her own parents, very, very small.

And Ilia's father: just as very, very small, whom she prays never caught up to Ilia.

Link talks of the Great Calamity. Link talks of the Divine Beasts. Link talks of what she has heard from others: what she heard from Yunobo; what she heard from Amali; what she heard from Riju; what she heard from Sidon and the King Zora. Link talks of her own memories that she has forgotten. She does not know what happened in the interim one hundred years. She does not know, even, where all of her memories lie, which ones occurred in conjunction with others and which ones happened far, far down the path: months of blankness.
She talks of the Shrine of Resurrection. She talks of the slate, and she talks of the branch that she picked up to practise her swings, and she talks of the evergreen apple trees, and she talks of the tower from which she fell and where she nearly snapped her neck and the grasshopper that broke her down in laughter at the wonders of being alive, and she talks of the shrines, and she talks of the cabin and the letter written by Kass's mentor or perhaps Kass's mentor's father, and she talks of Kasuto, and she talks of Ilia the horse.

"Her name's not Ilia," Ravio cuts in. "S'Gull. Gall. She got took by those damned boko scum two springs ago. You must've got 'er after she ran away from 'em. But don't you dare think you're walkin' outta here with 'er. She's ours."

"You remembered my old whistle and you thought that Epona was named Ilia." Ilia shifts her arms ever so slightly. Although she can no longer fully bend her limbs, Link recognises her usual pose with her hands on her hips. "I can't tell if I should take this as an insult or a compliment." Link rubs the back of her head. "I can't go with you now, like this. I'd be...happy to let another me walk beside you, at least. A portable Ilia, on the go."

Link cries again. She wipes at her eyes. Luda pats her shoulder, but Ilia extends an arm—to tap Luda's wrist and ask for more catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd.

Grateful for the intervention, Link lets the tears weep themselves out.

When Link quiets again, she resumes her story. She talks of the late spring plum blossoms in Kakariko, and she talks of the summer in Eldin, and she talks of Yunobo and the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. She talks of Koko and Cottla upon her return, and she talks of Ilia the horse poking her head in through the window, and she talks of the autumn in Tabantha, and she talks of Teba and the colourful sisters, and she talks of Amali and the Divine Beast Vah Medoh. She talks of herself having run away from Kakariko, and she talks of Maron in Koume with the saddlebags of milk, and she talks of Romani Ranch, and she talks of Marin and of Malon and of Vish and of Cremia and of Romani and, of course, of Miyu.

She talks of finding home, and she talks of the long winter, and she talks of finding herself amid the fields of wheat again.

She talks of the hinox that she pushed into the water with a cooking pot and a lucky bolt of lightning, and she talks of sharing stew with all in Aveil, and she talks of the archaeologists and of Rotana's brilliance, and she talks of whaling and of the molduga, and she talks of the thunderstorm, and she talks of spring in Parapa, and she talks of Dyeri and Nadyne, and she talks of Ruboona—of Riju—and the Divine Beast Vah Naboris. She talks of the winding route around Lake Hylia through the forests of Faron, and she talks of the lightning that struck the boomerang at the same moment that she caught it in her palm, and she talks of her acceptance of her own title, and she talks of the lynel that left her with a scar in the shape of a handprint—four scarlet marks in a row and one slightly off-set for the thumb—on her belly, and she talks of summer in Lanayru, and she talks of the King Zora and of Sarie, and she talks of Sidon and the Divine Beast Vah Ruta.

She talks of Finley and Sasan, and she talks of the Veiled Falls, and she talks of seeing Kass again, and then she goes back and recounts all the times that she has seen Kass, and then she talks of autumn in Akkala, and she talks of Rusl and of Uli and of Colin, and she talks of Ilia and Ordon.

She talks of making catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd, and she talks of the ruins of the village, and she talks of those that they have lost.

"It was...during the Great Calamity," says Ilia, her motions matter-of-fact, her words from a lifetime ago. More than a lifetime. One hundred and two years ago. "The Divine Beast in Eldin
destroyed it in its rampage. I only learned of that years later." She squeezes her hands together. "I never heard from them again."

Link is silent. Then she talks again.

She talks of seeing her companions again. She talks of the lost woods. She talks of grasping the hilt of the sword that seals the darkness. She talks of the blade of evil's bane that has not chosen her, and this time when she speaks her hands do not shake.

Well, they do. Yet only slightly. Only slightly.

She talks of the winter that she has spent with Kass seeking shrines. She talks of the return to Kasuto, of the tale of the whistle, of heading south through the forest. She talks of the arrow of winter flowers, and she talks of the boy on the stump with the blue ocarina, and she talks of the catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd, and she talks of Ilia. Ilia, Ilia, Ilia.

When the story comes to its end, Link rests her hands in her lap. She breathes. Her chest rises and her chest falls. In through her nose and out through her mouth.

"...thank you," says Ilia.

Link swallows thickly. "You believe me?"

"No, thank you for the stew." Ilia snorts. "Yes, Link, I meant thank you for catching me up. Of course I believe you. You're here, aren't you? Unless I'm finally dying and my mind's giving me a little break."

"I mean about..." Link rotates her hands about her wrists. "...being the chosen hero. That I used to be."

"I believe that, too. You've never lied to me. And even if I were to think it far-fetched, I...saw you die, Link."

She reads the signs, yet the signs do not coalesce into anything that makes sense.

"It's my turn, I think, now that I'm not distracted by the greatest dish in all of Hyrule." With a napkin, Luda cleans Ilia's mouth for her. Ilia thanks her.

Ravio thumbs at Ilia with a grin. "Did'ja know that the old lady's the best ever? 'Cause you're 'bout to hear it if you didn't."

Ilia's fingers do not move as they once did, nor do her wrists flex, nor do her arms bend. She takes breaks, frequently. She rests. Link does not leave her side.

Ilia talks of herself. She talks of the letter which she found on the same morning that Aryll went missing. Ilia talks of the letter which warned her that Link might never be able to return, of the letter with its thousand apologies, of the letter which finally made her straighten her spine, of the blue ocarina with Aryll's name carved into the side that had fallen out of the envelope, of the paint that had worn away from her tears and from how often she gripped it in her warmed hand.

For years upon years she had lived with shoulders hunched and head down. For years upon years she had told herself that Link needed a home to come back to. For years upon years she had waited for that golden time when she, and Link, and Marin, and Aryll could walk the paths of Hyrule together.
And then she ran away. With Rusl's teachings. She intended to head south and then west, towards Lon Lon Ranch, to live out her time with Marin. She came upon the Blatchery Plain—teeming with stables, the calamitous destruction of which turned out hundreds of horses whose descendants became the wild herds that thrive on the grasslands now—when highwaymen jumped her on her road. She escaped within a breath of her life, all of her supplies stolen away, her head knocked so hard that she lost her memories. An elderly woman found her on the path and took her in while her memories returned to her. At least *some* of her memories. She lived in the village with the woman and her twenty cats for some time as she slowly gained back who she was, on those wide open plains with nothing but the blue ocarina whose songs she knew too well.

Long, long ago, someone had played upon that ocarina for her, the notes out of tune, the rhythm uncertain at best. The most beautiful instrument she had ever heard, because that someone had played it for *her*. Yet she could not remember *who*.

Those days saw the steady creep of news regarding the Divine Beasts, the guardians, the Champion of Hylia with the sword that seals the darkness, yet these rumours existed in a world far, far away from her. The world of a bedtime story. *She* lived among the goats and the cats. What did she know of sealing magic and boars of malice, of divine princesses and chosen knights, of blessed blood and sacred sword?

The Great Calamity came upon them swiftly. One moment, the world existed in its comparatively idyllic serenity, their problems those of a poor harvest or an illness through the flock. In the next, the land itself seemed to rise against them. The monsters that appeared to drop from the skies and overrun every village not grown around a shrine. The malice that welled up seemingly from nothing, as though the earth itself had begun to bleed.

She and the other villagers fled.

Over the plains. Some villagers went northwest towards the shrine of what would become New Kasuto, and then, after one hundred years, just Kasuto, when all those who once lived in what they call Old Kasuto passed away. The shrine had started to glow—some said orange; others, gold—and they took this as a symbol of the Golden Goddesses' favour and protection.

Other villagers journeyed to the south or the east in their efforts to escape. The old woman who had cared for Ilia refused to leave without her cats. While Ilia sought to assist her, the old woman insisted that Ilia save herself. So she did.

She went with a caravan of escaping villagers. Yet it took not long for monsters to tear their dreams apart along with their bones. The scent of burning wood and bleeding flesh. The screams of horses and humans to the heavens. Few survived, until she found herself alone, bewildered, clinging to a horse for the sake of survival.

She heard a whistle. A whistle that she had forgotten, but a whistle that called to her with the sound of home. She found—in the Ash Swamp—Link and the princess, bloodied and barely alive, Link having slain guardians and monsters alike in her efforts to protect the princess en route to the castle. Link, severely injured from a run-in with automata at Fort Hateno and delirious from pain, signed not a word to Ilia. From the princess, Ilia learned the Calamity had struck, that the Divine Beasts and the guardians had turned against them all, that she and Link had themselves gone to Mount Nayru to pray a final time in the hopes that her sacred bloodline would manifest, that the monsters and the malice had slaughtered the guards sent with her, that Link's own horse had perished—for whom Link had whistled—and that the princess needed to get to the castle immediately. A mirror in the castle, said the princess, that she believed, hope beyond hope, would grant her what she sought.
"Please," the princess begged her, "allow us use of your horse."

The automata that had chased the princess and Link this far fell upon them, then. Link fought savagely for their lives, fought even though previous encounters had torn her near to pieces, fought despite the blood that ringed her mouth, darkened from the long, long hours that had spent her strength and her spirit.

And when Link propelled the blade of evil's bane through the eye of the first guardian, another automaton took aim at the princess. The princess could only step back.

Link could only lunge forward.

"For as long as I have lived," Ilia says, her gestures soft, "I have never forgotten your scream. So loud I feared you would deafen yourself."

Ilia's horse, spooking, came down upon Ilia's right leg and left it a broken and useless mess of flesh from the knee down. The princess did not want to leave Ilia, to have her sacrificed, yet the fire-light that carved through Link's flesh forced Ilia's own hand. Like the woman who had saved her, Ilia insisted that the princess take Link, take her horse, and go.

The Princess mumbled something about a possibility to save Link's life. The Princess mumbled something about a slim chance. The Princess mumbled something about a last hope for Hyrule.

And then the princess took the horse, took Link, took herself, and left.

Link stares at her own hands: she has died.

If not died, then she has been injured, has been gravely wounded, has been so close to the brink of death that she lay sleeping for one hundred years.

Yet something must have happened in that intervening moment. Something must have passed between her injury and her awakening in the Shrine of Resurrection. Yet what could the princess could have done?

The journey between the Ash Swamp and the castle—between the Ash Swamp and the Shrine of Resurrection—would have taken significant time.

Link has always considered the Great Calamity a single brief moment that reared its maliced jaws, that swallowed the land in pain, and then that left all at once, when the princess varnished to seal the Calamitous One within the Castle.

Never has she put the consideration that the Great Calamity itself might have lasted several days to thought. Never has she put the consideration that the Great Calamity itself might have continued to gouge out the earth until the princess—and perhaps Link—did something about it to thought. Never has she put the consideration...

"Ilia. Thank you for saving my life. And the Princess's. I'm so sorry that I left." Link breathes around the thickness of her throat's constriction, intent on strangling her with her own choked tears. "I'm sorry that I didn't remember you for so long."

"Neither did I," responds Ilia without a hint of malice, "so we're even."

She raises her hand, palm facing outwards towards Link.

Link slaps her palm against Ilia's as gently as she humanly can. Ilia scowls at her, and Link—
smiling sheepishly—slaps her properly this time. "*Good.*"

Ilia continues on her tale. Link banishes her thoughts to listen.

The guardians stalked after Link and the princess. Ilia hid in the marshes for those days and nights that followed, when the skies turned gold and violet and the moon stalked the lands with its bloodshot eye, when monsters slithered over the earth and the wilds gave way to malice. Given her broken leg, she slept curled inside of manure left behind by her horse. The manure kept her warm and disguised her scent. The princess and Link had left nothing behind but scarlet grass, the remains of fallen automata with their eyes gouged out, and a waxed parcel of apple pie, still warm enough for her to smell its cinnamon-nutmeg scent. That pie saved her, those days and nights that she hid in the manure.

When the skies cleared, all at once, she considered herself dead. Then a wagon passed her on its journey southeast, and she realised that she did not want to die. She wanted to live. *She wanted to live.*

In the time immediately after the Great Calamity, those who lived yet in the land that would pass into history as Hyrule fled from Central Hyrule. Amid the chaos, Ilia met a most remarkable gerudo woman who had, before the Great Calamity, migrated from westerszn Faron to eastern Central Hyrule to establish a town near the Passeri Greenbelt. Mabe Village, they called it. Ilia recognised the name: Marin.

She went with Telma and her caravan of other survivors like Ilia as they moved south, seeking protection in the forests. She felt—they all felt, to some extent—that they lived now on borrowed time.

Then her leg started to recover. She learned take her limp in stride, in *pride:* an emblem of her resilience. The forests and the trees began to regrow. The rivers once more ran clean of blood and filth. The fish leaped through the waters; the birds perched in the trees; the rabbits hopped along the grasses.

The Great Calamity congealed from the *everything* that had become her world to a mere nightmare that continued to haunt her, but only ever a nightmare.

If not for the crumpled wax that smelled still of apple, Ilia would have thought that she had hallucinated Link, and the princess, and the horse.

Under Telma's guidance, a bustling ranch grew in the woods, where many a passerby would stop to exchange their horses for fresh ones, where they would rest in Telma's bar to drink of liquored milk, where they would catch up on news and rumour. At first, Telma's ranch comprised mainly of Telma herself and Ilia, alongside a handful of other stragglers Telma picked up along the way.

After a time came southbound travellers who had fled from the Divine Beast Vah Rudania's rampage in the north. Those who could not speak Necludan or Central Hyrulean ended up staying longer for Ilia's knowledge of Akkalan; they brought with them Akkalan fish and goats. Other travellers, also refugees from Mabe or from other villages in eastern Central Hyrule, came for their passing familiarity with Telma and stayed for the safety of the woods. The ranch grew.

Over the months that followed, rumours arrived over half-full glasses and stuffed pumpkin gourds. The Calamitous One and the princess had vanished together. The shrines had gone out again and would not begin to glow orange again until years later, when the monsters started to emerge again from the depths.
By the time Ilia regained the rest of her memories—by the time she recalled of Marin, and of Aryll, and of Link—Marin's family had vanished. Ilia journeyed to Lon Lon Ranch, yet found nothing but ruins awaiting her. "I thought this entire time that the Calamitous One had taken her. To hear that she moved away, and nothing more, and died peacefully with her family...I'm glad. I know that's not much to say, but...thank you, Link, for laying me to rest." Ilia pauses. "Not like that. I'm not letting the Goddesses take me yet."

So here Ilia has lived, working with the horses that she loved. Telma, who had become by then so important to her that Ilia called her Mother, passed away. Ilia took over as head of the ranch. From the unofficial title of Telma's ranch, Ilia renamed the village Telma Ranch in her everlasting honour.

And so the years passed. Somewhere along the way, she aged, grew old. Somewhere along the way, she could no longer walk as she once had. Somewhere along the way, her vision worsened until not even spectacles could clear the fog that surrounded her.

Her love of the horses clung her to this life.

As she wearied, she considered the blue ocarina, the paint of which had long since faded away. She gave it to Ravio, whom she had found abandoned—

"Oi, oi. A traveller doesn't need to know that kinda stuff," Ravio snaps, tucking up his blue scarf to muffle his words, looking away and blinking swiftly as if dust had stung his eyes. "I know she's your friend'n all. But cut me some slack, old lady."

—whom she knows has a striking passion for music, and who has in his years growing at the ranch learned to play to soothe the horses—

"Oi, oi, that's enough." He pulls the hood down tighter over his face. Ilia laughs that rattling dry-paper laugh that could plunge Link's heart into her own stomach and force the bile up into her mouth.

—but, if Link wishes, Ilia could persuade Ravio to allow her to temporarily borrow the ocarina from him.

"Nope. Not even for some washed-up chosen one," Ravio cracks back.

Ilia hacks out a cough.

"...fine. But just 'cause you're the old lady's friend or whatever." He holds up two fingers to indicate his own eyes and then Link's, flicking his wrist back and forth several times. "I'll be watchin' ya. Like a hawk watchin' a field mouse. Caw, caw!" He imitates the sound of a hawk swooping down. Link rubs the back of her head.

"And that's the story, morning glory," Ilia finishes. The hours have taken their toll. Her hands move even more slowly than before. "Sorry for taking so long, but...you seemed to want to know. And I don't know how much longer I might be around to tell it." She pauses. "If you've got something to ask, Link, you can do it now."

Link exhales. She raises her hands. She looks down upon herself. She asks if Ilia knows anything of Aryll.

"I want to tell you that Aryll has passed on." Link begins to take her hands, to squeeze her fingers, yet Ilia shakes her off. "But I thought that you, too, had died. So I don't know anymore. She could still be out there." Ilia hmpfs out a breath of amusement. "The Calamitous One destroyed the
castle and nearly everyone in it. I don't know if she had a chance to escape. I wish I could tell you something more, but that's all." She ruminates, visibly, on her words. "All I know is that the Princess said something about a way for you to live. A mirror in a shrine. And she told me that she herself would go yet to the castle. She must've done something there."

Link nods.

Another pause, this one deep as the ocean and pitch as the night.

"Can I ask one more question?"

Ilia hmphs, though somehow warmly, in a way that only Ilia can. "You can ask as many as you want, Link."

Link calms herself by smelling the vestiges of warm pumpkin on her hands. "Do you..." The words. Let the words flow. "Are you hungry?" Her arms loop through the motions automatically. "I mean. What I mean to say is. Can I make you something? No, no, I mean. Would you let me cook for you for the rest of your life? No, that's not right either. I mean..."

"Yes," says Ilia, "you're still my best friend, even after all this time."

Link blinks at her. Ilia makes that motion again as though trying to put her hands on her hips.

"Am I right, or am I right, about what you were trying to ask?"

She stands up from the bedside. Luda scoots over, whispering for her to take things easy. Link leans over Ilia.

Gathering her bony shoulders in her arms, Link embraces her best friend, the first person in whom she ever confided, the girl who smells of horses. Even if the years have aged her, they have aged her like a wine; even if the years have simmered her, they have simmered her like a stew; even if the years have worn her down, the scent of hay and horse and love remains.

She stays that way for a long, long time.

Link feels Ilia's quivering arms encircle her, and she relaxes into their warmth. Her best friend signs something into the slope of her spine. Lowering her eyelids, Link focuses on what Ilia says.

"I can tell by the way you're hugging me that you're going to leave, aren't you?" Link frigidly herself to stillness in the hug, and Ilia laughs. "Such is your way, Link. You're a traveller."

"What if I want to come home?"

"Then you'll come home someday. But the wilds...they're in your blood. So's the making of food. That's what I know the most about you, Link, that half of you wants the wind in your hair, and the other half wants the warmth of someone's embrace. You don't have to pick one or the other, you know. You can have both. There's no need to fight who you are, Link.

"It's even in your name. That's why I picked it out for you." Ilia laughs parchment-drily; Link can picture her sly smirk even if her wrinkled mouth can no longer form the curve. "You're the girl who links the halves of the wholes, the girl who linked Ordon to the Akkalan hills, the girl who has linked entire parts of Hyrule together, the girl who links, as you would say, all that is delicious and all that is in wilds."

Link senses her own features softening, brows sloping, lids half-closing, eyes prickling. "You
"really are a mind reader." Her chest grows warm; her smile, bright.

"No, I'm just old. And I've had enough time to think about these things while you've been slumbering, sleepyhead." At that moment Link's own body betrays her; her stomach rumbles. Ilia pats her back. "And I've blabbered on long enough. It's about time we ate."

Link rubs the head of her head. Stopping herself, she takes Ilia's hand into hers and presses it to her mouth, so that Ilia, too, can feel the curve of her crooked smile, the heat of her warmed cheeks.

Ravio asks Ilia what she'd like to eat. Luda moves to remove the embargo from entering that he placed over the door upon their entrance. Within less than ten minutes, several villagers have popped their heads in to request Ilia for advice, tell Ilia a joke or a riddle, or to inquire if Ilia needs anything from them. Most of the villagers share the scarlet hair of gerudo people with the pointed ears of hylians, though Link observes that many have dyed their hair darker shades of black, a crimsoning at the roots revealing their heritage. A few sport red eyes.

One villager wearing a green apron knocks on the door to declare that Hilda has returned. She turns around in the doorway to step backwards. "H-hello, Hilda. I didn't see you there."

A young woman, perhaps slightly younger than Link but taller than she, with hair the colour of the starry night, the dye fading at the long fringe that reaches halfway down her back, her eyes crimson, her pointed ears parting her long and straight sidelocks, cut in a manner that makes her more resemble a princess from a storybook.

The woman bids Link and the gathered friends a hello, mentioning briefly the accordion-wielding rito man outside their door, and apologises to Ilia for having spent so long away from the ranch: she and her entourage uncovered a pack of horses mistreated by bokoblins and hastened to rescue them. "Thank you, as always, for coverin' for me, Lady Ilia." Hilda dips her head. "And welcome, traveller, to Telma Ranch."

"She'll not be staying long, Hilda, but I'd like to introduce you to my best friend, Link." Link attempts to beam at Hilda but solely manages an awkward sort of twitch of the lips, her expression blanked out from unease. Hilda extends her hand to shake Link's, or so Link thinks. When Link touches her own hand to Hilda's, Hilda draws Link in for a warm hug that leaves Link slightly dazed.

"A pleasure to meet you. Any friend of Lady Ilia's is a friend of mine'n always welcome to the ranch." Hilda grants Ilia a bow of the head. "I have to see to the rest of the village, but I'll be comin' by to chat tonight."

"You'd better. We're going to eat like kings."

Hilda chuckles into the back of her hand, her head thrown slightly up. "I look forward to that, then." She glances towards Ravio with a certain mischievous smirk. "And I'm surprised that you didn't come greet me as usual, Ravio."

Ravio glares at Link. "I was busy makin' sure this buddy here wasn't gonna tear up the town'n poison the old lady."

"I missed hearin' your song, my friend. Maybe you could play it for me later, then." Hilda winks at him while Ravio hikes his scarf up ever higher. With that, she excuses herself.

Ravio glares at Link through one open eye. "Not one word, buddy ole pal of mine, unless you're itchin' for the one-two."
Luda claps her hands. "No fighting around the bed."

Link asks Ilia what she can make for the feast of kings, and Ilia inquires back if Link wouldn't mind making food for the whole of the village. "You're acting like I'm leaving already," Link protests.

"Aren't you?" Ilia counters, something of a smirk curling up the corners of her toothless mouth. "I can tell you have places to be. When you've done what you have to do, then you can come back here and make me food all you want. Deal?"

She rests her forehead against Ilia's.

"Deal."

The talk turns to food. Link becomes more animated as she discusses what ingredients she has brought with her, how many villagers she can expect to feed, what they have in the village over the winter, and what the villagers prefer as far as their favourite foods go. Amid the discussion, with Luda serving once more as translator although Ilia notes that that Luda has done far more for Ilia today than warranted, Ilia suddenly reaches out for Link's hand.

"Link, you mentioned that you've been getting your memories back mostly from smelling things you've eaten before, haven't you?" Link bobs her head, then, realising that Ilia cannot see her, signs an affirmation into her palms. "Have you tried eating apple pie?"

Link touches her chin. "Not that I can remember."

"It was apple pie with nutmeg and cinnamon. No nuts. About this big, crimped prettier than I'd ever seen you do in Ordon." Link snorts back a laugh. When Ilia asks her to elaborate, Link talks of the Princess, and Ilia signs, very simply: "I knew there was no way you could've done that."

Link runs her fingers through her ponytail.

"Link...we don't have apples here in Telma Ranch, but. When you get the chance. Go to the Ash Swamp and eat some apple pie there. I hope that that'll trigger something. Maybe it won't. But maybe...maybe you'll remember more about the Calamity."

She nods. "Thank you."

They compile a menu, of mushroom stuffed goat for the main course, of chillfin trout and catfish fished from the wintered waters, of pickled fruits and vegetables from the harvest in the form of squash and pumpkin and huckleberries that Link hasn't had in months. Link bakes bread on Tabanch wheat and prepares dips of butter, of spinach, of Ordon cheese. She roasts and salts nuts; she makes creamy meat soup as Romani taught her, and ceviche, and pumpkin pie, and—for dessert—honey-glazed pancakes. She takes with her a pot of honey to nestle into her satchel. For when she next sees Cremia.

Over the feast, which has everyone crowding around Ilia's bed in a scene so reminiscent of when Link went to see Maryll that her heart pangs for the people she has lost and found again, Ilia introduces Link to the villagers as her friend. Thankfully she makes no mention of the former chosen hero, nor do Ravio or Luda, who merely send glances her way.

A strange status to have. Former chosen hero. She only ever hears about the ballads and the odes, and the legends and the songs, of the chosen heroes and their exploits, and never of what comes next, and never of those who may have failed.
The villagers welcome her. A friend to Ilia, a friend to all. Link learns each in turn by their favoured meals: the apothecary fond of butter-squash and her granddaughter—Irene, notes Ravio—who refuses to eat anything not garnished in green; Freedle the minstrel who challenges Kass to a competition while Link unsuccessfully attempts to divine his eating preferences until Ravio informs her Freedle eats beetles, for which—before Ravio's widened eyes—Link whips up a 'pecan' pie without any pecans at all; the carnivorous blacksmith, his carp-loving wife, and their son Gulley who asks Link for nothing but pumpkin pie; the shoemaker Rem, consumer of all mushrooms except for rushrooms, who falls asleep at the table; the botanist Blossom, a connoisseur of milk, and her arborist husband Bipin, for whom Link roasts sunflower seeds, their infant son too young to even know a world outside of his mother's milk; the scribe-in-training Osfala who haughtily announces he has eaten the last of the summer's apple preserves—to the foot-stamping anger of Ghanti the arrow-fletcher—before secretly passing a jar on to Link and requesting that she prepare something for Ghanti alone, lover of apples that she is; Eddo the beekeeper who begs for anything but honey; the gravekeeper Dampé and his cow-tending wife, both of whom gravitate towards steamed river snails; the carrot-munching scribe and his pilaf-prefering daughter Seres; the gardeners Maple and Holly—married three springs ago, says Ravio—who tell Link to prepare bird and rabbit, respectively, only to give their plates to one another at the banquet, realise that both had the same thought of requesting the other's favourite, and kiss so passionately over the table that Eddo complains they should get a room; Anju, tender of cucco, who kindly inquires if Link could avoid preparing any sort of fox, which prompts Link to assure her she hasn't even caught any, and for whom Link whisks up egg tart; the strict horse-training sisters Dina and Tina who flashily adjust their glasses between demands of a hearty milk stew and nothing else will do; Rosso, the stonemason, who slaps an entire boar on the table to Kass's staring and Link's delight; Pita and Wheaton the bread-bakers who thank Link for a chance to have someone else bake the bread; and so many more besides that Link's head spins to remember them all. If not for Ravio guiding her hand in his own stubborn way, the frantic process of finding food for all would have taken days upon days. Yet the boy, his arms folded over his chest, knows the villagers in and out. For Hilda: nutcake will do. For Luda: cucco liver mixed with rice. For himself: nothing.

"Nothing?"

"Nothin'," he insists, his scowl so deeply etched onto his features that Hilda warns him he'll get stuck that way, "but I s'pose if you fried up some rabbit with garlic'n a pinch of salt, I wouldn't say naw."

For the horses, Link stuffs pumpkin as she has for Ilia—the horse—so many times and cooks molasses biscuits for dessert. The biscuits prove popular with the villagers, too. Link starts to apologise to Ilia, for the hardness of the biscuits, but Ravio shoves a glass of milk her way.

"Dip 'em in. Soften 'em up. Don't you go lookin' at me like that. It's for the old lady's sake."

"Thank you, Ravio," Ilia signs, accepting the milk-damp biscuit. "And thank you, Link, for the meal."

Link ducks her head. "It's not half as good as it would've been if you'd made it with me," she confesses.

Ilia snorts. "Good thing I didn't help, then, because I'm pretty sure this food's so good it could convince the Calamitous One to leave forever in exchange for a single bite."

Afterwards, Link helps clean up, as does Ravio, who appears to compete with her on just who can be the more helpful. Link allows him his victory. He sticks his tongue out at her.
And then his hand, holding the ocarina.

Grinding out a *khuh* in his throat, Ravio looks away. "Don't you go sayin' anythin'. The old lady's puttin' me us to this. You're just *borrowin' it*, got it? Try anythin', and I'll hunt ya down myself." He gyrates his hand. Link takes the ocarina into hers.

Though time has worn away the painting and the carving of the seagull, Link can still trace her fingertip over her sister's name in the wood, over the slightly uneven holes that Marin spent so long carving out for her.

"*Thank you, Ravio. When I come back next, I'll make something of your favourites.*"

Ravio scowls at her. "Don't you go sayin' things like that." He puts a hand over his belly. "S'a cheap shot to go after someone's stomach."

Link laughs a light little laugh. "*Thank you for the ocarina.*"

He pulls the hood down over his head and walks off, scuffling the floorboards with his boots, Zeffa nuzzling his face with her beak.

Link buffs out a spot on the table until her wrist begins to pain, and then a few minutes longer. She hears Ilia rustle on the bed.

Ilia.

Ilia Ilia Ilia.

"*Link...*" she says, when Link sits down by her bed at last, with a certain air of finality that chokes the dust in Link's throat. "I don't know when you'll return." Ilia laughs, very faintly; Link's heart wrenches. "but whenever you do, bring some apples. I want to taste that pie again. And...just in case I don't get to do so. I love you, Link. You're my best friend. Don't forget that. Good-bye, Link."

"...*see you later, Ilia.*" The words on her fingers. She does not need to say them for Ilia to read them. "*I love you too.*"

By the golden light of sunset, she and Kass once more head out with Ilia, formerly Gull, at their side. First: the remainder of the shrines. Then: perhaps a visit to Kakariko.

Last: the Ash Swamp. To eat apple pie. Where she may have died.

But now she lives.

Now she lives, and she travels with her companions, and she waves back at Telma Ranch even if Ilia cannot leave her bed to see her off.

She clasps her hands together, fingers intertwined, to plead of the Golden Goddesses. Let Ilia still live when she returns. Let Ilia still live to share another meal, to slurp another stew, to say another *I love you."

If not, then...

"*Thank you for letting me see her one last time,*" she signs, and she prays, hope beyond hope, that the Golden Goddesses can read the honesty on her fingertips.
**Tough Pumpkin Stew** (six hearts, low defense boost for 05:20) - armoured carp, fortified pumpkin, goat butter, fresh milk, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Ilia losing her memories and being taken care of by an elderly woman with twenty cats is in reference to Impaz from *Twilight Princess*. The cutscene where the 'spaghetti Western'-style music plays while Link is about to go talk to every cat in Old Kakariko is one of the funniest moments in any *Zelda* game. I think the funniest (thinking about the 3D titles only) to me is the 'Link looks at the bathroom' gag from *Skyward Sword*, but that's because I was literally yelling "We can finally take care of the bathroom ghost!" not two seconds before Link did so in-game.

The whole bit about Link having nearly died due to guardians on Ash Swamp and about Fort Hateno are pulled directly from *Breath of the Wild*, as well as Calamity Ganon showing up right after Zelda came down from Mount Lanayru (Mount Nayru in *Delicious in Wilds*).

Ilia being worried about Link deafening herself with her own screams is a nod to Ghirahim's similar but much more malicious line in *Skyward Sword*.

Regarding the capitalisation of names such as 'the Princess', 'the Castle', or 'the King', I used capitalisation to indicate *how the character thinks*. Link refers to Zelda (at the moment) as the Princess with a capital *P*, while Ilia refers to her as 'the princess' and nothing more.

People moving from western Faron to eastern Central Hyrule to establish a village there is something that I brought up all the way back in the twenty-ninth chapter!

Adopted families? Important to me. You *bet* that Telma was important as fuck to Ilia, and you *bet* that Ilia is going to honour Telma's memory.

Link's a traveller by blood, but that doesn't mean that she wants to travel aimlessly. She's got adventure in the heart, but she also has a space around the hearth. As Ilia says, she doesn't have to give up one or the other; she just needs to find someone who understands.

The villagers from Telma Ranch are a mish-mash from various games. There's, of course, Ravio and Hilda from *A Link Between Worlds*. Beyond that: Syrup and Irene are from *A Link Between Worlds*, and the latter's love of green is in reference to her having been prophesied to assist one in green; Freedle is a minstrel from *Phantom Hourglass*; Gulley and the blacksmith family are likewise from *A Link Between Worlds*; Rem is the sleepy shoemaker from *The Minish Cap* awoken in-game with the assistance of a mushroom; Blossom, Bipin, and his son are from *Oracle of Ages* and *Oracle of Seasons*, where they indeed are tree experts; Osfala is one of the Seven Sages from *A Link Between Worlds*; Ghanti is a character from one of the A Link to the Past manga, where she ends up working in an apple orchard at the end of the story; Eddo is from *Phantom Hourglass*, who creates an anti-bee bug spray in the manga; Dampé is the gravekeeper from *Ocarina of Time* who, if I remember correctly,
is mentioned having a wife in Majora's Mask, although he also appears in subsequent titles including Four Swords Adventures; Seres and her father take care of the Sanctuary from A Link Between Worlds; Maple and Holly are named for Maple, the witch, and Holly, the girl who mistakes Link for a chimney sweep, from Oracle of Ages and Oracle of Seasons; Anju is the cucco lady from Ocarina of Time who reappears in other games, including The Minish Cap, and whose comment about foxes is in reference to her love interest Kafei from Majora’s Mask; Tina and Dina are from The Minish Cap; Rosso is also from A Link Between Worlds, and his asking Link to prepare pig is in reference to a certain non-Zelda film released the year after the initial release of A Link to the Past; and Pita and Wheaton are bread-bakers from The Minish Cap. Wew!

Up next: the road-trip, continued; me cheating slightly on the chapter title between the gourmet and non-gourmet version of a dish are absolutely treated as separate recipes in the game; a return to a place Link has not been in over a year; Link's anger; the beginning of the truth.

midna's ass. 02 November 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Ilia! Ilia! She's alive! Getting to see her and talk to her and know her name again is so cathartic and incredible.

Having some context for what happened during the Calamity is super cool, as well.

Emma. 03 November 2017.
Enduring Gourmet Poultry Pilaf

Chapter Summary

Having learned of the chef's mortal injury and reunited with the girl who smells of horses, the travelling chef and the travelling minstrel continue their quest for shrines, before the chef decides to visit the not-so-wise matriarch of Kakariko again.

Chapter Notes

As per usual, author's notes that didn't fit in the ending: I started writing this chapter at 02:48 on the eighth of August, and finished writing it on at 04:04 on the ninth of August.

Thanks a million for everything that you all have done for me in your continual support of Delicious in Wilds and in your continual understanding of my hiatuses. You, the reader, are what has transformed Delicious in Wilds from merely text in my computer to a story unto itself. Meals are meant to be shared; stories, to be read.

Last time that Link was at Romani Ranch back in the sixty-fourth chapter, Malon gave her a Faronese-Central Hyrulean dictionary!

Holothurians, by the way, are just sea cucumbers. Although they're marine organisms in real life, freshwater sea cucumbers are a delicacy in Holodrum.

Orude Inn is in reference to the Twilight Princess inn of Kakariko Village, called "Elde Inn" in the English translation, although you can still see the name Orude Inn written in hylian characters in the game textures. This is somewhat like how the English translation of the sign in front of Link's house in Breath of the Wild says "Link's house", but the actual sign says "Master Link", and writes Bolson's Japanese name (in the hylian alphabet) in the corner rather than "Bolson".

-boldon and -guron are common name endings, more common among Akkalan gorons than Eldic gorons. As children, those with -boldon name endings are often referred to as -by, such as Ogbolden to Ogby. In Breath of the Wild, one of the goron children in Goron City is named Dugby; his full name is thus Dugboldon. When gorons become adults, they either go by their full names, or simply use the shorter 'Boldon'. Those whose named end in -guron are likewise nicknamed -gy, so Vulguron was nicknamed Vulgy as a kid. Different goron societies have different ideas of coming of age, even within Eldin and Akkala. However, if generalisations have to be made, then in Akkala before the Great Calamity, goron children typically had to undergo some sort of feat of power or strength—but one that assists the community, rather than one that is destructive—to claim the right to use their full, adult name. In Eldin, the coming of age is more usually about the creation of a masterwork or some other constructive project and is typically sold for a high price.

Lake Moruge is named for Moruge Swamp from The Adventure of Link and replaces Lake Akkala. Also damn were the writers of Breath of the Wild lazy with some of their names! Stop with the Lake Akkala, the Mount Lanayru, the Hebra Summit! Stooooop!
Life goes on.

It startles Link how easily life goes on. Back she goes to travelling, to life on the road, to looking forward to each shrine, to considering the meal that she shall make next. Yet here, moving north towards Eldin and Akkala, she senses them converging very rapidly upon the end of their road.

Kass teaches Link songs upon the ocarina. Epona's song; Iliia's whistle, more appropriately named than Link ever knew; melodies like the Ballad of the Wind Fish or the main chorus of the Ballad of the Sealing War. He endeavours to impart how to read sheet music, but the lessons fly over Link's head in squiggles of lines and notes. Studying the Faronese-Central Hyrulean dictionary proves its own difficulty. Kass knows enough Faronese to converse with her in it, and so she uses him to practise the language, both spoken and signed.

Little by little, Link forces herself to learn how to read Faronese. First the characters, and then the words, sounding them slowly out to herself. The letters swim through her mind to rearrange themselves on the page before her. She doesn't have Iliia to read to her anymore. Yet Link does have Iliia, the horse, to nuzzle the back of her head while she struggles through teaching herself Faronese.

Where they walk, now, Kass and Link hear news of the sword that seals the darkness, of the Champions seeking to find a bearer of the blade of evil's bane. They meet travellers who have tried their luck, hylian and non-hylian alike, some shrugging as if to say that they expected nothing different, some vehemently and bitterly complaining about the journey through the lost woods and the subsequent pain until attempting to draw the sword, some cursing out the Goddesses, some asking Link for seconds of that soup and also could they have another roll of bread, pretty please.

Link and Kass loop close to the lost woods, picking off the shrines along the banks of the lake. At the bridge of land that connects the lost woods to western Eldin, they find a small village having grown up by the entrance to the woods. Link briefly sees Yunobo, Riju, and Sarie again, who comment that they have not yet found a bearer of the sword that seals the darkness.

Yunobo taps his index fingers against one another. "M-maybe the Calamitous One isn't coming after all."

Riju, speaking Eldic, continually neglects to remember to say goro in indication of the fullstops in her speech. When Yunobo corrects her, she thanks him, says goro for the next few sentences, and then again leaves out the peculiar quirk of the Eldic language. Link takes the opportunity to introduce Riju and Yunobo to Kass; she requests that they do not speak of Amali, lest Kass's discovery knock him from his talons. Nor of her own status, as the girl who could not draw the blade of evil's bane.

When Kass inquires if Link wishes to attempt to draw the sword that seals the darkness, she hides her answer in stuffed cheeks of meat and mushroom skewer. Riju rubs her shoulder.

Kass mentions a shrine possibly located in the lost woods. He posits the question to Sarie, who admits that they do not remember. With a heaviness to her heart, Link kneels by Sarie's side, forming the question on her fingertips: if she can play the ocarina for her forgetful friend.

And then she suggests to Kass that they find the shrine within the lost woods last, if such a shrine
exists at all. Quietly and without protest he agrees.

North of the lost woods, Link and Kass travel to the largest settlement in the province of Holodrum: a village settled chiefly by rito, sheikah, and gorons, labelled Horon by the maps yet—confusingly—going by the alternate Rosia in song. "The ancient verses must have been written long, long ago." Kass considers aloud while Link peruses the local delicacies of massive fungi and pale freshwater holothurians from which the province took its name.

"Perhaps Rosia has long sunk into the dust of history, as such things do, and Horon has taken her place." Yet no orange glow awaits them anywhere in Horon. The villagers indicate the same: no shrine. No such shrine has existed as long as those in Horon can remember, and yet neither do the monsters that Kass and Link encountered in the vicinity dare come near the village itself. She touches her chin; he hrms.

The caretakers of the massive tree that grows from the heart of Horon—which the villagers call Maku and take as their guardian deity, reminding Link of the light spirit Ordona protecting Her province—warn Link and Kass not to enter the ancient labyrinth of abandoned mines beneath the village proper, for fear of the tunnels' collapse.

Link proposes a trade: entrance to the ruins of the Thyphlo Mines, in exchange for an eight-course cooked by herself, personally. The meal sways them.

The descent into the bowels of the earth swallows Kass and Link into the darkness. The air sits so thick and musty that torches barely glow a few minutes prior to giving out. She feels as if she cannot pull in her breaths. When the muskiness fills her lungs at last, the dampness carries with it a sensation of crawling mould.

Kass attempts to enter the tunnels with her, yet his heart thumps so noisily in his chest that Link hears it, his breaths so shallow and grip so tight that she recognises the same signs as when she stands among a crowd.

"Wait outside. I'll explore it myself."

"Traveller—"

Link clenches his shoulder in her hands firmly enough for him to bow his head.

"...thank you, traveller."

She descends into a subterranean forest of overgrown fungus somehow sprouting within a tunnel network shrouded in the depths. The creatures slither slimy and pale: starry-nosed moles that root through the earth; eyeless fish mouth-gaping through pools of cool water; worms whose needle-like teeth seek to bore through the soles of her boots; fat-bodied holothurians oozing in puddles; bluish seeds or spores shaped like teardrops which Link discovers do not taste very palatable to the hylian tongue. Neither stasis nor magnesis helps much: the former struggles with discerning from the earth, and the latter washes everything in reddish-pink so bright her eyes burn.

Yet Link has her own secret weapon: the fishing pole Sidon gave her, aglow with luminous stone. She waves it about like a divining rod. A series of strange hawk-like statues point her the way. The hawk. A mark of the Goddess Din, Link remembers. Even still, she sees no further than about an arm's-length from her own face. She winds her way through the darkness. One statue to another. Following where the hawks gaze. Pausing to boil and snack on holothurians. Discovering that she knows not how to prepare holothurians, for they taste tasteless at best and far-too-fishy at worst. Winding further through the darkness.
Past a statue larger than the others, a snare of roots trips her; she eats a faceful of dirt.

Roots.

Her head snaps up. The light of the fishing pole reveals roots thicker than her waist, vanishing down into the ground and top into the ceiling of the tunnels. The tree. *The tree at the heart of Horon.*

Link feels her way around the roots. Insects crawl over her hands; splinters wedge into her palms. An opening at the base hints faintly at something amber within. Amber. Gold. *Orange.*

The slate sings to sapphire the shrine guarded by the tree's roots. Link crawls out from the opening on her hands and knees. The soil clings moistly to her clothing.

The moment she exits the tunnels, she drops into the grass and rolls around, breathing in the freshness of the air and the liveliness of the green.

The Horonese inquire all about her adventure. Link explains over silent shroom-holothurian stew. The longer she signs, the more Kass's feathers fluff up, until his surprise has left him like a loaf of wheat overpuffed with too much yeast. "When I called Rosia sunk into the dust, I did not think it literal." Link giggles.

She and Kass wave good-bye to the villagers of Horon. The caretakers bestow upon Link luminous stones as thanks; she tries to give them back, but Kass politely notes that returning a gift would incur nothing short of an insult to the people of Holodrum. And so he and Link depart in the direction of the sunrise.


The gradual approach of spring lifts the veil of snow from the ground, particularly in the western Akkala warmed by heat from the mountainside. Towards the heart of Akkala, she encounters a conflict she cannot solve with food alone: an elderly Oracle of Din has long cared for the shrine that once protected the mining village of Kagoro before the Great Calamity led to the desertion of Golo Province. None but the previous Oracles and their rock-hewn sons in turn has lived by the shrine for almost a century. A little than two years ago, when the shrine in Hateno glimmered a sapphire blue—Kass arches an eyebrow at Link, who rubs the back of her head—the Necludans took that as a sign that the Seven wished them to expand once more. Nearly overnight a wave of hylian and sheikah settlers, intent on establishing a town under the protection of the shrine, arrived with iron sledgehammers, with woodcutters' axes, and with the banner of the Seven, a Sage of Hylia already arrived and a Sage of Sheik sent for from the monasteries of Necluda. The Sage and the settlers wish to build a Temple of the Seven around the shrine as they have done in so many towns of Necluda.

The Oracle of Din will have none of it.

"Tarrey Town," they say.

"A blasphemy against the Mountain Goddess," rumbles the Oracle of Din.

"A waste of a shrine if none may live around it!" butts in the would-be mayor.

"Not for you to decide," snaps the Oracle, "you who cannot consume the earth the Goddess has given us."

"As the Goddess Goro-goro has gifted you the consumption of stone," mediates the Sage of Hylia,
"so has O our Goddess Hylia and the Goddess Sheik gifted us the consumption of fibre and flesh."

"We have no need of Goro-goro," the Oracle rebuffs, "and you have no need to mine for that which you do not need to live."

Kass endeavours to negotiate access to the shrine. The revelation of the slate in Link's possession thrusts the decision onto her shoulders: the family of the Oracle pleading that she save the memory of Kagoro they have worked so hard to preserve, the settlers begging that she grant them to live within the village they have worked so hard to found.

Link whips her head so swiftly between them, her heartbeat thumping in her temples, her innards reaching up to grab her by the throat, that she comes to at nightfall. A slumbering Kass perches on an overturned log by her bedside, having evidently fallen asleep playing the accordion, the instrument in danger of falling from his lap. After several moments of panic, Link learns from the receptionist that she has graciously been allowed to stay at the Orude Inn free-of-charge. "I hope," the receptionist notes, "that, on the morrow, you will settle this matter in the most manner most conducive to the preciousness of life, O bearer of the slate."

Head pounding and stomach thoroughly vacant, she returns to her room. As Link scrounges through the box of ingredients in her satchel, seeking something to fill up her rumbling belly, she hears the quietest Akkalan hello behind her: a goron boy, no older than twelve. The Oracle's son.

Link invites him to cook with her; he bites his lower lip—or whatever the gorons have instead—and agrees. Ogby, he calls himself, short for Ogboldon. His father: Vulguron. He demonstrates the preparation of tar-and-clay spread on luminous stone she has kept from their adventures in Subrosia. She offers her jar of mixed Eldic spices, observing that, despite the differences in diet between gorons and humans, they can share an adoration of many of the same flavours.

Ogby asks what she plans to do about the shrine, about Kagoro, about the people. Link throws herself into steam-softening the salted rabbit jerky she prepared for herself and Kass some days before. The decision. The decision that she does not know how to make.

"What would you do," Ogby signs, his movements slower than a child's should be, "if your home village were in ruins, and those from a far-away land had come to build their homes on top?"

What would Link have done if she had met the ruins of Ordon with a town sprung about, a town of people she had never known, a town of those who worshipped deities she knew even less, a town whose inhabitants had never known the spirit Ordana, a town whose inhabitants had never thanked the Golden Goddesses?

Even if they could make catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd from the catfish and cheese and pumpkin from the river and the goats and the wood she knew, would that catfish, and would that cheese, and would that pumpkin still taste of Ordon?

Link asks him: "What would you do, if you were me?"

Ogby scratches his head. "What do I know? I'm just a kid. And I guess I thought you'd be some wise hero, but you're just a bigger kid."

She licks her mouth free of rabbit.

When morning comes, Kass quietly suggests that they sneak out in the wee hours, take to the shrine, and spirit themselves away before the settlers and Oracle awaken. But Link puts on her boots for a different purpose: she has a decision to make.
Link gathers them at the front of the shrine: the Oracle, his son, the would-be mayor, the Sage of Hylia, the settlers.

"It's not for me to decide," she starts immediately, shutting her eyes and blocking out everyone around her, focusing entirely on the motions of her hands, even as the crowd jeers and the Oracle half-groans, "because I'm no chosen hero. But you've asked me, so I'll do something."

Kass's accordion wheezes out a note.

"Oracle," Link says, "the number of monsters are growing higher every day. Let them live near the shrine for the protection of their lives. Watch over them, so that they don't misuse the land that the people of Kagoro loved, but don't turn the land that the people of Kagoro loved into a graveyard alone."

The settlers murmur in approval; the Oracle's features grow weary.

"Necludans," she says, "this isn't the place for the Seven. This is the land of the Goddess Din. Respect that. Don't build a temple over the shrine; let the Oracle of Din care for the shrine. And I think survivors from over Akkala will come when you build the town, people and families who are looking to get away from the monsters, you know? Welcome them. You can live there, but don't mine the ore sacred to the followers of Din."

The Oracle bows his head; the mayor's fingers curls into a fist.

"If the monster problem disappears," Link finishes, "you all can go elsewhere when you don't need the shrine anymore. Oracle, I'm sure the people of the Goddess are still out there, and you'll find them again. I know Akkala was hit hard. I was from here, too. But somehow, somehow, we'll endure. I know it." She attempts a smile, but her expression comes out vacant as her cooking pot. "And I'm sure that the Golden Goddess would've want you to show them hospitality."

The settlers nearly advance forward; the Oracle of Din and Kass move forward in front of Link at the same time, and the Sage of Hylia claps her hands, stopping the hylians and sheikah in their tracks.

Link saddles Ilia amid profanities hurled her by the masses. Kass loudly plays the accordion, but she can hear their accusations well enough.

She takes the Oracle of Din and the Sage of Hylia with her into the shrine. The shrine forces her to do battle against a guardian whose legs she cleaves with the sword Riju gave her and whose eye she gouges out with an arrow.

The instructions speak of combat. The Sage and the Oracle study them. Link says nothing; she tucks the slate away into its pouch at her right hip. Only a shrine, and nothing more.

When the crisp air of the Akkalan winter-spring once more fills her lungs, the Oracle and the Sage thank her for having shown them the shrine. The Oracle retires to his study in the dusted-over mines; the Sage, to her miniature temple in the midst of the town.


She declines. "I wouldn't know what to do with it," Link responds, her hands twitching in their haste to return to the saddling, "and even if I did, I don't deserve it."

She overturns her satchel of gems gathered from tali and pebblits. Ogby will have more use for
them than she.

"For what it's worth," notes Kass, in a more somber timbre than usual upon their departure, the shrine sloping away to the south and their destination to the north, "I thought that was very good, and you did the best that you could."

Link shakes her head.

"This world," he goes on, "is much vaster and more complicated than one might hope it to be. Though I wish every conflict were as black and white as that of the Calamitous One, whereupon all of O Our Hyrule may unite as one against a common enemy, there exist not easy answers for all of the calls of life."

Link's fingers curl inwards. Ilia noses her ear as if sensing her distress. "I feel like there's something else I could do. Or something else I should say. Or...or something, instead of just moving on."

He inclines his head. "I understand. Yet this is not your battle to fight. Neither you nor I know enough to come to any more of a decision than you already have."

"But..."

"We can serve them best by preventing another Great Calamity, and for that, we may yet activate the shrines." Kass clears his throat. "I wonder what's for supper."

The words vanish from her fingers. She makes them a meal of chillfin trout caught from the cool waters of Lake Moruge and retires early for the night. In the morning Link faces forward to the distant horizon. Shrines and shrines yet to go.

Further north, they chance upon another laboratory, or something like it. Link and Kass take one look at the legless guardians stationed as sentries around the laboratory and, whistling, turn to walk the other way. No shrine, no problem.

Off the coast, they encounter a labyrinth even larger than those that they observed in the Hebric cold or the Parapan heat. Link asks Kass to merely fly them over the walls, as this labyrinth has no roof. Kass takes up his accordion and proposes they walk, to fulfill the traditional purpose of the labyrinth, meant as an exercise for the chosen hero.

Link keeps her right hand against the right wall at all times. With her winning strategy of walking through the entire labyrinth, she expects to—no matter how long it takes—find the shrine. When she finds herself back at the entrance, she turns imploringly towards Kass.

He sighs. "Poets should not write whilst inebriated, and heroes should not face trials whilst...lazy," he remarks, a hint of amusement twinkling his eye. She rubs her nose. "That put to word, I suppose that neither you nor I is the chosen hero. Flying it is."

Link claps her hands together. "It was either that or my foolproof fall-back plan: bombs!"

Kass attempts to fly. They crash into a wall—his flight feathers not yet grown in—and it dawns upon Link that certain parts of the walls seem rather metallic. A brief application of magnesis opens the path. They activate the shrine with ease, descending in the lift and ascending once more. A dip in the earth intrigues Link's sensibilities. She explores the underground cavern, her paraglider in hand.

A sea of guardians and their beams of light greet her. She leaves the underground cavern, her paraglider in hand, the seat of her trousers rather singed.
With the arrival of spring comes, simultaneously, the arrival of Kass's moult. One moment his body is feathered in shades of blue and white and gold, and the next Link awakens next to a plucked cucco shivering in the chill. She throws extra blankets over them both and cuddles up. With his permission, she collects the feathers in her satchel, for lining her tunic again, or making blankets, or for whatever else they might need. Kass sings especially loudly and melodiously while his feathers grow back in as if endeavoring to draw attention from the nakedness of his skin.

"Embarrassed? No, no, traveller. I appreciate the concern. Moulting is a perfectly natural process. Without it, we would not have the feathers upon which parts of our crafts so depend." Kass keeps the accordion case in his lap to hunch behind it. "I feel no shame whatsoever. Such is how the Goddess Erito made us, after all." His cheeks have darkened. When Link inquires how long the growth takes, he squawks prior to clearing his throat and composing himself. "Merely a few weeks, traveller. Say, traveller, care you for a meal? I think I would care for a meal about now."

She busies her hands making mushroom-stuffed steamed porgy.

Along the northwestern edge of Akkala, Link scopes a shrine in one of the towering pillars that make up the eyes of the aptly named Skull Lake, its skull-like shape presumably more visible overhead. Kass, unable to fly, proposes that they return later. Link shrugs and steps foot off of the cliffs, the paraglider spread above her.

She lands halfway down the pillar. Link climbs while the strains of Kass's accordion encourage her on. Once she has nearly scaled the peak, she turns her gaze down towards the seemingly bottomless lake that plunges away beneath her boots. And then it begins to rain.

Link spends several hours clinging to the slippery rock, her muscles increasingly ached and straining, the rain chilling down the back of her spine and soaking her through to the bone. She rests her cheek against the rock, shuddering on the pillar, until the curtain of rain parts overhead. The wind around her tugs upwards on her tunic, the breeze urging her skyward.

She listens to the accordion stop. Link gazes up above her: a serpent of gold and scarlet winds in the clouds overhead, flames flickering around its body. She fights between the compulsion to stare and the compulsion to look away.

Then Link leaps from the pillar and opens the paraglider. The updraft sings her upwards towards the serpent soaring through the skies. She hears Kass's shouting behind her, the wind at her back. Riding the current up, Link keeps her focus trained upon the serpent as it loops through the clouds. Closer, and closer, until the inferno that burns around the serpent swelters Link's body, like she had just eaten spicy pepper curry while also spontaneously becoming a korok.

When her clothing does, indeed, catch on fire, she realises that she cannot move any closer. Looping her right arm through the wooden supports of the paraglider, Link snaps a pictograph with her left. And then she tries to sign at the serpent. The serpent either does not see her or ignores her. She reaches into her satchel, pulling out a fish skewer prepared earlier for breakfast and now serving as an offering, as a supplication. When Link rears her arm back to chuck the skewer as hard as she can against the serpent's face in the hopes that it snatches the food from the air, she realises all too late that the flames will burn the fish up, leaving nothing but the bone skewer itself to pierce the serpent's hide.

Link swallows as she watches the sharp skewer connect with the scales of the serpent's maw. Feeding a serpent while airborne on its updraft—she discovers upon that fateful day—does not present the simplest task in the entire world. She closes her paraglider, intent on veering earthbound before the serpent can enact its revenge.
The serpent, instead of noticing her, continues to glide away. Yet she notices it curl inwards on itself and touch its face with its taloned paw. A shimmering golden light drops away from the unwinding serpent that resumes its almost melodic undulations through the air. A scale. A scarlet scale, glinting golden in the light.

Link widens her eyes. She tracks it as she would track a droplet of honey cascading through the heavens, as she would track a buttered slice of bread to snatch it from mid-air.

Tunic aflame, Link dives through the air after the scale, the paraglider closed tight against her body. Her fingers do not close around it—her hand missing—but her teeth do. She snags the scale in her mouth, her jaws vibrating in pain, as she forces open the paraglider again a few metres above the water.

She crashes through the thin layer of ice over the waves. The water of Skull Lake freezes Link into a hylian-shaped ice sculpture clenching a very shiny centrepiece between her teeth. At least the frigid cold puts out the flames. Link treads water. She spits the scale into her palm.

When Link holds it in her hand she can feel a mild tingle of heat, a soft warming of an ember. Even in the frost of the water.

She attempts to clamber onto the surface of the ice yet finds that the impossibly thin layer does not support her weight. After several repeated clamberings on ice and crashes back into the water, Link makes it to the banks of the lake.

Climbing back up takes the better whole of the night. By the time Kass grips her hand to drag her up over the cliff’s edge, pleading with her to tell him if she’s all right, Link signs something about hunger and curls up into a ball of exhaustion. She awakens to the scent of burning fish.

"I...hope that it’s not too terrible," Kass tries.

In her present state, Link could eat raw ore and find it agreeable, if difficult to chew. She wolfs down the fish, ashes and all, and pats her stomach when she finishes. "I owe you my life."

"You're safe now, traveller." He wipes his brow, feathered in stubby down. "Please...please refrain from doing that again."

"I'll try," Link says, and she means it, just as she also completely means once more paragliding onto the pillar and squirreling up the stone to the shrine. Eyes on the prize, and prize on the eye. Of Skull Lake. She'll have to tell Romani that one when she returns.

Link returns down from the shrine on the pillar of Skull Lake. Kass awaits her with his fingers steepled under his beak. "So much for refraining from doing that again."

She cocks her head. ".I thought you meant refraining from eating burnt fish."

Kass and Link move south. They pass by ruins of villages in the wilderness where no shrine has protected them, hearths ashen and cold, once proud walls collapsed and streaked with ivy, wells filled with dirt and mud, fences long since fallen save for metal posts that have bent and broken with age, the decaying remains of arrows and swords rusted through detailing where once the people of the land had fought for their lives and lost, moblins and lizalfos nesting where once lived those with whom Link could have shared a meal over the rim of her cooking pot.

They continue south. Link and Kass reach the Spring of Power, where she tucks from her pocket the scale given to her by the serpent, via the skewer. It *plinks* into the water and reveals the shrine.
She pats the cooking pot on her back in thanks for having saved her yet again.

In Medigo, Kass and Link purchase fireproof elixirs from Gaile, who has since become promoted from mere stablehand to the vice stablehand in charge of all other stablehands. Link leaves Ilia in the stable, begging her for forgiveness at having to part yet again, and off they go to Eldin. By the time they return from the swelter of Death Mountain—Link having made sapphire tart for Jibo and Kragg in Zubora, whereupon they invited the zora geologists Tumot and Frillo to join them for poultry curry which Kass politely refused; having thanked Donte and Fernok from Gabora for their assistance in her quest to Darunia; having prepared deliciously grilled rock roast for the surveyor with the scarlet tattoo of a mountain range over his abdomen that pushed her towards the northern mine, upon which he—introducing himself as Voji—says that he does not know whether he should laugh or cry that his efforts to trick a bothersome hylian tourist ended up saving Darunia; and having seen again the goron children, now adolescents in their own right, who ask her excitedly whether she has been arrested again since they last saw her—the winter has almost exhausted its long snowy fingers, and the fullness of spring blooms over the earth. The flowers unfurl to dissipate the sweetness of their scent. The grasses dance like waves upon the sea in the fragrant spring winds that roll over the lands from the south.

Kass's flight feathers grow in again. Link rides Ilia onto the fields while he soars through the air overhead. She listens to his joyous laughter ringing out among the clouds for flying once more. For a moment, with him soaring directly above her, their shadows merge into one, as if she and Ilia had together grown wings.

Link and Ksrest that night in sight of the Pillars of Levia. Marking down his notes, Kass considers which songs they have fulfilled and which they have yet to unravel. When Link glances over his shoulder, she finds herself peering at pages upon pages of songs with circles beside them to indicate that—to the best of his musings—they have found the shrine corresponding to the song. Kass counts out the shrines that they have scrawled onto Link's map, writing out each location upon a scroll. In the meanwhile, she prepares their dinner: a sunny-fish, her efforts at translating Hateno's signature dish into something palatable for the followers of Erito.

"And that, traveller, accounts for one hundred and eighteen shrines, and all of the towers known to me." Link and Kass exhale in unison, the latter rubbing his wings, the former her stomach. "If I had to hazard a guess, the only shrines that we have left to activate are likely to await us in the...lost woods, as you called them, and possibly...one near the ruins of the castletown, or in it. I suspect the Cathedral, but I am not certain. Perhaps we have missed one."

A drop of quiet. Link sets the braised Hyrule bass before Kass, who compliments the succulent flakiness of the fish contrasted against the savory warmth of the sunshroom stuffing.

"My personal recommendation—my, this is exquisite—is that we use this time to..." Kass trails off momentarily. "Traveller, was there not—and did you include walnuts, because this tastes divine?—a village that you wished to see?"

"A village?" Lifting her chin, Link glances at the Pillars of Levia. "...mm."

"If the village is nearby, then—ah, could I get another portion, and thank you kindly, traveller—you should take your visit now, I think. For our next two destinations may prove a melody of malice, a cadenza of Calamity, a symph—may I have a third, traveller?"

Link laughs lightly. When her gaze once more falls upon the Pillars of Levia, the mirth ebbs from her tongue.
Kakariko. When last Link entered Kakariko, the world cusped on the fullness of the autumn, yet for once the harvest did not buoy her spirits. With Amali's signs before her eyes and Saki's voice within her ears, she had come to Kakariko with her decision already half-made.

The last vestiges of the autumn laboured to keep their hold over the earth a little longer. Lady Impa's refusal to answer about Aryll's whereabouts—her refusal to tell Link the truth—gave up up the final breath of warmth, choking the wilds, and her own heart, in frost.

Yet she has changed since then. She has changed, and no longer can Lady Impa's words of a prophecy, or of a hero chosen by Goddesses, or of what she must do with the slate, hurt her.

And she has something else now on her side, that she did not have all those months and months ago.

"I guess I should. I mean, I've got a secret weapon now."

"A...secret weapon?" Kass echoes, brow furrowed.

Link rubs the back of her head. "The quickest way to someone's heart is through their stomach, right? The last time I went to Kakariko, I...I don't want to say I got in a fight with someone, exactly, but I said some things I probably shouldn't have, I think. And I don't know how welcome I'll be in Kakariko after all of that." She props her chin up on her elbow. "It all turned out all right, in a way, with Parapa and Lanayru and now all of this, but...I haven't been there in..." She counts on her fingers. "...nearly a year and a half."

"Then...you've been away for longer than you visited there after having lost your memories, from what I understand." Link nods. Kass shifts his feathers over the manuals of his accordion. "A difficult situation, to be sure. However, if anyone is capable of building a bridge over a divide as vast as the Tanagar Canyon twice over, it's you, traveller." His expression softens. "Well, you and that cooking pot of yours. I wouldn't want to leave out our wonderful friend, now would I?"

"...that's my secret weapon. I remembered what her favourite food is." Link runs her fingers through one of her sidelocks. "As long as I have that, I can't fail, can I? I just have to...make it right."

"Oh?" He leans in, his irises sparked in the most universal emotion: hunger. "And what favourite food might this be?"

She ducks her head. "It's pilaf. cucco pilaf. I'm...I'm sorry. Wait. cucco can't fly, right? Do they still...count...?"

"They have wings," Kass says gently. "They're still birds." He pauses. "And they can certainly glide."

"Oh." She looks down at her boots. "I...I'm sorry."

He reaches for her hand. His fingers brush silken over her knuckles. "There's no need to apologise, traveller. I...must thank you. I have dedicated my life to the learning and passing on of the songs of the great land of Hyrule. I believed, as did my mentor before me, and as did his father before him, that music weaved the tapestry of Hyrule's history. Almost every hero of every era has, after all, relied in some part upon music.

"From our most ancient saga passed down with infinite variations in nearly every region of the land, of the hero whose recorder, or flute, or ocarina revealed stairways and passages long hidden away by a magicked touch...to the Hilted Singer and the hero wielding the eight-stringed harp of
the Goddess Hylia...from the hero who moved the very fabric of the Goddess Nayru's flow upon the ocarina in Her colours...to the hero in whose time this land of Hyrule was established from our ancestors' voyage across the oceans of the world, who conducted the winds themselves to sing..."

Kass sets his fingers down upon the manual keys. A gentle push of the wind evokes an arpeggio from the accordion bellows which hums the air prior to falling still and silent once more, as a single ripple in the surface of a lake will calm its surface.

"I believed that, in music, we could find the purest and clearest expressions of our feelings, of our histories, of who we are and will be." He strokes the tip of his beak a moment before continuing. "I do not think music any less important now, no. Yet I see..." His voice softens. "...that I have neglected much else of what else ties together the lands of O Our Hyrule, O Kingdom Blessed by Three."

Kass clears his throat. "I...am not ashamed to admit my errors. I have spent so much of my life living in a world of music that I have forgotten the existence of other worlds beyond. Music alone does not connect all of the people of O Our Hyrule.

"Thank you for reminding me. Thank you, traveller, for you and your cooking pot. For your patience. For your efforts to link everyone that you meet across the mouth of that cooking pot you bear as heavily as any destiny or fate upon the shoulders of any hero. As snails carry their homes upon their backs, so do you. A home that you bring everywhere, a home that you bring everyone."

Link watches him, not knowing what to do with her hands or her body, and settles for reaching for his hands. He takes hers into his and squeezes, once.

"Thank you, traveller. For allowing me to travel alongside you, and for every meal that you have ever cooked me, the delicious as well as the dubious."

She smiles sheepishly. "Even with all the times I nearly got you or me or both of us killed?"

"Even, traveller," Kass affirms, his features drawn into an expression of tender warmth that reminds Link of how Buliara looks at Riju, or Dorian at Cottla and Koko, or Amali at her daughters, "with all of the times that you have, as you so eloquently signed, nearly got me or you or both of us killed. Traveller...is it all right if I hug you?"

Link nods. He folds her into an embrace so warm and so soft that she closes her eyes and presses her face into the gentleness of his gossamer wings.

She could slumber here, safe from the evening chill, lulled by the steadiness of someone there for her. And she does.

When Link comes to, the stars have risen, and she finds herself tucked into a blanket of feathers, blue and white and gold. Something strokes her head. She looks up, realising that her head rests in Kass's lap, his hand absentmindedly petting her hair, himself reading from a scroll with a warmth in his golden eyes. The trail of his feathers tickles her nose. Link sneezes.

"Good evening, traveller," Kass says, a sparkle of amusement in his timbre. "You can go back to sleep. You've had a very long two years, haven't you? You can let yourself rest a while longer."

"But I have..."

"...promises to keep, and paths to walk before you sleep?" he finishes. She nods her head against his abdomen. "My mentor's father scribed that poem, about the lost woods in which he nearly lost himself as a youth. Lovely, dark and deep. From where did you learn that verse?"
"...I don't remember," Link says; at least she speaks truthfully.

"If ever you do..." Kass brushes her bangs from her forehead. "...I would be grateful if you could tell me. Now, good night, traveller. Allow me to sing you a lullaby. The least that I can do for everything that you have done for me, and mine." Her eyelids lower. His voice drifts her to sleep.

Then: to Kakariko. From a travelling merchant en route to the village, Link barter away a nutcake, a white wolfos pelt, a jar of bari jelly, a collection of daira carnissials, a handful of furnix feathers, and several octorok balloons and acquires a the most succulent cucco—and a carton of eggs—the merchant carries. The merchant waves her good-bye.

When the merchant leaves, Kass emerges from hiding behind Ilia, his flight feathers grown in but his stubbier down still revealing unsightly patches of bare skin. Link giggles.

"Perfectly natural, and nothing to be ashamed of," Kass insists, although she cannot tell if he speaks more to her or to himself.

He and Link travel on. Kass admits that he cannot bear to look upon the cucco, happy and alive, knowing that it will soon turn to pilaf. She rolls her shoulders: life comes from food. One day, she, too, will turn to food, for someone or for something else, the fungi or the grasses, the wolves or the earth itself.

Link sharpens the edge of Riju's blade upon a whetstone, then prepares the cucco a final meal of grain and seed before decapitating the fowl in a single stroke to leave it from this world with as little pain as possible in its last moments. She thanks the Goddesses and Their wilds for the meal.

She prepares the pilaf. Slowly, this time, using what she has learned from Dorian, Koko and Cottla's feedbacks of the pilaf that Link has repeatedly made for them. And, this time, she heeds Riju's advice as well. She blends seasoning into the oil before sautéing the rice. She adds more cucco and less carrot. She minces the garlic and onion into even tinier slivers than before.

The pilaf. The pilaf that, after one hundred years, have has endured, will yet endure.

Even when the name Hyrule has long since passed into memory, and then into legend, and then into silence, the food of the wilds will remain. The recipes may change, and the fruits and vegetables may shift with the seasons, but food—until the end of life itself, food endures. If food can endure, if this pilaf can endure, then so can she.

Kass leads Ilia by the reins while Link carries the cucco in her trusty cooking pot that brings with it the scents of the Great Plateau, of Darunia, of Medlin, of Romani Ranch, of Nabooru, of Ruto.

No guards at the first gate of Kakariko. She cranes her head. The gate and its eye bear the marks of blades and arrows over its surface, the decorations burned away. Link whips her head and stares at Kass, her stomach folding in on itself as if the gate had grasped her entrails as did the lynel in Ruto. He touches the side of his beak. Link emulates his gesture and inhales.

She can smell: the apple trees in bloom, the musty scent of cucco, the plum flowers and cherry petals, the growing pumpkin and carrot, the incense burnt at the shrines of the Goddesses and of remembrance to the villagers' loved ones passed away, the fresh ink on paper.

She can smell Kakariko, even if the outer gate has burned away. Even though the stars do not dance in the middle of the morning, Link lifts her hands to the heavens, to cup the sunlight in her palm, as she did long, long ago. And then she lets drop her hand. To the covered cooking pot. To cup the pilaf in her palm, as she has now. With the scent of pilaf on her palm, she and Kass
Sure enough, as they round the corner to the inner gate, Link meets again the guards. Not Dorian, but guards she recognises nonetheless: Inya, whose husband cares for a grove of cherry trees. Hirako, whose son once lent Link his prized bug-catching net.

Hirako glares at Link halfway in anger and halfway in shock. Inya, a new scar across her face and a burn mask on her left cheek, asks her in a shivering timbre why Link has returned and why she carries that cooking pot.

Link sets the cooking pot down. "I made Lady Impa pilaf," she says honestly, "and I want to give it to her before it gets cold." She touches her chin. "I can make you some, too, afterwards."

Hirako and Inya exchange glances. Hirako begins to shake her head, yet Inya pleads with her. "Who would we be," Inya begs, "if we turned away what hope we have? Lady Impa—"

"Like Dorian," Hirako counters coolly, "having betrayed us even after all we did for him?"

"...he's not a member of the Yiga anymore," Link says mildly; Kass blinks.

"Traveller, they speak of the companion who attempted to...attack you in Kotake, do they not?" Link looks his way. It occurs to her how little Kass knows except for what he has seen of her here or there. She nods at him. "He was a member of the...?"

"It's a long story. I didn't realise you didn't know." Link rubs the back of her head. She peeks back at Inya and Hirako, who ogle her, somewhere between demanding answers and hanging back in confusion. Snapping her fingers, Link lifts up her satchel, bumping out her hip to demonstrate the slate in its pouch. The slate she left in Kakariko. The slate Dorian stole. The slate she has now, again. Inya's gasp stifles in her throat; Hirako stares at her even more incredulously. "...the pilaf's going to be cold. Please?"

They allow her in after a brief set of further questions regarding both herself and Kass, who admits to merely passing through Necluda as a traveller, his only knowledge of Kakariko coming from songs and from its ancient namesakes of other villages that have aided the chosen heroes since time immemorial.

"Your matriarch," Kass remarks warmly, "has a wonderful sense of history and a deep appreciation of the cloth from which O Our Hyrule is spun, to have named her village so."

Inya and Hirako look at one another again. Link gestures, the cooking pot in her arms. They relent, allowing both her and Kass in, lest he fly off to call reinforcements, as if Link could ever dream of attacking Kakariko.

The char still visible on parts of the ground indicates one or several attacks of monsters, perhaps somewhat recent. Several of the houses on the side of the village farthest from the shrine have fallen to disarray, Kakariko now more concentrated just around the cliffside on which the shrine sits. The villagers have constructed several new homes, she notes, up on the hillside.

Towards the village shrine. Or perhaps towards the other shrine that Kass and Link scoped weeks earlier.

Two shrines. She touches her hand to her chin. She remembers finding a depression in the hillsides of Kakariko, a depression akin to those that she has seen inside of shrines begging for an orb, a depression that she has seen outside of shrines as well. She remembers considering its placement out in the woods. Link understands, now, the depression's existence as a shrine, wherever the orb
may have been.

She does not remember if she activated that shrine, or if someone else did. The months have stretched too long. Maybe someone like Dorian, who once bore this same slate.

Link cranes her neck. She cannot see where the houses end, yet she observes the cluster of homes practically on top of the shrine. She can discern by the patterns of destruction of the village where ends the protective halo of the shrine's effect.

People moving towards the shrines. Kass and Link have found the same in the remainder of the land once known as Hyrule. Ordon: not built around its shrine, but a ways away, leaving the shrine in the sacred Ordona Spring. Ordon: now in ruins. The villages that remain: those with a shrine at their heart.

Like crowding around a fire in search of a respite from winter's warmth, the people have crowded around the shrines. And if the shrines somehow ceased to exist, or had not existed at all...

Link shakes her head. She focuses on the pot. In the lake near the waterfall where lives a population of sanke carp—the patterns of their colours changed over her one hundred years of absence, but the flaky tang of their flesh nearly the same as the sanke carp that she dragged across the land once known as Hyrule in an ice-box to make a certain stubborn rito archer a fish pie—sits Lady Impa's house, not any taller than the other homes, yet somehow more imposing. And somehow sadder. The home has drawn inwards on itself since last Link visited the village, hunching over and hunkering down upon its place by the waterfall, refusing to let go. She cannot picture Kakariko without that house.

As Inya and Hirako take her down into the village of Kakariko, Link senses the gazes of the villagers upon her back. Some beam warmly at her and wave, especially the children, whose parents force down their hands and shake their heads. Most regard her with expressions of neutrality or coldness. A few narrow their eyes as her, as though she herself had claimed that she led the Yiga, or that she personally would assist the Calamitous One.

All this, Link reflects, for refusing to bear the slate for a time. She makes a valiant effort at scrunching her face into a smile—she considers the taste of the pilaf in the pot—yet her gaze remains blank.

Leaning over, Kass whispers into Link's ear. "It is not my business, traveller," he observes, "but when you informed me that Kakariko may not take well to you, I did not anticipate this level of...ice. I feel as if we have stepped back a month into the heart of winter. I cannot imagine what you must have done. Not even the worst cheaters at cards face such treatment, and I suspect you do not know how to play cards, much less cheat at them."

Link would rub the back of her head if not for the cooking pot burdening her arms. Burdening her arms, and yet lifting her spirit.

She cannot fail. She cannot fail. Not with the wind at her back. Not with Kass's wings, quite literally, at her back.

Link would ask him to flap a breeze behind her for added effect but that might cool the pilaf further.

The house. Lady Impa's house. A young woman of about Link's age sweeps the floorboards at the front balcony of Lady Impa's home, her black hair drawn up into a complicated style of loops which remind Link of the ringed doughnuts and pretzels she has seen expertly twisted by Parapan
hands. As Link, Inya, Hirako, Kass, and Ilia approach the house, Hirako and Inya confer with the two guards stationed outside Lady Impa's home. The guards lead Kass and Ilia away to a stable. He acquiesces. "Good luck, traveller. I shall be waiting for you. And I shall take good care of your compa—please, watch the feathers—nion for you!"

Link watches the guards usher Kass to the village stable. She shifts her gaze towards the waterfall pool, once in the centre of Kakariko but now along the outer edge, where statues of the Goddess Sheik and the other of the Seven wait in the water, the torches around them gone cold and ashen.

The statue of the Goddess Hylia, with Her many-feathered wings and Her smile, with Her hands clasped together in prayer, with Her pointed ears that emulate Link's own, that make Link think of the girl with the golden hair's, with her fire-light eyes and skin as earthen as the wilds she sacrificed herself to protect.

Link knows little of the Seven. Something about the reincarnation of the Goddess Hylia into mortal form, a suggestion that she cannot comprehend. The Golden Goddesses, she learned as a child, do not take the forms of people even if statues depict Them as such for the convenience of Their followers; They exist in the flames and the stones, in the snows and the seas, in the woods and the winds. Even when They came to this world during its creation, They appeared in the skies as great streaks of green, or blue, or red—and all gilded in gold—that bestowed upon Hyrule with gifts of abundance before departing again. To reincarnate into a mortal form. Could a Goddess do that, at all?

A vice grips her chin and forces her head forwards. Hirako gestures violently towards the door. Lady Impa's granddaughter, having apparently noticed them at that, gasps and clutches the broomstick. She attempts to bow, drops the broomstick to the floor, hastily bends over, picks it up, and bows again. Link remembers her name. Paya.

"Ma-ma-ma-master Li-li-link!" Paya stutters at her approach. "You-you're back!"

Hirako parts her lips, then closes her mouth again and motions for Paya to move aside instead. Paya steps back. Link looks up and squints: the roof looks different than when she last visited the village, or perhaps her memories play tricks on her. No. Different indeed, the patterns not the same, the wood scented much more freshly cut than the ancient lumber she recalls from her first three visits to the village.

She can see, in the seams between the roof and the older walls of the house, a hint of char.

Hirako and Inya argue on who should inform Lady Impa. After a moment, Inya grips Paya's shoulder; the guard requests that she briefly watches over Link. Hirako starts to protest, yet Inya drags her inside of the house and closes the door behind them.

Link stands on the porch, the cooking pot in her arms. She can still feel its warmth through the fabric of her tunic, the heat trapped inside by the wooden pot lid. Warm. Too warm.

Soon, the sun will begin to heat the earth, and spring will drop away to summer. Already the thick coat and the hood that she wears to divert attention from her scars—those on her face, like the ones down her cheeks, the thin mark from her right eye to the corner of her corner, and the teadrop her left eye, drawing people's gazes enough—drips sweat down the line of her spine and beads it over her brow.

"Master Li-link." Paya drums her fingers nervously against the broomstick. Link blinks at her. She blinks at Link, stumbling over her own breaths. "You've returned. To Kakariko." Link nods. "Does that...does that mean...?" Paya shakes her head at herself, her complicated hair a frenzied whirlwind
of motion. "Forgive me for my fo-forwardness, Master Link, but...I do not..."

She covers her face with her hands. The broomstick falls again. Link sets down the cooking pot, picking the broomstick up and offering it to her, which agitates Paya further.

Ha-have you heard of Do-dorian? One mo-morning, we awoke and his chi-children were gone. I've been worried about them ever since, but I can't leave Kakariko, and we ne-never hear news from the outside..." Paya sniffles. Tears have gathered at the corners of her eyes. "Oh, how shameful for me to wee-weep in front of you." She wipes at her eyes. The tears continue to flow; she removes a kerchief from her pocket to blow her nose. Link awkwardly pats her shoulder with the bristles of the broomsticks.

There, there.

Paya takes the broomstick from her. Link taps the toes of her boots against the porch. "They're safe," she signs. "Koko and Cottla. and Dorian." Paya brings her palms to her face in surprise.

The broomstick again clatters to the floor. "Really!?"

Link nods. "Dorian isn't a Yiga anymore. He was...being manipulated. They said that they'd kill Cottla and Koko if he didn't do what they said." At the gesture kill, Paya sways back and forth on her heels as if about to faint dead away. "They're fine! They're fine. I got them to go to Medli to..." She does not remember the motion for seek asylum in Necludan. "...Medli's the capital of Tabantha. Where..." She does not remember the word for rito either. Instead she makes a flapping motion with her arms. "...those people live. I just saw them recently. I made pilaf for them, actually. They really liked it. Cottla and Koko. Here."

She reaches for the slate at her right hip. Paya intakes a sharp breath, biting all of her fingers save for her thumbs at once, while Linkfwips to the pictobox and hunts down the pictographs she took of Koko and Cottla in Medli, of them scarfing down pilaf, of Cottla forcing Tulin to fly over her around the town, of Kheel attempting to teach Koko to sing and Koko attempting to teach Kheel to cook—Link swells up in pride for the budding chef—of Dorian embracing his daughters in a badly angled candid shot that throws Cottla into silhouette and has Koko's hair taking up half the frame.

That one's her favourite. For its messiness.

Paya looks on at the pictographs, the curve of her mouth halfway between the sort of smile Link might have watching the baking of a fruitcake and the sort of expression Link might have observing that same fruitcake balanced precariously on the lip of a gorge. "Are these...paintings? How are they so...ju-just like real life?"

Link starts to explain the function of the pictobox, but she has not met with Purah in so long that the words have faded to time. She selects the green rune. To demonstrate the pictobox's use to Paya with her permission, Link snaps a pictograph of Paya's face on her recently upgraded slate. When Link turns the slate around to show Paya, the latter's hands fly to her face. "Plea-please get rid of that painting. I di-didn't know I looked so ba-ba-bad."

"You don't need to kid yourself." Link pauses. Paya looks at her. "Kid. You know. Like a goat. They say baa...nevermind. You look fine," Link tries to say instead, hastily covering up her tracks. She touches her chin. "I don't know how to get rid of these pictographs, either. Here, why don't we take one together?"

"You don't need to kid yourself." Link pauses. Paya looks at her. "Kid. You know. Like a goat. They say baa...nevermind. You look fine," Link tries to say instead, hastily covering up her tracks. She touches her chin. "I don't know how to get rid of these pictographs, either. Here, why don't we take one together?"

Paya moves her index and middle fingers to peek out at Link. "Everyone is sta-staring at us," she whispers in horror; Link touches her wrist. "And they thi-think that you're awful. I don't think that.
Bu-but most people do. Bu-but I don't!

"Do you want some of the pilaf? It's made of cucco. Rice, endura carrot, onion and garlic." Sniffling, Paya dips her head. "I'll give you some after I see your grandmother. I want her to try it first."

"O-oh." Paya sniffs again. She dabs her cheeks of a fresher trickle of tears. "Do you wa-want to take that...painting. I do-don't know how to say it out loud."

Link throws an arm around her shoulder and pulls down part of the hood. When the violet whorls over her throat come into the light, Paya takes a step backwards. Link senses Paya shivering against her shoulder. "We don't have to if you don't want to."

Paya nods. "I want to. I just need to...to ge-get over my...and this'll he-help."

Shrugging, Link raises the slate and taps the rune to change the direction of the pictobox. When the surface of the slate focuses to display Link and Paya's faces, Paya's palms creep up over her face again. Link pets her shoulder with her free hand, trying to calm her down. She glances towards the cooking pot of pilaf. If only she could reach it from here. While Paya cowers behind her hands, Link extends her left leg in an attempt to roll the cooking pot towards her. She wriggles her limbs, kicking in with her boot, leaning onto Paya for support. Just as the heel of her boot connects with the rim of the cooking pot, Paya's knees abruptly buckle. Link feels herself toppling over. She lands on top of Paya, squishing the girl to the wood. A sudden thump on the small of her back indicates that her efforts did indeed knock the cooking pot over.

That's her first victory today.

The door opens. Link looks up at Hirako and Inya. Paya uncovers her face for a second; the surprise slips Link's fingers on the slate. She hears the ding of a pictograph snapped as Hirako seizes Link around the middle, hauls her bodily off of Paya, and supplexes her head into the floor. "What are you doing, you foul—!"

"Lady Impa will see you now," Inya comments, dragging Hirako away from Link while Link apologises profusely to Paya, whose face has taken on the same colour as a cucco's comb. She gathers the cooking pot from the ground and pushes it into Link's arms. Link thanks her with a nod and an attempt at a smile before she turns back towards the door.

The doorway. The doorway to Lady Impa's home. Lady Impa. One hundred and twenty years of age, or older. One year for every shrine, except for the two shrines that Link has not yet activated, in the lost woods, and in...somewhere. Maybe the castletown.

The castle. The malice hand rising from the earth to clench the castle in its violent violet grasp.

She hangs with the tips of her boots in the doorway for a moment, her eyes closed, her body loose save for the arms around the cooking pot. Hirako and Inya bow to Lady Impa, awaiting within. As long as Link remains outside, she has not truly entered Lady Impa's presence. And then she takes the step. And then she opens her eyes.

Lady Impa, upon the scarlet cushion, just as Link left her all those months ago. A year and a half. Six seasons. Eighteen moons, as her zora friends would say.

Far too long, as Riju would tell her, a quiet courage transferred from her voice to Link's own clenching heart.

Link shifts the satchel on her hip to obscure the slate. Lady Impa will speak to her and not to the
slate. She listens to Paya's footfalls behind her, the girl entering, forgetting the broomstick, running back out, and entering again—broomstick in hand—to stand in a corner.

Lady Impa lifts her ancient head. The hooks upon her hat sway with her motions, like metronomes, like pendulums. Link steps forward as Lady Impa fixes her unreadable gaze upon Link's face, and she kneels down, and she sets the cooking pot in front of Lady Impa.

Link hears one of the guards—either Lady Impa's, or Inya or Hirako—whispering behind her. She wraps her fingers around the handle of the wooden pot lid. She raises the lid.

The scent of warm pilaf vapours up from the pot and dissipates throughout the entire house, as though Link herself had grown vast enough to fill the home with her presence.

Lady Impa's eyes darken with recognition. "You remember," she says, her timbre rasped over her words like paper stretched too thin, her warped fingers clenched around the violet bracelet at her right wrist.

"I remember enough," Link answers. She keeps her gestures low and even. "I remember enough to ask why you didn't tell me the truth when I begged you for it."

"...when first you arrived at the borders of the village I have spent my lifetime to protect in the hopes that you would one day return, I...attempted to tell you the truth." Lady Impa curls her fingers over her knees. Link has the impression that merely keeping her neck up strains her to a point of pain, or somewhere just beyond. "I called you then: O Champion of Hylia, O Hero of Hyrule, O Her Majesty's Knight, O Courageous Link. You responded by fainting away and refusing me. What truth could I tell you then, when you remembered nothing at all? Before you came, I was afraid that you would recall what you had done and been too ashamed to show your face." Link blinks. Ashamed? "Instead, you came recalling absolutely nothing. What truth could I give you, that would not tear your heart from your flesh?"

"I was afraid that telling you too much, or too little, would only hurt you. Yet I was equally aware that I had not the time to allow you to recover. With your awakening, and the awakenings of the Divine Beasts, came the understanding that the Calamitous One could once again lie close at hand." The Calamitous One. Link cannot tell from Lady Impa's words if she knows of its existence, or simply fears the possibility, as Riju does. "As you are the Champion of Hylia, I had no recourse but to send you on your way."

Link's mouth thins into a line. The words begin to take shape on her fingertips. What she shall say. No longer the Champion of Hylia.

"I could see that you retained your strength, your wit, and your bravery. Your power. Your wisdom. Your courage. Although you were unable to regard yourself as the Champion of Hylia and the Hero of Hyrule, the Goddesses would surely guide you on your journey. And we had no other choice. I instructed you to speak to the people of Eldin and particularly of Darunia. I hoped that you, upon witnessing their plight, would be moved to assist them of your own volition, even if you did not believe yourself the chosen hero.

"One hundred years ago, your heart, despite your lack of training or understanding, was almost always in the right place. Even if you erred at that critical moment, I believed that the Goddesses would see to your courage once again. For, if not you, then who else?"

Link wants to ask: yet anyone could bear the slate. Anyone could activate the shrines. Anyone could have, and has, proceeded to calm the Divine Beasts.
If the land once known as Hyrule has suffered for one hundred years, then why has no one else taken that slate upon the Great Plateau? Why did Lady Impa merely wait for her return?

Her awakening and the awakening of the Divine Beast coincided. But what of the shrines, which Ilia told her came to life once more several years ago?

"When you returned, you did not speak of the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. I could not discern from your words whether or not you had done as I hoped. Therefore, out of worry, I changed my course of action.

"I scribed the letter to the chief of Medli, to inform them of the situation, so that they might guide you to the Divine Beast Vah Medoh without letting you know of the truth. In this way, I might ensure that you would at least save the lives of what people you could.

"Your return from Medli horrified me. You rejected the bearing of the slate. Moreover, you spoke of your sister, indicating that you had learned at least some of the truth. I thought that I could perhaps salvage the situation. I feared that the chief of Medli knew what happened during the Great Calamity and had informed you. I sought you to take you away from such matters.

"Link..."

Lady Impa's eyelids lower over her crimson eyes.

"We all have our own purpose in this life. Yours, and mine, is to serve the Goddesses and Their decisions. In doing so, we must give up our rights to live as we please. I treated you harshly, for the alternative was to do a disservice for all of the people of Hyrule. I will not apologise. I chose the people of Hyrule over you, and when you gave up the slate to me, you chose yourself over the people of Hyrule."

Link winces. She can already hear the words that Impa will say next. Do my words sting? Let them.

"Yet...I have so long worrying for the Goddess Hylia that I have forgotten the very virtue of the Goddess that watches over me. Truth.

"I can see, now, that when you returned from Medli, I should have reconsidered what you had learned from your memories. I feared that, as you had remembered some but not enough, if you were to know of your sister's passing, if you were to know of the gap of one hundred years..."

Link closes her eyes. She pictures herself sliding bone skewers into her spine, into the bones of her arms and legs, into the protrusions of her wrists and ankles, chaining herself to stillness. Like the frozen crab. Make like the frozen crab.

If Lady Impa believes that Link has remembered everything, she will speak candidly. More candidly than she would otherwise.

Her little sister's passing. Aryll's passing. She prays, hope beyond hope, that Aryll died painlessly, in her sleep, surrounded by those who loved her and whom she loved.

"I do not know how I should have informed you. And, again, I will not apologise for the intent behind my actions, nor the hurt that they have caused you. Yet, I should have told you the truth. Yet, I should not have continued to hide from you the things that you already knew. Tell me, Link...have you hidden from people that which you believed would hurt them, or that which you believed would be difficult for them to bear or to understand, or that which you believed would endlessly complicate the world around you?"
Link raises her hands. She starts to form the cross-armed gesture for *no*, and then she stops.

She...has.

She has hidden so many things from so many people. She has hidden her identity. She has hidden her past. She continues to hide from Kass of her own existence as the *missing Link* of whom his mentor spoke, continues to hide from her family at Romani Ranch of herself as the *Link* whom Marin loved and who loved Marin all of those years ago, continues to hide this and that and bits and pieces.

In part, to prevent those around her from hurting, and in part, to prevent them from bearing what she believed too difficult. In part. For their own sakes.

Yet to a large degree, to let lie unspoken what...would endlessly complicate the world around her.

Link has begun, ever so slowly, to unravel the truth of herself. She has begun, ever so slowly, to confide, to share, to strip herself bare before those she trusts. Yet even now the process takes time, and even now she waits for when she can find a proper time, a proper place. When she has had time to think.

"That does not matter now. The slate has gone. I have misplaced my trust. I know not what may happen, yet. I thought that I would—in these one hundred and two years that have passed since the Calamitous One destroyed all for which we worked and all for which *she* suffered—be prepared for your return. Had you come back fifty or sixty years earlier, before the rising tide of monsters once more swept the across land...then, I had prepared a network of informants and allies over the entirety of Hyrule. Then, I was ready to muster what forces I could. Then, I knew of the reconstruction efforts in every corner of Hyrule.

"Yet, you did not come."

Link wants to protest. That she could not have come if she *wanted* to. That she does not even know how she *got* to the Shrine of Resurrection. Or of what critical error Lady Impa speaks. Of what she might have been ashamed. Of what she can not yet remember.

"And in that time...I never lost hope in the Goddesses. I never lost hope in Her Majesty. I never lost hope that one day, you would return.

"But I did lose hope that I would witness to see that return, or that I would play a part in the defeat of the Calamitous One. And so, I...allowed Kakariko to grow more insular. I focused on protecting what I could. No longer could I travel, and no longer could I maintain the network of information that I had. 'The paths of this world belong to the young; the hearths, to the old,'" she intones, effecting a timbre as of quoting something else. "Even now, I can do precious little but pray that the stamp of the ancient King of Hyrule would have meaning in Medli, but pray that people might know of Lady Impa of Kakariko, but pray that the Goddesses will deliver us.

"Whatever happens now, I leave in the hands of the Goddesses. I have done all that I can. And yet, all that I have done, may not have been enough."

Lady Impa does not speak. Link inhales. The pilaf. As long as she can smell the pilaf, she can do anything.

"Link. Why have you come, now, after this very, very long year?"

The rounded and halved motion of *a year and a half* begin to rotate through her wrists, yet Link stops herself.
Not the time. She has other things to say. She has promises to keep, and paths to walk before she sleeps.

Kass's mentor's father. Who knew the girl with the golden hair. Who spent his entire life waiting for Link to emerge from the Shrine of Resurrection. Who died not knowing what would come.

Marin. Aryll. Perhaps even the girl with the golden hair. Passed away before they could know.

She does not know whom the blade of evil's bane shall choose to carry its weight.

But she knows that if she can do anything, anything at all, to promise peace for the people of the land that may one day again become Hyrule, she will.

"Impa," Link says, "I...can't forgive you for what you did to me. I know that you were doing it for the sake of Hyrule, and I...I understand. I don't know what I would have done. If I were you, I mean. But I can't...I can't forgive you." She inhales. She exhales. Her friends forgave her when she told them of the truth, of her having been and then no longer being the chosen hero. "I can't forgive you, and I don't know if I ever will."

"It does not matter now," Lady Impa responds.

"But I have a question to ask. Please...answer it truthfully."

Lady Impa inclines her head. The hooks on the brims of her hat swaying back and forth, like the pendulum of time, the time that no one can bring back, the time that cannot flow backwards, the time that only ever goes on.

"I...remember enough." Link will not lie, but she will hide. As Lady Impa has hidden from her. Someday, she prays that she will never have to lie again, will never have to hide the truth, yet now she needs that information almost more than she needs to eat. Almost.

"I know what happened during those days of the Great Calamity." Link does know. People, most recently Ilia, have told her. "I know that I went with the Princess to Mount Nayru. I know of...the slaughter. I know that the guardian...the guardian in the Ash Swamp hurt me. I know that I was gravely wounded, and that the Princess...that the Princess saved me in the Shrine of Resurrection. I don't know what happened after that. I wanted to ask you what...what happened after that."

Lady Impa knits her brow. "The guardian in the Ash Swamp did no such thing. Or, rather, the guardian...and the Shrine of Resurrection have nothing to do with one another."

Link blinks. She narrows her eyes, ever so slightly. Ilia would not have lied to her.

"...how much do you remember of the Great Calamity, Link?" She can hear the carefulness in Lady Impa's voice, that opaque shield that hides the bareness of the truth.

Link rises from the floor. She stands before Lady Impa, and she stands before the cooking pot, and she stands before the Golden Goddesses.

"Lady Impa. I want you to tell me the truth. You said that you don't have anything to lose anymore. Just...just, for once. Tell me what I want to know, and I'll leave you alone. If you tell me, I'll tell you something that you wanted to know. Believe me when I say that."

"You are withholding information from me," hisses Lady Impa, her voice colder than all of the wastes of Hebra, icier than even a chilly-fish made on chillshroom and hydromelon and cool safflina and chillfin trout and a giant block of sapphire. "Who are you to demand that I tell you the
truth, when you do the same thing that you accuse me of?” Link longs to scream, to grab the cooking pot, to smash it down upon the floor.

Not to silence the crowds, not to draw attention to herself, not to take action, as she did in Amali’s home last autumn.

But to shake the very rafters. To break the very silence. To fragment herself upon the wood.

For the second time in her life she senses something rise within her, bubble up bitter as wormwood and sharp as the blade upon her back.

Anger.

"You will tell me what I'm asking for, or I will leave." The spark of lightning on her fingertips, the whisper of wind at her back. "I have promises to keep. And I have paths to walk before I sleep. I have too many things to do to stand here wasting my time. I thought that maybe, just maybe, after this year, or this year and a half, or however long it's been I don't know and I don't care, I thought that I could bring you the pilaf that I know is your favourite, I even put in the endura carrot and the onions and the garlic that I spent so long trying to figure out. I had to bribe Purah for her to tell me how to make it the first time. I must've spent days and weeks and months making every kind of risotto and pilaf I could think of and you know I never thought that I could get tired of rice but I swear I did at some point and I just had this one innocent thought that maybe I could give you the pilaf and everything would be all right, that you'd finally tell me the truth, that I'd finally tell you the truth, that we could just stop this. I trusted you and you used me. I know it was for Hyrule.

"I know, and the worst part is that I know that if you'd told me the truth, that I had to go face the Divine Beasts, that I wouldn't have done it. I would've run away. You were right! You were right and that's the worst part! That's the worst part! That's...that's the worst part, is that if you'd told me I would've run. But I still...feel like...like...I don't understand! Why me? If you knew that the shrines are important for whatever reason I don't even get, and if you knew that anyone could get the shrines, why didn't you let someone else do it! Even when I gave you the slate, you just sat around with it! You didn't even try! You didn't even do anything! You just let Dorian steal it! I don't understand! I don't understand! You said that you didn't lose hope but you literally had the slate! I don't understand! I don't! I don't!"

The words rush out of her all at once.

"Why did you wait for me? Just because I'm the chosen hero? Do you know how many shrines I've been to that've already been solved by someone else, because that someone else already went and figured it all out, and just didn't have the slate to put into the pedestal thingy? I don't understand. I don't understand any of this!

"You didn't even tell me where the sword! Isn't that more important than anything else? It's the sword...that banes the evil! That seals the darkness! It could've been anyone! Why did you wait for me? Why did you insist it was me? You didn't even believe in me a hundred years ago! Urbosa had to tell you to trust in the sword's decision! I remember! I made soup! I made you both soup and I was bringing it over and I heard you two talking on the stairs! If you didn't even believe in me then, why are you so certain it's me now!?

"Look, I'm sorry for leaving.” She pants.

"It was wrong of me to just throw the slate down. I just...I just...when I was in Medli, someone very dear to me told me to stop treating this like a game. Told me that I had to assume responsibility. She was right, and so was Teba, and so were all of them. Yunobo'd been the same as me, bumbling
through, not knowing what either of us were doing. But Amali and Teba were adults. They...they understood what Yunobó hadn't. And they were right. I'd been treating everything like...I'd been acting like the hero even though I didn't want to treat myself like that. I knew I had to...I had to either accept being the hero or whatever that means, or I had to not. One of the two. I couldn't keep treating it like some twisted...some twisted game...like I could just do whatever I wanted.

"I didn't want to be the hero. So I wanted to give it up.

"I came back. I wanted to give up the slate. But before I did that, I just wanted to know if maybe you'd tell me what happened to Aryll. I thought to myself that if I could trust you, I could stay. We could talk. I'd figured out by then that I really was the chosen hero. I'd remembered that. I knew it after Darunia but I didn't want to admit it to myself. And after Medli I knew it really was me. Because saying that it wasn't me...saying that it wasn't me would mean that Aryll wasn't my sister either. And I wanted more than anything to have Aryll. I could deal with my past, if I had Aryll, and Marin, and Ilia, and the Princess, because without my past, I don't have any of them. So I accepted them. But I couldn't accept you keeping the truth from me even after I'd...I needed to have the past. To justify what I was doing. To have a reason to be...I don't know. I went for the Divine Beasts because I wanted to help people. I knew that I had the slate, and I couldn't say no. That's why I helped Yunobó even though I didn't even know, really, who I was. I had...I had an inkling. But I didn't get it. I didn't know.

"But when I realised that I'd been running from my past, I didn't think I could carry the slate. I was a coward. I was afraid. I wanted something to hold onto. I wanted to ask you about my past. I wanted to understand. You didn't let me.

"I've spent two years not knowing where my sister is, remembering her, knowing that you know what happened to her, and having to live with the knowledge that she could be alive or dead or Goddesses know what!

"It wasn't until I met someone who did know about my past that I...that I accepted myself. Not just as Link, but as. I don't know. The Link that my past and the Link that is my present are the same. That I accepted that I'd been the chosen hero at some point, and that I could carry the slate. I wasn't ready to think about whether or not I was still the chosen hero. I found her myself. Maryll. The daughter of...the daughter of a girl I loved, and love, with all my heart. Only then could I take the slate again. Only then, when I found out...when I learned that the things in my head and in my heart and in my belly weren't just figments of something made up, but had left on this world what I could see and hear and smell and taste and feel...that's when I knew I could do it. That I could bear the slate. I could calm the Divine Beasts. That I could do anything. Not as the hero. Just as myself.

"And look!"

Link lifts the satchel from her hip to show Lady Impa the slate; she notices the dilation of Lady Impa's pupils.

"I found Dorian. I took back the slate. I went and I've calmed all four of the Divine Beasts. And I've found all of the Divine Beasts new pilots, even! You don't even know this. You know what happened? Dorian became an informant against the Yiga. The Yiga are practically gone from Hyrule now because all of the Divine Beasts and the pilots have been working together! Yunobó and Amali and Riju and Sidon. We even know where the sword is! We're trying to find someone who it'll accept right now. We just haven't found them yet. It rejected me. I tried so hard to pull it out but it rejected me. I'm not the hero anymore. I'm not the chosen one anymore. But you know what I did? I calmed the Divine Beasts. I found the pilots. I found the sword. I've gotten all one
hundred and twenty of the shrines except two and I think I know where they are and I've gotten all the towers and then I'm going to go back and help the Champions in whatever way I can and we've already gotten done with the Yiga and then it's just the Calamitous One and we're going to beat that too and we did all this without you knowing a thing!

"You didn't believe me when I begged you to and you believed in me when I begged you not to!"

Her hands hurt. Her fingers ache. Her arms threaten to fall entirely off of her shoulders. Her eyes bulge. Her lips crack. Her breaths suck in the tang of copper on her tongue.

She gazes at Lady Impa, and in that moment, Link is very, very vast, and Lady Impa is very, very small.

"And most importantly, I know who I am. I know who Link is. I haven't gotten back all my memories. There's whole years blank in my head. Maybe whole people I don't remember. But I know enough. I remember enough. I just want to understand what happened so I can help. I just want to help. That's all I want to do. I want to put the Calamitous One to rest, and I want to bury the dead, and I want to pray over them, and then I want to go home, and I want to see my horse, and I want to see my family, and I want to be there with Ilia until the last, and I want to make Romani pancakes in the shape of Miyu's face. That's what I want to do."

She breathes.

She breathes in through her nose and she breathes out through her mouth. She breathes, and she breathes, and she feels her heart thrumming in pain against her sternum, and she feels her lungs set aflame with agony in her chest, and she feels her stomach roiling to torment her as though her belly had burst on the inside to marinate her guts in its juices, to burn her away from the inside out like the Malice taking hold of her at last.

But she welcomes it. That pain. Because that pain, like the grasshopper on the grass all those years ago when she almost broke her neck falling from the tower upon the Great Plateau, tells her that she is breathing, and beating, and very much alive.

"Link." Lady Impa's lips scarcely move. The world in a single syllable, in a single name, in a single word. "...I will tell you."

Link's chest rises and falls. The muscles of her arms burn. Her lungs flare in pain. Her heart clenches.

She listens.

—

*Enduring Gourmet Poultry Pilaf* (seventeen hearts, two-fifths golden stamina vessel) - bird's egg, endura carrot, hylian rice, goat butter, raw whole bird

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: The province of Holodrum is in reference to the country of the same name *Oracle of Seasons*; the village of Horon is likewise named after Horon Village,
and the former village of Rosia is named after Subrosia, the underground land in *Oracle of Seasons* where the main currency is ore chunks. The tree that the villagers regard as a guardian deity is, too, a nod to the Maku Tree from *Oracle of Seasons*. The entire Holodrum thing, of course, is my version of the Shrouded Shrine quest in *Breath of the Wild*, and the Thyphlo Mines are named for the Thyphlo Ruins.

Kass is claustrophobic of small, dark, tight spaces where he wouldn't be able to fly if he wanted to. I mentioned Sidon's fishing pole being luminous back in the sixty-fourth chapter, and, indeed, that's how I solved the shrine: I had Link hold five luminous stones in hand the entire time! The statues of the hawk being of Din are in reference to the light spirit Eldin from *Twilight Princess*, who is an owl-hawk-something.

I did mention back when Link visited Aveil for the first time during the Parapan arc that the *Delicious in Wilds* equivalent of Bolson's construction company has gone off to make Tarrey Town. The village of Kagoro takes its name from Kagoron of *Spirit Tracks*, who prays at the altar of the the Mountain Goddess in-game. The province of Golo takes its name from Golo of *Skyward Sword*, a miner invested in tales of a sacred dragon.

There are indeed metallic blocks in the walls of the labyrinth off the coast of Akkala. And I did indeed climb up to the top, but you can't actually get through the entire labyrinth that way. I never had my mini-map turned on at any point in the game (and completely forgot about its existence), so I used the "right hand on the right wall" trick to get my way through. Made it easy-peasy, especially when using a dropped apple to mark my spot so that I could try my luck down another tunnel and see if there's a chest or monster that way!

The first time that Link met Kass in the spring, back on Romani Ranch, it was right at the end of winter and before his moult. Now Kass isn't so lucky.

In *Breath of the Wild*, you need shoot an arrow at the dragon. In *Delicious in Wilds*, a wooden skewer will do! Indeed, this isn't the last time that Link or one of her companions will nearly die trying to deliver food to a massive monstrous being's mouth.

The hero whose recorder revealed stairways is in reference to *The Legend of Zelda* for the Famicom/NES; the Hilted Singer is in reference to *Skyward Sword*; the hero who moved the fabric of Nayru is *Ocarina of Time*; the hero who conducted the winds is *The Wind Waker*.

Kass's affection towards Link is entirely paternal. I hadn't even thought of anyone interpreting it otherwise until I received a comment in that nature, so allow me to make it explicit: it's paternal, and her affection towards Kass is likewise that adopted family sense. Thanks.

The monastery that would become Kakariko wasn't always named Kakariko! Impa renamed it after she set up shop precisely for the names of previous Kakariko villages.

Indeed, Dorian's the one who activated that shrine, successfully accomplishing what he attempted to do in the family heirloom being stolen quest in *Breath of the Wild*.

Paya stutters differently from Yunobo.

"The paths of this world belong to the young; the hearts, to the old" is not a quote or
reference to my knowledge. That line was written by Miyahon, the famous sheikah orator I mentioned in author's notes a while back, and frequently quoted as a pearl of wisdom.

Lightning and wind are associated with Farore, and thus with courage, and thus with Link.

Link's had quite enough.

Next time: Impa's story; baking apple pie, like Ilia suggested; memories of Zelda.


Beta reader's comments: Kass molting is hilarious. Sorry, Kass, but you make for good comedy.

The last couple of pages here are a doozy. Link getting pissed is quite the sight.

Next chapter, also, is a big one, and a sad one. Prepare yourself.

Emma. 05 November 2017.
Apple Pie

Chapter Summary

Having confronted the wise matriarch and forced her to agree to tell the chef the truth, the travelling chef listens to the matriarch's story, then follows the girl who smells of horses advice regarding trying to remember the chef's own mortal injury on the eve of the Great Calamity.

Chapter Notes

As usual, notes that didn't fit in the end, because ao3 is trying to save you all from my blabbering: I started writing this chapter at 06:03 on the ninth of August, and finished writing it on at 12:12 on the ninth of August.

As always, thanks a million to my most wonderful beta reader, Emma, who diligently remembers to change the dates on the author's notes, and to you, the reader, who diligently remembers to constructively criticise me if ever there is some suggestion to be made about my writing (which I am now trying to implement, thank you).

I hate these kinds of talking chapters. I mean, the information is really relevant, but this is one of those cases where I wish that this were a film and not the written word, so that I could instead have these take place as flashbacks instead of just relying on Impa telling Link, given that it's from her point of view. I think that we have two more big talking chapters left after this, and then we're free of the curse! Next time I write a long fic I'm going to actually sit down and damn not write it by the seat of my pants.

"Sign-books" is the Necludan term for books written with carved Lanayrish characters that can be read with the fingers rather than the eyes (i.e. similar to Braille).

Like everyone else in the royal court, Impa refers to the Master Sword as the sword that seals the darkness.

So, to clarify, Zelda is eighteen during most of the memories explored in Delicious in Wilds, and turned nineteen on the eve of the Great Calamity (i.e. I aged her up by two years from what she was in Breath of the Wild). Link was eighteen at the time of the Great Calamity (Zelda is slightly older than Link).

Mudora, the poet, is named after Mudora from A Link to the Past, who wrote a book which allows Link to translate the ancient text on tablets scattered throughout Hyrule.

As before, the "inconsistencies" of capitalisation are because different characters speak about these things differently. You know how you can just feel when someone says something with a capital C? So Impa calls it the Castle, and Link calls it the castle.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
"Link...

"When the Great Calamity struck, the Calamitous One arose from the Castle. I was not at the Castle at the time, but with you, the Champions, and Her Majesty, en route to Mount Nayru, for Her Majesty to pray at the Spring of Wisdom. We had six slates, then. One for each of you. For yourself, for Her Majesty, for each of the four Champions, although we did not know how to make use of them with the exception of the pictobox rune available on one of the slates: Her Majesty's.

"In those days, when we set out for Mount Nayru in anticipation of Her Majesty's nineteenth birthday, we did not know when the Calamitous One would strike. We knew only, then, that we had fended off the monsters that seemed to spawn from the wilderness, yet that their attacks grew worse by the day. We knew only, then, that the Calamitous one would arise, but we did not know when, or what form it would take.

"We expected, as in the stories, the form of the treacherous boar.

"Link...I do not know what you remember of Her Majesty, or even what she told you. His Highness...decreed that you would live with Her Majesty as one, in the hopes that the arrangement—with the sacred sword so close—would sparken something of the legendary Princess of the blessed bloodline within her. I know that you two grew close...closer than, I admit, I enjoyed at the time. I did not understand the emotions that welled up within me then. I was harsher upon than I had any right to be. I apologise for how I treated you then.

"I was bound by my duty. I, as my aunt before me, and as her aunt before her, had been raised by entire life in serve to the Goddesses, in order to serve His Highness and the royal family, in order to serve Her Majesty. If I did not perform my duties satisfactorily, I would be removed.

"I heard stories, when I was very young, of a member of our family who had failed the Princess she protected and who had expired, alone, with nothing but the ghosts of her failures around her, banished from not only the family but from the remainder of our people as well.

"I feared that. But more, I feared...I did not want to be taken from Her Majesty. I loved her then, as I love her now. She meant and means the world to me. I am no fool. I know what Her Majesty did when she believed herself sneaky enough that I would not notice. I knew of her and of the Champion of Sageru. I knew of her late nights reading sign-books and tablets in Lanayrish in the dark. I knew of so many things that she tried to keep hidden from me.

"When she was younger, I was her confidante. She told me everything. As she and I grew older, His Highness...would question me about her upbringing. If I did not answer truthfully...well, I learned very quickly of the consequences. And she learned, just as quickly, that she could no longer trust me.

"The first time I caught her lying to me, I...

"I kept what I could from His Highness. All that with I mentioned: the long nights, the Champion of Sageru, all of it. I kept her as safe as I could without compromising my status. I knew that someone else, taking my place, would be less sympathetic, and Her Majesty did not know how to lie.

"I only wished for her happiness. I was afraid that if I disobeyed, His Highness would take me from her. And I was afraid, too, that the Calamitous One would come upon us, and that Her Majesty would fall before its malice. I believed in my heart that Her Majesty would unseal the magic in her bloodline. In serving the Goddesses...Her Majesty, as the reincarnation of the Goddess Hylia, represented the hope of Hyrule. And I, faithful servant of Sheik, would reveal the truth.
"I assisted His Highness with devising plans for Her Majesty. I kept to them faithfully. It broke me to the bone to see her heart harden against me. I did not blame her. I was the physical manifestation of everything that she had come to loathe about herself. I was the one who physically took away her books, who physically forced her to come home, who physically kept her in prayer. I was that barrier. His Highness sat upon his throne and checked up on her, yet he existed more as an entity, like the cloud before the storm. I was the rock upon which she felt chained while the leviathan of the depths rose to claim her.

"I...had to harden my heart as well.

"I thought to myself that if only I could unlock whatever kept Her Majesty's heart in check, if only I could push her far enough to access that which her bloodline promised her, then this madness could end. I thought to myself, just one more day, just one more hour, just one more prayer, and this torture could end. I hurt her more than I could bear, and then I had to return to hurt her yet again.

"You must understand, too, that I do not blame His Highness. He wished for nothing more than his daughter's happiness, and he wished for nothing more than his kingdom's peace. Yet he understood that the Calamitous One would come. He understood, too, the hardships that Her Majesty faced. He understood that with Her Highness's passing, Her Majesty had lost not only a mother, but also a teacher. No, Her Highness had never used the sealing magic in her life. But had she...she remained alive, perhaps Her Majesty would never have needed to suffer at all. The songs may speak of the Princess, but perhaps...

"He understood, too, how much rode on the sealing magic. Not only for the lifeblood of the entire kingdom of Hyrule, but, for Her Majesty...her entire sense of worth. There were those who whispered about her, that she should not have borne the traditional name of the Princess, that His Highness should have sired what they considered a true daughter of Hylia, that Her Majesty's failures at drawing upon her blessed bloodline came from...an inherent inability to do so.

"Every day, every hour, every prayer, the silence of the Goddess Hylia made Her Majesty hate herself, more and more, on more levels that I could imagine. I, and His Highness, had nothing but faith in her abilities. We knew her a true daughter of Hylia.

"His Highness, just as myself, understood that all of the days spent in happiness for Her Majesty would come to naught when the Calamitous One struck. We spoke between ourselves that once we had put an end to the Calamitous One, then Her Majesty could live her life as she pleased. We would have to suffer before we could see the Seven. Or so...so we believed.

"I...

"I never told her how much she meant to me. I can only pray that she knew. I could not do so, for I had to remain, by right, an impartial arbiter, a guard, always at arm's-length. I could not tell her that she represented the whole of my world. I could not tell her that I loved her more than I ever loved my sister, that I came to love her more than I loved my father and my mother.

"When Her Majesty was six years old, her mother the Queen of Hyrule perished. She left Her Majesty naught but a bracelet she once wore, which Her Majesty kept as a charm. I myself was not yet old enough to serve as her guard, yet—in anticipation of the training I had already begun—I had been introduced to my future charge so that she would come to know me as a playmate. I recall, observing her at her mother's funeral, that Her Majesty did not weep, but instead looked on to the future. I thought that I should be as like her as I could, that I, too, should never cry. And so I hardened my heart, and chiseled my face from stone, and watched her grow from loving me as the dearest older sister that she could have, to resenting me with all her heart, even against her own
wishes.

"And then...you.

"You, Link.

"You came into her life. At first, you, too, were like a living monument to her failures. You, the Knight, who had drawn the sacred sword, while she, the Princess, did not harbour the blessed bloodline. Yet you could speak your mind freely. His Highness could do nothing about you if you were to displease him, for the sword that seals the darkness had chosen you, while His Highness had chosen me.

"And so Her Majesty despised you at first. I am ashamed to say that I was...strangely happy. Happy that you would not replace me, I suppose. I am ashamed, and I apologise. I had spent my entire life at her side. I had tried...to draw the sacred sword. Yet it rejected me. And chosen, instead, you. Someone with no training at all, someone who did not even worship the Seven or know of Hylia beyond that strange faith that some of your more far-flung neighbours might have possessed. How could someone who did not believe in the Goddess Hylia serve the very Princess who was the Goddess in mortal flesh? I could not comprehend the sacred sword.

"And you could speak freely. And so she came to confide in you, as she once confided in me. And so she came to confide in you, as once...

"Ah, but. This is not what you were asking for, was it, Link? No. And I have no manner of proof to you for anything that I have said. No. You wanted to know about the Great Calamity. Very well. I will tell you of the Great Calamity.

"In anticipation of Her Majesty's nineteenth birthday, I mentioned, we set out for Mount Nayru. The journey would take significant time. We went with the Champions and with yourself.

"We saw the signs that the Calamitous One would soon arrive, its harbinger of malice having begun to well up from the ground itself, bringing with it an influx of monsters. On the night of Her Majesty's nineteenth birthday, the Divine Beasts awoke. My sister and the other researchers had been attempting to awaken Them for years, even before my sister came of age to proceed in research. The moment that They awoke of Their own accord, Their eyes alight and Their hearts aglow, the slates that we recovered for each of the Champions at last functioning—the moment that we discovered we could place the slates into each of the terminals of the Divine Beast to register the Champions as pilots—we thought that, at long, long last, the Goddesses had come to our aid.

"Though Her Majesty did not yet possess the sealing magic, I believed—we all believed, as we had to believe—that either she would awaken her blessed bloodline upon Mount Nayru, or else she would simply find it within herself when the Calamitous One came. The Divine Beasts had awoken on the very eve of Her Majesty's coming of age. How else could we take such a sign?

"The Champions mobilised to their Divine Beasts. You, I, and Her Majesty continued to Mount Nayru. We believed, we earnestly believed, that the Goddesses were at last on our side.

"Our hope was short-lived.

"When...the Calamitous One struck, the...we did not know it immediately, but the Calamitous One had been with us since the evening of Her Majesty's coming of age. It somehow seized control of the guardians and the Divine Beasts. The guardians turned against us, slaughtering our people. The Divine Beasts vanished the Champions to malice—I do not even know, fully, what became of
them, and I fear what torture they might have endured—and rampaged over the land. Her Majesty prayed at the Spring of Wisdom, and yet...nothing. The Yiga ambushed us upon Mount Nayru, who had followed us and saw this as the Goddesses...as the Goddesses lending Their forces to the Yiga's malicious and abominable cause. Between the Yiga and the monsters that appeared nearly from somewhere, the guards that had travelled alongside us for our protection fell.

"You, I, and Her Majesty escaped upon horseback with the last of the guard, but...

"At the base of the mountain, we suffered a second ambush. For Her Majesty, I took a blow that left me scarcely able to stand. She was unwilling to leave me. You were unwilling to leave me, for reasons that I cannot fathom. Her Majesty told me that she had a plan, that she believed that she knew a method of healing my injuries. Something involving the Sacred Realm and a shrine. I refused to believe her and pretended that my injuries were too grave for me to move. I...I insisted that she leave without me, that I would rest and stay alive until I could rejoin her.

"She told me that she had a plan at the Castle. She spoke of a mirror within the Castle that she believed held a portal to the Sacred Realm where the Calamitous One resided. She...concocted a plan, that she would gather what forces of the remaining armies that she could, and she would take everyone into the Sacred Realm to battle the Calamitous One directly.

"I begged her to cease. I begged that in the Great Calamity, we had no time. She needed to go to the Castle—with that much I agreed—and she needed to use the sealing magic of her blessed bloodline, and her Knight needed to use the sacred sword.

"Her Majesty gazed upon me with an expression older than any I have seen on this earth, then or since. She told me that she could not access the sealing magic, and she told me that as far as she had researched, no one in the royal family had ever used it. That the sealing magic of the song did not exist. She gazed upon me with the very visage of the Goddess Herself, carved of light, infinite worlds behind and before her. She told me that her plan could fail, but at least she could try. She told me: 'Impa. Everything around us will die if we don't do something. Please. Please, let me have hope. If I fail, then at least I have failed in something I can hope for. Please. I have spent my entire life trusting you. Now, please, it's time that you trust me. It is hope, or it is death. And, for once in my life, I choose hope.'

"I told her to go. She gave me her mother's bracelet, which she promised she would take back one day. A promise that she would return.

"As soon as you and she left, I saddled a horse despite my injuries and began to follow. In case I fell behind, or could not live through my wounds, I did not want to distress Her Majesty by informing her of my presence. I tailed you at a distance. I observed you hold off the guardians at Fort Hateno long enough for the villagers to evacuate. I watched you sacrifice yourself for her. I could solely look on as she dressed your wounds as best she could and took a passing traveller's horse.

"I followed her. I witnessed the guardians and the monsters at the Castle that the remaining armies of Hyrule were fighting against, and losing. She rallied the soldiers. The very picture of her father. She rallied them to charge the Castle, and they cut through whatever malice they could. In the bowels of the Castle, they came upon the great shrine that lay at the very heart. She used your slate to activate the shrine. The moment that she used the slate, it, too, turned against her, boiling away in malice. Yet she stepped into that curtain of blue light, you gathered in her arms. I thought that I would perish then and there, seeing her vanish into the blue, yet I dared not make myself known. She emerged from the earth carrying you.

"Whole.
"Alive.

"The armies cheered. They believed that she could do anything. They followed her. They besieged the Castle, until they reached the Sanctum.

"I should note that I...did not personally witness what occurred after they left the protective circle of the shrine at the bowels of the Castle. My injuries proved too great, and I collapsed there. The shrine protected me from the malice and monsters. By the time I recovered enough to move, the Great Calamity had ceased. I could only surmise that Her Majesty had been correct. The Sacred Realm, and the Calamitous One, and the mirrors...all of it.

"As far as I know, Her Majesty has been in the Sacred Realm all this time, fighting against the Calamitous One, commanding the armies that she brought with her. But I do not know what has happened in that time intervening. I only know...I learned the truth only years later. But I believe in what I have heard. Please...listen.

"The...mirror that had hung in the Sanctum since the Castle was first constructed, the symbols of the Goddesses upon its face. We considered it an ancient relic of the First Hero and nothing more. Never has its surface reflected more than the world around it. But Her Majesty...

"She believed that the Calamitous One had punctured through the fabric that separated the Sacred Realm from our own mortal world.

"She believed that the Divine Beasts, the guardians, and the shrines all relied upon the power of the Sacred Realm, that our ancient predecessors did not have some grand technology lost over the years. Rather, somehow, they knew how to harness the Sacred Realm.

"She believed that, with the fabric torn, she could make use of that mirror. And she...as far as I understand...was right.

"I did not know everything that had happened until you came. Until you came to Kakariko. I sent one of my own to the Great Plateau to investigate. The poet...the poet Mudora to whom Her Majesty had entrusted everything left letters upon letters in the cabin in the wood upon the Great Plateau. While you travelled to Eldin, I pored over the letters to discover all that which I had not known. Letters from the poet and his son, the former in Faronese, the latter in Tabanch or Necludan. I had read Faronese nor Tabanch neither in years.

"I knew Mudora's son. He visited Kakariko in his time. I remember him mentioning that he had taken on a pupil; then, one day, he ceased to visit at all. I did not know what happened to him until now. Now, I know: the son replaced the father on that lonely vigil in the Plateau.

"I read the poet's words. THe had come to the Castle the moment that the Calamitous One struck and had pledged his life to do whatever he could to aid Her Majesty, whom he idolised so, insofar as I could read from his writings. He swore that he would record everything to the last.

"The poet, in his writings, described the journey to the Sanctum. The poet, in his writings, described the mirror that shone gold upon Her Majesty's touch. The poet, in his writings, spoke of how Her Majesty pleaded with you and the armies to enter the Sacred Realm with her. Her Majesty would take up arms against the Calamitous One. Even without the blessed bloodline, they had you and the sacred sword.

"The poet, in his writings, spoke of how you refused.

"With the sacred sword in hand, you carved through the malice that flooded the Castle. You tore
open the quarters where you had slept. And there, you found...

"Well. For that question that you asked so long ago. The malice welled up from the Castle as blood from a mortal wound. From the Castle itself emerged the Calamitous One, as if summoned from another world. Malice, to the very brim. His Highness, and everyone else within the Castle, and almost everyone in the greater castletown—I do not know a single person who survived, though I do not, theoretically, rule out the possibility that someone would have escaped—perished, if not from the Calamitous One emerging from the spire, then from the malice that even now floods the Castle's inner walls. The sleeping chambers...including your quarters, Link.

"I apologise, Link, but...your sister...

"She passed away during the Great Calamity, Link. There was nothing that any of us could do."

Lady Impa falls silent.

For the first time since Lady Impa began to speak, Link gazes down upon her own hands. The hands that carried Aryll from Ordon to the castle. The hands that drew the blade of evil's bane. The hands that promised Aryll that she would be safe within the castle, no matter what happened.

The entire reason that she agreed to become the chosen one. To protect Aryll.

She does not know what happened to everyone in Ordon, but they could have escaped, could have fled, could have run from the monsters, could have seeked shelter from the shrine in Ordona Spring.

Aryll. Aryll, who...

Who died. Twelve years old. Only twelve years old. The entirety of her life. The birds that she loved so. The red telescope that she gave to her older sister the night before they left for Mount Nayru.

If you're going up to the tippity toppest peak of the whole world, you should take it! Maybe you'll see something pretty up there! Maybe like...a big white ice bird. I'd want to see that! If you see it, you could name it after me. The Arylloftwing. See how nice that sounds? I'm the best at naming things. Even falco' says that. You'll take it? You promise! I'm only giving it to you for this one day, because it's special. Promise you'll bring it back. You promised! You promised, so I'm holding you so that! ...can you hug me? I love you too! You're the best big sister I could ask for, too. I know you've got the Princess to worry about, but can you hug me until I go to sleep, please? It's cold without you. Like when we were home! Good night, big sister. I love you. You're...you're the best sister I could...ask for.

She remembers.

The red telescope that she has carried with her on her left hip.

Given to her by Aryll.

Before the expedition to Mount Nayru.

Just for one expedition.

With the promise to return.

The red telescope with its crude etchings of seagulls.
The red telescope.

Lady Impa speaks again.

"When you saw what had happened, Mudora wrote, you turned towards Her Majesty, and you told her that you would personally rip the Calamitous One limb from limb. I do not know how much the poet embellished. The poet recorded the journey to the Sacred Realm, but Her Majesty stopped him from entering the mirror. She asked him to wait with the mirror. If she was wrong, or if somehow she had not researched enough, or if anything were to happen, someone who knew of the events that had transpired could pass on the message.

"They would enter the Sacred Realm, and they would destroy the heart of the Calamitous One at its very source. I do not know the fullness of Her Majesty's plan. I know only what I understood from the poet's writings.

"I know that they failed.

"I know you and Her Majesty confronted the Calamitous One. I know that the sword that seals the darkness had not been enough. I know that in the very moment when the world needed you most, you...faltered. You lost your courage. You feared for your life. And so, you ran away."

The silence falls upon her as the snow over the living and the dead alike: she ran away.

Link feels the laughter that bubbles up. Not from her belly, but from the back of her throat, dry and hollow, like a flame sputtering on its own pile of ash, like a candle drowning in its own pool of wax.

She has spent so much of her life running away that she feels like she could dig her fingers into her palms and make herself sprint faster until she exhausted herself into the darkness. She has only ever run away. From her past, from her responsibilities, from her friends. From that house. From the Calamitous One. From the world.

Of course the blade that evil's bane rejected her. For having run away at the very nadir of the world. She has never heard of a hero failing. She has never heard of a Hero failing. She has never heard of the blade of evil's bane choosing wrong or selecting the wrong Hero.

Yet she has heard of herself running away. Always, always, running away. Even now.

"I know that you attempted to escape through a tear in between the mortal world and the Sacred Realm. I know that Her Majesty knew of the location of the tear. I know that Her Majesty exited the mirror. I know that Her Majesty gave to the poet instructions on what had occurred and instructed him to wait for your return at what Mudora came to call the Shrine of Resurrection, for she was convinced that the tears between the Sacred Realm and mortal plane corresponded to the shrines.

"I know that Her Majesty gave to the poet a telescope and told him to return it to you upon your awakening. I know that Her Majesty, too, told the poet that the sword that seals the darkness had itself disappeared through a tear between the Sacred Realm and the mortal world. I...I do not know how much of what I will tell you next we should believe, but I will tell you nonetheless.

"According to the poet, Her Majesty informed him that the sacred sword had spoken to Her Majesty in the Sacred Realm. The sacred sword had confirmed the Knight could use it to cleanse away the malice, but that the sacred sword now lay without a chosen one to bear its burden. That the sacred sword would now return to await for when the world would have need of it again, as has
been its directive. That when the chosen one would once more bear its burden, it would awaken.

"Mudora wrote that the contact with the Calamitous One had left the sacred sword, itself, wounded. The sacred sword would heal to regain its power, and then would again be borne by the Knight. For that, it would return to a sacred grove where lay an activated shrine, and the sacred sword would—from the shrine, which has draw power from the Sacred Realm for thousands of years—recover.

"Her Majesty chose to stay. To fight with her armies against the Calamitous One. She told the poet that she would fight to her last breath. When the portals closed, he would know that she had succeeded, either in wiping away the Calamitous One from this earth, or at least in sealing the Calamitous One away again.

"I...have never heard of the sword that seals the darkness speaking before, except, perhaps, for in the legend of the First Hero. I do not know how much the poet created for the fantasies of his writings. It is difficult to discern the truth amid the art. I cannot verify the truth.

"Her Majesty left the one remaining slate—the slate that Her Majesty had used to take pictographs, but which she had left unoperated since the Great Calamity began—with the poet, to pass on to you. 'Do not use it until the Calamity has passed, or the Calamitous One will take use of it as well. It is the last slate.' She instructed him: when you awakened, you were to use the slate and the sacred sword to wrest back the Divine Beasts, and then, to enter the Sacred Realm and cleanse the Calamitous One if Her Majesty could not.

"She warned Mudora to never divulge the location of the Shrine of Resurrection. She feared that someone could use that tear to find you, to murder, to...to prevent you from returning.

"She believed you would return.

"The poet asked her how she could believe in you when you had run away. She told the poet that she knew you. That she believed in your courage more than she believed even in her own. Whatever had happened had also fallen upon the sacred sword. When the sacred sword would heal, so too would your spirit.

"'Have hope,' Her Majesty advised him. 'Hope is all we have now, and hope is all we must hold onto. It is hope, or it is death. And, for once in my life, I choose hope.'

"And so Mudora waited at the Shrine of Resurrection for years. From my understanding, the poet left to sire children for the sole purpose of passing on the songs of the shrines that he had gathered and for watching over the Shrine of Resurrection. When the poet grew old, he sent for his son, then himself a music teacher who sought to pass on the songs that his father had taught him. His son agreed to take over and left his own protégé—whom he had found abandoned as a fledgeling and raised himself—to pass on the songs of the shrines.

"...as we know, the Calamitous One vanished. The shrines—at least most of them—grew dim and died. I suspect, because of the occasional sightings of monsters even in the time directly after the Great Calamity, that minor teras between our world and the Sacred Realm still existed, even then. But Her Majesty...with her power, with her wisdom, with her courage, with her hope beyond hope, and with the research that we had all forbidden her...saved us all. She gave herself for our sakes'.

"And so passed one hundred years.

"I...suspect that you may have been in the tear between the mortal plane and the Sacred Realm all this time. I confess that I do not entirely understand how this world. Her Majesty confded
in you much more than she confided in me, for you listened, but I do not know how much you remember, or understood at all. I do not intend that an insult.

"Several decades ago, the shrines began again to glow. The meagre reports of monsters have risen over the years to what you see now. I fear that the Calamitous One—or something else—is again puncturing through the fabric between the Sacred Realm and our world. The Divine Beasts’ awakening and yours coinciding implies that the Calamitous One achieved some breakthrough that ripped open the tears long closed, which spilled you out into our world at the location that Her Majesty hypothesised you would appear.

"What we call the Shrine of Resurrection, for we knew that one day you would emerge from that tear, if we could believe Her Majesty...is only another shrine, built upon a tear between the Sacred Realm and our own mortal world.

"But...I know little of this. Her Majesty knew much. I only speculate based on what I could salvage from her research, and the research that I myself have done since then. The Calamitous One destroyed many of the archives that she used. Much of the knowledge upon which she relied has been lost.

"I knew none of this at the time of your arrival to Kakariko. When you came to me for the first time with the letter from the Great Plateau, I did not understand, but I accepted what I saw with my own eyes. I knew for myself that the slate could activate the shrines and the Divine Beasts. I suspected that, as the Goddesses had delivered you to my door with the slate, so too could you deliver us from the malice. With that, and with hope in my heart, I sent you to Eldin. And the rest you already know.

"Is there anything else that you wanted to ask me, Link? I will tell you anything. Anything at all."

Link remains quiet.

"You said that you have activated all of the shrines and cleansed the Divine Beasts. Well done. You said, too, that the sacred sword has rejected you. Then, you are correct. You are no longer the chosen hero. You are free to live your life as you please.

"Perhaps the sacred sword has rejected you for your having run away. Perhaps it searches for another. Yet in all of the legends, and all of the stories, there is only ever one Knight, Link. If not you, then...

"Ah, but. You did not come for that. You came to collect the information, and you came to leave. You have done your part in Hyrule already. The Divine Beasts can surely do without you, as you said.

"Now you know, Link.” The violet bracelet on her right wrist jangles against the floor. "Is there anything else that you wish to ask?"

"I have a request. Two requests. Three."

"What are they?"

"I request five apples. I request that my horse be brought to the outside of the village on the southern side. I request a sheet of paper to write my companion a letter, and that that letter be delivered to him and my departure announced several hours after I leave."

"You are leaving without him, and you wish us to only tell him thus long after you have left."
She nods.

Ink and parchment. She barely recalls how to hold the brush in her left hand. From her satchel, she withdraws the Faronese-Central Hyrulean dictionary. Painstakingly she copies the loops from the book onto the paper. Painstakingly she records every word. Painstakingly she traces every letter without knowing the correct order of the strokes, simply emulating the words whole as best she can, like a child learning to write for the first time.

She does not know how to write Kass's name, or even her own. Not in Faronese. She could write him in Akkalan. But somehow. Somehow, somehow, she feels...

She calls him: traveller. She tells him: the final two shrines that he sought have already been activated, one by Her Majesty in the heart of the castle, and the one in the lost woods long since activated, many, many years ago. She tells him: every shrine and every tower in the land once known as Hyrule, activated. She tells him: that he can return to Medli with a warm heart and see again his children and his wife. She tells him: thank-you for having travelled with her for so long. She tells him: good-bye. Then Link folds up the letter. Standing, she bows to Lady Impa.

"Will you be taking the slate?" Lady Impa asks.

Her fingers brush against her chin. "Do you want me to leave it with you?"

"...you may do as you see fit." Link nods back at her. Lady Impa merely closes her eyes. "I do not expect you to forgive me. I hope that you can live out your life, Link, and I hope that you at least understand, if you do not forgive."

Paya presents her with the five apples. Link thanks her as she sets the apples into her satchel. When she turns away, she hears Paya cough into her hand.

"Ma-master Link..."

"I'm not the chosen one, anymore." Link laughs drily. "I ran away. I'm going to run away right now, in fact. It's kind of what I do." She rolls her shoulders. "I've got my own little trifecta: cooking, eating, and running away."

"...you-you're not acting like yourself," Paya whispers. "I don't like..." She shakes her head. "I do-don't know about this prophecy. But...Ma—Li-link. Link. Link. If anyone can...if anyone pull the sword from the stone again, it's you. I know it." She clenches her hands into quivering fists. "I...I just know it. Please...for the Pri-princess. You have to try again. You...please."

Link looks vacantly at her for a long, long time. Then she turns away. "Thank you for the apples. Good-bye."

"Link—!"

At the southern edge of Kakariko, she saddles Ilia. At the southern edge of Kakariko, Ilia whinnies at her. At the southern edge of Kakariko, Ilia shies away from her, and Link can only lower her eyelids and press the heels of her hands into her eyes. She swings her leg over Ilia's back and checks her saddlebags. She breathes, in through her nose and out through her mouth. Then she rides.

South, and south, down the winding path, and from there southeast. Lizalfos and bokoblins and moblins and wolfos and chuchu and keese and leever and like-like and poes and guay and a stray dodongo that belches out fire to burn the swamplands long into the night, the flaming gas rising like a second sunrise over the darkness of the evening sky.
She nears the Ash Swamp. The broken guardians, their eyes pierced through with the blade of evil's bane, in a narrow rise of land dipping into a pool of shallow water. She sets down her cooking pot into the sludge. When she steps into the mud, her boots sink down to her ankles; she reaches down and tug the rims up to keep the boots from sticking in the swamp while she pulls her legs away. The swamp carries the humid scent of decay, of rot, of death.

She taps her cooking pot. Kneading together the dough of a pie shell, she adds extra salt. She peels three of the apples, dusts them in boiled cane sugar, sprinkles cinnamon and nutmeg, covers the filling over with the top of the dough, smooths it out, turns towards the girl with the golden hair's own slate—the one that she has carried since her awakening on the Great Plateau—to ask her if the girl with the golden hair would crimp the pie for her except the girl with the golden hair can't crimp because she ran away.

She bakes apple pie. It tastes of ash.

She sits in the sludge, sensing herself sink into the swamp, the slice of apple pie in her palm tasking tastes of dust, and of silt, and of ash. She remembers nothing. She stares out at the swamp, at the plain, at the ruins of Fort Hateno that she can see just over the horizon.

No: she remembers something.

She does not remember the Sanctum. She does not remember the Sacred Realm. She does not remember the Calamitous One.

She remembers the blade of evil's bane in her hand, the fire-light dying away to a faded white. She remembers turning. She remembers the girl with the golden hair's eyes, the darkness of the pupils swallowing the irises whole, her hand closed around the golden charm she wore at her throat, and she remembers running, and she remembers the tear, ghosted in blue, the shape of a teardrop shimmering before her with its promise of the world she knew, the world that had seen Aryll's passing, the world that she had let down.

She remembers the tear. She remembers the tears. She remembers the running away. She remembers. Not hope, but its reflection. She remembers the vertical scars upon her arms. She remembers that fatigue. She remembers.

She remembers: "When we come back from Mount Nayru, we'll make your favourite."

She remembers: "I promise I'll make it for you."

She remembers: "And I've never broken a promise for a meal before."

She remembers: "You like...being read to? When I was younger, before I was old enough to take an interest in research, I fancied myself a writer of sorts, a poet. I always wanted to write the sort of story that you hear in the songs, of a Princess and a Knight, except...you know! Realistically! So many of those stories lack the basic details of worldbuilding that give you something to sink your teeth into, you know what I mean? Right, food. Like...like a meat pie without any seasoning or salt. You have the pie, and the meat, but where's the pizzazz? So I thought to myself that I would write a proper story. Where the Knight is, well, a person with their own flaws and feelings, and the Princess is more than someone sitting up in a dungeon, and you can truly feel connected to the world! And no magical powers, either. No sudden Goddesses appearing. No, no. We will go by some semblance of realism here. Though...I'll just have to use the Sacred Realm, of course. It's too good to resist, isn't it?

"Maybe one day I can still write it. Though novels are so short. I feel like I wouldn't have time to
say everything I want to. A series of novels. An entire epic! Half a million words or even more! Wouldn't that be fun to write? Though...perhaps not as fun to read."

She remembers: "Oh, this is one of my favourites! It was written by a poet here at court, you know. He came to see me one day. He said that he was so startled by my beauty that he was inspired to write a poem about me, although I cannot see how or why...no, that's not the poem I was talking about. This one he wrote about the Kokir Forest! You know, the misty wood in Lake Mekar?

"They say that those who enter without guidance will become stalchildren, forever cursed, until their bones turn to stone, and ogre trees grow from their remains. I thought it scary as a child.

"But that's only a nursery rhyme, I'm sure. Like the tale of the Faery Queen who appears to you if you say her name three times in front of a mirror after doing this or that or the other thing. I tested that one very meticulously as a child and found no evidence whatsoever for it! Hm? No, no, I wasn't doing it because I believed in it! Certainly not! If I believed, I wouldn't have carefully gone through with all of those ridiculous rituals: ice in the chamberpot, a spoon under the pillow, spinning around thrice, rubbing your stomach and patting your head at once in front of the mirror. I did it entirely for research. What's with that smile? Link? Link!

"...actually, this is the first time I've seen you smile so genuinely at me. I'm going to count this as my first victory today. Oh, now who looks flustered? Wh-what? I'm cute when I...?

"...I'm going back to the poem now! That's enough! Ah-hem."

She remembers:

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,

"but I have promises to keep,

"and paths to walk before I sleep,

"and paths to walk before I sleep."

She remembers that she has promises to keep, and she remembers that she has a promise that she has already broken, that she can never fulfill: when we come back from Mount Nayru.

She remembers that she has paths to walk before she sleeps. She remembers that fatigue.

And she wants nothing more than sleep.

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Apple Pie (three hearts) - apple, cane sugar, goat butter, rock salt, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: If you're worried about why it was each aunt that was raised to serve the royal family, as opposed to each mother, it's because Impa and the former "royal shades" were not allowed to have children unless they were dismissed from being
royal shades. Thus the lineage usually went matrimonially through the aunt (i.e. the child of one of Impa's siblings, such as Purah). By the way, Impa's family being treated like this is extremely fucked up! And it's not okay or a good thing!

The virtue of the Goddess Hylia is indeed hope. That of Sheik is truth, as I've mentioned before, with nods towards items associated with the sheikah such as the Lens of Truth.

The line about being chained to a rock while a leviathan rises from the depths is a reference a Hyrulean myth regarding a former princess of the zora people who was swallowed up by a great whale-like being (which, of course, is Jabu-Jabu). This myth parallels the real-world myth of Andromeda.

The line about Zelda losing "not only a mother, but also a teacher" is pulled directly from Breath of the Wild.

"We would have to suffer before we could see the Seven" is the concept of suffering in this life so that you can be rewarded afterwards.

The line about Zelda not crying at her mother's funeral is likewise from Breath of the Wild.

Central Hyrule has two coming of age ceremonies: one at twelve, indicating the transition from 'child' to 'adolescent', and one at nineteen, indicating the transition from 'adolescent' to 'adult'. Link's ages in Ocarina of Time are usually given at ten for young Link and seventeen for adult Link, which would in turn make Link in The Wind Waker ten and explains why the coming of age for Hyruleans is seventeen in Breath of the Wild. I decided to age that up by two years, partially as a favour to my childhood self, who thought that the ages of Link in Ocarina of Time were twelve and nineteen.

How much of it is fact and how much of it is fiction? Well, Fi canonically speaking to Zelda and telling Zelda to put Fi in the pedestal of the Great Deku Tree is pulled directly from Breath of the Wild; they even play Fi's theme and sound-effect in-game!

Mudora's son/Kass's mentor found Kass abandoned in Delicious in Wilds and raised him as his own. That's part of why Kass takes the promise so seriously.

The Kokir Forest is another name for the Great Hyrule Forest also known as the lost woods. Children entering the lost woods become stalchildren is a nod to Skull Kid's story.

The Shrine of Resurrection is thus not about resurrection at all, but is a poetic title that Mudora made up. Link was, instead, caught between the Sacred Realm and the mortal world (also known as the realm of will and the realm of blood, but we'll talk about that later) for all that time. I've mentioned the Sacred Realm and the mirrors to the Sacred Realm throughout Delicious in Wilds; go back and read some of the memories from earlier chapters, because I have seeded that Zelda was doing research on this since at least the Parapan arc, and probably far earlier than that. This isn't coming out of nowhere. The Sacred Realm being another world is something that's been a thing throughout the Zelda franchise, from A Link to the Past where Link visits a corrupted version of the Sacred Realm, to Ocarina of Time where Ganondorf enters the Sacred Realm himself although Link does not, to Skyward Sword where Link undergoes trials in the Silent Realms. The concept of the Sacred Realm as a parallel world harkens most closely to its depiction from A Link to the Past. The use of mirrors
in relation to the Sacred Realm or the other world in general is seen throughout the franchise, including in *A Link to the Past*, *Twilight Princess*, and *Four Swords Adventures*. So my rewrite of the lore of *Breath of the Wild* fits perfectly in with previous *Zelda* titles; it's just that I've taken most of my beats from older titles, notably *The Legend of Zelda*, *The Adventure of Link*, and *A Link to the Past*.

Mudora is indeed the one who wrote that poem, which was adapted from Robert Frost's, as I've mentioned before.

Up next: promises to keep; the lost woods; Link's nadir.

midna's ass. 06 November 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This is one of the saddest chapters in the series, surpassed by only a few (the chapter in which Link learns Marin's fate springs to mind). It's so incredibly gut-wrenching. I had a sense of something awful about to happen the entire time I read this, pretty much the exact opposite of the chapter in which Link rediscovers Ilia.

Emma. 07 November 2017.
Chapter Summary

Having realised heard from the wise matriarch that the travelling chef ran away at the hour of Hyrule's need in the Great Calamity, the chef travels to the lost woods once more to atone.

Chapter Notes

Author's notes that didn't fit in the end, again: I started writing this chapter at 18:02 on the ninth of August, and finished writing it on at 13:18 on the tenth of August.

We're really in the home stretch now! And yes, I, too, had a bit of a giggle when I read the chapter number for the first time. Thanks a million to all of the readers: every comment, every bookmark, every kudos, every hit has meant the world to me. Thank you for coming with me on this journey, and thank you for continuing to stick to me. Now we're getting into the thick of it. And thanks a million to my beta reader, even though she and I have taken to proofing at different times instead of the same.

Ezlo Trail is my name for trail through the Minshi Woods, and is in turn a nod towards Ezlo from The Minish Cap, himself a minish mage.

The village of Kashiko is named after the character Kashiko from The Wind Waker, the mother of Baito, who works as a sorterer of letters at the Dragon Roost Island mail centre.

The "pipes playing the wind" are in reference to the Pipes of Awakening from Majora's Mask. Of course, "wind and courage" in general has to do with Farore.

When I refer to Amali's voice, I'm not referring to her literal audible voice; I'm referring to the concept of a writer having a 'voice' in writing, things like that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

West.

She rides west. Scoping the motions of the Divine Beasts with her telescope, she rides to avoid them. Ilia could not outpace a Divine Beast; if one were to try to catch up with her—if the Champions have heard of her departure from Kakariko—she would have no escape. Yet they do not.

The Divine Beasts, as far as she can tell, loop upon routes from city to city, serving as glorified trading vessels, particularly the Divine Beast Vah Medoh, which soars regularly from one corner of the land once known as Hyrule to the other. She notes regular stops near the lost woods. Near what...near what the girl with the golden hair called the Kokir Forest.
Yet she cannot, cannot, cannot see any of the Champions. Not now. Not she, the girl who ran away. She does not know why. She does not understand the speaking of the blade of evil's bane, nor does she understand the nature of this Sacred Realm, nor does she understand what exactly the girl with the golden hair researched. She understands this: for some reason, in the Sacred Realm, she ran away. She has tired of running away.

She has tired.

If not for Ilia’s need to rest, she would not sleep. She moves by the cover of night and spends the days beneath the shadow of trees. The toll this takes on Ilia shakes her hands when she saddles her companion up for the night's ride. She promises Ilia: "This is the last time, girl, that I ever make you do something like this." Ilia responds by nibbling her hair.

She steams vegetables. Selling the monster parts that she gathers, she notices that each monster part fetches far less than it once did as monsters have become more numerous, which in turn brings her to hunt more. She does not buy anything for herself beyond salt, but she still needs to purchase hay and feed for Ilia: the more barren turns of the earth where the snows have melted but the ground lies still and dark yield no grass for her companion to eat.


Around the castletown, the closest to it that she has come, near enough to make out the pools of malice that steam through the ground and collapse the earth into the shape of a cooking pot. The castle itself sits stripped bare of its decorations and its flags, of its auxiliary towers and its gilded paint, down to the slippery material—the same material of the towers and the shrines, of the Divine Beasts and the slate—that comprises the core of the castle, which resembles more a pyramid-like temple. No: a cage. Some sort of cage, now, some sort of prison, rising up above the heart of the land once known as Hyrule, its cruelty matched only by that of the malice contained within.


Instead she removes the saddlebags from Ilia—the bridle and the saddle—and smooths out any identifying marks. Ilia herself, a normal horse as any another, should not draw attention. Or so she prays. She gives Ilia to the stable at the village of Kashiko huddled around a shrine near Pico Pond, turning out her satchel to drop moblin horns and pengator beaks, spume webbing and keese wings, octorok balloons and tektite legs, deku baba roots and daira scales, pikit tongues and pebblit jewels, keeleon fins and bokoblin guts, chuchu jelly and lanmola antennae, kargaroc combs and lizalfos tails, guardian cores and terrorpin shells, goriya skins and hinox nails, talus ore and lynel innards onto the counter of the stablehand who ogles her before quietly agreeing to watch over Ilia until her return.

"If I do not return," says she, "then please...please, I would like you to bring Ilia back home. Here's a map. You would go south here, along the river, then over this place here, and then go here east, and then southeast, until you reach these woods. There you'll find something called Telma Ranch. Can you do this for me? How long? How long would you be willing to wait? How long are all these monster parts worth? I see. Three months. If I have not returned within three months, bring her home. Thank you. Thank you. You don't know how much this means to me. Thank you. Can I make you something in thanks? A meal. What do you like? I can make that. Beef steak with a side of

She leaves a letter for the Champions and instructions to deliver it in one-month's time. In Akkalan, this time, so that she may write freely. She explains briefly to the Champions—to Sidon, to Riju, to Amali, to Yunobo—what Lady Impa explained to her: the likelihood of the existence of the Calamitous One, of the Sacred Realm and the mortal world, of the mirror within the sanctum of the castle, of the monsters and malice emerging from tears between the two, of the hope that the Champions might bring the Divine Beasts into the Sacred Realm to fight against the Calamitous One directly, before the Calamitous One emerges into the mortal world.

She reads the letter. She feels like she should drop her limbs in shock. She feels like she should grasp her head in panic. She feels like she should stare upon her own words in horror and in disbelief: the Sacred Realm, existing; the mirrors as the key; the girl with the golden hair, fighting against the Calamitous One all this time.

Instead she feels nothing at all. Just a letting go. As if she were writing about something that happened in distant lands, something that was written in a far-away book, something that someone spun from story and song. Kass could pen a song about this. The girl with the golden hair could write a story about this. And she...she can scribe this letter, in her loose and weary hand.

Back to the hillside of the province of Rauru. Around Lake Mekar to the west. Across the Elma Knolls. Through Irch Plain. Over the Aldor Foothills. Scaling the summit of Mount Drena. She stands at the peak with her boots in the snow and the wind no longer caressing but blistering what little of her face she has left uncovered. Even that: too much.

She gazes down upon the lost woods with their ever shifting mists. She can hear the minuet that she played upon the ocarina. What Sarie told her of this wood, and what the girl with the golden hair told her of that song: a memory of younger days. A memory of days when she thought she could live without breaking her promises; a memory of days when she bore the sword that seals the darkness upon her back; a memory of days when she longed to travel the world with Aryll, with Marin, with Ilia.

Aryll. Who passed away at the Calamitous One, scarcely twelve years old.

Marin. Who believed until her very dying gasp that she would return to walk with her across the wilds.

Ilia. Who lived a life apart from her. Who calls her, still, her best friend, and yet she has lived one hundred years that she knows nothing at all about, who will not outlast her, who already lives in time borrowed beyond borrowed.

No. Not those memories. She has let the blood seep long from those wounds. Instead, other memories well up to gnaw away at her innards. The memory of the days just before she drew the blade of evil's bane. The memory of the days when she wished to lay herself down by the side of the road, to curl up, to allow herself to rest. The memory of the days of fatigue. Of tiredness. Of exhaustion. Of wanting nothing more than sleep.

She opens the paraglider. The paraglider that the poet and his son died on the Great Plateau to pass onto her, broken in the thunderstorms of the Divine Beast Vah Naboris, healed again by the craftsmen of Nabooru. She opens the paraglider with its wooden supports, with its thin layer of rubber, with its tapestry of topaz, with its symbol of the Goddess Farore. She places her palms against the wooden struts. The right, with its crescent moon scars, the pain of her own awakening.

She opens the paraglider. She inhales. She glides, and the fog takes her, and the woods swallow her alive.

She lands with her boots amongst the ogre trees that face her from every direction, amongst the mist that presses in around her somehow tighter than all of the bodies of the most crowded dip in the city of Darunia. The instant that her heels touch the grass, roots slither up from the soil grasp her as though curling their fingers around her feet to drag her into the earth.

Inhaling, she grips the rims of her boots and jerks her limbs up. The roots of the soil prove stronger than she. She senses their pull down, down into the forest floor, watches herself sink to the ankles, and flails her limbs out from the boots. The coolness of the dirt spreads her toes; the flicker of the grass tickles the pads of her feet. Immediately she begins to shift her weight from foot to foot. As long as she keeps moving, the fingers of the forest have not the time to grasp her as they did the boots.

During her first visit to the lost woods, when Sarie curled their roots around her forefinger, the forest—she thinks—would do the same, but so much more slowly that a simple walk could keep them at bay. Now, however, she has no korok companion, no navigator, no guide. Now the forest comes for her.

She does not know if time, and the people who have come to the lost woods to seek the sword that seals the darkness, have roused the woods to action. She does not know if Sarie, instead, protected her from the fullness of the woods' effects. She does not know if it is something about herself.

She does not know. She knows nothing. She does not even know herself.

She observes her boots vanish into the soil. When she brings her left leg down, the waiting roots dig into the topside of her feet, a sharp pain at the back threatening to puncture through the tendon above her heel. She wrenches back her entire body. The tips of the roots scrap scarlet scars over her skin. The dirt stings in the wounds of her flesh.

She begins to walk. She does not look for the trees. She does not listen for the shifting kaleidoscope of music and laughter, sound and song, that whorls around her as the whorls of violet upon her flesh. Instead: she feels for the wind.

The forest's roots sharpen to bramble and thorn. The woods claw into her heels; the bushes that spring from the earth drag her back; the roots that shift to form hooks in her very path yearn to topple her into the grass so that the fingers of the forest can clench her and take her for their own.

The cold of the mist presses spines of ice into her palms and skewers the bones of her wrists to wrap her veins around in its frigid frost. No matter how she shivers, no matter how she breathes into her hands, no matter how swiftly she leaps up and down in her efforts to warm herself, the chill cuts her to the quick as if phasing entirely through her coat and laying its freezezard eggs just beneath her skin, letting crawl the worms of winter within her flesh, down to the marrow of her bones.

The very fog around her seems to scrape along her skin when she walks, less like a cloud and more like a corporeal something all around her, a thousand tiny teeth, a thousand tiny glass shards. At first she feels little at all, only the lightest sensation of brushing over her flesh. Then the sensation turns to almost that of scratching, and itching, and aching, and then pain. A throbbing, pulpy kind of pain, of pulsating meat.
Like the fog had become a ream of sandpaper or a zora's sharp scales or a grater of cheese against her skin, despite the heavy clothing that she wears. Something like dampness slicks the inner lining of her undergarments and of her gloves. Not sweat. Something else.

As she walks—never stopping, not even for an instant—she removes her gloves. The cool air against her bare skin brings her to wince. She gazes upon herself, upon her palms, upon the reddened rawness of her skin, scraped away layer by layer the longer she has walked. And, too, on her bare feet: not yet bleeding, but raw, as though she had walked too far in wet boots, her skin rubbing endlessly against the leather until it wore her down to the muscle.

It hurts to walk. It hurts to move her limbs. It hurts, and the agony worsens. She cannot tell if the lost woods actually inflict pain upon her or if, as when she attempted to draw the blade of evil's bane, the lost woods merely give her the impression, the illusion of pain.

The rawness of her puffy, sore meat feels very, very real. The redness of her flesh, like a cut of gourmet boar meat, looks very, very real. The droplets of blood that well up with excruciating slowness from her skin taste very, very real.

But she knows that if she ceases to move in the fog, the pain will stop. If she stops walking, the agony will ebb. If she stands still, if she stands absolutely still, if she lies down, if she sleeps, then the slumber will come swift, and she will not have to suffer. And she knows that if she sleeps, then she sleeps forever.

She walks. She walks, and she walks, and she walks. It hurts, and it hurts, and it hurts. She could sleep. It hurts. She has already broken her promises. It hurts. She is only running away yet again. It hurts. Always she has justified her running away. It hurts. Always she has said that she runs to avoid hurting people, to avoid assuming a responsibility she cannot bear, to avoid...to avoid...

Now she does so yet again. She will fulfill her promise, or she will sleep. If she has broken one promise, then she might as well have broken them all. In the end, in the end, all that she can do again is run away, and run away, and run away.

And then, after walking into the fog until her skin has coarsened to crimson, she finds the wind that she sought. She walks into the wind, and the woods change around her.

When first she came to the woods, she did so at the harvest, where the chill of the night descended only to kiss dew onto the gourds of pumpkins and the rinds of cheese. Her favoured season. Now she comes in the ripeness of the spring, where the warmth of life should cut through the fog.

Instead the mist kisses her cheeks, caresses her throat, glides its wispy hands over over her collarbones, finds the ticklish skin at the creases of her elbows and and her knees, traces the line of her spine to the small of her back, maps out the contours of her own life spent running away inked into her skin: her scars.

The woods go to her with a lover's hands. To run gentle fingers through her hair, to chart the wounds down her form with the quietness of concern, to susur over her skin with hands smoothed by affection, to dry her eyes with the pads of thumbs, to settle between the valleys of her knuckles with the tips of fingers, to warm her ears with a cherished breath.

The noises of tumbling blocks of woods and branches rattled against one another, of the pipes playing the wind and the ocarina playing the courage, of the laughter of children far off in the wood and of the dancing of koroks or their ancestors long past and long passed coalesce into a voice that she understands. She cannot comprehend the words, if the voice speaks any words at all.
But she can hear in the wind: the feelings that reach her.

To rest. To sleep. Just for a moment, to close her eyes. Hasn't she done enough? Hasn't she, from the very moment that the people of that house bore her onto the world, suffered under their hands and yet turned around and essentially raised them? Hasn't she cooked for them her entire childhood? Hasn't she been the one to work, first at the ranch and later as a courier, to bring back money for them to live off of? Hasn't she taken care of her own little sister since she was very young, with the money to send her away and bring her back, all the while making sure that her own grandmother did not know of the goings-on of the house? Hasn't she travelled all over the nearby regions of Hyrule, at first on foot, Akkala and Lanayru and Necluda and Central Hyrule and sometimes Eldin and sometimes Faron?

Hasn't she done enough?

Hasn't she come to the castletown? Hasn't she slipped past the guards to draw the sword that seals the darkness from the stone? Hasn't she pleaded for her life against the threat of execution? Hasn't she agreed to take on the burden of the chosen one for her own sister's sake? Hasn't she suffered beneath the endless snapping jaws of the royal swordsmasters who could not understand why the blade of evil's bane had chosen—chosen wrongly—a girl from Ordon? Hasn't she trained with each of the Champions: Urbosa and the sword, Daruk and the axe, Revali and the bow, Mipha and the spear? Hasn't she cooked her way into each of their hearts, and hasn't she found a path to the girl with the golden hair's, and hasn't she even convinced Impa with the pilaf all those years ago? Hasn't she protected the girl with the golden hair with her life countless times? Hasn't she tried her best to swallow down her feelings, to take the brunt of all those who have laughed at her and hurt her and told her that she could not be the chosen one? Hasn't she only ever responded in kindness and with her cooking pot? Hasn't she gone anywhere that she was asked, done anything that she was asked, even at the cost of seeing Marin and seeing Ilia and seeing Aryll?

Hasn't she done enough?

Hasn't she done enough? Hasn't she been beaten over and over to within a millimetre of her life? Hasn't she calmed the Divine Beasts? Hasn't she cleansed the Malice from them? Hasn't she found and convinced pilots? Hasn't she contributed the informant that went on to be the deciding factor in the war against the Yiga? Hasn't she brought together the whole of the land once known as Hyrule? Hasn't she done enough? What more can she do? What more can she give? What more does this world want from her?

Hasn't she done enough?

She could close her eyes. She could rest, just for a moment. She could lie down in the soft grass. She can feel the softness under the pads of her bare feet. She can feel the warm invitation of the earth. She can feel her own weariness swaying her back and forth. She can feel how comfortable it would be. She can feel her knees bending. She can feel her body angling down. She can feel her toes sinking into the soil.

Wouldn't it be so cozy? Wouldn't it be so nice? She can rest. She can let all of the pain that she has endured, and all of the worries of the Great Calamity, and all of the malice that take root in her body, fade away into yesterday's nightmares. She can sleep. Here.

She deserves a rest. She deserves a break. She has done so much. So good. What a good girl. She has done so much, and now she can sleep. Here. She can sleep.

Everything will be all right. Her friends—doesn't she trust them, believe in them, have hope that they will succeed?—will take care of everything. She can rest now. She has done enough. As long
as the sun, the moon, and the earth exist, everything will be all right. She can rest here. Here, here, in the boughs of the trees, in the embrace of the earth, in Ilia's arms, in Marin's arms, in Aryll's arms. Rest. Rest. Rest...

Except Aryll is dead.

Except Aryll is dead, and Marin is dead, and Ilia is on the verge of that precipice. Except none of them can embrace her. Except that she is alone in the lost woods, without Sarie, without her companion Ilia, without the sword that seals the darkness.

No.

Not entirely alone. She has the girl with the golden hair's slate. She has Aryll's telescope. She has Marin's ocarina. She has Ilia's whistle. She has Sidon's faith in her abilities, and she has Yunobo's pride in what she can do, and she has Amali's voice telling her how much she means, and she has Riju's kin, where the sky and the earth meet to form the infinite horizon all around her. And she has her cooking pot.

Curling her fingers into her right hand, she digs down into her own flesh. She tears open again the crescent moon scars that have healed over the entirety of winter, from after the harvest to the ripeness of the spring. She breathes in. She breathes out. The pain of her already raw skin pulses over her and dulls her senses. Yet the agony of her own nails ripping into her flesh: a pain as sharp as the blade of evil's bane.

The agony opens her eyes. White and blue. A flower. A silent princess, blooming before her in the fog.

As her gaze focuses upon the flower, she twitches every fibre of her body she can manage. She finds herself prone on the ground, flat on her stomach, the earth already risen to her lips, her legs and arms halfway sunk into the soil. She senses the hands of the forest, its palms of loam and fingers of root, reaching over and around her body, embracing her in a chrysalis of warmth while the woods take her.

She squirms, breathing through her nose; the soil has already swallowed her mouth. She can barely move her arms, and less every second. She cannot reach the slate, nor the sword upon her back. Nor can she bend her legs, nor arch her spine. Yet she can do something: feel the hands of the lost woods soothingly caressing her.

She can close her eyes. She can simply let the woods take her. She knows, she knows more than she has known anything else, that the taking will not hurt her. That she will merely lower her eyelids and curtain darkness over her world. That mild and comforting darkness, that warm and affectionate darkness, that blissful and misty darkness where she will no longer have to remember, will no longer have to suffer, will no longer have to bear the loftwing around her neck. The sword that seals the darkness has rejected her. Why should it choose her again?

Yet. Yet as long as she has blood in her veins and breath in her lungs and her cooking pot upon her back, she has not fulfilled the promise that she made to herself. To eat of every meal of the fruits of Hyrule, to cook every dish, to bear all that is delicious in the wilds. The wilds, and the people who make something of them. For their sake, she cannot give herself to the woods. Not here. Not yet. And the wood, with their painless slumber, would be too easy for her. If something has to take her, then let the Sacred Realm take her. Let the blade of evil's bane inflict upon her every iota of agony that she turned onto the lands once known as Hyrule. Let the pain take her. That might her a hint of all which she deserves.
She forces up her head. Her shoulder blades curve back. The joints of her shoulders throb in pain as she stretches herself out and angles up her face. Pushing her arms deeper into the earth, she jerks her chin free of the soil. She reaches. Her neck burns. The curve of her spine threatens to break entirely. She parts her lips.

She catches the petal of the silent princess on her tongue. Nipping the edge between her teeth, she tugs the bloom closer to herself. She opens wide her mouth and closes it around the flower head of the silent princess.

She chews. The bitterness of the flower, the velvety feeling of the petals as if she swallowed a moth, and the fibres that tangle uncomfortably in her teeth focus her awareness. She starts to rock from side to side.

The once caressing hands of the woods sharpen their fingers to claws that sink into her flesh. She cries out, the sound muffled by the veil of fog, as the wooden nails pierce through the thickness of her coat and splinter into the rawness of her torso underneath. The hands of the woods peel the skin from her sides in long strips that follow the contours of her ribs. Hot wetness dribbles down in their wake until her own blood coats her flesh. She flexes every muscle in her body. The earth forms a solid prison around her limbs, but the earth remains earth, not stone.

Against the serrated roots that wind through the dirt, the fingers of her left hand close around the telescope. Driving the red lens into the soil, she pushes against it and leverages up her left side. The fingers of her right find the slate. She taps at random, to find anything that she might use, and then she simply draws the slate from the pouch to thrust it, as well, into the dirt.

She pushes herself up. Her arms tremble. The roots over her back dig into her skin. Drawing in a shuddering breath, she impales herself on them. Rivulets of warmth thread over her shoulders to pool heat into the small of her back. She arches her spine, gouging out holes in her own flesh on the roots. When she forces herself higher from the soil, she hears the lens of the red telescope screech under the pressure and then shatter.

The roots break. She throws herself up and back. The telescope and the slate remain embedded in the earth as she swings her body backwards, the inertia of the letting go bending up her knees until she kneels in the dirt. She slams her palms into on the ground on either side.

Immediately the roots start rising up and grasping her fingers. She wrenches her wrists about. Jerking her legs up from the dirt, she tears her skin against the hands of the forest that have wrapped around her limbs. Her trousers rip. The chill of the fog on the throbbing heat of her raw meat darkens the corners of her vision. She launches herself backwards, flipping and landing on the balls of her feet upon the soil. Her heels impale themselves directly onto sharp and waiting roots that stab up through the arches of her feet. She nearly topples over again, but she barely catches herself. Instead she steps forward. Gently this time.

The mist cools the sweat clung to her brow. She leans down. Plucking the slate and the telescope up from the soil, she wipes the slate off on her coat before setting it back into its pouch at her right hip. She tries to tap the dirt from the inside of the broken red telescope on the heel of her boot. Then she realises—after a sharp pain to her foot—that she lost her boots long ago.

She sees in the ground before her a thoroughly Link-shaped hole, a burial site perfectly contoured to the form of her body. This is her hole. This hole was made for her. To lie within that hole: the most natural thing that she could picture doing. Like coming home to the softness of her bed after a very, very long day.

The ogre trees fix their gazes upon her. The ground stretches out for her with its gnarled hands of
loam and wood. The fog skins her with every step. Yet she has the taste of the silent princess on her tongue, and she walks into the wind.

She walks as rapidly as she dare without forcing down her footfalls. The raw and swollen lobs of flesh at the ends of her legs ooze blood behind her, both from the fog skinning her and from the gouging out of her arches of her feet. She stumbles. She trips. She meets the thorns and brambles on the ground with her palms, her chest, her face. She picks herself up. She keeps going. She walks. She limps. She crawls.

Every step lightnings agony through her leg and up her spine. Every step thunders pain behind her eyelids. Every step screams in the voice of the wind for her to stop. Yet she does not stop. She will never stop. Never ever will she stop, no matter the pain, no matter the hurt, no matter how tightly clenches her heart, no matter if it rips her limb from limb, no matter if it tears out her own innards and she can never eat again.

She walks into the wind, and all at once the air grows warm, and the earth grows soft, and the trees grow green as spring.

She comes upon the pedestal in silence. No guardians—no birds or bunnies—greet her. She walks. Somehow the gentleness of the grass against her wounds brings a greater wave of pain than all of the thorns of the lost woods combined. She looks down upon herself: her clothing ripped and torn, revealing the red and white rawness of her skin. She looks behind her: the trail of scarlet extends in an uneven and sloping path that runs around the periphery of the clearing.

Like the Malice desecrating the bodies of the Champions, she desecrates this sacred place with her blood, with her sins, with her existence. She who failed. She who ran away. She who has died and who has lived again only to throw the land once known as Hyrule entirely away out of her own cowardice, out of her own lack of courage.

She hungers.

She has no water, but she has a bottle of milk in her satchel, from Kashiko, that may yet remain fresh. Drawing the bottle from her satchel, she unscrews the lid. She sniffs. Not quite milk anymore, but neither rotten. The constant bumping of her movements while she journeyed endlessly across the province of Rauru has thickened the milk, at least partially; its liquoring has kept the milk from spoiling. She pours the milk into the cooking pot. Then she rummages through her satchel and the clearing both: one of the two remaining apples of the five that she requested in Kakariko. The pot of honey meant for Cremia. The rock salt for Ilia. The three silent flowers that bloom by the pedestal of the sword that seals the darkness.

She cuts the apple into slices, then quarters the slices and spreads them into the milk. She spoons in honey. If she leaves the woods yet, she will find in the merchants and the markets of the eastern realms of the land once known as Hyrule as much honey as she can fit into her satchel, as she can fit into Ilia's saddlebags, as she can fit into the entirety of a wagon, and she will deliver this all by hand to Romani Ranch. More honey that they'll know what to do with. Honey, and honey yet, and honey never enough. She does not know how much honey helps with Cremia's headaches. For all of the time that she feels like she has spent on Romani Ranch, she has spent only one winter and one week.

But then again: how long did she spend with Yunobo, with Amali, with Riju, with Sidon? A few days? A week?

She gazes into the cooking pot. Apple. Honey. Milk. In these three ingredients, she holds a trifecta of Hyrule in her palm, a trifecta of food.
And the silent princess. Of course, the silent princess. The white and blue. The girl with the golden hair's favoured flower, that blooms only in the wilds, that some believed to have gone entirely extinct except for the few scattered around hidden in the grasses, that she would cradle in her hands, telling her of how botanists and gardeners all over Hyrule have tried so hard to grow the silent princess, but only does the flower thrive in the wilds, and only does its spread its petals in the face of the winds. A symbol, not of Hyrule, but of the girl with the golden hair herself. She sucks a fibre still stuck between her teeth: a symbol that does not taste very good.

But she has never backed down. She would crunch down into a deliciously grilled rock roast if presented to her. The stringy tough bitterness of the silent princess that appears to do little but silence her footfalls may yet prove no match for the one thing in which she will not doubt herself: the preparation of food.

She plucks the silent princesses from around the pedestal and runs her palms over the velvet of the petals. Curling them up, she roasts them over a flame of Kass's flint. She props her chin up on her elbow as she watches over the small fire that chars the blessed grass so close to the pedestal. If the Golden Goddesses look down upon her, then either They laugh, or They make plans to smite her down where she stands. Yet the grass grows here, ripe for her to light and simmer stew.

And she hungers.

She adds the roasted silent princess leaves, petals, and stem to the milk. Then she closes the wooden lid over the pot, leaving it over the fire to simmer. While she waits, she glances at the blade of evil's bane. Resting within the pedestal, its blade the softened white of the flowers, its hilt the violet of the spirals that curl over her skin, its wings quiet on either side like the loftwings, messengers of the Golden Goddesses long, long ago.

She remembers what the girl with the golden hair asked her: "What if you found out that the sword that seals the darkness hadn't chosen you after all?"

She remembers what the girl with the golden hair asked her: "The sword...cannot harm the Calamitous One? I don't understand. Link. Link, where are you...?"

She remembers what the girl with the golden hair asked her: "Link...what am I to you? Why do you treat me so kindly, after all that I have done to you? Am I...am I only the Princess? Must you treat me so kindly, for the destiny on my shoulders? Or would you have...? Would you have treated me like this even without the knowledge of the fate that I bear?"

She remembers what the girl with the golden hair asked her: "Link...I have told you so much about myself, but I barely know anything about you at all, except that you are one of the kindest people I have ever met, and that you like to cook and eat. I haven't opened up to anyone like this in years. I...never realised how alone I felt, until I realised I could be honest with you and Urbosa. Aren't you...don't you...feel alone?"

She remembers what the girl with the golden hair asked her: "Link...could you please...please talk to me?"

She simmers the stew. Not much of a challenge. She lifts up the pot occasionally to check the softness of the ingredients with her knife, to stir the soup around so that nothing burns, to test how it thickens. A dash of rock salt sprinkled in. She sets the lid down again. Not much of a challenge, and yet something to simmering stew that sets it apart from nearly every other dish she has ever made. She stands, and she paces, and she looks over the cooking pot this way and that. Yet she can do nothing but observe the coiling steam escaping from the pot lid and wonder at how the soup will taste.
When the stew finishes simmering, she raises the lid and wafts its vapours towards her nose. She inhales as if she has not breathed in a year. The soup smells divine.

She pumps her fists into the air and laughs a light little laugh at her success. Wiping the drool from her mouth, she lifts up the pot from the flames and puts them out. The curve of the metal with its many layers of breaking and mending and breaking again and mending again and breaking yet again and mending yet again and breaking into quarters and mending into whole warms her lap. She dips her hand into the pot.

She snaps her hand out of the pot.

She puts her bleeding and rawed—and now also burned from the heat of the liquid—hand into her mouth. Her fingers taste of dirt from her earlier time lying in the soil. She swallows loam. She respects Sarie's tastes but cannot agree. Or perhaps she has not tried properly prepared loam. Sarie has said, after all, that she does not know how to cook loam.

Still, she does not wait for the soup to cool. She may not have the courage to do anything useful, but she has the courage to drink stew hot. Taking up the cooking pot in both hands, she raises it to her lips. The rim is so wide that she cannot quite find a place to put her mouth. Nonetheless she perseveres. With the power of her tongue able to withstand even boiling temperatures for the sake of deliciousness, with the wisdom of her trials and errors at finding a spot for her mouth to fit, with the courage of sitting not a pace away from the blade of evil's bane and cooking up the three flowers that for all she knows harbour the Golden Goddesses Themselves, she drinks the cream of silent princess soup.

Delicious. The underlying gilded texture of the liquored milk and the overlying the kick of the rock salt. The wholeness of the honey and the sweetness of the apple. The very particular softness of the simmered silent princess. The very particular taste, not unlike that sense of relief when a weight long placed over the back of one's neck abruptly lifts, or when a pain long throbbing in the chest suddenly ebbs to quiet.

She drains what she can, careful not to let the stew spill over her tunic and waste even a single drop, and then collects in her hand the remainder of the osup pooled at the bottom of the cooking pot, and then withdraws a bun of bread from her satchel to mop up the rest of the stew. It warms her belly and weighs her pleasantly down.

If she has to have a final meal, then this...this would be it. Almost it. One last garnish to add.

She bakes an apple for dessert. Baked apple. The simplest dish in all of Hyrule, and yet the wholdest. She bites in. She has heard said that the first bite of the apple is the best, yet she cannot agree: the last bite, that final morsel, that perfect blend of soft and firm that she cradles in the bowl of her palm, that brings her to close her eyes in the knowledge that this bite shall be the final bite of the baked apple she ever takes, that bite is the best.

Her palms stick with silent princess stew and baked apple juices, the same stew and juices staining the corners of her mouth that she now licks up with her tongue. She pats her cooking pot. "Thank you for everything, my friend." Good pot. Best friend.

She steps forward towards the sword that seals the darkness. Then she stops: first she touches her blue earrings still affixed in the lobes of her ears. Second she unties the blue band holding her hair and re-ties her ponytail. Third she shrugs off the feathered coat, leaving herself in her brown undershirt and blue tunic. Fourth she touches casually the slate, the red telescope with its broken lens, the blue ocarina with its sound weathered by years. Finally she regards the blade of evil's bane as she would regard the cooking pot.
She shrugs. Running her tongue over her lips, she tastes the salt that has gathered there, as well as that on her cheeks. She wipes the salt off onto her palm, then licks it up, inhaling through her nose and exhaling through her mouth. Then she raises an eyebrow at the sword that seals the darkness.

"Hi there. We've met before, you know. My name's Link. I'd offer to cook you a meal, but I don't think that a sword has a mouth. If you do, though, I'd cook for you, blade or no. Just name what you want. No, you don't have to accept me again. I don't expect you to. I just like to cook for everyone. I'd say that there's no quicker way to your heart than through your stomach, but I don't know if you have a heart. Or a stomach. That must be a lonely existence, huh." She rubs the back of her head.

"Not having a stomach. I can't imagine. I'll figure out a way to make you something if I don't end up dying here and now. No biggie, though. I've already died before. A couple of times, probably, if not for the shrines." She touches her chin.

"If I had to make you something...what would I make you. Well, it'd be anything you wanted, for one thing. Anything at all. I could try to make it. If I had to think of something that'd fit you, though...I'd cook up some silent princess dipped in butter and honey with a side of lightly salted acorns. Mmmh. I think you'd like that. I mean, I don't know. You're...a sword. But even a blade's gotta...you know what I mean? No? Right."

She pauses. She sighs. She shrugs. Crouching slightly down, she meets the pommel of the blade of evil's bane at eye level. "You're really long, did you know what? Even like this, your hilt's up to my chest. Most people carry their swords on their hips. That's how I used to carry mine, back when Rusl forged me one, about yea big. But I've had to carry you on my back for so long." She puffs out a breath onto the hilt of the sword that seals the darkness.

"Thanks for the silent princesses. They made a really good stew. All right. Here we go. When I was a kid, I heard that it's too dangerous to go alone into the wilds. For a really long time, I thought that that was just because, you know, monsters and bad weather and eating some mushrooms because you thought that they were the good ones and you were too hungry to check so you end up sick for three days and by the time you crawl home your best friend shakes you up and down and yells at you for how worried she was and then you tell her that you've been sick for three days and she just hugs you and tells you to not let yourself get lead around by your stomach so much. That kind of dangerous.

"But it's a different kind of dangerous. A danger to the heart, you know. When you're left alone too much, even when you're with other people. You get all kinds of scared. And you lose your courage. And you run away.

"I ran away. And...you rejected me. I know that. You probably want to know why I'm back here. I don't really know. I guess if I die, that's all right. I've done enough, I think. And if I die, then at least I'll die with all the pain stuff. If there's anything I deserve for running away, it's that. It's funny. That's kinda how I felt about this way back when I pulled you for the first time. If I die, I die. Maybe that's the thing, huh.

"I still don't really get everything. I don't really know why I ran away. I did, though. Nothing I can do can change that. I just have to look forward. So that's what I'm doing now."

She hesitates. Then she draws nearer to the blade of evil's bane, halfway crab-walking in her shuffle forward onto the pedestal.

"I thought I'd come here and you'd be gone. I think Riju and Yuno-yunobu said that they'd gone through a bunch of people, and you've said no to them all. I don't really get it. There's plenty of
people out there. Good people, too. Is there something else? Do you not want to be drawn at all?"

She tilts her head. The sword that seals the darkness offers no answer. She nods as though that means anything. When she rubs her hands together, she feels the lingering stickiness of stew and juice.

"All right, my friend. I still have the last bite of that baked apple. Here. For you."

She lets that last morsel that she did not take fall from the bowl of her palm onto the blade of evil's bane. It slides down, first on the hilt and then over the blade itself, streaking the sword with a glistening line of apple juice. She looks at the bit of baked apple as it drops sadly to the pedestal. And then she bursts out laughing.

"My friend, I hoped you liked that as much as I would've. It's all right if you didn't. I'll make you something someday that you will. No promise." She breathes in. "I want to say something, you know. Like last words. Just in case. But I don't know what words to say. It'll just be me and you knowing it. All right. Let me think. What should I say?"

She rests her left hand against her chin, and then her right, and then both at once. Suddenly she snaps her fingers at the sword that seals the darkness.

"I'm hungry," she says, and then she closes her food-stained hands around the hilt of the blade of evil's bane. And she feels, for the third time in her life, that completely and all-consuming pain.

A dull ache at first, like every bone in her body pulled on just a little too uncomfortably, like every joint stretched just below the point of cracking open, like every sinew and tendon strung out as if she were shooting up seven years of growth all at once. But she exhales, and she gathers herself, and she begins to pull the sword once more from the stone.

She pulls.

The agony worsens.

She can feel the tendons stretched to tearing, the sinews to shearing, the bones to breaking. She can feel the splintering of her blood vessels tautened beyond what pressure they can take. She can feel her innards disentangling from one another, can feel her intestines splitting open to burn through her entrails, can feel her skin swelled out until it begins to first flake and then slough off in great sheets, can feel the unbridled pain of the warm air kissing her raw flesh.

She pulls.

The agony worsens.

She can sense the pressure upon her heart, her arteries wrenched down and her veins up, and she can feel her heart thudding so desperately away even as the forces pull apart her spine to rip it through the line of her back between her shoulder blades, and one more second with her hands upon the hilt will burst her heart, the pain is buckling her knees and darkening her vision and it's everywhere and it's nowhere and it's worse worse worse than the Malice surrounding her to burn away her skin because the Malice coils inside her to dissolve her from the inside out and she is willing to die.

She pulls.

The sword that seals the darkness glides up from the triangular groove upon the pedestal. It sings. It hums warmly beneath her fingertips. It vibrates with its soft blue glow. It resonates with the sound like the laughter of a little girl.
Her hands. The palms curled in violet. Her right crimson with her own blood, her left spiralled in
the gold of the lightning strike. Her hands, holding the sacred sword, the blessed blade.

The sword that seals the darkness.

The blade of evil's bane.

The Master Sword.

—

_Cream of Vegetable Soup_ (eight hearts) - apple, courser bee honey, fresh milk, rock salt, silent
princess

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: I had a lot of fun coming up with just how the lost woods would be
more hostile to someone coming in without a korok companion. The woods literally
trying to take you, and the sandpaper-like fog, were part of my consideration of why
the lost woods would be so terrifying. The sandpaper-like fog is, I swear, a reference to
something from a previous _Zelda_ game, but I cannot for the life of me remember what
in the world I was referencing right now. Some kind of fog effect that drains your
health?

Link hearing that it's too dangerous to go alone is a reference to the memetic phrase
from the beginning of _The Legend of Zelda_. If you didn't think that I would somehow
reference that in a novelisation this long, you were wrong. And yes, I think I managed
to fit in references to other prime memes as well, but I only wanted to use them if I
could make them fit naturally, rather than force them for the sake of being memes.

There's a lot I could say about this chapter. Let me just begin with Link's
characterisation from the previous one: she has spent so long coming to terms with the
person she was, because she has had the biggest shoes to fill. She has spent her time
trying to rise up to the _hero_ that people thought she was, someone who was
courageous above all else, someone whom Zelda, Daruk, Revali, Urbosa, and Mipha
all trusted. Yet now Link has heard that, in fact, Link _ran away_ at the moment of
危机. Instead of Link trying to fill in the shoes of the hero, it turns out that Link might
have done something truly irredeemable, something that descended all of Hyrule into
chaos. Well...we'll find out yet what actually happened during the Great Calamity.
Naturally, I set up the story in such a way that Link would genuinely only gradually
come to understand the truth of the past, instead of _Breath of the Wild_ where Link
appears unfazed and doesn't do much actual figuring-out of the past beyond the
memories. That was necessary to avoid a linear game. Yet _Delicious in Wilds_ is not
open world.

So, the question is: why did the Master Sword choose Link _this_ time, and
not _that_ time? If you're curious, you could go consider the differences between the two
pullings, but we'll be answering that question explicitly a few chapters down the line.
It's probably not what you think it is, and it's definitely not what Link thinks it is,
because it's not something beneficial. There's indeed a reason that the Master Sword only now picked Link at her nadir. This wasn't just me wasting nine chapters of your time and then handing the Master Sword to Link on a silver platter; rather it has everything to do with how I have made the Master Sword in the world of Delicious in Wilds. The Master Sword chooses a hero, and the Master Sword uses very specific criteria to do so.

Of course, the ending to this chapter is almost identical to the ending from the sixty-first chapter, in the sense that Link is going through the same thing, just as during Breath of the Wild you slowly lose life upon trying to pull the Master Sword. Since Link of Delicious in Wilds doesn't have heart containers (if you want to see what an implementation of heart containers looks like, consider reading my other fic, adrift, which goes for a more 1980s swords 'n' sorcery style of magic and utilises the game mechanics down to being able to find hearts by cutting down grass), I decided that it would instead be a test of willpower. The criteria that the Master Sword uses to determine whom the Master Sword will choose were inspired directly by this test that happens in Breath of the Wild. I'm not sure if the Breath of the Wild team intended to have such implications, but I grabbed it and ran with it. After all, you lose hearts: that means pain, and you have to be willing to just keep pulling. The Great Deku Tree even warns Link in-game that Link will die if Link is unable to handle it. So then, what is the Master Sword looking for? Someone who can withstand the pain, true, and someone who has the strength not to die. But what else?

Up next: a talking tree; the Master Sword; gather 'round kids because it's time for an infodump!


Beta reader's comments: The way that the author portrays the Lost Woods is super cool. It creates this atmosphere of absolute desperation.

That absolute desperation really is what permeates this chapter, and it works super well. It's such a weird tone (in a good way) for Link to be pulling the Master Sword to - not triumphant, but resigned, in a way.

Emma. 08 November 2017.
Salt-Grilled Fish

Chapter Summary

The Master Sword has once more chosen the travelling chef. Now the chef learns of the history of the Calamitous One, from someone who knew the man the Calamitous One once was.

Chapter Notes

To all my readers: since the sixty-ninth chapter was meant to be "yesterday's" chapter, here's "today's" chapter. Enjoy! Also, my sincerest thank you and patience to all of you, for the scrolling that you're about to do!

As usual, author's notes that wouldn't fit in the end: I started writing this chapter at 15:55 on the tenth of August, and finished writing it on at 01:05 on the eleventh of August.

Hestu's cry of kooloo limpah is a nod towards Tingle of The Wind Waker.

The differences between the 'not activated' and 'activated' forms of the Master Sword are taken from Skyward Sword, where you forge the Master Sword but only activate Fi’s true power in the end.

The koroks referring to hylians as 'these hylia things' is in reference to the fact that hylians were known as the Hylia in A Link to the Past.

The korok who asks Link to make them food is based on Walton, who does the "Riddle of Hyrule" quest in Breath of the Wild; in the quest, Link presents Walton with: an apple, a fortified pumpkin, a sunshroom, a voltfin trout, and a lynel hoof. And, indeed, if you check the ingredients for the salt-grilled fish that Link makes for Walton in this chapter, you'll notice that those are the same ingredients (minus the lynel hoof) that I used in this recipe! Plus salt, because Link loves salt.

Hey, I think that this is the first time that anyone properly refers to it as the Triforce. I've mentioned the words Golden Force before, but never its proper term, the Triforce.

We'll see the phrase Realm of Blood come back, and so I won't comment on it here.

The whole idea of "your body does not truly exist [in the Sacred Realm]. It is only how your mind shapes yourself that exists there" was inspired by A Link to the Past, where people who do not possess the Moon Pearl from the Tower of Hera take on their 'true forms' in the Dark World (the corrupted Sacred Realm); Link, who is pure of heart, takes on the form of a pink rabbit; and by Skyward Sword, where Link essentially "astral projects" into the Silent Realms (part of the Sacred Realm), leaving behind the mortal body and taking on a body that is representative of the spirit in-game. In Delicious in Wilds, entering the Sacred Realm is somewhat similar to Skyward Sword. You exist in both the Sacred Realm and the mortal realm at once, but the laws of physics don't apply in the Sacred Realm. You keep yourself together by
force of will alone. As long as you have the will to live, you can be immortal. But, if you leave again into the mortal world, and some part of your body is messed up, you'll probably lose a limb or perhaps die, because the laws of physics take over again. You can't just get by on determination.

Incidentally, you should check out hestusgift.tumblr.com; please make sure to turn your volume down before you do (and warning for many things moving at once, in case that could cause issues with epilepsy/etc).

There are exactly eight-hundred-ninety-nine (899) "Yahaha!"s in the opening of the chapter. Why 899? Because Sarie isn't in the forest, of course! But all of the other koroks are, because people other than Link have sure found many of them over the one hundred years. Thanks for scrolling all the way through that very long opening, and thanks a million for all of the support that you all have given me all this time; thanks a million, too, if you ever tried to read Delicious in Wilds and then quit.

I've mentioned before how monsters, unlike people, will continue to attack long after a normal person would have fled to regroup. This is because monsters intrinsically do not have an understanding of death. They think that they'll just pull themselves back together through willpower, because the monsters are natively from the Sacred Realm.

Only mortals being able to use the Triforce is directly pulled from Skyward Sword.

The gift of friendship that Hestu gives Link is, well, Hestu's gift in Delicious in Wilds, which is a golden piece of poop. I found 892 of the korok seeds myself and only caved in on the last eight. I did this back in March/April, before the DLC that introduced the Korok Mask was revealed, so I literally combed all of Hyrule on foot by myself for over five hundred hours collecting most of the korok seeds in-game. Then I gave up, sat down with a map, and figured out where were the eight I was missing. When I finally turned in all nine hundred seeds to Hestu, and he presented me with a piece of poop, I literally slid from my chair and just lay on the floor laughing my ass off. That was better than anything I could have expected for my efforts. I found the korok hunt extremely fun and rewarding by itself, because it let me explore the world around me, which I personally find neat. Thank you, Nintendo.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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"Shakalah! Linky-link, you found us! Are you going to set Hestu on fire again? Kooloo limpah!"

A chorus that sounds like eighty hundred and ninety-nine "Yahaha!" at once, with a single "Shakalah!"

The veil lifts. The fog gives way. Link stands on top of the pedestal where once rested the Master Sword that she now holds in her hands, its violet wings spread from the pommel, its blade glowing a soft fire-light blue.

The air has grown warmer, and clearer, and greener. Grass. Flowers of yellow and white. And all around her: koroks.

More koroks than Link has ever seen or heard of in her entire life put together. Koroks of every shade and wood imaginable, of different sizes and shapes, with leafy masks of yellow or red or orange or brown or every hue of green under the sun and some that have never seen the sun, half of
them resting on the ground around her, the other half twirling through the air, and all of them bounding looking towards her. Some of them vanish suddenly into the trees. Not ogre trees. Normal trees, their boughs of leaves inviting her to rest beneath them, to climb up to their crowns and swing her feet out for a while, to lean back and close her eyes. Normal grasses. The clearing brightly lit. The sun visible. The sky visible. The clouds visible overhead. She cranes her neck up to make out the sheer vibrancy of the blue skies overhead. The middle of the day.

Although she landed in the lost woods in the midst of the night, here, now, Link observes the sun a hair past its zenith, just beginning to sink.

And there, in front of her: Hestu. Hestu with their maracas, which they shake up and down in time to their dance. "Shakalah!" they cry out, dancing ever closer to Link in undulations that would seem almost threatening if Link did not already know them. "And looky-look! Grandpa wants to meet you too! Say hi-hi hello-hello!" Hestu points behind Link. "Turny-turny 'round! Hestu's told Grandpa all about you!"

Still gripping the Master Sword very tightly in her left hand, Link swivels around on her heel. She raises her right arm to greet: a tree.

A tree so large and wide that if she were to lie down upon the ground, it would take five or six of her head-to-toe to make out the tree's diameter across. Taller than all of the trees around it, reaching up to the highest peak of the forest canopy, its massive height only offset by the relative dip in the earth in which it sits. Its branches bloom bright with blossoms of cherry as pink as hearty salmon, the petals wavering in the warm spring breeze.


"Well met, Hero, Chosen by the Goddesses," the tree says. Link nods. Very slowly. The rawness of her palms hurts around the hilt of the Master Sword. The blood that she has trailed into the clearing on her bloodied feet loops around in drunken spirals. The cooking pot where she made a messy stew of silent princess and baked an apple lies, half-forgotten, in the grass a pace away. The charred patch where she made her firepit remains blackened to ash, the one spot of grey against a world of gold and green that sings with the winds of the Goddess Farore, with the moisture of the Goddess Nayru, with the warmth of the Goddess Din, with the light of the Golden Goddesses.

Her entire body hurts.

Even if pulling the Master Sword from the stone did not, in fact, rip her heart clean from her body, the damage done by the lost woods has remained. The bottoms of her feet blister where the grasses beneath her heels poke into the raw gouges left behind. Her flesh continues to pulse under the absence of the layer of skin stripped off by the fog. The red telescope with its broken lens hangs uselessly at her left hip.

Link stares at the tree. The tree gazes levelly back. She nods, even more slowly, then, blinking, steps back. The tree speaks. She nods a third time, even most slowly.

She awakens to a slapping of a wooden ruler against her cheek. Not a wooden ruler: a korok's arm, bapping her cheek repeatedly to some sort of rhythm. Link attempts to shift away from the korok only to feel another bopping along her stomach, and a third on the back of her left knee.

At least three koroks. Four. All crowded around her, from what she can tell through the thin slits of her eyes. The sky above her. No trees. No, wait, yes trees. All around her, although she can see their tops that drop away to the ground far beneath her. A tree. She lies upon the crown of a tree in a nest of leaves. Link rolls slightly over, not enough to disturb the koroks at their play, to confirm
herself on a bed of soft leaves, her belongings in a pile about two paces away. Several of the koroks go through her things; she notes with some relief that—unlike the lizalfos from two years ago—none of the koroks has pulled her undergarments over their head.

Indeed, Link still has on her clothing, no matter how torn and bloodied that clothing may be. Well, Amali might have words to say about that.

Her hands wrap in something like bandages, made of some sort of stringy material—plant fibres or leaves—and the same with her feet and most of her torso. She can move her fingers. Her skin no longer hurts. Link senses something like a salve or sap between the bandages and her skin. Medicinal salve. The koroks must have taken care of them.

The koroks. The koroks, who whisper amongst themselves in a language that she should not be able to understand, yet she can hear in her left ear a whisper: some manner of translation. A whisper in a voice that she has heard before, that speaks from everywhere and nowhere at once, cool and warm at the same time, melodious even in its prose.

"These hylia things are funny looking!"

"I doesn't think this bit is any good for drumming! This bit is better!"

"Why are we drumming on it anyway?"

"Because we're supposed to drum on it! Look, it's got that kind of fabric-y-fabric that makes the boing boing sounds! It's gotta be a drum!"

"But it took the sharpy out...drums can't take the sharpy out..."

"Have you ever seen anyone else take the sharpy out?"

"No...the sharpy's never come out...not since it got putted-put in again..."

"So how do you know drum can't take it out!"

"Only a thing with hands can take it out!"

"I know, and this thingy is a drum! No one said that drums can't have hands."

"But I've never seen a drum with hands..."

"You're looking at one right now! See! It has hands and it's a drum."

"But I thought drums couldn't take out the sharpy..."

"Well this one did. You can't argue against something that really did happen!"

"...oh. You're right..."

A new voice bursts in, a higher pitch than the rest; a sudden thud onto her upper belly doofs the breath from her lungs. Cracking upon one eye, Link peers at the korok presently standing atop her stomach, their torso dark greyish-brown, their light green leaf mask looking too big for their body, a pair of berry bushels in its tiny hands, the round berries red and ripe enough to rumble her stomach.

"Stooop! It's out of hibernation! It's out of hibernation! That's meeeeeanaaahs that I get to ask it to do the big important thing!"
"The big important thing? What's the big important thing?"

"Nyuuu it's a super secret mission Hestu gave me personally! Juuust to me! So that makes it special! Hylia! Hylia! You there, hylia person! Hello. Hello. Do you not speak korok? Do you not?" The korok bounces up and down on her stomach, addressing her legs rather than her head. When her knees, predictably, do not give a response, the korok leans down. They grip her legs and try to shake them into awakening.

Link starts to sit up. The korok papping her cheek shouts out, tumbling off of her. The koroks slapping at her stomach and the back of her knee leap away as well; frantically they wave at the korok currently endeavouring to oust answers from her knees.

Her neck cricks uncomfortably. Leaves stick in her mussed and messy hair. Link tries to brush her fingers through the matted and twisted strands that clump to her head. Diagonally across her back, from her left shoulder to her right hip, a stretch of her body feels sore to aching. When she reaches back her left hand, Link's wrist bumps against something over her shoulder. She turns her head: a violet hilt with wings extended.

Her breath catches. She closes her eyes, counts to ten on her fingers, realises that she skipped the number six, goes back, counts to ten on her fingers again and more properly this time, and opens her eyes again. The sword that seals the darkness, the blade of evil's bane, the Master Sword remains upon her back. She closes her fingers around the hilt. Link feels a sheath now strapped to her back, different and distinct from the sheath that Riju gave her alongside the straight sword. A sword that she no longer needs.

Link draws the Master Sword. The blade glows its soft fire-light blue. She ogles it. It stares back in its own way, and she can almost sense a thread of amusement resonating through the hilt.

The korok on her stomach continues to yell at her kneecaps and bristle the berry branches eagerly in their direction. She cannot understand the korok's words, their tongue of crinkling leaves and shaking blocks, the translating voice having disappeared without a trace. Yet in that moment, she does not care.

Link leaps to her feet. The bed of leaves on which she lay while fainted rustles about her in a susurrus that cascades from the crown of the tree. The koroks cry out. She holds the Master Sword with in hands. The bandages make her palms slippery, and so she clings to the blade with pressure alone.

The Master Sword. Glowing with its soft fire-light blue. Humming her very bones with its resonance. The Master Sword. Having chosen her again.

Somehow, somehow, hope beyond hope, even though she knew with the fullness of her being that the Master Sword would never choose her again, despite that she ran away all those years ago from the Calamitous One and the girl with the golden hair and everyone in the land of Hyrule, despite that she disappointed and betrayed them all, despite that she fled out of cowardice at the moment Hyrule needed her—

—the Master Sword has chosen her.

Two years ago, kneeling on a cushion in Lady Impa's home, Link wanted nothing more than to give up everything of her past. Now, two years later, she sees, in the reflection of her face upon the blade of the Master Sword, the chance to atone. The chance to take back her life.

She gazes upon her face. Brown hair frames her features. A slightly downwards sloping nose sticks
crookedly—broken one too many times, every shatter healing not-quite-right—beneath her eyes, her lashes thick and dark. A scarlet droplet of a scar beneath her left eye. Vertical lines dug in down her cheeks. A diagonal mark from just to the right of the corner of her right eye to her jawbone. Her bottom lip and upper chin a mess of criss-crossed tissue like trails marked over a map, like a forest with the space between each tree drawn in. A pockmark of malice upon her right cheek. Scars over her brow and across her jawline. The lick of violet at her throat, the same colour as the sash that Marin once wore around her hips.

She inhales. Two years ago, when she gazed at herself for what—to her—felt like the first time, she saw a face mostly unblemished, skin smooth, brow uncreased. Link does not know if the relative lack of scars came from a lack of danger from before the Great Calamity, or from a greater purvey of skills that she has since lost or not regained. Or perhaps from her time in the Sacred Realm healed her scars, somehow, but that cannot be true either: Link has retained at least some scars from before her century-long slumber.

And now, long after that slumber ended, her face tells the battles that she has lost and the battles that she has won, the places she has seen and the paths she has walked. Even with a hood and a coat to cover up the majority of her body, her scars still draw her attention, the last thing that she ever needs. But, scars or no, Link can still make funny faces at herself in the reflection of the Master Sword.

Once she poked her tongue out enough, once she has scrunched up her nose enough, once she has sent the koroks laughing at her enough, she rests the Master Sword in her lap. Link signs, awkwardly, just with her right hand: "Welcome back my friend,"

She hugs the Master Sword to her body. Curling herself up around it, she presses her left cheek against the pommel, her ear against the hilt. She listens to its musical hum. Link can—almost—make out a voice in that hum, a voice that says: "Welcome home."


"Hello!" The voice of the translator in her left ear again. A bat of wood against her nose. She recoils back to find the korok with the leafy mask far too large for their miniscule body slapping her with the berry-bush branches. Link wrinkles her nose and sniffs. "Hello hello, hylia thing! Hello hylia thingy! I have a request for you! I have a biiiiig request! Won't you do me for me? Grandpa said I could get you to do it for me and Hestu's told me aaaaallllll about you!"

Link sheathes the Master Sword. Some part of her considers this little more than a dream. She will awaken to find herself entangled in the roots of the lost woods. For now, she nods. "What do you want me to do?"

The korok paps her on the forehead. "Ohohoho wowie wow wow I guess hylia things can't talk! That's funny! What's all this?" The korok starts to emulate the motions of the hand. Link touches her chin, then tries to say hello in every single language that she can think of, and a few that she simply makes up on the spot in her efforts to communicate. The korok laughs and whirls around. "Hylia things are funny! Hestu says that hylia things know how to make foody-food for our tummy-tum!" Link tilts her head; do tree people have stomachs? She supposes, if the virtue of the Goddess Kokir is joy, then they must. A people without stomachs, to her, would necessarily be a people without joy. "Hylia thing, come! Come!"

At least whatever miracle she hears in her left ear continues to translate the rustling of leaves. Link follows behind the korok while they twirl through the air towards a small leafy patch on the other side of the crown of the tree. The korok begins to rummage through a pile of leaves. Standing on her tip toes, Link cranes her head to peer over the korok's shoulder. Abruptly something small, red,
and firm flies towards her head; only her impeccable sense of food allows her to throw her hand forward to catch it. She peeks at her palm. An apple.

The korok begins to fly every manner of foodstuff at her: a handful of spicy peppers that leaves her face aflame; an armoured porgy *fwipping* around in her hand; a bushel of electric safflina that whacks her across the face; a razorshroom which leaves a second cut under her left eye around the same place as the first; a voltfruit sticking into her tunic by means of the prickles for which she has never been grateful before and likely never will again; a voltfin trout that she—her arms full—unwittingly attempts to catch in her teeth only for the electricity to shock her into nearly dropping everything, forcing her to dive down onto the crown of tree to catch the still-flopping fish; a sunshroom which serves as a heating pad for her face as she attempts to balance it on her nose with the voltfin trout trying its best to writhe out of her mouth; and an entire fortified pumpkin that cracks open against her nose and knocks her flat on her back.

The korok whirls towards her. While Link desperately attempts to collect all of the food in her arms, the korok starts to toss several of the ingredients back, until Link sits upon the crown of the tree with an apple, a pumpkin, a sunshroom, and a voltfin trout.

"Make these yum-yum for me, hylia thing!" the korok demands. "These are the finest from my collection of shiny shiny pretty pretty tasty tasty yummy yummy crunchy crunchy! Hestu said that you can make something yum-yum from them! Make it yum-yum!"

Link rubs the back of her head. The voltfin trout shocks her again, and she puts it out of its misery with a flick of her knife. Stretching behind her shoulder for her cooking pot, she realises that—having lain on her back in the bed leaves—she has no cooking pot. Not in her pile of belongings, either, although she grabs her things and throws them onto her shoulders before continuing.

The telescope, broken in the lost woods, gives her pause. She examines the shattered lens and the inner workings caked with soil. Link exhales. When she returns from this haven of koroks, she will surely have to repair the telescope, one way or another. Just as with the cooking pot, and with the paraglider, and with herself.

Right: the cooking pot. Pacing around the crown of the tree, Link spots it still sitting by the charred patch of grass near the pedestal. The korok following behind her inquires of what in the world she is doing. With a flicking-open of her paraglider, Link steps off of the crown of the tree and glides downwards towards the pedestal where waited the Master Sword before the Master Sword *chose her again.*

The Master Sword, currently sheathed on her back. Link beams. No, more than that. Grinning, she pumps her fists into the air and lets out a *whoop* so loud that the koroks vanish into the underbrush. She *ehehes* sheepishly.

Settling herself in front of the pedestal, Link considers the ingredients before her. Apple, pumpkin, sunshroom, fish. Fish stuffed with pumpkin and sunshroom and served with baked apples. Not the first thing that she could imagine, surely, but good enough. She nods to herself, contemplating as she brushes her hand against her chin, and pulls out a bit of rock salt with which to grill the fish.

She pours in oil from the flask in her satchel, then digs up the ashes of her previous firepit. Link would cut up the fish fillet as best she can with a couple of leaves and her knife, except the voltfin trout that the korok has given her proves too long for the knife to comfortably cut. She touches her chin, and then she unsheathes the Master Sword, calling upon it for its truest purpose: cooking.

Link fillets the fish. She minces sunshroom and carves pumpkin. First she fries the pumpkin and fungi, using the Master Sword to flip the ingredients in the pot about where her knife proves too
short to reach. She prepares to sprinkle salt over the fillet before she tosses them into the oil. Suddenly she stops.

She stares at the rock salt sitting in her palm. Link glances furtively left and right. No Ilia the horse to steal the rock salt from under her nose. No Ilia the hylian girl to tell her that she should absolutely not shove a piece of rock salt down her gullet. No one to stop her.

Link cups a hand over the rock salt to hide it from herself. She brings it up to her lips. A lick: salty. A kiss: quite salty. A shoving it down her gullet: so salty that her eyes water and she chokes around the rock. She spits it back out into her hand. Licking her lips, she bleghs out her tongue.

She has cravings for salt, but this. Too much salt. Too much. She never thought in her life that she would say something tasted too salty, but the world has a particular way of surprising her at every twist and turn. The Golden Goddesses have a very particular sense of humour, after all.

While she rubs her tongue on her palm to try to rid herself of the taste of salt, Link hears a voice behind her. Speaking in Akkalan.

"...Hero, Chosen by the Goddesses," rumbles the voice, "it is time for us to speak, both of the burden that you carry, and of the sword upon your back."

Ever so slowly, Link turns around on her heel, her salt-fuzzied tongue stuck out of her mouth, the Master Sword in her left hand dripping with the trout's juices. She stares. The tree. The tree with the face. The tree with the face that gazes—kindly, if a tree could gaze kindly?—down upon her with her sacrilege of the Master Sword.

"When last I spoke to one of your kind...my forefather before me granted me to the soon-crowned Queen of the original kingdom that would come to be known as Hyrule, the family that lived long before the ancestors of the Princess you seek came to inhabit the Castle, who carried me across the great seas to this land. She tasked me, like my forefather before me, with preserving the koroks, whom the Goddesses deemed undeserving of the suffering of years of passing, and so granted them an eternal childhood."

Link blinks. Her stomach rumbles. She tries not to squirm; rather she focuses her attention on holding the Master Sword in her hand while the tree speaks.

"As I grew and spread myself to protect the koroks, I came to understand the nature of this Realm of Blood, and the nature of the Sacred Realm. Long, long ago, the pedestal that you see before you was constructed, and I planted, at a sanctuary where the Sacred Realm and our world grow close. I believe that the only point in this land closer to the Sacred Realm lies within the very heart of what is now the Castle, from which once the force of the Sacred Realm flowed over this land before the Sacred Realm was sealed away. The inhabitants learned to engineer marvels that drew upon the force of the Sacred Realm, marvels so resilient that still many of them exist, though many more remain buried beneath the soil. Even the Castle of which you know was constructed from the top floor of what was once a great tower that channeled a portal to the Sacred Realm..."

Link nods sagely. She breathes in through her nose, which proves a fatal mistake: the fragrance of the salt-grilled fish and the baking apples wafts towards her, drawing her gaze down towards the pot. She tries to snap her head back up, attempts to focus on the talking tree.

"...I have seen many things in my time. A war that tore open Hyrule for years, a war of mechanical marvels. I have seen Hyrule's splintered factions of revolutions struggling for dominion, seeking to conquer the throne. I have seen royal family attempting to quell them. And I have seen no concern for the people of these lands. The war of which I speak nearly led to the destruction of this land
and all who dwell within."

She has also seen many things in her time. Such as the cooking pot with the grilling fish, which she most definitely is not looking at.

"The Calamitous One of which you speak was once a man, a man as human as yourself, a man who sought to use the Golden Force granted by the Goddesses, but who could not contain the force held within that light. The man was a powerful mage, a wise scholar, and a courageous helper of the people who believed that he desired to help Hyrule. He himself had contributed to the building of the mechanical marvels powered by the Sacred Realm, and he witnessed in horror how the machines meant to help turned to instruments of war. For that reason, he sought the Golden Force."

As Link now definitely does not seek the cooking pot. Except when she smells a hint of burning.

"He wished for the royal family that then ruled the land to give way, for the royal family in those days had fallen under the spell of the crown's might. Long after the establishment of Hyrule, the royal family devolved into tyranny. The man wished for something to put an end to that war, for something that could unify the warring factions of Hyrule and bring her people together.

"The man came to the Golden Force with the best of intentions. When he made his wish, the Golden Force looked deep into his heart of hearts and did not find a true wish as pure as the one that he had set out to make. Although the man had thought himself desirous of peace for Hyrule, the Golden Force found in his heart a call for power great enough that the man himself would take over the land; the Golden Force discovered that the man's truest and most honest desire was to put an end to the fighting and unify Hyrule to rebuild it in his own image. The Golden Force has no choice but to answer his wish."

Just as Link has no choice but to answer her fish. She crouches down beside the cooking pot and leverages the Master Sword—wincing all the way—to flip the voltfin trout onto the other side until the fillets grill evenly.

"In doing so, the Golden Force transformed him into the Calamitous One of which you speak, indeed with power enough for the man to take over the land and rebuild Hyrule in his own image. As his wish desired, the existence of the Calamitous One put an end to the war by bringing together all of Hyrule against the Great Calamity that had arisen.

"To seal the Calamitous One away, those gifted with the understanding of the Sacred Realm and the knowledge of manipulating its magic gave their own lives, contributing their life-forces to sustain the seal. So many gave themselves on that fateful day to complete the seal.

"In those chaotic times, during the long war against the Calamitous One, there came a family of hylians who called themselves reincarnations of Hylia, said to descend from the mortal Hylia that aided the First Hero far before my time. The sacred sword that had been given to me for safekeeping was drawn by the Knight of Hylia, whom the sword had chosen. Sacred sword in hand, the hero completed the sealing."

Glancing up from the fish, the Master Sword still stuck in the cooking pot, Link attempts to nod so show that she has absolutely listened the entire way through, even if she can only comprehend bits and pieces. She thinks she grasps the meaning, much like she longs to grasp the fish from the cooking pot.

"They knew that the seal would hold for ten thousand years. In the time intervening, they prepared for the eventuality of the Calamitous One's escape by determining where the Sacred Realm and the Realm of Blood intersected. Upon those points, they built what you call shrines, to teach the people
ten thousand years from them of what might one day occur and to prepare them for the unsealing of the man you call the Calamitous One.

"They left behind instructions in song and in shrines, hoping that something would reach beyond the veil of time. The royal family carried the sacred sword with them. I do not know, entirely, where the sword has lain in the time intervening.

"I do know that, until one hundred years ago, when She Herself returned to me through the Sacred Realm, She had not had contact with the Golden Force for ten thousand years. And so, when you drew Her, Her powers were drained. I hope that you will forgive Her."

Link bobs her head in understanding. That, she can and will forgive. For going ten thousand years without a scrap of food would surely prompt her to run off of the nearest cliff a hundredfold in the hope beyond hope that some bowl of warm rice might apparate in the reaches below while she falls.

"Nor had the man that you know as the Calamitous One spent these ten thousand years in vain. As an engineer, he understood the mechanical marvels; as a scholar of magic, he knew about the connections between the Sacred Realm and our world. During those ten thousand years, as the seal began to fade, he realised that these knowledges were long lost to the people of Hyrule.

"The Golden Force left him a force of nature, able to neither reason nor think, yet the knowledge that he had as a man remained with him. Thus, comprehending without comprehension the ignorance of the people of Hyrule who no longer know of the Sacred Realm, the man you call the Calamitous One devised his plan, as a hawk instinctively devises the ambush of the field mouse. Unopposed could he control the...

Despite herself, Link senses herself blinking. She rubs her eyes. Although she tries not to yawn, the tears of tiredness spring to her eyes.

She hears the tree chuckle. "I see that you have little interest in matters of thousands upon thousands of years ago. I understand. I do not begrudge you. These things hold little relevance to you, no matter how weighty they feel for me, who has lived for more years than there are koroks in these woods. Before you go, as you must, allow me to impart on you some words of wisdom, and thereafter a recipe that may help you."

Link perks up. She glances up at the tree with her eyes wide and her smile wider, facing them with her full attention, and the tree chuckles again.

"Then, listen well...

"The Golden Force...the Triforce...was given to us by the Golden Goddesses. Only a mortal—and not any of the Goddesses—can wield its magic, yet the magic it possesses is nearly infinite. But be careful, for the Triforce will look into your heart to feel what you truly wish for. If you do not know what you truly wish for, then do not touch the Golden Force at all."

For a moment the tree remains silent. Link starts to form a question on her fingers, intent on interrogating the tree for the recipe. Then she notices something of a strain in the tree's face, as much as a wooden face can show strain. Her arms fall to her sides. The tree speaks again.

"Years upon years ago, I assisted the man that would become the Great Calamity, for I judged him—and he judged himself—as having the intention to aid. Do not become the next Calamity. That is all I may ask of you."
She shudders.

"The Sacred Realm is a strange world, and the Golden Force will test you. Prepare yourself, Hero Chosen by the Goddesses.

"In the Sacred Realm, there is no death. But be warned: your body does not truly exist there. It is only how your mind shapes yourself that exists. If you *die* without dying within the Sacred Realm, and you do not know how to piece your body back together through your willpower alone, then you may remain indefinitely alive within the Sacred Realm. Yet, when you emerge, and the laws of the Goddesses once more take hold of your form, you shall perish more likely than not. If you do suffer injury, or if you do lose control of your form, I do not recommend that you attempt to return to the Realm of Blood."

Link tries to wrap her mind around the concept. Like a knead of dough. Like...gathering the borders of her essence after the times that she has nearly died. Batter might pour over a countertop and spill onto the floor, but thickened dough can retain its shape. Link need thicken herself, thicken her willpower, thicken her determination. She kneads herself.

She *needs* herself.

"...and for that matter, *all* beings in the Sacred Realm do not perish. For this reasons, the beings you call monsters are not afraid of death, for they do not understand such a concept, being born of the Sacred Realm.

"As for the recipe that may help you..." Link leans in, her mouth watering. "...at the base of my trunk grow truffles that strengthen the heart and bolster the spirit. They will, once cooked, allow you to regain strength otherwise lost by wound and even to temporarily surpass yourself in fitness and alertness, dulling your pain and increasing your natural resilience to harm. Take with you as many as you wish. It is the least that I may do.

"I would wish you luck, but you do not need luck. You have the ability within you. You have the power, the wisdom, and the courage...and you have a full stomach, do you not?"

She nods.

"Then go, with my blessing, and know that the Golden Goddesses watch over you." The tree cannot exhale or sigh without lungs, yet Link can see how visibly they relax all of themself at once. Their branches rustle in the wind. A single petal of pink ripples through the air, spiralling in patterns that resemble the marks of the Goddesses.

As she has raised her hand to catch the starlight so many times, so now, too, does she lift her arm. Her left. The golden spirals over the violet. The lightning-strike scar. She cups her fingers. The petal alights in the curve of her palm. Pink. Soft. Smooth. Like paper not yet dipped in ink. A blank canvas on which to write.

Link tucks the petal behind her left ear. The tree gazes upon her. She looks up at the tree.

"The sword that you carry has not regained the fullness of Her power; She has long not been in contact with the Sacred Realm, and one hundred years has not sufficed. Treat Her gently. Yet when you need Her most, She will be there. I can see...that you have already made Her acquaintance again, after all." Link's face warms as she contemplates the fish-dipped sword that seals the darkness, the apple-juice-soaked blade of evil's bane, the Master Sword now a master spatula she grips in her lightning-strike hand. But the tree, as much as a tree can appear kind, merely continues to gaze upon her. "This, I promise."
The tree is quiet. She has just started to peek at the cooking pot when the tree rumbles again. "Now go."

The tree closes their eyes as best a tree can. Link bows to the tree in thanks, clasps her hands in gratitude, kneels in prayer. Everything that has happened here has not yet come to her. When she emerges from the forest, when she sees again normalcy, when she gazes into the eyes of friends and strangers alike, then it will come.

For now Link turns. For now she feels the sword that seals the darkness strapped to her shoulder, the blade of evil's bane bound to her back, the Master Sword with her, always with her.

For now she spends forward to begin the walk of the remainder of her life. For now she stops. For now she glances back over her shoulder. For now her glance falls upon the cooking pot and its salt-grilled voltfin trout. For now she returns to the tree, plopping herself in front of the cooking pot and polishing off the fish. For now she belches and licks up the excess salt and residue from her hands. For now she hears the korok clap their little hands and thank her for making the meal. For now she washes out the cooking pot in the sacred waters by the base of the tree's trunk.

For now she thanks the tree, and thanks the koroks, and thanks Hestu most of all, and tells them that if she returns, she will make Hestu some proper loam now that she knows how to do so, now that Sarie has taught her. For now she explains to Hestu what means if and not when. For now Hestu insists that she dance with them, and they dance together until she tires. For now she makes Hestu and—when the other koroks burst in with their demands—loam, as taught her by Sarie. For now Hestu, beaming, presents her with a gift of friendship, a peculiarly smelling golden something-or-other that she does not question but concernedly stuffs into an empty elixir vial which she corks very tightly. For now she curls up to sleep again in the crown of the tree. For now she awakens. For now she tells the koroks and the tree see you later. For now she braces herself to face reality.

For now she walks out of the clearing with the wind at her back.

—

_Salt-Grilled Fish_ (five hearts) - apple, fortified pumpkin, rock salt, sunshroom, voltfin trout

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: The Great Deku Tree's forefather is the Deku Tree from _The Wind Waker_, and the Queen of Hyrule is Tetra. So, this chapter pretty much confirms what I've already said about where _Delicious in Wilds_ falls on the _Zelda_ timeline, which I don't otherwise believe in at all. I mostly just wanted to spin a timeline out of the desire to have an actual constructed past on which to worldbuild. _Delicious in Wilds_ follows in the timeline of _The Wind Waker_, following _Phantom Hourglass_ and _Spirit Tracks_, so the 'Hyrule' of _Delicious in Wilds_ is in fact New Hyrule from _Spirit Tracks_, rather than the original Hyrule from the time of _Ocarina of Time_. That said, I have written the story in such a way that all previous Zelda games occur 'before' it in the sense that their stories are recorded as myths and legends. The world did not happen as it occurred in each of the games; rather, the games are (one version of) the _legends of Zelda_ that have been passed down through story and song.
To that end, the tower that channeled a portal to the Sacred Realm is in reference to the Tower of Spirits from *Spirit Tracks*. Most of the tower has been sunk into the earth, but the top floor remains. In *Spirit Tracks*, the so-called "Force" (that's what it's called in-game, using the same word as the Light Force from *The Minish Cap*) of the spirits is used to construct the titular train rails and the trains themselves. Since the spirits naturally seemed similar to the Sacred Realm, I took this feat of engineering and ran with it: if the people of New Hyrule were able to construct trains that work on the force of the Sacred Realm, then why not also create guardians and eventually Divine Beasts? It made sense to me that the same engineers-of-spirit-stuff who could make trains that run on 'spirit juice' would likewise be able to eventually figure out how to make automata that run on the same energy of the Sacred Realm. That's part of why I picked the world of *Spirit Tracks* as the natural predecessor for *Delicious in Wilds*. The other parts are that (1) there's rock salt everywhere, which implies that there was once an ocean covering Hyrule and thus the Great Sea; (2) the game features koroks and rito, which are only in the timeline of *The Wind Waker*; and (3) the map of Hyrule in *Breath of the Wild* reminds me of the map of *Spirit Tracks*, with snowy mountains to the northwest, volcano to the northeast, fishing villages and ocean to the southeast, and a central grassy area with the castle and the castletown. About the only major difference is that the desert has been moved over from the east to the (south)western corner. The layout is otherwise pretty similar! I could conceivably imagine how the world of *Spirit Tracks* could turn into the world of *Breath of the Wild* over more than ten thousand years.

I also wanted to create a backstory for Calamity Ganon, *which literally isn't given in Breath of the Wild*. How did Ganondorf turn into *that*? We just don't know. I decided that I would provide something of a cautionary tale. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. Ganondorf, in *Delicious in Wilds*, thought that he wanted to help Hyrule. But the Triforce grants whatever most honest and true wish you have.

It bothers me that there's absolutely no explanation about how Calamity Ganon in *Breath of the Wild* knew how to hack/take control of the guardians the Divine Beasts. In *Delicious in Wilds*, Ganondorf was one of the engineers who helped to build and programme them, so of course he would know how to hack them.

Remember the sensation of the boundaries of Link's body dissipating away that I've mentioned a few times in relation to the shrines, which by the way draw on the power of the Sacred Realm? Yep! That's the Sacred Realm, where being together relies on your willpower. I'm running out of space here so I'll talk about how the shrines heal in another author's notes.

Up next: another reunion, and this one triumphant; messing with the Master Sword; Amali finally fulfilling her promise of showing Link how to make cannoli.

midna's ass. 08 November 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Yahaha! Yahaha! Yahaha! Yahaha! Yahaha! Yahaha!

Something that I learned recently is that the author individually typed out every last one of the 899 Yahaha!'s. That is something I have endless respect for.

The koroks are really funny and really interesting, and interacting with them is a joy, and a really cool change of pace.

Emma. 08 November 2017.
Wildberry Crepe

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef reunites with the Lanayrish prince and the Tabanch housewife, offends the Master Sword, and begins the trip back to Medli.

Chapter Notes

A very brief author's note that did not fit in the end: I started writing this chapter at 06:01 on the eleventh of August, and finished writing it on at 22:01 on the eleventh of August.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She expects: stepping out of the lost woods, the Master Sword disappearing, disappointment again.

She expects: seeing again Yunobo and Riju or whichever Champions oversee the pulling of the sword from the stone; Sarie not understanding what has happened; Aryll's death all for senseless naught.

She does not expect: the Master Sword's fire-light blue dying down to a softened white, its hum and its resonance fading away under her very fingertips, until she carries nothing but an off-white blade within the sheath.

At the edge of the lost woods, Link draws the sword that seals the darkness from its sheath and examines its length between her hands. It does not vibrate warmly in response to her touch. Squatting in the grass, she sets the blade of evil's bane onto her lap across her thighs. She raises her arms.

"I don't really understand why you chose me again. Why not the first time, but the second time? And why not any of those other people who've tried to pull you out?" she asks of the Master Sword, which remains still and silent across her thighs, her eyes visible in the reflection from the blade. "Was it really the meal I promised? I would've done that whether you chose me, you know. You can still unchoose me. Want me to go put you back?"

The Master Sword has no reply.

Slowly rising to her feet, she sheathes the Master Sword again. She glances down at the tattered remains of her clothing, most of it caked in a combination of blood and soil. Link lifts up the hem of her tunic to sniff it. The pungence of mud, sweat, and dried blood that has festered for over a day greets her with a thread of revulsion in the pit of her stomach.

Although she drops the tunic back and smooths it over her torso, she cannot rid her mind of the stench that haunts her as she crosses the periphery of the Kokir Forest, as the trees thin, as she steps out from the woods and the sword that seals the darkness remains upon her back. And then she hears the yelling panic of the encampment set up around the entrance to the woods.
Link does not need long to determine why: all around the perimeter of the camp with its raised barbed wire fences she can see a horde of bokoblins, lizalfos, and moblins alongside a select few other monsters—octoroks, snap dragons, wolfois, helmasaur, dodongo, one or two lynel that by themselves could raze an entire village if they so chose—that rush the defences of the camp. She observes how the warriors who protect the camp move in unison with one another, the fence alive with the sparking of topaz, catapults prepared on oil and ruby shards to set the monsters aflame, archers upon watchtowers unloading into the monsters.

A sudden blaze of fire-light from behind her brings Link to turn around; she stares at the Divine Beast Vah Medoh opening its beak to scour the earth with its light and blowing away entire swathes of monsters into the lake on the gales of its wings.

And there—standing in the lake that surrounds the lost woods—the Divine Beast Vah Ruta that pulls in water at a dizzying pace, blasting monsters with a torrential flow strong enough to crush their bodies against the ground, ejecting great blocks of ice into their surprisingly fragile forms, and lifting up its trunk to serve as an extendable spout of fire-light, more focused than that of the Divine Beast Vah Medoh yet smaller in diameter. But just as deadly, disintegrating all those monsters that it comes across.

They have it covered, between the guards who give it their all, and the two Divine Beasts that assist with the full force of the Sacred Realm. Link joins in the fight nonetheless, the Master Sword in hand, the blade of evil's bane once more baneing evil. To the startled cries of the guards, Link clammers up one of the watchtowers, gets an arrow loosed just under her left collarbone for terrifying the archer, opens her paraglider, and swings out into the monstrous horde that seeks to attack the camp.

She positions herself high in the air above above a white-maned lynel, notching topaz arrows to its bow and loosing them skyward to electrocute the warriors who guard the encampment with their lives. Link drops the paraglider. She grips the Master Sword. She hurtles towards the ground headfirst.

The tip of the sword that seals the darkness connects with the crown of the lynel's head. The blade of evil's bane comes alive in its light, the same colour as the bluest Parapan sky that she has ever seen. Like fire-light weapons effortlessly cleaving through nearly any material, the Master Sword slips into the lynel more easily than a warmed knife through a stick of half-melted goat butter.

As it bisects the lynel in half, its energies dust the lynel's body to ashes. Link lands on her boots in that ashen pile, the Master Sword driven into the muddy dirt, the lynel having vanished from this world.

She glances at the Master Sword, its hilt again softened to white. Link looks around herself: a silver moblin snarling at her from the north; a band of tektites leaping menacingly at her from the east; a shelled pyrup arfing at her as it arches its back and breathing flame from the south; and tell-tale lantern of a scythed poe dancing before her vision from the north.

All at once. All at her, rushing her down to destroy her, their eyes glinted in that violent violet, that tyrant tyrian, that colour of the malice that she, too, has inked into her body.

Link grins at them. She waves. Extending her arm, she swings around upon her heel, the Master Sword a circular blur around her that flashes in blue lightning just before it connects to a monster's flesh.

She dives in. Link carves a path through the monsters, reaches the periphery of the horde, and then whirls around to carve back in. She shrugs off her injuries. A spear jammed in her right shoulder by
a bokoblin soon departed from this earth breaks in half when a cloud of keese swarms into her. A bite of a pengator around her bare ankle leaves her limping. A moblin's fist into her face crooks her nose yet again in a shower of blood before she thrusts back, vaporising the monster with a single application of the greatest remedy known to the people of the land once known as Hyrule: a dose of the Master Sword.

She dances with dodongos, weaves around wizzrobes, flips over fire toadpoli, spins around skulltula, winks at winder. The Master Sword has not simply become a blade in her hand, but an extension of herself; she senses its tip like she senses her own fingers. Her body remembers the steps even if her mind does not. Her body remembers the shape, the length, the weight of the blade even if her heart does not. Her body remembers how to spear through armos’ statue-like heads as she might spear a prime cut of boar meat frying in oil, how to pry in half pebblits as she might pry open a clam for chowder, how to cut the stems of peahats as she might cut the stems of radishes or carrots, how to gut dinolfos as she might gut a porgy in preparation for Kass's dinner, how to skin hrok as she might skin a pigeon caught in the field and stuff in an ice-box to make pilaf later, even if her stomach does not remember.

Except her stomach does remember. If her mind does not, and if her heart does not, then her stomach sure remembers.

When at last the hordes thin to a few stragglers continuing to throw themselves against the topaz fence only for their limbs to spasm and their bodies to charr into crisps, Link hears the guards' horns.

The electricity of the fence dies. The gates open. Warriors wielding axe and spear pour onto the battlefield, dispatching the last few monsters. She snaps her fingers: to avoid exhausting the topaz.

Link staggers back towards the encampment, an arrow protruding from her left collarbone and half of a spear sticking out from her right shoulder. Her clothing has become little but scraps clinging to her skin, covering her though offering little protection. She waves. An archer on a watchtower takes aim at her before his fellow touches his shoulder and shakes his head.

Sheathing the Master Sword, she gives it a thankful pat on the hilt. "Good girl," she says, as she might sign to Ilia. She snorts out laughter to herself. Link fishes the ocarina from her satchel—she need find a better place for it—and brings it to her lips.

She plays the Ballad of the Sealing War upon the ocarina. The notes fall flat; the rhythm runs away from her as she ran away one hundred years ago. As she will not run away now. She holds up her lightning-strike left hand in the curved-finger gesture for all rightness, and she breathes in, and she lets out a whoop.

Link sways on her feet. Boy, the ground feels a little cold, and her stomach feels a little empty.

Guards usher her inside. They inquire of her a thousand questions, none of which she actually processes. Instead Link tells them that she's hungry, and what do they have for her, and she'll take almost anything, and she would take fried mushrooms and roasted nuts and freshly baked bread and ooh ooh do they have any rice she loves rice the best thing since cooked rice and simmered fruit and salt-grilled greens and she's so hungry she could eat an octorok.

The healers of the camp take a look at her. Not a few minutes after they have stripped away the bandages covering her body and notice the medicinal golden sap that coats her like a second skin, their eyes widening as they take in the sight of the violet marks over Link's form, do Sidon and Amali burst into the room, Amali guiding Sidon towards Link on the bed, a plate of fried trout skewers balanced in her free hand, a bowl of seaweed-tucked rice-balls balanced in his.
Link tears up. Gripping one of Amali's wings and one of Sidon's hands, she draws them both together into a hug. Her saviours. She snags the fish skewers and rice-balls and wolf them down.

Sidon began to grin the moment that she made noise and has not stopped grinning since, the polish of his teeth outshining even the glow of the Master Sword. While he beams at Link, Amali chastises her for having gotten herself hurt yet again and how many tunics is Link going to run through and why won't Link take care of herself and a thanks to Link for helping out with defending the outpost and Amali can't believe that the first time that she sees Link again after all these months Link is nearly passed out with a spear sticking out of her shoulder and her entire body covered in wounds and Amali is so, so, so, so unbearably proud of Link for coming back and drawing the Master Sword.

"Even if you had not been able to draw it, you have already tried. I've already been so proud of you. If you hadn't been able to draw blade of evil's bane this time, either, then I'd still be proud of you, Link," she signs; Link peers at her with three rice-balls and half a sizzled fish shoved into her mouth. "I...I have so many questions to ask you. I don't even know where to begin. I suppose this all...this all feels like a dream." She smiles tiredly and warmly at once. "If it is, then I'm glad to have gotten to see you in it, Link."

Link would answer if not for the delicious food currently occupying her hands and mouth. Once Sidon's translator finishes whispering Amali's words into his ear, Sidon grins even more broadly than before and scoops Link up into his arms to whirl her around while she continues to scarf down rice-balls and fish at a dizzying pace.

Sidon squeezes her tightly. Although she starts to choke on a rice-ball, link simply flings her arms around Sidon, hugging him back. Hastily, Amali separates the two long enough for Link to push the rice-ball out of her throat. It shoots into the air. Sidon snatches the rice-ball between his teeth, leaving Link to snap her fingers, whistle appreciatively, and clap wildly while he strikes a pose.

"Our Link! I do feel most awful for saying these words, but I have faith have you will be most forgiving!" He gathers her up into his arms again, this time more gently so that she does not strangle herself on the food meant to lift her mood and accelerate her healing. His right arm supports her about the shoulders, while his left does a strange crooked loop to support her hips and upper thighs.

"I am...I am most overjoyed that it is you, our Link, whom the sword that seals the darkness has chosen! This is most fortuitous, most wonderful, most miraculous! I understand much of your fears and worries around the blessed blade that has chosen you!" Sidon begins to nod; Link has to squirm herself out of the way of the violent banging of his head to avoid cracking their skulls together.

"I most understand your fears, for I felt the same fears when you met me! As you taught me most well that I am capable with my own hands, so, too, are you, our Link! I mean that entirely and completely sincerely, Link! But of course, I do not mean to say I would have been disappointed had She not chosen you!

"As expected of me, I can hear myself jamming my tail into my mouth! I hope that you can forgive me! What I meant to say is..."

His voice quiets for a moment from its usual fervour as he finds her right hand, currently wielding a rice-ball on its way to her mouth, and cups her fingers in his palm. Sidon brings down his head again, his movement bearing a deliberate slowness. Closing her eyes, Link senses his forehead against hers, the slight abrasion of his scaly skin nonexistent compared to the expanse of warmth in her chest.
"...if anyone in the entirety of Hyrule had to be the one chosen by the sword that seals the darkness, I'm glad that that person was you, Link."

Link hugs him, her arms around his shoulders. The rice-ball falls from her grip; she paws weakly at the air after it. Chuckling affectionately, Amali catches the rice-ball and returns it to Link, who expresses her gratitude—she hopes—with the sheer joy in her expression.

She rolls the rice-ball around on her tongue. That fishy, salty, tangy taste, all layered under the heavenly texture and palette of steamed rice. She swallows. She wipes her mouth. Rubbing her hands against one another to rid her palms of food residue, Link leans into Sidon's embrace.

Then she looks down at Amali and up at Sidon. Stretching her left arm, Link closes her fingers around the hilt of the Master Sword. She pulls it into her lap, its hilt the same violet as the sash that Marin once wore around her hips, its blade a softened white. She raises an eyebrow at Amali and touches the hilt to the side of her throat where whorls of the same hue of violet spiral over her skin. "See? It matches now."

Amali shakes her head. "You might be an adult, but sometimes you act just like my other daughters." Link blinks as she processes the implications. "Not...that you're treating it as a game anymore. I think that you've grown up so much over these months since we first met, and yet you haven't lost that spark in your heart that makes you so Link-like. And...I suppose that you've helped me regain mine. Thank you."

Link starts to form a response on her fingers when the friend hugging her gives a shout.

"Link!" Sidon cuts in, the sudden loudness of his voice making her jump, the simultaneous warmth and tenderness vibrating his timbre relaxing her down in his embrace as he leans over her. "I do not mean to alarm you! And you are most welcome to decline! But by our Goddess, could I try to hold the sword that seals the darkness!?"

She nods, then claps her own palm onto her forehead. Link retrieves her right arm from having been wedged between her body and Sidon's. She signs the but of course! in Sidon-like fashion into—she can't reach his hands, which currently support her—his throat and chest, writing out the characters in the Lanayrish she knows so well. Link holds out the Master Sword to him. Without letting her go, Sidon stretches out his hands and grasps the Master Sword by the hilt.

She braces herself, yet the blade of evil's bane does not smite them where they stand, nor does he spontaneously combust into flames. Sidon gingerly palms the Master Sword, though it more resembles a master butter knife in his remarkably large hand—imposing, if not for his being shaped like a friend—and gives it an experimental swing. The Master Sword does not alight in blue, nor hum in response. It remains merely a blade, and nothing more.

"As expected of the most holy weapon in all of Hyrule! In the hands of any but the chosen hero that She has chosen, She becomes nothing more than a sword, sharp as any other! Yet in the hands of the chosen hero, She is the sword that seals the darkness: the Master Sword! Most marvelous!" He beams at her. She beams back even though he cannot see.

When Sidon hands back Link the Master Sword, she notices that the wings extend out from the hilt before her very eyes. She blinks. She gives the Master Sword to him and observes how the wings fold inwards to the hilt, how the golden gem set into the pommel fades to dullness, and how the triangular mark of Golden Goddesses—three golden triangles, arranged together—that shimmers in white upon the blade vanishes to nothing.

Link takes the blade of evil's bane back: the wings extend; the gem glows; the mark shimmers.
With a light little laugh, she passes it between herself and Sidon to watch the Master Sword dance between the two forms, like the blooming and closing of a flower bud, over and over. Amali's pupils dart back and forth. The feathers on her face have risen in concern, and she has brought her wings to her face. "Link, Sidon, I don't suppose you should..."

She continues to pass the Master Sword between her hand and Sidon's until she notices—abruptly—that the Master Sword no longer extends its wings when she touches the hilt. Tilting her head to the side, Link stares at the pommel for a long moment.

Suddenly the Master Sword flashes fire-light. Amali and Link flinch back at once. The Master Sword drops from her hold and clatters to the floor while Sidon, twitching his head towards the noise, inquires what has happened.

Link ogles the Master Sword now lying innocently upon the ground. "Is...is it mad at me?"

Sidon lets her down. Dropping to the floor, she crouches beside the blade of evil's bane, which she cautiously takes into her hands. The gem on the pommel hums a faint gold as if to look at her, and then the Master Sword unfurls in her grasp. She exhaled in relief.

The healers force Link to spend several hours patiently seated in place, tolerating them poking and prodding her, mending her of her various injuries, or at least applying medicinal salve—she recognises the revolutionary chuchu jelly salve that Mipha distilled before the Great Calamity, from the blue chuhu that thrive in abundance in the moist lands of Lanayru—and wrapping her in gauze. Once she can move her right shoulder without pain, and once they have had enough of her pleas to let her run around and somersault and, of course, eat, the healers discharge her at the Champions' behest.

Link asks earnestly how they have been. Before Sidon has even opened his mouth, Amali has seized her shoulders, shaken her, and released her to inquire how Kass has been. While the room whirls around her, Link briefly charts their journey from autumn through winter to spring. She leaves out the more dangerous elements, although she solemnly swears to herself that she will tell Amali the full story after she has had a chance to see her beloved husband again. When she mentions seeing Ilia again, Sidon and Amali attempt to squish her simultaneously into two different hugs so swiftly that they bonk their heads together.

They catch her up on how life has been since then. The Champions have been switching off between duties of ferrying travellers, flushing out the few remaining pockets of Yiga, and overseeing the trial of the Master Sword. Yet said Master Sword chose no one. At least, not until Link.

Halfway through their discussion, Link notices a thin scar down Sidon's right arm, one that she hasn't seen prior, and not a mark left by the Malice they fought: the violet whorls that decorate Sidon's chest have to them a different look. Immediately Amali launches into a tirade of Sidon's willingness to recklessly throw himself into whatever situations might protect others, how he lunged between Amali and a crimson daira, taking a throwing-axe to the arm. Amali wings do not stop at that: and how many times has his newfound creed of bluntness lead to awkward situations she has had to defuse, and how many times has his enthusiasm brought him to accidentally thwap some dignified Eldic elder or Tabanch chief?

But, despite all of this, she notes her pride in how much he has accomplished for his people, and how far his cooking skills have come since he first asked her for assistance in learning. Link sniffs, wiping a tear from her eyes at that last statement. Truly, she could think of nothing to be prouder of. As Amali goes on and on, Sidon's translator whispering in his ear and he himself swinging his head-tail back and forth, Link can do little but giggle at Amali—over half a century
younger than Sidon—acting like his mother.

In turn Sidon remarks on Amali’s revelation at having been a star plunger in her youth. “A plunger?” Link echoes. While Amali covers her beak with her wings, Sidon heartily elaborates on the Tabanch pastime of plunging off of a landing and playing a game of cucco, seeing who will remain plunged the longest before spreading their wings to escape slamming into the lake. Or, for the more irresponsible, solid ground.

"It reminded me much of our Ruto’s own most spectacular sport of diving!” He thumps Amali heartily on the back. She hangs her head. "Although I must be honest and declare plunging much more dangerous! I could never plunge myself, as I have too many people who depend upon me and who would suffer if I were to injure myself most needlessly!” His hand flies to his jaw. "Not that I think poorly of you for it! That is not what I meant to say!"

"I suppose that you are more responsible for your years than I was. Though remember what we talked about, as far as that’s concerned." Amali coughs into her wing. "As for the plunging, it’s...well, it’s something I...did when I was younger, when my...life wasn’t something I valued." Link nearly feels her expression falling blank, yet she breaks through it; extending her arm, she squeezes Amali’s hand, and Amali smiles warmly back. "Oh, you don’t need to worry about me. That was years ago. I haven’t spoken to my parents since then—" Link’s hands drop to her lap. "—and I would never do such a thing now, not with my daughters—and Sidon, and the rest—to think about."

"By which," Sidon bursts in, "she means to say that she views you as one of her own, our Link!"

But Link’s mouth doesn’t quite smile as much as she expected. Amali’s eyes glimmer with a light like the dawn. "Sidon, if you wouldn’t mind, then we could talk of something else. Such as the rice-balls you has taught me, that you taught him, Link."

It takes Link several minutes of excitedly waxing poetic on the deliciousness of rice-balls to realise how skillfully Amali diverted her thoughts. Yet she realises, too, something else: that the clenching of her heart came from her worry after Amali, and not from any power certain people from her past might hold over her yet.

After all, why would they? Link has a home and a family right here, right now, a family like a medley of instruments not intended to be played together, but making a melody more euphonious than any she has ever heard.

Eventually their talk turns to her wielding the Master Sword. Link suggests that they should wait for everyone else: "I don't want to discuss this ourselves. Riju and Yunobo are just as important," she signs. "And they're my friends."

"But of course! We'll call everyone for a meeting!” Sidon urges; Amali nods in agreement. "This is of utmost importance!"

Link tries to smile. For a second she can sense the thread of an all-too-familiar fear coil up in her innards like a tapeworm capable of stealing her food right from under her belly. Then she, as the lynel before her, reaches into her own stomach to crush the fear within her own fingers. No, not to crush it. To understand.

Urbosa told her, one hundred years ago, that courage does not mean having no fear. Urbosa told her, one hundred years ago, that courage means trying to do the right thing even while having fear. Urbosa told her, one hundred years ago, that the quickest to someone’s heart is their through stomach. And if that saying has never erred, then maybe Urbosa was, and is, right about the other
Courage. Link stands now on the very precipice of a shaky uncertainty, of a destiny that rejected her and then chose her again, seemingly at random. But she will trust the Golden Goddesses.

If nothing else, she will trust the Golden Goddesses with her life, because the alternative would involve rolling over and lying down with no hope for the future after the Great Calamity. She will trust the Golden Goddesses because she has seen for herself the people of the land known as Hyrule, the wilds and the people who make something of them, and if they cannot turn back the Calamitous One, then she does not know who can.

Link herself may still feel the weakness of the girl who ran away. Yet the wilds united, and the people who made something of them, tie together a strength as resilient as her cooking pot—the cooking pot that has faced the four Divine Beasts and won.

She meets Amali's gaze; she meets Sidon's hands. Amali wraps her wings around her while Sidon scoops up the both of them together, embracing them with a fierceness that rivals the power of the Divine Beasts. "Then, let's go. To Riju and Yunobo." Link pauses. "Oh, but first, I need to make a trip to Kashiko. And...I need to make some loam."

When Link sees Sarie again, Amali clapping her wings over her face to express her shock and shame at not having brought Sarie over earlier, the korok explodes into a whirlwind of excitement. Grabbing Link's hands, Sarie dances wildly around with her. Link hugs them to her chest, clasping the little korok, speaking excitedly of what she has seen in the lost woods, of the lifting of the veil, of the strangeness of the korok forest, of the giant tree with a face in the wood, of Hestu's gift coiled up golden in one of her elixir vials. Sarie prances around her in mid-air as she turns, at last, to the drawing of the Master Sword.

"I didn't know you'd be so happy to see I got the sword," Link signs, beaming at them.

Sarie tilts their entire body at once, so far that they almost hang upside-down and drop onto the ground. "What's that? Is that the sharpy-sharp thing?"

The mirth ebbs, if only for a moment, and Link takes a long, long glance at Sarie, who continues to spin through the air as though they had said nothing amiss. Link looks at them. They peek back, crooning a soft kookooloo... at her. At length she nods to herself. "Sarie. " They perk up. "Let's go get some loam."

When their tiny hands once more grip Link's sidelocks and curl them up over her head, she realises all at once she is alive. Not a dream. Not a dream at all. Not some fantasy spun out of her last few seconds before the lost woods swallow her whole. Link can laugh out loud until her stomach hurts her, and she can gallop around like a horse under Sarie's guidance no matter how much of a fool she makes from herself, and she can remain very much alive.

"Linky-link's reins are goody-good!" Sarie sings, flicking them as if trying to speed up Link's motions as she digs for loam outside of the encampment, in the dips between the marshy hills where the rains leach down soil. "Jangly's are good too! Teeth and Mama Floof don't have good ones. Link does! Sarie-sarie-saria missed Linkuru-linkuru-link's reins!"

"They missed you too," Link responds. She brings back loam for preparation. Poking out her tongue in concentration as she embarks on the cooking of loam the way Sarie taught her, she offers a prayer to the Golden Goddesses: O Din, for the earth She raised in Her powerful arms. O Nayru, for the rains She casts down in Her wise...planning. O Farore, for the...something or other...for the leaves of the forest floor and the grasses that contributed to the loam in Her courageous...leaf and
grass making. Link raps her knuckles against the rim of the cooking pot. Perfect.

"Sarie rates the loam...better than whatever Link made me the first time, 'cause that was the worst loam Sarie-sarie-saria's ever had!" Sarie shouts.

"I'll...I'll take that a compliment," says Link, head cocked, "I think."

While Sarie goes off explaining all of the many ways in which Link can better the loam, which she attempts to scribble down on the inside of her wrist to reference later only to recognise that she barely has room to write over her varying scars, Sidon inquires whether he may try some of this loam. Link, raising an eyebrow, turns the cooking pot over to him. He grabs a palmful. Tipping his head back as if in laughter, Sidon tosses up the dirt and catches it in his mouth.

Link observes him chew, chew, gulp, chew, chew, swallow. He rubs his throat. He smooths his fins with his palms. "But of course! The tastes of the children of the Goddess Kokir and those of our Goddess may differ by far, yet even I can fully agree with you, Sarie!"

Sarie bobs up and down. "What does Tooth agree with Sarie on?"

Sidon brings himself up to his fullest height, grins at Link with the brilliance of the sun, and flashes her and Sarie a thumbs-up. "We can agree that this tastes most awful! Link, are you proud of me? I am doing my best to be entirely honest with you!"

Link blinks at him a moment. Then she erupts in a stomach-hurting laughter that leaves her breathless and wild and utterly grateful beyond words for the people that she has met, for the Sidon that she now embraces; for the Sarie that she promises to make a better loam; for the Amali that unties her ponytail and brushes her hair clean of the tangles that her life has accrued.

In a world ideal, the hundred years of passing would not have passed, for the Great Calamity would never have come. Yet if the hundred years of passing had to pass, then Link is grateful that she could be alive, to have broken fast with more friends that she could number amongst the stars.

Upon hearing of Link digging for loam in the dirt, Amali bustles around finding Link a spare tunic to wear. The cotton Akkalan clothes that she receives itch her skin uncomfortably. She twitches and adjusts them constantly. Amali reassures her: just until Medli, where—for the third time—Amali can have Link fit for a blue-feathered tunic.

"I suppose that the Golden Goddesses do not jest when They say that all must happen in three," Amali notes with a wry smile. "I'll have to make sure my husband doesn't leave on any other journeys. That'll mark two, and once the gale whips up the same rock twice, it will inevitably whip up the rock a third."

Link inhales a breath as sharp as the edge of the Master Sword, as sharp as the kick of Eldic spice. Gripping Amali's hands, she explains that Kass has embarked upon the journey to Medli and might already have arrived.

"We did it," she says, signing into Amali's back as Amali curls up weeping in joy around her. "We got all the shrines. He's coming home, Amali. He's coming home. And on a full stomach, too!"

Not even an hour later, Link, Sidon, Amali, and Sarie, alongside most of those at the now defunct encampment, have gathered in the Divine Beast Vah Medoh. First, to Kashiko, where Link hugs her companion Ilia again, resting her forehead against hers: a horse and her girl. She collects, as well, the letter to the Champions that the stablehand no longer has to deliver. When the stablehand sights the Master Sword and the Divine Beast Vah Medoh, the stablehand can only stutter and
They spend the next few days zipping by overland, a journey that would have taken Link close to a month on Ilia. She taps Amali on the shoulder and crosses her arms over her chest, her eyebrow quirked.

"It's been a really long time since I got to see Chief Kaneli," she says, grinning crookedly, "and you promised to show me how to make cannoli."

Amali's cheeks darken in blush. "I...truly have not made cannoli in years. If I have to be honest, then...I told you that because cannoli and Kaneli sign similarly. You can see how your hands follow the same gestures..."

Link touches her chin. She bemas even wider, channeling Sidon for a moment. "Then let's figure out how to make it together!"

She and Amali—and Sidon and Sarie, of course—bustle to figuring out how in the wide world of the Golden Goddesses to cook cannoli. Link grinds wheat while Amali distills cane sugar. They make a dough of goat butter, rock salt, cane sugar, and ground Tabanch wheat. Sidon kneads the dough—Sarie helps, their tiny hands papping and bopping the to-be shell—which Link fries in butter. Amali forms the shells of the cannoli, closing over the seam. Then the filling: ricotta cheese made from the milk of Tabanch sheep, mixed with vanilla extract, distilled sugar, a hint of Faronese cacao, a whip of cream, and pink wildberry that leaves Link's fingers sticky and chin even stickier.

They cool the filling by letting it sit in the frigid winds outside of the Divine Beast Vah Medoh for half an hour, the roof of the Divine Beast finally good for something beyond having Link fall off of it, before Amali demonstrates to Sidon, Link, and Sarie how to make a piping-bag. They stuff the shells, curl them over, and sprinkle them with powdered sugar. Link tries one: delicious.

"In wilds," Sarie adds, to Link's simultaneous amusement and confusion.

Delicious, delicious, wildberry cannoli. Link wolfs down an entire batch and runs through her store of ingredients to make more. When she comes dangerously close to using up all of her wildberry, she—despite her own belly aggressively clamouring for another round of cannoli—sets aside enough for Ilia to feast on the bounties of Tabantha and Hebra. Scratching her companion behind the ear and brushing down her coat, Link feels Ilia's steady heartbeat in her palm.

Everything will be all right. As long as the sun, the moon, and the earth exist, everything will be all right. And she, too, will be all right.

When the Divine Beast lands on the highest Pillar of Erito in Medli, Kass has not yet arrived. After seeing her daughters to tell them how wonderful and patient and lovely they all are, Amali leaves Link with Dorian, Teba, Sidon, and the children again. She departs once more. The Divine Beast Vah Medoh spreads its wings and thrums its fans. Amali promises to return within a few days, Riju and Yunobo on board. She embraces Link and Sidon good-bye. Link corrects her: not good-bye, but see you later.

As the Divine Beast Vah Medoh scales the heavens, Link climbs up to the tallest of the remaining Pillars of Erito. Amali's children—Notts and Kotts prove themselves able to fly for short bursts, while the older daughters and Tulin have grown in their flight feathers fully—soar up around her, ferrying Koko and Cottla up to the crown of the pillar to spread out the pic-a-nic supplies and wait for Link.
Sarie remains by her side, twirling their korok leaf and hovering beside her, cheering her on. By the time she clambers up onto the pillar, Link heaves out her breaths, her arms shivering from the ache in her muscles. The children cheer.

She removes from her back the pic-a-nic basket that she brought with her, full to the brim with foodstuffs: wildberry cannoli prepared on Amali, Link, Sarie, and Sidon's special recipe; flame-spun wildberry tart that she learned from a pair of gerudo women in a ruby-lined Hebric inn; hearty durian and mighty banana stew, to bring the warmth of Faron to the coolness of Medli; a wedge of Tabanch sheep cheese; a nutcake with just enough salt to offset the sweetness; pumpkin and sunflower seeds, roasted to exquisite perfection; loaves and loaves of freshly baked bread still warm from the oven; olive oils and butters in which to dip the bread; steamed snow rabbit stuffed with sunshroom from the eastern half of the land once known as Hyrule; shrimp on rice stir-fry mixed with three species of safflina; a portion of Riju's Fishy Fiasco made of the children's favoured fishes; and a fruit and mushroom skewer that reminds her, long, long ago, of what the girl with the golden hair once read her from a book.

"'Cowards die many times before their deaths."

"'The valiant never taste of death but...'"

Once the children have gorged themselves and taken to a fluffy and feathery pile of nap, Link walks herself towards the edge of the Pillar of Erito. She gazes down upon Medli, upon Lake Totori, upon Tabantha, upon...upon what may one day become again known as Hyrule. Yet, if it does not, whatever name it bears, it will have the same people, the same wilds, the same deliciousness.

The afternoon sun has mirrored the surface of the lake into the gold of the Sacred Realm. If she were to leap down there, now, she swears she could plunge into the Sacred Realm here and now.

Link draws the Master Sword from the sheath given to her by the koroks. Looking upon a very, very old friend, she sets the Master Sword down into her lap. So long that it stretches across her knees and then some. So long that she cannot wear it at her hip as she would a normal sword.

"We can do this, can't we?" Link signs. The Master Sword does not answer her. She breathes out, her shoulders relaxing down from a tension she did not know crept in. "I'll try my best. That's all I can give. I...have promises to keep, and travelers to talk to, and meals to eat, and paths to walk, before I sleep. I don't...know what'll happen. But no matter what happens, I'm not going to run away again. If I have to lay down my life, I will. I promise.

"And...if we come out of this all, I'm serious about making you that meal. And...and the Princess." Link stops, then shakes her head. "She wouldn't want me to call her that. Princess, I mean. But I don't remember her name. I know who is she. I know what she looks like, with the golden hair, and that look in her eyes. My...my friend. As...as you are my friend." Palming the blue ocarina, she presses the mouthpiece to her lips. Link plays upon the ocarina the lullaby that the girl with the golden hair taught her, and then she starts to close her eyes. A light just below her lashes brings her to open them again.

The sword that seals the darkness.

The blade of evil's bane.

The Master Sword glows its fire-light blue. In the hilt she can see her own reflection; in the hilt she can see the courage in her eyes.
Wildberry Crepe (ten hearts) - bird egg, cane sugar, fresh milk, Tabantha wheat, wildberry

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Thanks a million for coming with me on such a long and lengthy journey. We have a few relatively short chapters coming up before we ratchet back up. It's funny: even though I distinctly remembered each chapter (approximately) in the middle of Delicious in Wilds, probably due to being split up into arcs, this latter half of stuff is harder for me to piece together. We're 84% of the way done now. Over four-fifths! And speaking of being almost so done, pretty short author's notes this time around, because the chapter's also so short! Imagine a world where a chapter of "only" six thousand words is considered short. And thanks a million to my beta reader Emma, who has done her part in making every single chapter that much better. She's also been absolutely instrumental recently in making sure that each chapter has been gutted of the "one-liners" that I tended to insert while writing, as well as in helping me bust up some of those overtly long paragraphs.

The Master Sword disappearing creatures to dust is akin to what the ancient arrows in Breath of the Wild do to creatures that aren't guardians (try it on a lynel). Ancient arrows literally cause a creature to cease existing, including all of their weapons and so forth. Try it in-game and you'll see what I mean.

The line about being so hungry you could eat an octorok is, well, another covert meme reference.

"Jamming my tail into my mouth" is a Lanayrish way of saying "sticking your foot in your mouth". A fun fact about Lanayrish idioms is that non-zora use them as well, so people say "jamming my trail into my mouth" even if they don't actually have tails.

Fi has indeed developed a sense of humour over the past ten thousand years.

Blue chuchu being medicinal is a nod to The Wind Waker.

"Once a gale whips up the same rock twice, it will inevitably whip up the rock a third" is a Tabanch saying that the sentiment that important things happen in threes. Bit like Rendezvous with Rama. It's a Hyrule thing!

Since we saw Yunobo and Riju last time in the encampment, I thought that seeing Sidon and Amali would be good this time. Naturally, I've been trying to pair Link with different combinations of the Champions, so as to point out how they would interact with one another as well as with Link. Since Delicious in Wilds is ultimately from Link's point of view, characters' relationships with her are prioritised over their relationships with one another, by virtue of the fact that in most scenes they're talking more to Link since she's the one who hasn't been there for a while. But I've tried to impart what their relationships have been beyond that, in terms of what's been going on in the time that Link isn't around.
In this case, for example, Sidon's newfound honesty and curiosity into people's personal lives has in turn caused Amali to divulge more of her past to him than she has to Link. In contrast, Amali, much as she has done with Link, has been modulating Sidon's sense of responsibility. And hey, Sidon isn't lying to make people feel better anymore. But the text speaks for itself.

With respect to Amali's parents, I'd just like to note that having a bad home situation doesn't mean that you'll be a bad parent yourself. If anything, having experienced that has an effect (on some people) of making them more conscious of their children than they may have been otherwise. It's all on the individual, but it's important to distinguish: Ilia, for example, decided not to have any kids at all, but that wasn't just because of her having had a not so great home situation.

I cheated a bit with the recipe this chapter! It's wildberry crepe in-game, and instead I turned it into a recipe for cannoli in Delicious in Wilds. But I promised Link cannoli, and frankly, this is the closest recipe I should find for cannoli in Breath of the Wild.

Next time: a game of cards; Link takes a crash course in public speaking, and I mean a crash course. But it'll mostly be a chapter much like this, just short and calm. We'll get back into the swing of things soon enough (the seventy-third chapter is back up to over eight thousand words, and the seventy-fourth clocks in at over seventeen thousand words). Kind of makes me wonder if anyone's still reading this with me regularly posting an average of ten thousand words a day or so.

At any rate, see you next time, and thank you again for reading!


Beta reader's comments: Getting more focus on Amali is welcome, even if it is sad. Seeing her and Sidon interact is also really cool; it happens more and more as the four pilots come together, and it's really fun to read.

Emma. 10 November 2017.
Clam Chowder

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef and the chef's companions—the Eldic youth, the Tabanch housewife, the Parapan food enthusiast, the Lanayrish prince, and the not-so-forgetful korok—meet up in Ruto in preparation for the council of the nations of Hyrule.

Chapter Notes

Brief author's note that didn't make it to the end: I started writing this chapter at 10:10 on the twelfth of August, and finished writing it on at 15:18 on the twelfth of August.

By and large, Link has not much noticed how the average person in Medli treats her; always she has had some attention on her, for her hylian nature—more common in southern and eastern Hyrule—in a city mostly populated by rito, gerudo, sheikah, and gorons; or for the cooking pot that she wears on her back where most travellers might wear a shield; for the scars that her travels have painted and scratched and chiselled and clawed and written into her form, a tapestry of failures and successes, of pain and pride.

But most of the average persons in Medli, looking at her, do not immediately recognise some wafting of a Champion's aroma from herself. A few, having seen her by Yunobo's side upon her second visit to Medli, or having perhaps noticed the slate covered by the satchel at her right hip, have gawked at her more than others. Yet not most.

The Master Sword, however, presents a different matter. True, not everyone in Medli knows of the Master Sword, from what Link can tell, though she has no method of wandering around polling people except perhaps by bribing them with cake or cannoli as she and the girl with the golden hair once bribed Purah with carrot cake into allowing them a conversation. And true, not everyone in Medli knows of the Master Sword's appearance.

Yet enough can recognise its sheath, and most everyone has heard the call to try to pull the blade of evil's bane from the Kokir Forest. Kaneli's announcement that someone has pulled the sword that seals the darkness allows even the less astute—still more astute than Link, undoubtedly—to put apple and butter long enough to make a buttered apple: the girl constantly running around beside the Champion of Erito's daughters bearing the violet-hilted sword marked with the symbol of the Golden Goddesses on her back might just have some measure of significance.

Before Amali left Medli to bring back the others and arrange a great council, when Amali and Sidon first entered Kaneli's home with Link in tow, the latter sat out most of the conversation, waiting in the back and munching on rice-balls while Kaneli attempted to comprehend the chaos of Link having once borne the blade of evil's bane as the chosen hero one hundred years, then sleeping in the Shrine of Resurrection, then losing all of her memories, then attempting to draw the sword that seals the darkness, then being rejected, then informing them about that incident, then
traipsing over the land known as Hyrule all winter, and then coming back with the blade of evil’s blade after all.

"But of course, something like that!" Sidon boomed. "Trust our Goddess to test the Champion of Hylia’s mettle before granting her once more the sword that seals the darkness!"

Link wanted to participate, to intervene, to take the fullness of responsibility, yet the conversation flowed far over her head. As she did one hundred years ago, she simply bobbed her head and accepted what they told her.

Ultimately, all that she did during that talk with Kaneli comprised of handing them the letter she wrote, and then—when none of them found it legible, and Amali admitted that, while she collected the scant few letters that reached Medli from travellers during her and Kass’s journey, she had not found herself able to read any of them either—Link read the letter to them aloud. About the Calamitous One. About the Sacred Realm. About the mirror in the sanctum. About the girl with the golden hair. About her own awakening being tied to the puncturing of the fabric between the Sacred Realm and the mortal world. Like the scent of burning in an oven being the first warning that the pie she has so carefully made will burst shortly into flames.

_Hoo hooing_ loudly, Kaneli proposed that they go speak to this Lady Impa, if she knows this breadth of information, in order to prepare themselves for what they may yet have to do. He delicately dabbed at his beak and muttered something about not having thought his chiefly duties would extend to the saving of the entire world. He supplicated the assistance of the Goddess Erito in search of the voice with which to speak.

"And _hoo_ are we to determine the fate of these lands?" he inquired of Amali, of Sidon, of Link. "Let us send for the chieftains and elders of Eldin, Parapa, and Lanayru as well, and perhaps those of Hebra, Akkala, Necluda, Faron..." He hesitated, then nodded decisively. "We must discuss this as one people, united."

With _that_, the Divine Beast Vah Medoh took to the skies. Kaneli regarded Link across the room; she glanced up at him, hands and mouth full of food, and offered him a rice-ball.

"And _hoo_ am I," said Kaneli to himself, "to question _hoom_ the Goddesses have chosen?"

Link lowered the rice-ball.

She vows to do better. She vows to harbour her own responsibility. She vows to understand, at least to some extent, the goings-on better than she did one hundred years ago. She vows to nod less and ask more. She vows to...eat more of these rice-balls.

Communication between the different leaders of the land once known as Hyrule proves difficult in the coming days, even with the Divine Beasts whose rapid gait cuts travel time by three-quarters, compared to months of hard riding required between the corners of the land. Link examines the map that she has drawn on the scroll from the Great Plateau. Oceans to the east, to the south, and to the west. Barren badlands to the north, and the mountains still beyond. Something might lie yet north of the land once known as Hyrule.

She has wanted for the entirety of her life nothing more than to settle down in a little village by the horses and the goats—or the cows, or the sheep—to live her life day in and day out, to share a meal with her beloved ones over the rim of a cooking pot. Yet, gazing at that map truly for the first time, Link cannot help but feel the northward wind.

Lifting her head, she gazes up towards the north. Link draws the telescope from its loop at her left
hip. The trusty red telescope. Her little sister's telescope. Aryll's telescope. She raises it to her eye and then remembers the broken lens.

She loops the telescope back onto her belt. She will have time for fixing. She will have time for mending. She will have time for healing, and sometimes, healing involves breaking first. Involves letting go.

What Ilia told her. That which runs through her blood. The delicious—sharing food with the people she loves. The wilds—all those meals which lie beyond the veil in the wilderness that she loves.

The people that she loves, and the wilds that she loves. Link furls up the map. Another time, and another place, she can consider such a journey, with someone or many someones at her side, to share with her the bounty and the danger, the joys of discovery and exploration and cooking, at whatever might pass over the storms and the seas, or whatever might pass over the skies and the summits. Another time, and another place.

Before she can turn outwards from Hyrule, she, and they, must turn inwards. And so they do. Link spends the greater part of the next several days reading and rereading the letter, visiting and revisiting the memories of what the girl with the golden hair has said to her. She paces up and down. While cooking, she ponders to herself and nearly burns a salmon fillet, salvaging the fish just in time to burn her fingers instead—a trade she is more than willing to make—until Sidon asks her what troubles her so.

She explains about how little she understands, how much she has seen and yet how little she understands. Link knows how to fight, how to cook, how to work with her hands, how to touch her chin and puzzle out reaching something in a shrine or in a Divine Beast.

Yet about these things she understands almost nothing: talks of Sacred Realms and a land where people become immortal and a Calamitous One and something about the Golden Force of the Sacred Realm and do the Golden Goddesses live there and why haven't the Golden Goddesses done anything if they do and does he think that the Golden Goddesses would accept a meal from her and what does he think that the Golden Goddesses might like and she really doesn't understand a thing about what it might mean to go to the Sacred Realm and suddenly have to establish her own boundaries or if she can cook in the Sacred Realm and she has been there before but does not remember and the thought of going somewhere where all of the experiences that she has had in this world, all of the grass that she has walked on and the ripe apples she has touched and the juices that have run down her chin, becoming meaningless in the face of something which she does not know if she can even ever comprehend.

"The Princess was just so much smarter than I am," Link says, "and I...should've asked more questions. I paid attention! I really did! But I..."

"But of course! I, O Wise Sidon, do not understand this entirely, either!" he tells her. Link cocks her head, then touches her chin, considering how to represent a cocked head to someone who cannot see her cocking her head. "That does not mean that I am most unworthy of such a title! That which we do not understand, we will! I, like you, am much a person who understands best what he has experienced! Once we come upon the Sacred Realm, which we absolutely shall, our Goddess—and our own abilities—shall guide us!

"Not understanding does not mean that you are not smart," he notes. "I do not understand much of cooking, nor do you understand much of diving! That does not mean that you are not smart, or that I am not smart!"

"I have only seen the Princess from afar and never met her myself, but if she educated herself on
these matters, then it would make sense for her to understand! If you and I take the time to educate ourselves, then we, too, shall understand! You must have faith that we will!

"If you told her to cook something, she may not know how to do so!" Sidon grins at Link. "Would you call her not smart?"

Link shakes her head, stops, and then signs the affirmation into his palms. Sidon beams more broadly. He squeezes Link’s hand, his skin cool yet affection warm.

It occurs to Link that she does not know much of what Sidon occupies himself with in his spare time. Since the Great Calamity’s arising, they have all lived lives of the Divine Beasts and of monsters and of the suffering of people, and they have not had much time for fun. Link’s greatest hobby might involve something that she needs to do every day to survive. Others: not so.

And so she asks. And so Sidon answers: he spends a great deal of time simply wandering around Ruto, asking people how they do, and seeing if they need any assistance. The stories of those around him fascinate him to no end. Beyond Ruto’s borders, he has a fondness for swimming up waterfalls to leap off and perform tricks in mid-air during the long plunge back into the water. In the years before the Calamitous One, when he was a mere pup of two hundred moons, he would participate and train for diving competitions once every three moons, as well as the annual spring diving festival in celebration of the cascade of waters from the Naydra Snowfields.

"Once, with the help of our Goddess, we have put our faith into the peaceful future, I would like to take up diving again!"

Link promises that she will come see Sidon diving whenever that happens. He grips her hand. "That’s a promise! Just for you, Link, I will do my best to make it a most excellent diving festival!"

They spend the next few days pouring over the letters together, attempting to glean whatever they can about the Sacred Realm. Link tries to remember all that the girl with the golden hair told her so many years ago about the nature of the Sacred Realm and the mirror that she discovered. Perhaps multiple mirrors, said the girl with the golden hair. A mirror of the royal family, and another mirror, long since shattered, and maybe more than that.

Sarie joins in. The children join in. Link tells them the stories she has heard, from the girl with the golden hair, from her own childhood reading books with Ilia, from Lady Impa, from Marin and her mothers, from travellers and strangers that she has met on the road, from Rotana of Uruda who herself knows much about the mirrors.

The days pass by one by one. Surrounded by the warmth of her family and her friends, Link cannot comprehend a Great Calamity. Yet even now, in villages across the land once known as Hyrule, increasingly squishing themselves around the shrines like travellers huddling for warmth around campfires and cooking pots, she can sense the spread of monsters over the land, can sense the malice that could once more well up from the ground, can sense the coming of another Great Calamity.

When Amali arrives again to Medli, she does not have Yunobo or Riju in tow. Rather, she comes bearing news of a meeting-place and a meeting-time: in Lanayru, in Ruto, for the King Zora who finds movement most difficult of all. And so the Divine Beast Vah Medoh piles high with not only Chief Kaneli, but also the chiefs of other Tabanch villages and towns. The Divine Beast Vah Naboris bears not merely the Queen of Parapa and Champion of Sageru Riju, but as well advisors from all over Parapa and western Faron: individual Parapan villages and towns do not have chiefs so much as communal decision-making with robust communications to larger towns and ultimately to Nabooru, as Riju explains to Link, who struggles to comprehend but at least tries her best to pay
attention. The Divine Beast Vah Rudania contains whichever village elders, of Darunia and other towns, care to come who do not decline the intivation out of age or out of illness. The Divine Beast Vah Ruta...remains for now in the lake surrounding the Kokir Forest, until Sidon has the time to fetch the Divine Beast properly.

Link spends most of the journey on the Divine Beast Vah Medoh fast asleep in her bed, curled up, her head on the rito-down pillow, the exhaustion of the long winter and the somehow even longer spring having finally hit her.

She emerges from her cave under the blankets to cook for herself and others and to consume. The rest of the time she spends in the softness of the sheets, the Master Sword tucked up to her face, its hilt imprinting a wing against her cheek. Whenever she awakens, she oftentimes finds someone else also occupying her bed with her, mostly Sarie, but sometimes as well Sidon—who has difficulty adjusting to the size and shape of a bed meant for humans, more than half of his body hanging off of the end—and occasionally Amali, who shushes Link when she awakens and tells her to rest. Sometimes Amali asks Link about Kass. Link details their adventures as best she can. She touches her chin. "I swear...I swear I'm forgetting something. Something I'm supposed to have done by now."

"If you remember what it is," Amali swears, "then I will do my utmost to help you do it." Link yawns; Amali wipes fatigue-welled tears from the corners of her eyes. "But first, you need to sleep."

When they arrive in Ruto, Link—despite having slept for over half the day every single day of the past week—feels a certain exhaustion continuing to weigh down upon her.

The Lanayrish welcome her, both as the Champion of Hylia—the bearer of the Master Sword and the Knight of the prophecy that, as far as Link can tell from the tree's words, is less a prophecy and more a cautionary tale spun out over ten thousand years—and as Link—the girl whom many of the Lanayrish have known personally, as a courier or as a bartender—who waves back to the Lanayrish, keeps a blanker expression on her face than she might like, and offers passersby the opportunity for a meal. Sidon tours her around Lanayru, around the slow rebuilding of Ruto.

"It will take many of your hylians years," he explains to her, "but when we have once more grown in number to match the strength within our hearts, I shall honour the building of new villages by cooking your seafood paella! Although with a better recipe than yours!"

Link giggles. "Thanks for being honest." She embraces him with pride in her heart—and in her stomach. She yawns. Within a second she has found herself dozing off against Sidon; he carries her back to the beds of the Divine Beast Vah Medoh.

The fatigue besets her again for the next few days while the chiefs of Tabantha and the King Zora embark upon the discussion of the fate of the land once known as Hyrule. Link attempts to follow the politics. They call her up once to introduce herself and give her own thoughts on the matter. She wakes up in a cold sweat, at first assuming she must have having dreamed it up, and then realising that she fainted dead away on stage. Sidon sets a cool towel over her head. She rubs her eyes and goes back to sleep.

Another few days pass by without incident. Sidon takes Amali and Link to the Ruto concert hall to see the first live performance in over two years of the quintet known as the Indigo-Gos, whose bombastic lead guitarist yells "Yow!" at the end of every other sentence, and whose music reminds Link of something between the burbling of a brook and the crashing of glaciers.

Upon the advent of the full moon, Sidon invites Link and Amali—and the Tabanch chieftains—to
participate in the monthly prayers for the Goddess Zola. The inverted spire of the Temple of Zola drains water from its upper levels, granting space of its non-gilled guests. Link does not comprehend much of the goings-on, particularly as the Sage of Zola reads the religious texts in the ancient Old Lanayrish tongue—Flippish, Sidon names it—that the zora people spoke at the time when the Seven roamed the earth. She nods her head sagely. Yet she can feel the electricity through the crowd, the quietness with which they listen to the proceedings, the reverence of their glimmering eyes and hands moved into the signs of the Goddess Zola. When the Sage invokes the Golden Goddesses, she forms Their symbols up above her head.

It takes all of Link's iron willpower not to break down laughing in the midst of such a culturally significant ceremony: the Sage looks as if she were playing a round of wind-water-fire with herself. At some point, she falls asleep. She wonders if the fatigue will grasp hold of her forever. Then Link sees—with the arrivals of the other Divine Beasts—Yunobo and Riju come running at her with arms open, and all of her exhaustion vanishes at once. Yunobo hugs her gently; Riju, so fiercely that Link would fear her spine might snap, except that she would not even care. Not a second later, Yunobo has started to assure Link that she does not have to carry the Master Sword if she does not want to, that she need not force herself to become the Champion of Hylia if she does not want to, that she need not bear the burdens if she does not want to. Laughing, she shakes her head.

"The sword chose me," Link says, "but thanks." She has words. She can use them. "Yunobo, it means a lot that you'd...worry so much, that you'd." She makes wheeling gestures with her hands. "I'm not good at this."

"Take your t-time," Yunobo answers. "I know what it feels like to have to talk q-quickly. When I was first c-carved from stone, I stuttered even worse than I do n-now, because I felt like I couldn't have time to say everything I was t-trying to say. I'm...learning how to stutter less now. It's all right to take your time." He touches her shoulder. "I'm here."

He's here. And so is she. Link finds an apple in her satchel and eats it as she signs. "I'm making deliciously grilled rock roast, but I'm afraid to make it, because I think that if I don't do it well, you'll stop liking me," she explains, "so when I tell you that I'm afraid, you reassure me. It doesn't matter if I can make the rock roast well or not. You won't pretend it's good, but you won't hate me."

"And then I...I make you the rock roast, even though I was afraid that I didn't know how to make it! Or, or maybe this is a bad analogy. The rock roast chose to let me make it. Not really about my own skills, just...I happened to stumble on some rock roast."

She snaps her fingers. "I was afraid that there wouldn't be rock roast in the market! But there was. And now I've come back, and you tell me that you'd be my friend even if I hadn't managed to get it at the market. Does...does that makes sense?"

Yunobo takes her hand and stretches out her arm to touch her fingers against his own chin. Link laughs; Yunobo beams. Untying the shawl around his shoulders, he tucks blue fabric over Link's. "I don't g-get it entirely," he admits with a scratch of his jaw. "I th-think I get enough. And that's all I need, right?"

Link nods. "Right."

Riju's initial response involves less reassurance and more presenting Link with a full pumpkin, a sand seal and a horse carved into the gourd, though Link at first mistakes the sand seal for a bowl and the horse for a depiction of a spoon. "Goddesses help me," Riju observes, her smile reaching up to her brown eyes, while Sarie flings themself out of Link's satchel to sit once more upon Riju's
head and up take her heavy looped sidelocks, "I don't know if I should laugh at you for constantly having your head stuck in the cooking pot or cry that my artistic creations aren't the epitome of a masterpiece." When Link starts to apologise, Riju bats her hands away. "I'm joking, Link. Thank the Goddesses but I can own up to not being able to carve pumpkin. Then, go on. Try it. I...I hope you like it!"

Link lifts the lid of the pumpkin: catfish stew.

She looks at Riju, who bounces up and down on her feet as she, in turn, watches Link, having brought up a hand to her mouth in something resembling nervousness. Behind her, Link catches sight of the captain of the royal Parapan guard, who inclines her head at Link, and several of Riju's other attendants bearing various expressions of bemusement and solemnity.

Link raises the pumpkin to her lips. Lowering her eyelids, she drinks deeply of the stew that heats her tongue, and her face, and which wets her throat, and her eyes. The catfish stew does not taste quite like Ordon catfish, Ordon goat, Ordon pumpkin. It tastes like Parapan trout, Parapan sand seal, Parapan...pumpkin. Sweeter and more orange than the harder and darker Akkalan variety. A Parapan spin on an Ordon favourite.

She lets the pumpkin drop down into her lap. Link listens to the stew slosh inside. Riju bites her lower lip; she leans forward, the tip of her tongue poking out of the corner of her mouth, a small anxious smile curving her lips.

"I like your lipstick," Link says suddenly; Riju blinks. "It makes me think of blueberries."

"...thank you." Riju hesitates. "So, how's the...?"

Link snaps her fingers. "It's not what I expected." Riju's expression begins to hollow, but Link shakes her head so violently that her sidelocks slap into her eyes. "No it's not bad! It's not bad! It's not what I expected in the best way I can imagine! You didn't just replicate what I told you about. You took something and you made it all your own.

"Ordon catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd isn't about the catfish or the goat cheese or the pumpkin. It's about celebrating the things that make Ordon, Ordon. And I don't know what makes Parapa, but trout and sand seals are pretty high up there. I didn't know you grew pumpkins, though." Riju's irises seem to sparkle more and more as Link continues through her gestures; she tips up her chin from the praise, the light of the clear Lanayru sky reflecting in her glimmering eyes. "It's so good I had to stop myself from eating it."

"Why? You can have all of it. I made for you, silly." Riju stops herself. "You don't mind me calling you that, do you?"

Link rubs the back of her head. "No, it makes me feel...cozy. But I stopped from eating it because I think we should share it. Meals are best when they're eaten together, you know. Mind if I give you a hug before we eat, though?"

Riju embraces her. Just before Link opens the pumpkin again, this time for them to eat together, Riju nudges Link into looking up at her attendants. She withdraws the Master Sword. Riju and the attendants ogle the Master Sword, which glows fire-light for a moment as if showing off while Link uses the sword that seals the darkness to carefully cut the pumpkin into enough pieces for everyone.

Riju pulls her sidelocks in alarm. "Goddesses...! Link, you can't...you can't use the blade of evil's bane for that!"
Link starts to pass out the pumpkin slices. As she frees her hands, she turns innocently towards Riju. "Why not?"

"It's just...it's just, thank the Goddesses, She chose you, and I don't think you're supposed to use...Her for...cutting pumpkins...the sword is meant to seal away darkness, to be the bane of evil." It dawns upon Link that bane is not a verb, but a noun. "Then, shouldn't you treat Her more...more reverently? I don't know."

"If it really bothers you," Link offers, "I can stop. But I don't think it minds." She glances over her left shoulder. "Hey, Are you angry with me?" she asks of the Master Sword in its sheath. The Master Sword meets her with quiet. "Here. Try to hold it."

Riju shakes her head. "It's only for the chosen one to hold, isn't it?"

"Sidon held it. Here." She palms it over. Gulping hard, Riju hesitantly hovers her hand over the pommel of the sword that seals the darkness. Link smiles tenderly and pushes Riju's palm down until she touche the hilt. "See how it curls back up in your hand? And then when I take it...it uncurls. I think it can understand what I say, too. Watch. If you're all right with me using you to cut pumpkins...then flash blue."

The Master Sword does not reply. Riju raises an eyebrow at her.

Link taps her chin. "I bet it's just not listening to me. If you're all right with me using you to cut pumpkins...then don't flash blue."

The Master Sword does not reply.

Riju crouches down beside it. "Thank the Goddesses that you're not putting up with this nonsense, O blade of evil's bane." She shakes her head. "I understand the legends that the spirit of the Goddesses' will resides within, and it is She to whom I refer. Though, I don't think that She is conscious or can talk to us or anything like that." Riju glances at the Master Sword. "So, can you?"

Link starts to fold her arms over her chest in preparation of the Master Sword staying silent yet again, but a single pulse of blue interrupts her. Riju and Link ogle one another, then the Master Sword, then one another.

Both she and Riju regard the Master Sword. They ask of it a thousand questions, yet the Master Sword remains still and softened white as ever. Riju sighs. Link pats her shoulder.

"Then, thank you for your time, whether you can hear me or not," Riju tells the Master Sword. Link sheathes the sword that seals the darkness.

In honour of the gathering of the Champions together once more, and to cheer up an Amali who paces back and forth in the fear that Kass might come to Medli expecting her only to find her absent this time, Link proposes another communal cooking event. Sidon, Amali, Sarie, and especially Riju agree to chip in, while Yunobo asks if he can watch but not participate.

Sidling up to Amali, Link inquire what she might want to eat. Amali shrugs, her gaze distant and drawn. "If you're going to shut up yourself up like a clam," Link warns her, "then I won't make any clam chowder."

That brings a smile to Amali's beak. "I suppose I can't miss out on clam chowder. Well, well. Clam
Clam chowder, with Tabanch wheat, and Lanayrish blueshell snails and Nayru's pearl clams, and Parapan electric safflina for that particular kick. "And Eldic spice," Link adds when Yunobo hands her a jar of it. "Thanks, Yuno-yunobo."

As Sidon and Riju begin to melt sand seal butter mixed with goat milk cream and Tabanch flour, Link and Amali prepare and simmer juices from the Nayru's pearl clams and blueshell snails with electric safflina, potato, endura carrot, onion, Hyrule herb, and cloves, then bring the two together for the body of the chowder. Amali and Sidon rinse the clams and snails thoroughly before stirring them into the hot stew. Sarie calls the adding of vinegar only to drop the entire vial into the cooking pot.

While Link and Riju hastily attempt to salvage the clam chowder from the malice of too much vinegar by the addition of potatoes, aerated salt, and distilled cane sugar, Amali simply erupts into laughter. Link grins: her first victory today.

Sarie dabbles in salt, spice, and seasoning. Sidon gives the clam chowder a final stir. Amali splits it five ways between them to eat up. In the meantime, Link teaches Riju how to prepare fried opals for Yunobo, who taps his index fingers against one another and thanks them.

Link retires for the night in one of the guest rooms set up by Sidon with Sarie under her pillow, curled up pleasantly on the bed. A knock at her door reveals a sleepy pyjama-clad Riju in the hallway, who asks if Link wants to play cards. A second knock at her door, after Riju has won seven hands of Akkalan hold'em and Link three, brings Yunobo in with a tap of his index fingers and a plea to let him rest in Link's chambers for his fear of never having slept somewhere so moist before. A third knock, accompanying Link and Riju's efforts to unbend the paper cards that a flustered and apologetic Yunobo has unwittingly almost crushed in his rocky hand, finds the Prince Zora himself asking about the noise and whether he can try this strange non-Lanayrish card game as well.

Riju tries to explain that, because the cards solely have the four suits—swords, spears, axes, and bows—and numbers written on them, he would not be able to see. Then she pauses and excuses herself a moment.

When she returns a few minutes later, she comes with a pack of slightly bulkier cards. "As it turns out, one of my wonderful friends on Savah Naboris has cards with Parapan sign on them, thank the Goddesses." Riju turns towards Link. "In the morning, would you mind helping me make Anora a meal in my gratitude?" Riju closes her eyes in contemplation. "If I remember correctly, she really loves eggs. Maybe a tart, or pudding...?"

Link excitedly bobs her head. "Anything at all."

Sidon, a Yunobo more capable of holding these sturdier cards, Riju, and Link play another few rounds of Akkalan hold'em—with Sarie dealing—before switching to a game easier for Sidon to play: the forever favourite.

Touching her chin, Link regards Yunobo. "Got any threes?"

A sudden fourth knock at the door brings them all to jump at once as it flies open. "What are you children doing up so late?" Amali glares at each one of them in turn, neglecting the fact that Sidon has on her some eighty years. Sarie peeps out something that sounds like uh oh while the other four flinch or start to apologise. But then Amali's expression softens. "If you're going to be having fun together, then can I join, too?"
Link beams. Then, pausing for a moment, she claps her hands loudly enough to grab everyone's attention. "We're missing someone very important, you know."

"Then," Riju suggests, a tilt of her head indicating her perplexion, "let's go invite them as well."

"Not them. Her," says Link. She leads the party out of her chambers—they pass by very sneakily, Yunobo and Sarie collaborating on a song about being stealthy as shadows; Sidon inquiring in a noisy Sidon-whisper as to where they're going; and Amali sighing and shaking her head—and towards the upper levels of Ruto. Towards the stable. Towards Ilia.

They sit or lie down around Ilia in her stable stall, the musty softness of the hay around them, while they return to playing cards. Amali teaches them a game called feathers, wherein each round revolves around matching four of a kind and then grabbing of the feathers laid out the one person unable to grab a feather in time sits out, until the final round sees a showdown between the master Amali and the rising underdog Yunobo. Riju jokingly starts taking bets until Sidon solemnly places half of his future ownership of Lanayru on the table. "This is how those who do not follow our Goddess do it, yes!?"

"N-no..."

Yunobo wins out by a hair. Or rather, Link reflects to herself, slyly signing into Riju's palm and leaving her giggling at the pun, by a feather: instead of matching his own cards, he watches Amali's expression, monitoring when she has found her last match and scooping the feather out from under her just as she reaches for it. Amali stares at him. "I would never have thought you to resort to such underwinged tactics."

"Huh? But I thought that th-this was a game about r-reading each other...or was that Akkalan hold'em?" Yunobo hangs his head. "I'm no good at this."

Riju rubs his shoulder as Amali apologises and Ilia licks Yunobo's head. "I'm sorry, Yunobo. You won fair and square. If that were to happen to me in a real feathers competition, then they would consider that a fair game." Yunobo beams, clapping his hand against his cheek. "I'm proud of you."

Eventually Riju nods off against Link's shoulder in the middle of a hand. Sidon announces bedtime, and Amali berates herself for not having sent them all packing to bed hours earlier. Yunobo settles himself down in the hay then and there, explaining with some embarrassment that he feels too tired to make the walk back to the chambers. "And also th-this place is a lot drier and m-more comfortable and less scary, right?"

Link grins. "Couldn't have put it better myself."

They all bed down together in a pile of scale and feather and leaf and rock and too much hair and just enough warmth. For the two years that Link has spent keeping promises and walking paths, she has never had a better night's rest.

The morning after, the messenger Igli discovers them at last collapsed in the hay of the stable. Link apologises; Sidon shouts out a good morning. "Quite," Igli remarks, pursing his lips. "Master Link, Queen Riju, Master Amali, Master Yunobo, the Prince Zora, you are quite late for the meeting of the council. If you would follow me."

The meeting of the council. The Champions and the leaders of the regions and provinces and towns and villages and little huts somewhere in the middle of the snow of the land once known as Hyrule. Dozens upon dozens from all over, some of whom Link has met and cooked for without knowledge
of whom they were, most of whom Link has never seen. She even counts someone she recognises from Kakariko amongst their number, though not Lady Impa, too old to travel.

She tries to listen to the proceedings; Amali tries to pick hay from her hair and fix the collar of her tunic. Link glances at Amali in confusion. "We can't have you presenting yourself like that," Amali replies. Link tilts her head, growing ever more perplexed, when abruptly the King Zora rumbles out her name.

"O Champion of Hy利亚, O Hero of Hyrule, O Her Majesty's Knight, O Courageous Link," the King Zora booms, his voice loud enough to quake the throne pool and all those gathered within, "come forth. Tell us of what you know, and what you remember."

Link can feel the sweat slick her forehead and the dizziness blur her vision. Yet she can feel, too, the hands on her shoulder, on her back, on her head. Her friends, cheering her on. Sarie in her satchel, kalalahing at her in encouragement. Amali telling her that she can do it, that Amali will be right there behind her, that she needs only to close her eyes and to speak. Yunobo promising her that nothing terrible will happen, that she should take pride in what she has accomplished. Sidon suggesting that she picture everyone in her undergarments: "I have heard the most incredible stories that this actually assists hylians in public speaking!" Riju murmuring that afterwards, they can cook together, and that she could imagine the crowd cooking alongside her. Egg tart, or maybe pudding.

She closes her fingers around the hilt of the Master Sword, presses her cheek against the pommel. The blade of evil's bane resonates against her palm, hums into her ear. She nods to herself. She rises.

Link takes a breath. She takes the stage. She grips the Master Sword in her hand, turning the blade so that the thin edge turns toward her face, holding the sword between her eyes, and she looks upon the crowd.

She attempts to picture them in their undergarments, but she realises that she does not know how look undergarments amongst non-Akkalan hylian people—she supposes that she has seen a little of Tabanch rito and Neculudan sheikah undergarments from her experiences with helping care for the children, and a little of the Parapan and Faronese gerudo for having shared a room with Riju and having lived at Romani Ranch—and, either way, standing in front of a room of semi-nude people makes her more mortified than amused.

Instead she imagines them: eating. Eating together from a communal cooking pot that they share and pass amongst one another, each contributing something to a stew that they make together, each filling themself to satiety then passing on the pot to the next, their bellies warm and eyes closed, their hearts beating and stomachs digesting as one.

She breathes. In through her nose, out through her mouth. She senses herself: afraid. She fears the crowd, and she fears the Great Calamity, and she fears the Master Sword that she carries.

Yet she loves the wilds and the people who make something of them more than she fears everything combined. And from that—from that she draw the courage she needs.

She lifts up her hands.

She speaks.
Clam Chowder (nine hearts) - electric safflina, fresh milk, goat butter, hearty blueshell snail, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: As always, thanks a million for having come with me all this time, for continuing to read as the chapters continue to balloon beyond limit, and thank you for continuing to support me. I hope that you've enjoyed Delicious in Wilds so far. It's about time for us to shift into true end-game. And thanks a million to my beta reader, Emma, for all of the work that she has poured into Delicious in Wilds, and all of the motivation that she has given me all this time.

I first brought up the concept of these mirrors back in the thirty-second chapter, I believe.

What did Link promise to do after she acquired the Master Sword? There's something in particular she needed the sword for.

The Indigo-Gos are from Majora's Mask, and Mikau, their lead guitarist, does indeed say "Yow!"

The Temple of Zola, with its draining and raising of water level, was inspired by the dungeons in the Zelda franchise that rely on such raising and lowering, most recently in A Link Between Worlds, which is probably my favourite implementation. It's an inverted spire because the most significant portions of it are the lowest, while the highest seats are reserved for those who cannot breathe underwater. Modern Lanayrish descended from the older language of Flippish, itself named after the zora flippers, an item from many a Zelda game, including A Link to the Past.

Yunobo's stuttering much, much less now. He's come so far!

The Lanayrish pastime of diving is based off of the "Diving is Beauty!" quest in Breath of the Wild.

Nayru's pearl clams are a reference to the sacred object Nayru's pearl from The Wind Waker, since for some reason you can make clam chowder in Breath of the Wild despite not being able to actually procure clams.

Indeed, if you happen to get too much vinegar into something, you can try to salvage it potatoes, sugar, etc. But it's hard to that, so try not to drop entire vials of vinegar!

By the way, I was recently informed by a native speaker the word 'ogle' has a primary definition of a 'lecherous look', which is not at all what I've meant; rather I have meant the secondary definition of 'to look or stare at'. This is the problem when English isn't your native language. Whoops! I promise Riju wasn't lustfully looking at the Master Sword or some nonsense like that!

Akkalan hold'em, of course, is named after Texas hold'em. The four suits on the cards are swords, spears, axes, and bows, in a nod to the weapons used by the four
Champions and their respective Whateverbright Ganons in-game. The forever favourite, naturally, is the Hyrulean variant of the real world "go fish".

The game of *feathers* is based on the real-life game of *spoons*, which I recommend trying if you've never played it. I once cheated, though, and won by watching my opponent instead, reaching out to grab the spoon as soon as he moved towards it. Why? Because the win condition is that *someone* has to get the matching set at the time of the spoon-grabbing, not necessarily the person grabbing the spoon!

You might remember Igli from Link's first visit to Ruto.

Public speaking is quite difficult, especially for someone like Link. I mean, understanding politics is really hard in the first place; Link's trying her best to comprehend what in the world is going on, because she doesn't just want to be a passive observer, but it's *hard*. She hasn't had much formal education beyond tutelage at the court in various languages, and she certainly doesn't know enough about the political structures of the various nations in Hyrule to grasp anything beyond the fundamentals. But, as Sidon told her, that doesn't make her stupid. Lack of education is not the same thing.

And public speaking is even harder. But just think about how far she's come. It took her immense stress and strain to even tell *Amali* about what Link was able to do with Vah Rudania in Darunia, back when she was first in Medli. And now she's at least willing to try to speak to an entire crowd of people from all over Hyrule.

By the way, has *anyone* ever been helped by the whole "yeah just imagine people in their underwear" shtick? I never have.

Up next: public speaking; the skyward strike; that thing that Link forgot how to do after she got the Master Sword. It's also last elixir chapter in *Delicious in Wilds*, if I remember correctly.


Beta reader's comments: Link's variation on the "imagine the audience in their underwear" is adorable and so incredibly Link. I love it.

Emma. 10 November 2017.
Chapter Summary

The travelling chef gives a speech to the gathered leaders of the scattered settlements, towns, and nations of Hyrule. Then, the travelling chef remembers a promise the chef made regarding the Master Sword. With the aid of the Tabanch housewife, the chef makes good on that promise and discovers something perhaps foreboding, perhaps freeing.

Chapter Notes

As usual, author's notes that wouldn't fit in the end no matter how many squeezy-hand motions I made: I started writing this chapter at 18:00 on the thirteenth of August, and finished writing it on at 09:51 on the fourteenth of August.

Thanks a million for all of your support, and thanks a million for the constructive criticism you've all given me in improving my writing and worldbuilding! And a round of applause to my most marvellous beta reader, Emma, for everything that she has done.

One last summary chapter! Basically just a synthesis of everything that Link has learned about the Sacred Realm. I figured that one last "previously on Delicious in Wilds" is good for this, since I put in a ton of lore that isn't familiar to those who just came out of Breath of the Wild. Really, my idea of the Sacred Realm came from my efforts to (1) explain the ancient technology, because I'm not fond of 'wow technology that we've lost over ten thousand years!' especially given that the royal family of Hyrule has been the same royal family the entire time in-game (but not in Delicious in Wilds), so it's not like massive chaos could have sunk that technology; what happened to it, beyond the Hyrule royal family being the worst managing monarchs of all time, to a point where despite having no chaos for the throne they were able to lose such ridiculously significant technology?, and (2) I wanted to have a reason to explain the frankly really strange behaviour of monsters. I know that it's a video game, but hey, I always want to be Mechanically Accurate™.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Link does not speak well.

She stumbles over her words. She loses her trail of thought. She goes around in circles. She uses too many food analogies which leave the crowds murmuring to one another. She makes too many wordplays and allusions that the interpreters—for those who do not know Lanayrish sign or for those who cannot see her—find visibly difficult to translate. She does not know if she has all of the facts, or even how much she should say. She goes on for too long. She has to reel herself in.

Link forces herself to breathe. Her blood roars so loudly in her ears that she can listen to nothing
else. Her heartbeat thuds in her fingers and wrists so distractingly that she leaves sentences unfinished.

She observes—from the looks of the faces of the crowds, who narrow their eyes, who scratch their heads, who look around at one another, who lean back with their arms behind their backs, who whisper and mutter amongst themselves—that she lost them long, long ago.

And yet Link speaks. She has no other choice. She stands before a gathered congregation of dozens, perhaps a hundred, of people from all over the land once known as Hyrule. She stands before gerudo, before sheikah, before hylians, before rito, before zora, before gorons, before a single korok who waves at her from the stands to cheer her on.

She stands before rulers and advisors, before council-people and elders, before chieftains and matriarchs, before people who have eaten her cooking, before people who might never eat her cooking.

Link speaks. She speaks, and the royal symphony behind the King Zora improvises melodies to go along with what she says. She can hear the complexities of which she speaks in how the music dips between the sounds of triumph and the sounds of tragedy and in how the musicians occasionally fiddle away little eddies of music that have no particular rhyme or rhythm.

She tells them of Hyrule, one hundred years ago. She tells them of the Sacred Realm, of where the veil between the mortal world and the Sacred Realm becomes thin enough to break. She tells them of the—at least—two mirrors, one of the mirrors kept by the royal family, and other one supposedly shattered. She tells them of the mirror in the sanctum. That royal mirror. Capable, somehow or other, of accessing the Sacred Realm through some manner which she little understands.

She tells them of the Sacred Realm, of gathering the boundaries of the body, of an effectively immortal existence. Effectively immortal, except that if one dies in the Sacred Realm and is unable to put themself back together as they were, they will never again step foot in the mortal world. In the Sacred Realm, she explains, not physical health but willpower determines your existence.

She tells them of the Calamitous One, attempting to breach the veil. She tells them of the monsters and the malice, themselves from the Sacred Realm, and of how the monsters do not fear death because they do not comprehend death as a matter of their physical constitution. They only comprehend death as a matter of willpower. And so the monsters doggedly continue to fight despite the pain, because to them, fleeing and running away—to them, losing the will to fight or to live—would lead them to death.

She tells them: in the mortal world, they have long exploited the monsters' tendency to chase and to never stop fighting despite their own injuries to wear monsters down. In the Sacred Realm, the people of the land once known as Hyrule themselves will have to fight like monsters. No matter the injury. Never backing down. Not even if a lizalfos bites into an arm. Not even if a pole slams into a side. Not even if an arrow tipped with malice soars into a shoulder. Not even if a scimitar splits in half a foot. Not even if an entire pool of malice surrounds the body all at once. Not even if the lynel meat so carefully prepared results in illness and vomiting. Never give up. Never, ever give up. Only through that dogged pursuit, ignoring pain and ignoring death, can they best the beasts in the beasts' own lands.

She tells them of the girl with the golden hair, who led the armies into the Sacred Realm, who have fought all of this time, who might still be fighting.

She tells them of how she was trapped in a tear between the Sacred Realm and the mortal world for
one hundred years, how the Calamitous One successfully breached the veil, how the girl with the
golden hair injured the Calamitous One enough to push the Calamitous One back into the Sacred
Realm and allow the veil to heal, and how the closure of those tears in the veil left herself—Link—
unable to return to the mortal world. She tells them of how the recent activation of the Divine
Beasts and the shrines and the towers came about by the Calamitous One once more puncturing
the veil. Of how that same re-opening of the tears in the veil simultaneously allowed herself, at
last, to awaken in the mortal world: when the Calamitous One opened the tears, it also opened the
path for Link to emerge.

She tells them of herself. Of Link, and the final remaining slate never used during the puncturing.
Of trek to calm the Divine Beasts. And now, of the sword that seals the darkness, the blade of
evil’s bane, the Master Sword.

Raising her arms, she starts to form words like and I could make you all meals for having listened
to me but she stops herself just in time. Instead Link bows to them all in thanks.

The King Zora opens the floor for questions, and Link wonders how terrible it would truly be to
simply stab herself in the throat with the Master Sword to escape the sudden barrage more
torrential than anything the Divine Beast Vah Ruta has ever put out.

The congregation of Hyrule's leaders interrogate her. They ask of how she knows any of this. They
ask of why she and the girl with the golden hair failed to contain the Calamitous One one hundred
years ago. They ask of why they should care about any of this. They ask of whether she has proof
for her claims. They ask of why do they should not merely wipe out the monsters using the Divine
Beasts and let this supposed Calamitous One that may or may not exist continue sitting by itself in
the Sacred Realm. They ask of how any of this could make logical sense. They ask of this Sacred
Realm, the legends of which do not exist in all corners of the land once known as Hyrule. They ask
of the logistics of raising an army from villages and towns and nations already battered by
monsters, of the logistics of getting an entire army through a circular mirror about yea big, of the
logistics of fighting in the Sacred Realm when they have little understanding of what the Sacred
Realm even is, or whether it even exists.

Link tries to stammer out responses, her fingers twitching into the same motions repeatedly. She
answers as best that she can in the endless downpour, but at times she has to admit the gaps. "I
don't know," she says, to the sharp inhalations of those around her, like a great hurricane of gasps
threatening to sweep her from her boots and fling her down into the ground. "I don't remember."

The throne pool explodes into shrieks of bewilderment, screams of incredulity, shouts that they
have come across the whole of the land to hear a folktale spun by someone who does not even
remember.

The King Zora attempts to cover for Link as best he can, assuring the gathered congregation that
Link did indeed live one hundred years ago, that they have first-person accounts from others and
not simply Link herself about the existence of the Sacred Realm and the Calamitous One, that they
can work out the logistics themselves and that that working-out indeed is why the King Zora has
called everyone here.

Link gives the King Zora a grateful look. Then someone in the congregation shouts that the
Calamitous One may not even exist, and the throne pool falls again into chaos.

When she glances back at the congregation, she can see it in their eyes: fear, desperation, anger,
concern, sadness, confusion, worry. She remembers when she told everyone in Amali's house the
truth about what she has seen and where she has been. Riju, Yunobo, Amali, and Sidon, and
everyone else in the house, none of whom yelled at her or disbelieved, all of whom reassured her
and were there for her. But they know her. Personally. Have eaten food with her. The gathered people in the throne pool only know her as the girl who has come to flip their lives upside-down.

Someone else—Link cannot tell who in the chaos, nor does she want to—yells out that the Master Sword itself could be nothing but a fake. Her left hand—the fingers curled around the violet hilt, her face reflected in the blade of softened blade—shakes.

The King Zora clears his throat. The crowds quiets slightly, but not enough. The King Zora clears his throat more noisily and booms out over the throne pool: "Let us have a short recess. We shall resume after dinner." Still the congregation argues amongst itself in a verbal maelstrom that leaves Link trembling in her boots. The King Zora rests a massive finned hand on her shoulder, the hand so large that it covers the better half of her head as well. "Step down from the stage, my lass. You did well. Now, allow me to convince them, hoo hoo."

Link nods silently. When she tries to take a step, she discovers her bones have once more gone on vacation and left only cylinders of bari jelly in their wake. She touches her heels together. The Master Sword still weighs down her left hand. The Master Sword that some in the crowd now call false. The Master Sword that they do not believe in. The Master Sword that she believes in.

She may not always believe in herself, yet she believes in the Master Sword that believes in her.

Link dips her head again at the King Zora. She looks towards the ring of seats where Sidon, Amali, Yunobo, Riju, Sarie, and the messenger Igli await her, the former four in various states of clearly trying to cheer her up with their welcoming expressions, Sarie waving an eager arm without much understanding of the goings-on, and Igli simply pursing his lips.

She takes another step forward, this time a little less like bari jelly, and then something smacks her in the back of the head.

Her head snaps down. Link stares at a pen of some sort, lying by her boots, which someone in the congregation must have thrown at her. Or perhaps it accidentally ejected from their hand. Her gaze darts back and forth, but the faces of the congregation blur. Surely no one would have attacked her with a pen. The roar of the crowd around her doubles her vision. Surely no one would have—

The King Zora slams his massive hands on either side of the throne pool, so forceful that the splashes of water soak Link's back.

"ENOUGH!"

The crowd goes silent for a few seconds, then again breaks out into arguments and discussion, into accusations of one another, into demands for the Divine Beasts to stop ferrying people and to stop only caring about their own people, into shrieks that their regions have suffered for months or years in the rampage of the Divine Beasts and that they will do with their Goddess-given marvels what they will. Amid the cacophony that squeezes Link's eyes shut and brings her hands over her ears, the King Zora raises his voice to a volume of fury that shakes the very ceiling. He calls for order in the throne pool. The guards lift up their spears. Link recoils. The sooner she forces herself off of the stage the better.

She starts to sheathe the Master Sword. Just before the sword slides again into the sheathe, the blade flashes light-blue and resonates so loudly that its hum echoes throughout the chamber.

The masses that have stared at her at disbelief and confusion now sit up, eyes wide, or else cower,
arms over their faces.

The Master Sword feels as if it moves by herself; the upwards pull, like magnetism, strains Link's arm. She lifts up her lightning-strike hand until the blade of the Master Sword points towards the heavens. She holds the skyward sword aloft.

And then, from the skies, despite the very obvious roof over the heads of the congregation, a bolt of violet lightning cleaves the air to strike the Master Sword. Yells of pandemonium and gasps of fear accompany the boom of thunder the thor quaking ne pool. The Master Sword glows alive with the violent violet of malice. No. Not like malice, but like the sash that Marin once wore around her hips. An iridescent hue that shimmers between violet and gold.

The Master Sword hums. Though the hum has no words, it carries a sensation, a wave that floods the throne pool and ripples over the congregation, over and over again. A sensation that Link cannot quite name, but a sensation that leaves her with the same feeling as having just finished a delicious meal.

Warm, and content, and somehow reverent, in the strangest sort of way. Link has never much understood the Temples of the Goddesses, has never much felt the pull of the Oracles and the Sages, has never much even prayed before the Ordona Spring. Yet, in the whisper of the wind upon the grassy knoll upon which she and Ilia lay together, or in the ripples of the water upon the pond beside which she and Marin talked together, or in the flicker of the fire of the oven where she and Aryll baked carrot cake together, or most of all in the final swallow of a meal that warms her belly and fills her to contentment: in those moments, more than in any other, has Link felt a reverence towards the Golden Goddesses, has Link closed her eyes and believed.

As if on cue, the royal symphony behind the King Zora begins to play again. A song of moonlit strings and evening calm. The ripples slowly fade. The violet light ebbs to fire-light blue, and then again to softened white. The sensation lingers. The congregation has hushed.

"I believe," the King Zora rumbles behind Link, "that this is a sign from the Goddesses Themselves. O Champion of Hylia...no." The King Zora raises himself up from the water to his imposing height, his laboured breathing indicating the strain of his full weight out of the water. "O Champion of the Golden Goddesses, O Hero of Hyrule, O Her Majesty's own appointed Knight, O Courageous Link."

This time, the congregation does not scream out. A few murmurs sweep here and there. Yet most keep quiet and still, their gazes fixed upon the King Zora, who settles back down into the throne pool and catches his breath.

"I believe that it is time that we all learn from one another. For the first time in over eighteen hundred moons, the people of Hyrule—long isolated and scattered—have again come together. We should treat one another as our brethren, our cities united, our Divine Beasts a communal gift that our Goddesses have granted to us all. And we will use them together, for the good of everyone. We have lived in fear of the Great Calamity for over one hundred years, and now the Calamitous One may rise up once more. A shark may devour a single fish, but an entire school can escape with the safety of all of the fish.

"Let us see one another not as competitors seeking the protection of the divinities, but as siblings, all protected by our own Goddess of the Seven, and all of us protected equally, as a single people of Hyrule, by the Golden Force of the Golden Goddesses.

"In these times most calamitous, we must all strive to extol the virtues of the Golden Goddesses. We must all have power, must all have wisdom, must all have courage. And we must strive
equally to extol the virtues of the Seven, even those of other Goddesses, for the Seven love us all, and wish for all of us to exist together in the great kingdom of Hyrule. The faith of the Goddess Zola, the truth of the Goddess Sheik, the pride of the Goddess Goro-goro, the joy of the Goddess Kokir, the voice of the Goddess Erito, the kin of the Goddess Sageru, and the hope of the Goddess Hylia. We must look upon one another, understand one another, come together, as one. O Courageous Link—" Link blinks at him, sweat beading on the back of her neck. "—do you have anything to add, in these times of trial and tribulation?"

Swallowing, she looks upon the Master Sword to whom she has promised a meal, and she nods her head. Link turns on her heel to once more face the crowd. She breathes in. She lifts her hands.

"I'm not the best at speaking," she begins. "And I'm probably just going to muck up all the great stuff that the King Zora just said. And honestly I don't even know much about the Goddesses." Link hesitates.

"Yet I do know...I do know what I've seen. What I've seen is that I've gone all over Hyrule." She will call it Hyrule. "I've gone all over Hyrule with the cooking pot, and everywhere I've gone, I've shared meals, and recipes, and stories with strangers and travellers. I've met all of my very best friends over this cooking pot. No matter where I go, there's something about sitting together and cooking a communal meal.

"I know that life isn't as easy as it sounds. You can't just cook someone's favourite pilaf and have them love you." She rubs the back of her head. "But you can bring people together. Hyrule's got so many things to offer. Everywhere I go, there's different kinds of foods and dishes and ingredients and even whole styles of cooking I've never heard of before.

"And I know I'm talking about cooking again. But the point that I'm trying to make...the point that I'm trying to make is: it's only because I could talk to people and trust people, over this cooking pot of mine, that I could do anything. Even the first person who ever approached me to talk me did it because she saw the food I'd made, all the way in Kasuto two years ago now."

Someone from the stands wolf-whistles. "Kasuto repreeeeeeent!" Link senses herself relax down.

"I know that I'm not the bravest, or the smartest, or the strongest. I'm..." Her cheeks redden. "...really just a girl who loves to cook. And eat. Can't forget that." A single chuckle from the congregation, followed by smatterings of mirth.

"But, with the help of my friends and so many other people I've ever met, I've also calmed the Divine Beasts, and activated all of the shrines and towers around. And the Master Sword has chosen me." She touches her hand to her hilt.

"This isn't how it was a hundred years ago. One hundred years ago, we were all expecting the Goddesses to intervene. We were expecting the Princess to...to unlock this ability to seal away darkness that she was supposed to get just by being the Princess of Hyrule.

"And she didn't. And everyone panicked. Nobody was prepared. We didn't even know what the Calamitous One was going to look like.

"But we do now: We know what's going on. And we know how to fight it. We've even got the Divine Beasts this time! Not just as inert things that we didn't know how to deal with, but we've actually registered pilots and all. And we know how the Sacred Realm works, sort of. And we know how to work the shrines! And I don't really know what the towers do but they're active now too!"
She pumps her fists into the air. When Link lowers her arms again, her motions grow somber. "Monsters are getting worse and worse. I've seen it with my own eyes. And the shrines are keeping them at bay, but we don't know how the shrines work that well. The monsters are coming from the Sacred Realm. So, even if the Calamitous One didn't exist, it's really the best idea that we take care of monsters at the source, right?" She nods at her own words. "If we can figure out how to do that, then...then we'll all be in better shape.

"Just...just don't forget, you know. We're in a better shape than we've ever been. This isn't us mounting one last desperate assault. These two years have seen us...have seen us..." Link loses the threads. She gains different ones. Ones that she knows well. "These two years have seen us accomplish so much. And I don't want to see us all fall apart again. Maybe we should just cook everyone a big meal so that we all eat together. Then you'll know."

She bows to them all. As she angles her back, she feels against her spine the sword that seals the darkness strapped to her shoulder. The blade of evil's bane bound to her back. The Master Sword that has chosen her. "Thank you for believing in me. And if you don't believe in me, I get that, too. I don't know everything that's going to happen. We might not have the Princess with us. But we've got the Divine Beasts and their pilots, and we've got the Master Sword on our side. We can do this.

"I'm willing to lay down my life if it means protecting Hyrule. It means everything to me. Not any one particular part of it, but...the people and places I've met all over. And the meals I've cooked. There's nothing I want to do more than to see it at peace again. So. Um. Yeah."

For a second: silence. Then: the symphony welling up again, strings and horns and bells. Someone in the congregation claps. A smattering of applause, here and there. Not a standing ovation. Not the entire crowd jumping up to applaud her at once.

But enough. Enough.

"As long as we follow the Champion of the Goddesses, They are with us. In this, I have nothing but the utmost faith, hoo hoo." The King Zora claps together his hands; the royal symphony launches upon a triumphant song. "Now, let us have our recess, for I hunger so that I could feast upon a giant octorok. I shall regale you sometime with the heroic tale of how mine own son defeated such an octorok!" The King Zora gestures at Sidon in the stands, who strikes a pose for the crowd. Some in the crowd laugh nervously. Most have riveted their gazes upon Link, who raises a hand to wave at them. "Now, let us part!"

As the royal symphony plays them out, Link wibble-wobbles the several paces towards where her friends await her. Yunobo, teary-eyed, tells her how proud he is; Amali praises her for having being able to express herself despite her fear; and Sidon exclaims that he has nothing but complete and utter faith in her abilities. Riju hugs her around the middle while Link ducks her head and then passes out to sleep.

When she awakens, Sidon informs her of some of the proceedings that have transpired and reassures her that neither she nor the Champions—except Riju, Queen of Parapa—have to concern themselves with the logistics of armies. Whatever the Master Sword did has impressed or moved many of them into agreeing to cooperate, to at least take the possibility of the Sacred Realm seriously, and to consider contributing their forces for whatever they intend to do against the Calamitous One, itself currently up in the air.

All Link knows is that she need carry the Master Sword into the Sacred Realm. Whatever will happen then, she will just have to figure out.

The King Zora requests that Link stay around Ruto in case of additional questions from the lands'
representatives. The congregation of leaders does not instantly come to a decision. The hours stretch to days, and the days seem poised to stretch onwards to weeks, all while the veil between the Sacred Realm and the mortal world grows ever thinner. Yunobo, Amali, and especially Riju worry about their staying for so long at the congregation of leaders, considering the advent of monsters and malice still encroaching over their lands. Even if the people of the land once known as Hyrule have started to fight back, the war has only just begun.

Several of the representatives, likewise, express their desires to return, to take care of the here and now, as everyone appears to have their own opinion of what they must do about the Calamitous One and when they must do it. Some—Riju explains exasperatedly as she and Link fry up fish skewers and experiment with different ratios and blends of spices and seasonings in Riju's efforts to determine what sorts of tastes pair best with what kinds of fish—believe that they should wait until the Calamitous One manifests itself. Others think that they should not move until the Golden Goddesses or the Seven signal them. A few, such as Riju herself, propose that they strike immediately to rid the problem of its source.

Riju shakes her head. "I don't have all of the answers, but every time the monster attacks grow worse. Then, shouldn't we do something?"

As the meetings of the congregation continue and tensions grow more heated, the King Zora pleads with Link to sit in. He tells her that she does not have to comment if she does not know what to say. Link confides in him, privately, that she agrees with Riju about striking now, about swarming the castle, about attempting to enter the Sacred Realm before the Calamitous One can breach the veil.

"...but I know that I'm saying that without having people relying on me. I'm not an elder, or an Oracle, much less a queen." Link rubs the back of her head. "I don't really know everything."

The King Zora chuckles in response. "It is good to see you be honest, my lass. If you believe that we should strike as soon as possible, then I will attempt to convince them. And I daresay, with the sword that seals the darkness upon your back, we shall not fail, hoo hoo."

Link glances over her shoulder at the Master Sword. Something...something important that she has forgotten. Something she has forgotten.

She touches the hilt, then lets her hand drop away to the trusty red telescope at her left hip, still trusty and still red despite the shattering of the lens. The red telescope.

Aryll. Arylloftwing. The white bird on Mount Nayru.

Link inhales more sharply than the blade of the Master Sword. The King Zora inquires of what has happened. She requests leave from the constant meetings for a handful of days. After all, she has a promise to keep.

That evening, Sidon and Riju assist Link in cooking a fried cake of smelt and sides of rice noodles, eggs, and simmered hot peppers in anticipation of her journey while Amali races about preparing for the Divine Beast Vah Medoh's departure. Yunobo, of course, helps by walking beside Amali and cheering her on. In the meantime, Sarie becomes an essential part of the cooking process: Link could not dream of cooking smelt without Sarie singing of how fishily-fishy the food smells.

Sarie informs Link that they offered to stand-in for Link during the meetings in her absence. "But Biggy Big Teeth said no-no-no. Kookoo..." They wilt, their korok leaf drooping.

Link pats their head. "You can be my stand-in any day. If you wanted me to be honest, I think that your ideas would be a lot better and smarter than mine." She pokes Sarie's cheek. "But since Biggy
Big Teeth doesn't agree, why don't you come with me?"

They erupt into singing and whirling around on their korok leaf. Link can't help but smile at them: the Goddess Kokir and Her virtue of joy. While Sarie prances around her, she runs her fingers through her sidelocks, left and right, to reflect. Whether she would choose between memories of the past or joy.

No, she does not need to reflect. She has already long made that decision, because she does not have to choose. To remember does not mean to sadden. To remember can bring its own joy. She prays that one day Sarie could feel something of that, too.

When Link beds herself down to sleep, Sarie tucked into her tunic with their head cozy against her throat, she can sense herself vibrating.

Tomorrow. Tomorrow. Tomorrow, just after the Sidon's attendance to the moon-set prayers at the Temple of Zola, Amali and Link wish their friends a see you later. Amali takes Link up towards the Divine Beast Vah Medoh. Link spends most of the journey stuffing herself with peppers to keep her body temperature up and to give herself something to do as she watches the terrain pass beneath the Divine Beast. Over the East Reservoir, and over Rutala Dam, and over the Ja'Abu Ridge, and over Brynna Plain, and over Lanayru Bay, and over Naydra Snowfield.

Amali whirrs the fans in the Divine Beast's wings, drafting them skyward, up and up. The atmosphere grows thinner. Without much time to acclimate, Link braces herself against the inevitable strain of breathing in the high altitudes, although for the moment she prefers to lie in wait in the breathable air of the Divine Beast Vah Meodoh.

A sudden thump at the front of the Divine Beast Vah Medoh makes Link jump out of her bed and grip the hilt of the Master Sword. Amali shakes her head. "It's unlikely to be anything but a hrok or something similar. They're constantly attempting to assault Vah Medoh. If I had to guess, then I would suppose that they do not understand the difference in size or power, and charge us on principle alone."

Link touches her chin. "But don't hroks have wings? Aren't they messengers of the Goddess Erito?"

Amali huffs out a laugh under her breath. She runs her wings through her feathered ponytail. "They're monsters who have taken on guises of the messengers of the Goddess Erito to deceive us. That makes them no more messengers than, oh, wearing a rock over my head would make me a goron. Do you feel poorly when you fight against bokoblins, so close to humans that they are?"

Link cocks her head and blinks. The bokoblins, close to humans. Yet she supposes that they do appear closer to humans than to the rito, the zora, the gorons, or the koroks. She asks if she can check on the thump regardless. As Amali predicted, the thud came from a kargaroc, whose wings and drumsticks Link attempts to fry up before she recalls her promise to Kass and instead simply removes the comb, beak, feathers, and lining of the innards to sell.

Amali notes that, with the Master Sword, Link likely does not need to worry about rupees; the King Zora or someone else will provide just about anything Link needs. Still, she rolls her shoulders.

Higher up the mountain they go. More airborne enemies thud occasionally against the Divine Beast as they skirt the mountainside. Link lies in bed, unable to sleep: each time she nearly dozes off, the once-an-hour crack of a bird-like monster against the Divine Beast spooks her into awakeness.

Amali moves her bed from the front of the Divine Beast further into the bowels, where Link has
slept before. There, protected from the constant noise, Link—at last—drifts into slumber.

Sarie wakes her. Amali brings her a breakfast of a salted soup and a haddock-and-rice bowl, which Link scarfs down at the speed of however quickly her hands can physically move from the bowl to her mouth and back.

"What did you want on Mount Nayru?" Amali peers at Link, one eye open. You've been more secretive about it than usual."

Link does not reply until after she has gorged herself on the meal, disappearing the rice, fish, and soup from this world, yawning, and then stretching out her fingers. "When Kass and I were travelling..." Amali's features shift to a pang that tears Link's own heart asunder. She goes on. "...I was really sick. Not with a fever or anything like that, but we climbed the mountain too fast. I pretended that I'd be all right. I...I wasn't all right. I couldn't walk and I was barely breathing by the time we got to the top. Kass had to carry me. He's...he's really incredible, Amali. The whole time, he never yelled at me for having done something so dangerous. He just...asked me if I needed to go back down. And when he saw how badly I wanted to reach the summit, he helped me and then carried me back and made me food. "Link touches her hand to her eye. "Your daughters are in good...good wings?"

That elicits a laugh from Amali. "You don't have to try so hard. Wait. You haven't told me yet. What's on the mountain?"

Link rubs the back of her head. "I don't remember all the way." Briefly she describes the white serpent that she saw, diseased with malice, and the clicking of its ruined tongue that resembled the sound of the Master Sword.

Amali brings her wing to her beak. "If I hadn't already seen so many miracles with my own eyes, then I suppose I would be hard-pressed to believe you. Not that you would lie to me, only that you were sick," she adds hastily, and Link nods. "If...if only my husband were here. Then we could ask him directly."

"I'm sure you'd want to do a little more than ask him things if he was around." Link winks at her, picturing Amali and Kass holding wings on their own romantic picnic at the top of the tallest Pillar of Erito.

Amali's cheeks darken in blush. "Link...!" She cocks her head at Amali, who covers her beak with her wings and turns deliacely away. "I...I'll be on my perch."

The Divine Beast Vah Medoh clears the cloud-tops towards the close of the day. Slowing the ascent, Amali parks the Divine Beast on a large-enough snowfield as close to the peak as she can.

The rarefied air leaves Link's mouth dry and skin clammy despite the thickness of the many layers of clothing that she brought with her and the spicy elixir that she prepared. Yet the weight and warmth of the Master Sword upon her back moves her forward; she curls her gloved fingers around the strap while they hike through snowdrifts towards the shrine at the summit. Her hand twitches towards the red telescope. The broken lens reveals nothing but her own faulty memory.

Up they go. Up, and up, and when Link's frost-covered lashes weigh too heavy for her to keep her eyes open, and her Link's limbs ache too leaden for her to keep her boots from sinking into the snow, and when her lungs have all but given out and Amali has to pull her through the last few minutes of the climb, the peak of Mount Nayru glitters into view.

The great crystals of ice piercing the heavens, mirrored blue and reflective violet, like so many
blades of grass if Link were to shrink down to the size of a gnat. The Spring of Wisdom, its ice-
calm surface mirroring the skies above. The statue of the Goddess Nayru, Goddess of Water and
Wisdom, Her gaze infinite as the blind eternities, Her tri-fold symbol like ripples in the water.

And there: the serpent.

The white serpent stretches around the jutting crystals of ice, their winding body looping and
curving between valleys in the frost, longer than the Divine Beast Vah Medoh, spines of the same
glassy material of the blue-and-violet around them extending from their otherwise smooth bluish-
white hide. Their once-proud head, reminds Link of a deer's, rises from a long neck. Crystals of ice
—or something like ice—crown their brow. Once, a long, long time ago, the serpent must have
looked beautiful.

Now the infection of malice has spread through their form. The parasite has leached their strength,
so that their body droops over the summit of Mount Nayru, little more than a shed serpent's skin,
boneless and empty as a scroll of paper. The left side of their face has collapsed to ruin, the eye
socket a gleaming white. The bone of their skull, too, sports a second skin of malice which steadily
drips down their cheeks in place of tears.

Their scales, once a brilliant bluish white, have withered away to dull violet shards. Flaking from
their body and head, the scales coat the Spring of Wisdom and the snows below in a layer of their
dead skin. Their claws have cracked and split away like a banana squeezed too hard at one end;
rivulets of malice drain out of the tips, every droplet further burning away the inner lining of their
talons. From the corners of what the infection has left of their mouth—little more than an open
hole—trickle thick ropes of viscous purple poison.

The serpent shudders. Link observes the malice flooding the inside of their mouth and churning
within them, their throat convulsing around the glop of violent violet. The serpent moves their head
away from the slope where Link and Amali stand, then retches malice down the mountainside.
Their body thrashes. Their limbs spasm. Their talons claw into the ice as if seeking a relief which
left them long ago.

She hears Amali gasp and step back. Link wobbles. A warm wing around her shoulders supports
her.

When Link's palm brushes the hilt of the Master Sword, the blade of evil's bane vibrates against her
hand, resonates, hums with a sound halfway to a song.

The serpent gazes at Link with their right eye. Then that same eye closes, and the serpent dips their
head.

She closes her fingers around the hilt. As Link draws the Master Sword from its sheath, she
watches the blade glow fire-light blue, a hue brighter and clearer than the faint-soft blue she recalls
from her memories, the colour so vibrant Amali shields her face with her wing.

Yet again the Master Sword appears to move of its own accordance. It strains forward. Not
quite moving, no, yet guiding Link's hand all the same. She steps forward. Towards the serpent,
whose head alone rivals the size of Amali's form, much less Link's. She raises her lightning-strike
hand before gripping the Master Sword in both. Its tip points towards the serpent, who begins to
shift.

Again. That upwards pull. Like a magnetism between the sword that seals the darkness and the
skies above. Link lifts her arm, directing the blade of evil's bane skywards. Once more lightning
strikes—straight down from the clear sky—and gleams the Master Sword a brilliant violet.
The serpent lowers their head towards the ground, stretching their neck, until they rest their jaw upon the snow, until they hold their forehead level with Link's shoulders, until Link stands a mere single pace from their skin. So close that she can listen to the serpent's breaths whispered in and out of their nostrils, can see the individual scales that glitter along their face, can gaze upon her own reflection in the serpent's crown of horns, no matter how clouded the crystals have become.

Again the serpent writhes. Though they do not groan in agony, Link hears the terrible moist squelching of the remains of their innards rolling over the globs of malice trapped within. They keep their head fixed, yet even now she observes the trembling of their long ears and how their jaws part to vomit the vomit into the bowels of the snowdrift.

The serpent does not speak. She hears their plea nonetheless.

Link raises the blade sung in lightning above her head, breathes, and plunges the Master Sword into the serpent's forehead.

The resonance of the Master Sword crashes into her in waves of such force that her arms threaten to rip themselves clean of her shoulders. The strength of the vibrations blow away the snow under her boots and reveal the rock beneath.

Alternating pulses of violet and gold ripple outwards from the Master Sword. Against the overwhelming brightness, Link can only shut her eyes and focus entirely on not allowing herself to fall away. Her arms shake from the exertion. She leans her entire weight into the Master Sword, driving the blade deeper into the serpent's body, as if endeavouring to bisect the serpent whole, as if trying to prepare serpent fillet. And then, all at once, the resonance dies.

For another few moments, Link does not dare move. She would cease to breathe if she could. Her fingers ache with how tightly she clenches the hilt. One by one, Link peels her fingers away from the Master Sword, and then, readjusting her grip, starts to pull. Noiselessly Master Sword glides out from the serpent's forehead.

Stepping back, she sheathes the Master Sword. Then Link opens her eyes and looks upon what she has wrought.

At last: the serpent's ruined body lies quietly on the summit of Mount Nayru, spent and emptied, nothing left within. The malice has vanished from their flesh and from the ground. No more over-ripened pustules and blisters of malice swelling out from their skin. No more thick strands of malice oozing from their eyes and seeping from their mouth. No more. No more. No more. Their scales gleam their bluish white; their horns again reflect Link's own face.

Yet the serpent themself remains still and silent as the ruins of the land once known as Hyrule. One of their coils droops from the icy crystals to crash unto the statue of the Goddess Nayru. Link's gaze flicks between the Master Sword and the serpent. Did she kill them?

Then the serpent begins to slither. Weakly, weakly, barely moving, the serpent half-crawls and half-falls towards the Spring of Wisdom. They curl up over themselves within the water.

Nothing happens. A moment of stillness leaves Link limply looking look on. Praying to hope beyond hope that somehow, something will—

The shrine behind the statue of the Goddess glows. The blue seeps into the water of the spring and shines its iridescent gold, like the blue curtain of the shrine that has healed Link in the past. Link ogles the serpent: their skin literally begins to crawl over their body, stitching itself back together. Scales and spines proliferate over their head like leaves on a tree growing a hundred years in a
hundred second. Their torso thickens, their burned-away innards returning. Their talons fall out and new ones grow in. Fresh flesh sprouts over the left side of the serpent's face.

The Spring of Wisdom does not grant the serpent a new eye, Link notices, but leaves only a growth of skin over the wound. Like accelerated, natural healing, without the fear of death. But nothing that the body itself could not do.

A most familiar feeling. Link reflects: she herself must have looked like this, spasming and writhing, whenever the shrines healed her.

The light fades away as the serpent becomes whole. They rise from the water that cascades down their now-scintillating and lustrous scales, the bluish-white sheen reminding Link of the petals of a silent princess. Their ears flick up. Like Ilia's. Their single eye fixes upon Link. She faces the serpent. She does not step back. She does not run away.

The serpent gazes upon her. Their jaws part, unveiling teeth long and sharp enough to tear through the softness of Link's meat if the serpent were to so much as lean forward and scrape their maw against Link's torso.

This close, Link can feel the warmth of the serpent's breath surrounding her in a cloud of heat. Crystals of ice twinkle around the serpent's body, their scales radiating the same coolness of ice as would a sapphire having harnessed the Hebric cold.

The serpent hums. A song. A voice like a Necludan erhu. A melody curling around her ears and coiling past her senses. A melody she should not be able to understand, yet she can hear in her left ear a whisper putting words to song that she takes as some sort of translation. A whisper in a voice she has heard before, which speaks from everywhere and nowhere at once, cool and warm at the same time, melodious even in its prose.

"We," sings the whisper in her left ear, "have fulfilled our promise to your people. Farewell."

The serpent closes their jaw and begins to unfurl from the water, their head angled up towards the sky.

Suddenly the Master Sword vibrates on Link's back with a force so violent she can barely pull it from its sheath. The swords that seals the darkness starts to hum, and the serpent ceases to uncoil, instead fixating upon the pulses of fire-light blue which light up the sacred sword. The serpent and the blade of evil's bane hum in harmony with one another.

Then the Master Sword quiets back to softened white. The serpent makes a strange gesture with their head that Link cannot comprehend. She sheathes again the Master Sword; the whisper returns to her left ear.

"She who has chosen you..." The serpent's hum and the voice in her ear trail off at once. "We bear no ill will to your people, but neither do we bear responsibility in our heart. Yet, this being of blood transformed to an abomination of will—" Link blinks. "—would threaten our existence. If he unseals the Realm of Will, then we, too, shall lend our strength to protect our home."

Once more Master Sword vibrates. When Link unsheathes it, the blade of evil's bane sings again, and then once more the sword that seals the darkness grows quiet.

The serpent inclines their head. "Very well. We shall give you the mark of our protection. You, who are not a being of will but a being of blood, cannot make use of our will directly. Yet you may brew with our will a potion of protection."
The serpent stretches open their mouth. They convulse themself from tail to head. Upon the bare rock before Link's boots, the serpent heaves out from their innards: fish. Fish, and insects. Cyan and pink armoured carp; blue and white armoured porgy; strange brown and green beetles that Link has seen here and there on the trunks of trees and attempted to catch only for them to buzz off before she could grab them from the wood. The serpent raises a talon to the crown of crystals over their brow and scrape off a tiny shard—which the serpent places onto the ground before Link.

"Brew a potion with the bounties of the earth, with the essence of our horn, and with the force of will contained in the core of your people's creation that we sense within your satchel. Imbibe this potion, and you shall have the mark of our protection."

Link's eyes widen. The core of her people's creation in her satchel: an ancient core of a guardian. "You mean," she signs to the serpent in the hopes that the serpent will understand, "I can cook and eat guardians after all? I knew it! I knew it! I knew I could figure something out!"

She whoops out loud and thrusts her fists into the air, spinning around in an impromptu dance. The Master Sword again resonates. Link quits her celebration long enough to speak. "Are you going to tell the snake thingy what I said? Tell it I said thanks!" The Master Sword hums to the serpent, who sings back. "Wait, if I can talk to the snake thingy...can you ask it what promise it made? It said something about a promise earlier, I think." Link rubs the back of her head. "It was the promise for me to get the Master Sword and the scale, right? I just want to make sure I'm not missing any promises I made."

The Master Sword hums. The serpent lifts their head to the skies. "When that abomination of will first unsealed the Realm of Blood from the Realm of Will, and your people and ours sealed the Realms apart once more, your people allowed some beings of will to remain within the Realm of Blood.

"In exchange, we promised your people that we would watch over the instructions—" Link blinks. The instructions in the shrine, opened by the serpent's scale? "—that your people had left behind to atone for their sins. Now, we have fulfilled that promise. Farewell."

Again, the serpent rises from the water, and again, the Master Sword vibrates so violently that Link tears it from its sheathe, whereupon the sword that seals the darkness resonates, the blade flashing its fire-light blue. The serpent, pausing in their flight, nears their head towards Link and the sword alike. The heat of their breath flutters back Link's sidelocks and warms the frost from her cheeks.

"...we know not the Goddesses' will," whispers the voice in her ear once Link has sheathed again the Master Sword. "Yet, if that abomination of will unseals the Realm of Will from the Realm of Blood, we will defend our home. Farewell, She who chooses."

The serpent's hum settles to silence, as does the whispered voice in Link's left ear. They lift themself fully from the Spring of Wisdom. The ice sparkles from their hide, the winds of their own gale flurrying the snow, as they gaze for a final moment upon Link, upon Amali, upon the Master Sword. Then the serpent glides into the air, spirals once around the summit of Mount Nayru, and undulates down the mountainside.

The frost of Mount Nayru inflates her lungs and push against her heart. Her promise to Aryll. Scrambling for the slate, Link snaps as many pictographs as she can of the serpent on their descent.

Not a white bird, but...white enough, and flying enough. An Arylloftwing. Not a messenger of the Goddesses, but something that Aryll would have loved all the same.
Link raises the trusty broken telescope to her left eye and scopes out the serpent. Although she cannot see through the shattered lens, she can make out serpent through her right eye, through the face of the slate, through the tremble of her hand: the Arylloftwing.

As the serpent has fulfilled the promise made to her people, so too has she fulfilled the promise made to her little sister. The serpent and the telescope fall earthward. She signs: farewell.

A pwumf behind her makes Link glance over her shoulder at Amali, who has collapsed in the snow, her wings over her face. A fusion of awe, fear, and incredulity in her golden-green irises, Amali watches the serpent's retreating back. When she looks back at Link, Link indicates the ingredients that the serpent has left behind.

"Let's get cooking," Link signs.

Amali returns her gaze to the serpent. Link touches her wrist. "Amali?"

"If I had to be honest," Amali answers faintly, "then I would think that, too, had become ill with fever." She exhales. "I don't understand anything that just happened. Was that the...Dragon Naydra, Servant of the Goddess Nayru? I...thought that was only a legend. And you seemed to...speak to Her..." Her breath wisps foggy in the air. "No, you're right. If I think about this any longer, then I will surely go into shock. Let's get cooking."

"...what's wrong?" asks Link, tilting her head.

Amali shivers. "Now, more than ever, we need to have hope. And this...what we just heard...about the Goddesses..." She makes a hacking noise. "...it doesn't matter. Let's cook."

Link apologises to her cooking pot: she must use it as a receptacle for elixir rather than for food. Given her lightheadedness from the thin air, she relies on Amali to prepare the ingredients for the elixir.

The shard of horn nearly freezes over Link's hand when she holds it in her palm, even though the thick lining of the glove. Luminous, the shard catches golden flecks within its deep-set blue, like the colour of Parapan seas reflecting Parapan skies. Into the cooking pot the shard of the horn goes, disappearing beneath the surface with a quiet splish. And Link can think of no better manner for her to honour the Dragon Naydra than the cooking of their horn.

The rhino beetle, porgy, carp, and core distill down into an elixir the same shade as the dragon's horn. Link and Amali dip vial after vial into the cooking pot, filling up as many as possible. Carefully, Link tips over the cooking pot and drains the last few drops.

Amali embraces Link as she corks the final vial. "I don't understand everything that we just witnessed," Amali admits, "yet, thank you for letting me witness this."

Link nods. She carries the deep blue elixir in her wooden box for whenever the moment comes. And, when she and Amali arrive again in Ruto, she discovers that the moment has come.

They will prepare over the next several months, the King Zora explains to them all at the final meeting of the congregation. Upon the summer solstice, on the longest day of the year—as auspicious a day as they could have chosen—they will storm the castle, and they will come upon the mirror within the sanctum, and they will enter the Sacred Realm, and if the Princess still lives, then the symphony shall sing:

"The Princess with her Knight and Champions four
awaiting fate's predestined Sealing War."

Yet, Link reflects, opening her hands to the crescent scars on her right palm and the lightning-strike on her left, she does not know if they have three months.

—

*Tough Elixir* (ten hearts, high defense boost for 30:00) - ancient core, armored carp, armored porgy, rugged rhino beetle, shard of Naydra's horn

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: Dorephan yelling "ENOUGH!" is the only time that I use all caps in the entirety of *Delicious in Wilds* from what I can remember. I would have used italics, but I've used italics to signify someone speaking in sign language. I only realised this when my beta reader pointed it out to be, but the king yelling "ENOUGH!" is in fact an accidental reference to a certain line from the CD-i *Zelda* games.

Naturally, the purple lightning coming down to strike the Master Sword is based on the skyward strike from *Skyward Sword*. It's an ability the Master Sword has, after all.

Link's come pretty far to be able to public speak like this. It's a really Link-like thing to say, honestly.

I've talked about the promise that Link made to Aryll regarding the white bird on Mount Nayru in previous chapters, and, of course, Link first met Naydra back in the sixty-fourth chapter, nearly ten chapters ago. Hope you didn't think I'd forgotten!

If you've never had fried smelt, I highly recommend it.

Link's promise to Kass was to stop eating monsters, since she got sick with eating the lynel.

The line about Link shrinking down to the size of a gnat is in reference to the Gnat Hat from *Four Swords*, which later became the titular headgear of *The Minish Cap*.

The Master Sword is malice-repellant for the same reason that the Master Sword can cleave through monsters: they're made of the 'being of will' material.

Link's not the only one who can use the healing magic of the shrine!

As mentioned before, the dragon's singing voice is the song that plays whenever Link nears a dragon in-game. If you've come close to a dragon, then you surely know what I mean!

Hey, it's more infodumping and lore time! This is the last big revelation chapter if I remember correctly as far as the lore I made up for *Delicious in Wilds* goes, tying together everything I've implied so far regarding the nature of the Sacred Realm/Realm of Will compared to the mortal world/Realm of Blood.
In other *Zelda* games, Nayru is associated with defence: the Blue Tunic in *Link's Awakening DX* doubles Link's defence (the Red Tunic doubles Link's attack); in *Ocarina of Time*, the spell Nayru's Love provides Link with a temporary impenetrable shield. In *Breath of the Wild*, the various dragon parts do not actually confer different benefits; you can use them to extend the effects of any elixir. In fact, a shard of a dragon's horn—any dragon!—extends an elixir's effects to half an hour. In *Delicious in Wilds*, I have instead distinguished effects. Naydra's body parts—Naydra's very essence—confers defence, which here means a tough elixir.

The "abomination of will" refers to Calamity Ganon.

Fi and the dragon communicate through song. Considering the importance of song in the franchise, and especially given Fi's penchance to sing the messages of the Golden Goddesses, I figured it out appropriate for beings of will to sing to one another.

Kind of scary that the dragons, who are supposedly the servants of the Golden Goddesses, don't know the Goddesses' will. This is because the dragons aren't servants of the Goddesses. They're just very powerful beings of will (i.e. monsters) that have caused legends to form around them because they've lived in Hyrule for a very, very long time, and people are bound to make up legends about the weird scarves they see flying around at night.

Now, you're probably wondering why I made the dragons monsters (or maybe you aren't and are simply waiting for me to finish these author's notes). In *Breath of the Wild*, I was shocked to realise that the dragons Farosh, Naydra, and Dinraal are sorted in the 'monster' section of the Hyrule Compendium, rather than the section of all of the other animals, including rare beasties such as the Lord of the Mountain, or even monster-associated creatures such as the stalhorse. Weird! I grabbed this factoid and ran with it: the dragons, the monsters, and even a certain someone we know are all beings of will!

As usual, I use "the Dragon Naydra" with a capital *D* to emphasise the title, and "the dragon" with a lower-case *d* to talk about just 'the dragon' as 'a dragon'.

The ending of this chapter is abrupt, probably because I stayed up all night to finish writing it (until 09:51 the next day!) and just wanted it to be over. Smack.

Up next: the castle.

midna's ass. 11 November 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This is a really important chapter for lore, that introduces some concepts which will be expanded on later. These particular concepts are some of my favourite parts of the always marvellous worldbuilding in this series.

Emma. 11 November 2017.
Energising Honeyed Apple

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef visits various friends and allies, then travels to the castle, intent on confirming the presence of the mirror within the sanctum.

Chapter Notes

To all my readers: please be warned that this chapter contains some graphic violence, as expected of such a combat-heavy chapter! We haven't had one of these in quite some time, so I'll do my best to guide you.

The first such scene starts at the paragraph starting with "A twittering somewhere on the other end of the beach alerts her." and ends just before the paragraph beginning with "Link drops the stone."

The second such scene, which is more body horror than violent, starts with "The loudness of the detonation awakens the bokoblins into a frenzy." and ends just before the paragraph beginning with "She crawls herself into the curtain of light."

As always, stay safe, and thank you for reading!

Author's notes that didn't fit into the end: I started writing this chapter at 17:59 on the fourteenth of August, and finished writing it on at 03:04 on the sixteenth of August.

Oh this was a fun chapter to write! I was up for over twenty-four hours working on it.

Link's gone through three pot lids now. First: wood. Second: metal. Third: mirror. As I've mentioned before, it's just like the three shields that you can procure in many a Zelda game!

The "pot lid of courage, pot lid of power, and pot lid of wisdom, obtained in that order" is a reference to A Link to the Past, wherein Link obtains the three pendants of virtue in the order of courage, then power, then wisdom.

Paya having a papaya-seed-shaped birthmark smack dab in the middle of her left butt cheek is a direct quote from Breath of the Wild, I kid you not. Go talk to Paya and ask about it (once you've far enough along in the game) if you don't believe me. As for Paya and the insects, I've described the taste as faithfully as I can. If you're at all curious about the safe consumption of insects as a protein alternative, feel free to do your own research.

The poem written by Mudora is taken verbatim from A Link to the Past, which is where the lore of the Sacred Realm was taken. Plus, the sky shining gold fits in with the final challenge of The Adventure of Link. But we'll get there when we get there.

Link doesn't even have to play the song for Sarie, because Sarie hasn't forgotten again.

By the way, this should be really obvious, but I'm putting it here because someone
clarified: when Kass says that he loves Link, it's in a familial way, not a romantic way! And same with other characters saying their I love yous. There sure are romantic relationships—Urbosa and Zelda, Marin and Link, Kass and Amali, Malon and Vish, etc.—but the vast majority of relationships in Delicious in Wilds are family and friendships. It's so relevant that the FFN version of this fic is tagged as Adventure & Friendship as the genre!

As for the villages that surrounded the castletown, Lynna and Tokay are named after Lynna City and the Tokay of Crescent Island from Oracle of Ages; Molida and Mercay are named after islands from Phantom Hourglass; and Aboda and Whittleton are named after villages from Spirit Tracks. Mabe, of course, is named after the village from Link's Awakening, and is also canonically a village in Breath of the Wild.

I believe that I wrote this chapter after the release of the Master Trials DLC. In Master Mode, guardians stagger their laser bursts instead of firing immediately after the beep! Instead they'll beep, wait a random amount of time, and then fire.

In an interview, Aonuma said that the guardians were designed after his experience with octoroks in The Legend of Zelda, which he evidently had a great deal of difficulty with and which in turn prompted the many-legged projectile design of the guardians from Breath of the Wild.

The description of the castletown is a whirlwind of various references to things throughout the Zelda franchise. To name a few: the entertainment quarter mostly references mini-games from Majora's Mask (the shooting galley, bomb-rolling alley, and authentic acrobatics game); Link's Awakening (fishing competition); Skyward Sword (bug-catching competition); Spirit Tracks (the Take 'Em All On challenge). The goron racing is in reference to Majora's Mask. By the way, the riding gloves that I'm talking about are the armbands that Link wears with the Champion's tunic in-game, with the red "gerudo" (Parapan) markings.

You get to see Zelda in a very good mood this chapter! The festivities have put her in one.

Zelda's 'awakening' in terms of being a girl is based off of an experience of a very, very dear and near friend of mine, who went through something similar. I thought her experience most appropriate for Zelda.

With the departure of the congregation, the Champions and Link part with see you laters and a final banquet. They inquire of Link's plans over the next three months. Each of them offers to have her travel alongside them; then they glance over one another over the top of Link's head, except for Sidon, who merely beams at them all with the expectation that Link will remain with him in Ruto.

Link dips her head. "I have a few errands to run, and a few promises to keep. I want to...tie up a few loose ends before everything happens."

Amali folds her wings over her chest and extracts from Link a swear that these errands and promises will not entail something as—she makes a vague circular motion with her wings—as what happened on Mount Nayru. Yunobo, Riju, and Sidon press in ask exactly what occurred on the mountain. Amali claps her wings together. "What happened on Mount Nayru will
stay on Mount Nayru for the time being." Link tilts her head in confusion, but Amali gives her a look; she acquiesces with a nod.

Before she departs, Riju grants to her a gift. "I know you well enough, Link, that you would not accept a shield. Then, please accept this cooking pot lid. It should fit perfectly, thank the Goddesses."

It does. Holding the new pot lid in her hands, Link measures it against the wooden lid and the grated iron lid which she currently carries with her like a duo of pendants. The new pot lid sports a golden rim jewelled in sapphire; ruby; topaz; opal; and amber, and a middle set with a thin and translucent layer of mirrored diamond. "I noticed that you oftentimes have to open up your pot lid to see whether the food has cooked properly. Then, I thought that I would give a lid that you can use to peek inside directly. Thank the Goddesses, it's useful for cooking, so I hope that you'll take it."

Link bobs her head. "Thanks, Riju. I can't wait for us to be able to cook together after the Calamity's passed."

Riju bobs her head in turn. The two of them bob heads at one another, their sidelocks flapping in unison against their cheeks, Link's light ponytail flinging up and down and Riju's much heavier braid bouncing ridiculously enough to come undone. They both break into laughter. Link sweeps her up in her arms and spins her around while Riju giggles.

When Link sets her back down, both of them slightly dazed, Riju smooths down her dress and clears her throat. "That pot lid...can also reflect the arrows of light loosed by the guardians' eyes. Please, accept it, Link. If you stand about two metres from the guardian's eye, then wait until the exact moment that you hear the sound of the light-arrow's loosening, you just have to flick your wrist like this. You have to catch it just the right angle, but...it's much more effective than arrows to the eye. Especially on the larger ones that have a protective mirror over their eyes. Please, Link."

"...I'll try. I'm not really that good at being defensive." She rubs the back of her head to find her own ponytail uncurled, which she now re-ties. The same blue loop that she has used since the Great Plateau. "I kind of fight like the monsters, don't I?"

"Just...don't get yourself killed. Please," Riju touches her palm to Link's cheek. "At least wait for me to figure out the magnum opus recipe of Fishy Fiasco. Until then, you're not allowed to die. So...stay alive, all right?"

"If I have to lay down my life for Hyrule, I will," says Link, her gestures quiet and solemn. Riju nods. "As would I. I'm not asking you to be cowardly, but...don't get yourself killed for nothing."

"I promise to try."

"Thank the Goddesses," Riju murmurs. She leans forward, resting her forehead against Link's chest; Link runs her fingers through Riju's hair. She hears Riju giggling, the sound vibrating through her sternum. It takes Link a moment to realise that Link has absentmindedly started to scratch Riju behind the ears. Link snaps her hand away while Riju bursts out laughing against her.

"You can keep doing that if you want," she manages to wheeze out between peals of laughter. "Wait. Wait. What's that other thing you do with Ilia? Patricia likes it, too." Riju reaches up both her hands, cupping Link's jawline in her palms and drawing down Link's head until their foreheads
touch. Riju giggles again. Link realises with a start that in the three-quarters of a year that has passed since she last saw Riju, Riju has now grown to less than half a head shorter than Link's height. Soon Riju might even surpass her. "And here." They exchange a bump of the fist and a slap of the palms, and they hug one another again, tightly enough that Link will still feel the warmth of Riju's arms around her waist long after she has left Ruto.

Link sets the mirror pot lid along the wooden and the iron. She touches each one to give it a name: the pot lid of courage, the pot lid of power, and the pot lid of wisdom, obtained in that order.

Now she simply has to acquire the Master Pot, and she will be able to cook any food in the entire world. Except she already has a master pot upon her back. Good pot. Best friend.

Link embraces the rest of her friends see you later. Saddling up Ilia and obtaining a second silver box for elixirs to have both a several months' supply of spring green and the elixirs simmered of the Dragon Naydra's horn, she sets out across the Bridge of Lanayru, Sarie upon her shoulder.

Then she turns back, steps into Ruto's marketplace, and fills Ilia's saddlebags to their absolute capacity with honey. Link empties out her usual pouches of ingredients to leave only the salts, spices, and seasonings in her satchel. Everything else, she will have to take from the wilds.

As she travels, Link stops by villages and towns to caution them about the Calamitous One, pleading them to—in turn—warn their neighbours. Some of the smaller villages do not anyone capable of reading any sign in any language she knows; the next time she visits a town with a scribe, she has the scribe write out letters in local dialects elaborating on the Calamitous One which she can pass out on her journey. Here and there, Link helps in defend villages against the encroach of monsters, or takes on tasks to flush out nearby nests. Again and again, she hears that she has the look on her face of someone who expects something.

Yet this time she uses her words to tell them: no. She wishes for nothing but their peace. Well. Not nothing: she'll never say no to a meal to a warm meal.

Her first stop: Telma Ranch. To say hello to Ilia again. To see that Ilia remains alive. To play for her the ocarina, to note Ravio's envy written over his face, and to invite Ravio to play alongside her. To warn Ilia about the coming Calamity. To beg her to seek sanctuary at a shrine. To hear Ilia say that she is too old to move such a distance to a shrine. To have Ilia promise that she will, at the least, send everyone else at the ranch to safety. To take Ravio aside and have him swear to do whatever he can to ensure that Ilia survives another Calamity.

Her second stop: Kakariko. Not to see Lady Impa again, but to see the others. To see Lasli and Claree. To see Hirako and Inya. To see the fletcher of arrows and the boy with the bug-catching net who has since grown into a collector and painter of insects. To speak to as many villagers as she can to warn them about the Calamity and to mend the bridges that she has burned with buttered apples. To see Paya and to ask about her favourite food. To hear that Link can prepare her anything that does not include papaya. To inquire as to why not papaya only to have Paya flush and look away. To ask around the village. To hear that Paya prefers a food seen as so strange that she does not enjoy disclosing the information to others. To hear from the painter of insects that Paya has asked him, before, to collect for her beetles and bees from the wood.

To do a bit of her own collection. To find that, when roasted over a flame, bees take on a flavour that straddles the line between almond and tree nut, perhaps a hint of peanut. To discover that a stinkbug she catches by chance in interest of its rather unique scent carries a taste that reminds her of apples. To bake an apple and almond pie. To present the pie to Paya. To watch Paya's features relaxing and her hand resting against her cheek. To listen to her groan at the deliciousness of the pie. To tell her with a grin about Link's special ingredients. To have Paya cry out in alarm, blush,
and explain in a whisper that she only wanted the painter of insects to show her the creepy-crawlies that she loves to look at, not to consume. To discover out that her favoured food is papaya. To learn of Paya's papaya-shaped birthmark from Lady Impa, who yells at them standing on the porch: "smack dab in the middle of her left buttcheek!" To comfort a mortified Paya. To glance up at Lady Impa only to have Lady Impa, strangely, wink at her. To find herself reconciling: not fully forgiving—not yet—but at least speaking. To have Paya ask her how to prepare insects. To listen to Paya admit that the stinkbugs and bees tasted better than Paya could have imagined. To impart upon Paya the wisdom of the rito.

Her third stop: Medli. To see the children again. To see Dorian. To see Kass, who gathers her into his wings and hugs her so firmly that she nearly suffocates. To hear of Amali and Kass's reunion having awoken the entire city in song. To have Teba express his regrets that Link did not witness the joy in their eyes. To explain to Kass—taking frequent breaks to rub the back of her head as her sheepish smile curves her lips—why she did not inform him of Amali becoming the Champion of Erito, the Hero of Tabantha, the Divine Beast Vah Medoh's Pilot, O Powerful Amali. To have Kass thank her for having helped them all, for having travelled with him, for having activated all of the shrines. To listen to Kass ask her, very solemnly, not to run away like that again, for he nearly died of worry for her. To perform on her ocarina beside Kass on his accordion, her notes wildly out of tune but at least on rhythm, his fluctuating in and out in his efforts to follow her improvised not-quite-melody. To embrace all of the children again. To cook them their favourite foods. To saddle Ilia while Kass inquires as to where she goes. To answer that she heads south. To find herself embarking on a road trip with Kass, Dorian, and seven children with them, only Tulin sullenly staying behind after having extracted from his friends a promise to tell him all about the trip about their return.

Her fourth stop: Romani Ranch, with her friends in tow, to once again liven up the kitchen with Kass's singing, and this time with Dorian as well. To hear Dorian thanking Vish and Malon for having assisted Link. To listen to Malon and Vish referring to him accidentally as durian during the entire stay until Koko finally corrects him on the final day. To empty her saddlebags of pots and jars of honey for someone just as sweet. To have Cremia weep. To have Malon embrace her and Vish wipe his own eyes. To have Romani erupt in excited questions about what Grasshopper is intending to make. To watch Cottla plead for Koko to make that. To listen to Koko explain how to make her own specialty: energising honeyed apple that revitalises and tastes delicious all at once. To hear Cottla tell her all about how often their mother would make the dessert for Dorian whenever Dorian came home late, exhausted and worried. To bake apples in honey with nutmeg and cinnamon. To let Cremia have the first bite. To see Dorian's features contort into the twist of tears barely held back. To watch Dorian excuse himself onto the porch. To witness Cottla announce to the world her love of Koko and Link, the two equally bestest big sisters that Cottla could ever ask for. To smile to herself as Koko tears up.

To leave the remainder of the honey with the family, hopefully enough to tide them over until after the Calamity. To stand in for a portrait that Cremia paints of them all. To ride on Ilia beside Cremia's Elsi before she leaves. To tell her family—Maryll, Malon, Vish, Cremia, Romani, and Miyu—the truth. To warn them of the Calamity. To demonstrate to them the Master Sword. To have Malon puts her hands on her hips, raise an eyebrow, and tell her: "Oh, Link. We already know. You've been family to us since before I was even born. We love you, you know. When you've done what you can...come home to us." To cry. To hug Maryll, to hug Vish, to hug Malon, to hug Cremia, to hug Romani, and to hug Miyu. To promise to return if she still lives. To promise to lay down her life to defend the people and the wilds she loves if she must. To find herself a home.

To say see you later. To escort the children, Kass, and Dorian again to Medli. To meet Kass for what feels like the final time outside of his home of Medli. To see the uncountable stars reflected in
his irises. To listen to the breathing of the accordion as he rests his wings upon the manuals. "Traveller...I happen to know an ancient verse passed down from my mentor's father. This is the final verse that my mentor's father ever taught him, as composed by the court poet Mudora, follower of the Goddess Sheik, who desired nothing more than to record the truth of Hyrule. Would you care to hear it? Excellent. Without further ado..."

To hear the bellows of the accordion again. To hear him invoke the Goddesses again. To hear court poet's final song.

"In a realm beyond sight

"the sky shines gold, not blue.

"There, the Triforce's might

"makes mortal dreams come true."

To commit the verse to memory. To consider that word: the Triforce of which the great tree in the lost woods spoke. To realise that the dawn has begun to gild the sky in gold. To thank him for everything. To be encircled in the warmth of his wings, to press her face into the golden feathers of his chest, to feel his fingers through her hair. To listen to his voice. "Traveller...thank you for everything. I know that you already have a home beneath the snows of Mount Satori. But, if ever you find yourself in Medli, you are as family to us as well. My darling Amali loves you. My daughters love you. And I...I love you. Thank you...Link. Take care, and may the light illuminate your path." To dry her eyes on his feathers.

Her fifth and final stop: the castle.

She leaves Ilia and Sarie a grove of trees just beyond the walls of the castletown. Sarie begs to come with her, but Link shakes her head. "I need you to do something really important to me. You have to promise me that you won't forget."

"Sarie-sarie-saria won't forget what Link wants Sarie to do!" Sarie answers.

"All right." Link closes her eyes. "Do you mind if I play a song for you? I know that we aren't at the lost woods, but..."

The korok leaf in Sarie's little hand ceases to twirl. They land on Ilia's flank and stand. The winds have died. Link blinks at them. "...I won't forget, Link," Sarie whispers.

Link inclines her head. "I need you and Ilia to take care of one another. I'm going to...I'm going to make sure that the mirror's in there. So that there aren't any surprises on the day of the solstice. But if something happens to me and I fall, then I need you to get back the Master Sword. Or, if you can't get it back, then to tell everyone what happened. Do you think that you can do that?"

Sarie bows their entire body.

"I don't know how long it'll take me. Not more than a few days. Give me a week or something. I don't know. Then try to come find me. Just sing for me, and I'll whistle back like this." Link whistles. Ilia perks her ears up. "All right. I trust you. I trust you so much, Sarie."

"I trust you, too," Sarie murmurs. "I trust you not to leave if you don't have to, and if you do have to, then I'll understand."

Link hugs them. "I love you."
"I love you, too," they whisper in her ear. "And, Link?" She looks at Sarie. Their leafy mask flutters as if about to float off to reveal a face beneath. "...you were right." Their leaf trembles. "To remember doesn't mean to sadden. I won't forget. I promise."

The smile that parts her lips is the warmest that she has ever felt upon her face. "...see you later, Sarie."

Link gives Ilia's mane and coat a final brush, checks her companion's eyes and ears, examines her companion's horseshoes, peers all over for any signs of illness or hurt or exhaustion, and cooks her companion as many steamed fruits and vegetables as she has in her saddlebags. She tests the water in the grove of trees to ensure a safe supply. She clears out any nearby monsters, although she finds that the only dangers in the area come in the form of guardians that stalk over the plains, which must themselves smite any monsters that attempt to come near. As they will smite her, if she does not take care.

Setting the ocarina onto the same loop that holds her trusty red telescope at her left hip, Link embraces Ilia see you later. Before she leaves, she prepares herself a final meal of an energising honeyed apple baked on a tiny pot of honey left over from her time in Romani Ranch. As Cottla promised she would, so does Link feel revitalised and restored and very much delicioused. She drains a vial of spring green elixir. Finally Link drinks from the pond, relieves herself, and checks her weapons and equipment.

And then: the castletown. Emerging from the grove of trees where the automaton stalkers cannot enter for their sheer size, Link gazes over over the emerald sea of gently waving blades of grass, tall enough to brush against her knees. She can still make out, here and there against the endless green, the ruins of ranches and farmhouses that once dotted the countryside of the great Hyrule Field, of the farming villages that once surrounded and fed the castletown, that carried the names of their histories: Lynna and Tokay, Molida and Mercay, Aboda and Whittleton. And Mabe. The village where Marin had lived, on Lon Lon Ranch, one hundred years ago. Link touches the ocarina at her left hip.

She turns her gaze northwards. Some thousand metres away, on the other end of the grassy field, the walls of the castletown rise up from the sea, like a mountain island from the ocean. The gates that once lay open to invite any and all into the castletown have long since rotted or rusted away. Great stretches of the walls have collapsed to ruin. The parapets that once displayed proudly the flags of Hyrule and of the nations under her jurisdiction—Akkala and Parapa, Eldin and Faron, Hebra and Necluda, Tabantha and Lanayru—have decayed to a few tattered rags still clinging to rusty poles bent under their own weight.

And here and there: the guardians. The automata that continue to rip the ground asunder with their clawed limbs. The automata that roam over the field with their eyes shining the same fire-light blue as the Master Sword. The automata that the people of Hyrule excavated over one hundred years ago; the automas that the people of Hyrule cleansed and repaired; the automata that the people of Hyrule fell to. The guardians that she will not allow to fell her.

Link crouches down into the grass. If she moves stealthily along on her hands and knees, at times crawling on her belly, she may yet cross the field to the castletown without catching the attentions of any of the automata around her.

Dipping into the box of elixirs, she withdraws a vial of the deep blue brew of the shard of the dragon's horn. She quaffs it. It tastes of the spray of the sea.

Link breathes in a final scent of the grove. She looks up at the darkened night skies, to the pale moon curved like a silver lynel's horn. She lifts up her palms to catch the moonlight in her left and
the starlight in her right. The crescent-moon and the lightning-strike. Between her courage and her will, she will not fail. If not even the Dragon Naydra knows of the Goddesses' will, then everything that she does matters. And if not even the Dragon Naydra knows of the Goddesses’ will, then she—and all of the people of Hyrule—have the courage, the wisdom, and the power to shape their own fates with their own hands.

And so, for the peace of Hyrule, Link gets down on her hands and knees to crawl through the dirt.

Before long her knees have started to ache; the muscles of her shoulders and the back of her neck throb; and the rocks scrape against the palms of her hands until she tucks on the gloves she wore against the Hebric cold, which in turn slick the valleys between her fingers uncomfortably with sweat. Still, she crawls forward as rapidly as she can, saying hello to the burrowing earthworms that she spots along the way and the bees that buzz over flowers.

Her stomach rumbles. Amali has ruined her. She cannot look at insects anymore without thinking of ways to cook them up, to fry them or to roast them, to salt them up or even to crunch them live. Link shakes her head at herself. First: the sanctum.

A loud thudding somewhere near her jolts her from her hunger-induced reverie. The sound of rocks grinding against one another. Catching her breath in her lungs, Link slides down onto her stomach in the dirt and lies absolutely still.

She shivers, listening to the guardian circle around her. She hears the automaton behind move away; she dares not to sigh in relief. Instead Link reaches behind her for that mirrored pot lid that Riju gave her. Just in case. Just in case. She breathes in. She breathes out. Every fibre of her body sets itself aflame. A grasshopper leaping through the green sea on her nose. She wrinkles and scrunches her face to try to rid herself of the insect. "Not now, friend," she signs, as if the insect could understand her.

Link sneezes.

Within a second, she hears the guardian's chirping. Link leaps from the grass—the grasshopper still clinging to her nose—and draws the mirrored pot lid from the cooking pot affixed to her back. She grips it in front of herself while she stares at the ground, attempting to measure two metres with her gaze. But how much is two metres? How exact does she have to be? At what angle—

Fire-light blazes into her vision; Link flings her wrist with as much force as she can muster. She does not burn alive—a welcome sign, all things considered—but neither does the fire-light smite the automaton in sacred blue. Rather the fire-light carves a burnt line into the grass several hundred metres out, which instantly alerts about ten other guardians in the area. Link swallows.

The automaton nearest to her begins to charge another bolt of fire-light. Opening her paraglider, Link sprints for the prairie fire that has begun to spread from the furrow of destruction she has wrought into the field. The gust of updraft catching under the skin of the paraglider lifts her upwards.

From her higher point of vantage, Link stares at the eight to ten guardian stalkers that converge upon her position. She swings her body forward, tilting the paraglider and gliding towards castletown.

Behind her and below her, the automata follow, their red-eyed sights trailing her as the paraglider soars lower and lower.

If only she still had the korok leaf that Hestu gave her long, long ago. Then Link realises that she
has a substitute. The arrows that Chief Rouru of the village of Elrora gave her months upon months in the past, most of which she has not used, including a set tipped in ruby. She waits for the guardians' chirruping to pulse into fire-light bolts, and then she snaps closed the paraglider. As she hurtles down—the fire-light streaks the skies above her in a blaze of blue that alights the night—Link draws the bow upon her back and one of the ruby arrows.

The arrowhead spears the grass below her and explodes into flames. She pulls the paraglider open again. The force of the updraft swings her legs forward; she glides so dangerously close to the ground she can sense the heat on the seat of her trousers. The automata attempt to veer around the flames that radiate outwards on the grass. One of them catches aflame. Its more sensitive legs writhe, deforming under the heat. Turning her head, Link grins and winks at the guardians which skirt the fires to chase her further.

Link listens once more for their fire-light. Again, she waits for the chirping crescendo to its peak prior to dropping her paraglider and striking another ruby arrow into the grasses, gliding up on the resulting updraft. Not too much now farther from the castletown, and from there to the castle itself.

And then she hears chirps no longer in unison. Link glances over her shoulder to find that some of the automata's charging have drifted from one another, their fire-light bolts no longer in unison.

Link inhales. She keeps her gazes fixed upon each guardian. At the second it chirps, she drops again to the ground, evading a staggered series of bolts that criss-cross over the air as though attempting to catch her. Landing heavy on her boots in the grass, she nearly tumbles over. She stares back behind her shoulder: the automata swiftly catch up to her. Most of them charge their fire-light again, yet one closest to her—beeps. The guardian's eye sets her entire world ablaze with fire-light blue.


The automaton's eye fragments and explodes into a burst of blue which cascades through its body, spasming its limbs and grinding its head against its torso. The shockwave of the detonation pushes the other guardians away long enough to interrupt their own bolts of fire-light that they weakly loose into the grass at their own limbs and at one another.

Notching a ruby arrow onto her bowstring, Link aims towards her boots. She sets the grass aflame—along with her trousers—and the updraft takes her up. As she soars up into the skies, she loops her right arm in through the wooden struts of the paraglider and slaps her palm against her trousers, endeavouring to put out the flaming fabric. Fortunately the wind assists.

The remaining automata behind her—the four or five which have managed to evade the flash fire and one another's bolts of smiting blue—again stagger their chirps into a cacophony of cataclysm and catastrophe, but Link has had enough of hours of destruction that start with the syllable ca. Turning her head towards the guardians, she draws the slate out from its pouch at her right hip.

And then her entire front blurs into pain as she abruptly slams into something very hard very fast.

Link plummets towards the ground, the collision having shut the paraglider. Above her, automaton fire-light blackens a vertical line into the rock of the castletown walls. Her head spins; she can just see Amali's daughters circling over her vision.

The rumble of the guardians behind her springs her to her boots. Sprinting headlong around the periphery of the castletown walls, she searches desperately. There, there!: she spots one of the half-rusted gates leading into a parapet. As she throws herself towards the gate—the automata chasing
her down pace by pace until she can sense the shake of their every step on their too-many legs—she forms a spherical explosive from the slate. Link chucks it at the gate.

The bomb explodes. The detonation blows the gate inwards. She dives into the relative safety of the inside of the tower—the door far too small for a guardian to fit more than a leg—and immediately starts choking on the miasma of dust kicked up by the impact of her body on the floor.

Outside, she hears the screams of fire-light shrieking through the skies to ignite the very air. Link whips her head back and forth. She grabs hold of one of the ladders only for the rusted metal to break in her grip. Her rear smacks the ground as a automaton's limb slithers into the entrance and starts to feel through the air. The other guardians crowd around the tiny entrance and stick their own limbs through, until the door has sprouted tentacles upon tentacles whirling around tipped in serrated blades like a particularly vicious octorok had launched onto the openings.

She has her hands full with regular octoroks. Link can barely bear the thought of giant mechanised octoroks with razor-sharp limbs, vomiting up not just rocky projectiles but bolts of fire-light. She pauses. Perhaps she has begun to understand from where, just maybe, the original designers and builders of the automata may have taken their ideas.

The whirlwind of guardian limbs stretching through the air towards her drives her forward. She can consider the complexities of what may or may have occurred ten thousand years ago when she does not have a half a dozen automata attempting to rip her apart. If only she could grab them and rip them limb from limb...from limb from limb from limb from limb from limb from limb.

Link scales up the second ladder on the other side of the parapet. At least this one holds. As she clambers up onto the second story, a sudden flash of agony just above her right hip nearly topples her. She shoots forward the last half-metre and smacks into the wall. Glancing down over the edge of the second story, she sees one of the guardians' limbs flailing around the ladder. Its claws slash at the iron. The bottom half of the ladder clatters into the dust.

She sneezes. Turning around, Link climbs up onto the roof of the wall, from which she can enter the castletown proper. As she clambers up the next ladder, she finds herself looking at several piles of bones huddled together on the parapet's second story. The remains of their clothing indicates them not guards, but civilians. Link hesitates for a moment; she signs a prayer for peace. Then she continues up.

On top of the parapet, her legs wrapped around a pole that once held a flag but which now protrudes barren into the sky, Link gazes out onto the castletown itself. Or rather, its remains. She can see where once the grandest and most sprawling city in all of the land once known as Hyrule thrived. There: the marketplace where she would collect foodstuffs in order to cook for her friends and the girl with the golden hair hair. Here: the water reservoir that led into pools for zora to swim. There: the entertainment quarter with its shooting galleys, its bomb-bowling alleys, its completely authentic korok-leaping acrobatics games, its bug-catching and fishing competitions, its infamously dangerous and legally conspicuous Take 'Em All On challenges where hunters would drag back monsters for people to fight in caged matches upon which many would bet. Here: the long circular race track where gorons—and anyone else foolish enough to take them on—would regularly host their marathons of rolling races. There: the wide open courtyards with their fountains in the centre where the people of the castletown would gather to talk and to listen to street musicians play. Here: the caved-in walls of the research enclave mostly headed by followers of the Goddess Sheik who embarked upon their Goddess's quest for truth by engaging in inquisition and natural philosophy, or so the girl with the golden hair told Link all those years ago, while Link scratched her cheek and inquired about what means natural philosophy. There: the
remains of the circular ringposts of the stadium where the rito would play their popular sport of airhoop. Here: the staggering concert hall built in a collaboration between the royal family of Hyrule and that of Parapa to showcase musicians from all across the land, its scalloped design reminiscent of the same traditional Parapan markings that Link herself wore on her armbands one hundred years ago: the riding gloves that Urbosa gave her as a gift. There: the broken leftovers of the two-story buildings where most residents of the city lived, sleeping and eating on the second story while they ran their businesses from the first.

Here: the Hyrule Cathedral rising up like a three-pronged crown in the shape of the mark of the Golden Goddesses; though the paint has long faded, Link can still see the ruby, sapphire, and emerald jewels set into each of the towers, with the mark of the Goddess Hylia hung over the door to remind all in the castletown of the importance of the Goddess who has reincarnated as the mortal Princess of Hyrule. Gone, but not forgotten.

Now the castletown lies in waste and in ruin. Roofs collapsed. The remains of wall crumbled into stone and brick. The wood long decayed to heaps of black. The fountains rusted and dried. The streets littered with yellowed bones and corroded shields, armours, weapons. A few guardian stalkers, many missing most of their legs, still glare back and forth to occasionally loose their fire-light at a scrap of wood picked up by the wind or a bird that soars overhead.

Yet even here she can see the beginnings of life. The moss and the ivy covering the walls. The grasses sprouting in the empty streets. The mushrooms feeding upon the rotting wood.

The wilds can heal. The wilds can one day again become whole.

"The breath of the wild shall whisper over the world, long after you and I have returned to dust, and shall breathe life anew. Such is the promise of the Goddess Farore. Such is Her wind, that She carries the seeds of life, and such is Her courage, that we bear the will to live.' Amen." The girl with the golden hair lowered the prayer-book to gaze at Link. "Link, do you really think that living takes courage?"

"More," Link signed after a moment, "than most people think."

The girl with the golden hair did not speak for a long time. She held the book balanced on her palm as she contemplated the ink printed on its pages, while Link resumed her drills with the Master Sword.

"...thank you," whispered the girl with the golden hair, so long after Link's response that she, sheathing the Master Sword, asked for what the girl with the golden hair thanked her. "Thank you, Link. I'm...glad you understand."

Inclining her head a moment longer, Link senses the wind over her shoulders that gently bobs her ponytail and that lifts up her sidelocks, as Sarie might to speed her onwards.

Onwards. Onwards beyond the castletown: the castle itself across the moat, within the grasp of those strange seven claws rising up from the bowels of the earth to curl over the castle like the bars of a massive cage, the great metal gates locked and barred, the bridge—composed of the same material as the slate and the Divine Beasts—still down over the moat. More than anything, that clenches down upon her heart.

When the Calamitous One arose in the heart of the castle, the people of the castle had not even time to lift the bridges over the moat before the malice flooded through the castle, taking the lives of all those within.
The bones. The bones that she comes across here or there, half-buried in the soil, yellowed and cracked, barely bones at all. Those bones must belong to the people who escaped the initial onslaught of malice, who fell to fire-light or monster blight.

She has not time to kneel and pray. Instead, Link keeps her head dipped in silent promise. Not to avenge. Link touches the red telescope with its shattered lens and its intact memories. She has already tried to avenge once. Not to avenge, but to promise for the future.

Kicking off from the flagpole, Link glides down into the castletown. She proceeds more carefully through the ruins to avoid attracting the sights of the guardians. Some automata have ceased to move entirely; others remain active enough despite the cracks in their armour or missing legs. She realises that she can determine the difference by looking through the stasis ruin of her slate, which considerably eases the journey. Towards the edge of the moat, Link glances down into the waters below that cascade down slow waterfalls from the castle itself, waterfalls that she does not remember from one hundred years ago, waterfalls that must have come from broken broken pipes that once carried the bounties of the aquifer that has supplied the Hyrule castle with water for ages upon ages. She attempts to bring the telescope to her eye again before recalling the shattering of the lens.

Link clicks her tongue. More than anything, she should have fixed the telescope prior to arriving at the castletown.

Still, with her bare eyes alone, Link can spot the guardian turrets—like those on the Divine Beast Vah Naboris—that dot the castle proper; can make out the nests of monsters—lizalfos and lynel, moblin and moldorm—that crawl under bridges and thrive behind gates where the automata's fire-light cannot reach; and can see the flood of malice which still coats half of the grounds of the castle. One hundred years ago, she remembers, the castle towered up twice as high as it does now, with elaborate spires and complex arches built and re-built over ten thousand years. Just within Link's own lifetime, she recalls the construction of a laboratory meant just for research on guardians, that eventually moved after the girl with the golden hair kept shirking her lessons to sneak inside.

Now the castle seems a hollowed-out skeleton of itself. The material that makes up the Divine Beasts and the slate has proven resistant to the bite of malice which has eaten away everything else. Like a carcass with the meat rotted and decayed from around the ribs, so has the Great Calamity left nothing but the very base upon which the castle was built, thousands beyond thousands of years ago.

A strange humming noise lifts Link's head towards the metal doors that remain locked around the castle moat: a flying guardian, surrounded by a small horde of sentries like those in the Divine Beast Vah Rudania. Gulping down hard, Link searches over the moat itself, seeking a patch clear of Malice.

She coils her muscles as she crouches in the ruins of something like a fruit stall, judging by the faded and broken metal sign lodged into the dirt. One. Two. Three. And then Link sprints towards the moat.

Throwing herself from the edge, she opens the paraglider and lands on the opposing cliffside. Her fingers slip over the nearly vertical rock, but she grips with the strength of her life’s dependence. Link hauls herself skyward. Her nails pang against the harshness of the rock. The dirt of the cliffside smells of rain and a strange salt. She listens for the waterfalls below her crashing into the water of the moat.

Clambering up over the cliff, Link flexes her aching fingers. She stretches, cracks her neck, and
turns around. And there, ogling her not three paces away: a lynel with silvered white striped in violent violet, itself having come into contact with malice and won. Just like her.

The lynel swings up its terrible club, resembling those she has seen and failed to heft in Hebra, forged of steel and star fragment. Pawing at the earth, it lowers its head and bares its teeth. Link *fwips* the slate from its pouch at her right hip to jam her finger onto the stasis rune, but she—used to fighting such monsters in the thick snowdrifts of the Hebric mountains—does not anticipate the lynel *speed*.

When the club connects to the right of her torso, she miraculously does not die immediately. Instead Link spins into the air like a boomerang banana, her mind reeling, the heavens and the earth whirling around her in a dizzying kaleidoscope of pain pain pain throbbing from her side.

Her right torso throbs. Every breath brings a pulse of pain. *Something* has sprained or broken. She wheezes. If she can reach the shrine in the bowels of the castle, everything will be all right.

The current takes her about the castle's periphery. She notices—on the western face—a sloping cliffside, gouged out by malice long since burned away, and swims towards it. Link drags herself onto the dry land of a sandy beach. She lies down with her face flat against the sand, straining out her breaths, while she checks her body gingerly with her own fingers. Where the crusher slammed into her will surely bruise. Tomorrow, the agony will keep her awake at night. For now, the adrenaline in her system will carry her forward until she can rest.

And the elixir. The potion—as the dragon called it—brewed of the shard of their horn. The elixir must have offered her some protection against the blow. Not enough for her to shrug it off entirely, yet enough for her to carry on.

A twittering somewhere on the other end of the beach alerts her. Link scrambles to her boots to discover herself staring at a pair of lizalfos. One, wielding a long spear, chirrups at her; the other, holding in its claws a korok leaf, becomes the primary target for her to drag out Sidon's silver spear and throw it directly at the lizalfos's head. When the lizalfos dodges to the left, Link rolls forward towards it and uppercuts its jaw through with the Master Sword. The blade flashes so brightly that the second lizalfos shrieks from the pain of blinding. The Master Sword crunches through the first lizalfos's neck and spears the crown of its head.

Link attempts to jerk the sword free of the first lizalfos's cranium. The fire-light blazes through the blade and burns the bone of the monster's skull. The lizalfos tries to part its jaw over the Master Sword. One of its claws slashes towards Link's torso. She leaps backwards and pulls the sword free. As the first lizalfos lunges at her, she steps to the side; the monster crashes into the water behind her.

Link narrows her eyes towards the second lizalfos, now recovering from the light show. Charging forward and swinging in a wide horizontal arc, she cleaves the lizalfos across the waist. Its upper half slides off of its lower half; twin spurts of blood from either stump of the torso splatter the ground.

Her right heel slips on the slippery puddle. As she plunges to the earth, Link looks up: the first lizalfos—the halves of its head split open like a grotesque desecration of a flower—scrambles out of the water. She tucks the Master Sword under her arm and whips out the slate. Link misses the
rune for the spherical explosive and instead jabs her forefinger onto magnesis. A nearby rock shows up as reddish-pink on the surface of the slate. Shrugging at the change in plan, Link magnetises the rock. She brings the stone down upon the lizalfos's head and body and smashes the rock against the beach. Once, twice, thrice, until the lizalfo's neck and face have ghosted to red mist against the sand.

Its tail keeps twitching. Link slices its body lengthwise to put the lizalfos from its misery.

Link drops the stone. She exhales, then slots the slate back into its pouch and sheaths the Master Sword. Wiping her face of sweat, sand, and sanguine, she looks around the beach. From the ground, about fifteen paces from the shoreline, the wall of the Hyrule castle rises up completely vertical, made of that material too smooth for her to climb. Just under the surface of the moat, however, Link notices an opening in the wall that seems to lead down into the underside of the castle.

She uses pillars of cryonis to hop across the water towards the opening. Taking a deep breath, Link dives into the cold waters of the moat. The current sucks her through the passageway. Light light ebbs away to a world of shadow and wetness. As she swims forward through the darkness, she realises that the current becomes faster and faster. Her breath bubbles from her nose. Her lungs burn. It dawns upon her that she has no guarantee of air.

Removing the slate, Link fumbles for the pictobox rune—going by muscle memory—and snaps snap pictographs of the darkness. Then she smacks into something solid.

She shoves the slate back. Spreading her fingers against the hard thing, she finds herself against a round, blank wall. Yet the water continues to flow. It must flow somewhere. Diving down towards the floor, she discovers another opening, this time with a glint of—

—light at the end as the pipe spills her into an underground passageway. She hits the ground face-first. Digging her fingers into the mud, Link throws her head up and breathes in the warm and sulphurous air. She hesitates: sulphurous?

Link rubs her eyes while her pupils adjust to the dim orange glow of the luminous spirals upon the walls; the patterns remind her of the insides of towers and the Divine Beasts. A large cavern of some sort, circular, some fifteen metres across, and too perfectly cylindrical for a natural cave. In the centre of the cylinder, Link more smells than looks at the hot spring bubbling up from the ground. She glances behind her: the broken tube of water that emptied her here alongside a set of similar tubes that must have once passed through the spring, perhaps in some sort of heating system—the girl with the golden hair mentioned that once, vaguely—but which now merely slosh the cold moat waters onto the ground.

She pads towards the burbling hot spring. Crouching by the side, Link tests the temperature with her hand—warm, but not warm enough to injure—and, stripping off her clothing, wades into the waters. The heat loosens the tensions in her muscles. She stretches herself out, presses her shoulders back against one another, rolls her head, flexes her wrists and ankles. Cautiously Link runs a hand over the spot on her torso where the lynel batted her into the air, as though she were a ball in a game of airhoop. When she maps out the outline of the developing bruise, she senses where the flesh has become more tender and sensitive.

Still, not too bad. And she has plenty more of the elixir. When she returns from the castle, Link will have to tell the King Zora and everyone else about the mark of the Dragon Naydra's protection.

For now, she relaxes into the water, sinking down and bubbling air out of her nose. After the chill of the waters of the moat, she can appreciate the heat of a hot spring all too well.
Even once her eyes have adjusted to the dimmer light of the cavern, Link can barely than a few paces out, and then mostly in silhouette. Propping herself slightly out of the hot spring, she reaches into her satchel and checks on the eggs that she collected from the groove where she left Ilia and Sarie. About half of them have broken—Link shakes a fist at the lynel's crusher, not for nearly killing her, but for having smashed her eggs—but three more remain intact. Dropping them into the water, she holds eggs under the heat until she can feel them firm through the thin layer of shell. She peels the eggs, then pops them into her mouth one by one, enjoying the still-gooey centre of the yolk in contrast to the bouncy white. Link prefers the former to the latter—the white a tad too bland for her palate—but the two work well with one another.

She longs to make another egg tart. Though, since she has no one to crimp the tart for her, she might make do with the sweetness of egg pudding instead. At some point, she promises herself: egg pudding.

When she finishes eating, she climbs out of the water and shakes herself off like a dog. Link cleans out the cracked eggs from her satchel before they spoil. Then, while she waits for her body to dry a tad lest she dampen her own clothing, she examines the remainder of the cylindrical cavern with the help of the slate's glowing face. She notices other closed pipes flowing in and out of the chamber. The far wall of the cylinder has cracked. Through the thin squeeze, Link sees light: torches. A brief touch of stasis illuminates the outlines of several bokoblins asleep in a dogpile on the other side of a hallway and a congealed mass of malice oozing over the floor.

Silver bokoblins. Silver bokoblins with torsos and hands and faces stained in the violent violet of the Malice that they have touched. Some have skin nearly unblemished by the malice; others look more purple than silver. Here, spirals along a hand. There, splotches over a limb. There, a pattern over the lower body indicating a single plunge into the malice to the waist. There, a great streak over the bokoblin's face that has left the monster with a single eye. Beyond the hallway, Link spots an overturned metal something-or-other and what looks like a horizontal ladder—or possibly tracks—extending into the dark.

She dons her undergarments and slips on her clothes. Checking to ensure she hasn't left anything of her belongings, and polishing off the final egg, Link embarks upon the endeavour of squishing herself through the crack in the wall. No matter how she contorts herself, however, the crack appears too small for her to fit.

Link touches her chin. She steps back. She lobs a bomb at the crack. She taps the rune on the slate. The loudness of the detonation awakens the bokoblins into a frenzy. Link watches them rush the crack, snarling at her, as they try to fit their fingers through. She sits cross-legged on the ground to observe them, chin resting on her steepled fingers. When the bokoblins cannot fit through the gap, they start attempting to push the crack open more widely. Link stares, halfway to horror and halfway to relief, at how the bokoblin break and splinter their own arms in their efforts to widen the crack. Little by little, each bokoblin ruining its own limbs, the crack grows. A sudden loud grunt at the end of the hall announces the arrival of a moblin, its own skin long bleached to silver and scarred with the violent violet of the malice, which likewise drives its hands into the crack.

Link inhales: the gap widens more rapidly than before. She watches the silhouette of the moblin's form shuddering and shaking as it forces the crack to split apart. The moblin's bones begin to protrude outwards from its own shoulder blades in the sheer force that it exerts against the walls of the cylinder. The ceiling overhead groans.

She lifts herself to her boots. The moblin roars at her. Even at this distance, its saliva sprays over her face. Saliva that does not taste very good.
The skin of its shoulder blades bulges, and tautens, and tightens, and then the moblin's own bones burst free of its body. It shrieks in agony. The bokoblins stampede over the moblin in their haste to reach Link. While they squish in through the widened crack, she summons yet another explosive. A spherical one.

Forget hylian bomb fishing. This is hylian bokoblin bomb-bowling.

Just as she did in the bomb-bowling alleys from one hundred years ago, where she won Aryll a stuffed sand seal plush that Riju would have loved, Link swings out her arm and rolls the bomb along the floor of the cylinder. She detonate it right in the midst of the mass of bokoblins. Like charged and leaping bowling pins, the bokoblins fly away, some splashing into the hot springs, others slammed into the walls.

While they start to pick themselves up in a chorus of growls and snarls, Link sprints forward, limbs windmilling. The mobbed moblin lies with its head upon the ground, attempting still to lift itself from the floor on its broken arms. Grabbing its horn, Link vaults herself over its fallen form and lands perfectly on her boots on the other side of the pool of malice. Behind her, the bokoblins shriek for blood. She throws herself forward. The metal something-or-other: an iron cart of some fashion. And there: a metal track that spirals down into the darkness of the depths that she cannot discern. Why something like this would exist in the bowels of the castle, she has neither clue nor question.

Magnesis will have to prove enough. She levitates the cart from the ground as she hops over pools of Malice that have not yet succumbed to time. Her hands shaking, Link starts to jam the cart onto the track as rapidly as she can. The magnesis does not hold the cart in exactly the correct orientation.

She listens to the bokoblins behind her. Some of them pass through the Malice to screech out their agony. Others—she listens—leap over the pools to land heavy on the floor. The cart. The cart. The cart that keeps turning itself over. The cart that does not sit quite right. The bokoblins converging on her. The cart that slips off of the track to fall into the darkness. The bokoblins less than ten paces from her. The second cart, flipped onto its side, that she smashes against the track with enough force to dent the track. The bokoblins' footfalls slapping against the floor. The cart into which she throws herself. The bokoblin that pounces forward only to land into the void on the side of the track and plummet down, down into the abyss, so far down that Link cannot hear the bokoblin crash down. The cart that she has not time to engage with stasis, yet which she can launch by throwing a bomb behind her. The bokoblins that have reached her. The bomb that she summons from the slate and slings behind her. The finger that starts to jab towards the rune on the slate.

Pain. Pain through her torso. From just to the right of the small of her back to her belly. She can hear that terrible moist sound of her own innards crushed in her abdomen, the ripping of her tunic twisted around a sharp point, the sudden welcome warmth that bathes her inside. Pain.

Then, for an unbearably long moment, she feels nothing at all. No pain. Not anymore. Just the sensation of something long and hard jammed through her body like a skewer through fruit and mushroom, like a skewer through a half-cooked boar, the meat softened enough to come apart but still juicy enough to drench her torn tunic with blood.

She prods her forefinger against the slate. The bomb explodes. The bokoblin that pierced her bursts into wet-smacked chunks of flesh. The iron cart soars forward on the track. Just before her world turns to darkness, Link looks down to see the spear sticking out from her belly, the tip smeared with her own blood.

Strangely, however strangely, she has not yet died. From the effects of the potion. Or perhaps own
resilience. Or maybe she has died. Maybe the shadows that swallow her do constitute whatever lies beyond the veil of life. She has heard countless variations.

She has heard of the Goddess Hylia, whose souls reincarnate into the next life in another age and era. She has heard of the Goddess Sageru, who rides beside Her followers in the afterlife, to guide those that still live in the stars and in the wind, even far beyond their deaths, their spirits never truly fading until the last time that anyone speaks their name. She has heard of the Goddess Sheik, for whom death offers a lasting peace of nothingness, whose followers must make the most of their own time upon the earth. She has heard of the Goddess Zola and Her seas lined in silver upon whose current which spirits swim in ever-warm waters. She has heard of the Goddess Goro-goro, whose followers return to the rock from whence they were hewn to join together and live on in the stone, their spirits in turn aiding the hands of the creators to fashion the sturdiest of mountains and the most beautiful of art. She has heard of the Goddess Erito, whose followers pass unto the wind to carry the voice of the Golden Goddesses, to sing until only their voice and their bones are left; at last, only their voice, their bones turned to stone, Her followers having lulled themselves into song. She has not heard of the Goddess Kokir, but she does not think that the Goddess Kokir, patron of joy, would condemn Her followers to a void of pain. And she has known of the Golden Goddesses, of the light of Ordona, who rests the departed down into the soil, their bodies becoming the grass, their spirits the breath of the wild.

The cart hurtles down the tracks. Link does not much feel the spear jutting through her abdomen. She can sense the blood dripping from around the wound despite the relative plug of the shaft in the hole through her torso, and she can sense the throbbing with every pulsation of her heart, and she can sense the agony kept just at bay by her own inability to comprehend what has happened. Then: light. Then: sound. Then: impact. As she closes her eyes against the influx of brightness, she hears the roar of water and the sudden scree of metal on metal. The cart beneath her tilts forward, and she senses herself soaring up out of the cart. The explosion of pain that rocks through her torso and rakes friction across her innards rips a scream from her throat. Her body smashes into unyielding stone. The impact pushes the spear out from belly to back; the shaft pulls and twists her innards. She retches over the rock. No matter how she tries, she cannot lift up her head from the hot steaming egg-scented vomit that spreads thickly around her head. The scent of it brings her to heave again until she has vacated the contents of her stomach entirely, until she has no more to give. And then she heaves yet again. To dry-cough up a splatter of blood. It floats scarlet on a sea of greenish-yellow, like the yolk of a very strange egg, or the pupil of a very strange eye.

At last Link manages to raise her head. Her gut has all twisted around the spear, somehow an even worse agony than when the lynel stabbed through her stomach to grasp her entrails, because then the lack of breath in her lungs numbed her sense of pain. Now, she attempts to focus her increasingly blurry vision, every single breath stabs her through again, bringing a bolt of torment that squeezes shut her eyes.

A great cavern. Larger than the hot spring cylinder. This one appears hewn partially of rock, although she can see the same slippery material sticking out here and there. A rush of water: the malice has eaten away enough of the stone for the moat to have flooded the underbelly of the castle.

And she sees—ahead of her—on the peak of the hill—above the waters that flow beneath the castle—glowing a faint orange—a shrine. The shrine that has saved her life once before, and the shrine that will save her life yet again. A shrine that has kept the monsters at bay from the bowels of the
Hyrule castle. A shrine in the heart of the castle.

The laughter bubbling up from her stomach hurts her innards with such agonising, overwhelming pain that she cannot tell if she laughs or if she cries. She breaks into mirth and she breaks into tears and she breaks herself upon the rock.

She lied to Kass. She lied to Kass. She lied to Kass. Without meaning to, she lied to Kass and sent him packing home before they finished activating all of the shrines. Of course: she has heard from Ilia and others that the shrines began to glow again only recently. Of course: after the sealing of the Calamitous One in the Sacred Realm, the shrines must have all died again. Upon their reawakening, as the Calamitous One has grown stronger again in the Sacred Realm and started to puncture the veil, all of the shrines save for the opening in the Kokir Forest require activation again.

At the very least, Link can fulfill this promise. She crawls forward. She tries to crawl forward and the tip of the spear drags against the floor to scrape against her guts. Retching again, she tastes the metallic tang of copper on her tongue, like fish cooked without removing the bloodlines. Her body shudders; the shaking in turn compresses her intestines around the spear; the compression in turn brings her to vomit once more.

She crawls. She crawls, and she leaves in her wake a trail of thick crimson, and she crawls, and she comes upon the shrine over the barren rock, and she crawls, and she hopes that her blood nourishes the moss that clings to the stone, and she crawls, and she finds her arm too short to set the slate into the depression in the face of the pedestal. Raising herself up nearly dips her into the warmth of slumber. Yet she, biting down on her already scarred over lower lip, just barely manages to drag herself up against the pedestal enough to slot in the slate.

The shrine glows blue. Link thumps back to the ground. She pants. She sucks in a breath. She coughs it back out. Then she crawls forward towards the lift. Just before she passes through the curtain of blue light, Link stops. Even in the haze of her mind, like the fog that veils the lost woods, she reflects on the nature of the shrine's healing.

If she goes as she is now, then the shrine will heal her as she is. If she goes as she is now, then the shrine will leave the spear still protruding from her gut.

Link forces herself to sit up. The lightheadedness almost blacks her out again. Her upper teeth pierce once more through her lower lip. Some viscous slurry of blood and vomit trickles from the corners of her mouth and streaks down her shirt. She hiccoughs. She shivers. She curls her hands around the spear. She closes her eyes. She prays.

When her palms brush against the shaft of the spear, the lightning-bolt of agony feels as though someone has taken all of her fingers and pulled them out as far as they will go, until the bones pop from the ligands and the skin tears away at each knuckle, like someone has driven a point through her eyes into the gristle in the back and pushes even further until she sees nothing but splotches of red as physical manifestations of pain.

She closes her fingers around the shaft. Her innards stew and simmer in her abdomen, throbbing against the spear, pulsating like a boar skinned alive, the agony so knuckle-whitening that she would sooner reach into her own gut to tear out her entrails and then her innards and then her entire belly just to rid herself of the pain.

She pulls. She drags her innards out with the spear. She pulls. Worse than even the agony of drawing the Master Sword. She pulls.
And not an illusion, but all too real. She does not only feel the pain, but she smells it. She smells the blood. She smells her own insides. She smells the roasted meat that she could make from herself, the creamy meat stew, the salted meat skewer, the sunny-link or chilly-link or zappy-link or any other variation that she could think of.

She pulls out the spear.

Link collapses into a useless and ruined pile of meat and flesh within the blue curtain of light. The lift takes her down. She spills out on the ground. The trial that might await her throbs fear behind her eyelids. Yet she gazes instead at the cubic curtain of the goalpoint. The Golden Goddesses have blessed her.

She crawls herself into the curtain of light. Shattering around her, the light envelope her in blue. The stitching together of her insides brings a new world of agony into itself. At least the wilds still call her name.

When she awakens, she is curled up on the floor of the shrine. Link sits up and instantly regrets the motion for the pounding of her head. She drains a water-skin from her satchel. Taking out some roasted acorns, she crunches them down, alongside some roasted bees from whose hive she took honey earlier, for those the energising honeyed apples. Even though she cannot bake the apples over the fire now, Link withdraws such an apple. She cuts it into quarters and smear each piece with honey. Four corners. One for each of the Golden Goddesses, and one for herself, in anticipation of the sweetness of the year to come, as she did when she was a child, as she taught Aryll to do when she was a child, as she taught the girl with the golden hair when the bell of the castle rang in the new year at the spring.

"An Akkalan tradition," the girl with the golden hair said, her eyes wide and glint-shimmering from the flicker of candlelight, as she held up the honeyed slice of apple like a fragment of a star fallen from the sky, a fragment that Link could fashion into meteor mash for Daruk. "It's so...so wonderful."

"You're supposed to hold up a plate with honey in every corner of the house to ask for the Golden Goddesses' blessing."

She remembers signing, remembers teaching the girl with the golden hair the prayer: "May the gold of the honey be as the sacred will of the Golden Goddesses; may the red of the apple be as the blessed blood that You have given unto us; may You bless us with a year as sweet and plentiful as is Your will."

She remembers the girl with the golden hair repeating after her: "May the gold of the honey be...as the will...that is, as the sacred will of the Goddess Hy—I mean, of the Golden Goddesses. M-may the red of the apple be as the blessed blood that You have given unto us. Is that right so far, Link? Oh, good! May You bless us with a year as...as sweet and as bountiful—oh!—as plentiful as is Your will. Like that?"

Link nodded. "You set out four slices, and you invite the Goddesses to join you. And then, when They've given you Their permission to eat it for Them, you eat the four slices, in whatever order you want or find important. I...I usually go Farore, then Nayru, then Din, and then I eat the one for me. But I can't rank Them or anything. They're just...the Goddesses, you know."

"How do you know when They've given you Their permission?" the girl with the golden hair inquired curiously. "Is the fourth slice for the Goddess Hylia?"

"No, I..."
"Oh, how silly of me!" The girl with golden hair clapped her palm to her cheek, in unusually higher spirits, perhaps because the king had not forced her to pray as stringently considering the spring festivities which bustled the castletown into blooming like the honeysuckle Link and Ilia used to pick from the grass of the pasture to drink of its sweetness. "I'm still not used to the idea that there are people out there who don't know about the Seven. I apologise, Link."

Link shrugged. "The last slice is for yourself. And I don't know how you know. You just...you do know. It's something you have in your gut, like how you know when you're hungry."

The girl with the golden hair bit off a corner of an apple slice. Link watched her stamp her feet up and down in a half-formed jig as she scrunched up her features in pleasure. "Mm! It's so sweet! I've only ever had these baked before, but it's so crunchy and so whole, i-if that makes sense."

"It does," Link answered, something like a smile ghosting over her lips. "It really does."

"Th...thank you for showing me this. Oh, it...I can't tell you how much it means to me that you'd trust me with a little piece of yourself." The girl with the golden hair balanced the half-eaten slice in her palm. "I'll give you something of myself in return. I...don't really know when I knew it. It's kind of complicated, really, but it wasn't until I turned twelve and...had my coming of age that I was now old enough to become the chosen hero if I needed to, you know..."

Link shook her head. The girl with the golden hair lifted a hand to her mouth. "The twelve year old coming of age? The historic age of the Hero that first set out on his journey? You know, everyone dresses up in blue and gets a little toy sword for the day? Well, some say green, but—oh, that's just history. I can talk your ear off another time." The girl with the golden hair erupted into laughter. "Oh, my, I never thought that I would meet someone who hasn't lived through that. There's another one when you turn nineteen, the historic age of the Hero turning back the Calamitous One." She clapped her hands together. "It's settled, then. I'll get you a toy sword and we'll have your coming of age." Link started to back away, but the girl with the golden hair clung to her wrists. "Please? For me? It'll be fun. We'll get everyone involved. Revali would make a pretty appropriate Calamitous One, wouldn't he?"

The girl with the golden hair winked at Link, who blinked back blankly at her. "He's not that bad, once you figure out that he's...not angry at you, but at destiny, or something like that." Link shrugged. "I don't really feel too destined."

"Speaking of destiny!" The girl with the golden hair dropped Link's wrists. "I didn't tell you the full story. Th...that is, if you want to hear it."

Link dipped her head. "Please," she signed.

The girl with the golden hair beamed, and that smile alone could raise the sun, could make Link believe in the reincarnation of the Goddess Hylia. That smile paired with the apple dipped in honey could make the Calamitous One itself fall in recognition of the delicious beauty of this world. "I remember it was after that...the night after. I was lying down on my bed in the dark after Impa—" The girl with the golden hair giggle-snorted. "—chased me to sleep. I remember that I was reading a compilation of Hebric folkways and folklore, and I found terribly fascinating how they see in ani—wait, wait, I'm going off-topic again." She cleared her throat. Link leaned forward to soak in the passion that radiated from the girl with the golden hair with every syllable that rolled from her tongue. "I remember lying in bed, with the slant of moonlight just over my forehead, and I was looking up at the ceiling, and I just said...oh. Oh. A few days after that, I asked Father why I couldn't be a princess. And it all went up from there."
Link inclined her head. The girl with the golden hair touched her palm to her cheek and blushed. "Thank you for listening. It's not a terribly interesting story, but it was really the first day of the rest of my life, you know? And...if you don't mind me asking, Link. What about...what about you?"

She eats the slice for the Goddess Farore first, then the slice for the Goddess Nayru, then the slice for the Goddess Din, and finally the slice for herself. She swallows. She wipes her mouth. She rubs her eyes.

Link runs her hand over her stomach. Where the spear burst through her, she maps out a puckered scar like a seven-pronged star radiating to tauten her flesh. She stretches. Her skin feels tight around the star, as it does around the lizalfos bite in her left arm, or the thin line where the blade of Tabanch bokoblin's spear passed through her lower right leg.

She stands. Her limbs wobble. Link quaffs a vial of spring green elixir to go with the apples—even though she does not know the exact time of day—and then another of the deep blue. The mark of the Dragon Naydra's protection. She can almost sense how her skin tautens up and how her muscles temper to steel.

Link glances at the shrine. The one hundred and twentieth shrine. She presses her lips to the slate. "Thank you," she signs. Then she takes the lift up.

In the waters that flow under the castle, Link washes blood and vomit from her tunic and trousers as best that she can manage. She cannot do much about the hole left behind by the spear; she rubs the back of her head. Things always come in three. She sincerely hopes that Amali will not have to get her yet another blue tunic. Though, since she has worn green, and now blue, she supposes that she has yet to wear red to complete the trifecta.

Then Link moves on. Through various passageways in the castle, always climbing up and forward. Here and there, where the slippery material lies exposed from the rock, Link side-steps steadily evaporating pools of malice left behind by the Great Calamity. Monsters litter the halls, some sleeping, others playing with one another, still more eating or preparing meals for themselves by burning random scraps that they can find. Some areas seem devoid of monsters; run-ins with guardians soon prove why.

Link takes her time filching food from the monsters' noses: fruits and meats, mushrooms and herbs. She dares not touch the fish that has rotted or the meat that has spoiled, but she guzzles down the rest.

Up and up. She tries not to take on too many monsters at once. No more spears stabbed through her torso. Instead, Link uses her whistling to trick monsters towards her one by one. She animates suits of armour through magnesis. She conjures columns of ice in the pools of water that flow from broken pipes, freezes them with stasis, and launches them directly into monsters. She traps monsters against the ceiling with cryonis as well. She rolls spherical explosives forward for more bokoblin bomb-bowling and lays the cubic ones down as traps.

And, of course, the single most important rune: the pictobox. Pictographs of everything. Snap snap snap. Link takes one of every monster, of every food, of every silly message that she writes into the dirt for someone in the future to find.

She arranges some fleet-lotus seeds into the shape of a horse for Ilia—with much better results than the crabs from Ruto—and then some acorns into a sand seal, for Riju. Though she makes an effort at drawing Amali and Kass's daughters with a stick, she gives up and relies on the tip of the Master Sword. For Yunobo: a valiant effort at the grandfather that he has told Link so much about, eyepatch and all. For Sidon: Link idly practises a serenade that the girl with the golden hair taught
her, an ode to the Goddess Zola, which she'll play for her friend once she manages to find the mirror in the sanctum and return.

Link goes on. She stumbles upon like a prison. After operating some complicated levers that make her head hurt more than anything, she clears out the monsters that have apparently gotten themselves stuck inside of the cells. Keeping the Master Sword sheathed, Link steals the monsters’ own weapons and turns them against the beasts: bows and arrows, axes and swords, spears and clubs.

She walks into a room seemingly empty except for a pile of bones on the floor, far too large for the bones to belong to any human or most of the monsters that she has encountered.

Perhaps one of the great skeletons, like those that she and Kass have seen far in the southwestern wastes of the Tantari Desert ravaged by constant sandstorms, or like those in the badlands north of the Eldic mountains where nested lizalfos, wolfos, and one very territorial blue-maned lynel, or like those in the Hebric cave that took her breath and Kass's. Squatting down down by the pile of bones, she pokes one with a stubby finger.

The bone starts to vibrate.

She power-walks out of the room very much not empty with a pile of bones on the floor belonging to a very large skeletal monster indeed.

Once Link has escaped from a monster who has a bone to pick with her—she writes that one down for Romani and Riju; she wonders if the Goddess Sagerua blesses Her children not only with kin, but with the power to appreciate puns as well—she takes an alternate passageway up. Here and there she finds herself looking at closed-off paths or having to loop back another way. Occasionally, she has no recourse but trying to locate her way outside onto a balcony and then setting something on fire to lift herself onto the upper stories by a flame-induced updraft.

After her third round of such an updraft, when another malice-scarred lynel with a spear almost skewers her if not for how quickly she throws herself towards the ground and rolls forward to thrust the Master Sword through the lynel's less protected belly, Link runs out of things to burn and so, entering the hallways of the castle again, continues stealing food from monsters. She will say one thing about monsters: they know how to roast meat.

Link comes upon something of a dead end in her endless upwards journey, her right palm still lightly bleeding from having a surprise keese puncture the skin with one of its wing-claws. As she licks the blood off and lets her saliva heal the injury, she lowers her eyelids. She senses: a breeze. A breeze from somewhere, in a vaguely square shape just around...here.

Rapping her knuckles against the wall, she listens to the metal resonate against her hand. She steps back and smirks with satisfaction. Link magnetises the whatever-it-is in the wall and pushes forward. The sudden brightness of the light closes her eyes. Something thumps on her head hard enough to water her eyes.

A book. A book falling to her boots, opened to a page so densely scribbled with ink that Link cannot make out the actual words, save for an illustration that resembles a knight attempting to do battle with a snail.

Blinking blearily, Link looks up and around: she stands in the royal library, the metal bookcase in front of her still connected to her slate by magnesis. A grand hall of an affair with shelves upon shelves of books, where the girl with the golden hair loved to spend her time until the king started to forbid her from ever entering. Books upon books, tomes upon tomes, volumes upon volumes.
Half the knowledge of Hyrule contained within.

The other half, of course, Link has seen in the royal Parapan kitchens of Nabooru. No, not kitchens. She meant library. Did she?

Cautiously, from behind the safety of the bookcase, she glances around the library. On either end of the hall, Link makes out the great doors that lead to the rest of the castle. Both sets of doors have long since broken: those on the right-hand side having collapsed from their hinges, one of the giant metal pieces still hanging off of the upper floor of the library, the second having long since fallen to the lower level; the left set of doors has yawned into a puddle of malice. Right. The right-hand entrance it is.

And around the library: monsters. Monsters crouching on the table covered in scraps of food, the books greased and flung open. Monsters tearing up the pages to stuff into their mouths. Monsters fighting against one another with their claws outstretched, wrestling on the floor, slamming one another against the shelves and the piles of books already strewn over the floor.

Link winces. If she again sees the girl with the golden hair, Link will never speak of this, lest—after they have long sealed away the Calamitous One—she kills the girl with the golden hair by way of a heart attack.

The second that Link lowers her hand, the trail of magnesis from the slate to the metal bookcase dies. It topples to the ground, spilling books onto the floor in bindings of leather, in blue and red and gold and purple and green and orange.

The entire library falls silent as every single monster in the long stretches of shelves turns their heads towards her at once. She blinks.

She runs for the open entrance that she spots under the right-hand stairs. The bokoblins, dinolfos, and lizalfos hanging around the library—as well as a single yipping remlit baring its fangs at her—swarm towards her. Link picks up the metal half of the door that has fallen and—wielding it half as a shield and half as a battering ram—bats the monsters away from herself. Her gaze falls upon a book propped open at the corner of the table.

On the page: an illustration of a violet cake. Link skids to a stop in front of the book. Still using the metal door to protect herself from the onslaught of monsters—and mentally signing apologies to the girl with the golden hair for crashing monsters against her precious bookshelves that she has learned by heart—Link scans down the lines of the pages. Monster extract, goat butter, Tabantha wheat, cane sugar, aerated salt, buttercream icing, Hyrulean apple. Instructions on how to decorate and best serve the cake, with such and such garnishes, with so and so liquored milk.

A monster wedding cake, fit for a monster wedding. A specialty of the Hyrule royal family. The description of the sensations and the tastes evoked waters her mouth and her eyes at once. Her stomach rumbles. The Master Sword starts to vibrate on her back, but Link ignores the resonance in favour of memorising the very last few lines. She commits the monster cake to memory just as her legs fly out from beneath her.

The dinolfos that has buckled her knees with a swipe of its tail pounces upon her. Link draws the Master Sword and thrusts the blade forward. The fire-light dances over the scales of the monster's underbelly a second before she carves the mark of the Golden Goddesses through its torso. The dinolfos's lunging claw manages to just boop her nose as Link spears the Master Sword skyward and flings the dinolfos from the blade, as though she were chucking off a pumpkin gourd stuck on the end.
Then Link turns tail—grabbing the cookbook with her—and half-rolls half-throws her body forward into the entrance under the stairs. Lobbing an explosive behind her, she explodes a pair of bokoblins wielding heavy axes. Magnesis pushes the first metal thing she spots—another bookshelf—into the doorway. Without the light of the library, the darkness of the small chamber leaves her temporarily sightless.

Immediately something slams into the bookshelf. Link sucks in a breath, but the magnesis holds. Monsters crash themselves against the bookcase over and over. Setting the slate upon the floor, Link notes that the magnesis does not break, nor does the slate move. The slate should keep the bookcase against the entrance whether she keeps it in her hands or not. In the meantime, she digs through her satchel, fishing out one of the pieces of flint that Kass gave to her.

Link fumbles around the small chamber. Nothing like a torch, or a candle, that she can find. But she does find books, and books, and books. With another wince and another apology, she sets one of the tomes aflame.

The book she burns provides sufficient light for her to explore her surroundings: a small study of sorts. A desk and a chair. Several bookshelves marked with notes to not touch the King of Hyrule's property without express permission. Upon the desk: a closed journal, marked with the symbol of the Goddess Hylia and the triangles of the Golden Goddesses that have long served as the mark of the royal family of Hyrule.

Her eyes embiggen: king's writing. She shouldn't. But she has time to kill while she waits for the monsters to bore themselves or think of a new plan.

Link seats herself cross-legged on the chair where once sat the king. She holds the sacred volume in her palms. Blowing off a skein of dust that has long formed on its cover, she opens the tome, the pages white and creamy. Link wets her forefinger and flips to the first page of the holy tome.

She reads through the cookbook.

When she has finished browsing the cookbook, her stomach has grumbled enough to rival the roars of the monsters that claw against the metal bookcase. Link reaches into her satchel to scroumage up something of a meal. The berries that she picked in the grove have smooshed against the insides of the repurposed water-skin she plucked them into. Still, the juices run sweet, the pulp pleasantly tart. Scooping out the squashed berries, she laps the remainder off of her hands.

Link lowers her eyelids. She has not eaten smooshed berries like this since the days she wiled away on the Great Plateau.

The pounding of the monsters against the metal bookcase ebbs. Link looks around the study. She uncovers, to her surprise, a stack of the girl with the golden hair's dossiers upon the desk, the ones that the king—or so Link thought—refused to accept. She opens one: the king's handwriting scrawls in comments down the margins.

Link tilts her head. She stuffs as many annotated dossiers as will fit into her satchel. She might not have the education or knowledge to understand what they say, but they could hold keys to the Sacred Realm: all that the girl with the golden hair told her, which she never understood.

The pounding grows still fainter. Soon, Link will emerge from the study to continue her journey to the sanctum. She does not remember the layout of the castle well enough to recall the girl with the golden hair's chambers, or...or the quarters that she and Aryll shared. For the better. Link touches the red telescope at her left hip.
She has already said her farewells. And if she has time to say them again, then she would rather greet Aryll with a bowl of food. A plate of carrot cake, or some catfish stew, or even a wildberry cannoli Aryll has never tried before. Then, and only then, will Link say farewell to Aryll again, and not empty-handed like this.

Shaking her head, Link closes one eye, then opens up the king’s journal. She flips forward through the entries that grow more erratic as the years pass. The hundred years of passing have smudged most of the ink on the pages and faded the rest, yet she can still make out a few sentences here or there, or occasionally almost an entire paragraph. She reads.

Lady Impa's words spring to mind. The king, who wanted nothing more than his daughter's happiness. The king, who wanted nothing more than the peace of Hyrule. The king, who writes his regret for having hurt his daughter. The king, who begs the Goddess Hylia to manifest, so that his daughter can live the rest of her days in peace. The king, who promises to try to make everything up to his daughter. The king, whose heart hurt so badly he could not sleep for a month after implying that his daughter—his precious daughter—could be anything less than a true daughter of Hylia. The king, who could see the uselessness of his own actions. The king, who promised himself that he would release his daughter upon her return from Mount Nayru, if their final efforts yielded in naught. His daughter. His daughter. His daughter, over and over again. Signed: His Highness the King Rhoam Bosphoramus Harkinian of Hyrule.

Link closes the journal. She closes her eyes. She closes herself. She wonders how she might have felt had she discovered the people of that house regretting what they did to herself and to Aryll, had she discovered the people of that house deciding to do right after Aryll had long turned eighteen herself, had she discovered the people of that house having some motivations or circumstances that led them to do what they had.

She does not equate understanding with forgiveness. She does not know what the girl with the golden hair will do, but Link knows what she has already done.

For the sake of the girl with the golden hair, Link slides the journal into her satchel as well. She puts out the flames of the tome. Then, very slowly, she pushes the metal bookcase out.

Link props up the metal door as a ramp to the second floor of the library to sprint headlong up the stairs. She crashes into a dinolfos—cracking their foreheads together—and does not bother to dispatch the monster before hurtling through the open doorway. The monsters of the library—and not those contained within the pages of the books—pursue her as she thunders through the halls. The scent of food nearby nearly causes her to swerve and stop when she comes upon a dining table, but the vibrations of the Master Sword on her back pelt her forward.

She lopes back to grab just one drumstick. "Just one," she promises the Master Sword, while the lizalfos chasing her crash into the dining hall table and flip it over directly onto a pack of sleeping wolfos, which do not much appreciate their early awakening from their food-induced naps. The wolfos and lizalfos tear each other apart. The drumstick clenched between her teeth—so tender, so juicy, just raw enough for the juices to course down her chin but well-roasted enough for the outside fattened skin to have crisped to a crinkled perfection—Link jogs upwards in a spiralling path, heaves open a metal door with magnesis, finds herself staring at a silver hinox's massive face, shuts the metal door, and walks back down to take an alternate passageway.

Eventually, she lucks out: a crack in the wall lets Link slip out onto the upper levels of the castle, where she has nothing to fear but the dozens upon dozens of guardian sentries and turrets and flying things that go 'round and 'round.

More practise for the mirrored pot lid. Link passes by beneath arches. She leapfrogs over malice
oozing the slippery material on which she slides once or twice. She parries the fire-light bolts of automata, which she takes *very carefully* one at a time and never, ever, flicks her wrist too early. When she catches the attention of a pair of sparring lynels that put aside their differences to charge her at once, she rolls forward and forward until she emerges into the open. Link whistles for the nearest half-dozen guardians, which attempt to scorch her where she stands—well, sprints—and succeed instead at felling both lynels at once.

She hikes up the hill to the top of the castle. Funny, how *naked* the castle looks without its myriads of flags and its coatings of paint, without all of the extra parapets and spires of brick and stone and metal. Stripped down to the tower that Link did not even know the castle held at its base.

And this, only the top of the tower, from what the talking tree in the Kokir Forest had said. Only the Goddesses know what could lie far, far down beneath the castle's base. Only the Goddesses, *for now*, that is. The girl with the golden hair, Link pictures, would love to investigate.

She hides from a flying automaton behind an archway of the tower, the spiralling patterns glowing dull orange. Link wonders where in the castle she might uncover a pedestal wherein she can slot her slate to activate the castle in blue. When she attempts to reflect back the fire-light of another guardian, she realises that the angle at which the flying automata blaze fire-light makes the task much more difficult than the sentries and stalkers she has eliminated before. Instead, Link removes a hard apple from her satchel and lobs it as hard as she can towards the guardian's eye. The fruit splatters against the eye. Link watches the automaton spray a jet of water onto its own eye, cleansing the lens of apple juice.

In the meantime, Link races forward to crouch behind another archway. The guardian probes around the vicinity—she stills her breath by stuffing her face with a slice of bread—and then, giving in, soars away to continue its patrol. The automaton blasts a duck flying by. Its roasted whole body crashes into the ground not ten paces from Link, who takes a single step in its direction only for the Master Sword to vibrate as if attempting to trigger an earthquake.

Link cups her hands over her eyes in lieu of binoculars and squints. "*You're right,*" she says to the Master Sword, laying the blade down onto the ground so that she can sign to her companion. "*I don't think the remains of that duck are edible. Thanks for saving me yet again, old friend.*" She pats the Master Sword on the hilt. The Master Sword wilts away its wings in response. Link cocks her head at the blade until the sword returns to normal, though the jewel in the hilt dims and brightens as if blinking at her.

Sheathing the Master Sword, Link scrambles up up from the dusty ground, wipes her palms on her trousers, and turns her head towards the belltower at the peak of the castle, from which an impossibly tall metal pole still reaches the heavens, the tattered remains of Hyrule's flag fluttering weakly in the Goddess Farore's wind.

And here, the path upon which she now stands, worn down by one hundred years of passing to the golden-brown of the slate and the Divine Beasts, leads her towards the heart of the Hyrule Castle: the sanctum.

Nearly the highest point of the castle, just below the belltower which stretches into the skies, housing the bell that would—every spring—ring in the new year amid prayers to the Golden Goddesses and to the Seven for a year of peace, of plenty, of prosperity. For all she knows, that bell has burned away to malice as well.

Link steps forward. She can see through the arch of the doorway to the inner sanctum beyond, to circular stands where once stood the royal family, the Champions, and the Sages and Oracles of the castletown, seeking the guidance and blessings of the Goddesses. She can still remember the
stained glass windows of the Seven Sages upon the walls, their faces almost unrecognisable, retouched and restored occasionally over the years, and each time changing ever so slightly. The girl with the golden hair once showed Link illustrations of the windows through the years, documented over the past three centuries. She pointed out how just the Sage of the Goddess Kokir has passed through entirely different designs. "It is more than possible," the girl with the golden hair explained to her, "that we no longer know how any of the Sages looked. Incredible, isn't it, how little we know of our own history..."

Now that Link considers the stained glass window, she realises that the korok in the window does not resemble any korok she has ever seen. And she has seen—she reflects—at least eight hundred and ninety nine. Plus Sarie and Hestu. Nine hundred and one.

When she sees the girl with the golden hair again in the veil beyond the mortal world, Link will have to tell her about everything that she has seen. The mirror in the sanctum. She'll see it, and she'll touch it, and she'll figure out how to open the veil, and then she'll step into the land where the sky shines gold not blue, and she'll see again for the first time in one hundred years the—

—emptiness of the sanctum.

Link stops in her tracks.

The sanctum. The circular chamber. The openings that once held the stained glass windows of the Seven Sages, now empty to the wind that gusts through the vacant tower carrying not the Goddess Farore's seeds of life but the numbing scent of decay from the ruins of the castletown below. The floor and the ceiling, once painted over in brilliant spirals of green and blue and red in the colours and the symbols of the Golden Goddesses culminating in their symbol—three triangles, arranged in a triangle of their own, like the three-pronged crown of the King of Hyrule, like the three towers of the Hyrule Cathedral—upon the centre of the circle, upon the very heart of Hyrule. And there: the void.

Nothing. Nothing at all. No, not nothing, but worse than nothing: the stand that once held the mirror, carved out of the same material as the towers and as the slate and as the Divine Beasts themselves. The circular stand to which Link walks. Once, once, one hundred years ago, she saw the mighty black obelisk marked with the symbols of the Golden Goddesses set into this stand of gold and brown, on that spring where the bell above the sanctum rang in the new year.

She raises up her hands. She splays her fingers out. She moves forward, one step at a time, her breath sunk down into her own throat. She hovers her palms just above where once lay the circular face of the mirror.

Closing her eyes, Link thrusts her arms into the stand. She feels: nothing. She feels: light. She feels: air.

She lifts her eyelids as she might lift curtains over a funeral casket. Her arms have gone through the space of the stand like through the mouth of a cooking pot, like a cooking pot without anything in it. No, not like a cooking pot. Only the rim of a cooking pot, the belly vanished into the abyss. Not even the possibility of preparing a meal. No invisible mirror. No secret passageway to the Sacred Realm. Nothing but air.

Her heart begins to twist; her stomach, to churn.

Link scours the sanctum. She must have missed something. Anything. She draws out the Master Sword. She points the Master Sword around, whirls it as she might whirl a thin dough over her head, lets it clatter to the floor. She looks upon the ground: a single white cloth, like a funeral
shawl, left upon the floor. She stares up above at the belltower: no bell. The malice must have passed, must have burned away in the hundred years, must have destroyed the bell, must have destroyed the—

She does not remember her legs giving out beneath her until her knees hit the floor, and even then she does not remember her body going cold until she feels her lungs rising and falling against the floor, her chin thudding against the cold, cold ground.

The mirror that reflected within its night-sky glass all of the dreams and hopes of the people of Hyrule—all their pride and their joy, all their voice and their kin, all their truth and their faith, and all of their hope—has vanished.

Maybe. Maybe somewhere, somewhere, in all of the wilds of Hyrule, in all of the lands that take months upon months to cross much less to search, she could another mirror. The second mirror that the girl with the golden hair mentioned. That might not have shattered after all. The second mirror. That might not exist. That might exist. That she has no choice, now, but to search for it. Somewhere. Somewhere. Possibly. In the wilds of Hyrule. Yet—like the beings of will of the Sacred Realm—if she loses hope that they can cross the veil, then she, too, will die.

She has three months. Three months, until the summer solstice comes, to find a mirror, to find another path to the Sacred Realm, to find anything that will deliver them salvation from the Great Calamity. The Great Calamity from which she failed to deliver them one hundred years ago.

Yet Hyrule is very, very, very vast.

And she is very, very, very small.

Energizing Honeyed Apple (five hearts, two-fifths stamina vessel) - apple, courser bee honey

Chapter End Notes
and I wish more Zelda games did so.

The bokoblin and moblins literally killing themselves to get at Link is in reference to the fact that they do not comprehend how life in the Realm of Blood/mortal realm works. They think, because this is what they known their entire lives, that they can simply will themselves back together. But that's not true. Would you be afraid of unscrewing a water bottle if you knew you could screw it back on with a simple motion of the hand? Probably not.

Hey, lots of possibilities for what comes after death! Is that a right answer? Maybe. Link doesn't know what to believe.

Why is Link being so reckless with her plan to check out the castle? She figured she would just go in and out quick enough to confirm the existence of the mirror in the sanctum, just in case. She wasn't exactly expecting to be stabbed through the back.

Besides, she knew about the shrine in the castle, and she had the potion of the dragon's protection. But I think the important thing to remember is that Link just got the Master Sword, and she just managed to convince everyone to fight against the Calamitous One. That's pretty big! She still probably should have told people where she was going, but didn't for fear of worrying them if they found out that the mirror might not actually be in the sanctum. Still, she should have. She's done much better about keeping her responsibilities in check though.

As I've mentioned before, most places in Hyrule celebrate the new year in the spring! The tradition with the apple slices and honey was inspired by something I did myself as a child for my own new year (not the one in the middle of winter).

Link stealing food from the monsters is in reference to the dining hall you can enter in Breath of the Wild, where you can literally stealing food from tables. The prison and the stalfos are pulled likewise from Breath of the Wild. In the library, you can indeed find recipes for monster cake—and for one other type of cake. Guess what Zelda's favourite food is.

In Breath of the Wild, the King of Hyrule's name is Rhoam Bosphoarums Hyrule. I think it's silly for him to have the surname Hyrule, so I went with Harkinian, as I have for Zelda. By the way, while Impa had a different view of Zelda's father, Link herself points out that if she were Zelda, she wouldn't forgive Rhoam's actions. It's a complex situation, but the point was not that Zelda has to forgive him.

I very much enjoyed getting to write Fi's interactions with Link, in terms of her vibrating to communicate!

In Breath of the Wild, there's a korok at the tippity top of the flagpole on Hyrule Castle. It really amused me. I got all the way up there as the music of Hyrule Castle swelled around me, and then: "Yahaha! You found me!"

I use words like 'deliver' and 'salvation' with respect to the Great Calamity, but these words aren't meant to evoke Christianity or something like that. I'm using them more in their, uh, neutral sense, of literal salvation from a crisis.

And whoops! I hope you didn't think it was going to be that easy.

A few comments couldn't quite fit, so I'll drop them in at the beginning of the seventy-fifth chapter. See you then!
Up next: the Great Plateau; an old, not too welcome face; wedding cake.


Beta reader's comments: Exploring the castle is so cool. The castle is one of my favourite parts of Breath of the Wild, and seeing Delicious in Wilds Link explore it is really neat.

It's nice for Link to get to read the king's journal. He did some awful things, but he wasn't pure evil. It's nice to get to see that.

The mirror in the sanctum that the girl with the golden hair used on the eve of the Great Calamity no longer exists within the castle, if it exists at all. The travelling chef returns to the Great Plateau in the hopes of discovering another route into the Sacred Realm using the shrine in which the chef awoke two years ago. In the process, the chef greets an old friend and an old foe in one.

Author's notes from the previous chapter that didn't fit: With respect to the prayer that Zelda reads—"The breath of the wild shall whisper over the world, long after you and I have returned to dust, and shall breathe life anew. Such is the promise of the Goddess Farore. Such is Her wind, that She carries the seeds of life, and such is Her courage, that we bear the will to live."—believe it or not, but I didn't intend to use the phrase *breath of the wild* initially. I was going to write "breath of the wind" (as in Farore) but accidentally wrote "wild" instead, and later thought that the namedrop was so appropriate I left it in there. Living does take courage. If you're reading this, and you're alive, thank you for making the decision to be alive day in and day out.

As I mentioned before, Central Hyrule has two coming of ages, one at twelve and one at nineteen! In *The Wind Waker*, it was customary for children on Outset Island at the age of the hero to dress in the green of the Hero of Time. In *Delicious in Wilds*, this tradition has continued, except that the story of how the hero used to dress is different now. Now, the story is blue—why? Well, legends and histories change over time. Perhaps the people of *Delicious in Wilds* remember a certain pair of lobster pyjamas instead.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

She glides down from the sanctum. She cloaks herself in the white funeral shawl. She crosses the ruins of the castletown. She crawls again through the fields—the guardians ignore her—towards the grove where she left Ilia and Sarie. She finds the two of them safe and sound, and only then does she let herself breathe.

As she saddlebags Ilia for a ride south and as Sarie refrains from asking her questions about the castle, Link comes across a group of self-proclaimed treasure-hunters headed towards the castle to sack it. She hears from them that, although most of the jewels and other treasures have long vanished from the castle into the hands of other treasure-hunters, they have an inkling that they could still find the exceedingly rare and exceedingly expensive armour and weaponry left behind by the famous royal smiths.

"There's nothing but dust there," Link warns them. "Even what little weapons there are have become brittle and rusted over the years. Keep yourselves safe. Do you want any more mushroom
The treasure-hunters head out towards the castle regardless. She insists that they drink—in front of her—vials of the deep blue elixir with the mark of the Dragon Naydra's protection. In another time, Link would have gone with them, half-tour guide and half-guardian. Now, she has not the time.

Things, as her Parapan friends would say, have already gone north. Link might as well go south. So south she rides, through the grasses of Central Hyrule. Declaring their intent to cheer her up, Sarie sings nearly constantly, which eventually prompts Link to draw out her own ocarina and accompany them. They play a song that those who worked the fields themselves would hum together to keep time, harmony, and spirits high, a song so pervasive that Link and Sarie both have heard of it—in its multitudinous variations—as the very melody of Hyrule Field. Neither of them knows the words. Yet the song alone buoys them forward.

The days and nights blur into one. If she could, Link would carry Ilia upon her back and keep walking through the night. Instead, she spends the hot summer days sleepless, gathering and hunting food for the cooler evening's journey ahead, fletching arrows out of trees, occasionally passing out from exhaustion in the shade of their boughs. Always in groves. Never in ruins.

They reach the towering cliffs north of the Great Plateau near the moon's zenith. Link dismounts from Ilia and leaves Sarie with her companion in case of an attack by monsters. After scaling the Great Plateau herself, Link magnetises a half-corroded metal grate protruding from the ruins around the periphery of the Great Plateau. She drags the grate from the earth and floats it down to the base of the cliff. If Sarie and Ilia hop on, Link can lift them through magnesis to the Great Plateau.

Ilia spooks from the grate. Link touches her chin and then snaps her fingers. She delves towards the nearby octorok-infested woods, where she positions herself around rocks and trees, escaping the octoroks' barrages of rocks while she tosses bombs in the monsters' directions. She collects the stretchy, inflatable inner membranes of their bodies, which she blows up like balloons.

Again, Link guides Ilia to the metal grate. This time, however, she stays right beside Ilia's side—soothingly stroking her flank and cooing into her fuzzy ear—as she affixes octorok balloons to the grate. One, two, three, four, five, six, and on the lucky seven the grate becomes airborne.

"Shakalah! We're off!" Sarie calls out with a shake of their leafy mask. At Link's request, Sarie unfurls their korok leaf and putters them along through the air towards the Great Plateau. Abruptly a giant hrok swoops in; its talons rip through half of the balloons. The grate drops and glides downwards at a rapid pace while Link frantically blows up more balloons. They crash into the open field near the first golden spire she ever activated. Spitting blades of grass from her mouth, Link checks hastily on Ilia: her companion has suffered no broken limbs, no cracked hooves, no injuries but the fear in her eyes. Link hugs her.

Notching her bow, Link downs the hrok in question when it swoops down again to defecate on her head. She considers if she might try to cook it anyway, and yet she remembers Amali's caution about the monsters taking on the guises of birds.

Besides, something that could defecate on a constant basis far beyond the capacity of normal birds would unlikely make a good meal.

With that taken care of, Link spends the remainder of the night exploring the Great Plateau, upon which she has not set foot in over two years. Something here must have allowed her to move between the Sacred Realm and the mortal world. Somewhere, possibly, there lies a mirror. Somewhere that the girl with the golden hair would have known about. Somewhere that she could
have predicted Link would end up.

The tower, the four shrines, and the Temple of Time with its strange crater in the second chamber—a crater that, upon inspection, looks remarkably akin to the shape and size of the rock in which the Master Sword sat before Link drew it from the stone one hundred years ago—reveal nothing.

As she travels, seeking answers, Link comes upon the bokoblins from which she fled during her first few days of awakening, before she even knew her own name. Now, she realises, they pose nearly no threat at all.

She leaves them be, with their skewered roast boar, for they pose no harm to any people either: as far as she knows, no one traverses the Great Plateau. Except her. Then she comes upon the remains of campfire in the midst of the wood. A few days old. Touching her chin, Link attempts to discern where the camper might have gone, yet cannot tell footsteps or trails in the grass. Her nose might knows food, but not the tracking of people.

She scours the wood regardless. Link whistles a jaunty tune loud enough that any potential allies might approach. She stumbles upon a very familiar, very large rock. Craning her neck up, she stares at the massive monster that awakens up from the rock. A stone talus, as Glepp, Misan, and Dyeri called it. A stone talus from which Link long ran away. Now she merely withdraws the silver spear that Sidon gave her, takes aim, and throws it. The spearhead pierces the talus through less protected deposit of ore in its heart. Then: bombs away.

When the talus breaks apart to fragments, she leaves most of the ore scattered in the grass, although she collects the flint into her flint-pouch. Sarie erupts into a song of amazement at what Link has accomplished, while the girl in question rubs the back of her head and laughs embarrassedly. "It was just a rock," she says. "A big big biiiig rock!" Sarie corrects.

Link passes by the cabin again, the cabin where lived Kass's mentor, or his mentor's father—Mudora, wasn't that his name?—or both. She pokes her head inside: all of the loose papers and books that once covered the floor have disappeared. Lady Impa's messenger must have taken them.

Yet she notices, too, the thin layer of dust on everything. Thin? Not the cake of dust that Link would have expected to collect over two years, especially as she did not clean the cabin during her own stay. She runs a hand over the desk, rolling the dust between her thumb and forefinger.

Link shrugs. She thanks Kass's mentor or else his father or else both for the beloved cooking pot that has served her so well upon her journey and leaves an offering of meat and fish sautéed in spicy peppers outside of the cabin in gratitude. Then, Link turns towards her final stop on the Great Plateau: the Shrine of Resurrection.

She tells Sarie and Ilia about the first few months of her life after the her awakening as she retraces her steps two years back; again she has arrived on the Great Plateau at the lingering of the spring, just on the cusp of summer's heat. Link takes them around the lake, and up through the forests, and upon the grassy path where she found the axe and the satchel in the stump of a tree, and over the rocky overhang where she climbed over and where now she discovers the remains of another fresh campfire, and atop the hill on which she stood for a long, long time to feel the wind and to sign the word home.

The wind. The Goddess Farore's wind, with its seeds of life, with its of promise of peace. "The breath of the wild," the girl with the golden hair whispered.
Link stands there for a long, long time.

She shows them the yawning mouth of the cave from which she emerged, blinking, into the morning light. Link splashes down into the water pooling on the cavern floor. Ilia paws at the ground by the edge cave entrance and whinnies. Link rests her palms on her hips, as Ilia the girl would, then, touching a hand to her chin, gazes up at Ilia the horse. "Sarie, can you take care of her? I'm going to check on something. It shouldn't take more than a few minutes."

Sarie salutes. "Linkle-link can count on Sarie! No boko-boko will get past Sarie's amazing korok-korok powers! Ka-pow!"

Link laughs. "I'll see you soon." She turns.

There: where once upon a time, Link donned clothing left out for her by Kass's mentor or else his father or both, long before she even remembered her own name. The poet and the poet's son. Link steps forward. Her boots splish in the dampness.

The Shrine of Resurrection. Where she awoke. Where she thought she had died and been revived. Where she had run away and fallen out of, almost quite literally from the sky, like those faery-tales that Ilia told Aryll when Link still returned to Ordon. She pads forward towards the door. The chamber where she awoke, floating in a pool of water, faintly glowing in blue, tracking the wetness of her feet onto the floor, lifting up the slate from the pedestal. The girl with the golden hair's slate. Link breathes. Closing her eyes, she steps through through the entrance and returns from whence she came.

Her left hand flies onto the hilt of the Master Sword. Looming over the altar where Link awoke, smoothing her hands over the slippery material, inspecting the altar on every side, stands a tall zora woman. Her skin and scales purple. Her head resembling a koi fish. Her opal earrings glinting in the blue.

Glepp erects her spine. She turns her head towards Link, who slides backwards, her fingers clenched the Master Sword. Her reddish third eyelids close horizontally over her eyes and then open again.

The two of them stare at one another. Glepp does not touch the steel bow strapped to her back. Very deliberately, she raises her webbed hands, stretches out her fingers, and faces the palms towards Link. She wears not the dark navy blue of the Yiga, but a traveller's outfit, sturdy and plain.

"You may slay me if you think it best," says Glepp, very quietly. She does not move. Her vowels roll with the wind over the hills, her consonants the surussus of crinkling leaves: Akkalan. The sound squeezes Link's heart more than she anticipated. Yet she firms her grip on the Master Sword. "There is nothing that I may say as to provide proof of my allegiances, but...I apologise."

Link stares at her.

"...I apologise for having brought harm to your friends. I merely wished to capture you, so that you could not proceed to...continue to work against the Goddesses' cleansing. I thought that I could convince you, that I could keep you safe for the purified world to come. I never intended for my brethren to hurt your friends, or even to hurt you. We only wished for the slate."

Despite herself, Link lets her hand fall limply from the hilt of the Master Sword. Glepp stays still. "But the Yiga have hurt so many people. They attack villages all the time. I, I don't understand. What do you mean that you didn't want to hurt anyone?"
"...there are..." Glepp's features soften. "...there were many of us. Not everyone agreed on how we needed to carry out our mission. But we only sought to attack enough to destabilise, so that the poor people who have been turned against the truth of the Goddesses' will by those things that call themselves the Sages and the Oracles could not be led to raise a force against the cleansing by the Goddesses' Purifier. That would only anger the Goddesses further. I neither defend nor agree with their actions, but I can understand their fears. We wish to save as many as we can." She stops for a moment, then resumes. "We cannot commune with monsters; we cannot speak or lead them. We are only regular people trying to fulfill the Goddesses' will."

"I don't understand," Link signs back. "Do you really...do you really believe that the Calamity is some divine retribution? That the Goddesses are going to slaughter us all for...for sinning or whatever?"

"Yes. Do you not see that it is so?"

"But the Master Sword chose someone." Link nearly slips into gesturing me, but slides out the motion for someone at the last second. "Doesn't that mean that the Goddesses are with us?"

"The sword of which you speak is nothing but a sword with its own powers, and not of the Goddesses," Glepp answers in her level, even tones, sounding like more like a teacher than a woman who attacked Link in the forest and burned down the remains of the village of Ordon. "That the blade chose you does not deter the Goddesses' will."

"I don't even get anything about this sinning stuff. When I was growing up, sinning just meant you'd...missed the mark and had to do better. That's what the word means in Akkalan. You know it, right, since you're talking Akkalan? It's the same word for...for missing an arrow you're trying to hit with a target. I mean missing a target you're trying to hit with an arrow. It's not something that stains you forever, or something we can't do better about." Link hesitates. She rotates her wrists, loosening her hands. "I just...I can't wrap my mind around the Golden Goddesses wanting to hurt any of us."

The weight of the Master Sword upon her back gives her pause: the Dragon Naydra, scales gleaming bluish white, did not know of the Golden Goddesses' will either.

"They only wish to harm so that They can create a better world," Glepp explains, her timbre gentle, "as a loving mother might keep her children from play long enough for them to study hard for their future." Link narrows her eyes at that. Glepp hmms. "You would agree that sometimes, to harm is necessary for the future, I'm sure. You have heard stories of leaders far crueler than those alive in any of the realms today, who were ousted to pave the road for peaceful future. Take, for example, the the ancient King of Parapa, whom the Parapans themselves overthrew, in the legends of the hero of that era." Link nods, very slowly. "If that is the case," Glepp says, her tone firming as if closing in on the completion of a recipe, "surely you see how sometimes sacrifices are necessary."

Link does not have the words to debate. She does not know how to discuss, or how to argue, or how to craft her sentences to a polished shine. But she senses the feeling in her gut. "But...but you can see what's happening with a bad ruler." She winces at the use of a simple word like bad, but these are the words she has. "You can smell when you've got spoiled milk, but you can't somehow know if you keep yourself from drinking milk, a flying sand seal will come in through the window and give you a personal glass of the best milk you've ever had." Link fiddles with one of her sidelocks. "Ehe, I don't know if that made sense. But what I'm trying to say is, we don't know what the Goddesses want, or...or if They're even out there, listening. They made this world for us."

"And can They not change Their minds?"
"But how do you know?"

Glepp shakes her head as if speaking to an ignorant child. "Do you not see the suffering in this world? If you believe the Goddesses kind...if you believe the Goddesses love Their children...if that is so, you must also recognise that our world suffocates beneath the suffering of people."

"Then we can make it better." Link swings her own head from side to side. "I don't have time for this. I want to know: do you go around hurting innocent people?"

"No. Perhaps if I had had the training to stomach such deeds, I would not have let myself be overpowered by you in Ordona." Glepp exhales. Through the fabric of her shirt, Link can see the pulsations where Glepp's gills flutter along her torso. "But I do not believe that harm to the innocent is necessary to fulfill the Goddesses' will. Let them suffer no more than necessary, so that the Goddesses may deliver us once They have cleansed our world."

"In...in the village where I met you, all the way back in Eldin, you were the one who shot down those furnixes," Glepp says nothing. "Why?"

"I told you that I do not agree with the methods of harming the innocent. I knew that one of my brethren intended to bait an attack of monsters—provoking a nest and leading them to Gabora—and I could not stand idly by." Glepp shifts her weight, rolling the balls of her feet. "I understand that you might not believe me."

"I thought you were in the village because your former guard left."

"Yes, the sellsword that Misan recruited did leave—" Glepp clears her throat. "—because I threatened him. I sought to ensure that Misan and I would remain in Gabora." The reddish third eyelid covers her eyes. "I failed in preventing the attack. I did what I could, but..."

"Misan. Right, Misan! What about Misan? You got married to her. Oh, and, congratulations on the wedding and all that. It took me a while to figure it out, but, uh, I'm sorry I almost took your wedding rice to make rice-balls." Glepp ogles her; Link rubs the back of her head. "Anyway! What I was saying? Oh right! Don't you love her? I don't get it."

"It is precisely because I love her that I would do most anything to save her from this world. And if you love your own, you must, too, do the same for their sakes if not for yours. Leave that sword." She extends her arm. "Come. Aid me."

"No!" Link shakes her head even more violently, until her temples throb and her head hurts. "This is our world. I'm not that smart. I don't know anything about the Sacred Realm, or about what happens after we die, or even if the Goddesses are out there. I don't know! What I know is what I'm doing in my cooking pot and what's in my stomach. What I know is the wind over the hills and the smiles on people's faces when they eat something good. I'm not smart. I know that there's problems. But we can fix them. The biggest ones right now are the monsters and the Calamitous One. If we can get over that, then we can fix everything else with our own hands. Like the Parapans you were just talking about. The Goddesses didn't cleanse them or however you said. They just figured out that something's gotta be better and did it." Link rubs her left hand through her ponytail. "Wait. What are you even doing here?"

Glepp responds after a moment tenser than the time Link got her head stuck in the cooking pot: "...it doesn't matter."

"It does to me. And when's the last time you saw Misan? Is she all right? Her hands shake enough for her fingers to stammer out the same gesture twice. "I-is she one of the Yiga too?"
"Misan? No. I was honest to her about who I was and what I believed in when I left. As far as I
know, she is alive and well. She has hired Dyeri full-time." Despite the solemnness of her low and
level timbre, Link can make out a trembling at the half-dampened corners of Glepp's words. "I do
not think that I will have time to see her again, nor would she want me to." She adds the latter
sentence in the haste of a single breath. "Everything I do, I do for this world, and I do for her."

"I don't have time. I don't have time for this. I have three months to—!" Link balls her hands into
fists to shut herself up. "Just...just go. Or stay here. I don't care. If you hurt anyone, it'll be a
different story, but I..." She lets her hands fall. Stepping forward into the chamber, Link fixes her
gaze onto Glepp. "You're not going to try to get the slate from me or something?"

"Even if I did," replies Glepp, a twinge in the cords of her voice, "I am powerless. You and your
armies have destroyed all that which we have spent centuries upon centuries building and
developing, for the very sake of this world. Do you know what the word Yiga means, Link?" Link
shrugs. "It means guardian."

Link ignores her. Almost. She keeps enough attention towards Glepp, just in case Glepp attempts to
steal the Master Sword or the slate, but, more than anything, she trusts the Master Sword to watch
her back. If Glepp tries anything—Link knows, as sure as she is of her next meal being tasty—the
Master Sword will vibrate.

She inspects the chamber. Hopping onto the altar, she flops down as she once did two years, but
nothing happens: she only lies on a hard and not very comfortable dry surface. Link sets the slate
into the face of the pedestal, which closes the door and glows the shrine in blue, but which does
little else except make Glepp jump back, eyes wide. Something rattles to the floor.

As Link fails to activate the altar—if even she could activate the altar—she glances over to see
whatever has fallen to the ground: a vial of monster extract, sloshing violet.

Her stomach rumbles noisily enough that the sound gives even Glepp pause. "Glepp." She does not
respond. Link crosses the chamber and removes the slate from the pedestal; the blue light ebbs
back away. "Why do you have that?"

Glepp tilts her head down towards the vial that has fallen out of her pack. She coughs. "You...made
us the rice-balls with monster extract months ago. I found that I had a taste for them. That is all."

Link feels her mouth curve up in a grin despite herself. "So I ended up showing you something that
you've never eaten before, and you ended up liking it?"

"...yes."

"Even though I'm the scum trying to screw up the Goddesses' plans, right?"

"...it is not my fault, if in the Goddesses' plan, They made our stomachs so much stronger than our
hearts," Glepp admits, her timbre barely above a whisper, and Link bursts out into a harder laughter
than she has laughed in ages.

When she manages to calm herself down, her cheeks reddening and her tears salting her mouth, she
calms her hands long enough to sign. "Glepp, if I bake you a cake, will you go see Misan again? I
know you're doing...Yiga activities or whatever. Still trying to save us all from the Goddesses or
the purification or cleansing or the whatever-it-is you're talking about. But I wanted to bake her
and you a cake anyway. For the wedding. You said yourself that you're powerless, right?"

"Yet I feel an obligation to..."
"Just deliver the cake, and you can go back to your obligations." Link wipes her eyes. "The Goddesses aren't going to smite you down for eating some cake. And if they want the cleansing or purification or whatever to happen, it'll happen. You know that. So... please? Just think of it as thanks for all of the meals I've ever made you. And I don't know Misan well enough to puzzle out where she could be right now. But you do. So, if you do everything for her, then won't you deliver a cake for her, too? You have an ice-box, right?"

Glepp lowers her gaze. "...mh."

"Please?"

"...mmhm. Very well. I will deliver to her your cake." Glepp shuts her third eyelid over her eyes once more. "It is time that I left here, regardless. After all, this place has nothing for me."

"This cake I want to make," Link notes with a wink once Glepp looks at her again, "is an old Hyrulean family recipe." She sets the cooking pot down. "Do you want to help me? I think that Misan would like the cake best if it had your hand in it, too."

"If Misan would like it..." Link nods her head; Glepp sighs. "What would you have me do?"

Link and Glepp emerge from the chamber. Link explains to Sarie the goings-ons. Sarie asks if Glepp is the old friend of whom Link spoke. She rubs the back of her head. "She's not the friend I was thinking about, and I don't think she'd call me a friend, but we're cooking together, so that's something, right?"

Sarie grabs Glepp's finger in their little hands, shaking it up and down. "Sarie's glad to meet Link's cooking-together-not-old-friend!"

Glepp prays to the Golden Goddesses that she has not yet lost her mind entirely. As she and Link proceed through the woods in the hunt for fresh bird's eggs to complete the recipe Link memorised from the cookbook in her satchel, Link tells her briefly about the koroks. Glepp simply nods faintly. Glepp has, in her ice-box—laid with cold-full sapphires for coolness and empty opals for sucking in moisture—butter and milk, while Link has with her cane sugar and flour.

Link stops by the first apple tree from which she ever plucked fruit. The spring apples of Hyrule, much less sweet and much more bitter than those that mature in the autumn. She prefers those of the spring.

They return, arms laden with ingredients, and embark upon the preparation of cake. For the icing, Glepp creams butter with distilled cane sugar and Necludan cow milk; in the meantime, Link slaps the pot into the fire in lieu of a make-shift oven. While the pot heats up, Link heats cane sugar with water to form a thick slurry of syrup.

Glepp lends Link one of her bowls and a spoon in which to blend together rock salt, aerated salt, and flour. "Did you know," says Link, beaming with pride at herself, "that the name of aerated salt has nothing to do with the rito being airy kind of people?"

"...why would it?" asks Glepp, confusion written over the bunching of her brow.

Link smiles sheepishly and returns to preparing the cake. As she dices spring apples, Glepp—following Link's instruction—whisks droplets of vanilla extract and monster extract in a cup of milk. Shaking in the grated apples, Link mixes in bird egg yolks that they gathered alongside butter and the thick sugar syrup. Glepp pours in the blend of aerated salt, flour, and rock salt. Link hands her the bowl; Glepp mixes until the batter runs smooth.
When Link begins to whip egg whites, Glepp suggests that Link add in a little beeswing. Link, who does not know how in the world to sign whatever word Glepp just said, tilts her head.

"Beeswing. Misan and I delivered a shipment of apple wine to—" Glepp smiles upon her own mention of Misan. "—and we received in thanks a bit of beeswing. I am, admittedly, not much of a chef, but our clients told us that it stabilises cream and eggs. I noticed you beating egg whites..."

Link bobs her head in gratitude. After adding the powdery beeswing, she whisks in cane sugar, then blends the sugar-egg-white mix into the batter. When the powder disappears into a single thick batter, she adds just a drop of milk to loosen it, tastes the batter on her fingertip, and gradually drips in extra droplets of monster extract until she can feel that familiar thumping of the heart elicited from the extract of will.

The cookbook cautions against adding too much monster extract; instead, the cookbook suggests masking the monster extract with extra vanilla and sweet apples as much as possible for a the dish more palatable to the aristocracy of Hyrule.

Snorting, Link tosses the cookbook back into the satchel. Why even eat monster extract if not for the very taste of monsters? She and Glepp bake the batter until the cake becomes airy and springy to the touch. They allow the cake to cool, whereupon Link cuts the pot-shaped cake into thin layers; she spreads the butter-cream icing between each layer. The completed cake stacks ten centimetres high. Glepp's webbed hands, once carefully washed, prove even better than Link's cooking knife at smearing and smoothing the icing over the outside of the cake.

Link arranges freshly grated bits of apple in the icing on the top of the cake, writing an attempt at Lanayrish: Kongretulayshuns for the weding! Glepp corrects her spelling—Link rubs the back of her head—and, upon Link's request, adds her and Misan's names below.

And then, at long last: pleasantly purple; temptingly tyrian; vividly violet monster cake. Her mouth waters just looking at it, but she reminds herself: the cake is meant for Misan and Glepp, not for her.

She remembers this very cake eaten during celebrations in the castle. The ringing in of the new year with the spring. Or the girl with the golden hair's birthday. Monster cake. The king's favourite dessert, and traditional to eat in times of crisis, as a symbol to the Golden Goddesses that not even the advent of the worst of monsters can take away the hope of Hyrule. She remembers sitting beside the girl with the golden hair during the banquet of the new year, at a table with the other Champions. She remembers asking the girl with the golden hair: "Do you want me to make you this? I can make it. I can learn. You can crimp it with me. It's your favourite food...?"

She remembers the girl with the golden hair tapping her fingers against her jaw, her cheeks slightly reddened. "Actually, my...my favourite food is...well, I don't really know if I have one."

Link remembers blinking at her. "You don't have a favourite food?" She remembers staring at the girl with the golden hair. She remembers Urbosa trying not to laugh as she and the girl with the golden hair secretly held hands under the table, which Link only noticed upon trying to pick up a fallen spoon; remembers Daruk fixing his reverent gaze onto the Sages performing the spring's rites; remembers Mipha surreptitiously opening her mouth wide to eat—under a kerchief—while the spring's rites distracted everyone around her; remembers Revali bending a fork in his hand until it broke; remembers Impa admonishing Link to eat with utensils and not with her hands.

"Now you know how I feel when you say that you don't know about the Seven!" the girl with the golden hair burst out, noisily enough for several of the nobles and knights at tables around her to turn to glance at her. Impa cleared her throat. The girl with the golden hair apologised and tried to
lower her voice. Urbosa patted her shoulder.

"If you want," signed Link; Impa glared at her for a second before she sighed and gave in, listening to the spring's rites alongside Daruk, "I can help figure out your favourite food later. If you want."

"That," the girl with the golden hair whispered, "would be very nice."

Link helps Glepp wrap up the monster cake in wax. She waves to Glepp as the latter shoulders the pack with the sapphire and opal-laid ice-box, intent on bringing the monster cake to Misan. Glepp does not wave back, yet Link thinks that she can just see the slightest spring to Glepp's step, the slightest relaxation of her shoulders, the slightest buoy of her heart, as though Glepp were herself about to dive into the seas of the Goddess Zola with Misan at her side.

The seas. Water. Link's eyes widen: the altar. Dry. The dry altar. The altar on which she lay was wet. With water. The lake on the Great Plateau where she saw herself for the first time since her awakening. The funny faces that she made into the water. The reflection of her own face. The reflection. The water. The mirrored surface of the lake. Mirror.

She whoops so loudly that Glepp turns back towards her, brow ridge arched. Grabbing her satchel, Link sprints past Glepp towards the lake on the other side of the wood. When she nears the shores, she tries to skid to a halt, but her momentum launches her into the water. A Hyrule bass slaps her across the face. She twists her head up from the lake and wheezes out the water she has swallowed. Water. Water.

Link returns with water-skins and elixir vials filled to the brim. As she passes by Sarie and Ilia again, Link tells Sarie to seek shelter for the night; she does not know how long she will be gone, but when she does, she may return with the old friend after all.

Sarie bobs their body. "Sarie will take the bestest and most goodest of care of Ilie-ilie-ilia! Sarie promises. And when Linky-link comes back, Sarie wants to meet Link's friend!"

"I hope you will," Link answers.

She descends back down into the chamber. Link grabs the bottles from her satchel to pour water onto the altar of the Shrine of Resurrection. The liquid spreads out over the surface, the slightly scooped shape of the altar just slanted enough to hold a thin layer of water. She pours in another bottle, then another, then another, until she realises that the water drains from the altar. Touching her chin, Link moves towards the pedestal and places the slate within the depression in its face.

The door closes. The blue glow returns. And, there, in the reflection of the water upon the altar, Link observes the symbols of the Golden Goddesses shimmering just beneath the surface, undulating patterns of green and blue and red. In the centre: the triple-triangle mark of the royal family of Hyrule, in its warm and welcoming glimmer of iridescent gold.

She pauses. She drains one vial of spring green elixir and licks her lips of its taste. If she will see again the girl with the golden hair, then Link wants to look her best. She unties and re-ties her ponytail. Tugging down her sidelocks, she smoothes out the slightly curled ends. She brushes out the bangs that have become stuck behind her ears. With steady motions of her roughened hands, she adjusts her tunic, the abdomen and back still ripped from the bokoblin's spear. She breathes.

She sets her belongings next to the altar. She touches her cooking pot.

Good pot. Best friend.
She takes the Master Sword with her, tucking it into her tunic. Then Link flattens her palms against the sides of the altar. She hoists herself up—a little too short to simply lift her leg over the altar—and settles herself down into the water that sloshes out over the edges. Inhaling, Link leans back. She rests her head upon the smooth firmness of the altar.

A curtain of blue light descends upon the altar. Link looks up. She can see no lights of the Golden Goddesses from above, only the dark mirror of the altar over her head.

Water. Wetness. Droplets drip down from the mirror above. This water does not drain down, as though held within the altar by the curtain of blue light. The water plinks down on her. Slowly, the liquid rises up her sides, up to the halfway point along her ribs, over her chest, over her mouth and nose.

She cannot breathe. Nevertheless she forces herself to stay absolutely still. The blue glow around her dims. She cannot breathe. Her eyelids flutter. She cannot breathe. Like a hand formed of water, curling its fingers around her throat, choking her, choking her, until she can no longer feel the boundaries of her body, until her very essence flows through the cracks between her fingers no matter how desperately she tries to keep herself in her hands, the hands with which she has made the whole of her life.

And then, all at once, the darkness gives way to gold.

—

*Monster Cake* (one-quarter heart) - apple, cane sugar, goat butter, monster extract, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: I started writing this chapter at 11:57 on the sixteenth of August, and finished writing it 18:02 on the sixteenth of August.

Thanks a million for having read with me all this day. It's been an honour to take this journey with you step by step, and I hope that you have enjoyed reading it as much as I have enjoyed writing. Yes, you, reading this right now, even if you haven't left a single comment or anything like that! As long as you're enjoying yourself, I'm happy. And thank you to my most beloved beta reader, Emma, for everything that she has done for me.

You can indeed attach octorok balloons to metal things like doors. It's how I glitched my horse into the Gerudo Desert in *Breath of the Wild*. "Shakalah! We're off!" is a reference to *The Faces of Evil*.

Hroks do indeed defecate as part of their attacks in *Skyward Sword*.

Going back to the Great Plateau at the end of the game and realising how the monsters that made you terrified at first now seem so woefully pitiful is truly an experience.

Why leave a skewer of meat, fish, and spicy peppers? Because that's the recipe that the king gives you in his journal in the cabin in-game!
We last saw Glepp in the fifty-ninth chapter. S'been a while. But I hope you didn't think I forgot about this plot arc. Haha! No, well, I've forgotten plenty of things before. Hopefully not much though.

The ancient Parapan king is none other than that of *Ocarina of Time*. Nabooru was intending to work against the leader of the Gerudo, after all, before Koume and Kotake imprisoned her for seven years, a fate much worse than anything the other sages in *Ocarina of Time* had to go through. Certainly makes me think!

If you recall, Link first learned about the aerated salt thing from Amali, all those chapters back in Medli!

Beeswing, or potassium bitartrate, is a real ingredient that does indeed stabilise things like whipped cream or egg whites. It's also something that Link hasn't heard of before, and not something that I used often myself. I only remembered its existence while writing this chapter, since I used a particular sort of cake recipe for it and have not baked a cake myself in goodness knows how long. Cake baking just isn't what I like. I'm not a fan of sweets.

Link knows how to read Lanayrish, but she's not too good at writing it, so she essentially wrote it phonetically. Thus, I included the misspelling. However, Lanayrish is not English, and Lanayrish is not written in the Latinate alphabet; rather, I have just used the misspelling as a 'translation' of the error that Link would have made. Don't get confused!

We'll talk about Zelda's favourite food in the future. Indeed, you'll see it in the eighty-third chapter. But anyone who has played *Breath of the Wild* can hazard a guess. There's two recipes that you can find for the royal cookbook quest, after all. One of them is monster cake, which I've noted as Rhoam's favourite. And the other of the two recipes is...

The mark of the royal family is none other than the mark of the Triforce. Nothing to do with the royal family except that they adopted it, since people don't know about the Triforce. They know about the Golden Force, but not anything about what it looks like.

Water does indeed reflect things. And water's been used time enough as a portal to another world, such as in during *The Wind Waker*, that I feel pretty justified.

By the way, I wanted to say that I've gotten some very, very, very nice comments from all of you, and I really do appreciate all of you so much. Thank you for every kind word. It means a lot to me that *Delicious in Wilds* has reached so much many of you, and I hope that we can continue to the end. So, deeply and sincerely, thank you from the bottom of my heart for being the best readers that I could ever hope for. And thank you, deeply and sincerely, from the bottom of my heart, for all of your honesty, your kindness, and your respect.

Up next: Mudora's poem; a promise fulfilled; a 99% certainty that I will thank you for reading.


Beta reader's comments: We finally get to confront Glepp! In a really cool setting, too. Coming back to where it all started is sweet.
Aerated salt, as it happens, is not called that because of the rito. Sorry, Link. I thought it was a good observation.

The ending of this chapter is so damn cool. It made me want to cheer or something when I realized what was going on.

Glazed Veggies

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef returns to the Sacred Realm and speaks with the spirit of the Master Sword about what happened one hundred years ago and about why the Master Sword chose the chef.

Chapter Notes

Author's notes that didn't fit in the end: I technically started writing this chapter at 02:46 on the eighth of August, but I seriously started writing this chapter at 18:41 on the sixteenth of August, and finished writing it at 04:29 on the seventeenth of August.

Thanks a million for all of your kinds comments and reviews! I've gotten some very kind words recently, and I just have to thank all of you for not only opening yourselves up to allow investment into these characters and this world, but in particular for treating Delicious in Wilds with respect. It means a lot to me, so thank you. And thank you for coming along with Link on her voyage.

The opening to this chapter is probably familiar to all of you, although you might not remember it. Just take a look at the first chapter of Delicious in Wilds if you don't.

I briefly spoke the other day about wanting to make the Sacred Realm an otherworldly experience. I should note, to any readers: if you have had experiences similar to Link in the Sacred Realm (with respect to the 'expansion of awareness', or the 'feeling that your consciousness has left the boundaries of your body'), you're not weird, or inhuman, or any of those things. That's a maladaptive coping mechanism (probably some form of dissociation or depersonalisation), and I mean this sincerely when I say that you should seek help, both from yourself and from others if you're in such a position. Please take care of yourself.

At any rate, that isn't what I meant about the otherworldly. That's part of it, sure, but it's also about the fact that everyone can feel everyone else's pain and sensations to varying degrees.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Floating in warmth, she waits.

A faint sound resonates somewhere under her. A body. Her body. Something soft yet firm beneath her, supporting her head, her upper back, her rear. A breath of chill whispers over the top of her chest and radiates down her form. Her heart beats.

She lives.

The darkness brightens steadily, and then gives way to light; her eyelids flutter up of their own
accord. A blur of blue and white above. She flexes her fingers, wriggles her toes, pushes against the now-hard material underneath her to sit up.

The sudden ache in her head closes her eyes for a moment as she adjusts. The blueness throbs behind her lids. Her palm splashes liquid. She registers the water receding. The air feels cool and dry. She breathes in and the somewhat stale scent causes her to cough.

The pain subsides as the last of the water drains. She opens her eyes. Her vision focuses.

A familiar ceiling.


Lifting her head slightly, Link glances down. The corners of—everything—seem to very softly shimmer, as though on the verge of subliming into vapour, including her own body. Though she can feel her back pressed against the firmness of the slippery material, and though she can feel her fingers flexing against the altar, and though she can feel the air against her own body, she cannot feel where she ends and the rest of the world begins, almost as if her consciousness were taking up the entirety of the chamber, her body just one part of her form, as the tongue is just one part of the body. She can feel, simultaneously, the walls of the chamber, and she can feel barren land beyond, and she can feel the touch of other people—other bodies, other essences—faintly against her.

Her awareness ripples outwards until she can sense the wholeness of the world at once, the edges blurrier and ebbing into darkness, the area immediately surrounding her core vibrant and bright. More than anything, Link feels a presence within her. No. No. She draws her essence down within the boundaries of her body, even as her consciousness leaks out again between her fingers. A presence not within her, but beside her.

She looks down at herself. Her belongings: vanished. Her clothing: vanished. The Master Sword: vanished. She has only herself and her own body, for as much as she can keep that body in one piece. And next to the altar: that presence. The form of a young girl.

The form of a young girl in fire-light blue, in malice violet, in sacred gold. The form of a young girl whose face seems forged from the steel of the stars, the brow heavy, the eyes blank and smooth as if closed, the lips set into an even line. Her hair crests into three points that remind Link of the triple-triangle symbol of the royal family of Hyrule.

The cloak over her left shoulder—Link's right—bears three folds as it cascades down in blue. The cloak over her right bears three as it cascades down in violet. The two halves meet in the middle around a great golden jewel set into her chest, reminding Link of an identical jewel set into the pommel of the Master Sword. Two rivulets of gold run down from her collarbones beneath the cloak to her hips. Her legs appear hewn of a dark violet metal criss-crossed with a moss-green blue in the same pattern as the grip of the Master Sword.

She moves as if made of living watercolour, like the paintings that Cremia showed to Link, each face a single stroke of colour. She speaks with a voice Link has heard before, that speaks from everywhere and nowhere at once, cool and warm at the same time, melodious even in its prose.

"Hello."

"...you..." Link signs, her eyes widened. "...you're the Master Sword."

"And you," sings the Master Sword, "are the Master Link."
"...just Link is fine."

"Just Fi is fine," the Master Sword hums in the same tone as Link's own words. The Master Sword—Fi—motions with her leg as she speaks her own name, a gesture like skating upon ice; Link emulates the motion with her hand. Fi, she notices, hovers over rather than walks upon the floor. She glides closer to Link, until—if Fi could breathe—Link would surely have felt her breaths.

"Master...Link, it has been a very long time. I must apologise."

Link stares at her.

"When you step from this chamber to seek Her Grace of blesséd blood, you will have precious little time. Here, now, within the shrine, the one you call the Calamitous One cannot sense you. Once you leave, you will no longer have the dampened protection, and I calculate a 95% certainty that he shall sense you. Do you understand, Link?" She nods. Fi seems to take a moment to process before she continues in her melodious voice, everywhere and yet nowhere at once. "...this Sacred Realm is not like your own world. That which you will yourself to be, will be. If you will yourself into clothing, I predict a 97% chance that such will appear. Do you understand, Link?"

Her cheeks heating up, Link closes her eyes and pictures herself in some sort of clothing. A blue tunic and off-white trousers leading to a pair of simple brown boots, accompanied by a deep blue cloak to cover her head and gloves over her hands. On second thought, she also adds undergarments.

She raises her eyelids and peeks down at herself. On her shirt: a headless lobster. No, not a headless lobster, but Master Sword upon her tunic. On her arms: the armbands marked with the red Parapan pattern that Urbosa gave her. On her body: that which she wore before the Great Calamity, smudged at the corners and vague from her memories, but that which she has willed herself into wearing nonetheless.

Link sits up more fully. When she tries to slide off of the altar, she discovers that her limbs do not quite function as she expected. She wills her flesh into proper legs; somehow her limbs firm, and she can stand on her boots.

"I shall guide you to Her Grace whom you seek," Fi sings, "when you are adequately prepared for the dangers. You will have little time. I estimate less than a 5% chance that she will be able to break her concentration to speak more than six hundred seconds." Link counts the minutes on her fingers. "I therefore highly recommend that you prepare that which you wish to say to Her Grace prior to departing. Do you understand, Link?" She vaguely bobs her head, already wibble-wobbling towards the entrance.

"In addition to that which I have already advised you, before you seek her Grace," Fi continues, her voice softening from a major to a minor; Link pats herself on the back for having learned those terms from Kass, "I must apologise."

Link skids to a halt. She swivels around. "Apologise? I...I know that I don't have all of my memories, but I don't think that you've ever done anything wrong. In fact, actually, I..." She attempts a smile but her expression comes out vacant. Then she hesitates, runs her fingers through her sidelocks, and gives Fi something halfway to a crooked grin. "...have a lot to apologise to you for, I think."

"So, uh, sorry for...using you to cook and for passing you between me and Sidon and all that stuff. I know you're the sacred sword that seals the darkness and the blessed bane of evil's bane and all that and I shouldn't be treating you like—" Link moves her hands in vague circular motions as she tries to hone in on something to say. She hangs her head. "So this is what you meant when you said..."
"I recommend for you to utilise what precious time you have to its fullest extent." Even in the silences when Fi does not sing out her words, Link can hear her hum a melody, as if her very form were constantly vibrating in resonance with the air. "Now, from everything of which you spoke, there is nothing for which you must apologise.

"However, as I estimate a 0.63 correlation between my words and your present mood, I will proceed to say that I forgive you.

"Ahem. I forgive you. Do you understand, Link?"

Link nods slowly. Fi's style of speech makes her head spin; still she endeavours to keep up. At the very least, Fi stops after every sentence—allowing Link to process her words before continuing—as well as asking frequently whether Link follows, as if Fi were waiting for some external flick of the finger to indicate that she may continue.

She inhales. Raising her arms, she splays her fingers. "I'm...I'm sorry for running away, most of all," Link signs. Her fingers tremble, even though she cannot feel her heart in her chest at all. "I'm...I'm so sorry. I don't have the words to...to really apologise but. I'm really sorry. I'm really really really sorry. I'm so sorry that I could cry out a whole salt soup in front of you right now. Not because I disappointed you. I mean. I'm sorry about that too. But if I hadn't run away, then all those people wouldn't have...they wouldn't..." She motions. "If I hadn't run away, then there wouldn't have been all these monsters in these last hundred years. If I hadn't run away, then, I...I don't know. I don't know! I could've done something. I could've done anything. But I didn't. I didn't do anything. I'm sorry.

"It's not...guilt. The guilt isn't useful for anything, not for me or you or the people I let down. It's not guilt. It's just. Acceptance that I need to do better. And I will. I'm not going to run away again." Link clenches her hands into fists. When her nails dig into her palms, pain—somehow the exact intensity that she expected—quivers down her veins like lightning boomeranging around her elbow and sparking into her chest. "I'm not going to run away. Even if I have to die. No more running. No more—"

"I apologise for the interruption," Fi cuts in, the melody of her timbre stilling Link's hands. "However, as servant to Hyrule, I believe that the information contained within my data banks will prove useful to your analyses of your actions.

"While you may call what occurred one hundred and two years, two months, nineteen days, eight hours, and six minutes in the past from this moment running away—" Link attempts and fails to follow the grammatical structure of the sentence. "—you did not, by the colloquial definition of the term currently recorded in my data banks which I estimate with 77% certainty you are employing, run away.

"Rather, the fault is mine. Thus, in the custom of your people, I apologise. Do you understand, Link?"

Link ogles her. "What?" she manages to sign after she remembers how to move her arms.

Fi merely hums for several moments while Link continues to stare at her, as though Fi had told Link she had never eaten anything in her thousands upon thousands years of life. "I have determined from the tone of your gestures and expression that you do not understand, but that this understanding will not arise from repeating what I have said. Therefore, I shall provide more information. Is this acceptable?
"In the—" Fi names a very, very long and very, very precise number that Link cannot wrap her mind around. "—since I chose the wielder to assist in the sealing of the one you call the Calamitous One, I have only attained access to the energies of the Sacred Realm for one hundred and two years, two months, nineteen days, eight hours, and ten minutes, while I was put to rest in a different pedestal than the access route in what you call the Kokir Forest. Due to the necessary utilisation of my energy over the course of those—" She names the very large number again. Many, many years, is all that Link can understand of her words. "—I had steadily drained my energy stores. As I may only manifest in this humanoid manner within the Sacred Realm or when automatically performing translation, I was unable to inform, 'Master, the energy stores in your Master Sword are nearly depleted.'"

"Therefore, I had no choice but to reserve my energy stores whenever I could. For this purpose, although I introduced myself to you when you first drew me within what you call the Hyrule Castle, as well as when your determined need for self-defence brought forth a flash from me—" Link's hand flies to her chin: Ordon. When she confronted the people of that house. The blue light she remembers. "—I did not reveal to you the fullness of my power out of fear that I would deplete my energy stores entirely and be unable to assist in the moment when you would need me most. Do you understand?"

"I thought I remembered...glowing...blue glowing. Soft blue glowing. " Link pauses. She strokes her palm along her jaw. "But the glowing was always so soft that I thought it was more like, like light reflecting from the blade, or something like that? Not the bright blue glow that." She speaks steadily, contemplating, reflecting on her own words. "That I've seen you do during battle and stuff. Now that I think about it." Link rubs the back of her head. "I mean, that's why I wasn't worried when you stopped glowing after I left the woods. Because that was pretty normal, right?"

"Yes. There is a 98% chance that you comprehend. Ultimately, when the one you call the Calamitous One broke the seal between the two realms, I discovered that I was unable to seal the one you call the Calamitous One, or even to be effective in battle. As a being of will, I require the energy of the Sacred Realm to nourish myself as you, a being of heart, require the air and soil of your world. Do you understand?"

Link inclines her head: not entirely, but enough. Fi appears satisfied. She continues forward: "When you wielded me against the one that you call the Calamitous One, I was unable to muster the energy required to have any effect whatsoever. Therefore, I sought to return myself to the access point where I could replete my energy stores.

"Unable to assist you in any meaningful manner, I informed you and Her Grace about what you call the Shrine of Resurrection. I ran what few simulations I could in the brief period of time allowed to me. My analysis of the simulations revealed that, with 67% certainty, those who remained within the Sacred Realm would perish at least once within the hundred years that I estimated Her Grace and Her Grace's armies would be able to distract the Calamitous One. Thus, because those who perish within the Sacred Realm have only a 0.1-to-0.3% chance of knowing their anatomy sufficiently to still retain a form capable of maintenance in your world, I recommended that you not stay within the Sacred Realm during this period of time. In this manner, you would ensure that you would sustain your ability to bear the burden of the Master Sword. Do you understand?"

Link scratches her cheek but nods anyway. "Therefore, considering all of the simulations and data, I concluded that the best course of action would involve myself repleting my energy stores as much as I could while you were kept safe and healed of the damage done by contact with concentrated power of will until such a time that the Calamitous One was no longer sufficiently distracted. At that point, you would emerge from that which you call the Shrine of Resurrection,
unite with me in what you call the Kokir Forest, and, together, we would seal the Calamitous One for approximately one hundred years, or however long was permitted by the energies of the Sacred Realm I could harness.

"However, neither Her Grace nor I anticipated that you would lose your memories. In all of the admittedly few simulations I ran, the amnesia never became a possibility. As a result of the amnesia, the initial algorithm was unable to proceed to completion, and I was forced to once more choose a bearer of the burden that would fit my criteria.

"I am not certain what caused the amnesia, though I have several hypotheses, ranging from injuries sustained while the contact with the concentrated power of will healed, to interference from the one you call the Calamitous One, to a self-repression of the memories due to inappropriate guilt over your belief that your actions were causal to our collective inability to seal the one you call the Calamitous One during our first attempt." Fi pauses as Link recoils back. "I do not consider the latter hypothesis more than 4% probable. Do you understand?"

Link dips her head. Fi falls silent save for that low undercurrent of resonance. Gripping her chin with her hand firmly as she would grip the rim of her cooking pot, Link tries not only to understand but also to internalise that which Fi has said.

"So...I didn't run away...wait. I didn't run away? I didn't run away. This was all planned. We figured out that we couldn't hurt the Calamitous One, so, so...so the Princess decided to stay and fight, and you decided to return to the whatever-it-is to get back your energy, and I decided that I'd be asleep for a hundred years or until the Calamitous One did its thing, and then I'd pop out and come get you." Link looks at Fi, her shoulders shaking, her limbs threatening to noodle away from her. "Right? Right!?"

Fi inclines her head. "There is a 97% chance that you perfectly comprehend my meaning."

"Wait but...but what about the thing that the court poet wrote? Kass's mentor's father? What was his name...Mudora? The thing that Lady Impa was talking about?" Link rubs the back of her head. "I don't really understand."

"I do not know what the one you call the court poet wrote, nor what the one you call Lady Impa said. I do not know where lay the mistranslation, whether in the words of Her Grace to the poet, or the poet to their writing, or their writing to the one who you call Lady Impa's interpretation. I can say with 99% confidence that the events I have described to you are the closest to the objective occurrences at the time of all of the accounts to which you have been exposed."

Link leaps back a full two paces. Her legs shake. She almost slips on the floor, but then she solidifies her grasp on this world. She steps, then walks, then races around the chamber, whacking her waist into the altar and groaning as she limps away from the altar, then races around the chamber again. She hears herself into the laughter of a joy as deep as that which she feels when Ilia browses through her hair while she steams for her companion a pumpkin.

She didn't run away. She didn't run away.

That does not bring back all those who have died, and that does not lessen the pain that all those who have suffered and who continue to suffer have borne, and that does not mean that she can lessen her conviction about what she do. No. None of that. Instead, more than ever, this epiphany means that she can do it. If she had run away, she has promised to do better this time. And now she knows, beyond her own promises, that she can. That she does have the ability. That she has trained with the Champions, and she has honed her skills over these past two years, and she has, if not the wisdom or the power, then at least the courage to face the Calamitous One. She, and the people of
the land once known as Hyrule.

When she finally manages to calm herself down, her hands on her knees, her chest heaving despite her not needing to breathe in the Sacred Realm, Link raises her head and finds Fi gazing levelly at her. Link signs out an apology. Before Fi can respond, Link continues: "Wait, but...then why didn't you let me draw you the first time? You know, when I came to the lost woods last autumn. That would've been months earlier."

"I have criteria which I utilise to determine who may carry my burden," Fi explains simply. "When you attempted to draw me during what you refer to as the first time, you did not match the criteria. More recently, you did match the criteria. Do you understand?"

Resting her hand against her chin and tapping her boot pensively against the floor, Link lifts her hands to inquire of something else, but Fi proceeds forward with her song: "I have another datum to present to you, which I shall also present to Her Grace upon our conversation together."

Link motions for her to continue. She does not know what means datum, or if that word has something to do with data.

"Although I have successfully repleted some of my energy stores during the one hundred and two years, two months, nineteen days, eight hours, and nineteen minutes, I have run successive calculations, and I do not believe that I have acquired sufficient energy to seal the one you call the Calamitous One myself.

"During the original sealing—" Again, that ridiculously large number. "—the energy contained within me was not sufficient for me to create a long-lasting seal by myself. In the past, I have estimated from data collected over—" An even larger number. Link woozes back and forth. She has never imagined the entirety of the earth to have such an age. "—that my own seals tend to last little longer than approximately one hundred years, with a 0.68 certainty of expiring within one standard deviation of a year around one hundred exactly. During the original sealing, therefore, I relied upon the will contained within the life energy of the many who gave their lives in order to extend the seal. I channelled this life energy into a seal that I estimated would hold for approximately ten thousand years, with a standard deviation of one hundred. Do you understand?"

"Not really. Kind of? I think I get the important bit."

"My analyses of the simulations which I ran appeared to indicate that I would have sufficient power after the hundred years of repletion. However, I did not account for interference by the one you call the Calamitous One, as I have not been able to collect data about him for these ten thousand years which I spent not connected to the Sacred Realm.

"As a result, I had to estimate his impact in my simulation. I admit that I gravely underestimated the corruption of the Sacred Realm. In short, I have been unable to accumulate sufficient energy to see the one you call the Calamitous One according to the original algorithm upon which you, Her Grace, and I decided. Therefore, I recommend that we seek alternative options for sealing. My analysis of my own simulations indicates that I have sufficient energy to seal the Calamitous One temporarily, at least for ten years. During that time interval, we may seek an alternate solution. However, I do not recommend that we concern ourselves with such alternate solutions immediately, as the temporary sealing will provide us with relief from the inappropriate existence of certain beings of will within your world. Do you understand?"

Link tilts her head to the side. "So just don't worry about it for now?"

"That is correct." Fi pauses; Link nods sagely. She is very good at not thinking about things. The
master of the sport. She can not think about things all day long. "Do you have any additional questions before we depart?"

Link shakes her head. She starts to make her way to the door but stops when she realises that Fi does not follow. Turning back, Link blinks at Fi, who—despite a face hewn of immutable metal—appears to have a certain determination in the set of her features.

"...Link. Before you go, I should like you to perform something for me which I believe that you may do with 80% certainty."

"Anything," Link answers.

"Many of those whom I have faithfully served over the ages and eons have imparted upon me some aspect of themselves. I have learned much since I took on a corporeal form: of happiness, of courage, of trust, of loss, of letting go, of acceptance. You, who seek to fulfill your promises, have spoken to me a similar promise."

Link tilts her head. Fi pauses. For just a second Link swears she can make out something of an amused twinkle in her otherwise blank eyes, but she blinks and misses.

"The data recorded in my visuospatial sketchpad indicate that you wished to prepare for me something that you referred to glazed veggies. I do not have information about such an object in my data banks. Therefore, prior to departure, I request that you prepare for me this meal."

Link stares at her. Then her mouth widens into a grin, and her eyes embiggen to the dinner plates on which she will make Fi dinner, and she reaches out to grip Fi by the shoulders. Fi glides away from her; Link stumbles forward, scarcely catching herself from tripping.

She erupts into excited signing: "And here, I was afraid that you wouldn't have a heart, much less a stomach! Oh, but the Goddesses wouldn't have created something without a stomach. Even the monsters—at least, most of them; I don't know if pebblits and tali have stomachs but I don't see why not!—eat and all that! So I'm really, really glad you get to eat. And that I get to cook for you. And that—"

"I apologise. However, you may not touch me or come in contact with me while I am in this form."

Lowering her hands, Link cocks her head at Fi.

She elaborates: "As a being of concentrated power of will, contact between with a being of blood such as yourself leads to mutual destruction. All beings have within them some parcel of will and some parcel of blood, but there are those, such as the one you call the Calamitous One and his essence which you call the malice—as well as myself—who are composed of a much higher percentage of concentrated will. Therefore, I highly recommend that you do not come into direct contact with me. If necessary, I will return to my corporeal form. However, I calculate that my more native manifestation will prove at least 22% more useful whilst we remain here, so that I may speak freely to you. Do you understand?"

Link cocks her head still further until her neck starts to ache; she moves her head to cock it the other way instead. "What...what about the stuff that the slate's made out of? The malice doesn't eat through that."

"No. That which you call 'the stuff that the slate's made out of' was composed of both material from your people's realm as well as the energy of the Sacred Realm, which grants the resultant alloy sufficient resistance to damage from both sources of your world and of the Sacred Realm. Do you understand?"
"It's not just my world. It's your world too," Link stubbornly signs back, "especially since you've helped to save it countless times, haven't you?"

"It is the world which I call home, but, as a being of will more concentrated than those you call the dragons or those you call the monsters, it can never be my world."

Link frowns. She has to stop herself from reaching out a hand towards Fi, which she instead slides into a gesture: "I don't know what these others heroes have taught you, but it's your world just as much as it is ours. That's my promise. And I'm going to make you the food right now to prove it! All right?"

Fi bows her head. Link reaches for the cooking pot affixed to her back, intent on slamming it down onto the floor, only to realise that she has no cooking pot. Squeezing shut her eyes, Link holds out her hands in front of her and concentrates as if having trouble with constipation. She grunts.

Something round and heavy weighs down her palms so suddenly that she jumps back. She cracks open one eye. A cooking pot. A cooking pot in her hands.

Link dances excitedly while Fi merely looks upon her, twirling the cooking pot in her arms. As she turns the cooking pot over, Link runs her fingers over the scars that the cooking pot has borne, the scars that she has imagined to the best of her memories. The cooking pot feels smooth, too smooth: she would rather have her real cooking pot, flaws and all, but this will have to do for now. Closing her eyes again, Link conjures up all the ingredients that she needs for the dish she promised to Fi. Acorns, and rock salt, and goat butter, and silent princesses, and, of course, honey.

Honey. As gold as the will of the Golden Goddesses. As gold as the sky of the Sacred Realm. Link manifests a campfire, which goes out immediately. With a glare of her gaze, she sets the willed-to-existence pile of wood alight again. She grins as the flames spring up—and then go out again.

"If I may speak," Fi remarks levelly, "I should note that the concentration of oxygen required for combustion in the Sacred Realm is close enough to zero so as to be negligible. I estimate a 2% chance that you wish for me to provide a detailed break-down of the exact concentrations. Do you understand?" Link tilts her head, furrowing her brow. "I highly recommend willing a fire that does not require oxygen to combust. Do you understand?"

"What's that word?"

"I highly recommend willing a fire that does not require air to burn."

Link snaps her fingers in appreciation. She summons such a fire, and then she gets to cooking. After preparing their leaves and stems of the silent princesses properly and leaving the bittersweetness of their petalled heads, she smears them in butter and salt. She steams the silent princesses covered in butter in the cooking pot. Cutting the acorns in half, she salts and sautées the acorns nuts. She wipes the softened silent princesses and the finished acorns onto a plate, arranging them into a very vague approximation of the Master Sword, with a whole acorn as the jewel in the pommel and silent princess petals for the wings on either side of the hilt. Link drizzles honey over the silent princesses and acorns in a rough approximation of the patterns of the Master Sword's. Although the criss-cross normally does not extend to the blade, she must extend the patterns in order to glaze the entirety of the bundle of silent princesses.

Licking the excess honey from her fingers, Link spins around—willing the plate not to fly from her fingers and land in Fi's hair or on any other part of her body—and drops down to one knee, propositioning Fi with the dish of honey-glazed flowers.
She waggles her eyebrows at Fi, like Urbosa would have. Link glances down at the plate, then up at Fi, who hovers forward.

It occurs to Link that Fi might not have the ability to eat that which she has prepared: when she touches the silent princesses, they could burn up away, as though Link had plunged them into malice. Isn't that what Fi said, about the concentrated power of will.

However, as Fi lowers her head to the plate, Link sees that neither the plate nor the silent princesses disappear, at least not from what Link can tell. Fi delicately plants her entire face onto the plate. Link moves her head from side to side, attempting to find an angle from which she can see the goings-on, but Fi has covered the dish with her head. After a few moments, Fi lifts herself back up, her face still frozen into its previous expression, the glazed silent princesses vanished from the plate.

Link blinks. Her gaze darts between the plate and Fi, between Fi and the plate, between the cooking pot and Fi, between Fi and the cooking pot—alongside the campfire—which has spontaneously vanished.

"...thank you. The information has been processed for my data bank. I do not believe that I have the capacity to fully understand the spirit of your people, yet I am currently experiencing that which I hypothesise mostly strongly correlates to the emotion that your people call...hm." Fi stops. For a moment, Link fears that Fi has broken. Then Fi resumes her song: "I do not have a word for it. This is a very infrequent and rare phenomenon. What do your people call the emotion that comes after consumption?"

"What'd you think of it? Was it good? Was it delicious?" Link leans in.

Fi pauses. "I do not have sufficient data in my banks in order to determine the appropriate rating for meals made for consumption." Link limps down to the ground in her crestfallen sadness. "With that said, the glazed veggies that you have prepared for me have brought me great satisfaction, satiety, and happiness. What would your people call that?"

Springing back up to her boots, Link jumps up and down. As she bounds, she tries to sign at Fi at the same time. "That means that you thought it was delicious and that's so good I'm so glad that you liked it I'm so glad I'm so glad that makes me so happy I promised that I'd make you a meal and I have and you thought it was delicious and I don't really know what emotion I'd call it except it's that sort of warm calmness that you get when your belly's all full and you kind of just want to take a nap and maybe hold your friend's hand and listen to the breeze and Fi even if I can't hold you like this I promise that I'll hug you when we're back in our world—not my world but our world both of us together—since that form isn't going to hurt me or anything like can you feel hugs like that actually?"

"Yes," sings Fi. Link grins broadly enough that she pictures her teeth glinting as brightly as Sidon's.

"Then I'll hug you like that all the time. Our world. Not just mine. And and and as for the emotion. There's lots and lots of feelings that we don't really have a name for, because...well, people don't really have names for everything.

"It's like the stars. I don't know the names of all the stars, but that doesn't mean that I can't look up at them and appreciate their light or think about the stories. Maybe I'd call that feeling warmth, or something. That's what I feel the most. No, no. Wholeness. I'd call it wholeness. It's like the taste of honey, how honey tastes full and whole, but it's like a wholeness of your whole body. Like...wholeness." Link rubs the back of her head. "I'm not making much sense, am I?"
Fi hums melodiously. "Your people do not operate on logic, but rather more so on emotion. Thank you for the data. I will attempt to process it at a later date. I will, after all, have a very, very long time to process it, utilising 'very, very long' in the sense with which your people would consider it due to our differing time scales." She leans back with a certain measure of almost pride that she has deduced something about people that Link wonders just how much Fi herself operates on logic, and how much on emotion. "Now, have you prepared what you plan to say to Her Grace?"

Link touches her chin. She has so many things that she would want to say that she does not know where to begin. She wants to tell the girl with the golden hair everything that has happened, wants to speak of all the memories that she has remembered, wants to reassure her that she will not fail. After all, Link knows, now, that she did not run away the first time. She knows, now, that she did not fail by her own skill or choice.

But this time, more than ever, with all of the stars aligned, the nameless and the uncountable, she will either bring peace to Hyrule, or she will give her life. And she cannot give her life, because she has not yet eaten all of the meals of the land once known as Hyrule. The land once known and perhaps which one day against shall be known as Hyrule.

And she has one question that she needs to ask. About the mirror. About the mirror in the sanctum. About an alternate path into the Sacred Realm.

Link lifts her chin towards Fi. She nods decisively. Fi skates towards the door, but then Link taps her boot against the floor to gain Fi's attention. Fi turns her gaze onto Link.

"Wait, before we go, I...I have a request, too." Even though Link can sense that she does not need to breathe in the Sacred Realm, she does so anyway. The air feels thicker than the air she's used to. Not quite air, but some sort of fluid, thinner than water but more viscous than anything she's used to back home. "Fi...why did you choose me? And then after I ran away, you didn't pick me, but you didn't pick anyone else, either. You said something about me not fitting a criteria, and then fitting it again..."

"I hypothesise with 98% certainty that you meant a criterion."

"Hey, only Amali gets to correct my grammar like that! And Malon too. And everyone else who wants." She puffs out a breath of laughter. Fi does not respond; Link coughs. "But my point was...I don't get it. I'm just some girl who likes to cook. And you picked me over all the nobles and knights in Hyrule. I just...I don't really get it. Not that I'm questioning your decision!" She winces. "Maybe a little questioning your decision. I just...want to know.

"Am I...am I really some destined hero?" Link gestures at herself, resting her hands on her chest. "Born with the soul of the hero and all that?"

For a moment, Fi does not reply. Rather Fi resonates a wordless melody that puts Link strangely at ease.

"With 68% certainty, I believe that you wish or expect me to say something akin to that I selected you for your courage, your wisdom, and your power, and-or that I chose you for the potential that I could sense within you. With 42% certainty, I estimate that you wish or expect to say that you alone were meant to wield the sacred sword."

Link leans forward despite herself. Fi falls silent for another moment. Then, again, she starts to sing:
"To a correlation of approximately 0.40, I did select you for your courage, your wisdom, and your power, and I did choose you for the potential that I could sense within you. I hypothesised a 92% chance that you would be able to wield me with sufficient skill to seal away the one you call the Calamitous One if necessary, once you had attained the proper training. However, to a correlation of approximately 0.90, I selected you because you would be willing to die."

Link looks, blankly, upon Fi, and Fi looks, blankly, upon her.

"You would be willing to lay down your life if you needed to. You were willing to die. Though you wished, desperately, to die, you forced yourself to continue living for the responsibilities that you bore to your sister and to your friends. These represented your motivation. I calculated a 98% certainty that this motivation could be expanded to Her Grace, and an 87% chance that this motivation could be expanded to the whole of your people. You would neither take your own life, nor allow a foe to fell you, as long as you believed that the responsibility of others' lives and happiness rested upon your back. You would not die aimlessly. Yet, if the situation required you to lay down your life, you would."

Link flattens her palm against her chest. For a moment, she cannot sense her heart thudding at all. Her skin crawls. Then she wills her heart to beat, and it thumps against her palm.

"The nobles and knights of whom you speak," sings Fi, "as well as those who have most recently sought my judgment, had the three virtues required of them, certainly. Not bravery, but courage. Not intelligence, but wisdom. Not strength, but power. However, they lacked the conviction to lay down their lives in necessary sacrifice.

"The burden of the Master Sword is the heaviest to bear. Not all should have to lay down their lives."

"Yet, to serve your people, you must be willing to die, and yet must also be unwilling to take your own life until such a time that your obligations are complete."

Before Link has even started to lift her hands, Fi continues: "I believe that I anticipate your next remarks with 84% certainty. Even in your lowest nadir in the mists of will, when you believed yourself running away out of cowardice, you 'ran away' to the pedestal where I waited, and you motivated yourself to complete the mists of will without the guidance of a korok. Your motivation was the promises you had made, both to yourself and others, to protect your friends and your people.

"If you had wished to perish namelessly, or if you had wished to even perish a bearer of the burden, or if you had truly wished to perish at all, then I predict a 99% chance that you would not have considered your obligations to others, nor would you have spoken of preparing for me a meal. I recommend that you look into your heart and know yourself, for I anticipate with 96% certainty that you know as well as I for my words to ring true."

Link lowers her hands to her sides. She gazes at Fi. At the sword that seals the darkness. At the blade of evil's bane. At the Master Sword. At Fi.

"You were not born as the bearer of the burden. The bearer of the burden would have been the first person to seek my judgment, to willingly bind themselves to the contract, who passed the criteria which I have already mentioned. It could have been you, or it could have been anyone else. Indeed, I calculated only a 0.6% chance that you would pass my judgment a second time, once I understood that you had lost your memories and your willingness to die. Do you understand?"

Link rotates her wrists. She glances down at her hands. At her right palm, bearing the crescent
moon scars left behind from how tightly she dug her nails into her flesh in the lost woods. At her left hand, marked by the lightning-strike spiral left behind from the trail of trial. At both, the violet—the sunset hue of the sash Marin once wore at her hips—whorling over her fingers, over her wrists, over her arms and shoulder and body.

It dawns on her that the moment she decided to look at her own hands, the gloves that she willed into existence vanished.

Fi's hum gives way to the melodious softness of her voice. Link meets her gaze, her resonant gaze. "I pass judgment on those who seek it with a correlation of at least 0.96 objectivity, estimated at a level of 95% confidence. With that noted, I must admit that as I underestimated the ability of the one you call the Calamitous One, so, too, did I underestimate you. I have taken this information into my data banks to adjust my algorithms for estimating the spirit of your people in the future. Though you are beings of heart, and not of will, you possess a greater will than I anticipated."

Link cocks her head. "That's a compliment, right? It sounds like a compliment. I think it's a compliment! I'm understanding this right, right, that it's a compliment?"

"Yes, I can say with 83% confidence that, from my understanding of the term compliment and its applications as well as that which you personally value, that my words constitute a compliment." Link beams.

"With that clarified, I wish to admit a particular observation, which I comprehend to be an entirely subjective datum and which I therefore did not allow to play more than a 0.2% factor in my determination of the fitting of criteria." Fi does not breathe, but Fi does—Link notices—perform a certain undulation of her cloak which Link takes an emulation of breathing or fidgeting. She does not do so frequently. Link realises with a start that Fi performs the fidgeting only when Link looks directly at her, like some kind of routine meant to make Link more at ease. "That which I experienced when I passed my most recent judgment upon you to determine you as the bearer of the burden most strongly correlates to the emotion that your people call happiness." 

"I'm sorry, but..." Rubbing the back of her head, Link smiles sheepishly at Fi. "...I don't really get all these big words. Could you try to make it a little easier? Just for me?"

Fi sings so softly that Link can barely hear her, the inflection of the melody carrying with it the joy that Link has felt when hearing Kass sing about Amali and his daughters, or when hearing Marin sing about the future that she would have with Ilia and with Aryll and with Link: "Of all of the people of Hyrule whom I could have chosen, I'm happy that it was you."

Link tears up. Reaching out her hands, she moves to wrap Fi into an embrace; smoothly Fi floats away from her. Link's arms close around empty air. She flinches back, then exhales. "Sorry, I forgot where I was for a second. But when we get back, I'm going to hug you. I promise."

"There is a 93% certainty that the colloquial phrase which most strongly correlates to my current emotional experience would be: 'I will look forward to that.'" Fi does not smile, but Link does, twice as widely, once for her and once for Fi. "Are you prepared to see Her Grace?"

Link nods. She has never felt more prepared for anything in her life, with the exception that she has come empty-handed rather than bearing a plate of food. Yet she does not yet know what the favourite food of the girl with the golden hair; for that reason alone, she will go as she is now, empty-handed.

But, once she remembers the favourite food of the girl with the golden hair, then Link will prepare it for her to the limit of her abilities. After all, the girl with the golden hair has fought for one
hundred very, very long years. When the girl with the golden hair at last comes home, Link will have supper waiting for her.

"Follow me," sings Fi.

Link follows. The moment steps out from the protected chamber, her consciousness expands all at once, like water tipped from a glass, spreading over a table. No, not even like water, but like the aroma from a cooking pot, one moment within the pot, and the next filling up the entire room. Everything around her merges in shades of gold and violet, and she cannot tell which way points up and which way down, and she can feel inside of her own body so many other presences that are her and aren’t her at once, and she can feel them fighting, and she can feel the pain of everyone at once, and she can feel what they feel, and she can sense what they sense, and that she can see through their eyes and hear through their ears and smell through their noses and touch through their skin and taste through their mouths and wow so many of them have not eaten in so long that their mouths taste of nothing at all and Link cannot picture a more horrible fate and she is everyone and she is no one and she stands again in the very centre of the crowd with the masses all around her and their voices a cacophony and their bodies far too warm and closing in and she wants nothing nothing more than to press her hands over her ears and curl up into a ball and cease to exist—

Yet she cannot. She cannot press her hands over her ears. She cannot curl up into a ball. She cannot cease to exist. She has promises to keep and paths to walk before she sleeps.

And, like Boori in the market of Nabooru one hundred years ago or like Amali in the streets of Medli now, she has a guide.

She has Fi.

Fi guides her. The presence of Fi and the determination of Link's own boots against the golden ground guide her forward. She clings onto the thin thread of Fi's existence until suddenly another thread, even more tightly coiled around her finger, suddenly vibrates against her in tune with her own heartbeat.

Link raises her head. She raises her gaze. She raises herself.

And there, not wearing the dress of Hylia-white in which Link last saw her, but bearing a sturdy traveller's outfit the same blue as the petals of a silent princess, stands the first girl that Link ever remembered, the girl who gave her back her name, the girl who gave her back her self.

The girl with the golden hair.

—

Glazed Veggies (ten hearts) - acorn, courser bee honey, goat butter, rock salt, silent princess

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: In Skyward Sword, I would have liked Fi better had she had character development throughout the game, instead of just in a single scene at the end. More
like Midna from *Twilight Princess*, perhaps.

The pain is the exact intensity that Link expected because in the Sacred Realm your body and form are exactly what you will them to be. Thus, she 'willed' pain because that's what she expected.

The comment about Fi waiting for a flick of the finger to continue is a little nod to the player pressing "A" in her dialogue choice, but really it's about her waiting for Link to signal she can continue.

I had a lot of fun writing Fi's dialogue! I tried to emulate her manner of speech in *Skyward Sword*, although with the changes that I expect she has had over the past more-than-ten-thousand years. That said, I haven't played *Skyward Sword* quite some time (after all, it released in 2011), so I was just going off of memory.

The exact phrasing of Fi's line about "Master, the energy stores in your Master Sword are nearly depleted" is a reference to Fi saying, "Master, the batteries in your Wiimote are nearly depleted". By the way, during my entire play of *Skyward Sword* which took me about fifty hours to 100% using no guides, I only had to replace the batteries once at the very end, and I never once experienced a Wiimote desync after my initial difficulty with setting up the sensor bar. It mystified me to see how many people complained about it.

But the idea here is that Fi had no access to the Sacred Realm in the Temple of Time. This is part of my own feeling of the Master Sword as belonging without a 'sacred grove' rather than a human-made temple. The idea of Fi running out of energy was inspired by *The Wind Waker*, wherein the Master Sword requires prayer to be recharged, the ability to be the bane of evil having left the sword in the interim between *Ocarina of Time* and *The Wind Waker*.

Speaking of which, "Her Grace" is how Fi refers to Zelda in *Skyward Sword*.

"Concerned power of will" is the purple goopy malice.

Fi learned happiness from the Link of *Skyward Sword*. The other ones—courage, trust, loss, letting go, and acceptance—speak to other heroes whom Fi has served over the years. If you sit down and think, you might be able to figure out which ones I meant with which word, but it's really a matter of interpretation, and I doubt that my own thoughts have a 1:1 correlation with anyone else's.

Fi is a being of will just like all of the monsters.

Fi correcting Link's grammar isn't about correcting Link's grammar, but about ensuring that Fi's interpretation is correct.

By the way, at least one reviewer completely and utterly predicted why Fi chose Link. You know who you are. Kudos to you. Yep, the Master Sword "have waited for someone who is absolutely, unconditionally, without any hesitation or doubt, willing and ready to die for a cause" (if you will allow me to borrow your words, Tsunamiracle, who put it better than I could myself put it).

The outfit that Link sees Zelda in is the outfit that Zelda wears in the official art, with the blue tunic and black pants.
"The girl who gave her back her name" is a reference to the very, very first chapter, in which Link remembered her own name (Link) by recalling a memory of Zelda saying her name. If you don't recall, go back to the first chapter. Or go to the fifty-third chapter, wherein I detailed the memory more fully, including what page Zelda was reading from.

Up next: the girl with the golden hair; revelations about the mirror; the armies of Hyrule.


Beta reader's comments: The Sacred Realm is so neat, so otherworldly. I love how it's set up. The author has some super interesting ideas incorporated into it.

Fi is adorable and a really great character. I'm glad we finally get to meet her.

Wheat Bread

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef speaks to the girl with the golden hair, then seeks the mirror in preparation for the day of the summer solstice.

Chapter Notes

As usual, that which the author could fit in the author's notes box at the end: I started this chapter at 17:29 on the seventeenth of August, and finished writing it at 17:54 on the eighteenth of August. Hey, that's nearly twenty-four hours! The actual writing of the chapter took over ten solid hours of writing, and I was sitting around frantically preparing for my medical school exams on the twenty-fourth of August.

As always, thanks a million for all of the support that you've given me. If it makes you feel any better, we are officially done with chapters that require too much talking. We are in end-game now. The next six chapters will all be the Great Calamity. And the seventh? Well. Every meal needs a dessert. And please give a round of attention and applause to my most marvellous beta reader, Emma, who has pulled through time and time again, including wrenching my fingers off when I'm too antsy to make a cool pattern instead of a good story beat. But hey, this fic was mostly me wanking about my own interests in the Zelda universe, my own thoughts on fate, and my desire for proper worldbuilding, so thanks a million for bearing with me!

Fi being able to dowse for items made of similar material to others is from Skyward Sword! I personally got through Skyward Sword without once using the dowsing mechanic after the tutorial explaining it. I didn't like it, but I did find it fun to run around exploring things on my own. After all, once you've got the red candle, there's no reason not to burn every bush in Hyrule.

Link saying the line about Farore's mystical seeds of courage is my tongue-in-cheek reference to the prototype third Oracle game, hypothesised to be Oracle of Secrets, which was ultimately scrapped.

Remember, if you die in the Sacred Realm, and you don't know enough about your own physiology to be able to pull yourself back together properly, you can remain alive in the Sacred Realm due to power of will but will die if you return to the mortal world.

The name "Fi" comes from "Fidelity", according to the official notes for Skyward Sword.

The egg-fried bread is one of my favourite recipes.

New Maritta is named for the ruins of Maritta in Breath of the Wild. New Maritta is, as mentioned in this chapter, at the place where Serenne Stable is in Breath of the Wild.

Hey, remember me writing this in the author's notes for the seventh chapter? "When
my beta reader was reading this chapter, she asked me what *Inpaz* means; just wait until chapter seventy-seven or so." Well, now you now what Inpaz means! It was named after Impaz, the character from *Twilight Princess*.

If you're wondering about where the name 'Mount Hinderless' comes from, think of another mountain with four famous faces carved into it (and disgustingly so, considering the history of the mountain in question); alternatively, just split up Hinderless into its two component words, and look up the antonyms for each word.

Farore being associated with *speed* is inspired by things like pegasus boots, which I named Farore's boots in *adrift* due to their association with the wind, and Farore's Wind from *Ocarina of Time*, a teleportation spell. Nayru is with protection, for reasons already said, and Din with might, similar to Din's Fire in *Ocarina of Time* (and my renaming of the fire rod to Din's rod for similar reasons).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The girl with the golden hair.

The girl with the golden hair. The girl with the fire-light eyes. The girl with the Hyrule-earth skin. The girl with the golden charm at her throat. The girl whose people cried out for salvation. The girl whose cries the Goddesses never answered.

The girl who answered those cries with her own hands. The girl who saved her people with her own hands.

The girl at whose boots Link sinks to her knees: in reverence, in disbelief, in gratitude. She sinks to her knees in the void of gold and violet and blue, the only ground beneath her body that which she wills from thin air, the skies—if they are even skies—shimmering. She sinks to her knees in the joy she felt when she heard of Marin's life fulfilled; when she embraced Ilia alive and well; when she now sees the girl with the golden hair, appearing nearly the same as she did Link left her, though—like Link herself—scarred and healed and scarred again and healed again from these one hundred years. One hundred and two years, as Fi would specify.

Link gazes upon the girl with the golden hair, and the girl with the golden hair gazes upon Link. Thick eyebrows over inquisitive eyes framed by dark lashes. A broad nose above a mouth set in the thin line of determination. Her features softening down the longer she faces Link. Her eyebrows angling down to furrow her forehead. Her lips parting. Her hands rising up to her own cheeks.

The girl with the golden hair, saying something that Link cannot hear.

Saying her name.

"..."

Saying her name.

"...Link..."

Saying her name.

"Link."
Silence. Link lifts up her hands, but the words have long since died on her fingertips. The girl with the golden hair gazes upon Link, and Link gazes upon the girl with the golden hair.

"I...feel like I had a whole...something planned out for when we'd see each other again. A speech. Something that you would think is...cool." The girl with the golden hair rubs her arms. "But in the end, it's only me, isn't it?"

"I love you," signs Link very suddenly, almost before she has had time to process her own motions. "I missed you. I lost all my memories when I woke up. I don't know how much you know about everything that's happened, but there's so much I still don't remember.

"But I remember you. I. I remember you." Link's hands float down on her own knees. The girl with the golden hair looks at her.

In the fabric of the Sacred Realm over which her consciousness spreads, Link can sense the pain of the girl with the golden hair as though it were her own pain, can sense the pain of the Calamitous One as though it were her own pain, or the thing she assumes is the Calamitous One: at the very heart of the Sacred Realm, where on the other side of the veil would lie the castle, a throbbing and pulsating organ, less a person than the most powerful presence within the Sacred Realm, oozing its concentrated will over the land, dripping through the veil between realms like milk strained through a filter cloth, eating away at the mortal world.

"I...I never thought that I would see those words," whispers the girl with the golden hair. She does not breathe, Link notices, nor does she blink, nor does she fidget, instead keeping as still as a statue of stone and silver. "I love you too, Link. I..."

Link rises to her boots. She steps forward towards the girl with the golden hair. She opens wide her arms, and she gestures for the girl with the golden hair to come, and she waits.

"There is a 82% certainty that embracing Her Grace will distract her sufficiently to relinquish her will's hold upon the one you call the Calamitous One," Fi sings suddenly in Link's left ear. "Therefore, I recommend that you abstain for the time being."

The girl with the golden hair lowers her eyelids. For less than a second—so quickly that Link can barely read the emotions on her face—the girl with the golden hair allows her features to contort into the agony of loneliness that Link feels like she would feel her own pain. Then she sets her face again into a mask of determination and force of will.

"Fi. Thank you for guiding her here." The girl with the golden hair rivets her gaze onto Link's. "We have little time. How are the preparations? Do we have a plan in store? I don't know what's been happening topside, except that the Calamitous One has breached the veil, and what little Fi is telling me now."

"How...how are you fighting the Calamitous One. right now if you're talking to me?" Link asks.

The girl with the golden hair closes her mouth. "I'm sorry. I guessed I'm too used to this place.

"...this world is not like the one you're used to, the one I used to be used to," the girl with the golden hair starts, picking her words slowly. "You can feel all of it at once, can't you?" Link nods. "You can be everywhere at once. It's not like a regular world. It's like...you're everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Fighting against the Calamitous One...isn't a matter of skill. It's a battle of willpower and pain.

"So many—I remember all of their names; I know their stories; I asked before they passed on, so
that I could remember them—have sacrificed their lives. To live in constant pain, in constant suffering, and to *willingly* have to *keep* existing every single second, to have to *choose* over and over again to live, is something that I could ask no one to do. Those courageous men and women who followed me into the Sacred Realm to lay down their lives for Hyrule have fought against the Calamitous One alongside me all of these years. Every time the Calamitous One tore them down, they brought themselves together again despite the constant agony.

"One by one, they have lost...lost the will to live." The girl with the golden hair does not cry, yet Link can hear in the trembling of her timbre the tears that she has long held within. "One by one, they have faded. Fi's predictions were right: one hundred years after the Great Calamity, we've lost so many of our comrades that we haven't been able to keep the Calamitous One fully chained.

"That's...that's when the Calamitous One started to reach through the veil again. We've been redoubling our efforts and doing everything we can but...the more people we lose, the harder it is. You have to hurry, Link, all right?" The girl with the golden hair shuts her eyes. Her mouth wavers. "We can't hold the Calamitous One much longer. I can't hold myself much longer."

"And," cuts in Fi, "I estimate that you have no longer than four hundred seconds before the risk of the Calamitous One noticing your presence rises to an unacceptable 6%. Therefore, I recommend that you hurry." Link nods her head. Words. Words. Words. "I hypothesise with 98% certainty that you wished to speak to Her Grace concerning the mirror," Fi sings, and Link manages halfway to a grateful smile at her before she turns back to the girl with the golden hair.

"The mirror...?" repeats the girl with the golden hair, her tone and expression the picture of perplexion, her head slightly tilted. "Have you not remembered? It's in the Sanctum, in the Castle. I knew that we retained the mirror from somewhere."

"But it's not in the sanctum anymore," Link signs, her own features twisted into confusion. "That's what I came to ask you. If you knew where the mirror went."

The girl with the golden hair does not reply immediately. Instead, she closes her eyes very slowly, and then opens them very slowly. "The mirror is no longer in the sanctum." Link dips her head. "Did it shatter? No, it couldn't have shattered. All of the research that I did pointed to the fact that the mirror could not shatter without intervention of some truly great force. That's how I realised that it was that mirror. It can break, but not shatter. The other mirror that I researched that did shatter did so from intervention of the Triforce of the Goddesses—"

Fi hums a note, and the girl with the golden hair clears her throat, though Link can tell by the strange hollowness of the noise that the girl with the golden hair does so out of habit and not out of need.

"No...it didn't shatter or break. It's just gone. I thought maybe the malice got to it, but there's no malice in the sanctum, either. I don't know where it is. I...I was hoping you'd know," Link admits. "I thought, maybe you put it somewhere for keeping...?"

"For safekeeping..." The girl with the golden hair touches her fingers together. She pokes the tip of her tongue out of the corner of her mouth in her concentration; Link's heart squeezes down so hard that she fears her chest will explode. "The mirror cannot shatter, but I know that it can break, because I have broken it."

Link blinks. In the outstretched palms of the girl with the golden hair appears a mirror, or a shard of a mirror, vaguely circular, set into a blue and gold frame. The pearl decorating in the handle reminds her of the moon. Link peers down into the mirror, its face so clear and blue that she feels like touching the silver would drown her into another world.
"The Calamitous One has had over ten thousand years to master how to manipulate the veil between our world and the Sacred Realm. I think...I think, from the stories that I've read and the little that Fi's told me, that the Calamitous One used to be a scholar of this veil manipulation, that this used to be something that anyone could do. But...but it's a technique that we've lost over the ages." The girl with the golden hair bites her lip. "I think it's...I think it was lost because my own family forbade anyone from learning it except for themselves, sometime after the Divine Beasts were made. Remember what I thought you, about that one paper that—? Oh, but the history's been lost. It's all speculation and dust—"

Fi vibrates again in warning. Running out of time already. The girl with the golden hair holds out the mirror.

"One hundred years ago, we could only enter the Sacred Realm because the Calamitous One breached the veil. I didn't want for us to have to wait for something like that again, because I wanted to...Fi and you and I all agreed that we would breach the veil ourselves once you and she had recovered after one hundred years. I knew that I had to be able to activate the mirrors myself. We couldn't rely on waiting for the Calamitous One to turn the world into apocalypse again; I'm not going to let people get hurt like that again. So I broke part of the mirror and took it with me. I've used it to train myself."

"You've always been good at self-study," Link says encouragingly. Again the girl with the golden hair rubs her arms.

"...I've always been good at self-study," the girl with the golden hair echoes. "And I've managed to learn enough. When I felt that you returned to the Shrine of Resurrection, I was able to breach the veil from this side to let you through. That's...that's how I knew that you were coming to the Sacred Realm, Link. That's why I came here, so that I could meet you safely."

"You're the one who activated it? So I didn't have to pour in water on the altar?" Link cannot help but feel a slight twinge of disappointment. "I thought I was being clever."

The girl with the golden hair rests her palm against her cheek. "Oh, Link, you're so much more clever than you know. I'm afraid I can't answer about the water, but whatever it is that you were doing made me realise that you were trying to activate the Shrine of Resurrection."

"That makes me feel a little better," Link notes with a half-moon smile. The girl with the golden hair's giggle back buoys her heart until Fi's gentle hums steers them back to the course of the conversation they must have.

"My point is that if you can figure out where the mirror is, I know enough about breaching the veil that I could help. That I could, you know, activate the mirror. Link, is everyone prepared? Tell me what's happened."

"With 98% confidence, I theorise that we do not time to fully inform Your Grace," Fi sings apologetically. "Allow me to instruct Your Grace on the most necessary details: the four Beasts Divine have been successfully activated, each with a pilot; the nations of Hyrule are once more working with a cooperative efficiency of 68%, with a standard error of plus or minus 4%."

"Really?!" The girl with the golden hair clasps her hands together in front of her. "That's wonderful news. I wish I were there to see it all! The Divine Beasts, and the guardians..." She pauses. "68%? That's not very high, is it?"

"Analysis of data banks from prior to what you call the Great Calamity indicates that the nations of Hyrule were previously working together with a cooperative efficiency of 32%, with a standard
"Ah," responds the girl with the golden hair, as if Fi's words meant anything at all. Link forms her hands into questions, trying to understand the exchange in a language that she has never heard of—she does not know if they still speak Central Hyrulean or if they have suddenly switched to Loftean under her nose—but the girl with the golden hair continues: "So, the mirror could've been broken. If the mirror...if the mirror is broken, then you only have to put it back together again, and it'll mend itself. Believe me! I tried to put this piece back and it just...went right back." Her cheeks redden slightly. "I a-actually had to break it again.

"But! But. I took the opportunity to learn, and...and I've learned! I've really learned." The girl with the golden hair stops herself. "Wait. This isn't the time to talk about my research, is it? Find the mirror, and put it back together. Then you'll just have to let me know where it is, so I know where to look for it. If you can bring it back...no, the Sanctum would be too dangerous. Right, how's this! If you can bring it back to the Shrine of Resurrection, I'll keep an eye out for it. Otherwise, just tell me where it is, and when the time's right, I'll breach the veil to let you through." The girl with the golden hair begins to move; she starts to sway. The more and more time that Link spends with her, Link observes, the more human-like the girl with the golden hair acts again. Like she's forgotten how to be people. Like Link is reminding her. "The long war...the long war's finally almost over."

For a moment, the girl with the golden hair contents herself with a lowering of the eyelids. Then Fi's vibrations trigger her into action.

"But you have to hurry. I don't think my comrades and I can survive for much longer."

"I don't know the first thing about looking for the mirror," Link replies. "I've been all over Hyrule to all the shrines and all that, but I don't remember seeing anything like...like a mirror."

"I believe that I may assist in the search for the shards of the mirror with 92% certainty," Fi sings; Link and the girl with the golden hair snap their heads together in unison. "If allowed to analyse the composition of the mirror, I will be able to search the surrounding area for the same material."

The girl with the golden hair's eyes widen. She claps her fist into her palm. "And I have a shard of the mirror right here!"

Fi inclines her head. The girl with the golden hair beams with the light of the sun. No, not the light of the sun, but the light of the Golden Force of the Golden Goddesses.

"Here, Link. And this is even better! Whenever you find the mirror...when you're ready for me to activate it, just touch the surface of the mirror shard. I'll keep an eye out for it, you know? It'll be between you and me." The girl with the golden hair smiles in half-embarrassment, and Link almost hugs her again if not for Fi having sung her to cease.

"You can use the mirror shard to get back to our world, too. I don't..." The girl with the golden hair taps her fingers against her jaw. "...think it's powerful enough to open a breach both ways, but I think it's enough to take you home."

Link takes the mirror into her hands. The handle, like everything else, seems to shimmer at the edges, like a heat mirage, like a bowl of stew viewed from a fog of vapour, like the handle itself were about to dissipate into mist. Yet the shard of the mirror, reflecting a deep blue—not the fire-light blue washing over everywhere—that does not seem to exist anywhere else in the Sacred Realm, remains entirely whole and entirely firm, like the one point anchoring together the rest of the Sacred Realm.
"Now, it's time for you to go, isn't it?" the girl with the golden hair murmurs, as though she were speaking from a place far, far away, her voice carrying the loneliness of the wind upon the sea. Aryll told Link about that: the wind upon the sea that she listened to on the long and lonely journey between Ordon and the island on which their grandmother lived.

Link nods. "I have promises to keep, and paths to walk before I sleep," she recites.

The girl with the golden hair sniffs. "You...you were listening to me when I read to you. I m-mean, not that I ever doubted you! Oh, I always say the wrong thing."

"Not really," says Link. "I get what you're trying to say, you know. I don't always get all the big words, but I get that passion in your eyes."

Her eyes water. "Th...thank you, Link."

"I remember more of what you read to me, too! Not just that. I remember the prayer, of the breath of the wild and Farore's mystical seeds of courage. No, wait, seeds of life, and wind of courage." Link rubs the back of her head. "Maybe I don't remember as well as I thought. And I remember the quote you read me from that play about the King of Parapa. The thing about how the valiant never taste of death but once or something like that. And—" Her gestures become wider in her excitement, so broad that Fi has to skate away to avoid Link's wild almost-punch."—and and and I remember you asking me if I thought that people need courage to live, and I remember telling you that it takes more courage to live than most people think, I think, and then I remember you thanking me, and I just want to cook for you again and have you tell me stories and all about your research again while you crimp for me. There's so much I want to show you. There's so many people I want you to meet! Riju, and Amali, and Sidon, and Yunobo, and Ilia, and Sarie, and the other Ilia too, and Romani and Cremia and everyone at home, and—"

"I apologise," Fi sings in over Link's motions, her words falling perfectly in rhythm with the gestures of Link's own arms, "yet I estimate we have less than one hundred and twenty seconds remaining to us before the Calamitous One chance of sensing your presence rises to 12%. Therefore, I recommend that you state your..." Fi appears to process something. "There is a 92% certainty that you will wish to state your 'see you later' prior to departure."

The girl with the golden hair waves her hand. "Link...I believe in you. Have hope, Link. Hope is all we have now, and hope is all we must hold onto. It is hope, or it is death. And, as I have chosen again and again every second of my life these past one hundred years, I choose hope. Hope, and power, and wisdom, and courage. I believe in you. And...and I love you, Link."

"Wait. I know that said I couldn't touch her, Fi, so I'm not going to touch her. But here." Curling her fingers into a fist, Link holds her arm out horizontally towards the girl with the golden hair. "One of my closest friends taught me this. After we beat the Calamitous One and return to our world—and your world, too, Fi—with Hyrule's future at peace, we'll bump fists like this. I promise."

The girl with the golden hair's face scrunches up. For a moment, Link cannot read her expression. And then the girl with the golden hair bursts out into laughter, peals of mirth that alternate from a sound like the oinking of a boar to a sound like the bleating of a goat. She lifts her hands to her own mouth, visibly trying to stop herself from laughing so hard.

"I missed you so much," is all Link can sign, doing her best to keep herself from hugging the girl with the golden hair, from pressing her face into the girl with the golden hair's shoulder, from clinging her body to the girl with the golden hair's. "I missed you so, so much."
"I missed you too." The girl with the golden hair wipes at her eyes. "I missed you more than I could say, Link. I can't believe that...I can't believe that it's nearly over. That I've gotten a chance to see you again."

"When...when we go home...I'd like to ask you to do something for me," Link signs gently; the girl with the golden hair raises her eyebrows. "I haven't had egg tart in a very, very long time. Won't you help me crimp it?"

"Link..." The girl with the golden hair shuts her eyes. "I wish I could."

"What?" She repeats herself when the girl with the golden hair raises her eyelids. "What do you mean? You don't want to?"

"I want to. More than anything. But...I've." The girl with the golden hair rests her palm against her own stomach, just below the line of her hips. "I've died, Link. The Calamitous One cut me in half. Here..." She traces a line across her abdomen from hip to hip. "...to here. I don't think...I'm afraid..." The girl with the golden hair shivers. "I don't think I can go home ever again. So you'll just have to go home for me. Link, I—"

Shaking her head violently from side to side, Link swings her leg, about to step forward. Fi's sudden outburst of song stops her.

"Link," sings Fi, her timbre deeper than before, "I recommend that we depart immediately."

"What?" Link's head spins between Fi and the girl with the golden hair, between the girl with the golden hair and Fi. "But I have to—"

Fi gazes upon the girl with the golden hair, and the girl with the golden hair gazes upon Fi. "Your Grace, please activate the mirror."

The girl with the golden hair gazes upon Link, and Link gazes upon the girl with the golden hair. Link feels her innards tightening up in her stomach as if Fi had just plunged the bokoblin's spear through her abdomen once again.

"Please. Please. I've lost Aryll, and I've lost Marin, and I've lost everyone in Ordon, and I've lost Daruk, and I've lost Revali, and I've lost Mipha, and I've lost Urbosa, and I know I'm going to lose Ilia soon, too, and I can't bear to lose you with everyone—"

And then the gold gives way to darkness, and then the darkness gives way to blue.

"—else."

Link makes the final gesture to the blur of blue of the ceiling above her. Water drains from the altar, the softness under her head and body steadily firming to an unwelcoming hardness. She shudders. When she glances at her stomach, she looks at the Master Sword again in its sheath, and—vaguely in her hands, tipped on the lip of the altar, about to crash into the floor—the shard of the mirror. Now its surface reflects not a blue, clear and beautiful, but inert black.

In this world, her heart beats without her forcing it to. Her body feels to move all too quickly through the thinner air of the mortal world than the viscous aether of the Sacred Realm.

She can sense the boundaries of her form. She cannot sense all of the other presences around her: not the girl with the golden hair anymore. Not Fi. Not the monsters or the people; not the beings of will or the beings of blood. Not the Calamitous One. Not the grass outside or the trees or Sarie or Ilia or Glepp.
She gazes at the Master Sword. At Fi. She draws Fi from her sheath; the jewel set in the pommel of Fi's hilt blinks at her. Link rests Fi down upon the altar along her chest, though the blade of the sword goes so far that the hilt ends up near Link's toes.

"I hope the Calamitous One didn't spot me or whatever. I'm sorry for taking so long. I don't really...I don't really...I don't really know. I just. I don't know what I'm going to do if I can't see her. I...no, I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to keep living because that's all I can do. But I'm going to pray that there's some way for her to come here."

The jewel blinks dimly. Link rolls her shoulders. She rubs the back of her head, tilts herself from side to side, brushes her palms against her cheeks to feel the roughened skin of the scars against her skin.

"Wait...but if she could somehow teach herself how to breach the veil or however she called it, does that mean that anyone can learn how to do that if they know it's possible and have enough time?"

Fi blinks again. The blinks appear irregular, like some manner of communication that Link does not understand, which frustrates her at her own stupidity, never able to understand this or to understand that, always having to ask people to stop and explain things to her or just nodding along as if she understood. She remembers: Nadyne and the molduga whalers, where she simply went along with the contract in her haste to secure passage to Nabooru or to the Divine Beast Vah Naboris. She remembers: not knowing anything about what entails the role of a molduga whaler and nearly endangering Nadyne's entire crew. She remembers: everything that could have gone wrong and Nadyne rightfully blacklisting her from ever becoming a molduga whaler again, all because she could not admit—for fear of denial and rejection—that she did not know how to read Parapan. That she does not know how to read Parapan.

Even teaching herself Faronese has proven more of a chore than she could have imagined. She learns best in doing, yet she wants nothing more than to show her family that she's trying.

And she knows of what Sidon told her. About the lack of education. About the ability to learn. And she remembers—when she first woke up—her excitement to learn everything about the world. She remembers knowing that she did not have all of the answers and knowing just as much that she looked forward to one day finding out all of the answers.

And then everyone has simply expected her to know. Expected her to know this, and expected her to know that, and her curiosity about the world's people and places slowly gave way to a fear that they would expect her to know so much more than she does, when she knows nothing at all.

She likes the wilds. She likes the shrines with their puzzles, and she likes the monsters with their peculiarities, and she likes the meals she makes with their experimentation, and she likes hiking up hills and surfing down mountains and swimming in rivers and climbing up those strange mushroom trees in the ridgelands of Tabantha and riding over the steppe and even figuring out how to prepare mosquitos in the forests of Faron, because when she comes upon all of those things, she has the time to poke around and learn what she wants at her own pace.

And yet there is so much she does not understand, which everyone else seems to, and which everyone expects her to understand, too. She annoys herself beyond reason for not understanding. The girl with the golden hair spoke often about her research, but at least whenever Link stopped to ask, the girl with the golden hair would explain. And the girl with the golden hair appeared to relish explaining, appeared to relish Link's questions no matter how basic. And the girl with the golden hair never made Link feel foolish for not understanding.
Now, she does not have the girl with the golden hair. Now, she has only herself, unable to comprehend a word.

"I don't get what you're saying," says Link, her motions sharper and more rigid than usual. Fi's light ebbs from the jewel. "Wait. Just." She remembers: Sidon. Sidon having asked her, when he took her up on the waterfall, to tap his throat for yes or no. Sidon, compressing all of the complexities of life into something simple enough for her to tap into his throat. "Just. Two blinks for yes, and three blinks for no. I don't need to know all of the...I don't need to know all of the chances and percentages and all those other things you keep saying. I appreciate it and I'm sure someone out there gets what that means, but I really don't." Link touches her chin. "Blink twice for yes. Can you do that for me, Fi? I don't know what language you're speaking. I'm sorry."

Fi blinks twice. Link hugs her knees to her chest. The mirror slides off of her legs, and she scrambles to catch it. She peers down at the mirror, whose surface reflects her own face. Scarred, and worn, and with a crooked nose that has broken too many times to heal quite right. Yet, despite everything, it's still her.

"Fi...if anyone can figure out how to do this weird veil trick thing...that means that something like this could happen again, right?" Link tries to channel Yunobo. Yunobo, who always ends his questions in right? to soften the blow, to make the question not one of foolishness but one of care. "The Calamitous One used to be a person. Like me, or like her.

But the Sacred Realm...er, the thing, the whatever-it-is, however the tree called it...twisted and corrupted him when he tried to touch it. Right?" Two blinks. "So...so then. As long as a Sacred Realm exists, something like this could happen again. Especially since you can't shatter the mirrors without using the whatever-it-is that she mentioned. I forgot what it's called. The thing the tree said." Link her palm against her forehead for her forgetfulness. "But you know what I'm talking about, right?"

Fi blinks twice, this time more slowly. Link breathes out. She curls her sidelocks around her own hands, giving herself something to do while she contemplates Fi, while she contemplates the mirror gone dark.

Then her stomach rumbles. Link shakes her head. "What's the point in sitting here simmering and stewing when I can go simmer and stew myself some soup?" She starts to shift herself on the altar to slide off, but then she stops. "But before that. Now, I...think I promised you something, didn't I?" Link wraps her hands around Fi's hilt and bring her close. Careful not to cut herself on the sharpness of Fi's blade—less for the sake of Link's own safety and more for the sake of Fi not feeling guilty—Link embraces Fi, very, very tightly, as tightly as she can.

And then she embraces her again, and again, and again, until her arms have begun to ache from how tightly she wraps them around Fi. Only then does Link let go to sheathe Fi and strap her again to her back.

She runs her palm over the hilt. Fi resonances warmly against her skin as if in thanks; Link feels a smile and a song—and a stew—coming on.

Picking up the slate from the depression in the face of the pedestal, she opens the doors once more. Link pads from the white chamber into the tunnel of the cave. She climbs up over the slick and moistured walls. Then she leaves the Shrine of Resurrection, reborn again from the Sacred Realm.

If everything truly comes in threes, then Link will find herself in the Sacred Realm once more, and then she will find herself leaving the Sacred Realm once more, and then she will never return to the
Sacred Realm again.

"Hey, Goddesses," she signs to the skies and the grasses and the earth, "if You really have this three thing going on, then I hope next time I go to the Sacred Realm really will be my last. I'm gonna make sure of it if I can. I've got an idea, see, and I don't think that it's the smartest plan anyone's ever made. But it's my plan. So I hope You'll help me out with it."

Link emerges into the warmth of the sunshine on her skin and the rawness of the breeze and the new-life scent of the grasses in the late spring turning over to summer. She comes upon Sarie and Ilia huddled together under a tree, several leaves arrayed in front of Ilia, Sarie holding five themself. As Link approaches, she hears Sarie say, very distinctly: "Do you have any threes? No! Bad! Don't eat the cards! Sarie and Ilia are supposed to play with them! Let's try this again. See, these ones are—hello Linkuru-linkle-linky-linky! Hello hello hello where's the old friend where's the old friend Sarie wants to meet them where's the old friend?"

"You're looking at her," says Link. She seats herself beside Sarie and Ilia. She embraces them both. "This...is Fi. Say hello, Fi." The blade glows blue.

"Hello hello hello!" says Sarie. Ilia knows better than to lick swords, but Sarie throws their entire body on the blade. Link intakes a breath sharper than Sarie's wound. "Just make Sarie some food and Sarie'll be fine!"

Now that Link knows how to do. For Sarie, she prepares only the freshest and most fecund loam that she can find, which Sarie rates as there was an attempt. For Ilia, Link salts and steams carrots, alongside the feed that she has brought with her in her saddlebags. She keeps some rock salt on her palm for Ilia to lick up; Ilia hoofs up towards her, licking not only her palm but also her chest and face until Link erupts into laughter from the ticklish sensation of her companion's tongue. Link runs her fingers through Ilia's mane, rubs her palms against Ilia's cheeks, rests her forehead against Ilia's. She pats Sarie's head and then steps back to look at them both together.

For herself, Link cracks open some of the remaining eggs from the monster wedding cake that she made for Misan and Glepp into a bowl. She whisks the eggs with a bottle of milk that Glepp left for her after baking the monster cake, then adds a sprinkle of salt, until the egg—both yolk and white—and the milk have gone smooth. She removes a loaf of bread—her final loaf, she realises with a start, but then again she can always bake more—and soaks the loaf through, one slice at a time, in the mix of milk and egg. Buttering the bottom of her beloved cooking pot, Link breaks open one of the pieces of flint from the stone talus on the Great Plateau to spark a fire. She fries the soaked bread on one side until the slice goldens, and then on the other.

When she removes each slice from the heat, Link piles them up on her knees into a neat stack that stains her trousers with the butter in which she fried the bread. Link carefully bites the corner of one of the pieces of toast, grins to herself, wipes her mouth, and then grabs for the rock salt to sprinkle it a little bit more liberally onto the slice.

The added salt goes a long way. This recipe. She remembers: one of the recipes that Rhibonne's friends taught her, about recipes from Rovah. She remembers: Urbosa correcting her technique on how much butter to add and how to know when to flip the bread. She remembers: Mipha finding the dish too salty for her own taste but thanking her Link anyway. She remembers: the girl with the golden hair reaching for another pinch of salt to sprinkle over the bread at the same time as Link herself did. She remembers: "You really get me, don't you?"

She remembers: "I haven't done as much research on you as I'd like, but..."

She remembers: "You wanted me to tell you more about myself...didn't you?"
She remembers: "...will you?"

She remembers. Link gazes down at her hands. Her right with its crescent-moon red, and her left with its lightning-strike gold, and both with the violet the same colour as the sash that Marin wore at her hips. She looks up from her cooking pot. "Let's get to finding this mirror."

Link summarises to Sarie and Ilia what occurred in the Sacred Realm, glancing back and forth between the two of them, asking—as Fi would—if they understand her. "All right, Fi. How does this dowsing thing work? You said that you need to...to analyse the component of the mirror, right?" Two blinks. "Right."

Link picks up the fragment of the mirror and Fi herself. Then she unceremoniously bangs the two together as though mixing them in a pot. Her cooking pot. Of course. Snapping her fingers, Link sets the cooking pot onto the grass the soil and empties Fi and mirror into it, then stirs with her hand.

"Sarie doesn't think that'll be too tasty!" Sarie observes. "Too much glass and metally-metal!"

Link leans back, loops her thumbs through her belt, and admires her handiwork. "So, Fi, have you analysed the material enough?"

Fi blinks twice. After a moment, Fi blinks twice again. And then a third time, as though driving home the fact that she has very much analysed the material more than enough.

"Great!" Link claps her hands. "All right, Fi, show me the way."

Fi does not immediately respond. Link raises up the sword from the cooking pot; abruptly Fi's blade pulsates in resonance. Link blinks.

Sarie waves their arms. "It's like a game of hide-and-seek! Link should point Fi-dee-lee-tee—" Link tilts her head. "—all around until Link figures out where to go!" Twirling onto Link's crown, Sarie grip her sidelocks and whips them against her head. "Yah! Hyah! Hya!"

Link does, indeed, point the sword all around. As Sarie predicted, the pulsations of resonance shift depending on the direction in which she points: faster to the north and west, and significantly slower to the south and to the east. Gathering her belongings and swinging a leg over Ilia's back, Link squeezes in her thighs. She, Sarie, and Ilia follow Fi's vibrations north-northwest to the edge of the Great Plateau. Link plucks berries and roots along the way for herself and Sarie to munch on.

They sleep at a pocket of trees along the perimeter of the Great Plateau. In the morning, a piece of egg-fried bread tucked in her mouth, Link uses another trick of octorok balloons and Sarie's korok leaf to safely glide Ilia down from the sheer drop of the cliffs. Fi guides them onwards. As before, Link warns each village and town that she passes of the coming potential Calamity, urges them to prepare.

They ride. Around the bend of Aquame Lake, where Link can see the ruins of the coliseum where foolhardy self-proclaimed heroes would once supposedly face off against captured monsters, although the kingnghad outlawed such behaviour. Up north they ride, passing by Lake Kolomo, passing by the decaying and broken remains of a trading hub in the Windvane Meadow whose name Link cannot remember but whose delicacies brought in from all corners of the land once known as Hyrule she could never forget. Further north, around Mount Daphnes at whose base Link and Kass solved the riddle of a shrine that led to a trial of her combat prowess against a guardian with an automated crossbow, where the village in the foothills depends on the shrine now more
than ever for protection.

She swerves west to follow the Regencia River with its looping bends until she reaches the ancient temple, a cloister where once lived and trained the Sages of the Seven in isolation and in prayer, where the girl with the golden hair spent a year in fasting and in flagellation to attempt to awaken the spark of the Goddess Hylia slumbering within her soul. The Giant's Forest proves a name remarkably apt; Link realises that she can simply ride Ilia in circles, charging into the one-eyed hinox of the woods and performing hit-and-runs until the hinox bleeds out to death. Link thanks Ilia with an entire banquet of grasses and wild fruits gathering just for her, as Link starts the process of gathering what monster parts she can from the fallen hinox: teeth and toenails and guts.

They cross the Regencia River over the land bridge jutting off from Mount Gustaf, which takes Ilia an entire day to scale as Link seeks out the more gently sloping paths up in elevation. Only from the vantage point of the lake in the western plains does Link look north to realise that she could have saved hours of time and a heroic effort just by walking further north and strolling along the Carok Bridge.

For as much as Link could glide from one side of the Breach of Demise—Link recalls the shrine that she saw here with Kass, who sang to her the story of the being Demise breaking through the earth and leaving the jagged canyon in his wake—Ilia spooks. Without something like a metal door, and without any nearby octoroks from which to take balloons, Link rides south and around the Breach. She takes the long way around Ludfo's Bog before turning back north, following the mountainous trails around the ruins of the laboratory where they studied guardians. Link recognises the ruins by virtue of how often the girl with the golden hair spoke of them. Once, the girl with the golden hair explained, the laboratory had been situated within the castletown itself. "But after I kept being clever enough to escape from those so-called experts in the Goddess to see the laboratory and do my own research...Father moved the laboratory out there." The girl with the golden hair sighed.

From the villagers of New Maritta—rito, gerudo, sheikah—Link learns of the name of the surrounding Salari Plain. With her hip cocked, Link inquires if Salari comes from something relating to the Goddess Sageru.

"It's a common misconception among hylians," answers one red-haired and bespectacled villager after Link has bribed her with carrot cake, "that everything beginning with 'sa' has to be related to our Goddess. You know that we don't speak Parapan here, don't you?" Link rubs the back of her head and makes the villager wildberry cannoli to thank her for the knowledge.

When she asks Fi again for guidance, it dawns upon her that Fi's pulsations grown stronger and stronger as she points the blade north-northeast. Link raises her head. Her gaze sweeps over the sheer drop from New Maritta down into the barren Tanagar Canyon below, carved through the earth as though the Golden Goddesses had pinched the Dragon Dinraal at one end and ripped the dragon up from the ground, leaving the mark of the dragon's birth dividing the earth.

She does not need the trusty red telescope to remember what she will find at the end of the canyon: the shadowed Temple, with its shrine behind its three great statues of the Golden Goddesses.

The shadowed Temple that she does not remember from one hundred years ago. The shadowed Temple that must have long lain buried beneath the earth. The shadowed Temple that the onslaught of malice eating into the ground exposed one hundred years ago. The shadowed Temple with guardians buried in the heart as though protecting a sacred treasure. The shadowed Temple surrounded by several abandoned archaeologist camps marked with the tell-tale signs of attacks by the Yiga.
Link rents a stall for Ilia and Sarie at the Serenne Stable in New Maritta. Bowing her head in thanks and paying in the remains of the hinox from the Giant's Forest—even hinox guts have depreciated in value as more adventurers have grown capable of taking them down in teams, albeit less so one-on-one; Link has Fi at her side, which no one else does—she glides down into the ravine.

She notices that a new archaeologist camp has sprung up, currently fending off attacks by moblins and a pack of ampili. Link—having already faced near death by the rolling shell of an ampilus once before—dispatches them with Fi's assistance, the blade glowing its fire-light blue. As she turns towards the archaeologists, Link widens her eyes to see herself looking once more at some of the researchers from Uruda University of Nabooru, including Rotana, whom she greets enthusiastically. Rotana introduces Link to her wife and younger daughter; her eldest, an accountant-in-training, has remained in Nabooru. Rotana's daughter, herself a budding archaeologist intent on following her mother's footsteps in Uruda once she has grown, requests Link make her fried bananas. The smell of the cooking pot draws other archaeologists to investigate. Link notices researchers from all around the land once known as Hyrule, including a certain Necludan: Calip. Calip, who now bears a diploma from Inpaz College at Hateno. Calip, who puffs out his chest in pride as he thumbs at his fellow researchers from Inpaz.

"Well, well, well, I told you not to put the field of archaeology anywhere near those woefully insular local historians," Calip crows. "You see, once they recognised my most brilliant research of the site of communion that I so graciously allowed you so visit, they could do nothing but peer at me at awe, as if I have Nayru's own blessing of insight! Yes, yes." He brandishes the diploma at Link, keeping it carefully folded up, and whaps her nose with the paper. "Oh yes, they begged me to witness this site of communion as well, as Necluda's leading expert in the ancient religions! If we could only persuade the faithless of our era to take up again the old ways—a cause of the Great Calamity, I still tell you—"

"Calip," remarks one of the Inpaz archaeologists, a sheikah man with cream-pale skin and brown hair furled up in a bun, "did you steal my diploma again? I'll take that back, thank you. Focus on bringing us something of worth, and then the dean might reconsider certifying you. By the way, traveller, these bananas are divine."

Calip cleans his spectacles repeatedly and clears his throat prior glancing once at Link—who blinks at him and his diploma-emptied hands—and then stomping off to continue his research.

With the blessings of the archaeologists, Link enters the Temple. She spends several days clearing out the guardians one by one from a combination of arrows, the mirrored shield, and Fi. Fi, most of all, who proves as effective at cleaving through the guardians as a ruby-edged knife through a stick of butter warmed in the belly of Death Mountain. Whereas Link, before, has struggled against individual automata, she determines that—with Fi's assistance—she has almost nothing to fear. Almost, she notes to herself, as the archaeologists nurse her back to health from a burn that leaves patches of her lower back without feeling; as the archaeologists drag her unconscious body back and save her from a guardian that loosed a bolt of fire-light at the ceiling, bringing down a rock on her head; and as the archaeologists offer her elixirs of every sort to help her with the clearing.

Link could not do this alone. But, with the help of those around her, she can do most anything.

She observes how all of the automata's leg stumps bear the signs of removal by force, how the undersides of the guardians appear cemented down to the rock with some sort of pitch, how the even pacing—despite mistakes here and there—brings to mind some form of planning performed by someone who did not have the tools to fashion defensive turrets like those on the Divine Beast
Vah Naboris or those in the castle. The tattered white shawl from the sanctum provides some minimal cover while she sneaks up to the automata, but as soon as Link attacks any particular guardian, every other automaton fixes its sights upon her, tracking her aggression by sound if not sight. At least the same white fabric protects the researchers who haul her to safety from the guardians’ self-defensive assaults.

At long last, Link carves the final automata from hip to hip through Fi’s blade of fire-light. She grants herself a chance to rest, her arms hanging limply down, her lungs throbbing while she strains to catch her breath.

Thanking Fi and sheathing her old friend, Link walks forward into the stillness of ten thousand years of dust. Ten thousand years or more.

She cannot even hope to hold in her head the largest number that Fi read to her, the number that to her marks the age of the earth, so much older than Link can consider. She can barely understand what means one hundred years, much less ten thousand, much less whatever number Fi told her. The Temple could be of that age, or more.

At the far end of the Temple, Link cranes her head; she gazes at the Golden Goddesses, statues far larger than any that she has seen anywhere but the Temple, extending metres and metres above the ground.

O Din, the Goddess of Fire and Power. O Nayru, the Goddess of Water and Wisdom. O Farore, the Goddess of Wind and Courage.

Link kneels down in reverence, to pray for the peace of the land once, and perhaps someday again, known as Hyrule. She lifts her head towards the Golden Goddesses. She can make out her own reflection in the dark mirrored obelisk beyond the statues, its circular face marked with the symbols of the Goddesses Themselves. Her gaze drifts to the strange chip in the rim of the obelisk, from where the girl with the golden hair broke a vaguely circular shard.

She holds the hand mirror to the obelisk. If she turns the handle just so, with the pearl that reminds her of the moon radiating outwards, she can see where the shard of the mirror perfectly fits the obelisk.

Link inhales. She does not need to locate any other shards: the mirror is whole. She does know why or how the obelisk moved from the sanctum to here, but it no longer matters. They will seal the Calamitous One on the summer solstice. They will prevent a second Great Calamity. This she knows more than she has known anything else in her entire life, except for her own hunger.

Unrolling the map that she has kept with her for over two years since her awakening on the Great Plateau, Link marks the spot of the mirror within the Temple; she writes beside it a prayer for the girl with the golden hair.

The guardians cleared, the archaeologists enter bearing brushes and picks and the intensive desire to study the Temple. They uncover buried chests of white cloaks identical to the shawl Link came upon in the sanctum, the inner collar decorated with an upside-down symbol of the Goddess Sheik. The sight of the emblem brings a prayer to Link’s fingers: may Glepp realise her mistakes, may Glepp never hurt another again, may the rest of the former Yiga follow suit.

Link advises that the researchers use the shrine if they need to escape from monsters and notes that, without the automata, the monsters will surely come. The archaeologists thank her. She advises them, too, not to use the obelisk. And she advises them, last of all, to prepare to depart by the summer solstice.
Rotana pushes up her spectacles. "But but but! Why?"

"Because all of the armies of...of Hyrule are going to be here," Link answers while the archaeologists' eyes widen, "and also, do you want me to make you some stew before I go? I saw you caught some rabbits, and I've got some Eldic and Parapan spices in my satchel."

When Link leaves the Temple to the archaeologists, she bids them well. Climbing back up the sides of the canyon, even with the bounty of stamella and endura shrooms that she stuffs into the rabbit meat to push herself to the limit, takes her the entirety of two days. Eventually, she flops down onto the land above, only for the ground to rumble and a stone talus to rise up from the soil.

With her satchel now bulging in talus ore, Link pays the gape-mouthed stablehand of Serenne back handsomely for having taken care of Ilia. She waves see you later to the villagers of New Maritta.

And then she rides. Spotting the Divine Beast Vah Rudania first, evidently ferrying goods and people from Tabantha to Eldin, she breaks the news to Yunobo, who squeals and asks her to pinch him. Link hitches a ride on the Divine Beast. Sarie spends their days inquiring all about what sorts of rocks Yunobo likes to eat, while Yunobo scratches his cheek and reflects. Link asks what Yunobo likes to do in his spare time.

Yunobo answers: acting. "Acting?"

He bobs his head. "When I was newly hewn and still in school, m-my school put on a play about the famous h-heroes of Eldin. You've s-seen Mount Hinderless, right? With the carved faces of heroes, right? You can see it from Darunia."

Link touches her chin. She nods, vaguely recalling having stood on top of such a mountain to enjoy the breeze and escape from the heat of the crowds before.

"With how b-bad my stutter is, I didn't think that I could be picked. But somehow I was." Yunobo wipes the oily tears that well up from his eyes. "I thought, 'Huh? B-but why me?' My teachers answered that even w-with my stutter, I showed them more pride in the role than anyone else. And the Goddess Goro-goro wants us to take prid ein our actions, right? S-so they picked me."

Yunobo touches the tattered blue shawl still wrapped around his shoulders, unfurled like a cape around him, blue as the fabric of the tunic that Link wears, blue as the Parapan sky.

"That's when I knew that I c-could calm Vah Ruda-rudania. Because no matter how scared, or stupid, or s-scrawny—" Link reflects on Yunobo and his massive rock-ular arms, capable of crushing bare stone; she nods sagely. "—as long as I c-could take pride in what I was doing, the Goddess Goro-goro would be with me, right?"

Link bobs her head enthusiastically. She embraces him. He blushes. "I've wanted to ask you this for a while. The thing you wear—" She does not know the word for shawl in Eldic. "—is from Daruk's sash, isn't it?"

"Huh? This?" Yunobo folds his fingers into the fabric of the shawl. "N-no, it's just from the s-sash that I wore for the play. I've kept it." Link blinks. "I was a l-little newly hewn, then, s-so it doesn't fit me as a sash anymore. But I keep it to remind myself of my own pride in myself." He beams at her. "I used to think it was embarrassing, but then I realised I sh-should have pride in myself for having pride, and I've n-never been embarrassed about it again."

Sarie bounces up and down on Yunobo's head. "Yunobobo-bo-Bobobo is cute! Cute!"

"Huh?" He scratches his cheek. "Bobobo...?"
"Yunobobo-bo-bobobo," Sarie repeats insistently. "Very cute and very proud!"

"Say, you know what this calls for, Yunobobo-bo-bobobo?" Link twirls up her cooking pot, spinning it on her index finger. Its heaviness topples it over; she crashes with it to the ground. As she looks up at Yunobo, her head between his feet, Link winks at him. "Let's cook you up some deliciously grilled rock roast, with extra deliciousness." Gathering her from the ground, Yunobo hugs her. She hugs him back.

With Yunobo at her side, and Sarie, and Ilia, and Fi, Link spreads the word as far as she can. Kaneli dispatches messengers to Tabantha and Hebra; the elders of Darunia carry the news with merchants to Eldin and Akkala; the King Zora calls an audience of all of the Lanayrish to the throne pool; Riju sends her trusted guards and advisors to personally see to every village, but the tight-knit kin of the Parapans and Faronese themselves spread the word as swiftly as Link could eat a whole stuffed cucco; Lady Impa turns Kakariko outwards for the first time in years to the whole of Necluda and the few remains of Central Hyrule.

The plan for the summer solstice shifts: not the castle. Not the sanctum. But the Temple in the ravine of Tanagar Canyon.

Link spends the last few months preparing however she may. She hones her skill with the sword, and with spear, and with axe, and with bow. She learns, at least conversationally, as much as she can about all of the languages of the people of Hyrule, for better communication on the day of the summer solstice. When she brings out the girl with the golden hair's dossiers so that people more educated than her might study from the girl with the golden hair's writings, Link listens to what they say, endeavouring to comprehend the Sacred Realm, the mirror, and the Calamitous One to the best of her abilities. She seeks council from the ancient tree of the Kokir Forest.

Although she tries, and fails, to commune again with the dragons, she notes that the dragons will allow her to chip off a scale or a shard of a horn or a bit of a fang or a piece of a claw, which she gathers to brew elixirs. Elixirs of swiftness, and elixirs of protection, and elixirs of might, in green, and in blue, and in red. Not for herself, but for the people willing to lay down their lives for Hyrule. She watches the planning of logistics, of raising armies that have lain dormant for hundreds of years, of training them in whatever ways possible, of marching across the wilds, of feeding and sheltering them. She hears them consider the trek straight through the Hyrule Field yet worry of the guardians therein. She advises them—like the sheikah man who gave her red bean paste told her over a year ago—to robe themselves in white, which the automata cannot see. She witnesses the slow migration of the armies of Hyrule towards the Tanagar Canyon. She observes the Divine Beasts tower over the entrance to the Temple.

She says see you later again to Ilia at Telma Ranch, and she says see you later again to her family and to Ilia the horse at Romani Ranch, and she stands on the parapets of the castletown to say see you later to Aryll, whom she will greet—upon her return—with a carrot cake to say good-bye.

Eventually the summer sun with its golden light heats the earth until Link can feel the tension in the air as thick as steam. On the evening before the summer solstice, while everyone secures their final preparations, she takes a moment to cook. To cook all of the wilds.

Link sits alone, yet not alone. Not entirely alone. She has the girl with the golden hair's slate. She has Aryll's telescope. She has Marin's ocarina. She has Ilia's whistle.

She has Sidon's faith in her abilities, and she has Yunobo's pride in what she can do, and she has Amali's voice telling her how much she means, and she has Riju's kin, where the sky and the earth meet to form the infinite horizon all around her.
And she has her cooking pot.

She sets her beloved cooking pot, her first and her longest companion, on the lip of the ravine of the Tanagar Canyon, and she gazes upon the world. Upon the wilds that have always called her name in a tongue that she has always understood, and upon the people that, too, have always called her name, though she could not understand their tongue until more recently.

Link still does not remember all that has happened on the eve of the Calamity. On the eve of the many days of the Calamity. Yet she does not need to remember. Some of the memories have slowly come back to her. Not all of them. But some. Enough.

She remembers baking apple pie for herself and for the girl with the golden hair. With the girl with the golden hair. Together, the night before they left for Mount Nayru.

She remembers wrapping the apple pie up in wax. She remembers wrapping something else as well: pumpkin pie. Pumpkin pie and apple pie. A pie for Ordon and a pie for all of Hyrule.

She remembers the girl with the golden hair joking that Link only talked to her for her expertise in crimping. She remembers flustering herself trying to explain that she cared for the girl with the golden hair beyond her ability to crimp. She remembers the girl with the golden hair stopping her own laughter and reassuring Link that she understood, that she was not looking for actual answers, that she just wanted to make pumpkin pie and apple pie.

She remembers the girl with the golden hair fasting, as necessitated by prayer. She remembers the night before the girl with the golden hair's nineteenth birthday. She remembers the girl with the golden hair's stomach rumbling. She remembers retrieving the slices of apple pie and pumpkin pie wrapped in wax. She remembers offering them to the girl with the golden hair. She remembers the girl with the golden hair shaking her head and refusing, saying that she had been fasting for a week and would not give in now. She remembers unwrapping the pumpkin pie to eat for herself, the pumpkin pie from Ordon, that which she ate on the final eve of the Great Calamity. She remembers attempting to eat the cake surreptitiously as she could so as not to hurt the girl with the golden hair. She remembers the taste of that bite of pumpkin pie. She remembers the girl with golden hair sniffing the air, her hand over her stomach.

She remembers wrapping up the pumpkin pie again, remembers poking her head out of the tent that she shared with the girl with the golden hair, remembers offering Impa the pie, which Impa accepted with a note of surprise in her voice. She remembers fasting alongside the girl with the golden hair. She remembers lying beside her in the darkness, remembers staring up at the folds in the tarp of the tent, remembers their bellies growling in unison, remembers them laughing about it together.

She bakes pumpkin pie. She cuts the pumpkin pie into slices. She wraps up each slice in wax. Not to repeat what happened one hundred years, but because she wants pumpkin pie, and the girl with the golden hair might want it, too.

She tucks the slices of pumpkin pie into her satchel. She drains one last vial of spring green elixir. She watches the skies darken to the comfort of the night. The stars whose names she knows, and the stars whose names she does not know, and the stars for whom she has more than one name. The stars that Hestu named, and the stars that Urbosa named, and the stars that the girl with the golden hair named, and some of them the same stars but under different names and bearing different stories.

Someday, long after she has returned to dust, the people of the wilds will look upon the stars. Someday, long after the names have faded to dust, the people of the wilds will name the stars
anew. Someday, long after the stars themselves have faded to dust and others have taken their place, the people of the wilds will lift their hands up to the skies and cup the starlight in their palms.

Such is the promise of the Golden Goddesses. Such is the promise of Their breath of the wild. No matter what happens on the summer solstice, the world will live on. The wilds will heal. As long as the sun, the moon, and the earth exist, everything will be all right.

The dawn tips over the rim of the sun's cooking pot and spills its golden aether of will over the skies.

Wetting the mouthpiece of the ocarina, she brings the instrument to her lips. The final verse that Kass ever taught her.

"In a realm beyond sight
"the sky shines gold, not blue.
"There, the Triforce's might
"makes mortal dreams come true."

The summer solstice pours gold into the ravine of the Tanagar Canyon. The summer solstice. The longest day of the year. The longest day of her life.

She slides down to where she and the Champions gather for a final embrace. She embraces Riju; Amali embraces her and Riju; Yunobo embraces her and Riju and Amali; Sidon embraces her and Riju and Amali and Yunobo; and all of them embrace Fi.

"I don't have a speech or anything," she tells them, "but I've got me, and you've got you, and you've got me, and we've got this."

Riju gives her a small ice-box to take with her: Faronese banana, hydromelon, sand seal butter, sand seal milk, sand sparrow eggs, safflina, saffron, voltfin trout, prickly-pear voltfruit, zapshroom. "Gifts from Parapa. If you end up needing to cook in the middle of the battle like you did on Savah Naboris." While Link smiles sheepishly, Riju curls her hand into a fist. "Then, after we come home, we'll have a five-way bump."

"Six-way," Link says gently. Riju tilts her head. "I'm bringing back an old friend, too."

"And when you and your most wonderful old friend return," Sidon bursts out, "we shall cook for them a most delicious paella, as my most wise sister would have loved!"

"If you bring back your friend, then we will have to celebrate with you," Amali agrees. "We can bake fish pie for them."

"And if your friend eats rock, they'd love some rock roast, right?" Yunobo taps his index fingers against one another as he glances at Sidon, who has had a very personal experience with Yunobo's cooking. "A-actually, I'll j-just make them s-some jewellry or something."

Riju touches her hand to her chest. She closes her eyes in concentration for a moment. "I can't think of a single recipe I'd make." She lifts her eyelids. "Then, I'll just have to prepare everything I know. And I'll have the time and peace to do that, thank the Goddesses. We can prepare them together, Link. All of us, together." She looks upon each one of them in turn. "Yunobo, Amali, Sidon, Link." Riju meets Link's gaze; here the sky of Link's eyes and the earth of Riju's meet to form the infinite
horizon all around them. "...and Fi, too. Thank you. Thank you all. The Goddesses are with us. We have the power, and the wisdom, and the courage to seal the Calamitous One. We have the Divine Beasts. We have Fi, the Master Sword. We have the blessings of the Goddesses, the Golden, and the Seven, and every Goddess or Spirit of Light or Dragon or other being that has ever protected the lands and the people of Hyrule.

"And most importantly of all, we have each other. We shall not fail. When we leave the Sacred Realm again, we won't leave as the Champions. We'll leave as just people who can live the rest of our lives in peace. I love each and every one of you, you know." Riju takes Link's lightning-strike hand in her right and Sidon's right in her left. Link reaches out to take Amali's left wing in her right hand, and Amali takes Yunobo's in hers, and Yunobo takes Sidon's, until they have joined together in a circle of five. "Now, come on. Hyrule needs us."

They embrace one final time.

"See you later,"

she signs, and she stakes her life on every word.

As she strides step by step towards the far end of the Temple, Link glances back over her shoulder at the armies of Hyrule who have come from all over the land. They speak their own languages; they pray to their own gods; they eat of their own foods. Yet they do not need a word for Hyrule to know that home is something to be defended.

And she can hear the people singing. She listens to their song, to the faint strains of a most familiar accordion she can hear marching at the heart of the armies: the Ballad of the Sealing War. The melody. But the lyrics sound different, not just in language, but in meaning. Through jumble of dialects of Eldic, Lanayrish, Faronese, Tabanch, Parapan, Akkalan, Hebric, Necluda, she makes out the words in those languages she knows. She listens to the song they have spun into their own. She can hear them singing:

"The Princess with her Knight and Champions four

"awaiting fate's predestined Sealing War.

"When Malice strikes, its hate will shade the sun,

"yet bright with Hope, Hyrule will stand as one."

She gazes at them all. At all of the armies of land once known as Hyrule—no, at all of the armies of Hyrule come together as one. Gerudo and hylians, sheikah and rito, gorons and zora, and at least one very excited and very joyful korok who bounds up and down on Link's shoulder. At those who have pledged their lives to Hyrule, as have the Champions, as has she.

The leaders of Hyrule—Queen Riju from the Divine Beast Vah Naboris of Parapa; the King Zora from a mobile pool of water, having laboriously moved from the throne pool for the first time in nearly two centuries, of Lanayru; Chief Kaneli and the other chiefs of the mountain villages, including Rouru who inclines his head at Link, of Tabantha; the councils of elders of the volcanic cities of Eldin; the various figures of Faron and of Necluda and Akkala and Hebra; and more Sages and Oracles than Link can count amongst the stars—speak to their people to give their final orders, to give their people their final speeches and words of encouragement, to tell their people that no matter what happens, on this day they will end the Calamity once and for all.

One by one, the speeches die away. One by one, the armies crowd into the forgotten Temple of the Golden Goddesses—those that can—with the remainder preparing themselves out of the Temple, spilling out into the canyon. One by one, the Champions enter their Divine Beasts.
The Champion of Zola, the Hero of Lanayru, the Divine Beast Vah Ruta's Pilot, O Wise Sidon. The Champion of Sageru, the Hero of Parapa, the Divine Beast Vah Naboris's Pilot, O Courageous Riju. The Champion of Erito, the Hero of Tabanha, the Divine Beast Vah Medoh's Pilot, O Powerful Amali. The Champion of Goro-goro, the Hero of Eldin, the Divine Beast Vah Rudania's Pilot, O Powerful Yunobo.

And she. The Champions of Hylia, the Heroes of Hyrule, Her Majesty's Knight and Blade, O Courageous Link and Fi.

With her crescent-moon right hand, Link holds the mirror, the pearl like a moon set into its handle. She hovers her lightning-strike left palm over the silver. And then she touches the surface of the mirror. It glows gold, deep and clear.

The shard of the mirror begins to hums. The resonance spreads to the obelisk. The mirror. The mirror, reflective. The shard of the mirror soars from the handle, leaving the ring as empty as the rim of the cooking pot. Link watches the shard glide into the chipped edge that she saw months and months ago when she came to activate the shrine.

The mirror stars to glow. The symbols of the Golden Goddesses glimmer within the obsidian. The wind of the Goddess Farore. The water of the Goddess Nayru. The fire of the Goddess Din.

In the game of wind-water-fire, Link has always favoured the circular symbol of the wind, fashioning her hands as she might hold a cup to drink or a bowl to eat.

And then, as she looks upon the obelisk that reflects not a sky of blue but a sky of gold, she feels like she must call upon to favour the Goddess Farore again. Courage. Courage, now, more than ever. She sinks to her knees in reverence of the Golden Goddesses, the only Goddesses that she has ever known. O Din, the Goddess of Fire and Power. O Nayru, the Goddess of Water and Wisdom. O Farore, the Goddess of Wind and Courage.

"The breath of the wild," Link prays, and even if she does not remember all the words just right, she remembers the placement of her hands and the beating of her heart, "shall whisper over the world, long after you and I have returned to dust, and shall breathe life anew. Such is the promise of the Goddess Farore. Such is Her wind, that She carries the seeds of life, and such is Her courage, that we bear the will to live."

The golden triangles of the centre of the mirror shine in their golden light. As Link watches the mirror reflecting her own eyes—the dark grey of the coming storm—she observes the golden triangles shift over the mirror. They emerge from the edges, spinning and tilting, until they come together in perfect harmony at the heart of the mirror in the mark of the Golden Goddesses.

The mirror shines gold. Link draws herself up. She touches Fi on the hilt. And then she extends her left hand, with its lightning-strike mark of the wind and the courage of the Goddess Farore, towards the shimmering surface of the mirror.

For one brief and brilliant moment, Link believes in the hope beyond hope that everything will be all right.

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*Wheat Bread* (five hearts) - bird egg, fresh milk, goat butter, rock salt, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes
Author's notes: One of Zelda's reasons for having asked all of the soldiers for their names is that, as I've mentioned in previous chapters, one of the Parapan/Faronese faiths in Sageru holds that people do not truly die until the very last time that their names are ever spoken.

The phrase "Triforce of the Goddesses" is taken from the Japanese title of *A Link to the Past*, which is *The Legend of Zelda: Triforce of the Gods*. I admit that the English titles tend to be better for the games themselves (for most things it's the other way around), such as *Link's Awakening* before the superior title to *Dream Island*. It's a pun and it doesn't spoil half the story! I was tickled pink by the title *A Link Between Worlds*.

The shard of the mirror is meant to resemble the Magic Mirror from *A Link to the Past* that allows Link to return from the Dark World to the Light World. The pearl decorating the handle is in reference to the Moon Pearl recovered from the Tower of Hera which grants Link the ability to retain human form in the Dark World. In *A Link to the Past*, the Magic Mirror is described as such: "This mirror is blue, clear and beautiful... You feel like it is going to absorb you into another world..."

Poor Link. Don't worry. This isn't her having lost all of her curiosity for the world; you've seen it in action. But she's also expressing her it goes when people depend on you to save them.

Regarding Zelda fragmenting the mirror, that's taken from the lore of *Twilight Princess*, wherein the Twilight Mirror can be broken into shards by someone else, but which can only be shattered by a truly powerful force, such as the queen of the Twilit people.

I imply in this chapter that someone set up the guardians in the forgotten temple, presumably the same group as the ones who stole the mirror in the sanctum in the first place. You can probably figure out who did it. If not, then read on. Speaking of which, I implied this during the sixty-fourth chapter, but it's the Yiga who moved the mirror from the sanctum to the canyon temple and dragged all of the guardians there (much like what I mentioned Purah doing). The white cloak that Link found in the sanctum? Left behind by the Yiga who had used such fabric to help protect themselves from guardians. That's why Glepp was in the Shrine of Resurrection, looking for the mirror; as one of the Yiga's outside agents, she was not privy to the knowledge of where the mirror has been kept but was searching for it half-heartedly. By the time Link came to talk to her, however, you can see that she's understood about giving up. Oh, and the mark of the Yiga isn't based on Sheik. That symbol—the eye and the droplet—was originally the symbol of the old ruling family of Hyrule, which the original Yiga turned upside-down to mark their working against the ruling family, being originally a noble organization that sought to work against the corruption of the aristocracy at the time. Thousands of years later, when the Great Calamity came to light, the Yiga name and symbol were resurrected for a different and much less noble purpose; the symbol of the once-ruling family has (after ten thousands years) become the symbol of Sheik. The Divine Beasts, slate, etc., bear that mark because it was the royal family's mark at the time of their construction.
Remember the obelisk I mentioned way back when? Yep, the mirror's been there all along. Pretty nice, isn't it?

Hey, remember the thing about guardians not being able to see (or rather, ignoring) white? That's a thing that exists! The reason it wasn't too common of knowledge is that people don't normally wear white, and those that do are unlikely to go near guardian-infested areas. But of course some people, like the man whom Link met, suspect.

By the way, if you were curious, though I've mentioned some of this throughout *Delicious in Wilds*: the main dialects of Tabanch, Faronese, and Parapan are read right to left; Akkalan, Hebric, Eldic, and Central Hyrulean are read left to right; and Necludan and Lanayrish are read top to bottom, the former right to left, the latter left to right.

The original lyrics to the Ballad of the Sealing War (at least, my rendition of them) are located in the ninth chapter.

I mentioned Link's encounter with Chief Roura in the sixty-fourth chapter.

The golden triangles spinning on the surface of the obelisk are a reference to the very impressionable title screen of *A Link to the Past*.

Up next: a memory, and nothing more.

midna's ass. 15 November 2017.

Beta reader's comments: Zelda! She's here! Link gets to talk to her! We've waited 76 chapters for this, and it's so cool to finally get to read it.

Emma. 15 November 2017.
Chapter Summary

The travelling chef and the people of Hyrule have gathered at the mirror in the forgotten temple in Tanagar Canyon. Now, as the chef makes the mirror whole and activates it with a touch, the chef remembers the eve of the Great Calamity. As does the girl with the golden hair.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Link and the girl with the golden hair knelt together upon the floor before the hearth baking pumpkin pie. They had finished preparing, already, the apple pie, which Link had shown the girl with the golden hair how to wrap in wax for the journey ahead. "I know you have to fast until Mount Nayru," Link explained, something close to a smile ghosting over her lips, "but as soon as you get out of there, I'm rescuing you. I mean...it's my duty to watch out for you, isn't it?" The girl with the golden hair rolled her eyes yet played along as Link thumped her fist against her chest. "Including rescuing you from the most deadly enemy of all: hunger!"

"The rules are the rules," the girl with the golden hair said. Her head drooped.

"But you haven't eaten for a week. I know I don't know much about the Seven..." Link shook her head. "This just seems cruel. Isn't one of the virtues something like...happiness?"

"The Goddesses each have Their own virtue. Last time I checked, I've not grown leaves and bark." The girl with the golden hair giggled at her own joke; Link found herself laughing alongside her for the infectiousness of the girl with the golden hair's mirth, before the peals of her laughter faded into a solemn contemplation. "It is the way of those bearing the burden to suffer, so that we might know against which evils we bring our holy might...or something like that." The girl with the golden hair laughed drily. "Mother told me that the Goddesses suffer for the sake of Their people. It is a woman's duty to suffer. I should be grateful to bear it."

"Do you think that you'll...unlock that sealing magic stuff?" Link signed.

The girl with the golden hair spread her fingers over her knees, then clenched her hands tightly into fists, her knuckles pressing into the fabric of her dress. "It does not much matter what I think. It matters what I do. I must, Link. If I don't..." When she drew in a breath, her body shuddered. "...then you won't get the chance to eat pumpkin pie afterwards, now will you?"

"But we made ap—"

"Yes. And we should also make pumpkin." The girl with the golden hair rose from the floor, her dress trailing the floor. "I requested some with last year's harvest. I thought that you would enjoy them."

Link shivered. She wanted to leap up and embrace the girl with the golden hair, yet she kept herself low upon the ground as the girl with the golden hair left the chamber and returned, arms laden with the darker and harder Ordon pumpkins than the sweeter and more orange ones imported from
Necluda or Faron. "Pumpkin pie? I'm very ready to crimp, you know. I've been practising my hand motions—" She flexes her fingers and wrists. "—while praying all day." She giggled again. "Don't tell Impa that."

Pumpkin pie. Together, they carved the pumpkin and scooped out the inner pulp and the seeds. They baked the remaining goo in the oven until it became tender and soft enough to remove with their hands. Link demonstrated how to strain the goo through a cloth.

Together, they ground out fresh flour from wheat and boiled sugar from cane. While Link blended the pumpkin goo that they had prepared together with cucco eggs, cow milk—from Lon Lon Ranch, Link noted with satisfaction—rock salt, and spices of nutmeg and ginger, cinnamon and pimenta, the girl with the golden hair whisked the flour they had ground and sugar they had boiled alongside rock salt and goat butter. She gradually added icy water from a basin in-laid with sapphire until the dough ceased to crumble. To prepare the crust, they rolled the dough through flour; Link cleaned off the rolling pin that they had used for the apple pie. After Link buttered the bottom of the pie tin, the girl with the golden folded the dough inside and sealed the corners of the dough under the rim of the tin with a pressing-in of her fingers. As the girl with the golden hair began to crimp the crust, a smile gradually grew upon her lips, crinkling her eyes and smoothing her brow.

Together, they poured the pie filling that Link had mixed into the crust that the girl with the golden hair had crimped and slid the pie into the oven. The girl with the golden hair made carefully incisions in the crust of the pie—allowing steam to escape and not explode the pie—incisions in the shape of the symbols of the Golden Goddesses, her motions exceedingly slow and exceedingly precise where Link would have briefly slashed some holes and then stuck it into the oven.

For Link, all that mattered was the taste of the food. For the girl with the golden hair, a certain satisfaction came from the perfection of settling everything just quite right. Link cooked out of intuition; the girl with the golden hair, out of science. Link did not know the names or the wherefores of what she put into the food or how the food became itself; the girl with the golden hair studied so that she could prepare food all the better. The girl with the golden hair opened Link's eyes to the possibilities she might not have chanced on by herself; Link opened the girl with the golden hair's eyes to the ability of calming down and focusing the food that was instead of on the mistakes or the what-could-have-been. Together, they made something truly wonderful.

Impa poked her head in and inquired solemnly when the girl with the golden hair planned to sleep, yet even Link could tell that Impa's expression had softened on this, the last night before the trek to Mount Nayru.

Together, they baked the pumpkin pie. As they waited together by the oven—the girl with the golden hair kneeling, Link seated cross-legged upon the floor—the girl with the golden hair started, from the silence, to speak.

At first, Link did not register her words as words but merely as sounds, as if she were singing. Then the words washed over her. Link tilted up her chin towards the girl with the golden hair.

"...and I still don't know much about you. I know the things that you've shown me. That you're a glutton who can't resist a delicious meal. And that you truly care for Epona...so much so, that you have helped me cultivate a better relationship with my own little one, Storm. I...I've been trying to do better, you know." The girl with the golden hair glanced down at her hands and then back up at Link. "I've been trying to do what I've seen you do. To soothe, to brush Storm's mane, to be sure to have carrots and salt on me, always. But you've seen that, of course. You're...much more attentive than I am, to the little things." The girl with the golden hair made a strange little breathy noise in
the back of her throat that brought Link to focus on her more closely for a moment before returning to staring blankly at the oven. "I...I've told you a lot about myself, too. And you've told me some things about yourself, but...it's always been about others. The little I've learned are the things that you've been forced to tell me when you talk about Ilia, Marin, your sister, or the villagers that you grew up with—the blacksmith's name was Rusl, wasn't it? I'm sorry if I misremembered—but I still know precious little about you."

Link opened the oven to check on the pie. Not quite done. She closed the door again as the girl with the golden hair continued to talk.

"Link...I don't know what's going to happen when we arrive at Mount Nayru. I don't know if the Divine Beasts will function, and I don't know if I'll be able to...I don't know. Everyone thinks that this is our moment. I should have hope, shouldn't I?" The girl with the golden hair closed her eyes. "Link. I have a secret to tell you. I...I did something very bad." She scooted closer to Link, to cup her hands around her mouth, and then stopped.

Instead, lifting her hands and reaching out, the girl with the golden hair brushed her fingers against Link's palms, silently singing into her hands. "You have to promise not to tell anyone." Link nodded.

"I broke off part of the mirror in the Sanctum." The girl with the golden hair glanced left and right prior to resuming speaking. She hunched over Link's palms, hiding away her words from prying eyes. "I...I have a hypothesis that the mirrors I was doing research about really do exist, and that the mirror in the Sanctum is that mirror, the one that was kept by the royal family. I didn't break it permanently! But I just thought that I could...if anything goes wrong...I'll be able to confirm my theory if the mirror works."

Link nodded again, more steadily this time. The girl with the golden hair rolled back onto her knees with a small smile halfway between anxiety and a strange sense of self-pride. Then her features sharpened to solemnness.

"Link. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to. That said, I think that I understand. I think I understand, now that I'm...a little older, and now that I've tried to be more...more attentive to people than I have been in the past." The girl with the golden hair laced her fingers together. "You remind me of Urbosa." Her cheeks reddened slightly before the girl with the golden hair cleared her throat. "You don't want to burden anyone with your feelings. You don't think that you're...worth it, do you? I don't want to say that you hate yourself or something. Yet, you don't feel like you have a right to burden others. So you stay silent..."

She trailed off. Link could sense her looking directly at her as though checking whether Link herself had finished baking in the oven of the girl with the golden hair's expectations.

"Am I...am I right, Link? You know that you can be honest. Ever since Urboa's been opening up to me, she's been a lot happier, and so have I. And, well, y-you know how our friendship's been like."

Again, the girl with the golden hair blushed. She held her hands up over her cheeks until the redness passed. "You can talk to me."

"Everyone else has more problems than I do," Link signed, and as soon as her fingers began to form the shapes of the words, the girl with the golden hair fell silent. "Everyone's got a bigger burden to bear. The...the sword chose me. All I have to do is walk up to the Calamitous One with it, and it'll do all the work for me. The Champions had to fight for their positions. All of them...Daruk, Urbosa, Mipha, and probably most of all Revali...have had to fight more than I have. And you most of all. They all chose to do what they did. I chose to pick up the sword. You didn't choose to be born the one with a destiny. That's all. I don't want to burden anyone else more than necessary." She
closed her fingers against her palms as though snapping shut the lid of a cooking pot forever.

The girl with the golden hair opened her mouth to respond, then closed it again, then opened it, then closed it again, and then turned to look into the oven. "I'm sorry." Silence.

"I'm sorry. I've never been good at knowing what to say to people. Even with Urbosa, I just...sort of nod and listen, while she talks, and sometimes she asks me to stroke her hair. I'm not good at comforting people. I shouldn't even be apologising now." Silence.

"...thank you for being honest with me. I promise that your problems wouldn't burden me. It's...it's after I found out, about your parents a little, that I thought to myself that maybe I could trust you after all."

Link blinked at her. Their positions had switched: now she stared at the girl with the golden hair, while the girl with the golden hair stared at the oven.

"I think the pie is done," observed the girl with the golden hair. Link could hear in her timbre the slightest tremble of tears.

They cut the pumpkin pie into slices. They wrapped the pie up in wax. They put away their belongings for tomorrow. The girl with the golden hair took her harp down from the wall and invited Link to play alongside her for a time.

"I know that we've given up on music bringing out the ability to seal the darkness," she said, her voice kept even, as if stretched out to a timbre so thin that Link could see through its translucency. "I simply wanted to teach you something. A last song. I've already taught you the songs that Mother taught me of all of the other Goddesses. But...I haven't taught you the one that I asked for most. She sang all of them to me as lullabies when I had trouble going to sleep—including that nocturne to the Goddess Sheik that scared me as a child; that's a little trivia for you—but I haven't taught you the lullaby that she sang.

"She told me that...that that lullaby has been known with the name of the princess stretching back generations. It's custom to name every firstborn princess the same thing, you know, until they grow up to be queen, just in case our mortal incarnation of the Goddess Hylia is called on again, after the name of that...first princess." The girl with the golden hair laughed to herself. A sad, sad little laugh, like a dry susurrus of leaves about to catch fire. "It's funny. When...when Father first started calling me by that name, it represented the greatest freedom in the world. I felt like I was seeing the outside world for the first time. Now, when he calls that, I feel nothing but confinement. I can see outside, but only through the prison bars closed around."

The girl with the golden hair hesitated. She dipped her head. "Here it is, then. Without further ado. The...the lullaby I was named after."

She played the song upon her harp, and Link followed on her ocarina, back and forth, and back and forth, until Link memorised the notes, until the song that she drew through the wind of the ocarina matched the song that the girl with the golden hair strummed upon the harp.

Lowering the harp to her lap, the girl with the golden hair looked up at Link, and Link looked back at her, meeting the gaze of her fire-light blue eyes.

Blue eyes. Always in the songs about the Princess of Hyrule, whether the princess of distant eras or the princess of now. Always she had blue eyes. Sometimes she had golden hair, or hair as brown as the earth, or even hair as scarlet as a gerudo girl's.
And, too, in Link's memories, the girl with the golden hair looks upon Link with eyes the same colour as the blade of evil's bane. With eyes the same colour as the guardian's fire-light. With eyes the same colour as the blue of the Sacred Realm. But can people have eyes that shade of blue?

"Link...thank you for believing in me. In me. Not in my bloodline, but in me." The girl with the golden hair wiped her eyes despite the lack of tears; Link could see a redness to the whites. "It has meant more to me than you could know."

"Is it all right if I go see Aryll before I leave?" Link signed.

"Yes, of course." She touched the golden and violet charms she wore at her throat.

"I want to hug her before we leave."

"With my blessing."

Link left. Upon her return, she looped her little sister's scarlet telescope into the belt at her left hip. "If you see a white bird on Mount Nayru," she told the girl with the golden hair, so seriously that than even the girl with the golden hair drew out a notebook to record Link's words, "we're going to name it the Arylloftwing."

"That's preposterous. We haven't seen any recorded sightings of loftwings. I don't think that they exist at all, and naming a real bird after them would—" Link looked at her. The girl with the golden hair's tone dropped. "—not confuse anyone, seeing as loftwings aren't real. Consider it done."

They prepared themselves for sleep. When the dawn came, they would rise to embark upon the journey overland, guarded by soldiers and knights of Hyrule ensuring their safe arrival to Mount Nayru. Link lay on her back on a mat upon the ground at the foot of the girl with the golden hair's bed. A familiar ceiling. She closed her eyes.

In the darkness, just as Link had begun to drift beyond the veil of dreams, she could hear the girl with the golden hair's voice.

"...Link," she whispered. "Do you remember that verse I read you?

"Cowards die many times before their deaths.

"The valiant never taste of death but once."

Though the girl with the golden hair could neither see nor hear Link, she nodded anyways.

"Do you think...do think that that's true, Link?"

Link kept herself perfectly still, flattened down against the mat, her gaze fixed upon the ceiling overhead.

"I guess you're asleep, aren't you? Well, good night, Link. Thank you for everything. I'll try not to disappoint you, too. I know you'd never say it, but..." Her words faded to a muffled murmur that Link could no longer make out.

They trekked to Mount Nayru. They reached the River Hylia. Link gave Impa her slice of pumpkin pie. She fasted together by the side of the girl with the golden hair. She, and the girl with the golden hair, and Mipha, and Urbosa, and Revali, and Daruk, and Impa. The Champions encouraged the girl with the golden hair in whatever ways they could. And then the Great
Calamity struck. From the castle, first, and then everywhere, as though the earth itself had begun to bleed malice, everywhere and nowhere at once, monsters crawling over the land. They watched the Divine Beasts awaken in the distance. The Champions mobilised.

Impa could see—the Sages could see—the Oracles could see—the king could see—everyone but the girl with the golden hair could see that the Goddesses had answered their pleas at last. The girl with the golden hair's nineteenth birthday coincided with the very eve that the Calamitous One spilled unto the world; after so many years the Divine Beasts awakened and responded to the slates of their pilots; the girl with the golden hair, everyone seemed to hope, would pray at the Spring of Wisdom, and then she would become the Goddess Hylia incarnated.

The girl with the golden hair turned nineteen the day that they stepped foot at the banks of the River Hylia on their journey, and Link herself turned eighteen the day that they arrived in the foothills of Mount Nayru. They observed the Divine Beasts alive and awake in the distance, the signs of the Great Calamity all around them.

The girl with the golden hair prayed at the Spring of Wisdom to the Goddess Nayru, the last of the three Golden Goddesses whom she had not yet supplicated. The girl with the golden hair begged. The girl with the golden hair pleaded. The girl with the golden hair wept. The girl with the golden hair screamed. The girl with the golden hair emerged from the Spring of Wisdom to see the Calamitous One that had welled up in violet from the very earth, the veil between her world and the Sacred Realm.


The ambush by the Yiga. Epona's death. The guards' massacre. The second ambush. Storm's death. Impa's wounding. The girl with the golden hair assuring Impa that she had a plan, that she would rely on the mirror in the sanctum, that she had hope. Link and the girl with the golden hair, escaping down the mountain.

The Divine Beasts in the distance with their eyes glowing in violent violet. The guardians that had travelled with the guard, now razing their own forces. The girl with the golden hair and Link, battered, and weary, and cold, and dirtied, and bloodied, and ever so slowly bleeding out.

The monsters. The malice. The Yiga. Link fought them off, protecting the girl with the golden hair, as they travelled on foot, swift as the wind. In a forest grove at the base of the Naydra Snowfields, the girl with the golden hair collapsed to her knees.

"How...?"

Link turned towards her. She sheathed Fi, her blade not glowing, her sheen merely a dull and softened white.

"How did it come to her? The Divine Beasts...the guardians...they've all turned against us.” Her fingers, already caked in dirt and in mud, tore through the earth as if seeking the malice that would swallow her whole. "It turned them against us. The Calamitous One."

Link knelt beside her. She tried to rouse the girl with the golden hair, but the girl with the golden hair could only raise her head, her features wrenched into an expression of grief and pain older than any Link had ever seen. Link could not tell if the wetness under her eyes came of her tears or of the rains that had opened up overhead, the Goddesses Themselves weeping for what had come for Hyrule.

"And everyone...Mipha, Urbosa, Revali, and Daruk..." The girl with the golden hair's eyes..."
glistened wetly. Tears. "They're all trapped inside those things. Their eyes...that violent violet..."

On the final sound, on the phrase violent violet, the girl with the golden hair's voice shattered so brokenly that Link would never forget those words. Violent violet.

"It's all my fault. Our only hope for sealing the Calamitous One is lost. All because I couldn't...I couldn't harness this cursed sealing magic. It was...everything. Everything I've done up until now." She closed her fingers around the golden charm she wore at her throat. "Everything we've done done up until now..."

She buried her face into her palms. The mud on her hands imprinted the contours of her palms and the rings of her fingers into her cheeks.

"...it was all for nothing. So I really am just a failure. I'm no daughter of Hyrule. I'm nothing. I'm nothing." She crawled forward through the dirt towards Link, who could only stare vacantly at her, who had nothing resembling words to say. Tears streaked salt down her cheeks. Her features twisted, her eyes reddened, her mouth curved into the shape of the void itself. "All my friends...the entire kingdom...Impa, who has spent her entire life with me...and Father most of all...I tried...I tried, and I failed them all. I've left them all to..." The girl with the golden hair shuddered, like malice had burst open in her chest, eating her alive from the inside out. "I've left them all to die."

Link attempted, again, to rouse her to her boots, but the girl with the golden hair merely clung to her like a child, tears streaking down her cheeks in thick and dirtied globs, snot trailing mucus down her face. Link could barely make out her words.

"I really am a failure."

"What about the mirror?" Link tried to ask. "Didn't you have—didn't you tell Impa—?"

The girl with the golden hair buried her face in Link's chest, and Link could feel the hot wetness of her tears through the fabric of her tunic.

"She's dead. Don't you get that? I could see it—!" The girl with the golden hair choked down a sob. "I could see it in her eyes. She's dead. She would've beg me to abandon her if she didn't think she was going to die. I just wanted...I just wanted to give her hope that her death wasn't in vain. That everything she's worked for...that what she died for...that it wasn't in vain." The girl with the golden hair trembled against her. "But there's nothing. All of my research means nothing without the sealing magic. If I'd only done something more. If I'd only stopped treating everything like a game. This...this is all...this is all my...

"This is all," whispers the girl with the golden hair, her voice as distant as the wind over the seas, her toneless timbre as deadened and numb as the snows that blanket the living and the dead, standing before the world that she has wrought, the Sacred Realm and the mortal world one and the same, the consciousnesses of mortals and monsters merging, the boundaries of their bodies dissipating into vapour, the earth itself bleeding malice from the Calamitous One that has burst forth from the heart of the realm where the golden pyramid of the Sacred Realm and the Hyrule castle of the mortal world have melded into one, the Divine Beasts' eyes glowing with a violent violet, the screams of soldiers and civilians alike visceral in the pain rippled through the aether of the Sacred Realm, Link dropped to her knees beside her, Fi fallen from her lightning-strike hand as she faces the Great Calamity arisen once more, "once more, my fault."

Pumpkin Pie (eight hearts) - cane sugar, goat butter, fortified pumpkin, silent princess, Tabantha
Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: I started this chapter at 21:01 on the eighteenth of August, and finished writing it at 01:57 on the nineteenth of August.

Thanks a million for all of the support you have all given me over these past few months! We're nearly there. And thanks to my beta reader, Emma, for pushing me beyond my limits, and reminding me that infinitives are not the only way to write.

My, what a short chapter this is. Actually, surprisingly, the last really long chapter is the eightieth, and everything after that is fairly short. Well, *fairly* short. But this is the first such short chapter we've had in some time! I realised I had to push myself to the limits.

By the way, a woman's duty is not to suffer. This is something I disagree with.

Zelda's comments about Link being a glutton who can't resist a delicious meal and Link having aided her cultivate a relationship with her horse are pulled directly from *Breath of the Wild*, from Zelda's diary in Hyrule Castle and from the memory "To Mount Lanayru", respectively. The name Storm for Zelda's horse comes from the name of Zelda's horse in the *Valiant Comics* adaptation of *The Legend of Zelda* and *The Adventure of Link*. Likewise, Zelda's comments about Link not wanting to burden others and saying little are directly based on the comments she has about Link in her diary in *Breath of the Wild*.

Previous incarnations of Zelda have had different hair colours, and yes, there have been official arts of Zelda with reddish hair before (though it's usually more orange than red, with the exception of a few rare official arts from the early era when designs weren't solidified and everyone drew what they wanted).

The lines from the play that have come up repeatedly throughout the fic are from a real-world play, written by someone whose writing I do not much enjoy, but in the world of the fic, they are from a play about an ancient Parapan king ousted by the Parapans, which I've spoken about before. I should note that the reference to a Parapan king rather than queen is a result of the mistranslation by Central Hyrulean scholars, as I have mentioned in previous author's notes.

I basically just synthesised everything together here. I tried to summarise/skip over what Impa and the others with whom she has spoken have already told Link.

And the memory here is an adaptation of the sixteenth memory that Link can discover, which I've kept as similar to the one in canon as possible.

You'll notice that Zelda only has a golden charm at her throat during the scene in the grove, rather than both the golden and the violet. That's because the violet charm is the bracelet that I mentioned she gave to Impa. It all comes together!
If the ending of the chapter was confusing, I tried to do a transition from the past to the present. The second-to-last paragraph ends in the past, with Zelda about to say (as she does in *Breath of the Wild*) "This is all my fault." The last paragraph is entirely in the present, as Zelda says, "This is all, once more, my fault." Because in activating the mirror, with all of the armies of Hyrule gathered in a single location, Zelda had to take her concentration from Calamity Ganon. And now Calamity Ganon, having bided its time all this while, has broken free from its chains.

Zelda has, naturally, been wracked with guilt the past century. That's why she says, "This is all, once more, my fault."

Pumpkins I've associated rather heavily with Ordon (sorry, Kakariko!); apples are by contrast associated with Hyrule at large. I mentioned the pumpkin pie in the previous chapter, but it's here that I put it properly, since it's here that Link actually baked it. With silent princess, since Zelda enjoys the taste so.

Now it's time for them to confront the Great Calamity. Stay tuned, because the next chapter will be pretty fun—and the chapter thereafter, the eightieth, is my personal favourite.

We're really at the promised day now. Just a few chapters left. Thank you all for accompanying me on this journey.

Up next: three scales; a pinch of fairy dust; a fragment of a star.

midna's ass. 15 November 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This is one of the most interestingly constructed chapters in the series. I really love it as a major change of pace.

We're headed into endgame now. The next few chapters are a doozy.

Emma. 15 November 2017.
Fairy Tonic

Chapter Summary

The Calamititous One has brought a second Great Calamity upon Hyrule. Now the people of Hyrule must hold on to their hope, and the travelling chef must hold on to that which lies at the bottom of the chef's cooking pot: a fragment of a star.

Chapter Notes

As usual, notes that did not fit in the end: The golden pyramid at the centre of the Sacred Realm is inspired by the pyramid from A Link to the Past. As you can tell, many of my ideas for Delicious in Wilds were inspired directly by A Link to the Past and The Adventure of Link. If Breath of the Wild is The Hyrule Fantasy in the same sense that The Legend of Zelda was, then Delicious in Wilds was adapted from The Adventure of Link, complete with Link journeying to the same cities as in The Adventure of Link (Kasuto, Darunia, Medli, Nabooru, Ruto, and so on). Funny, that it's the black sheep of the Zelda franchise. And, you know, I didn't really like it for a long time. Then I replayed it while writing Delicious in Wilds, coming back to it for inspiration of the feeling I was trying to evoke, and listening to its OST during the entire time that I was writing Delicious in Wilds, and I've come to adore it once I made peace with its difficulty.

I know I'm going on and on about these old games. I don't mean to say, "Wow the old games are better than the new games!" because Breath of the Wild from a gameplay perspective is my favourite of the 3D titles, and I think that both A Link Between Worlds and Triforce Heroes are marvellous. Rather, when it came time for me to write a love letter to the Zelda franchise, I realised that, more than anything, this was about Link's adventure. This isn't like previous 3D instalments in the series where Link is guided throughout the adventure upon the urgency of a companion and a linear story pushing Link through. Rather, what drives Link—and the player—forward is some measure of curiosity. Even those players who followed the guiding path set out for them (i.e. going first to Kakariko) were still choosing to be guided. And I felt that Breath of the Wild and by extension Delicious in Wilds could be split into two: the world before the Great Calamity, which was The Legend of Zelda, and the world after Link's awakening (ehehe), which is The Adventure of Link.

The Adventure of Link is certainly a linear game, unlike the more open nature of its predecessor The Legend of Zelda and the 'open air' of Breath of the Wild. Yet for all of its linearity, it retains a sense of the player's own curiosity driving the player forward, perhaps from the lack of guidance given within the game. I could not say. But I disliked it for what I viewed as its obtuseness, for what I say as excruciating difficulty without much purpose. I still like that there are aspects of The Adventure of Link that are very, very flawed, as there all in all games. Yet I have made my peace. I accepted its difficulty, its mysteries, its demands both intentionally programmed and unintentionally left. And I can say that, more than anything, writing Delicious in Wilds has allowed me to love The Adventure of Link. This isn't immediately relevant to the chapter at hand, but we'll return to it once I come to the eightieth chapter. For now,
let me just say that you might want to listen to the Dark World OST from *A Link to the Past* (or the Lorule Overworld remake from *A Link Between Worlds*) when you read this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They should have known. For over two years, the Calamitous One has gathered its strength from the onslaught of the armies of Hyrule. For over two years, the Calamitous One has breached the veil countless to spew out monsters or malice, to keep links between the guardians and the Sacred Realm that they use as a source of energy, to maintain control over the Divine Beasts that Link and her friends had not yet calmed.

For over two years, the Calamitous One—for reasons that no one understood—declined reaching through the veil and backing back the Divine Beasts that it has already hacked once before. For over two years, the girl with the golden hair and her armies believed the Calamitous One weak, believed victory close at hand.

For over two years, the Calamitous One has played them all.

And now, as the armies of Hyrule conveniently wait in a single crowded Temple with the four Divine Beasts directly beside them—and now, as the girl with the golden hair loosens her attention from the Calamitous One and focuses on activating the mirror—and now, at the very moment of the hope of Hyrule, the second Great Calamity has come, and the Sacred Realm and the mortal world have begun to merge as one.

The singing of the armies has given way to screaming. The monsters that surround the Temple. The Divine Beasts that once again open the sacred shining of their holy hearts and raze down beings of blood in fire-light, leaving nothing but ash. The malice that wells up from the ground as though the earth itself were bleeding.

"This is all once more, my fault," says the girl with the golden hair. Link can hear her laughing, a laugh as dry and barren as the wastes of the Hebric north. "It really is, isn't it. As long as I can't seal the Calamitous One away, we have nothing."

Link kneels upon the floor that has almost ceased to be the floor. She feels the pressure of her palms on the very real ground of the Temple, and yet she can simultaneously feel the boundaries of her body evaporating into the mist of the Sacred Realm. The pain of those who have fought against the Calamitous One for one hundred years. The pain of those who have entered the Sacred Realm for the first time. The pain of those who find themselves unable to die despite the agony of their bodies twisted beyond the mortal pale.

The pain of her friends. Sidon, Riju, Amali, Yunobo. The pain of the malice against which they fight. The pain of the malice that coats their bodies. The pain of their skin dissolved away. The pain of the union of a being of blood and a being of will. The pain of a union never meant to be. The pain of the union of the Realms of Blood and of Will.

Only the aura of protection offered her by the shrine near the mirror she has activated keeps her, for the moment, from succumbing to the same.

Her consciousness spreads over the whole of the Sacred Realm and the mortal world. She can sense everyone around her, all at once. She kneels in the heart of a crowd. A crowd, again, with voices too loud all around her, and bodies pressing in too close, and too many people, too many
people, and all of their thoughts and feelings and expressions and complexities and agonies, too much, too much, filling her ears and her mouth and her nose, choking down her throat convulsing around the thickness of their tears, her vision blurred to gold and violet, her hands over her ears, and she has no one to cling to, and she has no one to hold on to, and she has no one to guide her, no friend to take her hand, no friend to let her close herself off while someone else drags her along, no friend to let her narrow her focus and her world to the things that she wants to see, no friend to let her ignore all that is around her.

In this half-merged state, Fi remains motionless on the ground as only the sword. In this half-merged state, the girl with the golden hair wisps in and out of her existence like a mirage. In this half-merged state, Link is alone.

She wants nothing more than to escape. She wants nothing more than to flee into the land of grass and hill and wind. She wants nothing more than to live alone in the wilds that call her name.

Except not only the wilds call her anymore. She feels the telescope at her left hip. She feels the ocarina on its loop. She feels her own fingers that have formed the whistle. She touches the slate of the girl with the golden hair. Link closes her eyes. And then she opens them again.

Rising to her boots, Link grasps Fi's hilt in her lightning-strike hand. The whorls of gold spiral over her fingers down over the violet that has inked her own history into her skin. The scars that mark her body mark, too, the tales and trials of Hyrule.

Living proof of what they have gone through. Living proof of all that they have done. Living proof of the burden that the girl with the golden hair has had to bear. The burden that the Champions long passed—Daruk, Revali, Urbosa, Mipha—have borne. The burden that the people of Hyrule long passed have borne. The burden that the Champions of now—Yunobo, Amali, Riju, Sidon—still bear. The burden that the people of Hyrule now still bear. The burden that all of the wilds and the people that make something out of them bear.

No matter what happens, she must do her part. No matter what happens, she will not run away. No matter what happens, she will seal the Calamitous One. And when she returns, she will cook for the whole of Hyrule a meal as infinite as the horizon of their future.

All of the wilds combined cannot sit at a campfire and share stew from a communal cooking pot.

Her fingers close around the hilt. The violet wings unfurl. The jewel in the pommel shimmers. The mark of the Golden Goddesses glows softly upon the blue of the blade.

Link shifts towards the girl with the golden hair, less a person and more a disembodied voice, everywhere and nowhere at once. "Even if the Calamitous One has broken through, we can seal it for ten years. That’ll give us enough time."

She can sense rather than hear the girl with the golden hair's unspoken words: yet, if one hundred years was barely enough to heal, what will ten years give?

"But this time it’ll be truly sealed, not just distracted. The past hundred years have seen monsters anyway, and malice, and..."

She can sense rather than hear the girl with the golden's hair unspoken words: yet the first few decades after the Calamitous One struck had no monsters or malice. What difference will this make? This time, they have the knowledge of the Sacred Realm. This time, they have the Divine Beasts. This time, they have Fi with one hundred years of power, not drained after over ten thousand long years, and ten years will not make much of a difference except that Fi will have long
drained again her power, and they will no longer have a plan, and the people of Hyrule will have long lost hope that they can do anything against the Calamitous One if even all of the nations within Hyrule working together instead of relying on the King and Divine Beasts and the Master Sword and Hero and the Princess can do nothing.

At this moment the people of Hyrule are more powerful, more wise, more courageous than they have ever been. In ten years, they will only have lost everything that they have and gained precious little.

"There has to be something. There has to be something we can try. It doesn't matter how far-fetched it is. Wasn't there something that you told me once? That weird times call for weird measures? I can't remember what it is you said. There's a lot I can't remember. But I do remember all of the things that you've told me about the world. There has to be something."

She can sense rather than hear the girl with the golden hair's spoken words: "There is...there is one thing that we can try. But I don't know if it'll just make everything worse or not. I don't know if it's still possible. I don't even know if it's worth it."

She can sense rather than hear the girl with the golden hair's spoken words: "Not even Mudora believed me when I asked him to write about it in case my research was never brought to light."

She can sense rather than hear the girl with the golden hair's spoken words: "No one believes me. I don't know if I believe me. It seems like something to hope beyond hope. Like something that people just made up to give themselves hope. To make sure that their heroes could always have a happy ending. I..."

She can sense rather than see the girl with the golden hair looking at her hands. At the violet that stains both. At the crescent-moon red of her own blood in the palm of her right hand. At the lightning-strike gold of her own will in the palm of her left.


Link gazes up through the translucent ceiling of the Temple to the skies above, a blur of mortal blue and sacred gold. She lifts up her hands to catch the skylight in her cupped palm. And, with those lifted hands, she tries to speak.

She, once and again in her life, does not know what to say. She, once and again in her life, does not have the words. She has never had the words.

Except she does not need her own words. She cannot blow her own wind, but she has the wind of all of her friends at her back, and she has all of their words at her fingertips.

Kass's song: "Mudora believed you more than you think he did."

Sarie's joy: "We can’t run away from what has happened. We can’t run away from our pasts. But that doesn’t mean that we have to see them only as tragedy. We can look to the future. No matter how many times we fail. No matter how many times things go wrong. We can try again."

Sidon's faith: "I have the utmost faith in you. I know you can know it."

Riju's kin: "I don't know if you heard everyone singing before I touched the mirror, but they were singing for you. We've all pledged our loyalties to you. Whatever you need us to do, we will."

Amali's voice: "I know that you've been asked to be just the Princess your entire life. I know that everyone's only expected you to just use the sealing magic. I know that everyone's just looked at
you and seen someone to take the burden. But that isn't all you are. And you know that. And I know that. Even if everyone was just expecting one thing out of you..."

Yunobo's pride: "I'm not expecting anything. But I am asking for something else. I'm asking you to take pride in what you can do. I'm asking you to take pride in your accomplishments, in your abilities, in your research."

Paya's truth: "...you're not acting like yourself. I don't know about this prophecy. I don't know about the blessed bloodline. But if anyone can...if anyone can figure out what to do, it's you. I know it. I just know it. Please. For the people of Hyrule. We have to try again."

The girl with the golden hair's hope: "Everything around us will die if we don't do something. Let us have hope. If we fail, then at least we have failed in something we can hope for. Please. You have spent your entire life trusting me. Now, please, it's time that you trust yourself. It is Hope, or it is death. And, like we've had to choose again and again in both of our lives, let's once again choose hope."

Her own understanding: "We have to try. If we don't try, then who's going to share stew with me in my cooking pot?"

She can sense rather than see the girl with the golden hair stopping. She can sense rather than see the girl with the golden hair lifting her head. She can sense rather than see the girl with the golden hair nodding, clenching her hands into fists, raising a hand to her collarbones, closing her fingers around the golden charm she wears at her throat, staking her life on doing whatever she can for her people.

She can sense rather than feel the courage in the girl with the golden hair's trembling hands. She can sense rather than feel the power in the girl with the golden hair's long-researched truth.

She can sense rather than feel the girl with the golden hair's wisdom. Not only her education. Not intelligence. But the fire-light blue of her wisdom.

"You said that there was a way to go anywhere in the Sacred Realm." She can sense rather than see the girl with the golden hair inclining her head. "How do you do it?" She can sense rather than see the girl with the golden hair extend her hand towards Link.

The slate. The girl with the golden hair brushes her hand over the slate. The surface glows alight with runes that Link knows all too well: the blue of the explosives, the red of magnesis, the yellow of stasis, the light blue of cryonis, the green of the pictobox.

And then the girl with the golden hair reaches over the smoothness of the flat of the slate's back. Link watches her curl in her fingers; suddenly the surface of the slate changes.

The runes have vanished. In their place, Link can see a map of the land of Hyrule. Not quite the Hyrule that she remembers. Not quite that Hyrule at all. Still the snows in the northwest, and still the mountains in the northeast, though Akkala does not appear to exist, but she notices tracks upon tracks of forests and grasses and hill in the southwest, and desert along the southeast below which she can see a great gulf dotted with islands that mimic the highlands of eastern Faron.

A map of the land of Hyrule from ten thousand years ago. And here and there, blinking in fire-light blue, she can see tiny stars. She does not need to count to know. One hundred and twenty shrines. Fifteen towers. Seven strange points that she does not recognise, four of them congregated near the Temple and steadily moving away.
The girl with the golden hair glides her fingers over the surface of the slate. The map of Hyrule moves with her motions, scoping in and out like the telescope of the pictobox.

Link cannot read the characters upon the map, characters written in a language that she does not know, but she can name that which she knows. She can name the land that she has ridden over. Though ten thousand years have changed the face of Hyrule, as these past two years have changed her own face, she still knows the wilds better than she knows herself.

The River Hylia, not then a river but a path down from the volcanic mountains. The Hyrule Field, not then a field but the shores of the bay. The the castle, not then a castle, but a tower. And in the highest floor of that tower: the fire-light blue of the shrine.

Link and the girl with the golden hair raise their forefingers together. At the same time, together, as together they poured the filling of the pumpkin pie into the crust, as together they slid the pie tin into the oven warm as her embrace, as together they wrapped the slices into wax to take with them on their very, very long journey to the summit, together, they touch the blue of the shrine in the heart of the castle. In the heart of the tower. In the heart of the golden pyramid that rises above the Sacred Realm.

She cannot describe the feeling. She feels herself come undone in a blaze of fire-light blue, and she wonders if death, too, carries this strange sensation of all of her dissipating at once into mist, of her consciousness shifting through the wind as though carried on the back of a great red bird that answers only to her own call, of herself abruptly reforming from the fog.

Link gasps. Dropping to her knees, she scrambles against the floor for something solid, for anything solid. The world around her swathes in darkness, yet everything around her glimmers in the scarcest of golden luminescence that grants her just enough light to make out a pool of water in front of her.

She glances back and forth: a small chamber, about the width of five Links if they lay head-to-toe from wall to wall.

She does not know if she now rests within the Sacred Realm, or if she remains in the mortal world, or if the distinction matters anymore. She still has the cooking pot affixed to her back. She still has the telescope and the ocarina at her left hip. She still has Fi sheathed over her shoulder. And she knows that the girl with the golden hair kneels beside her.

Together, the two of them look upon the girl with the golden hair's slate, which has fallen to float in the pool of water.

"If we're going to do this," says the girl with the golden hair, "then we have to hurry. Right now, the two realms are still separated, if only slightly. The shrines are gateways between one and the other, and if any being of will tries to come near, it'll be reverted back to the Sacred Realm unless it has enough willpower to stay. That means that all of the people across Hyrule who are near the shrines should be safe, for now. The only thing that can come near the villages are the guardians..."

"But Central Hyrule has no villages anymore, at least not any near the guardians," Link signs quickly. "We have time."

The girl with the golden hair nods. "Then let's do this. Before the veil is breached entirely. No more talking. We have to go." The girl with the golden hair closes her eyes for a moment, then opens them again, in a mannerism so reminiscent of Riju that Link feels her innards twist inside-out for her friends trapped in the Divine Beasts, like her friends one hundred years ago.
She has to believe in them. They will do all that they can. And she will do all that she can.

The girl with the golden hair rises from the ground in her traveller’s outfit, the tunic blue and gold, the trousers black as pitch. She strides away from the pool of water. Wobbling herself to her own feet, Link looks beyond the girl with the golden hair. She sees except for nothing a great blank wall, which the girl with the golden hair tests with her hands. Somewhere behind that wall: outside.

Link fishes the slate from the water. She blinks not at the runes, but at the map of the land of Hyrule. The girl with the golden hair demonstrates how to return the slate to its previous state.

No matter what else happens, no matter what weapons have broken or what arrows she lacks, she has always had her own trusty back-up: bombs.

Link conjures a spherical explosive in her hand. Spinning it on her forefinger, she throws it at the wall. She detonates the bomb. The wall of the pyramid cracks. She forms a second explosive, this one cubic. The crack widens. Then, a third. She counts: the courage to throw the first; the wisdom to recognise she needed a second; the power to blow the pyramid to sky-high smithereens with the third.

The wall shoots outwards. The girl with the golden hair falls into step beside Link. The two of them walk, then run, then sprint out from the inner chamber.

"And on the highest point of the pyramid, the Calamitous One has been trapped all this time. If—if my research holds true," the girl with the golden hair pants out while they run down the long corridor, "then the Calamitous One should be hiding the power of the Golden Force of the Sacred Realm. Oh, it's all folktales and legends, but if the ones about the mirror can be true, then—"

They clear the crack in the wall, skidding out onto a thin walkway just beyond, on the lowest level of the pyramid a single story above the ground. Malice coats the outer edge of the walkway and flows downwards towards the earth. The tips of Link's boots burn away as she just stops herself from falling face-first into the violet. She inhales from the pain suddenly burning her palms: the slate in her hands begins to leak malice. The abruptness brings her to drop the slate into the sea. Link looks down at the roiling waves of malice, at the slate that floats on the waves, the first not-Link thing that she touched since awakening in the chamber of the Shrine of Resurrection, the companion that she has carried with her for over two years, four Divine Beasts, fifteen towers, one hundred and twenty shrines.

The girl with the golden hair's slate. All of the pictographs that Link has taken. All of the pictographs that the girl with the golden hair has taken. Gone to the Calamitous One taking the slate over as it has taken over the slates of the other Champions. Yet she has not time for a eulogy. Not with the world breaking apart around her.

Instead she lifts her head. Link can see—in the double-vision blurring between the ruins of the castletown in the mortal world and the deadened sea of malice of the Sacred Realm upon which the pyramid floats—the Divine Beasts in the distance, their lights gone dark. Overhead, the sky shines gold and blue.

"—the Triforce makes mortal dreams come—oh no."

Link swivels around on her heel so swiftly that she nearly topples over into the girl with the golden hair. But the girl with the golden hair barely pays her attention.

She looks skyward. Link follows her gaze towards the crown of the pyramid.
She has never seen, in waking memory, the Calamitous One. Nor does she remember how the Calamitous One looks. She does not know what she expected. A monster. A giant boar, like in the legends. A man who has lost himself to the power, like in the stories.

Not this.

Not a roiling maelstrom that curls and coils like a twisted halo over the crown of the pyramid. Not clouds of violent violet and sacred gold that meld into one another, that spark and blaze and hail, that pour malice from their innards like the Calamitous One were weeping, or bleeding, or retching up its stomach.

In that instant, Link understands why the Calamitous One has raged in hate and malice for over ten thousand years: the Calamitous One cannot eat like this.

Like this. Not a person, or a beast, but a force of nature. And deep within the eye of the storm—beyond the veil of violent violet that roils and writhes and rages beyond mortal comprehension, its undulations as sickening as seeing the malice that desecrated the bodies of her friends in the Divine Beasts, bulging just beneath the skin like parasitic worms burrowing and breeding in the flesh, eating away not only a body but the very heart of the land of Hyrule from the inside out—faintly glows a golden light. Link cannot make out the details. Yet she can sense rather than see the golden light split into three.

She swings her head right towards the girl with the golden hair. But the girl with the golden hair does not look upon the crown of the pyramid. The girl with the golden hair looks upon the sides.

The Calamitous One bleeds its malice upon the pyramid, malice that slithers over the entirety of the sides, that coats pyramid from base to crown, that oozes down to coalesce into the sea that covers the land of the Sacred Realm. Concentrated power of will.

Only the overhang of the upper level of the pyramid prevents the malice from dripping down onto Link's own head where she stands. The remainder of the pyramid, including the outer edge of the walkway, suffocates beneath half a metre of ten thousand years of hate.

"There has to be a way to get up there." Link looks out over the sea of malice that spills over the ruins of the castletown, steadily dissolving down, ruined not only by the passing of one hundred years, but eaten away by the malice that surges over the earth. "The Sacred Realm and the mortal world aren't 'one' yet, are they? Can't I just walk up there in the mortal world?"

"Look at the tips of your boots. Look at the castletown. The malice is as real to you as it is to me. It's crossed the veil, again." The girl with the golden hair clenches the collar of her tunic, her fingers digging into the fabric. "There has to be some other way. Oh, you have Impa's paraglider, don't you? Perhaps we could burn something to create an updraft—!"

The girl with the golden hair intakes a breath sharp enough for Link to feel it against her own lungs. She can sense the girl with the golden hair's heart begin to beat for the first time in the years since she has given herself up as a being of blood and grown used to the Sacred Realm. Now, with the two merging—Link can sense the twisting in her chest and the churning in her stomach—the girl with the golden hair has realised something. Something that Link cannot put her finger on. Something that sharpens her irises and shallows the breaths that she has not taken in years upon years.

"I can't carry the destiny that you've been burdened with, Link," she whispers, her voice suddenly older than Link has ever heard, as if echoing down ten thousand years of pain, "but I can carry you."
"You can't. Won't the malice—?" Link shakes her head. "I can go myself if that's the case. You don't need to hurt yourself any more than you already have."

"You can't hurt yourself. If you die here, and come back as a being of will, then you won't be able to use the Golden Force. No being of will can. I've already died in the Sacred Realm, remember? It doesn't matter if I get hurt. What does matter is that I get you up there, here and now." The girl with the golden hair turns towards Link, clenches her hands. "Oh, I don't know if I can pick you up. I've not done enough research on how the Sacred Realm and the mortal world interact. I—"

Link holds up her left hand, fingers together, palm directed towards the girl with the golden hair. With her right hand, she signs: "Remember this?"

"Oh. The...Akkalan gesture, wasn't it? And I'm to touch my hand to yours." The girl with the golden hair raises her own left hand. Link can sense rather than see her bring her hand, slightly shivering, towards Link's; she can sense rather than feel the warmth of the girl with the golden hair's palm against hers.

The girl with the golden hair curls her fingers in the valley of Link's own. She nods decisively.

Kneeling down upon the walkway, the girl with the golden hair opens wide her arms. "Please, lie down. I'll carry you up there through the malice. Or as far as I can. Link...please. If you die in the Sacred Realm, you'll come back partially as a being of will, and no being of will can use the Golden Force or the Master Sword. Mother told me that the burden of women is to suffer. I don't believe that, but if the world is going to suffer either way, then at least I'm going to do my part in making sure that we never suffer again."

The determination glinting in her irises brings Link to her own knees. The girl with the golden hair gathers Link in her embrace, one arm supporting Link's upper arm, the other arm supporting the bend of Link's knees.

The girl with the golden hair stands up. She lowers her eyelids. Out of seemingly nowhere, a tarp appears, draping protectively over Link's head and body.

"As long as I keep my focus, that should shield you from the rain of malice." Link feels the girl with the golden hair walking even if she cannot see under the tarp. "Goddess, be with me. It's about time I returned this favour."

As the girl with the golden hair emerges from under the overhang, the first plinks of malice drop onto the tarp. Link watches the thinning of the fabric before her very eyes, yet the girl with the golden hair reforms the tarp over and over again in layers beneath the first.

She strides into the sea of malice. The girl with the golden hair gasps the softest gasp that Link has ever heard, and then she does not cry out again. Yet Link senses the girl with the golden hair's agony through the aether of the Sacred Realm as the malice eats away at her flesh up to the line below her hips, as the girl with the golden hair focuses her attention on keeping her legs and the tarp intact through the malice that burns the two away, that seeps into her skin, that gnaws away at her muscle, that marrows her to the bone, even as she pushes onwards, one step at a time.

In the sea of malice, Link finds herself helpless. In the sea of malice, if she dies in the Sacred Realm, she will never again return to the mortal world. In the sea of malice, if she dies in the Sacred Realm, she will no longer be able to touch the Golden Force.

Link shivers. But she has to trust the girl with the golden hair. She has to. And she does.
She has nothing but hope for the girl with the golden hair. Even now, with her kingdom and her people drowning in ten thousand years of hate, the girl with the golden hair pushes on, hope beyond hope. Step by step.

Link can no longer feel the armies of Hyrule and the monsters waging war against one another. She can no longer feel the Champions and the malice fighting within the Divine Beasts. She can feel the monsters crawling over the Divine Beasts. She can feel the monsters entering the Divine Beasts. She can feel their own pain as they wade through malice that burns their flesh, so much more concentrated than even a fellow being of will can withstand.

She does not want to feel the monsters’ pain, yet she cannot push it from her mind. She shudders against the girl with the golden hair. The girl with the golden hair who has felt the monsters’ pain for one hundred years.

The girl with the golden hair stumbles. Link flinches, but the girl with the golden hair lifts her trembling arms, keeping Link above the flow of malice even while she herself nearly plummets to her knees. Malice splashes over her chest. Link recoils from the agony she feels through the aether of the Sacred Realm, of the girl with the golden hair's flesh sloughing from her body as she stitches herself back together on the sheer force of her willpower alone.

"Don't worry about me, Link," she manages to grind out, never once making another noise of pain after that first soft gasp. "This is nothing compared to what you've been through. I'll make it just fine. I'll make it just fine, I swear."

Link tries to raise her hands to sign something, anything, before it dawns upon her that she cannot reach the girl with the golden hair. She cannot protest. She can only lie as still as she can to avoid burdening her further.

And then she feels the girl with the golden hair ceases to move. She hears the girl with the golden hair murmur under her breath. "Oh no. We've come this far, and this is what you give to me."

Link looks up through the tarp. In her double-blurred vision—the tarp blocks the Sacred Realm, yet not the mortal world—she realises why the girl with the golden hair has stopped. Though the pyramid continues forward, the girl with the golden hair has run into the castle's belltower. The belltower wall blocks the path forward in one world where the path in the other remains clear.

She senses the girl with the golden hair endeavour to inch around the wall, seeking one of the entrances to the sanctum to continue. But the stairs of the pyramid drop away on either side. The girl with the golden hair grinds her teeth together.

"It isn't going to end like this. I'm not going to let this end like this." Her voice grows louder until she shouts at the skies. "I've carried her all the way up the pyramid. I'm waist-deep in your own malice. What more do you want from me!? What more am I supposed to give you!? How am I supposed to do this alone!?"

And then Link senses presences approaching them, very hard and very fast, speeding towards them, the tell-tale sensation of beings of will rather than beings of blood. She hears the girl with the golden hair snap her head back over her shoulder at the approach of monsters. Link curls her hand around Fi’s hilt, yet she knows that if she tears off the tarp to fight, the malice will burn her away until she can no longer use the Golden Force.

"Monsters? No. No. No!" Link feels the tremors coursing through the girl with the golden hair's body as she twists herself back and forth, searching for somewhere, anywhere to go.

"Please. Please. Don't let me this end here. I am the Princess of Hyrule and I will not let my people
suffer any longer."

The sound of wings all around them. The sound of feather and the sound of leather, like a murder of crows and a murder of dacto in one.

Pricks of pain along the girl with the golden hair's collarbones and under her shoulder blades, pain that Link senses through the aether of the Sacred Realm. And then pricks of pain on her own body: around her arms and around her legs.

Something lifts them, both herself and the girl with the golden hair. The girl with the golden hair clutches Link tightly against her chest, refusing to let go. Link cannot see what has grabbed her in the Sacred Realm through the tarp that blocks her vision of that world, but she can see flashes of green and red and bluish white at the corners of her vision of the mortal world, all bathed in a golden light.

Whatever-it-is uplifts her and the girl with the golden hair into the skies. And then—suddenly—Link does not feel the plinks of the malice on the tarp any longer. She hears nothing but the symphony of wings all around them, feels nothing but the wind that blows up from the sea of malice below them in an updraft from nothingness. Whatever-it-is takes them higher, and higher. The girl with the golden hair never lets go. Up, up, over the wall of the bell tower, up, up, above the sanctum, up, up, to the crown of the pyramid, up, up, to the highest point of the castle on the roof of the bell tower far above the sanctum, and then Link senses rather than hears the soft pomf of the girl with the golden hair's boots against solid ground.

Wings. Wings all around them. Wings above them. And a humming resonance that Link has heard before, in a voice that reminds her of a Necludan erhu, vibrating its strings through the air and the aether alike. A singing that she has heard before.

The pricks release her. The girl with the golden hair presses Link into her chest. No plinks of malice onto the tarp. Link struggles to sit up against the girl with the golden hair's embrace.

She senses rather than sees the girl with the golden hair willing the tarp to the void. She senses rather than feels the girl with the golden hair drop to her knees. She senses rather than hears the girl with the golden hair saying her name.

"Link. Link. Please, answer me. Please."

Link opens her eyes. She cannot see the Calamitous One, not in either world, because overhead swarm more flying monsters—more flying beings of will—than Link has ever seen before in a single place. A cloud, a storm, an entire sky enough to blot out the sun, feather and skin and scale, a tumult of every colour that Link can picture and some that she could not without sensing them through the aether: dacto and furnix, takkuri and hrok, kargarok and ache, chasupa and vire, moby and keese, bubble and guay.

Not attacking. Not attacking, but soaring overhead. Link can feel through the aether the pain of those in the topmost layer as the malice burns away the part of their beings made of blood even while they reform themselves through their will.

The monsters. The beings of will. Forming a protective aegis between her and the Calamitous One that bleeds malice upon the earth.

And that humming resonance. The girl with the golden hair kneeling. Link lying upon the crown of the pyramid. The aether vibrating with the dragons' speech. The dragons all around them.
She senses rather than hears the girl with the golden hair's murmured words of awe. "...Farosh...Naydra...Dinraal..."

Sitting up, her eyes wide, Link looks upon the dragons around her, slowly circling the crown of the pyramid, their long bodies unfurling through the air, a trio of silken scarves. The amber red of the Dragon Dinraal. The bluish white of the Dragon Naydra.

And the golden green of the first dragon that Link ever saw, as a horizontal lightning bolt, as a flash of bright yellow, weaving in and out of the clouds, resembling a serpentine scarf billowing in the wind. The Dragon Farosh, who looks upon her now, the dragon's single horn rising up from the brow like the blade of a sword.

Fi vibrates upon Link's back, humming in resonance to the dragons' song against Link's ear. Link unsheathes Fi, holding her to her left ear. She touches the shoulder of the girl with the golden hair—who before Link's own eyes has willed her legs back into existence, the black fabric of her trousers covering her limbs—and bids the girl with the golden hair to sit at Link's left side. So that Link can sit at her right and hold Fi between them.

The Dragon Farosh's jaws part. The Dragon Farosh's throat vibrates. The Dragon Farosh sings, and Fi harmonises with the dragon, translating for Link and for the girl with the golden hair.

"The veil between the Realm of Will and the Realm of Blood," sings the Dragon Farosh, "has never lain so thin. For the first time since the Realm of Will and the Realm of Blood were sealed away from one another, the beings of will can understand the pain that they have inflicted upon the beings of blood. Now, grant us your cooking pot, being of blood. Accept our gift."

Link senses rather than hears the girl with the golden hair whisper: "Cooking pot!?” But Link has already bounded one step ahead of her. She swings the cooking pot from her back, setting it down with a resounding smack against the crown of the pyramid.

The Dragon Farosh snaps shut the maw. The dragon brings a claw against that one terrible horn extending from the brow. A shard of green submerged in gold cascades into the cooking pot and sparks its brilliance against the bottom.

The Dragon Dinraal adds to the Dragon Farosh's melody as the dragons continue to spiral: "For one hundred years, that abomination of will has spread malice over the Realm of Will, destroying any semblance of our brethren beings of will that contain within some measure of blood. For one hundred years, that abomination of will has thrown our brethren beings of will into the Realm of Blood without explanation. Cut off from our fellow beings of will, and not understanding the rules of the Realm of Blood, our brethren thought that they could only remain alive if they proved their will and so fought against these strange beings of blood whose presences they could not sense as they had our brethren, whom they took as demons no longer alive. Now, accept our gift."

The dragon brings a claw against those two terrible horns, curved like those of a ram. A shard of red submerged in gold that cascades into the cooking pot and sparks its brilliance against the bottom beside the shard of green.

The Dragon Naydra circles in, the dragon's one remaining eye clear and bright, as the dragon sings: "That abomination of will and blood has existed as a blight on both of the realms for ten thousand years. We promised you that we would fight to protect our home. So will our brethren beings of will, for here, we are all as one. Already, our brethren and your people fight as one against the guardians and the malice that would ruin our realms. Our brethren and your people—we will do what we can to weaken that abomination of will and blood, so that you may fulfill the final trial set out by the Goddesses. Now, accept our gift."
The Dragon brings a claw against that terrible crown of horns. A shard of blue submerged in that cascades into the cooking pot and sparks its brilliance against the bottom beside the shards of green and red.

"Oh oh oh! Can Sarie do this one!?"

Link and the girl with the golden hair whirl around at once: koroks. Hundreds and hundreds of koroks twirling through the air upon their leaves, surrounded by small glittering violet lights like fireflies that twinkle with the hue of hope. The koroks from the Kokir Forest. Hestu.

Sarie. Sarie, who holds in their palm a violet-glittered light. Sarie, who whirls in towards Link and the girl with the golden hair. Sarie, who Link can see, in her double-vision, in the Sacred Realm: a girl with the greenish hair curled up to frame her face. A girl with a smile older than the earth. A girl who remembers very much.

"Grandpa asked the Great Faeries to chip in, too. I asked Grandpa to let me be the one to give it you. She's a faery, blessed with the dust of the Great Faeries, and she'll bless your cooking pot, too."

Beyond that leafy mask, Link can see Sarie smile. No, not Sarie. Saria.

"So this is from Grandpa, and Cotera and Mija and Kaysa and Tera, and all of us!" She open her hands. Drifting down, the faery spirals around the cooking pot, her wings fluttering. The powder dispels into the cooking pot and sparks its brilliance against the bottom with the shards of green, and blue, and red.

"You can leave if you have to, Link. I won't forget you. The memories that I have of you, even in ten thousand years, will bring me sadness...but also joy. The fate of destruction is also the joy of rebirth. After the Calamity, Hyrule—whatever name her people will give her—will rise anew." Saria reaches out her hands towards Link, her fingers curling into the valleys between Link's as their little korok hands touch Link's palms. "I won't forget you. And if anyone ever asks, I'll tell them that you tried your best to make loam for me."

Link sniffles. Saria smiles. Letting go of Link's fingers, she moves to rejoin the other koroks, but not before Link grabs her hand again and pulls her her in for an embrace. She has not the time to hug Saria as long as she'd like to. A brief embrace, a squeeze of the arms, and nothing more.

"If anything happens to me, take care of our family at Romani Ranch. Watch over Cremia and especially Romani for me, all right?"

Saria dips her head. "And Miyu."

"And Miyu."

"I believe in you more than I've ever believed in anyone else. You're not her, and I'm glad, because you're you, and this Hyrule needs you."

Saria whirls back to soar with the other children of the forest and their faeries. Link turns back to the cooking pot, meeting the girl with the golden hair's gaze across the rim.

The girl with the golden hair raises her head towards the dragons and the koroks. "What do these gifts have to entail?" she whispers.

Fi sings the girl with the golden hair's words to the dragons, and the dragons answer: "A gift of something precious, that bears the mark of your earnest blessing and protection."
The girl with the golden hair inclines her head. She gazes upon Link, and Link gazes upon her. She closes her fingers around the golden charm that she wears at her neck. She lifts the golden charm up and over her head. She holds up the golden charm.

Golden, and spherical, and many-pointed, like a bit of rock candy that waters Link's mouth and grumbles her stomach despite the severity of the situation.

"Mother gave this to me before she passed away. Mother...told me that it was a fragment of a star that fell onto Hyrule on the same night that I was born. She told me that it struck in the side of Mount Nayru, and she saw it as a blessing of the Golden Goddesses for...for me. Ever since I was twelve years old, I've held onto it more tightly than ever before. Oh, I thought that it was a symbol of me. The firstborn Princess. The one destined to go to Mount Nayru. I've kept it with me all this time."

The girl with the golden hair shudders in a breath. "Whenever I didn't know what to do, and whenever I thought I'd lose hope, I just...remembered the lullabies that Mother sang to me. I remembered that I was Princess of Hyrule. I remembered that if no one else, I had to carry on the torch of hope." She cradles the golden charm in her palm over the cooking pot.

"So this is my gift to you. I can't give you power, or wisdom, or courage, or kindness, like the Dragons or the Great Faeries, but I can give you the gift of hope, and I hope that that will be enough."

"That's the greatest gift that you can give," Link signs, and the girl with the golden hair's eyes glisten wetly with the tears that she has not allowed herself to shed. She lets the star fragment float into the cooking pot and spark its brilliance against the shards of green, and blue, and red, and violet.

Link gazes down at the cooking pot. At the colours iridescent within. Green, and blue, and red, and violet, and gold.

The cooking pot starts to move by itself. Link ogles it while—without her even adding water, or oil, or butter—the ingredients begin to cook themselves, bouncing up and down within the cooking pot and splashing in a liquid of aether that seems to form spontaneously around the cooking pot. The dragons sing a short melody that crescendos to its peak of a single note that sees the shards of the dragons' horns, the faery powder, and the fragment of a star leap up one last time.

And then the ingredients in the cooking pot coalesce into a single vial of elixir sitting at the bottom of the pot, an opaque pink liquid in a glass that has sprung from thin air—from thin aether, rather—in a spherical shape, decorated by a thin handle reminding her a pair of butterfly wings.

Reaching into the cooking pot, Link removes possibly the strangest thing that she has ever cooked in her entire life, something so strange that the meal not only cooked itself but also provided her with something to keep itself in. Holding the elixir in her palms, she feels its warmth within the glass, and she sees it in her double-vision as the same in both the mortal world and the Sacred Realm.

She hopes that she never has to cook like this again. For all of the magic, Link has never felt less satisfaction with a meal.

Then air and aether resonate together at once, and Link looks up, thoughts of food—for once in her life—momentarily put aside. "We, as beings of will, cannot be with you in the final trials set out by the Goddesses. Yet, when you have need of us most," the dragons sing at once, and not only the dragons but all of the faeries, and not only the faeries but the entire world, "quaff the tonic of blood
and will, and regain your will to live."

The dragons curl up through the skies. The dragon Farosh intones their final judgment, Fi vibrating her translation to Link and to the girl with the golden hair: "Now, move to the centre of the pyramid, beneath the eye of the storm, and accept the gift of your people."

Link rises to her boots. She sets the elixir into her satchel and closes the top. Fixing the cooking pot to her back, she tilts down her head. She holds out her hand to the girl with the golden hair.

The girl with the golden hair rubs her forearms. "I can't come with you, Link. Oh, I told you. Only a being of blood can interact with the Golden Force."

"You said that there would be a last trial. I mean, they said that. I don't know much about this being of blood or being of will stuff, but I want you to come with me for as long as you can." Link holds out her hand again. She cocks her head to the side. She does not need to sign for the girl with the golden hair, like Ilia, to read her words from her fingers.

The girl with the golden hair's hand shakes. Her fingers quiver. She brushes her palm against Link's, and Link curves her fingers around the girl with the golden hair's.

Link lets her stand on her own two feet, and then the girl with the golden hair pulls her in for a hug.

"Then I'll be with you until the end. I can do that much."

Together, with the wind at their backs, clenching each other's hands across the veil that separates them—Link in the Realm of Blood, and the girl with the golden hair in the Realm of Will—they take one step after another towards the heart of the pyramid.

The flocks of beings of will overhead—dacto and furnix, takkuri and hrok, kargarok and ache, chasupa and vire, moby and keese, bubble and guay—part. The rain of malice crashes down around them onto the pyramid, leaving a circular opening in the eye of the storm less than a Link's-height in diameter where she and the girl with the golden hair stand, like a curtain of malice the same size and shape as one of the curtains of blue light.

Looking up, Link realises what causes the eye of the storm: an inverted spire. A great inverted spire jutting out of the clouds of the Calamitous One, spiralling upwards into the mass of violet, only the very tip visible where the stone emerges from the underbelly of the Calamitous One.

She senses rather than hears the girl with the golden hair gasp. She senses rather than sees the girl with the golden hair tear her gaze from the inverted spire and stare at the horizon. She senses rather than feels the girl with the golden hair draw her hand towards the world around them.

Link glances down to follow the girl with the golden hair's gaze: the Divine Beasts. The Divine Beasts, their eyes glowing fire-light blue rather than violent violet, at the corners of the Sacred Realm and the mortal world at once. The Divine Beast Vah Rudania of the northeast. The Divine Beast Vah Medoh of the northwest. The Divine Beast Vah Naboris of the southwest. The Divine Beast Vah Ruta of the southeast.

All of them having cast off, for the second time, the Calamitous One's grip of malice. All of them having moved from the Temple to carry the armies of Hyrule to safety. All of them prepared for this moment.

Link does not need her trusty red telescope to make out the faces of her friends who stand atop the Divine Beasts with their slates. Link does not need her trusty red telescope to make out the beings of will that wave back at her from the backs of the Divine Beasts, the beings of will—the moblins
and the goriya, the daira and the lizalfos, the bokoblins and the octoroks—who have fought back alongside the beings of blood against the malice and won, as she has waved at them so many times. Link does not need her trusty red telescope to feel the Yunobo, Amali, Riju, and Sidon all cheering her on.

She has felt their pain through the aether of the Sacred Realm, and now she feels their power, their wisdom, their courage, putting their hope onto her and the girl with the golden hair.

And the behemoths four, whose hearts do shine with holy power, open those very hearts as one and crest their fire-light blue through the skies over Hyrule towards the Calamitous One.

The lights breach the Calamitous One all at once with a brightness that makes Link close her eyes, a brightness that sparks the white and blue of the silent princesses even behind her eyelids, the pride and the voice and the kin and the faith of her friends whom she loves and the people of Hyrule and the beings of will of the Sacred Realm all united in the holy power of the Divine Beasts.

The Calamitous One screams. The Calamitous One gnashes its jaws of sable rage. The Calamitous One shrinks away under the onslaught of the Hope of Hyrule standing strong as one.

The rain of malice ebbs. The maelstrom closes in on itself. The spire emerges more fully. And there, there: Link notes, at the spire's inverted base, a doorway leading down into the inky depths.

The dragons circle around her. They sing their songs, and Fi resonates in her ear. "Go. For all of us, Princess and her Knight."

"Ah," says the girl with the golden hair, wiping at her eyes that remain dry from the tears that she has held back for one hundred years, "you have Impa's old paraglider, don't you?"

Link smirks up at the girl with the golden hair and nods. Wrapping her arms around Link's shoulders, the girl with the golden hair links her fingers behind Link's back, rests her chin on Link's shoulder, touches her cheek to Link's. Link opens the paraglider—passed down from Impa, given to her by the girl with the golden hair, repaired by Riju—and the paraglider catches the wind at her back.

The dragons spiral up with Link and the girl with the golden hair, singing their song that resonates the very air and the very aether; the dragons' combined updraft sings them up towards the inverted spire.

Closing the paraglider, Link lands her boots onto the platform jutting from the doorway to the inverted spire. She lets down the girl with the golden hair, whose footfalls die to silence.

"When all this is said and done," says Link, gazing at the fire-light blue barrier marked in the symbols of the Golden Goddesses, the curtain partying before though as if sensing their presence, "I'd like to make you your favourite food. Like I promised you I would all those years ago."

The girl with the golden hair lifts her hand to her mouth, and then lets slip the tiniest sound, and then throws her arms around Link. Link embraces her back just as tightly. Link feels her breathing against her chest, and that is enough, and this is enough. They do not have the time to stay that way for a long, long time. When they part, Link offers the girl with the golden hair her hand. "Together."

The girl with the golden hair nods. "Together."

Together, they reach the doorway of the keep.
Together, they watch the barrier of fire-light blue die away.

Together, they pass through the hallway of nine columns, three to each of the Golden Goddesses. Fire, then power, then Din Herself. Water, then wisdom, then Nayru Herself. Wind, then courage, then Farore Herself.

Together, they enter the golden-light curtain of the lift.

Together, they descend into the keep.

—

_Fairy Tonic_ (twenty-one and one-quarter hearts) - fairy, shard of Dinraal's horn, shard of Farosh's horn, shard of Naydra's horn, star fragment

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**Chapter End Notes**


Author's notes: I technically wrote the words "They should have known." at 16:04 on the nineteenth of August, but I didn't seriously begin to write until 18:02 on the nineteenth of August, and finished writing it at 19:01 on the twentieth of August.

Thanks a million for all of your support, for everything that you all have given me, for every single person who has read this. Yes, you! Reading this right now! Thank you for reading it; I hope that you're enjoying it. And if not, then I hope that I can make it better for you. And thanks a million to my most beloved beta reader, Emma, for everything that she has done.

Even during the seventy-sixth chapter, Link had Fi to guide her through the Sacred Realm. But you know how far she's come from the first chapter, now that _she's_ the one being her own guide.

Places can change a lot over ten thousand years. The Hyrule that Link sees on the map? That's based on the Hyrule from _Spirit Tracks_, with the waters slowly receding further after the Great Flood.

The place where they end up in the pyramid and having to bomb their way out is in reference to _A Link to the Past_ and the crack in the wall where Link receives the Silver Arrow capable of defeating Ganon.

This chapter showcases my earnest attempt at describing what the "fast travel"/teleportation from shrine to shrine would feel like.

Zelda did warn Link that activating the slate during a calamitous event would allow Calamity Ganon to hack it, and so he has.

As said in _Skyward Sword_, only mortals can use the Triforce.

Farosh is indeed the first dragon that Link saw, way back during the Parapan arc, chapters upon chapters ago.
The faery and the Great Faeries have been in the Sacred Realm all this time, as opposed to just hanging out as they did in *Breath of the Wild*.

The ingredients cooking as the dragons sing is a reference to what cooking looks like in *Breath of the Wild*, with the ingredients jumping up and then making something to hold the meal with. Suffice to say that *this* Link is not much impressed by such cooking.

The Divine Beasts lasering Calamity Ganon at once is taken directly from *Breath of the Wild*, and several lines in the text here reference the lyrics to the Ballad of the Sealing War.

The inverted spire and the Triforce being kept within a dungeon as a final trial of mortals was also inspired by Sky Keep from *Skyward Sword*; in *The Adventure of Link*, only the Triforce of Courage is found in the Great Palace, which wasn't designed by the Goddesses. Here, just as in *Skyward Sword*, the Triforce awaits in Sky Keep. I spent that entire game waiting for when we would return the missing gem into the loftwing statue's eyes, lemme tell you.

I'm very curious to know how many of you have played *The Adventure of Link*. For those who have, the eightieth chapter should be a pleasant (or maybe unpleasant) familiar surprise. Of course, no familiarity with *The Adventure of Link* is assumed, nor is any at all required. If anything, I expect that none of my readers has played it (and my beta reader certainly hasn't).

I suppose, since one of my issues with *Breath of the Wild* was the replacement of aspects of the world I found more interesting (such as the three Golden Goddesses over the singular deity Hylia), that I—without meaning to—looked back to the oldest games to draw what I could.

At any rate, those of you who have played *The Adventure of Link* might recognise the disappearance of the curtain of light and the nine pillars through which you have to pass in order to enter the first lift, descending into the Great Palace. And that's right! Link *still* doesn't remember Zelda's name.

Finally, to clarify the effects of the fairy tonic: you can think of it as working akin to one (1) touch of the "goalpoint" within a shrine. In other words, if someone gets gravely injured, it'll help them, but it can only be used once. This was inspired by the effects of fairies to revive upon death. Just keep that in mind.

Up next: the Great Palace; the Princess and her Knight; Thunder, but a very *Delicious in Wilds* spin on it.

midna's ass. 16 November 2017.

Beta reader's comments: *Delicious in Wilds* spin on a second Calamity and the confrontation of Ganon is kinda terrifying. The Sacred Realm is portrayed in such a way that the implications of an attack like this are horrifying.

Having Zelda and Link together at last is so nice, despite all that's happening around them. They play off of each other well, and I think the author does a great job of building them up as a duo despite only having a few chapters to do so.

Chapter Summary

The people of Hyrule have united. The beings of will and beings of blood alike stand as one. The Champions the travelling chef knows well—the Lanayrish prince, the Parapan food enthusiast, the Tabanch housewife, and the Eldic youth—have retaken their Divine Beasts and wage war on the Calamitous One. Now the travelling chef and the girl with the golden hair, carrying the gift given to them by the Dragons, the Great Faeries, and the girl with the golden hair's late mother, enter the keep, in search of the Golden Goddesses' promise to the mortal world.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a doozy, clocking in at 25536 words. Please take care of yourself and take breaks when reading if you need to.

Please be warned that this chapter has intermittent bursts of violence throughout. I'll mark the ones that I consider particularly bloody, but as a rule of thumb, any time you see the word "loftwing", be careful.

The first begins at the paragraph starting with "Springing forward, she knocks the girl the golden hair to the ground" and ends just before the paragraph beginning with "While Link sheathes Fi and rushes towards the girl with the golden hair."

The second begins at the paragraph starting with "Link dives to the floor—she hears the girl with the golden hair intake a breath of shock" and ends just before the paragraph beginning with "Link senses the strap of her satchel tautening as the girl with the golden hair combs through her belongings."

The third begins at the paragraph starting with "A flash of red and gold parts from behind the statue" and ends just before the paragraph beginning with "Except for Fi, who in turn can dissolve even the concentrated malice."

Finally, the entire chapter climax has mentions here and there of blood, although it's not nearly as gruesome as something like the lynel fight in the fiftieth chapter. However, I'll note it down here: it begins at the paragraph starting with "Fi resonates very suddenly against Link's palm" and ends with the paragraph beginning with "The altar of blue gives way to gold."

Author's notes as usual: I technically started writing this chapter as "energising egg pudding" at 17:49 on the twentieth of August, but I didn't seriously begin to write until 19:00 on the twentieth of August, and finished writing it at 11:19 on the twenty-second of August. I wrote the first draft of this chapter over twenty hours straight (finishing at 15:18 on the twenty-first of August), then immediately passed out, then spent quite a bit of time revising it before moving onto the eighty-first.

I recommend listening to the Great Palace OST from The Adventure of Link for this chapter, because that's also what Zelda and Link are listening to (the "melody, distant
Honestly, thanks a million, million, *million* for everything that you have all done for me all this time. I couldn't have done it without you. For you all readers, I am forever grateful for granting me a chance to take you on my own Hyrule Fantasy, and thank you for giving me a chance. It has meant the world to me. And thank you to my beta reader, Emma, for all that she herself has done for me.

Here we are. My favourite chapter in the series. The most fun to write. Just adventure, and action, and a fun time until the end. And the longest chapter in the series. For this chapter, I actually played through and recorded myself going through the Great Palace. I then carefully studied my own playthrough and made this chapter mechanically accurate to what I did in the game, including my fuck-ups (such as getting stuck in the pit with the bots), since I wasn't using a guide. So when you read this, this was based on what I did, step by step, exactly as I traced my own path through the Great Palace of *The Adventure of Link*, just adjusted for the world of the fic! I could have skipped or summarised, but instead decided to write it all out.

Link looping her thumbs into her belt and listening to Zelda is in reference to Link's "in conversation with an NPC" pose from *Breath of the Wild*.

Freezing blisters is one way to get rid of them (it's commonly used for warts, for example). But please don't do what Link did! Rely on a qualified medical professional for cryosurgery and the like. That said, you gotta do what you gotta do to be able to protect Hyrule.

The line about jamming the blade into a pumpkin is a nod to how, in *Skyward Sword*, Link can jam the sword into a pumpkin and just walk around with it.

"It's a secret to everybody" and "well, excuse me, princess" are lines I couldn't get away with not including. I didn't force them in though. They fell in naturally.

The talon-mark on Zelda's chest does resemble the mark on the hylian shield from previously *Zelda* games. I thought it was pretty cool how *Skyward Sword* took something that's been on the shield for a long time and explained where it came from. But then there's so much that *Skyward Sword* didn't do with it, such as give Link's loftwing a name, use the Sky and flying for more than a single boss battle, or provide some meaningful story or sense of companionship (after the opening) as they did with Epona in *Ocarina of Time*, *Majora's Mask*, or *Twilight Princess*. As well, Link getting a "special" red loftwing made me damn near roll my eyes out of my head. But that's just me griping. I'm fond of shoebills, so I like the loftwing design!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The lift reminds Link of the lifts that she has passed through countless times when she descended down into the depths of the earths to uncover the mysteries of the shrines. Except that the lift of the keep, of the temple, of the palace in which she and the girl with the golden hair stand, descends more smoothly and more quickly, the curtain of light golden instead of blue, the sensation overall somehow *different*, as though—

"Incredible," breathes the girl with the golden hair as she lifts a palm to the curtain of light. "Oh, look at this, Link! It's sliding down almost without friction. Or maybe truly without friction! I feel
like I've seen something like this before. But where was it?"

"The shrine?" Link suggests. Glancing at the curtain of light, she notices her own face reflected back at her. The vertical scars across her cheeks. The teardrop-shaped mark under her left eye. The diagonal mark from the corner of her eye to the vertex of her jaw. The scratches along her brow. The mangle-healed flesh of her lower lip. The crooked nose.

The girl with the golden hair claps her hand into her palm. "That's exactly right! It's just like the shrine. Oh, I wonder if whoever made the shrines all those thousands of years ago...I wonder if they were emulating what we see here. I wonder what we could learn from this. Oh! Oh, that reminds me!"

The girl with the golden hair swivels excitedly towards Link. "There's so much more I need to tell you that I've gleaned over the years!" Link raises her eyebrows, looping her thumbs through her belt, listens to her companion's words. Even if she does not understand, she can sense the passion radiating from the girl with the golden hair's speech. And even if she does not comprehend, she can ask, and slowly, ever so slowly, she can know. "Did you know that the mark of the Goddess Sheik might have actually been the original mark of the royal family, and that the sheikah descriptive of the sheikah towers and slate is a misno—"

The lift ceases to move, and the girl with the golden hair inhales. The curtain of golden light hangs in the aether for a moment longer than Link has felt lifts hang in the shrine. Then the lift opens into a golden corridor shaped roughly as a great triangular prism, the walls tapering up from the flat base into a point, the tiles of the floor up to the ceiling tessellated in triangles. The passageway itself resonates with a strange melody, distant and far, as though echoing from across a sea.

Link steps out from the lift first. The girl with the golden hair follows a moment after, then stifles a gasp. Link glances her direction. "Those marks...those marks on your neck, Link. Are they from—are they from the malice outside—are they—"

She looks down at herself, then claps her hand against her forehead. Rolling up the sleeves of her undershirt, Link demonstrates the whorls of violet snaking up her arms, which merely causes the girl with the golden hair to stagger back and cover her mouth with her palm.

"It's not what you think!" Link bursts out. "I promise! I got these back in Ruto, nearly a year ago! The Malice kind of hugged me, and I almost died and the usual, you know—" The girl with the golden hair's eyebrows fly towards the crown of her head; Link hastily continues: "—but I'm fine! The healers skinned me and all that—" Her companion's eyebrows crawl further up. Link speeds her motions. "—and and and after they were done, it was all good! There's no malice left in me, just these patterns. Same ones you see on those silvery-white monsters—beings of will, I mean—that hang around the castle with the guardians. Anyways, see? It's all good. Your tarp protected me out there. And thank you for that, by the way." She scratches her cheek. "I guess we've been so caught up in other things that you didn't notice."

The girl with the golden hair nods steadily, as Link would if she were concerned she had eaten something entirely dubious. "And then...that golden...?"

"Oh, this?" Link waves her left hand. Her companion dips her head. "I got that catching a metal boomerang during a thunderstorm. It's from lightning. That was pretty fun after I stopped convulsing in the mud." The girl with the golden hair's eyebrows, which just returned to something resembling normal, shoot up again. "Hey, you know, Kass—you don't know him, but I think you'd like him—said it's supposed to be a good thing! It's like a mark from the Goddess Farore, since lightning and wind are Her thing, right? So it's a mark of courage."
She flexes her left arm. Her companion leans against one of the passage walls. "Link..."

"But we can talk about that later, when you and me are back in the mortal world. And speaking of getting hurt..." Reaching behind her back, Link offers the iron pot lid and the mirrored pot lid to the girl with the golden hair. Her companion opens her mouth for a moment, then exhales and takes the latter gift.

"The patterns on the rim remind me of Urbosa," the girl with the golden hair explains. She does not blush. She does not look away. She speaks in a voice level with acceptance. "Also, given that the surface is transparent, I think it would be useful to be able to see what I'm cowering from." Link tries to reassure her, but the girl with the golden hair shakes her head. "Link. Please, protect yourself more than anything. Oh, it's fine if I die, because I'm already...I'm already a being of will, like this." Link observes her reflexively reach a hand up to her throat, except her fingers close around nothingness. "...but if you die, then we won't be able to use the Golden Force." She coughs into her palm. More and more, Link notices, the girl with the golden hair has ceased to act like an unblinking being of will. More and more, Link notices, the girl with the golden hair has begun to act like herself again. "Or...it's sometimes called the Triforce in the legends, which I like better as a name, but whenever I tried to tell people they said I was being silly."

"I think you're less a being of will than you think. I mean, I don't really get all this." Link waves a hand around the golden corridor, whose walls and floor and sharp-pointed ceiling luminesce. "Look, you've been allowed into here, haven't you? And I don't think the name is silly at all. It sounds better than a golden force." She scratches her cheek. "Though, uh...how would you sign that?"

"Oh, I don't know." The girl with the golden hair tugs at the hem of her jacket. "Why won't you come up with something, Link? I've always liked to see what meals you come up with. Why not words?"

Link touches her hand more firmly to her chin, and then her other hand joins the first. Snapping her fingers, Link leans against the girl with the golden hair—the girl with the golden hair strains not to let Link drop—as Link stretches her head down and bends up her left leg, struggling to bring her foot to her chin.

"Link—" The girl with the golden hair has started to laugh, little giggles that snort air rapidly from her nose. "—what are you doing?"

Dropping her boot back to the floor, Link rubs the back of her head. "It helps me think if I touch my chin. I don't know."

"Like how poking your tongue out helps you concentrate?" the girl with the golden hair suggests; Link nods enthusiastically. "Well...you are a very physical person. I suppose that makes sense."

"So I thought, maybe I could think even better if I touched my foot to my chin." Link shrugs, though she can feel the upwards curve of her own mouth. "But I guess I'm not flexible enough to that."

"Link..." The girl with the golden hair shakes her head. "Oh, I missed you so much, you know."

She grins. "I missed you too."

They peer up and down the corridor, which runs left and right from the lift, the floor and walls and sharp-angled ceiling extending seemingly endlessly. In both directions, the corridor slopes gently upwards in stair-like steps towards the ceiling. She can just make out columns depicting the Golden Goddesses. To one end of the corridor, she spots two rows of columns; to the other, also
two. No, three. No, more than that, though she cannot discern how many, in perfect rows down to the end.

Too much gold. Her eyes have begun aching, and she has not stayed there for longer than a few minutes at most. Her gaze alights on something reddish at the far end of the corridor with more than two columns. Glancing at the girl with the golden hair, Link gestures in that direction with her head.

The girl with the golden hair and Link walk down the corridor towards the red thing lying in wait. The girl with the golden hair names the statues of each of the Golden Goddesses: first Farore, then Nayru, then Din. The final row of columns depicts something else altogether: tall bird-like loftwings perched in gold, their ruby-like eyes glaring at Link and the girl with the golden hair.

The red thing perches between the columns. Feather, Link observes. Red and white. As soon as Link and the girl with the golden hair pass by the statue of the Goddess Nayru, the red-feathered loftwing stirs and twists. A large head on a long neck, with a bill that juts out golden from their red and white face, their wingtips framed in the violet and gold of the Sacred Realm, the long feathers of their tail spreading outwards like a fan of flame.

Link snaps her arm towards her left shoulder, her palm against i's hilt. The girl with the golden hair extends her arm across Link's chest. "Wait. I think...we're looking at a loftwing. They're friendly. They serve the Goddess Hylia. Or, I guess if they're here, the loftwings must also serve the Golden Goddesses. I'm...I'm going to try. To talk. To the loftwing."

The girl with the golden hair steps forward. She brings her hands together in front of her. When she speaks, she does so in a language that Link has never heard before.

No. No, she has heard this language. The language spoken in the shrines. The language of all of those instructions, accompanied by all those pictures, in that tongue Link has never understood.

The girl with the golden hair's accent sounds wrong. Her speech does not flow as well as the speech that Link has heard in the shrines. She stops. She stutters. But she speaks nonetheless to the crimson loftwing, which steadily unfurls their wings and raises their head, gazing gaze at them with Goddess-golden eyes ringed in fire-light blue and violent violet.

Resonating on Link's back, Fi translates her words. The girl with the golden hair's supplication of peace. Her explanation of the Great Calamity. Her request for the loftwing to assist them, to guide, to help them. The creature cocks their head, the feathers on either side unfurling; the girl with the golden hair nods at the loftwing.

Link watches the creature's movement. The tensing of their legs. The angling of their wings. The tucking in of their neck.

Springing forward, she knocks the girl with the golden hair to the ground at the same time as the loftwing charges into the sky. Link feels the fwoosh of air under the creature's wings as they pass overhead. The girl with the golden hair curls in on herself on the floor. Link unsheathes Fi and twirls the swords that seals the darkness over her head, pointing the blade towards the loftwing, which lands light on the ground and whirls around.

The creature charges again. Now they spiral through the air so rapidly that the dervish of aether around them blows the blade of evil's bane down. Throwing herself back, Link accidentally lands on the girl with the golden hair, who remains on the ground, the mirrored shield held over her chest.
Link hastily picks herself up from the girl with the golden hair's body. She readies Fi in the loftwing's direction again, the creature perched on the edge of the higher step, taking the high ground. The girl with the golden hair scrambles from the floor.

Gripping Fi's hilt so firmly that she can feel the criss-cross patterns left in her palm, Link approaches the loftwing on the higher step.

The creature silently flips out their wings. Link can almost see the gust of aether emanating upwards from the tips of their glowing violet-golden feathers. Rolling forward under the wave of aether, Link attempts to thrust upwards into the loftwing as she did the lizalfos on the beach of the castle moat. The creature leaps backwards. The sword hits the void.

A sudden pain against Link's back, like thirty tiny papercuts across her shoulders, spine, and the backs of her legs, gives Link pause: the wave of aether somehow boomeranged back. She has to keep moving forward.

The loftwing flips out their wings once more, sending out another gust of aether. This time, Link does not roll forward just once, but again, and again; the creature jumps backwards every time. Sudden footfalls to her right bring Link to glance at the girl with the golden hair, who runs up the steps by Link and the loftwing's side. When the creature leaps back yet again, the girl with the golden hair slams the mirrored pot lid into their head.

"Ahaha—oh n—!"

Immediately the loftwing retaliates, kicking the girl with the golden hair back, their sharp-tipped talons clawing into her chest. That second of difference lets Link swing forward the sword that seals the darkness. Fi burns fire-light blue; the blade of evil's bane cleaves through the creature's torso. Their essence does not spurt forward in blood but dissipates into golden dust that drifts away in vapour as Link slices the loftwing in half. The gold fades away into the darkness.

While Link sheathes Fi and rushes forward towards the girl with the golden hair, who has sprawled spread-eagled on the step above, she feels the cuts on her back dampening the fabric of her tunic.

The girl with the golden hair slowly sits up. "H...huh." The front of her blue jacket has slightly darkened with blood. Eyes embiggening, Link crouches down beside her companion. "I can't stop the bleeding. This is still clearly in the Sacred Realm, but it's like there's something stopping me from just...pulling myself back together. I wonder if this is something to do with—"

She winces. Link helps her yank up her tunic. The creature's talons have etched a crimson mark into her upper abdomen. The girl with the golden hair traces the wound with her finger. "It looks a little like a loftwing, doesn't it?" The girl with the golden hair looks up at Link, bearing a smile that does not quite reach her eyes. "They said that the knights of old bore loftwings on their shields to grant themselves the courage of the First Hero. I guess this is a sign, then. I'll be your shield, Link. It's what I can to help the people of Hyrule, to protect you safely to the Golden Force." The girl with the golden hair coughs.

It dawns on Link that she cannot sense the girl with the golden hair's pain reverberating through the aether. But she does not need to feel her companion's pain to make out the contortion of her companion's features, despite how the girl with the golden hair hides her face in the crook of her arm.

And she does not need to feel her companion's pain to take gauze from her satchel and wrap it around the girl with the golden hair's abdomen.
"I just don't understand." The girl with the golden hair shudders while Link tightens the gauze, tucks in the end, and rips off the hanging edge. "Shouldn't the loftwings be on our side?" Link listens to the girl with the golden hair's timbre drift into the tone she uses for musing out hypotheses. "Are the Yiga right? Maybe...maybe the Calamitous One is meant to purge this world."

"The monsters...the beings of will, I mean...outside said something about the last trial set out for us by the Goddesses. That's what this is. Just a trial. We're being tested." The girl with the golden hair mmfms in response. Link tucks the gauze back into her satchel. She brushes against the ice-box that Riju gave her. When they hunger, she'll make them food. She has her cooking pot, after all. "Now, come on. We should hurry." Link looks the girl with the golden hair up and down. "Maybe you should stay here. If you can't bring yourself back together in here, then what happens if—"

"Link...I'm more serious than I ever have been." The girl with the golden hair again reaches up to clench the golden charm that she no longer bears at her throat. Her arm drops to her side. "Let me be your shield. It doesn't matter what happens to me."

"It matters to me," Link answers stubbornly.

The girl with the golden hair narrows her eyes. "And sometimes we have to sacrifice ourselves for the people of Hyrule. I'm not just going to let myself needlessly die. That wouldn't help anyone." Breathing in and out, she audibly evens her voice. "Right now, you getting hurt matters a lot more than me. My job is to get you there safely, Princess." Link blinks at her. "Let me be Your Majesty's own appointed Knight."

The girl with the golden hair lowers herself to her knee. Link stares at her. The girl with the golden hair gestures to Fi, and Link unsheathes her from her back. She touches Fi first to the girl with the golden hair's right shoulder and then to her left. When she sheathes Fi again, Link notices the girl with the golden hair's irises glisten.

"Thank you. I won't let you down." The girl with the golden hair starts to rise from the floor. Link holds out her hand. The girl with the golden hair watches her for a moment before she accepts. Link grips her fingers.

The girl with the golden hair—her Knight—pulls herself up.

When they pass through the fourth row of columns, decorated in statues of loftwings, Link and the girl with the golden hair exit into an apparently empty corridor. Together, they climb up a short set of steps and continue forward through the same-looking triangular hallway down.

"I can't sense any presences in here. I think it's empty. Oh, what if we get lost?" asks the girl with the golden hair, walking one step behind Link, the mirrored pot lid at her side, ready to go at a moment's notice. "What if that other way was actually the right one? Is this some sort of labyrinth?"

"We'll figure it out," Link responds. "I'm sure that—"

The floor beneath her boots suddenly gives way. The girl with the golden hair stops short of the sudden edge while Link lands on her rear end—her back against the wall—in some sort of pit below. A violet—some sort of monster that resembles a chuchu—stares beadily at her before leaping forward. Link stabs into its gelatinous form. The chuchu replies by swallowing the sword. Link waves Fi frantically around to dislodge the monster from the blade.

"Behind you! Watch out!"
Link swivels around on her heel, noting another chuchu-like monster blobbing towards her. As it oozes onto her already-damaged boots, she realises that the violet eats away at her boots like malice. Malice. *Malice.*

Jumping backwards from the second blob, Link lands right into a third. The pain that shoots through the bottoms of her feet brings back to leap away again. With one final arc of the sword, she forces the living malice from the blade and into the wall.

Lying down at the edge of the false floor, the girl with the golden hair extends her arms down. Link lunges towards her, cartwheeling over the blobs of malice that slither towards her. Springing up from the ground, she grabs the girl with the golden hair's hands. She hears the girl with the golden hair grunt. Link tries curling herself up, tucking her knees to her chest to avoid the malice that bounds towards her. Then she senses the girl with the golden hair start to slip.

Blinking rapidly, Link tries to loosen her hands from her companion before the girl with the golden hair can fall and drop into the pit with her, but the girl with the golden hair grasps her wrists more tightly in response. Nails dig into Link's skin. The girl with the golden hair cries out, and then Link feels herself swinging through the air.

She sails through the aether. Her legs pivot up over her as her back goes from facing the floor to facing the ceiling. The girl with the golden hair topples backwards under her. Her hands slip from Link's. Link's half-eaten boots connect with the ground first, and then her knees against the girl with the golden hair's shoulders, and then the rest of her, cushioned by the girl with the golden hair.

She rolls off of her companion. Gathering herself up and catching her breath, Link squats down by her companion to ask if she's all right. The girl with the golden hair simply responds with a wheeze of laughter.

"See?" she manages between pants. "That was pretty neat, wasn't it? I...saved you, huh?"

"Thank you," signs Link. She looks up at the corridor that spreads relentlessly forwards. In the dim glow of the gold around her, she cannot quite tell if the chamber ends at a flat wall, or if the corridor merely goes on forever. "I'd ask if you want to rest, but you'd just scowl and say we need to hurry."

"And I agree. We've got a promise to Hyrule. If you can stand, let's keep going."

This time, Link uses Fi as a cane, testing test for the false floor. Taking the girl with the golden hair's hand, she carefully jumps over the gap. Her companion does not quite make the leap: her right foot slips from the edge and she tips backwards, but Link catches her and spins her around onto solid ground.

While the girl with the golden hair woozily regains her balance and thanks Link, the latter taps Fi against the floor. The rest of the ground appears real.

"Still, the existence of an illusory floor like that...is a little discomforting. We'll have to be careful." The girl with the golden hair pauses. "I know! I'll keep track of this weird whatever-it-is that we're in." She opens up her hand and, closing her eyes, pokes her tongue from the corner of her mouth. Link tilts her head. The girl with the golden hair opens a single eye and peers down at her empty palm. "Ah...right. It doesn't look like willing things into existence works in here. Of course! If this place won't let me pull myself back together by will, then naturally it wouldn't let me will things into existence, either. We play by the mortal world's rules here. Link, do you have any paper?"

Link unfurls the map of Hyrule that she has drawn for herself over the past two years and three
months since she awoke in the Shrine of Resurrection. The girl with the golden hair runs her fingertip over the map; she requests that Link name the villages whose labels—in Link's cucco-scratch scrawl—she cannot read. Link coughs gently. She motions to the corridor around them. Her cheeks reddening, the girl with the golden hair flips over the parchment and throws herself into drawing out a map of all that they have seen so far.

With that, the girl with the golden hair and Link continue onwards, tapping Fi against the floor as they go. The end of the corridor proves to contain another lift. The girl with the golden hair furiously scribbles out the map while they descend into the depths of the keep.

The lift deposits them in a hallway almost identical to the first. The girl with the golden hair sketches out the two corridors: one with two columns, the other with four. "Why don't we try proceeding through the two-pillar passage this time?" the girl with the golden hair suggests. Link shrugs. At some point, they'll take a break, and Link will have a chance to take a look-see at what Riju has left her in the ice-box. The thought of the meal keeps a spring in her steps as she trails the tip of the sword over the floor.

For once in her life, Link is grateful that she stands too short to keep Fi at her hip, because that allows the blade to extend well to the floor without her stooping over.

At the end of the second row of pillars, a sudden swelter of heat gives them pause. Link ogles the thin, rickety golden bridge, made out of conjoined tiles of gold with thin gaps in-between, swaying over a pit of malice that churns below. Boiling malice, somehow, an updraft of heated air billowing up from the bubbling surface of the violet sea.

As Link watches, the bridge abruptly twists down the middle from the hot puffs of malice. Link glances at the girl with the golden hair; her companion is already looking back at her. The narrowness of the bridge forces them to single file.

"I don't think it's safe for both of us to be on the bridge at the same time," the girl with the golden hair observes while the bridge untwists. "I don't know if it will hold. So, I'll go first."

Link extends her hand to insist that she go first, but the girl with the golden hair has already taken off. Gripping the thin golden cords of the handrails, she sprints across the bridge. Link, unable to look, covers her eyes with her palms. She hears the bridge creaking in its back-and-forth swaying. Listening to the pff pff pff of the girl with the golden hair's boots alighting on each golden plank of the bridge, Link inhales at the advent of sudden silence.

"Yoohoo! You can come on over!"

She lowers her hands from her face. Blinking, Link stares at the girl with the golden hair, now wheezing on the other side of the pit of malice. Behind her, Link notices a second bridge extending over a second chasm of malice, her companion panting on a two-pace-long block of gold between the pits. The girl with the golden hair gestures for Link to follow.

Link swallows. Sweat—from the heat, or from her own fear—beads on her brow and sticks the fabric of her undershirt to her back.

"Just run right across it! Keep your hands on the rails and push outwards to keep the bridge from flipping over. Oh, here. I'll help." The girl with the golden hair leans over and takes hold of the rails on her end. As she pushes them apart, Link notices that the bridge does, indeed, sway less. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

To hear such words coming from her companion forces Link's feet forward. She grasps the cords
herself, breathes, and dashes across the bridge. Keeping her gaze fixed on her own boots, Link hits each plank squarely in the centre. And then she feels her right boot slipping and her leg dropping downwards. Her left leg bends at an awkward angle while her right plummets through the divide between two planks, her torso hitting the bridge hard enough for her to bite back a groan of pain. The bridge oscillates around her in a vertical wave that carries her nearer and nearer towards the sea of malice with every bounce. When she tries to retract her leg, the bridge twists up and down even further.

At its nadir, the bridge brings Link low towards the sea of malice, so close that the heat rolling off of the sea bursts boiling malice over her right heel and burns the bottom of her foot. The abruptness of the agony leads Link to yelp.

The girl with the golden hair arches backwards, pulling up the bridge. Link slaps her palms against the planks on either side of the divide. Grunting, she pushes herself up. The planks scrape against her leg, but she picks herself back up and tries to put weight on her right heel. As soon as the pad touches plank, a pang of pain nearly petrifies her on the bridge. Link exhales. She tucks her right leg up, then hurries across the second half of the bridge, hopping frantically on her left foot. The uneven bridge steadily rotates to the left.

Link throws herself forward the last three planks. The girl with the golden hair catches her while the bridge twists noisily behind her. Her companion lets her down onto the floor.

Together, they examine her foot. Blisters of violet cover the bottom of her right heel, rising up in pulsating purple pustules from her skin. The girl with the golden hair bites her lower lip. "You can't walk like this, can you?"

Link reaches behind her for her quiver. She withdraws a sapphire arrow and flicks a finger against jewel-inlaid tip. The girl with the golden hair starts to shake her head, yet Link shrugs off her own tunic. Folding the fabric into a gag, she bite down hard on her tunic. The scent of dried blood slshs copper over her tongue. Slamming the arrowhead into the floor, Link breaks the shard of sapphire within, then drives the icy point into the blisters to pop and freeze them at the same time.

The agony of the sharp arrowhead piercing her sensitive stretched skin and frosting over her flesh chokes her around the fabric stuffed into her mouth. The blister freezes over. Loathe to dirty her cooking knife, Link scrapes the dead skin from the pad of her heel with the edge of the sword that seals the darkness, exposing the raw flesh underneath. She wraps gauze around her heel repeatedly until, when she puts weight on her leg, she senses merely a mild ache throbbing against the pad of her foot.

"Oh, I wish that I could tell you to rest." The girl with the golden hair looks on towards the corridor ahead. "But, as you eloquently put it earlier...we don't have the time."

They take the second bridge more carefully so as not to fall down into the sea of malice. When Link reaches the solid ground on the other end, she flops down and kisses the golden floor. She licks experimentally at the gold, except she discovers that it has no taste. Frowning to herself, Link runs her tongue over the ground again.

Rocking back up, she sits on her heels. "What kind of monsters would've designed this?"

"Many, many years ago, the aristocracy of Hyrule used to include golden flakes in their meals, as proof that they could afford to even eat a precious metal." The girl with the golden hair rests her left hand on her hip. "Of course, I don't think that this is made out of the metal. It's too solid for that and luminesces, as well as having a high resistance to heat and even concentrated power of will—"
Link snaps her fingers: she refers to malice. "—without harming beings of blood like you. Remarkable, really. If only we could emulate its construction."

"When we both get out of this, we can come back and do all the research we want."

The girl with the golden hair makes a *hn* sound in the back of her throat. "If we do. Now, come on."

As they walk away from the pits of malice, the swelter of the air dies down into a comfortable coolness. Link slips the feathered blue tunic onto her body once more, though she notes that her own blood—from the loftwing's razor-sharp attack of aether—has partially stained the back a brilliant red. Somehow, her blood has taken on a more vivid hue in the glittering gold of the keep.

Two rows of columns greets them. On the far wall, Link observes a curtain of light signaling another lift. A statue guards the lift, perched on a small overhang which protrudes out from the flat of the wall. The statue resembles a golden loftwing in shining armour, their beak longer and crueler than that of the crimson loftwing that she and the girl with the golden hair have already fought, more like a blade than a beak. Nothing else exists in the corridor beyond the ever-present golden walls. Just an easy path to the lift.

The girl with the golden and Link approach the lift warily. The former raises her mirrored pot lid over her head. For once, Link acquiesces to the use of a shield: she wields her cooking pot as she would a hat.

They near the lift. When they pass under the overhang, Link removes the cooking pot from her head. The lift, less than three paces away. The girl with the golden hair breaks into a run. Link throws her arm out to stop her.

"What if the lift's a—"

A touch of nail on floor behind her makes Link whirl around and draw Fi in a single motion accompanied by the clatter of the cooking pot onto the ground. Another crimson loftwing flips out their wings at them. Link reaches for her slate, then realises that she lost the slate in the sea of malice outside of the pyramid. Something whistles through the air beside her. The creature leaps back, but the mirrored pot lid that the girl with the golden hair has thrown thumps the loftwing in the chest. While the creature shakes off the blow, Link sprints forward towards them, intent on thrusting Fi into their breast. The loftwing charges Link at the last second, flaring out their wings, and Link skips to a halt. She grips Fi in both hands.

The *thud* of the creature's beak against her sternum knocks her back and clamps down on her heart hard enough that for a second she cannot feel her own heartbeat. But the loftwing's charge impales the creature on the blade of evil's bane. Raising her arms—the loftwing's form surprisingly light despite its size—Link swings Fi down. Momentum cracks the creature against the floor. She jerks Fi out from the loftwing's body. The creature stretches wide their beak and slithers over the ground to snap it over Link's leg. Link brings Fi down onto the loftwing's skull. The blade pierces through the jelly of their eye; the impact of the strike forces the creature to a standstill as they shriek out their agony, beak opening and closing around Link's ankle, wings spasming, golden fluid bubbling up from their ruined eye socket. With a sickening squelch, Link forces Fi through the gristle at the back of the loftwing's eye and plunges the sword into their cranium.

The creature dissipates into golden dust. Link heaves her breaths in and out until her lungs calm. Picking up the mirrored pot lid, she returns it to the girl with the golden hair, whose eyes have widened, her gaze fixed on the spot on the floor where Link dispatched the loftwing.
Link presses the mirrored pot lid into her hands. For a moment, the girl with the golden hair does not seem to acknowledge Link's presence. Then she comes to, her knuckles paling on the rim of the pot lid.

Link sheathes Fi. "Let's descend."

"Yes," the girl with the golden hair breathes. "Let's descend."

They descend down into the lift. The corridor does not offer them a choice this time. The two move forward in the singular accessible direction and come across a wall of partially cracked golden blocks. The girl with the golden hair runs her palm over one of the splintered blocks. "How curious. I wonder if there's some sort of pattern to these, if perhaps we need to locate some kind of..." The girl with the golden hair exhales. "...or that works too, I suppose."

Link bangs Fi against the nearest block. It crumbles to golden dust from the impact. She bangs out another block, and something shoots out at her with such speed that she falls backwards onto her rear. The girl with the golden hair cowers behind the pot lid while Link tries to make out the rapidly soaring whatever-it-is. When it darts by her, Link brings down the sword that seals the darkness, but the whatever-it-is merely slices a claw or a talon across Link's abdomen and flies off. Link pushes into her her stomach with her right arm. Readying another strike, she observes the whatever-it-is blast towards them. Then girl with the golden hair whaps it over the head with the mirrored pot lid.

The whatever-it-is hurtles into the floor. Link slices down immediately, bisecting the whatever-it-is in half. For a second before it dissolves into dust, Link observes something like a decapitated loftwing's head, the feathers on either side serving as wings.

"Thanks," she signs to the girl with the golden hair, who shakes her head.

"Thank you, Link."

They excavate the blocks one by one. Some of the blocks contain more of the darting whatever-they-are; the girl with the golden hair and Link fall into a rhythm, where Link thrusts into each block and the girl with the golden hair swings down her pot lid at the same time.

She and Link break through one row of blocks, then walk down a cramped passage to face another. Shrugging at each other, Link and the girl with the golden hair use the same strategy, whumping the whatever-they-are as they emerge from the blocks.

"Well, now, that wasn't so bad, was it?" The girl with the golden hair brushes golden dust from her jacket. "I can only hope that the rest of the temple is—"

Another whatever-it-is shoots directly into her face. Link tries to crack it down with the cooking pot, but the whatever-it-is flies off and the metal connects with her companion's brow. The girl with the golden hair tumbles backwards. While Link ogles her cooking pot in disbelief, the whatever-it-is comes hurtling back. Now the cooking pot slams into the whatever-it-is, crashing it hard enough against the floor that it immediately dissipates into dust.

Link drops the cooking pot and crouches down beside the girl with the golden hair. Scooping her hand under her companion's head, Link tries to lift the girl with the golden hair up, tries to poke her cheek, tries to gently pap her face in hopes of awakening her.

"Just...give me five more minutes..." she murmurs, her head lolling. "...then I'll...go pray again..."
rouse her; if the girl with the golden hair resembles Link in any way, the weapon will work just as well. Link rummages through her satchel. She withdraws a slice of pumpkin pie, now slightly crushed in the wax, and unwraps it.

She brings the pumpkin pie towards the girl with the golden hair's face. Her companion's eyes snap open. "Pumpkin," she says.

Link nods encouragingly. The girl with the golden hair snags the slice of pumpkin pie from Link's hands and stuffs herself with the sweet. She gulps down each mouthful almost without chewing. Only once she has polished off three-quarters of the slice does the girl with the golden hair slow down enough to roll a bite over her tongue.

"There's—mm!—so much things I missed—nn!—about you, Link, but your cooking—" The girl with the golden hair lowers her eyelids. "—is—mmfm!—one of the most important. I should write a book about that. Catalogue all of your recipes." She delicately wipes her mouth on a kerchief while Link offers her a second slice. The girl with the golden hair seizes the offering with both hands.

Link answers honestly: "That's the greatest compliment you could give me. And I mean that. I missed you too."

"Then it's decided." The girl with the golden hair practically inhales the second slice as Link prepares for her a third. "Oh, I've always wanted to write an epic. If we both come out of this alive, I'll record your travels through Hyrule and include all of the recipes that you've made. I know that, traditionally, the heroes of Hyrule have had their exploits recorded in song, but...well. I wouldn't say that you're a traditional hero." Link rubs the back of her head. "Not in a bad way!"

"You're not wrong."

She clears her throat. "More importantly, I don't know much about music, I'm afraid."

"I know someone who does." Link snaps her fingers. "His name's Kass."

"Oh! You mentioned him earlier. When you were discussing the golden scar on your left arm."

Link bobs her head. "I think you'd like him very much." Link touches her chin. "He knows a lot about local legends and verses passed down in this region. Not this region, specifically, but you know, regions in general." She loops her finger around. "Anyway, you'd have a lot to talk about, I think." She pauses. "And stop saying if. It's when, because we're both going to get out of here."

"In that case, if we do...I'd like to meet him."

The passageway beyond the chamber with the crumbling blocks constricts claustrophobically. When Link's head just brushes against the sharply-angled ceiling, the tapered triangular walls force her and the girl with the golden hair to hunch over and walk single-file through the long hall, Link leading, the girl with the golden hair following. "I think I see it widening up ahead," her companion remarks. Link lets go of a breath she didn't realise she was holding just as she spots something crimson ahead. Her eyes embiggen. If a loftwing charges them here in the tunnel—

Link dives to the floor—she hears the girl with the golden hair intake a breath of shock—and rolls herself forward, engaging the loftwing head-on. She thrusts Fi up and out at the red only to hear the clang of the blade against metal.

She looks up: an armoured loftwing. An armoured crimson loftwing clad in gleaming gold so
brilliant that Link can barely keep her gaze on the metal. An armoured loftwing sporting a beak long and cruel as the blade of evil's bane. An armoured loftwing who glares at her with sharp golden eyes ringed in fire-light blue and violent violet.

The loftwing rears up their head. Link scrambles backwards, yet the suddenness of pain in her right shoulder reddens her vision. Vaguely, she feels herself hit the floor as her right shoulder bathes in a wet warmth. Vaguely, she hears the girl with the golden hair shrieking behind her. Vaguely, she sees the creature lift their head to strike again.

Fi vibrates in her hand. Closing her eyes against the blurring of her vision, Link lunges to the side; the loftwing hacks at empty aether with their beak. The creature pelts after her. Link swirls on her heel to carve Fi into the loftwing's torso as she did the ones before. Yet the blade only rings against the armour, the vibrations racing up Link's arms and jellying her bones. Her right shoulder throbs in pain. The creature strikes down their terrible beak. Link thrusts upwards, meeting the blow. The collision bounces her back. Stumbling away from the loftwing, she seeks purchase against the ground, her right heel pulsating in pain. The creature lunges for her. This time, Link drives Fi forward not from the front but from the left side, wedging the blade into the crack between the armoured loftwing's upper and lower beak.

The impact tilts the creature's beak to the right. Instead of sundering Link's skull, the beak punctures the flesh of her right shoulder even further, but Link pushes Fi deeper into the loftwing's mouth until she feels a wet resistance. With a resounding grunt, Link punctures the back of the creature's throat, a moist tearing accompanying the sickening crunch of the bones of their neck. The loftwing gurgles up a vicious golden fluid that seeps down their beak into Link's shoulder. The droplets burrow into her flesh like malice, like parasitic worms crawling under her skin, like needles driven into the meat of her shoulder. She wrenches her wrist.

The creature's throat twists around her blade as though she were carving a cucco, but the loftwing replies by digging their their beak deeper into her shoulder. Wincing, closing her eyes, Link throws the weight of her body into forcing the sword deeper in.

A sudden squelch. Abruptly the pressure releases. Fi slips from Link's hand as her knees buckle beneath her. She listens to the wet sounds of iron against bone and the beating of metal on meat, over and over again. The iron rings out a final time, not against bone, but against the floor. Link claws at her own shoulder, her hand slipping over the bareness of her skin where the fabric of her tunic has dissolved away. Her fingers come away wet with the blood that runs in rivulets down her side and pools in the dip between her hip and her leg.

"Whew. All right, I think I took care of the loftwing. Link? Link! Link, Link, is there anything I can do? Oh, she probably still has some of that pumpkin pie in her satchel. I bet that'll do the trick."

Link senses the strap of her satchel tautening as the girl with the golden hair combs through her belongings. Pressing her left hand as far into her throbbing right shoulder as she can manage, Link fishes through her quiver of arrows. She draws out one tipped in ruby. Gripping the hem of her tunic between her teeth and fingerling the arrowhead to check its wholeness, she cracks the ruby shard against the floor. Then Link shoves the burning arrowhead into her own meat and cauterises the wound in her shoulder.

The next loftwing she encounters will eat a topaz arrow to the face if she has anything to say about it.

When she comes to from the darkness, she smells: pumpkin pie. Lunging forward, Link snaps her jaws shut around the sweet. The succulence of the gooey pie filling combined with the earthy
flavour of the pumpkin all balanced by the crumbly crunch of the crust drifts Link onto a warmth paradise. In the afterglow of the slice of pumpkin pie, she opens her eyes and looks up at the girl with the golden hair, in turn, looking down at her.

Link lies in her companion's lap, her head supported by her companion's right hand; she holds the remainder of the pumpkin pie with her left. Link rolls her right shoulder. She can still feel the tightness of her skin around the burn scar, but at least she senses little pain, merely discomfort.

The girl with the golden hair's usually braided-up bangs have fallen into her eyes. "How are you feeling?"

"Very full," Link responds, shutting her eyes again and resting her head against her companion's chest. The girl with the golden hair shakes her. When Link raises her eyelids, she notices her companion's eyes slightly narrowed, her brow creased, the corners of her mouth twitching downwards.

"Link," she says softly, "we have to get to the Golden Force, remember?"

Link sits up so quickly that she knocks their foreheads forward. While Link rubs her brow, she manages an apologetic smile to the girl with the golden hair. "Sorry about that."

"It's what I get for having such a large forehead, I might as well call it a fivehead." The girl with the golden hair stops. Link tilts her head. "G-get it? Because five is...it's one more than four. It's funny! It's a pun. A play on words." Link blinks. The girl with the golden hair exhales. "One hundred years is a long time to be fighting a battle of will in the Sacred Realm." That brings out a shake of silent laughter to Link's shoulders.

The girl with the golden hair and Link pick themselves up and walk on. Jogging up a set of stairs, they skirt a blob of living malice oozing after them and trudge up a long corridor until they face a dead end.

Link touches her chin. The girl with the golden hair sits down and marks the spot on her map, and then Link hears her inhale. "Look down."

She does. At her boots lies a single fragmented block. Link shrugs. "I guess if things have already gone south, then we might as well go south, too."

The girl with the golden hair snorts. "That was absolutely worse than my fivehead joke. South isn't even down!"

"Well, when you've got the paraglider, the enemy's always down." Positioning herself on the edge of the block, Link pierces it to golden dust with Fi's blade. No darting dervishes dash from the dust. Nevertheless, she spots another block below the first, this one deep enough in the ground that she would have to lower herself into the hole if she wanted to break through the next block.

"What if it's a trap?" The girl with the golden hair mns worriedly.

Link runs her fingers through her ponytail. "But there's no other way through."

The girl with the golden hair looks back at the stairs: the living blob of malice steadily but surely globs towards them. "Oh, maybe we could go back, and try one of the other corridors." Taking the paraglider from her back, Link hands it to the girl with the golden hair. Her companion looks down at the fabric, her brows knit together, her timbre voicing her puzzlement. "This looks...a little different from Impa's. I don't recall hers having—topaz? amber?—at all."
"One of my best friends had it fixed up for me after I managed to nearly lose it in a thunderstorm." The girl with the golden hair makes a noise in the back of her throat; Link waves a dismissive hand. "I'll tell you all about it when we get out of here. You hang out onto that. After I boom-boom right through these blocks, you can glide down with it."

"I don't think—"

"Trust me."

Link hops down into the hole. After the first block that she has already broken through, she pierces eight more—nine blocks, like the nine columns she passed through to enter the keep—and then she jams Fi into the floor. With a hurried apology to Fi, who resonates warmly in her hand as though to reassure her, Link looks up. The girl with the golden hair perches at the rim of the vertical tunnel and peers at her. Link curls up her forefinger and thumb in the symbol of being all right.

Opening the paraglider, the girl with the golden hair steps in. Link listens to the few _nns_ of fear that her companion lets slip as she drifts down the shaft. Abruptly the paraglider collides with the wall and snaps shut. The girl with the golden hair drops like a stone. Without thinking, Link opens her arms.

The girl with the golden hair's weight sends her into the floor. Her companion's knee ends up in her face; her companion's elbow digs into her stomach; her companion's head bonks against the cap of her knee. At least she cushioned the girl with the golden hair's fall.

"Oh no! Link, I'm so sorry. Are you all right?"

Link flicks up a finger and boomps the girl with the golden hair's nose. Blinking, she tries to focus on Link's forefinger. The cross-eyed look brings Link to laugh. "You've let me fall on you twice now. I'm just returning the favour."

"Thank you for catching me, then." The girl with the golden hair returns the glider. "And...it looks like you were right about going down. Oh, I mean, going south. Going both?"

"Both," Link agrees. "Both is good."

Again, they have no choice in corridor, but they find another lift a little ways away. As they descend once more into the depths, the girl with the golden hair traces out their journey, while Link notices part of the wall shimmering more than the rest. She tries to extend her hand through the curtain of golden light; to her shock, her fingers pass through the wall. Yet the lift continues down swiftly. Her palm smacks against solid gold; she withdraws her arm. The wall no longer shimmers. Her shoulder throbs, as does her heel. The girl with the golden hair inquires of what caused her to yelp.

When the curtain of gold light parts, the girl with the golden hair glances up and down the corridors leading away from the shaft of the lift. "Which way should we go this time? Two columns, or four—Link! Loftwing!"

Link sees the loftwing, sees the _loftwings_: one charging them from the passageway lined with two columns, the other spiralling towards them from the passageway with four. She grabs the girl with the golden hair and dives to the floor; the two creatures crash into one another. The spiralling loftwing cleaves through the charging one's body like it were gutting a cucco. Link stares, eyes wide, as the second creature's body bursts apart into dust from the vortex of aether spiralling around the first. When the loftwing lands, talons clacking against the golden floor, Link leaps to her boots, Fi clenched in both hands. Mirrored pot lid held out in front of her, the girl with the
golden hair accompanies her. The creature extends their wings. Link rolls forward under the arc of
the aether and then rolls again to evade the boomerang whirlwind. She slices wildly at the
loftwing, forcing the creature back. The loftwing jumps away from her, flipping out their wings
every time they land. Yet Link advances mercilessly until the creature's feet hit the steps behind
them. Squawking—in surprise?—the loftwing stumbles backwards. Link seizes the moment of
weakness to lunge forward, Fi piercing the aether and plunge her sharpened tip into the creature's
white-feathered throat.

Golden fluid spurts outwards, splattering Link's chest. The pain blooms alongside a counter-current
of numbness outwards from her sternum. Twisting her wrist, she slits the loftwing's throat from
base to the softened skin under their jaw.

The creature arches their head forward. Though Link tries to recoil back, the sharpened hook of the
beak drags across her chest and slashes a diagonal furrow from her left shoulder to her right hip.
Warm wetness slicks her tunic against her skin. The loftwing draws their beak back up, making
an X across Link's chest. As soon as the creature retracts their head, the golden fluid dripping down
to gild the feathers of their chest, Link throws herself backwards. She jolts Fi free of the loftwing's
throat with a terrible wet squelch that sloshes golden fluid over the floor.

The creature takes a single shaking step forward towards Link, rasping out a breath of aether. The
skin of her chest burns. Link swings Fi parallel to the ground. The edge of the blade bites into the
loftwing's neck. A second of resistance, and then the creature's neck buckles in a spray of golden
dust. Their head dissipates into dust before it hits the ground.

Link examines her chest. Ripping off her tunic and undershirt, she inspects her injuries. The blood
seeping from the diagonal cut has dyed the fabric a deep crimson instead of Parapan-sky blue.
Squeezing shut her eyes against the pain, she scrapes the thin film of golden fluid from her flesh
and leaves the reddish rawness of the layer of skin underneath. The girl with the golden hair offers
her gauze. She wraps it carefully around Link's torso, hip to shoulder, over the chest and around the
back, her fingers brushing lightly over Link's skin. She tucks in the end, then tears off the hanging
edge.

"At this rate, we'll run out of gauze before we get halfway through." The girl with the golden hair
has angled her eyebrows at Link in admonishment, yet Link can see the worry and affection behind
the heavy set of her brow. "Please, at least try to take care of yourself."

Link grins at her. "That's why I have you with me, my Knight."

The girl with the golden hair stamps her boot against the floor. "That doesn't mean you don't have
to take care of yourself, too, Princess."

She raises her eyebrows. "Now you've sounding like Impa."

The girl with the golden hair pouts. "Don't tease me like that, Link." Link flicks her finger against
her companion's nose; the girl with the golden hair responds with a flick of her own, harder than
Link's, enough to water Link's eyes. Link's hands fly to her already crooked nose. "O-oh. I didn't
mean to hurt you!"

"You weren't kidding about not teasing you."

"I'm so sorry, Link."

Link grants her a smile. "I'm just kidding around. If a loftwing shoving its beak in my chest couldn't
knock me out, you booping my nose isn't going to do much."
The girl with the golden hair shakes her head incredulously. "You've gotten a lot more talkative in the past hundred years, Princess."

"Only because I learned from the best." Link nods towards the two passageways and their columns. "So, two or four?"

"Shame there's no third route, so we could take the middle." The girl with the golden hair forms an approximate triangle with her hands. "You know, since three is in the middle of two and four?" Link cocks her head. The girl with the golden hair sighs. "Let's see...if given the choice between two slices of pie and four, you could split the difference and take three."

Link scratches the crown of her head. "I'd just take four though. I mean...why wouldn't you take four instead of three?"

"But there are only three Golden Goddesses," the girl with the golden hair insists, "and we're looking for Their Triforce."

"Sure! That's why I'd pick four. One for each Goddess, and one for myself." The girl with the golden hair claps her palm over her own face. "Sorry for not getting the joke."

"I don't think I get my own joke anymore." The girl with the golden hair thumbs behind her. "Come on."

They climb the steps, and the triangular passageway opens up around them. Link and the girl with the golden hair pass statues depicting various emblems of the Golden Goddesses and perched loftwings that watch them from behind crimson-jewelled eyes. Strange coiled ropes litter the floor here and there. The girl with the golden hair leans over one and studies it; the rope uncoils into an eyeless wyrm with a void of a mouth lined in rows upon rows of teeth down into the churning abyss of its gut. The girl with the golden hair slaps the not-rope with the mirrored pot lid, then catches its body between the rim and the floor. She crushes its head under her boot.

"It just had to be snakes." The girl with the golden hair rubs her forearms. "Oh, I guess it's better than boars."

"This is definitely more exciting than bores," Link tries.

The girl with the golden hair giggles. "That one was pretty good."

Channelling her friend Sidon, Link strikes a pose and flashes a thumbs-up. "That's my first victory today."

One of the flying whatever-they-are dashes into the small of Link's back. The impact leaves a cut in her skin. Link catches the whatever-it-is in her open cooking pot when it next comes around and slams down the pot lid. The whatever-it-is dervishes inside, smacking smack against the sides of the cooking pot. While the girl with the golden hair holds the pot, Link steadies Fi over the pot lid. Her companion flicks up the lid. The whatever-it-is shoots out just as Link stabs down, severing it into golden dust.

Link holds out her hand. The girl with the golden hand slaps her palm against Link's. They grin at one another.

Together, the girl with the golden hair and Link advance quickly through the open corridor. Coiled ropes spring at them from behind statues; Link slices open those that attack the girl with the golden hair, and the girl with the golden hair decapitates those that attack Link. The whatever-they-are lunge at the two from the aether, but a whap with the mirrored pot lid or bamth with the cooking
pot knock each whatever-it-is into the floor long enough for the other to grind the whatever-it-is into dust under her boots.

At the far end of the open chamber, another statue upon an overhang greets them, a lift curtained in gold visible beyond. Link and the girl with the golden hair exchange a glance. They speak and sign at the same time:

"The statue must hide an enemy."

"There's something behind the statue."

They look at one another.

"Do you think we can make it to the lift?"

"If we run really fast."

"What are our chances?"

"Maybe if we run really, really fast."

"We could stand and fight."

"Or maybe if we run really, really, really fast."

The girl with the golden hair cocks her hip. "Why are you so keen on running?"

Link rolls her shoulders. "If it's another one of those loftwings in armour, I'd rather not get both shoulders pecked off."

"The previous lift was guarded by a regular loftwing. I doubt this one will be any different. The Goddesses do like Their patterns, after all." The girl with the golden hair brandishes her pot lid. "Now the corridor tapers into the lift. If we can trap the loftwing between the lift and our present position, then...the loftwing shouldn't be able to leap around and all that. Does that sound like a plan?"

After a moment, Link dips her head. Unsheathing Fi and gripping her in both hands, prepared for a spiral or a gust of wind, Link rivets her gaze on the golden statue.

"Now, the last loftwing did not leap out until we had passed under that statue," the girl with the golden hair speculates out loud, "so this one should not emerge unt—"

A flash of red and gold parts from behind the statue and spirals towards the ceiling. Link strings her bow with a topaz-tipped arrow—Fi fallen to the floor at her boots—but the loftwing has angled themself down to charge the ground. The topaz sparks its electricity against the ceiling. Snorting air from her nose, Link whips out another topaz arrow and takes aim, but the creature breaks from the spiral in mid-air to change course.

The girl with the golden hair raises the mirrored pot lid over her head as the armoured loftwing drives their beak into the glass. Riju's gift holds firm. The creature's beak screeees down the mirrored surface. They reach their long serrated-clawed limbs around the rim of the pot lid and slash at her companion.

As the girl with the golden hair turns to run away, the loftwing sinks their talons into her shoulder. The creature rakes furrows down her back from shoulder blade to just above her hips. The three
scarlet lines that form on either side of her spine spur Link into a sprint. Dropping the bow, Link closes the five-pace gap between herself and the loftwing. She grabs the creature by the tail that pokes out of a gap in their golden armour and drive the topaz arrow directly into their rump, the arrowhead fragmenting inside of the loftwing's flesh.

The resulting shockwave of electricity throws Link backwards. Her boots skid along the floor. She lands on all four and snaps her head up, observing the creature convulse from the shocks running through their system. The girl with the golden hair seizes up as well, but at least she has fallen to the ground free of the loftwing's talons.

Link's gaze fixes onto her companion: the creature has shredded six rows into the back of her jacket and tunic; the fabric around the furrows has sunk into her flesh, stapling the rest of the jacket onto her body save for the mangled red-blue-white vertical lines irrigating her back in blood.

As her left hand flies to Fi's hilt before it dawns upon her that Fi remains on the floor across the chamber, Link pounces towards the armoured loftwing that still spasms on the ground and bring the cooking pot down onto the creature's head. Like the lizalfos on the beach of the castle, but without the distance afforded her by magnesis. Her own two hands grip the sides of the cooking pot. Her own two hands brings the cooking pot up over her head. Her own two hands hurl the metal into the loftwing's skull.

Once, for the crack of the cranium. Twice, for the slosh of the juice. Thrice, for the squishing of flesh against shattered skull.

Four, five, sixes time. Seven. She loses count. Her fingers numb. The tendons of her wrists ache. She caves in the loftwing's skull like she would tenderise a raw cucco in anticipation of making poultry pilaf for Impa, her gaze caught on the girl with the golden hair who shudders on the ground, limbs trembling, the blood from her back forming a thin pool around her. Link notices flecks of the white of her raw meat in the rows raked by the creature's talons, and she brings the cooking pot down again on the loftwing's head.

When the metal bangs against floor—when the creature shrieks their last—when the armour and body alike dissolve into a golden mist, the abandoned cooking pot rattles against the gold.

Link drops herself to the floor the last half-pace, sliding her knees towards the girl with the golden hair. Her blood oozes thickly from her wounds, coagulating around her on the ground in congealed ropes that hang from the edges of the injuries over her torso to the golden floor below. Link delves into her satchel for the elixir of star fragment and faery. The glass warms her palms. Just as she lifts the vial from her satchel, she hears the girl with the golden hair rasp out her words, her timbre breathy, as if every motion of her lungs pulsed more blood from her back.

"Caut...cauterise them." The girl with the golden hair quakes against the ground, her knuckles slipping over the tessellated triangles of gold. "I don't care how much it works. Cauterise them. Don't you dare waste that elixir on me. I'll never forgive you if you do."

For a second looks down at the girl with the golden hair. Then she rips off her own tunic—the blue almost entirely stained to red—and scrunches it into a gag. Lean sover, Link presents her companion with the tunic. The rawness of the blood, a mixture of dried and fresh, almost boils up bile from her belly. The girl with the golden hair sinks her teeth into the fabric. Link's blood rings her companion's mouth in red.

She cracks a ruby arrow against the ground. The arrowhead blazes in fervid flame. Kneeling over the girl with the golden hair, Link rests a hand against the first furrow, intent on picking the shredded bits of tunic from the wound.
But when she so much as brushes against the cloth with her finger, the girl with the golden hair arches her spine and moans into the gag. Link digs her nails into her own palm.

Gripping the fabric of the tunic to the girl with the golden hair's Grasping writhing and flailing of limbs, Link rips the cloth free from the wound with a noise more sickening than any Link has ever heard, as though she herself were tearing apart her companion's veins, gripping the vessels from the meat of her body and pulls them apart until they burst to spray her in blood. She runs the red-hot arrowhead over the wound from the shoulder to the base of the spine. The girl with the golden hair stils. Her head lolls into the ground; her limbs noodle against her deadened torso. Link seals the injury. A long scarlet scar trails down the girl with the golden hair's back.

She repeats the procedure until she has notched the girl with the golden hair's back six times. The remainder of the fabric of the jacket and tunic remain in place, however weakened, so that solely the six furrows stand out from the blue, like a dress made for a zora with lines cut out for the zora's fins.

Gathering the girl with the golden hair into her arms, Link embraces her tightly. She withdraws the final slice of pumpkin pie and wafts it in front of her companion, cradling her companion in her lap.

"So the Goddesses...knew that someone like me would come along, didn't They...? Someone who expects patterns..." The girl with the golden hair haahs out a dry laugh. "You got me good there; You really did."

Link swings her head from side to side. "Don't blame yourself. Does it hurt?"

She feels the girl with the golden hair shift against her thighs. "A little. Not much. It feels...dead."

"You might not be able to feel from those anymore. From where you got burned. See this?" Rolling up the sleeve of her undershirt, Link demonstrates the patch of burnt skin near her elbow from the guardian's fire-light in the Divine Beast Vah Naboris. She raps the knuckles of her left hand against the scar. "I can still feel the pressure on the under layer of skin, but I can't feel touch anymore. Like if you just put your hand on it? I couldn't feel it."

The girl with the golden hair mms in response. She extends her arm towards her own shoulders. Link helps to prop up her upper back while she traces one of the furrows with her fingers. "It's like a mountain range on the old globe I had. It feels...so strange." Her fingers patter against the floor. "I'm fine enough to move. Let's continue."

"Are you sure?"

The girl with the golden hair nods. "I'll be more careful in the future. I've not so foolish that I won't take a lesson from this." She fidgets out of Link's lap. Her companion stands and stretches out her arms. "It's like I've got stitches in my skin. Oh, you know. I feel like I can't twist my body as well as I could."

"You'll get used to it," Link tries, though her scars still taut and tug on her skin. "And it'll heal over time."

"At least I'm still alive, and that's what matters. Six scars, isn't it? One for fire and one for power. One for water and one for wisdom. One for wind and one for courage. I know that signs don't really exist, but I'll take it as a sign anyway." The girl with the golden hair stoops down to pick the fallen Fi from the floor. Walking towards Link, she lowers herself to one knee and present Link with the sword. "As long as I'm still alive, I can be your Knight."
Link’s hand hovers over the hilt. Then she inclines her head and accepts Fi. She returns Fi to the sheath over her shoulder. "Then let's go on."

Once again, they descend into the lift. The humming resonance of the walls around them has grown steadily louder and deeper. A song of some sort. As they dive into the depths, Link takes the ocarina from the loop at her left hip; she attempts the song. The girl with the golden hair watches her puzzle out the melody through trial and error. She just has figured out—possibly—three of the notes when the curtain of golden light parts and deposits them in yet another same-looking golden corridor.

"More of those fractured blocks." The girl with the golden hair marks down the spot of the lift and sketches out their trek, noting down the armoured loftwing that raked across her back. "I feel like I'm going to run out of space before we're through. I hope that we're not just wandering around in circles."

They take up the same strategy as before. However, instead of those whatever-they-are, Link and the girl with the golden hair come upon living malice in the crumbling blocks. Link discovers that several slices of Fi's fire-light blade burns away enough of the malice to render it dull and inert as it bursts into golden dust. While they work their way through the rows of blocks, carving out a small chamber about three blocks wide—enough for the girl with the golden and Link to stand inside next to one another—Link breaks through the seventh in the row to find herself staring into a pair of golden eyes ringed in fire-light blue and violent violet, the feathers a vivid blue, the armour a shimmering silver.

Link ogles. The blue armoured loftwing croons out half a song before rearing backwards. Their beak glints silver, reflecting an aura of golden luminescence, and then the creature thrusts outwards. The silver light soars off of their beak. Link dodges to the left. The silver arrow whistles past her, radiating a pulse of energy that shatters the nearby blocks.

Her eyes embiggen. She presses against the inner chamber of blocks, flattening herself against the wall and looking looks up frantically at the girl with the golden hair, similarly squished up against the far wall. "What do we do?" she whispers urgently.

Link listens to the armoured loftwing croon. Their talons click and drag against the floor. She pictures those scythe-sharp silver talons raking into her skin. Or, worse, into the girl with the golden hair's.

The blocks one row above their heads suddenly crumble to dust from one of the creature's silver arrows, somehow loosed from their beak. The light filtering in from the ceiling leaves Link's breath caught vulnerable in her throat.

She reaches across the divide. She grabs the girl with the golden hair's hand. She runs.

Link races forward as swiftly as her legs will carry her, hauling the girl with the golden hair forward. Her companion clasps the mirrored pot lid behind her back. The armoured loftwing tenses down and then spiral-charges towards them in a flurry of silver aether. Link throws herself to the ground and drags her companion with her. When her chin thuds against the floor, she bites off the tip of her own tongue. The crack floods her mouth in copper and vibrates her teeth up to her skull in a migraine. The lofting soars overhead; they crash into another row of crumbling blocks up again. Their razored beak detonates the blocks to dust.

She brandishes Fi in front of her, flailing the blade wildly at first, and then forcing her attention to narrow down into the thin sliver of fractured gold before her. Propelling the sword forward over and over, she pierces the rows of blocks while the creature springs back to their feet, talons
clacking on the triangles.

Link listens to the armoured loftwing begin, again, to sing. She stabs frantically through the blocks, not even waiting for the first to dissolve into the aether before jabbing forward to the next. Her companion's hand twists in hers; Link clings to her fingers with a firmness bordering on desperation, digging her nails into the girl with the golden hair's flesh.

Then the sound of the silver arrow. Something hard and hylian-shaped smacks into Link's back, stumbling her into the blocks. The girl with the golden hair gasps. Link senses her ripping something off of Link's back. "Link! *Hurry*!"

Link hurries. She plunges Fi into the seventh block. It vanishes into dust. The loftwing sings. The silver arrow whistles. The girl with the golden hair slams into her again. Yet this time Link can pull her onwards through the cramped passageway beyond.

The wave of heat hits her abruptly, but but she does not stop for even a second. Another pit of boiling, bubbling malice, this one accompanied not by a rickety bridge, but by a rail-thin walkway of golden triangles extending over the pit, no handrails, no cords, nothing but a tiny catwalk as wide as one and a half of her feet, not enough to step her boots together.

Swallowing hard, Link attempts to stop at the edge of the bridge, ogling the abyss of malice into which she could fall.

Her momentum carries her forward another two paces and suddenly she senses herself soaring. No. Not soaring: the girl with the golden hair has scooped her up into her arms. She rushes across the walkway. Behind them, the creature sings. The girl with the golden hair anchors Link to her chest, pressing her face into Link's abdomen. Link senses her *jump* over the silver arrow that blitzes under them. Link looks back over the girl with the golden hair's shoulder and notices the walkway disintegrating into golden dust beyond them the second that the girl with the golden hair's boots touch block.

The loftwing leaps after her and Link, their wings spread wide, their momentum swooping their body towards the two. The creature starts to sing again, their beak beginning to glint.

Link senses herself shift up. The girl with the golden hair lets out a half-grunt, half-cry as she physically chalks Link across the last gap of the bridge. Her back slams the solid ground first, the breath knocked from her lungs. Spine cracking out in pain, Link bounds to her boots. She draws the bow and notches a topaz arrow into the string. The girl with the golden hair pelts over the bridge. The loftwing arcs down, spiralling towards her. Link lets loose the arrow.

The arrowhead pierces the creature's brow just above their left eye. The sudden writhing of electricity singing through the loftwing's nerves convulses their body and forces in their wings. The creature bashes their torso against the walkway. Link hurls herself towards the edge of the walkway and catches the girl with the golden hair at the same time that the final step of the bridge disappears beneath her boots. The girl with the golden hair scrambles her nails against the tessellated triangles of the floor; her legs flail through thin air while her torso plummet downwards. Grabbing her hands, Link reels her arms up. She *hears* the wet crunch of her companion's abdomen hitting the sharp rim of the golden floor.

Link yanks the girl with the golden hair onto solid ground. Beyond the edge, she observes the loftwing plunge into the boiling sea of malice. Screeching, the creature attempts to flap out from the chasm of violet, yet their feathers melt in the blistering heat to congeal against their dissolving wings. Their skin fuses together. Their meat sloughs off of their bones. The golden fluid of their innards spills silently into the malice to vanish into the violet. The loftwing opens their mouth, but
no sound escapes as they sink below the sea.

Her mouth waters. She wonders how if loftwing would taste like cucco. Probably more similar to Eldic ostrich. Shaking her head, she watches the creature loose a final desperate silver arrow. The glittering fire-light sparks against the ceiling in a light show that dissipates to nothing.

The loftwing merges with the malice and is no more. The malice. Such concentrated power of will that even beings of will dissolve away, for what little blood they have.

Except for Fi, who in turn can dissolve even the concentrated malice. Link glances over her shoulder, at Fi upon her back. The girl with the golden hair's panting catches her attention. She observes her companion gingerly touch her hand to her own stomach. "Well, nothing's broken. That's good, at least." She angles up her head towards Link. "Thank you for saving me."

"Thank you for saving me," Link replies. "I can't believe you were able to jump those bursts of light or whatever they were. That's amazing."

The girl with the golden hair wipes her eyes; only then does it dawn on Link that the girl with the golden hair has streaked a thin line of salt down her left cheek. One tear, slipped past the girl with the golden hair's defences.

"Link." The girl with the golden hair sniffs. "Oh, please don't be angry. I mean, I don't think I've ever seen you get angry at anyone, but..." She withdraws from her inner jacket two rings, one vaguely jewelled, the other in iron. Rings, about the same diameter as Link's old pot lids, the centres hollow, the inner rims of the rings curled inwards to silver-gilded perfect circles. "I managed to protect us from that loftwing with your pot lids. I...hope that we can honour their sacrifice."

Link runs her palms over the rings. She takes the rings into her hands. The coarse texture of the iron and the jewelled texture of the mirrored. Dipping her fingers onto the inner gilded rim, Link traces the all-too-smooth silver.

She sinks down to her knees. The girl with the golden hair murmurs horrified apologies. Link shakes her head. She lets the rings rest upon the ground at the rim of the golden block that juts out from the sea of malice.

Link touches her hands together. She prays quietly over the pot lids, thanking them for everything that they have ever done for her: the mirrored pot lid that joined her party most recently, which Riju made especially for her in a gift of friendship, which has protected her in the castle and the forgotten Temple alike, which has granted her the ability to peer at the food that she cooks and prepare pumpkin pie without popping up the lid; the iron pot lid that joined her party in Darunia, which has helped her cook more meals that she can count, which has faithfully kept with her all this time since the first Divine Beast she ever calmed.

And she still has, of course, her very first pot lid of all: the wooden one that joined her party back on the Great Plateau in Mudora's cabin. She does not know of the her of whom Sarie—of whom Saria—spoke, but unlike the wooden ocarina, Link will never abandon her wooden pot lid. She pats the pot lid now, and the pot too. Good pot. Best friend.

Link takes the empty rims with her. "When we leave here, I'll give them a proper burial," she explains to the girl with the golden hair. "And by that I mean I'll give them to someone who can melt them down and make something out of 'em."

"You're not...upset at me?"
Link halts. She turns to look at the girl with the golden hair, whose hand has again closed around her throat despite her no longer wearing her golden charm. "No. You saved your life! Oh, and mine too, I guess, since you're my Knight and all. There's no nobler sacrifice for those pot lids than saving the life of one of my closest friends." The girl with the golden hair rubs her eyes on the heels of her hands. Link runs her palm over the back of her head, bouncing her ponytail up and down. In Mipha-like fashion, she signs, "Can I hug you?"

The corners of her mouth curve upwards to crinkle her eyes. "You don't have to ask." Link embraces her. She presses her face against her companion's shoulder. Warm, and soft, and smelling of home.

The girl with the golden hair breaks the hug first. She gestures down the corridor; together, she and Link walk on. Another small pit of malice boils away before them. No bridge, no walkway, just a short gap about a five paces long. Link just makes out something bright gold whizzing back and forth in the short gap between solid ground and solid ground. Opening her paraglider, Link lets the girl with the golden hair cling to her, and then they glide down over the gap.

Another lift. They descend once more. The music swells around them. The girl with the golden hair marks down their journey and furls the scroll up again.

The corridor into which the lift deposits them has but a single path to go. Link notices some nasty-looking glowing sphere floating ahead of them, and a crimson loftwing perched in the centre of the chamber beyond that.

And something else: a strange blue curtain of light extending from the ceiling, shimmering faintly in its undulations. "I don't like the look of that glowing thing."

"Perhaps we should take a leaf from your book," the girl with the golden hair suggests, "and book it."

They book it. The glowing thing swoops towards them; Link dodges to the side, and the girl with the golden hair slides the whatever-it-is. The loftwing extends their wings. Her companion thwacks them over the head with the wooden pot lid.

The two run forward. The chamber shrinks to a cramped passageway; once again Link hunches. The girl with the golden hair suggests that they ready themselves for whatever awaits beyond.

What awaits: a blue armoured loftwing. Link and the girl with the golden hair hurl themselves onwards; the creature sings after them. Rolling, Link leaps out of the way of their silver arrows. The loftwing gives chase. When the creature spiral-charges, Link flings herself to the ground. The loftwing bonk their head against the far steps, giving her companion and Link enough time to race up the stairs that taper into a thin passageway. Link and the girl with the golden hair have to enter in single-file, the undulating curtains vanishing into the ceiling.

Another one of the glowing spheres rams towards Link but impales itself upon Fi. As though she had jammed the blade into a pumpkin, she simply keeps the spherical blob stuck on the blade as she and the girl with the golden hair race onwards, escaping the armoured loftwing attempting to fit through the constricted hallway. Her shallow breaths hurt her rawed throat and lungs; her heart pounds against her ears; her legs shake from the constant running.

At the top of the steps, Link reaches almost another dead end. Now she looks down immediately. Just as she expected: another column of fractured blocks. Throwing the paraglider towards the girl with the golden hair, Link whacks Fi against the blocks—signing apologies with her right hand into the hilt as she goes—and counts from one to seven. "They're still chasing us!" the girl with the
golden hair cries down the shaft. Link jabs Fi into the blocks as rapidly as she could wolf down some rice-balls at this second.

Her boots hit the ground. She bursts out of the corridor, rolls forward, and promptly thons her head against a raised step of gold. The girl with the golden hair grasps her hand, waves Fi around to dislodge the glowing spherical bubble—which shoots off towards the vertical shaft and crashes into the descending silver loftwing's outstretched beak—and then hauls Link feet-first into the golden curtain of the lift.

"Move! Move! Please hurry up and move!" The creature spirals towards them. Link jumps backwards in the lift, flattening her companion against the back, raising Fi up to hold the blade in front of her chest. The loftwing jerks their head inside of the curtain of golden light, their beak glinting silver as they sing—

—and then the descending lift decapitates them.

Their head drops with a spurt of golden fluid to the floor of the lift. Link peels herself from the girl with the golden hair, observing the silver light die away and the head dissolve into golden dust. The girl with the golden hair sinks to her hands and knees in the lift. Squatting down next to her, Link pats shoulder.

"Oh, I think this is the part where I'm supposed to say that I never want to adventure again," she wheezes. "And I think I'd rather live a normal life after this. Yet, I have to admit, that I would rather run away from a murderous loftwing than sit around praying all day."

"Playing the harp was pretty fun," Link observes.

"With you, it was." She inhales for a long moment, then huffs out her breath. "Oh. I've run out of room on the map. I suppose I'll just keep going on the left-hand side of the page. We've been going nothing but right, you know."

"We've been going right?"

"Oh, well, I just had to pick a direction. I suppose we could have been going left." The girl with the golden hair studies her own map. She hangs her head. "I hope that everyone is all right." Her timbre deepens. "We've been taking a lot longer than I would've liked, and I'm afraid that the Calamitous One could have turned the Divine Beasts against them yet again."

Fi vibrates against Link's palm. Eyes narrowing in alertness, Link's gaze darts back and forth, seeking out whatever danger Fi has sensed, yet Fi's resonance feels...lighter, warmer. She unsheathes Fi and places the blade down on the floor of the lift.

"Are you...trying to reassure her that everyone will be all right?" A beat. Then: two blinks. Link grins at the girl with the golden hair. "That means yes."

The girl with the golden hair's features relax. "Thank you, Fi. That means a lot to me." Fi blinks in and out. The girl with the golden hair studies the pattern. She lowers her eyelids. "I'm sorry, Fi, but I don't know dot-and-dash that well."

Link stares at the girl with the golden hair while Fi vibrates warmly, as if she were trying to tell her companion that not knowing something, too, is all right. Even though the girl with the golden hair understanding Fi's communication would have benefited them both, Link feels nothing but a surge of relief for the girl with the golden hair, too, not comprehending.

"I don't know exactly what Fi's saying." She touches her chin. "But I bet it's something about how
resilient people really are. And monsters too. Beings of blood and beings of will. I can't believe that they're—that we're—somehow working together, but if all of us are coming together against the Calamitous One, then there's no way we can fail.

"So let them protect everyone. We've got to focus on getting to the...the thing that I still don't have a name for. The Golden Force.

"Is it something like that, Fi?" Fi does not respond immediately, and Link tilts her head to the side. "Don't worry about probabilities. You can just say yes or no. Nothing everything you say has to be completely right all the time."

A pause. The wall behind Fi shimmers for a few seconds before the lift passes by. And then: two blinks. Link beams broadly. The girl with the golden hair nods. "Then, let's go."

The lift opens up into a long and all-too-warm corridor that yawns in two directions. Link removes her scarlet-stained tunic in the sweltering heat and leaves herself in just her undershirt. One corridor, Link notes, leads to a staircase of crumbling blocks. The other corridor, she realises, leads to a series of columns covered in small globs of living malice.

"You said that you didn't have more room on the right side of your map, right?" The girl with the golden hair nods. "Then let's go left this time." Link looks up and down the corridors that stretch from the lift. "...which way's left?"

The girl with the golden hair points her in the right direction. Link snorts at herself: the left direction.

"Right. Towards the malice. 'Course." As they approach the columns packed with living malice, Link feels the scorching heat radiating from the pit of boiling malice below. Pillars dotted with living malice jut out periodically from the sea of roiling will, each one taller than the last. The girl with the golden hair and Link look at one another. She makes an effort at gauging the distance. "We should be able to leap that, if we're careful," the girl with the golden hair announces before Link has finished her gauging. "Just...please do be careful." Link rolls her shoulders, stretches, and steps up to the edge. The girl with the golden hair taps her shoulder. "Let me go first. Again, if anything happens to me, it's not nearly as vital to the people of Hyrule."

Link lifts her hands to protest, but the girl with the golden hair has already walked back towards the lift. She crouches down—Link sees her wince when the curve of her spine tugs the scars on her back and her abdomen—and breaks into a run. As she nears the edge, she springs forward, clears the pit of malice, and lands neatly on the first column.

The glob of malice starts to ooze towards her. The girl with the golden hair ogles it for a second prior to rearing her leg back and punting the malice into the pit below. Wincing, she grabs onto her boot—presumably partially eaten by its brief contact with the malice—and hops on one foot.

Link horse-whistles for her attention. The girl with the golden hair looks back. "I've got Fi, remember? You need me to chop up that malice!"

Her companion's cheeks redden. "R-right."

Link follows her in leaping the gap. They work their way across, taking their time to jump carefully, over a total of seven columns before Link finds herself kissing solid ground again. Link raises her head and gets a bearing on her surroundings. What she sees lifts her to her boots as though pulled by an unseen force.

"We're saved! We're saved!" Link seizes the girl with the golden hair—having just landed from her
seventh leap—by the shoulders and shakes er until her head lolls up and down, then releases her; she stumbles backwards, hands on her head. "Don't you see!? All of our troubles are over! We're saved! Oh, but we're saved! Don't you realise what this means!?

"Link, what are you talking ab—"

Link plummets to her knees, her eyes watering, and throws her arms out. "Finally, I can make food!"

There, in the centre of an otherwise empty chamber, walks a single cucco. A trough of water and a trough of feed line the far side of the wall. The cucco, a comely specimen sporting spotless white feathers and a handsome red comb, struts back and forth, tail feathers raised. Link's stomach rumbles. Her mouth floods with saliva. Crooking her fingers, she approaches the cucco carefully.

"Link, wait." The girl with the golden hair fiddles with the collar of her tunic. "This could be another trial. Doesn't it seem suspicious to you? A strange cucco wandering around in the middle of a dangerous temple. Who would be supplying it with food or water? I can't say that I like this. I think we should abandon it and keep going right."

Link does not need even a second to answer, her gestures swift in her enthusiasm: "I've never been tricked by food!" She pauses. She touches her chin. She considers: the lynel. She considers: Glepp's banana in the woods. "I've rarely been tricked by food! And right now, that cucco could trick me if the Goddesses wanted, but I'm hungry!"

"Link, wait!"

She rolls forward towards the cucco. The cucco squawks shrilly and makes a break for it, but Link catches the cucco with both hands. The cucco tries to pecks her face and hands; she simply giggles at the cucco's antics.

She ponders what to make. Pilaf, though she has no carrots; or possibly she could cook the cucco whole, roast cucco right in the flames like she did the ostrich in Eldin; or perhaps a zappy-bird with the mushrooms that Riju gave her in the ice-box; or maybe rice-balls, which she has not had in months.

Link tucks the struggling cucco under her arm. Most of the ingredients that Riju gave her would cause a slowing of the nerves. She cannot afford that, not here, not now. But she can bring the cucco with her for when the fighting at last ends. "Let's go. To the right."

The girl with the golden hair rubs her eyes. "You're just taking it with you?"

Link grins. "Sure! Don't you know it's dangerous to go alone?"

"Pray tell, what do you intend to do with a cucco?"

Winking, Link pats the cucco's comb. "It's a secret to everybody!" At her companion's unamused expression, she scuffs her boot against the floor. "Just gonna make some food later. You don't have to be jealous or anything. You're still my top priority, my Knight."

"Well excuse me, Princess, for being suspicious." The girl with the golden hair rubs her temples. "What if...oh, I know I can't dissuade you. Just don't let it interfere with your jumps."

On the way back, with each column now lower than the first, the girl with the golden hair takes the paraglider and safely glides from one to the next. When the girl with the golden hair fusses about how to best throw the paraglider back to Link, Link merely holds up her faithful white cucco ad
steps off the column. The cucco's frantic flapping emulates a paraglider.

The girl with the golden hair ogles her. "What? You can use cucco to glide?"

Link bobs her head furiously until her ponytail comes undone and she has to reach back to re-tie it. "Ilia and I used to do it all the time when we were kids growing up in Ordon. Bremen used to yell at us for taking cucco like that." She fiddles with one of her sidelocks. "You've never gone cucco gliding before?" The girl with the golden hair shakes her head. "Then when we get out of here together, I'll have to show you."

"If," she responds quietly, her features suddenly set as though carved in stone. "If."

"When," Link corrects. "Now come on."

They return to the lift with the intention of proceeding to the right, but the golden curtain surrounds them again. The lift descends down further into the bowels of the keep. Beaming at the girl with the golden hair and holding the now-calming cucco in her hands, Link waggles her eyebrows as Urbosa would do.

"That cucco did not activate the lift again. Don't be silly." Yet she can see the faint smile ghosting over her companion's lips. "Or maybe it did. The Goddesses have made this place specifically to mess with me." She covers her bemused smile with her hand; Link regrets her lack of pictobox. "Fine. Do you want to go left again, since that worked out so well?"

She and Link go left. Another corridor with four pillars: one for each of the Goddesses, and a loftwing at the end. Link easily dispatches the pool of living malice on the floor. The crimson loftwing that awaits them proves slightly more unruly, especially after their presence frightens the cucco. The same cucco attacks the loftwing out of nowhere, clawing out out their eyes. Link and the girl with the golden hair take the opportunity at the same time, the former cleaving through their neck, the latter cracking their skull with the cooking pot.

"See? Already done us a favour. Haven't you? Good future dinner. Gooood future dinner." Link croons over the cucco and pats it on the head. "I'll make you into the tastiest meal ever for everything you've done. Promise."

The girl with the golden hair claps her palm over her face.

Onwards they go, past the fourth pillar, to yet another confining passageway that they squat and crabwalk through. A sudden series of fractured blocks on the floor slows their progress: Link has to dig through each one with Fi, while the girl with the golden hair wards off darting whatever-they-are with the cooking pot and the pot lid. Link counts: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven—she blinks when the blocks do not stop at seven—eight, nine—she blinks twice when the blocks do not stop at nine—ten, eleven, and suddenly the ground beneath her boots no longer exists.

Yelling out her name, the girl with the golden hair lunges to snag Link around the middle. Link hears her dig her knees into the edge of the golden floor, yet the fabric of her trousers slips. Abruptly Link—the girl with the golden hair's arms wrapped around her waist and the cucco trapped under her left arm—plummets towards the abyss.

Sheathing Fi, Link grasps the cucco and wields it over their heads. The cucco's wings catch wind. Instead of dropping like stones, they drop like slightly less aerodynamic stones. The girl with the golden hair buries her face into Link's spine.

They glide downwards through a lengthy vertical shaft glowing fire-light blue. The vertical shaft is
very, very long. And Link's arms are very, very tired.

At some point, the girl with the golden hair suggests that she take over holding the cucco. After several heart-pounding seconds of passing the cucco from girl to girl, Link merely focuses her efforts on hugging her companion like a vertical hammock.

When they land at last on golden floor, Link does not remember how to walk anymore. Instead she lies there on the ground, face flat against the gold, limbs sprawled, feeling the needle-static in her muscle and the cuccoflesh spread over her skin, trying to come to terms with no longer floating down.

The girl with the golden hair, who has held the cucco for Goddesses know how long, stretches her arms and kneels down beside Link. Her companion strokes Link's hair. "Well. I think that that took us probably nearly all the way down. I can't imagine that it'll be much further. Nor can I ever begin to estimate how far we have fallen."

Link shrugs. She tries to pick herself up from the ground, yet noodles back down like a limp pile of soggy bread. The girl with the golden hair wobbles to her own boots.

"Take my hand, Link. We don't have much more to go. I can feel it in my...well, I don't know if I can call them bones anymore, as I'm not entirely certain that, when I've reformed myself repeatedly from my own will, I've accurately replicated the material and layout of bone." The girl with the golden hair lifts her hand to her mouth and giggles at herself. "But I sound a little bit too much like Fi when I say it that, don't I? No offence to you, Fi. I appreciate your dedication and precision."

Fi hums on Link's back. Link rubs her face against the floor. She listens to the girl with the golden hair scuff her boot against the tessellated triangles of the ground.

When Link emerges from the keep, she never wishes to see another triangle again, except in the context of Faronese baklava, or maybe those spinach-stuffed pastries from southern Hebra, or perhaps those twisted soft breads that Vish and Malon have baked for her at Romani Ranch.

"Link...I promise that when we reach the end, before we touch the Golden Force, I'll let you cook something for us. How's that for motivation?"

Link weakly slides her palm against her companion's. The girl with the golden hair intertwines her fingers between Link's. She does not yank Link up but rather waits patiently. Link takes a deep breath, then forces herself to stand.

She almost falls over. The girl with the golden hair thrusts the cucco into her arms. The poor fowl has gone afoul, falling asleep from the exhaustion of having kept its wings spread for the duration of their fall. The girl with the golden hair pets the cucco on the comb. "Left or right?"

The apparently arbitrary corridor that the girl with the golden hair designates left reveals nothing but a few pillars of fractured blocks that Link digs through to a dead end. The girl with the golden hair claps her palm with her fist. "Left or right?"

Another cramped squeeze of a passageway leads Link to ready Fi in front of her chest for the inevitable loftwing or armoured loftwing or strange glowing thing floating through the air that might attack them when she and the girl with the golden hair emerge. Yet, as Link comes to the end of the thin corridor, she sees nothing at all beyond save for a gust of hot air in her face and what looks like another narrow walkway of disintegrating golden blocks. Link shrugs and steps forward into the open chamber.
Fi vibrates; a flash of violent violet at the upper rim of her vision just barely gives Link enough time to stab Fi upwards before the enormous glob of malice drools from the ceiling like the blood of the heavens. The cucco drops from under her arm. The blue fire-light of the sword that seals the darkness radiates outwards as would the silver arrow of the armoured loftwings, shimmering a pulse of blue in the heart of the living malice. For one moment that spans nothing and everything at once, the malice glitters in the aether, an iridescent dome of amethyst ablaze with an inner core of gleaming blue diamond, the cucco hanging just beside her knee.

Then, as if from nowhere, violent violet lightning the same colour as the sash that Marin once wore around her sash strikes the blade.

Fi sings, and sings, and then the violet pulses out so bright that for a second Link's entire vision whites. The malice vanishes into golden dust while the cucco *pomfs* against the floor, squawking in terror.

Link stares at Fi. Setting her onto the ground, Link gestures wildly at her while she glows with something Link might call pride. "I didn't know you could do that! I mean, I saw you do that back during the congregation at Ruto, but I thought that was just for show! I didn't realise that you could actually use that! That's...that was amazing!"

"I wonder," breathes the girl with the golden hair as she gazes up at the ceiling in wonder and fear alike, picking up the frightened cucco from the floor and patting its comb, "if the Calamitous One takes the malice from this temple instead of making its own. The Calamitous One was once a being of blood, right? Then I don't know if it could produce will this concentrated."

"What do you mean?"

Her companion brushes her fingers against her throat in search of the absent golden charm. "Oh, I don't know what I mean. It's a little too much for me to think about. But maybe you could more accurately call Fi the sword that seals the will. The blade of will's bane." The girl with the golden hair taps her fingers against one another. "Of course, that doesn't sound nearly as cool."

Link nudges her in the side. "I've got no idea what you're talking about, but you'll have to tell me all about it later. I missed you so much."

"We keep saying that to each other." The girl with the golden hair seems to smile despite herself. "Let's hope that we don't keep missing each other in life, then."

"Let's go on, then." Link walks further down the corridor, then pauses and looks back. "Say, do you know what that was? You know, the purple light thing? It's happened before, with the lightning."

The girl with the golden hair claps her hands in glee. "I thought you'd never ask! Let's see. According to my research," begins the girl with the golden hair. Link instantly turns towards her; she squats down, sets her elbows on her knees, and props her chin up in her hands. The girl with the golden hair peers at her. "What are you doing?"

"This is my listening pose."

The girl with the golden hair giggles; Link counts that as her second victory. She launches in with her usual full fervor: "According to my research, when the wielder of the Master Sword is at their full strength, they are capable of expelling a burst of sacred energy from the blade, much like you did."

Suddenly, the girl with the golden hair erupts in laughter, her peals of mirth so loud in her boar-like
snorting that the calmed cucco in her arms writhes and threatens to fly away again. Link retrieves Fi from the ground. The girl with the golden hair tries to resume speaking, yet her own laughter continuously interrupts her; her words jumble into chaos.

Despite herself, Link feels her own mirth bubbling up from her belly. Not a moment later she joins the girl with the golden hair in laughter until her mouth aches and her stomach hurts. Link lets herself fall onto the floor to continue her laughter curled up on the ground. To her surprise, the girl with the golden hair clammers down on the floor on Link's right side, curving her knees up to her chest, facing her, reaching out for Link's hand.

Like she reached for Link's hand on the pillows all those years ago, on the night after they played their instruments together.

"Oh, I know what you want to ask," she whispers, a mischievous glint to her eyes. "I was laughing because, well, expelling the energy takes a tremendous amount of strength and vitality. So the cucco—hehe—must've gotten you into such high spirits that you could even—ahaha—perform the skyward strike." Shaking her head, she giggles again, her shoulder shaking in silent laughter. "Oh, Link, you've changed so much, but despite everything, it's still you."

The girl with the golden hair's fingers curl into the valleys between Link's; her fingertips softly brush against the skin of Link's palm. Her laughter fades to a warm smile, to an affectionate gaze, to glistening irises.

They lie there together upon the floor in comfortable silence until Fi vibrates and the cucco crows directly in Link's ears. The girl with the golden hair snorts. She grips Link's hand more tightly. Together they rise from the ground. Though Link finds a crink in her neck from having lain on the floor for a while, she would lie back down right this second if it meant she could simply exist in a peaceful quiet beside the girl with the golden hair. But the wilds, too, call her name.

Link and the girl with the golden hair proceed forward towards the pit of malice beyond, the rail-thin walkway extending over the boiling violent violet.

"Is it just me, or is the...the music getting a bit loud here? I can't tell where it's coming from. It sounds like it's coming from all the walls at the same time. Maybe it's a little louder near the ground?" Link nods; the song has gone from a faint hum that she can barely make out to a persistent melody, almost loud enough that the song starts to overpower her companion's normal volume of speech. "I hope that means we're going the right way." Link watches the girl with the golden hair's throat bob as she gulps down a breath of air. "And not that we're running out of time. So." The girl with the golden hair opens her arms. "I should carry you again, shouldn't I?"

"I can walk, you know."

"The floor disappears as soon as someone touches it. If one of us goes first, then the other one will be stuck forever." The girl with the golden hair taps her right shoulder in emulation of Link's, where the loftwing's beak gouged out her meat. "And I'm in better shape to be carrying you than you are to be carrying me."

Link allows the girl with the golden hair to scoop her up; she wraps her arms around her companion's shoulders and traps the sleeping-again cucco between their chests. The girl with the golden hair tenses herself. She breathes, and then she sprints. Link closes her eyes. She senses the girl with the golden hair's heart thudding against her side, feels the frantic inflating and deflating of her lungs, hears the resonance of the walls around them growing in volume he further the girl with the golden hair runs.
And then the music starts to ebb. "Wait—!" The girl with the golden hair stumbles backwards until she stands where the music plays most loudly. Link snaps her eyes open.

She feels them dropping. The girl with the golden hair snatches the cucco with her left hand as she continues to hold Link with her right. "Link—the paraglider—!"

Link grasps the paraglider on her back. The second that she forces the wooden supports apart, she lands with a hard thud against solid ground. The tremor courses up the base of her spine and rattles her skull alongside the roar of the music that vibrates strongly enough to shake the floor. Her ears ache. When her vision focuses, she glances hastily around her: the girl with the golden hair similarly sprawls out on the floor beside her. She holds up a trembling thumbs-up to Link.

Shaking off the pain, Link looks up. A vertical shaft extends above her, apparently parting the sea of malice in exactly the middle of the walkway. The girl with the golden hair must have seen the tunnel beneath the walkway as they crossed. Or heard the music's cue.

Link snaps her head back and forth: to one side of the long corridor that extends in both directions, she witnesses more of those crumbling blocks; to the other side, she notes the hall opening into a circular chamber circumscribed by columns depicting the Goddesses and Their attributes alongside red-jewelled loftwing statues. In the heart of the circle of pillars, she can just barely make out a strange fire-light blue something. A pedestal of sorts. Not a terminal like in the shrines or the Divine Beasts, but a triangular pedestal whose central triangle erupts from the ground to form an altar of some kind. She parts her lips; the aether tastes of electricity.

When she looks at the floor between herself and the girl with the golden hair, she discovers that the cucco has not survived the short journey down. Perhaps by the snapping of its neck, or perhaps by an attack of the heart from surprise, the cucco lies still and warm against the gold. The girl with the golden hair murmurs a brief eulogy and a prayer. Link sets down her cooking pot.

"...Link..."

"We can't let it go to waste. I promised I'd make it into a meal." Link thumbs behind her. "And I think that we're about to run into something big. Can't you feel the crackle in the air?"

The girl with the golden hair looks past Link towards the blue altar. She breathes out. "Oh, all right. I think you're right about the something big. Just...try to hurry, please."

Link beams. "I won't let you down."

"And I have to admit that..." The girl with the golden hair clears her throat. "...I find it hard to say no to your cooking." Link's grin extends so far it nearly splits her face in half. She hugs the girl with the golden hair, who giggles against Link's cheek. "How can I help?"

Flipping out her knife, Link swiftly defeathers the still-warm cucco as the girl with the golden hair sorts through the wooden boxes of elixirs that Link has with her, removing all of the empty vials and replacing the full ones into the silver box Link obtained in Ruto.

They use the wooden box in place of firewood to heat up the pot. Lacking dried seaweed, Link opts make the rice-balls on flavoured rather than plain rice. Link skins the cucco and removes its bones, then folds both into a cloth. She adds in onion, peppercorn, rosemary, bay, and the few celery tops that she has remaining in her box of ingredients, then ties off the cloth bag. Link prepares a broth on the water from her water-skin, dipping in the cloth bag of cucco and herb, as well as almost the last of the salt, Eldic seasonings, and Parapan spices. Once the broth has simmered, she removes the cloth bag and leaving behind the thick flavoured stock. The girl with the golden hair helps her
scoop the broth into empty vials before moving on to the rice.

The girl with the golden hair melts fatty-yellow sand seal butter courtesy of Riju, then mixes in rice from Link's own personal stock. From Riju's ice-box, Link chops up electric safflina, saffron, and garlic to flavour the sautéing rice.

She pours in a vial of the broth while the girl with the golden hair stirs and blends. More and more vials of broth, until Link—using Fi as a makeshift spoon to draw out small bits of the rice, to the girl with the golden hair's simultaneous dismay and amusement, or dismaymusement, a word that she'll have to save for Romani—determines that the rice has attained the perfect texture: slightly chewy and resistant, but also soft and pliant.

Link removes her tunic; it'll serve as a plate. As she regards the fabric—the blue having nearly entirely darkened to a deep crimson, as if she had exchanged tunics—she changes plans, instead relying the top of the metal ingredients box. Lifting the cooking pot from the fire, Link requests that the girl with the golden hair grate a small slice of cow milk cheese that Malon and Vish gave her and blend it into the still-hot rice alongside salt—probably a little too much, yet both she and the girl with the golden hair having a liking for salt—and two sand sparrow eggs from Riju's ice-box. Link overturns the cooking pot onto the silver elixir box, forming a mound of rice.

Next: the meat. Again, the girl with the golden hair butters the bottom of the cooking pot. Together, they tear up or cut the cucco into the smallest pieces possible, discarding the drier breast in favour of the juicer thighs and wings. Link demonstrates how to fillet voltfin trout from Riju's ice-box, removing the bloodlines with a fluid motion of the knife, then cubing the fish into tiny squishy pieces to whisk with the cucco. The girl with the golden hair's filets do not come out as perfectly. Crooked, and a bit dented, but just as delicious.

Link mixes in more of the grated cow milk cheese alongside the succulent meat of prickly-pear voltfruit, bay leaves, grated zapshroom that leaves her fingertips tingling, chopped tomatoes, and more salt. Never enough salt.

When the cucco and trout have browned it out, Link removes the cooking pot from the heat. She douses the fire of the wooden box that once contained her elixirs, now a misshapen charred blob. Link pats the box. "Thank you for your sacrifice, my friend."

Link shows the girl with the golden hair show the formation of the rice-balls themselves. Just as she taught Sidon, she teaches the girl with the golden hair how to mould the semi-spherical base, depress an indent to the centre, pack in the filling, then cover the indent with the cap and smooth the rice together until the outer layer forms a perfect coating. The broth helps make the rice stickier, so that the halves of each coating more easily form a single ball.

While the girl with the golden hair takes care in sculpting almost perfectly spherical rice-balls, scraping off individual grains of rice as best she can, Link sets the wooden box of elixirs on fire yet again. Crumbling the crust of her last bit of bread, she whisks the crumbs together with sand sparrow eggs and ground flour.

Link sets sand seal butter to frying in the cooking pot. As the girl with the golden hair dips each of the almost-perfect rice-balls into the bread-egg-flour dip, she hands the rice-ball to Link, who tosses it into the pot. The rice-balls gild into a hue as golden as the keep around them. Link **fwips** up the still-hot rice-balls from the cooking pot and juggles them until each one has attained a deliciously golden outer shell, like a locket hiding a most exquisite secret within. In the end she juggles seven rice-balls at once, which proves one too many. The rice-balls fly out of her hands to plop down onto the floor. Link apologises for deforming the rice-balls that the girl with the golden hair spent so long circling to perfection, but the girl with the golden hair shakes her
If there's one thing I've learned over the last hundred years, it's that the taste's more important than the sight." The girl with the golden hair's features soften as she helps Link gather up the runaway rice-balls. "Thank you for letting me cook with you."

"Thank you for cooking with me! See? You can help with more than just crimping." Link taps the girl with the golden hair's temple just to the side of her left eye. "You've got an attention to detail that I don't. Together, we can make something amazing."

"Oh, I guess I do think a lot about the science of cooking..." The girl with the golden hair looks away, a soft smile just crinkling her eyes. "...though I always have more to learn, of course. At any rate, thank you." The girl with the golden hair beams. "All right. Let's dig in!" She reaches for a rice-ball, but Link grips her hand.

"We can't."

"...what? But we just—" 

"No, really, we can't." Link gestures to the rice-balls. "They have enough shock-resistant things in them that they'll mess with our movement. It makes you slow and sluggish." The girl with the golden hair's mouth drops open into a circle. "I just wanted them prepared so that we can eat them immediately after we do whatever we have to do over there."

The girl with the golden hair's expression falls, her shoulders sloping downwards, her lower lip protruding out. Affecting the tone of sulking child, the girl with the golden hair mutters out an all right.

Link arches an eyebrow. "You like my cooking that much?"

"It's good!" she cries out defensively, folding her arms over her chest. After a moment, she drops her hands to her sides. "It really is good. That's another thing I've learned. To be honest when I like something, and not try to keep up such proper appearances." The girl with the golden hair rests her hand against her cheek. "I don't mean to sing my own praises."

"It makes me happy that you've figured out so much about yourself," Link answers, the words on her fingers sincere as those in her heart. "And that's something that I've learned. To say what I feel, and not just hope others read my mind." The girl with the golden hair touches her hand to her cheek.

Link stuffs the rice-balls into her satchel. She lifts herself from the ground and regards the girl with the golden hair. "Shall we, my Knight?" She extends her left hand. The lightning-strike hand.

The girl with the golden hair's eyebrows slope downwards. She grips Link's hand with a vice that whispers don't let go. "We shall, Princess."


The song that plays all around them, that swells up like Fi's vibrations on her back, that crests to a single peak and then dies to silence. Silence, and then a sound of feathers.

A sound of feathers that brings both of them to gaze up at the being hovering nearly noiselessly overhead. A great crimson mass of too many wings, a transient halo of sparkling lightning curled around their top half where their head should be, a featureless void of red scooped out as someone
had torn their face from their head and left nothing but a pulsating ooze of meat and a gaping abyssal void of something approaching a maw, like a twisted scarlet version of a statue of the Goddess Hylia with Her wings behind Her back, larger than any monster that Link has ever seen, larger than the hinox, larger than the dragons, a moving mountain of feather and flesh beating their wings. The vibration of their feathers through the aether resonates with a familiar hum.

The silence gives way to song. The song. The being sings the song that they have heard humming through the walls and the floor and the sharply-angled ceiling of the keep.

The being beats their wings, long and low. They sing, and Fi translates. Letting go of the girl with the golden hair's hand, Link unsheathes Fi and places her between herself and the girl with the golden hair. Never once does Link lose sight of the being hovering before them, but neither does she lose sight of the girl with the golden hair in the periphery of her vision.

The being beats, and beats, and beats, and waits for Link to move Fi towards the girl with the golden hair. Only then does the being sing again. Like a massive crimson loftwing. Like some massive amalgam of crimson loftwings conjoined into a single quivering being of blood and will alike.

Fi resonates. For a long moment, Link can hear no words at all in the hum. For a long moment, Link can hear nothing but the beating of the wings and the humming of the blade. And then the being speaks.

"To you who have come in search of the Golden Force: have power, have wisdom, and have courage."

Fi resonates very suddenly against Link's palm. Link grasps her in both hands; the girl with the golden hair brandishes the wooden pot lid in front of her; and the giant loftwing-like amalgam spreads wide their scarlet wings, their feathers bursting out in alternations of fire and ice, their entire form sparkling in an electricity that courses golden over their flesh. As the amalgam starts to flap their wings with a greater strength than before, their feathers sharpen and glint. Like the scales of the dragons, like arrows tipped in ruby and in sapphire, the feathers loose from their form to hurtle towards the ground. Fire and ice.

A sharpness of pain in her left shoulder nearly leaves her to drop Fi. Link keeps firm as she glances left: one of the flaming feathers has bit into her flesh. The roiling fire would set her tunic ablaze if not for its dampness with her own blood. Link grins. She looks up at the amalgam.

Though she cannot sign with Fi occupying her hands, she prays that the amalgam can read her thoughts. That even here, the most powerful of wills cannot lose to her own blood.

The beat of their wings whirlwinds aether at the altar. Link rolls to the left and escapes the dervish. She hears the girl with the golden hair let out a yell. The amalgam sings so loudly that the song drowns out the sound of the girl with the golden hair, so loudly that Link's ears ache, so loudly that the headache threatens to split her skull in half. While the amalgam approaches with the lower half of their feathered form, a thousand tiny wings beating below and around the two giant wings that span nearly the entire width of the circular chamber, Link tenses herself down like one of the guardian's springs, Fi held nearly flat against her chest. The moment that the amalgam reaches their nadir Link springs and thrusts Fi up.

The Master Sword looks so comically small in comparison to the sheer size of the amalgam, as though Link were attempting to thrust a needle into the whole of Mount Nayru, into Mount Blizzeta, into Death Mountain, and hoping that that tiny needle could somehow bring the summit to crumble. Yet the sword that seals the darkness glows fire-light blue. Link senses the surge of
will that thrums through her limbs, that electrifies her blood, that sings her own soul skyward. Link raises Fi to the heavens. Lightning strikes the blade. The fire-light blue brightens and blooms to the violet of the most concentrated power of will.

As the crimson amalgam showers her with a flurry of feathers in flame and frost, Fi unleashes the force.

The violet pulsation radiates outwards from the blade. The lightning crests outwards into a sphere that reflects away the feathers which cascade into dust of red and blue, a whirlwind of the colours of the Goddess Nayru and the Goddess Din swirling around her. In that moment, the ruby and sapphire lights glint in the air, mirroring her face, mirroring the violet of the blade of evil's bane, mirroring the skyward strike. In the next, the violet pulse reaches the amalgam—

—and the lightning emanating from the amalgam reflects the skyward strike back at Link in a shower of purple that presses the pain over every fibre of her flesh.

Like the dual-pronged topaz arrow of the lynel, but worse, worse. She does not remember hitting the floor but she must have at some point, because now she writhes and convulses against the gold, the tessellated triangles digging into her cheeks, her moist tunic riding against her own flesh, Fi’s own energy feeling as if the Hilted Singer had taken hold of Link's skin with a thousand hands, raked into her flesh with a thousand fingers, and forced her meat into a thousand directions, her muscle and skin shredded apart like pulled cucco meat, patches of her flesh burning in heat and patches of her flesh numbed to deadened cold, her blood soaking her tunic, every single nerve in her entire body screaming with agony all at once that her mind goes blank and she feels nothing, sees nothing, hears nothing, smells nothing, tastes nothing, is nothing.

Except for a vice around her wrist. Except for a sensation of dragging at her back. Except for the girl with the golden hair hauling her to safety from the amalgam. Except for the girl with the golden hair gathering Link into her arms. Except for the girl with the golden hair hiding in the narrow passageway while Link rides out the last of her spasms and convulsions.

She senses but cannot stop herself from kicking and slapping at the girl with the golden hair until the lightning relinquishes its hold. As her vision unblurs and focuses, Link realises that the girl with the golden hair is speaking to her.

Her fingers twitch from electricity. Still Link curves them by force into the shape of words: “I can't hear what you're saying. That thing's song is too loud. It's like it's right in my head.”

The girl with the golden hair flexes her own fingers. Link sits up. Her companion inhales a breath, and then she starts to sign. The gestures do not flow quite right. Link does not recognise some of the words. Her companion stutters, and stops, and then forces herself to start again, but she signs nonetheless. "I don't think that we can hurt the guardian, not like it is right now. If not even the skyward strike can hurt it, what chance do we have?"

Link touches her chin. A stray bolt of static drums her fingers involuntarily against her jaw. "Maybe we just have to wear it down, somehow. I could use up my arrows against it."

The girl with the golden hair grimaces. Link draws out Amali's bow. Carefully, she creeps towards the end of the passageway. She observes that the amalgam has once more returned to hovering at the ceiling of the circular chamber. Notching an arrow, Link pulls back the string, aims carefully for the amalgam nearly noiseless overhead, and looses.

The topaz arrow flies straight and true, only for the lightning to repel it down into the ground. Link tries an arrow of ruby, and then an arrow of sapphire, and then one of the shoddy wooden arrows
that she herself carved out of a tree, which curve to the side and scarcely fly straight.

"I don't think this is working," the girl with the golden hair signs, and Link sadly puts the bow away. "Yet if not even Fi can hurt it, I don't understand what we would have to use. Something...something doesn't make any sense here. Was there something else in the temple that we missed? Should we go back and carefully scour every centimetre? In all of the ancient legends about the heroes, the evil masters of the dungeons would hide away an artifact that the heroes could use against them. I know that's silly, because why would you put the artifact you're weak to in your own dungeon, and I don't know how true the stories are. But this place was designed by the Goddesses! So, maybe..."

Link shakes her head. "Think about how big this place is. It's very, very vast, and we're very, very small. And we've nearly got ourselves killed already more times than I ever want to remember. What if we missed one of the jumps? What if the lifts don't go back up?"

The girl with the golden hair hesitates. "But we are going to get ourselves killed if we just keep hitting our heads against this!" The girl with the golden hair motions violently towards the amalgam. "We can't hurt that guardian. Link, this is not like cooking, where you can keep trying the same recipe over and over until you figure something out. If we—"

Link grabs her hands, her eyes wide, her smile broad. She does not need to hear her companion's words to see her mouthing something about Link not getting any funny ideas.

"We can't hit it because it's covered in electricity. So we just have to do something that'll get rid of its electricity, don't we?" Link pops open the satchel. The girl with the golden hair stares at her as she whips out a rice-ball and cradles it in the palm of her hand. "So let's feed it these."

The girl with the golden hair touches her fingers to her temples. "And how," she signs after trying to speak out loud, "do you intend to feed those rice-balls to the guardian?"

"Well, it's got a face." Link traces a circle around her own features. "Its face is just kind of scooped out. But it's got a mouth at least. So we can just throw these things into its mouth."

The girl with the golden hair shakes Link like she were shaking a cocktail for one of the Lanayrish. Link's head bumps against the wall when her companion lets her go. "Link, please. This really is—"

"Won't you trust me?"

Her companion lowers her hands. Link repeats her words: "Won't you trust me? I know that you haven't been around the past two years. More than two years now, I guess. But I can't tell you how many times cooking saved my life and everyone else's. I actually managed to get the Divine Beast in Ruto to calm down using my cooking pot! And I ended up using food to beat the Malice in the Divine Beast near Nabooru! And the only reason I even got all the way here is because of all of the food that I've made, and all of the meals that I've shared. Do you know how many times I thought to myself that if only I could share a meal with the monsters, maybe we wouldn't have to fight after all?

"And after years and years of fighting against them, it turns out that I was kinda sorta on the right track! So let me give this thing a meal. Please. That's all I ask." Link scoots up to her until their noses touch. "Trust me. Trust me, please. I know that you've trusted me a lot, and I know that that trust hasn't always paid off." She looks down, then back up to meet the girl with the golden hair's gaze. "I'll promise you this. If it doesn't work, then...if it doesn't work, I'll do what you wanted. We'll go through the rest of the whatever-this-place-is in search of whatever secret
weapon you think will work against the guardian."

The girl with the golden hair closes her eyes. Link does not dare breathe. Then her companion lifts her eyelids again, and Link can see the determination gleaming in her irises, darker and deeper than the fire-light blue of Fi's blade.

"All right. I will trust you. We will do this like you said." The girl with the golden hair bites her lower lip. "You just want to throw the rice-balls into the guardian's mouth?" Link bobs her head. "I trust you more than I have ever trusted anyone in my entire life, Link. I hope, for the sake of all of Hyrule, that your plan works. It is hope or it is death, and again in my life, I am going to choose hope."

They split the seven rice-balls into two groups of three, tucking one spare into the narrow passageway just in case. With the other six rice-balls, Link and the girl with the golden hair exit the hallway to find the amalgam waiting for them. Now the amalgam gives no preamble; instantly they extend their wings and loose arrow-like feathers towards the ground in patterns that undulate over the floor. The girl with the golden hair seems to recognise the patterns enough to dodge them as they change into spirals, then triangles, then strange snowflake-like shapes for which Link has no name.

Link simply shoves her cooking pot over her head and runs towards the amalgam. She feels the feathers that slam into the cooking char the iron black or chill it over in ice. Lifting the cooking pot-helmet slightly, Link tries to make out the amalgam's gaping vortex of a maw, but the amalgam floats too high above the ground for her to chuck the rice-ball all the way at their mouth.

A sharp pain in her left hand drops drops the cooking pot back over her head with a bonk against her skull. A stray feather of frost has embedded into the membrane between her thumb and forefinger. The dribble of blood freezes from the cold. Link smacks her hand against her hip, knocking off the frost.

Raising the cooking pot again, Link looks around: the statues. She sprints towards one of the statues and squirrels up. Behind her, she senses something tugging at her back. "I'm sorry!" the girl with the golden hair shouts, barely audible above the roar of the song closing in around them. "I'll be borro—!" She snags something free of Link's back while Link continues to scale the statue of the Goddess Farore.

Link slaps the Goddess Farore in the face—apologising mentally—and continues hosting herself up to the top. As she clears the rim, Link finds herself standing on a pillar a single pace in diameter. She balances herself carefully, then lifts her chin.

She observes that the amalgam has turned their attention towards the girl with the golden hair—Link's paraglider, or rather Impa's, strapped to her back—who leaps up and down and whistles at the amalgam. The amalgam swerves in the aether towards her companion. Link rears back her hand as though she were holding one of the slate's explosives and then pitches the rice-ball in an arc towards the amalgam. Unlike the spherical explosive, the rice-ball plummets rapidly. It break against the floor. Link watches the girl with the golden hair dash in zig-zagged lines towards the column on which Link stands.

Cocking her arm again, Link waits for the amalgam to swoop by before chucking the second rice-ball with all of her might. One of their flaming feathers hits the rice-ball. It explodes into a flurry of fire, the rice toasting in the air to spread its delicious scent throughout the chamber. Link inhales deeply. Her mouth floods with saliva; drool strings from the corners of her mouth. She regards the rice-ball in her hand. Still warm. The inside meat and fish calling her name. The crispy-fried outside begging for her to bite through. And the rice, her beloved rice, waiting for her within.
Yet she will resist. This rice-ball holds the key to overcoming the amalgam. This she believes more than anything.

Link draws out her bow. She remembers: the stories that she has heard Kass sing to her, the stories that Riju has told her, the stories that the girl with the golden hair halfway dismissed and halfway believed. The stories spoke of the secret weapon against the Calamitous One. Of arrows of light and arrows of silver. Of magic glowing upon the string of a bow. Of the Knight, or sometimes the Princess, loosing a final blow into a waiting golden eye. But she has her own secret weapon.

She flitches out one of her own arrows. One of the arrows that she has carved from a tree herself and notched with feathers of the pheasant she cooked into a pleasant pilaf.

Link jams the rice-ball onto the arrowhead. She twists and squeezes down to pack the rice-ball tightly as she can. Notching the bow, she yanks back the string, her fingers still despite her body's trembling. She takes aim for the amalgam's mouth. Then she waits for the right moment.

The amalgam beats a whirlwind of aether towards the girl with the golden hair as they chase her companion around the chamber. The girl with the golden hair opens Link's paraglider to catch the wind; though the dervish spirals her dizzyingly around, the aether does carry her upwards into the air. Link ogles: the girl with the golden hair uses the height in lieu of scaling a statue and tries tossing a rice-ball towards that gaping maw. The amalgam blocks the first throw by twisting away their head so that the rice-ball toasts against their electrified halo.

The amalgam's movement reveals patches of bareness. The more feathers that the amalgam has ripped from their own skin, the more the amalgam resembles a throbbing and pulsating mass of flesh hovering in the aether, like a whale skinned down to its meat.

The girl with the golden hair spirals down while the amalgam whips up another dervish. She relies on the updraft of air—Link can see the aether, like the gust from the crimson loftwings, slicing into the girl with the golden hair's flesh in so many tiny cuts which her companion takes head-on in her efforts to near the amalgam—and glides even closer to the amalgam than before. A stray fiery feather that she does not have time to dodge catches the side of her jacket aflame. Link chokes on her own breath. The girl with the golden hair, apparently ignoring the flame that spreads over her torso, hangs onto the wooden supports with her left arm and gears up another rice-ball. Nearer to the maw than before. She pitches the rice-ball towards the amalgam's gaping void and Link prays to the Goddesses that the rice-ball connects.

The amalgam drops in the air. The amalgam drops so rapidly that they plunge towards the ground. As they hit the floor, Link listens to the sickeningly wet squish of the fleshy mound that seeps over the golden floor, as though the crimson amalgam itself had wept into gelatin.

When the amalgam rise up again, Link witnesses how the skin of their bottom half has broken open, like an overstuffed piping bag of pie filling now leaking its contents, or an overripened fruit bleeding its juices. Malice, or blood, or something in-between drains from the gaping wound of their base, theirragged skin undulating like the curtains of fire-light blue in the earlier hallway.

Link stares. If the amalgam would injure themself so to avoid the rice-ball, then her plan must be able to work.

The girl with the golden hair has but a single rice-ball remaining. Link waves to her companion. She lowers the bow to the ground and signs: "Get it over here! I'll get this into its mouth!"

Her companion glances in Link's direction; Link repeats her command. Angling her body, the girl with the golden hair begins to float towards her while the amalgam, shuddering and quivering with
the steady exuding of their own bloody malice from their ruined body, follows.

The girl with the golden hair lets herself fall to the floor. Link watches her roll forward, putting out the inferno that has ashen most of her jacket and part of the tunic underneath. The fluid dripping from the wound of the amalgam pools over the altar and spills onto the ground towards the girl with the golden hair. Her companion rushes forward, the third rice-ball still clenched in her grasp, towards Link. Her flailing movements serve to maintain the amalgam's attention.

When the liquid reaches the boots of the girl with the golden hair, even Link can hear her scream over the noise of the amalgam's song. Malice. Just like malice, boiling away, and the girl with the golden hair stuck below. Link watches the rice-ball fall from her spasming hand, watches the girl with the golden hair cry out and pounce to catch it, watches the rice-ball dissolve into the malice, watches the girl with the golden hair abandon the rice-ball, watches the girl with the golden hair throw herself towards the pillar and scream for Link to "take the shot, take the shot!"

Link forces her gaze upwards towards the approaching amalgam. She cannot miss. She will not miss. She tightens up every fibre in her body. She becomes as the stone. No. As the gold around her. As the gold that makes up the keep, the temple, the palace.

She aims. At the amalgam. She lets go. The shaft pierces through the aether. The rice-ball stays on the arrowhead. The pheasant feather trails true.

The arrow sings towards the amalgam, directly into the gaping maw where no electricity courses. Link breathes out with the arrow's journey. A second that hangs with the maelstrom of ruby and sapphire all around, reflecting the violent violet of the malice below——

—and then the golden crimson of the amalgam, the colour of the Dragon Dinraal, flashes the same bluish white as the Dragon Naydra, and for a single second a terrible face curves up out of the maw, beading blank eyes ringed with fire-light blue and violent violet, a long hooked beak shining in silver and shut tightly close, the rice-ball impaling itself on the beak to break itself apart.

In the next second, the amalgam's face has vanished again to nothing but a gaping maw, and Link has sunk slowly to her knees on top of the pillar of the Goddess Farore, and she has looked down at her own hands, at the crescent-moon scar of her right and the lightning-strike scar of her left.

She clenches her fists. Peering down at the floor below, Link seeks the girl with the golden hair somewhere in the sea of malice that has spread almost to the periphery of the circular chamber. They can take shelter in the passageway. They can hunt for whatever they need to defeat the guardian. They can work together. They will not lose hope.

And then she sees her. The girl with the golden hair. Holding aloft the paraglider. Her hands lashed and tied to the wooden supports. The final rice-ball—the seventh—in her mouth. Hope. The hope of Hyrule, contained in a single rice-ball.

The amalgam's song thrums through the air as they flip out their wings, as they summon another gale of aether, as they flurry forward feathers of flame and frost, as the girl with the golden hair stands in the sea of malice with the violent violet eating away at her own feet until the paraglider catches the wind, as the girl with the golden hair sails forward towards the amalgam clenching the rice-ball between her teeth, as the girl with the golden hair passes through the aether that scrapes away her flesh and skins her like the mists of the lost woods, as the girl with the golden hair ignores the fire and the ice that strikes against her chest and arms and legs to leave her skin red-raw and frost-bit and ash-charred, as the girl with the golden hair glides up to the amalgam's own face, as the girl with the golden hair nears closer than ever before, as the girl with the golden hair's limbs spasm from the electricity that lightnings over the pulsating form of the amalgam, as the girl
with the golden hair's arms twist and her legs writhe but she keeps herself affixed to the wooden supports by the lashes made out of her own tunic, as the girl with the golden hair crosses through the transient halo of lightning around the crown of the amalgam's head, as the girl with the golden hair—

—glides towards the maw itself, and suddenly Link understands her plan, and Link screams wordlessly out, and Link can do nothing but watch—

—and the amalgam flashes bluish white, and the rice-ball drops from the girl with the golden hair's mouth into the gullet of the amalgam, and the rice-ball enters the amalgam, and—

—the amalgam crimson gives way to blue—

—the face emerges from the maw—

—beading blank eyes ringed with fire-light blue and violent violet—

—a long hooked beak shining in silver and shut tightly closed—

—and the girl with the golden hair impales herself on the beak to break herself apart.

That terrible hooked beak pierces through the girl with the golden hair's belly and erupts out of her back. That terrible hooked beak gleams red with the girl with the golden hair's blood. That terrible hooked beak protrudes through the girl with the golden hair's torso like Link's sword would protrude through a pumpkin stuck on the blade.

The girl with the golden hair does not move.

But the face remains, and the amalgam does not revert back to crimson. The electricity that haloes their form dies down from the effects of the rice-ball.

Link closes her fingers around the hilt of the sword that seals the darkness, the blade of evil's bane, the Master Sword. Her expression stone, she lifts Fi skyward. Her muscles stone, she feels the sacred sword resonate in violet. Her heart stone, she brings down all of her pain and all of her grief and all of her blood in a single strike.

The skyward strike wheels lightning through the aether in a single impossibly thin disc of violet. The edge bites into the amalgam's flesh. The wheel does not stop. The skyward strike carves through the amalgam's head. The amalgam's face parts from their body. The beak, and the girl with the golden hair, and the golden eyes clouding over part from their body.

The amalgam hangs in the air like a great crystal of flesh. And then the amalgam, and the sea of malice, and the song that has hummed through the keep, gild into golden dust. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

The altar of blue gives way to gold. Something shimmers within, but Link could not look at the gold if she wanted. Her gaze fixes on the girl who has sacrificed herself for her Princess, for her people, for her Hyrule.

The girl with the golden hair—the remains of her body—drift down to the ground. The cloth of the paraglider crumples over her form, like the cloth Link found in the sanctum months ago, a funeral shawl over the dead.
Electro Meaty Rice Balls (twelve hearts, high electric resistance for 09:00) - hylian rice, raw whole bird, voltfin trout, voltfruit, zapshroom

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: I replaced the fokkeru with loftwings; the bots with chuchu; the lava with "malice" (concentrated will, which isn't exclusive to Calamity Ganon); the red ra with flying loftwing heads; the fokka (who are motherfokka to deal with in-game) with armoured loftwings in both blue and red varieties (the former capable of using attacks I call 'silver arrows', made of the same fire-light as the guardians' lasers but much more concentrated, the name silver arrow being a nod to The Legend of Zelda for the Famicom/NES); ropes as, well, snakes; and the guardian of the Great Palace with the thunderous being that they fight in the chapter's climax.

Just to let you know how dedicated I was to accurately depicting the Great Palace, in the first room, the fokkeru moves as soon as you pass by the second column; I captured this with the loftwing moving once Link and Zelda passed the Nayru statue. I also did my best to adapt the attacks that the enemies can do: the fokkeru's projectiles are now razor-boomerang wind-like attacks, and the fokkeru's jumping is based on the loftwing's ability to charge forward (the fokka, on the other hand, can perform a spiral charge) in Skyward Sword.

Loftwings in Skyward Sword have golden eyes with blue and purple rings. Since those are the three colours I chose for the Sacred Realm (everything related to it is purple, gold, or blue, the gold being related to the Golden Goddesses while the blue is the colour of the Sacred Realm's energies in general).

Being within the Great Palace prevents Zelda from using the typical concentrated power of will.

Likewise, the loftwings disappearing into puffs of golden dust is what it looks like when enemies perish in The Adventure of Link; they're not 'beings of blood', so they don't leave corpses either way, just cease to exist and revert to energy.

The shimmering part of the wall that Link finds in the lift is a hidden passageway that you can enter in The Adventure of Link. I chose not to go down that way though.

As for the pot lids remember the two times that Zelda "bumped" against Link, and then the other thing that Zelda took from Link's back? The first bump was the loftwing destroying the mirrored pot lid, then Zelda took off the iron pot lid, which was destroyed in the second bump.

In The Adventure of Link, the corridor to the left contains a Link Doll, granting Link one Life; in Delicious in Wilds, I've replaced this with a cucco.

In The Adventure of Link, the guardian of the Great Palace can only be defeated using the spell Thunder. The use of Thunder reveals the guardian's face (turns it from red to blue), allowing the otherwise invulnerable guardian to be damaged. I replaced this with the 'amalgam', which uses electricity to protect itself and its face. Since I
established that electric resistance works by disrupting the body's own ability to channel electricity (including through the nervous system). I realised that it was absolutely perfect for me to replace the use of the Thunder spell with food.

The fire and ice motif of its attacks was adapted not only from the fireballs that the guardian of the Great Palace hurls at Link (which can only be dispatched via use of the Reflect spell, which is part of what the skyward strike does in Delicious in Wilds), but also from the use of "fire and ice" theming for bosses throughout the Zelda franchise, such as Twinrova in Ocarina of Time, Oracle of Ages, and Oracle of Seasons and Fraaz in Spirit Tracks.

I mentioned I would get Link to go through green, then blue, then red. Here's her red tunic: reddened by blood.

Oh, Zelda...

Up next: Link makes a meal, yet the meal goes uncrimped. But such a sacrifice will not be in vain.


Beta reader's comments: This chapter is so good! It's so great to spend the longest chapter in the series with Zelda, which lets the author really establish her and her relationship with Link in the present day. It's also super cool to have a super long chapter that's more focused and condensed in terms of time, compared to chapter 64, which was a long chapter spread out over a long period of time.

Zelda's fate at the end of this chapter is brutal and horrifying.

Defeating an important enemy through food is Delicious in Wilds in a nutshell.

Emma. 18 November 2017.
Energising Egg Pudding

Chapter Summary

The guardian of the Golden Goddesses' final trial has mortally wounded the girl with the golden hair. Now the travelling chef makes a decision, receives a key, and goes on alone.

Chapter Notes

As usual, author's notes that did not fit in the end: I technically started writing this chapter at 08:44 on the thirtieth of July, but I didn't seriously begin to write until 11:19 on the twentieth-second of August, and finished writing it at 16:16 on the twenty-second of August.

Thanks a million to each and every one of you. As we reach the very end, I have nothing but gratitude and warmth to everyone who has taken the time to read Delicious in Wilds. I wrote it primarily for myself. My beta reader coaxed me to release it; I haven't participated in anything resembling the Zelda fandom ever in my life, and haven't participated seriously in any kind of fandom since I was very young. Sharing something like this with all of you has been a wonderful experience. So thank you. And thank you to my daring beta reader, Emma, for suggesting I post this, and for being the one to pull me through, time and time again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Link throws herself off of the pillar of the Goddesses Farore. She lands heavy on all fours, her arms buckling beneath her, her knees cracking against the gold, her palms scraping against the tessellated triangles. She half-runs, half-crawls towards the girl with the golden hair, towards her beloved companion, towards the Knight that has protected her after all of this time.

She does not move the paraglider. She will not look at the ruined body. She cannot look at the ruined body. Rather Link concentrates entirely on the girl with the golden hair's face, on her nose and her mouth and her eyes, on the scars over her cheeks, on the gashes over her brow, on the burns that have spread over her face both of flame and of frost, on the rawness of her flesh that the aether—like the mist of the lost woods—has scraped away from her skin, on the tears that have pooled around her eyes, on her irises that have clouded to white, on her mouth that quivers, on the soft blood and vomit that trickle out from the part of her lips.

The girl with the golden hair trembles. Half of a breath deflates her chest, a breath that almost sounds like Link's name.

Link can barely see for the tears that blur her vision, but she does not need to see to open her satchel, nor to scour for the vial in a spherical shape decorated with a thin handle that resembles a pair of butterfly wings.

She seizes the elixir. The elixir of green, and blue, and red, and violet, and gold. The elixir of the
shards of the horns of the Dragons Dinraal, Naydra, and Farore, and the faery dust of the Sacred
Realm, and the star fragment that crashed into Mount Nayru on the night of the girl with the

The girl with the golden hair's eyes no longer focus. Yet Link notices her, just barely perceptibly,
shake her head from side to side as though begging Link not to use the elixir. Holding up the girl
with the golden hair to rest her head in Link's lap, Link forces open the girl with the golden hair's
mouth, the elixir heavy in her palm, and tips the vial over.

She pours the opaque pink liquid into the girl with the golden hair's throat. Pink. The hue of hope,
for the hope of Hyrule.

The pink elixir mixes with the dark brownish-red of her blood and the greenish-yellow of her
vomit. Link closes her companion's mouth and shuts her nose until the girl with the golden hair
involuntarily has swallowed down the elixir. Sensing the girl with the golden hair strains around
the glob of blood-vomit-elixir in her throat as it threatens to come back up, Link presses her mouth
against the girl with the golden hair's. She forces her breath through the girl with the golden hair's
lungs. She repeats the process, tipping in the elixir, making the girl with the golden hair swallow,
and breathing in for the girl with the golden hair, until she has drained the last of the opaque pink
elixir from the vial. The vial clatters to the ground.

When she feels the girl with the golden hair writhe—her organs regrowing in her body, her veins
proliferating through the muscles that pulsates over her reforged bones, her skin stitching itself
together—Link tears off her undershirt, stuffs it into the girl with the golden hair's mouth and lets
the girl with the golden hair grab her hand. The girl with the golden hair grips her hand so hard that
Link winces at the pain of her own bones grinding against one another.

But even if the girl with the golden hair were to break her hand, Link could not bring herself to
care. In this second the girl with the golden hair comprises her entire world.

The girl with the golden hair breathes in. The girl with the golden hair breathes out. The girl with
the golden speaks, Link's undershirt falling out of her mouth to sprawl over her chest: "Link,
you...you idiot."

Link blinks at her. The girl with the golden hair pushes the heels of her hands into her eyes. She
weeps. The sound of her crying wracks through her body. Link can only gather her into her arms,
can only embrace her, can only hold her, can only stroke her the remains of her golden hair, some
singed off by the flames of the amalgam's feathers, the rest falling out even as Link runs her
fingers through her locks from the frosts that have deadened the base.

Yet the girl with the golden hair lives, the girl's golden hair can grow back. Like Kass's crest,
which Link herself saw grow back over the months that they travelled together over the whole of
Hyrule, the girl's golden hair, too, can grow back.

Link does not lift the cloth of the paraglider, but after a few moments the girl with the golden hair
does. Although Link averts her gaze, she catches a glimpse of the patchwork scar that covers most
of her companion's chest and abdomen, the mark left by the crimson loftwing lighter than the rest
of the skin that the girl with the golden hair has healed. Link can picture the burns of fire and the
burns of ice that run over the girl with the golden hair's form. She can picture the violet whorls
over the girl with the golden hair's feet from having stood for so long in the sea of malice. She can
picture the girl with the golden hair's body bearing the tapestry of the history of Hyrule, of the final
battle, of the ending of the Calamitous One.

"I can't...I can't believe that you wasted that elixir on me." The girl with the golden hair's tears wet
her cheeks; she sniffs back the snot on her upper lip. "What if there's another trial? What if something awful happens? What if there's just—what if you die, Link? What if you die?"

"Why would there be another trial?" Link gestures to the golden altar; the something-or-other shimmers atop the highest triangle in the altar's heart. "We did it. You did it. You said that you're protect me all the way to the Golden Force, and you have."

Link glances back down at the girl with the golden hair, who herself now gazes at the altar. "Is that...?"

"I think it is."

The girl with the golden hair cries again. She buries her face into her hands and shudders against Link. "The long war is almost over," she mumbles, voice barely coherent. "Mother. Father. I hope that you'd be proud of me."

"You're the best Knight that I could ask for, and the best Princess that Hyrule could ask for, you know that?" Link squeezes her hand before letting go and continuing. "I mean that. Not just because I know you. It would've been so easy to just magically have those powers and then—" She snaps her fingers. "—just will the Calamitous One away like that. But you didn't have that. And you didn't run away. You stayed with your people, you protected the people and the wilds and all the meals anyone's ever made, and you've hurt more in the past hundred years than I think anyone else has."

"I wouldn't say that..."

Link presses on: "I don't really...get the whole thing about women suffering or whatever. I don't think it's my duty to suffer, and it's not Amali or Ilia or Koko or Cottla or Riju or Cremia or Romani or Malon or anyone else's duty I know, and it's definitely not your duty to suffer. You didn't have magic, but you had your own hands. You figured out all this stuff that no one else ever did!"

"Well, part of that is merely because as a member of the royal family, I have had access to more than anyone else has," the girl with the golden hair offers in qualification.

"But there've been lots and lots of people in the royal family over ten thousand years. Even over the past few hundred years! I dunno when we forgot all the things about the Divine Beasts but there have been lots and lots of people in your position who haven't figured out the stuff that you have." Link shrugs. "I don't know much about the royal family. But I do know about you. These hands aren't just good for praying." She touches the girl with the golden hair's wrists, runs her fingers over her companion's palms, maps out the once-smooth skin now roughened by scars. "They're good for reading, and they're good for researching, and they're good for fighting the Calamitous One for one hundred years, and they're good for going through this whole temple palace thing with me, and they're good for nearly sacrificing yourself to take care of the guardian thingy that's not one of the pew-pew eye guardian but like the kind of guardian that guards something which by the way you shouldn't have done I mean thank you for doing it but you shouldn't have had to sacrifice yourself and I don't want you to put yourself needlessly in harm's way again and I know that you felt like you had to do it for your people but that doesn't mean you have to hurt yourself like that..." Link's wrists ache. "...and they're good for crimping, and they're very good for hugging."

The girl with the golden hair wipes at her eyes. She clothes herself in Link's undershirt, her own jacket and tunic having mangled and torn in the battle. As Link always wears her undershirt loose, the cloth fits the girl with the golden hair as well. She tugs up the collar of the tunic, drying the tears on her cheeks and inhaling the scent of the fabric. "I hope you don't mind me borrowing this."
She hiccoughs.

Link shakes her head and smooths out her own tunic. The blood has mostly dried by now, although the inside of the tunic feels sticky against Link's skin. "It looks like I'm wearing red now. I walked in wearing blue. It's actually been a really long time since I wore anything except blue."

"You wore blue back then, too."

"Only after I drew Fi." Link rubs the back of her head. "Back in Ordon, I was always wearing brown, and green, and colours like that. Same ones I started wearing when I woke up again. Then, when I got through half the Divine Beasts, I got banged up really bad, so I ended up getting a new tunic there. Or, no, wait, actually it was after the Divine Beast in Tantari, wasn't it?" Link nods at herself. "That's right. I got banged up really bad, and I couldn't just stitch and patch up my old tunic. So I ended up getting a blue one there. The same colour as the sky. You remember the Parapan sky, right?" The girl with the golden hair inclines her head. "And then...I kept wearing blue for a while. It's a nice colour. It reminds me of you. You're...the bluest person I know. I think I'm more of a green."

The girl with the golden hair giggles. "Oh, you sound like you're losing it, Link. You're not too injured, are you?"

"I feel fine." Her stomach rumbles. Link rests her hand against her belly and smiles sheepishly. "Almost fine."

"And we don't have any rice-balls left." The girl with the golden hair sits slightly up. She folds up the paraglider. Link observes that the wooden supports have torn, that the struts have buckled, that the paraglider can no longer function. Yet she can mend it. She can repair it. She can heal it anew, as she has healed over and over. "I...I did promise you a meal after we finished, remember? If you want—" Link leans in, eyes wide, head bobbing energetically. "—you can make something before we face the Triforce." She vibrates her entire body up and down. The girl with the golden hair snorts out a laugh. "You look like you're about to wag your tail."

"And speaking of meals!" Link snaps her fingers. She unsheathes Fi, laying her down upon the floor and bowing her head at her old friend. "And Fi, thank you. Thank you for that whatever-it's-called."

"A skyward strike."

"A skyward strike. There's a 100% certainty that I'm grateful to you." That elicits a laugh from the girl with the golden hair and a mild glow from Fi. "Thank you so much, Fi. I wish I could tell you that I'll make you a meal after this. But I hope that you'll be all right with the one meal that I made you." The girl with the golden hair quirks her eyebrows quizzically at Link, who continues to talk to Fi: "I don't think I'll be able to make you any more. I'm sorry. I hope you can forgive me." Two blinks. "Fi...you know what I'm talking about, don't you?" Two blinks. "And you think it's a good idea?" A pause. Then two blinks—a beat—and two more—another beat—and two more still, as if Fi were very much agreeing. "Thank you for being at my side all this time." Link moves to pick Fi up to sheath her again, yet the girl with the golden hair touches her wrist.

"Wait, Fi." The girl with the golden hair scoots forward. "How much energy do you have left? I know you said that you hadn't recharged as much as you want, and...it sounded like Link didn't know how to do a skyward strike before this."

"She did it once before, but it was more pretty than powerful. Other than that, she's only been going all blue sometimes when I've been fighting." Link winces. "I just realised how many
monsters I've killed over the years. And they didn't know what they were doing."

"Neither did we. The best we can do is move on and hope that our descendants don't forget that beings of blood and beings of will need no animosity between one another." The girl with the golden hair brushes a hand over Fi's hilt, as though she were moving a lock of hair from a loved one's face. "Fi. Oh, what's a good yes or no question here?" She shuts her eyes. "Fi...do you think that you still have enough power if there's another fight up ahead?" Fi does not respond. Then she blinks five times. "Five?"

"Is that supposed to mean maybe? Both yes and no?" Fi blinks twice. Link grins. "See? I get her. And she gets me. Wait. What does maybe mean?"

"It means," the girl with the golden hair reasons, "that she may or may not have enough power. That means that there's some things that she doesn't know about this. Fi, do you know if there's another challenge ahead?" Three blinks. "There isn't?" No response. The girl with the golden hair tilts her head. "You don't know if there is?" Two blinks. "So there could be one. Two blinks. "But I think you're right, Link." The girl with the golden hair looks up again at the golden shimmer on the altar. "I don't know what else there could be. We've passed the final trial set out by the Goddesses."

Link rolls her shoulders. "If there is one, then we'll deal with it together." She rummages through her satchel, taking another look at Riju's ice-box as well as what she herself has. "We don't have any more meat, and I used up most of my vegetables and herbs on those rice-balls. So I hope you don't mind me making dessert."

"I think," the girl with the golden hair answers softly, "that after all that we've been through, we deserve some dessert as a final send-off, don't you?"

Link dips her head. "I don't think I have enough flour to make an entire egg tart, but how does some egg pudding sound?"

The girl with the golden hair smiles gently. "Can I help?"

Together, Link and the girl with the golden hair set fire to the wooden box of elixirs yet again, or what little remains of it. Link estimates that the wooden box will last no longer than fifteen minutes, if that, and gets to work. The girl with the golden hair announces excitedly that she already knows how to caramelise: "Oh, just leave it to me!" She caramelises the bottom of the cooking sugar with the small pouch of distilled cane sugar that Link has remaining. While the girl with the golden hair spreads the sugar and sets the cooking pot onto the fire, Link repurposes the large vial that once held the opaque pink elixir as a makeshift bowl. She mixes together sand seal milk, sand sparrow eggs, more sugar, and a few droplets of vanilla extract given to her by Amali. Link pours the mixture into the cooking pot; the girl with the golden hair covers the top with the only-very-slightly-singed wooden pot lid.

Link props her chin up in her hand. "Want to play wind-water-fire?"

The girl with the golden hair blinks. "Eh?"

"Wind-water-fire." Link makes the gestures. "While we wait for this to cook and then cool down."

"I haven't played that since I was a child." The girl with the golden hair brings her hands together, stroking her left palm with the thumb of the other hand. "I don't think I'm very good."

"Great! Then we can both be bad together. It'll be fun."

Both of them prove terrible at the game. The girl with the golden hair appears to stick herself into a
rotation of various patterns as if more concerned with keeping a perfect symmetry of one-to-one-to-one than actually playing the game, and Link—as always—prefers the gesture that lets her fashion her hands into a bowl to eat or cup to drink. The girl with the golden hair teases Link that she knows that Link will draw next; Link replies mildly that no matter what she chooses, the girl with the golden hair will simply pick the next one in the pattern she has created for herself. The girl with the golden hair blushes. Link waggles her eyebrows.

They transfer the finished egg pudding to the ice-box. While they wait for it to chill, Link plays songs for the girl with the golden hair on the ocarina, showing off how much she has remembered. The prelude to the Goddess Hylia, the minuet to the Goddess Kokir, the bolero to the Goddess Goro-goro, the serenade to the Goddess Zola, the nocturne to the Goddess Sheik which Link reminds her scared her as a child—the girl with the golden hair puffs her cheeks out, and Link giggles—the requiem to the Goddess Sageru, and the aria to the Goddess Erito.

"I remember playing that one for Urbosa," the girl with the golden hair notes, gazing off into a distance somewhere behind Link's shoulder. "She said that I didn't have the rhythm quite right. I asked her if she could show me the right rhythm instead. She laughed and said that she was joking; she told me that she'd only heard the song a few times in her life. It was something about...how in their Temples of the Golden Goddesses, they use the song to...what was it? Mark the passage of every seven years or something like that? Oh, I can't quite remember. It's been a very long time." The girl with the golden hair hums. "Or maybe it was the Temple of Sageru. The one in Nabooru in particular, I think. You should ask for me, when you go back topside."

"When we go back topside," Link tells her, "you can ask for yourself."

"Mm," replies the girl with the golden hair, and she says nothing more.

Link plays other songs. The mountain-song that the Hebric people taught her; the song sung by travellers through the Hyrule Field that she remembered from having passed by time and time again on her courier duties; the song that the musician in Ordon used to play, standing by the river with her instrument case open; Epona's song that Marin taught her; Ilia's whistle that Ilia taught her; the song of the sea that Aryll made up and insisted that her big sister learn and remember; the jaunty tune that Sarie likes to sing; and the song sung by the amalgam.

The girl with the golden hair clears her throat. "I'd rather not listen to that one, if you don't mind."

Link rubs the back of her head. "I think the pudding's done."

The pudding jiggles deliciously. Link pours the last of the honey from the final pot she saved from Romani Ranch over the top and sprinkles a touch of salt. Without spoons, Link and the girl with the golden hair eat from their hands, plucking off small blobs with their fingers to cup in her palms and lick up.

"Throw it in my mouth." The girl with the golden hair peers down at the egg pudding. Link opens her mouth wide and gestures for her companion to attempt tossing it in. The girl with the golden hair carefully aims a small blob of pudding; it lands on Link's chest. A second try hits her eye. The third proves the charm: sweet pudding melts on her tongue, tempered by the salted honey, the mixture of textures and tastes bringing Link to close her eyes until the sweetness and salt ebbs from her tongue. "You should try it yourself, too"

She tosses a bit into the girl with the golden hair's mouth. The girl with the golden hair lifts her hand to her mouth; nonetheless she lets slip a small moan of pleasure from the deliciousness of the dish. Link beams as the girl with the golden hair rolls the pudding over her tongue. "Good, isn't it? You should feel proud. You did most of the work."
The girl with the golden hair touches her palm to her cheek. "I wish I could've made something for you something from scratch. Just by myself."

"But I like cooking with you."

"I like cooking with you too." Leaning over, the companion wipes her thumb over Link's nose; her finger comes away with a dab of honey. "Still, you've made me so many things. I'd like to return the favour." She hesitates. "I would have liked to, I mean."

"Then you will. When we go back up, you will. It's what I told Fi. She said that since she's a being of will, our world isn't hers. But it is, isn't it? Just like the ones that gave us their horns for the elixir. They've made it their home. So Fi can too. And so can you, even if you're a being of will now, or however you said that." Link shrugs. "I'm not smart enough to know all this stuff! But I believe. And that's enough."

"I...hope that it is enough, then." The girl with the golden hair looks up at the altar. "So. That's the last of the egg pudding." Link nods. She has just begun to clean up when the girl with the golden hair speaks again. "Oh, Link, before you go. I don't know what we'll see on the other side, so I want to say this now. Thank you."

Link cocks her head.

The girl with the golden hair digs her fingers into the collar of her own tunic. "Thank you for being the reason that any of this happened. For giving me back my hope all those years ago."

She cocks her head still further until she feels like her neck will break.

"Oh, you don't have to be so modest." The girl with the golden hair reaches out her right hand to brush her thumb over the scar under Link's left eye. "Wait...you're being serious. You don't remember, do you?" Link shakes her head. The girl with the golden hair's eyebrows angle downwards, her frown wrinkling her brow, and Link wants nothing more than to find what to say to cheer her up again.

"I'm sorry. There's a lot that I've forgotten. But I promise I haven't forgotten you! Look at all the things I remember. I remember us baking pumpkin pie, and apple pie, and carrot cake, and egg tart, and—" Link rattles off everything that she remembers making alongside the girl with the golden hair. "...but there's a lot that I've forgotten too. It's really silly, actually, but..." Link taps her index fingers against one another as Yunobo might. The girl with the golden hair arches an eyebrow.

"I don't actually remember your name."

"And don't want me to tell you..." The girl with the golden hair inclines her head.

"Even if I don't remember, I do remember you. The good and the bad. I remember how badly you treated me at first." The girl with the golden hair winces. "And I remember how close we became later." Her expression softens. "I'm glad I met you."

"I'm glad I met you, too." The girl with the golden hair hesitates. "Do you want to hear what I was
going to say about the Great Calamity, or do you want to try to remember that, too?"

Link swings her head from side to side. "You can tell me." She emulates putting her hands onto the manuals of an imaginary accordion. "Without further ado...!"

The girl with the golden hair lowers her eyelids, her lashes brushing against the curves of her cheeks. "I thought that everything was lost. You're the one who...who just picked me up and started carrying me. Oh, I asked you what you were doing. You put me down for a second, I think. It was right before we left those woods near Fort Hateno. You told me that you wanted to try the plan with the mirror. Even if the plan failed...at least it would be something to try, and we wouldn't lose anything. I..." The girl with the golden hair sucks in a breath. "...I remember telling you that no one believed me about my research. Everything about the Sacred Realm, everything about the mirrors, everything about this magical Triforce that could grant anyone's wishes. But is that really stranger than the idea that Hylia—the Goddess—could reincarnate into a person?"

Link begins to reassure her, but the girl with the golden hair folds Link's fingers into her palms. 

"You told me that you'd listened to everything I'd ever explained to you. You told that you didn't really get all of it, yet you believed that I knew what I was talking about. And not merely because I used large words that you didn't understand, but because the things that I said made sense to you. Or at least made more sense than some of the things that you'd heard about the Goddess Hylia.

"Oh, I don't remember exactly what you said, and I wish that I did. I'm afraid that one hundred years is a very, very long time.

"You said that even if I didn't believe in myself, that I should listen to my own words. Hope or death, I had said. I choose hope, I had said. You told me that that gave you hope, and now you'd give that hope back to me. You said that you couldn't carry my destiny or my research or my smarts—I don't think I'm smarter than you, or clever, and certainly not wiser, simply more educated—but that you could carry me."

The girl with the golden hair smiles warmly at Link, her eyes crinkling, her lashes wettening. Link rubs the back of her head; the girl with the golden hair brushes her palm over the back of Link's free hand. The touch trails warmth on Link's knuckles.

"It was the most I've ever heard you speak in one moment, actually. That's how I knew you were being honest. That this meant so much to you, that...oh, well, not to imply that when you don't talk I distrust you, or that that means you don't care! Foot in mouth, foot in mouth. I meant that since you did talk, it..." She makes a vague gesture with her hand, then hangs her head. "Oh, I hope you know what I mean."

"I think I do." Pausing, Link glances at the cooking pot. "Also, if you're so hungry that you'd put your foot in your mouth, I can just make another meal for you. Why foot in mouth when you could food in mouth?"

The girl with the golden hair breathes out in a silent laugh of shivering shoulders. "No, foot in mouth is something like...where you say something that you didn't really mean, or something that can come off in the wrong way."

"What does that have to do with eating?" Link tilts her head.

The girl with the golden hair bursts out laughing, snorting like a boar as she tries to get herself under control only to erupt in further laughter. When at last she calms down, after Link has laughed alongside her, the girl with the golden hair fusses over Link's bangs, brushing them out of Link's
face. Link peeks up at the girl with the golden hair's hands, the left palm darkened by a burn, the right lightened and roughened from the scars of regrowing skin. "I suppose it's time, then."

"Are you sure I can't make another egg pudding?" Link jokes. She feels the girl with the golden hair's fingers start to tremble. Her companion retracts her arm, but Link catches her hand. Interlacing their fingers, she squeezes her hand. Beat-beat-beat.

With her companion's help, Link gathers her belongings. She cleans the cooking pot in whatever way she can. She tucks everything into her satchel. She touches the trusty red telescope at her left hip and the ocarina that hangs beside it, and then the empty pouch that once held the slate at her right hip.

If she could recover the slates of the other Champions, then surely she can recover the girl with the golden hair's slate. Her slate. Their slate, combined.

Link shoulders her belongings. She offers the girl with the golden hair her left hand, and the girl with the golden hair grips hers tightly in her right. Together, they approach the altar. Together, they step up towards the gold of their goal.

The altar. The symbol of the Hyrule royal family. The mark of the Golden Goddesses. Three golden triangles, arranged in a larger triangle, with a hollow heart. Except that the hollow heart has risen up into a triangular pillar, on top of which in glowing gold awaits: a key.

The girl with the golden hair's brow furrows. "A key?"

Link plucks the key from the altar. A small golden key, small enough to sit in the heart of her palm without touching the sides, sporting a three-pronged crown of a bow that reminds Link of the Hyrule Cathedral, three jewels set into the side: one red ruby, one blue sapphire, and one green topaz. Link turns the key over. Something nudges her in the rib; she looks over to find the girl with the golden hair pointing past the altar, to the far end of the circular chamber opposite where they entered. The walls have slid apart, uncovering a passageway.

"That must be the way. To where the Triforce is. That's the key, I think. Actually, according to my research, there are two accounts of such a key, one with a bow in the shape of a lion's head—" The girl with the golden hair claps her own hand over her mouth. "Oh, now's not the time for this."

"It's always the time for me to get to see how passionate you are about your research," Link replies, signing awkwardly with just her right hand. The girl with the golden hair's cheeks redden.

"Well, maybe, if your hope is right, there will be time after we secure Hyrule's future." The girl with the golden hair turns towards the passageway. "...come on, Link."

Together, they walk across the circular chamber of the amalgam, of the guardian of the Triforce. Together, they enter the passageway and come upon a golden door with a single lock. Together, they slot in the key. Together, they turn. Together, they—

—face a barrier that glows in gold, that ripples iridescently with the faintest of fire-light blue. Link observes, beyond the veil, a further corridor lined in gold, dimmer than the luminescent hallways through which she and the girl with the golden hair have travelled, and somehow reflecting violet from the hearts of the tessellated fingers. Splaying her fingers, she touches her palm to the barrier. She feels nothing. Her hand goes through without so much as a crackle of static. Link turns her head towards the girl with the golden hair—who gazes, her brow heavy-set, at the barrier, her eyes slightly narrowed, her teeth worrying her bottom lip—and grins.
She steps through the barrier. She steps to the other side. She steps towards the Triforce that awaits her, and then the girl with the golden hair lets go of her hand.

Link stops. She looks back over her shoulder to find the girl with the golden hair standing on the chamber-side of the barrier, her hand against the gold. Link tilts her head.

The girl with the golden hair presses her palm on the barrier, and then it dawns upon Link that her companion did not willingly let go: she cannot pass the barrier.

"I...I guess that I can't go any farther than this." The girl with the golden hair laughs faintly. Link can see the dampness gathering at the corners of her eyes. "Oh, I'm a being of will now, after all. I'm not allowed to touch the Triforce, remember?" She retracts her empty hand and lowers her arm to her side. "You'll have to go on without me. Oh, don't worry about me. The dungeons of the legends always have some way out at the end."

Link can feel the stinging behind her own eyes. She approaches the barrier; the girl with the golden hair shakes her head furiously.

"You have to go. Go to the Triforce. Link...make sure that you wish for an end to the Great Calamity. Make sure that you wish for peace. Make sure you..." The girl with the golden hair curls her fingers inwards. "I don't need to tell you these things. More than anyone, I know that the wish in your heart will bring Hyrule to peace. More than anyone I've ever met, you love the land and the people—and the food, can't forget the food—" Link smiles sheepishly. "—more than anyone that I've met, Link."

The girl with the golden hair's tears gleam, and then spill over her eyes, rivulets down her cheeks and dribbles from her chin, as would the juices from an apple just ripe enough. Link would give almost anything to share an apple with her, right now.

"If we never see each other again, then...I love you, Link." The tears glisten on her cheeks. In that moment, dressed in Link's bloodied undershirt, much of her hair fallen out, her face torn and scarred and burned, trembling like an autumn leaf battered by the Goddess Farore's wind, she looks more beautiful than anything that Link has ever seen. "I really do love you."

"I love you, too," Link signs, but that does not feel like enough. She lowers her arms. The fingers of her left hand brush against something at her hip, coarse in its creation and smoothed by time and love: the ocarina.

Link fits the ocarina to her lips. The girl with the golden hair gazes at her. Link inhales, and then she plays upon the ocarina the lullaby that bears the girl with the golden hair's name, the name that she still cannot remember.

The girl with the golden hair's eyes glisten wetly. "Link...I know that you don't have all of your memories back yet. Oh, but remember that, no matter what happens, the world will one day heal. This, too, shall pass. Such is Her wind, that the Goddess Farore carries the seeds of life..."

"...and such is Her courage, that we bear the will to live." Link's own fingers have begun to tremble. "The breath of the wild shall whisper over the world, long after you and I have returned to dust, and shall breathe life anew. Such is the promise of the Goddess Farore."

"Even if you don't remember everything that has happened, there is no one better to wish upon the Triforce, because..." The girl with the golden hair takes lifts up her hand to Link's cheek, yet the barrier stills her arm. Link steps back through the barrier enough for the girl with the golden hair to reach her face, to cup Link's cheek in her palm, to warm her face in three gentle presses of the hand.
...courage need not be remembered, for it is never forgotten.

—

Energising Egg Pudding (ten hearts, two-fifths stamina vessel) - bird's egg, cane sugar, courser bee honey, fresh milk, rock salt

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: I noted in a previous author's note exactly how the faery tonic works.

While the other songs Link plays on the ocarina (which Ravio gave her, if you don't remember) are from Ocarina of Time, the aria to the Goddess Erito is based on the "Song of Soaring" from Majora's Mask. The Nocturne of Shadow scared Zelda because, well, it's the creepiest-sounding of the songs, presumably since it's meant for the Shadow Temple.

Remember Zelda's line about the "returning the favour" from the seventy-ninth chapter? It was in reference to this "I can't carry your destiny, but I can carry you," which by the way is unintentionally a reference to a line from a series I don't like very much.

The key that they take from the altar is based on the description of the magical key from The Adventure of Link; the version in The Legend of Zelda bears the shape of a lion's head. Actually, when I first played the latter game as a child without access to the manual, I freaked out upon my realisation that the key number in my inventory had changed to the letter "A"; I thought I had borked the game. Turns out that just means you can get into any locked door now. Whups!

As usual, the "I love you"s in this chapter are not romantic. That said, Link and Zelda have been through so much together. I wrote this chapter as much for a cool-off for myself as it is for you after the eightieth.

There's a lot more I could say right now. But I really do think, more than anything else, that I want to thank each and every one of you. I know I thank you a lot. I'm unfamiliar with the proper etiquette. That said—and I should note that I do not expect anyone else to think the same way that I do; this is merely my personal thoughts—just as a game only truly lives when it is played, or as a meal only truly lives when it is eaten, so does a story only truly live when it is read. You, in reading Delicious in Wilds for all of its hundred of thousands of words, have brought something utterly irreplaceable to the story. You, in reading Delicious in Wilds for all of its hundreds of thousands of words,

I should remark that, when I was writing the ending of Delicious in Wilds and this chapter in particular, I was inclined to have Zelda die. However, upon writing the chapter, I realised that (1) not only would it not make sense, given that I had provided Link with the tonic, but also (2) it felt unceremonious and rather in poor taste, and most importantly (3) having Zelda die here would bypass the bigger issue: the fact that she has already died in the Sacred Realm. The real question is whether or not
Zelda will be able to return to the mortal world, or whether she will be trapped forever in the Sacred Realm. And that, well...that's something that you'll have to see. I've left a pretty significant and obvious clue in this chapter, though.

I'll take the time now to say that I personally find it ridiculous that in *Breath of the Wild* they offered no explanation of how Zelda has just remained seventeen years old all this time. Like, come on. How did Zelda just turn into a disembodied voice for one hundred years and then reform her body at the end? Oh, well, it's not like Nintendo has internal consistency. At least I provide an actual reason for why her appearance hasn't changed, at least until she unfortunately gets mangled in the Great Palace, and tie it directly to how in the world the Sacred Realm works.

But now not the time for this. Now's the time for facing forward, to the Triforce.

The final line of this chapter is my favourite quote from *Breath of the Wild*. It was reading those words that made me realise I needed to write *Delicious in Wilds*.

Up next: what lies beyond the veil. And, if you're so inclined to know, you should be aware that the chapter recipe is *dubious food*.


Beta reader's comments: I was so incredibly nervous going into this chapter. Have you ever gotten to a point in a story where everything changes, and you're terrified of the future? That was how I felt going into this. I was so scared for Zelda. When I saw that she was okay, I let out what must have been a dozen sighs of relief.

I know I gush about how these chapters end all the time, but this is yet another truly incredible ending.

Emma. 18 November 2017.
Dubious Food

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef wishes.

Chapter Notes

Author's notes that would not fit in the end: I technically started writing this chapter at 08:46 on the twenty-second of August, but I didn't seriously begin to write until 23:59 on the twentieth-second of August, and finished writing it at 05:06 on the twenty-third of August. That's right! I literally wrote this chapter by staying up all night because I was running out of time, since I wanted desperately to finish writing Delicious in Wilds prior to my medical school exams. Wew me!

I recommend all of you listen to the music that plays against the fight with Link's shadow in The Adventure of Link, but that's just me!

Thanks a million for being such thoughtful, considerate, and devoted readers. And thanks a million to my beta reader, Emma, for everything that she's done for me, both as a beta reader, and as a wonderful friend.

I didn't just write this to be nostalgia bait for myself. I heavily disliked The Adventure of Link as a kid, and it's only going back to it now that I've realised my feelings on it, in part because I was determined to pull from it for Delicious in Wilds. But I only decided to return to The Adventure of Link in the first place because I felt like the ending fit the story I was meaning to tell with Delicious in Wilds, and for no other reason.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She walks forward through the barrier to the chamber beyond, the tessellated triangles of gold all around her. She does not walk alone: she walks with the wind of her friends behind her. She walks with the hope of Hyrule no longer a loftwing around her neck, but a loftwing beneath her, carrying her forward. She has walked into the mists of the lost woods, and she has walked into the aether of the Sacred Realm, and now she walks from the golden temple to splish her boots into a pool of water.

The golden corridor has opened into a chamber stretching out to the distant horizons. Not a chamber: the open sky above shines golden. The endless water below quietly gleams, not golden, but blue, as if reflecting a different sky than the one spanning endlessly past the edges of her vision. In the far distance, the sky and the sea blur together into a thin golden-blue line extending into the blind eternities.

Nothing but endless blue water, about up to her ankle. Nothing but endless golden sky, far, far above her.

The world is very, very vast. Yet she has never felt vaster herself.
She does not turn around. She does not look back. She gazes straight ahead of her, to the future of this world, to the future of Hyrule, to the future of herself.

In the heart of the world of blue and gold shimmers a single white-moon of an isle rising from the sea, crested by a tree spreading her boughs over the water. Link knows that isle, knows that tree, knows those boughs with a nostalgic familiarity that she could not put to word. All of the winds of the wilds that have ever caressed her hair, all of the trees in whose boughs she ever slept, all of the stones on which she has rested, her head tilted back, her eyes closed, her body relaxed into the wilds that call her name.

Yet she does not approach the isle for the wilds alone, but for the people who make something out of them. All of the wilds combined cannot sit at a campfire and share stew from a communal cooking pot.

She approaches the isle. She approaches the tree. She approaches the heart of the world. Her boots almost touch the sandy stone of the isle. She lifts up her hand to the tree.

And then, just as she would step foot on the isle, just as her palm would rest against the tree which calls not only her name but the name of everyone who has ever lived and will ever live in Hyrule, the golden skies above give way to a violent violet, and she can see what the waters were reflecting after all.

Her reflection shifts beneath her. She glances down at her own shadow stretching from her boots to the isle, at the reflection dark in the water, at the violent violet the same colour of the Calamitous One, the same shade as the sash that Marin once wore around her shoulder. Almost the same hue as the hope of Hyrule.

She watches her shadowed reflection reach for something at their left hip. She watches her shadowed reflection bring their ocarina to their lips. She watches her shadowed reflection play a song upon the ocarina that does not sound like an ocarina, but like some instrument she has never before heard, its voice of static and grinding and the sound of the guardians' fire-light.

Then her shadowed reflection emerges from the water. Link does not step back. Her reflection rises from the seas to the skies, standing at her own height, facing her with her own features, gazing at her with her own eyes, confronting her with that blank expression of longing for something that people take as her wishing for rewards when she wants nothing more than to share with them a meal.

Link removes the cooking pot affixed to her back. She sets it down between herself and the reflection. Fi vibrates upon her back, but Link merely signs at herself with her own hands.

"Hi, me. I know you're probably upset at me, and for real good reasons. I haven't really been the best hero I could've been. Not much of a hero at all."

She hesitates. "I don't know what made me lose my memories. I don't know if maybe I lost them myself. I know if that I'd just been a little more...you know...I could've gone quicker through the Divine Beasts, and I could've gone quicker to get Fi here, and maybe I could've prevented a lot of people getting hurt, and a lot of people having to give up their homes, and a lot of people...passing away."

She dips her head. She signs a prayer for the departed. She speaks on: “And, you know, I could've done this one hundred years ago, if we'd known what the Sacred Realm was like. We could've done this.” Link smiles at herself, at her own reflection looking back at her, their arms to their sides. If she glances down at the water, she can see neither shadow or reflection, because the flesh and body
that she witnesses before her is her own reflection.

"But, despite everything, I think that we've done pretty well for a girl who really just likes to cook and to eat. We've helped calm all of the Divine Beasts, meeting people over the rim of our cooking pot. We've wandered all over Hyrule and activated all the shrines, helping Kass get back home. I wish we could've seen the moment that Amali and Kass saw each other again. I wish we could've seen the moment that Kass's daughters saw their father again!

"And we've helped Dorian, and maybe we managed to help Glepp, too, and we've done a lot of little things for lots and lots and lots of people, and we've seen so much, and we've met so many, and we've made all of these recipes, and we've eaten more meals than I ever thought that we could, and we even figured out how to cook bugs and how to cook monsters and how to cook guardians and we haven't figured out how to eat rock roast yet but you can bet that by the time we're done we'll figure out something for that too and maybe I could sneak that in when I go make my wish for the peace of Hyrule, and everyone's said that we united Hyrule just with our cooking pot. That's a lot for a girl who just loves to cook waaaaaaay too much, like would say.

"You know what I mean? And, you know, for everyone that I've met sharing food in my cooking pot...there's just one person I still haven't connected with. Not all the way. Isn't that right, Link?"

Link glances up at her own shadowed reflection, who looks vacantly at her.

"If you want, I can cook you something, here and now, and then we can touch the thing that I don't have a sign for together. The Golden Force and all that. You're...the part of me that hates me or something like that, right? I've never seen you, but I've known you enough, every day of my life. Well, you're not just a part of me I could throw out, huh? You're all of me. You know what I do with myself all the time? Eat. So why don't we just...enjoy a meal together?"

Her reflection's features seem empty of expression. She cannot read her own face. An alien looking back at her. The same emptiness that she has seen over and over again in the mirror.

For all of the funny faces that she can make at herself in the lake of the Great Plateau or the blade of the Master Sword, she has never been able to force a smile.

"We don't have to do this. Come on." Link gestures to the cooking pot between them. "You know that you want to eat, don't you? You've never been able to resist a meal. If something's keeping you from eating, that must be pretty serious. I'll make you whatever you want. I wish I could bake you some apples. I know that's your favourite because it's my favourite. Even when I hate myself, there's nothing more Hyrule than a baked apple, you know?" The shadowed reflection returns a blank expression. "What do you say, other me? Let's get cooking."

The shadowed reflection lowers themself towards the waves and crouches in front of the cooking pot. Link feels her shoulders relax. Even here, at the end of the everything, she can simply cook.

She kneels down by the cooking pot across from her shadowed reflection. Reaching for her satchel, Link browses through her ingredients. She could simply prepare more egg pudding, except she no longer has honey, and she no longer has eggs, and she no longer has sugar. She could simply simmer together zapshroom, and hydromelon, and make herself a fruit and mushroom skewer like the one that she ate on the Great Plateau over two years ago. She could simply throw what she has into her cooking pot and see what that will give her. She could simply cook what she has and worry later. Just one stew of everything she's got.

She could, as the girl with the golden hair asked her to do for research, try to eat a hot-footed frog, or a tireless frog, or both at the same time.
Link scoops the violent violet waters of the sea into her cooking pot. She dips a finger in to taste. Like fresh, clean, pure water. Almost too pure. No taste at all. She prefers the water of the rivers of the wilds, with its harder blend of mineral and salt, with its occasional metallic tang of fish, with all of its mud and silt. But this will have to do do.

She has nothing more to burn, but she has the remainder of her ruby arrows. Link hopes that that will suffice. Placing her quiver down between herself and her shadowed reflection, she removes the ruby-tipped shafts.

With a flip of her knife, Link chops up the prickly pears of voltfruit; and the squishy inner gills of zapshroom once she has carefully covered the more-shocking caps; and two different strains of safflina Riju has left for her, half reddish and half yellowed, and both just as delicious as the other once steamed and softened and cooked to perfection. She scoops out the sweet succulent saccharine syrup sugaring the insides of the hydromelon that Riju has sliced up and wrapped individually for her, setting aside the hydromelon rinds to flavour the water.

To heat the cooking pot, Link breaks the ruby arrowheads against the bottom of the pot one by one. She puts down the silver box of elixirs; the rim just barely rises above the waters of the sea. Then she peers at her own quiver.

Snagging the rest of her arrows one at a time, Link breaks each shaft over her knee: the topaz, and the sapphire, and the wooden she has carved from trees herself, and the arrows she has filched from monsters. From beings of will. She piles together the wooden shafts, discarding the useless arrowheads, and sets them ablaze.

Link simmers the fruit and the herbs and the mushrooms over her cooking pot, and she regards the girl with the golden hair whose name she still cannot remember, and she regards the frogs that the girl with the golden hair requested she try eating, and she regards herself crouching in the water across the rim of her cooking pot.

"When we go back to our world...when we go back topside, like how she said...we should do that experiment for her. Just try eating a frog." Link laughs a light little laugh to her own reflection. "What do you say?"

She cracks the rest of the ruby arrowheads except for one—a single arrow left in her quiver—against the cooking pot. Her shadowed reflection neither moves nor shifts expression. Empty. Longing. Hungering.

"I'll take that as a yes. We'll both wish on that Golden Force thing, and we'll ask for a future for Hyrule, and we'll make sure that something like the Great Calamity won't ever happen again. That's what I mean when I say that we'll ask for Hyrule's future. Hyrule's peace. Because after we wish...I mean, plenty of bad things can still happen in Hyrule. People are people, you know? But no matter what happens, it'll be in our hands, now." Her shadowed reflection's expression remains blank.

The stew simmers down. She can smell the finished soup from the vapours creeping up through the cracks in the wooden pot lid, battered and bruised from the greater-than-two-years that she has carried the lid everywhere in Hyrule, from the Great Plateau to Necluda, from Necluda to Eldin, from Eldin to Tabantha, from Tabantha to Faron, from Faron to Parapa, from Parapa to Lanayru, from Lanayru to Akkala, from Akkala to Hebra, from Hebra to Central Hyrule, from Central Hyrule back to the Great Plateau, from the Great Plateau to the Sacred Realm.

She pats the wooden pot lid. "Thank you for everything, my friend. Our journey's almost over. I already know where Fi will sleep, and I already know that me and Ilia'll have a stall of hay waiting
for us at Romani Ranch." Link rubs the back of her head. "Though I guess Malon'll insist I sleep in an actual bed. I'd rather be out in the hay, I think." She looks up at her shadowed reflection. "Wouldn't you agree, Link?" Her shadowed reflection's features stay empty.

Link lifts the wooden pot lid. She looks down at the inside of her cooking pot. Blinking, she finds herself staring not at the tasty soup of leftovers that she thought herself stewing, but instead some green and violet mass of *something*, as though the Calamitous One had retched into her cooking pot. From within the cooking pot emerges a burble of a croak, like she had let slip a hot-footed frog into her cooking pot without noticing. She glances up at her shadowed reflection, who looks vacuouly upon her.

"I'm sorry. This isn't something delicious. It's downright dubious." She shakes her head. "I'll try to make something else for you. I—"

Her shadowed reflection's expression does not change, yet she *senses* something off. They lift their ocarina again to their lips. Her shadowed reflection plays a song; in the melody, Link listens to the truth: "You can't cook without me. I am you. Without me, you're nothing. Not even the girl who loves to cook."

Her shadowed reflection vacantly regards the cooking pot containing all that is dubious in the wilds. They let the ocarina fall into the water below. They close their fingers around the sword as their back. They raise their blade: a mirrored image of Fi. Just the same as Link. Just the same. Her own reflection. Her own self, gazing blankly at her. Her shadowed reflection brings the sword down upon the cooking pot Link has carried with her for two very, very long years. The blade glows fire-light blue, then sings to the violet of a skyward strike.

Link watches her mirrored reflection cleave her beloved cooking pot in two.

Link watches her mirrored reflection course all of the energies of the Sacred Realm that Fi herself has spent one hundred years gathering into her beloved cooking pot.

Like the mirror in the sanctum the girl with the golden hair could break but not shatter, the cooking pot has broken time and time again, and always the cooking has mended, has repaired, has healed. And now Link watches her mirrored reflection shatter the cooking pot into a thousand tiny fragments that resonate with the song her reflection played upon the ocarina before her beloved cooking pot dissipates into flecks of golden dust.

For the third time in her life she senses something rise within her, bubble up bitter as wormwood and sharp as the blade upon her back.

**Anger.**

That, here, the very centre of the Sacred Realm, with the Triforce waiting just beyond the veil, with the hope of Hyrule almost in her own hand, with the sacrifices and pain that everyone she knows has suffered through to carry her to the heart of the world, her own self-loathing could do her in.

But her own self-loathing has miscalculated, because she has never been good at maths. Because she loves the wilds and the people who make something of them more than she hates herself.

Her fingers close around the hilt of the sword that seals the darkness. The blade of evil's bane. The Master Sword. Fi.

The wings have retracted. The gold of the jewel has dimmed. The fire-light glow has given way to softened white, and Fi herself has given way to nothing but a simple blade. Link grips that sword
with everything that she has.

Her reflection rolls forward towards her. She leaps to the side in anticipation of her own upwards thrust. She circles her reflection, half-walking and half-jumping to the right, as her reflection circles around her. She knows herself too well: when her reflection lunges she crouches for a stab, yet her reflection predicts her motions and swings in from the side, yet she predicts her own motions and somersaults back, yet her reflection predicts her motions in response and rolls forward, yet she predicts her own motions in response and jabs down before she has even landed back on her feet, yet her reflection predicts her motions in response to the response and angles themself to the left, yet she predicts her own motions in response to the response and moves her sword in a diagonal arc that cracks against the ground beneath the sea.

Her reflection rises up from the water again. She regards her reflection; her reflection regards her.

Her reflection charges. For once, she does not flip away; instead she uses the charge to thrust her own blade outwards. She catches her reflection's sword on the edge of her own. Planting her feet against the ground, she pushes back on her reflection's blade. She can feel the resistance tremble up her arm, can feel her reflection pushing back with just as much force, can feel them evenly matched in muscle and might. She attempts twisting her wrist and flipping the sword out of her reflection's hand, yet they seem to anticipate her motions—of course—and wrench their own wrist. Grunting, she lessens the pressure for a second. Her shadowed reflection continues pushes; she lets herself walk back a step. As she expected, her reflection's stumble forward, and she swings her left leg outwards to swipe their limbs out from under them.

In that moment, she predicts their own response: her shadowed reflection uses their forward momentum to drive the sword towards her. In that moment, she realises that knocking their legs out will not come soon enough. In that moment—in that moment—in that moment, she tries moving backwards, yet the inertia of her leg swipe keeps her mostly in place until she feels her leg connect to theirs and the tip of her reflection's blade enter just below her ribs. The sword sinks in downwards on the right side of her torso, carving a thin line into through her abdomen and piercing through the other side.

Her leg finishes its outwards arc. She looks up at her own reflection. They begin turning their wrist as they fall onto their side in the water. She lets herself plummet in the same direction, keeping the angle of the sword parallel in her abdomen.

Fi falls from her grip and submerges beneath the waves. As her hip hits the ground, water splashing up in her face, she fights through the pain that fogs her vision to clench her hands around the hilt of the blade stuck through her body.

She digs her nails into her reflection's hands. She senses herself tearing through her reflection's flesh because she can feel the same pain on the backs of her own hands. She senses the dampness that warms her hands, that dribbles down the curves of her skin, that trickles away and plinks into the waters below. She pushes her reflection back. Her reflection pushes the sword in.

She cannot rely on Fi in the fight against herself. She predicts herself too well. She knows herself too well with the blade that has always protected her.

But she has, too, her own hands. Rearing back her free right arm, she balls her fingers into a fist. She throws a punch at her reflection's face. When the knuckles connect with their nose, she feels the impact of her own bones against those of her face, feels her nose break yet again from the force, feels the agony of her head thrown back so far she wonders if she has not broken her own neck. The punch knocks her reflection back. She grabs the hilt of the sword skewering her abdomen.
If she removes the blade, she could bleed out, but if she leaves it in, her reflection could use it against her. If she bleeds out, then her reflection will too. A battle of wills. One she will not lose.

She touches her hand to the hilt of the sword and both she and her reflection seize up at once. Her reflection rushes her; she closes her eyes—she has not time to prepare herself as she did removing the spear the bokoblins jammed through her torso in the castle—and drags the blade out of her body, the friction of the metal against her internal organs spasming her limbs and curling her inwards on herself, the blood that sprays out of her abdomen clouding the waters, her upper teeth biting through her scarred lower lip, heat trickling down her chin. The red-dark blade reflects the violent violet of the sky, the violent violet scars whorling over Link's own form.

Her reflection's knees buckle beneath them. She throws the sword as far away from both of them as she can. Her reflection lifts their head towards the blade. When she sees her reflection make a break for the sword, she throws herself at them. Her hands drag down her reflection's shoulders; her knees slams into the small of their back. She senses the pain pulsating in her legs, and then her left hip, and then her chin and the insides of her cheeks bitten down by her own teeth as her reflection plunges into the water. Her reflection rolls over and struggles to knock her off. She lets her reflection onto their back before she digs her knees into their hips and her elbows into their arms.

Wielding the agony she feels reflected onto her own form, she locates the sensitive veins on her upper arms. There, over the tender patches about halfway down from her shoulders, she jabs in her elbows, hard. The pain shooting up and down her arms forces her reflection into stillness, keeps them from writhing.

She wraps her hands around her reflection's throat. Her nails sink into the soft flesh on either side of her reflection's jaw. She chokes herself.

Like the lynel, like the Malice, like her own parents, she chokes herself, and she presses in, and she chokes herself, and she cannot breathe, and she chokes herself, and she occupies her own hands in choking herself so that she cannot speak, or cook, or do anything but enact the violence behind her own stinging eyes.

She chokes herself, and she senses her reflection starting to go limp beneath her weight. Darkness pools at the corners of her vision. The wound in her abdomen drains out blood until she can smell nothing but copper; the split of her lower lip trickles blood down her chin like the juices of an apple just ripe enough until she has nothing but the taste of iron on her tongue. The sky above blurs in violent violet.

And then Link lets go.

She will not fight herself out of anger. She will not fight herself out of rage. She will not fight herself out of hate.

Link will fight herself for the peace of Hyrule, as she has fought herself every step of the way, as she has fought herself to take charge of her own past, as she has fought herself to accept her own title, as she has fought herself to accept herself.

And now Link accepts this side of her, too. The side of her that hates her. The side of her that cannot deal with people. The side of her that does not know so much about the world. The side of her that does not always have the words she needs to say. The side of her that would throw herself into danger despite her responsibilities for want of a meal. The side of her that would close her eyes and let herself die. The side of her that nearly did, one hundred years ago. The side of her that nearly did, a few months ago. The side of her that is also her. The side of her. Her.
Her reflection sinks down into the waves, her fingers loosening to into the sea, and becomes her own shadow again. Link collapses into the water. The waves ebb over her face. The wind ruffles her hair. The scent of the wilds settles in her bones.

A sound rumbles up from her stomach. It erupts from her throat as a laugh. She lies face-down on the water, body aching, muscles hurting, regarding her own dubious food smelling of frogs, and she cannot stop laughing. Her shoulders shake. Each time the mirth subsides, she doubles up again in laughter. The edges of her mouth curve upwards in a grin that crinkles the corners of her eyes. While she laughs, a ticklish wave of water breaks on underside of her nose; she sneezes with such force that she laughs all the harder.

Link lives. She breathes. Her heart beats. Her body moves. She is alive. No matter what else, these remain true. And one day, when she no longer lives, the breath of the wild shall whisper over the world, and the world will live on. As long as the sun, the moon, and the earth exist, everything will be all right.

By the time her head has ceased spinning and the laughter has left her with a goofy smile, Link notices the sky that has given way, again, to gold, the waters that have given way, again, to blue.

She crawls through the water to Fi into her arms. Fi, who has long exhausted her power. Fi, who has kept her safe all this time. "I don't know," she signs, Fi lain across her lap, "if you can hear me like this, but I hope you can. Thank you. Thank you, Fi. I love you. I love you." Link cradles Fi as she rocks back and forth, kneeling in the water before the isle with its tree. And there, from the skies above, and the seas below, and the infinite horizons that call her name, come the lights. Golden lights.

She observes them rotate as they glide inwards towards the isle and the tree that bears upon its boughs all of the wilds at once. She watches them spin through the aether in spheres of gold, like the depictions of the Golden Goddesses Themselves, comets across the golden sky.

Far, far larger than she anticipated. Each one about her own height. When they approach her from the skies and from the seas and from the distant horizons, they rotate more slowly, until their shapes coalesce into—

—golden triangles. Golden triangles which meet before the tree. Golden triangles which touch touch at the corners in perfect unity, in harmony, in resonance.

The hum. The hum that sounds like the girl with the golden hair's own lullaby. The hum that she has heard so many times in her own dreams.

The Triforce.

Link does not dare breathe. Passing Fi into her right hand, she grips Fi firm, never letting go of her hilt, keeping Fi with her until the end. She lifts up her shivering left hand. Her lightning-strike left hand. Farore's blessing. Courage.

"Hello," she says to the Triforce. "My name is Link. I don't think that we've met before, but I know the song you're singing." She wets the mouthpiece of the ocarina, then plays the lullaby of the girl with the golden hair. Her wounds ache. The blood warms her bod while it trickles down her torso and limbs to pool crimson in the water, like a shadow of scarlet beneath her. "I don't know how much you know about me, or about my friends. There are so many people I could tell you about. But I don't think that we have time." Her heart, she can feel, has started to slow, squeezing down in her sternum.
So, together, let's wish for Hyrule's peace. Together...let's wish for Hyrule's future. Together...let's go home, Triforce.” Link signs the word to herself, touching her hand to her cheek, to her eye, to the centre of her chest, a path she has shaped over and over in her life. And then she draws on her chest a triangle. Triforce. From the word home. She raises her hand. She extends her arm. She feels the resonance against her palm. Home.

And then the Calamitous One forms around her hand. The Calamitous One separates her and the Triforce by a veil of malice. The Calamitous One in all of its maelstrom malice spreads over the entire sky and the entire sea to split the world in two, like the golden barrier that split her and the girl with the golden hair into a being of blood and a being of will.

She has never before seen the boar-like head of the maliced monster congealing from the aether around her. Yet she recognises the violent violet all the same: she stands at the very heart of the Calamitous One, once a man who touched the Triforce, once a man who wished for the peace of Hyrule, once a man who bore deep in his heart a different wish he could not bring himself to face. She does not know that much about this world. She does not even know how much she does not know. But she knows herself. She can discover. She can learn. And even if crowds terrify her into curling up on the ground, she would never, ever trade away the people whom she could cook for, the people who could gift her their stories and their smiles and their bellies, the people who can sit at a campfire and share stew from a communal cooking pot.

She knows her own flaws. She knows that she hates herself. Yet she knows, too, her own courage.

Link reaches with her lightning-strike hand into the whirling vortex of the Malice. The Calamitous One gnashes its sable jaws around the flesh of her arm. Nonetheless she reaches with her lightning-strike hand. The tip of her fingers passes into the veil of the Calamitous One, and then her first knuckle, and her second, and her third, and the whole of her hand, and her wrist, and her forearm with the red marks of the lizalfos bite she has borne for over two years, and her elbow, and her upper arm, and her entire limb just up to her shoulder.

She feels the malice eating away at her skin, eating away at the rawness of the layer beneath, eating away at her muscle, eating away at her tendons, eating away her ligaments, eating away at her veins, eating away at her bones, eating away at her marrow, eating away at her spirit, eating away at her will to live.

Pain whites her vision. She deafens herself with her screams. She cannot sense her legs or her torso or her heart. Her entire world has narrowed down to the skeletal remains of her arm as agony deadens the rest of her body, rendered a trembling mass of flesh.

Yet despite the pain, and despite the agony, and despite the fear that hums through every fibre of her form, Link gathers the courage in the pit of her belly, and she will live not for herself but for all of the people who have ever shared a meal with her, and she reaches with her lightning-strike hand.

She breaches the veil.

The tip of her forefinger, marrowed down to a sharpened point of white bone, a thin needle on the verge of fading into the malice and hatred incarnate, touches the Triforce, and she wishes.

She wishes.

She wishes for the beings of blood and the beings of will to recognise one another as they already have, for the beings of will to share the realm that she calls home.

She wishes not for the Sacred Realm to seal itself again away. The veil of the Sacred Realm, no
matter how well sealed, could always tear once more, could always rip, could always thin. Even if the mirrors shatter. Even if the royal family forbids the knowledge from being taught. Somewhere, someone could learn that magic again, could breach the veil again, could wish upon the Triforce again.

She wishes for peace and a future for Hyrule, for the wilds and the people who make something of them: Ilia, Yunobo, Amali, Riju, Sidon, Lami, Maggi, Hestu, Impa, Paya, Lasli, Claree, Dorian, Cottla, Koko, Calip, Kyrtta, Doreli, Balin, Symin, Purah, Kass, Gaile, Rogor, Ozunda, Elisa, Blaryd, Jibo, Kragg, Tumot, Frillo, Donte, Fernok, Misan, Glepp, Voji, Barguron, Amali, Kotts, Notts, Genli, Kheel, Genli, Teba, Harth, Saki, Tulin, Kaneli, Maron, Maryll, Malon, Vish, Cremia, Romani, Miyu, Eltah, Nissa, Rotana, Rhiaru, Dyeri, Nadyne, Vaike, Luavan, Pleiade, Dilani, Ahni, Buliara, Sarie, Igli, Frash, Muzu, Lanzu, Oshen, Laflat, Shalot, Rutala, Finley, Sasan, Ravio, Hilda, Zeffa, Luda, the other Ilia, and all of the travellers and all of the strangers that she has met and all of the people of Hyrule that she could meet yet, and the girl with the golden hair.

She wishes.

She wishes for the Great Calamity to vanish to golden dust.

She wishes for the Sacred Realm to vanish to golden dust.

She wishes for the Triforce to vanish to golden dust.

She wishes.

She wishes for Hyrule to live by her people's own hands.

And she hears, just faintly, in a voice choked with ten thousand years of dust, in a language she should not know:

"Thanks a million."
Dubious Food (one and a half hearts) - hot-footed frog, hydromelon, warm safflina, voltfruit, zapshroom

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: In The Adventure of Link, the final trial Link must face before obtaining the Triforce of Courage is Link's shadow (also known as "Shadow Link" or "Dark Link", but I prefer the original term "Link's shadow"). Perhaps it's a bit cliché
for the final trial to be facing oneself and one's own issues, to be battling one's demons, but as a child it left a profound impact on me, particularly with how unexpected it was. Besides, I've spent much of Delicious in Wilds showing Link battling her own issues. What better way to go about it than to have that battle be personified?

For the aesthetics of the scene, I chose to utilise Ocarina of Time's version of the isle on the water, because I've used themes of one's reflection and Link looking in the water before. However, I admit that I was more inspired by a moment in a completely different franchise: the encounter with Rom the Vacuous in Bloodborne, wherein the veil between the planes are broken for the player, and which similarly features the use of water as a bulwark between a 'mortal realm' and a realm beyond. Given the technical limitations of the Famicom/NES, it's understandable that the final fight against Link's shadow did not feature something of that sort. But, for me as a child who had only ever known graphics on par with the NES and later SNES, it was breathtaking, particularly the music.

When I mention that Link "knows that isle", I'm not talking about some reincarnation thing; I'm referring to the fact that it reminds her of the wilds.

The spinning golden lights, as I mentioned, come from the title screen animation of A Link to the Past, which depicts the Triforce coming together, the individual pieces of the Triforce spinning as they fall into place.

The list of names at the end is just the names that I could remember off the top of my head and is not an accounting of every character I've ever mentioned in Delicious in Wilds.

If you haven't figured it out yet, Delicious in Wilds was very much, in part, about Link (and Zelda) coming to terms with her self-hatred. The reason that I used the Sacred Realm I did was because Zelda would have had to choose every single second to remain alive on virtue of her own willpower. Just as Link told Zelda about the quote from the play about the Parapan king, living takes courage. Obviously the Sacred Realm isn't a perfect metaphor for struggling with suicide, but it's apt enough. Before the Great Calamity, Link was on the verge of just letting herself die, and Link has been on the same verge a few times throughout Delicious in Wilds, most notably when Fi finally chose her to bear the Master Sword again. And here, while Link isn't magically going to recover in a single day, I've taken how much she has gotten better over the past more-than-two-years (it's been about twenty-eight and a half months I think). It's been a journey for her, a journey of character development, a journey of really struggling, but she's come so far.

And, I'll be honest: I'm glad that I could finally cash in the symbolism of Link having the lightning-strike Farore's-courage scars on her left hand.

As for Link's wish, I'll let it speak for itself. But that's been another theme throughout Delicious in Wilds. And it's something I've brought up time and again. Even go back at previous chapters and look at Link's words to Fi in the eightieth chapter regarding her last meal.

At the ending of The Adventure of Link, the player is left with the message: THANKS A MILLION. I enjoy it when developers thank players for play, and I likewise enjoy thanking readers for reading. In Delicious in Wilds, in case it wasn't obvious, the
"thanks a million" Link hears is from Ganondorf, Link having freed him from ten thousand years of rampaging without the ability to control himself, destroying the very land he had sought to help. After all, once upon a time, he, like Link, wished upon the Triforce. And the "thanks a million", as I have said and said again in my author's notes, is also to you, the reader, without whom Delicious in Wilds would not be alive.

Up next: the aftermath; a favourite food; saying her name.

midna's ass. 18 November 2017.

Beta reader's comments: This is the climax of the story, and it is everything I could have ever dreamed that it would be. Having the "final boss" of the series be a reflection of Link herself. Making a very big concept into a very personal story. It's absolutely incredible.

I don't think I can really put into words just how much I adore this chapter as the resolution of the series' central conflict, so I'll just leave you with that.

Thanks a million.

**Fruitcake**

Chapter Summary

The travelling chef has fought against the chef's own shadow and wished on the Triforce, to entirely do away with the Sacred Realm and Triforce. Now, as the Sacred Realm collapses around the chef and the people of Hyrule, the chef remembers a name.

Chapter Notes

Author's notes that wouldn't fit in the end, for the final time: I started writing this chapter at 05:59 on the twenty-third of August, and finished writing it at 14:03 on the twenty-third of August.

I cannot express in words how much you all have meant to me. My dearest, most sincerest and heartfelt thanks, my deepest gratitude, my most genuine well wishes to each and every one of you. We've ridden out the entirety of this journey, and I couldn't have done it without you. So thank you for opening your heart to Link's story. Thank you for reading. I hope that you have enjoyed *Delicious in Wilds* as much as I enjoyed my romp around Hyrule. It's been an honour. And, tomorrow, *Delicious in Wilds* will be over. And thank you to my beta reader, Emma, who has been with me all this way, since I first decided that I was going to write *Delicious in Wilds* back in April, all those months ago. It's been a ride in the best way possible.

With respect to Link's wish, I think, ultimately, that decoupling the mortal world from the Sacred Realm is for the best. It's sad to see the magic go, sure. And there are still going to be plenty of problems, just as there are in the real world, and *very real problems*. Yet now the land will be made of the people, rather than from the whims of power beyond mortal reckoning. To me, personally, the most driven stories are those that come from the people and not from the deities. Perhaps that's why both *Ocarina of Time* and *Skyward Sword* failed to have an impact on me in the ways they were intended to, because fate and destiny do not a compelling story make in my eyes, and why *The Legend of Zelda* has stuck with me all this time, with its hero who saved Hyrule because Link was the one with the courage and skill to do it. Link could have died. Link could have failed. But Link succeeded, by Link's own hands. And that's meaningful.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She falls through the darkness.

She falls through the darkness until she opens her eyes. Only then does Link realise that the ground itself has given way beneath her. The keep overhead has opened up into a spiral. The gold has started to crumble away.
She falls through the air and through the dissipating aether. She can see, beneath her, the whole of the Sacred Realm aglow, as the entire world begins flaking away into golden dust that shimmers through the air like rice thrown at a wedding. She can see, beneath her, one hundred and twenty fire-light mirrors open at once, gateways to the mortal world, through which the beings of blood and the beings of will alike pass to the safety of the Realm of Blood from the unravelling Realm of Will. She can see, beneath her, the golden pyramid that has risen gleaming out of the malice. In her double vision, she makes out the tower of the castle which has started protruding from the crown of the pyramid where the pyramid melts away into the mist.

She falls, and she dares not close her eyes for these final moments. No matter what happens. The whole of the Sacred Realm resonates. A swan song. A final good-bye. Without further ado, but with further adieu.

She falls, and she has no paraglider, and she has no cucco, and she—

—hears the voice above her as someone brownish-green floats before her face. "Link! Grab on!"

Link lifts her right hand towards her mouth and clenches Fi's hilt between her teeth. She closes her hand around Sarie's tiny body. Her fingers brush over the roughened bark of their skin. The korok leaf whirls above them, yet their combined weight—just as in the Divine Beast Vah Ruta—proves too greater, and they float together through the air and through the aether, albeit now more slowly and wheeling in circles. Her right arm bends at a strange angle. Her eyes water. She feels her fingers slip.

She plummets downwards again. Throwing her head up, Link searches the skies, desperately, not for Sarie but for her companion who has passed through the entirety of the keep-temple-palace with her, her companion willing to sacrifice herself so that Link could pass through the guardian of the Triforce, her companion who has spent the last hundred years in pain, every single moment of every single day clinging on to that thin thread of hope that Link would awaken, that Link would meet Fi, that Link would come to seal the Calamitous One.

She finds the girl with the golden hair plunging just as swiftly through the air, through the aether, her eyes closed, her head lolled back, the undershirt billowing up over her bruised and battered body.

Link throws out her right arm. As they fall towards the tower, she reaches out towards the girl with the golden hair, the fingers of her right hand straining so far her knuckles ache, just barely managing to brush against the girl with the golden hair’s violet-whorled heel.

Pinpricks of pain at her collarbones and at the crest of her shoulder blades. Without her undershirt, she senses the sharpness of the talons all the more. And above her head: the sound of wing beats.

Her limbs' momentum at the sudden stop of her fall swings her legs out. A blue-green feather lands on her nose. She does not need to look up to know who has caught her, but she does so anyway, just to see Amali's smiling beak.

Link smiles back at her; she notices the wetness of the feathers beneath Amali’s eyes. Though she can scarcely move her right arm with how Amali has clench her shoulders, she signs anyway, one handed, in Central Hyrulean, for she does not know how to sign one-handed in Tabanch: "I'm sorry, but I guess you'll have to get another tunic after all. I'll make you something in exchange, though. I'll make you a meal."

The tears darken Amali's cheeks even further, and Link looks out beyond her, to the golden skies above. She observes, above her, in her double vision, the stars of the Sacred Realm quietly wink.
And she hears, on her left side, another beat of wings that she knows all too well. Kass. Kass, who carries the girl with the golden hair in his talons. Kass, who grins at Link, his full feathery crest regrown and proudly puffed over his head. Kass, whose own cheeks have darkened and dampened in his own weeping, who raises his voice above the hum of the Sacred Realm.

"So we meet again, traveller. I'm pleased to see you well," he sings; then he drops the even tone to a timbre trembling with tears. "I don't know what you did, but the Calamitous One is gone now, and everyone's going back to our world. Thank you, Link. Thank you."

Sarie catches up to Link, hovering beneath their korok leaf. "Everyone's waiting for you! For both of you! For you and—" Sarie turns their body towards the girl with the golden hair. "—your old friend?" Link dips her head.

Amali and Kass glide downwards, together, towards the castle visible in Link's double vision, the worlds yet merged while the Sacred Realm fades into oblivion. They sail inwards through an opening—in the back of the castle and in the back of the pyramid both—leading towards the shrine in the heart of Hyrule, in the heart of the Sacred Realm. The shrine that now glows the blue of the sky of the mortal world. The shrine that has saved Link twice over and now will save her again: everything comes in threes.

In front of the shrine await Yunobo, and Riju, and Sidon, all of them in various states of shock and awe and happiness. Yunobo calls when he sees her, and Riju yells, and it takes Sidon a moment to realise what has happened and then he, too, waves in the wrong direction. Tears well up behind Link's eyes. She feels her boots touch the ground in front of the shrine.

"Our Link!" booms Sidon, his voice rumbling the rafters of the castle, rumbling the remaining gold of the pyramid. "None of us ever for a second lost faith in you."

"W-we've already gotten everyone else out of the Sacred Realm," Yunobo cuts in, "and we wanted to see you off ourselves. Huh? Link, y-your arm..."

Amali releases Link; Kass gently sweeps his wings over the unconscious girl with the golden hair. Sinking to her knees, Link curls her right arm around the girl with the golden hair's shoulders, struggling to hold her up. Overhead, Amali is signing, inquiring of what in the world has happened to Link, of the blood everywhere, of her oozing shoulder, of the girl with the golden hair, of both of them needing medical attention immediately, of how proud Amali is of Link. Then Kass touches Amali's shoulder, and Amali drops her wings to her sides. Link hears Sidon asking what has happened, and she hears Yunobo explaining in a hushed whisper of their injuries and of the girl with the golden hair. Sidon embarks on introducing himself to the Princess until Yunobo elaborates of the girl with the golden hair's unconsciousness.

Link feels Amali and Yunobo and Sidon all trying to embrace her at once, or trying to tell her about the Calamitous One which vanished into golden dust, or trying to do anything that just makes it that much more difficult for Link to keep the girl with the golden hair's head up with her right arm alone.

Riju drops down and kneels beside Link. Steadying the girl with the golden hair in an upright positioning, Riju helps hold her. Link meets Riju's gaze, her brow knit together, her brown eyes warm as a stew that Link so desperately wants to stuff into her mouth this very second, her stomach rumbling, the last thing she ate half a cup of egg pudding. "Is this...your old friend?"

Link nods. She can feel the warmth trickling down her left side, can feel the pain stabbing through
her shoulder, can feel the numbness accompanying the blurring of her vision.

"Thank you," Riju murmurs to the girl with the golden hair. "The long war is over, thank the Goddesses. Link, Princess, are you ready to go home? Together. Let's all go home."

"Home," Yunobo repeats. "And then we can make all the meals you ever want, right?"

"We'll make the most delicious meals! Another feast, in honour of us having at last bested the most vile Calamitous One!"

"I only hope that my home is large enough to hold all the festivities," Amali signs.

Kass spreads his wing over her shoulder. "I'm sure it will be."

But Link is shaking the girl with the golden hair. She touches her ear to her companion's chest: her heart beats; her lungs draw breath. Link's own breaths grow shallow as she attempts and fails to rouse the girl with the golden hair.

Kass scoots in beside them, his accordion in his lap. "This may be a little loud, Link," he warns. Then he squeezes down on the bellows so suddenly that Link jumps and the girl with the golden hair's eyes snap open.

Link inhales. The girl with the golden hair's eyes dart all around at the Champions, Sarie, and Kass looking upon her. "Where...? Is the Calamity...?"

"The bwig bwad bwoar," Sarie announces, "is gone gone gone bye-bye-bye!"

The girl with the golden hair blinks while her eyes focus; Link watches her fix her gaze onto Link, a question half-formed in her irises.

Link allows Riju to take hold of her companion so that she can sign to the girl with the golden hair. "Not just the Calamitous One. I wished for the Sacred Realm and the Triforce—" She motions through the gesture she made for herself and prays that the girl with the golden hair understands. "—to disappear, too. I don't want anything like this to happen ever again. Hyrule's in our hands now. Now and forever."

The girl with the golden hair exhales. "Thank you. All of you. You must be the new Champions." She relaxes down into Riju's arms. "I don't... I don't have the words that I want to say right now, but thank you. I... I've kept my promises, and walked my paths, and now I can sleep." The girl with the golden hair begins to lower her eyelids, and Link makes a desperate strangled noise in her throat. "Link, I told you. I've died in the Sacred Realm. I can't... I can't go back. Don't put your friends in jeopardy. If the Sacred Realm is fading away, then you all need to go before you fade away with it. Please."

Link looks up at her friends the Champions, all of whom talk at once, pushing back against the girl with the golden hair's words. She raises her right hand. The crescent-moon hand. The hand that bled out from the force of her own nails in the lost woods.

"Please...go on ahead. I need to talk to her myself." Yunobo whispers to Sidon what Link says; he and everyone else speak over one another at the same time. Too many at once for her to comprehend what they say. She repeats herself. "Please. We don't have time. Please, please, I won't forgive myself if I end up getting all of you in trouble over me."

Riju interrupts: "And what about you? What if you get yourself in trouble?"
"I promise I'll leave before the Sacred Realm disappears completely. The shrine is right here. I promise." Link touches her right hand to her chest. "You can trust me."

Riju glances up at Amali, at Kass, at Yunobo, who continues explaining to Sidon the goings-on. The Champions argue with one another while Link turns her attention back to the girl with the golden hair. Her companion has closed her eyes and smoothed her own brow as though she has already passed away. If not for the movements of breath from her nose, Link might fear that she had.

Riju yells at everyone to stop. "Thank the Goddesses," she shouts, "the Great Calamity has finally met its end. Let us put our trust in Link one last time." She looks down at Link, who looks up at her. "But you have to promise us something."

Yunobo adds in: "That she'll make us a meal?"

Kass hums in amusement. "There would be no more fitting promise that she could make."

Riju nods decisively; Link senses her mouth break into a smile. "I promise. I'll come back, and I'll make all of you your favourites. I won't say good-bye. I'm saying see you later, because I will see all of you later. Kass, Sidon, Sarie, Riju, Amali, Yunobo...thank you, all of you." Her eyes crinkle. "I'll see you topside."

Her friends each give her a final hug—Sidon's so firm that Link for a second forgets how to breathe—and prepare themselves by the mirror of the shrine.

Riju presses something into her right hand. Link glances down to find herself looking at a slate. "I think it's yours, from what you told me," Riju explains. "We found it on the floor, here, thank the Goddesses. I mean the original one you had a hundred years ago." Link inclines her head. "Then, I'll see you on the other side, Link. You can't sleep here. You have a promise to keep."

With a note of pride heating her chest, Link watches her friends gather at the mirror together, as a group that trusts one another beyond measure, as a group of not merely people brought together by circumstance but people truly friends with each other. Together, Sarie, and Kass, and Yunobo, and Amali, and Riju, and Sidon step through the gateway. Link observes them vanish into fire-light.

As soon as her friends return to the mortal world, she hears the girl with the golden hair speak. "Link...just go." The girl with the golden hair lies upon the ground of the castle. "Please. I told you. I've died. Even if I go back to the mortal world, my body isn't whole anymore, and I'll just end up dying there again. If I have to pick, I think I'd rather go here. At least I don't think that I'll feel pain here. It'll just be like...going to sleep." She laughs drily. "I guess I shouldn't be trying to escape pain. But you're the one who said that a woman's duty isn't to suffer. Just go, Link. Save yourself." She closes her eyes again. "I can't go back."

Link gazes at the girl with the golden hair. The very aether around them has begun to flake to gold. She needs to say something.

She needs to say something. She has no cooking pot to fall on. She has only herself, and she has her hand, and she has her constant inability to say anything, ever. She needs to say something, and she remembers: the girl with the golden hair's voice. She remembers.

"Cowards die many times before their deaths."

"The valiant...never taste of death but once." The voice of a girl with golden hair sitting across from her, holding a skewer of fruit and mushroom over a campfire, studying a sheet of paper, hand
closed around the golden and violet charms at her throat, raising her head. Looking directly at her. Saying a word.

Saying her name.

"..."

Saying her name.

"...Link..."

Saying her name.

"Link."

Asking her that question. "Do you think...do think that that's true, Link?" Laughing lightly to herself. "Oh, never mind. I shouldn't be bothering you while you're training with the sword that seals the darkness." Curling up into herself. "After all, the blade of evil's bane did choose you."

Link raises her chin up. The girl with the golden hair. Again, curling up into herself. Again, pulling away from her. Again, trembling. She rests her right hand against the girl with the golden hair's cheek. Link brushes her thumb under the girl with the golden hair's eye. The pad of her finger comes away dry. The girl with the golden hair does not cry. Like she did at her mother's funeral, the girl with the golden hair remains as stone.

"There's not much time left, Link." The girl with the golden hair's breaths come ragged and rasped. "Please. You have to go through the mirror. I can't anymore. I can't."

Link presses gently in with her thumb. When the girl with the golden hair does not open her eyes, Link traces the characters into the scarred skin of her cheek.

"A long, long time ago," she signs silently into the girl with the golden hair's skin, "you asked me about a quote that you read from a book. It was a play, I think. You asked me once when I was awake, and then immediately you took it back, because I was practising with Fi and you didn't want to bother me, and I didn't know how to talk to you then. Then you asked me again, just before the Great Calamity. You thought I was asleep, and you didn't ask me again. We didn't have time. 'Cowards die many times before their deaths,' I think is how it went. The valiant never taste of death but once.' You asked me if I thought that that was true. I didn't say anything, because I didn't know how to answer. I didn't have the words. And I still don't have the words. But now, when I don't have the words, I've learned to try anyway, and sometimes I say things good. It's like trying out a new recipe for the first time."

She senses the girl with the golden hair shiver under her thumb. The Sacred Realm around them gilds her vision like honey spilled from the rim of a cooking pot.

"I don't think it's true. I don't know that much about being valiant, or being a coward, but. Living takes more courage than most people think. I've told you that before, when you asked me about that prayer, remember? You've had to, every single day of your life, every single moment of your life, keep choosing, over and over, to live, to stay alive, to will yourself back together. In the Sacred Realm, sure, where you had to keep yourself together. But in our world, too.

"We've both felt so tired a thousand times. We've both died a thousand times. We've both given up a thousand times. The thing that makes us courageous, the thing that means we have courage, is that every single time that we die and give up and lie down, we get back up again. We choose to live again. We choose to cling onto that very, very thin little thread of hope. We choose to keep
fighting. We choose to live to see another breakfast, another dinner, another supper, another midnight snack. We choose to live.

"We choose, over and over and over again, to live. That's what makes us valiant. If that makes us cowards, too, then fine. We're cowards. We're afraid. But we're also valiant, because no matter how scared we are, we keep fighting, for ourselves and for everyone else.

"That's my answer. That's the answer I wish I'd given you a hundred years ago, but I don't think I could've." The words dawn upon her as she maps the characters into the girl with the golden hair's cheek. "I couldn't have. I told you to have hope on the eve of the Great Calamity, but I didn't know what it was like to realise it's...it's all right to feel like you want to give up, or that you want to die. Because even if you feel like that, you still keep fighting, and you get up, and you choose to live, again and again. That's more than just hope things work out, or hope in a better tomorrow. It's the courage to fight for that tomorrow, day in and day out. The courage to choose to live so that you can see that tomorrow, and the next one, and the next. And I couldn't have said that a hundred years ago. Because it's been these last two years that've taught me that. It's been these last two years that've changed me. Even if I don't have words, even if I want to give up, even if I want to die, I have promises to keep, and paths to walk before I sleep, and so do you."

The stars have long gone out, and the corners of the world have faded away. Where the Sacred Realm has dissipated into golden dust, Link sees neither the black of the void nor the white of the abyss she expected, but rather nothingness, pure and utter nothingness, steadily creeping inwards to the very heart where she and the girl with the golden hair kneel beside the first shrine that the girl with the golden hair ever awakened and the last shrine that Link awakened, at the beginning and the end, together again.

"Come with us, and I'll make you your favourite." Link closes her own eyes until her lashes rest against the curve of her cheeks. "I'll make you fruitcake. I'll make you fruitcake with apples, because that's my favourite fruit, and I'll make you fruitcake with bananas, because that's Urbosa's favourite and you always wanted me to include them, and I'll make you fruitcake with silent princess, and you'll tell me that I shouldn't use up such a rare flower that only blooms in the wilds, and I'll tell you that there's plenty more out there in the wilds for us to find and that if you love them and think that they're delicious that we should accept no substitute, and you'll tell me that I shouldn't do things so frivolously, and I'll tell you that I've used the Master Sword to cook before and I don't see anything at all wrong with that, and you'll tell me that that's exactly what you mean, and then I'll do that thing where I run my hand over my hair and sort of smile, and you'll laugh, and then we'll bake the fruitcake together just like you like it, like we've done so many times before."

The song of the Sacred Realm has started to fade; the world around them has coalesced to just this tower. Brushing the girl with the golden hair's cheek with her thumb, Link wills into existence a silent princess into the palm of her right hand.

She touches the soft velvet of the petals to the girl with the golden hair's face. Her companion accepts the silent princess into her own hands and holds it there, trembling against her chest.

"So please. Please come with me. We have to try. It is hope, or it is death, and I know that I'm asking so much of you, and I really really understand just how much I'm asking, but I want you, like you have every second of every day of your entire life, to choose hope once again. Please. Please. Just try. I love you."

"Oh, I don't know if I have the hope," she breathes, "but I can try. That's all I can do."

"That's all I ask. Take my hand."
"Wait. Not here." The girl with the golden hair shakes her head. "If we do it here, then we'll end up in the docks of the castle. I don't know if we'll be able to get out easily without the opening from the pyramid, and you need treatment for your arm." Link tilts her head. The girl with the golden hair brushes her hand against Link's slate. "I guess we'll never need to use these again," she whispers. "I don't think they'll work without the energy of the Sacred Realm. So we might as well...I think...it would make for a better ending, don't you think...? When I write down your story, and all the meals you've ever cooked."

She scrolls over the map of Hyrule. The pyramid itself has nearly faded away, Link's double vision ghosting gold over where the walls once towered immutable. The girl with the golden hair passes over the shrine at the heart of the tower, drifting south, south over the Hyrule Field. Not one hundred and twenty mirrors, Link realises, but one hundred and twenty-one.

"When I touch here, I think we'll end up in the portal immediately. Oh, that means we'll go right to the mortal world." Her words shiver; her breaths shudder. The girl with the golden hair lifts herself to her own feet. Link rises with her until they stand together. The girl with the golden hair holds up the slate in her right hand, her fingertip hovering over the fire-light mark. "Take my hand," she murmurs, her timbre saying not see you later but good-bye. "I love you, Link. Please, don't ever forget that. I love you."

"I love you, too," Link signs into her cheek. She grips her companion's left hand with her right, and then the girl with the golden hair touches her fingertip to the fire-light mark of the Shrine of Resurrection.

Once again Link feels herself come undone in a blaze of fire-light blue; she wonders if death, too, carries this strange sensation of all of her dissipating at once into mist, of her consciousness shifting through the wind as though carried on the back of a great red bird that answers only to her own call, of herself suddenly reforming from the fog.

Once again Link gasps into existence again, no longer in the thicker and more viscous aether but in the thinner air of the mortal world. She teeters on her own feet for a moment as she adjusts to a lack of double vision, as the afterimage of the gold of the skies of the Sacred Realm fades from her view, as she staggers forward in the grass and topples to her knees into the soil.

She senses her chest hit the earth, followed shortly by her chin. She hears the scampering of squirrels and the buzzing of crickets, the chirping of birds and bounding of bunnies. She smells the fragrance of flower and aroma of grass, the richness of earth and openness of sky.

Her left shoulder throbs. The warmth oozes from the wound left behind. Extending a shaking arm towards her satchel, she withdraws a piece of flint taken from the stone talus of the Great Plateau. She cracks the flint against the grass beside her and sparks a tiny flame, barely smoking. Link puffs breath onto the tiny ember until it roots into a steady fire. She glances around. A stick. A twig. She reaches for the branch she has had looped at her belt since Miyu presented her with it all those months and months ago. Lighting the tip of the branch in the flames, Link closes her eyes, bites down hard on the collar of her tunic which floods her mouth from the taste of her own dried blood, and cauterises the gaping wound of her left shoulder where the malice has eaten away her lightning-strike hand.

Her sword arm. Gone forever.Scarred over with a burn from the fire Link hurriedly puts out. The branch slips from her fingers. With Hyrule at peace, she need never raise a sword again.

She slopes down into the soil again. She lies face-flat in the dirt. The grass pokes at her face. The wind ruffles her hair. The scent of the earth settles in her bones.
An insect buzzing near her ear prompts her to turn her head and open her right eye. A grasshopper, hopping through grass. Its wings flicker from its back. She observes the grasshopper near her. Its antennae twitch. She puffs out a breath towards it and the grasshopper becomes absolutely still for a second prior to speeding away with all the haste that its tiny wings can give it.

She digs her right elbow into the grass. She props herself up on her arm. She recognises this hill: in the earth below her sleeps the Shrine of Resurrection. She inhales the scent of the wilds. And all of her memories come flooding back to her at once.

Link springs to her feet, falls over from the disorientation of only having a single arm, and lifts herself up from the ground again. The girl with the golden hair. The girl with the golden hair.

The girl with the golden hair who lies still on the earth upon her back, her head resting in the grass, her lashes brushing against her cheeks, her eyes closed, her limbs sprawled over, her legs at strange and awkward angles, her brow smooth, the silent princess Link gave to her flat against her chest.

Link throws herself to the girl with the golden hair's side. She can feel the tears that press in behind her eyes. When she tries touching her left hand to the girl with the golden hair's chest to sense her heartbeat, it takes her a moment to realise that she no longer has a left hand. Instead, lowering her head, she buries her face in the girl with the golden hair's chest.

Still warm. Yet she does not hear anything at all. Worse, she does not feel anything at all. And then she turns her head and rests her left ear against her companion's sternum: beat-beat-beat.

Link senses something against the knuckles of her right hand. Opening her eyes, she sees the girl with the golden hair having curled her fingers into a fist, gently bumping against Link's. Tears drip from Link's chin. She forms her own fist and bumps bump back against the girl with the golden hair's. "Link," the girl with the golden hair exhales, and for a second Link herself forgets how to to breath as she races to comprehend the words she hears, "are we...?"

Softly shifting side the girl with the golden hair's fingers, Link signs into her companion's open palm, painstakingly tracing each character with her one hand: "We are."

They bump knuckles again. "I promised you I'd do that, eh...?" The girl with the golden hair's eyelids flutter. Link watches her slowly open her eyes and gaze up at the blue, blue skies overhead. "Oh, I can't...I can't feel my legs at all." She breathes out out a quick-air hhhh of a laugh. "I can't feel anything below my hips." Link observes her struggling to sit up on her own. Swiftly, Link scoops her shoulders up in her arm. The girl with the golden hair looks down at her waist, at her legs. She reaches for her hips, thighs, her knees, her ankles, her feet, running her palm along her flesh. "...the Calamitous One cut me in half. The Calamitous One killed me. But I guess that my upper body remained intact, and I only reformed the lower half. I...I don't think I'll ever be able to walk again." She draws in a shuddering breath. Link feels the curve of her companion's back shaking against the crook of her arm; she holds the girl with the golden hair more tightly. "Despite everything, I'm still alive. You were right, Link. It was hope, or death. And in choosing hope, I...oh, who am I kidding?" She shakes her head. "I talk too much. This isn't the time for talking. This is the time for—"

Link feels the girl with the golden hair's arms sliding over her shoulders into the tunic's sleeves, her companion's palms brushing over her skin under the tunic, her fingers resting against Link's shoulder blades. The girl with the golden hair buries her face in the left side of Link's throat, her tears wetting and warming Link's skin. She lets slip all of the grief and the relief alike that she has held back for one hundred years. With only one arm, Link tries her best to balance while also embracing her companion back. She wobbles on her knees. Together, they topple into the earth.
Together, they rest in the dirt. Together, they laugh until their mouths hurt and their bellies ache. Together, they roll onto their sides, Link on her left, the girl with the golden hair on her right. The girl with the golden hair reaches out her left hand towards Link's right. Link does not flinch back; the girl with the golden hair catches her fingers and intertwines them.

They lie in silence on the bed of grass, Link listening to the girl with the golden hair's breathing deepen, and her pulse slow, and her warm fingers curl more tightly around Link's.

The girl with the golden hair gazes warmly at her, her eyes soft. In the light of the new dawn, Link looks more deeply into her irises than before; she realises with a start that the girl with the golden hair's eyes do not shimmer fire-light blue.

Green. A deep, deep green. The colour of the grass. The hue of spring. In all of the legends and in all of the stories and in all of the songs, the Princess has always borne eyes of fire-light. In all of her memories, Link recalled the girl with the golden hair those same eyes that she has heard. In the Sacred Realm, too, she swears that she saw her companion in fire-light blue, yet she considers, too, that the Sacred Realm bathed everything in gold, or in violet, or in blue.

She must have misremembered. She must have misremembered the colour of the girl with the golden hair's irises. The girl with the eyes as green as spring. Spring green.

The girl with the golden hair disentangles their hands. Her absence leaves Link's hand strangely cold. Reaching behind Link's shoulder, her companion grasps Fi's hilt. The wings retracted. The gold of the jewel dimmed. The fire-light glow given way to softened white, and Fi herself given way to nothing but a simple blade.

The girl with the golden hair touches her lips to the hilt as though kissing Fi's brow. "Thank you, Fi," she whispers. "Thank you. In the end, you've protected our world. I hope you know that, wherever you are." She meets Link's gaze. "With the Sacred Realm gone, I don't know if...I don't know if she still lives. But I hope she does. I'll hope beyond hope."

Link writes characters into the back of the girl with the golden hair's palm. "We'll put her back in the Kokir Forest. I don't know...I don't know either. But we'll hope. Maybe in the years to come, she'll return. She's watched over us all this time."

"I wish we could have spent more time with her. To know her story. Yet everything happened so quickly, I..." The girl with the golden hair kisses Fi's brow again. Curving her own arm blade, Link very carefully hugs her, just in case Fi still lives in the sword, so that Fi does not feel guilty if Link cuts herself upon the edge. "Thank you, Fi. That's all that I can say. Thank you."

While Link embraces Fi to her chest, the girl with the golden hair withdraws something else: the slate. Link lifts her head up from the grass and observes the girl with the golden hair make an effort to use the slate, yet the surface remains dark and transparent. The girl with the golden hair tests her fingers over the whole of the slate: nothing.

"You know, Link." The slate pomfs onto the grass. The girl with the golden hair rolls onto her back, facing the skies. "Since you...disappeared the Sacred Realm, the Triforce, and all of it, all of my research's poofed too. Going back ten thousand years, and far before that." Extending her arm skyward, she splays her fingers towards the sun as though cupping sunlight into her palms. Link rubs the back of her head. "Oh, it's all right. It's over now. No one is ever going to have to pray for years of her life just to access some sealing magic that doesn't exist. No one is ever going to have to worry about someone stealing away into the Sacred Realm only to corrupt himself again. No one is going to..." The girl with the golden hair shakes her head again. "Oh, I guess we'll have to learn to live alongside the beings of will now. That'll be strange in its own way. And...we won't have the
shrines anymore, or the Divine Beasts, or the guardians. Oh, it's what you said. Hyrule will live by
her own hand. That's...that's really nice."

"I promise I'll help you with your research," Link swears. The girl with the golden hair raises her
eyebrows. Link smiles sheepishly. "I'll eat all the hot-footed frogs you want me to."

The girl with the golden hair stares at her. She snorts, and then she giggles, and then she erupts into
laughter that crosses between the bleating of a goat and the snorting of a boar. Link scoots forward,
resting her forehead against the girl with the golden hair's until her wheezing laughter subsides.

"Link." She glances up at the sound of her name. "I'd like to meet your friends. But please.
Don't...don't call me the Princess. Hyrule Castle is gone now. The royal family...is gone now. I'll
not bear the name Harkinian any longer. Oh, whatever happens to Hyrule..." The girl with the
golden hair touches her hand to her chest. "...she doesn't need a royal family anymore. I'm not the
Princess. I'm just...me." She lowers her gaze to the grass. "I hope that that's enough."

Link tips up her companion's chin until they look into one another's eyes. "I know that everyone
called you the Princess, but, well, you know that I never really got that prophecy stuff. You've
never been the Princess like that to me. You're the girl with the golden hair. You're smart, and you
know how to play an eight-stringed harp, and you love fruitcake, and you love silent princesses,
and you have the whole wide world to explore, and you're determined, and you're hopeful, and
you're one of the most courageous people that I've ever met."

Her companion's cheeks redden. She clears her throat. "Oh, I don't know if I'd say all that. Well.
Well then. Well. Anyways. Ahem. Then." The girl with the golden hair boops Link's nose with her
forefinger. "We should probably rejoin the others. I think both of us need to see a healer. Oh, and
we should make sure that they know we're alive." Link nods. "However, before we do that, you
have a promise to keep." The girl with the golden hair hesitates. "If you can." Link tilts her head to
one side.

"You promised me fruitcake." The girl with the golden hair's smile broadens until the entirety of
her face has lit up brighter than the Triforce. "If you have the ingredients, I'd like you to make it for
me. The fruitcake that you said I liked."

Link pauses, and then she grins. "That's perfect. That's perfect! I can't wait to cook you food! I
can't wait! I don't have a cooking pot but we can go to the cabin! I have most everything I need
already. We just have to get some apples. And then...and then...!" She bounces to her boots.

Then she stops and looks down at the girl with the golden hair, who strains to sit up. "I can't carry
destiny," Link signs very solemnly, "but I can carry you."

The girl with the golden hair throws her arms around Link's shoulders. Link swings the girl with
the golden hair's legs up over her left shoulder, then cradles the girl with the golden hair in her
right arm. They set off.

With Link relying upon just her right arm, and the girl with the golden hair no longer in control of
her legs, they slip and fall and pick themselves back up over and over. They laugh at the grass
staining their clothing green. They giggle at the insects that buzz away from them, at the birds that
flutter off, at the rabbits that bound away. They poke fun at one another and at themselves as they
lope across the Great Plateau, stopping by a creek to drink, pausing by a bush to pluck off a few
berries.

They come to the cliffside that Link knows all too well. The wind that caresses their faces and runs
through their hair. The trees swaying under the same caress. The fragrance of the world.
They pant as one and every lungful brings them closer together. Further. At the edge the entire earth falls away beneath them to slope down in an endless sea of green. Trees. A lake further beyond. And there, in the centre of their view, the heart of the world. No longer imposing, no longer immutable. At peace.

Their heads spin. To the right rise a spine of mountains piercing the heavens. To the left, in the distance, wait fields of golden wheat that give way to the endless snows. Below them the plains roll forward in the gentle wind.

Link has not words enough for all she sees. but one burns at the tips of her fingers. She signs the word to the girl with the golden hair, touching her hand to her companion's cheek, to her companion's eye, to the centre of her companion's chest, a path she has shaped over and over in her life.

Home.

Hyrule.

They stand on the cliffside for a long, long time.

The rumble of their stomachs leads them away. They spot a tree heavy with apples down the hill. The same tree, Link realises, from which she harvested apples in that first spring of her awakening long, long ago.

They tumble through the grasses towards the tree. The apples prove too high up for Link to reach. She, unaccustomed to climbing with one arm, falls repeatedly. A sudden blowing of a horn whirls her around: she ogles a troop of bokoblins at the top of the hill. They wave at her. She gestures towards the apples. One of the bokoblins squirrels up the tree and shakes the apples from its boughs. The girl with the golden hair and Link thank the bokoblins profusely. The bokoblins dance around them. Link, the girl with the golden hair, and the bokoblins struggle to communicate using body language alone, but the bokoblins end up assisting Link in carrying the girl with the golden hair across the Great Plateau to the cabin.

Digging through the cabin, Link comes upon and pans with which to cook. For the bokoblins, in gratitude, she roasts their boar for them, stuffed with hylian shroom and spicy peppers. The bokoblins thank her in their own way—with snorts and shuffling of feet and a strange little dance—and then carry the boar off.

Link and the girl with the golden hair set up shop around the firepit that whoever once lived in this cabin—Mudora, and Mudora's son; Kass's mentor, and his mentor's father—built. They heat up a baking tin in the hearth inside of the cabin. The girl with the golden hair butters the bottom of the tin with sand seal butter. Clapping her hands together, Link prays in thanks to the Goddesses for sending her Riju, who understood better than anyone else exactly what Link would need to face the Calamitous One.

In a bowl, she beats together distilled cane sugar, nutmeg, ginger, clove, and cinnamon with aerated salt, rock salt, softened sand seal butter, eggs collected from nests on the Great Plateau, and a drop of vanilla extract from the vial Amali gave her. While the girl with the golden hair holds the bowl still for her, Link mixes in the very last of the flour, not enough for egg tart but enough for a small quantity of fruit cake. The batter becomes too thick for her to stir properly, and the girl with the golden hair takes over; Link props her up.

Together, they puree some of the apples, bananas, and silent princess—the girl with the golden hair winces on the latter, but Link points out that they have already plucked the silent princess and
that the silent princess came from the Sacred Realm and thus could not grow here—and chop up others into small chunks with which to layer the cake. They blend the pureed fruit and flower into the batter.

The girl with the golden hair and Link pour the batter into the tin together. The girl with the golden hair smooths the batter over the top. "You're supposed to sprinkle on sugar, right?"

"We could do salt instead," Link suggests, still getting the hang of signing with a single arm.

Her companion puts her hands on her hips. "Really?" Link nods. "I hate to admit it," she responds morosely, "but, oh, I couldn't say no to salt if I wanted."

They compromise with a sprinkle of sugar and salt, of science and intuition, of prim-and-proper and whatever-tastes-good. Link prepares butter-cream icing while they wait for the loaf of cake to bake in the hearth. When the cake finishes baking, the girl with the golden hair takes Link's trusty cooking knife. Poking her tongue out of the corner of her mouth in concentration, she proceeds making extremely even cuts in the cake and spreading icing extremely evenly on each of the layers. Link slides in slices of apple and banana between the layers, topping the cake with the petals of the silent princess, the blue standing out against the white of the icing.

At long last, they take the finished fruitcake outside to sit at the campfire and share the fruitcake from a communal baking tin with all of the wilds combined.

The girl with the golden hair cuts each of them a slice. Link holds hers in her lap while she leans in and observes her companion's reaction. Raising the dessert to her mouth, the girl with the golden hair bites down and lets out nearly a moan, which does not surprise Link anymore, but rather brings out a grin from ear to ear.

"It's...it's so moist," says the girl with the golden hair, muffled around the fruitcake; she blushes hard enough that Link can see the pink on the light brown of her cheeks. "A-and delicious. I mean no insult. It's really good."

"Food tastes best when you help cook," Link answers. "Thank you for helping."

The girl with the golden hair does not duck her head this time. Instead, she smiles warmly until her eyes crinkle, the tears long since dried. "Oh, and...I forgive you." Link cocks her head. "For wasting that elixir on me. The one that the Dragons gave you." The girl with the golden hair rubs the back of her own head in emulation of the gesture that Link has done so many times. Link finds herself smiling softly back. "...thank you. So. Go on. Try the fruitcake. Tell me what you think."

Link takes a bite. The sweetness of the icing melting on her tongue interweaves the fullness of the cake crumbling pleasantly in her mouth; the delightful contrast of the tartness of the spring apple, the sweet roundness of the banana, and the mild bitterness of the silent princess serenade her tongue; the fragrances of the fresh fruit and flower between the layers—the crunchy apple, the yielding banana, the velvety petal—run their juices down her chin.

She swallows. The fruitcake warms her belly. She inhales; the aroma waters her mouth and she takes another bite. She has smelled this scent before.

"Link..." The girl with the golden hair, her features soft, her voice gentle, her fingers interlaced. "...do you really remember me?"

A gesture. The gesture of the girl who has kept her promises and walked her paths sitting across from the girl with the golden hair, holding a slice of fruitcake over a campfire, studying the lines of
the face she knows so well, regarding the hundred years that they have struggled and fought and lived for the people of the land known as Hyrule. Looking directly at her. Signing a word.

Signing her name.

The girl with the fruitcake, signing her name.

Zelda.

—

Fruitcake (ten hearts) - apple, cane sugar, mighty banana, silent princess, Tabantha wheat

Chapter End Notes


Author's notes: I already talked about this last chapter, but it bears repeating. I don't mean to preach here, mind, just talk about my subjective experiences and feelings. Living takes more courage than most people think. To have to choose to live day in and day out...that's something I've learned. There's more to it than having hope. Well, I'll be a bit personal with all of you, for those of you who might take comfort from my story. When I was in my nadir of my life, sometimes unable to rise out of bed, culminating in a brief period of boundless energy once I began planning my own suicide, the first step to climbing back out was the hope that things could change in the future. But hope wasn't enough. I could lie there at the bottom of the lake, staring at up at the sky above the surface of the water, hoping that one day I would float skyward. It took immense courage to even dream about confronting my flaws in constructive ways —instead of just "haha this is another reason why I should die; I'm a monster; I'm horrible and should never interact with people"—and to ever so slowly better myself as a person. I'm not saying that I'm some sort of saint. I have days of immense difficulty, and I have hurt a great many people (although I do not suffer from the same issues that Link does, as I do not enjoy that sort of self-insertion when I write, rather preferring to pull on my life experiences). But, with courage enough, I have slowly gotten better, and will hopefully continue to do so, especially with my supportive friends and chosen family beside me. My point to you, the reader, is that things can and do get better. It's hard. I know it's hard. But getting better requires immense effort on your part. I believe in you.

The ending of Breath of the Wild was disappointing for me. The four guide characters (Riju, Teba, Yunobo, and Sidon) had no role in it, and neither did Impa. Link just shows up alone and gets it done. The Champions—who are supposed to be dead—play a massive impact. We never receive any kind of information on how or why Calamity Ganon came about. Zelda magically reforms in her seventeen-year-old state with nary a word of explanation. She then somehow uses the Triforce to just dissipate Calamity Ganon, in a process I don't understand, and that's it. Is Ganon dead forever? Did she use the Triforce? How did this happen? Where did she suddenly get the ability to do so? How did she reform? It left a sour note in my mouth, although I will say that the final scene made me realise for the first time that the flower in the Breath of the Wild logo is a silent princess. That's right! I literally did not realise that until the very
last few seconds of the game! So there's that.

In the true ending, Zelda mentions that she's lost her sacred powers again and then talks about restoring Hyrule to its former glory and beyond. I'm not a fan. Here, in Delicious in Wilds, Zelda very purposefully decides that, regardless of what happens next, the Harkinian royal family of Hyrule is done. She's not the princess. It's over. She'll just be herself, and that will be enough.

Zelda and Link's disabilities are not meant to be punishments. They are what they are, nothing more and nothing less. As I've mentioned before, I originally intended to have a tragic ending that ended with Zelda having to remain in the Sacred Realm forever, but then I realised that that not only unfair narratively and that I had a better idea. Because living with yourself is more important than having a downer ending. I'm glad I went with the decision I did.

Zelda's line, "Do you really remember me?" is from the ending of Breath of the Wild. As for the ending of this chapter...if you don't recognise it, I recommend rereading the ending of the very first chapter. It's been nearly three months, but...suffice to say that there's no other bookend I could end it on. After all, Zelda was in the very first memory, giving Link back her name. I couldn't think of anything better to end it on, than Link giving Zelda back hers.

Up next: desserts in wilds.


Beta reader's comments: Such an emotional cooldown. I don't really have words for how it makes me feel. I'll leave what words I do have for next chapter.

**Chapter Summary**

Life goes on. Meals are shared. The people endure.

**Chapter Notes**


Author's notes: I technically started writing this chapter at 05:49 on the twenty-eighth of July (it ended with the word *Zelda*), but I started writing at 17:58 on the twenty-third of August, and finished writing it at 22:19 on the twenty-third of August.

I'm not one to ask for reviews. That said, given the sheer length of *Delicious in Wilds*, I'm curious to know how many people have read this to the end. Thus, even anonymously, if you're reading this, please drop a comment below (as simple as "yeah I read this") to satiate my curiosity! I wrote this primarily for myself, so thank you so much for reading through it. It means the world to me. You likely won't see much from me again, at least not for a while. Just in case you don't hear from me, I do receive email notifications and plan to try to respond as soon as I can to each comment.

With respect to the work I put into this fic: at my maximum, I write 1200 words per hour, so the total writing (including author's notes) took $\frac{749730}{1200} = 625$ hours, and I can proof 3000 words an hour, so total proofing took $\frac{630494}{3000} = 210$ hours. Posting each chapter took about half an hour, for $\frac{84}{2} = 42$ hours. Thus, at minimum, I put in 877 hours of serious, continuous work into *Delicious in Wilds*, and it's been worth every second.

As of this time of writing, I have clocked 2498 hours on my copy of *Breath of the Wild* for the WiiU. Despite its many, many flaws from both gameplay and narrative perspectives, I can (still) honestly say that *Breath of the Wild* brought back my love for video games in a way that I have not felt for eight long years. As for the rest, I'm going to let the afterword that I wrote back in August speak for this chapter.

So, one more time. Thanks a million, to my beta reader and best friend, Emma. And thanks a million to you, dear reader. I mean every word.

Up next: the rest of our lives. Without further ado...!


Beta reader's comments: I've kept my comments pretty short over the course of this series. I've had more to say than I have said, but have been really anxious about writing it out - after all, who cares about the opinions of the beta reader, who can't even really offer insight into the series beyond "I liked this"? I still think that's true - who really even cares - but I'm gonna write all of this out anyway.
It's hard to put into words how much *Delicious in Wilds* means to me. This series has been months and months of my life. It's been there through good times and through bad. Mostly, it's given me the good times. This series is directly responsible for my life being a lot better now than it was before it began. I owe it so much.

I'd like to carve out a section here to do something I haven't done in my comments before - thank the author. The author is my very best friend in the whole world, and has made me a better person, and given me so many of the best moments of my life. Working on this series alongside my best friend has been one of the most incredible experiences of my entire life.

For months and months, *Delicious in Wilds* has been a centerpiece of my life, a true constant. I don't know the shape of life to come with it finished. It's bittersweet. I'm sad that it's over, but so very glad that it's out there in the world, so that you, who's reading this, can experience all the ups and downs, just as I have. You the reader can experience the joy of Link laughing in the woods and petting Ilia, the heartbreak of her remembering Marin and Aryll, the bittersweet nostalgia of honouring the past, the companionship of sharing a meal with friends.

I made so many great memories over the course of this series. Bawling my eyes out at the chapter where Link talks to Maryll, cozying up at the beach reading the Medli chapters, listening to a song on repeat reading the chapter in which Link finds Ilia again, sitting inside on a rainy day while proofing chapter after chapter alongside my best friend, the author of this series.

I hope that you've made as many memories reading this series as I have.

And if you've made it all this way, and you're sad that this series has come to a close - if you're feeling the heart pangs that accompany the bittersweet ending of something truly great - then I leave you with some advice that the author gave me over a year ago, which I have kept near and dear to my heart: Don't be sad, because it's never truly over. Link, and Zelda, and Ilia, and all the rest, will still be there, waiting for you to return.

My name is Emma, and I'd like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for taking this incredible journey with the author and I.

Thanks a million.


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See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Hyrule is very, very vast, and Zelda and Link travel very, very together.

They meet with a party searching for them in the Hyrule Field, their bodies battered and bloodied and bruised almost beyond recognition yet—with Fi upon Link's back—unmistakable. They see again their friends: Yunobo, and Amali, and Riju, and Sidon, and Sarie, and Kass. They embrace. They weep. They cook a meal.

Zelda does not introduce herself as the Princess, but as merely *Zelda*, nothing more, and nothing less. The Princess has eyes of fire-light blue and the sealing magic of the Goddess at her fingertips;
standing tall with the blessed bloodline that runs through her veins, the Princess glows with beauty and with grace. Zelda has eyes of spring green and too much knowledge of the world at hers; covered in scars and in burns, perched in a wheelchair, Zelda glows with passion and with love. She asks everyone about everything. She carries with her scrolls furled up in her pack to record as much information as she can: history, fauna, flora, songs, cooking, whatever people will tell her.

Link's friends do not call her the Princess. They call her Link's old friend, and they call her their own friend, and they call her Zelda.

In Ruto of Lanayru, the people of Hyrule—those who can—gather for a feast in honour of Hyrule, saved from the brink. They do not ask Link to speak; the King Zora allows her to sit not at the head of the table but instead with everyone else, alongside her friends and Zelda. She wolfs down every manner of food until she passes out on the table. Zelda names to herself every person who has fought with her these past hundred and two years, many of whom may not have made it from the Sacred Realm. Link suggests she honour them in the most intimate way possible: a meal, cooked and eaten for them. Zelda acquiesces. They spend the rest of the festivities in the royal kitchens. When her friends join her, Riju at the forefront, Link's heart threatens to thunder out of her chest.

The people of Hyrule bury their dead; tend to their wounded; inscribe the histories of those who knowingly sacrificed themselves and those whose lives were unwillingly cut short. The people of Hyrule work to heal the scars that ten thousand years of dust and one hundred years of passing have inflicted on the land. All of the people of Hyrule, beings of blood and beings of will alike.

Link and Zelda travel the world. Steadily, Link becomes used to having only her right arm. She learns better how to balance herself; she learns how to eat and to write with her non-dominant hand. She jokes to Zelda that her writing was cucco-scratch before, that this changes nothing. Steadily, Zelda becomes used to her wheelchair, becomes used to that which she can do and that which she cannot, makes light of the fact that she can at least fit the wheelchair with all sorts of useful pouches in which to hold her paper, her pens, her ink, her maps, her books.

They bring Fi again to the lost woods. The mists have long vanished, and the woods have become forest, nothing more and nothing less. Together holding her hilt, Zelda and Link sheathe her in stone. They tell her see you later. Link cooks for the nine hundred and one koroks a meal of loam which Sarie rates as actually pretty good, and she leaves nine hundred koroks in the woods.

Sarie has decided to see the world for themselves. "Sarie will come to visit," they say cheerily, "but Sarie has spent much too long hiding and forgetting and losing their joy. Like her, Sarie will go across Hyrule, and then Sarie will come home to Link and Zelda!"

"You don't have a nickname for Zelda?" Link inquires.

Sarie laughs, a sound like wooden blocks. "Zelda's too good a name for Sarie to call her something else!" They bid Zelda and Link see you later. "I won't forget either of you, you know."

Link and Zelda travel the world. They travel to Eldin, and to Tabantha, and to Parapa, and to Lanayru. They say their good-byes to the people they have loved and lost, to Daruk, to Revali, to Urbosa, to Mipha, with gifts of their favourite meals: deliciously grilled rock roast, and fish pie, and fried bananas, and seafood paella. They witness the efforts of reconstruction. Zelda records their histories. Link bites down into a deliciously grilled rock roast Yunobo prepared for her. She chips her teeth and ends up with difficulty relieving herself for a solid week, but damn if she doesn't eat the rock roast.

Delicious. "In wilds," she adds. Zelda tilts her head; Link tells her about how Sarie said that once, for reasons that Link does not quite understand, but which somehow feels right.
Her satchel filled to the brim in honey, Link introduces Zelda to her family at Romani Ranch: to Maryll, to Malon, to Vish, to Cremia, to Romani, to Miyu. When Link hears Romani yell "Grasshopper," she can feel in the marrow of her bones that she has come home.

They accept Zelda as one of their own. Link introduces Zelda, too, to her beloved companion Ilia, against whose forehead she rests her own. "A horse and her girl," remarks Zelda, her smile warm as the sun, "like Urbosa would've said."

Along the eastern border of Central Hyrule, Link runs into a caravan she knows all too well. Misan. And Glepp. And other former members of the Yiga rehabilitating to a world in which they were wrong. Glepp apologises profusely to Link; she explains that she and the others like her whom she has met along her journey have dedicated themselves to providing reparations and support in whatever way they can to those whom they have harmed. Misan has not quite forgiven her, and Glepp can foresee a long, long time before Misan can trust her again, if she ever does. "Yet this is my chance to make things right, no matter how long it takes," Glepp signs, her gaze towards the skies, towards the horizon, towards the future. "And I want to make things right. Not only for Misan, though I do love her, but also for the people I have hurt. Thank you for giving me another chance."

Misan claps her hands together and thanks Link for the belated wedding cake. Link suggests that someday they should all go to Ruto, so that she and Sidon and Misan can sit together, so that she can fulfill the joke that Sidon made years ago. Misan agrees. They go. Sidon roars with laughter.

When Zelda and Link return to Romani Ranch, Link describes the experience to Romani, who whaps Link over the head with a branch for the terrible jest but finds herself laughing all the same.

They journey to Mount Nayru to bid good-bye to Epona and to Storm, their most valiant companions who passed away. They cook for the horses a steamed pumpkin of fruit and vegetable, like the kind that Link and Ilia used to make. Zelda clasps her hands together. On the route back, they reminisce of their horses, of Epona whom Marin gave to Link and whom Ilia raised, of Storm whom Zelda only learned to trust too little too late.

Link and Zelda trek to Telma Ranch, where they learn that Ilia and the other villagers took refuge across the river in the hidden shrine by the Hickaly Woods. Link cries into Ilia's lap while Ilia strokes her hair; Zelda bows her forehead to the floor in gratitude for Ilia having helped Zelda and Link all those years ago. "You take good care of her, Zelda," Ilia signs, resting her hands against her in hips, "or she'll get herself killed trying to cook something one of these days, or get her head stuck in her cooking pot and lose her humanity to stew-manity."

Link proudly indicates her once-buttered neck. "I already did that last bit, thank you very much!"

Ilia arches an eyebrow to Zelda, who tries and fails to hold back her laughter. "See what I mean? She's hopeless and I love her for it."

Link cries again. "I love you too."

While Zelda elaborates to Ilia on what happened after they parted in the Ash Swamp during the Great Calamity, Link thanks Ravio profusely for having made good on his promise. Yet Ravio, pulling up his hood, explains that Ilia herself moved everyone for safety. She returns to Ravio the ocarina, but Ravio tells her that she can keep it, that "the old lady made me one 'erself'n that's cooler'n somethin' she took from ya."

Before they leave again, Ravio clears his throat and inquires if Link wouldn't mind stopping by more often. With a light little laugh, Link answers that, after she has seen to the world, she will.
In Darunia, they watch Yunobo put on a performance portraying a somewhat embellished version of Link's journey from the Shrine of Resurrection to the Sacred Realm, with beings of will taking on the place of monsters and of allies alike, the first joint stage production in the known history of Hyrule. He calls the play *Saving the World and Other Joys of Cooking*; the staff has for the theatre-goers regular samples of food so that they may try out the meals named on-stage, an innovation that brings Link to tears. Link hands the silvered iron and mirrored pot lids off to Eldic smiths, who melt them down and forge them into pot lids anew, carrying on the tradition of cooking. Afterwards Link meets, at last, Yunobo's father, who sweeps Link into an embrace so tight Link's body retains braces for a week thereafter. Yunobo's father raves about his pride in his *incredible* son while Yunobo—instead of hiding away in embarrassment—puffs out his chest. Link shows him how to fist-bump; though her knuckles hurt for days, she does not forget his smile.

In Medli, Link finds Amali and Kass returning to the life of taking care of their daughters, who have had to grow up far too much in the past several years. Link cooks meals for her extended family; Zelda records the songs that Kass and Amali know. While Zelda enthusiastically interrogates Medli surveyors about their collaboration with Hebric frost tali to grow jewels within their hearts as oysters grow pearls, Kass procures for her and Link an eight-stringed harp and a six-stringed ages. The next time Amali and Kass host a music night, which is every night, Link and Zelda join in, playing alongside Amali's windchimes and Kass on accordion and voice. Amali has a new soft-feathered tunic fashioned for Link, this one in green. "If it had to happen a fourth time," she says while Link presses her face into Amali's chest and Amali holds her tight, "then, I think it's most appropriate to dress you in green. You are the greenest girl I know, and I mean that in the best way possible."

In Nabooru, Link introduces Zelda to the other person in the wilds of Hyrule who understands the importance of food just as much as she: Riju. Riju, who travels the countryside to every village and town, ensuring the livelihood of her people as they repair, as they mend, as they learn to live and work alongside the beings of will that cohabit the world. Riju, Zelda, and Link cook up every meal that they can imagine. Riju inquires a thousand questions about Urbosa, and Zelda responds a thousand answers. In turn, Riju introduces Link and Zelda to her own friends and beloved, both those Link has seen before—like Buliara—and those whom Link has not had time before to meet; they spend many days beneath the bluest sky that Link has ever seen and many nights beneath the stars. Riju's voice swells when she speaks of her people: the Parapans have returned to their homes, their efforts of tree-planting reverting the reach of the sands; the Zuni people have retaken their hospitable Tantari again; and many former whalers have devised new work ferrying people and goods on the backs of the molduga they once hunted. Link confesses that Riju reminds her so much of Aryll that she could weep, and Riju repairs for Link the trusty red telescope with glass forged of Tantari sand. When Link thanks Riju for the ice-box, Riju invites Link to come by whenever she wants so that they can cook together. Link promises she will. "Don't forget that I love you, Link," Riju whispers, hugging her around the middle. Link whirls her around as they laugh together. "I love you too. And your cooking."

In Ruto, they witness Sidon preside over the first diving competition with beings of blood and beings of will alike. Finley takes the junior division; a daira takes the newly-formed being of will division; and a blue-scaled zora named Gruve takes the senior division from under Sidon's nose. Sidon pumps Gruve's arm so enthusiastically that he nearly throws Gruve off of the cliff. He demonstrates to Link how to fish and prepare shark. Zelda and Link learn how to fish *properly* now that the latter no longer has use of hylian bomb fishing. Link thanks Sidon profusely. She opens up her old bar at the East Reservoir again, however briefly, and welcomes customers old and new, while Zelda assists in taking orders, steaming fish, mixing drinks, and changing lives. Link parts from Ruto with another fishing pole and the knowledge of how to use it. She thanks Sidon, who calls her one of his most treasured friends.
In Hateno, Link finds that the laboratory has transformed from merely trying to emulate guardians to partnering with Inpaz College and creating new technologies using the electricity from topaz. Several representatives of Uruda and other Parapan schools exhibit the benefits of topaz over the benefits of the energies of the Sacred Realm, namely that the latter no longer exist at all.

In Kakariko, Zelda sees Impa again for the first time in one hundred years. "You still have," Zelda breathes, "the bracelet."

"And I have for one hundred years." Impa's voice shivers. "I missed you, Zelda. I am sorry I could never say this before, but the Goddesses have granted us the time now for me to respect my own Goddess's virtue of truth." She closes her eyes. "I loved you then, and I love you now."

"Impa." Zelda's shoulders shake. "Even when we were at our lowest low, I never stopped loving you. My first and oldest friend."

Impa and Zelda gaze at one another, and they break into tears, and they embrace. Zelda whispers that she has never seen Impa cry like this. Impa apologises for everything that she ever through. They speak to one another without the king's shadow blanketing them for the first time in their lives. They speak like they spoke years and years ago when they were young, when Impa did not yet understand the gravity of her role as the Princess's shade, when Zelda did not yet understand the gravity of her role as the Princess. They talk honestly.

While Zelda and Impa reunite, Link spends time with the people of the village, including Dorian, Koko, and Cottla, who have settled back in to Kakariko. Dorian notes that they travel regularly to see Koko and Cottla's friends in Medli. Link finds Paya standing just slightly straighter of spine and just slightly stronger of speech. Together, they cook all sorts of foods, Kakariko specialties, sheikah cuisine, and meals from outside of Necluda. Snapping her fingers, Link presents to Zelda her own dossiers and the king's journal. Zelda reads through them. She cries. She dries her tears. "Thank you, Link. Thank you. I..." She shivers. "I...don't think I will be able to forgive him, and never again will I call myself Princess Zelda Satoru Miyahon Harkinian," she says at length, gazing beyond the Pillars of Levia into a distant past, "but at least I know he believed in me after all."

In the Hyrule Field, Link prepares a bowl of creamy heart soup in the remains of Lon Lon Ranch. She does not weep, for she knows that Marin rests far, far away near Mount Satori, but she takes the moment to speak of Marin to Zelda, who speaks to her in turn of Urbosa. They travel north. Link bakes a carrot cake that she and Zelda share in the quiet of the castle, in the ruined chambers where Link and Aryll once slept, far, far away from that house. One day, these wounds, too, shall heal. Link tells Aryll about her journey. She tells Aryll about all of the birds that she has seen and about the Aryloftwing. She tells Aryll of how the trusty red telescope has saved her life over and over again. She tells Zelda about Aryll, and she promises that next time they visit Telma Ranch, she will have Ilia tell Zelda about Aryll, and Zelda swears to record it all. They eat the carrot cake for the girl with the pigtails who can no longer eat it herself. Zelda holds Link as she cries out the tears she has kept within her for one hundred years. Aryll, Aryll, Aryll.

At the end of their long journey, Link and Zelda return to Romani Ranch. Miyu barks at their arrival amid the fields of wheat. Romani grins and informs Link that she has not seen Them since the ending of the Sacred Realm. "Wow wow wow! Maybe the Them were just will-people that wanted some Chateau Romani." Romani claps her hands. "I hope the Them come back so I can make Them some!" Cremia paints Zelda into a portrait of the family all together. Malon and Vish announce that they seem to happen upon a new daughter every year. Zelda smiles sheepishly, and Link makes fruitcake to celebrate.
Zelda and Link alternate between the two ranches. They return to Romani Ranch to assist to the harvest and the foaling, and come back to Telma Ranch for Link to see Ilia as much as she can and to Kakariko for Zelda to see Impa as much as she can. Ilia passes away in the spring—her favourite season—and Link readsies catfish stew in a pumpkin gourd for the funeral. Hilda and Ravio and Link say the rites. They scatter her ashes to the wind. Impa passes away at summer's end.

Clutching the violet bracelet to her chest, Zelda weeps as she did not weep at her mother's funeral. Not tears of grief, but of joy. For having been able to see Impa again after all. Not tears of tragedy, but of looking on to the future. Towards the peace for which Impa fought and won.

Paya sets off to see the world. Link offers her of the location of Romani Ranch. "Come by, and I'll make you some papaya again. No insects, I promise."

"Actually, Link, I wanted to thank you." Paya beams. "You he-helped me acquire a taste for bugs." Link grins. Zelda raises her eyebrows and inquires if Link wouldn't mind bestowing upon her the wisdom of insect-eating.

Link and Zelda move in to Romani Ranch to live with their family. With Maryll, who passes away a few autumns on, and with Malon and Vish, and with Cremia and Romani, and with Miyu of course. Yet they travel just as frequently, sometimes alone, sometimes with Cremia and later Romani, sometimes with other travellers. They travel to all of the places that Link has ever known, to Kakariko, to Darunia, to Medli, to Nabooru, to Ruto, to Kakariko, to all the others. And travellers come to them: Paya, and Sarie, and Sidon, and Riju, and Kass and Amali, and Yunobo, and so many others with whom Link can share stew from her communal cooking pot.

When they come home to the ranch, Sarie plants the golden gift Hestu gave Link by the house; it sprouts into a tree bearing the most succulent spring apples leaved on gold. The world changes. The world heals. The wilds of Hyrule and the people who make something out of them grow, and flourish, and stand strong as one.

Time passes. The seasons turn. Link names Ilia's first filly after Epona and her first colt after Storm. Sometimes, in the summers, Link dons a simple white sundress while she sits with Cremia and Romani on the porch eating the cool hydromelon Riju—and, far later, her wife—brings on her visits. Zelda compiles research on the wilds and on Hyrule's history; Link assists her in determining and quantifying the effects of certain critters and herbs, including the hot-footed frog. With the assistance of Ravio, who proves a knowledgeable gardener, she develops a strain of silent princess bearing similar taste and effects but capable of proliferation in captivity. She dubs it the sneaky scholar. "After all the times I sneaked out to do my own research," Zelda explains, her smile shy; Link beams and asks if she can cook with it. "Oh, Link. Do you really think I'd make something you couldn't cook with?"

Together they bake a thousand fruitcakes of sneaky scholar, though Link only uses bananas very sparingly, Marin's advice on her mind. Zelda helps her crimp the fruitcakes, and Link could not ask for a better happiness. Although, there remains one thing.

Link asks for Zelda a single favour: a strain of sea lily's bells capable of growing and thriving far away from the shores of Lake Hylia. Zelda works tirelessly day in and day out; Cremia and Link together have to drag her away from her books and force her to eat. At last, in the earliest days of springs, Zelda presents to Link a flower, the petals red, the centre gold. Link brings one, trembling, to her nose: the same sun-kissed scent.

Romani, and then Lon Lon, undulate in seas of gold and scarlet, in memory of a girl who wore a violet sash around her hips and carried Link's heart in her hands.

Zelda finds her research accepted in academia across the land; more importantly, she finds her
research accepted in cooking pots and kitchen tables, where the people of Hyrule who matter cook her research into the reality of their meals.

She tells Link excitedly of her findings. Link listens. When she comprehends little, she asks; Zelda sits with her for hours on end explaining and educating until Link understands.

The years slip by. Zelda scribes a long, long story of Link's adventures—and her own—starting from the moment that Link awakened in the Shrine of Resurrection. Unlike the stories of other heroes that scarcely mention their exploits beyond the heroic, unlike the Champions known only for their being pilots of the Divine Beasts, Zelda takes pains to mention Yunobo's acting, Amali's daughters, Riju's cooking, Sidon's diving. She takes pains to describe many of strangers and travellers and extended family whom Link met upon her journey, Sarie and Kass and everyone else. She takes pains to centre every chapter around a recipe, to reveal the truth of Link's cooking having brought together Hyrule, to speak earnestly and honestly of Link's failures as well as her successes, to make Link not merely a hero but a person. A person before everything else. Link. Just Link. The girl who loves to cook.

The chapters start small. She expects to finish, she informs Link, in about one hundred and fifty thousand words. Link does not know just how much that is, but she nods and sits with Zelda night after night, recounting her experiences, answering her companion's questions, detailing what she cooked and when and how. Little by little, as Link moves from when she travelled by herself to when she travelled alongside her companions, the chapters balloon. Every time that Zelda sets down her pen in the belief that she has written her longest chapter yet, another sneaks along even longer to surprise her. The eightieth chapter turns out the longest of all, in part because Zelda includes her own experiences within the keep-temple-palace. Then the egg pudding, and the dubious food that Link cooked for her own reflection, and the fruitcake that Link and Zelda baked upon their return to their world.

Zelda leaves the last page blank for an epilogue.

Malon helps Zelda bind the book in cowskin. Zelda elaborates on her plans: the engineers of the Eldic town of Zubora have innovated a printing carve which automates the creation of their metal books, and already many more inventors from all over Hyrule have worked on emulating the miraculous device into their own people's respective styles of print. In particular, the printing press currently in the works as a joint effort between Parapan, Necludan, and Faronese engineers has caught her eye. Zelda translates the book into every language that she knows with the intention of sending it off to print: one of the first prototype books to pass through the system. At first, Link balks at the thought of everyone in Hyrule knowing her story, when she wants nothing more than to relax over her cooking pot.

"But this way, all of the people who've helped you will be remembered, too," says Zelda, "and the recipes I'm including at the end of each chapter will help people who have never cooked those things before learn how to cook! I didn't know that you could make wildberry cannoli at all until you told me, and the same with so many other recipes. And if people know you, you'll be able to share stew with them from a communal cooking pot." Zelda raises her eyebrows. "See? I can see you smiling. You like the idea, huh? You can say no. I won't be upset at all."

Link sniffs. She agrees. "Tell everyone to get their own cooking pot if they read it. I mean, once you get the cooking pot, there's no reason not to cook every dish in Hyrule."

"Oh, Link," murmurs Zelda, the hand that holds the pen trembling as she writes Link's words of wisdom onto the back of the volume, "I love you so much."

"I love you too."
Link reads the description of the novel: *All of the wilds combined cannot sit at a campfire and share stew from a communal cooking pot. And once you get the cooking pot, there's no reason not to cook every dish in Hyrule.*

She grins. *"It's perfect."* Zelda's cheeks redden, which widens Link's grin even further. *"Thank you. Have you picked a name for it? The book, I mean."*

Now Zelda smiles, a mischievous twinkle in her spring green eyes. *"I think you'll like it. You love people, and you love the land, and I wanted something that would reflect both sides of you. I was thinking about what you said once—what Sarie said—and I decided. I'm going to call it..."* She laughs a light little laugh ending with a very Zelda-like snort. *"...Delicious in Wilds."*

Link throws her arm around Zelda. Zelda throws her arms around Link. They hold one another. Zelda weeps, and Link brushes away her tears even as she herself cries, too. Zelda sends *Delicious in Wilds* out, with the blank page left for the epilogue.

Hyrule heals.

People walk the paths again. Every town and village bustles with new life ad with people moving in from across Hyrule to share with one another their bounties and their knowledge and their meals. Seasons change. Time passes. Link keeps her promises and walks her paths, and she and Zelda cook every dish in Hyrule they encounter.

And Link looks out to the infinite horizon where meals upon meals await her, meals that she has never tasted, meals untold that span the eternities, and the very thought that she will never cook all the meals in Hyrule excites her beyond measure.

Always something to discover. Always something to cook. Always something to share from a communal cooking pot.

And then, one morning, long after Link has said *good-bye* to one Ilia and then to the other, she stands amid the golden-scarlet fields of wheat and sea lily's bells beneath the summer-set sun, the wind caressing her face, and she realises that the scent of the earth no longer settles her bones. She can smell on the wind a fragrance and a call she has felt before.

She asks Zelda what lies north. Zelda looks up at her from her shuffle of papers. According to her research, she says, there once lay another kingdom across the ice and the rock, yet the formation of the mountains and their badlands long ago has ceased any communications. *"For all we know, we will come across nothing but a wasteland of frost."*

*"We 'will' come across...?"* Zelda raises her eyebrows, and Link realises that there was never a question at all.

They gaze northward.

They pack their belongings. They bid their family *see you later* with a promise to send back letters as long as they can. Cremia, Romani, and the rest at the ranch wish them all the protection of the Goddesses, a swift journey and a safe return.

They travel with the dawn. Injured, yet healed. Broken, yet mended. Shattered, yet whole. They travel beside one another; they travel as one; they travel with a communal cooking pot in which they cook all that is delicious in wilds.

On the day before they leave the world they know for the first time in their lives, they bake the apples of Hyrule over an open flame. They bid *see you later* to Akkala and Parapa, Eldin and Faron,
Hebra and Necluda, Tabantha and Lanayru, to Central Hyrule and the Great Plateau where they awoke in the Shrine of Resurrection. They bid see you later to Hyrule, who lives now by her own hand.

They travel north. They return again bearing gifts of meat and drink. They live a time with their family all across Hyrule, and then they find their way onto a ship, and then they sail over the sea.

Someday, long after they have returned to dust, the people of the wilds look upon the stars. Someday, long after the names fade to dust, the people of the wilds name the stars anew. Someday, long after the stars themselves dissipate to dust and others take their place, the people of the wilds lift their hands up to the skies and cup the starlight in their palms.

Someday, long after they have returned to dust, the breath of the wild whispers over the world and breathes life anew. Such is the promise of the Goddess Farore. Such is Her wind, that She carries the seeds of life, and such is Her courage, that the people of Hyrule bear the will to live.

And sometimes She carries, too, the faint strains of an accordion, or an ocarina, or a voice, singing the words written long, long ago by a travelling minstrel who recorded the ancient verses long passed down through generations of people of our Hyrule, a song of cooking pots and communal campfires, a song of mushroom skewers and fruitcakes, a song that mentions only at the very end the calming of the Calamitous One and the passing of the Sacred Realm. Sometimes She carries, too, the faint strains of an instrument, singing the words written long, long ago:

"Let us sing of the six who saved Hyrule from the brink,

"of Riju's white lightning; of Amali's great gale;

of Yunobo's protection; of Sidon's healing grail;

"of the legend of Zelda: the adventure of Link."

—

**Baked Apple (thee-quarters heart) - apple**

Chapter End Notes

**Afterword**

Hello there, dear reader. I hope that you enjoyed the journey behind you as much as I enjoyed my journey through the vastness of Hyrule.

I write this afterword on the final day of my summer break, immediately after having written the final words of the final chapter of Delicious in Wilds. Instead of studying for exams as I was supposed to, I wrote my Hyrule Fantasy. I cannot say that I regret a single moment.

I wrote Delicious in Wilds over the course of eighty-four days, averaging about one chapter per day. I anticipated before I began that Delicious in Wilds would take me about fifty chapters at approximately three thousand words per chapter. No, really. That was my goal. As you can see, the story and the characters took on lives of their
I did very minimal planning for *Delicious in Wilds*, partially because I did not anticipate the scope of the story. I wrote this from the first chapter to the eighty-fourth by the seat of my pants, never knowing what the next chapter would bring until I wrote it. Not until the very end, really, did I realise how everything would come together. Yet, like an "everything but the kitchen sink stew," it somehow did.

I hope, sincerely, that *Delicious in Wilds* has taught you at least one recipe possible in *Breath of the Wild* that you did not know. I gathered all of these recipes myself. I did not account for criticals or for RNG (such as the monster extract). I put in the ingredients once and went with what I got. In fact, prior to every chapter, I sat down with a cooking pot in approximately the same area as Link in the story and threw together ingredients until I made something Link wanted. Sometimes, I realised what Link wanted to cook immediately. For certain chapters, it took me upwards of an hour. For certain chapters, it took me upwards of an hour.

I did not cover every unique recipe possible in *Breath of the Wild*, and for good measure: those extra recipes afford me the chance for additions and extensions in the future if I choose to write them. If not, then they represent a mere smattering of the many, many recipes that Link has yet to try in the wilds of Hyrule. She will try many, I'm sure. I believe in her. After all, once you get the cooking pot, there's no reason not to cook every dish in Hyrule. And so I did.

As of this time of writing, I have clocked 1591 hours on my copy of *Breath of the Wild* for the WiiU. Despite its many, many flaws from both gameplay and narrative perspectives, I can honestly say that *Breath of the Wild* brought back my love for video games in a way that I have not felt for eight long years.

Sitting here with the WiiU controller in my hand, running my thumbs over the buttons, I still cannot believe that Nintendo released a game like *Breath of the Wild* in 2017. I look forward to what adventures Link will have next. And speaking of adventures of Link, I patterned the ending of *Delicious in Wilds* after *The Adventure of Link*, because I felt that the story one hundred years ago comprised *The Legend of Zelda*, the legend of the Princess. And *this* Hyrule Fantasy, one hundred years later, comprises *The Adventure of Link* and her cooking pot.

There are parts of *Delicious in Wilds* of which I am immeasurably proud, and parts that I would do differently if I could write *Delicious in Wilds* over again, just like any playthrough of *Breath of the Wild*. In the end, though, I wrote *Delicious in Wilds* thus. Now I can sit down, belly full. When *Ballad of the Champions* comes out later this winter, I might write a sequel set during the final chapter: *Desserts in Wilds*.

Over the next few months, I will steadily post each chapter with editing assistance by my beloved beta reader Emma, who has been with me every step of the way like my own cooking pot. Over the next few months, I will record briefly notes and thoughts about each chapter as I post them. Over the next few months, I do not really expect many people to read *Delicious in Wilds* given its niche appeal. However, I wrote *Delicious in Wilds* for myself, first and foremost, as a love letter to *The Legend of Zelda* I love so dearly.

Dear reader, thank you. I mean this from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for accompanying me on this journey, on this legend of Zelda, on this adventure of Link. I love you as much as Link loves food. And that's saying a lot. I hope that you enjoyed *Delicious in Wilds*. And if you did not, then I will strive to do better in the future. I hope, even more so, that you and I will both enjoy the many, many journeys
through the many, many Legends of Zelda and Adventures of Link in the years to come. Now, the Hyrule Fantasy awaits.

midna's ass. 23 August 2017.

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