

1 Fortune

1.1 Draft A

IRENE LOOKED up* from her work, bit her lip, and glowered at the myriad suns and distant galaxies scattered across the black. If there were portents in the stars – and she was most certainly not conceding that there were – Irene wanted nothing to do with them. The very premise had something insulting in it. Reading palms or tea leaves, their subjects as rough and varied as the lives they predicted, required work and more than a little art. The charting of stars required a few pages of records and maybe an hour of computation. Irene could change lead into gold, or a bead into a bandicoot, but not a life into arithmetic, and whatever sense of professionalism might keep a better witch from crowing at an astrologer’s failures, Irene lacked it – and it was far too late to worry about professionalism, anyway.

“Net pull is weak, two or three–” the astrologer mumbled. Irene hadn’t a clue what two or three was measured in, and could only guess that it was stars doing the pulling, but he seemed to be talking for his own sake at the moment “– and it’s...five degrees, no ten toward... um...”

A turtle glid[†] serenely through the cosmos, before coming to an amenably smooth rock at the end of the visible universe and climbing half-way out. Behind it trailed a rippling wake that washed the million points of light from visibility; Irene beamed.

“That’s interference,” Link whined, “this go doesn’t count.”

“Does so.”

“Oh come on. I can’t finish the stars now until it settles, and you’re still reading my palm” She wasn’t; she was too giddy.

“If you don’t like it you’re always free to use the actual thing,” Irene said, motioning upwards to the clouded sky above them, boxed in by the courtyard’s walls and the boughs of trees reaching in and up. “I didn’t have to enchant this pool for you, you know. I’m already giving you a leg up.”

“But–”

Irene scooped water from the pool with her free hand and flicked.

“Okay! Okay! Fine,” he said in a voice clearly indicating he was anything but, and indeed might die at any moment, but whatever his pains he recovered quickly “there really *is* a reading to take from the clouds. They filter the stars’ influence, so depending which are covered right now...” and back he went to mathematical muttering. Which stars were covered seemed open and shut to Irene’s eyes, clouds evenly smothered the whole of the sky, and after the incident with the turtle, all that was left to light the yard were a set of torches sconced in the castle walls and the glow of an acorn[‡] that Irene had enchanted

*Quick note to self: I think we have two problems with this draft. i) I don’t think this gives enough room to Irene’s growing problem with fate vs her own reputation. ii) I don’t think this does a good job of setting context (making clear this is a few years after LBW, making clear how Link picked up astrology in Labrynnia etc.)

[†]I think the pacing here is off, this feels like a punchline landing too soon.

[‡]Revisit object choice

earlier for a reading aide. The latter of these suffused Link's face, and she could see the focus in his eyes as he peered intently out into space, his lip twitching in consternation at meanings she did not credit were there, not really, but he gawked with such conviction that some part of her wondered if there might be something to the starry mumbo-jumbo he had dragged back from Labrynnna after all.[§] That wondering was idle, the other parts snapped. This was a competition and if star-reading had any foundation it could win fair and square against her preferred style of divination,¹ and to do that she had to start in on actually reading. The only barrier being—

“Stop squirming.”

[¶]Don't like this response, not cattish.

“I'm not!” But he stilled all the same.[¶] Even with his palm steady, the low light proved a burden, and Irene had to scoot and shift her seat around him so that when she leaned in she did not cover the hand in shadow.

Once on her broom she had looked down over Zora's River and realized the hills of eastern Hyrule were ancient riverbanks whose river had wandered off.^{||} Rolling hills curlicued around the ghost of an oxbow, while three miles west the River ran straight. A bluff overlooked a valley that once must have been part of the Eastern Palace's moat, and now the River wended lazily around Hyrule Castle. Where now it bent west, in some age or other past it bowed east, and so on in a thousand variations on the same watery journey, always emptying into Lake Hylia. Link's palm was like that. What she initially thought was a severely bifurcated Life line, crossed and pockmarked by occlusions was, in fact scores upon scores of Life lines all run together. Once realized, it shocked her how easily she picked out her Link** from the tangle, and could trace the line as it turned toward the Mount of Apollo, like all the hundred others. His Heart line ran deep and clear, which was no surprise to her, and like all the others it doubled back up to the Mount of Jupiter before running a short distance and vanishing somewhere on the pads below his ring finger. A thousand meandering variations, all ending in the same place. The flow of time was cruel, indeed.

**“Her Link” is too possessive for the start of the story, but I'd like something similar — a little bit of a slip of language — something more personal than “this Link” that hints where feelings are going. They're already quite close

“—the brightness of p-thulan... or the Peninsular Star? I didn't know it bothered you.” There was a note of genuine apology in his voice.

“What?” It was only after asking that Irene realized she had flinched, and that Link thought it was something he'd said. She was going to have to explain, now, when she had only the vaguest premonition of what was even wrong — and even if she did understand, what could say? “Oh, not that. Don't get me wrong the Labrynnan names are dry as a *bone*, but— Link, there's something terrible in your future.”

¹viz., “literally anything else.”

[§]Before publishing decide for sure if you want this to be Labrynnna or the drablands instead

^{||}Cf. *Ancient courses within the Mississippi River meander belt* (illustration) in HAROLD N. FISK, U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENG'RS., GEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE ALLUVIAL VALLEY OF THE LOWER MISSISSIPPI RIVER (1944), available at https://biotech.law.lsu.edu/climate/mississippi/fisk/plate_22-2.pdf (real example of same phenomenon). This makes Zora's River an alluvial distributary system, which isn't supported by evidence from LBW or LTTP, but I like this metaphor enough I think I'll take artistic license.

“Future in the next few days? Weeks?” he said, handling doom with a calm that, on reflection, should not have surprised her.

“Further out than that.” She was sure of that much, at least, but what was she allowed to tell? “...More like years.”

Link gave a simple resolute nod, and it perturbed her how much even in this he seemed to be accepting an assignment. “Then I have both time and excellent counsel.” It was true, but hearing it somehow made everything worse.^{††}

“However I can, I’ll help.”

The conversation hung silent for a moment before Link mumbled an “anyway” and turned his head back toward the pool, and hung on for a moment longer while Irene processed his reaction.

“You’re *still* on that?” she exclaimed once she realized to where his attention had turned “Now, of all times?”

“Well I promised a fortune reading for one,” he said in that same bewilderingly calm tone “and this late at night it’s not like there’s an octoball game to join.”

It has to be at least partially an act, Irene thinks, and feels a little hurt that he feels he has to keep the performance going for her. But then again, how often had she flown in only to find him dodging cuddos when the world was at stake? Maybe it really was normal – well, normal for him – stress management. Maybe, but this still felt different to her.^{‡‡}

From the north wall Irene heard the clank of armor on stone; the guards were changing shifts. Link sighed heavily “though this late at night we may be past our welcome here, too.”

“Rain check?” She asked as she got to her feet. He nodded. “And a lift home?”

“I’m staying at the barracks tonight. Impa wants to meet early tomorrow.”

“Do you – alright.” She said and then did not say, because it wasn’t like you could argue Link out of Royal Duty. “Meet me later in the day then. To discuss your problem.” Euphemisms she thought in disbelief. She was using euphemisms.

“Why not the day after, instead? I wouldn’t mind tackling this after a full day’s rest.”

“Deal!” she said with far more vehemence than she meant to, and kicked off the ground. In the glowing acorn light below, she saw Link waving goodnight, and saw the turtle slip back in the water.

^{††}She’s reacting – subconsciously – to what I can only describe as the performative streak in this response. Having a response so polished ready to go disconcerts her because half of her worry is how much time he’s doing work on behalf of the Royal family and seeing him develop courtly skills...

^{‡‡}Come back to the pacing of these two paragraphs.

1.1.1 Draft A.2

What would Gram do? Not be caught in this situation in the first place because she wouldn’t tell fortunes for a lark.

2 Lorule

2.1 Draft A

Self-respecting witches did not meddle, her Gram had drilled this into Irene at the earliest age possible. Self-respecting witches did not bless infants with good character or with the ability to talk to animals. Self-respecting witches did not guarantee good harvests, nor did they guarantee anything. Self-respecting witches especially did not foretell people's futures; and if a self-respecting witch's daily reading of chuu jelly *did* happen to mention some idiotthane destined to become king, she kept it to herself. Irene intended to break none of these rules, now or ever, but also knew better than to hope that Gram, if she ever learned of it, would see the nuances of the present situation.

She likewise was under no illusions that, when Royal duty next found him and Link next vanished for weeks into the monster-infested wilds and returned, as he always did, stuffed impossibly and insufferably full of gossip, word of her visit would somehow not be among the scores of rumors he gathered like rupees. Nor did she have any question about the sense in which the rumors would run; a young woman asking after the fortune of a man her age was even more certainly doomed to romantic misinterpretation than a princess paying honor to her most favored knight. It had ever been thus, but now, on the cusp of what passed for marriageable age in this neck of the woods, it was harder to endure.

In light of the stubborn facts, Irene had taken no time at all to decide that there would be no rumors, nor a stern talk from her Gram about pride in her craft, and if it required traveling to a fortune-teller a world and a half away, well this was hardly any distance at all to a good broomstick.

It remained a great deal of distance to a young witch.

2.1.1 Draft A.1

In Link and Zelda's telling, Lorule was a land precisely unlike Hyrule in a thousand small ways which added up to a deep, untraceable family resemblance. This description was true, but only in the same strict and literal sense that, with enough great grandparents, she shared a family resemblance with pond moss. Lorule was not some distant cousin of her home, or the reverse to Hyrule's obverse, it was an imposter, and bore no relation from being different than cattails did to hogsheads. She marveled that neither Link nor Zelda had noticed this.

The Kingdom of Lorule disguised itself poorly and, beyond the copy-cat placed rivers and mountains, was completely dissimilar to the tranquil and prosperous Kingdom she knew. Here was a land

pockmarked with hermit-crab towns. A kingdom whose villages' borders stopped dead at the sight of woods and bramble. Whose rivers were left unbridged and footpaths left to overgrowth. Highways that went, even with the canyons gone and curses lifted, without the stamp of a single footprint. Even from the air she felt claustrophobic. Landing, in front of a tiny yellow tent in a grove of trees warped over themselves was worse.

2.1.2 Draft A.2

...Towns with borders that stopped dead at the sight of woods and bramble. Rivers left unbridged and footpaths left to overgrowth. Highways that went, even with the canyons gone and curses lifted, without the stamp of a single footprint.

2.1.3 Draft A.3

...The same knowing smile she had seen on the faces of a thousand people who knew *nothing*.

2.2 Draft B

In fortunetelling, the ability to divine what information was relevant to the customer was as vital as the actual ability to divine the future was superfluous. The telling was what sold, not the fortunes. The Great Periander, only-and-possibly- foremost fortuneteller in all of Lorule had gone far on this maxim, but was at present finding it deeply challenged , and if the present case was a trying one, it was all the more reason to cling to first principles.

2.3 Draft C

The quicker a fortune was told, the better. The typical customer came, not for a numinous encounter with forces beyond their ken, but to have the information they wanted and be on their way. The actual telling was, at best, an inconvenience, and at worst the source of terrible anxiety and acute embarrassment. What were, to him, the essential tools of his craft – his robes and hat, the yellow tablecloth and faintly pink crystal ball, were to customers malcolored and garish eyesores. At this advanced stage of his career he knew customers did not want an explanation of how, absent the aid of these accoutrements, the grueling difficulty of coaxing answers from the great beyond would simply render his trade impossible. What they wanted, dearly, was close their eyes and pretend that they did not see them.

2.4 Draft D

In years past this reluctance had taken an even darker turn, with efforts to predict the future running afoul of the [Masked monster worshipping folks] taboo of acknowledging that the future existed at all.

2.5 Draft E

This made the look of careful appraisal that the young woman gave to all of his instruments entirely unexpected. She had run her finger across the top of one of his bookshelves and frowned disapprovingly when it came up without dust when,

2.6 Draft F

“It’s not about that. I—” the peel of a bell cuts her off and her attention is gone from the conversation. She instinctively refuses to give the old fraud the satisfaction of seeing her fret, even as the familiar, if only momentary, panic sets in. It doesn’t seem to matter, and the old bat glows anyway. She keeps eye contact and does everything she can to ignore the smug, knowing grin of the smug, know-nothing parody of her Gram as she excuses herself.

She is on her broom and soaring as soon as she is out of the tent.

3 Consult

3.1 Draft A

The book – if the singular *book* was even appropriate – was unlike any she had seen in years of hard study. One page fell out into yards of inserts and appendices, and then those appendices unfolded into scrolls of errata and emendations running parallel to the book’s spine for meters before they came to another insert with its own set of errata and the process continued on and on, in tinier and more cramped hands with each succession.

Irene looked on in wonderment while a small committee of royal librarians, dressed in an assemblage of green robes that suggested a witch’s cloak that had gone up in society and then lost its way, worked to unravel the last of the pages. Once, as part of her apprenticeship, she had been told to speak with an oak. This was, in fact, a misnomer, because oaken communication was largely a series of mental images that rolling across her brain, and when the oak had said ‘I’ she had seen something of the same tangle of roots descending from trunks to thin white rhizoids as she did in the scripts’ endless branching into subcases and strata more and more obscure.

After the rustling of pages had finally settled, the leader of the committee cleared her throat and with visible relief the sub-librarians and the poor devils of sub-sub-librarians assisting her filed out of the room. When they were gone the chief librarian produced a quill from her robes and, after fumbling with the tails of the book, eventually settled upon an empty strand of paper.

Princess Zelda spoke evenly, in a voice Irene could almost mistake for indifference, “why do you believe you have irreparably shifted Hyrule off of its natural historical course?”

3.2 Draft B

“I think, as far as attitudes toward the recording of history goes, it would be fair to call us ‘pro-copious.’” the Chief Librarian offered.

4 Princess

4.1 Draft A

Irene woke in darkness and waited for her eyes to adjust. It was unseasonably warm for early spring, especially when the sun had not yet risen, and she wondered at what weather might have rolled in along with the unexpected heat. Wind? Rainstorms? But there was no faint wail of air through the cottage shutters, nor the gravelly hiss of droplets on the roof. Birdsong filtered through the closed windows, which settled the matter – if there had been storms they were gone now. It also meant that there should at least be the beginnings of a dawn outside, so why could she not see yet?

She pulled herself up straight and the quilt, a scratchy thing as old as the Great Witch Syrup, slid with uncharacteristic fluidity onto her knees still in covers. Extending her arm to her left – slowly, so as not to hit Gram if she was sitting awake – Irene outstretched her fingers and tried to move a bit of flame from the hearth’s embers into the wick of the candle they kept by the bedside. Warmth neither came in to her nor flowed out. Irene fumbled around in the substratum of all things for the objects she was trying to connect and found nothing. No candle, no hearth. With nothing to do she let her arm flop back down, and when her palm hit the mattress she noticed the third absence. No Gram.

Irene leapt, or tried to. The side of her jaw flashed in pain and the bone of her wrist hit hard against something cold and smooth. She kicked and kicked uselessly against the air and her foot, still tangled in blankets, moved half an inch at most. Her other hand, the one that wasn’t stinging, had also somehow smothered itself in blankets and it flopped like a fish as she tried to reach for something, anything in the dark to help her get her bearings back. It brushed something alternately soft and solid in a corded texture. She grabbed it by reflex. What on earth was *that*, why did this quilt go on *forever* and where was Gram and *why couldn’t she see*?

The curtains around her bed opened with a terrible rattle and Irene traded blinding dark for blinding sun. A palatial room and a distant figure, entering from the far side of it, burned against her eyes before she slammed them shut and pulled the quilt back over her face.

“Highness?” A voice – the figure’s – asked with poorly masked confusion.*

“Wise one?”† Another voice, stationed somewhere off to Irene’s left, asked with no mask at all.

I’m not a– but plainly she somehow was, so Irene swallowed her panic and gathered up her most coolly regal voice. “We are awake,” she announced, raising her voice to be heard over the quilt’s muffling. The voice out of sight burst into peals of laughter. Irene felt her lips

†I’m also considering: *Vitrsta Wite?* and *Witestre?* (female cognates of Old English *Wita*, wise man, advisor) and *Wicce?* (Old English for witch).

*Come back to the section and try to distinguish the voices by sound more than repeated ‘first’ and ‘second’

‡TOO BLUNT

tighten into a scowl. She had enough problems without being the object of someone's fun.‡

"And uninjured?" The first voice again.

"And uninjured" she snapped. Irene pulled the quilt down yet again, slow enough to allow her to prepare for the sun this time, and glared where she expected to see them. "Glad it's a laughing matter to you both, though."

She immediately regretted it. The face of a girl maybe four years her junior

4.2 Draft B

On her third day, Irene came to the conclusion that Being Witch-Crown Princess was an endless exercise in costumingu. She was still unsure whether she held one title or two, but she was beginning to believe it must be two because her attendants only ever helped her dress for the princess half, and then left her to find an appropriate cloak and hat by herself. But then what witch owned so many different styles of cloaks and hats?

and how ever was she supposed to fit her crown over the point of her hat without assistance?

5 Hygge

Suspensions had been growing in the back of his mind since lunch when the jam in his Chu roll – made fresh before Irene started divination sessions that morning, and from berries he had picked and preserved no more than two days ago – tasted weak of flavor. Later in the afternoon, just as the sun reached its zenith and the day grew its hottest, he absentmindedly traced the tips of his teeth with his tongue after a glass of water and thought them unusually sharp. He looked back to the hut and heard the murmurings of a fortune in progress before noting the line stretching out the door. On the principle of better safe than sorry, he had quickly extinguished the fire and dumped back his pile of unused coals into the covered bin, before setting himself to at least hammering out the general shape of an oxshoe with the last hot bits of metal. After that he spent an hour cleaning, and another clearing monsters in the surrounding wood before stopping to rest, and only when the sun was half-down and casting pallid rays of blurry indistinct smudge on the horizon was he certain.

The cottage door was shut tight when Link arrived, which meant Irene was still giving counsel. An elderly Zora and young girl waited patiently on the shady side of the house for their turn.

"Either of you here for an emergency?" he asked, knowing full well that they were not, but getting them to say that they'd been triaged into the least urgent category always made cutting in line easier.

“Just a refill on eye-drops,” said the Zora. Link gave a nod.

“My friend is dying” answered the girl.

“I’m trying to get you to *rest*”

“At least let me – here” her hand glowed bright and blue with the kind of magic he was trying to get her not to use. “*Dýrling*,” she said in the Witch-Language, as she tapped his chest. Amid the exasperation he marvelled again at how easily she switched phonologies* as the spell of protection came over him in a warm breeze.

*i.e., switched the sets of sounds used. I may be abusing the word “phonology” here (which is usually the study of languages’ sound systems) and also this may just sound dumb.