

Fanatical Publishing's

# Weekly Review

Issue #

July 14, 2013

## AND NOW, a word from the publisher:

Hello folks, Jochannon here; first let me say thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy, and please feel free to share it with your friends, re-post it to your profile, spread it around; the more people who get to read it, the better!

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If you want to contribute, I'd love to see your work, send it to me at the aforementioned e-mail address with: 'category(prose, fanfic, poetry), STORY TITLE, Author's Name' in the subject line: please include the text of your story in the body of the email, and please include a cover letter about you, your work, or whatever; include any links you want, and cover art if you have any.

Do you have any questions or comments? If you do, I'd to hear them; write to me at the aforementioned e-mail address.

I'm bad at stopping these things, so I'll just say again: thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy!

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# ORIGINAL LITERATURE

# CARNAL AND SPIRITUAL

Solilska  
of <http://solilska.deviantart.com>

In my tenth written piece i attempted to write about and explain the carnal and spiritual people and why adoration for the none tangible exists:

First of all I must point out my own personal problem of not knowing where to put this subject, because it is a fundamental difference in humanity, splitting us into two types of humans. But at the same time we are clearly heading towards a universal view against one of these views and the rejection of it, which I would claim as progress, of course the other side would claim this as transgression.

The two types of people are carnal and spiritual. "The carnals" are usually dominant people who will choose to do whatever they like and get what they want, they are here to enjoy this world and they shall experience it on their own terms, indulging in whatever they like and whoever they like. This world is tangible, and tangible is the only truth, they will earn respect via actions and achievements.

"The spirituals" are usually much less dominant, usually quite submissive. They usually seek someone, a father, a leader, someone or something to inspire them to live a certain way and for protection. These people are usually very moral, and when morals are put before the person, they make choices for the "Good" of others before themselves and often will earn respect via their ability to show compassion and tenderness.

Their brain is far more abstract, its about feelings and what they think and imagine, of course this can result in great work in the mechanics of thought, morals and art.

Neither of these two types of people are incorrect, they are naturally this way and that should not be stopped or looked down on, they both have weaknesses and strengths but the key thing is every weakness one has, the other does not, I honestly think that unity between these two brains would result in far greater progress than going our own separate ways.

The rate or percentage if you like of how Carnal or spiritual you are will be different in each person, some people show powerful signs of both and these are usually the most stable of people. Adoration for the

nontangible refers to god, spiritual people look outwards for a god, carnal people look inwards, trying to become a god. I personally do not feel adoration for anything I cannot touch or see as a tangible existence, because to me, that is not real or truth, its guessing.

But to a spiritual person that is most definitely factual to them and is proven by their leap of faith, I know which type I think to be incorrect, because I lack the eyes of the other side, so I can't understand it very well. But I would like to learn and be taught by others what this means so I can have a fuller understanding of humanity and our thought patterns. I believe this to be a positive cause, to interact with those different to me to teach myself and them about what they don't know or understand, we shouldn't separate ourselves from different people but try to find an understanding and agreement of mutual gain.

# I (HONESTLY) FEEL YOUR PAIN

Ambiguous-Catharsis  
of <http://ambiguous-catharsis.deviantart.com>

It was one of *those* nights, where nothing went as it was supposed to and everything managed to cut him to the quick. Where every passing emotion burned his skin and even the rain sliding down his collar didn't help take away the sorrow, the pain, the desperation or the heartache. It was one of the rare nights when Joseph Beckerman felt emotions, and he didn't like it at all.

In the beginning, he had tried to hide. He thought that, if he got away from people and their roiling feelings, he could keep his sanity. He was wrong. Even tucked away in the middle of a Canadian forest, he still felt the intrusive auras invade his body and mind. So he stopped trying to hide and just tried to make it all go away.

Alcohol helped, to some extent. It numbed his mind to the depression and my-God-my-God-why-have-you-abandoned-me thoughts that liked to run marathons around his synapses. The alcohol didn't help his body though, and for a long time he still felt the tears. He learned that heartache was a very physical pain and that fear did have cold, clammy fingers. He learned that despair could make you sick and that sadness tightened your throat like a hangman's noose.

And then one night, it rained. And the rain, and the cold, and the wind made his body numb, at least a little. It helped. The longer he stayed in it, the less he felt, and for that, he was thankful. He didn't want to feel anything. Anything at all.

But then there were nights like tonight, where the alcohol just burned his throat and the rain just made him cold and he wasn't numb like he wanted to be. These were the nights he felt everything, when he could honestly say to every person passing by, "I feel your pain" because he did. He hated it, and the best part was that none of them knew.

Sure, perhaps they noticed that they felt better around him, or that he tended to lift their spirits without ever saying a word, but they didn't know that he was absorbing their troubles, taking them away without leaving a trace.

Joseph was an accidental project, an experiment gone wrong. He, the

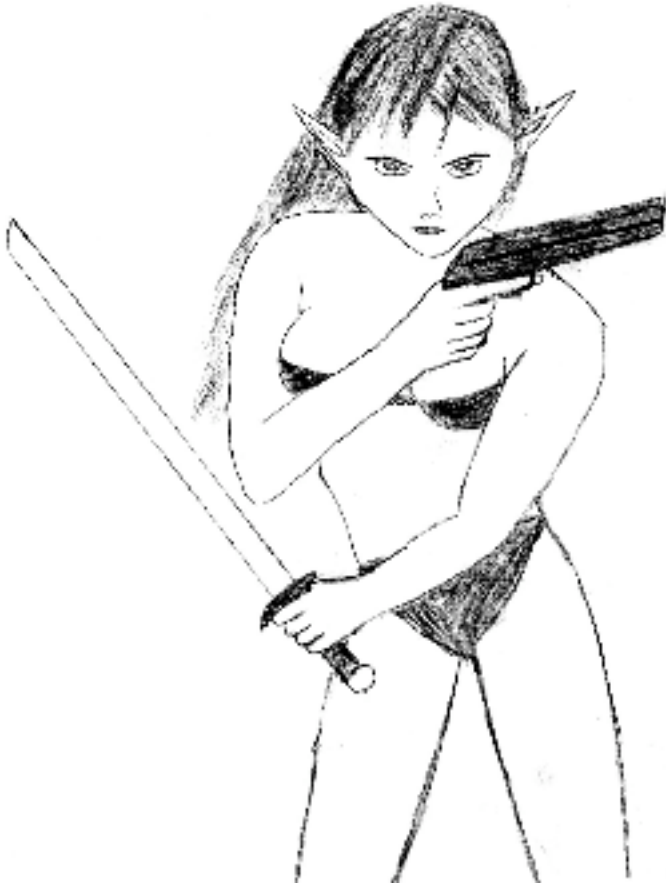
person, was never supposed to have existed. From what he'd heard, he was supposed to have been a drug, an elixir of happiness. As he sat on the bench in the pouring rain, smelling of whiskey but stone-sober, the irony didn't escape him. What was supposed to have made the entire world care-free had made him the most miserable man to ever walk it.

Somewhere above him, thunder crashed. A jolt of fear that didn't belong to him coursed through his body, clenching his stomach and curling his fingers into fists.

It was one of those nights, when pain made him its own personal sanctuary. And all he could do was wait for the morning.



# FAN FICTION



or: Leanna's Return

# ME2 HELLDIVER SAGA

## CHAPTER 32: JACK'S PAST

Veyron722skyhook  
of veyronmaster722@gmail.com

Since her little talk with Liara, Miranda had kept her promise and had ceased trying to get Austin's attention. Austin knew he shouldn't think like this, but he'd now made a small bet in his mind. Who would ask for his help next? Jack or Tali?

Jack certainly seemed more likely due to her... troubled past, and Tali was usually the sort of person who remained very focused.

As Austin exited the elevator, Kelly instantly turned to face him. She didn't even wait for Austin to say good morning to her. There was a worried look on her face.

"Shepard, I'm glad you came by." She said very quickly.

"Woah! Slow down, Kelly. Is something the matter?" Austin asked, nearly backing away by the Yeoman's sudden worried tone.

"It's Jack. She's been acting stressed all morning." Kelly replied as she tried to calm down a bit.

"Have you tried talking to her?" Austin asked.

"I wouldn't be this worried if I hadn't. I know it's a long shot, but is there a chance you can talk to her?" Kelly asked, almost pleading.

"I'll see what I can do." Austin replied as he put his hand on Kelly's shoulder reassuringly.

"Thank you, Shepard. I'm not sure what else to do." Kelly smiled.

Austin found Jack in her usual spot. True to Kelly's words, she had a somewhat stressed look on her face.

"Hey, Shepard." She said.

"You alright, Jack? Kelly tells me you've been a bit stressed all morning." Austin asked.

"Yeah. I got thoughts like little bugs crawling in and out of my head. I can't stop them." Said Jack.

The biotic convict then stood up and went over to the stairs. She then sat down on one of them. She did a look like she was struggling to think of what she needed to say to Austin.

"You know I have a history with Cerberus. You know how far back it goes?" she asked.

"Your whole life." Austin replied. "Jack, I'll listen to anything you have to say. Tell me what's bothering you."

"Cerberus raised me. First thing I remember is my cell door in a Cerberus base. They did experiments. Drugged me. Tortured me. Whatever chance I had to be normal, they stole it by trying to turn me into some super-biotic. The doctors... the other kids... Every one of them hated me. They let me suffer." Said Jack.

"What did they hope to gain by torturing a little girl? It's barbaric." Said Austin.

"That's putting it lightly, Shepard. It was something about pain breaking down mental barriers, and that might clear the way for a more biotic power. I'm sure there was a payoff due at some point, but I wasn't going to see it. I was wired up in a cell." Said Jack.

"They tortured you just to see if they could make a strong biotic? That's it?" Austin asked, almost in disbelief. He knew what Cerberus was like, but he never expected they could be this inhumane.

"Wasn't in a position to ask, Shepard. All I know is, a little girl crying in a cell, begging for the pain to stop..." said Jack.

"How did you get out of there?" Austin asked.

"There was some kind of emergency and I made a break it. The other kids came out of their cells and attacked me. So did the guards. I just killed everything in my way and ran. Guess my biotics had developed faster than they thought. I managed to get a shuttle off the ground. Drifted until a freighter picked me up. The crew used me, then sold me. That's my uplifting escape story." Jack explained.

"So there were other children in the base?" Austin asked.

"I didn't know much about them. I was kept separate. They hated me, just like everyone else there. When I broke out, I had to fight through them all. I showed them, but there's a loose end I need to deal with." Said Jack.

"You're sure it was Cerberus? It's not that I'm trying to defend Cerberus, in fact I hope it was them so that we can give 'em hell." Said Austin enthusiastically.

"You and me both. Trust me, I know it was them. I was a kid, but I wasn't dumb. I know how to listen. It was Cerberus. Don't care how far down the chain it was. They thought they were so clever. Turns out, mess with someone's head enough and you can turn a scared kid into an all-powerful bitch. Fucking idiots." Said Jack, her mood did brighten a bit knowing that Austin thought the same as her about Cerberus.

"I know what you mean. I myself have seen some of the things Cerberus has done. If we... no, when we eventually find the Illusive Man himself, he's not even gonna get the mercy of being put on trial. He'll die on the spot with my sword through his heart before that happens, provided he has a heart to stab." Said Austin.

"Hope I get to see that when it happens. But that's not what I'm after anyway. I found the coordinates in your Helldiver's Cerberus

files. I want to go to the Teltan facility on Pragia, where they tortured and drugged me. I want to go the centre of the place, my cell. I wanna deploy a big fucking bomb. And I want to watch from orbit when it goes." Said Jack, almost order like.

"I'm surprised you're not a Helldiver with an attitude like that. We're not busy right now, so we can do this right now if you want." Austin offered.

"The sooner the better." Jack replied.

"Then you'd better get ready. We've got a facility to destroy."

"I owe you, Shepard." Said Jack gratefully. "And tell Kelly I said thanks for sending you to talk to me."

"How did you..."

"I'm smart. I know she cares about me. Not that I mind of course."

The shuttle ride was mostly silent. Partly because there wasn't a lot to talk about, but mostly because the two squad mates that Austin had chosen to take for mission where Miranda and Urz. Jack of course despised Miranda to the core, regardless of whether she was with Cerberus or not. Urz on the other hand, Jack had a bit of respect for but he of course didn't talk and was a quiet Varren, only barking during a fight or when he was extremely excited.

"I forgot how much I hate this place. See the landing pad? Has to be on the roof, or the vegetation would overgrow it in a few hours." Jack finally spoke up as the dropship neared the landing zone.

"Shepard, I am picking up thermal signatures everywhere, except at your landing zone." Said EDI.

"Something's distorting the sensors." Austin commented.

"This was a secret Cerberus facility." Said Miranda.

"Yeah, they build their equipment to last. Assholes! It was a mistake coming back here, Shepard." Said Jack.

"Hey, you where the one that wanted us to come here. Get a hold of yourself. It'll be okay." Said Austin.

"I'm fine. Okay. Let's get on the ground." Said Jack.

The dropship doors opened, instantly allowing the rain from outside to flow in. Austin of course, being protected by his exosuit was bothered by the cold rain at all and it simply dipped and ran off the edges of its metal skin. Urz, being a Varren, wasn't that bother by the rain either, especially since he was also wearing armour. Jack seemed to mostly ignore it, despite her lack of much clothing. Miranda did seem a bit irritated by getting wet, but she did her best not to show it.

"Let's just get in there and plant the bomb in my cell. I want to watch this place burn." Said Jack.

Although the place was abandoned, they still had their weapons drawn just in case. It was easily possible they might encounter some

wild creatures. A few wild Varren where definitely likely to be in here trying to perhaps scavenge some food or anything from the wreckage.

They first entered a large room of some kind. It was filled with a number of large crates.

"I never saw this room. I think they brought new kids in these containers. They were messed up and starving, but alive. Usually." Said Jack.

Austin couldn't help but think what this place might have been like in its prime. Seeing it in this destroyed state and with a lot of the vegetation having overgrown in it just kept making him think that.

Eventually, they found what looked like an old message recording of some kind. There was one person actually doing the log and the voice of someone off-screen could also be heard.

"The Illusive Man requested operation logs again. He's getting suspicious." It said.

"When we get results, he won't care what he did. But if he knew..." said the other voice.

The message seemed to deactivate itself automatically.

"It sounds like this facility went rouge." Said Miranda.

"You'd like to think that wouldn't you? He didn't say what they were hiding from the Illusive Man." Said Jack.

The next room was a lot bigger. It looked like what was left of a loading area.

"I remember escaping to this room. Fighting here. I saw sunlight through the cracks in the ceiling. Only a half-dead guard between me and freedom. He was begging for his life." Said Jack.

At that moment, Urz started sniffing the air. From the Varren's body language, Austin could tell that Urz sensed something.

"Stay alert. I don't think we're alone in here." He said cautiously.

Sure enough, as they rounded a corner they found several wild Varren. They'd obviously caught their scent too and they looked ready for a fight. The group however where quick to deal with them though. Urz in particular managed to take down three Varren on his own, the special armour providing him protection form their fangs.

"This looks like what's left of an arena." Said Austin as he observed some of the wrecked area that had several small walls arranged in circle. A few where toppled over and some weren't arranged right. There were also one or two blood stains on the floor.

"That's right. They used to stage fights here. Pit me against other kids. I loved it. Only time I was ever out of my cell." Said Jack.

"What exactly where they studying?" Austin asked.

"Hell if I know. Maybe that's how they got their kicks. I never understood anything that happened here."

"How often did they do this?"

"I was in a cell my whole life. Sometimes they took me out and

made me fight. Filled me with drugs. Other stuff. Time gets funny in a cell."

"Did other children die in these fights?"

"I was a kid, filled with drugs. I got shocked when I hesitated. Narcotics flooded my veins when I attacked."

"They actually rewarded you for attacking?"

"I still get a warm feeling during a fight."

"What the hell was wrong with those people?!"

"I don't know. Doesn't matter now."

"Got anything to say about that, Miranda?!" Austin asked in Miranda's direction.

Miranda was a bit lost for words and didn't say anything.

"Didn't think so." Said Jack.

"Let's keep moving."

They continued through several more long corridors. Austin could tell that Jack seemed a bit unsettled in this place. Not that he blamed her of course, this was where she'd grown up and lived hell. As if he didn't have enough reason to hate Cerberus already.

Eventually, they came across another holographic interface that had a log in it. Jack nodded and Austin accessed it.

This one had the security officer from the last one it.

"Security Officer Zemkl, Teltin facility. We've come under attack from a Helldiver squad! The subjects are out of their cells! They're tearing the place up! Subject Zero is going to get loose. I need permission to terminate – I repeat, permission to terminate! All subjects besides Zero are expendable. Keep Jack alive!" he said urgently. There was a brief pause as he heard the response in his earpiece. "Understood. I'll begin the -"

He was interrupted however when a Helldiver soldier suddenly appeared behind him. The Helldiver smashed his head on the console and threw him to the floor.

"Don't move!" he ordered as he had his gun trained on the officer. "Area secure."

Jack had heard enough and switched the hologram off.

"That's not right. I broke out when my guards disappeared – I started that riot." She said.

"Things might have happened that you didn't see. Besides, I've been detecting some rare chemical residues in certain areas. Those are the same residues found in the remains of a dead Helldiver when their suit vaporises itself. The Helldiver part certainly seems true." Said Austin.

"Perhaps. Could be I thought they were mechs. But still, the other kids attacked me. The guards attacked me. The automated systems attacked me. That doesn't leave lots of room for interpretation." Said Jack.

They proceeded a bit further into the facility. As they went down some stairs however, they found something rather unexpected. Two dead Varren. They'd just been killed very recently, and with bullet wounds.

"This place is supposed to be empty. Who the fuck shot that Varren? It's a fresh kill." Said Jack.

At that moment, Urz suddenly started growling fiercely.

"What is it, boy?" Austin asked cautiously.

"More Varren?" Miranda asked.

"I don't think so. Urz tends not to bark or growl at other Varren. When he does..." said Austin. "I don't think we're the only ones here.

Urz didn't bark but kept growling. Austin allowed him to slowly lead the way. They soon got an answer to who and what the Varren had been growling at earlier. There was a large red Krogan and several Vorcha in the next room.

"Blood Pack! I should've known." Austin hissed.

"What the fuck are they doing here?!" said Jack, also keeping her voice down.

"I don't know. Regardless though, I don't think either of us wants to sneak past them." said Austin.

"I was actually thinking the same thing." Miranda agreed also.

"Okay, here's what we'll do..." said Austin.

Before the Helldiver could continue anymore however, Jack instantly leapt over the edge, her biotics flared and the whole place practically turned into a war zone as she engaged the mercs.

"Or we can go with Jack's approach." Austin sighed.

He and Miranda popped out of cover and joined the fight. Urz did the same and leapt onto a nearby Vorcha, sinking his fangs right into flesh.

Jack had quickly dealt with the rest of the Vorcha so that left just the Krogan, who was proving very difficult for Austin and Miranda to take down. Even with all their firepower and all the biotics, Krogan always took so much to take down. Eventually though, Miranda and Jack managed to both fling a throw attack so powerful that it tossed the Krogan high into the air. Austin was unable to resist some target practice. Setting his shoulder cannon to automatic, it immediately locked onto the falling Krogan. The familiar red targeting laser appeared, a blue plasma shot was fired and the falling body was vaporised.

"Jack, next time please check with me before you rush into a fight. I can't have you disobeying orders and starting unwanted conflicts." said Austin.

"Under the circumstances, it's okay to just attack mercs. You can't complain about that." said Jack.

"True."

They continued further and further into the facility. The further they got, the more wreckage there was. Jack certainly had made a mess of the place all those years ago.

"So strange to be back here. I feel like... I'm pissed off. I'm a dangerous bitch. But then I'm a little girl again. Shit, it's complicated. Let's just go plant that bomb." Said Jack.

The next room had some more wild Varren in it, but it was nothing to difficult. Further into the room showed that it was in fact a long corridor filled with doors, each one leading into a small isolated cell. All the other test subjects had clearly been in here.

"They kept children in this place?" Miranda asked in shock.

"This sort of thing surprises you?!" Jack retorted.

"I..."

"Knock it off, you two!" said Austin sternly.

After a while, the group found themselves outside again. It had stopped raining now, and the night seemed peaceful. They were on some sort of balcony over a small garden. There could be what looked like a large window of sorts at one end.

"This... It's a two-way mirror? My cell is on the other side – I could see all the other kids out here. I screamed at them for hours, and they always ignored me." Said Jack.

The next room looked the same as the one they first been in when they came in, but this time it looked more like a torture chamber and it had no containers.

"I must have come through here when I broke out, but I don't remember it. This is a bad place." She said.

There were two holographic interfaces in the room. Austin guessed these were more log updates. The first one showed a scientist of sorts.

"Entry 1054, Teltin facility. The latest iteration of PergNim went poorly. Subjects One, Four, and Six died. No biotic change among the survivors. We lowered core temperatures of surviving subjects, but no biotically beneficial reaction occurred. As a side effect, all subjects died. So we'll not try that on Zero. I hope our supply of biotic-potential subjects holds up. We are going through them fast." It said.

"This is bullshit! They weren't experimenting on the other children for my safety!" said Jack as the log ended.

"You can't help what they did to others." Said Austin.

"You don't get it, Shepard. I survived this place because I was tougher than the rest. That's who I am." Said Jack.

"You move on, harder and tougher."

On the other side of the room was another holographic log. The log had had the same scientist from the last time. This time though there was urgency in his voice and explosions could be heard in the



background.

"It's all fallen to pieces. A Helldiver squad's attacked the facility. The subjects are rampaging, and Zero is loose. We're shutting Teltin down. What a disaster. We'll infiltrate and piggyback onto the Alliance's Ascension program. Hopefully that will—who are...? Zero, wait!"

"Shepard, they started up somewhere else." Said Jack.

"Ascension is an Alliance program. It's a school for biotic kids. They don't torture children there." Said Austin.

"A lot of this... isn't the way I remember it." Said Jack.

"There was a lot going on."

"I was dumb. I keep my eyes open now, and I always shoot first. We're getting close to my cell. The place I came from. Let's keep going."

After going through another corridor, they were close to Jack's cell now. Right as they stepped into the next room however, they were met with a somewhat unwelcome sight. They were in the largest room yet, a massive loading bay, or what was left of it. In the room where more Vorcha, two more blood Pack Krogan and another Krogan dressed in more advanced armour. He noticed the group and spoke into his earpiece.

"Hey Aresh, it's Kureck. Yeah, the intruders are here. You want them dead, we have to talk creds. You promised us lots of salvage, but this place is a waste." Said the leader. There was a brief pause as he heard the reply in his earpiece. "Fine – we'll put 'em down. Then I'm coming in there, and we're going to talk salvage."

"What are you doing here?" said Austin.

"First we're gonna kill you, then we'll see." Kureck replied.

Everyone immediately pulled out their guns and the place was filled with gunfire. The good thing though was that the room was nice and large and there where more than plenty of spots to go into cover.

Miranda stuck back and used her biotics for far attacks, Jack went right up close with her more powerful biotics and Austin went on the attack with his Revenant. He hardly needed to worry about shots hurting him. Even if his shields gave out, his armour could withstand 24 hours of gunfire and attackers where usually dead within the first second of those hours. Urz of course stayed at his master's heels and relied on his own armour to keep him safe from rounds. A few times though he'd attack an enemy that got too close and would immediately eat them. He didn't eat the Vorcha though, something about their blood or flesh didn't appeal to Varren. He got lucky however when one of the Krogan tried to melee Austin and he bit into its leg. If he'd been allowed to take the whole body back to the Normandy, he'd be feasting on it for weeks.

The battle intensified for several long moments before all

opponents were finally dead. Jack finished Kureck by slamming him against the wall, then ceiling, then the floor and finally smashing his face in with a biotic punch. Violent, but against a Krogan, necessary.

"Only room left is my old cell. Whoever Aresh is, he's in there. I want to plant the bomb there, anyway. Might as well do it on his corpse." Said Jack.

Jack's cell certainly looked a mess. Nearly everything was smashed. There was an overturned desk and who knows what else.

They couldn't see this Aresh person, but they knew he was in here. Urz was also sniffing, but the Varren didn't go looking until his master said so.

"Come out. We know you're here." Austin demanded. Nothing happened.

"Last chance..."

Still nothing.

"Okay, you asked for it. Urz, seek!"

Urz obeyed and started sniffing around. It only took the Varren a few seconds before he started barking at the wardrobe. Austin immediately forced it open and Urz dragged a man out of it. He kicked and struggled against the Varren's strong jaw grip.

"Get the hell off me you filthy creature!" he yelled.

Urz didn't take kindly to this, and threw him a few metres. Jack and Austin stood over him as he slowly got back up.

"Who are you?" Jack demanded.

"My name is Aresh, and you're breaking into my home. I know you, Subject Zero. So many years have passed, and I thought I was the only survivor." Aresh replied.

"My name is Jack! How the hell do you know me?" said Jack as she aimed her gun at Aresh.

"We all knew your face, Jack. They inflicted horrors on us so their experiments wouldn't kill you. You were the question, and I'm still looking for the answer." Aresh replied.

"Looks like you're not the only one pulled back here, Jack." Said Austin.

"I tried to forget this. But a place like this... it doesn't forget you. It follows you. I hired these mercs and came back almost a solar year ago. We're rebuilding it, piece by piece. I'm going to find out what they knew - how to unlock true biotic potential in humans. I'm restarting the Teltin facility. It will be beautiful." Said Aresh.

"I wanted a hole in the ground - he's trying to justify what happened by using it!" said Jack.

"You'd do the same thing to other children?! This was forced on you! You're no better than Cerberus!" said Austin angrily.

"Some were bought from poor families on Earth or kidnapped

from colonies. Most ended up here the way I did: Batarian pirates. The Helldivers never stopped hunting Cerberus for that. They did such horrible things to us. They must have had good reasons." Said Aresh.

"There's no reason good enough! Are you nuts? You lived it!" said Jack angrily.

"This place was like a prison. How did you get out?" Austin asked.

"Your Helldivers eventually must've found where we'd been taken after the pirates sold us to Cerberus. Two Helldiver squads attacked the base, which provided a major distraction for the guards. We all attacked at once as they were taking us to the lab. The would've put us down, but then Jack got loose. When I came to, it was over – the guards, the scientists, and the kids were all dead. And you were gone. Only what was left of the Helldiver squads were still alive. They found me and took me back to civilization. They offered me a chance at being a Helldiver when I was old enough, but I turned it down. I wanted a more peaceful life." Aresh explained.

"I stopped it, all of it. Maybe the others did have it bad, but what you're doing is just as messed as them, maybe even more." Said Jack.

"Everything we went through must have been worth something!" Aresh retorted.

"We can blow up the place, but that still leaves him. What do we do with another you?" Austin asked.

"That's easy." Jack replied.

"Just leave me here. This is where I belong." Said Aresh.

"Fuck that." Said Jack as she threw a biotic warp at Aresh causing him to tumble.

"Jack, wait! He's trapped in his past. You need to move on from yours." Said Austin.

"He wants to restart this place. He needs to die!" said Jack.

"Look at him. He's crazy, and he's never going to restart this facility. My kin would sooner destroy it again anyway. You have to let it go. Killing him won't help you." Said Austin.

"It will help me!" Jack retorted.

"Your call then." Said Austin as he stood back a bit.

"What? You're supposed to be telling me to put the gun down! That's what you do!" Jack asked in surprise.

"I'm not your father, I'm your friend. Just be sure that this is really what you want." Said Austin.

"I... shit, is this right? Will killing him fix my head?" Jack asked.

"Only you can answer that, Jack. But remember, your past doesn't have to control you." Said Austin.

"You're right." Said Jack admittedly. "Get out of here. Go!"

Aresh didn't hesitate and ran. He narrowly managed to avoid Urz snap his jaws at him as he left.

"He's not worth chasing. None of it is." Said Jack.

"You did the right thing, Jack." Said Austin.

"Maybe." Said Jack. She then looked around for a second, a somewhat sad look on her face. "This room was my whole childhood. Give me a minute to look around."

"Go ahead." Said Austin.

"Nothing's changed... but it's all different." Said Jack.

The first thing Jack looked at was the large window.

"I thought that room out there was the rest of the world. I'd pound and yell. Never did any good." She said.

Next to that was a bed. Despite how old it must be, it still looked in rather good condition.

"Sometimes I dream that I'm back in this bed being tortured. I used to tie the sheets around my wrists and try to rip them off. I want to stop coming back here. Said Jack.

Jack then walked to the overturned desk. She gently ran her hand over it.

"I used this table for everything. It was like my best friend. I'd crawl under it to cry. I was pathetic." She said.

Lastly, Jack walked out of the room and looked at a large blood stain on the nearby wall.

"See the scarring on the wall here? That's where I killed my first man. One of the guards tried to stop me. Instead, I stopped him." She said, smiling a bit as she remembered the sensation. "Okay, no more wallowing. Let's blow this place to hell."

Austin and Miranda were both silent. Jack had the bomb trigger in her hand and flipping the cover on and off, still somewhat hesitant of pressing the button. After a few flips though, she finally pressed the button.

"Brace yourselves, ladies. Griffin told me that bomb he made pack a hell of a-" said Austin, but he was interrupted when the whole shuttle seemed to shake violently forcing everyone out of their seats. Even Urz lost his balance. "- punch." He finished.

Overall, that mission had gone rather well. A defunct Cerberus base was now destroyed, some Blood Pack mercs had been taken care of, Jack had taken care of her distractions and would now be focused on the mission and Urz had got a good little bit of exercise. It was a nice change for the Varren rather than him having his daily walks in the simulator, as was the case. (Walking him on the Normandy was rather boring and he hardly had any room. The simulator gave him plenty of room to have the exercise he needed, but it was still better

for him to get some fresh air every now and then)

All in all, a job well done. Just at that moment however, it seemed a bit premature as Joker's voice then informed Austin of some rather bad news.

"Major, Jack Miranda are in the middle of a... disagreement. Can you head it off before they tear out a bulkhead?" he said.

"I'll deal with it." Austin sighed.

"Take pictures."

Austin immediately headed for Miranda's quarters. He could already hear shouting. The second the door opened, he saw Jack throw a chair right at Miranda which she narrowly threw to the side with her own biotics.

"Touch me and I will smear the walls with you, bitch!" the convict yelled.

The two made for each other, but Austin quickly stepped in.

"Enough! Stand down, both of you!" he yelled as he forced the two apart and kept them at arm's length.

"The cheerleader won't admit what Cerberus did to me was wrong!" said Jack.

"It wasn't Cerberus. Not really. But clearly you were a mistake." Said Miranda.

"Screw you! You've got no idea what they put me through! Maybe it's time I showed you!" Jack retorted.

Austin hated having to take sides in an argument like this, but he had little choice. It was easy for him to decide who he supported, she was right after all.

"The people I recruit are my business, Miranda. You leave Jack alone!" Austin ordered.

"She can't be trusted, Shepard. She's unstable. She's jeopardizing the mission." Miranda objected.

"Jack's doing just fine. Maybe you should take a look at your own attitude!" Austin retorted.

Miranda didn't say anything. She knew she couldn't win this argument and simply went to sit back down, her expression clearly showing how angry she was.

"My thoughts exactly." Said Jack as she left.

"Are we good?" Austin asked as he too stepped outside.

"No even remotely." Miranda replied coldly.

The doors closed.

"Jack's right. She is a bitch."

Austin immediately wanted to check on how Jack was doing and he headed down to the engine room. To his surprise, he found that Kelly was there as well.

"Hello, Shepard." she smiled.

"Kelly. Jack." Said Austin as he acknowledged them both.

"I needed to wipe that place off the map. You took me there to do it, and I owe you." Said Jack as she lay back on her makeshift bed. "You don't know what it's like, Shepard. To have garbage like that following you. It marks you in ways you... you don't expect."

"I've made a lot of hard choices, Jack. Like what to let go." Said Austin sympathetically.

"Hard to walk away from it. You'd think it would get easier now that the place is a crater, but what else do I know?" said Jack.

"I never thought I'd see you show mercy, but you let Aresh live. I'm quite proud that you made that choice on your own." Said Kelly.

"He was trapped in the past, reliving it every day. Shepard showed how that could be me. I'm not getting stuck like that. I'm better than him, and I'm sure as hell not carrying that crater around with me." Jack replied.

"Do you think you're different now?" Austin asked.

"I know that place is gone. But I still kind of want to kill every person I see. No offense." Said Jack.

"Well, that's a start. I'll take what can get with you, Jack." Austin smiled.

"You did a lot, Shepard. Shit, I'm not good at this soft stuff. Just... thanks, okay? Let's... let's get back to work." Said Jack, managing to smile back a bit..

"I'll leave you two alone." Said Austin as he turned to leave. "And Jack, I trust this sort of thing won't side-track us again?"

"Yes, Sir! Major, sir?! Whatever." Jack chuckled.

"See you round."

With that, Austin left, leaving Kelly and Jack alone together.

"You okay?" Kelly asked.

She stood up from her usual spot and sat down next to Jack on her bed.

"Kelly, I'm not complaining, but why do you care so much? I know we've been together for a while but it's just been sex." said Jack.

"We both know that's not true, Jack. I've seen it in your eyes. I can't deny that I care for you. I want this to be more than just sex." said Kelly calmly as she held Jack's hand.

Jack seemed to grow a bit saddened by this. Her tone of voice indicated emotion.

"I... I know, and... I care about you too. Shit. I never thought I'd say this, but I see you as more than just a friend." she said

Kelly moved herself closer and went to kiss Jack, but the convict stopped her.

"But we can't. I don't want you to get hurt." she said.

"Why do you do this to yourself, Jack? Why do you push me away? I'm not trying to use you." Kelly asked.

Jack hesitated for a long while before she finally spoke.

"Murtock, a guy. He used me like the rest, for sex, for biotics. It was fun, and he ruined everything. We tagged a weapons frigate with a Batarian escort and got separated. He had a choice, leave with the guns or come back for me. Idiot dumped the score and waded into the squince. I made the shuttle, but no way he was getting out." she explained.

"And?" Kelly asked.

"I fly for a day or so, and then the shuttle kicks out this recording. He set it to play if he hadn't checked in. He figured that would mean he was dead. Talked about the future we were supposed to have, how he had planned to set us up a home, how he... how he loved me and he was sorry it wasn't going to happen." said Jack.

"You feel like his death was your fault." said Kelly as she put her arm around Jack reassuringly.

"No. He did it to himself. You feel, you get sloppy. It's that damn simple. He found out, and you'll find out."

"If he'd left you, you would have died." said Kelly.

"So what? You ever see me flinch, or run? Death is easy, fucking on-off switch. But this... it just burrows in. Like those husks, you end up with nothing inside. I'm supposed to take that and say "thanks dead guy." said Jack.

"I can't make all that go away, Jack. Not in a few talks." said Kelly, a bit more serious this time.

"No kidding. Told you we wouldn't work. Guess you'll be spending more time upstairs." said Jack.

"No. I'll be here with you." Kelly smiled.

"But you just said..."

"I said I couldn't fix it. I didn't say you weren't worth staying for anyway." Said Kelly.

"Okay, what the fuck, Kelly?" said Jack.

"So you're crazy. So what? That's practically stamped on the boarding pass for this mission." Kelly smiled.

"It's just gonna hurt, or you'll mess around, or I'll end up killing you or something." Said Jack.

"And?"

"And... that sucks." Said Jack, her voice starting to break. She looked like she might cry.

"So it'll suck. But how much fun is it gonna be on the way?"

"I... I..."

Jack finally let all her barriers down. Tears filled her eyes causing her makeup to smear and run down her face as she sobbed into Kelly's shoulder.

Kelly kissed her a few times on the cheek and neck to make them feel better. Jack let out a comforted sigh and leant her head on

Kelly's shoulder and eventually hugged her back. Sensing her distress, Kelly hugged her more tightly, and ran her hands all over Jack and kissed her a few more times.

"Shh, shhh. I'm here Jack, I'm here. It's alright." She said soothingly.

After a while, Jack finally calmed down and looked into Kelly's eyes.

"I need some time. I've never truly been in love before, so I don't wanna rush into love making. It's different from simple sex." She said.

"It's okay, Jack. I'll be there for you." Kelly smiled.

They slowly drew towards one another and kissed. They remained like that for a long time.

Down in the engineering deck meanwhile, Griffin had gone down to get rid of some of the garbage. Zaeed had mostly set his residents in the room that had the garbage cube maker. All around the room where several different souvenirs of Zaeed's.

"Griffin, I was just waxing goddamn nostalgic." he said as the Helldiver stepped.

Griffin nodded to him as he put all the waste into the machine. With that taken care of, he could now focus on talking to the Bounty hunter that he secretly looked up to a bit due to the fact that he'd founded the Blue Suns, the very merc group had briefly been a part of and learned how to use explosives from.

"You've certainly set up very well in here." said Griffin as he admired the place.

"If I'm gonna be staying here a while, I may as well make myself comfortable." Zaeed shrugged.

"It's nice. You've got a good collection of souvenirs." said Griffin.

He noticed an old Avenger assault rifle and went to pick it up to have a better look at it. Before he could however, Zaeed stopped him.

"Hey, don't touch! That rifle's older than you are. I call her Jessie." "That's my lucky charm. More men have been killed with that gun, than died in the Skyllian Blitz. The day I laid her to rest was the saddest day of my life. I'd give up every weapon I own for one more mission with that shitty old rifle." said the bounty hunter.

"Sorry. I hadn't realized." Griffin apologised.

"You've no idea, Wilson. I was down and out when I found that gun. Jessie was the first weapon I got my hands on. Took her everywhere. She didn't have much punch, but... reliable as all hell. She'd already been through a lot by the time I got her. Still, I never had to recite her once. Damn good rifle. I remember her first kill, Turian arms dealer out of Omega. I ran through miles of filth and rust



to hunt him down. When I finally cornered him, that gun was capped in two inches of the foulest sludge you can imagine, but Jessie wanted that Turian dead. So two shots, and he died right there.”

“Then why not still use it?” Griffin asked curiously.

“I don’t take Jessie into battle anymore, had to retire her about 5 years ago. I was hunting down this Batarian slaver, forgot his name not important.” Said Zaeed. This time there seemed to be a bit of regret in his voice, and even a hint of sorrow. “Carved my way through a hundred Batarian mercs, I don’t remember ejecting a clip once. Jessie just kept firing. Reached the slaver and he got in my face so I went to blow him away and... nothing. The old bitch had finally jammed. So I smashed his face in with the butt of the gun and called in the job. After that, Jessie couldn’t be fixed. Nothing anyone could do. Like she’d... finally had enough blood and was ready to rest. Been resting ever since.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. It’d be like Shepard breaking his sword, Excalibur.” Said Griffin sympathetically.

“Yeah. Sometimes the old ways are the best, but no weapon will ever compare to Jessie in my eyes.” Said Zaeed.

“What’s this?” Griffin asked as he pointed to what looked like a model of a Turian ship. “Hmm, didn’t expect you to be the sort of person to collect model ships, Zaeed.”

“Oh yeah. That’s a model of the Verrikan. Turian frigate, hell of a ship. I led a mission to bring that thing down from the inside with just five men and whatever guns we could bring. No chance of success, but we did it. Everyone died, but me. So I made out like a bandit. My first impossible mission as an independent contractor. There’s been many since, but nothing so goddamn sweet as watching that Turian warship crash planet-side.” said Zaeed. He smiled a bit as he remembered some of his old war stories.

“Hmm, sounds like you seen it all and done it all. Got any other good war stories?” Griffin asked.

“Hundreds.” Zaeed replied.

“What about this?” Griffin as he pointed to a Blood Pack Krogan helmet.

“Beauty, isn’t it? Pried that of the Krogan Warlord Gzaak. Used to run the Blood Pack out of Omega 17 years ago. Wasn’t even a job. The guy just thought he’d hijack a freighter I was hitchhiking on. Big mistake. I goaded Gzaak into one on one combat. Took out his legs, grabbed his gun and killed every Blood Pack bastard in the room. That was the most beaten Krogan I’ve ever seen. Kept the helmet to remind of that pained expression.” Said Zaeed.

“You know, with Vido gone the Blue Suns could learn an awful lot more from you.” Said Griffin, rather impressed.

“If only it were that easy.” Zaeed shrugged.

“Well, think about it. Many of them will be scared of you after that. He tried to kill you, but instead you killed him.”

“I turned my back on that life a long time ago. I should let you go. Talk more later, Griffin.” Said Zaeed.

Griffin got the message and felt it best to just leave the Bounty hunter alone.

“Thanks for the talk, Zaeed.” He said.

“The least I can do for what you did for me on Zorya. Believe me, killing Vido does more than solve my problems. It also solves hundreds of other problems as well.” Said Zaeed, his face flashing a brief smile of appreciation.

“See you round.”

# THE MASK OF HAPINESS

## CHAPTER 7

ReizYouUp

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“What should we do with this one?” a Gerudo asked Iayisha, pointing to the masked Guru Guru.

“Leave him be. He’s no threat to us, and Ganondorf wanted only the other two captured.”

“But we have captured their friends, too!”

“The ones carrying the alcohol tried to fight us. They should be imprisoned just for that.”

The Gerudos dragged The Happy Mask Salesman and Tsuki into the room they had reserved. They left Guru Guru behind, as Iayisha ordered. Once inside, they were reunited with Sakon and The Curiosity Shop Owner. Sakon was surprised that they had taken his uncle without hearing much sounds of a fight going on in the next room, but he supposed they were too quick for him. The Curiosity Shop Owner hung his head, feeling guilty for one of the few times in his life. He could not bring himself to look his brother in the eyes.

“I’m so sorry.” he said.

“It will be alright.” The Happy Mask Salesman tried to reassure him.

“You better be sorry.” muttered Sakon.

The Gerudos traveled the rest of the day and all night until they were in Hyrule. It was now the night of the third day since The Happy Mask Salesman and Tsuki found the ocarina. They all stopped to rest in Hyrule Field. Travel had made them weary, and the Gerudos got an idea. Iayisha was approached by one of her subordinates, who was red in the face and overly giddy.

“Hey Iayisha, you want a swig of this?” the Gerudo asked, offering her a bottle.

“Are you insane?! Do you know what will happen if Ganondorf catches you like this?!”

The prisoners watched in shock as the Gerudos proceeded to get drunk off of the wine. Some even started practicing their sword aim on each other as they wobbled drunkenly and laughed. Iayisha tried to control them, but was having severe trouble with it.

“Hey! They’re drinking my wares!” The Curiosity Shop Owner cried. “You have to pay for that!”

A drunk Gerudo toddled towards him and swung her sword.

“The prisoner is escaping!”

“Ahh! I can’t escape! I’m tied up, for crap’s sake!”

“Serves you right!” yelled Sakon.

The Gerudos, of course ignored Iayisha and The Curiosity Shop Owner’s pleas, and while they were distracted, The Happy Mask Salesman noticed a small glowing ball which was headed right for them.

“Why, hello there, fairy.” he whispered to it secretly.

“Hey!” Navi yelled, forgetting to remain quiet. The Gerudos did not seem to notice or care. Then, in a much quieter voice, “You’re that creepy guy who sold those masks to Link. What are you doing here, all tied up like that?”

“I take it The Hero of Time is in danger?”

Navi’s wings drooped as she remembered the dire situation. “We couldn’t find what the princess threw in the moat, so we went to town. Ganondorf was there and he caught Link and me. I escaped and now I don’t know what to do!”

“Wait, we found something in the moat.” Tsuki told her.

“Really?! What?”

“It was an ocarina, but now the Gerudos have it. We don’t know what it’s for or what it does, but it must have some strange power for them to want it so badly and for the princess to have had it.”

“How can we get it back? How can we help Link?” Navi asked in desperation.

“That depends. How much weight can someone like you carry?” The Happy Mask Salesman inquired.

“Huh? I don’t know. Enough, I guess. Why?”

With his hands still tied behind his back, The Happy Mask Salesman gestured to his mask bag with his elbow. “Please go to my masks. Bring me the one that looks like a mirror.”

Navi nodded the way that fairies nod, which means she went up and down slightly in mid-air. She flew over to the bag of masks and rummaged through it until she found the right one. Grunting with the heaviness of it, she brought back to The Happy Mask Salesman, who grinned at the sight of it.

“Now stuff it in my robe.”

“Don’t you want to put it on?” Navi asked in confusion.

“The time is not now. I would never be able to fight with these bonds.”

Navi did as she was told. The Happy Mask Salesman’s back now had a large lump on it, but he hoped no one would notice.

“You hide in there, too, fairy. I am sure you can be of help to us later on.”

Navi hid in The Happy Mask Salesman’s robe, behind the mask so her glow would not be seen.

Sakon briefly looked over off in The Curiosity Shop Owner’s

direction, who was still being chased by the drunken Gerudo, then to his uncle.

“When we get to the castle, uncle, wait a bit before using that mask. I have an idea.”

The Gerudos were now getting restless and were preparing to leave.

“Alright you desert worms! Let’s...try...to keep moving without any trouble.” Iayisha ordered.

The Gerudos were still drunk when they kept moving. They normally marched in a straight line, but kept falling out of sequence. Despite this, one of them walked beside The Happy Mask Salesman and was very suspicious.

“What’s with your back?”

“I have a tumor.” he responded.

“Oh. Ok”. The Gerudo accepted the answer and was satisfied with that.

As they entered the barren Hyrule Castle Town, the Gerudos let out drunken howls.

“All fear the mighty Gerudos!”

Iayisha facepalmed. “No one can hear you.”

They came upon Ganondorf’s new castle, and the bridge made of blood rose to greet them. They stepped inside, and went down, down into the dungeons. Ganondorf was already there. He had fixed the cage over the lava with his magic, and had brought his organ down there for ambiance. He was in the middle of playing it when his Gerudos walked in.

“This depressing music must be his form of torture.” Kaiden told one of his men.

The Gerudos were snickering as Ganondorf met them.

“What is the meaning of this?!” he demanded.

“I apologize, my lord.” said Iayisha “We subdued two others who knew the ones carrying the ocarina, and they had alcohol with them.”

“Y-you have a big nose.” a Gerudo commented.

“We all have big noses, you racist, inebriated cretins!”

Ganondorf insulted back.

Iayisha looked behind Ganondorf to see Nabooru in the cell surrounding the room. “Excuse me, Lord Ganondorf, but what is one of our sisters, and your second-in-command at that doing locked up?”

“She defied me by turning trader, which was a worse act than your women’s drunkenness. Barely. I promise you all will surely regret this later on. Now, if you are all even a little bit sober, do as I say and take the prisoners things’ away! Before you leave, hand me The Ocarina of Time.”

Iayisha gave him the ocarina and Ganondorf momentarily forgot his Gerudos’ insubordination, his victory in sight. The Gerudos slowly

began to stagger out of the room. Ganondorf lead the four new prisoners to the cage hanging over the lava.

“I see you have an organ. I happen to have one as well.” The Happy Mask Salesman told Ganondorf.

“Peh. I am sure mine is better. It was handcrafted by only the finest of Gerudo hands.”

Ganondorf looked into The Happy Mask Salesman’s eyes as he said this, and he felt a vision coming. Tsuki sensed it too and turned just in time.

They witnessed a tall man in green clothes like that of the hero swinging his sword back at Ganondorf, who was firing energy balls at him. A ball came back and hit Ganondorf, and the villain faltered into submission, appearing to be defeated. Then there was another vision with Ganondorf in the form of a giant pig. The older Link fired arrows at his head, which stunned him. The hero turned around and slashed at the beast’s tail, finishing him off for good.

“Did you see that?” Tsuki whispered.

“Yes. There is still a chance that I will be able to reopen my shop!” The Happy Mask Salesman replied, caring less for the fate of Hyrule and more for his own business.

Ganondorf put them in the cage and removed their ropes so they could move around their new home. He turned around and Sakon took this chance to get to work. He went over to The Curiosity Shop Owner and fumbled through his pockets.

“Hey, what’re you doing?!” The Curiosity Shop Owner quipped.

“Shh! Quiet. I’m breaking us out of here.”

Sakon removed a fishing hook and took it to the lock on the cage. He bent it into shape, and then unlocked the door. He was going to wait for Ganondorf and the Gerudos to leave before he opened it, but he leaned on it by accident and it made a squeaking noise.

“Wait!” Ganondorf ordered his Gerudos. They stopped in their tracks.

Ganondorf came towards the cell. Sakon backed up and dropped the fishing hook on the ground. Ganondorf picked it up.

“Who opened the door with this?” he demanded.

“It wasn’t me.” said The Curiosity Shop Owner.

“That’s too bad. I would gladly reward anyone who could open this door with such ease and crafty thinking.”

“In that case, it was me!” boasted The Curiosity Shop Owner, greedily thinking of the reward.

“He didn’t do anything! It was my idea!” claimed Sakon.

“Who’s the fisherman here? It’s my hook.”

“I’ve been looking for a new thief.” Ganondorf broke in. “Would you use your skills to assist me in my plans?”

“Um, no thanks. I prefer being my own boss.”

“Then we are finished speaking here.” with that, he tossed the hook on the ground.

Just as Ganondorf was about to close the door, The Happy Mask Salesman removed the mask from his back, Navi flew out, and he put it the mask on. A clone of Ganondorf appeared out of thin air in front of the mask. Ganondorf was spooked, but that alone did not deter him. He blasted a ball of energy at the mask, but the energy came back at him. At the same moment, the clone threw an energy ball. Two balls hurled toward Ganondorf, but he ducked just in time. The clone mirrored this movement.

“Get my other masks!” The Happy Mask Salesman yelled at his family. “Put them on!”

Tsuki and the others made a run for it. Navi flew towards Link and the other prisoners. Tsuki and Sakon headed for the masks. The Curiosity Shop Owner hesitated because of the Gerudos, but there being no other option, he ran towards them, too.

“Let us out of here!” cried Impa. “We can help you!”

Sakon switched directions, picked up the fishing hook, and headed towards the round cell surrounding the room. He unlocked the door and Impa, Nabooru, and Link stepped out. Link embraced Navi with a quick hug.

“You stay here and take care of the princess!” Impa ordered the soldier.

“Right. I will.”

Zelda reached out a feeble hand and the soldier caught it. She was still wounded from the last escape attempt. Impa, Nabooru, Link, and Sakon ran for the masks. Kaiden and his men followed right behind them.

“Ganondorf!” he called. “If we help you fight these guys, will you let us go free?”

Ganondorf did not respond right away. He was still battling The Happy Mask Salesman. He found out quickly that not only did The Mirror Mask capture his movements automatically, but the mask seller could bend his arms and the clone would react accordingly. He was having a tough time.

“Fine! So be it, but how can you fight without any weapons?”

“Just watch!”

By then, Tsuki and The Curiosity Shop Owner had made it to the mask bag and had grabbed two of the masks. Tsuki held the one with the red swirl on it, and The Curiosity Shop Owner had the one that looked like a dog. He was greatly reluctant to put on one of his brother’s strange relics, but he supposed he had to. He lifted it up to his face and just as he put it on, he turned into a magical dog. This frightened him greatly, and he began running around in circles.

Tsuki put on the mask that she had on, and there being no sand, the mask used the power of the lava. Lava-shaped icicles bared their sharp points at the Gerudos. They tried to defend themselves, but they wavered greatly in their fighting stances and many were seeing double vision. Only Iayisha was of much help, slashing a few dozen lava icicles out of her way.

Ganondorf and The Happy Mask Salesman were still locked in a tight duel. The King of Evil had pushed the mask seller back into the cage. Energy balls flew everywhere. The cage rocked back and forth, releasing lava waves into the air. At a critical moment, an energy ball hit Ganondorf's pocket, and The Ocarina of Time was jettisoned to shore. Sakon stopped mid-run and grabbed for it. Ganondorf looked back just in time to see Sakon reaching down to pick it up.

Impa, Nabooru, Link, Kaiden and his men had made it to the mask bag, and all clawed for their weapons. Link was the only one to put on the final mask, which was the one that could create purple prisms. He used the mask to encase himself in a prism in the air, and then came down upon three of the Gerudos and two of Kaiden's men, squashing them. Impa used her martial arts to knock two more Gerudos' weapons out of their hands. Impa and Nabooru picked up the swords and faced their opponents. Impa and Link fought the other four Gerudos and three of the men and Kaiden, while Nabooru locked into a duel with Iayisha.

"I'll make you pay, trader!" she cried.

As all of this was going on, the dog version of The Curiosity Shop Owner finally stopped as he ran into a wall. The mask fell off, and he was normal again. Kaiden himself saw this and stalked towards him. At the same time, Sakon had the ocarina in his mitts and was running it back to the other to see what they could do about it. Ganondorf charged up his power, carefully aimed, and fired towards Sakon. The Curiosity Shop Owner could see a powerful blast heading straight for Sakon and did the only thing he could. He pushed Sakon out of the way. He fell, and Tsuki picked up the ocarina.

The huge energy blast came upon The Curiosity Shop Owner. He cried out in pain so loud, everyone stopped what they were doing and looked at him. He was still standing, but was right next to the lake of lava. It was then that Kaiden came by and pushed him in it.

"That's revenge for getting us arrested!"

"Noooo!" The Happy Mask Salesman howled.

He dropped his mask and teleported to his side. He pulled him out of the lava, his own hands getting scorched, but he did not care. The Curiosity Shop Owner was wounded to an irreversible extent. Sakon was still on the ground, watching the whole thing. He was in awe that his greedy boss, who treated him with such selfishness, had sacrificed himself to save him. Without a moment to spare, he got up



and started towards the wine packages.

There was only one bottle left. Sakon took the Death Wine back to The Curiosity Shop Owner and placed it to his lips. He drank it and the pain subsided as the numbness filled his body. Sakon and his uncle watched The Curiosity Shop Owner until he stopped breathing. The Happy Mask Salesman rose in a rage and faced Kaiden.

“Damn you! You killed my brother!”

“Y-your brother?” Sakon repeated. He gazed towards the still form of The Curiosity Shop Owner, then back to The Happy Mask Salesman. “Does that mean he was my uncle, too?”

“No, Sakon.” the truth was finally going to come out. “He was your father.”

Sakon’s eyes grew wide in realization. Then he too got angry. He got up and began kicking The Curiosity Shop Owner’s body, even though he could not feel it anymore.

“You asshole! How could you?!”

It was then that Zelda dragged herself up and started walking towards the organ. The soldier followed, and tried to stop her, but she would not let him. She kept going until she reached the seat of the organ and sat herself down there. She turned her head to Tsuki, who had the ocarina.

“I’m going...to play...The Song of Time.”

She her hands on the keys and tried her best as physically possible to hit all the right notes. Tsuki followed along, not knowing what was going to happen. Magic sparkles flew all around her in the air, and then everything went white.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Tsuki found she was neck-deep in water. She was holding the ocarina in her hands, and strangely, so was The Happy Mask Salesman. It was now day time. She looked all around and came to realize that they were back in Hyrule Castle Town’s moat.

“What happened? How did we get in here?” she asked in confusion.

“Did you not know? A horse came by and nearly ran us over. We ducked just in time.”

“But we were just at Ganondorf’s castle!”

“A castle? But-”

He was cut off as he looked Tsuki square in the red eyes. From there, The Happy Mask Salesman received the longest vision he ever had in his life. He saw the desert and The Carpet Salesman’s death, the house of his parents, Ganondorf’s castle, and finally, the death of his brother. All of these events were now future occurrences.

“I see.” he stated in a rather serious tone. “This object’s power is that of time travel! We were sent back three days into the past!”

“Then you’re brother...my uncle! There’s still time?!”

“Yes, but we best leave this instrument here, lest the shadows of what would be come to pass once more.”

They both dropped The Ocarina of Time, letting it fall deep into the water. They climbed out of the moat at a spot where no one would see them.

“Where to?” asked The Happy Mask Salesman.

“Hmm... I think we should pay your nephew and that brother of yours a visit first, this time.”

“Good. I am glad.” he started out towards Kakariko Village.

Tsuki still held his grasp and prevented him from going any further.

“What is it?”

“Sato... When we get back to my home...Can you promise me something?”

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Sakon and The Curiosity Shop Owner had just come out of the village when they bumped into Tsuki and The Happy Mask Salesman.

“Uncle? What are you doing down this way?”

“Sakon, this is my fiancé, Tsuki.” The Happy Salesman went through the reintroduction. “We’ve come to invite you to attend our wedding.”

“Wow! I didn’t think a guy like you would ever get married!”

Sakon scratched his head nervously as he realized what he had just said. “Uh, I mean...”

“Never mind that, Sakon. You and your boss are both welcome to attend.”

“The Curiosity Shop Owner?” Sakon repeated.

“Geez, you really pick ‘um young, dontcha?” The Curiosity Shop Owner commented.

After that, they all walked for a time until they came upon Sakon’s other uncle, who was, of course, headed for Termina.

“Guru Guru!” The Happy Mask Salesman called out. “I’m getting married!”

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It was now night in the desert and all of the wedding guests were gathered in the tent that The Carpet Salesman and Tsuki called home. A flap was open at the top of the ceiling for moonlight to shine in. The Happy Mask Salesman and Tsuki stood in front of The Carpet Salesman with tribal wedding robes on and holding masks,

discussing things, while the others sat on cushions upon the floor. A great feast, which Tsuki had prepared, was laid out before them. Guru Guru was especially happy to see his other brother and whispered a few words to him.

“It’s been a long time. Too long, in fact.”

The Curiosity Shop Owner looked straight ahead and ignored his brother as much as possible. Guru Guru continued.

“I know you avoid me a lot. Is this just because of Sakon? Are you mad at me?”

The Curiosity Shop Owner said nothing.

“Oh, well. If you’re not going to speak to me, I guess that’s alright. I’m just happy to see you, and Sato, too. I hope you’re having a good time.”

Guru Guru reached over and gave his brother a great big hug. The Curiosity Shop Owner grunted at his squeezing. Finally, he let go and Sakon looked over to see what they were doing.

“Why did my uncle hug you?”

“I, uh, don’t know.” he could not come up with an excuse.

“Don’t worry. He’s just a little senile. Sorry about that.”

The Carpet Salesman nodded, and Tsuki and The Happy Mask Salesman got into position, facing one another on either side of him with outstretched hands. Everyone watched as The Carpet Salesman recited ancient words.

“The moon goddess shines Her light brightly upon these two lovers! Let all know that they their fates are forever entwined! So the moon pushes and pulls on the tides of the Earth, and the Earth pulls back! Let your bond be as strong as their relationship! Let the stars bless you and your descendants! May your love be as everlasting as time itself! Now please join your marriage masks together. As they become one, so shall you!”

The Happy Mask Salesman joined his Moon Mask with Tsuki’s Sun Mask. It came into one, and then they exchanged a romantic kiss.

“Now on with the feast!” proclaimed The Carpet Salesman.

As everyone got situated to eat, Sakon began wondering just why The Curiosity Shop Owner was there in the first place.

“So, are you a friend of the bride?”

This time, The Curiosity Shop Owner was prepared. “Yes. It just so happens that I’m her father.”

Sakon spat a bit of food out of his mouth. “Really? So you’re all part of this magical tribe and everything, too?”

“Well, yes, but I don’t have any of their powers. Unfortunately...”

“Me neither.”

They were still eating for some time when an idea popped into The Curiosity Shop Owner’s head. He was interested in seeing what

might happen, and this time, there was no risk involved.

“When my daughter was just a baby, I abandoned her. I was never really cut out to be a father, anyway. I was too busy running my business. I got a girl pregnant by accident. At first, I wanted nothing to do with her or the baby, but then I decided to sell her in my shop without her mother’s consent. Her uncle found out who bought her and bought her back. He tried to give her back to her mother, but she was too young to raise her all on her own. Her uncle ended up taking care of her, all by his self. So, Sakon, what do you think of me now?”

Sakon drank a few sips of juice before answering. “I think I’m glad you’re not my father. I’m very glad, in fact. I certainly wouldn’t invite you to my wedding if I ever had one, either. Heck, I wouldn’t even invite you if I had a wedding planned right now.”

“I thought you might say something like that.”

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The next day, the wedding reception was over, and everyone but The Carpet Salesman planned to leave. The Happy Mask Salesman and his new wife went off to Termina. Guru Guru and The Curiosity Shop Owner also went off to Termina, but Sakon got sidetracked.

He decided to see if he could not get some of that hot Gerudo tail. As he sauntered on into Gerudo Fortress, he began flirting with the nearest Gerudo he came into contact with. He walked right up to the guards, Akila and Nabooru and started with some pick-up lines.

“Hey there. I must have been blinded with sand in my eyes, because there is no way you are this good-looking!”

“Beat it, you man.” said Akila.

Sakon did not take the rejection easily. “You know it’s very hot out here. Why don’t you take off your top?”

Akila snapped at this request. “That’s it! You’re going in the dungeon, pal.”

“You’re throwing him in the dungeon just for that?” asked Nabooru.

“No one is going to get by sexually harassing me!”

She grabbed him and dragged him to the cells further in the fortress. Sakon struggled, but the warrior was too strong for him. She led him down to a room with hundreds and hundreds of other prisoners. They all clutched at the bars and wailed constantly to be set free. Some of them even rushed for the entrance as Akila threw Sakon in. No one escaped, of course.

As usual, there was also a cell in the very middle of the room. This one had no bottom to it, only a pit of spikes. There were skeletons at the bottom, as well as dried blood. This cell was a death sentence reserved for only the worst of behaved prisoners.

When Akila had left to return to her post, Sakon noticed she had left the circle of keys on the door. There was also a broom right near the cell for sweeping up the floor. Sakon grabbed it and got to work.

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Ganondorf had arrived back at the fortress to celebrate his taking of the castle with Iayisha and the seven other Gerudos in tow. He had not retrieved The Ocarina of Time, but both the young hero and the princess were out of the picture, for the time being. He walked up to his second-in-command to assess how things were going.

“Where is Akila?”

“Throwing some poor fool in your dungeon.” answered Nabooru.

Ganondorf witnessed Akila off in the distance, coming back from the jail with a smug look on her face. Then from behind her, a chorus of voices could be heard.

“We’re free! We’re finally free!”

Hundreds of prisoners came rushing out of the cell room and scattered in all directions. All Ganondorf and his Gerudos could do was shield themselves from the onslaught of bodies. When it was over, Ganondorf stormed down into the dungeon to see who was left.

Sakon was lying on the floor, still with the broom and keys in his hands, nearly trampled to death by the other prisoners. Ganondorf picked him up by the scruff of his shirt and swiped the broom away. Before he could take away the keys, Sakon still had one trick up his sleeve.

“Are you the one who was just thrown in here?!” Ganondorf’s voice boomed off of the room’s walls.

“Y-yes.” Sakon feebly responded.

“Well, I have a special cell for you!”

Ganondorf took Sakon to the cell in the middle of the room. He threw him in, and Sakon almost did not catch the bars in time to save himself. He gazed down at the skeletons that had let go and feared that too would be his fate, and all because of his usual perversions. He still clung there as Ganondorf left the room.

Ganondorf came out slightly satisfied, but there was now important business to attend to as he had to round up all of his prisoners.

“I took care of the escape artist. We won’t be hearing from him anytime soon. Now, Nabooru, take yourself and thirty other Gerudos to catch all the ones who broke loose.”

Nabooru said nothing, only pointing over her king’s shoulder. Ganondorf looked back to find Sakon tip-toing away.

“Hey! I thought I killed you!”

He grabbed Sakon and took him down to the dungeon once more. No one had ever broken out of the spike-trap cell, so Ganondorf would have to do something else to Sakon.

“How did you leave your cell a second time?!”

“I-I hid the key where no one else would find it.”

Ganondorf’s eyes widened in realization of this, then he regained his composure and said, “Do you know what I’m going to do to you now that you escaped me twice?!”

“Please! I don’t want to die! I’m too young and beautiful!” Sakon closed his eyes and waited for his impending doom. It did not come, however.

“I’m going to make you my personal thief.”

Sakon opened his eyes, not believing what he had just heard. “What?”

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The Curiosity Shop Owner had made it back to his business and was unloading the wine bottles. He rubbed his greedy hands together, thinking of all of the people, including teenagers, who would buy them. He took out the egg from his pocket and set it on the counter. He turned around to continue his work, but heard a crackling sound.

The egg was hatching! He crept up closely to watch the little miracle unfold. Chirping sounds could be heard from within. Soon, a tiny head poked out. The hatchling had the biggest googly-like eyes The Curiosity Shop Owner had ever seen. He tried to pick it up, but it bit him on the hand.

“Ahhh! You stupid moron!”

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Much time had passed since The Happy Mask Salesman had first met his wife, and now she was pregnant with their first child. The Happy Mask Salesman had wanted otherwise, but Tsuki insisted she give birth and raise the child on the moon, like her uncle did for her. She was going to raise all their children in the same way, in fact. Over the next ten years, The Happy Mask Salesman visited his wife and kids often while still going out for business. Whenever he was lonely, he only needed to look to the sky for reassurance. He no longer wore a mask of happiness.

The End

# POETRY

# FEAR

Maria Kubiak

I'm in a dark room.  
My hands tied up together.  
He is right behind me.  
What you want?  
Why me?  
Mess in my head.  
His breathe on my neck.  
Can't open my eyes.  
Tears made from blood on my cheek.  
Fear, is my worse enemy.



# BITTER-SWEET MEMORIES

Zorveska  
of <http://zorveska.deviantart.com>

If I could forget  
Just for a day  
I wouldn't be any better off  
You can never seem to escape the inevitable reality  
That comes crashing down upon you  
After such a stupid mistake.

The selfishness required to drop everything  
And move on  
Is unspeakable.  
Utterly atrocious.  
Yet I yearn for it  
So urgently  
Ravenous for that innocence I'm told I once had.

Close your eyes.  
Don't look back.  
What can you hear?  
I hear nothing.  
Yet everything.  
The honeyed bliss is stabbing daggers through my heart  
It's almost as if he were dead already.