

~ Heart of a Zora

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Chapter 11

Link and Sidon's feet once again touched the hard floor as they reappeared in Eldin Tower, close to Death Mountain. Though not quite within the boundaries of Death Mountain's inhospitable heat, Sidon could nevertheless feel it strongly from where he stood and could already barely tolerate it.

The Zora took out the first of the three Fireproof Elixirs and drank it down. Immediately, an invisible wave of cooler air engulfed him as though he were standing in the open grassy fields. Link knew what was at stake.

"We better hurry," he said.

"Right." Sidon nodded, perfectly fine with Link taking charge.

He linked his Sheikah Slate to the tower's control panel and set it to scan the Eldin region. Silently, he was hoping the stone *wasn't* here. At least then, they could go to a region with a preferable climate. Fate, it seems, didn't agree with him. A beeping sound emanated from the tablet, revealing a single blue dot located well within Death Mountain.

Link removed the tablet and held it up for Sidon to see. The stone's location was in the area behind the Isle of Rabac, the same area that the Igneo Talus Titan resided. And having fought the giant stone monster once, Link couldn't think of a worse enemy for Sidon to come up against. The lynel he faced would be tame by comparison. Link not only respected, but greatly admired Sidon's strength in all its forms. This time, however...

"Perhaps I should..." Link began.

"No." Sidon interrupted firmly. "The Zora's Sapphire is a sacred heirloom to my people and was one of the keys to the Temple of Time long ago when it served as the gateway to the Sacred Realm. I will not let some heat stop me from retrieving it...no offense, Link."

Sidon's expression softened at the last part.

Link touched his hand to Sidon's bare muscly chest. "None taken. I understand how you feel perfectly. Pride isn't always a bad thing. But speaking

as someone who loves you, this is still a very dangerous place for any Zora, including you. I'd be devastated if you were to die here...even for the stone."

Sidon placed his hand over Link's, holding it to his chest. He gave that same smile that Link had come to adore about him.

"I too understand. But this is *my* choice. Besides, I have no intention of dying here." Sidon reassured him.

"That's quite the sentiment. Well we better get going. It's already been a minute since you drank your first elixir and time is crucial. Luckily, there's a special shrine I unlocked near the stone's location. I'll warp us there immediately. We'll still have some running to do. Oh, and one last thing. There is an Igneo Talus Titan near the stone's location. If it spots us...well, let's just say that we're gonna have a bad time." Link said.

Sidon nodded his understanding as Link put on his Flamebreaker armor and warped them to the Kamia Omuna Shrine. As soon as Sidon's feet touched down, he could feel the otherwise unbearable heat as though from a distance. He knew if it wasn't for the elixir's effects coursing through him, his whole body would immediately catch fire just from standing here. He couldn't help but feel a pang of envy that Link could rely on his special armor for constant protection. He'd have to see about commissioning the Gorons for a specialized Flamebreaker armor set that can fit Zoras.

Link began running in the direction of the Sheikah Slate's beeping Sensor+. As they ran, Link pulled out some ice arrows and held them out to Sidon.

"Here. Take these just in case." Link said.

Sidon accepted them and added the arrows to his quiver with silent thanks.

As they passed a tall outcropping of rock, Link slowed to a fast halt with Sidon following his lead. The Hylian glanced out into the lake of lava to their left until he saw it: A huge fiery hot rock poking out of it.

“There it is. If we get too close, it’ll detect us. According to my tablet, the stone is somewhere over there.” Link pointed to a wall of rock past the stone enemy.

“We should try sneaking past it.” Sidon suggested.

Link shook his head. “It won’t matter. It can detect us by our mere presence. We should try moving along this wall here, away from it, and then double back on the other side.”

Sidon nodded his understanding and followed Link as he moved closely along the stone wall, which opened up into an open passageway leading northward. They went several feet along it before turning around and coming back in along the other side. It seemed to be working so far. Link’s Sheikah Slate was beeping rapidly, signaling they were headed right towards it. However, it was now positioned somewhere in the direction of that very lava! Link triangulated that it must be very close to the lava lake’s edge, no doubt buried under the ground.

“This isn’t good. If I’m right, the stone is buried under the ground. My bombs aren’t powerful enough to break it. I could try bomb arrows, but the scorching air would detonate them the moment I try to open my bomb arrow quiver to remove one.” Link said.

“Then we have no choice but to engage that Stone Talus. Judging from the stone’s position, the Talus will surely detect us and attack. We’ll need to take it out before we even attempt to unearth the stone.” Sidon said.

Link thought for a moment. It was a very risky thing to do, but he couldn’t think of any better ideas. He noticed a couple small nearby craters caused by his first encounter with it. It was then that he got an idea, but he would certainly need Sidon’s help.

“Sidon, I have a plan. Listen carefully.”

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Sidon, having felt the effects of the first elixir starting to wear off, immediately took out and drank the second one. There was no time to second guess Link's plan. They had to act *now*.

"Ready. Assuming you're right, the Talus will aim for you where you stand. Let's just hope this doesn't backfire on us." Sidon said.

"I can't think of any other way to break apart the ground. If you can pinpoint the exact spot the stone is buried under, I should be able to retrieve it once the Talus aims for it, assuming it's not buried far down." Link said.

"Very well. Ready?"

"Ready."

Sidon walked forward with the Sheikah Slate while scanning the ground in front of him. The moment it stopped beeping, he would surely find the stone's exact spot. As expected, the Igneo Talus Stone Titan arose from the depths of the lava, sending bits of lava flying in all directions. Sidon leapt back to avoid the bits of lava that flew his way while Link used his paraglider to catch the fierce updrafts and get some airtime as he engaged it.

Sidon forced himself to focus on the matter at hand as he walked forward again while listening to the beeps. According to Link, the tablet's sensor would stop beeping if its target was no longer in front of him, meaning he'd only need to take one step back after that point and point it in the western direction to confirm that the stone was directly beneath.

The Zora stole a glance to see Link land an ice arrow on the giant Stone Talus, removing its untouchable hot exterior and cooling it down enough for Link to land on and attack its black stone core, positioned on top of it. He couldn't afford to get distracted and returned to the task at hand.

The tablet was still beeping as he was now mere feet from the lava's edge. His heart started racing rapidly in fear that the stone might be within that lake after all, making it impossible to retrieve. The beeping kept going until he

was less than five feet away, when the beeping suddenly stopped. As planned, Sidon backed up a foot and the tablet resumed its beeping. He pointed it westward when it stopped again. He found it!

He looked up, however and saw that Link took a direct hit from one of the fiery stone projectiles the Stone Talus threw at him. Link barely got his paraglider open in time to prevent himself falling into the lake while catching the updrafts again to regain altitude. He had already landed several direct hits on the core before the Talus reignited its fiery cover, forcing him to jump off.

Link saw Sidon waving at him, signaling he found the position of the stone. The Hylian navigated to the spot Sidon was standing and as the Zora jumped out of the way, Link landed on that spot, waiting for the Talus to attack once again. Sure enough the Talus chucked a giant ball of fiery rock right at him as he waited til the last moment to leap out of its way. The impact was strong enough to break the ground where it hit, but the intensity of the battle made it impossible for either of them to confirm if the stone was indeed there.

Link needed to go for the quick kill and aimed another ice arrow at it. He would literally fall right behind the arrow and finish off the core as soon as he landed. Sidon watched as, in the span of a second, Link moved with the grace of a Rito as he took out his bow, aimed an ice arrow and fired.

The arrow traveled downwards towards its target as Link rapidly stowed his paraglider and fell down after it. However, the Talus shifted its position, resulting in the arrow missing it by mere inches! Link would not be able to get his paraglider open again in time!

Link tried to get his bow back out, but he was too late. His feet landed on the fiercely hot exterior of the Talus as he began to take damage. Link could feel his health getting very low at this point as he jumped off and got his paraglider back open to gain back altitude. But just when he thought he was safe, another giant rock of fire was already sailing right at him. He couldn't get one of his heart-recovery elixirs out in time and he was currently out of fairies. It failed to even cross his mind to capture some.

He thought he was done for, when an ice arrow struck the large rock, cooling it down in midair and knocking it off course, just barely missing Link. Link looked over and saw Sidon with his bow out. Already, he was aiming it at the Stone Talus as he fired a second ice arrow. This one hit true and once again took out the Talus's protective fiery cover.

Link flew back over his target, landed on it, and used a Savage Lynel Crusher he obtained previously to swing attack the black core, managing to finally destroy it and the Stone Talus Titan with it. It exploded in a shower of rocky debris and several gems flying out from it. Some landed in the lava, but others flew all the way to the cooler shore. Link was already back in the air when it happened and landed safely on dry land as the threat was finally neutralized.

Link was huffing for air, his stamina depleted. Sidon ran over to him as Link finally caught his breath and his stamina recharged. The taller Zora put his hand over Link's back and rubbed it, soothing him.

"That was amazing! That weapon you used was huge!" Sidon beamed.

Link put his hand over Sidon's bulging pecs and chuckled.

"You were amazing as well. You saved me." Link said in kind.

Sidon looked out at the now-empty lava lake. It was suddenly quite silent, save for the beeping of Link's Sheikah Slate.

"The stone!" Sidon exclaimed.

Link took his Sheikah Slate back out and scanned the source of the beeping. The stone was already close by, but it wasn't in the same place as earlier. That was when it dawned on him. Stone Talus's are known for harboring gemstones within them.

Link spotted them.

"Over there!" he pointed.

The two walked over to find the few gems that landed outside of the lava. Among them were a couple ambers, a ruby and...

There it lay, miraculously preserved after all these many centuries: The Spiritual Stone, Zora's Sapphire.

Link figured it was right for Sidon to take it, but Sidon gestured to him to do the honors.

"Go ahead. You defeated the Stone Talus after all. Hylian hands like yours deserve to be the first to touch it after centuries buried." Sidon insisted.

Link paused for a moment before finally nodding and picking up the stone. He held it high above his head to admire it against the backdrop of the hazy sun's rays. It glistened in an almost otherworldly way. There was a little dirt smudging on the intricate golden frame weaved between the three individual sapphires, but otherwise it looked very much in amazing condition, all things considered.

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