

# Eternity

By: Kasuto of Kataan

## Prologue

Both women carried torches in their hands, the glowing light illuminating the dark path in front of them. They walked through the low-ceilinged tunnel deep under the ground. They had been searching for years, trying to find the treasure. Over time, their quest had turned from a simple hobby to their life's work. Now it was more of an obsession. They had given up all their possessions and spent all their money for this search, and they were now closer than ever. They could both feel that they were getting close. As they turned a corner, both women let out loud sighs as they came upon a dead end.

One woman raised her arms in frustration. "I can't believe it," she said. The woman was about average size and relatively skinny, her small frame hiding her well-built body and above-average strength. She pushed back her shoulder-length hair, which was starting to turn gray after all these years. She wiped the sweat from her forehead and sighed again.

"It has to be here," said the other woman. She was slightly smaller than the gray-haired woman, and wasn't nearly as strong. She was relatively young, and had short, auburn hair. This particular woman was an apprentice to the older woman, and had decided to join her in her search for this treasure.

"Oh be quiet," said the older woman. "If I'd had my way to begin with, I'd be doing this alone."

"You know you need me," said the auburn-haired woman. "I was the one who discovered the scroll in the first place. Besides, we can both benefit from this. We can be goddesses."

"Yeah, we can...if we ever find the damned stone," said the gray-haired woman cynically. She pulled the folded piece of paper from her pocket and held it to the light emanating from their torches. "The map says that the entrance to the cave is right at the end of this tunnel." She pointed to the corresponding line on the map. "And I don't see it anywhere."

"The entrance has to be here somewhere. We've spent so many years, and this is definitely the right map. Let's just look more closely, look for cracks in the wall or something that might hint to a passageway."

"You're right," agreed the gray-haired woman. "I'm sorry, I'm just a little tense right now. I have been searching for the Stone my whole life, and time is starting to run short. The stars will align in only a few days, and if we miss that our whole lives will have been wasted."

"I understand that. Trust me, we'll find it. I'm not going to let this get away. We are meant to find this stone, and we will."

The gray-haired woman nodded and began searching for the entrance to the cave. She looked around the end of the tunnel, trying to find a hint as to where the entrance to this cave might be. It had to be here somewhere. She had exhaustively researched this treasure for most of her life. It was in this cave, and no one but them knew about it.

"Wait a minute, I think I've found something," said the auburn-haired woman, bending close to the ground and staring at the floor. She poked at a tiny crack in the floor of the solid-rock tunnel. She could see the faintest hint of a blue glow coming from behind the crack.

The gray-haired woman smiled broadly and patted the auburn woman on the shoulder. "Good work, Lani. What would I do without you?"

"You definitely wouldn't be here," replied Lani with a smirk. She picked at the crack once more, small pieces of rock flaking off in the process. "How do you suppose we'll get this crack open?"

"I think this'll take a little brute force," said the gray-haired woman. She stood back and picked up a stone-headed pickaxe from the spot where she'd placed it.

"Kisei-the-mighty," laughed Lani.

Kisei held the pickaxe over her head and prepared to hit the crack in the wall. "Hey, sometimes brute-force can get you things that intelligence and book-smarts can't. You never learned that."

"Well, I never liked exercising," said Lani. "Go ahead, do it."

"I'd stand back if I were you," said Kisei. Lani stood up and backed a few steps away from Kisei. She prepared herself as Kisei swung the pickaxe and slammed it into the crack in the wall. There was a large crash and some sparks as the point of the pick bashed a large hole into the rock. The area with the crack was weaker than they'd thought. Instead of being solid granite like the rest of the tunnel and the mountain, the cracked area must have been made of a weaker substance like sandstone or limestone. It was as if someone had intentionally patched up a hole in the tunnel.

"I've gotta admit," said Lani, "that's some nice work." She bent down and examined the large chunks of rock that had shattered from the wall. Lani picked up a rock and examined it closely, trying to figure out what it was.

Kisei also bent down and picked up one of the rocks. "This is definitely sandstone. You can crush it with your hand." Kisei squeezed her hand tightly causing the seemingly sturdy stone to crumble into dust. "This definitely isn't supposed to be here. Sandstone wouldn't form in a mountain of solid granite. And this sandstone isn't even very old. It should be a lot sturdier than this."

"Well, then we know this hole is supposed to be here," said Lani. "You going to widen the hole for us?"

"Of course," replied Kisei. She gently laid the pickaxe on the ground and smiled. "I don't even need the pick for this." She extended stepped up to the still small hole and administered a powerful kick to the edge of it. More of the stone disintegrated into a shower of sand, causing the hole to widen so that a person could enter. The bright blue light from beyond the hole spilled into the tunnel, causing everything to reflect an eerie azure glow. Both women looked through the hole, nearly awestruck by the sight before them.

"That's beautiful," mumbled Lani. What they saw before them was a seemingly endless dome-shaped cavern, completely bathed in a blue glow. The light, although seeming to come from everywhere, emanated from a small pit in the center of the cavern. "You think we've finally found it?"

"I know we have," said Kisei. She folded up the map and put it in her pocket, while removing a different piece of paper from her other pocket. "The scrolls said that the first thing we'd see is the blue light. I think this definitely qualifies. Well, would you like to step in first?"

"Gladly," replied Lani, stepping in front of Kisei and through the significantly widened hole. The sides of the cavern sloped steadily downward toward the center, making it relatively easy for them to walk from the hole at the top to the bottom. Kisei and Lani reached the bottom of the cave and looked down the shallow pit. Inside the pit, about five feet deep, were two blue stones. The stones were both equal in size, about the size of a fist. Lani and Kisei jumped into the hole and approached the glowing stones. The light coming from them was almost blinding, but strangely calming. Upon closer inspection, they realized that both stones were identical.

"You never told me that there were two stones," said Lani.

Kisei shrugged her shoulders. "I didn't know that there were two stones," said Kisei.

"I thought you knew everything about the Hateru Stone."

"I thought I did," said Kisei. "But I guess I don't. We did everything right, and one of these has to be the Hateru Stone. I do have a theory, though. Remember when you read the original scroll? It said that the Stone would come with both a blessing and a curse. Perhaps one of these stones is real, and one is fake."

"I never thought that it would be this difficult," said Lani. "It was hard enough just finding the stone. Now we have to pick the right one? This isn't fair. How do we tell the difference? They both look exactly the same."

"There has to be a way," replied Kisei. "But we shouldn't worry about that now. Let's take the stones with us and we can look at them at home." Kisei took the knapsack from around her shoulder and opened it up. She gently placed the glowing stones into the bag and tightened the rope to close the bag. Although they were confined in the knapsack, the brilliant glow of the stones still showed through the fabric of the bag.

"That's definitely a little too conspicuous," remarked Lani.

Kisei sighed and looked at the bluish-tinged bag. This would definitely catch people's attention if they

went anywhere public. "Yeah, I know. But we have to get these back. We'll just have to avoid the main roads and not go through the town." Kisei slung the bag over her shoulder and began to walk back up the slope and towards the hole they entered through. Lani and Kisei both hoped that they could make it back to their house without anyone noticing them.

Lani and Kisei stood at the very peak of Death Mountain, with nothing but the dark ground beneath them and the starry sky above them. It was such a beautiful night, and this was the night they would find out if their life's work had been in vain. "Well, this is what we've been waiting for," said Kisei. She was nervous and shaking, a cold sweat covering her body. She had never felt so anxious in her life. Lani too was trembling, and the brisk autumn night didn't make it any better. Both women looked at the two glowing crystals that lay on the ground.

"Which one is real and which one is fake?" asked Lani.

"I don't know for sure," replied Kisei. "Both of them may be real, and both of them may be fake. I hope that at least one is real."

"Well, we have about an hour to make sure. And the only way we'll find out for certain is once the stars align." Lani looked to the sky and gazed at the constellation that she had watched all her life. The stars had only appeared a few weeks ago, and, until then, she never fully believed that they would ever appear. But now they were there, brighter than all the other stars in the sky. The constellation consisted of five stars arranged into the vertices of a pentagon. To the naked eyes, they looked aligned, but it would still be about an hour until they were aligned absolutely perfectly.

"I've been thinking of how we can determine which stone is which," said Kisei. "But I don't know if the idea is any good. I remember reading the scroll, and it saying that whoever finds the stone will be faced with the possibility of choosing the treasure or the curse. One of these stones is the treasure, and one is the curse. And I don't want to know what'll happen if we pick the wrong one. It might very well kill us."

"I'm willing to take that risk," said Lani. "A fifty-fifty chance is good enough odds for me. So, how will we choose? I want to go through this together."

"Maybe we shouldn't," countered Kisei. "I would be foolish for us both to die, or be cursed or whatever, when we could ensure that at least one of us will get the treasure."

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"I hope so," replied Kisei. She pulled a copper coin from her pocket and held it in her hand. "We can flip a coin to see who tries the first stone. That's the only fair way to do it." Both Lani and Kisei didn't like the idea of only one of them surviving, but it made a lot of sense. It would be illogical for people to die taking a chance when one could be ensured survival. And flipping a coin would be the only fair way to determine who would be the test subject. "Okay, I'll pick heads, and you can take tails. We'll go best three-out-of-five. Whoever gets their side of the coin facing up three times has to be the test-subject. Does that sound okay?" Lani nodded. This method was as good as any.

Kisei rubbed the coin between her fingers for a moment, then tossed it into the air. A point of blue light from the stones reflected off the coin as it tumbled through the air and landed on the ground, causing a tiny cloud of dust to fly into the air. Kisei leaned over to see the likeness of the king staring up at her. "Heads," said Kisei. "One vote for me." She took a deep breath, picked up the coin, and flipped it again. The coin landed, revealing the head once again.

"Are you sure you don't want me to..." mumbled Lani.

"No," interrupted Kisei. "This is how we decided it. It's the only fair way. We'll do what the coin said." Kisei flipped the coin once more, not breathing as the shining circle twirled through the air and landed on the ground. This time, the seal of Hyrule looked up at them. Kisei breathed a sigh of relief. "That's two for me and one for you," said Kisei.

"This is getting a little tense," remarked Lani, trying to consciously control her sweating forehead and pounding heart. "Go ahead." Kisei flipped the coin and it landed on the tails side again. "Now we're

even," said Lani.

Kisei picked up the coin and looked at Lani. "Well, this is the moment of truth. Whoever gets this one has to go first. You sure you want to go through with this?"

"Yes, I am," replied Lani. "Now flip the coin before I die of nervousness." Kisei smirked and flipped the coin for the last time. It was like slow-motion watching the coin travel through the air. Both women held their breath, their hearts pounding like jackhammers. The coin slowly drifted to the ground and spun for a moment, finally resting tails-side-up. Both women let out loud sighs.

"Well, it looks like I'm going first," said Lani. She finally felt calm, and her heart was starting to slow down.

"Are you sure you're okay with this?" asked Kisei, knowing very well that she just might watch her best friend die tonight.

"Don't look so glum," said Lani. "You keep thinking that I have a fifty-percent chance of dying, just remember that I also have a fifty-percent chance of living."

"You're right," admitted Kisei. "I just don't like the idea of losing my only friend."

"Hey, we both went into this whole adventure knowing that it might cost us our lives. Besides, we don't know for sure that the curse will even be death. Maybe I'll just turn into a leper or something, and I can live with that. Besides, I'm sure that I'll pick the right one."

Kisei looked up at the sky and stared at the five stars. Their bright blue color was beginning to change to a reddish tinge. "It's almost time," said Kisei, pointing to the sky. Lani looked up and smiled. She bent over and tried to decide which stone to choose.

"Eenie, meenie, miney, moe," said Lani, picking up the stone on the left. She held it in her hand and smiled. "I think we're gonna have good luck tonight. I can feel it." Both women's attention was taken by the sudden flash of red light in the sky. They looked up to see the five stars now glowing brightly red. They felt a strange chill come upon them, the wind beginning to pick up.

"It's time," said Kisei. "I've waited for this my whole life." Lani grasped the stone tightly, which now glowed as red as the stars. It would only be a few minutes before the stones did their work. "The stars will be aligned for only a few minutes, but that should give us enough time. Hopefully, the stones will take effect before the stars unalign so we can find out which is the true Hateru stone. Now, the Hateru Stone will only work if you're holding it in your hand. So, if your stone works, give it to me when you're done and we can both live forever. And if yours is the wrong one, then I'll take the other one. I really hope yours is the true Stone."

"Me too," laughed Lani.

Kisei put a hand on Lani's shoulder. "If you don't make it through this, I just want you to know how much I care about you," said Kisei, trying not to let herself cry. *Everything will be fine*, though Kisei. Kisei opened her arms and gave Lani a tight embrace. "We'll be friends forever, no matter what happens."

"Of course," said Lani. Their moment was interrupted by a rumbling. The rumbling grew into a roar as the ground began to shake. It wasn't like a normal earthquake, but more like a low vibration. They felt the slight breeze turn into a driving wind.

"Here it goes!" shouted Kisei over the almost deafening roar. Now she would find out if her life's work was a failure. The five stars glowed brightly, and the stone in Lani's hand began to glow even brighter. The red light in her hand was almost blinding, but the stone didn't even feel warm. It was the most exhilarating experience Lani had ever felt. The feeling she had right now was like nothing she had ever experienced before. If she did die because of this stone, she would die happy. Lani had never felt such bliss in her entire life. She could feel the stone's energy coursing through her body.

Kisei took a few steps back as she watched the whole display. The stone's red glow began to engulf Lani's body, causing her to glow as well. Lani and the stone were one now, two inseparable entities. The deafening roar grew louder and the wind blew almost like a hurricane, but Lani and Kisei stood firmly, the wind not seeming to affect them.

Suddenly, the wind stopped and the roar grew silent. Lani looked at Kisei and smiled. "I feel it," said Lani. "I think this is the right one. I can feel the power!...I can...I..." Lani stopped, the expression on her

face turning from one of bliss to one of pain.

"What's wrong?" shouted Kisei. "Oh dear gods! Don't let it be the wrong stone, take me instead!" Kisei now realized that she didn't want to watch her friend perish. Lani's body became stiff, she no longer felt unbridled euphoria, now she felt pain, intense, searing pain. It was as if every point inside and out of her body was being prodded with thousands of red-hot needles. Lani realized that she had willingly done this, and was thankful that Kisei would survive.

"Friends...forever..." mumbled Lani with her last breath. She showed one last smile as her body shook violently and collapsed onto the ground like a sack of flour. The stone rolled from her dead hands and turned from a brilliant red glow to a deep black.

"I'm sorry," said Kisei, wiping a tear from her cheek. She kneeled down and kissed Lani's lifeless forehead. "I promised I would do this for you." Kisei walked to the other stone and picked it up. Immediately, the blue stone turned from its normal color to a bright red. The glow engulfed Kisei's body, causing the waves of energy to course through her body. *This is wonderful!* she thought. Kisei heard the wind pick up and the roar become louder again. The roar became far away as her entire being was engulfed by the stone. She felt nothing but the incredible power of the Hateru Stone. She wished that Lani could experience it, but Kisei would have to experience it for her.

The incredible high that Kisei felt suddenly stopped as the world came crashing back to her. Kisei fell to the ground and took a deep breath. The exhilarating feeling she'd just had was replaced with sheer exhaustion. Kisei smiled as she realized that she was still alive. Her legs shaking and her body trembling, Kisei mustered enough strength to stand. She looked at Lani's lifeless body and cried. "I'm sorry...I didn't want this." A large bang startled Kisei and she turned around to find its source. She saw the two blackened stones glow blue once again and hover above the ground. *This wasn't in the scroll,* thought Kisei. The stones slowly rose until they floated ten feet above the ground. Then, with a brilliant flash, the stones shot into the night sky, leaving fading blue streaks behind them. The star formation turned from their brilliant glow to nothingness. The stones and the stars vanished into the vast, empty expanse of the Universe. Kisei kneeled beside Lani's body and cried for her dead friend.

## Chapter One

All was calm, and they were at peace. Their minds were clear of thoughts, and they only concentrated on the task at hand. "Now, focus," said a female voice. "You have done this before, and you can do it again. Concentrate."

The boy the woman spoke to tried to focus his attention, but couldn't. He didn't feel like doing this right now. "Nothing's happening," said the boy. "I can't do this," he sighed frustratedly, opening his eyes and breaking the focus he had.

The older woman smiled to herself, she remembered what it was like being a teenager. She was lucky that she had gotten these kids to concentrate for five consecutive minutes. "It's all right, Link," said the woman. "We can try again later." Link agreed and he sat down on the grass between the two other people who were present. Zelda, on his left, wore a simple lavender-colored dress with a complex flower pattern on it, and her hair was tied back into a long pony-tail. Solo, who sat on his right, was wearing a blue tunic and a matching skirt, a strange combination of boys' and girls' clothing that would look unusual on anyone but her. Her long, flowing hair hung freely and went far past her waist, some of it piling on the grass as she sat down. She tugged at the blue bow in her hair, which had become a nervous habit of hers.

"It's okay, Linkie-pooh," said Zelda, putting her arm around him and resting her head on his shoulder. "Maybe you don't have any special powers."

"Yeah, you're just a dud," commented Solo, giving Link a sarcastic grin.

"Zoya said I have powers," rebutted Link, sticking out his tongue at Solo. Of course, Link really had no idea what he was really talking about. Only in the last few weeks had they been visiting with the

Guardians, mainly Zoya, who were also fellow Oracles. One day they had come out of nowhere, asking Link, Zelda, and Solo to come visit them. It turned out that they had many things to teach the children about the Oracles and who they were. Apparently they had more in their job descriptions than hiding the Triforce. Right now they were outside the village of Kataan, which was nearly twenty miles away from Hyrule Castle.

"I wouldn't call them 'special powers,'" said Zoya. "They're more like...supplemental abilities. You are lucky that your abilities have already started to surface. Many times they don't appear until you're in your twenties."

"I honestly haven't seen any special powers," said Link. "I'm just the same as I always was." The two girls nodded in agreement.

"Oh? You haven't?" said Zoya in an almost-sarcastic tone. She flashed her trademark grin, and Link knew he was in for a long lecture. Sometimes he hated having such a big mouth. "The fact is, you have already exhibited some of your abilities. All of you have. Zelda, you have shown extraordinary mental powers already. Those prophetic dreams you had so many years ago, those weren't simply coincidences. It was because of your extra-sensory abilities that you had those dreams. The most amazing ability you've shown is psychic imprinting. When you gave Link the Ocarina, whether consciously or not, you placed a message on it. You imprinted your thoughts on to an inanimate object, and Link was able to read those thoughts. Psychic imprinting is a very hard skill to master, even for me, and you did it without even thinking."

"I remember that," said Link. He could recall vividly when he had first touched the Ocarina of Time. It was so amazing, it had been as if Zelda were actually there talking to him.

"You have shown great promise too, Link," continued Zoya. "Your ability to even receive Zelda's message is proof. An ordinary person wouldn't have seen that vision, but you did. You are unusually sensitive to psychic energy."

"Does that mean I can read people's minds?" asked Link excitedly. The prospect of reading people's thoughts seemed strangely appealing to him.

"No, it's not quite like that. You cannot 'read' people's thoughts. Actual thoughts are private from everyone. But you are sensitive to the psychic energy. You can sense the feelings and intentions of others. You might see it as perfectly normal, but it is not something ordinary people can do. Have you ever noticed that? You always seem to know how people are feeling, whether they're hiding their feelings or not. You are an excellent receiver, you can sense the energy of anyone or anything in the world, all you have to do is refine that ability."

"I always knew Link was sensitive," said Zelda, hugging Link tighter. "You're so much better than boys who only care about sports and fighting, and...groping women."

"What about me?" asked Solo sheepishly, feeling left out. She couldn't think of any special powers that she had, maybe she was normal and they were just humoring her.

"You too will develop your abilities in time," said Zoya. "Your powers haven't been manifested outwardly much yet. But, it will happen all in good time. You have, of course, shown preliminary signs. Your dreams about Link were the key. You, like your brother, are unusually sensitive to psychic energy. You were able to receive the message from your mother, even across time. The first dream you had wasn't intentional on her part, but you got it even though it wasn't directed at you. Believe me, you will all discover things that you never even dreamed were possible."

"Like that tele-porty-thingie you were trying to get me to do?" asked Link.

"Yeah, I want to do that," whined Zelda. "It would be so cool to be able to zap myself to anywhere I want to go." She imagined what it would be like to be able to go anywhere instantaneously, and not ever have to worry about riding a horse again.

"I have to admit, that is the most fun," said Zoya with a child-like smile. "With practice, you three should be able to do that. But I'll tell you now, it's the most difficult ability to master. It is enormously taxing, both physically and mentally. I didn't master that skill until I was forty. The only one of you who has demonstrated this ability is Link."

Link raised an eyebrow when he heard that. "When?" he asked. He never remembered being able to

teleport.

"Don't you remember?" asked Zoya. Link shook his head. "During your whole time-travel adventure, you teleported countless times."

"I remember playing those warp songs on the ocarina..."

"That's it," said Zoya, the expression on her face looking like she had just completed an award-winning lecture. "I'm sorry, I should have explained this to you before. It wasn't the ocarina that warped you whenever you played a song. It was you. The ocarina was merely a device that helped to magnify and focus your energy. It was all your power that teleported you, the ocarina only enhanced that power since you were unable to use it on your own. If anyone else had played those songs, they would have only made music, nothing more."

"So you're saying I teleported on my own?" asked Link excitedly. "But I didn't even think about it. How could I even control it if I had no idea I was doing it?"

"Oh, but you did know what you were doing," replied Zoya. She annoyed Link once again with her all-knowing smirk. "When you played those songs, what were you thinking about? I seriously doubt that you were wondering what was for dinner. When you played one of the songs, the only thoughts in your head were of where you were supposed to be teleported to. You expected to be warped to a specific place, and you were. You did it all on your own, and you didn't even know it. But remember, it will still take a while for you to master your abilities. All of you will be able to do it eventually."

Link stood up, excited at the possibility of disappearing at will. He wanted desperately to do this now, he hated having to wait for things. "Can I try again?" asked Link.

"If you want to," responded Zoya. "Close your eyes. The only thing you should be thinking about is where you want to go. For now, just try to teleport yourself a few feet from here, next to Zelda. Now, focus your mind. Forget all thoughts, and think only about the place in the grass a few feet in front of you. Concentrate only on your task. Visualize where you want to go, and visualize yourself standing in that place. Concentrate on being there..."

Link closed off his mind to all thoughts. He imagined the place in the grass a few feet in front of him, and he imagined himself standing there. Suddenly, Link began to feel strange. His mind became suddenly absent of everything except for the vision of where he wanted to go. He felt his body begin to tingle. It was a very peculiar sensation, as if all the hairs on his body were standing on end. He knew he was doing this, he was finally going to do it. The strange sensation finally ceased as Link vanished in a flash of light. Zelda and Solo stood amazed, and looked at the spot in the grass, expecting Link to appear there any moment. "Where is he?" asked Zelda.

Zoya had a large grin on her face, and she turned to look at the small lake that was behind them. "Watch," said Zoya, pointing to the lake. Suddenly, there was a flash and Link was falling through the air. To the girls' amazement, Link hit the water with a loud splash. Zoya giggled and tried not to laugh out loud. A few moments later, Link came walking out of the lake, soaked to the bone and covered in green, stringy algae. As he approached the group, he aimed a frustrated glare at Zoya. The two girls giggled and Zoya finally burst out laughing. Link's face was red with embarrassment and slight anger.

"What was that?" asked Link frustratedly. "You said if I focused on where I wanted to go, that I would go there. Why did I end up in the lake?" With an annoyed expression, Link squeezed some of the water out of his clothes and picked the large strands of seaweed from his clothes and hair.

"I probably should have mentioned that..." said Zoya, attempting to control her laughter. She rarely got a thrill in her life, and this event was a welcome change from her usual boring routine. "Teleportation isn't something you can just do. Even though your thoughts were focused, they weren't focused *enough*. It takes a lot of practice to do it even for the first time. You didn't have the ocarina to focus your thoughts, so the results were...less than satisfactory."

"That doesn't explain why I fell in the lake," moped Link, beginning to become disgusted by the rotten smell that emanated from his clothing.

"All the Oracles who first discover their teleporting abilities end up in that lake sooner or later. The Temple of Truth, which you have visited before, has other properties other than being a gateway to the Sacred Realm and being a tomb for the Guardians. It acts as a beacon to other Oracles, almost like a

magnet. When an Oracle first teleports on his own, he will end up in the lake. You see, the portal attracts Oracles when they first teleport on their own. And it just so happens that the center of the lake is directly above the portal. So when you vanished, the power of the portal drew you to that point and you fell into the lake. It will take you a long time before you're able to overcome the pull of the beacon."

"Why didn't you tell me this *before* I tried?" asked Link, feeling uncomfortable for being the center of attention. The two girls stifled giggles and flashed him sarcastic grins.

"There are some things you just have to learn on your own," replied Zoya.

"Yeah, well, does that have to be one of them?" said Link sarcastically. Zoya's only response was her childish smile. Link knew he was beat. Instead of trying to think up a response, he instead sat down on the grass. Zelda looked at Link, who was still covered in stringy green algae and pinched her nose with her fingers.

"You smell like dead fish," commented Zelda. Solo merely grinned, picking a piece of seaweed off of Link's shoulder and dangling it in front of his face. Link pulled the seaweed from her hands and mashed it into her face. Solo gave an angered expression and stood up and walked to the shore of the lake. With an almost diabolical smirk, Solo grabbed handful of sticky, stringy algae and slowly approached Link. Knowing what was coming, Link tried to shield his face. However, his defensive motion was too late and the clump of seaweed smacked into his face, leaving a slimy green trail as it slid down his surprised façade. Then, as if nothing happened, Solo sat down next to Link and began to absently pick at the grass in front of her.

"You are so dead," said Link, giving Solo a look that only a sibling would understand. Zelda watched yet another display of sibling rivalry with acute fascination. She could never understand why they relentlessly tormented each other so much, yet could still stand living with each other.

"You know, watching you two is probably more fun than anything else I've seen," remarked Zelda. This only garnered her two cold stares.

"Yeah, well you don't have to live with this lazy lump," commented Link, looking at Link but directing the comment at Solo.

Solo merely crossed her arms and stuck out her tongue. "You're the lazy lump," retorted Solo. "Do you know what it's like living with him?" asked Solo to Zelda. "Especially when I'm trying to sleep. He snores so loud it sounds like a stampede. Not to mention his walks around in his underwear all the time, which is *not* a pretty sight."

"I wouldn't mind seeing that," said Zelda, causing Link's face to turn beet red. He couldn't believe that Solo said that. "I'd give anything to see Link in his underwear..." Zelda gave him an almost seductive look. "Or less."

Solo apparently, was not amused. "Yeah, you would," retorted Solo. "I'm just saying that that's not something *I* want to see. And after a while, his dirty clothes start to pile up and the whole house smells like a pig sty."

His embarrassment turning to anger, Link responded indignantly, "Yeah, well, what about the time you..."

"*Could we?*" interrupted Zoya harshly, stopping the argument suddenly. The three kids turned and looked at Zoya with shocked faces. "Thank you. Are they always like this?" asked Zoya to Zelda.

"All the time," replied Zelda, rolling her eyes.

"You guys are all too far gone to keep going for today. We can just continue our exercises next week." Link and Solo broke off their accusative stares and agreed with Zoya. "You're all too restless and we would just be wasting time if I tried training you anymore today."

"But we can just continue where we left off, right?" asked Link. "'Cause I really want to learn how to warp myself places and read people's minds."

Zoya sighed. Sometimes she wondered if enthusiasm was go or bad in this kind of situation. Sometimes being excited made them more eager to learn and made them concentrate harder. On the other hand, being over-enthusiastic could make them expect too much and then end up being disappointed when they didn't get the desired results. This obviously happened with Link. He was so excited that he might be able to teleport himself, that his excitement clouded his thoughts and he ended up in the lake.

"You guys can practice somewhat on your own," said Zoya. "Every now and then I want you to just sit down and relax. Try to clear your minds of thoughts and meditate. Not only will meditation hone your abilities, it is also simply a relaxing activity—especially after a strenuous day. Just sit and think, and try to see how many of other people's emotions you can sense. You'd be amazed at how many different emotions you can feel at once." Zoya huddled the kids together to prepare them for their quick jaunt home.

Link paused for a moment and gave Zoya a questioning look. "Can I ask you a question?" said Link. "I just had a thought...will we be able to teleport other people without actually having to go with them ourselves?"

"Well, sort of." Zoya smirked. "I know what you're thinking, and no. You won't be able to make some random person vanish without him even knowing. The subject has to be willing to do it. The only way you can teleport another person without their knowledge or consent is to physically touch them and to teleport yourself along with them. So don't get any crazy ideas."

"Rats," said Link.

"Are you guys ready?" asked Zoya.

"Yeah," replied Zelda for the whole group.

"Okay, where do you guys want to go? I can't send you guys to separate places, so you should decide on one place."

"You should probably send us to Link's house," said Zelda. She looked at him and gave a look of near-disgust. His clothes had begun to dry and now the algae was beginning to harden into some kind of crusty substance. "Because Link needs to change his clothes. Right, Link?" Link nodded his agreement.

"Very well," responded Zoya. She extended her right arm and faced the palm of her hand at the kids. "Now just relax and try to focus on where you want to go. If you guys try to exert some control over this, it'll make my job a whole lot easier. Take a deep breath and concentrate I'll see you guys in a couple days." Zoya closed her eyes and focused on sending the children to their destination. After decades of practice, teleporting others was almost unconscious. It had become so easy that it took very little concentration for her. The only drawback was the fact that once she teleported the kids, she would end up being tired and out of breath for a few minutes. But it was no different than sprinting a hundred yards. Just to amuse herself, Zoya snapped her fingers and the three children vanished in a brilliant flash of light. Zoya smiled to herself and walked back to her cottage.

Link, Zelda, and Solo had been walking through Hyrule Field and were just entering Lon Lon Ranch. Malon was in the corral babying the horses, waiting for the others to arrive. "Are my little babies happy?" asked Malon, directing her question at the totally oblivious horses. They continued grazing at the grass, mostly ignoring Malon. But she could tell that the horses were really happy. She seemed to have an unusual rapport with them, able to understand and read their feelings. Epona, who was now fully grown, walked up to Malon and gently nuzzled her with her nose. "Oh, what does my cute little Epona want?" asked Malon in a baby-voice. Epona snorted. "Oh, I don't have any apples for you. You'll just have to eat grass." The horse stared blankly for a moment and then walked away and continued eating grass. Malon smiled and walked back to the house. The others should be there at any moment.

Then, as if on cue, Link, Zelda, and Solo entered the ranch. Malon smiled and excitedly ran up to greet them. "Hi guys!" shouted Malon as she ran up to them. After a few moments, they finally met right in front of the house. Malon walked up to Solo and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. "How's my little angel doing?" said Malon in an affectionate voice. "I missed you. It's been nearly two days since I've seen you."

"Well, I've been kind of busy," replied Solo. "We all have." Link and Zelda nodded.

Malon gave an understanding smile, she knew what Solo meant. "So you guys were doing those mind-warping-magical-teleporting-sorcery lessons?" said Malon, as really more of a statement than a question.

Solo sighed and nodded. "It's not sorcery," rebutted Link. "It's a part of who we are. And it can get

really tough.”

“Well, I’d really like to be able to read minds and teleport and stuff,” pouted Malon. She looked at Solo. “Promise me that you’ll take me somewhere nice when you can finally do that vanishing thing.” Solo smiled and nodded, putting her arm around Solo’s shoulder.

“Oh don’t worry,” responded Solo. “We can have plenty of fun with that later on. Speaking of that vanishing act, you wouldn’t *believe* what happened earlier.” Link flashed Solo a glare that seemed to say that she would die if she continued, but Solo disregarded Link’s stare and redirected a smirk at him. “Link tried to do the teleporting thing, and he ended up falling in the lake.”

Malon giggled and Link gave Solo another death-glare. “So fairy-boy fell in the lake, huh?” said Solo, stifling another giggled.

“Yeah, and he came out all soaking wet and covered with gooey, sticky seaweed,” added Solo.

“Okay, I think we can stop talking about this now,” protested Link. “This isn’t let’s-make-fun-of-Link time.”

“Well, what are we going to do then, anyways?” asked Malon. She had no idea what the others had planned, she had only known that they were going to come over today. But Malon didn’t care, she just enjoyed being with her precious Solo.

“I thought we could have a little night on the town,” said Zelda in an excited tone. “It’ll be kinda like a double-date.”

“Ooh! That sounds like fun!” cheered Malon. “I’d love to go on a little date with Solo.” Malon hugged closer to Solo, causing her to blush slightly. “So where are you planning on going? It’s not like there’s much to do around here.”

“Yeah, I’d kinda like to know that, too,” added Link. He was beginning to become bored living in the same place for so long. It seemed like he had already been everywhere and done everything. He wanted so desperately to get out of Hyrule City and to go find some action and adventure. But he also didn’t want to leave Zelda behind. He always put her feelings in front of his, even when he didn’t like it. Sometimes Link wondered if Zelda thought he was being to sappy and love-sick, but he couldn’t help it. Link was completely devoted to Zelda, and gladly did whatever she wanted. Link knew he was spoiling her, but he felt like it was the only way he could express his feelings. Besides, she was a princess, it wasn’t like she hadn’t already been spoiled before.

“Oh, I’ve found a great place we can go to,” said Zelda. “It’s right by the market and I bet you guys didn’t even know it was there.”

“What is it?” asked Link.

“Yeah, tell us,” prodded Malon.

Zelda purposely smirked, trying to annoy them. “I’m not gonna tell,” she replied haughtily, turning up her nose. “Besides, it’s a surprise. Don’t worry, you’ll all love it. We’re definitely gonna have a blast tonight.”

“Well, what are we waiting for?” said Solo. “Let’s go.” All in agreement, they turned around and began to walk out of the ranch. Zelda excitedly grabbed Link’s arm and forcefully dragged him along with her. This had become a usual occurrence for him, and Link didn’t mind in the slightest. This reminded Link of a comment Saria had made quite a while ago. She had observed Link and Zelda’s relationship for quite a while and had developed a few interesting theories. She pointed out to Link that Zelda seemed to be the more dominant person in the relationship. It always seemed as if Zelda was the one who gave the orders and made the decisions, albeit lovingly, while Link merely followed her every whim. Link, of course, denied it, insisting that he was the man and he wouldn’t let a girl boss him around. But it was obvious even to him that Zelda exerted quite a bit of influence on him. Link was completely devoted to Zelda and showed her undying loyalty. So what if Zelda was slightly dominant over him? In a way, he liked it. It took some of the pressure off of him. He knew that Saria was right, but he would never admit it.

After a few minutes of walking and mindless chatter, they finally crossed the bridge into the village walls. It was late in the afternoon, around five o’clock, and the night-life was just beginning. Zelda led them to the center of the market, which was beginning to wind down and close up for the day. Zelda stood there and smiled at the rest of the group, annoying them once again. “Well? Where are we going?” asked

Link, annoyed.

Zelda took Link's hand and slowly led him to one of the side streets. "You're gonna love this place. My dad doesn't know I'm going here and neither does Impa. So don't tell them." They all nodded and agreed to keep the secret. Link, however, wondered what Zelda was getting him into now. She was always coming up with new schemes, each weirder than the last. Link hoped that he wouldn't regret this. They came around a corner into a dark alley and Zelda showed them to the front of a seemingly normal-looking building. She stood there and awaited everyone's reaction. "Well?" asked Zelda.

"Well what?" said Link. He looked at the sign in front of him. "It's a shoe shop."

Zelda sighed and gave a look of displeasure. "No, silly. It's down those stairs." She pointed to a small stairwell that was a few feet away from the shoe shop's door. Above the torch-lit stairwell was a small wooden sign that read: *Magillikutty's*. Zelda passed the shoe shop doorway and stood at the front of the stairs. Malon, Solo, and Link looked cautiously down the stairs, not knowing quite what to expect.

"You're taking us to a basement called 'Magillikutty's'?" asked Link, scratching his head.

"You are so dense," remarked Zelda. She grabbed Link's hand and took him down the stairs, the others following behind him. She opened the door and all of them walked inside. Link and the others were slightly shocked by what they saw. This wasn't a basement or a dungeon at all. The fairly large room was filled with rows of small tables with people drinking and chatting. At the far left of the room was a small stage with a man playing some kind of stringed instrument and signing fairly raunchy songs and limericks. The people in front of the stage laughed and cheered as the man finished another song. On the long side of the room in front of them, there was a long wooden counter with stools in front of them, many filled with men and women clutching drinks in their hands. Zelda looked at the other three and smiled.

"This is your surprise?" asked Link in near-disbelief. "It's a bar." He coughed slightly, the whole room was filled a very thin layer of smoke, most of it coming from various pipes and cigars in a few patrons' mouths. Link wondered what in the world possessed Zelda to take him here. Although he had to admit, this place didn't seem at all how he envisioned a bar to be like. The room was fairly large, but it seemed small because of the people. It was dimly lit by many torches and lamps, which gave the whole place a clamming effect. It was almost...cozy.

"It's not a *bar*, it's a *tavern*," insisted Zelda. Link shrugged his shoulders, he didn't care what Zelda called it, it was still a bar. "Come on, let's go sit down." She led them to the main bar where there just so happened to be four free stools. They all climbed onto the stools and looked with awe at the huge array of bottles on the shelves behind the bar. There were hundreds of bottles of every type of liquor. The colors of the liquids ranged from every shade of gold and brown to every color of the rainbow. Link didn't even know so many kinds of liquor even existed.

"So, you wanted to take us to a bar?" asked Solo. She smiled. "That is so cool!"

"At least somebody appreciates it," remarked Zelda, trying to get Link to brighten up. His face had an expression not of disappointment or unhappiness, but more of amazement. He never thought Zelda to be the type of person to take him to a bar.

Link's musings were interrupted by the bartender walking up to them. The man was huge and extremely bulky. His face was round and chubby, covered with a large, black beard. He slapped a fat, hairy hand onto the bar and smiled at the young patrons. "It's nice to see some new faces here," said the bartender in a surprisingly kind and pleasant voice. His voice didn't sound at all like what one would expect coming from such a large man. He sounded more like an old woman than a large, burly man. "So what'll it be?" he asked.

Link, Malon, and Solo gave looks of utter confusion. They had no idea what they wanted. None of them had ever been in a tavern before, what did this place even have? Link began to mumble, but Zelda interrupted him, "Can you give us a few minutes? My friends need some time to decide. We've never been to a tavern before, so we're not quite sure what you have."

"We've got every drink you could possibly imagine," replied the bartender. "You guys think of what you'd like. Just give me a holler when you're ready." The man smiled once more and went to the other side of the bar to serve some other customers.

Zelda turned to look at her friends. "Do you guys have any idea what you want?"

They all shrugged their shoulders. "Are you sure you even want to be here?" asked Link. "I mean, have you ever even had anything to drink before?"

"Oh sure," replied Zelda casually. "Daddy and Impa let me have wine with dinner all the time." It was true, for the last year or so, Zelda's father had allowed her to drink wine with her meals. After all, it was a fairly common practice. He had decided that Zelda was old enough to decide if she wanted to drink or not. "What about you?"

Link looked slightly embarrassed. "Well...not really," he mumbled. "I mean, I've never had anything before. But I've seen people who have had *too* much to drink before and I don't want to end up like that." Link envisioned a staggering, blithering drunk like he occasionally saw wandering around the marketplace. He could never stand losing control over himself like that.

"Oh, don't be such a pessimist," remarked Zelda. "You'll be fine as long as you do it in moderation. If you drink too much you'll get drunk, but you'll be fine if you have only a couple. Come on, we can have fun," she said, jabbing Link with her elbow. "You can tell the guy what kind of drink you want when he comes over here. Hey mister bartender!" shouted Zelda, waving her arm wildly. "Come over here, we're ready!" Link buried his face in his hands from embarrassment; he felt like everyone was staring at him when in fact no one was.

The bartender saw Zelda's wave and quickly waddled over to them, his face beaming with a jolly smile. "So, you guys decided?" asked the bartender.

Zelda decided to speak for her group. "We all have an idea of what we want, but we might need your help picking something out." She looked at Malon, who sat the farthest away from her. "What do you want, Malon?"

Malon peered at the hundreds of bottles and scratched her head. "Don't you have a menu or something?" asked Malon. The bartender shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I'm not sure..." she mumbled, scratching her head. "I don't know, give me something that a person who's never had anything to drink would like."

"How 'bout a nice light ale?" suggested the bartender. "I'll get you one that not too heavy. You should like it. And you?" asked the bartender to Solo.

"I want something sweet!" replied Solo excitedly.

"Okay...how about mead? It's an extremely sweet drink made from fermented honey and then we add some fruit juices and spices. It's really good, you'll like it." Solo smiled widely, that sounded like just what she wanted. "And for you sir?"

Link was just as stumped as Malon. "I don't know..." he mumbled.

"Just give him a beer," said Zelda. "Something good and dark for my little man." Zelda clutched Link possessively, causing him to blush. But he agreed with her drink choice for him, it was easier to just let her pick for him.

"And for you, young lady?" asked the bartender.

"I've heard a lot about Aldorian Whiskey, and I'd like to try it. Bring the bottle."

"Are you sure? That stuff is very expensive, and it's *really* strong," said the man. He was amazed that such a young girl would ask for a drink like Aldorian Whiskey. It was known for being extremely strong as well as expensive. It was more suited as "a man's first drink" than something a young lady would have. Zelda nodded her assurance and the bartender gave a smile. "Very well. I'll be back in a moment."

"Isn't this exciting?" said Zelda. "I thought we'd have a lot of fun tonight."

"Let's just try not to overdo it," said Link. He inwardly scolded himself, he was starting to sound like some kind of nagging adult.

"Hey, Link," said Solo. "You know, Saria was right about what she said about your relationship with Zelda." Solo gave a very predatory smirk, and Link glowered at her. Zelda didn't know of that conversation, and Link didn't want her to find out.

"Solo, ix-nay on the onversation-cay," said Link through his teeth trying not to make Zelda suspicious.

"What did she say about me?" prodded Zelda, very curious.

"Well, Saria told Link that she thought you dominated him. Like he let you order him around and he was just like a loyal little puppy. I think it's cute, he loves you so much." Zelda, Solo, and, Malon giggled

madly while Link's face turned a deep shade of red.

"Yeah, you're totally whipped," remarked Malon.

"I am not whipped!" countered Link.

Zelda put an arm around him and rested her head on his shoulder. "It's okay, Linkie-pooh. Don't listen to them. It's okay if you're my loyal little puppy," she said in a baby-voice.

"Come on, I don't let her boss me around. I just like making her happy. I'm perfectly capable of making decisions on my own. I'm the man here."

"That's so cute," remarked Zelda pinching Link's cheek. He knew he was fighting an uphill battle; he would never win in an argument against three girls. Especially girls like this. Before Link could make another rebuttal, the bartender arrived with their drinks. He placed the ale in front of Malon, which was in a large, clear mug. The liquid was a very light shade of yellow and there was a thin layer of foam on top. Solo's drink was served in a wooden cup and was thick and syrupy. The lager that the man gave Link was similar to Malon's, but was much darker and richer. Finally, he placed a bottle of liquor in front of Zelda, and poured a small amount of it into a shot glass. This liquor was a very unusual color, it was opaque and greenish. There were hundreds of tiny bands of green color swirling in the shot glass as Zelda picked it up.

"Now you be careful with that stuff, honey," said the bartender to Zelda. "It's the second-strongest drink I have. I don't want you choking on it."

"I'll be fine," insisted Zelda. She brought the glass to her lips and swallowed the liquid in one quick gulp. Her face contorted slightly as she swallowed it, and then she slammed the glass back down on the table. She slammed her hand against the bar repeatedly as the quick and sudden burning sensation traveled down her throat and into her stomach. When the shock had finally passed, she opened her watery eyes and took a deep breath. "Wow!" exclaimed Zelda, hiccupping slightly. She could already feel a warm sensation traveling throughout her body. "That was pretty strong."

The bartender had a look of near-shock on his face. He scratched his head in confusion. "Lady, I've never seen *anyone* handle a shot of Aldorian Whiskey like that before. I've seen grown men keel over and pass out from it. You didn't even choke or cough. Since you're such a nice young lady, the first shot is on the house. Just remember, that stuff isn't cheap." The bartender smiled and went to serve some other patrons.

"That stuff wasn't so bad," said Zelda proudly, pouring herself another shot. She hiccupped again, beginning to feel the effects of the alcohol. She sipped at the shot, not quite ready to down it all at once. She looked at the other kids in her group, who were all staring into their glasses. "Aren't you guys gonna try your stuff?"

Malon shrugged and took a sip of her drink. To her surprise, it wasn't as bad as she thought it would be. It had a very light, malty flavor with a slightly sweet hint to it. She took another gulp from it and wiped the foam from the top of her lip. "That wasn't so bad," she said. "It's interesting...kind of bubbly, and it tastes like barley."

Solo, meanwhile was the only one other than Zelda who tried her beverage without having to be prodded. She drank a large sip of the sweet, sticky liquid. "This is really good," said Solo with a large smile. She waved the cup in front of Link's face, to his disapproval. "It tastes like honey." She hiccupped loudly, causing the other girls to giggle. Solo drank her mead quickly, enjoying the sweet flavor.

"Well, Link," said Zelda. "You're the last one. Go on, drink your beer." She poked him on the shoulder and he reluctantly took the mug.

He never thought that he would ever experience peer pressure like this, but there he was. Although he wasn't averse to drinking, he wanted to make sure he didn't overdo it. He had never had any experience with alcohol, so he had no idea what his limits were. "All right, fine. I'll try it," replied Link. He took a sip of the beer, which was a very dark amber liquid and had a thick foam on top. He swallowed the first gulp and set the glass back down. The texture of the drink was slightly heavy, and the flavor seemed to match its color. It was very robust, and slightly bitter. His face gave a look of surprise. "Actually, that's not so bad," he said taking another sip. This drink had the perfect balance of sweetness and bitterness.

"That's the spirit!" cheered Zelda as she gulped down the remaining liquor in her shot glass. She slammed the glass down once again and grinned at Link. He could tell that she was definitely more

relaxed than usual. In fact, all of them were beginning to feel more comfortable and they all had a pleasant sense of well-being. "Link, you gotta try this," said Zelda, handing the bottle to Link and sliding the tiny glass over to him.

Link peered at the label on the bottle as he took another sip of his drink. When he came upon the price tag, Link almost choked. He quickly put the mug down and coughed for a few moments. "Zelda! This stuff is seventy-five rupees a shot!" exclaimed Link, pointing to the price tag.

"I know, silly," replied Zelda, her speech very slightly slurred. "I've got plenty of money. You guys can get whatever you want." She leaned over and whispered in his ear, "I'm the princess, remember? I'm rich!" She opened up the purse on her belt to show Link that it was full of purple and gold rupees. She must have had thousands of rupees on her. Link sure hoped no one else found out how much money she had. "I could buy the whole bottle if I wanted to."

"That would cost almost thirteen hundred rupees," Link pointed out. Zelda scoffed and poured a shot for Link.

"Go on, try this," she insisted, handing the shot glass to him.

Link wondered if he should do what Zelda said; he had no idea what his common sense would tell him because it was conveniently gone. He took the glass and gave Zelda a slightly accusative stare. "Are you trying to get me drunk?" asked Link bluntly, causing Malon and Solo to almost choke on their drinks laughing. Link wondered what Zelda would do to him if he was intoxicated. Dirty thoughts ran through his head and he quickly pushed them out. He was more honorable than that, but he knew Zelda might not be. He was more worried about her well-being.

"I'm not trying to get you drunk," replied Zelda casually. "I just want you to loosen up and have some fun for once. You're always so uptight worrying about things. Just relax."

Link nodded, Zelda did have a point. He often did worry about many things, most of which didn't even matter. He frequently drove himself crazy trying to please everyone and worrying about everyone else's problems that he never bothered to take time out for himself. "What the hell, you only live once, right?" said Link. He brought the glass to his mouth and swallowed the greenish whiskey in one gulp. As soon as he'd swallowed it, Link dropped the glass and began coughing violently. His mouth and throat burned and his eyes watered profusely. Zelda gently patted him on the back, trying not to laugh. She had no idea he would react like that. Link coughed a few more times, but finally relaxed after a few moments. He could feel the liquor going down his throat and into his stomach, causing a pleasantly warm feeling to course through his body. "How could you drink that?" he asked Zelda, his voice extremely hoarse. He took a long drink of his beer, which helped to extinguish the fire in his throat and stomach. "Oh, gods. That stuff is horrible!" he said in a disgusted voice. He stuck out his tongue and made a dissatisfied gagging noise.

"Really?" said Zelda, in a voice of child-like surprise. "I didn't think it was that bad. I think it's interesting. But I guess we just have different tastes."

"Well, you can go ahead and drink that stuff, I'll just stick with what I have," said Link, nursing the beer. He could still taste the horrible bitter flavor of the Aldorian whiskey, it was extremely unpleasant. Zelda poured herself another shot and began sipping at it. Link gave her a wary glance. "Please, don't overdo it, Zelda. That stuff is a hundred and fifty proof, and you'll get drunk real fast on that."

"You worry too much. I know my limits, I'll be fine." She sipped the whiskey again.

"You should've had some of this stuff," said Solo, offering him a taste of her drink, which he declined. "Oh, whatever. It's really sweet. It doesn't even taste like it has booze in it." She took a sip of her mead, and made a dissatisfied groan when she discovered that the flagon was empty. "Boy, that stuff sure went by fast. Hey mister bar guy! Can I have another one?" shouted Solo. The bartender waddled over and replaced Solo's glass, and she gave him a pleasant smile.

"You be careful with that stuff," warned the bartender to Solo. "Mead might not taste like it's alcoholic, but it really packs a wallop." Solo nodded her understanding and took another sip. The bartender noticed that both Malon's and Link's glasses were almost empty. "Can I get either of you a refill?"

Malon finished off her drink and shook her head. "No, that's okay. This beer was all right, but it's not exactly my favorite. Do you have anything that's a little sweet and fruity, but not *too* sweet like that stuff

she's having?"

"Of course, I'll bring you a glass of our strawberry wine. That's what most of the ladies prefer. You'll like it." Malon nodded her agreement. The bartender turned to Link, who had finished his drink while the man was speaking to Malon. "And you sir?"

"Just gimme another one of these," replied Link, pointing to his empty mug. The bartender smiled and went to retrieve their beverages. Link was beginning to feel much more relaxed. Maybe Zelda was right, he didn't feel nearly as anxious as he usually did. "Maybe this wasn't such a bad idea," he said to Zelda. The bartender came back with Link and Malon's drinks and then walked off again. "Zelda, where did you ever come up with the idea of taking us to a bar, anyway?" He was very curious to know that. Zelda never seemed to be the type to go to a bar full of roughnecks and commoners. He always envisioned a princess to be the kind of person who would sponsor huge balls with snooty guests. He wondered if anyone here even knew that their princess was even in the same room with them.

"Well, I wanted to do something different," replied Zelda. "I'm sick of stupid parties and dances. I wanted to do something with just the four of us, where we wouldn't have to worry about etiquette and all that other boring stuff. It's a lot more fun just being a normal person." She gulped down her shot of whiskey and smiled at Link. She was beginning to feel more than relaxed, she definitely felt the effects of the liquor now. "Come on, let's do something fun!" slurred Zelda.

"Let's go over there, by the stage," suggested Solo. She pointed to a table surrounded by over a dozen people, who were cheering loudly.

"I wonder what's going on over there," said Malon.

"Let's go find out," said Zelda, cautiously trying to stand up. She wobbled for a moment and Link thought she was going to fall over, but she managed to balance herself. She grabbed her bottle and slowly stumbled over the table, followed by Link, Solo, and Malon. Link noticed Zelda's stumbling, he made a mental note to make sure that Zelda didn't have too much to drink. She was already on the borderline.

They went and stood in front of the table in question. At the table sat a middle-aged woman, who appeared to be about fifty years old. She had long, silver hair that was tied into a tight braid behind her back, an unusual hairstyle in this area. There were six bottles of liquor on the table, and one of them was empty. The woman held one of the bottles in her hand and she was busy pouring shots and drinking them. "What in the world is going on?" asked Link to no one in particular.

A bystander turned around to answer Link's question. He looked just like a normal person, but it was obvious that he had already had a few drinks. Everyone appeared to be enjoying themselves greatly. "This lady is totally crazy," said the man, pointed to the woman. "We all have a pool going with this woman. We're trying to see how much of that rum she can drink in an hour before she passes out. I had my money on ten shots, but she's already gone past that. Now I'm just watching to see how much she can drink. This is amazing, it's worth the fifty rupees I lost." The man turned around to everybody cheering.

"That's fifty shots!" cried the woman in a slurred voice. She threw the bottle to her side and uncorked another one. She poured herself a shot and prepared to drink it. "Who wants me to keep going?" The response was a loud cheer from the audience. With that, she gulped down the shot and began to empty the bottle, bit by bit. "How are we doing time-wise?" she yelled in between drinks.

"Thirty minutes left!" shouted someone.

Zelda's group turned to look at each other and they all had looks of shock on their faces. "How can someone drink so much?" said Zelda in amazement.

"I have no idea," said Link, eyeing the strange woman warily. "That stuff's gotta be fake. Nobody can drink that much liquor in an hour. I bet it's all a big hoax."

Link was startled when he felt someone slap a hand on his shoulder. He turned around to see the huge bartender standing over him. "Trust me boy, this ain't no hoax. She's a regular here, but I've never seen her do this before. That stuff she's drinking is Hylian Rum, a hundred and ninety proof. It's the strongest stuff I've got, and she has all of it. I'll tell you, I've never seen anything like this. I've seen people pass out from drinking half a bottle, and unfortunately I've known people who died from drinking too much. She drank a whole bottle in fifteen minutes, and that's enough to kill a man. I'll give you a word of advice: don't ever do what she's doing." The man then walked away as abruptly as he had come.

"This is totally weird," said Malon, not believing her eyes.

"Come on, let's go sit down," whined Solo. The group agreed and they found an empty table near the stage. They all sat down and watched the drinking woman with fascination. They had a very good view of her from this position, there were no people in their way. The woman was already three-fourths of the way done with her third bottle, and showed no sign of stopping.

Zelda poured another shot of whiskey and gulped it down. Link bent over and grabbed the bottle before she could pour another one, to her dismay. "I think you've had enough," said Link. "I don't want you getting drunk."

Zelda folded her arms and began to whine like a little girl. "Oh come on, that's so mean," she complained. She put on the cutest face she could muster to try to guilt Link into giving her the bottle. "You sound just like Impa. Oh please, just one more, I promise I won't have too much." Link could tell that Zelda was obviously close to her limit. Her speech was moderately slurred and her eyes were a little glassy. Against his better judgment, Link let Zelda have one more drink. She smiled gratefully and sipped from the shot glass. "Thank you, Linkie-pooh," said Zelda. "That was so nice." She put on an almost seductive smile and leaned over to Link's face. "Did I ever tell you how much I loved you?" she whispered to him. Zelda leaned ever closer until she finally engaged him in a kiss. It was light and quick, but Link enjoyed it greatly. When they both leaned back into their chairs, they were met with hooting and lewd remarks from Malon and Solo.

"Oh, that's so cuuuute," teased Solo, closing her eyes and making kissing faces.

"You two are so sweet," said Malon. They both looked at each other and started giggling madly. Both Link and Zelda's faces turned red. They didn't care, no one else saw it. "Of course, you guys didn't do a very good job."

"What are you talking about?" asked Zelda defensively.

"Well, you didn't put enough feeling into that kiss," continued Malon. She too was feeling extremely relaxed and no longer felt inhibited by her normal common sense. She felt untouchable, as if she could do anything. She didn't care what anybody thought. "I'll show you how to kiss your girlfriend." To Solo's near shock, Malon leaned over and grasped her face with both hands. She then drew Solo's face closer until their lips locked in the most passionate kiss they had ever experienced. Malon's upper lip gently nudged open Solo's mouth and the tips of their tongues touched ever so slightly, sending shockwaves through their bodies. With a few more quick kisses, Malon released her grip and let Solo sit back down. The looks on Zelda and Link's faces were of utter surprise.

Zelda was speechless and Link was completely flabbergasted. "Oh..." he mumbled, not believing the display he had just seen. "Holy sh...Oh gods, I need a drink." He grabbed the bottle of whiskey from Zelda's fingers and took a long gulp directly from the bottle. "Oh man, that stuff is terrible." He looked at Malon and Solo, giving them glares. "Please don't do that in front of me again. Seeing somebody kiss my sister like that is...it's just gross," he stuck out his tongue in disgust.

"Well, you kiss Zelda all the time," remarked Solo. "And I don't complain about it." Link only huffed. "You're such a baby. Give me that bottle." Link handed the bottle to Solo, at least she hadn't had too much to drink yet. Solo poured some of the whiskey into her empty mug, which had previously contained mead. She sipped at it slowly. "Do you want some?" asked Solo to Malon.

Malon shook her head. "No, I think this is enough for me," she replied, holding up the glass of strawberry wine. She drank the last few ounces and set the glass down. "I don't want to have too much. I feel pretty good right now, and if I have any more I'll probably get sick." She recalled the time many years ago when her father had had a party at their house with his friends. He had had way too much to drink that night, and had gotten extremely sick, vomiting multiple times. He had given up drinking after that day and hadn't had a drop since. Malon didn't want to end up being as sick as he had been. "But somebody is definitely feeling good," said Malon, looking at Zelda.

"What? I'm fine," she slurred. "Don't worry, I didn't have too much. I'll be fine."

Solo drank more of the green whiskey she had poured into her cup. Now she too was feeling the increased effects of this liquor. "Wow," exclaimed Solo. "You weren't kidding when you said this was good stuff. Go on Malon, try some of it." Solo waved the bottle in front of Malon's face.

Malon still declined. "No, really, I'm fine," she insisted. "I'm gonna have to stay sober to take care of you." She gave a mother-like glance to Solo.

"Whatever, sweetie, you don't have to have any if you don't want to," said Solo, her speech beginning to become slightly impaired. She finished off the whiskey in her cup and grabbed the bottle. With a dissatisfied moan, she noticed the level of liquor in the bottle was dwindling. "Oh, the bottle's almost empty," she complained. The bottle was a fifth of a gallon, and now only a tiny amount remained. Solo tipped her head back and poured the last few drops of the liquor directly into her mouth. "Rats, it's all gone." She dropped the bottle back onto the table, where it tipped onto its side and rolled to the middle.

"Maybe we should get another one," slurred Zelda, preparing to raise her hand to summon the bartender.

Link, however, grabbed her hand and gave her a stern look. "No, no more for you," warned Link, to Zelda's dismay. "You've had enough. And you shouldn't be spending all your money on that anyways. Impa and your dad would kill you if you came home drunk. You're already wasted, and they'll probably blame me for it." He imagined Impa lecturing him for hours about how he should have made sure Zelda didn't drink too much.

"Oh, they won't get mad at you," reassured Zelda. "I can do whatever I want..." Her sentence was interrupted by loud cheering coming from the table with the drinking woman.

She stood up and threw her hands into the air like an athlete who had just won a marathon. She bowed a couple times to the cheers and applause coming from her small audience. "Thank you, thank you," she said, her voice slightly slurred. But Link noticed that the woman's speech wasn't nearly as impaired as Zelda's, and that made him wonder. Zelda must not have been very good at holding her liquor. "That's six bottles, gentlemen, over a hundred shots. And I did it in fifty-seven minutes!" The people hooted and cheered again, completely flabbergasted that a woman could drink so much liquor in less than an hour. Most people knew that one could die from drinking much, much less than she did. The woman bowed once more and dumped all the rupees that were on the table into her purse. "You all lost the bet. Now if you'll excuse me, I need to get going. I might be back next week if you all want to lose some more money." To the group's dismay, the woman got up from the table and walked up to the bar. She pulled a couple gold rupees from her pocket and handed it to the surprised bartender. "Here's the payment for your rum plus a little extra for you."

The man gave a surprised look and tried to refuse the money. "Lady, seeing you pull that stunt is payment enough."

The woman shook her head, putting the rupees into the man's hand and closing it. "Please, I insist," she said. She was about to turn around and leave until the man put a hand on her shoulder, stopping her.

"Wait a second. I'm dying to know, how in the world did you manage to drink that much booze? I mean, I've seen people go into comas from much less. And you drank *six* bottles in an hour. You should be dead."

The woman smiled, a smile that seemed to say the man would never understand why, a smile that was almost sarcastic and haughty. "Yes, I should be," she replied, turning around and leaving. The bartender merely stood there for a few moments, deeply confused by the woman's statement.

Meanwhile, Zelda had given up trying to talk Link into letting her get another bottle of whiskey. She crossed her arms and stuck out her tongue at him. "You're no fun," she whined.

"Yeah, what if I want some more?" complained Solo. Zelda smiled, at least she had one other person on her side. Malon simply rolled her eyes, becoming amused by Zelda's childish whining.

"I just don't want either of you getting drunk," nagged Link. "I only had a couple drinks, and I know my limits. You two obviously don't."

"Oh, fine, be that way," said Solo, turning up her nose at Link. She saw a cocktail waitress walked past and she flagged her down. The waitress walked up to the table and Link sighed, handling two drunk girls was turning out to be a lot harder than he thought. "Can you bring us two more ales, please?" The waitress nodded and went to fill the order. Zelda smiled at Solo and stuck her tongue out at Link.

"Whatever, if you want to get wasted, you go right ahead," said Link, finally giving up. "But I'm not letting you get *any more*."

"That's so sweet," slurred Zelda. The waitress returned and placed the drinks onto the table. Zelda and Solo each grabbed one and began to drink them. "Is there anything else to do now that that lady's gone?" asked Zelda, looking around the tavern. Then she noticed that people were walking up to the stage and performing drunkenly. Some of them sang songs, others read poems, and a few told dirty limericks and ballads that garnered cheers and lewd hoots from the bar's patrons. "Ooh! Ooh! Look at that, Link!" cried Zelda, pointing to the people on the stage who were singing so off-key that it was almost painful.

"Oh, no," said Link with a determined glance. "There's no way in hell you're getting me to go up there and sing."

Zelda huffed. "You're such a kill-joy. Well, I'm gonna go up there whether you like it or not." Zelda tried to stand up, but Link pushed her back down.

"What are you even going to do?" asked Link. "Zelda, you don't want to go up there and humiliate yourself in front of everyone. What if they recognize you?"

"Oh, no one will recognize me," insisted Zelda, her speech very slurred. "Nobody knows what I look like. And I just want to go up there to say some things, I'll think of something when I get there."

"But Zelda, look at those people." He pointed to the drunken persons on stage. "They're making idiots out of themselves. I don't want you making a fool of yourself."

"I'm not gonna make a fool of myself, I'll be fine."

Link sighed, Zelda just wasn't listening to him. "Zelda, you're drunk."

"I am not!" she protested. However, her speech was so impaired that it was obvious she was extremely close to being totally intoxicated or already was so. "I'm fine, I'm just a little...tipsy. I want to be like everyone else and have a good time. I'm just trying to blend in."

"Yeah, you're blended all right," remarked Link sarcastically, causing Solo and Malon to giggle.

"Oh, why don't you let her go up there?" asked Solo, not making a very good case for Zelda. She too was intoxicated, she had had almost as much to drink as Zelda. Malon held Solo's hand and tried to get to sit back down.

"No, trust me. It's for her own good," said Link. Link prepared for another protest from Zelda, but he instead heard a dull thump. He turned to see Zelda's head face down on the table, drooling slightly. For a split second, Link looked up at the ceiling, silently asking why the gods were doing this to him. Link gently lifted up Zelda's head, and she was barely able to keep it up. Her face was flushed and red, and her eyes were watery and glazed-over. "You are blind, stinking drunk," said Link. Zelda mumbled meekly. "That's it, it's time to go home." This only caused Zelda to attempt to whine, but she didn't quite manage to. Solo took up the slack and made a disappointed moan.

"I agree," said Malon. "You both have had way too much. Let's go." Malon stood up and put one of Solo's arms around her shoulder. She helped Solo stand up, who was extremely wobbly and could barely keep her balance.

"Are you sure you can handle her?" asked Link, worried that Solo might fall and hurt herself.

"I'll be fine," assured Malon. "I could pick her up if I wanted to."

"Okay." Link turned to look at Zelda, who was still in her chair staring drunkenly at the table. "Let's get up." Link grabbed Zelda in the same way Malon had taken Solo, and he gently eased her out of her chair. Zelda wobbled and put almost all of her weight on Link, which he easily balanced. "We're leaving." Zelda nodded slightly, not feeling like putting up a fight. Link and Malon both led their drunken girlfriends to the front of the bar. Still holding onto Zelda tightly, Link unhooked the purse from her belt and put it onto the counter. The bartender walked up to him and gave an understanding smile.

"I take it you guys are done for the evening?" asked the bartender, shaking his head at the familiar sight of customers who had had too much.

"Definitely," replied Link. "How much do I owe you?"

"Well, you guys drank the whole bottle of Aldorian, and that's a thousand rupees. And the beers and ales you guys had add up to, oh...one twenty-five. So your grand total is eleven hundred and twenty-five rupees. I hope you have enough." This man had had a lot of experience with young customers who drank more than they could afford. He hoped this youngsters wouldn't be like that.

Link dug into the purse and pulled out a handful of shining rupees, handing them to the surprised

bartender. "Here's twelve hundred. Just keep the change, you've been a really nice guy."

"Sonny, let me give you a word of advice. You and the brown-haired girl should be fine 'cause you two drank in moderation. But your two friends are *not* going to feel good in the morning. Believe me, I've had enough hangovers in my life to know that these two are in for a biggie. I recommend making them drink *lots* of water before they go to bed. That'll help prevent a hangover. But once the morning rolls around, the best cure is just sleep. You take care now."

"Thanks for the advice," said Link. He hefted Zelda's weight and slowly led her out the door, followed by Malon carrying Solo. Zelda just barely moved her legs, concentrating mostly on trying to hold onto Link and not fall over. Solo and Zelda both walked as if they were toddlers taking their first steps. Once Link and Malon had dragged their partners to the center of town, they paused for a moment. "Malon, why don't you take her home back to our house?" offered Link. "The bridge shouldn't be closed for another fifteen minutes, so you can still make it. Do you think you can walk her all the way there?"

Malon shifted her and Solo's weight to get into more comfortable position. "Yeah, I can handle her. I'll get her home fine."

"Okay, I'll take Zelda home, but just know that I probably won't be back until morning." Malon nodded and turned around to leave. "Malon, wait." Link looked at her with deep concerned eyes, which seemed to glow in the dark twilight. "Please take care of my sister. I don't want anything to happen to her. Promise me?"

"I promise," replied Malon. She then slowly helped Solo walk out of the castle walls.

Link hefted Zelda's body weight and walked her towards the castle gates. She occasionally took a few steps, but mostly relied on Link, who was practically carrying her. They went past the guard who quickly opened the gates for them, a slight smirk on his face. The guard knew that Zelda enjoyed getting herself into trouble, and the whole castle would be talking about this in the morning.

Link led Zelda up the path, where she tripped and fell down, taking Link with her. To his utter surprise she pushed him back down and sat atop his chest. She smiled seductively and Link felt like he was going to faint. This definitely wasn't like her. "Did I tell you I had a really great time?" slurred Zelda.

"Um...yeah," mumbled Link in response, feeling almost scared by the predatory look in her eyes.

Zelda examined her surroundings and saw that no one was watching them, they were alone in the huge yard in the front of the castle. "Well, the night's not over. We don't have to go inside just yet. I thought we could have a little fun first." She gently trailed her finger down Link's chest and smiled at him. Link was nearly paralyzed, his heart beating madly and sweating profusely. He gulped as Zelda leaned over and kissed him. Before he could make any response, she put all her weight on top of him and began kissing different parts of his neck and face.

He had never expected Zelda to act like this, and he was more nervous than he had ever been in his life. He knew what she wanted to do, but he couldn't let her seduce him. She was drunk and wasn't thinking straight. "Zelda, please, you're not well," said Link, breathing heavily. The feeling of Zelda kissing him all over his face and neck was unbelievable. He had always loved her personality and her wonderful nature, but now he felt so physically attracted to her. He was fighting an internal battle between his rational side and his deep, primal side.

"You worry too much," whispered Zelda. "Sometimes you need to listen to your feelings." She leaned over and placed her lips onto Link's, kissing him deeply. She gently nudged open Link's mouth with her lower lip and touched the tip of her tongue to Link's. He gasped, but she wrapped her arms around him and continued to kiss him passionately. Zelda then pushed her tongue into his mouth and began to explore with it. Link, finally unable to control himself, closed his eyes and put his arms around Zelda. He then kissed Zelda, their lips and tongues sliding and intertwining in a passionate ballet. Zelda moaned as she continued to kiss Link, at a continually increasing pace. After what seemed like an eternity of exploring each other's mouths, Zelda broke off the kiss and started kissing down Link's neck, occasionally touching the tip of her tongue to Link's warm skin. He had never felt like this before, he felt so alive and so in need. He wanted Zelda, and she wanted him just as bad.

Then Zelda stopped kissing him, and began to fiddle with his shirt, trying to find some way to remove it. This action caused Link to jump back, his rationality coming back to him in a crash. He knew he

wasn't supposed to do this, he couldn't let Zelda continue. He knew that they would both regret it if they went any further. "Zelda, no," said Link, gently pushing Zelda off of him and sitting up. She looked at him with almost heartbroken eyes. "We shouldn't be doing this."

"But I love you Link," said Zelda. She leaned over and kissed him again, only to be pushed away. She felt heartbroken. Did she do something to upset him? She suddenly became afraid that maybe Link didn't like her. "I want you so much. I love you more than anything, don't you love me too?"

"Of course I do," replied Link in a gentle and caring voice.

"Don't you want me too? Don't you think I'm beautiful? I've wanted to touch you for so long, and I want to feel your touch. I know you want me too. I want so bad to be able to feel you, to show you how much I love you. Why can't it be now?"

"Because Zelda, you're drunk. You can't make a decision like that when you don't have your full capacities. It wouldn't be right for me to let you do this. I know you love me and I love you too. I love you more than anything in the world. I would never do anything to hurt you. But if I let you do this, you know you would regret it. I would never forgive myself for that. Please tell me you understand."

Zelda sighed and nodded. "I'm sorry. You're right. I shouldn't have done that to you."

Let's just go home." Zelda tried fumblingly to stand up, but couldn't do so under her own power. Link put his arms around Zelda and helped her up. With his assistance, she was on her feet quickly, a little more quickly than she had wanted. She wobbled around for a moment, she had gotten up too fast and now her head was swimming. The world around her spun out of control and she began to feel sickeningly dizzy.

Link noticed the pale expression on her face and began to feel concerned. "Zelda, are you okay?" asked Link, worried.

She clutched her stomach and shook her head. "I...don't feel so good." She was beginning to get that uncomfortable bile and retching sensation form in her gut and work its way up her throat. She fell to her knees and bent over as she began to gag. Then, with a loud retch, Zelda bent over further and vomited violently. Link turned his head away as the contents of Zelda's stomach were emptied onto the ground before her. She retched loudly and coughed a few times as her stomach finally stopped regurgitating its contents. Zelda leaned back and sat on her knees, moaning in extreme dysphoria. She had never felt so sick in her life. "Uhhh...I feel...uhh," mumbled Zelda. She couldn't even manage to finish a sentence. She no longer felt pleasantly sedated like she had earlier, now she was dizzy and her stomach was sending waves of horrible nausea through her body. She thought a little drinking was supposed to make a person feel good and relaxed, now she felt absolutely horrible. That disgusting, acidic bile taste came back up as she bent over and vomited one more time. Link looked in horror as Zelda got sick again, which was not a pretty sight. Zelda took a deep breath as she finally stopped retching once again. She peered at the greenish-yellow stomach contents on the ground before her with morbid fascination. "Uhh, I don't remember eating that," said Zelda, peering at some half-digested lump of food. It was eerily fascinating to her. Link, however, thought he was going to be sick. Zelda finally gave up and collapsed onto the ground, lying on her back and staring up at Link with the most pitiful face he'd ever seen. "I can't get up," she moaned, almost to the point of tears.

"It's okay, honey," said Link, getting to his knees and putting one arm underneath her legs and the other underneath her shoulders. "I'll carry you home." He gently picked up Zelda and walked her home, cradling her like a baby.

Zelda out her arms around Link's neck and shoulders, and gave him an adoring look. "Thank you," said Zelda, sleepily. She let go of Link's neck and her head tilted back. Zelda closed her eyes and fell into a deep sleep as Link carried her into the castle. He was surprised and almost thankful that she finally passed out. The look on her face was now serene and relaxed, much unlike the face she wore just a few moments ago. Link passed a very curious-faced guard as he carried Zelda through the foyer and up the stairs.

He was faced with an unusual dilemma when he came to Zelda's door. He still held her in both arms as he tried to think of a way to turn the doorknob without having to put her down. Then he heard a door open down the hallway and turned to see a very curious-eyed yet stern-faced Impa approach. "Can you give me a hand with her?" asked Link meekly, feeling extremely anxious that he was going to get into a lot of

trouble. Impa nodded, and silently opened the door for Link, not giving him so much as an awkward glance. The sight of Link carrying a sleeping Zelda to her bedroom was so sweet, that she felt like a little kid again. Link gently placed Zelda on the bed, only a slight moan coming from her sleeping face. He stood above Zelda and then peered at Impa, a slightly confused and unsure look on his face. "Um..." he mumbled.

"Zelda's not going to be very comfortable like that," said Impa, pointing to Zelda, who was on top of the covers and still had all her clothes on. Impa walked over to Zelda's bed and tried to pull one of her boots off. Zelda merely moaned unconsciously, and gave no sign of being able to assist. "Think you can help me?" asked Impa. Link nodded and help her to remove Zelda's boots and socks. "We can forget her nightgown, just help me get her under the covers. Link gently picked up Zelda as Impa pulled the covers back. He then set Zelda back onto the bed and pulled the covers over her. After making sure Zelda was comfortable, Link sat in a chair and prepared to hear a long lecture. "You mind telling me what happened?" asked Impa in a serious tone, causing Link to fidget nervously. "I think I can make a guess as to why you carried her home practically in a coma. She smells like a brewery."

Link tried to think quickly and come up with an explanation. He didn't want her to get in trouble, so he decided to try to place the blame on himself. "It was my fault," he replied. "We went to a tavern in the town and I guess she had too much to drink, and I should've made sure that she didn't, but I guess I really couldn't say 'no', I'm sorry I really didn't mean to..."

"Whoa, whoa, slow down," said Impa, interrupting Link's nervous ramblings. She gave Link a kind and almost motherly look, as if to say that she understood him. "You don't have to try and defend her. I'm sure it wasn't *your* idea to go to a bar." Impa smiled to herself, this must have been Zelda's idea. Only she would think of something like that.

"But I don't want her to get in trouble, I should have watched out for her and made sure she didn't drink too much..."

"It's all right. I'm not mad. So let me guess, she dragged you off to a bar, right?" Link nodded in response. "That girl is always trying to do something to get herself into trouble. I guess it's just normal adolescent rebellion. She doesn't like being a princess and I guess this is her way of trying to shed that image." Impa looked at Zelda, who had rolled onto her side and was snoring slightly. "How much did she have?"

"I don't know...she got a bottle of Aldorian whiskey and finished most of that off."

"Holy goddesses in heaven!" exclaimed Impa. "Of all the drinks in the world she had to pick that one. That's what *I* drank when I first got wasted. How much of it did she drink?"

"About three or four shots. I had a little and then Solo finished it off."

Impa chuckled a little. "Well, she's definitely not going to feel very good when she wakes up in the morning. That stuff is notorious for the hangovers people get."

"You're not going to punish her are you?" asked Link concerned. "Because I don't want her to get in trouble, I shouldn't have let her have any more when I knew she'd already had too much."

"Quit trying to blame yourself. I think what she'll be feeling tomorrow will be punishment enough. This is one of those mistakes a person has to experience on their own if they're ever to learn anything from it. And don't worry, there's nothing wrong with have a little drink every now and then. After all, it's perfectly okay. I just think this'll teach both of you that the key is *moderation*."

"Yeah, tell me about it. I only had a couple beers because I was worried about her. Somehow I knew she was going to get drunk. It was almost funny."

"I'm sure Zelda made a hilarious drunk," mused Impa. "I remember when I first got wasted. I had a great time at first. We partied all night until I threw up and passed out. When a Sheikah, boy or girl, turns fifteen they are considered an adult. The whole town has a huge party on the lucky boy or girl's birthday, we call it the Day of Attainment. Everyone gets all drunk and rowdy and half the people end up passed out lying in the streets. The town doesn't go back to normal for days, and mine was no different. To this day I don't know why or how, but all I remember is waking up on the roof of my house." Link broke out laughing when her heard that.

"You climbed onto the roof?" asked Link in disbelief.

"Well, the Sheikah are known for their wild parties. Just remember this as a life lesson. Don't ever let alcohol take you over, because it can have disastrous consequences. Still, it was very honorable to try to take the blame for Zelda. It was almost...cute."

"Well, she's the princess and I don't want anything to tarnish her reputation. I love her so much and I don't want one mistake to start rumors."

"You don't have to worry about that," assured Impa. "It's an unwritten rule that nobody makes rumors when the royalty get too...rambunctious. It's so sweet how you carried her in like that." Impa remembered how her husband had always picked her up and carried her into her bedroom. It had kind of been a ritual of theirs. "You should probably go home, the guard can open the drawbridge for you, just tell him I said so."

"No, I want to stay here," insisted Link. "I want to make sure she'll be okay."

Impa saw the stern look of determination on Link's face as he said that. He glanced over at Zelda and the expression on his face melted her heart. Link had such a loving and adoring look on his face whenever he looked at Zelda. Impa had never seen anyone look at Zelda like that. She could tell that Link was unquestionably loyal and devoted to Zelda, that he would do anything for her. She couldn't say no to a face like that. "All right, you can stay and watch over her. I think she would like that. I can get you a sleeping bag and a pillow if you want..."

"No, I'll be fine," said Link. "I don't think I'm gonna get much sleep. I just want to make sure she's okay."

Impa nodded and stood up to leave. As she opened the door, she gave one last look to Link. "I'm sure you already know this, but Zelda really loves you. You are the center of her universe. She hasn't stopped talking about you since the day you two met, and I don't think she ever will. She worships the ground you walk on, and I know nothing will ever change that. You're very lucky to have found someone like her, and she's lucky to have found someone like you. Well, good night. Try to get a little sleep." With that, Impa closed the door and left Link alone with the nearly-unconscious Zelda. He already knew the facts that Impa had told him, but hearing the words come from someone else made it seem all the more real. He was in love with her, and he was completely infatuated with her. Everything Zelda did enchanted him, even what had happened this night. There had been something beautifully childlike about how she'd acted. It seemed like whenever he thought he had found every single reason to love her, a new one came up. He stood up and pulled the chair next to the bed. He sat down and rested his head on his hands, staring at Zelda. *Her face is so serene and beautiful*, he thought. *How could anyone not fall in love with her?* Link continued to stare at Zelda's face. She was his whole reason for being, and he had no idea what his life would have been like if he hadn't have met her. Link simply sat there in his chair, watching over Zelda. He was her protector, and he would never let anything happen to her. Right now, he felt like he was falling in love with her all over again.

Malon had finally managed to walk Solo back to her home in the Kokiri Forest. Listening to Solo's drunken ramblings on the way home had started out as entertaining, but now it was becoming annoying. "Did you ever notice how grass is always greener in the shade?" slurred Solo. "'Cause you think it would grow better in the sun. Why is that? And it's always bigger, too. You know, the grass kinda reminds me of that stuff we had at the bar. You shoulda tried some of that green stuff, it was really good."

"We're home now," said Malon, annoyed. They were standing in front of the tree-house and Malon was wondering how in the world she was going to get her drunk girlfriend up that ladder. "Whose idea was it to put a ladder here in the first place?" groaned Malon. "Can you at least try to climb up there? I don't really feel like carrying you."

"Okay, I'll try!" replied Solo, grabbing onto one of the rungs. She shakily climbed up, albeit very slowly. Malon was directly behind her, expecting Solo to fall at any moment. To Malon's surprise, Solo successfully made it up the ladder.

They both walked into the house and Solo simply stood there, staring at Malon.

"Okay, I think it's time for you to go to bed," said Malon sternly. Solo whined in drunken protest, but Malon insisted. She pushed Solo towards the bed and made her sit down. "You need sleep."

"Fine, party-pooper," said Solo in a huff. She stood up and began to dig in a pile of clothes on the floor, stumbling in an attempt to keep her balance.

"What are you doing now? I told you to go to bed."

"I gotta wear my pajamas," replied Solo. She sat on the bed and removed her boots and socks. Then, to Malon's shock, Solo began to strip all of her clothing off, finally removing everything but her underwear and a camisole. Her face turning beet red, Malon turned around and didn't look. Solo paused and saw Malon's back. "What's wrong? You don't want to see me in my underwear?" teased Solo drunkenly, this only increased Malon's embarrassment, who still had her back to Solo. Solo threw the nightgown on the bed and grabbed Malon from behind. "What's the matter? I thought maybe you'd enjoy seeing me with almost nothing on."

"I'm just trying to be polite," mumbled Malon.

"Okay, fine," pouted Solo, slipping her white nightgown over her head. She walked over to the bed and lay down on it. Like a caring mother, Malon went over to the bed and made sure Solo was comfortable.

"Thank you, Malon. I'm sorry, I guess I went a little overboard today."

"It's okay," said Malon. "You just had a little too much." They both looked into each other's eyes, saying things that words never could.

"You always took care of me," said Solo sleepily. She didn't realize how tired she was until she had gotten into her bed.

"It's because you're my little angel. You know I would do anything for you." Solo smiled. Then, in a totally reflexive action, Malon moved her face closer to Solo's. Their lips touched in a light, but emotional kiss. Malon kissed Solo a few more times, quick and short puckers on the lips. She then drew her head back, standing up and smiling. "I love you, more than anything in the world."

"I love you too," replied Solo. Malon walked over to the desk in the side of the room and sat down. The tiny oil lamp on the desk gave off a flickering orange glow that cast unusually shaped shadows on the walls. "Aren't you going to go to sleep?" asked Solo, already falling asleep. Her mind was already halfway gone, and the world was becoming fuzzy with the familiar feeling of sleep.

"I'm gonna stay up for a while. Just to make sure you're okay."

"All right...that's fine..." mumbled Solo as she finally drifted off into the peaceful embrace of sleep.

Malon sat at the desk for a few moments, staring at Solo's serene face. She looked so beautiful when she was asleep. There was such an air of innocence to her face, that made her look like a young child. She almost seemed to glow in the dark room. As far as Malon was concerned, Solo was her light in the world. She loved her more than anything, and felt so grateful that she had found a soul-mate in such a large and harsh world. Only Solo understood how Malon felt. They shared their feelings and emotions. Malon had never opened up to anyone in her life, not even her father. Solo filled the void that Malon had always felt in her soul. Now she felt alive, and truly happy.

Malon looked around the house that she was in. Solo lived in such a small house. Malon couldn't imagine what it was like living in such cramped quarters with her brother. Malon always wondered what it was like having a sibling, and from hearing Solo's tales, she didn't want one. As Malon's eyes circled the room and passed her love, she noticed something underneath the bed, something small and squarish. Malon wondered what that was. She was never a nosy person, but her curiosity was bugging her. It was something under Solo's bed, and it was probably hers. Maybe it was a diary, it looked like it could be a book. Malon debated in her mind if she should see what it was. After all, they both shared all their feelings, so she would find nothing new in it. Against her better judgment, Malon crept across the floor and took the object from underneath the bed. She sat down and looked to make sure Solo was still asleep; Solo had rolled on her side facing away from Malon and the object. She was still sleeping soundly. Malon looked at the object and discovered that it was a book, about nine inches wide and twelve inches long. It was much bigger than a diary, more like a sketchbook. She wondered for a moment if Solo could draw.

Her curiosity unrelenting, Malon opened the book. The first page was blank, disappointing Malon.

Nervously, she turned the page. What she saw shocked her; on the page was a beautiful pencil drawing of a girl. The girl in the picture had her back turned and was petting a horse. This picture was so lifelike, it almost looked real. Malon was amazed that Solo could draw so well. She turned the page to see a similar picture of the same girl feeding a carrot to a horse. The shading and curves and detail of the drawings was amazing. It seemed as if the emotion of the scene was embedded in the picture. It was such a normal everyday scene, but it was so beautiful when it was captured in this artwork. When Malon turned the page, she almost screamed with shock. She looked at the page and saw herself looking back at her. It was as if she was looking into a mirror. Sketched on the page was Malon, drawn in perfect detail. Every curve of her body and every minute shade and texture was recreated perfectly. Malon couldn't have seen a better representation of herself if she had looked in a mirror. The pencil drawing was absolutely perfect. In the picture, Malon stood in a relaxed pose, giving a small smile. Malon felt a tear roll down her cheek as she realized that Solo had drawn this, no one else could capture her image in such exquisite detail. It was then that Malon realized how obsessed Solo was with her. She couldn't believe that she had become such an object of affection. Malon saw Solo as almost a goddess, but she never imagined that Solo saw her in the same way.

Malon turned the page, and was almost brought to tears by what she saw. It was another picture of herself, but she was depicted with an almost god-like quality. In the picture Malon was standing in the clouds with the sun shining behind her. The paper almost seemed to glow. A small caption underneath the picture read simply: "My Goddess." Malon felt a surge of emotion come up and she wondered if she could turn the page without having to jump Solo and smother her with kisses, telling her how much she loved her.

Malon turned the page, and saw no drawing. Instead, there was a small folded piece of paper lying on the middle of the page. She unfolded the paper to see that it was a card. On the front of the card was another drawing of Malon, with tiny hearts floating in the air above her. There was some writing on the bottom that said "Happy Birthday." Malon then remembered that her birthday was only a couple weeks away. She had never told Solo when her birthday was, how did she find out? Malon reasoned that this must be a birthday card for her, made by Solo. Feeling completely overwhelmed with emotions of love and affection, Malon opened the card. Inside the card was very unorganized, scrawling handwriting. Ever since they met, Link had been teaching Solo how to read and write. Solo could already speak very eloquently, and she could read at a normal level. But her writing was below average, her penmanship was like chicken-scratch, and she had very bad spelling. But Malon read the card anyways:

*Happy Birthday Malon! I wan to say how much I luv you and this wass the onli way I coud think of. I luv you mor than anything in the world. Since its your birthday, I thout this wass the best way to say it. You shoud now that I wan to spend the resst of my life with you and I woud do anythin for you. You r the only person who understandz me. Your the only I hoo I fel konected with. You r my angel and I wan to dedicat my life to you. I luv you mor than anythin and I hope you fel the samme way.*

*Luv, Solo.*

Malon felt tears flow down her cheeks as she read this. Solo had told Malon that she loved her so many times, but she had never felt it like this before. The feeling was so tangible and so real. Reading Solo's writing made Malon love her even more. She was startled when she heard movement coming from the bed. Solo moaned and started to roll over. Malon quickly closed the book and slid it back under the bed before Solo moved any more. After a few moments, Solo rolled over and opened her eyes. Malon quickly went to her bedside to see what she wanted. "Malon, I'm kinda cold," said Solo. "Will you...please, just lay next to me for a while? I'm just a little lonely. I don't want to impose or anything, but you look like you're tired, and I thought maybe you needed some..."

"It's okay," interrupted Malon. "All you have to do is ask, you don't have to go into some rambling explanation." Malon smiled and sat down on the side of the bed.

"Oh sorry, I guess I got a little carried away. It's just that I was worried that maybe I was imposing too much on you and that maybe you're mad at me and you're just being too nice to tell me, I get that a lot..."

"You're doing it again," pointed out Malon. Solo often went into rambling soliloquies and Malon usually had to snap her out of it. Solo decided to just close her mouth instead of risking another

embarrassing response. Malon took off her shoes and socks, as well as her scarf and placed them neatly on the floor. Then Malon lifted up the covers and positioned herself underneath them. She lay flat on her back, with her hands underneath her head, staring at the ceiling. Malon felt a comforting warmth as Solo snuggled her body closer to Malon's and put her arm across Malon's chest.

Solo rested her head on Malon's shoulder and smiled, although Malon didn't see it. "Thank you," said Solo adoringly as she slowly drifted back to sleep. Malon enjoyed the warmth of another person next to her, it was so comforting. She felt safe and protected. It reminded her of her mother. When she was very young, Malon had always climbed into bed next to her mother whenever there was a thunderstorm. Now she had that same feeling of security that she remembered from so long ago. But now, instead of feeling simply protected, she felt like the protector also. Malon looked at Solo, who was sound asleep, her head still on Malon's shoulder. Malon loved this girl so much, and she would give anything to make her happy. If Solo wanted to sleep next to her, then she was happy to oblige. Malon still felt absolutely amazed by the glorious drawings that Solo had made of her. She wondered how she would be able to keep this a secret from Solo. She felt so touched by the discovery that she wouldn't be able to look Solo in the face without acting like she was hiding something. Malon was terrible at hiding things from people. And Solo could read Malon like a book, so it would be even harder to keep it a secret from her. She just hoped Solo would understand. Malon tried not to worry and closed her eyes. Then Malon too drifted off into the calming embrace of sleep.

## Chapter Two

The morning sun shone through the window into Impa's bedroom, the light falling directly onto her closed eyes. She opened her eyes and squinted, using her hand to shield the light. She yawned for a moment and sat up on her bed. She looked at the clock on her wall to see that it was almost eight o'clock. This was sleeping in for Impa, she usually got up at the crack of dawn. But last night had been a little more taxing than most nights. After Link had brought Zelda home drunk, Impa knew she would have a lot of work ahead the next day. She had been up all night preparing her famous Sheikah hangover remedy, knowing Zelda would definitely need it. She had been in the kitchen rummaging through all the pantries, trying to find the right ingredients. After nearly three hours of working, she had finally made her remedy. Impa got out of bed and put her usual clothes on. She smiled to herself, remembering the many times she had had to use her remedy for hangovers, she just hoped that Zelda's wouldn't be as bad as some of the ones she had.

Impa quickly made her bed and then walked out of her room and down the hall. Impa opened the door to Zelda's bedroom and went inside. She looked to see Zelda lying face-down on her bed, in the same position they had left her the night before. Her hair was disheveled and pointing in all directions. Every now and then, a quiet moan would come from Zelda, a precursor to the discomfort she would be feeling when she woke up. She saw the chair that Link had insisted on sitting in all night, but noticed that he wasn't there. She walked closer to the bed and saw that Link was sprawled on the floor, sound asleep. Impa knew that Link wouldn't be able to stay up all night watching Zelda. But he was so stubborn that he didn't accept Impa's offer of a bed or sleeping bag. Now he was simply lying on the cold stone floor, sleeping soundly. Somehow it was so adorable to see him like this, he had tried so hard to stay up but simply couldn't. Link had fallen asleep in his chair and had eventually migrated to the floor.

Impa walked up to Link and gently nudged him with her foot. He immediately shot up and looked around for a moment, not quite knowing where he was. But the memories of the previous night had come flooding back to him in an instant. Link looked up at Impa's smiling face. Link stood up and tried to brush the wrinkles from his clothing, attempting to look like he was wide awake. "Oh..." mumbled Link. "I was just, um, resting my eyes."

"Yeah, I know," said Impa with a smirk. "You should've just taken the sleeping bag."

"I'm sorry, I thought I could stay up. I guess I was a little tired." Link yawned and stretched, rubbing his back and wincing. Sleeping on the hard stone floor had been more uncomfortable than he realized. Impa knew how much Link sacrificed himself for Zelda. He always insisted on giving her everything even when it was more than imposing on him. But he enjoyed making her happy, that was the only thing he cared about. Link had always put his wants and needs last. Link looked over at the still unconscious Zelda. Seeing her like this made her seem so vulnerable, which was why Link always felt like he had to protect her.

"We need to get Zelda up," said Impa.

"Can't we just let her sleep?" asked Link, once again thinking of Zelda's welfare. "She probably needs it and I don't want to wake her up if she's comfortable."

"Trust me, she's not comfortable," replied Impa in a voice that seemed to reflect the many years of experience she'd had in this particular area. "There's some things I need to give her. I made up a hangover remedy and she needs it. Plus she needs to eat something, and then she can go back to bed. How are you feeling? 'Cause I only made enough of the little potion for one person."

"I'm okay," replied Link, in a half-lie. He felt a little sick to his stomach and had a mild headache, but he'd been through worse. "I just need to wake up a little, I really hate mornings." Link hated waking up in the morning with a vengeance. He always wished he could sleep in, but there was always somebody who insisted on pulling him out of his peaceful slumber, usually Saria.

"Well, shall I wake her up, or do you want to do it?" asked Impa.

"I can do it."

"Okay, well, get her up and I'll be right back," said Impa, moving towards the door. "I have to go get some things for her." Impa then left the room to go get some food and her remedy.

Link walked over to the bed and gently poked Zelda on the shoulder. She didn't move at all, and merely groaned. "Zelda, you gotta get up," said Link in a gentle voice.

"Uhhh..." moaned Zelda.

Link then shook her gently. "Impa has some stuff she wants to give you. Please, get up." Zelda moaned once again. Link then shook her harder, finally bringing Zelda out of her unconscious stupor.

Zelda slowly sat up, but became extremely dizzy and then lay back down again. She opened her eyes and squinted at the bright light. "Oh, somebody turn off that light," complained Zelda. "It hurts." She grabbed her head, in a vain attempt at stopping the throbbing within. She felt like her whole head was going to explode. Her stomach felt awful, like it was tied up in a knot. Waves of nausea flowed through her body, almost making her want to vomit again. Every muscle in her body screamed out in pain. She propped herself up on her elbows and looked at Link. Her eyes were red and bloodshot, and there were huge bags underneath them. She looked like she'd been through a war. "What happened?" asked Zelda, cringing at the foul taste of vomit and bile in her mouth.

"Don't you remember what happened last night?" replied Link.

Zelda sat there for a moment, searching her memory. It all came back to her; she remembered the bar and getting completely wasted. Her memories ended with her vomiting in the front yard of the castle. Everything else was a blur. "Oh, that. What was I thinking?" she cursed herself.

"Hey, it was your idea to go to the bar last night," said Link in an almost accusative tone. "You really got blasted last night. You were totally drunk."

"Yeah, I know. Oh man, I feel so bad. Everything hurts, I feel so sick. Why did you wake me up? I just want to sleep," she complained.

"Whoa, it wasn't my fault," said Link defensively. "It was Impa's idea to wake you up. She says she has some hangover remedy for you that will make you feel better."

"Please try not to talk so loud," said Zelda, grabbing her head. "My head hurts so much. I feel like I'm gonna die. So this is what a hangover is? I swear I'll never drink again." Zelda moaned a few more times to emphasize her point. She couldn't even describe how she was feeling. This 'hangover' felt like the worst experience she'd ever had. No one ever told her that drinking would make her feel like this the next day. Zelda tried to stand up, but a wave of dizziness and nausea overcame her. She stumbled forward and almost fell over, but Link caught her before she could do so.

"Whoa, slow down," said Link. "I don't think you should be getting up so fast."

Zelda gave him a pleading look and started wiggling around in his arms. He let go and she then started to fidget and jump up and down. "But I gotta pee so bad," she complained, hopping from one leg to the other. If she didn't get to the toilet soon, she was going to wet herself. "I gotta go."

"Fine..." Link replied as Zelda rushed out the door. She almost knocked Impa over as she came walking into the room. Impa shot Link a confused look as Zelda ran by like a bat out of hell. "She had to go to the bathroom," pointed out Link.

Impa nodded in understanding. She was carrying a tray with two steaming bowls and a few various bottles and empty glasses. She set the tray down on the table and looked at Link. "Okay, I was wondering why she was running so fast. I got her some breakfast and some of my remedy. I brought some oatmeal, and there's some for you too."

"Oh, thanks," said Link, walking up to the table and taking one of the bowls. He sat back in his chair and ate the warm cereal.

Impa went over to Zelda's dresser and took out a clean dress and underclothes. "I'm going to go give these to Zelda, I'll be right back." Impa took the clothes and walked down the hall to the bathroom. She knocked on the door.

"Go away!" came the response from within. "I'm trying to go to the bathroom."

"Honey, it's just me. I brought you some clean clothes, and I thought you might like to change while you're in there."

"Okay," replied Zelda. "Just open the door and put them on the floor." Impa heeded Zelda's request and cracked open the door, sliding the clothes inside. She then went back to Zelda's room and sat on the bed across from Link. She saw that Link had already finished the bowl of oatmeal in the few moments that she had been gone.

"That was pretty good," said Link, scraping the few remaining globs of hot cereal from the bowl.

"Thanks for the compliment," said Impa, taking Link's empty bowl and placing it back on the tray. "Oatmeal is about all I can make, I'm not a very good cook. I make oatmeal for Zelda sometimes, but she doesn't appreciate it."

"That's too bad. I've eaten oatmeal every single day for most of my life, so I'm used to it. But Saria usually makes it, I'm not much of a cook either. I can cook fish, but that's about it."

After a few moments, Zelda walked into the room dressed in her new clothes. She was wearing a simple violet dress with some lace embroidery on it. Impa learned long ago that Zelda disliked wearing her "princess" dresses with fancy gold thread and Triforce symbols, which were a dead giveaway to anyone, telling them that she was a princess. She always preferred wearing normal commoners' clothing. However, Zelda's clean dress did little to make her look better. Her face was tired and drawn out. Her eyes were bloodshot and their were large, tired bags underneath them. Zelda's hair was so out of order that Link almost laughed. Her normally beautiful hair was frizzy and puffy, and stray strands shot out in all directions. Zelda went and sat down on her bed, still not feeling much better.

Impa walked up to Zelda and gave her a very sarcastic grin. "Looks like you had fun last night. You really look charming this morning," said Impa sarcastically.

"Oh please, I feel like I've been trampled by a stampede," responded Zelda, not amused in the slightest.

"Believe me, I know how you feel. Maybe next time you'll think twice about going out to bar and getting drunk."

Zelda gave a look of shock. She saw the look on Impa's face and had no idea if she was in big trouble or not. Zelda prepared to put on her best puppy-dog face to try and weasel out of trouble. "How did you know that?" asked Zelda innocently. "I swear, I really didn't mean to do that. I just was having a good time and I guess I went a little overboard, I'm really sorry, please don't..."

"Shh," said Impa. "You don't have to explain it. Link told me what happened. He tells me you were *really* drunk last night."

"I was not drunk," protested Zelda, feeling her face flush. "I just had one too many."

"Zelda, you were blind stinking drunk," said Link. "I mean *really* wasted. You were..."

"I get the point!" said Zelda angrily, her head throbbing once again. She was not in the mood for a

lecture. "Impa, please. I'm so sorry. I promise I'll never do it again. Please don't punish me, I'm so sorry."

Impa smiled. "Oh don't worry, I'm not going to punish you," said Impa. "What you're going through is punishment enough. Besides, there's nothing wrong with going to a tavern every once in a while. You just have to know your limits. I think you've learned *that* fairly well."

"I feel like I'm gonna die," said Zelda. Her mouth still tasted foul, and it was extremely dry. "My head hurts, my eyes hurt, my stomach hurts, everything hurts. Is this a hangover?"

"Oh yeah, honey. And it sounds like you've got a nice one going. Tell me something, what ever possessed you to pick Aldorian whiskey?"

Zelda shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know, I heard it was good."

"Well, that stuff is notorious for its hangovers. I'm surprised you're even conscious."

"Well, I wish I *wasn't*," replied Zelda, directing a heated glare at Link.

"Let's not argue." Impa walked over to the table and brought the tray to Zelda's bedside. "I have some things that will make you feel better. I have an old Sheikah remedy guaranteed to cure the worst hangover. I've had enough hangovers to last a lifetime, believe me, this works."

"What is it?" asked Zelda, eyeing the small jar and bottle on the tray.

"There's three parts to it," responded Impa. She uncorked a small bottle and poured a small amount of greenish liquid into a glass. Zelda was reminded of the green whiskey she had had last night. "Step one is the hair of the dog that bit you." She handed the glass to Zelda and eyed it suspiciously. "It just so happens that I have some Aldorian whiskey in my cabinet. Drink that first."

Zelda looked at the glass and smelled its contents. It was definitely the drink she had last night. With the way she felt right now, if she ever saw another alcoholic drink again it would be too soon. "Wait a minute, I'm feeling like this because I had too much of that stuff last night. And you expect me to believe that drinking more of it will make me feel *better*?" Zelda wondered if Impa was pulling her leg.

"Who's the one who's had a lifetime of hangovers? Just trust me. If you want, you can just forget the remedy and try to take care of it yourself."

"Fine, I'll do it." Zelda tipped back her head and quickly swallowed the small amount of liquor in the glass, slightly less than a shot. Zelda immediately began to notice the same warm feeling she'd felt last night when she took her first drink. Zelda coughed and handed the glass to Impa. "What next?"

"Now it's time for the actual remedy." Impa opened the small jar and the room was suddenly filled with a very unusual odor that neither Link nor Zelda could identify. She poured the remedy into the glass, which was a thick, lumpy, brownish liquid. It looked disgusting. Impa handed the glass of the remedy to Zelda.

Zelda eyed the contents of the glass and felt like she was going to retch. "That stuff is gross! You expect me to drink that? It looks like, well it looks like it came out of the wrong end of a..." Impa hushed Zelda before she could finish her comment. Zelda sniffed the mixture and stuck out her tongue in disgust. "What's in this?"

"If I told you what was in that, you would never drink it," replied Impa. "Believe me, you don't want to know. All I'll say is that it's an aromatic blend of various herbs and spices. Now, drink it. I recommend holding your breath and taking it in one gulp, because it doesn't taste very pleasant."

Zelda sighed. Impa had never given her bad advice, so she trusted her. Zelda plugged her nose and quickly gulped down the lumpy liquid. She gagged as she swallowed, it had an unpleasant consistency akin to mucous. Zelda retched and gave the empty glass back to Impa. "That is horrible! It tastes like dirty socks. Now my whole mouth tastes like that."

"That's where the third step comes in," said Impa. She went and placed the tray back on the table, returning with another clean glass and a large pitcher. "Water. I can't stress it enough. Alcohol makes you lose water, so you need to replace it. You should be pretty thirsty by now." Impa poured Zelda a tall glass of clear water and Zelda downed it in one long gulp. She hadn't realized how terribly thirsty she was. Zelda indicated that she wanted more and Impa poured her another glass. Zelda quickly drank that glass. She took a few more glasses of water until her ravaging thirst was finally quenched. In the end, she had drunk almost two quarts of water. "Wow, you *were* thirsty. I told you booze makes you lose water."

"I guess that explains why I had to pee so bad this morning. I swear, I've never peed so much in my life. I thought it would never stop. Is that everything?"

"Well, you should have something to eat now, too. I brought you some oatmeal because it's probably the only thing that won't make you throw up." Impa gave the bowl to Zelda, and she began to eat the oatmeal slowly. "That remedy will take a while for it to work. You should start to feel better in an hour or so."

"Thanks, Impa," said Zelda.

Impa stood up and patted Zelda on the head. "Honey, I have to go do some important work. I have a meeting to go to in a few minutes, so I have to go. Don't worry, Link will take care of you." Link gave Zelda a broad and almost funny smile. Impa opened the door and walked outside. But she then leaned her head inside and looked at Zelda. "Oh, by the way, we won't tell your father what happened," said Impa in a quiet, conspiratorial voice. "This'll be our little secret." Impa then left and closed the door. Link sat down and stared at Zelda while she ate. The look he gave her was adoring, but she began to feel uncomfortable.

"What?" she asked self-consciously. "Is there something on my face?"

"No, I was just looking at you. Even when you're sick you still look beautiful." Link couldn't believe how sappy he was being, but he knew Zelda liked it.

"Thanks. I know I look as bad as I feel. I'm sorry I put you through all that last night. I got a little carried away. Why didn't you keep me from drinking too much?"

"What did you expect me to do?" asked Link. "You begged me to let you have more. And you gave me that pathetic face. You know I can't say no to that face."

"Yeah, you're right," said Zelda, placing the bowl on her nightstand. She didn't feel all that hungry. "It always works on Impa, and I guess you're not all that different. I have you trained just the way I want you," said Zelda in a baby-voice, pinching Link's cheek. "How come you stayed here all last night? I didn't want you to have to sleep on the floor."

"I was just worried about you. I wanted to make sure you would be okay. You've watched over me enough times, and I thought I should return the favor. You know how much I love you, I was just looking out for you."

"That's so sweet," said Zelda. It always amazed her how dedicated Link was to her. She had never met anyone who gave of himself so selflessly. She wished everyone had a friend like Link. "Thank you for that, I really appreciate it. I can barely remember what happened last night, it's all such a blur. I didn't humiliate myself, did I?"

Link tried to think of what a good definition of 'humiliated' would be. "You were pretty drunk, but you didn't do anything that bad. You were actually kind of funny."

"I remember one thing really vividly. When you were taking me home, and I...kissed you. I didn't mean to try and seduce you like that. I wasn't myself. You know I would never do anything to make you uncomfortable. I hope you can forgive me."

"You don't need to apologize," said Link. "Actually, I kind of enjoyed it. You've never kissed me like that before."

"I know. But I did that because I love you so much, it wasn't because I was drunk. But being drunk like that, I wasn't thinking straight. I didn't mean to try to force you into anything. I know that most guys would just want to...use a girl for their own gain. And if you were anyone else, you probably would've followed my advances. I didn't mean to put you in a position like that. Thank you for not taking advantage of me."

Link thought about Zelda's words for a moment. He remembered her advances last night, but he knew she hadn't been herself. Zelda wouldn't have done that had she been sober. Link was proud of himself for his self-control, or more for restoring Zelda's self-control. In Link's mind, taking advantage of Zelda wasn't even a possibility. He would never do anything she didn't want, and he knew she didn't really want to do that last night. Link couldn't imagine how some other men took advantage of women. It seemed so abhorrent to Link. Zelda was his reason for living, and taking advantage of her in any way was absolutely unthinkable to him. "I would never take advantage of you," said Link. "I love you and I'd do

anything for you.”

“I know,” said Zelda. “I know you would never take advantage of me. Actually, I’m worried that I’m taking advantage of you.”

“What do you mean?” asked Link.

“Well, it’s just that you always do whatever I ask without question. You’re always babying me, and going out of your way to make me happy. I’m just worried that maybe I’m imposing too much and that you’re just too nice to tell me.”

Link was taken aback by Zelda’s statement. He never once thought that Zelda was taking advantage of him. He enjoyed doing things for her, it made him so happy to see her happy. “What are you talking about? You’re not taking advantage of me. It makes me so happy to do things for you. I just love it when I see you smile, it makes me feel like I’ve made a difference in your life. Seeing you happy is all I live for. When you’re happy, I’m happy.”

“Oh, okay,” said Zelda. “You just give so much of yourself, and I never give anything back. You know that if there’s anything you want, I can make it happen.”

“Your happiness is all I want. I don’t worry about petty things like money and possessions. Things like that don’t give people happiness. Material stuff doesn’t last forever, but love does. The only thing I want from you is your love. It makes me feel good to give of myself. I never liked getting things. That’s why I don’t like my own birthday. It makes me feel guilty when people give me things and I don’t give anything in return. To tell you the truth, I’d rather give you a present and see the happy look on your face then to get a present from you. The smile on your face when you’re happy is the only thing I want in return. It lights up my soul when I see you happy. I couldn’t ask for anything more.”

Zelda was almost brought to tears. What Link said was so heartfelt and sincere. She never thought that her own happiness was so important to him. She always tried to make him happy, never realizing that all he wanted was for *her* to be happy. Zelda felt so blessed that she had someone who was so loyal and dedicated. Link was so noble, just looking at him made her feel loved and protected. Zelda couldn’t think of any words to tell Link how she felt, so instead she leaned over and hugged him. “I love you so much,” she said, kissing Link on the cheek.

After he embraced Zelda, Link looked her over and made a disappointed sound. “You look like hell. Your hair is all messed up.”

Zelda felt the top of her head, knowing that she must look like some kind of undead zombie. She blushed slightly. “Well, you’re not looking so hot yourself. Well, you’re always hot, but that’s something else entirely. Besides, what are you gonna do about it?”

Link smiled and took Zelda’s hand. She had no idea what Link had in mind, so she blindly followed him. Link took Zelda to the vanity and sat her down in the chair. Her vanity was a simple table with a mirror on the wall in front of it. Strewn on the desk were various makeup supplies and a myriad of brushes, combs, and other hair accessories. “I’ve always wanted to do this for you,” said Link as he picked up one of Zelda’s hair brushes. Link gently smoothed down Zelda’s hair and began to brush it. Link caressed the thousands of beautiful golden strands as he moved the brush through her hair. He had always loved how beautiful Zelda’s hair was. It was so smooth and delicate. He always desired to just touch her hair once, and now he was brushing it for her. Link was almost in a state of bliss.

“That feels so good,” said Zelda. She couldn’t believe that Link could be so gentle to her. This brought back so many wonderful memories for Zelda. When she was a little girl, Impa would always brush her hair for her. It had always been part of their daily routine, and it was when they always engaged in their ‘girl-talk.’ But Impa had stopped brushing her hair years ago. Zelda had become so much more independent then. Now she usually did it herself. She never knew that Link could brush her hair. She never thought of him as the type of person to do this. She had always wanted him to, but always felt too embarrassed to ask.

Link was enjoying this as much or even more than Zelda. He had always loved her hair so much, it was the most beautiful thing about her. Now he held the soft strands in his hands, and he gently stroked them with the brush. He saw the calm look on Zelda’s face and knew she was enjoying the experience. “This is almost like a dream come true,” said Link in a dreamy voice. “Promise you won’t laugh at what I want to

say."

"I would never laugh at you," said Zelda.

Link smiled and continued brushing with smooth, even strokes. "I've always been fascinated by your hair. It's so beautiful and smooth and shiny. It's always been a kind of obsession for me. I know it sounds kind of weird, but I always thought it was the most beautiful thing about you. Whenever I saw you, your hair would always be bouncing and shining and it was like seeing some kind of angel. It's silly, but I always wanted to touch your hair, and feel it between my fingers. It's even more luxurious than I imagined. You truly are the most beautiful person I've ever seen. I hope you're enjoying this as much as I am."

"To tell you the truth, I've wanted you to do this, too," said Zelda. "But I was always too embarrassed to ask. I thought you wouldn't want to do it. But now that I know you're willing to, you can brush my hair anytime you want. Thank you so much."

Link smiled and continued brushing. He was almost hypnotized by the smooth motion of the bristles through her hair. It was almost like a dream, he couldn't believe it. Link stroked the hair on the top of her head and moved the brush all the way to the very bottom, about halfway down her back. He brushed back the strands at the top of her head until they were finally perfect. He stood back and looked at the job he'd done. It was more perfect than he'd predicted. Her hair was brushed smoothly back all the way from her scalp to her back. Her hair was no longer frizzy and tangled, now it was smooth and fell down in exquisite waves and layers. It was perfect. "I'm done," said Link. "What do you think?"

Zelda peered at herself in the mirror. The face that looked back at her was no longer drawn out and tired. Her eyes sparkled and her golden hair shone. She had never seen her hair like this before. It was so smooth and perfect. Link had done a better job than she or Impa had ever done. She was so impressed that he was able to brush her hair so professionally and dexterously. "It's perfect," said Zelda. She stood up and gave Link a long kiss on the lips. "That was so wonderful."

Link laid the brush back on the table and looked at the various accessories on it. "Do you want any of those thingies in your hair?" asked Link. "I could put one of those flower things or bows or something in it. It would be like icing on the cake. And you can't have cake without icing."

Zelda smiled at Link's thoughtfulness. She sat back down in the chair. "That's sounds nice. Why don't you pick something for me?" Link smiled and picked up a small basket with a hodgepodge of hair accessories in it. He wondered which one he should pick. Then his face lit up.

"I've got a great idea," beamed Link. "I think you'll like this." Link took a clump of strands from the side of her head, just above her left ear. He took the strands and smoothed them into a longer, larger strand that went from the side of her head to just below the back of her neck. He then split this large string of hair into three smaller clumps of strands. Then, with diligence Zelda had never seen, Link began to weave this small line of hair into a tiny braid. In just a couple minutes, he had formed a small, tight braid that led from the top of her left ear to the base of her neck, and ended up being about seven or eight inches long. Still holding the braid, Link took a small piece of purple ribbon from the basket and tied a small bow at the bottom of the braid, thus securing it. He draped the braid over her ear to store it temporarily. Then he repeated the entire process on the right side of her head, forming another identical braid on the right side. Link then took medium-sized violet bow from the basket, which had a small hair clip at the bottom of it. He pulled the two braids together and connected them with the bow where they intersected at the back of her head. He stood back and looked at his creation. The two small braids he'd woven were now tied together with a bow at the back of her head. Half of each braid hung down below the bow. The majority of her hair hung free down her back, save for the two small braids on the side.

Zelda only saw the front of each braid going from the side of her head to the back. She couldn't see what else Link had done. "So what did you do?" asked Zelda.

"I hope you like it," said Link. He picked up a small hand mirror from the table and angled it behind Zelda's head so she could see what Link had done. She saw the two small braids and the bow and beamed. She had never thought of a hairstyle like this before. It was something new and refreshing. "What do you think?" asked Link nervously.

"It's beautiful," replied Zelda. "Where did you learn to do hair like that? And how did you manage to

make those cute little braids? I didn't know you could do that." Link simply smiled. The hair was wrapped around the middle of her head, almost like the back of a little crown.

"I can do a lot of things you don't know about," said Link mysteriously. He set all the supplies back on the table. Zelda stood up and kissed Link on the cheek.

"It's really pretty, thanks for doing that for me. You know, I feel a lot better now. Maybe it's you or maybe it's that crap Impa gave me. Or both."

"Well, I'm glad you feel better. That's great because I had plans for later today," said Link.

"Oh? What kind of plans?"

"Don't you remember? I signed up to go see a lecture at the University today. It's at noon."

Zelda tried to think for a moment. "Oh wait, I think I remember you saying something about that. That's today?"

"Yes, it is. I signed us all up to go see it a week ago."

Zelda shrugged. "Okay, whatever. But why would you *want* to go to a lecture? I mean, I listen to Impa's lectures all the time, and they're not fun. You didn't bump your head or go crazy, did you?"

"It's not one of those lectures. It's an archaeologist who's gonna talk about ancient myths and artifacts. I always thought that kind of stuff was interesting. Who knows, maybe they'll talk about some of the Triforce legends or something. Maybe about something we don't know about. I'm just so bored, and I wanted to do something interesting for a change."

"Well, whatever you want, Linkie-pooh," teased Zelda. "You always do things for me, so I guess we can do that."

"I should probably get home, too. Solo was just as drunk as you and I hope she's okay."

"Oh, I forgot about her," said Zelda. She took Link's arm. "Well, let's go. We can take them with us too." Link and Zelda walked hand-in-hand out her door and down the hallway. In just a few short moments, they were out of the castle and on their way back to Link's home.

They quickly passed the spot where Zelda had gotten sick and Zelda gave a disgusted face. All that remained was dried and there was a whole army of ants crawling on it. This brought back the memory of what happened the previous night. Link then remembered the advances Zelda had made on him. "Zelda, remember about last night? When you said that you... 'wanted' me?" Zelda blushed and nodded. "Well, I can't complain about the kiss you gave me. But you know I didn't want to do anything else because I know we're too young for...you know, *that*. But I just wanted to know, out of curiosity, I mean I would never do this because it wouldn't be right, but I just want to know..."

"Can you get to the point?" interrupted Zelda. Link always started rambling when he was nervous or embarrassed.

Link blushed and tried to look like he wasn't feeling self-conscious. "Okay, I was just curious. If I hadn't have stopped you, would you...um... would you have gone all the way?"

Zelda stopped abruptly and turned to look at Link. She flashed him an almost seductive smile and leaned over to whispered in his ear, "I guess you'll never find out." Zelda flashed Link a sarcastic grin and they both continued walking.

Saria woke up a couple hours after sunrise. She had spent most of the previous night just relaxing. Since Link and Solo had been gone, she didn't need to do any work and she didn't even bother to make dinner. She just had some of the fruit left over from breakfast. Yawning, she stood up and stretched. Saria looked out the window and thought that this would probably be a nice day. She made her bed and then put on her normal green dress. She wondered if Link and Solo had even come home last night. Earlier that morning Link had said they would be gone all day, and then he came back saying that he would be gone all night, too. Still shaking off the drowsiness of sleep, Saria decided to walk over to Link's house to see if he was home. She quietly climbed up the ladder, just in case he was there and sleeping. Saria pushed through the drape over the door and look over at Link's bed. It was empty. *He must not have come home*

*last night*, thought Saria. She then looked over to Solo's bed to see that it was occupied. She reasoned that Link must have stayed at Zelda's house and that Solo had decided to come home. When Saria walked closer to Solo's bed, she noticed that it had not one, but two occupants. Malon was sleeping on her back, with her head turned towards Saria. Solo was face down with her head buried in a pillow next to Malon's head, and her arm around Malon's chest, snuggling up close to her. Saria had never seen such an adorable sight.

Saria was startled when Malon rolled over and opened her eyes. For a few brief moments, Saria and Malon stared at each other. Finally, Malon decided to sit up. "What are you doing in here?" asked Malon sleepily, rubbing her eyes.

"I'm always in here in the morning," replied Saria. "I was just coming to see if Link or Solo came home last night. Apparently Solo did. How come you're here? If I had known we were having visitors, I would've made breakfast."

"That's kind of a long story," responded Malon. "I had to bring Solo home last night because she wasn't quite...able to come home under her own power. Zelda decided to take the four of us to a tavern in town, and, well, Solo had a bit too much to drink. And so did Zelda. So Link took Zelda home and I took Solo home. She got pretty drunk."

"Drunk? What do you mean?" asked Saria, slightly confused. She had heard the term before, but never quite knew what it meant.

"They had too much alcohol to drink, and when that happens they get drunk."

"Alcohol? Like wine?" asked Saria. She knew that people drank wine in the outside world, but she had never had any herself, as well as the other Kokiri. Saria only knew what it was from hearing Link's tales.

"Yeah, except she had too much. And when you have too much, you get all dizzy and wobbly, and you can't think straight. Her speech was slurred and she kept falling over. People just get goofy and really weird when they're drunk. And then they get sick too."

"That sounds horrible," said Saria. "Why would anyone drink it if caused so much trouble?"

Malon was charmed by Saria's naïveté, she had no idea of the many seamy aspects of the outside world. "Well, it's supposed to make you feel good, but if you have too much you get sick. That's what happened to her." Malon pointed to Solo, whose face was on the pillow next to a small puddle of drool. Malon poked Solo on the shoulder, causing her to moan. Saria giggled. "I don't think she's gonna feel too good when she wakes up. She'll probably have a headache and be really queasy."

"Tell you what...I'll go back to my house and make something for breakfast. I'll make some oatmeal, if she feels sick that'll be good for her. I'll bring the stuff over when it's done so you guys don't have to get up."

"That's really nice of you," said Malon. Saria smiled and left. Malon then turned to Solo and tried to shake her awake. Solo rolled over and moaned. "Come on, wake up," said Malon, poking Solo's side.

"Uhh...Link I don't wanna get up," mumbled Solo, half-asleep. She pulled the covers over her face.

"Link's not here," said Malon.

Solo pushed away the covers to see Malon looking down at her. Then she remembered the night before. "Oh, what happened to me?" she groaned in extreme dysphoria.

"Remember? You got wasted last night and I had to practically carry you home."

"Oh yeah," groaned Solo. She sat up and tried to stop the world from spinning. "I feel sick. Uhh, my head hurts and I feel like puking. What did I do to deserve this?"

"Oh...I don't know...maybe it was those drinks you had," replied Malon. "Those things really pack a wallop. You know that you have no self-control."

Solo gave an unamused smile. "Thanks for pointing that out," said Solo sarcastically. "Oh man, I feel so bad. How come you're so up an at 'em?"

"Because I know my limits. You went crazy last night and had quite a few too many."

"I'm sorry if I put a burden on you," apologized Solo.

"It's okay, I know you would do the same thing for me. Besides, I like babying you. It's kinda fun." Malon blushed slightly.

"Well, thank you for staying with me last night. I just wanted some company. Did Link ever come

home?"

Malon pointed to the obviously empty bed. "No, he took Zelda home last night. She was drunker than you were. You weren't too bad, but you were a little tipsy."

"Yeah I remember," said Solo. "I remember having a great time last night, but I didn't know I would feel like this in the morning. My head hurts, and I feel so sick. And I'm kind of thirsty." Solo gave Malon a pleading look.

"There's some water over there. I'll get you some." Malon padded over to the table and poured some water from a pitcher into a small glass. She handed the glass to Solo and she drank it so fast that Malon almost did a double-take. "I guess you were pretty thirsty."

"Thanks," said Solo handing the glass to Malon and taking a deep breath. Solo started to rub her temples in a vain attempt at making the throbbing pain in her head go away.

"Saria's gonna come and bring us some oatmeal pretty soon."

Solo rubbed her belly and made a discomfited groan. "I don't really feel like eating."

"But you have to eat something," insisted Malon, like a mother talking to a child. "Breakfast is the most important meal of the day."

"Yeah, well, if I eat it I'll probably end up losing it anyway. My stomach feels like it's being tied in knots and I feel like I've been spinning in circles for the last six hours."

Malon felt bad for Solo, she looked so sick and uncomfortable. Malon wished she could be the one who was hungover and not Solo. Malon went and sat on the bed next to Solo and put her arm around her shoulder. "Don't worry Angel, I'll make you feel better."

Solo leaned her head onto Malon's shoulder. "Thank you, I feel better just being next to you. If only you could make my stomach stop churning, then we'd have something."

"You'll be fine later," said Malon. A noise came from just outside the house and they both looked to see Saria coming up the ladder holding a basket. "See, there she is with the food right now. I want you to promise me you'll eat something." Solo nodded.

Saria walked into the house and set the basket on the table. She began to remove its contents and place them on the table. "I brought the oatmeal and some bowls and stuff." Saria took three empty bowls from the basket along with a much larger lidded pot filled with oatmeal. Saria also removed a tea kettle and a wooden cup. "I also made some special tea for Solo." Saria poured a steaming liquid into the mug and handed it to Solo.

Solo sniffed the hot liquid and blew on it. "What is it?" asked Solo.

"It's a special herbal tea I made," replied Saria. "Malon said you might have a headache and your stomach would be upset, so I made a special blend for you. It's got willow bark, ginger, and honey in it. It should make you feel better. It's the same thing I always gave to Link when he had a cold."

Solo nodded and took a sip. Luckily, it wasn't too hot. The ginger gave the tea a sharp, almost spicy taste, while the honey gave a more smooth, sweet flavor. "This isn't bad," said Solo, sipping the tea. She held the cup with one hand and massaged one of her temples with other. "If anything, I hope this makes my headache go away." The throbbing in Solo's head had only gotten worse since she'd woken up. The dull throbbing had now transformed into sharp stabbing pains. While Solo was busy sipping the tea, Saria and Malon began eating their oatmeal. Solo cringed at the sight of them eating in front of her. "Do you guys have to do that in front of me?" said Solo in a sickened voice.

Malon and Saria both gave innocent looks. "Well, it's not my fault you drank yourself silly last night," said Malon. She took another spoonful of oatmeal and purposely made a show of eating it. Malon put the spoon into her mouth and rubbed her stomach. "Mmmm...that's good," moaned Malon. She took another spoonful from the bowl and ate that one. "You should have some, it's so filling."

Solo only flashed a cold stare. "You keep doing that and you'll be wearing that oatmeal," threatened Solo. Malon smirked and went to eating her food normally. Solo drank the last of the tea in a long gulp and held the glass out to Saria. "Do you have any more?"

Saria nodded. "Yeah, there's some more in this kettle." Saria stood up and took Solo's cup, going over to the table and pouring her some more. Saria handed the refilled mug to Solo, who smiled to show her appreciation.

Solo took a sip of the new cup of tea. This one seemed a bit sweeter than the last, but perhaps she was just imagining it. "You know, I think this stuff might actually be working," said Solo in a slightly improved mood. "I think my headache's gone away and my stomach feels a lot better."

"See, Saria knows what's best for you," said Saria with a smile.

"Whatever you say, mother," remarked Solo with a grin. She went to the table and took the bowl of oatmeal that had been prepared for her. Solo sat back down and began to eat it in small spoonfuls. To her surprise, the oatmeal helped to calm her stomach more. "This is pretty good."

"Thanks," replied Saria. "I finally managed to get my hands on some fresh oats, so it should taste a lot better than normal. The big bag at home was full of bugs, so I had to find some more."

"Eew," remarked Solo, pausing her eating and staring into the bowl. She swirled the spoon around to make sure there were no creatures crawling in her oatmeal.

"Don't worry, that stuff is okay, I checked."

"You know, if you didn't throw the oats away yet, I could take them," offered Malon. "I can give it to the horses, I don't think they'll mind if there's a few beetles in their food. Besides, the bugs give it a nice crunch."

Solo gave a look of displeasure and put down the spoonful of oatmeal that she had been about to eat. "Ugh, I don't think I'm hungry anymore," said Solo. She stood up and put the bowl back on the table.

"You're such a wimp," remarked Malon. Solo just stuck out her tongue mockingly at Malon.

"Thanks for the tea, Saria. I feel a lot better now." Solo gave Saria a thankful smile and placed the empty cup back on the table. They all heard a noise come from outside and turned to Link and Zelda climb up the ladder and walk inside.

Link was surprised to see the three people already in his house. "What, are you guys having a party and you didn't invite me?" asked Link sarcastically.

"Oh yeah, you missed all the fun," replied Solo. "We were partying and having a blast all night. Too bad you weren't here."

"Does anybody have anything serious to say?" asked Link, ignoring Solo's comments.

"I was just bringing breakfast for these two," said Saria. "Looks like you finally decided to come home."

"Yeah, well I thought I should come check on Solo. She looks like she's not feeling too good." Solo merely gave Link a look that only a brother could understand. "But she looks like she's just fine."

"I am now," said Solo. "Saria's tea really helped."

"Tell me, were you really...hungover this morning?" asked Zelda. "'Cause you had some of that Aldorian stuff last night, and I'll tell you right now that I didn't feel very good."

"A hangover?" said Solo. "I guess that's what it was. I don't think I'll ever drink anything again for the rest of my life. It felt worse than the days before...you know, *that time of the month*. And I thought that was really bad."

Zelda and Malon nodded in understanding while like stood there trying to decode what Solo had said. Then it hit him, and he gave a disgusted look. "Eew, do you *have* to talk about that?" said Link. "I think that falls into the 'too much information' category."

Zelda sighed. "You wouldn't understand unless you had to go through that," commented Zelda. "Boys are wimpy, and you wouldn't be able to handle it. But I think Solo's right. I just thank the gods Impa gave me that remedy of hers, at least I feel better now."

"Well, Solo, since you feel better, you should get dressed because we've gotta go in a little while," said Link.

"Go where?" asked Solo.

Link sighed, apparently Solo's memory was just as bad as Zelda's. "Remember? I signed up for that archaeology lecture today. It's in a little over an hour and we should all get going."

"But I thought that was for you. Why do I have to go?" whined Solo. "Schools are boring."

"I thought you could get a little culture for once. You can't stay cooped up in the house all day. It'll be fun. The guy's gonna talk about ancient history and show people all sorts of cool artifacts. Like masks, and armor, and swords and stuff."

"I think that would be interesting," chimed Malon. "Living on a ranch and feeding horses all day is so boring, I think it would be fun to find out about all those ancient myths and stuff. I really don't get much of a chance to look into that stuff on my own. My dad's got a couple books, but they're not that informative."

"See, at least *somebody's* on my side," remarked Link, glaring at Solo.

"I never knew you were into myths and stuff," said Solo to Malon.

"Well, it's just that they're a little more interesting than the modern world. Life today is just so uninteresting."

"Fine, I guess I'll get dressed and get ready to go," conceded Solo.

Saria gathered the bowls and cups she had brought and put them back in the basket. "I'll clean up and you guys can go to your little lecture thingy," said Saria. She packed up the basket and left the house.

Solo got off the bed and dug around for some clothes to wear. When she had finally picked something clean enough to wear, she looked at Link, Malon, and Zelda, who were standing there staring idly. "Do you mind?" said Solo, slightly annoyed. "This isn't a freak show, do you think I could have a little privacy while I put some clothes on?"

Link and Zelda turned around and went out on the balcony with slight looks of embarrassment on their faces. Malon remained for a moment and smirked at Solo. "You weren't that modest last night," remarked Malon.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Oh nothing," said Malon as she turned around to join the other two on the balcony.

Link leaned over to whisper in Malon's ear, "I hope she wasn't too much trouble last night. Zelda threw up and passed out, so I had to carry her the rest of the way home."

"Oh, she was just fine," said Malon. "She was such a cute little drunk. She acted just like a little kid. I tucked her in all nice and she just fell asleep. But that was after she rambled endlessly on the way home. I don't know what's going on in her head, but I don't think I want to know."

"I know what that's like," said Zelda, wrapping her arm around Link's shoulder. "He goes on for hours when he starts talking about something he's interested in."

"Oh, that's so cute." Link glared at Malon, and she just smiled back. He hated how girls were always systematically trying to embarrass him. It was as if the mission of every female was to make him as uncomfortable as possible.

"I don't ramble," huffed Link, folding his arms over his chest with an expression of stern determination. "I just have a lot to say."

The awkward moment was interrupted when Solo came out from the house, dressed in her usual blue tunic. She walked up to Zelda from behind and stopped for a moment to look at her hair. Solo gently touched the braids on the back of Zelda's head and made a gleeful sound. "Oh, I just love what you did to your hair!" exclaimed Solo.

"Really?" asked Zelda, smiling self-consciously.

"Yeah, it's so cute. How did you think of that?"

"Link did it for me," replied Zelda, hugging Link proudly. "It was all his idea."

"That's so sweet," said Malon in a cute voice. Link blushed slightly. "It's so nice of you to do that. Girls really like getting their hair brushed and stuff. And you did such a good job."

"Yeah, Link. Where'd you learn to do that?" asked Solo, amazed that her brother could be so creative.

Link merely shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know, I just did it," said Link meekly. He looked at the girls for a moment and then began to climb down the ladder. "Why don't we get going? I don't want to be late." The other three nodded and followed Link down the ladder.

## Chapter Three

The University of Hyrule was bustling with people going about their business. Some were students attending classes, and others were teachers and lecturers in between classes. Most of the people here were in their late teens and early twenties. Link, Zelda, Solo, and Malon made an interesting contrast to the older people on the campus. A few people gave them strange looks, but most simply ignored them. Seeing such young children at a prestigious university was a fairly uncommon sight. They all took in the sight of the magnificent buildings of the University. The main building was a large, temple-like structure with high arches and dozens of flying buttresses. The main building was four stories tall, and it had large stained-glass windows on its façade. There were also many smaller buildings, all one-story dome-like structures.

They all looked in awe at the buildings. Link, Zelda, and Solo were amazed, as they had never seen this place before. "Wow, this is really beautiful," said Zelda. "I've never really been here before."

"I know, isn't this place great?" said Link. He began to walk down one of the narrow streets towards a cluster of buildings. "The archaeology department is that way," he said, pointing in the direction of the buildings. "That's where the lecture is."

"How did you ever come up with the idea of coming here?" asked Solo. She had never thought of Link as the intellectual type.

"Well, I come here sometimes to look in the museums and the zoo. In fact, I'm thinking of signing up for a few classes sometime. After all, I've got nothing better to do."

"Is that what you do when you go out for whole days and not tell us where you're going?" asked Solo.

"Yeah, sometimes," replied Link. "I just never told you guys, 'cause I thought you might think I was weird or something."

"We wouldn't think you were weird, Linkie-pooh," said Zelda adoringly. "I think it's kinda cute that my boyfriend is a closet genius. I'm surprised that you never told me. I always thought school was really boring. All my tutors ever do is go on for hours about math and grammar. I really think they have no other purpose than to bore me."

"My dad always taught me everything I know," said Malon. "He's really smart, but he doesn't know everything. Everything else I get from books that I buy at the market sometimes. I'd really like to learn more math, but Dad isn't very good at that."

"You can take classes here," said Link. "A month-long course only costs twenty rupees. In fact, all of you should come here, we could all take classes together."

"I don't wanna go to school," whined Solo. "I'd rather have you teach it to me, Link. I can understand you better." Solo had always been a street-smart girl, due to being homeless for so many years. But she had never been taught any skills that had to do with book-smarts. Since they had met, Link had taught Solo all he knew about reading, writing, and arithmetic. Solo enjoyed learning these things from Link. He always explained things in a way she could understand. She liked how he always got so enthusiastic about what he was teaching her. Solo never imagined that she would ever be able to read, but Link had taught her well. After only a few months of tutoring, Solo could already read at a near-normal level for someone her age. However, her only pitfall was spelling and grammar, which she was not very good at.

"But these people are professionals," insisted Link. "But you don't have to do that, I'm perfectly happy teaching you myself." They passed a building that housed the Mathematics department. "Ooh, that's a lot of fun," said Link.

Zelda stuck out her tongue and made a sickened face. "How could you like math?" asked Zelda. "Of all the things the tutors teach me, that has to be the most boring thing. It makes no sense to me."

"Oh, come on. Math is fun!" exclaimed Link. "Math explains everything about the world, like shapes and geometry they use in buildings."

Solo looked at one of the signs next to a door on the math building. "Al-gee-bra," said Solo, trying to sound out the words on the sign. "Algae bra? Is that a class about Zoran underwear?"

Link chuckled lightly and tried not to break out laughing. "That says 'algebra.' It's another kind of math. It uses letters along with numbers. It's cool, but it's too remedial for me."

Zelda gave Link a baffled look. "Are you serious? Algebra is the hardest, most boring thing ever! How can you like that?"

"It's so...logical," replied Link. "Besides, Algebra is too easy. I'm thinking of taking Calculus some time. Now *that's* fun." Link rubbed his hands together like some kind of crazed scientist.

"Is Link always this...weird?" asked Malon. Link gave a heated stare. "I didn't mean any offense."

"He's just full of surprises," said Zelda in a loving tone. She held Link's hand tightly. "I love him just the way he is. He makes life more interesting."

"I hate to interrupt your debating over my personality, but we're here," said Link, gesturing towards the door to another building. A sign next to the door read *Doctor Miko Sailann, President Archaeology Department*. Link walked into the building, followed by the others. This building was a small auditorium, with a large table at the head of the room and stadium-style seats in the back. All the stepped levels in the back were lined with nearly a hundred desks. Link walked by the table at the front of the room and grew giddy as he saw the array of artifacts. There were dozens of old ornamental masks, swords, suits of armor, pottery, and a myriad of wrinkled, yellowing scrolls. "Ooh! Look at all this stuff!" Link exclaimed. He examined all the artifacts on the table, which were being publicly displayed for the lecture. "This is so cool!"

A middle-aged man walked up to Link from the other side of the long table and smiled at him. "I take it you like the stuff here," said the man, who had long silver hair and an intelligent-looking face.

"This stuff is so awesome," said Link. "I'm glad I finally signed up for one of these lectures. History is just so interesting."

The man smiled. "Good, I'm glad. It's nice to see such a young person interested in archaeology. Most kids your age would rather be out playing games or chasing women. I don't get a lot of enthusiastic people in here. Most of my students take this class so they can come and take a nap. It's their loss. Allow me to introduce myself, I'm Doctor Sailann, and I'll be giving the lecture."

Link excitedly shook the doctor's hand. "Nice to meet you, sir," said Link. "I hope this'll be as good as I've heard."

Dr. Sailann smiled. "Oh, I've got a lot of really great things for today. I guarantee that you'll be fascinated by my lecture. I'm going to talk about a lot of really old legends and myths that most people have never heard of. Ancient mythology is very intriguing. I'm going to start in a minute, so why don't you guys go get comfortable?"

Link nodded and dragged his friends over to some desks that were in the front row. Link sat down and fidgeted in his seat, in giddy anticipation of the coming lecture. Malon, Solo, and Zelda were less than enthusiastic, however. They simply came here to indulge Link, and they didn't really care for the subject being taught. Zelda especially marveled at Link's enthusiasm and anticipation. She thought it was cute. Link was almost child-like in his anticipation, he was like a little kid waiting to open a birthday present.

The others gazed around the room, looking at the wide array of different people. Most of the students here were in their early twenties, and looked fairly decent. There were a few punk-looking kids with bizarre hairstyles and even weirder clothes. Malon made a surprised sound when she saw a familiar-looking woman sitting at a desk a few rows away. This woman appeared middle-aged and had long, gray hair tied in a waist-length braid. Malon never forgot a face, and that braid was a dead giveaway. She jabbed Link at the side, and he turned to look at her with an annoyed face. "That's the woman from the bar," said Malon. She pointed in the woman's direction.

Link turned to see who Malon was pointing at. "Who? Her?" asked Link.

"Yeah, that's the lady that drank six bottles of booze," added Malon.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure, I never forget a face." Malon leaned over and tapped Zelda on the shoulder, who sat to Link's left, and got Solo's attention, who was on Malon's right. Both girls turned to see what Malon wanted. "That's the drinking woman from the bar," whispered Malon. Solo and Zelda both looked at the woman and gasped in surprise.

"You're right, that *is* her," said Zelda.

"What do you think she's doing here?" asked Solo.

"Maybe she's interested in history, too," said Malon.

"I don't how she could even stand to come here after how much she had to drink last night," said Zelda. "She had a lot more to drink than I did last night. I felt like dying when I woke up this morning, and I can't even imagine how she felt. She should be unconscious, or dead."

"Maybe she has special powers," speculated Solo, half-serious and half-joking.

"Will you guys be quiet?" whispered Link loudly. "The guy's starting." The girls hushed themselves and looked towards the front of the room, waiting for the doctor to begin.

He stood at the middle of the table and got everyone's attention. "Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am Doctor Miko Sailann, president of the University's archaeology department. Some of you are currently taking my classes, and I thank you for giving up your free time for this special lecture. The rest of you have come to this as a one-time deal. Today I am going to give a big talk about some of the most interesting facets of our history. Today will concentrate mostly on mythology. Hyrule has a long history of interesting myths. Most of these you probably have never heard of. My purpose here is to interest you in these ancient myths, with the hope that maybe you'll pursue that as a career. Archaeology is a very dynamic and interesting field."

He turned towards the large blackboard and took a piece of chalk from the ledge. "I'll start out with the myths and religions of the Ancient Hylians, who were our predecessors." With almost, blinding speed, the doctor scribbled the names of some ancient tribes on the blackboard, in scrawling, barely-legible handwriting. As he was writing down the name of one group, the chalk impacted with the blackboard and broke in half. The doctor sighed. "Lousy, cheap chalk they keep on buying," he muttered. Dr. Sailann grabbed a new piece and continued scribbling.

Link watched with acute attention, taking in every word the doctor said with absolute relish. This stuff was so interesting. Malon also listened to him speak, fascinated by her country's ancient history. Zelda and Solo, however, were less than enthusiastic. Zelda merely stared into space, trying to pay attention, but failing. She came to this lecture to appease Link, but she was finding it immensely boring. It was a struggle to keep her eyes open. Her head felt so heavy, she just wanted to curl up and go to sleep. Finally unable to control herself, Zelda rested her head on Link's shoulder, Link not even noticing. He was too enthralled in the lecture. Solo stared with equal apathy. Instead of listening, she began to entertain herself mentally. She tried to turn the lecture into a little game. She tried to count how many times the doctor broke his chalk, or how many times he said a particular word. But even that was becoming increasingly boring.

After nearly an hour of lecturing, Link was still hanging on Dr. Sailann's every word. Solo had finally succumbed to her boredom, and was now sleeping soundly with her head in Malon's lap. Zelda still had her head on Link's shoulder, but she wasn't quite asleep. Her eyes were barely open, and she focused on some invisible point on the far wall. Mentally, she was in another universe. Her brain was totally empty in a state of mental nothingness. She was essentially sleeping with her eyes open.

"Now I'm going to get to the most fascinating part of this particular period," said the doctor with great enthusiasm. He so loved his job, enjoying every part of it. "Over the centuries, many people have sought the key to everlasting life. People have searched for fountains of youth, and magical elixirs that would prolong life indefinitely. It seems like immortality is the one common thread among all mythologies. Everyone wants to attain it in their own way, but it never happens."

"The most well-known and longest-lasting of these myths is the legend of the Hateru Stone. From historical studies, we believe that the legend first emerged between three thousand and thirty-five hundred years ago. Ancient scrolls, copies of which I have here," he held up an old, yellowing roll of paper, "tell of a mysterious crystal that has the power to grant immortality. Back when this story first emerged, whole countries fought wars in search of this mystical stone. Recently found scrolls shed even more light on the legend. Surprisingly, the Hateru Stone isn't simply a single crystal. It is said to actually be a pair. There are two identical stones. One has the power to grant eternal life, while the other is a kind of terrible curse. It was probably supposed to be a test of faith or courage, to pick the right stone."

"About two thousand years ago, all word of the legends vanished. It was as if it suddenly dropped out of history. The most mysterious part is that one-half of the Hateru Stone exists today." He opened a small

wooden chest on the table and pulled out a beautiful, shining blue stone. "Some years ago, this was unearthed in the remains of an ancient temple. This is believed to be one of the Hateru Stones. You might be wondering why nobody is fighting over this, since it could be the key to immortality. But the scrolls we found in the temple helped to greatly increase our understanding of this legend. The scrolls tell that the Stones will only work when they are together. From what I can gather, the key to this immortality is to put the stones together. Then only one of them will give eternal life, the other will bestow a great curse. The person must choose the correct one in a final test. Unfortunately, that's all that the scrolls say. Some were so deteriorated and faded, that they couldn't be read. It figures that the most important parts were unreadable. The last line of one of the scrolls tells about the Stones. We think that the rest of the scroll told exactly how to use the stones, and what to expect."

He took the chalk and wrote some foreign-looking letters and ideograms on the blackboard. "These are the last lines on the scroll, that hint at the key to the mystery. Roughly translated, this means 'The chooser knows not what he has chosen, he who chooses the blessing chooses life, he who chooses the curse chooses death.' This is fairly cryptic, but it is so far the best translation we can come up with. Nobody is really sure what it means."

The doctor was interrupted when the woman with braided gray hair raised her hand. "Yes, ma'am. Do you have a question?"

"More of a comment, really," replied the woman curtly. I noticed how you chose to translate that particular sentence. I just thought I'd point out that... well... it's wrong."

"Excuse me?" said Dr. Sailann, surprised. "I've studied Ancient Hylian for years and I think I have a fairly good understanding of the language. Believe me when I say it took me a very long time to translate these scrolls. I don't think that I made a mistake."

"Well, you did," said the woman.

"And what gives you the credentials to make that judgment? I have studied this language all my life. What do you think this says?"

"Well, you made a crucial mistake in the translation of that sentence," she said. "This particular construction uses a very rare form of grammar. It uses the subjunctive causative conjugations and declensions and doesn't mean literally what it seems to say. Where it says what the person chooses, those objects actually belong to the other clauses, not the ones they are in. The second part of the sentence should read, 'He who chooses the blessing chooses death, and he who chooses the curse chooses life.' The direct objects are reversed, and it radically changes the meaning of the sentence."

Dr. Sailann stood silently for a moment, pondering what the woman had said. She made an interesting case. "Well, if I'm wrong, I'll admit it. But Ancient Hylian isn't spoken anymore, it had to be reconstructed from ancient documents and scrolls that were written during the transition between Ancient Hylian and Old Hylian. But I have to say, you have an interesting hypothesis. If you're right, then it could change everything we thought we knew about the Hateru Stones. If you don't mind my asking, how do you know that the sentence is wrong?"

"Because I speak Ancient Hylian," replied the woman. "Natively."

"That's impossible," chuckled Dr. Sailann. "Ancient Hylian has been a dead language for over two thousand years. No one has spoken it for centuries."

"That's true. But I do."

"Well, I suppose it is possible that some parts of the language have survived through the centuries. But the odds of the entire language surviving for this long are almost zero. I'll talk to the linguistics department later and see what they think."

"Now, if I may continue the lecture..." Dr. Sailann continued. He went on explaining the legend of the Hateru Stones, and when he was finished with that he told of some more legends, the Triforce being one of them.

For about forty-five more minutes, the doctor continued his lecture. Link listened with such interest, he never thought a lecture could be so much fun. After giving a long account of the various digs he'd been to, Dr. Sailann finally concluded the lecture, dismissing the class. All the students shoved notebooks into their bags and stood up to leave. The braided woman approached the table and began speaking to Dr. Sailann in words that Link couldn't hear. They laughed for a moment and they both left the auditorium to discuss the woman's hypothesis with the linguistics department.

Link stood up and stretched, sitting down for so long was very uncomfortable. He turned around to see that Zelda's had fallen onto Link's chair when he got up, causing her to awaken. Zelda looked around and noticed that the whole room was empty. She looked at Link and saw nothing but a smirk on his face. "That was boring," said Zelda poutingly.

"I didn't think that was boring," said Malon. She sighed when she realized that Solo was still sleeping with her head on Malon's lap, snoring almost inaudibly. Malon stifled a chuckle and poked Solo on the shoulder.

Solo shifted slightly and moaned. "Link... I don't wanna do the dishes," she mumbled incoherently.

"Solo, the lecture is over, you can wake up now," said Malon, shaking Solo's shoulder.

Solo shot up and looked around. She was confused for a moment, but then realized where she was. "Oh yeah," she mumbled. Solo stretched and yawned. "That was interesting," said Solo, trying to humor Link, who had a disappointed look on his face.

"You could've at least tried to stay awake," huffed Link.

"I guess I needed a nap," said Solo. "We should get that guy to come over to our house and talk every night. Then maybe I could get more sleep at night." Solo rubbed her eyes and yawned again.

"Solo, you drooled all over my dress," complained Malon, gazing at the small puddle on her dress.

Solo blushed madly, trying to hide her embarrassment. "Oh, sorry," she said. "Here I'll help you." Solo tried to rub the spot off Malon's dress, but only succeeded in making the spot larger.

"That's not helping," complained Malon. Malon pushed Solo's hands away. "Just leave it, it'll dry up in a few minutes. Can't you at least sleep without drooling all over everything?"

"I can't help it," whined Solo. Link chuckled and Solo flashed a glare. "At least I don't snore like a bear and mumble Zelda's name all night. You're the reason I never get any sleep."

Link's face turned beet red. "What are you talking about?" he said.

"You know what I'm talking about. You snore so loud, I'm surprised that you don't wake up the whole forest. And you talk in your sleep, mumbling Zelda's name constantly. You ramble and hold conversations even when you're sleeping."

"You mumble my name when you're asleep?" asked Zelda, fascinated. She began to wonder what kind of dreams Link had about her. She had dreamed about him on numerous occasions, but had always been too embarrassed to tell him. Besides, some of the dreams were a little less than wholesome, and she figured that Link wouldn't want to hear about them.

"She's just making that up," countered Link, crossing his arms over his chest. "I don't talk in my sleep."

"Right," said Solo sarcastically. "You believe what you want. But I know what I heard. Anyways, can we go home now? I sat through your stupid lecture."

"Yeah, you *slept* through it," muttered Link. "Maybe you would've gotten a little culture if you'd kept your eyes open. But I don't want to go home. I figured that since we're here, we could head off to the zoo. It's just down at the other end of the campus, and it might be a nice break. Besides, maybe this time you'll stay awake."

"Ooh! The zoo sounds like fun!" exclaimed Zelda. "Come on, let's go," she said, grabbing Link's arm. Malon and Solo followed closely behind as Link led them towards the south side of the campus, where the zoological park lay.

"What do they have at the zoo?" asked Solo to Malon, unsure if this would be another one of Link's crazy schemes.

"They have all sorts of different animals there," replied Malon. "Really exotic ones that you can't see normally."

"That sounds interesting," said Solo, imagining what these exotic animals would look like. The only animals she had ever seen were the normal barnyard variety: birds, chickens, ducks, geese, dogs, cats, cows, and horses. Those animals were fairly boring to her, she hoped that the zoo's exotic animals would be more interesting.

After a few minutes of winding through the crowded campus, the group finally made it to the entrance of the zoo. They could hear animals making a whole host of different sounds from behind the ornate gates. A decorative sign above the gates read *Hyrule Zoological Park*. Link led the group to a small admission office right next to the gate. The clerk waved Link's whole group through, not making him pay for admission. "How come we didn't have to pay?" asked Malon. She saw the sign that said *Children: 6 rupees, Adults: 10 rupees*.

"Because I told them the princess was here," said Link.

"Yeah, I've seen that lady before and she knows who I am," said Zelda. They walked through the gates and into a large open space. There was a decorative fountain in the middle and there were signs pointing to the many animal exhibits.

"What do you want to see first?" asked Link to the group.

"I don't really care, as long as it's not farm animals," said Malon.

"Ooh! Let's go see the jungle animals!" exclaimed Solo. When no one objected, Solo gleefully ran in the direction of *Jungle World*. As Solo ran, she imagined what the fantastic jungle animals would look like. She had only seen normal farm animals and wildlife in her life, and she hadn't even known that this zoo existed. Link, Zelda, and Malon quickly followed behind Solo, trying to keep up with her.

Solo finally stopped when she reached a fenced-off area with a big colorful banner that said *Jungle World*. The rest of the group stopped next to Solo and looked at her for her next move. They followed her to the first animal exhibit. This habitat was strewn with false rocks and a miniature forest of tropical trees. Solo leaned over a metal railing and peered into the habitat. All she saw were strange-looking plants and nondescript rocks. "Where's the animals?" whined Solo. "I wanted to see jungle animals!"

"Don't look at me," said Link. "I didn't make this exhibit. What animals are supposed to be here anyways?"

Solo looked at the sign posted nearby and tried to read it. "Co...colo...something monkeys. I have no idea what that other word says."

"Colobus monkeys," said Link.

"What's 'colobus' mean?" asked Zelda.

"What's a monkey?" asked Malon. She only knew of run-of-the-mill farm animals, and had never even heard of these exotic animals.

"They're little furry animals that look like little hairy people," clarified Link.

"I want to see the little hairy monkeys!" whined Solo. "Where are they?" She peered into the exhibit one more time, trying to catch a glimpse of one of the monkeys. Then she saw a tiny lump of fur tucked away in the corner between two rocks. "There's one!"

The other three looked at the monkey Solo had pointed to, which was curled up in a ball sleeping. They saw more of the animals nearby, all of them lying in odd positions, not moving an inch. "Do they do anything?" said Malon, unimpressed. "I can go home to see sleeping animals."

"Well, they have to do something some time," said Zelda. "Nothing can sit around and sleep all day...except Link." Link glared at her comment. Just then, they saw a young lady walk by who was wearing a zookeeper's uniform. Zelda flagged down the lady, and she stopped and smiled.

"Can I help you?" asked the lady.

"Yeah, do those monkeys actually do anything?" asked Zelda, pointing to the extremely uninteresting exhibit.

The woman looked at the exhibit and frowned. She shrugged her shoulders. "Actually, they usually do. Monkeys are lazy, but they're never *that* lazy. It's mating season and they're usually in a frenzy right now. You should see they're mating rituals, they're fascinating."

"Well, why aren't they doing anything?" whined Solo. "I wanna see the monkeys dance or something."

"I've never really seen anything like it," replied the zookeeper. "All the animals have been sluggish

lately. Some of them have been acting quite strangely, too. One of our tigers dug a whole last week and hid in it for three days. And I'll tell you something, tigers don't dig holes."

"That's weird," commented Link.

"Tell me about it. I've worked here my whole life, and I've never seen animals act like this. You know, they say that when animals behave strangely, that means some kind of calamity is about to happen. Like before earthquakes, people's pets go totally nuts. Personally, I don't believe in that rubbish." She looked over to the exhibit and sighed. "Sorry, but there's nothing I can do to make the monkeys more active." The woman then walked away and continued going about her business.

"Well this really sucks," commented Solo, folding her arms over her chest. "I wanted to see the animals do something."

"How 'bout we go to the next exhibit?" suggested Link. "All the animals can't be this bad."

"Okay fine," said Solo. She left the disappointing exhibit and they all walked over to the next one. This next exhibit looked like a miniature savanna. It was a yellow plain with tufts of tall, tan grass and a few small flowering plants. Solo made a squeal of joy when she saw the animals in this exhibit: huge gray elephants. There were two elephants in this exhibit, and none of them had ever seen an animal so huge.

"Look at the size of that thing!" exclaimed Malon. "It's huge! How can something that big even stand up?" All of them were taken aback by the sheer size of the creatures.

"What are they doing?" asked Zelda, pointing to the bizarrely acting animals. The elephants were flailing their trunks in the air and running around in circles. Loud thumps sounded as the elephants circled their enclosure. Every now and then, one of them would stand still and make a loud trumpeting noise.

"Now *that's* what I wanted to see," commented Solo, happy to see some of the animals actually doing something.

"I don't think they're supposed to do that," said Link, getting a strange feeling of foreboding at seeing the elephants' unusual behavior.

"What do you mean?" asked Zelda.

"Well, I'm not an animal expert, but they look a little distressed. They're way too big to be running around like that. They look like they're running *from* something. I think they want to escape." Link stared at the distressed elephants, and had a look of worry on his face.

"Link, are you okay?" asked Zelda, becoming concerned. Link was usually very jovial, and he never looked this worried. She put her arm around his and looked into his eyes.

"I just got this weird feeling," he replied. He had an ominous feeling of foreboding that he hadn't felt in a long time. It reminded him of the feelings he'd had when he had prophetic dreams. But he hadn't had any dreams lately, and he had no idea why he was feeling this way. Maybe it was just nervousness or stress, but he couldn't think of anything that was stressing him. In fact, his life couldn't have been better right now.

"What kind of feeling?" she asked.

"I don't know," he replied, shrugging it off. "It's just nothing. I'm sure I'll be fine." He looked at the rest of his group, who were rapidly becoming bored. "Let's just go find something else. There has to be something here." Everyone agreed with Link's suggestion. Although the scampering elephants were entertaining at first, they were becoming dull very quickly. They all walked aimlessly through the zoo, trying to find an interesting exhibit. Hopefully their day wouldn't turn out to be a total waste.

She silently crept through the auditorium, being careful not to make any noise that would draw attention to herself. She gazed around the large room and made sure no one was around. Good. The auditorium that had been just a few hours ago bustling with people was now completely empty. This was the same auditorium that Dr. Sailann had just held his lecture in a few hours before. All the artifacts he had displayed were still sitting out on the table in the open. No one every worried about thieves in the University, most of the priceless artifacts were under guard in the museum. This room didn't contain any objects that would be considered priceless. Most of them were dusty old masks and broken pottery. The

only thing that could be considered even remotely valuable was the blue stone that sat in a small, open chest. But no one ever considered stealing this rock, the legends and myths surrounding it made everyone fear for their lives. No one wanted to end up dead for stealing a small crystal. But she knew better, she knew that this stone was the key to finally ending the torture she had endured forever. She remembered when she had first found this stone so long ago, how she watched her one and only friend die for it. Now Kisei, as she had once been called, was prepared to finish the job she had started. She remembered when she had been the crazy Kisei-the-scientist who lived in her little cottage, performing one hare-brained experiment after another. But then she had met her friend Lani, and her whole life had changed. But that damned stone ended up giving her a life of misery. But it would be over soon.

She quietly moved to the table at the head of the room and opened the small chest that contained the stone. She opened it and was greeted by a dull, blue glow. The stone only shone with a fraction of its original brightness, it would not return to its original brilliance until it was joined with its mate. She put the stone in her pocket while removing an identical blue sapphire from her other pocket. She had had this blue stone specially cut to exactly match the Hateru Stone in appearance. However, the sapphire weighed less than the real stone, but she would be long gone before anybody found out. Kisei put the sapphire in the chest and closed it. She then turned around and left through the back entrance into an alley, right where she had entered from. Kisei removed the mask that covered her face and walked through the campus as if she belonged there. No one would discover that the stone had been stolen for at least a few hours, and no one would ever suspect this middle-aged woman to be the thief. She smiled at her ingenuity and chuckled at the idiocy of the security in this place. She could've stolen millions of rupees worth of artifacts without being caught. But her goal was not wealth or money. She was sick and tired of her life, and money couldn't help her problem.

Kisei left the campus and mounted her horse that she had tied up out front. She rode in a southerly direction, heading towards the now nearly abandoned town of Quatari. She had lived there most of her life, and it had once been a thriving mecca of commerce. Now it was a near ghost town, with only a few aging residents left. She didn't care, she liked the privacy. No one ever came knocking at her door. Now that she had the first stone, it was only a matter of time before her plan was complete. The stone's mate had disappeared so many years ago, and it was due to return soon. By her calculations, it would end up somewhere in the southeast corner of Hyrule field in less than day. She just had to make sure she would be the first one there to get it.

"Well, *that* was a very disappointing day," whined Solo once again. The group was just leaving the zoo, after seeing nothing but disappointing exhibits and hiding animals.

"It wasn't a total loss," said Zelda. "Link bought me this." She showed the group for the umpteenth time the small stuffed emu that Link had purchased in the gift shop. "It's so cute, it has a long neck but it's a bird. I never knew there were huge birds that couldn't fly."

Solo rolled her eyes. "Yeah, we all know. You love the emu."

"You don't have to be such a killjoy," complained Zelda. "You're just jealous because Malon didn't buy you a stuffed animal."

"Yeah, why didn't you buy me a stuffed animal?" Solo asked Malon.

Malon gave a heated glare to Zelda, then looked at Solo. "If you want one, I can go back and get one..."

"No that's okay, I don't like stuffed animals anyways. It's just that these two are always being so sappy that it makes me sick." She pointed to Link and Zelda, who were walking hand-in-hand, occasionally giving each other adoring looks. "They look like love-sick puppies," Solo whispered, making sure the other two didn't hear her comment. "Promise me you'll put me out of my misery if I ever end up like that."

"I don't know if you'd want me to," replied Malon. "You've had your moments."

"What's that supposed to mean? I'm not a sap."

"Well, last night you had that little puppy-dog look on your face when you asked me to lay down with you, and..."

"That doesn't count. I was...not myself. Booze-induced stupors don't count as being sappy." Malon simply smirked, not being able to think of a way to counter Solo's excuse for logic.

The group walked through the campus toward the main entrance when something caught Link's attention. There was a group of people gathered around the auditorium they had attended the lecture in, and it seemed like something was amiss. "I wonder what's going on over there," said Link, starting to wander over to the gaggle of people.

"Do you always insist on getting yourself into places where you don't belong?" said Zelda, becoming slightly perturbed that Link always insisted on getting involved in everything.

"I just want to go look," he whined. Link pushed his way through the crowd until he stopped just inside the auditorium. There were a few security guards and some detectives interviewing the professor that had given the lecture a few hours before. Link leaned over to try to hear what they were saying.

"Okay, so you're telling me that someone broke in here and replaced your rock with this sapphire?" asked one of the detectives to the very annoyed professor.

"For the millionth time, yes!"

"Can you describe this stone for us?" asked the other detective.

"It looks just like this sapphire. It's blue, and about the size of a fist," replied the professor.

"Well, if it looks just like the sapphire, how do you know it's not the real stone?" said the first detective.

"I have studied the Hateru Stone for decades, I think I would know if it was missing."

"Relax, doctor. Tell us what happened when you first found out the stone was missing."

"Earlier today I gave a lecture about ancient myths, and the Hateru Stone was part of the presentation. After the lecture, I went about my normal business throughout the school. When I came back just a little while ago, I opened the box so I could put the stone back in the museum. That's when I discovered that it was missing. I wouldn't have noticed that the real stone was missing if I hadn't picked it up."

"What's the difference between this Hateru Stone and the sapphire?"

"Well, they both look the same, which is why I almost didn't notice. But they don't *feel* the same. The Hateru Stone is about three times heavier than this sapphire, and it has a much harder, smoother texture. It's one of a kind, and it can't be faked."

"Why would somebody come here to steal the Hateru Stone?" asked the first detective. "That sapphire looks to me like it's worth quite a bit on its own. Why would someone go through the trouble of breaking in here and stealing the first stone, and then replace it with one that's just as valuable. Nothing else in here was even touched, so it doesn't seem like robbery was the motive."

"Ooh, you're a sharp one," said the doctor sarcastically. Judging by the detective's expression, he didn't even realize that the doctor was insulting his intelligence. "You're right, it wasn't a robbery, at least not for money."

"You didn't answer my question, Dr. Sailann. Why would somebody come in here and replace the stone without touching anything else? What's so important about the Hateru Stone?"

"Legends have surrounded the stone for millennia. It's meteoric rock, which is why we can't find anything else like it anywhere. The people who first came upon it saw it as a gift from the gods, they worshipped it. They believed that it held the key to immortality, so different tribes were always fighting over it. That's how it got its name, Hateru is an ancient Hylian word for 'death.' They called it a stone of death because all who have ever searched for it have died on their quests. After a while, some people sealed it up inside a mountain where it wasn't discovered for centuries."

"So this person might've stolen it because it's the key to immortality?" asked the second detective.

"Possibly," replied Dr. Sailann. "But this stone is no good without its mate. You see, there are two stones. The first one was buried in a mountain and was on my desk until just a few hours ago, but the second one was said to have disappeared into the sky from where it came. Even if the legends of immortality are true, the Hateru Stone is no good unless it is paired with the other one."

"Where is the other one?" asked the first detective.

"I told you, nobody knows. According to all the records we have, it just disappeared. No one has seen it for thousands of years. Stories say that it just literally shot up into the sky."

"Okay," said the first detective, obviously unimpressed by the doctor's tale. "Just one last thing, did you see anyone suspicious lurking around here? Anyone who didn't fit in, or someone who might've had an unusual interest in the stone?"

The doctor thought for a moment. "Well... I did have a conversation with this woman after the lecture. She seemed to be quite interested in it. She knew more about the stone than I did. But she didn't seem like the type who would..."

"Can you give us a description of this woman?" asked the second detective, scribbling in his notebook.

"Well, she was average size. She looked like she was in her late forties, or early fifties. She had very long gray hair, tied up in a braid... about waist-length. And it was weird, she had really strange-colored eyes, they were deep red."

"A Sheikah, possibly?" mused the first detective.

"I have no idea," sighed the doctor. "I know they all have red eyes, but I seriously doubt she was one of them. The Sheikah are nearly extinct, and I don't think they'd waste their time here."

The first detective, who seemed to be the senior of the two, scribbled a few more notes and closed his notebook. "Well, that's all the questions I have. I still don't see why someone would go through all this trouble to steal a supposedly cursed stone. After all, at the end of the day what is it? Just a lump of useless rock."

"Your words, not mine, Inspector," said the doctor, angry that the man was insulting his work.

"Then why would anyone steal it?"

"I have no idea. Are you finished?"

"Yes," replied the detective. "We'll contact you if we find anything." With that both detectives left and shooed away the crowd that had gathered. Link's group was among them, and were told to go about their business and leave.

They all left the scene, slightly dumbfounded by the story they'd overheard. "You think it was that lady we saw at the bar?" said Malon after a few moments of silence.

"It very well could be," mused Link. "She seemed to match the description."

"Why are we even bothering to ask into this?" said Zelda. "It's none of our business. I really don't care about some stupid rock." Link gave a pitiful, hurt expression toward Zelda. "Oh what are you complaining about? You always want to get into other people's business. Can't you just leave stuff alone? You've been on enough adventures, you don't need to be searching for a woman and some stupid rock. I'm sure she's out in the forest somewhere worshipping it."

"I was just curious, that's all," said Link sheepishly.

"Curiosity killed the cat," said Zelda. Link merely huffed.

"I never said I wanted to get involved. I just think it's interesting. I just wish I knew why that woman would want to steal that stone."

"You're the history buff, not me," said Zelda, waiting for a rambling theory from Link. He just shrugged his shoulders. "I'm sure she had her reasons."

"Yeah, she's probably dancing naked around a campfire with the stone chanting some weird mantra," joked Solo. The rest of the group gave her very strange looks. "Well, that's what I would do," she added, smirking. Malon and Link both blushed, and Solo gave a maniacal laugh. She so enjoyed making her friend and her brother uncomfortable. She just hated the fact that, no matter how hard she tried, she could never get Zelda to be embarrassed by her comments.

"You're so sick, you know that?" said Link. Sometimes he wondered how he ended up with such an eccentric and weird sister.

Zelda, enjoying the opportunity of embarrassing Link further, thought of a brilliant follow up to Solo's comment. "Hey Link, how 'bout we dance naked around my stiffed emu? That would be fun." Link's face turned beet red, trying not to give any indication that he would give almost anything to see Zelda dance in the nude.

"Um..." mumbled Link.

“Ooh, I think he liked that suggestion,” added Solo.

“I don’t think Zelda would mind, either,” said Malon, causing Zelda’s cheeks to turn an almost undetectable shade of crimson. Solo felt jealous that Malon was able to illicit the response that she had tried so hard to get. “Come on, Link. I’m sure you’d love to see Zelda’s...”

“What is this, make-fun-of-Link time?” interrupted Link, becoming extremely flustered.

“We just like giving you a hard time,” said Zelda, kissing him on the cheek. As much as Link hated being the butt of jokes, it was all worth it to be Zelda’s boyfriend. He could stand her occasional teasing, and sometimes he secretly enjoyed it. But he would never admit that to her, especially not in the presence of his sister and her girlfriend. They all finally decided to walk back to Link’s house to have supper. It was a few miles away, but they enjoyed strolling on such a beautiful summer day.

## Chapter Four

It was a fairly uneventful day in the outskirts of Kataan, about twenty miles from the castle. One of the co-owners of a group of cottages was tending to his small herd of camels, while one of his friends was leaning against a fence post. “You know, you really could help me to brush these camels,” said the young man, who was wearing a thin brown robe. He pulled at the tangles in the animal’s hair with the extremely worn out brush. He would have to go get a new one pretty soon.

“Hey, don’t look at me, Gaiden,” said the woman. “You’re the camel expert. Taking care of camels was never in my job description. Besides, the last time I tried to brush one it spat on me. And I don’t like the idea of having to clean giant camel goobers off my face. The camels were Kasuto’s idea, not mine. You’re his successor, that means it’s your job to take care of them.”

“Well, you could at least get me a new brush,” said Gaiden, showing her the badly worn brush. “It’s your turn to go shopping.”

“Yeah, right. It’s always my turn to go shopping,” she huffed.

“You’re the only one around here who doesn’t do anything. What is your job anyways?”

“I am Zoya, the Guardian of Power,” she said in a haughty voice. “And I do do stuff, you just never see it.”

“Oh yeah, those kids,” said Gaiden, remembering that she was the one who taught them about being an Oracle. “So how’s their training going, anyways?”

“Fairly well,” replied Zoya. “They learn quite fast. But they’re still way too impatient. They want everything now, and don’t want to wait for it. Typical kids. I don’t think they’ve fully realized that developing there powers takes a lot of practice and it won’t happen overnight. Link is the perfect example. I tried to show him how to teleport, but he wasn’t focused enough. He ended up totally botching it.”

“He ended up in the lake, huh?” said Gaiden, remembering his own personal experiences. “I hated that so much. It wouldn’t have been so bad if the lake wasn’t such a stagnant pool of green muck.”

“Yeah, he started throwing the seaweed at his sister. It was kind of funny, but I didn’t want to admit it in front of them.” Zoya stood up straight and looked back at the main cottage. “Looks like it’s time for dinner. Give the camels a rest and come get something to eat.”

“Fine,” said Gaiden, finally dropping the brush that had been giving him such a hard time. They both walked over to the cottage, where Talan was preparing the meal. Sometimes he liked to prepare some strange new dish, but Zoya and Gaiden were both hoping that he would make something normal. Zoya sniffed the air as she entered the cottage; it smelled normal. By her senses, it smelled like he was making his famous onion soup.

Zoya walked up the pot that Talan was stirring intently. “Please tell me that’s just onions in there and not some weird concoction you thought up,” said Zoya warily.

“Nothing special today, just onions,” replied Talan. “But I could always make you up a batch of fried eel,” he said in a sarcastic tone.

“No, this’ll be fine,” said Zoya. Satisfied that she would have a normal meal, Zoya went to sit down at the table. Kira was sitting there looking intently at Zoya and she also noticed that there was a stranger

next to her. "So who's our guest?" asked Zoya.

"I don't think you've met her, but you should recognize her name," replied Kira. "This is Joushi, the Prime Oracle."

"A pleasure to meet you," said Zoya, shaking Joushi's hand. "So what brings you here? You're supposed to advise the king, not us."

"Well, what I had to say was something that he doesn't need to know about," said Joushi. "But I think you'd like to know. I came here to talk to the Prime Guardian."

"That would be me," said Zoya. "I'm the Guardian of Power, but I was also chosen to succeed Kasuto as the Prime Guardian." Although the Guardians were essentially equal in roles and powers, they also needed a leader. The Guardians all choose someone to lead them who then earns the title Prime Guardian. They normally serve as Prime Guardian for eight years unless they die first. Shortly after Kasuto's demise, they elected Zoya as the Prime Guardian, which greatly surprised her. She never thought of herself as a leader. "So what do you need our help about?" asked Zoya.

"I've just come across some disturbing news," said Joushi. "The Hateru Stone has been stolen from the University."

"Oh gods," sighed Zoya.

"Yeah, tell me about," said Joushi. "I knew there was nothing I or the King could do about it, so I figured I could use your help. You guys are responsible for monitoring supernatural activities. Since you're the most powerful of the Oracles, I came to you."

"Tell me, what do you know about the Hateru Stone?" asked Kira.

"Not much," replied Joushi, shrugging her shoulders. "All I know is that it was thought to hold the key to eternal life. People have tried to use it, but I don't know of anyone who has succeeded. I came to you because I knew you would know all about it."

"Looks like somebody's trying to become immortal again," said Kira. "Our records say that no one has tried to use it for at least a thousand years. When it resurfaced a few decades ago, we were worried that it would end up in the wrong hands, but it was just an archaeologist. We saw no problem because the Hateru Stone is no good without its mate."

Joushi raised an eyebrow. "I didn't know that there was more than one."

"Yes, there are two," explained Kira. "Most people who have sought the Hateru Stone didn't know that there were actually two. One of the stones is a decoy to prevent an evil person from getting their hands on it. Legend has it that only someone with a pure heart can choose the correct stone. But we've never verified that."

"Should I get some people to search for the thief?" asked Joushi.

"That shouldn't be necessary," said Zoya. "Hopefully the thief doesn't know that they need the other stone."

"Are you going to protect the second stone?"

"Well, that might be a little difficult," replied Kira. "You see, the second stone is not here. About a thousand years ago, the second stone disappeared. The person who used it, we don't know who, used the stone correctly. But when that happens, the false stone returns to the heavens where it came from. I wish I knew what the thief intended to do, because misuse of the stone can be disastrous."

"Disastrous?" said Joushi, confused. "This stone might give the person eternal life, but I would hardly call that disastrous. I mean, the person couldn't be killed, but I don't think one person with no other powers could be much more than a mere annoyance."

"It's not quite that simple," said Zoya. "The Hateru Stone isn't just the key to eternal life. It can also be the key to destroying life. If a person uses it in the wrong way, it might end up killing a lot of people. That stone is dangerous in the wrong hands. I don't know what the thief intends to do, but he might very well use it for evil. We don't know what this person wants."

"Well, how do we stop him?" asked Joushi. "Someone who's immortal or may become immortal can be a very dangerous person."

"That could be difficult," replied Kira. "We alone cannot do anything about it. We may be able to prevent the thief from getting the second stone, but if he manages to get his hands on it before us, we'll be

out of luck.”

“I think I know who can help,” said Zoya. “I believe that one of my students may be able to help. Link, Zelda, or Solo may be the key. They all have a lot of potential. I can sense that they have powers the likes of which we have never seen before. They are Oracles like us, but I also sense something else in them; something I can’t quite pinpoint. Link and Zelda were the chosen ones who defeated the Evil Force, but I think there’s more to it. I think there is much more that they can do. I believe that they may be the Supreme Oracles, the ones who have been prophesied since we came into existence. I believe they may be able to bring balance to the two forces. I’ve felt it, a strange sense of calm. The forces of good and evil are finally beginning to come into a sort of equilibrium. If this is true, then they may be able to stop a disaster from happening. The Hateru Stone will cause a great disturbance in the forces of the Universe; if I’m right they can stop that from happening. If they are causing this new balance, then perhaps their powers can be used to prevent such a catastrophe.”

“That’s an interesting hypothesis,” commented Joushi. “I’ve noticed a strange alteration in the balance of the forces. But it’s coming along slowly, it may be centuries before it happens completely.”

“But they are the catalysts,” added Zoya. “They are the ones who will start the turn of events. By destroying Daimanius, they changed the entire stability of the Universe. The Hateru Stone is just a small part of that. If they have the power to balance the Universe, then this is merely a small problem.”

“That’s great, but how do we get them to use this power?” asked Joushi.

“I don’t know,” replied Zoya. This garnered her a disappointed glare. “But they might, in a way. Many of their powers are unconscious, they don’t know they have them and they don’t even know when they use them. It’s almost an instinct. I think if we get them to help us find the stones, perhaps the solution will present itself.”

“Well, we’d better do it soon,” said Kira. “As in, now. By my calculations, the second stone should return somewhere in Hyrule field, probably in the south. It should return a couple hours after midnight. We’ll be there, but you have to go get the kids. Explain everything to them, they will understand.”

“Yes, ma’am,” responded Zoya sarcastically, giving a joking salute. Zoya gave a wink as she closed her eyes and concentrated on the Kokiri Forest. That would be the most likely place to find Link at this time of day. She took a deep breath and vanished with a flash of light.

Kira turned to Joushi. “You go back to your office and just keep an eye out for anything unusual. Make sure to keep a tight lid on this, if people knew what was happening, we would have a panic. Report anything you learn to us.”

“Sure, no problem,” replied Joushi. She and all the Guardians tried to shrug off the terrible feeling of foreboding they were having. They all silently prayed that the worst would not come to pass.

Kisei sat in her chair in her sparsely decorated home in Quatari. It had once been full of beautiful artifacts from all over the world, but now it was dull and empty. She wouldn’t need any of those things anymore anyways. Her time would soon be over.

She looked at the clock on the wall, it was nine in the evening. She finished off the drink she had been nursing and walked out the door. She placed the first Hateru Stone, which was now glowing brighter than before, into the saddlebag on her horse. The time was drawing near. She had prepared for this for so long. Kisei hopped onto her aging horse and snapped the reins. The horse began trotting with a jolt, and headed towards the southeastern portion of Hyrule field. She wanted to get there early, in case her predictions were off. But she did know that the second stone would reappear sometime tonight. She would just have to camp out and watch for it. The stone wouldn’t be hard to miss, a meteor falling from the sky wasn’t something that would be inconspicuous. She rode away quickly, hoping that no one would get in her way once the stone landed.

The group had returned to the Kokiri Forest early in the evening. They had all decided to go to Saria's house to have dinner and hang out. Saria was surprised that Link and Solo had brought two guests home, but she didn't mind the company. It was always so boring in her house, nothing ever happened. Saria secretly enjoyed watching Link, Solo, Zelda, and Malon interact. They were always so interesting; she especially loved it when they tormented each other. They were always so funny.

Now Link, Zelda, Solo, and Malon were in Link's house relaxing. It was a little cramped, but cozy. "So what did you guys think of today?" asked Link after a long silence.

"What, are you fishing for compliments?" teased Zelda.

"Well, no... I just wanted to know if you guys had a good time. That's what I intended. Sorry the zoo didn't work out."

"Oh, that's okay, Linkie-pooh," said Zelda. "I had a good time. Don't feel sorry for yourself, you had no control over those animals."

"It'd be neat if he did," commented Solo.

"I thought the lecture was interesting," said Malon.

"Yeah, me too," added Zelda.

Link turned to her and gave a quizzical look. "You were daydreaming the whole time. I bet you don't even know what the guy talked about."

"I was just trying to humor you. Besides, I had some interesting daydreams."

"It was boring," said Solo bluntly. "All the guy did was talk for an hour."

"Well gee, I wonder why," said Link, rolling his eyes. "It's a lecture, they're *supposed* to talk. And you were asleep, so you don't have any room to talk."

"Next time can't we do something that *I* want to do?" asked Solo. She enjoyed spending time with her brother, but he always ended up dragging her to something that she found quite uninteresting.

"Well, what would you want to do?" asked Link.

Solo thought for a moment, not expecting Link to actually follow up on her question. "Why don't we go swimming some time? There's lakes and ponds all over the forest. And it's no fun doing it by myself."

"Ohh, that would be fun," commented Malon gleefully.

"Yeah, I wouldn't mind seeing Zelda in a bathing suit," mused Link. The three girls gave him strange smirks, and he blushed slightly. "Oops, did I say that out loud? I just meant that you would look really nice in..."

"You don't have to explain," interrupted Zelda. "I'm flattered. Besides, the feeling's mutual." She winked at Link, and Solo and Malon giggled. "Maybe we could do that tomorrow. And we could have a picnic too. That would be great."

Link secretly smiled to himself. He definitely wouldn't mind seeing a little more of Zelda's body than usual. He just thought she was so beautiful. She would look good in anything. Sometimes he would want to just stare at her for hours, but he couldn't do that because it would probably make her uncomfortable.

"Now you guys are finally making sense," said Solo, getting out of her chair and standing up. "I think I have something I could use as a bathing suit around here somewhere." She began to rummage around in the many piles of clothes on and around her bed. She dug around, tossing some of the articles behind her. Zelda silently wondered how Solo could find anything in the huge pile of garments all over the floor. After searching for a few moments, Solo sighed in frustration. The clothing, which had previously been in a relatively orderly pile, were now strewn about. "I know I have something somewhere," Solo thought aloud. "Maybe it's under the bed." She got down on her knees and began to dig underneath the bed. She tossed out a few shirts, and then a small pile of various undergarments. Malon giggled and Link sighed and looked away, seeing his sister throw her underwear around wasn't something he wanted to see.

Link gasped and jumped as one of Solo's camisoles landed on his shoulder. "Eew, gross," he said, frantically brushing the undergarment off his shoulder. "Can you try not to throw your clothes in my face?" said Link, annoyed.

Solo took her head out from under the bed to stick her tongue out at Link. "Oh grow up," she teased. "It's clean, I haven't worn it yet. And you have no room to complain, at least I don't leave piles of sweaty, stinky undershirts on the floor." Malon and Zelda giggled madly, and Solo stuck her head back under the

bed and continued rummaging. Her noisy search suddenly halted as she gasped in near-horror. "Link! What in the name of the goddesses did you do!" screamed Solo. Link gave a confused look to the two other girls. Solo sat up from underneath the bed holding some kind of book in her hand. She had an infuriated, icy glare on her face, which was directed at Link.

"What? What did I do?" stammered Link, feeling Solo's glare pierce into his soul. He had no idea what he had done to anger her. He wondered if this was just one of her many mood swings.

"You were in my things!" she yelled.

"Calm down. What things?"

"This!" She showed him a large, nondescript book she took out from under the bed. "How dare you look at my private book. I thought I could trust you."

"What are you talking about? What is that? I never dig under your bed."

"This book is private!" she shouted, waving the closed book in front of his face. Malon was shifted her eyes to the floor, terrified that Solo would look at her and find out that it was she who looked in Solo's sketchbook. Malon had no idea how Solo knew that someone read it, and she didn't want to fess up and make Solo angry at her. Malon hated herself for making Solo so angry. "I know you were reading this. I always line it up with the same floorboard under the bed, and it was out of place. And I always put a hair in between the pages and it's gone. That means you read it! How could you betray me like that?"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" responded Link, nearly shouting. "I've never seen that book before in my life! I would never go looking into your private possessions."

Solo just huffed angrily, not believing a word Link said. "What's in that book that's got you so upset? Is it a diary?" asked Zelda shyly, wondering what could make Solo blow up like that.

"It's none of your business," Solo shot back, not meaning to direct her anger towards Zelda. "Link, you were the only one who could've looked at this. Saria is the only other one that comes in here, and I know she wouldn't do that."

"I never did anything!" insisted Link. "I don't see why you're getting so upset. I would never read your diary."

"It's not a diary!" said Solo. "It's a..." she hesitated for a moment, her common sense finally returning. "Why would you need to know? You already saw it!"

"Solo..." interrupted Malon. "Maybe Link didn't look in the book," she said quietly. Malon prepared to confess; she didn't want Link to get in trouble for something he didn't do. But when Malon saw the look of hurt on Solo's face and the tears in her eyes, she couldn't bear to tell her. She couldn't stand the fact that she had made Solo so upset. "I mean, maybe you just accidentally moved the book when you were digging under the bed. You could've moved it or the hair could've fallen out. I'm sure Link would never look into your private book."

Solo's angered expression softened when Malon's words sank in. Perhaps she had overreacted. It was possible that it was her own fault that she moved the book. Or maybe she had forgotten to put in one of her hairs the last time she closed the book. Solo saw the expression on Link's face. It was one of pain and upset, but not one of guilt. Maybe Link didn't do it. "I...I'm sorry," said Solo, hanging her head in shame. "Maybe I overreacted. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to mistrust you like that. It just that this book is private, and I was worried that you looked in it. I didn't mean to suspect you. I know you respect my privacy. I would just be so embarrassed if you saw what was in here. I don't want you to see it. I guess maybe I should've thought it out before I started yelling. Do you forgive me?" Solo gave a pitiful look that she knew would melt Link's heart. Zelda always gave him that look, and it worked for her.

"You don't have to apologize," said Link. He wasn't angry for Solo's outburst. She had been within reason to believe that it was Link who looked in her book. "I would be upset if someone read my diary."

All three girls gave Link a very strange look. "You have a diary?" they asked in unison.

Link suddenly flushed under the girls' surprised stares. "No...I mean...I would be upset if I had a diary. I didn't mean that I had..."

"Oh, Linkie-pooh has a diary!" said Zelda in a childish voice, sounding like a mother talking to a little child. "That's so cute. Do you write about me in it?"

"I...no...yes...I mean, sort of..." mumbled Link, feeling his face grow red. He couldn't believe he had

slipped like that. No one knew that he kept a diary, and he now regretted telling everyone. It was a secret he kept from even his closest friends. Now he worried if they were going to bug him to let them read it. He had written so many private thoughts in it, and would be embarrassed if anyone saw them. He especially didn't want them to read the things he'd written about Zelda. His writings greatly reflected his infatuation with her.

"Let's not get on his case," said Solo. "Just leave him alone. If he wants to keep a diary, that's his choice. But I have no idea where you hide that thing, because I've never seen it or seen you write in it."

"That's because I'm good at hiding things. And you'll never find it in a million years. It's not in the house, it's in a secret place. I can't risk people reading it." He had always kept his diary out of the house, originally for fear that Saria would find it, now doubly because Solo lived with him. He kept his diary hidden in the Sacred forest Meadow. He stuffed it in a leather pouch and stuck it under the tree stump Saria always liked to sit on. Not even she knew it was there. Link would always go there by himself to write in his diary, making sure that no one ever followed him.

"Don't worry, I won't go looking for it," said Solo. "I'm sorry I got mad at you, I didn't mean to blow up like that. I trust you not to look in my book. And besides, it's not a diary, it's something else. And *you* are not going to find out." Solo sat on the floor and shoved the book back underneath the bed. "Promise me you won't look at it."

"I promise," responded Link. "You might be my sister, but I'm not really interested in the dark secrets of your personality. I'd just rather..." Link was interrupted by a strange knocking from outside. "Who in the world could that be?" thought Link aloud. It was late and no one usually came here at this hour. And whenever Saria came over she either just walked in or announced that it was her before she entered. Link walked up to the entrance of his house and parted the curtain that hung there. He saw a familiar woman standing at the door with a blank expression on her face. "Zoya? What're you doing here? We're not due to see you in a couple more days."

Zoya continued standing there, her expression not changing. "May I come in?" asked Zoya. Link nodded and Zoya walked into the house. She saw that all three of her pupils were there: Link, Zelda, and Solo, along with a girl she'd never seen before. Zoya had had a feeling that they would all be here. That was good for her, she was tired and didn't feel like jaunting all over the place looking for them all. "Is this your friend Malon?" asked Zoya to Solo.

"Yeah," replied Solo.

"It's nice to meet you," said Zoya. The slight smile on Zoya's face faded as she prepared to talk to the kids. "I'm sorry to come in unannounced like this, but it absolutely cannot wait. I need you three to go on a little mission."

"Ooh, a mission," said Solo mysteriously. "Sounds like fun."

"I wish it were," sighed Zoya. The smile on Solo's face faded. "Unfortunately, it's literally a matter of life and death. Solo, I don't know if your friend wants to listen to this."

"It's okay, she knows all about us," said Solo. "She won't tell anyone."

"If you insist. She might be able to help, I just want to be careful that she doesn't get hurt."

"What's the 'mission' you have for us?" asked Link.

"Are you familiar with the Hateru Stone?" asked Zoya bluntly.

"Actually, we are," replied Link. "There was a lecture about it at the University today. Why? Is somebody trying to use it? It was stolen earlier today."

"Yes, I know. That's why I need your help. We're not sure who stole it, but we have a suspicion that he did it for reasons other than gaining the gift of eternal life. I've had an unusual feeling of foreboding, a very uncomfortable sensation. I think the thief might want to try to reverse the effects of the stone. All the other Oracles I've talked to agree that something bad is about to happen. And it might be the worst of our fears."

"You know, I've had this ominous feeling too," revealed Link. "It comes and goes, but now I think I know what you're talking about. We went to the zoo today and all the animals were acting strange. They were doing things that animals don't normally do."

"I understand," said Zoya. "Sometimes, when a calamity is about to happen, animals are able to sense it."

Then they behave in strange ways. That's what I'm here about. I trust that during the lecture, the professor told you that there were two stones?" Everyone nodded. "Well, when it was first used many millennia ago, the second stone flew off into space. The mystery was where it went. The first stone, which was stolen earlier, is no good without the second one. But tonight, the second stone is going to return. It will crash into the ground the same way it originally appeared. It will land somewhere in southwestern Hyrule Field a little while after midnight. We have to get to it before the thief does. We can't let him get his hands on it, it could be...catastrophic."

"What do you need us for?" asked Zelda. She understood everything Zoya had said, but wondered why she and her friends were needed.

Zoya sighed. "That's where it gets interesting, especially for you guys. Ever since I and the other Guardians met you, we've had very unusual feelings about you. It goes back to a prediction that the first Guardian of Truth made. He said that someday Oracles like us will come along, but they will be different. They will have powers and understanding that no one else has ever had, Guardian or not. We call them the Supreme Oracles. We believe that you three are the Supreme Oracles."

"Supreme Oracles?" repeated Zelda. "What does that mean? Do we get even more special powers?"

"In a way," replied Zoya. "The legend of the Supreme Oracles is that they, you, will have the power to bring balance to the two forces; the forces of good and evil. Link and Zelda, you two had the power to destroy Daimanius some years ago. I believe that's the biggest sign of all. Ever since you three came along, we have all noticed a strange shift in the equilibrium between good and evil, we call it the *hifashe*. There has been a shift towards the good force. Since the beginning of time, both forces were either equal, or slightly in evil's favor. But now it's turning the other way. The forces are balancing on the side of good. This has never happened before, only since you've begun to develop your abilities."

"You also fit the predictions. Kyuuro, the first Guardian of Truth, gave profiles of the Supreme Oracles. Two would be female, and one would be male. He said that the male and one of the females would be 'bound by blood' which means that they're related. You and Solo are siblings. He also said that the sister would be unknown to all, until she emerged from the shadows. That sounds like you meeting Link, Solo. And the most compelling evidence is the balance in the forces. I know my intuition is correct. You are the Supreme Oracles."

"That's great," said Link. "But how do we balance these 'forces' and what do we do about the Hateru Stone?"

"Balancing the forces is not a conscious process," replied Zoya. "Your mere existence does it. Whenever one of you does a good thing for someone else, it tips the balance a little more towards good. Everything you do affects it. And the stone, the stone is just another part of it. The Hateru Stone is a manifestation of the Evil Force. Its goal is to lure people into its clutches. And it did. One of you has the power to destroy the stone, and prevent it from ever being used again, thereby tipping the balance more towards the good side."

"Which one of us can destroy it?" asked Solo.

"I don't know," replied Zoya with a sigh. "That's why I need all three of you. There's an incantation you have to say. If a normal person says it, nothing will happen. But if the one with the power says it, the stone will be destroyed. So we need to get both stones, and have each of you give the spell a try. And you have to be careful. The stone is very dangerous, if you're not completely focused on the spell, you could be seriously injured. I'm just hoping that won't happen to any of you."

"I've taken plenty of risks in my life," said Link. "This is nothing new." Zelda and Solo nodded their agreement.

"What about me?" asked Malon, feeling totally left out of the whole conversation. "Is there some way I can help?"

"We could use you in the search," replied Zoya. "It couldn't hurt to have another person along. I suppose you can come."

"Should we go now?" asked Zelda. She felt a little nervous about everything Zoya said, but she was also excited that she would be able to go on such a mysterious adventure. It sure beat sitting on a throne and waving to people in parades.

"That would be a good idea," responded Zoya. "I really don't have the energy to be teleporting you guys all over the place, so we'll have to walk. It's pretty far, so it'll take a while."

"Well, wait a minute," interrupted Malon. "My dad owns the ranch. We can go over there and use some of my horses. It's not that far away."

"Now that's a good idea. We can cut a lot of time off our trip. I trust your father won't mind us borrowing the horses?" Malon shook her head. "Good. Do you all know how to ride?" Everyone nodded. "All right. Then let's get a move on. It'll be good to get there early." Zoya led the group out of the house and towards the exit of the forest. They began to walk briskly toward the ranch, trying to make good time. Zoya hoped that her calculations were correct and that they would get to there on time.

Kisei had tied her horse to one of the sparsely positioned trees in Hyrule Field. She hoped that the horse wouldn't be spooked when the meteor hit the ground. That last thing she needed was her horse running away. Right now the horse was blissfully grazing on a patch of grass, completely unaware of what was about to happen. Kisei pulled a small pocket watch from her pocket and checked the time, it was almost eleven. It would happen soon.

Kisei sat on the grass and folded her legs, there wasn't really anything else to do. She began gazing at the clear night sky. Her eyes locked on a small constellation in the northeastern portion of the heavens. It was a small cluster of five reddish stars, each star making the vertex of a pentagon. The pentagonal constellation was now nearly in perfect alignment, just what she needed to perform her final ritual. Of course, she learned long ago that this constellation wasn't actually a grouping of stars. It was actually a cluster of comets that entered the solar system only once every four thousand years. She could almost make out the faint tails of the comets, all pointing in the same direction away from the sun. She had discovered so much about astronomy, and the world in general during her life. Things that the most intelligent scientists still hadn't figured out. She would love to tell them her theories, but she didn't have time for that. Besides, they would all be dead soon anyways. She didn't really care anymore.

Kisei slowly became mesmerized by the bright, twinkling stars. Each one of them had its own unique characteristics. Some were large, others small. They came in all colors, mostly yellow and white, but some were bright blue. The stars seemed especially bright, on account of the fact that there was no moon tonight. She was taken aback by the sheer enormity of the universe. She wondered if there were other people out there on other planets, thinking the same thing she was. She knew there had to be more life out there, the heavens were just too big to be wasted on one measly planet.

Her attention was suddenly taken by a bright blue flash in the sky. She looked closely and saw that the flash of light was coming from the center of the pentagon constellation. It was beginning. She immediately stood up and stared at the heavens. The blue flash transformed to a long orange streak. The meteor had entered the atmosphere. The rock traveled at more than sixty thousand miles an hour, the friction from the atmosphere heating it to a white hot glow. The streak glowed brighter as the rock plunged deeper into the air, leaving a trail of glowing-hot air molecules behind it. Kisei closely watched the meteor's trajectory. It had appeared a few hours earlier than she expected, but her prediction was still very close. An error of a few hours in four thousand years was really close. But she did know that the meteor would hit where she predicted. It would definitely land within a couple miles of her current position. Studying astronomy sure paid off. She quickly untied her horse and hopped onto its back. She remained there for a few moments until she could gauge exactly where the rock was going to land. When she was absolutely sure of its trajectory, she took off on her horse and rode swiftly towards what would be the impact site. She made sure to stay at least a few hundred yards away, knowing that the meteor would make some type of crater. Although she would be able to survive a hit on the head from the thing, her horse definitely wouldn't. She stopped and waited as the bright orange streak flew through the sky. It would only be about four minutes before it finally crashed into the ground, and her torture would be over.

## Chapter Five

"Here Link, take Epona," Malon, handing the horse's reins to him. "She really your horse anyways." Link mounted the horse and waited for Malon to get hers. She was the last one to get on a horse, making sure everyone else was secured first. As Malon fetched her horse, she continued jabbering nonsensical baby-talk into their ears, as if they could understand her. Malon insisted that each horse had its own unique personality, and that she knew what each one of them liked. Link just thought they all looked the same. He always suspected that Malon was a little off, somewhat eccentric. Of course, he himself wasn't exactly normal, so he couldn't complain.

Malon was now on her horse and everybody was ready to go. "All right, let's get a move on," said Zoya. She led the kids out of the ranch and into Hyrule Field. "It's going to land somewhere in the southeast, so let's hurry," she shouted behind her. They all followed her through the field. Link remembered all the times he had ridden Epona in Hyrule Field. But he knew now that those things never happened as far as everyone else was concerned. He wondered if it was his imagination, or if Hyrule Field seemed bigger. Maybe it was just his imagination.

Link was jerked out of his daydreaming when Zoya suddenly stopped her horse. "What is it? What's wrong?" asked Link. Zoya didn't reply, she merely pointed to the sky. They all looked up and gasped. A long orange streak shot through the sky, growing ever closer to the ground. It could only be one thing. "You said it would land after midnight. It's only eleven."

"Well, I guess my calculations were off," replied Zoya, annoyed. As the streak grew brighter in the sky, they began to hear a low rumbling that steadily increased in volume. The rumbling was accompanied by a series of loud booms. The rumbling then grew to a steady roar as the meteor crashed through the lower atmosphere. Just a few moments later the streak disappeared in a blinding flash that emanated from the southeast, just near the horizon. The flash disappeared and was replaced with a glowing orange fireball and chunks of incandescent ejecta from the impact crater. There was now a steady orange glow near the horizon, which indicated that the surrounding countryside had burst into flames. "You guys better plug your ears!" shouted Zoya. They all obeyed, and within seconds there was a deafening roar completely surrounding them. The sound of the explosion frightened the horses, causing Malon's horse to knock her clear off. They could see a ripple in the grass approach them at blinding speed as the shockwave from the impact finally reached them. For a few terrifying moments, the ground shook violently as the shockwave traveled through the countryside. The glow on the horizon was now accompanied by a large cloud of dust that had been kicked up by the impact. They all watched in awe as the grass and trees in the distance burned with brilliant flames.

Malon had gotten back on her horse and tried to calm it. She felt that the impact had scared her more than the horse. "We have to get there, *now*," shouted Zoya as her horse began to trot away. The rest of the group quickly followed her lead. None of them had ever seen such an awesome and terrifying sight. Zoya hoped to the gods that she would get there before the thief.

The brilliant flash and deafening explosion had spooked Kisei's horse and it had thrown her off. She had been about a mile away when it happened, and she had nearly been deafened by the explosion. When she had finally calmed her horse, Kisei jumped back onto its back. The grass and sparse trees in front of her were now ablaze from the heat of the impact. However, there was a small break in the wall of fire where there was a patch of rocks that had no vegetation. She steered the horse towards the opening, and was there in a matter of minutes. Kisei dismounted her horse and led it by the reins behind her. Fires blazed all around her, and she could feel the heat from them on her skin. As she passed through the opening in the wall of flames, everything around her was illuminated in an eerie orange glow. The ground in front of her was charred and black from the inferno. Kisei walked about a hundred yards until she reached a mound of dirt about five feet high. She let go of the horse and it just stood there. She climbed

the mound of dirt and was taken aback by the sight before her. A huge crater lay before her, still smoking and glowing from the explosion. The round bowl of the crater was about a hundred feet in diameter and nearly ten feet deep. The walls were steep and coarse. The heat of the impact had melted some of the rocks into fragments of black glass.

She climbed into the huge hole and walked towards the center. At the very bottom of the crater lay the object that she had sought. A blue glow emanated from the completely unscathed stone, which was lying there in the exact center of the crater. It was as if someone had just placed it there in the center of the crater. Kisei was amazed by the fact that the ground around her had been vaporized, melted, and thrown into the air while the stone had remained completely unharmed. It was definitely made from something not of this planet.

Kisei slowly approached the stone. Its blue glow almost mesmerized her. She knelt before the stone, and could feel the heat radiating from it. Although it hadn't been harmed in the impact, it was still hot from its journey through the atmosphere. Kisei took a large canteen that was attached to her belt and opened it. She poured the cool water onto the stone, hearing a loud sizzle as it bubbled and boiled off the hot stone. She emptied the entire canteen, and was lucky that there was just enough to adequately cool the hot stone. Cautiously she extended her arm and placed her hand around the stone. It was quite warm, but not hot enough to burn her. With an almost evil smile on her face, Kisei pocketed the stone and stood up. Now her plan would finally begin to work.

The five rode as quickly as they could, growing ever closer to the glowing fire ahead of them. Zoya knew that the thief was there, and may have already made off with the stone. Once again, Zoya suddenly stopped her horse. This habit of hers was beginning to annoy Link. "What is it *now?*" asked Link, purposely expressing his dissatisfaction.

They were about four hundred yards from the impact site, and the fire was beginning to die down. They could make out part of the crater and its surroundings. "It's gone," said Zoya, pointing to the crater. "The stone is gone." They all looked at the center of the smoking crater, not quite understanding what Zoya meant. Link had figured that the stone would probably be buried or in pieces, judging by the size of that hole. Then, out of the corner of his eye, Link saw someone riding a horse. The horse galloped at a rapid pace, headed in a northeastern direction.

"She's headed that way!" exclaimed Link, pointing to the woman on the horse. Link knew that it had to be the woman that he had seen at the bar and then at the lecture. He could see her long braid swaying behind her. "Where's she going?"

"She can only be going to one place, Death Mountain," replied Zoya. "That is where it is going to happen. We have to hurry. Come on!" Zoya kicked her horse and it took off in pursuit of the woman in the distance. They stayed in hot pursuit, but also remained far enough behind so that the woman didn't notice them. As Zoya and the others followed, she repeated over and over in her mind the incantation they would have to use to neutralize the stones. She had memorized it long ago, and had to make sure she got it right so she would be able to tell the children. Every so often, the sense of dread in the back of her mind would come forward and give her sickening sensation of nausea. She hadn't told the children what terrible catastrophe would come upon the world if they failed, she hoped that they would never have to know.

Kisei flew through Kakariko Village and past the clusters of houses. No one was awake at this hour, and she hoped the racket wouldn't wake the people. She stalled her horse at the fence that blocked the only entrance to the Death Mountain Trail. The guard stood there and eyed her suspiciously. Kisei dismounted her horse and approached the man. "Is there something I can do for you, ma'am?" asked the guard warily.

Kisei chuckled. "No, nothing at all," she said. With a lightning fast swing, Kisei threw her fist into the guard's face, knocking him out cold. She quickly opened the gate and hopped back on her horse. She smirked at the inept guard as she made her way up the winding trail towards Death Mountain. After a minute or so, she reached a large boulder near the top of the trail. She would have to abandon her horse here. She dismounted the horse and made sure that the two stones were secure in her pockets. She climbed up the steep path and onto another trail that led higher up the mountain. She briskly walked up the steep path until she reached a sheer wall. Someone long ago had built ladders into the wall, for what purpose, she did not know. This would make it a lot easier than the first time she went up here. Kisei quickly climbed the wall and came out near the cave that led into the mountain's volcano. This was where that giant Goron usually lived. She had heard stories about it, but never actually saw him herself. It didn't matter, she had no intention of looking for him.

Kisei veered towards the left side of the tiny plateau atop the volcano. This was merely a smaller summit of a much larger mountain. She would have about a thousand more feet to climb before she reached the peak. She walked down a narrow path atop the plateau and around to the other side. On the other side of the small peak was an even larger rock that shot up into the sky. It ended in a flat mesa that was nearly a thousand feet higher than the volcano. Luckily for her, the peak had long since been eroded into a smooth peak, whose walls had a very small grade. She could almost walk up the mountain. Kisei climbed her way up the hill to the summit. She occasionally got a glimpse of the pentagon constellation, which had since moved closer towards the north. Soon it would be directly overhead and the process would be complete.

Zoya and the children slowed their horses down when they entered the village. They were careful not to disturb the people there. They got a few strange looks from a couple people who were roaming around the town.

Zoya gave a pitiful look when she saw the still unconscious guard at the entrance to the Death Mountain Trail. "I think we know where our thief went," she said to the others, who had stopped next to her.

"Shouldn't we help him?" asked Malon, concerned for this poor man who was lying there. "He'll be fine," replied Zoya. "We have more important things to do, if we fail then it won't matter whether we help him or not." Zoya and her horse took off up the trail, with the kids following closely behind. She knew roughly what direction Kisei had gone in, and the footprints from the horse made it easier to follow. Slowly making their way up the winding path, Zoya stopped at a turn in the trail. Up a steep incline they saw Kisei's horse standing there, oblivious to everything. "She went up there," pointed out Zoya. She dismounted her horse and indicated for the kids to do the same. "We won't be able to take the horses up there, we'll have to walk the rest of the way."

They all followed Zoya up the steep path and towards the other trail that led to the mountain summit. "Oh man, I really wish I could fly," complained Solo, not enjoying the strenuous climb up the hill one bit. She hated physical activity so much. Solo breathed a purposely loud sigh of relief when they made it up the steep hill and only had a smooth trail before them. Link remembered this trail very well, and was happy that it wasn't raining hot rocks on top of him.

"We're gonna have a little climb ahead of us," said Zoya. "The wall up ahead leads to the volcano's caldera. We'll be taking a little detour from there and will head up to the mountain's summit, that's where the ritual will be performed."

"Wall?" asked Solo. "I don't see any..." she paused when they came upon a curve in the trail and she saw a huge sheer wall just ahead. "Oh for crying out loud! You expect me to climb that!?"

"You're gonna have to," replied Zoya as they stopped in front of the wall. Solo looked straight up. The rock face had some kind of footholds attached to it and seemed to go up forever. The thing must've been at least thirty feet high. Zoya once again led the way as she began to climb the hill. "It's not the bad. You'll climb it in no time. Just don't look down."

Zelda and Malon followed up the wall, while Solo stood there giving Link a nervous and completely pitiful expression. "Link... I can't... I can't do it," she mumbled.

"I've climbed this dozens of times," he said. "Just make your way up one step at a time. It's not that hard. See?" Link climbed up a few steps and showed her how simple it was.

"No, you don't understand. I'm... I'm scared of heights. I can't do it, Link."

Link climbed down and looked into Solo's eyes. He saw the look of terror and fear, he had never known that she was scared of heights. "Now's as good a time as any to overcome that fear." He put one of her hands on a rung of the ladder-like structure attached to the wall. "It's just like climbing the ladder to our house. One step after another. Go on." She cautiously climbed a few steps up and looked back down at Link, who was smiling at her. "There, just keep going up. I'll be right behind you. Just don't look down and you'll be fine." Link began climbing just behind his sister, who was going rather slowly. Link would've rather climbed faster, but he had to make sure Solo would make it up okay. After a couple minutes of slow climbing, Solo finally made it to the top, where Zoya and Malon were impatiently waiting. Solo climbed over the top and dropped to her knees, literally kissing the ground.

"Oh, that's just gross," commented Malon at Solo's overdramatic display. "Some animal could've peed there." Upon hearing that, Solo abruptly stopped kissing the ground and stood up.

"There, that wasn't so bad now, was it?" asked Link, patting Solo on the shoulder.

"I think I almost peed my pants," she said.

Link gave a look of displeasure. "Eew, I'm glad you didn't. I was right underneath you."

"Yeah, I know. I almost considered it," she said with a smirk.

"Come on, we don't have time to waste," interrupted Zoya hastily. She pointed to a peak that went up into the sky just behind the volcano. "That is the summit of the mountain, and it's where everything is going to happen. We have to go off on a little path over there and climb up the hill. The hill is topped by a relatively flat mesa, and the slope itself isn't very steep. We can pretty much walk up it." Solo sighed in relief, at least she wouldn't have to do any more climbing.

Zoya led them up over a few rocks and onto a narrow outcropping. "Watch your step," she advised. Solo was scared stiff when she saw what they had to walk on. The outcropping was just a small ledge in the rocks that led around to the other side of the caldera. On the right side of the ledge was the wall of the volcano, and on the left side was a nothing but a drop two thousand feet straight down. Solo stopped dead in her tracks and didn't even move near the outcropping.

Solo was shaking and nearly hyperventilating. "There is no way in *hell* you're going to get me onto that path. Look how far that drop is! No way!" Her voice was shaky and nervous, and she was on the brink of tears. Malon, her face deep with concern, walked off the outcropping and back towards the trembling Solo.

"What's wrong?" Malon asked soothingly, rubbing her hand over Solo's shoulder.

"I... I can't. I'm scared. Please don't make me," Solo pleaded.

"Why are you scared?" asked Malon. "It's just a little trail."

"I'm scared of heights. What if... what if I fall?"

"Honey, you won't fall. Just hold my hand, I'll make sure you're fine." Solo nodded and stood up, grasping Malon's hand so tightly that it almost hurt. "Link will be right behind you. Just keep looking at me, and don't look down." Malon slowly led Solo onto the outcropping, with Link following closely behind. Solo stared at the back of Malon's head, trying with all her might not to look down. Step by step, she slowly made her way across the outcropping and around the volcano. Solo could feel her heart beating wildly and her breathing was rapid. She tried to think calming thoughts before she passed out. Solo closed her eyes and blindly followed Malon's lead, she couldn't bear to look anymore. After what seemed like an eternity, she felt a tap on her back. Solo cautiously opened her eyes to see who it was. Link was staring back at her with a twisted smirk on his face.

"You made it across," he said. Not quite believing him, Solo took a look around her to realize that she had in fact crossed the ledge.

"That wasn't so bad now, was it?" said Malon with a smile.

"No...not bad," responded Solo, her voice still shaky from the ordeal.

Zoya walked over to the group, flashing Solo and understanding grin. Zoya remembered when she herself had been absolutely terrified of being anywhere higher than a few feet. "Like I said before, the hill is not very steep, as you can see," said Zoya, pointing to the summit of the mountain. "This is where we have to split up. There's a flat mesa on top of the hill, but our culprit may no be there yet. This whole place has a small system of caves running through it, and she might be hiding in one of those. I'll go by myself and explore on the far side of the hill. Link, Zelda, you two can get the eastern side, and Solo and Malon, you guys look towards the west and then on the top. Before you go, you must take these." Zoya dug in her pocket and took out a few folded pieces of paper. "These are copies of the spell you have to read to destroy the stones. I suggest you look them over. The actual words are in Ancient Hylian, but they're spelled phonetically so you should be able to understand them. If any of you find the thief, think about me. Concentrate on my mind, and I should be able to pick that up. I'll come find you. We have about two hours before the stars align. When you see twilight coming and the star Nairune come up from the eastern horizon, that means it's time to meet at the top of the mountain. No matter what, the thief is going to be up their by then and we should all be able to handle her. Don't try to take her on by yourselves, remember, she can't be killed. Just call me and I'll come. Do you all understand?" Everyone nodded. "Okay then, let's go." Link and Zelda went off in an eastern direction, and Malon and Solo prepared to go west. Zoya stopped Malon and Solo for a moment and leaned over to Solo. "I understand what you went through on that ledge," whispered Zoya. "I used to be terrified of heights. You did a good job, especially considering how dark it is outside." It was the middle of the night, and there was very little ambient light. Most of their illumination came from small lanterns they were holding. "You two take care." Zoya flashed them a smile and took off towards the other side of the hill.

Malon and Solo stood there for a moment, and then decided to make their way towards where Zoya had said to go. As they were walking, Malon took the piece of paper from Solo's hand and read it over. "Are you sure you'll be able to read this?" asked Malon. She knew that Solo's reading skills weren't very good. "It's in a foreign language, and you're not that good at even reading our language."

"I'm sure I'll manage," replied Solo, taking the paper back.

"You think you're the one Zoya said had the power?"

"I don't know, maybe. But I doubt it, I never get the special powers."

"Well, I'll be proud of you no matter what," said Malon, putting her arm around Solo's shoulder. Picking up their pace slightly, Malon and Solo began to climb the hill. They saw the summit far above them, and realized that it would take quite a while to reach the top. They were thankful that the hill wasn't steep, or it might take forever. "Zoya said that the woman might be hiding in a cave, so we can check that one up there," said Malon, pointing to a cave that was a couple hundred feet up the hill. "It looks like the only one on this side. That'll make it easier. We only have one cave and then the top."

Solo looked over at Malon and smirked. "I'll race you up there!" blurted Solo. Before Malon could reply, Solo took off up the hill. Shouting up at her, Malon began to began to race up the hill towards Solo. Malon would normally be able to outrun her any time, but with a head start, she couldn't be sure.

"You're gonna regret this!" shouted Malon playfully as she climbed up the hill.

Link and Zelda had explored every twist and turn of this particular cave, coming upon nothing but dead ends. "Well, I guess she's not here," said Link as the weaved their way back out of the cave.

"She'll be around here somewhere," said Zelda. "I'm sure we'll find her. I won't let whatever disaster Zoya was talking about happen. If we're really these Supreme Oracles like she said, then I think we're destined to complete our mission. If the forces in the universe are supposed to come into some kind of balance, then maybe we can't fail."

"I certainly hope you're right."

Link and Zelda reached the exit of the cave and climbed back onto the hill. They looked up and saw another cave not much further above. "Looks like there's one more up there. I certainly hope this is the one."

"Yeah, me too," said Zelda. "I really want to get this over with. And I'm tired. I want to go to sleep." Link chuckled at Zelda's remark and she flashed him a glare. Remaining silent throughout most of the climb, they continued to make their way towards the last cave they could see. Link and Zelda both tried to push away the ominous feeling that plagued their unconscious minds. They both knew that this mission was a matter of life and death, hoping that it wouldn't have to come to that.

Kisei sat in the darkness of the cave, silently meditating and thinking to herself. She repeated her spell over and over in her head, knowing that reciting it correctly would be the key to being freed from her hellish existence. She had long ago quit feeling sorry for the rest of the world. They had no idea what she had been through. Kisei had no pity for them. They would gladly accept their fate if they knew what it was like to live forever. Eternal life, she wished that she had never heard of such a ridiculous proposition. Kisei now knew that her friend Lani had received the gift and not the curse. It was Kisei herself who had received the curse, she had found that out the hard way. She took the watch out of her pocket and shone the lantern on it. It was one in the morning, getting perilously close to the zero hour.

A noise coming from one end of the cave startled Kisei. She frantically looked around, trying to find the source. There it was again, a scraping noise coming from the tunnel behind her. For a moment she wondered if it was an animal. No, it couldn't be an animal. She had learned to differentiate sounds long ago, and this sound was definitely coming from a person. She wondered who in the world would be exploring this cave. Kisei quickly put out her lantern and hid behind a large stalagmite.

A flickering light came from the southern end of the cave, casting a large humanoid shadow onto the wall. After a few moments, a female carrying a lantern emerged into the large open space in the cavern. Kisei watched the woman closely. She was wearing some kind of strange robe that looked religious. But Kisei knew that this woman was here for a reason other than exploring. Kisei had a bad feeling about this woman, and knew that she was here to stop her. Kisei saw the woman rummaging around, probably trying to see who was here. Kisei almost wanted to laugh at this woman, she certainly wasn't very observant. Kisei removed a small bottle and a rag from her pocket; she had brought some chloroform for just such an occurrence. She poured some of the volatile liquid onto the rag, soaking it thoroughly.

The woman had passed through the center of the dome in the cavern and was walking towards the other end. This was her chance. Kisei silently crept towards the woman in the robes, and prepared to place the rag over her face. Suddenly, a loud crack sounded as Kisei inadvertently stepped on a rock. The woman turned around and saw Kisei face-to-face. Kisei stood there stunned, still holding the rag. "Planning to sneak up on me?" said the woman.

"I don't give a damn who you are or why you're here, but I'm not going to let you stop me," said Kisei. She lunged at the woman and tackled her to the ground. They wrestled for a moment, each trying to incapacitate the other. The lantern the woman had been holding fell out of her hands and broke on the ground, plunging the cave into darkness. Using this surprise, Kisei jump off of the woman and let loose a powerful swing to her jaw. The woman yelled in pain as Kisei's fist rammed into her face. While the woman was writhing and trying to regain her senses, Kisei quickly fetched the cloth she had dropped and mashed it into the woman's face. In a matter of seconds, the woman's eyes rolled back and her body became limp. She was unconscious. Kisei rubbed her sore fist, that woman's jaw was a lot harder than she expected.

Kisei dragged the woman's unconscious body into the corner of the cave. She pulled some rope from her pocket and tied the woman's wrists and ankles tightly. This would ensure that the woman wouldn't be able to move if she managed to escape, that is, if she ever woke up. Kisei wondered what else could go wrong at such a late stage. Somehow, she knew that this woman wasn't alone. There had to be more people with her, and she hoped for their sake that they didn't come inside the cave.

As if on cue, Kisei heard footsteps coming from the other end of the cave. This particular system of tunnels had an opening in the southern face of the mountain as well as the northeastern face. She wondered who was coming now, it was probably the unconscious woman's friends. She prepared the rag

and the bottle of chloroform for another go. Kisei hid in an alcove and waited for whoever was there to show himself.

Link and Zelda walked into the last cave that they could see. Link held up his lamp and looked at the inside. The walls were smooth and damp, and the ground was strewn with rocks. "It looks like all the others," complained Link.

"Of course it does, all caves look the same. Let's keep going in deeper." They both wound their way through the twisting tunnels of the cave. As they walked around another turn, the light from the lanterns spilled into a huge open area. This was a large dome inside the cave, with stalactites and stalagmites jutting out of all places. It would definitely make a nice hideout. "Wow!" exclaimed Zelda, her voice echoing through the chamber. "This would be a great place to hang out."

"Did you hear something?" asked Link, listening intently.

"Probably just an echo." Slowly, they walked deeper into the chamber, their footsteps reverberating off the walls. "I don't think she's here, it looks like it's empty."

"It's a big cave, she might be deeper inside." Zelda half paid attention to her surroundings, but began to daydream as well. She was exhausted and wanted so badly to be asleep in her big, soft bed. She wished that saving the world didn't include sleep deprivation. Link stopped at the end of the large chamber and sighed. "Maybe she's not in here," said Link. Zelda walked up to him and put her hand on his shoulder.

"She was probably..." Zelda's words were suddenly cut off when she felt something being mashed into her face. Before Link could react, he felt the same pressure on his own face. A chemical-like smell filled his nostrils for a moment until he began to feel lightheaded and dizzy. He and Zelda both attempted to struggle, but their limbs became limp and everything went black.

## Chapter Six

Link awoke feeling groggy and disoriented. His head hurt and his mouth felt extremely dry. The essence of some foreign chemical was still present in his nose. It was then that he realized he had been drugged. Link opened his eyes and they focused on the dark cave. After a few moments of dizziness, his mental faculties finally returned. He looked around him and saw Zelda next to him, lying unconscious. On the other side of the cavern lay Zoya, who was also unconscious and bleeding from the mouth. Link tried to move and realized that his arms and legs were tied. Link fidgeted a little and he could've sworn that the rope had just gotten tighter.

"Don't try to struggle," said a female voice coming from somewhere he couldn't pinpoint. "I tied those ropes with special knots. If you struggle, they'll only get tighter. I wouldn't want you to cut off the blood to your arms and have them fall off." She finished that sentence with a chuckle.

"Who are you?" asked Link groggily, his temples throbbing with each syllable.

"You don't need to be asking questions. You look a little familiar to me. I seem to remember you from a bar the other night, and that lecture at the university. It almost seems like you're following me. Then again, it could be a coincidence."

"I know what you're doing, and I won't let you do it," said Link, his voice fierce with determination. The woman laughed again, this boy's resolve was almost cute. "And I do remember you from the bar and the University. You seemed to stick out, and now I know why. The Hateru Stone isn't a toy, and you can't use it to make some kind of disaster."

"Oh, please," she scoffed.

"You won't succeed, I'm much more resourceful than you might think."

"Brave words... I've heard them before, from thousands of people across the whole world. But they're

all gone, as you will be in about an hour. Allow me to introduce myself, my name is Kisei." With a smug look on her face, Kisei leaned over and extended her arm towards Link. She laughed when he couldn't return the gesture. "Oh, I forgot. You're all tied up. I have to say, you're a pretty resilient little boy. With the amount of chloroform I used, you should've been out for at least three hours."

"Don't call me little boy," said Link, gritting his teeth. He hated it when people called him that. "What are you going to do? What could be so important that you would risk your life?"

Kisei let out a maniacal laugh. "Risk my life? *Risk my life?* You are a funny one. That's exactly what I'm trying to do. Don't you know what the Hateru Stone is?"

"Yes I do," replied Link. "It supposedly gives the holder eternal life."

"Supposedly? I'm living proof of it. I'm sure you know all about the stones. After all, you were at the lecture. Then you must know that there are two stones. One has a curse and one has a so-called blessing. I remember the day I first used it. My best friend, my only friend, died that day. She chose the wrong stone, and I lived to see it."

"You...you're immortal?"

"Immortal is such a misnomer. It gives it more of a positive connotation, definitely not what I've experienced." Link just stared at her, not knowing what she was getting at. "Something wrong? You look confused. Don't believe me? Here, let me show you." Link began to get nervous when Kisei removed a large dagger from her belt and showed it to him. "Immortality is a funny thing. Not only does it prevent me from dying, I seem to have the amazing ability to heal rapidly. It's actually very interesting." She took the knife and place the cold blade against the skin just below the elbow of her left arm. She flashed a disturbing grin and plunged the knife into her arm, a small trickle of blood coming from the wound. Then, in a move that sickened Link, she dug the knife deeper and drew it down her arm all the way to her wrist. She could feel the razor sharp blade tearing at muscles, skin, and tendons. She left a huge gash in her arm that was spurting blood from dozens of severed blood vessels. Link almost felt like he was going to throw up. Kisei smiled and dropped the bloody blade to the ground.

"Are you crazy?" Link shouted in disbelief.

"Shh," said Kisei. "Watch." To Link's amazement, the gaping wound in Kisei's arm began to coagulate and come together. Like a zipper closing, the wound sealed itself all the way from her elbow to her wrist. Link was flabbergasted to see the woman's fatal wound close up in a matter of seconds. She took a rag and wiped the blood off her arm to reveal nothing but smooth skin. There was no hint that she had been injured, not even a scar.

"That's...that's amazing," exclaimed Link in a hushed voice. He had never seen anything like that before.

"That, little boy," she emphasized 'little boy', "is what the stone did to me. I see the look on your face." She leaned closer to Link. "You would love to have this gift, wouldn't you? I'm sure everybody would. That's how I heard about the Hateru Stone. I spent thirty years studying it and tracking it down. Then I found it. My friend and I, we went up to the summit of the mountain. It was a lot steeper then. We both knew that one stone would carry a curse and that one would hold the key to eternal life. So we each picked one. My friend, Lani, went first. It killed her. The power from the stone and the stars knocked her dead. And I used the other stone. I had never felt so much power in my life. It was incredible. I had done it, I had gained what all those people across history had failed to do: I had become immortal. It was absolutely amazing. I was invincible, nothing could hurt me. I could jump off a mountain and come out with not even a scratch."

Link listened to her words, wondering what it would be like to not be able to be harmed by anything. He could do anything he wanted. "It sounds amazing."

"Oh, it was...for a while. I loved it. I did things no one else would ever dream of. It was a lot of fun. But that was four thousand years ago." Link's eyes grew wide, he found it hard to believe that the woman standing before him was four thousand years old. "Yes, you heard me right. I'm 4127 to be exact; a nice, ripe old age."

"What is it you want to do?" asked Link, becoming impatient.

"Haven't you figured it out yet? You look like an intelligent boy, but maybe I guessed wrong. Don't

you know what I went through all this trouble for? Tying you and your friends up? It's very simple: I want to die."

Link couldn't believe her. "You are immortal. You are impervious to everything. You can do anything no matter how dangerous it is. And you want to die? What are you, nuts? Everyone in the world would give anything to have what you have. And you're going to throw it all away?"

"Believe me, I'm not throwing it all away. Don't you think I've had plenty of time to think this over? Four thousand years is quite a while. Let me tell you something. It's true that people all want to have eternal life. It seems to be a goal, a desire that's built into our subconscious minds, the desire to live forever. But nobody would have that desire if they knew what it really meant. You're right, I did have a chance to do anything I wanted. And I did. I've traveled the world dozens of times. I have walked on every inch of this planet, seen every forest, every desert. I've seen every plant and animal in the world. I've met people from every race. I can speak every dialect of every language in the world. I've seen every celebration, and every ritual imaginable. Do you know how much of my life that took? About four hundred years. That's not bad considering I've been everywhere. Then I decided to put my mind to work. I studied, I philosophized, I examined everything. I was always an explorer and a scientist at heart. I have made discoveries about the universe that you couldn't even begin to imagine. Every scientist in the world couldn't come up with the revelations I've had. You know nothing about how the world works. But me, I understand *everything*. I have discovered things, built things, and done things that modern science won't be able to do for a thousand years. I have made unbelievable discoveries that explain how the whole universe works. All my theories, the natural laws I discovered, they all fit together into perfect harmony. Science has always been looking to explain the world and how it works; I know how *everything* works. It's all...perfect. All that took about a millennium. You'd be surprised how much one person can learn if they really try."

"And you want to kill yourself because of this?"

Kisei gave a look of obvious frustration. "Gods! You are so thick! You still don't understand, do you? Let me spell it out. I have done everything there is to do, I have seen everything there is to see, and I have learned everything there is to learn. There's nothing more to do, nothing more to see, nothing more to learn. My life is completely meaningless. That is the one thing people never think of when they search for immortality, the one thing they never even consider: what happens when you've lived your life? What happens when you have done *everything*? I never thought about that, until I came upon that very problem. I solved the mysteries of the universe. And then there was nothing left. Nothing. I had learned everything, I could explain everything. There were no more mysteries to solve, no more puzzles to unravel. That is what I didn't think of when I touched the stone, that I may have eternal life, but what would happen when I didn't *want* to live anymore? I tried having a family. That helped for a while. Then I watched my husband grow old and die. I saw my children grow old and die. I saw my grandchildren, then my great-grandchildren grow old and die. All of them, every person I ever cared about died before my eyes, while I remained behind. I don't know how many descendants I have, I don't even care anymore. For all I know, you could be one of my descendants. I don't give a damn anymore. And you know what the worst thing is? Do you know what the one things is that haunts me and torments me is? I have seen him. I have seen him take my family."

"You've seen who?" asked Link.

"Death, I have seen Death. The one who takes life, the one who takes people from this world. I have looked into his face as he snatched away my family one by one. I saw him, I looked at him. And you know what? He looked back at me. But that's all he did. He looked at me. I begged him to take me, to take me from this hellish existence. But he didn't, he just walked away. I have looked into the eyes of Death, and I survived. That's when I decided to try to end it all. That's another thing people searching for immortality don't think of, that trying to kill yourself won't work, even if you want to die. I tried cutting my wrists and my throat. You saw what happened when I cut myself. I jumped off a cliff into a shallow lake, about a thousand foot drop. All I did was get wet. I've tried every poison known to Man, the worst that happened to me was a stomachache. I jumped in the middle of a stampede of bulls once, I got a couple bruises. I tied myself to a rock and jumped into a lake. I was under there for a few hours, with

water filling my lungs. I saw a lot of interesting fish, but I didn't die. I even jumped into a volcano, this one in particular. It was warm, and mucky. But not fatal. Then I tried a novel idea, why not have someone else try to kill me? So I committed a capital crime, I committed treason against Hyrule. I gave classified information to the enemy. The punishment was death by beheading. I remember it like it was yesterday. My head was on the chopping block. The executioner swung the axe and it landed on the back of my neck. But it didn't go through. He chopped at least thirty more times and eventually broke the blade. Then they tried to hang me. They strung me up on a gallows and I hanged there for a day. I got a good night's sleep. Then they tried pressing me with stones. They piled dozens of boulders on top of me. It was quite cramped, but not fatal. After that, they just gave up and let me go. That's when I became so disenchanted. I couldn't kill myself, and no one else could kill me. That was the day that I had my revelation. That was the day that I made the ultimate discovery. Eternal life was not the blessing that the legends told about, it was not some kind of wonderful gift from the gods. What I got, what I thought was a wonderful gift, was actually the curse of legend. My friend, Lani, died that night. It took me two thousand years to realize that she was the one who got the gift. She received the blessing, and I got the curse of legend. Nobody ever thought of that. The curse in the legends wasn't torture or death or disease, it was everything that people had searched for in the first place. The curse was eternal life. Eternity is the biggest curse of all, the worst thing anyone could ever have. Everything people strive for, the greatest gift that no one can achieve, is the greatest, most horrible twist of fate.

The gift will turn on you. Just when you want him most, just when you *beg* him to take you, Death looks into your face and says no.”

“So, you're doing all this, going through all this trouble, because you want to die?” asked Link.

“Absolutely,” she replied. “You see, my life made a drastic turn about eight hundred years ago. It's when I made the ultimate discovery. I looked at Death, I confronted him. And do you know what happened? He told me, he finally told me how to end it all. All he had to do was say a single word. He said, ‘Hateru.’ That little word opened up a whole new world of possibilities for me. Do you know what ‘hateru’ means? It's the only Proto-Hylian word that still exists today. It means ‘death.’ That single word led me to my ultimate discovery. I'm not sure how much you know about geography, but let me give you a little lesson. About two thousand miles south of here lies a mountain range, the Hateru mountain range. It is a line of huge mountains that curves across the continent and separates it into two regions. But people don't know why those mountains are there. No one ever questions it. But I looked into it. The mountains aren't formed by volcanic and seismic upheaval, like the rest of the world. That was one thing I discovered in my studying, how the continents were formed. But you wouldn't be able to begin to understand that. Anyways, I went to the mountains and I explored them. I dug deep into the rock and I took samples, like any good geologist would do. Then I studied the rocks. This is where the discovery comes in. I analyzed the rock, using methods that modern science won't discover for a thousand more years. In every single rock in that range, I found traces of a unique mineral. A mineral found nowhere else on the planet, a mineral that wasn't even from this planet. It came from space. Then I analyzed the atomic and chemical structure of the mineral.”

“Atomic structure?” asked Link. “What does that mean?”

“You wouldn't understand. It fits into one of the many discoveries I made previously, science won't discover it for centuries. Let's just say that everything in the world is made up of tiny particles so small that they can't be seen. I studied the particles that this mineral was made of, and it gave me a message. The arrangement of the particles actually spelled out a message. I decoded this message, and I found the words that would be my salvation. The words to reverse the curse put on me. Once I made that discovery, all I had to do was wait. I had to wait for the second stone to return, and that happened tonight. Now it will end.”

“You found a message? In minerals? How do you know that?”

“I know by means that your puny mind couldn't even begin to comprehend,” she shot back loudly. “You have no idea where you are even standing right now. Like I said before, that mineral was not from this world. The Hateru Mountains were not formed by geological processes. They are the outer wall of an impact crater. The Hateru Mountains don't just cut across this continent, they extend underwater in a

circle four thousand miles in diameter. The impact crater was formed millions of years ago when a comet smashed into this planet. It vaporized everything for thousands of miles, creating the crater right in the middle of this continent. The mineral that was in the comet was melted and mixed into the mountains that formed, just waiting for me to find them. And at the center of this comet was a substance unlike anything else in the universe, the Hateru Stone. At the moment of impact, the stone was split into two pieces which flew off in opposite directions. They were later discovered over and over again, until I came across them. Do you know why Death Mountain is so important, why the ritual must be performed here? It's because Death Mountain is at the exact center of the crater. The volcano was formed when the comet crashed into the crust of the planet and opened a hole to let lava through. This place holds a cosmic significance. The Hateru mountain range and the walls of the crater act as a barrier to the stone's power. The stones can only be used at the center of the crater, within the confines of the walls. That's good for the people who live beyond the mountain range, but bad for people inside it, like you and your friends."

"Does this have something to do with that catastrophe Zoya told me about?" asked Link.

"Zoya? Is that your unconscious friend over there? Why yes, as a matter of fact, it does. I trust she told what would happen if you failed, which you will."

"Well...actually, no. She just said it would be a disaster."

"You mean she didn't tell you? Some friend. Well, allow me. What I am going to do is say a simple spell that will essentially reverse the effects of the stone. Whereas it gave me life, it will now give me death. But unfortunately, it has a few other consequences. Not only will it take away my life, it will also take away the lives of everything else. That is, everything within the confines of the crater. Like I said, the crater acts as a barrier to the stone's power. The power cannot reach beyond it. And unfortunately, in order for me to die, it will also kill every living thing in a two thousand mile radius. Everything."

It scared Link how this woman had said those words with such cold clarity. She almost seemed to enjoy it. "You're going to kill millions of people!" Link screamed. "Doesn't that even bother you? You're a mass murderer."

"Don't even attempt to judge me! I have no pity for these people. They are lucky. They would thank me if they knew what living forever was like. They didn't care about me, so I don't care about them. I'm perfectly happy taking their lives away if it means ending my own. So sorry, but enjoy your last few minutes of life while you can. Because it will all be over soon."

"You monster!" Link yelled. He tried to fidget a little to loosen the ropes. He had kept the woman talking, which had distracted her from his plans. He had been rubbing the ropes around his wrist against a sharp rock, and now they were almost broken. "I won't let you do this!" With just a few more movements, Link had broken the ropes and was freeing his hands. He leaned forward and stared at her. "You won't succeed."

"That was the plan all along, wasn't it?" she said in a maniacal voice. "Keep the bad guy talking while you free yourself. I'm not that stupid, little boy." Before Link could react, Kisei let loose a hard kick to Link's side. He doubled over in pain, it felt like she had almost broken his ribs. All the air had been knocked from his lungs and he struggled to breathe. Kisei walked up to Link and kicked his side again, causing him to roll over onto his stomach. She saw that his hands were free. She pressed her foot down on the back of his neck, pinning him to the ground. The pain was almost too much for Link to bear. She pulled a rope from her pouch and quickly retied the knots around Link's wrists. Then she flipped him over onto his back and looked at his grimacing face. "Please, you're not going to win," she teased. "I told you, I've planned this for hundreds of years. A little boy like you won't be able to stop me."

Link coughed and gasped, tasting blood in his mouth. He spat into Kisei's face, splattering blood on it. "You bitch!" he screamed furiously.

"Shut up!" she shot back. Link squirmed and struggled, but the ropes combined with the searing pain in his side made it impossible for him to do anything. "You're feisty, I have to give you that. Maybe this'll calm you down." Link prepared to be drugged again, but gasped in horror as she picked up the huge dagger she had left on the ground. She smiled at him as she waved the blade in front of his face. Link closed his eyes and whimpered, praying that this woman wasn't going to do what he thought she was. He had never felt so helpless in his life. With a lightning fast motion, Kisei jammed the knife through his

right shoulder, piercing all the way to the other side and into the ground. Link screamed in agony as the blade ripped through his flesh. The knife was embedded in the hard ground, pinning him down. The pain was so intense, that even breathing made it worse. "That should make you stay put. Sorry." Kisei smiled and began to walk away. "Now, if you don't mind, my time is almost up. See you in the afterlife." Kisei then walked out of the cave, leaving Link alone with the still unconscious Zoya and Zelda. Link screamed in pain, tears flowing from his eyes. He screamed as loud as he could, hoping someone would hear him. He could feel the warm blood from his wound soaking into his clothing. The pain wouldn't go away. He felt like he was going to pass out. He stopped moving, and lay perfectly still. He had to think of something. He'd been through worse problems than this. He had to think. But the pain wouldn't let him. It filled every corner of his mind, creating a barrier he couldn't penetrate. Link lay there, hoping that his sister would come and find him. But the feeling of dread came back in a crash, and he wondered if this time he would actually fail.

"Malon, look, it's the star," said Solo, pointing to the eastern sky, which was just beginning to show a glimmer of twilight. "It's going to happen. I have a bad feeling. Link and the others should be here. I think something's wrong. I have to find them." Solo stood up from behind the rock they were hiding near and tried to run away. Malon grabbed Solo's arm and stopped her.

"No," said Malon. "Zoya said we had to be up here by the time the star came out. We have to stay here. They'll come, I know it. That woman is going to be here any second." With some cajoling, Malon managed to get Solo to sit back down. They were sitting near a string of boulders at the edge of the mesa at the top of the mountain. They had a clear view of the whole plateau and could see everything.

"They are in trouble!" screamed Solo. "I can feel it! I have to help them."

"Just wait a minute." Malon grabbed Solo's shoulders and look her in the eyes. "You might be the only one who can stop this, you have to stay here. I'm sure Link will be fine..." Malon stopped herself and mid-sentence as she saw a figure come up the summit of the mountain. She indicated for Solo to look, and they saw that it was Kisei. Kisei leisurely walked to an open area in the center of the plateau. She sat on the ground and crossed her legs. Then Kisei removed two shining stones from her pouch, which were now glowing a bright red. Solo and Malon looked up at the sky to see the pentagon constellation glowing brighter than anything else in the sky, their light pulsating like a heartbeat. "We have to stop her," said Malon frantically. Kisei looked up at the sky and began to loudly chant words that Malon and Solo couldn't understand.

While Malon was frantically trying to think of a way to stop the woman, Solo suddenly stood up. As if by magic, a feeling of calm and tranquility washed over Solo. She could feel the power from the stones, and she could feel the power inside of her. She knew what she had to do. Solo walked around the boulder and towards the woman. "What are you doing?" whispered Malon.

Solo looked back at her with an expression of blissful understanding. "I think I'm the one. I can feel it," she replied. She took the piece of paper that had the spell written on it from her pocket. She crumbled it up and threw it on the ground. "I don't need this."

"Wait," said Malon. "I can help. I'll tackle her from behind, and you take the stones. Then you can say your spell."

"Sounds like a plan," responded Solo, smiling. Malon and Solo silently crept towards Kisei. She was sitting on the ground, completely focused on chanting her mantra. The stones grew brighter as she recited each verse. Without warning, a sudden rumbling came from everywhere at once, and a driving wind began to blow from all directions. The rumbling grew to a roar as the stones and the stars began to glow a blinding red light. Before they let it go any further, Malon ran and jumped onto the woman, startling her from her trance and causing her to drop the stones. Solo quickly grabbed the stones and ran to the other side of the mountain.

"What are you doing!" screamed Kisei. She tried to wrestle Malon off her back, but she held on tightly. "Get off of me you little runt!" Kisei jumped up, throwing Malon off her back. Kisei ran towards Solo,

who was now holding the stones and staring up at the sky. Before Kisei could reach Solo, she felt a sudden sharp pain on the back of her head, causing her to crash into the ground. Malon had thrown a huge rock and it had landed right on the back of Kisei's head. Kisei looked to see Malon running towards her. The pain was new to Kisei, who hadn't felt like this in a long time. She crawled on the ground, trying to get closer to Solo. Malon jumped on top of Kisei and bashed a huge rock into the back of her head, causing Kisei to fall unconscious. Her powers of healing were no longer working, the power from the stones was already beginning to fail her.

"Solo!" screamed Malon. "Do it! Say the spell!"

Solo looked for the source of the voice and saw Malon sitting atop Kisei's body. Now Solo knew what she had to do. She held the stones high in the air, and they began to glow once again. The light pulsed, in tune with her own heartbeat. Solo felt a sudden surge of energy travel through her. Her perception of the rest of the world suddenly disappeared. She was in a silent world here, nothing taking her attention from the stone. Solo closed her eyes and began to chant words she couldn't understand, words that came from somewhere deep inside her mind. "*Kolore degine kozashum. Kyomine tatakau nou jina. Kolore degine trofashe. Kyomine toi tijazme. Kolore degine nairune. Kyomine vaisam doshixre...*" With every syllable of the unknown tongue, Solo felt more and more power surge through her. She began to see the power from the stones. Solo could see, hear, and feel the essence. Her mind began racing with the memories of every person who had ever touched it. She could sense the memories, the essences, being sucked into the void. The void grew larger and larger as the power from the stones leaked from her hands and flooded into the infinitely empty void.

Malon was awestruck by the sight before her. Solo and the stones had both begun to glow an incandescent white. What seemed like a beam of energy shot into the night sky, converging in the center of the pentagon constellation. The points of light began to expand and glow white. In a spectacular astronomical display, the points elongated into streaks which pointed to the exact center of the constellation. It appeared as if the stars had tuned to giant puffs of smoke, which were being sucked into some invisible point in the center of the constellation. The light from Solo's body began to change colors rapidly, creating a glowing mosaic of every color of the rainbow. The beam of light from the stones shot into the center of the constellation, taking the power from the stones with it. Kisei regained consciousness and stared at the display before her. "No!" she screamed as the last remnants of the stones' power were sucked into the abyss. The clouds of light in the constellation streamed into the center, and vanished. The beam of light from Solo's body ended and flew into the sky. Where the constellation used to be was a point of brilliant blue light. As the trail of energy soared into the sky, the point grew larger. In a sudden display, the blue light rapidly collapsed into nothingness. A brilliant glowing shockwave in the form of an ever-growing translucent sphere traveled out from the center of what used to be the constellation. The shockwave expanded until it filled the whole sky. A deep rumbling filled the land as the sky above began to glow bright blue. Malon saw a huge wave of energy come down from the sky. She quickly ducked and covered her head as the shockwave smashed into the mountain, traveling away in all directions. A deafening roar filled her ears for a split-second but was suddenly silenced. Malon opened her eyes to see the shockwave travel across the land, finally disappearing over the horizon. Everything was completely silent and still, there was no wind, no noise, nothing.

Solo felt the energy leave her and close into the void. With a sudden jolt, she was brought out of her trance. She stood still for a moment, and dropped the stones. They no longer glowed a bright blue, they had transformed to a coarse black and dropped to the ground like pieces of burnt charcoal. Solo suddenly felt the life leave her body as she collapsed limp onto the ground. Malon saw Solo fall and yelled out to her. She looked down at Kisei, who was lying face first in the dirt. Her body had radically changed to the withered and skinny figure of an ages-old woman. Malon quickly ran to Solo's side. She lay on the ground, completely still. Malon shook Solo hard, and she moved her head and groggily looked at Malon. "I... I did it," whispered Solo in an almost inaudible voice. "I did it...."

Link screeched in pain as the shockwave shook the cavern and caused him to aggravate his wound. Then a sudden clarity came upon him. He knew something was happening, and he had no time left. Link winced and took a deep breath as he turned his head to see the blade sticking from his shoulder. Ignoring the searing agony, he leaned forward slightly and placed his teeth on the knife. He felt the razor-sharp blade cut his tongue as he pulled with all the force he could muster. Link wobbled the knife back and forth until he felt it dislodge from the ground. Taking a deep breath once again, he rolled onto his side and ripped the blade from his shoulder with his teeth. Link sat still for a moment, waiting for the terrible wave of agony and nausea to pass. Blood from the open wound flowed freely down his body and dripped onto the ground. He rolled on top of the blade and quickly manipulated its sharp edge with his hands. He dexterously used the sharp edge of the knife to cut through the ropes and finally free his arms. Link sat up and ignored the pain from his shoulder. He could barely move his right arm. He took the knife into his left hand and sliced the ropes off his legs. He quickly ran over to Zelda and cut her ropes. He shook her in an attempt to wake her up. "Zelda, Zelda!" Link shouted. Her eyes fluttered and she began to move. "Wake up!" Zelda opened her eyes and looked confused and disoriented. Before she could ask Link a question, he had run over to Zoya and was freeing her. Link shook Zoya and she awakened immediately.

"What..." mumbled Zoya as her head cleared and she sat up. She suddenly realized what had happened and made an attempt to stand up. She fell over and tried again. Zoya managed to stand, but wobbled slightly.

"We have to get up to the mountain," said Link. "It's happening." Zoya nodded and went over to Zelda, who was trying to sit up and open her eyes.

"Come on, honey, we have to go," said Zoya.

Zelda focused her eyes and saw Zoya looking down at her. Zoya helped Zelda to stand up. Link had already left the cave and was climbing to the top. Zelda groggily followed Zoya out of the cave, becoming more alert each second. The realization of what they needed to do gave Zelda the energy to climb her way up the hill. She didn't even care why she had been tied up in the cave, now she had more important things to do.

"Yes, you did it, Solo," said Malon with a smile.

Solo looked at Malon's face and gave a weak smile. She was finding it increasingly difficult to just keep her eyes open. Solo felt weak and paralyzed. It was a struggle to breathe. "I think...I think it's over now."

"Yes, it's over," said Malon.

"You don't understand," said Solo in a whisper. "I did what I was supposed to do, my time is over. I feel the life draining from me. I can't...I can't feel anything."

Tears began to well in Malon's eyes, but she kept her composure for Solo's sake. "Shh, don't worry. You're gonna be fine."

"No, I can feel it. I think...I think I'm dying. I can feel my life slipping away. Malon, I'm scared."

"Don't be scared. You're not dying. You're just a little tired, you'll be fine."

"It doesn't matter any more. I succeeded. That's all that matters. Please don't be sad, I had to do this...for everyone. Just stay with me here, please."

"I'm not going anywhere," said Malon, hugging Solo tightly to her chest. "I won't leave you. Solo, I know this isn't a good time, but I want to tell you something. Please don't be mad."

"I would never be mad at you," responded Solo.

"I have a confession. I was the one who looked in your sketchbook, not Link. I didn't have the heart to tell you. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to go into your personal things." Solo tried to laugh, but the only noise she could make was a slight hiss. "I saw the pictures you drew of me. They were so beautiful. I never knew you could draw like that. They were wonderful, and the card was so...touching, and loving."

"Is this confession time? I made those for you. I was going to give them to you for your birthday, but I guess you got them early. It's your present. I don't have any money, so I drew you those pictures. I knew

you would like them. Sometimes I would sneak into the ranch and hide. I would sit there for hours watching you tend to the horses. You looked so beautiful like that...just being yourself. I had to capture it somehow. I loved watching you do those things. I was so embarrassed, I didn't want you to know I was spying on you. I just got so obsessed. I love seeing you. I love you so much. You're...you're like a goddess to me. You're so kind and wonderful. I wanted to capture you in one of your most beautiful moments...to show you how beautiful you are. To show you what I think of you."

"Those drawings were so perfect," said Malon. "So perfect...I love you, Solo, please don't leave me." Malon felt Solo's body become increasingly more flaccid. She was fading fast, and Malon didn't know what to do. Solo's breathing had slowed considerably and she struggled to take in each breath.

Solo looked into Malon's eyes with a pleading expression. "Malon...promise me something. Promise me you'll do something for me."

"Anything."

"Please...tell Link...tell him that I love him. And tell him thank you for saving me. I don't know what would happen if I never met him. Will you tell him that?"

"Yes, I will. But you can tell him that yourself, you'll be fine." Somehow, Malon knew that she was lying. She could feel Solo's life slipping away, and knew that she would be gone soon. Malon wanted with all her heart to deny it, but the fact was inevitable. "I would give anything to put myself in your place. I would die for you, please don't leave me. Don't die on me..."

"I can't help it," said Solo, trying to keep a sense of humor.

"It doesn't have to end like this," pleaded Malon. "You don't have to die. Just stay with me. Concentrate on staying here. Please..."

"I had no choice, you know that. Somehow, I knew this was going to be a one-way trip. You know I had to do it. I did it to save you and everyone else. They'll all live because of my sacrifice."

"I know you saved all those people," cried Malon. "But I need you. I can't live without you. Don't worry about the others, focus on saving yourself."

"I don't matter. I'm sorry to make you sad. I had to do it. Please don't be mad at me. I realized something...I did something that saved everyone. One life is not important. Sometimes the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few...or the one."

"Solo, no..." pleaded Malon.

"Please, don't cry over me. Remember all the good times we had. Please, just remember the good things. Don't cry."

"I'll...I'll try."

Solo looked into Malon's eyes one last time and smiled. "I...I love you, Malon. More than anything in the world."

"I love you too."

"I'll always be with you, I promise..." Solo's voice faded away and the smile disappeared. Her eyes rolled back and her head went limp. Malon shook Solo's body and received no response. She lifted Solo's eyelids and saw nothing but a blank stare, no glimmer of life. Malon screamed, screamed so loud the world could hear.

"No! No! Don't you take her from me!" Malon shouted. She looked to the heavens and screamed in despair. "Don't take her! Please, take me instead! No! Please..." Malon collapsed onto Solo's body and cried violently. The only person she ever cared about, the only one who ever understood her, had died in her arms. She wailed and screamed to anyone who could hear her. Malon looked up from her fallen love and saw three people coming over the top of the mountain. "Help!" Malon screamed. "Help me! She's dead! Please, help!"

They heard Malon's screams and came running over. When Link heard Malon say that Solo was dead, he felt his heart sink. The pain in his shoulder and side disappeared as her ran to her as fast as he had ever run before. Within seconds, he was kneeling by Malon's side, who was inconsolably clutching Solo's body. "What happened?" Link asked frantically, trying to assess Solo's injuries. Malon merely wailed and cried, hugging Solo to herself.

"She's dead!" cried Malon. "She did the thing with the stone, and it killed her! Why? Why did it kill

her? This is all your fault Zoya!" Malon was trying to find anyone she could to blame for Solo's death. She knew it was no one's fault, but it made her feel better to blame someone. Zelda went to Malon's side and tried to calm her down and pry her off of Solo.

"Malon, you have to move," said Link. "I have to see what's wrong." To Malon's refusal, Zelda finally managed to pull Malon off and drag her a few feet off to the side. Malon continued crying, this time into Zelda's dress. Link put his ear to Solo's mouth to listen for any sign of life. He felt for the blood veins in her wrist, and then the one in her neck. "She's not breathing, and she has no heartbeat," said Link, almost ready to break down and cry like Malon. Link shook Solo's body violently, trying to force her to breathe again. She just lay there with absolutely no signs of life.

"I told you, she's dead!" screamed Malon. "If she's dead, then I swear on my mother's grave, I kill myself! I can't live without her."

"Malon, calm down. Just calm down," said Zelda, trying to be as soothing as possible. "Don't talk like that." Malon just hung her head and sobbed, not wanting to say anything.

"I'm going to try to see if I can get her breathing again," said Link. He leaned over Solo's face and pinched her nose shut.

"What are you doing?" asked Zelda.

"A doctor showed me this once. Just pray that it'll work." Link closed Solo's nose and he took a deep breath. He put his mouth over hers and exhaled as hard as he could. He continued breathing into Solo's mouth, seeing her chest move up with each breath. He breathed a few times and looked for a reaction. There was none. Link then placed his hands on her chest and began to push down hard on it, trying to make her heart work again. Link compressed five times and listened again for a sign of life. When there was no response, he repeated the process of breathing and compressing, hoping and praying that this technique would work. With every repetition of the process, he grew more and more disenchanted. Tears welled in his eyes as he came to the realization that his sister was lying lifeless before him. "Come on! Don't give up on me like this!" screamed Link at Solo's lifeless face. He breathed into her and pumped her chest a few more times. Nothing happened. In a desperate move, Link began to shake Solo violently, and pound his fist on her chest. "Please come back...please..." Link trailed off and collapsed on top of Solo. He sobbed loudly and screamed. He felt a hand on his shoulder and he looked up to see Zoya, her face wet with tears.

"She's gone," said Zoya. "I'm sorry, I didn't know it would end like this."

Link looked back at Solo and clutched her limp body to his chest. He buried his face in her shoulder and wailed. His sister had died up here, and he never got the chance to tell her he loved her. At that moment, he wished it had been he who destroyed the stone. He would give anything to be the one who was lying there dead. Link screamed and cried, realizing that she was gone and that there was nothing he could do.

It was peaceful and calm here. The sky was bright and blue, and the sun shone on the field of beautiful flowers before her. A vast meadow filled with flowers and trees spread out in front of Solo. It was so beautiful, so tranquil. She wondered how she had gotten here. All she remembered was talking to Malon and then suddenly being here in the field. This meadow was so calm, she felt happy and relaxed here. It was perfect. No fears or worries existed here, it was only peace and happiness, pure bliss.

*Welcome, you are most welcome,* said a female voice, coming from everywhere at once.

"Who are you? Where am I?" Solo asked aloud, not knowing to whom or to what she was talking to.

*I am sure you have heard of this place,* responded the voice. *Only thoughts and emotions exist here, only feelings.*

"Where am I?" asked Solo. "I want to go home."

*Your request is not valid, you are home.* Solo saw the foggy form of a person appear in the distance. As the figure approached, it dissolved into the figure of a woman. She was tall and kind-looking, with shining golden hair and sparkling blue eyes. She stood in front of Solo and smiled. The woman radiated a

sense of love and calm. "It's good to see you here," she said. "Welcome."

"You never answered my question. Where am I?" asked Solo again, becoming impatient.

"My, my, you're impatient," laughed the woman. "You are worse than your brother. At least he listened. I'm sure he's told you about this place. He was here right after you two met. Does that jog your memory?"

Solo thought for a moment. She remembered Link telling her about a vision he had when he passed out. Could this be the same vision he had had? "He told me he went to this place, where all the Oracles go to."

"That's correct. We call it the Vinculum. Welcome home, Solo. Or should I say Zelda? That was your given name after all."

"You...are you who I think you are?" asked Solo.

"Who do you think I am?" replied the woman cryptically.

"You're...you're our mother, aren't you?"

"Your intuition is right. I've spoken to Link on a couple occasions, and I've been waiting to speak with you. I'm sorry it had to be under circumstances like this."

"I'm dead, right?" she said solemnly. The fact had finally hit her. That was the only thing it could be. She remembered lying there and everything going black. And now she was here, talking to her mother.

"Sadly, that seems to be what happened."

"I can't be dead. I have a life back there. Malon's there, I can't leave her alone. I can't..."

"Malon? Is that a friend of yours?"

"Well...sort of," replied Solo hesitantly. "She's more than that. She's my...I mean I...I don't know how to explain it."

"I understand how you feel about her, you don't have to explain."

"You know?" asked Solo. "I'm sorry, I can't help it. It's the way I feel about her. Don't be ashamed of me..."

"Shh, calm down honey. You don't have to be ashamed of how you feel. I would never look down on you for something like that. But that's not important right now. I brought you here for a reason. What you did was very brave and noble. You gave your life for millions of people you didn't even know. That proves how kind-hearted you are."

"I did it for the people I loved. And they're back there crying over me, I can feel it."

"I know that. I need to speak with you first. I got to know your brother better this way, and now it's your turn. Your life has changed dramatically since you met Link. You used to live on the streets, homeless and hungry. I'm sorry you had to live like that. You have to know that your father and I both loved you very much."

"Is he here? Can I speak to him?" asked Solo.

"Unfortunately, no. He cannot be here. He is not one of us, he is not an Oracle like us. He is somewhere out there in the afterlife, but I haven't spoken to him since he died. It really saddens me. When I died, I chose to come here, to the Vinculum, to spend eternity. It was a final choice, and I cannot go back. I chose to come here for a reason. I knew that you two would become Oracles like myself, so I came here in the hopes that I would one day be able to speak with you. Someday, you both will be able to come here at will. But that will take much practice and concentration."

"What does this place do? Why is it here?"

"The Vinculum was created long ago, when the first Oracles appeared. Like I told Link, we come here to share our thoughts. Everybody is one here. All our thoughts combine and coalesce into something new and greater. You too will become part of this. What Zoya told you was correct. You, Link, and Zelda are the Supreme Oracles of legend. You are the ones who will bring balance to the Hirfashe, the ones who will tip the balance from evil to good. Your existence will change the course of history. What you did on the mountain today changes everything. You were willing to give your life, and you did. I'm proud of you. There really isn't much more I can tell you, I don't know everything. Now you know as much as I do."

"Can I ask you something, something personal?" asked Solo.

"Of course."

"I know about the war in the past, and that you had to give me and Link up to save us. Why did you

separate us? Why didn't you give us both to the Kokiri? I know you put me in an orphanage, but it burned down and I lived most of my life on the street. I couldn't even remember my real name."

"Honey, I'm sorry for all the pain you went through. I couldn't foresee that you would have to live such a hellish life. If I had known, I would've given you to the Deku Tree like I did Link. The reason I separated you two was to ensure your survival. If I put each of you in a separate place, it would make a better chance that at least one of you would survive if one of the places was attacked. You have to understand what was going on. I didn't have time to think of what would happen years later. I also had another, more personal reason for giving you to that particular orphanage. You see, I grew up in Batarael. One day, when I was about five years old, two thieves broke into our house. We lived in an isolated part of the town, and no one was there to help us. I remember it so clearly. I hid under my parent's bed while the thieves ransacked the house. We were poor and didn't have anything of value. I guess the thieves didn't like that fact. I saw them murder my parents. They stabbed my mom and dad dozens of times. They brutally slaughtered them and I hid under the bed, praying they wouldn't find me. I stayed under that bed for days, scared to come out because I thought the thieves were waiting for me. After a couple days, the neighbors got worried and came over. They found my parents' bodies and found me hiding. Nobody knew what to do with me. Although our neighbors were friends, they already had three children and couldn't possibly support me. I didn't have any living relatives, so the only choice was to give me to the orphanage. I spent the rest of my childhood in the same orphanage I gave you to. I had no idea it would burn down four years after I put you there. I would never have done it if I'd known you would end up living on the streets."

"Your parents, my grandparents, were murdered?" said Solo, feeling like crying.

"Yes, I know. It still upsets me. But that's in the past, as is your life on the streets. You have to look at the future and what lies ahead. Don't dwell on the past."

"I have no future, I'm dead!" shouted Solo, suddenly falling into a fit of tears after realizing how Malon and Link must be feeling right now. "How can I look to the future if I'm lying dead on a mountaintop somewhere?"

"That's where your choice comes in. I brought you here for a very specific reason. What you did to the Hateru Stone drained your life force. It sucked nearly all of the energy from your soul. Yes, it would have killed you either way. But I brought your spirit here to rebuild it, to rejuvenate it. By standing here talking to me, you are giving your soul the power it needs to go back. If I had let you just go off into the afterlife, you would never be able to return. Do you understand?"

"I think so. You brought me here just so I could go back?"

"Yes, I did. I couldn't let you die down there and let your soul just fizzle away. Your spirit was weak, but now it is strong. Now you have to make a choice. You can either stay here with us, or you can go back right now. I'm sure you already know what choice you want to make."

"I want to go back," said Solo.

"I thought so. You know what you want, you remind me of me at your age. Whenever I had my mind set on something I did it, no matter what other people thought. Use that as a piece of advice, if you think something is right, you do it regardless of what others think. I think that would cover your relationship with Malon. It feels right to you, and I would be disappointed if you broke off the relationship because of what other people thought. I'm proud of you for standing up for yourself. I know you have friends who support you, but it won't always be that way. Someday, somebody will come along and try to break you two apart, saying it's not right and it's not supposed to be that way. It will be a tough road ahead. But if you stick with your feelings, you can never be wrong. Now, it's time for you to go. I hope to see you and your brother again. I'll always be here, waiting for you. I'll always be out there looking out for you, and whenever you think you're alone, I'll be standing there next to you. I love you."

"I love you too, mom."

"It's over, she's gone," said Zoya. "There's nothing you can do." Zoya had tried to console Link as he lay there crying and holding Solo's body. He refused to listen to Zoya, he wouldn't believe that his sister was dead. He just couldn't accept it. Link let go of Solo's body and watched it drop limply onto the ground.

"No!" Link screamed. "No! She has a strong heart, she wants to live! Come on Solo, wake up." Link began to breathe into her mouth once again and started compressing her chest hard. He completely ignored the blood oozing from his shoulder and the sharp pains in his ribs. He pushed on her chest as hard as he could, and tried to breathe some life into her. He would not give up, he couldn't give up. "Dammit Solo! You never backed away from anything in your life! Now fight! Fight! *Fight!*" Link shook Solo hard and pounded his hand on her chest. "Fight it! Please!" he screamed. Link slapped Solo's face back and forth. He shook her again. "Don't give up on me!" Link stopped shaking when he heard the faintest squeal come from her mouth. Link stopped dead in his tracks, wondering if it was his imagination. He looked at Solo's face, praying that he hadn't imagined the noise. He then shook Solo gently a few more times and saw her eyelids flutter ever so slightly. "Come on, that's it, come back," said Link gently. He shook her again and Solo's eyes suddenly shot open and she coughed loudly. Solo turned her head and coughed violently, spewing small droplets of blood onto the ground. She lay back down and gasped for air, feeling like she was drowning. "Yes! That's it! Breathe for me," said Link, trying his hardest not to break down in tears and squeeze Solo with all his might and never let her go. "She's alive!" Link screamed at the top of his lungs. "She's alive!" Zoya simply stood there in disbelief, not ever expecting that Link's strange first aid would ever have an effect. When Malon had heard Link's words, her head shot up and she looked over. Malon thought she had just imagined it. When Zelda gently nudged her, Malon took off and ran to Solo's side, hovering over her face as she slowly regained consciousness.

"Solo... Solo honey, it's me," said Malon. Link leaned back to give Malon more room. Solo opened her eyes and saw a blurry, foggy figure before her. She couldn't see anything, but she recognized the voice. "Do you know who I am?" Malon asked excitedly, praying this wasn't a dream.

"Malon..." whispered Solo, falling into a fit of coughing again.

"You're alive!" squealed Malon. She leaned over and clutched Solo to her chest, frantically planting kisses all over her face. "I thought you were dead. Oh thank the gods!"

Solo made a feeble attempt at trying to get Malon to calm down, but she barely had enough energy to keep her eyes open. "Malon..." Solo mumbled. "You're... smothering... me..."

Malon gently laid Solo down and apologized profusely. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I was just so happy to see you alive. I thought you were dead. I thought I would die, I didn't want to live without you."

"What happened?" asked Solo slowly, still trying to regain all of her senses.

"You were dead," replied Malon. "And Link brought back to life. He saved you."

"My... face hurts," said Solo.

"That's where I slapped you," said Link. A large red handprint started to show on Solo's face where Link had hit her. "Sorry, but it was the only thing I could think of."

"I'd slap you back if I had the energy," said Solo, making at feeble attempt at humor. She smiled slightly.

"She's definitely back to her old self," said Link.

Malon leaned back over and gently hugged Solo again. "See, I told you that you would be fine. You have to have more faith."

"Well, I guess both of you have had near-death experiences," commented Zelda.

"Link," said Solo. "I saw her. She talked to me."

"Who did you see?" he asked.

"You know who I'm talking about," she replied. It was then that he realized what she meant. He didn't need to reply further, he understood everything. "I want to go home."

"We'll get you home," said Link. "We'll figure something out."

"Did I do it? Did it work?" asked Solo to Zoya.

"Yes, you did it," responded Zoya. "You had the power. The stone is dead now." Zoya walked a few feet over to where the remnants of the stones lay. She picked up the blackened rocks and brought them

over to Solo. "They're worthless now. The force has been neutralized." Zoya crumpled the stones in her hand, causing them to disintegrate into nothing but soot. The black powder blew away into the wind, being carried away across the mountains.

"What about the woman?" They suddenly looked up, surprised. They had completely forgot about Kisei. Link and Zoya ran over to where the woman's shriveled body lay face down. She no longer looked like the middle-aged woman she had been, she was now thin and lanky, and her skin was tired and withered. Link rolled Kisei over and was almost horrified to see that she was still alive. After all that trouble, this woman was still alive.

"I can't believe it, you're still alive," Link said to Kisei in a condescending tone.

She opened her eyes and looked up at Link. "It's you..." she muttered. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry for what I did. For what I tried to do."

"You were going to kill millions of people and you didn't even care."

"I'm sorry. I was selfish. But you were right, I didn't win. I shouldn't have underestimated you. Sorry about the shoulder."

Link looked back at the stab wound on his shoulder and saw that it had finally stopped bleeding. There was now a thick and gruesome scab on his skin. All the clothes around the wound had been soaked in blood and were now becoming dry and crusty. "If you had just let me explain, you would've found out there was another way. But your plan failed."

"She's going to die," Zoya said matter-of-factly. "The stones are dead, and with their power gone, she will die too."

Kisei smiled. "That's all I wanted."

"Well, you're gonna get your wish," Link scoffed.

"Tell me, what's your name, little boy?" Kisei asked.

Link glowered. "I told you not to call me 'little boy.' I'm not a little boy. My name is Link."

"Okay...Link. Listen, I'm sorry for what I did, what I did to you and your friends. I don't expect you to forgive me, and I don't want your forgiveness. I just wanted you to know that I'm sorry. I guess I'm going to get my wish. I've waited so long to die. Now I can finally rest, I can sleep. It's wonderful. You look like the intellectual type. Are you interested in science at all?"

"I guess so..."

"Link's a bookworm," interrupted Zelda. "He dragged us off to that stupid lecture."

"That's good enough for me. You might be interested in something I have. Remember all the discoveries I made? I kept records of everything in my journals. You'll find everything in them. Every theory, every discovery, every observation. You might want to give them a little look. They're in my house in Quatari. It's the only house there that's still standing. Underneath my bed is a trap door that leads into a basement. All my journals are there, thousands of them. Enough to keep you occupied for a dozen lifetimes. No one has ever read my work, you might like it."

"I'll see what I can do," said Link, suddenly becoming interested.

"Don't even bother trying to show them to the people at the University, they'll just think you're a quack. Believe me, I know. I'm sorry for what I did. I now realize what you were trying to do. Thank you for stopping me. This is much better than taking half the continent with me." Link was almost touched by Kisei's sudden repentance. He never knew that someone who seemed so evil and heartless could suddenly turn completely around. Death seemed to have a profound effect on people. "I...I see him."

"Who?" asked Link.

"Death. I see him. He's right there. He's come to take me. Finally, Death has come to free me." Kisei's eyes lost their gaze and focused of into nothingness. "He's finally come." Kisei reached her hand out to an unseen person. "He's come for me..." Kisei stared off for a moment and then went limp. Her arm dropped to her side and her eyes rolled back into her head. She let out her last breath as her whole body went still. She was dead. Link stood up and looked at the woman's frail body, whose youthfulness and strength had so suddenly faded away.

"She got what she wanted," said Link. After he had finished his sentence, Kisei's corpse began to wither further. In mere seconds, they saw her body rapidly decay and turn into a skeleton. The bones then

mysteriously broke apart, and within seconds they were dust. "That was freaky," he commented.

Zoya put her arm around Link's shoulder and walked him back to where Malon and Solo were sitting, Malon cradling Solo like a baby. "Let's go home," said Zoya. "Solo, can you stand up?"

Solo made a feeble attempt at standing, but even with Malon's help she couldn't even sit up straight. Her whole body felt weak and numb, and she could barely move her limbs. "I'm so tired," said Solo. "I can't." Solo looked at Link and for the first time saw the wound on his shoulder. "Link, what happened to you?" she asked worriedly.

"It's just a scratch, I'll be fine."

"I'll take care of Linkie-pooh," said Zelda, putting her arms around Link. "I'll take you back to the castle and the doctor can fix you up like new."

Solo smiled at Zelda's sappy display. "You two are way too sappy," said Solo. "You should get married, you're both perfect for each other." Solo smiled when both Link and Zelda's faces turned red.

"I think they're a little young for that right now," said Malon.

"It was just a suggestion. Now, I hate to be a complainer, but how am I going to get home? I can't walk."

"We'll figure something out," said Zoya. "Don't worry."

## Epilogue

Dotted throughout the deep woods in the Kokiri Forest were dozens of small ponds and watering holes. Many of the children went there nearly everyday during the summer to swim and relax. This particular pond was nearly empty today. However, the sparkling clear water was suddenly disturbed by a huge splash as Malon crashed through the surface after jumping from a rock outcropping above. "Malon!" screamed Solo. "You splashed me!"

Malon swam over to Solo, who was previously floating leisurely on her back, her long golden hair spread out over the surface of the water. "That's what I intended," replied Malon with a smirk. She splashed more water onto Solo's already displeased face. The water was the perfect temperature, not too hot or too cold.

"That's it, I'm gonna get you," threatened Solo as she stood upright and approached Malon. Solo then lunged at her and dunked Malon's head under the water. Malon popped up and a fierce water fight ensued. They both relentlessly splashed each other, giggling madly. After a few minutes of splashing, they desisted and Solo looked over at Link, who was sitting on the shore staring intently at a book. "Come on, Link! Aren't you coming in?"

Link looked up from the book he was reading and saw Malon and Solo staring back at him. "This is so fascinating," he whined. "You wouldn't believe the theories this woman came up with." He was reading one of Kisei's many journals, this one was about the solar system and the motions of the planets. "This stuff is so cool. Did you know that our planet revolves around the sun, not the other way around? And the moon revolves around us. It makes so much sense. And something called gravity keeps all the planets from flying off into space. And gravity is also what keeps us on the ground and makes us fall down. And the moon has no air because it doesn't have enough gravity. Did you know that air actually weighs something? It makes sense 'cause a strong wind could knock you over. This stuff is amazing."

"Geez. How can you actually enjoy learning?" said Solo, sticking out her tongue. "Books are boring."

"Mija akhtag na fashter," said Link in some strange language.

"Did you just insult me?" asked Solo, unsure of what Link had said.

"I said, 'I like learning.' It's in a foreign language, Akitilian. They're these people that live in a jungle on the other side of the world. She's got every language in the world written in these books. It's amazing."

"Come on Link!" shouted Solo. "Put those stupid books down and jump in. You're missing all the

fun."

"I'm waiting for Zelda to come. She should be here any minute." Zelda had said that she would come over at around noon. Link didn't have a clock, but judging by the shadows, it was about time. Just then he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him. He turned to see Zelda emerge from the trees with a smile on her face. She was wearing a very light pink dress and sandals.

"Sorry I'm late, Link," said Zelda as she sidled up next to him. "Impa took forever to get up and take me. I swear, she's always up at the crack of dawn, and she picked today to sleep in. There was some kind of Sheikah party at the castle last night and she was there dancing all night."

"I thought all the Sheikah were extinct," said Link.

"Me too. I guess they're not. I think they hide out all over the country and come together every now and then to have a reunion. You wouldn't believe how she acted! She was dancing like a maniac! I could've sworn she was having a seizure. I think she got totally drunk and that's why she slept so late. I'll tell you, that's not like Impa. I guess she totally changes when she's with her own people. It was almost scary. But what am I doing blabbing like this? Let's go in the pond." Right in front of Link, Zelda removed her sandals and then pulled her dress off over her head. Link almost gasped at the sight before him. Zelda was wearing a fairly skimpy two-piece swimsuit that was a bright pink color. Link eyed Zelda up and down, from the pink top, to her smooth, flat stomach, all the way down to her legs. He almost felt like drooling. He had never seen so much of her skin exposed, and the sight was almost titillating.

"Wow," Link mumbled, feeling nearly speechless. He was wearing a pair of his normal green shorts.

"You don't look so bad yourself," commented Zelda, peering at every inch of Link's body. She tried her hardest not to think unclean thoughts, but a few penetrated through her mental barriers. She bent over and grabbed Link's hand, pulling him off the ground and causing the book to fall to the ground. "Let's go swimming!" Zelda dragged him off to the pond and they both jumped in simultaneously, splashing Malon and Solo as they landed. Zelda splashed Link as she dove under the water and popped up behind him, splashing him once again. Zelda floated there, only her head poking above the surface. She saw Solo float over, with a strangely devious smile on her face. She floated over to where Link and Zelda had jumped in and made a motion with her hands so quick that nobody could see what she had done.

"What are you doing?" asked Link. "I know that smile. You have something planned. Malon, what's she doing?" Link figured that if anyone knew what Solo had in mind, Malon would. Malon also gave a wicked smile and shrugged her shoulders. Solo moved next to Zelda and smiled again, Zelda putting a suspicious look on her face.

"Oh Zelda?" said Solo. "Are you um...missing something?" Solo slowly floated backwards, just out of Zelda's reach.

"What are you talking about?" asked Zelda.

Solo flashed a wicked grin and raised her hands above the water, holding some pink piece of cloth. "Does this look familiar?"

Zelda gasped and then glowered at Solo. "My top fell off!" she exclaimed, her face turning a deep shade of red. She immediately folded her arms over her chest, which was thankfully hidden under the surface of the water. Link's jaw dropped and he almost started drooling again. "I know what you're thinking!" said Zelda.

"I would never dream of doing anything like that," insisted Link. He secretly wished that Zelda would stand in more shallow water, but that would never happen.

Zelda lunged at Solo and began to wrestle with her, trying to free her loose top from Solo's grasp. "You give that back!" Zelda shouted.

"Solo, that's mean," commented Link. As much as he wanted to see Zelda without her top on, he couldn't let them tease her like that. Before Link could intervene, Zelda had snatched her bathing suit top from Solo and was putting it back on, making sure not to let any more than her head show above the water. When she had put it on, she stuck her tongue out at Solo and splashed her.

Zelda went over to Link, who was still smirking. "I know what you were thinking," said Zelda.

"Oh really? You gotta admit, that was pretty funny. Don't worry, I didn't see anything."

"Yeah, but you would've liked to. Don't try to hide it." Link smiled and his face turned red. "I thought

so. You're not gonna get lucky today, mister."

"What's the matter Link?" asked Solo. "Didn't get to see Zelda's boobs?"

"Solo!" scolded Zelda. Link's face turned redder and he seriously considered diving under the water and not coming back up.

"You can see mine if you want." Link shuddered and felt like he was going to be sick.

"No thanks," he said in near disgust. "You're a little feisty for somebody who died a couple days ago. You should take it easy."

"Hey, you only live once," said Solo. "Or I guess twice in my case. We could all go skinny dipping. Wouldn't that be fun?"

"That's it, I'm outta here," said Link, walking to the shore. He desperately wanted to leave before Solo found some other way to humiliate him further. He stopped on the shore and tried to shake the water out of his hair.

"You're not getting away that easily," said Zelda, jumping out of the water and pulling him back in, much to his chagrin. She pulled Link closer to her and kissed him gently.

"What was that for?" he asked.

"I just thought I'd tell you that I care." She leaned over and whispered in his ear, "Just follow my lead. We'll show them what happens when they take the princess's bathing suit top. You take Solo and I'll get Malon. We'll jump on them and dunk them in the water." Link smiled and nodded. They both stealthily swam over to where Solo and Malon were splashing each other again. They were completely oblivious to Zelda and Link's approach and were taken by surprise when they were suddenly dunked under the water. A short wrestling match ensued as Malon and Solo attempted to turn the tables on Link and Zelda. Solo dived to the bottom and grabbed a chunk of seaweed from the ground. She pooped back up and threw it as hard as she could, the seaweed smacking into Zelda's face with a squish. "Oh, you'll be sorry for that," Zelda said. She jumped on Solo and wrestled her, while Link just watched in amazement. Sometimes he never understood the opposite sex. He just watched all three of them playfully fight in the water, splashing and giggling like crazy. It was then that Link realized how truly lucky he was. As much as his sister annoyed him, he couldn't even imagine what it would be like to live without her. After all those years he had felt empty and alone, he now felt complete. He was happy. And he didn't want to know what it would be like to lose his sister, especially after going through so much trouble finding her. He was so thankful for the people he had, his friends, his family. He didn't have to go out exploring and searching for some mystical treasure or magical power. He had everything he ever wanted right here.

The End