

~ Heart of a Zora

by RinjiPantera

Chapter 12

Link held the Zora's Sapphire out to Sidon, who took it and looked closely at it.

"It's so beautiful. Ugh..." Sidon cringed.

Link looked concerned. "What's wrong...oh...the elixir is wearing off, isn't it."

Sidon nodded. He had seconds left to either drink the last fireproof elixir or get the heck out of there. Now in possession of what they've searched for, it was time for them to make an exit. Link hurried to open his tablet up, select Zora's Domain and select Travel. The familiar blue light of dematerialization enveloped them both as their bodies disassembled into long fine strings of light that sailed into the air before disappearing.

Both of their feet touched down on the transport pad of Ne'ez Yohma Shrine. No sooner did their forms fully materialize were they greeted by one of the Zora guards, Dunma, who had been keeping a vigilant eye on the shrine for their return.

"You made it!" she exclaimed.

It was that moment when Link collapsed to one knee, the weight of the recent battle having finally caught up with him. Sidon grabbed and helped him back up while Dunma assisted.

"Wow, you two look like you've seen some serious action." she noticed.

"You could say that." Sidon responded.

Link limped on his good leg as the two helped him up the staircase. Once at the top, their presence was noticed by many of the other Zora, who all came running to greet their prince along with Link.

"Need to get out of this armor." Link stated matter-of-factly.

“Yes, that sounds like a great idea. You also need some rest. I’ll handle the crowd while you get some rest at Seabed Inn. I’ll cover the cost of the waterbed. We can pick up where we left off first thing in the morning.” Sidon gently insisted.

Link was in no position to argue. He was hoping to be there to see the stone returned to the Zora.

Sidon seemed to know what Link was thinking and gave him that reassuring smile that he loved so much.

“Don’t worry. Nothing will proceed without you. You definitely deserve to be there when I present the results of our search. Go. Rest up.” he said.

Link nodded and, with Dunma’s help, headed off to Seabed Inn.

Sure enough, Sidon became inundated with questions about how their search went and if they succeeded. He managed to keep a lid on it, saying that their first priority right now was recovery. He’d give an official report to their king in the morning. With that said and done, Sidon noted the late hour and went back to his private room to turn in for the night as well. He personally wished Link could join him there, but he had a reason for sending him to Seabed instead; one of them being the restorative effects of their waterbed. Being a Zora, his room had no such bed since he slept in water.

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Link slowly awoke from a restful slumber. His battle wounds were healed and his body felt rejuvenated. He half expected to be bombarded with Zoras asking questions, but thankfully he was left alone even after it was evident he was awake. He laid awake in bed for a few minutes, letting the cobwebs ebb away on their own. His mind wandered all over the place. His thoughts specifically turned to Princess Zelda who, as he understood it, was still at the castle with her escorts.

Ganon may be gone, but the monsters remain. Even without Ganon’s pervasive magic strengthening them, the Bokoblins, Moblins and Lizalfos were

still dangerous to face in battle. It was a concern that lingered in the back of his mind ever since they parted ways. It wasn't that he lacked faith in the Zora warriors' ability to protect her, but rather that he as her dedicated knight wasn't there protecting her himself.

Another thought that clashed with the other one was the precipice he now stood on. In spite of his dedication to his duties, things had changed now that Ganon was defeated. On the one hand, he felt very much honor-bound to remain at Zelda's side until such time that Hyrule was once again the safe kingdom it used to be before this all started. Even the monsters back then were only an annoyance at most, but generally kept to themselves for the most part. The lynels in particular were almost sociable.

And yet, here he lay, faced with a new reality: He had fallen in love. What's more, he had mated with the object of that love and made it official. It was quite a different story when long ago, Sidon's sister, Mipha, was the one who had fallen in love with *him*; yet he didn't fully realize it until it was too late. He believed himself to be naive, especially not knowing the true purpose of the Zora armor that she had gifted him, the armor that he carries to this day. It was meant not for its protection and waterfall scaling abilities, but as a symbol of engagement to the one that Mipha sought to marry.

Had Mipha lived and things turned out differently, there was little doubt in his mind that it would've been Mipha he'd reciprocate her love to. It would've been her he'd mate with and perhaps...

Link decided he'd best get up. The Zora were probably quite anxious to learn how they did. Some were no doubt expecting to hear they failed in finding Zora's Sapphire while others believed they succeeded.

Link put on his Champion's tunic and Hylian pants, which were his preferred combination, and walked over to where Kayden was tending to the front counter.

"Good morning, Link!" Kayden said cheerfully. "Did you sleep well?"

Link stretched his arms and legs in his standing position, yawning nice and good. Kayden chuckled.

“I’ll take that as a yes. Sidon is waiting for you up in the throne room. Everybody is itching to know how your search went, but Sidon wouldn’t tell us. Opinion seems split on the outcome. I don’t understand why he insisted on keeping everyone in the dark about it, including King Dorephan.” Kayden said.

Link sighed. “I suppose it’s because he didn’t want me to miss being there when he announced the results of our search.”

Kayden smiled. “I understand. He really cares about you deeply. I guess it makes sense that he would intentionally withhold vital information for the sake of not letting you miss out on it. But tell me something...if you guys hadn’t found it, surely you two would’ve said something the moment you returned, right?”

Link answered truthfully. “Honestly, I don’t know. Are you coming?”

Kayden shook his head. “I’d like to, but barring a direct order from the prince or the king, I must remain here in case a weary traveler shows up. My wife and daughter will probably be there though.”

Link nodded. “Thank you again. Your waterbed works wonders.”

Kayden smiled again. “Feel free to tell others that. Let me know what Sidon tells everyone.”

“I will.” Link said as he left the inn and made his way up the stairs to the throne room.

Much like it was when Link had first returned from freeing Vah Ruta from Waterblight Ganon’s control and Mipha’s spirit, most of the Zora tribe were all gathered in the throne room, surrounding their king and Sidon, who stood close by. Once he spotted Link, Sidon gestured to him to join him.

“Over here, Link!” Sidon called.

The other Zora moved aside, so Link could get through. He once again stood facing King Dorephan, Sidon joining him at his side.

The king eyed them with uncertainty.

“While I am most pleased to see that you two are safe, I don’t much appreciate being kept waiting all night just to receive your report. After all, the recovery of Zora’s Sapphire is essential to the history of our race.” the king said with weight in his words.

Link stood silent as Sidon looked up at his father. “My apologies, father. Normally I’d have reported immediately after returning. However, I wished for Link to be here when I did, the same reason I wished for most of the other Zoras to be here as well. However, Link was hurt from a battle we fought and needed time to rest first and recover. For you see, there is another reason why I insisted that Link be here when I present my report, which I’ll get too soon enough.”

After a moment’s silence, King Dorephan softened his gaze. “Very well. I accept your explanation. Now then, please proceed. Have you succeeded in finding the stone?”

There was a murmur among the crowd. As expected, Link could hear mutterings of some believing they failed and others believing they succeeded. They quieted back down once Sidon held up his hand.

At last, Sidon reached into his outfit and took out Zora’s Sapphire, confirming their success.

“I am pleased to announce that Zora’s Sapphire is back in our possession!” Sidon proclaimed happily, shattering the tension with a metaphorical Boulder Breaker.

All the Zoras clapped and cheered excitedly at the news. Even King Dorephan was visibly elated. After the cheers finally died down, Sidon effectively assumed control of the floor. Link wanted very much to hold Sidon’s hand at that moment, but given the formality here, he believed it may be inappropriate. Only a handful of Zora suspected his and Sidon’s deeper feelings

for one another and only two of them actually knew. He was thankful that Kayden and Kodah had kept their secret up to this point.

Speaking of which, Link spotted Kodah standing a few feet away along with Finley. Unless his eyes were deceiving him, it appeared as though Finley may have just begun her overdue growth spurt as she seemed a little bit taller now. What's more, the Hylan Sasan was there as well. Link couldn't help but smile, knowing that Finley and Sasan were beginning to connect pretty well for him to stand with her family like that. He knew Finley was much older than she looks; essentially an adult in her own right despite her childish appearance.

Sidon's voice pulled his attention back to him.

"Thank you! And to you, father, I am again sorry for the somewhat unnecessary dramatic tension in my silence until now. For you see, there is a special reason why I asked you all to be here when I presented my report."

Dorephan said nothing, prompting Sidon to continue. For a moment, though, Sidon looked at Link with a knowing look that told him what he wished to say in front of everyone. He was right, of course. Something as big as their mateship could not be kept a secret for long, despite the secret keepers.

Link smiled at him and nodded, wordlessly expressing his approval to say it.

Sidon regarded the crowd around him.

"I have asked you all here to announce that Link and I are officially in a relationship with each other. I truly believe that my late sister would be happy for us both to have found love in each other." Sidon announced.

~ TO BE CONTINUED