

~ Heart of a Zora

by RinjiPantera

Chapter 2

It was a strange sensation, dematerializing. Zelda remained aware of herself, except everything was disjointed. Within seconds, the bright blue light faded from her vision as she felt her body become whole once again, her feet touching the ground. They were standing on the platform of the Ne'ez Yohma Shrine, one of the 120 that Link had unlocked. Since the original Sheikah that once oversaw these trials passed on from this world, the shrines had served as beacons for Link to fast travel to anytime he needed.

The sounds of rushing water filled their ears as the two made their way up the water-covered stairs to the main square. One of the Zora guards was standing watch over the shrine and was the first to greet them.

"Hey, Link! Great to see you again!" she said, before noticing Zelda. "And you...er..."

Link raised a hand. "It's alright, Dunma. Considering she's been keeping Calamity Ganon sealed in Hyrule Castle for the last 100 years, I didn't expect you to recognize her. This is Zelda, Princess of Hyrule."

Zelda smiled as she offered a courteous bow. "It's nice to meet you. It's been so long since I've been here. And honestly, it's a little refreshing to not be immediately recognized for a change."

As she began conversing a little with Dunma, Link saw another more familiar face standing in his usual spot at this time of day: In front of Mipha's statue. Upon noticing him, his eyes lit up with excitement.

"Link!" Sidon waved.

Link ran past Zelda and over to the Zora prince. The much taller Zora was going to shake Link's hand with the same enthusiasm he was well known for, but Link beat him to it, took it further and pulled Sidon into a big hug, an action that surprised even Link himself, nevermind Sidon.

"I'm so happy to see you, Sidon." Link said before letting go of him.

It was fleeting, but Link was certain he saw Sidon blushing. He was just as certain he too was a little red in the face. He looked behind him and saw that their hug didn't go unnoticed by Zelda and some other Zoras that were just spotting their arrival.

"Um, so. How've you been?" Link asked, trying to pretend like this wasn't a big deal.

Sidon was happy to oblige the small talk. "It's been good. There have been talks about expanding our domain a little bit. There's been a number of recent pregnancies amongst the women here. I suppose word of Calamity Ganon's defeat has encouraged many of our mated couples to have children.

Link playfully elbowed him, "How about you...eh?"

Sidon actually lowered his head. "Sadly, no. You would think I'd have quite the pick of my ideal mate. The truth is, no one yet has seemed...*right* for me. I don't know how to explain it. I'm not ignorant to the gossip that goes on behind my back. To most of these women, I'm just a trophy Zora male for them to parade around. I don't want to be seen that way. I want someone who sees and knows the *real* me, not merely the Prince of our tribe or just some big strong muscular man to brag about."

Link nodded. "I understand. Um..."

Sidon didn't let Link finish his thought. "Since you asked me about my dating prospects, allow me to return the question."

Link looked up at him and felt himself hesitating. He wanted to tell him. But the time didn't feel right.

Sidon noticed Link's pause and followed up. "Do you still think about my sister?"

This snapped Link out of it. "Well, yeah. I miss her a great deal. She's been nothing but kind to me in the time I knew her. I guess I hadn't given much thought about who I would date in recent months."

Sidon put a hand on Link's shoulder. "Listen, Link. You're my dear friend, one whom I'll always cherish. I know you better than that. I can see it in your eyes. All that time adventuring across Hyrule. All those battles. One of two things always happens to such warriors: You either crave love in your life or you become hardened. I have no wish to see you become the latter. You deserve the former. You don't have to tell me who, but at least admit that that's what you want."

Link looked at Sidon's large hand and traced his eyes up his arm...that incredibly veiny and muscular arm. It oozed raw power, even when unflexed. For someone who could read him so well, Sidon was clearly blind as a bat to just who Link had eyes for. With the present company nearby, however, he wasn't ready to tell him just yet.

"You're right. I want that very much." Link said, smiling up at him.

Sidon didn't say anything. The way Link smiled at him when he said that made him wonder. Surely, he was imagining things. Sure enough, Link was already looking past him at Zelda, who was idly roaming around, saying hello and engaging in small talk with various Zora residents who noticed her.

Sidon gestured towards her. "Perhaps you should go and rejoin her. You two did come here to speak with my father...am I right?"

"Yeah, you're right." Link said.

"She surely could've proceeded without you, but it appears she's been waiting for you to join her. I can wait here, if you'd like." Sidon said.

Link shook his head. "No. Please, join us. This kind of concerns you too."

Sidon smiled. "Alright. Let's go then."

The three made their way up the grand staircase to the throne room, where King Dorephan awaited them. Zelda and Link walked up to him while Sidon stood back.

“Ah, Princess Zelda! And Link, the hero of Hyrule! It’s great to see you both! Your battle with Calamity Ganon was felt even all the way out here. I trust from your presence here now that you’ve triumphed over his defeat?”

Zelda caught Link’s eye, smiling and nodding at him before he looked back at Dorephan.

“It was a most grueling battle, but yes....” Link said.

After another brief pause and glance at Zelda, Link finished. “...It was also Zelda’s power that finished Ganon off.”

King Dorephan beamed at them both. “That is the best news I’ve heard in a long time.”

He looked past them at something. Neither of them noticed, but Sidon did. He knew he was looking down at the statue of Mipha, which stood tall over the village square.

“At last, my daughter Mipha’s spirit can rest in peace.” Dorephan said, more to himself than anyone else.

Zelda spoke up. “Actually, that’s why we’re here. You see, that’s why we’ve come; to help you find some closure. You see it was thanks to Mipha’s spirit and the spirits of the other three Champions that the Divine Beasts maintained their operation. It was thanks to the Divine Beasts’ power that Calamity Ganon’s was weakened, enabling Link here to defeat him in his first form. The second form was the one you no doubt felt, given how immense it was. What I’m trying to say is that Mipha’s sacrifice was not in vain. She succeeded in death, what she died for in life. All four Champions will forever be honored as heroes in Hyrule’s echelon.”

Dorephan smiled. At the same time though, sadness reflected in that smile. The wounds of Mipha’s death remained close to the king’s heart even to this day. Sidon also bore the subtle grief of his lost sister. Finally, Dorephan wiped his eyes and smiled.

“To say that I owe you everything is an understatement. Not only did you both save us all, but now that I know Mipha is at peace...thank you...truly.” he said.

After a silent moment, an idea dawned upon Link. He carried the powers of the four champions within him. What’s more, he remembered something Daruk’s spirit told him after his defeat of Fireblight Ganon. Daruk’s Protection, like all the other Champion’s abilities, is a power that comes from the depths of his soul. In other words, a bit of every Champion’s spirit lives inside of Link and continues to do so to this day.

He had experienced the healing powers of Mipha’s Grace. While it was quite jarring to be snapped back from certain death, he clearly recalled hearing Mipha’s comforting voice whenever that power was used. None of them ever confirmed it directly; but Link was sure that the Champion’s spirits, or at least the part of them contained within their inherent powers, were intertwined...or at least a shadow or an echo of them. He felt each of their presences everytime their abilities were used. It was worth a try for Dorephan’s sake.

Link clasped his hands together in a similar manner to Mipha. Everyone else present saw this and watched with curiosity. Link had the strongest connection with Mipha, so this had to work.

Link’s eyes were closed as he willed the power of Mipha’s Grace to manifest. If a portion of her spirit does reside within this power, he should be able to summon it forth. Small green flames appeared around him, which flickered for a moment. Moments later, a ghostly apparition of Mipha appeared in front of him. Unlike the true spirits of them which could appear as solid as their living bodies, this one was indeed but a shadow of her former self; no more than an imprint bearing all of her memories. Everyone fell silent as the ghost of Mipha appeared copying Link’s posture of her hands clasped together. Her eyes opened as she looked right up into the face of her father. Sidon moved forward to see her up close, hardly believing what he was seeing.

“Father. Brother.” Mipha spoke. “It was always my wish to be able to see you both one last time. I wish I could’ve seen you both sooner, but fate required

that I remain with Vah Ruta to pilot it and help Link in defeating Calamity Ganon. Now that my role has been fulfilled, my spirit can finally rest.”

As she was saying this, both Dorephan and Sidon’s faces were wet with tears.

Mipha could see the fresh grief in both their eyes and smiled most warmly. “Please. You don’t have to grieve for me any longer. I am at peace now. And know that one day, we will all be reunited. Until then, my spirit will always be with you.”

This time, Mipha looked at Link. “I thank you for helping to channel my spirit, so that I could fulfill my final wish. I have something I wish to say to you also. Though my actual spirit has already moved on, Mipha’s Grace will always be here to heal you if you’re ever in danger. There was something I wanted to say to you back when you freed Vah Ruta from Ganon’s control. Seems even in death, I still hesitated. No more. I wanted to tell you once and for all that I’ve always loved you, Link. You meant the world to me, which was why I made you that Zora armor in the first place. I believed that we could have had a future together; that we could even marry and have children. Sadly, it was never meant to be. And so, I truly hope that you’ll discover that love for yourself in whomever you feel is right for you.”

Link thought himself crazy, but he could’ve sworn he saw Mipha’s gaze turn briefly towards Sidon after she said this. Did she know? Sidon caught Mipha’s gaze, though he showed no sign of catching on.

“I’m very proud of you, brother. You’ve grown into a most handsome prince with a heart of gold. I’m sure father would agree that you are most worthy of taking up the throne when the mantle is one day passed down.”

“Father. Sidon. Both of you. Know that I’ll always love you. I am privileged to be able to stand here before you and say these parting words. Remember them. For this isn’t truly goodbye.” Mipha finished, looking around at all the other Zora, who had gathered to witness this.

After one last heartfelt smile, the green glowing apparition of Mipha vanished. Link sensed that Mipha's Grace was back on recharge, no doubt its power was used to fuel Mipha's appearance in such a way. Thanks to its power being enhanced through his trials with the Divine Beasts, the wait wouldn't be long. Now that he knew he could channel a shadow of their original spirits, Link thought it might be a good idea to visit the other villages to enable their respective Champions to also leave parting words. Such a venture would have to wait for another time, though.

~ TO BE CONTINUED