Link spent a year and a half helping the people of a distant land seal away a demon blade, forming friendships and precious bonds he was heartbroken to lose when he returned to Hyrule. Keeping secret what had transpired in that world, Link became the only guard of that demon's cage. Years later, fueled by curiosity and hurt, Zelda opens a forbidden door that unlocked it all.

With Link now being held captive and tortured by a human form of Soul Edge, the sword many lost their live to take down, heroes from two worlds must join together to save their friend. During the journey, Zelda and Siegfried come to realize that butting heads over the hero has more to do than simple friendship and duty. Feelings always did pick the worst moments to come out in full force.
Better Past, Uncertain Future

Siegfried slept soundly within the walls of the room he’d rented for the night, the finely woven and tightly stitched blankets provided for him at the beginning of his stay sprawled haphazardly over his battle worn body.

Well, battle worn was hardly an appropriate term though he’d heard someone call it that on his way up to his room. There’d been a small fight earlier on in the dining room of the inn, something hardly worth the image of a grueling contest of test, and definitely and unwelcome event to occur after a long day of traveling. No scar had been left, he hadn’t even been hit, but irritation fit over him like an annoying pair of gloves that had yet to be thrown away for some reason.

He’d taken his dinner to this room after that, and the bits and pieces of it remained settled on the nightstand next to his bed beside a worn map and a compass that had certainly seen better days. The place was chilly, but the corner his bed was in was warm enough, and he’d settled down within the first five minutes of resting his head against the pillow.

The sky outside his window was as still as the sleeping figures underneath it. The air was eerily quiet, not uncommon for this time of night. In fact, this night was different than most. This was a rare night of peace, a night where most could lay in bed without fear of dangers coming to disturb them in the middle of the night. This was a night when Siegfried could theoretically let his guard down.

But he was no fool.

Even in the midsts of a deep slumber, the knight was still deeply on his guard. His eyes were closed but his ears remained as sharp as daggers. He could hear the sliding of old wood signaling a window was opening up, could hear the rustling of fabric as a breeze flew into the room, heard the tapping of fine crafted shoes on the wooden floor as they made their way to his bedside. He could even hear a hand reaching out to him.

Really, like any good knight, Siegfried could hear threats before he saw them. And like any good knight he could react to said threats in mere seconds when the need arose. So when he felt a warm hand lightly touching his back, he instinctively clutched onto the wrist it was attached to. He was up on his feet in an instant, ready to attack if he needed to, but calmed slightly when he saw who was before him.

It was a Hylian.

Siegfried found himself looking into two very stunned and slightly confused blue eyes. The owner of those eyes looked down to his wrist, back up to Siegfried, before tilting his head.

The knight sighed before releasing his grip on the hand he held hostage. "Don't do that Link, I thought you were a bandit." He noticed the boy before him was now rubbing a slightly purple wrist. "Did I hurt you?"

The elf smiled and shook his head. "Sorry Siegfried. I just got a little excited."

"Excited about what?"

Link smiled playfully before reaching out for Siegfried's hand. The knight didn’t protest when the elf
decided to drag him over to the window on the other side of the room, and he faithfully turned to look towards a spot Link pointed out in the night sky.

Before his eyes was a sight seen only once in lifetime. There were dozens of stars falling and cascading different levels of the night sky, each giving the earth below a show before it disappeared. Their brilliance greatly contrasted the dark ebony glow of the late hour, but they complemented one another in a way only light and dark could. "It's a flock of shooting stars."

Link smiled widely before nodding, eyes glowing along with what he was seeing outside. "I've never seen them grouped together like this. And this night was just so perfect. No clouds, no storms, no chilling winds," He turned his attention back to the knight. "I wanted to share it with someone."

Siegfried turned as well. "Why me?"

Link shrugged. "I don't know. You just seemed like you needed a miracle tonight."

The darker blond chuckled. "You call shooting stars a miracle?"

The angel blond, as Link had come to be called when he wasn't around to hear it, simply continued to smile. "Of course. It's always a miracle to see something so brilliant fall and return to grace."

Siegfried tilted his head. He'd seen Link do it when the boy was confused or unsure about something. The small gesture made him look cute and added to his overall childish charm, but the knight was pretty sure it just made him look stupid.

Link understood him all the same. "There's an old folktale told to the children in my village. It says that stars are the spirits of warriors who died defending the kingdom. They shine brightly in the sky so that the people beneath it will always know how happy their guardians were to protect the country. Legend goes that in death they protect their new queen, the moon, from the darkness trying to hide her from her people down below."

"So, if regular stars are warriors, who are the shooting stars?"

"They say that soldiers can be torn down in death just as they do in life. Shooting stars are the warriors who have died in battle protecting the moon. The reason their defeats are so beautiful is because they don't want to worry the children in the world of the living. So they give them a show to enjoy until they can rise up to fight again."

"That's a nice story." It was a relief to hear the elf talk about his homeland like this. Link rarely ever spoke of his life in Hyrule without getting homesick and slightly depressed. This story seemed to make the young warrior happy, and Siegfried felt oddly flattered that he was the one hearing it.

"People say that's where I'm destined to go after I die."

"If you do, the moon will be extremely jealous."

Link tilted his head to the side, looking far too sweet and innocent for his own good.

"You'll outshine her."

Link's smile was doing just that. "I knew it was a good idea to wake you up."

Siegfried chuckled. "It's too bad the others aren't up to hear this. Won't they be jealous when I tell them all about it in the morning?"
The elf's kind smile turned into a thoughtful frown. A second later he snapped his fingers in joyful realization. "I should wake them up too!" And with that, he was out the door and off to one of the many rooms where his companions resided.

Siegfried watched him go with a smile. The Hylian was always thinking of others, and he always wanted to share something wonderful with all the people he cared about without a second thought. If there was ever a man that fit the definition of selfless, Link was his pitting image. The knight supposed it was the result of being tossed around time like a ragdoll. Such a thing was horrible to go through, but it allowed one to keep both the innocence of childhood and the wisdom of adulthood.

Still, sometimes Link was too innocent for his own good. He failed to realize that waking people up to star gaze, though a very sweet gesture, was bound to earn him a few unwanted responses. Siegfried was pretty sure that when the elf tried to awaken one of the girls he would end up with a slap in the face. If it was Ivy it would probably be more of a broken arm. If he tried to wake up one of the boys it could only get worse. Mitsurugi would probably slice his head in half... Voldo could turn him into shish kabob... or Lizardman could eat him...

And in an instant Siegfried was chasing after a very doomed and vulnerable elf. "Link, wait! At least take your shield with you! Or some pieces of meat!"

No. This Hylian was not Link.

This one was female, as petite and fragile as any concrete definition he had ever seen. Link had obviously been male, but he'd carried a strength and quiet resilience that she was lacking even upon first sight. Her eyes and hair were similar to Link's, but for some reason the knight found them to be much duller than the Hero of Time's happy go-lucky features. Her hair was yellow, the kind of color you saw on a banana or a lemon in the sun. His hair was pure gold, the kind of flawless color the sun would be envious of if it had a chance to see such a thing. His eyes were the epitome of the sea; bright when the day was happy and the sun was shining brightly, angry when a storm or battle appeared, sad when the rain brought bad news, and curious when the wind brought about new information. Her eyes were plain blue, pretty, but not something he ever wanted to write sonnets about or become overly romantic about at the drop of a dime. And, if he wasn't mistaken, they were also red and puffy in a way he rarely ever saw Link's become.

"Who are you?"

She didn't answer him. Her eyes were fixated on his bare chest.

"Who are you?" He repeated while tightening his hold on her delicate wrist. He should have been a little more considerate, and more properly dressed, but she’d caught him off guard.

She flinched, and before Siegfried could question her again a small ball of blue light with wings attacked his forehead. It didn't hurt, but the action greatly annoyed him.

"Hey, listen!" It shouted. "We need your help."

Siegfried scoffed. "You attack me and then ask for my help? Please explain to me why in the seven hells that would ever work." He was quickly becoming aggravated with the situation. "I'll ask you this one more time." He looked the young woman straight the eye, unflinching and impatient. "Who. Are. You?"

She finally summoned the courage to look him in the eye. "Zelda."
Siegfried knew that name. The second he heard it he tightened his grip, almost as if he was trying to break the bone he felt beneath her skin. She hissed out in pain and he was once again under attack by the blue glowing orb, but he had no intention of letting her go.

Link told him countless stories of the sacrifices he’d had to make over the years. All the bruises, the gashes, the near death experiences that seemed to come every hour, and all the discomfort he had endured all for the sake of one person. Princess Zelda. Princess Zelda, who dragged him into every battle she couldn't fight by herself. Princess Zelda, who took away every life Link had every single time they had been reincarnated. Princess Zelda, who was the only reason why Link ad ever been afraid to go back to his homeland.

"Well, well, well," Siegfried said slowly, eyes narrowing at the girl before him. "If it isn't the destroyer of lives. I have to say, it's good to finally have a face to the name.” His imagination had been off considerably, he’d thought she was older for some reason, but he distrusted her on sight like he’d always thought he would.

She went to slap him with her free hand only to find that he could grab it without any trouble. Too slow, this one. Link had always had lightning reflexes. She settled for scowling. "How dare you? You have some nerve."

Siegfried scoffed. "I have some nerve? I have some nerve? Says the woman who sent an innocent child to do her dirty work and save her kingdom when she failed to do so.” He tightened his grip, if that was even humanly possible at this point. Honestly, the show of strength just made him feel better, and there was a horrible feeling pooling in his gut that wanted to ignore for a minute. "How many of his lives have you ruined, hmm? 3, 5, all of them?"

She looked shocked at his angry outburst.

"What, did you think he would keep his life a secret? I hate to tell you this, but he told me everything."

Link was a reincarnate. A person whose was destined to be reborn into a new life every time he died, until the fates decided he could move onto the afterlife. Link was not immortal, Siegfried knew there were rules and restrictions to his existence, but when he would truly die and rest in peace was still a mystery to him.

Link had told the knight he found it unfair. As long as Zelda was in need of his services he could not die. Until she could handle her life on her own Link's life was not his own. The worst part about the whole thing was that Link remembered it all. All the memories of his past life, all the doubt, all the guilt, all the bitter emotions, were carried onto the next one. The Hylian could never have a clean slate. He could never forget what his princess had done to him. It meant, in essence, that Link could never forgive her for what she’d previously done to him.

"Why are you here?" He suddenly realized that she and the ball were the only others in his room. The object of his thoughts was nowhere in sight. "Speaking of which, where is Link?"

She scowled. "You're awfully bold to call him that. He's usually addressed formally as the Hero of Hyrule."

"I'm aware, now where's Link?"

She looked down to her shoes which were shining a bit in the pale moonlight. Siegfried was not in the mood for such childish games and he desperately wanted an answer. He let go of one of her hands in order to grab her chin and raise it so that the two of them could see eye to eye.
"I want an answer. Where's Link?"

She glared at him, but frustratingly sighed when she realized she had no choice. "Our hero has fallen into the hands of a danger unknown to me."

"How exactly did he fall into the hands of such a danger?" If she confirmed what he believed to be true, then her hand was as good as dislocated from her wrist.

Surprisingly, it was the blue orb that answered the knight's question. "He was trying to protect the princess."

Oh. She was definitely about to lose a hand.
An Unwanted Explanation

Chapter Summary

It could never be anything but painful, learning a fate of someone you once held dear.

Chapter Notes

One of the newest resolutions I had with this story was getting chapters up at least once week, if not every other week, to try and keep things moving. So far so good, so I'm happy to present the next chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Siegfried wanted to kill her. There was a rage bubbling up inside of him that cried for him to sever her wrist from her arm before making his way up to her neck. He would have liked nothing more than to take hold of Zweihander and cut the princess down where she stood, but doing so left him with unanswered questions. Link is in trouble?

It took every ounce of restraint he possessed in his body to respectively throw aside the girls wrist and demand she take a seat. He opted to stand up in front of her, tower in front of her to make it clear he was serious and still very much upset with her. Besides, he had a gut feeling this story was going to make him jolt up anyway. He might as well save time.

"Talk."

Zelda refused to look at him. Her eyes remained on her wrist which he could only imagine had started to bruise beneath her glove. Siegfried knew he should have felt guilty, felt remorse for such a violent act, should have at least looked sorry like he had when he had done the same thing to Link two years ago. Then again this Hylian was not Link. It was his oppressor.

"Do I have to twist your other hand to get you started?" He caught the blue orb in his hand before it could attack his head again. "I have no problem in doing so."

She glared at him.

"You're not going to impress me with that little scowl of yours." Siegfried narrowed his eyes. "If you want me to shut up, I suggest you stop wasting my time. Tell me why you came here and why Link isn’t with you. Do not leave a single piece of information out."

She was eventually going to have to say something. His patience was growing thin and he was more than happy to go through with his promise. "The Link you knew from before…he died a few years after returning to Hyrule."

Siegfried could feel his heart shattering and his eyes darted over to Zweihander. "What do you mean died? How?"
"His body had gone through far too much. Traveling through time and different worlds takes a lot of
strength. He eventually grew tired. When a new disease found its way to Hyrule, his body was no
longer in any shape to fight it."

The knight scowled. "He got sick? How on earth did that happen?" Link had never been sick a day
in his life in this world. He was the one treating the sick and injured.

"Our hero never took care of himself as well as he should have."

"That's because he was too busy taking care of you." Siegfried spat. "Did you not see he was killing
himself? Why didn't you tell him to slow down? You should have known he would ignore his own
health if only to see someone else is safe from harm."

Zelda still hadn’t looked him straight in the eye. He could only assume it was because he was
showing so much aggression. "If it makes you feel any better my death came soon after his."

That hardly mattered. "Where was he buried? You did bury him didn't you? You didn't cremate him
and keep the ashes to yourself, did you?"

"Deep within the remains of the Great Deku Tree." She said, ignoring his last two questions. "It was
his dying wish that he be near the creature so much like a father to him when it was finally his time to
be put to rest."

It seemed that Link had not been completely looked over in death, as he had been in life. Siegfried
could at least take comfort in that. "So the reason you stand before me now is because you two have
been reincarnated. Born once more as the princess and her kingdoms savior."

She nodded. "As always we were reborn with the memories of our past lives intact. Nothing much
had changed. The only difference this time around was that our hero was gifted with normalcy for a
short time. He was simply Link, a farm boy who lived in Ordon Village. He had an uncle, an
expected aunt, and a young cousin named Collin."

"And, as always, a problem that you couldn't take care of came up. Link had to, once again, abandon
his happy life in order to guarantee yours. Again" He had a hard time keeping the anger out of his
voice. "That still doesn't explain why you're here. That problem should have been taken care of by
now. Besides, that's Hyrule business. It should have nothing to do with this world." Siegfried had
been under the impression that the two wouldn't be allowed to mi anymore once Link had journeyed
home.

Zelda hesitated. "When we met each other again, I finally had the courage to ask him what happened
in this world. He didn't say much, only that some things should always remain a secret."

"Really?" Siegfried shrugged. "That's funny. He told me all about you and his life back in Hyrule. I
don't recall him ever keeping a secret from me." That was a cheap shot and Siegfried knew it.

Zelda had to have known it too, but she refused to comment. Siegfried wasn't sure if it was because
she had nothing to say or if it was because she’d simply chosen to keep that royal and majestic air of
silence that all royalty seemed to possess.

"He never wanted to talk about it." Zelda was calm when she spoke, almost ice cold. "At first I
thought it was too painful for him to bear. But he seemed so…” She gripped the fabric of her dress
for a short moment. "Happy." She concluded, relaxing her hands once again. "He just seemed so
happy when he spoke of this world."

Siegfried got a strange sense of satisfaction from that.
"I wanted to understand him. I wanted to know why he seemed to cherish this place so much."

"You could have just asked him."

"He wouldn't have told me."

He knew that. Siegfried knew that Link would have avoided every possible opportunity to have a touching heart to heart moment with his princess. He would make excuses, disappear from the face of the earth, even take on another life or death quest if only to stay away from Zelda. "He would have told me."

She glared at him. As a princess she was probably unused to people challenging her authority or pushing her buttons. Especially when it came to Link. "You seem so sure."

"He told me about you didn't he?" The smirk was in his smile as well as on his face, and Siegfried was not afraid to show either.

Zelda was silent, and again Siegfried urged her to tell the story she’d come to tell him, a bit more firmly this time. She sighed, finally relenting. "It started one afternoon after our hero had journeyed deep within a forest near Ordon. I had decided to take matters into my own hands and investigate his past journey into your word--"
upset if he knew what you were planning.” Navi sounded like she was pleading with the princess to see sense, to turn back now while they could. “You said he told you never to open what was sealed.”

That had been the reason why he slashed a line through the eye.

"Princess," His voice had been so firm that day. So unlike the kind and playful hero his people all adored. "You must remember. Keep what is behind this door out of sight and out of mind."

"Why?" she had questioned. "That item was yours in your past life. You deserve to have possession of it once more."

He looked almost remorseful when he locked the door. "It's true. That item was very precious to me. I used it often, and I admit it did me a world of good. Actually," he laughed a little. “It did me two worlds of good.” His smile faded just as easily as it arrived. "But you must never think of taking it out of here."

"I still don't understand."

"You don’t need to."

He refused to say another word on the subject. Zelda had not ventured down to the dungeons since that day. But now she had done what she had promised never to do.

Zelda had to admit, she was nervous. No, she was afraid. She was afraid that by coming down there, by taking out the key she had been entrusted with, she was setting herself up for a confrontation she could not handle. Afraid that Link himself would come down and try and stop her.

The door let out an eerie screech until it hit the wall behind it, allowing the lantern to give light into the familiar layout of the small room. Link had demanded it be kept simple. Simplicity was inconspicuous. Simplicity never tangoed with curiosity.

The room was small, only allowing any normal adult enough room to walk in a straight line. Zelda was forced to leave the lantern at the doorway. The end of that straight line had an old stone pillar with a wooden box on top of it. The box was nothing to gawk it. In fact it looked almost as innocent as the hero who had put it there.

"I don't think we should do this."

"Hush Navi. I know what I'm doing."

She walked the short distance to the wooden box, only stopping to ghost her hand over the old wooden lid. Gathering her courage, she opened it quickly and took out the item she had come to retrieve. It had been a while since she had felt the smooth blue marble this object was made from, and she was surprised it was as new and as beautiful as the day she first held it.

"The Ocarina of Time." Just saying the name brought back memories long forgotten. "Now, what melody did he play the last time? The one he used to go to that other world?"

Navi refused to speak. Not only was her loyalty to Link halting her voice, but the memory had to be a painful one to recall. Link had been forced to leave his partner behind, even though Epona had
been allowed to go with him. The two parted with heavy hearts, and Navi had to part with Link shortly after he returned. It had been ages since they’d seen each other.

"Navi, I order you to speak. Which song did he use to open that door?"

Navi let out a frustrated sigh. "The song you taught him. The song of time."

Zelda put the instrument to her lips and began to play. It was a song passed down since ancient times, as well as a memento from a past life. She was surprised she could play it as well so well. After all, it had been a literal lifetime since the song had even been played.

But there was something different about the song this time. Rather, there was something wrong with the way it sounded.

She took the Ocarina away from her mouth to examine it. “What’s this?” Nothing seemed out of place, but that odd feeling remained.

Navi hummed in question."Is something wrong?"

Zelda continued to stare. It was ridiculous. Staring at an object wasn't going to change it.

But this time it did.

The blue marble of the once precious royal item began to turn black. Before Zelda could drop it, dark serpent like hands clutched onto her writs. Her first instinct was to tell Navi to run, to go off and find some help, but that plan was quickly foiled when another hand shot up to grab the fairy. And they didn't stop there. Dozens more started shooting out, engulfing the room in a darkness even more absolute than the one already present. It only took mere seconds before they completely engulfed her as well. By then, all she could do was scream.

"You mean to tell me you went in there without his permission?"

"It's my castle." she argued. "I can decide if I can or cannot walk through the dungeon in my own castle."

"You fool." This was the person responsible for the lives of an entire kingdom? He was surprised they were all still breathing. "Link used that song to seal away the very spirit of Soul Edge in that ocarina. Playing it again would only release what had been sealed."

"I was unaware of that. As I’ve told you before, he never told me about it."

"But he did tell you to stay away from it. That should have been enough warning."

She was silent. Siegfried thought she might have tried to bite her lip, but the action was never completed.

"So you got possessed by Soul Edge, what happened next?"

"My people were forced to leave the city around the castle before they too became infected with that darkness. I had become a monster."

"As if you weren't one already."
"My people would disagree with you."

"Your people once helped to force a young man to solve their problems for them. Twice. I don't think they're the best example to go by."

She went silent once more.

"So you were left on your own, trapped in your own castle I assume?" She nodded. "What next?"

"Our hero was, unfortunately, nowhere near the castle. He had already saved our current Hyrule from a terrible darkness called the Twilight and the person responsible for it still roamed the land. He had escaped destruction once by sheer luck. Once our hero heard of this, he left to prepare for a final confrontation." She looked up at him, pure mistrust in her eyes. She didn’t want to tell him anything, he knew. "I'm assuming you know the man I speak of."

Of course he did. He and Link did not hide nightmares from each other. "Ganondorf."

She nodded. "He too had heard about the mysterious power I had obtained, and he found it too tempting a thing to remain in hiding for…"

Soul Edge loved the feeling of a new host. The body, the mind, the soul, it was all so fresh and clean. It all so pure and new. It was all his to dirty with blood and massacre. This particular host, this princess, was especially fulfilling.

She had a unique power, not unlike the one that brat had used to seal him in that blasted instrument. It was divine, almost god-like, and he enjoyed using it to murder the girl's beloved guards. His one regret was that his use of such power was limited. If he attempted to take control of it fully, he was bound to kill his current hostess and delete this power altogether. This energy surging through him, this unstoppable amount of control, was too sweet to let go. He could not, would not, risk it.

Lucky for him, this girl wasn’t the only one capable of housing such a marvelous gift.

He felt his lips twitch when the doors of the castle burst open with a flare of energy so dark it could have come from only the deepest pits of this land. He sensed a power, much like the one he had now, coming forth in the form of a tanned red headed male wearing black desert gear. This man strolled into the castle as though it was nothing, only stopping when he reached the steps that led to the throne Soul Edge now sat in.

"I sense a dark presence within the girl," he said. "Who are you?"

Soul Edge smirked. "My name is of no consequence. But yours would be very much appreciated."

"The names Ganondorf, the future master of Hyrule." He pointed to the throne Soul Edge was seated on. "And you happen to be in my seat."

This man had guts. The evil blade would give him that. "You are no ordinary Hylian." The sword observed. "No, you're on a different level entirely. What is this power I sense? This power so similar to that of this princess?"

Ganondorf scoffed. "Her power, similar to mine? Don't make me laugh."

Soul Edge raised an eyebrow. "Oh, am I wrong?"
"The only similarity we share is that we both have pieces of the Triforce."

The Triforce. An ancient power created by the three goddesses of this world. His hostesses' memories, which were now his to read as he saw fit, told him she had been chosen to wield a specific piece of this magnificent creation. "This princess, Zelda I believe, has been granted the Triforce of wisdom." His eyes darted over to his left hand. "It is strong."

"Not as strong as mine." This man seemed very sure of that. "Mine is the Triforce of power."

_That_ had the dark blades attention. "Power? So yours would be stronger, more potent, than this one?"

"Naturally."

_In a flash_ Soul Edge was behind the one who called himself Ganondorf. The male was unable to move, frozen as if something was pinning him to his spot at the base of the stairs.

"If you're so strong," There were suddenly talons grazing the sides of Ganondorf's neck. "Then you should be just what I need to get a body of my own."

"You have the girls." The second Triforce wielder knew in an instant where this was going, and it was nowhere he wanted to be.

"Yes, but as you have just told me, she is weak. I only have control of her body, but with strength like yours, I could very well become a solid human with one of my own."

"You won't succeed. Taking over someone else's body won't give you your own. You'll only get the same result you have now."

Soul Edge chuckled. The sound sent visible shivers up the others spine. "Who said anything about switching hosts? That's not what I have planned for you."

"Then how-"

Soul Edge leaned closer, right next to the poor fool's ear. "Have you ever heard the expression, 'You are what you eat'?"

_Another scream rang throughout the country that day, stretching as far as the driest deserts._

"You ate him?" Siegfried felt like throwing up.

Zelda scowled. "It was that creature in my body."

Siegfried still felt his dinner attempting to rise up from his stomach. Had he considered himself anything less than an epitome of strength he would have considered throwing up then and there. But sickness was a form of weakness. The last thing he needed was this princess thinking he had anything that even remotely resembled a weak spot. "Please tell me you didn't eat Link."

She glared at him. It was becoming a bit of a running pattern. "This is no time for jokes."

Siegfried was far from joking. "So how exactly did Link get involved in all this?"

"Would you stop calling him by name?" It was more of a demand than a request.
"Would you rather I call him by a pet name?" She shook her head. "Then stop complaining."

She let out a frustrated sigh. "To answer your question, he came to save me." She could probably see that he wanted to say something, so she continued before he got the chance. "This thing you call Soul Edge used Ganondorf's devoured spiritual energy and flesh to create a body of his own, if you want to call it that."

"What do you mean?"

"The thing looked more like a walking corpse than anything else."

As if he weren't sick enough. "What I want to know is why he kept you alive."

"His body was there, but it was far from stable. He still needed the power of my Triforce to keep him from falling apart. I was kept in one of the dungeons below the castle, only allowed to come out when he needed more energy for his new body. Word was sent to our hero and he came to get me..."

Zelda had never been happier to see him. She had never been happier to feel his surprisingly soft hands on her wrists or to see that reassuring smile she loved so much. "You came."

The blond focused his attention on removing the steel shackles holding her against the wall. "You needed me, didn't you?"

She was surprised by the tone of his voice. It was so kind and gentle. So unlike the harsh and cold hiss she had expected. "I'm sorry."

The chains that had once kept her captive fell to the floor with a few sharp clangs. "You did what you thought was best. There's no need to feel sorry for that."

Once she had been taken care of, Link set to work on releasing his fairy friend. The small creature had posed no real use to Soul Edge, nor was she any kind of threat. As such she had been kept in the dungeons in the smallest cage available. So small, in fact, that there was barely any room for her to breathe. This cage was steel as well, but thankfully the metal had rusted along with the sands of time. It was not difficult for Link to break.

But the fairy did not move.

"Is she alright?" Zelda asked carefully, the look on his face too much for her to stand.

Link held the fairy close to his chest, searching and praying for a sign of life. A pulse that would assure him that his small friend was alive. He was relieved when a faint beating began synchronizing with his own heartbeat. "She's tired. Let her rest a bit and she'll be fine."

Carefully, so as not to wake up his injured friend, Link ripped off a pouch from the brown leather belt he wore on his waist before taking off the green hat from the top of his head. He wrapped Navi up in the green fabric and placed his small friend in the pouch. Then he paused for a moment, looking back and forth between Zelda and Navi's new resting place. He looked as though he were in deep concentration, and almost seemed to doubt the intelligence of what he was about to do next. But he finally had no choice but to hand Navi over to Zelda.

"Please make sure to keep her safe."

"Why not just put her in a bottle?"
He shook his head. "It's made of glass. She might get hurt while we're moving."

Zelda should have known. Link was always quite gentle with Navi. He was always making sure Navi was safe. That had been why he demanded Navi hide in his hat during some of his toughest battles. He wanted his fairy safe at all times. Zelda was not sure he felt the same about her.

"Wait, wait, wait," Siegfried felt as though he had to interrupt. "You were jealous of a two inch blue ball of light with wings?" A glare was his only response. "You're pathetic you know that?"

By this point Navi had given up trying to get Siegfried to keep his opinions to himself. She could only assume that this instant rivalry between the two would continue until Link was there beside them, smiling brightly and safe from harm.

"Would you let me finish this story?"

Siegfried had the strongest desire to deny her request, but he knew better than to let his emotions get the better of him in instances like this. "Go on."

"From there, our hero managed to free us from the castle dungeons."

"Did he fight his way out?" Link had a tendency to overlook how much danger he put himself in when he attempted to rescue someone else. Mitsurugi used to scold him for his rash and often thoughtless behavior.

She shook her head. "I thought he would try something like that, but he surprised me. He dug an elaborate tunnel into the dungeons and used those same tunnels to help us escape. Once we resurfaced he had Epona ready to take us to our next destination."

Siegfried was impressed. Escaping through hidden tunnels was a trick the young elf learned from Yoshimitsu. The thief had bragged that the technique was the most effective way to deal with a hostage and rescue situation. Apparently, Link had been paying attention.

"He took as far as the old Temple of Time. It was collapsing and had been abandoned for years, barely anything more than a foundation with old imprints of magic, but it would work for what our hero had planned. It was the original location of the portal our hero used to get to your world. He intended to use it again to seek aid for Hyrule."

"So what happened? The way your story goes it seem like you should have made it out of there with no problems."

Zelda tightly gripped the fine satin fabric of her dress. "We had an unexpected dilemma."

Siegfried already knew where this was going, but he still wanted to deny it. "No,"

"Yes," She sounded close to tears. "Soul Edge followed us…"

Link could honestly say he was not afraid.

When you were afraid of something, your heart would beat beyond the confines of your chest. When
you were simply afraid of something, you were gazing into the eyes of something you had never seen before, a problem without a solution. When you were afraid, you were unarmed and unprepared to fight what was before you, and you were never completely sure you could.

He was not afraid.

Link's heart was not pounding against his chest. It had completely burst out of him altogether and was probably sitting on the floor beneath him, all too glad that its torment was over. When Link gazed into the eyes of his enemy, he did not see the unfamiliarity of a mystery he never experienced. He knew what was in front of him, had seen it before, and Link was certainly not debating whether or not he could defeat the danger. He was absolutely positive that he had no chance in any underworld at beating it in a one-on-one fight.

He wasn't afraid. There wasn't a word in any language that could convey what he was feeling.

"YOU!" That voice was poison to the young elf's ears. "YOU'RE THE LITTLE BRAT WHO SEALED ME IN THAT ACCURSED INSTRUMENT!"

Link would be lying if he said he never thought about what Soul Edge would look like as a human being. Back when he first entered Siegfried's world he had actually thought about the subject a lot. He even brought it up in conversations with the German when they were bored or the silence dragged on too long. Many thoughts had loomed through his head, ranging from Ganondorf to Nightmare like appearances. No matter what he came up with, one thing always remained the same. Human Soul Edge was a terrifying sight to behold.

The Soul Edge before him was not what he had expected. It was nothing more than undead remains of what used to be living flesh. Brown, rotten, and decomposed skin clumped together in a makeshift model of the human body. Link half expected the whole thing to start falling apart at any second. A dark dirt red liquid (it might have been the dark blades version of blood) shot through a thick murky tube (it must have been some type of vein) that curved in and out of every limb in what Link could only describe as a walking corpse.

No, it was not what he had expected. But it was terrifying all the same.

It took a step toward him, and he took a step back. His face was calm and unaffected, but his mind was telling him to run. Epona was behind him with Zelda safely strapped to her saddle. The door to Siegfried's world had been opened. He could run. If he really wanted to, he could jump right on Epona and run. Except he knew he would never make it. He would be killed before he reached the door, and all hope of destroying this monster would be gone. There was only one way this was going to have some type of happy ending.

"Princess!" He reached down to his belt. Another brown pouch was ripped off of the sturdy leather and swiftly thrown at Zelda.

Soul Edge raised it arms, sensing what the boy was about to do, and after a second of the air pulsing and sparking in the small space he threw a batch of dark energy at the young hero. Link managed to block it with his Hylian shield, but the dark matter did not stop. It kept pushing him, trying to break apart his only means of defense and make it to his body. Soul Edge would not move from his spot in the doorway. His body was weak. It needed the strength and nourishment of the power that had created it. It cried out for the power of the Triforce, the power that Link had taken away, a power that Soul Edge was desperate to retrieve. And so the attacks continued, each becoming a little weaker than the last, but somehow adding to the strength of the energy that was already there.

Link knew he did not have the strength to keep them at bay for long. "Princess!" he called again.
"Go through the door. Find a man named Siegfried Schtauffen. Ask for his help."

"But you--"

He only smiled. "I'll be fine." He was such a liar. "Epona, go!"

The horse did not want to adhere to such an order. She was no fool. She knew that if she ran, the chances of seeing her master again was slim. To never be able see that smile, to never again be able to hear that warm laughter, was too horrible a thing to realize. She had no desire to make such thoughts become a reality.

But the look Link's eyes, the fear in his smile, told her something he could not convey through words. Something that could very well become reality if she refused to move. With a few tears in her eyes, and a promise in her heart, she sped off before the portal could close completely. The last thing any of them heard before the door sealed itself once more was the last scream that managed to ring all throughout Hyrule. The final cry of the last of the Triforce holders.

"I cannot be certain what he is going through," Zelda admitted. "But I can only assume it's as severe as my treatment was."

"You'd be wrong." Siegfried’s eyes landed on his blade sitting on a wall opposite of the bed. He knew it would be heavy in his hand when he picked it up again. "His treatment would be far worse." He went around the room quickly, trying to gather what he needed with a semi cool head on his shoulders. "Link was the one who sealed that damn thing away. There's no doubt in my mind that Soul Edge would still hold a grudge. He's probably paying Link back for all the time he spent locked away."

"You think he's being punished?"

"I think he's being tortured."

The two were silent until the knight finished packing up all his possessions in a brown sack. Zelda was a little alarmed that the knight was so quiet. He'd had no problems in showing his deep dislike of her before, so she could not fathom why he was being so coldly polite now. He was angry, hell he was practically glowing with murderous intent, so why was he not saying anything about it?

"I'm not going to kill you." he said as though he could read her thoughts. "You're the only one who knows how to get back to Hyrule. I can't afford to let you die. Not until Link is safe."

Somehow, that did not give the princess an ounce of comfort.

The smile was on his face before he even had time to think about it. "So this is how you found me." Siegfried walked up to the happily neighing creature and gently ran his hands over the horse's nose. She was a friend of Link's, someone who had protected and respected the young elf in all that he had done. She was special to Link, so she was special to Siegfried, and he was happy to see her.

Epona, it seemed, was just as happy to see him. It surprised him a bit. He had not seen her in years, but she still knew who he was. She knew he was the man who would eventually help rescue her master.

Siegfried untied the rope that bound the horse to one of the wooden pillars and tried to hand it over to Zelda. She backed away until she had almost tripped over the steps that led back up to the entrance
of the inn.

"What's the matter with you?" He tried to hand her the reins once more. "Just take them and get on Epona. We have work to do."

She shook her head.

"This is not the time to act stubborn. We need help, and a decent plan as to what we're going to do." He explained as gently as he could, which, considering who he was talking to, was not all that gentle at all. "If we're going to do that we need to start, as much as it pains me to say this, traveling together to a list of places to find people who can help us out."

Zelda just kept shaking her head.

"Listen," Siegfried was quickly becoming annoyed with the princess in front of him. "The first stop on this list is a town 78 miles away. With you along, we won't get there until tomorrow night. I can't afford to let you slow this trip down by walking in overly priced shoes that will only let you move three meters an hour. Now. Get. On. The. Horse."

She still would not move. "She won't let me ride her."

He raised an eyebrow. "What?"

Seeing that the princess refused to answer, Navi spoke up instead. "Epona is very angry with the princess. She bucked her off the second we arrived at this inn. She won't even allow the princess to get near her now."

"If I even attempt to," Zelda added. "she tries to bite off my hands."

Siegfried sighed in frustration. This was going to be a bumpy ride.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think, and be sure to tell me if you have any suggestions or questions. Happy writings.
The Basic Plan

Chapter Summary

It took a village to do anything of value. This time, the task at hand is saving a friend. Siegfried just has to figure out how to go about it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He knew he probably should not have taken her in there. In places like these, where smoke was considered high class perfume and pocket knives were world class belt buckles, people like her were bound to be in trouble.

Zelda was a high class lady, someone who enjoyed the finer things life had to offer her. She had been fortunate enough to be born into a life where she had everything. Clothes to keep her warm in the winter, food to keep her nourished and able, an education to help her understand the world, and morals to keep her soul as pure as it possibly could be.

These people had no such luxuries. They were born on the streets where the only cloths and food they ever received were the ones they had to steal for themselves. They had no money. They could only ever consider themselves wealthy if they robbed, or killed, a particularly rich merchant or a duke of some kind, and the money was always short-lived. The biggest difference of all was that these people had no morals. They did not care who lived or died or the circumstances that went along with them. It was a dog eat dog world after all, and there was no room for sympathy.

Still, even though it might have been a mistake, Siegfried knew that he and Zelda would not be followed into the pub. That fact that it was dangerous meant that no one would think he would ever risk taking a princess inside. It was about as inconspicuous as he could afford to get. Besides, as long as the two of them kept their cloaks on at all times, they would not attract any unwanted attention. He hoped.

"I don't like this place."

Siegfried quickly looked around to see if anyone heard her. He doubted any one would, as he had chosen a table as far away from the crowd as possible, but you could never be too careful. "Keep your voice down." he warned. "Talk like that could get you killed."

She pulled the hood of the cloak even further down her head. "Remind me again why we're here."

"I told you, we need a plan." He called over a nearby waitress and asked that she bring him a pencil and piece of paper. He had to think about his next move very carefully. In all honesty, he had never expected something like this to happen. When Link left this world two years ago, Siegfried assumed that would be the last anyone ever heard of Soul Edge. He never thought anyone would release what had been so carefully sealed away.

"Can't we just go back now? What's stopping us from rescuing our hero this very second?"

That was what the knight had wanted to do in the first place. His first instinct, upon hearing what
happened to the elf, had been to grab his sword and rush off into battle. Now that he had taken some
time to cool off he could clearly see how completely stupid that was. Something this important,
something this dangerous, could not be handled so foolishly. There were too many risks.

For one thing, Siegfried did not know if Zelda had been followed here. Sure, she had not mentioned
seeing anything following her into the portal, but that meant nothing. For all he knew Soul Edge
could have sent some type of shadow creature after the princess in order to ensure she never made it
back home. Something like that wouldn’t be spotted so easily. That was why he had insisted on
disguising, and hiding, themselves for as long as they could. There was no way of knowing who was
stalking them, just waiting to strike from within the shadows.

Besides, there was no guarantee that he would be able to fight such a monstrous enemy on even
terms. Siegfried was not strong enough to fight Soul Edge on his own. It had taken over his body
before and it could do so again. He had fought against his other side and eventually broken free,
even helped Link seal the damned thing away, but he couldn’t dwell on those facts too much. After
all, Link had done most of the sealing and Link was the reason he had been able to break free in the
first place.

Siegfried hated to admit it, but he would need help, and a lot of it. He could not risk losing this fight,
because if he did it would be Link paying the price. Siegfried would not let Link pay for his mistake.

"Too risky," The waitress finally returned and threw down Siegfried's requested items before
running to take a locals order. Siegfried would have thought her to be inexcusably rude if he had not
been so focused on the task at hand. "We can't afford to make any mistakes."

He began scribbling down anything he thought might help. Name's, places, weapons, anything and
everything he thought might give him an edge when confronting Soul Edge. Ten minutes went by,
and almost every weapon he could think of had been scratched off of the piece of paper. In fact the
only sword still on the list was Soul Calibur, something he had no time to look for, and something
that had gone missing when Link left. It really was useless to try and think of a location that would
give him some type of clue as to how to beat the evil blade. The only place he could think of was
Ostriensburg Castle and he was never setting foot in that place again. Besides, it was next to useless
if he wanted to help someone in another world.

That just left his list of names. "I'll be honest with you," He found himself wishing for some type of
drink to magically appear in his hand. "You are going to have a very hard time in this world. We'll
be lucky if you manage to live through this."

He could feel her glaring at him through the fabric of the cloak. "Is that a threat?"

"It's a warning." He leaned back in his chair, holding up the list so that he could easily see the names
he had written down the moment before. "You've made a lot of enemies simply by telling me you
put Link in danger. Believe it or not he had friends in this world. Friends that will be just as angry, if
not more so, than me. And unfortunately for you, they're exactly the kind of help we need."

She knew he was serious. "How many?"

"Too many for you to handle." He handed her the paper and opted to rest his head on the table. He
could feel the presence of an oncoming migraine.

Zelda looked over the list carefully, trying to see if she was able to recognize any of them. "Who is
Sophitia?"

Siegfried caught the undertone of jealousy. "You can calm down. She won't go after Link. She's
happily married with two children." He couldn’t resist the jab, though. "However, her sister, Cassandra, will. She's had a crush on him ever since he rescued her niece and nephew."

She glared at him, yet again.

He couldn't see it, but he just knew she was giving him all sorts of dirty looks. "Watch out for them. Sophitia won't go crazy and kill you, since she's really not a violent person, but she did consider him one of her own. No one messes with one of her kids and gets away with it. Cassandra will most likely have to be restrained. Her infatuation with him was strong, probably still is."

"What about this Seong Mina person?"

Siegfried found it amusing that she started questioning the women first when he put the men at the top of the list. "She's a girl Link and I happened to run into when a young man named Yunseong came across our path. He was hiding from her and he asked Link to help him out. Link could never refuse a cry for help, and eventually the two ended up fighting. He beat her, she was impressed, and the rest is history. She considers him a good friend as well as a strong fighter. Yunseong pretty much thinks the same. Both will be pretty mad about what happened to Link, so don't anger them anymore than you already have."

"And what about this Taki person?"

"She's another one you have to watch out for. She's a ninja. We found her passed out in a forest after she had been poisoned by a group of bandits. Those potions Link had on him saved her life. At the time, Link was the only man she could really stand. He was so innocent to her. She wanted to protect him as much as possible from the poison in the world. When she hears this story you're going to be in a lot of trouble."

She had doubt of that, if Siegfried was any indication. "Ivy? Isn't that some type of weed?"

"Let her catch you saying that and you'll be six feet underground. She's an alchemist and the daughter of an undead pirate named Cervantes. Quite the solitary creature. She blockaded herself into her own home for years hoping to eventually die alone. Link refused to leave her side until he could somehow get her to understand that she had someone who wanted to be there. It took a while, but he eventually got through. She was never able to thank him enough."

"So were they… close?"

"She called him her sun."

Zelda did not want to go any further. "Talim?"

"A young wind priestess who was very fond of Link. He rescued her from an inhuman creature we all used to call Necrid. Link was as soft hearted as she was and they ended up convincing me to let the guy go. She treated him like a brother and she admired him greatly. She was devastated when Link had to return to Hyrule. If she could have, she would have gone with him."

"Xianghua?" The last women on the list. "How did you find her?"

"Technically, she found us. We had barely managed to escape a ship full of pirates at the time. We’d been fighting for what seemed like ages before we finally had to jump off the boat in a last ditch effort to get away. When she found us we were knocked unconscious on the shore of some beach. Took care of us for awhile, and when we got better she asked us for a favor. She wanted help finding her friend Kilik who had gone after another friend, Maxi. Of course, Link did the hero thing and got both of them back to her in one piece. He took quite the beating for interfering in other
people's business, but we got three new allies. He thought it was worth it."

"Yoshimitsu." she read out loud. "I think I've heard our hero mention him before, when he had rescued me using those tunnels."

"I'm not surprised. Link looked up to him a lot."

"Was he a warrior?"

"Kind of. He knew his way around a sword, but his profession was that of a bandit. Link was amazed by his skill and proceeded to learn all he could from the thief. Yoshimitsu took a liking to Link early on, so he never minded the onslaught of questions Link always had right up his sleeve. I thank Yoshimitsu for any kind of street smarts Link has. Those are his doing."

"You haven't told me how you two met with this bandit."

"He can tell you himself when you meet him. I'm not one to go spreading private business."

"A simple meeting is private business? My, this man must have been very secretive."

"Extremely." Siegfried smiled for the first time that night. "He wore a mask at all times. It used to drive Link crazy. I guess he didn't like it when people hid their face."

Zelda fidgeted slightly. She knew that Link did not simply dislike it when someone hid their face behind a mask. He absolutely despised it, hated it with a passion, and she knew the reason why. Heck, she was the reason why. However, she was less than eager to say such a thing to Siegfried.

"You'll notice," Siegfried began. "That there are two human beings left on that list. The first is Mitsurugi, a samurai who became a sort of surrogate father to Link, and Raphael, who appointed himself as Link's older brother."

"Hold on," Zelda glanced back down at the paper. "You said there were only two others. There are still two names on this list."

"I said was there were only two other human beings left."

Zelda frowned, and this time she lifted her hood up so he could see her expression clearly. "Come now, isn't that a bit harsh?"

She sounded a bit like Link when she said that. "It's harsh because it's true. I'll admit, Lizardman was human once, but now he's nothing more than a giant reptile. And as for Voldo..." He shivered. "I don't want to think of what Voldo was. Hell, I don't even know what he is now."

Her frown deepened.

"When you see them, you can decide for yourself what you want you want to call them. I don't consider them human, so I won't mark them as such."

"What does our hero consider them?"

"He, of course, considers them his friends. They, however, consider him their master."

Zelda almost fell out of her seat. "What?"

Siegfried shrugged. "Beats me. He saved them, and after that they deemed him worthy enough to be their master. I guess they got caught up in his innocent charm. They wouldn't be the first."
"And he just let them think that?" She was almost shrieking.

"Calm down." he said harshly before he continued. "What was he supposed to say? 'I'm flattered now leave'? He would never be so cruel."

"So many names." She seemed utterly exhausted. Had she been any one else Siegfried might have felt sorry for her.

"So many people you need to be wary of."

She looked to him desperately. "Is there anyone I don't have to worry about?"

He sighed. "Let me break it down for you. Link is important to four different groups in this world. The first is his surrogate family. His mother, Sophitia, will not like you one bit. She won't kill you. His father, Mitsurugi, will probably be disgusted with you. He won't kill you. Talim, his sister, will be devastated by your decision. She will not kill you. Raphael, his older brother, will hate you with all he's got, and this guy will kill you if given the chance."

"Three out of four isn't bad."

"Then we have his female friends. Xianghua won't like you, but she's a bit to kind hearted to kill you. Mina won't kill you either."

Zelda felt herself relax.

"She'll just beat on you whenever she gets the chance."

She then immediately stiffened.

"Cassandra will have the intent to kill, but she'll be so loud you'll be able to hear her coming, so the chance of her actually landing a hit is slim. Taki you have to watch out for. She's the personification of deadly silent. Ivy, I don' know what she'll do exactly, but it can't be good."

Zelda could feel a headache coming on.

"His guy friends won't be much better. Kilik will be polite. Maxi will do anything in his power to make your life utterly miserable, but he would never resort to hitting a woman unless he's in a fair fight with her. Yunseong will be the loudest of all your enemies. He'll be mad at you all the time, but the worst he'll do is yell."

"Oh that's all?" Zelda muttered sarcastically.

"Now his pets," Which was what he preferred to call Voldo and Lizardman. "Will want to kill you. Scratch that. They'll want to kill you, chop you up, throw the pieces on the ground, spit on them, and then feed them to something that will probably be vicious and savage."

"Please don't hold back on my account."

He shrugged. "You wanted to know."

He heard her head fall onto the table. He had to admit, it was very amusing to see such a high class lady acting like an over worked child. "Anymore questions?"

"Just one." she mumbled. "With little exception, you've told me how our hero came to be acquainted with each of the individuals you've mentioned."
He blinked. "Yes." He really couldn’t understand why she couldn’t just speak normally. Formality was fine when someone was in a castle or some type of high class court. In a pub like this, speech like hers just seemed really awkward. It was a lot better, and a lot more inconspicuous, to speak like you would on the streets.

"How did you meet him?"

Siegfried couldn’t speak for a moment. He wasn’t expecting that, of all things, to come out of her mouth.

"Who are you?" Nightmare asked as he drew his sword from its sheath.

The blond teenager in front of him, for there was no way he could have been an adult, took the opportunity to unveil his own sword. "My name is of no consequence, but yours would be very much appreciated."

The dark knight noticed a pair of pointed ears atop a mop of golden hair. "You're not human. At least not the ones I'm familiar with."

The boy smirked and lowered his body, mocking the knight before him with a simple bow. "Thank you for noticing. I'm a Hylian. Your people would call me an elf." He straightened himself up and went back into a fighting stance. "I was ordered by my princess to destroy you."

Nightmare scoffed. "You? You're just a child."

The knight swore he saw the other's eye twitch. "I would hardly call an 18 year old a child."

"My apologies, boy. Come then." he bellowed as he prepared to put his blade to use. "You shall become part of me."

The boy barely had time to blink before he became bombarded with an onslaught of swift slashes. On instinct he lifted his shield up to his face and upper body before any of the attacks could make critical contact. At first it was a struggle to try to protect himself. The warrior in front of him had a crazy forceful set of skills that must have taken years to perfect. Every move was crazed but had a purpose and direction that the young man couldn’t follow straight away. An odd rhythm all its own, a deadly serenade that could kill any man on the dance floor who was too slow to follow along.

The blond was determined not to be that poor sap on the dance floor. It would be difficult. He had never danced to such an intense and frantic melody before. It would take some getting used to, and he didn't have much time to get it right, but the blonde knew it was possible. He knew how to memorize the rhythm of a fight. He knew how to dance along to a battles melody without missing a single beat. He had done it before, he could do it again.

He began by focusing his gaze on Nightmares sword. The blade had an intense evil aura surrounding it. Every move it made, every attack it unleashed, could be seen with a keen eye. They could be heard with a careful pair of almost hyper sensitive ears. They could be sensed with a fine tuned spiritual intuition. Lucky for him, experience had allowed him all three, and there was no better time to use them.
He was not able to make a single hit, he was sad to say he was not so in tune with his senses, but he did manage to avoid any serious injury. His eyes were sharp enough to see oncoming attacks, and his body was quick enough to move out of the way before they made any kind of contact. On more than one occasion the dark knight attempted to forcefully grab hold of the young man, which forced the blonde to duck away from the threatening touch and roll to another section of the floor. Nightmare was too slow to stop him.

The boy knew he could not take on the knight evenly in close combat, could no longer rely on his speed with his sword to get him by in this fight. Now the game had changed. It was no longer about beating his opponent down; it was about tiring him out. It was not long before his efforts paid off, Nightmare too tired to try and make a grab for him again.

"Who are you?!" Nightmare panted out, leaning against his sword for support.

"My name is Link." The boy said at last. "I'm known in my homeland as the Hero of Time. That sword of yours had caused a lot of trouble in my world, and I'm here to destroy it."

Nightmare suddenly sensed something about the boy, and fixed his eyes on him with a heated glare. "You," He was standing up straight in an instant. "You carry a part of it, don't you?"

Link did not falter, but his hand did instantly cover a brown pouch on his belt. "You're pretty observant. I commend you."

"Give that back to me!"

Link shook his head. "You won't be getting this back ever again if I have anything to say about it."

"You cannot ever hope to control it. A child like you will only succumb to its evil in the end, no matter how strong headed you may be. Hand it over right now, and it will be less painful for you."

The elf's grip on his sword tightened. "I'm not afraid of getting hurt. As long as I know who I am, this thing will never corrupt me!"

Link rushed forward, using both hands to swing down his sword like a hammer. He realized a bit too late that he had been hasty when he assumed he had completely tired Nightmare out. The dark knight was able to block the attack with the sword Link had not seen move from the ground, all with an ease that spoke nothing of exhaustion.

It only took a second for Link to sense that he was being pushed back. He clamped his eyes shut and tried to shove the monstrous sword away, but he knew it was hopeless. Escaping death was just as tiring as fighting it head on.

"It's useless to resist child."

Link dared to lock gazes with the creature in front of him. What he saw made him gasp.

"Stronger men have tried and failed."

Link could not help but stare. Those eyes were so warm and gentle, they just drew him in. There was a sense of pride woven into the depths of endless shimmering blue green shores. Such dignity and honor, only seen within the finest soldiers, stood out against anything else Link could see. They seemed to call out to him, almost begged him to dive deeper and figure out the true and absolute nature of those rare depths. It was then that Link realized,

‘Those aren't his eyes.’
Using whatever strength he had left in him, Link managed to push the dark knight away. It was only for a second and Nightmare didn't go any further than about an inch, but it was enough to allow him to roll out of the way of a possible oncoming attack. Before Nightmare could even think of his next move, Link had risen up from his spot on the ground and tackled the dark knight into the dirt. Then he used his own blade, the Master Sword, to pin Nightmare down by his neck.

He was disappointed to see dark tinted flames where that light green resided only a moment ago. His mind instantly told him he must have imagined it. The raw intensity of his fight must have forced his eyes to betray him.

"Who are you?" But something in his gut told him otherwise.

Below him, Nightmare fought to free himself from Link's surprisingly strong hold. "What are you talking about?"

Link seemed to ignore him. "Those weren't his eyes. His are like dark fire, yours are like the ocean." He was no longer talking to Nightmare. There was something else, something deep inside the dark one that he was trying to contact. "Who are you?"

Nightmare felt some kind of pang resonate throughout his body. He tried, more frantically, to shove Link off him.

"Those couldn't have been his eyes." Link tried his best to keep the fighter subdued. "They were too kind, too proud." He could feel his strength beginning to diminish. "Who are you?"

That question kept clutching onto something inside of Nightmare. It kept reaching out to the heart of something buried deep within his subconscious. Whatever it was, it could hear everything that the elf was saying. It could understand the meaning of the words coming out of Link's mouth. It wanted to answer him.

"Were you a soldier?" Nightmare could feel a pulse vibrating within him. "Maybe a knight of some kind?"

Nightmare let out a freakish battle cry before finally throwing Link clear across the battle field.

The poor elf landed flat on his back, with his right ankle twisted to a point of almost no repair. His shield had flown in the opposite direction of where he had landed and was now sitting a good couple of hundred feet away from its owner. With his ankle in its current condition, he knew it was impossible to get up and run to it. Right now, it was impossible to get up at all.

Link quickly looked to his right and was relieved to see that his sword was only a few feet away. It was still quite a distance to travel, but it was something he could manage to get to by rolling.

He cried out in pain when he felt something heavy focus all its weight on his bad ankle. Link bit his tongue and looked up to the towering form of the dark knight he had been sent to kill. Nightmare let out a dark chuckle as he lifted his sword up above his head. Link's mind suddenly flashed back to a time when he had gotten trapped within the clutches of a guillotine of a dark temple back in his homeland.

"Any last words?" The sword had already begun to drop.

"What's your name?"

Nightmare froze mid swing.
"I know you’re not the monster in front of me." Link said, his voice almost begging, his blue eyes pleading. "You have a human heart, I’m sure of it." He tried to sit up. "No monster has eyes like those."

Nightmare tried to finish the boy off, tried to forcefully push his sword down upon the vulnerable child forced to stay on the ground. That boy kept reaching out to something that no normal human could see. That something wanted to break free, and the more the blond coaxed the more determined it became. Nightmare had to shut this child up.

"I can tell you’re trapped. I know you want to get out. You don’t want to hurt me. You don’t want to hurt anybody."

The elf had a voice like silk, but it felt like rusted copper to Nightmares ears.

"You are not a monster." Link repeated. "So tell me, who are you?"

"Si-" A voice that was not his own escaped Nightmare’s lips. "Siegfried."

A bright glow caught the blonds’ eye, and he turned to see his sword emanating a stunning silver light. Almost as if in a daze, he reached out his hand and nearly gasped when it flew right into his palm. From there, his body seemed to move on its own. Both his hands came to rest on the hilt of the Master Sword, while his good leg pushed him up into a standing position. Sea blue eyes met sea green once again, and Link thrust his sword into the dark knight’s heart.

Link had no idea what to expect, he could not even begin to guess what might happen next. This fight was nothing like he had ever experienced before. Every second was a new surprise, but he was trying to be prepared for everything.

However, he was nowhere near ready for what happened next. Then again, no one was probably ever fully prepared for a body weighing over a hundred pounds to slam right into your own, especially when you weighed considerably less than it did. It was enough to knock the wind right out of the blond elf who had not been expecting such a result. The strain was too much for his ankle, which had already gone beyond its limits by allowing Link to remain standing for even a moment, and he landed right back on the ground with another body lying on top of him.

Link took in a breath, hooked an arm around the waist of the one on top of him and, as gently as he could, rolled around until the man was flat on the ground. Out of breath, and quickly tiring, Link sat up and spared a glance at the now semi conscious human trying to focus his gaze on something concrete. There was a scar on the right side of his face, going right down from this man’s forehead and did not stop until just above his chin. He had long blonde hair, a little darker than Link’s, which went down to his waist or at least his shoulder. With him lying down like that, it was hard for Link to tell.

His eyes were slowly focusing on the elf in front of him, almost looking as though he had opened his eyes for the first time. He opened his mouth, let out a shaky cough, and managed to say, "Why?"

Link smiled. That voice, those eyes, that bewildered stare, they were all human. His instinct hadn’t failed him. There really had been someone trapped within Nightmare’s body.

"YOU INSOLENT BRAT!"

Link could feel a cloud of strong murderous intent rise up from something behind him. It was so thick and foul, he almost didn’t want to turn around. But his head began to turn, his eyes began to wander, and then his body began to shake.
Nightmare had gotten up from Link’s recent attack. He was slouching forward with a deep scowl on his face that reeked of his hatred toward the individual in front of him. The Master Sword was still lodged in his chest; Link could see the end of the blade protruding from the dark night’s back. He was growling like some type of wild animal. A wild animal that had just set its eyes on its next meal. Its next vulnerable and weak bodied meal.

"You took my servant."

Link glared at the wounded warrior, but did not say a word.

"Do you think you can escape my wrath?"

Link shook his head with a glare on his face.

"Smart child."

"Thank you." His voice was cold, almost calculating, and his eyes remained focused on his sword.

"I'll ask you again. Any last words?"

Link held out his hand while his eyes remained fixed upon his opponents. "Return to me."

Nightmare coughed up a dirty red liquid as the Master Sword forcefully withdrew itself from his body. Without pause or hesitation, the god like blade found its way back to the hand of the boy who had called it. He only had a split second to glare hatefully at the boy whose face was still fixed in a cold stare, before the world went black.

Link waited for the body to hit the ground before sheathing his sword and attempting to lift up the man he’d stolen from Nightmare. He had no idea how long the dark warrior would be out, and for all he knew he could wake up in two minutes, fully refreshed and ready to take on the world. Link could not handle that in his current condition. He was too tired, too emotionally worn out, and he had lost all feeling in his right leg. It was no doubt the result of his foolish abuse of his already injured ankle. He would not be able to protect himself, let alone the one he had freed from darkness.

"What are you doing?"

Link took in a deep breath. He was suddenly very winded. "We need to get away from here."

Seeing the way the younger blond struggled, the man, who Link remembered had called himself Siegfried, lifted Link up off the ground and allowed the elf to lean on his shoulder.

Link blinked, looked bashfully up to the long haired blond and smiled. "Thanks." His eyes suddenly darted around the battle worn area. "My shield." He said the moment his eyes landed on it. "I have to get my shield."

Siegfried slowly, so as to not harm the elf any further, walked over to the piece of weaponry Link had pointed to. He waited until Link had positioned the shield safely on his back before he spoke again. "How did you know I was in there?"

Link shrugged. "Instinct?"

"That's it?"

The elf chuckled. "That was all I needed." He looked back to the, thankfully, still unconscious form of Nightmare. "Now let's get out of here. I don't want to be around when that guy gets up."
He had never forgotten that day. It was the earliest memory he had of Link, and it was one of his fondest. That had been the first time he had heard that precious voice. The first time he had seen that precious smile. The first time he had been called human by someone who had never even heard of his existence.

"Siegfried."

He snapped out of his daze and focused his attention on Zelda, who was looking at him in puzzlement.

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"How did you two meet?"

That was a very personal question. The story was not embarrassing and caused no unwanted memories to resurface, but it was private. It was one of the few moments that had been shared strictly between Link and himself. She had no right to know such a thing. "Mind your own business. It is none of your concern."

She glared at him. It was obvious she was quickly becoming annoyed with his lack of respect.

"What you should focus on is getting a good night's sleep. You're going to need it. Tomorrow we need to find you a decent horse and get going. We have no time to waste."

"Where are we supposed to sleep?"

"I'll get us a couple of rooms here."

She gawked at him, a gesture very unbecoming of a princess. "You can't be serious. Do you see this place? Sleeping would be dangerous." she whispered harshly.

Siegfried was unfazed. "Then you should sleep with one eye open."

She opened her mouth to argue, he was sure, but he continued before she got the chance. "When I said I'd keep you alive, I didn't mean I'd babysit you. You're a big girl now. You can take care of yourself."

For the first time that night, Zelda was silent.

Chapter End Notes

Alright, so it's a bit later in the week than I would have liked. Still good progress though, if I do say so myself. Let me know what you guys think, and have a great rest of the day!
Siegfried couldn’t stop frowning. His reflection stared back at him from the slightly dusty glass with distaste in its eyes. He did not like what he saw in the mirror, and he got the feeling that his reflection was not very fond of him either.

"Hey, Siegfried," A blond with pointed ears and a worried look in his eyes came to stand beside the knight. "Is something wrong?"

Siegfried kept quiet at first. His eyes remained fixated on the image before him. The scar running down his face, the hair running slightly past his shoulders, it all seemed to belong to a different person. "My reflection."

Link leaned forward, trying to get a better look at the mirror Siegfried seemed so preoccupied with and what met his eyes when he looked at the glass so intently. "Is there something wrong with it?"

"Not really." Yet the frown was still on his face.

"Does something hurt?"

Siegfried turned to look at the elf, confusion written in his eyes. "No. Why do you ask?"

"You look like you're in pain."

The German sighed. He should have known by now that the young blond would have been able to sense that something was wrong. After all, he had been able to sense that Siegfried was trapped within Nightmare. A feat that no one else, not even the holiest of warriors, had been able to do. Siegfried wasn't even trying to hide it. "I guess it's just...I look too much like him."

"Who?"

"Him. That monster, Nightmare."

Link raised an eyebrow and focused all his attention on Siegfried's face. "You do?" He looked a little closer at the mirror, trying to see something even remotely similar to Nightmare. He found nothing. "I don't see it."

The other shook his head. "I guess you wouldn't. But all I can see is that monster I escaped from."

Now it was Links turn to frown. "You're not a monster. I told you that before."

"It's a little hard to believe that when you've been called nothing else for years."

Link tried to think of something to say, but even though he wanted to desperately cheer up the man beside him, nothing would come out of his mouth. The knight wanted to change what had happened in the past. He wanted to somehow take back everything that he had said, stop everything he felt he had allowed to happen, and return what his violent other half had stolen. An impossible dream, no matter how noble it seemed. Siegfried could not change the past and Link was forbidden to let him do so, could not even so much as try to do it for him.

Sometimes it was hard for the young hero. He had the power to change something, the power to fix
every mistake in history, but he was forbidden to use it, even if someone begged him to. He was beginning to think that being a Hero of Time was more of a curse than an honor. After all, what was the point of such a title if you could do nothing with the power that came with it? He couldn't help the starving individuals on the street. He could not give back time to the people who had not deserved to die. He was not even allowed to help ease the pain of a person who had been beaten, broken, and forced into submission by a blade beyond the reach of human hands.

Link could do nothing to help the one tortured soul that had nothing to do with the torment that surrounded him. He felt completely and utterly useless. "You can't change the past."

"I know."

"But the present is still up for discussion."

Siegfried looked away from the mirror in favor at looking at a now smiling elf. "What?"

"Well, it's obvious you see something that reminds you of him. Let's change it so that you don't have to think about it anymore." He sounded so sure, so positive that something so simple could solve the problem. "What do you want to change?"

"Is everything an option?" His gaze went all over the mirror. "My eyes, my hair, my face. Everything."

Link chuckled. "Well, we can't do anything about your face unless you want to wear a mask all the time. But they tend to be extremely uncomfortable and can get a little hot after about five minutes." He knew that from experience. "We have no way of removing your eyes, but they don't look a thing like Nightmare's so they don't really need to go anywhere at all." He liked Siegfried's eyes anyway. It would be a shame to get rid of something so beautiful. "The only thing left is your hair, and that, that we can change."

Siegfried raised an eyebrow. "Come again?"

Link did not answer. Instead he slowly made his way over to his bed, trying his best not to limp or trip over his own two feet.

The small, two-person bedroom they were currently staying in was going to act as their temporary home for the next few days, much to Link's utter dismay. He had not liked the idea of stopping, terrified that Nightmare would wake up, find out where they were, and try to take Siegfried back. He had been very adamant about moving on, but the knight had ordered him to slow down. Siegfried told Link that he was not going to stand idly by and watch as the elf abused his injured body until it fell apart. Link had been given no other option. They had to stop.

Siegfried had also demanded that the elf take something for the pain in his leg, which left Link with half of one of his potions. His ankle had healed nicely since then, but it still took a bit of an effort to get anywhere. He did his best to hide his discomfort. He didn't like seeing his traveling companion worrying about something that was not his fault. No, Siegfried did not need to have anything else rest on his conscious. Especially not Link's injuries. After all, it was his own fault his ankle was in so much pain. He shouldn't have been pushing himself so hard.

The blond jumped on the bed, basking in the softness of the pure white comforters, before sitting down and gently placing his injured right leg over his left. He was silent as he began to empty his belt pouches, looking over his inventory with a critical eye. After a few minutes, he picked up a small pocket knife and motioned for Siegfried to come closer to him.
Siegfried complied without any trace of fear or mistrust.

"Sit facing me." Siegfried did as he was told.

Link brought the knife to the darker blondes head and swiftly began cutting off the long blond locks that resided there. He started in the front, taking great care in measuring the pieces of yellow as perfectly as he could. His hands were gentle, never giving as much as a tug to the hair that had been put in their care. Link was forced to move around Siegfried several times, trying his best to make everything look as though it was natural using the only grooming tools he had with him. The pocket knife he was using to cut his companions hair and a small comb.

Siegfried waited patiently, occasionally glancing at the fallen locks that had been left on the floor. Link had a look of utter concentration on his face as he continued to cut and chop at the golden hairs. It was funny. He had that same look on his face when he had squared off against the terrifying Azure Knight. It was a look unlike anything Siegfried had ever seen on any warrior he had ever faced. It seemed to almost warn his enemy of his oncoming victory, while at the same time seeming to wonder what to do next.

"Almost done."

Tongue sticking out from the side of his mouth, Link attempted to make the now shortened dirty blond hair rise up and stay in the air. He imagined he'd come up against some type of resistance, and was proven right when the hair he was trying to get to stand fell limply against the sides of Siegfried's head. He considered leaving the locks in their current state, but quickly dismissed the thought once he noticed how odd that would look.

"Is your hair naturally straight?"

Siegfried had to think about it for a second. He hadn't had to worry about his hair in a long time, and up until now he hadn't paid it any attention. "No. When I was a knight they used to take my hair and press it between two pieces of hot iron. It was the only way they could get it tame enough to put into a ponytail, otherwise it would stick out."

Link had thought so. The hair he had been cutting seemed to have been tampered with quite a lot in the past. "Why'd they want it down?"

"It was the usual protocol. It was either that or I cut it off completely, and I wasn't a fan of premature baldness." Hearing the gentle laughter of his companion, he let himself smile a little bit before continuing. "It was still that way when Nightmare took over my body."

Link once again reached into his handy dandy tool belt. What he pulled out this time was a small bottle of water.

"How do you fit all of this stuff in that thing?"

Link tilted his head.

"I've seen you pull everything but a kitchen sink from that belt. How on earth does it all fit in there?"

The elf smiled sweetly. "It's bewitched. There's a spell on it that allows me to carry smaller versions of the items I use. When I need them I pull them out and they return to their regular size." He took off the worn leather glove on his left hand.

"How much can you carry in there?"
"Quite a bit actually. Clothes, weapons, bottles, food, you name it." He popped open the glass bottle he had taken out moments ago and gently trickled some onto his open palm.

"So, it's endless?"

Link shook his head, gentle smile still firmly in place. "Hardly. There's a limit to how much I can carry of each item I posses. But even with those limits, I still have a lot to work with."

The water in his hand was slowly dabbed onto the shortened light gold locks. When keen blue eyes saw the hair begin to spike up, he dribbled some more onto his hand and repeated the process again. He was gentle with every move, careful with every decision he made. Siegfried found it funny that the boy would take something as simple as cutting hair so seriously.

"What exactly are you trying to do?"

"You'll see." Despite the seriousness in his eyes, there seemed to be merriment in Link's voice.

Siegfried had no idea what to expect. His back had been turned towards the mirror, so he had no way of seeing what was being done. His only option was to wait for the finished product. Still, the knight had a childish desire to have a peek at what was being done to his hair. But whenever he tried to turn his head, even slightly, Link would gently turn it back to him.

"Hold still," He would say, laughter threatening to fall out from his mouth.

"But I want to see what it looks like." Siegfried had almost pouted, but at the last second he realized how childish that would look to the elf in front of him, and decided against it.

"Patience is a virtue my good man. Besides, I'm not done yet."

So Siegfried had no choice but to wait. Link knew the other was getting impatient, so he decided against taking his own sweet time just for the sake of teasing the German.

"All set."

Siegfried, who had lightly dose off within the past several minutes, felt his companion grab his shoulders and slowly turn him around. His gaze came into contact with the mirror his back had been turned to, and his eyes became glued to the image inside of it. Hesitantlly he turned to Link, a question forming in his eyes while trying to make it to his lips. He couldn't say it out loud, but Link assured him it was all right, and that was all the encouragement the knight needed.

Slowly, almost cautiously, he made his way over to the vanity mirror. He shut his eyes for a second, trying to emotionally prepare himself for what was to come, before deciding he was being stupid and finally managing to look into the glass. His eyes were instantly leveled with those of his reflection. He blinked a couple of times, trying to prove to himself that the image was actually really looking back at him from beyond the mirror, before understanding came to rest in his mind. It almost didn't seem real.

There was another person staring at him from beyond the glass. This man had short hair, which had been spiked up in different areas, making him look like a fighter from the streets. There was an air of confidence in the aura that surrounded him. There seemed to be a spark of determination that fueled what had to be a fighter's soul within him. There was also a smirk on his face, a challenge in his eyes that dared anyone to take a swing at him. This man was proud, strong, well rounded. He was a knight in every sense of the word, and yet, he was a fighter who had honed his skills in the dark underground of the city streets.
"It looks like me."

Link chuckled. "It should. That is your reflection."

Siegfried found himself playing with the small spikes on his head. He would have to get used to his hair being so short. "I look younger."

The elf nodded. "You do. Did you have short hair when you were a kid?"

The knight nodded. "I grew it out when I became a teenager. To tell you the truth I never really liked it."

"Then why did you keep it that way?"

"I don't know. I got used to it, I suppose." He had gotten used to a lot of things in the past. Looking back on them now, none of them had been very pleasant things to get accustomed to. Then again that had always been his lot in life.

Siegfried was surprised when he saw Link pop up from beside him and place his head on his shoulder a second later. The boy had a tendency to move as silently as a butterfly in flight. Siegfried never knew where he was going to show up.

"Think you can get used to this?"

Link's eyes remained on the image in the mirror, but Siegfried's gaze never left Link's soft, gentle face. "I think I already have."

The first thing to register in his mind was the fact that he was wet. He had not opened his eyes yet and could not confirm such a suspicion, but he could feel a cool liquid running over his face, soaking his neck and the bed sheets below him. The sun had started to sneak into his room through the open slits between the curtains, giving his closed eyes the message that light was filtering in around them.

The visions he had seen moments ago had been shoved out of reach, making Siegfried realize that they had never really been there at all.

Link would not be there when he opened his eyes. The elf would not be safe and sound in a room the two had decided to stay in for the night. He would not have breakfast ready, would not be waiting to greet Siegfried, who had overslept again, with a smile and a cheerful good morning. Or afternoon as the case often was. No, Link could not have been there to do any of that. He was back in Hyrule, trapped in a castle, being tortured by the very personification of a demonic blade. Siegfried had been dreaming, and apparently, he had been forcefully brought back into the real world. The real, as of right now, Linkless world.

Needless to say, he was not a happy person.

"Whoever just woke me up better be at least twenty feet away from this bed." he growled out. "I will not be held responsible for any lost limbs, decapitated corpses, or loss of life."
There was a shadow hovering above him. He caught the familiar scent of a lavender type lotion wavering over his nose. His memory vaguely told him that it was the same kind of body lotion Link used to use when he showered.

"You must get up Siegfried." A female voice called out to him. "The sun's already begun to rise."

It seemed that Zelda was trying to get him out of bed. "What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm waking you up. We have to get going."

"Do you not remember what happened the last time you tried to wake me up?"

He did his best to ignore the voice in his head telling him to throw the princess out the window. That was her plan after all. Get him angry enough to want to attack, and then gently remind him that he needed her. If she just kept reminding him of that little fact it would almost be like telling him that she was in control. It would not do to have her in that state of mind. If she started acting like she could order him around then someone was bound to get hurt, and it sure as hell wasn't going to be him.

"Yes, and I was quite surprised that you seemed to be a bit tamer this morning. It looks like you are somewhat housebroken."

He bit his tongue, trying to convince himself that she had not just suggested that he was some type of animal. "What time is it?"

"My guess would be a little after six."

He felt like strangling her. "Why the hell did you get me up this early?"

He could just picture the look of pure false innocence she was giving him. "Last night you mentioned we had to be quick and efficient in finding these friends of yours. I decided that getting up early would be a good way to start."

Siegfried managed to forcefully sit himself up, not missing the tiny droplets of water that fell from his face as he did so. He allowed his eyes to open slowly, trying his best to adjust to the incoming sunlight at a slightly more comfortable pace. He had never been a morning person, and anyone who had ever tried to get him out of bed any earlier than noon found themselves dealing with very painful bodily injuries. She was lucky he had learned how to control his foul morning moods during his travels with Link.

"Since when do you ever listen to me?"

"Since you promised to do anything to help rescue our hero from that dreaded sword."

He roughly rubbed away at his eyes with the back of his hand. "You do realize that you interrupted an extremely rare and pleasant dream, don't you?" He doubted she would even care, but the opportunity to make her feel even an ounce of guilt was too good to pass up.

She shrugged. "It couldn't have been all that good of a dream if you were so quick to wake up."

Siegfried had never been fond of royalty.

They always had everything in life. With a flick of their wrist or a whine to their parents they had the world on a string. They had friends who adored the ground they walked on. They had family who were the highlight of every worthwhile society. They had homes the likes of which could never be recreated even with the most brilliant artists and architects at hand. What's more, they had the means
to protect everything they held dear.

Zelda didn't understand how lucky she was. She had guards, soldiers, armies, ready and waiting to protect the things most precious to her. She had people standing watch, making sure that nothing that had any ounce of value to her could be taken. Even if anything was stolen from her, be it by a bandit or some type of traitor, someone like Link was always there to give back what she shouldn't have let go of in the first place.

Commoners, like him, had no say in whether they lost something or not. People like him never had much to begin with, so what they did manage to posses was special to them. It was rarely anything concrete, like a house or a priceless heirloom. More often than not it was the symbolic things in life. Things like love, friendship, or a good dream every once in a blue moon, things that truly made an impact on someone's life in the smallest but purest ways.

Unfortunately, the lower classes did not have the luxury of knowing that the things they cherished would be protected. They had to fight constantly to keep the things they loved by their side, and sometimes they had to lose. Peasants had no money. They could not afford guards protect their hearts desires at all times, or find heroes to get them back if they were stolen. In the end, fate decided who got to keep the treasures they had found in life. People on the bottom of the food chain had no right to interfere.

People like Link lost their freedom before they even got a chance to taste it. People like Siegfried lost the only true friend they ever had in life. People like Zelda lost absolutely nothing. She would never be able to understand the ways of life, no matter how many times she tangoed with the harsh reality of the world. So she would never be able to understand how truly precious that one dream was to Siegfried, and she would never be able to understand how cruel it was to assume that it was worthless just because he woke up from it.

"Figures," he muttered under his breath. "Of course you wouldn't understand."

Siegfried moved around the room quickly, gathering his belongings without bothering to make eye contact with the princess that stood near his bed. He could not stand to look at her. Doing so would only cause him to lash out, something he would later regret. He may not have liked her, but he needed her alive, if only for the moment.

"You know," she said after a moment of silence. "For some reason, I had pictured you differently."

A part of Siegfried was disgusted, not liking the idea that she had been given the opportunity to think about him at all, but another part of him was somewhat glad. The only way she could have been given that opportunity was because Link had talked about him before. "Oh?"

"Believe it or not," She fiddled with a sting of her hair. "I would have thought your hair was longer, and not so," She paused. "Street like."

He smirked. What she meant to say was that she had pictured him as the classic cliché hero of old legends. A bulky, handsome, bright eyed wonder that had long flowing gold hair that was as straight as silk.

"You have Link to thank for the way I look today." He strapped on the leather belt that completed his outfit.

"Really?"

There were still a few droplets of water left atop his head from his rude morning awakening. Seeing
no other water available to him, he loosely ran his hand through his hair before deciding to just leave it the way it was. He reminded himself to thank the elf the next time he saw him. This particular hairstyle was a lot easier to manage and every time he saw it, it reminded him of yet another time Link had cleared away some of the guilt in his heart. "I used to look like the person you imagined. Link cut my hair when we first met."

"An encounter you have yet to tell me about."

"I don't ever intend to."

"Come one Epona." Siegfried held fast to the thick leather reins of Epona's saddle. It took all he had not to let go and simply let the horse do as she wanted, which at the moment was bucking the cloaked princess off of her back, into a nearby water bin, and running off without bothering to look back.

"I told you she would behave this way." Zelda was clearly embarrassed with the situation at hand.

Siegfried could not bring himself to blame her. A small group of people had started to gather around them, anxious to see two people making complete fools out of themselves. Some chuckled, some tried to hide their giggling fits, while others tossed manners aside and chose to laugh out loud. It was enough to make anyone feel uncomfortable. Siegfried included.

"Epona," he tried gently. "You're not making this easy for me." He felt like an idiot. An idiot negotiating with a horse. An idiot negotiating with a horse, and losing. "I'll give you a carrot."

She looked at him as though he were the stupidest thing she had ever seen, which was exactly what he felt like at that moment, and continued to struggle against his grip.

Siegfried had never had this much trouble with Epona before, most likely because in the past, Link had been there to show him how to handle her when she was in a bad mood. If it ever came to a point where it was impossible for Siegfried to console her, the knight just handed the reins to Link. He knew how to soothe even the worst of tempers when it came to his horse. Looking back on it now, Siegfried was sorry he hadn't taken any notes.

"Oh, I give up!" Siegfried let go of the reins and turned his back on the whole scene.

He was expecting the shocked squeals of the girl behind him, and he knew the eventual splash and fits of loud laughter was inevitable. He was also prepared for the eventual hand that forcefully put him face to face with a very wet and very angry princess.

"Why did you let her do that?" Zelda was trying to remain calm, but even Navi, who was hidden in a pouch on Epona's saddle, could hear the clear murderous intent in her voice.

Siegfried would admit, even though he was embarrassed beyond belief, he still got a kick out of seeing the princess in such a ridiculous state. "What else was I supposed to do?"

"Oh I don't know," she muttered sarcastically. "Restrain her maybe?"
How he managed to shrug so casually in this situation was beyond him. "Consider it payback for this morning."

"Do you know how embarrassing this is? I'm utterly humiliated."

Something about that declaration ticked Siegfried off. It could have been that he was still tired from his all too rushed and far too wet wakeup call early that morning. Or it could have been the fact that he had just lost a battle of wills with a horse. Whatever the reason, Siegfried had already been angry enough to begin with, and Zelda had just managed to put the icing on the cake.

"You think I'm not?" he growled out. "You have some nerve you know that? First, you get Link caught up in another one of your pathetic damsel in distress routines, which you should have learned to handle by now, getting him in the worst situation anyone could ever imagine. Next, you just waltz right into my territory, waving your high class status around, expecting me to act like one of your spineless little subordinates. Then, you get yourself into an argument with a horse, lose, and to top it all off-- DO YOU PEOPLE NEED SOMETHING?!!"

The small group that had gathered around them disbanded immediately.

Seeing that he no longer had an audience, Siegfried slowly took in a breath of fresh air to cool his nerve. It didn't help much, but he was able to speak without sounding too irritated. "Not to mention that you practically dragged me out of bed at some ungodly hour in the morning and couldn't even bother to figure out how to convince Epona to let you ride her."

"I was a bit more occupied with waking you up."

"Well next time, let me get up on my own." He pulled at a couple of spikes of his hair. "It might just save us the humiliation of repeating this little episode."

"This is exhausting."

Siegfried ignored the childish whine and bent down near a group of purple flowers. "I'm not exactly happy about this either." He gently plucked a flower, making sure to take the roots out of the loosened soil after the plant had been removed, and placed them both in a brown sack he had in his right hand. "But you heard what that healer said. Get him the herbs, he gives us a horse."

Zelda did not like that healer. The herbs the old man wanted were somewhat familiar to the princess. She could not say with upmost confidence that she knew what all of them were, but she had managed to recognize the names of a few. Most of the plants she remembered could be used in poisons, faulty medical drugs, and things fairly similar in nature. She had been able to use quite a few of them when she had disguised herself as Shiek in her last lifetime. She wasn't quite sure if Siegfried knew, or even cared, what the plants were being used for, but she was uncomfortable with gathering suspicious items for an old man she wasn't entirely keen on trusting. She was also a bit angry that he had agreed to leave Epona with the old man until they returned. As a result, she refused to help him look for anything the two of them had been asked to retrieve.

Thus, the two were forced into a deep and almost eerie silence. It only helped to fuel the profound
dislike Siegfried had for the princess.

Truth be told, Siegfried hated the silence that had completely overcome them. He had no desire to hear the princess speak, no mistake about that, but he did wish that she would at least make some type of noise. A hum, a huff, a sigh, something, anything, to make it so the area around them wouldn't be so damn quiet.

He remembered a time he used to welcome the cold atmosphere that came with absolute silence. Back when he had been possessed, forced to relinquish his body and its senses to the demonic Nightmare, silence had been a blessing in disguise. He'd been spared the agony of hearing innocent people being slaughtered by Soul Edge, spared the pain of listening to the tortured souls waiting for death to come and put them out of their misery.

Since Siegfried had been unable to experience such painful noises, he had almost been able to pretend that they didn't exist. He could pretend that the cold and bitter silence was a path of redemption for a past sin that he was being forced to atone for right then and there, that it was all some type of bad dream that he was destined to wake up from any second. Even if such things were lies, constructed for the sole purpose of making him feel better, with no one else around to tell him otherwise, he had almost been able to fool himself into believing it was all true.

But Link had never liked the discomfort and loneliness silence brought with it. Admittedly the elf was not a talkative person. He was an awfully timid creature in this world at first, and Siegfried had seen firsthand how shy the teenager could be. In a crowd he was inaudible, on the road he was fairly quiet, but he would never be dead silent if he could help it. In fact he did anything he could to avoid it. He would sing, he would hum, he would talk, or he would play his ocarina. Anything to avoid the stillness that being quiet brought upon the world.

It bothered Siegfried at first. He had gotten so used to silence that even the smallest of noises made by the quietest of creatures managed to irritate him. He wanted to keep the area around him as peaceful as the emptiness in someone's mind, but the implication of such a thing seemed to terrify the blond traveling with him. So for his sake, Siegfried had tolerated the many sounds the world had to offer. He would talk to the young hero if it ever got too quiet, sing along to the tunes the elf sang to even if he didn't know the words, or tap his feet to the beat Link played on his ocarina. At first it was done out of obligation because Link had done so much for him.

However, soon the gestures of sound became more than a favor to his companion. They became routine, and he found himself desiring the noises and clamor of daily life. He wanted them around, needed them even. He never did manage to outgrow the desire for sound even after Link left.

"Did you hear that?"

Siegfried, who was momentarily taken out of his musings by the sound of his traveling companion’s voice, turned to look at the princess. "Hear what?"

She looked left, and then she turned right. It reminded him of an animal out in the wild waiting for a hunters attack. "Those noises in the distance. It sounds like clashing metal."

Siegfried could hear nothing, but he had forgotten how sensitive a Hylian's ears were. "Probably some kind of fight." He began walking off in another direction, set to ignore those sounds altogether. "Best to stay away from it." He had no time to interfere in other people's business.

He expected her to follow him, but after a few minute of hearing nothing but his own footsteps, Siegfried realized he was walking alone. "Are you coming?"
Zelda kept her focus on something in the distance. "Last night you mentioned a man's name. What was it?"

He raised an eyebrow. "I mentioned quite a few. Could you be more specific?"

"Father," she said. "You used that word when you described him."

One name instantly rang out in the German's mind. "Mitsurugi?"

"That's the one!"

Siegfried was at her side in the blink of an eye. "Where is he? Is he in that fight?" He could hardly believe his luck.

"I think so." Zelda closed her eyes and tried to pinpoint the location of the voices she was hearing. "I can't hear everything being said, but that name keeps popping up."

Siegfried was almost reluctant to believe this was happening. When he had mentioned Mitsurugi the night before, he assumed the samurai had returned to Japan after Links departure. Siegfried had been certain he would have to spend weeks tracking down the older man in a foreign country. To find him here, in Germany of all places, possibly only a short running distance away, was just too good to be true.

"Where is he?" He was nearly bouncing on his heels when Zelda pointed off to a spot somewhere to the left. "Lead the way."

Siegfried felt like jumping up for joy. It was him. It was really him. "You will only ever hear me say this once," he told the princess beside him. "So savor the moment. Thank you."

"You're very welcome."

Siegfried was rooted to a spot beyond the border of the makeshift arena the samurai he so desperately needed to talk to was battling in. Mitsurugi always had that kind of effect on him.

As a knight Siegfried had been brought up to know when proper respect was due. He knew how to recognize those who needed it, those who craved it, and those who deserved it. The Japanese swordsman never asked for it, but his presence just seemed to demand it. Siegfried had seen firsthand what disrespect would do to those foolish enough to mock the samurai. He had witnessed what it was that made the man so powerful, so true to his infamous reputation. His words, his demeanor, and the skill he possessed when his sword was in his hand. They were all top notch and worthy of the respect he demanded.

But that was not the reason Siegfried’s feet refused to move.

Currently, the man was surrounded. Dozens of men walked around Mitsurugi in a fairly threatening circle. They were young, cocky, mischievous little cretins who probably thought they could get away with fighting so underhandedly. After all, they outnumbered the man before them. They could always cover up for one another if anything got out of hand, or if questions ever arose about what
had transpired that day. It would be their word against his. Anyway you looked at it the odds were against the lone Samurai. And yet, Siegfried knew-

"Those guys don't stand a chance."

Chapter End Notes

Once again, a little later than I would have liked, but maybe Saturday will be the permanent post day. Enjoy guys! Let me know what you think if you get the chance.
Siegfried never thought he'd ever try to bring together two groups who were so different. There's a first time for everything.

Siegfried had heard tales Heishiro Mitsurugi when he had been imprisoned within Nightmare. The Samurai was known for taking down armies upon armies of experienced fighters without so much as batting as eyelash. Mercy was not something he indulged in, and not one of his opponents was ever given such a luxury. He went all out regardless of who was across from him or how weak his opponents must have been. Sometimes that brand of fighting would lead to a dead body.

The knight and young Hylian had been given a rare opportunity to meet the infamous samurai during their travels. Given what he knew about the older man, Siegfried was reluctant to let him within two feet of Link. The elf could undoubtedly take care of himself, he did not need to be treated like a child, but the young blond was too trusting. He was still optimistic about the world, and if the two of them were to stay even within walking distance of the Japanese fighter, they were likely to see more than their fair share of death and despair. Those were matters in life that still upset Link. He did not like death. He did not like seeing young warriors cut down in their prime. It didn't scare him per say, but it did manage to kill a bit of his soul every time he saw it happen.

Against his better judgment, Siegfried had allowed the samurai to tag along with them for a little while. He anticipated regretting that decision not to far down the road, but Mitsurugi had surprised him. They had encountered dozens of enemies during that leg of the journey. Some of the fights were easy going. Some were cutthroat bloodbaths. Siegfried had done his best to shelter Link from most of the destruction. Surprisingly enough, so had Mitsurugi. The man with no mercy had quickly gotten into the habit of keeping his 'victims' alive whenever Link was anywhere near the premises.

Whether or not Mitsurugi had chosen to keep that habit was up for debate. If not, it was obvious that he still never went easy on any of his opponents.

From this distance the knight was unable to determine just how much damage the men were taking. Almost all them, actually all but one at this point, had been knocked down to the floor. They were motionless, but whether that was unconsciousness or something else was something he could not decipher at the moment. Either way, the men had to have been in unbearable pain before they went down. Siegfried wouldn't be surprised if some of them stayed down to avoid being hit again.

Siegfried momentarily forgot he was in a rush and had no time to waste thinking about the past. Once he realized that was exactly what he was doing, he rid his mind of any unneeded thoughts and attempted to run over to the swordsman. He was surprised when a delicate hand gripped rather tightly onto his arm.

He turned his head to glance at Zelda, who he now realized was holding him back. "What do you think you're doing?" Maybe he had been unclear when he told her that the unusual civility between them had been a onetime event.

"Is it wise to interrupt?"
Now that he thought about it, no. No it most certainly was not. Mitsurugi was bound to chop off Siegfried's arm in retaliation to such an interruption, and that was if he was in a good mood. "I have no time to wait."

Still, the princess kept her hands clasped tightly around his arm. "You're going to get yourself killed."

Siegfried almost burst out laughing. How many times had he told Link that same thing? How many times had he tried to dissuade the young man from doing something as stupid as what he was trying to do right now? How many times had he felt the elf struggle against his grip? And how many times had he heard that bright eyed boy say the exact same thing?

"Don't worry," Siegfried repeated from memory. "Destiny's got too much in store for me. She won't kill me just yet."

Several strings tugged at the princess' heart. She, too, could remember those words. Those somehow sweet words tied together with a smile that whispered a promise of a safe return. For a split second, perhaps less than that, it was not Siegfried trying to rush off into danger. It was Link. Zelda knew that the image before her was not real and she knew that it would leave as quickly as it appeared, but her heart refused to listen to her head, and she found herself unable to stop her memories from rushing into the forefront of her mind all at once. In that one vulnerable moment she let go of the knight's arm.

Siegfried took advantage of the opportunity and made a dash for the battle ridden samurai. He expected to have to dodge batches of vicious sword strikes, he was eager not stupid, and he had mentally told himself to prepare for the inevitable onslaught. But after he had gotten about seven feet away from where he started, he heard an angry voice call,

"Stay out of this Schtauffen!"

Siegfried, once again, became rooted to the spot. That voice was utterly intimidating. Two years ago it had been enough to freeze Hell over about a dozen times over with one word. Even now, years after Siegfried had gotten used to it, it was still enough to stop his steps so quickly that he almost toppled over. He knew all too well that upsetting Heishiro Mitsurugi meant almost certain death.

Still, even though he was partially scared out of his mind, he knew time was of the essence. He could not afford to waste another second. "I hate to interrupt, but we need to talk."

"Two years and now you need to have a talk." Mitsurugi blocked an oncoming attack with the hilt of his blade. "I don't feel like talking."

Siegfried knew it was his own fault, really, that the samurai was so upset with him. After Link had left this world, Siegfried had up and disappeared. He simply woke up early one morning, something extremely taboo for his normal nature, and left without saying a word. He then cut all ties with his past teammates and wandered around his country like a shadow. Apparently, some still held a grudge over is impromptu disappearance.

"Look, I know I screwed up back then. I should have told you that I was leaving."

"You think?" Mitsurugi said in just about the most demeaning voice he could muster. "You are the most selfish bastard I've ever met. Did you think you were the only one who would miss him? Or did you just not care about how much pain the rest of us were in?"

That wasn't it. "Okay, I deserve that."
The samurai stepped to the side to avoid another strike. "No kidding."

"But I didn't come here to talk about me."

"Then whatever it is, it can wait."

Siegfried growled in frustration as Mitsurugi turned his attention back to the fight. The Japanese man could have ended this bout long ago. Now he was just stalling for time to tick the German off. "It's not about me, but it's really important. It concerns someone you know fairly well."

"I know a lot of people."

"This one you actually care about."

The other scoffed. "Who is it?"

"It's..." Siegfried was still hesitant about saying Link's name out loud. Call him paranoid, fine, but he had no intention of openly giving anything away when there was still a chance that someone was hiding deep within the shadows. "Someone I can't talk about right now in a situation I can't explain until later."

Had Mitsurugi been less preoccupied, he probably would have laughed. "Sounds serious."

"I'm telling you, we have a problem."

"No, you have a problem."

Now the knight was starting to get impatient. He had forgotten just how stubborn this man could be. "Mitsurugi,"

The samurai refused to acknowledge him. Instead he continued on with his fight.

"Mitsurugi!" Siegfried tried again, hoping to at least get a look from the corner of the eye.

He received no indication he had been heard.

"Mitsurugi!" When he got no answer the third time, Siegfried could not help but desperately blurt out, "Link's in trouble and he needs our help!" So much for keeping quiet.

The declaration had not come out the way he had intended. Not at all. In fact Siegfried had anticipated breaking the news rather gently, preferably when the two of them were away from open spaces. Now that was very much an impossibility, and he was pretty sure that the entire forest had just heard him.

But, on the bright side, his accidental outburst had gotten Mitsurugi's attention. The samurai was quick to end his fight with a massive whack to his opponent's collar bone, an act that left the poor guy sprawled out on the floor. After which Mitsurugi quickly walked over to his old traveling companion. There was a scowl on his face, and clear concrete panic in his eyes.

"What do you mean he's in trouble?"

"Just what I said. I can't go into detail right now, but believe me when I say this is a matter of life or death. His life and his possible death."

"How do you know? Who told you this?"
There was no way the man was going to move an inch until he got some answers. He always had the stubbornness of an enraged bull, and nothing was ever likely to break that iron will. Still, the knight had only blurted out the first part of the situation by accident. There was no way he could convince himself to do such a thing on purpose. He figured the Japanese fighter would just have to settle for a small token of proof. At least until they were out of earshot.

Siegfried turned to Zelda and beckoned her forward. She hesitated, sensing the obvious hostility in the air surrounding Mitsurugi. She almost looked afraid of him. She had every right to be.

Siegfried called to her again, trying to assure her, without words, that there was nothing to be afraid of right at that moment. She was still suspicious, but walked over to Siegfried's side anyway, and waited for his instructions.

"Pull down the hood."

She quickly locked eyes with him. Siegfried could see the doubt beginning to cloud over light blue.

But he could have none of that. Not now. "Its fine, we can trust him."

She raised an eyebrow.

"Just forget what he said."

The other eyebrow was raised.

"Listen," The knight growled. "You can take it off yourself, or I can rip it off by force."

Zelda's intuition told her not to trust the samurai. Maybe it was because she had been warned of him beforehand. Or maybe it was because she had seen precisely what the man was capable of when he wasn't even focused. Either way, her head was telling her to turn and run. Common sense told her she had no choice.

It was an awful feeling really, being between the proverbial rock and hard place. As a princess she was used to always having some sort of backup plan. Her line of work, as well as her people, required careful planning in order to be led to success. She could not afford to have just one plan, nor one way of thinking. If one were to fail she, as well as her country, would be taken down by its enemies before Hyrule even got the chance to think of getting back up on her feet.

Had she been an ordinary girl she would be used to dealing with situations she could not have control over, but she was far from an ordinary girl. She was a princess, and because of that, she had the resources to formulate multiple plans and move into another phase of things if something were to ever go wrong. She liked control; it meant she had a way out of something potentially dangerous.

But she was not in control here. They were. So despite what she may have thought about the men standing before her, she lowered the dark brown hood of her cloak.

Mitsurugi looked on in a sort of morbid interest as the young lady's head was finally uncovered. Golden hair, silky blue yes, and most importantly, pointed ears. His face remained steady, but his eyes had started to shake. It was a subtle movement, something that Siegfried almost failed to catch.

"Is she?"

Siegfried nodded. "Zelda, the princess who had ordered Link to journey here two years ago."

"And where is Link?"
Siegfried was silent. His eyes fell to the floor while his fists tightened inside leather gloves. He could not bring himself to speak. He could not stand to lock eyes with the samurai. His face would give away the truth that was too painful to whisper out loud.

Mitsurugi was quick to understand what that horrid silence met. "You're not joking are you? You're completely serious."

Siegfried nodded.

"What happened?"

Siegfried could not open his mouth. The words that were in his head refused to reach his lips. They stayed in his mouth, bitterness tinging his taste buds, torturing his throat with facts that could not be said. "I can't tell you." He saw the other about to argue. "Just not here," He said almost desperately. "Not now. Please."

Mitsurugi forced his teeth to clamp over his tongue. The sound of the younger man's voice spoke volumes for how grave the situation was, even though an explanation had yet to be announced. If Siegfried sounded that miserable, that heartbroken, then this was most certainly not the time for an argument.

"Very well then, let's go somewhere a little less out in the open."

"Here,"

The blond handed the bag over to an elderly man sitting on folded legs outside a grand mansion. The home he sat in front of was rather rustic in design with vines flowing down like water from the higher bricks of the building. There had been no attempts at trimming the vines that sat atop the roof, nor had there been any attempts to cut the overflowing grass along the property of the building. Some of the bricks had begun to crumble and it was likely the basic foundation was the only thing relatively new about the place. It almost seemed as though it had not been used in a few good decades.

But if one were to glance inside the dusty windows, behind the satin curtains, they would see brand new furniture being moved into different areas of the home. They would see, if they were to look a bit closer, new carpets being cleaned while shimmering artifacts are moved out of the way to avoid damage. The house was certainly old on the outside, but it was everything but decayed on the inside.

The old man smiled thankfully, and took the bag from the knight's hand with great care. "My sincerest gratitude young man."

The German waved it off. "Where's my horse?"

"In the stable with the other ones. You don't have to worry about her well being. She has been well taken care of."

"And our deal?"
"You can take your pick of one of the stallions in the morning."

Siegfried took notice of the sun in the sky. It was still out and about, as cheerful as it ever was, but it was beginning it's decent onto the horizon. Since it was summer, it had been given more time to enjoy splashing its light on the people below. The extra hours had been fun for the bright shining orb, but now it had exhausted its welcome. The moon would soon be rising, giving a splendid introduction to the darkness overcoming the world. It occurred to the knight that they had no place to stay.

"Would it be too much," he said politely. "To ask for a place to spend the night? We won't need that much space. A room with three beds and a decent bathroom will suffice."

"If you must." The old man said casually. "But I wouldn't recommend taking anything." He gleefully held up the bag in his hands. "This was supposed to be used for rat poisoning, but I can easily turn it into something else."

Siegfried smirked in spite of himself. He liked the old man's spirit. "I'll keep that in mind."

From beside him he could hear Mitsurugi chuckle. It was a soft quiet little noise, but after hearing nothing but the wind for hours on end Siegfried's ears were sharp enough to hear it. Even Zelda managed a dainty little laugh at the old man's obvious attempt at a threat. The old man's rather cryptic joke was just enough to lighten the tension that had surrounded the three of them for the past few hours.

They were soon ushered into the mansion. Servants old and new welcomed them warmly, offering anything that their hearts might have desired. The first thing they asked for was a decent meal. Siegfried had grown tired of the stale food recent inns had offered him (it was partially his fault, seeing he picked the worst looking places he could find just so he could torture the princess with him) and Zelda visibly brightened at the thought of eating food she was accustomed to. Mitsurugi had not cared one way or the other. Te was just hungry, therefore glad to receive any type of food at all.

During dinner Siegfried asked for quite a few bottles of heavy alcohol to be delivered, an act that did not go unnoticed by the samurai. It was rather suspicious behavior for the German, especially since none of these bottles managed to appear on the table. Mitsurugi had wanted to ask why, but the question died on his lips when he saw Siegfried attempt a somewhat truthful smile while trying to come up with a topic to speak about.

Then they were all invited to take a bath. Each had a separate room to bathe in, a quiet space to just let loose and relax. Once again, Zelda was thrilled. Mitsurugi was once again content with just getting clean. Siegfried, however, was rather uncomfortable and downright embarrassed with the situation. He had never had people waiting on him hand and foot before, and he never had someone around to cater to his every whim. It turned out that having others do things for him was not something he enjoyed very much.

He tried to get the servants in the lavished household to understand that. He could run his own bath water and he knew what types of lotions and shampoos to use while he was in there. He could get his own towels if they just pointed him in the right direction, and he knew how to undress without hurting anything. Siegfried was perfectly fine serving himself and did not want any of the servants in that house doing what he could do himself. Especially when it came to him dressing or undressing.

Siegfried was not cruel about the matter. He told them as clearly and as politely as he could, but they seemed just as uncomfortable about not serving him as he felt about them serving him in the first place. He considered not taking the stupid bath at all, but when he was reminded of the last time he
bathed properly, he chose to grin and bear the constant attention total strangers wanted to offer him.

With that part of the evening safely tucked away, and ready to be forgotten in the German's subconscious, the three were taken to their rooms. The bedrooms were all set up in a neat little line with a washroom set directly across the hall. That was a relief. The obvious attempt at keeping them together meant that their host wanted to avoid separating them. Though more for his good than theirs, it meant the old man was not willing to make a move unless they did first.

Zelda was the first to stroll into her room. She was obviously tired, both from the stress of the day and Siegfried's relentless attitude. Mitsurugi was prepared to follow her example, but he was fully aware, even in this tired state of mind, that Siegfried still owed him an explanation. So he waited until the princess closed her door and silently followed Siegfried when the knight began walking in some unknown direction.

"I hope you know where you're going." The samurai remarked casually, hoping to get some type of conversation going.

Siegfried seemed less than eager to talk. "A servant showed me the way." he said after a moment. "I know where I'm going."

There was something very wrong with that tone of voice. It seemed hollow, yet somehow filled with dread about something forthcoming. The knight was afraid, or at the very least highly upset, about the talk the two were about to have.

He had noticed it earlier when Siegfried had been so adamant about not speaking in public. About ten percent of that hesitation was thanks to paranoia, the overly frightened thinking that some unsavory character was watching your every move at every moment. But the other ninety percent of that hesitation was pain. A cruel, thoughtless pain that refused to let the blond speak a word of what was so desperate to leave his tongue. Such a realization made Mitsurugi hesitate to hear the story. He wondered if it was better to be left in the dark than hear the kind of mess Link had gotten into.

"We're here."

The samurai looked up passively, showing no sign of discomfort or concern. There would be no need for those kinds of emotions at this point. They could only make Siegfried hesitate, and apparently they needed no such distraction. The knight had said so himself. Time was of the essence.

He silently followed Siegfried into what appeared to be a private library that had been built into the estate. In the center of the room was a small table with two chairs on opposite sides. On this table was a generous amount of alcohol with two semi large wine glasses placed against each other.

"That must have been what he had asked for at dinner."

Well, at least he wasn't planning on drinking by himself. That meant he wasn't too deep in depression. That was a somewhat of a good sign, but did he really need all of those bottles? As far as Mitsurugi knew, the boy had never been much of a drinker.

Still, he said nothing as the two of them seated themselves and Siegfried began to pour himself drink after drink after drink. It was a bit unsettling to see him swallow glass after glass without stopping to breathe. He did not even bother to offer his companion a cup. His entire focus appeared to be on finishing every bottle in the place in one sitting. The samurai thought of suggesting some sort of break, but then Siegfried started talking.

The words were stiff at first. They were rigid and difficult to remove from the young man's throat,
and if Mitsurugi was not mistaken, they seemed painful. The knight looked close to tears at certain points, eyes prickling but tears falling, and then he drowned himself in another glass of wine until the bottle was nearly gone.

Mitsurugi soon figured out why the blond felt the need to drink so heavily. Since Siegfried had never been a heavy drinker, the effects of alcohol were still very potent to him. He could drink and allow the tempting poison to overtake him. At this point it still could overtake him. He could actually drink and get drunk. That meant he could spout out horrible stories without conscious decision and not have to worry about being able to remember it in the morning. The samurai wished he could say the same. As he listened to the story coming forth from slightly slurring lips, he wanted, more than anything, to erase the immunity he had to the drinks Siegfried was gulping down. Hell, he couldn't even get tipsy anymore. Trying would be no use.

Mitsurugi felt his heart breaking with every detail that came out of Siegfried's mouth. He kept calm for the sake of the younger man in the room, but he dreaded coming to the end of the story. He intentionally built up so much tension in his mind, hoping his imagination was worse than what had really transpired. Alas, it was not.

Link was a prisoner of a demon sword they had once tried so hard to destroy. All thanks to the princess who had sent him to this world in the first place, the one responsible for giving Link to the people of this world and the one to blame for taking him away. Mitsurugi didn't know whether to thank her or to slap her. He did know one thing.

Mitsurugi looked at the saddened German laying his head on the table. His arms were holding onto the other, forming some sort of makeshift pillow. His eyes were still open, filled with the pain of the story he had just told. Mitsurugi could see the suffering, and even though it would be forgotten in the morning, it was fairly obvious that it was hurting him now.

With a heavy sigh, and a gentle hand, he reached out to the young man's eyes and gently closed the tired lids.

"Sleep young one." he said softly. "And forget everything you have just said," Mitsurugi poured himself a drink. It would do no good, but perhaps he could fool himself into thinking it could. "Do not think of something that seems to be ending. Dream of what was once just beginning."

Siegfried's breaths slowly evened out, mind lulled to sleep by surprisingly soft words.

---

Link had been upset for a while now, and for the life of him Siegfried could not figure out why. There had been no change of routine, no lack or increase of the usual behavior, so nothing could have occurred in their daily lives to cause such a drastic change in his friends attitude. Life had been very quiet recently, so Link had been spared the agony of seeing peoples pain and suffering. No one had said anything particularly nasty about the teenager's ears or clothes or basic appearance within Siegfried's earshot, so that could not have been the problem. Link would have mentioned something like that happening.

It only made the German wonder exactly what was so horrible that Link was refusing to speak about it. The blond was usually quick to tell Siegfried if something was bothering him. Unless, of course,
Siegfried was what was wrong. Then it made sense that Link would refuse to say anything, for fear of offending or hurting Siegfried, and simply choose to wallow in his despair. Which could only lead the poor boy down a road of misery that would in turn only end in extreme pain regardless of how much of a true angel Link really was and--

"Did I do something wrong?"

Link kept his gaze out the window, sitting still on the bed he had claimed as his own. He had been there since early that morning, just staring out into the emptiness of the dawn. Now evening was fast approaching and there was still a solemn expression on his face, one that had been plastered on those gentle features for almost a week.

It drove the knight crazy. "If I did something to offend you, let me know so that I can apologize properly."

Link shook his head but kept his eyes on the scenery outside. Soon the stars and full moon would be the only visible things in the sky. "You didn't do anything."

"Then what did?" The knight was desperate to solve a problem he knew nothing about, to find a solution he wasn't even sure existed. "Did someone say something to you? Did you get hurt?"

Maybe he had missed something when they crossed over to the next town. Maybe someone had said something, or tried to take a swing at Link when he wasn't looking.

But Link shook his head again. "Nothing's wrong."

Siegfried snorted. "You've been walking around like a lifeless zombie for days. There's obviously something wrong. Or at the very least, something's not entirely right." He ventured over to the side of the bed. His strides were gentle in an attempt to show the elf that he meant no harm.

Link was still facing the window, lost in a daze he could not break himself out of, and he was surprised when he felt a pair of strong arms twist his body around. Sky blue eyes gazed into determined sea green. Warm breath danced upon Link's lips and he could feel soft skin touching his forehead. It took a second for his mind to register what exactly was going on, but his heart knew the situation all too well. Siegfried's forehead was upon his own, Siegfried having knelt down on the floor once he turned Link around, leaving the two face to face in a very close proximity. Needless to say, it did not take long for Link's face to heat up like an open flame.

Siegfried frowned for a second. "You're hot."

Link's eyes widened. "WH--what?" He scrambled back until he felt his spine hit the window sill. "What did you say?"

Siegfried blinked, stood up from his spot on the floor, and continued to wonder why his friend was acting so strangely. He almost seemed afraid of Siegfried. The knight reached out a hand and softly placed it on the Hylian's forehead. "You're hot, warm, feel as though you might be sick." A heavy sigh left Link's lips, leading Siegfried to believe that he really was the problem here.

But Link smiled at him. His face was still flushed and he refused to move from his spot against the window sill, but he was smiling. That was a definite improvement. "Oh. That's what you meant."

Siegfried raised an eyebrow. "What did you think I meant?"

Maybe it was Siegfried's voice that was beginning to unnerve the blond elf. It seemed as though every time he opened his mouth Link instantly became uncomfortable. Maybe he should consider
going mute?

"Uh-well-I-um…"

For about five minutes Link tried to force some decent sentences out of his mouth. From the looks of it, Siegfried had no idea what he was saying and was obviously having a hard time understanding what the elf wanted him to hear. Link wanted to make sense, he really did, but words did nothing but fail him. When that realization finally hit him, he chose not to fight it. It would be no use since nothing would come out but jumbled masses of words and pigments of speech. So for the sake of keeping whatever pride he had left, he simply decided to lean into the German's warm touch. "It's complicated."

At least he was speaking coherently again. "Are you sick?" Siegfried wondered. Could a cold or flu be the cause of all this?

Link thought of shaking his head, but that would cause the hand on his head to move. He wanted the contact to last for as long as possible. "I'm not sick."

"Then what's the problem?"

Link wanted to tell him. He just didn't know how.

"Please." It amazed Siegfried how close he was to begging. Him, a once proud and able knight, was close to getting on his hands and knees and begging the younger elf for an answer to his questions. Just what type of person had Link reduced him to? "I can't fix it if I don't know what's wrong."

Link turned red again, but there was a smile on that gentle face Siegfried had grown to love so much.

"Wait a second," the German blinked. "What?"

"I'm sorry if I made you worry, Siegfried. I just don't know what to say." Link admitted shyly.

The knight removed his hand from his friend's forehead. "Say about what?"

"I know what's wrong, but I'm not sure how to say it. I don't think it would make much sense."

"Try me."

The elf placed a gloved hand over his heart. That same depressing aura appeared to take over him again. He looked as if he was in pain. If Siegfried didn't know any better, he'd have thought the other was injured.

"It hurts." Link said after a moment. "I don't know why, but it hurts."

Maybe he was injured after all. "Do we need to take you to a doctor?"

Link shook his head. "It's not that type of pain." The hand clenched. "It only hurts when I..." He thought about it for a second. "See certain things."

"What kind of things?"

"Friends, families, groups of people," Link bit his lip. "I don't know what's wrong with me."

Siegfried let out a sigh of relief. Smiling brightly, the German took a seat next to the elf and began ruffling the others hair. Once again, Link leaned into his touch. "That's normal Link. You're perfectly
Link tilted his head to the side. "You know what's wrong?"

Siegfried nodded. "You're homesick. You must be missing someone very much." He raised an eyebrow and asked, teasingly, "Your girlfriend maybe?"

Link let out a laugh. A soft, joyful, almost musical laugh. "Siegfried,"

The knight feigned innocence. "What?"

The smile remained even though the laughter soon faded. "I don't have a girlfriend. Stop teasing."

Siegfried held up his hands in mock surrender. "You're right, my apologies." He pretended to carefully look over the boy next to him. "A guy like you?" He grabbed the youngers chin and examined the elf's face. "You must have at least five."

Link playfully shoved him away, trying, but failing miserably, to scowl. Siegfried continued to take the 'abuse' with a sly smile. This was the Link he was used to. This was the happy-go-lucky elf that had saved him from the darkness. This was the angel he had come to adore.

"Hold on," There were those odd little thoughts again. "What did I--"

"It still hurts a bit." Link's voice broke Siegfried out of his musings. "Not a lot, just a little.

Siegfried could not help but think that the elf looked utterly adorable. He sounded so clueless and innocent, almost to the point of helplessness. It was enough to make the German smile. "If you want, I think I know something that might help."

"Really?" Link tilted his head again. "What?"

Siegfried took hold of Link's shoulders and moved him around so that the two were facing one another. "Promise me you won't freak out."

"I trust you." The amount of trust he put into the German without a single question was incredible.

As swiftly as the blinking of an eyelash, and just as gently, Siegfried enveloped his elven friend in a firm, comforting embrace. Link involuntarily released a surprised gasp when he felt a hand on the back of his head and on the base of his spine. He was stunned for a second, but luckily his hands responded faster than his mind and wrapped themselves around the German's waist.

"Siegfried?"

"My mother used to tell me that the only way to lighten the load of depression is to allow the pressure of a softer burden."

"That sounds pretty." Link's voice was so soft, so quiet, that he was surprised that Siegfried was able to hear him.

The knight chuckled, sending little vibrations throughout Link's body. "I think it was just her fancy was of saying, if you feel bad ask for a hug." Link felt surprisingly gentle fingers run through his hair. "Still, it was always enough to make me feel better. Does it help?"

Link tightened his hold on Siegfried's waist. "It helps." He felt the other about to pull away, and could not help but attempt to hold on tighter. He only hoped his grip was not hurting the other male. "No."
The firmness of his voice took Siegfried back a bit. "Pardon?"

"Can we stay like this?" Link almost sounded like he was begging. "Just for a little while, please?"

It was at this point that the knight felt his face heat up. He knew for certain that his face was flushed, but he made no more attempts to pull away. "Sure Link, whatever you want."

Siegfried could have sworn he felt something nuzzle against his chest. "Thank you."

He must have been sick. They both must have been terribly ill with some rare disease Siegfried had no clue about because there was no other explanation for why his heart was beating so wildly against his ribcage. No other reason why his face was burning brighter than the sun. And he could come up with no logical answer as to why, despite how new and strange this was to him, Siegfried never wanted to let go.
A Small Vision

Chapter Summary

For some people, the fighting never ends.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

This child was the personification of a miracle. His body had been broken beyond repair. Limbs had been shattered, skin ripped off in a moment's rage, blood spewed from his mouth like water from the raining sky. His mind had been damaged tremendously. People had died in front of him, been slaughtered before him, had their souls destroyed right before his eyes. And yet... he had not broken.

His faith had not yet shaken. In his eyes there was still hope. Hope for a hero, hope for an escape, hope for a stolen freedom. He still believed in something other than the stone walls and silver shackles that bound him. The boy still believed.

"You are a fool." The cursed sword said to the boy. "You stand before me shackled to a stone wall, helpless to free yourself, injured well past your limits." He reached out to the boy's bloody throat and squeezed until he was sure he had choked out the last possible breath. "And you still have the gall to wish for a savior."

There was defiance in those eyes. It was amazing. The boy could not even breathe and yet he still had fight left in him. He still had the will to live buried deep within his soul. He was still challenging Soul Edge with every fiber of his being. A miracle indeed.

"What makes you so strong?" His grip on the boy's throat loosened, but there was still strong opposition lingering in the air. "Your princess was down here for a mere three days before her spirit was finally broken."

"I'm nothing like her." Link growled out. "I won't give up so easily."

"You seem bitter." If physical torture would not work, perhaps emotional battering would be a better strategy to put to use. "If you hated her so much, you should have just left her here. No need to go through the trouble of rescuing her."

The boy took in a deep breath, certain he would not have the opportunity to take another. "My people need their princess. I could never deny them that."

"Yet they denied you your freedom." Soul Edge told himself to remember that the boy specifically said 'their' princess. Not 'mine' or 'our'. "None of them have even tried to rescue you. That princess of yours ran away." This boy was a bit harder to break than most. Shocking really, considering he was one of the younger warriors to ever come into contact with Soul Edge. The youth were usually the first to be cast over by absolute darkness.

But him--"I will escape." he said confidently. "I will make it out of this alive."

"Big words for a little boy." He was different. This Link character was a regular diamond in the
rough. His faith was strong. "You're loyalty to your goddesses is amazing."

The Hylian faltered for a second. His eyes became glossed over with some type of painful emotion. It wasn't fear per say, and Soul Edge could not bring to himself to call it sadness. It was more or less like guilt.

"I'm not a child anymore." he said softly. "I can't depend on the goddess's strength forever." More like he could not bring himself to put his life into the hands of beings that had done nothing but misuse it throughout his entire existence.

But there was still belief in those young eyes. They believed in something. If not his goddesses, then perhaps, "Your princess then. Do you believe she will save you?" Had the sword been wrong in assuming that girl meant nothing to the former Hero of Time?

But the boy closed his eyes and bit his lip. It was another of his quirks, Soul Edge mused, that he used to show emotion. This one, he found, was also used to show signs of guilt.

"She won't come to save me." More like he didn't believe she could. "It's not fair to ask that of her." It was not smart to call upon the aid of a damsel in distress he had been forced to save time and time again.

"Then who is it?" Soul Edge was quickly becoming frustrated. His questions were getting him nowhere and served no purpose except to allow the hero a few more moments of decent breath. "Who is this mysterious hero you have placed all your trust in? Hmm? I'm dying to know."

Link actually laughed at him. It was odd, and awfully infuriating, to hear. The sound was not unpleasant. It was not as joyful as a bout of laughter from Link should have been, but it was sort of like a melody in its own right. "You don't know?" A smirk landed perfectly on teasing lips. "Honestly?"

The sword growled. How dare this child openly mock him? Did he forget what the creature before him was capable of? "Watch your mouth child. I might just decide to cut it off."

His threat was shrugged off. Link was not afraid of him. At this point it was safe to say he no longer feared for his life. His eyes were bright enough to shine through the darkness of the cell he lay trapped in. They showed understanding. An understanding that any death threats made against him could go unheeded. Soul Edge could not kill him, unless he wanted his own body to fall apart.

Enraged, the sad excuse for a human body reached out disfigured claws and ripped at the boy's throat. The gashes were nowhere near deep enough to be fatal, but they were deep enough to start quickly gushing out blood. Link's smile vanished as he bit down on his tongue to keep from crying out. He would not give the creature the satisfaction of screaming, but the pain was apparent in his eyes and the blood pouring out of the corners of his closed mouth was enough of a reassurance.

"Now, tell me boy," The sword hissed out. "Who is it? Who is this person you have so much faith in? Who in this world, in any other world, could possibly stand against me?"

Link narrowed his eyes. He turned his head to the right then swiftly swung it to the left, taking care to spit out all of the blood that had built up in his mouth right in the center of Soul Edge's face. He savored the moment of shock written in the evil blade's expression before gathering enough strength to answer.

"The one who freed himself of you many years ago." His voice was strong, despite blood dripping down from the corners of his mouth. "The only man who was ever able to escape your grasp."
Soul Edge narrowed his mutated crimson eyes. This child could not possibly be speaking of who he thought he was speaking of, could not possibly mean that one soul Link had taken from him long ago. He could not possibly mean…

"Siegfried." The voice called out, before succumbing to the all too tempting darkness that unconsciousness offered him.

His body lurched forward instinctively. Breath released itself slowly and painfully while lungs did their best to steady them. Eyes moved swiftly from side to side helplessly, fearfully, and desperately. Siegfried saw nothing but the room he had been shown the night before. The room he had been told would be his until he decided to leave the mansion of the old man. There were no dungeon walls, no chains binding someone to the wall, and there was no Soul Edge torturing an elf Siegfried had cared about more than anything else in the world. What he had seen had been nothing more than a dream.

A choked sob escaped his mouth accompanied by small streams of tears relentlessly clawing their way out of his eyes.

That had been…that was just so…

Cruel.

He held his knees tightly to his chest and rested his head upon them. He had known long ago that he would encounter enemies in his life. As a knight he had been almost guaranteed armies worth of adversaries in the battle torn world. Monsters, humans, weapons and spirits, everything had been a possible opponent. Every aspect of life was expected to be your worst possible enemy. But Siegfried had never expected his own mind to betray him.

It knew Link was his biggest weakness. Everyone in every world in every dimension in any parallel universe knew that. It was no secret. Even if Siegfried wanted to hide it, he would never be able to pull the charade off. Link was too precious to him and he would always have a special hold on the German's heart. Because of that, Siegfried would always treat the elf differently.

He would always be gentler with Link, even if he was acting foolishly. Everyone else was sure to get the riot act read to them, followed by a look that said, 'You reek of utter stupidity'. Siegfried would always go out of his way to make Link smile, even if it was just for a second. Anybody else could simply get over it or continue to wallow in their depression. Link was always fist on the list. Anyone else was lucky to even be written down.

It was blatantly obvious that Link had Siegfried wrapped around his pretty little finger. Still, that did not give anyone the right to use that against him. Especially not his own mind. It knew that Link was special to him. It knew that seeing the boy tortured and hurt, even if it was just a dream, would kill him to the very core. So why the hell had it done that? And why had it made that dream so real?

Everything had been so clear. There were no faint spots of hazed clarity. The German had seen everything perfectly, from the rust of Link's chains to the decayed skin on Soul Edge's body. He could smell the foul stench of the cell mixed with the sweat coming down from Link's brow. He could feel the thickness of the air surrounding both captive and the one who had captured him.
Siegfried could practically taste the blood coming out of Link's mouth. Worse than that, he had heard every pained noise the elf had made, as if the two had been right next to each other. And he had been able to do nothing to stop it.

Siegfried had no idea what that was, but it was sure as hell no dream. He wanted to believe it was. More than anything he wanted to fool himself into thinking that he had seen had nothing more than a figment of his imagination. But who was he kidding? Nothing so terrible could be fiction. Life saved the worst for the real world.

A knock broke the silence of the morning, but Siegfried was in no mood to hear it. His ears were still focused on the last thing he had heard before he woke up. His name. Link had muttered it right before everything went black. He had called out to him, and Siegfried could do nothing. He was not even able to answer. Some help he was.

The door opened up and in waltzed Mitsurugi. By now the tears that had fallen down Siegfried's face had stopped. Maybe they decided to give the obviously distraught knight some type of break, or perhaps they knew they would not be wiped away or paid attention to. Whatever the reason, by the time the Samurai had stepped into the room, there was nothing on his face to signify that he had been crying.

Still, something seemed out of place to the samurai. "What's wrong Schtauffen? Rough night?"

Siegfried did not respond. He did not so much as move.

"Siegfried?"

The knight could barely hear him now. The images, the sounds, the taste of blood on innocent lips, were clouding his mind over in a crimson mist.

Mitsurugi shook the young man when he got no verbal response. The action got him nothing. Not a twitch of the eye, not a shake of the head. Just more silence. The samurai shook a bit harder. The knight stayed still. So he tried harder still. He did not get the slightest of peeps from the dazed blond.

It was quite unnerving. Mitsurugi knew that Siegfried was not a morning person. It did not matter who had awoken him. If it was before noon they were considered public enemy number one, and as such they were wanted dead or alive. While no warrior would admit to being concerned about such a thing, they would testify to it being the reason why they always wanted Yunseong to wake Siegfried up. Otherwise they would need to call the only person Siegfried never allowed his temper to hurt. Link.

And then it hit him like a sack of bricks. "Link."

That managed to get him a reaction. But as he looked down at those devastatingly heartbroken eyes, he found himself missing the silence he had been wary of a second ago. "Good God, what the hell happened to you?"

"I saw," Such a soft voice. Far too dormant for a knight of great strength. "I saw him."

"Saw who?"

"Link." Came the longing reply. "He was hurt."

Mitsurugi could not follow Siegfried's train of thought. The German was not really saying anything. Just short bursts of soft thoughts. "What are you trying to say?"
Siegfried sighed and looked down at his hands. "I fell asleep, and when I woke up I remember seeing him. Soul Edge had him and," His eyes quivered just a bit. "He called my name."

Well, while he still did not have a complete picture, he at least had the border of the puzzle. "You had a nightmare."

Siegfried shook his head. "It was so real."

Mitsurugi tried coaxing the knight out of bed. He did not have much difficulty actually getting him out of it, but he did have a bit of a problem getting him away from it. Siegfried seemed to want to stay near the last possible place he had seen Link, even if it that place had given birth to a nightmare. Because even though it hurt him to the very core, that bad dream had been the only concrete and real time he had seen the elf in over two years. In this state the German was unable to see that nothing about that nightmare had been real.

"Come on," The Samurai insisted. "Let's get you into the shower so you can wake up."

Siegfried resisted him. "I am awake."

Now the Samurai was starting to panic. The longer the German spoke, the more it sounded as though he had lost the will to live. "Snap out of it Schtauffen. You had a bad dream. End of story."

"But it felt real." he insisted.

"Nightmares often do. But it was all a figment of your imagination, understand? It was not real."

Siegfried actually looked at him with disbelief. He honestly thought that Mitsurugi was lying to him. This was getting ridiculous. Mitsurugi was a patient man, and extremely lenient when it came to the younger warriors he traveled with in the past, but even his patience had its limits. Fear was one of the few things that could put it on a very thin line, one that broke as easily as glass shattering on a patch of rocky terrain. And right now he was not ashamed to admit that he was afraid.

In a moment of uncertainty and utter frustration, Mitsurugi brought up his hand and quickly connected it with Siegfried's face.

The clap rang out through the empty room, leaving an awkward echo in its midst. Siegfried blinked several times as Mitsurugi brought back his hand. The samurai could not keep his vision on one object for very long. His gaze kept shifting from Siegfried back to the hand he had slapped him with and then to the floor.

Finally his voice decided to attempt some kind of explanation. "I'm--"

"Thank you."

The samurai looked back to the young man. "Come again?"

"I said thank you." Siegfried rubbed the side of his face. It didn't really hurt all that much, which was surprising considering who had struck him, but it was odd to feel that familiar sting again. No one had landed that kind of hit on him since Soul Edge's defeat. "I needed that."

Mitsurugi was not quite sure how to respond. It was strange for someone to thank another person for physically assaulting them, even if the assault was rather small. Still, Siegfried's voice sounded stronger than it had been a little while ago, and that apology actually seemed sincere.

"You're welcome?" So he decided that for the moment he would leave the situation as it was.
Siegfried continued to rub at his injured face. "I was pretty out of it, wasn't I?"

"That's a bit of an understatement."

"Sorry." he said sincerely. His voice was sterner, a lot more like the Siegfried Mitsurugi knew. "It won't happen again."

"What the hell made it happen the first time?"

"That dream," His voice trailed off as the content of his midnight scare returned.

Mitsurugi was almost frantically trying to figure out a way to keep those thoughts from overtaking Siegfried completely. The problem was that he had no clue what this dream was about. How was he supposed to keep something at bay if he could not even know what made up its being? "You keep talking about this dream. What happened in it to make you so disturbed?"

The German laughed. It was a brittle little thing that sounded rather pained and forced. "Disturbed? Isn't that a little harsh?"

"Trust me. I could think of a lot harsher things to say."

Siegfried knew that was probably true. "It was more of a nightmare." Siegfried admitted. "Link was chained to a wall being tortured by Soul Edge."

"What did it look like?"

The blond scowled. "Like a burned bloody body." Exactly as Zelda had described. "It seemed to have no qualms about making Link squirm. It kept picking at him, kept trying to break him, both physically and emotionally."

"Did Link survive?"

Siegfried clutched at his hair. "I think so. He seemed to black out at the end of the dream, but I think that was more from exhaustion than anything else." And also, "He called for me, told Soul Edge that he was sure I would save him, then everything turned black for the both of us."

Mitsurugi did not know what to say. He knew the knight was still somewhat distraught. It was obvious in the way he spoke, and apparent in the way he moved. There was still a part of that dream that unnerved him, even though Link had not died within it. Yes, he knew all of this. Yet, Mitsurugi had no idea how to comfort him. At best he could only offer a few kind words, and those would probably end up coming out crueler than Mitsurugi intended. He had never been good at consoling people.

"Are you going to be okay?" Was about the only response he could come up with. It was short, uncaring, utterly pathetic, and Mitsurugi cursed himself for it the second it left his mouth.

Siegfried simply waved him off with a tired hand. "I'll be alright. You go on ahead. I'll meet you at the breakfast table." He saw doubt rein over Mitsurugi's eyes. "I'll be fine, really. Go get something to eat. And check on Epona for me while you're at it?"

The samurai stood his ground for a minute, but finally relented and turned towards the exit.

Siegfried waited until he heard the familiar click of the door before he finally collapsed back on the bed. Now that he had a moment to relax, he realized he was in pain. His senses had decided now was the best time to bombard Siegfried with a dose of their most powerful capabilities. The light
around the room seemed brighter to his eyes, small noises seemed explosive to his poor ears, and even the smells around him seemed more potent to his nose. It took him a second, but he realized that he was in the middle of a hangover. A very painful, though somewhat delayed, hangover.

He sat up slowly, wondering how he had managed to get inside his room in the first place. Had he gotten up on his own? Had he been carried? He couldn't remember. He had obviously gone a little overboard with the drinking the night before. He wasn't even able to recall anything that occurred after that first glass.

He had a very vague idea of what might have transpired. He must have told Mitsurugi what had happened to Link. That had been the purpose of the alcohol in the first place, after all. To loosen his tongue so that he would be able to explain the unfortunate circumstances without sounding too pathetic. It might have worked a little too well if his memory had become this impaired.

Then again, it might not have worked at all. All that drinking could have been for nothing. He might have just passed out after the first few drinks, or completely gone off topic and blacked out before he had the chance to say what he wanted to.

And that dream. He groaned as the remnants of it reached the forefront of his mind again. That had been such an awful nightmare, and such an odd one at that. Now that he had the time to examine it rationally, he realized how out of place it was to him. Even for a nightmare straight out of his own somewhat twisted subconscious, it was completely out of his league.

Siegfried had dreamed of Link before. They used to be simple figments of his imagination, just little occasions the two of them would encounter in his head. Recently they'd shifted to memories the two of them shared together, just like the first dream he'd experienced last night. But the second one? He had never had dreams like that one before. That was neither imaginary nor a memory of a beloved past.

It had seemed too real. Siegfried had seen the blood falling from the elf's lips. He had heard the ripping of the boy's skin. He had practically tasted the mildew encased in the small, damp cell, could actually still smell the sweat coming down from Link's soaked brow. That could not have been a dream. No dream was as clear and precise as what he had seen last night. He was willing to bet money that he had been right in assuming that it was more than just a stream of unconscious thought. So if it wasn't a dream, what was it?

His mind tried to rationalize the whole thing. Maybe it had been the after effects of recollection, having to put reality to words that admitting Link was in so much trouble. Perhaps his mind had simply chosen to torture him by giving him the absolute worst possible images of what his friend was going through as a punishment. So it felt real, that was normal. All nightmares felt real when you were trapped within one. That was, after all, what made them so scary. All Siegfried had to do to avoid dreaming about things like that again was to not tell anyone else just how much trouble Link was in. He would just have to avoid thinking about how much danger the young blond was facing and how pain he must have been suffering.

Siegfried blinked. He would need to stop thinking about those things fairly soon, lest his sanity be lost with the sands of time.

Groggily, he stood up and made his way around the room in a blurred frenzy. Finding clothes, putting them on, trying to figure out what time it was, all done with a sloppy precision the knight was surprisingly able to maintain. The alcohol consumed the night before was now starting to work against his system, lending him a horrible nausea to add to the horrible headache pounding against his skull.
He mentally told himself over and over again that he would never do something so stupid again. Next time, that princess was opening her mouth and telling the story herself. The only reason he had explained it in the first place was because he had no idea how Mitsurugi was going to react. For all Siegfried knew, Zelda could have been killed the second she took the blame for what had happened to her young hero. That was not the result Siegfried wanted. As much as it killed him to say it, he needed her alive. So he took it upon himself to tell a story that killed him a little more every time he had to remind himself it was real.

He would never make that mistake again.

"Link," He whispered miserably. "I should have never let you leave this world."

That had been the real reason for his disappearance all those years ago. That had been the motive for isolating himself from all those who cared about him. That had been the ammunition he used to punish himself with whenever guilt was too far. He left Link leave this world, and he was pretty sure he could have stopped the departure. After all, he and Link had been friends, good friends, and they would have done anything for each other. Or at least, Siegfried would have done anything for Link.

He should have asked him to stay. Maybe none of this would have happened if he had, but he had been scared. Scared of the rejection, scared of the result, scared of what that question really meant to him, and scared of what that question might mean to Link. In the end it had been easier to just let go. Let go of those mesmerizing blue eyes, let go of that angelic voice, and let go of that kind smile.

And what good had that really done him? Now, Link had become nothing but a memory. A precious memory that would be all he had left of Link if Siegfried were to betray his friend's trust and arrive too late to save him.

“This is all my fault, not hers.”

Chapter End Notes

Since this month will be filled with NaNoWriMo madness, updates will all probably be posted up on Sundays. That said, don't worry, I have the next few chapters ready to go so you can still expect one every week. Happy reading and writing.
Siegfried did not have the words to describe the type of mood he was in. Mad was far too tiny an inclination, angry would never begin to fully cover it, and infuriated was too small a thing to describe the emotion that was consuming him. To his credit, he did do a fantastic job of keeping his temper in check. It was a skill he had not always possessed, and it was a skill he had worked hard to perfect.

Years ago, when Link had chosen to stay by his side, Siegfried had been a very angry person. Even the smallest of things were certain to aggravate his nerves. He had snapped at his young companion many times during the first couple of weeks of their travels, though he had regretted his temper only seconds after he had allowed it to surface. It had not been easy trying to ease the embers of rage inside him, but Link had been patient. The elf worked with him when the knight had gotten angry, and always did his best to soothe his irritated friend. Siegfried had been a bit like a child back then, learning and relearning how to handle emotions, but he became a better man because of those patient teachings.

Teachings that were beginning to crack under pressure, threatening to shatter altogether.

His feet were aching, his body was knee deep in mud, the sun was beating down on him from the small slits between treetops, and his temper was threatening to explode. The smells of the swamp surrounding him were almost gag worthy. Musty, old, rotting pieces of earth and shrubbery bombarded his senses. That, coupled with the suns simmering rays, was enough to make him want to slap the person he felt was responsible for this.

"I hate you." he grumbled loudly enough to be easily heard. "I want you to know this."

Zelda glared at him through the particularly low hanging roots in front of her. "There's no need for you to take your frustrations out on me."

He almost felt like growling. The only thing stopping him was the stubbornness to give Zelda any kind of ammunition to throw back at him later on. "Isn't it an old custom to blame the person responsible for your misery?"

"Don't you dare try to blame this all on me!

"Hard to do otherwise when it's all your fault!"

Beside the two of them, Mitsurugi rolled his eyes. He tried to guide Epona through swampy terrain while simultaneously ignoring the two bickering adults. The horse was less than eager to move forward, even though the Samurai reassured her that going back would be worse than where they were now. He could not blame her for doubting him. The further they ventured on inside the murky infested land, the more curious and rather disgusting creatures attempted to introduce themselves.
Small fish with odd scale patterns, slimy eels and other such relatives who loved to rub against their legs, and bugs whose sharpened little jaws were anxious to take a bite out of them. It took all he had to keep Epona calm enough to move forward without running away himself.

But Siegfried and Zelda kept arguing, making leaving them behind all the more tempting by the second.

"This is utterly ridiculous."

"Your entire existence is utterly ridiculous."

"Why don't you stop acting like a child?"

"Why don't you stop acting like you can order me around?"

Mitsurugi growled. "Why don't you both stop arguing until we get out of this damn swap?" He felt Epona struggle against his grip while a strange creature slithered against his ankle. Try as he might he could not see anything beneath the waters. "You're scaring the horse."

Siegfried knew better than to start an argument. When Mitsurugi spoke, everyone in his party was quick to stop what they were doing and listen. There was no objecting, there was no complaining, and there was no whining. Any attempts at doing so would result in a nasty injury and an earful about how they deserved it after having ample warning.

"I still don't see why he insists on taking this out on me."

And yet, even the fear of severe repercussion by a very well kept blade was not enough to keep him from responding to the trap Zelda had planted. "Because you were the one who accused the old man of poisoning his competition at the breakfast table. You even called him out on it, saying he used us to get the poison."

"He did use us."

Siegfried was very pleased when he stepped on something rather hard and shattered it to pieces beneath his boots. If he closed his eyes and blocked out his surroundings, he could almost pretend it was the princess's skull. "Us? What's this about an us? I was the one who got all the damn ingredients."

"For a deadly toxin that would in no way be used for rats." Zelda paused for a second. Her attention moved to the liquid below her. Funny, she could have sworn she saw something slithering along in the water. Nevertheless she quickly hurried on to catch up to the two warriors trudging along in mud. They seemed to have little to no problems leaving her behind in this terrain. "I was not about to let some innocent man be the test subject for a new murder weapon."

She could hear Siegfried scoff, but all she could see was the back of his head. "What we gave him wasn't going to kill anyone."

She felt an intense rage gather in the pit of her stomach at his cocky voice. That nonchalance, the lack of proper care, it could only mean one thing. This man was obviously as cruel and heartless as Zelda had initially thought he was. She was certain now that he did not care one way or the other what happened to people as long as he got what he wanted, and while what he and Zelda both ultimately wanted was their hero's safe return, he had an evil way of showing it.

Well, Zelda was not one to stand idly by and let people die in her saviors honor. She would not have his good name tarnished with this man's indifference.
"How dare you?" she hissed. "You would let a killer do as he wishes while our hero lies in shackles fighting against one? You are no better than that sword."

Siegfried froze for just a second. In that one second every sin Zelda ever committed was swiftly played before Siegfried's eyes, Link's voice coating each and every word. Before he could stop himself, his memories began replaying every single horror story and every single scar Link had ever revealed to be attributed to the girl he served. Siegfried then quickly turned around with the full intention of going after the girl's throat. Restrictions be dammed. Now he was angry. He had been patient enough with this girl, but she just kept pushing every button she could find. He would teach her.

Or so he thought.

Siegfried honestly had not expected Mitsurugi to get in his way. Or for the samurai to be strong enough to successfully hold him back. Even Zelda, shocked and unmoving though she was, looked as though she had been expecting anything but that rescue. "Get a hold of yourself Siegfried! What in the world do you think you're doing?"

"Getting even." His voice was oddly cold, which was very ironic considering the boiling rage festering within his chest. When he got his hands on that girl.

"This is exactly what she wants. Hit her and she proves what a monster you are."

Siegfried growled in spite of himself. "I'm no monster!" Link said he wasn't. The elf had never believed he was, and Siegfried would always believe in Link's opinion. Never hers.

"Prove it then! Stand down!"

"You have no idea what this brat has been putting me through." The knight spat out, still struggling against the man restraining him. "If she wants to play these stupid games, then I'll show her what happens when she loses."

"Would you listen to yourself? You're getting too upset over something so foolish. Be a man and fall back."

But it seemed that, at the moment, being a man was the farthest thing from Siegfried's mind. Right now his only goal in life was getting rid of one irritating princess. Even the threatening tone Mitsurugi was using was not enough to break through the haze this sudden anger used to overshadow him. He just did not care. Not about Zelda, not about the samurai's words, not about his own punishment. However, Mitsurugi knew something the knight would care about.

Even though it was a cheap shot, when it seemed as though he might never be heard, Mitsurugi knew it was time for a blow beneath the belt. "What would Link think if he saw you now?"

The tensing of Siegfried's body was almost instant. The guilt in his heart came soon after, as did the lowering of his head. "That was a dirty trick."

"And I apologize for having to stoop that low." The samurai sincerely meant it. He hated it when the situation called for filthy tricks like that. They always left a sour taste in his mouth. "But you left me no choice."

After a long moment, Siegfried let out an agitated sigh. Mitsurugi was right. Of course he was right. Link would be disgusted if he saw Siegfried like this. If not disgusted, then at least disappointed. He knew the German had more self control than that. To let it go over something as insignificant as a princess like Zelda, it was downright disgraceful. To do so in Link's honor would be even worse.
So he tightened his hands and clenched his teeth, letting them be the barrier that restricted a tongue with far too much to say. Now was not the time. "You can let go now."

Mitsurugi’s arms stayed as stiff as a board as he looked for signs of a calm rage. Siegfried was all but famous for such behavior, and he could hide it well until it was too late to do anything about it. The samurai could remember several instances where that silent rage was unleashed without warning, or knowledge, on the part of his own party. Unleashing it on Zelda would not be very difficult, especially with the way she had been acting.

"I'm good." Siegfried reassured. "I won't try anything."

"Can I get that in writing?"

Siegfried chuckled. "You could if you let me go."

Mitsurugi still seemed hesitant about releasing him, but a few seconds later Siegfried found that he was able to move freely again. He understood just what that release meant, the price of that freedom. It was a favor, a privilege that was given to him only on the basis that he wouldn't use his strength to strangle the girl traveling with them. If he were to show any kind of serious violent intention towards her, he would not only be restricted, but he would also be unable to voice his opinions from then on. He would be forced to be silenced because of his own stupidities.

Still, the anger in his heart would not subside. Mitsurugi had done well to knock it down to size, but it did not disappear. Siegfried knew it would probably remain, there deep in his heart, until the princess was far enough away from him that he could pretend she did not exist. It would not be properly satisfied either. Not until he did something to make Zelda feel at least a portion of the pain he had been experiencing. He knew physically was out of the question, but there was more than one method of hurting someone.

Siegfried dug into his pocket. Seconds later he roughly pulled out a few pieces of foliage he had managed to sneak into his possession before being kicked out of the mansion. He flung them all at the princess. She was able to catch a few, but many fell down into the muck beneath her.

She glared at him for a second, but curiosity ultimately forced her to examine what he had thrown at her. "What are these?"

"I may not be an expert on plant life, but I do know thing or two." he said coldly. "I was well aware of the poison in the plants I gathered."

"So then why--"

"I also knew that only one section of the flower could do any real harm to human beings. A single red root hidden amongst the denser greens of the plant. That is the only section with enough poison to kill anything bigger than a beetle."

She quickly examined the roots in her hands.

"Take those out, and the rest of the plant is harmless. By the time the old man figured out I had taken away his means of poisoning, we would have already been long gone with a few choice horses and that much closer to Link." By this time, the bitterness in his voice had finally reached his eyes.

Zelda could hardly stand their intensity. Though the knight did not say another word, she understood his implication. She had slowed them down, at least by a few weeks, simply because of her selfish desire to be the one to defend Link's name. In doing so she had blatantly ignored the heroes request to accept help from the only one who could save him. She had once again betrayed the elf’s trust, and
once again it was he who would ultimately pay the price.

Mitsurugi grumbled under his breath and motioned for Epona to move forward. She did not struggle against him this time. Zelda and Siegfried chose to follow behind them in silence.

Mitsurugi was not happy. It just figured that after finally accepting Link was gone for good, two years of forceful recognition of reality, the man was suddenly bombarded with what could become an even bigger loss to his heart. And of course his current company did nothing to soothe his worries about getting to the elf too late. Fantastic.

This was why he had always chosen to travel alone. With no one but yourself for company, it was easy to forgo any painful emotions that would cause problems. Things like loss, betrayal, attachment, and worry. Feelings that were sure to get you killed if you dwelled on them too long. Either that or you got too accustomed to who you were traveling beside. Then, when they left or died, you were the one stuck with the wounds they accidentally inflicted upon you.

He had not wanted that. Mitsurugi had always wanted to live his life by the sword, on his own, and he had been doing a pretty good job of that. Until he had gone against his better judgment and began working with other people who managed to worm their way onto his good side. Let in one optimistic elf and his German friend and suddenly things all go to hell. A hell that you would still be paying for years later.

A sudden whine from Epona had Mitsurugi leaving his bitter thoughts alone for the moment in favor of glancing towards her saddle. The horse did not show any signs of distress, but the samurai did take notice of a pouch moving about on the side of her saddle.

"Did a bug find its way in there?"

Siegfried looked at the pouch in question. It took him a moment to remember that it was the pouch Navi claimed as her traveling space for entirety of the journey in this world. She had been so silent up until that moment, the knight had almost forgotten she was there. "That's just the fairy."

"A what?"

Siegfried took notice of the pouch's movements as well. They seemed forceful, almost frantic. Like somewhere in that cramped space the fairy was attempting to relay a message of dire importance. Which puzzled him, seeing as the group was perfectly fine. Greatly upset at one another, but fine nonetheless.

"It doesn't need to go or something does it?"

Siegfried held back a chuckle. "I don't think that's the case." He really had no idea how a fairy did things. How she ate, how she slept, how she...did other things. He had not paid too much attention to her since she and the princess had arrived.

Though, looking back on it, he really should have.

Navi burst out of the pouch mere seconds later. Siegfried found his head being viciously attacked by the blue ball he had nearly forgotten. She was persistent in her onslaught, going from the top of his head to the front of his face, spouting sentences so quickly that all the German could hear was a panicked hum.

"Slow down," He tried to slap her away. "What's the matter with you?"

"Something's in the water!"
Then Siegfried heard it. A snort. A snort many people residing in the Western world would recognize as a pig. In Germany, however, that snort was a sign of an animal much more vicious than the average farm pig, and it had a reputation for being violent. The notorious wild boar.

Siegfried had come into contact with these creatures only once before in his life, and that first encounter had been more than enough to leave an impression. He had been a young adolescent back then, just a boy who had recently celebrated his twelfth birthday. His father decided to take him out on a hunting trip one day. Its purpose was to teach the young Schtauffen the tricks of survival. Frederick had been somewhat apprehensive about bringing the young boy along, as he very well should have been. Siegfried was cocky back then. He was a boy who thought himself a man with no regard to the world around him. He thought he could do anything, including trespassing on a mother boar's territory. He still had the scar on his left leg from the encounter.

Now he was staring down a group of them, a much more dangerous threat to him than that single mother had been. He wondered how he had not noticed these creatures coming up behind them, but he would ignore that for the moment. He had bigger problems to deal with, the most important of which was figuring out how he could possibly come out of the situation without another scar on his body.

"Don't move." he whispered to his companions.

Zelda held back a whimper. "What should we do?"

"Kill them?" Mitsurugi asked softly, staring down the animals a few yards in front of them.

But Siegfried shook his head. "These are not the kind of creatures who will let themselves be slaughtered. They'll fight back, and when they do they'll leave a nasty scar."

"So what? We stand here until they leave?"

Zelda looked at the boar's scrutinizing gazes. "Perhaps they'll leave if we show them we mean no harm?"

The animals simultaneously took a step forward.

Siegfried took that to mean they had already made up their minds about their human guests. That conclusion was that, yes, they did indeed mean harm. "I don't think that will work." The boar's stepped forward again, tusks already at full attention. "Nope, absolutely will not work."

"So what do we do?" The samurai asked as his group took a tentative step back.

"I want you both to listen carefully." Siegfried whispered. "I am going to count to three. When I say one, Mitsurugi will grab hold of Epona's reins. When I say two, the princess will grab onto the saddle. When I say three, I'll take hold of Navi, the princess will jump onto the saddle, and Mitsurugi and I will proceed to run for it."

Zelda nervously looked at Epona. "Is that really all that wise? She won't let me ride her."

"She will today," Siegfried said firmly, looking towards the horse in question. "Won't you?"

Epona, somewhat reluctantly, nodded in reassurance.

"One."

The reins were taken in hand.
"Two."

Hands were placed on a saddle.

"Three."

In a fast paced chaos of rushed movements, the group followed the orders given to them seconds ago, and ran. In those few fearful seconds marking the beginning of their escape, they realized that speed would be of no help to them. Nature was not on their side. The animals chasing them knew the terrain. They could determine the best way to trap these trespassing humans. The swamp itself kept slowing the group's movements with each new step. Whatever died there, or died elsewhere and just so happened to wind up there, was pulling and yanking on their feet.

All the while Siegfried could not stop his mind from wondering. What on earth was going on here? Boars did not travel in packs. They were territorial creatures. It was unlikely that any of them had decided to randomly join together for the sake of protecting one piece of land that could not have possibly belonged to all of them at once. It made about as much sense as he and Zelda suddenly deciding to exchange wedding vows, which was not only impossible, but quite frankly disgusted him.

"Hold it!"

It was almost second nature by now for Siegfried to follow an order coming from a higher authority, even when his mind had not understood its purpose. It was that nature that had his feet sliding to a halt before his mind could fully process why he was doing it when Mitsurugi called out the order. His eyes soon decided that it had been the best course of action when they took in what was before them.

"Oh for the love of!"

A sharp decline of land, a landslide more or less, of mud and water cascading down a very steep hill. One wrong step would send anyone tumbling, and it was a very long way down.

"Can we go back?"

They immediately turned around, only to realize that they were staring down the group of boars they had been foolishly trying to run away from, and those boars were slowly approaching them, horns glinting even with the lack of good lighting. Siegfried needed a plan B, and he needed one fast. In his hand Navi had gone suddenly still. He had done his best to keep his grip somewhat loose, but maybe he had held on too tightly. Asking her for advice now would be no good. She was in no state to give it.

Epona could no longer stand the growing tension. She took one look at the looming threat in front of her, saw an unfamiliar black glint in empty eyes, and started to panic. She tugged roughly at the reins Mitsurugi held. He fought her for control. She responded by whining loudly and shrieking madly for him to let go. Mitsurugi struggled to keep her steady, and Zelda tried her best to call Siegfried's attention to the problem at hand. The knight turned around just in time to see Epona raise her front hoofs off of the ground. Mitsurugi and Siegfried jumped to grab hold of her reins, holding on for dear life to an edge of her saddle. For a moment they seemed frozen in the air.

When time restarted again, Epona had made a sharp turn. When her hoofs went to hit the ground, they instead met the air that was just over the decline they had been trying to avoid. The group tumbled down. Mud splashing into hair, rough patches of land digging its way in skin, cutting and ripping small areas of flesh. It seemed at one point as though the fall would never end.
When it finally did, each member of the small party was thrown onto a piece of land somewhere below the large slope of land. Mitsurugi and Zelda lay next to one another for a moment, while Siegfried lay further away beside Epona and Navi, who had shockingly stayed in his grasp during the fall. Their breaths came out harshly, each of them desperately trying to calm their beating hearts, trying to ignore the pain in their bodies. Slowly, each sat up, checking themselves over for any kind of serious injury.

Mitsurugi looked startled when a check of his robes seemed to turn up empty. He padded himself down before he stood up abruptly, eyes scanning the ground for something.

Zelda followed his example and pushed herself up from the ground. "What's the matter?"

"Where is it?"

She narrowed her eyes in confusion. "Where is what?"

He did not answer. His eyes caught sight of something hidden among fallen leaves and dirt, apparently what he had been searching for, and he snatched it up without a second thought. He dusted it off for a good minute before he held it up to the sun. That was when everyone in the group recognized what he had been so worried about losing. It was a medallion.

A thick golden band wrapped around a single group of triangles that had been fused together to create the illusion of one very symbolic shape. The triforce; Power standing atop the flat pyramid, wisdom at the bottom right of the formation, courage being left to its own devices on the left. It shone brightly in the mid morning sun, a unique energy flooding through every inch of gold. It was unseen, unnoticeable to the average human heart, but it was there all the same. It was an energy that each member of the group was able to recognize.

To Mitsurugi it was the endless smile of his adopted son. To Epona it was the gentle call of her master. To Zelda it was the presence of her beloved hero. To Siegfried it was the kind soul of his most precious person. To each and every one of them it was Link's boundless and generous life energy.

Zelda reached for it, but Mitsurugi retracted his hand too quickly. "What is it you want with this?"

She was unable to speak for a moment. "That artifact, where did you get it?"

"Where do you think? Link gave it to me." Mitsurugi eyed her suspiciously. "Why?"

Siegfried stood up from the ground and dusted himself off with his left hand. The other held onto to a panting Navi, who had worn herself out from the earlier fiasco. She was semi conscious and no doubt tired beyond recognition. He gently set her atop Epona's saddle, making sure the horse was alright, before turning his attention to Zelda for her explanation.

"By transferring a small portion of a person's magic energy into the object you now hold, a user can track and follow that object to wherever it may wander to. By giving it to a person, or attaching it to another object, they are also able to keep a silent eye on whoever has it."

Siegfried spared a glance at the small item in Mitsurugi's hand. "So, it's a tracking device?"
Zelda nodded. "In a sense. Anyone with basic magic training could make use of it. Since it uses the users own magic energy, it is almost like following themselves."

Siegfried looked at the object longingly. He used to have one just like it, Link had given one to about seven people in his group, but Siegfried's had gotten lost. Rather, he had left it behind when he disappeared after Link's departure. The German had been in shambles about forgetting it, but when he went back to retrieve it, the group had already moved on. There had been no sign of his medallion anywhere.

"So," Mitsurugi began. "How do we follow this trail?"

"You can't." Zelda crudely pointed out. "Neither of you have the magic abilities needed to follow our hero's energy."

Siegfried could almost swear she was happy about that. "And you do?"

She nodded. "After years of training, it should be fairly simple to pick up the presence of the trail."

"And yet it took you this long to sense the existence of the trail." Siegfried muttered loudly enough to be heard. He felt a great deal of satisfaction when he saw her scowl.

"I can follow it." she said a bit more humbly. "All it requires is a decent amount of energy."

Siegfried was reluctant to believe her. It was instinct now to see the world through a pessimistic eye. This could not be so simple.

"It's not." Zelda said to him, as though he had spoken aloud. Perhaps it had been the look on his face. "In theory, this should be as simple as I have described."

"But,"

"But, unfortunately, theories can be misleading." She seemed to sincerely regret that. "This particular spell works perfectly with the original user's energy, but I am not the original user."

Siegfried understood what she meant. "Link was."

"Correct. That means I would have to use my own energy to follow his path. It would be like me following his tracks in a forest, instead of following the original marked trail."

It was like an off telling of Hansel and Gretel. One where there was no certainty of a happily ever after. Still, "That doesn't sound too bad."

"It's secondary following. The paths that lead to the other mediums might fade as we're following them. If we don't work quickly enough, it'll recognize me as an intruder on our hero's spell, and the trail will disappear altogether."

Siegfried could have chopped down the entire swamp. What else could have possibly gone wrong in his life? All he needed now was to selfcombust and his misery would be complete. "How fast can we move?"

"Not nearly fast enough." Mitsurugi replied. "The transportation for this world is slow."

"They're all we've got."

"We need something else."
Siegfried ran a jittery hand through his hair. At this rate, the rapid beating of his heart would soon prove to be fatal. "What else can we do? Time is running out already, and we've barely gotten started."

"I know, I know."

Now both men were gripping their hair in their hands, trying to force their minds to concentrate on something other than their rising panic. The only thing they could focus on, however, was an internal clock that kept ticking away. It kept reminding them that with every passing second they could not come up with a solution, the problem further shattered into a mess they could not fix. They could not even begin concocting a plan. In fact the only thing they were concocting was a headache.

"Perhaps," Zelda interrupted gently. "There is something I can do."

In an instant, all eyes were on her.

"Are you two familiar with the three magic gifts our hero was given by the goddesses back in our world?"

Sadly, Siegfried only knew of two. "Din's Fire and Nayru's Love." Those two spells had been of great help during Link's travels in this world. Din's Fire had been great as an offensive maneuver while Nayru's Love had worked wonders for the group's defense. Siegfried knew of a third spell, but Link had never seen fit to use it in front of him.

"There was another." Mitsurugi added. The elf had only used it once, and only because Siegfried contracted a virus that could have proven fatal. The medicine needed to treat it had been one town over, a six day round trip from their location at the time, and Siegfried had been in no condition to travel. Link created half of some kind of portal he later used to get back to camp just in time to administer the medicine to the bedridden knight. "Farore's Wind." But as far as the samurai knew, that spell only worked on a one-way basis.

"As you may know, Farore's Wind creates warp points our hero used to get in and out of temples during his travels. Using those warp points, he could escape from or travel to areas he had already planted other warp points on."

"Yes, but," How he hated to be the bearer of bad news, especially when poor Siegfried was just starting to look hopeful. "That only works for a one way trip, and only helps if you've been to that spot beforehand. How could that spell do us any good in this situation?"

"These medallions were given out amongst the people of this world, correct?"

"That's right. Seven of us have them."

"Well, each has a piece of our hero’s magic signature embedded inside them. That is to say, they have a small portion of his magic abilities hidden inside. All his past capabilities, including Farore's Wind."

The men nodded.

"It would not be too much of a stretch to say that these medallions hold enough magic to be considered as an already made warp point of Farore's wind."

"Go on."

"If we assume that much, then theoretically all we have to do is create a second warp point from
where we stand while holding onto the one we already posses. Then the nearest medallion should pull us towards it, as well as the person who holds it."

Siegfried nodded. "It sounds a little too good to be true."

Mitsurugi agreed wholeheartedly. "What are the possible down sides to this?"

"Many, I'm afraid." Zelda said. "The first of which is that this theory of ours might not even work to begin with. After all, just because it can, does not mean it will."

Siegfried knew that all too well. A lot of things in his world could have been something better, something more than the tragedy it turned out to be. However, life was a being all its own with a sick, twisted sense of humor. Things that could have been often were not simply because life thought it was amusing to see people crumble.

"Then, even if it does work, the portal might not let us travel the entire distance needed to journey to the next warp point. It could recognize us as intruders on our hero's spell at any time."

"Not to mention," Mitsurugi added. "That this type of spell could very well kill us." He could see it now. The three of them, five if he counted their nonhuman companions, would stand. They would be absolutely ecstatic when the princess finally managed to summon up the strength to perform the spell. A bright light would surround them, giving them false hope of a safe journey to their next destination. Then it would all come crashing down. They would either end up in the same spot they had been at mere seconds before, be dropped out of the warp hole prematurely in some godforsaken wasteland, or be torn to shreds by a magic tunnel that knew that they were not the elf who created it.

Mitsurugi turned to Siegfried, and the princess followed suit. Epona lifted her head from the ground to look at the knight, as did the small fairy resting on her saddle. The German avoided their eyes. He knew what they were all silently implying. This journey began with him and it would no doubt end the same way. He alone could decide what to do next. He alone would bear the responsibility of every outcome on this unwanted adventure. This could only be on his conscious.

"Perform the spell." He straightened his back, kept his head held high, and walked to the area where Epona lay. Using firm yet gentle tones he eased her up until she stood steady on all fours. He then placed Navi on his shoulder, stroking her wings a bit to ease the tension he felt when he took hold of her. For some reason it felt comforting having the small creature with him.

"Are you sure?" Mitsurugi asked. "This is really the path you want to take?"

"Absolutely." Not.

Siegfried had many doubts about taking this particular course of action. It was too risky and far too uncertain for his tastes. If he had his way, the group would be following a much more certain path, but the fact of the matter was there was simply not enough time to think about every little thing that could go wrong. The more indecisive he was, the longer it took to alleviate Link's suffering. The thought of such a thing was more than enough to convince him to take the risk.

"Will you try?" he asked, turning to face Zelda. She said that the spell was possible to perform but never said she would do it. She would agree though. Siegfried had learned by now that when it came to Link, the girl was willing to do just about anything.

Just as he expected, Zelda ushered them all to come closer to her. Siegfried took hold of Epona's reins and Mitsurugi placed a hand on his shoulder, his other hand holding tightly onto his medallion.

Zelda breathed. She then opened her eyes, a soft glow now showing on her right hand. Her arms
extended to her sides. Then she swiftly spun around in a circle, letting an almost transparent yellow ribbon expand until it circled the entire group. Siegfried took notice of the colorful energy spreading along with the ribbon. It was green. The same green that reminded him so much of the person closest to his heart.

'Link,'

That was the last coherent thought he could muster. The second the name left its echo in his head, he was surrounded an extremely warm sensation. At first he thought he was just feeling a bit hot due to the effects of the spell. However that thought soon left his mind when his blood began to burn him from the inside. If he had to describe the feeling, he would have said it felt like boiling water was just bursting through his veins, scorching the walls and muscles in his body all in one rapid motion. It was actually painful in a sense he had never thought possible.

In a mere blink of an eye the sensation was gone, replaced by a feeling so foreign to him he was not able to name it. It started with his feet. The desire to run was there, and he thought he may have taken a step to try and escape the portal Zelda had put him in, but then he could not feel his feet. They were not numb, or even asleep. It was almost as if they just weren't there.

A sick feeling settled in the knight's stomach. Alarm was dying to be heard out by someone, and it finally got its chance in the slight gasp that left Siegfried's mouth when his stomach seemed to disappear from his sensory radar as well. Then his arms went, and his panic only increased.

His eyes had not closed since Zelda first performed Farore's Wind. Yet they could see nothing more than an intensely bright white light. The comforting green he had seen earlier was gone, the sight before him now far from soothing. Its presence was so intense, Siegfried felt his eyes melting just by looking at it. Then, suddenly, there was nothing but a cool darkness filtering through his gaze.

When he came back to a decent consciousness, he realized that there were voices around him. They sounded a bit distant at first, as though they were calling out to him from across entire oceans. It was hard to make out their intent. He knew they were calling to him, at the very least they were calling out his name.

"Siegfried!" One called. "I'm telling you right now to get the hell up!"

"If this is a joke," A softer voice said. "Then you will surely regret it once this charade is over."

He had the strongest desire to scoff.

"Shaking him will do you no good." Was he being shaken? This voice was different from the first two. Where the hell was he? "It will only make things worse."

"Is he going to be alright papa?" That one sounded like a little girl.

The voices were starting to become more recognizable in terms of gender and age. Now if he could just figure out where he was and who these people were, he might be able to relax a little.

"He'll be alright, Amy," Amy? "He just blacked out for a bit."
An earlier voice returned. "I still don't see what happened. I'm fine, and the girl only has minor discomforts."

"I suppose he took it harder." Took what harder?

"Siegfried Schtauffen, wake up!"

"It would help if you didn't scream at me!" Siegfried finally managed to open his eyes and glare at the air above him.

Slowly his blurred sight began to focus on the figures hovering over him. The recognition took longer. The first two were most obviously Mitsurugi and Zelda. The other two were a pair of friends he had not seen in years. Two people who had once been so important to him, the ones who used to house the entire party in their mansion when the fight for Soul Edge left everyone feeling weary.

The older of the two smiled. "Welcome back, Siegfried." The girl beside him waved shyly.

Siegfried could not help but return the smile. "Raphael, Amy, good to see you."

Amy giggled and Raphael nodded in approval. "How are you feeling?"

The German took note of his condition. He wasn't feeling particularly bad. A little tired, sure, but still able to function. He sat up, on what seemed to be a couch of some sort, and flung his legs over the edge. He stood without any trouble and stretched out the muscles in his arms. There was no sign of any of the sensations that had caused him to pass out.

"Fine." he said finally. "Where are we?"

Raphael smirked. "My sitting room. The lot of you was passed out on my front lawn this morning. I had to drag you all in here and wait for you to wake up."

"Morning?" How long had he been asleep?

"You were out for the better part of the day. It's close to dusk now." Raphael said in response to the German's unasked question. "The other two woke up within the hour."

Siegfried ran a hand through his hair. Then, realization hit him as he turned to glance around the entirety of the room, and its occupants. He felt a relieved when he saw Navi perched over Zelda's shoulder. He also took notice that the princess was not disguised. The cloak that had hidden her appearance must have been destroyed during the spell.

"Where's Epona?"

"In the stable." Raphael pointed over his shoulder to an open door. "Amy took her in while I took care of all of you."

"Was she okay?"

"Was a bit panicked at first, but relaxed when she saw Amy."

Siegfried was glad to hear that. "She must remember her."

Raphael nodded. "Now that that's settled, care to tell me exactly what you all are doing here? And just why you showed up in such a dramatic fashion?"

The room instantly became silent.
"Don't all of you rush in at once now."

Siegfried turned to Mitsurugi, who motioned for him and Zelda to come closer to him. When the group was huddled together, far enough from Raphael's earshot, Siegfried posed the question, "What do we do?"

Mitsurugi shook his head. "We can't dance around it. We have to tell him."

"He will *kill* her." Siegfried none too gently reminded. "He will not take things very well."

"Then we have to break the news to him gently."

"He will break her neck, *gently*." Siegfried was honestly concerned. Raphael was not a cruel person, but he was as vengeful as any man Siegfried had ever known. They could not risk losing Zelda.

"She can't be in the room when we tell him," Mitsurugi said at last. "It will only make things worse."

Siegfried turned to Zelda. "I'll tell him to give you a room you can stay in for the night. You can see him tomorrow when he's had time to process the story."

"Very well."

"Navi," he said turning to the fairy. "You go along with her. Keep her safe if you can."

"Roger."

"I'll tell Raphael," Mitsurugi said.

Siegfried was relieved, but he still felt the need to ask. "Are you sure?" The blond could be a handful when intense emotions were concerned. This was not going to be easy.

"Better me than you. If anything, you two will fuel the others rage." He had a point. "So I'll take him, while you explain all of this to Amy."

Wait, "What?" That was where Siegfried drew the line. He was not good with children. He had never been, even when he himself was a child. They saw him, and nine times out of ten they tended to run away crying. "That won't work well. I'm no good with kids."

Mitsurugi raised an eyebrow. "You were fine with Sophitia's children."

"No offense to their mother, but those two are not exactly normal."

"And Amy is any better?"

Zelda fiddled with the hems of her gloves. "Should I-"

"No!" The two men said, after which they quickly turned back to the other.

"Siegfried, you have to be the one to tell her. There is absolutely no room for discussion."

"I'll screw this up and just end up making her cry. I know I will."

"It's better than the alternative. If you and Raphael are in the same room, you'll just end up feeding each other's anger and the girl will be dead before morning."

Siegfried could not argue with that. Not only was it dead on as far as accuracy went, but it was one
of the reasons why he wanted to avoid direct questioning from the Sorel. "Fine." He sighed. "You win."

From there the group dispersed as casually as they could manage. Raphael gave Siegfried directions to a room Zelda could use for the night, after which he and Mitsurugi retired to the mansion's study.

Siegfried did his best to avoid Amy's gaze as he saw the princess off to bed. Zelda might have tried to reassure him, but all it managed to do was tick him off. He had scoffed at her attempts, saying she should not feel the need to see to him. She had not done so before, and she should feel no qualms about not doing so now. He then continued to avoid Amy's questioning eyes as he silently followed her to the stable where Epona waited. He all but ran to the horse when she picked up her head up to look at him.

"Hey girl." Siegfried ran his hand along Epona's mane. The white hair had been stained brown from their earlier encounter with the boars and various pieces of foliage wedged their way into the now tangled hair. She must have felt miserable being dirty for so long. "We'll have to get you cleaned up properly tomorrow," he said softly. "You can't like being this messy."

Epona quickly shook her head.

Siegfried chuckled. He began unfastening her saddle, which he knew must have been about as dirty as she was and could not have been very comfortable to wear. Dried dirt and damp grass did not feel all that good against bare skin.

Amy stood patiently at the door of the stall. A light smile graced her features as she watched Siegfried move this way and that to tend to Epona's needs. The horse seemed flattered by his ever vigilant attention.

"She likes you."

Siegfried smiled. "I should hope so." He ran a hand down Epona's mane. "I like her a lot as well."

Epona blew a small puff of air into the knight's hand. A sign of affection she liked to use when someone was particularly kind to her.

"Does she let you ride her all the time?"

"I don't know. I haven't asked." He turned to Epona with a serious expression. "If the situation calls for it, would do the honor of allowing me to ride on your back?"

Epona took a moment to ponder the question before nodding slowly.

Amy laughed. "That was polite of you."

Siegfried shrugged as he ran his fingers through the horse's hair, trying to dislodge the twigs he could see tangled.

"You take very good care of her."

He hummed lightly in response.

"Almost as good as Link used to."

Siegfried's hand froze instinctively. "Uh-oh."

"Where's Link, Siegfried?"
"So, I see Siegfried has the girl on a tight leash."

The blond was in a very happy mood. That was usually a hard mood to notice. Rapahel always smiled, and more often than not it was fabricated, as was his cheerful demeanor. However, this was honest amusement. The samurai could tell by the jubilant way he poured the wine, no doubt the best of its kind, into two very expensive looking wine glasses that really did not have to be used for this occasion. He kept one for himself, and then handed the other to the samurai. He then sat down in the chair opposite of his friend, smiling contently, glass swaying slightly in his hand.

"I wasn't aware he'd found a pet."

Mitsurugi fought down the urge to laugh. It was amazing how accurate Raphael could be about the situation between Siegfried and Zelda, even though he had only watched them interact for a few short moments. "Interesting take on their relationship."

"It seems to fit." It would seem that way to him. He was a man who, at times, felt no qualms about seeing people as possessions. "So, what brings you all here? I can't imagine it being simply because you wanted to see me."

Had Siegfried been there, he would have been surprised to discover that the comment was more of a blow towards Mitsurugi than anybody else. The samurai had been less than inclined to revisit his old traveling companions once they had all gone their separate ways. He would have liked to say it was because he had had no time to do so, but the truth was that he had just been selfish. It hurt to see the group so incomplete. If he could not see them all, he did not want to see any of them period. Thoughtless perhaps, but that seemed to be a common trait amongst the old friends.

"I wish I could say you were wrong. Unfortunately, the situation is much more urgent than that."

Raphael took the words in stride. The meaning of the word 'urgent' had always been different for the self proclaimed father and son. "Oh? Is something wrong?"

"Very."

"Then do tell." The Frenchman took a leisurely sip from his glass. "You know how much I love a good story."

Mitsurugi was in no mood to start story telling about Link's unfortunate circumstances. That would be too risky. Unless he took the proper precautions, the blond in front of him would not take the news well. He would be distraught, upset, and most likely very, very angry. He would then clearly take his frustrations out on the person responsible for it.

That girl may have been somewhat to blame, but she was also part of the solution. If she was killed or harmed now, so early in the game, then the small bit of hope they had for retrieving Link was all but gone. No. To recklessly tell Raphael of what had transpired was too much of a gamble. A gamble that Mitsurugi was not too sure he would win.

Certain measures had to be taken. "I need you to do something for me first."
"Which is?"

Mitsurugi held out his hand. "Give me Rapier."

Raphael blinked. "You can't be serious."

The samurai did not retract his hand. "Deathly."

"Do you think I will kill you for this news?"

"I think this information may lead you to that extreme, yes."

The response had drawn Raphael's attention. The man was by no means an exceptionally violent kind of person. He would admit to being a bit of a snob at some points in his life, but he was a human being. He did not kill mindlessly or without a valid reason. Granted, his emotional health had taken a slight turn for the worst after his adopted little brother's departure. Yes it had been something new to him, losing someone in such a permanent way without the obstacle of death. Yes he had taken it a bit harder than he should have. And yes that departure may have made his emotions run loose a bit more than they used to.

But Mitsurugi had never seen fit to make mention of that before. It had not mattered. The damage was not so great that it had to be constantly watched and monitored. Raphael was a grown man, after all. If there was a problem, he could decipher it and take care of it himself. His emotions had not robbed him of common sense. So for the swordsman to make reference to it, even in the slightest, now of all times?

"I take it this conversation will go no further until I do?"

"Perceptive as always."

A part of Raphael wanted to refuse. His sword was almost like another child to him. It never left his side until, or unless, it was absolutely necessary. He loathed having to hand it over so easily without knowing what kind of information he would get in return.

"I better get this back." But his curiosity got the better of him, forcing his body to comply with the samurai's request before his mind could think of arguing.

Mitsurugi could not help but feel relieved when the hilt was passed into his waiting palm. At least half of the hard part had been taken care of. "Write down where the girl's room is."

"Siegfried knows where it is."

"Well now I need to know."

The blond raised an eyebrow. "Planning to pay her a visit later on?"

Years of training his face to remain calm at all times, even as his emotions ran rampant, was about the only thing that kept the disgust from showing. "Funny. Now write down the directions."

"Why can't I just tell you?"

"I'll need something concrete to prove what you gave me was in fact the correct way to her room. If I have written directions I can, immediately after our conversation, go check to see if you were telling me the truth."

"Oh for heavens-" Raphael managed to bite his tongue before anything else could pass through his
lips. He needed to remember who he was talking to. Mitsurugi had never been one for disrespect. Now that he had Rapier with him, he could very well show the Frenchman what he did to those who chose to mouth off to him. Raphael may have been frustrated with the situation at hand, and he would go far enough to say that he thought it was all ridiculous, but he knew better than to place himself into a position to receive bodily harm.

"Is this really necessary?" He settled on asking.

"Extremely."

He had half a mind to refuse. "It's Yunseong's old room. The one he would always claim when the group spent the night here."

Mitsurugi had that location stored away within his memories. He knew precisely where it was. That was quite a good sign. "You'll notice that she looks somewhat like Link."

"The ears yes. Everything else is but a superficial resemblance."

The samurai smiled. Raphael had a high opinion of Link. Absolutely no one could compare, and it was doubtful that anyone ever would. Even if Link were to suddenly appear side by side of a carbon copy of himself, Raphael would still be able to tell the difference.

"Well those ears are the proof that tells us she came from the same country he did."

"I had gathered that from the triangle on her dress." The triforce. It was a symbol that had yet to ever be recorded in this world. It was doubtful that anyone who was not part of Hyrule would be caught wearing a replica of it.

"You'll also notice that the horse she arrived on was Link's."

"I gathered that from the way she greeted Amy." The horse honestly had a better memory that Raphael did.

"You've no doubt realized that Link is not actually here."

"I figured that much from his lack of presence."

"There's a reason for that."

Raphael rolled his eyes. "You don't say. Look, I don't mean to rush this riveting prologue, but can we get to the point?"

Mitsurugi too rolled his eyes, and then settled himself down for the somber tale.

"Where's Link, Siegfried?"

The German did not want to do this. It had been hard enough explaining the situation the first time, and that had been with the aid of a large amount of alcohol and the knowledge that he would forget it all in the morning. Not to mention the fact that the first time he had uttered this tale, it had been to a
full grown man. Mitsurugi was able to take hard news fairly well. He had hardened himself over years of difficult sword training and harsh encounters with reality. He had seen enough, knew enough of hardship, that he could handle everything Siegfried had thrown at him.

Amy was different. She was still very much a child, both in mind and at heart. Sure, she may have seen death littering the streets where she came from, but those victims had been empty faces. They had been meaningless tragedies that she had had nothing to do with, and as such she had never needed to feel much of anything for the tormented.

This was different. Amy knew Link. Like he had been for Siegfried, Link was somewhat of a savior to her. Closer to her in age than any other male in her life, he could relate to being a lost child in a world filled with adult expectations. The elf took time to listen to what she could not say, and was patient enough to wait for what she could. She grew to love him as a dear uncle.

Now Siegfried would have to inform her that her beloved uncle was fighting against a sword who had, at one point, taken possession of her. From his mouth she would hear a kind of pain she had probably only seen in her nightmares.

In a sense he was glad that he had forced Zelda to retire so early. She would have been of no help to him, and could have only pushed more grief onto a little girl who would not be able to take it. Of course, even with the princess gone, his job was not any easier. However, at least it took the violent edge off of things.

He opened his arms slightly, and Amy came to him without question. She was probably doing it more out of instinct than actual trust for the German. Link used to open his arms to her like that. When he did, it was usually followed by him hoisting her up to sit on Epona's back. There she would turn to face him, and the two would talk. That arrangement was, after all, designed for that purpose. It was created for heart to hearts and serious discussions. A tool that the blond used to help Amy understand a situation without causing her to panic. Like he had done in the past, Siegfried repeated the action, making sure the girl was calm before he began speaking.

"Amy," he began uncertainly. He had no idea how he was supposed to go about this. How could he explain the situation to her? He could not afford to be overly emotional unless he wanted to upset the girl, but being too withdrawn would be too cruel to her. Too serious and he risked making her cry, but if he was too nonchalant about it she would think he was joking. That or he was teasing her to be mean. Honestly, he was not meant to see to these types of situations.

"Link is," he tried again. "Link isn't here right now." Well, he certainly could have hit himself for that one. Of course the elf was not there. That was the problem. “Never let it be said that I can't state the obvious, though.” he thought to himself dryly.

"Where is he?"

"Back in Hyrule." Now he was subconsciously trying to avoid the subject. A part of him knew that he should just come out and say what had happened. It should not have not been all that hard to accomplish. It was just...she just kept looking at him with those eyes. Eyes that wanted to know why something so good was no longer in her reach.

"Why didn't you bring him here with you?"

"I can't do that." And wasn't that just painful to admit?

"You brought the girl."
"The truth is, Amy, she came here on her own. She brought the fairy and Epona along with her."

The redhead looked confused. She had every right to be. He was making absolutely no sense. Vague answers, hesitance to speak, hell all he was doing was making an idiot out of himself. He supposed that meant it was time to stop acting like a coward.

"Amy, I want you to listen, and listen very carefully. Zelda came to this world because her kingdom was in trouble."

"Why didn't Link save it?"

He should have known she would ask him that. She knew as well as he did that Link was the go to guy for a world that needed to be rescued. He had been that type of guy in this world too.

"He tried." Siegfried said softly. "But this danger is a bit different than anything he was used to fighting in the past."

"Why?"

He fought down the urge to bite his tongue. If he did not find the guts to tell her now, he would never find the strength to do so in the future. "Soul Edge escaped from its prison." He would leave out the how. She did no need to know how. Her knowing would only complicate matters. "He devoured a very powerful being and took control of his powers in order to create a body of his own. That was the creature Link faced back in Hyrule, and right now it's keeping him held captive. Zelda came here to ask me for help. I need to rescue him from Soul Edge."

Amy started shaking her head. "No. You're wrong."

Denial. He had been afraid of running into that. "I wish I was. But I'm not lying." He wished he could say something better than that. Something to appease her, soothe her if he could.

Something passed through her eyes. A slow reluctant understanding that he realized was her way of accepting the situation. She did not want it, that much was certain, but she knew he was telling the truth. She may not have cherished Siegfried as much as she had Link, but she knew the German just as well. She would know when he was lying.

"That's not fair." she said after a moment. "Why him? He was good. Why not her? Nobody liked her."

He wished he had an answer for that. He had been asking himself that same question for a long time. Even before Link had been imprisoned, before Zelda had revealed herself to him, he had asked why. Why Link?

"I wish I knew." After a minute of silence he looked back up to Amy with a raised brow. "Why did you say that nobody likes her?" Link had never mentioned the princess around Amy, and Siegfried highly doubted that her father had said anything about her.

"I can tell." She said sadly. "The way you talk to her is mean. The way Mitsurugi looks at her is too. And papa treats her worse than how he treated Link."

He supposed he should have been nicer when he sent the girl off to bed. He then reminded himself to ask Mitsurugi about what had happened during the time he had been unconscious. Raphael seemed to take an instant dislike to the girl, for reasons the German would have to figure out later. Because of that, an encounter between the two had stirred Amy's suspicions.
"Did that monster kill him?" Amy asked him after a moment.

"No." At least he could say that with confidence. "He's still alive."

"How can you know that?" She was not asking to be cruel. She was asking to be sure. She wanted to be assured that her light had merely been shrouded in shadow, and not obliterated altogether.

"Soul Edge had a body of its own, yes," Siegfried admitted. "But it can't survive on its own. It needs Link to stay alive. If he dies, then Soul Edge will get sick and eventually disappear. It needs him. It won't risk destroying him."

She hardly looked convinced, but he knew she would take his word for it. "I...don't really understand."

The knight laughed a bit in spite of himself. "I don't quite understand it all myself."

She almost looked as though she would utter a reply. All that would come out of her mouth, however, were small choking sounds. When she reopened her mouth to try again, she was met with the same results.

Siegfried was instantly concerned. "Amy? Are you alright?"

She shook her head. Then she did something he had been dreading since he had walked into the stable. Amy dropped her head into her hands, and started to cry. In the wooden shed that had been absolutely silent mere moments ago, her cries sounded like the wails of a lost child, calling out to a mother lost and out of reach.

Siegfried could do nothing to comfort her. Any attempts to console her would be useless. He was not the one she wanted to help her through this. The only one who would be able to wipe away her tears was the one that she was crying for. Siegfried was not that angel.

So all he could do was stand there and wait. All the while he wished something would deafen him to her cries.

Mitsurugi had been right in taking Rapier away from his companion. The sudden rage he now saw would not have been any better with a sword in hand. Raphael paced around the room angrily. Anything in his path was likely to get smacked or knocked over. The Frenchman was lucky he had money to replace everything he was breaking.

"How could you allow me to let that thing into my house?"

"Where was she supposed to stay? Outside?"

"Yes." The blond responded bitterly. "Outside with all the other vermin running amuck in the world."

"Raphael," Came the exasperate response. "Just calm yourself for a moment and take a seat."

"Take a seat? Take a-" Raphael scoffed. He took a moment to turn around and place his hands on his
hips in the perfect picture of annoyance. "You expect me to just sit down while a monster sleeps perfectly in bed as her victim, my little brother, battles torture against a damn sword!"

In a fit of rage Raphael swung his hand at the closet item in sight. What he knocked down was an expensive looking vase that shattered to pieces on the carpeted floor.

Mitsurugi sighed. "Trust me," he said soothingly. "I know exactly how you feel."

"Then why are you so damn calm about this? Why aren't you doing something about it?"

"What do you think I'm doing?" Mitsurugi rose from his chair. Raphael's rage was contagious. "Do you honestly think I like that girl? I nearly killed her myself when I found out."

"What stopped you then? Hm?"

"Siegfried."

Raphael skeptically raised an eyebrow. "Siegfried? That's the best excuse you could come up with?"

"How close were they?"

"Who?"

"Link and Siegfried."

Raphael scratched the back of his head. "They were best friends I suppose."

"Soul mates would be a better term to use. Those two were everything to each other. They knew each other's dreams, their secrets, and their desires. They knew each other better than they knew themselves."

"Alright, so-"

"Siegfried was the first to hear of any of this. Don't you think he wanted to rip her throat out?"

"Well, yes?"

"And what does the fact that she's still alive tell you?"

"She's serving him some kind of purpose? How the hell should I know?" Raphael had quickly gone from looking like an enraged war general to a petulant child in thirty seconds flat. It would have been the funniest sight under other circumstances.

"Exactly. She serves a purpose. She's the only way we can get back to Link. Otherwise Siegfried would have let her die long ago."

Mitsurugi had not spoken to Siegfried about any this of course. There was no way that the knight would be so open with him about the given situation. It was not because he was not trusted, but the samurai was simply not Link. Still, he could tell. His keen instincts were not restricted to the battle field. He knew what he said was true.

"Don't you think this was hard on him? He was the closest to Link, and he was the most heartbroken when the boy left. If he could, he would have already found a way to get rid of her. However, he was smart enough to look for a good enough reason to keep her alive, and Link was that reason."

Raphael listened somewhat intently as he walked over to one of the windows in the study. He turned
his back to the samurai and instead tried to focus on the night sky outside. There was no moon tonight, and no stars bothered to make an appearance. Instead clouds blocked anything that might have made the scenery beautiful to the human eye. It was a rather depressing sight actually, not unlike the current flow of conversation.

"I know you're upset." Mitsurugi said. "But try to understand. We came here to ask for your help, and without the girl it's all but useless. She needs to survive." That was really what this argument was about after all. Raphael would help for Link's sake, but that resentment inside him would hinder the journey. It could very well stop it all together if left unchecked.

"I," Raphael kept his back to the samurai. "I don't understand how this could happen. He was sick? When was that child ever sick in this world?"

"Never." Mitsurugi admitted. "But that had more to do with us than anything else. You in particular were always making sure he was in top shape." The man could not help but smile at the images that came through. "You really were like his older brother."

Raphael scoffed. "Some sibling I was. I couldn't even save the only one I had."

Mitsurugi frowned. "You had no way of saving him. He was already out of our reach by then. It was not your fault he died once before. Nor is it your fault he's in trouble now."

"Oh?" The blond seated himself on the window sill, eyes scanning the gloom ridden sky for something he could not see. "I could have stopped him from going. I could have at least tried." Taking a deep breath he dropped his head into the palm of his hand. "That boy did so much for me. He gave me my daughter's voice, gave me back her smile, gave me back my own damn humanity, and in the end what did I do for him? Absolutely nothing. I could not convince him to leave behind a world he didn't even like. If I had, then none of this would have happened."

Mitsurugi stepped towards Raphael. He did not like the look in the man's eyes. It was too much like the darkness that used to be so prominent in his gaze. "That's not fair, placing all the blame on yourself like that."

"It certainly feels justified. I could have given him a home, a family, a better life than the empty one he had. When the time came to offer it, I was silent. I was useless to him then. What good can I possibly do for him now?"

Mitsurugi placed a hand on Raphael's shoulder and turned him around so that the two were now eye to eye. "Come with us. Link needs you now more than ever. We need you with us."

Raphael looked towards the sky again. He seemed to think long and hard about the decision he was about to make. Mitsurugi got the feeling there was more to it than just leaving to fight Soul Edge. "Amy will come as well."

"What?" Was the blond going crazy? "She's too young. She hasn't had proper battle experience-"

"But she has had proper training." Raphael argued. "You'd be surprised just how quickly she catches on."

Mitsurugi doubted that every much. "She's merely a child. This entire experience would hurt her." She could very well be killed, and he did not very much like the sound of that.

"Then you can explain to your granddaughter why she can't journey off to find her uncle when she is more than ready enough to start a battle for his life. I'm sure she'll keep her tears to a minimum."
That sounded even less appealing. "That is hardly fair."

"Yes, well neither is bringing an animal into my home and then expecting me to let her eat at my table."

The conversation was as good as completed. Mitsurugi knew there was no longer a place for arguments. Now it was simply about acceptance. "Very well. She may come, but please, do try to at least be polite to Zelda."

"Oh, sure." Raphael assured him. "I will do all I can not to offend the antichrist."

Mitsurugi felt he should just leave everything be for the moment.

Chapter End Notes

...we can all just pretend I skipped a week, right? Pretty please?
Emotion

Chapter Summary

Hearts were a pesky thing to accept. Especially when times were tough, and the competition tougher.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Siegfried felt her approach more than he heard it.

His ears had been somewhat shot hours earlier, so he unconsciously decided not to hear much of anything for a good while. Amy's cries had affected him a great deal more than he originally thought they would, had hurt so much more than he expected. It should have come as no real surprise.

Amy was a child. A little girl who had suffered more than enough for her short lifetime, and she did not deserve to suffer again. Not like that, not by crying her eyes out over something she had no control of, and not by losing something so precious. The pain he caused her should have hurt, and it should have hurt him as much as it did her.

"I told you to go to bed." Siegfried said to the princess as she entered the stables. He should have known she would not listen to his orders so easily.

He felt hay stir as she sat beside him on the floor. "It is already morning. I have gone to bed and awoken from my slumber. You appear to have not."

Siegfried had not been able to leave the stable. Not after what he had done to such an innocent child. He did not deserve to sleep in a proper bed, had no right to sleep peacefully.

Amy had not been able to drag herself to her room either. Instead, after she stopped crying, she decided to sleep where she was. Epona, the kind creature that she was, chose to lie down and make herself a cushion for Amy's personal use. The horse hated that position, as it made her extremely uncomfortable and unable to run at a moment's notice, but she made an exception this once.

Siegfried chose to sit opposite of the stall, silently watching from against the wall. That was all he had been able to do. Apparently he had been there far longer than he had intended to and lost track of the time. Honestly, he hoped he could have been able to act if Amy woke up during some kind of nightmare if he remained, but he knew he would have been useless when it came to something like that. Link knew how to calm nightmares. Siegfried only knew how to ignore them.

"I noticed you did not see yourself to bed, nor have you gotten any decent amount of sleep."

He scoffed at her attempt at concern. Or perhaps it was real. He had no idea. It would not have mattered much if it was, or was not, sincere. Not when it was her trying to give him comfort. "What, were you looking for me outside your window?" Yunseong's old room did have a decent view of the stables. She would have been able to see him if she had been looking.

"You don't seem very up to par." Siegfried could tell she was looking at him, even though he did not turn to confirm that suspicion. "You usually come up with wittier responses than that."
"Don't speak like you know me." Had he not been so tired, he would have done something to get her to leave him alone. He did not like her beside him. "Where's Navi?"

"She is still asleep. I thought it best to give her a bit more rest after yesterday's ordeal."

"How very kind of you." Siegfried noted with sarcasm. How could she not understand that she was the last person he wanted near him at the moment? Was she that dense? Or did she simply not care?

"I am not a cruel person, though you seem highly convinced that I am."

Siegfried turned to look at her just then. She was already staring back, waiting for a very specific type of response. In her eyes was a challenge. A challenge that sought out the honest reaction to what she had just said. Did she think he would lie? If she did, she would be highly disappointed.

"It is no surprise I think lowly so of you. I told you that when we met. At the very least, I implied it."

"You truly have no reason to. We have never been formally introduced. I have given you no option that says you should hate me so."

He narrowed his eyes. "You do not give me options period, because you do not get to decide what options I have. And to be clear, I don't hate you. I detest your existence." He stopped to glance at Amy. He wanted the girl to sleep throughout the entire conversation, as he felt it might turn very ugly very shortly. "Hate is a word I reserve for Soul Edge."

"Forgive me if I don't comprehend."

"I forgive you for nothing, but I will understand why you don't 'comprehend'." He wanted her to know where she stood with him. She would have no excuses later on. She would not be able to complain of how he had not made himself perfectly clear. He would say it now. "I can't bring myself to like you."

"Why not?"

"You hurt Link." It was the only reason that mattered. "You were selfish, and he paid the price. You used his kind heart as a way to bend him to your every will over and over again. It was because of you that he could not live his own life, and it was because of you he could never see to himself."

That was what angered him the most. Link was bound to her, whether Siegfried wanted to acknowledge that fact or not. The two had some kind of unbreakable connection that would last for eternity. It would not have been such a bad thing had she not taken advantage of it. Had that bond not damaged Link in any way, it would have been perfectly fine. She might have also been perfectly alright in Siegfried's book as well. But because it had hurt, that bond was toxic, and she was too.

"I blame you for everything that happened to him." he added in. The empty life, painful death, she was the cause of everything Link had gone through, and he wanted her to know that she had been the cause of it all.

Her demeanor was quick to change. Instead of arguing with him, like he was certain she would, she wrapped her arms around her legs and rested her chin atop them. It was a position not fondly recognized among royalty because it made them look like something weaker than what they were. For the first time since she had shown herself to him, she did not seem like the heir of royal blood she was intended to be. Right then, Zelda just looked like a little girl. One who was now standing against a man, or maybe a boy in her eyes, who was making her take responsibility for what she had done.

"It was not my intention to make him suffer."
"It doesn't matter what your intentions were. The fact remains that he is suffering because of you."

She tightened the grip on her legs. "Try to understand me."

He scoffed. "I highly doubt that I would ever be able to understand the likes of you." He did not want to try. He was lost as to why she wanted his understanding so desperately anyway. Even if he were to have it, he would still think of her as a monster, and she would still see him as evil.

"Then at least listen as I explain myself. Please?"

Siegfried was honestly surprised. Zelda had never asked anything of him before. Asking implied some kind of need. Needing implied the power of the party one was asking something from. She would never, in any of her lifetimes, give someone beneath her the impression that she needed him or that he held any kind of power over her. All she ever barked out were orders meant to give her control. The fact that she was asking for something now meant that she was giving him some of the power she had tried so hard to hang onto.

"You can explain." he said. "But I give you no guarantee that I will accept any excuses."

She let loose a hollow little laugh. It seemed oddly twisted to him, when he took a moment to think about that gesture, and other actions like it. The two of them were not friends, not by any means, yet they had laughed and smiled at one another numerous times. Those gestures were reserved for people of the heart. Friends, family, lovers; those people were all given such affectionate tokens of fondness.

Instead of using them as they should, however, the two of them had used those smiles and that laughter as a way to show the contempt and bitterness between them. Was it always his lot in life to turn beauty into ash? Was it hers as well?

"You can't begin to imagine how hard it is to be a reincarnate." she began solemnly. "It is a cycle of never-ending exhaustion. You die, and instead of finally resting in peace, you awake. You rise to find yourself alive, having been denied the release of death once more, yet again placed with the burden of every past memory. You see everything your past life was used for. The mistakes you made, the plans that fell through when you died, the causes that you did nothing to aid though you tried so hard."

She was not talking about Link. Siegfried knew she could not have possibly been speaking on behalf of that wonderful hero. He knew everything that Link did was a positive contribution to his lands history. Link had made no mistakes, but Seigfried knew she had.

"It was difficult. During my first few lives I laid witness to the outcomes of past rulings. There were many disappointments. Changes I involuntarily forced to be made, stagnant issues I could not see fixed, people I had persecuted for the wrong reasons. I could never see those mistakes during my current time on the throne. It was only after they had been carried out through time, during every new life, that I saw if I was truly a good queen, or if I was a failure who only made it worse for those after her."

Siegfried wondered if Link had to bear witness to such things as well. It could not have been easy, seeing the full effects of what you had done in the past. Siegfried had experienced something similar after his escape from Nightmare, but it could not possibly compare to what the elf must have gone through. For one thing, it had never really been Siegfried who caused such monstrous feats of damage, so none of it had ever been his fault. Everything Link had done would be his responsibility to bear later on. That was a lot of pressure to withstand, and Link was a much softer soul than Siegfried was. The younger blond might have taken seeing the consequences of his life much harder
than his friend would have, even if the events that transpired because of it were not of his own doing.

"I was quick to learn that there was no perfect way to rule. What worked during one lifetime was not guaranteed to work in the next. Trying to force a good outcome would end in disaster. Every life was spent trying desperately to live up to the last. I, at one point, spent days on end looking at portraits of myself from the past, wondering if I was any different from what was on that canvas in my people's eyes. It was ridiculous to, trying to outdo myself time and time again."

Siegfried furrowed his brows. When Link had first told him of what he was, the knight had been somewhat envious. To be constantly reborn into new times, to see the bounty brought upon by your own efforts, it had sounded like such a blessing. Maybe it had been nothing more than a curse wrapped in deceiving packaging. To create an image you had to live up to constantly, it had to have been exhausting. How did Link feel trying to live up to his own reputation again and again and again? Did he feel like he had to travel down that same path, trapped in a never ending cycle of life?

"Sometimes I forgot that I was not the same person I once was. Not to the people around me. There were times when I would come upon a familiar face. They would perhaps be the descendant of a past friend, or perhaps an acquaintance's reincarnation."

"What's the difference between that and a reincarnate?" Siegfried found himself asking. Link told him once that the two types of people were different, though not by much of a defining factor. Siegfried wanted to ask why, but simply admitting that a line between the two words existed seemed to physically pain the young blond. So Siegfried had bitten his tongue and left the matter alone.

"A reincarnate is basically the same as someone's reincarnation. Both are the rebirth of someone who died. The difference lies the key sections of the words used for each term. It is hard to fully understand the meanings in this language, but in Hylian the terms are vastly different."

"Like?" He hated the thought of being so ignorant when it came to this topic. This had been a crucial part of Link's life and Siegfried could hardly believe he had never truly tried to understand it until now.

"In the Hylian language, the word used for reincarnation means a person whose soul has been taken from the grave and placed into a new body similar to the one it had before. Only the soul, understand. The word used for reincarnate, while very similar, has an entirely different criterion. Reincarnates have their entire being brought along for the rebirthing process. Memories, likes and dislikes, abilities, every single thing that made that person who they were the first time is carried on into their next life."

That had to be painful, the knight found himself thinking. For you to stay the same while others around you changed with the passing of time. For the faces you once treasured so dearly to suddenly look at you as though you had never existed. For those same individuals to then spare not even a passing glance when the two of you encountered each other again.

Was that why Link had been so wonderful to the people of this world, even when they were horrible to him? Had a desperate sort of kindness been trying to make itself remembered? Just this once?

Was that why Link had been so desperate to free Siegfried?

"There was nothing stable in my life. I found myself grabbing hold of anything that could have provided me with some reassurance. Someone whose life I could truly impact."

Was that why the two of them had gotten so close?
"I wanted to know I was precious to someone again, just as they were to me. I wanted **my** life, not my family name or past titles, to mean something to another. I wanted my life to, perhaps, be loved far beyond the limitations of time."

Had Link been trying to find someone who would keep him in memory? Link the person, not Link the legend. Not the Hero of Time, not the Hero of Twilight, not the hero of anything. Just Link, the boy who had a kind heart and a simple longing for companionship that was truly once in a lifetime.

"I myself never found that one person I was seeking. No one I came across could ever truly be."

Siegfried suddenly felt his stomach turn. His throat chose then and there to close up with halted breath. Something was hitting him hard.

"I think our hero did."

The German had to stand just then. Sitting down was just making him restless. He was dizzy when he finally stood on both feet. He felt sick, sick with a sudden, cruel realization.

He could have asked. Two years ago he could have asked Link to stay. He could have asked and Link would have agreed. Link would have said yes, simply because he could not have said no. Not to Siegfried, because Siegfried was the first person who had ever truly seen Link for something more than just a title, something more than what the elf had been in the past. Siegfried had been that one person whose life had truly been saved with the simple kindness of a simple human heart. And Siegfried had been the only one to appreciate it and reciprocate Link's desire for companionship.

Link had clung to that. Siegfried had never seen it before, but Link had clung to the knight's desire to have the elf remain by his side. Link would have done just about anything to keep the knight happy, including, but not limited to, remaining in a world he did not belong in.

Since Siegfried said nothing, Link must have assumed that the knight would be happier without him.

"Are you alright?"

Siegfried placed a hand over his mouth. He stomach felt an almost dire need to purge itself of every piece of food he had ingested for the last three months. His heart, meanwhile, started roughly beating gruelingly against his ribcage, almost as though it were trying to kill him. Almost as though it wanted to punish him for his lack of proper attention pertaining to someone who was so dear to it.

"You don't look so good."

"Shut up." he spat harshly. He did not want her talking. Her voice only made things worse.

Zelda sighed. "I did not mean to make you upset." What the hell did she think she was doing then? "I only wanted you to understand."

"I already told you," He took in a deep breath to calm his nerves. "I won't ever understand you."

"It was not me as a person I wanted you understand." she said firmly, as though she had reached a final decision on some kind of large conflict. "I merely wanted you to understand why I won't let him go."

Siegfried turned his head so quickly he nearly spun it right off his neck. Zelda was already staring back at him. She looked determined, facing him with absolute resolution in her eyes. He could only stare back at her in disbelief.
"What did you say?" No, there was no possible way she had just implied that she...that was just...
"You can't be serious."

"You can't begin to comprehend what it's been like for me. I have lived countless lives where my name is the only thing to remain the same." She stood up, trying to seem somewhat intimidating to the man in front of her. "He has been the only constant throughout my existence. I will not relinquish him."

Siegfried's hands were twitching, itching to grab hold of the princess' throat. After everything was said and done, this girl intended to rescue Link from one imprisonment and put him right back into another. "You sick, selfish brat." he growled. "Stand down already. You've taken everything away from him. He's been alone for lifetimes because of you. Let him go!"

"Why, so you can have him?"

He could not answer for a split second. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

She laughed at had, haughty and cruel as anything. "Don't play coy with me." She smiled condescendingly. "The reason you want me to 'set him free' is so that you can capture him yourself."

Siegfried really just wanted to slap her. "Don't be a fool."

"Who's the foolish one? Since I've been here, all you've done is talk about our hero as though you were a young girl who has just laid eyes on her first crush." She narrowed her eyes. "To see you act so infatuated whenever you say his name is disgusting."

"Watch what you say to me."

He had not noticed how close the two of them had gotten since their argument began. Nor had he realized how each of them had subtly reached for a nearby weapon the longer they stared each other down. His hand had just found its way to the hilt of his sword when he took notice of it. By then he hardly cared. All he wanted to pay attention to was the red taking over his line of sight.

"Siegfried?" A young voice called out to him.

Siegfried sincerely believed that Zelda owed Amy her life. Had it not been for the young redhead, Zelda would have found herself with a slit throat. As it were, the knight found that he had more important things to tend to than finishing the brat off.

He swiftly turned away and walked over to where Amy lay. "You alright, Amy?"

She nodded tiredly. Yawning softly, she pushed herself up from the ground. "What time is it?"

Siegfried looked towards the crack in doorway. Sunlight was quickly gaining control of the land below it. "Probably time for breakfast."

Amy nodded. "I'm hungry then."

Siegfried smiled and began leading her out of the stable. Amy bounded out of the wooden building before he could get the chance to, leaving the knight and princess alone for a few moments. They simply stared, each silently cursing the other and wishing beyond reason that looks could suddenly kill.

She only said one thing to him. "I won't let you take him."
He only responded with one promise. "I won't let you keep him."

The scene at that table could not have been any tenser had Nightmare himself waltzed in with a wedding garbed Soul Edge and an absolute intention of marriage. No one would have been any more uncomfortable. In fact that disturbing scenario would have been a much more welcomed atmosphere than the one currently taking place.

The morning started off on an odd note, beginning with the seating at the breakfast table. As customary in the Sorel family, Amy took the head of the small table. Mitsurugi and Raphael took seats opposite of each other and waited for the knight and princess to take theirs. Siegfried requested the seat next to Mitsurugi, leaving the spot next to Raphael for the princess.

It confused the samurai and the Frenchman a great deal.

Last night the soldier had been adamant about keeping Raphael and Zelda as far apart from each other as humanly possible. He knew that Raphael would attempt to harm her. He knew the Frenchman's rage would get the best of him if the two nobles were separated. That still rang true, Raphael was still very willing to rip off the girl's head if given the chance. The German almost seemed like he was offering the opportunity to do so on a silver platter.

Zelda did not say a word in regards to the arrangement. She had to have known that Siegfried was putting her in the line of danger on purpose. She had to have noticed how hostile he was being, how angry he was acting in regards to her. Still, she said nothing. Instead she merely asked for a particularly sharp knife to eat her breakfast with. A breakfast that did not happen to be compiled of any kind of food that would require being cut with a sharp implement.

Mitsurugi was also quick to notice that Siegfried was paying very special attention to Zweihander, more so when he caught the princess's eye. Her eyes seemed to glow a menacing blue whenever she caught his in return. Something was not right.

Mitsurugi decided that he would sit next to the girl instead. Raphael would take the seat at the head of the table today, and Siegfried would sit directly opposite of Mitsurugi. If need be, the two older warriors would be able stop a lunge from the German at all the important angles. Mitsurugi had also chosen to place Amy next to the empty seat beside the German because he would not act violently with a child nearby. He also asked Navi to come down to the table to flutter around the princess, as she would keep herself well dignified around the fairy. He, meanwhile, instinctively went into a survival state, where he was constantly monitoring every move his party made.

Raphael felt awkward with the sudden tension. It was so thick that even he had a hard time swallowing in bouts air. His meal was left to be poked and prodded at, as he could not bring himself to eat it at the moment. Somewhere in the far end of his subconscious he laughed at the memory of the conversation he and Mitsurugi had shared the night before. It was the reason why he was on his absolute best behavior. He had not once said anything impolite to Zelda, though she was not giving him much of an opportunity to do so, and had even agreed to Mitsurugi assigning their seats as though they were children with no arguments whatsoever.

Zelda and Siegfried were not being very fair, filling the area around them with such harsh intentions. It almost made him want to unsheathed Rapier. Another part of him, the more childish portion of his mind, remarked that the samurai really should have given the both of them the same speech he had
been subjected to.

"So," The Frenchman said casually. "How's the food?"

"Fine."

"Fine."

The two had not even looked up from their plates. Raphael looked to Mitsurugi, hoping to get some sort of signal as to what that meant, only to get a shrug in response.

"I wasn't sure what you two would like. I'm afraid I forgot to ask for your preferences last night. I told my servants to just work with what they had."

"Thank you."

"Appreciate it."

The blond was beginning to get annoyed. They could have at least had the decency to look at him when they answered. Now they were simply being rude.

"Do you need anything else? The cook is still in the kitchen if you want to ask for something."

"I'm alright."

"Don't need anything."

Raphael sighed and dropped his utensils on his plate. He was done being polite. If they wanted to sit in such an uncomfortable silence, so be it. Never let it be said that he did not try to be a good host.

After a moment Amy looked up from her meal, searching for something that she soon realized was closer to Siegfried than herself. "Siegfried," Amy said from the knight's right. "Can you pass me some bread, please?"

Siegfried tried to smile at the girl as he reached for the bread basket. His hand met with the gloved palm attached to the princess, and the two locked eyes in a heated exchanged. They looked as though they wanted to rip the others hand right off.

Zelda glared at him. "If you don't mind." She tugged on the basket.

Siegfried did the same. "And if I do?"

Mitsurugi could hardly believe what he was seeing. He looked to Raphael for some sort of confirmation, some kind of sign that he was not in fact witnessing two grown adults fighting over food. They could not really be playing tug of war with a mere bread basket. Raphael only shook his head in response. He could not make much sense of it either.

Amy pouted when she realized that the basket had yet to find itself one person to move with, putting a definite pause on her meal. "I want bread."
"You heard her." Siegfried said a bit too politely for anyone's taste. "The girl wants bread."

"I think she can wait a moment or two."

"Could you handle depriving her the food she desires?"

"I think I could very well live with myself."

Siegfried huffed. "I should have assumed. After all, it isn't the first time you've selfishly denied a young innocent something they've deserved."

Zelda's eyes narrowed dangerously and she slapped the basket out of his hand. She looked at him menacingly, a warning of attack now at full attention. Siegfried merely looked to where the food landed on the floor. He tisked and returned to his meal as though he were not being torn apart by the princess's stare.

"That was mature of you." he 'gently' admonished. "What a waste of food."

She cursed at him. She very, very harshly cursed at Siegfried's entire existence. She went after everything. His name, his family honor, anything he stood for was under the fire of one very bitter royal tongue. She took quite a risk in doing so. With the way the two were interacting with one another, Siegfried was likely to cut her mouth right off for a stunt like that. She probably thought she could get away with saying such things because she was speaking in her own tongue, a language not many people of this world had ever come into contact with and likely never would. Hylian.

Siegfried, however, was not one of the many people ignorant to the Hylian language. He knew what Zelda was saying, or at the very least he could translate a few words. Link had somewhat inadvertently taught them to him. The boy was not foul mouthed, but things did tend to slip every now and again when one was hurt or angry. Siegfried knew what she was saying, so he launched into his own angry tirade about what he thought the princess amounted to. His words were much harsher than hers, and he decided to even out the playing field by screaming it all in German.

She could only look back in astonishment. She had absolutely no idea what he was saying, but she knew it could not have been anything good. Especially not with the pure fury put behind every word. Such emotional effort aimed towards her could only signify malicious intentions.

The two carried on insulting each other in their own respective languages. After about five minutes, Mitsurugi, in complete disbelief and annoyance, lost his calm and started ordering the two of them to stop whatever twisted game they were playing, in Japanese. Raphael chimed in moments later about how ridiculous the lot of them were being in a perfect French tongue.

Amy sighed. She realized now that she would have to forgo the usual bread and jam portion of her meal. As the adults in the room continued to argue in multiple languages, she reached over and took a few uneaten pieces of fruit from Zelda's plate and put them on to her own. She then took hold of Siegfried's untouched glass of orange juice and took a dainty, little sip. What she took would not be missed, and the ones they belonged to would not be in any mood to enjoy them for some time.

Meanwhile Amy decided to indulge in the show that was accompanying her breakfast. It would not last much longer. The silly grownups in the room would come to realize that soon. After all, how could anyone keep an interest in an argument if no one knew what the other was saying?

Just like clockwork, Mitsurugi stood up and slammed his hands against the top of the table. All chattering ceased at once.

"You!" He screamed at Siegfried. "And you!" He said to Zelda. "Both of you come with me. Now."
The two stood without looking at one another and followed Mitsurugi's lead into a nearby, presumably empty, room. Raphael followed seconds later, mumbling something about how he refused to be left out of the conversation.

Amy was left alone with a very confused fairy who had not understood exactly what had just transpired, or what was to occur. A part of her felt she should follow the princess, just in case the girl's life was in danger. The other part wanted to remain where she was to guarantee her own safety.

"Do you want something to eat, little fairy?" Amy asked, holding up a small strawberry.

Navi decided it might be best to stay put. This argument was none of her business. "Sure, why not?"

"What the hell is the matter with you two?" Mitsurugi demanded once the group was out of the dining hall, taking matter into a second study on the first floor of the mansion. "Arguing over food as though it was the last damn loaf of bread in the entire world! Disgusting."

Zelda and Siegfried were quick to point an accusing finger at the other.

"He/She started it!" They shouted in unison, glaring at the other once they realized what was said. "It was not my fault!" They said, again, in unison. "Yes it was!"

"Enough!" Now the samurai was starting to get agitated. If the two of them did not stop bickering soon, he was going to start hacking away at something. "The both of you are acting like children. Do us all a favor and start acting your age."

"Yeah grandma," Siegfried muttered. "Start acting your own age." That, admittedly, was a bit of a low blow. Insulting a woman by means of her age was a universal taboo. It was also a bit uncalled for, seeing as Zelda was still young in this lifetime. However, when he thought about it, she was technically probably hundreds of years old with all of her lifetimes combined. It was probably a fair assumption to think her elderly.

Zelda did not believe it was fair at all. "You insolent--"

"What did I just say?" Mitsurugi interrupted. Honestly, were these two even listening to a word he was saying? "What is going on here?"

"What, are we acting unusual?" Siegfried sounded so innocent it was almost eerie. "Are we normally so happy with each other that this sort of behavior is baffling to you?"

Raphael had to hold back a laugh. "He has a point."

Mitsurugi glared. Raphael responded by holding up his hands in surrender. "No, this is not really all that surprising, the two of you fighting," the samurai said. "What is surprising is that what I saw out there was about to turn violent had I not intervened. As far as I knew, we agreed nothing would ever turn that vicious."

Siegfried rolled his eyes. "It was not that bad."

"The girl had her hands glowing and you had a steak knife, which I don't understand how you got a
hold of, ready by the fourth bilingual insult."

Both guilty parties avoided responding to the accusation. Neither of them thought anyone had taken notice of those carefully hidden movements.

"Now, I'll ask again. What is going on with you two?"

How was Siegfried supposed to explain that? It was hard enough for him to understand it. Why would Zelda do such a thing? Why would she continue to make Link suffer?

Zelda knew Link had lost his freedom, knew he had never really had it in the first place. Link had always been at someone's beck and call. If it was not her, it was his goddesses. If it was not them, it was his country. If not it, then someone somewhere with some kind of problem managed to find him, and he never had the heart to reject their pleas. In return for his kindness he received nothing. Never had he been given a second to himself or ever been offered true friendship. Not in that world.

He had in Siegfried's. Link was free here. He did as he pleased with who he chose to associate with at whatever time he chose. Here only a handful of people knew his name, but that handful was enough to fill the blond's world with precious memories. Here that handful had filled an empty heart. Here they had repaired broken faith. Here they made themselves as vulnerable as he had. That made Link hope again. That made him believe again. He was happy here.

How could she not see that? Why didn't she just give up?

"Why won't she just let me keep him?"

"Siegfried?"

The knight shook his head and turned his attention back to Mitsurugi. The samurai was looking mildly concerned at his lack of focus. If the German was not careful, he would wind up getting slapped again.

"Ask her what she plans to do once this is all over."

"Pardon?"

Siegfried motioned towards Zelda's general direction. He did not want to look at her right then. He would only end up becoming violent. "Ask her what she intends to do once we release Link. I think you'll find it very interesting. It's certainly different from what I had planned." He would enjoy this. Let her try to explain kidnapping Link a second time. He was sure it would go over splendidly.

Mitsurugi raised an eyebrow. "Why? Is that what this is all about?" He turned to Zelda, who was glaring at Siegfried with the fullest intent to end his life then and there. "What are you planning to do?"

She huffed. It was an obnoxious little thing the samurai could have slapped her for. "Don't make it sound so deviant." Had she just tried to order him around? "I only mean to take him home."

"Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait," Raphael quickly interrupted. "You mean to tell me she's going to take him back to that godforsaken hellhole? I don't think so."

"My thoughts exactly." Siegfried added. "But apparently she thinks she has the authority to do so."

She glared at him. "I am his princess. He follows my command."
Siegfried took a menacing step towards her. "You're not his anything in this world. You're not anything to him period."

She took a step towards him as well. "Watch your mouth."

Mitsurugi had had enough. This behavior was going to stop. Now. He swiftly walked over to the knight and princess, inching closer to one another by the second, and yanked them apart by the ear. He was quickly met with yelps and sounds of pain. "Stop whining." he said coldly. "You two want to act like brats, I'll treat you like brats."

Zelda was nearly crying, and though Siegfried did his best to stay still he too was feeling some pain. Mitsurugi's grip was not tender. It was firm and rough with a harsh intention behind the action. It better hurt. Otherwise the two of them would not have gotten the message.

"Apparently the two of you aren't grown up enough to stand in the same room with each other. So now I have to waste my time separating you. Siegfried," He tugged on the knight's ear. "Will go with Raphael. Epona needs a bath. And you princess," He tugged on hers. "Will stay with me and explain yourself. Is that clear?"

The two were silent as they tried to remove themselves from the samurai's grip.

Mitsurugi only tugged harder. "I said, is that clear?"

The two nodded quickly.

"Good."

Raphael was torn between arguing with the arrangement and keeping his mouth shut to avoid meeting the same fate as the two squirming in Mitsurugi's grip. He was not a baby sitter. He loved his own daughter immensely, he had an affectionate fondness for Sophitia's children, and an incredible amount of devotion to Link, but that was the extent of his patience for child like behavior. If the two of them were acting in such a way, he wanted nothing to do with either. However, Mitsurugi would be in no mood for any kind of mutiny. Not when his patience was already wearing thin.

Raphael did not fancy himself a masochist, and he most certainly had no desire to act as though he had a death wish. Amy still needed a father in her life. So he would, for her sake, bite his tongue and simply go along with whatever the man said.

"So," The Frenchman began uncertainly. "Epona needs a bath, correct?"

Mitsurugi waited until Raphael and Siegfried had left the room before giving the princess his full and undivided attention.

She was busily nursing a red ear while trying not to cry. Mitsurugi knew his grip had not been all that terrible. It hurt, yes, he had made sure it did cause a small amount of pain, but it was nowhere near painful enough to bring about tears. Even a Hylian's sensitive ears could withstand a small tug here and there. Zelda was not hurt. Not physically anyway. The only thing he might have mortally
wounded was her pride.

She was humiliated. She was a royal heir. Mitsurugi, in her eyes, was a common street thug. The difference in social standing between the two was substantial. She should have been able to make him bend over backwards to gain her favor. Instead she had been the one bowing down to him when the question of authority came into play. It was pitiful, and the fact that Mitsurugi was all too aware of the current status quo and did not care to return it to how it should have been made it all the more humiliating for her.

"Did you have to be so crude?"

He scoffed. What a childish sort of question. "Hasn't your own father ever disciplined you before?"

"Never in such a barbaric manner."

"Too bad."

That was one of the worst things about noble children. They believed they were immune to the workings of the outside world. That was largely due to their parent's lack of proper discipline. More often than not, noble parents were simply too lazy to enforce any decent rules, turning their children into spoiled little creatures. That made them think they could do anything. They failed to realize that other children, other adults, would not care where they came from. If you were rotten, you were going to get hit the second that large body guard was distracted. And it was going to hurt because mommy and daddy did not think to give you a small slap to show you what would happen if you did not behave.

He was not a fan of child abuse. That was a different matter entirely, but a good, reasonable, slap on the hand or to the mouth to get the point across could do a child good. Zelda certainly could have used those methods in her younger years.

"Now, I believe you and I have something to talk about." Mitsurugi said. "So start talking."

The subtle way her body tensed, the way her eyes narrowed slightly, made him aware of one simple little fact. She did not want to talk. She did not want to talk because she knew he would be displeased with the course of the conversation. This would be interesting indeed.

"I meant what I said." She was awfully calm for someone so nervous. He could almost commend her for it. "Once we have ensured our hero's safety and health, I intend to take him home."

"You mean your home."

"Our home." she corrected. "He was born of Hyrule, bears the blood of its people. That is where he belongs."

"And what if he doesn't want to go 'home'?"

"Don't be absurd." Another order. "Why wouldn't he?"

Did she want the list in Hylian or Japanese? "I could think of a few reasons."

"Such as?"

"You, for starters."

She looked highly affronted. For a moment or two she tried to silently come up with various rebuttals
and denials. Obviously nothing had been suitable enough to present to the samurai, for nothing of consequence came out of her mouth.

"You're awfully arrogant, princess. Did you honestly think we would let you take Link away from us a second time without a fight? Have we given you any indication that we would lie down and just let you walk away with him?"

She shook her head.

"I didn't think so." He was expecting more of a fight from her. She was certainly very fond of debates when it came to Siegfried. Perhaps she was scared of Mitsurugi? "Come to think if it, did you ever think about what Link would want?"

Zelda remained silent.

"Or to be more specific, who Link would want?"

Her eyes widened slightly, a movement barely noticeable to anyone without his keen eye for detail. "What do you mean?"

"Let's not beat around the bush. I'm not stupid, and I assume you aren't either." H could be wrong about her character, but he was usually right about those kinds of things. "What all this comes down to is Siegfried's company versus yours, am I correct?"

She turned her head to the side. "Don't joke like that. There is no contest."

"I am fully aware of that." Mitsurugi told her confidently. "I just wanted to make sure you knew you were sorely outmatched."

When she looked back up at him, her eyes were filled with a mixture of raw hurt and pure denial. She did not want to admit to what he had just said, and she did not want him believing that it was even a possibility. The problem was that she knew it to be fact. That was what was killing her.

"Do not dishonor my hero with such lies."

"Your hero? How incredibly possessive for a princess whose servant did everything in his power to stay away from her."

She was silent once again. Mitsurugi had come to learn that such an act from her was meant as a defense mechanism. Silence was forever golden. It could mean whatever you wanted it to mean, and could be bent in whichever way was necessary to keep up the facade of perfect indifference. It was a good enough strategy. He was simply far too used to it to be properly affected. He knew how to beat it. After all, silence was only golden if nobody else provided a sound.

"Listen carefully girl," And hopefully she would get the point the first time. "We need you around. I'll admit that. You have proven to be somewhat useful. That is why you are still alive. However, remember one thing. You need us too, and we outnumber you a good ten to one. We decide what will happen on this little journey, and you have no choice but to go along with whatever we say. Whether that is fair or not does not matter. It is fact and I guarantee you that is what Link prefers."

Zelda remained silent. This time Mitsurugi did not feel the need to add anything to his previous statements. Instead he went straight for the door, leaving the princess behind in a stupor. He was finished with the current conversation at hand. If she did not understand by now, it was no longer his problem. He had to go get Amy packed and prepared for the journey ahead.
Raphael was silent at first. If he were to open his mouth too quickly, the only thing that would come out would be something of complete and utter embarrassment to the knight. Siegfried would not be in the mood for his cynical humor. He had just been dishonored right in front of the princess, the fact that she was embarrassed as well would not make much of a difference to him, and needed to retain at least a bit of his dignity. Raphael could give him that, if nothing else.

"How exactly do we go about washing her?" Raphael asked, looking down at the basin of water on the ground. "Just dump the water on her and let her shake it off?"

Epona gave an indignant neigh, to which Siegfried promptly burst out laughing. "She's not a dog."

"Well, they're both animals aren't they? Can't they both work the same way?"

Epona angrily blew air in the Frenchman's general direction.

Siegfried shook his head. "I hope you never own any kind of animal. The poor thing would die within a week."

"I am not so terrible. I keep a child fit and healthy, don't I?"

Siegfried smiled. He took a wash cloth from his pocket, dropped it in the water, and then scoured the area for some soap. "A child is different from an animal. Children can tell you what they want, and it's easier to see if something is wrong with them." The knight caught sight of what he was looking for and was quick to dump the bar into the warm water, giving it a moment to mix in with the liquid surrounding it. "Animals can't."

Raphael shrugged. "If nothing else my servants could take of it."

Siegfried shook his head again, smug smile still standing tall. "Creatures of the earth need affection from the humans that keep them. Otherwise things could get ugly."

"You know this from experience?"

Siegfried shook his head.

"Then kindly shut up. My imaginary pets and I will be just fine."

The knight laughed. It was about as sincere as it could have been at the moment, which was not as much as it should have been, but Raphael could work with that. Siegfried said nothing more as he took hold of the wash cloth again, rung it out, and began the tedious task of washing the horse in front of him. Epona would occasionally force his hand away from scars he would accidentally linger on too much, but other than that she stayed still. The warm water and soap mixture seemed to calm her a great deal, and after about ten minutes the Frenchman was shocked to see her completely at ease.

Siegfried soaked the hair of her mane and tail before looking to Raphael in expectation.

The swordsman blinked. Was he supposed to do something now? "Should I dry her off? Do we need a towel?"
"Actually, I was hoping you had a brush I could use for her hair, but if you had a towel on hand, that would be great." He took a glance at the various small cuts and bruises Epona had gained from the day before. "And some kind of disinfectant wouldn't hurt either."

Raphael had no idea where to look for such items. He looked around him, spotted another horse in a stall nearby, and silently asked it with his eyes if it knew anything. The horse, in what appeared to be an answer to his unasked question, tilted its head to the side towards a haystack in front of it. Raphael moved to stand over the haystack in question. For a moment he stood, un-moving, looking to the horse, the hay, and then back to the horse again. The creature in question seemed confident in the contents of the straw, and with a sigh Raphael fell to his knees and began digging around in the stack.

Siegfried and Epona could only stare on in shock. "Raphael Sorel, are you on the floor, digging about in a haystack, of your own free will?"

The curses the Frenchman sent towards the knight were happily overshadowed by the rifling of scratchy yellow horse feed.

Siegfried smirked. "I should call a few of your servants down here. I bet they would be delighted to see their master so low on the social ladder."

Raphael sent a one finger salute out from beneath the hay.

Siegfried only laughed. "I wish I could document this somehow. Do you think an artist is anywhere nearby? I'm sure this would make a great painting above your mantle."

"Don't you ever," Raphael paused for a moment, before jumping out of the stack in triumph. "Ah-ha!" In the blond's hands were a brush, a small towel, and a small covered tub of cream. "I found them!"

Siegfried turned to Epona. "I don't know which is more amazing. The fact that a horse told him where to find the stuff, or that he actually went and followed the order."

"Ha ha," Raphael could not keep the victorious smile on his face, despite the various pieces of hay sticking out from his hair and clothes. "You're just jealous."

"Yeah, that's it." Siegfried took hold of the small tub and brush. "You start drying her off. I'll take care of the cuts and hair."

For a few minutes the two men worked together to try and get Epona looking good as new. She quite liked being pampered, and Raphael and Siegfried made for good temporary handlers. They were almost as gentle handed as her master had been, and Raphael was sure she was mentally replacing one of them with the blued eyed boy she loved and adored so much.

"So, what did she say?" Raphael ventured cautiously as he began drying off Epona's hooves.

"Who?"

"The girl…harlot…thing."

Siegfried merely shrugged and dabbed some ointment onto a cut on Epona's neck. "Nothing of major importance. Just what she told you two in the study."

Raphael did not believe that for a second. If it had been something so simple, Siegfried would have been able to control his temper. "There was nothing else? Something besides her threat of whisking
him away to hell in a hand basket?"

Siegfried's hands stopped moving for a few seconds. His eyes narrowed and his breath hitched ever so slightly. "She may have."

Now Raphael was getting somewhere. "She may have what?"

"She may have…accused me of something."

"Accused you of what?"

Siegfried did not answer. For a moment, though, it looked as though he wanted to. Then it almost seemed as though he were going to.

"Siegfried! Raphael!" And then Mitsurugi walked into the stables, ruining any chance the Frenchman might have had to get the German to talk. The knight would not speak so freely around Mitsurugi. Not for a few days anyway, until the samurai had a chance to forget the little episode earlier that morning.

"You two almost done?"

Siegfried nodded. "She's all set and cleaned up."

Raphael added, "And I do believe someone already took the liberty of cleaning her saddle."

Siegfried had done that the night before. Watching Amy sleep, tossing and turning with tears in her eyes, had not been good for his guilty heart. He would have gone crazy if he kept his eyes her for too long. So he kept himself busy. He cleaned, polished, and dusted off every inch of the saddle Epona brought with her to this world. Everything except for the pouches attached to the sides. For some reason they were tied shut with very intricate knots. He found it odd, but he cleaned around the areas surrounding them and soon forgot all about them.

"Well then, get ready." Mitsurugi said. "We leave as soon as the two of you are through. We still have a long journey ahead of us, so remember to pack light."

"You call this light?"

Raphael stared back at Mitsurugi, innocence at its absolute finest. "What? I only packed the essentials."

Mitsurugi raised an eyebrow at the nearly dozens of bags Raphael had around him. "Really? These are just the essentials?"

The Frenchman nodded. "Clothes, bathing materials, life savings, family heirlooms, jewelry, any other valuables I do not trust my staff with, and a few goods that can be sold in other towns."

Mitsurugi shook his head. "Do you know the meaning of the word essential?"

Raphael huffed and pouted. An odd combination that would have looked ridiculous on anyone else
but him. For one reason or another, even the most childish of actions seemed regal on the head of the Sorel family. "I need clothes don't I? And I simply cannot live without my bathing materials. For the life of me I can't bring myself to trust these people with heirlooms or jewelry, and you cannot deny that I will need money along the way. Eventually what I have will run out, in which case I will need to sell a few things in order to get more."

Mitsurugi felt like finding a nearby brick wall and bashing his head against it. The Sorel's were impossible. He thought Amy had been hard headed when she packed her belongings. Despite Mitsurugi's request, more like gentle orders if he were honest with himself, Amy had chosen to pack around three bags worth of materials she probably would not even need. Suddenly, three seemed like nothing next to the dozen her father had.

"I hope you realize that you're carrying all this yourself."

Raphael waved off the warning. "Once we manage to get to our next destination I'll sell of a few things to lighten the load."

There was no more room for arguments. Even if there was, Mitsurugi did not want to try. His head would surely implode. "Everyone just circle around Mt. Sorel. Princess, in the center."

A few minutes later, after the initial adjusting of bags and horses, the group circled around Zelda in a somewhat uncomfortable formation. Siegfried had not remembered the gathering being nearly so cramped the first time around. He and Zelda were so close together he nearly vomited on the spot. Mt. Sorel would have to be torn down as soon as possible.

Farore's Wind was repeated. This time, something was different.

Siegfried began experiencing the same sensations he had the first time Zelda cast the transportation spell. The same unusual pain, the same numbness, the same tear jerking white. Only this time,

"Siegfried!"

There was also his voice.

To have them all together like this was a rare treat.

The men in the group could not normally say they had a free minute to themselves. They were the breadwinners, so to speak, of their odd little family. They were the first line of defense for any and all means of the journey, whether it be in a fight, collecting money for the voyage, or making sure the group was in top shape at all times. Someone had to do it.

Sophitia needed Mitsurugi's help in seeing to the overall well-being of the group. She would tend to the medical and emotional needs of her younger companions. Jobs like those were her specialty, a forte of which no one else could rival. That was a lot of responsibility to take on, especially with the added task of making ground rules for the group to follow. Some of them were not always favored. Mitsurugi needed to be that added muscle to enforce any rules Sophitia thought needed to be seen to. It was not often needed, but it was good to have his figure looming about in order to discourage any bad behavior. It also helped the Athenian know that she had some support at her disposal. Had she
not had that reassurance, she probably would have felt too overwhelmed and unable to handle the pressure. The woman was a gentle soul, and Mitsuuri had gotten fair warning from her husband to keep it that way. The samurai was also the leader, the first man people went to with concerns and complaints. He had been the most experienced in battle and issues pertaining to the ugly side of human nature. He had become hardened over the harsh years of war and fighting, and so he had turned into the rock that kept his group grounded.

Yunseong had a duty to both Talim and to Seong Mina, more so than any of his other companions. That duty often involved making himself a scapegoat for sudden rage, and becoming open to embarrassment from far too awkward questions. He was also the group's main source of muscle power. He was not, by any means, the only man capable of completing manual labor, but he was the one with the hardest head. He could take damage easier than anyone, and as such was expected to do so every time it was asked of him.

Raphael was in charge of keeping a dignified air around the group, wherever it saw fit to travel to. He made sure the men were always on their best behavior and never lacking in somewhat decent manners, and that the women knew to keep a classy and feminine demeanor around the right people. He was fond of all his traveling companions, and he did not wish to change any of them. However, he knew that certain mannerisms were important to different classes around the world. The group had to be prepared to travel in all walks of life. They knew the bottom of the food chain. Raphael just wanted to ensure they knew how to act around the higher class. He had been given quite a fight at first, from just about every member of the group, and was at times still being fought against by hard heads. Despite it all the Frenchman knew how to keep his companions in decent shape.

Yoshimitsu was expected to keep the group well stocked in regards to both supplies and money. It would be disastrous if they were to suddenly run out of food during a leg of a journey, or become sick without proper methods of treatment. They were a large group that needed a large supply to keep functioning. Yoshimitsu made sure that they were never short on anything. They would always have what they needed when he was in charge of supplies. The thief was very good at his job and he knew how to gather what was needed. He may never have done so legally, but he always got the job done.

Maxi and Kilik took on their duties as a tag team. They were the ones who gathered and spread various pieces of information about the country. Maxi knew the ins and outs of the harsher areas of the world. A pirate himself, he knew how to appear sleazy and dangerous enough to get what he wanted. Often times the underground had valuable information that needed to be extracted in a very intimidating way. Maxi was more than happy to stoop so low for the sake of his team.

Kilik did the same, except he was used more for the kinder, less trusting patrons of the gossip world. He was a kind soul, and very unassuming to the average eye. He was easy to trust. People like priests and unwilling participants in the fight against Soul Edge felt like their knowledge was safe with him. With he and Maxi covering both sides of life, their methods for gathering information was near perfect in execution.

Link and Siegfried had to be the ones to take the brunt of the women's mothering instincts. The blonds were warriors, the best of their lands, just as strong and capable as their male comrades were. However, the two of them were one thing that their friends were not. They were sympathetic and understanding to the need a woman had to be nurturing. Whether it be a friend, a lover, or a child, the want and desire to baby something or someone was always present. It did not matter how hardened a woman was. That desire was still buried deep within her, somewhere she herself might not even be aware of. Other men in the group were quite uncomfortable with such strong instinct.
Link was used to it by now. Saria had babied him quite a bit back in his old forest home. She had been the one to soothe his childhood injuries, and scold him when he did something foolhardy. She was also the one to go about punishing the ones who teased him, who was more often than not Mido or someone working on behalf of Mido. Link had hated the treatment at one point in time. He knew how to take care of himself, and he had proven himself capable of doing so on many occasions. Saria just never gave him the chance to showcase his skills. She took care of his problems for him without him necessarily asking her too. The other girls in the forest soon followed her example and took to caring for him as well. They felt it necessary after seeing how naive and vulnerable he was compared to the other boys. He had not seen it that way, - again, he knew how to fend for himself just fine thank you very much- but they had gotten very cross with him whenever he tried to argue with them, which was about 99% of the time. After a while he simply let them do as they pleased. He found he rather liked having a sort of parental presence over him. It certainly came in handy when he was thinking of things to threaten his tormentors with. Little boys, surprisingly enough, were absolutely terrified when faced with the possible rage of little girls.

The German had had similar experiences in his young life. Siegfried's mother was the most excruciatingly nurturing person in all of Germany, if not the entire world. She was the one woman all the little boys in his hometown feared to have as their mother. She loved to kiss, cuddle, and hug her child. She did not care one way or another who was within view as she was doing so. Siegfried secretly believed she had wanted a girl as her first child, a gender that could very well take said gestures kindly, and would in fact actually welcome them out in public. Siegfried often found himself wishing he had a little sister, if only to take his mother's attention away from him. Her love could be quite embarrassing, especially when she expressed it around other boys his age. He stopped trying to fight it when he realized she would not stop, no matter many times he begged, and simply decided to deal with those who had a problem with it. If they laughed at him when his mother showed she cared, he quickly hit the closest body part he could reach, made sure to mention how they would not be so quick to laugh if they had mothers who actually wanted to come near their ugly little mutant bodies, and pushed them down to the ground. Those who did not cry never bothered him again. Those who did cry never came near him again.

The two blondes had taken those past experiences and turned them into tolerance. When Sophitia wanted to be strict about how hard the two of them were allowed to train, they agreed with her wholeheartedly and only sparred with the other once they were sure they were out of her line of sight. When Ivy decided to monitor their meals, spouting something about proper nutrition, they simply nodded, ate what she told them to, and then ate whatever they wanted to in secret. When Cassandra wanted to take them shopping, they followed her through the line of various shops with little more than grumbles, making sure she never ever found them something to wear. When Xianghua wanted to teach them how to dance, they studiously attended her lessons and let her take care of anyone who made fun of them. That was their civic duty to the group, to make sure all the women had something to take care of, and they carried it out with pride.

Needless to say, each and every male member of the group had an important job. They saw to them as well, and as often, as they could. Because of this, they rarely ever had free time. Especially free time to spend with each other. When they did get together, it was to see that a job had been done to its fullest and in the best interest of the group. They were not little boys. They could not come together for fun.

Tonight was different. The women had all shuffled off to some kind of 'festival' that their male companions were not welcome to attend. Mitsurugi suspected this 'festival' was nothing more than some kind of girl getaway, seeing as none them had on any formal festival wear, and had taken Voldo and Lizardman as their source of protection instead of one of the actual human men. Nevertheless Yoshimitsu still asked if they would need any money for the night, Mitsurugi still asked Sophitia if she would have any trouble handling the small group on her own, and Raphael still asked...
if they were sure that they would need no one else to go with them. A negative response was given to each inquiry, and then the women were off.

No matter. Those remaining saw the free night as a gift, and they had never been ones to look a gift horse in the mouth. Within the hour they were all drinking outside of their current inn around a bonfire, behaving as though they were all on some kind of vacation. They laughed, complained, and made bold declarations well into the night. Forget fanciful festivals. Men did not need such parties to bond. Simply drinking together could show you so much more about your traveling companions. The words you spoke in the daylight hours could be deceiving. The way you drank was not.

Raphael, for example, took his time with every drink. He would smell the wine, hold it up to the fires light, and when he was satisfied with what he saw, he allowed himself to take a sip. Once he did he rolled it around in his mouth to assess the quality. Only when he was assured of its richness did he completely immerse himself in the alcohol he let pour down his throat. The way he investigated every detail about each and every single glass was a testament to how he chose everything in his life. Nothing was ever second hand shop worthy in his world. His friends, his family, his weapon, and his duties were all of the highest brand and taken care of with the finest of efforts. Raphael would never take on any endeavor, accept any kind of offering, with anything less than a feral grace that knew the taste of perfection.

Mitsurugi could drink to his heart's content. He had long since grown immune to alcohols immense power over the human mind. Technically, he could drink however much he desired and would not be punished for it in the morning. Still, even though he did drink enough to keep up with his younger comrades, he did not overdo it. His rate was steady, just enough to be social and have a good time. He did not guzzle or chug whatever was in his glass. That would make him look like a drunkard. The samurai prided himself on having a proper image wherever he walked in life. On the battlefield he was the powerful warrior. In his group he was the strict father figure. In a social gathering he was the man who could hold his liquor. However, he was never overbearing with his presence. He was not a cruel slaughter machine when he fought, though some would argue against that. He did not beat on those he looked after like some kind of abusive father, and he was most certainly no over indulgent drunk. He knew when enough was enough to make a point. Anything more than that was overkill. Just enough, what was needed to the full extent, and nothing more than that was necessary.

Yunseong, one of the youngest members of the group, drank alcohol as though it were some kind of fruity drink. He was indulgent in the way it made him feel. He knew his limits. That much was certain, otherwise he would have been attempting to fly off the roof by the second round. He also knew that while he could not go over those limits, he could meet them in a pleasant way. He wanted to smile. He wanted to feel good. Sure, he could not fly off the roof, but that did not mean he could not think of some wild way of doing so. He liked to dream, and drinking was just a way to dream whilst still awake. The drinks he let flow were a way of letting them come to life in a way that others could hear them. When he was under the influence, he did not care if others laughed or made teasing remarks. The smiles they produced were just as good as what he had been thinking about anyway.

Maxi drank every glass as though it were his last. He ’d tasted his fair share of liquor in the past, the fruits he bore of holding the title of a pirate, and had had his fill of some of the finest wines in all of humanity. What he was drinking now, though not cheap, was not the grand ambrosia of taste. Yet he appreciated it. He let it slide down as though it were as refined as a high glass drink. He knew better than to discriminate. Looks could be deceiving. If a man walked into a situation with the mindset that there was something better, what was before him would seem inferior. If one were to look at a situation as though it were a God given gift, he would be pleasantly surprised at how good it truly was. Maxi applied that kind of thinking to everything in life, including drinking with the guys.
Kilik was not used to indulging in 'sinful' activities like drinking. He knew how to overlook certain temptations. He was always too busy trying to redeem or protect and letting small poisons into his system, ones that could knock him down in the middle of something important, was just asking for trouble. When he did indulge in such things, with a few little shoves from who he was with, everyone was quick to realize just how unprepared he was to deal with them. He drank like a newcomer. He did chug when his pride was teasingly threatened, and he did his best to hide the fact that it burned. He was the first to become inebriated simply because he was not used to the pace he had set for himself. It was further proof of how unused he was to letting himself enjoy a few guilty pleasures in life, because when he did he went overboard with how much fun he really had with them. However, it also proved that he trusted who he was drinking with because otherwise he never would have let himself indulge in the first place. Had anyone else asked him to, he would not have accepted the first glass.

Yoshimitsu knew how to have fun. It was apparent in everything he did, but it became even more obvious when he had a drink in his hand. He was a merry drinker, and that night's mask actually did give him the room to drink without removing it, much to Link's frustration. The thief was the first to suggest a drinking game and he was the first to begin what became a movement of some of the most sadly sung songs the group would ever utter, accompanied by Link and his ocarina. Yoshimitsu liked a happy atmosphere and he believed everyone deserved one. He knew it might not come again, but that was part of the thrill. That tonight could be the last time you celebrated anything made tasting its sweet nectar that much more satisfying. There was also an amused curiosity as to what would happen when Sophitia discovered the group had been drinking. He was even more curious as to what she would do when she realized he was the one who supplied the alcohol.

Siegfried knew what his limits were. His father had been the one to teach him how to drink. The older Schtauffen had shown his son how to drink alcohol without letting it become an addiction or compulsion. He taught the younger how to slow down so that the drink would not burn his throat as it made its round throughout his body. He taught his son how to recognize when he was feeling the effects of what was in his glass, so that no regretful mistakes could be made because of his less than alert mind. Most importantly, Frederick taught his son when to know he’d had enough. Siegfried had taken those lessons to heart, and now the knight could deduce, depending on the drink, just how many he could have before he called it a night. He liked having that kind of control. When he was around strangers, he liked to keep that control as strict and as proper as it had always been. When he was surrounded by friends, however, there was no harm in drinking a few more glasses than what he was used to. The extra drinks made him loosen up and become more open to the fun endeavors he would never partake in under normal circumstances. When Link was around, Siegfried liked to keep the limit to just that extra drink or two. It showed the elf that he could loosen up and have a good time, yet still keep himself sober enough to watch out for the younger if he needed to.

Link had no more than five glasses the entire night. He was not a big fan of alcohol. No matter how fine it was, it was usually always bitter and it took a lot to keep it from burning him. He was also naive about its consumption. He never drank in his world, peasants like him never got the chance, and doing so purely for social enjoyment was a new concept to him, as was just about everything else in this world. Siegfried taught him how to drink, and though he did not like it very much, he did like to show the German that he had taken in the lessons. It was also nice to feel the small buzz he acquired after a few of the drinks made their way into his system. He never allowed himself to get too out of hand, he was scared of finding out what he would do when he could not control himself, but he did like to be social, and this crowd was one he trusted very much. He did not mind following their lead.

It was only when they were on their fourth rendition of some old folk song, either from Germany or
from France, they had a hard time remembering after a while, when the innkeeper screamed at them to stop shattering the glass with all their screeching, did the group finally laugh out a consensus to call it a night and head to bed.

Yoshimitsu and Mitsurugi stayed behind to clean up whatever mess the group had left. They were men, not pigs, after all, and they knew how to pick up after themselves. Besides that, it would be a lot less harder to pin any bad behavior on the group of men if there was no evidence to back up the claims. Raphael decided to sweet talk the staff into letting it slide that there had been alcohol present that night. It would be so much better for everyone involved if the women thought their evening to be uneventful. Kilik was still far too drunk to move himself anywhere. Siegfried and Maxi, out of the kindness of their hearts, now armed with the means with which to tease for years to come, decided to help him to his room. Link and Yunseong went on ahead to bed.

Siegfried found it beyond amusing to see his usually composed friend consumed by alcohol. Their particular choice had not even been all that heavy of a dosage. Had Kilik taken it a bit easier with the drinking, he probably would have had no problems keeping himself under control. Instead, now he had absolutely no idea what was going on in the world around him. He called Maxi mother about eight times and had attempted to confess something of dire importance to Siegfried who he thought was Xianghua. It took about an hour before Siegfried was able to leave for the room he shared with Link, just barely keeping his laughs down to a reasonable volume.

The knight tried to be as quiet as he could when entering the room. Link liked to sleep as thoroughly as he could whenever he got the chance. When the young man's rest was interrupted, he usually did not fall back asleep easily. If he did manage to fall back into some semblance of slumber, it was nowhere near as deep and comfortable as it had originally been. Siegfried found, however, that he had not needed to be so careful. Link was still awake when he slipped in, sitting up on his bed and staring down at the sheets as though he were in deep thought.

"I thought you'd already be in bed." Siegfried said closing the door behind him. "Can't sleep?"

Link looked up at him and shrugged.

Siegfried responded in kind.

He chuckled when Link sent him a pouting glare. The boy did not like being teased, especially when he was not prepared to retort with something. Siegfried merely ruffled the younger's hair as he went about preparing for bed. He felt extremely tired, and his greatest desire at that moment was to simply get a good night's sleep.

Drinking never had that affect on him, never made him drowsy or exhausted in any way, but he usually never enjoyed his drinking endeavors much either. Drinking had always been a purely social and expected requirement he took to without complaint. He never knew you could actually have some fun while acting like a fool in front of all of your comrades under the influence of a simple bottle's contents. The added enjoyment must have taken up a good amount of his energy, causing him to tire out faster than he normally would. It was a new experience for him, but one he found he would not mind repeating in the future. Being tired after having fun actually sounded very nice.

Siegfried had been pleasantly distracted when he began redressing himself for a night's rest. He had not paid any more attention to Link until the elf had asked, rather boldly,

"Is it wrong to say I love you to another man?"

Siegfried dropped the shirt in his hand before abruptly turning to face Link. His expression was a cross between utter confusion and pure disbelief. "What did you say?"
Link just looked back at him in fierce determination. He wanted Siegfried to answer him one way or another. The knight would not get away with an 'I don't know', not even to a slightly intoxicated naive young boy. "Is it wrong to say I love you to another man? I thought it was alright to say that to anyone you cared for."

The knight was not quite sure how to respond. The fact that he was shirtless and was now expected to answer a question about love, in a room alone with his tipsy best friend, who had also decided to forgo wearing a shirt that night, sitting innocently on a bed, did not help matters at all. "Uh," Just what was he supposed to say? "Why do you ask?"

Link furrowed his brow and looked back down to the sheets on his bed. "Yunseong and I were walking to our rooms and we passed by a group checking in. I think they must have been a passing platoon of some kind of army. Anyway, one of the older guys, they called him a commander, had his arm around the shoulders of this younger guy. The commander kept whispering things to him, smiling kind of oddly, until finally the younger one pulled out his wallet and paid for the troops stay. Then the commander patted the younger on the back and said he loved him." It was then that Link looked back up to Siegfried. "Yunseong said it was wrong to say that. He said people like that shouldn't say I love you. He said it was wrong."

That did not sound like Yunseong at all. Not even drunk Yunseong would say something like that. "How old was this kid?"

"My age."

"And the commander?"

"Older than Mitsurugi I think. I don't know, I didn't ask, but he looked it."

Siegfried raised an eyebrow. "And were there other people around when this commander made this little declaration of love?"

Link shook his head. "The other platoon members left after the younger took out his wallet. And Yunseong only knew what this guy said because I told him. I think I was the only one to hear it."

"How did he say it?"

Link scratched at his head. Siegfried could see the small doses of alcohol were starting to affect Link's way of thinking. "He sounded happy about it, but."

"But?"

"It sort of sounded how Yunseong sounds when he's playing around."

Siegfried sighed and shook his head. It made sense to him now. What was going on, and why Yunseong had felt the need to add in his two cents. "Yunseong didn't mean it was wrong for the guy to say he loved his subordinate because of his gender. In general that kind of thing doesn't matter."

That was probably the biggest lie the German had ever told Link. Things like that did matter in this world, more so than Siegfried cared to admit. People were persecuted for it, taken advantage of because of it, and in some cases they were executed for such actions. However, Siegfried was not so sure how it worked in Link's world. He would rather not sink the Hylian's opinion any further if he could help it. No one else would tell him, and Link would never need to know if it was true or not. Besides, the group they were traveling with did not think about aspects like those very often. They had better things to do than worry about someone else's personal life.
"It was wrong in this case because he probably didn't mean it." Siegfried explained further.

Link tilted his head in confusion. He was far too innocent for his own good sometimes. Of course he would not understand the situation. He was slightly tipsy and even at the worst of times thought the best of people. He could not fathom someone not meaning the love they preached. This would take a lot more than a few sentences to explain.

Siegfried motioned for the younger to scoot over and proceeded to seat beside him. Link kept his eyes solely on the knight, as though he had all the answers in the world.

"Link, that commander had an entire platoon to pay for. It's expensive, especially for a soldier's wages. That subordinate must have had more money to spare. So the commander coaxed and charmed the kid into paying. He sugar coated the deal with a false declaration of love because he was glad he wasn't paying. He might have also thought it would get the kid to do things like that more often."

Link frowned. "But that boy looked really happy when he heard his superior say that. He was even glowing with pride."

Siegfried sighed. He did not much care for this kind of conversation. He was sure it would only lessen the respect Link had for humanity. "That was probably why this commander thought he could get away with it. Admiration can get someone to do a lot of things, including being fooled by pretty little lies. The kid heard what he wanted to hear, and he believed it because he respected his higher officer. Yunseong saw that, and he knew that was not the right way to use love. It's not a tool to abuse as you see fit."

Link did not seem to fully wrap his head around the situation. "That's so cruel."

Siegfried regretfully nodded. "I've seen it happen before. It's a bit too common actually." It was sad. Higher officers were supposed to be a standard, a pillar that their subordinates could look to for guidance and support. That power was not meant to be abused for selfish gain.

Link took hold of a clump of his hair in his hand. "So, how else can you abuse love?" He shook his head. "I mean, when else are you not supposed to say it? Is it wrong to say it all the time?" With each new question the hair was tugged, frustration causing Link's pitch to higher slightly.

Siegfried took hold of the hand Link was using to pull his hair and held it in one of his own. He used the other to gently ruffle the younger's hair, soothing the areas Link had assaulted seconds before. "There's really only one time you're not supposed to say it, and that's when you don't mean it. Otherwise it'll just end up hurting the person you've said it to."

Link leaned into the touch, glad for its comfort, but he was frowning yet again. "Well, how do you know you mean it?"

Good question. "You just feel it in your gut I guess."

Link did not seem to like that answer. "But you said it could hurt someone if you don't mean it. How do you know if it's truly a gut feeling or just a desire for it to be?"

Siegfried was no expert on the subject. He had never been in love with anyone before, at least not to his knowledge. He knew how strong love could be though, and part of the reason why was because of the boy sitting beside him. He owed it to Link to at least try and explain that kind of love.

"Love, true love, is not something you do for yourself. Human's are selfish by nature, but love is the most selfless things we've got."
Link's eyes were starting to glimmer a bit. He looked to be hanging on Siegfried's every word as though it were the golden law of legend. To him it probably was.

"Love is what makes a person think less of themselves and more about the person they care for. For that person they would move heaven and earth, give up everything they own, suffer torments they had never before imagined, all for the sake of that one special person."

It was like how Siegfried did everything he could to see that Link always had what he needed. The little things, like the kind of foods he liked or a special trinket he thought was pretty, and the big things, like new clothes and small tune ups for his weapons. Link's well being was at the forefront of the knight's mind every single day. So much so that his own was put to the back of his mind for at least a few days at a time.

"Love is what has you smiling despite your mood because the one you love is happy. Love is what has you happily going out of your way to help the person you adore."

Link had that kind of effect on Siegfried. Those eyes, that smile, that soft and kind face. Everything about Link just spoke of joy and devoted happiness. Siegfried found himself smiling even when he was so upset about the world around him that he was ready to jump off a bridge. It was a rare gift, that ability to make those around you happy despite it all, and Link had learned to mold it into a weapon to fight off horrid feelings. Siegfried was thankful for it. He wanted to protect it, wanted to protect Link. Nothing was too large a request and nothing was too much of a burden to complete. As long as he got that smile as a reward, Siegfried was happy to do just about anything. Even if it meant stopping the sun from rising.

"Love is when people are completely selfless to the point that their life is no longer their own, and they're okay with that." Like how Siegfried Schtauffen was no longer the German's identity, but was now only his name. His life was Link's now, and he could not have been any happier with that.

"What if it's not so strong?"

"Then it isn't love. Anything less is either obsession or mere infatuation."

Not that he would know from personal experience. This was one of those rare moments when he had to supply Link with an answer he never got the opportunity to test. He usually held off on doing so, he never wanted to give Link improper information, but explaining something like this to the elf, giving him nothing more than what the knight felt to be so… it felt truer than anything he had ever said .

"But you should know that when you do mean what you say, those words can be said to your most important people." Siegfried quickly added. "Family, friends, lovers. Just mean it and you can say it."

Link took a moment to let the knight's words sink in before he smiled brightly. It was an expression better suited for him than the frowns he had been sporting. "Thanks Siegfried. I think I get it now."

"Good." Siegfried got up and straightened himself out with a stretch. Talks like that usually left his body much tenser than any actual battle.

He reminded himself, as he walked over to where his forgotten shirt lay, to have a little chat with Yunseong in the morning. If the redhead was going to carelessly open his mouth and confuse Link, he could at least have the decency to provide the Hylian with some sort of information on the subject. It would certainly save the knight a bit of the embarrassment he felt that night.
For a moment he pondered on whether or not he wanted to wear the shirt he had in his hand. It was rather warm tonight, and perhaps he was just a bit too lazy to bother with putting it on. He could do without it for one night, surely. Not like he would get sick or anything, and Link was the only other person sharing this room. There was no fear of being indecent. That in mind, he was just about to toss the article of clothing to the nearest corner when he heard Link call out to him.

He turned to face the boy once more. "Anything else?"

Link smiled brightly. "I love you Siegfried!"

The knight stood immobile for a second. Link continued to stare at him with pure honest blue eyes, and a smile that coaxed the knight into believing what he already knew to be true. Siegfried found himself smiling too, and then surprised himself, and his friend, by throwing his shirt at Link's head. The elf was so surprised he fell backwards on his bed when the article of clothing hit him square in the face.

Siegfried laughed. "Put that on. It'll get chilly soon, and the last thing I need is for you to get a cold."

After that, the knight happily walked over to his bed. Link sputtered and tried to complain as Siegfried tucked himself in. He would get an earful for that tomorrow. Barely drunk or not, Link would not let such a blatant insult to his reflexes go. No, a challenge would be brewing in the morning. Yet, Siegfried was oddly okay with that. He was happy, and a soft fluttering feeling was forming in his stomach. He rather liked it. Whatever it was, alcohol or simple joy from Link's words, he liked it very much.

A moment later he felt a soft weight collide with his back. He turned around to face a slightly red Hylian with his arm outstretched, the pillow he had thrown now on the floor. But, the knight noted with a smile, he was wearing the shirt Siegfried had tossed to him.

"You didn't answer me." he said.

"Answer what?" The knight smirked.

Link blushed, and glared at his friend. "I said I love you."

Siegfried beckoned the elf over with a wag of his finger. Link tilted his head, but rose and took a few steps towards Siegfried. The knight beckoned him closer, and Link obliged yet again. It was not until the two were mere inches apart, that Siegfried leaned up and whispered in the elf's ear,

"I love you too, Link."

He was warm. This time when he rose to consciousness, he was warm. It was as if his body had been frozen to the core and was just now basking in a glow long forgotten, allowing its heat to slowly seep into him. He knew of only two things that would bask him with unbiased light, and only one of them was now within his reach. The sun.

"It's still daylight?" He found himself whispering, unsure if anyone was there to hear him or not.
A soft laugh and a gentle caress on his face was his reward. "It's good to have you awake, my little one."

Clarity was coming to him much more quickly than the last time. So was the recognition. Siegfried knew that voice. He knew that nickname. There was only one person who had ever called him that, and he had only ever allowed one person, besides his mother, to speak to him in such an endearing way. "Sophitia?"

The hand on his face came to rest on the top of his head. "You'll never know if you don't open your eyes."

Warily, just in case he was still trapped in a land of fond memories, Siegfried opened his eyes. He was quick to realize that he was laying down on something, a bed if he was not mistaken, that was much more comfortable than what Raphael had put him on the day before. His vision soon cleared completely, and once it did he was able to see the familiar furnishings of an Athenian household.

"It's real."

A smiling face, one he had adored two years prior, obstructed his line of sight. Sophitia's eyes danced in glee. "Did you think you were still dreaming?"

The knight nodded. "I've been having really realistic dreams lately. It's kind of hard to tell which ones are just figments of my imagination." It was also hard to determine if he even wanted to wake up from those dreams anymore. The world his mind conjured up was much more fulfilling than his current reality. Sleeping for an unsolicited amount of time could be beautiful.

"Uncle Siegfried!" Two little voices shouted.

The knight instantly sat up, and Sophitia straightened immediately. Siegfried wanted to question whose voices sounded so familiar. Sophitia looked like she wanted to explain. Before either got the chance to open their mouths, a young boy and girl burst into the room with their distressed aunt following close behind. Siegfried barely had the chance to properly recognize them before they climbed onto the bed and tackled him further into the sheets. How he managed to remain sitting was a mystery.

The girl latched on to his neck while the boy took hold of one of his arms. Instantly they began speaking a thousand miles a minute in what Siegfried assumed was some kind of a human language, but could only be perceived as speeded buzzing. Still, he knew these two small monkey like creatures to be a friendly pair. He remembered how that blond haired, blue eyed boy had sometimes been mistaken for his son on casual outings to the market place, much to Siegfried's embarrassment. He recalled how that little lightly brown haired, pale blue eyed girl had mischievously sent Link on wild goose chases whenever he believed her to be in trouble. He also found himself reminiscing on how he and Link would often partake in games with the two young children when other adults were too busy.

He also recalled how strong a grip each of them had once the air flow and blood circulation in his body was lessened considerably. "Pyrrha, Patroklos, Uncle Siegfried needs to breathe!" The knight managed to wheeze out after roughly five minutes of being lovingly strangled.

The children pouted, but eventually decided to give the man a break and let go of their beloved uncle. However, neither of them wanted to leave his side just yet. So they decided to simply sit beside him on the bed for the moment until he caught his breath.

They were glowing. Just looking at him, smiles alight in unfiltered happiness, seemed like enough to
make them content for dozens of years to come. Having him right there, being able to actually reach out and touch him, looked to over joy them far more than anything else could have ever managed to. It occurred to the knight, as he rubbed his neck, that they must have missed him something fierce. Children grew attached to individuals fairly quickly, and Siegfried had been something of a constant in their lives two years prior. Disappearing without warning for x amount of years must have hurt them.

Siegfried could have at least visited them. They were innocents in the fight Soul Edge had brought to the people around them. They were mere children. They had done nothing wrong. Yet they had lost both Link and Siegfried in what appeared to be one final swoop. The pain that brought to their little hearts could not be measured, but surely it was enough to shatter whatever world they had composed for themselves at the time. Link could not be blamed for that. He had an excuse for not being there for the two small children. Siegfried did not.

He tried to smile through the guilt, hoping they could see how sorry he was in that pathetic little gesture. "Hi guys. Long time no see."

They smiled back at him. Neither of them said anything.

"Have you guys been good since I last saw you?"

They nodded.

"Uh, have you given your parents any trouble?"

They shook their heads.

He was quickly becoming uncomfortable with their staring. Had he said something weird? Did he have something on his face? "Uh-

"You were gone a long time." Patroklos said.

"And you didn't even write us a letter." His sister added with a pout.

The guilt magnified tenfold. Not only had he chosen to never visit, but he had also never even considered sending a letter during holidays or their birthdays. "Sorry about that. I wish I...I was busy."

"Were you traveling?" The little boy asked, eyes wide and full of wonder.

Siegfried was going to have to lie to ensure those eyes remained tear free. "Yes I was. I went to all sorts of places." He ruffled the boy's hair. "Places much too dangerous for little boys to venture off to."

Patroklos pouted. "Well, where are they then?"

Siegfried blinked in confusion. "Where are what?"

Pyrrha scoffed. "Come on uncle Siegfried, you know."

No he most certainly did not know. And where had she learned to scoff like that? She looked a bit too much like Cassandra when she did. "Enlighten me."

The young brunette blinked. "What's that mean?"

Cassandra piped up from behind Sophitia, who was watching the exchange with an amused smile.
"It means talk to him as if he were dumb. You know Siegfried has never been all that bright to begin with."

Siegfried did not feel even the slightest bit of guilt when the pillow he threw hit her square in the face. His only regret was that he had not taken hold of something stronger. He had forgotten how irritating Cassandra could be at times.

"So," He started casually, conveniently ignoring the fuming blonde girl. "Tell me what it is you two want again."

They both took in a deep breath. "Presents! Presents! Presents!"

It took a moment for Siegfried to fully comprehend what it was he had just heard. When he finally did manage to understand, he smiled. It just figured. A trip away from home meant that gifts would be presented upon the traveling party's return. They thought Siegfried had brought them back something from his little trip abroad and that was why he was there.

"You guys want gifts?"

They nodded eagerly.

"I think I can do a little something." He cupped a hand over his mouth. "Oh Raphael!"

A moment later, Amy appeared in the doorway with Navi floating above her shoulder. "Papa is busy talking to Mitsurugi. Can I take a message?"

Siegfried motioned to the two kids beside him. "These two want gifts. There must be something in that mountain your father brought with him that would appeal to the two of them, right?"

Patroklos tugged at Siegfried's arm. "What does that mean?"

The knight smiled fondly and ruffled the boy's hair again. Patroklos was almost as curious as Link was. It was nice to be reminded of the elf in a pleasant light. "I'm asking her if there's anything you two would like."

"I can check." Amy said quickly, eager to offer up some kind of assistance. "We can all check together if you want."

The children bounded over to the redhead promising them presents. Once they had reached her side they were immediately pulling and tugging her out of the room. Amy looked to Siegfried when he did not get out of bed to join them. After a few more minutes of managing to keep her arms attached to their sockets, despite the siblings apparent desire to rip them off, she wondered why he was not attempting to stand up.

Navi noticed the girl's question, and asked, "You're not coming with us?"

The knight shook his head. "I'm actually a little tired. I want to get a bit more rest before I try to get out of bed. You guys go on ahead."

The children took his excuse at face value and ran off for the room that held their promised treasures. The Alexandra sisters remained.

Cassandra was the first to speak, frowning at the blond's relaxed form. "You're tired? Still?" The frown deepened at the nod she received. "You've been asleep all day."
"All day?" He could have sworn he had only--"But the sun's still up."

"Beginning to set, I'm afraid." Sophitia said gently. "Mitsurugi and Raphael had to drag you in here earlier on this morning."

"This morning?" He yawned. If he had slept for so long, then why was he still so tired? "But I could have sworn that I only closed my eyes for a few seconds. A few hours at most."

Sophitia looked at Siegfried intently. Something was troubling her, and the look in her eyes told the knight that she was not all that comfortable with what it was. Siegfried tried to see something more, something to identify what it was she was so concerned about, but she turned to Cassandra a moment later. "Go see to the princess."

Cassandra blinked. "What?"

"The poor girl's been sitting outside our kitchen for hours, and she looked just about as tired as Siegfried did. Be a good hostess and show her to a guest room."

Her sister looked as though she wanted to argue. One of Cassandra's most annoying qualities was the constant desire to have knowledge that she should not have. It was an inner curiosity that had not faded since childhood. Unfortunately it was not one of the more polite kinds of curiosity like Link had. Hers came in the form of an overbearing presence and to the point questions. Everyone received the same kind of treatment if they had information she desired. Siegfried was no exception, even in his current state. She would want answers from him. Answers he did not know, or remember, at the moment.

"Now Cassandra."

But no one disobeyed Sophitia. Not when she spoke in such a firm tone of voice. Cassandra, even after a lifetime of living side by side with her big sister, was not immune to it. Siegfried supposed it was some kind of divine intervention. Having one sibling to interrogate unjustly, and another to force their sibling to stand down. Cassandra walked out of the room without another word, though she did glance back a couple of times, before she turned into the hallway to do as she had been told.

Sophitia lay Siegfried down on the bed not a second later. The knight, meanwhile, rubbed at his eyes and tried to stop the yawns that were beginning to occur every fifteen seconds.

"Perhaps waking you up was not one of my better ideas," she said while tucking him into bed. "If your history with such situations is anything to go by."

Siegfried settled himself further into the sheets. "I wouldn't have hit you." he said through a yawn. "Or the kids."

"And Cassandra?"

"I make no promises."

She giggled and gave him a pat on the head. "Get some sleep. I'll wake you up when dinner's ready."

"Dinner?"

"Yes, dinner. A meal in which a family comes together to speak about their day regardless of whether or not they want to because mother says they have to."
Siegfried chuckled a bit through his tired daze. He'd missed this woman. He had not realized how much until this moment, but he had missed her nurturing and selfless gentleness. How long had it been since he was cooed and coddled over? "Will you need help with the food?"

"Don't worry about it. I'll drag Mitsurugi and Raphael into the kitchen. They do need to explain the situation to me."

Siegfried made motions to sit up. "I could tell you." He must have been mindlessly exhausted if he was offering to tell this tale. He did not so much as want to think about it during normal circumstances.

"You've exhausted yourself enough," Sophitia told him as she laid him back down. "They're big boys. They can let me know what's going on." She placed a small peck on his forehead, and just like that the matter was settled.

"I don't envy them," He found himself thinking as he saw Sophitia walk out the door. "That story is not easy to tell. Especially not to a woman."

Chapter End Notes

...never get into sales if you can help it guys. Eventually there is no life when the hours are too long. No real excuse for me, but consider things back on schedule.
Sophitia and Mitsurugi were no strangers to settling matters within the group. When there was a problem, they would force out a solution if they needed to.

Sophitia placed a hand over her heart. She wanted to know that it was still beating, though she half expected it not to move. It was somewhat of a surprise to feel its familiar thump within her chest. Was the heart not supposed to stop when news like as this became known?

"I see." She smiled sadly at Mitsurugi and Raphael. "I suppose it was too much to ask for this visit to be a pleasant one. I did have some suspicion. I just hoped I would be wrong."

The men before her shifted uncomfortably. They had no way of knowing how to handle this particular reaction. What they expected was anger, tears, hysterics, something volatile and out of control. Those they could handle somewhat well. Those they understood perfectly. This, this soft form of depressing acceptance, this was completely foreign to them.

"How long ago did this occur?"

Mitsurugi scratched the back of his head. "Siegfried started this journey about a week ago. The girl has yet to tell us how long before that she began her trek to find him."

Sophitia shook her head. The men in the room got the feeling that she had not really wanted to know how long any of this had been going on. She asked out of mere obligation, since she would need to know that information to fully comprehend the situation. She probably did not care how long ago any of this had taken place. No answer would have been able to console her. Even a day would have been too long for Link to suffer through such imprisonment.

"And what exactly is the course of action?"

"First thing's first. We need to gather everyone who had battled against Soul Edge before." The samurai explained. "We must come together to fight against it. This time we need to destroy it. Putting it away a second time will do us no good."

"That is easier said than done." Sophitia replied sadly. "We had not been able to destroy it the first time and sealing it had been difficult enough. Siegfried had been able to wield Soul Calibur, and Link had been on our side back then. Ever since that day, the legendary blade has yet to appear, and the method of sealing we originally used left when Link returned to his world."

That was one of the sour details the group had yet to talk about in length. It had been nagging at Mitsurugi since Siegfried had informed him of his very vague plan. The German had yet to elaborate on just what he intended to do once his old group came together again. Did he intend to look for the holy blade? Did they have the time to look for it? Without it, would they even have a chance this time around? Could they find a way to seal Soul Edge away, for good this time, if they were not
powerful enough to destroy it all together? Was that even possible? The method they had used that first time had been thought up on the spot. It had been a result of quick thinking and panicked adrenaline. Mitsurugi hardly doubted they could replicate something remotely like it on demand.

"Siegfried has yet to inform me on what he plans to do next. He's taking this whole mess on one step at a time."

"It's better than our course of action." Raphael admitted. "Had it been up to us, we would have killed the girl long ago without thinking about our actions."

The samurai scoffed. "Speak for yourself."

"How is she, by the way?" Sophitia gently interrupted. "Zelda, I believe her name is?"

The two men looked at each other, and shifted somewhat uncomfortably yet again. "Uh,"

She raised an eyebrow. "I take it not very well? You have been treating her at least somewhat decently haven't you?"

"Yes,"

"Maybe."

"We tried."

"We may have failed?"

Sophitia shook her head. "What am I going to do with you two?"

Mitsurugi felt his face heat up. "Things were fine for a while. Up until this morning she was treated as politely as could be expected." It was not nearly as polite as they could have been, but the samurai would leave that out for the moment.

"What happened this morning?"

Raphael coughed into his hand. "She may or may not have insinuated that she intended to bring Link back to Hyrule when we found him."

"And how did you incredibly mature men handle that situation?"

Mitsurugi repeated the blond's action. "Somewhat immaturely I suppose."

"You suppose?" Sophitia asked with a raised brow. "Or you know?"

The two men refused to meet her ever critical eye. In essence they felt like two children who'd just disobeyed their parents and opted to pick on a little girl half their size. That look she was giving them certainly made it seem as though that were the case at hand.

Raphael could never stand the different kinds of looks Sophitia gave him. She had dozens of paths to venture down in order to make the Frenchman feel as though he had been incredibly dumb in any given situation, and they all had a look that could be associated with them. None of them were very fun to look at, doing nothing less than reminding him of a time when he was a child who could be humiliated by his mother's scolding.

"Would it make it any better if I said we were sorry?" He tried meekly, even though the answer was in his mind before Sophitia could verbally let it loose herself.
"What do you think?"

"That it was worth a try?"

Mitsurugi sighed and attempted to think up something to say. He could not give the woman in front of him a reason for the way he acted. There was none, and even if there had been, it would not have been the reason for her mistreatment. That was due to his own biases and dislike of the princess' character. The older Alexandra would no doubt realize that.

Sophitia shook her head in disbelief. "I pray that the two of you never get married. I pity the poor women who would have to put up with you."

The two couldn't rebuke that statement. You did not win in a situation where you had been wrong to begin with, no matter what what arguments you had up your sleeve.

"Do I have to fix this?"

Mitsurugi knew there was a reason why he liked this woman. She was intuitive, and even before he had time to ask she would always know his train of thought. "I'm not saying it's necessary, but it would be a problem if she grew too distant from us. We at least need her to remember that our acquaintanceship is mutually beneficial."

Sophitia shook her head again, but this time there was a fond little smile spreading across her face. The two men were already forgiven, and she would no doubt do her part to aid them. "Leave it to me."

The two men let out matching sighs of relief. "We appreciate it."

"Prove it." She stood up. "Help Rothion finish up dinner, and prepare to help Cassandra and I pack for the journey ahead. I should warn you ahead of time. We take the act of packing very seriously, and do not appreciate being told what to bring or what to leave behind. You have an interesting fight ahead of you."

Mitsurugi nearly bashed his head against the table.

"This'll be your room, I guess."

Zelda bowed in response. She entered the room slowly, eyes scanning over every aspect of the space. Her gaze held an almost inquisitive grace that truly spoke of her royal lineage. She had an eye for detail, one that was exact and precise in what she wanted in a living space. She would no doubt be able to find flaws within her room in mere seconds, and she would surely make mention of them in no time.

Cassandra stayed near the doorway for that very reason. She knew the room was nothing grand. There was a bed, a couple of windows, and a small bedside table in there for a guest's use. The home she and Sophitia stayed in was nothing compared to the grand estate their parents and younger brother came home to every night. The Alexander sisters, while appreciative of their childhood, had never seen fit to replicate that large house and magnificent garden they had lived in when they were
little girls. Their home was large, yes, but incredibly simple. Simple suited them just fine.

Simple might not have been very suitable for royalty though. Zelda was probably not impressed with her new lodgings. What the Alexandra family could offer would be nothing to a girl of her upbringing.

Zelda surprised her, however, by pleasantly smiling after she finished looking around. "It's lovely. Thank you."

Cassandra was quite unsure how to respond. "You're welcome…I guess."

Zelda took a seat on the bed and smoothed out the wrinkles on her dress. "I suppose I should apologize."

Cassandra raised an eyebrow. "How come?"

"Siegfried has, by now, told you all about me."

"Not really." The knight had not gotten the chance to say much of anything before he fell back asleep. "You didn't come up in conversation." Not that there had been much of a conversation anyway.

"I'm quite surprised. I was sure he would have read you a list of at least a few hundred reasons as to why I was public enemy number one."

"Siegfried?" The knight was not one to ramble on about other people's faults. He himself was no angel. He had been reminded almost daily of how much blood was residing on his hands. The last thing he ever planned on doing was damning people for their imperfections when he had yet to fix his own.

"I was a bit surprised as well." Zelda smiled kindly. "Our hero told me much about all of you. He did not mention anything about the knight being so openly hostile."

"Hero? Do you mean Link?"

Zelda nodded, and immediately Cassandra put her full attention on the princess sitting in her guest room. She had not heard of that sweet, blond haired, blue eyed outsider in years. All she had to remember him by was the medallion he had given her sister. All she had been able to hold onto was the hug and light kiss on her forehead she received as a goodbye. To hear anything about that boy after so many years, even from a third party, was something she found she wanted more than anything.

"He spoke of all of you quite a great deal. I was told of a thief, a ninja, a young priestess,"

One by one Zelda named and described every single member of Link's past traveling companions. She would pause every few seconds for some kind of confirmation, or a small question, but other than that she merely retold Cassandra what she already knew about her old friends. It seemed Link had been very specific about the stories he told her, and from the sound of things he had spoken to her about them often. There was no other way she could have known all of this, no way she could have spoken so confidently if she were not sure of what she was saying.

"Were you close to Link?" Cassandra found herself asking. "You look a bit like him. Are you his sister or something?"

Zelda giggled. "No, we are not related, though his family has served mine in the past. So I suppose
you could say we're family friends."

Cassandra nodded. That made sense. Families who had similar positions in life tended to be friendly with one another, and no doubt would introduce their children to each other if they were around the same age. Knowing Link, his family must have been as strong and loyal as he had been. No doubt they would have been favored by the royal family.

"You've known him for a long time, haven't you?"

Zelda nodded. "Several lifetimes tend to make two people very well acquainted with each other."

Something uncomfortable settled into the pit of Cassandra's stomach. In her experience, when a woman was well acquainted with a man, it meant that the two shared a fairly intimate kind of relationship. Link had never spoken about having a girlfriend, but he never talked much about his personal life with anyone other than Siegfried. Could the Hylian have had a lover and simply neglected to mention it to Cassandra? Had he even wanted to?

"Are you his girlfriend?"

Zelda's eyes widened slightly, only to narrow in confusion a second later. "I beg your pardon?"

Cassandra found herself lightly scratching her cheek. It was a nervous habit she had been a servant to since she was small. "His girlfriend. His lover, his betrothed, his-"

Zelda held up a hand to stop any more suggestions. "Forgive me, but what on earth gave you that impression?"

"Well, I mean, I just assumed,"

Zelda placed her hand down on her lap. She smiled kindly at the Athenian once again and simply shook her head. "I'm afraid I gave you the wrong impression. Our hero and I are nothing more than friends."

"Really?" The hope in her voice could not be stopped. She barely had time to realize it was even there.

Zelda merely giggled. "If anything I see him as a brother. We know each other a bit too well for anything more."

Cassandra's face became a bright red. "Oh."

The thought of bidding a chaste goodbye and running far away from the fair Hylian seemed like a tempting option at the moment. Yet, Cassandra could not bring herself to move. Someone close to Link, someone who had known him longer than anyone else in his world, was only a few inches in front of her. Zelda had answers to the questions Cassandra had never managed to ask. Questions the girl was never sure she would get responses to. Now was her chance.

"You knew him well, right?"

"Yes I did."

"Would you mind telling me about him?"

Zelda moved aside on the bed, patting the spot beside her in an invitation for Cassandra to join her. The blonde hesitated slightly, and then decided to forgo any nervousness and take her up on the
"What is it you would like to know?"

Cassandra thought for a moment. "What's his last name?"

"He has not had a last name in years, but he does have a middle name that seemed to follow him throughout the decades."

"What is it?"

Zelda made a show of looking around the room. When she was certain no one else was there, she whispered a name into Cassandra's ear.

"Rinku?"

Hours passed between the two. It was an odd sight to anyone who knew of their histories to see them so close, laughing and exchanging stories as though they were old friends. In the back of Cassandra's mind she knew it was somewhat taboo for her to feel so joyful around the princess. She may have been a guest, but she was also the one who had supposedly destroyed Link's life over and over again. She just could not help herself.

The more questions she asked, the more responses she received, the more her mind began to change. What if they had all been wrong about Zelda? What if they had misunderstood the villains in the Hylian's story? Zelda seemed so regal and sweet hearted. What Cassandra originally thought about her could not have been true. If she was so terrible, if she was so cruel, would she have humored the Athenian for so long? Would she have answered all her queries with a smile and a desire to help? She was indeed answering everything. Anything from favorite food, favorite past times, favorite people--

"Our hero mentioned your name quite a few times."

Cassandra felt her face heat up. "He did?"

Zelda nodded. "I cannot remember the precise way he worded your presence, but I believe he described it as being akin to the feeling of water on a scorched throat."

Cue the overbearing blush, and fade into the abrupt violent turning of the head. "He was too kind."

She heard the other giggle. "Oh? I don't know. I think he may have been unable to do you enough justice."

Cassandra spent the next few minutes trying to rub the red from her face. Zelda, meanwhile, tried to apologize for her abrupt assumptions through a fit of giggles.

When the room quieted down seconds later, the princess saw fit to speak again. "He spoke quite a bit about Siegfried as well."

Cassandra sighed in relief. This was a topic she could talk through without becoming embarrassed. "I'm not surprised. They were best friends. Link could probably write Siegfried's memoirs himself."

"I don't doubt it, although,"

Cassandra frowned at the hesitant tone. Now that she took a moment to look closely at her, the princess seemed so restless. When her eyes were not focused on the girl beside her, her gaze
remained on the floor or on her hands in her lap. Coincidentally, those hands were tightly closed around the creases of her dress. Her shoulders were tense and would shift nervously every few seconds with just the slightest provocation. It was obvious she would try to force herself to remain steady whenever she noticed her nervous movements, but it was a futile effort.

"What's the matter?" Cassandra could not imagine doing anything to make the Hylian uncomfortable. They had been getting along so well moments before. Something else had to be causing this.

Zelda jolted a bit at her host's voice, which only fueled to confuse Cassandra more. The princess quickly tried to cover up her surprise by laughing. There was no emotion in it. The sound was so empty that it was almost painful. "Oh it's nothing. I was just thinking."

"Thinking about what?"

"Oh, nothing in particular."

Cassandra had never been too good at reading people on demand. Human beings were too cunning, and could at times be as cold as the stone models of temple deities. Cassandra was often one of the more easily fooled when those around her were being untruthful. However, this time it was blatantly obvious. The way the girl spoke, the way she moved, the way her eyes darted from side to side, she was obviously tense about something. "Tell me. Please?"

Zelda looked torn. For a moment it seemed as though the Athenian would be denied her request, but at last the princess decided to speak. "Siegfried, do you consider him to be a good soul?"

Cassandra blinked. Siegfried was her friend, had been for a good few years. He may not have been perfect, but he was a good man. "Yeah, I mean, he's not bad or anything. Link liked him a lot."

"It would appear that way, at least it did to me, but as time goes on I have to wonder."

"Wonder?" Cassandra frowned. "About what?"

"It's just that...he's been so hostile towards me. So cruel and nasty. I just don't understand."

"Siegfried?" That was a complete surprise. "He can be a bit mean sometimes, but never cruel."

Zelda shifted her gaze around the room. Her eyes spent a few seconds longer than necessary staring at the door. "Our hero used to sing the knight's praises so sweetly. I was sure that when I requested his assistance, I would be met with a soul as loving as our hero's ready to help in any way he could. That was not the case."

"What do you mean?"

Zelda looked around nervously once more. Again, she spent a few more moments looking at the door than she needed to. "I'm afraid I must beg for your secrecy on what I'm about to tell you."

"Secrecy from who?"

"Siegfried."

Cassandra could feel a lump overtaking the area around her windpipe. There was emotion welling up inside of her, but for the life of her she could not name what emotion it was. Nervousness? Anxiousness? Reluctance? She did not want to keep a secret from Siegfried. She could not even understand why she would need to. What would the princess tell her that would need to be kept
strictly between the two of them?

She agreed nonetheless.

The agreement only relaxed Zelda slightly. Whatever she was worried about made it impossible to fully let loose all the nerves accumulating in her body. "When I began this journey, I was given a set of names to search for. Siegfried was one, and he was the first one I found upon entering this world, but there were others who I was told would be good for the leadership of this unfortunate quest. A Mitsurugi, a Sophitia, and Ivy were among the top five. Yours was mentioned as well."

Cassandra knew she should have stopped the blush from appearing. It was just that the thought of her name slipping from Link's lips was too much.

"However, when I made mention of letting the rest of you in on the plan of rescue, he suddenly became very angry. He told me he wanted charge of this mission and that no one would take our hero's attention from him. He told me he would be the hero this time."

Cassandra suddenly found it very hard to breathe. "He said that?"

"Indeed." Zelda said solemnly. "I could not understand his reasoning. He was not being clear when he was screaming at me, and I became quite frightened. When I tried to ask him to calm down, he…"

Cassandra placed her hands on Zelda's shoulders. "What did he do?"

Zelda clamped her eyes shut and rolled up one of the sleeves on her dress. Circling the entire area of her wrist was a dark blue and slightly purple bruise. It looked painful, and to Cassandra's horror, it looked fresh.

"He warned me of what would happen if I defied him. Yet I did not see fit to listen. I again asked him to reconsider his position on the subject. I even asked, if he was so against another male being in charge of this endeavor, to enlist the help of one of the female companions our hero had suggested. I believe I suggested your name though I did not know you at the time. I was merely repeating a name I heard most often. He did not take it so well."

Cassandra felt a dark feeling swelling up in the pit of her stomach. "Did he do anything else?"

"He only marked me one other time. This one is on my back, though I do not wish to reveal it if it is alright with you."

Cassandra honestly did not want to see further proof of her friend's surprising violence. "On your back? That's a type of mark you can't just hide. Hasn't Mitsurugi seen it? Hasn't Raphael?"

"They did inquire about it once," Zelda sighed tiredly. "He told them I received it from falling off of Epona. They believed him without further discussion."

"Just like that? Why didn't you tell them the truth?"

"Honestly?" Cassandra nodded. "I began to think it was my fault. After the second assault, he attempted no more abuse of the physical kind. He resorted to verbal and emotional instead. He likes to hit below the belt, as I soon discovered, and did not pull any metaphorical punches with me. He has very strong, hurtful opinions on the way I lived in my past lives. Anything he could say to bring me pain, he did. After a fairly short while I stopped trying to have him desist."

Cassandra was shaking now. A growing rage was quickly filling the spaces between her veins.
"I'm sorry to have to reveal this to you. Perhaps I shouldn't have done so, but I felt almost compelled."

"Why?" Cassandra's voice was oddly calm. It belied the intense feeling she was developing for the knight sleeping somewhere else in the house.

"If his rage hinders this journey in any way, I honestly believe you can be someone to force it back to action. Our hero always believed in you, and perhaps that is why Siegfried was so upset when I mentioned your name."

Cassandra did not answer. For ten minutes she did not so much as utter a sound. The workings of her mind were slowly being twisted and bent by the words of the girl sitting next to her. At one point she was forced to take her hands from the princess' shoulders, lest the fists they turned into caused the Hylian to suffer anymore than she already had.

More than she had suffered from Siegfried's hands. On Link's name. After he had specifically asked for Cassandra.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a semi soft knocking at her door. It was Zelda who ushered the knocker inside. In walked Patroklos, smile large and eyes bright. Blond hair and blue eyes. Just like Link's.

"Auntie, Miss Guest, mama said dinner is ready."

Zelda smiled kindly. "Is it? Are we terribly late, then?"

The boy shook his head. "Everyone's there already, but we're still getting the table set. Oh! Auntie, mama said it's your turn to get the water."

"We'll be there shortly." The princess assured the boy. "You go on ahead of us."

Patroklos nodded and bounded off, calling his sister's name and asking what he was supposed to do next. Cassandra had yet to move.

Zelda gently shook her shoulder. "Cassandra? Are you alright?"

The girl was finally shaken enough to come out of her own inner world. "Yeah, I'm fine." She turned to Zelda, smiling halfheartedly. "Why don't you go on ahead? I'll be there soon."

"Are you certain?"

"Yeah, I'm sure."

Zelda nodded. With a smile and a small bow she made her way outside the room. Cassandra stood not long after. Her body went through the motions of completing the task she had been given. She considered it a blessing, as her mind was far to occupied with rampant and angry thoughts to be bothered by such a thing.

As her feet touched the ground outside, she was reminded of how Link always completed this specific chore when he was in Athens. Rothion never gave him anything harder to complete because he saw the boy as a frail little thing that needed to be handled delicately. It was a gross misunderstanding. It would have bothered Cassandra to be so terribly underestimated. The Hylian never minded, or if he did, he never let that irritation show. He simply smiled and did all he could to help.
"You were like that with everybody." she whispered to herself as she began pumping water into the wooden bucket that was kept beside it. "Especially with Siegfried."

Now that she thought about it, the knight had always taken up a good chunk of Link's life here in her world. The Hylian always found himself paired with the knight in fights, was the others first pick when a partner was needed to gather information, and was never cruel enough to refuse passing up any free time he may have had for Siegfried. Where there was one, there was always the other.

But had that been a mutual agreement? Or had that been an enforced suggestion on Siegfried's part? Cassandra never thought him to be a violent person, but that bruise, the serious way the princess had talked about her injuries. Everything about the knight's character was suddenly coming into question.

Her feet moved of their own accord. Cassandra had barely even realized that the bucket had become full. She most likely subconsciously counted down the seconds it usually took for her to fill the wooden tool to the rim, and then quickly went about bringing it to its destination. She could care less right then if it was filled to her older sister's expectations. Again, her mind had more pressing matters to see too.

Was Siegfried the type of person to harm a lady? To hurt someone who could not obviously fight back? Could he have done the same thing to Link?

Her breath completely left her at that point. Her mind released a set of thoughts so horrific, so inhumane, the lack of oxygen she received when mentally viewing them could have sent her to the floor. Link had worn clothing that could cover any scar. He was a master of perfecting false smiles, and it took nearly a lifetime to unravel them all. Could he have been under constant abuse as well?

Her eyes only returned to their normal working order right before she entered the doorway to the kitchen. Numbly, she took in the picture in front of her. Sophitia and Rothion had either food or wine ready to be served to their guests. Mitsurugi and Zelda sat on one side of the kitchen table. Amy was over by the doorway opposite of the room, Navi flying over her shoulder, saying something about finding the other children. Her father, Raphael, sat opposite of Mitsurugi at the table, laughing at something next to--

Siegfried, apparently woken up from his slumber to join the rest of them for dinner, was sitting down at the table. He was laughing. Laughing, when the girl he abused was but a few feet away from him. Laughing, even though the people around him were slowly fooled into believing he had become a victim in this entire mess. Link was chained up in Hyrule, suffering, helplessly holding out for any kind of rescue that would hopefully come for him in time. And through all of that deception and pain Siegfried was sitting there. Laughing.

Cassandra could not stop herself. She violently turned the bucket of water over and let every frigid drop land on Siegfried's head.

Siegfried felt an annoyed sense of nostalgia wash over him as water was suddenly dropped directly over his head. If Zelda had not been sitting directly opposite of him, he would have believed her to be the culprit. Confused, and a bit aggravated, he leaned back a bit to see Cassandra hovering over him with an empty wooden bucket in her hands. She looked absolutely livid.
"Is this some kind of hint that I need to take a bath?"

She responded by trying to slam the object down on his head. Siegfried's instincts kicked in at the last second, forcing him to lean forward just a bit, leaving the bucket to narrowly miss the base of his head by a mere centimeter. Everyone else in the room stared on in shock as the wood splintered completely against the stone floor.

Siegfried just looked annoyed. "What the hell was that for?"

"As if you don't know!"

Siegfried rolled his eyes. "Listen, I'm in no mood to play games with you."

"You were more than happy enough to play them with Link."

Those who were not silent before, had certainly lost any ability to speak now.

"What did you just say?"

"You heard me."

Siegfried pushed himself up from his seat, hand gripping the top of his chair so tightly it was almost ready to crack. "Did you have something you wanted to discuss with me?" His tone was low, dangerous in a sense that it gave memory to the days where his calm rage could overtake him in an instant.

She narrowed her eyes at him. She was not afraid. She knew whatever threat was present in his voice was empty. He would not dare hurt her. She hoped. "As a matter of fact I do."

"You've got a big enough mouth." Siegfried said lowly, moving closer to her. He knew the girl's bark was worse than her bite. She would back off soon enough. "Use it."

She pushed at him. The purpose was to put some distance between the two of them, to try and deepen the rift she wanted to maintain throughout her argument. It did her no good, Siegfried was much stronger than she was, and could not be moved so easily. Instead it looked like was a sign signaling she was raring and ready to come to blows. The knight could very well take it that way and react accordingly. Whatever move he made after would be intentionally threatening.

Cassandra, she stood proudly and looked him dead in the eye. She had no qualms about what she was starting. Her confidence, or arrogance depending on how you saw things, was her strongest weapon. "I should congratulate you. You're a wonderful actor. Playing the role of an angel when you're really a demon in disguise."

Siegfried raised an eyebrow. "Angels and demons? Shouldn't you be focusing on Gods and Goddesses? Nymphs and deities and all that?"

She turned a furious bright red. "Shut up!"

He rolled his eyes. Cassandra was no good in logical arguments. She was fine as long as her opponent had no idea about what she was talking about. If they were smarter than the average farm animal, however, she was about as skilled in tongue as a newborn was in ancient Latin. "Is there a point to all this? Like I said, I'm in no mood for games."

"You were more than in the mood for them when Link was here."
Siegfried narrowed his eyes. Why did she keep bringing Link into the conversation? Whatever was happening here had nothing to do with Link. "Just what the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"You know exactly what I mean. Wasn't that your plan all along? Force the rest of us to the background so you could play the hero? Isn't that why you were so adamant about talking charge?"

"Did you hit your head on something? You're more of an airhead than usual."

"Better than a space case of violent thoughts for one of the kindest of beings."

The two of them had, at this point, gotten right into the others face. Neither of them cared to back down. Not when they could see the anger and pure rage flashing through green and blue eyes, feeding their own foul emotions.

"You accusing me of something?" He wanted her to say it. She would take the blame for starting this. He would not take the fall for her. Not today of all days.

"Took you long enough to figure it out."

"Your explanations are like your subtleties. They never make a damn word of sense and are about as full of it as the girl they come out of!"

"Oh yeah! Well--"

A small cough brought the blonde's attention away from the argument at hand. They soon realized they had a small audience surrounding them. Mitsurugi, Raphael, and Zelda were still sitting at the table, eyes widened and unsure of how to react to the fight before them. Sophitia stood frozen by the table beside Rothion. Amy blinked repeatedly by the doorway where she and Navi had been about to exit. None of them made a sound.

Siegfried and Cassandra turned to the other, and then to the people watching them. They each held up a hand in a 'wait here' gesture, before running off to another room and slamming the door behind them.

Siegfried made sure no one had followed them before turning his attention back to Cassandra. "What did you think you were doing out there?"

"Making sure you understood how bad it felt."

"How bad what felt?" He would never understand women. They very rarely, if ever, said exactly what was on their minds. They beat around the bush, spoke in vague responses, and then got mad when men could not decipher their puzzle of a complaint. Honestly, they could drive a man of sound mind to insanity with all of their none-too-slightly confusing mind games. It was a wonder man and woman could get together in marriage in the first place. He would remember to congratulate Rothion and Sophitia with extra vigor when their anniversary came around that year.

Cassandra scoffed. "Alright, since you obviously can't get this yourself, I'll tell you. You, sir, are a liar."

Siegfried narrowed his eyes. "Were you dropped on your head as a child? You make less and less sense as time goes on."

She ignored him. "She told me everything. She told me about your first encounter with her and how you selfishly took charge of this rescue for your own sake. It sounded kind of pathetic to me at first, you never seemed like the manipulative type, but then it started to make sense."
That was more than he could say for the flow of this conversation.

"You really wanted him to see you. You wanted all of his attention on you at all times. You wanted to be his hero."

He had a sneaking suspicion of who Cassandra was referring to.

"But with the rest of us here, you couldn't be. You were second place. So this time around, you decided to push everyone off to the side and take the glory for yourself. You rescue him and all of his affection will be for you."

He did not like the way this conversation was going. Something about her accusations was putting him on edge. They sounded too much like Zelda's. "What are you talking about? That's not what I'm doing at all."

"Oh aren't you? Why not let Mitsurugi take charge? Or Sophitia?"

No. Siegfried did not want them taking charge. Link had asked for him. "Because it's not their responsibility." None of them could have been nearly as invested in this as he was, anyway. They could not have been nearly as heartbroken as he was. Right?

"What makes it yours? Tell me Siegfried, what on earth makes this rescue mission rest on your shoulders alone?"

"Link asked for me." Didn't he? He was certain the elf had. That was why Zelda came to him in the first place. That was what she told him. Wasn't it?

"Just for you?"

He had not asked Zelda about that. He could have sworn his had been the only name called, but he had never clarified. "Yes." He hated how unsure he sounded. Cassandra would catch onto his doubt quickly, and she would certainly use it to her advantage.

"You sure about that?" She asked, eyebrow raised and a challenge in her voice.

"What does that matter to you?" He was losing his edge, he realized somewhat bitterly, and if he did not think of a clever argument quickly enough, Cassandra would get an advantage. And it would be a cold day in hell before he let her win a verbal fight against him. "Whether or not I was the only one called, he at least asked for me. That's more than I can say for you."

Perhaps that may have been a low blow, if the way her eyes shook was anything to go by. Her gaze alone told him that his comment would, on any other day, give her more than enough reason to cry. Cassandra hated being second place in anything. Being anything less than number one was a disgrace for her and she no doubt hated the thought of being a mere second best in someone else's heart, especially Link's. He had been, so Siegfried had been informed, the first man she had ever become smitten with.

"You really do hit below the belt." Cassandra said at last. "She wasn't lying."

Siegfried knew something was about to come back and bite him. "Who wasn't lying?"

"Zelda. She said that you didn't particularly like to play fair. She was right." The blonde crossed her arms over her chest. "Meaning that she was right about everything else."

Oh of course. That would explain everything. He knew letting that girl get too comfortable would
come back to haunt him. Now that she felt somewhat safe around Siegfried, she thought she could start moving in on his territory. Zelda knew the knight would not touch her. Even though she knew she could not lay a hand on him in return, there were other ways of damaging him for his actions towards her.

She knew he had distanced himself from his old team. She knew that would cause some to stop and wonder if he had changed over the years. Change into a Siegfried completely opposite of the one they already knew. He had told her himself that some of the old group members held Link in secret spaces inside of their hearts, meaning they were more likely to respond to her if she made herself seem like his beloved ally. He had also involuntarily told her which member would be the easiest to fool if the circumstances mentioned above were taken into consideration and molded into a weapon to deceive.

Again, she could not touch Siegfried, but the other members of his old team were not out of the question. From there it was simple child's play. A few mishandled truths mixed in with some very small boosts of the wrong kind of motivation, and one very manipulative princess could have her least favorite German in some very painful situations. The damn brat.

"You can't be serious Cassandra. You cannot be standing in front of me defending the person solely responsible for Link's predicament. Even you can't be this dumb."

Cassandra seemed to be getting surer of herself as the seconds flew by. That was unusual. She was in the wrong here. She was the one who had no clue what she was saying. Yet she was the one standing confidently before him. There was something immensely wrong with that picture. "You demonize her, but you only heard what you wanted to when she tried to explain things to you, didn't you?"

It was then that Siegfried heard the pitter patter of tiny feet beyond the doorway. Someone had become curious about the noises coming from closed doors and had decided to investigate. Amy would not have followed them after what she had witnessed in the kitchen. No normal person would. But there were two small nosy little tykes who had not seen the initial confrontation between the two blondes, and they alone would be curious enough about the noise to try and find out what was going on.

"End of argument." Siegfried said firmly, turning to the door. "We'll finish this later."

He was pulled back by Cassandra's surprisingly strong grip on his wrist. "We finish this now."

Siegfried nearly felt frantic when he heard the doorknob turn. This was not something he wanted Patroklos and Pyrrha to see. His words had already brought one little girl to tears. He did not want two more sets of eyes to water by his actions. "I'm warning you, let me go. Now."

"You can't scare me like you did her. I can see right through you."

Siegfried had a very bad feeling about the look in Cassandra's eyes. It was accusing him, marking him as a target. In that instance she was a predator eying a piece of prey that should logically be beyond her reach. Just what was going on here?

"You just could not stand sharing him could you?"
Siegfried's heart nearly combusted when the door was finally opened. As he suspected, Pyrrha and Patroklos had come looking for them.

"Let go." he whispered harshly, but the words had been spoken one too many times already. They had no affect on Cassandra. She would not relinquish her hold.

"No."

Siegfried felt a tug on the back of his shirt. He did his best to look calm and collected when he turned to see which child it was. Patroklos was standing beside his sister, his hand twisted in the cloth of Siegfried's shirt.

"Uncle Siegfried, mama said it was time for dinner."

The knight could have cursed up a storm right then. The children had been sent to retrieve everyone for dinner. Siegfried had already gotten up on his own, and followed his nose to the kitchen before they had gotten a chance to reach his room. They must have started searching for him the moment they noticed his bed was empty. They were probably still looking when they heard him yelling. The volume of his voice had to have been what led them there. He should have just stayed in bed.

Siegfried tried to smile, tried to hide the panic he was feeling, but the gesture came out as nothing more than a grimace. "Uh, I know. I was just getting Cassandra."

The boy took notice of his uncle's wrist locked inside of his aunt's hand. The frown deepened. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing!" Siegfried was loathe to admit the word came out much more forcibly than he had intended it to. As a result, the little boy flinched and took a step back.

His sister, however, took a step forward. "Are you two fighting?"

Siegfried shook his head, praying to whatever celestial being was listening, that it did not look half as frantic as it seemed. "No, we're not fighting. We're just...having an intense conversation."

Cassandra chose then, of all times, to open her mouth again. "You just can't seem to tell anybody the truth, can you? You would even lie to children!"

Siegfried harshly shushed her.

Pyrrha saw right through the act. "You are fighting!"

Patroklos regained his courage and ran right up to his aunt's side. He took hold of the hand tightly squeezing onto Siegfried's wrist and tried to dislodge it. "Auntie, let him go."

Pyrrha meanwhile grabbed hold of Siegfried's arm. She tried, with all the strength her young body could muster, to pull him away from Cassandra. "That's enough."

It broke Siegfried's heart. "Cassandra, stop it." He tried to pull his arm away again, and was frustrated to see that Cassandra was somehow still stronger than him at this point. She was even pulling him in her direction.

"You aren't getting away from this Siegfried."

Patroklos started to whine. "I'm telling mama!" A child's favorite threat, and a tool used to stop a situation from going too far. The knight truly wished it would help in this case.
Alas, Cassandra just kept tugging and glaring. Siegfried and Pyrrha kept being dragged further towards the Athenian, and poor Patroklos kept trying to tug everybody apart. His whines grew louder, soon joined by his sisters, and tears began falling from his eyes. He pleaded with Cassandra to tell him what was going on, but she just ignored him.

After two minutes of listening to him cry, she raised her hand to push him away. Siegfried, for two frightening seconds, thought she was going to hit him.

"Don't!"

He made a reach for Patroklos, hoping to pull the child over to his side of the room, but Cassandra reached the boy before he did and shoved him beside her. She kept him there with the hand not currently trapping Siegfried.

"What, you going to hurt him too?"

Panic flashed through the knight's eyes. Did the two children in the room believe that? Cassandra obviously did. "I would never do anything to hurt them. You know that!"

"I thought I knew you too, but now I'm not so sure. You hurt her. What makes the kids any different?"

Hurt her? "Hurt who?"

"Zelda. I saw that mark on her wrist."

Siegfried gulped. He knew acting on his rage was going to get him into trouble eventually, especially when the princess was involved. "You saw that?"

Cassandra narrowed her eyes. "How could I not see it? It was as big as her wrist, Siegfried! How could you do such a thing?"

"It was an accident!" he tried to defend himself. "I didn't mean to hold on that hard."

"She's a toothpick compared to you! You should have known what a 'small grip' from you would do!"

"I didn't mean to!"

"And what about the mark on her back?"

"Mark on her-what?"

"There is apparently a large bruise on her back from when you attacked her out of misplaced rage. You tell everyone she got it from falling off Epona."

That little! "She did fall off Epona! Or rather, Epona bucked her off."

"Oh really? That horse has always been well behaved. You expect me to believe she would buck off a princess of her own land?"

"She's obviously a good judge of character."

Cassandra yanked Siegfried towards her one more time. Siegfried nearly fell forward onto his face. Pyrrha, who had been holding onto the knight's arm, unfortunately did happen to fall to the ground. She landed on the floor, made of nothing more than concrete, with a loud thump right on her knee.
The pain was severe enough to make her cry.

Siegfried tried to reach for her. Cassandra finally let go of her nephew and used her free hand to latch onto the knight's chin. She forced his head to remain steady.

"She was confused as to why you were acting so harsh. You were so good to Link that she couldn't imagine you being so terrible. There didn't seem to be a reason to her. But I know why."

Siegfried could not fathom why his strength was suddenly so far away from him. He was stronger than Cassandra. He should have been able to throw her off of him. Any other time he would have been able to toss her aside with no problem or question as to whether or not he could. He had no idea why that strength was failing him now. He had a nagging feeling it had something to do with the way his heart and mind, instead of using common sense to get him out of the situation at hand, were instead panicking beyond a reasonable, controllable, level.

"You were jealous of her."

Siegfried tried to scoff. He was certain the gesture did not come off as he wanted. "Why would I be jealous of that miserable excuse of a princess?"

"You were in love with him."

Siegfried was now desperately trying to get away. He suddenly wanted to leave the room immediately. The moment the word 'love' was brought forth from her mouth, cold, calm and composed, he felt something ring throughout his chest.

It must have been similar, if not exactly as the same, as the ring Nightmare heard when Siegfried regained his consciousness. The sound of a heart awakening to feelings buried deep within it, and bursting with the withheld emotions. Siegfried's heart had awoken once to freedom, but he dared not think about what this second awakening would mean.

"You have a human heart, I'm sure of it."

"You were in love with him and she was threatening that. We were all threatening that."

"I trust you."

"And you couldn't have that could you? You didn't want to take the risk."

"I love you Siegfried!"

Siegfried tried to turn his face. Tried to shake his head to rid it of the voice taking over. That noise was sweet torture, and he did not need to hear it right at that moment.

Cassandra forced his head to turn to the opposite direction. Green eyes gazed upon a mirror, what she must have been trying to lead him to all along. The room was starting to spin. Patroklos was whining, Pyrrha was still crying on the floor, footsteps were now rushing towards the room, and Siegfried was suddenly feeling sick of his own reflection. The more he continued to stare, the sicker he became.

"Look at yourself. Do you honestly think he could ever return that love?" she asked coldly. "Forget the fact that you're another man, but you're a violent person."

Siegfried was beginning to see a very frightening image in that mirror. Link was there, but he was frowning, as though he were disappointed in him. Suddenly, a whole new set of voices was barking
out at him from the far regions of his mind.

"Creature!"

"Beast!"

"Vermin!"

"You've made people suffer because you couldn't keep your temper in check."

Link was shivering in that mirror now. He was afraid. Afraid of Siegfried.

"This is all your fault!"

"You aren't human!"

"Murderer!"

"You didn't have the nerve to ask him to stay the last time because you knew he wouldn't listen to you."

That was not true. He would have stayed. Right? "Shut up."

"He wanted to get away from you. He wanted to go home."

"You deserve to die!"

"May you burn for all the sins you've committed."

"Shut up."

"He didn't want to be anywhere near you, and I guarantee that once this gets out no one ever will again. And do you know why?"

That image was starting to change. The glass no longer held blond hair and blue eyes cowering away from Siegfried's gaze. What was in there was much, much worse.

"Vile."

"Disgrace."

"Heretic."

It was Nightmare, laughing at him from the glass.

"It's because you're a monster!"

"Monster!"

"I told you to shut up!"

His strength finally saw fit to return to him, masked in the gear of intense rage. He yanked forward the hand Cassandra had been holding onto and slammed it against the mirror. Hers had been the one to take the brunt of the impact, and as such dozens of little shard wedged themselves into her hand, bypassing the cloth of her gloves. Others had scattered amongst the ground, too small and damaged
to be repaired. The image Siegfried had seen was gone.

But so, in turn, was the delusion that Siegfried had been fighting something within that mirror, and not, instead, someone who was made of flesh and blood.

It was the wailing that brought him back to his senses. Both Patroklos and Pyrrha had started sobbing as soon as their aunt's fist hit the glass. Cassandra had let go of him in favor of clutching the hand imbedded with glass shards to her chest. She was crying now too.

He had done this. He had single handedly caused all of this.

"No! Wait," His head whipped back and forth between children and adult. "I-I didn't mean to-I--"

The door slammed open moments later. Mitsurugi was the first to enter, followed closely by Sophitia. He went straight for Cassandra and Siegfried. She took one look at her children and was by their side in mere seconds. Raphael and Rothion stood still by the door. The room was far too tense, and the fathers did not have the courage to venture any further. Not when they saw the small scene that lay within it.

"What the hell is going on here?" The samurai was quick to take notice of Cassandra's injury. "What happened to you?"

Siegfried looked down to the ground. He could still hear the children crying from the floor, even though Sophitia did her best to soothe them. He had done it again. He had caused innocent children to suffer, and this time he had actually gone and hurt someone.

"I'm sorry." Was as he could manage to force out of his mouth before he turned and bolted out of the room. No one could make a move to grab him.

Sophitia shushed and cooed at her children. They refused to be consoled. "What happened, Cassandra? Why are you hurt?"

Cassandra grumbled under her breath through the sting of the glass. "It was his fault."

Mitsurugi raised his eyebrows. "What? His fault for what?"

"Ask Zelda."

Sophitia frowned. "Zelda? What do you mean?"

"Zelda? What does she have to do with this?"

Cassandra tried to pick out a piece of glass from her hands. "She told me everything, and when I confronted Siegfried about it he blew up."

Now the samurai's eyes narrowed. "Cassandra, tell me you didn't start a fight with Siegfried because of something Zelda said." She was silent. "Answer me."

"He started it!"

The man let out a frustrated sigh. "This is just great. What did you say?"

"None of your business."

Sophitia rose from the floor at once. "If I know her, it wasn't anything pretty. He needs someone to talk to and fast." The mother ran out into the hallway, looking towards the direction where she had
seen the knight run off to. "He'll be inside. He wouldn't leave the grounds, not until he was sure my children were alright. He'll most likely be on the other side of the house."

Mitsurugi nodded. "Should I go after to him?"

She shook her head. "It would be better if I were to speak with him. Can you take care of Cassandra?"

He nodded.

"Raphael, please make sure Amy's alright, she most likely has questions, and do not touch the princess. Rothion, please explain the situation to Pyrrha and Pat and then quickly put them to bed. They'll need their rest. After that, guard Zelda's room. Is that clear?" She waited for the two men to nod in confirmation before she bounded off.

"Sophitia." Mitsurugi called.

She turned around and gave an impatient hum in response.

Mitsurugi rubbed his forehead. "After you calm him down, can you make me a drink so I can forget this night ever existed?"

Sophitia nodded before running off once more.

It did not take her long to find him. She had been right in assuming he would run all the way to the other side of the, though not very grand, large estate. She searched quickly, opened every door with a speed unknown to mankind, and had listened with a hearing nearly as good as a Hylian's. She was going to find him one way or another, and he should have known it would have happened sooner rather than later. When she finally did find him, he had slumped down against a wall of a dead end hallway.

Siegfried figured he must have looked so pathetic at that moment. Sitting on a dirty floor, curled up in a small ball, not saying a single word, and looking absolutely anywhere but straight at Sophitia. His father must have been so proud of what his only son had become.

"I don't want to talk about it." he whispered, more for his benefit than for hers.

Truth be told, he really did feel the need to talk. His head was spinning with unconfirmed suspicions and denials of realized truths. It hurt. It hurt so much that even the pain in his heart was pushed to the side in his attempts to sort out the focus of his mind. He was confused. He was uncertain. He needed some kind of understanding. He needed someone to tell him what it all meant, someone like Sophitia.

She was a mother. She had two kids in her life who were imperfect, but they were two little souls she loved more than anything else in the world. She did not judge them. She did not condemn them. She simply loved and accepted them for who they were. A true mother who protected her children from their worst enemy. Themselves. Siegfried's mother had been like that too. She had been warm and kind, like the gentle breeze on a spring morning.
Her presence was what he remembered now more than anything. He was certain that if her memory were to ever begin to fade, what she looked like or what her voice used to sound like, that presence was what he would never forget. The way her arms used to hold him tight, how he knew it was her embracing him though he had not had the time to check. The way that simply listening to her heartbeat was reassurance enough that he was alright in whatever he was doing.

He had told that woman everything. Crushes he used to have, confusions that used to arise in him, lost faith that he did not want to obtain again, she knew it all. Even secrets Siegfried's father had not been allowed to realize about his son were tucked away in his mother's heart. She, more than anyone, made her child feel as though nothing would harm him. Not as long as she was there to protect him.

Sophitia had that kind of presence too. It almost made Siegfried want to blurt out everything that was bothering him. Almost. The only thing stopping him from doing so was his own stubbornness and the cold hard fact that the woman before him was not his mother.

"I don't want to talk about it." he repeated, like he wanted to emphasize the point by saying it a second time.

She smiled softly before plopping down next to him. She said nothing for a moment, causing him to look at her questioningly. She continued to smile. "That's alright. We don't have to talk about anything you don't want to."

"The floors dirty." he told her. It was a rather pathetic way to tell her to go away. His voice was not even firm. "You'll ruin that outfit." Girl's cared about that kind of thing, right?

She just laughed a little. "I've got others like it. You learn to keep a wide stock of clothing when you have two children."

Speaking of which, "How are they? My fight with Cassandra really upset them."

"They're just a bit confused right now. They'll be alright once the situation is explained to them."

"I didn't mean to make them cry."

"I know that." she assured him. "You would never hurt anyone intentionally."

She thought too highly of him. He was nowhere near that just. Cassandra had pointed that out all too well. "I hurt 'her' intentionally."

"Who? Zelda?"

He nodded. "It felt pretty damn good at the time too."

"And how does it feel now?"

He tightened the hold on his legs. "Like a hollow victory." More like a sour taste in his mouth. Cassandra sure knew how to dig those kinds of emotions out of him. "Honestly, it felt like being scolded by my father after hitting a girl."

Sophitia ruffled his hair. Siegfried usually did not take kindly to the action. He was not a vain person by any means, but he did take some pride in his appearance. Most of which was his hair. He, for some reason, did not appreciate people touching it. Even if they meant well, most people would just ruin it until the knight was left looking like a mess of a man who did not know the concept of proper hygiene.
Link was the only person ever allowed to touch Siegfried's hair without question, because he did not abuse the privilege. He only took advantage of it on two occasions. The first of which was to fix and adjust it in case Siegfried had failed to do so properly on his own. The second was when the elf was nervous about something and needed a distraction to keep himself busy.

The first instance did not bother the knight in the slightest. His short hair had taken some getting used to. It was an entirely different experience than managing his previous style and he had been clueless about how to go about dealing with it the first time. Link was used to shorter hair. He knew how to fix and play around until it looked decent enough. He knew better than Siegfried, at least, so it was a blessing when the elf took it upon himself to help his oblivious German friend.

The second instance was something he allowed for Link's sake more than his own. The younger blond, despite how courageous he was, could get very nervous when situations got too tense or uneasy. His hands would often get jittery if he did not quickly find a way to occupy them. The first time he turned to Siegfried's hair for a distraction was also the day he had seen his first bar brawl.

The two of them had been traveling with Seong Mina, Yunseong, and Talim during what had to have been the second month of their journey to find Soul Edge. During their second week together, the group dropped in at a local bar to try and gather information. While inside, Yunseong partook in multiple games of cards in an effort to earn a bit of pocket cash he could use for himself. The longer the games dragged on, and the more money he won, the quicker an enraged drunk was able to accuse him of cheating. After a few more games, the man refused to pay what he had lost. Yunseong would have none of that, and neither would Seong Mina who was egging him on from the sidelines.

Siegfried saw it coming before anyone else had. The tension in the room was soon fueled by other less than sober customers. It thickened, becoming more and more volatile by the second. At its peak, Siegfried decided to pull Link and Talim out of the bar. The other two could handle themselves. The teenagers he latched onto would be unable to take a bar house brawl.

The first strike was thrown just as the three of them walked out the door. Not long after that, the noises became increasingly louder in volume and more intense in execution. Siegfried thought nothing of the growing chaos. Back when he was a young knight, his old comrades used to drag him off to bars all the time. Once there, they would quickly immerse themselves in the ancient art of binge drinking and bar brawling. None of them had ever known how to drink correctly, or understood when they were well past their limits. Siegfried learned by the third outing when to spot those breaking points and the subsequent fights that came from them. By the fourth outing he knew the perfect time to leave so as to not get involved. By the fifth outing he had ceased to feel guilty about leaving his platoon to fend for themselves, and simply relaxed while waiting for the fights to come to an end.

That night he had lied comfortably on his back atop a circular fountain located near the entrance of the bar. Talim stood a few feet away from him, though still directly within his eyesight per his demand, flinching every so often when she heard Yunseong's voice. Link sat beside him, looking just as nervous.

Siegfried, soon bored with how long the fight was taking, had been about to fall asleep. That was when he felt them. Nimble fingers threading themselves through his hair. Startled, he looked up and saw that it was Link. The elf's blue eyes were still glued to the building his friends were fighting in, and his hand had decided to busy itself in his anxiousness.

Link had no idea what he was doing, he was more focused on whether or not the two redhead's in the bar would come out alright, and probably would have continued on in perfect obliviousness had he not noticed Siegfried's gaze. Once the two did meet each other's eye, Link quickly turned a
fetching shade of red before immediately taking back his hand.

Siegfried had suddenly grown cold at the loss of contact. Link looked guilty, like he had done something to seriously offend Siegfried. The knight had not minded. Really, he had just been a bit surprised was all, and all the blond had done was mess with his hair. Again, no major sin committed. Link did not have to look so ashamed about it.

Not quite sure how to make the other feel better, the knight let instinct take over. He pushed himself closer towards the elf and placed his head in his lap. He then gently placed the gloved hand back to his hair and closed his eyes. Link did not move at first. He was too shocked by Siegfried's bold action to do anything other than just sit there. However, after a short minute in which he turned every possible shade of red imaginable, he continued to run his hand through the knight's hair.

It became routine. Link would get nervous. Siegfried would offer himself to be at the elf's disposal. The boy would be comforted, and all would be well in moments. In time the action became a gesture that calmed both of them and offered a small amount of comfort when times were uncertain. The two of them even looked forward to the occasion when they could bond in such an innocent way.

This, admittedly, was not either of the two instances where Siegfried enjoyed having his hair touched, and Sophitia was not Link, but…

"I'm doing it again." Siegfried groaned out miserably.

"Doing what?"

Going against all thoughts of modern day creation? Committing a form of blasphemy? Possibly tainting the most holy being in his world with simple thought? Questioning everything he once thought was innocent affection thanks to Cassandra's big mouth? "Thinking of Link."

"What's wrong with that? He's your friend, and he's not in the best of circumstances right now. Why wouldn't you think of him?"

He cringed. If only his thoughts were as harmless as she believed. "Lately these thoughts have not exactly been… "friendship" oriented."

"Come again?"

He realized a moment too late how terrible that must have sounded. He quickly tried to amend what he said. "What I mean is-what I was really trying to say was-" He wished she would stop looking at him like that. Her questioning gaze, though fueled by concern, was just making him nervous. "They're more…not about friendship?"

He hated himself. He sincerely hated himself. The world would have done him an absolute favor by opening up and swallowing him whole. Then he would not have to worry about his ridiculous tendency to overstate the obvious which was only managing to make him look like an idiot.

Sophitia tilted her head. "They're not about friendship? So Link isn't your friend?"

"That's not what I mean."

Siegfried was starting to get frustrated. He had never been any good at this sort of thing, explaining what was bothering him in any given situation. As a knight he had not needed to. Nobody would honestly care, and it was considered whining if you spoke too loosely about emotions other than anger and rage. He had never done too much of it when Link was around either. Link just seemed to know what his friend was thinking. He would always be the one to pull sense from the jumbled mass
of thoughts and— dammit he was doing it again!

Siegfried nearly yanked out his hair. His own mind was rebelling against him. He no longer needed to be asleep for it to happen. Now it could slip through the cracks of his most private thoughts and into his conscious frame of mind. He did not appreciate it.

Sophitia gently took his hands within her own. She held onto both with a very firm grip, letting Siegfried know he would not be putting them to use until the two of them understood what was going on. She either thought he actually would pull his hair out or give in to his frustration and punch a wall.

"Why don't you take a nice deep breath?"

Siegfried complied with the order. He was surprised at how relaxing it was.

"Good. Now, do you want to tell me what's going on?"

He wanted to. He really did. Everybody else around him got to throw in their two cents about the struggle they were recently going up against. He, however, never got the chance to express his opinion on the personal little version of hell he was currently living in. It was his turn now.

Yet, the words to express his torture were not going to come out. He knew that already. It had nothing to do with trust, or with understanding. He was just afraid. Saying everything made it all real. If he kept quiet he could almost pretend that none of it was happening. Just as not listening to suffering made it easier to pretend it did not exist.

Sophitia became uneasy when he refused to answer. "How about I guess? If I answer correctly you nod or say yes, and if I'm wrong you shake your head or just say no. That way you won't have to say anything more than what's absolutely needed. Alright?"

He nodded. Sophitia made it sound so easy. He wondered if something like this could really be so simple. Then again, simplicity had always worked for Link. Simple solutions from him could make miracles occur. Could Sophitia be the same way?

"When you said these thoughts of yours had nothing to do with friendship, you meant the relationship had become something stronger, didn't you?"

He nodded.

"As in, you're not friends, you're more like brothers?"

He wished that were the case. Then these feelings might not be so horrifying to him. Then again, if he felt as strongly about his own brother as he did for Link, then he would have much bigger issues to see to. "Not exactly."

She raised an eyebrow. "Do you think of him as a son?"

"No!" Dear God no! That would just be sick. This woman was going to give him a heart attack.

"Then what?"

He had to turn away from her. Looking her in the eye now, when he was almost certain of his own desires, seemed wrong. Instead he found his eyes landing on the floor. The cold, dirty floor.

"Siegfried, tell me."
Did she honestly expect him to say it? He had just figured it out himself, and not in the most comforting of ways. How was he supposed to utter words that were still burning his heart?

"Siegfried," she said a moment later. "These thoughts you have about Link, they bring out certain feelings right?"

He nodded.

"These feelings are not platonic are they?"

He shook his head.

"They're not family oriented either, are they?"

He shook his head again.

"They're more like the feelings between my husband and I." It was not a question. She knew the answer already.

He had no choice but to answer in the affirmative.

"You're in love with Link."

The words nearly suffocated him. He knew she would eventually come to that conclusion. She was not stupid, and apparently his feelings were obvious to everyone else but him. Still, a part of him was shocked. She knew, and yet she could say it out loud without any problem. He was surprised her voice did not quiver or show signs of the disgust Siegfried felt within himself. She was braver than he was.

"Siegfried?"

He shook his head. As he did so, he felt something prick at the sides of his eyes. Still, he kept shaking his head, denying himself even the smallest of droplets to form. He would not let them be shed. He would not let them fall. He would not.

"Siegfried," Sophitia's voice sounded surprised. "You're shaking."

Was he? He could barely notice. His mind was focused on not letting his eyes be moistened. He appeared to have missed the fact that his body had its own way of crying. It was worse than actual tears. Those he could hide. Convulsions of his body were a great deal harder to keep to himself.

"Tell me what's wrong."

What wasn't wrong with his life at that moment? His best friend turned love interest in the mere blink of an eye was millions of miles away from him, a girl who he had considered a sister had just betrayed him by siding with his new romantic rival, and he had just scared the living daylights out of two beloved little kids so much that they probably never wanted to see him again. The better question would be if there was actually anything working in his favor at the moment.

"What are you so afraid of?"

"Everything." He could not have been anymore disgusted with himself if he tried. How low had he fallen? Shaking, tearing up, voice about as loud as a pin drop. He was pathetic. So completely and utterly pathetic that he just wished he could disappear.

Sophitia quickly took him into her arms. He might have been mistaken, but he could have sworn she
was shaking too. Now that he thought about it, he was certain that he felt little droplets falling onto his shoulder. Was she crying? Did he make her cry?

"I'm sorry." he managed to croak out. Good God, was he going to start bawling? That was just what he needed right now.

"Talk to me." Sophitia pleaded with him. "I can't fix it if I don't know what's wrong."

Of all the things for her to say. She had to pick that phrase of all things? He said that same thing to Link. Link had responded to that phrase. Did she really have to say that?

"I don't want him to hate me." Siegfried whispered desperately. Did he really have to be that quiet? Link was not going to suddenly come running around the corner in time to hear every single word he was saying. "I don't want to lose him."

"You won't lose him." she tried to reassure him. No doubt she was using every motherly instinct in her body just to make him stop crying. Just to stop him from destroying himself with all the toxic thoughts going in and out of his mind. "He would never hate you."

"I couldn't stand it if he did." How funny. Moments ago not one syllable wanted to escape his mouth. Now he could not stop the words from flowing. "He meant everything to me. I," He had to say it now. If he kept it in any longer he would self destruct. "I love him. I'm in love with him."

Sophitia shushed and cooed out his name. "That's fine. That's alright. You don't have to cry about that."

Really? Then why had Cassandra made it seem so bad? Why had Cassandra made it seem like he deserved to be in this kind of turmoil? Had he not deserved it? "You're not mad at me? Not disgusted?"

"Absolutely not." she answered instantly. "Why should I be? You're still the Siegfried I have known and loved for years. Nothing will ever change that."

"But I love him."

"What's wrong with that? When has there ever been anything wrong with loving somebody?"

"We're both guys."

"That doesn't mean a thing." she said confidently, almost like she believed in what she was saying. Siegfried wished he could say the same. "Love is love, regardless of gender."

He wanted to laugh. The prospect was so funny he could honestly, sincerely laugh. How pretty those words of hers sounded. How ugly the reality of the world really was. "When has something like this ever been anything but an abomination? These feelings of mine are marked as a taboo."

"In certain parts of the world that may be true, but that's only because they don't truly understand you and the bond you have with Link."

This time he did laugh. "I'm a freak Sophitia. I deserve to burn for all eternity."

He felt her entire body tense up. Not a single muscle moved. Not even her breath was filtering in at this point. He thought he had finally gotten his point across. Maybe she had figured out the harsh reality Cassandra had done her best to shove down his throat. It was not all that hard to comprehend. Sophitia was just too kind sometimes. She did not like to see the ugliness of the world. It was
understandable that she would take so long to see where he was coming from.

"Siegfried Schtauffen," That was not a good sign. Sophitia never used full names unless she was highly upset at whoever she was speaking to.

"Yes?"

When she pulled away, Siegfried saw that she was absolutely livid, just as much as Cassandra had been when she confronted him at the dinner table. Sophitia, he found himself admitting, was a lot scarier than Cassandra. Whereas the younger Alexander showed her rage through the loudest methods she could find, her sister took advantage of the fear that silent, brewing anger could instill.

"What I have I told you about using that word?"

Siegfried was not all too sure which word she meant. Mothers had a tendency to not like a lot of words that did not seem like a big deal to the ones who had spoken. If he had to take a guess, though, he would put money on his use of the word freak. If that was the case, she could only have one opinion on it. "You don't like it?"

"I despise it." she said coldly. "I find it atrocious and cannot fathom why such a terrible word would even exist. Not one person is my acquaintance is a freak, and that includes you. Do you understand?"

Siegfried flinched. He almost preferred Cassandra's constant screaming to this kind of solemn scolding. "I'm sorry."

"No you're not." And there was that all too familiar motherly rage. The kind of anger that stemmed from being lied to, however unintentional the fib was. Siegfried had almost forgotten it. He had not been in contact with that special brand of spine tingling fear for quite some time. "You're not sorry because you have no idea what you've done wrong, do you?"

He shook his head. There was nothing else he could think to do. This woman scared him about as much as his own mother had when he was a child, and she was just about the only one who could scare him into silence. Had it been anyone else speaking to him like this, he would have had his defenses set and ready to go. He would have been snapping back and denying for all he was worth, even if it was all futile in the end. With Sophitia, that was all but impossible to accomplish.

"Siegfried, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Link would be absolutely heartbroken if he were to hear even half of what you've just told me."

Siegfried could not stop the sudden increase of his heartbeat at the name. Suddenly everything about Link made Siegfried feel different in a way that was not at all unpleasant. It was like he was now hyper sensitive to everything about the elf's presence, even memories that were once the only part of Link he had left.

"What do you mean?" Was all he could think to say. He was curious as to what she meant, what the truth of her words amounted to.

"Siegfried," Her voice soon reverted back to the soft and gentle tone the German was used to.

Sophitia brought him into her arms again. This time he allowed himself to simply relax into the grip, accepting the affection and comfort. His head dropped to her shoulder, and his arms wrapped around her like a child desperate for a love he had been deprived of for far too long. He needed comfort and hugs had always been the best means to achieve it. It had been true when he was young, when Link came into his life, and remained true now when he was at his lowest.
Sophitia was warm and protective. She was accepting of him in a way he had not been expecting. She would not shove him away. She would not reject him now of all times. No, Sophitia would never be so cruel, not even to her most despised enemy. How could he have allowed himself to believe she ever would, even for just a second?

"You know, you were his everything too." She gently ran a hand up and down his back. Her ministrations were nothing short of soothing.

"I was?" he asked timidly. He was reluctant to believe those words. She had him hoping though.

"You were. Not a day went by when Link did not speak of what you had done for him. 'Siegfried taught me this' 'Siegfried is so incredible, he can do that' Honestly, I think I learned more about you from his mouth than I did from yours."

Siegfried never liked talking about himself. There was a fine line between speaking about yourself, and giving out your life story to anyone that asked. There was also a fine line between giving out enough information in order to be considered polite, and withholding everything important in your life to a point where you were constantly being compared to a rock. There was a method and a ritual that had to be set forth so that the right impression could be made.

Siegfried did not have the time to master the technique. He simply gave out important medical information to his comrades, so they knew what to do in case of an emergency, and left it at that. Anything else could be figured out by simple observation or answered with a simple question. Again, Siegfried was not his own favorite topic, and did not think himself to be particularly interesting.

Link apparently seemed to have a different opinion.

"Did you know he used to talk about taking you with him?" Sophitia waited for the inevitable surprised shake of the head. "I didn't think you would. As far as I know, Mitsurugi and I were the only ones he felt safe enough to divulge that information to."

Mitsurugi knew about something like that? Why had he never mentioned it to Siegfried? It certainly would have helped him emotionally if someone would have had the courtesy to relay that little bit of information to him.

"He had sworn us to secrecy." Sophitia went on to explain. "Link, at the time, still had no way of knowing if such a thing was possible. He didn't want you getting your hopes up if something didn't work out the way he wanted it to."

It still would have been nice to know. Emotional turmoil wasn't fun in the least.

"For a good while he thought he had everything planned out. All it would really take was one more passenger on the trip back to his world. He thought about making space for you in his home, thought of showing you everything about his homeland, and the two of you could have lived out your days with someone who cared."

"Then why didn't he ask me?" Had Siegfried done something wrong? Link had apparently been so determined that the two of them should wind up in the same world. What made him change his mind?

"He had a dream one night. In it, his goddesses told him that they knew of his plan. In no uncertain terms they warned him of what that action would entail."

"What did they say?"
She took a moment to respond. Siegfried could just picture her eyes wavering slightly, a recollection of a bad memory coming to her mind. "Three years is all they would give him. Three years in his world, and through some circumstance or another, you would die."

Could the eternal beings of Link's world really be so terrible? The German knew they could be unfair, but could they honestly be as cruel as what he just heard? "That dream, was it real?"

"Link seemed to think it was. That night he ran into my room crying. He was so upset it had taken both Mitsurugi and me settling him down enough for him to get back to sleep, and he only promised to go back to bed if he could sleep next to you."

Siegfried vaguely remembered that night. He had been half asleep when Mitsurugi suddenly shook him awake. When the knight finally got into a decent state of consciousness, he had asked, irritably, what was going on. Link appeared by the bed a second later, shaking and unable to form a coherent sentence. Siegfried had no idea what made him understand what the boy wanted, but he had known somehow. He had lifted the blankets without a second thought, urging the boy to climb in next to him. Link refused to remove his head from the knight's chest at any point during the night. Though he thought it odd, Siegfried had quickly forgotten all about such things and fell back asleep once Link's breathing evened out. Now he wondered. Had Link been listening to his heartbeat?

"He didn't talk about taking you with him after that."

"I still would have gone." Siegfried found himself saying. "Even if that dream had been a real threat, I still would have gone with him if he asked me to."

She chuckled a bit. "I'm sure you would have. That is precisely why Link never told you about it. He was terrified. He could be reborn again, but you only had one life to live. Even though it killed him inside he would rather you live on in this world than cut your life short just to quench his loneliness."

Link really was that selfless. He would break any law of time and space just to ensure the comfort of those he cared about. Even if it meant he was in eternal torment, he would do everything to have those he loved living in happiness forever.

The hallway was silent after that. Siegfried, oddly enough, was no longer bothered by it. The monsters in his mind were no longer plaguing him. Sophitia's kind words, dripping with a love laced secret, had kept them at bay.

Link would not hate him. Link had cared about him, still cared about him. Link had loved him, still loved him, even if it was not in the same way that Siegfried did. The knight would not be tossed away, and Sophitia would no doubt see to it that no one else gave him a hard time about his feelings. He was safe for the time being.

"Are you okay now?" He heard her ask. "Do you feel any better?"

"Much better." He liked the certainty of his own voice. He was happy to have it back. "Thanks."

The two stood up a second later, and Sophitia escorted the knight back to his room. With each step he felt a bit more of his self esteem returning to him. It had been gravely injured, almost in critical condition after Cassandra's rapid fire tongue. Sophitia had been a saint, soothing and consoling until it was back to what it had been before. It was amazing how one sister could crush his heart so badly, while the other could mend it until it was back to its former glory.

Again, he had to wonder, was that done on purpose?

"Will Patroklos and Pyrrha be alright?" he asked before he retired to bed for the second time that
day. "I think I really scared them."

Sophitia shook her head. "They'll be fine. I had Rothion explain things to them. He may not know everything about the situation at hand, but he knows enough about his own children. The two of them will be their usual cheerful selves by morning."

Siegfried let out a relieved sigh. He would never forgive himself if the brother and sister were to be permanently scarred because of what he had done. Those children had never been anything but good to him. They loved and accepted him as one of their own, called him by a family name without any kind of outside expectation. They were precious to Siegfried. He did not want them to be afraid of him.

"Do you think they'll act differently around me?"

Sophitia shook her head. "You underestimate their ability to understand. They've been angry before, and they've broken quite a bit during those times. They'll have no trouble understanding you."

"That's good." He yawned, and he became aware of just how tired he really was.

Sophitia gently pushed him inside. "Off to bed with you. You'll need the energy for tomorrow."

Siegfried nodded tiredly. "Are you going to bed too?"

"In a little while. If I'm not mistaken, a certain aggravated Samurai will need a drink to get him through the rest of the night."

Siegfried chuckled. "You're not going to give him any alcohol are you?"

"Unless that's what they're calling tea these days, then no."

The knight bid his hostess a goodnight before finally closing his door. He then proceeded to prepare himself for a decent night's sleep. The day ahead would bring a lot of stagnant issues to attention. He would need to discuss and divulge his own feelings, as least to an extent, to the other members in his group while keeping a suitable amount of dignity around his person. He would also need to patch things up with Cassandra the best he could, and make sure to threaten an understanding into the princess. There would not be a repeat of the night's events ever again if he had anything to say about it.

But right now, he just needed to sleep.

"I don't ask for much." he thought as he tucked himself into bed. "But, tonight, I want to dream of him. And for the love of God," He slowly closed his eyes. "Can it please be a nice one?"

Mitsurugi was not normally a gentle man. It was not in his nature to baby the idiots of the world and humor them by telling them that situations were not their fault. The world was a cruel being, and he happened to be of the opinion that he was a great deal fairer than it was.

His only exceptions were when dealing with the deathly ill, Link, or small infants who could not...
Cassandra did not fit into any of the three categories, and he normally would have demanded an explanation for her actions regardless of how much she was 'hurting', but that would do him no good with this girl. She was a complicated creature, more so than any other female he had ever encountered. If he met her with demands while she still had something to whine about, she would clam up and refuse to speak to him for the rest of the evening.

He needed her to explain a few things, fill in a few blanks, and she could not do that if she were silent. Her wound would have to be treated. Then the samurai could lure her into a small false sense of security and coax out answers from her. Those answers would likely come in the form of intense shrills and banshee like screeches, but they would be answers nonetheless.

The injury was not serious. Cassandra's hand was bleeding, but the flow was nothing to worry about. She was lucky no shards had managed to slice through the more delicate parts of her upper arm. That would have been a much more serious wound, and might have needed more medical attention than those in the house were able to give. As it was, she just needed some simple first aid.

The bathroom was lit by a few candles and a generous amount of moonlight. All the samurai had at his disposal was a basin of water, some bandages, and a whole lot of patience. He needed a drink, something strong preferably.

"Your glove captured most of the smaller shards, and only the big ones managed to get through. Those were far fewer and did a lot less damage collectively. Consider yourself lucky."

She winced when he dislodged a very wedged in piece of glass. "You call this being lucky? It hurts!"

"It could have hurt a lot worse. Now hold still."

She fidgeted. "You're hurting me."

"The glass is hurting you, and I wouldn't be if you would just stay quiet and hold still."

She winced again when he yanked out another shard. However, she remained steady and refused to move. "Sophy would have been gentler."

"Sophy is busy looking after Siegfried. A man you just so happened to enrage to the point of injury." His eyes met hers then. His stare was cold, accusing, and just this side of demanding. "You really should be ashamed of yourself."

She stared back at him, the picture of perfect defiance. "He got what he deserved."

"And what exactly did he deserve?"

"Being told the truth."

"Which was?" Honestly, his patience only went so far.

"That he was a monster."

And that was when the line was drawn and the swords were unsheathed. "You did what?" He could not believe what he was hearing. That word had been taboo since day one of working with Siegfried. Link had ensured, painfully, it was never uttered within a hundred feet of the knight. And she had just blurted it out to him? When he really did not need to hear it? "What the hell is the matter
with you? Didn't your parents raise you better than that?"

She turned away. Why was it that people thought turning away from him meant that he would suddenly become oblivious to what they were thinking? It was starting to get aggravating. "He started it."

Mitsurugi rolled his eyes. He should have expected that kind of answer from her. Why he was secretly hoping for an adult's response was beyond him. Cassandra was still the same girl she had been two years ago. She was still far more childish than her young niece and nephew, and she could still give him a headache in ten words or less.

"This is the argument you're going to present to me? That's honestly the best you can do?" He now knew this conversation would not end well. It was likely to start the fireworks early on. "The only thing that will get you is a whack on the head for stupidity."

"You wouldn't."

He dunked her hand a bit too harshly into the basin of water. "Try me."

She would not dare. Cassandra was bold, stupidly stubborn at times, but she knew better than to push her luck with him. Normally she would not even test her luck with Siegfried. There was a sort of silent agreement between the two of them. It kept her mouth shut when it needed to be around him, and kept his temper in check when dealing with her constant mood swings.

In a sense, the two of them were like siblings, a pair involuntarily put together with no choice but to have a common foreground of respect. They both knew how to push the others buttons, but they also knew when to stop pushing for fear of severe repercussions. Cassandra knew all too well what could happen if she were to ignore the signals telling her to stop.

Siegfried could hit hard too, both physically and verbally. Even if he chose not to hit Cassandra out of sheer force of will, he could still cut deep with a few choice words. His were always much more carefully selected than hers. The German had a sharp tongue once you got him going, and he could seriously hurt a person if he managed to hit the jugular. Cassandra was not up to par with him in that respect. As a result, she usually did not invite such situations to happen often. She knew she would end up losing in the end. Tonight had been something new.

"Are you going to tell me exactly what started all this? You don't usually try to decapitate your dinner guests with buckets."

She took back her hand. No doubt it was stinging from the treatment it received. "It's none of your business."

He had to be careful now. She would cut him off completely if he did not bait her well enough. Whether or not she wanted to give them, he would still receive answers come hell or high water. "Try again. Siegfried ran out of that room in quiet shame and Pat and Pyrrha were just ushered out in tears,"

"They're none of your business."

He rolled his eyes again. He wondered how on earth she thought repeating the same argument over and over would help her win anything. "If you really cared about them, you would have stopped fighting with him when you saw they had entered the room." He narrowed his eyes. "You're running out of excuses. Come up with some more or I'll have to end this conversation."

"Why am I the one in trouble? Why don't you go yell at him?"
"Why should I?"

"Because it's his fault!"

Yet she still refused to tell him why. He would have to try a different approach. "For what? Gathering us all together like this? At least having a plan to get us through this mess? For getting us around quicker than we normally would have? Please enlighten me."

She glared at him. "Tell, me Mitsurugi, who's in charge of this rescue mission?"

"Siegfried is."

"Why?"

"Because Link asked for him specifically."

"Is that what he told you?"

He raised an eyebrow. "Yes, that was the way the story was told to me."

"So Zelda didn't tell you directly?"

"No." So this was where the problems began. "I take it she told you her version?"

"She told me the truth."

Or at least her version of it. Royalty always had such a creative way of spinning a story. "And what did she say was the truth?"

"Link told her to find several people to help her save him. Siegfried never wanted to mention it to anyone because he wanted to be the one responsible for saving Link."

Mitsurugi let out a frustrated breath. "Let me tell you two very big problems with that story. One, I highly doubt Link had time to give her any lengthy list of names while being viciously attacked by Soul Edge. At most he maybe had time for two, and he could not possibly have had the time to say which one he preferred. Two, even if we suppose that he had been able to do all the above, Siegfried is in no position to 'play' hero. He needs help, and the fact that he willingly went around asking for it, making himself look weaker in the process, seems to dismiss any theory saying he wanted sole glory."

"Then why not give anyone the opportunity to lead? It's not like he has the experience for this kind of thing anyway."

"Who else would you have lead us then, Cassandra?" He expected her to point him out, or perhaps suggest her sister. Even Ivy was a possibility.

What she said instead surprised him. "What about Zelda?"

"Oh yes, let's let the damsel in distress lead us to the hero she got locked up. How very wise of you. In the meantime, why don't I walk out in a dress and parade around the city singing a variety of old folk songs in Latin?"

Her face turned red in humiliation. "I'm being serious!"

"Could have fooled me. Why on earth are you taking her word over Siegfried's?" That princess was the Athenian's competition, not her friend. It made no sense for her to suddenly start believing in
everything the girl was saying.

"Don't tell me you haven't noticed them."

"Noticed what? Stop beating around the bush and get specific."

"Her bruises." she said. "The marks she got because of Siegfried."

"What marks?" He had not seen any, but the girl must have had them hidden somewhere on her body, and it looked like she had found the perfect opportunity to use them to her benefit.

"There's one on her lower arm that he admits to causing."

"From when he took hold of her wrist the night they met. Yes, I knew about that one." He assumed that was the one she was talking about. He had never seen the knight grab hold of her anywhere else but her wrist since he met up with the two of them, and even then he was hesitant to touch her.

"What about the one on her back?"

"She has one on her back?" Siegfried could not have possibly done that. There were very few ways to scar a person from behind messily enough to leave a mark, yet carefully enough to make it so that the one injured can still move. Siegfried had no idea how to do that. He was either going in for the kill or holding back to teach a lesson. There was never and in between with him.

"Yeah, she said he did that to her. She also said that he keeps telling people she fell off the horse."

"It wouldn't surprise me." Epona did not like Zelda. It initially surprised the samurai to see the creature act so hostile towards the princess. Epona was normally so well behaved, having been trained from Link's special brand of upbringing. Apparently, she knew a bad seed when she saw one, and she could obviously hold a grudge.

"Epona would never misbehave like that."

"Not normally, no. But when people hurt her master, she can be quite the vengeful being."

Cassandra frowned. "Zelda would never hurt Link."

Oh, Mitsurugi knew that much. The girl would never hurt the boy of her own accord. However, her actions could cause more than enough damage. "Why not?"

"They were friends."

He could not help it. His self control was shot from the long day of constant arguing, and he just could not hold it in any longer. He burst out laughing.

Cassandra did not find it so amusing. "I'm serious."

That was what made it funny. "Friend's. That's a good one."

"She wasn't lying. She said the two of them were close."

"Of course they're somewhat close. They share a forced destiny. That doesn't mean they were friends."

"She knew about him. She knew everything about who he was. Things we didn't even know."
"He was under her rule and they have known each other for, possibly, centuries. Whether they wanted to or not, they would have had to learn about each other to survive." The only one who ever really knew Link was Siegfried.

Link never made an attempt to fully open his heart to anyone else. Not even to the rest of his traveling team. It was not as if the Hylian did not trust them. He loved his old team, cared for them, and held them in the highest esteem. Again, it was not about who they were to him. What it came down to was who they were not. They were not Siegfried. They were not the knight who had been with the boy since day one. So they were not the ones who were privy to all those secrets and intimate kind of knowledge.

"That's not what she said."

"Then, she was lying to you."

Something flashed in Cassandra's eyes. Something akin to horror and disbelief mixed together in one flurried broth. Mitsurugi was getting through to her, just a little bit, even though she did not want to listen to him. "She said they were friends. They way she talked about him--"

"He never wanted to be anywhere near her." the samurai told her pointedly. "She may have wanted that to be the case, but he did not reciprocate her feelings."

"She said he was like a brother to her."

Mitsurugi scoffed. "Yeah, a brother she would love to commit incest with." He wished he had been present for the girl's conversation. The things he would have loved to dispute, the points he would have loved to tear down. The comments he would have loved to laugh at. If only he had been aware that such a conversation was taking place.

"You're lying."

"Oh I'm lying?" He was tired of playing this game, and his headache had grown considerably worse within the last few minutes. "Tell me Cassandra, how long have you known this girl?"

"...One day."

"More like a few hours."

"So? What does that-"

Mitsurugi tugged on a clump of her hair. "I'm talking." She shut her mouth immediately, but he did not let go of her hair. It was best to have insurance in these kinds of instances. "And in those short few hours has the girl done anything worthy of your trust?"

"I guess not, not really."

"You guess? Not really? It's a yes or no question. Answer as such."

"...no."

"Despite the fact that she is indeed not worthy of your trust, as we have both established, why on earth would you listen to a word she said?"

"What she said was true!" Cassandra was sure about that. She lost quite a bit of her confidence during the course of the conversation, but this she had absolutely no qualms about feeling sure about.
"When she talked about us, she just seemed to know everything. The way we were, the things we liked, our general attitudes. How could she have not known about us if Link didn't tell her?"

"I'm sure she could have found a way. In fact, I'm almost certain I know how she did it. Tell me, during her little story, did she fidget a lot?"

"Yeah, she was nervous about Siegfried walking in."

"Even though he was fast asleep and was so exhausted he could hardly remind himself to breath?" She did not answer. "So she was fidgeting and she was nervous. Did she look around a lot? Seem hesitant to speak at times?"

Cassandra frowned and tried to look the other way. It was rather hard to do so when he still had a grip on her hair. "Yes and yes."

"I have one last question. Did she barely manage to look you in the eye?"

The rage returned. He could see the fire beginning to spring to life in her eyes. It would have transferred to her mouth had he not yanked her hair again to remind her who was in charge of this conversation.

"Let me tell you what smart, calm, rational people make of all of that. She was lying. She was lying and she was scared you would not believe her. So to turn matters towards her favor, she began feeding you information you already knew. Information Siegfried gave her when they so she would know who was likely to kill her and who would only scowl. However, in doing so, he also gave her a method to prove someone told her all about us. You mistakenly thought that person was Link."

"So what she said about her and Link?"

"All a fantasy she would love to see come to fruit. You were fooled Cassandra, and you took your stupidity out on Siegfried."

She narrowed her eyes. "If I told you I didn't believe you?"

"Then you're a lot dumber than I thought and a lot less likely to listen to reason."

"Oh shut up! You barely ever talked to Link kindly, and I never once heard you praise him! Maybe you're just jealous that I mean so much to him."

"That you mean so much? A bit cocky, aren't you? I don't recall him ever saying anything like that."

She realized her mistake, but she was not backing down. "What do you know?"

"I know that your sister would have never been foolish enough to make such a horrible mistake." That was low. It seemed he had been hitting below the belt a lot lately. He would feel guilty about it later. Right now, he needed to make a point. "You're so desperate to be number one in someone's heart that you forget you have a brain that needs to be listened to every once in a while. Maybe you should start wondering why Siegfried was so much more important to Link than anyone else, instead of blaming him for the boy's emotions, since I have a feeling that was why you were so easily fooled."

Her face was flushed. He let go of the hair he still had enslaved and she quickly looked. Her hand was still being coddled. Now it was shaking slightly, and she had to turn it into a fist to keep it steady. She was humiliated, she was forcibly humbled, and she was ashamed. All of that had brought her to silence.
"You need to stop being so selfish. Don't persecute Siegfried because he was special to the boy. It makes you too much like the princess. When you're like her, you get desperate enough to trick people."

Mitsurugi was not a gentle man. He had to be harsh, as the life of a samurai had demanded a hard countenance from day one. He would speak out on what he believed to be true. He would bluntly let you know his opinions on matters if you got him involved. He would not pull punches, or take it easy on anyone. That was the way he treated everybody in life, minus the sick, the young, and Link.

But when he stopped in the doorway on his way out of the bathroom, he turned to look back at Cassandra. She was crying silently, doubled over and shaking with suppressed sobs. She was suffering because of him.

He walked out of the room without another word. But for a minute, he truly wished that he could afford to make her an exception to his rule.

Mitsurugi could hardly understand how Sophitia did it every day. How she could soothe and understand the fragile hearts of her own children, take time to comfort the members of her old traveling group as though they were her own, and still manage to calmly brew him a batch of tea for his shaken nerves without complaint was beyond him. Mitsurugi had only been handling the overly emotional roller coaster for one day and he already felt like crawling into an early grave and nailing his own coffin shut.

"I don't think we've ever fully appreciated you." he said once she sat down with him at the table. "I don't even think I've ever fully comprehended what it is you do."

She smiled at him.

The samurai could understand how Siegfried allowed himself to open up to her so freely. It had nothing to do with how much of an authority she possessed in the group, as he had originally thought. Sophitia knew how to make you feel safe. She knew how to ease your guard down without making you feel afraid or desperate enough to withdraw from her. Just seeing her smile at you, no judgment in the way she looked at you, was enough to have you sharing all the secrets within your soul.

"Drink." she urged as she placed the cup of tea in his hands. "It'll help you some."

He took a long sip. He detected a hint of lavender, an herb that helped with sleep as well as calming fragile nerves. She used to make this particular brew for Link, as he had an affinity for the plant. She must have also added in some honey to sweeten the blend. Mitsurugi always preferred it to sugar in any tea he drank, and he could always taste when it was present. It figured. She was the type to remember what was needed to comfort people.

"I had no idea what I was doing." he admitted. "I went to talk to Cassandra, and all she did was argue with me. I was blunt, I was crude, and I didn't even take a moment to realize what I was saying to her until she was silent. Then I just left her there to think about what she'd done." He massaged the area around his temple, hoping to stop the headache he felt coming on again. "I did the same thing with Raphael. I was unfair to them both."
Sophitia smiled softly. "I know it might seem that way, but that is unfortunately how you deal with someone of Cassandra's nature. You have to be blunt with her, otherwise she tends to not take you seriously enough. It's the same with Raphael." She took a sip of her own drink, finding strength in the warmth it had.

"It's not like that with Siegfried." The samurai said sadly.

She shook her head. "I'm afraid not. Strong though Siegfried may be, he is not the type to benefit from that kind of confrontation. That was why the argument with Cassy hurt him so much. Hard headed arguments only work for the hard head." A saddened look passed through her eyes. "Too many people rely on that kind of argument for every single situation."

"I take it you disapprove of that method?"

She nodded. "Being harsh relies on breaking down someone's defenses to make them see your point. Siegfried has a personality that dwells on the fights he's had, and he tends to think too much about his own contributions to one. That kind of personality is often riddled guilt after any argument, and in the end they destroy their defenses themselves. Being harsh with somebody who already broke down their own walls is only going to destroy them further."

"Meaning, take a fragile heart that hurts itself, break it even further, and all you end up doing is shattering it altogether?"

She nodded again. "Cassandra added salt to a wound that had just been opened by Siegfried himself. She hadn't even given him time to heal before she rushed in, adding her input into a situation that was none of her business. Siegfried could have really been broken."

"It was because of you that he wasn't."

She tucked a stray hair behind her ear, looking down to the table so that he could not see the flash of red cross her face.

Mitsurugi realized this was probably the first time they had ever had this kind of conversation. In the past, they had accepted their roles in the group and simply acted out their responsibilities as surrogate parents. They did what was expected of them whenever the time called for it. However, they never sat down with each other to consult on how to go about completing those roles to the fullest, or to tell each other how much of a good job they were doing. She was not used to hearing him praise her like this.

"Siegfried's personality needs a gentler nurturing," she added after a moment. "He needs someone to understand him in any argument, to help him understand that he's not going to be hated for what transpired, even if it was his fault."

"Meaning, he does not need someone to blame him since he's already begun to blame himself." It made sense. That was the kind of person Siegfried was. It was who he had become after being a part of Nightmare for so long. He blamed himself for absolutely everything. "Fighting with Zelda beforehand probably didn't help matters either."

Sophitia shook her head. "The fight with her scarred him deeply. Cassandra damaged him further by taking her side when she had no need to. It was not her argument."

"She was hurt more than anything. I think she realized where she stood with Link after hearing where Zelda rested on the boy's spectrum. She could not have made Link stay in this world anymore than Zelda could have kept him in her castle. Siegfried could have, though."
"Jealousy is a nasty emotion I'm afraid. I was surprised, though, to see her take it out on Siegfried more than Zelda."

"The princess is no competition to her. Siegfried is."

Sophitia's eyes widened for a moment, before they relaxed in understanding. "You see it too, then?"

He nodded. "I've suspected it for a while. Even back before Link left, I knew something was going on between them. They were closer than anyone else I'd ever seen, had a bond stronger than any batch of lovers I've known in my lifetime. I even referred to them as soul mates when talking to Raphael."

That made her smile. "He thought we'd hate him for it."

He raised an eyebrow. "He what? Why would we, of all people, hate him for something like that?"

Other people on the outside, the samurai could understand. But they were family. An incredibly odd family, but a family nonetheless. "What would make him think that?"

"Cassandra's reaction for one," She too began rubbing her head. It must have been painful for her to speak about her younger sister so truthfully. He felt honored that she would do so with him. "His own fear of rejection for another."

"Rejection from us?"

"From Link as well, I imagine."

Mitsurugi felt like bashing his head against the table. "How could I not see how much he was torturing himself? How could I not see he needed help?" Had he really gotten so clueless over two short years?

"For what it's worth, it is a lot easier to notice these things with a female intuition."

He could not help but smile. "It doesn't help much, but thanks for trying."

She laughed, and the samurai was reminded of a day when they all had something to smile about. Such days seemed so far away.

"This will get easier," she promised him. "Cassandra will see how wrong she was, and Siegfried will feel better in the morning. Friends who know each other as much as we do seldom stay mad for long."

"I wish I could believe that."

She raised an eyebrow. "Is that doubt I hear?"

"It's simply realistic expectations. I hardly think Cassandra will realize her mistake so soon."

"Sophy, Mitsurugi," The two at the table turned to see a fidgeting Cassandra standing at the doorway to the kitchen. She looked absolutely everywhere but directly at them, but they could see the look of shame. "I'm sorry."

Mitsurugi turned to look at Sophitia, who merely smiled cheekily back at him.

"I was acting like a brat. I shouldn't have put myself in the middle of something I had no place in."

Sophitia almost looked smug, while Mitsurugi could barely hold back his astonishment.
"We're not the one's you should be apologizing to," he managed to say to the younger blonde.

She fidgeted even more. "I know, but Siegfried wouldn't open the door when I tried knocking."

Sophitia rose from her seat and went to pat her little sister on the head. "He probably just fell asleep. You can try again in the morning." Cassandra nodded and looked up to Sophitia, a small question in her eyes. Sophitia turned to Mitsurugi with a smile. "She wants to be tucked in."

"Sophitia!"

"Will you be alright by yourself?"

Mitsurugi waved her off with an amused flick of the wrist. "Go make sure little Cassandra is tucked in safe and sound. Wouldn't want the monsters getting to her, now would we?"

Cassandra, face red in embarrassment, stomped her foot on the ground. She then ran out of the room with an aggravated, "You guys are such idiots!" echoing behind her.

Those left in the room could not help but laugh.

Sophitia was about to follow her sister, with a somewhat half hearted apology at the ready, when she heard the samurai call her name. Confused, she turned to see one of the most sincere smiles she had ever seen grace Mitsurugi's features.

"Thanks Sophitia. I don't think I'll ever be able to say that enough to you."

She smiled too. "It was nothing. Please don't feel like you owe me anything."

"Trust me. What you do is not 'nothing'."

She turned red slightly, but the grin on her face could not have been any prouder. "You speak too highly of me. I'm not so grand as to deserve it."

He laughed. "I disagree. After all, amongst other things, you are the mother of my children."

The laughter that rang through the house after that was enough to put everyone at ease.

Chapter End Notes

...I'll be over there in the shameful non-updating corner.
Light and Shadow meet again, more personal an interaction than a simple fight against inner demons.

His body was numb. Completely, entirely, and so tragically numb there was no sensation that could reach him. Heat, chills, pain, the weight of something against his body, it was all the same to him now. His skin was too tired to make distinctions between one or the other and the very cells that once told him what he touched could no longer handle the torment they were receiving. They simply stopped working altogether.

Link knew this was only the beginning. The beginning of his suffering, the beginning of Soul Edge's revenge, and the beginning of the end of this current life. The clock had started ticking the second the portal to Siegfried's world was closed. Link no longer knew what day it was, what season it was, or even what hour of the day had come and gone. Time could no longer be measured in such a way. It now had to be calculated in his body's natural ability to remain functioning enough to be considered alive. In that sense, time was starting to run out.

He could no longer feel. That meant his body could no longer regulate its natural temperature. If certain areas started to chill, he was not able to tell. As a result, those areas would not get the warmth they desperately needed. If he were to get warmer than considered normal, perhaps because of a fever or a virus, he would not be aware of the dangers plaguing him until it was too late. Not to mention that since he could no longer feel pain, he no longer knew how close his body was to deteriorating. Because he did not know such crucial information, he did not know how to properly keep himself alive.

The food he was receiving was beginning to dwindle. Soul Edge was trying to break his spirit, tame his soul into some pitiful little thing he could control. He would begin with the physical. Weaken the body, and the mind would eventually follow. Three days without water. One week without food. Seven nights without blankets followed by seven days without a means to cool himself from the heat. Lather, rinse, repeat. That schedule had been repeated to Link so many times he could match it syllable for syllable whenever someone would say it to him again.

To an extent, those methods were starting to work. His body was slowly shutting down. It would not be long until he started hallucinating, his tired husk going on autopilot in order to survive. At this rate he might even start trying to change into his wolf form to hunt down some of the local rodents for a decent meal, but that would be a last resort. His body may have been showing signs of surrender, but his will was still working at a hundred percent efficiency. It would keep him grounded.

Link would never allow a sword of all things to conquer him. Not in his own homeland. Not with his own power. He had yet to be defeated by a mortal enemy in any life. He was not going to be outdone by his own flesh and blood now. If he had to, he would force himself to survive the ordeal. If it took biting his tongue until he bled, or screaming the truths of reality until he cried, then so be it. He was not about to lay down and die. Not without seeing Siegfried one last time.
The knight would come for him. He had never let Link down before and he would not start now. No matter how much time had passed in that world, if Siegfried was still alive, he would come for Link. The Hylian had a hard time feeling certain about anything these days, but he knew that to be true. Siegfried was moving heaven and earth to come to his aid. He just had to be patient.

If there was one thing Link was thankful for down in these dungeons, it was that he was now literally in the correct position for it. In the beginning of his imprisonment, Soul Edge had him chained to the wall as he was standing. When his legs began to quiver, and his arms began to slouch, the sword had seen fit to take pity on his prisoner. He elongated the chains so that Link could now sit on the floor, arms free to move about or remain motionless at his side, with his back against the dirty stone walls for support. The position helped him rest a bit easier when it was time to sleep, and it lessened the amount of his discomfort a great deal.

Link knew, however, that this was in no way a sign of mercy. Soul Edge was testing him. He either wanted Link to reach a breaking point in the form of a desperate surrender, or see how far to death he could bring the boy before he had to stop and treat the wounds before reopening them again. It was all a game. A sick twisted little game that the former Hero of Time did not have an advantage in.

Soul Edge knew how to torment, the warrior would give him that. He knew how to rip apart a person's sense of self better than anything else in this world and he knew how to do it from the inside out, in very creative and unorthodox methods.

"Don't you look comfortable?" One such method was standing before him carrying a small tray of rations.

Link set eyes on a carbon copy of himself. One dressed in black where green should have been. Cold red replaced what should have been warm blue, and what was golden on one had been dulled to an eerie silver on the other. Link knew this individual well. How could he not be familiar with his own dark side? "Hi Dusk. Your day's been pleasant, I hope?"

His counterpart scowled and dropped the tray on the floor. What little water there was, which had been placed inside a broken tin can, was splashing about, spilling on whatever pieces of food Link was graciously being given that day. Dark Link kicked the tray over to his lighter half, only half-heartedly watching to make sure it slid somewhat smoothly to its destination.

Link smiled when it reached him. "Thanks." Better to show as little negative emotions as he could. It was not the other's fault, so copping an attitude would only fuel the assumption that was starting to crack.

Again, Dark Link scowled. "You shouldn't be thanking me. That bread's gone stale, the cheese has been sitting out in the sun for days, and that water used to be fresh until it was purposely placed in a rusted can. That meal could kill you."

Link shrugged. "I take my chances with the cheese, but the bread will only cost me a few teeth at worst. Most of the water should still be good to drink, and even if I ingest some rust, my body can process poisons pretty well."

"Even when it's severely beaten up and too tired to stand?"

The blond winked. "We'll see." He brought the can to his mouth and swallowed the contents in one long, savoring gulp. He could taste no copper on the tip of his tongue. That meant the darker Hylian had been lying about any possible rust contamination. He had only been trying to scare him. "I think I'll be alright. Thanks for the concern, Dusk."
"You really shouldn't call me that." Red eyes narrowed. "I'm Dark Link."

"But that can get so confusing. Link, Dark Link, how is anyone supposed to tell us apart?"

The other growled. "My existence is not meant to give you a playmate to show off to your friends."

"No, you're right. Your existence was created to eliminate mine at the Water Temple." Link found the bread was not too stale when he took a small bite out of it. A bit crusted over, sure, but still salvageable. At least he could eat it without breaking his jaw. "Yet, here you stand before me. Not as a shadow, but more as a twin of sorts." Link looked up at Dark Link, eyes all knowing, yet still very curious. "I wonder why that is."

"You know why." A hand clenched, and seconds later it smashed itself against a cracked brick in the wall. The dark leather surrounding it was cut, as was a small portion of the skin beneath. A trickle of blood started to flow from it. "The new bastard took hold of the one's power. Ever since then, everything you've ever feared has been recreated and let loose in this castle for his personal amusement."

Link's gaze was somber. It was as calm, as cool, as his dark side's voice. "You don't say."

Dark Link narrowed his eyes at the blond. A slow, simmering rage was beginning to fester in harsh red irises. "Everything hero. Armos, Beamos, Stalfos, Floormasters, ReDeads, anything and everything that ever gave you nightmares as a child is back. This time with twice the powers of their originals, ready and willing to serve their new master with deadly accuracy."

Link could hear a slight panic in that voice. He could see the slight tension of the shoulders. He could ever smell the sweat forming on the other's brow. "You seem concerned."

Link kept his mouth shut, remarkably well in his opinion, when his head was suddenly slammed up against the wall a second later. His eyes, he found he could not stop them from closing, opened slowly, taking in the sight of an enraged dark Hylian swordsman. One hand held onto the collar of the hero's tunic while the other crushed his shoulder into the wall to hold him steady. Link had forgotten that speed and strength. He had forgotten the soldier of darkness who had given him the ultimate test of endurance back in the Water Temple.

Link realized it would be best to remember it from this moment onward.

"Don't misunderstand. I couldn't care less about what happens to you." Dark Link snarled. "You've been the bane of my miserable existence since the day I was 'born'. I don't care one way or the other if you die."

"Then why are you here, Dusk?"

The grip on his tunic tightened. "Whether I like it or not, your fate has been intricately tied with mine. That thing you brought into this world has created a hell not even Ganondorf could have unleashed. He gave life to things that should not even exist,"

"Including you." That was why the other was there. That was why he now had human form. "Are you scared Dusk? Are you afraid of what might happen if he were to die? Or are you more frightened of what would happen if he were to live?"

Dark Link was taken aback. His composure was regained seconds later by hissing and wrapping his hands around Link's throat. They encased, but they did not strangle. The hero was still able to breathe at least. "Do not take me for a fool."
"Shall I take you for a coward instead?" Now Link was certain. His darker half would not harm him. Just like Soul Edge, Dark Link was too afraid to send him to the grave. Not yet.

"How dare you?"

"Am I wrong?" Link raised an eyebrow. The question was unneeded. He knew the answer already. "You're afraid, Dusk. Afraid of living and afraid of dying."

Dark Link let him go just then. His show of dominance was doing nothing. Even shackled and chained to a wall, Link still had the upper hand. The son of a gun could still find something to give him an edge in whatever fight he was placed in. With Ganondorf, it was the wizard's inability to gauge his enemy's true power. With Soul Edge, it was the swords constant need of the triforce's power. For Dark Link, it was his own hidden fears.

"The last time you were created, you knew exactly what your fate entailed." Link said, as though the two of them were discussing the weather. "You knew that you belonged to Ganondorf and that you had one mission. Fight and destroy me. If you lost you would die. If you won you would live until Ganondorf killed you himself, or until someone managed to kill him and all his servants in one foul swoop."

"What are you getting at, hero?"

"Now you're unsure. Your master is different, and instead of keeping you as you once were, he changed you entirely." To prove his point, Link grabbed hold of the hand Dark Link had cut earlier and held it in between the two of them. "You can get hurt now, can bleed when your skin rips. You can feel and think and wonder for yourself. You're not a mindless shadow anymore."

Link knew this to be fact. Those eyes were proof enough. They were angry at the moment, and they were filled with intense pent up emotions, but within them was the miraculous truth. Dusk was no longer an entity made out of Link's inner demons. He was his own man now. He was flesh and blood. He was sweat and tears. He was dreams and hopes. He was regret and fear.

"You've tasted what it feels like to breathe and eat and hear your heart beat. You know what living is like for the first time. You don't want to lose it, and that scares you. Your life belongs to your master, but now you don't want to be tied to him anymore, do you?"

Red eyes were narrowed dangerously, but no words were uttered in response to Link's question. So he continued. "He dies and everything keeping you stable is gone. You can't fend for yourself yet, and without him you're little more than an infant dependent on his mother's milk. This time dying alone would hurt so much worse than it did before, and you fear that pain so much you can barely even breathe."

Dusk forced his lungs to function correctly.

"If someone were to rescue me, if someone managed to break through these walls and kill him, you'd be in a lot of trouble." Link let out an empty laugh before smiling at his counterpart. The upward twitch of those lips was knowing, and just this side of accusatory. "Then again, if I were to die, you'd be in even worse of a predicament, wouldn't you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know very well what I mean. Soul Edge does nothing without meaning to, and he didn't give you a body like that just because he felt like it. Just like he hasn't kept me alive all this time out of the goodness of his heart. He needs the power of my triforce, ergo he needs me. Or rather, he needs me
until he can find a suitable replacement that can hold onto it after I die." He took a quick look at Dark Link, just a swift glance up and down, as though he were inspecting him. "Who better than my own shadow, who has no choice but to answer to the one who holds the triforce of power? And who knows. With time, and with both the triforce of power and courage at his finger tips, he might even be able to fully take over your body."

Dark Link scoffed. "Don't try to scare me."

"I don't have to try. You've figured this out on your own. I'm just confirming."

Dark Link stood at full height, ripped his hand away from the hero, and glared down at the boy dangerously. "What are you trying to do, hero? Get me to let you lose? Convince me to attack the damn thing? What?"

Link shrugged. "I'm just striking up conversation." He smiled honestly at the other. "I haven't had anyone to talk to in a while."

"That's because you're a prisoner you idiot. Can't you see that? You're stuck in a room, chained to a wall, suffering at whatever kinds of torment Mother Nature wants to throw at you, being killed slowly and without sympathy, and to top it all off, everyone you could have counted on has left you here to die. What the hell are you smiling about?!

Link did not falter. "Someone out there hasn't forsaken me, and he'll be coming to get me soon."

Dark Link rolled his eyes. "Oh really?"

"That's right."

"You're too optimistic. There is no warrior, save for the ones who have long since died, who could rescue you from here."

"Siegfried could do it."

Dark Link seemed disgusted with the answer.

"No, not disgusted." Link corrected himself. "He's jealous."

"Siegfried this and Siegfried that. I don't know if you've realized it yet, but he's in another world, hero! He is light-years away, and that princess isn't all too good at tracking people down. He may never show up."

The smile softened fondly. "He's always been able to find his way to me when I needed him. This time will be no different."

Dark Link growled and slammed him hand against the wall. Once. Twice. Three times. It hurt, but he would be lying if he said he did not relish the pain. Pain made sense. It was an obvious problem with several understandable solutions. It. Made. Sense. Link did not. "How can you sit there and act so confident? You're going to die, and I'm going to replace you." His hand quivered against the wall. "How can you not be afraid of that?"

Link felt his heart stop. It had been quite some time since he had seen a warrior so truly terrified of what was ahead of him. And Dusk was the last person he would have expected to see cracking so easily under the prospect of an unknown future. He was scared. Truly and honestly scared. The one true warrior of shadows was simply terrified.
Link took in a long breath, tilted his head, and tried to look as reassuring as he could. "Do you know the true meaning of the word courage?"

Dark Link looked towards him from the corner of his eye. "What?"

"For Hylians, the word courage is different from the one used by normal Hyrulians."

"Is there a point to this?"

"Hyrulians use courage as a term to describe people without an ounce of fear in their bodies. Hylians use it to describe people who, though clouded by fear and doubt, carry on with their lives in the hopes that they will succeed." His tone was sincere, and his eyes were so warm. Dusk could hardly believe that glow. "True courage does not stem from the certainty of life. It stems from the hope that something other than oblivion lies at the end of the journey. Courage is the strength you get when you believe in something, someone, more than your own fears."

Dark Link looked confused. He was always confused when it came to Link, but this time the confusion was somehow different in nature. The heart he now had was beating rapidly against his chest, and his stomach was growing warm at the words the hero was speaking. Dark Link could not understand. What was so important about foolish words like those? What made them so powerful they could cause his body to react so strongly?

"You can't believe that. You'd be a fool to believe in such a thing."

"I can't believe in much anymore," Link admitted, eyes fluttering closed. "But I do believe in the bonds of friendship, and I trust him more than anything. I believe he will be my savior this time around." The smile returned. It was strong, confident, and steadfast. Everything that Link was, it was in turn. "You know, it wouldn't hurt for you to put your trust in him too."

Dark Link huffed at the mere suggestion. "Something like me shouldn't believe in anything."

"You're not a thing anymore."

That was true. The blood on his hand, the beat of his heart, the thoughts in his mind, proved that much. "I can't believe in him." he said solemnly. "I don't know the first thing about this knight in shining armor of yours. I don't think he's anywhere near strong enough to free me from this forced destiny. There's only one being I could ever find myself trusting with that kind of task, and he's chained up to a wall."

Link opened one eye. "But he's not dead yet. He's still got more than enough fight left in him to survive until help arrives. And if he trusts that this savior will come, shouldn't you?"

Dark Link shrugged. "You're such a friggin romantic, you know that?"

Link shrugged.

The Hylian promptly turned towards the exit of the cell. He paused, however, just as he reached the doorway. "Don't have any more of what's on that tray. I may have over exaggerated, but it really will get you sicker if you eat too much of it. I'll bring you something better in a little bit. Think you can survive that long, hero?"

"I think I can manage."

Dark Link turned to look at his counterpart. He was glowing, even within the dark confines of his cage. Incredible. "Don't look into this too much. I could care less about your well being, but at this
point, you and I are painfully connected. I don't have much of a choice but to believe you know what you're doing."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence, Dusk. I'll be sure not to disappoint."

"Whatever." Dusk left the room with a mock salute. Before the door was closed, he suddenly felt the urge to say something, anything, to the boy he was leaving behind. "We'll see if this knight really is worthy of your trust. Later, hero."

Link did not feel the usual emptiness when the door was closed and locked. In fact, for the first time in what seemed like centuries, he felt relieved. The temperature of the cell was beginning to cool. A breeze was coming in from the window above him, and by the looks of the dark blue shadow, night was coming to pay him a visit. Miraculously, there was a blanket beside him that Dusk had most likely been ordered to take from him when he delivered those rations. Whether he had simply forgotten or left it there on purpose, Link had yet to determine. Regardless, he knew this night would be spent in some semblance of comfort. He might even go to sleep with a full stomach.

When another breeze entered the room, he picked up the blanket and wrapped it around himself. There was no guarantee of what the next day would hold, but tonight's outcome was certain. He could rest easy.

"Night Siegfried," he whispered as he made himself as comfortable as he could against the wall. "If you don't come soon, Dusk will think I'm a liar. Can't have that, now can we?"

He could almost swear, as he fell into the finer comforts of unconsciousness, that he heard a familiar amused chuckle, and a voice he had treasured for years.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, this ends the original rewrite chapters. Starting next chapter, everything is going to be brand new material. Kind of nervous.
Rebuilding by Brick

Chapter Summary

It takes time to fix things. You start out smaller than you would like.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Siegfried had to give credit where credit was due. He normally preferred not to, credit was often demanded rather than earned, but he had been known to give a word of praise from time to time. It just didn’t happen often.

He was a skeptical man by nature. In his experience people tended to be easily impressed with the supposed ‘wonders’ of their ever growing man made world. It was hard to find one of a kind anything anymore, so people sang praises for the most ordinary of miracles just for the sake of believing such things still existed. It was hard to take what they said to heart. Sure, they could smile and pledge all they wanted, but that didn’t change cold hard facts. Nice compliments did not make the ordinary into something extraordinary.

That was why the knight was so hesitant to let Rothion anywhere near his sword. Sure, he could say he was one of the best smiths in all of Greece, but that did not mean he was unable to somehow irreversibly damage Siegfried’s prized weapon and turn it into a mass of hot steel. Would it be nice to think the man would be nothing less than perfect with his workmanship? Yes, of course it would. Did that mean Siegfried was willing to let his guard down, and hand over the only line of defense he had left in this world, just because it was a nice leap of faith? Absolutely not.

Link, however, was an optimist at heart. He said the man knew what he was doing and he was willing to let him work on his Master Sword with no suspicion. It was difficult to stand back as his friend passed over his own blade with little more than a smile. Siegfried also found it difficult not to give Rothion his weapon when it was Link challenging him to take that little leap of faith.

He thought about simply telling the elf not to do anything too hasty, insisting that he would not follow his lead on this occasion, but the puppy dog eyes were quick to appear and Siegfried knew there was no chance of victory in this matter. He agreed to a quick sharpening, giving the man the benefit of the doubt for Link’s sake, but did give fair warning about what would happen if the sword was not returned to its owner in the same condition it was given.

The Athenian smiled and agreed to the terms. Rothion not only sharpened the weapon, but he also cleaned and polished Siegfried’s Zweihander at no extra charge. The German did his best not to be impressed, but the quality of the work made it difficult. The man was good. He had to admit it, the guy actually knew what he was doing, and he did it well.

“Maybe next time I’ll ask for an upgrade.”

He found his eyes wandering over the various well kept weapons and materials held within the blacksmith shop. For such a small location, it certainly had its fair share of variety to offer. It had been ages since the German had seen this much good quality merchandise with an equal amount of quantity to choose. He was tempted to pick something up from its place on the wall and test it out.
“Maybe I should just get a new one altogether.” Now that he thought about it, it might be a good idea to carry another weapon. Not necessarily one as large as the one he had now, but something else he could use if an emergency happened. A dagger or maybe even a small spear would be nice.

Whatever he decided on, he would have to wait a few days to relay the order to the blacksmith. Rothion was currently preoccupied with other important matters and would be out of town for the next three days. He had a meeting with a very important client who recently purchased an entire stockpile of new weapons.

The knight supposed he could ask the man to give him one when he got back from wherever it was he was traveling to, but asking for something right at that moment would be unwise. Rothion was still finishing up the necessary packing. If the knight was not careful, he would wind up on that three day trip as well. Siegfried appreciated what the man had done for him, but he had no desire to become anyone’s delivery boy.

As he toyed with the idea of what weapon he would ask for, even going so far as to see if there were any Link might find useful, he heard the door behind him slam open. Startled, he turned to see if Rothion had decided to come back for one last look around the workshop. Siegfried was technically not supposed to be there without permission, and his mind was already coming up with a number of excuses as to why he was in there gawking at all the merchandise, when he caught sight of two familiar small children rushing straight to the back of the room.

Pyrrha headed to the back and ducked behind a large anvil. It was slightly worn and riddled with various hammer and scorch marks. It was her father’s favorite anvil and was supposed to bring the weapons forged on it a bit of good luck. Siegfried had no earthly idea how, but who was he to find a method to the madness?

Patroklos flew in after his sister. He chose to duck under a table covered in a thick blue cloth. Rothion would sometimes take his meals in here and Siegfried once made a joke about it being used to hide from his wife when he needed a break. The smith had stuttered and shouted, but he never denied the claim. Today, his son was apparently using it to hide from someone.

The seriousness with which they darted to these hiding spots was astounding. As was their determination to control their fits of giggles. Siegfried did his best not to laugh. He wondered what on earth the two of them were doing, and was just about to open his mouth to ask.

Link ran into the room a second later, eyes bright and cheeks flushed. Whatever he was previously doing tired him out, forcing him to hunch over with his hands on his knees. He took a moment to gather his bearings, and when they returned he stood up straight. It was then that he noticed the knight staring back at him.

“Hey, Siegfried.” Link said with a wave. “Fancy meeting you here.”

Siegfried chuckled. “Don’t you look charming?”

Link looked down to his tunic and boots. Both were covered in shards of grass, mud splatters, and other various unsightly marks. All in all, the blond looked as though he had trekked through every ounce of filth in Athens, and then came back home to bathe in the trash. The smile he wore made it seem as though every second of it had been experienced voluntarily.

“I was playing with Pat and Py. I guess I got a little dirty.”

“A little?”
Link looked down at himself again. “Maybe more than a little.” he admitted. “We’ve been at this since this morning, so you can’t exactly blame me. Fun doesn’t take cleanliness into account.”

Siegfried smiled. “I suppose not.” His eyes darted over to where Pyrrha and Patroklos lay in hiding. “So, where are they now?”

Link pretended to look annoyed. “I don’t have a clue. They ran away from me shouting, “Hide and Seek!” and I haven’t been able to find them since.”

“I see. Quite the predicament you’ve gotten yourself into.”

“Sophitia will be upset with me when she finds out I lost track of them. I don’t suppose you’ve seen them anywhere?”

Siegfried’s gaze flew back to the children’s hiding spots while Link made a show of looking the other way. Pyrrha stifled a batch of laughter, and Patroklos peeked out from under the table long enough to raise a finger to his lips in a silent plea for secrecy.

“Haven’t seen them.”

Link snapped his fingers and pouted. “Man, these kids sure do know how to hide well.”

“How are you ever going to find them?”

Link sent him a secret smile. “Oh, I don’t know. I think they may have outsmarted me this time.”

Siegfried faked a gasp of shock, trying hard not to sound amused when heard a giggles erupt from behind him. “They’ve outsmarted the Hero of Time? Well, I guess we’ll never see them again.”

“Which is sad, really, considering what we’re having for dinner and all.”

“Remind me what that is again?”

The elf winked. “Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten already? Sophitia made us a splendid cake to enjoy. Nice and large and filled with fresh fruit.”

“Ah, that’s right, I remember now. I saw her baking it earlier.” He hoped those two would forgive him for this tall tale, but once Link began a game, it was impossible not to play along.

“It’s a shame. She made it special, so that all five of us could enjoy it.”

“Now it’s down to just the three of us.”

“She’ll probably be so upset about the children that she won’t want to eat. I guess that means more for the two of us.”

Siegfried was lucky he had his back turned to the siblings. They would have been able to see the smile that belied his solemn tone. “It just doesn’t seem fair somehow.”

Link shrugged. “There isn’t much we can do. We can’t find them, and it’ll be time for dinner soon. Unless they magically appear before then, we’ll just have to eat without them.”

Siegfried tried to hold in his laughter at the sound of the disapproving squeal behind the anvil. Link did a tremendous job of keeping a stern face. His eyes were still dancing in glee.

“Can’t we wait for them?” the knight asked. “I’m sure they’ll show up eventually.”
Link pretended to ponder the idea. “For how long?”

“How about until Sophitia calls us to the table?”

“That’ll be in about…” He pretended to ponder again. “Five seconds.”

Pyrrha’ scoffed.

Link held up a hand. For each second that went by, one gloved finger went down. When it was down to that final digit, they heard Sophitia call out,

“Children, dinner’s ready! I have something special for you today!”

There was a quick moment of helpless shrieking before both children burst out of their hiding places and ran straight to the kitchen. Siegfried and Link waited until they were out of sight before they burst out laughing.

“You’re terrible you know that?” the German said through his laughter. “You probably gave those kids heart attacks.”

Link’s shoulder’s shook with unsuppressed mirth. “I’m sorry. I just couldn’t help myself.”

They took a moment to calm themselves before they attempted to speak again. Siegfried was the first to get his bearings back. “There’s no cake waiting for them at their table, is there?”

Link shook his head.

“So what was that splendid surprise Sophitia was talking about?”

Link turned mischievous eyes towards the direction of the door. “A particular assortment of odd looking vegetables that their mom has been meaning to get them to try for ages now.”

“I repeat, you are terrible. You realize they’ll be furious with you for this, don’t you?”

“Hey, growing kids need to eat their veggies.” The Hylian wagged his finger at Siegfried. “If it takes putting on a little show to get them to eat them, what kind of supportive guardian would I be if I was unwilling to do so?”

Siegfried shook his head. “You know what the funniest thing about this is?”

Link tilted his head.

“They’re most likely going to be mad at you for all of four hours before forgetting any of this ever happened.”

“I hope so. I don’t like it when they’re mad at me.”

“You don’t like it when anybody’s mad at you.” Siegfried’s eyes darted to the doorway and he smiled. “You’d make a good father, you know that?”

Link blinked. “I would?”

Siegfried nodded. “You remind me of my own sometimes.” He smiled gently. “He was the clever type. The kind of guy who could trick people into doing what was good for them. He could get me to devour an entire vegetable patch before I realized I didn’t like a square inch of it.”
Link laughed. “He was that good?”

“The best. There were days when I swore I despised him for outsmarting me.” He scratched the back of his head, memories swarming and collecting from the area of his mind where he’d kept them dormant for the past decade or so. “I never could get him back for it.” His eyes suddenly sparkled with realization. “No, I take that back. I did up him once.”

Link raised an eyebrow. “Really?”

“We had both been on leave at the time, and we were actually eating a meal as a family for once. During dessert I stood up and said, with the upmost seriousness, that I had been having a heated affair with a woman named Belinda, who had been a fling from my father’s past. I went on to say that I was tired of living a lie and that I had fathered several small children with my new fiancé.”

“What did your father do?”

“He spit out his wine and food in one colorful array. Then he stood up and told me that I was not funny and should learn not to disrespect my parents in such a way.”

“Ouch.” Link actually felt the need to wince. “That was harsh.”

“His anger didn’t last long. When he finished his mini tirade, three rambunctious blond haired, blue eyed children ran into the room crying out for me, saying, ‘Daddy, we want to meet grandpa!’”

“And how did their ‘grandpa’ take this bit of news?”

“He promptly fell face first into the rest of my mother’s apple pie.” The knight seemed so proud of this fact. “It was worth the few coins I spent hiring those kids.”

Link laughed. “Your poor father.”

“My poor father nothing. That was the first and only time I ever beat him in a match of tricks. I happen to cherish it.” The knight sighed and smiled ruefully after a moment. “He still managed to win in the end. By the next morning, my little ‘secret’ had been told to the entire town, and they all thought it was true. It took me months to get them to believe I was single and not laying down with someone who had once been in bed with my own father. What a nightmare that had been.”

Link reached up and patted the knight on the head. “I still think you had a glorious victory.”

Siegfried ruffled the younger blond’s hair in appreciation. “It’s okay, I’m not bitter about it. I think that’s how the battle between a parent and child should be.”

Link happily agreed. “You know, I know you won’t believe me, but I think you’d make a good father too. Just like your dad.”

Siegfried scoffed.

“I mean it. You’re firm, sweet, playful, and you know how to teach people the ways of life.”

Siegfried almost turned red at the compliments. “You’re too kind. I doubt I’d be any good at taking care of another human being.”

“’You take good care of me.”

Siegfried chuckled. “You’re a special case. You won’t die if I feed you the wrong thing, and you won’t cry every second of every day for no apparent reason.” Just the thought of dealing with small
children sent shivers down his spine. “I don’t do well with kids. They don’t like me.”

“Pat and Py like you.”

“Pat and Py are abnormal. They thing I’m normal for god’s sake!”

Link merely smiled in return. “You’re too hard on yourself. I can see your children going up to be fine upstanding citizens under your care. They’d be kind, loyal, brave, protective--”

“Only around your children.” The knight quickly interrupted. “They’d be completely different around, say, Yuseong’s. Or even Cassandra’s, if she ever managed to find herself a man crazy enough to marry her and give her children.” He hardly even wanted to think of it. The poor metaphorical fool. “Any child of mine would need to have one of yours around to keep their tempers in check. Yours would be fine on their own.”

“Not true.” Link playfully argued. “Any offspring of mine is bound to get into trouble at any given moment. I’ll need your children to keep them grounded when I’m not around.”

Siegfried shook his head in amusement. “Then, you realize that in order for these twerps to live until adulthood, we’d have to have them around the same time?”

“Of course.” His friend answered as though he had already thought of the idea. “And we’d have to live close enough to each other so they could play together.”

“We’d also probably have to be commissioned by the same lord so that our families will never be too far away from each other.”

Link nodded eagerly. “I want a boss with a big castle and lots of land in the country.”

“Big castle, yes, country land, no.”

The blond pouted. “What? Why not?”

“I’m a city boy at heart, Link. My kids are undoubtedly the same. They want to be surrounded by things that are constantly moving and dozens of opportunities at their fingertips.”

Link still had yet to get rid of the pout. “Well, I’m a country boy, and my children are of the same brand. They want enough room to run around and be children in. Besides, how can I teach them to ride horses in the city?”

“Be fair.” Siegfried pleaded. “How can I be expected to teach my children how to interact with society if we’re stuck in the middle of nowhere?”

Link’s eyes softened. He placed a hand under his chin and crossed the other over his waist, thinking how to best to continue the conversation. “You have a point.” His eyes were quick to light up, and both hands went to his hips. He was the perfect image of sheer brilliance coming to fruit in young eyes.

Siegfried could say he blushed because of it. Link had this tendency. It was unknown to the knight what the proper name for it was, or if it even came into practice with anybody but Link, but he knew the other possessed it. It was like this very humble but strong confidence. That or an uncanny ability doused in a bath of good luck. It made Link shine, simply glow, and gave him the ability to personify the most wonderful aspects of life. Most of the time he seemed to embody three main concepts of human life, which were actually three very important foundations in his homeland. Power when he fought. Courage when fear presented itself to him. And wisdom when he showed off that incredible
clever little mind of his. The latter was what he was showing right at that moment.

It was something to behold, and for some reason it made Siegfried nearly breathless. He supposed it was because he had never seen anything like that. Otherworldly aspects of life did not come into mortal form. Not usually. That was what made them something to live by. Because they weren’t human, they were something humans could aspire to. Maybe that’s why Link could embody them. He was not quite human either. He was something so much more…magical, Siegfried supposed.

Right then that magical creature was staring back at Siegfried with the biggest smile he could muster. “How about this? We’ll find a lord with a large country estate outside an equally large city. We’ll build our own houses right in the center of the locations.”

It took the knight a moment to remember what they had been talking about before his mind had wandered. He had to backtrack a bit before he could answer. “Close enough to get to where we need to be quickly, yet far enough away from each to spot any oncoming danger.” He nodded. “Alright, I’m all for it. But your wife is going to hate me by the third year.”

Link tilted his head. “Why’s that?”

“I’m going to have to teach you how to be a knight, properly, the hard way.” the knight said, crossing his arms over his chest. “That means hours upon hours of training. You’ll see more of me than you will of her.”

Link rolled his eyes. “Cocky much?” He smiled playfully. “Your wife is going to despise me for getting you out of the house so often to go exploring. You’ll probably forget what she looks like by the third year. Not to mention that, since I already know how to be a knight, I’ll be running circles around you in no time.”

“Oh really?” Came the amused, but not quite believing, response.

“Really.” Link answered confidently. “Your poor children will be crying off on the side of the road in shame.”

Siegfried scoffed. “Please. I’ll have you so tired and weary that you’ll be licking my boots, pleading with me to let you go home. Then your children will be the ones who’re shamed.”

Link shook his head. “Mine will be far too busy explaining to yours why their father is such a horrible tyrant who cannot seem to conquer such a great hero.” he said as he pointed to himself. “How very sad for you.”

“Oh yeah? Well—” Siegfried paused for a moment. He replayed the conversation back in his mind, bit by bit, and started to laugh.

“What’s so funny?” His companion asked.

Siegfried had to take in a breath to calm himself. “Link, when did we get married and have kids?”

“I have no idea.” The Hylian winked. “But I guess we have a lot of explaining to do to the others.”

They burst out laughing. All the while Siegfried marveled about what he was doing. He was playing. Playing a silly little game where there was nothing to gain but a smile. He could not remember the last time he had done that. Games were for children, and he had only played pretend when there was something he needed from the other individual. He never felt bad about it because the other person was usually doing the same thing. Siegfried just happened to be better at the game than they were.
This was different. This was simple fun. This was joy with no strings attached. This was a game, played with Link, which simply meant enjoyment. How the smaller blond could cause such a reaction in such a supposedly hardened soldier was a mystery, but Siegfried found that he did not mind not knowing the answer to this particular anomaly.

“In all seriousness though,” The knight began after a small moment of silence. “I don’t think I’m very good parent material. Kids don’t like me very much, and I think they can just sense that I’d be no good with them. Something like an anti Siegfried sense.”

Link laughed. “You’re too hard on yourself.”

“You’re just too easy on me.”

The Hylian shook his head, an air of amusement settling comfortably around him. “You’re wrong. You know better than anybody what the rules of any game are, what the rules of any world are, and you know how to teach those around you the proper ways to play. More than that, you’re kind, patient, and willing to please the people closest to you. Any child would be lucky to have you as a father.”

“They’d be luckier with you as a parent. You would actually get along well with them.”

Link smiled sheepishly. “I like kids. They’ve always been a big part of my life. I wouldn’t mind having a couple of my own.”

Siegfried could sense a bit of sadness in the elf’s demeanor. “What’s wrong?”

Link shrugged. “It’s just that... that dream might never come true, that’s all.”

The knight frowned. “Come on, don’t say that. You’re still young. It can happen.”

“It’s not about being young or being able.” Link told him solemnly. “It’s about not really being alive. Or, rather, not having a life that you can claim all your own. I belong to destiny and to my goddesses. I don’t think they’d let me have a child. Even if they did, I’d eventually have to die and be reborn again without them present in my new life. Something like that would hurt too much.”

Siegfried could not stand the tone of that voice. He could not stomach the look in those eyes. Link was in pain, and it had never been more palpable than it was in that one miserable second. Destiny had taken just about everything away from Link, including the possibility of a future. There would be no house to settle down in after a rough day. There would be no family to come home to after all the adventures were said and done. All that awaited the Hero of Time was fighting, chaos, and more fighting topped off with an enormous amount of misplaced responsibility.

Suddenly, Siegfried stood up straight, posture firm and eyes locked in a fierce determination.

Link was so surprised by the sudden change he nearly stood at attention and saluted. The pure authority his freind was radiating made him want to drop to his knee in a bow. “Siegfried?”

The knight placed his hands on the younger mans shoulders. “I need you to listen to me very carefully.”

Link nodded slowly.

“You’ve been through too many trials with far too little gain in return. Your world hasn’t given you much to hope for, but my world is very different.”
“What are you trying to say?”

The knight smiled. “Your goddesses have no control here. They can’t dictate the way you live your life. I won’t let them. For as long as you’re here, you’ll get anything you’ve ever wanted without worrying about the things you’ll have taken from you in return.”

Link swallowed hard. Some distant voice in his mind told him that his face was turning a fetching shade of red right at that moment. Despite that, he could not tear his eyes away from Siegfried’s face. Nor could he stop himself from believing what the other was saying. It all sounded so wonderful, but the reality of the situation was, “I can’t stay here forever. I’ll eventually have to go back home.”

Siegfried’s smile did not falter. “Doesn’t matter.” he said confidently. “I’ll find some way to drag you back here.”

Now Link knew his face was red. He wondered how long it would be before his friend took notice of it. “You can’t.”

“Says who?” Siegfried raised an eyebrow. “Have I not defied destiny before?”

“Well, yeah--”

“Have I not overcome obstacles that should have been impossible?”

“That’s true, but--”

“And have I not made miracles happen by blatantly ignoring common sense?”

“This is different!” Link could not believe he was even having this conversation. When had he ever given thought to someone else, and a human no less, taking control of his twisted destiny? It just could not be done. No matter how strong or absolute someone may have seemed. It just could not happen. “My entire being exists on an entirely different playing field riddled with its own sets of rules to play by. You can’t just change them to suit your mood.”

“Sure I can.” How could he be so sure of himself? “When you’re involved, I can do just about anything.”

From anyone else, that argument would have been a waste of a might-be-decent effort. From Siegfried, it suddenly made the entire flow of the conversation go his way in a perfect alignment. How on Earth did he do that? “You’re insane, you know that?”

“I’ll take that as a compliment.”

Link laughed helplessly. “I honestly don’t know whether to believe you or get you medical attention.”

Siegfried took hold of the back of Link’s head. Slowly, he moved closer until their foreheads were touching. Because of the height difference, Link had to look up to see the other’s eyes.

“This isn’t a proposal on your part, is it?” The Hylian found himself asking without thinking. The premise of the question was embarrassing, and too bad a joke to crack a smile at, but Link could do nothing to take back the poorly thought out words.

The knight he was facing did not bat an eye. “Not the kind you’re thinking of.” Siegfried said with a wink. “It’s more like a friendly proposition.”
“And what exactly does this friendly proposition entail?”

“Let me be the one to handle your destiny here. No goddesses, no princess, no kingdom in mortal peril. Just a knight who holds your best interests at heart.” He smiled, and suddenly Link felt as though he could no longer breathe. “How does that sound?”

“Too good to be true.” And yet, how could he not believe? How could he not take very word as fact when they were being spoken with such certainty? “But I find myself believing every word coming out of your mouth.”

“Good.” Siegfried pulled away and Link’s lungs finally saw fit to function properly again. “Thought you’d see it my way.”

The elf shook his head to clear his mind. It was as though he were emerging from a very pleasant daze, heart beating steadily and filled to the brim with satisfaction. He could hardly name the feeling, but he knew that he liked it regardless of what little sanity it allowed him.“You have this uncanny ability to make my brain turn to mush when you want something from me.” He raised an eyebrow. “Are you sure you’re not some kind of soul sucking demon?”

“That a challenge?”

Link laughed. “Something in my gut tells me you’re dangerous. Yet I can’t seem to tear myself away from you.”

The other shrugged. “It’s a gift. That or animal magnetism.”

Link shook his head again as he made his way out the door. “It’s a type of magnetism all right. I just can’t figure out which one it is.”

There was a fond tenderness in his voice that made Siegfried smile. Link could resist and deny all he wanted, but Siegfried was not going anywhere. Nowhere that the two of them could not travel to together.

Waking up after a nice dream, he decided, was one of the worst things a person could experience in their lives. Sure, give someone a touch of paradise. Let them live in perfection for a moment before ripping it away without any ounce of sympathy. See if that didn't make a person the cruelest being to ever walk the Earth.

It was different when one had been in the midst of a nightmare. Those were things people wanted to end, and waking up from them was more a blessing than a curse. Who wanted to stay in the clutches of a bad dream? No one. But who wanted to remain within a dream that far exceeded reality? Everybody, and if there was someone who claimed otherwise, they were a damn liar.

Siegfried was no exception. Hell, he was the poster child for the theory. He asked for a good dream, and for a change he got what he wanted. However, what he asked for might have been worse than what he was originally going to receive. Link was in his sleeping conscious, frozen in a time when the two of them could laugh and make promises about the future. He was not in the world the knight would wake up to and hat alone made Siegfried want to remain in his bed, never to come out again. If he could get away with it, he might have tried to accomplish the task.
But as it was, “Siegfried, time to get up.” The world had other ideas. “Someone wants to see you.”

The voice was like a bell, ringing softly throughout his ears, filling his head with the whisper of a memory before his eyes had even opened. Still, he could not put a name to the sound. “What time is it?” he asked, just to give him enough time to ease his mind back into a better working order. He hated being so slow to fully awaken.

“Late morning, early afternoon.” the voice said softly in response. If nothing else, he could thank her for keeping the volume of her voice down. It made him want to be easier to deal with, and his mind worked to supply rationale rather than emotion. Soft tones tended to have that affect on him. Anything louder than necessary, for no reason whatsoever, just made him infuriated and eager to be difficult.

It was a smart answer, too. If Siegfried had been given a time too early for his liking, he probably would have gone back to sleep, perhaps after whacking his little alarm clock away. However, the way things were phrased things made him curious enough to remain conscious. “Who's talking to me?”

“Navi.”

Ah. Siegfried tried to remember if the fairy had done something to aggravate him over the past few days. As far as he could remember, she had been nothing but good to him, casting that first initial meeting aside. Actually, he probably owed her a favor or two for the incident with the boars and how harshly he might have accidentally handled her. “Can I ask why you're getting me up at whatever hour it is?”

How many times would he have to have this conversation with people? He was not a morning person, and the chances of a happy outcome was slim to none before noon. People kept testing him, but they had no idea just how bad for their health that was.

“Someone wants to see you.” Navi said, much to Siegfried's surprise.

He thought his old team would be wary of him, at least for a few days. “Who wants to see me?”

Navi hummed a little before answering. “Come with me and find out.”

Siegfried wondered if he could get away with refusing, but he heard stories about this little fairy. Link used to talk about his old traveling companion with a fond but sometimes irritated look in his eyes. The elf said she used to keep him on track, something very much needed at the time, but all Link had wanted to do was explore. He thought her a nag sometimes, but she was just as often a caretaker of sorts. When her partner was sick, she used to be the one to find help or summon a very secret kind of magic to heal any ailments she could. She tried to do what was best for people.

Siegfried knew he was not going to be getting back to sleep at this point. His thoughts were starting to whirl, and Navi didn't seem like she would let him close his eyes again once he opened them. With a sigh, he threw off the covers and let them fall where they would. “I'm up, I'm up.”

“When did you two get up?”

The siblings stayed silent. Instead they smiled, somewhat conspiratorially, arms bent behind their
backs. Siegfried thought they might have been hiding something.

He raised an eyebrow when a minute passed without any reply from them. “Well?” The siblings turned to each other, nodded once, then held out their hands. In their slightly cupped palms were flowers.

Pyrrha's was white while her brother's was a buttery yellow. Siegfried could not for the life of him remember the names of the plants, but he supposed they were bright enough colors to catch the eyes of children.

“Flowers?” he said, because he could not understand the connection between the time of day and the things they were holding. Who woke up just to go frolic in fields? At that age?

They beckoned him closer. Siegfried moved slowly, afraid to spook the children so soon after their traumatic experience the past night, and knelt down in front of them. Pyrrha and Patroklos held the plants up to his face, and thinking they wanted his opinion on what they smelled like, the knight took a quick sniff. They both held a sweet scent, but the white flower held an aroma of cleanliness as well, like sheets drying in the sun. A unique plant, and Siegfried wondered where it came from, how the children knew where to seek it out and how to grab it.

“They smell good.”

Pyrrha's smile brightened. “Take them. They're yours.”

The knight was momentarily taken aback. “These are for me?”

She nodded. “We picked them for you this morning. We can't tell you where, because that's a secret, but we got them specially for you.”

“I wasn't so sure.” Patroklos said, glaring at his sister. “Boys aren't supposed to get flowers as gifts, but she wouldn't be quiet so I picked a non-girly color.”

Siegfried rolled his eyes, but he smiled softly as he took the flowers from their outstretched hands. “Boys can get flowers too, Pat. It's not too common, but they can.”

The blond boy stuck out his tongue. “I never want to get one.”

Siegfried ruffled the boys hair. “You say that now, but you never know.” He smelled the flowers again to demonstrate his point. “The day may come.”

Patroklos pouted. “But you can't do anything with them. “You'll probably lose those before lunch.”

The kid had a point. “Hold on.” Siegfried noticed that the flowers still had a good amount of their stems attached. He tried to tie the two together, tried to keep them as in tact as he could, but his efforts were proving futile. Nothing would stay around his wrist for more than a few seconds and all he was doing was wrecking the plants.

“Hey!” Navi, who had been flying overhead since the knight walked into the room, lowered herself to Siegfried's hand. “Let me try.”

In a matter of minutes the fairy had tied the roots together in the shape of a bracelet around Siegfried's wrist. The flowers were twisted together on the top, and the knight was amazed to see that no petal had been misplaced during the process. When he shook and waved his hand, to see what movement would be too harsh, everything remained still and in tact.
He chuckled. “I'm impressed.”

Navi's wings gave off a light ringing sound. “I've got skills.”

Siegfried just had to laugh. It was too funny, hearing something so silly sound so confident from such a tiny thing. Pyrrha and Patroklos began laughing as well. It was almost enough to erase the images of the night before, when the only thing any of them were doing was crying.

“Do you feel better now?” Patroklos asked softly after a moment.

“Better?” the knight asked, voice just as soft.

Pyrrha nodded, tugging on his shirt sleeve. “Daddy said you were sick last night, and that was why you go so mad at aunty.”

“Raphael said you were in pain.” her brother added. “Since we didn't have any medicine, we had to let you sleep for a while. Only, we woke you up because sleeping so much is bad.”

The poor things. Had they been worried about him all this time? “Yeah, I'm fine now, thank you.”

“What was hurting you?” Patroklos walked over to Siegfried's left. He did not grab at the knight's shirt, but his hand was twitching as though he wanted to.

“What made you so sick?” Pyrrha continued to tug and pull lightly on his shirt.

Siegfried wondered if he should tell them the truth. They were too young to understand the seriousness of it all, and he knew they were not really asking him for in depth details. They just wanted to make sure Siegfried was okay. They wanted to know if he was still hurting somewhere, and if he was, they probably wanted to know how to fix it. “My heart started hurting last night.”

Pyrrha frowned. “That sounds serious.”

“It kind of was.”

“Did you cry?”

“Oh yeah.”

Patroklos began shifting from foot to foot, eyes downcast. “Did auntie Cassandra do it?”

Siegfried didn't know how to answer that either. Did he tell the truth, or just a section of it? “She did part of it.”

Patroklos’ posture instantly tensed. “She shouldn't have done that.” the boy said angrily. “You can't hurt somebody like that without thinking.”

Pyrrha shushed him. “Pat, you can't say things like that. She's our aunt.”

“Well, he's our uncle, and she was wrong to make him sick.”

Siegfried tried to quiet the children down with gestures and hushes. “It wasn't all her fault, okay? Someone else took the first blow. Your aunt just got dragged into things.”

Now Patroklos was glaring, tired of keeping his gaze on the ground, and the look shocked Siegfried so much he almost missed what the boy said. “It was that stupid princess, wasn't it?”
Pyrrha tried to shush him again. “You can't say that either! She's our guest.”

“She's a whore!”

“Patroklos Alexander!” Siegfried could hardly believe what he was hearing. There was no way a child he helped knock sense into on a daily basis during his stay in Athens would speak like that. He had never dared with Siegfried around. “We do not use that kind of language in this house. Apologize.”

“Why?” Patroklos looked around the room. “There's no one here!”

“I said apologize.” the knight said sternly. The boy was clever, and Siegfried could mentally concede that he had a good point, but no one had to say that aloud. “Say sorry to me for being disrespectful, and then say sorry to your sister for making her hear such harsh language.”

The blond huffed. For a moment it looked like he was ready to ignore Siegfried's order, but the harshness of the air was too much to stand for very long. “Sorry.” he mumbled.

It was hardly enough for Siegfried. “Sorry for what?”

“I'm sorry I was disrespectful and made people hear a bad word.”

Siegfried nodded, pleased that he could make some type of discipline stick when he had to, and ruffled the boy's hair. This behavior was not going to be accepted while he was around, but he wanted Patroklos to know he had been forgiven in a small way. Like Link, Siegfried never did like it when he thought the children were upset with him.

“Come here,” Siegfried pulled both children into his arms.

They wasted no time in bombarding him with plenty of hugs and kisses. There was normally an air of awkwardness to every show of affection. Siegfried did not know how to take those gestures for what they were without embarrassment. Surprisingly, or maybe not so surprisingly after all, there was only comfort in this instance.

“What about you two?” he asked once they were all settled in a familiar warmth. Patroklos was hanging off his neck and Pyrrha was holding onto his hand like it was her most precious possession. “You looked upset last night.”

“We're alright.” Pyrrha reassured him, and she sounded so much like her mother.

“You sure? You were crying.”

“So were you,” she reminded him. “But you're better now. It's the same with us.”

She made the same kind of sense that Sophitia made, too. It made Siegfried smile. “Did I scare you?”

Pyrrha shook her head. “You just worried us. We didn't know how to fix anything or how to make you better.”

“I'm sorry.” The last thing he wanted was for Pyrrha to feel like she had to push aside her feelings to make sure he was alright. The little girl had gone through too much, seen too many people in pain over steel and greed. She did not need to shoulder Siegfried's pain as well.

But she just smiled at him, and Siegfried wondered if people knew how freeing it was to be forgiven by a child you had wronged. “Us too, for making you worry about us. Can we pretend that last night
was just a bad dream?"

The child was too good to him. “Sounds like a good plan.”

Navi laughed, and again Siegfried heard the twinkle of her wings. “Group hug!”

Siegfried rolled his eyes, but he had to admit he was happy when everyone moved in closer. Navi even fluttered at the top of his head, a stark difference to the way she avoided him like a dangerous anomaly the first time they met. He did not like being this frightening thing people needed to be careful of every second of every day. He was only human.

“You know,” Siegfried said. “You never did tell me why you got up so early. Was it just for the flowers?”

Patroklos shook his head. “Want to go for a walk? There’s a pastry shop down the road from here, and a park we could sit at. It’s nice and quiet and princess-less.”

Siegfried wondered if Patroklos and Pyrrha were just as tired of the atmosphere in the house as the adults were, wondered if they could tell that something less than concrete was making it so much harder to breath. It had not occurred to him that they might have wanted an escape too. “We can do that.”

The three stood up, stretching bones and yawning once for good measure, and dusted off their clothes. It was amazing how any emotional encounter could make the body ache so much, make a man feel as though he had run through an entire village three times over. Siegfried had come out of fights with less soreness in his muscles than the talks he had had over the past twelve hours.

Emotions were such a pain. “Ready to go?”

The siblings cheered their agreements, and Navi called out her well wishes as they made their way to the door. Siegfried paused just before they left, looking back at the fairy still hovering in the air as Pyrrha and Patroklos ran ahead of him. When she stayed still, he frowned.

“You're not coming with us?” He found the thought saddening. “You're welcome anywhere I am, you know. I may not like the princess, but I consider you a dear ally.”

Navi hummed. Siegfried wondered if all fairies sounded so musical. “Truly?”

“Honestly. You were a great help to him once before. I hold you in the highest esteem for that.”

“She helped him once too, you know.” Siegfried could tell she was not trying to be arrogant, was not trying to scold him into seeing a point of view he was being stubborn about, but she did want him to be aware. It seemed to him that she wanted him to have all the facts on the table.

It was a small gesture, but any man worth his weight in gold would appreciate it. “She did it because she wanted him to see her. You did it because you wanted him to see the world.”

She giggled, and damn it if it was not at least a little similar to the way Link used to laugh. “I'm happy to hear you say that, but I think I'm needed here.”

Siegfried shrugged, smiling and walking backwards out the door. He hoped he did not trip over something. “The invitation stands. Wherever I step, you're welcome to flutter along.”

Siegfried knew without asking that Link felt the same way. A child, no matter how big, always welcomed the light that lead the way home.
This marks the beginning of the new chapters I worked on for this story. I'd been dealing with edits up until now, and it's as nerve-wracking as I thought. A good nerve-wracking, but extremely nerve-wracking nonetheless. The chance for mistakes is a little more, so don't feel weird about telling me so I can fix them. Happy readings!
Forgiveness in Understanding

Chapter Summary

When it rains, even if it lifts slightly, it most certainly will pour.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Breakfast had given way to a walk around the town, and soon Pyrrha and Patroklos were dragging Siegfried this way and that, showing him what had changed since the last time he visited Athens. A lot of little things had moved around, people had come and gone, but the place still felt familiar. The buildings were the same pastels he had gotten used to seeing, and people went about their business as though small town life was all they would ever need to claim their focus. Though there was a personal struggle going on within their borders, in the hearts of neighbors they had known for years, they were completely ignorant to those carrying on in torment.

Siegfried envied them.

Eventually, the children grew tired of playing tour guide and their restlessness led them to a nearby park. Siegfried noted the amount of new space in this area since his last visit and noticed that the children had a lot more friends to play with. The knight thought they might have been new faces, children that moved in from other parts of the country, but he could not be sure. All he knew for certain was that his two favorite Alexander children wanted a bit of fun and he was not above keeping watch for an hour or two. Far from it.

It was entirely too easy to watch those kids run and play along with children their own age. It was the only time he could observe without interruption, make predictions about what would become of them, and see what had already grown in them when he was not looking.

Pyrrha was a somewhat delicate little girl who carried her mothers grace with an unknown dignity. Her hair and eyes were her fathers, light as they were, but every other fiber of her being screamed of Sophitia. Siegfried imagined she would grow into the roles her mother had. A kind and tender nurturer, a fighter with a comforting heart and a wisdom beyond most mortal understanding. He could see it in the way she interacted with her friends.

Today, Pyrrha was surrounded by three other little girls. One was loud, obnoxious in attitude and tongue. Siegfried would have assumed she was the leader of the group, and it seemed as though she was used to that arrangement herself. However, in this instance it was inaccurate. Whenever this girl spoke too loudly, whenever that attitude became far too disrespectful even for children, Pyrrha would appear. Pyrrha would stand firm, staring the girl down until she took a respectful step back. Then the brunette would console the other girls who had taken to hiding behind her. All without batting an eye.

“She'll save peoples lives someday.” he thought to himself. “And it'll be with a smile on her face.” An image of Sophitia consoling him the night before came forward. “I'll bet anything she won't even think of taking compensation for it.”

While Pyrrha's character had always been easy to pinpoint, her brothers had alluded the knight for
some time, mostly because Siegfried could not figure out who the boy would emulate later on in his life. His features were his mothers, that much was certain, but that was just about the only thing he inherited from her. Unlike his sister, Patroklos tended to shy away from tender moments between him and his four friends. If they cried, he helped them up but did not dry away tears. If the 'boss' tried to push him around, he pushed back but let his stance do more talking than his mouth. This was nothing like Rothion, who would take a step back and speak calmly. Now that Siegfried thought about it, the boy never did anything by his father's book. It appeared it was fine in print, but it was apparently a terrible foundation for Patroklos.

The boy tended to try and find outside sources to pull strength from, and for a while Siegfried thought Link would be the hero atop the pillar of Patroklos' world. The Hylian had been a prominent figure in the boys life, so it would make sense. However, seeing the way Patroklos smacked away the hand of his older friend with a warning to stop picking on the other boys, Siegfried was forced to come to a different conclusion. Especially after he caught Patroklos looking his way, as though looking for approval.

"It's me." Siegfried laughed and nodded encouragingly to the boy, who then joyfully looked back to his friends. "He acts more like me than anyone else."

The revelation made him unspeakably happy. He was not the type of man children usually aspired to. Siegfried just flat out looked like a scary guy, and he had sharp temper that sparked up like lightening if someone pushed him too far. Even the adults in his life were wary of his presence months after making his acquaintance. The Alexander family was one of the biggest exceptions in his life. Sophitia and her children never treated him like an outsider. Sophitia saw him as a son, Pyrrha saw him as one of her guardians, and Patroklos apparently saw him as a hero he should try to be like.

It was new, it was a little odd, but it made his heart beat a lot more normally and brought a smile to his face.

However, there was one aspect of his character he hoped the siblings never saw fit to copy. Siegfried was a fighter, a warrior, a knight. It was no longer a question of if he would ever pick up a weapon again. It was just a matter of how long it was until he took the next swing. That kind of life suited him fine, and now it was all he knew. That did not mean those two kids, those precious little ones, needed to follow in his footsteps.

As far as Siegfried was concerned, they were perfect the way they were. The last thing they needed was to pick up a sword save for games of play. The moment they laid a finger on any hilt, they set their course for a world where the definitions of pain and suffering were rewritten to horrifying degrees. It was a type of pain they did not deserve. They did not even like fighting all that much anyway.

Then again--

"Patroklos and Pyrrha Alexander!" Siegfried's tone was enough to halt the siblings movements. Pyrrha looked ready to slap Patroklos and he was ready to kick his sister in the shin. Meanwhile their friends were cheering, egging them on with quips and false confidence. Siegfried was not sure what fight had broken out between them while he was daydreaming, but he was not about to explain to their mother how they ended up with bruises the size of small fists. "No fighting."

They both pouted, but eventually they pulled away from each other and ushered their groups to opposite areas of the playground. It reminded him of something, of someone he would have to have a serious conversation with very soon.
Siegfried knew he would have to patch things up with her. Time was short, and he could not afford to waste it sitting around awkwardly waiting for the matter to simmer down itself. He needed to move and there was no way he was leaving her behind. She was too valuable an ally with a sense of determination that could rival his own. She may have been emotional and susceptible to suggestion, but she was strong in her own right, in ways Siegfried was unable to reach.

More importantly, she was his friend. They had their ups and downs, but they were true friends. He cared about her, whether she felt the same was still up for debate, but she had just as much at stake in this matter as he did. It was too cruel to leave her behind. Siegfried would just have to fix the situation by whatever means necessary.

If she wanted an apology, he would offer one without complaint. If she wanted him to keep his distance, he would comply without a word. If she wanted him to cook her meals for the rest of the year-- well, she took a risk with his cooking, but he would be happy to prepare three meals a day if that was what it took. Siegfried just needed a point in the right direction, a signal that showed him what she wanted. The answer was around somewhere--

“Siegfried?” The knight was surprised when a shy, quiet voice broke through his thoughts and brought his visual attention away from the children.

He was even more shocked when, upon focusing his eyes on the person who called him, he realized it was the sandy blonde haired Athenian he had been thinking about moments ago. “Cassandra?”

She shifted awkwardly where she stood. “Hi.”

Siegfried stood up. He thought about extending his hand for a shake, but he quickly thought better about it and settled for a small wave. “Hi.”

“Can we,” Cassandra kicked at the ground. “Can we talk?”

“Sure.” Siegfried looked around for a suitable spot. The only area available was the small stone wall he was using as a makeshift bench. There was more than enough room for the two of them, but he doubted she wanted to sit so close to him. “A seat is...”

Cassandra followed his eyes to the stone wall. “I don't mind standing.” She looked up at him, eyes hesitant and body slouched forward slightly.

Siegfried did not know what to make of the behavior, uncharacteristic as it was. “Me neither.” If he stood, he was less likely to flee. Standing meant his body remained stiff and exuded confidence, a habit formed during years of working as a commissioned knight. It was enough to force respect from an opponent.

Right now it only seemed to be making Cassandra uneasy. “So...”

“So...”

For a full five minutes, all they did was stare at each other. Siegfried tried to catch Cassandra's eyes, but every time they locked for more than a second, one of them turned their head away. Siegfried could not remember ever being so uncomfortable in his life. He was not sure whether he should try and speak first or let her have control of the conversation. If she even wanted a conversation in the first place. How was he supposed to read her actions and come up with the right response?

“This is hard.” Cassandra muttered under her breath, but with how quiet the area was, Siegfried
heard every word. “It didn't used to be like this.”

Siegfried shook his head. “Things were always way too easy within the group. We took it for
granted.”

“Doesn't that always happen when you have something too good in your life?” Cassandra sighed
and plopped down on the small stone wall. She patted the spot next to her in an open invitation
Siegfried was surprised to be offered.

Accepting it, however, was as easy to him as breathing. Sitting next to her was a little awkward
given the circumstances, but it was natural in a way he could not explain. Friendship, he supposed,
ever needed to make sense. Even with its ups and downs, it still just was.

Finally, Cassandra broke the silence. “I’m sorry.” she said softly, eyes focused on the ground.
“About all of this.”

Siegfried shook his head, even though he knew she could not see him. “It’s not your fault. I should
have seen this coming. The princess tends to take advantage of people’s emotions. With feelings as
strong as yours, well, I should have known she’d go after you like she did.” He had never been good
at emotional conversation. Cassandra knew this, or at least was mildly aware. Hopefully, she would
forgive him for how awkward he was making the situation. “I should have known better than to
leave you alone.”

Cassandra bit her lip, her fists gripping the hem of her skirt tightly. “It just…hurt. Because he was so
different and…I mean, before we all met, before we even knew Soul Edge could be destroyed, this
town was all I’d ever known. The people, the places, the animals. I knew them so well I could
practically run my week based on nothing more than how they reacted.”

“That doesn’t sound so bad. It actually sounds kind of normal.” And what he would not give for an
ounce of normalcy. Some kind of concrete routine, something that would stay the same regardless of
the shifting circumstances, would be a welcomed change in his life. A nice home country to return
to, a few friends that he was found of, a job he could live off for the rest of his life, something he
could depend on for the next day. That was all he wanted.

Or maybe, he thought with a fond smile, what he really wanted was a house in the middle of a city
and country castle estate with a certain Hylian soldier standing beside him. Siegfried knew that was
what it all came down to in the end.

His idea of normal was a green clad hero waking him up at noon everyday so the two of them could
explore whatever surface of the world they left untouched. Normal to him would be fighting beside a
presence so uniquely magnificent it would leave him unable to breathe properly for the next several
hours. His type of normal meant looking into those mesmerizing eyes, seeing that ever charming
smile, and basking in the ability to be near someone so warm and kind. Normalcy to Siegfried
Schtauffen was standing next to a wonderful human miracle called Link, and knowing that there was
a place he would always belong. To him, normal was just another, more mundane, word for
perfection.

That was why he had never been able to fully understand Cassandra. She was a person who wanted
something different every second of every day. She thrived on changed, welcomed it with such open
arms that Siegfried was just about ready to call in some sort of specialist. He supposed it was simply
part of her nature. Her mind had a passion for constant stimulation. It wanted to be presented with
things she had never seen before, things she had no logical explanation for at on hand.

Maybe that was why she had grown so infatuated with Link. In hindsight, he had not been a man so
much as he had been a legend in mortal form. To her, a girl drowning in village life’s monochrome existence, he must have been a glorious treasure bursting with color and new life. Link had not only been one of the biggest changes in her life, he had been the change to alter it entirely.

“I knew this town.” she said softly. “I knew the expectations. No matter what I wanted in life, I’d eventually have to find a man who thought I was pretty enough to forget what annoyed him and someday have his kids.”

The thought must have horrified her. Cassandra was not the stereotypical housewife. She was not the type of woman who would be satisfied with staying at home waiting for a man’s support with a batch of children biting at her ankles. Nor would she ever be the girl that happily put down her sword in exchange for domestic life. Not with that spirit and not with that passion for an ever shifting existence.

“I didn’t want such a shallow life.” she told him. “I wanted something real, something extraordinary. A real life adventure I could experience with my own senses.” The knight could see her hands start to shake. “I couldn’t get that here.”

Siegfried was well aware of that. Athens was a wonderful city. It had monuments of the past, testaments to the afterlife, and a promising future at its finger tips. It was beautiful, but once you lived within the old stone walls long enough, all its secrets were laid bare before you. It became predictable in the most flinch inducing sense of the word. Even the small surprises life was known for could be anticipated and related to a certain time frame. For warriors like them, even warriors completely opposite of them in personality, it was hardly desirable.

“Then you two came along. And there was Link. A shimmering hero who seemed to come right out of a storybook to save the innocent people around him. When he saved Pat and Py from those bandits, it was--it only--”

“Reinforced that first impression of how incredible he really was.” Link had that kind of effect on people. One look was enough to stun you. One day was enough to have you fall in ways you could never imagine. One week and you would completely hand yourself over to him on a silver platter without complaint if he asked you to.

“Yeah, that’s exactly it.” Cassandra smiled when she thought it over. “At first I thought I was dreaming. There could not possibly be anyone like that in my town. I was suspicious. Then I actually got to know him, and I knew. He was real. No, he wasn’t perfect, but--”

“He was as close as it got.”

“Stop doing that.” Her tone was light, teasing. “It’s a little freaky.”

He chuckled. At least she was happy enough to crack a joke. That was a definite improvement. “I’ll stop.”

“That’s better.” She smiled again, and he held out hope that maybe the conversation would not be as bad as he originally thought. “He was all I thought I’d ever wanted. Kind, strong, unpredictable. He was really something special.”

That he was, and Siegfried was feeling a little validated about his own feelings. Hearing Cassandra speak, it made him realize that it was only a matter of time before his heart shifted so strongly.

“He made me feel special too. I guess he must have been that way with everybody, but it was something new to me. Everyone else acted like I was stuck in some kind of stupid phase. They
treated me like I was a freak. He treated me like I was someone precious to him. But--"

Siegfried mentally cursed when he saw her entire body began to tremble. Her voice had softened further, he noted uncomfortably, and her head was now tilted so that her hair was hiding her face from view. He knew what was coming. He also knew that there was no way he could possibly avoid the outcome. Not with his luck. “Cassy? You okay?”

She nodded, but the act was far from convincing. “I wanted more. I didn’t just want to be his friend. I wanted a relationship, and for awhile I thought he may have wanted one too, but deep down I knew that it wouldn’t happen.”

Siegfried was afraid of Cassandra right then. He was even more terrified than he was the night before, when she came to him with completely based accusations and a thirst for his blood. This was much worse. This time he was not worried about what she would do to him. Now he was more concerned about what she would do to herself while he could do little more than sit there and watch.

“He never liked me that way, and I could tell. What we had was purely platonic.”

Siegfried winced. Platonic. What a horrible little word it was. When had that word ever been used to describe something good? The knight could not remember an instance where that word meant anything decent. Its base was set in rejection and disappointment. Its core was made of hurtful understanding and lines drawn with tears. That word was a curse. It was also a painful reminder to Siegfried about what his relationship with Link amounted to. It was strictly platonic.

“Still, I kept on hoping. As long as he didn’t outright reject me, I could keep on dreaming. As long as no one told me it was pointless, it was okay.”

She was outright shaking now, and even though her voice was trembling it was rising in urgency.

“Then this girl comes straight out of nowhere. She’s just as mysterious and majestic as Link used to be, and she tells me everything I’ve ever wanted to hear. I was just so happy.” One hand left the safety of her lap in order to rub at her face. “I wanted to believe her.”

Siegfried was horrified to see a few drops of water cascade down Cassandra’s face and land effortlessly onto her lap. She did not notice their escape, but the knight was all too aware of them. He had seen them far too much for his liking, and too many people had cried because of his carelessness in the past few days, himself included. The last thing he needed was to have another person reduced to tears.

“I wanted to believe her because it would have hurt more to realize she was lying.”

Siegfried could see them clearly now. Small specks falling into the blonde’s lap without a care in the world. They did not falter. They did not hesitate. Siegfried was somewhat envious that they could accomplish their task so efficiently without any second thoughts. They were just about the only things that could at this point.

“And I’m sorry,” she cried out, placing her head in both of her hands. “Sorry that I hurt you so I wouldn’t be the only one in pain. Sorry I believed her over you just so I could breathe easier. I’m so sorry!”

Siegfried cringed. How was he supposed to handle this a second time? “Cassy?” he asked gently. “Are you crying?” ‘Idiot.’ he thought to himself. ‘Is she crying? No you moron. She’s just shooting water from her eyes!’
Thankfully, Cassandra did not notice his moment of stupidity. She simply shook her head and angrily told him, “No!”

Siegfried wished he knew how to handle feelings, especially when they were brought to him in such a high capacity. As he was now, he was useless when coming into heavy contact with large scale emotion. He usually just made things worse.

It was not because he meant to cause people distress. He just no idea how to make them feel any better. Everyone had hearts that worked in different ways and had different triggers that set them off. What made one person settle down made another frantic. What made one person smile made another want to cry. What made one person let you in only made another shut you out. It was complicated. Most of society could translate the basic emotional code within their acquaintances, but Siegfried was socially stupid. He could barely act as a shoulder to cry on when things got rough.

Link, of course, was the only exception. Siegfried was beginning to see that the elf was quickly becoming the exception to absolutely everything these days.

“I’m fine.” Cassandra’s voice broke through his thoughts a moment later. When he turned to look at her, she was furiously rubbing her eyes. “I don’t why I started crying, but I’m fine.” She was lying. He may not have known much, but he knew she was lying in an attempt to save face.

He would forgive her for it though. He could at least let her have her dignity. “It’s fine.” What else could he say? Was there anything he could utter that would make her stop hurting herself so much? What would Link have done? “There’s nothing for you to feel sorry about. I forgave you last night, before I went to sleep.”

Honestly, he had never really been mad at her. Not for his own sake, anyway. He had been annoyed and quite frustrated with her lack of regard for her nephew and niece, but he bore her no ill will for anything she had done to him. He wanted her to know that. He wanted her to know that she was not going to be hated because of what she felt, even if she was wrong in expressing it. She was still dear to him, even if she had managed to hurt him so badly.

“I forgive you. For everything, understand?”

She smiled at him. Yet, there was still something bothering her. He could see it in her eyes. “Does it make me a bad person to say sorry, yet still somehow stay mad at you?”

So that was it. He smiled reassuringly and shook his head. He was not about to deny her the feelings she had every right to have. “You’re not a bad person. I hurt you, no matter how unintentional it was. You have a right to be mad at me.”

She surprised him by leaning against him, resting her head on his shoulder. He knew he should have felt somewhat uncomfortable with the action, and to a degree he did. Still, he could not find it in him to push her away. For once he knew exactly what it was he needed to do to make someone feel better. So instead of opening his mouth and saying something that would make everything awkward, he let his head fall on top of hers. In the back of his mind he thought of how often Patroklos and Pyrrha would end up in this same position when they finished fighting.

“Siegfried?”

“Hmm?”

“Just to be clear, I didn’t mean what I said last night.”

“I know. You just got caught up in the moment.”
“I sure know how to hit hard don’t I?”

“Oh yeah.”

She giggled. “Is it okay if we just forget this whole thing ever happened?”

“Forget what ever happened?”

She nudged him. It was a subtle sign showing that they were both on the same page. She was still upset with him, and that broken heart of hers would take some time to heal, but this he could handle. Siegfried could take the throws she would aim his way. They were softer now, and at least he knew the reason why they were coming. Knowing made things so much easier to bear. That was probably why he was feeling better about what had occurred the day before. The tears, the heartache, those bitterly sweet dreams, they all made sense.

He was in love with his best friend. It explained everything. He was in love with Link, and he was surprisingly okay with that. In retrospect, he should have seen it coming a mile away. Siegfried had never been in love before, so he had an excuse for not recognizing the signs. However, he could admit he had been ignorant about his own feelings for far too long. It was a miracle no one figured it out sooner.

Who else had Siegfried been so close to? Who else had the knight been so in tune with? Who else had he been so completely and utterly loyal to? No one. No one but Link. What else could it have been but love? Siegfried had just been too dumb to realize it.

“What are you thinking about?”

He wondered if he should answer honestly. The girl’s heart was still wounded, wasn’t it? “Don’t ask questions you don’t want the answers to.”

Surprisingly enough, she was not deterred. “It’s Link isn’t it?”

She asked. So it must be alright to answer her. Right? “Yes. I’ve been thinking about him a lot lately. Though, the feelings associated with those thoughts have shifted a bit.”

“Due to discovery?”

“More like recognition.” He knew the feelings had always been there, after all. Now their true intensity was beginning to show, was all.

Cassandra hummed in response. “Are you scared of them? Your feelings, I mean.”

“I was last night.” Last night they terrified him so much he wanted to throw himself onto his sword. “They don’t scare me now. They’re more or less a comfort, believe it or not.”

“How so?”

“They’re not faceless anymore. They have a name, a core, a purpose, and a rhyme to how they work. It’s hard to fear something you truly understand.”

“Are you going to tell Link about them?”

Siegfried had been thinking about that as well. The knight knew what he was feeling inside. He considered that a benefit. But one sticky questioned remained. Did he let Link in on his little secret? “No. I don’t plan on telling him.”
Cassandra jumped a little, shocked at the response. “Why not?”

“Simple. It would change everything.” Cassandra may have been excited at the prospect of change, but Siegfried was downright terrified of it. He had a relationship with Link as it stood. Granted, it was not the kind he would have preferred at the moment, but it was fulfilling in its own right. It guaranteed him a piece of the elf’s heart. Siegfried considered himself lucky to have as big a piece of it as he did. If it were to lessen, if his meaning in Link’s life were to diminish, it would break him. “I’d rather things stay as they are.”

“Won’t they get better if you say something to him?”

“Shouldn’t you be trying to avoid this conversation?”

“I’m trying to build up a tolerance. If I make it hurt enough, soon it’ll just be numb.”

“That’s kind of sadistic.”

“No, it’s masochistic, and you didn’t answer my question.”

Siegfried would not get away with dodging it either. “I take too big a risk in letting him know how I feel. I don’t think he’d ever hate me for it, but he might not reciprocate.”

“And if he does return them? That is a possibility.”

“So is the chance that he won’t.” In fact, no matter how pessimistic it was, that was the more likely outcome. “If he doesn’t, he’ll try to do whatever he can to make things normal for us. Which, in the end, would only make things worse. One of us would lose our good opinion of the other. I feel like it would be me losing his good favor instead of the other way around.” That would hurt too much. He could handle all sorts of pain in any amount of intensities. But Link no longer thinking of Siegfried as he once did was an agony he knew would slaughter him entirely.

“What if things turn out good? What if you’re being too paranoid?”

“I won’t chance it.” He refused to lose Link in any way. “It’s selfish, I know, but I would rather him think no less of me than think any more.”

“That’s not selfish.” Cassandra said softly, pulling away from him far enough so that they could look each other in the eye. “Me wanting him to recognize my feelings and return them was.”

Siegfried wanted to say something. He had the oddest feeling deep within his gut that this meant something very important. This small confession was not to be ignored. Cassandra was trying to make him understand. What she was trying to force him to understand was unknown, but it was something he needed to see. He thought about asking.

Before he opened his mouth, a sound erupted that nearly stopped the beating of his heart. Pyrrha was screaming. No. She was shrieking.

Chapter End Notes

Posting up a chapter on my birthday seemed like a nice tradition, and I couldn't resist posting the 12'th chapter on the 12'th of May. Cassandra redeemed herself (hopefully) and I feel good about the situation! Save for that last part, but it'll be better next
week...maybe.

A merry un-birthday to all of you!
Breaking it Down

Chapter Summary

No one would ever accuse Siegfried of having brilliant ideas. Most would just say his mistakes had great outcomes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first thing that ran through Siegfried's mind was that Pyrrha did not scream like that. She was a timid girl compared to her brother, but Siegfried only knew of three times when her voice skyrocketed due to fear. Last night when her aunt and adopted uncle were at war with one another, two years prior when Link walked out her front door for the last time, and the day six months before that when she and her brother were taken hostage without any promise of mercy.

The second thing that ran through his mind was more of an instinct than an actual concrete thought. There was hardly anything paternal about him, but before his mind could react, his body was already forcing him to his feet and carrying him over to the sound of the cry. By now a small crowd had gathered around Pyrrha, and the knight had to shove his way through to her, as none of them were doing anything to make her stop crying.

“Py!” When Siegfried, followed closely by Cassandra, finally reached the girl, she was on the ground shivering and shaking. She stopped screaming when she saw the knight, but she was crying far too much to speak properly. The friends she had been surrounded by had scattered. “What's wrong? What happened?”

“Where's Patroklos?” Cassandra asked as she knelt down next to her niece. “I don't see him.”

Siegfried's head whipped left and right. Patroklos would never have abandoned his sister in such a state. That boy was many things, but an insensitive sibling was not one of them. “Pyrrha, where's your brother?”

With a shaky hand, Pyrrha pointed up to the sky, and Siegfried followed her line of sight to a terrifying one of his own. A large bird, talons gleaming dangerously in the morning light, had Patroklos in its grasp. Siegfried had never seen such a huge thing, and for a moment all it did was stay still. The noise around him died, replaced instead by blood rushing through Siegfried's ears. He locked eyes with the creature as it turned its head just so, and he could swear its eyes were pitch black.

The moment was broken and the world returned to its original volume when the bird flapped its mighty wings. It started flying through the air, carrying Patroklos as though he were a mere scrap of bread instead of a human that was easily double its body weight.

Siegfried broke out of his daze when he heard Patroklos, voice choked with panic and fear, call out his name. He only had time to hurriedly tell Cassandra, “Take care of Pyrrha!” before he dashed after the animal.

Siegfried did not know it was possible for a bird to fly that fast. Even with Patroklos fighting tooth
and nail, the animal kept up a consistent speed, fast enough to keep the knight out of breath and a few steps behind its shadow on the ground. It did not help that despite the sense of desperation and urgency, the townspeople were just standing around like idiots. They pointed and looked highly concerned, but none of them did anything to help. No one even thought to pick up a bow to try and knock the thing out of the sky, which the knight would have done if he had one on him. Instead, they stood in the way, forcing Siegfried to shove them from his path.

The knight did not understand what that damn creature was trying to do. Patroklos had to be heavy. As young as the boy was, he was well fed and well built for his age. Any other animal would have dropped him by now, the risks outweighing any gain, but this one flew steadily as though it had a very singular purpose in mind.

Siegfried was not about to let it succeed. Regardless of what it wanted, its time was up.

“Sorry,” Siegfried said quickly to a baker who had come out of her shop to see the spectacle. The knight snatched away the circular tray she carried, spilling the small cakes on top of it. His eyes locked on the bird, who was only now struggling to hold on to the boy in its claws. Left alone for a second too long it would regain its strength from sheer will alone, Siegfried was sure. “I'll pay for a new one.”

The Alexander family used to tell their companions stories of large disks thrown for the sake of a casual game. With enough strength, precision, and a bit of luck, they could hit anything with fatal accuracy. Those stories, interesting as they were, always ended in tragedy. Siegfried wanted to be spared that outcome, and had he been given any other option he would have chosen a different tactic, but--

He took aim. He was no sharpshooter, his way of fighting was more up close and personal, but his body took over for his faltering mind. A line of strength went into one consecutive set of movements. It began with the force he put into his arm, moved along with the direction he pointed the tray to, and then he let it go along with hope he had in its success.

The disk flew. The wind moved the item here and there, making Siegfried worry that his split second decision had been in vain, but it ultimately did what he wanted. The bird was hit in the area just below its neck. The bird began falling, and Patroklos went down right along with it. Siegfried ran frantically to the growing shadow on the ground, counting down seconds in his head until the boy would hit the concrete. Siegfried braced himself for the impact of the body that fell into his arms. His stance was strict and his body would be screaming out the next day for how stiff he was when he finally caught Patroklos, but he was safe and Siegfried could physically confirm that.

“I've got you.” he shushed and consoled the child with a tenderness he was unaware he even had. “It's okay. Uncle Siegfried's got you.”

Patroklos clung to the front of Siegfried's shirt. The knight was so focused on the boy that he barely registered the hand that came to rest on his shoulder. When he turned around, he saw Cassandra holding a similarly distraught Pyrrha in her arms. She looked relieved when she saw her nephew, but something about the scene before her made her frown.

“You just killed an owl,” she said. “A freakishly huge owl.”

Siegfried was semi astonished by the statement. He had not been in a state of mind to identify the type of bird he shot down. He only now noticed how big it was in comparison to others he had seen. “I didn't know they mattered that much to you.”
She shook her head. “No, did you see the colors? The size of its wings?”

“I wasn't about to waste five minutes inspecting it.” he said in exasperation.

“Use your common sense,” Cassandra said in a similar tone. “When have you ever seen an owl that big in that color in this area?”

Siegfried opened his mouth to respond, only to clamp it shut a split second later. He had seen dozens of owls before, the things seemed to be on every continent, but he could never dreamed of one like this. It was in no way native to these parts, so why would a freakishly out of place creature show up out of the blue all of a sudden? And why would its diet go from mice and small creatures to a young boy who was a difficult piece of prey? Where had it crawled out from, and why did it fly so far from home?

“We'll figure this out later.” Siegfried hiked Patroklos a bit higher on his shoulder. “The others will want to know what happened.”

More than that, an overly curious crowd was beginning to form around them. Siegfried had not seen a single one of them try to lend a hand, but now that the danger had passed they were more than willing to stand around and gossip.

This was hardly the place for a pair of upset children and one easily annoyed knight. “Let's go,” he muttered to Cassandra. “Before I lose my cool enough to hit someone else with a pastry tray.”

Mitsurugi was not impressed. “Why is it that whenever you two are in the same space, all you can produce is hysterical children?” Despite the small joke and whatever innuendo that came with it, the samurai was hardly in the mood for uncontrollable sobbing. He had enough of tears to last him a lifetime and help him create several oceans. “Why are they crying?”

Siegfried and Cassandra passed over the children to Mitsurugi. Once in his arms, they took a few moments to settle down as much as they could. Which meant they weren't screaming, but they were still sniffing. However, he was left standing in the middle of the doorway, confused and without an answer. “Hello?”

Siegfried was more preoccupied with banging on walls and screaming out names. Cassandra stood still as the rest of the household was called into the room, each walking in cautiously one by one. Even Zelda was curious enough about what was going on to make an appearance.

“Siegfried.” Rothion said warningly. He was no doubt annoyed with the lack of respect the knight was showing his home. “I don't suppose you could tell us what's going on before you take down my house?”

Siegfried offered an apologetic look in response. “I'm sorry, but we've got a problem.”

“Another one? Did my kids end up crying over this one too?”

Mitsurugi coughed and Siegfried could only duck his head as Rothion whipped his head around to see Pyrrha and Patroklos being coddled.

When he turned back to look at Siegfried, his gaze was scalding. “What did you do?”
Siegfried readied himself for a punch. Rothion was not a violent man, but he was fiercely protective of his children, especially after the Soul Edge issue two years prior. The man almost lost his wife and sister-in-law, and he could have lost his children if things had progressed any further. Rothion would rather die than let that sword near his family again, and Siegfried was a very frail link back into the world of the evil blade.

To the surprise of everyone in the room, Cassandra quickly came to his defense before her brother thought of striking a blow. “It wasn't his fault!”

In a flurry of words, she began to explain the events of the past twenty minutes, giving as much detail as she could to an eagerly waiting crowd. The adults were the only ones who truly understood the gravity of the situation, though Amy did try to seem like she fully knew what was being said. In the end, she fell asleep on a bench along the wall of the hallway across from the main sitting room, Pyrrha and Patroklos asleep on her lap and Navi fluttering around them.

Cassandra had, by that time, taken a breath to finish her explanation. “If it hadn't been for Siegfried,” she said. “That bird could have been halfway across the country with Pat in its talons.”

Mitsurugi narrowed his eyes. “What was it doing trying to take off with him in the first place? Human children are hardly a normal diet for an owl.”

Cassandra fidgeted and shrugged. “I guess it wanted to scare him?” She shook her head. “No, that's silly. Maybe Pat was the one who scared it, somehow? Made it want to attack?”

Siegfried looked at Patroklos, snoring slightly and resting easy. It was miraculous considering the ordeal he had just been through. “All it had to do was drop him.” If it was so concerned with its safety, it would have been all too easy to take down a vulnerable threat. “But it didn't want to drop him.” the knight insisted. “It wanted to take him somewhere.”

Sophitia jogged over to where her son lay sleeping. “But,” She ran a hand through the boy's hair. Patroklos stirred, but he appeared to still be sound asleep. “Why?”

Raphael hummed. “Why indeed? Why would anything be chasing the lot of us right now?”

Sophitia frowned. “You think it was Soul Edge?”

Raphael shrugged. “Minions of the sword have attacked us before, and their ingenuity of disguises were only matched by their tenacity in following us.”

“It's all the way in Hyrule. How could it send orders from so far away?”

Raphael shook his head. “Influence doesn't need an order. The leftover evil here could have awoken along with its master, even from hundreds of miles away. And I can only think of one thing it would want to do upon opening its eyes.”

The room went silent. Siegfried could not look anyone in the eye, the weight of what had been said forcing his shoulders to droop. He thought the fight would be hardest in Hyrule. Soul Edge had control over resources and new bodies to take over on that front. But to find out it could still cause trouble from another universe? To learn it was still just as dangerous from across celestial borders?

“We have to move,” he said to distract himself from the onslaught of thoughts trying to break through. “If we stay any longer, we'll be putting innocent people in danger.” Siegfried could barely stomach the thought. To once again distract himself, he turned to Cassandra. “I need your help.”
Cassandra quickly responded, “You have it.”

That only left one Alexander sister left. Sophitia had been one of the greatest allies in the fight against Soul Edge. Her spirit had been unrivaled and her skills as a holy warrior were a huge benefit, but she had also been the one to sacrifice the most. She left behind a family, a home, and there was never any guarantee she would be able to return to any of it. She had done it once, but asking her to do it all over again was the cruelest thing he had ever done to her.

His apologies showed in his eyes. Had he been a stronger man, he would have cried when he managed to catch her eyes. Whatever she decided, he vowed to hold nothing against her. “I can't ask you to go with me.”

She just smiled. “I'm going.”

“Sophitia!” Came Rothion's outraged voice. Siegfried winced and turned towards the man. Rothion looked as though he was torn between pleading and demanding from his wife. “Another life or death mission? Think of the children.”

“I'm doing this in part for the children.” Sophitia's voice was just as determined as it had been the night before, strong and sure and resolved enough to stick with the decision she had chosen. “What message would I be sending them, giving up because things became difficult? Abandoning someone just because the outcome was so unsure? I could never live with myself if something were to happen because of my inaction.”

Siegfried admired her bravery. Speaking against her husband had to hurt, especially when they both meant well. Their harshness came from their love for each other and concern for the family they both cherished. Siegfried could hardly keep himself together, let alone an entire family unit.

“He needs me,” Sophitia insisted. “And I refuse to turn my back on him.”

“But you would turn your back on your flesh and blood?” Rothion accused with the harshest voice Siegfried had ever heard. “You would forget the ones you gave birth to in order to save a boy you knew for all of two years?”

Mitsurugi coughed, loudly, and pointed to the door. “This is our cue to leave.” And he quickly began ushering people out.

Amy woke up to the sound of multiple moving feet, and blearily stood up to head off to bed. Cassandra scooped up Pyrrha and Raphael lent a hand by picking up Patroklos. Then everyone made their way out of the door in a single file line. Siegfried was the last to leave, though he was more eager than anyone to go, and it was only the sound of someone calling his name that had him turn around.

Sophitia’s back was turned to him, but her posture was straight and her head held high. “Make no mistake about it. I intend to go with you. Make sure to get my things ready.”

Siegfried did not know what to say. He was not even sure if she wanted an answer or if one would only make things worse. In the end, he simply nodded and quickly walked away.

That next morning was one of the worst Siegfried had ever experienced in his life. That was saying
something, seeing as he had his fair share of hungover days when the actions of the night before could not even be told to a priest during confession. At the moment, he would have preferred to relive every single one of those days in quick succession.

Siegfried did not look at Rothion, Cassandra did not look at Zelda, Mitsurugi did not bother looking at anyone unless he absolutely had to, and Raphael found his gloves increasingly interesting as the morning progressed. It was a miracle any of them had been able to arrange themselves outside in a coherent manner.

The supplies needed for the trip created a circular barrier around the group. Each member silently took resented to their own space. Mitsurugi and Raphael were on the far left and right of the circle, respectively. Zelda stood at the front of the group, already preparing herself for the motions and energy required for Farores Wind. Epona stood behind her with Amy securely seated on her saddle, Siegfried directly to the right of the horse, hanging onto the reigns, Sophitia and Cassandra stood side by side, standing a little in front of Siegfried and a couple of inches behind the princess. Their hands were clasped, heads bowed low, and Sophitia's shoulders were shaking.

The reason for the sisters behavior was because of the three outside the barrier.

“Mommy!”

Siegfried felt sick. Leaving the Alexander children behind had not been this difficult before. There had been pouting, there had been whining, and Pyrrha tried to convince Siegfried to take them along as she clung to his leg, but it had hardly been this painful. There were two sobbing children behind him, the only thing holding them back was their father's strong grip, and Siegfried felt so guilty about it, he almost could not breathe.

“We'll be good, I promise!”

Siegfried shut his eyes. If he could, he would have clamped something over his ears to block out the sound of their cries.

“We'll behave. We won't even fight with each other anymore!”

“I'm going to start bawling,” Siegfried admitted under his breath.

Navi flew up to the side of his ear. “It's always hard to hear a child cry.” she told him, voice sad and glow dimmed. “I cried when I left Link all those years ago. He tried to call me back too, but I just...”

Siegfried knew he was mere moments away from bawling his eyes out without shame. It just did not seem right, seeing Amy sitting comfortably on Epona's saddle waiting for the next leg of their journey. Meanwhile, Pyrrha and Patroklos had to stand back and wonder what might become of the people who were leaving them behind a second time. Would they come back alive? How long would the fight last this time? Would everyone still be the same if and when they returned?

Patroklos cried out, “We love Link too!”

Pyrrha added, “We want to help save him!”

And that was where Siegfried broke completely. Because it was true. Those two children loved Link as much a Siegfried did, as much as Amy did, as much as any of them did, and they were just as affected by his disappearance as their mother and aunt. They deserved the chance to prove it.

“Stop!” The sheer volume of his voice stopped Zelda mid-chant and shocked everyone else around him. “Stop the spell.”
“It's a bit difficult to keep chanting when someone else is screaming.” Zelda said tiredly. Siegfried did not know much about magic, but he could only assume that stopping an unknown power right in the middle of calling for it took a great deal of energy.

Siegfried would not risk pulling a stunt like it again, but desperate times called for equally desperately measures. “We're not leaving things like this.” He turned around, finally, to face the children who had been calling out to him. “Pat, Py, go grab your things because you're coming along.”

Sophitia gasped, Pyrrha and Patroklos fell silent, and Rothion had never looked so gobsmacked in his life. Siegfried almost wished he could turn around and see everyone else's expression, but knew if he did he would lose the focus his impulsiveness brought with it.

“You mean it?” Pyrrha asked.

“A hundred percent.” he assured her.

“You swear we can come along?” Patroklos asked.

“If you promise to behave yourselves.”

“Siegfried,” the knight heard Sophitia call out his name, and she sounded as though the only thing keeping her from crying was the fact that her children might see. “If you're doing this for me--”

“It's not just for your sake.” he insisted because this time he needed to be honest about his feelings and take responsibility for his actions. He could not stand to see those two crying, and he was damn sick and tired of seeing people shed tears because of one of his bad decisions. “I just think it would be best for everyone if they came along.”

“Over my dead body!” And Siegfried had been waiting for Rothion to get his bearings back so this fight could occur.

The two men stepped towards each other, one glaring and one looking determined. Siegfried knew it would be one of the hardest obstacles he faced in Greece, but it was also undoubtedly the most important.

“They're coming.” Siegfried was surprised he sounded so firm when he had so little ground to stand on. He was not even blood, and most people would have told him to butt out of family business. “Even if I have to kidnap them myself.”

That was a terrible choice of words, and Siegfried regretted them the moment they left his mouth. Even more so when he saw the glare Rothion offered in response. “You wouldn't dare.”

No, Siegfried was not the type of man who would up and take children away from their parents. He just needed to make a point that the idea was in his mind. “You said it yourself. They shouldn't have to be separated from their mother again.”

“And your brilliant solution is to take them away from their father?”

“Then come with us.” Rothion was not part of the original team, sure, but neither were the children, and Siegfried was grasping at straws. “Ensure your family comes home yourself.”

Rothion reeled back, shocked by the bold suggestion. “You're kidding.”

Siegfried raised an eyebrow. “You've barely ever seen me laugh. You want to ask me again if I'm
joking?”

Rothion seemed to think better of it. “They're not warriors, Siegfried.”

“Neither is Amy, but her father is perfectly alright with bringing her along.”

From somewhere behind him, Siegfried heard Raphael huff. “Can we please refrain from making me sound like a terrible parent?”

Siegfried ignored him. “My point is that children are already journeying along with adults for a common goal. Why not let Pat and Py in on it too?”

“Because they'll get hurt.” Rothion argued, his children whining their protests to their father’s sound logic.

But Siegfried went on. “They will have some protection, you know. I'm not thrusting them out there without a shield.”

“No offense,” And Siegfried was sure he was about to be offended. “But after what's happened the past couple of days, I wouldn't trust you to protect their stuffed animals. Let alone take care of the smallest of their issues.”

Siegfried was not surprised by how much that stung, but he was shocked someone could say something like that to his face. People could say what they wanted about him, say he was horrible with people and had the social skills of a rock, and he would happily stand back and congratulate them on a keen sense of observation. But he loved those kids. A miracle though it may have been, he adored those two children and he would be the first in line to come to their defense if they called him. How could anyone ever insinuate otherwise?

At that moment, Siegfried did not care Rothion was their father. He was mere seconds away from receiving a vicious right hook to the center of his face.

A hand on his shoulder, the warmth and gentleness he had come to associated with the eldest Alexander child, stopped any rage from boiling over. With a smile only she was capable of in a situation like this, Sophitia gently pushed Siegfried aside and stood in front of him. It was a silent way of saying that the time for fighting was done with and she would take it from here.

She said to Rothion, “But you can't argue that they'd be better off with their own mother.”

Her husband did not want to argue the point. “They won't be safe out there.”

“And there's a chance they'll be no safer here,” she argued softly. “Greece has proven to be dangerous, and there's no guarantee that danger will follow once we leave.” Her eyes softened. “I would ask you to let me protect them the best way I can right now.”

Rothion frowned, a little upset that his arguments were being taken care of so easily, likely sadder his own counterarguments would be nowhere near as sound. “You honestly expect me to come along on this mad quest, willingly taking along my young and vulnerable children, just like that?”

“Absolutely.”

Siegfried felt something small, like a pebble or tiny rock, hit the back of his head. When he turned around to see who had decided to pull a childish stunt like that, now of all times, he was shocked to see Mitsurugi staring back at him. The samurai had one arm hidden in his sleeve while the other was above the cloth of his hakama. What caught Siegfried's eye were the two fingers resting over the
man's sleeve. It was another silent sign between the group.

'She's bluffing’ it said, and Siegfried turned back to Sophitia with nervousness biting at his gut. He was not leaving without those kids, but if Sophitia could not change her husband's mind--

“Alright,” Rothion huffed out in defeat.

Raphael whispered harshly, “She's a damn miracle worker.”

If Rothion heard him, he paid the comment no mind. “Can you give us ten minutes?”

Siegfried could do little more than nod until father and children were inside. When he could no longer see them, he pressed a quick kiss to Sophitia's cheek. “Thank you.”

She tousled his hair affectionately. “Thank you for being so sweet and considerate.”

Siegfried knew he was not being nearly as selfless as she thought, but it felt good to hear her say so, all the same.

“You might feel a little weird during the spell,” Siegfried explained as he settled the Alexander children onto Epona's saddle. It seemed safest to place them in the immediate care of a creature brave and determined enough to break through to another world to help a friend, which was why he placed Amy there in the first place. “Nothing is going to happen to you, but you might feel like you're flying.”

“Can I flap my arms like wings?” Patroklos asked.

Siegfried winced. “I would rather you didn't.” Siegfried was surprised the boy was not afraid of birds and flight altogether at this point. “Just stay still until your mother gives the okay.” With one final look to make sure everything was nice and settled, Siegfried moved aside so Rothion and Sophitia could stand on either side of the horse.

“Are we all ready?” Zelda asked from her spot in the middle of the group.

“As ready as we can be.” Siegfried did not even want to know what else was waiting to jump out at them from the shadows. If they waited any longer, the rest of the wildlife was probably going to start tripling in size, and the last thing Siegfried wanted to deal with was a squirrel the size of a horse. “Go ahead and start.”

Siegfried was starting to realize a pattern with Farore's Wind. Depending on what move the princess was on, Siegfried could expect to feel a different sensation. When he tried to make sense of them, he found himself thinking a rather funny thought. Every one of them reminded him of Link in some way.

Like the sting from a slap of his hand when a battle was won, or the press of his body when he was too tired to care about personal space, forcing him to lean on the knight. There was a moment when Siegfried felt the brush of lips against a brow that was far too warm, and then a whisper of breath against his ear that signaled an oncoming secret. It was friendship and all the warmth that came with it, all the affection it selflessly offered, all rolled into one spell.
Everything that Link personified was tied together in bits of green and light. Which was odd, Siegfried thought to himself before the world went black, because how could that be when Zelda was the one performing the spell?

Chapter End Notes

...once a month is better than once a year, right? No? I'm sorry. I'll go in the corner now.
He was starting to wish that numbness came as easily as pain.

It was the first time Siegfried remembered waking up to pain. His body ached after the last few trips inside Farore's Wind, and he never felt quite right in his own skin until a few hours later, but this searing pain was something new. He opened his mouth to express his discomfort. Though he could feel the hurt in his bones, he could neither feel the opening of his lips nor the workings of his tongue.

The knight could hear things pretty clearly, however, and it was not long before he picked up the sound of several voices chirping up around him.

Mitsurugi's was first. “Did everyone make it here in one piece?” Groans of various exaggerations met his question. “Any broken bones?”

Cassandra whined. “I think I sprained my ankle.”

“How badly?”

“I can still walk, but I shouldn't do too many jumping for the rest of the day.”

Rothion's voice was next and it sounded a bit closer than the samurai’s. “I'm more concerned about Siegfried. Why isn't he awake yet?”

Siegfried tried to say something. It was the first time Rothion expressed anything besides overly polite disdain for the knight’s presence since seeing him again. That warranted a response more than anything, but the blond could not hear a sound. Was he even speaking?

“This is normal for him,” Mitsurugi said without a hint of concern.

Raphael spoke up a second later. “Is it normal for her?” Siegfried heard rustling, and then a sharp intake of breath. “Check if he's breathing.” the Frenchman hissed. “Quickly!” There was more frantic rustling, closer this time. He thought someone might have been right beside him, but his attention was on his comrade's voice.

It was the panicked tone that got him. Raphael was rarely ever so frazzled. The Sorel always had an air of control about him. Even in a fight where the odds were stacked against him, he was as calm as the oldest of roots holding fast to the ground. When they first met, Siegfried wondered if it was just the nature of every noble, the blood in them so used to hardship that very little could shock them. Now the man sounded like a twig seconds away from blowing over the horizon.

“What's wrong?” Now Cassandra sounded concerned and much closer than the first time she spoke. Was everyone moving closer, or was his hearing becoming sharper? “Are they okay? Siegfried!” There was silence for a short moment, and then she was screaming. “He's not breathing!”
"Yes, I am." He tried to take a breath and gather the strength for a sentence. Nothing happened.

Raphael cursed. “She isn’t either.” They kept talking about a 'she', someone else who must have been suffering from similar ailments. Did they mean Zelda? “Sit them up. Try to get some air into their lungs.”

Lord help anyone who tried to give Siegfried the kiss of life, was all he had to metaphorically say about the whole thing.

Then, suddenly, he heard the light ringing of bells. “Siegfried!” Navi’s wings rang in his ears. She had to have been right beside him, so why could he not feel her beside his face? He was starting to panic. “I need you to listen to me very carefully.” If Siegfried had been able to speak, he would have assured her he would listen to just about anything if she could provide a solution to the problem at hand. "Think of the color green. Think of Link's color."

That was not difficult. Link never left his thoughts, and neither did that color. It was the elf's signature. Even though Link had tunics in red and blue, he felt more at ease in green cloth and barely a day went by when he could not be seen wearing one. Siegfried joked about someday losing the young hero in a cluster of bushes.

“Someone loved me enough to deck me in her signature shade, as a show of her greatest support,” Link said one night, a campfire glow illuminating his smile. “I feel safest when I honor her like this.”

Siegfried never asked who 'she' was, only knew 'she' was a constant in Link's life. She could not have been his mother, Link never met that woman in any of the lives he cycled through, but the hero spoke of her as though she were a maternal figure.

"Link called for help with that color," Navi said, interrupting his thoughts. "You can do the same. Think of that color, and then think of this name."

Siegfried felt a gentle breeze blow across his face. It was something so small it normally would have gone unnoticed, pushed aside for greater senses, but it had been solid minutes since he had been able to do anything but listen. Now that he could actually register a prickling on his skin, it was enough to catch him completely off guard, as though he never felt a simple wind in his life.

"Farore."

Siegfried focused on every syllable. A gust of wind surrounded him, and though he was still shrouded in darkness, he could feel the heaviness of his eyelids lighten. When he found the strength to open his eyes, he realized he was standing in a room of dark shimmering red and blue. The ground was a solid green, bright and glowing, which formed a single path that stretched across the floor. Siegfried rubbed at his eyes, trying to adjust to the bit of light there was and see if there was an end to it. Every path had a destination, and though he could not understand why he wanted to know, he had the strangest desire to find one and rush along it. Like a boy searching for gold marked on an old map.

A tug on his pants brought his gaze down. He gasped when he saw a small boy staring pleadingly up at him, looking so achingly familiar he could have cried. If Link had a son, he would have looked exactly like this child. Pointed ears, golden hair, and deep blue eyes; he was practically a mini version of the hero. The boy was even wearing a smaller version of Link's signature tunic, and a small drooping hat sat atop the young one's head. The boy said nothing, but he tugged on Siegfried's clothes again and pointed to the end of the pathway. The knight turned his head and his breath completely left him at the sight.
The last time Siegfried dreamed of Link, the hero had been shackled to a wall like an animal unworthy of decency. Mirroring the images of that nightmare, Link was once again chained to a wall, head down and body sagged. But there was someone with him this time. Someone who held his motionless body in her lap.

It was a girl, one who could not have been any older than thirteen, hair a light green and dress the color of a setting sun. Her head was bent as she held Link in her arms, grounding him to life. It was as though she were trying desperately to offer protection against disappearance, though the effort might have been futile. When she raised her head, Siegfried saw Link's favorite shade of green reflected in her eyes.

Siegfried did not have to think about what he did next. He grabbed the boy's hand and began to run down the pathway. The child kept up with the knight's longer strides, even gathering enough strength to pull ahead. Though the hallway felt endless, they seemed to be making good progress, looked mere inches away from Link and the girl next to him at one point, when there was a shift in the air. Reflexes worked faster than rational thought and Siegfried pulled the boy back as a wall of solid red fell from the ceiling to block their way. A translucent sheen erupted from the floor, creating a barrier between the four.

The boy clutched at Siegfried's leg. The girl burst into tears. Link had not moved the entire time and Siegfried was seconds away from having a heart attack at the motionless sight of a young man who used to be so full of life.

“Link!”

The girl was startled at the sound of Siegfried's voice, and had the knight been looking down at the boy beside him, he would have seen a shred of hope beginning to grow in his eyes. Siegfried did not know what he thought that call was going to do, what effect he thought it would have on that barrier, but he knew it had done something when he saw Link's ear twitch.

The girl looked him over for the first time since he appeared in this odd room. She was so young, but her gaze searched for aspects of life no child had any business knowing. It was like she could see right through to Siegfried's very core and the feeling almost made him take a step back. After a moment, she reached out to him. The boy reached out for her, and Siegfried followed his example without thinking.

Somehow their hands all connected through the glass, Siegfried having to bend down to meet with the other two. When one set of fingertips touched another, Siegfried's eyes were assaulted with a bright flash of white. Once again he could do little more than listen to the world around him. But that sense alone left him with a powerful message.

“Reach him in time, Champion from another land, and I swear my aid will reach you when you need it most.”

Siegfried regretted getting feeling back in his limbs. Numbness meant peace for at least five minutes, but now every single muscle in his body was screaming out in agony. If he didn’t know any better, he would have thought a group of anvils had fallen from the sky and landed right on top of him. Repeatedly. It would hardly be the first time something so odd and cruel happened to him for seemingly no reason.
He breathed in deeply. It was amazing how grand simple air could taste when the lungs had been deprived of it for so long. He got greedy and took in a bit more and the strain of the action made him cough, forcing him to sit up and try not to hack up his lungs. His patience with recovery had always been paper thin, regardless of how much worse he would make himself feel by rushing things. He never learned. He was about to try to breathe in again when a warm hand came to rest on his arm. It was softer than Sophitia's but the fingers were still calloused from holding a weapon that called for more grip than a normal sword would require.

The air around him suddenly became less suffocating, and the atmosphere was as calm as the gentleness of the night breeze. Only one person ever had that effect on the world. “Talim?”

And as soon as he opened his eyes, there she was. Easy presence, kind smile, looking a little older than the last time they had seen each other. Siegfried was surprised that very little had changed about her despite the time. It appeared life could do little for someone's true nature, and hers had catered to the sick and wounded since the very beginning. No doubt that soul of hers had led her to the side of a fallen friend, even if he had become a stranger after so long.

A quick look around the room let the knight know that they were currently in a sick bay of some sort, the kind used when students of a fighting art overworked themselves or overestimated their skills. He was tucked into a futon, the blankets around him clean but obviously well used. How long had they been here, he wondered?

“You've grown.” he told her, thinking back to the young girl who used to follow Link around like an eager puppy. Talim was a young woman now, and it was so odd to think she was only a year or two older than Amy.

“Only a little.” She smiled at him. “An inch or two, at the most.”

“How long have I been asleep?”

She frowned at the question. “A day. Sunrise to sunset.”

That was the longest stretch of time yet. If he slept any longer after a trip through Farore's Wind, he might be an old man before they reached Hyrule. “You've been here that long?”

“For the most part. Sophitia and Raphael were here when I couldn't be. You had us worried.”

“Why?” He could already guess. From the bits of conversation he was able to overhear before that last mental blackout, it seemed like he had not been breathing when the group landed, though he swore his body had been working perfectly well at the time.

But instead of answering the obvious, Talim just shook her head. “It doesn't matter. The important thing is that you're alright.”

Siegfried yawned. How could he sleep for so long and still feel so tired? It was like he had not closed his eyes in months. “What about the princess?”

The priestess bit her lip. “She's awake as well. There's no sign of any serious injury, save for exhaustion, and she's been placed in another room.”

“Did she introduce herself?”

She nodded. “To Yunseong and Mina, but I chose to stay here with you, so we haven't formally met.”
Siegfried frowned. The knight had never known Talim to be so unfriendly. Even with sketchy characters, she would at least say a quick hello before keeping her distance. “What's wrong? She didn't offend you in any way, did she?”

She shook her head. “I had a chance to see her before you were settled in.” She turned away from him, shame in her eyes and in the stiff stance of her shoulders. “I know it's a superficial resemblance, but--”

Siegfried held up a hand, effectively stopping whatever she was going to say next. “I get it.” Zelda looked too much like Link from a distance. When all any of them had were fading memories, those looks could cause too much nostalgic pain. “Where am I? Location wise?”

"Korea. Your group managed to find your way to Mina's family dojo before being bombarded by bandits. Han-myeong said it was lucky you managed to get so far with two unconscious comrades.”

Siegfried huffed, doubtful anyone would dare try to rob such an odd looking group, and sat up. The point was to try and get a bit more feeling in his legs. The longer he stayed still, the worse for the wear he would be once he needed to stand without falling back on his rear end. That was the last thing he needed to do in front of the owner of this particular dojo.

Thinking of Seong Mina’s father made him sigh. “He'll want me to request an audience with him soon.”

Siegfried had no idea what he had ever done to Han-myeong. Out of the entire group, consisting of people from all walks of life, Siegfried was watched the closest and given the strictest orders whenever he stayed at the dojo. His diet was monitored, he had to check in for weekly progress reports, and Han-myeong expected a request for an audience the moment the knight crossed the border. Hwuang used to tease him about it, saying Han-myeong probably wanted to groom the German into a perfect husband for his daughter. Siegfried found that hard to believe, but the expectations never weaned or wavered.

“Don't let him know I'm here just yet.” he told the girl. “I want to at least look somewhat presentable when I talk to him.”

Talim giggled. Two years prior, that laugh matched Link’s so well, it was almost as if the two of them really were siblings. Had they not looked so dissimilar, Siegfried would have thought they shared an ancestor of some kind.

He smiled at the thought. “Are you hungry?”

She nodded eagerly. He did not like the thought of her skipping meals, and that was probably what she had been doing just to make sure he was as comfortable. A day was a long stretch of time to be without food and she must have been starving. His stomach was about to start growling as well, so a quick meal was certainly in order.

He also needed to take note of where everyone else was. Talim did not usually seek out Siegfried’s company over the others unless she craved safety. His muscle and attitude provided shelter against the worst of the world in a way none of the others could. She had ducked behind him in many a battle with the understanding that he would fight off what was terrorizing her without question. But what could have happened in a day to warrant that kind of protection?

"The last time I was here, it was a kitchen free for all." Siegfried hopped off the futon, satisfied with the way his muscles sang instead of cried. It was slow progress, but it was a sign of improvement. "A couple of dolts tried to knock me out for a sandwich." He smirked. "Let's see if they're still around."
“That was mean.” Talim scolded him as she finished setting up their tarp and food. Having lunch in the stables had not been the original plan, but after Siegfried's stunt in the kitchen, things had to be adjusted. This ground was not made for picnics, the basket could only fit so much, and Talim was no doubt annoyed that they even had to bother Epona for space in the first place. She may or may not have thought the place smelled too unsavory to eat in as well.

Siegfried could care less. As far as he was concerned, Epona was as good as any company in Korea. He also had had no problem rough housing for the food they managed to snag for themselves. When his blows were not aimed at the people he cared about, Siegfried liked blowing off steam in a battle of brawn. It was a quick and easy way to see if his skills were getting too rusty. Talim was a pacifist at heart, though, and he could understand how uncomfortable she would feel at the sight of a confrontation.

Still, “Sorry, but they were literally asking for a fight.” Siegfried plopped down next to Epona. The horse neighed, delighted at the sight of an apple he took out of the basket. He chuckled and tossed the fruit in the air, smiling as the mare caught it with ease. He rewarded himself with an apple of his own.

Talim smiled, though she quickly tried to hide it with a frown. “You didn't have to hurt them that badly.”

Siegfried shrugged. “You're right, but I was nice enough to let them crawl away when they were down for the count. Mitsurugi wouldn't have shown that much mercy.” Speaking of which, the samurai and the rest of the group were nowhere to be seen, and he had kept a very sharp eye out for them on the way to the kitchen. The knight wondered if they were hiding. The dojo was only so big. He should have run into one of them by now. “Have you seen any of the others since we split up?” he asked in an attempt to get some kind of conversation going.

“Just you guys.”

He raised an eyebrow. Talim had been close with many of their comrades, yet had only seen the group tumbling into Korea. "Really?"

Talim nodded, raising a hand to pet Epona's mane. “I've only been in the country for the past six months. Before that, I remained in my village for as long as I could...before I just couldn't sit still any longer.”

Siegfried could understand. He himself had done nothing but hop from place to place, hoping he could settle down somewhere, anywhere that would erase the seemingly endless feelings of restlessness in his bones. He had been searching for faces and feelings he left behind and nothing new could ever feel the same. They just ended up being mediocre replacements. At that point, it made more sense to keep moving.

“I didn't even realize I was coming here, at first. Then, I didn't have any idea I was even going to stay for so long. I just stopped in for a visit and never left.”

He nodded. “The winds brought you home.” She said something similar to him once, the one and only time he seriously considered going after Soul Edge on his own. He had not gotten very far, most of the group still had no idea he ever attempted such a foolish stunt, but Talim had just known.
Maybe she knew him better than he thought, but all she needed was one look. Her words from back then had carried him through many a tough time later on in his life.

She smiled at the sound of them, shoulders easing and eyes overflowing with gratitude. It was odd for him to dish out words of wisdom like that, so he could understand how humorous it sounded, but he was happy it could make her feel better. Talim's eyes deserved to be as clear as her future.

“I'm actually a little scared of going back home now.” The admission made the knight blink. “I took off with so little warning, and I think my parents were hoping I’d stay where they could keep an eye on me. I'm sure I let them down, running off like I did.”

"Your parents will understand someday," he said reassuringly. “They'll realize you were meant for bigger things.” He was hardly one to know the workings of a parental mind, but the words felt sincere. “It might take a while, but I'll bet they saw this coming.”

She laughed. "You've never even met my parents. How would you know all this?"

Siegfried shrugged. “Parents know their children. Adults can usually tell if a kid is going to make something of themselves or not.”

Siegfried knew it was not a given. Life did not always hand out luck when it was needed, but he had experienced small miracles like that firsthand. People had given him chances beyond his reach, offered opportunities that never should have belonged to him, all because they saw a spec of promise on his scrappy face.

“That's probably why people give the greats of the world such a hard time. They know they're worth the struggle. And I can only imagine the parents of those greats knew well before anyone else did.”

“Right you are, Schtauffen.” said a male voice from beyond Siegfried's shoulder. “Parents always do know best.”

Ten minutes. Ten minutes into a meal he fought tooth and nail to obtain, hoping for at least a half an hour to finish it in peace, and Siegfried had already been tracked down. He had not even gotten a chance to bite into that stupid apple. “Good evening, Han-myeong.” He warily turned his head to look the master of the dojo in the eye.

Han-myeong was not smiling, but his eyes were twinkling with a quite kind of mirth, as though he wanted to. “Your manners have dwindled since your last visit.”

And now he was getting a lecture. He half expected it, but there was something all too aggravating about being scolded by a man other than his father. “I was hungry, and I didn't think it polite to disturb you on an empty stomach.”

Han-myeong tilted his head. He had dealt with both Yunseong and Seong-Mina at their worst, so he knew when someone was lying simply because they needed to save face. "And the kitchen was too dull a place to eat?"

And now he was getting a lecture. He half expected it, but there was something all too aggravating about being scolded by a man other than his father. “I was hungry, and I didn't think it polite to disturb you on an empty stomach.”

Han-myeong tilted his head. He had dealt with both Yunseong and Seong-Mina at their worst, so he knew when someone was lying simply because they needed to save face. "And the kitchen was too dull a place to eat?"

At least Siegfried knew how he had been found. One of those sore losers must have gone crying to their master. They probably thought they were going to get justice, but Siegfried was going to make sure they had the rudest awakening come morning. "I wasn't welcome there." he told the older man, hoping that would be the end of the matter. “So I found other arrangements.”

Talim was going to be of no help. During the conversation between the two men, she was happily offering up their dwindling apple supply to Epona. The horse was lapping up the attention and the food in equal vigor, apparently seeing no need to offer so much as a whine to the knight's defense.
Han-myeong was not impressed with the response he received. “And what brings you here?”

“I’m trying to help a very old friend.”

It was odd referring to Link that way, now that he knew how deep his feelings really went. Of course, they were still the best of friends. Siegfried would never let anything take that away from him. There was just a lot more intensity to those feelings now. It felt wrong to give the elf such a simplistic title when so much had changed between them. At least, on Siegfried's part.

“He’s in terrible danger, and I need to call in the Calvary to help rescue him.”

Han-myeong had a very particular look about him. It was similar to the way Frederick looked when a tough parenting decision was on the horizon, but it was somehow so much more unsettling to Siegfried. It was hard to look on for too long without breaking a sweat, and to date he had only been able to stand it for ten minutes. Collectively.

“Your journey has changed you.” the man said at last, making Siegfried narrow his eyes in confusion. The two of them had only been in the room together for a few moments, and his words were fairly standard. How could any of that signal a significant change? "I see a meditation is in order."

Siegfried would have rather finished his meal. “That's not necessary.”

“That was not a request.”

Siegfried knew that, but he was hoping it could be twisted into one with a good enough reason. "I was eating.” he whined. It was a pathetic argument but he hoped the dojo master would take pity on a starving traveler.

Han-myeong clicked his tongue in expectation.

Siegfried looked to Talim, hoping for a bit of help, but she just smiled. Even Epona, the equestrian traitor, nudged at his back.

Siegfried sighed and picked himself up from the ground. The fact that they were in Han-myeong’s dojo on his land meant Siegfried was at his mercy. A lack of control never sat well with the knight, and this was certainly no exception. But a lot of things had not been sitting well with him as of late, and so far he had kept on going in spite of them.

“Lead the way.”

Siegfried had gone on small meditation trips with Han-myeong before, back in the beginning of his friendship with the man’s daughter, along with younger students who found their new discipline a bit too much to handle. Link had come along once or twice, but Han-myeong never invited anyone else in the group to attend. Again, it made Siegfried wonder what he’d done to get such ‘special’ treatment from the master of the dojo.

“Do you remember this place?”

Siegfried nodded, though Han-myeong was a step ahead and not able to see the movement. “It’s
It was a small area of lush green surrounding a waterfall. Siegfried made a comment the first time he saw it, wondering out loud if they were going to sit under the water and hum like he always assumed people did during meditations. It took ten minutes for everyone to stop snickering at his ignorance, and the knight had not stopped pouting until Link made his favorite meal for dinner that night.

“I find it suitable for clearing my thoughts.” the old master said. “Something about the rushing water puts the most important things into focus.”

The two sat close to the water’s edge. Siegfried felt the spray splash onto his face every few seconds, and the sound of it hitting the rocks beneath the water provided a calm that only nature could deliver. The situation was uncomfortable, but at least the atmosphere was somewhat soothing.

Han-myeong coughed lightly. “Link is on your mind.”

Siegfried kept his eyes on the waterfall. “A lot more than usual these days, but yes, he’s nearly always on my mind.”

“And he’s in trouble.”

Siegfried nodded, sure that eyes were now on him. “It’s a desperate fight. I’m trying to be as quick as I can.”

“It’s easy to see that you’re worried about the whole thing.” Han-myeong cleared his throat. Siegfried wondered if the man had a cold. “I imagine there is quite a lot to be concerned about.”

Siegfried was surprised he had not keeled over from the stress. “Everything seems to be a problem. Time, distance, uncertainty, it’s all an issue. I can barely find anything to be happy about before something else starts to worry me.”

“And your health?” Han-myeong asked pointedly. “Does that ever cross your mind at all?”

Siegfried scooted further away at the sound of the man’s voice. He was unaware a meditation trip could turn into an interrogation so quickly, and here he was with a hand tied behind his back. How was that fair? “No? I’m fine, so it doesn’t cross my mind much.” As long as he did not have a broken limb he was fit to fight and travel.

Han-myeong scoffed. “My daughter tells me you were barely breathing when the group dragged you in.”

“Ah.” There was not much he could say to that. Being unconscious left him unable to account for or defend a few hours of his life. “Sorry.”

“I didn’t say that so you could apologize.”

Siegfried cleared his throat. He wondered if Mina had to deal with this type of trick questioning and baiting of conversation. “Then why did you mention it?”

“Because you’re acting foolishly and I need you to understand that.”

Siegfried wanted to bite back, say something smart to force some dignity back into his skin, but he was so tired of defending his fragile heart. “How so? I’m trying to get to him as quickly as I can. Am I supposed to put this quest on pause for every discomfort? I’d never get anywhere.”
“Do you believe you’re any good to him as you are?”

Now Siegfried felt a little offended. “I’m not dying.”

“Keep going on like this and you soon will be.”

Siegfried wished Mitsurugi was the one scolding him. It would have made a lot more sense and been a lot less embarrassing on his end. “How is any of this your business?”

“Watch your mouth.”

Siegfried supposed that phrasing could have been considered disrespectful. He had not meant it that way, but trying to defend himself would be a moot point. “I just don’t understand why you brought me here.” He took a risk looking at Han-myeong, but the conversation was a little too irritating when he could not see the man’s facial expressions. “What do you gain from this?”

The master did not answer right away. “I acted this foolishly once.” Siegfried was shocked to see a soft smile appear. “And only once.”

It took a lot to keep from gawking at the admission. “When?” The thought of Han-myeong acting anything less than composed did not fully register in his mind.

“When I met Mina’s mother. I acted quite the fool whenever she came into my line of sight.”

Siegfried was so surprised he started laughing. “I can’t believe that. Next, you’ll be telling me you were always bumbling around and literally falling in front of her.”

“I shall save you a few stories then.”

This was too priceless. If only Link were there to hear it. “Does Mina know?”

Han-myeong shook his head. “I never told her myself, and I doubt anyone else would have mentioned it.”

“Don’t I feel special.” But, again, the knight wondered why they were even having this conversation. It jumped from topic to motivation, and he was getting dizzy trying to keep track of it all. Honestly, it was easier to keep up with a raving Alexander sibling.

“I did all sorts of things to impress her, including but not limited to, nearly killing myself with stunts meant to show off several skills I didn’t have.”

“An impressive attempt indeed.”

Han-myeong just smiled. “She was the one to knock some sense into me, saying I was an unfit suitor if I was dead.”

Siegfried snorted. “She was right.”

“The point being that I know what a fool in love looks like, and I know how it feels to be an idiot controlled by strong feeling. But as men who know better, we cannot allow them to overtake us. We become useless that way.”

The advice was sound, but Siegfried focused on the first section of Han-myeong’s small speech. He knew a fool in love, did he? “My feelings--”

“Are fairly obvious.” The master said in a teasing tone. “And always have been.”
Apparently to everyone but Siegfried himself. “Then you understand why I can’t stop myself from going after him with such vigor.”

“I more than understand, but if you’re dead before you reach him? Link is an amazing young man, but even he cannot return the affections of a ghost.”

Siegfried felt his face heat up. He tried to fight it down, tried to pretend that Han-myeong could not see the flush clear as day on his cheeks. “I--”

“I do not mean you should stop this journey completely. I can’t even advise you to slow down given the circumstances. All I can ask is that you try your damn hardest to keep yourself well along the way.”

Health advice from a man in a completely different discipline than his own. It was odd, but it was nice the man cared. He was a bit overbearing, but nice all the same. “I’ll try.”

The dojo master narrowed his eyes. “Try?”

Siegfried shrugged. “That’s all I can promise.” Making a commitment at a time like this would not feel right, and there was no guarantee that he would be able to keep it. He had never been a dishonest man when it came to important matters like this, and he was not about to start now.

Han-myeong sighed, no doubt aware that was as good a vow as he was going to get. “Very well.” Though the conversation seemed finished, the man made no move to get up from the ground.

Siegfried waited a polite minute before speaking. “I’m sorry to talk and run, but I need to see the rest of the group. Are Mina and Yunseong around?”

“I believe they are all sharing a meal in one of the sitting rooms.”

The knight frowned. “And they didn’t think to invite me?”

“You were unconscious if you recall.”

“They’ve woken me up for less important reasons than food.” He rolled his eyes. “Some friends.”

Han-myeong waved him away. He was one of the only people in the world who could get away with that type of dismissal. “Find them. There’s nothing else I can say to you.”

Siegfried didn’t know whether to thank the man for letting him go or apologize for being such a hopeless case. “I’m going to ask Mina and Yunseong to come with me. I’d like them to leave with your blessing.”

“They have it if they choose to go.”

Siegfried dashed off before another awkward conversation had a chance to erupt.

Everyone had finished their dinner by the time Siegfried arrived in the sitting room. Talim, who must have found the group right after Han-myeong dragged the knight away, beamed when she saw him in the doorway. She sat in a circle on the floor with Mitsuugi, Sophitia, Seong-Mina, and Amy, playing some kind of game Siegfried had never gotten around to understanding. He knew a board
was at the center of it, and there were small pieces to move around, but that was the extent of his knowledge. Siegfried gave them a smile and a nod before extending the gestures to Raphael and Yunseong, who were leaning against the wall.

Siegfried made his way over to them, making sure to ruffle Talim’s hair as messily as he could when he walked past her. “Traitor.” He was only half teasing. “Do you realize how awkward that was?” he asked as he leaned against the space next to Yunseong.

Seong-Mina laughed. “Did father find you?”

“Yeah, and a bit too soon for my liking.” He looked around the room suspiciously. “Which one of you pointed him in my direction? I thought it was a kitchen idiot, but now that I think about it, none of them would dare.”

Mitsurugi raised his hand, smirking at the incredulous look on the knight’s face. “I thought it would be amusing.”

“That’s not the term I would use.”

The samurai shrugged. “I tried speaking to him myself. He wouldn’t hear an explanation from me.”

“And I bet you tried so very hard to give him one.” Honestly, was a little loyalty so much to ask for, or was his flustered state that funny to watch? “Where’s the girl?”

Sophitia looked up from the game board. “Rothion thought it would be better for her to spend the day with him and children. They’re gathering supplies, and attempting to sell off some of Raphael’s.” The knight wished them all the luck in the word with that. “You likely won’t see them until later on in the evening.”

Siegfried took a quick glance around the room. He noticed a distinct lack of blue throughout the air. “Did Navi go with them?”

Mitsurugi raised an eyebrow. “You’ve become oddly attached to the little thing.”

Navi was a solid innocent connection to Link. Aside from Epona, Siegfried could count the number of those on one hand, they were so few and far in between. He would hold onto any of them as strongly as he could.

“She’s been good to me,” he said by way of explanation, knowing the man would not press him for more. That was one of the good things about the samurai. To an extent, he was comfortably predictable.

Mitsurugi did not disappoint, and the subject changed in a split second. “It’s just old friends here. We’ve spent the better part of the day catching up. You miss a lot in two years.”

Didn’t he know it? “Then you all know the situation?”

Seong-Mina nodded, more solemn than Siegfried had ever seen her. “To be honest, when Link left for home, I had hoped he was heading to a safer place. Somewhere he could relax and be at peace after such a tough fight.”

Raphael smiled sadly. “Hoping without action is useless, I’m afraid.” To normal civilians, that would have sounded cruel. Normal people could look out a window and see parts of the future in the sky. Soldiers like them did not have the liberty of hanging onto false hope. Reality was their only comfort.
Siegfried sighed. “I don’t like the idea any more than you do. Of all the people in existence who could have been dragged into a mess like this, Link is the least deserving.”

Talim looked to the ground; Yunseong focused on the opposite wall, but Seong-Mina focused her attention on Siegfried. The knight had never known her to be afraid of anything. He could tell she was distraught by the current circumstance, but that pain would not force her to her knees. She would instead use it as a weapon to take her to a solution.

Even if he knew the question was pointless, Siegfried still had to ask. “Are you with me?”

Seong-Mina smirked. “You couldn’t leave me behind if you tried.”

Satisfied with the answer, he turned to Talim. In all honestly, he didn’t want to ask her to fight with them. Her heart was still so young and innocent, her life bright and full of possibility despite past roadblocks. Would he be able to live with himself if this new battle were to change that? Permanently?

But that was not his decision to make. Talim did not need him to ask her anything. She stood tall all on her own. “I’m coming too.”

She was only a few years older than Amy. Many would look at her and still see a child, but Siegfried had met war torn soldiers with less determination in their eyes. It was heartbreaking, but at the same time, it was awfully endearing.

“I don’t intend to stop you,” he reassured her with a smile. “You’re one of the greatest assets I have.”

She beamed, and his shoulders felt a little lighter.

Siegfried turned to Yunseong, expecting a large, boisterous proclamation of how he intended to fight alongside his old team. But there was only silence, and Yunseong was still looking at the opposite wall. There was an odd look in his eyes that was so unfamiliar to Siegfried it made his stomach sour.

It was the only thing that ever made him pause when talking to the Korean warrior. “Yunseong?”

The redhead was still, “I’m glad you’re doing this,” he said after a moment of absolute quiet. “And I wish you all the best.”

Siegfried frowned. The air in the room suddenly felt thin. “What are you saying?”

When Yunseong turned to look at the knight, the blond was finally able to put a name to that gaze. It was rejection. “I’m not going with you this time.”

Chapter End Notes

Black Friday is killer stressful in general, but more so tonight because I had dibs on the midnight shift. Here’s a chapter for those of you snuggled up indoors feasting on leftovers, and here’s hoping I can have a fraction of the strength and patience Siegfried does in this chapter.
Chapter Summary

The two Hylians needed some sort of good sign to start planning. This was as good as it was going to get, even if it might not be a good idea after all.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The boy was resilient. Soul Edge knew this beforehand. Link was no pushover. He may have been kind, patient, and understanding, but he was far from weak. He had proven as much two years prior. Perhaps it had been even longer in this world.

Yes, the dark wizard’s memories informed him. *An entire lifetime, over a century at least, was used to prepare for a moment like this. A century to dream, to plan, and to hone his skills in the new fields of his old homeland.*

It had obviously done him a world of good. He still had yet to break. Even though it was incredibly frustrating, Soul Edge had no choice but to be impressed. The boy was something else entirely. Even his darker half was nowhere near the being he was.

The sword should have expected as much. No copy was ever as good as the original. You could tweak and improve on the original blueprint all you wanted. At the end of such a tiring endeavor, you would have only made a small leap in the grand scheme of things. Humans did not stay the same. They grew, bettered, and outgrew old expectations rather quickly. Soon, what you thought was a better product was old news compared to the improved model.

Dark Link was a perfect example. His body had originally been better than Link’s. Stronger, faster, more resistant to pain, and with the added ability to eventually hold an ancient power within, he should have been a much better warrior than his counterpart. He was at first, especially after Soul Edge started breaking down the hero’s body with an inconsistent schedule of food and water consumption.

Then the hero grew stronger. His body became immune to the changes. His mind adjusted to the situation, and his physical systems adapted to his new surroundings. His strength returned, the color in his face got a healthier shine, and what made him a formidable opponent in the sword’s world returned to him once more.

Link looked as though he had never even seen the stone of a dungeon cell. Aside from the dirt and blood coating his body like a second skin, he looked fine. Which was something that was most certainly not fine with Soul Edge.

“Dark Link,” he called from a new throne placed in the center of Hyrule Castle. The material was quite smooth, much more soothing to his skin than marble. Had it been made from the bones of the soldiers he killed upon his arrival? That would explain why he had not seen hide nor hair of the things in days. “Since when was your strength equivalent to that of a newborn child?”

Dark Link groaned from his spot on the ground. A slightly injured Hero of Time stood only a few
feet away. He was slouching, and he was breathless, but the blaze in his eyes said he was far from through. Dark Link, however, looked ready to call it a day regardless of what his master told him. Still, ever the obedient little creature, he spat up the blood in his mouth and managed to stand again. The green-clad hero was giving him a run for his money. These days Dark Link could barely manage to give an amount of pain equal to what he received.

When Soul Edge started these matches of brute strength, he merely wanted to test Dark Link’s endurance. The goal was to make sure he was better than Link in every single kind of contest the sword could think of, and he had done fine in the first battle. Each one after that, however, was a slowly declining slope of failure. Link seemed to get stronger as his counterpart grew weaker. It irritated Soul Edge a great deal. How was he supposed to rid himself of the golden boy if the silver one could not hold onto his power? At this rate Link would die before Soul Edge brought Dark Link up to par with him.

However, as it stood, it was still the best course of action available to him.

Dark Link could barely keep his eyes open. During the first five minutes, Link kicked a large mound of dirt straight into them in retaliation for Dark Link going for his throat. Link now had some very dark bruising on his throat while his other half was just about blind. In hindsight, Dark Link believed it would have been better to just duke it out with their swords. At least one of them would have been down by now. Soul edge, however, wanted to test brute strength, not warriors with handicaps. He did not want to see what tricks they could pull off when they had a toy in their hands. No. He wanted real, indisputable results.

All that resulted in were two very stubborn Hylians who did not want to stay on the ground. Someone had broken an arm, and the other had a displaced jaw. By this point, they were so tired they forgot which one had which injury. It hardly mattered. The fight would not stop just because one of them was hurt. They would go nowhere until their observer grew bored of the show.

Today, that boredom came a lot sooner than usual.

“Take him back to his cell!” the sword shouted angrily. His eyes honed in on one of Dark Link’s swollen ankles. He was so disgusted with the dark one’s performance he could have gone over there and crushed it in himself. He had no time, however. The clock was ticking, and he needed to find a way to improve his warrior’s overall abilities. A mock punishment would have to do for today. “And because you’re so hell-bent on being such a disappointment this evening, you can take him there by yourself. Make sure to watch out for that ankle. With your fragile little body, it could shatter.”

Dark Link glared at him. The fight exhausted him far beyond what it should have. If Soul Edge had his way, the creature would not have even broken a sweat. Dark Link was supposed to be the superior being. The perfect copy. The creature that exceeded his superior.

Obviously, the sword thought bitterly as he watched the dark Hylian limp away with his double leaning on his shoulder, there was still a lot of work to be done.
himself flinching at the noises. He never thought about how such simple sounds could affect a person so greatly. Those sounds never seemed so bad when he created them in a careless hurry. Now that he was the temporary prisoner, he thought them to be quite terrible in nature.

“How can you stand those things rattling all the time?” he asked the Hylian beside him. “They would drive me crazy.”

“You learn to ignore them after a while.” Link answered, eyes scanning the area and ears listening to every echo they could pick up in crowded stone. “It’s when they don’t rattle that I start to worry.”

Dusk, too, looked over his surroundings. The walls had eyes and ears in this castle now, and they were usually always preoccupied with their prisoner. Usually, he specifically noted, because there were times when they found other, more enjoyable things to do with their time. They could feast now, and there were times when animals drew too close to the castle walls. Then there were times when a human decided to let his foolish pride guide him to the grand doors. On both occasions, screams filled the castle, and the smell of fresh meat ripped off the bone permeated the air. Neither was pleasant, but they did give anyone inside a sense of privacy.

Dusk would ignore that the privacy he was relishing came at a hefty price. “You know why he’s doing this, don’t you?”

“He wants to test us.” Link answered solemnly. “He needs to see if I’m weak enough to die and if you’re strong enough to live on in my stead. I think we’re disappointing him.”

Dusk clutched his injured arm. “I would damn well hope so. You nearly busted every bone in my body out there, Hero.”

Link had the decency to look apologetic. “Sorry. I had to make it convincing. To be fair, you weren’t exactly pulling punches with me either.”

“You broke my arm.”

“You tried to knock off my jaw.”

“I can barely see anymore.”

“And I probably won’t be able to swallow solids for a week.” At the lack of response Link raised an eyebrow. “Is that it?”

Dusk shrugged as best as he could. “I’ve got nothing else.”

Link began searching his surroundings again. He was almost certain no one was listening in on them, but he could never be too sure. Not in this castle. “Did you do what I asked?”

Dusk nodded. “I somehow got that thing to let me accompany some of the Stalfos on patrol. The cities immediately around the castle are empty. Almost everyone was able to get away.”

“Almost everyone?”

“Don’t ask for specifics, Hero; you’ll only be disappointed.” The last thing he needed was for his only ally to be too depressed to act when the time came. “You were right about security by the way. No one is ever getting on or off castle grounds without that damn sword knowing. I was out of his immediate sight, and I still couldn’t find an opportunity to run.”

“You were going to leave me behind?”
Dusk refused to look at the other. “I thought about it, but I couldn’t have gotten away.”

“What was stopping you?”

“Did I mention these new incarnations are fiercely loyal to their new master?”

Link sighed. “I hate being right sometimes.”

“Then you’re really going to hate this. All those weapons you used to carry with you, you remember those, right? Well, this thing has them locked up somewhere top secret. He’s not letting anyone know where they are. I couldn’t track them down.”

Link knocked his head against the wall. “Anything else Dusk? Ganondorf in a dress, maybe?”

“I wish.” At the odd look he received, Dusk instantly turned red and tried to stammer out an amendment. “I didn’t mean that the way it sounded. I meant that anything besides what’s going on would be a welcome sight. Not that that kind of thing would be welcomed anyway because it wouldn’t be, even though it’s a funny thought—”

Link covered the other’s mouth. “You’re not helping yourself.” The other glared, and Link saw fit to take back his hand lest it got bitten off in retaliation. “I was worried about this.”

Dusk frowned. “What’s with that tone? So security’s tight, so what? That doesn’t mean we can’t try to get away.”

“Nothing makes it so that we can’t try to get away, but there’s something making it so that we would fail.” Link was starting to get a headache, and his current state, it would keep him up for the rest of the night. “Soul Edge isn’t stupid. He knows the old pros and cons of power.”

One adage seemed to ring out in Dusk’s mind. "The emperor's range is far and wide; but the further his reach extends, the weaker his control becomes."

Link nodded and somehow found a reason to smile. “You were thinking that too?”

“It seemed to fit.”

“Very well in this case. Soul Edge is theoretically doing what every evil mastermind should. Start out small, gain absolute control, and then head out to the next destination.”

“No normal human has the time for that.” Perhaps that was why Ganondorf failed in every life pledged to world domination. He took too much too soon, while his opponents had the patience to wait and finish off the war as opposed to the battle. “Good thing he’s not normal.”

“Or human. He can hold back his greed a little better than one, but he won’t be patient for long.” A small smirk appeared on the blond’s face. “We’re irritating him too much. He won’t deal with it much longer.”

“I’m surprised he hasn’t noticed. You’re not losing any weight, you haven’t gotten sick, and you’ve yet to break despite his best efforts. He must know something’s up.” Dusk thought that the sword was smarter than that. It must have at least thought about the possibility that the dark warrior was sneaking in food and medicine to the hero. How could anyone be so clueless?

“He overestimates me to a large degree.” Link said in response to the unanswered question. “He thinks of me as a being that is larger than life. This nonhuman entity that was able to seal him away when the most powerful of holy warriors couldn’t. That’s what makes him think that if I don’t get
weaker or sicker, it’s because of my own will. He’s giving me far too much credit, but I’m not going to correct him.”

“One thinks too little of you, the other thinks too much. There’s never a happy medium is there?”

“I sure hope not.” Link said seriously, despite the attempts to make him smile. “I haven’t figured out how to beat that kind of enemy yet.”

Link’s ears perked up at the sound of a screech bouncing off the walls. It was a bird, an honest to goodness bird, a species that had not been able to reach the higher walls of the castle since Soul Edge’s control took hold. Link expected it to be shot down in seconds, it was food to most of the creatures walking around, but the cries continued.

The Hylian started keeping count. Ten seconds, thirty-five, sixty-seven, and he frowned once the two-minute mark came and went. When three minutes went by, a hundred and eighty of the most miraculous seconds to date, there was a powerful flapping of wings before everything became silent. Link could have sworn those feathers moved right beside his ear for how loud and clear it sounded.

Dusk started tugging on his sleeve, but Link’s eyes focused on the tower window miles above him. “Did you hear that?”

Link nodded. “Something's coming.”

Dusk started tugging harder. “Was that a sign? Who sent it? Is this some freaky hero power I didn’t know you had?”

Link shook his head. “I can't tell you who it came from. Only what it probably means.” Link turned to look at his shadow. “Anytime I've ever heard a bird screech like that, it's only ever been trouble. The question is, trouble for who?”

Chapter End Notes

*Le Sigh* This is still the most draining story of mine to date, but working on it is the most therapeutic. Funny how that works out.
Chapter Summary

Siegfried has to come to terms with a lot, but he's not the only one forced to think about the way the future may turn out.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Siegfried stood stalk still. Everyone in the room was quiet, some from surprise and others from grim realization. They all heard the same thing, the same sentence in the same tone, and they all had to come to the same unfortunate conclusion.

Siegfried titled his head, as though the direction of his skull could change the way he heard the conversation. “What do you mean you’re not coming?”

Yunseong stood straight, squaring his shoulders and holding his stance. Any other time, this would have been seen as an intent to fight until the last man standing. “Gather everyone else if you have to. Give him a fighting chance. I'll support you in spirit, but I’m staying behind.”

Siegfried heard the words, but their meaning completely alluded him. He thought, for an idiotic moment, of asking the redhead to translate them into German. “Do you understand what I’m asking you?” He took a step forward. “Link is in trouble. You remember Link, right? Blue eyes, pointy ears, a huge love of green?” He narrowed his eyes. "The guy who would have fallen on his own sword if he thought it would spare you any grief?”

Yunseong’s eyes trembled. “I get that.”

“Do you? Because if that was really registering, you wouldn’t be offering to stay here like a coward.”

Yunseong bristled, and he shouted in outrage, “Who you calling a coward?”

Siegfried met the shout with a hard glare. “The sorry excuse of a swordsman with flaming hair!”

Raphael stepped in between the two. Much like the confrontation with Zelda days prior, the two had inched closer and closer without noticing they were crossing into each other’s personal space. “Settle down. That’s enough name calling, Siegfried. That behavior is beneath you.”

The knight was beyond caring about what was decent, or what would spare the feelings of the man in front of him. He ignored Raphael, locking gazes with the redhead who was trying his damn hardest not to look him in the eye. Yunseong seemed so confidant when he spoke a moment ago, but now that Siegfried had raised his voice, he looked a lot more timid than was normal for a warrior of his skill.

“How could you turn your back on him like that?” Siegfried asked, accusation layering every word. “He was your friend.”

“He still is.” Yunseong insisted, and Siegfried was surprised to hear how sincere those words were.
“And he’s as precious to me as he is to you.”

Siegfried heard Cassandra snort and mutter, “I doubt that.” The knight silenced her with a harsh look.

If Yunseong heard what she said, he did a fine job of ignoring it. “But a pattern follows him like a plague.”

Raphael was physically keeping the two apart at this point, hands on their chests and pushing them a step back. They were harder to keep apart than the knight and princess during that disastrous breakfast. “And what plague would that be? To me, he was never anything close to a sickness. He was more like the sun.”

Yunseong nodded. “He was, and he probably still is to everyone he meets. But you know what happens when the sun leaves?” His heated eyes landed, one by one, on everybody in the room. He locked eyes with each of the comrades he’d once fought side by side with, the ones he swore he was willing to die for, and sighed. “It gets dark, it gets cold, and then everyone scrambles for warmer pastures.”

Sophitia walked towards the three men, eying Yunseong carefully. “I understand how hard it was for you when Link left—”

The redhead scoffed. “How could you? Not a single word came from you after the group split up.”

There was an overtone of anger covering the undertone of frustration in the young man’s voice. Mitsurugi was on his feet in an instant at the sound of it. “Don’t blame her for that. We were all selfish in our grief.”

Sophitia held up a hand, halting the samurai’s defense of her character. “But your feelings are valid. It was wrong of me not to reach out to you. I must have hurt you very much.”

Yunseong scoffed again. “Like it matters anymore. The second Link left, everything about this group fell apart. It’s a hard truth, but I dealt with it just fine, alright?”

Siegfried pushed against Raphael’s hand. “That wasn’t Link’s fault. Don’t take this out on him.” Pleading for someone else’s sake was not going to work. Siegfried never thought Yunseong would hold a grudge like this, but apparently, old feelings ran deep. Link was not there to plead his own case and Siegfried’s demands were falling on deaf ears. So, instead, he swallowed his pride. “I need you.”

Yunseong reeled back at the admission. It was rare to hear Siegfried ask for something, rarer still to hear him beg for anything. The weight of the words softened Yunseong’s tone. “I’m not going through that again. I lost a sun once, and it nearly broke me. I’m staying in the shadows where it’s safe this time.”

The blond growled. “I’m asking for help, Yunseong, your help.”

“And I’m rejecting your request.”

The knight saw red. Siegfried clenched his fists, ground his teeth, and narrowed his eyes. The target in front of him was perfect. Attacking it could cure a fraction of his rage, and if it hit back he could claim self-defense when he unleashed the full brunt of his anger. It was a win-win situation—

Talim tugged on Siegfried’s sleeve. He’d forgotten she was still in the room. He was usually so much better about his personal space, but she’d broken through in that gentle way of hers. Siegfried’s
blood was boiling at the unfairness of the situation, but when he looked at Talim, her eyes were begging him to understand. Clearly, she did not see this as the betrayal Siegfried thought it was. The knight had no idea what she saw. All he knew was that she was asking an awful lot from an emotional man who was still getting used to being in love.

“Traitor,” Siegfried muttered as he pushed Raphael’s hand away. With one last dirty look at Yunseong, he walked out of the room and slammed the door behind him with enough force to make the doorframe rattle. It was immature, an unworthy thing of him to say to one of the most loyal of them all, but the knight felt as though he had to walk away with some kind of victory. Even if it was a hallow one.

The room was suffocating after the knight’s departure. Yunseong was seething, breathing harshly and glaring for all he was worth, first at the door and then at the empty spot Siegfried once occupied.

“Traitor, he says!” Yunseong spat. “He would know a thing or two about that, wouldn’t he?”

“Let’s all just settle down,” Sophitia said softly. “Emotions are a little high, and we’ve never done our best thinking in that kind of an environment.”

Yunseong quickly turned his attention to the holy warrior. “Why don’t you just go home, Alexandra?”

Cassandra was at her sister’s side in a minute. “Watch your mouth!”

“Watch your tone,” he argued. “I keep telling you guys I don’t want to tag along, but you keep talking as though a conversation is gonna change my mind!”

Sophitia frowned. “You’re not making any sense.” Cassandra tried to pull her sister back, but Sophitia was as stubborn as ever when it came to fixing an issue within her team. “This isn’t like you. You may have a hard head, but your heart beats for the friends you make.”

Yunseong flinched. The sudden movement made Raphael move away slightly in surprise.

Sophitia reached out a hand. “I know you, Yunseong.”

“The hell you do!” Yunseong slapped her hand away, and the way he shoved past Raphael, who once again tried to force him back, made it seem as though he were going in for a harsher attack.

Sophitia froze, but Mitsurugi was quicker. He pushed the redhead back easily, making the younger stumble over his own feet. It was only years of discipline that kept him from falling on the floor and possibly twisting his ankles, managing to force his body into a crouch at the last minute. “I don’t know if that was bravado or a real threat, but you will not be doing that again. Ever. Understand?”

Yunseong rose, head bowed and eyes on the floor.

Raphael sighed loudly and threw his hands in the air. “Fighting each other now?”

It was irritationally reminiscent of the first they'd all come together. So many strong personalities and skills, forced to mash for a singular goal, was hard. It took days, for those of them who got along to begin with, to decide on something as simple as what basic enemy swung left or right. They made
progress, each day coming together a little more as one cohesive team, until they were nearly unstoppable. And now this.

Raphael could have murdered something. "Just what has become of this old team?"

Yunseong clenched his fists. "We’re not a team anymore.” Had he not sounded so miserable, people would have thought Yunseong was fighting to make everyone agree with the sentiment. There was just no way he would have wanted that to be true. “That stopped years ago.”

Raphael clicked his tongue and raised an eyebrow. “We’ve grown so far apart in so little time?”

“Two years is a long--”

“Not long enough,” The Frenchman argued. “To forget why we worked so well together in the first place.”

Yunseong shook his head. “That reason’s long gone, back in Hyrule where he came from.”

“Link was not the only thing keeping us together.”

“Then why’d we fall apart the second he left?”

It was a valid question. The answer was always just out of reach, and to this day none of them had been able to grab hold of it.

Yunseong’s fists turned white. “I loved him too.” His shoulders slumped, and both the samurai and the holy warrior noted that he was shaking ever so slightly. “He was one of my best friends. I want him safe, but I can’t go through a dozen losses all over again.”

Yunseong was no coward. Once he committed himself to a task, he would never run away without finishing what he started. However, right then, he had no desire to remain in a room with a bitter batch of old reminders. The last thing he wanted was to start another conversation he was not going to be able to finish. He stole for the door instead, silent, unwilling to look anyone in the eye as he made his escape.

Just like when Siegfried left in a rage, the room was quiet. Cassandra was the first to disturb the solemn calm.

“T’ll go get him.” she told the room at large. “If anyone can show him how unreasonable he’s being, it’ll be the most unreasonable one of the bunch, right?” She was out the door before she could get a response.

Raphael huffed, puffed, and plopped down to the floor. Mina and Amy, who had been silent bystanders up until this point, each sat beside him. “What a mess.” He patted his daughter on the head. “I’m so sorry you had to see that, my darling.”

Amy leaned against her father. “Is Yunseong not coming with us?”

“Perhaps not.”

Mitsurugi took hold of Sophitia’s hand, noting with displeasure how she winced at the slight touch. “Are you alright?”

Sophitia smiled and nodded. “It was just a small tap.”

The samurai turned her hand over, gentler this time. “A small tap that left an ugly red mark. Does it
sting?"

He knew it did, but just as he knew she would, she shook her head. "Hardly."

He clicked his tongue, but since this was far from a fatal injury, fighting with her would do more harm than good. Some battles just had to be conceded. "I'm under strict orders from your husband to keep you as uninjured as possible. I don't want to think about what a smith would do to either of my swords if I failed to keep that promise."

She laughed.

Raphael joined in a moment later, but the laughter died down quickly. "As much as I'd like to enjoy any moment in our exceedingly dark existences, we still have a very big problem."

Talim looked longingly at the door. "Will you leave him behind?"

Raphael laid his head on top of Amy’s. "We don't have much of a choice. Yunseong doesn't want to budge, and we can't very well force him."

Sophitia looked down at her hand. "Leaving him out of this fight doesn't seem fair. He deserves to have a place on this team as much as the rest of the us."

"More deserving than most, I would argue." The blond man shrugged. "But, ultimately, it is his choice. Times is scarce enough as it is, and we don’t have time to waste convincing him to join us again."

Mitsurugi sighed. "Give Cassandra a chance to speak with him. If a solution isn’t found by tomorrow, we have no choice but to leave with who we have on hand."

---

"You’re not going to change my mind." Yunseong said as he plopped onto his bed. This room was small, the furnishings sparse, but the light coming in from the window was warm and plentiful. The view it overlooked was breathtaking at any time of day, and it was a comfort to keep such a constant space. It only made sense he would run there to escape his old teammate.

Not that he had been running very fast. Cassandra only had to increase a step or two to keep up with his pace. Even then, there was no hiding behind objects in the hall or ducking into unseen corners to make her lose his trail. Yunseong just let Cassandra follow him. Even though the air was awkward, it appeared she was still welcome around him.

That was something at least. "Please, don't be mad at Siegfried." She quietly closed the door and went to stand in the middle of the room. Yunseong had his back to her, awkwardly facing the headboard in an attempt to avoid looking her in the eye.

However, she did not have to look at his back for long. As soon as he heard her request, he sat up, shaking barely repressed agitation. "He was an ass."

That was mostly just how Siegfried was, she wanted to say. They should have all been used to it. "He didn’t mean to be. He was just upset. I promise he didn’t mean what he said."

"Yes he did." Yunseong glared at the bedsheets. "Like I even care."
Cassandra frowned. “You care a lot.”

“And maybe that’s the problem. When you care, things hurt.”

“I know.” Even though she promised to be the ultimate support, the thought of Link and Siegfried together made her chest ache. “Trust me, I definitely know. But you have to understand, this runs deep for him.”

“It runs deep for me too.” Yunseong tried to slam his fists on the bed, but it lacked dramatic effect when the sheets swallowed his hands in softness. Cassandra got the point, though. “Link and I were seriously close. It hurt when he left.”

“It’s not the same.” Cassandra didn’t know how to explain. This secret was not hers to tell, and she knew Siegfried would be upset if she just blurted it out without his permission. What else could she do? “Don’t you want to see Link too?” Yunseong may have been hardhead, but he was not hard hearted.

Just as she thought, his eyes quivered at the question. “I would give everything I had if I could. I just don’t want to say goodbye.”

Cassandra bit her lip. Saying goodbye was hard, whether it was to a person or to an idea, and she had to admit she could sympathize with him. “You remember how I used to feel about Link, right?”

He smiled wryly. “It was hard to miss.”

“I thought my heart shattered when he said goodbye. I thought I was, well, in love. So I figured no one could possibly be hurting as much as I was right then.”

Yunseong nodded. “You cried a lot back before everyone split up.” He scratched at his neck. “That’s why I never talked to you about how I was feeling.” His tone was so apologetic, as though he committed some grave offense to her by keeping his feelings to himself. “I didn’t want you burdened with my emotions too. You were already going through so much.”

It was sweet, and such a Yunseong thing to do. People did not give him enough credit for how selfless he could be. “Thank you, but I’ve realized that I wasn’t the one suffering the most.”

Yunseong rolled his eyes. “If Siegfried’s name is going to come out of your mouth--”

“It has a right to!” Now things were just getting lost in a circle of wills. Cassandra could not reveal a secret that was not hers, but in order to keep the group together, she might not have another choice. “He definitely…” Now the only issue aside from the betrayal of confidence was actually finding the words to say it aloud. “They were…”

Yunseong raised an eyebrow.

Cassandra’s eyes darted around the room. She needed something, anything, that would convey her message without actually using words. In the corner of the room, hanging over the side of a basket littered with dirty clothes waiting to be washed, was a pair of ragdolls. They were old, frayed, faded, and obviously very well loved. Most importantly, they looked like people. If words were useless, maybe images would hit a better nerve.

Cassandra quickly jogged over to the corner and picked them up from the basket. She held them up for Yunseong to see. “Link and Siegfried are like these two.”

Yunseong blinked and sat up straighter. “Bald and dirty?”
Cassandra shook her head. “They were,” She linked the dolls together by their arms. For a moment, she flashed back to her childhood, playing out various stories for her brother and sister with her favorite toys. The thought made her smile. “The closest any of us could ever be.”

Yunseong titled his head. “Because they held hands a lot?”

Cassandra had to think back. Had those two always been so obvious with each other? They never held hands that much around her—but that was beyond the point! “No, you’re not getting it.”

Yunseong pouted. “Well, you’re not really explaining it.”

Which was true, but what she needed was a helping hand, not his completely concrete criticism. “Alright, so, friends,” She held the dolls out to Yunseong.

Yunseong nodded and tried to lean away from the toys.

“Sometimes they end up being more than just regular friends.”

“Sure?”

Progress! It was a small thing, but she would take what she could get. “And sometimes they can’t say that.”

Yunseong frowned. “Why not?”

“Because they can’t.”

“That’s not an answer.”

Cassandra sighed in frustration. “Because even they might not know it at the time.” Her shoulders began to shake, but it was more out of an odd sadness than anger. The earlier happiness that came from recalling her childhood was slowly fading with the reality of the present. This situation, Cassandra realized, was hard to handle. Sophitia would have wrapped the conversation up four times over by now. “So they couldn’t say what it was because they didn’t know what to call it.”

“It or they? Are we still talking about people or dolls?”

Cassandra felt like crying. She shoved the dolls together. “What does this mean to you? This.” She did it again. “Movement.”

Yunseong shrugged. “Like you’re knocking heads together.”

If only life was so simple. “Think about it in a more romantic sense.”

The redhead hesitated and leaned further back on his bed. “Lovingly knocking heads together?”

The only thing that kept Cassandra from throwing the dolls at his head was the knowledge they wouldn’t hurt enough to be worth the effort. “Work with me here!”

“I’m trying!” Yunseong suddenly jumped from his bed, standing before Cassandra in as firm a stance as he dared after his earlier episode with her sister. “Why won’t you just come out and say what you mean?” His pitch was higher, his eyes quivering, and Cassandra realized she was not the only one trying not to let her shoulders shake. “That’s what was wrong with us. We took for granted the fact that we could read each other so well, and when the time came to actually use our damn words, none of us knew what to say.”
Maybe, Cassandra thought, she was still going about things the wrong way. No one was handling these matters with sincerity. They were tiptoeing around issues, using tricks to get messages across without actually taking responsibility for them. What they should have done, what she should have done from the start, was confront the secrets with transparency. What good was taking a secret to the grave when keeping it meant no one would take your hand to travel to the other side? What good had it ever done any of them in the long run?

Cassandra tossed the dolls aside. She fixed Yunseong with a determined look, startling him into standing as straight as she was. “I was in love with Link.” She was shocked at the steadiness of her voice. “Or, at least, I thought I was.”

Yunseong nodded.

“Siegfried, however, is still very much in love with him.” Before she lost her nerve, she barreled on instead of focusing on anything that would clamp her mouth closed in anxiousness. “But the different natures of our love don’t really matter in the end. We’re all doing this because we love him in the first place.” For a moment, she averted Yunseong’s eyes. “Don’t you?”

She looked up in time to see him nod. “That’s why I can’t say goodbye again.”

Cassandra shook her head. “You’re not a coward, Yunseong, this isn’t like you.”

He shrugged, seeming even more unsure by the minute.

Cassandra had one last shot, and she prayed she had enough wisdom to say the right thing. “You two were dear to each other, and I know you miss him as much as I do. If you pass up the chance to help him now, I know you’ll regret it for the rest of your life.” She smiled warmly. “You would never turn your back on a friend.”

The room went quiet. She worried those words had not been enough. Cassandra cursed herself for her lackluster approach, and wondered why she could not have been more like her sister, who surely would have succeeded in her place.

But then Yunseong was smiling at her with a twinkle in his eye she had never seen before, and for the life of her she could not explain it. “You really want me to go?”

Cassandra held back the urge to yell. If he was teasing her, this was the one day in her entire life where she could not afford to rise to the bait. “Yes,” she said sincerely. “Will you help us?”

Yunseong was quiet for another long moment, but eventually he let out a small but shaky breath. “Siegfried won’t forgive me,” He smiled brighter than Cassandra could ever remember. “But you win, Cassandra. I’m in.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh my gosh, I do hereby swear that this story is going to be finished this year. So I do solemnly swear on everything I love about writing and the Zelda series as a whole.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!