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# **PROLOGUE**

## **JUMPING IN**

"We have arrived," Zelda said, leading Link into the chamber. Light poured into the room from the great stained window above them, reflecting off the old sword across from them. The elements that had once made the sword what it came to be sat on pedestals around them, unpolished and slowly becoming like stone once more. "That is the sacred blade I spoke of, the Four Sword. Sealed away in its forged steel is Vaati, the Wind Mage."

Zelda turned away from Link, looking at the sword. "Lately I have been sensing weakness in the seal. It worries me. That is why we have come here..."

Link stepped towards the sword.

"Be careful," Zelda warned. "It is said that the body of one who touches this blade will be shattered to pieces. It has mysterious powers... Legends say that when mighty Vaati attacked, a hero arose and saved the people from destruction. They go on to say that by using this sword, the one was as four, and the four combined their strength!"

Zelda moved away from Link, closer to the sword. "Let's check the seal... step back a moment."

Link listened and Zelda walked the rest of the way to the sword. Before she could do anything, the sword shifted, tilting slightly. Alarmed, Zelda jumped in surprise.

Then the room got darker, and a wicked shadowy hand reached down from above, grabbing Zelda. Link tried to reach for her, but Zelda was pulled into the air too quickly, and the monster that held her hovered above Link.

It was some kind of demon; a warped ball of death and darkness, a single large eye looking down at him. The demon made the room darker, shadows spreading out around him, wrapping around Zelda. They were too far from Link for him to do anything, all he could do was glare up at the monster.

"Hoh hoh hoh hoh!" the demon laughed, his voice coming from everywhere at once. "Have you some business with me?"

Link grit his teeth.

"So you noticed that the seal was weakening?" the demon mused.

The eye floated downward a bit, staring at the sword. "How rude! Release me!"

Nothing happened.

The demon looked up, then at Zelda. "Eh?" he muttered. "I sensed a great power approaching, so I hid myself. But my, what a lovely catch! Surely you must be some noble maiden." His eye grew wide, looking down at Link. "My name is Vaati," he said cheerfully. "I am the great Wind Mage! The seal is broken... so I shall rage yet again! Hoh hoh hoh! And what a gift awaits my return! I shall make you my bride!"

Vaati hovered upwards again. "Onward we go, to my palace of winds! Hoh hoh hoh!"

Vaati was still too far. As Link jumped to grab Zelda, Vaati just pulled her away further. Then he flew upwards, and swooped back down before flying off, knocking Link back against one of the elemental pillars.

"EEEEEEK!" Zelda screamed as she was carried off. "Help me!"

Link felt his eyes grow heavy as he watched his friend get taken away. His head hurt too much to stay awake.

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*Open your eyes... Young hero...*

Link forced himself awake, rubbing his eyes. When he could see again, he found three glowing fairies floating before him. Blue, red, and yellow balls of light each with a pair of wings.

"Princess Zelda has been carried off to Vaati's Palace," they all said in unison. "Hurry! You must go to her... But you cannot go alone... You have need of the Four Sword... Draw out the blade..."

They floated away from him, staying by the sword.

Link got to his feet, stepping towards the sword. It sat tilted in its stone, but it hummed with energy, almost glowing. He wasn't sure how, but he knew he was the only one able to see that light. It was like it was there, but wasn't. It hadn't been doing that before, when Zelda was here.

He placed his hand on the hilt, and pulled it from the pedestal.

His vision flashed, and he stumbled backwards, but something seemed to hold him up. He realized he couldn't move his hand, it remained stuck to the sword's hilt, holding it in the air as if something was drawing it upward.

Then the strangest thing happened.

One by one, another Link took their sword from his, pulling away from the strange force. They were him, but not, at the same time. First the

Link in red; he held his sword high, a stern look on his face. Then the Link in blue; holding his sword, he kept a more caring gaze as he stared up at the light of the blades. And lastly, the Link in purple; he stood with the rest of them, a cheerful gleam in his eyes, like he was stepping outside for the first time in centuries.

The Link in green, the original Link, stumbled backwards. The power that had held him finally let go. As he caught his footing, he saw the three other Links standing before him and some old memory came to mind.

*"We're at your side... No matter how many times it takes."*

"No matter how mighty the enemy," the fairies said, snapping Link back to attention. "With the power of four, you can defeat it... The Great Fairies ahead know the path to his palace... If the Great Fairies acknowledge your abilities, they will show you the way."

Link looked at the sword in his hand, the gem at its base glowing green. The silver blade caught the light from the broken window above them, but he could still his reflection. He looked at the other Links standing in front of him, and saw the differences. They were him, but not him. A different version of him, like they were...

"Please," the fairies said. "Rescue the princess..."

Link nodded, sliding the sword into his belt. He led the other Links out the door he saw Vaati go through. If he hurried, he shouldn't be too far behind.

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## **Prologue: Jumping In**



# **CHAPTER 1**

## **THE SEA OF TREES**

Off the shore of a smaller island to the east of Hyrule; that is where the Four Sword lay hidden, and where this story begins. Its location was kept far from the kingdom, to insure that if the seal had broken, Hyrule's people wouldn't suffer the consequences.

But this also meant Link was far from home, in a territory unknown to him. As he stood on the sandy shores, staring at the forests that covered most of the island, the trees themselves seemed foreign to him.

"We're not going to stand around all day," Red said. "Are we?"

Link shook his head.

"First thing's first," Purple declared, sitting down on the beach. "Who are we?"

They all looked at him, not sure what he meant.

"This feels different than last time," Purple explained. "Like, I remember being there... in the end, when we fought Vaati... but this is like actually being here!" He looked up at Red and Blue. "That's not just me, right?"

"It's not," Blue agreed. "And not only that, but even though we're here... our original isn't." He looked at Link, the one in green. "You haven't said a word this whole time, but you must have noticed the difference. We're you, but... another you."

Link shook his head.

"This one's mute," Red realized. "I don't think he *can* talk."

"Is that true?" Blue asked.

Link looked at the shrine behind them. It wasn't too far from where they were. "I can speak," he said. "I just haven't had much to say."

"Well... anyway," Purple chuckled. "What do we call ourselves? We can't all be Link, but I don't feel like calling myself a color."

"I'm Link," Link said, walking ahead of them. He started for the forest. "Call yourselves whatever you want."

"It's not like Zelda's dead," Purple muttered.

"Still blames himself anyway," Red told him.

"We can worry about names later," Blue decided. "For now, we should follow."



Purple shrugged, getting to his feet. "Fair enough."

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Unfamiliar territory as it was, Link had grown up hearing stories of the island. He knew of the Great Fairies, and where they resided. If you paid attention, there were signs throughout the forest to point you in the right direction. A carved path here, a bridge there, and some times broken pieces of stone.

From what Link knew, there were structures built on the island as part of the ever growing expansion of Hyrule, but it had been torn apart by Vaati's attack a hundred years ago. Though most of Hyrule was repaired when the princess of that time made her wish, it seemed the damage here was left untouched.

But in the ruins of temples, knew sites were built for the Great Fairies who watched over this land. Their magic helped keep Vaati on the island, which is the only bit of reassuring knowledge Link on Zelda's safety. So long as the Great Fairies were around, Vaati couldn't have gotten far.

That being said, it didn't make *getting* to the Great Fairies any easier. Their magic might be protecting the island, but they themselves were quite defenseless. So they resided in areas that were fairly hard to get to.

Take for instance, the chasm that Link faced now.

It was a great gorge, cut into the earth. There remains of a bridge on either side of it, but like everything else it had been broken a long time ago.

"How do we get across?" Purple asked.

"We could throw ya," Red chuckled.

Link looked up at the trees. "We could jump," he said. "Branch to branch. They're close enough together." He didn't wait for a conversation, and started climbing the trees.

He walked across the lower branches, holding onto the ones beside him for support. "You guys coming?" he asked without looking down. As he made it to the end of the branch he looked across at the tree on the other side of the chasm.

"You can't be serious," Blue muttered. "That's too far of a jump."

Link ignored him, and prepared to jump.

Red tore off a rope from the bridge remains and tied it around Purple.

"What the-?"

"Just hold still!" Red hissed.

"Link!" Blue barked. "You won't make it!"

Red tied the other end of the rope to himself, and grabbed Purple.

"Let go of me!" Purple complained.

Link jumped from the branch, stretching for the other tree. He came within inches, but it wasn't good enough.

Red threw Purple over the edge, then held on to the post of the broken bridge.

"What you doing!?" Blue exclaimed.

Purple grabbed Link out of the air, and the sudden weight nearly jerked Red off the cliff. Blue kept him from going over, but as Link and Purple swung beneath them he feared the rope would snap before either of them fell with them.

"Get the rope!" Red barked.

Blue let go of Red and started pulling up the rope.

Amazingly, the rope was okay, but clearly Link wasn't.

"What were you THINKING!?!?" Purple scolded, glaring at Red. "You couldn't have said *anything*?"

"Just shut up," Red hissed. He nudged Link with his foot. "You almost killed yourself. Why?"

Link stared at the other side of the chasm.

"I don't care if you want to or not," Red growled. "You gonna talk, got it? Answer me!"

"I thought I'd make it," Link muttered. "It looked close enough."

Blue looked at the trees. There's no way those branches looked close enough.

"What?" Purple huffed.

"You realize how these swords work, right?" Red continued, drawing his blade. "If you die, we disappear. You're the original wielder-"

"Except I'm not," Link countered. "Am I?"

Purple started walking back down the path they came, staring at the vines on the ground.

"Leave him alone," Blue sighed, patting Red's shoulder. "Let's just find a way across."

"Pff," Red shook his head, turning away from Link. "Real great guy this sword picked."

"Hey guys," Purple called. "These vines look weird."

"What vines?" Red asked, turning around. "There weren't any vines the way we came."

"That's why they're weird," Purple agreed, kneeling down by the side of the path. He picked up a vine from and followed it to the grass. Crawling now, he tried to find where it was coming from.

Blue drew his sword. "They're moving," he hissed. "You... Purple, Link... get away from them!"

"Wha?... Oh!" Purple jumped back, drawing his sword. "That's why we names."

"Later," Red sighed. "What is this stuff?"

"It's alive whatever it is," Blue said, watching the vines slither across the ground like snakes. "But if we can cut it up into long enough pieces, we could use i-TWAH!!!"

Blue stumbled backwards as suddenly a vine slashed him across the face.

Red chopped at it, and only made it angrier.

"Let *go of me!!!*" Purple yelled, angrily swiping at the vines that grabbed him.

"Link!" Blue shouted. "We could use the help!"

Link looked over his shoulder, then turned away again.

"We don't need him," Red said through clenched teeth.

"Yeah we do!" Purple yelled. "Look!"

A tree had already started falling, and collapsed right in front of them. Dust and dirt was sent flying into the air, clouding their vision for a moment. When it cleared, they saw the vines were already crawling over it. Behind them however, was something far deadlier.

An enormous plant-like creature, thorns and sharp leaves covering it's body, was lurking just behind the fallen tree.

"What is this thing!?" Red gasped.

"Probably something Vaati cooked up to stop us!" Purple answered. "Or remnants of the monsters he once unleashed!"

"Link!" Blue shouted again as the vines crept ever closer. "Get up and do something!"

Link looked down into the chasm, standing. He drew his sword, turning to face the other Links and the monster in front of them.

He walked past them, brushing away the vines as they slowly wrapped themselves around him. As the others watched they realized the vines weren't really the threat, but that plant monster had teeth, and it seemed capable of moving faster.

It's flower shaped head stretched out of the large mossy body, the neck extending to look down at Link. It barred it's teeth, inching closer to Link. The tree began cracking under it's weight as it lifted itself over, and

it was soon face to face with Link. If it attacked now, Link wouldn't have any time to esc-

***SWISSH!***

Link sliced through the monster's neck, the head falling to ground. As he sheathed his sword he walked back passed the others, the vines already dying. "It's just a plant," he muttered.

Red growled at the back of Link's head, but Blue stopped him from doing anything.

"I'm gonna start breaking up wood," Purple decided. "See if we can't build a way across."

"I'll gather the vines," Blue nodded.

Red shook off Blue, walking away.

"We really do need names," Purple said, sharpening the wood into curved points.

"Well what are gonna call yourself?" Blue asked, sitting down beside him and cutting up vines to use as rope.

Purple thought for a moment. "Well," he sighed. "I'm in purple, I think. Looks more pink to be honest, but whatever. Either way, a name starting with P is probably what I'd go with. You'd pick a name starting with B, and Red would be R-something."

"And Green gets to be Link," Blue huffed.

"Or he can be Gary," Purple said. He chuckled to himself, wondering what would happen if he actually called him that.

"He wouldn't like that very much," Blue grinned. "But... I could with Bartholomew."

"Yeah," Purple agreed. "I'm gonna call ya Barry."

"I regret it already," Barry decided.

"And I will be... Paulus, no! Plautis!" Purple shook his head.

"Paul," Barry nodded. "You're Paul."

Paul shrugged. "Guess that leaves Red."

"Rrrrrrrroger," Barry said. "He's Roger."

"These are the most boring names in the history of names," Paul laughed.

"Hey you wanted them to match our color," Barry said. "That's the best I got on short notice. Hey Red!"

"What!?" Red shouted from off somewhere else.

"You're gonna be called Roger from now on!"

"Fan-freaking-tastic!"

Paul and Barry continued making their grappling hooks.



Near the end of the day, the four heroes had finally made it to the first Great Fairy's shrine. It was large pool of water, with six stone pedestals around it. A carving of a fairy sat at the top of each pedestal, names in languages none of them could read etched into the pedestals themselves.

As they stepped closer to the pool, a light began to glow in it's waters.

The surface rippled, and slowly a woman emerged. She was taller than any being they had ever met, as tall as the trees that surrounded her, as tall as the pool was wide, but slender like the tree's branches, or the intricate carvings on the stones. Wings fluttered behind her, glowing like flickering flames, and her long green hair was tied up on either side, but still draped over her shoulders and behind her.

"I am the Great Fairy of the Forest, guardian of the Sea of Trees," she said, her voice kind. "You have done well to come this far. I dub you... little eggs, waiting to hatch into heroes. I grant you each a Silver Key."

A blinding light flashed, and suddenly each hero held in their hand a Silver Key.

"If all of you collect the three Silver Keys of the Great Fairies of Forest, Ice, and Flame, the path to Vaati's Palace shall open. You can then make your way there to rescue Princess Zelda." She bowed. "Onward, little hero eggs!"

Another blinding flash of light, and the Great Fairy was gone.

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## Chapter 1: The Sea of Trees



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **WHO ARE WE?**

Link stared at his reflection in the Silver Key, his face warping with the curves. As distorted as his reflection was though, he kept seeing more and more differences between himself and the other Links. They all looked the same, just with subtle changes in how they made expressions.

If Red-- or Roger as the others called him-- smiled, he would smile with his whole face. Blue, now Barry, would half smile, just the one corner of his mouth tilting upward. And Purple, or Paul, had a habit of looking at the ground and shaking his head when he smiled, like he agreed something was funny but he'd also think it was annoying.

They felt like people, and somehow that made it worse. Link tucked the key back in his pocket, trying to focus more on walking.

A river had been running alongside them for a while now, but it had suddenly split off and now blocked their path. It seemed too wide to jump over, and too rapid to swim through. As with the chasm, they'd have to find some other way across. This time however, there weren't any trees nearby. They'd left the forest too long ago for it to be worth going back to.

"So how are we getting over *this*, leader?" Roger muttered.

"We could throw *you*," Paul jabbed. Roger bonked him on the head.

"I don't think grappling hooks are gonna cut it this time," Barry said. "But I think if we stayed mostly in the fork of the river, we could get across."

"How deep is it?" Paul asked.

"About this deep," Link answered, dropping into the water. He jumped into the part of the river they'd been following, where it was calmer before forking off.

"Idiot!" Roger hissed as Link's head went under.

Only a moment later though he resurfaced, one hand still holding on to the ground. "Well the bottom is really deep, but I think Barry's right. If we stick to swimming through the center of the fork we should be able to make it."

"Still," Paul mumbled. "That's a long way to swim. There's nothing we can use to keep us afloat?"

Roger looked around. "... No, doesn't look like it."

"We could use each other?" Barry suggested.

"How does *that* work?" Roger asked.

"We hold onto each other's arms in a line, and swim through the center, the water would pull us in both directions at the same time, so we wouldn't get swept away."

"Then we all drown," Link sighed, resting his head on his arms, still in the water. "If we're holding hands how do we swim?"

Barry raised a hand to answer... then face-palmed. "Yeah, didn't think of that."

"Well what do *you* suggest?" Paul asked. "Or are ya gonna just sit in the water until you get swept away?"

Link raised an eyebrow.

"Don't," Roger growled.

Link pushed off of the ground, letting the river carry him to the rapids.

"You know, I let it go last time," Barry hissed, running along the river. "But this is insane."

"I got him," Paul said, jumping into the water.

"Not him too!" Roger barked.

Paul grabbed Link by the collar, struggling to keep himself above water. "What *is* wrong with you!?"

"Get off!" Link ordered. "The water will carry us just fine if you float!"

"That's not how rivers work!" Paul argued, waves smacking him in the face. "We're-*pf*- drowning out here!"

"Too late," Link sighed, grabbing hold of Paul's arm and trying to swim towards the other shore.

Somehow, against all odds, the two of them made it. Both of them choking on salt water, but alive. The first thing Paul did of course, was punch Link in the face.

"Are you an idiot!?" he exclaimed. "You're either gonna get yourself killed, or one of us!"

Link wrung out his hat, not caring for Paul's words of anger. "If you'd floated like I said, like the others are doing now, you wouldn't be choking so much."

Paul grumbled in annoyance and turned away, worrying about drying off. After a moment, Barry and Roger came ashore as well, both equally as angry as Paul.

"There's something wrong with you," Roger huffed, throwing his soaking hat on the ground. "You could have said *something*, instead of

jumping headfirst into possibly *killing* yourself!"

Link ignored him.

"Nope," Barry kicked him over. "I'm not dragging this out any more. We have to work together from now on, and that means you're going to say *exactly* what your problem-"

"Vaati captured Zelda," Link said blankly, staring at the sky.

"... Well yeah, that's why we're on this mission," Paul said. "What does that-?"

"The seal was weakening," Link continued. "Has been for a long time. Slowly, but surely. And we could've stopped it sooner, but we didn't. Zelda didn't want to risk..."

"Risk?" Barry pressed.

"Every child in Hyrule knows the legend of the Four Sword," Link explained. "Most grown ups do to, and plenty of them have sought out it's power. Guards are usually stationed in certain areas to prevent that... my parents being some of them." He sat up, looking them each in the eye. "You want to know the truth? The *whole* truth? My parents were killed protecting this stupid thing, and Zelda didn't want to check on the island because she didn't want to risk upsetting me. If it hadn't been for my cowardice, the seal could have been fixed sooner, and Vaati wouldn't have escaped."

They all stared down at him, none knowing exactly what to say. Roger however, used action to say what he couldn't with words. He punched Link square in the jaw.

"That has nothing to do with anything!" Roger screamed. "You're going out of your way to do the most unnecessarily dangerous stunts because you miss your *parents*!? Because you blame yourself for Zelda's kidnapping!? That doesn't help or fix anything! If I were you I'd-"

"You're not me," Link hissed, getting to his feet. Standing toe to toe with Roger, Link was taller. He was taller than the others too, because they were all the same person. "You're not me, you're just echoes. Remnants of a kid who died more than a hundred years ago. He's dead, and you're still here. So what do you need me for?"

"You're supposed to wield the Four Sword," Paul grunted. "Use it's power to-"

"Bring you back," Link interrupted. "I'm just an extra pair of hands. I'm just here to hold the original blade, so the rest of you will show up."

"The blade chooses who holds it," Barry corrected.

"I didn't want that!" Link argued. "I didn't train for this! I don't



want this!"

Roger pushed him. "Deal," he told him. "You don't get a choice. We popped into existence because of that kid a hundred years ago. Didn't ask for that. We were created, and then suddenly we had lives of our own, with no real understanding or knowledge about what we were supposed to do. But we're here anyway."

"Then you're just as useless as me," Link told him, pushing him back. "We're all nobodies. I'm an orphaned farmer, and you're the three ancient shadows that were outdated the day they were born."

**\*CRACK\***

Link slammed to the ground, bashing his shoulder on a rock. Paul stood over him, a dark look on his face.

"The way I see it," Paul started. "Link's right."

"What!?" Barry exclaimed, totally lost.

"Link's right," Paul repeated. "We're all nobodies. But we each got a Silver Key from that Fairy, so we need you if we're going to get the next four keys from the next two fairies. And whether you want that or not doesn't matter."

He knelt down in front of Link, offering him his hand. "So we're starting over, *all* of us. Link, Roger, Barry, and Paul. We'll figure out what we're doing as we go, other than that, we're all on equal footing, just trying to stop Vaati from doing something *else* insane. Does that sound fair?"

Link rubbed his head, sitting up. "You're the most like him, I think," he muttered. "From what I heard in the stories told of him." He shook his head, taking Paul's hand and standing up. "Fine... we'll work together. But... I'm not doing anything like this again, the whole exposition thing isn't my usual style."

"No promises," Barry sighed. "I think I'm still confused on a few things."

Roger slapped Barry on the back. "Well hopefully we're over this now," he said before looking at Link. "Right?"

"... For now," Link answered.

"So that's it?" Paul asked, just making sure. "No other dark secrets you aren't telling us that could effect our future journey?"

"No," Link answered, already starting down the path forward again.

Roger shook his head. "A great big bucket of sunshine this one."

"Yeah," Barry agreed. "Give him time. So long as we can keep his head on straight..."

"Yeah," Paul nodded. "Let's get going before he leaves us behind."

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"And there it is," Link said, staring at the entrance to the cave. "The second Great Fairy Shrine, should be through here."

"Should be?" Barry asked.

"I'm going off of stories here," Link admitted. "Rumors, mixed with conjecture, and a bit of theory. It's not like there's people out here mapping this stuff out, that's what m-the guards are supposed to stop."

"Well judging by the architecture," Roger said. "I'd say this is as good a guess as any that the shrine is this way."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Paul asked, taking the lead. "Let's go in."

Roger and Barry followed, but Link took a moment to stay behind. He looked over his shoulder at the forest in the distance, the land they'd crossed to get here. It was a big island, with the forest just being a small corner of it. They stood now at the base of a mountain, an old cave entrance the only path forward.

But Vaati had used his magic here as well. The mountain was covered in snow and ice, so much so that it blocked their path most of the way here.

Link wondered what other curses Vaati had placed. What other dangers awaited them? First the vine monster, and now the frozen tundra of a once fruitful land. Things would only get worse from here on out.

"Are you coming!?" Roger called.

"Yeah," Link sighed, stepping into the cave.

But as Link caught up to the others, the floor broke, and each of them began tumbling into darkness.

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## Chapter 2: Who Are We?



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **TALUS CAVE**

The Four Links slammed into the ground, cracking the hard ice floor. Luckily it held, but it seemed as if they weren't going anywhere else any time soon.

"Well that's great," Barry muttered, brushing himself off. "How do we get back up?"

"I knew I should've kept the grappling hooks," Paul sighed.

"Stop moving," Roger warned.

Everyone froze, staring at the ground. It was solid ice, but fissures had started spreading out from around them.

"I think we hit it too hard," Link sighed. "Any i-"

Suddenly the floor gave way, tipping them sideways. Unable to grab hold of anything, they slid straight down, screaming into the freezing water below. But it didn't end there. The harsh currents immediately swept them away. The river that had been so challenging to cross less than an hour ago no seemed like trying to stay afloat in a kiddie pool. *This* was like being swallowed whole by hurricane.

Down deeper into the cave they were taken, crashing and knocking into the hard rock walls. It was hard enough keeping their heads above water, but when they realized they were very quickly getting separated there was nothing they could do. None of them could do anything as they watched each in turn disappear around a corner.

*Think!* Link thought. *What do I do!?*

He reached out to grab the wall, right as the water slammed him upwards. Hitting his head on the ceiling, everything went dark.

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Link woke leaning against the cold wall.

"You alright?" Roger asked.

"Yeah," Link mumbled, his vision still blurry. He realized he was shaking, but at least everyone else was too, so it was probably just from the cold. "We should hurry up. Get through this, get out, get warm."

"Agreed," Paul said, helping Link stand. "So... which way do we go?"

Link looked at the chamber they were in. There was a pool of

water which clearly came from the tunnels they'd just been pushed through, two cave entrances on either side of them, and a steep drop off in front of them where the ice broke off into darkness. Luckily enough, there was a bit of light spilling in from the cracks the cave ceiling above them, but the ceiling was so far up it didn't matter if Paul *had* brought the grappling hooks.

"Seems like there's only two ways forward," Roger said. "Which do we wanna pick?"

Paul squinted at the light. "I wish I had a better idea of where the sun was. Then I could tell which direction we were facing, and could figure out where... well, I guess we don't exactly know where the shrine is anyway."

"My first thought is splitting up," Link said. "But that seems like a bad idea."

"Clearly," Paul agreed.

"I say the one on the left then," Link decided, already moving.

"Why?" Roger asked as Link walked passed.

"It's a fifty-fifty chance either way," Link answered. "And I don't feel like freezing to death worrying about it."

They took the tunnel on the left, each keeping a hand on the wall as it got darker. It led them deeper into the mountain, lower and lower. They could hear creaking as ice broke off in the distance, and water running as the rivers flowed above them. But as they continued on there were other sounds as well, an odd sound closer than the rest.

"Something just moved passed me!" Paul hissed. "It felt... squishy."

"Squishy?" Barry asked.

"I think I just stepped in something," Roger agreed. "My foot's stuck on something."

"Here," Link said, drawing his sword. "Everyone step back." He ran it along the rock wall, the metal sparking. In the quick flashes of dim light, he could make out a gooey red substance covering the ground. "Well, I think there are Chuchus here."

"Oh," Paul sighed. "I thought it was gonna be something bad."

"Yeah, luckily they're harmless in small numbers," Barry agreed. "But small numbers don't cover the floor."

"So we move quickly," Roger said.

"No!" Link hissed. "If they haven't attacked yet, they're probably asleep."

The cave rumbled overhead.

"Well if we don't wake them up, the cave will," Paul said.

"Just move cautiously," Barry warned. "And keep quiet."

The cave rumbled again, and Link kept watching the ceiling. "That sound," he said. "Sounds an awful lot like the sound the floor made when we got sent crashing through it."

Ice continued breaking in the distance, and suddenly the rushing waters above them sounded louder. The rumbling kept going, getting louder.

"Okay, new plan," Barry decided, picking up the pace. "Move faster."

"I thought you said not to wake them up!" Roger hissed.

"Judging by the state of the cave," Link said, moving faster as well. "I don't think they're sleeping."

Barry bumped into Link, unable to see him or the others in the dark. Link grabbed his arm, and put his other arm to stop Roger and Paul. "Hold on! If we start running we'll get split up again. We need to find a way to not get sep-"

**CRACK!!**

The ceiling caved in behind them, and water started pouring in.

"No time! Hold on!" Link grabbed hold of Roger and Barry, Roger grabbed hold of Paul and Paul clung to Barry.

A moment later... the stream of water puddled at their feet.

They stood there in silence, staring at the ground they couldn't see. There was barely an inch of water, moving slowly across the floor. It washed away some of the dead Chuchus, but other than that...

Link laughed.

"Hey look at that," Roger jabbed Link's shoulder. "Real Human emotion for once."

Link shook his head. "Let's just keep going while luck is on our-"

**BAM!!**

The rest of the raging water broke through, and this time it hit the four of them full force. It picked them up, and swept them away.

"Stop interrupting me!" Link shouted at the water.

"Hold on to something!" Barry yelled.

They all reached out for each other, but again the water tore them apart. Fighting to keep their heads above water once more, they weren't able to keep track of the others, and instead ended up flailing for their lives. And the caves winding through the never ending darkness didn't help, they kept hitting the walls, doing everything they could to take any serious hits.

And then Link went under. The current was too strong, and he ended up flipping upside down. Spinning without control, Link was tossed around through the heavy waters. He had no idea where the others had gone, or where he was himself.

Then suddenly he was falling.

He could breathe for a moment, as he was flying out of the waterfall. The air rushing up at him, stung his eyes, but he tried to see below him. There were mushrooms, glowing mushrooms, that gave off just enough light to see exactly what he needed.

"If any of you can hear me!" Link shouted. "Aim straight down from the waterfall! There's a lake!"

"*What!?*" one of them shouted from the distance. The winds took their words away, they could barely hear each other.

"Aim downward!" Link shouted louder. "For the lake!"

He hoped they could hear him, or at least could see the lake themselves. He couldn't see them, so he didn't know how far down they were, or who had made it so far, but he had to hope.

Link braced himself, and hit the water.

He sunk, floating beneath the surface for a moment as his limbs were too shocked to move. But as his breath failed him, he forced his way up. As he gasped for air above the surface he wiped the water out of his eyes, then started looking around for the others.

There was a loud splash, the waves hitting Link and almost drowning him again.

"Roger! Barry! Paul!" Link shouted. "Where are you!?"

A moment later, Barry broke surface. "I-I'm alright, I think. The others?"

"I don't know," Link panted.

Then another splash, pushing Link and Barry away.

"Come on!" Roger growled, fighting the water in his eyes as he too came up for air. "I can't see anything, who else made it?"

"Myself and Barry," Link said. "I'm Link though, I don't know where Paul was."

"Any minute now then," Barry said, watching the waterfall. "We landed one right after the other, so Paul shouldn't be too far behind."

Link watched the waterfall as well, but no one else came down. "Paul!" he shouted. "*Paul!*"

"Paul!" Roger and Barry shouted.

"Where are you!?" Link shouted. "Paul!"

"... ere!" Paul yelled from the distance. He was still at the top of

the waterfall, he hadn't been thrown off like the others.

"Ride the waterfall down!" Link told him. "We're down here!"

Paul could see the tiny dots of light far below him as he clung to the rock walls. The water threatened to push him over the edge, but he was scared stiff. "I don't want to move!" he shouted. "There's got to be another way down!" He looked to either side of the tunnel opening, but there weren't even ledges.

"You gotta jump!" Roger yelled. "We made it! We're fine! Jump!"

"Yeah," Paul huffed. "They're fine... I'll be fine." He lowered himself, preparing to jump.

Before he even had the chance, the water flipped him. He was in the air before he even knew what had happened, tumbling in circles, feet overhead then head over feet and back around again.

He screamed even as he steadied himself, seeing the water get ever closer. And finally when he hit, and sunk... he expected every bone in his body to shatter. Instead, it was like he just slowed down, and then it pushed him back up to the surface.

"I'm alive," he coughed as the others swam over to him. "I think... yeah... I'm alive. We really shouldn't be though... what happened?"

"I think we're getting closer to the shrine," Link said. "Whatever magic protects it must have guided us here, protected us as well."

"Maybe," Barry agreed. "I wonder what would have happened if we'd taken the other path."

"Doesn't matter," Link said. "Let's get going. We shouldn't waste any more time."

"Right," the others nodded.

They swam to shore, and started away from the high rock walls. Passing the lake the ice sloped upwards, narrowing into a flat path. It was slick, but doable. The tiny glowing mushrooms on the walls lit their way, and eventually they arrived at the chamber of the second Great Fairy.

The floor was made of ice, but it wasn't slick like the ice outside. There were pedestals with stone carvings of fairies lining the chamber as well, same with the shrine in the forest, but these fairies seemed to glow. And at the end of the chamber was the large pool of crystal clear water.

A light shone from beneath the surface, and an impossibly tall woman emerged. Her long dress trailed over the water, her wings glowed and fluttered behind her, and her long blue hair touched the water. She folded her hands in her lap, looking down at the four heroes.

"I am the Great Fairy of Ice," she smiled. "I am the guardian of Talus Cave. You have done well to come so far, through such dangerous

lands. I dub you... little hatchlings, waiting to grow into heroes. I grant you each a Silver Key."

As before, there was a flash of light, and each hero held a Silver Key in their hand. It shone brightly, a faint blue glow around it. As Link pulled out the second he realized it reacted the same way, but green. They seemed to mirror the Great Fairies they received them from.

But there were three Great Fairies, and four heroes. Link wondered which of them, for whatever reason, wouldn't be represented.

"If all of you collect the three Silver Keys of the Great Fairies of Forest, Ice, and Flame, the path to Vaati's Palace shall open. You can make your way there to rescue Princess Zelda." She bowed, her hair falling around her. "Onward, little hero hatchlings!"

In another flash of light, the second of the Great Fairies was gone.

*Only one more*, Link thought. *But... why doesn't it feel like we're moving forward?* He looked at his sword over his shoulder. *Why doesn't it feel like we're getting stronger?*

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### **Chapter 3: Talus Cave**





## **CHAPTER 4**

### **PROBLEM SOLVED**

Link, Roger, Barry, and Paul, climbed out of the hole the Great Fairy of Ice had led them to. They all stepped out into the daylight, the sun blinding them after having been in darkness for so long. It wasn't much warmer than it had been in the cave though, but at least they were out at last.

And as their eyes finally adjusted, looking to the north to the mountain range they would have to traverse next... the top of all three mountains exploded.

"Whoa," Paul mumbled, stepping to the edge of the cliff to get a better look.

Fire bellowed from the craters as rock and lava poured out. But then came the smoke, and ash. The mountain range was a couple dozen miles away, far enough that the heat and fire wouldn't reach them, but the ash was carried by the wind.

And they all knew who controlled the winds here.

"Everyone down!" Link ordered, pulling them all back into the hole.

A dark cloud of death swept over them, putting them in darkness once more. These heat they could feel, even sitting in the icy hole of Mt. Talus. They could smell the rotten stench of sulfur, and the burning of ash as it settled down around them.

"What the?" Roger coughed, poking his head out. "What just happened!?"

"Vaati," Barry growled. "Has to be."

"Maybe," Link muttered.

"Who else would do this?" Paul asked sarcastically.

Link didn't answer, but he climbed out of the hole again, taking his hat off and using it to cover his mouth. "Well... Not sure what else we're supposed to do, so..."

"Are you actually thinking of going there still?" Barry asked. "If Vaati could do that, then what chance do we have at the moment?"

"Barry's right," Paul agreed. "We should at least wait for the eruption to stop, the lava to cool. Otherwise we're not getting anywhere close."

"If Vaati's capable of that," Link corrected. "Then we need to move

faster, not sit around waiting for lava to cool."

"I think Link's right," Roger said, still staring at the volcanoes. "Something like this, we should just keep moving."

"Two to two," Barry sighed. "Anyone got a coin?"

"Man," Paul huffed, shaking his head. "I guess if Roger's siding with Link what choice do we have?"

"Three to two," Barry hung his head. "I guess I lose."

"Come on," Link started down the side of the mountain, trying his best not to slip. The others were close behind.

---

Night had fallen long before they reached the bottom, the sky dark and the moon covered by smoke. Their footsteps crunched on the ash beneath their feet, and they kept their heads down and their hat covering their mouths to avoid breathing any of it in.

Luckily, the river they would've had to cross had dried up enough to simply walk through, but as they continued closer and closer to the mountains the hotter it got. They could see the glow of molten rock from the edge of the river bed, where they chose to rest.

Being so close to an active volcano was hot enough, but now that the sun was rising they didn't want to risk moving in the day. So they started setting up camp, finding a comfortable place to rest.

"We don't have to worry about setting a fire at least," Paul joked, laying down on the sand.

"Ha ha," Roger muttered, still staring at the light at the top of the mountain.

Paul shut up.

"We're screwed aren't we?" Barry sighed, sitting beside Roger, also watching the flames flicker in the distance.

"I thought you guys fought with the last Link," Link said. "Shouldn't you have more experience?"

"It's not like we've retained nothing," Paul answered. "Sword fighting techniques, sure, and experiences in adventuring, yeah. But it's not like we were there the whole time."

"Exactly," Barry agreed. "We were there when he needed us, but for the most part that just meant lending our sword's powers, or helping him out of some predicament."

"I think the most we did was that final fight with Vaati," Paul nodded. "But even then it's not like it was some great battle. It was

basically just us screaming light at him, using our own life force and channeling it *through* the sword."

Link sat up, watching the mountain with them. "So if you can do that then, why are we screwed now?"

"Cause I don't think it'll work that way this time," Barry answered looking at his hand. "I don't... I don't think we were real last time, not until the very end."

Link wasn't sure how to respond to that. "This sword is the stupidest thing," he finally said. "Isn't it?"

"What?" Roger scoffed.

"Think about it," Link explained. "Not only does it need to split the person into four of themselves in order to be used properly, but then it gives the other lives identities of their own, only to rip that away from them in the end. I don't know who designed this thing... but they were cruel indeed."

Roger looked out of the corner of his eye over his shoulder, at the sword on his back.

"Maybe," Barry agreed. "I don't-"

Roger stood suddenly, drawing his sword and jabbing it into the ground.

"What are you doing?" Paul asked.

Roger kept his eye on the sword, and started walking away.

"Where are you going?" Barry asked.

Walking backwards, Roger continued watching the sword, but kept an eye on his hand as well.

"Roger, stop," Link barked. "What are you doing?"

A few more steps, and Roger stumbled. He landed flat on his back, ash and smoke puffing up around him.

"Roger!" Paul shouted.

Barry grabbed Roger's sword and they all ran over to him. He was alive, and fine it seemed, but he was glaring at the sky. Barry dropped Roger's sword beside him.

"What is wrong with *you*?" Link scolded. "I thought *I* was the one who did stupid things."

"I wanted to know how far I could go," Roger scoffed. "Apparently, not far."

Barry and Paul looked at their own swords.

"You're right," Roger told Barry. "We weren't real... but you're wrong if you think we're real now." He sat up, sheathing his sword, and looking back at the mountains. "We're just here to stop Vaati, whatever

that means for us. If we have to give up our life forces again, so be it. Because we made that promise, remember?"

They remembered, Barry and Paul. No matter how many times it would take, they would defeat Vaati once and for all.

"Besides," Roger huffed, getting to his feet. "We came back once... Maybe we'll come back again." He started back for the riverbed. "Come on, we should rest before continuing."

Barry and Paul hesitated, but eventually followed. Link however stayed behind.

Link looked at his own sword still sheathed on his back. *Maybe you guys will come back*, he thought. *But... I won't, will I. I don't think I get that choice.*

He stared up at the mountain one last time before turning away. *Even if we succeed, it'll be your version of Link that gets remembered... your promise that carries on. Me... I'll be forgotten as soon as it's done.*

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## **Chapter 4: Problem Solved**



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **MT. KASAI**

As they drew closer to the flames that erupted around the mountain, the smoke thickened, blinding them and choking them. The path upwards that they had been following seemed to disappear in front of them. Each of them kept their hats pressed against their noses and mouths as to not breathe in ash and smoke.

"This is pointless," Paul muttered. "We can barely see two feet in front of us, and if Vaati really has enough power to do something like this, what chance do we have?"

"And that's why I didn't want to come here yet," Barry agreed. "Told you guys we were screwed."

"Actually I've been thinking," Link said. "I don't think Vaati did this."

Paul and Barry both looked back at him. "What do you mean?" Barry asked. "Of course he did. Who else could've?"

"The Great Fairies that guard these places," Link said looking up at the tiny point of light at the top of the volcano. They could barely see it through all the smoke but it was the only thing leading them in the right direction.

"What?" Paul asked.

"Vaati's the *wind* sorcerer," Link explained. "And none of us made the connection to the fact that the dangers of the area matched the element each of the Fairies represent? It just gets more and more dangerous because they have more time to prepare. When Vaati attacked the Sea of Trees there was no real warning, so it was much easier. Then with Talus cave there was a bit more time, so the entire mountain is covered in ice. And now with Mt. Kasai, this Fairy's had plenty of time to work up the power to protect her territory, and so now everything's on fire. And yet, it's been easy enough for us to get through cause they're guiding us. They can't let Vaati through, so it's dangerous, but we need to get across and retrieve the silver keys, so they open up paths for us as we go."

Paul and Barry were silent.

"Well when you put it like that," Roger muttered.

"So, so long as we keep heading towards the light up there," Link finished. "I'm sure we'll be fine."

"I thought you were done with exposition," Barry joked.

"Yeah well," Link muttered.

They hoped Link actually knew what he was talking about, and not just acting reckless again. But they followed him, walking up the side of the volcano, making sure to stay far enough away from the rivers of lava that flowed down beside them.

The heat was dizzying, but after what Link had said they all realized it easily could've been much much worse. In fact, being this close to lava should've killed them just from exposure, and technically that fall from in Talus cave should've also killed them.

Thinking about it this way, it almost made Link's passed decisions less reckless. It really felt like there was some outside force protecting them along their way. If he'd jumped from that tree in the forest, would he have lived if they didn't catch him? And the river, when Paul swam after him, would Link have floated safely across as he claimed he would've?

All these thoughts ran through Barry's head and he had to stop Link again. "Have you thought this way since the beginning?" he asked. "Or did you just piece this together?"

Link didn't answer right away. "It always felt off," he admitted. "But no. I thought at first it was Vaati as well."

"So all those stunts you pulled-"

"Weren't cause I assumed I'd make it," Link said.

They walked the rest of the way up the mountain in silence.

—

As with Talus cave, there was a carved arch at the end of the path that entered the mountain. This time however, the ground didn't collapse when they entered, luckily. But it was still getting hotter, cracks of lava flowing through the walls. At the very least, the ash wasn't so bad in here, and if they kept their heads down the smoke wasn't much of a problem either.

What *was* a problem though, was the path.

They stepped out of the tunnel entrance and into a large cavern. The path split around a rock wall that was too high to see over, but it didn't reach the top of the cavern. Figuring the left path looked like a dead end, the group headed right, walking around the rock wall. The wall got lower, but it was still too high to climb. On the other side of the room however, things seemed higher up and could be seen over the top of the wall.

But then the path split again, leading in three directions, and one of the paths seemed to split off again.

"I thought you said the Great Fairies were guiding us," Roger huffed. "I don't see any indication of there being a right way."

"True," Link agreed. "But this cavern is big and echoes, and there are four of us and four paths."

"Split up?" Paul asked. "I mean it makes sense, but what if there's trouble?"

"Then the rest of us will come running," Link answered.

"That's reassuring," Barry sighed.

"Then move carefully," Link told him, already starting down his own path.

Roger, Paul and Barry exchanged worried glances, but split up, each picking a path on going on alone. And as soon as each was alone, the mountain shook. Large boulders fell from above, crashing down behind each of them and blocking their way back.

"Hey!" Roger shouted. "What just happened!?"

"We're trapped!" Paul shouted back.

"We're not trapped!" Link argued. "Each of us has a way forward, we're just on our own until we reach the end!"

"How can you be sure *any* of these paths reach the end!?" Barry countered. "What if only one leads out, and the rest are stuck!?"

"Then find a wall," Link instructed. "And get over it."

"Seriously," Paul grumbled. "*Why* did I leave behind the grappling hooks!?"

---

Link's path seemed to wind in circles, leading upwards. It split off in a few other directions, but every time it did it either dead ended quickly or was blocked by lava or rocks or lava rocks. For the most part though, everything was calm... too easy. Fire dripped from above, but it was easy to avoid, and no monsters appeared like he kept expecting.

There were plenty of blind spots, areas where it made sense for there to be some kind of creature lurking just out of sight. And yet, there was nothing, and at the same time he could *feel* as if there *was* something, like it was being kept away from him.

Or he was being kept away from it.

*I appreciate the help*, Link thought, thinking of the Great Fairy. *But how do I know if I'm good enough if I can't test myself? If Vaati truly is such a powerful evil, I need to know if I'm able to defeat him.*

There was a rumbling, and above him several boulders fell. One

landed right behind him, blocking his path like before, and the others landed elsewhere out of sight. Then the ground cracked in front of him, and lava started bubbling up, a flaming hand reaching out.

*Very well*, Link heard. *Let us see what you can do.*

Link drew his sword as the bubbling beast came rampaging towards him.

---

Roger darted to the side as a boulder came crashing down behind him.

"What!?" he exclaimed. "Again!? Whoa!" He jumped again, this time dodging a flaming rock that had been thrown at him.

*There are doubts in your mind*, said a voice. *Allow me to erase them.*

"Great Fairy?" Roger muttered, watching the lava bubble monster. He drew his sword. "Well alright then, come on!"

The monster charged.

---

"I understand what you're trying to do," Barry muttered. "But some *warning would've been great!*"

He ran away as the fire chased him, crashing through boulders that stood in its way, and bouncing off walls as Barry turned corners through the cavernous maze.

He drew his sword, still running as quickly as he could, but he doubted it would really do anything against something like this. "There's gotta be another way out of this..."

---

Paul clung to the jagged cliffs. He'd managed to get high enough away from the flaming demon, but there was nowhere else to go now and it was still coming after him. His fingers were slick and his grip was weakening. He knew he'd fall at any moment.

Looking over his shoulder, Paul tried finding a new place to jump to. He figured the maze wall would have to be close enough, but seeing as it was also made of jagged rocks it would be hard to grab while jumping at it.



*I don't need to grab it, Paul told himself, preparing to jump. I need to get over it.*

He leapt towards the inner wall...

Right as it exploded.

Paul was thrown backwards, and stones were sent flying in every direction through a cloud of smoke. Another rampaging fire beast had crashed through, smashing into the one that had been chasing him. As Paul hit the ground, rolling across the ash and dirt, he tried to catch his footing. For the most part he was able to slow himself, but he still ended up hitting the other wall.

"That... that could've gone better," Paul muttered, getting to his feet. The monsters started shaking themselves off, and Paul knew he had to get moving.

"This way!" Link hissed.

Paul ran through the opening the monster made. "So that was your fault!" he huffed as Link started leading them back through his part of the maze.

"Yeah sorry for trying to stay alive," Link muttered. "You didn't happen to run into the others?"

"Nope."

They turned a corner, and the walls started blowing up behind them. The monsters were chasing them again. But as Link looked over his shoulder, he only saw one.

"They merged!" Link exclaimed, shoving Paul down another path out of the way as it came stomping through. "The monsters are merging."

"It's also tearing apart the maze," Paul noticed.

"Let's follow it," Link told him, turning and peeking around the corner. "We can't *find* a way out, we'll let this guy *make* one."

"Right."

They stayed quiet, keeping low as they followed behind the monster. It ripped rock like it was paper, tearing through everything in its path. They soon noticed it was heading towards something intentionally as well.

Too late they realized that something was the other monsters.

It smashed through a wall, and walked right into another lava demon, merging right into it.

"Barry!" Link hissed. "Over here!"

Barry ran as fast as he could, using the still settling smoke from the broken wall as cover. "Man am I glad to see you guys."

"Where's Roger?" Paul asked.

"Still somewhere else I guess," Barry answered.

"Then keep out of the way," Link told him. "This thing will bring us right to him."

He was right of course, but the others weren't sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing. Every time these monsters merged they got bigger. With every step the floor went up in flames, and pools of lava dripped down from its shoulders, leaving a trail of melted rock wherever it went. Its sharp claws dragged across the ground, leaving scorch marks as well as scars in the rock.

"Even if we do get to Roger," Barry whispered. "How do we know we can take this thing down?"

"I honestly have no idea," Link admitted. "But we either beat it or we don't. I don't think we get to accidentally ourselves out of this."

"Well it looks like it found something," Paul told them, pointing.

The monster was slashing through walls again. It looked like it was digging now, the walls being so low compared to its massive size.

"Then Roger's up ahead," Link said. "Come on."

Staying low they followed the monster's trail of destruction. They saw it break through its last wall, taking the final piece of itself. Yet Roger was nowhere to be found.

"Keep an eye out for him," Link said. He jumped up onto a rock, climbing up to the top of the inner walls. With all the rubble the monsters created, it was easy enough to do now. They might as well have built him a staircase.

"Over here!" Link shouted from the top. "Come on!"

The monster turned to him, flaming eyes focused.

"Dude run!" Paul shouted.

Link ran along the top of the wall, trying to keep his footing as the rocks crumbled beneath him. The monster shaking the cavern didn't help.

Below, Paul and Barry started searching for Roger now that the monster was out of the way. "Hey!" they called. "Where are you!? Roger!"

"Uuughh," Roger groaned, shoving part of a rock off him. "What was that thing?"

"No idea," Barry answered, helping Roger to his feet. "Link's leading it away, we should try to help."

"It's getting bigger," Roger huffed. "Any ideas on how to stop it?"

"None," Paul answered. "I think we're just winging it."

"Good enough I guess," Roger sighed. "Let's go get ourselves killed."

Link jumped from the wall as the monster slashed at him. Boulders flew and he crashed to the ground, rolling back to his feet so he could keep running. As the monster struck again, Link used the cover to take a hard right, hoping to lose it.

Ducking behind a boulder, he peered out to see the monster finally slow down. It stomped along, searching.

*Good, Link thought. Now I just need to get back to the others.*

He walked quietly back down the path he'd come from, watching the head of the monster bob along on the other side of the wall. Going back around the corner, it wouldn't be able to see him anymore, and he was finally able to take a breath.

Link couldn't see the others from here, but at least the monster charged after him in a straight line. There was now a wide hallway that ran through the maze, lined with smoldering rubble. Except for one path to the side that remained unblocked, there wasn't really anywhere else Link could go.

As he walked past that unblocked path though, he stopped.

*Leaving the door open?* Link thought.

*You can enter alone, the Great Fairy told him. You have your sword, and its power. You wanted to be the hero, so go on.*

*You and I both know it doesn't work like that,* Link thought.

*Perhaps, the Great Fairy responded. But wouldn't it be nice if it did?*

*I'll see you when I find the others,* Link told her.

*It doesn't work like that either, the Great Fairy said, stopping him. Now's your chance. Take it or leave it.*

Link gripped his sword, staring at the open hall that led to the Great Fairy's chamber. He looked over his shoulder at the monster in the distance. "I'll be back when I find the others."

As he walked away, the hall sealed, and Link picked up speed. He ran as fast he could, and when he heard the monster coming back he ran even faster.

"Hey guys! I could use some help!" Link shouted. "Wherever you are or however you're planning to help, now would be the time to do *something!*"

"Over here!"

Link looked over his shoulder to see Paul standing behind the monster, waving his arms. The monster stopped for a moment, also

looking back at Paul. Before it could do anything though, Barry also started shouting from on top of the wall. Both of them were out of reach, but also far enough apart that the monster had to choose which to go after.

"No! Over here!" Roger shouted from even farther behind Paul.

The monster charged that way, figuring it could get two at once.

"No this way!" Barry called.

"Over here!" Link shouted, getting the plan.

"This way!" Paul shouted, getting closer.

"Come on!" Roger shouted, also moving in.

Barry dropped down. "Come and get us!"

"We're right here!" Link shouted.

They circled the monster, then started running around it. It punched the ground but they were all just out of reach. It kept punching the ground, stomping at them and roaring. It was also spinning, trying to keep up with them, and finally...

The ground broke. It punched a ring around itself, and the ground became too weak to support it. The four of them jumped out of the way as the ground exploded and the monster sunk. It clawed at the ground as it fell, barely hanging on. It's head stretched upward, still trying to get at them, like eating them was more important than saving it's own life.

Link was closest to the monster's head, and looked it in the eye. "I think we win," he huffed. "But just to make sure." He drove his sword into the monster's head, right between it's eyes.

It roared, and it's grip slipped. The monster fell as Link pulled his sword back.

*I hope that door's still open,* Link thought.

---

After resting for a bit, Roger, Paul and Barry, followed Link back to the hall that led to the Great Fairy's chamber. It was blocked at first, but as they walked closer, the entrance opened. It was the same as the others before it; podiums of fairies lined the way, the fairies flickering in the dim cavern, and at the end was a pool of lava, with a stone pool in the center filled with water.

A light shone from the center of the water, and a woman emerged, towering over them. Her wings spread out behind her, her hair flickered like the fairy lights, her wings glowing. She looked down at them, a warm smile on her face.

"I am the Great airy of Flame," she said. "Guardian of Mt. Kasai."

You have done well to defeat such a troublesome foe. I dub you... heroes, with only the end of your mission before you. I grant you each a silver key."

She held out her hands, and a light appeared in her palms. It split into four and the pieces floated down to each hero. The lights faded and in their hands they held the final silver keys.

"You all seem to have collected the three silver keys," the Great Fairy continued. "Vaati's palace of winds is a great castle that floats in the sky. Now that you have gathered the keys of the Fairies of Forest, Ice, and Flame, the palace shall appear." She bowed. "Onward, young heroes! You must save Princess Zelda!"

She disappeared in a burst of light, sinking back into her waters.

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## **Chapter 5: Mt. Kasai**



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **THE END IS NEAR**

Link, Roger, Paul and Barry, stood on the cliff overlooking the whole of the island they'd traversed. They could see the forest, spreading along the edge of the island; they could see the river that ran through it; they could see Mt. Talus still frozen in ice; and off in the far east, just passed the forest, they could see the tiny spec of grey that was the shrine to the Four Sword. Mt. Kasai's flames had finally died down, the ash settled.

But they could see something else now as well; Vaati's castle, floating in the clouds above the forest. It didn't look evil, or menacing, or anything like they'd expected what a castle belonging to such a powerful villain would've looked like. And yet, despite it's looks, they could *feel* the evil radiating from it.

"That's where Zelda is," Link said. "We should be able to get there before midnight."

Barry stopped Link from starting down the mountain. "We just went through all that and you're not even going to *ask* if the rest of us want to rest?"

"We have everything we need, and the end is right there," Link told him. "Knowing that, I *can't* stop here."

"We're no good half dead," Paul reminded him.

Link stared at the castle for a moment. "I'm not resting here," he decided, moving passed Barry. "It's downhill. We can rest at the bottom."

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The sun started setting as they made their way across the river. The waters were calm here, but it was cold. As soon as they were back on the other side they started making camp, drying themselves off. Roger started the fire, Paul fished for food, and Barry and Link set up a place to sleep.

The ash on the ground helped with the fire, but Roger had to go hunting for big enough rocks to keep the flames contained. By the time that was done though, the campsite was finished. They didn't have anything to use as shelter, but at least the ground had been cleared enough to sit comfortably.

Paul however, had a harder time catching anything. He returned to

the others with two fish. "Not much fish stayed when the volcano erupted," he said dejectedly.

"It's more than we've eaten all day," Roger told him. He started skinning the fish, then cooked it. When it was done he handed everyone their food.

"Wouldn't it be great if things like this *didn't* happen every hundred or so years?" Link muttered. "There'd be more fish."

"Yeah," Paul agreed, looking at the fourth of a portion he got. Two fish hadn't been enough to feed one of them, but half a fish each?

"That reminds me," Barry said. "What's the mainland look like?"

"Huh?" Link asked.

"Well, last we saw it, Vaati was tearing things apart," Barry explained. "We kinda... disappeared before things got fixed. I'm assuming they *did* get fixed though, since Vaati had to have been locked up in order to escape now."

"Yeah we never saw the end play out did we?" Roger huffed. "So what happened?"

"Well, your Zelda used the Light Force, and wished for everything to get fixed," Link started. "From what the stories say, that was pretty much it. The Four Sword was locked away here, and Hylian knights watch over it, for the most part."

"And why aren't any of these knights here now?" Paul scoffed. "Could use their help."

"They're back on the mainland," Link answered. "Everyone kind of assumed he was locked away for good. And besides, they don't exactly train people to fight demons."

"And you?" Roger asked.

Link looked at the fire. "My parents named me Link," he said. "I guess, somehow... they knew."

Paul looked passed them, to the forest, and the castle that floated above it. "How do you think he got that?" he asked, trying to change the subject. "He didn't have a castle before, and he's been locked up this whole time."

"True," Barry agreed.

"Yeah," Roger muttered. "Also, how did the Great Fairies have the keys to this place that didn't exist?"

Link pulled out his set of three keys, looking at them. "I... have no idea."

"Huh," Barry mumbled. "Come to think of it, there's a lot of things that suddenly don't add up when you consider that."

"Like what?" Paul asked.

"Well, Link explained that the Great Fairies were the ones protecting their territories with the dangers presented," Barry also pulled out his keys, setting them on the ground in front of where he sat. "Like, Vaati was moving from place to place, so they set up defenses against him. But... that doesn't explain these keys... or, or his castle. Or why he seemed... different."

"Different how?" Link asked, not knowing much of who Vaati used to be.

"Well I guess a hundred years trapped in a sword would drive anyone mad," Roger suggested.

"We were trapped in a sword for a hundred years," Paul told him.

"And I'm still mad," Roger huffed.

"No I mean he's acting like a different person," Barry explained. "He used to be... cruel, with obviously evil intentions. This Vaati feels... not all there..."

"So what does this all mean?" Paul asked.

"No idea," Barry admitted. "But I don't like it."

Link put his keys back in his pocket, then rolled over. "Go to bed," he told them. "We'll deal with this in the morning."

Barry put his keys away as well and they all tried to get some sleep. Not that it was much use; that conversation ran through each of their heads all night.

---

By the time the sun was up, the fire had gone out, and none of them were any more rested than they had been the night before. On the bright side the closer they got to the forest, the lower Vaati's castle seemed to get. On the down side, the closer it was, the bigger they realized it was.

When they finally reached the forest's edge, the castle was directly above them, puffy white clouds swirling around its base as if the castle was sitting on top of them. The white walls of the castle mirrored those clouds, smoke seemingly shifting inside the walls themselves. It looked like a castle made of glass, with clouds trapped inside.

But they knew the monster that lurked inside those glass walls, they just needed to get up there.

Paul suggested grappling hooks, now having what he needed to make more. Barry agreed and he and Paul got to work. Roger and Link searched for a tall enough tree to throw the grappling hooks from, the



ground being too far from the lowest point of the castle.

Within an hour they had everything. They started up the tree, and when they reached the top, one by one they threw their grappling hooks up to the castle. They swung above the forest, dangling above the tree tops as they climbed. And when they were high enough, the clouds seemed to lift them up higher.

All at once they set foot on the stairs up to the castle.

The golden palace doors opened for them as they neared them, and inside reflected the outside. It was all bright lights and gold embroidery across smoke filled walls. But it was just the one chamber they stepped into.

At the other end of the room there was an obvious place for a door, but no door. Instead, in front of the wall was a podium, with three slots.

Link, Roger, Paul and Barry, stood before the podium and took their keys from their pockets. As they held them out, they merged.

The four keys they retrieved from the first Great Fairy, formed into one single key. Then the next four into one, and the last four into one as well. Now, there were only three silver keys, and they placed themselves in the slots of the podium.

They turned, and the wall opened up as a door.

This time, there was no light, only darkness beyond.

The four heroes drew their swords, and entered.

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## **Chapter 6: The End is Near**



## **CHAPTER 7**

### **VAATI'S PALACE**

As they entered the chamber everything seemed dark, but the chamber was small so what little light spilled in from the shrine allowed them to see after their eyes adjusted. There was a door on the other side, but when they opened it the door behind them slammed shut.

No going back now.

This door entered back into daylight, and for a moment they thought they stepped back outside. Instead there were high walls all around them, but the inside walls were taller and there was no ceiling.

"I think just this hall is outside," Paul suggested.

"Do we wanna just climb the walls then?" Roger asked.

Link looked at his grappling hook, then back at the top of the wall. It rounded outwards too high up. It would be impossible to latch onto the edge at this angle. "We're just gonna have to find our way through."

Barry looked down either end of the hallway. "Looks like it goes the length of the building," he noticed. "But I count three doors. Two down the left and one on the right."

"We're not splitting up again," Paul told them. "That was a bad idea last time."

"So what's the plan?" Roger asked. "Go room to room knocking on every door? 'Hey Vaati you in there?'"

"Might as well," Link said, starting down the hall. "We'll work our way around until we find anything of interest."

Link opened the door down the hall on the right. Making sure to stay out of the way in case something came flying at him, he peered inside. All he saw though was an empty room. But this room did have a ceiling, meaning Paul was right about just the hall being outside. What was strange though was the grass that grew in the room. The hall seemed fine, but inside the actual palace seemed old, unkempt.

"Come on," Roger said, moving along.

The headed back the other way to check the two doors on the left. The first was similar to the first; an empty room with grass growing out of part of the floor. Moss hung from the ceiling here though, and there were a few smashed pots on the ground.

Then the last room on this side. Once again, empty.

They continued down that side of the hall, going around the corner

of the building. There was another line of doors and the inner wall was still too high and too far out to reach. Door by door they checked each room, and every time they came up empty.

"What happened here?" Link muttered. "What is this?"

"It's like it's all dead," Roger agreed.

"More like nothing ever lived here in the first place," Barry corrected.

"Well yeah," Roger muttered. "That's what I meant."

"Hey hold up," Paul said, looking around the next corner. Everyone else had been looking at yet another empty room but they came to Paul when he motioned for them to follow. "Check out the floor."

The hallway opened up to a wider terrace sort of platform. The outer walls fell away to fences, and the floor looked more like a grate before dead-ending into a drop that let them see the forest below them. Then there were the odd glowing tiles. There were green tiles on the side of the pit the four heroes stood at, but blue and red tiles on the other side.

Paul put a foot on one of the green tiles, ready to jump backwards if it triggered a trap, but instead his foot nearly fell through the tile!

No... it *did* fall through the tile!

Paul had caught himself, grabbing the grated floor, but his leg was phased *through* the glowing green tile.

Paul pulled himself out and backed away quickly. "That's not right," he muttered.

Link took a step forward. "Well, I'm green," he said. Before the others could stop him he put his foot on the tile.

Paul nearly had a second heart attack, but Link was okay. He stood with both feet on the green tile, looking into the pit. "So... that means only Barry and Roger can stand on those tiles?" Link asked.

"Sure," Barry answered. "Only problem is there's nothing between them and us."

"So throw us," Roger suggested.

"Throw you?" Link asked. "I mean, it's not as far as the cliff in the forest, but even then."

"Go ahead," Roger said, standing on the grate and bracing himself. "The tiles you're on should give you just enough extra room to pull it off."

Link shook his head. "I'm not doing that," he said.

"Good!" Barry sighed. "I thought you were actually going through with-"

"You're gonna have to get a running start," Link told Roger.

Barry sighed again, this time in disappointment.

"Got it," Roger headed back to behind the grated floor. He lowered himself, and Link prepared to throw him.

Roger bolted forward, and at the last second Link grabbed him. He used as much of Roger's momentum as he could, and swung him over his head. Roger flipped, completely losing direction.

He ended up crashing sideways on the red tile, rolling across the floor on the other side of the pit. Grunting, he managed to stand, but he was wobbly. "Well it worked," he huffed. "But yeah, not doing that again."

Then Roger saw the buttons on the floor. There were two of them, spaced too far apart for one person. That's when he realized why there were two colored tiles on this side, he needed both himself and Barry to press the buttons.

He looked back at the others. "I mean... it was great!" he smiled. "Yeah! Real easy! Come on Barry! You're turn!"

"Um no," Barry chuckled. "I'm not doing that. But Paul could!"

"Not his color," Link told him.

"True but Paul's lighter than me," Barry said hurriedly. "And I mean, when you threw Roger he landed near enough to the floor. If you threw Paul just a little harder it wouldn't matter which color he is, and then we'll figure out a diff-"

"You know you're right," Link told him, patting his shoulder. "Paul *is* lighter."

"See!" Barry nodded.

"But you're also lighter Roger," Link said, grabbing Barry's collar. "So you don't need a running start."

"I don't agree to this!" Barry shouted, already in the air. He crashed into the blue tiles, tumbling past them and skidding his knees on the grate. Eventually he ended up face down on the floor just in front of Roger. "I hate all of you..."

"That's fair," Roger said, helping him up. "Go stand on your button."

"Button?" Barry asked. Roger pointed to the button in the floor. "... Fine."

Barry and Roger stood where they had to, and a bridge extended from the floor on their side. The pit was closed, and now Link and Paul had a way across.

When Link and Paul were safe on the other side however, Roger and Barry stepped off the buttons and bridge receded. Again, there was no way back.

"Looks like there's only one door left," Roger told them from around the next corner.

The outer walls were back up, and the hallway dead-ended. On the inner walls however there was one more door for them to check. Link opened it, and they entered a room with a staircase headed up. Judging from the look of the building when they were in front of it before entering, there were three floors, and Link figured Vaati would be at the top.

"This feels like the right direction," he told the others. "Come on."

—

They stepped into a similar set up as the floor before; a narrow hall that ran the length of this level of the building, with no ceiling, plenty of doors, and the inner wall too high and too far to reach. At least, that's what it looked like at first. There were marks in the walls where doors should've been, but no actual doors, and it was only this side of the hall that had space to walk, with just a tiny space between the inner walls and outer walls the rest of the way.

"Well, this door opens," Barry said, looking at the one door in the wall. It was the first thing they saw, and they just kind of assumed that the rest of the spaces in the wall had doors had well.

When they stepped inside the only room they could, they first noticed the four podiums lined at the back of the room. There were hats like theirs sitting on each one, red with a golden hem. Other than that though, the room was empty, no way forward.

"Great," Roger muttered. "Now what?"

"Well, there's four hats," Paul said. "And four of us. I think we're supposed to put them on."

"Sure," Link sighed. "Cause everything makes sense like that here."

"But they're all red," Barry said. "If the floors were color coded, are the hats too?"

"What good would wearing four hats do?" Roger asked.

"I'm just saying," Barry said, raising his hands.

Roger took off his hat and picked up one from the podiums. As soon as he put it on though, he disappeared.

"Roger!" Paul shouted.

"Crap!" Link hissed. "Roger take off the hat!"

A moment later Roger was back, staring wide-eyed at the hat in his hand. "That... was messed up."

"What happened?" Barry asked. "Where'd you go?"

"I didn't go anywhere," Roger started.

"It makes you invisible!" Paul exclaimed, pumping his arm. "Awesome!"

"No," Roger said. "It makes you small."

Paul and Barry's expressions turned solemn. All of a sudden the excitement was gone.

"Wait what just happened?" Link asked, sick of being left out of it every time they remembered something.

"I'm guessing you only know the story of the Four Sword itself," Barry explained. "Cause it was still around when we left."

"But you don't know about Ezlo," Paul continued. "Or the Minish."

Link shook his head.

"The Minish are a race of tiny people," Roger said. "Barely bigger than ants. Ezlo was one of them."

"He created something called the Minish Cap," Barry said. "An all powerful hat that could grant the wearer's wish. Vaati got a hold of it, and... well, you know the rest I think."

"But Ezlo had a certain power," Paul told Link. "He could help the last Link shrink to the size of the Minish... but, these hats seem to have the same power he did. They can shrink us."

Link looked at the hats on the podiums, picking one up. "But why are they here?" he asked quietly. "Why would Vaati keep only these, while every other room is empty?"

"No idea," Barry sighed. "But there are cracks in these walls, and it might actually be easier to get through this floor if we're smaller."

"Good point," Paul agreed. "In fact, it almost seems like we're *supposed* to do that, since there's no other way."

"Then let's just get moving," Roger said. "Let's get to Vaati, end this."

They all put on their Minish Caps. In an instant, they were tiny, all far away from each other, and they could see every crack in the walls. But they could move faster it seemed, and met back up with each other quickly. Barry was right, it would be easier to travel the rest of the floor now.

Without wasting any more time, they headed for the nearest wall. They just needed to find a way up now, all that was left was Vaati.

The second floor was a lot like the first, being almost entirely empty. The plant life and dangling moss seemed to get worse as they went though. But eventually, they made it to a door they had to take their hats off to enter. In that room they finally found the staircase they were looking for. There was a hatch at the top of it and four empty podiums in the room beside the stairs. It seemed Paul had been correct as well; they'd needed the hats, and Vaati had given them to them for that reason.

But now the hats usefulness were over, and when they were placed on the podiums the hatch at the top of the stairs opened. Link, Roger, Paul, and Barry, drew their swords and started up the stairs.

They stepped onto a large stone platform. Columns rose from the eight corners of the platform, bending inwards and connecting to create a spire that rose even higher. In the center of the platform however, was a stone statue of Vaati. The eye in the center was closed, and it was framed in gold.

And then a shadow was cast over them.

They all looked up to see the ominous figure that was Vaati. A cloud of darkness, with cruel shaped wings flickering around him, and a large eye glaring down at them.

"Gwoh hoh hoh hoh hoh hoh!" Vaati laughed. "Welcome to my palace!"

Vaati hovered lower, floating just above his statue. "I never thought you would be so bold as to pursue the maiden Zelda until you stood before me." He sounded crazy, like he was mashing thoughts together, unable to form a complete one. Then he noticed the swords they carried. "Eh? What's that? That blade you have... Is that not the accursed Four Sword? So it is the power of that blade that has brought you this far... Hoh hoh hoh hoh hoh! Did you think a dull and rusty blade such as that could defeat me again? You know not your own folly! Watch as the hunted becomes the hunter!"

The heroes braced themselves, but they weren't about to run away after coming this far.

Then Vaati merged with the statue. The stone cracked, disintegrating, but the gold framework stayed, acting like armor around Vaati. "Gwoh hoh hoh hoh hoh hoh hoh! Prepare to meet the full might of Vaati the Wind Mage!" A funnel of wind formed beneath him as he flew upwards, knocking each of them back.

"He's not well," Roger growled to the others. "There's something wrong with him!"

"He seems out of focus," Barry agreed. "We can use that against

him."

"We can't even get close!" Paul hissed. "The winds are too strong!"

"The winds are blasting upwards," Link said. "We-"

A gust of wind was sent right at them, separating them.

*Fine*, Link thought, sliding back on his feet. *I'll just show them!*

Link pulled out his grappling hook, and threw it right at Vaati. It latched on to the framework, and he jumped. The winds pushed him away at first, but as he pulled on the rope and drew himself closer the winds lifted him up. As soon as he was close enough, he slashed at Vaati.

Vaati roared in anger, throwing Link back. The winds whipped away his grappling hook, sending it flying over the cliff. But at least the others got the hint, though there was still part of the plan he needed the others to know.

Link fought to get to Paul, the closest of them, fighting against the winds that pushed him away. Figuring he was close enough he just shouted his plan and hoped they heard. "Mt. Kasai!" he yelled. "Remember Mt. Kasai!"

Paul nodded, hearing him, then they fought to tell the others.

Vaati kept pushing them away from each other, and eventually they gave up trying to organize a plan and just went for it. Roger had seen Link throw his grappling hook and attempted to do the same, but Vaati saw it coming this time.

Luckily, that worked with what Link's plan was.

While Vaati was distracted, Paul threw his grappling hook from behind, latching on. He swung upwards into the winds, and grabbed hold of the gold framework. He stabbed into Vaati's armor, cracking it.

Angered, Vaati spun, throwing Paul away. But as Barry caught him and kept him from falling over the edge, that gave Roger the opening he needed.

Using his grappling hook, Roger followed Link and Paul's lead and went for his attack. He actually managed to get in front of Vaati, and grabbed hold of the framework around Vaati's eye. Vaati spun again, but Roger held tight. Then he used his sword and jammed it in between the framework and Vaati's outer shell, prying off the armor.

Vaati screeched in pain, whipping his winds around Roger, trying to push him off. But the Four Sword in his hand started glowing, and seemed to drive itself deeper into the armor until it pierced it straight through.

Then suddenly Barry's grappling hook stuck. Roger moved the spike into the open wound and let the weight of Barry, Paul and Link pull



on the armor. They all climbed up together, ripping the armor away. Vaati couldn't shake them, and soon each of them were clinging to the framework or his wings.

Vaati could do nothing as they all drove their swords into his eye.

The demon fell, his armor exploding and sending each hero flying. The smoke hissed as it escaped, dissipating in the air. The shadow that had come over the platform lifted, and all that was left was shards of smoking gold.

Link sunk to his knees. "It's over," he huffed.

"Finally," Roger muttered, leaning on his sword.

"But... where's Zelda?" Barry asked.

Link looked around. There was nothing else. Nowhere else to go. "I... I don't know," he admitted. "Maybe, back at the shrine? Safe and sound?"

"Maybe," Roger agreed. "Let's try and find a way down."

They headed back for the hatch to the stairs, but then the platform shook.

"Are we falling?" Paul asked. "I mean it's a way down but-AH!"

They all jumped back as Vaati appeared once more in front of them.

"Gwohhhhh-ohhhh-hohhhh!" Vaati hissed. "Did you think you could just leave? Fools!! Impertinent brats! I'll shatter the Four Sword and cast its pieces to the wind!"

Something seemed off, more off than before. He didn't seem weaker... he seemed... stronger.

Vaati screamed in rage, and the world around them darkened. For a moment, Roger, Paul and Barry remembered the strange dimension Vaati had taken them too before...

But this was different. Instead, the world just went dark. They could hear Vaati's laughter echo around them, but...

Suddenly they were all back in the shrine.

"Let's... play again," Vaati hissed.

Link sunk to his knees.

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## Chapter 7: Vaati's Palace



## **CHAPTER 8**

### **STARTING OVER**

Silence rang in their ears as they tried to piece together everything that just happened.

They'd beaten Vaati... right? But, they were back here... back at the shrine where they started. Did they do any of it? Was Vaati toying with them this whole time? Did Vaati *really* have the power to just... *reset* everything? And where was Zelda?

"This... doesn't make any sense," Link slammed his fist on the ground. "What did we miss? What just happened!?"

"I don't get it either," Barry agreed, numb. "This is... It's just... ah, eh..."

Paul was the first to get to their feet. He walked to the door of the shrine, but he didn't leave, he just looked outside. "Vaati's Palace is gone," he told the others. "We... we really do have to do everything all over again."

"All those things that didn't add up," Link said, facing them. "Why the fairies had the keys in the first place; where Vaati's Palace came from; how Vaati even broke free; why Vaati's acting different; and why there's only three of the four elements active, when there's still four of us."

"I don't remember talking about that last one," Paul said.

"I didn't mention it before," Link answered. "But there's a green Great Fairy of Forest, a blue Great Fairy of Ice, and a red Great Fairy of Fire. Why wasn't there a pink Great Fairy of Earth?"

"I told you it was pink!" Paul exclaimed.

"The element is purple," Barry corrected. "So you're purple too."

"That's not how colors work," Paul muttered.

"That's not what matters either," Link interrupted. "What matters is figuring this out." He stopped for a second. "... How-Where do we go for that?"

"Vaati's still here," Barry said. "I think, so it would be stupid to just leave for the mainland for answers. We're going to have to find answers here, assuming they exist."

"Roger?" Paul asked. "You gonna chime in to tell us the answer's obvious or something?"

Roger didn't answer, he just sat on the ground staring at his feet.

"Hey Roger," Link said. "You okay?"

"That's a stupid question," Roger hissed.

"Don't start another fight," Barry muttered under his breath.

"Just trying to help," Link scoffed, throwing up his hands.

"Trying to help?" Roger growled.

"Aaaand there's a fight," Barry sighed.

Roger got to his feet and looked up at Link. "Now you want to help? After trying to get yourself killed over and over, *now* you decide to be useful?"

"Excuse me?" Link chuckled. "Even if I endangered myself, ever decision I made got us farther! Walking up to the plant monster; jumping into the river; following the dark paths of the Talus caves and eventually going over the waterfall; merging the lava monsters in the caves of Mt. Kasai. I should also remind you, I had the option of leaving you all behind at that point, and I *chose* not to! I went back to save your-"

"And what about all your bad decision!?" Roger exclaimed. "Jumping off a cliff in the forest; charging ahead into Mt. Talus, *and* into Mt. Kasai-"

"You agreed with me on that one!"

"And every time we tried to talk things out you'd decide we could talk about it later!" Roger continued. "You'd bring something up, then decide when it got serious it didn't matter. You *act* like you can handle everything, but as soon as it gets tough you just barrel through it so you don't have to think!"

Link punched Roger, but Roger grabbed Link's fist and punched him back. As Link stumbled for a moment, Roger kicked him.

"Hey! Stop!" Barry shouted, grabbing Roger.

Roger looked down at Link. "All you do is point out problems, and complain about them. And now, *now*... Now that there's a way for Vaati to rewrite *time itself*, do you finally want to help. Well it's a little too late; you're done giving orders, and we're done following."

"You think you can do better?" Link hissed, getting back up. "All you've ever done is argue. You act like you know better, but let's be honest; you're just as lost as everyone else, if not more."

Link walked passed them. "Go ahead," he told them. "Find your own answer then, if you're so sure it's that easy without me."

"Okay that's it," Paul huffed, grabbing Link by the collar before he could leave. "I'm done with your constant fighting, and so is Barry."

"Yeah!" Barry agreed.

"None. Of. Us. Want. To. Be. In. This. Situation." Paul looked Link dead in the eye. "You, take too many unnecessary risks and it is a *miracle*

you're not dead yet." He turned to Roger. "You are an idiot, and a jerk." He let go of Link and took a step back. "Both of you are right about each other, and *both* of you need to improve, or *none* of us are going to get *anywhere!*"

Barry crossed his arms and nodded, having nothing to add.

Link looked away.

Roger grunted, standing. "Whatever," he grumbled. "Fine, you know what? Where do you want to start?"

"... I want answers," Link said, still looking away from everyone. "I want to know what Vaati has to do with the Great Fairies, and where the Palace and keys came from."

"So where do we start?" Barry asked.

"Where else?" Link answered. "We're going to ask them directly."

"We're going after the Great Fairies again?" Roger asked. "So we're just... starting over. Just like Vaati wanted us to do?"

"You have a better plan?" Link retorted. "It would take too long to get to the mainland and back, and even longer if we're leaving for information. If we can only work with what we have here, then that means all we have are the Great Fairies, and Vaati himself. Meaning, if we can't get answers from the Fairies, then we still need their help getting back into Vaati's palace."

"For whatever reason," Barry sighed.

"So there you go," Paul nodded. "We start over. Let's go get the first key."

—

Barry jumped to the side, slamming into a tree. "What the-!?" He ducked the large vine that swung out at him. It snapped the tree in half, and he had to dodge to avoid that as well.

"It wasn't that difficult to get through the forest last time!" Roger growled, slashing at the vines that whipped out at him from no where. "Where are these things even *coming* from!?"

They'd been walking for all of ten minutes before Paul noticed the vines that slithered across the ground like last time. As soon as he brought attention to them though, they attacked, and they were more powerful and plentiful than last time. The monster from before didn't attack them the first time until they made it all the way to the chasm, but this time the forest itself seemed... darker, somehow.

"Just keep moving!" Link ordered. "It's powerful, but it's missing

too often for it to be actively fighting us. I think it's just lashing out!"

"Say that again when you're patching my scars," Barry muttered, trying to brush off the vine's last strike.

"Group up!" Paul said, trying to get closer to the others. "Let's make a break for it."

Link nodded. "Roger and I will take point, carving a way forward. You and Barry keep these things off our backs."

Roger didn't have time to argue. Not he could've even if he wanted to, it's not like there was a better way through this mess. So he and Link cleared the path, with Paul and Barry behind them. The vines continued swinging wildly, but Link was right, there wasn't any pattern. They swung without aim.

Not that was any comfort. If there was a pattern at all, they could predict what vines were coming from where, but like this it was all random. It felt warped though, like a child that knew something was wrong but didn't understand how to react so it simply threw a tantrum. The forest itself seemed to feel the evil that was Vaati, and it didn't like it.

And Link, Roger, Paul and Barry got caught in the middle of it.

"Stop!" Link finally shouted. He kept himself balanced near the edge of the cliff, looking across the chasm. "Anyone got a new way across?"

"Not enough time to sit and make grappling hooks," Paul grunted, defending himself against the vines. "These things are *not* letting up!"

"They're on the other side too," Roger huffed, trying to find any way across.

"We'll use that to our advantage," Link decided. "For the record, this won't be like last time."

"What are you doing?" Barry exclaimed as Link took a step back.

Before any of them could stop him, Link launched over the cliff, stretching out for the other side. Roger reached out to grab him but he was already too far, and Barry and Paul were still holding off the vines. But Link hadn't been aiming for the other cliff, he was aiming for the vines that swung over that cliff's edge.

He grabbed a hold of one, and crashed into the cliff. His hands were cut on the vine's thorns, but he held his grip, starting to climb up. "Come on!" he shouted to the others. "It's the only way up!"

"Seriously?" Roger scoffed. "Alright, Paul, Barry. We're jumping."

Barry took a second to look over his shoulder, seeing Link cut his hands on the vines. "Nope," he decided. "It was a risk when I was getting *thrown* over a gap like that. I'm not throwing *myself*."

"Either jump or I *will* throw you," Roger growled.

Barry considered his options.

"We're leaving without you!" Paul said, turning to the cliff. He kicked off the ground, flying across the chasm and reaching for the closest vine. He barely made it, but he would have fallen for sure if Link hadn't grabbed him.

"... Rrrrrr," Barry sheathed his sword and forced himself to jump without thinking. If he took another moment to consider his options he would've convinced himself not to do it.

Roger was right behind him, slamming into the rock, but climbing quickly after the others.

When finally all of them were at the top, it seemed they were able to break at last. Link cut at the last of the vines, and the path forward looked relatively clear. Apparently, the vines on this side were only near the edge of the cliff, but didn't stretch too far down the rest of the path.

"Great," Roger huffed. "But... what about that plant monster from before?"

"The thing Link one-shot-killed?" Paul chuckled.

"Yeah," Roger nodded. "If everything's reset...?"

Link looked at his sword. "Well like Paul said, I killed it." He sheathed his sword. "I guess dead things don't come back, even if Vaati resets things."

Roger looked at his own blade as Paul and Barry followed Link. *Dead things don't come back...*

---

After another long walk, the four of them finally made it back to the shrine to the Great Fairy of the Forest. The rows of stone podiums lined their path, but Link noticed the fairies on them moved this time. They glowed, the same green as the Great Fairy had before, and like how the fairies had at the other two shrines. Link wondered if they had glowed before, and he just missed it.

Regardless, they stepped up to the carved pool of crystal clear water, and watched as a light began to rise from it's center. Once again, a tall woman emerged from the depths. Her wings spread out behind her, but their tips were darkened... Her hair was tied up as it was before, but her eyes were paler... There was something off here, something wrong.

"I am the Great Fairy of Forest," she said, her voice echoing in a slightly distorted tone. "Guardian of the Sea of Trees."

Off yes, Link decided, yet still the same as before. It was almost like even though they were reset as well, they were fighting back.

*Or showing their true selves*, Link thought. *Who are you really?*

"You have done well to come this far," the Great Fairy continued. "I dub you... brave heroes, and grant you each a Golden Key."

*What?* Link thought. "That's not what you said before," he said, stepping forward. "What-?"

A light sparked in the Great Fairy's hands, and it split into four. The small lights floated down to each of the heroes, and in their hands appeared a small golden key.

"What's going on?" Roger asked. "Why are you different? Why is the forest different? Why do you have keys to Vaati's Palace if Vaati's Palace isn't supposed to exist!?"

The Great Fairy didn't seem to acknowledge any of their questions, and instead continued as normal. "If all of you collect the three Golden Keys of the Great Fairies of Forest, Ice, and Flame... a path to Vaati's Palace shall open! Onward heroes!"

"But how!?" Barry exclaimed. "What are you!? What is your connection to Vaati!?"

"Answer any of this!" Paul said. *"Please!"*

The Great Fairy of Forest bowed low, and sunk back into her pool. The light in it's center faded, and suddenly the forest seemed even darker than it had before. Even the fairies that lined the shrine seemed dimmer.

"What... what?" Roger muttered. "That's it?... No answers?"

"We got answers," Link growled, clutching his key.

"What do you mean?" Barry asked.

"The Fairies didn't get reset," Link explained. "Not entirely. Vaati is powerful, and possibly forcing this reset on them, but I think they're fighting back. Either way, it means things haven't *completely* been reset."

"Which means," Roger grinned. "Whatever damage we did to Vaati-"

"He's just recovering!" Paul exclaimed. "Buying time!"

"Exactly," Link nodded. "Which means if we want to get back to him before he can recover-"

"Then we need those other two keys," Barry finished.

They didn't waste time moving on from the forest, and set out again for Talus Cave.

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## Chapter 8: Starting Over



## **CHAPTER 9**

### **SLIPPERY SLOPE**

As stated before, the band of heroes hurried quickly to their next destination: the Caves of Talus. But this time when they arrived, Link took Roger's advice and slowed down. The mountain was still covered in ice, frozen over completely, and just as fragile as before.

When they finally reached the cave entrance part way up the mountain the tunnel inside had been repaired as well. The hole they'd fallen through was gone, replaced by the unstable thin ice.

"Go slow," Link mumbled, taking a cautious step forward. "Hold on to each other's belts, just in case. I'll go first."

Barry held onto Link's belt, Roger held onto Barry's, and Paul held onto Roger's. In a line, they moved forward, tapping the floor carefully as they went. The ice cracked ominously, the sound like a squeaking echo through the tunnels. It was still dark, darker than they would've liked, but this time as they were taking the correct path somehow it seemed a little lighter, like the ice cast it's own glow up here. Even as they turned down corner after corner, lights still flickered on the walls bouncing up from the floor.

After a while though, they found there was solid ground at one point, rock instead of ice. There they took a moment to break, studying the room and the different tunnels that split off from it.

"Does anyone know which way we'd gone last time?" Barry asked. "Which way we were facing so we can tell which direction to go now?"

"No idea," Paul answered. "I think we talked about that last time. Can't see the sun from here, and even though we're less turned around this time, we were so turned around last time we have nothing to really compare with."

"Yeah," Barry nodded.

"Well we're not splitting up again," Roger said.

"No," Link agreed. "But I don't think we have to."

"What do you mean?" Roger asked.

"Look at the carvings around this tunnel entrance," Link said.

The others all came over to Link, squinting at the faint cracks in the rock.

"What carvings?" Barry asked.

"Well I don't see this many scratch marks on the rest of the



tunnels," Link said. "Besides, that kind of looks like a Triforce, don't you think?"

Roger got on his knees and looked closely at the tiny triangle shape at the base of the tunnel entrance. There was *almost* another upside down triangle inside of the first. "I guess," he muttered. "If you squint... with your eyes closed."

"We're going this way," Link said, starting slowly down that tunnel.

The rest of them followed behind, holding on to each other's belts in case the floor broke.



For the most part, the rest of the tunnels were easy to traverse. They couldn't hear the rushing of water like last time, the floor was more rock than ice, and the ice that covered the walls seemed to glow, lighting their way. It was clear this was the path they'd been meant to take before if they hadn't fallen through the floor.

That being said, the calmness of it all set them each on edge. The forest had been harder to walk through this time, so why was the cave easier? Was it just because they chose the right path, or was there something in else in store later on?

Either way it was too quiet. The only sounds they could hear were their own footsteps. There wasn't even water dripping from the ice above them. Everything was completely frozen.

Even the tunnel exit they eventually came across.

At the end of the tunnel they ran into a thick sheet of ice blocking their path. They could almost see through it, a light on the other side, but it was too thick to break.

"What do we do?" Paul asked, kicking the ice wall.

Roger drew his sword and stabbed at it, but it didn't do anything.

"At least we know the swords can take a hit," Barry muttered.

"What were you going to do if you broke your sword?"

"Well I'm pretty sure I'd disappear so it's not like it'd be my problem anymore," Roger huffed, sheathing his blade. "But these swords were built to last anyway."

"Did we go the wrong way?" Paul asked, pushing the wall a bit to see if it'd budge.

"No," Link answered, facing away from the ice wall. "The other way's blocked too."

"What!?" Roger exclaimed.

"We're stuck here," Link said. "Unless you want to keep stabbing the ice."

"We might not have any other options," Barry sighed.

"Can we dig under it?" Paul asked, tapping at the ground with his feet. "Dirt seems loose enough."

"On the surface," Link agreed. "But it's all rock underneath. You wouldn't get far."

"Up there!" Roger pointed. High above them in the ceiling of the tunnel was a small hole.

"That's pretty high," Barry said. "How do we reach it?"

"Seriously," Paul chuckled. "I really need to make us all a set of grappling hooks that we cling to for life at this point."

"Well we're gonna have to think of another way," Link mumbled, staring at the hole. "We could climb on each other's shoulders. We might be just able to reach it then."

"Can we keep that stable?" Paul asked. "Even if you used the walls for balance, the walls are still slick with ice anyway."

"We might not be able to break the ice wall," Link said, drawing his sword. "But these rock walls... maybe."

Roger drew his sword as well. "I'll be on bottom," he decided, stabbing the wall. "I'm heavier."

Barry was about to climb on Roger's shoulders, but he stopped. "How are you heavier?"

"Are you complaining that I'm heavier?" Roger scoffed. "I don't know, I'm just bigger... I guess."

"No," Barry shook his head. "We're all the same person."

"But you're taller," Paul told Barry.

Roger stared at his sword. "... What?"

"It was something else I noticed before actually," Link said, crossing his arms. "Somehow, the longer you guys exist, the more you differ from your original forms."

Roger left his sword in the wall, looking at his hands. "I thought..."

"But if Roger and Barry are changing," Paul said. "Why aren't I?"

"I told you," Link said. "You're the one most like the original, the hero from a hundred years ago. That reflects in who you are. You don't change much cause you're already who you were going to be. Roger and Barry I guess, needed to be something different."

"Alright shut up," Roger muttered.

"Watch your anger, Roger," Link joked. "Don't want to stunt your

growth."

"Shut up!" Roger hissed.

"I'll go next," Link told Barry. "You're taller than us, but since Paul is lighter he'll go last."

Barry took a step back and Link used Roger's sword as a step and stood on his shoulders. He jammed his own sword in the wall, and then Barry was next. Finally, Paul used their swords like a ladder and climbed to the top.

"Just out of reach," Paul hissed, stabbing his sword in the wall to keep steady.

"You're gonna have to jump a bit," Link huffed, trying not to buckle under their weight or knock Roger out from under him.

"Link," Paul said, staring down at him. "This seemed like a great idea at first, and I didn't *think* it was going to be a problem... But I should remind you I am deathly afraid of heights."

Link remembered the waterfall incident, how Paul had frozen up and refused to jump. Granted, at that height anyone should have been afraid of heights.

"That was a lot higher of a fall," Link told him. "From here you might bruise an elbow or a knee. Besides, just a little hop and you can reach that hole."

Paul stared at the ground. "Whyyyyyy am I on top?" he whimpered. He took a deep breath, looking away from the rocky ground and up to the hole. It was just out of reach. "Don't think about it don't think about it don't think about it--"

Paul jumped of Barry's shoulders, grabbing the ledge of the hole. Immediately Barry raised his hand to push Paul's feet up, steadying him. As soon as Paul had his grip on the rock in the hole, he looked back down. "What do I do now!?"

"We climb!" Link grunted. "Paul, you're going to have to hold on, but we'll give as much slack as possible." He looked down at Roger. "You go up first. Barry and I will hold on to our swords as best we can, but use them as steps when possible."

Roger nodded and Barry and Link prepared themselves. As soon as Roger ducked out from under Link, Link and Barry nearly fell, dragging Paul along with them. Luckily, they were able to hold on, but one wrong move-

"Hurry up!" Link told Roger.

Roger started climbing, trying to move fast without cutting himself on the blades. When he got as high as he could he grabbed Paul's belt.

"Hold on tight," he told him. Roger climbed up Paul's back, weighing him down.

"I don't like this plan at all!" Paul complained.

Roger got to the top and grabbed hold of Paul's arms, keeping him from falling. "Alright Link! Go!"

Link let his grip slacken for a moment, swinging from his sword. Then he started up, standing on his sword and grabbing hold of Barry's shoulder. He swung, sheathing his blade before he could continue climbing. At least Paul wasn't at risk of falling to his death now, and when at last Link reached the top all that was left was Barry.

"Come on Barry," Link grunted, taking his seat inside the hole.

"Yup!" Barry hissed, hoisting himself up onto his sword. He grabbed hold of Paul, and pulled his sword from the wall...

Then watched it fall all the way back to the ground.

Barry hung there, completely lost.

"What... the heck, did you *do!*?" Roger screamed.

"It slipped right out of my hand!" Barry exclaimed, staring at his sword that now lay about fifteen feet below. He could drop and retrieve it, but he'd have no hope of getting back up.

"Just get up here," Link told him. "We'll figure out what to do in a second."

Barry finished climbing and at last Paul lay sprawled out on the floor of hole. It was a tunnel that seemed to go over the ice wall that blocked their way, so it was the right path, but they didn't know how to get Barry's sword back.

"Roger proved we can't be away that far from our swords," Barry muttered, leaning against the wall. "So I can't continue. I can already feel that I'm too far away as it is."

"Then you stay here," Link decided. "I'll check ahead real quick and see if there's a way to break the wall."

Barry nodded and Link moved past the others. The tunnel led beyond the ice wall at a downward angle, and it ended in a set of stairs. At least this meant they were still going the right way, but when Link made it around back to the other side of the ice wall he still didn't see any way to break it.

He kicked the ice, not even sure what else he could do.

"Any luck?" Roger asked. "Paul's keeping an eye on Barry."

Link nodded, looking around the rest of the chamber. It seemed to just end in darkness. He could see the ice wall, and the stairs to the tunnel he came from on the right, but everything else was pitch black.

"I have no ideas," Link muttered. "Unless you want to sit here for hours chipping away at the ice."

"Better than standing here for hours doing nothing," Roger sighed, sitting on the stairs.

"Mayb-"

Link froze, hearing the sound of cracking ice beneath his feet. He'd been so preoccupied with trying to get around the wall, he stopped worrying about the ground. This side of the wall, the ground was entirely made out of thin ice.

"Roger," Link said quietly. "I'm going to jump towards you in a moment, and you're going to catch me."

Roger was about to ask why, but he could see the cracks forming beneath Link. "Go."

Link made the smallest of movements, and the floor shattered. He never had a chance to jump before everything started collapsing around him. He couldn't hear Roger shouting behind him, he couldn't find a way to stop himself from falling, even as he crashed down onto a slanted part of the cave. More ice, even less grip, Link slid farther and farther into the darkness.

Once again, Talus Cave had separated him from his allies. And once again, he was tumbling through the pitch black cold.

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## **Chapter 9: Slippery Slope**



## **CHAPTER 10**

### **BREAKING THE ICE**

"Link!" Roger shouted.

The floor of ice had already shattered, there was nothing left to stand on. All that remained were the hollow sounds of chunks of ice sliding down the slope, and soon that stopped and there was only silence.

Roger looked into the deep abyss, then back to the tunnel he'd come from, then the ice wall that still hadn't seemed to crack. *What do I do?* he thought. *Jump down for Link? Go tell the others? Continue trying to get Barry's sword?*

These all seemed like the wrong answer, but he'd only just told Link that anything was better than standing around doing nothing. So he turned around, and headed back for Paul and Barry.

"Still no luck?" Paul asked, stretching as best he could in the short tunnel.

"It's worse," Roger grunted, shaking his head.

"We heard a crash," Barry mumbled. "Everything okay?"

Roger looked at the ground, moving his eyes to the hole where he could see Barry's sword so far below. "The floor broke," Roger explained. "Link fell through. We need to go after him, but we need to get Barry's sword first."

"No," Paul said sternly. "*You* go after Link, I'll find a way to get the sword."

"Splitting up is always a bad idea," Roger said. "I thought we agreed on that."

"We're already split up with Link gone," Paul corrected. "Besides, what choice do we have?"

Barry didn't even look like he could move. Roger had tested before just how far they could get from their swords, and it wasn't very far. Barry was testing that limit now, and it showed. Paul though, was already trying to find a new way back down.

*I guess I don't have a choice*, Roger thought. He backed away, returning to the slope Link had fallen down. "You're still alive right?" he called into the darkness. "The swords wouldn't work if you died... right?"

Hoping that logic checked out, and that somehow Link was still alive wherever he was, Roger hopped down onto the slope.

His feet slipped out from under him, and he was gone.

The sword was right below the hole. If Paul even just had rope, he could probably get it, but that'd be too easy apparently. Even if he tied all their belts together it wouldn't be enough.

*Might as well check,* Paul thought, getting up. *I'll be back in a moment.*

Paul ducked through the tunnel and took the steps down to the other side of the ice wall. There he saw that Roger wasn't joking; pretty much the entire floor was gone. There was a slope that started a few feet down, but if you'd dropped down onto it unexpectedly you'd be gone before you knew it.

That being said, the wall was what mattered.

Looking at the base of the wall, where the ice floor had been connected to it, it looked chipped. The floor might have broken off enough pieces of the ice at the bottom to break through... Maybe. The problem now was getting over there.

"Gotta make this as difficult as possible," Paul muttered. "Fine."

He tried to tell the distance between himself and the ice wall-- maybe four feet. Not exactly far, but there was nothing but that slope between them, and nothing to stand on or hold on to on the other side. He considered jumping and stabbing the rock wall beside the ice, but he doubted that would work. Jamming a blade in a cracked rock surface while standing was one thing, since you could use more force behind it and control the strike, but trying to jam a blade in a slick rock surface while moving through the air, he would have to be a lot stronger to manage that.

"There's just no way to continue, Is there!?" Paul complained. He looked into the darkness, thinking of the Great Fairy that resided here. "You helped us out last time, yeah? You made our path easier, and brought us to you when we couldn't see an inch in front of us. I don't know what kind of hold Vaati seems to have over the fairy of the forest, but I really hope his hold on you if any is weaker."

Paul turned back to the ice wall. "Please," he said, a little quieter. "If you can do anything, if you can help in any way--"

The air felt heavy, and a moment passed. It made Paul feel dizzy, like he'd just spun around a few times, but he stayed focused on the wall.

And the wall cracked.

It wasn't much, but it was enough. Paul smiled. "Thank you *very* much."

He unsheathed his sword, took a few steps back, and launched himself forward. He drove his sword into the crack in the ice, slamming both feet into the wall at the same time. The crack spread like a spiderweb through the ice, and Paul drove his sword deeper, widening those cracks. And finally, he slammed his shoulder into the ice, breaking through.

He tumbled to the ground, and for a brief moment there was a wide grin on his face.

And in the next moment that smile faded.

Paul had landed with one leg over the ledge, and he slipped. He could do nothing as he fell backwards down the slope.

*No!* Paul gasped. *I know I landed that! I couldn't have missed!* He slammed into the ground, rolling across the ice into the darkness. *No! Stop! STOP!* he sobbed, desperately trying to gasp at anything. *PLEASE!!*

*\*Crack!\**

---

Link couldn't feel his fingers... or his toes for that matter. He couldn't feel his ears either, or anything but the pain in his back. Everything else felt numb, cold... wet.

*I'm floating*, Link realized, staring up at nothing. The water he lay in was calm, unmoving, and freezing. *How long have I been laying here?*

He tried to move, but his limbs weren't cooperating. He tried to turn his head, but didn't get very far. It did tell him something though. This water wasn't deep, only a few inches. He was laying on solid ground, just in a puddle.

*Meaning that pain in my back is probably just a rock*, Link figured.

He tried again to move, this time getting an arm under himself. His fingers wouldn't move though, and his hands were completely numb, but at least his arm still worked well enough to prop himself up.

Link rubbed the back of his head with his wrist, brushed the rock out of the way. He was so tired he wanted to lay back down, but knew the cold water was only going to cause more damage. He just hoped whatever it *had* done wasn't permanent. He couldn't fight Vaati while dying of frostbite.

The cavern he'd fallen into was massive. Natural paths carved by rivers stretched around the area, and arches of rock threaten to fall away into the deep pits that were spread throughout. Yet, there still didn't seem to be any source of water, there were just random puddles everywhere.

Above him there was nothing, only darkness. He could only see in



this cavern because of the glowing mushrooms that grew in caves like this.

*No way back up*, Link thought. *Do I have a way forward?* He scanned the area for any kind of doorway.

There were thirteen.

Forcing himself to move, even as his legs threatened to give up beneath him, Link started investigating the tunnel entrances. He hoped, maybe, there would be some kind of marking signifying that was the right way, like before.

There was no such luck. These caves have not been seen before, no one's ever been down this far. These paths are not man-made, the tunnels carved by water, not by tools.

Finally Link sat on the ground, as far from water as he could, and stared back up at the darkness he'd fallen through. "Hey!" he shouted. "Can anyone hear me!?"

His words echoed in the silence with no response.

"Anyone!?" Link called out. He sat his chin on his knees and stared at the pits, figuring he was at least lucky enough not to have continued falling even deeper than he already had.

Granted, he had no idea how far he'd fallen already.

After a moment, he got to his feet, and walked over to the edge. He couldn't see the bottom of it, and even tossing a rock into it, it made no noise. The bottom was too far to hear anything hit bottom.

And for a moment, he wondered what was down that far. He wondered what it would be like to just keep falling, endlessly. Would he hit bottom? Was there a bottom? Did the hole just keep going until he came flying out the other side?

"Don't be an idiot."

Link froze, and not just because of the cold. That voice... a voice he hadn't heard in a long time...a voice he'd never thought he'd hear again.

Link slowly began to turn around, terrified of what he might see. "Fa-..."

There was nobody there. Just the same dead silence.

Link fell to his knees.

---

Roger jumped from the base of the slope, grabbing onto a short ledge on the wall he nearly slammed into. He couldn't hold on for long though and ended up slipping, falling again. Unable to see anything farther than a foot in front of him, he tried reaching for anything, tumbling

through the air. As soon as he could reach another wall he stuck as close to it as he could, using the tips of his boots to slow him down, but not having the balance to stay up right this simply caused him to flip over.

His decent now entirely out of his control Roger continued falling. He rolled with it as best he could, using the momentum of slamming into something against itself, but he could do nothing as the rocks scrapped his arms and cut his legs.

Moving from slope to slope, he shielded his head, just trying to breathe. The air was rushing by so fast he felt he would lose consciousness after every drop. And there so many holes he didn't fall through, that Link could've gone through any of them and ended up in a completely different cave.

And finally, when Roger slid to a stop, face down on flat ground, it felt impossible to even move. His blood mixed with the puddles of water and he forced his head to turn so he wouldn't drown in any of it.

It was pitch black around him, not a torch or glowing mushroom in sight.

*This... was a bad idea, Roger huffed. Should'a... freaking stayed together...*

His limbs shook as he tried to get up, his hair dripping in his face. He stumbled to his feet, leaning against the wall. His shoulder slid across it as he walked, his blood making the ice even slicker than it already was.

"...Lhhh..." Roger shook his head. "... Link!"

He tripped, landing flat on his back. After that, moving was just something he couldn't even think of.

---

Paul woke up standing upright.

Or at least, that's what it felt like at first. He'd landed in what felt like sand and had sunken as far as his neck. His arms were stuck, his head hurt, and he couldn't move to grab anything to pull himself out. But on the bright side, he was alive, and that counted for something.

"Alright," Paul huffed. "How do I get out of this one?"

He looked around, turning his head as far as he could in either direction. He couldn't see behind him at all, nor could he see more than a foot in any other direction.

"Well that's not good," Paul muttered. "Hey Link!? Roger!? I uh... I fell! Barry's still up there alone! So if you guys get back before I do..."

Paul struggled to move his arms, wiggling as best he could, but it

did basically nothing.

"I don't suppose I could ask for your help again?" Paul sighed. "This *is* your cave, right?"

He shifted his feet a bit, trying to feel if there was ground below him, or just more sand.

"You helped me break the ice wall," he continued. "But I know I made that jump... something pulled me back. Was it you? Or was it Vaati?"

He didn't exactly expect an answer, which is why he wasn't disappointed when he didn't receive one, but some confirmation that he wasn't in the complete wrong spot or just entirely lost would have been nice. That being said, if it had been the Great Fairy who pulled him back, maybe he was already where he needed to be. He just hoped the Great Fairy was looking out for the others as well, if she was in fact looking out for him in the first place.

"Okay," Paul said, determined to get out. "It's just like water, right? Swimming through water?"

He moved his shoulder up, then tried to slide his arm up. This only served to push him lower.

"Okay okay!" Paul panicked, freezing. "Not like water..."

On the bright side, it didn't feel like quicksand. It wasn't muddy, or sticky. It was just heavy.

"Maybe I just need to move faster," Paul decided.

In as many movements as possible, Paul began flailing through the sand with the intent of moving upwards. Sand was kicked into the air and was rough on his skin, but at this point if he stopped moving he would sink even deeper. So he grasped at the sand and frantically started clawing his way out, kicking beneath him to try and stay afloat. Like this, he fought his way through the sand and started thrashing in a random direction hoping to find solid ground.

He nearly broke his hand on the rock wall, not having seen it until them. But at least it was something to hold on to.

"Whoo!" Paul chuckled. "Now to find the others."

He started sidling across the wall, looking for a path out.

---

Barry jolted awake, trying to stay focused without fading back to sleep.

"Paul?" he mumbled. "Roger?"

He could've sworn they were here a moment ago... where did they go?

"Paul!?" he called. Talking made him dizzy, sick. Keeping his eyes open made him feel nauseous, but he couldn't be expected to just sit and wait. They were all trying to get... They were trying to help him with something...

*What was I doing?* Barry thought. *I wanted to sleep... I think. I want to lay down...*

He was of course, already lying down, but he wanted to lay down even more.

*There's a hole,* Barry thought, moving his hand towards the hole. *I could lay in that hole.*

Barry shifted sideways, inching his way to the hole. It looked big enough to fit in, if he curled up into a ball. A little ball, like a pill bug, or an armadillo, whatever that was. But what if, because he was a ball, he wouldn't fit in the square hole?

*There is only way to find out,* Barry decided, plunging headfirst into the hole, not even bothering to curl up.

He flipped, and landed flat on his back. All the air was knocked out of his lungs, and it took about a full minute of gasping and coughing to finally be able to sit up straight.

Already his thoughts felt a little more coherent, but he still felt dizzy. Now he just had to remember what he was doing.

*I think I was looking for something...* Barry looked around the tunnel. There was a big gaping hole in front of him. Another hole, but this one led out onto a steep slope.

He stood, standing by it. *No... no I shouldn't go down there... What was I...?*

Barry turned around and finally saw the sword lying on the ground. It all came rushing back to him.

*Right!* Barry gasped, diving for the sword. *Link! Roger! And Paul!*

He sheathed the sword and turned back to the slope. *So this is what was on the other side,* he growled. *No wonder they haven't come back. They must have all fallen in!*

So that meant there was only one thing left to do.

Barry jumped down onto the slope, riding it all the way down.

"Hey!" he shouted. "Anyone there!?"

He thought he heard a faint response, but he wasn't sure.

"Keep making noise!" Barry shouted, clinging to the wall the slope launched him into. He listened to the vague yelling noises from deep in the

darkness, and hoped he knew what he was doing.

There were two holes he could drop into, and the noise seemed to be coming from the one on the left, so he jumped towards that one. After that, he barely had more than a second to decide which hole to fall into after every drop.

Rocky tunnel after rocky tunnel, each dropping him into small chambers with more rocky tunnels. Each was frozen solid, but only a few of them seemed to carry the yelling. And eventually, Barry started getting close enough that he could hear the voice that was yelling.

"Paul!" Roger yelled. "Is that you!?"

"It's Barry!" Barry responded. "Sit tight and keep yelling!"

Barry dropped through a few more holes, eventually skidding across the ground as it evened out, landing sideways and rolling across the ice. Roger stopped him.

"How did you get down here?" Roger asked. "How'd you get your sword back? Where's Paul!?"

Barry shrugged, trying to keep everything straight. "It's all still a bit blurry," he sighed. "I was pretty out of it. I don't know where Link and Paul are though. But when I woke up, that ice wall had already been broken, and since none of you were around I figured that's where you all went."

"Well that was a risky move," Roger grunted. "Not usually your style."

"Yeah, well, obviously I'm not thinking clearly."

Roger helped Barry to his feet. Or at least tried to, Roger was so injured already Barry ended up helping *him* stand.

"What happened to you?" Barry asked.

"Caves are stupid," Roger growled. "Let's just hurry up and find the others."

---

Link couldn't manage to do anything besides stare blankly forward. Of course his father wasn't actually there, he couldn't have been. He had died a long time ago... but his voice rang so clearly behind him.

*Who am I kidding?* Link told himself. *You're just... tired. You're probably dying of hypothermia and are hallucinating.*

*Keep moving!* Link ordered as he fought to stay on his feet. *Find somewhere warm!*

"See?" Roger huffed. "This is what you get for rushing ahead."

"Bite me," Link hissed, stumbling through the darkness.

"Excuse me?" Roger scoffed. "No. We've done things your way, and look where it got us!"

"This is Vaati's fault," Link mumbled. "Don't blame this mess on me."

"I think Roger's right," Barry agreed. "I'm pretty sure you were supposed to be the leader, but I think that's just because the last Link was better than you. At least he knew what he was doing."

Link hadn't even realized it, but he was on the ground. He didn't remember falling over, but his limbs were done listening to him and refused to move. It seemed his friends were done listening as well.

"You said before I was most like the last hero," Paul grinned. "Maybe *I* should take charge. Get something done for once instead of watching you and Roger squabble."

"Shut... shut up," Link spat, the room spinning. Closing his eyes didn't make it any better. There were pauses, moments when he'd stop thinking and everything would go quiet. But every time he tried to focus on anything to keep himself from fading all he heard were the other's voices bickering at him. "... Help... Help!"

"Pathetic," Roger sighed. "Can't even stand up anymore, and now you're crying out for others to come fix your problems."

"Help!" Link coughed.

"Can't go anywhere without someone else holding your hand," Barry sighed. "You need us to watch your back... but have you done for us?"

"And your parents?" Paul chuckled. "They even *died* protecting other people! You're just going to die here, in a dark pit, with no one to care once you're gone."

"And now even Zelda's going to pay for your stupidity," Roger barked. "You're a waste of space! A sorry excuse for a-"

*\*WHACK!\**

Roger fell flat on his back, Link having kicked his legs out from under him.

He didn't care if his limbs were shaking, that was the last straw. His arms might have been dead weight, he himself wasn't! He would use his numb fists to make Roger pay for his words!

"You don't get to talk about her like that!" Link roared. "You didn't know her!" He punched the ground over and over, his knuckles bleeding as he scraped the rock. "So just shut up!"

"Link!"

"Shut up!" Link shouted. "Shut up! Shut up!"

"Link stop!"

Link pushed Paul away as he tried to stop him from beating the ground.

"Knock it off!" Roger grabbed Link from behind, holding him down.

"What?" Link gasped. "How did you...?" He looked at the ground, where Roger had been. There wasn't anyone there, just a few drops of blood from his fists.

"What is going on?" Barry asked. "Why are you beating the ground?"

Link couldn't answer. He didn't have an answer, at least not one he liked. He couldn't even get the words to form.

"We've got to get you out of here," Paul said. "Those pools near the Great Fairy are warm. We need to hurry."

"No," Link mumbled. "I... I'm useless... just... leave me... I don't... I don't want-"

"Barry, help me," Roger said, lifting Link. They carried him, and he didn't have the strength to argue. Even as they started to walk, Link had already lost consciousness.

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## Chapter 10: Breaking the Ice



## **CHAPTER 11**

### **NOT A COMPETITION**

"... lucky we got him here when we did..."

...

"... he would've been..."

...

"... he's waking up!"

...

Link opened his eyes and found himself floating in the warm pools of the underground cavern. Glowing mushrooms made a ring of light around the water, but his vision was so blurry all the mushrooms just looked like one great big line.

"Are you awake?"

Link lolled his head to the side, which even though it was only a tiny movement made him dizzy. "What happened?" he mumbled, barely able to hear himself. "Where... where'd you guys...?"

"Over here."

Link forced himself to look the other way, which hurt this time. Sitting by the pool's edge he could see the other three, Roger, Paul, and Barry.

"I think you got hurt," Barry said. "Worse than just leaving your sword behind."

"I don't even think he *has* that problem," Paul said. "But yeah, you got hurt."

"Went crazy for a little bit there," Roger added. "Started punching the ground."

"The ground?" Link breathed, remembering that differently. "No... you should've left me."

"That's not how this works," Roger grunted. "Stop beating yourself up. The waters seemed to actually heal some of your wounds, surprisingly, but they aren't going to do anything about your mental state."

Link huffed silently, staring up at the darkness. *Funny*, he thought. *Only a moment ago I was staring down at the darkness.*

"But we can't wait around forever either," Barry said, standing up. "We're at the end of Talus Cave. We need to collect the keys so we can move on."

Link remained still.



"Link," Paul said. "We've gotta keep going."

Link shook his head slowly. "Why?" he asked.

"To stop Vaati," Roger growled. "Come on."

"Can we?" Link asked. "Do any of us really know how to fight? So far, it's just been us running around, barely making it out of each situation alive. Situations, by the way, that get progressively worse as we 'keep going'!... And besides, at this point you'd be better off without me."

"You're an idiot," Roger said. "Why do you keep doing this? We already solved these problems! You blame yourself for Zelda getting captured; we get it. We're all basically children with the world thrown at us like it's our problem; we get it. This whole thing with Vaati and the Great Fairies makes zero sense;... *we... get it*. But you seem *stuck* on those things!"

"Roger," Barry warned. "Enough."

"No, not until this is settled for good," Roger hissed, dropping into the water.

"What are you doing!?" Paul exclaimed.

Roger floated out towards Link, then grabbed him by the face and forced him to float upright.

"Let go of me!" Link demanded. "Let go!"

"*You* let go!" Roger barked. "You let go of the crap you're lugging around, and *I'll* let go of your face!"

Link pushed Roger away. "It's not that easy!"

"It is!" Roger countered.

"It's not!" Link argued. "I'm useless! There's no reason for me to be here! You're all better off without me!"

Roger threw water at Link. "We're all useless!" he yelled. "None of us have idea why we're here or what we're doing!"

"But it's not the same!" Link shouted, throwing water back. "You're all connected! You all matter! The swords need you, and you need the swords! *I* don't matter!"

"We don't either!" Roger threw a wave of water. "We *die* if we leave our swords for too long! We're *only* here until Vaati is defeated, then we're gone again! Locked away until some other danger comes up! Then where does that leave us!?"

Roger glared at Link, his eyes burning. "You get to go back to a normal life!" he shrieked. "*We* don't get that!"

Link was silent.

"Both of you, stop," Paul said, floating up to them, looking at them each in turn. "Everything sucks... But it's not a competition to see who's

life sucks more."

Roger fell silent as well.

"We're all stuck," Barry said, dropping into the pool as well. "But we're running out of time. If we don't hurry, *nothing* will matter."

Link looked at the water, unable to see the bottom. "I never thought of it like that," he said quietly. "... I'm sorry... I didn't even realize..."

"... It doesn't matter," Roger said. "Let's just get it over with."

"After we're done," Link said, stopping them for just a moment longer. "If we defeat Vaati, for *good* this time... there'd be no reason to put the swords back, right?"

"I don't think it works that way," Paul said.

"But there could be a chance," Link said, looking at each of them. "Right?"

The others weren't quite sure how to answer. In truth, none of them had even considered just *not* putting the sword back. But at the same time, none of them wanted to get their hopes up.

"We'll worry about that when the time comes," Barry decided. "Let's just get to where we're going first."

"Yeah," Link nodded.

They all swam to the edge of the pool.



When at last they reached the Great Fairy's pool, none of them expected anything different than last time. The Fairy of the Forest had only repeated herself this time around, Vaati's power keeping a dark hold over her. And with the Fairy of Ice it was the same.

"I am the Great Fairy of Ice," she said, hollow eyes looking down at them. "I am the guardian of Talus Cave. You have done well to come so far through dangerous lands. I dub you... true heroes, and grant you each a Golden Key."

A light appeared in her hands, which divided into four, each floating down to the heroes. They took their keys and pocketed them, then looked back to the Great Fairy.

"If all of you collect the three Golden Keys of the Great Fairies of Forest, Ice, and Flame... a path to Vaati's Palace shall open! Onward heroes!"

She bowed.

"Thank you," Paul said, stepping forward a bit. "For your help

earlier, thank you."

The Great Fairy hesitated, then returned to the depths of her waters.

"Alright," Barry said. "Now there's just one more key for each of us."

"And we need to get them before Vaati gets his strength back," Roger nodded.

"Then we're running out of time," Paul added, already walking towards the exit.

"You know what I just thought of?" Link asked as they followed Paul.

"What?" Roger asked.

"Why didn't we just enter through the exit?" Link chuckled. "Instead of going through the entire mountain, why didn't we just start with the entrance that led directly to the Great Fairy?"

Roger almost said something about how stupid Link was for not thinking of that earlier, but he didn't think of it himself either. "Yeah well," he sighed. "Live and learn."

They climbed up the slope that ended at the tunnel they'd walked before. At the end of it was the hole they climbed out of, and from there they could see most of the island.

"Strange," Barry mumbled. "Vaati was able to reset things enough that even the ash and lava from the volcano disappeared. I hadn't realized that until now."

"Do you think it'll explode like last time?" Paul asked.

"If it does," Link said. "Do we wait until after? Or do we risk running through to get it over with, even though the whole thing could blow up around us before we make it?"

"I think we risk it," Roger said. "We don't know when it could explode, if it does at all this time. What if we just sit here forever?"

"And what if we make it to the base of the volcano right as it all goes up in flame?" Paul asked.

"We're not having this discussion again," Link sighed. "If we wait, we lose. If we hurry, we *might* lose."

"I don't like these options," Barry said, shaking his head. "But you're right."

"Yeah," Roger muttered. "So let's go back to the Volcano."

"Hopefully there won't be giant flaming bubble monsters this time," Paul huffed.

*Sorry about that*, Link thought as they started down the mountain.

*I promise not to ask for a challenge this time.*

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## **Chapter 11: Not A Competition**



## **CHAPTER 12**

### **TAUNTING FLAMES**

The plan was to get in, and get out.

Move as fast as possible, and outrun the potential eruption of the volcano.

Find the Great Fairy, retrieve the keys, and hurry to Vaati's Palace before they wasted any more time.

Instead, they found themselves dodging flaming boulders that fell from the sky. They covered their faces once again with their hats, and stayed as far as they could from the lava that spilled through the cracks in the mountain. It flowed like rivers over the paths they tried to follow, blocking their way.

Eventually they were trapped, sitting huddled together in a small hollow in the side of the rock as lava poured around them. They were cornered, closed off, and the hollow only got hotter and hotter, like a furnace trying to cook them alive.

—

The rest of the day passed, they could even see the sun setting from their hollow. It was like the sun was mocking them, like it knew that even with it gone the lava was bright enough to keep them awake all night.

"We're not going to make it in time are we?" Paul huffed, tapping the back of his head against the cave's inner wall.

"Nope," Barry sighed, shaking his head.

"Doesn't matter," Roger said.

"Yeah," Link agreed. "We'll beat him anyway... we have to."

"Yeah," Roger mumbled.

"This is my fault," Barry scoffed, curling up into a ball and hugging his legs tight, sitting his face in his knees. "I dropped my sword, screwed everything up..."

"Don't you start," Roger scolded.

"... Sorry," Barry said.

"What do we do in the meantime?" Paul asked.

"Meantime?" Link asked.

"Until the lava's done with," Paul explained.

"I don't think it will," Roger answered. "At least not for a while."

It's not like it just dries up automatically."

"Yeah, I guess not," Paul sighed.

They sat in silence again, watching the night sky. They smoke and ash blocked the stars, and from here would probably block the sun in the morning as well. As the hours passed they started taking turns trying to sleep, but Paul would just stand outside the cave, looking at the top of the volcano.

Roger kept asking him what he was doing but Paul would give vague answers. Link eventually stood out with him, trying to see what he was seeing, then realized for the most part Paul had his eyes closed, like he was thinking.

"You're trying to talk to the Great Fairy," Link whispered, not wanting to wake Roger and Barry who had finally managed to fall asleep.

"The Great Fairy of Ice heard me," Paul whispered back. "When I needed her help. I've been trying to talk to the Fairy of Flame... but I don't think she can hear me."

"Why didn't you say something?" Link asked. "Why keep dodging the question?"

"I thought it sounded stupid," Paul answered.

"I spoke to the Great Fairy of Flame," Link said, looking at the top of the volcano.

"What!?" Paul exclaimed.

"Shut up!" Link hissed.

"Sorry," Paul mumbled. "But, when?"

"Right before the monsters started attacking?" Link answered. "I was in my own head, freaking out about how under prepared we were... I kind of asked for a challenge."

"... That was you?" Paul said blankly.

"Sorry," Link chuckled. "I would've said something, but I figured you guys would kill me for it."

Paul shook his head. "Well... say something now. See if she hears you now."

Link watched the smoke billowing from the top of the mountain, at the lava spilling down it. *Hey Great Fairy of Flame? Link thought. I don't suppose you could help us out here? We can't con-*

*I am trying.*

Link froze.

"What?" Paul hissed. "Did she answer?"

"She said she's trying," Link explained. "But it sounded strained. She's struggling to fight against Vaati, and I doubt it's an easy battle."

"Vaati's preventing her from helping," Paul said.

"He's trying to," Link nodded. "But the Great Fairies were here for a reason."

"Yeah," Paul nodded.

"Okay," Link said. "Then we need to do something."

"Like what?"

"We distract Vaati," Link grinned.

"What?" Paul scoffed.

Link drew his sword, then faced the direction of the Sea of Trees. "Hey Vaati!" he shouted, pointing his sword at where Vaati's Palace would appear. "We're still here!"

"Yeah!" Paul shouted, drawing his sword as well. "Didn't forget about us did you!?"

"Can't get rid of us that easily!" Link taunted. He dipped the blade of his sword in the lava, then pulled it out and sliced at the edge of the rocky cliff. He picked up a couple of rocks and started throwing them in the direction of Vaati's Palace. None of them made it very far of course, but he kept up his shouting as well.

"Pay attention!" Link shouted. "Come fight us yourself! Coward! You can't hide in your magic castle forever!"

"He finally lost his mind?" Roger yawned, crawling out of the hollow.

"You got anything better to do?" Paul asked. "Hey Vaati! Wake up! You *suck!*"

"There's something wrong with you two," Roger sighed.

Link and Paul laughed, continuing their shouting.

Finally Barry rolled over. "Shut *uuuuup*," he whined. "I'm sleeping."

"So is Vaati!" Paul taunted. "Cause he's lazy! Can't do his job right! All he had to do was beat us! Still hasn't! We're waiting, Vaati! We're right here!"

"Are you *trying* to get us killed?" Roger hissed.

"Just letting our enemy know what we think of him!" Link shouted. "Vaati sucks!"

"You're real great at insults, you know?" Roger muttered sarcastically.

"Whoa," Barry gasped, bracing himself.

The others felt it too, freezing. The mountain had shaken for a second.

"Was that Vaati?" Paul asked.

"See what you did?" Roger growled.

"Nope!" Link laughed, not letting up. "Vaati doesn't have that kind of power! All he could do is make the wind blow! Wind Sorcerer! Weakest magic *ever!*"

The mountain rumbled again.

"Guys, stop," Barry warned.

"Come on Vaati!" Paul shouted. "That the best you got!?"

The mountain rumbled, and the wind started to pick up.

"If you two don't shut up I'm throwing you in the lava!" Roger barked.

"Come on!" Link laughed. "Take your best shot!"

The wind nearly knocked him over, but he kept his footing. And at the same time, the inside of the hollow cracked, revealing a pathway into the mountain.

"That's our opening!" Link yelled, shoving everyone inside. "Move! Move!"

"This was your plan!?" Roger asked, running through the pathway.

"Vaati was keeping his attention on the Great Fairies," Link explained quickly. "Stopping them from helping us. We were trying to divert his attention."

"Should've said something," Roger muttered. "I had a few words for that creep."

"It's not like you couldn't say them before," Paul chuckled.

"Nah," Roger shrugged. "I don't think my words would've been as nice."

"Just keep running," Link said, leading them through the pathway.

It opened up into the cavern from before. The tall rock walls rose up around them, the maze intact once more. At least this time there wouldn't be any more adversaries in their way.

They ran through it, remembering where to go from last time. The holes created by the monsters weren't there anymore, but they knew the direction to go in, and eventually made to the other side of the cavern. There, they found the hall that led to the Great Fairy of Flame's fountain chamber. Finally they risked slowing down, walking the last path through the hall. The fairies on the pedestals flickered dimly around them, casting shadows on the walls. And then they stopped at the fountain itself.

A light began to glow at its center, and the Great Fairy of Flame rose out of it. Her bright red hair fell over her shoulders, and her large wings fanned out behind her, matching her incredible height. She looked down at them, her eyes blank like the others.



"I am the Great Fairy of Flame," she bowed. "The Guardian of Mt. Kasai. You have done well to defeat such a troublesome foe. I dub you... great heroes and grant you each a Golden Key." They all held out their hands, and a light dropped into them. It flashed, and they all held their final Key. Finally, they had everything they needed to confront Vaati again.

"At last all of you have collected all three Golden Keys," the Great Fairy said. "You can now choose the path to Vaati's Palace."

Link's smile dropped. *What?* he thought. *Choose?*

"That path will most likely be much more dangerous than any path you've seen yet," the Great Fairy explained. "And yet onward you must go, great heroes!"

She bowed again, and disappeared into her pool.

"That was a message," Link hissed. "A warning."

"But it's clear they're on our side," Paul nodded.

"So let's hurry," Barry said. "Defeat Vaati, save Zelda, and free the Great Fairies."

"Come on!" Roger said, already backing away. "Thank you, Great Fairy."

"Thank you," the others said in unison.

Then they ran, hurrying to get back out of the cave.

Next stop, Vaati's Palace. This time, it would be over for good.

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## Chapter 12: Taunting Flames



## **CHAPTER 13**

### **VAATI'S FINAL HOUR**

Deciding that this time rest would only be a waste of time, the four heroes hurried down the mountain side, jumping over the still flowing lava. They kept their faces covered until they crossed the river, and from there they ran back towards the forest.

The end was approaching, and they'd already run out of time. They didn't want Vaati to have another second more. He had to be stopped as soon as possible. And the adrenaline pushed them to keep going. This time, no matter what, they weren't going to let Vaati get away.

So when they arrived at the forest, Paul and Barry quickly got to work making their grappling hooks. And as soon as those were done they climbed back up to the tops of the trees, and used them to return to Vaati's Palace.

Again, all at once they set foot on the stairs up to the castle.

The golden palace doors opened for them as they neared them, and same as before it was all bright lights and gold embroidery across smoke filled walls. At the other end of the room there was the wall with an embossed door shape, but no door, and the podium in front of it with three key slots.

Link, Roger, Paul and Barry, stood before the podium and took their keys from their pockets. As they held them out, they merged.

The four keys they retrieved from the first Great fairy formed into one single key. Then the next four into one, and the last four into one. Now, there were only three golden keys, and they placed themselves in the slots of the podium.

They turned, and the wall opened up as a door.

This time, it opened up to a downwards staircase, but there was light shining from within.

The four heroes drew their swords, and entered.

"...Link?" Barry mumbled.

"... Yeah?"

"... Everything's on fire," Barry stated.

"Yeah," Link nodded.

The light that had been at the bottom of the stairs was cast by the glow of the flames. But it was worse than that; the entire castle seemed to be melting.

The gold turned to liquid from the heat, pooling like lava across the floor. The stones smoked and cracked, falling to pieces and melting into the gold.

"How are we supposed to get passed this?" Paul huffed.

"I don't think grappling hooks are gonna cut it this time," Roger grimaced. "And I don't see any other way across."

Link took off his hat and wrapped it around his face, tying it in a knot as best he could. "Follow me," he said, kicking off the nearest wall and grabbing onto the ceiling.

"What are you doing!?" Paul hissed. "Oh wait, actually..." The gold wiring ran along the ceiling. It was breaking, and hot, and the smoke blocked their vision, but there wasn't any other way.

"Alright," Paul sighed, following Link's lead.

The gold creaked as their weight pulled down on it, but it held. Then as soon as they were passed the pool of molten gold they dropped back to the floor and rounded the corner, only to see things get worse.

The floor was gone, the walls were falling, the ceiling was on fire, and everything was a mess of liquid gold and melting marble. This entire level of the palace was falling apart.

"Okay," Barry said. "What now?"

"These walls are already falling apart," Link said. "Let's see if they lead anywhere better."

He kicked through one of the walls, only to nearly get blasted in the face by a ball of fire. It knocked him back, but it seemed more of a pressure build up than anything. Now that the wall was gone, and the pressure had been released, they could enter the room.

They each kept their hats tied around the lower halves of their faces, but kept low to the ground anyway. After breaking through several more rooms like this, they finally managed to find a staircase leading back up.

Once they were out, and on the next floor... everything seemed calm.

"Was it just that floor?" Roger asked. "That's... that's kind of stupid."

"That doesn't even make sense," Paul said. "Why would the bottom half of the palace be melting?"

"It means we might not be as late as we thought," Link grinned. "It's getting hard for him to keep his crap together. Come on."

They hurried through the rest of the second floor, not finding anything more than the same broken pots and hanging vines from before.

Other than that, they made it through the halls and empty rooms faster than before. The lower floor had only been a challenge because of the fires, but it had still been the same layout. Same as this floor, so they knew where everything was.

And they arrived back at the top of the palace, the eight columns around the platform rising into the spire above them, and the statue of Vaati sitting in the center.

Link drew his sword. "Alright," he growled. "Let's make sure he can't--AAGH!"

Suddenly all of them were slammed against the ground.

"What the heck!?" Roger grunted, unable to reach his weapon, let alone move more than an inch.

"GWOH HOH HOH HOH HEH HEH HEH!"

"Vaati," Link hissed.

"Nice of you all to join us again," Vaati said, clearly not at all meaning those words. "You've all been thorns in my side for a loooooong time... I say we fix that... shall we?"

"Where's Zelda!?" Link shouted, doing everything he could to try and stand. "What did you do to the Great Fairies!?"

"Oooooohhhh, the Fairies," Vaati said happily, his voice echoing in the hollow air. He still hadn't appeared, but there was a dark shadow cast on the whole platform. "Some of my best work... it wasn't easy, being trapped in that sword for so long... but darkness creeps farther than light, and it is *much* more powerful."

"Where are you!?" Roger demanded. "Show yourself!"

"Fine," Vaati answered. "I'll show you the face of your destroyer."

The columns cracked, and the spire above them disintegrated. Then, as Vaati appeared, the world seemed to fall away. He was massive; a single large red eye floating amidst the clouds of black smoke. The sky turned red, and the platform shook.

"What's happening!?" Link shouted.

"The same thing that happened last time!" Roger growled.

"This is Vaati's world," Barry hissed.

"An entire other dimension," Paul finished.

Vaati laughed, thunder rumbling around them and lightning striking the platform. The stones splintered, sending rubble flying in every direction.

"We can't hit something this big," Link grunted. "How did you beat him last time?"

"We didn't hit him," Paul answered. "We used the power of the

Four Sword.... But, I don't think...." he strained against the pressure of Vaati's magic forcing them down. "We can't move."

"He's toying with us," Link realized. "But his attention is on us."

"Yeah!" Barry agreed. "That's a *bad* thing."

"No it's not!" Paul hissed, smiling. "Hey Vaati!"

"You going to finish us off or what!?" Link roared. "Quit messing around and get it over with!!"

"So impatient!" Vaati scolded. "If I wanted to, I could fry you into corpses in a matter of seconds!"

*Hey Great Fairies, Paul thought. Is it possible you could knock Vaati down a peg?*

"But if that's what you want!" Vaati laughed. "Then by all means... *FRY!!*"

**\*BAM!!\***

They all watched as lightning struck Vaati.

For a brief moment his focus wavered, and that was all the time they needed. Each of the heroes kicked off the ground, lunging towards Vaati. The only problem now was hitting him.

"You said you didn't hit him," Link hissed, the others standing beside him. "What did you do?"

Paul and Barry gave each other worried glances, but Roger looked away.

"We used our energy," Paul explained. "Our life forces. It took everything we had to defeat him last time."

Vaati roared in anger, another lightning bolt striking him. The Great Fairies were trying to distract him, but that couldn't last forever.

Roger raised his sword.

"Are we doing this?" Barry asked.

Paul looked up at Vaati, then raised his sword as well.

"Okay," Barry nodded, raising his sword. "I mean... it is what we came here to do."

"Are you sure?" Link asked. "There's no other way?"

"We told you before," Roger huffed, trying not to regret this. "We made a promise. No matter what it takes, every time. This is the end... I've made peace with that."

Link held his sword, but he couldn't get himself to lift it higher.

"We've made our peace too," Paul assured him.

"Yeah," Barry agreed. "Beating Vaati's more important."

The platform shook, the power of the Great Fairies was waning. They didn't have long for Link make his decision.

"We'll figure it out later," Roger growled. "Just focus your energy on Vaati!"

Link nodded. He hesitated, but he forced himself to lift his sword.

Wind whipped around them, lightning struck at their feet, and their blades glowed. Vaati finally looked down at them, realizing he should've ignored the Fairies' attempts at distracting him. But it was too late.

Using the power of the Four Swords, they fired a blast of pure energy at Vaati, cracking the glass orb around his eye.

"Stop this at once!" Vaati bellowed. "You think these toys will hurt me!? You use ancient, rusty magic!"

They pushed further, forcing Vaati back.

"It's futile!" Vaati laughed. "You are weak! I am pure magic in it's truest form!"

He used his magic to strengthen the winds, trying to keep the heroes down. But even Vaati couldn't keep his attention on everything at once, and the lightning struck him again.

The heroes used that moment to press even harder. Using every ounce of strength they had, they shattered the orb around Vaati's eye.

... But that wasn't the only thing that broke.

The sky burst into flames, eating away at the smoke. The veins Vaati's eye pulsed, electricity wrapping around it. It glared down at them, and the air tensed, burned.

"This isn't right!" Roger gasped, dropping.

"What happened!?" Paul hissed, falling to his knees.

"This didn't happen last time!" Barry exclaimed, doubling over.

"... What did we do wrong?" Link mumbled, stumbling.

Vaati shrieked, laughing. "I warned you!!" he screamed. "You don't stand a chance against me!"

"No!" Link argued, trying to stay on his feet. "This is where it ends! For you! It's over!"

"No," Vaati chuckled. "It's not over... not yet."

"Guys!" Link shouted. "He's weaker! We can still do this!"

The others could barely move, Vaati's magic had once again pinned them.

"Well I'm not giving up!" Link screamed. "Even if I have to do this alone, I *will* defeat you!"

Vaati lowered himself, the eye warping. For a second, he almost looked... human. He looked like a monster, like something that had once been human, but had been corrupted by magic for far too long. It was a form tall and wicked, deathly thin, and wrapped in shredded robes.

"Almost," he chuckled. "So close... but it's not quite over yet... I still my powers back... My *true* powers..."

"You're dead!" Link roared, swinging his sword.

Vaati took a step out of the way and watched Link fall. His winds flung him to the side. "What do you say we play one more time?"

"No!" Link coughed, gripping his sword.

"This was fun," Vaati smiled. "I wish you all the luck in the world."

Vaati raised his arms and Link threw his sword. The blade went straight through Vaati's heart...

...

...

And then the sword clattered against the shrine wall, falling to the ground.

"No!" Link cried. "*NOOOO!!*"

He fell to his knees, shaking. He was so close! He was *so close!*

"Vaati!" Link screamed. "Vaati get back here! I'm not finished with youwll..."

He toppled sideways, propping himself up on his elbow. He felt dizzy, like the world was still falling apart.

"Link!" Paul mumbled, barely managing a crawl. "Roger! Get Link's sword!"

Roger lay face down on the ground, unmoving.

"... B-Barry!" Paul stammered.

He too lay motionless on the floor.

Link fell over completely, unconscious.

"... No..." Paul shook his head, the shrine warping around them. The room was spinning... falling... upwards?

Pieces of the shrine's walls were cracking off, and slowly floating upwards into nothing.

"What... what's happening?"

---

## Chapter 13: Vaati's Final Hour



## **CHAPTER 14**

### **THE DIFFERENCE'S THE SAME**

Paul struggled to stay awake, crawling across the ground as it seemed to crack beneath him. It took all the strength he had, but he made his way to the other side of the room. His vision was blurring, and it was getting hard to breathe, but he had an idea.

As soon as he could reach it, he grabbed Link's sword and threw it back to him.

Link's sword clattered to the ground as Paul finally passed out, exhausted.

---

The world tore itself apart, time resetting once again. The wicked vines in the forest were in a frenzy, ripping apart the trees. Mt. Talus' ice had frozen the river solid, but it was also breaking apart the land. Mt. Kasai had cracked in half, spilling lava that mixed with the icy rivers. The sky was filled with ash and frost, the water was frozen or boiling, the land was destroyed and crumbling in on itself...

But worst of all, it continued to erase itself. Small pieces of the world broke off from the ground and disappeared into flickering lights.

The world was fighting back against Vaati's magic, destroying itself in the process. If this kept up, if Link and the others couldn't stop Vaati, the damage would spread passed this island, and enter Hyrule. At that point, there'd be no stopping him.

*And now that they are in a weakened state, Vaati thought, looking at the chaos he'd wrought from his shinning palace. Now that I have defeated them twice... and they have restored my power... I can be rid of the cursed Four Sword once and for all!*

He remembered the day, so long ago... the Picori Festival. He'd won the chance to touch the blade, and he'd broken it. Yet *somehow* a *child* had brought it back! Some... *boy* had reforged the blade, and used it to imprison him!

But not this time... this time would be different! Vaati would not let an old relic of his past best him again. This time he would destroy the blade, and the boy who wields it.



*This time... Ezlo, Vaati thought, glaring at his prison island. I will surpass you.*

---

Link gripped his blade, pushing himself off the ground. The shrine shook, creaking, but he could already feel his strength returning. He just had to stand up!

His legs felt like bricks, or like they had been chained to the floor. Link could only crawl, and he moved not a moment too soon, as suddenly a large piece of ceiling crashed down behind him. It shattered, and the chunks of stone dissipated into light, then flickered into nothing.

"Wh-what?" Link grunted, trying to move faster now. "Guys! Get up! The place-hff..." he shook his head, trying to wake up. "Get up!"

Link shoved Roger, rolling him over. "Wake up!"

Roger mumbled something incoherently but at least his eyes were open.

"We gotta move!" Link grunted. "Paul! Barry!"

"... Yeah," Barry moaned, barely able to get to his knees. "I'm awake." He almost managed to stand, but the floor beneath him suddenly disappeared.

Paul grabbed his arm before he could fall into nothing. "We've got to get out of here!"

"Yeah," Link hissed, forcing himself to get up.

"What are we waiting for?" Roger asked, standing now.

They hurried out of the shrine as more of the ceiling started to collapse. The floor in front of the door disappeared, but at least the doors did as well. They jumped out of the shrine, landing on mostly solid ground.

"It doesn't look much better out here," Paul noticed.

The trees were going through the same thing as the shrine. They were falling apart, turning into tiny lights.

"No," Link mumbled. "It's the whole island."

"Crap," Roger grunted.

"Then we move faster," Barry said.

They hurried down the hill and into the forest. Slashing at the wild vines they cut their way through, making a beeline for the Great Fairy of Forest's fountain. The vines moved faster this time, and they were actively attacking the heroes. The first time it had been slow, but sudden. The second time had been faster, and random. This time they knew what they

were walking into, and their moves were predictable despite moving faster.

The heroes took their hits, but they made it through in record time. But when they finally arrived at the Great Fairy's fountain, they weren't prepared for what they saw.

She came out of her pool, but her eyes were black, and she too was under the same spell that was ravaging the land. Small pieces of her skin broke apart, flickered, and then reformed. It was like she was actively trying to hold herself together.

But then she spoke and if this hadn't been a nightmare before, this sealed it.

"I ma het raGte riFay fo rotseF, uagdanir fo eht aSe fo eseTrs." her words echoed like she was speaking from far away, but there was a faint screeching in her voice. Vaati's power was greater this time around, and it was taking everything the Fairies had to fight back.

"What the heck?" Roger gasped.

"reeTh si ohntign elft ot eb isda. I ubd uyo... teh aetrtgse fo reehos dna trang ouy aceh a eHr'os yKe."

She held out her hands, and a light split to fall to each of them. Then each of them held the first of the final set of keys.

She continued speaking, but still they couldn't make out what she was saying.

"I'm sorry," Link said. "We'll hurry. This time we'll stop him. We promise."

"We promise," the others agreed.

The Great Fairy bowed, returning to her pool.

"Come on," Link growled. "We gotta keep moving."

—

"I want to know what happened back there," Roger said as they walked ran through the field to Mt. Talus. "At the shrine I mean. I get what happened to the Fairies... kinda... But what happened at the shrine?"

Link shook his head. "I have no idea," he admitted. "I guess I can't be separated from my sword either."

"But it's different," Paul added. "When you separated from your sword, we get weaker too."

Link looked over his shoulder at his blade.

"So you're like us after all," Barry said. "Different, but the same."

"Yeah," Link nodded. "I guess so."

Finally they arrived at the river. It was frozen solid, so it was easy enough to cross it, but instead of going the usual route, Link reminded them that the exit was right near the Fairy's fountain. So they started up the side of the mountain, and eventually made it to the small hole they'd usually leave through.

Expect this time it was frozen as well.

"I guess we're not allowed to come this way," Paul huffed.

"Screw that," Link scoffed. He stabbed the ice, kicking it. The others joined in, and managed to chip enough away that Vaati's magic even started to break it apart as well. Large chunks of ice just started disappearing.

"And there you go I guess," Roger chuckled, dropping into the hole.

The others followed and slid down to the fountain of the Great Fairy of Ice.

"Sorry we entered through the back," Link said as they hurried to the Fairy's fountain. "We didn't want to waste any time."

The fairy rose out of the waters, under the same spell as the first Fairy. Once again, her words were broken and she herself was falling apart. She raised her hands and granted them each their second key.

"We won't be much longer," Link told her. "We'll break this spell."

"Two down," Roger nodded. "One to go."

"To Mt. Kasai," Paul said.

The Great Fairy bowed, and returned to her pool.

"I feel sorry for them," Barry mumbled. "This is just... wrong."

"Then let's hurry and fix it," Link told him. "Come on."

---

They left the way they came and slid down the mountain. Crossing the river was a little harder than before, since now they had reached the section that was boiling. They couldn't walk or swim across it, but further back along the northern side of the mountain the river was still frozen.

It was a bit of detour, and made them take longer than they'd wanted to, but with the time they'd saved on not going through the entirety of Mt. Talus, they felt they were making decent time. And when they reached Mt. Kasai again, they road was even clearer.

Vaati had been destroying this island, but it seemed the damage he did made some things easier. For instance, Mt. Kasai had split straight down the middle, causing all the lava to spill out. But because it was

controlled in one direction, the path they'd usually taken up the mountain was clear.

And, with the spell still breaking apart the world, the door inside was still open.

The only problem from there, was that the entire cavern was flooded with lava.

"There... is no way across," Roger sighed.

"And it's even hotter than usual," Paul agreed.

"Plus we've been running all day," Barry added. "I feel like this is a great place to at least take a rest. Maybe it'll cool down in a bit."

"Again," Link said. "This is an active volcano. It's not going to 'cool down' any time soon."

"So then how do you suggest we get across?" Roger asked. "There's no paths or short cuts here."

"True," Link said, staring up at the ceiling. "But I feel like we need a challenge."

"What!?" Roger growled.

The ceiling broke, and boulders started dropping in front of them.

"We've got to hurry," Link said, jumping onto it. "I don't know how long it'll last."

Another boulder fell in front of the first.

"Just like the first time," Roger realized. "Was that whole mess *your* fault!?"

"Get angry at me later," Link told him. "Move faster."

They all climbed onto the boulder as more started creating a path to the other side of the cavern. Each one kept kicking lava into the air, so they had to stay a few boulders back to keep from getting hit, but eventually they made it across. And finally they were running down the tunnel to the final Fairy.

"Sorry we had to ask for help," Link said as she rose from her waters. "But I promise we can take it from here."

She spoke her nonsense words, and presented them with the final key.

"This time for sure," Link told her. "We'll beat Vaati."

"Once and for all," Roger growled. "He won't be coming back."

The last Great Fairy bowed, and returned to her waters.

"All that's left is Vaati," Link hissed.

"No more wasting time," Paul nodded.

They returned to the forest as fast as they could, still having to go back around to Mt. Talus to cross the frozen rivers. When at last they arrived, Paul and Barry got to work creating their grappling hooks, and Roger and Link fended off the vines that continued to attack them.

"It's not working!" Paul growled. "Everything keeps... dematerializing!"

"Yeah this isn't doing us any good," Barry agreed. "Any other ideas?"

Link looked up at Vaati's Palace. The bottom floor was still falling apart, melting. "I have an idea, and it's the stupidest one I've had yet."

"Well they all seem to work anyway," Roger huffed. "What do you got?"

"Those boulders dropping from the palace!" Link pointed. "We can jump from boulder to boulder."

"Physics would disagree with you!" Barry argued. "You'd be falling at the same rate as the boulders! You can't have the strength to jump--"

"Look at them!" Link countered.

They were falling, but they didn't make it to the ground. They all ended up dissipating in the air, but for a brief moment they were suspended.

"Ooooh, we'd need *perfect* timing," Barry complained.

"Then move fast," Link jumped up a tree, still fending off the vines.

"I don't like this!" Barry shouted as Roger and Paul followed Link.

Barry stood there for a moment, defending himself against the vines. "Ahhhhh... Fine!" He followed the others, climbing the tree.

They hopped from tree to tree, making it closer to underneath the palace. And as soon as they were close enough Link jumped.

No plan, to hesitation, no waiting to figure out a pattern or anything. He jumped from tree, to boulder, and from boulder to boulder.

Paul moved just as fast, but Roger and Barry were a bit more weary.

"Hurry up!" Link shouted from above. The boulders got smaller and smaller they higher they went, since the bigger ones fell farther before being suspended, but Link still managed to keep up with it.

"I guess his recklessness was good for something after all," Roger huffed. "I guess we don't have a choice."

"I *really* hate jumping off of things," Barry sighed.

Grudgingly, they followed Link and Paul.

Vaati, Link thought. *Are you ready? You don't have much time left.*

—

*Keep climbing, Vaati chuckled. Keep running. Keep wearing yourselves out. Keep fighting this battle we all know you're going to lose.*

It had taken them roughly a day and a half this time. Much faster than their previous attempts, but still not good enough.

*The chains that bound me, Vaati thought. The prison you stuffed me in. You'll pay for it all. Let's see how you like an eternity in darkness!*

He gathered his power in his hands, waiting for them. He laughed, wanting nothing more than to see the looks of utter despair on their faces when brought them to the brink of death, then finally killed their princess in front of them.

Then the *Great Fairies* would pay for their part in keeping him here. And then he'd destroy Hyrule, and it's King, and it's people. And finally, he'd pick apart the world, and rebuild it. He would create a new world, one where only ruled.

In this world, he would be God.

And *everyone* would suffer!

---

## **Chapter 14: The Difference's the Same**



## **CHAPTER 15**

### **GAME OVER**

Vaati's Palace was falling apart around them. Every step they took they risked falling through the floor, and every level was the same. Whatever powers Vaati had used to conjure this place from nothing, was finally failing. But they could tell that Vaati himself was growing stronger.

Or maybe it wasn't that his power was failing, but rather Vaati simply had no further use for the palace.

But that wasn't going to stop them, not this time. They'd all agreed to put everything aside at last, that no matter what they had to do, they would do it. This time, no matter what, Vaati's reign would end.

He was *not* making it off this island!

So jumping over lava pool after lava pool, scaling walls, and ducking smoke, the four heroes arrived again at the final door of the palace. Roger, Paul, and Barry all remembered the end of their last adventure, with the last Link and Ezlo. They remembered fighting Vaati over and over, each time believing him finally defeated, but this time... This felt different.

"Are we ready?" Link asked, pressing his hand to the door.

The others nodded.

"Let's do this," Roger said.

"We've beaten him before," Barry added.

"We'll beat him again," Paul agreed.

"Alright then," Link pushed open the door.

They drew their swords, stepping out onto the platform where Vaati stood waiting for them. Even here, the columns cracked and fell, and the ground shook.

Vaati stood at the other end of the platform, facing away from them. He stared down at the island, and the land of Hyrule on the other side of the sea. "I see we've reached the final battle," Vaati chuckled. "It has been fun, I must admit, but I've no use for you children any longer."

"You're not getting away this time," Link growled, brandishing his blade. "This time, we'll beat you once and for all!"

The others stood beside him, ready to fight.

"I see," Vaati chuckled, turning to face them. "Very well. Let's see how well your bodies burn." He hovered above the ground, dark energy wrapping around him and the sky filling with smoke. Then he laughed the

same laugh Roger, Paul and Barry remembered. He was back to his old self, the all-powerful Wind Mage, the dark sorcerer, Vaati.

Vaati raised his hand, electricity crackling in his fingers. "Perhaps I'll toy with you a little," he smiled. "For old time's sake! Heh heh heheheheh!"

They dodged as Vaati blasted the ground at their feet.

"Plan!" Roger shouted.

"Knock him down!" Link ordered.

Roger and Barry charged towards Vaati. "Get ready!" Roger growled. Barry braced himself and when they were close enough Roger grabbed Barry and threw him at Vaati.

Vaati grinned and swatted Barry away. Barry blocked with his sword, but Link used the distraction to throw his blade at Vaati. It stabbed straight through Vaati's side and Vaati screamed, darkness leaking out of his wound.

As Barry was getting back on his feet, Paul and Roger were already ready for Link. Using their hands as steps they tossed Link into the air. Vaati was still struggling with the blade, and Link managed to grab on to Vaati's foot.

"We always were a pain in your side!" Link huffed, grabbing hold of Vaati's robes to pull himself up.

"Begone!" Vaati roared, blasting Link.

Paul caught him as he fell, but all Link had needed to do was bring Vaati a little lower. Now that he was closer, Roger and Barry were able to jump and grab Vaati, pulling him to the ground.

"No!" Vaati shouted, blasting each of them as well.

Link spin kicked Vaati in the face, then grabbed the hilt of his sword and drove it in deeper. Paul took his own blade and stabbed through Vaati's other side, but it only made Vaati angrier. He expelled a blast of energy in every direction, like an expanding bubble of electricity and fire.

All four heroes were thrown backwards, but when the attack dispersed Vaati was clearly wounded. Both blades were still stuck in his sides, and they burned him. He wouldn't be able to remove them himself.

"Roger! Paul!" Link shouted. "You're up!"

"Link!" Barry called.

Paul was barely able to stand, the last attack having severely injured him. "Just get him in front of me," he growled, leaning on his sword.

"Roger," Link said. "Let's go."

"No!" Vaati bellowed, a harsh wind pushing them all back. "No



more games. It seems I underestimated you... but no more... I'm done toying with you. Now, you *all* die!" He rushed forward, grabbing Link by the throat. "I've suffered cramped in that accursed blade for *too long*! I will not go back! I have come to far to be felled by yet another *child*!"

Vaati's eyes widened. "No... how...?" He dropped Link, his hand shaking. Ever since he'd been freed from the Four Sword he'd been struggling to use more than a fraction of his power. He knew he hadn't been himself, but how could he have not seen this? "The same child?"

Suddenly he felt another blade pierce through him. He staggered, choking as he looked down at the bloody swords. Roger had taken advantage of Vaati's momentary lapse in focus. And that was three now... but his power hadn't failed him yet.

"Back!" Vaati shrieked. "Get away!" His winds pushed the heroes away again, but it was noticeably weaker this time.

Again Link kicked him in the face and Vaati skid across the ground. "My power was greater now... than it ever has been before," he looked at his shaky hands, trying to sit up but only managing to kneel on all fours. "How...? Why...? Every time... like it's *nothing* to you...! *How!*?"

He sat on his knees, staring at the ground. "Ezlo," he hissed, his voice shaking as he was barely able to breath. "This is your doing... isn't it!? *You betrayed me! I curse your name! You-shuuk...*"

Vaati's arms went slack as Paul's blade pierced his heart.

"Game over," Link told him. "You lost."

"No," Vaati mumbled. "No no... I... I... I..." He fell silent, body slack and eyes glazed over.

The four heroes all took a step back, waiting for something else to happen. They waited for Vaati to make one more move, to disappear and reappear stronger than before... but nothing happened, nothing changed.

So Link pulled his blade from Vaati's side. "This is the end," he said. "But it's not over yet."

"What do you mean?" Barry asked. "What's left?"

"You defeated him last time," Link explained, staring down at Vaati. "But even then you only managed to seal him away. I'm going to finish him off for good."

Link brought his sword down on Vaati's head, stabbing through his skull.

There was a cracking in the wind, and suddenly all of them were knocked on their backs. The air forced them down, and the winds were rushing in their ears, but the smoke was starting to clear. They could see the palace crumbling around them, and then they were floating.

"Hold on!" Link yelled as the ground began falling away from them. It splintered, into boulders and slabs of stone, all crashing back down to the surface below.

They each pulled their swords out of Vaati and tried to stay above the avalanche of broken castle. Vaati's body was quickly lost in the rubble, but the heroes aimed the descent towards the trees, crashing through the foliage. Catching and snagging on branches, they all hit the ground relatively hard but at least it could have been worse.

Link lay on his back, watching as the last of Vaati's palace came crumbling down. He took a few wheezing breathes, finally laughing, laying his head back on the soft ground.

"We did it," Barry sighed, leaning back on a tree. "We finally did it."

"One more problem guys," Paul grunted, trying to sit up. It was clear his leg was broken, but that wasn't what he was referring to. "Zelda wasn't in the palace... so where is she?"

"Right," Link nodded, struggling to get up. "Let's go... check it out."

They forced themselves to keep moving, Roger and Barry supporting Paul as Link went ahead. They climbed up the rubble, rocks and boulders slipping beneath them. Dust hung in the air, carried by the soft winds that had finally calmed.

"Zelda!" Link called. "Zelda!"

As they reached the peak of the debris they stopped, looking every direction for some kind of sign.

"Look!" Roger said, pointing to the sky.

They followed his directions and saw a small light twinkling in the sky. It floated through the air, falling towards them. As it got closer, they saw that it was Zelda.

Link caught her, lowering her and laying her on the ground. The twinkling lights faded, and her eyes opened as if she'd been sleeping the whole time.

"Hey," Link said.

Zelda rubbed her eyes. "Uhhhhnnn..." When she could properly see again she looked up at Link. "Oh!" she smiled. "You saved me, didn't you? Thank you."

"Not just me," Link said, looking over his shoulder. Roger, Paul and Barry waved to Zelda, happy to see her alive.

"Why!? There are four of you!" Zelda gasped. "So, the legend of the Four Sword was true... But, how can we get you back together?"

Link lowered his gaze.

Roger put his hand on Link's shoulder. "I've thought about it a lot," he said. "Since that fight in Talus Cave..."

"This isn't right," Link said. "You're not just tools to be put away after you're done being used."

"Except we are," Roger corrected. "That's *exactly* what we are."

Link stood, helping Zelda to her feet. "I refuse," he told Roger. "Even if it means carrying this blade with me for the rest of my life-"

"You can't," Barry told him. "You know that."

"The sword itself can't stay separated," Paul explained. "Which means, *we*, can't stay separated."

"It's time to put us away," Roger said.

Link shook his head.

"It's okay," Barry smiled. "I think we've all thought about it... I think we've all known how this was going to end from the beginning."

"Besides," Paul joked. "There can't be four Links running around, that'd be weird."

"You're not Link," Link said solemnly. "You're Roger. You're Paul. You're Barry. You can't just..."

"This isn't your choice to make," Roger said. "We weren't going to leave this island."

Link looked away from them.

"It's been a pleasure working with you," Paul said. He held out his hand. "But it's time to say goodbye."

"The evil's been defeated," Barry said. "Zelda's been saved. The island has been freed of Vaati's magic... You get to go home Link."

"But you don't," Link argued, looking at each of them. "I thought we were going to find a way to fix this! I thought we were going to beat Vaati, and... and find *something*..." He choked on his words. "I don't want to say goodbye."

"Like I said," Roger told him. "This isn't your choice, it's just how things are."

"Link," Zelda said, taking Link's hand.

Link couldn't even speak... but he knew no argument he could make would convince them not to do this... And even if he could convince them, he knew it was wrong to do so. It wasn't his place to decide for them. If this was where they parted...

He looked back up at them. "Thank you," he told them. "For everything you've done, all that you've given up. Thank you, for saving the world."

He shook Paul's hand, hugged Barry, and nodded to Roger. Then one by one, each of them stepped back. They drew their swords, and placed them in the ground.

The gem in their hilts glowed their respective colors, and Link's vision shifted. For a moment, he saw through their eyes. For a moment he saw the world fading away, and when he opened his eyes, only the last sword remained in his hand, and Roger, Paul and Barry, were gone.

Link fell to his knees, feeling sick. He wanted to throw up, he wanted to cry, but the last thing he'd wanted was to say goodbye...

---

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-Executive Producer-  
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Link placed the Four Sword back in its pedestal in the shrine. The gem in its hilt shined dimly before going dark. He could almost feel them, still with him, until that moment.

In that moment, it was all finally over...

Link backed away from the sword, and at last turned to leave. He returned to Zelda who was waiting for him by the door, and together, they set out for home.

