

Lost, then Found

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/4418438) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/4418438>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	F/M
Fandom:	The Legend of Zelda & Related Fandoms
Relationship:	Link/Zelda (Legend of Zelda)
Characters:	Link (Legend of Zelda) , Zelda (Legend of Zelda) , Impa (Legend of Zelda)
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe , Alternate Universe - Modern Setting , Alternate Universe - Reincarnation , Reincarnation
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2015-07-25 Words: 7,984 Chapters: 1/1

Lost, then Found

by [SaintPellegrino](#)

Summary

Two people waiting on their luggage strike up a conversation, get to know each other, and maybe fall in love a little bit - at least that's how the story normally goes. This is not one of those stories. AU oneshot, Zelink.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Every time she flew Rito Air something awful would happen.

When she was seven, one of the men on her detail got held back at a security checkpoint and they all missed the flight to Termina.

A few years ago the woman sitting next to Zelda got sick all over herself.

Just two months ago her flight was delayed by four hours while on the runway because a herd of cuckoos wouldn't move out of the way.

She thought, as mistaken as she was, that flying Rito Air back to Hyrule might work out this time. *Fourth time's the charm, right?*

But of course, her entire security detail missed their connection at Dragon Roost – Zelda didn't even know how that was possible, she thought they were right behind her the entire time through the terminal – leaving Zelda to fly alone.

And to top it all off, she was standing in front of the Rito Air concierge counter and using her most authoritative voice possible (though that wasn't really much to speak of in the first place) to pinpoint when exactly her luggage would arrive.

"Miss Harkinian, I can assure you that your suitcase will arrive at Castle Town International Airport in a matter of hours. It simply was placed on another flight."

"A matter of hours, you said?" Zelda wished she could snatch those words back as soon as she said them. The Rito man behind the counter seemed to shrink where he stood. She peered at him from above her eyeglasses, a scathing look she thought she perfected early on in life. "So just wait around then? Twiddle my thumbs?" She heard the other complaints from the customers around her. A father was wrangling his children while trying to figure out where the souvenirs from their vacation were now, and a man in Hyrule's desert uniform was speaking in hushed tones with the Rito woman trying to help him.

"I'm afraid so, ma'am. I'm doing my best to track it right now, and it looks like there's a flight scheduled to arrive around nine o'clock. It might be on it, if you're willing to wait for it at the baggage claim here." The Rito rubbed his beak and tapped a few more keys at his computer. "Is there anything else I can do to help you, m'am?"

Zelda considered calling the lovely, reticent Medli to see how the CEO of Rito Air would react to the fact her old friend's luggage was somehow lost between connections at Rito Air's hub airport. Or, better yet, Zelda could ask this poor Rito to call Hyrule Castle and inform King Daphnes that the briefing detailing the peace talks with the Gerudos will have to wait, since the documents are on some flight that his daughter isn't on.

She shook her head. "I'll stick around. Thank you for your help," she said sharply before scooting out of the way of the Zora already walking up to the counter.

Her steps echoed in the mostly-empty baggage claim area. Zelda sat down on a bench at the far end of the carousels. Far away from the chatter and clamor that beleaguered the Rito Air

employees, but close enough to keep an eye on any developments. Like she was taught to.

She knew she should be panicking. Those documents had *everything* to possibly put an end to the war with the Gerudos. Gonzo told her to keep them on her person for their entire trip home. All she had to do was convince the King that it's time to lay their prejudices aside for the sake of human life. And they were just sitting on some flight with some other people's baggage and could just as easily be lost again.

A flash of something danced in front of her eyes *losing the Ocarina and finding it again putting the Mirror back together swimming towards her ship with tears in her eyes* but it was gone before Zelda had the chance to write them down.

Zelda knew she was supposed to call Impa to pick her up and promptly return to the Castle. She could do that, try to explain the situation to Father, and then return in the morning to get her bag. She felt the kinks in her back and her heels crying out from the long hours of travel. The bags under her eyes were showing. She ran out of things to read on her eFairy.

But this was probably the last time she would be alone for some time. Without a bodyguard five feet near her, without routines and appointments and smiling politely until her face hurt.

She dug through her purse and took out her FairyPhone to text Impa – “*waiting for suitcase that missed connection, security detail with me. Will probably be a few hours*” – hopefully the head of her whole detail will overlook the tiny lie when she actually has to be picked up. Now to sit back, relax, maybe people-watch...

“Hi there.”

The man in uniform from the help desk stood in front of her. He was... tall. Definitely tall, almost as tall as her. Maybe nice-looking, even with the scar on his temple. His hair used to be a crew cut, but now grown out, blonder in some places than others, and looked like it hadn't been combed in months. His beard wasn't long, but long enough to betray he just finished a deployment

He looked so young, but his eyes looked so old. Almost as old as the ones she saw in the mirror every day.

“Can I help you?” She didn't even get a full five minutes alone that she hoped for.

“I, uh,” he began, hoisting a rucksack higher on his shoulder. “I know this is a bit weird, and you're probably going to think I'm crazy or somethin' – but I feel like I know you from somewhere.”

Zelda clasped her hands together. She really thought she could get away with being alone, all out in the open like this? What if he was a psycho serial killer, the ones that play with their food before they eat it? “I can promise you, sir, that I've never seen you before in my life,” she replied, an automatic response.

“I mean, that might be true. But still.” The man stepped around Zelda and dropped his pack on the ground before sitting just next to her coat on the bench. “Something just... pushed me,

I guess, to talk to a fellow passenger that lost their luggage. You weren't all that kind to that fella back there."

"You already have your luggage here," she pointed out. Wasn't it regulation that the soldiers had to fit all their effects in a single rucksack?

He kicked it with his toe. "I got another one that didn't make it on my flight from the Gerudo desert. It's sittin' somewhere on Dragon Roost. I'll be here a while." He leaned against the wall, still looking at Zelda.

"I assume you're returning from a deployment?" Anyone could've noticed that. Now he just thinks you don't keep up with the news.

"My third, actually. The Crown needs good men to go out to the Gerudo Desert."

Zelda pushed her glasses up her nose. "You're awfully young for so many tours."

His previously smiling face turned quickly to a frown. "There's better, younger men than me that are still in the Desert. They deserve better than a war that's dragged on."

It was Zelda's turn to frown. She didn't want the war, the longest and costliest in Hyrule's history – and they'd had quite their fair share - to continue anymore than her people did. Maybe King Ganondorf's representatives seemed a bit more willing to listen than before, but it would still be some time before men like the one sitting next to her could come home. Of course, he could never know that. "So you want to go back?"

The man became extremely interested in his fingernails, picking dirt out of them and flicking his findings to the cold linoleum floor. It took him a moment to open his mouth again, this time in a much quieter tone. "Have you been in the Desert, ma'am?"

"A while ago, yes." The past week should count as "a while ago," she thought.

"There are men that return home that say they weren't scared of what was out there, in the sands that went on forever." He twisted his upper body to face her. "There's good men, good soldiers, that said they weren't afraid of the beating sun or the howlin' winds that came at night, or of the Gerudos that would creep out of the dunes, shoot at you, and then scurry back as quick as they came."

"But I was scared. Still am scared. Because men that aren't scared don't last long in the Desert. They don't get that the sand in their hourglass might be trickling out at any moment. You can't serve your country to the best of your ability without knowing that the fear inside you is real - "

"And still be able to do what is right, despite that fear. That is true courage," Zelda interrupted.

A ghost of a smile danced on his lips. "Well, I think you got it, ma'am." His voice sounded far away. "I want to go back to help my men realize that courage inside them. Then I think we'll have a war we can win."

She looked away. “If more men were like you... then I think we just might.”

A still silence settled over them. “Well, I don’t even know your name!” Zelda spotted his hand stuck out in her peripheral vision. “I’m Link. Captain Link Ruslan.”

She eyed the hand for a moment before clasping it. It was rough, hands that had seen work and pain and everything in between. “Zelda. It’s a pleasure, Captain Ruslan.”

“Just Zelda?” His lips spread into a toothy grin. “I don’t get a last name?”

“Not quite yet,” she smoothly replied, dropping her hand from his grasp before the inevitable blush came to her cheeks. “Link isn’t a common name.”

“I got a lot of crap for it as a kid. Never knew why my parents decided on that. But Zelda ain’t popular either.”

“Only historical buffs and parents that want to torture their children would name their child Zelda.” Or other reasons, such as being the first daughter in the Royal bloodline to possess the Triforce of Wisdom in quite some time.

That wouldn’t be necessary for some upstart soldier that wouldn’t leave her alone in the baggage claim to know, however.

A few seconds passed. “So are you travelin’ for business or pleasure, Miss-No-Last-Name?” Link turned to sit like a proper gentleman again, only to bounce his knees up and down, up and down. “You look too serious to have gone on a vacation – not that I think you look bad or anything - ”

A giggle escaped Zelda’s lips before she could contain it. “I’m returning from a work trip, actually.”

“What do you do?”

Zelda paused. Was there anyway to just tell a single person who she was without them backing away and prostrating themselves, immediately flip-flopping how they acted around her? Would that ever be possible?

No. Of course not.

“I work for the government,” she eventually managed to say.

Link laughed, a sort of growl from the back of his throat. “And I’m guessin’ you can’t talk about it?”

The corners of her lips twitched. “It’s a conversation killer.”

“That just means you have to start a new topic of conversation, doesn’t it?”

She looked at him, without disdain or judgment or whatever previous bias she might’ve had. He couldn’t be much older than her, he needed his uniform to be ironed, and he could use a

good shave, maybe a good few hours of sleep as well. His eyes shone with every word he spoke. If she looked closely she thought she saw the edges of scars peeking out from his collar and sleeves, only adding to the appeal.

In fact, Zelda found Captain Link Ruslan to be fairly handsome.

A bad decision, really, she knew as she ducked her head away from his eyes. “Where are you from?” She gathered he was from the southern provinces by his accent, but normal people asked acquaintances silly questions like that. Impa said being decent at small talk, managing a conversation for just eight minutes, would be beneficial when Zelda became head of state one day. Zelda thought the jury was still out on that one.

“Ordon, so as south as it gets.”

“It’s so beautiful there! The sunsets there aren’t to be missed.” Zelda remembered when her parents would take her there in late autumn to watch the sunset dip below the pumpkin farms. Before things got so much harder for the Royal Family.

“I loved watching them with my foster family before I left for school. One of the boys, Colin, insisted on watchin’ them from under same damn apple tree on this hill on the property.” Link shook his head, laughing softly to himself. “I gave him so much crap about being so stubborn with watchin’ the sunsets in the fall, but once we tried to go somewhere else, we didn’t have a good view. The kid was right.”

“You were in the foster system then?”

“Whoa, Princess, you got to ask a question, I get to ask one!” Though his tone meant business, Link’s smile was anything but. “Ya gotta make this fair for me too!”

Zelda almost forgot to breathe at “princess,” as if he actually had her figured out by now. “Why’d you call me that?”

“What? Princess?” At her nod, Link guiltily looked down, fidgeting with his sleeve cuffs. “I, uh... I really don’t know. It kinda fit. Like it just came to my mind and I thought it fit you.”

“*Fit* me?”

“Kinda. Like you seemed a little stuck-up and in your own little world at first, but you’re actually a really nice lady. Like a princess should be. So ‘princess’ fit.’ He itched his left hand and looked everywhere but her. “Sorry.”

She knew he meant well, but just didn’t know how to convey his thoughts. *Just like so many before him*, a voice whispered into her ear, the same one Zelda’s heard for years. “You just caught me off guard, that’s all.” She slid her glasses back to the bridge of her nose. “There’s nothing to apologize for.”

Link exhaled the breath he seemed to have held. “Good to hear. I thought you were gonna smite me where I sat.” Before she could reply, Link rubbed his hands together, almost evilly. “Now you gotta answer one of my questions! We switch off, to make it even!”

Zelda couldn't help but to roll her eyes. "Is this really necessary?"

"By my count, Princess, we have about..." he leaned over to check the clock on the wall above them, "two hours and thirty minutes until our luggage is suppos' to get here. So, if you got a better proposition on how to spend our time, speak now or forever hold your peace?"

"Our time?"

He wagged a finger at her. "Someone has to look out for the Princess until she gets her luggage, don't they?"

Captain Ruslan was quite right, when it came down to it. Zelda picked up the coat that was between them and folded it on the other side of her. She held back a smile when she saw the surprise on Link's face. "First question?"

"Tell me about that scar on your eyebrow."

She shot him a sharp look. "How could you - "

"That's why you wear glasses, right? So people don't have to see it?" Link drew his knees up to his chest and scooted forward, almost imperceptibly.

"Well," she started to say before stopping herself. "It's a long story."

"We got all the time in the world, Princess." His grin was boyish now. Not that she didn't like it. "Our luggage won't be here for a while."

Zelda glanced at her FairyPhone. Only one message from Impa – "*K. Text me when you're ready to be picked up.*" It was like she was Zelda's mother, not the head of the Princess of Hyrule's security detail.

Surely Impa wouldn't worry about her. She hadn't in years.

She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "When I was little, my father had this coffee table in his study..."

xxx

He told her about his life willingly, like he was a book on the bestsellers' shelf, simply volunteering information every which way. Zelda learned about his foster family, how they eventually adopted him, how they paid for his school, and treated him like he always wanted to be. He told her how he liked his coffee (very black) and how the last dream he had was him fighting a dragon in the sky ("I might've been real drunk when I went to bed that night, but it felt so real," he added later).

Link told her a bit about the Desert too, even though Zelda saw how his knuckles went white and how his eyes looked distant as his words tumbled out slowly, falteringly.

Zelda thought she could give him little details of her life, if not all of them. She told him how she found her favorite books in her mother's private rooms (true), how one time seven-year-old Zelda hid for six hours because she thought no one would miss her and her parents would find her soon enough (mostly true – Impa found the little Princess instead). When she said she didn't drink coffee, only tea with lemon, he promptly went to the Cuckoo Brew down the hall and returned with coffee for him, tea for her, a lemon wedge balanced on top of her cup.

She wanted to tell him everything, from the nights she prayed to the goddesses to ease Father's sadness when Mother wouldn't wake up, how Zelda would fall asleep at her desk at night and wake up in the morning in the very same place. How she felt incredibly, incredibly lonely all the time, even in a world where Hyrule was a friend to every country.

Instead her happiness, her sadness, her life, was diluted down to being seemingly normal to a normal guy.

All the while, her left hand itched like it never had before.

He discussed his nightmares – or dreams, he called them both, where he saw death and fire and more emptiness, more pain than he thought was possible. “Maybe PTS? I dunno. It just seems real, every time.”

The dreams always seemed real to her too. Maybe they were. Only Impa knew about them.

They were sitting facing each other now (“criss-cross apple-sauce,” as Link showed her – Zelda never learned), and she had a lovely view of the freckles that dotted his face and how his tanned neck went to pale skin at the collar of his shirt. “What do you think of the Royal family?” He was playing with her glasses now, having stolen them moments before. Zelda only half-heartedly protested.

“I thought we agreed to not discuss politics?” Her brain raced to find possible, neutral opinions on the Royal family. Nothing that would give her away, but nothing that would discredit the operation she has worked and will work for her entire life.

“It's more celebrity gossip than anyone else.” Link tried to put on the glasses, only to realize they would never fit on his nose, and gave them back to Zelda. “Everyone has an opinion on them. It's like not having a preference for ice cream.”

“That's a terrible metaphor,” Zelda replied as she slid her glasses back on.

Link played with the laces of his boot. “You still gotta answer it.”

She took a moment. And then a few more. “I believe that the King and Princess serve Hyrule to the best of their abilities. It's certainly not easy, having such power like that.”

“A diplomatic answer,” he offered. “So you're saying you know what it's like to be in power?” He tried to hide his blush by rubbing his face with his sleeve.

“Do you have a problem with women in positions of power, Captain Ruslan?” Zelda attempted to look mock-affronted.

“I *enjoy* seeing women in positions of power, Miss Zelda.”

Zelda felt the blood rush to her face. “I... I see” was all she could manage in reply. It was a harmless comment of course. But still. It’s not easy to respond to things like that.

She snuck a look at him. Link was looking anywhere and everywhere but her, and his face was redder than the brick wall they were sitting next to.

A loud *BEEP BEEP* echoing in the baggage claim saved Zelda from trying to recover the situation. Link jumped up, in what could be almost instinctual, but he held out a hand to Zelda with a grin on his lips. “Looks like you finally get your wish, Princess.”

“And what would that be?” Zelda gathered up her things, took his hand, and stood.

“You finally get to be left alone.” Link’s grin quickly fell when Zelda looked away. “Hey, hey I didn’t actually mean that, I was jokin’ - ”

“You’re fine,” Zelda interrupted, willing back the emotions that were almost bursting from her chest. “I’m just not ready to go back yet.”

Her eyes flicked up to catch Link’s eyes and quickly traveled back down, like she was seeing him for the very first time, wrinkled uniform and rough beard and all. He barely had an inch on her, though she was in heels, yet Zelda felt as though he would always tower over her.

Captain Link Ruslan was a solider, a war hero, and would serve his country and make a difference. People would remember and care about him.

Princess Zelda Marie Nohansen Harkinian deHyrule XIV, a girl with a too-long name and not enough influence to do anything worthwhile, would never be able to say the same thing. Her people would remember, yes, but do they ever really care?

She wished, just a small wish, that she didn’t have to go back to the Castle and prepare a briefing for Father. That she could just be a girl that met a guy in the airport and they talked for hours and they would go on a date, maybe more, and then something more would happen if they were lucky.

But princesses, even ones prepared to rule the most powerful state in the world, were not blessed with wishes and could not rely on luck.

Almost robotically, Zelda turned away, heading towards the luggage carousel in step with Link. The bags were already sliding out – she spotted a military-issue duffel rounding the corner. “There’s yours,” she mumbled.

“’Scuse me” Link grunted as he swung the bag over the lip. Zelda tottered to the side to ignore being slammed when Link dropped the duffel. “D’you mind if I wait until you get yours?”

“Of course not.” Zelda thought for a moment she responded a bit too quickly. That’s what men did, right? Gallantly waited for luggage with you?

“You got a ride home?” They watched two boys were climbed on top of the conveyor belt, skipping just out of their reach of parents that looked too tired to deal with hyperactive children.

“My friend is picking me up.” She really, *really* hoped Impa would do the sensible thing and just wait outside for Zelda, just this one time.

“A friend?”

Zelda looked at him with arms folded. “An old friend that was kind enough to drive out here to pick me up and drive me home, actually.”

“That was a lil’ snappy, don’ you think?” Link clasped his hands behind his back, standing straight and tall at parade rest like Zelda had seen so many times in so many soldiers before him. She didn’t know then how handsome it would look to her now.

“It was a bit of a nosy question, especially for someone you’ve only just met.”

“I feel like you’re beyond the “just met” territory with someone when they tell you how they were running with flip-flops on and ran into a coffee table when they were just a baby.”

She sent him a scathing glare. “Fine. So what territory are we in then?”

Link considered the question for a moment. “A good one.”

Zelda smiled softly. That was good to know. “Do you have someone waiting for you? To drive you home?” The second question came out hurried, as she didn’t know if she could bear the thought of Link going home to someone that wasn’t herself.

“Nah. I couldn’t contact anyone about my arrival. Orders from the top itself. I’ll just get a cab to my new house,” Link said as he shook his head. “What’s your bag look like?”

Order from the top? That could only mean... “The, uh, khaki one with the blue ribbon, right there!” Zelda started towards it, but Link pushed his way through the throng of passengers and scooped up the suitcase, setting it down neatly in front of her. “You didn’t have to do that,” Zelda started as she lifted up the handle.

“Nah, I’d look like a dick if I didn’t,” Link’s breath hitched as he swung his duffel over his shoulder. “I mean – rude, I’d look rude if I didn’t-”

“That’s not proper Hylian grammar, Captain Ruslan,” Zelda called over her shoulder, rolling her suitcase towards the exit. Link jogged after her.

“C’mon, you know what I meant!” He grabbed her elbow, stopping just in front of the doors. It was nine at night; people were streaming out of the airport, they were in the way, and she saw their glances and heard their annoyed sighs, but she didn’t care.

She did her best to memorize the moment, to ingrain in her heart and in her mind how her fingers twitched towards his, the Hylian flag on his arm, how his eyes had seen so much death but strangely, somehow, still seemed to have the capacity to love in them.

“Zelda?”

“Yes?” She knew she was too eager, said it too quickly, looked up into his eyes too fast-

“I don’t really know how to do this – I’ve been in the Desert for ten months and you met me hours ago - I’m not tryna guilt trip you on that part, but I don’t know if I’ll see you again if you don’t let me.” Link scratched the back of his head. “So, uhm, could I see you again? It don’t have to be a lot, not even dinner, maybe coffee or something, I dunno-”

“Yes” was on her tongue, just about to escape. She parted her lips –

“Princess Zelda,” she heard a third voice say. Lower than her own. Serious. Impa’s.

It was Impa, who couldn’t wait in the *fucking* car. It was Impa, barely steps away from her and Link, in her pressed suit and her braid swaying. People walked past, staring at the immaculately dressed woman juxtaposed with the tattoo of the Sheikah emblem on her cheek. It was Impa, with anger in her eyes at her charge’s poor communication and dilly-dallying with a soldier.

“*Princess?*” She heard Link whisper in front of her, reflexively withdrawing his hand from her arm.

“Your father has been expecting you. Let’s get going.” Just like that, Zelda knew that her three hours of freedom were up. She couldn’t bring herself to look back up at Link. “And what’s your name, boy?”

Link immediately stood a bit straighter. “Ruslan. Captain Link Ruslan. I was simply escorting Miss Zelda to-”

“Please know, on behalf of the Crown, that we sincerely appreciate your time and energy for doing so. I’ll be looking after *Princess* Zelda now.”

“But-”

“Not many taxis come to Castle Town International Airport at this hour, Captain Ruslan.” At any other time she would think nothing of Impa’s curt tone, but Zelda couldn’t believe what she heard. Impa had no idea of what he’d done, what she knew of him. “I think it’s best if you found your way home before it’s too late.”

His shoulders stiffened and Link curtly nodded to her. “Understood, ma’am.” He hefted his pack a bit higher as he stepped further away from Zelda. “I’ll... I’ll see you around, Zelda.” Link didn’t wait for her reply as he walked out of the doors of the airport.

Zelda felt like she should run after him, to spin him around and kiss him, deep and long, like she’d seen so many other people do. She could know him and love him, forsaking her crown and learning normalcy for once. Allowing herself happiness, just once in this life, like she had so many lives before this one.

Impa gripped the handle on her suitcase, slowly prying it from Zelda, and harshly bringing her back to the ground. “We must go, your grace,” a tight voice said.

“Yes. Of course,” Zelda replied with a tight-lipped smile, walking ahead of Impa into the night air.

“We have to go over the details of your briefing in the car. I have some suggestions sketched out for your main points - ” she heard Impa saying. She also heard her suitcase rumbling on the concrete, the plane engines roaring, and a voice she knew calling “taxi!” with no success sticking out from the rest of the din.

Zelda stopped short of the long black car at the curb. Impa passed off the suitcase to the unsmiling driver – Zelda never bothered to learn their names – and opened the door for the Crown Princess of Hyrule.

Link was only a few meters down from her. He must’ve felt her stare, because he slowly lowered his arm to look at her. He was so close.

In other lives, ones that flashed before her eyes and haunted her sleep, Princess Zelda would’ve sent the Hero of that era back to his village, on another quest, somewhere far away so she wouldn’t have to deal with the emotions that caused her so much turmoil. She would watch him from afar, watch him live a life that paled compared to the deeds he had to his name, and let her heart and the love she had inside of her wither and die without him by her side. But Hyrule would prosper, guided by their broken queen’s unwavering hand.

She would let him go. Anyone could do that. Her ancestors all did that. Everyone read the stories.

Other Zeldas would take him as her husband, her consort, her lover, damned be the consequences. Hyrule would weaken, crumble at the edges when the Hero and the Princess dared to defy the gods’ command. Their children would try to fix their parents’ mistakes.

Centuries passed and the princesses-turned-Queens soon learned what must be done to ensure Hyrule would not fall like Calatia, Altea, and so many of their neighbors. Every Zelda recorded their stories, taught their daughters and guardians to keep the man blessed by the gods at arms’ length. Let him do his duty and return to the quiet life he earned.

And Princess Zelda XIV knew their stories as well as anyone. She lived them every day and every night.

“Can we at least give him a ride home?” The question was innocent, meaningless, yet Impa looked at her incredulously. “It’s the least we can do for a soldier coming home.”

Impa’s hands tightened on the door. “He’ll only bring you heartbreak, Princess. He’s done it so many times before. You know that well enough.”

“But-“

“I’m only doing this for your own good.”

Zelda pried her eyes from his. “Let me at least feel it, Impa.”

Impa blinked. “Yes, your grace.” She turned and cupped her hands to her mouth to be heard over the din. “*Captain Ruslan!*”

His head turned and his legs carried him over here faster than Zelda could process. Captain Ruslan’s eyes were intent, focused... almost wolf-like. She suppressed a shudder before he stopped just in front of her, paying no heed to Impa’s pained face.

“Yes, ma’am?” Zelda wished he would stop looking at her like he wanted to lay her out on the hood of the sedan right now and love her like she deserved to be loved (at least that’s what she wanted him to do, though a Princess, especially a Princess of Hyrule, would never say that aloud).

“We need your address. Get in the car.” Zelda knew that tone, the one where Impa disapproved as much as she could but had no real reason to stop what was happening.

“7 Goat Lane. It’s just outside the city limits,” he replied without missing a beat. Zelda hopped inside the car, took her customary position on the right side, and was followed by a duffel-less Link. The door slammed shut behind him. She heard Impa’s voice programming the GPS up front, and soon the lights of the airport were far behind them.

Zelda had no idea what to say to him, now that he was here, just an arm’s length away from her. Everything that came to mind – *I’m sorry I should’ve told you I had to lie to you* – couldn’t make up for the fact that there was a gulf between them that wasn’t there before.

“This is the nicest car I’ve ever been in.” Link stretched out, his legs almost kicking the back of Impa’s seat.

“It’s your government tax dollars at work,” Zelda said with a sneer.

He shook his head. “Active duty don’t pay taxes. Gotta brush up on your tax code knowledge, Princess.”

She didn’t dignify that with a response.

“I figured it out, you know. Before the security guard and the car and everythin’.” Link said. She could see him looking at her in the window reflection, but she couldn’t bring herself to meet his eyes.

“How’d you know?”

Link reached out and tugged at her blazer sleeve. “I mean it was just a guess. Your glasses were a shitty disguise for someone that’s always on the television-”

Zelda was appalled. “I actually *need* them, thank you very little-”

“Let me talk.” She shut her mouth and reluctantly turned her head towards him. “You slipped up and called your “nanny” your “guard” one time. You said your father is a super powerful businessman, you work for the government, but you’re flying commercial and you can’t talk about your work. You just came from the Gerudo Republic, a warzone that doesn’t allow Hylians into the country, and I doubt anyone else that didn’t look like you would be able to

enter.” The highway lights cast figments of shadows and yellow lights over his face, alternating dark to light, light to dark. “And the Gerudo probably didn’t want everyone knowin’ a Royal plane traveled in their airspace, so you had to blend in with the rest of the world that wants to see the ruins that haven’t been bombed yet.”

She laughed softly, thankful it was so dark so Link wouldn’t see her blush. “You just had a wish and a lucky guess.”

“Sometimes that’s all you need when you meet someone.” His fingers crawled towards hers, interlacing without so much as a word.

Without words, Zelda knew this was all she wanted.

xxx

Goat Lane wasn’t in the best part of town, but Zelda thought Link could’ve lived in a worse place. The streetlamps flickered, some lawns were unmowed, but it wasn’t loud. It was still and silent, away from the city lights and hustle. “The realtor told me it’s an up-and-coming neighborhood, it just needs a few more families and less GIs,” Link reassured the car inhabitants. Zelda stifled a laugh when she saw Impa’s eyes rolling in the rearview.

The driver slowed to a crawl as they pulled up to a white and green house, with long grass and no lights on.

“This is you,” Zelda said, almost a whisper. She wanted to tell the driver to circle the block, to tell Link to pack up whatever was in that house and move into the Castle. She could very well do that; all it would take was a few words.

“Can you help me with my bags?” Link opened the car door and jumped out before she could answer. With a quick look to Impa – who barely nodded to her – Zelda threw open the door to follow.

He held the rucksack to her. “It’s really not that heavy, but I want to pretend that I at least need you for a little bit longer,” Link explained with a sad sort of smile.

Zelda clutched the bag to her chest. “Impa knows you don’t need any help.”

“C’mon, I’m a war hero! I gotta enjoy the privileges while I got them!” They started towards his front door, footsteps padding up the driveway as slow as possible. “Besides,” Link cleared his throat, “I had to have you just to myself.”

Zelda stepped up on the sad, sagging excuse for a porch and lowered the bag to the ground. Her eyes adjusted to the dark, but she could only make out a dark image of Link’s face and nothing else. Zelda became very interested in the toes of her pumps, how they contrasted with the dusty combat boots so close to her.

“It’s only a temporary place while I gotta report for duty.” He was racing to give an explanation for the sorry state of affairs, but Zelda didn’t mind. Not one bit. “When I’m out I’m going to buy my old house back in Ordon. Fix it up. Run the farm.”

“That’s quite pastoral of you.”

Link shrugged. “It’s what I want. The fields, the horses, the rain. A beautiful wife,” he coughed, “maybe kids.”

“It sounds wonderful,” she whispered, entranced by what could’ve been so many times before.

“You could visit, of course.” She felt her hand reaching out for his, ghosting the callouses on his palm and fingers. “If you had the time.”

“Could I stay? At your farm?”

“You wouldn’t need to ask.”

This was uncharted territory. Part of etiquette training should include how to let a potential mate know how much you want to go inside and learn what makes him cry out and what their bedhead looks like, instead of standing silent like Zelda was now.

“Princess Zelda?”

She sighed. “Link, please don’t call me that, it’s just us-” She was going to continue to reprimand him (even though there really wasn’t a point, since she got somewhat of a thrill from hearing him call her by her title) if it wasn’t for him closing the distance between them before she could process what was happening.

“Captain Ruslan, I-I think you should-”

Link carefully took the glasses from Zelda’s nose, setting them in her blazer pocket. “Do you think we’ve met before, Princess?”

“Yes,” she breathed. Somewhere far-off, she heard the *thump* of his ruck dropping on the porch. “I know you, though I do not know how.”

“Sometimes you have different hair. In my dreams. Red. Blonde like the sun. One time it was black. But I don’t know if she was actually you. That kingdom didn’t look like Hyrule.” He sighed. “I’m rambling, I’m sorry, I don’t know why I’m being like this.”

Her hands reached up, tracing the scar on his temple. “Have you always had this?” Her world was spinning, around and around, like it was just the two of them, the hero and the princess, and it would always just be the two of them.

“Dunno. It appeared one day.” His hands settled on her waist, drawing her flush to him. “Princess Zelda?”

“Yes?”

“Would the head of your security detail hate me if I asked you out on a date?”

She giggled. “If you really wanted to rile her up, you could kiss me right now.”

And so he did.

And did.

XXX

“I’ll assume he was a lovely conversationalist?” Impa’s words greeted Zelda as she slid back in the car with the taste of coffee and mint on her lips.

“Yes. Quite the best I’ve ever had.”

“You do realize he’s been authorized as part of the King’s special mission task force, correct?”

She paused before replying. Goat Lane’s flicking streetlights turned to the glow of the interstate, cars flying by every which way. “No, I didn’t.”

“He’s going back to the Desert in three weeks.” *He’s doing the target mission. That’s why his deployment was cut short.* Zelda was too in shock to respond. “Moving on, I have prepared remarks for the briefing from the papers in your suitcase, as we should arrive in thirty - ”

“It’s a suicide mission, Impa.”

Impa raised a thin eyebrow. “I beg to disagree-”

“A five percent chance of all combatants returning alive is a suicide mission, especially when we’re so close to diplomacy with the Gerudo.” Zelda was in disbelief at the woman sitting next to her. Wise, strict Impa, who always taught her compassion must come before anger, that kindness will always kill pain. “We’ll lose all progress we made with the Prime Minister, with King Ganondorf, with domestic support just climbing - ”

“You have to think of the bigger picture, Princess-”

“I’m *tired* of always thinking of the bigger picture, Impa,” Zelda shot back in a thin voice quite unlike what she was used to. “I can’t remember the last time I thought of myself, because my thoughts are filled with memories that aren’t *mine* and no one ever told me that *this life* would ever matter.”

She couldn’t meet Impa’s piercing gaze. “This is why we actively seek to keep you two apart. It brings out Wisdom’s repressed passion, her need to have answers. You serve a greater purpose than to love a man who’s already dead. You learned this when you were a child, Princess.”

Zelda could count on one hand the number of times Impa made her cry in this life. So she stared out the window instead, willing the tears back to where they belong, where they shouldn’t even exist in the first place.

She was right, of course, as she always was and always will be.

“Impa?”

“Yes, your grace?”

“Do you think we’re cursed, the hero and I? For something we did that we don’t recall, ages ago? For choosing love instead of duty, that we still pay for today?”

Impa took her time choosing her words. “I believe that there is a time and a reason for everything that occurs on this earth. It’s a blessing that you were able to encounter him in this lifetime at all. It’s a blessing he can help us win this war this time.”

“Were we ever happy, in our past lives?”

“Yes,” Impa said with sincerity. “And you knew those memories would give you the strength in lives that you wouldn’t be.”

“Memories aren’t enough anymore.” The road turned from smooth asphalt to cobblestone. Castle Town proper.

She sighed. “I know, my Princess. I know.”

Zelda watched the billboards and advertisements pass them by. They changed since she was last home. It’s always strange, returning home when your heart, mind, and soul are in a completely separate place.

“You’re home, Princess.” Impa’s voice sounded disembodied, shuffling papers around. “You still have about an hour before you’re to brief the King. Would you like to unpack, have some supper - ”

“Impa,” she croaked out.

“Princess Zelda?”

She didn’t know when she began, if she cried the entire way home and wanted to ignore the wetness running down her cheeks while still having a civil conversation with Impa. But she wept the way she hadn’t wept since she was a child at her mother’s grave, runny nose and hacking sobs and the tears that just wouldn’t stop. She wept for her past lives, the ones that found happiness in some way, and the ones that never even had the chance for it. She wept for her childhood, lost in a stream of books, loneliness, and bodyguards for playmates.

Most of all, she cried for herself. Is it selfish to want what you cannot have, knowing that it will destroy you once you have it? Is it terribly wrong to live while you have the opportunity to? *Yes* she was taught, but *no* to what she wanted now, Captain Link Ruslan and a house in the country with no schedules and making love whenever and however she wanted it and two children playing in the yard as the sun turned the sky to a palette of oranges and reds and pinks.

She felt Impa wrap her arms around Zelda’s shaking shoulders, letting the tears soak through the standard-issue security jacket. “I know, my little bird. I know.”

Zelda hiccupped. “You haven’t called me that since I was a little girl. When mother passed.”

Impa rested her cheek on Zelda's head. "Be weak, Princess, before you're asked to be strong."

They stayed like that for a few more minutes, as Zelda let the final tears slip down her nose. One could mistake them for mother and child.

A vibration in her pocket drew Zelda back up, fumbling for her phone.

From: 089-477-5432 – 1 attachment.

Her finger wavered as she input her passcode, ignoring Impa peering over her shoulder.

Let me know.

It was a picture of a farmhouse. Yellow with blue shutters, a windmill rising in the background. Blue sky with a single cloud. An apple tree. A "For Sale" sign.

She laughed to herself.

"I'll get your bags, Princess," Impa said as she climbed out of the car. Discreet as always, that Impa.

Maybe, she typed out before she deleted it.

Someday, only to be erased too.

Soon, she smiled as she tapped "send."

xxx

'King Daphnes XXV made a statement at 8:30 P.M. last night from Hyrule Castle reporting that the Kingdom has come to a peace treaty with all combatants currently in the Gerudo Republic. The most immediate result of this negotiation was the abdication of King Ganondorf Dragmire IX, leader of the Gerudo Republic. King Ganondorf IX has been held responsible for the murder of thousands of men, women, and children, as well as the deaths of several international leaders, most prominently Queen Rutela of Zora Dominion. The Hyrule Kingdom invaded and occupied the Gerudo Republic shortly following this tragedy, drawing several other nations into the conflict as well. The King stated "a small team of Hylian diplomats carried out this mission over the past few weeks with extraordinary courage and capability, complete with an armed escort. Following the conclusion of the negotiations, King Ganondorf Dragmire willingly entered international custody as per terms of this agreement. He will be charged with crimes in accordance to the actions he took while on the throne, but I am happy to say he is no longer a threat to the world."

Noticeably absent from the broadcast was Princess Zelda, who more and more as of late has made brief statements alongside her father at public appearances. Princess Zelda has made many recent international trips due to Secretary of State Auru's bout with Poe Pox, and it would not come as a surprise if she played a hand in brokering this peace agreement or even placating her hawkish father. The Princess may even ascend to the throne in the near future,

though only time will tell if the visibly ailing King will abdicate, or what the legacy of Hylian occupation of the Gerudo Republic will be.

When we reached out for a comment, the Princess' Press Secretary stated that at the time of the broadcast, Princess Zelda greeted the foreign service officers and soldiers arriving at Eldin Air Guard Base that underwent this dangerous mission, for reasons she declined to elaborate on.'

Story continued on page 7.'

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! This is something I've been working on for almost a year - school and life in general always got in the way of doing substantial writing for a very long time. I hope you enjoyed this, and please let me know what you thought!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!