### Complement

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#### Summary

He was a loyal hero, while she was an aggressive pirate. At first glance, they had nothing in common - at second glance, it was exactly what they needed.

A collection of oneshots featuring the Great Sea's hero and pirate over the course of their relationship.

#### Notes

Welcome to Complement, a fic I started on FanFiction six years ago and finally decided to cross-post here. It's ongoing, with the goal to hit 100+ chapters before I call it quits. But I also suck at updating, which is why it's taken six years to even get this far. Nevertheless, it's proven to be a very popular read for TeLink shippers and Wind Waker fans alike, so I hope you enjoy!

The story begins at the start of Wind Waker and consists of oneshots in a mostly-but-not-always consistent timeline. I do jump around at times, and I always include where we're at in the notes. I aged up Link and Tetra to fourteen at the start, because it's unclear exactly how old they are anyway.

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**Fandom:** The Legend of Zelda & Related Fandoms, The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker, The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass  
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Stars

The waves lapped gently against the ship as it slid silently through the dark waters. Apart from that, it was silent all around him. He couldn't quite believe how quiet the ocean could be at night, but here he was, witnessing it firsthand. Beyond water, there wasn't a sound anywhere.

Which begged the question as to why he was up at such a late hour. It was clear that the rest of the world was lost in a dark, quiet slumber, but he found himself unable to do the same. It may have been the fact that everything he knew in his life had been thrown upside-down, what with his sister being kidnapped by a monstrous bird. That thought alone was enough to keep him awake, out of guilt and worry.

On top of that, he had impulsively persuaded a group of pirates to take him to his sister. It had seemed like a good idea at the time – he needed to find his sister, and they knew where she was. But maybe, in hindsight, he should have thought it through a little more. After all, these were pirates. Who was to say they didn't just throw him overboard as soon as Outset was out of sight and be done with him? He supposed the captain felt indebted to him for saving her, though it was apparent she didn't care at all for the thought.

Regardless, he was on a pirate ship with no one to watch out for him. And while the crew seemed to respect him enough to leave him be, he still felt nervous at the thought of falling asleep with them. They outnumbered him seven to one, and he didn't have much experience in fighting – none at all, actually. What was he doing here again?

Link sighed, rubbing his temples. He needed to stop thinking about this, or else he'd never get any rest tonight. He had decided to get some air in lieu of lying on a bunk while sleep eluded him, thinking that some fresh air would calm him down. And so he found himself on the deck of the ship, surrounded by darkness and the sound of water softly splashing against the boat.

Looking around, he noticed the clear sky full of stars above him. They were intriguing, the way they glimmered so brightly while dotting the black space above him. Glancing at the crow's nest, he decided to get a better view. Everyone else was asleep anyway, so it wasn't like he could get in any trouble for being up there.

That thought flashed through his head when he reached the top of the ladder – only to find the girl he had helped earlier sitting in the nest, staring up at the sky herself. He froze, wondering if she had seen him. She hadn't reacted, and her eyes seemed glazed, as if she was deep in thought. He decided to shift back down the ladder, being as quiet as he could, until-

"Where are you going?"

He cringed. She had noticed him after all, and now she had made it worse by addressing him. Somehow, he didn't feel comfortable being alone with this girl on top of a tall platform. She had an air about her that was… scary, and almost dangerous. But it was too late to leave now. Besides, they were on a ship in the middle of the ocean; even if he did ignore her, where could he go where she couldn't find him?

So, he struggled to come up with some answer that would explain what he was doing: why he was up so late, why he was up in the crow's nest, and why he had tried to leave after finding her. The problem was that his mind was completely blank right now. Truthfully, he was pretty scared of her, and it was distracting his thinking.
"I… Um…" he stuttered, trying to think of something, anything, to say to her. She was looking at him now, her expression unnervingly neutral. "I just, you know, wanted some air. Because I couldn't… um, sleep," he answered lamely, but her expression didn't change.

He was worried about getting in trouble for being on the crow's nest before she spoke, "Seems fair. Well, you're here now. Stop hiding and get up here."

Hesitantly, he complied and sat down beside her. There was just enough room for two to sit side by side, and it left him a little nervous to be so close to her. His eyes dropped down to the dagger she had sitting on her hip. What if she used it on him? What if she killed him right here to get rid of him? This had to be a trap. What were the odds they would both be in the same, cramped place-

"You're shaking," she noted, bringing him back from his worries. He looked down and noticed that his hands were indeed visibly shaking in his lap. She eyed him oddly with a raised brow and asked, "Are you cold? That getup doesn't offer much warmth?"

Great. He had known this girl for less than a day, talked to her, what, four times? And now the subject was back on his clothing. It wasn't like he enjoyed it himself, but he hadn't thought of changing when leaving with the pirates.

"I'm not cold," he answered, trying to keep his voice steady. "I just wanted to look at the stars, that's all." *And I hadn't expected to run into you here.*

She was silent for a moment, her eyes back up at the sky above them. Slowly, Link did the same. They sat in silence for a moment, taking in the view, before she answered, "Mm. It's relaxing, seeing them shine. A treasure you can't put your hands on, and one that chooses when it wants to show itself."

Link blinked. That was actually… very nice to hear. He glanced at her, and quickly looked away when she glanced back. Eye contact with her just didn't feel like something he wanted. It felt like she could see right through him with her focused gaze. Even so… She had a way with words, he had to admit. It wasn't something he had expected from her.

Then again, he didn't know her at all; she was a pirate, and that was it. Maybe he had been jumping to conclusions about her and her crew. They *had* agreed to help him find his sister, and that was something he was grateful for. Could pirates really be compassionate like that…?

"Look kid, I'm sorry about what happened to your sister," she spoke, and despite himself, he felt the corners of his mouth tugging into a frown. Kid? She had to be the same age as him. Where did she get off talking down to him like that?

"I'm not just a kid. I'm fourteen years old," he protested. "How old are you supposed to be?"

He immediately regretted it. She shot him a look that was chilling enough to make him recoil slightly. It was a look that told him that question was too personal, one you didn't just forwardly *ask* a pirate captain. Sure, it had been disrespectful, but even so. They *had* to be close in age.

After a moment of tense silence, she finally answered. "I'll be fourteen in a couple months," she replied, and he stared, incredulous. He was older than her? And she was bossing him around like it was nothing?

She seemed to read his mind, because her next reply immediately shot down his thoughts. "I've seen things that would make your head spin, kid. I've fought in some vicious fights, and barely come out with my life. You?" She trailed off, glancing over him. "It doesn't look like you've fought at all. I'm
willing to bet serious money that you've never even been off that island of yours. So before you say anything, I have enough experience to kick your scrappy backside into a coma before you could even say 'help me'. If you're on my ship, you will do as I say, and you will address me with respect. Got it?"

He was stunned. Maybe she wasn't quite what he thought she had maybe been a couple minutes ago. Even so, he did feel a little guilty. "I'm sorry," he replied quietly.

Her gaze softened in response his defeated look. That had been too aggressive. After all, she was used to dealing with adults and had to act like one. Link was not an adult. Rather, he was a boy with no gritty life experiences, someone who hadn't tasted dark reality before now. She sighed. "Don't be," she muttered. "It's not your fault." He looked at her, and she kept talking to lighten the mood. "I mean, I guess it sort of was a little bit my fault that your sister was taken. Stupid bird thinks all blondes look alike," she tossed out with a sarcastic roll of her eyes, and Link found himself smiling. "And I know this whole thing is way beyond what you're used to. So… I'll help you out for a while longer. Just for a while though," she added quickly when his face lit up. "I don't need to be distracted by some kid when I've got more important things to do."

Link's grin only widened, and it was so sincere that she had a faint smile rise to her lips as well. "I'm turning in. Tomorrow's going to be a long day, so don't be up too late. We work on this ship, and I expect you to carry your weight."

He nodded as she stood up and headed for the ladder. Before she could disappear, he said, "Thank you for helping me, Captain."

She stared at him a moment before shooting him a quick wink and answering, "Don't mention it." She descended out of sight, leaving him alone. "And it's Tetra," her voice called out of the darkness. "Just Tetra."

Link's eyes lingered on the ladder before turning back up to the sky. The scary captain wasn't actually that scary at all. In a lot of ways, she was just being an adult because she needed to be. It was obvious she wasn't used to being with someone her age. Maybe he could change that.

He smiled slightly, laughing internally for ever being afraid of her. "Tetra," he echoed softly to the darkness. "It's nice to meet you."
"Nudge! Senza! Secure the line!" Tetra barked as she strode across the deck. "Gonzo, take us north! We've got a new destination!" She glanced around, making sure everything that needed to be done was happening. It was then that she happened to notice Link practicing at the bow of the ship, swinging his sword at the imaginary foes that surrounded him.

Her attention caught, she watched for a moment as he went back and forth. It was clear that he'd had a bit of training – the cuts he made were accurate and strong. But it was also obvious that he had been in few real fights. His stance was still unbalanced, and he did not grip his blade with any force. It was as if he was afraid to really hold the weapon. If he was going to storm the Fortress and save his sister, that had to change.

"Alright, kid, I've seen enough," she called out as she joined him at the bow. Link stopped and turned to face her, brow furrowing as he panted.

"I'm not a kid. My name is Link, you know that," he spoke with almost a hint of annoyance. It seemed he'd learned from the last time he'd spoken out. Regardless, she ignored him.

"You're going to get yourself killed if you keep that up," she instead voiced, eyes directed at his feet. To prove her point, she stepped forward and softly but steadily pushed his shoulder. His eyes widened in surprise as he loudly fell over onto the deck, with hardly a hint of grace.

"See? No balance," she added with a chuckle. "One strong parry and you'll end up just like that. Only your enemy won't hesitate to strike you while you're down there." She held out a hand to help him up, but Link ignored it and simply picked himself up, obviously frustrated with her.

"I'm not that bad. I did save you in the forest, in case you've forgotten. I think I can hold my own just fine," he countered, dusting himself off. Tetra only snorted and rolled her eyes, turning away to face the ocean.

"Against those mindless idiots? Your grandmother could've taken them down without breaking a sweat. That isn't a feat to be proud of." She turned to face him again and drew her dagger. "You think you're good though? Prove it." She adopted a stance and waited while he stared blankly at her.

"You want me to attack you?" he asked skeptically. She nodded with a determined look. Link simply shrugged and walked toward her, raising his sword.

"Stop." He did as he was told, confused. Tetra shook her head. "You said you had skill. I want you to prove it. Attack me like you mean it. Pretend I'm the one who took your sister!"

Link frowned, but stepped back and adopted a ready stance. Staring at Tetra and imagining her as some faceless foe, he gripped his sword tightly and swung.

Effortlessly, without so much as flinching, Tetra blocked the blow and shoved back. Link cried out as he found himself back on the deck. Tetra rolled her eyes. "See? You're unbalanced. I didn't even
do anything. I didn't have to; I just acted on what you'd already done to yourself."

Link got back up, frustrated again. He raised his sword over his head and brought down a strong cut aimed at Tetra's head. Lazily, she raised one arm and caught it with her dagger, deflecting his sword down beside her. He pulled back and swung again, only to have it yield the same result. His frustration building, he took a clumsy step forward and stabbed at her, only for her to nimbly step back and swat his sword away. She made contact again and spun the blade a couple times before he lost his grip and dropped it. It clattered loudly as it slid away down the deck, while Tetra said nothing as she sheathed her weapon. She had driven her point home – there was nothing left to say.

She turned and walked away, content to leave him with his thoughts. His voice calling her name, however, stopped her. She turned around to find him back on his feet and walking her way, sword in hand. He stopped before her and stared into her eyes, anger clashing with curiosity. After a moment, he closed his eyes and sighed.

"You're right," he mumbled. "My form is off. There wasn't much time for me to learn." She frowned. She only wanted to teach him, not depress him into thinking he couldn't fight. However, his next question banished the thought from her head.

"You said you've had lots of experience fighting, and I can see it," he spoke softly. Looking at her again, he asked, "Could you teach me how to fight?"

She hesitated, her voice catching in her throat. She hadn't meant him to think she'd instruct him; she only wanted to offer a few pointers. And she did have other things to attend to, surely he understood that?

But the way he looked at her wore down her resolve. She had spoken the truth: fighting like that would only get him killed in the Fortress. But he was determined to rescue his sister, and though she couldn't understand why, she wanted him to succeed. So, for reasons she couldn't explain, she found herself nodding to his request.

"Alright. I'll teach you." She stepped back and drew her weapon once more. Adopting her position from before, she took a deep breath before staring at him straight in the eye. "Again."

Link nodded, and, smiling, raised his sword.
Candy

Chapter Notes

So, unless I explicitly mention a reference or continuation of another chapter, these don't really have much of a chronological order. So I have no idea when this takes place. Sometime during Wind Waker, likely.

He had no idea what town they were in – travelling on the ocean for so long, he'd realized that the islands began to blend together. He didn't mind, though. It was bright and cheerful, and all of the townsfolk seemed quite friendly and inviting despite the enormous ship that was docked there. He was thankful they weren't hostile towards pirates. Or perhaps Tetra just had a decent reputation around here. Either way, as they walked down the road, the only looks they got were smiles.

They stopped off at a kiosk to buy some supplies and a bit of food for the men. The man was more than friendly towards them, and offered his services at a very low price. It was almost too good to be true; perhaps business was just good around here. Link didn't care though. He was just happy that everyone else seemed to be content.

It also struck him as a bit odd that pirates still legitimately bought things, but Tetra had once said that if you stole too much, it hurt your reputation to the point where you wouldn't even be allowed near civilization. Besides, her crew were known for being… much more merciful than most pirates. They rarely inflicted any actual harm when stealing, and they usually only stole from people who either deserved it or wouldn't suffer too much from it.

It wasn't perfect, but Link was happy enough with the results. They could walk around without being feared, at least. That was always a plus in his books. Especially since he had a bit of a reputation himself building; associating with dangerous pirates probably wouldn't be seen as acceptable.

The sound of Tetra and the shopkeeper chatting brought Link out of his thoughts. They were finishing up already? Tetra really didn't care to waste time when her objective was clear. She thanked the merchant and began hauling bags into Link's arms, which he responded to with a roll of his eyes and a smile. Obviously she had brought him along for something like this, but he couldn't help but notice that she didn't mind his company, either.

They began their trek back to the ship when Link noticed a small bag in Tetra's hand. He stared at it until Tetra noticed his gaze and glanced away.

"It's nothing," she said, but Link wasn't going to accept that. He was a curious person by nature, and wanted to know what was in the bag she'd rather carry herself than give to him.

She sighed and pulled out a small, red ball. He blinked in confusion until she popped it into her mouth, a content smile rising to her lips. They walked in silence until she could no longer ignore his confused stare burrowing into the side of her head.

"It's candy, alright?" she answered finally, though with the slightest hint of embarrassment. Link couldn't help but crack a grin. This tough-as-nails pirate had a sweet tooth? She had been so serious about buying only what they needed, and yet she had bought candy for herself. Not only did it seem
out of place for her, but it was a rare glimpse of what she really was: still a child.

Tetra rolled her eyes. "Open your mouth," she told him, and he hesitantly did as she asked. She took a ball and placed it in his mouth. He chewed it slowly, savouring the taste. It was a little tough and sour on the outside, but the core was very soft and sweet. The flavours and textures were a very nice complement; he could see why she liked them so much.

She smirked and plopped another one in her mouth. "Just don't tell the boys, alright?" she asked. "I like to surprise them with these. They go nuts for them." Link nodded in understanding as they walked on. He couldn't help but notice, as they arrived at the ship, how similar she was to the candy she so adored. Watching her walk up the gangplank, he wondered if she knew it as well.
Guilt

Chapter Notes

I like to imagine that Link stops and visits Tetra every time he does a dungeon or something. Just for a bit. Just to keep in touch.

She stood silently, watching him. There was something unnerving about the way he sat there, crumpled against the railing, his face hid in his knees. His breathing was ragged, she could see that. He was likely crying. But the problem that stood, the one that prevented her from doing anything, was obvious all over her body.

She didn't really know how to comfort someone. She wasn't sure what to do, or what not to do. What to say and what not to say. What to console and what to hammer in. It was clear that he needed something, but she was simply at a loss as to what that was.

Her men didn't have these issues, so there had never been an opportunity to learn. And her own issues, she either buried behind a mask or hid with herself in her room. The simple truth was that she clueless about what to do to help him. But, deciding she had to do something, she found herself walking over to him, her steps slow and tense.

She sank down beside him, but he didn't acknowledge her. Perhaps he hadn't noticed? That seemed possible, given his condition. She sighed. What did she do? Say something? Pat him on the back? Were they even close enough to console each other? What if she screwed up and did something that scared him, or made things weird? This was beginning to terrify her.

He let out a dry heave, and her brow furrowed. Deciding to act, she slowly extended a hand and, after intense back-and-forth consideration, hesitantly placed it on his shoulder. He sniffled loudly and turned to face her. Her expression became pained when she noticed the cascade of tears falling down his cheeks, and the large stain they'd left on his tunic. His eyes were glowing red, and his breathing was shallow and erratic, broken occasionally by hiccoughs. He looked terrible; something serious must have happened in the Fortress. It occurred suddenly that she still did not know the reason for his pain, so she gently squeezed his shoulder, hoping the action wasn't too odd. "What happened?"

He took in several huffy breaths that she assumed were an attempt to calm himself down, and wiped his eyes. "I f-failed," he stuttered in between heaves. "Sh-she was right th-there, but I-I-I-" He swallowed, trying to control his breathing. "I got c-caught by that bird and thrown o-out into the water!" He lost himself again, burrowing his face into his knees once more. Tetra frowned and, despite herself, began rubbing his back to calm him down.

"I was s-so c-close!" he cried, his strained voice muffled further by his knees. She kept rubbing, a little upset herself. No wonder he was like this. He was afraid of security tightening in the Fortress, or something happening to his sister now that it was known that someone was looking for her. She supposed that, if the girl had seen her brother only for him to be taken away by that monster, she would be having a freak-out herself. Link could be dead, for all she knew. And from his point of view, she could be gone, taken elsewhere for safekeeping.

"It's all my f-fault!" Link cried louder, losing himself once more. "I couldn't p-p-protect her! I tried to h-help h-her, but I screwed that up t-too! I'm a useless brother!"
Tetra put her arm around his shoulders and awkwardly pulled him into a sort of hug. Her entire body screamed uncomfortable, but she would just have to learn to live with it. Link needed some help right now, and even if she didn't know what she was doing, he seemed to be taking solace in it.

"You're not a useless brother," she replied, and Link looked up at her, trying to wipe away his tears. "You braved the worst place on the ocean to try and get her back. That's some serious commitment, Link." His eyes lit up at the sound of his name, and she cracked a small smile. "Trust me. If could do that, I think she believes in you to rescue her. It may not be anytime soon," she added before his hopes could get too high, "but she knows you'll come back."

He took a deep breath, his voice shaking considerably less. "You really believe that?"

She smiled with a wink. "Count on it."

His face broke into a grin, and he chuckled, trying to wipe his face dry. "Okay. Thanks, Tetra."

They sat in silence for a moment, both unsure of what to do. Her arm was still around him, and she didn't know whether to keep it there or take it back. Link didn't seem to mind, but he seemed a little embarrassed as well, now that he had calmed down.

A thought entered her head, and she was compelled to ask, "If you were tossed back into the ocean, how did you make it back here?"

"Some magic boat found me in the ocean." Magic boat? Well, she surmised, that would probably explain what that red thing banging against her ship had been. And though she wasn't sure what exactly made a boat 'magic', she didn't feel the need to ask. Not right now, at any rate.

They sat together in silence, Link having calmed down considerably. Tetra’s arm remained around him, and an awkwardness remained in the air that she was fully aware of. Ignoring it, her thoughts turned to the boy beside her. They had both learned something about each other, and, she realized, she had learned something about herself as well – she supposed she had him to thank for that. Despite that, she also wanted this healing to be over at some point, so she could ditch this caring attitude and go back to what she was supposed to be. But Link didn't need a cold pirate right now; he needed a caring friend.

So for now, she was content to sit there with him, for as long as he needed.
Sing

It was without any real purpose that he walked across the deck, sighing softly to himself. It was an odd feeling, having a day off. No work to be done on the ship, no heroics that demanded his immediate attention… It was almost nice, being like a normal citizen every now and then. The only problem was that it always left him, though he disliked it, a little bored. He was so engrained in routine that he didn't really know how to handle a day off. And so, when those few special days came around, he usually found himself doing exactly as he was doing: wandering around, attempting to think of some possible task that could occupy his time.

Sadly, nothing came to mind now. He'd go visit his grandmother if she weren't so far away, but he couldn't help that. Besides, he was already on the ship. His intention had been to spend some time with Tetra and her crew. The problem was that they were nowhere to be found.

He had arrived at Windfall only to find the ship docking there as well. He had eagerly gone over to greet them; however, the men seemed a little more intent on food or some such, having rushed past him with only a quick "Hey, Link" to acknowledge his presence.

So here he was, wandering around on the deck. He supposed he could try and find some of the guys – it wasn't like Windfall was that big. But he assumed they'd been out for a while now, and they were probably anxious for some real food and drinks, likely without wanting to catch up while doing so. Not that it bothered him; he knew the experience all too well himself. But it still left him without anything to do. There was also an unspoken question that had entered into his thoughts when the ship arrived, and now it was beginning to plague him.

Tetra was nowhere to be found. He had assumed she'd follow her men out on some errands of her own, but she had yet to show herself. He frowned as he eyed the door that led below deck. It wasn't like she knew he was here – perhaps she wasn't here at all – but he had wanted to see her. If she wasn't going to show herself though, then he supposed he would have to go looking for her.

He was about to do so when something reached his ears. It was a soft, very faint echo, but it sounded… musical. Yes, it wasn't noise; there was definitely a rhythm to it. He stood and listened, straining to hear it. It was so faint, but it sounded incredibly nice. He had to find out where it was coming from. It couldn't be far from him, it was barely perceivable already.

He wandered back and forth on the deck, turning around whenever he lost the sound. After a moment, his eyes darted towards the door, and he slowly made his way toward it. Throwing it open, he was hit with a much more resonant sound. His eyes widened in surprise. It was singing! But it was coming from below the deck?

Link stood there momentarily, puzzled. It was definitely a voice, he was sure of it. But he was the only one he knew of on the ship; everyone else was accounted for, save for the reclusive captain. He blinked, trying to register his thoughts. Logically, if she was here, that would mean she was the source of the sound. But that thought just didn't sit right. Tetra didn't seem like the type to sing; she seemed like the type to yell and swing a blade at you, a leader born out of fighting. They seemed like two ends of a spectrum.

Shaking his head, he passed through the doorway and descended down the stairs. The pleasant sound was growing louder, very clearly coming from behind the closed door ahead that led to her room. He couldn't believe his eyes. She was singing…? He had to be sure. He walked towards her door and softly knocked.
The music immediately stopped, and the absolute stillness that followed felt a little unnerving. After a moment, he heard slow footsteps coming closer, before the door finally swung open. She stood there, with wide eyes and burning cheeks. It seemed like she hadn't planned on being discovered.

"I- What're you doing here?" she asked in disbelief, her fingers drumming on the door rather quickly. Link had to suppress a grin. She was obviously embarrassed that he had discovered her doing something so out of character. He didn't want to rub it in though, at least at the moment, so he bit his tongue and swallowed.

"I was in town, thought I'd drop in and say 'hey'," he answered. "I can come back if it's a bad time."

Tetra hesitated a moment before shaking her head. "It's fine. I just… thought I was alone, that's all. I'll be right up." She quickly closed the door before he could reply. So he simply smiled and turned around.

How interesting. She had thought she was alone, so she had sung. He wasn't sure why others knowing that fact would embarrass her, but it likely had to do with her image that she cared so much about. He had to admit, she wasn't wrong – he hadn't been able to believe she would sing, either. Even so, when she was by herself, she seemed to shed the attitude she always wore. Truthfully, that made him curious: he wanted to know what else she guarded for the sake of her tough reputation. She had unknowingly given him a look into something personal that she did, possibly even enjoyed. And he wanted to know more.

He shrugged, returning to the deck. If she had tried to cover it up out of embarrassment, he'd keep the teasing to a minimum. Even despite the fact that, he had to admit, she had a beautiful voice.
Responsible

Chapter Notes

I think this predates 'Sing' – he's only taking his first steps as the new hero.

She eyed him skeptically. This wasn't quite what she'd imagined when he had told her. "So that's it?"

He nodded in response, smiling softly at the delicate baton in his hands. "It's pretty amazing, actually. With it I can basically bend time, or warp space. I can twist the fabric of reality by manipulating the elements as I wish. I could do almost anything I wanted with this," he spoke with a hint of excitement, not unlike prospect of a child convincing a parent for a new toy. "It was used by the kings of old, way back when there was still a kingdom. But, supposedly, they're all gone. So it's fallen to me."

He held out the Wind Waker, gesturing for her to take it. But she hesitated – it was not her place to wield it, after all. She was not the prophesized hero; from what she'd heard, that was now supposedly him. But he insisted, so she reluctantly held out her hand for him to drop it into. The first thing she noticed was that it was heavy; she hadn't anticipated much weight to it, but it was as if all of the magical qualities it possessed were bearing down on it. The other thing that was odd was that it was quite warm. Not a scalding heat under the aggressive sun, but simply… warm. Inviting. As if begging to be used.

"Here, follow me," he told her. He held out his arm and she copied him, holding the baton firmly. She began to follow his arm motions, and almost dropped it in surprise – it began to glow, and disembodied voices sounded from all around them, reacting to the baton's guide. She finished his pattern, looking at him expectantly. He only grinned, watching her expression. "Think of a direction."

She wasn't sure she understood. Think of a direction? Like, north- Immediately, a strong gust blew past her face. Blinking in disbelief, she pulled out her compass and studied it. The wind had changed direction, and it had answered what she had unknowingly asked.

Link laughed, taking back the baton. "Pretty cool, right?" She shared his smile after a moment of consideration. It was, actually. It was as if the world was waiting at his command. The thought of controlling the elements was an intriguing one, but as she eyed the object in his hand, she felt it was also one that frightened her.

The thing had ridiculous power, and it was being entrusted to a child. She supposed there wasn't a chance of him using it for evil – he was quite responsible, after all – but it just felt like too much for one person. By using it, he was stepping into a new destiny, one that tied him to the kingdom and evils of old. It was a tremendous responsibility that had been placed on his shoulders. He was having the fate of the ocean shoved into his hands without a say in the matter, but he didn't seem to mind. Maybe he didn't yet realize it; she hoped it stayed that way for a while longer. He couldn't yet see that his life was going to change, but it inevitably would. He had set out to save his sister, but had now gotten involved in something bigger, some much greater fate that awaited him. His life couldn't be the same now.

And in a way, she felt a pang of guilt for leading him to it.
Swim

Chapter Notes

Kind of a silly idea, and one that's been done to death, I'm sure. I don't care though; it's all character development, right? I mean, she's a pirate, so it might be a necessity, but...

Oh well, I suppose it could happen.

He surfaced, taking in a deep breath while splashing water all around him. He had always enjoyed swimming, ever since he was little. After all, there weren't too many things to occupy his time on Outset outside of chores, so he often got his exercise by swimming laps along the beach. He would always try and convince others to join him; however, the adults were too busy with work, and the children were too young to swim without their supervision. The only other person who could was Aryll, and there were times when she did accompany him. Often, though, she preferred to play with the seagulls in the lookout, chatting away with them as if they could speak back. It didn't bother him – she had her hobbies and he had his. So he swam by himself.

Now, though, he couldn't understand why he was alone. There were definitely others who could've jumped off the ship with him, yet no one had. Surely the men liked to cool off every now and then; wasn't it a reasonable assumption that they would have swam too? Supposedly it was, had they not been too tired from the day's work to attempt it. He couldn't argue with that. However, the captain had holed herself up in her room all day, studying several charts for a reason she refused to divulge. She had finally come out for some air, seating herself on the prow with her legs swinging to watch him. But she showed no indication of entering the water.

He couldn't explain it. It felt unbelievably refreshing, the cool water chilling his body under the glaring sun. It should have been an immediate choice. "Aren't you coming in?" he finally called up at her. She was motionless for a moment before he could make out her head shaking. "How come? It's really nice!"

"I don't feel like it," she called back with a shrug. The corners of his mouth fell into a frown. How could someone not feel like cooling off when the water was right here? Especially after being cooped up in small quarters, staring over papers all day?

"C'mon, Tetra! Swim with me!" he coaxed with an innocent smile. He saw her snort and dramatically roll her eyes, but she still refused him. What was wrong with swimming? "What, don't you like it?"

"Of course I do!" came the reply, but there had been an unmistakable hesitation. He frowned again. There was something in her voice that he couldn't let go. Sighing, he swam over to the hanging rope and pulled himself back up to the deck. Shaking his hair out, he wandered over to the prow, where she hadn't moved.

"Why don't you like it?" he asked, a bit more gently this time. He noticed her body tense slightly before quickly relaxing. Why was she hiding something from him?

"I do like it. Really." He wasn't convinced.

"Then why didn't you join me?"
"I didn't feel like it."

It was his turn to roll his eyes. He didn't understand why she was being defensive. "You're not hot?"

"Of course I'm hot," she answered crossly. "Who wouldn't be? Can't you feel the sun?"

"Then why not cool off in the water?"

"I-" She stopped herself, carefully thinking before finally closing her mouth. Standing up, she walked past him. "We're done talking."

"Tetra, wait!" She ignored him and kept walking, her destination unclear; it simply seemed like she just wanted to get away from him. He ran ahead and stopped her before she could get any further.

Her eyes narrowed in anger. "Move."

"Not until I know what's bothering you," came his steady response. She could have easily overpowered him right then, and the look in her eyes had him believing it for a moment. Instead, though, she sighed, her shoulders falling.

"Alright, look," she answered, not meeting his gaze and instead staring at something over his shoulder, "When I was little, we ended up in a bit of a storm. The waves were choppy, and they just kept hitting against the ship. And then this pretty big one came out of nowhere, and it slammed the ship so hard that it rocked, and then…" She trailed off with a shrug. "I dunno. I just… fell over the edge."

She glanced at him, but he said nothing. So she continued, "I couldn't really swim. I mean, I knew how to, but the waves were too strong. They kept pulling me under." She sighed, obviously not fond of the memory. "My mother jumped in and got me, but it just… It shook me up. I never really cared for being in the water after that."

He wasn't sure what to say. Part of him felt bad that he had tried to make her swim, but another part said that she should have told him something like that. Or at least just admit that she didn't like it. It would have been easier in the long run. "But I've seen you in the water before. You swim fine."

She shrugged. "I can swim, when I need to. I mean, I'm on the water a lot; it's going to happen now and then. I just don't like to. I'd rather just sit and watch it."

Link nodded in understanding. That would be a pretty jarring experience, to be sure. But still… "Why not just tell me you don't like swimming? It would've saved us an argument." She shrugged again, obviously searching for an answer.

"I guess I just thought that you would think it was silly," she replied finally. "I mean, a pirate that doesn't like swimming? Pretty embarrassing compared to an island boy." She quickly glanced at him and added, "No offense, I mean."

He laughed. "Relax, I'm not going to think less of you over something you don't like. I'm not that shallow, am I?" he asked, raising a brow and offering a cheeky smile. She slowly cracked one in response.

"Fine," she agreed with a roll of her eyes, "Next time I have a secret that interferes with your plans and ultimately pisses me off, I'll tell you straight-off what it is."

He raised his eyebrows expectantly. "Promise?"
After a moment's hesitation, she sighed and nodded, still smiling. "Yeah. Promise."
Some angst, because I felt like it. It'll probably come from time to time; they won't all be nice and sweet.

Takes place after Wind Waker, I think, but not quite Phantom Hourglass.

She flinched rather aggressively as he applied some healing cream to her face. Regardless of how much she protested, she needed it. She should have been thanking the Goddesses that she was even alive, but instead she stubbornly assured him that she was fine. Even though the contrary would have been obvious to a blind man.

They had come across another ship in their travels, one that Tetra knew to have a dangerous reputation. They were pirates to the fullest extent of the word: cruel, greedy, and *murderous*. She had desired to put them in their place, to show that everyone had their limits, but it hadn't quite played out that way. Actually, as he thought back, everything had fallen apart the moment they had boarded the other ship.

The enemy had obviously been better equipped to handle a fight, and they had outnumbered her crew two to one. Regardless, she had thrown herself into the middle of them, and her men had loyally followed. Even as he joined behind them, he had seen how deep in over her head she was. But her stubbornness had blinded her. These pirates had meant business, and they made it quite clear within seconds.

Thankfully, none of the men had been killed, though Zuko had come dangerously close; had Gonzo not reacted quickly enough and saved him, he wouldn't have come back at all. The rest had their fair share of bruises and scrapes, but nothing that wouldn't be gone in a week. Zuko would need a bit more rest than that, but he would be fine, too.

But it had been an embarrassing retreat, as well as a tense getaway while the enemy had briefly pursued. Tetra had disappeared to her cabin without a word after confirming that her crew was okay enough to be on their own. Hesitantly, Link had followed her. It was as if she couldn't tell that she was in far worse condition than any of them.

As he cleaned up her face, he frowned with concern over how deep some of the cuts went. She had been beaten, quite badly. She never once gave in though, picking herself up every time she was thrown down. She likely would have done it until death, until he had stepped in and pulled her out. His skill had vastly improved over his journey, and he had fought three of them off with ease with Tetra barely hanging on to his shoulders. Nevertheless, her pride had taken a pretty harsh beating.

"Ow, damn it," she spoke through clenched teeth, pulling away from him and rubbing her cheek. "Look, I'm fine! I don't need all this! Zuko's worse-" He cut her off by gently placing a hand on her lips. He placed the cream back on her cheek and resumed rubbing.

"No, he's not. He was just pinned down, but Gonzo got to him." He shook his head as he moved down to her neck. "You took it a lot worse. Look at yourself! You're bleeding all over!" It was true; she had cuts all over her arms and legs, with cloths roughly tied over them to hold the blood until he
"They were screwing with you, Tetra. They just wanted to see how much pain you could take before you finally gave up," he continued, trying not to hurt her as she flinched again. She snorted, eyes dark.

"I wouldn't have given up. Never," she muttered angrily. "Someone had to teach them a lesson! They go around doing what they're doing because no one's strong enough to stop them!"

"Not even you," he added, and her face fell. "Don't the lives of your crew matter to you?"

She looked at him as if she had been slapped. "How can you say that? Of course they do! I fought to get them out of there—"

"I fought to get them out," he corrected. "You couldn't fight at all at that point. I was worried you were going to bleed out before I could even get you back. Tetra, they followed you because they trust you. Even if you're leading them into danger." She studied his face, her bitter eyes meeting his concerned ones. "You have to think about them, too. You're a leader, remember? Their needs are more important than your attempts of revenge."

She was silent, her face blank. He wasn't sure what she was going to do. History dictated that she was going to yell at him, or kick him out of her room. He hoped not – she needed his help. But she was motionless, her glazed eyes showing only deep thought. He sighed, waiting for the words.

Instead, she crawled further onto her bed and leaned against the wall, bringing her knees up to her chest. He blinked, not sure what to make of it. She didn't do this very often; it was only when she was deeply upset that she would try and close herself off. Which meant that his words must have really hit her.

His thought was confirmed by the way her eyes began to water. In an instant, he was at her side, pulling her into a hug as she rested her head on his shoulder. She took a few shaky breaths, trying as hard as she could to not let a tear fall. She hated being like this. But it was moments like these, and like her reckless tactics, that she exposed the fact that she was still just a kid. Just like him.

"You're right," she said after a moment, wiping her eyes. "I almost got them killed, and it would've been all my fault." She took a deep breath to try and calm herself down, realizing only now how much she had worried him over her safety. "I'm sorry, Link. I didn't even realize…" she trailed off before she could finish, wiping her eyes once more. Link said nothing, only dropping his hand to rub her shoulder.

Immediately, she cried out and recoiled, her hand flying up to where his had been only a moment before. He frowned and looked at her, trying to figure out what had happened. Then his eyes dropped down to her arm, where he hadn't noticed the blood staining the blue fabric of her vest. Carefully lifting up the short sleeve, his eyes widened at the gash on her shoulder. It was the deepest cut he'd seen on her, and it didn't seem to show a sign of clotting. He quickly grabbed a spare rag and covered it, applying as much pressure as he could to slow the bleeding. Her eyes were down on her lap as she struggled not to make a noise.

"An arrow caught me as it went by," she spoke finally, her voice soft and with a hint of guilt. "I didn't think it was that bad." He sighed as he reached for a new cloth. This was going to be considerably more difficult to take care of. But he wasn't going to give up. He would make her better, so she could get back out there and make it up to her men. She always felt the need to protect them. The problem was, she didn't let anyone protect her.
Maybe this was the lesson she needed to open her eyes to the consequences of her actions. She couldn't lead her crew into suicidal missions, and she had to learn when to call it quits. Otherwise, none of them would be lasting much longer. He closed his eyes as he reached for the cream. It hurt him that it had needed to be such a painful lesson, but if it got the point across, maybe it was for the best.

She seemed to be thinking along the same lines. As he began applying the cream, she looked at him and, taking a deep breath, whispered softly, "I'm sorry."

He paused and nodded, unspoken forgiveness evident in his eyes. "I know."
It was odd, finding an island covered in snow. On the warm ocean, it just seemed out of place. Then again, they had been travelling northward for a few days now. She supposed it wasn't too foreign, considering the noticeable drop in temperature the further they went. It was just… odd.

In all fairness, there wasn't much snow to be found on any charted island in the archipelago they called home, so comparison was a little bleak. Nevertheless, she and Link found themselves walking around on it, just to check it out. It was cooler than either of them had expected; Link had begun to shiver in his thin tunic, and even she was trying her best not to display any sign of discomfort. But they had already begun forging a path inland, so she figured that they may as well continue.

She looked around, taking in the sight. There was a frozen beauty to the place. The few trees offered no movement in the breeze, held in place by the layers of snow and ice that permeated their branches. The sunlight reflected frost that littered the ground, offering a dazzling light show that they walked across. It was a very pretty scene, she had to admit.

"This place is so peaceful," she commented, gazing at the trees. There wasn't a sound to be heard anywhere. It was as if the island itself was trying to sleep. Only the crunching of ice beneath their boots broke the tranquility.

"Yeah, it's pretty nice," he agreed. "I mean, there's nothing to do, or even look at beyond blinding white, but I guess it's okay." She rolled her eyes while trying to suppress a grin. Leave it to Link to find something captivating and boring at the same time. His adventuring had certainly changed him; he was so used to action now that he was almost bored when away from it. She hadn't decided whether that was a positive or negative point, but he didn't seem to mind it. She supposed that probably meant positive.

"Well, I think it's nice here," she replied, a hint of mock pain in her voice. She heard him snort in return.

"That's not like you," came his voice from behind. She frowned, glancing back. She hadn't noticed him slow down. She ignored it; he had probably just found something interesting to look at.

"Well, I guess you should consider yourself lucky that I can be honest with-" she was cut off by something cold hitting her in the back of the head. She spun around, only to see Link wearing a sheepish grin with flakes of snow on his hands. She stared at him for a moment before he shrugged, still smiling.

She narrowed her eyes, and his face fell into once of worry. Bending down, she grabbed a handful of snow and carefully shaped it into something resembling a ball. Then she slowly began walking towards him, tossing the ball lightly.

Link began to slowly step backwards, holding his hands up in defense. "Okay, before you say anything, I was aiming for your-" He trailed off as her snowball hit him straight in the face. Coughing and sputtering, he wiped it off before grabbing more snow in return. Though his face was red from the cold, he couldn't hide his competitive smile. "Alright then. If that's how it's going to be…"

She grinned, another ball ready in her hands. That was exactly how it was going to be.
Chapter Notes

It's funny how the best things can come from just sitting and talking. Or, occasionally, saying nothing at all.

She sat at the small table quietly, drumming her fingers against the polished wood. She glanced over at Link, who was buying coffees for them. For whatever reason, they seemed to meet up in Windfall a lot, whether planned or by coincidence. At one point one of them had suggested visiting the café, and it had sort of become a catching-up tradition since.

She watched him pay the woman and carry their drinks over to the table. Honestly, she thought with a sigh as he tucked his wallet away, she didn't know how he managed it. In his travels, he was finding ludicrous amounts of treasure, almost rivaling her own income. Unlike her though, he sent the majority back to his grandmother, keeping only small amounts for himself. He backed this by saying that he had no need for money when he was off on his heroics, but she never argued him. It was a noble thing to do. It was something she would've considered herself, had she had any family to take care of. Maybe that's why she gave the boys such large shares.

She took her beverage with a soft 'thanks', sipping it and glancing around. They were the only ones occupying the place at the moment; the café was rarely busy in the day, which was one of the reasons they came. She rather liked quiet places to retreat to, compared to the loudness of battle she constantly found herself in. Link, too, had come to adopt a similar way of thinking, finding it relaxing when they had the opportunity to do so.

They drank in silence, simply enjoying the moment. She had come to enjoy these little outings with him. She wouldn't admit it to anyone else, but she took pleasure in having someone her age to spend time with. They could discuss things she wouldn't have dared mention to her crew, and related to situations that adults simply wouldn't.

A few months ago, she wouldn't have even considered getting involved with someone that wasn't one of her men, least of all a boy with no life experience. But she couldn't admit that now, even if she wanted to. She hadn't realized what having a confidant could do, but it had given her an outlet instead of having her bury her feelings and issues. It took some of the stress off when she could share insecurities and worries with someone who would genuinely listen – someone who actually cared. A true friend, rather than just a loyal crew member. Something she had needed for a long time.

She realized that she had been staring into her coffee. She looked up and saw him staring expectantly at her, brow raised. "Sorry, what?"

"I asked what you were thinking about so intensely," he answered. "You were out of it. Must've been something pretty big."

She hesitated, looking deep into his eyes. That was just how he was: honest, patient, and always willing to help. She was quite lucky to have him, and was thankful that she did. She could never put it into words, but it was there nonetheless. She gave a small smile and shook her head. "It's nothing."
Skin

Chapter Notes

I really can't decide when this takes place… Maybe mid-WWish? I dunno. Mm, let's say that, just for giggles.

Like he often did when he had nothing to do, he found himself wandering around on the deck of the ship. Everyone else was busy with chores that needed to be done, but no one had vocalized the need for help like he had hoped. They were relatively mundane tasks, so there wouldn't have been much for him to do anyway; what he had really been hoping for was some company. As much as the King of Red Lions talked with him when he was out on a mission, he was bound to being a boat. So when he was left behind during a dungeon trek, Link was on his own.

He didn't really care for it, which was one of the reasons he made an effort to visit Tetra so often. She never minded his company, whether she was busy or not. Often, he just talked about whatever harrowing task he had most recently completed while she nodded and offered a few 'uh-huh's while working over her maps. But they didn't mind – it was still time spent together, and that was what was important.

Now, though, she was busy helping out Mako and Niko with some chests full of their most recent plunder. All she had mentioned was that they'd pulled it up from some sunken ship not too far from Dragon Roost. He had no doubt he'd be hearing the full story later on, but he looked forward to it. She told great stories, after all – she could spin words like no one else he knew.

So, for the time being, he was content to hang out at the stern with Gonzo while the latter manned the wheel. He leaned against the railing, taking in the spray of the salty water as the ship cut through the waves. There was a soft breeze that played with his bangs, and he absentmindedly brushed them under his hat. With nothing else to look at, he decided to watch the others finish their task.

As Tetra sorted through the loot, the hilt of her dagger caught the light of the sun and momentarily blinded him. She seemed to notice, for she tucked it under her vest with a smirk before returning to her task. Blinking the glare out of his eyes, he resumed his watching, tracing his eyes over the captain. She had quite the unusual look for someone who led a group of pillaging men. Most would adorn themselves with the precious metals they had swindled, but not her. In fact, the only jewellery she wore was a necklace hidden under her shirt. He had noticed a couple of times, but she always made sure to conceal it.

No, instead she wore an assortment of clothing, a collection of vivacious colours that complemented each other. Her red scarf cheerfully contrasted her deep blue vest, which was accented by her bright blonde hair that was only a few shades off from his own. She topped it off with white pants and wristbands, which stood out vibrantly against the colours and her dark skin. Her dark, smooth, flawless skin…

He blinked. Had he been staring? And daydreaming about her skin? He could admit that it was a nice shade, especially when held up against his fair colour. But hers had been darkened by the sun after being in direct light for weeks, months, years on end. He doubted it would ever change back now; it was permanently tinted after all her time on the ocean. Not that he minded, of course; in his opinion, her skin was beautiful, and it was certainly unique – no one had skin as tanned as hers. And
it was always warm to the touch…

Okay, again? What was he doing? Skin wasn't *that* infatuating, it was just skin! He shook his head and got up, turning away from her. Somehow she was distracting him, and he didn't like it. Maybe it was just heat of the sun, or the stress of his quest, but either way he didn't want it happening. Think about something else. Think about-

"Hey!" came her voice, and he spun around. She was waving at him, with the wink and smirk she usually wore. "Get down here, I have a story to tell. Someone's going to hear it, so hurry up!"

He nodded and made his way down to her. It was probably nothing to worry about. She had nice skin, end of story. There was no reason to go on and on about it. She had a feature that he liked, probably because he'd never seen it before. No big deal. Really, it didn't help when it was added with such soft, amazing-looking hair…

He sighed, rubbing his eyes. He'd been around talking boats for too long.
"Do I need a new flag?"

The question came out of nowhere, and he froze, not sure if he'd heard right. Had she said a new flag? Why, on the Great Sea, was she worrying over a flag? Weren't there more pressing matters for her to deal with right now?

"Link. I asked you a question." He sighed, pushing away the plate of food he had been picking at. Glancing across the table at her, he saw her eyeing him with a serious look. That probably meant she wasn't joking, which was a shame; the question likely would've sounded less silly than it did now.

"Why do you ask?" he inquired slowly. She shrugged, continuing to eat as if nothing was out of the ordinary.

"Because I want your opinion, that's why," she spoke after a moment, wiping her mouth as she did. "I mean, I love mine and all, but it's a little tattered and ripped. Wouldn't it be better to put on a fresh flag?"

He blinked. He couldn't believe he was having a serious conversation with her over flags. He had to be hallucinating. Maybe the food was bad? That seemed possible. "I dunno. Aren't pirates supposed to like tattered flags? Doesn't it show how much action they've seen?"

"Well, yeah. But a new flag would look so cool! Don't you think?"

He didn't answer, no words describing the level of his confusion coming to mind. This wasn't like her. Tetra didn't go on about aesthetics; she went on about action and profit. Caring about how her ship would look with a new flag was so outside her character that he found himself wondering if she had a fever. He couldn't even be sure she'd buy a new flag if she ever lost the current one, never mind comparing visuals.

Her ship notwithstanding, her dagger was her only real possession. Her room consisted of functional furniture – a bed, a dresser, a desk – and a picture of her mother, but otherwise it was quite plain. It was not the room of a teenage girl – rather, one of someone who was prepared to lose everything at a given moment. It was her blade that she truly cared about, and the fact that she rarely took it off her person showed.

So the fact that she was asking about a new flag baffled him. Material objects had no meaning to her because in the life she led, they could disappear in an instant. She even stowed away her share of treasure elsewhere, rather than spend it on weapons or books like her men did. It just didn't add up; he may as well start asking her if she looked good in summer dresses if they were going to change everything they knew about each other.

"Well? How long are you going to stare at the wall? What do you think?" she interrupted, breaking his thoughts. He still didn't know what to say, so he simply shrugged. "Okay, why do I ask for your opinion? You're useless."

"Tetra…" he began, trying to place the words carefully, "and please be honest with me here: are you just truly sick right now? Or is this a really stupid joke?"

She stared at him, eyes narrowing. He faced away, ready for the yell. But instead her look of scorn deteriorated to a snort, and soon she was laughing as hard as she could, her head resting flat against the table. He frowned and crossed his arms. That ordeal had not been worth the stress to his brain.
"Do you… understand…" she wheezed between gasps of air, "how serious… you look? You look so… adorably lost!" Another fit of giggling took hold, and she buried her face in her hands.

He rolled his eyes. Of course she had been joking, why had he even considered the possibility of anything else? It was a poor joke, but she was obviously in a good mood today. "Are you that desperate to laugh at me?"

"Nah," she replied with a wink, wiping tears from her eyes. "I just like seeing your face contorted with confusion. Makes me smile."

He sighed, rubbing his temples wearily. Sometimes he just wasn't sure how they were friends.
Her brow furrowed as she strode out onto the deck. It was going to be one of those mornings, she could already tell. The kinds of mornings when she woke up in a bad mood, and it reflected against the rest of the day. The kind where her crew just knew not to piss her off, or heads would roll. She glanced up at the sky and sighed. The sun was bright, but there were no clouds to attempt to shade it. On top of that, there wasn't even much of a breeze right now. Just friggin' wonderful.

For whatever reason, she hadn't a clue, she was a pretty bipolar person when it came to the subject of her mood. Some days she woke up and felt like she owned the world, and could accomplish anything. Other days she woke up wanting to burn everything that stood simply because it tried to exist when she was angry. She didn't know the cause, but she had come to accept it without reservation. And, quickly enough, so had her crew.

Her thoughts drifted to the boy in green down below. If he tried anything, anything at all, to annoy her today, he might not live to see the sun set. Part of her tried to resist the thought, that it wasn't fair to him. After all, he hadn't worked around her enough to know of her violent mood swings, so how could he have a chance? Even so, stubbornness shoved logic aside, as it occasionally did. She hoped for his sake that he just didn't screw up.

Said boy walked up onto the deck at that moment. Her eyes narrowed when she saw him, already wary of anything he might do that would set her off. No jokes today, no slacking off, and no being happy around her. If she wanted to be miserable and cross, then everyone could just damn well let her.

He noticed her standing off near the railing and smiled. It was such an innocent, sincere smile that she froze, captivated. He was so... happy. Really, he seemed as happy as she was on her good mornings. Was that how it radiated off of her as well? No wonder her boys were always bright and cheery when she was like that.

"Good morning!"

They were such simple, basic words; they could have been said by two strangers passing each other on their way. But he spoke them in such a way that said he felt joyous inside. As if he was positive it was going to be a spectacular morning. She didn't know anyone could come off that way.

To her surprise, she felt her bitter mood softening the longer she stared at his face. It was impossible to feel anything else but the look that shone from his smile. He wanted the world to be happy with him, and she found her spirits lifting to the point where a small smile curved onto her own lips as well. He grinned wider and headed off towards the bow.

She found her eyes wandering to him as he walked. Maybe it didn't have to be one of those mornings after all.
He sighed in contentment, letting the peacefulness of the day relax him. A distance away, he could hear the bustle of town life as the people of Windfall went about their business. It was just another day to them, but to him it was a break from travelling all over the ocean and trying to save their unknowing lives. Being a hero wasn't an easy task; it demanded focus and endless commitment. But the King of Red Lions had decided that he deserved a day off every now and then, usually after he finished a dungeon crawl or something big. After all, he was still just a kid. He needed time to himself every now and then.

His usual plan was to find Tetra; after all, his other friends were half an ocean away, while she generally wasn't too hard to pin down. It helped when he still had the stone she had given him before sending him into the Forsaken Fortress, and he could easily get a plan of where she was going. Besides, at this point in his life, Tetra was really the only one who could relate to what he did. So she was a good set of ears to listen to his tales.

Since she was again restocking in Windfall, he'd wandered up to the hillside to wait while she finished her business. He had found it a great place to simply lie down and stare at the clouds. It was a habit he'd begun when he was a little younger, spending hours on Outset's cliff watching the sky drift past. It was a good way to collect one's thoughts when there was serious thinking to be done, but more than that, it was very relaxing. He had lost count of how many times he'd fallen asleep doing this back home. It was just a simple way to pass the time.

"There you are," the all too familiar voice spoke from behind him. He smiled but said nothing, simply watching the large white clouds float lazily across the bright sun. Her head appeared in his vision, casting a dark shadow across his eyes. "What are you doing up here?"

"Clouds," he answered absentmindedly, staring past her. She raised a brow and glanced up at the sky herself.

"Why?"

He closed his eyes. "It's relaxing."

There was a moment of silence as she searched for a reply. The best she could come up with was, "If you say so."

He opened his eyes and watched her expression. She didn't get it – that was why she didn't understand. He had to show her what he meant. He grabbed her hand and gently pulled it down toward him. "Lie down with me."

She eyed him curiously. "Why?"

"Because I want you to see."

"They're clouds. I've seen clouds before."

"They're clouds, I've seen clouds before."

He pulled a bit harder. "Just lay down. Please?"

She sighed and complied, taking a spot beside him and resting on her back. They were silent as they looked into the expanse of blue that was peppered with white. Eventually he heard her breathing slow to something that could be called a tranquil state. He wondered how often she actually did unwind and do nothing. He knew she did stay up some nights to have some alone time, but it wasn't..."
the same as just taking a day to yourself.

"Why is this important to you?" she asked, breaking the silence. He shrugged as best he could, not sure how to explain it.

"I dunno. If there's something that being away on life-threatening missions has taught me, it's that you have to enjoy the little things. Otherwise the big things will just weigh you down."

She didn't answer, instead mulling over his words. It seemed that it hadn't been something she considered. "I guess sometimes I forget what it is you're going through," she spoke after a moment. They fell back into silence as the clouds rolled on. He didn't want sympathy from her; she had probably dealt with more in her life than he had. He just wanted her to see that it was okay to stop and breathe every now and then. A break had never killed anyone – not yet, anyway. If she saw his reasoning though, he was content with that.

"Link?"

He turned to look at her. "Hmm?"

She smiled faintly at the sky. "This is pretty relaxing."
Time for a bit of development, I think. A bit of a peek into the minds of our heroes, to see what drives them to do what they do. Or something. Damn, I messed that up. Let's start over.

Let's peek at our heroes in their private times! …Wait. Shit. Ah, whatever. You probably know what I mean. Ah, Tetra, more involved than you know. Before the Zelda reveal, obviously. Also takes place before 'Snow', 'Coffee' and 'Clouds' – Link's not a real fan of fighting yet.

The sound of his knock echoed around the otherwise quiet ship. There was a moment of silence before her voice sounded, "Come in." He gently opened her door and stepped inside her room. His eyes wandered over to her desk, but to his surprise she wasn't there. Instead, she was sitting cross-legged on her bed, writing on a piece of paper. She continued for a moment before her eyes lifted to meet his. "Hey. What do you need?"

He shrugged, closing the door behind him. "Nothing, really. I just wanted to talk, if that's alright." She nodded and gestured to her desk chair. He grabbed it and pulled it toward the bed, taking a seat and resting a foot against the mattress. He searched for a means to say what he wanted while she waited patiently. How did he express it in a way she would understand?

"I've been doing some thinking lately," he began slowly. "The King of Red Lions is quite sure that I'm the hero destined to defeat Ganondorf. Everyone on the Great Sea is depending on me to save the world, even though they don't realize what I'm doing. But…" He trailed off, unsure of how to continue. "I dunno. Am I the hero?"

She closed her paper and tossed it aside; it was clear that this conversation would take a lot of focus. Turning herself to face him, she asked, "Why wouldn't you be?"

He sighed. "I don't know. It just seems like a lot to be expected of me, especially when I don't feel like a hero. I just see myself as someone who got thrown into this to save someone close to him. I still feel like I'm only in this to save Aryll. After that…" He hesitated. This was the part he was afraid to voice. "After that, I'm not sure I want to be the hero."

She was silent. He wasn't sure how she'd react. Call him a coward, perhaps? Part of him wouldn't blame her, but he didn't want that to be the case. Thankfully, it wasn't.

"Frankly, I don't blame you," she said, and his eyes widened. She understood? "You're putting your life on the line to save the entire ocean from an evil that's more experienced that either of us can imagine. Why should you feel obligated to save these people? They don't even know what you're going through to do it." Her voice softened. "Maybe that's a little blunt, but it's the reality."

He nodded. It did sound selfish, but he hadn't wanted this life. He'd been chosen for it, and now he had to keep going without a say. "I just… I don't understand why it had to be me," he continued, staring at her wall. "And, if it's as important as the King says it is, why I have to do it alone. I'm tired of almost getting killed every time I step into a dungeon."
"I don't think you're alone," she answered quietly. He blinked and looked at her, and she shrugged. "You have me, right? It sounds backwards coming from a pirate, I know, but I'll always lend you a hand. Whether you want it or not," she added with a wink, and he chuckled.

"I know what you mean though," she continued. I've thought about it too, believe it or not. It's a lot of pressure for one person. And you're still a kid, on top of it. You don't need that." She was silent for a moment, searching for something to say. "I guess that's why I want to help you," she finally spoke. "Since I've known you, and since it was partly my doing that you got thrown into this, I've wanted to see you succeed. In a way, I feel involved now too."

He lost himself in his thoughts. She had always been beside him when he asked for it. She listened to him when he needed to vent, and lent him supplies when he was short. She had graciously given him bombs when he was seeking Jabun, though not without putting him through a bit of teasing grief first. She had always been there for him so far. He hoped that didn't change.

"You're right," he said finally. "I guess I'm not alone. You had no obligation to help me, but you did anyway. I really appreciate it." He looked straight into her eyes and smiled. "Thank you, Tetra."

She waved her hand. "Don't worry about it. You're going through some heavy stuff right now. I don't expect you to do it by yourself. I'm here for you whenever you need."

He smiled. "You're a true friend, you know that?"

She nodded, still facing away. "I know."

They sat in silence for a moment. He glanced around her room, nothing striking his eye until he came to rest on the portrait of her mother. A thought rose to his lips – one that had often crossed his mind before. "Can I ask you something personal?"

She looked at him quickly, studying him with a look he couldn't decipher. After a moment she shrugged, the look being replaced with one of neutrality. "I guess we'll find out."

He took that as a decent confirmation. It was better than throwing something at him, anyway. "You took over this ship after your mother died, right?" Her eyes flashed in surprised anger. He added quickly, "Nudge told me when I first came aboard."

She rolled her eyes, but remained silent. He proceeded as cautiously as he could. She was protective of her past, and he didn't want to upset her. "Why did you take over? Why not leave it to Gonzo or someone?" She frowned and turned away. He decided to add, "And why are you still one today?"

She didn't say a word, and he wondered if he'd dug too deep. Maybe he should leave. But part of him was genuinely curious to know. She never mentioned anything from her childhood, or her parentage. The most she'd done was acknowledged to him that the picture that bore a resemblance was in fact her mother. Other than that, she was silent on the topic. He wanted to know why.

"Why do you care?" she asked finally. Well, at least she didn't sound angry. She didn't sound happy, but it was better than getting yelled at.

"You don't really talk about your past," he said. "None of the others really say much either. But I feel like you know a lot more about me than I do of you."
She hesitated before saying anything, trying to collect her thoughts. "That's probably true," she told him. "I don't know. I just don't like talking about it."

"You don't have to," he replied quickly. "I just thought… Since we were discussing secrets, maybe you'd share one. I didn't mean to pry."

"It's fine," she said quietly. "I guess fair's fair. You trust me enough to talk to me about something private, and I did just say I'd always be here for you. I should've expected the same from you." She sighed, glancing at the ceiling.

"It's okay," he said, holding his hands up and standing. "I feel bad for asking now. Don't worry about it."

"Sit down." He complied without a word.

"I'm just not used to sharing about myself," she spoke. "I don't really do secrets. They always seemed childish to me."

"So? Friends are supposed to share secrets. It's a sign of trust." She glanced at him, raising a brow. He feigned a frown and batted his eyes, trying to lighten the mood for her. "You trust me, don't you?"

She snorted and turned away. "Of course I do," she answered. He raised his eyebrows hopefully, and she sighed again. "Alright, fine," she agreed, rolling her eyes while trying not to smile. She was silent for a moment, and he sat patiently. It was sort of exciting, actually, that she was opening up to him.

"I've lived on this ship all my life. I'd known the crew for years. So after my mother died when I was eleven, they offered me the position to replace her while they taught me the basics. They kept me out of the fighting for a while, but my mother had trained me pretty well. Eventually I just started falling into the position. I gave an order, they listened. They said it was like having her back in command."

She glanced away, blinking quickly. "It made me feel happy, that they thought I was as good as she had been. She was the best, after all." She fell into silence once more.

"I guess if you'd been around it all your life, it would come naturally to you," he said in understanding. "But how come you still do it? Isn't there something else you'd like to do?"

She shrugged, still facing the wall. "This is what I know. I don't know what else I'd do. I could never settle into a normal job like normal people. Not now."

That was also understandable. But there was still something that intrigued him. "You're a pretty odd pirate though. You claim to be vicious, but I've never seen you kill an innocent person. You don't steal from the weak, or the sick, or the old. In fact, I've seen you protect civilians from a raid. You've done a lot of noble things for a pirate." He shook his head. "And you help me, the supposed chosen hero. That all sounds pretty heroic itself, don't you think?"

She was still, not answering. It was almost as if she didn't know what to say. Perhaps she didn't, as after a moment she replied, "I guess I just have a strong sense of fairness. The strong should protect the weak." She shot him a look and added, "Don't go spreading that around. I still want to be able to steal from who I want."

He shook his head, but the corners of his mouth pulled up into a smile. "I'm just saying, you'd make a pretty good hero if you ever wanted to."

She seemed to consider it before shrugging. "Maybe. One day down the road, if I ever get bored."
He smiled wider. "I mean, I could use a partner out there. And since you basically are already…"

She laughed, throwing a pillow at him. "Shut up. Don't put ideas in the civvies' heads. They won't take me seriously."

He laughed as well, which furthered her own. After a moment, they were both giggling without control, clutching their sides in pain. Trying to calm himself down, he took a deep breath and said, "See? It's healthy to share."

She shook her head and took a breath as well. "Whatever, you just wanted some alone time with me. Just stop worrying about the future. We'll get through it together."

"Alright," he agreed, "if you stop burying everything. Share with me once in a while, huh? You're not alone either."

She nodded, holding out her hand. He took it, and they shook, both smiling. "Deal."
Battle

Chapter Notes

Takes place after 'Secrets'.

It was becoming increasingly evident that pirates didn't really get along with each other on the ocean. Based on Tetra's mentioning of the "third fight this month," Link came to that conclusion rather quickly. Their foe had come up behind them out of nowhere, and a boarding had been inevitable. However, the captain hadn't so much as flinched; in fact, she had simply prepped her men with a small smirk. He had been unsure what it meant, but it became clear as soon as the enemy was upon them.

The crew had met them head-on, and swords rang all over the deck. Tetra herself had jumped into the middle of the action, attacking the opposing captain with an aggressive offense. He had watched in surprise as the mayhem unfolded. The men were actually enjoying themselves, shouting compliments to each other and wearing confident smiles. They were a much smaller crew than their opponent, but they held their own with ease. Tetra seemed the most involved; even in the middle of her own fight she called out orders to her men to help each other. It was spectacular to observe, really. They all seemed to live for fighting like this.

That was all until a pirate had targeted him, and he had found himself involved in the fray. Which is where he was now, beating back a vicious assault from his two foes. He had to say, he'd improved greatly since his first bout with Tetra; he could stand against two experienced opponents without too much trouble. His only issue was debating on how far to take it. Could he kill them? He wasn't used to fighting other people – it was a quite a stretch from monsters bred from dark magic. He wasn't sure whether this could be counted as the same sort of kill.

Glancing at Tetra, he noticed that she held no such reservation. Every attack was aimed to take down her foe. No doubt she felt no hesitation when the lives of her crew were on the line. But she'd had a different experience with fighting than he had. He only had a couple months' practice and killed only when his life was threatened. Which tended to be everywhere he went, but that was the philosophy he tried to hang on to.

The men as well fought with the intention of dropping the pirates. They looked out for each other, and protection in battle often meant death for the opposition. It was a gritty reality, but the reality nonetheless. Or so he thought until an idea struck him. Maybe it didn't have to be.

He flicked his wrist and stabbed one of the pirates in his sword arm. As he yelled and dropped his weapon, Link ducked under the other's counterattack and delivered a cut to his leg, deep enough only to incapacitate. The pirate dropped to the ground and he stepped back, raising his weapon defensively. It was a worthless gesture, though; the rest of the crew had already given up and were retreating. Tetra stood aside and let them run, only glaring until they all disappeared. He glanced around quickly but came across no bodies, secretly thankful that he didn't have to see a dead pirate today.

He understood the need to take a life – sometimes it was inevitable. But for the time being, it was a thought he just couldn't entertain. Besides, he'd managed to get through the fight without needing to resort to it, and it had worked. For now, he'd try incapacitation on human foes and see if it was
effective. If there ever came a time when it wasn't... Well, maybe his views would have hardened enough to not care. If that was reality, then so be it.

He walked towards the men who were congratulating each other on their repulsion. It was obvious that he could get some serious fighting experience from travelling with them and Tetra. But he had his own journey to take, with lives of his own to protect. And as he sheathed his sword, he realized that he had discovered his reason to fight: to protect the people of the ocean who could not defend themselves. As Tetra had told him, "The strong should protect the weak." Even if he owed them nothing, he had a responsibility to fight for them, and for the peace they desired.

He smiled softly as she approached him. Maybe he could do this 'hero' thing yet.
"Coming at you!" he yelled, raising his sword overhead. She gritted her teeth and raised her own, their weapons clanging together in atonal harmony. She shouldered him back and took a swipe at his chest, but he flipped back out of range. He took a step forward with the intention to stab, but she sidestepped around the point of the blade and delivered a strong punch to his wrist. He cried out in pain and stepped back.

"We're punching now?" he inquired with a frown, gently massaging the joint. She simply shrugged in reply.

"I'm keeping you sharp," she answered with a wink. "Really, you should be thanking me."

He scoffed. "Keeping me sharp… I've been holding back, but if we're going to play dirty, then that changes now."

He gripped his sword tightly and lunged at her, deflecting her counterattack and delivering a kick to the back of her knee. Her eyes widened in shock as she loudly fell to the deck, her weapon clattering away. He smirked and held out his hand to help her up, but instead she kicked it away and flipped back to her feet, cartwheeling to her weapon. He blinked in surprise, but it was expected – she had kept it a closely guarded secret of how agile she was. After all, one couldn't reveal all their tricks right off the get-go.

They met once more, going back and forth, spinning and grunting all over the deck. Link had vastly improved over his encounters, and was quickly gaining on the captain in terms of skill. Since they were much more even now, they made an effort of training together to keep them both in shape. Practicing on the ship had the added benefit of a rocking terrain, which forced them to keep on their toes. So far, it was proving quite beneficial.

Of course, they were still trying to work out a few kinks. The main issue was that Tetra became competitive when she was in a contest. It was quickly becoming apparent that Link was developing a similar streak, which led to often escalated confrontations that had utterly ridiculous consequences. Their last bout had ended when the captain had attempted to shoot Link with a cannon, while he had whipped out his Wind Waker to summon a tornado. It took Senza and Mako, who had been observing their duel, to intervene before anyone was seriously hurt.

They were both aware that things had gotten out of hand, and were embarrassed at their actions. Nevertheless, they were back at it as if nothing had happened, an unspoken apology in the minds of both. There was also, however, no promise of it not happening again. Youthful pride had taken over, and showed no signs of letting go.

She ducked under a swing and managed to pin his sword under hers. However, he spun around and delivered a kick to her chest. She rolled with it out of the way, but lost her advantage. Picking herself up, she stepped in close and drove her fist into his stomach, holding back nothing. He wheezed and fell to the deck, clutching his abdomen. She lowered her weapon in concern, wondering if she’d gone too far. But he cut off her train of thought, lashing out and knocking out her feet from under her. She fell roughly on her back, and they remained motionless for a moment, staring into each
other's eyes and panting.

"You're getting better," she admitted. She was secretly annoyed at herself for letting her guard down; it was such a rudimentary mistake, one that she never did. And that he had taken advantage of it was almost cheap – pirate cheap. Despite herself, she was proud of him.

"I'm just starting to play like you," he replied with a smirk. "You and your 'anything goes' rule of fighting. It's all unpredictable when you aren't expecting things like punches to wrists and spitting in faces."

She tilted her head with a quick wink. "Pirate, my friend."

"Well, I'm done with this back and forth," he replied, picking himself up. He stretched out his neck and shook out his shoulders before grabbing his shield off of his back. She frowned. He was adopting a much more forward strategy now – he could effectively block anything she tried. At least, the way she was fighting now.

She stood up as well and drew her dagger off of her hip, dropping it into her non-dominant hand. She always preferred her dagger in a fight – it was more comfortable than a regular sword, in her opinion. Dual-wielding it as a shorter parrying weapon was preferable to using a shield; it allowed for more control, and could also be used offensively. It was a skill she had honed for years, and since it wasn't widely practiced on the ocean, it often caught her opponents off-guard. She had a cache of cutlasses below deck for unexpected boarding raids, and she often used them against Link for a straight, fair one-on-one. But even the hero knew that when she drew the small blade, she meant business.

"You sure you're ready for this?" she asked as a warning. He could still walk away, though she knew he wouldn't. As expected, he nodded and raised his shield, quickly advancing on her. She jumped to the side and delivered an upward swipe at his arm. He turned quickly and blocked, her blades rattling uselessly against his shield. He grinned and raised his sword to bring down on her head, but she raised her own blades and parried the offense between them. Taking the brunt of the force against her dagger, she knocked his weapon down while simultaneously chopping with her sword, only to be blocked once more by the shield.

She gritted her teeth and jumped away. She hated that stupid shield of his; it made trying to land a hit almost impossible. He saw her annoyance and laughed, waving his defense at her as a taunt. "What's the matter, Miss Pirate? Am I not playing fair?"

His eyes widened in horror as she lunged at him, blades raised overhead and eyes burning with fury. They continued their stalemate while their voices rose louder, with the language being used slipping into what would have been considered less than tolerable in a public location. The attacks became crazier, and their emotional control was quickly vanishing.

Down below, the men all glanced above their heads in concern. By the sounds of it, it was beginning to escalate again.
Princess

Chapter Notes

A bit of a different view than what people consider on Tetra's transformation. I dunno, I just never saw her being too thrilled with the change.


They were all words the man claiming to be a king kept saying, but they meant nothing to her. They were all part of the kingdom that was currently sitting at the bottom of the sea. The very kingdom that, somehow, they were occupying at the moment. It was supposed to be gone, forgotten over the generations to erase its mistakes from history. But everything had resurfaced, and she wasn't happy about it.

First, the King had gotten Link involved, stating him to be the new hero of legend. Fat lot of good that did, being a possible descendant of the hero that protected this lost land. The Great Sea was not Hyrule, and it hadn't needed a hero. If the King and Ganondorf had just left them alone, life would have gone on better for everyone. Now, though, everyone was in danger, and it was up to poor Link to save them all.

Second, this apparent ancestor of hers was claiming that she was just as involved as Link was. So now she was helping not because she wanted to, but because she didn't have a choice. She was beginning to really understand how the boy had felt when he first gotten involved. It almost felt to her like there was less incentive to help when you were told to do so.

She glanced down once more at the clothes that now covered her. A long dress, and pink, no less – it was as if this man was just trying to insult her. Her hair was longer somehow, and hung down her back. Likewise, her skin was very fair, a far stretch from what she felt comfortable seeing on herself. She was adorned with jewellery and makeup, which was something she tended to avoid. And what was this stupid mark that had appeared on her hand? She felt bogged down by all of this useless weight; she couldn't win a fight now if her life depended on it. However, that appeared to be the point.

The King had said that she was to remain here, "for her own protection". She had snorted in disgust – like she couldn't protect herself? He was asking her to behave like a princess, which was something she was not willing to do. Princesses just sat around and did what they were told. They were useless that way; she was used to doing things herself. She wasn't afraid of getting her hands dirty, she was Tetra! Or was she? The King called her 'Zelda'. Was that who she was now? Princess Zelda, the girl who did nothing?

Being told what to do was something she was not used to. Restricting her freedom was even more aggravating, especially since it was in this tiny basement. What was she supposed to do down here, stare at the windows? She was supposed to be helping Link because he needed her. She couldn't do that down here by herself, cut off from the world she knew. Why was her protection suddenly so important? The King was keeping something from them, but refused to speak about the matter.

The man spoke to Link, telling him not to be long before disappearing. Her thoughts interrupted, she simply stared at the boy across from her. He seemed unsure of what to think of her now. Perhaps he
didn't like the change either; she sure didn't seem like herself. But she couldn't change that. She had to sit here and stay out of trouble, wearing these prissy clothes and being a respectable royal member. For all the good it did.

Link began to walk to the stairs, set on finishing his quest. But she couldn't let him leave yet. "Link." He turned to her, wearing a look of both curiosity and concern. She picked up her dagger off of the floor and walked towards him, pressing it into his hands. "Take care of this for me, 'kay?" she asked quietly. He hesitantly nodded, studying the weapon in her hands. If she was stuck here, she might as well give him something that might save him. It was really all she could do now. She gave him a quick hug and he awkwardly responded, surprised by the action. "Good luck," she mumbled. "Don't take too long, alright?"

He nodded with a faint smile and turned away. A moment later he disappeared, and she was alone. Glancing around in the darkness, she sighed.

*Princess.* She hated it.
She tried not to shiver in the evening air that blew coolly over her exposed skin. Why were they sailing north? The only thing north was colder weather. Then again, it had been her order, so she had no one to blame but herself. Which wouldn't have bothered her, but for the fact that it was her reason for the decision that escaped her. It was as if she was trying to run away from the events that had taken place on Ganon's Tower. She knew it was ridiculous, but it's almost how she felt now.

She shivered again and brought her knees chest as she sat on the deck. Staring out at the dark, starry water, she contemplated the King's fate. She hadn't really approved of his decisions, and he certainly hadn't needed to throw her life out of order, but had he really needed to die? Was it his way of atoning for his mistakes? Her thoughts bordered on similar thinking for the King of Evil as well, though they were rather more conflicted. Ganondorf had attempted to reintroduce Hyrule to the world, but his reasoning held a sympathetic vibe to it. His actions had been with malicious intention, but did he deserve death for them? They were both a carryover from an age that had long since disappeared. Finding their way in this new world simply hadn't happened. And now they were both dead in their forgotten kingdom.

She sighed as she rubbed her arms for warmth, her thoughts turning to the King's final wish. They were to seek out a new land for the populace of the ocean to reside. It hadn't been enough that they'd defeated the Dark Lord and prevented his takeover; they now had to undertake a massive journey to find a land big enough to accommodate the ocean's residents. Had it not occurred to the man that flooding his kingdom may have left such a large landmass nonexistent? In addition, had they not earned a vacation from their fights?

She was jarred from her muse by the feeling of something soft encompassing her shoulders. She looked up to find Link wrapping a blanket around her with a smile. She blinked in confusion before mumbling a 'thanks' and turning back to the ocean. He took a seat beside her and did the same.

"You looked cold," he spoke softly without looking at her. Regrettably, she nodded. She hated showing discomfort from weather, but she had been getting a bit of a chill from staying out here. But she wanted some air, and had no intention of remaining locked in her cabin. She'd done enough of that since returning from Hyrule, and she was beginning to feel trapped with her thoughts in there.

"What are you thinking about?" she heard him ask, and cursed herself for not paying attention to him. She shrugged and wrapped the blanket tightly around herself, embracing its warmth.

"Just what happened," she replied. She knew she had no need to elaborate – he would know exactly what she was referring to. She continued with a sigh, "I just can't quit thinking about what he asked us to do. I feel…” She trailed off, searching for the words.

"What, obligated? Annoyed?" he offered, and she nodded.

"Both, yeah. I mean, he decided to die down there, so I feel we should respect his final wish, as much as I disagreed with him. But on the other hand, hasn't he asked enough of us already? We did
what he wanted us to do. Hyrule's gone forever, and so are he and Ganondorf. But he couldn't just leave it at that." She snorted in annoyance.

"I mean, really! 'Go find a new Hyrule'? Where on the Great Sea are we supposed to find a landmass that wasn't flooded? The whole reason we live on islands is because that's all there is. And even if we somehow find something, hundreds of thousands of miles away, how are we supposed to convince everyone to listen to us and get them all there? It's not possible!"

He nodded, which surprised her. He agreed with her thinking? "I've been thinking the same, actually. But the way I see it is that we've gone through a lot with all of this. He didn't say we had to find this new land right away. I say we take a break for a while." She stared at him and he shrugged. "For as long as we need. We'll go off to who-knows-where when we feel like it."

"Can we afford that?" she found herself asking. "I thought this was a top priority. And I thought that, if anyone, you would be all over it."

"Well, it's not like anyone else knows about it," he replied with a shrug, "so it isn't like anyone can get mad at us for putting it off. We have our entire lives to find the new Hyrule, right? But we've done enough for a while, I think anyone would agree. So we're going to wait a while, and worry about it later." He glanced at her and raised his eyebrows. "What do you think?"

She thought about it a moment before replying, "I like it. I don't really want to take off anywhere right now anyway. A break sounds nice, and totally earned. I say we do it." He smiled and nodded in agreement. Maybe it was simpler than how she'd made it out to be. They would figure it out later; for now, they would relax and reclaim their lives.

She noticed him shiver, though he tried to pretend that he hadn't. Rolling her eyes with a smile, she opened her arm and gestured for him to join her. He chuckled and scooted closer to her, and she wrapped the blanket around him as well. They sat in silence, enjoying the warmth of the cloth and, though neither would acknowledge it, each other. The thought of a chance for things to go back to the way they were before getting involved with Hyrule's fate, even for just a little while, gave her the comfort she had been seeking for the last few days. She also hoped that he decided to stick around; she couldn't imagine parting with him now, after everything they'd done together.

It was getting late, and she knew that they probably should have been turning in to get some rest. But she had no desire to leave right now, and it seemed like he had no intention of it either. So they sat together, watching the water and letting the stillness of the night wash over them. They had a rare moment of peace, and she was content to enjoy it for as long as it lasted.
Sick

Chapter Notes

This is some time after Wind Waker, but not yet Phantom Hourglass. I'd say they're both fifteen here.

She probably had no idea how much she worried him, and knowing her, that wasn't going to change anytime soon. Even so, if she was on the deck an hour past sunset attempting to give orders for sailing, he should probably be worried. She couldn't be joking; she didn't kid about giving orders, so her crew always knew that she meant everything she said. Which meant that, for some reason, she genuinely believed what she was saying. He sighed. The crew were all giving him looks of concern, so he took it upon himself to figure out what she was trying to accomplish.

He approached her carefully, as she had begun yelling that no one was listening to her. Gently placing a hand on her shoulder, he asked gently, "Tetra?" She turned to him and immediately he knew she wasn't well. Her eyes were unfocused and her body was trembling. Up close, she appeared to be barely keeping herself up, swaying softly back and forth. He frowned and held his hand up to her forehead while she attempted to pull away.

"Tetra, you're burning up," he said after a moment, surprised at her fever. She had seemed fine all day, but it was clear that she was ill. "You need to lie down. Let's go."

"No," she protested softly, trying to protest. "We need to get ready to sail! We have to find the island! We're losing time!" He stared at her, trying to make out what it was she was talking about. Whatever it was, it was something that existed only in her head; she had never once mentioned an island for any reason. The only thing he understood was that her slight slur simply verified her condition.

"Let's go," he spoke delicately, grabbing her hand and wrapping an arm around her shoulders. "We need to get you into bed." She shook her head, but still allowed him to guide her across the deck. She began leaning against him more, unable to walk on her own. He wrapped her arm around him and half-carried her down below deck.

"Link, we need to get the treasure before the others," she spoke softly, though she seemed to be fighting to stay awake. He shook his head as they walked into her room. He had never known her to be so delirious – she didn't seem to be making sense of anything. Would reason even mean anything to her?

"It's too dark to do anything," he answered, sitting her down on her bed. As he bent down to remove her shoes, he added, "We'll do it in the morning, I promise." Normally he didn't make promises he didn't intend to keep, but she seemed too feverish to even remember. She would need a couple days to recover, at least until her fever broke. He'd likely be keeping a close eye on her until then.

Throwing her shoes aside, he pulled back her blanket and helped her crawl underneath. "Okay, just try and get some rest, alright? I'll get you some water and check on you later." She nodded and pressed into her pillow, likely unaware of what he had just said. It didn't matter though – she was ready to pass out, and rest was what she needed.
He stood up and moved back to her door. He was about to leave when he heard a faint voice mumble, "Wait." He turned around to find her sitting up and blinking slowly at him. She still looked confused, but she stared intently and whispered, "Stay."

He blinked. She wanted him to stay with her? She couldn't be in her right mind at the moment, but she seemed completely serious. He shook his head and was about to object before she weakly added, "Please?"

His mouth hung open, but no sound escaped. She really wanted him here with her. He glanced at the door. He knew it wasn't a good idea. If someone found out, there would be no way of explaining himself, not with her in her fevered state. And what if she woke up in the morning not remembering, and took it the wrong way? It was simply a bad idea, and he knew he should protest.

But the look of helplessness on her face banished all other thoughts from his mind. He finally nodded and closed the door. She needed him right now, and she was begging him not to leave her alone. If it helped relax her, then he would do it for her. Besides, it would make it easier to make sure she was okay.

So he stayed.
He was hiding, though he wasn't entirely sure why. Curled into a corner in the cargo hold below deck, he buried his face into his hands, trying to forget his experience. It was really the first time he'd ever felt like he had failed as a hero. After Ganondorf's defeat, he had been sure he could take on any challenge that awaited him. Only... he couldn't.

"There you are," Tetra spoke softly as she approached. He closed his eyes, not wanting her to tell him to grow up, or that things happen, and to get back out into the world. But she didn't; instead, she simply sat down beside him and wrapped an arm around his shoulders. "I'm sorry."

He stared ahead into nothing, letting his shoulders fall in a half-shrug. "Wasn't your fault. It was mine," he answered with a whisper, though she shook her head.

"You don't know that. They were cruel people, Link. I don't think they would have left without there being a few casualties."

"But it shouldn't have happened," he argued. "I should have been able to prevent it. I could have..." He trailed off, his words unsure. "I shouldn't... I didn't mean to kill him." She looked at him sadly before tightening her hold around him, pulling him into a sort of hug.

They had been in a town to gather supplies when bandits had appeared out of nowhere, quickly spreading everywhere to ransack houses and shops. Tetra had immediately jumped in to fight, and he had been right behind her, drawing his weapon and taking on three men at once. He had been so caught up in the action that he had struck one down instinctively, plunging his weapon deep into the man's chest before the same happened to him. But a witnessing comrade had grabbed a fleeing civilian and viciously sliced open his throat. The thug had only laughed and disappeared, leaving the man to die a slow, horrible death. While the thieves had fled as quickly as they had come, they had left half the town trashed, making off with countless valuables. Many people had been injured, but it was quickly assessed that the poor victim and another woman had been killed – the latter being witnessed by Tetra, he later found out.

She sighed and rested her head on his shoulder, trying to soothe him. "I think we did what we could," she said gently. "It would have been worse if we hadn't been there. Yeah, we lost two, but we could have lost a lot more."

"I know," he replied, "I just feel that... I feel like I caused it to happen. Because I killed first." He looked at her with pleading eyes. He wanted her to understand. "I didn't mean it though. I just lost myself in the moment and experience took over." She nodded and grabbed his hand, squeezing gently.

"I understand, Link. Believe me, I had every intention of killing the ones I fought. There were just too many for me to try." She looked into his eyes and continued, "You can't blame that poor man's death on yourself. That one you got? Who knows how many more he would have killed himself, had he gotten away today? Long term, you could have done some good, getting rid of him."
Shrugging, she added, "You don't know what may have happened if you had acted differently, so there's no point dwelling on 'ifs'. What happened is past. If you regret it, then it'll just take some time to accept. Or, you can believe what you did was right and worthwhile, and get past it. Either way, you'll learn from it."

She leaned onto his shoulder once more. He was silent, carefully weighing her words. She was right, as usual; she always knew what to logically explain when he felt stuck. But he wasn't sure if this was something he could just shrug off. It had been a blow to his confidence, as well as his morality – no one had ever died under his watch. Either way he looked at it, that fact would take getting used to. He had to live with it now, but was it noble or shaming?

"I don't know," he whispered, leaning against her head and closing his eyes. "I just don't know if it was the right thing to do."

She squeezed his hand in response and whispered back, "Then I'll sit here with you until you do."

He felt miserable, unsure, and upset. But despite that, he managed a small smile and laced his fingers with hers. "Thank you."
Y'know, I don't even know where this came from. It's just something silly, one of those stupid arguments you get into with your best friend over something so trivial it shouldn't ever warrant a fight. Y'know, one of those. The problem with these two is that they just like to argue.

"Look, all I'm saying is that it took them about eight rocks to finally hit the bird," he argued. "It was kind of a big bird. It shouldn't have been that difficult."

"Yeah, a big bird that was flying through the sky," she retorted hotly. "The bloody sky, Link. There isn't much to aim at against a sky. Not to mention that the beast was over your little island. I think your townsfolk would appreciate the fact that my men weren't trying to crush them all."

"Yes, and they managed to drop you into a forest crawling with monsters instead of anywhere safer on the island. Truly skillful of them."

"Excuse me, but I'd rather be dropped into a forest than anywhere on the vast ocean where I would've drowned. I was unconscious!"

They had been carrying on with this for so long that neither even remembered how it had begun. All they cared about now was proving to the other that their points were right… whatever their points happened to be. He wasn't even sure how he'd gotten on to attacking her crew, but his pride prevented him from backing down now. Maybe she'd see his side and agree, though he doubted this as a legitimate possibility – she was the most stubborn person on the ocean.

"How hard it is to shoot a rock?" he asked skeptically. "You aim, it flings. Boom! Done."

"Alright then, smartass," she shot back, "the catapult's right there! Go try it out!"

"Fine!" he replied, tossing his hands in the air. Truthfully, he had no idea what he was trying to prove. But he didn't back out of a challenge from her. Secretly, competing with her in any form was immensely enjoyable. He had never had anyone his age to hang around with, so she provided all sorts of fun. And he took it however he could.

He strolled over to the bow, where a rock was already loaded and waiting in the catapult. Noticing a small island they were currently sailing past, he spun the contraption around and took aim, pretending to look like he knew what he was doing. Drawing his sword, he glanced at a taut rope and asked, "Alright, so I just cut this, right?"

"What? No! Don't cut-" she was broken off as his blade cleanly sliced the rope in two. With a terrible lurch, the arm swung forward at a crooked angle and shot the boulder. Both were frozen as they watched it sail toward the island only to collide with a thin tree. The trunk snapped loudly in half as the top was flung comically into the ocean while the rock settled against the base of the remaining bottom.

They were silent for a moment, both marvelling at the spectacle. Eventually she turned to him with a
flat expression. "Congrats, Link. You just ruined part of my catapult. And you took down a tree."

He rolled his eyes in annoyance before countering, "And I did it in one shot. I'll take that point and make it one-nothing."

"You weren't even aiming for the tree! You literally screwed up every possible thing and coincidentally hit an innocent plant!"

"Better than the seven nothings your men hit! The bird was four times the size of that tree!"

"They were trying not to hit me, you clod! You just crushed an immovable object, and you're comparing the two? You also owe me a new rope! There was a goddamn switch right by your hand!"

Gonzo sighed, trying to steer the ship while drowning out the petty argument across the ship. Knowing the two of them, this could go on for a couple hours more. He just hoped that they pushed each other overboard by then so he could steer in peace.

He smiled at the thought as they sailed on while the voices escalated. A man could dream.
Drawing her arms around herself, she huddled closer to the flames for warmth. Her men were always content with cards or dice or whatever else captured their attention, remaining safely in the protection of the ship. But she preferred to be around nature when she could, to walk barefoot in the soft grass and smell the intricate aromas that permeated the air. They were simply more pleasing to her than candlelit gambling. She had assumed that her emerald-clad friend would share similar feelings; however, she had not yet seen him outside.

In the failing daylight, they had come across a small island abundant with fresh fruits. They had eagerly dropped anchor and collected enough for a couple days' worth of treats. By the time they had finished their task the sun had well since disappeared, and they'd elected to remain stationary for the night. The men had retreated back to the ship, but she had remained to survey the scenery. Deciding to stay out to enjoy the air, she had found some materials lying around and quickly built a small fire for herself, as well as utilizing a fallen tree as a seat.

She couldn't tell how long she had sat here, watching the light waltz back and forth with the ever-creeping shadows, but she had anticipated company by now. She had not seen a glimpse of the hero since they had arrived, and was beginning to grow concerned. It was unusual behavior for him.

She was considering returning to check on him, to make sure he hadn't fallen ill when she noticed his shadowy figure appear on the deck across the beach. Watching him make his way over, she noticed subtle differences about his appearance. Namely, the fatigue in his eyes and lack of a hat.

"I was beginning to think you'd forgotten about me," she spoke when he was near, raising a questioning brow. He smiled sheepishly and took a seat beside her. She noticed that he was marginally closer to her than he could've normally been, considering the long tree they were seated upon. She pushed the thought away though, blaming it on her own growing weariness.

"I think I fell asleep," he answered with a weak laugh. She rolled her eyes. So much for worrying over him.

"How were you tired enough to fall asleep? What have you done today?" she asked skeptically. She hadn't seen much of him throughout the day, but what could he have possibly been doing that would warrant an evening nap?

"I spent most of the day training down below deck," he answered, stretching his arm. "I have to keep sharp, even when you're busy." Oh. That would probably do it. Her eyes turned back to the fire, choosing not to admit her lack of foresight.

He gazed into the flames as well, letting the crackle of the spitting heat dampen the silence. A question flitted through her mind, though she hesitated to ask it. She was nervous about the answer she would receive, but her desire to know eventually brought it to her lips. "Why are you still here?"

He glanced at her with a look of confusion, not understanding what she asked. Trying a bit more specification, she asked again, "Why are you still with us?"

He was silent for a moment, mulling over her words before shrugging. "I don't know. Where else should I be?"

"I'm not sure where you should be," she proceeded cautiously, "but I figured you would have other plans since Ganondorf's dead. You have time to visit people, or do some other heroic acts. I thought
you'd be doing something else, not just sticking around with us the whole time." She didn't want to sound like she didn't want him with her. Truthfully, she enjoyed his company more than anyone could tell. But he was a famous hero now, after all. Didn't he have other engagements to occupy his time?

"I'm sure I'll get around to it," he replied after a moment. "But right now, I'm content with being here. I mean, you haven't told me to leave, so I assume I'm still welcome," he added with a chuckle, and she felt her lips curve into a smile as well.

"Okay, I won't say I'm unhappy," she confirmed. "But is there someplace you want to go? I've just been taking us to a few treasure hotspots, but I've been wondering if you're comfortable with that. There isn't much action like you're used to."

He shook his head. "There doesn't need to be. I'm fine wherever we go. Just as long as I get to stick around with you, I'm pretty content." He smiled warmly at her, and unconsciously moved closer so that they were shoulder to shoulder.

"Link?"

"Hmm?"

"You're getting kind of close," she said with a playful wink. His eyes widened and he scooted away, face glowing with embarrassment.

"Sorry, I didn't even realize-"

"Come back," she told him, and he stared, mouth hanging open mid-apology. "You're warm. I like it."

Slowly, words began to form in his mouth, tripping out into a sentence. "Are… You're… Are you cold?"

"Kind of," she admitted. "It's not like I'm dressed for cool nights. So get back over here, you were warming me up."

Awkwardly, he slid back beside her, his torso resting softly against her own. She smiled in contentment, and eventually felt him loosen a bit as well. They sat in silence, watching the flames jump and shooting sparks to the sides.

"And you don't tell a bloody soul, got it?"

He nodded quickly. "Got it."

She smiled satisfactorily. "Good."
These past few chapters are sort of taking place along the same tangent – post-WW, they're older (fifteen) and closer than when they first met, etc.

It was something he missed, he realized, once he had gone out on his life-changing adventure. Back on Outset, he often passed the time by reading stories from Sturgeon's collection. He would picture himself in the scenarios, getting so involved in his imaginings that he would neglect his chores for hours until he finished a book. There was something appealing to him about the way one could get lost in the words. Each story was a portal to a journey. And he was free to repeat them as often as he wished.

So when Tetra had mentioned a few books that she had in her cabin, he had eagerly asked if he could borrow one. After all, it had been close to a year since he had gotten caught up in a gripping novel, and he still enjoyed placing himself in the place of the protagonist. Having selected one, he had retreated to the darkness below deck for peace, quietly getting lost in the pages in the faint candlelight.

'Taking her hand, he whispered, "I promise." They embraced as the ship sailed off to the horizon, content on drifting ever closer to the glow of the falling sun.' He closed the book, sighing with a smile. That had been a good one – one of the best he'd read, perhaps. Adventure novels with a mix of romance never bothered him; in fact, they had to be his favourite genre to read. There was something exciting, if not a bit foreign, about them. He wondered if Tetra had ever read this book. He would love to talk about it.

"Link?" her voice carried through the darkness. "You down here?" Perfect timing. He called out his confirmation and she strolled over to him, arms crossed with a look of confusion written on her face. "What are you doing down here? I've been looking for you."

"Sorry," he replied. Maybe he should have mentioned his intentions to her. "I just wanted to read somewhere quiet. What did you need?"

"Don't worry about it, it wasn't important," she assured him with a wave of her hand. "What are you reading?"

He held up the novel for her to see in the dim light. "I just finished it, actually. It was really good."

She frowned, tilting her head. "I don't actually remember that book. You found that on my shelf?"

"Yeah," he told her, "sitting with the rest of them. Have you read it?"

She shook her head. "Reading was more my mother's hobby, not mine. I just never got rid of them. I guess I should have looked at them though, if I can't even remember half of them." She shrugged.

"So you haven't read any of them?" he asked, appalled. "You don't know what you're missing!"

"That's not to say I haven't heard some of them," she answered. "My mother used to read to me, to put me to sleep at night. She was such a good storyteller. Occasionally she would even read to the
crew because her reading was so enjoyable." She smiled faintly, clearly remembering something that had long since passed.

She turned her gaze to him after a moment, raising a brow. "Are you any good at storytelling?"

"I'm not really sure," he admitted. "I always just read to myself back home. My neighbor, Sue-Belle, used to read to Aryll, but they were always gentle stories – nothing I really got into. So I never actually had a reason to read out loud."

"Try," she told him, taking a seat beside him. "Read to me." He stared at her for a moment, unsure of whether he could do a decent job. But she nodded with a wink, so he smiled and opened the cover.

"'It must have been luck, that he crossed paths with his destiny so early in life,'" he began, "'but it was the opportunity he had been waiting for as long as he could remember. He knew, in his heart, that he was not fated to remain a blacksmith. He had a grander calling, and now that it was before him he was all too eager to seize it. Too long he had heard stories from sailors about the news they brought across the oceans, wishing how he could see with his own eyes the wonders of the world. Now he was ready to take his first steps towards his own journey.'"

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed her close her eyes and rest her head back, letting his words spin forth the tale that remained encompassed between the covers. With a soft affirmation to continue, he carried on the blacksmith's quest with the excitement he had held inside when he first read the pages. He began to lose sense of the time, but it didn't matter. She was content to listen to him, and he had no desire to stop.

"'She captivated him with her beauty as she strode by. It was not a walk of arrogance; rather, a careful, bashful step with which she carried herself. It was a look that danced in her eyes that he found himself drawn towards her. She noticed him, but simply smiled softly. It was a sincere smile, one he had never seen so dear, and it made his heart melt.'"

She chuckled beside him, and he stopped, glancing at her. Shaking her head, she said, "Sorry. You just captured the attitude of a love-struck young man really well. The thought made me laugh." He rolled his eyes, and she grinned. "Keep reading, you're making this really interesting," she told him, leaning against him to glance at the pages.

He smiled back and continued. In his mind, he was once again the protagonist, the young blacksmith ready to begin his life. But this time, instead of the quiet young maiden, he found himself acting across from the lively, sassy pirate that was sitting beside him.

He wondered briefly, with a small smile, if she envisioned the same.
A blinding flash shattered the black sky, quickly followed by an absolute deafening roar. Waves crashed across the ocean, thrown into an outrage from the wind whipping across the waters. The ship rocked uneasily back and forth, rain splashing harshly against the deck. The sails were furled and anchors dropped, making sure she didn't move in the conditions. Everyone was below deck, eating or sleeping to pass the time while the storm carried through. There wasn't much they could do at night anyway, so they simply waited.

Tetra had retreated to her cabin, while inviting Link to do the same. She sat at her desk pouring over her chart, attempting to replot their course while taking account of their potential drifting. He simply sat quietly on her bed, staring out the rain-lashed window. She began to notice him flinch every time thunder sounded and frowned. He didn't appear to care for storms.

She sighed and dropped her quill, tossing her compass into a drawer. She was getting nowhere anyway, so there was little point in continuing to try. Standing up, she made her way over to her bed and took a seat beside him. He didn't say a word, but continued to stare out the window. She followed his eyes and stared in silence as well.

Maybe he'd had a bad experience with storms, like she had. Or perhaps it was an irrational fear. Either way, she didn't ask. It wasn't important why he was uncomfortable. Although, she thought, traversing a storm in that small dinghy of his would likely rake on anyone's resolve. Maybe that was the reason? Who knew.

Another flash ignited the window and he jumped in surprise. She caught a look in his eyes before he turned away, trying to ignore the crash that came shortly after. Was it embarrassment? Did he feel silly that she was seeing him like this over something so trivial? It didn't bother her – everyone had fears, after all. She simply wanted to help him, so she threw him a small smile when he again turned to the window.

At least he wasn't alone; he had her to be with. Hopefully her presence put him at ease like she intended. He still wasn't talking, but she wouldn't force a conversation. She was content with sitting in silence for as long as he was. He would talk when he was comfortable, when the weather had once again calmed down.

So they watched, and waited.
"Alright, boys! Keep your eyes peeled! I want to know the minute anyone sees something!" she was yelling across the deck as the crew acknowledged the orders. "Look for this fog everyone keeps talking about! And if it's those bastards from before…" she trailed off and gritted her teeth angrily. "There'll be hell to pay. Understood?"

A rounding chorus of 'Aye!' rang out, and he shook his head while watching the scene from the stern. The rumours of this cursed Ghost Ship were likely that – simply rumours meant to scare sailors on treacherous nights. He himself doubted the existence of such a ship, though not enough to completely disregard the possibility; he had come across such a ghostly vessel on his travels, though that ship had not been 'cursed' in the sense that this one was spoken to be. Regardless, his worries at the moment were tied to the girl that was supposed to be recovering from their last battle.

Like him, she didn't entirely believe that there was a haunted ship patrolling these waters, but rather some troublemakers who were trying to have some fun. She fully intended to put a stop to it, but he was concerned about the possibility of the entire ordeal being more than she could handle. He had become a little protective of her since their encounter with the pirates that had viciously defeated them. Tetra did not appear fazed from the ordeal, but he knew that her scars ran deeper than the ones keeping her arm in a sling.

"Tetra," he called out to her, standing up from his perch. She seemed not to hear him, continuing with her orders without a second thought. "Tetra!"

"What?" she called back, her tone evident that he was distracting her. He jumped to the deck and walked to the railing, waiting for her to join her. After a moment she did, though she did not appear happy about it.

"Are you sure you're alright?" he asked, concerned. "You should be taking it easy, not actively seeking out more trouble."

"I'm fine," she huffed. "I'm not going to be kept down by some stupid cuts on my arms. Stop worrying about me."

"There's more to it than a few cuts," he replied softly, eyes trailing to the shoulder that was heavily bandaged. She followed his eyes and covered it with her free hand, shaking her head.

"No, there isn't. Look, I've learned my lesson, alright? As much as I hate a loss, those stupid thugs did teach me something. Just like you told me."

"And I'm happy for that," he said carefully, trying to think about how to proceed. "I'm just concerned about what you might do if it turns out to be them behind this fable."

"Link, relax. I wouldn't take them on again. Not yet, anyway. Besides, I don't think it's them this time. This is probably just a bunch of drunken morons who need to be slapped a couple times. And
I'll be able to do as much soon," she assured him. "I swear, my arm's almost better."

He nodded. "Okay. I trust you, you know that. I just don't want you doing something reckless this time."

"Already thought of it," she answered. "I've told you, I did learn something from last time. When we come across the ship, I'm going to check it out myself. If I get into trouble, then the boys join me. That way they aren't in immediate danger. You see?"

He stared at her. Was she serious? "Okay, remember when I just said I didn't want you doing something reckless? That's about as stupid as I could've imagined. This is why you're worrying me."

"Link, it won't be that bad," she said determinedly. "Look, last time was a fluke. We've come out of danger plenty of times before I had even met you. It'll be fine." He still wasn't convinced, so she lifted his chin with her hand and looked straight into his eyes. "Trust me, okay? Please?"

He wanted to argue, to make her see that it was a bad idea, but his mouth remained shut. She seemed set with her plan, and nothing he could say would change that. And she had survived this long without him watching over her all the time. She had put her faith in him when he was saving her life before. He knew he had to trust her now.

"Okay," he nodded slowly. "Just promise you'll be careful."

She offered him a quick smirk, though he saw the sincerity in her eyes. "I will. I promise."

With that, she turned away and addressed her crew once more. He simply watched her while mulling over his worries. He could only hope that this Ghost Ship turned out to be a harmless ruse. He wasn't sure he could live with himself if he let something happen to her again.
The sun had long since set on the oceanic world, yet there were still two that remained active in the slumbering darkness. He wasn't sure why they hadn't turned in yet; the rest of the crew had long since retired below deck to eat and sleep. But he and his companion had remained talking in the failing light, eventually taking their conversation up to the crow’s nest to adopt a clearer view of the dotted sky. Their discussion was anything but important, yet neither had a desire to cease it in favour of food or rest. So they talked, ignoring the world that slipped into quiet around them.

"I love stars," she spoke to the infinite void, and he nodded his concurrence. "It's funny, hey? That's how we first got to know each other."

"Yeah," he agreed, remembering back to that night that seemed so long ago. "You were scaring me for most of that exchange. I kept thinking you'd throw me off of here."

"C'mon," she replied with a smirk, spreading her arms wide. "You know me now. Do you think I would ever throw someone off for any reason?"

He smiled and shook his head, but then added, "Unless you really wanted them dead."

She tapped her chin, considering his angle. "True… Then again, if I wanted someone dead, I'd impale them before I ever got the opportunity to throw them off of something. Sound like me?"

"Mm, touché," he laughed. "I don't know, you were a pirate! How else was I supposed to react?"

"You thought I was scary?" she asked in a mock hurt tone. "I'm just a young, pretty girl! I'm supposed to entrance a young boy!"

"Well, you did at first," he admitted. "Y'know, when you fell from the sky. That was pretty entrancing."

She smacked him loudly as he burst into laughter. "You suck," she told him, fighting the smile that rose to her lips.

"At least I'm honest," he countered, rubbing his sore chest. "What if I lied all the time? Some people do that; I'm pretty sure that those disgusting pirates do."

"Some of them," she nodded in agreement. "I guess you're lucky that I'm honest with you too. We can say we have an honest relationship!"

"We can?"

She sniggered. "More like dysfunctional."

They fell into a chorus of laughter that echoed all around them. It was a good feeling, to just sit and laugh like nothing else mattered.

And really, it didn't. They had no obligations or tasks to be completed right now. They were free to do whatever they wished for as long as they wanted. And after the whole ordeal with the legendary kingdom, they intended to take advantage of that for as long as they could.

"Oh, there's something I've wanted to ask you for a while," he said as the laughter died down. She sighed and rolled her eyes.
"Yes, I'm tanned all over," she said, and his face flushed a slight pink.

"Uh, no, that wasn't- Wait, you are? How does that work?"

"Think about it," she said flatly. When his eyebrows rose in surprise she winked and added, "You know how much time I spend up here. What do you think I do?"

He blinked. Were they actually talking about this? "Are… Are you being serious right now?"

She snorted. "Of course not! …Or am I? Guess you won't know." She broke into a grin and turned to face the sky. He rolled his eyes and continued on.

"Anyway, you had a picture of the Hero of Time in your cabin." She glanced at him in surprise. It was obvious she wasn't expecting something like that.

"How did you know who he was?"

"Well, I heard enough about him from the King. And Ganondorf. And pretty much every spirit I happened to meet," he said with an exasperated sigh. "But there was a statue of him in Hyrule Castle. I didn't put the pieces together until later on, but eventually I realized that you knew about him. How? And why?"

She shrugged. "I don't know about why, but my mother knew all about his legend. She told me bits and pieces over the years that I was eventually able to put together. I don't know if it was coincidence or because she was part of the royal bloodline – or even if it was her that was – but she told me that it never hurt to know."

"I see," he responded. "I sort of wondered. You had no idea you were a princess but you seemed to know a decent chunk about Hyrule's history."

"Yep. Guess it came in handy after all," she agreed before yawning. "Ugh, it's getting late. I need to get some sleep. You coming?"

"No, I'll stay up for a bit yet," he said, glancing up at the sky. "I mean, I like stars, right?"

"Almost in a creepy way," she added with a roll of her eyes. Heading to the ladder, she said, "Alright, don't be up too late. 'Night."

"Goodnight," he smiled as she disappeared. Facing back to the sky, he placed his hands behind his head and sighed. Interactions like this were so simple, and really meant nothing. But they were also special, and their friendship made all of their ordeals worth it.
Disaster

Chapter Notes

This one takes place sometime during mid-Wind Waker. The song played is simply the Ballad of Gales backwards. I just made it up; don't try analyzing the technical aspects of a fictional magic baton.

They had a new destination that was, problematically, upwind. However, the hero had by chance paid her a visit, so they could easily step around that issue. She smiled to herself as her crew prepped the ship around her. It was beneficial, having a friend who could manipulate the wind. And apparently the sun. She had been trying to figure that one out ever since he had told her.

"Alright, I think the ship's ready," said the boy as he approached her. She nodded in satisfaction and watched as he pulled out the legendary baton. She still didn't trust its power, but knew that he had been nothing but responsible with it. Well, he hadn't blown up an island or anything, so that was good enough for her.

He closed his eyes and raised the wand, until-

"Hoy, Link! Where did you put those spare ropes?"

His eyes shot open and he sighed. "I threw them in the hold," he mumbled. Placing the baton in her hands, he ran below deck, calling back, "Just do it! You know how!"

She shrugged and glanced at the baton. She had conducted the wind song, once, and it had completely surprised her. But now that she knew how it worked, she prepared herself and thought back to his lesson, all those months ago. She just had to…

Wait, how did it go? She gritted her teeth in frustration. How many times had she watched him conduct it, and she couldn't remember now? It began up, and then one way, then the other… or something. And was that it, or was there more? She narrowed her eyes. Whatever, it couldn't be hard to figure out.

She moved her arm into position and began conducting. It was up, left, right… down?

A blinding flash of lightning cut through the blue sky, and her eyes flew up in concern. Dark grey clouds covered the heavens in an alarming fashion, bringing down heavy rain and fierce winds. The lightning returned with several more bolts flicking across the expanse, thunder sounding continuously as its echo. She spun around wildly and looked out at the water, which was quickly building waves of treacherous heights.

She shoved her already-soaked bangs out of her eyes and could only listen to the yells of her crew as the swiftness of the storm overtook them. She stared at the Wind Waker in her hands. This stupid thing has the power to do something like this? All I did was wave my arms around!

In a moment Link was by her side, keeping his hand before his face to protect it from the harsh rain. "What happened?" he yelled above the wind, and she could only shake her head.

"I dunno! I did it wrong, I guess! What did I do?" she called back. He shrugged, at a loss.
"I've never done this before! What did you play?"

"CYCLONE!"

They both spun around at the call and looked out over the railing. Indeed, a cyclone was forming and whipping across the ocean, sending a flood of water in every direction. Further away, it appeared that a second wasn't too far behind.

"We have to get out of here!" she heard him yell, and felt his hand take the baton. Wiping her eyes, she missed whatever he did next, but she heard the ethereal choir singing over the howling winds. Before she could say anything, a cyclone bigger than the one they had seen enveloped them from above and lifted the entire ship into the air. She screamed as she fell to the deck, gripping the boy’s legs desperately.

When she next opened her eyes, she saw clear blue sky above her, and the men were getting to their feet, having fallen as well. She picked herself up and glanced around. There was no sign of a storm in any direction. For that matter, there was nothing in any direction. Not an island, not a boat... Not so much as a cloud in the sky.

"Where are we?" she asked, turning to Link. He simply shrugged in response.

"I warped us out of the storm," he told her, "but I didn't think of a location to put us. I have no idea where we ended up."

"Good job," she said sarcastically with a roll of her eyes. "Get us somewhere familiar then."

"Not until I figure out what you did," came his reply, and she noticed his voice sounded slightly crisp. "If you don't mind me saying, this was your fault, not mine."

"You're right," she said quickly, narrowing her eyes at him. "It's my fault I played something I couldn't remember because it isn't my job to. Why didn't you do it before you left? Would've been smarter, Mr. Hero."

"Excuse me for assuming you could remember a few movements. Based on how you have most of a sea chart memorized, I assumed that waving your arms would be easy. But that was obviously too much to be expected."

"My chart is important," she muttered angrily. "Unlike your stupid wand."

He was about to reply, but instead took a deep breath to calm himself. "Whatever, it isn't important right now. What did you play?"

"I don't know, I don't remember!" she exclaimed, throwing her hands in the air. "I just moved my hands like I thought you did!"

"You had both hands up?" he asked, holding his arms in front of him to demonstrate. She squinted, trying to remember.

"No, I think my other hand was just by my side. Why did it need to be up?"

"The position of both hands dictates the effect of the song," he answered. "And I have no idea what else can be done with this thing. I only stick to the songs that I'm taught. Experimenting, like that, terrifies me."

"Wait a damn minute! It matters where the other hand is too? How does that bloody work?!" she
yelled. That was a detail she had never noticed about his executions. He had held up both hands every time? She couldn't say – she was far too angry right now. Angry at herself for such a catastrophic failure, but more so at him right now for bringing it up.

How could he tolerate such an artifact that could have such negative ramifications from such a slight inaccuracy? If she was in his position, she'd have snapped it in half long ago. He had told her that it was used initially by kings, but now it was in the hands of a teenage boy. It was just too much power for someone, especially if they were careless.

But Link wasn't careless. She had first doubted his ability to control its power, but he hadn't had a disaster with it. It was her that was too irresponsible to use it, not him. She had screwed up and taken them way off course. If he hadn't fixed her mistake, something much worse could have easily destroyed them. She sighed, dropping her eyes to the deck.

"I'm sorry," she mumbled. "I didn't mean it. I just didn't think that was even possible."

He sighed as well and nodded. "I know. Neither did I."
He enjoyed a strong wind – after all, he was a sailor, and depended on it for travel. But some days he could easily do without the choppy waters it occasionally brought. And based on the way the ship was tipping and turning today, he was really hoping it would die down soon.

Of course, they just had to be sailing across the waves, so water would frequently hit the ship and splash up onto the deck, cascading onto whoever was unlucky enough to get caught under it. So far that had been Zuko, Nudge, and, three times now, himself. Wringing out his hat out once more, he sighed and tucked it into his pocket. It just wasn't worth the effort right now. Not when it was going to get wet again in a few minutes.

"How goes it, boys?" Tetra's voice rang out, and he turned to find her. She was walking onto the deck and glancing out over the railing at the water, riding the rocking as if it wasn't present. Of course she wouldn't be fazed by it; she had practically grown up on this ship, and knew its movements better than anyone. He had to admire that about her: no matter what the situation, she always appeared collected and ready. Even if it was something as simple as keeping one's balance.

He began to head over to her, ready to make a comment about her aversion to the water that was relentlessly hunting him, when a rather large wave crashed up against the ship, drenching the girl in seawater. He stopped dead, fighting a laugh that came to his lips when he saw the expression on her face. It appeared that he was wrong; even the steady captain got wet now and then.

"Ugh, damn it!" she cried in disgust, shaking water from her face. "Stupid weather. Why did I bother trying to fix my hair today?"

He smiled sympathetically as he approached her, noting the matted mess that her styled bun had become. A secret that she had once confided to him was that there were actually four clips that held it in place. He hadn't believed it, thinking there should have to be more. But after she had pointed them out, he'd had no choice but to accept it. She reached behind her head and began removing these, rolling her eyes as she did.

"I guess I should've expected it," she admitted. Glancing over him, she added with a smirk, "Looks like you got a pretty good soaking too."

"Y'know, just a couple times," he replied with a laugh. "At least the sun dries you quickly enough."

"Tell that to my hair," she countered, and they laughed. "It'll be soaked for the afternoon."

She removed the final clip and ran her fingers through her tangled hair, letting it fall down her back. He watched with amusement, but began to see her differently the longer he gazed. Without her hair up she didn't appear as Tetra. She seemed like, well, a girl. Not that she hadn't before, but this came off as very un-Tetra.

He had known her for the better part of a year now, but the only time he had seen her with her hair down was as Princess Zelda. Now, though, as the pirate he trusted, she looked... beautiful. It was a thought that didn't often enter his head, but he felt as if he wanted nothing more than to run his fingers through her hair, letting it slip away and shower down her back. He knew from experience how soft it was, but he longed to touch it purposefully, to whisper the fact in her ear...

He blinked quickly, jarring himself from his daydream. Where had that come from? She was still Tetra, just without her hair up. It happened to look good on her, that was all. There was no reason to
see her differently because of it. Even though she ought to wear it down more often... Okay, he was making this too complicated.

He noticed her eyeing him oddly. "You alright? You just sort of went somewhere else for a minute," she said, brow raised. He nodded, trying to hide the flush of his face. The fact that she'd noticed made it even more embarrassing.

"I've just never seen you without your hair up," he admitted. Better to speak the truth. "It looks really good."

She blinked in surprise. After a moment of silence she chuckled. "Thanks. I usually wear it up because it's more practical. Doesn't get in the way then, right?" She shrugged. "But if you really like it, maybe I should wear it down more often."

She shot him a wink and strolled away, continuing to run her fingers through her damp hair. He did nothing but watch her, allowing a smile to rise to his lips. That was something that definitely needed to happen.
Regret

Chapter Notes

So this chapter takes place around the beginning of Phantom Hourglass, and ties to 'Remember'.

_This fairy had better be taking me somewhere useful. I swear to the Goddesses, if this little walk is a waste of my time, I'll_...

He snarled to himself, glancing at the fairy that was guiding him up the beach to wherever she knew help to be. She had been the one to find him washed up onto the shore and had immediately ordered him to follow her. He had explained that he couldn't, that he needed help finding the Ghost Ship, but hadn't a clue if she heard. So he'd had no choice but to follow, hoping that she knew what she was doing. Whatever that turned out to be, anyway.

He was furious, upset, and a range of other emotions he couldn't even identify right now. And it was entirely his fault. He had told her that he would protect her, that he would let nothing happen – not after what had already transpired. She had just recovered from her injuries! And now she was gone, he was who-knows-where, and this naïve fairy was trying to possibly help somehow. What was he doing?

If he was to believe the rumours, Tetra was already dead; the ship would have taken her life before he had even reached this island. But he couldn't just give up hope. If there was a chance, _any_ chance at all, that she was alive, he would fight his hardest to rescue her from her fate. That was what he promised her, and he refused to be called a liar twice.

She had jumped ship, as planned, once they came across the legendary boat. However, it had immediately pulled away with her on board; despite his best efforts to join her, he had fallen into the ocean before he could and quickly lost consciousness. When he awoke he was on an island he couldn't recognize, with a strange fairy hovering over him. She had mentioned the name 'Mercay', but he had never so much as heard the word before. He could only guess that he was hopelessly lost, made worse by the fact that he had no boat. By the sounds of it, not many here did.

He couldn't believe how badly his luck had turned. The Ghost Ship _was_ real, it _was_ cursed, and it had vanished as quickly as it had appeared. His best and closest friend, assuming she lived, was potentially oceans away. And he was stuck on some stupid island with no boats, with a loudmouth fairy chattering away about things he couldn't care less about. How could this have happened? Was he that weak? He was the Hero of Winds!

Or he had been, anyway. He had left all of his equipment behind on the ship. He had no sword, no shield, and scarily, as he quickly checked his pockets, no Wind Waker. Without its power, he felt less of himself. Was he still the hero? Was his title now false? He was so confused. He needed help to organize his thoughts.

He sighed, sneaking another peek at the fairy leading the way. She had yet to mention a name, or even a destination. He just hoped that she knew what she was doing. He _had_ to find Tetra. He wouldn't rest until she was back at his side, and they had put the Ghost Ship and this island far behind them. No matter what it took, he would rescue her.
I promise, Tetra. I will find you, no matter what. You'll be okay. I promise.
He hadn't told her why, but he had dragged her to Windfall for what was apparently a secret. She had denied his request until he divulged the information, but he had stubbornly refused to budge on the matter. Eventually her curiosity had overwhelmed her and she charted a course for the island. He was excited, but still oddly quiet.

Now here he was, leading her up by the hand through the town with a grin on his face, letting her stew in her wonder. What was he so excited about? And why wouldn't he share? It wasn't difficult to do – just say the words and she'd feel better. But it had to be a surprise. Because?

"I don't want to give you a chance to say no," he said as they wove past Zunari's shop. She frowned. That usually meant one thing.

"So I'm going to hate it."

"No," he replied dismissively. "I'm just not giving it a chance to come up, that's all."

She sighed and rolled her eyes. "Fine. And when are we getting there?"

"We already are," he answered with a grin, throwing open a door and gesturing for her to enter. She did so, taking a glance around. Everywhere she looked there were picto boxes and pictographs hanging from the walls. What was this? She'd never known about it before.

"This is Lenzo's shop," he explained, noticing her confusion. "He specializes in pictography."

"Okay…" she said slowly. "And we're here because…?"

He sighed. "You know how I've been keeping in touch with my grandmother, right?" She nodded, and he continued, "Well, I've mentioned you a few times, and she wants to meet you. But since that may not happen anytime soon, she at least wanted a picture of you. She assumes you're pretty and appreciates that you run your own 'business'. But she wants to be able to put a face to…" He trailed off, his cheeks turning pink.

She raised her brow expectantly. "Put a face to what?"

Looking at the wall, he answered, "Well, to 'my girlfriend'."

She rolled her eyes. Typical seniors and their relationship jokes. "Funny," she said dryly. "And you couldn't have mentioned that before actually arriving here?"

"I didn't know what you would say," he replied with a shrug. "Maybe you don't like getting your picture taken. I really have no idea."

She sighed. "If it's just for your grandmother, it's fine. What do I do, just stand here and look pretty?"
"You're always pretty," he said with a grin, the tinge not quite faded from his cheeks. "But yeah, just some sort of profile she can admire."

She brushed her bangs out of her face and stood tall as Lenzo approached with a picto box. There was a bright flash and he nodded satisfactorily. She breathed a sigh of relief, dropping her shoulders into a slouch. That had been quick, considering the length of time it had taken to get here.

"Hold on," she said quickly before Lenzo could get too far. "Why don't we get one together? We'll show her how much of a cute couple we make." She finished her sentence with a smirk and Link laughed, stepping into place beside her. Lenzo snapped another picture and smiled.

"No you don't," she muttered, throwing her arm around Link's neck before he walked away. "Get cozy, let's do a cuter one." He raised his eyebrows in surprise, but nonetheless slipped his hand around her hips, trying to keep his face from flushing. The room was illuminated once more.

"Ah, damn, I think I blinked. One more."

And so it went, both of them finding excuses to snap more and more pictures, in different poses and situations. By the end of their session she found herself laughing with joy. She couldn't believe how out of hand this had gotten, or how fun it could be.

Link seemed to share a similar thought as he approached Lenzo's desk with his wallet drawn, sorting out his money. "See? You're glad you came," he said with a chuckle, and she had to nod. "I just wonder what my grandma is going to think when she sees everything."

"Who said she's getting all of these?" she asked with a smirk. "She gets the first two. I'm keeping the rest."

He flashed a smile and turned back to Lenzo. "Can we get two of each?" he asked, and the man simply laughed before nodding. Pulling out more money, he shrugged and said, "If you get pictographs of us, then so do I."

She nodded her approval with a wink. Maybe it had been worth coming here after all. Not only had they had fun, they also had a memory that would preserve it forever. And as she gazed over the pictures later in her cabin, she realized that Lenzo had slipped in third copies of the two pictures for her, free of charge. She smiled to herself as she examined the shot of the two of them holding each other, knowing full well that she would be staring at it for a long time.
Another typical argument from our adorable duo. More so teasing this time around than actual fighting, so it's more a lighthearted story this time. I think it's a sign that they're maturing.

She was watching his conversation with Mako intently, trying to mask a smile that relentlessly attempted to form on her lips. He had accidentally dropped a box full of tools that Mako had spent an hour organizing. The small man had confronted him about it, but he continued to proclaim his innocence, citing a rough wave as the cause of the issue. She had scoffed rather loudly at this, knowing full well that he heard. There was hardly a wind today, so he had a greater chance of flying before a wave strong enough to dislodge heavy boxes struck them.

Mako stormed off angrily, still not convinced but having no proof to convict the boy. He sighed loudly and walked over to where she sat perched against the wheel, staring out over the water. Plopping down beside her, he said crossly, "You weren't helping."

"I'm sorry, you thought I would?" she replied with a laugh. "It was far too much fun to watch you struggle through that. Besides, you did screw up. You're on your own when that happens; don't expect any help from me when my boys confront you."

"Whatever," he said. "At least he bought it. Or at least bought enough to leave me alone."

"Good thing he didn't notice the obvious tick you had," she mumbled with a sly grin. He looked at her quickly, glaring at her statement.

"You rub your fingers together when you lie," she noted, still grinning. "That could kill your cover if anyone else ever noticed. And don't ever try to lie to me now; I know what to watch for." She laughed and stretched her legs. "You should talk to Senza – he can lie like no one else, it's really impressive. Gonz's pretty convincing too, actually. So is Zuko… Actually, no, he's just really quiet. Nudge can't lie worth a damn though, he's too kind to even try. Niko too, he's too meek to. That and he shakes like he's dying."

He simply rolled his eyes as she rambled. "I get it," he muttered. "So I have a tick when I lie. Everyone does!"

"Especially you," she emphasized slowly with a smirk, bumping against his shoulder. He sighed.

"I don't think it's as bad as this one pirate I know," he countered. She raised her brow, unsure of what he was talking about. "She's a badass who can handle anything. Except awkward and embarrassing situations, when she blushes as red as a rupee!"

Her eyes narrowed, the smile gone from her lips. "I do not."

"You totally do! Remember when we were eating a couple weeks back, and you spilled your juice all over yourself? You were red all night!"

"I wasn't," she mumbled, but her voice wavered. To her dismay, she could feel her cheeks getting
hot even as she thought about it. She hoped he didn't notice, but of course he did.

"You can't even think about it without getting embarrassed!" he exclaimed, breaking off into laughter. "Everyone makes a fool out of themselves at some point. Even you, Miss Badass."

"You blush all the time!" she retorted hotly. "Especially when I do something flirty. Does it make you nervous?" She leaned in dangerously close to his face, their lips only centimetres apart. Staring deep into his eyes and whispering seductively, she asked, "Are you nervous now?"

He swallowed, seeming to be wrestling with something. Eventually he turned away, his own face bright red as well. "That's just because it seems unlike you," he said, turning away and looking out over the water. She glanced down at her hands trying to calm herself. She didn't want him to know, but doing that had caused her own face to heat up again. She had gotten closer than she had intended to. She had almost kissed him, but the embarrassing part was that part of her had screamed to. And, unless she was wrong, part of him had wanted to as well. What did it mean?

"I do blush all the time, so I don't really care," he said loudly, rousing her from her thoughts. "You don't, so it's a bigger deal. So there."

She groaned. That was a pathetic excuse, and he knew it. But it didn't matter; she had other points she could use. "When you're embarrassed you can't talk at all. It's like you freeze up or something. What's up with that?"

He ignored her, but was well aware of these occurrences. "You almost skip when you're really happy! It's obvious in the way you walk!" he accused. "That's not like a pirate – that's part of the girl you suppress coming out!"

"You sneeze like a girl."

"You slurp your soup!"

"At least I don't cover myself in crumbs when I eat bread! Learn to open your mouth more!"

"Maybe you should learn to shut yours! Then it wouldn't get you in trouble all the time!"

"Hey, I stand up for myself!" she shot back. "When I first met you, you were a spineless coward! If you hadn't changed I don't think I could've ever befriended you!"

"At least I showed emotion!" he opposed, irritated. "You were so cold and distant when I first rescued you! I didn't think I'd ever become friends with you based on that!"

They sat in tense silence, glaring at each other. She was about to reply, but she had no accusation to retort with. Instead, something completely unrelated and kind popped into her head. Taking a deep breath, she said quietly, "You... smell nice."

He stared at her, unsure of what to say. A slight smile appeared on his face and he replied, "You always look good no matter what you do."

After a moment they broke into laughter, wiping away the pointless argument that had dominated only moments before. She shook her head, trying to calm down. Why that had escalated the way it had, she couldn't say. But it wasn't worth their time to compete and accuse each other of being themselves. They were who they were. That was why they appealed to each other, and why they were so close. She wouldn't ever change, and knew he wouldn't either. And that fact made her happy.
"Tetra?"

She turned to look at him. "Hmm?"

He smiled sincerely at her. "I'm glad I met you. I'm thankful that we're friends."

She smiled back, resting against him as they stared out over the water together. "I am too. More than you know."
Loss

It felt like something was wrong. He hadn't yet placed what it was, but she seemed to be in a short-tempered mood today. She would blow up at anyone who performed a task less than perfectly, and critique any positive aspect she found with her day. It bothered him; she was supposed to trust him enough by now to confide in him when something happened to her. What was worrisome, though, was that none of the men seemed to even acknowledge her mood swing, each wearing a morose mask of their own, void of any joy they found. It definitely felt like something was wrong today.

He glanced up to where she stood, poised at the stern beside Gonzo as the big man guided the ship through the waters. She was silent, but her eyes seemed to be yelling at everything they looked at. Her arms were crossed tightly across her chest and she scarcely moved, only allowing the breeze to lightly play with her hair. "Faster," she snapped at Gonzo, who simply mumbled, "Aye, Miss," in response. He frowned. That behaviour wasn't like either of them. What was going on?

"Hey," he called up to her, though she ignored him. "You alright? You're starting to worry me." She didn't respond, instead staring straight out across the ocean before them. He narrowed his eyes. Why wouldn't she talk to him? Had he done something to infuriate her? Nothing jumped to mind that would set her off like this. What could it be then?

"Tetra," he called again, a little more aggressively. "I'm talking to you. At least acknowledge it." He caught a flash in her eyes, but she remained stubbornly silent. He let out an exasperated sigh. "Is something wrong? Talk to me!"

"Shut up, Link," she hissed angrily. "I have enough to think about without you chattering away in my ear. Leave me alone." His face fell into one of hurt annoyance.

"Where did that come from?" he asked angrily. "I'm just trying to talk to you!"

"Who said I wanted to talk to you, genius?" she shot back. "I'm trying to accomplish something. If you're not going to help, then get out of here."

"Goddesses, what the hell's biting your ass today?" he spat under his breath. Her eyes flashed frighteningly, and he knew that she had heard. Jumping off of the stern, she slowly approached him, balling her hands into fists.

"I'm sorry," she whispered dangerously, "what did you just say to me?"

"So now you want me to talk," he replied instead, turning away. "Pretty bipolar today, aren't you? What's wrong?"

Hearing knuckles crack, he glanced back at her. She was gripping her fists so tightly that her fingers were popping. She looked angrier than he had ever seen her, as if she was ready to drill him in the teeth. For a moment it seemed as if she was considering it, and he took a tentative step back. Finally, though, she turned away and stalked below deck without a word. He raised a brow and, proceeding cautiously, followed her out of sight from everyone.

"Hey," he said softly, grabbing her arm. She spun around and threw his hand aside, looking ready to explode. He felt that now he carried some blame for her mood.

"Go," she whispered, trembling. "Get out of my sight." He stared for a moment as she resumed her trek to her cabin, throwing open the door when it was within arm's reach. Before she could seal herself off though, he stepped forward and shoved his foot in the door. She failed to notice before
slamming against it, and he gasped in pain.

Glancing down at his foot, and then back at him, she muttered, "Get. Out." He shook his head stubbornly and stepped inside. She snarled and turned to face the wall. "We're not talking! You might as well leave!"

"Tetra, I want to know what's wrong," he said firmly. You're supposed to tell me, remember? You promised you would. Please?"

"What do you want from me?!" she yelled, and he noticed her voice quiver. Slowly stepping around her, he knelt down and glanced up into her downturned eyes. His expression softened when he spotted tears rolling down her cheeks. Standing up, he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her into a firm hug. She was motionless for a moment before breaking her composure and sobbing into his chest, weakly hanging onto him.

"I'm sorry," she choked, trying and failing to calm herself. "I didn't... didn't mean to yell at you." He softly shushed her and held her tightly, gently rubbing her back as they sank onto the bed. She breathed deeply as she buried herself into his shoulder, trying to regain her composure. He comforted her quietly, waiting until she felt ready to talk.

They sat in silence as the minutes ticked a half hour by, though neither took notice. She eventually rubbed her eyes, exhaling deeply and shaking her head. "I'm sorry I'm such a mess sometimes."

He smiled softly, squeezing her. "You aren't a mess. I just knew you were upset, and wanted to help. I'm sorry I lost my temper, I should've controlled myself."

"Don't apologize," she mumbled. "It was all my fault. It's just... a hard day. I didn't mean to take it out on you, it just happened."

He frowned, concerned. "What do you mean, it's a hard day? Why?" She took a deep breath, shuddering for a moment.

"It's... my mother's anniversary," she said shakily, another tear falling down her face. "Of the day I lost her."

He mentally slapped himself. Why had he not been able to piece that together? Of course she was upset – that explained why everyone else seemed to be in low spirits as well. It was the day their captain, her dear mother, had left them behind. He felt guilty for getting angry now. Tetra had never once talked about when or how she had lost her mother, but the signs had been clear. If only he'd been thinking.

"I'm sorry, Tetra," he whispered, drawing her closer. "I didn't know."

"I didn't expect you to," she responded dejectedly. "I never told you about it. I guess I'd never wanted to."

He nodded in understanding. If it was something painful, of course she wouldn't want to talk about it. "When did she...? I mean, don't tell me if you don't want to. I just thought that..."

She shook her head. "You might as well know, since I put you through all that crap. It was five years ago, when I was only ten. She had caught a bad illness and was stuck in bed for days. When she tried to leave, to get back to her duties, she ended up cutting herself pretty badly. She hadn't shaken her sickness yet, and then her wound got infected." She swallowed. "She didn't make it two days after that."
He sighed, holding her against his chest as he gently rubbed her shoulder. "I'm sorry that had to happen. You always talk about her so highly."

She nodded, wiping her face. "She taught me so much. And I mean, I never really had a father, so she was everything to me." She took another deep breath, trying to keep her voice level. "I never really learned to deal with the pain. I just… pushed it away, and buried it. But it makes today so hard every time it comes around."

He nodded, but placed his hand on her chin, gently lifting it to look into her eyes. "But you know you have me now, right? I'll help you cope with the pain. I know what it's like, believe it or not." He shrugged. "Maybe not exactly the way you do, but I can relate better than most. So I can help you with this." He smiled at her. "You trust me, don't you?"

She nodded. "Of course. More than anyone." His heart skipped a beat. She trusted him more than anyone else? More than any of her crew members that she had known for years? He almost couldn't believe it, but it made him joyous to know that he could do that for her. She was, after all, the same for him.

Staring deep into her eyes, he whispered, "Then let me help you, 'kay? You don't have to deal with this by yourself when you're not."

She took a deep breath and nodded, wiping her eyes once more as she embraced him. "Okay," she whispered into his ear. "Thank you."

He smiled as he hugged her back, enjoying the moment. It wouldn't be a quick fix, especially when she had ignored the pain for years. But it was something they would work at together, so she would someday be free of its burden. He hated it when she was upset, and wanted more than anything to heal all of her grief. He simply wished for her to be happy.

It was what she deserved, more than anything.
Birthday

She took a deep breath, letting the salty air fill her lungs and calm her down. It was sort of a big day for Link – namely, he turned fifteen, and was obviously excited about it. So was she, to an extent. But she was also nervous. She had never really been close enough to someone to feel an obligation to gift-giving on a birthday; with her crew, a birthday meant a day off doing whatever they wanted. But she couldn't just do that for him, and she really didn't want to. He was a special friend, and she wanted to do something nice for him.

The problem had been the lack of ideas, experience, and, though it had been entirely her fault, time. She found herself unable to come up with a solid proposal for an event or even a gift, and had been panicking the last few days. So she hastily threw together some 'decorations' to acknowledge the day for him: a roughly painted sign that read 'Happy Birthday' hanging on the mast, some dangling ropes painted various colours that blew in the wind, and a variety of hats fashioned out of old treasure maps that the crew wore only out of esteem for the boy. It wasn't much, but on a ship in the middle of the ocean, it was the best she could manage.

She was sure she was the only one who hadn't wished him well yet, and felt a pang of guilt rise in her chest. But she quickly pushed it away, clutching the small, poorly wrapped package in her hands tightly. Odds were he was looking for her, since she'd been evading him all morning. Well, here she was, in the middle of the deck; there was no way he could miss her.

 Needless to say, he rose to the deck only a few minutes later with a slight smile on his face. Strolling over to her with his hands in his pockets, he said, "There you are. I was starting to think you were avoiding me."

"Me? Never," she replied with a wave of her hand. He chuckled and shook his head.

"Well, call me crazy then. I just thought, because you haven't said something to me yet…"

She rolled her eyes with a smile. "Happy Birthday, idiot," she told him with a laugh. He laughed with her, brushing his hand through his hair. She noticed he had neglected to put on his hat as usual today. It was an odd sight – it was almost a part of him. She slipped his paper hat out of her pocket and handed it to him, trying to remedy the visual issue.

"Anyway," she said, trying to be confident, "this is all for you." She gestured all around her to the shoddy decorations, shrugging. "Sorry it isn't much, but it's all I could manage."

He shook his head, the hat wobbling loosely. "You didn't have to. I wasn't expecting it, but it looks really nice. It has that 'pirate' feel to it that I've come to enjoy from you." She let out a soft chuckle. That was something she'd needed to hear, concerning his gift.

She held out her hand for him to take the package. "This is for you, I hope you like it. I mean, I didn't really know what I could get you," she mumbled, glancing away. "But… I found this not too long ago, and I thought it might be alright."

He eyed it curiously before carefully opening the paper, trying to preserve the map it was wrapped in. Handing the wrapping back to her, he slipped the object into his free hand as it caught the sun's light. It was a gold necklace, a thin chain with a pair of crossed cutlasses hanging from it. The gold was fairly heavy, so it must have been worth a fair bit of money. But truthfully, she couldn't care less of its value. All that mattered to her was that he found it appealing.
"I figured it would be a good way to keep you in my head," she said with a wink, trying not to let her uncertainty rise. "Is it okay?"

He smiled at her, stepping forward and pulling her into a hug. "Of course it's okay," he told her, staring at the jewellery. "Where did you find it? It looks really valuable."

"We pulled it up in a chest last month, near the Fortress," she told him. "I slipped it into my pocket right beside you, you didn't even notice. I found it intriguing, but then I thought that you might enjoy it more."

"Well, it'll definitely keep me thinking of you," he replied with a smirk as he placed it around his neck. "How many times have we crossed blades now? I don't even know. Talk about symbolic."

She laughed, her nerves calmed. She hadn't even considered that.

"I'm sorry it isn't much," she said. "You're kind of hard to think of for gifts, though. But I'm glad you like it."

"It didn't have to be much," he responded, glancing down at the swords on his chest. "You put thought into this, I know you did. That means more to me than if you had spent a hundred rupees for a plain chain. Y'know?"

She nodded. She knew exactly what he meant. "I'm not sure if you're into jewellery. But I figured it couldn't hurt, right?"

"Don't worry, I won't be taking this off," he replied with a grin, fingering the pendant. "This stays on me, no matter what."

She smiled, pleased that he so enjoyed her gift. She stepped forward and, fighting the nerves that rose once more, placed a quick kiss on his cheek. Smiling at his blush and trying to ignore her own, she shrugged and winked. "Happy Birthday, Link."
Feelings

He sighed, running a hand through his windblown hair as he stared at the evening sky. He wasn't sure what was wrong, but it was awfully hard to focus when the object of his issue was the blonde captain he was currently distancing himself from. Something had been happening lately, and he couldn't explain what the cause was. So he had thought it a good idea to hole himself up in the crow's nest for a while to figure it out, watching the sun dip into the horizon as tiny diamonds began to dot the sky. It hadn't been too successful so far.

Recently he had begun to see the girl... differently. Whatever that meant – she was still Tetra, through and through. But he felt almost a sort of flutter in his chest when it was just the two of them together, whether they were working or simply chatting half the night away. When she laughed, he wanted to laugh with her. When she cried, he wanted nothing more than to stroke her until she was calm. And every time she looked deep into his eyes, he had to fight the strongest urge to lean in and kiss her.

He stared up at the faint stars, breathing slowly while a breeze brushed against his face. It was pretty obvious that he liked her, and it was getting harder to hide it. The problem was that he didn't know why it was happening. She was his closest friend, and they had been through a lot together. Why was he developing feelings for her? Things were fine now, so why change them? He told himself that repeatedly, but somehow his emotions kept slipping refusals into his mind, pushing the argument away.

But it wasn't just what he wanted – whatever that really was – but what she did as well. Of course she flirted with him now and then, but that was just because she did that. It didn't necessarily mean she felt the same way that he did. Unless she did, and that was her way of showing affection? Or she was just being Tetra...

He groaned, running his hands through his hair once more. This was really confusing. What did he do? If he told her and she didn't feel the same, things would get unbelievably weird! Could she even be around him after that? But what if she did feel the same? They could maybe get together and...

Wait, what would change? Besides a bit more physical intimacy, however far it went, he couldn't see much difference to their current friendship. And it wasn't like they could just go out whenever they wanted. They were stuck on a boat in the ocean, only docking when they needed to. And she had her crew to think about, too. She couldn't just skip out on them and their wants to be with him. Really, getting together would just make things worse.

But he wanted it more than he could even express. When she had kissed him the other day, he had so desperately wanted to grab her and kiss her back, to share a real kiss between them. Maybe it had been her way of telling him to? Or maybe it was just a gift because they were friends, and she was simply a girl while he was simply a boy. But they were definitely close. He had helped her a few times with emotional issues now, and she had done the same for him for as long as he'd known her. So where did the friendship line stop and the 'feelings' line begin? That's assuming there were feelings to contend with. Which he didn't know at this point.

He sighed, rubbing his temples wearily. So far he'd gotten nowhere apart from giving himself a headache. He had simply gone in circles and still had no results to act upon. Did he tell her? Not tell her? Wait and see what happens? He pondered the latter, drumming his fingers impatiently. Maybe that was the best choice for the time being: carry on as normal and see what transpires between them. Maybe, one night in her cabin, if she's really happy, they may just end up a little too close, catch
themselves in the moment, lean in slowly, and…

He rolled his eyes; if only it was that easy. Feelings were confusing. Who dealt with this? They made him feel happy, but also miserable and confused. Why was that even a thing? It was inane! He rubbed the bridge of his nose, exhaling softly. Life was hilariously funny sometimes.
"Ugh, not good," she moaned, rubbing her temples sorely while her stomach raged in pain. It turned out that bad timing was, in fact, sentient, and did, actually, have a sick sense of humour. And the worst part was that she couldn't even run it through with her dagger like everything else that attempted to screw her over. But even if she'd had the opportunity to do so, two things prevented her from this. The first was the illness that had reared its head in the last couple hours. The second was the very sick boy that was lying in her bed, sweating and coughing as if he was near death.

He had fallen ill quite suddenly, the symptoms quickly taking his strength as he collapsed in the midst of cleaning the deck. She had taken him to her cabin to watch over him, placing a chair at his side and refusing to move for any reason. But his condition had done nothing but deteriorate, breaking into chills while fighting a fever that had been steadily rising. Consequently, he had been persistently fighting her for blankets even while she insisted that they would only make him worse. He'd been too delirious to understand, though, and now he barely recognized what was happening, which didn't surprise her.

What did was that she was now feeling sick herself. It had come out of nowhere, but she now found herself hunched over her bed while Link attempted to rest, oblivious to her suffering. There must have been some sort of influenza that someone on the ship had picked up. He was struggling to prevent it from overtaking him, but it was starting to appear that it had also spread to her body and was already putting her through the same treatment.

She could feel the beginnings of a fever quickly overtaking her, and she panted while trying to cool herself with a damp rag. It had been used to keep Link cool through his own, but he didn't even seem to notice her sponging his forehead anymore. Hopefully that continued, because she desperately needed to treat herself before she got any worse. Although, she thought with a grimace, if he'd fallen victim in such a short timeframe, there was probably nothing she could do now to prevent her own fate.

They were already setting sail for the nearest island, which she knew had a doctor. They just needed to last long enough to arrive, and they'd be fine. The worry was that they wouldn't estimate an arrival until the following morning. She was beginning to doubt that Link may have that long; he couldn't keep any food down, and was still attempting to wrap himself in a thick blanket in the midst of a high fever. He needed medicine.

But they barely had any left. She grabbed the bottle of liquid and cast a concerned glance over the contents. There was maybe enough for one helping. She wasn't sure that he could last with only this to sustain him through the night. And what about her? She was getting sicker with each minute that passed. He was already in trouble, but she could possibly fare better if she took it herself.

She sighed, closing her eyes and trying to ignore the pain she felt everywhere. She couldn't do that to him. He was already suffering, to the point where he wouldn't even be around to see the morning if his fever continued to rise. Uncorking the bottle, she lifted his chin and gently poured the remainder of the remedy into his mouth. He drank without even opening his eyes, too confused to attempt a protest. She tossed the bottle away once he finished as her stomach heaved for what seemed like the dozenth time.

She was tough, right? She could manage to make it until morning without it, no problem. She smiled to herself, but then shut her eyes and gripped her head as the room began to spin before her, trying with all her might not to throw up all over her bed. Taking a deep breath once it felt that it passed, she opened her eyes only for the feeling to continue. Moaning in frustration and pain, she breathed...
Once more, willing herself not to cry.

She slipped her hand onto Link’s, who had once again passed out. "You'll be fine," she whispered, laying her head down on the bed. "You just have to make it till tomorrow, then we can get help. We can both get help." Her eyelids were terribly heavy; it took all of her focus to keep them open. She felt like she was ready to faint, her own fever rising steadily as her poor head pounded in agony. He had to be okay – he had medicine to ward off the symptoms, for however long it lasted. Once tomorrow came he’d be perfect in no time.

"It'll be okay," she mumbled softly as she slipped into unconsciousness. "It'll all be okay."
This really wasn't a terribly difficult thing to learn. Actually, it had come to her rather quickly, since she sat down and played for an hour each night. But it was also relaxing, and very enjoyable. Why hadn't she ever thought to try this sooner? Probably because she hadn't learned to unwind before meeting Link. She wouldn't have ever imagined creating music back then – she was completely committed to making herself and her boys richer with each day that passed. But now... It was nice to slow down and branch out.

She had always enjoyed music, especially when she was little and her mother would occasionally sing while working. But the inspiration had probably settled into her mind after returning from Hyrule. Medli and Makar had been part of their greeting party, and had played a beautiful ballad duet to mark the end of the threat across the Great Sea. It had spoken to her; ever since then the urge to try playing an instrument had settled in the back of her mind, occasionally jumping forth like a curious child.

She secretly enjoyed singing like her mother, but was shy of her voice and only did it when alone. And ever since Link had caught her, she'd been terribly careful of that. However, pouring her energy into an instrument was a different form of expression, and it was quickly becoming one that she thoroughly enjoyed. Medli's gentle strumming had piqued her interest in the harp, so she had bought a decent quality one the week prior when they had stopped to restock at a major port.

The fact was that she had an exorbitant amount of money stashed away in a hidden reserve. And since she never really bought anything beyond food and supplies, her wealth simply accumulated to extreme figures. She was technically rich enough to purchase an island half the size of Windfall, if she so deemed. But since there were a variety of uninhabited islands already, that idea was utterly stupid. So it grew until something ever occurred and she needed money to fall back on.

Or until she happened across something she really wanted. She could have easily purchased Link a diamond for a birthday gift, the size of which almost all of the ocean's population could only dream about. But what would he have done with anything expensive? Truthfully, she'd been rather happy with the chain; true to his word, she had yet to see him without it faintly visible under his clothes. So that had worked out without the need to fall back on money. Besides, the harp was a practical excuse of spent money; you could only stare at a diamond.

Ultimately, her plan was to practice a song and then surprise him with it when they were alone. She'd been committed to it, practicing without missing a night regardless of how tired she may have felt. It was showing, though: her playing was becoming much more steady and confident, and her song was almost perfect. It was a simple tune that was popular on Dragon Roost, but it sounded especially pretty on the harp. She knew he'd enjoy it; he had some musical knowledge himself from the Wind Waker, and was sure to find it soothing. She just had to ignore her nerves and play it properly in front of him.

She closed her eyes as she lay on her bed, letting the gentle melody float around the room. Goddesses, music was relaxing. She could really get into this. Maybe she could find a piece to sing along to! She could offer shows whenever they docked, playing on the side of the road and making a bit of extra money. Not that she needed it, but it was a sincere form of appreciation. But she was probably getting ahead of herself. She had a long way to go before something like that, but it was nice to have a goal to work toward.

A faint knock on her door shook her from her imagined future, her playing ceasing immediately. Knowing the knock, it was likely Link. But what was he doing up at this hour? It was well past
sunset; he should have turned in hours ago. Calling out, "Come in," the door swung open a crack and the familiar blonde head poked inside with a smile.

"Hey," he said, eyes tracing over the harp. "Thought I could hear music. Whatcha doin'?"

"Uh…" So much for her surprise. She felt like a kid caught stealing a cookie. "Well, I bought a harp," she answered lamely, holding up the instrument. He nodded and closed the door, walking closer and taking a seat on the edge of the bed. "I thought that I'd learn a song and surprise you. So… ta-da?"

He laughed. "Sorry, I didn't mean to spoil your plan. I just thought I could hear music when I was trying to fall asleep. It sounded pretty nice."

"Thanks," she told him, honestly appreciating the compliment. "I've been practicing every night for a week, though. I don't know how you didn't hear me before if you did now."

"Well, before I've been up early and working all day," he answered with a shrug. "Today, though, I didn't really do much. So I'm not really tired, and was conscious of subtle differences when trying to sleep. Make sense?"

She nodded. She hadn't thought her playing could be heard, but then again, he had also caught her singing while on the deck of all places. Maybe her room wasn't as soundproof as she thought. That had been a pretty stupid assumption on her part.

"So can you play me something then?" She looked up, staring at him. He wanted a song? She wasn't sure she was quite ready. But the way he looked at her didn't leave her with much of a choice. So she shrugged and hugged the instrument to her chest, taking a deep breath. She began to pluck the strings as the familiar melody filled the room once more.

He closed his eyes and softly nodded to the beat, a small smile curving onto his lips. She smiled and closed her eyes as well, letting her fingers guide themselves in the familiar movements. They sat in silence and let the music carry them away, far away where they were nowhere near the ocean, or the sky, or anything comprehensible. They were in a place that had nothing. Nothing but each other, staring into the other's eyes and dancing softly to the lyrical tune that emanated from her playing. And because of it, it was a place that held everything.

In her mind, she sighed in contentment. She could only imagine her excitement if he happened, by any chance, to be envisioning the same.
Aryll had been dying to see him for ages, writing a weekly letter and detailing the slow happenings around Outset. He'd felt guilty about leaving her behind after Hyrule, but the potential danger he may have been facing would have been no place for her. Besides, someone needed to watch over their grandmother, who tended to worry herself sick every time she wasn't with them. Even so, it had been months since he had seen her. After her most recent letter had explained her taking a trip to Windfall with Sue-Belle, he'd decided to swing by the city to pick her up for a visit. It was only to be for a couple days, but Tetra had understood that he needed to spend time with her.

She had been more than surprised when she noticed the ship approach the island, but had greeted him with a tight hug all the same. She'd also been excited to see Tetra again, who she enthusiastically looked up to as a sister. And of course she had spent the first hour with the crew that she'd befriended when he and Tetra had been dealing with Hyrule's struggle. The men all held a soft spot for the girl, and were always on their best behaviour around her. It was a vibe she gave off; she could charm and befriend anyone, no matter who they might be.

She'd rarely left his side as the ship took a small loop around Pawprint Isle, idly killing time. She had even requested to sleep near him last night, telling him that she missed hearing his breathing to help her fall asleep. He couldn't help but agree to that. After all, he had been away for a long time. As much as he'd gotten used to her absence, it was obvious that she still longed for someone to be around. Though by the sounds of it, she spent all of her time helping Sue-Belle as the older woman began to mentor the girl about life. At least she had that as a benefit, in lieu of him being around.

She seemed to always have a question for him about his plans and dealings, but he didn't mind. His answers weren't necessarily something she understood, but it made little difference to her. She was simply happy talking to him again, and truthfully, he was too. She seemed older than he remembered. She'd done a fair amount of growing up since they'd last been together.

"Brother?"

He glanced at her as they stood at the railing together, staring out over the water. It was a sight he never tired of, but the view was something different for her, watching the ship cut through water as waves washed up against the hull. "Yeah?"

"Are you and Miss Tetra together?"

He blinked in surprise. She'd asked a lot of questions since yesterday, but none of them had been remotely close to something like that. "…What?"

"I dunno, you look at her funny. It's not the same way you look at me; there's something else in your eyes, do you understand? And you keep looking over at her when you talk. How come? Is it because you're together?"

It was incredible, how a kid could notice things that even escaped adults at times. He hadn't ever realized that he looked at Tetra differently. Or, for that matter, that he kept glancing over at her. He subconsciously turned to where she stood at the stern, chatting with Gonzo and Senza. Clearly he had been, if he knew where she was and what she was doing. Shaking his head, he turned back to his sister.

"We're not together, Aryll. I look at her because… she gets into trouble a lot, so I have to keep an eye on her. It's a habit, that's all."
"That's silly," she replied with a frown. Leaning close and raising her eyebrows, she asked quietly, "Is it because you like her?"

He tried to remain neutral, to let no tick indicate that her question made him nervous. Shaking his head as casually as he could, he said, "I don't like her. She's my friend, okay? I just care about her."

She slyly let a small grin flash across her face. "It's more than that. I think you do. You can't hide the way you look at her."

"Trust me, alright? There's nothing going on between us. We're just friends."

She smiled, but there was something in it. She didn't quite believe him, but refused to argue it. "Sure. It was only a question." She turned away to look at something in the distance, keeping her back to him. After a moment, she added, "I just wondered because she looks at you the same way."

"I- What?" he asked, a little too quickly. She turned back to him and blinked innocently. She seemed content with keeping silent, and he knew he couldn't press the matter without her calling him on his lies. So he closed his mouth and turned back to the island that was quickly growing.

They reached Windfall a few minutes later, but he spent the entire time mulling over what she'd said. She was probably telling the truth; she knew him better than almost anyone. More than that, she was a pretty perceptive person. He'd have to watch what he did more carefully, lest someone else happened to notice. That was more stress than he needed.

They pulled up to the dock, and Aryll gave everyone a big hug before running down the gangplank to where Sue-Belle waited patiently. He stood with Tetra at the stern as the pirates called out goodbyes. It hadn't been a terribly long visit, but it was still nice to catch up with her. He made a mental note to visit more often. She and their grandmother needed it.

"Make sure you're doing your chores, okay? Tell everyone I said hi. And let Grandma know that I'm doing fine, and that I miss her. Do that for me?" he called to her.

She nodded with a smile. "I will, Brother! Come visit soon! Everyone misses you!" Looking at the girl beside him, she waved and called, "Bye, Miss Tetra! Come visit too!"

Tetra chuckled and gave a wave. "Bye, kiddo. Take it easy."

"Bye, Senza! Nudge! Mako! Gonzo! Zuko! Niko!" Aryll cried, calling each pirate in turn and waving enthusiastically. "I'll miss you! Come see me soon!" The men all waved back, promising that they'd stop by Outset before she could even notice their absence. As the ship pulled away from the island, the pair began walking across the deck as Tetra called out for everyone to resume their positions.

Turning to him after a moment, she asked, "So what were you and Aryll talking about just then?"

He smiled and shrugged sheepishly. "Oh, you know. Nothing important."
It was once again well past the point that they should have been up, but they once again found themselves talking up in the crow's nest, basking in the moon's glow while underneath the faint flurry of stars. It had become a habit for them, staying up half the night and discussing everything and anything that occurred to them. They didn't necessarily have a reason for it; they simply enjoyed the time spent together. Or at least that had to be the reason, because often their conversations led nowhere.

"No, it would be okay. They stole the money first, so it's inherently up for grabs," she explained while he listened intently. "It's sort of a pirate golden rule, if you will. Stolen money is freer than untouched money."

"Wait, the money has different levels of value…?" he asked, frowning. She squinted into the distance, trying to think of an acceptable answer.

"Well, in a way. I mean, anyone can just steal from someone. But once that money's in pirate hands, it's 'ownerless', so to speak. So other pirates are more than free to try and take it."

"And you're all okay with it?" he asked skeptically. "It seems like something everyone would get burned by sooner or later."

"Yeah, probably. It's more an accepted reality, rather than an agreed upon law. Make sense? It just started happening, and we all came to live with it."

He shook his head. "You have more laws than… the law. I never knew being a pirate was so complicated."

"Oh, you have no idea. I'll teach you sometime," she replied with a wink. They fell into silence, staring up at the moon that was high above them. She got such pleasure from talking to him. Most of the conversations were absolutely pointless, and some even led to arguments, but it was still personal time spent with the hero. It was a concept she never tired of, especially because she hadn't had this sort of friendship when she was younger. It was something special to her.

"Oh, shooting star!" he said suddenly, pointing at the vast expanse. "Did you see it?"

She shook her head, having been staring into the face of the moon. "Lucky. Make a wish on it."

"Already did," he said with a grin. She raised her brow in curiosity, but he simply shook his head. "Nope. Won't come true if I tell you."

"That's such a made-up excuse to cover embarrassing secrets," she protested. "C'mon, tell me!"

"Not on your life," he laughed. "If I say, I'll have to leave."

She smirked. "Aww, it is embarrassing? You're so adorable." He rolled his eyes and turned back to the sky, scanning the night for any more falling stars.

"Why are we friends?" he asked with a chuckle, not taking his eyes away from the celestial bodies. She snorted. Good question.

"I assume it's because we were forced to work together when we first met, came to tolerate each other, got to know each other, and somehow developed a liking for the other," she suggested
teasingly.

He nodded casually. "Yeah, I meant besides all that." They broke into laughter, letting it rise to the heavens without a thought of minding the noise. She calmed herself and looked at him, studying the playful smile that spread across his face.

"Whatever the reason was," she began with a sincere look, "I'm really happy I met you. You know that? You're probably the best thing that happened to me. No matter how much I hated the fact that you rescued me when I didn't even know you."

"Goddesses, you just can't let that go!" he exclaimed, pretending to sigh heavily. "Just accept that I'm better than you already."

She rolled her eyes and pulled him into a hug, which he reciprocated with a laugh. Holding her tightly, he said, "But really, I know what you mean. You're my best friend, and I really don't know how I would have gotten this far if it weren't for you."

They parted as she shot him a wink. "I guess we're lucky we found each other then."

"I guess so," he replied. "I mean, you fell onto my island, which isn't that big. Would've been hard not to."

"Shut up," she told him with a light smack. "You need me as much as I need you. Can we just agree on that and watch the stars?"

He chuckled and nodded, leaning back beside her to stare at the diamonds that glittered in the darkness. "Yeah, I suppose. Thank you needing me as much as I need you, friend."

She sighed and shook her head. "Whatever you say, ass." He stuck his tongue at her tauntingly, and she couldn't suppress the laugh that rose up her throat. "I hate you sometimes."

"You say that because you couldn't bear to live without me," he countered, nudging her in the ribs. She sighed and rolled her eyes, but smiled all the same.

"I suppose so."

He glanced at her in surprise – evidently he hadn't expected an honest answer. But he shrugged nevertheless and replied, "Well, ditto. So don't go anywhere, 'kay?"

"Fine, I won't," she told him. "You too though, alright?"

"Of course not," he said with a sure smile. "What else are friends for?"

"What indeed?" she answered mostly to herself as the silence washed over them once more. There were a few things she could think of, but they may transcend the bond of what constituted friendship. Or would they?

She chuckled to herself. There was really only one way to find out, wasn't there?
They were lying on the deck, feeling the ship's gentle rocks with the waves and enjoying the fiery orange of the sky as the sun began to vanish beyond the horizon. It had been a rather long, exhausting day – they had cleaned out and sorted the cargo hold for the first time in far too long, and there had been a lot of shuffling around to be done. It had taken the better part of the afternoon, after which anyone had been too tired to do anything else. He had wandered over to the bow and all but collapsed onto his back, and it hadn't been much longer before she had taken up a place beside him.

She wasn't sure how long they'd been here – truthfully, she'd lost track of the time that she'd scarcely monitored to begin with. But the sun had begun to set, so it was safe to say that they'd been in the same position for a few hours now. She may have fallen asleep at some point, but wasn't really sure anymore. Everything seemed to be blending in and out of reality. She briefly wondered if she was by herself. Was Link even out here anymore? She hadn't heard him in a while.

She reached out beside her and felt an arm. Yep, still there. He didn't react though, so she snuck a quick glance at him to check if he was asleep. He didn't appear to be; his eyes were glazed over but half-open, facing the sky while obviously lost in thought. As she studied him, she became aware of his breathing.

In… Out… In… Out…

He was totally relaxed, it was clear. She turned back to the orange expanse and sighed softly. This was new for them: just lying together, enjoying the atmosphere and their presence. No talking, no disturbing sounds, just… silence. Nothing but breathing.

She closed her eyes and focused on the sound of his chest rising and falling, subconsciously matching her own breaths to his. This was so settling; why couldn't they do this forever? Just sailing along the ocean, watching the sky as its flurry of colours came to pass above their heads. It was beautiful. So beautiful that she didn't want it to stop.

The thought fluttered through her head and she felt a question rise to her lips. But did she want to ask? What if she ruined this moment? Or could she, if she simply wanted to ask about the very thing in question? It didn't really seem possible, so it couldn't hurt, could it?

"Hey, Link?"

She heard his head turn towards her, stirred from his thoughts. Why did she open her mouth? He'd been content before. "Hm?"

She glanced at him again. He simply seemed so relaxed, so at peace; it was a rather sharp contrast to the lives they led, often being thrown into danger before they could realize. She didn't want to take it away from both of them. It wasn't fair, especially to him. Besides, the question had already died in her mouth, along with the desire to voice it.

She shook her head. "It's nothing." She moved her hand out and gently brushed her fingers against his, closing her eyes once more and losing herself to the sound of his rhythmic breaths. "Never mind."
Had she been nervous on his birthday? He rather hoped so; it seemed a little more even that way. Despite that, he was quite unsure about his gift. It was no necklace pulled up from the ocean floor, that was for sure. He touched the chain under his shirt briefly. Maybe his present wasn't that good. It was a little conceited, to be honest. But he'd had a feeling she'd enjoy it upon first spying it. He just hoped his initial instinct would hold up to impress her.

He stood on the deck anxiously, glancing every few seconds at the gift in his hands. Maybe he should rethink this. But how would he have time to? It's not like he could put this off for another day; it was her *birthday*. That came once a year. Besides, she'd been unsure of his gift, right? It would probably be fine. He needed some confidence in himself.

He knew why he was nervous, though. He just wanted to impress her, to make her happy and satisfied. He wanted the knowledge that he was capable of that. It really had to come from this, or else what would do it? Well, perhaps saving her life, but that seemed to happen so often now that it didn't even faze them anymore.

His thoughts were banished as she strode up onto the deck and, noticing him, headed his way. He straightened and took a deep breath. *Relax. You can do this.* She stopped before him and raised a brow at the object in his hands, and he shrugged sheepishly.

"Hey," he said as casually as he could. "Happy Birthday! How's it feel?"

"Feels like yesterday?" she replied carelessly. "I don't want to kill the mood, but did you ever find those charts?"

"What? Oh! No, but I have a feeling I know where they ended up. Uh…" He shuffled on his feet. He'd forgotten how little she seemed to care about birthdays; Nudge had warned him as much, but it was evidently something he needed to observe firsthand to have sink in. "So, I got you these."

He stuck out his hand and she took the gift slowly. "Oh, thanks. I mean, you didn't have to. I don't really care about these things."

"I heard. "Well, you got something for me, right? That would hardly be fair if I didn't do the same."

He glanced around uncertainly as she carefully unwrapped the gift. Suddenly he wanted to be far from here. Screw confidence; he took down Ganondorf, that was enough to be expected from him.

"Oh, wow," he heard her say, and he brought his eyes back to her as she examined the earrings in the sunlight. They were simple small rings, thin and gold. Nothing terribly ecstatic, but then he'd never seen her wear earrings. He found it odd, since he'd noticed her pierced ears long ago, but had never actually asked about it.

"My mother made me get them pierced when I was little," she explained, noticing his stare directed at her ears. "She did it herself, actually. I still stick earrings in them from time to time just to keep the stupid holes open, but I don't have anything I'd care to wear full time."

"Oh. That may have been good to know before I bought those," he admitted. "So those are too plain?"

She shook her head. "No, these are what I mean. They're *there*, but they're functional. They won't pull or dangle or anything to distract me. They're actually perfect." She gave him a sincere smile, and he breathed a sigh of relief. He hadn't known which way to go with the earrings, but it seemed like
he'd made the right choice.

She glanced back down to the gift to notice something else in the wrapping. Curiously, she pulled out a big blue cloth. She eyed it over before turning to him, a blank look on her face.

"…What is it?" she asked, confused. He simply shrugged in response.

"A bandanna," he replied. "I… Well, I like seeing you with your hair down. But you said that your bun was functional. So I thought that a bandanna would be a way to have you wear your hair down and keep it out of your face. And it would look good on top of that, so…"

She stared at him for a moment before breaking into laughter, pulling him into a hug. "Touché, I guess. I hadn't actually considered that." She looked into his eyes and smiled. "Thank you for these. They're really thoughtful. I'll wear the earrings a lot, I know that for sure. And I promise I'll wear the bandanna for you, if it makes you that happy."

He grinned in return, before noting that they were still holding each other. Staring at her, he wrestled with a decision, ever so slowly inching towards her face. At the last moment, he delivered a quick peck off to the side of her lips. She raised her brow, but gave an amused giggle. "Missed."

He blinked, and she gave him a wink before leaning in. Her eyes closed as his heart began to race. Their lips were about to meet, when-

"Miss Tetra! We need you at the stern!"

Her eyes shot open, and she sighed before turning to Mako, who stood near the wheel. "I'll be right there!" Turning back to Link, she smiled apologetically and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. "Sorry, I need to split. Thanks for the gifts, though. I'll come find you later."

With that, she turned away and headed off to where her crew waited. He exhaled before facing up to the sky and mulling over what had just happened. He was pretty confused, but she had ultimately enjoyed his gifts. He'd woken up this morning anticipating worse.

Even so, the entire situation left more questions in his head than he would have cared for.
Thoughts

Chapter Notes

Takes place shortly after 'Equivalent', but before 'Sick', 'Pain', and 'Remember'. Confusing, I know; the point is that we're drawing closer to Phantom Hourglass.

She sighed as she paced slowly around her room, going over her musings for perhaps the tenth time. He had almost kissed her yesterday, she was sure of it. For whatever reason, he'd backed out at the last moment and only pecked her cheek. And she had almost kissed him back, with full intention to. She couldn't explain what had happened; she was caught up in the moment and wasn't thinking. Which meant that she'd acted instinctively – so her instincts were to kiss him? She had lately become aware of feelings that may have surpassed a tight friendship, but had also tried her best to ignore them for the time being. They confused her, and she had other things to do right now than worry about him, and whatever it was that they were.

But he hadn't pulled away before, or even voiced an objection. Did that mean that he wanted to? Or had he just been too nervous to move? Goddesses, he was confusing sometimes… Wait, hang on; he had kissed her first, right? He must have wanted it. Unless he only did it because she had kissed him on his birthday, and he was being fair. She moaned and ran a hand down her ponytail.

It felt odd, she noted. As she'd promised, she was wearing the presents he had given her. True to her word, the earrings were sitting comfortably, and didn't actually look too bad, either; they added a bit more of a feminine flair to her outfit. She could start getting into that, if she looked this good. The bandanna had been a bit more hesitant, mainly because she'd gotten so used to having her hair up into a stylish bun. She'd let it down, tied it back, and thrown the cloth over – and she had to admit, it did look pretty fine on her. Not to mention it offered some protection from the sun, which didn't hurt. Once she got used to wearing it, she could definitely get into it as a look.

And wasn't that the point? She wanted to look good for him, when she shouldn't really care about her appearance. Hell, when you work all day, you look dirty and you deal with it, no questions asked. But that didn't mean she couldn't style herself up a bit at night, when they were finished… There it was again. Where were these thoughts coming from?

She sighed and sat at the edge of her bed, rubbing her temples gingerly. Part of her wanted to just find Link, kiss him, and see what happened. It felt like that would answer a lot of her questions, so why not? Well, it could make things really awkward between them, possibly unhinge their friendship completely. That was… less than desirable. So that was a no-no, then.

Maybe he didn't even really like her. She flirted occasionally, and he did get embarrassed, but maybe that was just his shy nature when it came to romance. Had he ever actually instigated something between them? As she thought about it, nothing came to mind. So was she just projecting, then? Was she simply seeing what she wanted to see in him? …Or was she just going crazy?

She groaned loudly and threw herself back onto her bed. This was why she ignored this sort of crap; it was just too distracting. And she'd been locked up in here for over an hour now, doing nothing but trying to decide what everything meant. She should probably get back up to the deck and see how they were coming along. Besides, Link was likely wondering what it was she was doing. She'd told no one of her dealings, unlike usual. What was she going to say?
She closed her eyes. Did it matter right now? Not terribly – she'd think of something after she got this straightened out. Now, there *had* to be an answer somewhere...
"Tetra, they're coming. Tetra, they're coming. Tetra, they're coming!" he exclaimed, and she flinched. Yes, she was fully aware that they were coming. Bloody pirates, trying to steal from her… She found the island first, she dug up the chest first, and she found the bloody crown first. Everyone else could just screw off; it was her crown, and she was pawning it off for some serious money.

Well, if they could get off this stupid little island, anyway. Another ship was quickly approaching, cutting off their path back to her own ship anchored off the beach. It was just the two of them, so they likely had little chance of fighting through an entire crew and living to talk about it. Which didn't leave much else to do. Stay there and wait to die? Fat chance. Give up the crown? She snorted; even less likely.

"Damn it, what to do…?" she muttered, glancing around. There was little foliage to hide in, and climbing a palm tree sounded like a terrible idea. They could duck into the water around the island, but with his bright green tunic and her tanned skin, they would probably stick out worse than Tingle. "Alright, I'm open to suggestions right now."

"Give them the crown?"

"Are you nuts? Then coming here was pointless! Besides, I'd rather die than give up a bounty," she snapped, shooting a peek at the ship that was now dropping a dinghy into the water. No less than six huge men – wonderful. Her eyes scanned the area again, falling on some crates that had been grown over with moss. Probably left by whoever had ditched the treasure here, but they suddenly gave her an idea.

Closing the chest and dropping it into the hole, she quickly kicked it in and stomped the sand on top. She kicked everywhere to clear any signs of digging or footsteps as Link watched, bewildered at the sight. When she was finished, she studied her handiwork. The beach was a mess, but no one would tell that they'd removed the chest recently.

"Tetra, what-?"

"Shut up!" she hissed, grabbing his arm and half-dragging him to the nearest crate. It took some effort to pry off the lid, but eventually it came free with a slightly soggy 'snap'. "Quick, get in!"

"What? Why?"

"Because we're hiding, dumbass!" She grabbed his legs and ungracefully dumped him inside, hopping in behind him. Pulling the lid back overtop, she carefully set it into place and ducked into the darkness.

"Ow! Don't kick!"

"Shut. Up," she whispered through clenched teeth. "They can't know we're here!"

"So you hid us in a box? One of the only things on the island?"

"There's moss on the box, did you not notice? They just have to think that this has been here a while. Hopefully they won't bother checking."

"This plan is ridiculous," he muttered, attempting to shift himself out from under her. "It's just a stupid crown!"
"Yeah, and now it's my crown," she shot back as quietly as she could, clutching the object to her chest tightly. "So just drop it already!"

"Fine," he snapped. "Goddesses, move over! You're squishing me!"

"Move over where? I have nowhere to move! We're in a bloody tight crate!"

"And whose fault is that?"

"I- ...Shut up," she whispered, but attempted to wiggle out of the way so he could sit up. After a moment of grunting and struggling, he managed to get up and they awkwardly half-stood, facing each other with masks of annoyance.

"We could have just passed this one up," he murmured. "Is this really worth it?"

"We'll know once I sell it," she replied shortly, narrowing her eyes. "But like I said: I found it first, and I do not give up what's mine."

"Yeah, I know," he said. "You get weirdly competitive over this stuff. And really impatient."

"I do not!" she countered, but he stared at her flatly. "Shut up. I could be worse."

"Whatever," he retorted, rolling his eyes. "Just don't get me killed over your stupid thrill."

"No promises," she shot back. Cautiously cracking open the lid, she snuck a glance down the beach. "Crap, they're here. Don't make a goddamn sound, hear me?"

"Aye, Captain," he answered mockingly, rolling his eyes once again. She felt like smacking him, but that likely wouldn't end well for them. So she contented herself with staying still as they silently stared at each other. Muted footsteps could now be heard trekking through the sand, followed by a shovel sinking into the ground. She bit her lip anxiously as they listened to the agonizingly slow process. She prayed against hope that this worked.

After a moment of quiet talking, there was a brief blanket of silence, followed by, "It's empty!"

"They must still be here somewhere. There's a boat on the beach!"

"Look around, moron. The place is deserted. How do we know that ship out there didn't drop it here to throw us off?"

"Yeah! They must have it! It doesn't look like they're leaving, either! We can still catch them!"

"Let's go!"

The sound of muffled footsteps led to splashing, and the chopping of disturbed water getting fainter allowed her to crack open the lid of the crate for a peek. She couldn't believe their luck; those idiots had actually fallen for that! After the dinghy had reached the ship, she felt safe enough to leave. Cautiously, she slipped out and stretched, as Link followed suit shortly after.

"Ugh, that was unnecessary," he moaned, rubbing his shoulder. "So what do we do when they go after the ship?"

Her eyes widened as the nerves of being discovered wore off, and the pirates' words began to sink in. "Oh hell, they're not actually-"

A loud bang echoed through the air, and they both spun to the ocean. The pirates were attempting to
shoot the ship, which was quickly turning and sailing away to avoid the fire. They watched in tense silence as their only means of escape sailed further into the distance while the enemy attempted to give chase.

"...So, that happened," Link voiced with a bitter laugh. She simply gritted her teeth, balling her fists tightly and almost snapping the artifact in her hand.

"Goddamn it. Stupid asshole pirates. Looks like we'll be here a while." She sighed and kicked at the sand in frustration, not bothering to watch her ship disappear. Sometimes, she was willing to admit, treasure was more trouble than it was probably worth.
Fall

Chapter Notes

This takes place during our ever-growing WW/PH interlude.

The weather could change so quickly out on the ocean that it was terrifying if one didn't know how to anticipate it. Luckily, there tended to be telltale signs. The biggest one today would have to be the crashing waves that had been nowhere present this morning; this was a pretty big tip-off that a storm was approaching and would be upon them before sundown. The plan was to be docked by then, but they would just have to see what happened if the water kept throwing them around like this.

He sighed and stared out onto the water, glancing occasionally at a rather large wave that attempted to bowl them over. Of course, he wasn't worried about being overtaken by a storm. He'd seen his fair share of them firsthand, and had come to learn proper procedures to prevent injury or damage. There were others, though, that tended to frown upon the same regulations, preferring to throw caution to the wind and let whatever happened happen. Even if it meant injury to oneself.

He rolled his eyes up to the crow's nest, where the fearless captain was climbing around and working without any regard for her safety. Even in the crashing waves, he had to admit, her balance never faltered. Even so, though, she had to be nuts to be doing that right now.

"Tetra, please be careful," he called softly. She looked down, appearing quite small as she occupied the sky above him.

"What?" she called back, shaking her head. "Can't hear you over the wind. Say again?"

"I said be careful! You're going to fall!"

He heard her faint laugh even over the water hurtling itself against the ship. "Not likely! I do this too much!"

"That doesn't matter!" he shouted back, trying to be heard. Why were the waves getting louder? "It only takes one screw-up to fall!"

"Link, seriously, I'm-"

Before she could finish, a series of irregular waves began pounding against the ship, sending it into a rock. He gripped the railing in concern, struggling to keep his balance. A short yelp from above drew his attention to the girl that was clinging desperately to a rope to avoid falling from the nest. The water settled as quickly as it had stirred, and after a brief moment everything returned to its state of moderate tranquility. He released the breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding and snuck a look at Tetra, who was righting herself and looking quite please with herself, despite the shake-up from a moment ago.

"There! Told you!"

No sooner had she spoke when a final wave slammed hard against the boat. He stumbled and fell against the railing to catch himself. Hearing a loud scream however, he realized too late that Tetra had attained no such luck. Spinning around, he witnessed her tripping out of the nest, struggling to
grasp a loose rope that was constantly beyond her reach. Time seemed to crawl by as she spun head over heels on her very short trip to the ground. With a sickening thud, she impacted the deck and was unconscious before the scream for help even formed in her mouth.

"Tetra!" he shouted, though he was quickly drowned out by a strong call of, "Captain down!" Appearing from nowhere, the men were at the girl's side, trying to rouse her and check for any immediate issues. Nudge kneeled at her side and examined her closely, looking for anything bleeding or otherwise out of place. Coming across a swelling ankle, he cringed and pulled the bandanna off of his head.

"Ooh, might be a sprain if she landed on it wrong. We should take her below," he voiced, carefully wrapping the cloth tightly to support the joint. "We have to be careful moving her, or she'll end up worse."

"Alright, easy," Senza murmured as they gently picked up their delicate captain. "Gonzo, grab the door, yeah?" Gonzo was already heading for his position and held it open wide as the other two carried Tetra below. He followed, and Link was right behind them – she wasn't leaving his sight, not when she couldn't help herself.

She was placed on her bed, and the men began discussing medicines and supplies that she would need. Leaving Link to watch over her, they left the room to fetch their equipment. "If she wakes up, she doesn't move. Hold her down if you have to," Gonzo ordered as he walked out. He nodded his understanding and turned back to her as they found themselves alone. He sighed and brushed her hair out of her eyes, taking note of a small cut above her eye.

Dabbing at it with a nearby rag, he studied his unconscious friend and felt an overwhelming sense of pain settle in his stomach. "I told you," he whispered. "Why don't you listen?"
Worry

Chapter Notes

Takes place during the back half of Wind Waker.

Pacing around, she massaged the bridge of her nose while her thoughts once again turned to the hero. Was he alright? Was he dead? She hated this, not knowing what was happening. Why did she have to be down in this bloody basement? She could help him! Why did no one seem to understand that?

She absentmindedly tugged at her long dress. The thing was simply impractical; it hindered her movement, just like these stupid tight shoes. It was no wonder they didn't want her out there, but this was pathetic. She wasn't a princess, so there was no need for these stupid clothes! She was a pirate! She knew more about fighting than Link did, regardless of the legendary sword he now carried. There was a lot being asked of him, to be sure, but the King had mentioned finding sages to help him. But why couldn't she help too? She could take care of herself; it made no difference to her if she was 'important', for whatever stupid reason.

She sighed and took a seat on a ledge, swinging her legs freely over the water that littered the lower floor. She hoped that he was okay. He had to come back – she'd gotten used to having a friend to rely on. Besides, she was still stuck down here; if she was forever trapped, who would lead her men without her? They would miss her too much to even function properly. She smiled to herself; she loved her crew, even if they were goofy at times.

It was Link that she truly worried over. This wasn't his life, getting involved in an epic struggle for power. She wasn't sure she could forgive herself if he was killed. After all, it was indirectly her doing that he got involved in everything. Could he really get past Ganondorf's forces and repel his evil grip over the ocean? Naturally, she believed in him, but she'd feel a lot better if she was there to cover his back. After all, she taught him to use that bloody sword. But now he was in the position to save everyone and free her. Oh, the irony, she thought with a bitter roll of her eyes.

She shook her head, trying to banish the thoughts. She had to believe in him. He'd done so much already, and made it this far without being killed. Surely dealing with a couple sages and the Dark Lord wouldn't be too difficult. After all, he was Link: kind, brave, tenacious… He was a natural hero. Who better to show that stupid fat prick who was boss?

She laughed. He could do it, she knew he could. But despite herself, she just couldn't calm her nerves. Part of her wouldn't stop worrying about his possible premature fate. It wouldn't happen, though. It couldn't happen.

Right?
Sailing over the vast ocean was so relaxing, and so *freeing*. He was given the opportunity to go anywhere, to accomplish anything that he wished. Except right now, when he had a mission to complete and a villain to put down. So, looking for pieces of an ancient magic may not have exactly been 'freedom', but it was still better than being trapped in a basement.

Glancing up from his charts, he sighed and adjusted his course. So if this was always relaxing enough for him before, why did his thoughts now keep turning to her? Trapped in that dank chamber, cut off from all contact, alone in the dark… He felt awful leaving her behind, but what else could have been done? The King insisted that her life was of the utmost importance, and had to be protected. Conversely, he was the hope of everyone on the Great Sea, but it was up to him to accomplish the tasks set before him. It still didn't make a whole lot of sense to him, but he was far past trying to figure it out. The King refused to divulge anything, so unless he didn't even have a reason for doing so, it was likely to remain a closely guarded secret.

He knew that Tetra absolutely detested the idea of sitting out of a fight, but there were powerful forces at work. She'd saved him from the King of Evil once already, but almost at the cost of her own life. He had the now-restored Master Sword, and according to the King, even that wasn't enough to confront Ganondorf with. If that was the case, there was no way he wanted her getting involved. Even though, knowing her, she'd figure out a way to intervene anyway. She always did, somehow.

Turning his eyes back to his charts, he massaged his temples as the markings before him began to blur. Goddesses, he was tired… He'd hardly had a break since he had last parted with her. Between sages and golden powers, the King was keeping him too busy to even sleep more than an hour. Lives were at stake, the man had always repeated. He wasn't sure how effective he'd be if he was fatigued and tripping over his feet, but then again, he wasn't the expert. *That would be the man who headed the flooded kingdom*, he thought bitterly. Clearly the exhaustion was starting to get to him.

Despite that, he had to finish his quest as soon as possible. Tetra was waiting for him, *depending* on him to succeed. And he couldn't believe how much he missed being around her. She always had the answers to his questions, the solutions to his problems, and a cheeky remark to pull him out of an overwhelming expectation. He'd only known her for several months, but it was funny how close they'd become, and how much he had come to rely on her. Being away for such a period of time was… odd. Like a newly formed hole in his life that was now unfillable.

He shook his head, trying to wash away the weariness from his body. He was getting close to the end. Soon she'd be back by his side, and they could put all of this behind them. And then, hopefully, they could continue their friendship without having to go their separate ways. He didn't want to go back to being an island boy now; he'd been exposed to a whole new life, and she was at the centre of it all.

He only hoped that she was okay, and that he lived long enough to see her again. As each step in his journey brought him closer to the Dark Lord, he had an increasingly unsettling urge that he was
taking a step further from her.
Parentage

They leaned out against the railing, gazing at the endless water that stretched out beyond their sights before finally meeting the sky in a fusion that was ever-elusive. She never tired of the ocean; no matter how many complained about the hardships of living on it, she would always view it as a prospect to take one's fate from the world. It was… freedom, as Link had once described. That was pretty much it, dead-on: it was the choice to head off to wherever and prove yourself, or bow under its daunting presence. She lived for that feeling, every minute she took control of her vessel. It was indescribable.

"It's so beautiful," she murmured, and he nodded beside her.

"Definitely. Especially when the sun catches it right and it just glitters. When it's calm like this, you know?"

"Not just that," she replied, "but its rapport with life. Its entire idea of conquering your fear of it to conquer it yourself. And that's the whole point – when you do, it provides opportunity. It gives chances. It's generous, if nothing else. Right?"

"Not necessarily," he said, shrugging. When she gave him an inquiring raised brow he shrugged. "It takes lives too. I know of a lot of people who've been lost during a storm or hurricane or something. Even falling overboard drowning is a real risk, right? Not everyone conquers it like you say. You need to be careful or else you can die."

She blinked. That was a pretty blunt statement from him. Usually she was the cynical realist, not him; he was the one with the positive outlook, with the view that bitter experience hadn't soured. So where had that come from? "Please, it's not that treacherous. Who do you know that's died on the sea? Who couldn't handle the poor water with its splashes and breezes?"

He shrugged again. "My parents," he responded casually.

She was silent, her mouth hanging open in a half-formed thought that had died once the realization followed his words. She'd never known, even guessed at that part of his life before. Somehow, it had never occurred to her to ask. "…Oh."

He nodded, turning back to the blue vastness. "I told you, it happens. You've stayed alive because you're smart, but I don't think you've ever been unlucky enough to be caught in a tempest. Therefore, you can't say for sure what others are made of when they fall to it."

She was stunned, unsure of what to say. Overwhelming guilt from her careless words was flooding throughout her body, but her mind remained blank, bewildered by the dramatic one-eighty the conversation had taken. "I… Link, I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault," he responded nonchalantly. "I can't assume you'd hope to be caught in a storm."

"No, not that," she said quickly with a shake of her head. "About what I said. I didn't know about your… I should've thought about what I was saying. I spoke too carelessly, that was just rude."

"Relax," he answered with a wave of his hand. "How were you supposed to know? I never told you. No offense or anything; I wasn't purposely keeping it to myself, it just never came up."

She nodded slowly, but his words didn't change the fact that she felt like a huge, inconsiderate ass. "How old were you?"
"Five, I think," he said, trying to think. "Aryll was only one or two. They just left one day, to travel to Windfall or something for a trip. They never came back."

"Goddesses," she muttered, putting her arm around his shoulders and squeezing him into a side hug. "I'm sorry."

He shrugged. "A sailor found what was left of their boat after a storm, and eventually the story made its way to Outset. I think I was upset for a little while, but I got over it rather quickly. Still don't know why or how though."

He said it as if he was reciting the weather. There was no hint of sadness, or pain, or even anger directed at her carelessness. It simply didn't seem to faze him in the least. "How can you be so removed about it all? Doesn't it bother you?"

He squinted, mulling over the question. She watched silently, privately surprised at the hesitation. "Not really. I don't remember much about them anymore, besides that they were really kind. Poor Aryll doesn't remember them at all; she just stares at pictographs and tries. I think about them from time to time, but our grandmother took to raising us once we were orphaned, so I'm used to seeing her as my guardian. She's not the same as a mother or father, but we were a lot better off than having no parent at all, you know?"

"I guess," she murmured, not removing her arm from him but turning her eyes back to the water below. Suddenly it didn't seem so inviting. The misguided innocence it had veiled itself in had been lifted, and she saw the other side for what it was; aggressive, relentless, and pitiless. But at least he and she had similar situations to relate to. "Well, I never knew my father either. He left before I was born, so I don't even know who he is. Maybe I've met him before, who knows. I really don't care, though. Whatever reason he had, he isn't in my life, and I have no desire to undo that. I got along just fine without him."

He smiled, and she glanced at him curiously. Holding back a chuckle, he added, "Or maybe we're both just damaged because we don't have parents and made do with substitutes instead."

Despite herself, she found herself snorting at the idea. "Maybe that's why we get along so well. It's a vibe we give off to attract others like us."

"Oh, good, that doesn't sound sad," he laughed. "We give off a damaged orphan vibe. Glad being potentially screwed up isn't rewarding enough."

"Hey, even if we might have had to do a lot of growing up ourselves, I think we managed all right," she smiled. "At the very least, we both have someone who understands. That's more than a lot of people can say."

"True," he nodded in agreement, slipping his arm around her as they stood side-by-side comfortably, staring out once more at the ocean. It seemed different to them both, much more real now that two truths were out in the air. But there was no hint of fear – only the excitement of freedom. "And I'm thankful we have that."

Her eyes gleamed in agreement. "Me too."
Dispute

"I know it doesn't make sense, but just trust me, okay?" she called to her crew, who nodded before setting out to their stations. "I got a good tip back at port, so I know what we're doing."

He shook his head in disbelief. If he ever needed proof that her men were loyal, it was that they followed her no matter what she asked. Even now, when she gave directions to a vaguely known island in the middle of nothing, there was only a slight bout of questioning before they set out to fulfill her orders. It was almost inspiring to observe; even if her tip turned out to be a hoax, they wouldn't complain. She would have to make it up to them somehow, but they weren't ones to hold grudges. They were too committed to their captain.

Approaching him, she stretched her arms out with a smile. "Time to be underway," she spoke lightly. "I can't wait to find that cache. It's going to taste so sweet!"

He chuckled. "As long as it's real, right?"

She frowned. "What do you mean? Why wouldn't it be?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. It just seems too good to be true. If that sailor knew about a treasure location, why would he just tell you? Why not go find it himself?"

She was silent a moment as she searched for an answer. Coming up with nothing, she simply replied, "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth, alright? We caught a break, that's all."

"Assuming there is a treasure, yeah," he added. "We don't know that yet."

"What makes you think there isn't?"

"I don't know. The reason opposite what makes you think there is?"

She shook her head. "Which is what, exactly?"

"I have no idea. I just don't believe it, that's all."

She sighed and looked away. "Whatever. You'll see soon enough, I guess."

Was she not considering what he said before dismissing it? "It doesn't occur to you that you could be wrong?"

She blinked. "Wait, what do you mean? Should we not act on the tip? I can't do that, it's too risky."

"And this is too easy! It's supposedly in the middle of nothing! Why would anyone put a treasure way out there? It's deserted ocean!"

She snorted. "So I'm wrong. Because you think it's 'deserted ocean', we should just brush it off as a useless joke."

"I'm not saying you're wrong. I'm just saying you're being pretty demanding on some rumour. What if there's nothing? Doesn't it affect the morale of the men or something?"

Her eyes narrowed, seeming not to notice the end of his sentence. "You think I'm too demanding?"

"No!" he protested. "Well… I mean, you can be, sometimes. Like now, for example. The poor guys
just came off of their break; they were only at port for a day. And now we're shipping out to some random island at top speed over a rumour? I'm just saying, you could go easier on them."

"Don't tell me how to lead!" she exclaimed, throwing her arms out in disbelief. "Are you their captain? Do they trust you with the decisions? No! So just let me do what I command. That's how this works, got it?"

"Hey, I'm not trying to pick a fight," he responded, throwing up his hands defensively. "I was just… Never mind."

"No, please, humour me," she urged, a mask of anger flashing across her face. "What was it you were doing?"

He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "I was just giving my opinion on your actions lately. But now you're going to freak out."

"Freak out?" she yelled. "Why ever would I freak out? Certainly, you're entitled to your opinion! And since it's noted, why don't you go swim back to port and take the bloody thing with you?"

"Will you calm down?" he asked, though he could feel his patience beginning to evaporate as well. "I didn't mean to start an argument. I just didn't think that the treasure would be real because your tip came so easily."

"And then you took a jab or two at my leadership skills," she continued, "before capping it off with inferring that I'm a hothead. No, yeah, I'm totally in the wrong right now."

"You are hotheaded!" he countered, frustrated. "You've told me as much!"

"Shut up," she interjected before he could continue. "I don't care. Your opinion is stupid, and I don't want to hear it anymore. For the record, I never want to hear your thoughts on how I lead my crew. That's my business, not yours. Finally, calling me quick-tempered is likely going to blow up in your face. So maybe watch it in the future before you get tossed overboard."

"So you're denying that you're quick-tempered?" he frowned. "Do you hear yourself right now? You sound like a child."

"Excuse me!" she retaliated. "I assumed that, since I was talking to one, it seemed appropriate!"

"Goddesses, will you stop?" he shouted. His tolerance that had held back his tone was gone, and he was quickly letting loose the anger that had slowly been building. "All you do is attack me! I'm trying to talk and you just take offense and shout!"

"Why would I not take offense?" she shot back. "You did nothing but call me out on everything I do! That's not talking, that's being an asshole!"

"Oh, we're name calling now? Mind if I call you on the fact that some sailor deceived you?"

"Yes, I mind! What the hell is your problem, you jerk?"

"I guess whatever yours is!" he screamed. "How's that for being fair? Now, can we agree that this is stupid and not going anywhere?"

"Oh, it's going somewhere," she muttered, glaring daggers into him. "It's going to bite you in the ass, I promise you that." With that, she spun on her heels and headed for the door, retreating below deck with a loud slam. His eyes followed her, seething at the attitude that had just departed. After a
moment though, he sighed and dropped his eyes to the deck, turning and heading for the bow.

That had been unpleasant. And really, it had come from nothing. *Had* he been accusing her? He wasn't even sure anymore. It was obvious that she was upset, but she'd done a real number on him as well. Did they both take some blame them? Probably – that tended to be the way of things.

He sighed and took a seat on the ground, staring out off the deck while lost in his thoughts. Regardless of what had happened, he hated fighting with her. The only thing that was stopping him from finding her and making up was that she was going to be fuming for another few hours yet, locked away in her cabin. He didn't like it, but understood the feeling. Because despite a twinge of guilt, he also carried a great deal of anger inside himself, and he had no immediate desire of letting it go.
Apology

She sighed and buried her face in her hands. It was an interesting progression: she'd gone from pacing around her room angrily, to irritatingly taking a seat at the foot of her bed, to withdrawing with her knees to her chest and trying not to break down. Why was she angry? There wasn't a solid reason she could remember; she had just let some petty issue get on her nerves and she'd blown up. Then it had escalated to a heated argument, and now they were livid with each other. And it was essentially her fault.

What was her problem? That was something she'd asked him, but it was completely misplaced. She felt horrible, but was far too ashamed right now to even try and face him. Maybe he would decide to leave, to return home or even take a new journey. She hoped that wasn't the case, but honestly wouldn't blame him. Even she would want to get away from someone like her. Goddesses, she was a terrible friend...

A light knock sounded from her door, shaking her from her thoughts. Hesitantly, she made her way across the room and slowly swung it open. Link stood there, flashing a brief smile across his face. "Hey," he mumbled. "Can we talk?"

She nodded awkwardly, and he stepped into the room and closed the door. They stood there in the piercing silence, neither looking the other in the eye. She sighed and rubbed her temples, finding the tension unbearable. So she decided to speak first. "I'm sorry."

She blinked as he simultaneously repeated the words, and they shared an embarrassed chuckle. He asked carefully, "Do you mind if I talk?" She shook her head and took a seat on her bed, giving him her full attention.

He took a deep breath, seeming unsure of where to begin. "Um… I'm sorry, okay?" he began. "I didn't mean to sound accusing earlier. I was doing some thinking and decided you were right – I was trying to force my opinion onto you when it really didn't matter. I don't want to be that kind of person, you know? I don't know why I-" He trailed off as she desperately shook her head.

"Please, don't," she murmured, glancing down at her hands. "It wasn't your fault, okay? You didn't do anything wrong. I overreacted so badly, and for what? A stupid fight? That's not even close to a legitimate reason." She took a deep breath, trying to keep her composure. "I just feel so bad about what happened. I'm really sorry."

"Hey, relax," he replied, waving his hand. "It's not that big a deal, okay? I mean, it was a silly misunderstanding, right? We were both wrong, and we're both sorry. Why don't we put it behind us?"

"I just…" She felt a tear roll down her cheek. So much for being tough. She was such an emotional wreck; if anyone picked through her outbursts, she usually ended up crying. Why did she even try and cover up her worries when he could see through her? "I just feel so guilty! Do you understand how stupid I look right now? I'm crying because we yelled at each other and you aren't mad at me!"
Why do you even hang around? This must drive you insane!"

"Tetra, calm down," he said softly, pulling her into a hug. "You think it's worse than it really is, okay? I don't mind that you are the way you are; everyone has issues, we're both great examples of that. It's part of what makes you unique, whether you like it or not. And besides, where else would I be if not here with you? Who would help you when you get all sad like this?" He flashed a grin and she let out a choked laugh. "I'm not going anywhere, alright? It was just a stupid fight – it's not going to destroy our friendship. Everyone fights! Aryll and I used to argue every week! Hell, we did the same, way back when! So don't worry, please?"

She nodded and wiped her eyes, breathing heavily to calm herself. "Okay," she whispered as she hugged him back. "I'm sorry I yelled."

He gently shushed her as he rubbed her shoulder. "I know. I'm sorry that I yelled too. I didn't mean it."

She sank back down onto the bed, pulling him down beside her. Resting her head on his shoulder, she mumbled, "I don't like it when we fight. Especially over stupid reasons."

"I don't either," he agreed. "I promise I won't judge your intentions anymore, 'kay?"

"Okay," she said softly. "Not that it's really a bad thing; it was me, not you. But I promise that I won't freak out over nothing. Or I'll try my best, anyway. No promises."

He laughed and squeezed her tightly. She enjoyed his touch; it was so soothing, so reassuring when she was upset. He was so much more understanding than she deserved. He probably didn't know how thankful she truly was to have him as a friend.

They held each other for a moment before he stood up. Pulling her to her feet, he asked tenderly, "Now, shall we go find that treasure?"

She smiled and nodded, following him to the deck and interlacing her fingers with his own. "Yeah. Let's."
This takes place after 'Remember', 'Dispute' and 'Apology', coming up very short on Phantom Hourglass.

Grunting, he heaved and lifted the crate, setting it rather unkindly onto a second one. It must have been some law that the cargo bay would become disorganized no matter how clean it was kept. He never even saw it happen; it may as well have been someone playing a sick joke. Despite that, it bothered him when he couldn't find something he happened to be looking for. So he'd taken it upon himself to once again tidy up upon discovering its state of disorder. The immediate regret was that he had attempted such a task alone.

He sighed and leaned against his new tower. Removing his hat and tossing it aside, he ran his fingers through his damp hair to cool off. It was a little warm down here – there was no circulation of air, which left a stale taste in his mouth. There was no sunlight reaching this low either, hence the dimly lit candles mounted on the walls. It was actually a decent, peaceful atmosphere. If one could get past the nagging mugginess, that was.

"Link?" He glanced to the stairs. "You still down there?"

"Not going anywhere," he called back. "I might actually just die down here. It's become sort of homey."

A light laugh carried down the stairs along with its source, and she glanced around in the dim light. "Hey, not bad," she complimented. "You work fast. It's only been about a half hour."

"Well, I don't like to brag, but I am motivated by 'I don't want to be down here'," he joked, and they shared a chuckle. "So what's up? Found the ghost?"

"No, not yet," she shook her head. "I had something I wanted to talk about."

"Alright," he replied with a shrug. Taking a seat on a crate, he asked, "Is it serious?"

"Um…" she trailed off, glancing down at her feet. He raised a brow curiously, but she seemed to be battling over a response. After a moment she said, "I guess it is to me. Is that okay?"

"Of course," he nodded. Placing his hands in his lap, he waited expectantly while she began to pace back and forth. The silence drew on longer than he'd anticipated; whatever she wanted to talk about, it was definitely personal. Although, the fact that she was addressing it of her own accord was a pretty big step for her.

"Okay, uh…" she began hesitantly, "I think – and correct me if I'm wrong – but I think there's a bit of… tension between us."

He blinked, confused. Whatever he'd been expecting, it certainly wasn't this. For that matter, he wasn't even sure what it was she was saying. "What sort of tension?"

"Like… I don't know," she mumbled, staring at the wall while her face began to glow. "Like…"
He stared at her, unsure of what he'd just heard. Attraction? Had *Tetra* just uttered the word 'attraction'? Was she feverish? "You mean, you…?"

"Maybe?" she shrugged. "And I get the feeling that you do too."

He wasn't sure what to say. Part of him wanted to deny it, but he decided against it. She *had* come down here and admitted to it, so why should he lie? So he nodded. "I… Sort of."

"Thought so," she replied, and they let an awkward silence hang between them. Their secrets were out in the open, and rather unexpectedly. Had she come down simply to confirm that? Or was there another motive behind it?

"Why did you want to talk about it?" he asked, glancing at her and hopping off his seat. She sighed and fingered the bridge of her nose, trying to organize her thoughts. He watched her patiently. She had never appeared like this before. She was standing before him, opening up her feelings without any prompting from him to do so. There was no frustration in her eyes, or sadness in her frown. Which meant that he wasn't sure how to read her. What was it she wanted?

"I don't really know anymore," she sighed again. "I thought… that maybe talking about it would help, for some reason. But I wish I hadn't mentioned it. This is really awkward. I mean, no offense."

"Hey, it is for me too," he responded quickly. "Don't get me wrong, I'm glad you felt you could talk to me about it. It's just sort of weird now that it's actually *known*, you know?"

"I know," she nodded. Fidgeting with her fingers, she looked at him and took a deep breath. "Link, can we… kiss?"

"I- What?" he asked, taken aback. She was just full of surprises today. "Why?"

"Because, we've come close a few times already, right? I think that just says something about our feelings. And on your birthday, when were so close, and we were interrupted…" She glanced away, her blush deepening. "I just want to find something out."

His mind was blank with the thought of kissing her, but he found himself nodding – he'd be lying to himself if he said he didn't want to. Quickly, she added, "It doesn't mean anything has to change, okay? We don't have to, like, get together, or whatever. I mean, unless we want to. Goddesses, I don't know…" She buried her face in her hands and took a deep breath.

He stepped closer until they were directly in front of each other. Gently pulling her hands away, he whispered, "Just one kiss, right? Something to think on?"

She swallowed and nodded. "Sorry, I'm really nervous now. This wasn't quite how I imagined it happening."

"Right, yeah, I *totally* saw it happening this way too," he replied with a roll of his eyes, and she giggled. "Forget about being nervous. We just kiss, and then go back to our jobs."

"Right," she nodded. They stared quietly into each other's eyes, observing the other in a way they hadn't before. She stepped close so that their faces were only centimetres away. He glanced down at her lips and felt himself leaning closer. Or was she? He couldn't tell, and honestly, didn't care. She looked so pretty… Her eyes flicked shut as their lips were about to meet, and he followed suit a brief moment later.
The sensation of her lips against his was… tingling. They were soft, and warm. And she was kissing him, and he was kissing her, and Goddesses what was happening, how had it come to this, he didn't care because it was what he'd wanted for weeks now! She was kissing him firmly – inexperienced, but with intention. He wasn't much better but did the best he felt he could, pressing against her as much as he reflexively allowed.

How long had they stayed like this? It felt like an eternity, but was probably only a few seconds. He tenderly drew away, opening his eyes a hair to observe her. She looked bewildered, as if she'd come to understand the biggest secret of her life. Blinking, she stared at him and tried to find something to say. Before she could though, he found himself leaning in once more and taking her lips against his, and they lost themselves once more in the moment. He fought the urge to fall to the floor from his weak knees, but she was so much more important and was making it pretty hard to focus on standing up…

After another infinite length of time, she pulled away and could not suppress a wide smile. His face became hotter as he studied the genuine look that she gave him. "So… How was that?" he asked sheepishly.

"I think…" Her name was called, and she glanced back to the stairs. Smiling, she shot him a wink as she headed back up to the deck. "I think you've given me lots to think about."

She disappeared from view and he simply slouched to the floor against a box. His mind was racing with what had just occurred, but the buzzing feeling didn't compare to the absence of pressure on his mouth. He couldn't believe that had just happened, but it was amazing. There had been so much going on in that moment that he couldn't even put it into words. So he didn't try.

Rather, he let the moment of her leaning closer replay itself in his head, until his aching muscles caught up and drifted him off into a tired sleep. And so it was that he failed to hear the call indicating the spotting of the haunted ship.
As the steamship cut its way smoothly through the thrashing waves, he stood at the bow with his arms crossed. It’d been a long day already, but he didn't have too much to say. He was still angry, naturally, but also felt… defeated. By the sounds of it, he was going to have to embark on a massive quest just to figure out how to find the Ghost Ship. The very thought of it was daunting, but he had to get Tetra back. There was no 'if' that entered into his mind – she was alive, and he would find her.

His concern was that his heart just wasn't into the journey. Disappointment in himself had settled into the back of his mind, and he was beginning to lose confidence in his abilities. What was the point of promising that he’d protect her when he had so spectacularly failed? If only he'd been more focused when the ship was present – then she wouldn't be gone and he wouldn't be lost. That was another growing concern; no one had been able to identify for him any water that he could recognize. As far as he knew, he'd simply drifted into a whole new world while unconscious.

And now here he was, teamed up with two others he still couldn't assess. The fairy, Ciela, was certainly a dreamer. She enjoyed talking, but seemed genuinely excited to go out and see the world. She had a true adventurous spirit – almost, he reflected, like his dear friend. She had listened to his story and started making decisions for them, deciding automatically to help him rescue Tetra. He supposed he should be thankful that someone so kind had stumbled across him when he was in such a vulnerable position, but noted that she wasn't the first to offer help without expecting a return. He found it difficult to push the fairy away; she had an inviting personality that drew him to her. Whether he liked it or not, he had a feeling that they'd bond rather quickly.

On the other hand, the reputable captain who owned the ship was a direct contrast. He was ambitious, but it felt subtly that he had other plans besides finding the Ghost Ship. His cheeriness was a false one, meant to bury something far from the surface. It was strange, but he also brought back memories of the pirate; she had similarly veiled herself in their initial interactions, as if unsure of letting out her true thoughts to him. How odd that meeting two new people had brought back so many feelings that led to his first meeting with the girl… However, this man Linebeck seemed to have no intention of letting him into his head. Whether or not that was an issue, he wasn't sure. There was a chance he wouldn't even be around long enough to get to know the man – he seemed dead-set on claiming the rumoured Ship's treasure and was focused on nothing else.

He sighed and rubbed his face gently. It was odd to be staring out at a different ocean, off of a different boat. It didn't feel like home; rather, it was a constant reminder that things were going to change before he could return to Tetra. Despite that, he had two new allies that seemed to reinforce her presence in his mind. Whether it was real or simply his imagination, he didn't care. This wasn't going to be an easy job, but he was thankful to have his resolve staring at him wherever he went.

Because his biggest fear was that he wouldn't have the strength to complete his mission. After all, he'd already let her down once.
Surprise

Chapter Notes

Takes place during the WW/PH interlude.

Smiling, he jogged up the gangplank to a chorus of greetings from the crew. Laughing and joking with the group, he quickly got caught up in their dealings over the past week. He'd left to take care of some business concerning a dispute over property; apparently ownership of a cabana did not simply pass via the handing of a deed. Supposedly he was to talk to an office on Windfall about the change. When he hadn't, the office had attempted to 'repossess' the oasis, as Mrs. Marie no longer had a deed to present to them. So he had been dropped off at the island to settle the dispute – which had taken considerably longer than he'd intended. The men had simply refused to believe that Mrs. Marie had relinquished ownership to a boy, which led to several days' worth of arguing. Once the woman had appeared herself to confirm the exchange, he'd needed to sit through another couple of days to take care of months' worth of backed up paperwork. His patience had paid off in the end though, as the oasis was now legally his. The only thing he still couldn't understand was the act of repossessing an entire island. The concept just went over his head.

Regardless, he tried to shake it from his mind as he chatted with the pirates. It seemed they hadn't done too much in his absence, apart from completely destroying a nearby Bokoblin tower. Not for a treasure like he had assumed, but just because it was there and Tetra hadn't felt like going around it. The notion seemed a little dark for the girl, until he was informed that there no actual Bokoblins present in the platform at the time. That sounded better: cold-blooded murdering was something Tetra held in reserve, but she wouldn't hesitate to destroy when bored. In fact, that had been one of very first things he'd learned about her. Ah, memories.

As he mused, he realized that the girl wasn't present with her crew. Hadn't she missed him? Seriously, he'd been stuck on Windfall for a week dealing with boring businessmen; he needed someone to complain to about their priorities. Not to mention he'd stopped at the café before boarding and bought some soup that he knew she enjoyed. Yet she was nowhere to be seen. He rolled his eyes and headed below deck, addressing the men that'd he'd only be a few minutes and tossing them a bag of their favourite treats. He smiled as he descended the steps. They'd come to accept him as one of them, and he enjoyed hanging out with them. Sure, none of them were into sparring, but daring each other over stupid bets held merit as well. Especially when Tetra was too busy working to pay attention to anyone.

Reaching her door, he sighed and knocked. It was probably what she was doing right now, pouring over her charts, planning out a path to their newest destination. Having an argument about her own priorities half-formed in his head, he gently pushed open the door and stuck his head inside. "Hey, I know you don't care, but I happen to be-" He trailed off as he noticed the girl was not hunched over her desk like he had anticipated, but instead lying in bed and buried under blankets. She appeared to be asleep, but her eyes cracked open upon hearing his voice, lifting her head slightly to look at him before falling back to her pillow. She mumbled something incoherent, so he closed the door and approached the bed.

"How was your trip?" she asked again, her voice barely above a whisper. He frowned and placed a hand on her head, feeling an aggressive fever present. Noticing a damp rag on her table, he grabbed
it and placed it gently over her forehead while brushing her hair back. She looked dreadful, her skin a lighter shade than usual and her hair a dishevelled mess. Dark, sagging bags were present under her eyes while she shook slightly. Whatever she'd caught, it had definitely taken its toll on her.

"How long have you been sick?" he asked, ignoring her question and grasping her shoulder firmly. She shrugged weakly and buried her face into her pillow.

"Not sure," she answered feebly. "I was up all last night with a fever. Didn't get much better after that."

"Are you nauseous? What's wrong?"

"I am sometimes," she replied, attempting to sit up. "It sort of comes in waves. I have a pretty killer headache too, and my elbows are sore. Like, enough that it hurts to move my arms."

"And let me guess," he countered flatly, "no one knows."

She shrugged again. "No one else needs to be bothered by it. I went out to wet my cloth earlier, and no one noticed my condition. Obviously I don't look that bad, so it can't be that bad. Make sense?"

He sighed and dabbed at her forehead. "No offense, but you look completely sick. So it is that bad. Why don't you ever tell anyone? Those guys would do anything to help you."

"They have jobs to do," she replied stubbornly. "They don't need to look after me when I can take care of myself."

"Sometimes I wonder if you can," he muttered, grabbing a bottle out of his pocket. She eyed it suspiciously and recoiled.

"What's that?"

"What do you think? Medicine I picked up," he told her, uncorking the bottle. "Open up. I know you hate it, but I also know you haven't taken anything else, so you need it."

"I can do it myself, I don't need you to baby me," she argued, but flinched as she raised her arm to take the bottle. He shook his head and raised it to her lips. Grudgingly, she drank until it was empty.

"You just said it hurts to move your arms. Why do you think I'd let you take a bottle then?" he asked skeptically, raising a brow. She sighed and leaned back against the wall, trying to rid the vile taste from her mouth. Taking pity on her, he reached back into his pocket and swapped bottles, producing one that was filled with a creamy yellow liquid. Upon seeing it, her eyes lit up.

"Is that...?"

"Yeah, I figured it'd be a nice surprise for you," he replied with a smile. "I didn't envision giving it to you like this, but then again, it'll probably help. So... surprise!"

She giggled as he uncorked the bottle and raised it to her lips. She took an eager sip before pulling away and swallowing. Once she had, she looked him in the eye and spoke, "I did miss you, by the way. Sorry I didn't come see you."

He laughed and brushed a strand of hair out of her eyes. "Don't worry about it. All things considered, you had a pretty good excuse."
Out of rope? How could they be out of rope? It wasn't like it was supposed to be expendable; that was sort of the entire point behind *sustaining* the stupid rope. That little coward Niko probably dropped it overboard and was too afraid to man up to it. But then he actually had the balls to address the matter with her, making *her* fix the problem? Sometimes she had days where she just didn't want to handle stupidity. Really, was it too much to ask that people try and fix their own problems instead of dumping them on her? She was their captain, not their mother; they should be following her orders, not the opposite.

Luckily she was no fool, and always kept extra supplies below deck just in case of such events. Sad to say, they tended to happen often enough to warrant to concern. But she had the funds to afford it, so it wasn't the end of the world. She *was* however beginning to question why she was the one constantly making the run below deck in such situations; the other, stronger men were unable to move heavy crates? She was half their age and doing more physical labour than anyone else… She needed to revaluate her leadership strategies.

Descending below deck, she sighed at the mess of crates stacked rather haphazardly. They likely should be kept more orderly, but that was a task for another time. One of these crates held spare rope, that she knew, but it was almost impossible to differentiate between them. Mako should have marked them ages ago; what was going on with the quality of her crew? This was hardly ideal for her reputation, now that Link was popping in every now and then and then getting a close look at their dealings. She was sure she was coming off as unprofessional – that was going to be changing *very* quickly.

Her eyes traced over the boxes only to fall back to a thinly etched 'R' on the side of one. She rolled her eyes in frustration. *Really, Mako? You couldn't have finished the other three letters?* Approaching the container, she eyed the larger crate that was covering access to her treasure. "Go figure," she muttered quietly. This entire ordeal was exasperating; she just wanted a spare rope!

Grabbing the stacked box, she braced herself and tested its weight – it didn't feel too heavy. Whatever was inside felt loose though, so she had to be careful that nothing broke. Wiggling it towards her, she managed to tip it slightly into her chest and catch it. There, now to just bring it down…

"C'mon, easy… Oh, sh-" The crate's contents shifted heavily and fell towards her. She found herself caught underneath, being shoved to the floor and struggling to hold up the immense weight before it crushed her. *Goddesses, this is ridiculous. I'm not getting anything from down here anymore.* She tried to pick herself up but couldn't, the crate being too heavy for her to budge at this angle. "Wonderful."

"Hello?" a voice called from the deck, and she closed her eyes. Of anyone to find her like this, why the newcomer? She had no desire to look vulnerable in front of Link, especially since she was trying to teach him how to fight. And now it was him making his way down the steps to investigate the disturbance. "Is anyone down here?"
She bit her lip and swallowed. "Just me. Relax, I just knocked over a crate." She saw him wander into view, looking surprised and concerned. Well, so much for that.

"Are you alright? Let me help you!" he exclaimed, stepping forward quickly. She shook her head and argued his wish. This was bad enough, but she would not show that she needed help. She was tough, like her mother had taught her to be. She could do this.

"Get back, I don't need you," she shot at him, and he faltered, confused. Struggling, she attempted to free her legs from underneath her, but was unable to. She switched tactics to trying to rock the crate to the side and off of her, but whatever was inside was resting right against her body. She was, for all intents and purposes, stuck. And she had no way of helping herself.

"Tetra, you can't move. I'm helping, alright?" he said again, stepping forward once more. She struggled against the weight that was slowly slipping from her grasp, but stubbornly shook her head once more.

"I'll do it myself!" She had no idea how at this point, but she would not accept help. She was the captain, not some swabbie; she could manage. However, Link seemed to disagree as he gripped the container tightly, lifting it off of her and throwing it to the side. Panting, he held out a hand for her to take. Instead she picked herself up and dusted herself off. "Were you listening? I had it!"

"You were losing it," he countered sternly. "That could have really hurt you! Why wouldn't you let me rescue you?"

"Please," she snorted. "I hardly needed rescuing. I would have been fine, you would have seen."

He stared at her blankly before turning away to the staircase. "Whatever you say, then. Don't hesitate to ask for help in the future though," he told her as he ascended the steps once more. "I won't hear you get into trouble every time."

She laughed bitterly and returned to the box of rope. That was a riot. She just ended up in a bad spot this time, that's all. She didn't need help from anyone; she was a leader, after all. Leaders didn't get help because they were capable – everything they did could be managed alone. He just got lucky this time. It wouldn't happen again.
Bored

Chapter Notes

Again after WW, during our 'growth time'.

Leaning against the railing, she sighed as her eyelids drooped. Occasionally there came a day when there just wasn't anything to be done. They simply had to sail straight forward through calm waters and manageable winds. That took at most two people working the helm and lookout, between eight of them working in shifts. She was nowhere close to her turn, and there was nothing else that needed her attention, so she stared out over the water and tried not to fall asleep in the warm weather.

Seated at the stern, Link was leaning against the wall and staring at the sky, rapping his knuckles against the deck. Of course they'd been tasked together since the others had their usual pair-offs. But so far he'd just sat there tapping away whatever rhythm was in his head. Normally she wouldn't care, but her patience was already wearing thin today due to the lack of... anything to do. She would tell him to stop but based on past experience, it would only stick in his head for about five minutes. So unless she could just let it go, which she couldn't, she needed another strategy.

The problem was that the drumming was quite distracting, which only fueled her irritation. Didn't he realize that he was the only thing making noise right now? The silence would be tolerable – at least she could withdraw into her thoughts. That infernal tapping, on the other hand, only made me want to tug at her hair. How did he not find it annoying?

Wait. Maybe he didn't because it was stemming from his own hands. But if he got a taste of it, he might clue in and stop, right? It made sense to her, purposely contrasting his beat to augment the nuisance. She smirked as she did so; this was sort of fun when the intention was to annoy.

However, his noise did not falter. Rather, she frowned, it was growing louder. She glanced at him to find him still staring at the sky – it was as if he hadn't even noticed the additional duet and simply played louder to hear himself. She narrowed her eyes, never one to back down from a competition. Of course, this was probably far from being a contest, but he had unknowingly sparked one. And now he was going to lose it.

She began to drum louder against the railing, hoping to spark a reaction from the boy. His eyes flicked to her for the briefest moment before turning away. She smiled thinly, thinking herself successful, but quickly frowned when he began tapping his feet as well. She knew that he'd had basic musical training in his youth, so this dissonance would undoubtedly drive him crazy. All the better – she was finally getting her point across. He could stop anytime now so she could return to her thoughts.

Instead of backing down though, he simply began banging even louder, shooting a glare at her. She puckered her lips and blew, whistling a random assortment of pitches that contrasted both of their rhythms. He visibly flinched, but kept up his solo. She knew that he'd had basic musical training in his youth, so this dissonance would undoubtedly drive him crazy. All the better – she was finally getting her point across. He could stop anytime now so she could return to her thoughts.

Instead of backing down though, he simply began banging even louder, shooting a glance at her. She gave a dirty look in return and retaliated by increasing her own volume. It was no doubt that their clatter could be heard from all around, but luckily no one was around to suffer through the agony.
No one except for Gonzo, who stood at the helm and cringed as the competition began to scale up to a war.

"Why am I always the one caught in the middle of this?" he muttered with a tired sigh, gripping the wheel tightly and trying his best to drown out the racket. He knew it was in vain though, since the real battle had only begun. Without a doubt, it was going to be a long shift.
Post-WW, as usual.

It was hypnotic, watching her sit there, hunched over whatever it was she was doing. She'd been there for almost an hour now, parked near the prow with her back to everyone. Not so much as a word had been uttered, and she ignored anyone who attempted to communicate with her. All of her focus was going into her task, and she showed no signs of stopping anytime soon.

He'd initially been interested about her chore, but the longer he'd stared the harder he found it to look away. He couldn't see anything from his seat on the stern's ledge, but her arm kept moving vigorously. Was she scrubbing the deck? He hadn't seen her carry out any supplies with her; she'd just dropped down and begun working. His curiosity was eating away at him, but still he couldn't turn his eyes away from the spectacle. It was simply so unusual for her; of course it was going to draw everyone's attention.

Ah, was that the idea? Perhaps she wasn't actually doing anything at all! It was just an attempt at some attention! …Or, no. She was already the captain, so that was sort of a given. Besides, she wasn't one to fish for attention – she tended to get it even on occasions when she just wanted to be left alone. So, was it a game then? She was just trying to screw with everyone, was that it? He tossed this idea around in his head. Wouldn't be unusual for her, he thought with a shrug.

Well, there was only one way to find out. Deciding to finally lay his curiosity to rest, he hopped off of his perch and wandered over to her stooped figure, stumbling momentarily as he did so. Wow, my legs are asleep. How long was I sitting there? Casting a shadow over her small form, he asked, "So, how's it-"

He stopped as he surveyed the scene before him. Her dagger was in one hand, with a rag in the other. The blade was practically glowing in the sunlight, but she continued to rub away at the metal, aggressively doing away with any stains that were long since taken care of. She didn't seem to notice his presence, continuing her job without any indication that he'd attempted speaking.

Clearing his throat, he tried again. "Uh… What are you doing?"

"The hell does it look like?" she answered without stopping. "I'm polishing my dagger. It was dirty."

"Yeah, um…" he hesitated, studying the weapon that shone in her hand. "I don't think it'll get much more polished than that. You could blind the sun at this point. Like, it's not going to get cleaner."

"Does it look clean yet?" she asked quickly, thrusting the blade into his face. His eyes traced along the edge before spotting a rather miniscule stain which was already quite faint. Narrowing his eyes for a closer look, he felt her gaze boring into him.

"I see what could maybe count as a spot," he answered after a moment. She nodded firmly and resumed her scrubbing. Wait. She was not that neurotic… "Are you serious?" he asked flatly. "This actually bothers you?"
"Yes, it bothers me!" she snapped back. "It's not clean if I can see a stain! Now either help me get it off, or shut up! I need to finish this!"

"Tetra, do you realize how long you've been out here?" he asked slowly. "Like, a long time. For that matter, why was I watching you for so long?" His face paled. "Oh Goddesses, I actually wasted more time than you did, and you're polishing a friggin' knife!"

"Dagger," she corrected, "and that's your own fault. Now go away and let me clean my favourite dirty possession."

He opened his mouth to reply, but after a moment simply threw his hands up and walked away. It seemed these days he was learning something new about her on a weekly basis. Not that it was a bad thing, but this was quite an… interesting habit. Was this a regular thing for her? He'd certainly never noticed before.

Lord only knows what she would do if she got a scratch on it, he thought, and shuddered.
Beyond the horizon, it was not difficult to imagine the sea mingling with the sky it was close enough to kiss. The blues simply faded together, creating an expanse that appeared to never end. Was it true that the world was spherical? If one travelled in a straight line, would they really end up back where they started? The endless illusion invited one to stare as far as they could; almost as if whispering that, if you looked deep enough, you would see yourself on the other side. An endless circle creating a chain of ships on the endless ocean. Wasn't that a compelling thought?

Well, not really. It reminded her of holding up two reflective pieces of glass and seeing the endless 'tunnels' it created. Most people found that sight interesting, trying to position themselves to glance down the path to infinity. Not her; for whatever reason, the sight of endless copies of her was unnerving. She preferred the very physical world that they inhabited; the one she had travelled many times over while growing up. The sky doesn't meet the sea beyond the horizon – it's just an optical illusion of blue, that's all.

And it was the same damn sight in every direction. Blue here, blue there. Blue up, blue down. She sighed and rubbed her eyes, tired of searching for the speck of red that was clearly nowhere in sight. Where the hell was he? She'd been watching the horizon for so long that she'd begun to fantasize about 'what-ifs' and the grand scheme of the world. And those were thoughts that she hated having. The essentials in life mattered, not sitting around thinking about the stupid world and all of its mysteries, and why the hell wasn't he back yet?

He'd left weeks ago on an errand – some sea creature terrorizing a town or some such – promising that he wouldn't be more than a few days. She'd rolled her eyes at his heroism, but acknowledged that it was the sort of thing he wouldn't back down from. So she hadn't paid much attention once the first week had passed, and only brushed the thought from her mind during the second.

But by the third week, she'd begun to grow concerned. Day after day she watched the ocean, hoping to catch a flash of red as he made his way home, or a Rito soaring through the sky to deliver a message from him. But as the sun set and brought night, she'd been routinely disappointed. He'd been gone almost a month and she was beginning to fear the worst had somehow taken hold.

She closed her eyes, clenching her fist with enough force that her knuckles popped. That idiot. Why had he gone to be the hero? No one else on the damn island could handle a monster? It was probably just a Big Octo, which wasn't that bad – he'd taken care of them plenty of times. That wasn't a threat to him, so why wasn't he back yet? I swear to the Goddesses, if anything happened to you… I'll find you and kill you myself for scaring me.

Nope, she couldn't even threaten him in her head. That just brought guilt that, realistically, she might not ever see him again. Why did that have to happen? They'd taken down Ganondorf, they were supposed to be safe now! Taking a deep breath, she placed her elbows on the railing, stroking the wood with her thumb. No threats, no crying, and no bargaining promises. She just wanted her hero back.

"Miss!" came a call from above. She glanced up to Zuko, who was spying something through his telescope. "Link," was all he said, and her eyes widened in surprise. Following his gaze, she stared across the water where a speck of red had appeared out from behind an island. The dragon carving and tall sail were unmistakable, as was the mass of green that was operating the boat.

She was silent, watching his progress as he drew nearer to the ship. He's okay. He was several weeks late, but he was alive. She caught him waving in the distance, but ignored it. Part of her simply
couldn't believe it, but the proof was right there, pulling up alongside them. As a passing thought, she realized that she would actually get some sleep tonight. No more staying up and worrying about where he was.

She exhaled audibly as he climbed up onto the deck, trying to keep her composure. He was fine, just a couple of scratches on his face and a fading burn on his arm. All of that fretting had been pointless – of course he'd make it back okay. That said, he had a hell of task ahead of him, explaining his extended absence, and he would never know how much he'd worried her… but despite all of that, he was safe. Relief washed throughout her body as her muscles finally relaxed, the meaningless stress of the past month blowing away with the wind.

Stretching his neck, the boy flashed a nervous grin and gave a small wave. "Hey!"

She rolled her eyes, but a smile rose to her lips. And this time she had no reason to fight it. "Hey."
This takes place the day they meet.

The ocean stretched endlessly beyond her view, the waves crashing in a rhythmic pattern. She glanced at her surroundings but found only water in every direction. Looking down, she saw that she was standing on the surface – yet did not feel the coolness washing against her feet. Waves simply passed through her legs as if she was nothing but air. Where was she?

The sunlight all around unexpectedly began to retreat, drawing further away from her. The shadows crept closer and she felt a shiver jolt up her spine. The darkness felt frightening, and on an instinct she took off after the failing light. Her efforts were in vain, though; the dark cloud overtook her, and the source of protection became all but a thin beam in the distance.

A laugh, terrible and insane, came from everywhere. Wide-eyed, she searched for the source. There was nothing but blackness and the small point of light she vowed not to disappear. Even the water below her was vanishing from her sight. She wanted to escape, to leave this terrible place – but desolation began to burrow into her heart, claiming the hope that her light would stay. Surrendering to the misery, she began to close her eyes, bowing in defeat. What could she do? The darkness was taking her. It would consume everything.

As she glanced for a final look at the light that would be her last view, it suddenly erupted, pushing back the shadows with a shining brilliance. Her eyes shot open in surprise. The light was fighting the darkness that was consuming the world! Looking all around, she noticed the two appeared to meet at a stalemate, drawing a line down the middle of the ocean – where she currently stood. She waited, her breath held. Which side would claim the other? And what would happen when it did?

The light shone brighter, and far into the distance, a figure appeared. She flinched from the blinding brightness but struggled nonetheless to see what had changed. The figure was approaching her and the shadows, striding over the water without a second thought. She caught a flash of green, and an outfit she recognized suddenly registered in her head. She knew this person! She had heard his stories dozens of times as a child, when her mother would send her off to sleep with tales of an ancient kingdom.

Before she could speak, the Hero of Time was before her, his face neutral but his eyes serious, staring out into the darkness that loomed just before him. “History is to repeat itself,” he spoke softly, refusing to meet her gaze. “The time is upon you. If the world is to be spared, you must be decisive.”

Her tongue caught in her throat, and she was unable to speak. What was he saying? What was going to happen? And why would it involve her? The questions swirled around in her mind, but refused to form in her mouth. The Hero turned to face her, and for the briefest moment their eyes met. And then he was walking steadily into the embrace of the darkness, the reason for which she could not fathom. “Be strong, Zelda,” hit her ears as his figure began to disappear into the shadows.

Blinking in confusion, she was raising a hand to stop him, to call him back to explain, when she froze and took notice of the white glove that covered her hand. Following her arm with her eyes, an entire outfit became visible, one she knew she hadn't been dressed in only moments ago. An
elaborate dress, ornamental jewellery, a strange glowing mark on the back of her hand … What did this mean? What was happening? The forces around her began to press against the other once more, and she shut her eyes, afraid to witness the result.

She opened her eyes slowly, blinking away the fatigue. A quick look around confirmed that she was in her room, and she sighed heavily. Raising a hand to her forehead, she noticed how damp it felt; she must have been profusely sweating throughout her mental ordeal. Rubbing the bridge of her nose gently, she swung her legs off of her bed and stood up, trying to gather herself. Sunlight poured in through her window, and she felt an odd sense of appreciation that she hadn't before.

What sort of dream had that been? It felt uncomfortably real. She shook her head slowly while peeling off her shirt and fetching her usual attire. Did it mean something, or was it just a very unusual nightmare? The words the Hero had spoken to her… They were chillingly cryptic for a dream. She took a deep breath and turned to look at the painting on her wall – the very one of the Hero of Time that her mother had explained about countless times.

She noticed a set of golden triangles above the Hero's head and thought back to the mark that she had seen on her hand. They were the same, but how would she have known that? She wasn't sure she'd ever noticed those triangles before. They were obviously important, but for her to imagine them on her hand? What had that been about, she wondered?

A thought clicked in her head: those triangles seemed oddly familiar. *Wait…* she spun to her desk and yanked open a drawer, pulling out an old sea chart that her mother had used to sketch on. Her eyes widened as she studied the map. Yes, her mother had drawn those same triangles across six islands! She noticed a small red 'x' in the very centre and frowned. What did all of this mean? There was nothing where that cross was; she'd sailed through that water countless times. But these triangles that kept appearing? Her mother had known something about them…

She sighed and collapsed into her chair, pushing her bangs out of her face. She wished her mother was here. She would've known exactly what her dream meant, and what the triangles were, and whoever the hell 'Zelda' was. Pulling out her necklace, she stroked it gently while she thought about what had transpired in her head. Her dream had been too specific about information she couldn't have possibly known, but was turning out to be very true. What history was possibly going to repeat itself? Was it something to do with the ancient kingdom the Hero had protected? She gritted her teeth and grasped the necklace tightly. She wanted answers!

A memory flashed through her mind. She remembered confiding in her mother after a bad dream one night. Burying her face in her lap, she had asked why people had to dream at all. And of course her mother had had the answer. *'Dreams are important,'* she had replied soothingly while stroking her hair. *They are a look into our true selves, our loves and desires. And sometimes, they are a message from the Goddesses. Never forget that, princess. It may be very important one day.'*

She sighed and slipped the necklace back under her shirt. Did that help her, or simply confound her further? She wasn’t sure anymore. Maybe it was best to just leave this for now. If it truly did mean something, it would likely reveal itself in time. She stood up and twisted her hair into the bun she employed as an urgent knock sounded from her door.

"Miss Tetra! That monstrous bird has been spotted again!" Gonzo's voice rang through the door. "We should divert our course, yeah?"

She exhaled, annoyed. She was sick of that bloody beast terrorizing the seas the past few weeks. Maybe it was time to put an end to it. Opening the door, she met the man's gaze with a strong one and replied, "No. We're following it, and we're going to hit it until it stops coming back. Let's rid the
ocean of that menace once and for all."

Gonzo nodded in understanding and returned to the deck, shouting her orders. She rubbed her face and followed, eyes tracing the skies for the bird. She had no time to worry about whatever had happened last night. If something big was going to go down, it could just happen without her.

After all, she didn't believe in fate. She lived her own life, and no divine intervention would ever change that.
Link sighed, drumming his fingers against the table he was seated at. What was taking so long? They'd been back from shopping for almost twenty minutes; how long did it take to put away a couple of bags? He wasn't even sure what Tetra had purchased – for some reason she'd been oddly protective of her purchase. Goddesses, if she had bought dried Gyorg meat and was keeping it from him…

He glanced around the dimly lit cellar. It seemed rather dreary since he was alone. How pleasant. The candle he'd lit was steadily burning away, swaying slightly with the rocking of the boat as it hung above him. He'd be lighting another soon if she didn't hurry up and get down here.

"Come on, Tetra," he muttered over the growl of his rumbling stomach, "I'm starving. Some of us didn't eat breakfast this morning." He stared at the chair across the table, as if expecting it to answer in her stead. He held his gaze for several moments before realizing what it was he was doing and turned away.

His stomach growled louder and his eyes flicked up to the ceiling, trying to imagine what was keeping her in her room. "Honestly, I might die down here," he mumbled. "It would serve you right, though. Then you'd feel all bad for my passing, and it would destroy your life, and I'd just watch from wherever I was and laugh! It would be a perfect guilt trip! Well, besides the part about me dying. Other than that though, a total success! So ha!"

He snorted. "Then again, you really aren't the type to sit and cry. No, you'd bury your feelings and act as if nothing had changed. You'd pretend to be glad to be rid of me, I bet. But eventually you'd break down. The guilt would eat away at you from the inside, until the mere sight of green would snap your mind. You'd break down and sob over what you'd done, and for whatever the cause of my starvation had been. You'd be destroyed! And then I would laugh!"

He laughed then and looked around the room for others to join in his evil thoughts. "Wait, who was I talking to? …Oh Goddesses, am I going crazy?! I just had an entire conversation with myself! No, wait, I'm not crazy. Crazy people go back and forth with themselves. Then again, I sort of did that. Or did I?" His eyes widened as he dropped his face into his hands. "I just did it again! I am crazy!"

He began to panic until a stray thought entered his mind. In an instant he was sitting up again, mulling over the new point he had made against himself. "Actually… This was brought on by you making me wait for lunch! These aren't insane conversations, they're hunger delusions! Wait, are those real? Yes, they must be! And more importantly, it's your fault!" he exclaimed, pointing once more at the empty seat. "Well, I'll show you, chair! I mean, Tetra! Er… Whatever. My point is that no one makes me crazy but me!"

Standing up, he kicked over his absent friend's seat and marched out, heading for her room. Upon arriving at her door, he gave a brief knock and called, "So, are we eating soon? Or should I go save the world again while I wait?"

"What?" Tetra's voice sounded from behind the door. "Oh! Right, I'll be right there. I guess I lost track of time."

"Lost track? How?" he called back. "What've you been doing?"

"I've…" she trailed off, to his confusion. What, she wouldn't tell him? "I was putting my stuff away."
"Tetra, that should've taken two minutes," he answered crossly. "Tell me what you were doing!"

"No! It's not important!"

He rolled his eyes. "I'm coming in."

"What?! No, I'm changing!"

"No you're not, you only wear one outfit!" he called, throwing open the door. "I don't understand why you're trying to lie to-"

He froze as his eyes fell upon her. The first thing that registered in his mind was 'pink', which was shortly followed by 'frilly'. This, with the addition of his tomboyish friend's face over it all, caused a level of confusion to the point where a pressuring headache began to form in his head.

He blinked, trying to find his tongue. "Um… You, you're… That, uh…" He swallowed. "That's a dress," he sputtered stupidly.

She sighed, though frustration flashed in her eyes. When she did not respond though, he attempted to continue. "Why are you… Why did… Did you buy that?" he asked, finally forming a question. After another moment of silence, she nodded. Realizing the pacing of their 'conversation', he took a deep breath and uttered, "Why?"

Silence took over once more before she shrugged. "Curiosity, I guess," she responded rather quietly. When he frowned, she continued. "I just wanted to know what it looked like. Most girls aren't pirates and wear this every day. Since I don't have my princess dress anymore, I just bought this."

She glanced down at the fabric. "It was the girliest one I could find," she added, looking away.

He didn't know what to say to that. Looking her over, he noticed details now that the initial shock was gone. The outfit displayed much of her legs, and the fabric cut off at her shoulders, and her hair was down, and… she looked very pretty. The appearance did not at all suit her personality, but she looked rather good.

He noticed her expression and realized that he'd been staring at her. Clearing his throat, he said with a shrug, "I think you look nice in that."

She froze, but her expression softened. Taking a step towards him, she asked, "You do? For real?"

"Yeah!" he said enthusiastically. "If you weren't a swashbuckling pirate, it would really suit you."

Her mouth pulled up into a half-smile as she stepped closer. "Thanks," she spoke softly, stopping before him. He was about to respond until she quickly grabbed him by the shoulders and spun him around. "Now get out," she said with a shove.

He caught himself at the door and turned. "Why? I said you look good! Take the compliment and keep it on!"

"Link. Out. Now."

"C'mon, wear that to lunch! It'll be so cute!" he argued but failing to contain a grin. She shot him a glare so chilling that his face immediately fell, and he took his cue and hastily stepped out of the room. With the slam of the door she disappeared from sight.

"And I swear to the Goddesses, if you tell anyone, I will murder you!" her shrill voice yelled. He quickly retreated and returned to the cellar to resume waiting once more. As he walked he had a
fleeting thought of how he might look in a dress.

"Ugh, nope," he muttered, quickening his pace. "Although…" He glanced down at his tunic and thought back to the number of people who had mistaken it for a dress. He considered the possibilities for a moment before shaking his head and breaking out into a run.

"I'm not crazy!" he screamed to the air. "Tetra, hurry up before the crazies catch me!"
"I can't believe this is fun to you," Tetra moaned, crossing her arms as she slouched lower into her chair. Everyone else in the room had a buzz of excitement about them as their eyes were focused solely on the small man in the poofy blue parka that was heading the auction. Unfortunately, she failed to share in their zeal. These townsfolk were simply raising the previous bid by a couple rupees every time. And for what? She flicked her gaze up to the stage, realizing she'd already forgotten what the prize was for this round. Ah, one of those butterfly pendants that Bokoblins wore. Truly this was a riveting and worthwhile activity. As her eyes traced around the room, she came to realize that it would be a great time to do a little pick-pocketing while everyone's attention was drawn to the stage.

"I can't believe you aren't more into this," she heard Link reply, breaking her concentration away from potential targets. "I really thought this would be right up your alley."

"Spending petty amounts of money on items I could literally kill for? Are you sure you really know me?" she countered dryly with the raise of a brow. Link only chuckled in response and called out a bid.

"Seriously? You probably have a dozen of those. Why do you need this one?" she asked. The boy shrugged, frowning slightly as an older woman outbid him for the third time.

"I don't. I just like keeping things interesting for these people," he replied. "If I weren't here the prices would never get near this high. Where's the fun in that?"

She snorted. "You're deliberately making them pay more than these stupid things are worth. You're kind of cruel, you know that?"

He rolled his eyes and shook his head as Zunari announced that the woman had won the pendant. The hall erupted into applause for the win as Tetra stifled a yawn. The dim lighting coupled with the unreasonable heat in this place was making her drowsy. Not to mention her chair was unbelievably padded and so comfy...

Link had gone on and on several times about how exciting the Windfall actions could get. They were an adrenaline rush as you competed to outbid your opponents with increasingly outrageous bids for usually underwhelming prizes. Until, that is, that one gem of a prize came out towards the end of the night. At that point, all bets were off, and you did whatever it took to win. And, as he liked to boast, most were empty-pocketed by that point of the evening, while he was simply getting started with the large amassment of funds he'd collect over the course of his travels.

When he'd expressed interest at participating again after being away for a few weeks, she had reasoned that they could swing by the island to grant him his wish. He had immediately invited her to accompany him, and she hadn't wasted any time accepting. After all, she enjoyed some one-on-one time with him off of the ship, and she was rather curious about the supposedly amazing auction. Frankly though, she'd been here for two hours and still didn't see the appeal. "This is so boring," she drawled, her eyelids drooping. "Please tell me we're almost done."

Link shot her a sly smile, but she didn't catch it. "We are. Just one more item."

"Thank the Goddesses," she mumbled, shifting in her seat. Zunari stepped up onto the stage once more with the final item, hidden beneath a cloth.

"Thank you all for your wonderful participation this evening!" he called enthusiastically, and Tetra
rolled her eyes. "We are unfortunately down to the last item of the night, so I do hope you'll give it your best shot!"

He drew away the cloth, and 'ooh's filled the hall. The pirate sighed as her eyes flickered shut. It might be an early night tonight…

"That's right! A map, and one that shows the path to a supposedly ludicrous treasure!" Her eyes shot open, and she was immediately sitting up with her full attention on the scroll that was sitting on the stage. A treasure map? *Now* there would be some action.

"Twenty rupees!" a man called out. This was quickly followed by "Forty-five rupees!" Tetra simply smirked and patted her wallet lovingly. It was time to play the game she was best at.

"Two hundred rupees," she called calmly. The buzz of the hall quickly fell silent, only to be replaced by whispers of disbelief. She crossed her arms and sat back, satisfied with the reaction she'd caused. Zunari began calling out for a higher bid, but she knew it wouldn't come. No one could match her.

"Three hundred."

Her eyes widened as she spun around to face Link. He didn't meet her gaze, but instead stared ahead at Zunari, who looked quite flabbergasted. Her eyes narrowed as she sat back once more. Fine then. They would play, and he would lose. "Four fifty."

"Five fifty."

"Six hundred."

She noticed the corners of his mouth tug up into a small smile. "Eight fifty," he countered, finally returning her gaze. The crowd was whispering frantically, completely shocked as to the amount of money the two children claimed to possess.

Zunari cleared his throat and looked at the pirate, who could be the only one at this point with a counter offer. She gritted her teeth and glanced at Link once more, who was sitting back and looking quite calm. "What exactly are you doing?"

"Playing the game," he answered simply. "I believe it's your move. Either raise me or forfeit."

"Link, I've amassed almost limitless amounts of wealth over the years. Unlike my crew, I only spend on the necessities. You won't be outbidding me."

Link's smile only grew. "And what will you do, give the man an IOU? You'll pay what you have on you here, right now. If you have the money, then make another bid. Everyone's waiting."

She opened her mouth to protest, but grudgingly closed it when she realized he was right. Peering into her wallet, she made a quick calculation before looking back up at the auctioneer. "One thousand rupees."

"Twelve hundred," Link countered immediately. "You know it'll belong to one of us, and we both live on the same ship. One way or another, we'll both get that treasure."

"Like hell we will," Tetra shot back. "Thirteen."

"Thirteen fifty."

"Fourteen."
"Fourteen fifty."

"Son of a- Fifteen hundred!" she yelled. The hall grew still as her words echoed off the walls. No one could quite believe how a treasure map had gone for fifteen hundred rupees; it was unheard of for someone to participate with that much money. Then again, the girl did have a bit of a reputation as a thief, so it could likely be explained.

Zunari glanced between the teens expectantly before asking, "Mister Link? Do you have a counter offer?" Link pulled out his wallet and peered inside. He glanced at Tetra for the briefest moment before shaking his head. The man threw his hands in the air and announced, "We have our winner then! For a staggering fifteen hundred rupees, Miss Tetra has taken the treasure map!"

Amidst the applause, Tetra approached the stage and emptied her wallet to pay for the prize. Despite costing almost all of her current savings, she had beaten Link, and that was what made this chart special. No one beat her at her own game.

Pocketing her winning, she met up with Link as they ducked out before everyone else had a chance. Stepping out into the starlit sky, they began to walk down the street, breathing in the fresh cool air they had been absent from. Link cast a glance at her and smiled. "Congrats."

She gave him a light punch on his shoulder. "I told you I'd beat you. You should know better than to compete with me."

He nodded. "Yep, you think I'd have learned by now. Oh well, maybe next time." He said it casually, but something in his voice caused her to stop. She grabbed his arm and spun him around, looking him dead in the eye.

"You had more money." It wasn't a question, but an accusation. He raised his eyebrows at her but remained silent. She glared and snatched his wallet from his belt. "You did, didn't you? You lying-"

She stopped as she stared into the sack. Not believing her eyes, she poured some of its contents into her hand. "I don't- You have over two grand in here!" She looked between her hand and his face, becoming increasingly confused as disbelief began to flash across her own. "You could have outbid me! You could have won! You… Why didn't you?"

He blinked as a smile spread wider across his face. She stared intensely, waiting for a response. After a moment he simply shrugged and took back his wallet. "You were having fun, weren't you?" he asked sincerely. "You earned it."

She was speechless. Somehow the knowledge that he could've won but still gave it to her stung more than anything else could have. But she also felt… grateful? Why? He seemed to read her thoughts and said, "I know you wanted it. I was just making it tough for you. I told you, that's what I do at these things."

She continued to stare blankly at him before finally dropping her shoulders and allowing a smile of her own to surface. "Well… Thanks," she said softly. "I guess it was fun." He laughed, and she joined in. "But if we find the treasure and it turns out to be less than what I paid, I'll throw you overboard."

His eyes glazed over as a thought popped into his head. After a moment he seemed to have an answer for her. "How about this? If it is less, I'll pay you the difference. That way our 'fun night' won't be a total screw-up. Sound fair?"

She considered this before nodding, holding out her hand to him. "Deal." They shook on it before
turning down the street once more. "Now let's hit the café bar. I think you owe me a drink after all that."

He laughed and patted his bulging wallet affectionately. "Deal."
Exiting the café bar quietly, he glanced up at the starry sky and studied the brightly glowing moon while descending the rather long staircase, exhaling softly as he did so. It was nice to have a moment to relax after the rather tiring excursion they had been on the past few days. Well, maybe 'relax' wasn't the right word; it was more along the lines of simply having a few extra hours to themselves rather than immediately surrendering to the sleep that beckoned so dearly. No doubt that was what the crew had opted for, even against the gift of Windfall's uninhabited bar that was a short trek from the docked ship. Not that he could blame them – he was a little surprised he hadn't passed out as soon as the docking procedures were completed like they had seemed ready to.

Reaching ground level, he veered towards the bench that overlooked the cliff side, where his companion was already seated. Balancing the coffees in his hands precariously as he struggled not to stumble in his fatigued state, he took up a place beside her and handed off a beverage. She mumbled a soft 'thanks', huddling over the warm drink as a thin veil of steam drifted towards the twinkling lights above. Her gaze followed, and his shortly after, admiring the vast expanse in silence, half-lidded eyes resisting the temptation to close for even a moment.

Raising the cup to her lips, Tetra took a slow sip before letting a small, content smile spread onto her face. "It's nice," she whispered, studying the stars that stretched endlessly in each direction. "It's been a while since we've been able to do this, huh?"

He nodded in agreement, turning his head to study the blonde pirate. It was obvious that her weariness rivaled his own, and he briefly wondered why they were even bothering to remain awake when the rest of the town had long since retired. But she gave him a gentle look in return and the thought quickly vanished. He took a sip of his coffee and nodded again. "Almost too long. It's soothing, watching darkness and listening to silence. Lets you be alone with your thoughts."

She didn't answer, though something in her eyes suggested her head was anything but empty at the moment. "I was thinking," she started, turning back to gaze at the dark ocean, "while you were gone, anyway. This is a view that these people probably look at every day, right? How many of them take it for granted, I wonder?"

Following her gaze into the distance, he studied her words before offering a shrug. There was likely some truth there, but how many of these islanders would admit to it? Or even understand how to acknowledge it? "I guess it's normal to them.

"Exactly." He turned to her again, raising a brow in confusion. She exhaled slowly before elaborating, choosing her words carefully so he would understand her thoughts. "What you said, it's just a normal view to them. Something out of their normal, consistent lives." He shook his head, still unsure of her focus. She fell silent, studying her coffee before helping herself to a drink before continuing. "I was wondering what it must be like."

It felt like he was beginning to understand some direction of the conversation, though he was still lost in regards to the point. "What it would be like… to be normal?" he asked, hoping for clarification. His heart rose when she nodded, happy that he'd understood – only for it to fall again when her words began to register in his mind.

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It wasn't difficult to see that they were about as far from the 'average' citizen as one could be: they battled monsters, pirates and other evils almost on a weekly basis; they lived on a ship and sailed all over the ocean and beyond, searching for treasures and, though neither cared to voice it, keeping an eye out for a landmass to fulfill the King's twisted wish; they carried weapons on them out of
necessity, constantly drawing some degree of staring whenever they entered a civilized location; and, even if it was behind them now, they had been caught up in the largest power struggle ever to be seen in the world and narrowly saved the entire populace from a terrible fate under a dark, tyrannical rule. They didn't have the opportunity to enjoy a 'regular' job, follow a 'normal' schedule, and live 'average' lives. Destiny had called on them to fulfill many great expectations, and no one on the Great Sea could understand what that entailed.

Was it fair? They had been robbed of the chance to live simple lives, to be content with their proceedings like everyone else. They instead continuously put their lives on the line, hoping that luck would side with them time after time to spare them a potentially gruesome but ultimately irrelevant permanent end. And all for the safety of those who barely acknowledged their efforts. Of course this was a predicament that had crossed his mind many times, back when he was actively pursuing the objectives that earned him the moniker Hero of Winds. But to hear it from Tetra, one who had been more or less born into an absence of such generally accepted order, was slightly unnerving.

"Is that why you bought your dress?" he spoke finally. "To understand what it would be like? To be someone who had the opportunity to care about such a thing?"

"I told you not to mention that," she retorted with a hint of irritation. "But… I don't know. It might have been, on some level. It's just different, the more I think about it. These rare moments like this, that you and I take as a treat, are probably something that anyone else could have on any given day if they wanted. It just seems…" She trailed off with a low sigh. "I don't know."

His eyes fell to the steadily cooling refreshment he held. Was she pining for such a life? She had never displayed much desire, or even patience for a slow, routine existence. But then again, fighting changed people; he could barely recognize the boy within him that had first left Outset to find his lost sister, the one who had steadily evolved into a hardened warrior. It would be foolish to assume Tetra was infallible, but it was a jarring idea all the same.

But this was his life now, regardless of what had happened or how he felt about it. And it was hers as well, and they had each other to understand it all. Perhaps it wasn't fair that he had to bear this burden, but he was used to it. The world needed someone to step forward to repel the evils that resided in the shadows, someone to take up the mantle of the hero.

And maybe someday they would settle down, and allow others to take their places. Surely that was acceptable; this wouldn't be the way things would be forever, would it? One way or another, their existence as they knew it would come to an end, and then they would find a place to call home, and find a consistent job to fill their days, and enjoy whatever it was others did that granted them a life.

"I still stand by what we're trying to do," Tetra voiced, before adding with a sarcastic, "whatever that is." She turned her focus heavenward once more, examining the infinite reaches of the sky. "But maybe one day I won't. And if that day comes… Will it be okay to step back and make my own life? It feels selfish if the world is depending on us, but we'll have earned it by then, won't we?" She looked at him, staring intensely into his eyes as if pleading for a truth he could unyieldingly provide.

He took a deep breath in an attempt to steady his racing thoughts. "I understand why you're concerned. I feel the same way, honestly. But you know what? I believe we're doing the right thing, even if it seems unfair to us or bizarre to others. I also know that we can't keep doing this forever. So if we live through all of this struggling, and the day comes that we want to stop being heroes and pirates and 'seeds of the future' and whatever else…" He took her hand and gave it a comforting squeeze. "Then we'll stop. We'll make new lives for ourselves, and find a new home, and be normal people. Because we didn't ask for this fate, but we bore it regardless. You're right, we'll have earned it by then. No one can be the judge of that but us."
She didn't answer, instead watching their hands with glazed eyes. She seemed to be wrestling with what he had told her, and he hoped that she understood what he had been trying to convey. After a moment of deliberation though, his hand was met with pressure from hers and she gave him with a soft smile, nodding in agreement. He smiled as well and returned his gaze to the darkened horizon, contentment returning once more to his weary mind.

Maybe they weren't exactly 'normal', but right now that was okay. Because they had each other to fall back on when things became unbearable, or when their faith began to slip. They had a connection deeper than could be put into words, a shared destiny most people couldn't begin to comprehend. Perhaps it was unfair that their lives followed a much more difficult path. But it had presented him with the best gift of his life: the chance to meet her. And no matter what happened, he would never trade that opportunity for anything.
Late

The man and the fairy were arguing again, but this time it fell on deaf ears. His attention was solely on the stone figure in front of him, reaching out almost comically as a plea for help. It was what he had feared all along; try as he might to banish the thoughts from his head, to escape the worry that seized at his heart. The petrified expression written on her frozen features, magnified by the genuine fear he could read in her dull, grey eyes, cut more deeply than any weapon could ever hope to. It was all a grim, brutal reminder to what he had realized the moment he had stepped into the room, thinking himself her rescuer before laying eyes on her lifeless, statue-like form in the corner.

He was too late.

He balled his hands into tight fists as he struggled against the tears that began to fill his eyes. Of course he was! Why had he ever expected any other outcome? He'd almost known from the moment she disappeared that he had already failed in protecting her. But even then, he'd hung onto to some sliver of hope, a tantalizing thought that she would be strong enough to fight whatever it was this cursed ship threw at her. He had fought as hard as he was able through vicious dungeons, gathering the elements needed to track her down while being reminded of the unfriendly parallels to his last grand adventure.

But last time, he'd had her to fall back to, to gather support and encouragement from. This time he had been on his own – though not in the literal sense. Yes, Ciela and even Linebeck had provided some degree of comfort, and had helped him get this far; if not for their efforts, he'd still be stranded on Mercay. But they were no substitute for the soothing reassurance of Tetra's soft yet confident words, far from equal to her occasional gestures of affection. These were what had rung in his head every moment he spent cutting down a foe, or perilously throwing himself into some unknown pit. He had fought his absolute hardest to catch up to her, to find her, to hold her.

That would not happen now, he realized with a sob as the tears began to cascade down his face. It was over – he had failed, and Tetra was gone. With a shaking hand, he gently grasped her outstretched one and held it tightly, trying to keep from collapsing to the floor. She felt cold, hard, unnatural; it was all wrong. This wasn't supposed to have happened! They had kissed, and he'd fallen asleep, and she was on the Ghost Ship and taken before he'd even realized what had happened, and it was his fault! He had promised to protect her, to prevent anything like this from happening again. How empty those words sounded now. He wasn't a hero – he couldn't believe how far he was from deserving of that title. For the second time in his life he couldn't save the person he cared about most. But Aryll hadn't died; he had succeeded only because she hadn't been killed for some terrible purpose. Apparently luck didn't stretch far enough to prevent that a second time.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, and through his watery gaze followed the path up the arm up to Linebeck's neutral expression. "The old man's here," he spoke calmly. "I know you don't want to hear it, but there's still a job to do about the creature that caused all this."

He was about to scream, to punch the man, to tell him that it was over, that he was done – when Linebeck seemed to anticipate it and held up a hand to stop him. "The old man also mentioned that there was still a way to save her," he continued, turning his gaze towards the petrified pirate and studying it for a moment. "She's not dead. Or at least not yet, anyway. It's far from easy, but there's still a way we can still prevent all of this." He gave his shoulder a soft squeeze while shooting the half-smirk that he'd become accustomed to seeing on the man's face. "So whaddya say we try, hey?"

"I don't… You're still going to help?" he asked hesitantly, trying to keep his voice steady. "There's no treasure on the ship, I scoured every inch of it. I thought that's what you were after."
"It was," Linebeck admitted, before adding, "I've been promised something better. Besides, I've sort of become involved in all this, haven't I? It's sure as hell not what I expected when I signed on for this, but your glowing sidekick and I still want to help you through this. So wipe the tears and let's head off, alright? Sparkles will fill you in on the game plan from here on out." With that he stepped forward and carefully picked up Tetra's form, balancing it gently over his shoulder before making his way out of the room.

His eyes followed the receding pair and he exhaled loudly. She wasn't dead – or at least not yet, anyway. Those words were sure to haunt him for weeks. There was more to be done, and if he succeeded, then she would be free. But that sort of thinking was what had started all of this. And she hadn't been free. Whatever she was now, she was trapped. And if he didn't succeed this time, she would undoubtedly die. He was being forced to repeat this situation all over again! On the one hand, it could be seen as a second chance; there was still hope that he could do what was right. But on the other, it was a bitter reminder that he'd taken too long before, and now had to live with that thought while he desperately tried again. This time he had to prevail. He refused to let Tetra down now, when she needed him more than ever. But the doubt, the proof that he was fully capable of failing, began to settle into his heart once more. One way or another, things would soon be coming to an end. And it needed, more than anything, to be the right end this time.

He shook his head as he departed the room. As much as he had to, he wasn't sure he could live with the guilt until then.
He imagined it would be a euphoric feeling, one that would fill his mind with excitement, even nervousness. But in truth, it felt... quiet. Perhaps it was a testament to how much he had grown – and how long he had been away. But that could not be helped; he'd had a job to do, after all, and he was not one to shirk responsibility. True, he had told his companion that there was no real rush to begin the task, but they had been ever vigilant regardless since departing, traversing uncharted seas and listening for whispers of a potential land. In that time, a few leads had presented themselves – all turning up dry, unfortunately. Nevertheless, they continued onward, keeping eyes and ears ever focused in case any information just so happened to present itself.

Perhaps this was the reason that he had remained so focused on their travels. The days had begun to blur together until he'd had no knowledge of time's true passage. Or perhaps he had simply been so comfortable with the crew, with her, that his thoughts had no need to travel elsewhere. It was only when he had laid eyes on a calendar this past stop at port that he had become aware of the reality – just how long he had truly been away.

He had brought the information to her attention, and had seen the mild surprise flash across her features; it was not simply his neglect, then. But it was not until she asked what his concern was that he had stopped and struggled with his answer. Why did the lapse of time distress him? The answer was to be obvious, he knew it – it presented itself in his mind's eye, buried just below the surface of his conscience. An idea that should have been in his thoughts often, but had been neglected, pushed to the side in favour of more important, immediate tasks.

And it had hit him, the realization such a force that he had almost dropped to his knees. He recalled an unfinished letter sitting among his possessions, gathering dust along with his promise of finishing it at a later date. He recollected his sister's visit, along with his word to her of making a journey out to see everyone. He remembered his grandmother's smiling face – a face he had not seen in so long – gradually losing itself in his memories as he began to lose its finer details.

The calendar had told him such a large span of time had ensued, almost eighteen months; had it truly been that long since his departing? How had he not taken the time to visit at any point? He had fought a wave of nausea at the thought of his letter, trying to remember the last time he had heard word from his grandmother. Was it four months? Five, even? Was she worrying herself over the lack of a response, or trusting that he was simply too busy to keep in touch for the time being? He had shaken his head, coming to a decision; he had been an awful grandson for far too long.

And so he had made a request to her, a side-stop at his island for a couple of days so that he might see everyone again. She had frowned – not in disagreement, but in disappointment, that she too had forgotten he came from elsewhere; that the ship she had known her entire life was not his home like it was hers; that he still had something of a family left, one that had been neglected for far too long. The flash of something in her eyes, which he had noticed for only a moment – pain? Sadness? – had vanished as she had nodded her affirmation, setting their new course shortly after.

Perhaps it was chance that they had been in familiar waters at the time, or perhaps it was the manipulation of the Goddesses. Whichever he chose to believe – he wasn't really sure these days – he was simply thankful, that their journey would last only an hour or two more before his faithful island of Outset peeked out from behind the horizon and presented itself to him.

It was for this reason that he had taken up a spot at the bow, where he currently stood, watching out over the ocean towards the vast blue expanse beyond. His fingers gripped the railing tightly, though the reason for which he couldn't say. The emptiness within him was still present, and he was unsure
of its reasoning; it was possible he was still in shock, but it seemed unlikely. Perhaps emotion would settle in when the island came into view, when he was able to verify that he was in fact returning.

She stood beside him, arms crossed and mouth pressed into a firm line, matching his gaze across the water. Her expression was unreadable – he did not think she blamed him for a detour, but suspected she might blame herself for his absence. If that were the case, he would not allow it to continue; it was their duty to do what they had been trying to accomplish, and likewise their choice to do so. There was no blame to be placed on her, or him for that matter. Yes, he should have kept in contact, and he resolved to maintain a better focus of that in the future. He would explain his absence in true detail this time, rather than the rushed, vague explanation he had given his people before in order to hurry on out. But that would all come later. For now he remained still, standing alongside his companion as the island began to shape itself before them.

"Home," he whispered, as if the absence of feeling might again attempt to convince him otherwise. "I'm going home."
Family

The night atmosphere was one of calm, quiet serenity, one that she often spent hours reveling in. There was something about it that could not be put into words, a sharp contrast to the bright, energetic feeling that daylight gave. It allowed her time with her thoughts, and nurtured some of her most secret desires – when she could be alone, and lower the walls she instinctively threw up around everyone else.

Of course, that serenity cut both ways, as it often did with her, with some nights inviting thoughts that she had no desire to dwell upon to fester and poison her fatigued mind. Trapped within her invading thoughts, her emotions often swirled out of control; many nights had she thrown an aggravated punch at her wall, or fallen asleep in tears. It was imprisoning, when the night seemed to stretch on almost endlessly in a grating torture. And of course, when she needed a chance to retreat into her head, tonight had to be one of those nights.

She wasn't sure where it had come from – she had been in town earlier in the day with Link, picking up a few supplies that weren't necessarily needed, but were enough to kill an afternoon. As they had wandered through the settlement, they had come across a small girl – how old, she couldn't say, but definitely no older than five – running toward them and screaming. A man chased her close behind, arms outstretched, and she had instinctively reached for her dagger. But before she'd gotten a chance, the man grabbed the child and tossed her into the air – and the child laughed.

As the man held her close and kissed her forehead, a woman she could only have assumed was the mother came into view, before embracing the pair and kissing the girl as well. They had walked off together, laughing and enjoying the day, while she and her companion had looked on. Link had seemed amused, certainly, even giving off a soft chuckle at the father's affection. But the sight had churned something inside of her, hitting her with a feeling she couldn't identify.

She'd shrugged it off for the rest of the day, but now, as she sat alone on her bed with her knees to her chest, the memory couldn't help but burst forward into her head, replaying itself again and again. Why did it bother her? There hadn't been anything wrong with the people; they were an ordinary, happy family. By all accounts, it was something she'd experienced plenty of times.

Except… She frowned, her brow knit in thought. Had she really seen something like that before? A mother, a father, a child, enjoying their lives without a worry… Perhaps she hadn't; it wasn't a particularly common sight in battles or trading ports. But what did it matter to her who they were or how they lived their lives? Why should she care about the joy in the girl's smile, the excitement in her laugh, the love in her eyes...

Her eyes widened as the foreign feeling returned, along with its identification. She longed for that experience.

She'd never known that opportunity, to have a real family. Her mother had cared for her, yes; the woman had been everything to her, all that she'd known. But her mother also headed a gang of pirates, essentially a business – as much as she'd spent time with her, she was often busy leading. Her mother had not had the time for her like the girl's mother had; giving her loving hugs and light kisses and caring smiles. And her father…

She blinked quickly as tears began to form, stubbornly refusing to let them drop. She and Link had discussed their parentage before, to a degree. She had of course told him about her father's absence, and her relative aloofness to it all. What he hadn't noticed was the pain in her eyes as she veiled the reality with attitude. She hated the admission, absolutely despised that it formed in her head, but the
truth was that she had always wanted a father in her life.

She rubbed her eyes, trying to clear them. She had no right to feel this way. He'd walked out on her mother, before she was even born. He had made that choice, and she and her mother had been better off without him. She'd learned everything she needed to know from her mother, who'd loved her unconditionally. And in spite of the absence, and the anger that boiled in her blood at the thought of his cowardice, she knew in her heart that she would give anything to meet him.

She glanced at the picture hanging on her wall, as her mother stared back with dull, emotionless eyes. One parent, who had loved her more than anything else. A girl with a similar mother, as well as a father, just the same as his wife... She sighed. There was no sense dwelling on the past; what was done was done, and she had no power to change that. Truthfully, though, she had always wondered about her father's identity, even if just to have a face to put the concept to. A little more painfully, she'd also speculated at his reasons for walking away – it tore at her heart to imagine that she might have been the cause.

She was tough. She was fearless. She was Tetra, the temperamental pirate who never backed down from a challenge. And she was the lonely girl who'd always dreamed about having a real family.

Glancing around the room for anything to distract her, her eyes fell to her nightstand, where a picture was sitting. She picked it up, examining it as she wiped off the faint layer of dust – it was from the day she and Link had gone to Lenzo's shop for pictures. As she stared at the image of the two of them, arms curled around each other and giving wide smiles, she couldn't help but think of the boy's own background.

Link had had what she wanted, at least for a time: two loving parents that devoted themselves to him. They had also been taken from him, at an age when he could barely comprehend it. And yet his attitude towards their absence was... bizarre. He never seemed upset by their disappearance, but rather accepting of it as one of life's happenings. He always attributed this to his growing absence of memories, but she still felt unsettled by it. Did he not know what a precious thing he'd had? Something that not every child was given?

Perhaps he didn't, she realized. He'd been what, five at the time of their deaths? She'd known her mother for much longer, established a much closer bond. While it was true she hadn't had a father as he had, she'd been given more time with her parent before being forever removed from their embrace. One could make an argument that it put her on even terms with him. But it didn't matter. The reality was that both of them had lost their parents too soon.

Her thoughts wandered back to the girl, and she sighed. No, Link hadn't had that experience after all. The girl would grow up with a mother and a father, something that neither of them had truly known. They'd had substitutes – he with his grandmother and islanders, she with her crew – who had filled that role instead, becoming the new foundation of a family. But while he'd accepted the reality of the situation, a rather mature move for someone of his age, she instead suffered from emotional scars that, years later, still refused to heal.

Maybe he could help her with that. They'd come to an understanding that they had each other in lieu of parents, that they would be the support the other needed when the challenges began to mount. Perhaps she ought to talk to him about her feelings toward her absent father. She doubted he'd be able to really help her condition – but then she'd been surprised by him before. If there was a chance, however slim, that she could find her emotional stability and security within him, she was willing to give him a chance to try.

She sighed again as she curled up tightly, keeping her eyes locked on the picture as the fatigue began to overtake her. It didn't make up for her father's departure, or for her mother's death. But it would be
Exhaling, he rubbed his tired eyes as he tried his best to ignore the call of his screaming muscles. He was back on the S.S. Linebeck, with the second Pure Metal now sitting on the floor with the first. There was but one more to go before he could move ahead with slaughtering the cause for this mess – but he was exhausted, his mind dull and body ready to drop. He rested his back against the cabin wall and sank to the floor, hardly noticing the slight pain of his ungraceful impact with the surface.

Since he'd retrieved Tetra's petrified form he'd been going non-stop from one destination to the next, searching desperately for the metals needed to create a weapon that would destroy Bellum. It had been almost a week, but he couldn't recall the last time he'd properly slept. His entire focus was on finishing his mission and saving Tetra before it was too late, and he couldn't afford to waste any time. Perhaps because of that, he felt useless and frustrated at moments like these – when the travel took over, when he had little control in the speed of the voyage or the manoeuvring of the ship.

If he was smart, he would take these opportunities for rest – but he couldn't, for he knew what awaited him within his subconscious state. The guilt would return, twisting and writhing in his mind, trapping him in yet another nightmare in which he would be forced to relive his failure. It was for this reason he’d forgone sleep, in favour of continuous bursts of adrenaline to keep his body active. He would sleep when Tetra was no longer in life-threatening danger, when each minute was no longer a race against her survival.

Looking around, he noticed that Linebeck was not in the cabin with him; the man was likely dealing with something on the deck, then. His eyes fell to the shining ores that sat on the floor, before travelling up to the statue they rested beside. Her expression still haunted him, the look of utter fear that he'd been helpless to counter. The blame was his, for it was his lethargy that had led to this situation; it was the reason he fought so hard to free her, or was determined to at least die trying. He wondered if she blamed him for not being at her side, like he had been so many times before.

He stood slowly, ignoring the cracking of his bones and the protest of his muscles. He approached his frozen companion and stared into her lifeless eyes, forcing himself to remain strong. He would not break down again – not when he still had a chance to save her life from this fate. He would finish this journey with everything he had. He would free her – or he would die along with her.

Reaching for her outstretched hand, he held it in his own for a moment, rubbing his thumb over her cool fingers. She wasn't supposed to be cold; her skin was always warm to the touch, as if it had permanently absorbed the heat of the sun it was repeatedly exposed to. Her eyes, likewise, were usually full of fiery determination rather than the chilling fear he saw now. It wasn't right. It wasn't her.

He sighed. "I'm sorry," he mumbled, not meeting her eyes. "If I'd been paying attention, this wouldn't have happened. I could've gone with you, I would've had your back. I…” He trailed off, swallowing the lump in his throat. "I'm sorry, Tetra."

Hand remaining in hers, he allowed his gaze to travel upward, meeting her dull eyes as he continued. "I don't know if you blame me for this, but you should. I do, and I haven't been able to live with myself. I thought I lost you before, and I wasn't able to take it. But I will save you from this. I've said it before, but this time I mean it: I will protect you from here on out. That's a promise."

She didn't reply, but of course he wasn't expecting her to. He gripped her hand tighter and, in a moment of hesitance, lightly brushed his lips against her cheek. Pulling away, he whispered, "I just want you back. And I will succeed."
Releasing her hand, he turned and made his way to the staircase. As he began to climb he stopped, casting a final glance at her. A moment of silence followed, until he repeated his admission to the statue before departing.

"I promise."
Tetra leaned heavily onto the rail, fingers drumming against the wood and half-lidded eyes staring unfocused at the horizon. It was clear to everyone present that she was deep in thought about something; it was even clearer that she wished to be left alone to sort out whatever it was that was troubling her. But sadly, there was no such thing as a perfect world, and it wasn't ten or fifteen minutes before her emerald-clad companion sauntered over to her side, throwing his arms onto the railing and leaning his head back to the sky. "So," he drawled, tilting his head lazily to glance at her scrunched expression, "whatcha thinkin' about?"

She huffed silently, trying to block out the voice she knew was trying to get a rise out of her. "You're distracting."

"I imagine I would be if I wanted to talk," he replied with a smirk. "Really though, what're you doing over here? You didn't even order any of us to put away the supplies."

"I still have to tell you to do that?" she murmured, brow creasing. "Thought you'd all be used to the routine by now. Go to town, pick up supplies, leave town and put supplies away. Bloody pig could figure that out."

Her attitude surprised her, and she half-expected him to retort with an irritated jab. Instead, he chuckled and waved her attack away, turning his gaze back to the clouds. "Of course it's all put away, even I know the drill. It's just that it's unlike you to isolate yourself and think when there's work to do." He paused for a moment before frowning. "Well, unlike you to do it without hoarding yourself up in your cabin."

She sighed, shoving her bangs off of her face. "Sorry," she mumbled with a guilty glance at the deck. "I'm not meaning to be distant or moody. Not sure where that came from."

"Relax, it happens," he replied with a shrug. Leaning toward her, he continued, "Now then, what's got you so distracted?"

She took a deep breath and leveled her gaze with his before trying to put words to her buzzing thoughts. "When we went into town, I went for a walk."

"While the rest of us did the actual work, right."

Her eyes narrowed in brief annoyance. "I'm the captain."

"I was kidding!" he laughed, raising his arms defensively. "Yes, you went off for a walk. What happened?"

"Well, nothing. Not really, anyway," she admitted. "I just happened to be passing by some merchant's stand and overheard a couple guys talking." She paused to glance at him, only to be met with an expectant gaze. So she added, "Talking about the Legend of the Great Flood."

Link raised a brow in surprise before interjecting, "But it's not really a legend, right? I mean, you and I both know what really happened. The King told-" he tripped over his words only for a moment, pushing through the tension that arose with the mention of the name. "We were told about what really happened in the past, and more importantly, why it happened. So why should that bother you?"
"Because they didn't believe the legend!" she blurted out before she could stop herself. Taking a deep breath, she continued more clearly, trying to keep her frustration in check. "They thought it was just some stupid story, that the entire idea of a sunken kingdom at the bottom of the ocean was ludicrous. They said..." she trailed off for a moment, unsure of whether or not to voice the true source of her disturbance. Deciding to trust Link's opinion, she said quietly, "They said they didn't believe in the Goddesses."

Link was silent for a moment, absorbing the impact of her words. After what felt to her like an awkward silence, he spoke slowly. "I've never once pegged you as an overly religious person."

She couldn't help but snort. "Please, I'm hardly what you'd call an advocate. But look at what you and I have experienced together: the Triforce, a legendary power that can bend our world's laws and bring reality to any wish; your Wind Waker, a magical artifact that can similarly manipulate the world around you; even the friggin' ocean, which we both know for a fact didn't exist a few hundred years ago. It's all proof that the Goddesses are real! How can some people not...!" She exhaled slowly, letting the tension in her shoulders relax as she tried to let go of her aggravation. "I just have trouble accepting religious denial when there's proof in the world," she mumbled, turning her gaze to the sea.

"So you're bothered because a couple of random guys have an opinion you know is wrong?" Link asked with a puzzled look. "Since when do you care about what others think? Especially when you know they're wrong?"

She didn't answer right away, instead mulling over her reply. This was a topic she really didn't feel like conversing about, but she knew that it was only Link who stood a chance at calming her nerves. "Because I was thinking about it and... um... I'm afraid this won't make sense, but what if they're... Well, not wrong?"

Link's brow furrowed, confusion evident on his face. "I don't follow."

"I mean, we have what we assume is proof of their existence, and I know that, but there are times when even I have trouble accepting the Goddesses' existence. I know I'm not supposed to, but I just do. Sometimes it all just doesn't make sense to me."

She expected him to gawk, to call her blasphemous or even crazy over her conflicted logic. But again he surprised her with an opposite reaction, simply raising a brow and calmly asking, "And why would that be?"

"Their actions don't seem right to me! Why create us and then do nothing to interfere? Why bother creating us then? And then the one time in history they do intervene in our lives is to flood the world and 'start over'? I mean, what was the point of that? If they were just going to kill off most of the population, why bother creating a population to begin with? I just can't understand any of it!"

Link glanced away into the distance for a moment before returning his gaze to her. "You're upset that these guys didn't believe in the Goddesses, but you're more upset that they might actually be right?" She nodded. "Alright. So your disbelief is partly predicated on the idea that the Goddesses are real but never show themselves or even provide acknowledgement of their existence, right?" he asked, and she nodded again. "Well, perhaps they don't like to meddle. I mean, we do have free will, right? We choose what we do; it's what makes us people rather than animals. Maybe their lack of interference is because they don't want our lives to revolve around their wishes for us. Does that make sense?" She nodded, though she was not convinced. Link recognized the look in her eyes and continued.

"And when they chose to flood Hyrule... Well, Ganondorf was taking over and there was no one to
stop him. Maybe they felt that for the sake of our people's survival, they had to intervene. Otherwise everything they and we had worked to create would've been lost. I'm not saying it was a good choice that was made, but maybe it was the best one they could offer. And more importantly, these are sacred, divine deities whose existence transcends everything we know. Do you really think that either of us can make sense of their grand plan for everything?” He raised an amused brow at her, and she couldn't help the smile that tugged at her lips.

"Alright, I'll admit I never looked at it that way before. But they aren't the only gods that are or ever were worshipped. What about the other gods and goddesses?” she asked, raising her hand to list them off her fingers. "My mother's old history books talked about a goddess called Hylia or something who was entrusted by the Goddesses to watch over all life, but there apparently hasn't been a record of her actions or even worship for centuries! There was a tribe of desert people who supposedly worshipped a Goddess of Sand, but no one else had even heard of it. And there might've been a Goddess of Time, but maybe not, and… Ugh, this is giving me a headache,” she sighed, placing a hand on her forehead.

"I'm almost sorry I interrupted your thinking earlier,” Link smiled sadly. "You must've really been going at this."

"You have no idea," she muttered under her breath. Louder, she added, "And I can't come up with a reason for the existence of several deities but possibly not others. What if different groups come up with the ideas of deities themselves, and none of them really exist? Or how do we know that they don't all exist? I can't explain it either way!"

"Unless they're just different names and ideas for the same goddesses,” Link countered with a shrug. "It's possible everyone just has different ideals and views that are really of the same figure, you know? Maybe ideas or legends or whatever get spread around, but twisted through word of mouth or the passing of time. Maybe all of those deities you listed are the Goddesses, but worshipped for different purposes or reasons.

"On the other hand, there very well could be other deities beyond the Goddesses, but that would mean there had to be a hierarchy or sorts…” he trailed off, lost in thought. "Or it could be that the flood was brought on by natural phenomena, or even the cause of the Triforce. Could we just have powerful artifacts in the world without the actual influence of the Goddesses? Wow, this is starting to give me a headache too…”

A moment of silence fell between them before Link waved his hand to the side. With a shrug, he said, "Whatever the case, I wouldn't worry about it. It's ultimately your life – you can choose to believe whatever you want to believe. And if it differs from anyone else, then you just have a difference of opinion. Let those guys believe in nothing, if that's what they choose, I'll believe in what I want, and you can believe in what you want. And if you don't quite know what that is, then don't fret over it. Just give it time and I'm sure one way or another, your answer will come to you."

She stared silently over his shoulder, focusing on nothing as her head raced to grasp his advice. It was frustrating, not having an immediate answer to her dilemma, but perhaps there simply wasn't one. The idea of religion wasn't something that was definitively right or wrong, especially when there was so much variety between beliefs. Link's response hadn't been the response she'd been expecting, but perhaps it was the best answer she could've gotten. And he was right, after all: she was only a teenager, with a lifetime to find her answer. Beyond that, there were more immediate, realistic things to focus on; she couldn't waste every moment of every day dwelling on something she didn't completely comprehend.

So instead of arguing any further, she simply nodded and allowed a small smile to grace her lips.
Link returned the gesture and turned his gaze toward the horizon, with her following suit a moment later. As they stared out in silence, she felt an odd sense of peace wash over her. She didn't have a definite answer to her questions, and she knew she wouldn't be completely satisfied until she finally did. There was a chance that her understanding may never come at all. But for the time being, that answer could wait.

For now, this was okay.
Maturity

For the number of times they found themselves seated in Windfall's Café Bar, Tetra had to wonder if the barista/bartender (or whatever her title was) ever got tired of seeing them. Then again, there were probably a number of Windfall residents who frequented the establishment on a much more regular basis, so they were probably fine. Although, they were likely the youngest patrons the woman ever got – she'd never noticed anyone even remotely the same age as her in the café, so that was probably a detail that stood out to the woman. Luckily, she and Link were very mature adolescents for their age, having had to grow up too quickly to answer life's demands. Well, they were usually mature; she supposed they were both guilty of childlike moments of immaturity every now and then. Or maybe more often than that. Didn't she try and shoot him with a cannon once?

Link's return to the table with their drinks roused her from her idle thoughts as she blinked back into reality. Accepting her coffee, she took a careful sip from the steaming beverage before sighing and letting her eyes carry around the small empty room. She took notice of a new painting the barista must've bought before letting her gaze turn back to Link. She noticed that he was likewise staring at the walls, although with a bit more spontaneity than her. His gaze moved quickly around the room, taking in a sight before immediately moving on to another. She felt a small smile tug at her lip before taking another sip.

"You think that woman's tired of seeing us?" she asked, bringing the boy's attention back to her. Link studied her for a moment before she indicated to the bartender behind the counter. Link followed her cue and cocked an eyebrow in understanding.

"You mean Gillian."

She blinked. "That's her name?"

"Yeah," he replied with a shrug. "What did you think it was?"

She shrugged back, exaggeratedly copying his motion. "I dunno! Kind of just assumed she didn't have one. She's Barista Bartender Lady."

Link laughed before taking a drink of his coffee. Swallowing loudly and forcefully smacking his lips, she rolled her eyes and tried to fight the smile that took over her face. "I doubt it. Why would she be?"

"Because we come here so often," she answered, running her finger along the rim of her cup. Link stared at her incredulously.

"Often? We come here, like, once a month when we happen to be in the area. How is that often?"

She shrugged again. "I don't know. It was just a thought."

Link snorted and sipped at his coffee. "You and your thoughts," he mused.

She sighed with a tired smile. "Yeah, I know."

They fell into silence for a moment, enjoying the quiet atmosphere of the café. Her eyes once again wandered to the new painting, taking in its muted, blending colours, when she felt a nudge against her leg. Glancing back across the table, she saw Link shifting in his seat.

Noticing her gaze, he asked, "Sorry, did I kick you?"
"Yes," she scoffed, feigning hurt in her voice. "How could you be so cruel?"

He smirked with a long eye roll. "I pick it up from hanging around a cruel pirate every day. She's a bad influence on my tender, easily-influenced mind."

"Oh, Goddesses," she drawled, aiming a soft kick back at him. She missed, however, and ended up whacking the leg of his chair.

"Whoa!" he exclaimed as he was shifted back. "Hey, I only hit you! I never assaulted your poor seat!"

"Oh please," she replied with a wave of her hand, "you assaulted my 'poor seat' the other day when you knocked me on my ass running up out of the cargo hold. Remember that?"

Evidently he did, judging by the mild colouring of his face. Still, he retaliated with a kick at her own chair leg, and she grabbed the table to avoid shifting.

"Wha-" she started, before glaring at him. "Don't start something you aren't prepared to finish, hero."

He leveled a blank look back at her before saying, "And what makes you think I'm not prepared?"

The words were barely out of his mouth before she lobbed a solid boot at his chair. It moved out from under him so suddenly that he had fallen onto the floor before he'd even realized what had happened. A loud thud reverberated throughout the shop as she cast a quick glance around, wondering if she'd gone too far.

She didn't have time to garner an answer, though, before Link was back in his chair and kicking at her own seat again. "Alright, well now I need to make it even. Hope you like hard floor!"

A small shriek escaped from her lips as she gripped the table again, laughter quickly following suit as she fought to stay in her chair. "Link, no, I didn't mean to knock you off! We're in public!"

"You started it!" was the only retaliation she heard before her seat continued to jar its way out from under her. Trying to fight her giggling, she attempted to lobby back a kick at his chair before she met her own demise on the vicious floor.

Gillian watched in silent amusement while she wiped down her counter, observing the abandoned coffees and her teenage customers having too much fun with their ridiculous game to notice.

"I wish those two would come more often," she murmured quietly to herself, tossing the rag aside and pouring herself a drink. "Always too serious for their age when they leave. Life's just too short for that."
Spar

It was an opportunity he'd been wanting for weeks now: a day free of any work to be done, where everyone could do as they please. Days like this were few and far between on the ship, what with Tetra's relentless treasure-seeking and his own penchant for rushing off whenever some town was threatened by whatever challenge of the week presented itself. However, his patience had finally worn out, and Tetra had announced her desire to drop anchor for a day and give everyone a rest.

He knew the men were likely to lounge around for most of the day, swapping silly stories and snacking on whatever treats Tetra liked to save for them on days like this. The captain, however, was sure to have her own plans for taking advantage of the peace, and he was sure to bet that it would involve holing herself up in her cabin, as it often did. But unbeknownst to her, he had other plans.

He stood on the deck, leaning against the railing and taking in the shining sunlight while a gentle breeze tousled his hair. He'd asked her to meet him here when she had a free moment, and given how long she'd been stuck in her cabin, he had a hunch that moment was coming fast. Sure enough, it was only a couple minutes later when the hold door was tossed open and she emerged, stretching her arms and stifling a yawn.

Catching sight of him, she rolled her shoulders and made her way over. "Alright, I'm here. What's up?"

He let out a chuckle at the sight of her tired form and turned to face the ocean. "Falling asleep down there?"

She snorted as she matched his gaze out to the water, stretching her neck as she did. "I happen to be working on something important. Leaning over a table for long periods just also happens to be bad for your body."

"Uh-huh," he replied, dragging out the vowel for emphasis. "You're not just torn between two huge prizes and trying to figure out the most efficient way to get them?"

He caught her wide eyes in his peripherals. "No! What? Shut up! Where'd you hear that?"

He grinned. "Someone may or may not have been eavesdropping at your door. You talk to yourself a lot when you focus on something."

She sighed. "Nudge?"

"Who else?" Crap. He said he'd pretend he didn't know. "Wait. I mean, no?"

"Honestly..." he caught her mumble, before she straightened up. "Whatever, it isn't important. What did you need?"

He simply smiled, but didn't meet her gaze. Maybe this idea was better than he thought. Sounded like she needed a change of pace herself right now.

"I need a workout," he answered, stretching his own arms above his head. "You up for some training?"

She cocked an eyebrow as she set her hands on her hips. "What, like sparring? We haven't done that in forever."
"Like that," he answered with a small smirk. "But without weapons. Just you and me, hitting each other the old-fashioned way."

She stared at him in disbelief as she let his words sink in. "You want to… fight? Like, an actual fistfight?"

"Well, not quite that callous," he replied, "but something along those lines. Interested?"

She continued to stare at him, looking more confused than anything else. "What exactly brought this on?"

He shrugged. "Honestly, it's something I've been wanting to work on since my first foray into the Forsaken Fortress. Remember that? When you shot me off of a catapult and I almost died?"

"For Goddesses' sake, are you still bitter about that? It was over a year ago!" she exclaimed, throwing her hands in the air. He couldn't help but chuckle.

"Anyway," he continued, "when I lost my sword, I felt pretty useless. I couldn't really fight, so I had to sneak around, which sucked."

She tried not to smile, but he noticed the corner of her mouth quiver. "Ever since then, I've wanted to learn how to fight without a weapon, in case I ever need to. I've been reading up on some techniques whenever we stop at Windfall, but I haven't had a chance to actually try anything." He gestured to her, adding, "Which is where you come in."

She pinched the bridge of her nose and sighed. "So let me get this straight," she said. "You dragged me out of my cabin, away from my super-busy work, because you want to hit me."

He shrugged. "Yeah, I guess so. What do you say?"

She sighed again, and removed her scarf. "Yeah, alright."

He blinked in surprise. "What, really? Just like that?"

"Sure, why not?" she answered as she took off her vest. "A workout will feel good, if you aren't too afraid to take me."

He grinned as he removed his hat and unlaced his boots. "Hey, it's either you or your crew. And since I'm taller than half of them and the other half could kill me with a flex, you seem like the only fair game."

"Ugh, you baby," she replied as she kicked off her own boots and adopted a fighting stance. "Alright, tough guy. Tell me when you're ready."

He cracked his knuckles and fell into a stance that mirrored hers. Here we go – time to finally apply what I've learned. "Ready when you are," he said, and then blinked as a foot came swinging at his head.

The next thing he knew, he was lying on the deck with a throbbing headache. Coughing, he picked himself up and tried to regain his balance. Wow, his head hurt. Did she really just kick him?

"Thought you said you were ready," he heard her say, and looked around until he noticed her standing across the deck. "You alright?" she asked, though he could tell from her tone she was smirking.
"Pfft, are you kidding? Never better!" he answered as he fell back into a stance, trying not to fall over. "Just didn't want to make the first move, that's all. It's disrespectful to hit a lady."

She scoffed and beckoned him closer. "Come on, hero. Your turn, don't hold back."

Trusting that she knew what she was doing, he quickly threw a punch at her face – only for her to knock his fist to the side, catching only air. He followed up with his other arm, but it met the same fate as its predecessor.

_Uh-oh. Maybe Gonzo would've been the smarter choice after all._

Before he could back away, she threw a punch of her own at his side. It hurt, but he could tell she was holding back. Maybe she was feeling guilty about the kick? Unless she'd even been holding back then. He swallowed. Goddesses, he hoped not.

Seemingly reading his mind, she let a smirk rise to her lips. "I've been a pirate since I was born, Link. You think I can't take care of myself in a fight? I've busted more of my own knuckles than you have baddies," she taunted. "Now I hope you have more to bring than that, or else I'm afraid I'm going to be wasting my time out here."

She was goading him, obviously – but it was working. Maybe that was the point, he realized as he threw another punch. _She's trying to rile me up so I get angry and let loose,_ he thought as she took the punch into her forearm and retaliated with her own. He quickly threw up his own arm to block, and was amazed when it stopped her attack.

Tetra seemed surprised as well. "Hey, not bad," she said with a whistle. "Maybe this'll be fun after all."

Before he could answer, she aimed a kick at his head. But he was ready this time, and quickly ducked under it. While he had the chance, he stuck out his leg and hooked her knee, pulling it in. She collapsed to the deck with a loud thud, and he beamed, proud of himself.

"Well, damn, look who's a fast learner," Tetra said as she stood up and resumed her stance. "Or did it just take a while for that theory to kick in?"

She jabbed an elbow at his face, but he knocked it away and drove a knee up to her stomach. Before it could make contact, though, she caught it and pushed him away before taking a dig at his side. Gritting his teeth, he took the hit and returned one to her wrist as she snapped her arm back. Clearly it had hurt, as she swore under her breath and shook out her hand.

"Theory hasn't actually done a thing," he answered while they had a moment to breathe. "Instincts just kind of took over. Too focused to think."

To his surprise, she barked out a laugh before running at him. "So you _are_ learning, then," she replied as she delivered a powerful kick to his stomach. He managed to roll with it as he was knocked away, but it helped to lessen the hit. Picking himself up, he feigned a punch at her head while following through into her chest. His fist made contact, but she barely flinched. Instead, she grabbed his arm and flipped him over her, throwing him onto the deck with painful force.

As he lay there, she stood over him before placing a foot on his chest. Leaning in close to his face, she stared him dead in the eye before whispering with a smile, "Guess I win."

They stared each other down for a moment before he started to laugh. She was quick to join in and held out an arm, which he graciously took to help him up.
"Got to admit, you weren't bad for your first time," she complimented, rubbing her chest tenderly. "You fight dirty when you actually want to."

"Well, I do tend to learn from the best," he replied with a wink. She rolled her eyes and threw a punch at his shoulder, which he happily took. "But I did learn a lot. That was fun."

"Sure was," she agreed as she sank down to the deck, leaning against the railing and staring into the sky. "It's been too long since we did something like this. We should make a weekly routine of it, keep us both in shape."

He smiled and sat beside her, turning his eyes to the clouds as well. "Sounds good to me. Whatever gets you out of that room for a while."

She hummed in agreement, and they sat in silence as the breeze blew over them. They took in the beautiful weather in silence before Tetra spoke up again.

"I still have to yell at Nudge for spying."

"Please don't. He'll know I told you."

"That sounds like a 'you' problem."

"Which I would then make sure also become your problem."

She turned to look at him. "Excuse me? Was that a challenge?"

He locked eyes with her. "What if it was?"

She grinned wickedly and sprung up, pulling him to his feet as well. "Round two, hero. Let's go."

He only laughed in response. Round two it was, then.
The sun was dipping below the horizon as she secured the final rope, tying the sail in place. They had dropped anchor for the night rather than opting to sail straight through the dark to their destination, which suited her just fine. She had also declared that she’d finish securing the lines while everyone else grabbed a bite below – something of an unusual request from her, but the men had respected their captain's wishes as they always did. This would've gone a lot quicker with help, but she wasn't really in the mood to be around others. It was one of those days.

Granted, it hadn't started out that way; she'd woken up feeling fine, ready to tackle the day's tasks. And for the morning, she'd done just that with no issues to speak of. But then the afternoon had set in, and, somehow, so had thoughts of Hyrule. She knew she had to let go of her feelings, but that was far from easy. It also never failed to absolutely dampen her day.

She didn't like thinking back to her experiences beneath the waves – they were anything but enjoyable, and brought nothing but a bad taste to her mouth. She knew Link had worked closely with the King of Hyrule, but her own experiences with the man had been less pleasant. "Stay hidden in the basement until we return." "Wash away this ancient land of Hyrule." "Seek out a new land for everyone to call home." It was always the last one that really got to her.

Shaking her head, she double-checked the lines before climbing down from the mast. Ensuring everything else was either put away or secured for the night, she descended into the hold and slipped into her cabin. Only after closing the door behind her did she stop, let out a frustrated sigh, and rest her head against the wood. Months had passed since their adventure had ended; why wouldn't the man just get out of her head?

How could he ask such a task of two children? It had been his own mistakes in life that had doomed everyone to live on an ocean, wasn't it? And really, what was so bad about it? Sure, the sea could be dangerous, and there were plenty of foul beasts to be found, and maybe everyone was stuck miles apart, too scared to venture onto a boat to visit new places… But there were still positive aspects! Those numerous monsters made for a lot of food if you knew how to get them, and trade and commerce were a thriving part of the major islands. No single business owned a monopoly anywhere, which was always a plus in her eyes – everything seemed nice and fair. Maybe it wasn't like the old kingdom, but it wasn't bad, and more importantly, everyone had managed to adjust to it just fine.

Frankly, in her eyes, the King had had plenty of other options. If he really was set on a new land for everyone to repopulate, what exactly was the danger of just raising Hyrule? He could've just as easily wished for Ganondorf's defeat without damming the ancient kingdom to be lost under the ocean. And yet, he'd decided that Hyrule was a relic and should disappear, much like Ganondorf and himself.

Okay, fine. So he'd realized that his ideals were outdated. Then why had he asked Link and her to find a new land to call home? People had survived on the Great Sea's archipelago for centuries, and there were still so many uninhabited islands! They could've just as easily started using that space for
new towns and businesses, rather than just forsaking it all and looking for something entirely new. There was no reason to demand they create a new Hyrule when a perfectly fine society already existed! Did he even comprehend how much work carving out a new kingdom would take? And he'd opted to skip out of all the work and just die. So sweet of the old bastard.

And as for the other King, the self-proclaimed ruler of evil… She sank to the floor, resting her back against the door. He had been the cause of this huge shitstorm in the first place, hadn't he? He took just as much blame as the King; probably more, if she was being honest. Too bad she liked to keep things fair.

Granted, it was because of Ganondorf's actions that she'd come to know Link, so she supposed that was a plus. And on some level, she did understand why the man had acted the way he did, and even reserved a small amount of sympathy for his upbringing. But his actions had ultimately been a result of his choices, and they had wronged countless people. It was the things like kidnapping children and destroying islands in a mad pursuit of power that she couldn't forgive.

He'd easily taken the Forsaken Fortress for himself; he'd had an outpost with which he could call his own on the vast ocean. If that wasn't good enough for him, he'd had access to Hyrule beneath the ocean, right? What was it he'd enjoyed? The shining sun, the rolling fields, the vast forests, the gentle wind… He could've had the entire country to himself and it wouldn't have hurt a single person. But that wasn't enough, was it? He'd wanted to rule over everyone. He'd wanted to dominate the population.

One person ruling everyone else didn't fit in the world today. She'd thought the King of Hyrule had realized that, having seen every inch of the Great Sea while travelling with Link. People looked out for each other, opposed those who didn't, and left only the important decisions to a mayor or chieftain. They managed just fine! And more importantly, Ganondorf's rise to power had been that of a hostile takeover, almost ruining the lives of the entire Great Sea. Shouldn't that have been enough of a lesson for the King? But what did he want? A new kingdom for everyone. A monarchy that he likely expected her to lead, with her precious royal blood.

She sighed, burying her face in her hands. These were the same arguments her brain always made, and she could never find answers. She didn't want to approach Link with her feelings, didn't want to dampen his own spirits with her troubled thoughts. Truthfully, she didn't want to find a new land. She'd grown up on the ocean – it was all she knew. It was all anyone knew! Who would even want to leave their home, their way of life, to start over somewhere else? Wherever that happened to be? It was ridiculous!

She stood, crossed the room to her bed, and curled up under her blanket. A part of her hated the two of them, for what they had done to the Great Sea. Neither of them had found a place in the new world, and they'd caused everyone to suffer for it. She was glad they were both gone from her life – all they'd done was cause her, and everyone else, pain.

And as much as it would help her to talk about it, maybe even help her let go of the anger, she could never tell Link her true feelings. He'd idolized the King, looked to him for support in order to complete his quest. She wasn't sure what he'd do if she told him her thoughts; he would likely be devastated that she resented his mentor and hated the thought of his dying wish. No, she had to keep her feelings to herself, even if it was toxic to her health.

Her eyes fluttered shut, weary from stress but far from content. Link had done so much to make her life better – she owed it to him to keep this pain a secret. She could manage that for him. She had to.
Pet

Wait, where were they, again? He must've asked almost a dozen times, but he couldn't seem to keep the name in his head. Some island that was populated enough to warrant a stop at, but he couldn't recall any trace of a name. Man, he really needed to start listening better. Regardless of that, here they were, on the relatively bustling island of… Here. He was calling it Here Island.

Whatever, I'll make more of an effort to remember if we ever come back here, Link thought to himself as he strolled through the small town with the pirates. They'd needed supplies, and Here had been the closest island for restocking. But because it technically laid beyond the archipelago he'd traversed for Goddesses only knew how long, he had no idea of its existence. Tetra, on the other hand, had been here countless times, given the relatively warm and friendly reception they were getting as they passed stalls and residents on the road.

"And they think we're, like, free-trading merchants or something stupid, so if you mention we're pirates, we'll get banned, and I will drown you," had been Tetra's warning to him, and it had been a good warning. He had no desire to be tossed overboard in the middle of the ocean. Not least of which because trying to climb back onto the ship was so much work.

He masked a yawn as their group made its way from stall to stall, purchasing the usual supplies – food, water, bombs, rope, a new book for Mako to read/hide a knife in… His attention began to wane as he instead took a look around this new town, taking in the locals and their homestead. The place was definitely bigger than his own home, but nowhere near the size of Windfall. There were still a number of merchants present, though, which suggested a lot of traffic to the island from elsewhere. As for the other residents… Farmers? He thought he could spot a crop or two poking out from behind a house. Farming wasn't easy to do on an island of this size, but he was willing to bet they were very wealthy for it.

He turned his attention back to the pirates as Tetra finished buying whatever it was she'd needed from the stall before moving on to the next one. He sighed, eyeing the rather long stretch of stalls all set in a nice row before them. Ugh, is she going to stop at every one? Women and their shopping, I swear to- PIG!

A pink blob came running from around a stall and made its way right up to him, squealing happily before plopping down on its back and exposing its stomach. He laughed with childlike glee as he bent down to rub the pig’s belly. They'd had pigs on Outset, and they were a lot of fun to play with. Actually, they were quite the popular pet all over the Great Sea. He knew a number of people with pet pigs running around, getting snuggles and attention, making the general atmosphere around them happier… Hmm…

"No."

Goddamn that mind-reading pirate! He stood while picking up the pig into his arms and turned to face the girl now standing next to him, arms crossed and her full attention on him. "I didn't say anything!"

She scoffed. "What, and you don't think I know you well enough by now? You were thinking of bringing it back."

Damn. "Was not!"

"You were too. You were thinking that it would improve morale or something like that."
"Alright, fine, I was. Can we please keep him? He'll help us so much!"

"No, he would not," she answered with a shake of her head. "He would be a hindrance."

Hindrance? How could that be? He was adorable, and he was already making him so happy. Wouldn't that break through to Tetra soon? "How?"

She seemed glad he'd asked, raising her hand and counting off. "One, it's another mouth to feed. Two, we hardly have the room for him to run around, and we don't need him in the way while we're working. And three, what happens when that thing grows up and gets huge? We don't need more weight on the ship. It's impractical, so put it out of your mind."

Oh. When you thought it through, it actually didn't make much sense at all. But still, some of those issues could be overcome. "But what if we-"

"Link, he already belongs to someone. Wild pigs don't run free on populated islands."

"I…" He had no argument for that – she was right, plain and simple. He looked down into the pig's eyes, which earned only a beady-eyed blink and a snort in return. With a sad sigh, he set the pig down, which immediately took off running down the road, squealing happily. He watched him run, trying not to feel distraught from a two-minute bond that was now irreversibly broken.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, and saw Tetra giving him a small apologetic smile. He nodded in return, turning and making their way back down the road.

"I didn't want to break up your fun," he heard her say, "but I just didn't want you getting ideas in your head."

He nodded and replied, "I know. I didn't really think through the details, but he seemed like so much fun."

She chuckled and nudged him with her elbow. "Maybe someday, huh?"

His eyes lit up. "Does that mean you'll consider getting one in the future?"

She blinked in surprise. "Wait, what? That's not what I meant."

"But he was so cute! Please, can we get one someday? Please, please, please, Tetra?"

"Link, that doesn't work on-"

"Pleeeeeease?"

"Link-"

"Pleeeeeeeeaaaaaaaa-"

"Goddesses, alright, fine!" she yelled, throwing her hands in the air. "I will consider it in the future, happy?"

"Yes!" He threw his arms around her in an excited hug. "You're the best, thank you!"

She sighed, closing her eyes and rubbing the bridge of her nose. "Yeah, whatever. You're welcome, you nightmare of a child."

He only beamed in response.
Fear

Another day, another way to kill time while they sailed to their next destination. While sparring was becoming a popular workout for her and Link, they needed a break every now and then to rest their aching bodies. Today, they'd opted for just enjoying the breeze and making small talk while perched at the bow. It was a rather lazy day, with minimal effort required to sail – Nudge was at the wheel while Mako had lookout duty, with everyone else taking it easy below. Since their turn in the work rotation was most of a day away, they were planted on the deck overlooking the ocean, swapping stories of their respective travels.

"So we booked it like hell out of the cave, pretty sure Niko had just abandoned the satchel at that point, and we're running as hard as we can through the jungle, right?" she explained with a flourish of her hands while Link nodded intently. "And we're hoping we're in the clear, and then all of a sudden, BOOM! The thing had rolled itself into a ball and just *bowled* its way through the cave entrance, there's giant chunks of rock falling everywhere." She paused and rolled back her sleeve to expose her shoulder. "That's where this mark came from. Bloody rock clipped me before I could get out of the way, almost destroyed my shoulder." Link made a face at the faded but still visible scar, and she smirked before rolling down the sleeve again.

"Anyway, it's raining rock, we're still a few seconds from the beach, and the lizard unfurls itself and starts breathing… Like, just an *insane* amount of fire. We're barely outrunning this stream of hot death, and all of a sudden, half the jungle is lit up." She shuddered a bit at the memory, the hot sun on her skin an accurate reminder of the suffocating heat. "We finally make it to the beach, just flat-out ignore the dinghy, and just start swimming into open water. Like, just trying like hell to get away from this thing. And I look back after a minute, and freaking Senza is swimming *while* the dinghy's rope is in his mouth, like, he's pulling it along with him while he swims even though it's slowing him way down. Bravest idiot I know," she sighed fondly.

"So at that point we all just clamber into the boat, start paddling for the ship, and just thank the Goddesses none of us actually died. That giant lizard stopped chasing us once we got to the water. Didn't seem to like it for some reason, just stopped on the beach, trying to spit fireballs at us. We get to the ship, hit the nearest civilized island, and just hole up there for a couple days." A strand of hair fell in her face, and she pushed it away without thinking. "Next day, we're eating in a market, and some guy sees we're travellers and warns us to stay away from the jungle island, because it's rumoured that some giant thing called King Dodongo lives down in the caves." She rolled her eyes while Link howled with laughter. "Like, yeah, thanks bud. Coulda used that warning a couple days ago."

Link wiped a tear from his eye, still chuckling. "I mean, when you hear 'caverns with lots of rumoured dead explorers' and decide to go pillage their bodies, don't you spare a thought for why they were all dead in the first place?"

She shrugged. "Yeah, *now* I do."

Link laughed again, clutching at his aching sides. "How scared were you?"

She paused, thinking back to that day that went so wrong so quickly. "Honestly, I don't think I was all that scared. I was way too hyped up on adrenaline and focusing on trying to outrun that thing to feel fear, y'know?"

Link nodded in understanding. "Yeah, I know that feeling. Felt it at least once a week when I was questing. Bad memories, usually."
She chuckled and nudged him with her elbow. "Alright, your turn. Scariest thing you've seen?"

"Well, there was that giant bird that kidnapped you and Aryll, that was pretty traumatizing," he said with a wink, and Tetra rolled her eyes with a smile. "But apart from that, the scariest was probably the first time I came across a Big Octo."

She felt a pang in her chest, and she took a deep breath to calm herself down. Link didn't notice, instead continuing to talk. "Like, clouds just came out of nowhere, rain pounding down all of a sudden. And then it just emerges from the ocean, and it's huge. I was so panicked the first time I almost fell out of my boat."

Images flash through her mind, and she tries to shut them out to no avail. Link continues, "It's gigantic, and I have no idea what to do, and I'm stuck in the middle of the ocean, and I can't go anywhere because it's causing a whirlpool and pulling me in. So I panic, start shooting arrows blindly, but nothing happens. It takes a swipe at me, knocks me out of the boat. The current's so strong I almost get pulled under, and I have to swim as hard as I can to get back up. And I can barely pull myself back into my boat before it's splashing waves at me, rocking me around. I can't think of what to do, so I pull out my cannon and just start shooting every inch of it I can to try and distract it or something. I'm hoping anything will change so I can get out of there."

He took a deep breath, and she did the same, trying to calm her nerves. "Turns out I catch it in its eye, and it doesn't like that. So I shoot every eye I can find, and eventually it gives up and retreats. And the storm dissipates, and I'm left lying there on my back, staring up at the sunny sky, wondering what just happened, and how quickly my life could've ended right there."

He sighed, rubbing a hand across his face. "Thankfully, that first time was right after I'd gotten your bombs. If I hadn't had them, I'd probably be dead." He laughed a bit at the dark thought before continuing. "After learning that eye trick, they became easier to deal with when I found them. I never felt comfortable fighting them though, or even in control. There was always an underlying panic that this time I was going to die. It was just going to swat me down into the current, or swallow me whole, and that would be it." He shook his head. "You ever see one of those things?"

Link looked at her, and seemed to finally take notice of her discomfort. "Tetra, are you okay? You look sick all of the sudden."


"Do you remember back when we first met, and I told you about why I don't like swimming?" she asked, and he nodded.

"Yeah, because you fell overboard during a storm when you were little, right?"

She exhaled with a nod, taking her time before answering. "Yeah, well… That storm was because of an Octo. My mother jumped in after me, and everyone thought we were both goners. I mean, that thing was right there. I don't know how she managed to grab both me and a lifeline in that mess of water, but she saved me. That was the only time I've ever seen an Octo, and I would love to never see one again. It was just…" She took another deep breath. "Horrifying."

Link wrapped an arm around her shoulders and gave a gentle squeeze. "Godesses, I'm sorry. I wouldn't have talked about it if I'd known."

"No, it's okay," she shook her head. "You didn't know, and I can't just live pretending it didn't happen. It's just a childhood fear, nothing huge. I just don't like remembering it."
She took a deep breath to calm herself before surveying the ocean. "Maybe that's enough stories for a bit. I want to know where we are."

She called up to Mako for a location update, and it was a moment before he answered, "Nearing the Seven-Star Isles, Miss!"

She nodded contently, while Link frowned and stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Oh, that's funny," he murmured. "I'm almost positive this was where I first crossed a Big Octo. The one I don't think I actually… killed…"

He trailed off, and they looked at each other quickly. She was on her feet in an instant, relaying orders to Nudge.

"Turn around, Nudge! Move us! Get us the hell away from that island!" she screamed, while Nudge only stared back in frightened confusion.

"Miss, what's happened? Why do we need to move?"

"Tetra!" Link called, and she spun around to find him staring out at a swirling mass of open water. "I think we might be in trouble!"

"Shit, shit! She ran for the gong at the bow, gripping the mallet tightly and beating a few quick strikes from the metal. "All hands on deck!" she yelled as loudly as she could while dark clouds began to settle. "Mayday! Mayday!"

"Miss Tetra! We're caught in a current!" Nudge shouted, and she swore under her breath. Not now. Not again.

"Get us out of it!" she yelled back before turning to Link. "Link, warp us out of here!"

"I can't!" he shouted back as a sheet of rain began to fall, thunder crashing in the sky. "My tornado was barely strong enough to lift my boat from the current! No way it'll work on this ship!"

"Son of a bitch, what do I do?" she whispered as the hold door swung open. The other pirates spilled out and assessed the situation before quickly taking up positions to secure the sails as they were battered against the increasingly strong winds.

"Tetra!" Link called, and she struggled to find him – he was halfway up a ratline, trying to help Gonzo fold a sail. "Tetra, what should we do?"

"What should I do?" she repeated helplessly. *Damn it, what did Mum do? How did she get us out of this?*

"HOY!" Mako shouted over the thunder. "Unknown off the port side!"

Everyone's heads snapped to the water, where the whirlpool was becoming stronger. A mass appeared beneath the waves, and she ground her teeth anxiously.

"Grab hold!" she shouted. "Senza, Niko, Zuko, get on the cannons! We're in-" She was cut off as a column of water erupted from the whirlpool. With a loud screech, the Octo surfaced before them.

Her orders died in her throat. She couldn't move. The thing was even bigger than she remembered. Eyes everywhere – bright, yellow, piercing, so many eyes. All focused on them. On her.

It screeched again, throwing up more waves, and she shivered but could not bring herself to move. It
was happening again. What could she do? She wasn't strong enough for this. She was going to die. Her mother wasn't here to save her this time. She was going to die.

Over the sound of the thunder, she thought she heard her name. Was someone calling her? How could they focus on her when that beast was right there? It was huge. It was angry. It was going to take them.

A loud boom shook her from her mind's trap, and she blinked as a bomb shot through the air and collided with the Octo. Another boom soon followed, with another bomb striking the monster. Before she could process what was happening, Link dropped from above and grabbed her hand.

"Tetra! C'mon, we have to move!" he yelled, and she dumbly followed, unable to focus on anything else. They made their way up to the stern where Nudge was struggling with the wheel, abandoning the notion of escaping the current and simply trying to keep them from capsizing under the elements. Link rushed to help stabilize him, and she flinched as the Octo screeched as another bomb found its mark. She noticed the smoking remainder of an eye and silently praised her men as Link returned to her side, grabbing her hand tightly to comfort her.

She surveyed the scene before her: Nudge, desperately fighting to keep the ship steady against the raging current; Gonzo, still trying to finish securing mainsails while being battered by the wind and waves; Mako, up in the crow's nest and trying his hardest not to fall, tying down the topsails to the yard; Senza, Zuko and Niko, each manning a cannon below deck and firing relentlessly at the beast; Link, gripping her hand tightly while focusing an anxious but steely gaze on their opponent. Everyone was scared out of their minds, yet they had a job to do. She had to be too.

"Forgot the bastard was twelve-eyed," Link said beside her. "This is going to take some work to get out of." A thought sprang to his head as he said this, and he took off below deck, leaving her standing with Nudge, wishing she could help her men. They were all risking their lives to get everyone out safely, and she had frozen like a child. This wasn't going to happen again. She was going to fight this time, and come out on top. She didn't know how her mother had triumphed, but they'd find their own way. And damn it, she was going to lead them like she was supposed to.

Link returned a moment later, almost being knocked overboard by another wave striking the ship, and handed her a bow with a quiver full of arrows. He held up his own set and gave her a grim smile. "Thought we could help the boys," he said, and she nodded with a smile of her own. He ran to the bow, already nocking an arrow, while she took up her place beside Nudge and followed suit.

Out of the corner of her eye she noticed Mako and Gonzo use the Octo's distraction to make their way down the mast, Mako heading below deck to help the others while Gonzo ran to the bow with Link to man the catapult. Perfect – no worry of them falling now.

She drew back and launched an arrow. Amazingly, it found its mark through the wind and rain, and the beast recoiled slightly, its eye quivering. She shot again, and saw Link's own arrow meet the same eye with hers. The Octo shook as the eye began to bleed, and she cheered. Glancing across the ship, she saw that Gonzo had the catapult aimed and was beginning to lob rocks at the Octo, which was proving to be quite effective against the squishy body.

The cannons continued to fire, the frequency much faster with the additional help down below, and she realized they were making progress – the Octo was beginning to writhe in pain under the constant barrage of bombs. She continued to fire, hers and Link's arrows helping to provide a distraction from the bigger weapons, while the Octo continued to throw waves at them.

"Miss!" Nudge shouted from behind her. "Tentacle!"
She noticed the arm reaching back to swing at them, and quickly shot an arrow at the tip. It buried itself deep into the tentacle, and she succeeded in temporarily halting the attack. She noticed Gonzo calling out a similar attack to Link, who answered in turn.

The fight continued on, with Nudge trying to keep them a respectable distance from the creature while they unloaded everything they had on their foe. The crashing rain was streaming down her face, and she quickly tried to wipe her eyes clear of the water. Gonzo launched a rock that seemed to daze the Octo – the others below took the chance to get a few clean shots at the exposed eyes. She and Link continued to shoot down the tentacles that tried to reach for them, until the Octo suddenly began to thrash in the water. With a few flails, it screeched a final time before collapsing back into the water and sinking from sight.

She released a breath she didn't realize she was holding and glanced up at the sky, where the storm was already beginning to dissipate.

"Miss Tetra, the current's weakening! We can escape the whirlpool!" Nudge called to her.

"Thank the Goddesses," she mumbled, rubbing her face. "Get us away from here."

"We're right turned around, Miss," he replied. "I'm not sure what direction we're in."

"We'll figure it out later, Nudge. Just… Let's get out of this water."

Nudge called his response and directed the ship away from the Isles. She made her way down to the deck where everyone else had emerged from below, celebrating their victory. Rather than join them, she stepped off to the side and collapsed against the railing, only now realizing just how exhausted she felt. She noticed Link join her a moment later, taking the bow from her hand and setting it aside with his own.

They said nothing, simply staring out at the water that was now mercifully calm. She imagined he was as tired as she was, though perhaps not quite as emotionally taxed. As though reading her thoughts, he spoke, "So, I guess that's one way to tackle a fear."

She snorted, despite herself. "Yeah, I suppose. Sorry I froze up. I was…"

Link pulled her into a side hug and shook his head. "Don't apologize. I know how scary it is."

She hummed in agreement and let her head fall onto his shoulder. Wow, was she tired. Maybe she should just drop anchor somewhere and let everyone rest after that. Goddesses know they’d earned it. They were quiet for another moment before Link added, "Besides, that thing seemed a lot pissier than the last time I fought it."

Despite everything that had just happened, she felt a small smile tug at her lips. "What, you mean when you fight a terrifying sea beast and aren't sure if it's dead, you don't spare a thought for avoiding that pocket of water until you can deal with it for sure?"

They locked eyes before Link snorted in laughter. "Yeah, I guess now I do."

They laughed together while gazing out at the gently lapping water, still in each other's embrace. As she studied the waves, she felt a pressure in her mind disappear, an uncertainty she felt with the ocean finally vanish. For the first time in years, she felt at peace.
Rest

The fatigue was overpowering, sleep attempting to claim his body as he flicked his eyes open to keep from passing out. Dimly, he was aware of a foot resting against his own; likely Tetra's, but he couldn't say for sure. The room was eerily quiet, save for the slow breaths of several sleeping bodies scattered across the floor, strewn about without a care for comfort. Everyone had simply retreated below deck to collapse in what felt like a small safe place to lower their guard. Judging from the lack of shuffling or whispering, it hadn't taken long for the overextended tiredness to take everyone else into a dreamless oblivion. For reasons that he was too foggy to tell, though, he wouldn't let himself rest.

Yesterday, everything had been normal – routine observation in local waters, following up on rumours of vicious marauders ransacking the nearby towns. It had been several hours of nothing, and then they had simply shown up, seemingly out of nowhere. But they hadn't just appeared – they'd come out firing, catching everyone off-guard. They had tried to get the ship moving as quickly as they could, but it had taken a hit early on, catching a bomb near the rudder and throwing off the steering. They hadn't had much choice after that; ship battles were a long shot with hindered control. So they'd just kept sailing, partly to try and stay out of their foes' firing range, and partly to try and lure the marauders away from the area. The latter had worked, at least – the enemy had been all too eager to chase the damaged ship. But then began an arduous chase through the ocean, the pirates trying at every angle to weave between islands for cover as well as to try and angle a shot at their pursuers. But the enemy knew they were struggling and oftentimes kept their distance, strafing just out of firing range for either ship but cutting off their path and forcing them to recalculate a retreat.

And so it had gone for the rest of the day, and indeed all through the night. The crew worked constantly, rotating positions on steering, lookout and cannons so that no one was stuck on any one position for too long. By daybreak the following morning Tetra's frustration was boiling over, and with the lack of rest her calls became increasingly drastic. The pursuit had culminated in her most reckless decision to drop anchor while at full speed to force a sharp turn against the marauders coming up on their side. In another time, it may have proven successful. However, with their damaged rudder already strained from over a day of full-speed sailing and weaving turns, the pressure proved too great and it gave out completely, crippling the wheel column and leaving them without any way to control their movement.

Miraculously, the maneuver had forced their foes to take evasive action, swinging their own ship out of the way and dropping their anchor to cut their speed. As it was, both ships were dead in the water, and the marauders took their chance to board. Swinging over, they bore down on the crew in a vicious assault, almost outnumbering the pirates two to one. Luck continued to shine on them, however; while they were exhausted from the relentless chase, so too were their attackers. They fought sluggishly, unable to rally themselves into any sort of strategy. The pirates, on the other hand, were on the defensive. They were fighting simply to stay alive, instinct overruling any sort of coherent thought of the staggering odds against them. As well as the added benefit that their leader was pissed.

Tetra had met the charge head-on, blades drawn and any evidence of fatigue gone from her body. She moved like the wind, cutting down a marauder before he'd even gotten to his feet. He and the pirates had been right behind her, fighting with all their might to keep the marauders from establishing a foothold on their deck. Even so, it was a struggle – they were outnumbered, and it bad shape, seemingly ready to collapse at any moment. With no time to prepare, the winds still tore at the sails, pulling desperately against the anchor and forcing the ship to lurch, constantly throwing everyone off-balance. And yet the morale of their captain had pushed through the fatigue and forced
them to focus, to fight on and claim some insane victory.

Tetra, somehow still able to strategize, had rallied them to one side of the deck, clumping their team together and forcing the marauders to come in all from one front. It had been easy then to focus their attack, dropping one enemy after another whenever an opening presented itself in their assault. He had realized at some point that there had been no moral struggle then, no impulse to avoid taking a life. The marauders were vicious, pursuing to wear them down and pressing an attack to wipe them out. It was a matter of kill or be killed; there was no middle ground in that battle.

And then, after Goddesses knows how long of fighting, they realized it was over. The few remaining marauders had realized the tide had somehow turned and fled, simply jumping ship to try and return to their own. Senza and Gonzo had retreated below deck, angling the cannons into position and laying down hellfire of bombs against the vessel. The marauders had attempted to flee, but there had simply been no time – the assault tore through the ship, and it had barely escaped beyond firing range before it gave out and disappeared below the waves.

When it was over, no one had spoken a word. As if sharing a thought, the sails were quickly furled before everyone descended into the hold and collapsed onto the floor. The dim candlelight and warm air proved to be too much to handle after the exertion, and everyone had passed out within moments. Everyone except for him, as he continued to stare at the swinging candle overhead.

The marauders were all dead. The towns were safe from their pillaging. And yet their ship had taken more than its fair share of damage, critical points wrecked that would take weeks to repair. For now, they were dead in the water, simply floating in place. How they would get to port, he had no idea. But that shouldn't matter right now. Somehow, they'd all come out alive, with only a few injuries that would have to be treated when they all awoke. And yet he could tell that his own weariness ran deeper than most.

The danger, the fighting, the times when they barely came out alive from certain failure… It was all starting to get to him. He and Tetra had once confided that this life might not be the one they stick to forever, but he'd never imagined he would want to escape it while still so young. This bout should have been the end of them. They had only survived because their luck had continued to favour them, chance after chance. They couldn't keep banking on that to stay alive, though. Sooner or later, the luck ran out. What would happen then, no one could say. But he was willing to bet that it would be nothing good.

He realized his eyes had flickered shut again, and this time didn't try to fight it. He needed sleep. His thoughts were betraying him because of the exhaustion. When he awoke, he'd feel better. Once he was rested, he could make a better assessment about everything. He felt a sigh escape his lips as he faded from consciousness. So he hoped, at least. He would hate to be wrong, for it to be the death of him.
Fashion

Chapter Notes

FYI, this chapter is a straight continuation of the last one.

Through the careful use of the Wind Waker's warp cyclone and wind manipulation, Link had managed to guide the damaged ship to a bustling town that could handle the extensive repairs. They had miraculously managed to dock without any further incident, and a shipping yard crew had set to work looking over the damage and assessing the extent of the repairs needed. The good news had been that the rudder and steering column were fixable – the bad news was that it would likely take a couple of weeks and that, for the time being, they were stuck.

That news had come about four hours ago and Tetra was already at her wit's end. Pacing back and forth on the ship's deck while workers scuttled about around her, she fought not to pull out her hair out of sheer boredom. Typically she only stopped at land when needed, and usually only for as long as was required. To be honest, she had never been stuck this long in one place before – unless that dreary basement of that castle could count. While this island was big enough, being roughly the size of Windfall, it still wasn't enough to sate her adventurous spirit. She couldn't leave for two weeks and she was already suffering after a few hours; how in the Goddesses' name was she going to get through this?

Well, Link grew up on an island. He would surely have some ideas on what they could do while they were here. She'd ask him what he used to do for fun, and maybe that could appease her for a while. Although now that she thought about it, she hadn't noticed him throughout her endless pacing. The rest of her crew were working rotating shifts assisting with repairs, while taking in the island on their down time. Perhaps he'd gone out as well?

She approached Gonzo who was busy removing the half-crumpled steering column. "Gonzo, have you seen Link?"

The big man gestured toward the town. "Think he went for a walk, Miss. Saw him leave a little while ago."

She snorted. "Maybe he's too bored for this place too."

Nevertheless, she made her way down the gangplank and headed into town. As she looked around, she figured the boy wouldn't be too hard to spot. This wasn't a particularly… vibrant island. All of the townsfolk wore bland, muted colours, sticking to basic, functional clothing. There was nothing wrong with functionality in her eyes, but it didn't hurt to splash some colour into an outfit – it wasn't as if dyeing was all that difficult. She'd find Link no time, imagining how much his green tunic would stand out among-

Oh. She saw him all right, examining something at a stall, but he wasn't standing out quite the way she'd been expecting. His yellow-blond hair was bright enough, but his tunic was… not there. Instead he was wearing a darker blue shirt with waves and a crayfish on the front, accompanied by orange-brown pants and grey shoes. His usual hat was also missing, letting his hair blow gently in the breeze. He looks… Wow.
He seemed to take notice of her standing in the middle of the road staring at him and wandered over. She tried to shake herself out of her stupor, but it was difficult. Damn, he looked nice.

"I wasn't sure you'd actually leave your poor baby," she heard him say, and forced herself to vocalize a response.

"She'll be fine. It's just the 'up to two weeks' part I'm not really a fan of," she replied, trying to keep her voice level. She couldn't let on that she'd been way distracted by him. "Besides, I was going crazy with boredom."

Link laughed softly. "I'm sorry, I should've asked if you wanted to come. You seemed distracted though. I thought it'd be best not to interrupt your thoughts."

She snorted. "Wasn't thinking, that's for sure. What were you doing?"

"Just taking a look around," he replied as they began to walk down the street. "Figured I might as well familiarize myself with the town, since we're going to be here for a few days. Plus it was a good way to clear my head after all the stuff that happened," he added with a sigh as he slowly ran his fingers through his hair.

The action was noticed by Tetra, who bit her lip. Stop looking so good.

Shaking her head, she instead said, "Yeah, I get that. So you thought you'd distract yourself with some shopping?"

Link looked at her confused for a moment before realizing she was referring to his clothes. He shook his head with a smile.

"No, I've always had these. Just kind of forgot about them, that's all. I was moving my trunk out of the way so those guys could work, and I remembered they were in there. Thought I'd wear them out today," he explained. "Thought this place could use a bit of style," he added under his breath, with a sideways glance at some nearby villagers.

She chuckled. "I was thinking the same thing before I found you," she admitted, and they shared a laugh. "I just can't believe you've had that for over a year and never wore it."

He scratched the back of his head sheepishly. "I didn't realize you'd never seen it before. Although I guess the one day I couldn't wear it was the day I had to wear the ceremonial outfit of the ancient legend. And of course that just had to be the day I met you and got involved in a sweeping adventure. And then, y'know, just kept wearing the outfit I'd initially hated," he explained with a shrug, and she laughed again.

"Well, I almost didn't recognize you looking like that. I didn't realize an island boy could know anything about fashion," she answered with a wink. Link mock-gasped and placed a hand on his hip.

"Excuse me, I was the leading authority of fashion on Outset. The women used to have me put outfits together for them," he retorted with a playful smirk. "And, I mean, one of us has to look good."

She rolled her eyes and reached up to her hair, removing each hidden pin until her golden locks fell over her shoulders. She brushed it out with her fingers before throwing her bangs to the side. Link watched her in silent amusement until she was satisfied.

She shot him a devious smile from under the hair framing her face. "If I tried, I could outpretty you any day, hero."

He chuckled as they resumed walking. "Sounds like a challenge. But you're probably right. You
always look great, even when you just put your hair up and sport your colourful pirate outfit. You're always fashionable."

She willed herself not to be embarrassed by the compliment, instead hitting his arm with her elbow. "Yeah, well… You look really nice like that. For real," she said softly, and he grinned at her before taking her arm in his and strolling down the street.

"C'mon, let's teach this island about style while we're stuck here. These people are too set in their ways with this blandness," he gestured around exaggeratedly.

"Sounds like that could take a few days," she replied with a smirk. "I'm in."
"I'm out," Tetra called, tossing her cards onto the table and standing. She'd been playing for a couple hours now, and her back was starting to get sore from the chair. There was no way she could deal with another game.

"Should we deal you in next round, Miss?" Nudge asked, grabbing the cards from Senza before the bearded man could peek at their captain's discarded hand. She shook her head and stretched her arms above her.

"Nah, I think I'm done for the night. I'm gonna get some air, then I think I'll turn in." She cast a glance at her small pile of poker chips and sighed. "Besides, I don't know how much longer I'd last. Unless Zuko's stealing my chips when I'm not looking, I just haven't been playing all that well tonight."

"Wouldn't dream of it, Miss," Zuko mumbled quietly, not taking his eyes from his cards. Beside him, Gonzo's attention suddenly snapped to his own dwindling pile of chips, before circling back to Zuko's rather large pile.

"Wait a minute…" Rising from his chair, the big man grabbed Zuko by the shoulders and hauled him out of his own seat. Before the smaller man could protest, an avalanche of chips cascaded from his lap and onto the floor.

"You rat bastard! You've been stealing my chips! No wonder I can't get ahead!" Gonzo yelled, dropping his crewmate to the floor with a thud.

"Right, because you've never cheated?" Niko called from across the table. "Remember last time, with the two aces we found up your sleeve? From a different deck?"

"This is different!" Gonzo roared as Tetra casually made her way to the door. "He's been taking from my pile! Probably every game!"

"You all cheat!" Mako screamed, pointing an accusatory finger around the room and waving a poker rulebook in his other hand. "It's impossible to win when all of you are exploiting the rules! The rulebook says-"

Senza grabbed the book from Mako, and everyone watched as a few cards tumbled out from the pages.

Mako simply stared at the cards now littering the floor. "…Oops."

Tetra closed the cabin's door behind her just as the noise grew to physical-violence levels. Another sigh escaped her lips as she ran her hands through the loose hair Link had convinced her to wear
down for a while. Half of their poker nights erupted into an all-out brawl, so this wasn't too surprising. So long as no one ended up too badly hurt, she didn't care. She just wanted everyone fresh enough to continue work on the ship's repairs, and stupidly-gained injuries would only earn her wrath.

Climbing up onto the deck, she turned her gaze to the sun that was just peeking out over the horizon. It was still a little early, but she wanted to wind down a bit before bed. Besides, Link had said he was going for a walk before they'd started playing, and she hadn't seen or heard from him since. Briefly, she wondered if he'd found some cave to explore before noticing him perched at the bow, hunched over something in his lap with a lantern glowing faintly beside him.

Making her way over and perching on the rail beside him, she turned her eyes to the faint stars appearing above. "How was your walk?"

"Good," his voice replied softly. "Chatted with a few people, had some tea, visited a couple stalls."

"Oh, yeah?" she replied, tracing her gaze across familiar constellations. "Find anything interesting?"

He was quiet for a moment before answering. Her ears caught a faint scratching sound. "Some nice parchment. Gave me an idea."

Her attention turned down to him, watching him scribble out what looked to be a lot of text with a rather fluffy quill. "What, a novel? A grand biography of your heroic endeavors thus far?"

He hummed in amusement. "Just writing a letter back home, letting Grandma and Aryll know what we've been up to the last couple months. Although that novel isn't a bad idea."

She rolled her eyes with a smirk tugging at her lips. He still hadn't changed back into his tunic, instead opting for his 'fashionable' ensemble – the look that could so easily render her a distracted mess. She looked back at the nearby town before she lost herself in him like she had the other day.

"I'm so bored of this place," she said under her breath, voicing the first thing that popped into her head. Beside her, Link let out a chuckle. He'd heard.

"Tetra, we've been here, like, three days. You need to find something to do."

"I have! I help work on my poor, broken ship! Remember, the reason we're stuck here?" she replied with a wave to the hole where the steering column should have been, a mere few feet away.

"Right," Link said slowly, "but that can only go so quickly. And besides, the shipyard's crew can handle most of the work. There isn't a whole lot for you to personally help with."

She huffed and crossed her arms. He was totally right, of course, but she wasn't about to admit it.

Continuing his thought, Link asked, "What were you doing tonight while I was out?"

"Poker night."

"Ah." Silence hung between them for a moment as he continued to write. "Good night or bad night?"

"Bad. Fight started right after I quit."

"That sucks. Who was cheating tonight?"

She sighed. "Probably all of them, to be honest. I don't know why they bother. They're all onto each
other at this point."

Link chuckled to himself while he finished a line in his letter. With a quick signature, he folded the papers and stuffed them into an embroidered envelope. "Did you know they were cheating?"

She snorted as she watched him work. "Are you kidding? Just because Gonzo doesn't keep an eye on his pile, or Niko doesn't know how to keep his cards to himself, or no one knows how to sneakily hide their secret cards, doesn't mean I don't pay attention."

Link shook his head in amusement as he finished signing the envelope. "You ever cheated?"

"Not in cards. What fun would that be? You should see the looks on their faces at the end of the night when you were the only one playing fairly and end up with all the chips."

"Of course." Finally finished, he set aside his supplies to rise and lean against the rail beside her. "So what do you cheat at? Fighting, obviously."

She scoffed. "I am a clean fighter! Probably the cleanest fighter on the ocean! Why ever would you think otherwise?"

He glanced at her out of the corner of his eye. "Tetra, you used to *brag* about being a dirty fighter when we met. Said it was the mark of a pirate. *Stealing, cheating, and lying!* It was basically your credo."

Oh, right. Stupid past-Tetra. "Maybe I was lying back then?" she said with a shrug and a wink. Link only sighed and rubbed his face.

"That's self-defeating logic. Only affirms you really a pirate," he retorted through his hands.

"Ooh, look at Mr. Fancy Words! You buy a dictionary, too?" she smirked, nudging an elbow against his ribs. Even in the dwindling light, she could see his face heat up.

"Shut up," he said with a smile, running a hand through his hair. It was a nervous tic of his, she had quickly come to notice with his lack of a hat. She bit her lip and glanced away, staring out at the open sea.

A breeze blew through them, tossing their hair and fluttering the ship's furled sails. The smell of the salty sea drifted up her nostrils, calling her to follow its lead. Her body craved the adrenaline of adventure, the excited tightness that took hold of her stomach when she was working on their most recent quest, and she let out a heavy sigh.

"I just want to be back out there," she mumbled, drooping her head to the water. "I feel so useless stuck on an island."

She felt something touch her, and realized he was leaning his shoulder against hers. "I know," he replied softly. "We'll be gone before you know it. Just be a bit more patient, okay?"

She looked at him for a moment, meeting his gaze and almost sinking into his emerald eyes. He held the gaze and appeared to look straight into her thoughts, and she felt the tension in herself begin to recede before she nodded and leaned into his touch. "Okay."

He smiled, and they remained there together until long after the sun had slipped below the horizon.
She was about ten minutes into her session of drumming her fingers on her desk when she groaned and slammed her head down onto the wood, too bored to continue even the most meaningless of things. Day six of Stranded Island Adventure was wrapping up, and her ship was still a long ways away from being fixed. Apparently the shipyard's chief carpenter was away, and she was the only one with the skills to create a new rudder for the pirates. Which meant progress had slowed to a halt the last couple days while everyone awaited the carpenter's return.

Which only served to stoke the captain's frustration. It was hard enough when she couldn't help the workers repair her ship faster, but now no one was working on it. If this continued for much longer, she was going to lose her mind. At the very least, her crew was settling into a rhythm here, finding odd jobs to do to keep themselves busy. And a little extra income didn't hurt, given their recent lack of plundering.

And Link… How in the hell was he possibly staying so upbeat? Every day he was all smiles, ready to help out with whatever needed doing or finding ways to occupy himself. And here she was, holed up in her cabin and slumped over her desk, with what felt like a couple splinters nestled in her forehead. Was this what the fearless Captain Tetra had been reduced to? Exactly when had she lost her edge?

Picking herself up, she blew a wisp of hair out of her eyes before turning and heading for the door. It was maybe a half hour from sunset, which meant Link was probably back by now. Every single evening, he'd finish up whatever work he'd found for the day and wander into town, staying and keeping himself occupied until the sun almost disappeared. She was glad he wasn't going crazy like she was, but frankly, she was also crawling with anxiety. How could he possibly be finding things to do every day? Here she was, ready to throw herself off the crow's nest, and he was apparently living it up every chance he got. How did he do it?

A quick search of the ship turned up nothing, so she headed up to the deck. Another look around also came up short, and she frowned. If he wasn't here, then he had to still be out. She cast a glance at the setting sun and huffed. Fine, then. She'd just have to find him herself.

As she trekked off down the path to the town, she noticed the usual bustling stalls were all closed for the night, and the streets were rather quiet. If her objective was in the area, she'd find him in a heartbeat. Unfortunately, her disappointment continued as she was unable to locate him. She circled the main street a couple times, peeking in taverns and shops, but came up with nothing.

"This island isn't that big. Where could he be?" she muttered as she wandered down a road for perhaps the fourth time until something caught her attention. Her ears perked as she stopped, listening intently. Over the gentle breeze blowing through the trees, she could make out the faintest sound, something that definitely wasn't natural. Certainly artificial, yet pleasant all the same. Music?

Surprised, she tried to follow the source in her mind and began walking in a wide arc, trying to pin down the location. It didn't seem to be coming from the town, but away from it. Down a beaten dirt
path that led to the ocean. *The beach?* she wondered as she began to follow.

Picking her way through overgrown weeds and gnarled roots, she stumbled out onto sand and took in her surroundings. An occasional palm tree dotted the beachline, with a collection of small bushes scattered around. Waves gently lapped the shore, and she briefly felt a sense of peace at the familiar sound washing over her. Right until a chorus of notes interrupted the rhythmic sea, and she turned to follow the noise.

*Ahh*, there he was. Sitting against a tree, sprawled out on the sand, and strumming an instrument in his hands. Well, that answered two questions. Too bad for them, a third was now nagging in her throat even louder.

Making her way closer, she could see his eyes were closed, a sweet smile plastered on his face as he listened to the harmony stemming from his fingers. He seemed completely unaware that she was standing over him, and that gave her a wicked idea. After a moment's consideration, though, she brushed it aside, unable to bring herself to destroy his tranquil state. So instead she slowly sank into the sand and took up a spot beside him.

"Were you planning on coming back tonight?" she asked with a cocked eyebrow, and she caught him flinch slightly at the sound of her voice. Eyes opening a crack, he glanced at her before releasing the tension in his shoulders and closing his eyes again.

"Of course. Was just going to hang out here until sundown. It's really relaxing – reminds me of home."

"Mm," she hummed, glancing at the fading sun. "Well, I hate to burst your bubble, but it is sundown. Ten more minutes and you'll be playing in the dark."

His eyes shot open and he sat up, taking in the sight of the setting sun before exhaling loudly. "Oh. Guess I didn't realize how late it had gotten," he said with a sheepish look to her. "Wow, I've been here for hours."

"Must feel nice," she replied dryly. "How can you just sit on a beach for hours and be okay with that? Hell, how are you able to just keep busy every day? Doesn't being stuck here bother you at all?"

He shrugged, settling back down against the tree. "Not really. I grew up on an island, remember? Keeping busy every day is just something I got good at. Frankly, a week here is nothing."

She stared at him a moment before turning her attention to the rolling waves. "I guess. Maybe it's harder for me, even though I grew up on a boat. There was always something interesting going on at each port, or some brush I could wander through at any island we stopped near. Here, it's just… the same."

She caught him release a quiet sigh. "I told you, you just have to find something to keep yourself occupied, especially in the evenings," he answered. "I mean, have you actually bothered to look around the town? I'm not sure I've actually seen you leave the ship unless it was to find me."

He was right, she considered. Aside from prowling the shipyard to supervise the work, she hadn't gone into town more than a couple of times, and she certainly hadn't been looking around in wonder. But really, what difference did it make? She didn't need to buy anything other than food, and the guys happily took care of that for her. And the idea of sitting in a café shop and visiting just turned her stomach. If there wasn't a reason for the conversation, she had no desire to talk with strangers.
Link seemed to be following her thoughts, because he smiled to himself. "There doesn't have to be a purpose to what you're doing. Just something to kill a few hours. Otherwise you'll just end up in your room, drumming your fingers against your desk."

She felt her cheeks grow warm at the memory of her evening before finding him and quickly desired to change the subject. She looked down at the stringed instrument in his hands, and his gaze followed hers.

"Like it?" he asked, holding it up for her to see. "The lady said it was called a ukulele. Turns out they're super easy to play, and great for singing with."

It was interesting, and the polished wood was certainly pretty, but she focused on him and asked, "How many things have you bought now, anyway? First it was that huge box of candy, then the parchment for your letters, then that map that you immediately lost in the wind, then that second map to replace it, and then that weird skull ornament thing, and now this? Did I miss anything?"

"You missed the part where I sold the weird skull ornament thing," he answered with a shudder. "Thing was giving me the creeps. I swear the eyeholes would glow red at night."

She rolled her eyes and returned her attention to the instrument. "So why this?"

He shrugged. "Why not? It's music, and I love music. Besides, I've always wanted an instrument of my own. Weren't very common on Outset."

He began to strum a chord, and she followed his fingers as they danced around the strings. She thought of the instrument sitting in her cabin and asked, "You play it like a harp, then?"

"Yeah, sort of," he answered. "You brush your fingertip across it sometimes though, and you can hit all of the strings at once. But you can also pluck them like a harp. It's cool."

She hummed in agreement, following his movements and listening to the melody that rang out. "You've had some music training before, right? You mentioned it once, way back."

He nodded without looking away from his hands. "Mhmm, I had a few lessons when I was younger. Just some theory and a bit of practice on my neighbour's violin. I wasn't any good with the instrument, but I never really forgot the theory."

"I don't know anything about theory," she said bluntly, noticing the sun slip beneath the horizon and looking back at him. "I just know what sounds good."

He grinned at her and continued to play the same melody, his fingers finding their place with a certainty that seemed to match his own experiences on the island. She envied the feeling.

"You're pretty good," she told him after a moment, and he beamed.

"I've been practicing all afternoon," he replied, ceasing his playing. "I wanted to be decent before I asked you to…"

He trailed off, apparently realizing what he was saying. She stared at him expectantly, and he sighed before handing her the instrument to look at.

"To be honest," he started, and she caught him glance away from her, his voice becoming softer, "I was sort of thinking this was something we could do together. I know you've been struggling with being here, especially now that the repairs are going to take longer, so I figured we could maybe learn some duets. I thought playing might give you something to focus on while the ship gets fixed."
She blinked, surprised. Buying an instrument hadn't really phased her; he'd been rather frivolous with his money ever since they arrived. But he'd been out here doing this… for her? Learning something to take her mind off of her stress? Her eyes fell to her lap, her hands clenched around the neck of the ukulele. Come to think of it, he'd been doing that all along, hadn't he? Every evening he'd headed into town, he'd invited her along. But she always refused on the basis of having something to do, even though that was usually a complete lie. And every time he returned, he'd recount to her what he'd been up to while she listened with almost desperate attention. He could see that she'd been starving for a distraction, but was unable to work out how to get through her stubborn attitude. That was something she really needed to work on.

"I…" she began, unsure of what to say. "Yeah, I mean… That would be nice. Well, I haven't even touched my harp in weeks, so I don't know how good I'll be, but I suppose spending some productive time together wouldn't be the end of the world."

"Well, it was that or sparring," he answered with a wave of his hand. "But I wasn't sure if that would relax you or just wind you up more," he added, bumping his shoulder against her. She began to pout, and he laughed at the sight of her lip pointing at him, but relented when she realized he was probably right. Shaking her head in silent amusement, she stood and handed over the ukulele.

"C'mon, let's get back before it's too dark to see," she said, and he rose to join her. As they began to pick their way along the dark path, Link began to play a pattern on the instrument and singing the goofiest lyrics she'd ever heard. She snorted, despite herself, and he took it as encouragement to continue.

She sighed, exasperated, but couldn't fight the grin that forced its way onto her face. He was such a dork, but he couldn't help but make her smile. She doubted he realized just how much that really meant to her.
Relax

Chapter Notes

Continuing on with Stranded Island Adventure.

It was a true testament to her word – she had decided that she would start partaking in more social activities to pass the time, and that was exactly what she'd done. Granted, he knew that she'd likely rather be anywhere right now than a crowded tea shop, but still, the pirate was making an effort to relax and enjoy herself. Mostly for him, but he appreciated the sentiment.

All the same, he couldn't help but chuckle to himself as he watched Tetra – the girl was clearly anxious about being around so many people for the sole reason of just being there. She had an almost vice-like grip of her steaming cup, legs crossed closely under the table and a tightness in her jaw as she eyed the room for whatever imaginary threat he figured she was expecting to see. To be honest, she looked more like a fugitive trying too hard to avoid suspicion than a young woman just enjoying an evening out with her friend. But she hadn't thrown her drink at him and stormed out yet, so he had to count that as a success.

"I don't think I've ever seen you so nervous in public," he commented, drawing her focus to him. She glared and took what could only be described as an aggressive sip of her tea, letting the cup drop back to the table with more force than was necessary.

"I'm not nervous," she responded levelly, obviously trying not to snap at him. "I'm just… I don't like being around so many people. It's so clustered, and… I don't know, just noisy. I've always hated it."

"But you've been in crowds before. What's different?" he asked curiously. "I never noticed a problem in the Café Bar in Windfall, and we've spent lots of time there."

She snorted and took another sip of her tea. "Windfall's Café Bar was never this busy. That place can't fit more than a few people anyway. Not like here." She cringed as someone hollered a few tables away.

"Okay, but what about markets?" he countered. "Some towns we stop at are packed. Does that bother you?"

She considered for a moment before rocking her head back and forth. "I mean, it does, but I can kind of ignore it when I have something to focus on. If we need supplies or information, I just keep my mind on it and tune out everything around me."

He nodded as it fell into place. "But you've never really taken the time to just be around other people like this. Just sitting and enjoying yourself."

She shrugged. "I guess not? When would I?" Raking her fingers through her loose hair, she added, "Don't get me wrong, I like hanging around you. But we've never really been in packed places to hang out that much, y'know?"

He glanced away, chewing on the inside of his cheek. He'd been trying to help distract her, to give her something to do other than sitting on the ship like she had every night for over a week. And since
he stopped in here every other evening, dragging her here had seemed like a logical idea. But he hadn't realized she didn't do well with crowds. Honestly, he felt a pang of shame that he'd never noticed that about her before. What he'd first thought was a single-minded focus during shopping trips was actually a self-distracting tactic for avoiding discomfort. He had always thought he was rather good at observing peoples' habits and quirks, but it seemed he could stand to do a bit better in that regard. He resolved to do better in the future about catching uneasiness, especially for the girl sitting across from him.

Reaching across the table and covering her hand in his, he offered a faint smile. "Don't worry about everyone else," he said softly, rubbing his thumb across her knuckles and trying to convey comfort into her deep blue eyes. "They aren't even here right now. It's just you and me here, right? Focus on me."

She stared back for a moment, considering something, before giving his hand a soft squeeze. Her eyes softened, gaze turning down to her cup before coming back up to him. "It doesn't bother you?" she asked, gesturing around. "Being around all this noise?"

"Not really," he answered with a shake of his head. It was true; even though he'd been born and raised on an island with a population comparable to that of a pig pen, crowds never got to him. While he certainly enjoyed his alone time, he liked being around others, and talking with them, and laughing with them. There was so much emotion he could share with other people, especially those he was just meeting for the first time. And he seemed to make connections with others rather easily, which definitely helped. Although, as he considered this, he could also see why the opposite could be true for his emotionally closed-off, hard-ass-presenting companion.

Deciding to steer the conversation away from what was bothering her, he began playing with his almost-empty cup and said, "At least we'll be leaving soon. You should be happy about that, I bet."

She made a noise in her throat – which sounded oddly like a suppressed snort – and nodded. At long last, the repairs were back on track with the return of the shipyard's head carpenter. The crew figured it would be only a few days more until they were ready to leave. The news had left Tetra looking more positive than she'd been in weeks, to the delight of her crew.

"Finally," she mumbled, allowing a hint of a smile to pull at the corner of her mouth. "First place we're going after this is a friggin' hot spring. I need to soak out all of this stress."

"That sounds great, actually," he said with a grin. "I know Dragon Roost has springs, but I'm betting there are other volcanos around the ocean that you know of."

She shot him a wink and downed the rest of her drink. "It helps to be a well-travelled sailor. Yeah, I know of a couple that might be closer than Dragon Roost. No sense hoofing it all the way back there just for a bath."

He chuckled and finished his tea, glad to see how much calmer she'd become in the last little while. It seemed like she was capable of unwinding if he was there to guide her through unfamiliar situations. Well, that was an advantage if that was the case – it wasn't like he was planning on going anywhere. She was stuck with him whether she liked it or not. Although, he'd had an increasingly growing suspicion lately that she really didn't mind. Time would tell if his hunch was correct, though. Truthfully, he was indeed hoping it was.

Standing from his chair, he gestured to the door. "C'mon, I think I've tortured you enough by staying here. Let's head back."

She followed him out, darting around tables and patrons, and offered a shrug. "I dunno. It's actually
not so bad, once you pretend that no one else exists and that deafening noise is just your rowdy crew."

They reached the door, but he stopped before he could open it, glancing instead to the corner of the shop. "Well, don't look now, but I think your crew is contributing a lot of this noise."

Tetra whipped around to follow his gaze, taking notice of the large group of people gathered around a table. They could easily make out the faces of their crewmates, tossing dice across the wood and slapping down what looked to be a lot of rupees. The flushed faces and tell-tale swaying of several men and women, including most of her crew, was indicative of a certain liquid being passed around underneath the table. They shared a look before walking through the door.

"I… don't think that's tea," he muttered, stepping out into the cool evening air.

"I don't think that's legal," she said with a sigh, pinching the bridge of her nose. "Let's get out of here before something happens. The less I know, the better."

He rubbed his head as they began to head back to the boat. "So much for the relaxing evening. Maybe I shouldn't have pointed them out, sorry."

She waved her hand. "Whatever, it's not your fault. We'll just have to try again back on the ship. It's still early – up for some playing?"

He flashed her a wide smile and offered her his arm, which she took with an amused smirk as they made their way up the street. "I thought you'd never ask."
"C'mon, boys! Shift it! I'd like to leave while I'm still young!" Tetra barked from the dock to her crewmates, arms laden with crates and barrels full of food and drink. Link fought the urge to roll his eyes as he shifted the weight of the barrel in his grasp, making his careful way up the gangplank. It figured that she'd be in a hurry to depart, but the loading would go quicker if she physically helped, as opposed to her self-proclaimed mental assistance of shouting 'encouragements' to her men. He was cautious to keep those thoughts in his head, though – any hint of improving her leadership and the captain wouldn't hesitate to throw someone overboard with her own two hands. One only had to learn that lesson once, and it was indeed the hard way.

So he kept quiet and continued working with the others, noticing with a breath of relief that they were almost finished. Tetra had also taken note of this, following them up onto the ship and beginning to unfurl the sails for departure. You'd think she was in a hurry, he considered with fleeting amusement. Though of course he understood her attitude. They had finally been given the go-ahead to depart after a long twelve days on the island, of which he wasn't sure Tetra had even bothered to learn the name. The moment the shipyard crew had declared their work finished, Tetra had started giving commands to load supplies and begin preparations for their leave. Even though it was well past midday, it seemed clear she had no intention of waiting around another night.

Adjusting his cap, he made his way back down the gangplank. Since they were sea-bound once again, it made sense to change back into his tunic, even though he was going to miss being the most fashionable person around. He'd noticed Tetra pull her hair back into a bun at the soonest call of freedom, after wearing it down for most of their stay here. He supposed nothing could last forever, but it had been a nice change of pace for them. They needed to mix it up more often.

He approached the dock to grab the last of the supplies, and took notice of an old man standing near his crate. Recognizing the man as one he'd had a few pleasant conversations with during their time here, he offered a small wave as he approached.

"It's been so nice to have you young men helping out here," the old man said with a toothy smile, and Link waved his hand aside.

"It was nothing," he answered with a grin. "It was nice to have something to do while we were stuck. You know what they say about idle hands."

"Posh," the old man replied, "you were a tremendous help with our work. You have our deepest thanks."

He offered a smile, fighting the urge to rub his head. The accolades felt nice, but they were still embarrassing all the same. He didn't expect praise for working hard, and had a hard time understanding those who did.
"But I want to make sure you stay safe," the man continued in a serious tone, drawing his attention once more. "Tell me, you aren't planning on sailing north, are you?"

"Uh..." He was caught off-guard by the sudden shift in tone, and wasn't sure what to say. Before he could answer, though, Tetra had appeared by his side. And it seemed she'd overheard the question.

"We don't have a definite heading yet, but I do have some business to take care of up north," she answered, eyes narrowing. "Why? What's so important there?"

The old man shook his head. "No, no, you must stay clear of those waters! There have been awful rumours lately coming from the fishermen who travel that way! You mustn't go!"

Yeah, you've convinced her, he thought wryly. As expected, a quick glance caught her jaw tighten before she repeated, "What's happening there?"

"Oh, terrible things!" the old man said with a shudder, and he noticed that Tetra was fighting to contain her frustration. "There are pirates who've claimed those waters as their own! They'll attack anyone who approaches! We have townsfolk who have barely survived a run-in with their lot! And they were the lucky ones!"

Tetra studied the man flatly for a moment before offering a lazy wave. "Thanks, but we can handle pirates. We've dealt with their kind; it happens all the time."

She started making her way back up the gangplank, and he made to follow with the crate. But the old man shot past him with surprising speed and grabbed the girl's arm, stopping her dead.

"They aren't the worst of it!" he cried, shaking. "As bad as they are, there's a greater evil up that way! You mustn't go!"

Tetra's eyes met his for the briefest moment, and he knew they shared the same thought. But it was impossible; Ganondorf was gone, buried beneath the weight of an ocean in a long-forgotten kingdom.

"Uh-huh," she drawled, eyeing the man carefully. "And that greater evil would be...?"

The man swallowed, shaking worse than before. He seemed too nervous now to even speak. Tetra sighed. Her strained patience wouldn't last much longer. "Well?"

The man took a deep breath to calm himself, then mumbled, "Hee oushih."

He blinked, confused. "I'm sorry. A little louder?"

"The Ghost Ship!" the man cried, eyes filled with terror. "The scourge of the sea! A ship said to have no captain, no crew! But it'll snatch you up, and it'll suck the life right outta you!"

He found her eyes again, and they shared a long look before turning back to the old man. "Ah," Tetra said, nodding. "Well, I'm glad you warned us then. We sure don't want to go tangling with the Ghost Ship."

"Make sure you stay away from there!" the old man pleaded. She nodded and patted his shoulder.

"Don't worry, we will. First chance we get, south it is." She turned her back to the man and headed up to the ship. "Bye, now!"

After a moment he followed, shooting the man an apologetic smile as he passed. Once he'd secured
the rest of their supplies below deck, he returned to find Tetra next to Gonzo at the helm, ordering the men as the ship began to depart. Sighing, he made his way to her.

He massaged his eyes as he approached, already knowing what was going through the girl's head. "You want to find this ship."

"No," she said with a shake of her head. "Not just this ship. The pirates too, ideally. In fact, I'd say they're the priority."

He glanced back at the island that was beginning to shrink behind them. "I don't know. He seemed pretty scared. These might not be the usual pirates you're used to bumping into."

"Doesn't matter," she replied, shaking her head. "I want to see what all the fuss is about. Besides, we needed a heading. To be honest, I'm tapped out of ideas after being marooned for so long."

He chuckled. "What happened to your spa vacation? I thought that's what was driving you to get out of here?"

"Vacation can wait. If there's something weird going on, I want to investigate."

He exhaled slowly, choosing his words carefully. "Look, I know you want to see what's up, but this could actually be dangerous. Didn't you hear the old man? Some of their people didn't even come back. And if there is a Ghost Ship taking people -"

"Link, there is no ghostly ship sailing the ocean," she interjected. "Those pirates are the ones who made up that stupid story to scare people dumb enough to wander up that way."

"Right," he said, drawing out the word as he thought, "and what are we doing?"

She cracked her knuckles and smiled darkly. "We're the ones who are going to put them in their place."

He opened his mouth to reply, but the words died in his throat. Arguing the matter further would be pointless – and probably lead to a fight. Tetra was impossibly stubborn, and there was no letting go of an idea once she had one.

Maybe she was right, and it was nothing major. Or maybe they'd be heading right into a trap. Either way, they were heading straight for a new challenge, right as they were fresh off of the last one's repairs. He turned his gaze to the horizon and considered the outcomes. Whatever happened, he only hoped they made it out of this safely. Otherwise, everything would be mixed up for good.
Forgive

Chapter Notes

This one's right near the end of Phantom Hourglass, with all the final prep work before taking on the final boss.

The gentle creaking of the cabin wood and an occasional flare from the nearby furnace floated into his ears, but he tuned it out. Though the S.S. Linebeck, the technological steam-powered marvel that continued to impress him, was anchored at the moment, the ocean waves still rocked it about, movement that was sure to unbalance anyone unacquainted with sea travel. Thankfully, everyone present on the ship had spent large chunks of their lives on boats – or simply lacked legs and floated – and the rocking was mostly ignored. Hell, he'd just thrown down with a bloodthirsty pirate out for revenge on Linebeck, fighting hard without either of them batting an eye at the ship's unsteady terrain. There was something to be said about finding one's sea legs. Frankly, at this point in life he was more familiar and comfortable with ocean walking than he was with being on actual ground.

But all of that was irrelevant now, he mused as he sat upon a crate and stared into Tetra's lifeless eyes. Comfort had been with her, being by her side through thick and thin. More than the adventure, it was the little things between them he missed most: the way she'd shoot him a wink whenever they made eye contact; the way her head slumped onto his shoulder when she was too tired to stay awake but too stubborn to admit it; or the way she'd obsessively fixate over a chart while mindlessly chewing on the inside of her cheek, oblivious to his watchful and amused gaze. Those little actions that made her unique caused his heart to ache at the thought of their absence. And the guilt in his stomach over the idea of a potential permanence threatened to tear him apart.

He was so close to the end, however things ultimately played out. He'd finally acquired the three Pure Metals that Oshus had commanded of him, and turned them over to Zauz in order to forge a sacred weapon strong enough to put down the vile Bellum. And while they'd waited for the results, a challenge from Linebeck's 'stalker' had opted to kill time and finally remove an obstacle from their way. So they'd rendezvoused with the pirate Jolene, in order to finally put an end to the violent feud between her and Linebeck. And in the end, it had turned out that Jolene was simply a spurned lover, a woman who only wanted an explanation for her former partner's sudden and mysterious absence from her life. The two of them were up on the deck of the S.S. Linebeck at the moment, having a long-overdue talk. And it had appeared, at least as they were heading up, that Jolene had already seemed to let go of some of her resentment – perhaps something of their friendship might yet be saved. So that had turned out amicably, if nothing else.

And while they were above, and Ciela and the other spirits had wandered off to talk somewhere, he'd found himself alone. He'd initially been thankful for the others allowing him a moment's reprieve from the journey – Ciela and Linebeck had even cut back on their bickering, obviously making an effort not to aggravate his feelings. But the moment had passed as he'd realized he was alone in the cabin with Tetra's petrified body. And in the end, it had turned out that Jolene was simply a spurned lover, a woman who only wanted an explanation for her former partner's sudden and mysterious absence from her life. The two of them were up on the deck of the S.S. Linebeck at the moment, having a long-overdue talk. And it had appeared, at least as they were heading up, that Jolene had already seemed to let go of some of her resentment – perhaps something of their friendship might yet be saved. So that had turned out amicably, if nothing else.
"I'm sorry," he mumbled, eyes tracing over her face until they fell to his lap. "I don't remember how many times I've said that to you now. I don't really know what else to say." He noticed his hands begin to shake, and realized his voice had started to quiver. He took a deep breath, willing himself to keep his composure.

"I just… You need to come back. I don't know what I'm supposed to do if it's not travelling the world with you. I can't find a new Hyrule on my own, and I don't think I could ever go back to being just an island boy. I've seen too much of the world. You showed me so much of the world, places and things I wouldn't have ever imagined. I can't just forget it all now. We've done so much together. I thought… I want to do more. And I want to do it with you."

His voice began to break, and he swallowed a lump in his throat. "You mean so much to me," he whispered, a tear escaping his efforts and falling down his cheek. "You know? You're the closest friend I've ever had, and you've helped me through so much. I've never had this with anyone in my life. And I've never felt like this about someone. At some point you just became everything to me. I don't know how, but the thought of… The thought of being with you is so exciting. And being away from you is awful! And I don't know how this happened. You just became so important to me, and I didn't know what to do about it, and then…” His thoughts turned to their last interaction before her disappearance, how everything had seemed to come together and work out better than he could've imagined. He recalled the nervous fluttering in his stomach when she'd asked for a kiss, the explosion in his body when they had, how everything was suddenly and clearly understood in his mind.

He choked back a sob and wiped his eyes. "I haven't stopped fighting for a way to fix this, not since I woke up on that beach, but I'm so tired, Tetra. And seeing you like this just hurts so much. I don't know how much further I can go. I have to take this all the way to the end, but what if I can't? If Bellum is strong enough to contain you, what if he's too strong for me? The only way we beat Ganondorf was together, remember? And that was with the Master Sword, and those holy Light Arrows. I don't know if this Phantom Sword will be strong enough to do it." He pulled the Phantom Hourglass from his pocket and stared into its glowing sands, catching his dark reflection in the glass. "I don't know if I'll be strong enough to do it."

"I think I'm hearing a lot of nay-saying down here," a voice called, and his eyes turned to the steps where Linebeck was descending. A smirk quickly disappeared from the man's face as he took in the sight of his red eyes and glossy cheeks. With a small sigh, Linebeck crossed the cabin and planted a hand on his shoulder.

"Hey, c'mon. Chin up, kid," he said softly. "You aren't beat yet, right?"

He shook his head glumly, hoping the captain hadn't heard too much of his rambling confessions to the petrified girl. Linebeck patted him on the back and crossed his arms, studying Tetra's figure.

"From what I've heard, and definitely from what I've seen, you have a knack for taking down big bad monsters," the man said, turning back to look at him. "What's one more? Bellum's nothin' you can't handle."

He wiped away the dampness on his face and nodded, trying to convince himself of the man's words. Linebeck leaned against the wall and grinned. "Trust me, kid. You're fighting for the right reasons. You'll be just fine."

The man sounded way more sure than he did, but he didn't comment on it. Instead, glancing at the stairs and hoping to deflect the conversation away from him, he asked, "What happened with Jolene? Is she still here?"
"Ah, things went great!" Linebeck answered, flashing a big smile before it slowly faded. "I mean, they went as well as they could have, given how mad and upset she was for so long. Can't blame her, honestly. I treated her like hell, stealing her own treasure and just ghosting her like that."

Rubbing his face, the man shot him a tired look. "Suppose I have you to thank for that. Before I met you, I never would've thought twice about it. Spending so much time around a hero seems to have given me a whatchamacallit, though."

He gave a small smile, despite himself. "Conscience?"

"Yeah, that thing! I think I... care about other people now," Linebeck answered, shrugging. "Crazy. But it definitely helps with Jolene. It's tough, y'know? Being involved with a strong pirate woman."

A snort escaped him. "You don't have to tell me," he said quietly.

Linebeck grinned. "Anyway, I think we're going to spend a bit of time together again, see how things go. I have a lot to make up to her, after all. She sure as hell isn't going to let me forget it."

Despite his tone, the man flashed a smile at him. It seemed he didn't mind the prospect too much.

"No, I most certainly won't," Jolene said as she descended into the cabin with them. It was odd, he decided, seeing her approach them without a sword drawn or an angry insult on her tongue. Whatever talk they'd had must've sifted through a lot of long-repressed bitterness.

She took up a place beside the captain and glanced over Tetra's petrified form. It seemed to be the first time she'd really studied the girl, standing in the corner like a bizarre statue. "Linebeck told me what you're doing," she said softly, eyes locked on Tetra. "What you're trying to do. It's admirable, pushing yourself so hard to save someone you care about. To be honest, I wouldn't like your odds, Phantom Sword or no. But Linebeck tells me you aren't just some courageous boy."

"Sure isn't," Linebeck retorted, throwing an arm around his shoulders. "This kid is a one-of-a-kind, genuine do-gooder. And he's been a man on a damn mission since I met him. Fearless, skillful, dead-set on success – reminds me of myself, honestly! Don't you think?" The man shot Jolene a smirk, eyebrow cocked.


The cocky attitude fell from Linebeck's face. "Wait, what? I was joking, Jo."

She rolled her eyes. "In the beginning, it was what I found so enticing about you," she said, bumping him with her hip. "That bravery when you saved me from that sea monster, even if it was an accident. And that look you would have in your eye when you had a goal in mind. When we first met, you struck me as a fearless sea captain, out to claim every treasure the ocean had to offer. It was alluring, to be completely honest. If what you say about Link is true, then you two sound more similar than you might realize."

Linebeck crossed his arms, facing the wall and suddenly looking very awkward. "Well, I don't know about all that. But I definitely pull off the 'rugged' look better."

Shaking her head with a smile, Jolene turned her attention back to him and knelt, eyes level with his. "He's told me how stressed you've been," she said softly. "Says you whisper things in your sleep."

He was silent, glancing away. He hadn't been aware of that fact, and briefly wondered what Linebeck had heard from him in his tortured nightmares.

"You have to know," Jolene continued, "that this whole thing isn't your fault, no matter what you
might think. Bellum and his Ghost Ship have been terrorizing these waters for ages now, and
countless people have fallen to its curse. I don't know what happened, but you can't take
responsibility for Tetra's fate."

He shook his head. She didn't understand. "She boarded the Ghost Ship when I wasn't there to help,
and it got away before I could catch her. If I had just been there, I"

"And what exactly would've happened if you had been there?" she interrupted, raising an eyebrow
in questioning. "The curse would've taken hold of both of you, and you'd have both died. Yeah, she
was captured and taken, but she isn't gone yet. You're still here to save her, and that's the best
outcome that could've happened in this situation."

He stared at his boots, unable to come up with a response. Truthfully, that outcome had never once
crossed his mind. He'd been convinced he could fight off whatever imaginary monster had taken
hold of her, but how did one exactly fight off a curse? If he'd been there, would he really have fallen
to the same fate?

Jolene looked him dead in the eye, her gaze steely. "You have to forgive yourself and let go of this
blame. If you need to point a finger, then point it at Bellum. But understand that this is not your
fault."

"I…" What could he say? Forgiving himself wasn't that easy; he'd have done it ages ago if it was.
But Jolene seemed to be expecting a response from him, so he gave a small nod.

"Nuh-uh." Jolene shook her head. "Say it."

He took a deep breath. Was it imaginable that she could she be right about this? "This isn't my fault."

"Like you mean it!" she commanded, her pirate-edge returning.

He narrowed his eyes and repeated with conviction, "This is Bellum's fault."

"And?"

He clenched his fists tightly. "And I'm going to stop him," he said, starting to feel more energy flow
through him than he had in weeks. "I'll go down the Temple of the Ocean King, plant that sword in
his head, save Tetra, and put all of this behind us." He turned to Tetra and looked into her stone-grey
eyes. "I swear to you," he added in a whisper.

"Damn right you will!" Linebeck called, clapping them both on the back. "You'll knock that stupid
beast on his ugly ass, and your girl will be forever grateful for your heroism!"

He simply stared, unimpressed at the man, noting out of his periphery that Jolene was likely doing
the same. Linebeck balked for a moment before brushing his coat and clearing his throat.

"Or… Okay, forget that. But she'll be happy to see you again, right? Look forward to that."

He considered this for a moment before nodding. Determination, not guilt. I'll finish this. I'll see her
again.

"Hey, what's the deal?" came Ciela's voice from above. "Shouldn't we be getting back to Zauz to
check on the Phantom Sword?"

"Yes! Let's go get us a sword, kill us a monster, and save us a Tetra!" Linebeck yelled, pointing
forward in an exaggerated pose. Jolene groaned, facepalming, but he nodded in agreement, a firm
smile emerging on his lips. It was time to put an end to this.
She awoke with a gasp, sitting up and taking gulping breaths as her heart hammered against her chest. Her eyes darted frantically around the room, searching for her threat, until she realized that she only saw the darkened interior of her bedroom. Blinking at the lack of light, she placed a hand on her forehead only to feel her hair plastered there with a sheen of sweat. Her pulse raced in her neck, as if trying desperately to free itself from her; she closed her eyes and tried to slow her breathing, thinking to the technique she'd developed as a kid to get it back under control. In and out, one. In and out, two. In and out, three. Make it to ten, and start over again – just breathe until the fear disappeared. Ever so slowly, her pulse relaxed, and the panic lessened. She was okay. It was just a nightmare.

Her sheets were all twisted, and her legs were tangled inside. A brief moment of alarm flashed through her, and she scrambled to get her legs free, tossing the sheets aside and throwing herself off of her bed. Standing in the middle of her room, she felt marginally better, but her heartbeat was still going faster than she would like. Taking deep, slow breaths, she wiped her forehead with her arm and pushed her hair off of her face. The air in the room felt cool, but her body didn't seem to register it, still feeling like she'd just stepped out of a furnace.

She glanced out the window, only to sigh in frustration. There was a sheet of rain falling outside, coming down fast. Normally in this situation she'd go up to get some air and stare at the stars until she felt relaxed enough to fall asleep again. Tonight, though… She glanced down at her sleepwear – an old, almost too-small sleeveless shirt and a pair of ratty shorts – and decided against it. Instead, she went to her desk and sank into the chair, burying her face in her hands as she tried to shake off the lingering feelings in her mind.

What had this one even been about? Her face scrunched in thought as she tried to remember what had plagued her only moments earlier, but it was too faint to recall. Taking a deep breath, she placed a foot against the desk and pushed, leaning her chair back on its legs. Slowly rocking herself, she wrapped her arms around her knee and chewed on her lip as she stared blankly at the wall ahead. It wasn't often that she couldn't remember her nightmares; typically they were pretty blunt, and rather memorable as a result. And she only ever really bent against a few traumatizing events in her past.

Her mother's death used to hang over her head when she was younger, dreaming up awful ways that she would be at fault for the woman's disappearance. But those had gone by the wayside as she'd gotten older and accumulated much more life experience regarding death. That monstrous bird that had kidnapped her had secretly messed with her fears for a time as well, something not even Link knew; but with time, not to mention the beast's death, those dreams had disappeared as well. The most lingering nightmare she could recall was the Big Octo from her childhood, when she'd almost drowned in a storm, but recent events had eliminated that as well. It was possible that this was just an isolated, bothersome nightmare, but that only frustrated her more. She hated not remembering what had frightened her; it couldn't be rationalized away in the daylight when it was forgotten.

She released a breath she wasn't aware she was holding and lowered her chair to the floor. She supposed she had someone she could talk about it with, sleeping below. But with another look out the rainy window, she shook her head. No sense waking him up in the middle of the night because she felt bothered about a dream she couldn't even remember. Besides, he'd become all worried and make a bunch of extra effort to make sure she was feeling perfectly fine. The boy wouldn't get any sleep for the rest of the night, and she didn't want to do that to him. She didn't feel much like being fawned over right now, either. She'd rather just be alone with her thoughts, as per usual.

That being said, perhaps she would talk with Link in the morning and find out if he ever had
nightmares. Maybe he knew what she went through every few months, and maybe he had a solution that she hadn't figured out yet. At the very least, he might have some new ideas, since she'd more or less exhausted her own over the years. But for the time being, she'd cope on her own. She always managed to in the past, no matter how much the thought of her loneliness ached in her heart.

She rose from her desk and made her way back to her bed, but stopped before she could get in. The thought of being wrapped up in blankets again, so tight that she couldn't move her arms or legs, sent another shiver down her back. Instead she grabbed a blanket off the bed and dragged it to the corner of her room. Tossing it on the floor, she made a sort of nest before sinking into it and wrapping a corner over her body. Curling up into a ball, she stared along the floor, becoming aware of how tired she felt, yet knowing that sleep was still a far way off.

There was no guarantee that she'd even get back to sleep tonight. But she just had to make it to sunrise, when the dark thoughts that haunted her mind wouldn't reach her. After that, Link could help her. He could provide some insight, or he could even just sit there so she could sleep on his shoulder. Either way, she just had to make it to morning. Then she would be okay.
"Let's go! C'mon, move it!" Tetra shouted, waving her arm frantically at her crew. She had one foot planted on the boarding plank, the other still resting on the enemy's ship, but every instinct she had was screaming to cross back to safety and get the hell away from this spot. A sword was in her hand, so tightly she could've squeezed through the grip, and she took a wild swing at a hulking pirate who was approaching. The man faltered, and was then knocked off his feet as Senza shouldered him from behind in his path back to the ship. Tetra contemplated charging him while he was down, but an ally of the man was already at his side, protecting him while he regained his bearings. She clenched her teeth and shouted again at her men as they slowly fought their way to her.

Link had already hobbled across the plank, though she wasn't sure if he was okay – he hadn't been moving very quickly despite the danger they were in. Senza was across, and Niko was making his way over now. The rest were almost to her, and her heart was racing, adrenaline keeping her on edge. As the enemy was bearing down for another assault, she lunged forward and met a blade with her own, shoving Zuko behind her and barking at her allies to get to the ship. Making sure everyone was now behind her, she shoved off her opponent and turned, sprinting for the plank. In their rush to board the enemy, they'd barely secured it, and even now she could feel it teetering beneath her. As soon as she was across she whirled around and gave it a hard kick, and the board fell between the ships before anyone else could cross.

"Up anchor! We need to go!" she shouted, but Senza had already taken care of it, and Gonzo was taking a place at the helm. With a great heave, he spun the wheel as the wind fought the sails without the resistance of the anchor, taking them into a sharp turn away from the pirates. She eyed them warily, ready for them to retaliate with cannons, but they made no effort to attack, instead simply watching them from the deck as they treated their wounded. It seemed they were as eager for the fight to end as she was.

"Damn it," she muttered, beating a fist against the railing. That had turned into a disaster. She'd spotted them in the distance, and they'd responded by firing a few warning shots at the ship. But given her attitude towards other pirates on the ocean, she'd ordered them closer to deal with them personally. Gonzo had taken them straight in, faster than it had seemed the pirates were expecting. In a tense standoff within range, neither side had fired cannons due to the proximity – an attack from either side would warrant a return-fire that would leave everyone dead. Instead, the enemy had let them pull up, set up a plank, and let them board. And the moment they'd crossed, Tetra had realized her mistake. Rather than the half-dozen crew she'd seen that matched her own in size, reinforcements spilled onto the deck from below, and they'd immediately found themselves overwhelmed. A good old-fashioned pirate lesson had turned into a desperate fight for their lives to organize a retreat, and their opponents were hell-bent on keeping that from happening.

Thankfully, she and her crew weren't just regular pirates. They may not have had the numbers of their enemy, but they certainly made up for it in skill, which had worked for them time and time again in the past. But this time, the numbers had almost taken them down. There were just too many men to fight against. She'd lost sight of Link early on as he dove headfirst into the fight, only to spot him a couple minutes later in trouble against numerous foes. She'd jumped in to assist, and as soon as he was clear he'd staggered back to the ship. That was the point she knew they were in over their heads and had called her retreat.

As the enemy shrank into the distance, she did a quick headcount and breathed a sigh of relief upon seeing seven standing figures on her ship. Her eyes narrowed in on Link and spotted him off to the side, one hand gripped on the railing and the other across his stomach. She approached him with a
frown, hoping he wasn't too hurt.

"You doing okay?" she called, and he returned a thumbs-up. She let out a breath she'd been holding, glad he was all right. But that happiness began to fade when she noticed he wasn't turning to her, keeping himself facing outward with his eyes on the sea. From her angle she couldn't see the side he was holding, and a worry began to form in her stomach as she approached, wondering if he was lying to her.

"Link," she spoke as she came up beside him, "honestly, are you hurt?" Her eyes fell to his hand and noticed how tightly he was gripping the railing. His arm was practically shaking.

"I'm fine," he answered, but she noted how laboured his voice sounded, and realized he was quietly panting. Her worry grew – he was worse than she'd expected, and was trying to cover it up.

"Face me," she ordered. "Move your hand so I can see."

She felt a pang of frustration as he ignored her, still facing the water. Taking in his body language, she wondered if he was struggling to even stand at the moment. She grabbed his shoulder and forced him to turn.

"Show me your-"

Her order died on her tongue as Link turned toward her, and immediately collapsed to the deck.

"Link? LINK!"

She rolled him onto his back and sucked in a breath. Without his hand covering his side, she could clearly see the blood that was staining through his tunic. With a quick glance at his bloodied hand, she carefully rolled up his shirt to inspect the wound. Her heart almost dropped through the floor.

It was deep. The edges of his skin were ragged and raw, and blood was beginning to pool on the deck under him. She swore under her breath and screamed at her crew for medical supplies – what they had, anyway. She ripped off her vest and pressed it against his side, wincing as Link gasped and squirmed away from her.

"No, Link, stay still, okay? I know this hurts, but I need to stop the bleeding. You've already lost a lot, why didn't you tell me, if we'd caught it sooner then maybe we could've- GONZO!" she screamed, wondering what in Din's name could be keeping him with the supplies.

Link's breathing was becoming more laboured; she wondered if it was only because of the pain. The wound was low, not too far above his hip – there was no way the blade that hit him could've pierced his lung. She swallowed loudly, knowing that if he was bleeding into his lung, there was nothing they'd be able to do for him. But the wound was low. It couldn't have reached up there. He should be able to breathe without drowning. Why was his breathing so irregular?

"It's okay," she said softly, not sure if he was even listening. "We can fix this. You'll be fine." Her head was spinning. She was having trouble collecting her thoughts, her panic overwhelming her. This hadn't happened before. This was too personal. This was all her fault. What could she do?

"Doctor," she mumbled, before tearing her eyes to the helm where Nudge had replaced Gonzo. "NUDGE! DOCTOR!"

"Uh," he fumbled, glancing around at the ocean. "Miss, I'm not sure where we are. Gonzo had the chart last I-"
"Link needs a doctor!" she cried, fighting back hysterics. "Figure out where the closest one is! And where the hell is Gonzo?!"

"Here, Miss!" Gonzo shouted as he returned onto the deck. He dropped down next to Link with their medical supplies, but Tetra shook her head and pushed him away.

"I'll do it! Help Nudge find a doctor!"

The man hesitated for a split second, glancing at Link, before answering his affirmative and heading to Nudge. Tetra grabbed the box Gonzo had brought and threw off the lid, pulling out bandages and rags. She removed her now-soaked vest from Link and placed a clean rag there, pressing it tight against his side. It had to hurt, but Link barely reacted. This was bad.

"Link," she said, cradling his head in her free arm, "Hey, I need you awake, you hear me? I need to know you're still here." He didn't move, and she swallowed her panic. He needed help. He needed a doctor, and medicine, and- Medicine! Link usually carried a bottle of revitalizing elixir in his belt pouch. If he managed to swallow it, it might at the very least dull the pain for him.

"Link, come on. Stay with me, 'kay? I need to grab your medicine. I need to roll you onto your- Shit," she whispered, noticing the leaking coming from his pouch. She flipped open the cover and spotted pieces of glass everywhere, the medicine seeping through the fabric. She felt tears stinging her eyes. This wasn't supposed to be happening. What could she do?

"Miss!" she heard Nudge call. "Nearest island is fairly populated, fair chance they'll have a doctor or someone there! Should be there in thirty minutes, forty-five if the winds change!"

She bit her lip as she peered at the darkening rag she held to his skin. No medicine, and the bleeding wasn't stopping. Link wouldn't have thirty minutes like this. She needed to do something.

"Stitching," she realized as she glanced back at the box. She knew a bit about sewing, and could do basic stitches on clothing. And she knew in theory how doctors stitched wounds shut. But could she do it? And even if she could, would it help? She didn't know if it would stop his bleeding, or somehow make things worse for him. But they didn't have the time to guess at this. Link would die if she did nothing.

With a quick look at Link's alarmingly pale face, she removed the rag and rustled through the box for a needle and thread, praying one was inside. Spotting it, she pulled it out along with a thick thread that was thankfully already fitted. She grabbed a bottle of alcohol from the box and uncorked it, nearly dumping it all onto the needle with her shaking hands. Should she sterilize the skin, too? She let out a frustrated breath, corking the bottle and tossing it aside. Swear to the Goddesses, first thing she did if Link survived was learning first aid.

She had no idea how to do this. But all she had to do was keep it closed as best she could, so that Link had enough blood in him when they reached the doctor. Taking a deep breath, she plunged the needle into his skin, under one end of the wound and back out other side. Willing her hands to be as steady as could be, she worked at what she hoped was a quick pace, going back and forth along the wound with the thread. The first few stitches were too shallow, she realized as she continued, too close to the tear. She shook her head and continued – she'd fix them afterward. Around the halfway point she noted that Link was bleeding less than he had been, and began working even faster. Part of her hoped that Link had passed out, not wanting him conscious through this without any painkillers, in case her technique was aggravating his condition. She reached the end of the cut and redid her first few stitches, glancing over her work as she did. It looked terrible, his raw skin being held together by her crooked and uneven stitches. But it was holding, and the bleeding was barely a trickle.
She let out a shaky sigh and tossed the needle aside, grabbing a bandage and fitting it over the wound. The bleeding was manageable now. All she could do from here on was keep an eye on the injury and pray the worst of it was contained under her frantic work. She'd done what she could. Link just had to hold out long enough until they got him to a doctor. She took a deep breath to calm her nerves. Link would be okay. The doctor would sort this out. Goddesses only help her if this island didn't have one.

She moved to sit by Link's head, placing him in her lap and stroking his hair out of his eyes. Her hands were soaked with blood, but she didn't care enough to wipe them clean. She needed the reminder that they weren't done yet – that she'd brought this on him. She shook her head, trying to clear the thoughts from her mind. Link had gone through too much. He'd come out of worse situations than this before. He wouldn't die here. He couldn't.

"It'll be okay," she whispered to him as she stroked his cheek, wishing his eyes would open and he would see her. A tear fell and landed on his forehead, mixing with the blood she'd left there. "I promise we'll get through this. Please just hold on a little longer. Please, Link."
Recovery

Chapter Notes

And may I present the follow-up to the previous chapter!

How long he'd been floating in a murky haze, he couldn't say. He would be vaguely aware of muted sounds now and again, but never enough to provide a clue as to what was happening. He could tell that he was heavy, very heavy, and could not force himself from this strange state. He could barely focus, aware at times that he was slipping in and out of consciousness, but never able to wake up to more than a confusing darkness and the feeling of the sheer weight pulling him down. It was likely this time would be no different, but he had to try, needed to give his mind something to focus on. He sensed for his eyelids, and it took a moment to realize where they were. They felt so heavy, just like everything else, but he fought against the haze and willed himself to focus. Open. Open. C'mon, open.

His eyes cracked just a sliver, and he was briefly surprised that he had actually managed something this time. But as soon as the feeling had touched him, it was sucked out by the sheer overwhelming light that had pierced his eyes. Involuntarily his eyes clamped shut again, and he felt frustration begin to form. That was good. Feeling frustrated meant he was getting sharper. He focused on his eyelids again and forced them to open, despite the luminous assault waiting for him on the other side. Slowly peering through the slits he formed, he blinked a couple times. It hadn't seemed quite so bright the second time, thankfully.

He flicked his eyes open all the way and glanced around. The room he appeared to be in wasn't all that bright, actually – lit candles were flickering all around the room, but it was a soft, pleasant warmth rather than the blinding sun he’d thought it to be. The walls were dark, but all manner of pictures hung from them. He traced his gaze around the room and stopped at two lumps in front of him, coming out of the oddly-textured ground. He stared at them for a moment before his sluggish brain deduced that those lumps were actually his feet, covered by a thick blanket. His eyes slid up his body and he nodded, finally understanding. A bed, of course. His antagonistic weight while he slept was nothing more than blankets. This was starting to make sense.

He turned his attention back to the room, continuing his search and trying to understand where he was. This certainly wasn't the ship – he felt no movement of the ocean, and no one collected pictures like the ones that adorned the walls. What had happened to him? He closed his eyes and thought back as far as he could, but nothing jumped to mind. Only the foggy darkness he'd spent seemingly an eternity in filled his thoughts. He felt a small sigh pass through his lips and opened his eyes, a bright myriad of colours catching his attention. He glanced beside him and realized Tetra was sitting there, legs crossed and her eyes buried in a book. He almost snorted; she was so bright in the dark room, and somehow she'd completely escaped his notice. He opened his mouth to call her, but what came out was a strangled gurgle that led to a dry cough.

Tetra looked up in surprise and tossed her book aside, standing and grabbing a cup from somewhere he couldn't see. She held it to his lips and he thankfully realized she was offering him water. He drank until the cup was empty, and breathed deeply, feeling like he could fly. The haze was gone completely now; he was starting to feel like himself again. Beside him, Tetra settled back into her chair, though her attention was fixed entirely on him.
"How're you feeling?" she asked softly, and he paused, trying to take stock of what he should say. He felt exhausted for some reason, and there was a dull throbbing coming from his side. Other than that, he seemed okay. Why was he so weary though? It felt like he'd been sleeping for years.

"Tired," he admitted, and glanced around the room again. "Where are we?"

"Doctor," Tetra answered, grabbing her book off the floor and setting it by his feet. "On Lurelin Island."

"Doctor?" he repeated, shifting so that he could turn to her. "Are you hurt?"

She blinked at him for a moment before slowly shaking her head. "No," she said slowly, looking at him oddly, "that would be you."

He was hurt? That didn't sound right. "What happened?"

"You don't remember?" she asked, her tone incredulous. He shook his head, and she continued. "We were in a fight with pirates, and you got cut up really badly. We got away from them, but then you just collapsed."

As she spoke, memories came flooding back. The pirates he was fighting. Getting overwhelmed as more kept jumping in against him. A blade catching him in the side, hurting like he'd never felt pain before. Panic setting in as he tried to get away. Relief washing over when Tetra was suddenly at his side. Running away, just trying to get as far away as he could while he was in so much pain.

"Oh," he said breathlessly, his hand traveling down to his aching side. "That's right. I got hurt, there were just so many of them, coming in from every side. I just-" He stopped, thinking. The last thing he could remember was running away from the pirates, just trying to get back to the ship he knew would somehow keep him safe. "I… don't remember collapsing."

Tetra grimaced, glancing away. "Maybe that's for the best," she mumbled. He was about to inquire when a door swung open and an older woman with wild hair who was dressed impeccably well strode into the room. The doctor, he guessed.

"Oh, super, you're awake," she said to him with a bright smile, coming up beside the bed. "How're you feeling? Any piercing pains?"

He shook his head slowly, his hand still resting on his side. "Nothing piercing. More a dull throb."

"Mm, that's to be expected," the doctor answered as she grabbed his other arm and placed two fingers on his wrist. "Your stitches will have to stay in for another week or so, just to be safe. I'll be giving you a bottle of medicine that you'll be taking twice a day in the meantime. After that, though, you should be good to do. Just don't go exerting yourself too much right away. Just because the stitches will be out doesn't mean you can't hurt yourself again. Doing too much will make it worse, not better."

He blinked in confusion, trying to keep up with the information that seemed to be spilling at him. "I have stitches?" he asked stupidly. His brain was still hung up on that detail.

"Yep, 'fraid so," the doctor answered, leaning close and starting intently at his eyes. "Lucky for you though, they've done a nice bit of healing already while you've been out."

He turned his attention to Tetra, who was watching them intently. "And how long have I been out, exactly?"
Tetra shrugged. "Few days. Four, I think. You haven't missed much. The boys took a day trip to the neighbouring island to get some supplies. Otherwise we've just been resting here, waiting on you."

"This time next week, your stitches can be taken out," the doctor added. "Tetra knows how, so she can take care of it when the time comes."

Wait, what? "Since when do you know anything about being a doctor?" he asked, and she smiled sheepishly.

"Actually," she replied, "I was the one who did your stitches the first time."

"You did what?!"

"You had collapsed!" she exclaimed, her eyes wide. "You were bleeding out on the deck! I didn't know what else to do! We were too far from the doctor, you wouldn't have made it!"

"Yep, you were in a right state when they brought you in," the doctor said, looking him over. "Almost didn't know if anything could've been done. But Tetra saved your life with that little gambit. Granted, the work was fairly crude, and will probably cost you a few extra days' recovery." Tetra stared at the wall, looking embarrassed. "But I got you sewed up properly, and a transfusion later, you were already looking better. Might have a scar, but that's a small price to pay for your life, I think."

"I got a what now?" Maybe he should've paid more attention whenever Sturgeon tried to teach him.

"Transfusion," the doctor repeated. "Means I took some blood out of her, and put it into you."

He almost gaped. "You can do that?"

"It's a newer practice, but yes," the doctor nodded. "Stick a needle in her, a needle in you, and I squeeze a pump to move it through a tube into you. How's that for cool?"

"You'd lost a lot of blood," Tetra added quietly. "When Gonzo picked you up, and I saw how much was on the deck, I thought we were too late."

"You're lucky to have the friends you do," the doctor said with a wave of her hand. "Anyway, I'll be keeping you here overnight just to make sure you're okay, then you're free to go tomorrow. Your medicine's on the table there – don't forget to take it twice a day. You'll be dying from the pain without it."

With that, she turned to Tetra and said, "Now, the mayor's finally back, so I've cleared all the fees with him. I won't be charging much, just mainly to cover the medicine and the-"

"It doesn't matter," Tetra said with a shake of her head. "I'll pay whatever you ask for, it's no issue."

"Mm, I'll bet," the doctor responded with a wink as she headed for the door. "Still, I make it a habit of not bankrupting my patients. Living shouldn't cost your livelihood. And you," she added to him as she stopped at the door, "still need to rest. If I so much as see your feet touch the floor, I'll tie you down at the ankles. Clear?"

"Yes, ma'am."

She nodded. "Good man." She left, closing the door behind her.

Silence hung between them for a moment, Tetra looking down at her hands while he gently
massaged his side. He wasn't sure what to say, so he simply said, "I like her."

Tetra snorted. "Yeah, she's got such an intensity to her that I love, and her hair is crazy. But she really knows her stuff. She taught me a lot while you were recovering. Even taught me how to stitch properly, and how to take them out when they're ready." She picked up her book off of the bed and passed it to him. "I've been reading up on all kinds of easy treatments and remedies in case something like this happens again."

"Wow, you're turning into an honest member of society, huh? You should be a doctor," he said with a smirk. "I mean, you've already saved my life, and you didn't even know what you were doing, by the sounds of it."

"Shut up," she replied, rolling her eyes. "Just do what she told you and rest. I won't be happy if you undo all my hard work."

He chuckled, but a silence settled in again. He could tell that something was bothering her. She was smiling, joking, sassing him – but none of it was reaching her eyes. Something was still there, chewing away at her. Was she angry with him for getting hurt?

"You scared the hell out of me," she spoke, so quietly he almost missed it. "I thought you were going to die. I thought I was going to have to watch you die."

He didn't know what to say, so he kept his mouth shut. Odds were she wasn't done yet anyway.

"And you didn't tell me! You were hiding it from me, and by the time I found out it was almost too late! By the time we got you here it was almost too late! It was just luck that everything worked out! You should be dead!" she cried, and he realized just how much she'd been worrying over him the past few days.

"I'm sorry," he said softly, pleading her to see the sincerity in his eyes. "You know I didn't mean to worry you. I don't think I thought it was that bad. Something I could deal with myself, you know?"

"Link, I want to know," she answered, her voice betraying just a crack. "If you need help, I want to be able to help you. You're my friend. Please don't ever be that reckless again. I don't know what I would be doing without you beside me."  

"I know, I'm sorry. It was my fault, I know I shouldn't have just rushed in without you-"

"It wasn't your fault," she cut in, her eyes tracing down to his side. "This happened because I was too freaking stubborn to just let things go. We could've ignored them, just kept on sailing by, and you would be fine. But I couldn't, and now look at you."

"Hey," he said firmly, needing her to understand. "Tetra, look at me. I'm alive. I'm healing. I am fine. And I sure don't blame you for what happened, and I know the others don't. The ocean's a dangerous place, especially for those of us who travel it so often. Honestly, I can't believe no one's ever gotten hurt before now! You want to talk about luck? That's lucky!"

Tetra mulled over his words for a long time before giving the slightest nod. "Besides," he continued, "now you have some idea of what to do if someone else gets hurt. And you'll teach me too, just in case you're the one who gets hurt. Because you probably will," he added. "You're more reckless in a fight than me, you lucky-ass stubborn pirate."

She was looking away from him, arms crossed tightly, but he could tell she was desperately fighting a smile. She stole a glance at him, and that was her mistake. He gave a cocky grin, brow raised, and
she snorted before giving in to a fit of laughter.

"Damn it, let me be mad at you!" she said, pretending to stomp her foot. He simply shook his head and smiled widely, propping himself so that he could sit up. Tetra reached over and repositioned his pillow to give him support.

"Well, since you're stuck here till tomorrow and are forbidden from leaving your bed, I guess I'll have to entertain you," she said with a drawl, and he fought the urge to roll his eyes at her.

"Right, and the last four days of you sitting in here was…?"

"Shut up," she retorted, though her smile was glowing. "Are you hungry? I can grab you some food if you want."

"Maybe some soup? I'm starving. Does Lurelin have good food?"

"Only some of the best," she replied as she headed for the door. "They're huge on seafood here, you'll love it. I'll be back." She shot him a wink as she left.

The door closed behind her and he sank back against his pillows with a smile plastered on his face, feeling better than he had in ages.
Dance

Chapter Notes

Hell if I know when this takes place – it's got to be close to their PH separation.

She wasn't normally one to get impatient – a sailor couldn't be, after all, traversing the wide ocean they inhabited. But even more than that, she'd always liked to think of herself as a rather patient person, content to just wait around for whatever life decided to throw her way. Of course, it was more than likely that her crewmates would vehemently disagree with her thinking, and go on to cite numerous examples of her agitated behaviour stemming from impatience over the years. But what did they know? They weren't in her head. It wasn't like they knew her better than she knew herself.

With that being said, her curiosity was eating her alive at the moment. Link had not-so-innocently asked her if she was going to be working in her room for a while, and had then insisted she stay there for "an hour or so, or maybe two, depending on how things go, you know what, I'll just grab you when I'm ready, don't worry about it". Of course she'd wondered what he was up to, but she'd simply shaken her head and wandered down to her room to work on some chart comparison. After about ten minutes of staring at her desk, though, she'd thrown down her quill and crossed her arms. Link's behaviour wouldn't get out of her head, making it impossible to focus on anything else. He could be spontaneous with his interests and desires, but he almost never acted so forward with a plan. It was driving her crazy.

Which was where she was at right now, a half hour later: sitting at her desk, chin planted in her palm and lethargically drumming her fingers against the wood. Honestly, if she had to wait a full two hours like this, she would probably die. She knew this shouldn't bother her nearly as much as it did, but she couldn't help it. Link had a penchant for getting up to things, and that wasn't always a positive. And that was when things were spur-of-the-moment. Goddesses only knew what he could get up to when he was actually planning it.

"Miss Tetra," came a quiet call from her door, accompanied by a knock. She sprang from her chair, so quickly it crashed to the floor, and crossed the room to the door. Zuko stood there, a thumb pointed upwards. "You're wanted on deck."

Without another word, he turned and descended further below deck, where she could hear the rambunctious calling of a card game being started. She frowned and climbed the stairs, mulling over the situation. Odds were that everyone else was below, so she and Link would be the only ones above. Not an unusual circumstance, but his behaviour was still chewing away at her. She had no doubt he was up to some sort of scheme, but the question was whether it was one she'd enjoy. She tended not to like surprises; she preferred to feel in control of situations.

A barrage of horrible possibilities flitted through her mind as she ascended, growing increasingly tense with each step. Had he painted everything some stupid colour in an attempt to impress her? Had he broken something without her realizing and wanted time to repair it before she noticed? She was convinced that whatever lay before her wouldn't be welcome. Throwing open the door, she gritted her teeth as the cool air of the evening washed over her face. Here goes nothing.

"Alright, I'm here. What have you been…" The question died on her tongue as she looked around, eyes widening. Though the sun had almost completely dipped below the horizon, the deck of the
ship was aglow with dozens of candles arranged on the ground and the railing, sitting neatly in simple holders. A wide berth was left on the deck, the candles creating a large circle she found herself standing in. Link stood across the deck, fidgeting with something and blocking her view. Her eyes trailed up his shoulder and noticed a large bell sticking out behind him.

"What in the…" she mumbled, before setting her eyes on Link. "Is that a music box? What have you been doing up here?"

Link turned at the question, shooting her a small wave and a big grin. As she approached he gestured to the candles surrounding them and answered, "Y'know, just creating some ambiance."

She gazed again at the setup around them before focusing on him once more. "Ambiance for what, exactly? And when did you buy a music box?"

"Oh, this?" Link asked, jerking a thumb to the box beside him. "I didn't buy it – it's Nudge's. He was telling me about it today and I asked if I could borrow it."

"Nudge owns a music box?" She'd never known that.

He nodded and gestured to the candles around them. "And when I heard its music, it gave me an idea. I thought maybe we could take a break from sparring and do something else together."

She cocked an eyebrow at him and crossed her arms. "Like…?"

Link smiled sheepishly. "Maybe dance?" he asked with a shrug.

Her mind went blank. He wanted to what now? "Are you for real?"

He nodded. "Yeah!"

"You set all this up because you wanted to dance?"

"Yeah!"

"…With me."

"Yeah!"

She had over half an hour to dwell on what his plan might be, but even if she’d had a week, this would have never crossed her mind. He was actually serious. He wanted to dance with her. Somehow that thought made her more nervous than she'd been climbing the stairs just a moment ago.

"I… Uh…" she fumbled, glancing at the candles, then the music box, and finally Link. He grinned and offered a hand to her. She stared at it for a moment before taking a deep breath in an attempt to calm herself.

"Link, this is nice, but… I'm not really much of a dancer," she admitted, feeling embarrassment well in her at the thought of trying to move gracefully. "I wouldn't know what to do."

"And you think I do?" he replied. "I read a book once on basic steps of forms, so I would hardly call myself an expert. And I knew I'd need to convince you to do it. You always get so uncomfortable when it comes to expressing yourself with things like this. I've still only heard you sing once, and that was by accident. You have such a nice voice, but you just refuse to let anyone hear it."

She stared pointedly at the disappearing sun, determined not to look him in the eye. She was already uncomfortable enough with the dance proposition; his compliments were making her flush even
"C'mon, it's just you and me, and we're on the same page for experience," Link said, offering his hand again. "Why do you think everyone else is below? No one's going to see but me."

She stared at him long and hard, thoughts racing through her head a mile a minute. Taking a deep breath, she hesitantly put her hand in his. His smile widened and he walked her to the centre of the circle.

"I'll be fun," he said softly before moving to the music box and winding it. In a moment there was slow, gentle music wafting through the air, playing out a beautiful tune. Link took her hand again and placed his other one on her hip, and she paused for a moment before deciding to simply rest her own against his arm. They stared at each other for a moment before she glanced down at their feet.

"So... Now what?"

Link chuckled. "Now the hard part. Just try and follow my steps while I figure this out."

She fought the urge to roll her eyes but diligently followed him, matching step for step as they slowly moved around their manufactured dancefloor. They were clumsy at first, him getting his steps mixed up and her crushing his toes a few times, but gradually they improved and began to move with more confidence.

As they continued, she found herself looking less at her feet and more at his eyes. There was an energy burning within that she could see, and she felt herself relax into his touch. She was still a little nervous – this was way more artistic than she was used to being – but she found herself enjoying what they were doing. There wasn't the usual passion that came with sparring between them, but she was discovering an intimacy in their close proximity and gentle movements. It was very different, but... nice.

All of a sudden, Link grinned deviously. "I'm gonna dip you."

Her eyes narrowed. "Don't you dare-"

He moved quicker than she was expecting; she screamed as she plummeted to the deck. He caught her before she went down and brought her back up, laughing hard.

"That's the most alert you've looked tonight!" he exclaimed. She levelled a punch at his shoulder before grabbing his arm again.

"I'm going to kill you." He simply shrugged, smiling widely as they continued. They rotated around the deck a couple more times before the music came to a stop.

She wound the box again before taking Link once more and placing a hand on his hip. Looking at his confused expression, she said, "I think we're getting this. My turn to lead now."

He snorted, but placed his hand on her arm and they resumed their motions, this time with her guiding the movement. They were becoming more comfortable with the steps, so they moved closer together and tried gliding more gracefully across the deck. It went well until Link stumbled over his feet and fell, landing hard on his rear. They stared at each other for a moment before bursting into laughter, and she pulled him up to continue.

They danced on and on, ultimately moving closer and closer together until they were mere centimetres apart. At some point she'd let him resume leading, letting him carry her around the deck as the candles glowed around them. As the music carried them away, she found herself resting her
head against his shoulder, their movements slowing but still swaying to the song. She moved her hand from his arm and placed it around his waist, and felt his own arm curl around her back.

With a clear head, she would probably panic at what was happening. They were basically enveloped in each other's arms, slowly moving around the deck, lost in their own world. This was definitely more intimate than they'd ever been, and deep inside she felt a small surge of nerves. But she pushed the feeling away, taking a deep breath and sinking further into her partner's body. She'd worry about what all this meant later. Right now, this was too comfortable to disrupt.

"The music stopped," she heard Link murmur in her ear. "A while ago, actually." She felt his head shift, presumably turning to look at the box. "Should I wind it again?"

She closed her eyes and released his hand, joining her other arm around his waist. "Maybe in a bit," she mumbled, letting the warmth of his body distract her from the present. "This is fine."

"I take it you didn't mind this idea, then?" he asked, and she could hear in his voice that he was pleased. "You're enjoying yourself?"

She smiled, despite herself. "A little."
Reunion

His lungs burned as he sprinted across the hard stone floor, making for the daylight that was spilling in from the doorway. His heart was pounding, still pulsing with adrenaline from fighting Bellum, but he ignored it. He couldn't explain how, but he'd been magically transported back to the entrance chamber of the Temple of the Ocean King after the monster's defeat. Based on the pain in his body, though, it felt like he'd run back up all thirteen floors himself. But it didn't matter. He'd deal with the pain later; there was something more important to take care of right now.

He almost tripped as he broke out into the clean air of Mercay, but he barely registered a thought as he tore across the field, making his way to the port. He'd done what was asked of him. Bellum was dead, so the curse had to have been lifted. This nightmare should be over, and he could finally go home and resume his life, putting this series of mistakes behind him…

The trees around him thinned and he ran out into the town. Friendly villagers called out to him as he passed, but he didn't as much as blink at them. His eyes were glued to the S.S. Linebeck, floating gently in the waves at the dock. He noticed the captain was nowhere to be seen, which was an odd thing for the man. Briefly, he realized that Ciela wasn't with him, either. He shook his head. He'd find them later. Only one thing mattered right now.

He leapt onto the deck of the ship and threw open the cabin door, all but tumbling down the stairs below. His body was screaming in pain at him, and he drew ragged breaths to satiate his lungs. His mind was blank, though – his attention was fixated on the glowing statue in the corner of the room.

Tetra's form was brighter than he's ever seen the statue, and it seemed to be growing ever brighter. He found himself squinting as he gazed, until a blinding light enveloped the room and he was forced to cover his eyes. A shattering sound reverberated around him and he forced himself to peer through his fingers. The light was fading, and the statue was gone. In its place stood a young woman, her chin resting against her chest and her eyes closed.

"Tetra!" he cried, and ran to the corner. Tetra didn't respond, however, and began to pitch forward. He gasped and moved to catch her before she fell to the floor. Grabbing her in his arms, he held her tightly against him as he stared at her motionless form.

"Tetra," he called, but she didn't move. "Hey," he said, more desperately, giving her a small shake. No response.

What was wrong? Bellum was dead; the curse should have been broken! Why wasn't she moving? Why wasn't she waking up? Was she… Had he been too late?

"No," he whispered, his eyes beginning to well with tears. "No, Tetra, come on! You can't do this!" He shook her again, to no avail. Her head simply bounced against his chest.

"Damn it…" he mumbled, his back catching the wall behind him as his legs threatened to give out. "Why?" he said to no one as tears fell down his cheeks.

The silence around him was deafening, and he closed his eyes, still holding her tightly against his chest. This wasn't supposed to happen. He'd finally done it! He'd succeeded in finding Bellum, in burying him at the bottom of the temple… And it had been for nothing. He was too late. He'd always been too late.

He choked back a sob, shaking his head and gripping her tighter. How was he going to explain this?
What was he supposed to do now? He had no idea how to find his way back to familiar waters. He wasn't even sure he wanted to. How could he face anyone he knew after how much he'd failed? His grandmother, Aryll, the pirates… The thought of the last group sent fresh tears down his face. They loved Tetra. They'd been counting on him. He couldn't go back to them now.

His sobs echoed around the room, drowning him in his own sorrow, until a small noise cut through it. He opened his eyes and looked down at Tetra, and she coughed again, more roughly this time. He gasped and sank to the floor, letting her lean against him as she coughed violently into his tunic. When it subsided, a silence hung around them, until her eyes fluttered open.

"Link…?" he heard her mumble, and his heart soared. He gently pushed her off of him so that they could look eye-to-eye. Her drooped eyes caught his gaze and she smiled softly. "Hey there."

He swallowed, new tears spilling out. "Hey, you." He pulled her into a crushing hug and felt her arms weakly circle around him. He couldn't believe it. He thought he wouldn't ever get to do this.

She coughed again over his shoulder and he realized he was squeezing too tightly. He pulled away but didn't release his hold on her, which was probably for the best; Tetra, though awake, seemed very weak. He wasn't sure she could even keep herself upright at the moment.

"I…" she started, before swallowing and rubbing her eyes. "Where are we?" she asked instead, glancing around the small room.

He could see the gears in her head turning, so he wiped his face dry and answered before her thoughts went too far. "Not on the Ghost Ship, don't worry."

She made a noise in her throat, and he felt her stiffen. "Right, the ship… I jumped on, and then…"

She trailed off, squinting at something over his shoulder. He could tell she was trying to remember—her mind still seemed hazy. "And then I was attacked," she finished. "By these creatures in cloaks."

"They're dead," he told her firmly. "I found the ship and got you off of it. Wasn't easy, though; I had to fight my way through a lot of guards that didn't want to let you go."

He nodded, and then her face perked as though something else had just occurred to her. She must've been remembering more of the past.

"Link, the ship… I'm sorry," she said quickly, and he blinked in surprise. "You were right about it. You were right about everything. I was reckless, it was too much for me to handle, I should've listened, you could've been-"

He silenced her with a finger to her lips, and she closed her mouth dumbly. He shook his head and said, "I should be sorry. After… what happened, I got lost in my thoughts and ended up falling asleep. I missed the sighting of the ship. If I'd been there, I could have gone over with you. We could have fought off the guards and escaped. If I had just been there-"

This time, she silenced him. "If you had been there, you might've been taken as well," she said, echoing wisdom he'd heard before. "And then odds are we both would've died. So… thank you."

He shook his head. "I still should've been there. Maybe I could've stopped you."

She rolled her eyes at him, and he smiled. Goddesses, how he'd missed that. "Fine," she said, and he saw a smirk rising to her lips. She was falling back into her old self. "We'll both take some blame to make it even. Can we call it good and forgive each other?"
He smiled and pulled her into another hug. "I guess that's fair."

"Good," she muffled into his shoulder. After a moment she pulled away and tried to stand, her legs shaky. He rose to catch her if needed, but she managed to make it to her feet. Her strength was returning rather quickly. She always was hard to keep down.

Tetra glanced around the room, but didn't appear to be taking in anything. Her brow was furrowed and her eyes were far away from him. "After what happened..." she mumbled quietly, and he thought back to what he'd just said. She was remembering back to before she was taken, when they-

"You know," she began, interrupting his thoughts, "I can't really explain what happened to me. It was like being in a very deep dream, as if my mind was somehow in a prison." She shuddered, clearly remembering her torment. "But at the same time, I can remember... Well, I'm not sure how much I can remember, but I can remember things. From after I was captured."

She stared hard at the wall, obviously deep in thought. "I can't explain it, but it's like there were times when I was kind of aware of reality. I remember a man in a blue coat, and I'm sure his name is Linebeck." She glanced at him, and continued when he nodded. "I saw him a lot. But I also remember a fairy – I saw her enough too. And..." She scrunched her eyes shut. "A tall person with dark hair and a sword. A woman."

He listened silently, watching her. Her eyes travelled around the room, as if reliving one of his fights with Jolene. "But what I remember the clearest..." she said, trailing off as she turned back to him.

"I remember you. You were talking to me. Crying, you were so upset. And I wanted so badly to answer back. But I couldn't, I was slipping back..."

She took a couple steps toward him and placed a hand on his cheek, a look of concern washing across her face. "You look so tired," she said softly, and he felt himself nodding.

How long had he gone, now? On and on, from mission to mission, in and out of temples, fighting beasts, ready to drop at a moment's notice... And still he'd pushed on. One more temple, he'd told himself. One more monster. And he knew it had been a lie, but it had kept him going. Until finally, he'd reached his prize. Bellum was dead, and Tetra – his Tetra – was here, alive and well.

Only now, at the end when she voiced it, did he allow himself to feel the fatigue. His muscles ached, and he felt every injury he had glowing on his skin. He felt like he could slip into unconsciousness at any moment, and sleep for a year. But he forced himself to deny that pleasure one last time. This was more important. Rest could wait just a bit longer.

"I'll be okay," he almost whispered, pressing slightly into her hand. "You're more important."

A soft smile replaced her concern and she drew closer, taking his hands in her own. He stared into her eyes – those deep blue pools he could lose himself in at a moment's notice – and felt himself closing in as well. They were only centimetres apart, and he saw her eyes flit down to his lips for the briefest moment. He leaned in, closing the distance between them, and closed his eyes.

A scream rang out, so loud his ears pounded, and his eyes shot open. Tetra was thrashing in front of him, pulling at black cords wrapped around her chest. His eyes widened in horror as he followed the cords to the ceiling, and saw a dark portal had materialized above them. Bellum's tentacles tightened around Tetra, so much so that she couldn't even make a sound, and she went limp. The tentacles began receding into the portal, pulling Tetra with them.

"No! NO!" he screamed, jumping at her and grabbing the tentacles tightly. He pulled with all his
might, but they didn't as much as budge. With a violent shake, he was thrown from Tetra as she began to disappear through the portal. He watched helplessly from the floor as her eyes met his, a primal fear etched across her face. And in a flash, she was gone.

"TETRA!"

He banged his fists onto the wood, his fingers almost breaking. This wasn't happening. Not now. How was that thing still alive?

"Link! What's wrong?"

Ciela came floating down the stairs, and he rose to his feet. But his thoughts were racing, and he was so overwhelmed that he struggled to speak.

"Bellum! Took Tetra! We need to go!"

"What?!" exclaimed the fairy. "How did- He can't be- Where are they?" she asked wildly, spinning quickly around the room.

He raced past her, climbing the stairs and emerging onto the deck. Linebeck and Oshus were there, just boarding from the dock.

"Kid, what's going on?" the captain asked. "People are freaking out, saying the Ghost Ship's reappeared off the coast! I thought you put a stop to all this?"

"It's him!" he all but screamed. "He was here! On the ship! He took Tetra!"

Linebeck balked, staring at him for a moment. Then he shook his head, planting a hand on his hip.

"That so? Well, then we have a pretty good idea where they're going. Untie us and let's get after them!" Linebeck disappeared below deck as he raced to fulfill the man's order.

This couldn't happen. He wouldn't let it happen. Not this time.
His head was pounding, which honestly wasn't much of a surprise these days. With the number of blows he took to the skull, he should really start seeing a doctor to make sure he was okay. As for the rest of him… He felt hard wood beneath him, and he sighed. He was lying on the ground, with no idea how he’d gotten there. But he could feel a subtle rocking movement beneath him, and he smelled the saltiness of the ocean. Ah – he wasn't on the ground, but on a ship. His eyes fluttered open and he took in the bright blue sky above. Yep, the deck of a ship. The S.S. Linebeck? He raised a hand to his face and gently massaged his temple. What was the last thing he remembered?

Well, after Tetra had been taken, they'd all given chase to Bellum, who'd infected the Ghost Ship with what seemed to be parasitic copies of him. They'd managed to repel the monster's efforts and shoot down the ship, exploding it and leaving pieces of driftwood scattered all around them. Then they'd boarded what remained of the ship's deck to find Tetra, only for Bellum to reappear and grab her unconscious body first. And then he'd grabbed Link, and all had seemed lost… Until, to everyone's surprise, Linebeck had grabbed his sword and was fighting Bellum. Next thing they knew, they were free – but Linebeck had been possessed by Bellum and transformed into a giant Phantom. So they'd fought, him ready to pass out from the strain but putting his all into it, until finally Bellum had released the captain and disappeared into a cloud of black smoke. He'd known then that it was finally over.

With Bellum finally dead, Oshus had reclaimed his true form as the Ocean King, which was apparently a giant whale with magic powers. He'd barely gotten to Tetra, who'd awoken after the fight, before the Ocean King offered Linebeck a wish – his payment for continued service after the bust that was the Ghost Ship's legendary treasure. And, surprising all yet again, Linebeck had not asked for the riches he'd been spurned, but to revive his ship that had been lost in the battle. And then… Everything had gone white, as though a fog had settled in, and…

With a grimace, he sat up on the deck, glancing around before a flash of yellow beside him caught his attention. Tetra was lying with him, her own face stirring as though she'd been unconscious as well. He got to his feet, staring blankly at the mast that stood nearby, until a thought hit him like a wall. The S.S. Linebeck didn't have a mast.

He looked around again, and he realized what his sluggish brain had failed to notice a moment before: they were back on their ship! The one he hadn't seen in weeks, and thought he'd never see again!

Tetra made a noise beside him, picking herself up off the deck with a look of discomfort. He extended an arm to help her up, but the moment she was on her feet there was a banging noise behind them. The door to below deck had been thrown open.

"MISS TETRA!"

They both turned to the outcry before being swept up in a rush of bodies, finding themselves pressed hard together as their crewmates crowded tightly around them. They were all shouting questions and concerns, but his head was spinning. He was still trying to make sense of everything; he couldn't even begin to try and explain it all.

"How did you make it back?" Nudge exclaimed, looking ready to cry. "That haunted ship
disappeared the moment it had you! We were in your cabin going over your map and notes about the ship just now!"

Tetra shook her head quickly – she was undoubtedly trying to clear her head as well. "I'm not really sure how we made it back, but Link saved me."

"Ha!" Senza laughed, slapping him hard on the back. "We saw you jump after it, but we thought we'd seen you fall into the sea! We looked everywhere, though, and didn't find you. We assumed you must've pulled yourself on somehow!"

"...Yeah, something like that." He glanced away, scratching the back of his head nervously. He'd fill them in on the full story later.

"Not much fight for a Ghost Ship, then, huh?" Mako was saying to Tetra, and he snapped his attention back to them. "Couldn't hold you very long, hey Miss?"

"I don't..." Tetra trailed off with a glance to him. "I'm not really sure how much time has passed, actually," she said slowly, as if realizing it for the first time.

"A few weeks," he told her, then whipped his head to Gonzo, who'd answered at the same time, "A few minutes."

They stared at each other in silence for a moment before he decided he'd misheard. "I was out there for probably three weeks, doing everything in my power to assemble an ancient artifact with the power to vanquish the curse that took her."

Gonzo's eyes traced over him to Tetra, and back again. "Not sure what you mean by that," the man said, looking very confused. In fact, he realized, all of the crew were looking at him funny. "Wasn't more than ten minutes ago that the ship disappeared."

He stared back in disbelief. That was impossible.

"I was not gone ten minutes," he retorted firmly. "I wish it had only taken that long, but I've been away for ages! I wasn't sure we'd ever see you guys again!"

But to his shock, everyone but their captain was shaking their heads, muttering "no way" and "that's impossible". He stared ahead blankly, trying to rake his brain for something to go on. It had been real, hadn't it? He hadn't just dreamed up the whole thing under the curse's influence, right? No, that couldn't be true. He had no memory of getting onto or off of the Ghost Ship. How would he have gotten them off without remembering any of it? Of course his recollection was the true answer. And yet, everyone else seemed convinced that he was wrong... All except for Tetra, who simply looked lost with the conflicting information.

He thrust his hands into his pockets – he had to have something on him that would prove his tale. But he paused as his fingers made contact with cool glass. Confused, he carefully removed it from his pocket and stared at the Phantom Hourglass sitting in his hand, its chambers now empty of the magical sand that had protected him from Bellum's curse. For a moment he wondered how this had ended up on him – hadn't it been used in the creation of the Phantom Sword? But he shook his head; it didn't matter how it had wound up with him. This was undeniable proof that his adventure had been real.

"Ooh!" he heard a voice explain, and he realized Niko was staring intently at the hourglass. "You find that on the ship when you were over there?" the pirate asked excitedly. "Looks nice. Maybe you can make a nice buck off of that!"
"What? No! This was the artifact I used to help rescue Tetra from the Ghost Ship's curse!" he exclaimed, but quickly realized it was in vain. All of the pirates were now examining the hourglass, and expressing a disappointment that they hadn't thought to board the haunted vessel to plunder its wares as well. Frustrated, he walked off to the railing to collect his thoughts.

Leaning against the wood and staring out at the sea, he breathed in the salty air and allowed his shoulders to relax for the first time in weeks. It was finally over; he should be happy about that. But yet, perhaps greedily, he wanted to know more. Now that he stopped to think about it, how had any of this happened? Back at the beginning, he'd definitely missed his jump for the Ghost Ship and tumbled into the ocean. And somehow, instead of drowning, he wound up on an island he'd never heard of. He'd sailed those waters for weeks on end, but nothing had ever been familiar. And even stranger, no one he'd met seemed to know the landmarks he'd been asking about, save for his sarcastic captain. Linebeck alone seemed aware of the ocean that he called home, but even the captain had said that he wasn't entirely sure how to get to it from where they were.

Behind him, he heard Tetra questioning her men and giving orders, and was momentarily distracted from his thoughts. He couldn't ask her any of this, because she didn't seem to know any of what had gone on around her. Not that he blamed her, of course; her soul was literally being eaten away by a demonic squid monster. But it would've been nice to have someone to discuss all this with. There seemed to be, in his mind, a strong line between the events happening before meeting the cursed ship and the events happening afterward. A divide that broke up the two timeframes… The two realms of events…

He blinked in surprise. A random thought had just come back to him: someone in his adventure had referred to their ocean as the Realm of the Ocean King. And yet he'd never heard of such a thing in all his travels, and was willing to bet that Tetra hadn't either. The Ocean King was a being of great power, and was revered by his citizens as a guardian deity of sorts. So couldn't it be possible that the realm in question was protected by a sort of magic? A place that couldn't be found by conventional means? Was it possible…? Had they crossed into a different dimension, of sorts?

He glanced down at the hourglass still in his hand. As ridiculous as it sounded, it would actually explain a lot: how no one here had ever heard of anything there, how no one there had ever heard of anything here, why there was an apparent time difference between his actions over there and the pirates here… The Ghost Ship must have been able to breach the Ocean King's barrier and cross between the realms. And once Oshus had been attacked and weakened, the magical seal would have likewise lost its power, allowing others to slip through unknowingly. People like Linebeck, and him…

As soon as the man had entered his thoughts, something on the distant horizon caught his eye. He squinted for a moment before he gasped in surprise. How could he not recognize the shape of the vessel he'd more-or-less lived on for the past few weeks? The S.S. Linebeck was sailing off into the horizon, puffing out small clouds of smoke as it sailed off, presumably to lead its captain to ever greater treasures. He smiled softly as he pocketed the hourglass. As aggravating as Linebeck had been at times, he was really going to miss him.

"…take care of it. I have some unfinished business to attend to," he heard Tetra say behind him, and the crew answered their affirmative before rushing off to their duties. He continued watching the distant waves and the rolling clouds, enjoying the peace. No doubt Tetra was exhausted from the ordeal she'd been through. As much as he wanted to hold her close and make sure nothing ever took her away again, he knew they were safe now. And they'd have time to catch up later, once she was rested. For now, he was content to simply relax and enjoy the-

A hand grabbed his arm and spun him around, and he barely registered the sight of his friend before
she had smashed her lips against his, holding him so tightly he was afraid he'd lose his arm. She pulled away, her face pink, but he was still so surprised that he couldn't think of anything to say. That was probably for the best, though; he didn't trust himself to speak right now even if he could.

"Sorry," Tetra said, eyes fixed purposely on the deck below them. "I just wanted a bit of closure from before I was kidnapped." She sighed and rolled her eyes up to the sky. "Again."

"I- Yeah, that's cool," he said weakly, before mentally kicking himself. That's what he had to say to her kissing him? He cleared his throat and tried again. "So... What happens now?"

"Well," she started, still avoiding his eye, "after all this, I wouldn't mind being back in familiar waters for a while. Maybe find someplace to lay low for a bit, so we can get our bearings and recover. Hell, maybe that hot spring idea from forever ago wouldn't be such a bad idea now. I know I could use some help unwinding."

"That's not what I meant."

His voice was softer than he'd meant it to be, and he wasn't even sure if she'd heard. Until he saw her face, that is, and noticed how dark her cheeks were becoming.

"Well... I mean..." She trailed off, her gaze locked downwards again. He couldn't believe it: she was embarrassed? After what she'd just done? He couldn't remember the last time Tetra had been at a loss for words.

He took a deep breath to steady his own nerves. It looked like it was time for a talk that was long overdue.

"So," he began, and he felt his own face heating up already. "I care about you a lot. You're probably the most important person in the world to me. And I've... had stronger feelings for you over the last few months now. And I've been too scared to say anything in case you didn't feel the same way and I ruined everything. And I think you probably caught some of that while I was depressed and pouring my heart out to your statue-body," he added, and she nodded, still looking down.

"And because you've kissed me twice now, I assume you kind of feel the same way?" he asked, and she nodded again, finally meeting his gaze.

"Yeah," she said quietly. It had definitely been a long time since he'd seen her this embarrassed. "I'm not sure when it happened. I didn't even realize at first. But spending time with you, and having fun with you, just became more and more important. And it made me happier than I think it was supposed to. And then you became all I'd think about, because it seemed like I was always happy with you, and you could just fix any problem I had. And I enjoyed it that way, and I didn't want to let myself understand what was happening at first. And... Yeah," she finished lamely, unwilling to say any more.

He took off his hat and raked his fingers through his hair. It was probably good that they were finally being open about this, but on the other hand, part of him wished he'd never had to do this. Spilling his heart, the feelings he'd kept secret for ages, to his best friend was so awkward that he thought he might die of embarrassment. It was a small comfort, then, that Tetra appeared to be in the same boat.

"I wasn't planning on that, just now," she said suddenly, and he thought back to her surprise for him. "I just saw you standing alone, and I remembered what was about to happen the last time we were alone, and part of me just decided to go for it, and I wasn't really thinking, and..." She shrugged, a half-smile forming on her lips.
"You, impulsive? I never thought I'd see the day," he replied with a grin, and she snorted.

He tried to hang on to the humour – it would make the next few moments a bit more bearable. "Well, the way I see it, two things can happen from here." He raised a finger. "One, we put all this behind us and continue on as we did, which worked fine." He raised another finger. "Or two, we keep going with this, into territory neither of us are familiar with, and see what happens."

She studied him for a moment, the smile gone from her face. She was thinking hard, he could tell. He didn't blame her, either; this wasn't an easy decision. Did they stay with what was familiar, and keep their feelings to themselves? Or did they take a huge step forward, together, and stumble in the dark with whatever came next? Would that end well for them? Would it blow up and destroy what they had? Was the possibility of that happiness worth the risk of failing?

He heard a small sigh escape her lips. She rubbed her arm nervously, and in a quiet voice, said, "I don't know if I'll be able to put all of this behind me."

He'd known it was coming, because the same answer had been sitting on his tongue. Too much had happened, too much was known, to simply try and forget it all and go back to the way things were. They'd reached a point of no return.

"Yeah," he said with a nod. "I don't think I can, either."

She took a deep breath. He noticed her hands were shaking slightly, knowing they were entering a level of trust and intimacy Tetra had never allowed herself to have. He reached out and grasped her hands in his own, trying his hardest to convey all the comforts and feelings in his heart through his squeeze. She took another deep breath and met his eye, nodding slowly.

"So... We move forward then? Together?" she asked.

He nodded as well. "Together," he answered with a smile.

She grinned and, despite herself, began to laugh, throwing her arms around his neck and pulling him into a hug. "I've stared down pirates, marauders, sea monsters and the King of Evil, and I don't think I've ever felt this nervous," she said over his shoulder.

"Hey, I was right by your side during the last one," he told her, pulling away a bit to look at her. "And I'll be by your side from here on out," he added with a soft smile.

She snorted and pushed his face away. "Goddesses, don't be sappy. I can't handle much more of this."

"Fine, fine," he laughed. "How about a kiss, then? I'd like one that I'm actually ready for, if that's all right."

In spite of herself, Tetra giggled. "Yeah, I guess I can allow that," she answered with a wink, and closed the gap between them.

As the tenderness of her lips washed over him, he knew that things would always be different from this point forward. But as a warmth flooded throughout his body and he hugged her tightly, he knew, somehow, that they'd be okay. They would be side-by-side from this moment on, and they'd figure all this out together. Exactly the way they always did.

Chapter End Notes
Starting now we're entering a new chapter of Link and Tetra's relationship as they navigate what being a couple actually means. Because really, how hard could it be for a couple of sixteen year olds with absolutely no romantic experience to speak of?
Something I wanted to just mention: these two were fourteen(ish) at the start of the story. WW (in my eyes) took place over the span of most of a year. The interlude between WW and PH was a little over a year, so now that we're entering the post-PH timeframe, I just wanted to clear up how much time has passed, and that they're both sixteen(ish) now. They've been at this for a while now, is my point.

A small scream ripped past her lips as she shot up in bed, clutching her heart as it beat wildly. Panting, she took in the darkened interior of her room before groaning loudly and aiming a punch at her pillow. Again with this. Of course she was fine – it was over! She was safe and sound, back in her room. He was dead. There was no possible chance of him coming after her again. Of course, she thought bitterly as she sat tensely on her bed, if it was that easy to convince herself of that, it would've worked the other six times she'd gone through it. And yet, here she was again.

They'd been back on the ship for only a couple days, and most of that time had been spent resting. Her body still seemed to be recovering from its long incarceration, as she found herself frequently winded over the smallest actions. As for Link, he'd more-or-less passed out the moment he'd been allowed to sleep and hadn't risen until well into the following afternoon, at which point he'd gotten up, eaten some food and gone straight back to sleep. It was a testament to just how far he'd pushed himself over the last while, and she was on the verge of setting course for a doctor to make sure he was okay. But he'd argued her down and insisted he simply needed some down-time, so she'd left it alone. Her crew seemed to think that she also needed a recovery period, though, and the moment they had their new heading – she'd been adamant about getting far from those formerly-haunted waters as quickly as possible – the men had effectively barred either of them from working until they were sufficiently rested.

She didn't disagree that she needed it, but the problem came from trying. As badly as she wanted to, she could not close her eyes and drift off without being tormented with memories of imprisonment and flashes of Bellum looming over her, wrapping her tightly in tentacles, drawing so close she could not breathe…

She sighed and planted her face in her hands. All she was supposed to be doing was relaxing, but if anything she felt less rested than before. She wasn't a stranger to nightmares, but this last encounter with dark forces seemed to really be getting to her. But if she couldn't sleep without waking in a blind panic, how in the world was she ever going to get feeling better?

A sound came from above, and with a start she spun around and grabbed her dagger from under her pillow. She jumped onto the floor and backed against a wall, watching and listening as hard as she could, until realization settled in: it was simply a floorboard creaking overhead. Snorting, she thrust her dagger back into its hilt and tossed it onto her bed. When she was younger, in the days after she'd lost her mother, paranoia had settled into her heart and she'd taken to sleeping with her weapon under her pillow. She'd stopped doing it years ago, but the habit had returned when she'd spent most of the last couple nights awake. The slightest sound seemed to set her off, and it frustrated her to no end.
Rubbing her face, she stole a glance out her window and moaned. It was the dead of night – still a long way to go till morning. Her eyes flicked to her bed and back, wrestling with a decision, before she exhaled slowly and shoved her loose hair off her face.

"To hell with it," she muttered, and grabbed her dagger and a blanket off her bed. Some fresh air might do her good, like it always used to when she couldn't sleep. Except that she still couldn't shake the feeling that something might happen, paranoid though she knew she was. Tucking her weapon into the waistband of her shorts, she threw her blanket around her shoulders and softly crept out of her room to the deck.

The chilly air bit at her skin as she pulled the cloth tighter around her. Even with a couple days' sailing, they were still fairly far north, and the weather had been appropriately cool. A person with more sense would have dressed warmer before coming out into the night air, but she had a certain reputation concerning a stubborn streak. Besides, she probably wouldn't be out here too long. Just enough to lull her back into a state where she could take another attempt at sleep.

She was deciding where to sit when her instincts were suddenly screaming, telling her that something was wrong – she wasn't alone up here. Her hand flew to her blade and she gripped it tightly as she quickly scanned the area. The moon wasn't out to cast its usual glow, and she squinted futilely through the darkness… *There!* There was a mass tucked onto the floor, right at the crook of the bow. She took a few cautious steps forward, willing her feet to be as silent as possible, before she stopped dead. The mass had hair. And it was hair she recognized. She exhaled quickly and released her grip on the dagger. It was just her boyfriend.

The thought sent a chill up her spine, and she wrapped herself tighter. That's right – he was her *boyfriend* now. The label was still very new, but they'd decided that it was basically where they were going, so it made sense to use them. Admittedly, nothing had really changed yet. There were a couple embarrassed kisses here and there, but otherwise it had been business as usual. The crew had worked fervently to get back to their familiar archipelago, and both of them had simply taken to staying out of the way. Honestly, between his sleeping and her feeble attempts at the same, they hadn't seen too much of each other.

She stepped closer, no longer trying to keep herself quiet, until she stood over him. He was sitting with his back against the wall, slumped to the side with his head resting behind him. His eyes were closed, but somehow she knew he wasn't sleeping; his face was too tense, his brow constricted as if in deep thought. She nudged his leg with her toe, but he took no notice. So she did it again until his eyes finally shot open and landed on her.

"Tetra?" he asked quietly, before taking a deep breath and rubbing his eyes. "I guess I was drifting off. I didn't mean to – I just wanted some fresh air so I could…"

He trailed off before asking instead, "What're you doing out here? Why aren't you sleeping?"

She shrugged. Her desire to discuss her lack of rest was admittedly low, and she was quite curious to know why he was out here in the middle of the night instead of down below. He seemed to catch her thoughts, as he scooted to the side and asked, "Did you want to sit?"

She obliged and sank down to the floor beside him, tossing the blanket around his shoulders as well. They sat together in silence for a moment, pressed against each other and listening to the stillness of the night, before she decided to speak up.

"How come you're out here?"

Her soft voice seemed to cut through the silence like a knife, but she didn't care; who else was
around to hear them? She watched Link consider a response, as though he was trying to be very deliberate with his words. After a moment of silence, he answered. "I just wanted a bit of fresh air. I've slept enough the last couple days."

She watched him closely for a moment, determined to catch his eye. He deliberately avoided her gaze, though, before he sighed, glancing down at the deck. "Fine. I was having… dreams."

"You too?" she asked quickly, then swallowed as she realized just how fast the words had tumbled out. He studied her for a second before nodding, leaning into her slightly.

"Yeah. I just kept thinking I was waking up, and you'd be gone again. And then I'd actually wake up, and everything would be fine. And then I'd fall back asleep and think I was waking up, and you were missing…" He blew a strand of hair out of his eye. "And so on. I was getting confused about which was real, so I decided to stay awake for a while."

She nodded, absently running her thumb over his knuckles. Seemed she wasn't the only one who was still getting over their last incident.

"And you?" he asked, and she slowly exhaled. He'd been open with her. Fair's fair.

"I haven't been sleeping well at all since we got back," she answered quietly, looking down at their hands. "Just… nightmares. All the time. I haven't gotten any rest."

"I wondered," he said softly. "I didn't want to say anything, but you weren't looking well today. I was just waiting for you to drop, but you fought through it. Probably, I assumed, because you're too stubborn to sleep," he added, and she nodded with a twinge of embarrassment.

"I keep hearing things, or thinking I'm hearing things… I'm jumpy, I guess. I keep…" Her voice died, but she shook her head, knowing he wouldn't laugh. She could trust him. "I keep thinking I'm going to be taken again."

He shifted beside her, and she felt an arm curl around her waist. Pulling her even closer, Link whispered, "I'm not going to let that happen. Not ever again. And he won't be taking you. He's dead—I made sure of it this time. You're safe."

She nodded. "I know. But… It's still too soon, I guess. A lot happened."

"Yeah," he said, his eyes glancing down at the dagger tucked into her shorts. "No one could expect to just go back to normal after all that. It'll take time. I'll help you through it, though, if I can." He squeezed her gently. "I want to help you."

His hand slipped into hers, interlocking their fingers. She took a deep breath to calm herself, and settled her head down on Link's shoulder. She felt his own head rest against her, and they sat in the silence once more, curled up together under her blanket. She felt too tired to even think, but decided that she likely didn't need to right this minute. Link was here. She was safe. Maybe she could stop fighting off the sleep that had been calling to her for days.

At some point she realized her eyes had drooped closed, and felt too heavy to open again. She briefly considered going back to bed, but brought her attention back to the arm around her waist, the hand in her own, and the gentle breathing she could hear by her ear. No, she was fine here—she didn't feel the night's chill at all anymore. His warmth was filling her, calming her mind of the fears and anxieties she'd been hung up on. She let out a breath as she relaxed into his body. She was safe.
Chapter End Notes

Artwork credited to ashmcgivern at Tumblr and used with permission.
"Alright, that'll do," Tetra called to her crew as she set her crate in the hold. Wiping her brow of sweat, she examined the room that was now stocked full of supplies. It was packed tight, but it was organized, and Goddesses help her if it didn't stay that way this time. It had taken the better part of the afternoon, though, she noted as she returned to the deck with her men; the sun had already begun its descent and would only light up the sky for a few more hours. But at least the job was done, and would last them for a solid couple of months.

It could have gone a bit faster with Link's help, but the hero had his own engagements he had to take care of today. He'd been away for hours, and likely wasn't to be back until much later. She hadn't pried into his business, but had to admit she was curious about his absence. She supposed she could always ask him about it when she saw him – odds were he wouldn't mind. Besides, she knew she'd be seeing him later, but wasn't there a particular reason why? She felt like she was forgetting something important.

"Miss?" a voice broke through her thoughts, and she glanced at Gonzo who'd approached her. "Didn't you have an engagement tonight?" he asked with a glance at the falling sun, and she stared at him for a moment before gasping loudly, the memory coming back to her.

"Son of a bitch," she swore before running across the deck and ripping open the hold door. She sprinted down the stairs and tore into her room, pulling off her bandanna and vest as she ran. Of course. How had she forgotten?

Before Link had left, he'd asked her (with some embarrassment) if she wanted to get together that evening, "like a date or something". She'd agreed almost immediately – things had progressed slowly between them over the last couple weeks. Granted, it was hard to do… well, anything on a ship sailing the ocean. But because they'd docked at a rather large town for supplies, the time seemed right for a real date. She wasn't sure what he had in mind, since he'd just told her to meet him in town when she was finished. But the work had taken longer than expected, and her plans had been completely forgotten.

She stood in the centre of her room, taking her hair out of its usual bun and brushing it down to her shoulders. She was probably late, and she was utterly gross; her clothes were damp with sweat and she was sure she smelled as bad as she looked. With a scowl forming on her face, she peeled off her shirt and shorts and grabbed a wet cloth from a basin of water she kept on hand. Rubbing it up and down her body, she was determined to wipe the sweat off her skin to be at least somewhat presentable. When she was sufficiently clean she tossed the cloth aside and marched to her wardrobe, only to hesitate when she threw it open.

Admittedly, she had very little experience with dressing with the intention to look nice. She wore her usual get-up so often because it was practical in the hot sun and high winds she dealt with every day. At night she slept in old, thin clothes to stay cool, and everything else was an afterthought. She pulled out a pair of dark pants and contemplated for a moment before shrugging and pulling them on. Women typically didn't wear pants; dresses and skirts were the standard fashion. These pants were supposed to be for men, but she'd done what she could with a needle and thread to make them acceptable for her. She might draw stares later, but she hardly cared about that. Besides, it would hardly be the first time.

She pulled on a white shirt, then selected a light-blue top – something she'd bought once on a whim and never worn – to go over it, finishing the look by tying a small yellow sash around her waist. After a moment of consideration, she removed the wraps around her wrists and examined herself in a

Date
mirror. She definitely wasn't dressed like a typical woman ready for a date, but she didn't really do dresses and Link probably wouldn't care much either way. She moved to the door but paused as she opened it, looking back at her dagger sitting among her discarded clothes on the floor. The options raced through her mind before she bit her lip and grabbed it, fitting it to her hip. It probably didn't help the "date" image, but better to be safe than sorry.

As she left the ship, her eyes traced across the sky to the disappearing sun. Gritting her teeth, she walked into the town and glanced about for Link, noting how dusty and worn her boots looked – she probably should have wiped them down before leaving. As she approached the town's square, she picked out her objective through the throng of people milling about. Link was standing near a statue, looking cool and casual as he watched others going about their business. As she made her way over, she took in his appearance: his hat was gone, and he was wearing a blue shirt with white markings over light tan pants – clothes she'd definitely never seen before. He caught her eye as he approached and turned to face her, and her eyes were quickly drawn to twinkling lights near his face. She gasped.

"You pierced your ears?" she yelped, so loudly that a few islanders passing by turned and looked. Link grimaced at the attention but smiled, gesturing to the small silver hoops that hung from his earlobes. She stood silently, admiring the metal. Earrings were common enough among sailors, but not everyone wore them well. But he actually looked rather good.

"I thought they might help with the look since I hang out with pirates so much," Link said with a grin. "What do you think?"

She simply nodded, still trying to find the words. "They look great. I think they suit you."

"Thanks," he smiled. For a moment his eyes wandered down and up her figure, and he said quietly, "You look really nice tonight."

She felt a bit warm at the compliment, but smiled softly. "Well, I'm glad you think so, but thanks. So do you."

He beamed, then turned and began heading down the road, and she fell into step beside him. He placed his hand in hers, an action that was starting to become familiar between them. Walking down the street hand-in-hand, she considered all of the questions she wanted to ask about today. She finally decided to simply go with "So where are we going?"

"I thought we might grab some food, to start," he answered as she noticed they were heading toward an eatery. "I have a couple of ideas for what to do after that. Unless you had something you wanted to do?"

She shook her head. "I have no idea what we're supposed to do. People in my eyes were always either single or married. I'm not really sure what happens between those two points."

"I dunno," he replied with a shrug. "Eat, see a show, do an activity, general spend-time-together things."

"That's what we always used to do!" she exclaimed. "How is it different now?"

Link was silent for a moment, and she waited with bated breath. Finally he said, "It's more meaningful now?"

"Oh Goddesses," she snorted with a roll of her eyes. "Nothing's going to change much, is it?"

"Well," Link started as he opened the door to the tavern, "maybe things don't have to change. It was
always nice to spend time together before, wasn't it?"

"But we're 'together' now," she retorted with air quotes as they took a seat at a table. "How is being a couple different from just being close friends who constantly save each other's ass from danger? Doesn't a relationship mean more? Don't things become more… I don't know, intimate or something when we go on dates and stuff?"

Link signalled to the bartender for two meals before turning his attention back to her. "Search me. I'm new to this too, remember. I spent an hour today chatting with people just to get ideas about tonight. The rest will come with time and experience, I imagine."

"I guess so," she murmured, chewing on her lip. Trying not to think of the awkwardness chittering away in her mind, she asked, "So what else did you do today besides interrogating these poor people?"

Link mocked a scoff for a moment before they both laughed. "Just did a few errands," he answered with a wave of his hand. "Asked around about the local area, sent a letter to my grandma and Aryll, did this-" he gestured to his ears- "though it didn't take as long as I thought it would. Or hurt as much, either."

"And did some shopping?" she asked, raising a brow in amusement at his clothes. Link simply smirked and looked away.

"Well, excuse me for wanting to look nice tonight," he responded playfully. "I don't exactly have many outfits with me. I wasn't thinking of dressing up for a date when I packed, y'know."

The bartender appeared and dropped two meals in front of them. With a word of thanks, she picked up her fork and began sifting through the plate. "You think I was ready at a moment's notice? I've never had to put together an outfit just to look good before. Although I did pull this together rather quickly," she said as an afterthought. "Not bad for a few minutes' work, if I do say so myself."

Link snorted. "You forgot about this, didn't you?"

"No!" she answered indignantly. After a moment of Link's raised brow at her, though, she dropped her head. "Yeah. Gonzo reminded me."

"Well, at least one of you was paying attention," he said with a chuckle. "To be honest, I think he was rather excited about this. He was definitely listening when I asked you earlier."

She thought back to the morning, when she was distinctly sure she'd heard the big man mumble something like "finally" when he was passing by them. She decided not to comment on it and simply said, "Yeah, maybe."

They ate in silence for a moment, her thoughts still dwelling on the proper way to handle a romantic outing. To be honest, the thought of being 'romantic' with Link was still embarrassing to her. The idea of being love-struck and entranced over a boy just seemed silly to her, and a bit… girly. She knew she was very unlike the traditional women of the Great Sea, from being a pirate to her usual habits and interests. Her brief time spent as Princess Zelda had been eye-opening for learning compassion for everyone instead of simply her and her crewmates, but otherwise she'd hated it. The clothes, the attitude, the responsibilities, the expectation to be prim and proper… None of it was her. Being expected to sit around and let someone else work out problems concerning her was the most frustrating thing she'd ever experienced. But standing side-by-side with Link, staring down Ganondorf as he seemed determined to kill them? That was where she belonged. She'd decided then and there to drop the princess act and just be who she was. And they were probably alive because of
But despite that, she still worried over what Link might think of her. She never acted the way women were socially expected to, and she knew she never would. But where Link was concerned, she wanted to make an effort to at least try. For Hylia's sake, she was in nice clothes and out on a date with a boy her age – it all would have been unheard of a year or two ago. Was it enough for Link, though? Would he want something more 'traditional' and eventually realize she could never give him that? Was all of this just an exercise in futility? Link had grown up on a small island, and he was probably used to more conservative couples than what they could ever be. She felt her eyes begin to water. Should she just call this off before they headed down the road to failure?

"You okay?" Link asked, rousing her from her whirling thoughts. She realized she'd been staring into her food for the last few minutes. "You seem troubled."

"I'm fine," she said, quickly blinking her eyes dry. "Or… I don't know. I'm not really used to this."

"We can go back if you like," he replied, frowning. "We don't have to do this tonight if you don't want to."

She shook her head. "No, it's not like that. I just don't know if I… If I'm being a good date."

Link stared at her, confused. "What are you talking about? All we've done so far is talk and eat."

"Yeah, I know. I meant…" She sighed and rubbed her face. "I don't think I'm girly enough for you."

He was silent, looking at her as if she'd grown a second head. "…What?"

"I'm sorry," she mumbled, pushing her plate away. "I'm ruining this. Maybe this was a mistake."

"Tetra, what are you going on about? All we've done so far is talk and eat."

"Yeah, I know. I meant…" She sighed and rubbed her face. "I don't think I'm girly enough for you."

He was silent, looking at her as if she'd grown a second head. "…What?"

"I'm sorry," she mumbled, pushing her plate away. "I'm ruining this. Maybe this was a mistake."

"Tetra, what are you going on about?" Link interrupted. "You're not girly enough for me? When did I ever say I needed someone more girly than you?"

"You didn't," she said slowly, "but I thought-"

"If anyone else interested me, why would I still be living on the ship with you guys?" he asked as if she hadn't spoken. "Wouldn't I stay behind somewhere if I cared about someone else?"

"I guess, but-"

"I'm with you because I like you, exactly the way you are. I don't care if you don't dress or act like other girls. It's just part of what makes you so unique," he said firmly. "I don't want you to act like you're someone else. Just be yourself, like you've always been. Nothing has to change just because we're on a date."

She sat in silence for a moment, taking in his words. Of course he was right; why would he care about her if he didn't like her for who she was? After everything they'd been through together, wouldn't he have a pretty good idea of her? She certainly did of him; it was why things had changed between them, the reason this evening had even transpired in the first place.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, her blue eyes meeting his emerald gaze. "I don't know where that came from. I'm… just nervous, I guess. I'm thinking about this way too much."

"It's all right," he said softly, a smile appearing on his lips. "Like I said, we're both new to this. But I want to figure it out with you. I'm not going to leave you just because someone less pretty shows up and talks to me."
She smirked, despite herself. "What about someone more pretty?"

"Oh please," he rolled his eyes, "who's prettier than you?"

She snorted, which led to a laugh that seemed to lift all of her hang-ups from her shoulders. She could be such an idiot sometimes – this didn't have to be nearly as hard as she was making it. Thank the Goddesses she at least talked to him about her fears, instead of sitting on them and ruining their evening together. They could still have fun.

Rising from her half-finished meal, she asked, "Do you want to get out of here and do something else?"

"Sure," Link responded, leaving a handful of rupees on the table and standing. Taking her hand, he led her out of the tavern and into the cool evening air. "I have an idea of where we can start."

"Care to share?"

"Well, there are a few bards playing on the street around here," he said as they slowly strolled down the road. "I saw them a bit earlier, they're pretty good. Good music to dance to."

She smiled at him. "That doesn't sound so bad. And then?"

"There's a pretty big hill outside of town," he said, gesturing in a direction. "Perfect place for some stargazing."

Her eyes glanced up to the darkening sky. "We haven't done that in ages."

"I know," he nodded. "I always enjoyed the time we spent together doing it. It was the very first thing we ever did when we met, remember?"

"Yeah," she breathed. "I do." She grabbed his elbow and snuggled against his shoulder as they made their way along the street. "I guess this really isn't so different from the way things used to be."

"Told you," he whispered, though she could hear him smiling. "It's a little different, though. We can actually cuddle now."

She hummed in agreement. "It should help me deal with the next date."

Link chuckled. "There's a next date? We're barely through this one."

"Yeah, I think there'll be another one," she smiled, gently stroking his new earring. "I'll even dress up again, just for you."

"You don't have to dress up for me," he said quietly, hugging her closely. "Although you do look beautiful tonight."

She smiled widely and squeezed his arm. "Being a little girly isn't so bad sometimes. I think I could get used to it for special occasions."

"Oh, I'm flattered!" Link said excitedly, placing a hand on his chest. "You think I'm special?"

She laughed and hugged him tighter as they wandered down the road. "Yes. Very much so."
Something stupid and silly because it's been forever since I did that with these two.

“They’re getting closer,” he called over his shoulder for what was probably the fifth or sixth time now. He heard his pirate/princess/girlfriend groan and pick up her pace as she jogged through the dense jungle of trees. Somewhere behind them he could hear the bandits crashing through the foliage in their pursuit, and he rubbed his eyes wearily.

“Stupid assholes,” Tetra muttered, weaving between two palm trees and taking off in a new direction. “They have nothing better to do than chase a couple of teens across an island?”

She stumbled over a root, and he winced as her shoulder dug into his stomach. Ignoring his discomfort, he watched behind them for signs of disturbance, but it seemed like they’d thrown their pursuers off the trail. “I mean, you did insult them. And then taunt them. And then shoot at them. One would almost call this karma.”

“Will you shut up?” Tetra shot back. “You’re not helping!”

He sighed, long and deep. “Yeah, about that. Maybe if you put me down, I could run for myself? This is probably slowing you down.”

The pirate snorted. “No, you standing there going “Maybe I can talk to them!” was slowing me down. Besides, I run faster than you anyway. You can’t compete with years of experience when it comes to physical training!”

“Oh, that’s intimidating,” he taunted. “The great Captain Tetra, well-experienced in running from fights!”

“Ooh, screw you,” she said, but he could tell she was trying not to laugh. He adjusted himself over her shoulder – which wasn’t easy, given that the woman wasn’t very big – and placed a hand against his cheek as he stared at their recent trail.

“So all that stuff about trying to be more girly was just thrown out the window, huh?” he called as Tetra slid down a small hill. “I don’t know many girls who carry their boyfriend over their shoulder and run a race.”

He felt a smack on his butt, which was quickly followed by, “Oh, sorry, forgot your face wasn’t facing this way. Anyway, I said that stuff was for dates, smartass. Day-to-day I’m just my same old self. And you said you were cool with that!”

“I am cool with that!” he replied indignantly. “You’re the one who was getting uppity about it!”

“Shut up, I was just nervous! It was a new experience and I was overthinking things and started to panic and- Oh, hang on. That’ll do.” With a quick change in direction, Tetra shifted left and ducked into a cave entrance that was overgrown with vines. Retreating a few paces into the darkness, they stood in silence for a moment, listening intently while Tetra planted a hand on the cave wall and caught her breath. After counting to thirty and hearing nothing outside, though, he felt safe enough to
“Well, isn’t this pleasant?” he said cheerily, though his tone betrayed a trace of sarcasm. “Hiding in a
cave while being chased by angry people with sharp weapons, and we’re unarmed. Next time we go
treasure hunting, I’m bringing two swords.”

Beneath him, Tetra bristled. “It was supposed to be an easy job – there wasn’t supposed to be
company! I can’t believe I just left my dagger sitting by the hole. It had better still be there when we
get back, or I’ll paint that whole beach red.”

“Lovely,” he replied, grimacing at the imagery and looking around the cave. As he examined their
hiding place, however, a thought came to him. “Hold on. A cave on a jungle island… We aren’t
about to relive your King Dodongo story, are we?”

“Will you relax? That was way further south than here.” She paused to think for a moment. “I mean,
I think so, anyway. It’s been a while.”

“Super,” he exhaled. “I wonder which would kill us quicker: short-tempered bandits or a giant fire-
breathing lizard.”

“You’re very snarky today,” the pirate commented, squatting to the ground to stretch her legs. “Hard
to believe that I’m the one who pissed off those guys.”

“Yeah, it’s a mystery,” he said with a roll of his eyes. “Will you put me down now? Do you trust me
enough to stand here in the dark?”

“I guess we’ll find out,” she answered, but still leaned forward to set his feet on the ground. As he
cought his balance, her hands moved to his stomach to steady him, and he squeaked as her fingers
dug into his side.

“Hey, easy!” he cried, stepping away quickly. Tetra looked at him for a moment, confused.

“What?”

“You tickled me!”

She stared at him flatly, clearly unimpressed. “Aww, poor Link. Too sensitive?”

He reached forward and planted his fingers against her stomach, and she gasped and swatted his
hands away.

Looking him dead in the eye, she glowered. “You don’t want to start this, hero.”

“Oh yeah?” He wiggled his fingers menacingly. “Try me, pirate.”

In an instant they were at each other, aiming for sides, stomachs, armpits, and anywhere else they
could reach. Tetra shrieked and he laughed as they fought back and forth with their touches, each
seeking to dominate the other until someone called mercy. Tetra screamed louder and he could see
tears forming in her eyes, and he grinned. He could handle this easily. They continued as they
squirmed and danced around the cave, completely forgetting that they were supposed to be keeping
quiet.

“I hear them! They’re close!” a rough voice cut through the noise, and they both froze, hands still
planted against each other’s bodies. After a moment, a second voice called out, “Wait, there’s a cave
hidden over here! Let’s check it out!”
“Oops,” he said quietly, while Tetra uttered a single “Shit!” through clenched teeth. Grabbing his hand, she ran for the cave entrance, him right on her heels, and they tore through the vines and right past an unsuspecting bandit.

“I’m telling you, karma’s real,” he called as their foe relayed their position to his mates and began to give chase. “You should be nicer to people.”

“Don’t even start,” she retorted threateningly. “Just get to the beach.”

But they’d barely taken two steps when the Tetra looked at him again sharply. “When did you get taller than me?”

“I- What?”

Just now, in the cave! I realized something was off, but I couldn’t explain what. I don’t think I’m taller than you anymore!”

He couldn’t believe his ears. “This is hardly the time to be doing this!”

“No, hold on a second. I want to measure us to see if you really are.”

“Tetra, later!”

“Oh, fine,” she huffed as they jumped a fallen tree. “But assuming we survive this, we’re measuring as soon as we get back to the ship!”

He sighed, resigned to the fact, and kept running through the trees as they headed for the beach. He wasn’t sure if their stupid tickle fight was over, but he had a feeling round two might pick up later on the ship.

Especially when the pirate realized that he had indeed overtaken her height in the last few months.
A light breeze permeated the evening air and played with their hair, but Link took no notice. Up in the crow’s nest and resting against the wall, he was fairly distracted by the cute girl sitting in his lap and leaning against his chest, her head resting just below his. They'd been up here for ages, simply talking away the evening as they watched the light disappear and the stars begin to show themselves. Not at all a bad way to spend an evening, if he was being honest. The two of them had been itching for some alone time for a while now, but that wasn't easy to come by on a ship full of working pirates. Now, though, when everyone else was unwinding below, they had the night all to themselves. He wrapped his arms tighter around her stomach and refocused his attention on the pirate's words.

"And really, I think we should head back that way anyway," Tetra said, oblivious to his own musings and filling the air with her voice. "It's been months since we were back there. We can hit up Windfall for information to see what's what, and we could even swing by Outset so you can visit your family. I know it's been a while since you've seen them." She shifted slightly against him and peered at the sky above. "Plus, I wouldn't mind seeing Aryll again. I like that kid."

He hummed in agreement. "A visit with Grandma would be nice. And I'm sure the guys are dying to see Aryll."

"Then we'll start heading that way tomorrow," she said with a nod. "Should only take a couple weeks, I think, if that."

Silence fell over them, with him aware only of his breathing, as well as hers under his hands. It was turning out that Tetra loved to cuddle. Of course, it shouldn't really have surprised him – Tetra was always a very physical person. But even so, she'd found that she greatly enjoyed sitting together with their arms wrapped around each other. He wondered if it was because it was still a new experience for her, or if part of it stemmed from her lack of intimacy for several years. Whichever it was didn't matter to him; he was simply happy to provide her with comfort. And besides, relaxed, comfortable Tetra was doing wonders for everyone. Of course, if anyone saw her like this, she'd freak out. Which was why they were all the way up the crow's nest, away from prying eyes.

"I wonder how much has changed there," Tetra said, and his attention snapped back to her. "I wonder if people still remember me. Maybe I should visit that bomb merchant on Windfall. I'm sure he at least still remembers me. The guy almost shit himself the last time we met."

He chuckled slightly. "Yeah, wasn't that the time you ransacked his store and left him tied up in a corner?"

"Well, there may have also been threats of murder if he struggled or informed he authorities. Just threats!" she added quickly as he leaned forward to look her in the eye, eyebrow cocked. "We weren't actually going to kill him, come on! Not over something as stupid as bombs!"

He rolled his eyes. "Honestly, you pirates."

She shrugged. "His prices were outrageous. Even I thought it was criminal. Besides," she added, poking him with her elbow, "I happened to know a spying hero was there with us. I assumed you'd deal with him, so no harm done."

He actually laughed this time – he couldn't help himself. "Me? I didn't help him. I was too busy trying to get onto your ship to steal some bombs. I didn't know how long you guys would be
distracted, so I didn't want to waste any time."

Tetra turned around and gaped at him. "You just left him there like that? You're supposed to be a hero!"

"Yeah, take the high ground, pirate," he retorted, drawing out the last word on his tongue. "I had things to do. And he was kind of a dick."

She snorted and fell back against his chest. "I wonder if anyone ever found him. He could be dead for all we know."

"Please, I'm not that insensitive," he scoffed. "I went back and saw him at one point, and he was fine. He was even nice and his prices were reasonable! I mean, he also looked scared, so that might've had something to do with it. Come to think of it, he may have thought I was affiliated with you guys. That might have explained a lot of his behaviour."

Tetra shook her head and glanced up at him. "Hero of Winds, huh?"

He smirked and nuzzled her head. "Shut up."

She hummed in contentment and turned her attention back to the stars, wrapping his arms around her once again. "Well, you'll be remembered by most everyone, at least. You did a lot for people in a short amount of time."

"What, like a year?"

"Yeah," she nodded. "Within a year you went from a useless island boy with no life experience – no offence! – to a full-blown noble hero who was slaying baddies and rescuing damsels. I'd say that's a lot to do inside of a year."

"Don't forget befriending vicious pirates," he added, squeezing her tightly. "Clearly I wasn't that noble."

"Hey, this pirate kept your clueless ass alive back in the beginning," she countered with a grin. "I taught you how to fight, remember?"

"Yep, and then I became better than you and you were so thrilled that the student had surpassed the teacher."

Tetra snorted. "Please. You've never been a better fighter than me."

"Well, it's been a while since we tested that," he said casually. "Maybe tomorrow we find out?"

She glanced at him for a moment before shrugging. "Sure. If you want me to plant you on your ass again, I can do that."

He chuckled and planted a kiss in her hair, and knew from her silence that she had nothing to say to that.

Quiet dragged out again, but only for a moment before Tetra said, "You know, with all of your heroics, you remind me of a knight."

He blinked quickly and frowned. "A what?"

"A knight," she repeated. "Mum used to tell me stories about an ancient kingdom when I was little. Which I guess was Hyrule," she said as an afterthought. "Anyway, the Royal Family ruled the
kingdom, but there were these people called knights who served them. They were really brave and fought for the Royal Family whenever they were needed to. They were protectors, I guess. And they were said to be very noble, always ready to lend a hand to others in need. That all reminds me of you." She shrugged. "Maybe your ancestors were knights, who knows? It wouldn't surprise me."

He stared at the dark sky in thought. It was certainly an interesting theory. "It's possible, I suppose," he mused. "I mean, we did have a family shield that was supposed to be generations old. Never knew why – we just had it."

"Well, you're definitely the noblest person I know," Tetra said, sitting up and turning to face him. "Taking off every other week to deal with some crisis or calamity. If people come to rely on you too much, they won't know how to deal with their own problems."

He snorted and waved a hand. "Come on, I don't help that much. I'm used to monsters and other things trying to kill me, so I handle what I specialize in. That's all." He shuffled forward a bit so their legs were pressed together, their faces only a slight distance apart. "But I don't mind the idea of being a noble knight. Especially since I already have a princess that I protect and serve."

Even in the dim light he saw her features warm, but she retorted, "I am not a princess, and you know that."

"I mean, technically you are," he countered. "Whether you like it or not, you're descended by blood from the Royal Family. If Hyrule was still around, you'd be sitting in a castle right now."

"Leadership because of relations is a stupid way to do things," she replied with a roll of her eyes. "Besides, 'my' kingdom drowned, remember? Some princess I am."

He leaned even closer so that their lips were almost touching. "A very cute one, though."

Tetra fought a smile and failed. "Yeah, I'll give you that."

He pressed their lips together and she crawled onto him, pushing him back to the wall as lay herself on his chest. His arms curled around her back and held her tightly, and she hummed into his mouth in approval. Her own arms snaked around his neck as the kiss deepened, threatening to never let go. He pulled her body tighter against his and revelled in her weight on top of him. After a moment he felt something trace against his lips, and realized it was her tongue. He grinned against her lips and decided to match her. Despite her initial hesitation when this thing between them had started, she'd quickly taken the reins when it came to pushing forward. Not that he minded in the slightest – leadership was one of Tetra's strongest qualities.

As their tongues danced together for a few seconds, they eventually broke apart for air. He felt lightheaded, and was glad he was mostly lying down. Above him, Tetra looked dazed, but she had a grin on her face that was growing. Leaning down, she quickly stole another kiss before sitting up and pushing her hair back.

"I don't think knights were supposed to mingle with princesses," she said, but she couldn't fight her smile. He simply shrugged and pushed himself back into a sitting position.

"Oh, I'm sure it happened at some point. Especially if all princesses were as starved as you," he replied coyly, which earned him a smack on the chest.

"I told you, I'm not a princess. I'm a goddamn pirate," she said as she settled back against him and they stared out at the horizon. "And I used to be the most feared pirate on the ocean."

He raised a brow. "Used to be?"
"Before I met you!" she exclaimed. "I never cared about mercy or morality or anything like that! If a job needed doing, I just did it! It's not like I killed indiscriminately or anything – I wasn't a marauder. But anywhere I went, people knew who I was. Do you know how impressive that is for a kid? Mum would've been proud."

"But you're not like that anymore," he said, seeing where this was going. "And that would be my fault, right?"

She glanced at him. "I mean, I wasn't going to say it," she replied, and he couldn't help but laugh.

"Okay, so I made an impression on you too. I wouldn't say that's bad, though. You're still well-known, just not for the same reasons anymore. You're considered the noblest group of pirates around. Did you know that?" he asked, and she shook her head.

"And it's not like I made you give up stealing or anything. Now you guys just choose your targets a bit more carefully. Steal from those who deserve it or won't miss it or whatever. I'd say that's an improvement."

She scoffed, but he knew she was avoiding his eye because he was right. "Of course you would, hero. Anything to better the world."

He smiled and threaded his fingers through her own, squeezing her hand gently. The night was very dark now, the sun having disappeared completely below the horizon and the sky alight with flecks of diamond.

"Speaking of heroism," Tetra said softly, and he felt her feeling his shirt between her fingers, "you're not in uniform anymore. You haven't worn that tunic since we got back after the Ghost Ship."

It was true; since their return, he'd shed the old outfit and had instead been wearing a variety of clothing he'd bought back when their ship had been incapacitated. He'd personally been enjoying the bit of freedom he had with expressing his look, though the pirate hadn't mentioned it until this moment – he was almost hoping the question would have been forgotten. But of course it was a stupid wish; Tetra was the most observant person he knew, and of course she'd wonder why he stopped wearing the thing he'd worn for most of their known time together. But it didn't make the reason any less silly in his head.

"Yeah, well…" he said, squirming uncomfortably under her. "I mean, it was starting to get small. And it was a couple years old, and it had been through a lot, so I thought retiring it might not be a bad idea."

"Mm, fair enough," Tetra replied, though he could tell from her tone that she wasn't convinced with his answer. He rubbed a hand over his face and took a deep breath.

"Alright, this is going to sound really stupid," he told her, and she sat up again and turned to face him. "But it seemed like… Well, every time I put it on, someone close to me got taken away. The first time I got it, I lost Aryll. But then I stopped wearing it when we were stuck on that island for repairs, right? But when it was time to leave and chase the Ghost Ship, I put it back on, and…" He swallowed. "And it wasn't too long after that that you disappeared too. And I know it sounds really dumb, and it's completely a coincidence, but I don't want to… tempt fate, or whatever. I can't deal with losing you again, I can't. And I don't want to wear that reminder anymore."

The mood in the air had changed completely, and he felt bad for dragging down the atmosphere when they'd been enjoying themselves. But Tetra didn't seem to notice. Her deep sapphire eyes were locked onto his own, and she raised a hand and placed it gently against his cheek, stroking him with
her thumb.

"You're such a sweetheart, you know that?" she whispered softly, and he could feel his face heat up. "I understand. I know what it's like to live with painful reminders. I just didn't realize that was…"

She shook her head. "Besides, I like your look like this. These clothes make you look… older. Almost sophisticated."

"Yeah, that's what I was going for," he said with a small grin. "The sophisticated hero with his scary pirate girlfriend."

She snorted in amusement and pulled him into a hug. "Okay, so we've always been different. Is that such a bad thing?"

"Not at all," he whispered into her ear, and felt her shiver. "In fact, it's just the way I like it."

"Good," Tetra answered, before pulling back to shoot him a devious wink. "It's just the way I like it too."

She leaned into him as their lips met again, and he lost himself once more in her touch.

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